



Brexit: NI businesses need ‘better advice’ on UK-EU divergence

## Description

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**[Brexit: NI businesses need ‘better advice’ on UK-EU divergence](#)**

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Northern Ireland businesses need better government guidance about post-Brexit divergence between UK and EU rules, a House of Lords inquiry has found.

Divergence is significant for Northern Ireland because it has remained inside the EU's single market for goods.

That means free-flowing trade between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

However, new checks and controls are required on some goods coming from Great Britain.

Growing divergence could potentially increase the level of controls on goods coming from Great Britain to Northern Ireland and require businesses to make changes to their processes.

Northern Ireland's revised Brexit deal, the Windsor Framework, contains mechanisms for managing divergence.

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However, the inquiry, by the Lords' Windsor Framework sub-committee, heard that businesses were unsure about where to find information on how diverging rules could impact them.

Cautious approach

The committee said businesses adjusting to new ways of working under the Windsor Framework "should not be additionally burdened by the need to search for the ways in which new or existing legislation is creating regulatory divergence which may have an impact on the way they conduct their business".

"It is incumbent on the government to provide somewhere for stakeholders to go to find out this information in an easily accessible and digestible format," it added.

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Up until Brexit, the UK automatically updated its rules on things like product standards in line with the EU.

Since Brexit, the UK has had the power to set its own rules, meaning that over time its rules could diverge from the EU.

The current government has ultimately taken a cautious approach to divergence, scrapping a plan to automatically repeal thousands of EU-era laws.

But divergence is still likely to occur as the EU updates its rulebook, particularly in areas like environmental standards.

The Lords committee has written to the government asking if it will commit to providing “central portal of divergence” as well as sector-specific logs.

The inquiry heard that the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has begun to track and share instances of upcoming or possible divergence.

This was described as useful, but short of the sort of “central log” that businesses need.

What is the Windsor Framework?

It is the post-Brexit trade deal for Northern Ireland, amending the original deal known as the Northern Ireland Protocol.

It was designed to make trade between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK easier.

The framework gives the Stormont assembly more say over EU rules and was welcomed by most Northern Ireland parties.

It was formally adopted by the UK and EU in March.

However, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) voted against a key aspect of the deal and is still refusing to re-enter power-sharing.

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