



Boots Regional Office  
36 Queen Street  
Cardiff  
CF10 2EG

9<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Economy, Trade & Rural Affairs Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the committee's consultation on the strategic priorities of the committee for the immediate six months and longer-term.

Boots has been on the side of our customers throughout the Covid-19 emergency. For over 125 years in Wales, Boots has been a pioneer in healthcare, and throughout our history, we have always put patients first and been at the heart of our communities. Our first branch opened in Swansea in 1896, and we are proud of our strong Welsh roots and heritage. We currently have over 120 stores with a mixture of retail and pharmacy, opticians, and hearing care in Wales, and employ over 2,000 people in communities across Wales. We are one of the largest employers of trained healthcare professionals in the country outside the NHS, offering pharmacy, opticians, and hearing care services.

In the run-up to the election we shared our concerns and priorities with members publishing our 2021 manifesto, a copy of which has been attached for you. On page seven of the document we outline the business support needed to keep shops, like Boots, open on high streets up and down Wales.

Shopping on the high street has changed, with measures such as social distancing keeping us all safe, and during this period we saw an increase of online retail and a reduction of footfall to local stores. The increased, unequal burden of the costs in operation and running of physical stores was demonstrated by the increased closure of stores, nearly 50 a day during the pandemic. Policy networks must evolve to support the high street before those who rely on these shops, such as our outstanding retail workers and customers, are left behind. We call for a new Retail strategy for Wales, developed in partnership with the sector to comprehensively evaluate and support our high street. Without it, the support networks that we have built upon over the pandemic are at risk.

Business rates are another stumbling block exacerbating the unequal dynamic of operating a physical store on the high street. We must accelerate the progress of reform of property-based taxes for the new world of multichannel retailing. England has already begun to lead the way in developing this policy area. In short

term, we call for the committee to review what has been done in England and demand parity until a bespoke policy is developed for Wales.

With a change in our shopping habits came a shift in how we live, work, and develop our future. Apprenticeships have been the bedrock of Government policy, helping to deliver new opportunities for young people up and down the country. At Boots, this is part of our fabric too.

In May of this year, we agreed to support BiTc 'Boost scheme', where our store managers become coaches that have all been trained in helping job seekers most impacted by Covid 19. In Wales, ten of our brilliant managers share their skills, improve the confidence of those on the programme and work to complete six coaching sessions over 3-6 months.

In our Flagship store in Cardiff, we will be working with the Prince's Trust to support a pilot scheme called the 'Get into Retail Programme'. This is a placement programme for 16-30yr olds. We will be helping individuals with a 4-day practical work experience in our store, working with our team to gain insight into retail work.

Alongside programmes such as these however, we need urgent skills reform to allow a greater choice of providers and recognition of in-house training programmes with more time to spend funds on long-term programmes such as these. Young people deserve more opportunities, with greater flexibility in the funding, including internal training, retraining, and eligibility of part-time colleagues – we also demand the abolition of funding caps for more advanced programmes.

Supporting businesses across Wales supports not only our high streets but also our customers and retail workers. Communities have already seen the devastating effects of the pandemic; without shops like ours, the community is affected, especially the most vulnerable who rely on us for their daily needs. That is why we are calling on this committee to review, adapt and develop new policies to help businesses build greater resilience for a more sustainable future.

We look forward to providing evidence to your enquiries and stand ready to provide any support required to help develop a new, bolder strategy for businesses in Wales.

Warm Regards,



Andy Francis

Head of Stores Wales, Merseyside & West Midlands  
Boots UK