Written evidence submitted by Generator North East Ltd

I, Hannah Matterson, am the CEO of Generator North East Ltd (most commonly known as Generator) and we are a music talent development agency based in Newcastle Upon Tyne, with a remit of serving the whole of the North East with our talent development services.

Generator has worked in music talent development for 30 years, supporting artists and those working in the wider music industry from our region to develop their careers. The North East is a relatively small region, has traditionally been underinvested in where it comes to music (and arts and culture as a sector) and is somewhat isolated from the clusters and hubs of music industry activity across the UK. Its isolation through geography and networks should've seen the region struggle to develop talent in music, yet the North East has a plethora of artists who have achieved national and international success, are regularly recording and releasing music, who are the backbone of a thriving local music scene and who act as impeccable advocates for the region. Generator primarily exists to support these artists and those working in the industry (producers, distributors, sound techs, tour managers etc) by bringing knowledge that is often only found in the larger music hubs (London, Manchester, Birmingham) into the region to benefit our talent. We have worked tirelessly over many years to build connections and networks that we can call upon to help those from the North East to take the next steps in their careers. We do this through programmes of sustained talent development, workshops and masterclasses, as well as showcasing opportunities through our annual multi-venue festival, Tipping Point Live, which provides a platform for artists across the North East to build new audiences for their work and gain recognition of their talent at a national level.

Our networks across the North East reach far and wide, and this evidence has been collated by Generator through significant consultation with those engaged with our work. It is by no means definitive, but we believe it gives a very good indication of the experience of streaming from those artists and music practitioners in the North East of England.

SUMMARY

Our participants

It is important to note that the participants in our research had a wide range of engagement with music. Many were music creators and music consumers. But many were also working in the live music industry, in venues, in publishing and labels or in music PR and marketing. The topic of streaming clearly effects the lives of all who work in the industry.

Dominant Platforms

When asked what are considered the dominant platforms for music streaming our participants cited the following:

Spotify, YouTube, Amazon, iTunes, Apple, Tidal, Soundcloud, Deezer, TikTok, Pandora, Shazam and Bandcamp

as the sites where people stream their music from. There was a feeling that most consumers of music were now opting to make sure that the sites they use and pay for, by a monthly subscription of otherwise, at least created some revenue for the artists. It was also noted that, although these business models appeared to act like a 'service' to both creators and consumers, they couldn't

possibly be a service unless there was a reciprocal relationship i.e. artists gained back something for their work, which is was clear that these sites do not do enough of.

Have new features associated with streaming platforms, such as algorithmic curation of music or company playlists, influenced or affected you?

Our research shows that those who engage with streaming sites were very split about this question. Around 50% said that they didn't have an effect on their listening patterns or engagement with new music. However, for those who said it did, the impact was vast and deep rooted.

There were concerns around the economic impact of streaming for artists. Spotify have already announced plans to pay artists less per stream then they do already, in exchange for greater exposure. This will create a 'race to the bottom' and devalues the artist's work. Publishers are concerned about the licensed background music rights and royalties that come from PRS and Public performance, where now, streaming sites can be used to fill that gap without any real regulation. There is a potential issues around monetising playlists, whereby artists are being asked to pay for their spot on playlists associated with certain companies or music PR outlets, without there being any real payback other than exposure.

However, the most common issue our participants had with the features of streaming platforms, was that it was killing creativity. Many of the artists commented that they felt like that had to fit into a certain genre, category, image or sound to be featured on a streaming site's playlist, which is stifling their creative output. If you know that the music you are making isn't going to get picked up by these algorithms or curated playlists, then you begin to question why you are making it. The homogenisation of music is making the process soulless and impersonal. It was often answered that participants were more likely to follow recommendations from artists they are already fans of, or friends who they trust, rathe than that of an automated algorithm which would throw up wildly inaccurate listening options or those that were simply boring. They cannot detect mood and feeling of a person.

What has been the economic impact and long-term implications of streaming on you?

"Streaming initially made a huge range of music a lot more accessible and opened a lot of doors introducing me to lots of new artists but as the platforms have evolved - I think the scales have tipped making listening to music on a streaming platform obviously commercially focussed instead of about the artist and their music."

This quote sums up the overall response to this question. It is widely acknowledged how streaming has enabled artists to build audiences all over the world, that music is now readily accessible and you don't need to have seen that artist perform live for you to get to know their work. It has enabled audiences to access music that they wouldn't usually, and it could be argued that this is broadening our cultural experiences to no end. There is an element of personal convenience to the streaming story, which links to our own cultural behaviours.

The flip side to this is that it devalues that work almost instantly. The process of recording and releasing music becomes comparatively very expensive and therefore one the music is available on streaming sites, it becomes very difficult to monetise. Many admitted that they have spent significantly less on purchasing music in the last 5-10 years due to it now being so accessible for a minimal subscription fee. There is, however, recognition of this from audiences and there is a benefit

that they see streaming as a gateway to music, where they can discover new artists and 'try them out' before heading to a relevant site or store to purchase the music, often in a physical copy rather than a download.

How can the Government protect the industry from knock-on effects, such as increased piracy of music? Does the UK need an equivalent of the Copyright Directive?

On the whole, participants agreed that a copyright directive would be useful, but would be extremely difficult to police and enforce. Piracy is almost an accepted part of our industry now, so we need to look at alternative way to protect music.

The Government should ensure that artists are paid for their work. It is really that simple. Music is a job like all other jobs. You wouldn't ask a plumber to fix your skink without paying them, so why would you ask a musician to give you their songs without paying them fairly, too? The artist's work must remain the property of the artist, not the streaming site. It is not theirs to use how they wish. Proper remuneration is the key to sustaining a thriving and healthy music industry, as without it being a financially viable industry, we will lose talent and new artists, affecting out cultural make up, exports and lives to a bigger detriment than one would expect. Streaming sites need to be held to account for this and must adhere to legislation which provides fair pay for both the sites themselves and the artists who use them.