

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

NOTES 28 APRIL, 3.30-5.30PM VIA ZOOM

ATTENDEES: Tom Barnes (Lyth Arts Centre), David Butterworth (Royal Lyceum Theatre), Ruth Butterworth (Freelance), Phillip Brown (SOLT/UK Theatre), Fi Fraser (Freelance), Jennie Green (Great Leap Forward), Louise Gregory (Freelance), John Pike (Horsecross Arts), John Robb (Edinburgh International Festival), Graham Sutherland (Citizens Theatre), Gemma Swallow (National Theatre of Scotland), Nick Trueman (Pitlochry Festival Theatre), Nik Whybrew (Assembly Roxy Theatre/Assembly Festival).

PRESENT: Ruth Butterworth (Freelance Covenor), Julia Amour (Festivals Edinburgh), Sebastian Howell (Scottish Government), Amanda Liddle (FST), Joseph Peach (FST), Fiona Sturgeon Shea (FST)

APOLOGIES: Robert Townley (ABTT), Kevin Kimber (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society), Yolanda Aguilar (Shaper Caper)

1. Introductions

RB welcomed attendees, including Phillip Brown (SOLT/UK Theatre) and Sebastian Howell (Scottish Government), both attending the group for the first time.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting on 18 February 2021

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

3. Update on National Gateway Program

JA began a short update to members on the National Gateway Program, noting that eligibility details for this process are still emerging. Further developments are expected in June, when the picture with the country being more open becomes clearer.

SH added that an example of the more bespoke approach being taken by the program might include increasing the cap on attendee numbers which comes in each level, while measures such as physical distancing and mask wearing would remain in place.

JR shared some of Edinburgh International Festival's event planning scenarios and experience in Gateway process.

- EIF are planning to use large spaces, capable of accommodating relatively high numbers whilst maintaining distancing and mask wearing measures. This is being planned based on these spaces being defined as "outdoor" per current statutory guidance.
- That definition requires a structural "openness" of 50%. EIF structures plan to exceed that being 60% open.
- There appears the possibility of some movement on permitted audience numbers for these events, but planning continues based on 2m+ distancing and mask wearing.
- Environmental health teams have asked for further data on the circulation of air. EIF have brought in an expert from Edinburgh University to write a paper on aerosol dispersion and transmission risk within these structures.
- Local Authorities appear reluctant to work to the statutory definition of an outdoor covered space. SH added that further work is required on the indoor/outdoor question.

- The National Gateway process is an opportunity to present evidence and methods of working to clinicians, but as yet there has been minimal movement beyond current guidance.

FF shared details of ongoing work with Imagine on Edinburgh International Children's Festival, being undertaken through the National Gateway process.

- Planning activity is being undertaken assuming protective level 3 guidance
- All performance will be outdoor and on a “walk past” basis
- The biggest site will stand 70 people
- The Local Authority have sought further detail on how physical distancing will be maintained

4. Reflection on ongoing issues

- Members indicated that even though there is the possibility of movement on permitted capacities through the National Gateway process; the limits on space to accommodate 2m+ physical distancing make reaching either original or increased capacity limits an impossibility for most.
- Several members expressed that there still exists considerable confusion on which regulations apply to multi-use spaces – i.e. venue spaces, foyers etc. which also contain hospitality services
- Members reflected upon issues relating to guidance for airflow and ventilation in indoor spaces. Current guidance specifies 8-10 litres per second of airflow, while many venues have the ability to provide three times as much airflow. The point was raised that this fact should be taken in to account when considering other mitigations such as social distancing.
- Questions were raised on the use of lateral flow testing to enable less restricted events. NW mentioned that following a meeting with Local Authority the position has not changed owing to doubts from Public Health Department. These are not yet seen as a viable means of allowing more people to attend events and reducing restrictions.
- Members agreed that the sector have been making considerable efforts to work within restrictions, doing so within much more stringent parameters than industries such as hospitality. It is difficult to understand these disparities, especially given the sector’s track record when it comes to managing audiences and working safely.
- Members discussed the possibility that test events taking place in England will impact future regulations applied to the sector in Scotland. There is hope that the Liverpool pilot will encourage clinicians, ministers and outbreak management to be more understanding of needs across the sector.

5. Reflection on funding and sector support

- Members discussed the urgent need for clarity on further financial support. Under current restrictions most activity is economically unviable, and with the furlough scheme set to end in September, there is the chance of redundancy processes beginning in June.
- Members reflected upon the fact that without further support, the sector is facing a crisis situation.
- Discussions are ongoing in Culture Counts steering group towards linking up communication of this message with work being undertaken across the culture sector.
- Clarity is urgently required on £40million of consequential funding earmarked for the arts.

- Members discussed how it is important for funding to reach freelancers, small companies and producers. The exodus of skilled staff and infrastructure from the sector is huge. Some members mentioned they are now struggling to find crew for upcoming tours.

6. Reflection on the situation in England and internationally

- At a recent test event in Barcelona, where 5000 people gathered for live performance with physical distancing or mask wearing restrictions, six people tested positive for Covid-19 following the event, but these cases were untraceable back to the event itself.
- Getting test events off the ground in England was a difficult process, with decisions on measures, working practice, insurance and liability proving hard to reach. Learning from these events has potential to be very useful going forward.
- The requirement for 1m physical distancing in England makes re-opening a considerably more viable prospect.
- For England-based or international producers, touring in Scotland is not financially viable. There is significant concern over how long this will remain the case.
- The third round of the Cultural Recovery Fund will take place soon, but there is concern over how widely this will reach within the theatre ecology.
- Insurance remains a difficult area. Without government backed insurance akin to what has been made available to the screen sector, organisations planning to re-open are carrying considerable liability.

7. Risk Assessment

RB is sending round a risk assessment checklist, asking members to populate the list – the aim is to work out what is needed and would apply under categories previously identified by the group.

Action – RB – share risk assessment checklist. **Action – whole group** – populate list.

In terms of outputs, the starting point is enabling the sector to demonstrate robust planning and processes to inform conversations with Local Authorities.

PB outlined that it is key to engage staff with the contents of risk assessments – they will play a key role in enacting mitigations both for themselves and audiences. In risk assessing for Covid-19, it is useful to see this as building on what would've been in place before the pandemic, as opposed to starting again.