

Petitions Committee

Oral evidence: Arrangements for touring professionals and artists in the EU, HC 1166

Monday 8 February 2021

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Committee Members present: Catherine McKinnell (Chair); Tonia Antoniazzi; and Nick Fletcher.

Other Members present: Giles Watling; Harriet Harman; Jamie Stone; Kerry McCarthy; Alison Thewliss; Sir Robert Neill; Alex Davies-Jones; David Warburton; Kevin Brennan; Patrick Grady; Damian Collins; Matt Western; Greg Clark; Christine Jardine; Nickie Aiken; Pete Wishart; Alison McGovern; and the Minister for Digital and Culture, Caroline Dinenage.

Questions 1-18



Q1 Chair: Thank you all for joining us. Today's e-petition session has been scheduled to give Members from across the House an opportunity to discuss arrangements for touring professionals and artists in the EU. Sessions like this would normally take place in Westminster Hall, but due to the suspension of sittings there, we have started holding these sessions as an alternative way to consider issues raised by petitions and present these to Government.

I am very pleased that holding today's session virtually means that Members who are shielding or self-isolating and therefore unable to take part in Westminster Hall debates can participate. We received many more requests from Members wishing to speak than could be accommodated in 90 minutes, even with a short time limit for Back-Bench contributions. That shows the importance of this issue to Members from across the House. I am pleased that Opposition parties have fielded Front-Bench speakers, and that we have the Minister attending, who will respond to the points Members raise, as they would in Westminster Hall.

I am pleased to present e-petition 563294, which calls on the Government to negotiate a cultural work permit that would allow music professionals, bands, musicians, artists, and TV and sports personalities to travel freely and tour in the EU. It also calls on the Government to introduce carnet exception for touring equipment.

We cannot discuss the petition and the importance of the issues raised without taking stock of how the music industry's business model has been turned on its head in the last decade. While artists once toured to boost their profiles and sell more records, the explosion of streaming services in the last 10 years has changed the landscape beyond recognition, to the extent that few records make money any more, and all but the most prolific artists are unable to make a decent living purely from streaming. In the 2020s, live performances are where careers and moneys are made; it is also where the creative and cultural exchange that makes our music and arts scene magic takes place.

Covid-19 has, of course, been utterly catastrophic for a business model reliant on large gatherings and the ability to travel. Some of the artists the Committee spoke to in our evidence session last week told us how little financial support they had received over the course of lockdown, but plans to rebuild careers and businesses after the devastation of the pandemic will be made all the more challenging, and impossible for some. Musicians could once tour freely throughout the EU, but now the rules will vary from state to state, which has huge implications. There will be new and complex forms, costs for moving people and equipment around Europe, and less ability to work flexibly and easily with EU artists and organisations.

A look at the mountain of bureaucracy our touring creators will have to deal with if they want to gig in Europe probably makes the argument for a broad UK-EU agreement better than any of us can. Looking at short-term working arrangements, an artist could go to Germany and France for 90



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days in a year without a permit. In the Czech Republic, no permit is needed for those whose performances do not exceed seven consecutive days or 30 days in a 12-month period; in Poland, it is 30 days; in Spain and Portugal, it is nothing, unless you get a work permit in advance. Navigating the rules for multiple country tours has become remarkably complex, adding costs that will eat into the financial viability of the tour, and make touring some countries at short notice virtually impossible.

The new requirements for carnets and CITES musical instrument certificates will also add to the time taken to cross borders and increase the risk of being caught in delays. That is a major risk for artists who need to cross multiple borders to get to shows on time. For many, that probably means adding additional days on either side of the tour, to leave room for delays and bureaucracy, impacting the financial viability of the tour.

For most people in the industry, the nature of working as a musician was already unpredictable and precarious, with low rates of pay, but people stick with it because it is their passion. They are often a team, and they want to pursue their dream. Working in the EU—whether touring, recording, teaching or hopping on a plane at the last minute to fill in for someone—has been an absolute lifeline for them, and an essential part of their earnings. There just is not enough work or profile in the UK alone for most artists to make a living from.

At the weekend, Sir Elton John said from experience, “It’s absolutely vital for new artists to tour Europe. Getting your music across to crowds from a different culture to your own, who don’t necessarily speak the same language as you, just makes you a better musician... Touring Europe allows you to absorb different influences, understand different crowds and meet new musicians. It helps you get inside your art. You not only play better, you write better songs as a result.”

I know that there is disagreement between the Government and the EU about who offered what and who rejected whose proposals, but although it is important to have clarity on what was discussed during the negotiations, a political blame game will not solve the huge bureaucratic challenges faced by UK musicians seeking work in the EU. This is not about squabbles over Brexit; it is about the Government’s key role in championing a vital UK industry that enriches our cultural life and that of the rest of the world. The Government just need to create the right channels to allow creative media artists to thrive, and they will do the rest, just as they always have.

Before I conclude, I have specific questions on how the Government intend to move forward, and more technical points that may seem obscure, but are important to touring artists. I would be grateful if the Minister could respond. The EU-UK Joint Committee meets this week to discuss problems with the application of the Brexit agreement. Can the Minister provide assurances that reviewing the touring rules is on the agenda? Bilateral agreements are very much a second-best solution, but what work is ongoing to reach agreements with individual EU member states that do not offer cultural exemptions for work permits, such as Spain, Italy, Belgium and Portugal?



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Post-Brexit cabotage restrictions mean that live-event hauliers can cross into the EU and then make just two stops before having to return to the UK. Haulage trucks usually travel with the tour, making stops at each show, so that makes the standards touring model of moving musical instruments by truck from the UK to venues across multiple countries impossible. Are the Government looking at negotiating exemptions to the cabotage rules for cultural purposes? The ISM, the ABO and others say that they have lobbied the Government for months to clarify whether carnets are required to move instruments and equipment between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and between the UK and the EU. Can the Minister today provide some much-needed clarity on that?

Over this enormously difficult and bleak period, we have all looked forward to the time when we can forget about social distancing and face masks, and can experience again the unique buzz of a live music event. Most of us cannot wait for that opportunity and creativity to be unleashed when this awful pandemic is finally over, when we can go and see bands and artists in the flesh and follow the music that we love again. A particular fear is that the way the pandemic has overlapped the end of the Brexit transition period is masking serious underlying problems created by a lack of an EU-wide agreement for touring artists. As more and more people come to understand what the current situation really means for the future of live music and touring for our world-renowned creative industries here in the UK, and for our impact and influence around the world, there will be an ever-growing clamour for the Government to find a workable solution.

The creative industries cannot afford, while struggling to recover from the devastation of the pandemic, to wait years or decades for this to get sorted out through painstaking negotiations with individual member states. They need the Government to get to work on an EU-wide solution sooner rather than later. I know there is real cross-party support for the need to find a solution, and I hope we will hear a reassuring and committed response from the Minister on the actions that the Government are taking to bring this about, and to secure the future of a sector that we all love and value so much.

I call Giles Watling to speak.

Giles Watling: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am here to represent the 142 people in the Clacton constituency who signed the petition, and of course our world-leading performing arts industries, which were the focus of my professional life before entering this place. Having worked in Europe in that life before politics, I know there are significant opportunities for touring performers on the continent, and we must ensure that our domestic talent can continue to access those. That is crucial for its development, and of course it is a great deployment of UK soft power.

As I said Digital, Culture, Media and Sport questions last week, our performers face a double whammy: an industry devastated by covid, and the loss of an entire continent as a venue. Thankfully, we are already working to help the industry recover through the Culture Recovery Fund, which provides a significant amount of money and at least demonstrates



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that the Government take this seriously. However, alongside that investment, we must ensure visa-free and carnet-free travel for performers, their kit, and of course their support teams. Unfortunately, our proposals to the EU on this matter, which would have allowed UK professionals to tour more easily, were rejected.

We must continue to raise this issue with our EU neighbours. The Minister encouraged me in his reponse to me last week; he set out how “the door always remains open should our European friends wish to reconsider our mutually beneficial proposals.” After all, this is a two-way street: we in the UK want to welcome EU performers here as well. Everything from the smallest provincial venue to the largest festival is affected.

In the meantime, where visas are needed, our agreement with the EU contains measures designed to make the necessary processes as smooth as possible, but they are not good enough, so we must remain open to discussing this matter. We must be ready to act for our performing artists who so rely on opportunities in Europe, and vice versa.

For the moment, I want to focus on music. Touring European countries is deeply important for the UK music industry. The EU is a key overseas market for the £2.9 billion of UK music exports, and the UK is the biggest exporter of music to the EU member states. That success has been built on the ability of artists to travel freely through the EU.

Music is also a key national economic asset, employing four times more people than the steel and fisheries industries combined. The inability of performers to access Europe is putting those economic, social and cultural contributions at risk. We see that across the arts; the same risks are emerging for theatre and dance groups. That is why, as chairman of the APPG for theatre, I wrote to the Government to raise concerns about provisions of the Brexit deal that impact on the performing arts. I was joined in that by the APPGs for classical music, music education, music, dance and opera, supported by our secretariats from UK Theatre, SOLT, the Association of British Orchestras, the ISM, UK Music, and One Dance UK. I am sorry, Madam Chairman, for the list, but it is a parliamentary clarion call.

I ask the Minister to look at the points raised in our letter, to bring about that refinement, and to continue to seek discussion in and with the EU on the need for visa-free travel for touring performers. We need to get together. The EU needs to see sense.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you. I call Harriet Harman.

Ms Harman: Thank you, Chair; I agree with everything you said in your introduction, and agree strongly with everything that the Member for Clapton said. I want to speak about the music sector, which is so important in so many ways, culturally and financially. It needs income from EU touring to sustain it. Without a deal on visa-free touring, the costs in time and money of dealing with 27 different regimes—of getting certificates and paying for visas and carnets—will undermine touring and



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cut a swathe through our music sector. This is not a covid problem, though covid has made things immeasurably worse, and it is not a Brexit teething problem, either; it will be enduring unless it is sorted out.

Those musicians just starting out will be unable to do the tours they have to do to get their careers off the ground. Many at the pinnacle of their careers will feel they have no option but to base themselves abroad, which will be a terrible loss to this country. And many of those who currently make a great contribution to music will find that it is no longer viable for them, and they will give up and change career. This is going to erode the critical mass of our music base. We have been told this loud and clear. Every individual musician and organisation says the same, so we have to listen.

It is not as if this is going to cost the public purse. On the contrary, it will cost more if the Government have to subsidise orchestras to compensate for the loss of money they could be earning in EU touring. The objective is not to use this as a stick to beat the Government or to beat the EU. The only aim is to ensure that our musicians can tour the continent without hindrance. We do not want a row; we want a fix.

We have a deal for UK fish and we need one for UK musicians. It is really not acceptable for the Secretary of State to tell musicians that it is somehow their job to sort this out with the EU. That is his job, not theirs. The responsibility is on his shoulders and the power to break the logjam is in his hands, so what is he doing? Being Secretary of State is a big role, but he took it on—no one forced him to do it—and the buck stops with him. The music sector is looking to him to save them from this. He cannot opt out. Does the Secretary of State want his legacy to be failing our—*[Inaudible]*—or does he want to be remembered as the one who rolled up his sleeves, gripped this problem and sorted it? That is what he should do, and if he does we will back him all the way.

Q3 **Chair:** Thank you. I call Jamie Stone.

Jamie Stone: Thank you. As Giles and Harriet have made all the important points, I am going to switch to an anecdote. When I got married, my wife and I had a one-week honeymoon in Paris. After a meal, we were walking in the Quartier Latin and heard the sound of the bagpipes. I said to my wife, "That sounds like my friend, Johnny Munro." We went round the corner, and it was Johnny Munro. He was piping—he was busking. If ever I saw an example of British soft power—okay, at the most basic level—this was it. The crowds loved him, and he filled his bonnet with a lot of money we then spent on beer. So, exactly as Giles said, soft power is hugely important.

Let's face it, music is truly international, speaking to us all regardless of our language, our creed or the colour of our skin. It is for all of us. What concerns me is that a lot of people are thinking about coming out of the profession, whatever sort of music it is. That would be absolutely disastrous, because they are the role models for the people just starting out—the child who is good at the violin, the bagpipes or the guitar at



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school—to give them the ambition to succeed. So we have to be very careful with this. If we get this wrong, we could deplete our musical resource and what we can offer international audiences. By the way, my friend Johnny Munro made quite a few francs—or was it euros? I get muddled. How much money do we earn internationally through our orchestras and performers travelling abroad? It is a vast amount, and it is incredibly important.

Can I switch the argument around the other way? The reciprocal arrangements are colossally important. Would the Edinburgh Festival be what it is without the international performers who come and play? It generates an enormous amount of money for the city of Edinburgh and the area around it. Furthermore, there are spin-offs from it. We have to get that right.

Music means an enormous amount to me, and I think it means an enormous amount to people out there. As I said when I started, if we fail on this one, we as a country will deplete our soft power, which, let's face it, in these days of change, and in a difficult world, we need to exert more than ever before.

Q4 **Chair:** Thank you. I call Kerry McCarthy.

Kerry McCarthy: I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak today, not least because I know many other colleagues wanted to do so but will not get the chance. I congratulate Tim Brennan on doing such a great job with his petition.

We have heard about the huge economic contribution of live music, but it is not just about the money. Earlier today I was reading a wonderful piece written by Bernard Sumner after the Brexit vote in 2016 for *The New European*, talking about how being able to tour and work in Europe and just to absorb the atmosphere and sounds from Berlin to Ibiza had influenced both Joy Division and New Order. He said, "When Joy Division first toured Europe in January 1980 we were four rejects from the north-west for whom driving a rain-lashed van full of gear onto a swaying cross-channel ferry felt like entering a portal into another world. It was thrilling and exciting; the dawn of a decade and a time when anything felt possible." That is what the Government are taking away from musicians and everyone else associated with putting the show on the road. It is an act of stupid wanton sabotage by those who promised that Brexit would mean a brighter future. Elton John said this weekend: "If Brexit prevents many new musicians from touring, the only artists who are going to have any meaningful kind of live career are big, august, mainstream artists like me. And, trust me, I don't want that any more than you do."

He's right. Elton John has people to deal with this for him. The acts that will be really badly hit by this are not the big players, but those building an audience or still slogging away playing to the faithful after many years, or those whom Elton John describes as "edgier, weirder and more exploratory"—in other words, the sort of bands that I like. I fully support today's calls for the Government to get back around the negotiating table



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and reach an agreement over visas, carnets, and everything else. Live music has such a terrible year, and if this is not sorted out before the summer, it will just be rubbing salt into the wounds.

Finally, with my shadow Transport hat on, I want to touch briefly on the cabotage rules, which will limit UK concert trucks to making just three stops in the EU. This is a sector where the UK dominates, not just because of the popularity of UK artists, but because huge US artists fly into Heathrow and sort out the logistics of their European tours here, with UK trucks transporting gear, costumes, sets, lighting and merchandise from country to country, sometimes for months at a time. Hauliers are calling for a cultural exemption from the return-home rule and the three-stop cabotage rule, for the EU to recognise the UK CPC qualification, and for drivers to be treated as road crew when it comes to visas. I have raised this with Ministers several times, and to be frank, I received an absolutely appalling response from the roads Minister last week. I hope that the Culture Minister cares more about this than her counterpart in DFT—in fact, I know that she does. I look forward to hearing what she has to say at the end of the debate. I urge her, please, let us get this sorted before the summer.

Q5 **Chair:** Thank you. I call Nick Fletcher.

Nick Fletcher: As an MP whose entry to this House was partly due to the slogan “Get Brexit Done”, I am pleased to say we did, and now we have our newest slogan, “Global Britain”. I am a huge supporter of that programme; after all, I believe that one of the main reasons people voted for Brexit was that they wanted their country to stand on its own two feet and be a huge success as an independent sovereign state. Alas, since 2019, we have reasserted our independence, which I believe is wonderful, yet we have also had to battle a terrible pandemic that has subsequently caused a massive hole in our public finances. My only belief is that the only way through this pandemic is to stand true to global Britain values, and to start becoming a net exporter instead of a net importer.

I was greatly dismayed therefore to hear of the trouble that people in our creative sector are experiencing in travelling abroad to carry out their work, not only because of covid-19, but because of the new travel restrictions across Europe. Initially, many may not appreciate the financial and cultural wealth that our artists produce, but I hold the firm view that our artists are probably our greatest exporters and true bastions of global Britain.

With that in mind, I hope the Minister will take time to listen to Ian Smith and others who have worked in the industry for many years. Last Thursday, Ian suggested in evidence that his solution to the travel restrictions that British artists face would be for the EU and the UK to provide creatives with 90 days, in any part of the year, to tour without needing a certificate of sponsorship. That would eliminate the requirement for a work permit, while also ensuring that creatives stay only for as long as is necessary to perform their shows. I do not know if that is the solution or if it is a policy that the Government are investigating. I would be



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grateful if the Minister could confirm whether she believes that her Department sees any merit in introducing such a regime.

In the limited time that I have in this session, I have touched on the economic situation that has been caused by covid-19. I have also made clear that only by promoting British exports will we get out of this recession as quickly as possible. Yet as we have heard, for many people in our creative industries, their individual financial positions are extremely worrying. Like everyone, they need to earn money to live. Like everyone else, they need to earn money to live, and this is where my most significant concern lies.

Evidence having been heard from Rakhi, Yousef, Emma, Stuart, Anna and the petition creator, Tim Brennan, it is clear that if these talented people cannot earn money in their chosen field, they may have to look elsewhere. If that happens, we all lose. Can you imagine a world where the UK no longer leads in this industry? No, neither can I. We have led the world for many years in this sector. How sad would it be if in the year we became global Britain, we also became cultureless Britain? I therefore hope that the Government will do all they can to rectify this situation as soon as possible and will investigate ways whereby our creatives are not faced with these travel restrictions.

Q6 **Chair:** I call Alison Thewliss.

Alison Thewliss: Thank you very much, Chair, and I thank the Petitions Committee for allowing this session. This issue is of huge concern to my constituents in Glasgow Central, and the petition has received 1,015 signatures from my constituents. That is no surprise, because we are a UNESCO city of music here in Glasgow. In my constituency, we have the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and Scottish Ballet, as well as many smaller organisations and musicians, artists and performers who are based here and tour regularly, but I want to make specific mention of those skilled professionals who are essential to making shows happen, who do not always get the recognition that they deserve.

My constituent Shaun Murphy is one such professional. He works as a lighting designer and technician for a range of international musicians and artists. He says: "I cannot overstate how much of a difference this would make to myself and the many other production designers, engineers and techs...in Scotland who make far more money on tour than we ever did working in local venues as well as having incredible opportunity to present our work on stages and at festivals we could only dream of having here at home. In particular I mainly work with underground/up and coming artists for whom touring budgets are already very very tight so this is particularly critical for us vs bigger tours."

Shaun asks this of the Committee: "One factor to remember is that it is not only a band that goes on tour, they take with them engineers, tour managers, crew, catering and so on. They also...hire lighting and sound equipment and trucking here in Glasgow and drive it round the EU. If visa



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free travel is not secured the likely outcome will be that the band will still tour, making less profit, but critically they will hire most of their crew and equipment from European suppliers." That will be devastating to those skilled professionals who live here in Scotland and take their work all around the world.

A different constituent, Craig Corse, has raised with me the issue of reciprocity, which other hon. Members have mentioned. This issue is absolutely key: it is about artists going out into Europe and about the artists who come to Scotland and make Glasgow such a great city. Craig speaks of the enriching live experiences for our domestic audiences that will be lost if we do not ensure that artists are able to travel here as well. Celtic Connections and the world pipe band championships have in the past been hampered by the Home Office's hostile environment. It breaks my heart that this will be extended to those European artists who wish to come and enrich our city as well.

Craig says: "That back-and-forth collaboration not only enriches our artists' musical awareness and cultural understanding, in turn raising their international profiles and touring prospects—but is of immeasurable cultural benefit to our domestic audiences, who are introduced to so many new influences, ideas and art forms. For somewhere as multicultural as Glasgow, it's very much a fabric of the city." I could not put the potential loss that we face here in Glasgow from not bringing people in and our own artists not going out into Europe better than Craig has put it. I very much support the petition and hope that the Government will act on this with great urgency.

Q7 **Chair:** Thank you. I call Sir Robert Neill.

Sir Robert Neill: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It is a pleasure to support this debate; I am grateful that it is taking place. I particularly want to support my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on opera, I was happy to be one of the signatories to his letter to the Secretary of State. I declare that as an interest, together with the fact that a number of members of my family are professional musicians.

This issue is important in particular for the opera sector, and I want to concentrate on that, but we should bear in mind the important financial contribution that the music sector as a whole makes, as well as the soft power contribution that has already been referred to. More than 460 constituents of mine have written to me about supporting this petition.

From the opera sector's point of view, the linkage with the European market is absolutely critical. Over the years, hundreds and perhaps thousands of British singers, other musicians, directors, producers, administrators and conductors have made their careers both in the UK and in Europe. It has been the launchpad for many of them to great international careers, but it has also enriched our own domestic opera companies.



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It has been particularly important, over the years, for many young British singers to cut their teeth in the smaller German repertory houses, of which there are more, I have to say, than there are in the United Kingdom. It gives them the chance, quite early on in their careers, to learn their stagecraft and build up the professional connections that take them forward, learning in front of a live audience.

To do that, they need to be available not just for the run of the particular production, but for rehearsal periods as well. If they are taken on for a number of productions, perhaps in small parts, to start their careers in the course of a season, that will go beyond any 90-day period that has been talked about. That is why we need an extension and why we need a touring visa. That also applies to access to the major European opera festivals. Again, they will be run over a period of weeks or perhaps months, and therefore a longer period is needed.

Finally, we need action for them urgently, because planning for these opera festivals happens not just weeks or months, but frequently years in advance. We have already had so many setbacks with the covid restrictions, but as they look to reopen, they are looking to the 2023-24 season. They will be signing up those artists now. So, we have to have certainty for them, and for agents, at the earliest possible stage, that they will be able to undertake those commitments, and then bring that skill and expertise back to the UK, just as we want to see their European counterparts enriching our cultural life in the UK as well. That is why it really matters.

I am delighted that we have had the chance to have this debate. I look forward to the Minister's response.

Q8 **Chair:** Thank you. I call Alex Davies-Jones.

Alex Davies-Jones: Diolch, Madam Chair. I am grateful to be able to speak in the debate today on an issue that truly cuts across the political divide.

It is a big, yet candid, claim that music is a central component of what makes Welsh communities unique. From singing the Welsh national anthem, "Mae Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau" at the rugby to memories of singing "Calon Lân" in school and beyond, music really is at the heart of Welsh culture and identity, not least my own.

Some of my earliest memories growing up around Rhondda Cynon Taf are based on listening to one of the oldest and most well-known brass bands in the world, which quite literally developed on my doorstep: the beloved Cory Band. The group have a proud competitive history in their field, both on the national and international stage, and are the world's number one band and European brass band champions.

In ordinary times, the group would be travelling to Malmö in Sweden this summer, to compete once again to fiercely defend their title. All of this was made possible in years gone by thanks to the freedom of movement that being a member of the European Union afforded us. While I am



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disappointed to see that coronavirus has led to the cancellation of this year's competition, I have urgent concerns about the viability of groups like the Cory Band and their ability to travel post-covid and post-Brexit across the world.

The current system in place for those required to travel includes unnecessary and extremely costly admin fees that make travelling to EU states for work purposes virtually impossible for those in this sector. We must also bear in mind that touring professionals and artists represent a group that has often slipped through the net of the Government's financial support schemes that have been made available over the last 12 months or so.

The fantastic Musicians' Union, of which, I declare, I am proudly a member, has revealed some shocking findings about the future of this vibrant sector. It predicts that 87% of musicians will be earning less than £20,000 this year, well below the UK average income of £29,600. Worryingly, 65% of musicians are currently facing financial hardship too.

I am incredibly grateful to represent Pontypridd, an area with a rich musical history of its own, and I am speaking up today in the knowledge that people in my area have been and continue to be specifically impacted by this issue. It would also seem foolish of me to speak in a debate about touring professionals without mentioning our very own Sir Tom Jones, who was born and bred in Treforest in my constituency. Without the ability to travel freely and easily across the EU, some of Tom's great classics, which we all know and love to sing, would never have reached the ears and hearts of people all over the world. That could have been, I am sure we will all agree, a musical tragedy of epic proportions.

While I am grateful to the Minister for taking the time out of her busy schedule later this week to meet with me, representatives of the Cory Band and industry brass band associations, it is clear that the Government need to be bolder in their ambition and determination to solve this crisis in the creative sector, before it is too late. I urge the Minister to feed back the concerns raised here today, on behalf of the 280,000 plus people who have signed this important petition and take the necessary actions to support those impacted. Diolch.

Q9 **Chair:** Thank you. I call David Warburton.

David Warburton: Thank you very much, Chair. As chair of the music APPG, this debate really is critical. I thank the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham, both for her words earlier and for her EDM on exactly this subject, which I very much support. I would also like to thank the Minister in advance. We all know that the Brexit negotiations were tough, and both sides needed to protect national interests and commitments to the electorate, but sadly, we have got ourselves into a bit of a sticky situation for an enormously successful industry.



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We have heard this already, but I think it will do no harm to repeat that because an industry visa waiver has not been agreed, each EU country now treats UK citizens as visa nationals when entering the EU for paid work. Some EU countries apply a performer's exemption, but not all, so artists may need a visa and work permit, depending on the rules in each of the EU27. Obviously, facing 27 different regulatory regimes, immigration rules, and rules on work permits is going to make multi-country travelling massively more complicated and hugely more expensive, and EU promoters are going to be far less likely to book British artists, orchestras and so on until this is sorted out.

We also have new customs controls, including carnets, CITES and musical instrument certificates. Portable musical instruments are exempt from customs controls on entering the EU, but there is uncertainty about whether the UK has applied the same exemption, and I would be grateful if the Minister could give clarity that professional musicians will not need carnets for entering or leaving the UK. Anyway, this is only individuals with instruments. Trucks do require carnets and wet stamping on each side of the border, and the free trade agreement imposes cabotage limits on haulage: a truck can make no more than two journeys after entering the EU before it has to trundle all the way back to the UK, which obviously makes conventional touring pretty much impossible.

We each have three minutes, so I will just say that this is the tip of a growing iceberg. It is great to see such cross-party support, but I am keen to hear from the Minister what urgent steps are being taken to negotiate an exemption from the cabotage rules, and of course a reciprocal visa waiver as exists between the EU and other third countries. The music industry must be mobile: that is crucial for its success. When most artists and performers have not worked for a year, and many have fallen through gaps in support as well, the very last thing they need is more uncertainty about working after the pandemic. We have to clear that up, so our world-leading cultural industries can continue to flourish and grow. Thank you, Mrs McKinnell.

Q10 **Chair:** Thank you. Kevin Brennan.

Kevin Brennan: Thank you, Chair, and I also declare my membership of the Musicians' Union. Essentially, this is a debate about an incredibly successful and growing part of the UK's export earnings, and it has been shunted into the irrelevant sidings of post-Brexit UK immigration policy. In essence, this is not an immigration issue, but it appears that the Home Office is insisting on treating it as such. I say it "appears" to be the Home Office, because we do not know for sure, due to Ministers' refusal to publish the details of the discussions it had with the EU that have led to this damaging outcome for UK plc.

On immigration, I have yet to receive a complaint from a single Cardiff West constituent that says, "You have to do something about all these Polish violinists coming over here, carrying their fiddles, playing in our orchestras and entertaining our people." It is nonsense, yet the Government cite their manifesto concerns about taking back control of our



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borders as the reason they cannot find a deal with the EU. Let us be clear: this is not about mega rock stars with the resources to employ people to sort this out. It is about the small-scale touring artists, starting out and touring on a shoestring, as hon. Members have said, but it is also about British businesses that provide the movable infrastructure and touring crew for the big shows across Europe.

Why are the Government not more exercised by the fact that 80% of the trucks used in the EU for touring are located in the UK, with UK businesses—buses and trucks, by the way, that are all left-hand drive for a reason, because most of the shows will be in Europe? I spoke to one business owner who told me that he recently did a recalculation for a sold-out tour that had to be cancelled last year because of covid. The whole crew—PA, lighting, busing, trucking, catering, and so on—is from the UK, but under this new regime, the original plans would mean losing an absolute fortune. To be profitable, 50% of the crew will have to come from Germany. The UK arm of the tour will have to be cancelled, and the band's equipment will all be moved out of the UK for storage in Europe. The losers are UK workers, UK gig goers and UK export earnings. As one business owner told me, the other losers will be the next generation of sound engineers, lighting engineers, technicians and so on, as well as our musicians and artists. If the Government does not fix this, it will constitute a staggering act of self-harm. And for what? In order to tackle a non-existent immigration issue. Surely, as the Beatles said, "We Can Work It Out".

Chair: Thank you. I call Patrick Grady.

Patrick Grady: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the Committee for facilitating this debate. Glasgow North is also in a UNESCO city of music, like my hon. Friend's constituency of Glasgow Central, and it is home to some of Scotland's finest creative talent: authors and poets, musicians and singers, actors and directors, painters and sculptors, dancers, storytellers and makers in every shape and form. It is also home to thousands of equally talented folk behind the scenes who help connect our artists with their audiences. All of them have been hit dreadfully hard by the pandemic, and all of them have been let down by this Tory UK Government. The venues they rely on were the first to close in lockdown, and they will be the last to reopen. Far too many self-employed creatives have been excluded from the support packages available. Now, just as the vaccine brings some light at the end of the tunnel, they are being hit by the consequences of Brexit.

Hundreds of people in Glasgow North have signed the petition that we are debating today—the highest percentage of any constituency in Scotland. As others have said, they know how important the ability to tour is for performing artists and their support crews. We have heard the statistics about the millions of pounds generated for the economy through overseas markets, but we should not overlook the creative imperative and inspiration that comes from touring—interacting with different audiences and cultures, the opportunity to try different things and to hone your



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talent, and all the benefit that brings. The reciprocal element is hugely important too. Our creative talent and their teams want to travel to Europe, but global artists want to come here too, and our audiences want to see them. We have known for a long time how difficult it can be for inbound artists to secure visas, and now the barriers that global artists have experienced will be felt by European arrivals too.

The Tory Government's ideological pursuit of the hardest-possible Brexit is having all sorts of consequences. Many of us warned about them, but the Government seems to be surprised. We are beyond indulging in a blame game. It is time for the Government to get its act together. It has to put aside its ideology, engage seriously with the industry and get back to the negotiating table with Europe. Throughout the last Parliament, the Government was warned about this; it cannot say it did not realise how important the issue would be.

The hundreds in my constituency and thousands across Scotland who have signed this petition are increasingly coming to realise that the best way to secure visa-free travel across the EU is for Scotland to become an independent member of the European Union. In a post-pandemic world, that will be more important than ever. We have just had an incredible online virtual Celtic Connections festival, which drew audiences from all over the world. It was fantastic. Undoubtedly, these new ways of experiencing music and art will not go away. But ultimately, if our creative and performing artists are to get back on their feet, they need to get back on the road.

Q11 **Chair:** Thank you. I call Damian Collins.

Damian Collins: Thank you, Chair. The restrictions on UK musicians touring in the EU add costs and delays and will make it more likely that artists will no longer consider it viable to do so. Music venues and festivals in the EU will also lose out, with fewer UK artists touring. This is completely unnecessary and will have a negative impact on artists, venues and music lovers across the continent of Europe.

I know that the Government tried to get a general exemption from these restrictions for the music industry, and I would ask the European Commission to work with us to achieve that. The Member for Cardiff West was right that The Beatles were right when they said that "We Can Work It Out", and I hope the Minister can do more than quote Oasis and say that we just have to "Roll With It". We need not only a simplified visa scheme that would make it easier for musicians to tour, but an exemption from their equipment having to go through the kinds of customs checks that will be required if you are exporting goods.

Other Members have spoken about the cabotage restrictions, but I think it is quite important—not just in limiting the movements to different countries, but the restrictions you have to go through. A load of musical equipment leaving the UK has to get pre-clearance at the internal border at Ashford in Kent. It could then have clearance again when it arrives in Calais. If it is going to a member state, such as Italy, it gets clearance



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from the customs clearance point in Italy again, before it can go on to its ultimate destination. All that adds not only cost but time, and time is money for touring artists.

We want to build back better from covid, but to do that we need to back the major talent of the future. Currently in the music sector, emerging artists face the toughest time. All artists are suffering because it is not possible to perform live, but that impacts on new acts more, because that is where the majority of their income comes from,

Online music streaming services have grown in revenue during covid, as have other online services, but the vast majority of the revenue from streaming that reaches artists at all goes to the major acts. UK festivals, which give new acts their chance to perform alongside major artists, are being cancelled, because their organisers cannot afford to carry the full liability for putting on an event for which they cannot get covid insurance—they either cannot get it at all, or can only get it at extortionate cost.

Music venues can appeal for support from the Government's Cultural Recovery Fund, but many of the artists who would seek to perform in those venues have little or no financial support.

For years, the music industry has been a great British success story, because of the talent of our performers. We have a responsibility to support them if we want the next generation to reach its potential and be able to make a living from their music. Thank you.

Q12 **Chair:** Thank you. I call Matt Western.

Matt Western: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to start by congratulating Tim Brennan on generating this petition. Some people will whine that it is just about the well-paid megastars and rock bands complaining about Brexit. As we have heard, though, it most certainly is not.

The truth is that, five weeks in, this is the latest sector to shout out and demand that the Government recognise their needs and get a grip, in order to save their businesses. All too often, the Government speak of the value of our creative industries, and we should understand how important this sector is. Of course, our music and performing arts are often cited as the primary driver of Britain's soft power, as many have said. In fact, our creative arts account for a staggering 11.7% of GDP in total, according to figures from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. And live performance is the engine room of the creative arts.

Of course, our music industry is a huge part of this, but so is the expertise that UK companies provide to US bands looking to tour Europe. The UK has been the bridge-point into Europe, but if this situation is not resolved, those companies will relocate to Europe and we will lose valuable exports.

However, I will focus on the challenges faced by other performing artists who tour Europe, such as Motionhouse, the world-renowned dance



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company that is based in my constituency of Warwick and Leamington. It depends on easy, unfettered access to Europe. That was promised to them by Ministers and the Prime Minister, but because the Government have not agreed a sector-specific deal, they have created a monstrous problem, not only in terms of work permits and moving kit around, but in terms of taxation.

In the case of Motionhouse, 50% of their revenue is generated from European touring, with the remainder being generated here. They typically travel to 15 countries across the European Union every year, so this situation is desperate for them. In the last 15 years, they could put together a comprehensive tour; they could fill in last-minute dates; they could accept any booking; and they could pop individuals in and out of a country. However, it differs from the mainstream music industry, in that a fair amount of that zig-zagging around takes place.

So one of the primary issues is the movement between countries and the work visas that a country may extend. All 26 EU countries have their own rules, so companies must arrange for each performer to get a visa for each and every country. That compares with zero administration previously. And if a performer takes a holiday in that country, that will count against their visa days.

For example, Spain has a five-day limit, so Motionhouse will need to apply for a waiver, and the cost of visas equates to about £100 to £150 per person. Take 15 people and that becomes a significant cost. And as one of Motionhouse's contacts remarked, "Why has the UK not negotiated cultural passports?"

As I said, the second issue relates to movement of equipment and the matter of cabotage. Many others have commented on this, so I will not go into it in detail. However, the truth is that if you use a smaller van, you are not restricted. The final point is about tax. The entertainment tax in Germany is at 17.5%, which is a significant cost.

Let me just conclude by saying this: the Government need to negotiate a cultural passport. It was an obvious consideration. Why not put it in place? That is the most obvious thing that the Secretary of State can do.

Q13 **Chair:** Thank you. I call Greg Clark.

Greg Clark: I am grateful to the Petitions Committee for allocating this debate. As you know, Madam Chair, I chair the Science and Technology Committee of the Commons, and we welcomed the fact that, as part of the Christmas eve agreement, UK scientists were able to continue to participate in EU schemes via the Horizon programme. One of the reasons this was a good move is that we know that science does not recognise borders, but is positively better for international co-operation. Exactly the same is true for the arts. The experience of working together with the best, regardless of where they are, helps excellence everywhere. The current situation is urgent and would be even more visible were it not for the curtailment of performances that covid has required. The privations of



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suppressing a pandemic whose virulence is not of human making is different from these constraints, and these restrictions, which are entirely man made. There is no excuse for artists and audiences being prevented from enjoying future artistic performances.

I understand that the EU proposes not to allow technical staff to be subject to the same rules as performances, which is utter nonsense, and disrespects the essential artistic and technical contribution of professionals to artistic achievements.

I also understand that the EU would not contemplate tours, insisting just on ad hoc performances—a pointless restriction. European tours should be encouraged, and everyone should look forward to celebrating them, when we are able to. The arts is a field in which the spirit of creativity and fellow feeling must be found. That spirit is necessary, but it is not sufficient, because details count, as we have heard from discussions of cabotage and carnets; from visa waivers; from work permits; from customs; and from insurance. The practical is important. As Stephen Sondheim wrote of artistic labours,

“Having just the vision's no solution

Everything depends on execution

Putting it together

That's what counts!”

I hope the Minister will be prepared to roll up her sleeves and do just that.

Q14 **Chair:** Thank you. I call Christine Jardine.

Christine Jardine: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It is a pleasure to take part in this debate to support the petition and to hear so many other voices raised in defence of this vital industry. I should declare an interest because I have a sister who works in the music and creative industries. She doesn't tour Europe, so she won't be directly affected by this, but like everyone else in the industry, there will be an impact for her if the Government cannot find a way to reach an agreement with the EU.

In truth, which of us does not benefit from the music industry, the creative industries in this country? Which of us has not turned to music to help us through, to lift our spirits in the past year? Free livestreams, old gigs, theatres, have all made their way from the stage into our lounges. But it is not just something that is there simply for our enjoyment. People like the self-employed opera singer in my constituency who gets most of her income from Europe—or at least has done until now—or the many self-employed musicians, technicians and specialists are now struggling, as many other businesses are, with the red tape they have to navigate through Europe.

We have heard so much about cabotage and visas. They are all affected, but together they make up an industry which is vital to this country's economic wellbeing. The music industry creates £5.8 billion worth of



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income and the creative industries more than £100 billion worth of income a year. There is also, as my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross said, the flipside of that. It is not just the touring musicians going out into Europe and gaining the experience they do; it is the people who come here as well.

In my city of Edinburgh, it is almost incomprehensible to think what the impact might be if we cannot find a solution for this. The Edinburgh international festival is an event that is rivalled in size only by the World cup and the Olympics. It is the largest arts, music and entertainment festival of its kind in the world.

You can measure its importance in terms of the money it brings in or the jobs it creates, but there is something more than that. The Edinburgh international festival, like events up and down the country, are part of the cultural fabric of this country. That is what is at stake here: our cultural fabric, a vital industry and the future of so many individual musicians, artists and craftsmen who depend on the music and creative industries. They are now depending on our Government and the EU to come up with a solution. Surely they can do that.

Q15 **Chair:** Thank you. I call Nickie Aiken.

Nickie Aiken: I am delighted that the Petitions Committee is hosting this virtual debate and I thank my 1,112 constituents who signed the petition. As hon. Members have outlined, as of 1 January, UK musicians can no longer travel and work freely across the EU. It is hugely disappointing that the European Commission chose not to pursue what appeared to be a sensible solution suggested by the UK Government at the beginning of the Brexit negotiations to allow freedom of movement for performers.

British musicians, including our world-leading orchestras, bands and singers, bring so much in terms of both their cultural and their economic contribution, but they and their supporting managerial and technical staff must now abide by 27 different sets of rules and regulations. What might be required as a permit in Berlin may not be in Paris.

The new rules are painfully bureaucratic. Instruments transported by truck or cargo, for example, will require carnets—passports for goods—to be wet-stamped by border control officials while portable musical instruments for professionals will not. For touring musicians used to frictionless travel between several countries, the new restrictions are expensive red tape that threaten the entire industry.

The London Symphony Orchestra, based in the Barbican centre in the City of London in my constituency, was founded in 1904. It is the oldest of London's symphony orchestras, but the present restrictions on live performances combined with the future challenges for touring in the EU threaten its very existence. It needs a reciprocal agreement that allows the free passage of performers, equipment and crew. A reciprocal visa waiver already exists for performers and crews between the EU and other third countries, and the Government should aim for equivalence to secure visa-free travel for touring musicians. Under the new restrictions, UK



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trucks carrying touring musicians' equipment are restricted to one international movement followed by only two further permitted stops before being required to return home. This limit is arbitrary and punishing. Without multiple stops, there simply cannot be a European tour, and the UK concert haulage industry will be devastated.

I hope my hon. Friend the Minister will discuss with her European counterparts an extension of the current limit of stops on the continent for any registered vehicle. The UK is a global leader in this sector, and every step must be taken to allow both UK and EU musicians to tour freely to support our economy's recovery, ensure a prosperous future and uphold our global influence in the music industry.

Q16 **Chair:** Thank you. I call the SNP's Front-Bench spokesperson, Pete Wishart.

Pete Wishart: Thank you, Chair. I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. This has been a fascinating debate, which demonstrates the support for our musicians and the affection they are held in right across the House. I also want to pay my appreciation to Tim Brennan, who has assembled the petition with customary energy, commitment and passion.

I had the great fortune of having some modest success as a touring artist, having spent 16 years in the music industry as a keyboard player with Runrig. I was lucky—Runrig had top 5 albums in Germany, Scandinavia and the UK, and we filled arenas and managed to play at all the top festivals. Much as I love my time as an MP, that was simply the greatest of times—something that every young artist dreams of and aspires to: from starting out in that cramped Transit van, guitar case on your knees, four to a room in some cheap hotel in Hamburg, Copenhagen or Amsterdam, spending what is left of your very modest fee on a beer after the show, there is the dream that you will come back all conquering. Breaking Europe and building a career—that is what it was all about.

Europe is on our doorstep, but it can sometimes feel like another world: a continent with a diverse musical taste, loyal fans and an almost inexplicable and insatiable musical curiosity—it is just the experience of being there, with the excitement of performing in an array of wonderful destinations and sharing a musical exchange with people desperate to know where the music comes from and what informs it.

Music is a border-free proposition. Bands are multinational. Music does not care which country it is in. It is almost the exact opposite of Brexit. Leaving the EU and ending freedom of movement was, therefore, always going to be a disaster for our artists and musicians. Never properly considered in any of the discussions, our artists and music industry have ended up as nothing but mere collateral—nothing but chaff in the tragedy that is ending freedom of movement. Like the rest of us, musicians will be allowed to spend only 90 days out of 100 in the EU—at least, I think that is what it is, because nobody has actually clarified the situation.



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A European tour can involve playing in anything up to 15 countries, each of which has its own developed live scene and its own demands in terms of transport and organisations. When bands tour, there is an economic cost to assembling crews, transport and organisational infrastructure. At the height of our success, I remember that sometimes we would be on the road for about half the year, mainly in Europe. Ninety days could be almost over before the set list has properly bedded in. Musicians will also now have to negotiate the Brexit border arrangements, which will increase red tape and costs. The fact that a band's carnet has become a political issue is almost surreal and extraordinary. Carnets are supposed to be boring. Under the new arrangements, they are allowed only two stops before a UK truck will have to return home. That being the case, it has to be said that most European tours will probably just have to close.

Then, there are the new Brexit taxation and fiscal measures, with new arrangements for national insurance and income tax, and there is also VAT. I still do not know whether it is going to be a requirement to register for VAT in all European countries. However, whatever the outcome of all this, there will be more accountancy costs, more hours spent on paperwork, and more costs for artists. Artists just want to perform and create. They do not want to be overwhelmed with paperwork. Brexit was supposed to end bureaucracy and the bureaucrats, but drummers might end up as bureaucrats now—think of the absurdity of that.

Where touring is the prime generator of income for most artists—because, as we have heard, of the pitiful return they now get for their recorded works on streaming and digital—one feature of it can often make the difference on profitability, breaking even or going under, and that is the merch. All the new EU rules can make that margin even more precarious. Profitability from merchandise could be reduced dramatically. Again: more barriers, more burdens, more costs.

But it is the visa that is the killer in all of this. It is the one thing that could just make the whole enterprise simply not worth it. The first thing to note is that the Government assured the music industry that they would secure an arrangement that would ensure visa-free travel. I remember quite clearly the former Minister, the hon. Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams), saying explicitly that visa rules for artists would not change. That is why this all seems like a total betrayal of a sector. It is true that some countries, such as France, have said that they will continue to allow visa-free travel for artists, but most have said that they will not.

We do not know what the total costs are going to be but let us generously assume that the cost of a visa, insurance and other associated costs will come in at around £300 per person—and that is being very generous. A modest travelling outfit of five band members, three crew, a sound engineer, a tour manager and a driver will mean additional costs of £3,000, and that is just for one country. That could be doubled, trebled or increased tenfold depending on how many countries will be included on that tour. Medium-sized and larger enterprises, with their array of lighting technicians, set designers, PA crews, caterers and accountants, could face



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costs of £10,000 before a sound check has even been done. For bands operating at extreme margins, the EU will be closed because of those costs.

It has been said before, and it is worth reiterating to sum up, that the music industry is the UK's cultural jewel in the crown. It is worth £5.6 billion to the economy, and we are second only to the US in worldwide reach and impact. It is just something that we do spectacularly well. It provides immense soft power for the UK, which makes the Government's lackadaisical indifference even more bizarre.

I think we know that this is all about this Government's obsession with ending freedom of movement. Nothing is more important to them than that mission. If live music falls foul of that objective, it is just going to have to suck it up. For all the ridiculous EU-blaming, the Minister said the other week that people must have what they voted for. The offer the EU made to allow visa-free travel for those 90 days was rejected because, as she said, it might just open the door.

I remind the Minister that it is this Government who took us out of the European Union and ended freedom of movement. It is their lack of negotiating guile that has left our artists abandoned. I struggle to think of one artist who wanted this awful Brexit, but it is our artists who have been left in a situation where they have to pick up the pieces of something that they wanted no part of. It is up to the Government to fix this.

The Government did not count on the backlash: the almost 300,000 people who have now signed the petition; the letter by the cream of UK talent and top musicians; and the strong feeling right across the industry. The Government versus our musicians and top artists is not a good place to be for any Government. All anybody wants is for this to be fixed out. Being phoned up by Sir Elton John of an evening, warning about the demise of the touring sector, is not good for a Secretary of State. The UK Government must work with the industry and negotiate a cultural exemption or a cultural passport, as has been explained and defined, with the EU to allow our musicians and crews to travel and work freely across the EU.

We no longer want to hear that it is all the EU's fault. We want to hear what the Government are actively doing. This petition shows that the public really care about their artists. They support their music industry and want to get behind it and ensure that we get this fixed out. The Government have said that the door is open, and the EU has said that it is prepared to discuss and negotiate. It is now time for the Government to listen, respond and, for goodness' sake, get this fixed out.

Q17 **Chair:** Thank you. We will now hear from the Labour Front-Bench spokesperson, Alison McGovern.

Alison McGovern: Thank you, Chair. I would like to begin by thanking you and your Committee for arranging this important debate. We have heard from a number of Members about the impact that the lack of an



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agreement will have on their constituencies. I know that a large number of MPs who wished to speak in this debate were not allocated time. I am sure that if this issue is not resolved, the House of Commons and, no doubt, the other place, will return to it again and again. It is simply not going to go away. It would be great if, in her response, the Minister could answer the questions I am going to ask about the next steps. The high level of interest across all parties demonstrates that this issue must be resolved.

I was particularly struck by the comments of the hon. Member for Clacton (Giles Watling), my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone), my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones) and for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) and my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western), which showed that this issue is not London-centric. It is not the preserve of those with interests in London's west end, although we did hear from its representative. This is not confined to the metropolis; there is interest right across the country. I will try to say why that is the case and press the Government on how to resolve this, as we clearly must do.

I thank the 300 people in my Wirral South constituency who signed the petition and showed their support for performers—not just musicians but performers of all kinds—who are affected by the lack of agreement. I also thank Tim Brennan, who started the petition. I don't think even he thought it would have the impact it has had. I thank him for starting the petition and I thank all those throughout the creative industries who have taken time to share their thoughts with Members of Parliament in advance of this debate. We have heard many representations that have made the debate really meaningful.

This issue is truly personal for me, not because I have had a successful career in performing—unlike the previous speaker, the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart)—but because my grandad was a folk singer. Some of my earliest memories are of watching him on stage. He was not wildly successful; he had one song that did pretty well. He didn't earn a huge amount of money from music, but the truth is that he didn't earn a huge amount of money from the railway job he did. The reason he started gigging was the same reason that loads of musicians start gigging today, which is that their income might be pretty low but if they have a talent, it can bring in that extra bit of cash that means they don't just survive but really live. Of course, that love for music is, as other Members have said, about enjoyment and all that it brings to our society and our culture, but that extra bit of income means the world. It certainly meant the world to my family when I was growing up.

I have heard from performers of all kinds over the past few weeks—since Christmas eve—who tell me that it remains the case that playing live is what keeps many performers going. Of course, they will still be able to play live in the UK, but European touring, for all the reasons we have



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heard from Members, is an absolute crucial part of what has happened to make the UK's creative industries so good. Bernard Sumner has been quoted in the debate. He is right: we cannot let touring just be for the wealthy or successful.

In Merseyside, journalists from the brilliant cultural paper *Bido Lito!* reminded me that, just about now, breakthrough artists from Merseyside should be going to Groningen in Holland for an industry showcase that could make or break their careers. Maybe this issue is being masked because of covid at the moment, but in years to come we will pay the price, unless we resolve it.

Several Members have mentioned opera, which is an industry at which we excel. It is years in the planning, and professionals and all those involved right across the creative sector may need to make many trips to bring the wonderful world of opera to life. Some may see it as an added extra, but given the growth in the creative industries over the past few years, and considering the growth we are going to need to secure our country's economic future, we cannot dismiss the creative industries.

People right across these industries are worried. They are worried that being a British passport holder just became a disadvantage at the very time that we need advantages in the global marketplace. There is an impact internally on our economy, too, as we know that many of the cities outside London have a leading edge in the world of culture and creativity and a reputation for music. Being from Merseyside, I hardly need to describe how important this is. While we may no longer be leading in other industries, this is one where we do and where it can have a disproportionate impact in terms of rebalancing our economy.

The Secretary of State said that the current situation is "absurd and self-defeating". The Government must accept that the situation has got to change—they have heard that from Members of all parties today. As the Chair of the Business Select Committee said, there is no excuse.

I have two fundamental questions that I hope the Minister can answer. In order to build trust and confidence in the process, we need to know what really happened. There has been a lot of chatter in the newspapers about this. To clear it up, will the Minister commit to the Government placing all correspondence between the UK Government and the European Commission, and between all Government Departments, in the House of Commons Library? Will she explain what assessment has been made of the relative position of UK passport holders in creative industries now and the impact it will have on our economy?

Secondly, we need to know what is happening now—we do not want to leave this as it is—so what meetings have been arranged? What is the schedule of meetings going forward to discuss this? What proposals have been tabled? Will they deal with the cabotage issues that have been mentioned, particularly by the Member for Bristol East, and which Department is in charge of this issue? Can we just get that clear? Is it the Home Office? What role is the Department for Transport playing? What



role is the Treasury playing? Who is leading on the fiscal and social security aspects that have been mentioned, and exactly what role is DCMS playing? Is it bringing forward all the opinions of all the different Departments about how to resolve this, or is it leading on policy creation? Are they the people who those in this sector should be speaking to? I have to be honest with the Minister: it is really not clear.

One of the reasons it is not clear—this is where I will finish, Chair—is that behind all of this debate is a suspicion. There is a suspicion that some quite hard-line ideology is now more important to the Tory party in Government than one of our most successful industries in the British economy. That feels quite ironic to me, and I hope it is not true, so the Minister must prove us all wrong and show that our culture—one of our successful British exports and, frankly, the thing that carries our reputation abroad, beyond any diplomatic exercise—is much more important than simple ideology. She has a choice. Prove that our industry matters more than politics, get this sorted, and we will all be able to enjoy the output of our creative industries for many years to come.

Q18 Chair: Thank you. I now call the Minister for Digital and Culture.

Caroline Dinanage: Thank you, Chair. I begin by thanking you and your Committee for calling this debate on such an important issue.

The Government recognise the importance of the UK's cultural industries. We understand the huge role that they play in creating jobs and generating investment and growth. The art and culture sector alone contributed almost £35 billion to the UK's domestic economy in 2019, and the support and media attention generated by this e-petition demonstrates how touring is not solely important to the cultural and creative economy and those who work in it. It also highlights the UK's passion for these sectors: how vital they are for our entertainment and our enjoyment, but also for our emotional and mental health and wellbeing and our sense of collective enjoyment and togetherness at a time when so many of us are separated from friends and family. We all look forward desperately to their full return following the pandemic. That is why I welcome this debate, and I have been really grateful for the views shared by Members from across the House. I agree with very many of the comments that have been made today.

We have heard a lot about the Brexit negotiations today, and I should start by clarifying some of the points around the UK's negotiations with the EU on this issue. The starting point was that the Government fully understood and understands, and recognised and recognises, the importance of touring for UK musicians and other cultural professionals. I have met the team at BEIS, who conducted this part of the negotiation and who fully understand that the cultural and creative sectors that we in DCMS represent rely on the ability to move people across borders quickly, simply and with minimal cost and administration. They are fully aware of the financial implications for this significant sector of this being hindered, which is why—as so many hon. Members will be aware—the UK pushed for ambitious arrangements for performers and artists to be able to work



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across Europe after the end of freedom of movement. Of course we did, because they are so vital to our economy.

Our proposals were very straightforward. They involved capturing the work done by musicians, artists, entertainers and their accompanying staff through the list of permitted activities for short-term business visitors. It was very straightforward and would have meant that performers and artists could travel and work in the EU more easily, with no requirements for work permits either. It is really important to stress that the UK's offer was not one dreamed up by civil servants or politicians: it was very carefully developed in consultation with experts from the UK's creative sectors. We listened to experts in British music, those at the coalface, including bodies like the Musicians' Union, and we reflected their views honestly in our proposal to the EU. That proposal offered a very straightforward solution for our creative industries, which would have benefited all sides. Quite simply, Chair, the EU rejected this proposal.

There was no specific counter-offer from the EU concerning touring for musicians or for the creative sectors. In other areas of negotiation, the EU tabled texts regarding paid activities that can be conducted without a visa. This suggested that that might include ad hoc performances. These proposals would not have addressed the sector's concerns that we worked so hard to gather before the negotiations. Critically, the proposals put forward by the EU were non-binding. They did not include any of the touring or technical staff, who we know are absolutely vital. They did not address the massive issue of work permits, which are different in every member state of the EU, as we have already heard.

On top of all that, while not offering any special carve-out for performers, the EU's proposals were also part of this package of visa-free travel not only for current members of the EU, but FOR any future EU member. That was a wide range of other sectors. It is simply not consistent with the manifesto commitment to take back control of our borders, and it wasn't consistent with the idea of Brexit that the majority of people in this country voted for.

This isn't a blame game. The outcome of the negotiations is deeply regrettable for all our sectors. It is not the deal that DCMS or the Government wanted, and it is not the deal that the negotiators pushed for. As I have said before, my door and our door remain 100% open. There is scope to return to this issue in the future if the EU should change its mind, and we would welcome it with open arms.

It is important to stress that through negotiations with the EU, transparency and procedural facilitation measures were secured. That will help ensure processes are as prompt and as smooth as possible. The agreement also contains provisions that promote efficient customs arrangements. We are working very hard to make it easier to apply for and to use the ATA carnets, for example.

The other key thing that I really wanted to stress today is that performers from the UK are still very welcome to tour in the EU and vice versa. Each

individual member state will have its own requirements for this, but some are very straightforward. In France, for example, creative artists can visit visa-free for 90 days.

As ever, the UK remains open for musicians to tour here. Musicians, entertainers, artists and all their technical staff from non-visa national countries, such as EU member states and the United States, can all come to perform in the UK for up to one month without requiring a visa, if they are paid by a UK source, and they can come for up to three months without requiring a visa, if they are sponsored by a registered tour sponsor.

Non-visa national artists can also receive payments for performing at a permit-free festival for up to six months visa free. The list of permit-free festivals is published under the immigration rules and includes a wide range of events, from Glastonbury to Glyndebourne.

Finally, EU musicians and support staff who are being paid in the UK may also qualify for entry under the tier-5 creative worker route, if they are sponsored by a UK entity licensed with UK Visas and Immigration for this purpose. That is for up to 12 months, with the relevant rules providing for accompanying dependants as well. That means that the UK's offer to touring professionals is more generous than very many of the EU member states.

It is within the gift of each member state to improve their own arrangements, if they want to encourage a more vibrant and welcoming culture and environment in their country. As a Government, we will engage with bilateral partners to find ways to make life easier for those working in the creative industries in countries across the EU, but we can all play a part in that. There is an onus on all those who care about this issue and for everyone who signed the petition. These are not EU rules; they are rules decided in each member state country, from Rome to Paris to Bratislava, as to how they welcome artists from around the world to their shores and how they value culture.

Many Members have asked what we have been doing in my Department, DCMS. Of course, we are absolutely committed to supporting individuals and businesses to understand and navigate the actions that they will now need to take. We are taking all the steps that we can to make new processes as straightforward as possible for UK artists performing across the continent. We have published guidance on gov.uk, signposting official information provided by EU countries about their business travel routes, and that will be regularly updated. We are also undertaking a very expensive programme of engagement with the sector to help it understand requirements, and we are working with Arts Council England and other sector bodies to help distil that information and simplify the new rules.

Of course, working hand in hand with the sector is absolutely vital to our efforts, so on 20 January, the Secretary of State and I held a roundtable discussion with a number of cultural stakeholders to hear from them directly about the issues faced by the sector. As a result of that meeting,



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we have established a DCMS-led working group. That group—the cultural and creative touring group—met for the first time last Friday. It consists of representatives from other key Government Departments and from organisations covering the breadth of our cultural and creative sectors.

This is about action, not words. It is about working collaboratively and urgently to address the range of issues raised, with a view to improving processes and reducing burdens to help the sector work and tour confidently in the EU. Some of the priorities that we will be looking at include how we can get guidance to the sector to cut through the confusion and bureaucracy. We will be working with other Government Departments to make progress on some of our issues, such as the Department for Transport, for example, on the issue of cabotage, which worries me for all the reasons that have been set out by the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), among many others. We will be moving forward bilateral engagement with other nations to get things done as smoothly and as swiftly as possible. We will be looking at what practical support we can put in place.

The first meeting, which, as I said, was last Friday, proved very constructive, and I am very much looking forward to the next one, which is next week, and to working collaboratively across Government Departments and with the sector to deliver our shared ambition. As Elton John, who has been mentioned a lot today, said last week, this is not just about the Government doing everything; the music industry and other performing sectors can all play their part. Those are incredibly influential groups, and we look forward to pushing this forward together. With that spirit in mind, I am really pleased that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is starting ongoing negotiations with his EU counterpart this week.

It is also really important to stress that the Government are aware of the significant impacts that the covid-19 pandemic is having on those sectors. We are really committed to continued work with the creative and cultural sectors to understand the difficulties that they face and to help them access support through these incredibly challenging times, through to recovery. The £1.57-billion culture recovery fund has already benefited a huge range of cultural organisations, including venues, festivals and theatres, and £1 billion has already been committed, supporting well over 3,000 organisations and more than 75,000 jobs, with many more freelancers and jobs in vital supply chain industries also benefiting.

That is the biggest ever one-off investment in our cultural and creative industries. It is a sum that far exceeds what has been provided in other countries, and it builds on billions more coming from furlough, the self-employed income support scheme, and other Government support. Some £400 million from the fund was held back as a contingency to support cultural organisations, and is now the basis of the second round of grant and repayable finance funding. The second round will support organisations that face financial distress as a result of closure, and will help them transition back to fuller opening, hopefully during 2021.



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I hope that that gives the Committee some indication of some of the things that we have been doing. I am so pleased to have been given this opportunity to discuss these issues regarding UK musicians, artists and cultural professionals seeking to tour the EU. I hope that you can understand how passionately I care about making this work for them. The trade and co-operation agreement does deliver on the Government's promise to take the UK out of the EU customs territory and single market, and to regain control of our borders, but the Government are absolutely committed to supporting the cultural and creative sectors in navigating those changes. I look forward to continuing our work with sector stakeholders to build our understanding of the impact, to provide clarity wherever possible, and to remove blockages. Our cultural industries have always been of such vital importance to this country, and with our support, they will remain so.

Chair: Thank you, Minister, and thank you to all right hon. and hon. Members for your contributions. Thanks also go to the broadcasters, *Hansard*, and all the staff who have facilitated today's session. I pay particular tribute to the petition creator, Tim Brennan, as well as to Stuart Murdoch, Anna Patalong, Emma Pollock, Rakhi Singh, Ian Smith, Nicky Spence, and Yousef, for all their useful comments in the evidence session last Thursday. I think they and the petitioners will still be concerned following the Minister's response.

As the issue is not going away, I want to leave the Minister with just a few of the sobering comments we received from artists about what the new rules will mean for their careers. One told us: "The new rules will be devastating for new musicians who don't have the backing of major labels, this will destroy British DIY music, arguably one of Britain's greatest exports." Another said: "Often I play in 3 or 4 different EU countries in a week. That is going to be a logistical nightmare. Also, often I am asked to replace an artist who is ill and has had to cancel at the last minute. Now if I need a visa, this won't be possible." Another simply said: "New rules will mean we, as a band, will never be able to afford to play in Europe again."

We are the country that gave the world the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Britpop, Elton John, Queen and other cultural exports that are revered around the world. It would be an absolute tragedy if we were to lose that status as a cultural hub, so we need real leadership and foresight from the Government to ensure that we do not. We need the Government to get back to the table and sort this out urgently.