

## Written evidence submitted by Elliott Haslam

I am Shao Dow, an award-winning rapper and manga author. I have previously spoken on a DCMS Select Committee panel on behalf of grassroots music venues.

The pandemic and the subsequent lack of live shows and opportunities this year has helped me become more acutely aware of just how little I am actually paid for people listening to and enjoying my music.

My music is available on all streaming services, but the bulk of my listenership is concentrated around Spotify and YouTube.

Prior to this year, anything that I made from streaming was a nice bonus but not financially significant. Due to the loss of my live performance income, I'm now forced to look more seriously at my streaming figures and definitely don't feel as if the money I receive makes all of the hard work and love I put into my music worthwhile.

I work with a boutique music distribution service that supplies my music to all of the major streaming services and then takes a percentage of the resulting income.

On average I attain somewhere in the region of 10,000 streams a month, this generates approximately £500 a quarter for myself after deductions. Which is nowhere near sufficient for an artist who has been making a living from his music for the past 10 – 15 years.

Luckily, I have other sources of income that are related to my music, but is it right that a full-time musician has to rely on income streams other than their actual music in order to survive?

Furthermore, I can only take the streaming/distribution company's word for it in terms of how much money my music has actually made through streaming. There is no reliable way to audit or authenticate this.

I can't easily tell exactly how much each individual streaming service is paying me for 1 play, because they have different streaming rates and sometimes the rate is different based on whether or not you are signed to a major label.

Furthermore, because of the way that streaming is set up, I don't know who is listening to my music or who my biggest supporters are on the platform unless they make themselves known. There is no way for me to grow the fan relationship organically through merchandise sales, special fan events etc because the information available to artists about their listeners is limited.

This fan relationship is integral to longevity within the music industry.

I don't believe the current streaming model is fair. Dominance and preferential deals for major labels has skewed results and means that I as a smaller artist do not receive the full contribution from people who are actively listening to and supporting my music on the platforms. In a global crisis like this, it is even more important to protect the talented unsigned creators.

I truly believe that if left unchecked, these streaming models will deal a severe blow to the emerging talent, because it just doesn't seem worth the effort to create great music in exchange for little money.

I have had my music included on a few Spotify curated playlists and noticed an explosion in my listening numbers, I have also paid external playlist curators in the past to pitch my music to popular non-Spotify affiliated playlists.

In both instances, my overall streaming numbers have benefitted, but I have doubts about whether or not it has done much for my long-term career or fan numbers.

My major issue with being included on arbitrary playlists is that people are treating my art as background music, if they haven't heard of me before they are unlikely to become a new fan and whilst the numbers look nice, once the music is removed from the playlist there is no guarantee that the casual listeners will keep listening.

In addition, paying to be added to playlists just allows people to 'game' the system and it starts to become more about how much money you're willing to spend in order to get streams.

I've stopped using this strategy for my music, it felt as if I was paying money for results that couldn't be guaranteed and as I said, the longer-term results were lacklustre.

If artists are encouraged to make music that will appeal to casual playlist listeners (throw away background music essentially) and even worse forced to have to pay just to have the opportunity to be considered for playlists, I truly believe that the art of music will suffer long term.

In terms of government support, I would like to see the following.

1. Better or equivalent copyright protections for music similar to those awarded in Europe.
2. Greater transparency amongst record labels, music publishers, streaming platforms and other licensing entities so that creators can effectively use their right to audit music companies they are signed to or who administer royalties for them.
3. Contracts between music creators and companies tasked with exploiting their works should always ensure that all creators will be paid appropriately and proportionally to their music's success.
4. Be able to renegotiate contracts if the remuneration originally agreed under a license or transfer of rights turns out to be disproportionately low compared to revenues generated by a creator's music.
5. Assignment of rights to a music company should have a maximum term, after which the rights should automatically return to the creator, who could decide to extend or place their rights elsewhere.

Thank you for reading

Shao Dow