

Events Industry Board (EIB)

Meeting Minutes – Thursday, 14th May 2020

Via teleconference

Attendees: Michael Hirst (Chair)
Paul Bush
Claire Fennelow
Tracy Halliwell
Rob Holt
Simon Hughes
Susan Jacques (DIT, *observer*)
Jennifer Jenkins
Kerrin MacPhie (VisitBritain)
David Martin (DCMS)
Kate Nicholls
Sheila Pardoe (DCMS; minutes)
Mike Rusbridge
Chris Skeith
Giles Smith (DCMS)
Naomi Waite

Guests: Nick Brooks-Sykes (Marketing Manchester)
Paul Szomoru (Newcastle Gateshead Initiative)

Apologies: Kate Nicholls; Francis Loughran (BEIS, *observer*); Robert Wright

Introduction

- Michael Hirst opened the meeting. He reminded members that a full update on industry activity was documented in the chair's briefing note which was circulated before the meeting. He highlighted that the Minister for Sport, Tourism and Heritage, Nigel Huddleston MP hosted a meeting of the events industry senior leaders advisory panel on 29th April; he said that while the [12th May] furlough extension was welcome, more support would be needed because the events industry would be one of the last to return to business. He said the [then] proposed 14 day quarantine of those entering the UK was a significant concern for the industry, in particular because it would make the UK less globally competitive [*since the meeting, a 14 day quarantine has been announced; stakeholders have advised government of concerns for the events industry; some have requested a trade and consumer show exemption*].
- Michael said the industry was very concerned about not being explicitly recognised in the UK government's Roadmap, published on 11th May and that he was actively seeking clarity from officials. He said the UK government would be working with the

tourism industry on guidance and he was a member of the Visitor Economy Working Group (formerly the Tourism Industry Council) which is tasked with doing so.

Declarations of interest

No members had any declarations of interest to make.

Approval of minutes from last meeting - 30th March 2020

The previous minutes were cleared with no revisions.

Matters arising

Michael informed the board that Sarah Wright had offered her resignation from the board. Michael asked members to join him in recognising Sarah's significant contributions to the board, including the skills and talent taskforce report she led on, which he said he was still keen to present to the Minister, when appropriate.

The discussion

Update from DCMS

- Michael invited Giles Smith to share updates from DCMS.
- Giles provided updates, including a summary of the UK government's 10th May announcement, which included a Roadmap for easing the lockdown; Giles updated members on the 11th May announcements on economic support packages, including the extension to the Job Retention Scheme. Giles recognised that the industry had significant concerns with not being explicitly named in the Roadmap and that officials were actively seeking clarification.
- Giles noted that developing guidance for reopening was a growing priority [*since the meeting, the Tourism Industry Council (TIC) was re-developed into the Visitor Economy Working Group, which the Minister for Sport, Tourism & Heritage chairs; broadly, its remit is to collate sector guidance and support the government on guidance development. This includes business events*].
- He also said that recovery was another priority and he was keen to hear from members what their ideas were.
- Giles thanked members for their patience and input, which was helping to raise concerns across the department and the government.

Update from VisitBritain

- Michael invited Kerrin MacPhie to share updates from VisitBritain's Business Events team.
- Kerrin provided a summary of the work the business events team is doing, including updates on the virtual MeetGB event (which launched on 14 May), scheduled for 17 - 23 June 2020 and the Business Events Growth Programme.
- Members asked questions about VisitBritain's programme of activity and Kerrin offered answers.

Member feedback on recent UK government announcements

- Michael asked members to share advice and feedback on the recent announcements made by the UK government.
- Members shared feedback. Key points included:
 - Members **welcomed the 12th May extension to the furlough scheme**; at the same time, members **urged the government to extend the scheme further**, advising that since the events industry will likely be one of the last ones to return fully, it will need support for longer. Members said that because no events are taking place, business event organisations, and their supply chains, are cash starved and would require further financial support. Members warned that without it, there would be redundancies and companies failing.
 - Members noted **significant concern with a lack of explicit mention of events in the government's Roadmap document**, published on 10th May. Specifically, members said that a lack of clarity on whether events were considered in Phase 3 meant it was nearly impossible to plan a return to work. The inability to plan creates challenges for the industry because it tends to forward plan at least 3 months - sometimes 18 months - in advance.
 - Some members noted the **creative industries businesses of the industry were falling through the cracks** in the government's economic support; members said that many of these businesses were too small to access support and could not provide the forward forecasting necessary to receive bank loans.
 - Members expressed **concern about the financial viability of reopening with some social distancing measures in place** (e.g. significant caps on capacity; 2m social distancing (compared to 1m social distancing in many European countries). Members asked the government to consider the events industry in any guidance it developed. Many members were keen to support the government in developing guidance for the events industry.
 - Members raised the issue that **consumer confidence is low** - in terms of organising future events and sentiments about attending events. Members said **clear government messaging was needed to state when organised gatherings could resume and to reassure the public and consumers that organised gatherings were safe to attend (when appropriate)**. Members said that **without government reassurance, the UK risked losing its market share to international destinations** which can reassure the public and consumers (e.g. Germany, which has given a clear start date and indicated that business events and consumer shows are "organised gatherings" which can control public safety) and they pointed to some examples of events moving to Spain. It was also recognised, however, that a 'second spike' in cases remains a risk.

Member advice on potential recovery support for the events industry

- Michael asked members to provide advice on their ideas for potential recovery support for the events industry from the UK government. Michael reminded members of the paper which was circulated in advance of the meeting and encouraged members to expand on these ideas.
- Each member offered advice. Broadly, key points included:
 - A recommendation for the department to **pursue an ambitious Spending Review proposal** which could better support the UK events industry to compete internationally; specifically, members said that governments in top competing destinations in Europe and Asia were offering generous subvention packages to their events industries and asked government to consider international examples when developing a potential UK recovery support plan;
 - For key officials and Ministers to **raise the profile of the industry across government**, including with relevant Other Government Departments, which would support improved coordination (e.g. Department for International Trade, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy);
 - For **barriers to consumers and buyers/visitors to be eased or removed**, encouraging increased ease of access into the UK (e.g. a business events tax relief policy; subvention for transportation costs); members also asked the government to consider travel incentives to encourage international travel when it was safe to do so - this is because sentiments towards travel, including business travel, is low;
 - For key Ministers to **provide clear messaging on when the events industry can reopen; specifically, members asked that the government identify a start date for when organised gatherings can take place in order to reassure consumers and visitors that the UK market was safe and open**. Members warned that a failure to provide a clear start date would result in a significant loss of the UK's market share to international competition - especially where destinations were separating 'mass gatherings' (e.g. protests) from organised gatherings (e.g. trade and consumer shows).
 - For **the government to consider which government-led events it can organise** as a way to encourage event activity to begin and lead the way for other industry-led events to begin to be organised;
 - For the government **to consider domestic, as well as international markets**, when developing any potential support packages, including the potential for a fund to help Destination Management Organisations and Convention Bureaus sell in-market.
 - In order to address consumer confidence, members recommended that the Government look at rules around insurance premiums so organisers had the confidence to make future deposits.

Summary

- Micheal Hirst asked Susan Jacques (Department for International Trade) to provide updates. Susan noted the work DIT was doing to support events, including virtual events.
- Michael asked DCMS officials to provide a summary of the discussion. David Martin acknowledged the challenge the industry raised about a lack of explicit mention in the Roadmap; he thanked members for their contributions and said the ambition was recognised. He noted next steps, which was that DCMS officials would produce a paper for the Minister for Sport, Tourism & Heritage to consider these ideas, and others, for potential recovery support.
- Michael Hirst thanked members, observers and DCMS for their contributions. Michael closed the meeting.

Next meeting date: TBD.