

19th March 2020

Dear Minister

Given the current situation with the outbreak of Coronavirus across the country we recognise that this will be an extremely busy time for you personally and for the Department. However, we would ask that as the Minister for Business and Industry with the responsibility to look at the necessary support to sustain businesses through this hugely challenging period, due consideration is given to the vital role of the vaping sector in their communities, both from an economic and public health perspective.

Our simple ask of you is to ensure that vape shops in towns and rural areas stay open during the crisis. We recognise and support the Government's intensified containment plan for the virus but would urge you and your colleagues to look at the example of Italy. Dr Riccardo Polosa, a world renowned scientist and researcher on vaping and tobacco harm reduction and founder of the Centre of Excellence for the Acceleration of Harm Reduction, successfully argued that due to the stress caused by the Coronavirus, with the closure of vape shops vapers were highly likely to go back to smoking cigarettes to maintain their nicotine needs. This could be dangerous from a public health perspective and could heighten the risk of exposure of tobacco smoke to bystanders. This could also place a further burden on an already overstretched health system.

Online stores are critical to stopping an increase uptake in smoking given the present environment, but so are physical vape retail outlets as smokers and vapers rely on the specialist advice that they receive at these shops.

In addition to keeping vape shops open for business we would particularly like to understand what types of support will be available for our members who are manufacturers, compliance specialists, vape store owners and online retailers. Many are small to medium sized operations, and both during and post this crisis we want to ensure that they are still able to provide a service to the three million plus vapers in the UK, including those in self isolation and people living in remote areas. It's also crucial that our members are able to continue to help even more smokers transition to much less harmful vaping. As I am sure you will know, vaping has been a UK plc success story and has bucked the challenging high street environment in recent years, reflecting the key role the sector plays in local economies across the country. The sector also has a huge role in ensuring the Government hits its target to be smoke free in England by 2030.

As mentioned, we understand how busy you will be at this current time but we hope that you take on board our views above and provide us with feedback on support measures which will go some way to reassuring our members. We would, of course, be happy to discuss this matter further if this were helpful.

I am copying this letter to Jo Churchill MP as the Minister for Public Health and Paul Scully MP, as the Minister for Small Businesses.

Yours sincerely

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