

Culture Counts
c/o Federation of Scottish Theatre
The Lyceum
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EH3 9AX

Cabinet Secretary for Finance
Kate Forbes;
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture
Fiona Hyslop;
Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism
Fergus Ewing
St Andrews House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

18th March 2020

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Coronavirus / Arts and Culture

I am writing to you regarding Covid-19 which has a significant impact on the cultural sector. Culture Counts has now gathered 141 responses to our impact survey and we are keen to share the wider issues and recommendations from this with stakeholders as soon as possible.

This letter, which has been drafted in collaboration with the Culture Counts Steering Group, sets out the major issues and priority recommendations for the Scottish Government to best support the cultural sector through this crisis.

On an individual level we already know that our sector relies heavily on freelance workers. Cultural freelancers work across a vast number of occupations including performing artists, lighting and sound engineers, camera operators, ushers and tour managers. We know from our impact survey that a significant number of events have already been cancelled regardless of capacity due to travel restrictions and people having to self-isolate to protect others.

Due to the precarious nature of freelance work in the cultural sector, it is highly unlikely that individuals will be able to secure work of similar value from today and up until May/June 2020.

Having undertaken some initial conversations with Citizens Advice, Jobcentre Plus and Local Authorities, we are very concerned that social security systems currently in place are not sufficient to support cultural freelancers through this crisis.

We hereby request that the Scottish Government consider temporarily extending the criteria for applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund Crisis Grant administered by local authorities as follows:

- The Crisis Grant should be available to cover payment of rent to a landlord; rent should not be considered to be an 'outstanding debt'
- Applicants should be able to apply up to four times between now and June 2020 without having to report a change in circumstance

The Scottish Welfare Fund is preferable to Universal Credit because it's controlled by the Scottish Government. Universal Credit with a six-week minimum turn-around will come too late for cultural freelancers.

In order to weather this crisis, it is equally important that Scotland's cultural institutions and vital local employers remain as resilient as possible – so that they can support the artists and creative freelancers that make the work happen and connect them with audiences. We welcome Creative Scotland's commitment for existing funding allocations to be fully honoured and the flexibility for them to be repurposed for core activity to secure resilience where needed; and we would ask Scottish Government to encourage the same commitment and flexibility from all public funders.

The cultural sector is closely connected to hospitality and tourism and Culture Counts support:

- The UK Hospitality calls for an extension of the business rates and NIC payments break to all hospitality businesses for at least six months; the UK to follow the lead of other countries such as the USA, France and Denmark by committing to additional working capital support while funding salaries and retaining staff; pressure on landlords and banks to avoid forfeiture of rent payments.
- Scottish Tourism Alliance call for commercial landlords to be encouraged to defer rent payments with Government guarantees as necessary
- Association of Independent Professionals and Self Employed to publish specific guidance for the self-employed that provides information on the infection, how they can certify absence from work to clients, advice on coming into workplaces and support available to them
- The introduction of a mitigation fund available for self-employed people who are affected by the coronavirus to cover loss of income

Cultural organisations, charities and companies are currently working on measures to keep employees safe; postponing events, managing human resources, focussing on cash-flow and how to keep afloat so that they can support their connected supply chain.

Both organisations and individuals are keen to skill themselves up for digital offerings so they can support people's wellbeing while they are social distancing; all are considering how to introduce potential for the sector to contribute and initiate support within the creative community to mitigate the current situation, and shape the post-virus cultural landscape.

If you require any further information from Culture Counts please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Jennifer Hunter

Executive Leader

Culture Counts / Steering Group