



And so it continues...

Luke Moore, Co-Founder of Dental Elite, explores the current state of Brexit and what it could mean for the dental profession.



Brexit. It wouldn't be a stretch of the imagination to say that the word will evoke a sense of anguish and exasperation among generations for years to come. Regardless of which way you voted on that fateful day in June 2016, you will likely be among the majority of the UK who just want decisions to be made and implemented so we can all get on with our lives. The UK population – and indeed those of many other countries around the world – have grown steadily more and more exhausted of the political deadlocks that have prevented anything much from constructively moving forward.

Now, we appreciate that we are writing this ahead of the March 29th deadline and cannot know for sure how that will turn out. However, at time of writing we don't see the conclusion of Brexit on the originally stated date as a likely outcome. Instead, we predict that some kind of extension will have been agreed with the EU. The length of the extension will have depended on what Parliament were able to agree on and what the EU ministers were willing to accept, but ultimately, this is irrelevant in terms of possible Brexit outcomes.

Whether we have one month, 6 months or 21 months, the UK has the same potential exit options – which will do little to alleviate any concerns or apprehension among the population. In particular, businesses that interact with overseas suppliers and services will remain hardest hit by the uncertainties that continue to frame our current political situation. Unfortunately, this includes dental practices.

Right now, there are various ideas floating around as to how Parliament might break the existing deadlock, such as a second referendum and a General Election. Both would have a negative impact on businesses in the short-term, as any major event such as either of these options would cause significant fluctuations in currency rates. For any dental practices who source materials, products or technologies from other countries, a weaker pound will obviously make dealings more expensive, increasing overheads and reducing profit margins.

Another aspect that has been highlighted among the dental profession throughout the past couple of years is the impact of any eventual Brexit deal (or no-deal) on recruitment. We know that a significant percentage of GDC registered dentists are from EU countries (17%) and so anything that would prevent these individuals from working in the UK could spell disaster in the industry. It could be particularly damaging to corporates, where up to 60% of the workforce is thought to comprise of EU nationals. It would also have an affect on the medical sector – where nearly 6% of NHS staff are from the EU[i] – which may in turn may impact NHS funding across all healthcare.

In addition, the fluctuating strength of the pound will influence how attractive the UK is to EU professionals. Higher living costs and unfavourable exchange rates could reduce the appeal of working in the UK for many. If fewer people are interested in moving here, the pool of potential professionals will be significantly reduced. This could become a growing problem throughout the Article 50 extension period, as all the uncertainty surrounding Brexit has already been, and will continue to be, a major cause of worry for individuals considering a move to the UK. The consequences would make dental recruitment an even more difficult area than is already is, emphasising the need for dental practices of all shapes and sizes to find other ways of building their workforce.

Further still, we haven't even started talking about how all of this will impact the NHS contract reform process. Is it still in the pipeline? Is it likely to meet the most recently proposed deadlines? In short – it is still being talked about, but we shouldn't expect any major changes in the coming couple of years. The reality is that Brexit is consuming all time, effort and attention of Parliament right now and it is likely to continue doing so for the foreseeable future. As the nation's economy, international relationships and internal infrastructure are balanced on the outcome of Brexit, the NHS dental contract reform has moved further down the agenda. If anything, it appears that the concept of a totally new contract has been all but benched completely. Instead, there seems to be more appetite for an evolution of the existing contract, with the rolling out of further prototypes over the next few years and initially giving businesses the opportunity to participate on an 'opt-in' basis. A mandatory switch over looks set to be several years down the line, if that is the end result at all.

So, what can we do? Unfortunately, there is little we can do to until some solid decisions are made in Parliament. Until then, preparing your business for any eventuality is still key. Make sure all your accounts are in order, speak with your suppliers about any expected price increases and do what you can run your practice in the most efficient possible way. Regarding your existing team, ensuring their happiness and satisfaction will be key to maintaining their loyalty in the months to come. When it comes to recruitment, keep channels open wherever you can to maximise your chances of finding suitable candidates when vacancies do become available.

No one knows where and how the Brexit rollercoaster will end. It may result in little change to our day-to-day lives, or it may require a completely new approach to business. Putting your practice in the strongest possible position now will help make sure it thrives whatever the Brexit outcome.

For more information on Dental Elite visit www.dentalelite.co.uk, email info@dentalelite.co.uk or call 01788 545 900

[i] www.parliament.uk. Parliamentary business. Publications & records. Research publications. Research briefings. NHS statistics. NHS staff from overseas: statistics. October 2018.
<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7783> [Accessed March 2019]