

## **Written evidence submitted by the Association of Festival Organisers**

DCMS Select Committee COVID-19

### **Immediate impact.**

The cancellation of almost my whole AFO festival memberships events has devastated our corner of the events industry. The majority of my members run either voluntary or self employed and invariably for the benefit of local and national charities. To date 85% of the festivals in AFO have cancelled. Apart from the overwhelming costs involved in cancellation the charities they support will also feel the impact soon.

In addition, my association is already losing membership income from those who have cancelled and so do not have funds to renew their membership.

### **Support provided by DCMS**

The support you have offered has not had much impact on AFO or it's members as most are either voluntary or self-employed. The expense already paid out for the 2020 season is gone in deposits to contractors or artists and in many cases wages to temporary staff and general expenses.

The ticket agencies have halted payments to the events so cash flow has stopped along with ticket sales. I struggle to find any funds or advice from DCMS that will fit our situation.

### **Long term Impact**

Where many businesses will restart as soon as the restrictions are safe to lift, our festivals are annual events and mostly in the open air, so our next period of business is more than a year away.

It is hand to mouth business so to survive a whole new year before the next event will be extremely tough for most and the end of the road for many. Some have already declared they will not be back.

I believe it will take 2-3 years for this area of charitable and valuable socio-economic events to recover, some won't.

Our industry WILL learn from this both in planning and artistic terms as well as reviewing what constitutes Cancellation in the eyes of the insurance world.

### **Lessons to learn. (see above) plus**

We need to engage more with DCMS and other authorities so that they may better understand our place in both the entertainments industry and the management of community arts events.

May I suggest the reader view this research

<https://www.eventsindustryforum.co.uk/index.php/contributing-billions-to-the-uk-economy>

### **How ...evolve after COVID**

I believe our festivals and events will return, some in 2021, others will collapse and in time be replaced by new ones. However, I believe the industry will be very nervous for many years with suppliers needing large non-refundable deposits and organisers needing more security of their own

income and funding support. The grass roots world of festivals is not the giant corporate that gets the TV coverage and yet represents over 1000 events each year. In turn provides the breeding ground for new artists, traders, marketeers, and organisers who put the heart into the community's economy.

DCMS could assist in a few small areas.

Business rates are levied on some festival sites for the short period they are occupying. i.e. on rental from perhaps a landowner or farmer (who clearly is the one paying the rate and passing it to the festival). This action is relatively new in recent years but is increasing through the industry.

A halt on this on the grounds that most of the festivals I represent are bringing social involvement, finance in their economy and jobs for locals. In short, they bring a boost in quality of life for the community.

DCMS could also play a part in encouraging Local Authorities to carry forward any license fees paid for 2020 on to 2021 without further expense.

Finally, perhaps DCMS could support the grass roots of this festival industry in their recovery with verbal, published and where possible financial backup and demonstrate the Government's agreement that the outdoor events industry in all its forms are of vital importance to national pride, tourism, economy and the UK's way of life.

**Steve Heap. General Sec. AFO and Chairman of The Events Industry Forum.**