



House of Commons
Digital, Culture, Media and
Sport Committee

**The future of UK music
festivals**

First Report of Session 2021–22

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 26 May 2021*

The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

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Summary

In 2019, almost 1,000 music festivals took place across the UK contributing £1.76 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) to the economy, and enriching the cultural and social lives of more than 5.2 million attendees. The following year, the Covid-19 pandemic forced widespread cancellations, threatening the futures of not only festivals but the freelancers, suppliers and small businesses they rely on, and leaving a hole in the lives of music lovers and makers alike.

Now, two years after they last generated revenue, festivals and their supply chains face the prospect of another lost summer. We warned the Government this would happen at the start of this year. Although exacerbated by uncertainty around the spread of new Covid-19 variants, this situation is a direct result of the Government's refusal to back insurance for the sector, and failure to accommodate the lead times involved in delivering large-scale events.

Despite hopes that the vaccine programme and lifting of lockdown would partially enable the UK's cultural calendar to return to its former, vibrant self this summer, the festival industry's prospects remain uncertain. Few festivals benefited from the Government's support for the creative industries. Some of those that did have since been forced to cancel due to the lack of insurance. The loss of skilled members of the events workforce and key suppliers will affect this highly seasonal industry's ability to return at short notice. Following our questioning the Government belatedly recognised the need to pilot the unique nature of a festival in its Events Research Programme, but this effort will be wasted if an insurance solution isn't introduced prior to 21 June.

A diminution of our world-renowned festival sector would mean more than just reduced tax revenue for the Treasury. Festivals play an important role in communities and can be a significant source of income for local authorities. They provide vital opportunities to earn money and build audiences for our musicians, who will face increased barriers to playing at European festivals as a result of the UK's deal with the EU.

The impact of the pandemic also provided an opportunity to reflect on how the Government might ensure that, when festivals return, they are better than before. The rapid rise in the number and size of festivals is limiting the effectiveness of their environmental pledges and initiatives. We recommend that the Government and local authorities do more to hold the sector to account on its environmental impacts through licensing. We are also deeply concerned that the risk of drug-related harms at festivals will increase once lockdown is lifted, and call on the Government to remove the legal barriers to drug checking services that provide life-saving information to festival-goers. We also call on the Government to ensure the pandemic does not undermine efforts to improve the secondary ticketing market for consumers.

1 Introduction

1. Music festivals are a rapidly growing, and globally renowned, part of the UK's £70 billion events industry.¹ In a typical year, some 975 music festivals take place across the UK.² These vary by capacity, location and genre: from commercial multi-day festivals in fields and parks to small, community-led events or city-based festivals across multiple venues. Music also often features heavily at other festivals, from food to literature; however, all are characterised by hosting a series of appearances by a range of different performers and using temporary infrastructure.³

2. Although big names such as the Glastonbury Festival, the Isle of Wight Festival and the Reading and Leeds Festivals are known the world over, the vast majority of the UK's festivals are community-based micro-events. These are usually run on a voluntary basis with capacities under 5,000 people. The commercial market, which includes both independently owned and operated festivals, as well as those backed by large promoters, accounts for only about 20% of the UK's festivals.⁴ Rowan Cannon from Wild Rumpus, which runs the Just So Festival in Cheshire and Timber on the Leicestershire/Derbyshire border, told us that as the UK is home to "a very diverse spectrum of events" our inquiry should "reflect that diversity and not just be thinking about 80,000 20-year-olds in a field".⁵

3. In 2019, festivals contributed £1.76 billion in Gross Value Added and at least 10% of that went directly to local businesses and economies around festival sites.⁶ It was a growth sector: since 2015, total spend on festival sites and at the box office had risen between 151% and 174%.⁷ In 2019, 5.2 million people attended music festivals, a 6% increase on the previous year and our survey of more than 36,000 festival-goers showed what a significant contribution they made to people's wellbeing, social lives and careers.⁸

4. The vast majority of festivals in 2020 were cancelled owing to Covid-19 restrictions and the sector's revenues dropped by 90%.⁹ Festivals were harder hit by the pandemic than many other creative industries: as typically seasonal and one-off occasions, events and their supply chains were unable to generate income for an entire year, rather than experiencing a temporary shutdown.¹⁰ During our inquiry on the impact of Covid-19 on the DCMS sectors, we heard about the challenges faced by musicians, festivals and the businesses that supply them with facilities, equipment and staff. The loss of live music during the pandemic has focused attention on its centrality to the careers and incomes of not only musicians (the focus of our concurrent inquiry on the economics of music streaming) but also crew members and suppliers.

5. With festival planning starting months, if not years, in advance, it was essential that the Government started looking ahead to the return of festivals this summer before the

1 Business Visits & Events Partnership, [The UK Events Report](#), (5 May 2020) p 72

2 Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 3.1

3 Association of Festival Organisers ([FES0035](#))

4 Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 3.18–3.23, para 8.6

5 [Q90](#)

6 LIVE (Live Music Industry, Venues & Entertainment) ([FES0062](#)), Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 3.29

7 Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 3.38

8 UK Music, [Music by Numbers 2020](#), (November 2020) p24, see Annex for survey results

9 Carey & Chambers on behalf of Live Music Industry, Venues & Entertainment (LIVE), [UK live music: At a cliff edge](#), (October 2020), p 6

10 Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 4.2

sector faced another year of lost income. We launched this inquiry to put pressure on the Government to address the barriers to festivals taking place in 2021, such as the need for insurance and a target date for the lifting of restrictions. Following our predecessor Committee's 2019 inquiry on live music, which highlighted the plight of grassroots venues, we also reflected on long-term challenges to ensure that when festivals return post-pandemic they are even safer and more sustainable than before.

2 The return of festivals after the Covid-19 pandemic

6. This summer is crucial for the long-term health of our festival industry. Anna Wade from Hampshire’s Boomtown told us that “it is unlikely that most events or festivals could weather the storm of no event happening in 2021” because, “most event and festival organisers only put on one event” a year.¹¹ The return of festivals post-pandemic depends first and foremost on whether they have survived the financial hit of 2020 and can afford to start planning amidst the continuing public health uncertainty. Moreover, as festivals both rely on and sustain a wide ecosystem of staff and supply chains, the resilience of these sectors is equally important to events going ahead. The lifting of legal restrictions on large gatherings and easing of social distancing measures are also crucial for festivals to progress at economically sustainable capacities. All of these factors, however, are influenced by the size, nature and management of the particular event. Rowan Cannon told us that the Government must recognise the diversity of music festivals in the UK when planning for their return and suggested “that different decision making could be in place for different scales of festivals”.¹²

Financial resilience

7. At the start of 2021, the UK’s vibrant and valuable festival sector faced ruin. When festivals were forced to cancel at the start of the pandemic, many event organisers had already accrued significant sunk costs (as of March 2020, independent festivals had spent an average of £375,000 in non-recoupable costs for the year, ranging from £20,000 to £1.7 million) and very few were covered by communicable disease insurance or had sufficient reserves to see them through to 2021.¹³

8. The festival sector has seen many acquisitions in recent years, with formerly independent events now majority-owned by a handful of companies: 29% of festivals over 5,000 capacity are owned by Live Nation or AEG Presents.¹⁴ There were concerns that “if independent festival businesses become vulnerable to collapse due to Covid-19 it may increase acquisitions and further consolidation across the UK festival sector”, which would exacerbate challenges identified by independent events.¹⁵ For example, we were told that consolidation has “had an impact on competition, pricing and diversity”.¹⁶ The Association of Independent Festivals (AIF) told us that the large players, which might also manage an artist and promote their tours, book acts under exclusivity deals that limit the ability of independent festivals to book them too. This was echoed by an independent festival that told us that, as it cannot benefit from economies of scale, it has to pay more to book an artist than companies that can offer multiple dates.¹⁷ From the supply chain perspective, consultancy Method Events told us that:

Reduced levels of competition have had a negative effect on pricing, especially

11 [Q8](#)

12 [Q90](#)

13 Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 4.2–4.3

14 Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 8.6

15 Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 8.9

16 Method Events Ltd ([FES0021](#))

17 Confidential written evidence

within the freelancer market which props up the industry. Day rates for experienced personnel that are burdened with significant responsibility and accountability have been restricted to much lower levels than other sectors, despite the steady increase in event ticket prices.¹⁸

The AIF identified that concern about takeovers “was cited in France’s published emergency plan to save the cultural sector which states: ‘the goal is that small festivals can benefit from (these-state backed loans) to avoid them being bought by big actors and structures’”. However, it also acknowledged that “all live music and festival companies have been profoundly affected by Covid-19”, and the UK Government should, therefore, support the whole ecosystem.¹⁹

9. The Government intended its £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund (CRF) to help cultural organisations weather the impact of the pandemic. In the first round of grant funding, when organisations could apply for grants of up to £50,000, more than £25 million went to festivals and organisations in their supply chains.²⁰ The AIF told us that 71% of its members that applied for the CRF were successful, and the grants stabilised at least 65% of those recipients, ensuring they have sufficient funds to stage their events in 2021 if permitted to do so.²¹ However, the festivals that were unsuccessful remained:

on the brink of imminent collapse and have exhausted (or being rejected for) other options including repayable finance such as [the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme] and Bounce Back loans. These include high profile festivals, many of whom can be considered to occupy a unique and in some cases leadership position in their regions, generating significant direct and indirect economic impacts.²²

10. A closer look at the figures draws the benefit of the CRF to the sector into question. Of the 975 music festivals in the UK, only 81 (or 8%) applied for the first round of CRF grant funding and only 51 were successful, receiving approximately £8.1 million (or 1.3%) of the £622 million in grants available.²³ Paul Reed told us that the AIF “had to fight very hard to get festival eligibility for the CRF” and, once they did, festivals faced barriers accessing it.²⁴ For example, the Association of Festival Organisers (AFO) told us that in the CRF’s “documentation and the detail there was no mention of festivals, it took some considerable time to get clear answers that festivals were included as part of entertainment”.²⁵ Boomtown’s organisers initially thought the festival was “not eligible” for the CRF and told us they “did not have quite the right resources to be able to put our all into” the application.²⁶ Similarly, Cheshire’s Deva Fest told us that:

The Culture Recovery Fund is an utter red herring to the festival industry and was of absolutely no assistance whatsoever. We—like many other festivals—applied and were turned down. Whilst we qualified (technically) the convoluted, cumbersome and highly time-consuming application process

18 Method Events Ltd ([FES0021](#))

19 Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 8.10–8.11

20 [Q312](#) [Victoria MacCallum]

21 Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 7.1, 7.5

22 Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 7.5

23 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ([FES0064](#))

24 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ([FES0064](#))

25 Association of Festival Organisers ([FES0035](#))

26 [Q35](#)

was geared only to arts organisations who needed the funding to survive until 31st March 2021. Our event happens once a year in August. Deva Fest Ltd had an income of precisely zero in 2020—a fact deemed irrelevant by an application process so hideous that it took weeks to complete.²⁷

11. We asked the Minister for Digital and Culture, Caroline Dinenage MP, whether the messaging around the CRF was flawed, given the relatively low numbers of festivals applying. She told us that the Government “put together an enormous package of financial support at pace and at scale” and had “busted a gut to communicate that it was available to a whole range of sectors”. Moreover, she suggested that “in the early stages a lot of the festival organisations [...] 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”. As organisations “had to have exhausted all of those before they could apply to the CRF”, that may have led to them not applying.²⁸

12. Yet Steve Heap from the AFO highlighted a different reason why festivals may not have applied for the CRF: an “enormous number of festivals quite simply didn’t need £50,000, and they were honest enough to say so by not applying”. This was addressed for the second round of grants, when the minimum organisations could apply for was reduced to £25,000; however, we heard that reducing this even further to £15,000 or less could help grassroots festivals and supply chain businesses.²⁹

13. The Government held back £258 million to support a second round of CRF grants, which was supplemented by money not allocated in the first round. Among the 2,272 successful organisations in this second round were Boomtown, which received nearly £1 million, and Glastonbury Festival, which received £900,000 to deliver two smaller events this year and carry the festival through to 2022. However, overall, the number of festivals receiving grants in the second round was broadly similar to the first.³⁰

14. With only 8% of festivals applying for the first round of the Culture Recovery Fund, and those that were successful receiving just 1.3% of the available grants, the Government’s flagship investment in the arts was of limited benefit to the festival sector as a whole. This was in part due to the needs, resources and management structures of festivals, many of which were not used to applying for public funding. However, it also reveals that there are lessons for Arts Council England and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to learn about how they engage with, and meet the needs of, this important part of our creative industries.

The case for Government-backed insurance

15. Insurance gives festival organisers and suppliers confidence that money will be recouped in the event of cancellation.³¹ It also unlocks the rest of the supply chain by enabling festivals to start signing contracts.³² The AIF estimates that a festival taking place in early July 2021 will have paid 40% of total costs by 14 June (the date when the

27 [Deva Fest Ltd \(FES0032\)](#)

28 [Q317](#)

29 [Q73](#) [Steve Heap]

30 [“£400 million to help more than 2,700 arts, culture, heritage organisations and independent cinemas survive and thrive”](#), Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport press release, 2 April 2021

31 [Q9](#) [Anna Wade]

32 [Q50](#)

Government will decide whether restrictions will be lifted one week later), with an initial 20% of costs having been paid in April on essential infrastructure such as licensing, policing and medical provisions.³³ However, the commercial insurance market is unlikely to offer any cancellation cover relating to Covid-19 until at least 2022, which Paul Reed called a “market failure”.³⁴

16. In January, our Chair and more than 100 co-signatories called on the Chancellor to correct this market failure and introduce a Government-backed reinsurance scheme for live events, similar to the £500 million insurance scheme that enabled film and TV production to resume earlier in the pandemic.³⁵ It was estimated that a £650 million scheme would enable £2 billion-worth of activity to go ahead.³⁶ The need was urgent: the long lead times in the festival industry meant decisions on events this summer were being taken at the start of the year. Steve Heap told us that to go ahead in 2021, 15% of AFO members needed to know about insurance in January, 30% by March and 27% in April.³⁷

17. Jamie Njoku-Goodwin, CEO of UK Music, told us that while the vaccine roll-out gave “hope that the conditions will be there to be holding festivals safely [...] if we don’t have the confidence now, then they will not be happening this summer—not because of the landscape, but actually because of the lack of confidence and security now”.³⁸ The Prime Minister told the Liaison Committee in March that he does not want to see “people unwilling to take risks on productions, performances and events because they are thinking about what happened last year” and that the Government was considering how it might “top-slice some of the £1.57 billion” CRF “to see if we can be useful in that way”.³⁹

18. Yet more than a quarter of festivals with over 5,000 capacity, including Boomtown in Hampshire and Bluedot in Cheshire, have cancelled for a further year.⁴⁰ As independent events without the backing of large, transnational companies, they cannot take the financial risk in the absence of insurance.⁴¹ These cancellations will affect the amount of the CRF that reaches the sector. Dr Darren Henley, CEO of Arts Council England, told us that second round CRF grants were awarded “on the basis that those organisations will be able to trade”. He indicated that a recipient that then cancels should not lose out if it “has incurred expenditure in good faith” prior to cancelling. However, the pay-out of grants is “phased on delivery”, so following a cancellation, ACE will “have a conversation with organisations about the rest of the grant”.⁴²

19. The case for Government-backed insurance for live events this summer intensified after the Prime Minister announced the roadmap for lifting lockdown. From 17 May, outdoor performances with a capacity of 4,000 people or 50% (whichever is lower) were permitted, with the intention to lift remaining restrictions on events from 21 June. Yet despite months of discussion between DCMS, HM Treasury and the sector, the Government continues to refuse to back such a scheme. The Minister for Digital and

33 [“UK festivals could be forced to cancel 2021 events without Government insurance”](#), NME, 1 March 2021

34 [Q46](#)

35 [Letter from the Chair to Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer, re festivals, 6 January 2021](#)

36 UK Music ([FES0092](#)) para 5.34

37 [Q54](#) [Steve Heap]

38 [Q54](#) [Jamie Njoku-Goodwin]

39 Oral evidence taken before the Liaison Committee on 24 March 2021, HC (2019–21) 1285 [Q74](#)

40 [“More than a quarter of UK music festivals cancelled over insurance fears”](#), The Guardian, 4 May 2021

41 Bluedot, [‘AN UPDATE FROM THE BLUEDOT TEAM’](#), and Boomtown, [‘WE WILL DANCE TOGETHER AGAIN...’](#), accessed 20 April 2021

42 Oral evidence taken on 20 April 2021, HC (2019–21) 1352, [Q17](#)

Culture stated in February:

The evidence of market failure must clearly demonstrate that such a scheme is the only barrier to staging events. At the moment, progress with the vaccine rollout and beating the virus is crucial in achieving the next stages for large events as set out in the roadmap. As such, HM Treasury does not believe that now is the right time for an insurance intervention.⁴³

Likewise, the Secretary of State, the Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP, told us that the Government will not back insurance before all restrictions are lifted under step 4 of the roadmap. If, after that point, a lack of commercial insurance remains the last hurdle to events taking place, the Government “stand ready to look at” intervening in the market. He told us that although he gets more confident “with every passing week”, the risk of new Covid-19 variants means the Government “still don’t know that we can fully go ahead with events from 21 June”, and it is not reasonable to expect taxpayers “to provide a full indemnity for those events if it is not possible for them to happen”.⁴⁴

20. Government-backed insurance is crucial to mitigating the Covid-19 related risks to festival organisers and enabling them to start planning, as the vast majority do not have the financial resilience to cover the costs of another year of late-notice cancellations. Despite the events and insurance industries proposing a range of solutions for how such a scheme might work, the Government have refused to take multiple opportunities to address the market failure in the provision of insurance for live events this summer and set the conditions to unlock the significant economic and cultural contribution made by festivals and their supply chains. Although there remains considerable uncertainty around the risks of new Covid-19 variants, the Government’s plan to wait until all restrictions are lifted will simply be too late for festivals this summer. With restrictions on lower-capacity, socially distanced outdoor events already having been lifted, the Government must act now.

21. We repeat our call for the Government to introduce a time-limited insurance scheme for costs incurred by live events scheduled to take place after 21 June that may have to cancel if there is a need for, or return to, continuing Covid-19 restrictions. The scheme should run until the commercial insurance market offers sufficient cover to the events industry for Covid-19 related cancellations.

Staff and supply chains

22. In July 2020, at least 50.5% of the festival sector’s skilled workforce faced redundancy by the end of the year.⁴⁵ Although the continuation of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme into 2021 addressed that immediate need, the sector will likely face a similar cliff-edge if unable to generate any income again this year. Festivals of all sizes are heavily reliant on a large temporary workforce: Towersey Festival in Buckinghamshire employs two full-time and four part-time staff throughout the year but supplements that with up to 100 freelancers and contractors in the run-up to the event, as well as more than 300 artists annually.⁴⁶ Bournemouth 7s Festival employs a full-time team of seven but more than 1,200 additional people work on the festival each year.⁴⁷ At the larger end,

43 PQ [154798](#) [on Events Industry: Insurance], 19 February 2021

44 Oral evidence taken on 13 May 2021, HC (2021–22) 44, [Qq42–43](#)

45 Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 4.4

46 Towersey Festival ([FES0011](#))

47 Bournemouth 7s Festival, South Coast Events Forum and National Outdoor Events Association ([FES0028](#))

Boomtown employs 40 full-time staff but will have in the region of 17,000 “crew, staff, artists, guests and traders on site” during the festival itself.⁴⁸ Many of these people, as well as musicians themselves, slipped through the Government’s support packages for self-employed workers.⁴⁹

23. Festivals rely on extensive supply chains including technical production, staging and catering companies, many of which are small businesses.⁵⁰ These were also badly affected: technical suppliers that provide staging, lights and sound systems saw revenue fall by 95% during the pandemic.⁵¹ One audio supplier, which unsuccessfully applied for the CRF and so only benefited from the furlough scheme, told us that if business doesn’t return to ‘normal’ by summer 2021 it “will no longer be sustainable” and will have exhausted all of its reserves. This will leave a permanent skills gap, with the company stating that “it is naïve to think that if we fail other companies will step in and fill the vacuum. Our competitors are all in the same position as ourselves, at whatever market level they operate at”.⁵² #WeMakeEvents, which represents the supply chain to the live events industry, agrees that “the 2021 festival season must go ahead or there will be a profound and long-term impact on the live event supply chain—waiting until 2022 for festivals to restart will be too late”.⁵³

24. If individuals or companies in the supply chain close down or change industry, festivals will struggle to access the goods, services and skilled staff they need to return safely.⁵⁴ The volunteer leaders of MugStock festival told us that, post-pandemic, “it is questionable whether the trained staff will be available and key suppliers still operating”, while Boomtown’s Anna Wade has “seen a huge number of the people that we would normally employ have to go into different industries—for example, the scaffolders, the sound engineers, the technicians have all had to repurpose their skills elsewhere into different industries, such as construction, and that leaves a very worrying gap in our market”.⁵⁵ The Sheffield City Region Music Board warned that “the loss of skilled technicians, equipment suppliers and production staff would cause huge problems for the return of festivals” because “these are the key staff who ensure that safety measures are upheld and ensure a high-quality experience on the day”. As such, “the safety of staff and public alike could suffer from the lack of staffing with this expertise and experience”.⁵⁶

25. This would be compounded if, as seems likely, the 2021 festival season is condensed into a few weekends in late summer and September, putting further pressure on supply. Tour manager Tre Stead explained that even in a typical summer, although “there is huge infrastructure in the UK [...] there are a lot of bands trying to do a lot of things”, and therefore equipment such as tour buses need to be booked a year in advance.⁵⁷ Furthermore, #WeMakeEvents told us that “many of those that organisers are relying on to make festivals in 2021 happen are being forced to decline offers of work until they know the sector is back at a capacity which means they can sustain a living from it”. This creates

48 [Q2](#)

49 Southby Productions ([FES0022](#)), Henry Baroche ([FES0039](#)), [Q132](#)

50 Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 3.41

51 Carey & Chambers on behalf of Live Music Industry, Venues & Entertainment (LIVE), [UK live music: At a cliff edge](#), (October 2020), p 6

52 SSE Audio Group Ltd ([FES0046](#))

53 #WeMakeEvents ([FES0040](#))

54 Bournemouth 7s Festival, South Coast Events Forum and National Outdoor Events Association ([FES0028](#))

55 MugStock ([FES0031](#)), [Q8](#)

56 Sheffield City Region Music Board ([FES0096](#))

57 [Q124](#)

a difficult situation because:

Festivals will not be able to get back to capacity if they cannot secure the skilled people that are needed to make them happen, which will stop the sector getting back to pre-Covid levels, which will mean it is unviable for those highly skilled people to return to the sector.⁵⁸

26. Supply chain organisations faced similar problems to festival organisers in applying for the first round of the CRF. Overall, 90 organisations in the festival supply chain applied, with 81 successful applicants receiving approximately £17.1 million in total.⁵⁹ Yet ticketing platform Skiddle said that “the process for applying was also pretty prohibitive as many people were unfamiliar with the grant writing process, couldn’t afford to pay grant writers or weren’t clear on what the applications were really asking for”.⁶⁰ The size of grants was again a barrier: Tre Stead told us that a lot of smaller, limited companies could not “justify applying” as they did not need the minimum grant and that more could benefit from smaller pots for organisations that “can probably survive on £5,000 or £6,000”.⁶¹

27. We asked the Minister whether there was scope to reduce the size of minimum grants for future rounds of the CRF, but she responded that organisations in need of lower amounts could benefit from the “discretionary business grants that the Government have been funding right the way through the whole of this pandemic”.⁶² Although some organisations have told us they benefited from these discretionary grants, the picture remains mixed.⁶³ PLASA, a membership body for those supplying technology and services to the entertainment industries, told us that only 12% of its members received funding from the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant or Small Business Grant schemes administered by local authorities. Likewise, 27% of respondents to a National Caterers Association survey reported that they had not benefited from any Government support at all.⁶⁴

28. The Government expected that organisations in receipt of CRF grants would use the money to employ freelancers and supply chains; however, evidence suggests this did not reliably occur.⁶⁵ Method Events, which provides consultancy services to large festivals, told us that “the financial conservatism of promoters and event owners has caused funds to be withheld” and “suppliers are wondering whether to flag to the Arts Council that they are not benefitting from the funds as expected”.⁶⁶ It stated:

a clearer mandate or covenant may have been required with the grants to ensure that they were distributed effectively. This creates a concern about the UK’s gross benefit from the funds: for festivals that are owned by overseas private equity funds, for example, there is a threat that the funds

58 #WeMakeEvents ([FES0040](#))

59 Examples of organisations classed as supply chain by Arts Council England include staging, lighting/sound (equipment manufacture, supply, installation, maintenance and engineering), transport, ticket agencies, PR/comms firms, artist agencies and management companies. Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ([FES0064](#))

60 Skiddle ([FES0057](#))

61 [Qq156–157](#)

62 [Q330](#)

63 Festival Medical Services ([FES0020](#)), Bournemouth 7s Festival, South Coast Events Forum and National Outdoor Events Association ([FES0028](#))

64 NCASS (National Caterers Association) ([FES0063](#))

65 HC Deb, 7 July 2020, [col 851](#) [Commons Chamber]

66 Method Events Ltd ([FES0021](#))

are lost to overseas companies as they refuse to open up their balance sheets to the supply chain.⁶⁷

Lifting of restrictions

29. The biggest risk to festivals taking place in 2021 is if mass gatherings are not permitted or can go ahead only with restrictions that make them economically and practically unviable, such as social distancing, in place.⁶⁸ The organisers of Notting Hill Carnival and Manchester’s Parklife both told us that social distancing would not be viable for their events, and UK Music told us that “the best way to support and protect the festivals sector is to get it back on its feet and enable it to start generating income again. The focus must therefore be on how we get live performances happening again at capacity”.⁶⁹ However, Rowan Cannon cautioned against “the idea that festivals cannot go ahead and be socially distanced” because “it very much depends on the style of your festival”. For example, because her company’s two events “both have a capacity of around 5,000 and both have vast sites of about 100 acres”, they can “adapt our programming, put infrastructure in place and change the way we do things to enable something to happen with social distancing in place”.⁷⁰

30. Early evidence to our inquiry called for “an indicative date from Government for when we can hold live music and live events at scale again”.⁷¹ We were pleased the Government recognised this in its roadmap for lifting lockdown, under which it hopes to lift all remaining restrictions on social contact and large events in step 4 (no earlier than 21 June). However, all dates have been subject to change and step 4 is subject to the findings of the Events Research Programme (ERP)—a series of pilots to provide scientific data on how small and large-scale events can safely resume.⁷² Furthermore, as we draft this Report, the Prime Minister has voiced concerns about the Indian variant bringing the date for step 4 into doubt.⁷³

31. As each step of the Government’s roadmap will be announced one week in advance, festival organisers should hear about step 4 on 14 June at the latest. Yet festivals require weeks of setup, and discussions about licensing happen months in advance. We asked the Minister whether organisers would get sufficient notice to start rigging festival sites before the end of June, and when licensing authorities could confidently grant permission for festivals to take place this summer. She said the Government hoped to “be able to provide the full scientific research and evidence by the end of May” but that guidance had yet to be published to local authorities about permitting events.⁷⁴

Festivals in the Events Research Programme: an afterthought?

32. During April and May, the Government held pilot events “using enhanced testing approaches and other measures to run events with larger crowd sizes and reduced social

67 Method Events Ltd ([FES0021](#))

68 Bournemouth 7s Festival, South Coast Events Forum and National Outdoor Events Association ([FES0028](#))

69 [Q30](#), [Q82](#), UK Music ([FES0092](#)) para 2.3

70 [Q90](#)

71 [Qq4](#), [58](#)

72 “[Government announces pilot events to pave way for larger audiences at sport, theatre and gigs this summer](#)”, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport press release, 5 April 2021

73 Prime Minister’s Office, “[PM statement at coronavirus press conference: 14 May 2021](#)”, accessed 17 May 2021

74 [Qq293](#), [288](#)

distancing to evaluate the outcomes”. The Minister told us that the findings of the ERP will be analysed by the end of May to help the Government “to determine a consistent approach to lifting restrictions on these events” in step 4.⁷⁵ The timing of the ERP is crucial, and any delay could mean its findings come too late to permit 2021’s festival season. This is despite industry having called for pilots for months, and developed plans to test their own safety mitigations as far back as June 2020.⁷⁶

33. We questioned whether it would be strange for 21,000 people to attend the FA Cup Final in Wembley when smaller numbers were not yet permitted to gather at a festival. The Minister told us that festivals “are quite an unusual and unique entity” and although their outdoor setting benefits from 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.⁷⁷

34. In late March, the Minister told us that the ERP “is not based on sectors so much as on settings”, but that “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”.⁷⁸ While the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) intended to “do a festival-type event”, the Minister said that in the first phase they were unable to deliver a “large multi-day music festival with an unstructured audience, because there are massive operational and ethical challenges to conducting something of that scale”. Indeed, there was no festival-type event in the initial list of pilots announced on 5 April; however, we were assured by the Minister that DCMS’s chief scientific adviser, Professor Tom Rodden, would “look at the best ways of filling those gaps” to give the festival sector the clarity it needs.⁷⁹ This gap was at least partially addressed when the Government announced, after the Minister spoke to us, that a pilot event for 5,000 people would be held at Liverpool’s Sefton Park in early May.⁸⁰

35. The Government have acknowledged that pilots held under the ERP require backing in case they are forced to cancel.⁸¹ In the absence of our preferred, sector-wide insurance option we wrote to the Secretary of State to propose extending the ERP and the liability available to the pilot events under it to a wider, yet defined, selection of events scheduled for after 21 June.⁸² We argued that if the Government backed a range of events including grassroots, mid-scale and large events across sport and the arts, it would enable the country to enjoy a greater number of culturally significant events this summer, support

75 [Q289](#)

76 Oral evidence take on 8 September 2020, HC (2012–21) 748, [Q51](#)

77 [Q294](#) [Caroline Dinéage]

78 [Q290](#)

79 *“Government announces pilot events to pave way for larger audiences at sport, theatre and gigs this summer”*, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport press release, 5 April 2021 and [Q294](#) [Victoria MacCallum]

80 *“Festival Republic joins Government pilot programme with a live gig to trial the safe return of fans”*, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Department for Health and Social Care press release, 18 April 2021

81 HC Deb, 14 April 2021, [col 12WS](#) [Commons written ministerial statement]

82 [Letter from the Chair to Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP, Secretary of State for DCMS, re Extension of pilot scheme and associated liabilities to large events this summer, 27 April 2021](#)

the economic recovery of the events industry and its supply chains, and build on the investment already being made into the pilots.

36. The success of the vaccine rollout and the target date announced during our inquiry under the Government’s roadmap for lifting lockdown gave hope to many that festivals will be able to take place this summer. However, the lifting of all restrictions on live events remains heavily contingent on the Events Research Programme. Despite initial positive data from some settings, we are not confident the pilots will deliver the evidence needed in time to lift all restrictions on live events from 21 June. By the Minister’s own admission, festivals are unique settings and yet they were initially overlooked in the first tranche of pilots. We strongly welcome the decision, following our questioning of the Minister, to conduct a festival-type pilot in early May; however a one-day event for 5,000 people does not capture the full range of UK festivals and further pilots may therefore be needed.

37. While our preference remains for a comprehensive sector-wide insurance scheme, we recommend, in the absence of such a scheme, a targeted intervention that extends the Events Research Programme and associated liabilities to a range of additional pilot events, including festivals of different sizes and genres, across the UK during the rest of 2021.

3 The economic and cultural contributions of festivals

38. Festivals bring a range of economic, social and cultural benefits to local areas, communities and individuals. This is illustrated by the diverse range of beneficiaries that were hit by the cancellation of Tenterden Folk Festival in 2020:

All our sound engineers, security staff, first aid staff, marquee and equipment hire companies and other contractors have lost substantial income.

The festival includes around 50 craft and street stalls including musical instruments, food, local products, gifts, etc. and the stallholders have lost their income.

The guests at the festival are mainly self-employed musicians and dancers who have also lost the source of income.

Hotels, bed and breakfast establishments, campsites, venues, public houses, shops, petrol stations and other traders have lost the substantial trade generated by the festival over the four days.

Others who lost out include a group of students and Ashford College who would normally, as part of their course, have volunteered to help our PA and lighting engineers and therefore lost necessary work experience.

Other students from Highworth School lost the opportunity to bring their Highworth Folk Band to the free music stage.⁸³

The benefits of festivals for communities

Local businesses

39. The business communities around festival sites benefit significantly from a festival's presence and the Association of Independent Festivals estimates that at least £176 million in off-site spend was lost in 2020.⁸⁴ Manchester's Parklife, for example, brings £16 million into the local economy, and raises £100,000 to £120,000 on average for local good causes.⁸⁵ Like the events themselves, the benefit derived from them is highly seasonal. In a typical August, local catering and hospitality businesses take around a third of their annual income during the eight-day Sidmouth Folk Festival and Matthew Phillip, Chief Executive of Notting Hill Carnival, told us that many of the businesses in the area "take a big chunk of their yearly income" in the month leading up to Carnival weekend.⁸⁶

Local residents

40. Festivals are increasingly significant sources of income for local authorities and park services that hire out spaces. Dr Andrew Smith from the University of Westminster told

83 Tenterden Folk Day Trust ([FES0005](#))

84 Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 4.7

85 [Q12](#)

86 Sidmouth Folk Festival ([FES0026](#)), [Q91](#)

us that while festivals account for only “a small proportion of the local authorities’ overall budgets [...] for some individual parks it is almost all of their income”, with some “able to earn six figure sums from hiring their green spaces out to festival promoters”.⁸⁷ For example, Finsbury Park in Haringey is “financially self-sufficient because of the music festivals it stages”, generating more than £1 million per year from event hires—enough to fund its annual maintenance budget.⁸⁸ However, cancellations in 2020 “highlighted how precarious this new reliance on festival funding is”, which could have serious consequences for local authorities’ frontline services funded through festival income.⁸⁹ At the same time, many festivals have called for at least a proportion of license fees for events that did not happen in 2020 to be rolled over to 2021 or beyond. We heard of significant variation between local authorities that have agreed to roll-over fees and those that have not, suggesting that central Government guidance to local authorities on their “discretion” around enforcing section 55A of the Licensing Act 2003 is not being consistently applied.⁹⁰

41. The benefits of a festival are not always spread equally among a local authority’s residents. According to Dr Smith, although festivals can “supplement the cultural offer in peripheral parts of cities, and provides a way of engaging audiences that do not normally use cultural amenities (including host parks) [...] using a park regularly for music festivals comes with considerable social and environmental costs”. These include making parts of the park inaccessible to local residents:

for extended periods, not just over festival weekends, but during festival assembly and derig (which can take 2–3 weeks). This problem is exacerbated by the damage to turf caused by installations and attendees, which extends interrupted access, and by the fact that disruption tends to come at times—late spring and midsummer—when demand for park use is at its highest.⁹¹

42. The high ticket prices of commercial festivals can exclude certain parts of the local community, while also pricing out less lucrative, community-focused events. Dr Smith identifies that urban festivals “are often very expensive (£50-£100 for a day ticket; £100+ for a weekend pass) and tend to appeal to a regional or national audience, meaning the proportion of local attendees is usually quite low”, yet:

If a council or a park authority is short of income, they are going to prioritise the events that generate the most income, and free festivals and free events that do not generate much income tend to get squeezed out of those spaces.⁹²

43. When asked whether any particular festivals are getting their engagement with local communities right, Dr Smith highlighted that for its events in east London, AEG has “genuinely committed to a consultation and a collaborative process, which is dealt with in a much more tokenistic way by other companies and other festivals” and “changed the scheduling of the festivals in Victoria Park so that they are hosted on two consecutive weekends with a community event in between”. By consolidating its programme, AEG reduces the period of disruption caused by the assembly and de-rig of the festival site.⁹³

87 [Q162](#), Dr Andrew Smith ([FES0086](#))

88 Dr Andrew Smith ([FES0086](#))

89 Dr Andrew Smith ([FES0086](#)), [Q166](#)

90 Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0103](#))

91 Dr Andrew Smith ([FES0086](#))

92 [Q165](#)

93 [Q172](#)

Festival-goers

44. Notting Hill Carnival demonstrates the role that festivals can play at the heart of local communities. As a free and unticketed event, Carnival’s community extends beyond the hundreds of volunteer participants to the thousands of Londoners and tourists who attend.⁹⁴ This benefit is not limited to one weekend either: its CEO told us that many of the 100-plus events that make up the Carnival on August bank holiday “are based in community centres around London, and they do year-round activities”.⁹⁵

45. More than 36,000 festival-goers told us what they value most about festivals, from its benefits for their mental health to the opportunity to forge wider friendship groups and the feeling of being surrounded by like-minded people.⁹⁶ Over half of the 36,497 respondents to our survey (53%) attended three or more festivals in a typical year, and although the most missed aspect of the festival experience is ‘the atmosphere’, the more festivals people attended on average the more likely they were to miss ‘socialising & meeting new people’.⁹⁷ Nearly a quarter of respondents (23%) told us they missed seeing their favourite artists or discovering new music.

46. The cancellation of licensed festivals in 2020 correlated with a rise in unregulated mass gatherings across the UK. Events consultancy Method Events told us:

There has been a substantial increase in the number of black-market and illegal events occurring during the pandemic, causing threats to communities in terms of public safety, disruption and anti-social behaviour; without adequate risk mitigation and control measures. It is vital that the festival industry be enabled and supported, not just for the social, cultural and economic benefits, but also the prevention of unregulated gatherings.⁹⁸

Likewise, Notting Hill Carnival’s organisers told us that “young people felt frustrated with the lack of social opportunities in London” in summer 2020 and so they worked hard “to discourage people from taking to the streets of Notting Hill during that period, especially because we had no infrastructure in place”. Matthew Phillip said that if, come August this year, “large gatherings cannot happen but small independent venues can open and licensed premises are open as normal [...] there is a risk that we could end up with something that is not managed”, lacking the many safety and crowd management measures usually in place.⁹⁹

Volunteers

47. Festivals rely on a vast community of volunteers, which is one of the ways they generate income for charities.¹⁰⁰ Michael Pacy told us he has been attending music festivals for 25 years, and started volunteering at them in 2012. He has since taken on paid roles managing other volunteers, stating that “volunteering gave me experience and skills that I would not have gained elsewhere”.¹⁰¹ Since 1993, Oxfam has provided tens of

94 [Q111](#)

95 [Q99](#)

96 Our survey ran from 2–22 February 2021 in the form of an open, online poll and was not a representative study. The results and analysis can be found in the Annex.

97 See Annex

98 Method Events ([FES0021](#))

99 [Qq107–109](#)

100 Festival Medical Services ([FES0020](#))

101 Michael Pacy ([FES0024](#))

thousands of volunteer stewards to festivals across the UK, and operates pop-up festival charity shops. Between May and September 2020, these activities should have generated around £1.2 million; however, all that income was lost and Oxfam warns that should the 2021 festival season be cancelled, “there would be redundancies across the board” in its festivals team.¹⁰² Rowan Cannon told us that as the volunteers of today will become the “production managers, site managers, runners and site assistants” of tomorrow, the loss of development opportunities in 2020 is a risk to that pipeline of “people who are going to keep this industry going in the future”.¹⁰³

The benefits of festivals for those who work at them

Suppliers and crew

48. The festival sector supports 85,000 jobs, with the vast majority of staff working on a freelance basis across the events industry.¹⁰⁴ Duncan Bell of #WeMakeEvents, which represents production staff, told us that “the industry is very proud of the freelance structure that exists, because it works seamlessly between cross-sector disciplines” with engineers, for example, “working on corporate events, exhibitions and conferences out of festival season” or going on a subsequent tour with an artist.¹⁰⁵

49. However, with all these sectors effectively shut for over a year, many have been forced to find work in other areas, which in turn may hinder their return to the sector once live events resume. This was Tre Stead’s experience: having worked as a tour manager for 15 years, she took a job in catering at Manchester’s Nightingale Hospital in April 2020. She told us that “everybody is doing stuff at the minute that means they are able to jump back into touring, but being promised three weeks of tour is not enough if you do not have a plan for the long term”.¹⁰⁶ The consequences of this will be twofold: not only will a lack of income and experience prevent the next generation of freelance talent from entering the industry, but the loss of experienced workers will mean no one will be available “to teach the kids coming in how to do this job well”.¹⁰⁷

50. Festival supply chains and freelance workers cannot sustain another year with little to no income. Continued uncertainty about whether events will go ahead or a significant reduction in the number that do go ahead this summer will make it harder for skilled personnel temporarily working in other industries to return to the sector. We are concerned that this will have consequences not only for the safe running of events this summer but for the talent pipeline of this important growth sector.

Musicians and performers

51. Festivals are a valuable source of income for artists. During our inquiry on the economics of music streaming, we heard that 70% of a musicians’ revenue typically comes from performing live “and the cream is to be had in the summer festival season”.¹⁰⁸ Nadine Shah told us that, from the artists’ perspective, festivals “pay us well and they pay

102 Oxfam ([FES0083](#))

103 [Q98](#)

104 Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)), para 3.30

105 [Qq116–117](#)

106 [Q133](#) [Tre Stead]

107 [Q134](#)

108 Oral evidence taken on 24 November 2020, HC (2019–21) 868, [Q60](#)

us fairly”, while the Musicians’ Union stated that:

Many festivals are programmed around a particular genre or theme, which is invaluable for niche artists who may otherwise struggle to have a full touring itinerary across music venues. Such events feed into the diversity of UK music, and allow artists to sustain a career without compromising their musical output.¹⁰⁹

Tre Stead also told us that festivals are “a linchpin that the rest of the touring ecosystem works around”. It is common, especially for overseas artists, to make the most of their time by starting and ending a tour with festival appearances and then “use the month or so in between to visit the smaller towns and cities around the UK or Europe”. The amount of money they make from the festival then “props up the tour”.¹¹⁰

52. Festivals are crucial for artists to develop their acts and audiences. Typically, 35% to 83% of an independent festival’s line-up is comprised of emerging artists and, according to Ticketmaster, 54% of festival-goers seek out gigs for artists they have discovered at festival.¹¹¹ As Tre Stead observed, “festivals are the best way of exposing an artist, big or small, to a new audience, and you can only go so long playing to people who know your music. Radio play, press, all that sort of stuff is great as well, but getting out there on the live circuit and exposing yourself to a load of people [...] That is how you get a new audience in, and that is how you further your career”.¹¹²

53. The loss of those opportunities over the past year will have a disproportionate impact on those already under-represented on festival line-ups. Rowan Cannon told us that the pandemic presents “a massive risk to representation and diversity”.¹¹³ In 2015, a music blog shared a doctored version of the poster for the Reading and Leeds Festivals, removing all acts that did not feature at least one female performer: only nine groups remained.¹¹⁴ A number of female-only festivals and industry initiatives aim to address this issue with the talent pipeline. The PRS Foundation’s Keychange initiative encourages festivals to have a 50/50 gender split among performers by 2022; more than 150 events worldwide have pledged to hit this target, including the Proms. Tre Stead told us she thought the aim was “desirable” and that the sector’s issue:

is all about the acts that are out there and young women feeling they can start a band and put their music out there without getting pushback. I think the industry is changing a lot to make a lot more women feel they can do that, and the knock-on effect within a few years is that there are more and more great female artists who can headline festivals.¹¹⁵

54. We welcome the PRS Foundation’s Keychange initiative to increase the number of female artists appearing in festival line-ups, and recommend that all festivals sign up to it. During the pandemic, support from the public purse has been available for festivals, albeit to an insufficient degree. It is incumbent on festivals to ensure that

109 Oral evidence taken on 24 November 2020, HC (2019–21) 868, [Q104](#), Musicians’ Union ([FES0049](#)) para 1.4

110 [Q113](#)

111 LIVE (Live Music Industry, Venues & Entertainment) ([FES0062](#)), Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 3.42

112 [Q114](#)

113 [Q103](#)

114 ‘[Crack in the Road](#)’, Twitter, 24 February 2015

115 [Q123](#)

under-represented female artists at all career stages also benefit from that support by appearing in greater numbers on festival line-ups in the future.

Festivals and touring in the European Union

55. As festival organisers, artists and crews grapple with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, another challenge has emerged: the implications of the UK-EU trade and co-operation agreement for live music. Festivals across the EU have been an important source of work for UK artists and crews. During our streaming inquiry, Colin Young told us that his accountancy practice “grew by 25% as a consequence of touring bands going to Europe”. Where bands would previously “do two, maybe three if [they] were lucky, festivals in the UK”, they had access to “nine to 12 festivals” in the European market, and he concluded that “any obstacle is bad for live touring in Europe”.¹¹⁶

56. The deal made no specific provisions for short-term travel for creative work, and UK musicians and crews touring in the EU must comply with a range of rules governing the movement of people and equipment. Deborah Annetts, from the Incorporated Society of Musicians, told us that “the administrative burden, in terms of sorting out all the paperwork in order to get hold of a work permit that could cost hundreds and hundreds of pounds, plus of course the cost of the carnets, is going to make it uneconomical to tour in Europe”.¹¹⁷

57. International travellers and bands coming to play at UK festivals will also face increased costs moving between here and the EU. Sacha Lord from Manchester’s Parklife told us that the added red tape when bringing in bands to play is “a big barrier that [...] might stagnate new talent coming through” while UK Music’s Jamie Njoku-Goodwin said “every year, you will find some Australians, Germans and South Africans travelling to a field in Somerset to watch American, French and Korean musicians perform. [...] International talent is one of the things that makes our UK live music scene the dynamic live music scene that it is”.¹¹⁸ Under the Permit Free Festival route some festivals and events can invite artists without issuing a certificate of sponsorship; however, only 50 festivals (5% of the total each year in the UK) currently qualify for this exemption.¹¹⁹

58. There are concerns that the deal will make UK musicians and crews less employable than their EU counterparts. Duncan Bell from #WeMakeEvents told us that rather than UK festivals being a launchpad for tours around Europe, they will now just be legs on tours that start, and source, elsewhere. He explained:

all the staff on that tour will have been sourced from the EU and, therefore, will only have one country in which to work out their visa and work permit, rather than British citizens having to do it the other way round and then get 27 sets of paperwork in place to do that. That impacts on freelancers, it impacts on the supply chain and it impacts potentially on where the equipment comes from for festival seasons, because that is the nature of the touring game and the way that the equipment moves.¹²⁰

116 Oral evidence taken on 24 November 2020, HC (2019–21) 868, [Q60](#)

117 Oral evidence taken on 16 February 2021, HC (2019–21) 1176, [Q18](#)

118 [Q5](#), [Q61](#)

119 Home Office, ‘[Immigration Rules Appendix Visitor: Permit Free Festival List](#)’, accessed 20 April 2021

120 [Q134](#)

59. The consequences of the UK-EU deal on haulage could exacerbate pressures on the supply of equipment during the festival season. According to live music publisher IQ, an estimated 85% of the European concert trucking business is based in the UK, yet under haulage rules, which limit the number of journeys trucks can make, bands are likely to hire European road haulage operators, and/or UK-based haulage firms will need to relocate to the EU.¹²¹ Tre Stead said experienced UK-based trucking companies “cannot function with the deal as it is” and are already seeing a hit on their business as their “European counterparts have business pencilled in [...] for the future and UK companies don’t”.¹²² Likewise, Deborah Annetts urged the Government to take action ahead of the festival season as UK-based touring hauliers already face “imminent insolvency”.¹²³

60. In January, DCMS established a working group to liaise between Government Departments and the creative industries, support their understanding of the new requirements and identify priority issues to address in negotiations with the EU and its member states. However, when we asked the Minister for Digital and Culture which Department was responsible for leading the UK Government’s negotiations on securing a better deal for creative workers she responded:

If it is to do with the cabotage rules, it is the Department for Transport; if it is to do with visas and work permits and free movement, I think we would start at diplomatic level, and that would go through the FCDO. [...] In terms of overall responsibility for the mechanics of government, you would want to have the Cabinet Office”.¹²⁴

We expect to take evidence from the Rt Hon Lord Frost, Minister of State at the Cabinet Office with responsibility for business with the EU and its member states, on 10 June.

61. The UK has long occupied an important place in Europe’s live music ecosystem, and has traditionally been a starting point for tours creating work for UK-based freelancers and suppliers. The substantial UK-based infrastructure, including haulage, for tours and festivals is currently at risk unless the Government finds a solution to Brexit-related costs and complexities. We recommend that the Government report to us, monthly, on actions it is taking to alleviate this issue bilaterally and with the EU Commission.

62. The UK-EU trade and co-operation deal threatens not only the vibrancy of the UK’s festivals but the music industry as a whole. The cost and complication of moving people and equipment between the UK and EU will make it less attractive for bands from overseas to play at the UK’s festivals, and will limit the chances for UK artists and crews to build audiences and contacts at European festivals. We are not aware of any progress having been made to resolve the issues arising from the deal, and will continue to put pressure on the Government by questioning the Secretary of State, DCMS Ministers and the Rt Hon Lord Frost CMG.

121 *“THE BREXIT DEAL: WHAT WE KNOW SO FAR”*, IQ, 31 December 2021

122 [Q135](#)

123 Oral evidence taken on 16 February 2021, HC (2019–21) 1176, [Q14](#)

124 Oral evidence taken on 16 February 2021, HC (2019–21) 1176, [Qq135–136](#)

4 Securing a safe and sustainable future for festivals

63. Although the immediate pressures of the pandemic are the most pressing for the festival sector, it faces a number of structural and long-term challenges including reducing its environmental impacts, tackling the dangers of illegal drug use and combatting ticket touts. The sector's post-Covid recovery presents both opportunities and challenges to addressing these issues.

Environmental impacts

64. UK festivals generate 25,800 tonnes of waste, 22,876 tonnes of CO₂ and use 185 million litres of water annually.¹²⁵ Festival-goers produce 2kg of waste per person per day: “nearly twice as much as is produced per person per day from household waste”.¹²⁶ Despite an industry-wide pledge to halve the negative environmental impacts of festivals by 2025, and a “23% reduction in relative emissions per audience day from energy, waste, and water, mainly driven by diverting waste from landfill”, total music festival carbon emissions from energy, waste, and water on-site have actually risen over the past five years, “driven by a nearly 50% increase in audience numbers”.¹²⁷ Similarly, environmental charity Julie’s Bicycle told us that “sector-wide progress on diesel use reduction [...] barely changed” between 2015 and 2018.¹²⁸

65. Robert Del Naja, vocalist with Massive Attack, told us that he was “livid” at the “the lack of meaningful activity” to reduce emissions from live music. He said that, as artists, “if we are going to make declarations we want to stand by them and know that meaningful action will follow” rather than participating in the “greenwashing” that arises from industry pledges that do not translate into action.¹²⁹ Likewise, Professor Carly McLachlan from the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research said that the failure for sector pledges to achieve results demonstrates “a need for a clear policy and regulatory framework” that holds the industry to account on its efforts to reduce carbon emissions.¹³⁰

66. Professor McLachlan told us that the sector’s recovery from the pandemic provides an opportunity to reimagine how festivals operate and “build back better [...] into a more sustainable version”.¹³¹ She recommends that festivals reduce primary emissions by incentivising audiences to travel via mass-electrified transport and by sourcing power via the national grid or renewable energy suppliers, rather than from less efficient generators. Likewise, Dr Smith from the University of Westminster stated that “if venues had their own power, water and other key infrastructure, this might lessen the considerable number of vehicle movements and polluting generators that tend to accompany most major festivals”.¹³²

67. The feasibility of making such changes depends on a festival’s location as much

125 Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 9.1

126 Vision:2025, [2020 Update THE SHOW MUST GO ON](#), p 42

127 Vision:2025, [2020 Update THE SHOW MUST GO ON](#), p6

128 Julie’s Bicycle ([FES0065](#)) para 4.3

129 [Q203](#)

130 [Q183](#)

131 [Q209](#)

132 Dr Andrew Smith ([FES0086](#))

as organisational will. Dr Smith told us that the pandemic offers “scope to think more imaginatively about where urban festivals are held”. For example, “the relocation of the Field Day festival from Brockwell Park to an industrial site, Meridian Water in Enfield” shows that “successful festivals can be staged in brownfield sites, private estates or stadium venues: they don’t have to be staged in green spaces or public parks.¹³³ Likewise, Professor McLachlan told us not “every festival needs to move but [...] this would be a time to consider for a long-term low-carbon future, is this the right venue for us? Could we, should we be somewhere else?” She acknowledged that while “festivals where the location is really a central part of their identity may not want to do that”, they could still think about getting a grid connection or renewable energy sources.¹³⁴

68. Others have warned that the pandemic could simply exacerbate festivals’ environmental impacts. Travel and transportation related emissions have “consistently been found to make up at least 80% of an event’s carbon footprint”; however, changing behaviours due to the pandemic could undermine ambitions to reduce reliance on private transport. Public transport information platform, Zipabout, warned:

Before the pandemic, only 20% of UK festival-goers used public transport (train and coach) to travel to and from events. If festivals do go ahead in 2021 there is a risk even more passengers will travel by private car, making it harder for festival organisers to predict crowding and stagger customers.¹³⁵

Environmental charity Julie’s Bicycle recommended that the Government work with the industry “on a campaign to facilitate and celebrate rail travel to events in 2021 and 2022 to help build consumer confidence and avoid a ‘rebound’ of audience travel into private vehicles”.¹³⁶ Similarly, sustainability not-for-profit A Greener Festival told us that “increased single use plastics usage through PPE [...] are putting additional strain and expense on festivals and support is needed to help them to identify, navigate, and innovate the new normal to be a greener normal”.¹³⁷

69. As more local authorities declare a climate emergency, their role licensing events could incentivise festivals to reduce their emissions and contribute to wider sustainability goals.¹³⁸ Local authority requirements currently rank low as a driver of environmental action, with Julie’s Bicycle telling us “declarations of climate emergency and central Climate Change Act targets are not yet translating into policy signals or incentives on the ground”.¹³⁹ Professor McLachlan recommended that local authorities require festivals not just to consider their environmental impacts but to have a clear plan for reducing them, and for licensing to be contingent on progress being made against those targets.¹⁴⁰ The Minister for Digital and Culture told us that she supported the proposal as it “is very important that local authorities make sure that they include strict environmental measures within their licensing framework”.¹⁴¹

70. Professor McLachlan also called for independent oversight to hold the industry to

133 Dr Andrew Smith ([FES0086](#))

134 [Q222](#)

135 Zipabout Ltd ([FES0037](#))

136 Julie’s Bicycle ([FES0065](#)) para 3.2

137 A Greener Festival ([FES0045](#))

138 A Greener Festival ([FES0045](#))

139 Julie’s Bicycle ([FES0065](#)) para 2.1

140 [Q200](#)

141 [Q351](#)

account. A regular review convened by Government, for example, would also give the sector an opportunity to tell policy-makers what help it needs to make faster progress.¹⁴² The Minister disagreed that there is a role for Government as “there is great progress being made already, and [...] a huge will within the sector to continue in this vein”.¹⁴³ However, Julie’s Bicycle warned that this progress is under threat:

with festivals facing additional financial pressures from both Covid-19 and Brexit and few policy incentives, without external support and environmental requirements built into recovery, voluntary environmental budgets and action will be vulnerable. Action to reduce environmental impacts will stall, or may even reverse.¹⁴⁴

71. Despite the good intentions and countless initiatives to reduce the environmental impacts of festivals, the growth of the market has undermined the sector’s efforts to reduce overall emissions, and the legacy of the pandemic presents a further threat to those measures. The Government and local authorities should signal their commitment to emissions targets by holding the festival sector to account on, and supporting, its pledges to reduce emissions, rather than letting it continue to mark its own homework.

72. We recommend that before the 2023 festival season the Government, the Local Government Association and representatives from across the festival sector develop standardised environmental objectives that local authorities must adopt when licensing festivals, and that local authorities should report back to DCMS on those events’ progress at reducing emissions year-on-year.

Drug-related harm at festivals

73. Although not all festivals are affected equally, many must plan for the eventuality that illegal drugs will be dealt and consumed onsite and they employ a range of measures to prevent drug use, from searches and awareness campaigns to amnesty bins.¹⁴⁵ Research indicates that about half of those attending festivals take drugs, while the UK has one of the highest rates of drug-related deaths in Europe.¹⁴⁶ This leads Boomtown’s Anna Wade to argue that the “zero-tolerance approach of, ‘Don’t do drugs, they’re illegal,’ does not work with young people [...] and it just does not keep people safe”.¹⁴⁷

74. Professor Fiona Measham, director of drug-checking service The Loop and Chair in Criminology at the University of Liverpool, told us that there are particular risks associated with drug use at festivals. Her research has found that festivals are sites of “excessive” and “atypical” intoxication: a quarter of festival-goers take larger quantities of drugs at festivals than they would normally, and the risks are compounded by their consumption of alcohol, disrupted sleep patterns and the length of the festival experience.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, drug dealers at festivals “are twice as likely to mis-sell substances on site as neighbourhood dealers”, which Professor Measham attributes to the fact that with “tens of thousands of people in a crowd, they can sell pretty much anything, disappear, and there

142 [Q211](#)

143 [Q350](#)

144 Julie’s Bicycle ([FES0065](#)) para 1.2

145 [Q41](#)

146 [Qq232](#), [233](#)

147 [Q232](#), [Q40](#)

148 [Q277](#)

is no recourse”.¹⁴⁹ Finally, some festival-goers “only take drugs at festivals once a year, so their tolerance will be lower, and also their knowledge of the market will be lower”. Professor Measham has “seen people in their 30s and 40s and older get into trouble for that reason, this once a year blow-out, and they are unaware of what is in circulation”.¹⁵⁰

The risks at festivals this year

75. The unique nature of the 2021 festival season could increase the risks of drug-related harm. The drugs market and people’s behaviour once restrictions are lifted are cause for concern: Switzerland has recently “tested the highest strength [MDMA] pills in circulation ever”, and at New Zealand’s recent festivals “about half of substances sold as MDMA” were tested to be another substance.¹⁵¹ Professor Measham told us that as “most people have not been to festivals or nightclubs for a year” they will have “lowered tolerance to drugs”, while Assistant Chief Constable Justin Bibby of Staffordshire Police told us of a likely “increase in risk-taking behaviour”.¹⁵² As a result, Professor Measham is concerned that “drug-related harm will increase”, and the number of drug-related deaths at festivals this year will also rise.¹⁵³

76. The likely consolidation of the festival season this summer will also prevent agencies from testing drugs in circulation and issuing alerts ahead of events. Usually organisations such as The Loop start testing substances in May, and by the main festival season there is robust intelligence about what is in circulation and what the risks are. However, Professor Measham said that this year it feels “like we are going to be fighting with one arm tied behind our backs at the beginning of the festival season”.¹⁵⁴

77. As we have already explored, job losses could mean that experience in dealing with people under the effects of illegal substances is lost. Deputy Chief Constable Jason Harwin, the National Police Chiefs’ Council Lead for Drugs, told us that “40% to 50% of the stewarding on site at festivals will not be the same people who were there two years ago” and the potential lack of expertise about dealing with those experiencing drug-related harms could create a “real risk”.¹⁵⁵ Yet despite these concerns and the need for public health and law enforcement agencies to build their intelligence in advance of the festival season, the Minister told us that preventing drug-related harms “is not being considered” in the pilots of the Events Research Programme.¹⁵⁶

Drug checking

78. Drug checking is among the measures that some festivals, including Boomtown, have employed to reduce the risks of drug-related harm. Drug checking involves testing a substance to determine its content and strength and then issuing health advice based on the results. It can happen ‘back-of-house’ on substances that have been seized from the public, or ‘front-of-house’ when people voluntarily submit samples for testing. Its advocates stress that it neither promotes illicit drug use nor claims that any drug is safe,

149 [Q259](#)

150 [Q277](#)

151 [Q232](#)

152 [Qq232, 237](#)

153 [Qq240–241](#)

154 [Q240](#)

155 [Q239](#)

156 [Q340](#)

but rather helps drug users to make informed choices “to reduce the risk of poisoning, overdose or other harmful effects caused by ingesting substances of unknown content or strength”.¹⁵⁷ However, the provider of medical services for Glastonbury and Reading festivals cautioned:

Back-of-house testing of seized substances can provide useful intelligence, but [we believe] that the benefit of front-of-house testing of samples submitted by festival-goers is not established and there is real potential for unintended consequences which does not appear to have been adequately assessed.¹⁵⁸

79. The Loop conducts front-of-house Multi Agency Safety Testing (MAST) at UK festivals. Substances are submitted by the public for rapid forensic analysis by professional chemists in pop-up laboratories. The results of those tests and tailored harm-prevention advice is then given by healthcare professionals to the individual who submitted the substance. They will be told, for example, about the harms of mixing particular substances or consuming alcohol at the same time as an illegal drug. The Loop operates on a cross-agency basis, involving festival organisers, licensing authorities, the police and public health officials. This means information about the drugs circulating at an event is passed to the police or medical services, while any surplus substances are destroyed or passed to the police.¹⁵⁹

80. Since 2016, “there have been no drug-related deaths at any festival that MAST has operated at and some evidence of reduced hospital admissions”.¹⁶⁰ Evidence suggests festivals see a 10% to 25% reduction in drug-related harm when The Loop operates on site, and that it changes behaviours: half of those who find out that substances are not what they thought they were sold hand the drugs over to be destroyed, with similar proportions who find out substances are stronger than they thought taking less to prevent overdose.¹⁶¹ More than 95% of the people who use The Loop’s services “have never spoken to a healthcare professional about their drug use before”, which means the organisation “offers information and advice directly to a typically hard to reach demographic of predominantly young adults about the risks of drug use and the hidden dangers that can exist in experimentation without knowledge”.¹⁶²

81. However, the legal framework for drug checking in the UK is a barrier to organisations such as The Loop. Under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, “the possession, supply or production of any amount of a controlled drug without a licence—where one is needed—is a criminal offence”; therefore, The Loop relies on the police not enforcing the law against people handing over substances for testing.¹⁶³ While the Home Office can issue licences for organisations to handle controlled drugs, these “have always been for fixed sites, permanent laboratories and not for mobile facilities” such as tents in festival fields.¹⁶⁴ Professor Measham told us that the cost of having to apply for a licence for each festival would be prohibitive, and even if The Loop was licensed it would not be specifically for

157 [Q44](#), Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 9.24

158 Festival Medical Services ([FES0020](#))

159 [Q39](#)

160 Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 9.31

161 [Q244](#)

162 [Q243](#), Association of Independent Festivals ([FES0034](#)) para 9.28

163 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ([FES0064](#)), [Q271](#)

164 [Qq268](#), [280](#)

drug checking, which is different from handling substances.¹⁶⁵ The Loop can operate at a festival only if local police forces agree, and Professor Measham “would appreciate having greater clarity about the legislative and policy framework that we operate in because legal opinions differ”.¹⁶⁶ DCC Harwin described the current situation as “a no-man’s land [...] where policing is stuck in the middle”.¹⁶⁷

82. In 2018, the Government stated that the Home Office does not stand in the way of any decision to permit The Loop to conduct MAST at a festival as these “are local operating decisions”; however, the AIF observes that “there is some confusion between agencies at national level”. For example, We are FSTVL in Essex told us that it has tried on several occasions “to introduce Multi Agency Safety Testing (MAST) testing [...] but each attempt has been denied by the Metropolitan Police”. The AIF therefore recommends that the Government:

clarify the current policy situation, support professional lab-level drug checking of the type delivered by the Loop to reduce drug-related harm at festivals, and to work with the UK’s MAST service provider to enable roll out across the UK.¹⁶⁸

83. In doing so, the UK Government might learn from New Zealand, which passed legislation in December 2020 to allow drug and substance testing services to operate legally over the country’s summer festival season. New Zealand’s Drug and Substance Checking Legislation Act enables drug testing services to legally handle controlled drugs for the purposes of testing a substance’s composition or disposing of a sample.¹⁶⁹ It remains illegal for members of the public to possess controlled drugs and unapproved psychoactive substances. The Act’s provisions will last for 12 months, after which time New Zealand’s Ministry of Health is expected to have developed a full system to regulate drug checking services permanently.

84. We asked DCC Harwin and ACC Bibby if they would support a change in the law to permit drug checking services to operate in the UK. They were clear that any legislative change would have to be based on evidence, but also indicated that the scale of drug checking in the UK has been too small to build a robust evidence base, and that a year of potential evidence building has been lost to Covid-19.¹⁷⁰ DCC Harwin also told us that “the Home Office should not technically lead” on legislative changes in this area, and that it “should be led more by the Department of Health and Social Care because really it is a public health response”.¹⁷¹ There is also a financial challenge to overcome: The Loop is staffed by volunteer chemists and healthcare staff, so does not charge festivals for its services. If it did, the true cost “would probably be £50,000 or £60,000 per festival”, which raises questions about how the UK might have an economically sustainable but accurate drug-checking service in the future.¹⁷²

85. The Minister told us that “there have been no conversations between” DCMS and the Home Office to discuss learning from New Zealand’s approach or evidence. She was

165 [Qq267, 268](#)

166 [Q280](#)

167 [Q247](#)

168 Association of Independent Festivals ([FE50034](#)) para 9.35

169 [Explanatory note to the Drug and Substance Checking Legislation Bill](#)

170 [Qq247, 248, 252, 279](#)

171 [Q280](#)

172 [Q243](#)

clear that the Government's view is "that no illicit drug can be assumed to be safe" and expressed concern that drug checking could give the wrong impression that a substance is safe. However, Professor Measham stressed that The Loop is always clear with service users "that the safest way to take drugs is not to take them at all" and that it will "never return substances to people" nor "encourage, facilitate or assist with drug use"; the Minister later admitted that she had "not done enough research or investigation" into The Loop's work to conclude that it sends a message that drugs are safe.¹⁷³

86. We are highly concerned that a compressed festival season, the likely circulation of high-strength, adulterated drugs and increased risk-taking after lockdown will lead to a spike in drug-related deaths at festivals this summer. We heard compelling arguments that drug checking saves lives, but in many cases service providers and police forces are being constrained by a lack of clarity in the legal framework and the need for a stronger evidence base. While it would be preferable for the UK to develop a dedicated legal framework for drug checking services, rather than try to retrofit the existing legislation, this will take time.

87. We recommend that, before festivals take place this summer, the Home Secretary should make regulations under section 7 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 that allow organisations conducting drug checking to operate lawfully. Thereafter, the Government should introduce a dedicated licensing scheme for drug checking to set a clear legal framework and minimum standards that service providers must meet. Within the next six months, DCMS should convene a roundtable on such a licensing scheme bringing together the Home Office, the Department of Health and Social Care, police representatives, festival organisers and service providers.

Secondary ticketing

88. The effects of the pandemic could exacerbate long-standing issues with the resale of tickets. If restrictions are not lifted in time, some sold out festivals will not go ahead this summer and ticket-holders will have to secure a refund or roll-over their tickets to next year. This should be straightforward if tickets have been purchased through official, primary platforms; however, our predecessor Committee's inquiry on live music heard how consumers can struggle to secure refunds for tickets bought on secondary resale sites such as viagogo. The Minister does not consider it irresponsible for organisers to sell tickets for these events because it gives them "the confidence to want to go ahead"; however, she told us that the Government "would always recommend that [consumers] 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".¹⁷⁴

89. Although some festivals have robust measures in place to stop the resale of tickets by touts, not all do. Touts buy up large numbers of tickets from primary ticketing platforms to resell at a profit, often by using bots to make large volumes of transactions at speed. The Breaching of Limits on Ticket Sales Regulations 2018, which the Government committed to review before 2023, made it an offence to use automated computer programmes to purchase more tickets than allowed under an event's terms and conditions for financial gain.¹⁷⁵ However, the fight against touts depends on both the intervention of primary

173 [Qq267, 343, 346](#)

174 [Qq361–362](#)

175 DCMS Committee, Ninth Report of Session 2017–19, [Live Music](#), HC 733 and Eighth Special Report of Session 2017–19, [Live music: Government Response to the Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2017–19](#), HC 2555

ticketing platforms and promoters setting purchase limits for events. We asked whether the Minister is concerned that the industry's significant loss of revenue during the pandemic might make it less inclined to take such steps against touts, and she replied "it is something we will definitely keep an eye on".¹⁷⁶ Likewise, following concerns that Google continues to promote secondary sites in breach of its own advertising guidelines, she confirmed that DCMS will review online advertising later this year.¹⁷⁷

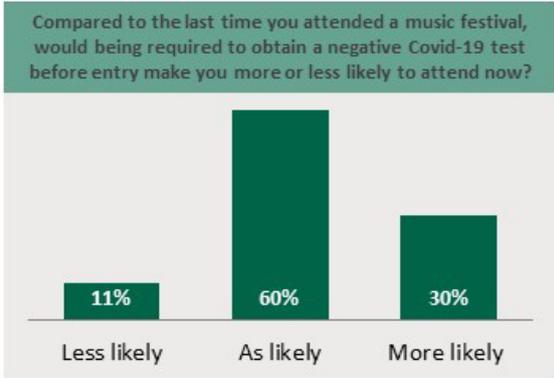
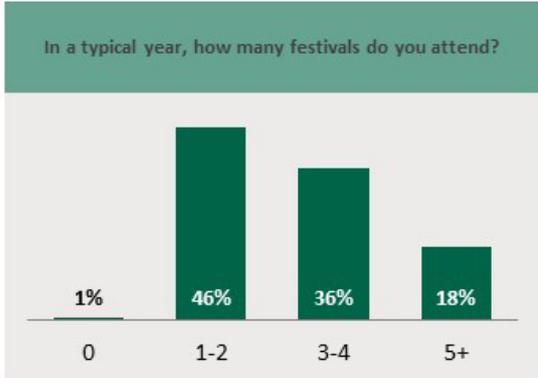
90. With tickets on sale for festivals that might not take place, we are concerned that the difficulty of securing refunds from secondary ticketing platforms, and the industry's understandable desire to maximise sales, could mean consumers lose out as the events industry emerges from the pandemic. We recommend that the Government assesses the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in its Post Implementation Review of the Breaching of Limits on Ticket Sales Regulations 2018, which it committed to conducting between 2021 and 2023.

176 [Q359](#)

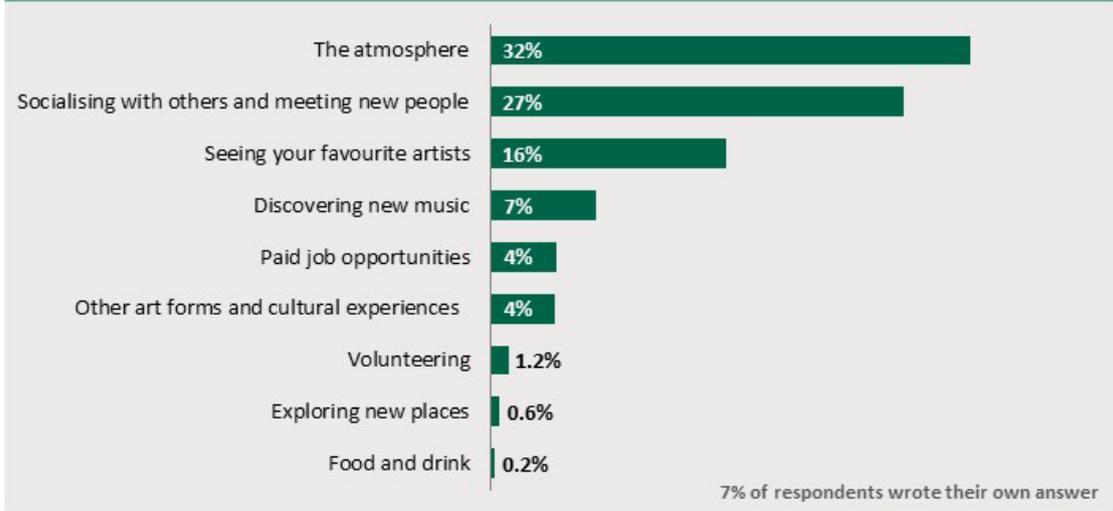
177 [Q360](#)

Annex 1: Survey results

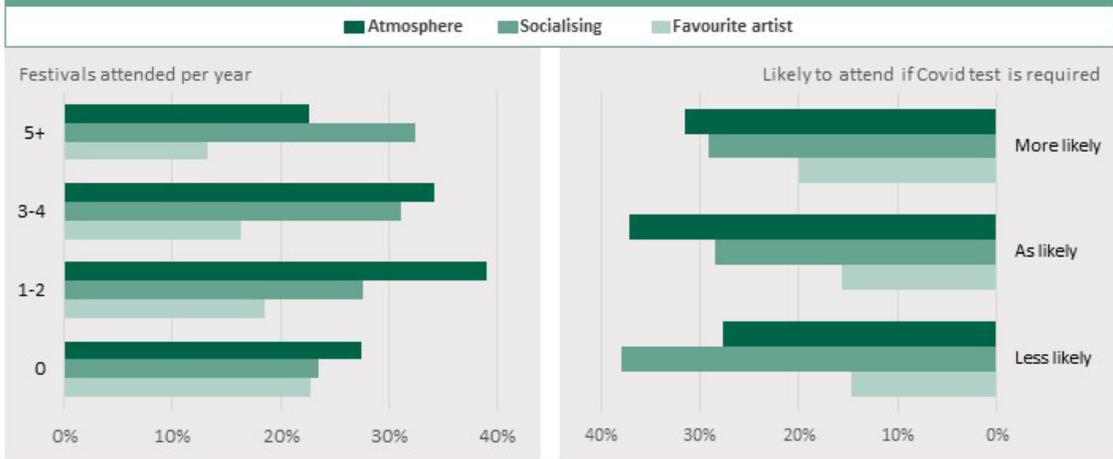
DCMS Committee survey: Calling all music lovers and festival goers – what do music festivals mean to you?



What have you missed most from the cancellation of music festivals in 2020?



Whilst respondents were most likely to miss “the atmosphere”, those attending a lot of festivals and those less likely to attend if a Covid test is required missed “socialising with others and meeting new people” the most.



Results based on 36,497 responses to open online poll that ran 2 - 22 February 2021. Survey was not a scientific, or necessarily representative, study.

Conclusions and recommendations

The return of festivals after the Covid-19 pandemic

1. With only 8% of festivals applying for the first round of the Culture Recovery Fund, and those that were successful receiving just 1.3% of the available grants, the Government's flagship investment in the arts was of limited benefit to the festival sector as a whole. This was in part due to the needs, resources and management structures of festivals, many of which were not used to applying for public funding. However, it also reveals that there are lessons for Arts Council England and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to learn about how they engage with, and meet the needs of, this important part of our creative industries. (Paragraph 14)
2. Government-backed insurance is crucial to mitigating the Covid-19 related risks to festival organisers and enabling them to start planning, as the vast majority do not have the financial resilience to cover the costs of another year of late-notice cancellations. Despite the events and insurance industries proposing a range of solutions for how such a scheme might work, the Government have refused to take multiple opportunities to address the market failure in the provision of insurance for live events this summer and set the conditions to unlock the significant economic and cultural contribution made by festivals and their supply chains. Although there remains considerable uncertainty around the risks of new Covid-19 variants, the Government's plan to wait until all restrictions are lifted will simply be too late for festivals this summer. With restrictions on lower-capacity, socially distanced outdoor events already having been lifted, the Government must act now. (Paragraph 20)
3. *We repeat our call for the Government to introduce a time-limited insurance scheme for costs incurred by live events scheduled to take place after 21 June that may have to cancel if there is a need for, or return to, continuing Covid-19 restrictions. The scheme should run until the commercial insurance market offers sufficient cover to the events industry for Covid-19 related cancellations.* (Paragraph 21)
4. The success of the vaccine rollout and the target date announced during our inquiry under the Government's roadmap for lifting lockdown gave hope to many that festivals will be able to take place this summer. However, the lifting of all restrictions on live events remains heavily contingent on the Events Research Programme. Despite initial positive data from some settings, we are not confident the pilots will deliver the evidence needed in time to lift all restrictions on live events from 21 June. By the Minister's own admission, festivals are unique settings and yet they were initially overlooked in the first tranche of pilots. We strongly welcome the decision, following our questioning of the Minister, to conduct a festival-type pilot in early May; however a one-day event for 5,000 people does not capture the full range of UK festivals and further pilots may therefore be needed. (Paragraph 36)
5. *While our preference remains for a comprehensive sector-wide insurance scheme, we recommend, in the absence of such a scheme, a targeted intervention that extends the Events Research Programme and associated liabilities to a range of additional pilot events, including festivals of different sizes and genres, across the UK during the rest of 2021.* (Paragraph 37)

The economic and cultural contributions of festivals

6. Festival supply chains and freelance workers cannot sustain another year with little to no income. Continued uncertainty about whether events will go ahead or a significant reduction in the number that do go ahead this summer will make it harder for skilled personnel temporarily working in other industries to return to the sector. We are concerned that this will have consequences not only for the safe running of events this summer but for the talent pipeline of this important growth sector. (Paragraph 50)
7. We welcome the PRS Foundation's Keychange initiative to increase the number of female artists appearing in festival line-ups, and recommend that all festivals sign up to it. During the pandemic, support from the public purse has been available for festivals, albeit to an insufficient degree. It is incumbent on festivals to ensure that under-represented female artists at all career stages also benefit from that support by appearing in greater numbers on festival line-ups in the future. (Paragraph 54)
8. The UK has long occupied an important place in Europe's live music ecosystem, and has traditionally been a starting point for tours creating work for UK-based freelancers and suppliers. The substantial UK-based infrastructure, including haulage, for tours and festivals is currently at risk unless the Government finds a solution to Brexit-related costs and complexities. *We recommend that the Government report to us, monthly, on actions it is taking to alleviate this issue bilaterally and with the EU Commission.* (Paragraph 61)
9. The UK-EU trade and co-operation deal threatens not only the vibrancy of the UK's festivals but the music industry as a whole. The cost and complication of moving people and equipment between the UK and EU will make it less attractive for bands from overseas to play at the UK's festivals, and will limit the chances for UK artists and crews to build audiences and contacts at European festivals. We are not aware of any progress having been made to resolve the issues arising from the deal, and will continue to put pressure on the Government by questioning the Secretary of State, DCMS Ministers and the Rt Hon Lord Frost CMG. (Paragraph 62)
10. Despite the good intentions and countless initiatives to reduce the environmental impacts of festivals, the growth of the market has undermined the sector's efforts to reduce overall emissions, and the legacy of the pandemic presents a further threat to those measures. The Government and local authorities should signal their commitment to emissions targets by holding the festival sector to account on, and supporting, its pledges to reduce emissions, rather than letting it continue to mark its own homework. (Paragraph 71)
11. *We recommend that before the 2023 festival season the Government, the Local Government Association and representatives from across the festival sector develop standardised environmental objectives that local authorities must adopt when licensing festivals, and that local authorities should report back to DCMS on those events' progress at reducing emissions year-on-year.* (Paragraph 72)
12. We are highly concerned that a compressed festival season, the likely circulation of high-strength, adulterated drugs and increased risk-taking after lockdown will lead to a spike in drug-related deaths at festivals this summer. We heard compelling

arguments that drug checking saves lives, but in many cases service providers and police forces are being constrained by a lack of clarity in the legal framework and the need for a stronger evidence base. While it would be preferable for the UK to develop a dedicated legal framework for drug checking services, rather than try to retrofit the existing legislation, this will take time. (Paragraph 86)

13. *We recommend that, before festivals take place this summer, the Home Secretary should make regulations under section 7 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 that allow organisations conducting drug checking to operate lawfully. Thereafter, the Government should introduce a dedicated licensing scheme for drug checking to set a clear legal framework and minimum standards that service providers must meet. Within the next six months, DCMS should convene a roundtable on such a licensing scheme bringing together the Home Office, the Department of Health and Social Care, police representatives, festival organisers and service providers. (Paragraph 87)*
14. With tickets on sale for festivals that might not take place, we are concerned that the difficulty of securing refunds from secondary ticketing platforms, and the industry's understandable desire to maximise sales, could mean consumers lose out as the events industry emerges from the pandemic. *We recommend that the Government assesses the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in its Post Implementation Review of the Breaching of Limits on Ticket Sales Regulations 2018, which it committed to conducting between 2021 and 2023. (Paragraph 90)*

Formal minutes

Wednesday 26 May 2021

Virtual meeting

Julian Knight, in the Chair

Kevin Brennan	Rt Hon Damian Hinds
Steve Brine	John Nicolson
Clive Efford	Giles Watling
Rt Hon Damian Green	

Draft Report (*The future of UK music festivals*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 90 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Annex agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the First Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No.134.

[Adjourned till Thursday 10 June at 2.00 p.m.]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 5 January 2021

Sacha Lord, Co-founder, Parklife and The Warehouse Project; **Anna Wade**, Communications & Strategy Director, Boomtown Fair [Q1-45](#)

Steve Heap, General Secretary, Association of Festival Organisers; **Jamie Njoku-Goodwin**, Chief Executive, UK Music; **Paul Reed**, Chief Executive, Association of Independent Festivals [Q46-80](#)

Tuesday 2 February 2021

Matthew Phillip, Chief Executive, Notting Hill Carnival Ltd; **Rowan Cannon**, Director, Wild Rumpus [Q81-112](#)

Duncan Bell, Political group leader, #WeMakeEvents; **Tre Stead**, Tour Manager [Q113-159](#)

Dr Andrew Smith, Reader, Architecture and Cities, University of Westminster [Q160-181](#)

Tuesday 16 March 2021

Robert Del Naja, Massive Attack; **Professor Carly McLachlan**, Professor of Climate and Energy Policy, The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research [Q182-229](#)

Assistant Chief Constable Justin Bibby, Assistant Chief Constable, Staffordshire Police; **Deputy Chief Constable Jason Harwin**, Lead for Drugs, National Police Chiefs' Council; **Professor Fiona Measham**, Director, The Loop, Chair in Criminology, University of Liverpool [Q230-282](#)

Wednesday 24 March 2021

Caroline Dinenage MP, Minister for Digital and Culture, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport; **Victoria MacCallum**, Deputy Director, Head of Screen, International and Skills for the Creative Industries, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport [Q283-362](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

FES numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 #WeMakeEvents ([FES0040](#))
- 2 A Greener Festival ([FES0045](#))
- 3 Adlib Audio Limited ([FES0091](#))
- 4 Adventure Camp Limited ([FES0095](#))
- 5 All Party Parliamentary Jazz Appreciation Group ([FES0077](#))
- 6 Arts Council England ([FES0099](#))
- 7 Association of Independent Festivals (AIF) ([FES0103](#))
- 8 Association of Independent Festivals (AIF) ([FES0034](#))
- 9 Baroque, Mr Henry ([FES0039](#))
- 10 Birmingham, Sandwell & Westside Jazz Festival ([FES0060](#))
- 11 Bob's Radio Know-how ([FES0027](#))
- 12 Bournemouth 7s Festival; South Coast Events Forum; and National Outdoor Events Association ([FES0028](#))
- 13 Brian Yeardeley Continental Ltd Trucking By division ([FES0102](#))
- 14 British Entertainment Industry Radio Group ([FES0098](#))
- 15 BunkFest ([FES0030](#))
- 16 Collins, Stewart ([FES0013](#))
- 17 Cornwall Council ([FES0075](#))
- 18 Davies, Dr Karen ([FES0074](#))
- 19 Deerstock Music Festival ([FES0003](#))
- 20 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ([FES0107](#))
- 21 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ([FES0106](#))
- 22 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ([FES0064](#))
- 23 Deva Fest Ltd ([FES0032](#))
- 24 Drew, Mr Rod ([FES0043](#))
- 25 Edinburgh International Festival ([FES0097](#))
- 26 Featured Artists Coalition (FAC); and Music Managers Forum (MMF) ([FES0089](#))
- 27 Festival Medical Services ([FES0020](#))
- 28 Griffiths, Mr Danny ([FES0012](#))
- 29 Happy Days Live Limited - 'Happy Days Festival' ([FES0085](#))
- 30 Harwich International Shanty Festival ([FES0080](#))
- 31 Hay Festival ([FES0101](#))
- 32 Instant Access Medical Limited ([FES0105](#))
- 33 Isle of Wight Council ([FES0088](#))

- 34 Isle of Wight Independent Festivals & Events ([FES0061](#))
- 35 Isle of Wight Literary Festival ([FES0073](#))
- 36 Julie's Bicycle ([FES0065](#))
- 37 LIVE (Live music Industry, Venues & Entertainment) ([FES0062](#))
- 38 Lakefest ([FES0029](#))
- 39 Lichfield Arts ([FES0036](#))
- 40 MP, Bob Seely ([FES0100](#))
- 41 Massive Attack; and The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research ([FES0090](#))
- 42 Mattingley, Mr Nick ([FES0067](#))
- 43 Method Events Limited ([FES0021](#))
- 44 MugStock Limited ([FES0031](#))
- 45 NCASS (Nationwide Caterers Association) ([FES0063](#))
- 46 Noisily Festival LTD ([FES0044](#))
- 47 Notting Hill Carnival Ltd ([FES0069](#))
- 48 Oxfam ([FES0083](#))
- 49 PLASA ([FES0081](#))
- 50 PLRS ([FES0019](#))
- 51 Pacy, Michael ([FES0024](#))
- 52 Pearce Hire ([FES0068](#))
- 53 Priddy Folk Festival ([FES0007](#))
- 54 Production Services Association ([FES0048](#))
- 55 Robson, Mr Luke ([FES0001](#))
- 56 SSE Audio Group Limited ([FES0046](#))
- 57 Schofield, Mr Derek ([FES0042](#))
- 58 Serious Stages Ltd ([FES0033](#))
- 59 Sheffield City Region Music Board ([FES0096](#))
- 60 Sidmouth Chamber of Commerce ([FES0041](#))
- 61 Sidmouth Folk Festival ([FES0026](#))
- 62 Skiddle ([FES0057](#))
- 63 Smith, Dr Andrew ([FES0086](#))
- 64 So Sussex ([FES0082](#))
- 65 South Oxfordshire District Council ([FES0053](#))
- 66 Southby Productions ([FES0022](#))
- 67 Spindlewood Limited ([FES0015](#))
- 68 Stompin on the Quomps CIC ([FES0066](#))
- 69 Surey, Elliot ([FES0078](#))
- 70 Swanage Jazz Festival; and Stompin' On The Quomps, Christchurch ([FES0071](#))
- 71 Tenterden Folk Day Trust ([FES0005](#))

- 72 The Association of Festival Organisers (AFO) ([FES0035](#))
- 73 The Green Gathering ([FES0072](#))
- 74 The Musicians' Union (The MU) ([FES0049](#))
- 75 The University of Sheffield ([FES0093](#))
- 76 Thorpe, Hollie; and Erin Corby ([FES0076](#))
- 77 Todmorden Folk Festival ([FES0016](#))
- 78 Towersey Festival ([FES0011](#))
- 79 Trades Union Council - South West; and Tolpuddle Martyrs' Memorial Trust ([FES0006](#))
- 80 UK Live Ltd ([FES0017](#))
- 81 UK Music ([FES0092](#))
- 82 University of Gloucestershire ([FES0104](#))
- 83 University of Gloucestershire ([FES0070](#))
- 84 Vale of White Horse District Council ([FES0052](#))
- 85 Valley Fest Ltd ([FES0079](#))
- 86 Watchet LIVE C.I.C ([FES0025](#))
- 87 We Are FSTVL ([FES0047](#))
- 88 Whitby Folk Week ([FES0094](#))
- 89 Zipabout Ltd ([FES0037](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

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1st Special	BBC Annual Report and Accounts 2018–19: TV licences for over 75s Government and the BBC's Responses to the Committee's Sixteenth Report of Session 2017–19	HC 98
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