

## Opening Statement

Elaine O' Connor, Co-Founder of the Event Industry Association of Ireland

Chairperson,

Thank you for the invitation to attend today to engage with the Committee on the topic of reopening the economy with regard to the Arts and Entertainment Sector.

My name is Elaine O' Connor and I am the Co-Founder of the Event Industry Association of Ireland (EIAI), established in 2013, EIAI was founded by a group of Event Practitioners and Industry Experts with the aim of improving the overall event industry in Ireland. Attending with me is Mr. David Mongey, Managing Director, of Mongey Communications, a core service provider to the Event Industry for over 30 years.

We are here today representing an estimated 45,000 workers, and an industry that annually generates in excess of €3.5bn<sup>1</sup> towards the Irish economy, €850m towards the Irish export market, and produces up to a 52:1 return on state investment <sup>2</sup> the current risk is significant and needs urgent attention. At the immediate onset of COVID-19 the Event Industry suffered disproportionately to all other sectors and we now need to prepare for the long-term implications of dealing with Covid-19 into 2021, and potentially beyond.

The Arts Council of Ireland, Fáilte & Tourism Ireland, local authorities and development agencies all over Ireland have identified the strategic importance of festivals and event in their strategies over, at least, the last 20 years. Festivals and events also occupy the unique space of affording citizens and visitors an opportunity to consider identity, place and define their home place through celebration, commemoration but ultimately connection through shared experiences, and what makes us human. The Event Industry underpinning these events of strategic national importance is unique, intricate and often mis-understood. Our "Front of House" comprises of a bustling calendar of events, world class entertainment, and kaleidoscope of sporting, business, corporate, leisure, cultural and social experiences. This often distracts from the eco-system "behind the scenes"; here you will find an industry powered by resilience, determination and devotion to the promotion of our Arts, Business, Culture, Heritage, Innovation, Tourism supporting the national economy and most crucially delivering experiences that exceed expectations, entertain, connect emotionally and enhance our attendees' quality of life.

The Event Industry needs to prepare for the long-term implications of dealing with Covid-19 into 2021, and potentially beyond. While we are grateful and commend the Government for its' prompt and effective

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<sup>1</sup> <https://eventindustryireland.com/events-industry-report-2020/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/plan-to-turn-st-patrick-s-day-into-month-long-shindig-1.3789494>

application of valuable supports that immediately provided a degree of comfort across our industry, we are filled with apprehension when considering our industry's ability to generate income while we await the lifting of restrictions. With no definitive start date combined with the knowledge that even when that date comes it will not mean that the industry can immediately activate and resume business as usual we understand that it will be a slow but steady progress.

The public health safeguarding measures that have been implemented by Government to date and the anticipated duration of these measures, while absolutely necessary, essentially mean that the majority of businesses, organisers and workers are simply unable to generate revenue at present and many for the foreseeable future. The situation is unprecedented and absolutely devastating – the Irish Event Industry, usually an extremely ambitious, active, and competitive industry is facing a pro-longed hibernation period which has already impacted our entire eco-system on a short, medium and long-term basis.

In addition to the impact on Businesses, Covid-19 has resulted in a loss of livelihood and the potential loss of industry specific skilled workers who may abandon employment in the event industry in the future. It is important to note that many of the specialist roles required in the Events Industry are highly skilled, industry specific and were in high demand and short supply coming into this crisis. Due to the seasonal nature of the industry, with January and February being notoriously quiet and inactive a large portion of our workforce had not yet been employed and as such did not qualify under the current TWSS system.

In addition to a large segment of workers, artists, performers and entertainers excluded, many festivals, events and cultural activities sit outside the remit of Arts Council and Fáilte Ireland funding criteria. Therefore the support package allocated to the Arts Council and Fáilte Ireland funding will not and could not adequately filter down through the industry eco-system.

Due to these very real risks Covid-19 poses to our industry as a whole, ever mindful that each vital component of the Event Industry is considered in both the short and long term, further significant mitigation measures must be implemented.

We are now calling on our government to;

1. Recognise that this sector is one of the last remaining sectors that has not been provided with a pathway to or date for re-opening and as such requires a unique suite of supports and recognise, as part of that process, that the additional funding provided to the Arts Council will, at best, reach a portion of our sector.
2. Recognise the Event Industry, in its' own right, to acknowledge it for the preeminent economic sector it is and assign direct responsibility for this sector to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

3. Continue the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) wage support scheme for our sector until such time as restrictions with regards to mass gatherings are removed
4. Protect and support each part of sector; our workers, volunteers, performers, venues, SMEs, promoters, our smorgasbord of community events right up to our national hallmark events, and our stakeholders to ensure that our eco-system endures and that our professionalism, expertise and vital skillsets are retained.
5. Enable and resource the Event Industry to utilise this recovery period to address the new challenges presented by Covid-19, improve industry best practice, standards and professional competency, safeguarding our ability to deliver events that will be: delivered in a safe and successful manner, critical to the rebuilding of our communities, significant contributors to our national economic recovery, and that will continue to grow our reputation on the Global Stage as an excellent host nation for international events.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to discuss these issues today. My colleague and I are happy to take questions from the committee on this matter and I would request you open page 2 as we will be referring to it in the Q & A.