

Ken Skates MS
Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales

13 October 2020

Dear Ken,

As Helen Mary Jones mentioned in Plenary on 7 October, as part of our ongoing inquiry into Covid-19 Recovery, we took evidence on Wednesday 7 October from long-term affected sectors including tourism, hospitality, retail and the hair and beauty industry. In advance of agreeing a full report, the Committee would like to seek assurances on a specific issue raised which requires prompt attention, and which we understand you are already looking into.

Victoria Brownlie of the National Hair and Beauty Federation (NHBF) highlighted the disproportionate impact of current restrictions in the guidance on close contact services on beauty parlours. The guidance strongly advises against treatments around the face, which constitute 50-70% of treatments offered by the beauty industry, an industry which is 95% female.

The hair and beauty industry is a significant contributor to the Welsh foundational economy and to health and wellbeing. However its importance stretches beyond this, Victoria highlighted salons and beauty parlours are a key force in drawing people to the high street and as such generate footfall for other businesses, and they also often act as local community hubs.

Another reason the industry is vital to the Welsh economy is it is a large employer of women. Most hair and beauty businesses are micro businesses owned by female entrepreneurs and supporting working women with children.

Victoria Brownlie pointed to the need to be constantly amending the guidance to ensure that Covid-secure services can be offered so that businesses can generate income again. The NHBF's evidence also urged against any “flippancy” in how the sector is perceived and treated, and expressed concern that the economic contribution it makes is not always recognised.

As you'll be aware from Victoria Brownlie's letter to you dated 7 October, the NHBF have warned that over a third of hair and beauty businesses in Wales have said they are unsure they will survive beyond Christmas. The NHBF has highlighted to us that if these businesses fail there is not just the tragedy of a previously prosperous businesses closing but also the risk that then people currently employed may need to turn to the 'black market' for work. Unregulated hair and beauty treatments are risky for both the practitioner and their clients.

Members would welcome assurances that there is no unconscious gender bias being shown in Welsh Government's policy approach to this sector. We note that in response to the ELGC's recent report 'Into Sharp Relief: inequality and the pandemic', Welsh Government said that further impact assessments relating to Coronavirus regulations and guidance will be published, and it would be “looking to learn the lessons of the past few months.”

The Committee welcomes your response to Helen Mary Jones' question in Plenary and your commitment to look into potential anomalies in the close contact guidance, and would like to be updated with the outcome of this. However we would also like to ask the following questions:

- What consideration has been given to the impact of these close contact guidance on the viability of businesses in the hair and beauty sector?
- How does the guidance in Wales on undertaking treatments in the 'high risk zone' compare to that in other UK nations?
- Are you satisfied that there has been adequate impact assessment of these continued restrictions? and
- As this guidance requires regular review, what is the process for this?

I have copied this letter to John Griffiths in light of his role as chair of the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Russell George". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R' and a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Russell George MS

Chair: Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee