

NICKIE AIKEN MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

29th April 2020

Dear Chancellor,

International Visitors and the Coronavirus Jobs Retention Scheme

Businesses in my constituency, which includes the two International Centres of the West End and Knightsbridge, have warmly welcomed the unprecedented level of support the Government has provided to ensure that they survive the coronavirus lockdown, retain jobs and survive to make a strong contribution to the recovery.

As the Government starts to consider how best to reopen the economy when the time is right, I urge you to take into consideration the specific requirements of those businesses in a small number of vital retail, entertainment, hospitality and travel sectors whose income relies wholly or partly on spending by international visitors to the UK.

West End retailers, theatres, hotels, restaurants and major visitor attractions are heavily reliant on spending by international visitors. Over 50% of the £9bn retail sales in the West End International Centre comes from international visitors. West End theatres will not be able to reopen or even just break-even without international audiences. Over 70% of visitors to major attractions, such as the British Museum and St Paul's Cathedral, are from overseas.

If, as currently forecast, these customers not expected to return in significant numbers before the first or second quarter of 2021 any reopening of these businesses without some continuing temporary business support will result in significant closures and job losses.

A vibrant West End is vital for the wider economies of London and the whole of the UK. At £51 billion annually, the West End's GVA is bigger than that of the City of London and comparable to the whole of Wales. It is a crucial economic asset, being a

major attraction for overseas investors, talent, visitors and students both into London and throughout the UK.

It is true to say that London accounts for most of the £22 billion annual spend by international visitors, however, 46% of this is spent in the UK's regions outside the Capital. Ensuring businesses in London are able to attract international visitors again is therefore crucial to regional recovery.

I ask that you consider a tapering of the Coronavirus Jobs Retention Scheme and greater flexibility to give temporary additional support to this small number of important businesses until such time as international visitors return to the UK. This relatively minor additional support would help to retain thousands of jobs, ensuring that Government spending on these schemes to date is not wasted and these important businesses can survive to save jobs, help rebuild the economy and grow the tax base.

I am attaching a briefing on this issue produced by the Association of International Retail.

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this with you and, alongside the co-signatories of this letter, would be delighted to offer you any support you might require.

Yours sincerely,



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CC:

Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, Secretary of State for Transport

Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

Signed and supported by:

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Chief Executive, Association of International Retail

Julian Bird

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