

Written evidence submitted by Skiddle

Introduction and summary

[Skiddle](#) is a primary ticketing outlet and the UK's biggest What's On guide, providing a [free facility](#) for event promoters across the UK to list their events online and sell tickets through our independent ticketing service. We currently work with over 35,000 UK and European promoters, at over 30,000 venues. We specialise in helping events through that critical growing phase by providing the marketing and technology support that they need, working with boutique / grassroots festivals and larger scale festivals such as Creamfields, Belladrum, Parklife, Lovebox, South West Four, MADE, Reading and Leeds Festival, and many more.

Skiddle has its own case study to refer to, as [Highest Point Festival](#) was created and developed by Skiddle director Richard Dyer, Jamie Scahill (Head of Marketing) and Account Support team member Holly Wignall. Through Highest Point - an annual music festival held in Williamson Park, Lancaster, we understand the inner workings of running a festival event from all angles. For example, operations such as ticket scanning and security, artist booking and ticketing.

As a ticketing outlet for festivals both big and small, Skiddle has been working with festival bookers and event promoters since its fruition in 2001. Therefore, we understand the concerns of both the consumer and festival organisers.

Skiddle believes that a lack of festivals will have a significant *social, cultural and financial* impact in the UK. Therefore, this evidence submitted by ourselves and on behalf of our promoters and customers will illustrate the impact that a lack of festivals in 2020 has had on all stakeholders. It will also include proposed suggestions on a safe return for festivals in 2021 and consumer confidence in purchasing tickets for festivals.

Skiddle has written this report on behalf of festival promoters we have worked with (detailed list of participants found at the end of this report), aiming to put forward their concerns in a concise manner while keeping each sentiment intact. We have also included information on Skiddle as a business on questions where this is applicable as Skiddle is a company that has been directly affected by the lack of festivals in 2020.

We asked our festival promoters the questions outlined in the [Parliament's call for evidence](#) introduction and answers to these questions can be found below. We received a number of submissions from promoters we work with and have detailed the names of these individuals and the companies they work for at the bottom of this report. Please note that a number of these promoters wished to remain anonymous so we have respected their wishes accordingly.

Q: In your opinion, what is the economic and cultural contribution of the UK's festival industry?

1. The festival industry creates thousands of jobs directly and indirectly in the UK. From the businesses that own and operate the events to people that trade at the events selling food, clothing, jewellery, hair wrapping, glitter stalls and much more. Festivals employ staging, tents, lighting and sound companies plus staff to run the events. There are thousands of events every year ranging from small village fetes and fairs right up to the well known large scale festivals and sporting events. People dedicate their whole lives to it and it is often a very seasonal livelihood that people rely on. Given that scale of the festival industry, it has its own ecosystem of cultures that are ingrained in the fabric of our society.
2. As a result of this, the [live music industry contributed £1.3 billion to the economy as per UK Music's Music By Numbers 2020 report](#), which covers the 12 months up to 31st December 2019. The live music industry in UK Music's report includes music festival organisers, music promoters, music agents, production services for live music, ticketing agents (the proportion of their activities involved with live music) and concert venues and arenas (the proportion of their activities involved with live music).
3. World renowned UK festivals such as Glastonbury has put the UK on the festival map and attracts tourists from outside the UK, contributing greatly to the UK economy. Because of this, the UK has in recent years become a choice of a summer holiday for locals and rather than going abroad, people would gladly invest in a ticket for a UK festival, thus putting more money into the local and national economy.
4. Without festivals this year, it's a struggle to champion breakthrough acts (e.g John Peel stage Glastonbury). No festivals for two years will hinder the careers of many talented artists. Festivals also give young musicians the opportunity to work with professionals in a way which is usually denied to them. [According to a recent Musicians Union survey of 2,000 members](#), 34% are considering abandoning the industry completely because of the financial difficulties they face during the pandemic, as performance opportunities are severely curtailed. This has a significant cultural impact as there will be less breakthrough talent coming out of the UK and the music industry's ecosystem relies on a constant pool of breakthrough talent each year.

Q: What has been the impact of cancellations on local economies and those who derive income from festivals during 2020?

1. Festivals of 5000+ that take place are the equivalent of small temporary towns being built and everyone that goes to these sites will use or interact with the local area either before, during or after the event takes place. This will have a hugely detrimental impact on the local economy. Not to mention the staff who work in these roles. For example, many technical and construction workers for festivals find themselves out of work for the whole year.
2. No festival seasons disrupt local economies that survive on tourism. Festivals extend the tourist season by a number of weeks in September in St Ives, Cornwall. This affected revenue for the town council who own the St Ives September Festival venue and the local pubs who put on entertainment. In addition, for small towns like

Beaconsfield in Buckinghamshire, they have lost 6 major local festivals all within a 60 mile radius. These festivals are Beaconsfield-NOW, Amersham Music Festival, Jordans Music Festival, Windsor Festival, Wooburn Festival and Chiltern Arts.

3. Companies that directly work with UK festivals are financially affected such as marketing agencies and ticketing vendors like Skiddle. The festivals themselves may have been supported, but many businesses and the self-employed have been left out of funding rounds. Skiddle's income (which is 98% ticket sales) has been reversed, as we have refunded millions of pounds back to our customers. We are currently operating at a maximum of 15% of our usual income. We have had to make 20 staff redundant and close one of our offices.
4. Promoters have been affected dramatically as they take on financial responsibility in managing deposits and accommodation for artists. For festivals that have been postponed and cancelled, promoters lose money as well as local caterers, facility suppliers, venues and artists. Many promoters have had no wages from March this year with many other promoters going into liquidation. Some promoters are entirely reliant on the opportunity of low cost bookings and Government grants.

Q: What are the risks to festivals taking place in 2021 and beyond, and how can these be mitigated?

1. There will always be a risk for festivals taking place while the virus is circulating the population until a vaccine has been green-lit and rolled out to a high enough percentage of the population for it to take effect. However, given that the festival industry has worked with HSE/PHE and must produce safety documentation that ensures we are able to manage and mitigate risks to health and public safety, we feel that we would be able to implement enough safety controls and measures to ensure the safety of the public, staff and performers at events. [The Association of Independent Festivals \(AIF\) have already put out some documentation working with the industry-standard Purple Guide](#) regarding operating within government guidelines with events during the pandemic so there is planning and work being done already to get the events industry back on its feet.
2. Social distancing is not feasible for festivals due to the very nature of festivals being a social experience in tightly packed spaces. Not only this, but if social distancing measures still have to be observed, then this becomes an issue in reduction of capacity and financial viability. The obvious risks in this case are potential COVID outbreaks. Rapid testing upon entry or evidence of two negative tests before the festival can stop any outbreaks. In addition, plenty of sanitisation points, one-way systems where possible and asking people to wear masks between stages would ensure everyone's safety.
3. An obvious solution is vaccination especially with recent vaccines being rolled-out as of this month. This will enable safe festivals but there must be clear communication with festival organisers as they cannot plan festivals with quick turnaround times. Due to the nature of the supply chain and the hundreds of stakeholders involved, this will take careful consideration and a sufficient amount of time. So any Governmental

changes to timeline would need to be communicated with these organisers well in advance.

4. Events will take the leap and begin planning for Summer 2021 only if insurance will cover them. No insurance = 100% risk. Many festival organisers are taking huge financial risks with insurance companies charging huge premiums or refusing to insure 2021 events. On top of this, certain booking agencies are asking for non-refundable deposits for artist fees and some ticketing platforms are setting minimum sales targets. Event Directors need to receive increased financial and legal support, and an open route of communication with the institutions controlling decisions on event cancellations and feasibility.
5. The loss of revenue this year means a loss in investment capital to fund next year's festivals. In an article with The Guardian, [Glastonbury founder Michael Eavis announced the festival would be bankrupt if the festival is not able to continue in 2021](#), which illustrates just how razor thin festival margins are. More Government financial support if festivals are not able to continue in 2021 is needed in this case.

Q: What measures are needed for audiences to attend festivals without social distancing, and how realistic are they?

1. Reliable and cost effective rapid tests need to be widely available and used in conjunction with some sort of health passport so that people can show that they've been vaccinated. In theory it is realistic but it depends on uptake of the vaccine, people wanting to share their personal information and also how cheap, widely available and reliable the rapid tests are. At the moment there seems to be a lot of different rapid test kits coming onto the market and there needs to be an industry standard or a methodology that is universally used so that there is a uniform method and data collection process so that data can be shared across the industries and with the NHS to really track the spread and isolate cases, therefore preventing localised/wide shut downs due to infection clusters.
2. In addition to the above, measures such as temperature scanning and revised layouts could be taken for audiences to attend festivals. Rapid testing with an app-based clearance, full event support and contactless systems, council and media support and public reassurance through official sites.

Q: What has been the impact of the temporary VAT cut and Culture Recovery Fund on festivals and their supply chains, and what else can the Government do to secure their futures?

1. The impact of the VAT cut has been fairly minimal at the moment as the majority of festivals haven't sold their tickets in the last 6 months. The bulk of tickets will have either been bought last year and rolled over or they will be bought in the month(s) leading up to the event which will be from May onwards for the main festival season. Most festivals in 2020 sold their tickets before the pandemic struck so would have accounted for VAT at 20% in their prices.

2. The CRF was a welcome reprieve to those who received the funding, but there were still hundreds of festivals/businesses that weren't deemed 'culturally viable' enough so haven't had any support. It hasn't trickled down to enough people to make it really worthwhile. The process for applying was also pretty prohibitive as many people were unfamiliar with the grant writing process, couldn't afford to pay grant writers or weren't clear on what the applications were really asking for.
3. In addition, the Government should ensure funding is awarded more properly. Skiddle did not apply for funding as our MP, Ben Wallace, informed us that "this support package will benefit cultural sector services by providing support to cultural venues and many other organisations in the Creative Industries that host live events, to stay open and continue operating". Yet when the funding was announced, competitors such as Resident Advisor have received funding where it would be more appropriate to festival organisations who have not been able to generate income this year. The government could start by changing any Bounce Back Loans into grants for those that weren't in receipt of any financial assistance or grants.
4. The Culture Recovery Fund is only a short-term solution for some festivals and venues. One suggestion is to partially subsidise ticket purchases in a way similar to Eat Out To Help Out.

Q: How has the structure of the UK festivals market evolved over recent years, and what has this meant for consumers, artists and the wider industry? What further changes might be anticipated?

1. There has been a decrease in independent festivals over the past few years as more and more are being bought up by big companies like Live Nation. It takes away the individuality of festivals, stifles creativity and means that programming tends to lean more towards the commercial end of artists. It will also limit the number of suppliers that get contracts as often there will be larger national suppliers employed on these events rather than the smaller local suppliers that support independents.

For consumers, it often drives prices up as the whole cost of putting events on has increased across the board. It is harder and harder to make a living from putting on events without a pandemic.

Artists are finding it harder to get booked for decent prices as budgets are constantly restricted and now with the added cost of COVID safety requirements, it could cause more festivals to reduce their artist/creative budgets or just shut down altogether. I think we will see a lot less independents in the next few years and a rise in the commercialisation of the festival industry.

2. Attendees have come to expect more from their festivals - for example from package experiences (including travel, accommodation, VIP experiences) and the addition of networking opportunities and conferences. So we've had to do and spend more to provide this integration and higher entertainment value. Whilst artist and agency fees have soared and venue hire and licensing costs have also increased dramatically. We only see an escalation in both these areas.

Q: How can festivals be supported to reduce their environmental impact and tackle the dangers of illegal drug use?

1. In order to reduce environmental impact, there should be subsidies and incentives supplied to event organisers to reduce the plastic use and carbon emissions, and also to use their platform to educate attendees on our collective impact and responsibility. More financial breaks and incentives should be offered to organisers who work with local suppliers, use greener power sources, more recycled and / or compostable cups and plates, etc.
2. Raising awareness, providing more recycling points for rubbish and recycling. Providing reusable bottles and packaging where possible.
3. In an ideal world we would have a drug free society, however, the realities are that there will be members of the public who will take drugs at festivals regardless of measures taken for prevention. The best way we can tackle the dangers of illegal drug use is by mitigating the danger as much as possible. Festivals currently conduct drug searches as well as searching for offensive weapons. To extend these efforts, one suggestion would be to work with services like The Loop who support festival drug testing to identify what is presumed and actual drug contents and provide confidential drug testing areas. Opening a dialogue and educating members of the public on safe drug use is the best way to tackle the dangers of drug use.

Customer Survey Data Findings

As a customer-first company, Skiddle prides itself on taking customer feedback on board. We have spoken to tens of thousands of customers on the phone, understanding their frustrations of the movement or cancellation of events, hearing their own stories of the challenges that COVID-19 has created. That's why we felt it was important to gather the opinions of our customers throughout the pandemic, and now, for this evidence inquiry. In July, [we surveyed 200,000 customers](#) to find out how keen people were to watch live music post-lockdown, and discovered that around **75% of music fans were ready to attend socially distanced shows**. Looking forward to live music events in 2021, **38%** of respondents said they had **already purchased tickets for 2021**, with a further **47%** saying they'd be **happy to buy tickets for 2021 before the end of this year**.

For this evidence inquiry, Skiddle surveyed 10,000 customers about their opinions of what festivals bring to the UK economy and culture. It's incredibly important for MP's to examine support needed for festivals to return, but it's also important to consider the impact on consumers' confidence in events, what festivals bring to the UK public's lives, and our culture and economy overall.

Q: What do music festivals mean to you?

1. It was heavily noted in our customer survey findings that festivals go a huge way towards obtaining a positive mental health, with **23% of respondents referencing mental health**, where people can “escape the pressures of work, reconnect with themselves, partners and friends, and reaffirm what is important to them”, (Sue Thackeray, 49, Northwich).
2. Participants in the survey noted that festivals were an “escape”, and “amazing points of human interaction and culture”, despite the huge range in size and capacities. It’s important to consider that attendees of these music festivals work in all sectors and industries, one anonymous participant in particular notes working in care and states, “I book as many as possible, all over the UK and sometimes abroad in Europe. I cannot go another year with nothing to look forward to. I’ll happily wear masks for the entire weekend if it means it can go on again.”

Q: In your opinion, how does the festival industry contribute towards the UK’s culture and economy?

1. In addition to our promoters, our customers had some opinions around how the festival industry contributes towards the UK’s culture and economy. “From artists earning financially, to people discovering new music that they love and invest in for years to come. Not to mention tourism. I’ve travelled all around the UK for festivals, but at these festivals you always meet people who travel from further afield.” “It can be a platform for upcoming bands to make a name for themselves, it can be a platform for older bands to earn a new lease of life, it props younger more inexperienced artists up”, (Jamie Canning, 32, Glasgow). Customers also recognise that festivals support a number of industries such as food & beverage, logistics, travel and even fashion, not to mention attract a huge number of people from abroad as “the UK is renowned for its first class music and festivals”.

Q: What measures are needed for audiences to attend festivals without social distancing, and how realistic are they?

1. Most importantly, we surveyed our customers about their confidence in attending festivals without social distancing, and on average our participants were **61% confident to purchase a festival ticket next year**.
2. Looking into common keywords in our participants answers about the measures needed for audiences to attend festivals without social distancing, **39% of the answers mentioned vaccinations would be necessary**, in addition to **20% mentioning rapid testing**. One participant expertly highlighted that, ‘the only place I would ever carry hand sanitiser and use it as much (if not more) than I do now, is at music festivals’, (Jamie Canning, 32, Glasgow).
3. Most notably, a high proportion of responses highlighted testing before the festival in the same way that has been implemented before overseas travel to many countries. “Testing [people] before, during and after the event and asking for proof of a negative result, [and] self isolation before and after. These are realistic and possible if people

comply with the rules and I'm sure they would enjoy a sense of normality again", (Anonymous, Inverness).

Q: What did you miss most about festivals this year? How important is it to you for the DCMS to support your favourite festivals?

1. In order to support our case that festivals require support from the DCMS and MP's, we asked our customers what they've missed about festivals and how important it is for them that they are supported by the government. **33% of respondents included references around togetherness** in addition to 'friends', 'music' and 'people'. It is clear to see that for many, a 'social' element is lacking in their lives and they miss 'people from all walks of life being able to come together', (Anonymous, 32, Mossley).
2. Almost all respondents to the survey noted it was 'important' to them for festivals to return, "for the people of this country, for the culture that we have created and also for the production and owners of these festivals who have worked extremely hard over the years to become established to not have lost their legacy", (Anonymous, 28, St.Helens).
3. "Without festivals in the UK, people will take their money elsewhere. Already it is often cheaper to buy flights & tickets for a festival abroad than attend one in the UK", (Anita Star, Cambridge).

Closing Statement

At Skiddle and on behalf of the organisations and individuals who offered their thoughts for the inquiry, we hope this report goes some way towards proving the impact and importance of festivals on the UK's economy, society and culture, and its impact on the supply chain which is an industry in itself. It's clear to see the huge impact attending music events has on a person's mental health and wellbeing, and there is confidence on a consumer level in purchasing tickets in 2021, following the introduction of rapid testing and vaccinations, and financial support for all festival organisers and supply chains.

This report was compiled by the following people, on behalf of Skiddle and Highest Point Festival respectively:

Angeli Bhandal - Marketing Executive, Skiddle
Georgia Roberts - Marketing Manager, Skiddle
Jamie Scahill - Head of Marketing, Skiddle & Highest Point Festival

The promoters who took part in this report are as follows (in no order):

Darren Bunting of Music HQ & O'Rileys in Hull
Steve Jason of The Met Lounge in Peterborough
Eoin Fenton of Lakota in Bristol
Mike Sinclair of St Ives September Festival in St Ives, Cornwall

Lynn Fearn of Rockers United in Swadlincote, South Derbyshire
Tom Hoyle of Platform Live LTD in Bristol
Graham Gold, Independent DJ in London
Jess Chambers of [WeAreViableUK](#) / Rebellious Creative in London
Peter Lacey of Ska N Mash in Hornchurch
Benjamin Street of Wild Paths Festival LTD in Norwich
Milena Lukic of Noise Test in London
Ros Maidment of Wooburn Singers in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire

There were a number of promoters in this survey who requested to remain anonymous, therefore we have respected their wishes and not listed them here.