

What does Parliament want on Brexit?

The government has now decided to delay voting on the draft Withdrawal Agreement until 14 January. It looks likely that it will still lose that vote. The government hopes that it will extract from the EU better language about a timetable for negotiating a trade and future partnership agreement, which is the way to avoid the Irish backstop. They want stronger language about avoiding use of the Irish backstop in any way that might be available. It may also play up some of the fears of No deal in the hope of persuading more MPs to vote for the Agreement. Given the 100 or so Conservative MP public pledges to vote against it is difficult to see how the government can win the vote, even allowing for a substantial number of MPs changing their minds. The DUP have said they cannot vote for the Agreement unless the text concerning the Irish backstop is amended. The EU so far has refused all attempts to re open the legal text. Instead it offers clarifications and reassurances that are not legally binding. The DUP and others say if it is the intention of both sides to avoid the backstop, then delete it from the text as an earnest of good will on this matter.

Meanwhile the government is intensifying work on a Clean WTO Brexit. It has announced resolution of the aviation issues so it can assure us the planes will fly, and is well advanced with fixes to ensure reasonable transit times for goods through channel ports. The EU and its member states too are busy working on this, as they now sense it is a possible outcome even though the UK government says it intends to pilot the Withdrawal Agreement through Parliament. The government has announced the UK will remain in the Common Transit Convention after departure which ensures simplified cross border trade as today.

The House of Commons has a large Remain majority, with a set of Opposition parties keen to use the issue to destabilise the government. There are several other options in play amongst Remain factions. Some favour a second referendum. Some want to cancel Brexit altogether and just tell the people they cannot negotiate a satisfactory exit. Some believe it would be possible to negotiate a better or different deal and favour a delay to attempt a different approach.

The second referendum idea cannot now be legislated in time to hold the vote before the UK leaves on 29 March 2019. Proponents therefore have to support delay to the UK exit, which requires agreement with the EU and repeal or amendment of the EU Withdrawal Act. The EU is reluctant to allow much slippage as they have European Parliamentary elections to consider next May which could change the political direction of the EU itself. The current plan is the UK will not be contesting them. Advocates disagree about the question

to be put in a referendum. Some want a three way question, offering WTO exit, staying in or the Mrs May Withdrawal Agreement. Were staying in to win with say 35% of the vote the other 65% would say they had been cheated of Brexit by a minority of voters. Some want a two way skewed to staying in, running Remain against Mrs May's Withdrawal Agreement. Leave voters would say this did not offer them their choice. Some want a Leave oriented vote, running the Withdrawal Agreement against just leaving, on the grounds that Leave/Remain has been settled by the original People's Vote. Remain of course does not like this approach. The government so far has ruled all these out comprehensively. It would require a government with a majority to draft the legislation and make the time available to try to pass it through Parliament. This all looks unlikely. Conservative MPs are mainly opponents of a second vote and would not even wish to vote for a timetable motion to help get a second Referendum Bill through, so it would require full Labour backing from the outset which Mr Corbyn would be reluctant to offer.

It is difficult to believe this Parliament would vote to simply remain and argue the people were wrong to vote for Leave. It would need the full repeal of the EU Withdrawal Act and supporting measures. Both main parties in the Commons stood for election in 2017 on a Manifesto to implement the result of the referendum. It would require the two front benches of Labour and Conservative to join together to force it through against a major revolt on the Conservative side and a smaller revolt on the Labour side, with considerable public anger.

So that leaves us with some form of delay as the other option to the WTO Clean Brexit. The EU may well say they have set out the terms for delay. They are in the Withdrawal Agreement. The UK would just have to swallow those if it wants another 21 months or up to 45 months more to negotiate a future relationship. In the meantime the Withdrawal Agreement sets out the terms for the UK continuing in the single market and customs union. If the EU were to back down on this stance, they could presumably agree to the UK continuing with current arrangements for a bit longer to see if anything different could emerge from new talks. This would be quite a loss of face for the EU, but would not guarantee they would go on to concede on all the issues over the future partnership to make it palatable to the UK. It is difficult to see what new would emerge from the talks, given the lack of any progress on the future partnership in the 30 months used up so far.

There could be an agreement to delay for a few months to tidy up remaining issues for a managed No Deal Brexit between the EU and the UK, but this would also require legislation in the UK and the consent of both the UK and EU Parliaments.

Universal Credit Arrangements During the Christmas Period

I have received this letter from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about Universal Credit payments during the Christmas period. The arrangements for when claimants will be paid over Christmas as well as contact details, including the Freephone number, are available at <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/how-youre-paid> and opening arrangements are also at <https://www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus/christmas-and-new-year-opening>



The Rt Hon AMBER RUDD MP
Secretary of State for Work & Pensions

17 December 2018

Dear Colleague

In my first few weeks as the Secretary of State for work and Pensions I have seen first-hand the good work that the Department does across the country, supporting the most vulnerable in our society. During the festive period it is even more important that people receive the money and support that they are entitled to. In the run up to Christmas we're ensuring that anyone who claims or needs to claim Universal Credit knows who to contact, what they need to do and what support is available.

For those making a new claim for Universal Credit advances of up to 100% are available. All advances are paid within 3 working days, with payments to those in need processed on the same day. Applications for Universal Credit can be made online, over the phone or in a jobcentre throughout the festive period.

Over the Christmas period some working claimants could have two monthly paydays, which will not affect the continuity of a claim if the below actions are followed.

With thanks to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury we have worked with HMRC and employers to ensure that they are aware of the actions they need to take to reflect an employee's earnings. This will ease the reporting burden on claimants so that the amount they receive is not reduced.

Where this hasn't happened a claimant should reapply within 7 days to ensure no reduction in what they receive. Re-application requires claimants to update existing information; this can be done by confirming a reclaim in their online account, or by calling our Freephone number (details included in Annex A).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amber Rudd'.

The Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WORK AND PENSIONS

Annex A:

The arrangements for when claimants will be paid over Christmas as well as contact details, including the Freephone number, are available here on gov.uk - <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/how-youre-paid>

Our opening arrangements are also on gov.uk - <https://www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus/christmas-and-new-year-opening>

Payment schedule over Christmas:

When your payment is due	When you'll be paid (except Universal Credit)	When Universal Credit will be paid
Monday 24 December 2018	Friday 21 December 2018	Monday 24 December 2018
Tuesday 25 December 2018	Friday 21 December 2018	Monday 24 December 2018
Wednesday 26 December 2018	Friday 21 December 2018	Monday 24 December 2018
Thursday 27 December 2018	Thursday 27 December 2018	Thursday 27 December 2018
Friday 28 December 2018	Friday 28 December 2018	Friday 28 December 2018
Saturday 29 December 2018	Friday 28 December 2018	Friday 28 December 2018
Sunday 30 December 2018	Friday 28 December 2018	Friday 28 December 2018
Monday 31 December 2018	Monday 31 December 2018	Monday 31 December 2018
Tuesday 1 January 2019	Monday 31 December 2018	Monday 31 December 2018

Wokingham Post Office

I have sent a letter to the Post Office telling them that many constituents wish to see the current Post Office counters remain open. I have urged them to consult not just on the range of services they could provide through a move to a local shop, but also on whether the idea of a move is a good one in the first place. We do not wish to lose the current facility to replace it with a worse one. There is space in the current building to expand the Counters, and tackle the queues.

Office opening over the Christmas and New Year period for constituents

I will be working as normal throughout the Christmas recess. I am planning to take December 25th and December 26th off and December 31st and January 1st. I will continue to answer emails and queries the rest of the time including week-ends as I usually do. I will also continue to run the website throughout the period and welcome contributions from constituents.

My Parliamentary office in London will be operating normal hours and service on 18-21 December, 27 and 28 December, 31 December, and from January 2nd onwards.

Wokingham's living advent calendar

On Saturday I wrapped up well against the rain and cold to join the living advent event at Martin and Co on Peach Street.

Those of us attending were made very welcome and invited into the offices to be out of the rain. We enjoyed the spirited singing of Christmas songs. Mia Turner sung well with great enthusiasm.

I would like to thank all involved in organising the string of events for the Christmas build up. The daily free entertainment is another reason to go to the Town Centre and enjoy its shops and facilities.

This series of events is raising money for charity. On Saturday Wade was the beneficiary.