

Stakeholder engagement note: Other Voices festival

October 2023

1. Background

- 1.** In July 2023, the Senedd's Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee launched an inquiry into "Culture and the new relationship with the European Union".
- 2.** As part of this inquiry, the Committee held a drop-in session for stakeholders working and appearing at the Other Voices festival in Cardigan, Dyfed. The purpose of this exercise was to gather information to understand the impact of the UK's exit from the European Union on the culture sector, notably on touring artists.
- 3.** Artists and those working at the festival were invited to attend a drop-in session with Members of the Committee on Friday, 27 October 2023.
- 4.** Members discussed the impact of Brexit on cross-border touring; funding and networks; as well as the changes stakeholders would like to see following the implementation of new trade rules in 2021.
- 5.** Participants in this work included a soloist, a festival organiser, a booking agent, the creative director of a theatre, and an experienced music tour manager.
- 6.** This short report summarises the discussion's from the event held by the Committee.



2. Key themes

7. The main themes discussed with participants are outlined below.

Cross-border touring

8. We need to use creative forms to advocate for the disadvantaged – not just touring musicians but other parts of the arts.

9. Issues include the cost of visas and carnets to EU artists...You have to think about cost and implications that didn't exist before...Third party arranges all the visas and costs, if you are trying to do it yourself its problematic...touring for young musicians is now unviable, consequence of this is does culture now belong to the middle class?

10. Attending a festival recently in France was the biggest paperwork nightmare of my life. Filling out carnets was extremely confusing and the information available is inconsistent. For example, what's the difference between a portable and non-portable instrument? I was lucky that my costs were covered, if we'd paid it would have been a financial disaster...Went to the EU last month, and didn't need any paperwork.

11. Staff continuity is really important for tour cohesion but it's difficult to replace staff quickly or easily when they are unwell, particularly with staff from Wales...session players for [a well-known Welsh rock band] obtained Irish passports to be able to move freely in the EU.

12. Aside from other stuff, there's a question as to how well all this is being policed by customs, we just don't know...There are no positives from the new rules...I consider the need for an EU passport vital.

13. It's concerning that there's no consistency with the paperwork checks. In one port we were held because the our carnets had "[this]" rather than "[that]" on them.

14. Customs staff at borders need better training. Even when you do everything right, ports might move the goal posts.

15. I was scared I would get sent to prison for an error on the customs form.

16. Our hands are tied by the new [customs] requirements, they are not worth my time.

17. The requirement for a carnet should be removed, especially between Wales and Ireland.

Impact of Trade and Cooperation Agreement rules

18. In the UK, selling merchandise is a massive chunk of my income as it helps cover costs. In the EU I only take a small amount I'm willing to be confiscated as I am unclear on what I can sell.

19. I set up a distribution centre in Germany to try to make this [selling merchandise] easier, but this was also problematic, so I have started shipping an individual distribution to each venue ahead of time, although this adds freight and air miles to the tour.

20. Merchandising is most affected by Brexit. I would love to have sold more merch than I took but I was too scared to take the chance.

21. Brexit has had an impact on community grants previously provided by the EU, for example for culture and peace projects. This would provide funding for music lessons, this has stopped. Nowadays its preserving what has been, there's no growth (in music participation) due to no EU. The Irish Government provides some cross border funding to make up the shortfall.

22. There's no compensation for everything negative about Brexit.

23. Looking at the constitutional question....the north of Ireland has been tarnished by the vote.

24. More generally, I'm keen the impact on creativity is somehow captured, but I wouldn't know where to start.

25. Brexit has budgetised going across to Ireland...Irish customs and exercise were much better in terms of our plans.

26. We are consciously looking West instead of East but there's a perception in Ireland that it's harder to work in Wales post-Brexit.

27. Close-working between Wales and Ireland just isn't there anymore.

28. I participated in a music showcase and was offered work internationally. However there is no afterthought with these showcases, no thought is given to the help that is needed afterwards.... Brexit doesn't allow for spontaneity.

- 29.** The spontaneity to join other companies has gone...to avoid the slough of despondency, you just don't entertain the idea and that is damaging to Wales.
- 30.** We haven't put European touring in our three year plan...we have no aspiration to do this.
- 31.** A multi-country tour would be a nightmare...we are no longer considering touring in Europe at all - this aspiration is cut off.
- 32.** It's daunting, it stops you from even imagining doing it... it's hard enough.
- 33.** You can't compare and exchange with other cultures and you lose learning from cross-fertilisation, which is essential...you start sharing stories and you get inspired.
- 34.** There are stresses in touring, but there's also the pleasure in finding sympatico...shared culture and stories is a fantastic way of building trust.
- 35.** The more isolated we become and divided we become, and it seems a deliberate decision to do so.
- 36.** Due to cuts, do we end up creating cultural wastelands - where is the support and opportunity for young emerging artists - we need viability, space and place for this to happen.
- 37.** Young artists can't build a career in Wales.
- 38.** Transport logistics have been a deterrent, even for larger companies and the effect on drivers is reported.
- 39.** All artists are equally affected by these commonalities. The reality is that their situations are as precarious and as desperate, and there's nothing there to help.

Guidance and support

- 40.** Didn't know where to go...had to pay a broker to negotiate on paperwork...we're a busy with a small company with small margins.
- 41.** Better guidance and support for smaller artists would be great...I've taken on an agent in the EU (as well as one in the UK) to help with working and understanding work in the EU.

42. Clarity on what is expected from paperwork would be helpful...My union has some advice but unfortunately it is a one size fits all approach....Clarity on selling merchandise would be really helpful.

Future for cross-border working

43. I am very enthusiastic about what I do but when it comes to Europe, I'm frustrated. You build up trust with people by being in the room.

44. The challenges remains in EU artists not wanting to come to the UK. I am programming festivals purposely looking at EU based acts. The EU is seen as a cool place, the UK isn't.

45. There are barriers to supporting work and being serious about supporting artist to reach their potential – this applies to acts at all levels.

46. Wales has fantastic opportunities to share... our Future Generations Act, other countries look at us, but we can't have that discussion in Europe.

Solutions

47. Rejoin Europe, I'd love you to fiddle around the edges and make it easier, but really I just want to jump in the van and go.

48. I'd love exemptions in place for the performing arts, there's no logic presented for why not.

49. Reverse the decision! There's a question as to how we go back cap in hand and apologise.

50. Access to funds to be able to assist with moving i.e. a tour manager or sound engineer would reduce the stress of travel significantly and would make it feel possible.