

PRESS RELEASE

Date: 18th June 2021

Festivals demand Government action on social distancing

In an unprecedented step, the 11 major Edinburgh Festivals have today issued an urgent call for the Scottish Government to address anomalies at the heart of their Covid-19 social distancing legislation to permit parity with hospitality and sport.

Statement from Edinburgh Festivals

We, the Directors of the 11 Edinburgh Festivals, today ask the Scottish Government to take steps - in their forthcoming review - to eliminate the anomalies in the current social distancing guidelines which threaten the jobs and livelihoods of our world leading cultural events sector.

While the current support received through the Government's Gateway process for a limited festivals season this summer is welcome, it is nothing like the income required to sustain the sector and what is now needed is a change to social distancing which would enable the festivals to trade more effectively.

Current social distancing guidelines allow the hospitality sector, including bars and restaurants, to operate at 1 metre social distancing whereas the cultural events sector remains restricted to 2 metre distancing – severely restricting the capacity of venues and thus the financial viability of events.

We watched and supported the hospitality sector as they fought a long hard battle to secure such 1m restrictions, trusting that Government would ensure such changes could then be fairly applied to cultural venues and events. However, that trust now seems misplaced, and patience is running out with those who seem oblivious to both the anomalies in the current legislation and the precarious position of the festivals and their supply chain.

To say we are frustrated with the current anomalies is an understatement. It makes no sense to allow groups of people to eat and drink together and then have to separate to watch live cultural events – and our frustration has been intensified by the apparent special treatment applied to events surrounding the current UEFA European Football Championships.

Our festivals, and creatives across the sector, are effectively prohibited from trading our way through to recovery, while hospitality and sports are now being supported to do so to the maximum safe extent. It is beyond credibility that our covid-mitigated live events pose a greater risk to public health than the conditions the public is now experiencing in pubs, restaurants, shops and sporting and leisure facilities up and down the country.

We are not seeking special treatment but rather to be treated the same as others, especially the hospitality sector, and it is our deep hope that someone at the centre of Government will realise that what is required now is one clear set of rules for all.

Livelihoods within the wider cultural sector are now at stake. Without immediate changes to the current social distancing guidelines it is clear that we will see the bankruptcy of many well established and much valued cultural companies and their support businesses, with the probable loss of more than 7000 jobs.

A sector that has evolved over many decades into a world recognised Scottish success story stands on the brink and we dearly hope that the recent cancellation of the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo is not a harbinger of things to come.

ENDS

Notes to Editor

- The 11 Edinburgh Festivals are:
 - Edinburgh Science Festival
 - Edinburgh International Children's Festival
 - Edinburgh International Film Festival
 - Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival
 - Edinburgh Art Festival
 - Edinburgh International Festival
 - Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society
 - Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo
 - Scottish International Storytelling Festival
 - Edinburgh's Hogmanay

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