

Confusion reigns with late night hospitality to resume within 60 hours – LVA

Government has no plan for the return to normal trading in pubs LVA stunned that pubs are not allowed use bar counters with all customers fully vaccinated

Gov supports must now be further extended

LVA publishes series of questions to be answered in advance of 22 October

Confusion now reigns over late night hospitality with the resumption of activity less than sixty hours away, the Licensed Vintners Association (LVA) has said. They warned that the latest announcement from Government has left more questions than answers and will lead to problems throughout the licensed trade.

The LVA expects several nightclubs will proceed with their expected reopening plans which are scheduled for just after midnight the day after tomorrow (as Thursday turns to Friday 22 October).

They also expressed their dismay that the Government now has no plan for the return to normal trading in hospitality, with the sector having previously been repeatedly told that they would be able to resume full service once the majority of the population was vaccinated. Currently 92% of the adult population has been vaccinated and anyone who has not received their vaccine would have zero difficulty or wait time in sourcing one.

On the back of the muddled announcement made by Government, the LVA has a range of questions which they will be seeking urgent responses from Government.

- How does public health advice permit people to closely dance together but not allow the use of the bar counter?
- With some night time venues due to open in less than 60 hours, when will the Government be publishing the guidelines for that sector?
- When will updated guidelines be available for the rest of hospitality?
- How does the Government plan on distinguishing between traditional bars, late bars and nightclubs?
- Is the Government aware that for many nightclubs it will not be feasible to open without access to the bar counter?
- With the hospitality sector having been repeatedly told they must wait until a large majority of the public is vaccinated before they can fully reopen and 92% of the adult population now vaccinated, what does the Government expect to change that will permit the future return of normal trading?
- If, as the Government said, these problems started arising 2 – 3 weeks ago, why did they wait until 3 days before 22nd October to make their latest announcement? For example could this not have been done last week? Is it fair to leave such major announcements to the last minute?
- What actions are the Government taking to ensure there is greater emergency capacity in the health service in the future and when will those be achieved?
- What additional financial supports will they be providing to pubs with the sector expected to indefinitely cope with severe limitations on trading?

Reacting to the Government announcement, Donall O'Keeffe said, "We are astonished with the latest announcement from the Government. They have effectively thrown out their previous plan, that normal activity would resume once the majority of the public was vaccinated. Instead we now have a 'wait and

see while hoping for the best approach'. This is not a plan and this is not what the social contract was built upon.

"All they have done today, indeed since last week, is sow confusion. We now have a night time sector that will be reopening in less than 60 hours and which doesn't know what restrictions they will be trading under or whether it will be viable to open in the first place.

"Permitting certain activities while preventing others also makes little sense to those who work in the hospitality sector. We are delighted to see the return of dancing for example but where is the logic that permits that activity but rules out the use of the bar counter? It is easy to see that the Government once again failed to engage with the hospitality sector in coming forward with these measures. They have created more questions than answers. Their anomalous approach to restrictions will not be practical in the real world.

"With such tight restrictions now remaining in place for the licensed trade for many more months, it is imperative the Government confirms that the Covid business supports will be extended for pubs as long as these restrictions remain in place, particularly the EWSS at current rates and the commercial rates waiver," Mr. O Keefe concluded.