

Written evidence submitted by the Barbican

Covid-19 Impact on the Cultural Sector

Context

- The Barbican's business model and artistic programme relies on the wider health of the arts sector, both in the UK and internationally. For the UK cultural sector to be able to recover quickly from the current crisis, it is therefore essential for the Government to take action that protects the cultural ecosystem at all levels.
- The Arts Council emergency funding packages offer welcome support for NPOs and to individual artists. We know that many of the organisations we work with are also taking advantage of the Government's job retention scheme to provide much needed financial support and stability for employees during this time.
- Due to the complexity of the UK's cultural ecology, there are areas where current Arts Council and Government schemes may not be reaching or where there are shortcomings in the support offered – e.g. no mid to long-term support is available beyond immediate emergency funding for lost current earnings.
- Independent early-mid career artists and artistic companies we work with across the programme, plus the local community and civil society organisations we work with to deliver inclusive cultural experience in areas historically underserved by major funders and cultural infrastructure (e.g. places with no or few NPOs) are significantly at risk.
- The work the Barbican undertakes, supporting those earlier in their careers, those underrepresented across the sector and those working at a local, grassroots level is made possible by long-term partnerships with local civil society organisations and groups, alongside schools, creative enterprises, freelancers, small companies and independent artists. We commit core budgets and receive additional funding to support this work on a long-term basis, but those partners we work with rely on project-by-project commissions and top-up support from funders to make their business models sustainable in the long-run.
- The current situation presents a precarious future for this ecosystem of organisations and individuals. This poses a threat not only to the individual people and organisations affected but also for larger organisations such as the Barbican, as it may restrict our ability to continue reaching the widest possible public by developing relevant and inclusive cultural experiences through working with this network of local organisations, independent early-mid career artists, companies and freelancers.

Barbican Position

- Currently the Barbican is not intending to take advantage of the policy package from government, including the job retention scheme, with no immediate intention to furlough staff. This is largely due to our status as part of a local authority due position as a department of the City of London Corporation, who are our founder and principal funder.
- This said, the situation is having a significant impact on our business model, with a major loss of income combined with ongoing pressure of already committed expenditure and our desire to protect the wider cultural infrastructure through reaching equitable settlements with organisations and artists whose events are being cancelled or rescheduled.
- The direct cost of this is not yet known and has to be considered in line with the local authority requirements to justify public expenditure in the most appropriate ways, alongside

aligning with arts sector best practice regarding how we honour contracts to support independent artists and freelancers.

Current Sector Challenges

- Outside of the Barbican position (i.e. that of our partners and the artists we work with), the issues around the financing of mid to long term planning are the main challenges facing artists and cultural organisations. This is particularly true for independent artists, freelancers and smaller local and community-based arts organisations, often led by individuals or small groups on a part-time or voluntary basis. These organisations infrequently employ staff in a full-time capacity, meaning that government support for furloughing staff does not apply.
- Similarly, the support currently available to freelancers/artists/orgs (from ACE) is designed to cover existing lost earnings. Although this is a significant lifeline for immediate cashflow challenges, it does not protect from the large-scale loss of funding from commissioning partners, venues and funding bodies that can no longer support future projects.
- Due to the immediate halt on all applications for funding to support future work, alongside the inability of commissioning partners to commit any funding to future projects on account of their own financial losses, any planning or development of new work is very difficult.
- This affects freelance producers and artists who need to continue to earn a living beyond the immediate future (e.g. from current emergency funding) and will have a knock-on effect on venues, festivals and community events who are now unable to programme works from artists/orgs working at this level into the near and long term future.
- It is also worth noting that the relatively informal set-up of organisations operating at a community/grassroots level means that they tend not to have pre-existing relationships or experience with major funders such as Arts Council England and could therefore be less able to successfully apply for funding in the current circumstances (ACE's response funding). Many of these organisations and artists have struggled to engage with the ACE application processes in the past or tend to require a lot of support to make applications.
- Additionally, many freelancers with their own Ltd companies are falling through the gaps in Govt emergency funding at the moment because they don't meet the freelancer criteria and don't meet the bigger business criteria.

Long Term Impact

- Consideration needs to be given to longer term implications for cultural sector once lockdown restrictions begin to be lifted and cultural events can begin again. This is likely to be a gradual process, with lead times for creating and commissioning cultural events/exhibitions meaning that it may take some time for organisations to begin to programme and operate at full capacity. This, combined with potential initial public nervousness about attending large scale events, may mean that it will take several months for organisations to begin to generate box office and commercial income at levels similar to before the COVID-19 lockdown.
- The fragility of the independent cultural ecosystem means that if mechanisms of support are not responsive to the mid to long term challenges, and/or if current available support is not easily accessible to those organisations and artists that are less financially stable, a large part of the sector could be significantly compromised. This would not be a loss on a purely individual level, but the work and money that has been invested to date in developing these broad cultural ecologies across the country will be significantly damaged or lost.

- Potential loss of earnings and access to project funding for future activities for those individuals, groups and companies that would normally be developing a multitude of new projects during this time could have a very detrimental effect on a significant part of the sector (e.g. early-mid career artists and companies, local, community groups and organisations) and all associated work.
- Loss of local, independent and early-mid career cultural operators and their work will impact on larger, more secure organisations' abilities to engage wider and more diverse audiences, make and maintain meaningful relationships with their local community and arts networks, support artistic development, and diversify their programmes.

Areas for Consideration re: Government Packages

- Ensuring Arts Council and Government emergency packages take phased approach to reducing support for organisations once lockdown restrictions are lifted. This would help stabilise the sector as it begins recovery period and organisations begin to rebuild income streams
- Development of funding packages / support for projects and activities beyond those currently lost to ensure those more fragile parts of the cultural ecosystem are not lost
- Clarification on the criteria for freelancers with Ltd companies
- Clarification of temporary measures available - such as studio/office rent and rates waivers/holidays for those not constituted as a small business such as independent artists and freelancers
- Practical resources for those unclear of their rights regarding cancelled contracts and sector wide position and support from funders for organisations on honouring contracts with freelancers in relation to delayed/cancelled delivery of projects