



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

Peter Hebblethwaite
CEO
P&O Ferries

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18 March 2022

Dear Peter,

We are writing to you to express, in the strongest possible terms, the UK Government's anger and disappointment at the way that P&O Ferries handled the redundancy of so many of your staff this week.

The way that staff, who have given years of dedicated service to P&O and played a critical role in keeping our country going during the pandemic, have been treated has been appalling. It therefore gives the Government no pleasure to say that P&O has lost the trust of the public and has given business a bad name.

It is particularly depressing that this should happen given the millions of pounds of British taxpayer support P&O companies received from the furlough scheme. It cannot be right that the company feels tied closely enough to the UK to receive significant amounts of taxpayer money but does not appear willing to abide by the rules that we have put in place to protect British workers. At the very least, P&O should have given the Government the courtesy of sufficient notice so we and our agencies could have worked with you to protect workers and support those in finding alternative employment.

As you will be well aware, there are clear rules around the processes that employers must follow if they are making large groups of staff redundant. These include carrying out consultation with trade union or elected employee representatives and notifying, in advance of these consultations, the Secretary of State via the Insolvency Service and the Redundancy Payment Service. Failure to meet the notification obligation is a criminal offence and can lead to an unlimited fine.

We note that in this case that P&O Ferries appears to have failed to follow this process. We have therefore asked the Insolvency Service to look at the notification requirements and to

consider if further action is appropriate. In the meantime, we would like to understand why you think these rules do not apply to you.

In particular, we would like clear answers to the following:

1. The exact number of staff you have fired this week and whether any consultation was carried out in advance;
2. What options you considered before deciding on this course of action and why those were rejected;
3. What parts of your business the staff you have fired work in, and the location of the work for each dismissed worker;
4. What establishments the relevant workers were working at, for the purposes of section 193 [of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992];
5. If and to the extent P&O consider an establishment to be a ship, the place of registration of the ship and the place(s) between which the ship operates;
6. What numbers of dismissed workers were based at each establishment;
7. Whether there was any material difference between the contracts of staff that have been fired and those who have not. We have seen media reports workers in France and Holland have not been affected in the same way as UK workers;
8. Any other details of the contracts you think are relevant and we should be aware of;
9. Whether any of those you have made redundant have been offered alternative roles within the company or similar roles on amended terms and conditions (including via an agency);
10. What your plans are in relation to other UK based staff. In particular we would like a reassurance that no other similar action is currently being considered.

We would ask for an urgent response – no later than 5pm on 22 March - to these questions as the information you provide will inform next steps, including whether or not we look to make a formal complaint to the relevant prosecuting authority on a failure to notify the Secretary of State as required. We reserve the right to ask further supplemental questions should your answers not provide the clarity that we are seeking.

This letter has been copied to the Secretary of State for Transport.

Yours sincerely,



RT HON KWASI KWARTENG MP
Secretary of State
Department for Business, Energy &
Industrial Strategy



PAUL SCULLY MP
Minister for Small Business, Consumers
& Labour Markets
Department for Business, Energy &
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