



Department for
Digital, Culture,
Media & Sport

Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture,
Media and Sport
4th Floor
100 Parliament Street
London SW1A 2BQ

www.gov.uk/dcms
enquiries@dcms.gov.uk

Julian Knight MP
Chair
DCMS Select Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

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Thank you for your letter dated 23rd September. I wanted to thank you for your work with the Select Committee in gathering evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on the performing arts sector on behalf of the public and Government.

The Government recognises the huge contribution the arts and culture sector makes, not only to the economy and international reputation of the United Kingdom, but also to the wellbeing and enrichment of its people. Those you have spoken to are very much a fundamental part of this, and the outstanding work that organisations are producing is well recognised in the department.

It is for this reason that we have invested an unprecedented £1.57 billion, the biggest ever one-off cash injection, into UK culture to tackle the crisis facing our most loved arts organisations and heritage sites. You will have seen the announcement today, which I am sure you will agree provides a crucial lifeline to our cultural organisations, and I have provided more detail on this below.

That said, I am under no illusion as to the challenges faced by the sector and I know that there are many cultural organisations and professionals who are currently facing difficult and uncertain circumstances. My officials and I will keep engaging with the sector and through our arms-length-bodies to ensure we understand the impact of these measures and continue to find solutions that support this vital sector as the Covid-19 pandemic and its implications continue to evolve.

Taking your points in turn:

(I) Stage 5 date for reopening and (II) Government co-ordination on safety and mass testing

We recognise the importance of giving the sector clarity for when Stage 5 activity can resume and acknowledge the lead-in time required for programming, casting and rehearsing productions. However, we have always said that further reopening would be dependent on the public health context at the time, a context which is currently extremely challenging as we see a steep rise in Covid-19 cases.



We continue, however, to work with the sector on practical action to support the sector. We have convened a Venues Steering Group which includes representatives from leading sector organisations as well as Public Health England and other experts to develop an action plan for maximizing activity under Stage 4 and how we can proceed to Stage 5. This group is considering what additional guidance is needed to manage the infrastructure within venues; such as ventilation, testing and hygiene measures, whilst also considering what additional measures need to be implemented for managing larger audiences and keeping those who work in the venues safe.

One of the other areas that is being considered by the Venues Steering Group is the role that testing could have in bringing back fuller audiences safely. Officials in my Department are working with their counterparts in the Department for Health and Social Care on the Moonshot programme. I want to ensure that cultural events are considered for any events that are confirmed under the programme in the coming months.

We are continuing to work at pace with this group on a range of areas and proposals, whilst ensuring that venues remain Covid secure and continue to implement all the safety mitigations recommended within existing guidance.

I am sure you will have seen that the National Lottery has announced a creative initiative which I hope will mean theatregoers are able to enjoy pantomime this Christmas. As I've said, we must hope for the best but prepare for the worst. Either way, I am absolutely clear that we must keep working with the sector and associated organisations to explore every opportunity within the current constraints, and that is why my Department has worked with Camelot to support this initiative.

(III) Support for venues and (IV) The consequences of failing to act

The £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund was created in response to the challenges faced by the sector. It is there to ensure culture weathers the storm of coronavirus and comes back stronger.

As I have announced today, more than 1,300 arts and cultural organisations will receive a share of £257 million. This is the biggest tranche of funding distributed to date and will save 1,385 theatres, galleries, performance groups, arts organisations, museums and local venues facing the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic, ensuring they have a sustainable future.

This is in addition to previous funding which includes providing £3.36 million in emergency funding to support 136 grassroots music venues (22 Aug), 42 independent cinemas shared £650,000 from the first BFI awards (2 October) and £103 million going to support 445 heritage organisations (9 October).

A portion of the funding has also been held back until later in the year to enable the Government to respond to the emerging public health picture and reflect on how this could best be targeted.

Finally, to complement the Government's own unprecedented investment in the Culture Recovery Fund, ACE have made over £115m of funding available for individuals, including freelancers, to apply to.

All of this funding will help allow performances to restart, venues to plan for reopening and to protect jobs and create opportunities for freelancers.

In the meantime, officials in my Department continue to work with the sector to consider other funding propositions raised with the Select Committee such as a designated insurance scheme for the sector. There is understandably a very high bar for intervention in the insurance market and, as was the case with the film / tv restart scheme, the Government would need to be absolutely clear that access to insurance was indeed the final remaining obstacle to reopening if it were to intervene. I know DCMS and HMT colleagues are closely monitoring the situation together with the sector.

There is no doubt that there will be tough choices to make during this period, but I believe our critical cultural landscape can go on to thrive again. Inevitably organisations will still need to take difficult decisions about how they scale back and adapt, but I am hopeful that the Government's investment will help many institutions to survive long-term, and be ready to get back to full strength employing the many talented individuals in the sector.

As I know you will appreciate, the context continues to evolve and my department therefore continues to work at pace to support sectors through this challenging context. I remain committed to doing all I can to support and champion the cultural and creative industries and the people and organisations who do so much to contribute to them. I look forward to discussing these points and more at the Select committee meeting this coming 14 October.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'O Dowden', written in a cursive style.

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

