

# PANIC STATIONS

How businesses should prepare for every eventuality after Brexit.

AUTHOR – Lesley Batchelor OBE FCICM

**D**ON'T panic – although setting up borders is no easy task, this is the gargantuan task the UK Government could face on day one of their post-Brexit world, whenever that may be. If we do take back control of our borders post-Brexit, this will require new border checks and controls for goods being moved between the UK and the EU to be applied either overnight, or after a transition period.

Much has been written and said about the potential for disruption should UK authorities not be properly prepared to take on these functions for UK-EU trade in a sudden 'no-deal' situation. The Government is taking steps to prepare itself for the surge in checks to be applied – including the training of new customs officers.

More important, however, will be the preparing of the whole chain of organisations involved in the moving and checking of goods from the UK to the EU – from port operators, clearance agents and freight forwarders to the exporting businesses themselves.

## PERIOD OF ADJUSTMENT

According to the Institute for Government there are 180,000 businesses currently moving goods between the EU and the UK that will be making customs declarations for the first time, many of which are SMEs. They also calculate that the introduction of customs declarations for these businesses could cost traders in the region of £4 billion a year.

In December the Government sent out advice to these businesses for what it termed 'the unlikely event that the UK leaves the EU without a deal on 29 March 2019'. In this advice businesses were asked to register for an Economic Operators Registration and Identification Number (EORI) with HMRC, plan for how they were going to make customs declarations (through an agent, by themselves or using a software programme), and to ensure the organisation moving their goods knows what additional information they may need to provide (for example, safety and security declarations).

It is apparent, therefore, that businesses and the customs support and logistics organisations they rely on, need to be prepared for changes at the border after Brexit – whether that's in March 2019, the end of 2020 or beyond. At the Institute of Export & International Trade we've been adamant that it's never too early to start preparing for changes as significant as this.

## CUSTOMS DECLARATIONS

We welcome some of the steps being taken by government to facilitate this change. For instance, we particularly support the grant funding it is providing for businesses that will be making customs declarations post Brexit. This funding is provided for training to learn how customs procedures work or the improving of IT systems businesses use for managing declarations.

In partnership with EEF, we deliver professional training courses across the country that this funding can be applied to. We provide a series of courses that give individuals and organisations a proper understanding of how customs declarations are made and general customs procedures, including the following:

- *Customs Procedures and Documentations\**
- *Customs Classification and Tariff Codes\**
- *Understanding Rules of Origin, Free Trade Agreements & Export Preference\**
- *Excise Duties & Procedures*
- *Introduction to Export Licensing Controls*
- *Post Brexit Compliance & Documentation*
- *Post Brexit Planning Workshop*
- *Introduction to Exporting*
- *Introduction to Importing*
- *Advanced Exporting*
- *Advanced Importing*

\*These courses qualify for HMRC grant funding so greatly reducing the cost to you and your business of achieving this award from the Institute of Export & International Trade

## A SMOOTH TRANSITION

We have also created a 'Customs Professional Pathway' through which six of our courses can be taken in conjunction

towards the attainment of our 'Customs Practitioner Award' (including the first four of the fundable courses listed above). We did this because we believe that a new profession of 'Customs Practitioners' is key to ensuring businesses can navigate the new checks and controls being applied to goods being moved between the UK and the EU. This profession could well be the lifeblood of a new customs partnership between government and the private sector – one that is able to adjust to the significant changes ahead.

Whatever happens in regard to the UK's exit from the EU, as long as it happens, some changes at our borders will be inevitable at some point. Waiting for the outcome of Brexit to crystallise is a waste of time for businesses, because if there is a cliff-edge exit in 2019, 2020 or beyond, the impact will be sudden and unavoidable. Businesses that have not prepared for this impact will suffer greatly. Businesses need to have the skills and the ability to adjust processes for any outcome of Brexit – the stakes are that high.

If you are interested in becoming one of the Customs Practitioners we need, please get in touch with the Institute of Export & International Trade – our mission is to help UK Businesses to build competence and confidence to trade internationally.

*Lesley Batchelor OBE FCICM is Director General of The Institute of Export and International Trade.*



**Lesley Batchelor OBE FCICM**