



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

News Release

Issued: Wednesday 14 February 2018

UNDER STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL 00.01 GMT, FRIDAY 16 FEBRUARY 2018

Live music census strikes note of caution over future of venues

Small live music venues are facing a number of threats that could affect their long-term future, research suggests.

Results of the UK's first live music census announced today (Friday, 16 February) show that increasing tax rates and noise level restrictions are affecting smaller venues in particular.

One third of the nearly 200 music venues surveyed reported that increases in business rates were having a negative impact.

One in three of the small live music venues surveyed – which often give up-and-coming acts their first big break – have experienced problems with property development around the venue, which can cause noise complaints from people living nearby.

Researchers from the Universities of Edinburgh, Newcastle and Turku in Finland carried out the live music census in March 2017. Surveys were carried out in Brighton, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Newcastle-Gateshead, Oxford, and Southampton.

Findings show that the total spend of people at live music events contributes significant sums to local economies – £78.8 million annually in Glasgow, £43.3m in Newcastle-Gateshead and £10.5m in Oxford.

The study provides further evidence that people spend more money on live events than on recorded music.

Nearly half of 4,400 people surveyed spend more than £20 on tickets for concerts or festivals each month. Only one quarter spend the same on recorded music.

Some 44 per cent of the 2,700 respondents to the audience online survey had to resell a ticket for a live music event in the past 12 months. However, only 0.4 per cent of those surveyed said that they bought a music festival or concert ticket for the purpose of reselling it at a profit in the last 12 months. Only 2 per cent of those who had to resell a ticket actually resold it for profit.

Ranked among the top universities in the world

The census highlights the social and cultural value of venues – how they help people discover new music and become part of their life stories.

The findings showed that many people attend events in smaller spaces. More than three quarters had visited small music venues – those with a capacity of up to 350 people – during the past 12 months and 74 per cent had visited pubs and bars for live music.

The researchers say mapping current trends will help inform debates about the future of the live music industry, an area of increasing importance to policymakers – such as the recently announced Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee Inquiry into live music.

Dr Matt Brennan, from the University of Edinburgh’s Reid School of Music, said: “Festival and concert attendance continue to grow. This report not only shows the cultural and economic value of live music but also the challenges it faces.

“This survey is the largest of its kind in the UK. We hope it can influence the valuable contribution live music makes to wider society and help support the protection of the live music ecology.”

Researchers tracked performances in cities across the country, which included pub gigs to massed choirs and arena concerts. The research combines data collected over a 24-hour period with data from nationwide online surveys.

Academics from the University of Edinburgh’s Reid School of Music led the project in collaboration with Newcastle University’s International Centre for Music Studies and the University of Turku’s Institute for Advanced Studies.

The project is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The industry partners are the Musicians’ Union, Music Venue Trust and UK Music.

Affiliate censuses were run in March 2017 by Brighton’s British and Irish Modern Music Institute (BIMM), Leeds Beckett University and Southampton Solent University; LIPA/University of Liverpool ran its live music census in June 2017.

The final project report and executive summary can be accessed at:
uklivemusiccensus.org/#report

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