# Twitter Thread by Peter Foster

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**UK’s £35bn fashion industry warns of “decimation” from #brexit - big names sign open letter to @BorisJohnson urging action. Many of 50,000 SMEs on the rack due to VAT, customs and work permit issues. Stay with me/1**

@BorisJohnson You can read the full text of the letter here, co-ordinated by Fashion Round Table @FashionRoundTab, but tl;dr it says that #Brexit has left a "gaping hole" in an industry that relies of free movement of professionals. It's a familiar cry /2

https://t.co/gGurZTIcho

@BorisJohnson @FashionRoundTab The industry, already whacked by #COVID19, is now discovering that cross-border sales are a horror (VAT, Customs, long delays) and models, stylists, photographers that used to blat around Europe can't any more. They need permits, for themselves, for their gear /3

It is on one level amazing that this is only just fully dawning - as the musician industry found out recently - but fashion is not just big names and big companies. It's actually a mountain of small companies and sole traders often that feed into a huge (£35bn) industry /4

I've written about fashion models issue before (they need tier-5 sponsorship visas) and how that will erode London's status as a hub, but this goes so much wider than this - hence the #dontmakefashionhistory campaign - and comes down the lack of a mobility chapter in the deal /5

This campaign has some big names...400 have signed, including @twiggy @YLBofficialsite Yasmin Le Bon, Nick Knight, @RoksandaIlincic @laurabailey_uk and serious industry players, who now see how badly an industry like fashion gets squeezed by #brexit /6

> Other signatories included Nick Knight, the fashion photographer; Jefferson Hack of Dazed Media Group; John Horner, the chief executive of the Models 1 agency and head of the British Fashion Models Association; Sam McKnight the hair stylist who worked with Diana, Princess of Wales; the designer Roksanda Ilinčić, the London-based Serbian designer whose dresses are worn by the Duchess of Cambridge and Michelle Obama; Laura Bailey, the model and Vogue contributing editor and Andrea Thompson, the editor-in-chief of Marie Claire magazine.

@Twiggy @YLBofficialsite @RoksandaIlincic @laurabailey_uk These luminaries want some kind of 'fix'...as Helen Brocklebank, CEO of @Walpole_UK says 42% per cent of UK luxury export sales are from the EU. The #Brexit costs and admin mean many of her members "have concluded they simply can't afford to continue selling to those countries"/7

@Twiggy @YLBofficialsite @RoksandaIlincic @laurabailey_uk @Walpole_UK Isabel Ettedgui, the chief executive of Savile Row brand Connolly, which sells Scottish cashmere and manufactures leather goods in Spain says its an existential challenge for "a 185-year-old company that holds the Royal Warrant" /8

@Twiggy @YLBofficialsite @RoksandaIlincic @laurabailey_uk @Walpole_UK Katharine Hamnett, the fashion designer best known for political T-shirts and championing ethical business practices, says "brands will die" without a radical overhaul of customs & VAT arrangements /9

@Twiggy @YLBofficialsite @RoksandaIlincic @laurabailey_uk @Walpole_UK These are big names, but they are the front of house for a huge number of small traders - the button makers, the jewellery makers, the leather workers, stylists etc that fitted into an industry that has grown up on free movement - which is now at an end /10

@Twiggy @YLBofficialsite @RoksandaIlincic @laurabailey_uk @Walpole_UK And as Barnier aid @StefaanDeRynck observed after the musicians made similar pleas...well, that's what happens when you don't have a 'mobility chapter ' in the deal' - welcome to a new world of #brexit /11

https://t.co/4FftDitAKr

> This sums it up well. The rejection of the mobility chapter was indeed crucial. The challenge now is for all those concerned to adjust to the new reality of being outside the EU and its single market, without a mobility chapter in the new agreement. https://t.co/D9ZV7AgeV8
>
> — Stefaan De Rynck (@StefaanDeRynck) January 20, 2021

@Twiggy @YLBofficialsite @RoksandaIlincic @laurabailey_uk @Walpole_UK @StefaanDeRynck So where is the British government in all this? Well, pretty impotent really - it just issues statements saying it is working with industry, it wants to "seize new opportunities" and, oh, it has helplines that it spent money on...but then what else can it say? /12

**A government spokesperson said:**

"We are working closely with businesses in the fashion industry to ensure they get the support they need to trade effectively with Europe, and seize new opportunities as we strike trade deals with the world's fastest growing markets."

"We are aware that some businesses are facing challenges with specific aspects of our new trading relationship with the EU. To this end, we are operating export helplines, running webinars with policy experts and offering businesses support via our network of 300 international trade advisers. This is on top of the millions we have invested to expand the customs intermediaries sector."

Fashion is a big UK success story - 1.6% of UK GDP, growing 11% a year - and trading with New York or Tokyo or China really isn't going to help a lot of those SMEs offset the losses that come with a deal that makes it a pain to buy British, sell to the EU, hire a UK model /13

There are some things in the UK's gift that @FashionRoundTab is asking for - like putting garment workers on the occupation shortage list, but on the really big stuff - customs, VAT, free movement - well, that's what we asked for. We wanted to be Canada...now we are /14

@FashionRoundTab There is still hope in some industries that as #COVID19 lifts, as the UK erects the same customs borders as the EU in July (and EU traders and professionals feels the same pinch) that 'common sense will prevail and that easements and fixes will emerge..../15

@FashionRoundTab But given the politics at the moment - UK refusing EU ambo full recognition, the spats over #COVID19 vaccines, the clusterf*** over the Irish protocol last weekend, the appointment of Lord Frost "Captain Sovereignty" as chief #Brexit guy, I'm not sure I'd bet on it /16

@FashionRoundTab The fashion industry is of course right to campaign hard as it can, for whatever it can get, but as @SamuelMarcLowe has observed, there are hard limits - whether on professional services, or hubbing goods into the EU from the UK - on what can be achieved /17

@FashionRoundTab @SamuelMarcLowe The #COVID19 pandemic gives the govt some breathing space...but sooner or later, you'd think the government will have to start to explain what the point of all this is? Other than alluding to the mythical 'sea of opportunity'...which may start to grate when folks are drowning END