

Coronavirus – British Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong response

On Weds 11th March, members of BCC team spoke to colleagues in the British Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong in order to learn from their experience of the Coronavirus situation. This note provides an overview of how the Chamber has responded to the situation.

Attendance

BCCHK

- Hugo Deacon (Business Policy and Corporate Relations Manager)
- Andrew Seaton (Executive Director)
- Emily Weir (Marketing and Communications Manager)

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- Ryan Denston (Press and Communications Manager)
- Hannah Essex (Co-Executive Director)
- Anne-Marie Martin (Director Global Business Networks)

Background

The cycle began 6 weeks ago, and impact has been challenging particularly as it comes after a time of social disruption and protests that had already created difficulties for the business community.

There have been 3 key responses to the impact of the outbreak:

1. A corporate response;
2. A chamber response;
3. A government response.

The same sectors that have been affected by the social protests are also bearing the brunt of impact from the Coronavirus outbreak. These are:

- Retail
- Tourism and hospitality
- Food & Beverage

Supply chains and trade flows are further impacted and this has led to a slowdown in broader economic activity.

Corporate response

Mainland China reports are that whilst the virus is still in existence there is a feeling that it is under control. It is important to push forward and get the economy going again and a difference will likely be felt through by Q2.

Hong Kong was affected very suddenly and has had to respond quickly. Businesses have introduced new processes / structures and relevant enabling technology to create an

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environment for flexible working, particularly home-working, which is not a normal modus operandi for business in the region. However, these new tools, mechanisms and processes will be part of their future business plans now that they have been introduced. They have helped to demonstrate that agility in working practices can bring benefits.

Chamber response

The Chamber was taken by surprise, and the biggest challenge has been how to manage the normal day to day which is based on a core programme of 150-160 in person events per year.

To mitigate the impact, the Chamber has:

1. Set up a [resource hub on the Chamber website](#)
This includes both official advice and guidance provided by government and government institutions around travel, health, etc. and curated content from member companies that they have made freely available to others.
2. Introduced a webinar programme series of events covering aspects of virus itself - what does it mean in business terms - supply chains – specific construction industry issues - managing remote workers - mental health and wellbeing - how to implement effective home working. All webinars are available free of charge to members with a minimum charge for non-members (c. £16).

Two best performing webinars were:

- [Managing Your Remote Workforce Successfully](#)
- [Employee Management Through Coronavirus](#)

Other popular topics included:

- [COVID-19 Impact on Business + Discussions with Government](#) (the initial webinar with Chamber Chair and CEO)
- [COVID-19 and Supply Chain Disruption](#)
- [Staying Mentally Healthy Through COVID-19](#)

The communications and webinars platform the Chamber is using is Zoom which works very well. It has reliable host controls. Events registration takes place as before via the Chamber's website events hub.

The kick-off webinar included a discussion with the Chamber's Executive Director and Chairman. They gave an update on conversations with Government and were able to give assurances about what was being done.

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The Chamber is now expanding the webinar programme to include regular business events going forward and potentially working together with colleagues on the Mainland, e.g. chamber in Shanghai, to offer joint webinars.

The response from members has been positive and appreciative of the measures that the Chamber has taken to ensure continuity in benefits and services.

Government response

On a policy level, the Chamber is speaking to government in respect of impact, and how government should respond particularly in terms of social issues. For example, schools are now all shut and that has a knock-on impact on family life.

The Chamber is seen as critical in getting official information out to businesses (rather than the Embassy, for example).

What would you have done differently?

If the Chamber would have had greater insight and warning ahead of time they feel that they would have been a bit more thoughtful about the content of webinars ensuring that they are covering the right subjects, with a themed approach.

Furthermore, they would have followed the chamber in China's example of surveying members in respect of confidence and outlook so that the webinar content planning could reflected the members interests and needs

The Chamber's response as an employer

The Chamber has followed the official government guidelines which has been reflected in the Chamber's own working policy, as follows:

- Non-essential people working from home
- Consider concerns of employees and what comfortable with doing, e.g. travelling on public transport
- Option of voluntarily working from home
- Introducing culture, protocols and technology to enable employees to work remotely

There have been challenges:

- Technology – members' systems not up to scratch
- Policies and procedures needed to be brought up to scratch at speed