



ASVA/Moffat Centre Attractions Survey – October 2020

Introduction:

The latest ASVA/Moffat Centre Attractions Survey was conducted over a 15 day period from 30th September 2020 to 14th October 2020. The online survey was sent out by email to 776 Scottish visitor attractions with respondents being asked to provide data in relation to the impact of COVID-19 on their attraction(s). A total of 359 surveys were completed, which equates to a 46.3% response rate.

The survey was produced to assess:

- Business performance since lockdown
- Levels at which Government, and other, support has been accessed
- Business confidence within the sector in the short, medium and long term
- Redundancy levels and anticipated redundancy levels across the industry

Results:

Business performance since lockdown

Re-opening

The majority of attractions (64.3%) have re-opened following lockdown. Of these however, two thirds have only been able to partially open, i.e. with either limited opening hours or with some facilities closes.

A significant percentage, 34.3%, have not been able to open at all.

Q: If your attraction has not re-opened, what are the main reasons for this?

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| • It is not economically viable to open this season | 48.0% |
| • Resource Restrictions (e.g. unable to man the site) | 16.3% |
| • Yet to be given a re-opening date by Government | 2.4% |
| • Buildings/staff temporarily repurposed | 2.4% |

By far the main reason for not re-opening was that it was not deemed to be economically viable to do so, with physical distancing restrictions of 2m and a general lack of visitors (particularly from the international market) the main barriers.

Extension of the Season

Seasonal attractions that had opened were questioned on whether they were looking to extend their season this year, considering the summer season was so truncated. Only 26.1% of seasonal attractions responded that they were looking to extend their season, with 73.9% stating that it would not be prudent to do so under current conditions. It is anticipated that, following the announcement of the new strategic framework and the introduction of tighter restrictions, particularly on travel, that more seasonal attractions will take the decision not to extend their season.

Economic Sustainability

Only 22.5% of attractions have reported that they are operating at an economically sustainable level since re-opening. As with previous surveys, the primary reasons given for not operating at a viable level are current physical distancing measures restricting capacities and, moreover, a general lack of visitors. It is anticipated that the number of attractions unable to operate at a sustainable level will rise further following the further tightening of restrictions announced in October.

Comparative Total Turnover

Respondents were asked about comparative total turnover so far this year, compared with 2019. In total, two thirds of attractions are reporting that turnover has declined by more than 50%. Most worryingly, almost a third (29.5%) of attractions are reporting that turnover has declined by 90% or more. Only 1% of attractions have reported a comparative increase in turnover.

Government, and other, Support accessed by the Sector*

**Please note this survey was sent to members prior to the announcement of the Coronavirus Job Support Scheme, so this scheme is not referenced in this report.*

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)

Some 63.8% of respondents confirmed that they are or have used CJRS with the remaining respondents not using the scheme.

Coronavirus Funding Support Packages

Two questions regarding accessing funding support packages were asked, the first relating to government led coronavirus funding support (e.g. Pivotal Enterprise Resilience Fund, Funding, Small Business Support Grant, Retail, Hospitality & Leisure Support Grant) and the second relating to other support packages (e.g. 3rd Sector Resilience Fund, National Lottery Heritage Emergency Fund, Museums Galleries Scotland Recovery & Resilience Fund).

Just over a third (38.1%) of respondents benefited from Government led coronavirus funding, and 17.9% benefited from other funding support.

Of those who received Government led funding, over two thirds (69.4%) found this support to be 'essential/very beneficial' in assisting them to sustain their business. 80% of those businesses that received other funding stated that the support was 'essential/very beneficial'.

Attractions that have not received any support were asked why they had not been able to access support, with eligibility criteria proving to be the main barrier, both for Government led support (60% not eligible), and Other Support (58% not eligible).

Kickstart Scheme

The respondents were asked if they would consider applying (or already have applied) for the UK Government led Kickstart Scheme.

17% of attractions stated they would apply, either on their own or as part of a group, with a further third unsure if they would apply. 50% of attractions stated they would not apply.

Business Confidence in the Short, Medium and Long Term

Respondents were asked how secure their businesses are over the short, medium and long term, with the following results

	Short term (1-3 months)	Medium Term (3-12 months)	Long Term (12 months +)
Completely Insecure	4.3%	4.3%	7.0%
Somewhat Insecure	9.8%	25.9%	28.1%
Neutral	35.9%	41.8%	41.4%
Somewhat Secure	28.9%	17.6%	14.8%
Completely Secure	19.5%	10.5%	8.6%

There has been a continual increase in confidence from July to October. In July, 18% of businesses stated that they felt their businesses were either completely or somewhat insecure in the Short Term, rising to 43% in the Medium Term and 39% in the Long Term. In October, the number of businesses feeling completely or somewhat insecure has decreased to 14% in the Short Term, 30% in the Medium Term and 35% in the Long Term.

It is, however, important to note that more businesses currently feel insecure in the long term (35%) than feel secure (23%).

It should also be noted that the majority of responses received were prior to the further tightening of restrictions on 9th October. It is anticipated that business confidence is now more fragile than it was at the time that responses were provided.

Redundancies

In total, 11.8% of organisations reported that staff redundancies had already taken place, with a further 12% advising that future redundancies would follow.

Whilst on the surface these are relatively encouraging figures, it should be noted that the survey also highlights that there has been a significant reduction in workers in the sector when compared with 2019.

Respondents were asked to provide details of staffing levels in the main season last year versus staffing levels in the main season this year. In total, there were just under 5,000 individuals working at respondents' attractions in the height of the season last year. This has declined to just over 3,500 individuals post lockdown in 2020. This is primarily because many seasonal staff were not able to be retained at the beginning of lockdown, as they were not eligible for the furlough scheme and therefore not re-hired.

Summary

The latest ASVA/Moffat Centre survey of attractions provides further evidence that, whilst much of the sector has reopened following lockdown, only a very small percentage of attractions have been able to make any significant income since reopening. More than half of attractions have experienced a decline in turnover of 70%+ when compared with 2019. With further restrictions now in place that will impact on the sector and the fact that we are now moving into the traditionally fallow winter months, the future outlook is not a positive one.

It is, however, encouraging to see that business confidence has grown since July, though this must now be caveated by the fact that the vast majority of survey results were received prior to the introduction of the new, tightened restrictions in October.

It is clear that, whilst financial support from government and other schemes has been very beneficial to those that received it, there are still many attractions have not been able to benefit from any grant support at all, primarily due to eligibility criteria issues. Any further support must be easy to access and efforts must be made to ensure that fewer businesses slip through the net.

In the main, the sector has been successful with other cost cutting measures which has prevented major job losses to date. However, it must be noted that we have lost a significant number of skilled people from the industry in 2020, particularly many of the seasonal workforce that would normally be brought on board during the main season. Whilst the survey does not point to further major redundancies on the horizon, it must be recognised that the new restrictions introduced in October are likely to see business plans revised over the course of the next few weeks and it is likely that further cost cutting measures will be required.