



Request of support for the Office Products Industry

Dear Chancellor,

I am the Chairman of the British Office Supplies and Services Federation (BOSS). Our members represent all parts of the supply chain providing offices with the supplies and services they need to keep our workplaces running. The office products industry was estimated to be worth £10bn in 2019.

Our industry is reliant on offices being open and populated. So, as you can imagine, it has been greatly challenged over the last twenty months with office attendance estimated to have been as low as 30% and never recovered above 75% of pre-pandemic levels.

The reintroduction of the working from home directive under Plan B has led to revenues dropping back to 30% of pre-Covid levels. With the expectation that businesses will continue to be instructed to ensure staff work from home, a great many businesses in our sector now face a very worrying first quarter of 2022.

I understand that working from home is a key part of the Government's Covid containment strategy, and is in the interests of public health, but I also note with interest the targeted support being given to the Hospitality and Leisure sectors during this time of reduced demand. Whilst the impact on the office products sector may not be so visible to the public, nor generate headlines, our need is no less urgent.

As such, our Federation requests that you consider an immediate and substantial response for our sector too.

In terms of what that response should look like, there are issues to which I would like to draw your attention. In addition to the impact of the Plan B provisions, many businesses in our industry are also facing requirements to repay the Covid loan support offered by the Government earlier in the pandemic. I believe that additional lending, to already highly leveraged businesses, could be problematic and I am also aware that the Government is not inclined to reintroduce the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

For these reasons, I ask that you extend the grant scheme for the other impacted sectors to the office products and services sector. I would also like you to consider additional cashflow support by instructing government bodies and other lending facilities to show significant flexibility on existing repayment schedules and interest mechanics. Our sector's businesses should be allowed to defer repayment on National Insurance, PAYE, VAT, Bounce Back Loans and Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans for the immediate future, at least until the work from home guidance is lifted (and ideally until offices become adequately populated once again).

I believe if this is not forthcoming the working from home directive could cause widespread failure in our supply chain which will impact the recovery that we all so desperately want and anticipate in the latter quarters of next year.

I would welcome a direct correspondence with you or a senior member of your Department to discuss our sector in more detail and await your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Drakeford', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Simon Drakeford

CC: The Rt Hon Boris Johnson, Prime Minister
The Rt Hon Lucy Frazer QC, Financial Secretary to the Treasury
The Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Alan Dick, Policy Adviser, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy