Impact of Covid-19 on DCMS sectors

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

Angels is the largest supplier of costumes to the film, theatre and TV industry in the UK (and worldwide). From mid-March productions worldwide started to go on hiatus and by the time we closed our doors on 23 March everything had shut down/been cancelled. We currently have costumes all over the world and no idea how/when we will get them back.

We have taken advantage of the Government’s Job Retention Scheme and placed 110 staff on furlough. Our suppliers/outworkers are also suffering as we are now closed and there is no work for them either. We have absolutely no income as a result of the shut-down.

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

From our own point of view the Job Retention scheme is very helpful and has meant that difficult decisions about likely redundancies can be better considered when we have more of an idea of when work is likely to start again.

We are not eligible for the Business Rates Relief package because our part of the industry seemingly doesn’t come under Leisure/Hospitality which is very disappointing. Indeed, it seems as though companies like Angels that are the backbone of the UK Entertainment Industry are slipping through the cracks of what may be available to others.

The result of all of this, is that despite our best efforts, we are likely to still need to make considerable redundancies thereby losing specialist staff and skills that we have taken years to invest in and nurture.

The announcement by the BFI of various measures they are introducing may also offer some support although as yet we have seen no detail of these and so cannot say how much they will help us. This initiative to set up a committee to consider the implications of Covid-19 on the sector is also a reassuring step.

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

It is impossible to know this and the long-term impact won’t be evident for many months to come – regardless of how quickly things start to improve. There may be a reluctance to travel (by both talent and crew) for some time after restrictions after lifted; it may take some time for travel networks/airlines etc to re-establish routes and availability may be patchy.
For Angels, who supply costumes all over the world, the shipping of cargo (including costume) could become problematic. Because of the considerable uncertainty shipping could become much more expensive in the short term which may lead production companies to restrict the costume designer to source stock domestically excluding companies like ours in the UK entirely. In those circumstances we would have no way of knowing whether we would have got the work at all.

The UK film industry is actually very much an international one and heavily reliant on star names to drive both the funding and box office appeal. If the travel restrictions remain in place or there is a reluctance on individuals part to travel to the UK then this will inevitably mean that there will be a considerable delay before those feature films get really started again.

We would hope that the domestic television side of the business will take off far faster, even if there is initially a call to restrict both the number of crowd actors and locations visited. Some of the established TV series have their own studios and sets thus removing the necessity for as much location filming. As we believe (panem et circenses) that the public and TV networks will be hungry for new productions, we would hope to hire costumes to these shows once lockdown is lifted as well as seeing the ones that were in production or about to start re-activated very quickly.

It is a different matter with live theatre because whilst the need for social distancing remains in place the theatres will not be able to perform to audiences. Our own sources indicate that West End theatre (regardless of anywhere else) are unlikely to begin properly again until the New Year. Screened performances may be part of the answer but this still presents its own practical issues that would need to be overcome.

Whilst everyone needs to be safe it is imperative that things get moving as quickly as possible. Angels have in place a plan for a phased return to work as soon as it is safe to do so and as soon as there is work for us to do. Some key staff are still working from home and we are in the process of creating a clear and thorough risk assessment with the relevant protocols to support that and create a Covid Safe environment for when we can return. We are also consulting with our staff on this as it is vital that we have their confidence. We have also created an initiative with BECTU to establish clear protocols for working in a costume house to reassure our customers (as well as our staff) that when we do return, it will be as safe as we can possibly make it.

There has, and will be, considerable expenditure required by everyone in the procurement of PPE where appropriate and cleaning protocols (for example we are looking at thermographic cameras, disinfection systems as well as additional costs for regular sanitisation).

We are disappointed that facilities houses such as ourselves (which are an integral part of the industry both domestically and internationally), seem to have been forgotten and it has been for us to create our own initiatives.

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

It is important that any planning considers not just ‘talent and crew’ but also the enormous range of suppliers and facilities houses like our own without whom there would surely be no industry.
5) How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can DCMS support such innovation to deal with future challenges?

We believe that new ways of working both on and off set need to be established. It is likely that there will be smaller crews on set because of the need to socially distance and that different departments will be unable to mix easily. There could be more of a focus on off-site facilities to help as they already have space and staff in place to ensure the relevant safety requirements.

Another important factor is the need to stimulate the entertainment industry in the UK as quickly as possible so that we can continue to be a source of world excellence in this field.

As a major player in the industry Angels welcomes any incentive to bring this about whether it be in the form of tax breaks for non-UK based productions, generous recruitment and apprenticeship schemes or any other initiatives.