



# How to Lobby on Post-Brexit Public Policy

Ian Wright, Director General of the Food and Drink Federation (FDF), shares his advice on how to campaign and influence government on public policy after Britain leaves the EU. Mary-Anne Baldwin reports

**Ian Wright** has been involved in politics so long he's come full circle. A self-termed "foot soldier" in the early-1970s, he bore witness to the Conservative's 1974 snap election, which led to a hung parliament.

At that time however, Britain was just months into its membership in the European Union having joined on 1 January 1973. Forty years on, UK businesses are clamouring to tell government about how leaving the EU may affect their business, and to protect themselves from the fallout.

As the Director General of the Food and Drink Federation (FDF), **Ian** petitions government on behalf of 7,000 companies

within his industry. This means understanding both the considerations and concerns of government and the 400,000 employees he represents.

Here, **Ian** shares his advice to UK businesses beyond his sector, on how to lobby government on post-Brexit policy.

## How should big businesses seek to affect post-Brexit policy? Who should they speak to?

So, my strong advice is to make sure you know exactly what you want and go to every constituency MP who represents your business, don't limit yourself to just one. They will be very

receptive at the moment and infinitely more willing to listen to businesses in light of Brexit.

I think you have to be fleet of foot in that conversation. You won't be able to recover ground in the next year if you haven't already got to a position of prominence with the relevant ministers.

## How can smaller businesses get their voices heard by government?

The government is always going to struggle to accommodate a huge amount of lobbying from individual businesses, except when that individual business is the industry, such as Toyota or Land >



Rover. So, if you're a screw manufacturer, for example, my strong advice is to go to your trade association and make sure they're speaking for you.

The only way the government can understand what trade-offs are acceptable to specific industries is by talking to a mixture of the very biggest players and representative bodies, they simply won't be able to get around to enough people in time.

You need to be speaking for your industry, rather than for your business. There are clearly challenges there, in getting cross-industry agreement and getting around the vested interests of individual business.

## BREXIT SELF-ASSESSMENT:

### Assessing your workforce

- How many of our people are Europeans and how many of them have the right to stay in the UK on the basis they've lived here for five years?
- In a worst-case scenario, how many of our EU workers might be ejected and how would we replace them?
- What level of readiness do we have in securing new talent and who in the local environment might compete against us?

### Regulations and Customs

- What percentage of our goods do we send to Europe, and how much revenue do we gain from that?
- Considering the possible trade barriers, how easy would it be for us to bring products into and out of the country?
- What turnaround do we have and how can we keep to it?
- What are our businesses opportunities beyond the European Union and how can we develop them?

## How easy is it for businesses to prepare given the amount of uncertainty around Brexit?

Going forward it's likely we'll know a lot more about the UK's plan for post-Brexit policy. To date, the government has said that it's going to play its cards close to its chest because they don't want to give away their negotiation strategy to the other side. I've always thought that was a naïve view because the other side has an obligation to reveal its strategy every month to the European parliament. Part of that process will be to discuss our plans too.

I imagine us being in something that is like a single market in some ways and a customs union in others. Either way, be aware of the government's short-term thinking and don't expect them to be ambitious about some of their policy priorities, despite what it says in the manifesto.

William Hague [Former Conservative First Secretary of State and Leader of the House of Commons] and Michael Gove [Environment Secretary for the UK Conservative Party] have discussed the possibility of a cross-party commission to agree the Brexit strategy. I think that is entirely the right thing to do and would be an interesting mechanism to find a way through the issues surrounding Brexit. That's not the Prime Minister's natural place of comfort, but she will have to do things she doesn't want to.

## What questions should boards pose when examining the risk of Brexit?

Firstly, this problem cannot just be brushed towards the Risk Committee and forgotten about. Brexit is all about political risk while risk committees are substantially wedded to questions of

financial risk or catastrophic operational risk. I go out to boards and executive committees each week and take them through a sort of diagnostic, asking them a series of questions that are designed to get them thinking about potential issues.

We see risks in the food industry crystallising around three main things. The first is the labour force, the second is the regulatory environment, and the third is customs and border checks.

More specifically, it's also worth thinking about how your procurement function will work in the post-Brexit period. For example, what would happen to your business if – and it looks likely – there were four regulatory forces in the UK, one each for England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland? How would that impact your business? ■

These thoughts were shared during a recent Criticleye Global Conference Call on [Understanding Public Policy & Lobbying](#)



**Ian Wright**

Director General  
Food and Drink Federation (FDF)

As Director General of the Food and Drink Federation (FDF) Ian petitions government and represents the largest manufacturing sector in the UK.

Ian previously headed a global team of 200 at Diageo and was a member of Diageo's Executive Committee.

He has been active in third party politics since the 1970s and was an adviser to Liberal Democrat leaders Paddy Ashdown and Menzies Campbell. Ian has written and broadcast extensively on politics and communications.

Contact Ian through:  
[www.criticleye.com](http://www.criticleye.com)