

Written evidence submitted by the Kiln Rooms

Call for evidence - Impact of Covid-19 on DCMS sectors

The Kiln Rooms is made up of 3 open access ceramics studios based in South London. After opening our first studio in 2015 we grew quickly and now welcome over 450 makers (of all abilities) every week. We also have a team of over 20 freelance staff.

- ***What has been the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector?***

Everything has ground to a halt and as far as we know all similar studios are closed. There are some makers who are selling work online but markets and events have had to be cancelled. Not only have hobbyists and professional makers been affected but beginners aren't able to gain access, as doing classes from home is particularly challenging as with ceramics it's difficult to get hold of the necessary materials / equipment and it's not possible to fire work. The impact could not be greater.

- ***How effectively has the support provided by DCMS, other Government departments and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?***

For us there has been no support from DCMS or other arms-length bodies. We are a Limited Company and as it stands might have some access to government support however we're not sure that we're eligible for any of this support.

- ***What will the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?***

Difficult to say at this early stage. People might have a craving to make things with their hands, or with an economic downturn it might be that crafts is a luxury that fewer can afford.

- ***What lessons can be learnt from how DCMS, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with Covid-19?***

These arms-length bodies are geared up solely to support charities and organisations who rely on public support and funding. Generally speaking this works well and is the way it should be. However, during times of crisis these bodies have to look at supporting the sector as a whole – including for profit companies such as ours.

- ***How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can DCMS support such innovation to deal with future challenges?***

Evolution of the sector:

One of the main joys of the arts and crafts is the experience of practicing in a purpose built studio amongst other, likeminded enthusiasts. This will not change but perhaps the sector needs to explore new ways for people to engage in the crafts remotely or from their home. One of the reasons that open access studios work well is that makers are able to share space/equipment and at times these spaces can become busy, where people work in close proximity. It will be important for the sector to evaluate how sustainable this model is, particularly if people's mind-sets change with regards to co-working.

DCMS support:

DCMS need to listen to the whole sector, not just publicly funded organisations in order to understand what changes are happening. Also, when social / economic / political changes have a negative impact on the crafts it's important to ensure that there is support for the whole sector, and that this support can be put into place quickly.