

Waive Government charges on late night venues to aid their recovery – LVA

Any pub or nightclub seeking to open late must pay Government additional €410 per night

Government imposed charges on late night venues should be waived for the next six months to aid the recovery of nightclubs and late bars, according to the Licensed Vintners Association (LVA).

Any licensed premises who seeks to open late currently has to make an additional payment to Government of €410 per night. For a late night venue that operates five nights a week that represents an extra €8,200 per month imposed by the Government, so they can open their doors late.

Late bars and nightclubs are not due to reopen until 22 October, meaning they will have been kept closed for a period of 585 consecutive days – more than 18 months in total. The LVA estimates there are about 300+ late pubs and nightclubs around the country who have been kept closed, employing approximately 5,000 people.

Any pub or nightclub who wishes to open late must seek a Special Exemption Order (SEO) for each individual night they are looking to remain operating beyond normal closing time. This amounts to an additional two hours trading. Only venues who meet strict criteria around CCTV, security and public liability insurance are eligible to apply.

The LVA proposal would work in a similar fashion to the current liquor license waiver for other hospitality businesses that has been adopted by the Government for 2021.

"While it is great that there is now a date when late bars and nightclubs will be able to open their doors again, it is also true that for many of these venues it will take them a long time to recover," said Donall O'Keeffe, Chief Executive of the LVA. "There is an opportunity here for the Government to aid the revival of these venues simply by waiving the Government charges involved in Special Exemption Orders.

"Securing an SEO involves Government charges of €410 per night as well as solicitors' fees, which all adds up to significant expense for businesses who have not been allowed to trade for more than a year and half. Paying these Government fees when you lodge your application, which is how the process works, is a major burden on businesses who have had no turnover since March 2020. To help give these late bars and nightclubs a chance to recover the LVA believes the Government charges involved should not be imposed for a six month period from 22 October 2021 to 22 April 2022.

"Under the LVA proposal the application system would remain the same – any late bar or nightclub would still have to go to Court to secure their SEO and Gardaí would be able to voice any potential objections. The only alteration is that the extra expense imposed by the State would be waived for that period. In that way it would be very similar to the liquor licence waiver the Government has provided for the rest of the hospitality sector. This is a relatively simple step for the Government to take and would also be an important saving for cash strapped businesses.

"Another benefit of this approach is that it will provide a window for full consideration of the Night-time Economy Taskforce Report, which is due to be published shortly and will have a significant bearing on the future of late bars and nightclubs. As part of that process the LVA has sought to have SEO costs reduced and late trading hours extended," Mr. O'Keeffe concluded.