



Event Production Industry Covid-19 Working Group

Joint Committee on Media, Tourism,
Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gaeltacht

An Comhchoiste um Meáin,
Turasóireacht, Ealaíona, Cultúr, Spórt
agus Gaeltacht



A member of The Event Industry Alliance



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Executive Summary

In response to the crisis in the live event industry, created by the Covid-19 pandemic, this working group was elected, to represent the interests and concerns of the individuals and business involved in producing live events and performance.

We have seen some successes from supports such as the LPSS, and the extension of the PUP and EWSS helping to maintain as many of our staff as possible. However there have also been large parts of our sector left behind, such as our supplier SMEs of which only 4% are eligible to access the CRSS. We are at present engaging with the Department of Trade and Enterprise and hope to very swiftly to bring forward some supports for those who have neglected so far. In comparison Venues and Promoters in Northern Ireland have received significant direct support grants from the UK Arts Council.

In our survey of the 22nd of February 2021 of event supplier SMEs and micro-enterprises (285 companies responded), the following figures are crucial:

68% of businesses are a CLG, 32% are a sole trader

42% occupy a Rateable Premises, 58% don't pay rates or pay a rates-rent bundle

96% are not eligible for CRSS, 4% are eligible.

Average fixed costs are €3566 per week (Range €453 to €10,395 per week, excluding staff)

With Live Event suppliers are closed continuously since March 2020, due to the ban on mass gatherings, and almost no online options are available for trading, as nearly all are in-person service suppliers.

EPIC estimates 50% of event suppliers will be insolvent by June 2021, without new sufficient supports being put in place.

SBASC Issues: (Previously known as CBAS)

- Single support level regardless of turnover, or fixed costs of the business.
- Support equal to €307 per week is too small in comparison to the fixed costs of the companies.
- Support is far too small to allow business owners to negotiate loans with banks, with or without state guarantee.
- 58% of event supplier SMEs are not occupying rateable premises or paying rates directly.
- Turnover reduction of 75% required, does not take into account LPSS or seasonal activity. EPIC suggests a scaled response as per the Culture Taskforce recommendation.

Restart Lag Effect:

The planning time, ticket selling, rehearsal, performance, invoice and pay cycle for events runs from 6 months up to several years. There will be a significant lag between the lifting of the ban on mass gatherings and any business having a viable income.

Solutions:

- The urgent establishment of the expert industry 'Return to Live Entertainment Working Group' as per Minister Martin's press release of the 9th of March. Advancing a sector specific, Strategic Roadmap, developed in partnership with your Department/HSE and relevant authorities to ensure

the safe reopening and operation of venues, but only when it is safe to do so.

- Implement the Arts and Culture Recovery Taskforce recommendation #4 – a CRSS equivalent scheme open to Event Industry SMEs, with scaled supports proportional to lost turnover.
- Make SBASC supports a reasonable response to fixed costs.
- Open the SBASC to alternative qualifying criteria for Micro-enterprises who don't pay rates.
- Take into account "bundled rates and rent" for all schemes, where rates are not in the name of the tenant, they are in the name of the landlord.
- Insurance guarantee scheme for event promoters and organisers.
- Insurance guarantee scheme to ensure event SMEs have access to business insurance continuity.
- Extended Tax warehousing until 12 months after the ban on mass gatherings is lifted.
- Restart grant for SMEs with capacity and application window timed to coincide with the lifting of the ban on mass gatherings.
- Extend the EWSS and PUP on a sliding scale for 12 months after the ban on mass gatherings is lifted.
- Extend the rates waver until 24 months after the ban on mass gatherings is lifted.

Skill Retention: The Event and Entertainment sector is staffed by qualified and experienced people, with very transferable skills. It has taken decades to bring together these skills and experience, in this country. These people are not highly paid, they work on these events because they have a passion for the work. However, if driven to work in other industries they will get higher paid jobs or emigrate to other countries and will not return to the Irish live events industry. It is vital to retain these skills to staff events, large and small, in Ireland.

Brand Ireland: The Events sector employs about 35,000 full time and part time staff but makes a massive impact on both the island of Ireland, and when selling Ireland to the world. The Arts, Festivals and Events are the Ireland brand, sold throughout the world. Without our SMEs and individuals who make up the industry, the Ireland brand will be lost, and will not be available to the tourism and hospitality industries to sell. Attracted 4.8 million people to live events including over 550,000 overseas visitors

Two Entire Years Lost: The vast majority of the Events industry work in annual cycles, the sector has lost up to two year's turnover – not just a few months. Even though we are hopeful of some events this year, they are unlikely to provide anywhere near the full income of a normal Summer powered by the large events & festivals, arena and theatre shows.

National Spirit: The Arts and Event industry will be needed more than ever in the years to come, to bring the spirit and enthusiasm of the nation of Ireland back to full strength. Events keep both local & national community spirit alive, from vintage steam rallies & threshings to St Patricks Festival, the National Ploughing and Electric Picnic. 92% of incomes of Event workers, have been affected by the requirement for a ban on mass gatherings to keep Ireland safe. Unless businesses and workers are protected, and their skills retained, the sector will not be able to play its valuable and considerable part in rebuilding Ireland's spirit and economy.

EPIC Working Group

Live events continue through wars, they raise money for famine, they raise the spirits of a nation in times of need and provide a focus in times of celebration. Never, in the history of staging live performance and events, has there been such a sudden and total stop to work in Ireland, as happened on the 12th of March 2020.

The Irish Live Events industry has been decimated by the restrictions placed on mass gatherings and the need for social distancing on foot of the Covid-19 health crisis. For more than 35,000 full and part time Live Events & Arts workers across Ireland, employment and revenue streams are now non-existent, with no real indication or guidance on when live events will return.

The people who work on live events understand – probably more than most, the requirement to keep the public safe. In fact, it is what we do on a daily basis, through every action and decision we take. We depend on the well-being and happiness of our audiences to pay our wages on every event we work on. We fully appreciate the restrictions to keep Ireland medically safe from the Covid pandemic. Unfortunately, the knock on effect of those protocols has been to create a crisis in our industry.

In response to the crisis in the live event industry, created by the Covid19 pandemic, this working group was elected by it's peers, to represent the interests and concerns of the individuals and businesses involved in producing live events and performance. The working group consists of people who are prominent in the production of the country's many large scale events and the representatives of the companies, promoters and venues that support these events. The people represented by EPIC are people & businesses involved in the actual production of live events, and promoters and venues that support and hold them.

The EPIC Working Group, has grown in a very short time to represent the workers and SME suppliers in the industry; and to be supported by promoters, venues, and festivals. They include MCD, Aiken, Live Nation, Festival Republic, The Gaiety, The INEC, The Olympia, Dolans, 3Arena, Electric Picnic, St.Patrick's Festival, Longitude, Indiependence and many others.

EPIC Elected Members



Sophie Ridley (Chairperson) - Event Safety Consultant & Event Controller. Event Controller Ed Sheeran Irish Tour, 2018, Co-ordinator of the Pedestrian & Transportation Sub Group & Deputy Event Controller Papal Visit 2018. Safety & Licensing Consultant to The Beatyard, Big Grill, Life and Forever Young Festivals as well as Hozier and Ireland's Fittest Family. She has worked on most of the major events in Ireland and with very many of the companies and crew, this working group is proud to represent.



Pearse Doherty (Deputy Chairperson) - Former Head of Production, Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture 2019 - May 2020. Head of Operations, Volvo Ocean Race, 2012. Head of Production Aiken promotions, Site Manager Electric Picnic 2013 - 2017, Site Manager Sea Sessions 2012 - 2017, Tour Manager Tommy Tiernan 2005 - 2018. Band Member, The Saw Doctors, 1988 - 2002.



Liam Fitzgerald - Chairperson of the Association of Irish Stage Technicians. Working for over 25 years in the industry in various professional roles. Currently Technical Manager of the Bord Gais Energy Theatre. Previously Site Manager for The Rolling Stones at Croke Park, Crew Boss for Bruce Springsteen at Croke Park. Production Manager and Lighting Designer for An tOireachtas, Oireachtas na Samhna Festival for twelve years. TSM Draiocht Arts Centre. Director Stage Lighting Centre.



Kim O'Callaghan - Project Manager and Deputy Event Controller for MCD's Slane, Croke Park, RDS, Pairc Ui Chaoimh and Aviva Shows. Deputy Project Manager and Deputy Event Controller for the Phoenix Park and Croke Park aspects of the 2018 Papal Visit to Ireland. Chief Operating Officer of The Olympia Theatre during the refurb of the iconic Dublin venue, 2015-2017. Founder of EVNTZ App.

EPIC Elected Members



Joe Betts - Joe has been working in the Events industry for 16 years, having started his career in Lighting, working as a Lighting Tech in An Glór theare, Ennis, followed by touring with Pat Shortt and more recently Walking on Cars as Lighting Designer. He quickly moved to rigging, and is MD of Made for Stage Ltd, where he works primarily on design and engineering projects.



Neil Burke - Neil is owner and MD of Archetype with 15 years experience in the Event Industry. Archetype is a creative production company that specialises in creating and programming unique experiences in the world of music arts and culture.

Recent Production/Programming Projects include. St Patricks Festival, Laya City Spectacular, Guinness Storehouse After Dark (20 Million Visitor Celebrations), Love Sensation *(two-day Music LGBTQ Festival), Forever Young (80s Festival), Wine & Cheese at the Iveagh Gardens, Playstival (family festival) and Starlight Cinema Drive Thru Cinema.

Archetype is also the controlling company for a number electronic music brands Including, District 8, Life Festival, Boxed Off and Index



Live Venue Collective represented by Úna Molloy and Brian Byrne - Live Venue Collective is a group of small to medium-sized independent music venues established to try to sustain Ireland's incredibly important but fragile live music ecosystem, during the Covid-19 crisis.

MEMBERS : The Black Gate, Galway • Cleere's, Kilkenny • Connolly's Of Leap, Cork • Coughlan's, Cork • Crane Lane Theatre, Cork • Cyprus Avenue, Cork • DeBarra's Folk Club, Cork • Dolan's, Limerick • The Grand Social, Dublin • Levis Corner House, Cork • Lost Lane, Dublin • Mike the Pies, Kerry • Opium, Dublin • Kavanagh's, Laois • Roisín Dubh, Galway • Set Theatre, Kilkenny • Sin É, Dublin • Sky and the Ground, Wexford • The Sound House, Dublin • Spiegeltent, Wexford • Spirit Store, Dundalk • The Sugar Club, Dublin • Hotel Doolin Barn, Clare • Whelan's, Dublin • The White Horse, Cork • The Workman's Club, Dublin

What are live events?



Live Events are the organised celebrations, gatherings, concerts and festivals that have form a huge part of the fabric of Irish life.

Live events are community events such as A Taste of West Cork, The Westport Arts Festival, the Irish Maritime Festival in Drogheda or the local Vintage Steam Rally. Many of these events are community based, but their impact is much broader and they are part of the Irish palette sold internationally by Failte Ireland, etc. These events use professional suppliers and people to give them infrastructure and co-ordination. These are the people we represent.

Live events are the commercial events like concerts and festivals where Irish and international people gather in their thousands to hear their favourite national or international artist such as Metallica at Slane Castle, Tom Jones at The Marquee, Cork, Leonard Cohen at Lissadell House or Ennio Morricone at the 3Arena. These events need to be well managed and safe. All the infrastructure and personnel required to run these events are the people we represent.

Live events are the state supported and sponsored events such as State Visits, St.Patrick's Festival, the Fleadh, the Special Olympics and international events such as Euro 2020 & the Ploughing Championships. These events require professional suppliers and staff to make them happen. We represent the people and contractors who make these events happen.

Restart Lag Effect

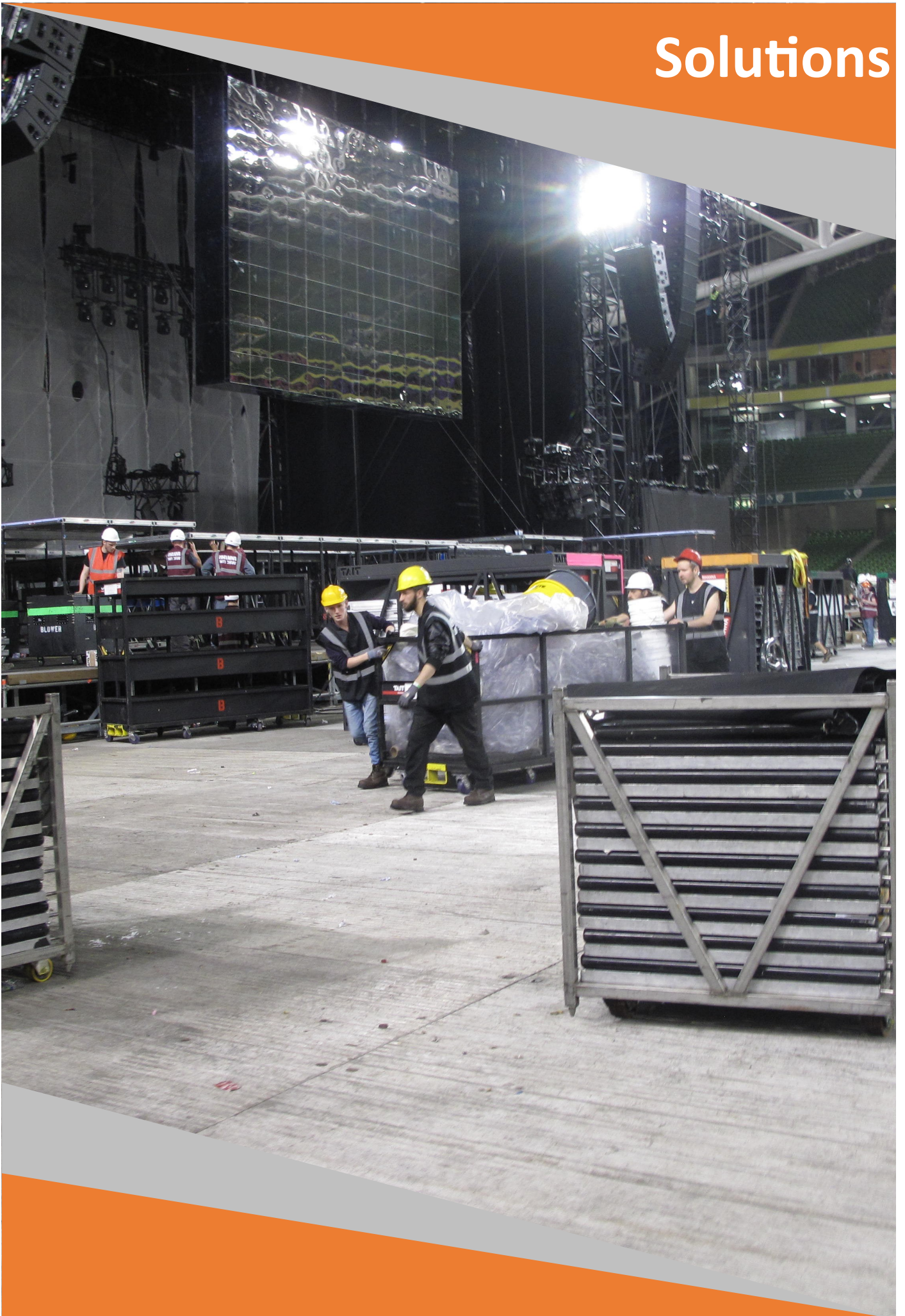


Looking forward, there are many hurdles still to navigate as we contemplate the re-opening of live events over the coming months. One of the most important concepts for us to convey is the potential for lag in our industry opening. Over the cycle of planning, marketing, selling tickets, rehearsing, and building, the time from the proverbial gates opening for our industry and meaningful income for our staff and SMEs will be between six months and year. It is vital that the planning starts in earnest as soon as possible.

We know that no one has a crystal ball, and no one can tell us right now the exact date when we are going to be open again. However, we do need a sector specific strategic roadmap with a series of mile markers, from health experts, showing us the correlation between the vaccination levels for the country versus the scale of the events allowable.

It is of the highest urgency and importance to swiftly form the expert working group as put forward in the Department of Culture Taskforce recommendations with key experienced stakeholders around the table, to develop the criteria, mechanisms, supports and time frame, in parallel with government policy, and rollout of the vaccination programme. Advancing a sector specific, strategic roadmap, developed in partnership with the various departments, the HSE and relevant authorities to ensure the safe re-opening and operation of venues and events, will enable us to put thousands of people back to work across all levels of the sector, but we need to start the months of planning now. The government will need to support all of the local authorities and state agencies to ensure they have the resources to make this happen.

Solutions



What do we need?

The vast majority of the Events and Arts industry work in annual cycles, the sector has lost an entire two year's turnover – not just a few months. This was lost when most businesses and individuals' financial reserves were at their low point, just leading up to St. Patricks celebrations, traditionally the start of the busy summer season. The summer season powers the event industry.

SMEs: While nearly every business involved in the industry is an SME, employing a small number of people, most have very large inventories of equipment, from large sound systems for concerts, to kilometres of fencing for parades and events. All of this equipment is high quality and expensive, and needs to be stored when not on site. SMEs are facing large premises rent bills, contents insurance costs, and repayments on bank loans and leases, with up to 12 months of no income. These SMEs need to be protected to keep the equipment and skill of the staff inside the country, and drive the recovery.

1. The urgent establishment of the expert industry 'Return to Live Entertainment Working Group' as per Minister Martin's press release (9th March 21).

Experts meeting remotely that could develop the criteria, mechanism, supports and time-frame in parallel with Government policy and rollout of the vaccination programme. Advancing a sector specific, Strategic Roadmap (including a Method Statement), developed in partnership with your Department/HSE and relevant authorities to ensure the safe reopening and operation of venues and events, but only when it is safe to do so.

2. Implement the Arts and Culture Recovery Taskforce recommendation #4

A scheme open to Event Industry SMEs, with scaled supports proportional to fixed costs and previous turnover. Equal to the value of the CRSS.

3. Amend the criteria for the SBASC, or initiate an equivalent for Event microenterprises.

- Make SCASC supports a reasonable response to the true level of fixed costs.
- Open the SBASC to alternative qualifying criteria other than rates paying premises
- Take into account "bundled rates and rent" for all schemes, where rates are not in the name of the tenant, they are in the name of the landlord.

4. Insurance guarantee scheme for Event promoters and organisers.

Insurance cancellation protection support. As currently being advanced by other EU countries for the live sector. For example, six weeks costs for an event or theatre production which could face immediate closure on opening night due to an outbreak of another wave of COVID-19. In line with other EU nations leading the way such as Denmark and The Netherlands.

5. Insurance guarantee scheme for Event Suppliers.

To ensure event SMEs have access to business insurance continuity, partially due to covid, but also due to Brexit causing underwriters to leave the market.

6. Tax warehouse extensions.

Extended Tax warehousing until 12 months after the ban on mass gatherings is lifted, to enable business to regain stability before beginning to repay tax warehoused.

7. Restart grants for SMEs

Restart grant for SMEs with capacity and application window timed to coincide with the lifting of the ban on mass gatherings. Such grants have been operated recently, but will have run out by the time event industry SMEs need them.

8. Continuation of staff and worker supports.

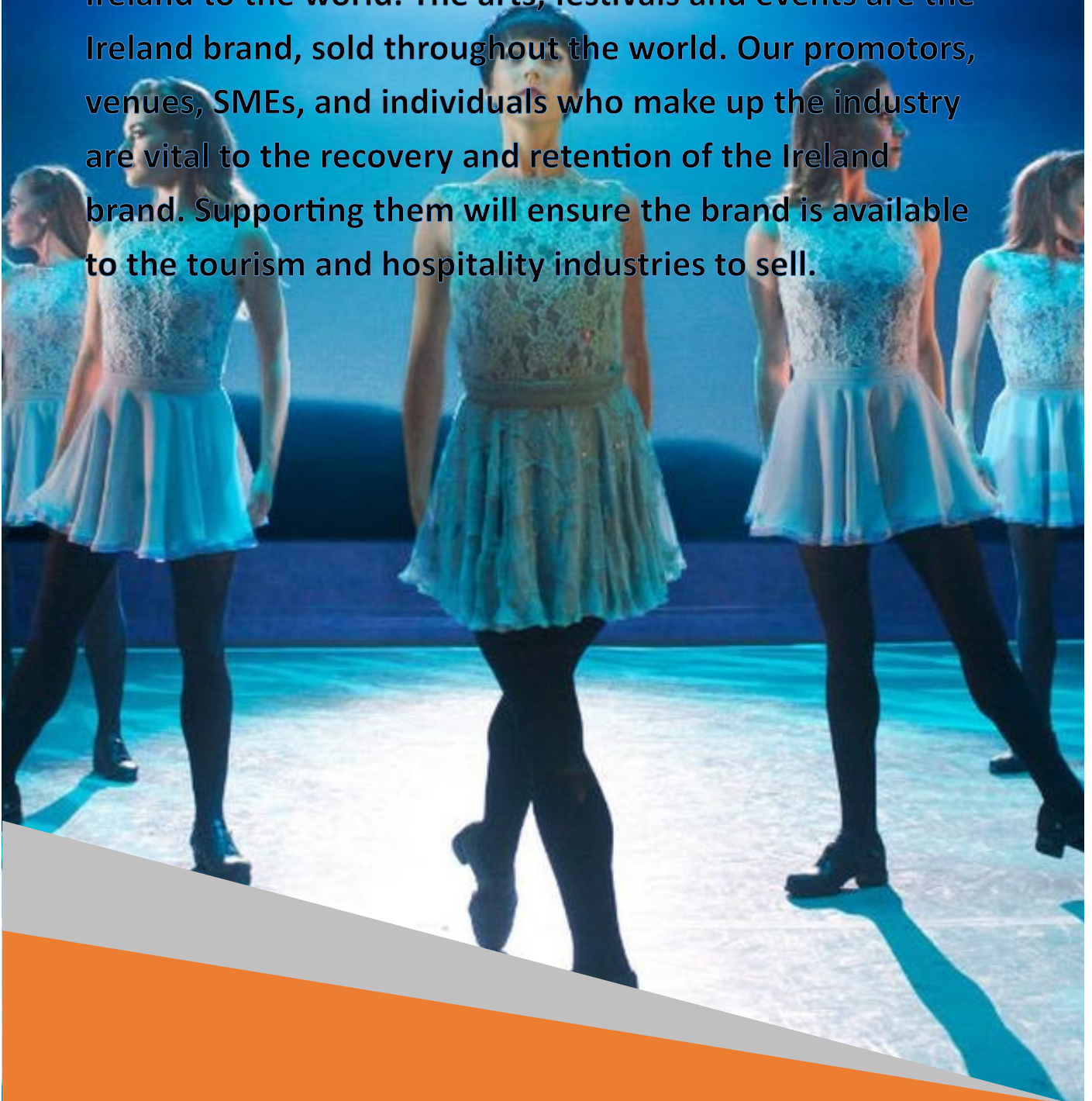
Extend the EWSS and PUP on a sliding scale until 12 months after the ban on mass gatherings is lifted.

9. Continuation of rates waivers.

Reversal of recent local authority demands, contrary to the spirit of the rates waiver.

Extend the existing rates waiver until 24 months after the ban on mass gatherings is lifted.

Brand Ireland: The Events and Arts sector employs a comparatively small number of people, but makes a massive impact on both the island of Ireland, and when selling Ireland to the world. The arts, festivals and events are the Ireland brand, sold throughout the world. Our promoters, venues, SMEs, and individuals who make up the industry are vital to the recovery and retention of the Ireland brand. Supporting them will ensure the brand is available to the tourism and hospitality industries to sell.



Contribution

- Estimated to be worth €3.5 billion (includes ancillary spending by audiences, supply chain expenditure made by businesses catering for live event visitors and secondary impacts of all visitor and supply chain spending).
- Employed over 35,000 people, more than tech giants Google, Apple, Yahoo, Facebook and Twitter combined.
- Attracted 4.8 million people to live events including over 550,000 overseas visitors.
- VAT on ticket sales alone contributed in an average year over €30 million to the exchequer.
- Directly delivered over 3.5 million bed nights to the Irish tourism sector.
- For every €1 euro spent on a ticket, an additional €6.06 of revenue was generated in the rest of the economy – source Let's Celebrate/BOP International/Fáilte Ireland www.letscelebrate.ie
- Contributed multiples of millions of euro in company PAYE, VAT, Rates and Corporation Tax.

In Conclusion

While some support measures have been introduced which are appreciated, the sector has remained closed under the government mandate since 12th March 2020.

One year later, it still remains shut. We were the first to close, and will be the last to re-open. In this regard, the commercial live entertainment sector is unique. Pubs and Night-clubs who are the only other businesses shut for so long, are in receipt of the CRSS since it's inception. Almost none of our businesses are eligible.

As the pandemic now enters its second year, venues, promoters, and businesses have spent their cash reserves surviving 2020, topping up salaries and meeting fixed business costs such as rent, insurance, building maintenance, security, and utilities, all against a backdrop of having almost no turnover to fund such expenditure.

Without assurance of sufficient supports until the sector fully recovers, and with the delay in activating an expert working group, some of Ireland's most iconic live entertainment venues and its promoters will be forced to implement plans to shut down entirely for the foreseeable long term future, and implement extensive layoffs.

The commercial industry is in danger of collapse with permanent unemployment inevitable, taking years to recover, unless meaningful action is taken. While there have been many meetings over the past 12 months, the full plight of our sector has gone largely unheeded.

This is an industry of entrepreneurs, a business filled with people who have forged their own path, highly skilled and dedicated people who invest their own time and their own money to create events and experiences, to allow others to make memories that will last a lifetime. This was a thriving industry prior to Covid and it will be again. We don't want a hand out, we just need a hand up until it is safe for our industry to return to full capacity. We need some help now, so that in turn, we can drive the rebirth of our economy by recovering the spirit and optimism of the nation.

We hope that you will take on board and make reality the practical requests within this document to aid with the support and recovery of the Live Entertainment Sector in Ireland.

Thank you for your time.