

How well do you believe that the Government understands the trade? What would you like them to know, if you think they don't already?

The British Institute of Innkeeping (BII) has represented the views, concerns and priorities of its individual members directly to Ministers and Government officials throughout the pandemic. The majority of our 9,000 members are licensees running freehold, leased and tenanted pubs. We have surveyed their views throughout the pandemic and presented this data to Government. Whilst we have had confirmation that the main issues are understood particularly from the Minister for BEIS, Paul Scully, we do not feel that the devastating impact of trading restrictions has been fully understood by other key Government departments. Treasury also need to accept that specific support for the pub sector will be needed over the next two years to allow a full recovery, however, this will be an investment which will be returned through taxation and higher employment if pubs are safeguarded. These are viable businesses and able to support over 900,000 jobs in the wider pub sector. Trading margins in pubs are low and any impact to their trading capacity and additional costs incurred through social distancing and table service in particular results in loss making businesses. Also the continued uncertainty is extremely damaging to consumer confidence, bank lending and employment with a reluctance for talent to join the sector at this time.

Tell us about how Government support schemes have worked during the COVID-crisis– have they been enough for the pubs you represent? Has financial support arrived in a timely manner? Have you/the publicans taken out Bounce Back Loans? Are you concerned about the end of the Job Retention Scheme? If you haven't received sufficient support to cover periods of closure and restrictions, what measures have you had to take because of this?

Overall support measures; grants, flexible furlough and Government backed loans have been helpful throughout the pandemic. However, this support has simply not covered our members' costs during this period and many have incurred significant debts which will take several years to re-pay. Grant support which has been critical for cash-flow has been extremely slow to process with huge variations between local authorities. As I write this we still have around 30% of our members yet to receive their restart grants, six weeks after the LAs received the money from central Government. The repayment of all Government related debts needs to be flexible in repayment terms similar to those given with Bounce Back Loans, although initial payment should be delayed until autumn of this year to allow pub businesses to rebuild their financial position through full trading. Over 50% of our members have taken Bounce Back Loans and around 15% CBILs. Many of our members have had to use these funds to remain viable including paying the contribution to furlough with no income.

Throughout the pandemic there have been a number of leaks, as well as speculation from the media about changes to regulations, dates for reopening, and financial support. How do you think this impacted businesses' ability to plan?

Media speculation has been incredibly unhelpful for our members throughout the pandemic. This has damaged critical consumer confidence and caused real uncertainty with our members as they have attempted to manage their fragile businesses. Information from Government, only a short few days ahead of new requirements being implemented, did not allow sufficient time to plan business operations and has resulted in money being wasted in areas such as stock and labour cost.

Do you feel that there was sufficient time to make these plans once changes were officially announced?

No. Significant changes in trading requirements needed 3-4 weeks' notice to plan and resource team rotas, stocking, customer communications and financial planning.

What will your pubs/ the publicans you represent need to be successful in the future?

They will need specific economic investment to allow them to rebuild their damaged businesses. Insight from our members' surveys confirms the following support priorities;

- Removal of all trading restrictions to allow full and free trading in their venues, nearly 80% of our members see a significant negative impact of rule of 6 on their businesses
- Business rates holiday for the whole of 2021 – in line with the devolved nations
- Full business rates reform rebalancing bricks and mortar businesses with digital
- Extension of VAT reduction for hospitality
- Draught beer duty cut for pubs
- Continued reduction of red tape allowing them more flexibility in operations

Do you expect the wider pub trade to change following the end of the COVID-19 crisis? In what way?

Whilst there is undoubtedly a renewed sense of value and appreciation for our nations' pubs, customer expectations have also developed during lock down. Many customers have experimented with new food and drinks offerings at home during lockdown and will expect this to be matched in the pub with great service. Also many more pub customers are now comfortable with digital platforms and this is a real opportunity and challenge for pubs to engage, attract and retain customers.

The business fragility of our members' pubs must not be under-estimated. They will need ongoing Government support to rebuild their business, develop their trade to pre-pandemic levels and clear debts specific to lockdown. These are viable businesses and are worthy of Government investment as pubs support local employment, local suppliers, provide essential & accessible places to connect us all in our communities whilst also generating on average £140k per annum of revenue to the Treasury. Pubs APPG - organisation survey

What opportunities do you think there will be for the sector after COVID, and what would you need from the Government to support potential growth?

Pubs that engage their customers, provide a great customer experience, diversify their business to meet the wider opportunities with their customers i.e. takeaway, and develop their teams, building their skills, will succeed moving forward. Our pubs, showcasing local beers & food, provide a unique place in our society that is highly valued by customers as they reconnect, celebrate and commiserate with friends, family, colleagues and neighbours.

Our nations' pubs play an essential role in their communities. They provide places of connection tackling key social issues such as isolation and many have also reached out beyond their doors in providing services to their communities. The BII has recognised over 130 individuals in pubs across the UK with its Heart of the Community Awards. Recognising activities from prescription deliveries, repurposing into shops for essential groceries, cooking & delivering meals for the vulnerable through to online pub quizzes, they have continued to keep us all connected. We look forward to their social value being formally recognised by Government as the truly accessible and relevant hubs of their communities that they are. They will need economic support to safeguard their place at the heart of our communities.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

We asked BII Members in a recent survey to list the ways they feel pubs and hospitality businesses can impact the economy and society, the top 5 results were;

- Boost to the National economy
- Job creation & employment opportunities
- Bringing communities together
- Community health and personal wellbeing
- Tax contributions

Our members' pubs are viable businesses and uniquely deliver economic, employment and social value. We would welcome engagement with the APPPG to further the case for ongoing support for our members.