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Speech to the events industry reception at the House of Commons

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Good evening.

Firstly, thank you for asking me here this evening to say a few short words on behalf of the events industry.

When I started to think about what to say tonight, I immediately went for the obvious. Which of course, being a businessman was to quote figures at you. Many of these you may already know and many of these Michael has already referred to;

- An industry that delivers over £36 billion of economic benefit to the UK economy annually

- An industry that supports a diverse and skilled workforce of over 500,000 people directly
 - An industry that supports over 25,000 small businesses across the country
 - An industry that welcomes over 8 million international business visitors a year, boosting trade and exports through over £100 billion of goods sold at UK Trade Shows and Exhibitions;
-and the list goes on.

And, whilst those numbers alone should be reason enough for everyone here to take more than just a passing interest in this industry, they are not the reason I would like you to.

My reason is simple;

It's because we are the best at it.

Let me say that again;

WE ARE THE BEST AT IT - ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD.

In the events industry, in this country, we have the talent, the skills, the resources, the creativity and the infrastructure that make us world leaders in creating, staging and managing events of every variety.

That is not just an idle boast. It is a simple fact. One which I have personal experience of after 28 years of creating and managing events all over the world. And one which is universally shared.

Just a short distance from where I am standing, we Troop Colours. And we Change Guards. We lay Wreaths at Cenotaphs and we hold Garden Parties. We stage Marathons and Boat Races. New Years Eve Parties and Firework Displays. And we put on Festivals and Concerts. At the O2 we watch and listen to the Greatest Artists. And at Chelsea we watch and cheer the greatest sportsmen – well, I don't, I'm a London Irish supporter.

And these things we do every day, up and down the Country. From the largest City to the smallest Village. For Business and Leisure.

We invite world leaders to attend summits, and the world comes to visit our trade shows and exhibitions.

And, in just 644 days time, we will host the two greatest events on earth; the Olympic & Paralympic Games. And I am especially proud that Excel London will be a host venue for both of those extraordinary events in 2012.

We have a rich history of creating some of the most iconic and memorable events ever witnessed. And that is all part of our unique heritage. It is something we as a nation excel at, and we are rightly celebrated for doing so.

And, because we are the best at it, with a hard earned global reputation, leaders from industries around the world want to hold their events here and bring together their greatest minds.

So, when a Medical Congress comes to London, we see thousands of the world's most talented and experienced surgeons and doctors in our capital, sharing their knowledge and skills. When a technology conference is held in Brighton, the brightest young stars and global brands gather to discuss their future in our city.

And, when the Commonwealth Games come to Glasgow and the SECC in 2014, the world will watch and the legacy will remain.

And that is the key word.

Legacy.

By attracting events from around the world their delegates not only bring that economic benefit that is so vital to our economy, spending on everything from hotels to transport, restaurants to attractions. They bring their own global leaders and thinkers to discuss, debate, learn and share. And by doing so they engage with our own leaders and institutions in their particular fields; - medicine, science, technology, aerospace, communications, finance and many others. Leaving that invaluable legacy of knowledge and making connections that will last for decades and influence our communities for generations.

One other point I would like to make.

My venue Excel London has been I am pleased to say, a real success story for this industry. Part of its success

is due to the fact that we have a world class product and a world class team.

But we also have an owner, in Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Company, who saw the potential that Excel, London and the UK had to offer, and invested its money, time and resources to create London's first International Convention Centre, with a private investment of £167m.

ADNEC recognised the potential that this industry offered, and because of their commitment, London is now competing fully on the global stage, attracting world class events to London, that previously would have gone to Paris, Barcelona, Vienna and elsewhere.

And that investment is helping us to deliver over £1.6 billion of economic benefit to this City, and support over 28,000 jobs.

But we also had another partner who was vital in helping us to deliver our vision. One which in many ways has been a silent partner. But one which totally understands the potential this industry offers.

The Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, and his team at the GLA, including Dan Ritterband, who I am pleased to see here this evening, have supported us tirelessly.

Removing many of the outdated bureaucratic obstacles and working with us to help attract those all important events to the capital. And I would like to personally

thank Mayor Johnson, Dan and his team this evening for that support.

And I would also call on local government in other UK Cities and Destinations, to follow our Mayor's lead, and engage with this industry in their own communities.

The opportunities are real and the prize significant.

I mentioned at the beginning of my speech the figure of £36 billion of economic benefit that this industry delivers annually. A considerable figure. But, one which represents only a fraction of the potential.

The UK sits at just number five in the world rankings on the number of events held, behind the USA, Germany, Spain and even Italy.

In the City rankings, the position is even worse, with London the only UK City in the top 20, at just number 16.

And, as Dan Ritterband often reminds me; London just doesn't do 16.

So, with just a bit more support, what could we achieve?

This industry provides our new Coalition Government with the opportunity to deliver a big win. Easily within the term of the current Parliament.

And the Manifesto which is being presented today, sets out clearly and simply how that can be achieved. So I

would ask you all, please, if you haven't already done so, read it and give it your fullest support.

As a country we perhaps can, sadly, no longer be regarded solely for what we make. What we build. What we sell.

But we can be proud of what we create. What we share. And what we now have in this country is a truly world class meetings & events industry which is held up as THE standard for others to aspire to globally.

And the reason we have that is because of you.

You are all here because you are regarded as leaders in this industry. Venues and Hotels. Agencies and Organisers. Cities and Destinations. Convention Bureau

and Marketing Organisations. Trade Associations and Voluntary Groups.

Do not underestimate the role you play, and the difference you make.

And to those of you here from the political spectrum this evening; I would just please ask that you also recognise these people for what they do and support our industry for the remarkable contribution it makes to our Country and our Economy.

This is indeed an industry which we can all be truly proud of, and one that I in particular am proud to represent here this evening.

THANK YOU