

## Tuesday 2 February 2021

Dear Prime Minister, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture and Media, Secretary of State for Business and Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Home Secretary (for UK Border Agency regulations),

We write to you as concerned members of the UK's fashion and textile industry, an industry which contributes £35bn to UK GDP and employs almost 1m people, but which is at real risk of decimation by the Brexit trade deal and current Government policy.

Ours is a thriving industry, based on global leadership, complex supply chains and above all a deeply interconnected relationship with our overseas colleagues.

The UK's fashion talent is world-class, and our sector touches many areas of our lives. There are many diverse businesses that make up the sector, from manufacturing, to digital online retail platforms, innovative, creative and brands to top-ranked fashion education in the world. We are highly regarded globally for events which bring business to the UK, such as London Fashion Week (visited recently by HM the Queen), as well as create jobs for those working in advertising, editorial, costumes for film, TV and musicians.

The deal done with the EU has left a gaping hole where promised free movement for goods and services for all creatives, including the fashion and textiles sector, should be. The fashion and textiles industry is the largest component of the previously thriving UK creative industries, growing 11% annually, bringing vital jobs and innovation to the UK. We contribute more to UK GDP than fishing, music, film and motor industries combined. Yet we have been disregarded in this deal and our concerns overlooked in current policy decisions. This has significantly impacted our opportunity to build back better and grow our onshoring manufacturing, digital innovation and sustainable design and technology in the UK, where we now, more than ever, have the real chance to show global leadership.

Everyone working across the EU, our largest trading partner for imports and exports, will now need costly work permits for each of the member states they visit and a mountain of paperwork for their products and equipment. This is a step backwards and out of touch with the realities of how the sector works. From travelling to the EU for trade shows to large value shoots and shows happening here in the UK, red tape delays and costs are impacting our industry already, with work relocating to the EU, all impacting our opportunities to trade and travel. Like many, we heard the news that some UK brands might have to burn clothes stuck in the EU with horror.

The current deals with other non-EU territories do not allow for the same levels of business opportunity as we already enjoyed with the EU and many of the UK's thriving 59,000 industry SMEs cannot afford the added costs of red tape experts, nor should they. We note that the Government has offered the fishing industry a £23m package to support their export business. Fishing contributes as much to the UK economy as East London does from the fashion and textile industry, employing the same workforce as just one of the many high street retailers currently facing liquidation. 176,718 jobs have been lost across the retail industry during the past year. Parity in support is vital if we are to save not only the 890,000 jobs across the UK fashion and textiles industry but also to show leadership in being the sustainable innovator we could be: timely with COP26 almost upon us.

For the sake of <u>UK fashion brands</u> needing to work across Europe and for uK shows and shoots wishing to host them, the deal should be reciprocal. UK Fashion businesses now

need to have EU distributors which impact on margins. If they sell B2C online to EU customers, these customers are now charged with VAT, duties and handling fees amounting to an additional 30% on top of the product price, making them less likely to continue buying from UK brands. This will impact UK SMEs who cannot afford to pay EU distributors and use online sales platforms, the most.

For the sake of <u>UK fashion manufacturing</u>, we urge the Government to add garment workers to the Shortage Occupation Visa List, at least until the relevant T Levels are rolled out in September 2023, to



mitigate against the thousands of vacancies currently unfilled in our UK factories. To boost UK manufacturing, we need to fill those vacancies and train domicile talent simultaneously.

For the sake of <u>UK retailers</u>, we urge the Government to rescind its decision to stop the VAT Retail Export Scheme, which is forecast to impact all UK retailers who sell to tourists at a loss of more than £3.5 billion worth of tax-free retail sales and up to 41.000 jobs. This will not only impact our retailers but also impact on tourism and travel, both industries who will need support post-pandemic.

For the sake of our <u>fantastic fashion and textile SMEs</u>, who manufacture everything from knitwear to millinery, jewellery to shoes, denim to designer clothes, we urge the Government to support our sector with the same levels of recognition and financial support offered to other industries. We urge the Government to consider the same kinds of tax relief offered to the film industry for brands showing sustainable leadership and innovation with UK manufacturing, in light of the climate crisis.

For the sake of our <u>UK fashion creatives</u>, we urge the Government to recognise the contributions that <u>photographers</u>, <u>stylists</u>, <u>models</u>, <u>hairdressers</u> and <u>make-up artists</u> make to our global leadership across the media, with the same levels of support as seen for the film industry, who are currently listed on the critical workers' list and were offered a travel exemption. There are approximately 15,000 models represented in the UK, of whom circa 60% are non-British, while many of our UK models enjoy global name recognition and as world-class high earning models from the UK, pay a percentage of their total worldwide earnings to their UK "mother agency" here in the UK as taxable income for UK GDP.

We call on the Government to stand by their commitment to frictionless work travel for British creatives, including the fashion and textile industry and their equipment. We note that both film and music have met with the Government and request a meeting with the Secretaries of State for DCMS and BEIS and the Home Secretary urgently to discuss these issues.

Yours Sincerely,

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