



National Outdoor Events Association: Report

June 2021

Department of Culture Media & Support

“Investigation into the impact on the outdoor events industry of the delay to step four of the easing of the lockdown process”

Background

This report has been created to address specific questions from the Department of Culture Media and Sport following the delay to step four of the easing of lockdown roadmap, outlined by the government in the spring of 2021.

The delay to the roadmap was announced 14th June 2021. The following responses have been collated from the membership of the National Outdoor Events Association, and include emotional, anecdotal but highly credible feedback on where events and event supply businesses find themselves as we reach peak season in the events industry.

The National Outdoor Events Association would like to add to three areas of context to the feedback below:

- The UK events industry follows a bell curve business model with between 85% and 95% of all revenue taken between the months of May and September
- The average length of time between the decision to organise an event and its delivery is between 5 and 12 months, this lead in time grows with the size of the event
- Many of our members have been without income for over 18 months, and with no expectation of income now until spring 2022

The Department of Culture, Media and Sport, asked for specific reactions from the following questions. Questions and answers are listed below:

- What is the impact of the delay to Step 4 on your part of the sector?

“We have lost £100k in cancelled events due to the change, and more to come as a result of a complete breakdown in buyer confidence”

“Events not happening, suppliers going bust”

“For us personally as a company, it puts approximately £300k of revenue at direct risk. But more importantly, removes even more confidence from clients on the rights holder and brand front. In terms of the live events investments and sponsorships they are looking to make in the second half of the year.”

“We have had events cancelled and are now in a period of uncertainty for work for the next four months”

“Trust is down the drain again with consumers and local authorities – our first mass participation cycle on 4th July (Liverpool/Cheshire) being questioned by one of the key local authorities again, due to the announcement and scare mongering of North-West having high infection rates.”

“Yet more wedding cancellations as there are too many unknowns”

“Means we have to stay with the “mini” tours at a reduced rate so approximately ½ or more of our ticket income for the year”

“Means fewer people coming on tours as there is a lot of confusion about what is or isn’t open, allowed, etc, so reduced numbers”

“Some corporate events are postponing or cancelling as, due to the need to social distance, we can’t accommodate their numbers, or means using alternative space – so where we are having some events, they are at a much lower venue hire rate and no catering so lost income on food services”

“Impact on weddings has been ever evolving and challenging; we are fortunate that our diary is very flexible as we limit how many weddings we do any one year – so we were able to put back-up dates in the diary for every client back in March 2020 and again in November 2020 and up to April 2021.”

“A number of large free to attend tourism events have been cancelled with financial loss and impact to the local hospitality and retail trade. Other events moving dates, thus putting further pressure on getting these reconfirmed. Many contractors have lost another month of income and the supply and demand issue for August / September has been made worse with some many postponements of events.”

- What is your key concern over the upcoming four-week period?

“Staying alive, no business no money etc.”

“A further additional revenue hit but more importantly, the risk of clients not having confidence to commit in H2 and therefore writing off ANOTHER year of activity”

“No work booked in”

“The feedback that we are receiving is what’s the point of the vaccine if events are still cancelled – especially those outdoors not involving alcohol. There is no guarantee that they’ll stick to 19th July as there could easily be another variant between now and then. Most clients want to run events for double vaccinated guests only or single vaccinated with a lateral flow or PCR test plus those medically exempt.

This is what the majority of the cruise sector are doing. They have to let the outdoor events sector move forwards but use the vaccines to reduce the already significantly low risk."

"That the local authority will use its power to pull the event, after all of the investment we have made/everything paid out already (event is only 17 days away) from a reputational/profile perspective so they look as if they are doing something- rather than actual risk!"

"Potential loss of wedding date options in 2022

We are experiencing dealing with continued holds on dates in the event of a new variant which means new bookings are either on hold or tentative, supporting clients to ensure they have a plan A, B, C, D and E – contingencies for contingencies to adapt and keep stress levels as low as possible

*Loss of all larger outdoor events which is a loss of ticket sales as well as venue hire fees
Impact on holiday cottage bookings if you can't move between areas at different levels
Wedding clients with guests travelling and using holiday cottages who have to cancel, and we end up with empty accommodation that may have booked for a local family or group
Loss of limited, small group tours booked (groups of 8-16 for private tours)"*

"Lack of guidance on major festivals on measures after 19th. Large events take many months to plan, and we are unable to finish event plans without this guidance. Supply guidance when restrictions is too late, and many organisers are cancelling due to the lack of clarity. Another concern is the lack of pilot events on free to attend outdoor festivals or clarity on what is in and out of scope."

- Have you already received, or are you anticipating visitor cancellations or postponements?

“As stated above we’ve lost £100k as a direct result of the extension. On top of this we brought staff back from furlough and prepared equipment that had been dormant for a year, so the actual cost is much higher. Now we don’t know if we should furlough everyone again or hope that July will be ok.”

“Yes, we have already received both”

“Yes quite a few.”

“Yes, have already received 2 in the last 2 days. One for July and one for August”

“Yes, we have had some cottage cancellations, we have had a number of event postponements and are now postponing well into 2022/23 or just cancelling their event to consider rebooking at a later date”

“Outdoor events have cancelled”

“Many events have postponed”

- Do the concessions relating to weddings and out-of-school residential stays make a difference?

“No”

“Individual authorities are making up their own rules on weddings with some tables of 10 ok, others 6. Some no dancing and some music inside but dancing outside etc.

No consistency and too short notice for the weddings we have in the first few weeks of July, who are now either trying to rebook or work around the new perceived rules.”

- What are your concerns for the longer term, post summer?

“We have now lost two entire summer seasons, but government seem to have no interest in supporting business through until next year. We worked really hard to get work for July to see us through and that’s been taken away and at the same time we’re now going to have to pay more for furlough so another kicking.

Realistically there seems very little point continuing beyond the end of the existing season and the government will lose not only our tax and NI revenues, but they will also lose all the loans that we have.

If government let us run with double vaccinated events, with provision for single vaccinated and medically exempt, and guaranteed that they could go ahead regardless, then there may be some light.

But with outdoor events needing social distancing there’s little point.”

“Lack of finance grants and support for the industry”

“That promoters will not commit to advance planning, and we will be in the same situation as we were this time last year, with no work for the autumn/ winter while people wait to see what happens”

‘A return of 2020, where things opened up over summer, and swiftly got shut down in Autumn. This would mean all our work wiped out in one hit again.’

‘Nobody believed last year that it could last until 2021 and now I think that events might find it hard to recover from a two-year break, which could have implications going forward. Annual events in the calendar bring confidence for cashflow’

“Collapse of the events industry, more uncertainty for winter events which are being financed now. Lack of insurance for the industry to help them get some confidence back in putting this on.”

Covid-19 Insight Session

- What measures have been the most and the least challenging for the sector to manage? (Social distancing, Test & Trace, capacity caps, etc)

“Managing isn’t an issue but being permitted to stage OUTDOOR events without social distancing is.”

“Social distancing”

“We have no issues managing physical elements, we are experts at risk assessment and mitigation, NONE of this is difficult. The difficulty is the lack of certainty and clear parameters based solely on facts and figures. Ambiguity is our main enemy.”

“Social distancing is the most challenging and seemingly pointless for an outdoor event when every high street is rammed with people.”

“Test and trace and capacity caps are easy to implement.”

“What is reasonably ok to ask from participants for an outdoor sports event, and what is too much, or gives too much reason to opt out and require refunds (for example, asking them to test evening prior- if weather is terrible, they will all have the excuse of testing positive... meaning too many refunds)”

“Being supportive of wedding clients; needing to manage rescheduling, coping with suppliers going out of business and finding new suppliers for them; trying to help them stay positive and always have options for them – challenging but likely most successful.”

“Social distancing has really limited our capacity”

“Risk assessment without any clear guidance on risk assessment – this quite frankly is a joke; venue managers must complete risk assessments and there isn’t even a template available unless you become a member of something. “

“I think it is outrageous and then the websites say “risk assessment to be published” – When? We need it now. I am an ISO:9001 and 45001 certified auditor and have an extremely extensive risk assessment but most venue managers don’t have my background so what are they supposed to do? How do we know if it is sufficient or meets requirements?”

“... social distancing on large events that are not ticketed. Test and trace clarity on non-ticketed open to attend events.”

- How have consumers responded to the various measures? Have rates of adherence been high?

“Most of our events have cancelled again including November fireworks as there is no appetite for risk with the Government not being pragmatic or logical in its approach.”

“Consumers have been great when opportunities to participate have arisen and have been perfectly fine and compliant with mitigation procedures.”

“On the whole yes”

“Yes”

“Clients have been very cooperative and understanding, even appreciative that we are as well versed and prepared in risk assessment which takes the pressure off them and third-party suppliers”

“Public are less compliant than they first were in terms of measures. It’s virtually impossible to manage numbers of people in one group in public open space and there is little or no enforcement capability to do so.”

- Has the sector developed innovations beyond the government-mandated measures to make their businesses Covid-Secure?

“We haven’t had any events to create innovations beyond drive ins.”

“Yes, pivoted in services and moved to less physical alternatives, virtual events and fan mechanics”

“We have done what we can but with ever changing guidance we feel like we are second guessing”.

“We have had a very mixed experience; some vendors are thoroughly prepared, mostly trades people and those coming to provide a service to the estate.”

“Most event services we have worked with to date are struggling with what they need their risk assessment or protocols to cover.”

“Beach app designed to advise public where the quieter areas are, updated through cameras across the seafront with the option to manually update. Hot spots reporting form for areas causing pinch points for social distancing.”

“Details are not helpful on the Scottish Government website – it states all the restrictions and then advises where to “look for guidance” on how to comply! A JOKE! They should be setting out the rule book for compliance or designating the clear authority to provide the details, templates, able to take calls or emails and then actually respond!

I submitted an email almost 9 months ago to the address provided on the Scottish Government website and still have had no response. Midlothian council is even worse, emails go ignored, no one answers a call, you can't leave a voice mail message now."

- Do you have any other views of the government and industry response to the pandemic over the past 12 months?

"There's a complete lack of understanding about outdoor as opposed to indoor events and the transmission risks associated with each. The double vaccinated population want to use their position to attend more events, but they are blocked by a government that is obsessed with the minority who are not vaccinated, many of whom have made a conscious decision not to participate in the programme or the wider society. If we don't permit those that have adhered to the rules for 15 months some benefits then those that have chosen to stand outside society will have won."

"The two things that we have asked for have been assistance with insurance underwriting, and assistance to freelancers and supply chain. For whatever reasons, neither seem to have been properly considered or acted upon. We hear the politicians every day on the news, but do not see the true facts and actions trickling through."

"Government insurance backing for events would be a game changer and would have meant that we wouldn't be seeing the cancellations now. It would also have helped customer confidence with ticket sales."

"Terrible and devastating- no support for our industry, being turned down on most occasions for funding as outdoor events falls outside all the sectors supported. – Culture, leisure, tourism, etc."

“Far too much inconsistency. It is shocking that the football events in Glasgow are allowed to go ahead when it is one of the hotspots in the country for the virus, when so much else is locked down, even in areas that are in a lower tier, it is inconsistent, unbelievable and unjustifiable.”

“Poor and a disgrace to effectively wipe out a whole industry for what was basically a bad dose of the flu”

“It feels like you’re playing a game and the rules keep changing, the goal posts keep moving and you never get anywhere – or if you remember the movie Poltergeist? The scene where the mom is running down the hall and it keeps stretching out in front of her.”

I absolutely appreciate the need to contain and control, so put all the resources into running 24/7 vaccine centres and make it compulsory for reopening”

“Have rules for masks and social distancing and then let us get on with our jobs. Some of us know how to risk assess and manage risk, some of us have 30+ years of experience in event management, project management and even Crisis Management (i.e., emergency response, earthquake and natural disaster training, contagion containment)”

“At some point people have to be responsible for themselves, at some point we have to be allowed to demonstrate we can comply. Give the public the means to deal with people who won’t comply, give premises owners the ability to enforce rules, make the consequences actually breaking the law with penalties for doing so – then let the rest of us get on with our lives.”

“Write the laws that are going to allow making the vaccine mandatory for event managers to require, as well as requiring proof of vaccination. It can be managed confidentially but there can be a national database that can provide confirmation of vaccination.”



“Lack of clarity on what is being said and written in guidance. Guidance comes after the announcements and sometimes this is days later which is difficult when everyone is looking to you as a local authority to have the answers.”

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