

SPOTLIGHT

Impact of Brexit: CMS Select Committee

Executive Summary

The situation facing UK performers and those parts of our creative industries that support them is dire. The loss of freedom of movement¹ post-Brexit has installed prohibitive administrative barriers and costs that have had a profound impact on the entire casting process. In the majority of cases, it is simply easier not to engage with opportunities for performer employment in the EU and to pretend that they do not exist, than to invest time and effort for an audition only to lose out to an EU performer who has the legal right to work where the work takes place. Some streams of employment are now almost completely unavailable to UK performers, such as commercials, where the quick turnaround from audition to filming cannot be met by the administrative requirements placed on that UK performer wishing to work in the EU. In some cases, casting directors are finding the impact on their businesses unsustainable. Drama schools are seeing a loss of income that affects all their students and agents are having to navigate a complex hiring environment for their performers making difficult decisions about whether certain opportunities are worth their clients even auditioning for, which will in turn impact their earnings.

The music industry has been outstanding at raising the issues facing musicians² and their support teams touring in the EU in a post Brexit world but nothing has been said about the other performers and creatives seeking to continue working in EU countries for the vast opportunities for experience and talent growth. This is because there is no available evidence of what opportunities were like pre-Brexit - touring, theme parks, cruises, commercials. Instead, the evidential basis is limited to what agents can see from how their clients worked and the overwhelming feedback that opportunities across the whole ecosystem are significantly reduced. Where processes existed before, these are now significantly harder, slower and more complicated, and the financial value of EU engagements are negatively impacted by the differing tax and social security systems across all EU member countries.

The information provided in the document has been collected from our subscribers and industry partners. It has been anonymised because if attributable to individuals it would potentially impact their careers. With this anonymity, our partners and subscribers have been honest and frank about their experiences, concerns and wishes for the future. We considered this to be far more valuable to the Committee compared to a sanitised document with fewer contributors.

¹ The right for UK nationals to live and work freely within the EU and vice versa for EU nationals within the UK.

² A detailed timeline of lobbying efforts made by the music industry is included in Appendix A.

When reaching out to our partners for their experience of engagement with the EU the word most used was “faff” - “faff” for admin, “faff” for interviews, “faff” over costs, “faff” over payments and tax refunds. In other words, everything required to enable UK performers to accept EU jobs includes needless complications and delays, and many considered it was not worth the effort at all. Many performers are unaware that their agents are making difficult decisions about what to put them forward for, based on the low likelihood that they will get the part. It is not that they are not skilled enough, or do not have the experience or ability; instead, it comes down to the need for visas and whether it is ‘worth’ them going for a job that might impact their availability for a longer contract within the same period. Despite that, however, there is still a strong desire to work in the EU.

Without empirical evidence, it is hard to be definitive but there is an acceptance within the sector that there has been a loss of jobs for performers in the EU across all forms of engagement, particularly touring productions originating in the UK due to prohibitive administration and costs leading to a loss of income, skills development and cultural exchange. Working as a performer in the EU allows performers to diversify their skillset, to contribute to EU productions and then bring their experience back to the UK and build on our rich tapestry.

As a result, it is not just the income for creatives that has been lost but also the loss of shared experiences through culture and the development and growth that comes with it. English Touring Theatres have all but disappeared from our cultural offering to the EU, and authenticity of performance is threatened with the loss of UK performers for specific roles that may have an historical origin. Our sector also loses the experience and skills that come with engaging on a European cultural level. This has an impact on economic growth and our global competitiveness.

As the Government strives to encourage our sector to fulfill its potential as part of the Industrial Strategy, UK performers have lost access to European markets and with it the experiences that help grow their development into world class workers. The impacts on UK performers as detailed in this document have inevitable cost consequences for UK productions. Any disincentives to making content in the UK, such as increased costs, puts production jobs at risk and undermines the potential growth of the creative industries. The complications impacting UK performers working in EU countries, as outlined in this document, have a consequential impact on those companies producing content in the UK. Increased costs impact creative culture in reducing the range and breadth of content being made, as well as threatening many production jobs. In 2024, inward investment and co-production films and high end television shows accounted for 86% of the combined production spend in the UK³ attracted by the UK’s recently modernised and enhanced Audio-Visual Tax Credit regime. Many of these productions also wish to take advantage of the proximity of the UK to other popular filming locations such as Iceland, Spain and Hungary which offer tax incentives which can be claimed alongside the UK Audio-Visual Tax Credit – with increasing pressure being put on budgets there is often a real imperative to ensure productions receive the benefit of more than one tax incentive. The

³ <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news/official-bfi-statistics-2024>

additional cost and administration of moving cast outside of the UK means those productions are more likely to hire local talent. Moreover, the additional cost in hiring two casting teams and/or travelling UK cast makes the UK a less attractive production destination.

Performers

There are a number of ways in which performers can legally work in the EU and the details for each of those are outlined in the Glossary. Briefly, however, the rules state that before an UK performer can work in the EU they must hold an A1 form⁴, which states that they pay social security in their home country, as well as a Schengen visa⁵, which is a short-term visa that allows its holder to work within the Schengen Area, a region of 29 European countries, for a maximum of 90 days within a 180-day period. The 90 days will include any other types of visits made to the EU such as holidays, so if you holiday in Spain for two weeks, your allowance for work will drop to 76 days during the 180-day period. A "D" visa⁶, also known as a long-stay or national visa, is another option for longer term employment. It is issued by individual European countries within the Schengen Area for stays exceeding 90 days. Applications are made through the primary country for work but allow the performer to work in any Schengen country for the duration of the visa.

Spotlight surveyed our subscribers for their input into this inquiry. We asked all performers who held only a UK passport to let us know what differences they have seen in employment opportunities both pre- and post-Brexit.

It is clear from the responses that agents have provided some level of shielding for performers in their engagement in the EU post-Brexit, as you will note in the agents section of this report. However, for those performers who have directly engaged in seeking work in the EU, the feedback is damning.

"The entire process is a joke. Everything is a joke but nobody is laughing."

Performers cite the amount of paperwork and its precise completion as a key problem particularly as they required a level of legal understanding that neither they, nor their agent could meet. If applications are not completed correctly, then owing to the delays to rectify that, the performer could lose their job before even starting work. They considered that they did not have the experience, skills or understanding to confidently meet the requirements of the processes across all EU member countries. If and when they do go through a process, the costs involved are often too high. Many performers who have worked in the EU post-Brexit have relied on their agent or hirer to meet the administrative requirements for their work, thereby passing the administrative and financial burden to another part of the industry but for those who cannot, the increased costs were a major consideration.

⁴ See glossary for details

⁵ See glossary for details

⁶ See glossary for details

"Possible double taxation and paperwork! European casting [directors] won't bother with UK actors for lots of EU jobs and this shrinks my potential income."

The costs involved in applications for A1 forms and visas can be prohibitive - financial costs, time for completion, research and/or legal advice. In total 81% of respondents unsurprisingly said that the process was more expensive post-Brexit. Even when performers do persist with EU engagements, the tax and social security provisions can leave a performer unpaid for 6-12 months as paperwork confirming their UK status (A1 Form) is processed slowly. Tax will be processed at source which has also meant a loss of earnings while that is reclaimed, making accepting work in the EU or a tour across the EU a financial and logistical consideration. This is a particular problem for new entrants into the industry and for those from working class or underrepresented backgrounds. Without a financial safety net, the wait for the tax rebate can be critical as to whether one can afford to work in the EU or not.

"It's awful, the opportunities lost, the extra expenses not just for production but for the individual having to go to embassies etc."

Respondents to the survey also highlighted the decreased availability of jobs. Casting for jobs in the EU will often specify a requirement for EU passport holders only, because the turnaround time for casting then engagement will be shorter than the turnaround time for the paperwork processes for UK passport holders. As a result, most agents/performers will not bother to apply because they know that they will not meet the deadlines.

"I've been asked for my passport country after a self-tape and been told I'm no longer applicable."

"Way fewer opportunities. Pre Brexit I averaged one job a year in the EU, post-Brexit I have worked once in the EU."

In our survey, 36% of performers report having lost out on work because of their passport status. However, performers were split when asked at what stage of the process they were asked for their passport status but this likely due to agents' management of their availability for EU-based work which is supported by information provided by agents and casting directors. Performers did also highlight that agents are encouraging their clients to get an EU passport where possible to allow them to be put forward for work and that some casting calls have asked for a list of EU passport holders from agents for casting for roles in a group or block.

Most concerning is the anecdotal evidence that suggests performers are being asked to lie about their reasons for visiting an EU country (indicating tourism when in fact they are travelling for employment) if paperwork has not been finalised, putting them at a personal high legal risk. This circumvents the visa process but puts the performer at real risk because they are failing to meet the legal requirements placed on them when working in the EU. This is a 'ticking timebomb', with the potential for performers and their agents to face sanctions from the host

country, including deportation and potential ‘blacklisting’ preventing future applications and, therefore, work opportunities.

We are also aware that there are some areas of engagement which are almost completely out of reach for UK performers such as commercials which have quick turnaround times that cannot be matched with paperwork processes. We are aware of named holiday companies, for example, that no longer audition UK-only passport holders.

Should a UK passport holder be cast in an EU role, performers may find that their contracts specify that an artist cannot visit a Schengen country for holiday/another contract for a specified period prior to a contract beginning so as not to impact on the 90-day allowance. Failure to comply may lead to termination of that contract. This requirement has placed an unnecessary burden on performers and will restrict both their ability to work and where they choose to spend their leisure time.

Overall, it is clear that performers have lost opportunities to work in the EU since Brexit. This has meant a loss of income, experience and is detrimental to performers building a sustainable career. Without intervention, this situation will remain unchanged and the wider impact on our sector will negatively change it forever.

Agents

Agents have been at the forefront of establishing the landscape for performers in the EU post-Brexit. Their whole focus is presenting opportunities to their clients in the best possible environment so that they may work and grow as performers, earn enough money to sustain their careers and develop their professionalism within our sector. It has therefore been a significant source of dismay that the opportunities for UK-only passport performers have been diminished as a result of Brexit. Agents recognise the value of working in the EU; experience, skills development and cultural value, as well as the income needed to sustain their engagement in our sector and be available for employment in the UK, but practicality means these opportunities are not available to the vast majority of UK performers.

“More broadly, this situation reflects how Brexit has made it far more complex, costly, and uncertain for UK artists to work in Europe. Many artists lack the legal expertise or resources to manage these bureaucratic hurdles, and the freelance nature of creative work makes long-term visas impractical.”

In order to support their clients in the best possible way, agents have had to make difficult decisions. As cited above, performers have been encouraged to obtain an EU passport if eligible and agents have tried to help with paperwork where necessary. However, both agents and performers have indicated that they do not consider themselves to have the experience, skills or understanding to confidently meet the requirements of the processes across all EU member states. The level of paperwork and its precise compliance is as difficult for agents as it is for performers, with legal repercussions if they are inaccurate and if incorrectly completed

could lead to the performer losing that job because of the delays to rectify. This is a level of expertise that it is unfair for agents to be expected to provide, and as such many will automatically recommend that performers seek legal advice, which then becomes a disproportionate, but necessary, additional cost on performers.

“...clients being restricted on travel plans when joining a production touring in to the EU eg. acceptance of contract only valid if artist has xxx no of EU travel days left and “must not travel to EU for longer than 3 days before xxx date” as this activity would then disallow the artist in question to be able to join that portion of the tour.”

In the current environment therefore agents will make difficult decisions as to whether to put performers forward for auditions that will require their client to work in the EU.

“A general sense that EU markets are closed to us and our clients: no-one needs more admin.”

As cited above, in the commercials sector the turnaround time between casting and production starting is not matched by the paperwork processes for UK-only passport holders so most agents know that it is better for their clients not to go through the process of audition because they will not be able to meet start dates (particularly for commercials work). Agents will also not let their clients know about opportunities that they may well consider perfect for their clients because the casting specifications will ask for EU passport holders only. Performers have therefore been shielded from the loss of opportunities post Brexit by their agents. This is disappointing for agents too; one agent told Spotlight that they considered the EU previously provided real opportunities for new entrants to the industry to build their portfolio and experience. This impacts individuals and the industry itself.

“...one thing that happens time and again is that with projects filmed in Europe, casting directors are only able to consider actors with an EU passport for many projects - so we have encouraged any actors with Irish heritage (for example), who are eligible, to get passports so more opportunities have opened up for them but of course shut down many opportunities for our British passport holders”

One agent who continues to put their clients forward for EU opportunities stated that they recognise an inconsistency in application of visa policies and a general lack of understanding of creative sector needs within some EU consulates, especially in the UK. Accordingly, even with the additional administrative burden with visas for work in the EU, creatives are being let down by a lack of understanding of how the sector works when help is sought.

Agents, like their clients, have suffered economic losses as a result of Brexit. The inability to engage the European market for their clients has a direct impact on their earnings, and ultimately restricts their ability to do the best job they can for their performers. They want their clients to succeed and without a change to the visa requirements, they will not be able to

promote UK performers for work that is recorded or performed in Europe. This is a loss to them, their performers and to the wider cultural ecology.

Casting Directors

Casting directors have also been at the forefront of this issue. It is their experience being engaged by productions that most clearly demonstrates the impact of Brexit on the opportunities for UK performers. Each casting director is working towards a specific timeframe. Casting must meet the requirements for rehearsals (where appropriate), and performance. Some castings have very short timeframes; for example, commercials may require a very short turnaround time from casting to filming, which may be a matter of days not weeks. As mentioned above, the administrative requirements for a UK performer to film a commercial in the EU cannot meet this short timeframe unless they have a EU passport. Even if they had previously applied for a Schengen visa⁷, and there is still time to run, it cannot be used for a new engagement. Application for the visa has to begin afresh with every single job. This is the same for the A1 form also. Some productions have a longer lead time, such as film, but even then anecdotal evidence suggests that UK performers are often excluded from this work because the administration of the visas and permissions is too long for even this lead time. One casting director considered it was easier to cast UK performers for jobs in Australia than in the EU.

“Commercial production companies don’t have the turn-around time to research what visa requirements are needed and there is a lack of clarity about what is / isn’t possible. This is particularly confusing with Greek productions. The lack of clear information has lead to me being asked to send actors to EU for work on tourist visas, which of course I refused and therefore lost the job.”

There is also a lack of uniformity across EU countries, which makes it harder to navigate. Some countries can process visas in a few days, others require weeks. Casting directors will have to become experts themselves in these processes to know whether they can audition performers with a UK-only passport for a role. Things can be so country dependent that we have been given examples of major television shows, which would have been career defining for a UK actor that have conducted a UK casting process and provided a short audition list, but the production timings changed which led to insufficient time for those UK actors to be cast and obtain visas. In one instance the casting director was instructed to abandon the UK casting and look for EU actors. This was nothing to do with the experience, skills or suitability of the UK performers but merely a timing issue. Time simply ran out to be able to cast them. Casting directors can often work to deadlines of three weeks to rehearsals, sometimes less.

Major UK cultural institutions who also tour are now restricted in their casting choices because of visa requirements. Through this limitation in their choices, their reputation, quality and opportunities for UK actors to grow their skills and experience with internationally recognised cultural organisations is diminished. If the large organisations are finding this difficult, it is no surprise that smaller organisations are no longer able to navigate it at all.

⁷ See glossary for details

Casting directors are also quick to point to the decrease in working class actors being engaged in European productions. They attribute that to the financial commitments required for the job - costs for visas and loss of social security monies that must be reclaimed - which means that they cannot accept a job in the EU because they cannot afford to do so.

Casting directors will openly say that they consider the UK has the best talent pool to draw from, but productions (especially co-productions) shot in the EU will always have an issue concerning whether visas can be obtained for rehearsals and filming. To combat this, some casting directors will develop their own lists of UK actors with EU passports, which has been essential when there is a casting need for a talent pool with English speakers. They argue that this provides an unfair playing field for UK actors. This can have an impact on authenticity by having casting shaped by administrative pressures, not the best performer for the job nor the creative vision for the product.

The impact of Brexit on casting as a profession in the UK, has been catastrophic.

“My pre-Brexit (2018/2019) turnover was approximately twice the annual UK living wage. My post-Brexit turnover (2024-2025) is roughly half of my pre-Brexit turnover, and my yearly profit now equates to one third of the annual London Living Wage. Working as a UK casting director is no longer sustainable without a second income stream. I am currently in the process of re-evaluating the viability of the career I have had for the past 34 years (since joining the work force), a career I love and would love to retain.”

“I have knowingly lost multiple jobs due to Brexit. The impact it has had on my career has been devastating.”

*“When I lose a casting job, it means a loss of work for me and the actors, but also for the casting studio, camera op, and any assistants. On one pre-Brexit TVC campaign cast out of the UK, I worked out it created jobs for a **minimum** of 45 people (casting / actors / casting studio / agents / assistants). These kind of campaigns are now being cast out of Spain or elsewhere in the EU.”*

Casting is an essential and vital part of our industry. It brings a level of sectoral knowledge and understanding that is not replicated anywhere else in our sector. Casting directors can recognise performer talent and utilise it to their and the industry's benefit. The loss of opportunities to cast UK performers in EU roles has left those casting directors we spoke to in real difficulty and in some cases questioning their continuation in the sector. Once lost, their skills and experience are difficult to replace and this has consequences for all UK performers.

Drama Schools

Drama Schools have also felt the impact of Brexit. Brexit has made UK drama schools less attractive for foreign students which has an impact on their ongoing viability, their offer to all students, and their ability to forge connections that add value to the cultural experience and skills of their students. This has an impact on the quality of UK performers and their visibility in a global industry.

All drama schools are different and how or if they are connected with other institutions can make a difference in their ability to weather the administrative burdens associated with Brexit. If a school is linked to a university, the university provides sponsorship for EU students or if the school is of a sufficient size, they can afford to employ staff to only deal with visa requirements for international students. If not, then depending on the size of the school, the staffing, time and administration it means they are unlikely to be able to place EU students. Small schools cannot afford to be registered visa sponsors because of the administrative and financial requirements on them. Unless they can pair with a larger institution that can absorb those demands, they simply cannot choose this option. One conservatoire explained that because of their size, after Brexit they took the decision to no longer accept international students on their full time courses. While EU students can attend their 6 month foundation courses, they have had to lose promising performers to other UK schools because they could not accept them to the degree level course. Smaller schools therefore can suffer a disproportionate impact of Brexit and with it the administrative burdens will impact harder. As for larger schools, one school explained that pre-Brexit applications from EU countries were 10-15% of those received. Post Brexit, that has fallen significantly. In 2025, EU applications were 6% while the national trend for HE schools is currently 37%. For any that do apply and are successful, those students will be individuals that can afford to study here. Prior to Brexit, EU students were classed as 'home' students and so paid the same for tuition as a UK student. However, post-Brexit, EU students are classed as international students and as such may pay a yearly tuition potentially two to three times higher than their UK peers. This will impact on the make up of the schools, leading to a narrower life experience represented by students with the potential to create an insular and homogenous student body. This loss of experience of people from a variety of backgrounds narrows the exposure of UK students, which for drama studies is not helpful.

As well as international students that schools may wish to take but cannot, there is also an impact on staff choices. The visa requirements are also important when recruiting teachers and anecdotal evidence has suggested that they have not been able to recruit international teachers for the same administrative reasons. The recent Erasmus+⁸ announcement could go some way to alleviate this problem, but as the teaching is limited to 60 consecutive days or less, it will not make a fundamental change to the choices available to drama schools.

There has certainly been a decline in the number of students from EU countries, and for those students who still attend the administrative and financial burdens on them have been particularly difficult. Where this has affected the income of drama schools, the teaching and support that

⁸ See glossary for details

they provide has had to change for all students, not just those from other countries. Drama schools are very teacher intensive. Lessons have to be in person and the support given to individual students is built around the relationships developed in the classroom. Students cannot receive tuition virtually, nor can they split their time with home study and teaching in person, unlike many university courses that are now provided that way. A school's income therefore has a real and marked impact on what it can deliver. One school explained that it had recently had to scale back the 1-1 support it provides to its students because it could no longer afford to provide it. Other schools have had to change the curriculum on offer or reduce support for students in other ways such as career development post graduating assistance. As it stands EU students are prevented from accepting work in the UK as a performer during the duration of their studies, and they must leave the country to gain experience before being eligible for work in the UK in the future. Student visas⁹ prohibit drama students from working as an 'entertainer'¹⁰ while they are in the UK on that visa, which restricts the experience of EU students studying in the UK and is another disincentive to study here. This makes studying here a very expensive and unhelpful challenge. Furthermore, the duration of Graduate visas¹¹ which often follow Student visas, will reduce from two years to eighteen months from 1 January 2027.

Brexit itself has had an impact on the decision making for international students. It is not just the visas and fees required, but a general feeling that the UK is not friendly to migrants anymore. The internationally recognised reputation of our drama schools in the UK has been affected by the perception that we do not welcome non-UK citizens, and this is damaging their viability.

As for the UK students studying drama here, Brexit has had a direct impact on their ability to build and sustain their careers. Students and new graduates typically would get summer contracts for theme parks, tours, and cruises, but these are now closed off for UK performers. The limits on their working times with the Schengen Visa means that where work is cumulative across Schengen countries, they are only available for 90 days within an 180-day restriction period. This means that they cannot risk accepting shorter contracts which would make them ineligible for longer contracts, nor can they visit any countries for leisure that might reduce their working time availability.

Crucially, without the relationships with EU organisations and institutions that comes from welcoming EU students, connections and opportunities are lost for all students regardless of their passport status. Without representation of UK drama schools and their students in a European context, our reputation on a world stage is negatively impacted. If we are not seen, it is not possible to sustain a world leading reputation. If UK students are unable to work in the EU, then they lose experience which then feeds back into the creative offer in the UK. The loss of freedom of movement for performers has also had a direct impact on career navigation for those students and it has also directly affected the ability of drama schools to retain EU students beyond their initial programme of study.

⁹ See glossary for details

¹⁰ See glossary for details (Student visas)

¹¹ See glossary for details

Drama schools are seeing a real financial impact of the Brexit vote. The loss of European students and their financial contribution to the school has affected all their students in what they can offer and deliver. Our drama schools are internationally valued for their teaching and for the quality of their output. Anything that stops their ability to deliver globally competitive performers should be a concern for the sector and our economy.

Conclusion and recommendations

There are a number of things that would make a real and practical difference to the situation facing UK performers and those other adjacent careers and institutions that support them and the UK economy. The following are three key recommendations that could alleviate the administrative pressures opening up the EU as a potential employer for UK-only passport holders again. Without these changes, as we have seen from our conversations with performers, agents, casting directors and drama schools, it is likely that the continual damage to income and cultural exchange, our UK creative sector will see the loss of many people working in these professional fields. This loss will have an impact on the UK cultural offer at a time when our sector has been identified as key to the success of our economy.

We would strongly urge the Select Committee to endorse these recommendations and actively seek Government support in the current conversations taking place with EU counterparts around the movement of citizens across borders.

1. VISA WAIVERS/TOURING ARTIST VISA WAIVERS

Musicians have lobbied for a Visa Waiver Agreement for workers, which would allow exemptions to the normal rules for people travelling between two countries.¹² This could potentially allow more time to work in the EU and reduce costs when performers travel to the EU to work. This would be reciprocal and therefore support EU actors working in the UK as well. If a Touring Artist Visa Waiver Agreement could be achieved then this would also remove the bureaucratic barriers with the removal of the need for reciprocal visas.

The introduction of a Waiver could also deal with issues such as last minute bookings or quick casting for commercials for example, and the Touring Waiver could restart the cultural exchange that was so valued pre-Brexit. For example, English speaking theatre tours would be able to make use of these visas for all their performers.

At present to work in the UK as an EU citizen, performers can do so using the Global Talents visa¹³, the Permitted Paid Engagement¹⁴, or the Creative Worker visa¹⁵ which is open to temporary workers in the creative industries. To qualify for the Creative Workers visa, an artist must be offered an employment opportunity to make a unique contribution to the UK, have sponsorship and/or meet minimum salary requirements.

While in Opposition, the Labour Party was supportive of these proposals and even included a commitment in their Manifesto. Both the Musicians Union and Equity have publicly stated support for this scheme. However, the EU has previously ruled out allowing visas for performers after Boris Johnson's Government rejected a provision in the discussions before Brexit.

¹² Appendix A

¹³ See glossary for details

¹⁴ See glossary for details

¹⁵ See glossary for details

2. REJOIN CREATIVE EUROPE

Another significant development would be the UK rejoining Creative Europe. Through its access to EU funding, Creative Europe was a significant partner for the distribution of UK films (190 between 2014-2018)¹⁶. Creative Europe has an extensive budget that has been utilised to the UK's benefit in the past. It has also been key in developing networks that have fostered new opportunities, specialist expertise and developed export markets. Artistic exchange is important not just for the employment of actors and performers from a financial point of view, but is also essential for our cultural offer and relevance to grow. As a nation, we gain real value from our artists performing overseas. Those skills and experiences add to our cultural offer make our creative industries more relevant and enhance our quality.

One of Creative Europe's core objectives is enhancing artistic and cultural cooperation. This includes promoting the cooperation, competitiveness and innovation potential of the audiovisual industry. The programme to deliver this includes the development of audio-visual works, including video games and the production of innovative television content including co-productions. It recognises the value culture plays in societies by promoting resilience, and in the economy whether that be through jobs or economic growth.

3. IMPROVEMENTS IN MOVEMENT FOR STUDENTS

The Government, in their current discussions with the EU, are focusing on the youth population. They are looking at a Youth Movement/Mobility Scheme, which would facilitate temporary migration for young people (potentially 18-30 or 35) to live, work, or study in each other's territories under reciprocal arrangements. The UK already has such arrangements with Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Korea¹⁷. The initiatives aim to create new opportunities for cultural exchange and mobility between the UK and the EU, particularly for the younger generation. It is important to ensure that this incorporates changes in the ability of EU students in the UK to gain experience of performing while they are in the UK. One potential option is an Exchange Partnership for Study allowing UK and EU drama students to work in their respective study countries with similar provisions to the UK US theatre exchange programme. This would provide oversight and measurable value while fostering greater connections between UK and EU drama schools who will need to host students while they are in their host countries. This could also potentially lead to collaboration between these schools and bolster inclusion and conversation. The rejoining of the Erasmus+ programme is certainly a positive move and will create more opportunities for students to spend time studying abroad, and also EU students in the UK. It also potentially allows drama schools the opportunity to engage teachers from EU institutions to teach for a short period of time. This should be welcomed. However, there is still more to be done to truly improve the opportunities for performers.

¹⁶ <https://www.ietm.org/en/node/11501>

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/youth-mobility>

Appendix A

Ongoing lobbying efforts within the music industry

- January 2021: Over 100 prominent musicians sign an [open letter](#) to the UK government urging it to negotiate exclusions from work permits and red tape for EU touring. Signatories include Ed Sheeran, Elton John, Sting, Bob Geldof and Peter Gabriel.
- February 2021: In response to a [petition](#) which collected 286,797 signatures, parliament debates the request that the UK government should negotiate a free cultural work permit that gives musicians visa free travel throughout the 27 EU states for music touring professionals, bands, musicians, artists and others. In January the government had responded to the petition saying that in EU negotiations it proposed measures to allow creative professionals to travel and perform in both the UK and EU without needing work permits, but the EU rejected those proposals.

The [Carry on Touring](#) pressure group is set up to pursue the issue in the wake of the petition:

- June 2021: The more senior pressure group [Let The Music Move](#) is set up to pursue and lobby on the issue. Supporters include Radiohead, New Order, Mark Knopfler, Bob Geldof and Annie Lennox.
- May 2022: In response to pressure, the [All-Party Parliamentary Group on Music](#) is set up, headed by musician Kevin Brennan MP, to discuss challenges facing the music sector, including EU touring.
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- September 2023: UK Music, the trade body for the UK music industry, conducts a survey of nearly 1,500 in the industry which [reveals](#) that eight out of ten British musicians touring Europe have said they have lost earnings as a result of Brexit, and 43% of those impacted said it was no longer viable to tour in the EU.
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- May 2024: Rachel Reeves, then shadow chancellor, [restated](#) the Labour Party's commitment to introducing a touring visa for UK artists.
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- May 2025: International musician bodies send an [open letter](#) to the UK PM, the European Council President and the EC President, regarding the soaring costs and red tape involved in touring the continent.
- December 2025: The [Cultural Exchange Coalition](#) is launched as a collection of individuals and organisations in response to the UK-EU Summit 2025 to lobby against the barriers for touring.

Glossary of terms

UK performers working in the EU

1. A1 certificate

An A1 certificate, also known as a Certificate of Coverage, is a document issued by the HMRC (HM Revenue & Customs) in the UK to confirm that an individual working temporarily in another EU/EEA country or Switzerland is covered by UK social security legislation. This means they will not have to pay social security contributions in the host country. The worker needs it for every trip, per EU member country. There are no multi-trip, or more than one EU country, forms. It is only valid per trip, per country and for the dates entered on the form, up to a period of 24 months. Certificates can be extended if a job is extended.

2. Schengen Visa

A Schengen visa is a short-term visa that allows its holder to travel within the Schengen Area, a region of 29 European countries, for a maximum of 90 days within an 180-day period. It is a type of visa sticker affixed to a travel document.

- **European Union Members:** Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden.
- **Non-EU Members:** Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.
- **EU Members with Schengen obligations:** Bulgaria, and Romania.
- **Note:** While not part of the Schengen Area, Cyprus and Ireland do not issue Schengen visas and instead issue national visas.

The 90 day allowance applies for both work AND leisure. This means that if a cast member has been in a Schengen country for 1 month, they are left with 2 months out of their allowance. It is important to note that the 180-day period keeps rolling.

3. D Visa

A "D" visa, also known as a long-stay or national visa, is issued by individual European countries within the Schengen Area for stays exceeding 90 days. These visas allow for long-term stays for various purposes like work, study, or family reunification in the specific issuing country, and often allow for travel within the wider Schengen area for up to 90 days within a 180-day period.

Countries that issue D visas:

- **Austria:** Issued for specific long-term stays, research, seasonal work, internships, students (one semester), working holiday for New Zealand nationals, and for collecting a residence permit.

- **Germany:** D visas are issued for residence permits for employment or to pursue economic activities. They are also issued with the Chancenkarte (opportunity card) for non-EU nationals with academic or professional qualifications.
- **Other Schengen countries:** D visas are issued by other individual Schengen countries for long-term stays within their respective territories.

Important points about D visas: Not a Schengen visa in the traditional sense. While a D visa is issued by a Schengen country, it is a national visa, meaning it is specific to the issuing country and allows long-term residence, unlike the short-stay Schengen visa which allows for travel within the entire Schengen area for a limited time.

Typically, individuals apply for a D visa at the embassy or consulate of the country they intend to reside in. Holders of a D visa for one Schengen country can often travel within the Schengen Area for up to 90 days within a 180-day period. Each country will have its own specific requirements for issuing a D visa, including the purpose of the stay, documentation, and financial resources.

4. Turing Scheme

The Turing Scheme is a UK Government programme that provides funding for students, including those studying drama courses, to study or work abroad. It is available for placements around the world, including the majority of European countries. It aims to increase opportunities for international placements, with a particular focus on supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds by providing additional monies for costs such as travel and living expenses. There is additional funding available for students with disabilities to assist with any additional needs they might have to benefit from the placement. It is delivered by the Department for Education (DfE) but applications are made through schools who are recognised by the DfE for the scheme. The placements are for a minimum of four weeks to a maximum of a year.

EU performers working in the UK

5. Visitors

An international performer can come to the UK to attend auditions as a Visitor. They must not receive payment from a UK employer while in the UK as a visitor for any activities, nor can they complete unpaid work unless they are acting under a Permitted Paid Engagement (see below). Each visit must not last longer than 6 months. Depending on the individual's nationality, an application for a Visitor visa may need to be made in advance of travel. Standard Visitor visas for up to 6 months currently cost £127.

6. Permitted Paid Engagement (PPE)

Individuals can visit the UK for certain paid engagements or events (a 'permitted paid engagement') - such as festivals - if they:

- have a formal written invitation from a UK-based organisation or client (as further set out below) for a pre-arranged event or other permitted engagement
- can show they are an expert in their profession
- are 18 years of age or over

The engagement must be relevant to their expertise, qualifications and main job in their home country. They can come to the UK for up to 6 months, but they must do the engagement in the first month. The engagement must be arranged before the applicant travels to the UK and be declared as part of the application for entry clearance or, if asked, declared when seeking permission to enter the UK.

An individual can be invited as a professional artist, entertainer or musician but they must meet the basic eligibility requirements for a standard Visitor visa. Who can invite an individual and what they can use to show their expertise in the industry is dependent on your profession.

Professional artists, entertainers or musicians can be paid to do an activity that relates directly to their profession including:

- performing
- talking about, presenting or launching their work to other professionals or the public
- giving lectures
- joining judging panels or debate panels
- taking part in professional conferences

A 'professional artist' can be anyone working in the performing or creative arts.

The invitation: the individual must have an invitation from a UK-based:

- creative organisation, such as a gallery, university arts faculty, school or events venue
- agent or agency
- broadcaster

The event or engagement must relate directly to the individual's full-time profession and they must be able to show they are an established artist, entertainer or musician in their home country, through, for example:

- their published work
- publicity material for recent performances, screenings, concerts, talks, readings or exhibitions
- media coverage and reviews
- awards they have received

7. Global Talent visa

An individual can apply for a Global Talent visa to work in the UK if they are a leader or potential leader in one of the following fields:

- academia or research
- arts and culture
- digital technology

The applicant must also be at least 18 years old.

Applications for a Global Talent visa depends on the applicant's circumstances. If the performer has won an eligible prestigious prize, they can apply for the visa directly¹⁸. If not, they will need to get an endorsement first to prove that they are a leader or potential leader in their field. Arts Council England¹⁹ administers these applications, with support from PACT for audiovisual prizes.²⁰ A performer can only apply using experience from either Arts Council covered experiences or audiovisual experiences. A performer cannot use experiences from both areas of performance to demonstrate exceptional talent or exceptional promise, which are the two categories for application.

With the Global Talent visa, the applicants can live and work in the UK for up to 5 years at a time but if the performer wishes to stay longer, there is no limit on time, just a requirement to renew or extend the visa when it expires. Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) is possible after three or five years, depending on which field they work in and how they applied. It is worth noting that this may be extended given the Government's recent announcements to extend the qualifying periods for ILR across most visa routes.

Applications are processed online and decisions on a visa are usually made within three weeks if made from outside the UK or eight weeks if the applicant is within the UK. It costs £766 to apply, which is split into two parts if you are applying based on an endorsement: £561 for the endorsement, and £205 for the visa itself. Not included in this is the cost of the Immigration Healthcare Surcharge (IHS) which is usually £1,035 per year. Depending on where and when the application is made, it may be possible to expedite the processing timeframes referenced above for an additional fee.

8. Creative Worker visa - Temporary Worker

Individuals can apply for a Creative Worker visa (Temporary Worker) if they have been offered work as a creative worker and meet certain eligibility criteria. A creative worker is someone who works in creative industries, for example as an actor, dancer, musician or film crew member.

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-talent-eligible-prize-list/global-talent-eligible-prize-list>

¹⁹

https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Guide_for_Global_Talent_applicants_December_2020_0.pdf

²⁰ <https://www.pact.co.uk/applying-for-talent-visas/notable-industry-recognition-awards-list.html>

Before applying for a visa, the applicant must have a certificate of sponsorship from a licensed sponsor and the work must relate to the work of the sponsor organisation. Applicants can apply up to three months before they are due to start work and decisions can be made within three weeks if applying from outside the UK or eight weeks if made from within the UK. Once again, there is an option to pay an additional fee for a faster decision. The visa has an application fee of £319 and the IHS of £1,035 per year (see above). The worker will also have to prove a level of personal savings (£1,270). Workers can be in the UK for a maximum of 12 months, or the time given in the certificate of sponsorship plus 28 days (whichever is shorter). The worker can also choose to extend their stay up to a maximum of two years with the same employer. If a worker intends to work in the UK for three months or less, then the worker may be eligible for the Creative Worker visa concession.

9. Creative Worker visa concession

Workers can enter the UK without applying for a visa in advance if they have a valid Creative Worker certificate of sponsorship, are coming to work in the UK for 3 months or less and do not normally need a visa to enter the UK as a visitor (i.e. are a non-visa national). Workers will need to prove that they have an offer of a job as a creative worker from a sponsor that holds a creative worker sponsor licence and that they will be paid the minimum salary as set by Equity contracts. The worker must only undertake the work for which they are sponsored and must showcase personal savings to support themselves while in the UK.

Sponsors in the creative sector can issue certificates of sponsorship to individual creative workers but they can also issue group certificates for a performer and their entourage, which includes people related to the employment of an entertainer, but they must have proven technical or specialist skills.

10. Creative Visit visa

The Creative Visit visa is for amateur and professional artists, entertainers and musicians (and their personal and technical staff) who wish to visit the UK to undertake permitted creative activities for a period of up to six months. The Creative Visit visa is a sub-category of the Standard Visitor route. As a Creative Visitor you can undertake the following permitted activities: give a performance as an individual or as part of a group, take part in competitions or auditions, make personal appearances/promotional activities or take part in one or more cultural events or festivals on the Permit Free Festival List.

Because the Creative Visit visa is a sub-category of the Standard Visitor route, Creative Visitors may also undertake other activities that are permitted under the Standard Visitor route. This includes permitted paid engagements, provided the paid engagement is arranged before travelling to the UK and is completed within 30 days of arrival in the UK.

As part of the application for a Creative Visit visa the applicant will also need to satisfy the Home Office that they will leave the UK at the end of their visit and will not live in the UK for extended periods through frequent or successive visits, or make the UK their main home.

There is a financial requirement for the Creative Visit visa. Workers must have sufficient funds to cover all reasonable costs in relation to the visit (including travel, maintenance and accommodation costs) without working or accessing public funds and these must be held in a permitted financial institution.

If an individual wishes to enter the UK for the purpose of a Creative Visit they may apply for a Visit visa that is valid for either 6 months, 2 years, 5 years or 10 years. The individual may enter and leave the UK multiple times during the validity period of your Visit Visa, unless their Visit visa is endorsed for a single or dual entry. Each single visit to the UK must not exceed 6 months. The Home Office application fee for a Visit visa for a short stay of up to 6 months is currently £127. If a Visit visa is valid for either 2 years, 5 years or 10 years then the Home Office application fee will be £475, £848 or £1,059 respectively.

Creative Visitors are also permitted to come to the UK to seek employment and attend job interviews. However, if successful in obtaining employment, they will be expected to leave the UK and seek the appropriate entry clearance prior to commencing work.

11. Skilled Worker visas (changed July 2025)²¹

From July 2025, actors, entertainers and presenters were removed from the Skilled Workers visa route, alongside 180 other occupations, which allows workers to come to or stay in the UK to do an "eligible job with an approved employer". This means that they are no longer permitted for sponsorship under one of the most prominent UK working visa routes.

12. Student visas

EU drama students need to have a UK Student Visa to study in the UK. This is a requirement for all full-time courses of more than six months. To qualify they must have been accepted by a licensed student sponsor, provide a Confirmation of Acceptance of Students and potentially demonstrate English language proficiency. There is a visa application fee of £524 and they will also have to pay the IHS (£776 per year) (see above).

The Student immigration rules allow student visa holders to work under certain conditions, such as hours of work during term time and vacations. Most importantly, there are restrictions on the type of work they can do relevantly, they are prohibited from being employed as an entertainer. This includes paid work as an actor, musician, dancer or 'other' performer. There is an exception for 'dance, drama and music' students if the performance is part of an integral or assessed work placement but only if the course is degree level or above.

²¹

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statement-of-changes-to-the-immigration-rules-hc-997-1-july-2025>

13. Graduate Visas

A Graduate Visa currently gives permission to stay in the UK for up to two years (this period shall be reduced to 18 months from 1 January 2027, albeit those with a PhD or other doctoral qualification can obtain visas for up to three years) after successfully completing an eligible course in the UK. It must be applied for from within the UK and the applicant must have either a current Student visa or Tier 4 (General) Student visa. There is an £880 application fee and the IHS is payable (see above). With this visa the applicant can look for work, work in most jobs, be self-employed and continue living in the UK with any partner or children, if they are eligible.

14. Erasmus+ Programme

On the 17th December 2025, the Government announced that the UK will rejoin the Erasmus Scheme in 2027 as part of their commitments for young people as discussed at the May 2025 UK-EU Summit. The UK was part of Erasmus+ from 2014 to 2020, and predecessor programmes prior to that. The programme will create educational and training opportunities for British apprentices, further education students and adult learners, as well as those in higher education.

Erasmus+ is an EU programme that provides grant funding for international placements and partnership projects for organisations working in education, training, youth and sport. It aims to help people improve their education, gain work experience, and grow personally by offering chances to study, learn and work in eligible countries²².

The aims of the programme include supporting students, building partnerships with education providers and countries across Europe. UK students can spend time studying abroad, train, volunteer or undertake a work placement. Applications for the programme are made through a participating organisation such as an educational establishment. Funding contributes towards travel and living costs, course fees, visa and entry costs and other essentials. Additional funding is also available for people with disabilities, additional learning needs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Study periods must last between 2 and 12 months, excluding travel time. The programme is also available for teaching staff at a UK higher education institution to teach at a partner higher education institution abroad for between 2 and 60 consecutive days.

²² <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a/eligible-countries>