

To the Chair and members of The Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media, thank you very much for this opportunity to meet with you to discuss the challenges that Covid 19 has had on the Restaurant industry over the past 15 months or so

To give you a brief background, most of our industry closed their doors on Sunday 15th March 2020 before anyone had even instructed us to do so. Our industry is based on ensuring people enjoy themselves in a very safe manor and this is something we have done throughout time. Our customers and indeed our staff's safety is of the utmost importance to us.

Over the past 15 months or so, we have traded as a restaurant for a little over 3 of those months. Last summer, we did everything we were instructed to do and indeed more. Killarney experienced the busiest 6 weeks I have ever seen in twenty years of business and not a single spike or surge was witnessed. We had no vaccine at this stage

On October 5th we were shut down again. To be honest, once Dublin was locked down in mid September, we might as well have locked down the whole country as business fell off the cliff literally over night. We personally adapted and pivoted again and reopened our pop up deli. I decided that we would run this straight to Christmas as I had a feeling we would not be reopened, as was suggested, by the end of October and it was the right thing to do for a number of reasons but mainly because it kept our team together and our sanity, although the latter is debatable. There was a 2 week window in December we could have opened, but everyone in the hospitality industry knew it wasn't going to last.

All our suppliers had now told us that they would not be offering credit for any stock, unlike the first lockdown, if we were closed down again in the coming weeks. To give you an idea of what it takes to start up again with purchasing stock, you wouldn't see much change from 15 thousand euro. At this point, a lot of restaurants said it wasn't worth the risk and remained closed. This turned out to be the right call. I have to admit; even I didn't see us still being closed to this very day. Almost nine months later

Since this last lockdown from October 5th, my industry along with others, have not earned a single cent for our livelihoods. We have been tarnished with the blame and surge of number of cases, hospitalization, ICU admittance and deaths last winter when the data clearly shows that this was not the case. The surge had already started in November 2020 when we were all closed. From January

onwards, almost 97% of all new cases were the UK Variant. Chefs are indeed creative but none of us have the recipe to that strain . It was brought into the country from elsewhere. I am not here to point the finger of blame at anyone, but I love my profession too much to see my industry and hospitality in general take the blame or be used as scapegoats any longer. The Delta variant is now present in our country, which the CMO has said is of great concern. We have mandatory hotel quarantine and testing to prevent this so how has this happened?

The restaurant industry has sat and waited patiently for our turn to reopen. But when you looked around and saw everything else that was opening and realized that nothing made sense, it became harder and harder to accept this. The biggest blow to my peers, my team and indeed myself was hearing The Taoiseach repeatedly state that we were deemed nonessential in the society to which this government wished to govern over. We work long and very hard hours. We do everything we can to ensure that every single customer enjoys their experience. I would argue that the tourism industry is the backbone and indeed the single most important pillar of our society and economy and to be told we are nonessential was an insult to every person working in Hospitality around the country.

On May the 12th, I launched my campaign simply known as #ThePlan. All we wanted was to have the same level playing field as hotels were given and be allowed to open on June 2nd I received incredible support and indeed from a lot of this very committee to which I am eternally grateful for. The Plan highlighted all the issues that would happen if we weren't allowed to open and every single issue I said would happen has happened. The biggest one, for now, is the staffing issue.

My campaign reached over 150,000 people per day on twitter alone for 3 weeks. The Plan was the right course of action but unfortunately it was ignored by this Government. The biggest issue yet to arise will be the absolute carnage that will follow this winter when so many restaurants will simply go bust as soon as the subsidies stop. They will fall off the cliff and unfortunately a lot have and already closed their doors. Some have fallen but just haven't realized it yet.

Our industry is in serious trouble and I will gladly answer any questions that you may have to the best of my ability.

Thank you

Paul Treyvaud