



COVID-19 HANDLING & IMPACT

Show: GESS Dubai (Education)
Venue: Dubai World Trade Centre
Dates: 25-27 February 2020
Organiser: Tarsus Group

The first case of coronavirus in the UAE was confirmed on 29 January, by 27 February (last day of the show) the confirmed number of cases in the UAE was 19.

Exhibitors

The GESS Dubai show featured a Chinese pavilion; there were 30 confirmed exhibiting companies in the pavilion by January 2020 – the show team would have anticipated one or two more late bookings in the pavilion at most. Chinese customers represented 441m² contracted space on the show floor.

11 exhibitors in total (10 Chinese & 1 international) cancelled their participation due to the Covid-19 situation (travel bans, flight cancellations and unwillingness to travel); 114m² of contracted space. Approximately 3 other exhibitors within the Chinese pavilion used locally based representatives to man their stands instead of travelling themselves.

For the Chinese customers who cancelled their participation in the 2020 event due to being unable to travel; the show team maintained contact with them and rolled their participation over to the 2021 edition. 3 other exhibitors contacted the show team seeking to cancel their participation due to unease regarding the Covid-19 situation; they were advised that normal cancellation procedures would apply in this case and eventually just 1 cancelled.

All cancelled exhibitors were shell scheme customers so there were no issues with regards to service charges from the venue or contractors.

Communication

The show team first observed a small number of queries from exhibitors from late January; in line with the first case being confirmed in the UAE. The team prepared a statement regarding the show status, in that it was going ahead as usual and that additional measures were being put in place by the venue, the statement was used to respond to individual enquiries and also by our customer support team. The statement was not published online; as the number of queries were deemed to be low and there was no activity noted on social media.

The show team worked with the venue, DWTC, to ensure that stringent health and safety practices were in place at the venue; which included installation of thermal cameras at the venue entrances.

As the event approached the show team began to receive queries on whether Chinese attendees would be allowed into the show along with a handful of exhibitors requesting to move their stand away from the Chinese pavilion – as in the lead up to the show the team stressed the stringent health and safety practices that were being deployed to mitigate against any risks.

Visitors

Pre-registration was tracking about 15% ahead of last year up to the beginning of February; there was then a gradual decline and pre-registration finished about 7% lower year-on-year by show open.

Overall, core visitor group numbers including private schools and international delegates were in line with last year's edition. The show team noted a drop in Ministry of Education teachers in attendance but this was almost certainly due to reasons outside the Covid-19 situation.

In addition, on the first day of the show, Bahrain blocked all flights to Dubai; and the UAE blocked all flights to Iran; which impacted visitors from these countries (approximately 150). The show team have also noted how the show was fortuitously timed – the UAE government has now closed all kindergartens and nurseries; and all private schools have been instructed not to attend events which would have had a huge impact on the show had it taken place any later.

2021 outlook

Overall feedback on this year's show was very positive, with a good quality audience and lots of business done; the show team hit their rebook target.