

COVID-19 Forum – TAG Commercial Development 12.00, 18/03/20

Stacey Kirkpatrick **(SK)** – ActivateUTS

Matt Posetti **(MP)** – Swinburne Student Union

Alison Scott **(AS)** – JCU

General

SK UTS directive to cancel all non-essential events, so the Aerial UTS Function Centre will be significantly impacted.

AS Responsible for campus accommodation, and retail and food, and heavily involved in external bookings on campus. Current restrictions on gatherings of over 100 will impact on dining options on campus.

Concerns that sustainability will be sacrificed in order to mitigate the spread of the virus. Eg, restriction on reuseable coffee cups, etc.

MP Forced closure of their commercial outlets next week. Planning on a four-week suspension, but ultimately be determined by the university. Some consideration being given by Swinburne to inserting a third winter semester mid-winter, but given current medical views, this may be unlikely.

TAG Many universities are bringing forward non-teaching weeks to absorb the current suspension of attendance.

TAG, as part of a tertiary sector peak representative group, is approaching the ATO with a proposal for GST relief for 2020 to mitigate the impact of the crisis. More information will be forthcoming shortly, pending discussions with ATO.

It is expected that assistance from the various universities may be muted as the financial impact of the crisis will be significant.

Staff and Closures

SK No events this week, so no requirement for casual staff. These are being redeployed across ActivateUTS's other commercial outlets, Haberfield Club and bars, all of which currently remain open, but full-time staff will receive preference for redeployment.

Chef and kitchen team are using the down time to focus on training. Only a matter of time before government forces shutdown of other outlets, or UTS closes the campus. Both actions will force ActivateUTS's hand on staff measures.

MP Believes that SSU is more than just a business, and that they have an obligation to their students, which they also employ. As some may hold second jobs externally in the hospitality industry, these may dry up as well, growing the obligation of SSU to maintain employment for them as best as they can.

Broader support for staff can be simply by providing guidance on how to apply for CentreLink or facilitating redeployment to other sectors. Can TAG assist there?

TAG How long can they re-train for before it becomes financially unviable?

There is a finite availability of accrued leave for any business. What is the solution if campus closures extend for months, and available leave is exhausted? What is the organisation prepared to cover in that event? Negative accrual can pose a problem going forward, creating a liability and a possible obligation of ongoing employment for that staff member.

How do we ensure that staff working from home have a safe work environment? Is self-assessment effective? FWA feels that employers who compel staff to undertake a self-assessment of their home working space have established concern for the well-being of staff and compliance to the law.

CentreLink is waiving the Newstart waiting period for casual staff.

Event Restrictions and Cancellations

SK As the event restrictions are a university directive, they are refunding deposits by clients, or encouraging them to postpone and reschedule. However, second half of the year is already quite full and there may not be enough calendar space later in the year to accommodate all postponements.

Currently projecting closure until June but expects that may extend.

Still receiving bookings for audience-free events that will live stream.

AS The new "100 or less rule" will impact on their residential student dining service, resulting in staggered meal sittings. Was waiting to enact that once COVID-19 cases were identified on campus, but the ruling has now made that an immediate action item.

Chose to cancel a 1000 guest event at the uni bar on the weekend, even though they had reduced to 500 to comply with previous restrictions. What can they now provide their students for entertainment and engagement when events are restricted?

MP Looking to take events such as trivia nights online to maintain community and interaction.

Macquarie Uni has suspended classes until March 30, at which point all classes will have been migrated online. Commercial outlets still operating, but at semester break hours. Looking at staffing levels.

Operational

MP Perishable stock in hand is being cooked and frozen or being given to staff to take home.

SK Cancellations made before the UTS decision have been charged for food purchased for their event. Other stock can be transferred to other outlets without too much wastage.

AS JCU will transition to online classes by early April. This will impact on campus tenants, who in the first instance will be offered the option to close doors for the duration without penalty. Next step will be rent relief, but that will impact on university revenues.

TAG Is compiling COVID-19 Statements from key supply partners.

Budget Impact

SK ActivateUTS will be significantly impacted by event restrictions. Difficult to forecast, as the changing situation makes the calendar uncertain for rescheduling cancelled events.

AS Decisions made by the sector and other parties. is driving many of the cancellations. Eg, last week all US residents were mandatorily asked to return home last week, resulting in 70 lost accommodation contracts. The impact for universities is much broader than just the loss of Chinese students. Significant financial impact is expected but will be unknown until after census date.