



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

News Release

Issued: Friday 3 March 2017

Tax rise threatens gigs, experts say as music census begins

Increasing tax paid by music venues could pose a major threat to the UK's live concert scene, experts from the University of Edinburgh have warned.

The organisers of Britain's first live music census, which starts today (Thursday), say a major overhaul of commercial property rates could amount to a huge rise in costs and force many venues to close.

Matt Brennan, from the University of Edinburgh's Reid School of Music – who is leading the project – says venues operating at grassroots level are particularly vulnerable.

Dr Brennan said: “Venues around the country have been telling us that they already operate on thin margins, so proposed increases in rateable values of up to 55% in some cases will have a significant impact.

“The UK Live Music Census will be very important in identifying challenges that the industry faces, such as rising rates and other issues. It will give us a detailed picture of what exactly it means to be venue owner, a musician, and a live music lover in 2017. Our hope is that the Census will be a vital tool in strengthening a much-loved part of the UK's culture.”

Described by its organisers as a “*Springwatch* for live music”, the UK Live Music Census is led by the Universities of Edinburgh, Newcastle and Glasgow.

For 24 hours, a volunteer army of music lovers will track performances in cities across the country – from lone buskers to massed choirs and from dancefloors to stadium concerts.

There will be coordinated censuses in Glasgow, Newcastle, Oxford, Leeds, Southampton and Brighton. Volunteers will attend live music events including Olly Murs at Leeds Arena, Nicola Benedetti at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, R&B in Oxford, and jazz in Newcastle.

A nationwide online survey for musicians, venues, promoters and audiences will also go live on 9 March and will be open until 8 May. Music fans, musicians, venues and promoters across all genres and at all levels are asked to fill in the survey at the official website: www.uklivemusiccensus.org

Ranked among the top universities in the world

The Census – a world first – will quantify for the first time the nationwide challenges the industry is facing and inform policy to help it flourish. Experts expect the potential rise in taxes to feature strongly in the feedback.

Jo Dipple, chief executive of UK Music, one of the Census' industry partners said: "UK Music is delighted to partner this ground-breaking UK Live Music Census research. The findings for each of the six cities will inform academics, entrepreneurs and music fans alike. It will help organisations like UK Music to understand better the pressures on music businesses and venues so we can lobby for the most effective policies in each area.

"For example, we know that a disproportionate hike in business rates could pose a serious threat to qualifying music SMEs and grassroots venues. The more we are able to identify threats, the more effective our lobbying for policy change in that area will be."

Lord Clement Jones, the Liberal Democrat peer and spokesman for the creative industries in the House of Lords, said: "The UK Live Music Census is a very welcome initiative for policy-makers as it will provide rich data about local live music activity from those who make it and those who enjoy it.

"Live music is facing a number of challenges at the moment, from venues closing down to the threat of increased business rates. However, data about the sector has so far been relatively scarce and mostly anecdotal, and so the much needed data collected by UK Live Music Census will help us protect live music going into the future."

Other issues the Census aims to capture include the diversity of musical genres, audience demographics, ticket prices, live music's economic and cultural value, and attitudes towards secondary ticketing - the reselling of tickets.

The project is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The industry partners are the Musicians' Union, Music Venue Trust and UK Music. The affiliated institutions are Brighton's British and Irish Modern Music Institute, Leeds Beckett University, and Southampton Solent University.

Two years ago the project team ran a pilot live music census in Edinburgh. Its findings were used to inform the city council's decision to change its policies about noise levels to the benefit of performers.

For further information please contact:

Edd McCracken, Press and PR Office, tel 0131 651 4400, 07557502823; email

edd.mccracken@ed.ac.uk

Ranked among the top universities in the world