



Clear Guidance required from the Public Health Professionals and Government in regard to COVID-19 and the hair, beauty and spa Industry

Leo Varadkar TD
Government Buildings,
Merrion Street,
Dublin 2

19/03/2020

Dear Taoiseach,

The impact and requirement of social distancing measures in order to help flatten the curve of the COVID-19 in Irish society is proving extremely difficult to implement and maintain within our industry. The direct, hands-on and close-contact nature of the services provided by hair, beauty and spa industry professionals makes it virtually impossible to implement social distancing as per the current HSE requests. *“Where all citizens are required to increase interpersonal distance (ideally separation of at least 2 metres)”* (Gov.ie, 2020)

As a collective of industry organisations, we do not believe that our industry at this point can meet the current requirements set out by the HSE.

In a live government update press conference on Monday the 16th of March 2020, you made the following statements *“it would be counterproductive to shut restaurants and hairdressers and send people home to interact in the same way”* and you also noted that you as government will act on the *“advice of the public health professionals”*. Following your statement, we are seeking leadership and guidance from Government. As an industry collective, we are seeking a clear and comprehensive recommendation from Public Health Professionals and the Irish government as to the continuance of trading within the Irish hair, beauty and spa sectors.

As an industry, we fully support the HSE and Government requests for social distance. We as an industry take our social responsibility very seriously - hence the vast amount of voluntary closures nationally. The health and welfare of those in our society is our key priority.

Thousands of salons across Ireland have already been forced to close their doors in order to meet the HSE requirements on social distancing. The hair and beauty industry employs 25,800 (CSO, labour market figures Q4 2019) with a 90% female workforce, throughout 9,286 businesses (CSO, Business figures, Q4 2019). The vast amount of these employee's will now have no option but to join the live register on the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment.



2019 proved to be one of the toughest years within the industry. Labour market figures fell by 8% (down from 28,000 in Q1, 2019) due to the reversal of the VAT rate, abolishment of trainee rate, and increase in National Minimum Wages. We say this in a time of crisis as these businesses are the backbone of Ireland's towns and villages, providing essential services, and employment. They deserve your full support.

As an industry collective, which is fully supported by ISME, we call on the Irish Government to develop an inclusive economic recovery package that supports domestic SMEs in the hair, beauty and spa industry, focusing on:

- Financial grant payments in order to ensure liquidity of organisations
- Reinstatement of Statutory Redundancy Rebate
- Reduction in the VAT Rate to 9%
- Reduction in Employers PRSI contribution
- Review of the apprenticeship payment model to include a training allowance
- Freeze on commercial rents and rates
- One-month vulnerable industries wage support grant - paid to employers who rehire laid off employees. This would help to generate cash flow as the business enters recovery mode.

It is vital that inclusive economic recovery supports are put in place in order to help our members rebuild Ireland.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret O'Rourke Doherty, CEO, Hair and Beauty Industry Confederation (HABIC) & Vice Chairperson of ISME,

David Campbell, President of the Irish Hairdressers Federation

Sean Taaffe, President of the Hairdressing Council of Ireland

Anita Murray, Chairperson of the Irish Spa Association

Catherine Finn, Chairperson of Synergy Hair Group

Copy; Heather Humphreys TD, Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

Paschal Donohue TD, Minister of Finance

Regina Doherty TD, Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Neil McDonnell, CEO, ISME