Dear Prime Minister,

I write on behalf of the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM), further to your evidence session with the Liaison Committee on 7th July.

I wrote to you on 27th April, along with more than 300 representatives of the creative industries, to outline a series of issues in relation to visas, work permits, and movement of goods and people, arising from the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) which mean it is now virtually impossible for many creative professionals to work in Europe on a short term or freelance basis.

We welcomed the commitment you made at the Liaison Committee on 24th March to address the crisis which is facing the creative industries as a result. Therefore, it was extremely disappointing that, in your evidence of 7th July, you were unable to provide detail of what progress has been made and what practical steps are being taken by Government to resolve these issues.

People working in the UK’s world leading creative industries have already faced months of uncertainty about their future earnings and job opportunities. Sector leaders have had many conversations with civil servants where we have presented solutions to the prohibitive new costs and bureaucracy which our members now face.

I am sure you will understand our frustration that another two months have passed since you made this commitment – and yet no progress has been demonstrated on these crucial issues.

I have reiterated the most pressing of these below and ask you to take action on them as a matter of urgency:

1. Negotiate a bespoke Visa Waiver Agreement (VWA) with the EU for our sector, covering all creative professionals including technical and support staff as well as journalists.

   We have taken legal advice from a leading QC who has advised us that a VWA would be legally binding and be compatible with your manifesto pledge to take back control of our borders. It would not require a renegotiation of the TCA.

   **Will you engage with the EU Commission and move forward with this proposal?**

2. Negotiate bilateral agreements with key individual EU Member States that do not currently offer sufficient cultural exemptions for work permits, or which are the most important financially for creative workers.

   You stated in your evidence that “About 17 EU members are quite good [in terms of access for UK touring artists, musicians and performers]”. However, it is not the case that touring is as accessible in all of these countries as it was prior to the TCA. In fact, restrictions vary widely between them and in many cases are still prohibitive.
While you have said in the past that conversations are ongoing with individual EU member states around this issue, my understanding is that the immediate focus has been on improving their guidance around entry and work requirements. As made clear in the letter of 27th April, this on its own will not be sufficient to give the sector the mobility it needs.

**Will you now make detail on the progress of these discussions’ public?**

3. Provide comprehensive, accurate guidance on the Government website around visas, work permits, and movement of goods and people in Europe.

In recent months, we have noticed several inaccuracies in the guidance on the Government website. There are cases (For example, the Czech Republic and Norway) where the work permit exemptions for performing artists have been omitted from the guidance, and in others (eg. Denmark and Latvia) it is very unclear from the guidance provided what, if any visas, are required.

**Will you ensure all guidance on these issues is regularly reviewed to ensure it is accurate and up to date?**

4. Provide an emergency funding package to support creative professionals given the level of additional costs they now face when undertaking work in Europe.

**Will you, or representatives from your Government, meet sector leaders to discuss the support required?**

5. Urgently take steps to reduce the adverse impact of the new road haulage and cross-trade rules that have made it impossible for UK established touring companies to facilitate pan-European tours.

**Can you ensure these issues will be on the agenda for discussion at the next meeting of the EU-UK Partnership Council?**

After the months of uncertainty the creative industries have faced, I would be extremely grateful if you could provide an update on the practical next steps the Government will be taking to address these issues going forward.

To date, restrictions on foreign travel due to the coronavirus pandemic have masked the full impact of these issues. However, as these restrictions ease, the challenges which creative professionals now face travelling and working in Europe – and the consequences for their livelihoods and the wider economy – will become increasingly clear. I urge you once again to act on this as a matter of urgency, before widespread touring is due to recommence.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

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