



“To be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing”

Raymond Williams, Welsh cultural theorist (The Analysis of Culture)

Why we chose to submit a team in response to R&D call for Festival UK 2022

Since the announcement of [Festival UK 2022](#) shortlist of consortia selected to press ahead with the next stage R & D for ambitious mass engagement events in 2022 there's been both positive and negative feedback. The origins of the festival are linked to Brexit and, coupled with the current government's slow response to supporting the arts and culture sector in the pandemic, there has been a backlash from artists, organisations and freelancers opposed to what they see as a politically-driven event tainted by Brexit.

Festival UK 2022 issued its own statement, which can be seen on social media via searching **#festivaluk2022** on Twitter and also at the bottom of this document.

As leaders of a successful consortium bid, we want to articulate our position:

We actively want to play a part in shaping what Britain's cultural landscape looks like in 2022 and beyond; we want people to participate in an ambitious project that brings together artists, engineers and environmental scientists; we want to create space for under-represented voices and emerging talent...and we trust the F2022 team to ensure that we have the creative freedom to explore the questions our R&D process began to ask. The Festival's stated premise is based around expressions of hope – and we share with Raymond Williams a sense that there is value in the idea that hope may combat despair.

Below are responses to some of the issues trending on social media.

Why is Walk the Plank engaging in this Festival when the government has decimated the arts sector through its mishandling of the pandemic? The money should be re-directed to supporting the arts sector.

As an arts organisation that has been significantly affected by Covid-19 we, and our network of freelancers, have been part of many vocal responses to the government's delayed support to the arts sector, including the #WeMakeEvents marches. We have also benefited from Culture Recovery Fund money to enable us to survive.

Festival UK 22 is a committed event with ring-fenced funding and a political will to make it happen. We believe that the best use of these funds – our money, as tax payers, not the government's - is to use them for the purpose outlined in the Festival UK 22 literature.

Not since the Olympics has there been an event of this scale and creative ambition and, regardless of the fact that it is taking place under the watch of a Tory government, the most important thing is that we have this once-in-a-generation opportunity for the sector, and the wealth of talent that exists within it, to do something amazing. The challenges of isolation, lockdown and uncertainty created by the pandemic surely make this more important than ever.

It's worth noting that the festival is actively supported by all four UK-nations regardless of the political leadership that exists within each one, and it has cross-party support within Westminster.

Migrants in Culture: “Framed around false-narratives of ‘openness’ and ‘optimism’, FUK22 is a celebration of nationalistic imperialism capitalising on racism & xenophobia that led to Brexit, Windrush Scandal, Hostile Environment, the rise of UK far-right, Grenfell & societal divisions & inequality”

While the origins of this festival were propagated by the desire to create a national expression of post-Brexit unity, we believe that both the public and the government are extremely wary of this becoming an unbridled jingoistic celebration of Britishness. We have listened to and trust Martin Green - who has a laudable record leading major cultural events, including the London 2012 Olympic ceremonies and Hull UK City of Culture 2017 – and his team to ensure that Festival UK 22 won't be hijacked to become a Trojan horse for a government-bolstering feelgood moment.

Following the UK's Brexit referendum, we issued our own [Our thoughts on Brexit](#) which clearly state our belief that we're all better off working together. We believe Festival UK 2022 can provide a valuable platform to draw people and communities together - in particular, those that have felt marginalised or isolated from the polarising impacts of Brexit, and this is what we aim to achieve.

By being part of Festival UK 2022 you're signing up to a Tory agenda...

This is an understandable reaction by anyone or any arts organisation that witnessed the slow-to-respond 'too little too late' approach to supporting the arts, and the freelance community, following decimation of the sector by the pandemic.

We disagree that the festival, or our part in it, support a Tory Agenda. Our decision to lead a Team was based on a belief that, regardless of the political colour of the government, this was a rare opportunity to work on a project with scale and creative ambition – one which would give as broad a range of partners as possible the chance to collectively work on something could have a major impact, and leave a legacy.

Brexit has, without doubt, caused deep divisions, xenophobia and economic upheaval, all of which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Festival UK 2020 gives the arts and cultural sector an opportunity to mobilise the healing power of art to help repair differences. Our work on the Derry-Londonderry 2013 UK City of Culture, for instance, is a powerful testimony to how this can work.

We also believe that the R & D process was an important moment of scrutiny and rigour to ensure that the creative responses of diverse and extraordinary teams fulfilled a challenging remit to ensure that each event truly reflects the ambitions of the festival, namely “to create extraordinary acts of public engagement that bring established organisations and renowned individuals to work with under-represented voices and emerging talent”.

Hope springs eternal

After four years of division and discord, we feel that it makes sense to embrace a festival that aims to bring hope and optimism to a country that faces a huge number of challenges, including the negative impacts of Brexit.

Having operated within the arts sector for nearly 30 years we've created work against the backdrop of many different governments, each with their own agendas around culture and the arts. We see Festival UK 2022 as an opportunity to inspire a new generation of people to help reset the agenda through an extraordinary moment. By working collaboratively across all four nations as well as across STEM subjects, we think art and cultural expression might give us a pretty good chance of bringing people and communities together.

We'll remain committed to holding this and other governments to account on their support of the arts sector beyond 2022.

Official statement from Festival UK 2022 issued in October 2020.



“Festival UK* 2022 is about bringing people together – creatively, as audiences and participants, and from across the four nations and beyond. It's an unprecedented opportunity for talented and forward-thinking creatives from science, technology, engineering and maths, as well as the arts, to collaborate in ways they might never have imagined.

Whilst some may have misconceptions about what the festival is seeking to achieve, hundreds of brilliant individuals are now working together to develop genuinely ambitious projects. This includes more than 100 freelancers at a critical time for all creative sectors. When we announce the ten projects next year that will go into full production for 2022, we are certain they will excite people, whilst demonstrating the festival's positive aims.”

This Twitter feed thread from Jim Hollington, cited by Festival* UK 2022 offers a response to the issues trending on social media which people may find useful too.

 **Jim Hollington** @jimhol

I've been asked why @DanceBase is participating in a consortium proposing project ideas to #FestivalUK2022 given the view of many that this is a celebration of a Brexit roundly rejected in Scotland. Here's my thought process:

10:27 AM · Nov 18, 2020 from Edinburgh, Scotland · Twitter for iPad

1 Retweet 4 Quote Tweets 18 Likes

   

 **Jim Hollington** @jimhol · 5h
Replying to @jimhol

For what it's worth, my personal view is that Brexit is a catastrophic mistake and makes me feel fortunate that I'm no longer @BritishCouncil and seen by some as representing the UK around the world

 **Jim Hollington** @jimhol · 5h

But @BritishCouncil are experts at using government money allocated for 'soft power' to give artists freedom to create and collaborate. The best way of 'messaging' your country's creativity is to support creative people without giving them boundaries or messages to convey

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 **Jim Hollington** @jimhol · 5h

@DanceBase role is to support the success of dance in Scotland. To reject out of hand being part of a project that could bring millions of pounds to support dance and dance artists would not be right. From my @BritishCouncil experience I looked at three 'tests':

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 **Jim Hollington** @jimhol · 5h

1. Is the money giving artists and creative people freedom? The brief is simple: 'a project that celebrates creativity and innovation and reaches 66 million people' so for me that passes the test

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 **Jim Hollington** @jimhol · 5h

2. Is it being run outside government by people who will give artists freedom and avoid crass propaganda? Martin Green has a fantastic pedigree using government 'festivals' to deliver incredible creative work that brings people together, from 2012 Olympics to Hull City of Culture

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 **Jim Hollington** @jimhol · 5h

3. Are our main funders @CreativeScots and more importantly @scotgov supportive? I've had discussions with both, and it's very clear they are pragmatic about how it can be made to work. It's not an accident that @scotgov logo is on this and Event Scotland are directly involved.

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 **Jim Hollington** @jimhol · 5h

So I'm happy to be part of a consortium that will think big about how to use this money, and how it might support dance in Scotland. It's a judgement that many won't agree with and I respect and understand that, but hope people can see it's a considered decision