

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

INQUIRY ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SCOTLAND'S CULTURE AND TOURISM SECTORS

SUBMISSION FROM Literature Alliance Scotland

Literature Alliance Scotland (LAS) is a membership organisation committed to advancing the interests of Scotland's literature and languages at home and abroad. As Scotland's largest literary network, we bring together writers, publishers, educators, librarians, literature organisations and national cultural bodies, to create a strong, trusted collective voice for literature and languages, which are celebrated locally, nationally and internationally.

We surveyed our membership to provide a further update on the impact of the pandemic in 2021 and this submission is based on the responses received.

To keep the survey short and focussed, we asked for the three biggest challenges facing our members, the two actions the Scottish Government could take to help support them as well as the opportunity to add any further comments.

The responses identify six key challenges and/or areas of concern, which are similar to those our members were facing in April 2020. They are **funding support** for organisations and individuals; **income generation**; lack of **strategic recovery planning**; the impact of no in-person **events and school closures**/restrictions; **digital/EDI** - moving programmes online and associated access costs; and the **health and wellbeing** of staff and artists/practitioners.

Key Challenges for 2021

Funding and support

- Uncertain funding horizon, and, consequently, our stability, resilience, and capacity moving forward, as demand for services grows exponentially due to the crisis
- Our own dwindling resources, lack of fundraising capacity and increased demand on the Trusts and Foundation we are applying to
- The fundraising environment is extremely tough right now, with Trusts and Foundations in particular reduced in their offer or focussed on very narrow areas. This makes future planning really hard.
- Cash flow - to pay for investment needed
- Funding with flexibility is needed i.e. to deliver digital, physical, or hybrid event - all of which cost vastly different amounts.

Income generation

- Viability of venues into second pandemic year
- Continuing lack of opportunities for freelance playwrights, storytellers, writers, practitioners
- Retaining clients and justifying why they need us

- Reduced income through ticket sales and book sales
- Drastic drop in book sales, especially of school study guides
- While it's been heartening to see bookshops and festivals offering events online, the conversion to book sales is so much lower than in-person events. There is a huge appetite for free content from publishers, but the effort and expense, is not matched by return on investment. We need a solution to this.

Lack of strategic recovery planning

- There is great concern that there is no clarity on a recovery strategy nationally or for the arts and culture sector
- Inability to plan ahead with limited guidance on how the situation for the events industry might look quarter by quarter.
- With so much fire-fighting and reacting to our ever-changing circumstances, there is no time for strategic, creative, long-term thinking that our sector needs to keep developing in good time and for the benefit of the cultural sector, and the population as a whole.

Events/schools

- The loss of in-person events impacts on generating new customer leads for business as well as authors' book sales.
- The loss of opportunities with face-to-face events since much of the publishing business is conducted at book fairs and other networking spaces, and the online events, while encouraging, are not a great substitute so far.
- Those dependent on live in-person activities are at greatest risk of not being able to continue professionally
- Restrictions with conducting programmes in schools.

Digital & EDI

- Making best use of various methods of online communications
- Transferring part of our model to an online context
- Planning for programmes - uncertainty around return of live events, the if and when
- Developing more online events and boosting our online marketing needs more resources - people, time, money and digital capacity.
- Access costs (including for disabled people, carers, childcare, people on low incomes and people who cannot access online events).

Health and wellbeing

- Pressure on staff due to long lockdown conditions and the need, as regulations continue to shift, to constantly re-plan, re-budget, and find creative way to deliver programmes, month by month.
- Work environment hard - staff and freelancers juggling carer duties with work.
- Mental health of freelance writers, artists, practitioners.

Other comments include

- Maintaining the delivery and the desired impacts of key national programmes under long-term and disruptive logistical and access challenges, including receiving post and co-ordinating deliveries and mailings
- Lobbying against excessive legal curtailment of freedom of speech

- Effective publicity for our activities
- Dealing with change and connecting in new ways across many boundaries and agendas.
- Involving people and helping them develop their voice through communication, comprehension, being included and a sense of being listened to.

Specific actions that could be taken by the Scottish Government to support member organisations/ the sector

Funding

- Emergency funding to cover shortfalls in income; perhaps pay publishers to make school titles available as eBooks via local education authorities (not easy, for a variety of reasons)
- More funding for non-profit organisations along the lines of what is offered to hospitality
- Extension of the furlough scheme until events programming can return
- Continued provision of funds to support creatives and programming venues
- Digital/tech grants
- Funding to pay for freelancers/contractors rather than employees
- Review funding support to acknowledge the increased cost of professional digital events, alongside the challenges of monetising them, and the cost of implementing any new health and safety requirements at physical events
- Recovery funds for independent publishers. While book sales have remained buoyant during COVID, this success has not been evenly spread throughout the publishing sector. Book media, bookshops, book festivals have been heavily reliant on the safe bets, the big names, usually from the biggest publishing conglomerates. The long tail of sales that has arisen in the years before COVID, has been shortened, which isn't good for the diversity of the sector.
- If the Scottish Government, like Creative Scotland, can move to offering three-year funding agreements for major national programmes, this would provide considerable reassurance and stability and allow the strategic development of services, while responding to the new challenges Scottish society will face as it emerges from extended lockdowns and the associated economic challenges. A three-year funding agreement would also be a far more cost effective way of realising some efficiencies, allowing for economies of scale and of making a bigger impact with Scottish Government investments in culture and education.
- We understand that the Scottish Government will make its budget announcements at the end of January 2021. Given that additional crisis funds were provided in 2020 and they are now allocated, it is essential that they and Creative Scotland provide as detailed a picture as possible, and as early as is feasible, of both grant-in-aid awards and any further emergency funding that will be made available moving forward, whether to organisations themselves, or to the writers, artists, practitioners and communities they work for, and with. Cultural organisations have shown themselves to be highly creative and adaptable in responding to the crisis but cannot plan and deliver effectively without long-term clarity.

- Close gaps in HMRC freelancer support, continuing Performing Arts Venues Relief Fund into second year
- Radical thinking about financial support, such as Universal Basic Income
- Some people may be put off applying to Creative Scotland's Hardship Fund due to successful applicants names being published.

Strategic recovery planning

- A coherent and immediate recovery strategy to allow for planning and adaptation with clearer insight into the Scottish Government's and Creative Scotland's long-term strategy
- Develop some guidance based on what is known (or can be reasonably assumed) about physical events and potential limitations for Spring; Summer and Winter 2021, to enable organisations to reasonably evaluate what we can deliver, areas of highest priority and, most importantly, financial planning
- Keep bookshops open - thank you for the recent click and collect announcement) - and continue to support events / festivals which will disappear without trace without it
- Become partners instead of authorisers, step away from grandiose projects and involve people at the coal face in developing ambition and action.
- Invest in the public library service to keep local libraries open as they are essential to support local communities throughout Covid recovery and beyond
- A sustained promotion of the importance and successes of the Scottish cultural sector, a confidence-building on what Scotland gives through the cultural space - not just in a surface way of celebrating obvious wins - but placing this at the heart our political objectives, and to let our culture makers thrive in true encouragement
- It's absolutely vital that the digital access that has been put in place during Covid-19 doesn't disappear when things "go back to normal". Please see the [Disabled Artists Manifesto Not Going Back to Normal](#) and The Scotsman's article on [Why Disabled Artists Can't Go Back to Normal](#)
- Regarding the "funding for access" point, the majority of disabled people have a horrendous experience of the benefits system and the Access to Work scheme is not available for all disabled people who work. More funding needs to be available for disabled artists and organisations, especially small organisations.