300 cross-industry organisations are backing the wedding industry as key to unlocking the future of the UK economy

Friday 26 March, 2021

Over 300 cross-industry organisations have signed a letter to the Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng calling on him to unlock the future of the wedding industry as well as the many sectors that are reliant upon a thriving wedding industry

- The wedding industry is critical to the UK's economic recovery and has a key role to play in unlocking growth industries, such as home buying and increased longer term investments in assets, as couples plan for their future together

- At a business summit, Kwasi Kwarteng acknowledged that the wedding sector has been "adversely affected" by the pandemic, and recognised the economic and social contribution of the wedding industry. The Business Secretary also stated that he is hopeful that "all the metrics are pointing towards a full reopening on 21 st June" but stated that flexibility was needed to respond to the coronavirus
- However, the current guidance remains ambiguous, with large parts of the wedding industry still unsupported by the Government's various financial support packages
- The wedding industry is calling for immediate parity with other similar sectors, clarity on guidance, and financial support from the Government
- Public supporters are also mobilising as a bride's Change.org petition has gathered over 1,000 signatures in just 48 hours, asking the UK government to "Unlock Our Future"

Over 300 cross-industry organisations, including MUTA (UK Marquee Association), We Make Events, the British Beauty Council and the Nationwide Caterers Association are calling on the UK Government to unlock the future and potential of the wedding industry. After being shut for almost a year, many wedding businesses are on their knees and over 500,000 couples have been left in limbo over their wedding day. The wedding industry has a crucial role to play in the UK's coronavirus recovery, but to do so, the sector is calling for immediate parity with similar sectors, clarity on covid guidelines and financial support.

At a Hostology Summit on "Creating a Business Friendly Framework", Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng acknowledged that the wedding sector has been "adversely affected" by the pandemic, and recognised the economic and social contribution of the wedding industry. The Business Secretary also stated that he is hopeful "all the metrics are pointing towards a full reopening on 21st June" but reiterated flexibility was needed to respond to the coronavirus. While many in the industry welcomed the recognition from the Business Secretary, the reality is that large swathes of the sector are unable to plan ahead due to the lack of clarity in the guidance and 50% of wedding businesses remain excluded from the current government support packages.

As the country moves out of lockdown, economic stimulus is needed to boost the economy. The wedding industry contributes £14.7 billion to the UK economy every year, with billions spent on ceremonies, wedding attire and wedding related travel and tourism. In addition, the wedding sector has a key role to play in unlocking growth industries, such as home buying and increased longer term investments in assets, as couples plan for their future together. However, this potential boost to the economy is being hampered as many in the wedding industry are still unable to work due to current restrictions up until June.

In the Government's roadmap out of lockdown, pubs are permitted to have marquees erected in pub gardens and social distancing based on capacity, while live events with 1,000 attendees are permitted indoors and 10,000 attendees outdoors from May. Meanwhile, the wedding sector is unable to host weddings with numbers above 30 in any setting. The wedding sector must be given parity with live events and hospitality as weddings of 6, 15 and 30 attendees are simply not financially viable for wedding businesses and their supply chains.

The contrast in treatment with other sectors is of serious concern, particularly given that 80% of those working in the wedding sector are women, and the recent ONS report revealed that women have been most impacted by the pandemic. The Government should therefore be doing everything it can to unlock the most impacted sectors.

Many in the industry are also frustrated at the ambiguity of the Government's guidelines. The wedding

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sector had to wait weeks for the guidance on wedding ceremonies and receptions to be published, but many found that the guidance was riddled with inconsistencies, confusing language and outdated references to previous guidelines.

The lack of clarity is severely damaging to the industry as it undermines consumer confidence. No further detail has been published for weddings from 17th May onwards, which is unacceptable for an industry reliant on longer lead times. Members of the public are also mobilising as this week, a bride's Change.org petition on behalf of engaged couples which asks the UK government to "Unlock Our Future" has gathered over 1000 signatures in just 48 hours. Supporters of this petition are asking for "fairness, clarity and a commitment to full reopening of normal weddings by 21st June 2021 at the latest."

Unfortunately, it is largely women suffering from the Government's oversight. Jessie Westwood, co-founder of What About Weddings and an independent wedding planner at Studio Sorores Ltd ,highlights how women in the wedding industry have been constantly overlooked by the Government and why the wedding industry's potential needs to be unlocked by the Government:

"The wedding industry provides highly skilled, well paid and flexible employment opportunities for many women. However, it is clear that the Government has not given enough thought to the challenges that many women have faced during the pandemic, especially those that are self-employed and have childcare responsibilities.

The Government must now recognise that it needs to work more closely with female-led industries, prioritise them by giving them adequate financial support and allow them to go back to work.Businesses in the sector are ready to bounce back as soon as possible to help recovery of the economy, and thousands of couples are eager to wed so they can move forward with their lives.

However, this can only be done if the Government gives the wedding sector parity and support."

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