

Dear George,

### **Closure of schools – need for childcare for the food and drink supply chain**

Very good to speak with you this morning. I am writing in similar terms to Alok Sharma and have copied this letter to him.

As referenced on our calls in the past week and mentioned by a number of my members this morning, the most pressing concern the FDF has at the moment is around the impact of school closures on our essential workforce and on the UK's food security. The UK's food and drink manufacturers are keeping the nation fed in the most challenging of circumstances and we must do all we can to support them to continue to do so.

With the decisions taken today to close many schools – unfortunately with no notice from the Scottish and Welsh Governments – food and drink manufacturers will be deeply concerned about how they will maintain essential production in the coming weeks and protect their staff. We have surveyed our members over the last few days and over 8 in 10 said that their key concern was maintaining production levels if a substantial number of staff are not available for work. This has now become even more acute.

Unlike food retail and hospitality, many of our production and technical roles in factories rely on specific skills – workers cannot be easily moved either for reasons of geography or ability. In some factories, agency workers had already been in short supply before the pandemic and the efficient, cost-effective nature of our supply chains means there is little flexibility. The recent [report from the Food and Drink Sector Council](#) demonstrates the skills requirements across the whole industry and existing challenges that will be brought more sharply into focus by the current situation.

As food and drink production is part of the UK's Government Critical National Infrastructure, I am therefore asking for you to consider designating the food and drink manufacturing employees in factories as essential for the purposes of prioritising available school and childcare places. We can work with you to determine how we might designate and segment the workforce. I would further echo the calls made by FDF members this morning to support wherever possible the need for essential PPE to encourage those workers who are well enough to work to do so. Lastly, we share your desire to see a test in force as soon as possible which indicates that workers are safe to return to their roles.

I attached the full details of our survey and would be delighted to expand further on this with you or colleagues.

Yours,

Ian

**Ian Wright CBE**  
Chief Executive  
**Food and Drink Federation**  
6th Floor | 10 Bloomsbury Way | London | WC1A 2SL  
**T:** 020 7420 7101