

Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP

Chairman

Environmental Audit Committee

House of Commons

London

SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Dunne

### **Usdaw and Boohoo**

1 Usdaw is the UK's fifth largest Union, with more than 400,000 members. Our members work solely in the private sector with the majority employed in the retail sector. We also have significant membership in road transport, warehousing, food manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, call centres and home shopping.

2 Usdaw welcomes the opportunity to shed light on our interactions and attempts to work with Boohoo for the benefit of employees and Usdaw members. We have been campaigning for recognition with Boohoo for employees in their Head office in Manchester and its distribution sites and call centre in Burnley since January 2017.

3 Our written report to the EAC in December 2018 shows the work we have undertaken on behalf of all employees at Boohoo. Since then we have continued to make approaches to the company and to hold campaign days outside their sites, but they still refuse to engage with us, despite the EAC's recommendation that they should "engage with Usdaw as a priority and recognise unions for its workers."

### **Recognition and Members**

4 Boohoo will not formally recognise Usdaw, have refused to meet Usdaw representatives, and will not engage with Usdaw despite your recommendations.

### **On Site Employee Intimidation**

5 It is absolutely clear that employees feel intimidated. They have informed us that they have been told not to engage with Reps, not to take leaflets and not to make eye contact.

6 As an example, of employees were arriving for the 6am - 6pm shift, we were informed that those who were brave enough to take a leaflet showing the benefits we offer were told to put all information into a bin bag, that was being held by a shift manager.

7 Union Reps visit the sites only to represent people at grievance or disciplinary meetings.

8 When we attend the sites, the meetings will take place in a part of the building where employees can't see the work we are doing – i.e. that we are on site assisting members.

## **Union Reps**

9 It could be perceived Boohoo's statement of July 2019 that Union Reps can freely visit the site and engage with employees openly. This is simply not the case and is untrue.

10 Boohoo did not welcome Usdaw Reps as guests to their AGM.

11 Usdaw Reps leafleted the shareholders attending the meeting, and then took seats in the public gallery. Incidentally, the meeting lasted 10 minutes.

12 We waited to speak to company representatives, however they left the meeting by another exit.

## **Engagement with Usdaw**

13 In regards to Boohoo suggesting they have not blocked engagement with Usdaw, I would again refer to our written submission that was presented to the EAC, which demonstrates that this is not the case.

## **Covid19 Pandemic**

14 Usdaw has tried to engage with Boohoo throughout the pandemic, for the benefit of employees and Usdaw members, as well as the wider public.

15 Usdaw raised the sale of facemasks as a fashion accessory directly to Boohoo, condemning their gimmick of selling masks that have no protective purpose at a time when PPE was in short supply.

16 Following numerous queries from worried members, Usdaw raised two questions to Boohoo on 26 March, specifically

*Could you please confirm that you intend to close the warehouse for the safety of your employees and their families?*

and

*Could you please confirm that you will continue to pay staff their FULL wages as normal?*

17 We received a response stating a number of points, including that they were monitoring government guidance, they had conducted a 'thank you' visit to the warehouse and were ensuring social distancing measures were in place, and that pregnant workers were at home on full pay. Neither question was answered directly.

18 However, based on the increased number of calls Usdaw received from Boohoo employees, what Boohoo described in their response to us was not the reality of life on the floor.

19 Usdaw received calls from people who were terrified they may become infected with Coronavirus and put their loved ones at risk.

20 Usdaw received increased contact from the media, and about Boohoo specifically, during

this period.

21 Many of Usdaw's members were designated key workers in the fight against the pandemic, and ensured that food, medicines and medical supplies were available to the public, and through the supply chain to the shop floor. Usdaw is clear that Boohoo warehouse employees were not key workers during this national emergency.

22 Usdaw asked again that Boohoo close its warehouse, furlough the staff and apply to the government's coronavirus job retention scheme so that its employees get the support they need at this time of unprecedented worry.

23 Usdaw stated to Boohoo that businesses that were remaining open at that time even though they are not essential were putting employees at risk and were coming under more and more scrutiny.

I hope you find this additional information useful. For further background information on the relationship between Usdaw and Boohoo, please refer to our written submission to the EAC.

I hope this is helpful and please do not hesitate if I can be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely

Mike Aylward

Divisional Officer

Usdaw