



Department for
Digital, Culture,
Media & Sport

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Julian Knight MP
Chair, DCMS Committee
House of Commons
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Dear Julian,

Thank you for your letter of the 18 May expressing your concern for the UK's cultural institutions and creative industries, and in particular the threat that COVID-19 poses to the nation's theatres.

Since you first wrote to us regarding this issue on the 20 March, my Ministers and officials have been working tirelessly to support the cultural sector and creative industries. My department is in constant contact with cultural sector representatives, including a number from the UK's theatre industry, to collectively consider how best to support those working in the sector during this challenging time. My officials are working closely with Arts Council England and organisations like UK Theatre and One Dance UK to assess the impact and ongoing needs of the sector, through collating data from surveys and working through individual case studies.

Current Support

As you will know, in March, the Government announced an unprecedented package to support businesses and organisations across the country. The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, Self-Employed Income Support Scheme, Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) and business rates relief in particular are providing support to organisations across the arts sector. CBILS for example, will make it easier for SMEs with a turnover of up to £45m to access vital financial support during these difficult times. We have also announced the extension of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, and last month, we announced that the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme would be extended with applications opening in August for a second and final grant. The Government will of course continue to monitor the impact of these funds and the other measures announced for the cultural sector, while my department will continue to engage daily with HMT and other government departments to ensure the needs of the cultural sector are factored into the thinking on the Government's ongoing economic response.



As you noted in your letter, significant support has also been delivered at speed by DCMS arm's-length bodies. Arts Council England having launched a £160m Emergency Funding Package, the National Lottery Heritage Fund launching a £50m Heritage Emergency Fund, and Historic England launching a £2m Emergency Fund. Their support has been much appreciated across the cultural sector.

Work on Reopening

You have asked about the work we are doing alongside the sector to guide it through this difficult time and prepare it to reopen. Since lockdown measures were introduced, we have spoken to over 150 stakeholders to understand deeply the current challenges and we know that there is much more to do to support the sector as we ease the lockdown measures.

We have also worked with Arts Council England to survey the sector, with the data feeding into our planning for reopening. On 11 May, the government published its roadmap to reopening. Reopening businesses and public places is taking place in phases, when the science allows, and when businesses can meet new COVID-19 secure guidelines which relate to their specific activities.

To support the cultural sector as we look to reopen, representatives from the arts, cultural and sporting worlds have joined a new Cultural Renewal taskforce aimed at helping get the country's recreation and leisure sector up and running again. The Entertainment and Events working group is one of the eight working groups that support the Government's Cultural Renewal Taskforce. The working group includes Arts Council England and UK Theatre amongst other organisations from the arts and culture sector. The Entertainment and Events working group is tasked with developing creative solutions, including digital solutions, to drive the return of the sectors whilst maintaining consistency with medical advice and providing key stakeholders with access to ministers. The focus of the working group is to work with the department in developing sector specific guidance in line with the phasing ambitions and public health directions. This guidance will build on existing guidance for COVID-19 secure work settings, and the role of the working group is to provide sector-specific intelligence and expert input into its development. The Cultural Renewal Taskforce's role is to challenge this guidance and look at cross-cutting themes emerging from the eight working groups.

Our current thinking is theatres, libraries and music venues will reopen from 4 July as per the Government's Roadmap, but this is conditional on it being safe to do so. Our task is now to look at what we can open safely, and then support can be focused on those that cannot open for some time.

Future Support

We want as much of our sectors to reopen as rapidly as possible, consistent with public health guidelines, but we accept that this will present significant challenges for some sectors and that in some cases it may not be possible in the short term. We acknowledge this and are working at pace to consider how we support these sectors.

The challenges going forward cannot be underestimated, but DCMS will continue to update you, and your committee, as our assessment of the sector's needs and any further plans to support the sector develop. It is clear that a number of organisations and businesses, from all parts of the UK economy, will face significant challenges as part of the COVID-19 crisis, and unfortunately the cultural sector is no different. I expect that many organisations in the sector will face difficult decisions, and the decisions made now will shape the future of their organisations and our outstanding cultural sector.

Whilst this crisis surely means change, I continue to be committed to working with the sector to consider how we can ultimately emerge better, stronger and more forward looking. I know that finances will be stretched, but I believe that the arts and cultural sectors are vital not only to our economy, but to the wellbeing of the nation. Our cultural organisations and creative individuals make a hugely positive difference to every part of the UK, providing vital education, social impact, reaching out into communities, boosting mental health and benefiting the most vulnerable in our society. They take pride of place within communities and bring people together. As we move forward through this crisis it is vital that we work together to protect the full diversity of our thriving cultural sector. We must embrace this challenge, not just as a test of our resilience, but of our flexibility, ingenuity and capacity for change.

I welcome your continued support of the sector, and your ongoing communication with my department.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Oliver Dowden', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport