

Federation of Scottish Theatre/Festivals Edinburgh
Joint Technical Advisory Group on Safer Systems (TAGSS)

1 JUNE 2021 AT 1500 - MINUTES

ATTENDEES: David Butterworth (Royal Lyceum Theatre), Ruth Butterworth (Freelance), Phillip Brown (SOLT/UK Theatre), Louise Gregory (Freelance), John Pike (Horsecross Arts), Graham Sutherland (Citizens Theatre), Gemma Swallow (National Theatre of Scotland), Nik Whybrew (Assembly Roxy Theatre/Assembly Festival), Kevin Kimber (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society), Tom Barnes (Lyth Arts Centre)

PRESENT: Ruth Butterworth (Freelance Covenor), Kirstie Allan (Festivals Edinburgh, minutes), Ann Monfries (Scottish Government), Fiona Sturgeon Shea (FST), Allan Ramsay (FST)

APOLOGIES: Julia Amour (Festivals Edinburgh), Amanda Liddle (FST), Robert Townley (ABTT), Yolanda Aguilar (Shaper Caper), Fi Fraser (Freelance), John Robb (Edinburgh International Festival), Nick Trueman (Pitlochry Festival Theatre), Jennie Green (Great Leap Forward)

1. Introductions

RB welcomed attendees, and reintroduced Fiona Sturgeon-Shea as the new director of FST.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting on 28 April 2021

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as a true and accurate record.

3. Update from Scottish Government

AM shared that the capacity for standing at indoor venues has been brought in line with seating, and that the review of social distancing was due to be published by 7 June. Members noted that it would be good to have sight of the exemptions guidance so they could know what guidance local authorities are working from – **AM confirmed that has been published and she would share with Ruth to circulate.**

AM shared there had been an introductory meeting between the new Cabinet Secretary and representatives from the culture and events sectors. The focus of the discussion was on the impact of social distancing on the ability to reopen. FSS reported that the meeting was positive, the Cabinet Secretary seemed very engaged and attendees were happy to hear him report he was speaking directly with clinicians about the critical impact of physical distancing.

4. Reflections on latest guidance and latest levels.

PB shared that Equity have reported high levels of staff anxiety about returning to work (some issues highlighted were overall uncertainties, not wanting to work with unvaccinated colleagues, concerns about frequent testing requirements). NW noted there is currently no legal guidance for employers on managing staff and testing – can it be enforced?

GS stated that they have concluded from their risk assessment that twice weekly testing be compulsory for staff attending site. As it is free and easily accessed this seems a reasonable measure that is extremely practicable in terms of health and safety. Citizens Theatre do not ask for evidence

of testing from staff but ask staff to declare they have taken a test through an online form. A staff consultation of this process was carried out and there was no resistance – workers want confidence of safety in the workplace. From discussion with English counterparts, this seems to be best practice across other organisations.

5. Update on Risk Assessments and Checklists

Members agreed that the best way to present the information was categorising by types of performance instead of venues. It was key that the risk assessments and checklists do not repeat guidance that has already been published (eg. by APTD and HSE). The targets for these were smaller creative companies who might struggle to find relevant details in the broader guidance, and so TAGSS' publications must be concise and easily referenced.

It was also agreed that the checklist could include questions to prompt thinking for planning scenarios rather than prescriptive answers, for example;

- Have you considered testing (staff and/or audience)?
- Have you considered heavy lifting procedures when only one person can participate?

RB noted that GS and LG have submitted documents with these types of questions to the Dropbox already and they could be easily converted into a simple checklist.

Finally, GS noted that it would be very useful if the TAGSS checklists/risk assessments aligned with the local authorities exemptions guidance.

6. Final Outcome/End Process

Members noted that there needed to be accountability for updating the guidance as things changed after publication. It was agreed that the easiest process would be to create an FAQ page rather than changing guidance routinely. This would allow TAGSS to keep track of queries/requests that members have made. **FSS, GS and RB to discuss developing the FAQ page.**

FST shared that they are producing a 'Covid Awareness' video that acts as a module preparing employees for returning to the workplace. Once finished, employees can take a certificate of completion to present to employers. This was inspired by a similar video created for the film and tv sector, and is aimed at staff who have been out of work or on furlough for most of 2020/2021. **RB offers to connect AR with contact at ScreenScotland** to curate IT skills required to publish the video as soon as possible.

7. Update on what is happening with 2021 planning for FST and Festivals Edinburgh members; and for any other members

JP: Horsecross had 4 indoor concerts with live audience of 100 last week that went very well. Could not provide normal experience as couldn't sit audience near stage and face masks had to remain on – and so ticket prices were low. However audience response was incredibly positive. Behind-the-scenes, more staff were required than initially foreseen, and managing staff movements was difficult at first, but the team were able to adjust.

PB: Reported some issues with queuing in venues as there are now so many things to queue for (QR sign in, temperature check, ticket check, coat room, toilets etc) so need to manage that logistically. Have asked DCMS if there can be flexibility on managing isolating procedures in the future, as don't want to shut down shows immediately when one person gets a ping on their phone.

FE: Imagine Festival is live until 6 June. They have digital events online, in schools and for delegates during the week and outdoor events in four venues across Edinburgh at the weekends. So far they've reported great turn out, particularly for the in-person events.