



## **We must remain free to trade with the Continent**

In her first few weeks in office the prime minister has spoken of the need to make sure that the UK has a viable industrial strategy to rebalance the economy away from financial services and to minimise the likely adverse consequences of Brexit for businesses and workers.

Few would disagree with those aims but success in the second objective depends heavily on making real progress on the first. Our future prosperity, with a weaker pound, will depend more than ever on strengthening our manufacturing industry. For UK manufacturers to thrive and build large world-class facilities so we can trade, serve our customers and take advantage of the size of the European market, we must carry on working in partnership with our neighbours in our mutual interest.

For DS Smith, with about 200 factories and 26,000 employees in pretty much every country of Europe, there are three critical "asks" we have of government as it establishes the underlying principles of its Brexit negotiations.

The first is the ability to move skilled workers across Europe; the second is to maintain a relationship with Europe that helps rather than hinders our service to our multinational customers; and the third is to underline the importance to us of uniformity of standards for businesses to trade easily and successfully across borders.

Skilled workers and trained engineers whom we can move between our various European locations easily and without undue bureaucracy are critical to our highly technical business. One of our leading specialists in manufacturing had been based in Germany and the Netherlands but under the current rules was freely available to be seconded to run our UK paper operations based in Kent, where we needed his particular skills. His success in running this UK plant has made a huge contribution to the mill's continuing viability and competitiveness. At the moment, he can come to the UK without a visa, without paperwork, without delay.

Others may debate whether the UK benefits from open borders to all EU citizens, regardless of their skills. However, there is nothing theoretical about the benefit to companies such as DS Smith from the ability to move highly skilled specialists with the minimum of hassle.

Continental Europe is the closest and most important external market for our UK operations because the customers we provide a service to are multinational companies such as Unilever and Nestlé. We need to reassure them that we will be able to continue to serve their needs in every part of continental Europe.

For us, therefore, access to the single market is not simply a question of free trade but also of preserving the ability to serve customers in the same way wherever they do business. UK jobs depend more than ever on access to customers within the rest of Europe.

As leaders in recycling and waste-management technology we benefit from having clear, consistent European rules on environmental protection. Uniformity of standards is not a bad thing for business. For example, the Waste Framework Directive embedded the principles, set national recycling targets and paved the way for landfill tax that has been so effective in reducing waste sent to landfill and prompting recycling systems.

This is not a case of trying to reopen or reverse the result of the referendum: we merely want to build a future that actually works for our employees and customers without creating confusion and additional cost.