

# Are events at breaking point?

***By Poppy Surplice, Events Assistant at the Centre for Brexit Studies***

Have events been forgotten about? Will the events industry survive this global crisis when we return to normal? Will the industry receive any support? After Boris Johnson's roadmap to end lockdown, can we see live events coming back soon? Enough is enough, the event industry is at breaking point!

The drastic impacts of the global pandemic crisis have caused great disruption to many industries, in particular to live events. In an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19, all events came to a halt nearly a year ago today. Whilst the virus is still around, events simply cannot happen.

Figures suggest over 93% of people who work in live events have lost income due to the pandemic. 65% of people working in the events industry have lost over half of their income this year. Moreover, 43% of live event companies believe they will collapse by June the 1<sup>st</sup> if they don't get government support. We really are at the breaking point<sup>(1)</sup>.

On the other hand, some event companies have actually benefited from the pandemic and have expanded their market through virtual events. Virtual applications such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams have allowed many event companies to work throughout the pandemic. For example, here at the Centre for Brexit Studies, all our in-person events have moved onto the online platform and many have actually increased in popularity.

These virtual events allow event companies to host global conferences, trade shows, product launches or even immersive experiences from the comfort of a home or office<sup>(2)</sup>. Although some event companies have benefited from the virtual world, many events simply just don't work online.

Hybrid events have also become popular, particularly as a method of streaming live events. For example, a socially distanced group of

people at a panel debate can be broadcasted to viewers at home virtually. Therefore, some events like product launches and conferences may benefit from this alternate method. In contrast, festivals, concerts and weddings rely on in-person experience.

Thankfully, event companies such as #WeMakeEvents, have created a large social media platform for the survival of future events. The hashtag, #WeMakeEvents is an international movement to highlight that the live events sector urgently needs support from governments to survive the Covid-19 crisis.

Their main focus is to get government initiatives to help the industry get back to work as far as possible, whilst providing support until it can fully return to work<sup>(3)</sup>. The success of the movement, first introduced back in April 2020, has led to a global coming together in a spirit of mutual support and solidarity. Their movement has brought together a community to help others during these horrific times.

Luckily for some larger event companies, the furlough scheme has helped to pay for staff wages. However the events industry will not survive on just this. The reality is, the event industry simply has not received the support it needs, causing many to leave the industry.

Unfortunately, many 'ex' event managers and staff in the industry have needed to change their skill sets and increasingly have sought work in different industries due to redundancies and issues finding work. This isn't just a career, it's a lifestyle for many working in the field of events.

On a brighter note, with the current mass vaccination process in the UK and the government's "roadmap" announced on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February, live events could return in the summer following government guidelines. For example, reducing capacity size of venues or using technology advances to improve health and safety.

For sure, many people are eager to get back to events, but many also worry about safety. If all continues to go well with the current vaccination process, I believe there will be a boom of events later this year. Nevertheless, the likelihood of international events happening soon is low – I can't see this happening for a long time. Due to the current rate of vaccination process in the UK, we may see small

events taking place this year, if the government helps to support the industry in the interim.

Concluding on reflection, the events industry needs to support now more than ever. Like many other industries, the sector has collapsed from the detrimental impacts of the global crisis. This is our future; we need help.

1. Simon Brookes, Founder of Seventa Events, and Innovative Hire (Jan 2021)

2. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/events-industry-dead-adam-piperdy/>

3. <https://gcsu.wemakeevents.com/>