

Customs future unsure but rules will change

By Elaine Keogh
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Businesses need to prepare to operate in a full customs environment after Brexit according to Tony Buckley, assistant secretary and deputy director general of Customs, who is the Revenue lead on Brexit issues.

He believes there will be Customs requirements as a result of the UK leaving Europe, although it may not mean a land frontier with the UK. He said: "You have to have Customs because otherwise we will have no way of knowing what the patterns of trade with the UK are and we will have no way of measuring the impact of any policy changes the UK government introduces after Brexit."

Speaking at a seminar organised in Dundalk by the Irish Exporters Association (IEA), he added: "What does that mean in terms of a border, a land frontier? The answer to that is I don't know."

He said that it may be possible to have Customs without a border. He compared it to monitoring of immigration which can be done, saying "not at the border but at various points of business, places of business, welfare payments... In a modern world physical obstructions serve little or no purpose".

He added: "Is there going to be a physical border (between) the North and South? I don't know is the simple answer, but I do know the Government's priority is the continuation of the existing unhindered movement of people and within the island and between the two islands and also the freest possible movement of goods.

"That means whatever solution we come up with, we are challenged to ensure that Customs does not delay the process, in other words the flow of goods should be free and timely in so far as possible as timely as it is at the moment."

Addressing the Irish Exporters Association Supply Chain Initiative meeting on Brexit in Dundalk last week, Mr Buckley said businesses should start preparing now for Brexit.

"Prepare for a situation where you will have to operate in a full customs environment. There really isn't any practical benefit in assuming anything else.

"There may be simplified procedures agreed with the UK, but you will still need the infrastructure."

The IEA said the meeting is the first in a series of four large supply chain seminars which will take place around the country as part of a new supply chain collaborative initiative. More than 90 exporters and manufacturing companies from across the region attended the meeting.

Simon McKeever, chief executive of the IEA, said: "The north-east of the country is an extremely important export location. It has the distinct advantage of being nationally connected with rail and road networks and internationally connected with access to Dublin Port and Dublin Airport, proximity to Northern Ireland and the Midlands.

"With an abundance of thriving ICT, life sciences, food and drink, manufacturers and international business services across the region, our supply chain initiative will provide a network for our corporate members across all sectors to interact and exchange information on challenges, industry requirements and best practice, while keeping up to date with local, national and international issues affecting the export industry supply chain."