



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP
Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

Our Ref: SO16978

18 February 2021

Dear Kwasi

Re: Information and advisory services for small businesses on EU trade

I'm writing to you on behalf of the small business owners in my constituency who have been struggling to make sense of the government advice on trade following the implementation of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

Specifically, over the past few weeks I've come to hear of the difficulties many are facing in trying to obtain practical and reliable information on the GOV.UK website and effective advice from the Trader Support Service helpline.

Amongst their concerns are:

- Unclear and/or insufficient information on rules of origin requirements resulting in goods getting stuck in customs
- Unclear and/or insufficient information on need to obtain EU VAT numbers
- Unclear and/or insufficient information on significant freight cost increases
- Advisory officers insufficiently equipped with the necessary information and/or guidance

Overall, there is a clear and pressing need to overhaul the information and advisory service that our small businesses rely on. There also needs to be more support given to EU traders to help them understand their VAT position, and for your department to outline exactly what help there is for those that need to register for VAT in EU territories.

I urge you to act now and help struggling firms mitigate against the risk of having to introduce price increases that may ultimately force their customers to turn elsewhere. Our small businesses are limited in capacity at the best of times. They are, unlike their multinational competitors, unable to hire extra staff for the sole purpose of navigating the particulars of the Trade Agreement. They are simultaneously trying to keep their businesses afloat in the face of pandemic and make sense of an agreement for which the information and guidance is, at best, unclear. To compound the stress, there is increasing anxiety over the upcoming introduction of the UK's own import controls in April and July.

Once again, I would therefore urge you to undergo an immediate and thorough review of the information and advisory services on GOV.UK and the Trader Support Service helpline,

provide support to EU traders to enable them to understand their VAT position and explain what help there is for those that need to register for VAT in EU territories.

As we emerge from the pandemic it is imperative that we provide all the support we can to struggling small businesses, and that means delivering an adequate information service that enables them to remain competitive in a post-Brexit marketplace.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah Olney".

Sarah Olney
Member of Parliament for Richmond Park