

**Written evidence submitted by Stuart Needham (Training and Development Manager at The Training and Skills Development Foundation)**

We are a C.I.O. registered with the Charities Commission, & we provide 'on-site' minibus driver training & assessments to predominantly education establishments & organisations in the voluntary sector. We also, with the use of our volunteer minibus drivers, provide some very low cost (actually it sometimes costs us money to do this!!!), minibus group travel services for very grass root organisations, & we don't need to use an office/unit or shop to perform our activities.

All our 'income generating' activity ceased on 13<sup>th</sup> March when 'lockdown' started to have an impact, & it is envisaged that any 'income generating' activity will not arise until at least all schools are back functioning & social distancing rules are relaxed, & the 'R' rate is under control.

From information provided to us by Debbie Abrahams MP, when the Small Business Grant scheme was started, out of approximately 7000 businesses/charities in Oldham, 44.7% (3,100 ) could not receive the SBG support, because they didn't fit the rigid criteria of having to be in receipt of Small Business Rates Relief or Rural Rate Relief.

In light of this anomaly, the Discretionary Grant was subsequently set up, but there is still a high percentage of businesses not able to access this grant either, because the criteria requires the organisation to be paying rent.

Well it transpires that not every Business or Charity necessarily needs to operate their business activity or charitable services from a shop or office, & as such are able to operate in a smart & economical way so as to help reduce the 'on costs' to their customers & end users; but the organisations still have significant operating costs to be covered.

Like numerous other 'smart working' organisations, we work '*outside the box*'. We don't always need to be surrounded by 4 walls to be productive. This has also helped us to consciously try to reduce our carbon footprint & not having to drive to an office every day, not using gas & electric when we get there etc.

Many businesses & workers are now realising the same thing – that actually you don't have to 'go to work' to work, you can work in a smarter way, you can be productive, if not more so by working from home, improving people's well-being & mental state with a better 'work-life' balance.

You don't need to sit in congested rush-hour traffic twice a day pumping fumes into the atmosphere, getting all stressed up from indulging in the occasional 'road-rage'.

The roads are less congested so public transport & road haulage can actually move, cyclists & pedestrians are a lot safer.

We are requesting parity with the organisations that have met the rigid criteria for the SBR or the DG grants, & even though the Government stated that the Local Councils will have discretionary pragmatism, this is not the case, & we feel as though we're being discriminated against with our request for some support all because we work in a smart way '*outside the box*'!!

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