

Anonymous submission in relation to a business within the 'Sport and Healthy Lifestyle' industry – 09.02.21

The Panel would like to hear how the cancellation of one to one or group training sessions has impacted your business overall e.g. were you able to offer virtual training sessions and if so, did this impact on your eligibility to claim under the government schemes. Ours is a 'people/community' activity, a 'bricks & mortar' business. I am not an avatar and I take exception to the prevailing idea of the moment that 'oh you can just go online' to do what you do. Besides the fact that we are not 'performers' /not comfortable on camera, there are 'insurance' considerations for doing what we do online and criteria that must be met; such criteria is prohibitive for providing our activity online the way 'the customer' wants it; the alternative is to ignore the insurance cover criteria and operate anyway; not for the risk averse and not a good move if you want to be able to sleep at night knowing your insurance covers you i.e. not for us.

Impact on Business Overall? I presume EIASP are talking financial? Well obviously we had no 'real time' money coming in for any period of closure. Whilst some bought extra class passes whilst we were closed the reality of those purchases were they can only be used in 'real time' i.e. when we are open. So that money would have come in at a later date anyway. When we reopened people were using up 'old' passes (extended validity period because of period of closure) i.e. old money/credit they had with us, therefore, again, no 'new money' coming in. Because of distancing restrictions we had significantly less space and therefore less people attending per class THEREFORE it taking LONGER for people to use up their existing passes, therefore every which way you look at it, in what we do, during this crises there is always going to be less money coming in until we can get back to servicing a full capacity class. We have of course paused our business loan/mortgage but we endeavour to continue to pay all the utilities and other fixed costs (e.g. annual contracts with different companies for fire alarm servicing, aircon servicing, fire extinguisher servicing, website costs, insurances etc) so as not to get behind/out of date/warranty on these important services but also not to be building up future debt. Consider also these contracts are with other local businesses who are also in the same crises as us and need money coming in to pay their overheads. Our fixed costs do not go away just because we are not open. Additionally, the extra work burden should not be overlooked; Frankly if we had to employ a cleaner we would be out of business. As self employed we do all the extra sanitizing ourselves when we are open and it is burdensome time/energy wise. Additionally, the valuable time before/after classes where we would normally be connecting with our customers is now spent 'policing/discussing protocols'. In a larger/other business this type of work would be absorbed by a team and would have a big financial implication but when you work for yourself you do everything at no extra monetary charge. There is also the extra PPE costs to be considered. You cannot pass that extra cost on in the climate we are operating in; our customers are in this crises too.

The closure last year came in the middle of what was a good time for our business, we were building back up after a crises the year before and feeling optimistic. Then, understandably, we all had to lockdown (Please never misunderstand, we 100% 'get' the need for certain measures. But it was hard). This time round we were closed in the middle of the most 'optimal' time in our

calendar for us to make our living that might tide us over at quieter times of the year; unfortunately in what we do in the last few years we have been 'up against' the phenomenon of 'park & beach' instructors (many who do it as a hobby) who, unlike us, have no overheads to pay. When we are allowed to reopen it will probably be just at that point where they all come back out to play and with the gov't effectively discouraging indoor activities for so long it may well dampen our re-opening significantly, as people may well still be in a 'fear' mindset.

Have you accessed a support scheme and if so, which one?

Co funding for myself; whilst partner is part employed by the business in the first lock down he got extra work from his other employer to make up the difference of his not being employed in our business so we did not apply for co funding for him. In this second closure he has not obtained extra hours.

How did you find the application process? Were you provided with any information on the scheme?

STRESSFUL. Firstly last year we closed 20/3/20 as per strong gov't 'advice' (think back to last March please; closing was very much the right thing to do) ; at that point the whole 'co funding' scheme was not really on our radar and in a panic we approached social security; went through a process (many calls and many failed form completion attempts) to see if SS could help. The upshot of that was, because we had a 'mortgage' i.e. 'capital' they could not help. Then word of the co funding scheme came through to us but (1) we had to wait SIX WEEKS before we could be sure we were eligible (*the only way we could be sure we were eligible was successfully getting through the application process on 1/5/20 – think! Having been rejected by SS we had every reason to doubt whether we would be accepted for this new scheme*) SIX WEEKS of considerable stress/worry. (2) gov't would not help financially for the 11 days in March that we were closed because that closure was classed as at our own volition; clever penny pinching on the part of our gov using our moral obligations to not help us out; the issue I have had with SOJ all throughout that time was their 'weak' language and putting it all on the local businesses to make the right decision (their personal financial detriment). Trawling the gov.je website was a pain (to say the least; I feel I have lost years of my life trawling it) I ultimately found the most useful information about the scheme through the 'FB small business group'. Gov.je should bear in mind that vast majority of small business owners are not States/Office employees and they seriously need to improve their 'speak' when communicating with us plebs and try to be more user friendly and at the same time try not to 'talk down' to us; a hard balance to achieve I know.

Did you feel supported through the process?

Last year only felt true support via the 'FB small business support group' set up by Beverley Le Cuirot (not a gov't department), this group provides a feel of 'human' connection something that you will never get from a govt page.

I should say that in January I made a mistake on a form which resulted in a much reduced payment being made and I can say that the administrator I got to help me resolve the problem

was very warm, helpful and supportive; problem got sorted in a couple of weeks (not bad).

Were you excluded from applying for a scheme? If so, which one?

At the moment and trying to see how far I get in this new FCSS application. I have already been marked 'unable to apply for FCSS' by virtue of the 'type of activity' I have put down (the same type I used for my co-funding applications) I am awaiting to hear back from gov.je. There is another 'type' available on the form (wasn't available before) that I could perhaps use but I do not trust that if I work 'outside the box' to get past that part of the form, that it will not create loads of questions/problems later; so I will await a response to my email for a couple of days.

If you could make improvements to the scheme(s) what would they be?

EVERYTHING IS TOO SLOW. Govt reactions to the crisis for businesses and their solutions; all way too slow. When this started last year it almost seemed like our elected representatives were paralysed with the shock of it all and then holding on too tightly to the purse strings failing to realize THIS is the rainy day! It is too late now, we will NEVER understand WHY it has taken our govt so long to get a package of support in place. If they were so unsure what steps to take why didn't they emulate what was being done in the UK/Scotland/Ireland? We just don't understand it. Effectively it has felt like businesses had to get down on their knees and beg our govt for support package; I expect the 'admin costs' for their penny pinching efforts must be costing the tax payer a fair bit of money. **The main purpose of your review being to ensure the schemes are effective and fit for purpose?** well maybe they are getting there 'piecemeal style' but cannot stress enough ALL TOO SLOW.

Any other comments on issues related to the review that you would like to bring to the Panel's attention would also be very welcome.

Deferral of GST and Employer Social Security Contributions as a solution?

Would the CM like to acquire himself some lovely extra long term debt! Yes I get that SS must be paid but surely the point of SS is times like right now? Waiving SS for forcibly closed businesses might have actually been a cheap solution to aiding employees/employers

Also, Govt should also be speaking with banks; whilst our bank was accommodating 'pausing' our capital repayments for our business loan/mortgage (they call it a capital repayments 'holiday'), we still have to make the interest payments. Ultimately we will pay more interest in total which increases overall borrowing costs because of the extension period of the loan. There is something not quite right about this. Really don't feel like govt is covering all the bases. If they truly 'had our backs' they would have been addressing things like this.

business support packages fit for purpose? For the govts purpose which appears to be giving away as little money to people as possible (whilst happily throwing it away on statues that nobody wants and frittering away millions on a hospital that hasn't happened); if the purpose is to make people feel like they are begging for govt support and then giving the bare minimum and taking chance that some business' won't survive this crises but some may just scrape through then yes they are fit for purpose.