



Submission to the Covid Recovery Commission

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Events along with the Business Visits & Events Partnership (BVEP), the umbrella organisation for the business visits and events industry, is pleased to submit evidence to the Commission to show that business events, including conferences, exhibitions and trade shows, together with cultural and leisure events, can play a critical role in the rebuilding of the UK economy and the levelling up agenda.

Prior to the pandemic the Industry was worth £70 billion to the UK economy in terms of visitor spend, representing over 50% of all tourism spend. In addition, over £165 billion in respect of trade was transacted at business events. The Industry directly employs over 700,00 people.

Over £31 billion of this total is comprised of business events, principally meetings, conferences, and exhibitions, while almost £39 billion is contributed by leisure events, including arts and cultural events, music events and festivals, and sporting and recreational events.

The major activities of the Industry have been severely curtailed by COVID19 and due to an almost total lack of ability to operate since the start of the pandemic, annual revenues will be down £55 billion, and it is anticipated 434,000 jobs will also have been lost. But if permitted to reopen, the Industry can bounce back quickly to support business recovery and the drive to renew and enhance community engagement.

Business events held in the UK showcase Britain's industrial, scientific and innovative skills to international markets, driving trade, exports and inward investment. Cultural events project Britain's creative energy and educate and entertain communities across the UK. They are critical to place making and regeneration. Additionally, both business and leisure events add significantly to the value of the visitor economy, productivity and the levelling up agenda.

Events shape a destination's identity, engender creative enterprise and stimulate innovation, cause positive social impact, strengthening community cohesion and heightening Britain's soft power.

Britain already plays host to an impressive number of high-profile world events from major political, commercial, medical, scientific and educational conferences, trade and consumer exhibitions to leading cultural, sporting and music festivals every year. Now there is a growing appreciation by government and the wider business community of the value and the broader economic, social and cultural benefits of the events industry to the UK.

Business events, whether meetings, association events or trade exhibitions, underpin sectoral growth in the economy, attract foreign direct investment, and promote expertise and knowledge transfer opportunities. Festivals, consumer shows, sporting events, and other cultural and music events all help to animate a destination which, in turn, drives more tourism, more business visitors and investors, and students wishing to come to the UK to study – whether that be in the area of event management or in other disciplines.

Britain's role on the world stage post Brexit can also be boosted by a revitalised approach to government sponsorship of global events, starting with its hosting of the G7 and COP26, followed by using the Festival 2022 as a further platform for reasserting its role as a world destination of choice for events and focussing on those industry sectors that the government will wish to prioritise in any revision of its Industrial Strategy.

The utilisation of business, leisure and cultural events offers economic growth opportunities and improvements in community well-being across the United Kingdom.

Places – Events help make prosperous communities across the UK.

VisitBritain, the tourism marketing agencies of the devolved administrations and destination marketing organisations are working to attract and stage successful events so that communities can benefit from such activity

VisitBritain is focused on raising awareness with buyers and organisers to consider the UK for business events. Together with **VisitEngland**, its' strategy is designed to increase business wins to the UK and support the key pillars of the British Tourist Authority's corporate strategy:

- **Growing value** – by targeting the high spend segment afforded by business events. Just a single business event win can have a large, concentrated economic impact
- **Improving productivity** – business events are year-round, but with high peaks of activity in spring and autumn. Capacity mapping can help the events industry to fill gaps in occupancy more effectively
- **Enabling dispersal** – business events activity is very concentrated in London. English regional destinations need support to be more competitive and to access international markets
- **Being the expert body** – business events are a major priority for the UK government. They can also act as an enabler for the government's industrial strategy and a catalyst for trade and investment in priority sectors.

The Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events / Exhibitions sector is a significant contributor to the economy of Northern Ireland. **Tourism Northern Ireland's (Tourism NI)** brand proposition demonstrates what is offered to event buyers when choosing to meet in Northern Ireland:

VisitScotland's Events Directorate is responsible for supporting and developing Scotland's events industry and its wide and diverse events portfolio. It focuses on three main areas:

1. Building on its previous work and the legacy of 2014 to attract, sustain and develop major events, festivals and business events and maximise their impact
2. Leading and advising the events industry, providing information and training, sharing best practice and working with the industry to focus on quality delivery
3. Using events to maintain and enhance Scotland's international reputation, influencing partners to develop Scotland's infrastructure.

Located within the Welsh Government, the **Visit Wales Business Events team** (**#MeetInWales**) promotes Wales as a destination for meetings, incentives, team building,

events and conferences. It provides impartial and free advice on products and venues across Wales that cover city, countryside and coastal locations in a mix of modern, historical and purpose-built facilities, supported by spectacular landscapes, incentives and accommodation options.

Included in the response to the Visitor Economy Recovery Plan being prepared by DCMS and in the work being done by DCMS, in consultation with the Events Industry Board, there are opportunities highlighted for events to play a greater part in the rebuilding of the economy and the levelling up agenda through the following key areas:

1. Events to provide a platform for UK to showcase its industrial, scientific and cultural strengths to meet its new global ambitions.
2. Great co-ordination across government departments of resources and sponsorship for events, leading to the creation of an at arms- length strategic body to drive the growth of international events held in the UK.
3. Inclusion of event strategies in local authority plans to create programmes of festivals and enhance place-making opportunities
4. Included in the Tourism Sector Deal as part of the Industrial Strategy is the use of events to extend the holiday season and also provide out of main holiday season activities and to also use event to spread activity across the Country.
5. Introduction of Tourism Zones, as recommended in the Industrial Strategy Tourism Sector Deal, to focus on tourism development to include new and revitalised event infrastructure.
6. Increase resources within VisitBritain for direct sales representation and for funding for the Business Events Growth Programme to attract, grow and create international event activity in the UK.

The overall view is that post restrictions, there will be a heightened appetite for events that deliver experience, well-being, education and training. Delivering experiential events will go beyond traditional event settings but will be used to drive visitor traffic to retail, high street and other public environments as well.

Britain's role on the world stage post Brexit can also be boosted by a revitalised approach to government sponsorship of global events, starting with its hosting of the G7 and COP26, followed by using the Festival 2022 as a further platform for reasserting its role as a world destination of choice for events and focussing on those industry sectors that the government will wish to prioritise in any revision of its Industrial Strategy.

The UK's recovery plan should acknowledge the UK Events Industry as having a key role being probably the most flexible and profuse in its variety of product provision of all sectors in the visitor economy with a rich profusion of content, offering highly innovative and creative solutions to the business and social environment.

As was envisaged by the Tourism Sector Deal, events continue to offer opportunities to improve productivity of the visitor economy, extending the season and utilising spare capacity across the UK. Greater programming of a National events calendar to ensure such opportunities are maximised could be considered.

International competitiveness will also rank high in a post COVID19 and Brexit environment, especially for international business events. Exceeding competitor nation offers for both buyers and attendees will be critical as well as facilitating the ease of access for overseas visitors attending and participating in events.

The Events Industry considers it has a unique role to play in revitalising the visitor economy, but even more broadly offering a strong platform on which the UK can showcase its industrial, scientific and cultural strengths to the world as part of its global ambitions.

We hope the above provides ample endorsement of why events should be included in the rebuilding of the UK economy and the levelling up agenda.