

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom  
10, Downing Street  
London  
SW1A 2AA

Friday 8 May 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

**Ref: Event catering companies have been one of the hardest hit segments of the UK Hospitality sector from the effects of Covid19 and the enforced lockdown. Event Catering has slipped through the cracks regarding government support. 1,000s of businesses and individuals rely on this sector. Our summer has been decimated. A slow return with social distancing measures in place will mean zero to few events being booked for the foreseeable future. Our future is bleak: and many jobs are on the line.**

I am the owner of Top Hat Catering Limited, a Battersea based boutique event catering company in London. I have been in business supplying some of London's great public and corporate events and many venues since 2007. We are a relatively small team, but we represent a massive part of British industry within which many who rely on our sector will be suffering immensely.

Whilst this is a personal letter, I know that some other companies in my sector (and our suppliers), of which some are far larger than Top Hat Catering, will be looking at the future with enormous concern. Some of those have chosen to support this letter.

#### **First up**

I am very grateful for the Government's speedy deployment of the furlough scheme which has certainly rescued some of our full-time staff from the jaws of financial depression. The Government backed Business Interruption Loan Scheme for some of our sector may be a solution but, for our business, this would inevitably layer us in a substantial debt hole from which we would never be able to climb out. We are not asset rich and have high fixed costs. Despite our success, we work with slim profits and as Top Hat Catering is self-invested to date we operate growth relatively hand to mouth.

As a segment under the heading of Hospitality, event catering seems to have slipped through the net. There are no grant schemes available and the Business Rates Holiday does not currently apply to us (despite rateable values and all other eligibility points being met). We cater outside, not inside, so we do not fall under any offered support.

I am not writing to moan; I am a grafter and a fighter. I have always paid my way, my taxes and my debts. I do not collect any government support other than child tax credits. As a single mother (nearing the end of a divorce) I get little support, but with my two small children I will see this through. On this occasion, however, I am asking for any help you can afford us in such extreme circumstances. I have just written to the landlord of my flat to see if they can accept a fraction of the rent I should be paying.

#### **Big British Business is At Stake**

According to Eventbrites helpful infographic\*, the UK events industry is worth £43.3bn and 570,000 people are employed full time. There are over 10,000 venues, 1.3m business events held each year and 85m event attendees. After the Olympics in 2012, the UK has established itself as a world leader in outdoor events and London is considered the #1 city in the EMEA in terms of meetings and events activities.

#### **What are we talking about?**

With social distancing measures continuing indefinitely, people will be very nervous about putting on or attending events whether mainstream or small gathering like weddings, parties, conferences or

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tradeshows. Whilst some of the segments within event catering may have received some government support or intervention others have not. With zero and followed by limited events into the future there will be an enormous negative impact on the future of event catering. Many jobs are at risk. Here is the value of Britain's Events Sector – direct spend by segment which includes all supporting businesses (as well as caterers of course):

- Conferences and meetings – £19.9 billion
  - Exhibitions and trade fairs – £11.0 billion
  - Incentive travel and performance improvement – £1.2 billion
  - Corporate hospitality and corporate events – £1.2 billion
  - Outdoor events – £1.1 billion
  - Festivals and cultural events – £1.1 billion
  - Music events – £1.3 billion
  - Sporting events – £2.3 billion
- (figures based on last years events)*

According to Raconteur\*\* - in terms of generating employment, government tax revenue and spending by delegates, the business events sector is a UK economic powerhouse. This is under threat.

#### **Our plea for more and continued support**

**We need some help *right now* to see our creditors right and also to help carry us through the lockdown (to cover rent, on-going bills and handle bad debts in order to keep the pulse of our business going). Catered events are not going to just bounce back when lockdown is relaxed. We are terrified that furlough will end and the expectation will be that business is back to normal – this is very unlikely to happen this side of Christmas.**

#### **Please consider:**

- Treating event catering businesses as other Hospitality businesses such as restaurants, cafes and hotels.
- Ensuring that the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund (RHLGF) is extended to include event catering businesses.
- Extending the time period of furlough until end of Q1 2021.
- Providing and extending the Business Rates holiday to event catering businesses until end of Q2 2021.
- Assisting in rent payment to landlords for up to 12 months rent free period.
- Reducing VAT for event catering businesses throughout 2020/21.
- Further extending the time for repayment of deferred VAT/PAYE, allowing for normal trading to fund these payments.

We appreciate these are extremely difficult times for the government. Thank you for reading this far.

Best Regards



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\*<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/blog/academy/uk-event-industry-in-numbers-ds00/>

\*\*<https://www.raconteur.net/business-innovation/events-industry-helps-power-uk-economy>

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