

Roadmap must include plans to allow 300+ late night venues to reopen – LVA

Late pubs and nightclubs important employers and also venues for live musicians/ DJs

Plan also needs to provide for use of bar counter and normal trading resuming in hospitality

The Government's new reopening roadmap must include plans to allow the estimated 300+ late night venues around the country to reopen, according to the Licensed Vintners Association (LVA).

According to figures prepared by the LVA, there are more than 300 nightclubs and late pubs who have been unable to offer late night service for 527 days since the pandemic began in March 2020. Many of those venues will have remained completely closed for all service during that period.

An additional 5,000 – 6,000 jobs are dependent on the reopening of the late night hospitality. Late pubs and nightclubs also provide venues for a significant number of live musicians and DJs. Nightclubs have already reopened in England, Scotland and Wales.

The LVA is also pressing the Government to include details for the resumption of regular service in hospitality settings as part of the new roadmap, taking into account the continued success of the vaccination programme. Among the measures the LVA is seeking are the return of the use of the bar counter, allowing capacity limits to return to pre pandemic levels, resumption of normal trading hours and permitting customer movement around pubs – including standing, mingling and even dancing. Presently all these measures are banned, despite all customers inside pubs and hospitality venues being required to provide proof of vaccination.

"With more than 85% of the adult population already fully vaccinated and further progress to be made in the coming weeks, now is the time to start planning for hospitality to return to normal trading," said Donall O'Keeffe, Chief Executive of the LVA. "That will mean the return of late night pubs and nightclubs, who offer significant employment around the country. These are also key venues for the recovery of the music sector, with many of these late pubs and nightclubs providing platforms for live musicians and DJs to perform. Music is part of Irish hospitality and Irish life, so its return to hospitality settings is long overdue.

"The plan also needs to outline the return of hospitality to normal trading conditions. We would expect to see specific details for when the bar counter will be permitted for use again, when normal trading hours will resume and when capacity limits will return to their pre pandemic levels. Permitting normal socialisation has to be part of this process and in a pub context that means allowing customers to stand up, to mingle and even dance.

"As we move closer and closer to reaching practically full vaccination, a time is coming when there will be no practical argument for the imposition of the restrictions on hospitality. After the difficulties this sector and others have gone through over the last 18 months, this roadmap needs to show what the future for Irish society will look like and whether we will actually be able to really live with Covid," Mr. O'Keeffe concluded.