

***Event Production Industry Covid19 Working Group
Submission to Oireachtas Special Committee Covid19 Response
Recovery Of The Arts & Entertainment Industry***

EPIC Represented By;

Sophie Ridley **Chairperson**
Shane Dunne **Deputy Chairperson (Speaking)**

Submission

Good afternoon.

Firstly, I would like to thank you for allowing me the opportunity on the behalf of the EPIC Working Group to speak to you today.

You may not know who we are, that's not surprising; the live event industry has prospered for decades with little state intervention and no state aid. We have never needed your help before, we have never received funding from the Arts Council, nor any department with responsibility for arts or culture. 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.

We are, and should be invisible. If we have done our job well, you will never know we were there. You just walk on stage and speak into a microphone, with the lights shining on you, the autocue lined up, and the cameras rolling, at an Ard fheis, or other event, and your words appear on the RTE news that night. We must retain the skills built up in our sector, in order to maintain that standard of service to Ireland.

But now we are in a crisis, created by the restrictions required to fight the Covid19 pandemic. The industry that we love so much is on its knees. 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. Now we need to step out of the shadows of backstage and shine a light of our needs, no longer can we afford to be invisible.

Please do not confuse us with the funded arts. We greatly welcome the funding recently administered to the Arts Council, but that funding will not make its way to the businesses and staff supported by this working group. The non-funded Live Entertainment and Arts Sector accounts for a vast multiple of both ticket sales and turnover in comparison to the funded sector, this is a much bigger business.

This past weekend should have been one of the busiest our industry has seen. In excess of 500,000 people would have been attending events from Marlay Park to Live At The Marquee and from Malahide Castle to Irish Independent Park to name but a few.

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

The live entertainment industry is a business of innovators, a business of entrepreneurs and creators, a business which was thriving before Covid and will again in its wake. We are commercial, profit making entities and we are happy with that. We risk our own money to build businesses, these businesses span the length and breath of the country, 65% are based outside of the Greater Dublin Area.

Businesses like Made For Stage in Limerick, Event Power in Thurles, Donohue Marquees in Carlow. Venues like the Roisin Dubh, The Spirit Store, Cyprus Avenue and the INEC. Festivals like Sea Sessions in Bundoran & The Vodafone Comedy Carnival in Galway. This industry touches every part of the island. Our reach is far, our actions are seen worldwide, Ireland's seat on the UN Security Council, starting as a comment during a U2 show, visits of Barack Obama, The Pope, and historically the Queen of the UK, all facilitated by our industry.

All over the world, the Ireland Brand is sold, using the festivals, events and entertainment provided by our industry and the funded arts community. The funded sector is starting to see supports provided, now the non-funded sector must be addressed too. Events keep both local & national community spirit alive, from vintage steam rallies to St Patricks Festival, the National Ploughing to Electric Picnic. Unless 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.

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, according to the latest pre-covid figures.

In the past when you ran a large scale event in Ireland, we had to look abroad for the equipment and the people to run it. We don't do that anymore; we have an indigenous workforce here that are the best in the world. World Tours start here because the artists know that the people they will work with are highly skilled. Just last Friday as part of Comic Relief, Hozier, a brilliantly talented Irish Artist stood on the pitch in Croke Park, a performance that is now being lauded worldwide, an Irish Lighting Company, an Irish Lighting Designer, an Irish Director.

For decades when money needed to be raised for a charity, we were asked to help. Now, for the first time we have to ask, we need to ask for help and support, as other industries get back to work. We were one of the first industries to shut and we will be the last to return to full capacity.

This is why we are asking for the supports listed in our submission.

This is an industry 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.

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 are not asking for a hand out, but we do 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.

Thank You

ENDS