

Open Letter to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport calling for Government-backed insurance scheme for major festivals and events

Sir, the UK's major festivals and events are in danger of being invisible in the current Covid crisis – despite the fact that the Government-backed Business Visits and Events Partnership showed them accounting for over 50% of spend in the UK visitor economy in 2019.

The public may assume that support for hospitality and tourism attractions also benefits major events and festivals. But often this is sadly untrue, either for major event organisers or for theatre, music, sporting and exhibition venues. All of these are interdependent parts of a beloved family of renowned UK events approaching a point of no return.

There is a deep longing from people across the UK and the world to break out of the routine and celebrate togetherness again as soon as the time is right. This is a role played by festivals and events since the start of human history – but the current degree of risk means that if they fall in the coming 12 months, they may not return to help us renew national optimism and wellbeing.

We are committed, as an industry, to the highest standards of public safety. We recognise the high degree of assurance that public authorities and audiences will require for major gatherings to return on a more viable basis with the minimum restrictions.

Discussions continue with UK Governments about how to work actively towards providing that assurance. Meanwhile, given the long lead times involved, landmark UK events urgently need to plan for the 2021 season and beyond.

There is a measure that must be brought in now that would make a huge difference in allowing our sector to rebuild and to play our part in rebooting the economy for the years to come – a Government-backed insurance scheme for major live festivals and events.

This has already been introduced for the screen industry with the UK Film and Television Production Restart Fund, making direct compensation available to cover losses from Covid-related risks that are currently uninsurable in the commercial market. However, there has been no parallel Government response to the risks facing the UK's major live festivals and events industry.

Without it, it is hard to see how our sector can rebuild and give economic confidence to our participants, our supply chains and our audiences. This could affect not only our role as a magnet for future tourism to the UK, but also our global success in showcasing and exporting UK creative, sporting and business excellence.

We urge the UK Government to recognise the gap, underwrite an insurance scheme for major events and festivals without delay, and address this time-critical threat to one of the UK's truly distinctive sectors.

Yours,

Signed [in alphabetical order]

Adrian Turpin, Director, Wigtown Book Festival
Alan Laidlaw, Chief Executive Officer, Royal Highland Show
Alan Thomson & Penny Dougherty, Directors, Unique Events Ltd
Alex Petty, Director, Laughing Horse Festivals Ltd
Alison Woods, Executive Director, No Fit State Circus
Andrew Comben, Chief Executive, Brighton Dome & Brighton Festival
Andy George, Co-Founder & Director, VAULT Festival
Anthony Alderson, Director, Pleasance Theatre Trust Ltd
Arwel Gruffydd, Artistic Director, Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru
Buster Howes, Chief Executive, Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo

Charlie Wood and Ed Bartlam, Directors, Edinburgh's Hogmanay
Cíntia Gil, Festival Director, Sheffield Doc/Fest
Claire Malcolm, Chief Executive, New Writing North
Dani Rae, General Manager, Assembly Festival Ltd
Darrell Martin, Venue Producer, booker and promoter, Just the Tonic (Yippee Productions)
Darren Neale, Director, Greenside Venues Ltd
Deborah Keyser, Director, Tŷ Cerdd – Music Centre Wales
Donald Smith, Director, Scottish International Storytelling Festival
Eleanor Livingstone, Director, StAnza [Scotland's International Poetry Festival]
Emma Gladstone, Artistic Director & Chief Executive, Dance Umbrella
Emma Taylor, Artistic Director, Canal Cafe Theatre
Fergus Linehan, Festival Director and Chief Executive, Edinburgh International Festival
Fiona Alexander, Producer, Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival
Fiona English, Executive Director, King's Head Theatre
Fiona Goh, Director, British Arts Festivals Association
Gareth Machin, Artistic Director, Wiltshire Creative
Geoff Ellis, Chief Executive, DF Concerts Ltd
Hartley Kemp, Artistic Director, C venues
Hugh Brasher, Event Director, London Marathon Events
James Seabright, Producer, Seabright Productions
Jim Hollington, Chief Executive Officer, Dancebase
Julia Amour, Director, Festivals Edinburgh
Karen and Katy Koren, Artistic Directors, Gilded Balloon
Karen Pimbley, Arts Consultant
Ken Gourlay, Venue manager, Lauriston Halls
Ken Hay, Chief Executive, Edinburgh International Film Festival
Kris Nelson, Artistic Director & Chief Executive, LIFT
Lee Martin, Director, Gag Reflex Ltd
Lisa Thomas, Agent/Co-Promoter, Lisa Thomas Management Ltd
Lynn Morrison, Executive Director, Leith Theatre
Mark Mackie, Chief Executive, Regular Music
Martin Sutherland, Chief Executive, Coventry UK City of Culture
Melvin Benn, Managing Director, Festival Republic
Michael Salter-Church & Alison Camps, co-Chairs, Pride in London
Mick Perrin, Agent/Promoter, Mick Perrin Worldwide
Mikey Martins, Artistic Director and Joint CEO, Freedom Festival Arts Trust
Natalie Mae Kelly, Events Coordinator, The Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Centre
Nevin Truesdale, Acting Chief Executive, The Jockey Club
Nick Barley, Director, Edinburgh International Book Festival
Nick Dodds, Managing Director, Festivals and Events International Ltd
Nick Rust, Chief Executive, British Horseracing Authority
Paul Demarco, Managing Director, Edinburgh Corn Exchange
Paul Fitzpatrick, Chief Executive, Edinburgh International Children's Festival
Philip Barley, Founder, Theatre Digs Booker
Philip Contini, Chairman, Valvona & Crolla
Richard Bucknall, Promoter, RBM Comedy
Richard Wakely, Artistic Director & Chief Executive, Belfast International Arts Festival
Rowan Campbell, General Manager, Summerhall
Sarah-Jane Roberts & Cathy Bolton, Co-Directors, Manchester Literature Festival
Shona McCarthy, Chief Executive, Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society
Simon Gage, Chief Executive, Edinburgh Science Festival
Sir Steve Redgrave C.B.E., Chairman, Henley Royal Regatta
Sorcha Carey, Director, Edinburgh Art Festival
Susie Troup, Director, Hexham Book Festival
Suzanna Rosenthal, Producer, Something for the Weekend
Ted Hodgkinson, Head of Literature and Spoken Word, Southbank Centre
Tom Clements, President, National Outdoor Events Association

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