

Boris Johnson's first week – an assessment

*Our colleagues at **Briefings for Brexit** have assessed what progress Boris Johnson has made in his first week as PM towards securing a genuine Brexit, using six key tests. Below is a short version of their findings. For a more in-depth analysis, please do read the full-length original [on the Briefings for Brexit website](#).*

Test 1: Disown entirely the Treasury's doom-laden reports of 2016-18 and totally overhaul the Treasury

Rating: 1/10

Unfortunately, there has been no sign so far that the government intends to disown the Treasury's doom-laden and skewed analyses of Brexit, several of which have been produced since 2016 and which continue to exercise a negative and unjustified influence on public discourse about Brexit and on financial markets.

An early denunciation of previous Treasury analyses is essential. The government also badly needs to make some upbeat announcements of possible future policies that will boost the UK's economic performance. Examples might be a commitment to reduce corporation tax to Irish levels, or to removing some of the more onerous regulatory burdens resulting from EU membership (reform of the hated MIFID regulations would cheer the City, for example).

Test 2 – make the right appointments to key positions

Rating: 6/10

Johnson gets positive ratings for clearing out much dead wood in the cabinet and injecting some renewed energy. The balance of the cabinet between Leavers and Remainers has also shifted towards Leavers, with Leavers occupying three of the four top government posts.

The replacement of Philip Hammond at the Treasury is unambiguously a good thing. We nevertheless have our doubts about his replacement, Sajid Javid, and whether he is either forceful or imaginative enough to give the Treasury the overhaul it desperately needs and put forward bold new policies to take advantage of Brexit.

Michael Gove's appointment as head of 'no-deal' preparations is concerning. While Gove is talented and intelligent, he has proved untrustworthy on Brexit over the last two years, strongly supporting Theresa May's withdrawal agreement.

In terms of officials, the big story is the appointment as Johnson's advisor of Dominic Cummings, former leading light of Vote Leave. Cummings is intelligent and radical and is keen to shake up the civil service – all good. However, he has also floated dangerous notions in the recent past, including that the UK could sign up to the Withdrawal Agreement and then simply ignore it later if necessary.

Test 3 – No deal preparations must be accelerated and broadened.

Rating: 6/10

So far, the government has talked a good game in this area but not made any key concrete moves that would persuade us – or, more importantly, the EU – that they are serious about going ahead with a WTO-based Brexit if necessary. We get the impression, unfortunately, that the government is trying to bluff its way to a new deal which is a tactic almost certainly doomed to failure.

The 'extra' £2 billion announced for no-deal preparations looks largely to be PR. Some of the money has already been announced and so isn't new, and there is a notable lack of specifics on which this money will be spent.

We need to hear about new customs officers taking up their posts, contracts being issued for infrastructure upgrades etc. It is also worrying that there is little evidence of increased activity in key civil service departments – if anything, the opposite.

Test 4 – Categorically state that May's Withdrawal Agreement (WA) will not be revived under any circumstances.

Rating: 6/10

The government has not been consistent in this area so far. Johnson has said that the WA is 'dead' but has also hinted at other times that elements of it might be revived. Remember that the backstop is very far from being the only problem with the WA: the WA has rightly been described by leading lawyers as 'a legally binding death-trap for Brexit' and as a 'political Chernobyl disaster'.

Johnson also recently muddied the waters further by suggesting the UK might stay in the EU customs union and single market for another two years – i.e. the 'transition' period envisaged in the WA. This would be a very bad idea – two years as a powerless rule-taker from the EU would leave the UK open to a plethora of regulatory and legal attacks by the EU.

Test 5 – End 'mission creep' over the Irish border issue.

Rating: 6/10

The rhetoric in this area is, so far, positive. As we hoped, Johnson has broken with the May government's approach of

allowing the border issue to expand from avoiding checks at the border to avoiding almost any changes at all with regard to the border. He has clearly hinted that the government would now accept checks and controls on trade away from the border, using modern customs processes.

But Johnson needs to go further. Drawing on the work of new commissions set up to look at the border issue, the government should draw up a set of concrete proposals for managing the border from the UK side, to be put in place unilaterally if necessary. These proposals could go a long way to defusing some of the scare stories associated with the border.

Test 6 – End the stealthy ceding of UK defence and security autonomy to the EU.

Rating: 1/10

A number of interlocking defence provisions have been agreed with the EU since November 2016, almost entirely under the radar, which if ratified by treaty would lead to the UK ceding huge areas of defence autonomy to the EU and risk the UK's vital security cooperation with its 'Five Eyes' partners.

There has been little noise in this area so far. The departure of Sir Alan Duncan from the FC0 is welcome, but the new ministerial team at the FC0 and at Defence have yet to take a public stance on the defence giveaways noted above. Nor have we yet seen the essential changes in key officials.

Overall Rating: 5/10

It is very early days and it would be wrong to pre-judge the new government. Some early indications are positive, at least rhetorically. But we have concerns about the lack of concrete actions that would convince us the government is serious about pushing ahead with a genuine Brexit, of the WTO type if necessary.