

PRESS RELEASE

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Brexit talks dominate UKWA's Parliamentary Lunch

Some 120 senior personnel from UKWA member companies, key suppliers to the logistics industry and supply chain directors from some of the leading UK retailers that belong to UKWA's Warehouse Users Group - including John Lewis, Sainsbury/Argos, Debenhams and Marks & Spencer, mingled on the House of Lords terrace in the October sunshine before UKWA's recent Annual Parliamentary Lunch.

The event brought warehousing and logistics industry professionals together with a number of influential Government advisers, so, it was perhaps no surprise that the dominant theme of the day was Brexit.

One of the first to speak was Karen Wheeler CBE, Director General for Border Co-ordination at HMRC and Head of the Cross Government Border Delivery Group.

Ms Wheeler represents over 30 government departments - from Border Force to Trading Standards - and has the unenviable task of pulling together all of those departments to ensure that goods continue to flow smoothly in and out of the UK after Brexit.

Ms Wheeler thanked UKWA for its help in suggesting practical, sensible, workable solutions to a variety of challenges.

She commented: "Engaging with industry is important and we need to undertake individual dialogues with all stakeholders to facilitate the flow of goods and ensure we are not introducing processes which affect that flow of goods through our ports and airports."

The next speaker was Lesley Bachelor OBE, Director General of the Institute of Export & International Trade. Ms Bachelor outlined the various Brexit deal options that are currently being considered – including the Norwegian and Canadian models and, of course, the no deal possibility.

She told the audience that many businesses are not ready for Brexit and encouraged all companies present to follow UKWA's advice and "familiarise themselves with trade deals again."

“Trade Associations such as UKWA have a vital role to play in helping the 300,000 business that currently trade with the EU to prepare for the future,” she said.

Guests also heard from Fiona Jenkins, Senior Policy Advisor to the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC), the body charged with reviewing the options required to improve existing infrastructure and recommend ways to use new technologies and processes to transform how freight moves by road and rail and into and out of ports and airports.

Ms Jenkins said that a call for evidence had resulted in an interim report. Produced in conjunction with a number of stakeholders, including UKWA, the report will be released in November 2018 and will be followed in 2019 by the full report.

Ms Jenkins commented: “From the outset, UKWA and its members have been extremely supportive of the NIC’s work on the future of freight. UKWA has worked with the NIC to provide relevant resource, knowledge and market experience and has also been able to offer expert input from its UKWA Advisory Boards, which bring together industry leaders and specialists to share knowledge, best practice and develop thought leadership on a range of issues.”

But Ms Jenkins cautioned that, in her view, not enough decision makers are thinking holistically about supply chains and, as a result, are failing to take an integrated systematic approach to regulations concerning the movement of freight.

The final speaker was Debbie Shandley of The Real Apprentice Company, who brought guests’ attention back to Brexit when she stated her view that Britain’s exit from the EU offers a new opportunity to look at technology and decide what skills are needed for future.

“AI, robotics and smart systems will enhance higher value jobs as more mundane tasks are removed from the labour pool by technology,” she said.

UKWA’s CEO, Peter Ward, commented: “The House of Lords is a fitting venue to host an occasion with so many prominent members of the UK’s logistics community as well as key policy influencers.

“As the voice of the logistics industry, UKWA is constantly exploring how best it can work collaboratively with the policy makers and other stakeholders to overcome the challenges confronting our sector and the Association has been actively advising the Government on our industry’s requirements as the Brexit clock ticks down.

“Our Parliamentary reception provides a chance for our members – the people who, after all, will be at the ‘coal face’ when it comes to ensuring that the UK’s post-Brexit supply chains don’t break down – to meet with government advisors and discuss their concerns to help to shape the current negotiations.”

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