

55% say business travel by end of year is of 'high' importance

The Institute of Directors (IoD), the Guernsey International Business Association (GIBA) and the Guernsey Chamber of Commerce recently issued a joint survey to hear members' opinions on business travel and the impact of the current border restrictions.

In responding, 55% of members said travel before the end of the year was of 'high importance' or 'critical' for their business.

Respondents who said their business was impacted, cited client relationships, the opportunity to develop new business and the management of staff relocation as key reasons.

For those to whom business travel is important, travel to and from the UK is deemed more important than trips to Jersey.

In terms of reducing the risk to the wider community, the most supported options were: repeat testing (78%); socially distancing business new arrivals (48%); and, face masks for new arrivals (48%). Only 9% of respondents supported community-wide restrictions.

Respondents' comments show that travel needs and opinions are varied across the business community, and whilst there is a clear need for a number of businesses to travel, a substantial minority is concerned about the true risks of opening borders.

Currently, 41% of respondents said that the seven-day isolation period will prevent all business travel. Conversely, 71% said that a test on arrival would restore their travel habits to pre-Covid levels.

A plan to move to a shorter isolation period for travellers has been presented by the States of Guernsey, but there is no timeline for implementation yet. Currently, the need for travellers to self-isolate for a 14-day or seven-day period means there is little appetite for business travel.

The next phase, 5(c), would see travellers from certain lower-risk countries tested on arrival, meaning isolation only until the test result is received. Commenting on the implementation of this phase, respondents said that there would be a negative impact on short inbound trips.

Charging for testing has also been mooted by the States of Guernsey. Elaine Gray, President, Guernsey Chamber, said: 'We hope charging would only be considered as a last resort. Our economic recovery has to be of utmost importance and boosting air and sea passengers is key to this. Travel should be accessible for all and small businesses particularly would struggle with additional costs.'

John Clacy, IoD Guernsey Chair, said: 'We were delighted to have so many responses to the survey. The results provide important evidence to assist the States of Guernsey in their decision making and future planning. The global nature of Guernsey's businesses often requires people to travel to the UK - and elsewhere - to market, network and generally build pipelines of new business, which has been reinforced with the results of this survey.'

505 respondents completed the joint survey. The survey is planned to be repeated in Q4 2020 to establish business travel priorities for the new year.

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