



Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport
Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport
100 Parliament Street
London
SW1A 2BQ

11th August 2020

Dear Mr Dowden,

THEATRES AND LIVE EVENTS

In writing to you I would like to first thank yourself, Caroline Dinéage, and the officials in the DCMS for all the work that went into achieving the Culture Recovery Fund that was announced at the end of June. In no way do I underestimate what an achievement it was to convince the Chancellor that a support package for the arts was not only desirable but also necessary for the future of the creative industries.

However I also wanted to highlight the very real challenges that we are currently responding to, particularly in theatres and live events where there is still no firm date for opening without the requirement for social distancing. It was good to see the detail of the grants criteria and application process published last week but it has already highlighted some challenges for theatres that we fear may not be possible to overcome and so I wanted to share those with you so that you and your officials can give them some thought.

- Theatres are telling us that it will be impossible for them to halt redundancy consultation without knowing whether or when they will receive money from the arts recovery fund.
- They are telling us that that the exclusion of new projects from the funding criteria will be a barrier to a successful application.
- Large houses are saying that they need more than £3m and so will only be eligible for a loan not a grant which brings with it long term implications.
- Theatres are telling us that they need a similar insurance guarantee to that provided for film and TV before they will be able to reopen.
- Theatres are laying off casuals and continuing with redundancy consultation because of the furlough scheme being phased out at a time when the money from the arts recovery package is not yet available.
- Theatres seem to be of the view that the purpose of the arts recovery package is to effectively 'mothball' theatres until next spring.
- We are doubtful that much of the money available will be used to support the many thousands of freelancers who contribute their skills and expertise to make UK Theatre the huge economic success that it has been and can be again in the future.

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Bectu takes the view that it would be more productive for the sector in the long run if the money were made available to theatres and venues during August. This would enable them to halt redundancies and support their workforce, both employees and freelancers, whilst the job retention scheme and the self-employed income support scheme are phased out.

More importantly it would enable them to focus their thinking on the future for their venue and how they might innovate to bring performances back in an imaginative and safe way. Inevitably this would involve commissioning new work but we know that the industry wants to be able to bring live performance back to the West End and Regional Theatres and to give audiences an opportunity to venture back to much loved local venues.

In order to be able to achieve this the sector obviously needs some clarity about the final stage in the road map and some certainty about insurance.

I hope that you will give some thought to the issues that we have raised, we remain confident that if the sequencing of some of these elements linked to the Culture Recovery Fund were given some further consideration that it could both save jobs in the sector but also maintain the skills necessary to rebuild UK Theatre once this immediate crisis is over. Theatre and live events contribute a huge amount to the UK economy and we must ensure that as well as saving buildings that we also support the creatives and crew that make our cultural industries truly world beating.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Philippa Childs". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Philippa Childs

Head of Bectu