

Written evidence submitted by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Call for Evidence on The Future of UK Music Festivals

Top Lines

- **The Government welcomes the invitation to provide written evidence to the inquiry of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee examining the future of UK music festivals. We want to ensure that the Government provides robust data to inform the debate.**
- **The Government is therefore providing information setting out its assessment of the contribution of the UK's festival industry, risks to events taking place in 2021 and the support we are providing to the sector to secure its future.**
- **The Government recognises the importance of the cultural and economic contribution made by the UK music festivals industry. The Government continues to engage with festival sector stakeholders to discuss the on-going challenges facing the industry.**

1. What is the economic and cultural contribution of the UK's festival industry?

The UK Festival sector is a global leader with festivals such as Glastonbury, Reading and Download recognised across the world. There are an estimated 975 festivals held in the UK every year, with the sector contributing £1.75bn GVA annually and supporting 85,000 jobs¹. The live music sector attracts significant international tourism and spend. In 2019, 845,000 international visitors came to the UK for live music tourism, spending on average £899².

Festivals are a vital component of the British cultural landscape, and 5.2 million people attended a festival in 2019. The festival sector brings cultural and economic activity to areas all over the UK, with increases in live music spend in 2019 driven by Glastonbury in South-West England and Parklife and Creamfields festivals in North-West England³.

Music festivals provide a vital platform for new acts to break, develop their craft and then be exported globally, supporting the UK to continue to be the world's second biggest

¹ Media Insight Consulting, "Valuing Live Entertainment" report (June 2020)

² UKMusic, Music by Numbers 2020, (November 2020)

³ UKMusic, Music by Numbers 2020, (November 2020)

exporter of recorded music. Furthermore, they ensure artists have a diversified income stream, which is increasingly important if revenue from recorded music is constrained by streaming and illegal downloading.

Festivals support an extensive supply chain including technical production, staging and catering companies, many of which are small businesses local to the area of the festival. Over 10% of UK festivals' annual GVA directly benefits local businesses⁴.

Festivals often have a wide social and cultural impact: they can raise money for charity and awareness of issues, and they can act as a forum for social and political expression. In addition, many festivals play an important role in the preservation of British history by raising revenue for the historical estates which host them.⁵

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

The Government is committed to enabling music events and festivals to take place where the public health risks from such events can be effectively mitigated. DCMS has worked closely with the festivals sector throughout the pandemic, and they have published draft planning guidance to enable the industry to consider whether and how their events may be able to take place in future, and adapt to the latest regulations and guidance.

There are many different types of music festivals and events, which may have different considerations regarding whether and how they can effectively mitigate public health risks.

The Government understands that there are around 975 UK festivals.⁶ The broad categories for UK festivals (with full audiences) are:

- 80% are below 5000 attendees (multi-day greenfield);
- 8% are 5,000-10,000 attendees (multi-day greenfield);
- 8% are 10,000-30,000 attendees (multi-day greenfield);
- 2% are 30,000+ attendees (multi-day greenfield); and
- 2% are metropolitan and urban festivals.

Covid-19 risks associated with festivals are linked to the level of incidence at the time of the event. The risks associated with festivals can be considered in terms of risks at the festival event itself, the risks associated with social mixing before and after the event and the risk associated with the pressures around shared travel and movement of people. Most summer festivals are largely outdoors, which provides effective ventilation and helps to mitigate the risk of Covid-19 transmission.

⁴ Association of Independent Festivals survey (November 2020)

⁵ Webster and McKay, From Glyndeboune to Glastonbury: The Impact of British Music Festivals (2016)

⁶ Information from the Association of Independent Festivals for 2019 events. To note, free entry and local authority operated festivals over 30,000 capacity are not included in these figures.

Music festivals typically involve large crowds and unstructured movement of people, which would normally lead to high levels of contact between individuals and groups from different households. Attendee behaviour at some festivals may lead to close proximity contact, and these behaviours may be enhanced by alcohol use.

The duration (e.g. multi-day) and scale (e.g. number of attendees) of events may also increase the level of social contact within an event. Ingress and egress to the event and mixing before and after events, including public and shared transport, may also lead to high levels of contact between attendees from different households. Some larger events are likely to encourage the movement of people across the UK.

Whilst risks of Covid-19 remain, it will be particularly important to mitigate the risk of “super spreader” events where widespread transmission occurs, and to prevent onward transmission following events through integration with NHS Test and Trace.

The Government appreciates that planning for festivals would normally have lead-in times of several months, and the challenges this creates for event organisers. Whilst the Government wants to help the festivals sector to plan, we are not in a position to provide certainty on the restrictions that may be in place in summer 2021. In particular this will depend on the incidence of and rate of transmission of Covid-19 at a local, national and international level, and related to this, the impact of the rollout of vaccines and testing arrangements.

Extensive Covid-19 risk mitigations are set out in Covid-19 secure guidance, including the DCMS Performing Arts guidance and the Events Industry Forum guidance on outdoor events. If some Covid-19 restrictions continue into next summer, including with regards to social distancing and larger events, the UK festivals sector will need to demonstrate how events can be organised in a way that limits the nature and level of social interaction. This would build on existing Covid-secure guidance, but in addition seek to further mitigate risks that are most specific to certain types of festivals and events.

Whilst some festivals may be able to adapt to continued Covid-19 restrictions, others may not be operationally or economically viable until restrictions are relaxed further and large scale festivals with fuller audiences are permitted.

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

The impact of a vaccine rollout on preventing individual infection and community transmission, and developments in mass and rapid testing technology, could be important enablers for festivals being able to take place with fuller audiences in the future. Developments on effective treatments will reduce risk to lives and serious illness for people

who do contract the virus. Further information on these areas is set out in chapter 2 of the Government's [Covid-19 Winter Plan](#).

In addition to these factors, the Government welcomes innovative and practical solutions from festival organisers on how they could further mitigate risk at their events.

The Government is working closely with the UK festivals sector on additional mitigations that could enable festivals to take place in future without, or with a less restrictive form of, social distancing. UK Live Music chairs a group of festival representatives, which provides the sector the opportunity to engage with the DCMS Chief Scientific Adviser and Public Health England on these issues.

Transmission risks associated with the nature of level of social contact at festivals could be mitigated by measures related to audience behaviour and crowd management.

Demonstrating the effective mitigation measures for these areas could potentially enable more events to take place, and for more people to attend events.

The Scientific Pandemic Group on behaviours (SPI-B) has highlighted the important role of group identities and norms shared by attendees at festivals.⁷ Event organisers have a relationship with their attendees that provides an opportunity for sustained communications to promote audience behaviour that helps mitigate Covid-19 risks. Whilst social contact outside of groups attending events together (household or larger) cannot be eliminated, the way in which crowds are managed and lower risk audience behaviour is encouraged could reduce the relative risk of particular types of events. In addition, many risk mitigations that are not dependent on social distancing should continue, such as hygiene, sanitation and cleaning.

The risks of transmission associated with shared transport to and from large events in particular would need to be mitigated to enable events to take place with fuller audiences. Attendees travelling from outside the UK will need to continue to comply with any restrictions on travel, and requirements to isolate on arrival in the country.

The Government welcomes representations from industry experts and event organisers on innovative solutions for mitigating risks across these areas, and is committed to working across sectors to help develop and assess proposals and solutions.

4. 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?

⁷ SPI-B, Consensus statement on the reopening of large events and venues, 19 August 2020
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spi-b-consensus-statement-on-the-reopening-of-large-events-and-venues-19-august-2020>

The £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund (CRF) has benefitted the music sector by providing support to venues and many other cultural organisations to stay open and continue operating. So far, over £500 million has been announced from the CRF for over 2,000 cultural organisations across England. Almost a fifth of this (over £100 million) has gone to the music sector, with over £22 million being received by festivals and their supply chain organisations.

81 festivals applied for CRF funding, with 51 successful (62% success rate), totalling approximately £8.1m⁸. The geographic spread of awards was:

- London: 15
- Midlands: 10
- North: 13
- South West: 5
- South East: 8

For festival supply chains, a total of 90 applications were received for CRF funding in this category. Of these 81 were funded (90% success rate), totalling approximately £17.1m⁹. The term 'supply chain' covers a wide range of organisations involved in creating a festival (and other live music events)¹⁰, including production services, comms and marketing, and content, which accounts for the difference in funding.

65%¹¹ of festivals who were successful in receiving CRF grants have sufficient funds to continue operating and stage festival activity next year as a result of this support, if permitted by the latest Covid-19 regulations and guidance.

As a result of CRF grants, there has been a 22% overall increase in expected number of staff expected to be retained at the end of December 2020 in comparison to previous estimates by the Association of Independent Festivals.

The temporary reduced rate of VAT was introduced on 15 July to support the cash flow and viability of over 150,000 businesses and protect 2.4 million jobs in the hospitality and tourism sectors, and will run until 31st March 2021. This relief comes at a significant cost to the Exchequer, and while the Government keeps all taxes under review, there are currently no plans to extend it further.

The Government has held back a proportionate amount of CRF funding with a view to offering further support when needed. DCMS and its arm's length bodies are working

⁸ Arts Council England

⁹ Arts Council England

¹⁰ Examples of organisations classed as supply chain by ACE: staging, lighting/sound (equipment manufacture, supply, installation, maintenance and engineering), transport, ticket agencies, PR/comms firms, artist agencies and management companies.

¹¹ Association of Independent Festivals

closely to identify the ongoing needs of the arts, heritage and cultural sectors, and decide how best to use the contingency from the CRF to provide further support.

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

The government is seeking to make the UK a world leader in using resources efficiently and reducing the amount of waste we create as a society through the “reduce, reuse and recycle” approach.

Action to achieve this is being driven at the national level and The DEFRA’s [Resources and Waste Strategy](#) (2018) sets out ambitious plans for how the Government will help affect a shift towards a resource efficient and circular economy, in line with the Government’s [25 Year Environment Plan](#).

The Government supports a more sustainable approach to event management, including festivals, and from a waste perspective this means events that events should have a minimal negative impact on the environment. Government supports the BSI Group publication called a [Sustainable Events Guide](#) which outlines ways to develop a sustainability management system for events.

The government recognises that litter has been an issue at music festivals in the past, and welcomes the steps taken last year by the Glastonbury Festival organisers to address this problem. We would like to see other music festivals following Glastonbury’s example. The ‘Keep It, Bin It’ campaign partnered with Leeds Festival in August 2019 to use this large gathering to promote education and awareness about the impact of litter on the environment.

We are committed to tackling plastic pollution. We recognise that consumption and incorrect disposal of single-use plastics at festivals is a significant problem, and we commend the recent efforts of many UK festival organisers to reduce plastic consumption and in some cases go single-use plastic free. We encourage others to follow suit and take action.

In line with the 2019 manifesto, the Government will introduce a deposit return scheme for drinks containers to incentivise people to recycle plastic and glass. Such schemes have previously been trialled at a number of UK festivals, with festival goers paying an additional deposit on the container when purchasing from a festival retailer, incentivising them to return the empty container to a return point where they will be refunded the deposit. This helps to boost the sustainability credentials at such events and promote good recycling habits for the future.

No illicit drug can be assumed to be safe and there is no safe way to take illicit drugs. Drugs can devastate lives, ruin families and damage communities. This Government's approach is to prevent drug misuse in our communities and support people through treatment and recovery.

Festival organisers, in consultation with local partners, are responsible for decisions relating to drug testing at festivals. Any policing arrangements around festivals are an operational matter for Chief Constables. The possession, supply or production of any amount of a controlled drug without a licence - where one is needed - is a criminal offence.

Local initiatives to improve safety and reduce drug-related harm at festivals, including social media messaging and other communications, often involve local authorities, which are supported by regional Public Health England (PHE) centres. PHE continues to run FRANK, the national drugs website and helpline for young people, which has extensive information on drug risks and how to avoid them. FRANK news articles around the festival season cover these risks in more detail. PHE has also used social media to communicate