

# Aspirations, but little detail

The Government's eagerly-awaited white paper, "The United Kingdom's exit from and new partnership with the European Union" appeared yesterday. It consists of over 70 pages in total, although one or two pages are blank.

It has twelve sections, which are as below:-

1. **Providing certainty and clarity** – We will provide certainty wherever we can as we approach the negotiations.
2. **Taking control of our own laws** – We will take control of our own statute book and bring an end to the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union in the UK.
3. **Strengthening the Union** – We will secure a deal that works for the entire UK – for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and all parts of England. We remain fully committed to the Belfast Agreement and its successors.
4. **Protecting our strong and historic ties with Ireland and maintaining the Common Travel Area** – We will work to deliver a practical solution that allows for the maintenance of the Common Travel Area, whilst protecting the integrity of our immigration system and which protects our strong ties with Ireland.
5. **Controlling immigration** – We will have control over the number of EU nationals coming to the UK.
6. **Securing rights for EU nationals in the UK, and UK nationals in the EU** – We want to secure the status of EU citizens who are already living in the UK, and that of UK nationals in other Member States, as early as we can.
7. **Protecting workers' rights** – We will protect and enhance

existing workers' rights.

**8. Ensuring free trade with European markets** – We will forge a new strategic partnership with the EU, including a wide reaching, bold and ambitious free trade agreement, and will seek a mutually beneficial new customs agreement with the EU.

**9. Securing new trade agreements with other countries** – We will forge ambitious free trade relationships across the world.

**10. Ensuring the UK remains the best place for science and innovation** – We will remain at the vanguard of science and innovation and will seek continued close collaboration with our European partners.

**11. Cooperating in the fight against crime and terrorism** – We will continue to work with the EU to preserve European security, to fight terrorism, and to uphold justice across Europe.

**12. Delivering a smooth, orderly exit from the EU** – We will seek a phased process of implementation, in which both the UK and the EU institutions and the remaining EU Member States prepare for the new arrangements that will exist between us.

After reading it through, the abiding impression it creates is that it has identified the key issues we will face in leaving the EU and also sets out in very broad terms what the Government would like a post-Brexit UK to look like. What is missing is the detail, including how we will arrive at the end point.

To take one subject which will be familiar to readers of this website – fishing. All the White Paper tells us is that “it is in both our interests to reach a mutually beneficial deal that works for the UK and the EU’s fishing communities. Following EU exit, we will want to ensure a sustainable and profitable seafood sector and deliver a cleaner, healthier and

more productive marine environment.” There is no detail regarding what is to supersede the Common Fisheries Policy, even though there would be huge problems if it were repatriated into UK Law.

For instance, Regulation 1380/2013, the most important fisheries regulation, contains numerous mention of “union waters”. On leaving the EU, the waters up to 200 nautical miles from our shoreline (or the median point where we are less than 400 miles from another country’s coasts) will no longer be union waters, so a lot of re-writing would be necessary. Why bother, however, when the CFP and its quota system is so seriously flawed? We can but hope that by the time negotiations get under way, the Government realises the importance of excluding fisheries legislation from any large-scale repatriation of the EU *Acquis* into UK law.

The White Paper raises the issue of the EU customs union and our future relationship with it. The Government has been very enthusiastic about wanting to make the most of our freedom to strike our own trade deals but there is very little detail about how it proposes to maintain trade with the EU. *“There are a number of options for any new customs arrangement, including a completely new agreement, or for the UK to remain a signatory to some of the elements of the existing arrangements.”*

The positive assessment of the UK’s involvement in Ukraine (under Section 11) does not make for happy reading, sadly. Now we are on the way out, it is time to leave the EU to its own empire building and to join President Trump in seeking rapprochement with Russia rather than continuing foolishly and unnecessarily to antagonise Moscow.

Of course, this white paper has been produced to satisfy demands by MPs to be given some idea about the Government’s Brexit plans. The government has a bit of a tightrope to walk. MPs understandably don’t want to be left in the dark but at

the same time, there are good reason for Mrs May and her team keeping their cards close to their chest so as not to give too much away to the people from the EU with whom they must negotiate.

On balance, however, anyone who has been listening to the recent speeches by Mrs May and her Brexit team would have not found much in this document which they did not already know. It defines the important tasks which needs to be addressed and paints a very positive vision of what life will be like once we're out. How the Government will take us to this point is another matter and we hope more will be revealed soon as it cannot afford to get this wrong.