

## Written evidence submitted by the Hay Festival

### 1. What is the cultural impact of Hay Festival?

Described by President Bill Clinton as, ‘The Woodstock for the mind,’ Hay Festival is one of the world’s leading arts and literature festivals. Founded in 1987, the festival has grown from a small event to a series of major international festivals that take place annually across the globe.

The 11-day festival in Hay on Wye is still the largest of all the festivals and regularly presents over 500 of the world’s leading writers and artists in 650 events each year, attracting audiences of 278,000 to the rural community of Hay on Wye. The thousands of writers and artists who have appeared at Hay represent ambition, creativity, relevance and inclusivity and have helped shape the world we live in. From Arthur Miller, Maya Angelou, Harold Pinter and Margaret Atwood to Toni Morrison, Elif Shafak, Salman Rushdie and Stephen Hawking, they have all left an indelible mark on our culture.

The Festival has long term partnerships with the British Council, BBC, BBC Mundo, Royal Society, British Academy and many other important national cultural institutions and international Embassies.

*“Hay is more than a literary festival. It’s beginning to resemble something closer to cultural diplomacy. The stunning locations are certainly a plus, but what’s most exciting is its ability to bring together a range of disciplines and voices, to transmit a slice of collegiate experience to different populations” GQ Magazine*

#### 1.1 The Festivals contribution to culture in 2020:

Even in a year with the challenges that 2020 has brought, our small team delivered eight Editions of Hay Festival that took place both on and offline in seven countries, on three different continents; Europe, Latin America, and Middle East.

979 writers, artists, musicians took part, from over 50 different countries in 630 individual ticketed/registered events.

1,049,567 attendances by tickets or active registrations\* from 140 countries

Our Hay Player archive include 8500 video and audio recordings from 92 Festivals.

Hay Festival made one of the largest single contributions to the British Library, 30 years of archive material. We are incredibly proud to have made such an important contribution to the UK’s cultural reputation worldwide.

\*Active Registrations – Each event required viewers to register to watch, and the results shown are the audiences who actively watched after registration.

#### 1.2 Education and Outreach

In normal circumstances our work in the UK goes far beyond Festival's main public programme to deliver culturally important and successful projects – free of charge for the beneficiaries.

All of these projects were cancelled in 2020 and are under threat this year.

The Hay Academy is for older teenagers and young people in education who benefit from free tickets to lectures, creative industry work experience opportunities, creative writing residential programme for A level students, and professional development projects for Welsh writers.

A national live literature tour for primary and secondary school students that takes place in University Campus venues across Wales. Dedicated access programme for Foster Families and provision of engagement initiatives for the Neuro-diverse.

Similar important outreach education projects also take place at all international Festivals, reaching deprived communities working in difficult circumstances.

## 2. What is the economic impact of Hay Festival in the UK and local economies?

The main Hay Festival edition in the UK has taken place annually for 33 years.

2020 was the first time a live Festival did not take place in rural Hay on Wye. The economic impact of this edition, is measured independently by market researchers using the Government's 'EventImpacts' Economic Calculator. The latest results are from 2018, recording an economic impact (within a 30-minute drive radius of Hay on Wye) as:

**£25.6m, supporting over 400 jobs annually**

For context, Hay on Wye has a population of 1800 and is 25 miles from the nearest train station. Public transport is extremely poor and broadband and mobile coverage provision does not compare with metropolitan centres.

Without the live editions, this economic benefit has been entirely lost. Unlike music festivals Hay does not offer camping within the ticket price and only offers a limited number of food outlets due to the relatively small size of the site itself (11 acres).

Therefore 100% of money spent by our audiences on accommodation goes to local providers. Pubs, restaurants and Cafes also make up to a third of their annual turnover during the 11 days of the Festival.

The town of Hay on Wye is a very important part of the visitor experience, renowned for the many bookshops and other (previously) thriving independent retailers benefit from visitor spending.

Each year tens of thousands of pounds are raised for charities during the Festival.

A great deal of work took place in December to plan for a socially distanced, live Festival. However, it is now very unlikely that a live Hay Festival in May will go ahead.

The main Hay Festival is one of the first Festivals to take place - an important start date for the sector. Infrastructure typically starts to be built at the end of March.

In May 2020 we lost over £400k in sunk costs as a result of having to cancel in March (over 15% of the festival costs) with 100% loss of income from ticket sales, bookshop sales, catering etc.

The economic impact to Hay on Wye and environs, losing three live Festivals (2 May editions and 1 Winter edition) will be at least:

**£51.2m loss**

### 3. Risks

There are significant risks to the future of the organisation. Driven entirely by the uncertainty about the predicting the Covid 19 situation on major events.

The tier-based restrictions in place at the time of writing mean we are unable to proceed with a live Festival that is financially viable. However, we do not know what the restrictions might look like by the end of May. The risks therefore are:

- financial sustainability, can we get through the next 12 months?
- decisions need to be made months ahead of any live events, impacting on lead time for programming, audience engagement and promotion. As well as what we can offer for sponsors, supporters and wider stakeholders.
- socially distanced events are too high risk to be viable
- inability to insure against risks
- public confidence to book in advance will be greatly reduced by changing restrictions
- fatigue of digital alternatives will reduce appetite
- Accommodation providers may not survive the next 12 months and that will impact our audiences in 2022

#### 3.1 Mitigation

In the absence of insurance and income from our activity the only way to mitigate the risks is to secure funding to get through the next 12 months and deliver digital alternatives to our calendar of live Festivals.

Hay Festival receives no statutory arts funding whatsoever. It is not a portfolio client of either Arts Council Wales or Arts Council England.

In 2020, to mitigate the impact on our audiences, and to sustain engagement for the future live Festivals, two digital editions of the Festival took place in the UK free of charge to audiences.

The following results are extracted from the totals shown in paragraph 1.1

239 artists took part in 140 individual events

399391 attendances by active registrations\*

There have been some important benefits to working digitally, especially with regard to audience development. However, it is no substitute for the live experience.

### 3.1 Mitigating the risks to our communities

The Festival endeavoured to support our local economy by promoting those businesses able to sell online to our audiences, especially during the Winter Weekend at the end of November – an important pre-Christmas shopping period.

Securing year-round significant media coverage to help keep Hay on the map and that encourages tourism (when permitted).

Our hugely successful programme for schools has made an important contribution to maintaining free access to live (digital) literature for schools and parents during this time and forms part of the Welsh Governments continuous learning platform known as Hub.

Although we are known for literature, our programme includes music, comedy and other forms of performance. All our events require the talented teams of freelance support staff - stage managers, light and sound technicians, camera operators etc. These contract staff will be suffering the loss of income and there is little we can do to mitigate these losses directly.

Other contractors including event caterers and exhibitors have also lost the opportunity to generate significant sums.

According to the ACW's published list of recipients, no Festival in Wales received funding from their Cultural Recovery Fund. Although a small grant of £35K was received from the ACW's Covid stabilisation fund.

Temporary Vat Cut was of no benefit whatsoever.

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

Welsh Government have issued their guidance for events based on the tier system and that information is available here <https://gov.wales/coronavirus-control-plan-alert-levels-wales>

These restrictions make the live festival an unrealistic proposition.

5. Evolving Market

The Festival scene has changed in recent years and competition for 'Festivals of Ideas' has grown significantly. Competition comes not only from regional, smaller literary Festivals but also from various media companies too.

Hay Festival evolved rapidly over the last 10 months – from live to digital attracting larger, new, more diverse audiences. It is our intention to offer digital content alongside our live Festivals to reach those people who may not otherwise be able to attend in person.

In particular those from lower socio-economic groups, older people who find the Festivals crowds challenging, those who have additional access needs, in particular the deaf community who have benefited from live captioning provided through our digital Festival.

Monetising this model is a huge challenge while maintaining such good access, we also face fatigue and much greater competition in the market place than at the time of our first digital Festival when we were leading the field.

With an ambition to deliver both formats in the future, the live offer is paramount to our organisation, the shared experience of live cannot be replicated online. Nor can the benefits of being in the heart of the Brecon Beacons National Park and all of the wellbeing derived from being in an outdoor environment.

Participation is of huge benefit to society as a vital antidote to the negative impacts on mental health that many have suffered during the pandemic. We need to welcome back the hundreds of volunteers who form such an important part of the Festival too.

The opportunity cost of managing a way through this crisis and simply surviving has come at the expense of any development work that would otherwise have taken place.

Hay Festival is a market leader and innovations are very important. While we have innovated to survive we cannot afford to continue in this crisis mode. We need to be supported through this period so we can return from a position of strength, building on what our small team of 20 staff have achieved in such extraordinary circumstances.

## 6. Reducing Environmental Impacts

Hay Festival has developed a programme of managing and mitigating the environmental impact of creating a live festival, focusing on energy, waste, transport, procurement and venues. Full details of how we do this can be found here <http://www.hayfestival.com/green-hay>.

### 6.1 Drug abuse is not prevalent at Hay Festival.

## 7. Qualitative Evidence

Here are just a few quotes from various stakeholders about what the Festival means to them.

## 7.1 International reputation.

*“Hay Festival democratizes inspiration. It is more human than other idea fairs” New York Times*

*“An experience that will change your life...” National Geographic*

*“The depth of this year’s programme is true testament to Hay’s global appeal and I know it will provide light, inspiration and optimism for the future to people across the world. As we approach the end of a year like no other, I once again applaud the continued resilience and endeavour of our friends across the rich cultural and artistic landscapes who are adapting to this challenging time in innovative ways to showcase Wales to global audiences.” Dafydd Elis-Thomas MS, Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism*

*“The world’s biggest book event, the Hay Festival, has surprised even its organisers after being forced to go digital - and proving to be more popular than ever... While most of the entertainment sector has suffered as music festivals, concerts, theatre shows and film productions hang in the balance, no one could have predicted the festival’s digital success” – Sky News*

*“Congratulations for an excellent Winter Weekend – really enjoyed the fantastic variety of entertaining, enlightening and some slightly spooky fare!” Caroline Dinenage, MP and Minister of State DCMS*

## 7.2 Educating, Inspiring and Entertaining

*“I can only add how grateful I am that this programme has been moved online this year and applaud everything about it. The quality of this service has been second to none and I’ve had countless messages from my pupils brimming with enthusiasm about the various authors they’ve watched. I personally thought that Laura Bates and Laura Coryton’s sessions were outstanding and I will certainly use their sessions, their books and the resources that have been so kindly created as part of my teaching when the schools return. Honestly, I can’t thank you enough for the most wonderful festival.”*

*Teacher, Ysgol Gyrun Rhymni*

*“My 12-year-old daughter listened to Cressida Cowell on the Hay Player this afternoon and she said it has inspired her to write more. Thanks also for making this archive available; I’ve always encouraged Machynlleth’s Ysgol Bro Hyddgen and Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn to take the kids but to my knowledge they haven’t – so to have this accessible is just awesome!” Parent, Machynlleth*

## 7.3 Audience feedback

*“Thank you to everyone involved in making this Winter Festival possible. It has been wonderful. It was great fun reading the 'Live Chat' for each event. Amazing that people from all over the world were united in supporting the Festival. Just magical! Thank you.”*

*Frances Byrne*

*"Thanks to the festival we've all had the opportunity for our minds to be transported to another place. So essential currently. Many thanks to the hard working team."*  
*Maris Watkins*

#### 7.4 Volunteers

Over 200 volunteers support the Festival annually.

*"Hay Festival is now the highlight of my year. I've made new friends, not to mention some incredible writers. It's great that I've been able to use my professional skills in this volunteer role and share my experience, as well as learn from others."* Paul Walsh, volunteer steward.

## 8. Conclusion

Unlike most national major arts institutions Hay Festival received no statutory funding from government. We create a wealth of cultural and economic impact for our communities wherever we work.

We need to secure funding to enable us to continue our work that is so important for the wellbeing of our communities and to make our contribution to helping them to recover from the pandemic, and to secure the future of the organization for the next generation.