



Janet Finch-Saunders MS|AS

Aelod Senedd Cymru dros Aberconwy
Member of the Welsh Parliament for Aberconwy



Mr Vaughan Gething MS,
Minister for Economy,
Welsh Government,
Tŷ Hywel,
CF99 1NA.
By Email.

Office of Janet Finch-Saunders MS,
29 Madoc Street,
Llandudno,
LL30 2TL.
01492 871198

Welsh Parliament,
Cardiff Bay,
CF99 1SN.

Janet.Finch-Saunders@Senedd.Wales

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RE: Covid-19 Business Support Concerns

Dear Minister,

I hope that this letter finds you well. May I begin by congratulating you on your appointment as the Minister for Economy. Our nation's economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the need for job creation across Wales, is now of central importance and I look forward to hearing your plans in the Senedd for how these aims will be achieved.

In the meantime, I write on the critical and pressing matter of financial support for businesses who are now beginning to reopen after a prolonged period of lockdown. Firstly, on the issue of the next tranche of support to be released under the ERF scheme, local businesses have written to make plain their dismay at the wording of the criteria featured on the Business Wales website. Whilst the application portal will be accepting claims between the 24th May and the 7th June 2021, businesses are confused as to how they will be expected to evidence a material negative impact – “through reduced turnover of 60% or more” – in the month of June, ahead of time. With previous experience of claims being turned away due to quibbles over evidence, will you commit to urgently review the wording so that greater clarity is provided?

Likewise, and as I have raised in a letter to the First Minister on the 12th May, the present funding proposals appear to have missed providing support for the month of April, including the closures of business over the pivotal Easter break. I would encourage you to listen to Mr David Chapman, Executive Director of UK Hospitality Cymru, who has rightly stated that ‘the last tranche of finance ran out more than a month ago.’ Consequently, can you confirm if your department will now look to backdate financial support to the start of the financial year, so that enterprises across Wales are compensated for every week of restrictions they have been subjected to?

It would also be appreciated if you could urgently consider removing the following rule: ‘If a business has declared they have received Self Employment Income Support Scheme (SEIS) then they are ineligible for the Economic Resilience Fund.’ As I am sure you are aware, SEIS has been an invaluable financial lifeline to businesses in Wales, with around 140,000 individuals having been potentially eligible. As such, I am extremely concerned that the restriction on the self-employed will see a lot of enterprises miss out on the latest ERF scheme.

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Local businesses have been emphatic that they want to be empowered to trade. They have made clear that money is needed to restart rather than to redevelop, something that has gone amiss in recent support schemes. For this reason, will you confirm whether Welsh Government will urgently look at developing packages to restart the economy, such as a new Welsh Restart Grant, replicating the success of the support packages provided by the UK Government?

Finally, it was with much disappointment that I learnt that the First Minister has decided not to have any ministerial portfolio with clear responsibility for tourism. As I am sure you will recall, Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas served as Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism. It follows that I would be grateful if you could outline your commitment to working with and in the best interest of the tourism sector.

I await your reply so that businesses throughout Aberconwy can get the clarity they deserve.

Yours sincerely,

Janet Finch-Saunders MS/AS