

EIA welcomes the Chancellor's focus on supporting jobs and businesses but seeks urgent clarity and action on specific measures to support the still-closed exhibitions sector

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The Events Industry Alliance (EIA) represents the UK's event organisers, venues, and suppliers - a sector that prior to the Covid-19 pandemic was generating £11bn in economic activity and supporting 114,000 jobs - has today issued its preliminary response to the Chancellor's 2021 budget announcement.

The EIA welcomes the Chancellor's statement that he intends to help businesses and individuals through the challenging months ahead. However, it is essential that all measures announced yesterday that give support to retail, hospitality and leisure businesses are also extended to those in the exhibitions and events sector, given the identical nationwide restrictions to their activities they are facing.

Specific measures announced, such as the extension of the furlough scheme until September, will bring relief to our members who are still facing a national shutdown due to national Covid-19 restrictions and face additional unique challenges to resuming operations once restrictions are eased.

We will study the budget proposals in full, but we are seeking urgent clarity as to whether exhibitions and events companies, along with the freelancers who are a vital part of the industry's ecosystem, will be eligible for inclusion in the various business support measures announced yesterday.

However, even if all the business support measures announced are extended to the exhibitions and events sector, it still is not enough to maintain a viable industry over the coming months.

If the exhibitions and events sector is to avoid catastrophic job losses and business failure rates over the coming months, it needs further time-limited targeted government support and a clear roadmap to reopening to allow it to plan for the resumption of activities when the time is right.

We have previously called for, and are still urgently seeking, the introduction of a government backed insurance indemnity scheme to enable activities to resume once restrictions are lifted. In addition, the sector requires the publication of a sector-specific path to resuming activities within the government's wider reopening roadmap.

The UK exhibitions industry is a hugely viable sector and simply requires support to survive until the time is right to resume events, at which point we can return to our role of driving growth in the wider economy. The sector is also a vital contributor to the UK's economic competitiveness, and acts as the UK's shop window to the world, enabling companies from a wide range of sectors to meet prospective customers, generating sales, and driving UK exports.

While some of the measures announced yesterday are welcome, this budget by itself does not give the exhibitions and events industry the support it needs to survive.