

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: The future of UK music festivals, HC 886

Wednesday 24 March 2021

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 24 March 2021.

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Members present: Julian Knight (Chair); Kevin Brennan; Steve Brine; Alex Davies-Jones; Clive Efford; Julie Elliott; Damian Green; Damian Hinds; John Nicolson; Giles Watling; Mrs Heather Wheeler.

Questions 283 - 362

Witnesses

I: Caroline Dinenage MP, Minister for Digital and Culture, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport; and Victoria MacCallum, Deputy Director, Head of Screen, International and Skills for the Creative Industries, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Caroline Dinenage and Victoria MacCallum.

Q283 **Chair:** This is the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee and this is our final meeting on UK music festivals post-Covid. We are joined by two witnesses, Caroline Dinenage, Minister for Digital and Culture, and Victoria MacCallum, Deputy Director, Head of Screen, International and Skills for the Creative Industries, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Caroline and Victoria, thank you very much for joining us and good morning.

Caroline Dinenage: Good morning, Chair; it is lovely to see you.

Q284 **Chair:** It's nice to see you, too. I don't know whether you saw at the weekend but the BBC carried quite an interesting story on a Dutch festival event with 1,500 partygoers. Everyone had certificates to say that they had had a recent Covid test. People were wearing masks and everyone seemed to have an absolutely amazing time, yet Holland has a higher Covid rate than us and one of the most sluggish vaccination rates in the EU. I think it would be quite hard to be any more sluggish than the rest of the EU, but it is very sluggish in that respect. Why is it that they can do it and we cannot?

Caroline Dinenage: I suppose the answer to that would be the appetite for risk. We have been very clear about the steady and safe way that we want to bring back those sorts of large-scale events. I don't know if you have had the opportunity to read the Imperial College report. It highlighted quite clearly that during the course of the pandemic there have been some very high-profile one-off large mass events, which have been a real catalyst for the spreading of the virus, not least in a church in South Korea. That is one of the places that is mentioned.

That is why the motivation for our approach has been a very careful road map that is backed up by the data, not the date, at every turn, and also backed up by a whole range of scientific research. We have the Events Research Programme looking to pilot a number of events across a whole different range of sectors, and we have this review of Covid-status certification. Above all, our approach has been backed up by probably one of the most generous economic support packages in the world, to make sure that, while we are moving in a slow and secure way, businesses are not disadvantaged.

Q285 **Chair:** I did not realise you were using the South Korean example; you could have used one closer to home, of course, such as the Cheltenham Festival last year and the Liverpool game against Roma. What you are saying, effectively, is that the Dutch are taking undue risk—if their Covid rates are higher than ours and their vaccination rates are far lower than ours, they are taking undue risk. Is that right?

Caroline Dinenage: We have to be very cautious. We all saw over the summer the amazing videos of New Zealand. Obviously, over our winter



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it was their summer and we saw amazing videos of their festivals back up and running, people having a wonderful time. I just remember being stuck at home in the cold thinking, "Oh my goodness, I just can't wait to get back to that." The only way you can do that is if you know that it is not going to cause a further risk. At the end of the day, these large-scale mass events, particularly festivals, which are a real combination of a large number of people densely gathered together, freely moving around—

Q286 Chair: With respect, Minister, this was a test event of 1,500 people. Why is it that we are going to have to wait seemingly forever for test events, whereas the Dutch are doing theirs now? We should be much further along the road of vaccination than they are. It seems to be completely the cart before the horse. It seems to be the wrong way around. Why is it that in Germany, for instance, they have a €2.5 billion Covid-insurance scheme, yet their vaccination rates are lower than ours and they are unlikely to be able to have much of a festival season? Whereas our vaccination rates are much higher so we may have one, but we don't have the insurance in place. Do you understand the frustration of those in the live events and festival sector who think that this is far, far too slow in terms of gearing up to get things going?

Caroline Dinenge: I do. I completely understand your frustration and I understand the impatience of the sector, but what I would say to you is we really want to avoid a situation like just before Christmas where we walked all the way up to the hill to be able to get our theatres reopened and then, within minutes of them being able to reopen, the public health situation meant everything had to shut down again. That was disastrous for the sector. It was economically very difficult.

We want to do this in a way that is going to be sustainable, so we are doing pilots that are starting in April. They will be running throughout April and it is going to be very carefully conducted in a way that gathers the scientific evidence as part of the pipeline right the way through, so we are not going to wait until the end to come up with conclusions.

More broadly, you talked about insurance packages in other parts of Europe. The German one, which is the only one that is anything like a comparable size to what we would need, has now been stalled. They have now said that they are not going to bring it forward for the foreseeable future—

Chair: Minister—

Caroline Dinenge: Let me just finish this point, then I will come back to you. They are not bringing it forward in the light of the public health situation. The fact is, Chairman, that as the Minister responsible for this I would much rather be able to make an announcement when I am absolutely certain things can go ahead, or there is at least a much better sense of predictability that things can go ahead, than announce an



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indemnity scheme, give people the confidence and then pull the rug from under their feet again. I just would not be prepared to do that.

Q287 Chair: We did the indemnity scheme for the film industry last year, which you had a hand in, and obviously it was very welcome. The difference with Germany is the fact that their vaccination rates are much lower than ours and therefore effectively they are probably quite right to have decided to pull their scheme. However, we do have an opportunity to get going what is a very crucial industry, worth £11.7 billion with 975 festivals and events, many of them very small scale—we all think of it as thousands of people in a field; it is not in, most instances. It may be just a few hundred people at a local arts festival.

We have the opportunity to capitalise on our faster vaccination by at least setting out a proper road map—and I don't just mean, "We will just do a few test events and suck it and see"—and putting insurance in place so that in the second half of the year we can have at least a limited festival season, but also major events, such as the Great North Run, which is the biggest mass participation sporting event in the world, held on 12 September. They will not do that without insurance in place.

Caroline Dinenge: I don't disagree with anything you have said there. You are right that 80% of festivals are multi-day greenfield festivals, which we all know and love, and are below 5,000 attendees. Those are the sorts of things we want to see back as much as we do the much bigger-scale events. I know some of the big players in this, the likes of Leeds and Reading, have announced that they are planning to go ahead later on this year. I know the Isle of Wight is, but it has been moved to September.

Our system of pilots is not ad hoc, or "Just throw a few in the air and see how it lands." It is incredibly well planned. The science behind this is incredibly strong and incredibly well thought out. It is quite a significant piece of work and I can talk you through more on that if you would like me to. I had a meeting with Tom Rodden and the team yesterday. He is our chief scientific adviser. I think this is the way to go.

The one thing that has been absolutely missing right the way through, right from the beginning, and the one thing that the sector has told me over and over again that they need is certainty and predictability. We are in a global pandemic. Do not forget, this isn't like a Government fiscal event where we know exactly what is coming round the corner but we cannot tell anybody. This is a global pandemic that is completely uncertain and certainty and predictability are like the magical unicorns, the great luxury that everybody is searching for.

The only way we can build anything like an amount of predictability is by working through a clear road map, borne out by the evidence, backed up by things like this pilot thing that we are doing and the investigation into the Covid passport scheme. These are the only ways that we will be able to get back to something like the kind of predictability you are asking for.



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More broadly, you speak about the indemnity; I understand the sector's calls for this. We have put in place everything else that the sector has asked us for, from the economic support to the investigation into the Covid assurance documentation. Everything is being investigated or put into place already, and you know as well as I do that the indemnity is a question for the Treasury.

Chair: Yes, thank you. I will leave it there and hand over to Damian Green.

Q288 Damian Green: Good morning, Caroline. Let me pick up on what you just said. You talk about predictability, so that means people need to know when things are going to happen. What guidance have you issued to local authorities and safety advisory groups about when they can safely grant licences for large events after 21 June?

Caroline Dinenage: We have not told local authorities that they can go ahead and run live events. What we have done is set out the road map very clearly, and the road map says from 21 June as the starting date—some date from 21 June at the earliest—we will be able to do large-scale events, hopefully without social distancing. Very clearly the road map does say that that may include some other form of mitigation.

Alongside the pilot testing, we are compiling the guidance that will go out to local authorities as to what they will need to do to make sure that that is being implemented correctly. Clearly, it would not be correct to provide that guidance right now—until we have done the research that shows what those mitigations need to be.

Q289 Damian Green: Does that mean that nobody can start rigging up a site? As you know, that takes weeks for festivals. Should they not even start thinking about going onsite before 21 June at the earliest?

Caroline Dinenage: We did say that we will be producing the guidance as soon as we have it. Clearly quite a lot of these pilot events are happening throughout April and we will be bringing the evidence together in May, so we should know a lot more by the end of May and be able to be a lot clearer about how this is going to look.

Q290 Damian Green: Does this pilot include pilot festivals? Will festivals be covered by the pilot programme that starts in April?

Caroline Dinenage: The thrust of the pilot scheme—the ERP—is not based on sectors so much as on settings. For example, one of them is going to be in the Crucible for the snooker world championships, because the Crucible is also a theatre venue and would host a similar sort of crowd.

At the moment, the closest thing to a festival that we are looking at is a nightclub, which also allows free movement of people in an unfettered way. We do plan to do a festival-type event. Clearly, one of the things we will not be able to do in the April phase of pilots is a very large multi-day



music festival with an unstructured audience, because there are massive operational and ethical challenges to conducting something of that scale.

Our chief scientific adviser, Tom Rodden, is working with festival organisers to build the evidence base around a smaller-scale event and other events of a similar nature where we can take the same scientific learning so that we can make sure we have strong evidence around music festivals.

Q291 Damian Green: I am asking this question about timing because it is obviously completely crucial for the rest of the summer. We heard that officials have said to the sector that there might be a pilot in June and then guidance published in mid to late July. That would clearly be too late for the festival season this year. Is that right—is that what your officials are telling the sector?

Caroline Dinenge: We are hoping to have conducted all of the pilots across April and May.

Q292 Damian Green: As I said, we have been told verbally by your officials, although not in writing, that there is going to be a pilot in June and then guidance in July. That is not right, is it?

Caroline Dinenge: I am not aware of that, Damian.

Q293 Damian Green: Can we be clear that everything that will be needed to make an assessment on safe reopening—I take all the points you make about it needing to be safe—will be included in the main Events Research Programme, which is due to report by the end of May? Or will there be a separate strand of activity, meaning decisions are taken after 21 June?

Caroline Dinenge: I am hoping that everything will be done together—that we will be able to provide the full scientific research and evidence by the end of May, based on a whole range of different scientific and pilot events.

The thing to bear in mind is that as well as having a team of scientists that are working at each event looking at that event, all its different aspects and all the different mitigations around it, there are three different consortia as well, who are each leading studies. There is a consortia in Liverpool that is looking at the issue of transmission; there is one in Loughborough that is looking at the issue of ventilation; and there is one in Edinburgh that is looking at things like crowd behaviour, compliance and people's sentiments around all the mitigations and what have you. It is a case of bringing all that together and trying to do so at pace.

Q294 Damian Green: I get your point about settings, not sectors. I suspect it will look slightly odd if Wembley is full or half full for the final games of the Euro championships and at the same time people are not allowed to be going outside to festivals. Even more so perhaps if nightclubs are open, but festivals are not allowed to be open. Are you conscious that



there needs to be a consistency across sectors about which settings are safe?

Caroline Dinelage: I get your point, but we have to recognise that festivals are quite a unique beast in and of themselves. They rank alongside things like big country fairs and other things where people gather in large numbers. Of course, being largely outdoors they do have the one issue, which is the effective ventilation. The big risk of a festival is the size, which you would get at something like the FA Cup, but equally people are not sitting down. There are typically very large crowds and an unstructured movement of people—they are not sat in one place. There are very high levels of contact and obviously behaviour that might be a little bit influenced by the odd drink, which does tend to make you forget a little bit about social contact. Obviously, the duration and scale need to be taken into consideration as well. I would say to you, as much as I understand your sentiment, that festivals are quite an unusual and unique entity in their own right.

Victoria MacCallum: Good morning, everyone. If I could come in to add to what the Minister said. On the Events Research Programme the objective is, as she said, to build the best possible evidence base by testing a range of settings and getting that transferable evidence. What I want to stress is that myself and my team are talking regularly to the events, festivals and live music sector. As these pilots are designed and developed, we hope to make an announcement about the range of pilots in the next week or so. As the pilots take place, if it becomes clear that there are some gaps in evidence from them, we will continue to talk to the sector. Our chief scientific adviser will engage with them to look at the best ways of filling those gaps in order to give that certainty to festivals that we know is absolutely crucial to them.

Q295 **Damian Green:** To give them that certainty in time for them to go ahead later in this summer, if it is safe?

Victoria MacCallum: We absolutely understand the importance of that and we are all working incredibly hard to make that happen.

Damian Green: Thank you. Back to you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you, Damian. Julie Elliott.

Q296 **Julie Elliott:** Thank you, Chair. A lot of what I wanted to ask has already been answered, but how are these pilots being funded?

Caroline Dinelage: *[Inaudible.]*

Julie Elliott: You are on mute.

Caroline Dinelage: Sorry, I forgot to unmute myself. It's an occupational hazard—the phrase of 2020. Thank you, Julie. I am sorry if I have answered some of your questions already. I talk a lot.

Julie Elliott: No—I am happy that you have answered them.



Caroline Dinenage: On funding, a lot of them are events that will be going ahead anyway. We are trying, if possible, not to upset the pilot. We are doing things, as you know, like the snooker and what have you, so that is largely funded by whoever would be running the event anyway, and then obviously we will provide support with the additional costs of the mitigation measures.

Q297 **Julie Elliott:** The Government are going to support the extra costs above and beyond what would already be there. Is your Department funding that and then charging it back, or is it another Department?

Caroline Dinenage: Vicky might have to come in and answer this one for me, but I think it is us, isn't it?

Victoria MacCallum: I believe it is, yes. The detail of how that is going to work is being worked out over the next couple of weeks.

Q298 **Julie Elliott:** When you have that information, will you send it to us, please?

Victoria MacCallum: Yes.

Julie Elliott: Brilliant. Thank you. Thank you very much, Chair.

Q299 **Kevin Brennan:** Good morning again, Minister, and good morning, Victoria. Having listened to the exchanges with Julie and Damian, it sounds to me that despite festivals having many of the features of other outdoor events—which are, to my understanding, probably lower risk in many ways than indoor events—from the Government's point of view they are the highest risk of all. Is that right, Caroline?

Caroline Dinenage: It is lovely to see you again, Kevin—I think this is the third time in three days. We must stop meeting like this.

No, I don't think so. This is what the science says. We do not have any preconceptions about this. This is what the science is out to discover. Obviously, indoor settings have challenges in and of themselves, around ventilation and cleaning. I have already articulated what the challenges are with large-scale mass events where people tend to cluster in set parts of the sites—obviously in front of the stage you get very large and intense gatherings of people.

Q300 **Kevin Brennan:** Yes, that is true, but looking at the overall picture, it seems to me that of all the events you are talking about, whether they are held in a theatre or inside a nightclub, or they are ongoing events that are part of the pilots—like Wimbledon, and the snooker is indoors—you are basically picking out festivals as the highest risk. From what you have said, if I was a festival organiser, I would be thinking, "I don't think they are going to go ahead this year. I don't think I am going to be able to put my festival on this year," because you have basically said that people who go to festivals naturally behave in a more disinhibited way and therefore they cannot be allowed to proceed. Isn't that a fair assessment of what you have just told us?



Caroline Dinenage: I don't think so. I think you are putting words in my mouth, if you don't mind me saying so. I have explained that we are measuring all the risks and all the mitigations for the risks. I want to see everything reopened as much as you do. To be honest, I have so many tickets for events I could not go to last year that I am hoping will roll over to this year. I understand how vitally important the sector is to our economy and to everybody's wellbeing and all the jobs that it creates.

If we did not want this to happen, we would not have invested so much money into festivals through the Culture Recovery Fund—for 68% of the festivals we have funded through the CRF, that has given them the money to be able to stage events this year. They have said that that is what the money will enable them to do. We would not have done that if we did not have a genuine interest in and a passion for helping the sector to get back up and running again, if at all possible. That is why, alongside these pilots, we are also doing this testing—the Covid certification review.

Q301 **Kevin Brennan:** I think others are going to come on to that. How is the passion so great that you are not even having a pilot festival?

Caroline Dinenage: No, I think I have explained that we are trying to see if we can get a pilot up and running with festivals. The team are meeting with one of the large festival organisers today. In fact, as we speak some of my team are meeting with one of them so we are trying to do that. What I explained to you is that quite a lot of the pilots that have been arranged so far are around events that were going to go ahead regardless, but without a live audience, so it is quite easy to just chuck a live audience in alongside all the scientific measures to make it work.

With regard to a festival, clearly there were no festivals that were going to take place because they require a live audience, so we would need to create a special event, which is why up until now we have tended to work just within the context of those events that were already going to be taking place.

Q302 **Kevin Brennan:** Can I move on to other indoor events? Why is the return of the arts—attending something in relation to the arts in an indoor setting—subject to pilots when the return of indoor hospitality is not?

Caroline Dinenage: You mean things like theatres as opposed to—

Kevin Brennan: Yes.

Caroline Dinenage: Not all of what you might call our wider arts—our culture—is subject to pilots. We are not doing pilots in museums and galleries and things like that.

Kevin Brennan: But in theatres you are.

Caroline Dinenage: It is entertainment venues and sporting venues. That is because generally they have a very large number of people in one place. It is not just about what people do when they get there; it is also



about how they get there and the risks that are associated with that. If they are small events—

Q303 Kevin Brennan: Wouldn't that be true of a large-scale pub or a large-scale restaurant and so on? I would have thought that perhaps in the former people might be more inclined to become, as you described earlier, eventually more disinhibited in their behaviour than they would in a theatre. Why have theatres been singled out rather than large pubs and things?

Caroline Dinenage: Probably because of the fact that so many of the pubs were open for a large chunk of last year and so quite a lot of the evidence that would have needed to have been collected about that is already in the bag. This is about trying to gather the evidence where we don't have it, just to reassure public health experts that our sectors are just as safe. I know that they can be.

Q304 Kevin Brennan: Will the findings of any of these pilots, and all the science behind them that informs the decision-making, be made public and open for people to be able to see what has informed them?

Caroline Dinenage: I would imagine so, yes, because of the scientific nature of this. It would not be something we would want to keep to ourselves.

Q305 Kevin Brennan: The Committee understands that some local public health directors and safety advisory groups are reluctant to give permission for the pilots because of safety concerns. Is that correct? If so, how is DCMS dealing with that catch-22?

Caroline Dinenage: I am not going to go into details but there have been some local authorities that haven't been quite as keen as others to get involved in some of these pilots. In other areas people have been really leaning into this. Obviously, we are working very closely with Liverpool over a number of the pilots and Sheffield because of the use of the Crucible. It is so important that they do, because we did see some case last year, as you will recall, where under Government guidelines events could go ahead but the local authority stepped in at the last minute to stop them from happening.

We have an example in my local area of the Southampton boat show, which was in the worst possible scenario. The Government had given it the go-ahead to proceed, it had unfurloughed all its staff, got all the boats, created all the pontoons, got all the merch printed and everything ready to go, booked all the hotel rooms, and at the 11th hour Southampton City Council cancelled it.

Q306 Kevin Brennan: You should be all right with Liverpool because the Government are taking it over anyway, so that is probably going to be able to proceed. Leaving that aside, why won't you tell us who is reluctant? You are very keen to tell us who is enthusiastic with Liverpool, Sheffield and so on, but who is not being helpful?



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Caroline Dinéage: I do not have the details of that to hand. Even if I wanted to tell you, Kevin, I would not be able to.

Q307 **Kevin Brennan:** Don't you think we are entitled to know that information?

Caroline Dinéage: I do not have that information even to share with you. I don't know to what extent things have been discussed in respect of which local authorities could say that no, they did not want to do it. I know some have been much more keen than others to get involved.

Q308 **Kevin Brennan:** Do these pilots require any new regulation for them to be able to go ahead? What is the legal status?

Caroline Dinéage: I do not think so. Victoria may know more about that than I.

Kevin Brennan: Does Victoria know the answer?

Victoria MacCallum: I do not believe that they do, but we can certainly check on that.

Q309 **Kevin Brennan:** Would you be able to let the Committee know in writing what the legal position is and so on and whether any further regulation is required?

I want to ask about one more area. The Government took a decision to go down an independent route and commission just one company to run the pilots—I think it is called Trivandi, the company that is running the pilots—rather than utilising the expertise in the rest of the festival sector. Am I right in saying that that is the company? How was the procurement for running the pilots conducted?

Caroline Dinéage: Victoria will want to come in and fill in some more of the detail, but my understanding is that we have a senior steering board that is made up of Sir Nicholas Hytner and David Ross. It is not a private company and it brings in expertise from a whole range of different groups. There is a particular taskforce that has been established by DCMS to establish how events could be brought back into place, and there is a joint programme board, which they chair—in fact, it is meeting today—and it is not a private company. Then there is the science board, which has an independent chair and they provide the scientific assurance across the programme. There is a whole range of different involvement that is in no way linked to any private individual company.

Q310 **Kevin Brennan:** Victoria, can you tell us about Trivandi, who it is and how its services were procured, and also about Innova, which is the testing business? Am I right in saying that it is involved as well?

Victoria MacCallum: I don't have much more to add than what Caroline has set out about the clear governance structure, the senior steering board that reports into the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, the programme board and then the independent scientific advisory board as well that ultimately decides—



Q311 **Kevin Brennan:** I am not asking about that. I am asking about the events management company that has been commissioned to run the pilots. Am I wrong in saying that that has happened and that Trivandi is the name of the company?

Victoria MacCallum: I would have to check the details. Clearly, this is a very fast-moving situation and there are a number of different pilots that are being discussed and will be announced in the next week. I would not want to say definitively what the governance and operational structure is of all the 10 to 15 pilots right now, because I do not have that level of information to hand at the moment.

Kevin Brennan: I am going to express surprise, in front of the Committee, that you are not aware of who has been commissioned to run these pilots. That is certainly the briefing that we have been given as a Committee and I would have thought that briefing would be available to Ministers and senior civil servants, but perhaps you could check after the hearing. I will hand back to you, Chair.

Q312 **Chair:** Thank you, Kevin.

Caroline, you just referenced the Culture Recovery Fund and the festivals receiving money from it. Precisely how many festivals did receive money from it?

Caroline Dinénage: Do you have that, Victoria?

Victoria MacCallum: Yes. A total of 81 festivals applied for CRF funding and of those 51 were successful. In the festival supply chain, 90 organisations applied for funding. Of those 90, 81 were successful, so a total of over £25 million has been given to festivals and their supply chains in the—

Q313 **Chair:** Thank you. The question was about festivals, not specifically about the festival supply chain. £8 million has gone to festivals, has it not?

Caroline Dinénage: £8.1 million has gone to the 51 successful festivals. About 63% of those successful festivals have said that that is the money that will enable them to put on events this summer.

Q314 **Chair:** Yes, I remember that particular figure. It is interesting because there were 15 in London, 10 in the Midlands, 13 in the north, five in the south-west and eight in the south-east. By my calculation, 5% of all festivals received funds and 0.5% of the first tranche of the Culture Recovery Fund went to festivals.

I point that out because we have Ministers in front of us often—it is mostly you, Caroline, unfortunately for you—and we have Ministers in the Chamber, and every single time we have, “The Culture Recovery Fund this, the Culture Recovery Fund that”. I know that it was a major undertaking and so on, but it is not a catch-all. It does not mean that everything is in any way rosy in the garden. Those figures show that,



first, many festivals did not even know they could apply—we know that for a fact—and secondly, of those that did apply, 62% got the money, and they got a tiny amount of money compared to many other institutions.

Just to put that into context, what festivals received is one twelfth of what the National Trust received, so this is a sector in dire straits. I don't quite get what you say in terms this somehow facilitating the festival season as we go forward, Caroline.

Caroline Dinénage: You are right to point out the fact that we can only give money to organisations that bid for it. Before Christmas, I met with all the representatives of the festivals across the Isle of Wight, with my colleague Bob Seely, about their situation. At that point only two festivals on the Isle of Wight had bid for any form of support whatsoever. One of them had been successful and one of them had not been successful. That was the first round of the Culture Recovery Fund.

We have had a second round since then and the results of that will be published soon, and then a further £300 million was announced as part of the recent Budget. What I would say is that we can only pay out money from the Culture Recovery Fund to those that bid for it, and those that applied had quite a good success rate in CRF1.

Q315 **Chair:** Do you think that the messaging was wrong around the Culture Recovery Fund, because in effect these bodies did not know that they should be able to apply for it? I cannot believe that only around 5% of festivals thought they would be able to claim from the Culture Recovery Fund. Is there a breakdown there? A lot of that money is basically going to the bigger institutions, the landmark ones—the buildings—whereas something like this, which seeps down into our very culture across the whole country, with 975 events, they have missed out.

Caroline Dinénage: I think the spread of where the money went and the scale of that money is quite strong. I have a list here in front of me. Small festivals like the one I mentioned on the Isle of Wight, the Rhythmtree Festival, they had £138,000. The Fairport Convention do Cropredy, which I have been to—I don't know whether you have heard of Cropredy.

Q316 **Chair:** It was a civil war battle—that is where I know it from. I can remember Fairport Convention during that dreadful period, with the resurfacing of folk in the '70s.

Caroline Dinénage: I saw Madness at the Fairport Convention festival, Chair. They were very good. Cropredy got £200,000.

Q317 **Chair:** My point is simple. Those festivals may have known about it—I know that Bob Seely is a very active MP, because I spoke to him about the Isle of Wight Festival when this process was going through—but so many other people did not know. They did not think it was for them, and that is because of the communications from the DCMS.



Caroline Dinéage: I am sorry that you feel that way. Bearing in mind that we put together an enormous package of financial support at pace and at scale, I think we busted a gut to communicate that it was available to a whole range of sectors. Probably in the early stages a lot of the festival organisations, and a number of other cultural groups, organisations and companies, had been insulated quite a lot by the very large economic package that the Government have put in place on a whole range of other fronts—everything from the furlough scheme through to the business support grants and the loans. Of course, people had to have exhausted all of those before they could apply to the CRF, so that may have something to do with it. As I say, that is why we did hold back an element of £400,000 from the first round of the CRF to be in a position to support those that bid in round 2 if we needed to, which I am very pleased we did.

Chair: We will be interested to see whether or not more than 0.5% of that £400 million goes to the festival sector and whether or not more than 5% of festivals apply this time. That will be very interesting indeed.

Q318 **Giles Watling:** Before I go on to my main question, I would like to follow on from what the Chair was just saying. It is fascinating that the bigger organisations that have the staff—the people—and have been running and have financial backing are clearly in a better position to apply for whatever there is going from the Culture Recovery Fund, so the smaller ones might fall through the gaps. On the back of what the Chair was asking, what sort of communication was in place for those smaller venues to help them? Because they might not know. They need the communication. How did we reach out beyond, for instance, the Arts Council and so forth?

Caroline Dinéage: I will come to Victoria in a minute. Obviously, we did a massive amount of PR from DCMS, flexing every single opportunity we could. I did a number of interviews across regional media. My boss, the Secretary of State, did a lot of national media and then we worked collaboratively with MPs from across the country. They were given all the information they needed to be able to advertise and publicise this in their local areas.

I have the list in front of me, Giles, and it just does not bear out that the money has gone to all the big festivals. There are a lot of festivals on this list, alongside the big household names, that—forgive me if they are your local ones—I have never heard of. I am just going to rattle through a few: the Truck Festival in Oxfordshire; the End of the Road Festival in Wiltshire; the Nozstock Festival in Herefordshire; the Deer Shed Festival in North Yorkshire; the Lost Village Festival in Lincolnshire and Derbyshire. There we go, just to name a few.

Q319 **Giles Watling:** You have made your point. What I was talking about there was the actual technical stuff—they needed help to fill out forms. They needed to know where to go.



Caroline Dinenge: I would say that the level and scale of festivals that have bid does not bear that out. The Rhythmtree Festival in the Isle of Wight is not a big global event.

Q320 **Giles Watling:** I take your point. The Chair mentioned insurance earlier, which of course is vital. If you are smaller and independent, you do not necessarily have the necessary financial backing, because typically a festival ends up paying—I think it was quoted—some 40% of total costs some three weeks before the event happens. That is a massive risk for some people to take without guaranteed insurance. Now that we have a date for lifting restrictions in sight, surely the case for Government-backed insurance for live events is now stronger than ever.

Caroline Dinenge: Of course we are aware of the challenge of securing indemnity for live events. Victoria and her team and myself have been working very closely with all the sectors to understand what those challenges are. We said from day one that the bar for considering Government intervention is really high—I suppose particularly in the light of some of the recent announcements that we have put in place that have massively extended the financial support, such as the extension to the furlough scheme and the local business support scheme. I am aware of the fact that a lot of festivals would love to see this put in place.

It does lie with the Treasury and it is not off the table. It is something that the Treasury is considering at the moment. What you do have to bear in mind is that it would be very difficult to do this for festivals alone. If we were to put in place a package like this, there would be huge demand for it to be put in place for all other types of big live events, everything from sporting to business events to country shows to museums. The difficulty of doing that is encapsulated by the fact that no other country in the world has so far been able to put in place a large-scale insurance policy. There are a few countries that have put them in place, but they are tiny. The only one that has attempted it is Germany, €2.5 billion, and they have just stalled it.

Q321 **Giles Watling:** The one piece of experience that I do have in this realm is as a theatrical producer, and the plea I would make is that the run-up time is enormous and very long. You have to start planning very early and you start spending money months in advance, on occasion. Without some sort of insurance in these current tricky circumstances, with the health problems, you need some sort of backing and some sort of guarantee, and I think now is almost too late.

Caroline Dinenge: I totally understand that and I know that time is not on our side with this. What I would say is that if you look at the list of measures that the sector were asking the Government for towards the autumn of last year every single one has been put in place, bar this indemnity scheme, and everything we have been trying to do is trying to build their confidence in the ability to be able to move forward. The road map with the indicative “no earlier” dates is what they asked for. The Events Research Programme, to try to get the confidence for large-scale



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events to resume, is what they asked for. All the stuff we have been doing is all about trying to build that certainty. That is why I am sure so many of the big names have said that they are planning to go ahead this year. You will have noticed yesterday that Glastonbury announced that it has applied for a licence to run a two-day event in September, which shows that there is some level of confidence in the sector.

Q322 Giles Watling: Let's hope it can go ahead. I would just like to ask about a differential. A film and television reinsurance scheme has been introduced; why were live events treated differently?

Caroline Dinéage: Quite simply, Giles, for the reason that there are no live audiences in high-end film and TV production and that is where the risk is: moving large numbers of people around the country. Also because of the fact that when you are talking about live events, if there was suddenly an uptick in public health risks—as there has been in mainland Europe over the last few weeks—you are suddenly looking at a large number of events that would all be claiming on their insurance at exactly the same time, whereas the film and TV insurance indemnity scheme was over the course of a year and would kick in as and when it was required. I think Victoria has her hand up there.

Q323 Giles Watling: Yes—Victoria?

Victoria MacCallum: I feel like a Brownie guide. To come back to your earlier point about smaller festivals, just to reassure you that the Association of Independent Festivals is one of the key stakeholders that my team and I deal with in this area. They are a very effective way into some of those much smaller organisations. We are at the moment working out how we design the £300 million top-up to the Culture Recovery Fund that was announced at Budget and how we distribute that. We can certainly look at redoubling our efforts to reach out to that group of smaller festivals to make sure that they are fully aware of it.

On the differences between film, TV and live-events insurance, as the Minister said, it is quite a different prospect insuring live events with a live audience compared with film and TV, which is a much more controlled setting with much smaller numbers of people working on production sets. Of course, production has never been banned under coronavirus restrictions, so it is quite a different prospect.

Q324 Giles Watling: Thank you for that. Just one more question, if I may. I think it was on 9 February that the Chair urged you, Caroline, to meet Treasury Ministers to share learnings about how festivals could run safely. Have you done so?

Caroline Dinéage: I have been speaking with Treasury Ministers all the way along, Giles. Yes, my team have been feeding all our information into the Treasury. It has everything right now.

Giles Watling: Thank you very much. Back to you, Chair.



Q325 **John Nicolson:** Thank you for joining us, Minister. We hear a lot from people in the sectors affected and we get an incredibly heavy postbag. A recurring theme that we hear is that lack of support from the Government has been particularly acute for folk who are on short-term contracts, especially those 3 million excluded that we hear about all the time. What are you going to do to help them—all the freelancers who are going to see another year without any income?

Caroline Dinéage: Thank you, John. Apologies, I forgot to unmute myself there for a second. I think you make a very good point. We know that the festival industry, virtually more than anyone, relies on such a strong and talented cast of freelance workers, particularly in the construction and the technology around setting up a successful festival. Of course I was very pleased when the Chancellor announced in the Budget an extension to the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme—not only extending it until further on in the year, but expanding who was eligible, so people who only became registered as self-employed in the year 2019-20 are now eligible. It is now about an extra 600,000 people, which I think will make an enormous difference.

More broadly of course we have been working with Arts Council England to make sure that a lot of its packages are available for individuals to bid for. There is a whole range of different schemes that ACE are funding. It has been putting money into some of the support schemes that different individual organisations are running but, more broadly, it also has pots that people can bid into as individuals. Quite a lot of the Arts Council money—I will find the statistic in a minute—has gone to supporting organisations that support freelancers. It has gone through the supply chain.

I have been quite pleased with the amount of supply chain companies that have been successful with the Culture Recovery Fund so far, but I am confident that many more of them have bid into Culture Recovery round 2 and we will be making an announcement quite shortly on the outcome of that. I am hopeful that a large number of them will be supported through that as well.

Q326 **John Nicolson:** You sound very confident but the problem is the people who work in the field are much less confident. Let me quote Torsten Bell, chief executive of the Resolution Foundation: "The big picture is when it comes to unemployment the more difficult part of this crisis"—the peak—"is ahead of us rather than behind us." The Creative Industries Federation has warned of a "cultural catastrophe", with 409,000 jobs—that is one in five creative jobs—expected to be lost.

Caroline Dinéage: All I would say is that every single person that is uncertain about their future, every single person that has had difficulty over the last year with their job, I feel so desperately sad for them, because these are people who are immensely talented. These are people who have fantastic skills and, above all, these are people who are very



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passionate about what they do and we are passionate about them being able to continue to do it.

The best thing that we can do to support them is to get back the sectors that they love and they are so brilliant at, get them back up to full steam and get them back up and running. That is why we have invested so much money to protect our cultural organisations and establishments and those jobs, so that they are there when it is safe, from a public health perspective, to get up and running again and we can do so at the earliest opportunity.

Q327 **John Nicolson:** All that passion does not pay the bills, Minister, and according to—

Caroline Dinenage: No, but £1.57 billion-worth of funding does pay the bills.

Q328 **John Nicolson:** According to Equity, over 40% of its members have not received any help from the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme. Why do you think that is?

Caroline Dinenage: As you know, the scheme is run by the Treasury and up until the most recent Budget announcement it did not apply to those that had become recently self-employed. More broadly, it does not apply to those who earn less than half of their income through their self-employment. Those have been the two issues. The first of those two issues is now tackled by the fact that the Chancellor has announced that he is going to extend it to those who are more recently self-employed, so that is an extra 600,000 people who are now going to be scooped up and supported through the next two steps—through steps 4 and 5—of the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme.

The scale of our support for the self-employed is I think probably more than anywhere else in the world. It is well over £300 million and there are very few other countries in the world that have been able to put that level of support in place.

Q329 **John Nicolson:** Let me touch briefly, if I may, on a question that has been raised a few times before, which is why so few festivals applied in the first round of the recovery fund. Do you think there is an argument for reducing the minimum amount to accommodate some of the smaller operators with smaller grants that would maybe be transformational for them but are currently not factored in?

Caroline Dinenage: I think the lower amounts are quite small but that is something we have under review. Do you know more about this, Vicky?

Victoria MacCallum: As you say, there is an example of La Linea Festival in London, which received £68,000, and the Nozstock Festival in Herefordshire, which received £70,000, so I think we are confident those small amounts are getting through to those—



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Q330 **John Nicolson:** I am talking about much smaller than that. From the postbag, Minister, some festivals are saying that—it is a lot of money by anybody’s standards—grants of £10,000 or £20,000 could be transformational and could save them. We are not talking about £60,000, £70,000, £80,000, but much smaller grants that could perhaps save a small number of jobs, which of course has a huge knock-on effect for families and local communities.

Caroline Dinénage: Yes. Those are the discretionary business grants that the Government have been funding right the way through the whole of this pandemic. They put an additional £425 million into the discretionary business grant funding, on top of the £1.6 billion that has already been allocated. I am very keen that local authorities look at supporting our sectors in particular—things like those small festivals—through that kind of opportunity.

Q331 **John Nicolson:** Finally, the Prime Minister was asked yesterday by the BBC’s political editor what the greatest mistake he had made was in the handling of the Covid crisis. Looking back, what do you think is the single greatest mistake that your Department has made with regard to helping people in the arts sector?

Caroline Dinénage: John, it is so difficult to be drawn on that sort of question, particularly now. We are still right in the middle of all this and I am sure, once we get to the end, that we will have a chance to look back and see where we would have done things differently.

Q332 **John Nicolson:** When you lie in bed at night do you worry about the sector? Because I think all of us sit and think about mistakes we have made. I am not asking you for a big long list, just what is the top thing, that when you think about it you think, “I wish I had done that differently. I might have helped people more”?

Caroline Dinénage: The thing is that a mistake implies that, given the information you had at the time, you would have chosen differently. The problem is that at every stage of this pandemic there has been so much unpredictability, so much uncertainty that quite a lot of the decisions we have made we may have made in a slightly different way with the benefit of hindsight, although in many senses I think we have acted in a very responsible way. It would have been very easy to have handed out all the Culture Recovery Fund money before Christmas but we kept back that second tranche in the expectation that there could potentially be a second peak of the virus, which of course there was.

John Nicolson: Basically you cannot think of anything.

Caroline Dinénage: If I had to pinpoint one thing, which I still don’t know the answer to, it would be that I know there are some freelancers who have fallen through the gaps. I have spoken to people for whom, through absolutely no fault of their own—maybe because they took a career break for a couple of years and then have recently come back into work; maybe because their earnings from their freelance employment



were quite low but their partner had high earnings—the amount of Government support that was available wasn't as much as they would have wanted or needed. All these things are very hard to hear. Even now I don't have a solution for that. If there was a solution to be found I know the Treasury would have put one in place, but those are the people I worry about.

John Nicolson: Minister, I am not really hearing about lots of freelancers who have fallen through the cracks because their partners were earning so much, but anyway, thank you. Back to the Chair.

Q333 **Alex Davies-Jones:** Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Victoria, for joining us this morning. We got over 36,000 responses to our survey about what festivalgoers have missed the most about festivals. The majority of them, it will be no surprise, miss the atmosphere and socialising with many, highlighting how the positive impact of the festivals had helped their mental health. Have the Government struck the right balance, do you think, between the risk of live events and their economic and social benefits?

Caroline Dinenage: Thanks, Alex. It is lovely to see you. I completely understand that and that is very much our motivation. We understand that there is a huge economic benefit to getting our festivals up and running but, above and beyond that, it is just the fun that all of us had been missing so desperately from our lives last year. It is the sense of wellbeing and community, bringing everybody together from all across the country to enjoy the stuff that we all love, sharing our favourite music, bands and experiences. Yes, we completely understand, which is why we are so desperate to try to support the sector to come back as soon as possible. That is why we are throwing everything at things like this pilot scheme in order to try to make it possible.

Q334 **Alex Davies-Jones:** On the pilot scheme, some of the festival goers have told us that they are going to be too nervous about large gatherings when festivals do return. When the pilots are being considered, will the safe return of all audiences, including those with disabilities, be considered?

Caroline Dinenage: Yes, that is a good point. We want to reflect on issues of diversity and inclusion and equality. That is why these pilots cover a range of age groups, a range of ethnicities, a range of people from all different backgrounds and they are inclusive, and they cover things like geographic location as well. We want to make sure that they are as broad and as inclusive as possible.

Q335 **Alex Davies-Jones:** Is it possible you could send the Committee the plan for the pilot so we can see in black and white exactly what is proposed?

Caroline Dinenage: Yes, we can send you the terms of reference. Can we, Victoria? What do we have available?



Victoria MacCallum: We can send the terms of reference and the list of pilots should be coming out in the next week, so we can certainly make sure you have that as well.

Caroline Dinelage: We will send you everything we have, Alex.

Q336 **Alex Davies-Jones:** We would be very grateful to have them. One of the bands who responded to our inquiry told us: "We rely on the festival scene to get our music to new audiences". What long-term support will DCMS provide to the creative industries to restore the talent pipeline that has been lost as a result of this whole year that we have lost?

Caroline Dinelage: I am so sorry, Alex, you cut out halfway through that. Could you just repeat it, sorry?

Alex Davies-Jones: One of the things that musicians have told us is that festivals provide them with the opportunity to reach new audiences that they maybe would not get their music to in other circumstances. What plans does the Government have to support this new talent pipeline to ensure that it doesn't get lost?

Caroline Dinelage: That is a very interesting question. You are right: festivals are a brilliant opportunity for new bands to break through and to reach an audience that have never seen or heard of them before. Some of the new band stages at some of the festivals are a brilliant opportunity to find the next big favourite that you are going to be into. That is very important. There is a lot of support through a whole range of organisations to invest in new talent. We want to do everything we can to support that.

Q337 **Alex Davies-Jones:** My colleague John Nicolson just touched on the 3 million people who have been excluded thus far from any of the support packages and the concern regarding freelancers and those wanting to enter the industry. One of the big concerns that I have, which a lot of young people are telling me about, is that they were considering a career in music and festivals and the events sector, but because of the current situation they now see that as an unstable route to employment and they are reconsidering and are potentially leaving the industry. We are losing that pipeline of talent coming into the industry, but we are also losing the wealth of experience from people who have just given up and taken jobs as supermarket delivery drivers instead. What plans do you have to address this talent drain in the industry?

Caroline Dinelage: That is a very good point. I meet on a regular basis—on a weekly basis—with representatives from right across our sectors and right across the country in a whole different range of events and entertainment genres. One of the questions I ask quite a lot is: what will happen to talented individuals? At the end of the day, bricks and mortar buildings are one thing, but they are nothing without the talent that brings them to life. I am very keen to look at what we can do to make sure that we support that talent to continue into the future. A lot of people say to me that they feel that once the sector is back, the talent



will come back, but we do not want to take any chances, so I am very keen to look at every way we can support people to make sure that their talent is nurtured and that they feel confident that this is a profession for them.

Q338 Alex Davies-Jones: How are you doing that? Sorry to press you on that, but what schemes are in place or what support is available for these people?

Caroline Dinénage: At the moment it has all been about just trying to get through the pandemic and out the other side. But I am very conscious of this, and I would be very keen if the Committee has thoughts on how we can protect the talent in this particular aspect of the festivals industry, but also more broadly—we would be very keen to hear it. Victoria is now waving.

Victoria MacCallum: Yes, thank you. I would also point to the work that we are doing to make the Apprenticeship Levy more effective for the creative industries. We have known for some time that the levy is not as effective as it could be for the CIs. We have been working with our colleagues in the Department for Education on some pilots and other work to try to make that levy fit for the future and help to develop that pipeline of talent that you speak about, so that in 10 or 20 years' time the UK creative industries are as strong as they can be.

Caroline Dinénage: That is a very good point, Victoria. I forgot to add that Arts Council England has a number of different funds that individuals can bid into if they have a certain project that they want to work on or a certain theme of work that they want to follow. There are individual pots of cash from the Arts Council that people can look at. I am very keen on anything like this that supports that talent pipeline.

Alex Davies-Jones: One of the things that could have supported them is being included in some of the support packages that were available. I know John has already pressed you, but if you could speak to the Treasury—if there is any way they could be included in some support packages—that would be huge for the sector. Thank you, Chair. No more questions from me.

Q339 Steve Brine: Long time no see, Caroline. I will touch on the subject of drugs and festivals and drug-related deaths at festivals this summer. We heard some very compelling evidence from The Loop. I am sure you know The Loop—it is a drug-testing facility and it operates at some festivals, including Boomtown, which you are aware of and happens to be in my constituency. We heard concerns from them that the drugs market, people's behaviour and consolidation of the festival season—and I guess reduced tolerance, given that there has been such a drop in social activity—will increase the number of drug-related deaths at festivals this year, when they happen. I am keen to get a view from the Government on what we are doing to mitigate those risks.



Caroline Dinéage: Yes, thank you, Steve. I heard that evidence and I understand what they are saying. They feel that people's desire to let their hair down is probably more profound now than ever because of being cooped up for the last year. Equally, people's tolerance for any kind of substance is obviously going to be in question. That is also going to be an issue. I have looked at this quite a lot. I am aware that at a festival quite near my constituency, the Mutiny Festival in Portsmouth, we had two deaths a couple of years ago. My big concern is that this form of testing that is being suggested is rendered useless by combining one substance with another. Virtually all deaths, including, I think, those that took place at the Munity Festival, are a combination of substances, usually MDMA or ecstasy with either alcohol or sometimes things like ketamine or cocaine. You cannot possibly field test how that will react in a young person's body. That is what I am worried about.

I am also worried about how an illegal illicit drug being deemed as safe will impact on people's regard for it. The Government's position on this is very clear; no illicit drug can be assumed to be safe. I am very worried about the implications for young people's attitudes if someone is saying that this drug is safe and about the peer pressure that might be put on them by a supposed safe drug when we actually do not know. Everybody's body is different and we literally do not know what the impact on that individual person will be. Those are, frankly, my concerns.

Q340 **Steve Brine:** How are we going to consider the drug safety bit during the pilots that we are talking about? Is that part of the piece?

Caroline Dinéage: What do you mean, Steve?

Steve Brine: The event pilots that you have been talking about with colleagues.

Caroline Dinéage: How do we consider the drug aspect to it?

Steve Brine: Or are we? If we are not, we are not.

Caroline Dinéage: No, that is not being considered. At the moment the pilots that are kicking off in the next month that we have announced are things like the World Snooker Championship at the Crucible, which I am not sure is necessarily a haven for people taking these drugs, but I am happy to be corrected.

Steve Brine: I am guessing it is not an MDMA-rife marketplace.

Caroline Dinéage: No, that was my thought.

Q341 **Steve Brine:** That would be a different snooker tournament altogether.

Switzerland has identified the highest strength MDMA ever in circulation. We have these issues about tolerance. We have people, as you rightly said, wanting to have it larger than ever this year, given that it is time to kick back, if they can. We heard in our evidence there have been no drug-related fatalities at festivals that offer the drug-safety testing. I



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have seen The Loop in operation. It is quite something. Is it your view that drug-safety testing should be more readily available at festivals? Should it, for instance, be a requirement that the safety advisory groups consider?

Caroline Dinenage: The Government's view is, Steve, that no illicit drug can be assumed to be safe. I would be very careful about that.

Q342 **Steve Brine:** The legal framework then is a barrier to its work. You may well remember Nick Hurd, when he was a Minister at the Home Office, answering questions about this. The Loop walks a very, very fine line, but we had evidence from senior police officers who joined the panel with them. I wonder what DCMS can do to help with that fine line, if indeed it has any desire to do so.

Caroline Dinenage: This is something we would have to look at. Of course any policing arrangements around festivals are very much an operational matter for their chief constables. You are right with regard to the legality of all this, the possession or supply of any controlled drug without a licence is a criminal offence, so anyone wants to take part in this sort of activity would need to get a licence, and I believe that would probably have to be from the Home Office.

Q343 **Steve Brine:** Yes. To give you an example, in New Zealand there is the Drug and Substance Checking Legislation Bill, which will mean, bluntly, that drug-testing services will be able to legally handle controlled drugs for the purposes of testing a substance's composition or disposing of a sample. It is still illegal for members of the public to possess controlled drugs and unapproved substances, but the Bill does what I just said to regulate drug-checking services over the longer term, basically. Are there any conversations that you are aware of between your Department and the Home Office in support of any legislation of that hue in Westminster?

Caroline Dinenage: No, Steve. I am aware of the New Zealand Government's time-limited legislation, as I understand it. But there have been no conversations between my Department and the Home Office that I am aware of to discuss anything along the same lines.

Q344 **Steve Brine:** Would you be interested in instigating such a conversation? I know there are always so many different competing things on a Minister's desk, but is that something you have an interest in and would like to see happen?

Caroline Dinenage: To be honest with you, Steve, for the reasons I have already articulated—the dangers of suggesting that any kind of illicit drug is in any way safe and the very real health risks of the combination with other substances—I would be very wary of it. But I would always look with interest at the evidence that comes out of other countries as they take these steps. I know that Holland has done something similar in recent years as well.

Q345 **Steve Brine:** What about the evidence that comes out of this country?



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We know that there have been no drug-related fatalities at festivals where The Loop operates. It is not just evidence from other countries, it is evidence from this country. Surely we have to accept the world as it is, not as we would like it to be. The world as it is means that young people—and even old people like us—are taking substances at festivals. It was fascinating talking to The Loop about the way that it has other conversations about other health matters. If you heard the evidence, you will have heard it say this. It has conversations about many other health matters at that time, with many who have not interacted with health services, primary care services or secondary care services in forever. It seems to me that if there is a will in Government to do this, then there could be a way. Whether it will come from the Home Office, I am not so sure, but could it come from your Department? It sounds like you are not sure that there is an appetite for that.

Caroline Dinénage: I have not met them myself. I would be interested to learn more about their work and to hear about their evidence, but I do have the reservations that I have already articulated.

Steve Brine: I know they will be listening to this and I know that they will take that as a challenge, so I would check your mail. Thank you very much, Chair.

Q346 **Chair:** Thank you, Steve. To bore down into one comment you made there, do you think that initiatives such as The Loop effectively send a message that drugs are safe—yes or no?

Caroline Dinénage: My concern is that drugs are illegal. No illicit drug can be assumed to be safe, and that is my concern.

Chair: Is that a yes, then?

Caroline Dinénage: A yes that no illicit drug can be assumed to be safe, yes.

Chair: The question is whether initiatives such as The Loop send a message that drugs could be safe.

Caroline Dinénage: I would not say that. To be honest, I have not done enough research or investigation into their work. I have never met them.

Q347 **Chair:** You have obviously formed an opinion. You said you think this basically sends a message about whether it is safe or not. If you think it sends a message that it is safe, surely they should be closed down, should they not?

Caroline Dinénage: Sorry, you broke up then, Chair. I did not hear the first part of that question.

Chair: Do not worry; it is fine. My internet is not very good, which is ironic for the Chair of the Digital Committee. Clive Efford.

Q348 **Clive Efford:** Thank you, Chair.

Minister, I will move on to the environmental impact of festivals. Do they



need to improve their performance in terms of their environmental impact?

Caroline Dinenage: Thanks, Clive. Historically festivals have not had a great reputation. The consumption of things like single-use plastic and litter have been significant problems. We have heard evidence given to your Committee about the environmental impact of the travelling to and fro. I have to say that I feel there have been enormous strides forward on this in recent years. I think 2019 was quite a watershed moment. I know that there was a 50% reduction target by 2025 and I saw a lot of good activity happening in 2019. There was much-improved recycling, some cases of single-use-plastic-free and some companies including the transport price in their ticket.

There was a brilliant company I met called NiftyBins that were doing recycling at some of the big major events like Download and Latitude and they were reducing the amount of litter by about 60% in some of the fields that were previously the worst. They do it by a combination of different recycling bins in different colours with different shapes, working on the principle that once people have had a couple of drinks they may not necessarily be reading the signage effectively, so they use colours and shapes to help. There were also some very imaginative things about promoting the message as well, alongside competitions and getting people to sign pledges. I think there has been a lot of positive work going on and I would love to see it continuing.

Q349 **Clive Efford:** Carbon emissions, waste and water use have risen despite all those good measures over the last five years. That is largely driven by a bigger audience and more attendees. We had evidence from Professor Carly McLachlan from the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research. She said to us that a clear policy—a regulatory framework—is needed. Is there a role for Government in setting that framework and are you having discussions with colleagues in other Departments to that effect?

Caroline Dinenage: I think it is very important that the festival sector stays in tune with what is happening across the rest of the country. More broadly, the Environment Bill has introduced powers to do things like impose charges on single-use plastic items and to make sure that there are consistent recycling services for households across England. We have already done things like banning microbeads and charging for single-use plastic carrier bags. Reflecting that in the activity of festivals, I noticed a couple of years ago at one that is local to me, Victorious, there was money back on taking back your plastic cups. All those sorts of things make a massive difference.

Q350 **Clive Efford:** Your view is that enough is being done and we should just leave it to the festival industry—that there is no role for Government in creating a regulatory framework.

Caroline Dinenage: I think the industry seems to be behind this. It is such a shame: we saw massive progress in 2019, but because 2020 did



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not happen we did not see how that progress continued. That is something I am very keen to keep a watchful eye on. There are some very interesting organisations. There is one called Julie's Bicycle, an environmental group that are helping to provide information and studying festivals and supporting them. There is a whole lot going on out there. I am not sure it necessarily needs Government regulation to make it better. I know Live Nation has produced its own sustainability framework. It is something we will keep an eye on, but there is great progress being made already, and I know there is a huge will within the sector to continue in this vein.

Q351 Clive Efford: What would you say about local authorities that have venues within their boundaries and are putting in place stricter measures to control the environmental impact of festivals? Would you support that?

Caroline Dinenage: Yes. It is very important that local authorities make sure that they include strict environmental measures within their licensing framework. That is a very important way of moving this forward.

Q352 Clive Efford: Do you fear that the local authorities that shoulder that responsibility are undermined in other areas, where perhaps that has not been implied as strictly, and that those in the industry that are taking a looser approach to adopting environmental measures—let's put it that way—will take their business elsewhere, so we will have a levelling down rather than a levelling up in the absence of a regulatory framework?

Caroline Dinenage: As I say, we will keep it under review, Clive. I do not see any evidence of that at the moment. It is very much the sense of direction from the Government. We do have one of the world-leading plans for this—our Resources and Waste Strategy is very forward leaning. Even later on this year we are going to be consulting on things like return schemes for drinks containers and things like that—very forward-thinking things. I know a lot of festivals have been really leaning into that as well. I do not see it as a disincentive; I see it as something that we all believe in and that we all want to move forward with.

Q353 Clive Efford: Professor McLachlan also said that there should be an independent body to oversee festivals' environmental initiatives and hold them to account for emission reductions. Is that something that DCMS want to facilitate?

Caroline Dinenage: I would look at the evidence, Clive. I am always very keen on encouraging organisations to come together to do stuff of their own accord, rather than because they are being forced to or monitored by the Government.

Q354 Clive Efford: Do you think a laissez-faire approach has had an impact on the environment in other areas?

Caroline Dinenage: I prefer to call it trusting people, rather than a laissez-faire approach. That is how I would prefer to describe it.



Q355 **Clive Efford:** We always seem to get to France when we ask questions. Anyhow, let me move on to ask about secondary ticketing. Do secondary ticketing platforms have any impact on restrictions that may be imposed when festivals and other events open up? Does the potential to undermine measures that may be put in place for safety cause the Department any concern? Do you think that is an area that should be looked at before tickets are allowed on to secondary platforms?

Caroline Dinéage: What do you mean by that, Clive? Sorry, I know that this has been an issue, but I also know that the festival sector has taken such enormous strides to protect the integrity of their ticket sales.

Q356 **Clive Efford:** When tickets become available online—and there are some already on sale for events that we do not know will go ahead—we do not know what the measures will be at that time. If they are already on sale on secondary platforms or being offered and people are being put in queues by places like Ticketmaster for festivals in September, for example, is there a potential that the sale of tickets on secondary ticketing platforms could undermine any measures that have been put in place, any checks that have been put in place at the primary sale of the ticket? This is just a hypothetical question. I just wonder if it is something the Government are looking into.

Caroline Dinéage: I do not know about that. What I would say is that the Competition and Markets Authority monitor this very closely and it is monitoring all issues particularly concerning the pandemic—things around reported refunds and cancellations that have come about as a result of the online secondary ticketing market. That is something it is looking very closely at. Is that what you had in mind?

Q357 **Clive Efford:** I wonder if that is an area that we should be looking at as we go forward. If we are going to be putting checks in place when tickets are sold—and that is a possibility—how does that operate within the secondary ticketing market?

Caroline Dinéage: Yes. I know that the CMA has very clearly said that if any kind of consumer law has been breached, it will consider what action is necessary to be taken. It has obviously taken quite a lot of action in the past over broader ticketing-market issues.

Q358 **Clive Efford:** We have relied on the primary ticketing market to minimise the access that people using bots have to buy tickets and to minimise touting and things like that. Do you think in this current financial situation there is going to be an incentive for people to just get the tickets out there and be a bit lax about who is buying them?

Caroline Dinéage: Obviously everyone is keen to snap up tickets for events that are happening later this summer and I know quite a lot of the festivals are pretty much on the verge of being sold out already.

Q359 **Clive Efford:** Yes. But what often happens, as you know, is in that rush the illicit end of the industry gets in there using these bot nets and



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scoops up tickets at the expense of the genuine fan. Are you concerned that a blind eye will be turned to that and that it will get worse because people need to get the cash in?

Caroline Dinenage: No. Well, I do not know. Obviously, it is something we will keep a close eye on. I know there is a very strong code of practice, something called STAR, which is advocating for a much more responsible ticketing market. We encourage all secondary ticketing markets to sign up to that code of practice, because it gives the consumer much more protection. It is a good point, Clive, and it is something we will definitely keep an eye on.

Q360 **Clive Efford:** Google continued to promote secondary sites in breach of its own ad guidelines. Is that something the Department should be tackling?

Caroline Dinenage: I know the Committee has been concerned about that before. We are having an online advertising review in my Department—as you know, I also sit with the digital hat on. We are consulting in the latter part of this year on an online advertising review. We did a call for evidence last year to look at the initial scope. It will include looking at the role of advertising on digital platforms like Google to look at what more we can do to better protect people online.

Q361 **Clive Efford:** There are people who are struggling to get refunds from the secondary ticketing platforms for festivals and events that did not go ahead. Given that we do not know yet that things are going to go ahead this summer, is it irresponsible of the festival industry to be selling tickets for events in the summer?

Caroline Dinenage: I am in two minds about this, because in actual fact for festival organisers to know that there are grounds for local support, that people want to buy those tickets and have confidence in the market, that gives them the confidence to want to go ahead and organise the event. There are probably two ways of looking at that.

Q362 **Clive Efford:** Many people out there are struggling to get refunds for things that did not go ahead. Is it fair to put more customers in that position?

Caroline Dinenage: Obviously no one is forcing the consumer to buy more tickets. It is a matter for them as to whether that is something they want to do. We would always recommend that they buy tickets from a reputable site, because you are more likely to have the protections in place that you need if things do not go ahead.

Chair: Thank you, Clive. That concludes our session. Thank you to Minister Caroline Dinenage and Victoria MacCallum for your evidence today. That is the third session in three days, so well done, everyone. Thank you.