

Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport
100 Parliament Street
London
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Dear Mr Dowden,

This weekend we will each take to the start line at this year's Tour de France and La Course by Le Tour de France – races where British riders have been victorious an unprecedented six times in the past decade, sparking a tidal wave of interest and enthusiasm in cycling in all of its forms.

While each of us has taken a different journey through our sport, what is clear to all of us is that we would not have made it this far without the intensity of regular top-level racing and the ability to test our limits in unfamiliar settings. We write today because we fear that same road to success for today's young British riders is arguably more challenging than ever, and risks being wiped out altogether for most.

Since the first British team's participation in the 1955 Tour de France, hundreds of this country's finest riders have decamped to Belgium, France or elsewhere to make their name – often riding for amateur teams with little to no pay, many supported by the generosity of the Dave Rayner Fund to pursue their dreams.

Since the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union, today's riders must grapple with the 90-day stay limit and the impact that has on their ability to race, stay and train with their teams for longer periods. We are the fortunate ones, with professional contracts with top tier teams but if we had experienced the current restrictions on visa free residency early in our careers, we might not have achieved that privileged position.

The impact of Covid-19 across Europe has masked the problem in 2021, due to the subsequent restrictions in place on travel across borders. We fear that the absence of a robust solution by 2022 – whether in the form of an amateur sportspersons visa or other agreement – will see many riders lose the opportunity to gain such critical experience. We know that sport is not the only industry affected and we don't expect sports people to jump the queue for Government support, but we do ask for dialogue.

You may ask why these riders cannot find such high-level racing opportunities closer to home. While it is true that our country plays host to many excellent and storied events, the difficulty of securing the necessary local permissions for racing on Britain's busy roads means that many have sadly been lost. The number of road races in this country fell by 23% from 2016-2019, and the hesitancy of local authorities and the police to approve sporting events in the current climate means that the immediate prospects of recovery are bleak.

While British Cycling is working hard to address the challenges ahead, to make a real difference we need your support to urgently revisit the Cycle Racing on the Highway Regulations. This will enable us to empower more volunteer race marshals and review police charging, to make British races secure and financially viable in the future.

As a cycling nation we have come an incredibly long way over recent decades, and each of us is proud of the role we have played in flying the flag for Great Britain across the world. However, we also believe that it is our duty to fight to give the riders of tomorrow the same opportunities which we have so enjoyed and benefitted from – and to ensure that the sight of a British rider on the top step of the podium continues to be a familiar one for future generations.

Yours sincerely,

Anna Christian - Drops-Le Col s/b TEMPUR

Dani Christmas - Drops-Le Col s/b TEMPUR

Mark Donovan - Team DSM

Lizzie Deignan - Trek–Segafredo

Chris Froome - Israel Start-Up Nation

Lizzie Holden - Bizkaia-Durango

Joss Lowden - Drops-Le Col s/b TEMPUR

Dan McLay - Arkéa–Samsic

Connor Swift - Arkéa–Samsic

Geraint Thomas - Ineos Grenadiers

Alice Towers - Drops-Le Col s/b TEMPUR

Fred Wright - Team Bahrain Victorious