

DCMS Chief Scientific Advisor & Business Events stakeholders Meeting Tuesday 16 February 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 is the Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) for DCMS, working on the Covid-19 response and its impact across DCMS sectors. He works with SAGE and Government departments on Covid-19 science, data and guidance. The main priority is understanding transmission risks across DCMS sectors.

- The CSA noted that the current wave has peaked; the R Rate is below 1 across the country. However, he said that there are still high levels of deaths and hospitalisation and there was more time before significant relaxation.
- He noted that the main aim for government is to bring the incidence down, which with the successful vaccine rollout of over 15 million, is starting to happen.
- There are a number of scientific questions that are being addressed. These include: duration of immunity; understanding transmission after the 1st vaccine dose; the impact of transmission; variants (UK; Brazil/South African); efficacy of vaccines.
- As the vaccine roll out continues, answers to these questions will emerge. Work is ongoing to roll out the 2nd dose.
- This means a slow release / phasing out of restrictions is imperative to measure the impact at each phase of release.

Vaccinations & Testing

Q1: What would the conditions (e.g. number of vaccinations, R number, number of hospital admissions, number of deaths etc) need to be for scientists to recommend the reopening of business events?

- CSA understands lead times / supply chains
- Looking at modelling impacts of relaxation / ongoing work to model potential outcomes of relaxation
- The need for sectors to implement guidance that recognises the virus as moving from a pandemic to endemic (i.e. that it will continue to exist in population). For example, the CMO has identified some NPI measures will likely be needed next winter.
- A pilot programme may help us understand the risks in this context.

Q2: We are aware of a number of pilot events. Are pilot events being commissioned by one government department or more, with the specific objective of getting the events sector open? How are they joined up to best support the sector? What is the best solution for reopening the business events industry safely?

- Government is working at pace to develop the pilot programme. Government will continue to engage with stakeholders.
- To determine how and when we can lift the restrictions on large events and closed settings, Government will run a scientific programme of pilot events, starting in the spring, to trial running large events with larger attendances and reduced social distancing. This will include trialling 'test-to-enable' approaches to returning people to these settings. These pilots will test different settings (including indoor and outdoor) at venues and events.
- Some of the factors under consideration as part of these pilots will include what evidence we have already gathered, venues' existing infrastructures, customer behaviour, environmental issues, ventilation, occupancy, tracking etc.

Consistency & Capacity

Q3. During the last phase of reopenings, cinemas and indoor shopping centres were allowed to open. Are there any scientific reasons why Business Events were not included as these sectors, which we feel are comparable (e.g. ventilation; timed entry), reopened last time? Are there any additional/different measures that they had in place which we could replicate?

Do you (TR) foresee a risk assessed approach being implemented, rather than capacity limits like previous reopening phases?

- The CSA recognised the frustrations and said a programme of work was continuing to provide evidence to Ministers. Agreed that a risk based approach was needed.

Q4. Last year, the sector experienced inconsistencies in how Local Authorities interpreted the guidance around events, including the Southampton Boat Show? What are the plans for clearer guidance for the sector?

- The CSA recognised that this is a challenge; he agreed there was more work to do to ensure consistency is applied nationally.

Supply Chain

Q5. Are there different scientific approaches to different audience types and employees? For example, an exhibition, with its supply chain (logistics, constructions staff) and then delegates, visitors and venue staff? Does the sector need different protocols, or are the existing guidelines/protocols adequate?

- The CSA advised that there is a need to look at categories of people involved in an event and identify their individual risks. He offered an example: an AV Tech in a conference setting for the whole duration of an event would need a separate risk assessment to a delegate who walks around an open space for a few hours.
- He noted further research and assessment was needed on: flows of people, ingress/egress, catering and networking areas.
- He recognised there can be comparability between other DCMS sectors (e.g. conference layout to that in a theatre).

- The CSA said that in light of current uncertainties in the science, the risks of a number of events needed to be mapped to demonstrate safety and the impact of mitigations.

Guidance

Q6. Based on sector research, 60% of businesses cannot profit with 1m social distancing in place. For how long will this be in place?

- The CSA said that an assessment of NPIs and risk assessments will help to determine this, generally.
- He also said that social distancing is likely to remain for the foreseeable future. The Events Research Programme will look at whether a combination of other mitigations can be used in certain settings to reduce the need for social distancing.
- He noted that more understanding is needed on the risks associated with travelling to and from an event, rather than the event itself.

Close

The CSA is happy to continue engagement with the sector. DCMS officials will organise a follow-up meeting in due course.