



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

4th June 2020

Dear Mr Dowden,

We are writing to you to explain the deep concerns we hold about the future of the theatre and live events industries and to urge you to put into place specific support and guidance for the employers and workers who are desperate to return to work.

Bectu represents thousands of workers in the creative industries including theatre and live events workers who are worried about their future as social distancing measures mean that they cannot return to work until the measures are eased or lifted and therefore cannot return as quickly as other parts of the economy. To attempt to open while these measures are in place is asking theatres to fail. As you can imagine, social distancing measures mean that these venues and organisations will be unable to sell the number of tickets needed for them to raise the revenue critical to sustaining their businesses.

The most immediate concern that we share is that changes to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme will result in mass redundancies as employers can't afford to even pay National Insurance or pension contributions. Bectu recently organised a webinar attended by a vast range of theatre employers in and outside London. During the discussion a number of polls were run which demonstrate the will of the industry for government to step in and support the industry and its workforce.

- The first poll asked employers: Will changes to the Job Retention Scheme, ultimately, result in you having to make furloughed staff redundant? 74% of those on the call said yes.
- The second poll asked: Would you support a joint employer and unions co-ordinated industry wide call for government funding as the industry continues to understand how it will operate? 88% said yes.
- The final poll asked: Would you support industry-wide guidelines on returning to work? 96% of the group said yes.

These three findings demonstrate that the industry is united in the hurdles that it has to overcome to get back to work. We would urge you to take these considerations into account in any discussions and plans being devised for these industries.

There is a huge need for clear communication about the department's approach and thinking on how theatres and live events can get back to work again. The department must manage the industry's expectations and outline any plans that are being worked on to create uniform guidance encompassing all shapes and sizes of employer. Diversity of representation which includes regional organisations and underrepresented groups are crucial to conversations about how theatre can return to work.

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We are urging you to work with the Treasury and Chancellor to put the measures into place that are desperately needed to ensure that the theatre industry and workforce can survive the crisis. The existing funding streams including Treasury backed loans and Arts Council grants simply aren't enough for the challenges that lay ahead as many organisations have already explored them and are still struggling to see a way forward.

We believe the sort of measures that should be adopted include: the theatre industry being exempted from the contributions to the job retention scheme; a new scheme to support the freelance workforce; financial support to ensure the industry is in a position to start-up again and funding to protect the industry in the future.

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