

Federation of Scottish Theatre & Festivals Edinburgh
23 April 2021

TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP ON SAFER SYSTEMS: RESPONSES TO LATEST SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT DRAFT GUIDELINES | (CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): CALCULATING PHYSICAL DISTANCING CAPACITY IN PUBLIC SETTINGS – DRAFT)

Responses to latest draft Scottish Government guidance on performing arts and events from members of Festivals Edinburgh and the Federation of Scottish Theatre

1. Capacity and distancing

- Members' main comments are about capacity, even at level 0. The maximum indoors is 400 but all events will be asked to calculate physical distance based capacity (PDBC) in line with guidance and taking into account the additional considerations listed on page 4, 2m social distancing is not economically viable.
- Social distancing now required at 2.5m seated on this calculation. We would welcome a clarification of under what circumstances the [SGSA Method 1](#) measure will be satisfactory (2m nose-to-nose, or from centre of seat).
- Many venues have hospitality areas which have 1m social distancing and auditorium 2m. How will this work?
- Page 4 says that maximum capacity has to include staff. This needs absolute clarification – does this include performers who will be in a different part of the building?
- There is nothing about passing in rows of seats (for example, for someone having to leave their seat for any reason)
- For audience interactions with one another, the following factors reduce risk significantly compared to other settings like the workplace, restaurants, bars, transport, sporting activity etc:
 - Theatre is a more carefully controlled and managed environment. (We can dictate when people arrive, when they take their seat and how they get to it etc.)
 - Audiences are relatively passive throughout the show, apart from the occasional moment of laughter they are more passive than people talking/shouting in other social settings or partaking in sport for example.
- Treatment of households/bubbles: need confirmation that parties from the same household/bubble can sit together without social distancing, and need clarity on seating plans for people from different households
- If you have to maintain 2m clear routes for people to pass within the auditorium, then even the low numbers in the PDBC are not achievable. I cannot think of a venue where this would be practicable. Sector needs clarity on how the Scottish Government sees routes for people to pass

might work within an auditorium setting – typical layouts, routes in and out for individuals during performance etc?

2. Ventilation

- Clarity is needed on ventilation, both in auditoria and circulation spaces.
- Many auditoria have better air handling systems than many hospitality venues.

3. Data and rationale for Scotland/England differences

- What evidence is the PDBC based on?
- Is the Scottish Government using different data from England?
- What is the rationale for Scotland's policy vs England's 50% capacity from 17 May, potentially 100% post 21 June?

4. Implications for Scotland/England differences

- UK producers are re-routing tours to exclude Scotland at present and sticking to just England where the limits are still difficult, but more achievable.
- Lack of touring to Scotland is already having an impact with severe (and possibly long-lasting) economic implications for major Scottish cities. UK touring circuit severely affected.
- Social distancing of any sort is a real barrier to commercial producers, and most are planning tours on the basis that it will be lifted in England (or at least be at 1m rather than 2m).
- Commercial producers are making plans for UK wide tours now and will just avoid Scotland which will exacerbate the plight of the venues further. Full (or very close to full) capacity with audiences sitting side by side to make touring commercial theatre viable. A 2.5m radius between people is therefore also not viable. A number of commercial producers and some venue owners have fed back that, with capacity limits below 1,000, it doesn't make sense to re-open large scale theatres commercially.

5. Definitions of business or invitation-only events

- Events for business or related purposes / events by invite only are missing from the description of an event, which would mean that conferences are excluded. This is very vague as it's not really covered elsewhere for venues which are licenced as a concert hall/theatre. Business events are a key economic driver for a number of venues, and we need to be able to get them back into our buildings. They also help businesses who may have a lack of space to hold larger meetings.

6. Licensing

- The guidance on page 6 that normal local authority application processes apply is welcome.

7. Forward planning and sector resilience

- Is there a sense of what the long-term plan is for removing social distancing altogether? Is this just a short term measure or is this looking likely to continue into the autumn? Venues, companies and festivals need time to plan.

- What is needed is clear planning horizon of indicative dates for moving from 2m to 1.5m/1m/0m, and clarity on what criteria have to be met in order for the Scottish Government to reduce/lift social distancing.
- A more consistent national approach to guidance on key planning permission issues would be useful to avoid pushing risk and complexity down to local authorities and support coherent national recovery.
- What mitigations would make a difference to reducing social distancing - are they looking at patrons still wearing face-coverings but being able to reduce social distancing, along with testing, for example? The recovery of the sector from a commercial point of view is completely dependent on this as, under these restrictions, it's likely that only subsidised companies will be able to produce work and, even then, is there going to be additional subsidy to make up for reduced capacity?
- We might need to start small as we test the waters but if this remains in place as we work our way down through the levels then whole sector is going to need considerably greater financial support in order to make it temporarily viable for the coming year and possibly beyond.