

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

CALL FOR VIEWS ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SCOTLAND'S CULTURE AND TOURISM SECTORS

SUBMISSION FROM WASPS

Wasps welcomes this review of the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the creative sector and the opportunity to comment on the funding support currently available to individuals and organisations. This submission sets out the impact on Wasps as an organisation, on the creative community we support across the whole of Scotland and highlights the challenges that now need to be addressed to enable the creative economy to recover and emerge as a more resilient and vibrant sector for Scotland.

Impact on Wasps:

Wasps is a 43-year-old charity and home to Scotland's largest creative community, operating 20 buildings which support the work of 1,000 creative individuals and organisations, including 38 creative industries, 35 cultural organisations and over 830 artists and makers. Our buildings and their tenants, located throughout Scotland, deliver significant economic, social, and cultural benefits in city centres, rural, and island communities. A not-for-profit social enterprise, Wasps' core costs are 100% funded by rental income. At the beginning of March 2020, occupancy across our 20 buildings (in 13 Local Authority Areas) was 99%.

Wasps closed all 20 sites as a result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on 24 March, based on Scottish Government guidance; and our heritage construction project (Inverness Creative Academy Phase 2) closed down on 25 March.

Many of our tenants lost 80-100% of their income overnight as a result of COVID-19 due to the cancellation of exhibitions, workshops, and international projects. To support our tenants and the sudden financial implications of the pandemic, Wasps deferred rent collection for April and May, a position which is unsustainable long-term for the organisation: without rental income or other financial support, Wasps will not survive to provide space and support for the creative community.

Impact on our Creative Community:

As detailed above, many of our creative community have lost a significant proportion of their livelihood due to COVID-19. Many have applied for funding support towards the survival of their own practice and livelihood. The various funding schemes provided by the Scottish Government, Local Authorities, Creative Scotland and associated organisations have been most welcome where artists have been eligible, there are many, however who fall below the eligibility thresholds and as such have not been able to access this financial support. For those eligible and successful, the funding provided is short-term; consideration of support for the long-term recovery

period is now essential if there is to be a return to a creative practice as a sustainable career.

“There are hundreds of artists across Scotland who benefit from the high-quality, safe, professionally-run facilities which WASPS provides. The loss of any part of them would be devastating to the artists and the communities they’re part of.”

- Wasps Tenant, West Park Place, Edinburgh

Challenges:

As a creative organisation of Wasps scale, we have not been eligible for many of the funding schemes provided.

We have applied for and secured some funding support from the Third Sector Resilience Fund and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and have applied to the Pivotal Enterprise Fund. These schemes, and the speed they have been set up and administered have been critical in Wasps survival so far and in turn has reduced some of the financial pressure many of our tenants in the creative community are facing.

However, more is still needed. The impact of this national pandemic on Scotland’s creative sector cannot be understated. For Wasps, this is the single biggest challenge the organisation has faced in its 43-year history. The sustainable long-term survival of the organisation, and in turn, Scotland’s largest creative community, is very much dependent on vital financial support at this critical lockdown stage.

As with many studio operators with larger, multiple properties, we are not eligible for the Small Business Grants as many of our studios do not fit the defined rateable value thresholds. Some adjustment to the terms of eligibility to this scheme would help significantly, allowing us to apply to this scheme across the country and in turn enable us to support creative businesses nationally, which cannot apply directly to this scheme.

Applications to other funds are in competition with frontline charities supporting ‘at risk’ groups, hospitality, and tourism organisations, more aligned with criteria. As with other arts organisations, our operational sustainability is a careful balance to cover costs whilst delivering against charitable aims, therefore borrowing using the COVID-19 loans available is not sustainable and would put our organisation at significant financial risk.

If we as a studio provider are supported, it will allow us to survive the COVID-19 crisis, and in turn, support Scotland’s largest creative community to return to their studios and continue their contribution to the Scottish creative economy.

Therefore, a combination of adjustment to the criteria for funding schemes in existence and a consideration of long-term support for Scotland's affected creative sector is now necessary.

As the leading provider of creative studio space in Scotland, we are now adapting our business model to adjust to the new norm we expect to be working in as the country moves into recovery stage. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Government to identify ways the creative people we support could adapt and develop, including increased digital activity. Through such proactive, collaborative working Scotland's cultural community can, and will recover, emerging stronger more resilient and vibrant.

A Carlin
CEO
WASPS

20 May 2020