

Events Industry Board (EIB)

Meeting Minutes – Monday, 30th March 2020

Via teleconference

Attendees: Nigel Huddleston, Minister for Sport, Tourism & Heritage
Michael Hirst (Chair)
Paul Bush
Claire Fennelow
Tracy Halliwell
Rob Holt
Simon Hughes
Jenny Jenkins
Jack Karet (observer, GREAT Campaign)
Francis Loughran (observer, BEIS)
Kerrin MacPhie (VisitBritain)
David Martin (DCMS)
Kate Nicholls
Sheila Pardoe (DCMS; minutes)
Mike Rusbridge
Chris Skeith
Giles Smith (DCMS)
Laura Stocken (DCMS)
Naomi Waite
Robert Wright (observer)
Sarah Wright

Summary of actions arising from the meeting

EIB members

- To regularly contribute recovery support ideas to DCMS officials that the government can consider. **Ongoing.**

DCMS officials

- To determine appropriate channels/explore opportunities to contribute to public health guidance and announcements on social distancing/mass gatherings, seeking advice from the events industry, where possible. **Updates for the next EIB meeting.**
- To consider the economic recovery recommendations that members raised as part of officials' wider work on a potential recovery package for the events industry. **Updates for the next EIB meeting.**
- To raise the request for the Job Retention Scheme to expand the time staff can be furloughed. **Updates as soon as possible.**

Introduction

- Michael Hirst opened the meeting. He thanked the Minister for Sport, Tourism & Heritage, Nigel Huddleston MP, for joining the first half of the meeting and for his interest and support of the business events agenda, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis. He welcomed members and observers to the meeting and thanked DCMS officials for their engagement. He also reminded members that a Chair's paper was circulated before the meeting, summarising action that had been taken to support the industry through the outbreak, to date.

Declarations of interest

No members had any declarations of interest to make.

Approval of minutes from last meeting - 29 January 2020

The previous minutes were cleared with no revisions.

Introduction from the Minister for Sport, Tourism & Heritage

- Michael invited the Minister to offer opening remarks.
- The Minister welcomed members and observers to the meeting. The Minister acknowledged that events industry businesses qualifying for Business Rates Relief is a key issue for the industry; he asked members to report on whether any Local Authorities were interpreting the guidance so as not to include event venues for Business Rates Relief; he said the department was working at political and official levels on the issue. The Minister acknowledged that COVID-19 presents the industry with significant challenges including the impact on a large number of jobs and the industry's supply chain. The Minister also recognised the potential of the events industry and said it was an important part of the UK's future.

The discussion

- Michael thanked the Minister for his opening remarks. He outlined that the meeting's discussion would take place in two parts - the first with members outlining whether the current government support was adequate and what else the government could do; and, second, what ideas members had for recovery support.

Part 1 - whether government measures are adequate for the events industry

Members answered whether government measures to date were adequate; this included:

- The **initial lack of clarity from the government on its public health measures had been very challenging** (e.g. uncertainty over whether to hold events; how to ensure public safety); however, members said that the government's public health announcements on 23rd March offered needed clarity during the crisis.
- Members advised that **the government would need to work early and closely with the events industry on when it plans to loosen or lift social distancing/mass gathering restrictions**. This is because the industry will need time to come back to

work at scale (e.g. staff that have been furloughed or laid off will need time to return; it can take 6 to 18 months to organise an event) and to ensure that the public is confident in attending mass gatherings again, and in particular feel that it is safe to do so.

- Members discussed **the challenges of a potential bottle-neck of events in the third and especially the final quarter of 2020** when the industry is anticipating that public health restrictions are likely to be lifted. Members advised that during this period, there may be more events to schedule than there are available, appropriate venues to accommodate these events or capacity and cash flow in the supply chain to deliver them. The industry also noted that it relied on a healthy supply chain (from airlines flying passengers internationally, caterers providing food and furniture suppliers building stands etc); members said these businesses were under severe pressure due to lack of liquidity and said that many might not survive. Members felt that the events industry would likely be one of the last activities to return to business as usual.
- Members noted that public confidence in attending mass gatherings would be damaged because of the public health measures currently in place in most countries. Members **recommended that the government create clear guidance for event venues that could be used to reassure consumers**; they also **recommended that the government develop clear, positive messages for domestic and international audiences, that the UK is safe** (when appropriate).
- Members said that as nations lifted restrictions, **global competition would be fierce and there was a risk of losing major events to other countries who might be better prepared to return to business after the crisis**. Members recommended that the government, working with industry, **needed to prioritise a list of major events that are economically significant and which it does not want to lose to global competitors**. Members were also keen for VisitBritain to be funded so that it could promote the UK in market. Members said it is likely that in the initial phases of recovery, the domestic market would offer the biggest opportunities to generate events.
- Members said that several **membership organisations had lost income because SME and freelance/self-employed were cancelling membership payments** as they struggled to manage their own cash flows. Members also said that **associations, many of which organise major events (e.g. medical associations), were membership-based and were struggling**; members warned that this could negatively impact the events pipeline if associations did not have the cash to organise events.

- Members noted that they were **not aware of any local authority which was interpreting the Business Rates Relief scheme to apply to event venues**. They noted this continues to be a major concern across the UK.¹
- One member noted that **Creative Industries organisations are “falling through the cracks”** of government support, noting the industry were not finding themselves eligible for rate relief or rent relief. While the Job Retention Scheme was welcomed, this member also encouraged greater flexibility - mainly, **extending the time period that an employer could furlough staff from 3 to 6 months**. This was because of the lead time for organising events and because many creative industries organisations are SMEs, which will take longer to stand up once business activity can resume. The issue of allowing staff to volunteer to work on specific projects during their furlough was also important for members, as even events to be held well in advance needed pre-planning, despite no revenue accruing during the lead-in period.
- One member noted that **the outbreak presented challenges to retaining skilled workers and there was a question about how to make use of furloughed workers** to ensure the industry has skilled workers when it can return to business. This member also asked how apprenticeships should be managed/utilised and whether there was a central location to direct volunteers to.
- One member also noted there were **challenges with the government's current measures and seasonal workers**, especially on the hospitality side of the industry. This member also noted that some companies that are considered ‘too big’ or ‘too small’ were falling through the cracks on the loan schemes.
- Members raised other issues which they said were critical, including: concerns that while many organisers were postponing events, **prolonged uncertainty to when mass gatherings could take place may mean these postponements become cancellations**; members discussed **the benefits and challenges of event venues becoming temporary hospitals** on the industry’s ability to return to work; and, members also noted that **some insurance providers were finding loopholes that removed them from paying claims**, even in instances where a pandemic should have been covered in the policy.

Summary of Part 1

- Michael thanked members for their contributions. He thanked the Minister for attending and noted that the Minister would need to depart from the meeting [the Minister’s departure at this point in the meeting was planned]. He invited the Minister to offer closing remarks.

¹ Since the meeting, the Local Government Association (LGA) published guidance on how the Business Rates Relief should apply to the tourism industry. Specifically, the LGA guidance noted a number of business types that it recommended to be in scope, including conference and exhibition venues. Please see the LGA link: <https://local.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-rates-relief-hospitality-and-leisure-sector>

- The Minister thanked members for their contributions. He noted that some items were new, but many were consistent with what he had heard to date. The Minister noted that DMOs are an important part of the events industry and he was aware many were struggling with cash flow due to declining membership. He said he understood members on the need to consider the entire supply chain and the impact for the large number of self-employed and freelance workers in the industry.
- The Minister noted that there was further work to do with seasonal workers and apprenticeships. The Minister also recognised that some announcements had needed clarification; he said the government was working as quickly as possible to make announcements for public health reasons and offer the details that businesses needed.
- The Minister thanked the industry for supporting its employees and communities as furloughed staff volunteered and by hotels offered rooms to critical workers. He encouraged the industry to keep working together, including continuing to support its supply chain so it could better endure the challenges it faced with the coronavirus outbreak. The Minister also thanked members for thinking early about recovery and how Britain can be competitive when the time was right.
- The Minister recognised that many elements of his portfolio were devolved and, where appropriate, the government wanted to work with the Devolved Administrations and offer support. [the Minister and Laura Stocken left the call].

Part 2 - what ideas members have for recovery

The Chair asked members to consider the policy paper circulated before the meeting; in particular, whether the suggestions for recovery support were sufficient and whether members had other recommendations.

- Members said it was **critical for the events industry and government to prioritise a list of major events** that support key UK sectors/bring in considerable trade and investment and which the UK does not want to lose to international competition if other nations return to business activity more effectively.
- Members noted again that the events **industry would need early warning and time to return to business activity at scale**; members **asked the government to work with industry on plans and announcements relating to when social distancing/mass gathering restrictions would be loosened or lifted**; furthermore, members **advised the government to work with the events industry to create public health guidance for event venues/mass gatherings** - this is with the view to encouraging public confidence in returning to mass gatherings after the pandemic. Furthermore, members **asked the government to provide clear, positive messages to encourage domestic and international consumers that mass gatherings are safe**, when appropriate. **ACTION:** *DCMS officials to determine appropriate channels and explore opportunities to contribute to guidance and announcements, seeking advice from the events industry, where possible.*

- Members asked the government **to consider a range of other options in support of the events industry** including tax relief policies and funding measures (e.g. subvention, VisitBritain funding) to ensure that the UK does not lose its market share after the crisis. Members noted governments in Australia and Hong Kong had offered generous support packages for their respective business events industries. Members continued to raise how critical it was that the government consider and support the entire events industry supply chain. **ACTION:** *DCMS officials to consider these economic recommendations are part of their wider work on recovery support for the events industry.*
- Members raised again that enabling **greater flexibility in the Job Retention Scheme** would be welcome, in particular expanding the amount of time that an employer can furlough staff from 3 to 6 months. **ACTION:** *DCMS officials to raise with appropriate cross-government channels.*
- One member said **recovery, in particular for SMEs or self-employed/freelance workers in the supply chain was next to impossible** given most do not have a cash flow and because of the uncertainty about when there will be work for them given restrictions on mass gatherings means there is no work; rather than recovery, this member noted most were focusing exclusively on survival.
- **Members said the domestic market was likely to pick up more quickly than the international market** for various reasons. Members advised the government that it would need to ensure positive messaging was reaching domestic consumers in order to build public confidence in attending mass gatherings. Other members noted international markets were showing an eagerness to travel as soon as social distancing restrictions were lifted.
- Michael asked Kerrin MacPhie to summarise how the business events team at VisitBritain are supporting the industry. Kerrin noted that recovery support and planning is taking place/being developed, from appropriate marketing/engagement to destination management support. She said MeetGB would take place as a virtual event and include destinations only from across the UK; she said the team was delivering webinars to maintain international engagement; she also discussed ambitions for the Business Events Growth Programme in 2020/21.
- Michael asked observers to offer advice. Observing government officials broadly said they were keen to keep abreast of developments and recovery support for the industry; **they recognised the events industry can play a role in economic recovery for the UK.** Another observer noted that there is an interest for positive stories.
- Michael invited DCMS officials to summarise the discussion. David Martin said many useful points were made, including on public confidence and safety guidance; he noted that officials would raise points made on the Job Retention Scheme and prioritising events. David reminded members of a survey from the Department for Business, Energy and Industry Strategy on associations which are losing money because of a decline in membership [since the meeting, the survey closed; anyone

interested is encouraged to contact Linda Cavender, Chief Executive of the Trade Association Forum].

- Michael thanked members for their contributions and encouraged members to continue to share advice with DCMS officials.

Any Other Business

- One member noted that in China, the first event since the outbreak was taking place. He said that it was to a domestic audience only, but recommended that the events industry could consider the timelines and guidance applied there for the UK.

Close

Michael Hirst closed the meeting.

Next meeting date: Thursday, 14th May.