



# Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP  
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport  
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport  
100 Parliament Street  
London  
SW1A 2BQ

18 May 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

On 20 March I wrote to you expressing concern about the impact of Covid-19 on the UK's cultural institutions and creative industries, as well as on the hundreds of thousands of people, many of them freelance, who work in them or their supply chains.

Sadly, since then, the situation has become even more urgent. Today the DCMS Committee is publishing evidence that lays bare the scale of the challenge facing the cultural sector, particularly theatres. The threat to the UK's cultural landscape is stark, from freelance producers who are "falling through the cracks" of the Government's support for the self-employed and Arts Council England's emergency funding, to world-renowned institutions such as Shakespeare's Globe warning of insolvency and closure. Moreover, the loss of cultural institutions will be felt hardest by those places and communities with the lowest levels of cultural provision from the outset.

It is clear from the Government's plan for emerging from the lockdown that theatres and similar venues are likely to be some of the last to reopen. Yet the economics and practicalities of live performance mean that when this day comes this sector cannot simply be expected to open its doors and return to normal without adequate support and preparation. Social distancing of audiences must take place, yet it will greatly affect revenues.

The evidence welcomes the Government's swift action regarding support for businesses, notably the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, and Arts Council England's £160 million of emergency funding. However, ACE itself acknowledges that demand for this funding has exceeded supply. We have also heard concerns that as it is drawn from existing funding streams, there will be an impact on ACE's future funding capacity.

The Government needs to step up for cultural institutions. Additional financial support needs to be provided to individuals and institutions in the creative industries that are unsuccessful or ineligible for ACE funding. Furthermore, the Government needs to be prepared to support the sector well beyond September 2020.

In the Downing Street briefing on 13 May, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government referred to the work you are doing alongside the sector to guide it through this difficult time and prepare it to reopen. **I would be grateful for an update on what this work has entailed, what assessment the Department has made of the UK theatre industry's immediate and long-term needs, and what additional support the Government intends to make available to support the creative industries over the coming 6-12 months.**

The creative industries are a central pillar of our economy and national identity. The DCMS Committee intends to hold an evidence session on this issue after the House returns from the Whitsun recess. To inform this work, I would be grateful for your response to this letter by Monday 1 June.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Julian Knight', written in a cursive style.

**JULIAN KNIGHT MP**  
**CHAIR, DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT COMMITTEE**