

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence here today regarding the plight of our industry.

EPIC is a working group of independently elected representatives from the live production sector, and is a foundation member of the wider industry grouping, the Event Industry Alliance. EPIC includes representatives from the Association of Irish Stage Technicians and the Live Venue Collective. Hence we speak here today for a very wide range of organisations, companies, and individuals throughout all facets of the live event and entertainment industry.

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 little or no turnover to fund such expenditure.

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 workers 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 bring forward some supports for those who have been neglected so far.

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 reopening. Over the cycle of planning, marketing, selling tickets, rehearsing, and building, the time from the proverbial gates opening for our industry to the meaningful income for our workers and SMEs will be between six months and year. It is vital that the planning starts in earnest as soon as possible.

It is of the highest urgency and importance to swiftly form an 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 the 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.

We know that no one has a crystal ball, and no one can tell us right now when we are going to be open again. However, we do need a series of markers, from health experts, showing us, for example, that when x percent of the adults are vaccinated we can do such a scale of an event, and when y percent are vaccinated, then the events can advance up to another level.

To be clear, we are not looking to, and never will try to open when it's not safe to do so. Our industries' fundamental core value is taking care of our audience and our staff. Every day, every decision we make when planning and executing an event is about the safety, welfare and enjoyment for our attendees. We are looking to open when it's safe to do so, but we need the mile markers to allow us to build up towards that, so that the lag between it being possible to open and actually being able to open is as short as possible.

We are an integral part of the cultural fabric of society. The Live Entertainment Industry is an ecosystem and all aspects are needed for it to survive. The talent of the artist, the venue or the promoter and the contractors and crew to pull it all together. For every €1 spent on a ticket in Ireland, there is €6 spent as a result, in the wider hospitality and tourism sectors. Live events were directly responsible for 3.2 Million Bed nights a year.

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.

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.