

Mr Simon Light

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Ref: FOI2020/46778

Dear Mr Light

## Freedom of Information Act 2000

Thank you for your enquiry of 24 December 2021, which we have considered under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the FOI Act).

You asked for the following information:

*"In light of the recent announcement of the deal between the UK and EU, I would like to understand more about the economic modelling that supports Government statements about how the UK will "prosper", and how the deal is "fantastic".*

*It is common when setting goals that they use the SMART acronym, Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely.*

*Please could you address the following queries with relation to SMART.*

*"S (Specific)*

*How specifically will the UK prosper?*

*M (Measurable)*

*How will prosperity be measured? Compared with a base case of EU membership, will the UK prosper more or less now with the deal that has been agreed?*

*A (Achievable).*

*Much has been promised as part of Brexit arguments, in terms of the ability to replace what would be lost in terms of EU trade with improved worldwide trade. Will this come at greater cost to end consumers? Given the greater distances involved, what additional cost will there be to the environment compared to the baseline of EU trade that has been modeled as being replaced by world trade?*

*R (Realistic)*

*Have realistic assumptions with regards to future trade deals been applied? What are the risks that within the UK Government control that would threaten the modeled outcome of the prosperity that has been communicated by the Government? What probabilities have been assigned to these risks? What are the risks that the UK Government can no longer control because they are not part of the EU that could threaten the the modeled outcome of the prosperity that has been communicated by the Government? What probabilities have been assigned to these risks?*

*T (Timely)*

*Of most importance to me personally, is the question associated with Timeliness. Will the UK prosper within my working lifetime (I am 54), my children's lifetime (they are in their early 20s) or otherwise. This needs to be assessed compared to the baseline of what would have been continued membership of the EU, which needs to factor in the deals they have recently made with Japan and elsewhere which have been largely replicated by the UK.*

*In addressing this question, please also factor in the costs (and itemise in your response) that have been incurred over the past four years in setting up Government departments to deal with Brexit."*

Section 1(3) of the FOI Act provides that a public authority may reasonably ask an applicant to clarify the scope of their request where it is unclear. Your request, as currently framed, does not enable us to readily identify what information is, or is not, in scope. It would therefore be helpful if you could clarify what information you are seeking to obtain.

In particular, you have asked a question regarding how the UK will prosper; to access the information you wish to find, we would need a more specific understanding of what information you would like to view to address your understanding of prosperity, which can be measured using a wide variety of metrics. We would also require more specific requests for the information sets you would like to see under the remainder of the SMART target questions.

Please note that the FOI Act gives a right of access to recorded information held by a public authority. Locating recorded information to answer questions which require yes / no answers, which ask why, or which seek an explanation, may not be easy to do. You may wish to consider reframing such requests, with reference to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) guidance at the link cited below. Your questions listed under the SMART targets generally appear to be of this type.

It is also worth noting that the FOI Act does not oblige us to create information in order to answer a FOI request. We think it is unlikely that we will hold all of the information likely to be needed to answer your request, particularly for your questions under *A (Achievable)* and *T (Timely)* headings. This is because the economic modelling carried out is unlikely to directly reference these criteria in the way you have described.

You may wish to consider reframing your request with reference to the Prime Minister's announcement of 24 December 2020, published at the link below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-ministers-statement-on-eu-negotiations-24-december-2020>

However, it is worth being aware that Section 12 of the FOI Act allows a public authority to refuse a request if it estimates that locating and extracting all the requested information would exceed the appropriate limit which, for central government departments equates to 24 hours' time. Given the depth and breadth of the questions you have asked, you may wish to consider clarifying a narrower scope of request to ensure that we can provide a satisfactory answer.

Once you have clarified your request, we will be able to begin to process it. You may find it helpful to consult the ICO guidance before doing so, which is available online at the following hyperlink:

<https://ico.org.uk/for-the-public/official-information> .

If you do submit a clarified request, it is possible that substantive exemptions may apply to any clarified request you submit, which means that information could still be withheld.

Regarding your final point on the cost incurred by government departments to deal with Brexit, the following National Audit Office report looks at how much government departments spent on preparing to leave the EU:

<https://www.nao.org.uk/report/the-cost-of-eu-exit-preparations/>.

You may also wish to view the following report from the House of Commons Library service which summarises the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement which outlines what the agreement will achieve in practice, as well as what is and is not in the scope of the agreement:

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9106-2/>.

Similarly, you may want to view the government's summary document of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement which provides a similar outline:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/948093/TCA\\_SUMMARY\\_PDF.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/948093/TCA_SUMMARY_PDF.pdf).

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact us. Please quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely

Information Rights Unit

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Email: [foirequests@hmtreasury.gov.uk](mailto:foirequests@hmtreasury.gov.uk)

It would assist our review if you set out which aspects of the reply concern you and why you are dissatisfied.

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