

Effect of COVID 19 on the NI Occupancy Survey

On the 23rd March 2020, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Government imposed a lockdown across the UK. This lockdown included all accommodation providers such as hotels, B&B, Guesthouses and Guest Accommodation. Relaxation of the lockdown allowed hotels, B&Bs, Guesthouses and Guest Accommodation to reopen again from the 3rd July.

During the lockdown, NISRA did not issue the occupancy survey and only restarted again to collect July data. When the July survey recommenced, some additional questions were included about the impact of COVID 19 on the reopening of their premises. Unfortunately, the number of responses were too low to allow for any meaningful analysis of these questions. However, responses did provide some useful anecdotal evidence and combined with e-mail correspondence and NI Occupancy survey responses it gives an insight into the effect of Covid-19 on accommodation providers.

Analysis of Responses

Due to the low response rate, it is important to note that this paper does not display any statistically significant results. The overall response rate to the NI Occupancy survey for B&Bs, Guest Accommodation and Guesthouses has dropped, over the year, from 57% to 18% but we can be unsure if this is due to COVID-19 or other reasons (for example the person who fills in the survey is furloughed/natural closures). Please note that normally up to half of our responses from B&Bs, Guest Accommodation and Guesthouses are made via post and due to Covid-19 and our inability to access our offices there may be some postal returns for July that have not yet been recorded. NI Occupancy figures are revised every year once late returns are taken into consideration, at that time the response rate for July may be revised.

Half of those who did respond to the survey and were not opening their establishment felt that they didn't have enough interest yet to warrant opening. Five hotels responded to say they remained closed or shut during July which is unprecedented in this type of establishment during the summer season let alone any month of the year. Due to the nature of the B&Bs, Guesthouses and Guest Accommodation surveys year on year comparisons cannot be made, especially as we are unsure if nil responses or no responses are due to closure or no staff currently working to complete the return. A quarter of those who reported they were shut indicated that this July was the first time that they have shut their establishment.

Some qualitative responses -

"in COVID lockdown until there is a vaccine ... "

"closed until next year due to the uncertainty around COVID-19 ... "

"unopen in July due to not enough interest from customers and health reasons but hope to open ASAP"

"transformed into an office due to COVID19 ... "

"operating on a reduced capacity basis and offering only 50% of our rooms"

"don't feel our venue will work under the current social distancing guidelines. ..."

"still closed ... due to the pandemic"

"only allowing one room to be occupied at a time, due to COVID-19, not exactly difficult given the lack of interest ..."

"... have decided because of COVID 19 not to take any bookings at the moment. It is also true to say that we have not had any enquiries so it has not been a problem"