

**Written evidence from Melvin Benn, Managing Director, Festival Republic [MiM0051]**

Festival Republic works extremely hard delivering safeguarding policies to keep everyone safe at festivals. Our primary goal is for festival goers to have a fantastic experience free from harassment or harm.

Harassment has no place nor is accepted at my festivals. However, as the Committee knows only too well, harassment is currently an inevitable societal harm, and it does raise its ugly head everywhere.

I'd like to reassure the Committee that Festival Republic takes its duty to keep people safe very seriously. We work closely with the local police and the local emergency services. Our on-site welfare and medical services are second to none.

Prior to an event being delivered, my teams work on many welfare strategies to support anyone who may feel harassed or unsafe due to unwanted attention, and in the very worst circumstances, have been subjected to sexual assaults or abuse. We encourage anyone who is subjected to this type of behaviour to report it, whether that be to an event organiser, one of our on-site charity partners, or the police.

On-site, we promote a clear policy of mutual consent between individuals. In collaboration with Brook, the sexual wellbeing charity (see listed below), FR will be running unique consent messaging across festival sites this summer.

Some examples of the messaging below:



**How do you get consent?**

**ASK your partner**

**Do you want  
to have sex?**

**READ their body language**

**Are they:  
comfortable and relaxed?**

**ASK your partner**

**Is it ok if  
I kiss you?**

The campaign will run on screens across festival sites.

## Our work with campaigning, charity, and welfare providers

Festival Republic's welfare and access teams work closely with charitable organisations such as Safe Gigs for Women and other supportive agencies like the Samaritans to ensure support and aid to anyone on-site. The organisations we work with are:

- **Safe gigs for Women** - Safe Gigs for Women work across all our festivals. We raise awareness of their 'Bystander Method' using customer-facing stands on-site - [https://www.facebook.com/safegigsforwomen/?locale=en\\_GB](https://www.facebook.com/safegigsforwomen/?locale=en_GB)
- **Ask For Angela** – FR operates Ask For Angela at all bars and with all staff members - <https://www.met.police.uk/police-forces/metropolitan-police/areas/about-us/about-the-met/campaigns/ask-for-angela/>
- **FMS (Festival Medical Services)** – FMS is a registered charity providing on-site medical services across our festival estate. (<https://www.festival-medical.org/>)
- **Code Blue UK** - Provides medical care and additional safeguarding team support - <https://www.codebluemedical.co.uk/>
- **Brook** – A sexual health and wellbeing charity who distribute condoms on-site and encourage conversations about the importance of consent and safe sex - <https://www.brook.org.uk/>
- **ITHINC** – A registered charity providing festival welfare services and harm minimisation solutions. They work hard towards the right outcome depending on the case. This might be providing professional advice, involving the parent(s) and guardian(s), linking in with our partner agencies or enabling everybody to feel safe and happy once more to enjoy the duration of the festival - <https://ithinc.co.uk/>
- **Salvation Army** – The Salvation Army have volunteered at our festivals for decades, providing emotional and practical support for festival goers. <https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/>
- **Samaritans** - The volunteer team are expertly trained at listening and providing comfort to those in need in a confidential manner - <https://www.samaritans.org/>
- **Street Pastors** – They provide a friendly face and listening ear for festivalgoers. They also stock tea and coffee and hot water for all pot noodle needs: <https://www.streetpastors.org/> and <https://streetpastors.org/locations/reading/about-us/>
- **Narcotics Anonymous** - Narcotics Anonymous is a community of friendly people who support each other to achieve and maintain a drug free life. There are joining us at the festival to host daily meetings throughout the day discussing drugs, keeping safe and any concerns you may have. Support can continue with them post festival.
- **Festival Angels** - Active throughout the campsites and offering food in the village, the Festival Angels provide a friendly face and listening ear for festival goers. - <https://www.festivalangels.org.uk/>
- **Brighter Futures for Children** - New to the team in 2022, their vision is to unlock resources to help every child and young person to have a happy, healthy and successful life. Bright futures will be working with all the above partners throughout the festival - <https://brighterfuturesforchildren.org/>

## Our on-site welfare facilities

The scale of our welfare operation is vast. We flag advice on personal safety on our websites such as here: <https://www.readingfestival.com/information-category/personal-safety>

FR provides training to staff and employees. We encourage our staff and employees to volunteer with welfare organisations on-site as part of our holistic, whole-team effort to combat harassment and offer support to those who suffer.

Our on-site welfare services are constantly being reviewed and improved. Where a policy is provably effective, we will review and roll it out based on feedback and the needs of our audience.

Please see below a list of measures we have on-site in terms of safeguarding and harm reduction.

- **On-Site Medical** – full staffed on-site hospitals (plus ancillary First Aid Points) operating 24-hours. This service provides everything from First Aid to in-patient treatment to X-Ray to podiatry to psychiatric support. The on-site facilities link with local services to transfer patients to hospital if required.
- **On-Site Welfare** – fully staffed welfare tents located in prime locations around the site to act as a safe space for those in need and provide support to medical.
- **AIR HUBS** – new for 2023, these hubs will be staffed with volunteer groups to provide Advice, Information and Response to those in need around campsites at our major camping festivals. Signposting to other services on-site and acting as a friendly face.
- **Information Tents** - The experienced info hubs ran by WAVES' team can help with general queries, sign posting, what time bands are due on stage to everything else in between.
- **BOH Dugs Testing** – Drugs amnestied or seized are all tested in a secure room on-site. Continual updates are provided to SAG on the types and strengths of drugs we have found. Informed decisions can then be made on proactive harm reduction messaging warning of the dangers of a particular drug which may be in circulation.

The BBC ran a piece on BBC News TV piece from Reading Fest 2022 featuring vox pops from festival goers and welfare staff which the Committee might like to watch, link here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1m2bD3l8SCG0FMIBWD71aFqQQ38l5kY-i/view?usp=drivesdk>

### **AIR - Assistance, Information, Response Hubs – 2023**

We have introduced AIR (Assistance, Information, Response) Hubs across our major festivals. These hubs will provide information, support, and signposting for campers to get to the appropriate facilities.

With AIR Hubs alongside our many aid facilities, a festival goer will never be more than 200m away from contact with festival staff who can radio through or signpost them to the nearest appropriate help available.

At Leeds, we have had 'Safe Hubs' in each campsite since 2017. Initially staffed by young volunteers they have evolved to be run now by trained welfare staff. The Hubs were not designed to hold people for a long time. They were designed as a "first point of contact" to assess, potentially treat and get people moved on to the right place if their needs require escalation.

From 2023 onwards, the new public facing welfare tents will be able to hold and treat more people – with bigger tents, more facilities and a higher level of trained first aiders.

## Communication Campaigns

We run proactive consumer-facing campaigns, to talk to and educate our audience ahead of arriving at a festival.

At Reading and at Leeds we have a collaboration called FACT between Reading Borough Council, CGL (Reading), Thames Valley Police, Leeds City Council, Forward Leeds and Festival Republic. Members of the FACT have expertise in drugs and alcohol, health and wellbeing, welfare and safeguarding, marketing and communications and events management.

In 2021, FACT developed #LookOutForEachOther – a drug, alcohol, consent, and wider health & wellbeing festival campaign. Based on a series of animations, the campaign aims to raise awareness of these issues, to ensure festival goers have the best time, while remaining safe. The campaign is also used at several festivals across the country, including Download, Wireless, Latitude and Creamfields.

As well as supporting the Government's #ENOUGH campaign to stop violence against women and girls, FACT includes messaging around spiking.

Festival Republic's on-site focus is one of communication using the following channels:

- Push notifications to customers phones via our festival apps which have up to a 99% download rate (R&L)
- Specific 'help' maps published on the app so people can easily find where to go
- Use of large screens across the stages to highlight issues of concern
- Signposting to welfare, festival support and charitable organisations who can help with listening services, advice and aid
- LED scrolling screens around campsite and area which can display messages

## Drug use and drug policy

In addition to welfare policies on-site, Festival Republic has a large security operation in place as well as numerous policies to reduce the harmful use of drugs. These policies sit alongside policies aimed at combatting and reporting potential spiking incidents.

- We have drug dogs on the public gates as well as proactive behavioural detection officers.
- We have drugs amnesty and CCTV cameras around the site to monitor during the weekend. Our security teams work closely with the local police constabularies to ensure our respective crime and safeguarding plans dovetail with each other.
- We will take firm action in conjunction with the local Police to arrest people suspected of selling any drugs or NPS on-site.
- There are covert staff on-site and as a condition of entry you are subject to search at any time. Staff will search for illegal items including drugs.
- We offer very clear advice to festival-goers, that if someone offers them drugs, they should be reported to the nearest member of security with as much information as you can.

Our policy can be accessed here: <https://www.readingfestival.com/drugs-policy/>

*Festival Republic does not condone the use of drugs. Drug enforcement laws are as applicable on-site as anywhere else in the UK and it is, therefore, illegal to buy, sell or possess drugs. All drugs are potentially dangerous, there are no harmless drugs. The only way to avoid risks is to not take drugs*

at all. This goes for new psychoactive substances (formerly known as “legal highs”) as well. We still want our festival-goers to know that they can come to us for help if they or their friends need it, without fear of getting in trouble at any time.

Our communications policy uses progressive language, the only way we have found information on drugs harm will be listened to and absorbed by a young audience.

We suggest festival goers go to Talk To Frank <https://www.talktofrank.com/> to get information about drugs, their effects and the law. We also signpost festival goers to:

- [wearetheloop.org/crush-dab-wait/](http://wearetheloop.org/crush-dab-wait/)
- [bluelight.org](http://bluelight.org)
- [drinkaware.co.uk/alcohol-facts/health-effects-of-alcohol/effects-on-the-body/alcohol-and-illegal-drugs/](http://drinkaware.co.uk/alcohol-facts/health-effects-of-alcohol/effects-on-the-body/alcohol-and-illegal-drugs/)
- [acast.com/saywhytodrugs](http://acast.com/saywhytodrugs)
- [prescription-drug.addictionblog.org/mixing-xanax-with-alcohol/](http://prescription-drug.addictionblog.org/mixing-xanax-with-alcohol/)
- [addictioncenter.com/addiction/polydrug-use/](http://addictioncenter.com/addiction/polydrug-use/)
- [themix.org.uk/drink-and-drugs/drugs-and-your-body/misusing-prescription-drugs-9575.html](http://themix.org.uk/drink-and-drugs/drugs-and-your-body/misusing-prescription-drugs-9575.html)

### **Drugs on-site and the law**

The Home Office will not issue licences for FOH (front of house) testing. The matter has been widely and continuously debated both by members of Parliament and Ministers from the Home Office. The Home Office has raised the matter with National Police Chiefs in terms of their support or otherwise for FOH testing. Summed up by Victoria Atkins MP (former Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability) (Louth and Horncastle): *Home Office officials are in regular contact with the National Policing Lead regarding the consumption of illegal drugs at UK music festivals. No illegal drug-taking can be assumed to be safe and there is no safe way to take them. While operational decisions are a matter for Chief Constables, the Government and the public expect the police to enforce the law.*

BOH (back of house) testing on drugs amnesty or seized does take place. Drugs amnesty or seized are tested in a secure room on-site. Continual updates are provided to the Local Authority Safety Advisory Group (SAG) on the types and strengths of drugs found. Informed decisions can then be made on proactive harm-reduction messaging warning of the dangers of a particular drug which may be in circulation. (The SAG is co-ordinated by a local authority and made up of representatives from the licensing authority, responsible authorities (police, emergency services etc) and any other relevant authorities and the event organiser.)

### **Festival Republic Rebalance**

Lastly, as I mentioned in my email to the Committee, change of a structural nature is both the most important and the hardest to implement. To specifically address gender imbalance, structural change is necessary.

To that end, I launched a scheme called ReBalance. ReBalance puts funding behind core female and gender-minority-led bands, musicians, and solo artists at the point where funding is most critical in progressing their career, the professional recording of their first EP. This will ultimately culminate in a guaranteed slot at a Festival Republic or Live Nation Festival.

ReBalance aims to provide more opportunities and create space for those who want to work in sound engineering by offering mentoring/training/internships to aspiring engineers.

After a hiatus from the pandemic, the scheme is returning for 2024 with a full-time member of staff supporting it, with plans to expand to include Ireland.

My commitment in this area is guaranteed. This change requires continued investment over time. Without this investment, the same old barriers will be met time and time again. It is only schemes like this that will change the way the sector looks in a decade or more.

Many industry pledges have been made to address the gender imbalance. Whilst these pledges undoubtedly do good, they do not go far enough to tackle the recently dubbed a 'pipeline' problem for gender-minority artists and professionals.

#### QUESTIONS FROM THE COMMITTEE

##### **What challenges do festivals face in trying to achieve gender balance in their line-ups?**

We work hard to get full diversity, especially women, on our stages. I am committed to a diverse line-up and working hard to deliver that. However, it will only be through structural change with schemes such as ReBalance that diversity can be delivered.

I work hard at smaller festivals to give bands and artists the opportunity to take a step up. I am committing to a performance slot on a Festival Republic or Live Nation festival, for each of the acts who come through the ReBalance programme.

As promoters we endeavour to put on the stage what people are listening to. If we put things on the stage that people are not listening to, they're not going to buy tickets. We give audiences what they want to hear, we don't tend to direct them. Radio has a greater ability to direct audience tastes than we have, we can only reflect them.

The challenge we face is very well expressed in statistics with studies and research showing the scale of the structural change necessary to achieve diversity.

##### **Counting the Music Industry - 2019**

<https://www.ukmusic.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Counting-the-Music-Industry-full-report-2019.pdf>

Writers currently signed to 106 music publishers: 14.18% are women, 85.82% are men

Artists currently signed to 219 UK music labels: 19.69% are women, 80.31% are men

Those working for 126 UK music publishers: 36.67% are women, 63.33% are men

##### **Why Not Her? Gender and Racial Disparity Data Report on UK Radio 2021-2022**

[https://www.canva.com/design/DAFF8ZA-Gg/VmTmzHp9uEmYmBqCjGa9ag/view?utm\\_content=DAFF8ZA-Gg&utm\\_campaign=designshare&utm\\_medium=link&utm\\_source=publishpresent#1](https://www.canva.com/design/DAFF8ZA-Gg/VmTmzHp9uEmYmBqCjGa9ag/view?utm_content=DAFF8ZA-Gg&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=publishpresent#1)

The report assessed stations individually, noting that one of the largest British radio stations, BBC Radio 1, saw just 15% female artists in the station's top 20 most played tracks in 2022.

- BBC Radio 1 played 85% male artists, 15% female artists in 2021, gender collab: 0%
- BBC 1XTRA played 75% male artists, 15% female artists in 2021, gender collab: 10%
- BBC Radio 2 played 70% male artists, 20% female artists in 2021, gender collab: 10%
- BBC Asian Network played 80% male artists, 10% female artists in 2021, gender collab: 5%



- BBC 6 Music played 45% male artists, 50% female artists in 2021, gender collab: 5%
- Kiss played 55% male artists, 5% female artists in 2021, gender collab: 40%
- Kiss Fresh played 90% male artists, 0% female artists in 2021, gender collab: 10%
- Magic played 70% male artists, 25% female artists in 2021, gender collab: 5%
- Kerrang played 75% male artists, 20% female artists in 2021 gender collab: 5%
- Absolute played 75% male artists, 20% female artists in 2021, gender collab: 5%
- Capital played 40% male artists, 20% female artists in 2021, gender collab: 40%
- Capital XTRA played 90% male artists, 20% female artists in 2021, gender collab: 5%
- Heart played 55% male artists, 20% female artists in 2021, gender collab: 25%
- Smooth played 70% male artists, 15% female artists in 2021, gender collab: 15%
- Radio X played 95% male artists, 5% female artists in 2021, gender collab:0%

### USC Annenberg Study – 2022

<https://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/aii-inclusion-recording-studio-20220331.pdf>

Inclusion in the Recording Studio? Gender & Race/Ethnicity of Artists, Songwriters, & Producers across 1,000 Popular Songs from 2012 to 2021 Annenberg Inclusion Initiative USC Key Findings

- Artist Gender. There were 180 artists on the Billboard Hot 100 Year-End Chart in 2021; 76.7% were men and 23.3% were women.
- No artists identified as gender non-conforming or non-binary in 2021.
- Across all ten years evaluated, 78.2% of artists were men and 21.8% were women.
- There was no significant difference between 2020 (20.2%) and 2021 (23.3%) in the percentage of women artists.
- Additionally, the percentage of women artists on the chart in 2021 was not significantly different from 2012 (22.7%).
- The peak for women artists was in 2016, when 28.1% of all artists on the charts were women.
- The genre of all 1,000 songs was evaluated. Pop music was most likely to feature women artists (32%) over the last 10 years. Women were least likely to appear on the chart in hip-hop/rap (12.3%), where 7.1 male artists charted for every 1 female artist.
- Artist type was also evaluated: solo artists; duos; and bands. Of the solo artists across 1,000 songs and 10 years, 30% were women. In 2021, women comprised 30.6% of solo artists, up from 22.5% in 2020 but still less than the high of 35.8% in 2012.
- Artist Race/Ethnicity. In 2021 57.2% of artists were from an underrepresented racial/ethnic group and 42.7% were white. The percentage of underrepresented artists in 2021 dropped 1.8 percentage points from the 10-year high in 2020 (59%), and reflects an 18.8 percentage point increase from 2012 (38.4%). Overall, 47.8% of artists in the 10-year sample were from an underrepresented racial/ethnic group and 52.2% were white.

<https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/women-in-music-study-annenberg-gender-inequality-1235052876/>

- The study examined the artists, songwriters and producers credited on each of the 1,000 songs on Billboard’s Hot 100 Year End Chart from 2012 to 2021, along with the gender and race/ethnicity of every person in those three roles.
- In 2021, there were 180 artists on this chart — 76.7% of them were men and 23.3% were women. (No artists identified as gender non-conforming or non-binary in 2021.)
- Across all ten years, 78.2% of artists were men and 21.8% were women.

Finally, it must be said that if artists are not working, or if they are in the studio recording, then they’re not touring.



**To what extent are festivals resisting balanced line-ups for fear of losing ticket revenue?**

As I said in answer to the previous question, promoters promote musicians and music that fans are listening to. If they are not listening to the artist, they are not going to buy tickets to see them. So that much is true about how a line-up and ticketing revenue are attached. However, the challenge here is not about revenue. It's a far deeper supply/pipeline issue.

**Should there be a responsibility on larger festivals, like Reading and Leeds, to set the standard for the industry?**

Of course, yes. We must set the standard for the sector. I hope that we do that.

**To what extent do exclusivity agreements between female acts and major festivals make it difficult for other festivals to have balanced line-ups?**

I don't think this plays a part. Like previous answers, the problem is a pipeline one which requires structural change.

**Major festivals often sell out in advance of the line-up being announced. Do you think this has created a sense of complacency regarding balanced line-ups?**

Absolutely not. Festivals are complex events with a multitude of stages and activity. My festival bookers and our teams work tirelessly to achieve a gender balanced and diverse line-up. Anyone coming to my festivals will know that the offer, across the festival site, is diverse and current. Indeed, the promotion of grassroots and emerging acts at my events is second to none. My support for artists, in giving them opportunities to perform, is widely understood by agents and artists alike.

**Even if it does not lead to greater ticket sales, why do you think festivals should book balanced line-ups?**

Festivals should do their very best to book balanced line-ups and I work very hard to achieve this. So yes, I agree with the premise.

**What are you doing at your respective festivals to encourage men to call out and report sexual violence?**

I think this is possibly answered in the earlier submission. We encourage all our festival goers to call out and report sexual violence and we run pro-active campaigns across our festival sites to that end.

**What do you think are the major barriers to reporting sexual harassment and assault at music festivals?**

I don't think there are barriers to reporting sexual harassment *if* the route to doing so is made very clear, and easy, to festival goers on-site. Therefore, our communications on-site are designed specifically to make reporting, on any issue, as easy as possible. With the introduction of AIR Hubs alongside our many aid facilities, a festival goer will never be more than 200m away from contact with festival staff who can radio through or signpost them to the nearest appropriate help available.

**Do your staff undergo training so that they know what to do if they observe or hear of sexual violence?**

Yes, they do undergo training.

**We asked Safe Gigs for Women if festivals were supporting them financially. They said no, despite often being asked to attend. Why are Festivals not financing them? Will Festival Republic fund groups like SGfW in the future?**

Festival Republic pays a per-show contribution to Safe Gigs for Women and covers the cost of their tickets and access to the site. For Reading festival, SGfW was paid a £500 donation with all costs on site covered and two meals a day for volunteers. This will be similar across the board for all festivals and events SGfW attend.

To date, and I'm writing this mid-way through festival season, SGFW have been/are at the following in 2023:

- PULP Finsbury
- 1975 Finsbury
- Jamie T Finsbury
- Wireless
- Reading
- Leeds
- Download
- Isle of Wight
- Creamfields South
- N-Dubz – Gunnersbury Park
- KYGO – Gunnersbury Park
- Joji – Gunnersbury Park
- Boygenius – Gunnersbury Park

***July 2023***