

## **DCMS Chief Scientific Advisor & Business Events stakeholders Meeting Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

### **Attendees**

- Tom Rodden, Chief Scientific Adviser, DCMS
- Nicole Huggins, Principal Scientific Officer, DCMS
- Michael Hirst OBE, Chair, Events Industry Board
- Kerrin MacPhie, Head of Business Events, VisitBritain
- Chris Skeith, CEO, Association of Event Organisers
- Rachel Parker, Director, Association of Event Venues
- Andrew Harrison, Director, Event Supplier and Services Association
- Jane Longhurst, CEO, Meetings Industry Association
- Sarah Baylis, Tourism, DCMS
- Sheila Pardoe, Tourism, DCMS

### **Introduction**

Tom Rodden (TR) opened the meeting with a high-level overview of the current public health situation: ONS data shows that Covid-19 case numbers are falling, but are still high in the UK population. As a result, the scientific community is continuing to advise that a slow reopening happen through the Roadmap (announced by the Prime Minister on 22 February). This includes embedding time within each phase of the Roadmap to protect public health.

TR noted that the vaccine rollout continues at a pace and is progressing well; he also noted that there a large proportion of the population is not vaccinated which presents a risk. Furthermore, he reminded participants that the UK needs to continue to proceed with caution on reopening to avoid an increase in Covid-19 case levels. TR also said Government will need to continue to watch the rise of European Covid-19 cases and the development of global variants carefully.

TR noted that while the vaccine rollout should improve conditions (e.g. reducing case numbers) for the UK by the summer, questions remain about how to reopen the economy in a controlled and safe way. He reminded participants that the Roadmap presents review dates, rather than reopening dates and that any decisions would rely on the data and science at the time.

### **Questions from the industry to the CSA**

**Q1:** Will the pilot programme consider any risks associated with shifting uses of event spaces during a single day by different groups (e.g. different groups using one space for breakfast, followed by a conference session, and then a dinner event across one day)? Participants flagged that the guidance may need to be updated to address this.

Response:

- TR noted that Government will need to look at the sequencing of events and the turnover of people for both attendees and staff, including contractors, and any associated risks;
- Government research will need to consider how workplace guidance may need to be updated to address this.

**Q2:** Will the pilots in the Events Research Programme (ERP) cover banqueting events? Participants reminded DCMS that banqueting is a key activity of the events industry, including an important revenue stream for venues.

Response:

- TR noted that Government will consider banqueting; however, he also noted that work will need to be aligned with the CSA of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), Paul Monks, as this crosses over with entertainment and hospitality and which BEIS are the lead department for;
- The pilot programme intends to include an event which will consider banqueting. TR reminded participants that pilots in the programme are reviewing broad settings in order to understand risks at a range of events.

**Q3:** How will employees/contractors at an event be considered in the pilot programme, including during the build-up and break-down phase of events? Participants noted that these activities are often similar to the construction industry.

Response:

- TR noted this activity would likely be covered by workplace guidance from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). For example, guidance for restaurants should be followed by kitchens in venues, construction workplace guidance for build and break;
- DCMS officials invited participants to share any questions with them for forwarding to relevant departments where cross-departmental and/or BEIS guidance may be applicable.

**Q4:** What events are included in the programme of activity in Liverpool?

Response:

- TR noted there is a significant amount of work currently being undertaken for the Events Research Programme (ERP), including: alignment of research teams, testing capabilities, local health authorities, and associated activity such as ticketing. He said that because of this, the details have not yet been confirmed; however, he recognised the urgency for businesses and noted that details would be shared as soon as possible:
- He noted that, at a high level, the ERP aims to cover the following, at least:
  - Small indoor seated event, such as a comedy club
  - Outdoor event, seated and non-seated
  - Business event for c. 1,000 attendees
  - Nightclub for c. 3,000 attendees
- For Liverpool, the specifics of the programme are being worked through including: research ethics, research questions, crowd management and logistics of research delivery;
- All of the above will shape the dates of the pilot events with the aim conducting events at the beginning of April;
- TR reassured participants that the programme is moving at a pace.

**Q5:** Are the ERP events “mock” events, or real events such as the ones announced to take place at Wembley and the Crucible?

Response:

- TR noted that the ERP aims to review evidence from 12 pilot events across a range of settings and to produce an interim report by the end of May. He noted this information would likely need to be supplemented by further event pilots which would likely take place as restrictions lift (subject to the public health situation at the time);
- From 17<sup>th</sup> May, if the public health situation allows, Government's aim is for events, with capacity limits to be permitted to run, from which further evidence can be obtained, and considered further;
- He noted that the urgent priority is to secure events to run from 12th April, during Step 2 of the Prime Minister's Roadmap.

**Q6:** What is the Government's plan regarding testing and vaccinations, and the impact on social distancing, in particular for business events?

Response:

- TR noted that broadly, three types of studies are being conducted as part of the ERP;
  - Overall transmission: at a high level, testing attendees before and after an event to compare to local incidents of the virus;
  - Ventilation test: broadly, identify areas of risk;
  - Crowd motion and movement: at a high level, identifying contact risk, and people's compliance with Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs), where relevant.
- TR discussed, at a high-level, further details that may form part of the transmission study including longitudinal testing, comparison testing and/or a vaccination approach.
- TR also noted that a separate review is taking place on options around Covid-19 certification, vaccination and testing status as well as considerations for future international travel and economic viability.
- He noted that current scientific work is understanding how vaccinations and testing could negate the need for NPIs as the pandemic becomes endemic.

**Q7:** Events in the industry have particularly long lead in times and participants noted the industry's request for certainty and confidence from government. They flagged that without it, member businesses could face a "cliff edge" and a potential of long-term damage to the industry. When can we have clarity and be able to communicate this? Participants also noted their interest in supporting Government with these communications, where relevant.

Response:

- TR reiterated that Government recognises the need to work at pace on the programme; he noted that the aim of the ERP and concurrent studies is to test how large events can safely be run as quickly as possible whilst balancing the public health situation and economy;
- He reminded participants that timescales are largely subject to the public health situation and status of the virus; this involves monitoring variants and the public health situation in other nations, including in Europe where cases are rising again;
- TR reassured participants that the ERP is a priority for Government and communications would be shared with the public as soon as possible on further details of the ERP.

**Q8:** Given that technology will likely continue to be used to mitigate against risks of the virus spreading, how can venues prepare, for example, using aerosol solutions?

Response:

- TR encouraged participants to read and share the [SAGE EMG 4th November paper](#);
- He also noted that interventions to plug into air ventilation systems or some use of UV lights were more effective than misting or fogging, which are not recommended. A well ventilated space lowers the risk of transmission and ventilation should be improved first, if possible, before considering air cleaning devices. Air cleaning devices are not a substitute for ventilation.

**Q9:** How likely is it that businesses will be operating without NPIs in the final stage of the Roadmap, currently set for not before 21<sup>st</sup> June?

Response:

- TR noted that Stage 4 of the Roadmap refers to the removal of legal restrictions, not guidelines the latter of which cover NPIs such as social distancing and wearing face coverings;  
TR noted that as the virus becomes endemic, there will likely be seasonal variations and therefore, some interventions likely to be required in the winter. He noted that data was continuously being monitored and considered. Part of these considerations is the ERP, which is aiming to take a risk assessed approach.

**Q10:** International delegates, visitors and exhibitors are a lifeblood of business events, will they be allowed for business events?

- TR noted that there is a review of international travel and that the Global Travel Taskforce will look at international travel;
- He noted that the World Health Organisation is also considering this urgently as more data is gathered constantly, including transmission after vaccination and what this may mean for the future of international travel.
- He noted that restricting travel helps control the variants, which is especially important as the vaccination programme continues to be rolled out.

TR and NH departed the meeting for another engagement. DCMS officials agreed to forward additional questions. These included timings of the reports relative to dates in the Prime Minister's Roadmap and what plans there were for domestic/regional travel.

#### **Close**

The CSA (TR) is happy to continue engagement with the industry; DCMS officials will organise a follow-up meeting in due course.