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142-144 Long Lane,  
London, SE1 4BS

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
10 Downing Street  
London  
SW1A 2AA

16 November 2020

### **Open letter calling for toy retail to be added to essential list ahead of Christmas**

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing as Chairmen of the British Toy & Hobby Association (BTHA) and the Toy Retailers Association (TRA), to call for toy retail to be added to the essential retail list. Toys are essential tools of play that contribute to child development and learning and have been essential to families this year during lockdown, keeping children entertained, keeping them active, maintaining positive mental health and underpinning the morale of families around the country.

Now, we are entering the season when toys are more essential than ever. Christmas is synonymous with toys under the tree. Toys and games bring joy and entertainment to children and they are important in creating moments that bond and unify families during the festive period. We all have fond memories of the excitement of opening presents and getting the toy we asked for on Christmas morning from Santa. 2020 hasn't provided many opportunities to make happy memories and you have the power to make sure children get that chance this Christmas. Please don't allow Covid to steal Christmas from children and families across the country.

We thank you for trying to keep retail open with click and collect opportunities. However, there are mixed messages around lockdown which are limiting the opportunity of spreading toy purchases across the festive period. Although the government position is to allow shops to operate click and collect, the message to consumers is to only go out to shop for food and medicine. That means shopping centres and town centres are simply not getting consumers to leave their homes to pick up purchases. This is leading to more consumers relying on online purchases. Retailers are trying to cope with demand online, but courier slots are limited, and retail will not be able to cope with demand as we get closer to Christmas. The only platforms with almost unlimited capacity are the online marketplace platforms and that is concerning given our recent report into toy safety on those platforms which found that 86% of toys sold by third-party sellers were illegal to sell in the UK and 60% had safety issues that would make them unsafe for a child to play with.

The toy industry is worth £3.2 billion to the UK economy with 50% of toys sold in the last quarter of the year. The current closures are impacting on the £400 million value in November and we simply cannot lose the £820 million December trade - this period is crucial to the survival of toy companies and retailers in the UK and without November and December trade, many companies will not survive. Limiting toy retail at this crucial time of year will result in damaging the toy industry and will put child safety at risk. This will be devastating to many toy suppliers and retailers that have spent the year supporting charities and local communities in lockdown. The toy industry charity, the Toy Trust, has been making donations throughout the year to struggling children's charities to help them

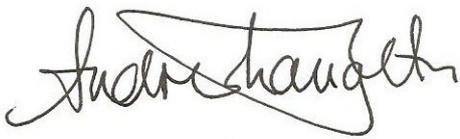
continue their work during tough conditions and members of the BTHA have been sourcing and supplying PPE since the Spring.

We understand the need for some restrictions to keep the country safe but we can assure you that toy retail is already set up and prepared to operate under safe, Covid-compliant conditions. To do that we need to help consumers get access to toys as early in the season as possible to spread demand and prevent last-minute panic buying. We therefore call on the government to add toys to the list of essential retail as soon as possible, and at a minimum, ensure that toy shops are allowed to operate from 2<sup>nd</sup> December when the current lockdown is likely to be lifted.

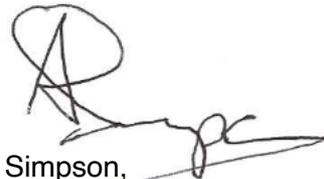
We would greatly value your support in adding toys to the list of essential items so we can continue to support children and families throughout the country, help maintain their play, development and educational needs and contribute to the overall morale of our great nation during these most difficult times. We need you to ensure that Christmas isn't cancelled in a year when we all need some joy to lift the country's spirits, to assist the UK toy industry and, most importantly, to support families that need our toys for essential child development and some joy this Christmas.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us, via the BTHA's Director of Public Affairs and Communications Natasha Crookes at [natasha@btha.co.uk](mailto:natasha@btha.co.uk) or 01208 832 827.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Laughton  
Chairman,  
British Toy and Hobby Association



Alan Simpson,  
Chairman,  
Toy Retailers Association.