

# SUMMARY REPORT

The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit was held over two weekends in September 2017. It brought together 50 randomly selected citizens who reflected the diversity of the UK electorate. The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit aims to provide much needed, robust public input into the Brexit process and show the value of informed and in-depth public engagement on controversial areas of public policy.

## KEY POINTS

- The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit made recommendations on the UK's post-Brexit policies for **trade and migration**.
- On **trade**, it preferred a bespoke UK/EU trade deal and a customs union that would allow the UK to conduct its own international trade policy while maintaining a frictionless UK/EU border.
- On **migration**, it voted to retain free movement of labour, but with the UK government exercising all available controls to prevent abuse of the system.
- **If a deal cannot be reached** in negotiations on trade, it preferred to stay in the Single Market and Customs Union to no deal at all.
- The 50 Members of the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit were **selected randomly** to reflect the socio-demographic characteristics of the broader population and their vote in the Brexit referendum in 2016, so included more Leave than Remain voters.
- During their first weekend together, the Members heard from **diverse experts** and received **balanced briefing papers** vetted by a **mixed Advisory Board**.
- During the second weekend, Assembly Members **deliberated and reached decisions**. They were supported throughout by **professional, independent facilitators**.
- Feedback from Assembly Members provides strong evidence of the **fairness, balance and quality of the Assembly process**.

# WHY A CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON BREXIT?

We know that the majority of those who voted in the 2016 Brexit referendum want to leave the EU. But that does not tell us what the public thinks our future relationship with the EU should be. The government is negotiating with the EU with limited knowledge of the priorities of the UK electorate.

The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit was an opportunity for a diverse group of 50 UK voters with different viewpoints to learn about the issues of trade and migration from a variety of experts and politicians, deliberate with each other and come to recommendations on the form that Brexit should take. The Assembly was organised by an independent group of academics and civil society organisations and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council as part of its UK in a Changing Europe programme.

The citizens' recommendations should inform government decision making, debates in parliament and broader public discussions over future relations between the UK and the EU. Government should also support the organisation of citizens' assemblies on other critical policy issues.

## RECRUITING THE ASSEMBLY

The 50 members of the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit were selected with the help of the polling company ICM. Five thousand people were approached through a survey, which gave their socio-economic characteristics and views on Brexit. Impressively, just over half were willing to participate in the Assembly, of whom over a thousand said they could attend both of the weekends.

The 50 Assembly Members were selected randomly from this pool to reflect the characteristics of the broader population, including their vote in the referendum. As the table indicates, the Members were well matched to the broader population. The Assembly contained more Members who voted Leave than Remain, but had a lower proportion of non-voters than the wider population.

Members were gifted an honorarium in recognition of the work they undertook.

Stratification criteria		Assembly Members %	UK population %
Age	18-34	28	28.8
	35-54	38	34.4
	55+	34	36.7
Gender	Female	48	50.7
	Male	52	49.3
Ethnicity	White	86	86.0
	Non-white	14	14.0
Region	North	22	23.3
	Midlands	14	16.0
	East of England	8	9.3
	London	10	13.4
	South	22	22.2
	Wales	8	4.7
	Scotland	10	8.2
Social grade	ABC1	50	55.0
	C2DE	50	45.0
Brexit vote	Voted to remain	44	34.7
	Voted to leave	50	37.4
	Did not vote	6	27.8

## THE WORK OF THE ASSEMBLY

The first weekend focused on learning. Assembly Members were introduced to trade and migration issues as they relate to Brexit. Experts with different viewpoints on these issues made presentations and were questioned by Assembly Members.

The second weekend focused on deliberation and agreeing recommendations. Assembly Members heard from two MPs with divergent views and discussed and debated their own priorities for Brexit. They created guidelines for the UK government on what the UK's trade and migration policies should be post-Brexit, then made more specific recommendations on future trade relations with the EU, on trade relations with non-EU countries and on migration policy. A summary of their recommendations and other findings can be found on the following pages.

The Assembly's design and briefing materials and the selection of expert speakers were reviewed by an Advisory Board that included both Leave and Remain supporters, as well as experts in the presentation of neutral information on Brexit-related matters. Critical to the success of the Assembly was the professional facilitation led by the charity Involve. For further details and links, see the back page of this report.

# RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE ASSEMBLY

This section reports on the decisions made by the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit regarding the UK's trading relationship with the EU and its migration policy post-Brexit.

## TRADE WITH THE EU

The Assembly considered four possible options for how it wants the UK to trade with the EU post-Brexit.

**Option A:** stay in the Single Market as it relates to goods and services

**Option B:** leave the Single Market, and seek a comprehensive trade deal that would keep trade with the EU as open as possible by maintaining zero tariffs and minimising non-tariff barriers through harmonisation or mutual recognition

**Option C:** leave the Single Market and seek a limited trade deal that would maintain zero tariffs but not address non-tariff barriers

**Option D:** do no trade deal with the EU

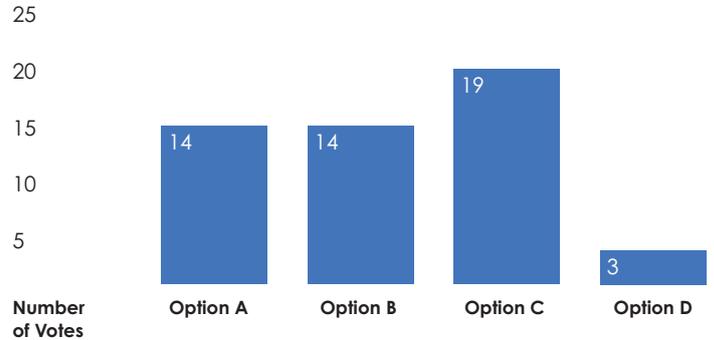
The implications of these options were considered in relation to issues such as the economy, public services, the degree to which the UK can set its own rules, contributions to the EU budget, and the regulation of workers' rights and environmental standards. After detailed discussion, Members voted by ranking the options in order of preference.

As the first chart shows, Members' first preferences spread widely across the options. **The most popular option was a limited trade deal (Option C), though a majority of Members wanted, if possible, some kind of closer relationship with the EU.**

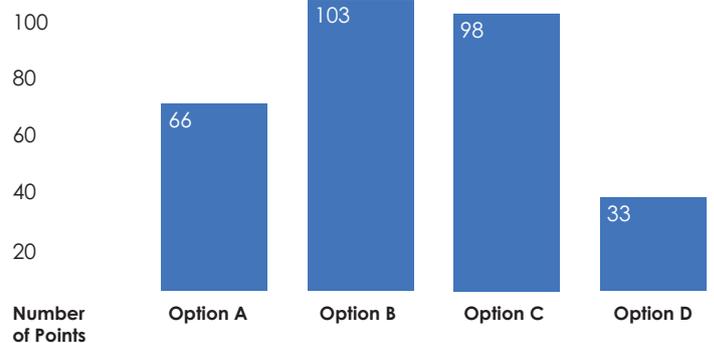
The second chart takes account of lower preferences by assigning three points to a first preference, two to a second preference, and one to a third preference. **When all preferences are counted, the option of a comprehensive trade deal came marginally ahead, as it received many second preferences.** The same result is achieved using Alternative Vote (AV).

The results also tell us Assembly Members' preferences if a trade deal with the EU is not possible. The lower two charts show how Members' first preferences split if a comprehensive trade deal proves impossible, and then if no trade deal at all can be done. Assembly Members preferred a limited trade deal to Single Market membership. But **if the choice is between the Single Market and no deal at all, members preferred Single Market membership.**

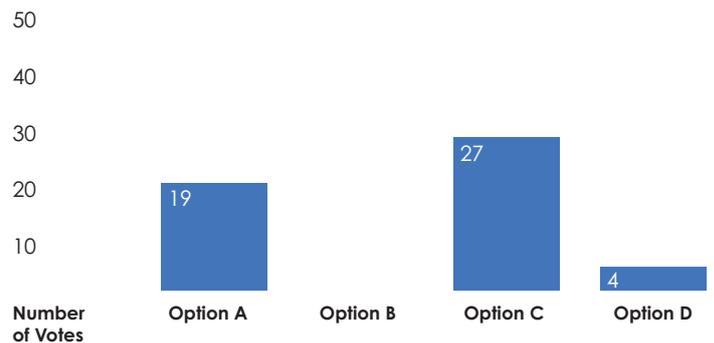
Trade with the EU: First Preferences



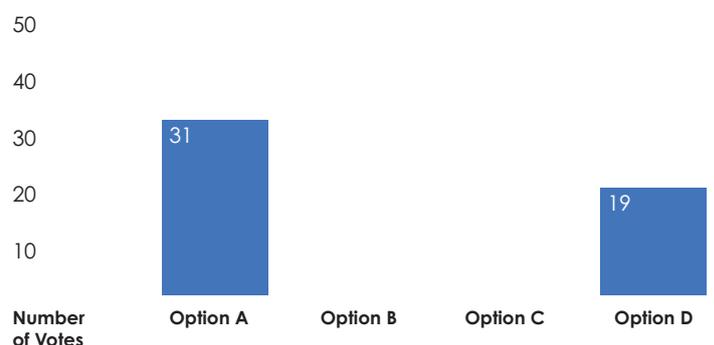
Trade with the EU: Points for Preferences



Trade with the EU: What if we can't get a comprehensive deal?



Trade with the EU: What if we can't get any trade deal?



# TRADE BEYOND THE EU

The Assembly considered three possible options for how it would like UK trade with countries beyond the EU to be governed post-Brexit:

**Option A:** stay in the Customs Union, so that the UK adheres to EU external tariffs and trade deals

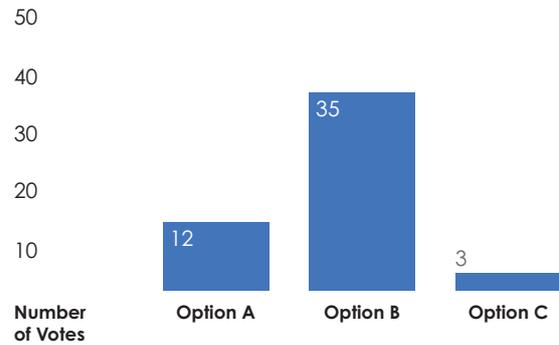
**Option B:** do a customs deal allowing the UK to conduct its own international trade policy while maintaining a frictionless UK/EU border

**Option C:** do no customs deal, so that the UK can conduct its own trade policy, but physical customs controls are needed.

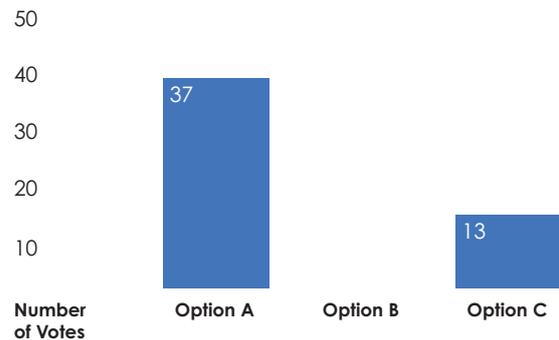
The implications of each option were laid out for, among other areas, the potential impact (from a UK perspective) of trade deals with countries outside the EU, the appropriateness of tariffs to the needs of the UK economy, the degree of control that the UK has over trade policies, and the level of customs controls on the UK/EU border, with its potential effects both on trade and on community relations in Northern Ireland.

**Members preferred a bespoke deal by a clear majority. If such a deal is not possible, however, they would prefer to stay in the Customs Union than to leave with no deal.**

## Trade beyond the EU: First Preferences



## Trade beyond the EU: What if we can't get a bespoke deal?



# GUIDELINES ON TRADE AND MIGRATION POLICY

Assembly Members created a long list of potential guidelines on what UK trade and migration policy should be after Brexit and selected their six priorities in both of those areas.

Priorities for trade policy	Priorities for migration policy
minimise harm to the economy	investment in training for UK nationals
protect the NHS and public services	better data on migrants
maintain living standards	sustain public services
take account of impacts on all parts of the UK	benefit our economy
protect workers' rights	responsive to regional need
avoid a hard border with Ireland	better planning of public services



# MIGRATION BETWEEN THE UK AND THE EU

The Assembly considered five options for post-Brexit policy on migration between the UK and the EU:

**Option A:** maintain free movement of labour as now

**Option B:** maintain free movement of labour, but make full use of available controls to prevent abuse of the system

**Option C:** end free movement and reduce immigration overall, but continue giving EU citizens favourable access compared with people from outside the EU

**Option D:** remove any preference for EU over non-EU citizens, while maintaining current immigration levels

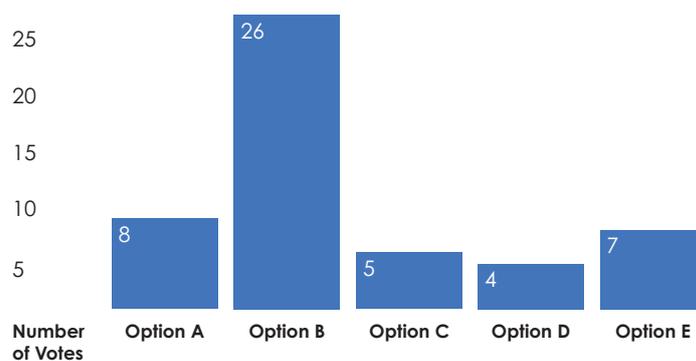
**Option E:** remove any preference for EU over non-EU citizens, and reduce immigration overall

The implications were presented for each option in relation to areas such as the economy, jobs and wages, public services, population, housing, culture, and the ease with which UK citizens could move to EU countries.

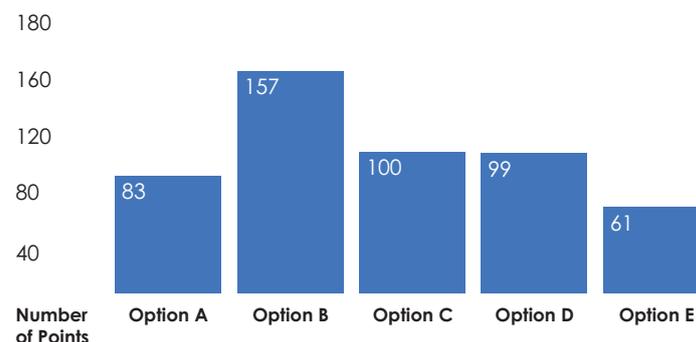
Option B was added after the first weekend to reflect feedback from Assembly Members, who were interested to learn that Single Market rules do not confer an unconditional right on all EU citizens to reside in the UK and that the UK could do more to remove those who do not have a right to remain. Though it was emphasised to Members that the impact of exercising the available controls on total immigrant numbers would be small, **the option of maintaining free movement of labour while using permitted measures to prevent abuse received the support of a bare majority of Members (26 of 50).** Only seven Members chose option E as their first preference, which was clearly presented as the option that would reduce total immigration most significantly.

The decision to support a more permissive attitude to immigration seems, from feedback on table discussions, to have been driven by a desire to maintain the benefits of immigration while also minimising the costs. Beyond measures to remove migrants who cannot support themselves financially, tighten up benefit rules and prevent benefit fraud, Members also wanted better training for UK citizens so that the need for immigration is reduced. And they wanted more effort to relieve pressure on public services in parts of the country where immigration is particularly high.

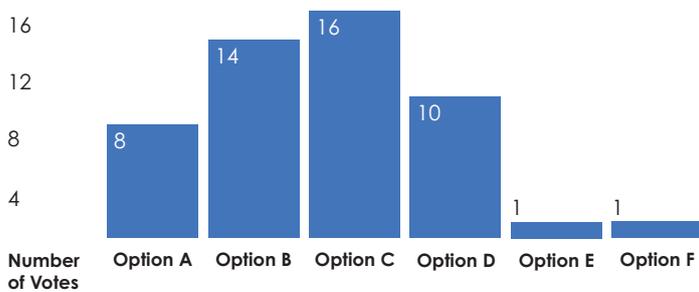
Migration between the UK and the EU: First Preferences



Migration between the UK and the EU: Points for Preferences



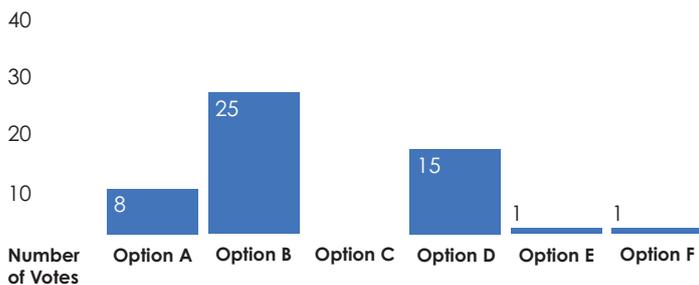
### Fitting it all together: First Preferences



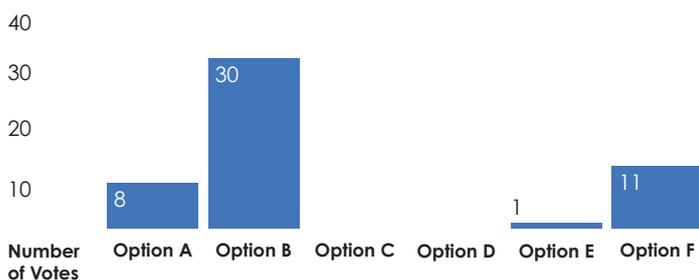
### Fitting it all together: Points for Preferences



### Fitting it all together: What if we can't get a comprehensive deal?



### Fitting it all together: What if we can't get any trade deal?



# FITTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The final vote taken by the Assembly focused on a range of Brexit packages that cover the main positions discussed currently in political debate in the UK. Particular attention is given to the relationship between trade with the EU and migration to and from the EU:

**Option A:** stay in the Single Market, with free movement of labour as now

**Option B:** stay in the Single Market, with free movement subject to all available controls

**Option C:** do a comprehensive trade deal and allow favourable access for EU citizens short of free movement

**Option D:** do a limited trade deal with the EU, without giving favourable access for EU citizens

**Option E:** do no trade deal with the EU, and allow EU citizens favourable access or free movement

**Option F:** do no trade deal with the EU, and allow EU citizens no favourable access

Assembly Members' preferences remained strongly consistent with those they expressed in earlier votes. In terms of first preferences, **a comprehensive trade deal with favoured access for EU nationals gained the most support**, closely followed by Single Market membership with full use of available controls.

Giving points for preferences had the two favoured options in the same order, while counting by the Alternative Vote (not shown) revealed a tie. **If it turns out that no trade deal is possible (comprehensive or otherwise), Members again strongly favoured staying in the Single Market over doing no deal.**



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# MEMBERS' VIEWS ON THE ASSEMBLY

Members' support for the Assembly process can be judged through surveys that they filled in at the start and end of each weekend. Members were extremely positive about their experience, rating the overall event highly (on average, 4.6 out of 5). They were equally positive about the balance and fairness of the information they had received (4.4) and the range of diverse opinions they had heard (4.6). They felt that they had ample opportunity to express their views (4.6) and that their fellow participants had respected what they had to say, even when they didn't agree with them (4.5).

Members believed that they had enough information to participate effectively (4.6) and that the Assembly had helped to clarify their views about Brexit (4.4). Their perception of their understanding of the issues of trade and immigration in relation to Brexit rose significantly across the two weekends (3.2 at the start of the first weekend to 4.2 at the end of the second).

Having completed two weekends of service, there was strong agreement amongst Members that citizens' assemblies should be used more often to inform government decision-making (4.8).

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE BREXIT NEGOTIATIONS

Public opinion on the form that Brexit should take is not well informed. Citizens find it hard to access balanced information and debates are highly polarised. The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit has gone further than any previous exercise in revealing what members of the public think about the options for Brexit when they have had the chance to learn about the issues, consider their own priorities, and work out the future policy direction they support. It has revealed a much more nuanced picture of public opinion than many have come to expect. **The Assembly deserves to be listened to by those with political power and influence.**

The recommendations of the Assembly run counter to the position advocated by various leading politicians who talk up the 'no deal' option if a favourable trade deal cannot be reached with the EU and who stress the over-riding importance of strong control over immigration.

**The support for a 'soft Brexit' is not driven by the Assembly being full of those who voted Remain in the referendum.**

Of the 50 members, 25 voted Leave in the referendum last year, while 22 voted Remain and 3 did not vote.

**Nor was the Assembly given a biased picture of the options.**

The programme for the Assembly, the briefing papers, and the options were vetted by our diverse Advisory Board, and the speakers at both weekends represented a balance of views.

**The results reflect the nuanced conclusions of a cross-section of the UK electorate** who have dedicated two weekends to learning about and discussing the issues in depth and then come to carefully considered views. While legitimate disagreement over the future direction for Brexit will continue, their conclusions deserve to be taken seriously in current political debates.

## THE VALUE OF CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES

The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit provides robust evidence that UK citizens are willing and able to learn about, deliberate and come to subtle and well-considered recommendations on highly complicated and controversial policy issues. If citizens can do this on an issue as divisive as Brexit, this suggests strongly that citizens' assemblies and other deliberative processes can be used on a range of challenging political and constitutional issues.

Decision makers draw heavily on opinion polls, but these rarely tell us the informed views of citizens. Such polls often encourage respondents to provide simple answers to complex questions, with headline results allowing one side or the other to claim support for their position. They tell us little of public attitudes on policy choices that involve trade-offs or where citizens need more information.

**Deliberation can provide a richer and more nuanced account of public opinions that goes beyond the alluring but false simplicity of polls.**

**Citizens' assemblies and other deliberative processes can strengthen representative democracy**, not only by giving politicians insight into informed public perspectives on complex policy issues, but also by building trust in the political process. Random selection means that the wider public can be confident that Members are just like them and are not representing special interests. They can be confident that fellow citizens have spent time learning and deliberating with each other before making recommendations.

Citizens' assemblies show that it is important to think carefully about how we design public participation. Poorly designed processes can further alienate citizens from politics. Citizens' assemblies are not the only way to engage citizens in a deliberative process, but they have proved their effectiveness.

**We encourage governments, parliamentarians, councillors and others with political power to think carefully about how to design public participation so that engagement is meaningful for both citizens and decision makers. This will be good for government, for citizens and for the future of our democracy.**

## WHAT THE CITIZENS SAID ABOUT THE ASSEMBLY...

"So glad to be a part of a Brexit Assembly where all voices can be heard."

"I valued the respect showed by everyone given the diversity of opinion."

"The Assembly gives an all-round balanced view from the whole diverse country we live in."

"Thank you, this was brilliantly organised and should be part of democratic decisions in the future."

## ... AND WHY ASSEMBLIES SHOULD BE USED MORE WIDELY...

"Politicians need Assemblies like this to be informed about the public's views. Makes democracy more accessible to everyone."

"Gives a diverse group of citizens a voice on major issues."

"It's an ideal democratic way to try to affect decisions."

## ENDORSEMENTS BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY...

"It's a great pity that we didn't have a citizens' assembly before the referendum took place, on what is actually the biggest political, economic and constitutional decision of my adult lifetime. I think we have an opportunity now to use the outcome of the Assembly to inform decision-making as we leave the EU." **Kate Green, Labour MP**

"I am delighted to support this Citizens' Assembly on Brexit – where people will be given a chance to discuss the best way for the UK to leave the European Union."

**Bernard Jenkin, Conservative MP**

"Whilst MPs are able to represent their constituents' views in Parliament, it is important that the public also have an opportunity to learn more about the options for Brexit from leading experts and campaigners, and discuss their ideas with their peers. Therefore, I am delighted to support the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit." **Nicky Morgan, Conservative MP**

"The Citizens' Assembly has, I believe, a great capacity to add something that it is too often missing from our political debate – the voice of citizens." **John Mills, Chair of the 'Labour Leave' campaign**

## ... AND IN THE WAKE OF THE RESULTS...

"If democracy is to work well, public opinion needs to be properly informed... On an issue as complex as Brexit, people need more citizens' assemblies to cut through the cacophony." **James Blitz, Financial Times (3/10/17)**

## ORGANISERS AND FUNDING

The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit was organised by an independent consortium of universities and civil society organisations. The project was led by Dr Alan Renwick of the Constitution Unit at University College London in partnership with the Centre for the Study of Democracy at the University of Westminster, the University of Southampton, Involve and the Electoral Reform Society. The project was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council's 'UK in a Changing Europe' programme.

## ADVISORY BOARD

The project was supported by an Advisory Board that represented the diversity of viewpoints on Brexit and included experts in the presentation of balanced information on controversial policy issues.

For membership see <http://citizensassembly.co.uk/brexit/about/advisory-board/>

## FOR FURTHER DETAILS

More detailed information on the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit – including briefing materials, presentations, further endorsements, the structure of the Assembly weekends and an electronic copy of this report – is available at

<http://citizensassembly.co.uk/brexit/about/>

A full report will be available on the webpage from November 2017.



The Constitution Unit

