

Written evidence submitted by OutdoorArtsUK

UK Parliament Impact of Covid-19 on DCMS sectors

Introduction

This evidence is submitted by OutdoorArtsUK. OAUk is an Arts Council England-funded **membership, networking and strategic organisation** that brings together the many diverse parts of the Outdoor Arts sector offering advice, leadership, connection and community. OutdoorArtsUK currently represents over 300 members working in the Outdoor Arts sector, including agents, artists, companies, curators, festivals, funders, producers, local authorities, production companies, programmers and venues.

About Outdoor Arts

In 2019 OutdoorArtsUK listed 592 Outdoor Arts events on our website for that year, including 13 major city-based festivals, 18 melas and 35 carnivals across the UK. Participation ranges from a mass community cast of hundreds, to a cast of just one. Events are not just concentrated in the summer months, with the recent expansion and popularity of winter events, we listed 31 light-art themed events in 2019 and 23 lantern parades and winter carnivals.

Outdoor Arts performances and festivals...

... take place **all over the public realm**, from streets and parks, rooftops and rivers, to high streets and marketplaces.

... encompass a **wide range of artforms** including dance, puppetry, comedy, mela, pyrotechnics, visual art, digital art, carnival and circus.

... scale up from **solo performers** to **large companies** producing, city-sized work, such as Royal de Luxe's *Giants* in Liverpool and the *Manchester Day Parade*; alongside **smaller local events**, such as Cohesion Plus's *Gravesend Fusion Festival* and Creative Barking and Dagenham's *Dagfest*.

... producers range from **community organisations** and **local authorities**, to **theatres and arts venues**, such as Winchester's Hat Fair; and to **commercial organisations** producing greenfield festivals, such as Boomtown and Greenman.

... are **seasonal**, with the majority of festivals taking place from May to September, with LightNights and pyrotechnic events in the winter.

Outdoor Arts Audiences

Outdoor Arts engage **the widest-ranging audiences of all artforms**: all ages, socio-economic and cultural groupings, genuinely reflecting local populations; individuals least likely to engage with the arts (Audience Agency evidence).

Audiences attend for **social and entertainment reasons, in adult and family groups**, and demonstrate **a high degree of satisfaction** with both the quality of performances and the overall experience.

Evidence shows Outdoor Arts contribute to **local pride**, encourage **community cohesion**, fuel **cultural tourism** and generate significant **economic impact**:

- Total attendance estimated at 29.5M with a spend of £5.6B and 92,692 full time equivalent jobs
- Liverpool's *Giants* production in 2017 welcomed 1.2 million visitors, generating £46M
- Freedom Festival, Hull, attracted 83,173 people to the city, generating an estimated spend of £3.5M in the local economy in 2019

OutdoorArtsUK reached out to the whole sector to compile this evidence for the DCMS and conducted an extensive survey and received 151 responses.

Recovery

Because it is not constrained by buildings, Outdoor Arts may well be the first artform able to start up again to help repair communities, public confidence and help get the economy and other art sectors working again. It is worth reiterating that Outdoor Arts...

... has unique qualities **in bringing communities together**.

... can be mobile and perform in local neighbourhoods, high streets and market places, helping bring back confidence and encourage people into town centres.

... has skills and experience to help other arts and cultural organisations present work outdoors.

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

Like all of the cultural sector, bluntly, Outdoor Arts has been completely devastated. Most of those working in the sector have lost 90-100% of their income and work and due to the seasonal nature of Outdoor Arts, many now have no potential employment or revenue until next summer.

- All UK and international events have been cancelled or postponed.

- “We have had to cancel Spring, Summer and Autumn outdoor festival programmes, including commissioned and co-commissioned work”
- “We lost the majority of our upcoming projects within a couple of weeks:” Cancelled programme, new plans, new collaboration, postponed programmes and press launch”
- Many have lost 90-100% of work and income for the entire year:
 - “May - October is usually the main employment of my year which has now been effectively cancelled out by the virus”
 - “Every single contract... terminated... I have no idea if I will be earning anything this year and quite likely not till next spring/summer”
- Withdrawal of ACE applications:
 - Our projects grant application... was one week off getting a decision”
 - “A funding bid which had secured match funding was in the pipeline and is now stalled”
- Other funding has disappeared:
 - “Pretty much all income from sponsorship, advertising and concessions lost”
 - “Loss of usual ACE project funding, decrease in corporate sponsorship.... Loss of staff on fixed term contracts - unable to renew due to losing funding”
- Loss of existing and new works
 - “Artists are having to reconsider (and in many cases, discard) artworks they have built up over years, and start afresh”
 - “Our new production has been postponed and unlikely to be performed this year putting pressure on..... to safeguard the budget for next year [and find] new funding to support our core freelance team... through the crisis”
- Uncertainty and inability to plan or know when, how and what a return might look like:
 - “No way of knowing when we'll be able to work again”
 - “Struggling to plan for the future with no idea when it will be ok to hold outdoor events again and how audiences will feel about returning”

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

Of survey respondents:

- 77% received financial support, include from other areas such as Trusts, cancellation fees, and donations
- 23% have received none – including some artists and ineligible organisations
- 32% received support from one source, 45% from two or more

SEIS, ACE Emergency and OAUK Benevolent funds were the major lifelines for artists and smaller companies. Larger organisations, including NPOs, relied more heavily on furloughing staff and secured support from a wider range of sources.

Overall, the DCMS, government and arms-length bodies have provided short term stability:

- “The support was welcome but limited”
- “Self-employed support was late coming, but... very easy process and very welcome”
- “The support was very efficient in our case, covering the salaries of the personnel and giving us the possibility to organize [an] online edition of the festival”

Like the wider freelance community, there have been many discrepancies:

- “As well as performing, I direct and lecture both here and abroad. This has meant I did not qualify for self-employed assistance, furlough or any other Govt. schemes”
- “Many artists... usually get more than 50% income from other part time jobs that have vanished”
- “We fall into a gap between self-employed and employed (with) 2 directors on payroll”
- “Those in their 1st year of self-employment” are penalised
- “2019/2020 was unfortunately not included; it was the third year of growth and a bumper one”

Outdoor artists and companies reinvest a considerable amount back into their businesses, so ‘profit’ is low compared to ‘turnover’, and overheads disregarded.

- “[SEIS] doesn't take into account people on tour living off expenses for the season, measured on tax return net, so not necessarily realistic amount”
- “Based on net profits and not earnings it amounted to under £300 as I've poured most of my earnings back into training and development since I started freelancing”

Many have already lost the entire year's income:

- "Whilst the scheme could help for a couple of months, my reality is my next paid work may not be until May 2021"
- "For outdoor artists the summer is not just the time to earn but to save for the leaner winter months"

The withdrawal of ACE's project grants to facilitate the Emergency Package caused uncertainty and the loss of invested money, time and resources in application development. There was a much longer wait for a response from cultural funding bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which was both unsettling and caused further insecurity.

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

Most urgent is the **loss of the entire season** of work and all income for the year:

- "[The support] has provided short term protection of the company... The big problems will come in the latter half of the year when this money has been used up"
- "In October... I may be left without any employment"

The potential collapse of funding

- "Funders have focussed on the now and... the future for our sector will struggle post crisis with much of the funding having been used"
- "As one of the largest funders, will local authorities have resources to continue this work?"
- "Funding and sponsorship are a big issue for us, we know we will have to downscale some of our planned events"

A significant contraction, with job losses, closures and bankruptcies:

- "The uncertainty... and the knock-on effect that has on planning for some sort of financial robustness"
- "The long-term future... does not look hopeful or good. With the anticipated immediate closure and then a slip into administration for many (if not most) large to small scale venue arts organisations"

"Public confidence...to gather at live events, exhibitions and festivals.... critical to the sector's survival."

- “We are struggling to understand where we go in terms of procedures going forward (and we are a local authority!)”
- “Will audiences be happy to engage with outdoor arts events; can artists incorporate socially distancing into their work?”

Making events safe:

- “The challenges of making a festival safe with social distancing measures are so overwhelming, I fear many won't be able to address these challenges and will give up / not try, or won't have the resources to do the necessary work.”
- “Will [safety] impact audience numbers and viability, in line with funders expectations or financial bottom lines?”
- Cancellation Risks
 - From outbreaks in an area where an event is taking place
 - Artist and event staff becoming sick
 - Impact on insurance premiums

Artistic Practice, Social Distancing and Travel

Current restrictions, impact the artistic model of creating, performance forms, structures, and touring:

- “How to bring everyone together for rehearsals?”
- “Our participation work funds a lot of the creative work... we won't be able to rely on the income the same as before”
- “The close-up interactivity [with audiences] will be lost”
- “Around UK and internationally – how will [artists] travel and perform together - we don't want a team of 3 travelling 15 miles in 3 vehicles, and public transport is still not a great idea”

SUPPORT NEEDED:

1. The sector needs an extension of financial support and a plugging of gaps until the Outdoor Arts sector is operating again - potentially until Summer 2021
2. “A New Deal Scheme... recognising the potential for the sector in bringing people out again after the pandemic, helping to restore public confidence”
 - a. ACE grants reinstatement to support the experimentation and development for the new environment, to be ready to present work when safety allows.

- b. Funds to “employ artists while there are restrictions rather than relying on grants... creativity will suffer long term so it would be good to encourage people to continue with their practice” and “still be here for the 'recovery”
 - c. Dedicated funding for local authorities to support the sector to bring people back to high streets and help to restore public confidence
3. An effective and comprehensive approach from the government and local authorities is essential to ensure the public's safety when outside of their homes
 4. “Funding for [new] skills/qualifications. A lot of us will have to change career or industry or the nature of their jobs will change entirely”

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

Key lessons include:

- The “huge difference in the support offered to payroll employees versus freelancers, is a great injustice”
- “[SIES] could have looked at fixed costs”
- Recognising the portfolio nature of self-employment and reducing the 50% threshold, when other part-time work and zero hours contracts have collapsed
- “[Furlough] a very blunt instrument, unhelpful to not allow people to do some work [even voluntary] for the organisation”
- A sector by sector approach to extend schemes when “our ability to earn has been stopped for at least a year!”

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

As a sector, we believe Outdoor Arts can help society recover emotionally and physically and, if managed well and sensibly. we can lead the way for other cultural sectors.

There is a multitude of ideas on how the sector might evolve:

Event Structures and Forms

- “Taking performance out to the community rather than the community coming to an event”
- “Work to be seen from a distance or in large spaces”

- “Performances for supermarket queues”
- “Adapting the use of volunteers in shows... to work crowd safety into the setting up of the performances”

Touring Structures and More Local Events

- “Adapt to how touring happens and where bookings come from”
- “More work closer to home”
- “We want to work in our high street area to support our local economy more”

Reinventing the Artform

- ““We're happy to adapt and create for the circumstance If we need to make a new show with no contact, we can do that”
- “Portable work that can be moved around and performed in a range of spaces, highly accessible, adaptable for different audiences”
- “Smaller scale outdoor processional interventions, with clear social distancing for public and participant”
- “Intimate performances [for] doorsteps/small streets, cul de sacs etc”

Experimentation and Audience Interaction

- Everything will have to be done from a distance. The intimacy of the work will be lost for a while. Until I get back out there and try things out and have any kind of safety guide lines I have no idea how it will evolve and adapt.”
- “What is most visual, so would be effective without much personal [physical] interaction.”

Outreach / Participation / Education

- “Find ways to deliver activities face-to-face in a safe way.”
- “Teaching will take a lot of planning and investment to make sure we have enough equipment set up in the right way.”
- “Small scale community work is the key. In a lot of places people have gone out of their way to help their neighbours.... We need to find a way to inspire these communities to continue and develop themselves.”

Providing skills and experience other sectors

- “Exciting opportunity to broaden people’s artistic interest and increase cross genre collaboration”
- Outdoor artists have a wealth of experience to offer from 360° movement and design, to engaging and managing crowds, crowd flows and moods, to working in the landscape and protected areas.

SUPPORT NEEDED

Public Support

The Outdoor Arts sector covers all areas and forms of artistic works imaginable. It is adept at creating and work adapting to the widest range of environments, and uniquely placed to assist with recovery.

Our work brings people together, engages all parts of society, and generates significant economic benefits for local economies; the sector can assist the recovery in the broadest sense.

To recover, evolve and assist, the whole of the cultural sector needs a New Deal style intervention and nationally agreed safety standards and guidelines.

Funding and funders’ support

- “Direct, quick investment to deliver projects... across wide areas. It isn't going to be any cheaper, but **these manifestations of renewed confidence need to be made quickly**”
- “Creation of commissioning opportunities to replace venues/promoters' ability to have cash to commission over next 2 years”
- “Commissioning funds to create new work that is adapted to a different landscape”
- “Clarity on what the funding plan will be from ACE and the other arts funders”
- “As one of the largest funders, resources for local authorities to continue this work”

Support to build new artistic models and financial viability

Enabling artists/promoters to:

- Safely experiment with new forms and practises
- Create new work and models of how to do this safely

- Exploring creating “work that is financially viable if seen by smaller numbers, perhaps just locally”
- “Share work with touring networks for reopening of events in 2020/21”

National safety standards and guidelines

- “A nationally agreed way of presenting events safely... rather than current situation where every council has its own policies and way of working”
- “A new set of practical advice papers or documents with case studies or examples for working safely under the pandemic”
- “Safety procedures and measures for dressing room, toilets etc backstage/unseen areas”

Infrastructure guidelines

- “The support elements will need thought- car parks /toilets/catering as they are all part of the visitor experience”
- “For events to happen outdoors we need plentiful public toilets which are regularly cleaned and well stocked with things like hand gel”

Risk Assessment Support

- “Risk assessments only show you have considered the risk - a shared understanding of that risk is required before we manage it”
- “Example risk assessments, successful examples of different formats that have been trialled”
- “Risk assessments on how to ensure health and safety of staff, freelancers, volunteers and participants/audience members”

Testing Guidance and Support

- Guidance and support on testing, temperature taking etc for:
 - Event Staff, Technical Crew Stewards etc
 - Artists for rehearsals and at events
 - Audiences
- “Regular CV19 testing which is freely available for all, with results in 30 minutes at the same location”
- “Effective government implementation of the test and trace system”

Liabilities and Insurance

- Clarity on “who is responsible for Covid safety (contractors, audiences, artists, organisers)” and “who is legally responsible for [guidelines] being observed
- “Insurance that covers pandemic cancellation, including for artists, event staff and outbreaks”

Public Confidence - Joint Communications around Safety

- “Joint communications campaign to raise awareness of safety at outdoor arts events”
- “Kitemark for outdoor events re. the correct regulations and procedures to put in place to deliver an event safely”
- Guidance on when “public opinion differs from official guidance and safety” and “getting people to comply with safety measures”

A fuller report with more detail from the OutdoorArtsUK Survey will be available on the website in due course.

- OutdoorArtsUK Resources:
<https://outdoorartsuk.org/advice-resources/>
- Outdoor Arts Audience Agency Research:
<https://www.theaudienceagency.org/resources/outdoor-arts-audience-report>
- Events Industry Forum Value of Outdoor Events:
www.eventsindustryforum.co.uk/images/documents/EIF_summary_report_final.pdf
- Liverpool Giants’ Economic Impact:
<https://theguideliverpool.com/the-impact-of-giants-spectacle-has-been-revealed-and-its-huge/>

Survey and report commissioned and developed by OutdoorArtsUK’s Executive Director, Angus MacKechnie, and the evidence has been analysed, rationalised and prepared by Karen Poley, Creative Producer, KP-Projects.