

RE: Easing of Restrictions and Beyond for the Hair, Beauty and Spa Industry

Leo Varadkar, Tanaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment,
Department for Enterprise, Trade and Employment,
23 Kildare Street, Dublin 2

22/11/2020

Dear Minister,

The hair and beauty industry presented a solution-based approach to government on the reopening and activating of our industry in a safe and systematic manner. Our collective engagement with the former Minister Heather Humphreys and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Health and Safety Authority led to the development of [a Roadmap for Reopening Hair Salons and Barbers, and Beauty Salons and Spa's](#). Throughout this pandemic our members have conducted business in a professional and exemplar manner. Businesses within the hair, beauty and spa sector have continually complied with the regulations and lockdowns in the public interest.

Hairdressers, Barbers, Beauticians, and all other industry colleagues have gone over and above the requirements laid out in the Government's Return to Work Safely Protocol to ensure the safety of their clients and staff. Yet we find ourselves redundant once again. Little reassurance has been given to the business community to give confidence in the roadmap that lies ahead, as we listen to leaders say they cannot assure us that a 3rd lockdown will not happen. Also, communication strategies are giving conflicting messages, as we watch our testing regime take days and our tracing capacity fall to pieces, we start to seriously question the path forward.

As an industry we closed our doors in mid-March and reopened at the end of June. Salons had 17 weeks of trading between the lockdowns before they were instructed to close yet again on the 22nd of October. In the 17-week period of trading, this industry has proven to be a safe and responsible environment. Salons by their very nature are controlled environments operating by appointments and when clients are in the salons, they are stationary limiting the movement of people. Salons across Ireland have invested extremely heavily in structural modifications and screening, PPE, training, enhanced sanitization, screening of clients for COVID-19 symptoms, retention of data for contact tracing, reduced capacity to ensure social distance of the full 2 metres and many salons have gone as far as being independently audited to ensure compliance with the guidelines. Yet as an industry we sit and watch our colleagues classed as essential services continue to trade with far less measures in place.

As an industry we have more than played our part in preventing the spread of COVID-19 in our professional environments and yet we find ourselves debating reopening dates, fearful of rolling lockdowns and firmly on the brink of industry ruination due to a thriving black economy.

While we appreciate the unprecedented impact of this global pandemic and the impact this has had on all aspects of our society and economy, it is clear that the current government strategy is flawed and is suppressing an industry that has proven itself to be extremely responsible.

Our members have been extremely vocal about their dissatisfaction around the Government's communication strategy regarding the reopening of businesses. At this point, an entire industry has taken appointments for all of December including the 1st. Thousands of our industry colleagues understood the statement made by An Taoiseach on Oct 19th, to mean they would reopen their doors on the 1st of December and now we find out this is not the case and they are not permitted to reopen their doors until Dec 2nd. ["If each of us does what is asked of us for a period of just six weeks, we will suppress this virus and we will emerge from these restrictions on the 1st December"](#) Salons nationally are fully booked in December and have limited capacity to rearrange clients to a later date, therefore we urge Government to amend the current regulation to allow for an earlier reopening so that salons can continue to provide a controlled environment.

While we fully appreciate the unpredictable nature of this COVID-19, we are more than 4 weeks into our second lockdown, and we are none the wiser as to Government's plan for reopening. With less than 2 weeks

to go, the lack of a clear communication plan and a fully confirmed reopening date is an extreme source of anxiety, serious stress and avoidable worry for thousands of SME's who are required to ensure the economic activity continues on this Island. The reactivation of a business cannot be done with a flick of a switch, it requires careful planning, and the current lack of clarity does not support our business community, or employees.

We urge the Government to take on board the following.

1. Urgent amendment to the current regulations. Personal grooming services must be allowed to open their doors and trade earlier than the 2nd of December.
2. The blanket closure of personal grooming services at level 4 and 5 is an extremely unjustified approach. Urgent amendment to the classification of personal grooming services from "non-essential services" is required. Personal grooming services should be classified as an "Essential Service" and allowed to remain open for the duration of this pandemic for multiple reasons including mental health and wellbeing.
3. A clear strategy to avoid future rolling lockdowns is required, the use of continual crude lockdowns as a method to control the virus must be avoided as SME's will not survive a 3rd lockdown and compliance may dwindle.
4. Personal grooming services must be excluded from any future lockdown, particularly as the industry has not been noted in any way as a source of infection.
5. The strengthening of our testing and tracing regime is essential, which should be extended to include antigen testing that is more widely and rapidly accessible.
6. Enhanced engagement and communication with the business community will strengthen the understanding of the needs and challenges faced by SME's nationally.

The hair and beauty industry has proven beyond doubt that it is a safe and responsible environment, and this has been echoed by various professionals and research:

- Tony O'Brien (former head of the HSE) noted that the hairdressers should be allowed to [reopen during Level 5 Restrictions](#) as they have demonstrated that they can work safely during the pandemic
- It is clear from the daily HPSC Epidemiology reports that personal grooming services carried out within a controlled professional environment are not a super spreader, source of clusters nor noted areas of transmission of COVID-19
- A recent publication by HIQA compiled various research from across the world, within this report there is one reference to salons which notes "[No significant association was found between any of the other exposures and infection with SARS-CoV-2](#)" which further confirms and demonstrates that salons are a safe environment. (HIQA, Evidence Summary on activities and settings associated with SARS-Cov-2 Transmissions, P-19)
- A report from the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention notes the [Absence of Apparent Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from Two Stylists After Exposure at a Hair Salon with a Universal Face Covering Policy — Springfield, Missouri, May 2020](#)

The board of HABIC would welcome the opportunity to meet to discuss the above issues and to outline the needs of the hair, beauty, and spa industry.

Yours sincerely,



Margaret O'Rourke Doherty,
CEO, Hair and Beauty Industry Confederation (HABIC)

Copy:

Minister Damien English, Department of Business, Employment and Retail
Minister Robert Troy, Department of Trade Promotion, Digital and Company Regulation
Declan Hughes, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.
Neil Mc Donnell, CEO Irish SME Association (ISME)