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Lords,

I would like to reiterate my thanks to Lord Cormack for securing a debate on such an important subject, and to all noble Lords for their insightful, valuable contributions to the topic.

Due to time constraints, I was unfortunately unable to address all points raised during the debate in my closing speech, and will therefore respond to the remaining points in this letter.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester, Lord Wood of Anfield and the Earl of Clancarty enquired about what we would be learning from international examples. We have noted what other countries are doing. Direct comparisons are difficult, as both the existing funding mechanisms and support measures taken are different in each country. We are working closely with our arm's-length bodies and sector representatives to understand the impact of COVID-19 now and in the future and to understand what support museums and heritage organisations need.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury, the Earl of Clancarty and Baroness Bull raised concerns about support for freelance workers in the sector. We recognise that freelancers are vital to the work of our museums and heritage sectors. The Self-Employed Income Support Scheme has opened for claims, weeks ahead of the original timetable. Millions of self-employed individuals will receive direct cash grants through a ground-breaking UK-wide scheme to help them during the coronavirus outbreak. The plans will see the self-employed receive up to £2,500 per month in grants for at least 3 months. The government continues to monitor the effectiveness of this support.

Noble Lords raised a number of enquiries about additional financial measures to support museums and heritage.

Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate, Baroness Altmann and Lord Janvrin enquired about incentives for philanthropy, including through tax benefits, payroll giving and incentives for greater corporate philanthropy and lifetime legacies.

Government support has always only been part of the equation in the arts and culture funding ecosystem. The support and contributions from private donors, trusts, and foundations has long been another essential component and now, more than ever, their support is vital to the continuation of so many organisations, their outreach programmes and professional artistic practices. Government is in touch with trusts and foundations, including through a roundtable held recently by the Minister for Digital and Culture, and with the active involvement of Neil Mendoza, the new DCMS Commissioner for Cultural Recovery and Renewal.

The Lord Bishop of Portsmouth, Baroness Altmann, Lord Cormack and Lord Duncan of Springbank, raised concerns about VAT on repairs to historic buildings. Repairs, maintenance and alteration to all buildings, including listed properties, are charged at the standard rate of 20%. I understand that many see this as a perverse incentive to demolish existing buildings entirely and start again. I also recognise that owners of older properties, particularly listed buildings, are likely to have to pay more, and more regularly to maintain their homes and that the proper upkeep of buildings, especially those of heritage significance, is in the wider public interest. We are aware of this issue and I am pleased to say that my officials are engaged with the sector's tax working group who are aspiring to build a robust evidence base and develop targeted interventions that might benefit listed buildings. As with all tax matters, this is something which HMT keeps under regular review.

Lord Russell of Liverpool raised the issue of guidelines for charities accessing their reserves. Reserves are of course very important for charities to maintain against risks, but in these unprecedented times many charities will be considering how to access their reserves. In some cases we are aware of organisations speaking to donors around unrestricting previous funding. Charities should continue to follow guidance on use of reserves.

Lord Houghton of Richmond enquired about the redirecting of funding for Festival 2022. Festival 2022 is just one of many future events and programming that will be important to the recovery of the sectors, following the impact of Covid-19. There is no current plan to defer Festival 2022. Planning is underway and we expect Festival 2022 commissioning and the Research & Development phase to begin later this year. This will offer opportunities to organisations and individuals through research, strategic, and development work.

I will now turn to a number of queries that were raised about support for specific sectors.

The Earl of Devon raised concerns about support for privately owned heritage. We recognise that many heritage assets are privately owned and that owners are struggling financially in the present situation. We have been working closely with the wider heritage sector to listen to their concerns and ensure any emerging issues are escalated in government. Organisations like the Historic Houses Association, a body that represents more than 1,650 privately owned historic houses, have been in close contact with us throughout and have already benefited from initiatives like the Job Retention Scheme that have enabled them to maintain staff. Similarly, support packages from our arm's length bodies, like Historic England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, have supported the wider sector, prioritising sites and organisations most in need.

Similarly Lord Stevenson, Lord Baker of Dorking, Baroness Wilcox and Lord Mandelson raised concerns about independent museums, and those which earn most of their own income from their visitors, have been particularly affected by being closed to help fight the spread of COVID-19. We are working closely with arm's-length bodies and the Association for Independent Museums to understand the impact of COVID-19 and the support these museums need to return to welcoming visitors soon and in the future.

Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville asked about support for private galleries. The UK is home to a thriving art market, including a wide range of galleries and businesses who are also able to benefit from the wider business support measures. The Government is in frequent contact with representatives and individuals from the art market, to provide support and guidance.

Baroness Scott raised a question about the impact on archives. We are very much aware of the issue for archives, which have many similarities to those of museums and galleries. DCMS is the parent organisation of The National Archives, a non-ministerial department, which supports archives around the country and we are hearing from them about the support required. Baroness Scott noted that while closed at Kew, The National Archives has made digital downloads free to users.

Lord Bhatia enquired about additional funding to clean historic buildings such as churches and cathedrals. The Government has provided support to churches and cathedrals through a range of schemes, including the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, currently funded to £42 million per annum to provide grants equivalent to the amount paid in VAT on eligible work to listed buildings of all faiths. Lord Truscott enquired about support for our theatres. As well as the wider business support measures, DCMS has also been working closely with Arts Council England to monitor and respond to the challenges being faced by the arts and cultural sectors, and on 24 March Arts Council England announced a £160m emergency response package, made possible by Government funding, to ensure the immediate resilience of this vital sector, and to ensure that, where possible, it can respond creatively to the needs of communities at this extremely challenging time.

Many theatres have benefitted from this support, but we understand there will be ongoing challenges. This is why we recently set up the Entertainment and Events working group, which is one of the 8 working groups that will support the Government's Recreation and Leisure Taskforce and will include Arts Council England and UK Theatre amongst other organisations from the arts and culture sector. Support for the Theatre sector will of course be a key point for discussion.

Lord Shutt enquired about assistance for heritage railways. These are also able to benefit from the wider business support measures. Furthermore, I was delighted to see that several heritage railways have received support in the first round of Heritage Emergency Fund grants awarded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. These grants, ranging in value up to £50,000, have been awarded to railways across the country, from the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway to the Isle of Wight Railway, totalling over £200,000 of assistance. The Heritage Emergency Fund is open to applications until the end of June. There were a number of enquiries regarding wider cultural policy at this time.

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle raised the issue of cultural education. We recognise that, during these challenging times, it is important cultural and creative education continues to form a key part of a broad and balanced curriculum, as well as a source of enriching and enjoyable experiences for school children. That is why we made a commitment in our election manifesto to offer a new Arts Premium for secondary schools, to help young people learn creative skills and widen their horizons.

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle also enquired about public art. Government recognises the huge contribution the arts make, not only to the economy and international reputation of the United Kingdom, but also to the wellbeing and enrichment of its people. Through Arts Council England, DCMS supports a number of community focused arts projects that put arts and culture at the centre of communities. The Cultural Development Fund, for example, launched in 2019 across five areas supports regional towns and cities to implement transformative culture-led economic growth and productivity strategies by investing in place-based cultural initiatives, making places more attractive to live, work and visit. Alongside this, the Cultural Investment Fund is the biggest one-off Government investment in cultural infrastructure, local museums and neighbourhood libraries in the last century. In October 2019, £250m of funding was confirmed for the cultural and creative sector. The investment will drive local growth, support young people, and reinforce culture's role at the heart of communities.

Baroness Randerson and Lord Holmes of Richmond raised the issue of free entry to our museums. Maintaining free entry for our national museums was a manifesto commitment. This commitment to free entry to the permanent collections at DCMS-sponsored museums has had a dramatic effect on the total number of visitors, which rose by 51% in the first 10 years of the policy. This Government is deeply committed to ensuring that everyone, no matter their background or geographic location, can experience and enjoy the brilliant collections and benefits that our national and regional museums bring.

There were also a number of questions about wider governmental strategy.

Lord Stevenson noted that many museum and heritage sites attract a great number of international tourists. Baroness Kennedy of Cradley enquired about the impact of the 14-day quarantine policy for airline passengers on our visitor attractions. As the level of infection in the UK reduces below that in some other countries, it will be important to minimise the risk of transmissions being reintroduced from abroad.

In line with many other countries, the Government will introduce a series of measures and restrictions at the UK border, to contribute to keeping the overall number of transmissions in the UK as low as possible, which will apply to all arrivals other than those on a short list of exemptions.

The Government has considered the economic impacts of this policy, including on the tourism industry. The changes will be subject to a rolling review every three weeks to ensure they are in line with the latest scientific evidence and remain effective and proportionate. We are engaging with the tourism sector on a regular basis and will ensure the impacts on the sector are considered in the review. We recognise that these are extremely difficult conditions for tourism businesses. The Government is committed to helping the tourism industry through this crisis and during the recovery period. Ministers and officials are engaging with the industry about the impacts and recovery on a regular basis.

Our immediate national priority is containing the spread of the virus. As soon as it is safe to do so, we will be encouraging people to book holidays and support tourism companies once again.

Baroness Bull enquired about the sector representations on the Cultural Renewal Taskforce announced last week. The panel will help identify and resolve specific issues, and play an important role in the development of guidance for the sector to restart. There are a number of working groups which feed into the Cultural Renewal Taskforce. These aim to represent all parts of the sector, including smaller institutions across the country and those representing freelancers.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury, Lord Russell of Liverpool and Lord Holmes of Richmond enquired about reopening guidelines for the sector. As I mentioned in my speech, I wanted to provide further information on this. The Cultural Renewal Taskforce includes working groups for both Heritage and Museums & Galleries. These working groups are led by DCMS Ministers, include key sector representatives and are overseeing the production of sector specific guidance that will supplement existing workplace guidance. We expect publication of guidance documents in the coming weeks. This will allow time for organisations to plan before they reopen. We hope that these guidelines will give confidence to staff, volunteers and visitors.

On 11 May the Government published the road map setting out how we expect organisations such as museums, galleries and historic sites, as well as places of worship, to open back up and welcome visitors again.

Baroness Doocey raised concerns about perceived inequity between different sectors, notably between estate agents and wedding venues in historic sites. As the roadmap sets out, heritage attractions are included in the third phase of reopening. This means the earliest that they will be able to open from is July 4th. They can take enquiries from people wishing to book weddings or other events in the meantime.

I would also like to note receipt of the cultural strategy produced by the North East Culture Partnership, with thanks to Baroness Quin who mentioned this in her speech.

I am copying this letter to all Lords who spoke in the debate and placing a copy in the Library of the House.



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