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Project Report

Business Impacts of the Coronavirus outbreak:
PGL Travel Ltd

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Events Management
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Executive Summary

To determine the impacts of COVID-19 on outdoor activity centre PGL Travel Ltd, this report uses PESTLE and SWOT analysis' to establish how the individual sectors of the business were affected. (Full PESTLE/SWOT analysis displayed in the appendices). Researching the companies contingency plans, crisis management and effectivity of leadership and management, this report concludes that the company does have the potential to sustain business after the pandemic; however, the repercussion of substantial negative portrayal in the media could result in a loss of clients making reforming more challenging.

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1. Introduction

The factors which impact a business can source from internal operations and management or unpredictable external environments (Seo & Lee, 2019). Whether the forces be controlled or uncontrolled, a company must identify the potential impact and adapt to efficiently prevail (Sikdar, 2011).

Organisational change (Ford & Ford, 1995), whether it be from business evolution or due to a substantial impact, can cause a variety of responses from its employees. Some of these reactions could be positive and accepting, whereas others could portray a natural refusal to change (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). When this happens during a crisis situation, the responses from employees are never more paramount. The urgent pressure to edit procedure may either encourage people to adapt effortlessly for the benefit of their customers and colleagues, or increase this natural resistance to change causing defiance or confusion (Badzmierowski, 2019).

Ensuring a positive response is crucial to maintaining both customer and employee; safety, loyalty and trust in a businesses ability to cope under pressure (Stark, 2010). To combat adverse outcomes, crisis management schemes and contingency planning can be used to not only promote immediate action but assist an easy, structured transition for employees (Alas & Gao, 2012)

Covid-19 has had a significant impact on businesses worldwide. With in the United Kingdom, 24% of companies reported that they would be closing temporarily (Ons.gov, 2020). Of the remaining business who chose to remain open, two-thirds reported that their financial performance was abnormal, with 93% of these announcing their turnover was lower than average (Ons.gov, 2020). This has caused a considerable amount of changes to almost every workplace globally.

This report will be exploring how activity centre PGL Travel Limited was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic focussing on their response to Government Guidelines, how efficiently management approached the change, and what impacts the virus had on the companies internal and external stakeholders.

2. PGL Travel Ltd

PGL is an outdoor activity centre that hosts accommodation, entertainment and education to over 400,000 guests a year (Pgl.co.uk, 2020). The clients of the company can range from school groups, individuals under the age of 18, families and more. Since its opening in 1957 (Walsh, 2013), PGL is now at the forefront of outdoor leisure and educational holidays and was awarded The Best Adventure Experience 2016/17 (School Travel Organiser, 2016).

PGL's relationship with schools and education resulted in the business joining the Education Division of the company Holidaybreak in 2007 (Pgl.co.uk, 2020), and began registering the first of its centres with educational inspectors, Ofsted, in 2009 (Ofsted.gov, 2020).

Not only does the company accommodate a sometimes exceeding amount of guests, but also provides catering and living quarters for the majority of its 3,000+ employees (Pgl.co.uk, 2020). At full capacity, its largest centre Liddington could have approximately 1,450 people living at the same location at one time (Pgl.co.uk, 2020).

Typically this could be deemed beneficial for the business as it is providing a service to many customers efficiently. Its facilities are being used rapidly, with guest turnover and income maintaining at a high. However, during the Coronavirus pandemic of 2020, hosting to a vast amount of people simultaneously quickly became a cause for concern.

3. Coronavirus Outbreak & Government Guidelines

Covid-19 is a newly discovered human infecting strain of coronavirus. The virus primarily causes respiratory issues in the infected, which can be severe and potentially deadly in those who are vulnerable (WorldHealthOrganisation, 2020).

Originating in China at the end of 2019 (Cookson, 2020), the virus had infected more than 11.4 million people across the globe by July 2020 with 534,000 of those resulting in death (Newey & Gulland, 2020).

As Covid-19 is spread through respiratory droplets passed by sneezing or coughing, the virus is typically transmitted either directly onto others or through the touching of contaminated objects and surfaces (WorldHealthOrganisation, 2020). Due to this, it quickly became apparent that limiting social interactions would be the most effective way to combat the spread of the virus (NHS.uk, 2020). By April 2020 the initial social distancing guidelines had escalated to at least 91% of people

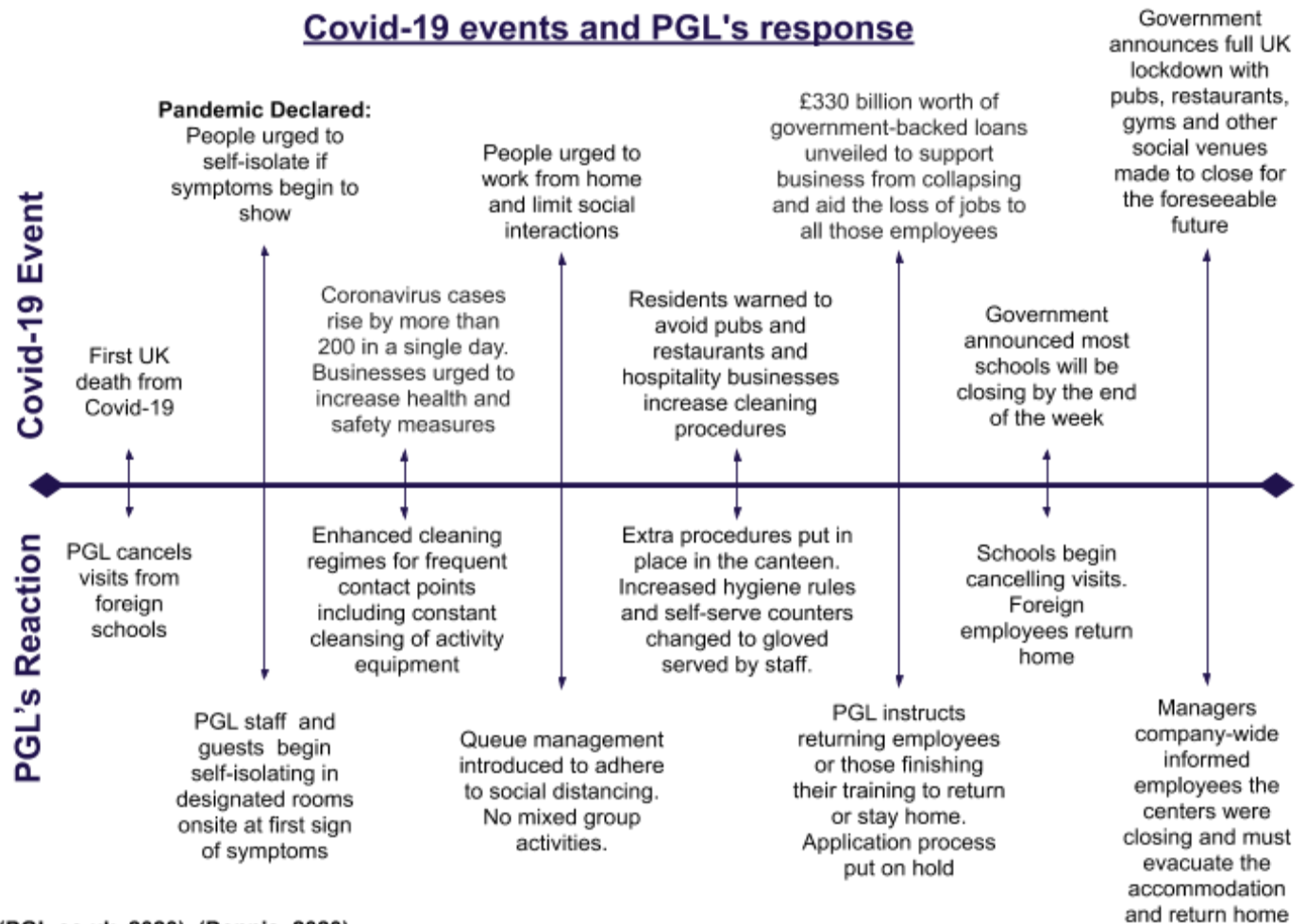


around the world living in countries that had travel restrictions or completely closed their borders as country-wide quarantines and lockdowns began (Connor, 2020).

These closures have had a considerable impact on many businesses with specific amendments being made in sectors such as operations, trading and employment (Singh, 2020). One of the most debated concerns for companies, employees, and the Government has been how to continue work while adhering to social distancing guidelines (Bickel, 2020) (Jones & Carver, 2020).

As PGL is a residential activity centre, there are many instances in the accommodation and activity departments where complying to these guidelines would contradict other health and safety initiatives. In all harnessed activities, it is imperative that instructors are confident that the guests are secure and fastened correctly. To effectively ensure this, consensual physical checks are completed (Pgl.co.uk, 2020). These measures are just one of the situations in which guests and employees would inevitably breach distancing guidelines. Therefore it was crucial PGL remained up to date with government guidelines as they progressed and implemented new procedures where possible.

3.1. A brief timeline of Government guideline updates (Covid-19 events), and how PGL responded to them



(PGL.co.uk, 2020), (Dennis, 2020)

4. Operational Impacts

When the coronavirus pandemic first became a concern to the well-being of UK residents, all businesses were expected to make amendments to their operating procedures to adhere to government guidelines (Gov.uk, 2020). This was one of the processes PGL tackled expeditiously with exceptional care.

Asides from the housekeeping department adopting an enhanced cleaning regime for high-risk areas and congregational regions, new sanitation processes were also established within the AIGL department.

In activities such as sensory trail and fencing, guests come into physical contact with multiple pieces of equipment, specifically those worn on the face (Pgl, 2020). Due to the risk of virus transmission staff members were instructed to wash and sterilised face guards and blindfolds after every session. If the centre had many of these activities running in concession, additional off-session instructors were scheduled to complete this task allowing those leading activities to return to their guests (Pgl, 2020).

Changes to activities were also made in reducing group sizes and preventing the mixture of schools. When a school arrives at PGL, they are divided into groups which they will remain in to complete activities and attend meal times. The typical group sizes consist of 15 children, with one to two teachers (Pgl, 2020). When the company began making social distancing amendments, these sizes were reduced to minimise virus spread. Groups from multiple schools would also sometimes amalgamate for evening activities, including disco. These events were either suspended or altered to prevent the blending of different schools (Pgl, 2020).

AIGL operations were also mildly affected by the prohibition of using water fountains (Pgl, 2020). Instructors were directed to lead guests inside to drinking stations where they could re-fill water bottles to minimise facial contact with potentially contaminated items. However, this did sometimes cause a mass of people in close proximity.

The canteen also encountered evident changes. All self-service provisions such as the salad bar, desserts table and the collection of trays and cutlery, became served stations (Pgl, 2020). This reduced the risk of cross-contamination and virus transmission to guests or staff via food and drink. To further this effort, additional staff were scheduled to complete frequent table, and condiment cleaning (Pgl, 2020) while the remaining employees were requested to clean their chairs and table upon finishing their meal.

5. Impacts on Key Stakeholders

Like any business, PGL has a variety of internal and external stakeholders. These stakeholders depend on the organisation to aid in the success of their personal goals, whilst PGL relies on them to support the business financially, supply equipment and clients or work for and manage the company (Friedman, & Miles, 2006). During a crisis, it is integral to a businesses future to ensure that these stakeholders are addressed with care and consideration when managing the situation.

(Full list of stakeholders and partners in appendix)

5.1 Impacts on Internal stakeholders

Internal stakeholders such as employees, managers, directors and owners are directly affected by a business and have a key stake in its success (Nilson, 2006). Even though the coronavirus impacted all of these stakeholders, as floor employees had no control in the management of business when the virus struck, they could have experienced the most significant and abrupt impacts.

The coronavirus has been noted as the largest worldwide organisational impact since the global recession of 2008 (Giner, 2020). Keeping employees informed of any organisational change, especially one of such magnitude is crucial to maintaining an efficient and happy workforce that accepts the transition rather than breaking down (Galbraith, 2018). However, during the lead up to the closure of PGL, the staff did not receive updates as regularly as advised.

During morning meetings, the staff were informed of additional procedures and reminded of distancing guidelines such as queue management (Pgl, 2020); however, the advancing stress of job uncertainty was not addressed for some time. As employees received regular information on the virus through the media and friends or family, the looming potential for a country-wide lockdown was present in employees minds but was not being eased by PGL managers. Not effectively informing employees of the future of their career and how the organisation may be changing can cause rumours and confusion within the workforce which could be detrimental to work ethic and morale (Kishor, 2011).

5.2. Impacts on External stakeholders

Due to the nature of the company, the majority of PGL's external stakeholders are legal organisations, schools, and sports or outdoor educational companies which facilitate and partner with PGL for a variety of holidays, events and equipment loans (Pgl.co.uk, 2020). The closure of



PGL centres as a result of COVID-19 may have had a great impact on these stakeholders and changed the way each party functions.

Of these stakeholders, it could be argued that as PGL is a holiday and activity centre, the guests, or organisations that provide guests, would be affected the most. Besides from the closure and cancellation of school groups, an example of this is the cancellation of England Netballs visits.

England Netball is the not-for-profit National Governing Body for female netball teams within England (EnglandNetball, 2020). The partnership between PGL and England Netball comprises of PGL offering accommodation, food, activities and a location for the netball teams to compete in various friendly tournaments throughout the year (EnglandNetball, 2020). In turn, this benefits PGL's financial position and ensures fixed dates where definite bookings will occupy a large portion of their facilities. England Netball hosts the majority of its PGL events in later winter, early spring and had scheduled 14 school weekend tournaments and one club event between the 28th February and 17th May 2020 (EnglandNetball, 2020). Of these 15 events more than half had to be cancelled due to COVID-19 guidelines and PGL closures.

The impacts of this could affect England Netballs scheduling, completion of tournaments, and potentially deter those who struggled with the confidence to compete for their first time to take part at a later date. As England Netballs company ethos is to motivate and support young women to join netball teams (EnglandNetball, 2020), this may have had an emotional impact on the companies leaders, and caused a need for additional advertisement, workshops and presentations to re-encourage potential players.

As for PGL, this may have affected the business not only financially but could have caused an emotional response from AIGL's, Team Leaders and Head of Departments who have personally invested in assisting these events over the years creating low morale between employees.

The customers of PGL, particularly schools groups, have also been affected by the lack of full refunds that have been issued (Brignall, 2020). When PGL centres closed in compliance with Government Guidelines, many schools and individual guests experienced the cancellation of their visits. Although declining guests was a mandatory procedure, the substantial financial impacts of successfully fully refunding every visit were too dire for PGL to achieve (Read, 2020). To maintain their economy, PGL retained the 30-35% cancellation fee as is customary for the business (Pgl, 2020) and suggested the use of school insurance to repay the losses. However, even though it is the responsibility for the schools to repay its parents (Gill, 2020), as some schools had insufficient insurance complaints began being widely publicised against PGL within the media.

6. Contingency Plans

One of the primary contingency plans for PGL is the choice to have an exceeding amount of employee to guest ratio on centre (Pgl, 2020). This results in the permanent insurance that when crises such as COVID-19 occur, there are an ample amount of employees to continue operational functions regardless of how many are not capable of working.

Another initiative that is always active in PGL is that children are never completely unattended even when not with a member of staff. In activities such as orienteering and passport to the world when guests are sent away from instructors to explore the area, the group sizes are never less than three (Pgl, 2020). This was beneficial during the virus as if a guest became suddenly ill while completing such activities, one child could stay with the afflicted members whilst the other returned to the meeting point to inform the instructor. This efficient method allowed for guests to remain under supervision at all times and reduced the time taken to aid the potentially infected child.

7. Leadership and Crisis management

Crisis management is how a business responds and reacts to potentially catastrophic situations (Holla et al., 2018). How a company approaches this management is critical as it determines whether the business will prevail and be successful once the crisis period is over.

Navigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic required high stake crisis management and strong leadership. As the virus was a globally unexpected impact, those responsible for managing a company were challenged with leading their business through unforeseen circumstances which were not prepared for (Frankel, 2020). However, the weight on management has not only been from the handling of legal, operational or financial matters but the pressure posed by the media to hold accountability for their actions (Hinks, 2020). Some companies have been criticised for early closure and relinquishing employees (Davies, 2020), whereas others were disparaged for remaining open. These opposing representations of different companies demonstrate how crucial it was for management to make the correct decisions for their business and its employees, as it would not only impact the other internal stakeholders but potentially affect its reputation.

Managing the backlash of unfavourable publicity is a challenge for any business (Monga, & John, 2008). The impact of negative portrayal could be escalated during the uncertain environment of a global pandemic.



PGL experienced this when they advertised their inability to provide refunds. The media's response to this was extensive. The dispute was advertised in most newspapers and the majority of school-related articles regarding holidays (Carr, 2020). Additionally, a petition was created against PGL, which has currently been signed by 5,376 disgruntled guests seeking to make direct repayment to parents of school children a legal requirement (Sandhu, 2020). In an attempt to manage the reduction of their guests' anger and regain customer loyalty, PGL chief executive Anthony Jones offered schools the 30-35% cancellation fee back as a future visit voucher in an attempt to combat negative portrayal (Byers, 2020). However, even though some schools willingly accepted this compensation, headteacher of Walton-le-Dale primary school, Christopher Shields said they would be looking at different holiday choices in the future (Byers, 2020). This is just one example of the potentially many guests that may now choose to holiday elsewhere after this event. If more customers react this way to the situation, it could have a detrimental effect on PGL's client list and have damaging consequences to its social prominence and financial status.

An organisation's primary obligation during the pandemic was to adhere to the guidelines and laws set by the Government. However, the additional care and consideration for employees witnessed in some companies (Gallacher, 2020) could also be a defining factor between which businesses reform quickly, with happy and dedicated employees, and which experience a decrease in staff upon their return.

The management of PGL employees to ensure they completed the new procedures could be described as well managed and effective. The changes made to ensure the safety and well-being of guests and employees were implemented promptly with great attention (Pgl, 2020). For example; when self-isolation started being advised management adapted to allow any employee who was experiencing symptoms to be relocated to free rooms where they could be secluded from other staff members. These employees were delivered food directly by masked and gloved kitchen staff who were ordered to use antibacterial gel to thoroughly clean their hands before returning to the kitchen.

However, managing the emotional aspect of the staff and making themselves aware of how employees were coping with these changes did not seem to be a priority. Although, management would be under enormous pressure and strict time constraints to ensure their assets and finances were in order before the lockdown date (Kearsley, 2020), it could be argued that more focus should have been paid to keeping their employees informed (Ryan, 2016). This would have allowed employees more time to prepare off-site living arrangements and eased the transition during such a chaotic event.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, PGL approached managing the crisis with a clear objective and promptly implemented new procedures. In relation to the management of sterilising equipment or surfaces, and adhering to social distancing guidelines PGL acted efficiently and safely to contain the virus as much as possible. Government guidelines were met, and the company adjusted well to the self-isolation regulations.

However, the potential mistreatment and seclusion of its operational staff during this time may have left staff members feeling ignored and unincorporated into the business. The effects of this will only be assessable once PGL centres re-open and the company calls for its employees to return.

With UK corona-related deaths decreasing and businesses scheduled to re-open, PGL is now taking bookings for visits that will commence from August 2020 (Pgl, 2020). In an attempt to receive as many guests as possible, PGL are offering a reduced cost to its clients in hope to encourage a mass of guests from the offset (Pgl, 2020). This initiative could have the potential to persuade existing customers to return to the activity centre or attract new clients that may have previously deemed the company unaffordable to visit. However, with the substantial economic impacts, every business has encountered during the COVID-19 outbreak, re-opening to its full potential may be challenging. Moreover, the media's severely damaging portrayal of PGL may have had a greater effect on the company, noticeably influencing a guest's decision to visit. This could make the restoration of the business to its pre-coronavirus state substantially more difficult to achieve. Without the high volume of guests and quick turnover that PGL is accustomed to, returning to financial stability and social prominence may take a considerable amount of time.

9. Recommendations

- If PGL were to experience a crisis again, more consideration should be made to ensuring the well-being and updated knowledge of their staff to prevent rumours, and levels of stress.
- An apologetic public announcement being issued immediately after realising the company could not fully repay schools could have prevented negative media portrayal from escalating.
- During and after the virus lockdown PGL should ensure to remain in regular contact with their partners to guarantee relationships maintain their strength so events and loans can continue upon re-opening.

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11. [Appendices](#)

11.1 PESTLE/SWOT analysis

Appendix A: PESTLE analysis of COVID-19

<u>Political-</u> (Hocking, 2020),(Travers, 2020)	<u>Economic-</u> (Hocking, 2020),(Inman,2020)
• Post-Brexit trade talks being suspended after Boris Johnson contracted the virus. • Johnson being pressured to conflict his word and extension prohibition as COVID-19 has caused the economy to fall and negotiation time has been lost. • Government and others in authority using warlike terms ('NHS being in the front line, invisible enemy..') to urge people to face the virus as a unit. • Governments having to deal with the backlash of denying civil liberties even though it has been mandated for the health and well-being of the people. • Debates as to whether the authority given to police to question locally travelling citizens or physically remove people from public gatherings is too extreme and a misuse of power. • The government have been scrutinised by the opposition for the delivery of testing equipment and NHS supplies. • Constant debate as to whether the devastating economic impacts of lockdown have been outweighed by the benefits to public health.	• The pound is now not only carrying the weight of Brexit but the substantial economic impact that resulted from the cease of trading and business lockdowns. • The Government have given copious amounts of grants and loans to support those on furlough and help prevent business bankruptcy. • The pound is facing 'eleven-year lows against the euro and thirty-five-year lows against the dollar'- (Hocking, 2020) • Estimated to have the worst economic damage of all developed countries. • Argued that the mismanagement and chaotic exit lockdown strategy will make reforming the UK's economy considerably harder. • Returning to previous levels of GDP had also been reported as a challenge for the UK as the pandemic will have long-lasting effects. • Concern has been expressed that if the lockdown exit strategy triggers a second wave of the virus the UK will face a severely damaging recession.

Social-(Ons.gov.uk,2020),(Mohdin,2020)

- The UK is forecast to report a 9% increase in unemployment.
- Social distancing causing families and friends to separate.
- 85.8% of adults said they were in constant fear that someone they know or care for would contract the virus.
- Many people felt as though they didn't know enough information about how the UK was going to combat the virus so when regulations changed it came as a surprise.
- High levels of stress within households as people began to worry about their finances.
- People became nervous or anxious to leave their homes even if it was for important reasons like food shopping or the collection of prescriptions.
- Extreme changes to peoples work-lives may have had a great impact on mental health and stress over how furlough would work has increased anxiety levels.
- The Coronavirus has caused people to commit suicide or overdose due to increased depression, anxiety and fear over spending time alone in isolation.
- Not being able to attend drug and alcohol meetings has caused people to relapse and potentially become harmful to themselves or others.
- Lack of face to face counselling or therapy causing people who are a danger to themselves to act out.

Technological-(Sallomi,2020),
(Risley,2020)

- People having to work from home is causing an influx in personal purchasing of computers, printers and other various work necessary equipment.
- The lockdown and people spending more time at home has also caused more purchases of home entertainment systems such as televisions, consoles, laptops etc.
- This time has also given people the opportunity and realisation that practical electronics for their homes need to be replaced such as washing machines, vacuum cleaners and dishwashers.
- The release of new products, particularly mobile phones, has been disrupted due to products only being sold online rather than in-store. This could have an impact on company profits as their advertisement could have been overshadowed by the rapid change in peoples livelihoods.
- The supply of raw materials used to create many electronics is becoming harder to acquire due to trading issues and delivery time.
- However, the mass increase in products being sold to support people working and spending more time at home has boosted some companies economy including the high demand for high functioning security software to support and secure the intel people now have access to from their personal computers.

Legal-(Amies,2020), (Legislation.gov.uk, 2020), (Dearden, 2020)

- Temporary law stating that it was illegal to leave your homes or remain outside for prolonged periods of time without reasonable excuse.
- Health Protection Regulations allowed police to arrest and fine those in breach of lockdown.
- Temporary amendments to the Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001 Health Professions Order 2001 to help increase the number of people qualified to support/work for the NHS.
- Temporary modifications to the Social Workers Regulations 2018, the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016, the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001, and the Registration of Social Workers and Social Service Workers in Care Services (Scotland) Regulations 2013 to allow more care to be given to children and young people in need of care during the virus.
- Changes to UK Insolvency Law:
 - The Wrongful trading law in Section 214 of the Insolvency Act 1986 has been suspended to help businesses continue to trade during the pandemic.
 - New Restructuring Plan and Moratorium Procedure.
- Medical certificated will temporarily be unnecessary for cremations.
- Children and students are temporarily not obliged to attend schools as they close during the lockdown.

Environmental-(Marshall,2020), (Vince,2002)

- The impacts COVID-19 has had on the environment could be deemed the most beneficial outcome of the pandemic. Lowered CO2 emissions, less human activity and the ceasing of outdoor interaction has resulted in some incredible advancements in the global environment.
- Bee's are benefiting from the reduction of air pollution which in continued may help their repopulation.
- The cancellation of cruises and limited trading has allowed sea animals to travel further and live more peacefully.
- The stress levels of whales have reduced due to the lack of man-made noise in the sea.
- Wild animals, particularly cats have been witnessed walking in the streets, exploring landscape they would have originally feared at it is human territory.
- People being indoors has decreased poaching and trading in some countries.
- Pangolins are one of the most heavily trafficked animals in the world due to their high levels of Keratin. This has brought them to the brink of extinction. In June 2020 it was speculated that these animals may have been the cause of COVID 19 and explains why the spread of the virus was so fast. This news has caused traders to cease their operations potentially saving the Pangolins.

Appendix B: SWOT analysis of the impacts of COVID-19 on PGL Travel Ltd

<u>Strengths</u> • The quick response to the changing environment allowed for staff to continue working for as long as possible. • Excess space and accommodation allowed for staff to safely self isolate on-site at first signs of symptoms. • As the majority of staff are UK residents, the amount of staff lost due to returning to foreign countries was minimal. • Furlough has allowed for experienced, trained staff to return as soon as the centres open. • Having a vast amount of staff allowed for the cleaning of activity equipment and amendments to the canteen easier to achieve.	<u>Weaknesses</u> • The mass of guests and staff living at the centres made risk levels higher than other companies. • As PGL offers food, accommodation and activities it counts under a variety of different services. Hospitality, restaurant, hotel, activity centre, educational facility etc. This may have made knowing which of the business guidelines to follow difficult to determine. • As many of the staff live on centres this left some people without a home to return too when lockdown began. This may have caused an extra responsibility for the company as they would not wish to leave their employees stranded and high levels of stress or anxiety for the employees.
<u>Opportunities</u> • The lack of guests on centres when the virus outbreak began allowed for the company to clean up the centres and train employees on different activities as they were not needed to service guests. • Those in management and higher up the ladder could spend this time looking at ways to update the business with new activities or educational programmes. • Time to potentially re-brand. • Repairing, maintaining and procuring equipment for the reopening of centers.	<u>Threats</u> • The time employees have spent out of work may have caused them to look for other places of employment. This idea may have been enhanced after the uncomfortable realisation that their whole livelihood and home is based on the same centre and if, like during COVID-19, the business closed they would not only be unemployed but also homeless. • The negative portrayal the business has had in the media due to the issuing of refunds may cause a severe drop in guest numbers during the reopening.

11.2 Full list of stakeholders and partners

Appendix C: Stakeholders and partners

Internal Stakeholders

- AIGL's
- Team Leaders
- Head of Departments
- Centre Managers
- Retail Department
- Housekeeping Department
- Catering Department
- Human Resources
- Marketing Department
- Maintenance and Equipment management Department
- Customer Services
- Recruitment Department
- Owners/ Shareholders

External Stakeholders

- LOTC: Learning Outside the Classroom
- ABTA: The Association of British Travel Agents
- AALA: The Adventure Activities Licensing Authority
- ATOL: Air Travel Organisers Licensing
- ABPA: British Activity Providers Association
- BC: British Canoeing
- England Netball
- IOL: The Institute for Outdoor Learning
- SkillsActive
- RYA: Royal Yachting Association
- British Council
- YST-BHC: Youth Sport Trust Business Honours Club
- BSAC: British Sub Aqua Club
- STF: School Travel Forum
- Ofstead: Office for Standards in Education Department
- Other guests