Supplementary written evidence submitted by the University of Gloucestershire

DCMS Future of UK Festivals
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Supplementary evidence submission
UK Festivals Pilot Scheme overview
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Overview & methodology

This supplementary evidence presents a scope, framework and recommendations for the testing of events environments to allow the safe return of managed access events in the UK in 2021. The work is based on a literature review of DCMS enquiry evidence[1], events management and infrastructure testing[2], interviews with events health & safety specialists and consultation with members of the UK Music Live Music Group and their attending contributors[3].

This report is a collation of work that began shortly after the publication of the first report on the impact of Covid-19 on DCMS sectors[4] This work grew from a series of events which incorporated testing access and hygiene controls, that developed into a regional consultation project[5] resulting in a Future of UK Music Festivals evidence submission[6]. As part of this process key members of the UK live events industry were contacted and consulted about the scope and framework for a potential pilot scheme, and have been updated as work has progressed.

Although this supplementary report is presented independently, it has been conducted with assistance from UK Music. This has facilitated communication with representatives and members within the Events & Entertainment and Venues working groups to aggregate evidence in order to produce the following report.

1. Rationale

1.1 Covid-19 has decimated the live events industry. In order for events to take place in 2021, it is essential that a pilot scheme produces data to provide clarity for the sector in order to progress successful events planning and delivery strategies in the following areas:

- Thresholds for events testing, hygiene and tracing practices
- Technical, legal and ethical frameworks for the above

1.2 This overview presents an event management solution within a public health context that provides a road map for enabling UK festivals to take place in 2021. If a framework can be agreed that builds on 'managed access' as a key principle, then a series of scaled, controlled events could be implemented to test existing structures [7][8][9] with the aim to produce data, and target financial support for partial sector reopening.

2. Scope

2.1 The key principle around which this pilot proposal is based is *managed access*. This assumes that there are managed entry/exit points into events for all attendees and staff, creating a control area and boundary by which risk can be measured effectively[10][11]. The justification for this scope is based on latest guidance available on mass events in Covid-19 from both the WHO[12] and the industry led frameworks referenced in (3.1)

2.2 The scope of this pilot does not make planning assumptions for testing within relaxed restrictions, instead looking to produce data to recommend effective controls without the context of restrictions. With hygiene standards and event capacities defined by an informed public health strategy[13], the live events industry can work with the UK government to set a reopening date, provide guidance in training and testing through toolkits, and build confidence through public awareness of a pilot scheme and events safety practices.

2.3 Audience testing and tracing would require a technical solution, and there are ethical and legal implications of how such an approach could work. In order to secure an environment with a minimised/negligible infection risk, on and off-site data controls would need to be considered in line with both pilot testing and hygiene practices as part of the frameworks outlined within the rationale.

2.4 This pilot would seek to integrate accessibility and sustainability as part of a set of recovery strategy solutions. The 7 Principles to Ensure an Inclusive Recovery[14] from the UK Disability Arts Alliance has been endorsed across the sector, and presents an opportunity to incorporate a community informed position to promote a recovery strategy through the lens of Disability and relevant Equality legislation[15]

2.5 During consultation several event organisers and charities have suggested that potential audience behaviours present a significant environmental concern due to the national impact of the pandemic. Solutions to encourage public transport use (such as satellite testing sites at travel hubs) and promote sustainable hygiene practices (reusable cups using Covid-19 disinfection bar protocols) could be explored within a pilot scheme in order to present a 'sustainability as recovery' approach.

2.6 An additional objective of this pilot would be to produce shareable event and space management protocols in order to help a range of sectors across the UK prepare a strategic response to future pandemics.

3. Frameworks

3.1 Members of the Events and Entertainment working group and operational sub groups[16] have already developed a number of frameworks that could form the basis of testing risk levels and safety measures as outlined in guidance published with DCMS, PHE and industry input in October 2020.[17]

3.2 This guidance presents key themes and Covid-19 safety measures and areas of policy to monitor that have been progressed by an expanded group with the planning assumption that event organisers will not be expected to manage social distancing. This assumption suggests a pilot scheme could begin with a series of smaller controlled events exploring mitigation in this context, examining and cross referencing a series of risks/measures before being scaled up to larger venues and audiences.

3.3 These frameworks suggest thresholds must be agreed in order to define event format, capacity and distribution as the scheme progresses - with the UK government and industry agreeing a schedule and standards that provide both sector certainty and public confidence. With a pilot scheme producing data in place, a date for partial sector reopening could be determined, and funding could be targeted between securing insurance for planned events or providing financial security across the sector until 2022.

3.4 Early coordination between local and national public health/safety organisations would be advantageous in informing a cohesive approach that would allow confidence for event organisers to begin planning[18] As such a pilot scheme should look to establish an integrated/matrix framework that addresses these requirements. This could also include the potential for investigating the sharing of site and infrastructure with local authorities for additional event planning purposes.

3.5 Although a wide range of pilot locations and contexts is required for reopening, initial stages could be managed as a scaled phase of framework tests before larger events took place. This would allow for iterative review of data produced in areas of event format, transmission and localised impacts. This could then inform the progression of a second phase of planned, larger events that progress the testing of successful mitigation and risk management strategies. A potential model for this is outlined in 4. Location

3.6 Initial pilot events should also seek early refinement in areas of research identifying less effective methods and approaches that cannot be completed within the scope of the delivery schedule. Different strategies may present themselves as more effective in certain contexts, but the focus of the pilots should be to determine risks and define optimal practical mitigations.

3.7 Producing data from pilots that investigate a range of industry and government defined thresholds would help inform national planning strategies in managing risk and response based on individual event profiles. A pilot scheme of this nature presents additional opportunities to incorporate data collation for legacy research in events sustainability and accessibility, as well developing future pandemic response strategies.

4. Location

4.1 Public safety will be the primary focus for any pilot, and thresholds around capacity and infrastructure will need to be agreed and set before progressing. In order to minimise risk to the public (and subsequent impacts on local health infrastructure) a location could be identified for the pilot that offers existing cross-sector infrastructure

and coordination as a potential model. This model could be used for, or integrated into, any format of wider pilot scheme.

4.2 Case study: Gloucestershire (or a similar suitable location) could be viable for these reasons:

(i) good regional Covid-19 management. 91% of 80+ were vaccinated as of 02/21[19] with the program ongoing, and the case rate in Gloucestershire has dropped from 114.1 to 80.9 (Feb 4th to Feb 13th)[20]
(ii) a variety of venues, sites and facilities; recent government investment in the county
(iii) potential for HE provision and expertise in healthcare & creative industries to support locally. As a result, possible facilities and sites for testing could be identified, procured and managed safely.
(iv) a control location to allow for sustained testing and tracing of community transmission data. This could answer additional research questions and explore wider impacts of the return of regular events.
(v) pre-existing coordination within the regional music and events economy in a national context.

4.3 An example of (v) would be a potential greenfield trail at Wychwood Festival[21] (June 4-6) that was identified as a possible location for testing as part of the initial evidence submission, offering an extensive and flexible environment for examining a variety of events contexts and testing frameworks. Similarly a proposed 2,200 capacity event with Cheltenham Science Festival[22] has been discussed as an option, using the same infrastructure and resources.

4.4 Consultation with festival directors[23][24], Cheltenham Racecourse/The Jockey Club[25], AD Health & Safety[26] and third-party stakeholders including members of the local authority SAG[27] have already been undertaken to determine a basis for viability for an event classed as a small, multiday greenfield 10,000 capacity festival[28]. These discussions explored the scope and frameworks outlined in this report, with public safety as a key focus. With a scaled approach producing early data, larger events would be subject to later scheduling as a testing approach, so a UK government backed pilot scheme would need to be in place as part of any risk mitigation strategy.[29]

4.5 The scope of the themes and safety measures referenced in (3.1) could be explored as part of this regional infrastructure in Gloucestershire (or one similar to it) to establish a viable framework that could be integrated efficiently and effectively within the timeline of requirements for testing.

Recommendations

In order to progress this proposal to facilitate data gathering and sector reopening testing it is recommended that the committee should:

- Identify and evaluate options for pilot events with stakeholders that test a variety of event contexts as outlined in this report.

- Analyse and evaluate methodologies for testing a variety of risks and mitigation strategies within these pilot events to develop continuity for an exploratory framework

- Collaborate with the UK wide testing/pilot programmes to align methodologies, schedules and explore data value and frameworks that could be shared across the performance/event/ancillary sectors

- Outline a scaled approach to operating pilot events, employing an iterative data analysis/review strategy to define thresholds for phased reopening as pilots progress

- Integrate frameworks for legacy research in order to provide data for ongoing investigations towards event sustainability, accessibility, and developing a public health response strategy for future pandemics.

- Establish an industry led taskforce to work with the UK government to develop and deliver a pilot scheme to produce data that allows the safe reopening of events and festivals in 2021

Acknowledgements

References

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