



The Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport
Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport
100 Parliament Street
London
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cc. Lord Frost, Minister of State for the Cabinet Office

26th March 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to you following the Prime Minister's appearance at the Liaison Committee yesterday, where he spoke at length about the work that is going on to resolve the serious challenges musicians are facing with respect to working and touring in the EU.

The UK music industry is a key national asset that contributes £5.8 billion to the economy annually and supports 200,000 jobs. We are also a key exporter – in 2019, the industry generated £2.9 billion in exports and there were around 20,000 performances by British artists in the EU reported to *PRS for Music*.

It was very welcome to hear the Prime Minister highlight the importance of the UK music industry, echo the sector's frustrations about the EU touring issues, and declare that "we must fix it". This commitment was extremely encouraging and is something we desperately want to see delivered.

It was also reassuring to hear from the Prime Minister that bilateral talks are currently happening at national capital level and the Government is "working flat out bilaterally with countries" to resolve the issues we are facing. We stand ready to support Government in these negotiations with EU member states, many of whom we have existing relationships with. UK Music and its members are currently engaging with contacts, consulates and embassies across the EU and it is already clear that requirements for work permits or visas will be particularly challenging in Spain, Portugal, Croatia and Bulgaria, as well as a host of other urgent issues in various other European countries.

The more we know about the status and direction of your bilateral talks, the better we will be able to reinforce the work you are doing with our own lobbying efforts. **We would therefore kindly request regular progress updates on these bilateral negotiations that the Prime Minister referred to, so we can better understand how to support them as effectively as possible.**

We also recognise that negotiations of this nature will not conclude instantly and it may take some time to reach a sustainable solution. This means that while the engagement process with member states takes place, we will need to support musicians that are facing increased costs and help them adjust to what we must hope are temporary barriers. **It is therefore vital that government urgently introduce a transition touring fund, that can help musicians with the costs and admin of the new barriers they face.** This would not be a permanent fund; rather, it would act as a means of supporting musicians in the short term, while Government conducts bilateral negotiations aimed at removing the need for costly work permits and visas. Other costs associated with carnets, cabotage and the need for specialist advice should also be covered by this fund. In January, the Government introduced a £23m fund to help the fishing industry in "adjusting to new requirements for exporting." Given the challenges the music industry is currently facing, there is a very compelling case for a similar approach to be taken here, not least given the £5.8 billion economic contribution it makes to the economy in normal times.

There is a common misconception that because the pandemic restrictions have temporarily halted international touring, we have some time before this issue starts to have an impact. We are however already starting to see major consequences – musicians and crews are booked for concerts and tours months and often years in advance, and the prospect of costly visas and work permits for certain countries is already forcing cancellations.

Every day, we hear heartbreaking stories from musicians who are having to cancel tours or turn down work in Europe because the cost of EU visas and work permits makes those opportunities unviable. Some are now having to rely on government welfare support instead of expected performing opportunities. I am sure you will agree that a European concert hall paying a British musician to perform is preferable to the British state subsidising them to be silent. It is in our country's economic and well as cultural interest for us to enable our brilliant musical performers to work internationally.

Resolving these challenges will require action from industry and Government in the short, medium and long term. In addition to bilateral negotiations with member states to resolve the issues around visas and work permits, **it is also vital that the challenges facing concert hauliers around cabotage across the EU are resolved.** The music industry and the Road Haulage Association continue to engage with the Department for Transport on this, and there are currently proposals for a solution with Government now.

In the longer term, a Music Export Office could offer exciting opportunities for our whole sector – both in terms of increasing support for existing programmes like the Music Export Growth Scheme and International Showcase Fund, and also in opening up new opportunities internationally for our sector and helping turbocharge global success for our industry. Of course, the urgent priority remains the immediate challenges musicians are facing in touring Europe right now; however, we continue to work constructively with your officials in DCMS and DIT in exploring how a Music Export Office could operate successfully in the longer term.

Ultimately, this is about ensuring that the UK's world-leading music industry can continue to be the global success story post-Brexit that it has been for decades. In addition to the huge economic and social contribution it makes, the UK music industry boosts our global reputation and plays an intrinsic part in our core national identity. It is a sector that should not just be protected, but actively championed and promoted.

We appreciate the work that you, your ministerial team and your officials have been doing on this issue. In particular, we welcome the Government's efforts to convene a Touring Working Group with representatives of the creative sector and hope to continue this constructive engagement. From what was said at the Liaison Committee, I understand that the Prime Minister has tasked Lord Frost with overall responsibility for this issue. We have copied him into this letter and would welcome the opportunity to meet with him to discuss how best we can support his work on this crucial issue.

Yours sincerely,



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