

Written evidence submitted by Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts

Impact of COVID-19 on DCMS sectors

1. What has been the immediate impact of COVID-19 on the sector?

As a mixed cultural and educational resource COVID-19 has impacted all areas of our business.

The closure of our building has immediately ended all income through ticket sales for our two theatres and revenues from room hires for rehearsals and meetings. Our resident companies (including café/bars and arts organisations) have suffered significant income falls and requested rent reductions to cover the period that they are unable to access the building.

We have had to cancel our evening and weekend classes for adults and young people affecting hundreds of regular attendees who come for creative education.

Our in-person vocational drama and production arts training is now being carried out online. We have had to quickly address our delivery methods both for teaching (including acting, dance, voice and instrument) as well as creative performances and project work. We have had to reconsider with our academic validating partner the University of East Anglia how we assess students through distance learning.

We are expecting a drop in full-time student numbers in 2020/21 as students request deferrals. We have had a significant drop in international student applications as they are particularly impacted by travel restrictions. International students pay higher fees and make up a significant part of our annual income.

Students are also reporting considerable concern about the shortage of job opportunities on graduation. Typically, 95% of our graduates will work in their chosen creative field within a year of finishing study. At the moment there are almost no opportunities available. Student hardship was already an issue, and is likely to increase due to loss of part time jobs and family financial hardship issues.

If we aren't able to begin teaching in person in the autumn we expect further students to request interruptions to study or reductions in fees. And any reduction in student numbers has continued impact over the following two years as those places can't be filled mid-course.

Longer term, the lack of arts training happening in schools because of coronavirus restrictions means future students' creative development will be affected.

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

Support has been offered through Business Loans and Business Rates Reductions however neither has applied to us.

The Office for Students has provided some support and has directly engaged with us to lobby within government.

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

Student confidence and income is likely to be affected for a number of years. Students will be cautious of undertaking vocational training and reluctant to take out debt to pay for study.

We are expecting to see ongoing reductions in rental income from short-term hires and commercial tenants as businesses struggle to re-establish themselves in a post-COVID recession. There are likely to be fewer rehearsal room hires as theatre companies either close or need to create much smaller-scale work. We don't know when theatres will be able to reopen and when companies will be able to start rehearsals in our building.

The strides that Mountview, amongst others, has made to ensure that vocational training is accessible to all and seen as a valid pathway to employment will be cut back and there is a real risk creative arts training will return to being only possible for wealthier families. The student loan programme needs to be made affordable to lower income families.

The whole of the Higher Education sector will be affected by reductions in numbers of international students concerned about overseas study and the impacted uncertainties over post-Brexit visas. We need more certainty given to international students.

The sector needs to support theatres and theatre companies to ensure the creative industries survive the COVID-19 crisis. Arts Council England has reported that the arts and culture industry creates £21.2 billion in direct turnover and provides 137,250 jobs (<https://www.thecreativeindustries.co.uk/industries/arts-culture/arts-culture-facts-and-figures/the-economic-contribution-of-the-arts>)

The companies that create this turnover train at Mountview, rehearse at Mountview and their practitioners will teach at Mountview. These companies will also employ Mountview graduates. Unless these companies are supported there won't be future employment opportunities for creative arts students and they will no longer want to train.

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

We were hearing of some organisations (such as the National Theatre and Southbank Centre) as well as industry umbrella groups such as Theatres UK having direct dialogue with DCMS. However these organisations do not represent the drama school sector.

We are a supplier of services and talent to this sector but our impact isn't being clearly heard. We are also not part of the Higher Education system so they aren't able to fully represent us either.

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

The whole of the DCMS portfolio is reliant on the training sector. Yet we are lumped in with the education sector who have different challenges. There need to be distinction made between education and training and particular support for the specialist requirements of the vocational conservatoire colleges who provide world class bespoke training and on which the UK creative industries rely.