

“Dirty, dangerous, disorganised and loud”: Festival working conditions

Bectu briefing • August 2025

Dangerous working conditions

Behind-the-scenes festival workers and crew, including those working in construction, sound, lighting, production, stage management and more, have reported serious issues relating to their working conditions and health and safety over the summer festival season.

While late nights, limited showering and loud noise might be seen as part and parcel of the festival experience for festival attendees, for the professionals working to run the events and may be on site for weeks either side of the event, operating heavy machinery and working 18+ hour days, there are serious safety concerns.

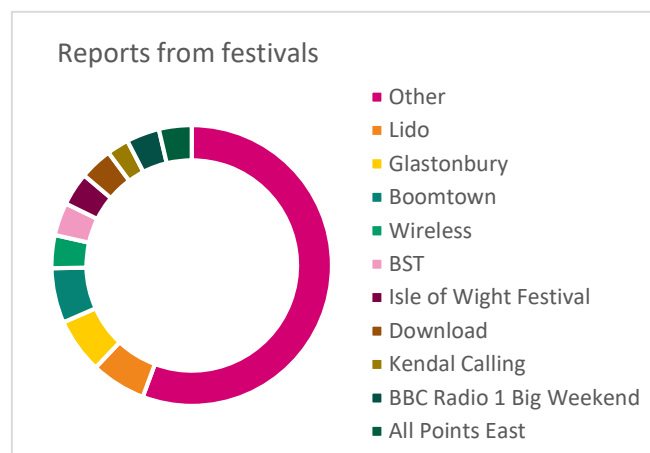
In a Bectu survey of behind-the-scenes festival workers carried out earlier this year¹, half the respondents said they ‘sometimes’ or ‘usually’ felt unsafe while working at UK festivals in 2024.

- 3 in 10 had experienced a risk to their physical safety, such as working at height without proper training or equipment.
- And worryingly, 35 per cent of respondents were unclear about who they could report health and safety concerns to onsite.
- 1 in 5 festival workers said working conditions at UK festivals have worsened in the past five years.

Excessive noise or noise pollution without adequate PPE, working in extreme heat without access to adequate drinking water, issues of sanitation on site, such as substandard washing and toilet facilities, were all raised as common issues putting workers at risk. 70 per cent reported long hours, with some reporting 18-20 hour days and as little as 3 hours off between lengthy shifts and nearly half the respondents said their mental health was impacted as a result of health, safety and welfare issues onsite.

Reports from the 2025 season

Bectu have collected 79 reports from festival worker across 54 different festivals over the 2025 season, including Glastonbury, Boomtown, Mighty Hoopla and Lido. Reports came from across the workforce, including stewards and security, carpentry, rigging, lighting and sound technicians and stage hands.



¹ <https://bectu.org.uk/news/18-hour-days-heatstroke-and-sleeping-on-the-floor-life-behind-the-scenes-for-uk-festival-workers>

Out of all the responses, 11 were broadly positive though mentioned small issues, while most raised significant issues. Coding the reports into categories, there are clear patterns of concerns.

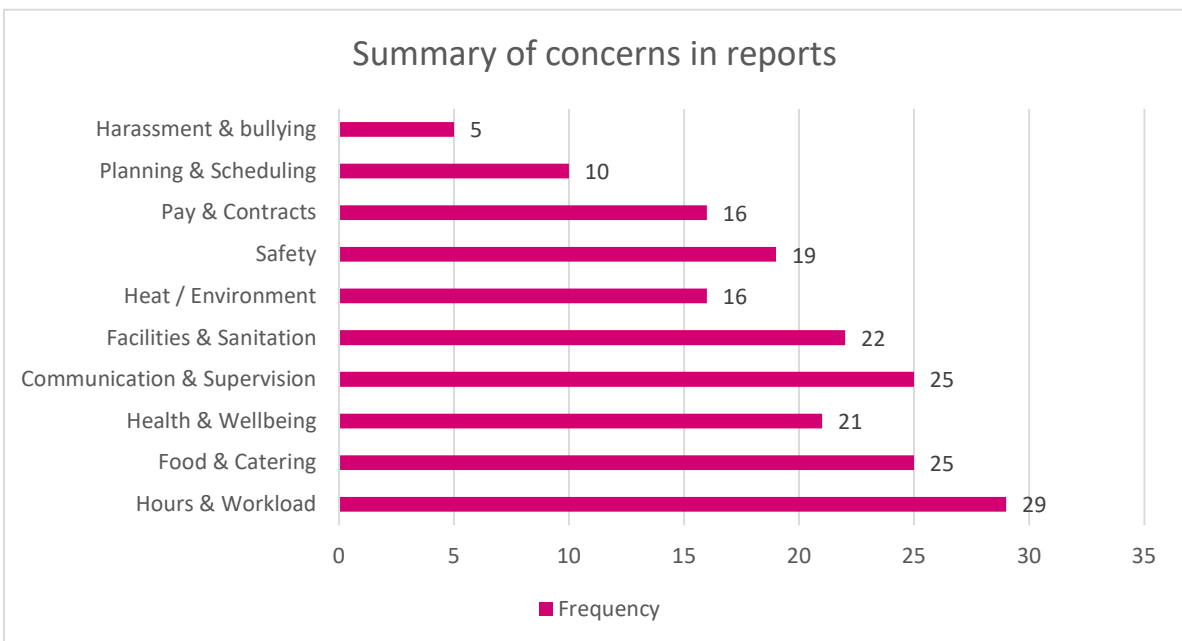
Category	Definition	Example	Frequency
Hours & Workload	Overwork, exhaustion, long shifts, lack of breaks or rest periods.	<i>"12–16 and 18 hour working days, 1-month nights, working every day, then straight onto a week of days."</i>	29
Food & Catering	Issues with crew meals, catering systems, or food access/quality.	<i>"Snacks not allowed in. Only empty water bottle and no access to water points - so no food or water for 7 hours, no breaks, toilets so far away couldn't take time off for loo breaks."</i>	25
Health & Wellbeing	Impacts to physical or mental health; welfare support or lack thereof.	<i>"There was an area labelled drinking water that people were using, but it was visibly from a trough that wasn't from a clean source. A lot of the haze (or possibly fumes from the generators) blew back on the stage and gave the stage crew coughing fits."</i>	21
Communication & Supervision	Problems with management interaction: poor communication, absent leadership, unclear or dismissive direction.	<i>"Dangerous lightning storms within 10 metres(yes metres) of site, I stopped all operation during this period for the owner of the festival to come scream at me and threaten to have me dragged off site"</i>	25
Facilities & Sanitation	Access to and condition of toilets, showers, handwashing, or crew areas.	<i>"The stink of the crew toilets could be smelled for miles. They had not been emptied and made people gag."</i>	22
Heat / Environment	Exposure to unsafe weather or environmental conditions (heat, storms, dust, lack of shade/shelter).	<i>"Every year when it's hot the stewards are left battling hot weather with little to no respite. We often lose minimum 5 stewards per shift to heat stroke or sun toxicity."</i>	16
Safety	Hazards and unsafe practices on site; lack of proper health & safety measures.	<i>"One of us was almost hit by a motor chain that was misplaced when we were working below the video wall."</i>	19
Pay & Contracts	Issues with wages, contracts, unpaid work, overtime, or fees.	<i>"Many people had not been paid for their last 5 or 6 events with the company."</i>	16
Planning & Scheduling	Poor work organisation: chaotic scheduling, last-minute changes, inadequate rotas or understaffing.	<i>"Allocated shifts with only a 6 hour break between them."</i>	10

Category	Definition	Example	Frequency
Harassment & bullying	Bullying, discrimination, intimidation, threats, or toxic behaviour by management or others.	<i>“Production manager told me she would destroy my career and name.”</i>	5

These reports only highlight the scale and range of challenges faced by festival crews across the UK. The most common issues raised relate to excessive working hours and unsustainable shifts, with many workers reporting 12–18 hour days, minimal rest, and inadequate breaks. Alongside this, food and catering problems appear repeatedly, from poor-quality meals to token-based systems that leave staff struggling to eat properly during long shifts. Concerns about health and wellbeing also feature prominently, with workers flagging exhaustion, stress, and in some cases serious medical risks exacerbated by working conditions.

Facilities and sanitation remain a major weakness, with many accounts describing overflowing or unclean toilets, lack of showers, and insufficient access to drinking water. Environmental conditions such as extreme heat, storms, and exposure to dust add further strain, while safety issues range from unqualified use of equipment to dangerous structural practices. Underpinning many of these problems are failures in management, communication, and planning: crews report poor supervision, chaotic scheduling, and absent leadership. Pay disputes and precarious contracts continue to erode trust, while some testimonies also describe bullying, harassment, or intimidation. Taken together, these reports reveal a pattern of systemic neglect in crew welfare that undermines both safety and the sustainability of the workforce.

Moreover, some of these issues raised the issues of timing, that while during the festival things may have run smoothly, during the weeks of set up and pack down, sanitary or catering provisions could be missing.



These reports highlight a working environment where resilience is tested to its limits and morale is frequently eroded. For many crew members, even basic needs, food, hygiene and rest, are compromised in favour of operational demands. This amplifies the risk of mistakes, accidents, and health emergencies. The emotional toll is also significant.

There is a clear consensus that meaningful change requires proactive leadership, transparent communication, and investment in welfare infrastructure, not just during peak festival days, but throughout the entire cycle of build, event, and breakdown. Ultimately, the sustainability of the UK’s festival culture depends on the dignity, safety, and wellbeing of those who make it possible.

Positive Experiences

Despite the many concerns raised in festival workers' reports, we also heard quite a few positive experiences.

Across the reports, positive experiences of well-run festivals consistently centre on good organisation, clear communication, and visible commitment to crew welfare. Where festivals were managed well, crew describe feeling treated as professionals rather than an afterthought. Advance planning and clear health and safety processes stand out: one respondent noted a *"Positive experience on site. Health and Safety Comms sent in advance. All working personnel appeared to be wearing appropriate PPE,"* while another added, *"I knew who to report any concerns to."*

Well-run events are also characterised by competent scheduling and realistic hours; crews valued environments where work was *"basically good and sensible hours, no major concerns and duty of care by management in evidence,"* and where events were described simply as having *"ran like clockwork."* These accounts contrast sharply with poorer experiences elsewhere and underline how basic organisation and leadership set the tone for a safe, calm, and productive site.

Equally important in positive reports is practical welfare provision and a respectful culture. Clean facilities, reliable water access, and decent catering repeatedly feature as markers of good practice. One crew member summed this up succinctly: *"Excellent working conditions for me, treated as a professional, good sanitary infrastructure and the catering is actually super nice. Can't complain."* Another highlighted proactive support from management: *"Small crew, nearly all of whom are eager to return to work at the event every year. Competitive pay. Relaxed build and break schedules... event management HODs actively discuss and monitor all staff welfare internally."*

Good catering in particular had a strong positive impact, with reports of *"3 meals per day on working days"* and festivals where *"catering was good, water points and toilets maintained."* Positive cultural experiences also mattered, such as inclusive teams and strong leadership on the ground, exemplified by the comment: *"MainStage audio team were the strongest most hardworking group of females I've ever experienced. More like this please!"* Together, these accounts show that when festivals invest in welfare, fairness, and communication, crews notice, and are keen to return.