

Written evidence submitted by The European Entertainment Corporation Ltd Trading as CONTINENTAL CIRCUS BERLIN

Summary

The European Entertainment Corporation Ltd Trading as CONTINENTAL CIRCUS BERLIN operates a touring production that is performed in a Circus Big Top involving a theatrical set and tiered seating .

Circus Berlin is one of the largest Circuses touring in the United Kingdom.

In an ordinary year from March until November.

At Christmas and Winter we then move into some of the United Kingdom's premier Winter Events such as Winter Funland Manchester and other large cities throughout the country.

We employ specialist acts within the United Kingdom and from various countries throughout the World to showcase their talent and artistic flare.

For many families a visit to the circus is an annual tradition and for lots of families it is their first experience together of live entertainment a means to escape the becoming norm of the Internet and live streaming.

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

Following government guidelines on the 23rd March we had no choice but to cancel without warning the planned tour of Circus Berlin. We currently have no idea when we can open and if at all this will be possible. There are various restrictions currently in place these are understandable, but unfortunately we can not make any plans or risk further financial losses until we have clear guidance from the government and our full circus capacity is allowed.

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

We feel the Circus Sector in the main has fell through the cracks and appears to have been ignored by many of the current government schemes available.

The Circus itself has been unable to access grants from our Local Authority because we do not pay Business Rates. Although the Circus does pay lots of rents around the country for offices, workshops and storage facilities. Predominantly we operate from a Big Top tent in fields, parks and council/privately owned venues throughout the United Kingdom.

We are reluctant to take on more debt especially with no current possibility of opening and with all the expenditure paid out up front prior to the pandemic. This makes the CBILS scheme a very risky choice. Further to this currently the Bank has refused a CBILS on the basis that the circus has no definitive opening date confirmed by the government, this makes any cash flow forecasts potentially inaccurate. The bounce back loan, although an easier accessible option is restricted to £50,000.

Deferrals for VAT, self-assessment and short-term holiday payments, although welcome, don't help with the constant worry of insurance companies and financial institutions demanding payments or threatening cancelling policies and not renewing them once this is all over.

The Furlough Scheme and self employment income support scheme has been very helpful to us and the staff we feel it is essential this scheme continues until the Circus opens its doors again to the public.

We feel there is a lack of any government grants support for the circus sector, which has very specific needs, we feel in order to survive we will need a huge injection of funds.

Of these three support packages below none are accessible to Circus Berlin and very probably to most Touring Circuses

Arts Council

This scheme is now closed and in addition the business requesting funding has already had to have been receiving funding from the Arts Council.

National Lottery Heritage fund

To benefit from this fund the business has to be a not-for-profit organisation to receive any of this funding that Circus Berlin is not.

Historic England

Circus Berlin are not eligible as the business is not a heritage organisation.

Circus Berlin feels like it has not been treated equally to that of other art forms within the United Kingdom. We contribute to the economy significantly including through the various taxes we pay, we do not request any special treatment but would at least expect to be on the same level as other arts forms, theatres and institutions.

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

The possibility of a severe recession, combined with falling through the cracks of financial support schemes, the uncertainty in the minds of the general public and the fear that could be running through the communities the circus visits preventing the general public from visiting events.

A package of measures to help Circuses to get reopened and crucially to support throughout the first 3 years of trading are urgently needed.

Specific measures that would help include;

Support the workforce through a Circus/Arts Sector extension of the Job Retention Scheme until reopening is possible; and an extension of the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme. This will also protect the wider areas of the Arts, and many other small companies across the United Kingdom that allow such sectors to operate.

Speed up the recovery of the Circus Industry including temporary modifications to the Theatre Tax Relief for the first three years, increasing the relief and other crucial measures, such measures would ease the tax burden in the short-term and allow for a stronger and sustained return for Circus businesses.

Reducing VAT on ticket sales to something comparable to other countries to encourage the public to attend events again, suggested revised VAT rate 5%.

Helping with visa costs, including refunds for the time visas are not used in the United Kingdom (a question we asked of UKVI as early as March when the situation unfolded but to which we have received no reply) we have many of these unused visas totalling thousands of pounds.

Start up Grants/Financial rescue package that all Circuses can receive regardless of rates status, to assist circus to get their respective shows open again and also to help with upfront costs like advertising, travel, insurance, visas, fees to meet government COVID 19 Directives, production costs and costs during Covid 19 Lockdown period etc. These Grants/ Financial rescue packages could be based on turnover from previous year or costs paid out prior to Covid 19 outbreak and expenses during this year or a combination of everything.

Following government guidelines on social distancing measures is necessary. However, for as long as social distancing measures are rightly in force, for Circus Berlin this makes the prospect of reopening with any profitability impossible. Whilst many other business sectors will be able to gradually reopen under current measures, Circus Berlin cannot. Current Social-distancing measures of 2 metres will allow for only a 22% capacity of our tent – this is not an economic business model for Circus Berlin, where 65% to 75% occupancy is typically needed to break even and means we cannot operate. We would need to wait until the social distancing is reduced before we could at least start planning again to open the show

Reduction in Ground Rents and practical support from councils on supporting Circuses coming to their area

Training grants for dealing with Covid 19 Government Directives

Support with Marketing/PR for the sector as whole

COVID-19 Testing regardless of if symptoms are present

We need some positive lines and messages spreading throughout the United Kingdom by the Government.

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

The Circus sector feel forgotten by the DCMS, which appears to not completely understand the touring Circus. At Circus Berlin we feel that the government appoints all these various financial funds to the various Arts but they rarely reach the touring commercial shows.

This needs to be addressed to make sure that the businesses operating Circus on a commercial scale and considerably contributing to the economy working hard and taking financial risks should be able to receive some type of funding or at least have the opportunity to be able to tap into such emergency funds now and in the future.

Circus is an important cultural entertainment, in many cases it is a persons first introduction to the arts and is hugely important for peoples mental and physical health. Circus was invented over 250 years ago in the UK and needs your support to keep the tradition alive.

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

Circuses through history have always evolved, Circuses are very much a family entertainment. The post Covid-19 public will be undoubtedly looking for entertainment, will families, especially those with young children, be crowd averse? The DCMS and the Government need to put as much effort into informing the public they can go out (when its safe)

The Circus in time could introduce live streaming of shows and public interaction including through mobile phone and computer apps providing a virtual experience to the customer however without some significant investment the customer level of engagement would be limited

The DCMS and the Government could host various regional events involving large cities and towns. Similar to Winter Funland for example, could be organised around the UK and funded by the DCMS /Government. Admission could be free, this could encourage the public to go out again and attend events, thus helping to maintain a level of confidence, people could once again get used to going out in mass

gatherings. We need to show the public (when its safe) that it is safe to visit large outdoor events again.

Circus Berlin moving forward could introduce such measures as below and financial packages to help deliver the following would be beneficial to the business:

- Covid-19 Manager, who would supervise the provision of
 - Daily Temp Checks
 - Hand Wash/Sanitising areas
 - Test and Trace for staff – as per government guidelines with support from the relevant government body
 - Ensure Risk Assessments are adhered to and understood by all whom they affect

- Staff Training
- Safe Working Practices
- Event Management Plan (EMP) for tour(s) including each location Circuses are going to, to assist local Council Safety Advisory Groups for Events (SAGE)
- Risk assessments including consideration for COVID-19
- PPE - Where applicable

Benefits to the general public of attending Circus Berlin:

- Mental Health
- Arts for Health
- Need for people to leave their house
- It is a controlled environment
- Need for people to perceive they are being sociable
- Laughter and Enjoyment
- Lifting the community spirit
- Increased economic impact on the economy