

British public say no chance of being back to normal by Christmas

- Almost three-quarters, 72%, say things will not be back to normal by Christmas
- Public's view of how many people have died from coronavirus are up to 100 times worse than the reality
- Although no return to normal this year expected, workers going back to work report a better, more productive and safer experience than expected
- The Government and the Prime Minister are seen by a clear majority to be "making up their coronavirus policies as they go along"

London, 25th July 2020 – The fourth Kekst CNC international tracking survey has shown that only one in ten (11%) expect things to have returned to normal by Christmas, as predicted by Prime Minister Boris Johnson last week. Almost three-quarters (72%) disagree that this will be the case.

Expectations of a second wave of COVID-19 have also increased significantly since June with three-quarters (76% up from 72%) expecting this in the next year or so. This proportion is well above the 64% average seen in the other countries surveyed.

People are also expecting the impact of the virus to last for longer. More than nine in ten British adults (91%) believe that COVID-19 will impact upon the economy for at least another year (up from 87% in June) with a clear majority (62%, up from 54%) believing that it will last more than two years, into 2022.

A key factor in this level of concern is individual views of the health impact of the virus. Around one in three cannot say how many people in the UK have or have had COVID-19 but the average estimates for the remainder illustrate the challenge facing the Government to persuade people back to work and previous levels of consumer spending. On average **the UK public believes that one in five (22%) of their fellow citizens has had the virus, more than four times the figures published by the ONS**, with half of these being seriously ill as a consequence and that one in ten (11%) currently has COVID-19. **People think 7% of the population have died of the virus: more than 100 times the figures published by Public Health England.**

Commenting on the results, James Johnson, Senior Adviser at Kekst CNC and former Senior Opinion Research and Strategy Adviser at 10 Downing Street, said:

"This research shows why the UK is still the nation most worried about the virus. The British people think nearly a fifth of people have had coronavirus, that one in ten people have it now, and that one hundred times as many have died of it than actually have.

"It is in this context that more people are expecting a second wave, and that almost three-quarters disagree with the Prime Minister's claim that things will be back to normal by Christmas.

"The better news for the Government and employers is that people who have returned to work in the UK say it is better, safer, and more productive than they expected. But businesses are not

protected from public anger – and as we move into the next phase of the crisis, people’s views on business brands are deteriorating. And with questions about the speed of the exit from lockdown, high levels of concern about the virus, and falling approval ratings, the Government continues to face significant challenges as it tries to restart the economy.”

The research, carried out among a representative sample of 6,000 adults, including 1,000 in the UK, between 10 and 15 July also found that the UK public’s views of the Government and the Prime Minister’s response to the pandemic has worsened. Boris Johnson’s rating is net -12% compared to net -7% in June. The Government’s rating is net -10% (net -7% in June).

More specifically, two thirds (67%) of the UK public believe that “the Government seems to be making up its coronavirus policies as it goes along”. Only 13% disagree. This view is held by a majority across all groups surveyed including Conservative voters by a two to one margin (50% and 25% respectively).

The research also found:

The economy is becoming more important to British voters

The public are still very focused on saving lives rather than prioritising the economy, but the gap between the two is narrowing faster than in any other country. Given a choice, 24% say prioritise the economy (up from 22% in June) with 56% (down from 63%) still believing that the Government needs to prioritise limiting the spread of the virus even if this means there will be major economic damage. This gap has closed by 9 points – the biggest swing towards the economy globally.

Increasing concerns about business support, and business brands on the decline

While the UK is still rated the best by its citizens in terms of the provision of support for businesses compared to the other markets surveyed, the last month has seen a noticeable decline in the proportions saying that the Government is giving businesses the support it needs (57% agree compared to 63% in June) and that this assistance is getting through to the businesses that need it the most (38% compared to 42% in June). Alongside this there has been a fall from 64% to 59% in the proportion agreeing that businesses have stepped up during the crisis, mirroring falls overall in the net ratings for business performance.

People who have gone back to work have found it better than expected

Among those working full or part-time some 58% say that they are back at work in their normal workplace for at least one day a week. While half (53%) say there has been no difference, one in three (32%) says that the return to work has been better than they had expected with 15% feeling that it has been worse. For half (50%) productivity has been no different to usual with 29% being more productive than they had expected and 20% worse. 38% felt safer than they had expected, 19% felt less safe than they had expected, with these people more likely to be lower income earners

Methodology and full results

- Nationally representative sample of 1,000 adults in Great Britain, 1,000 adults in Sweden, 1,000 adults in Germany, 1,000 adults in United States, 1,000 adults in Japan and 1,000 adults in France.
- Fieldwork took place on 10 July- 15 July 2020.
- Quotas and weights on gender, age, and region in each country.
- Margins of error of +/- 3.3% for all countries.
- Full results of the survey available at: xxxxxx

About Kekst CNC

Kekst CNC is a leading global strategic communication consultancy. The team of over 250 experienced professionals serve clients from 13 offices in New York, London, Munich, Berlin, Frankfurt, Paris, Brussels, Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Stockholm. As trusted advisors, the firm contributes its expertise on such high-stake matters as: M&A, shareholder activism and governance, crisis communications, restructurings, regulatory investigations, litigation support, investor relations, IPO communications, issues and reputation management, change management and employee engagement, as well as digital and social communications. For more information, please visit: www.kekstcnc.com

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