

EVIDENCE ON THE GOVERNMENT'S CORONAVIRUS FINANCIAL PACKAGE

SUBMITTED BY THE FEDERATION OF SCOTTISH THEATRE

1. The Federation of Scottish Theatre is the development body for professional dance, opera and theatre in Scotland, bringing the sector together to speak with a collective voice, to share resources and expertise and to promote collaborative working. FST represents a network of over 200 professional performing arts organisations and individuals throughout Scotland including main house producers, presenting venues, touring companies, companies working in schools and communities, companies producing and presenting work for children, dance companies, local authority venues and educational establishments.
2. FST undertakes advocacy at a national level with government and funding bodies, co-ordinates capacity building initiatives and provides training, advice and other services to members to secure the creative future of dance, opera and theatre in Scotland.
3. On behalf of our members we make the following brief points:
 - We warmly welcome the support put in place for those in employment, and we particularly welcome the fact that it is to be available for charitable organisations.
 - There is some concern over the likely future interpretation, by HRMC and others, of the guidance that Retention Payments will be made in respect of 'those employees that would otherwise have been laid off'. Absent any definition of or precedent for 'furlough' in UK employment law, we seek rapid guidance on eligibility details for furlough payments and urgent reassurance that businesses will not, as a condition of furlough payment eligibility, have been expected to have followed full redundancy processes.
 - We also have concerns that this definition could work against those employers in our sector who, despite the likely implications for future production, are trying to do the right thing by their staff by not making them redundant. Further clarification on this is urgently required so that businesses can treat staff fairly and humanely now **and** give them a better chance of continued employment in future.
 - For our members engaged in international touring work, for instance to China, income has been cut off for at least two months. Ticket income for venues and companies began to drop precipitately over a week ago; planned productions are now cancelled or on hold to protect communities. This means that many of our members are now reaching, and indeed have reached, crisis point. They are frequently small businesses operating with limited capacity and they simply cannot wait much longer for cash. We urgently need clarity on how and where grants can be accessed.
 - Our industry relies heavily on highly skilled professional freelance workers, from dancers and directors to lighting designers and backstage technical experts. Current arrangements mean they can access only SSP rather than a proportion of their usual income. We therefore ask the Committee to use its influence to urge the UK Government to act quickly to offer equitable support to these thousands of creative and entrepreneurial people. We will need them more than ever as we seek to recover from this crisis, and we must support them now to avoid a catastrophic loss of creative talent.

Jude Henderson, Director, Federation of Scottish Theatre