



European
Movement
United Kingdom

Creating Culture Together:

A Practical Reset for UK–EU Creative Cooperation

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FOREWORD BY

TOM KIEHL



As we mark the tenth anniversary of Brexit, the momentous impact of that decision is back in sharp focus amid growing discussions of a Government reset with the European Union.

The proposals in this excellent report outline a roadmap of how that reset could happen in a way that would deliver huge benefits for creative communities both in the UK and the EU.

As Chief Executive of UK Music, which champions and campaigns on behalf of our £8 billion sector and the 220,000 jobs it supports, reducing barriers that impede cultural exchange and trade with the EU is a top priority.

The political landscape at Westminster has changed significantly since the 2024 General Election with Labour making a manifesto promise to tackle the obstacles facing music creators and businesses touring and working in the EU.

Under the Common Understanding agreed by the UK and EU in 2025, we have a shared objective to “support travel and cultural exchange” and to transform that support into meaningful actions.

However, touring the EU remains financially unviable post-Brexit for many musicians and performers, hindering our efforts to grow our respective creative sectors. We need to sweep away these barriers and build on the work that is already under way.

UK Music helped set up the Cultural Exchange Coalition last year. It now has around 150 organisations in the UK and EU that are working together to put pressure on political leaders to remove these barriers to trade, tourism, supply chains - and help boost cultural enrichment.

With organisations like the European Movement, we are on a joint mission to find solutions to the problems that prevent us growing businesses, boosting regional and national economies and nurturing future talent.

In the music industry, we want to see changes to establish a dedicated touring visa to improve the mobility of artists. We are pushing for complex “cabotage” transport regulations to be overhauled and a solution to ATA carnets that add huge expense and burdens to EU tours for British artists and crew. The UK should also rejoin Creative Europe to maximise opportunities for cultural co-operation and exchange.

Music and the arts are a crucial way the UK tells our story to the EU and the world - and one of the most powerful weapons in our soft power armoury. If we make the right choices now, we can rebuild the creative bridges with the EU to the benefit of us all and create a strong, vibrant and diverse creative sector to drive jobs, growth and cultural exchange.

TOM KIEHL
UK Music Chief Executive

01

Executive Summary

The cultural and creative sectors in general, and in particular music and the performing arts - the main focus of this report - are among the UK's most successful and resilient sectors. They have weathered both the global financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. But now they face further major challenges created by Brexit.




This report lays-out six main recommendations for how the UK Government can work to improve creative cooperation between the UK and the European Union (EU), and repair at least some of the damage Brexit has caused to the cultural and creative sectors. We also draw attention to further ancillary issues that should be dealt with in this report.

European Movement UK recognises that the only way to solve these problems in full, is for the UK to re-enter the EU single market - and we are campaigning vigorously for that. But it will take time.




In the meantime, we are calling for the Government, in the meantime, to ramp up its efforts to negotiate with the EU to remove as much as is possible of the Brexit red tape which is hampering the cultural and creative sectors.

The six main changes we are asking for

Changes for negotiation between the UK and the EU:

-  Short-term mobility and work framework covering touring performers and cultural professionals;
-  A relaxation of cabotage rules that limit the ability to transport touring equipment freely;
-  The UK joining Creative Europe, the EU's flagship cultural programme, and its successor, AgoraEU

Changes the UK should make unilaterally:

-  Reduce the cost of Temporary Admission (ATA) customs 'carnets' for instruments and equipment;
-  Designate St Pancras International station as a port providing CITES accreditation to transport rare materials;
-  Meet the 15-day target for issuing A1 certificates exempting UK cultural professionals from EU social security contributions.

European Movement UK recognises that the only way to solve these problems in full is for the UK to re-enter the EU single market and customs union, or – preferably – return to the EU as a full member. We are campaigning vigorously for each of these things to happen.

What are the cultural and creative sectors?

The activities classified by the UK Government as creative 'industries' are: advertising and marketing; **architecture; crafts; design; film, TV, video, radio and photography (audiovisual); IT and software (including video games); publishing; museums and galleries; music and the performing arts.**¹

In 2024 the creative industries contributed about **£145.824 billion in Gross Value Added to the UK economy**, roughly 5.5 percent of the total,² and supported more than 2.4 million jobs, around 7 percent of the workforce.³

This report focuses primarily, though not exclusively, on music and the performing arts. In this report, we will refer to the sectors which are the target of our recommendations as the 'cultural and creative sectors'. This is in-line with how they are referred to by the Cultural Exchange Coalition. In this report we also refer to the people working in these sectors as 'cultural professionals'.

Music alone contributed £8 billion to the UK economy in 2024⁴ - including exports worth nearly £5 billion - and the performing arts sector as a whole contributed over £11 billion.⁵

However, many of the issues highlighted - notably on mobility and on obstacles to British and EU professionals working in each other's jurisdictions - are highly relevant also to other sectors. European Movement UK stands ready to work with stakeholders in those sectors to highlight the specific difficulties they are facing, in the same way as we have worked extensively over the last few years with the music and performing arts sectors.

The effects of Brexit

Cross-border co-operation and cross-sector collaboration has been key to the success of the UK creative sectors. Yet the UK's withdrawal from the EU has placed their potential for continued success at risk. Despite this, the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) made no specific provision for touring musicians or other creatives.

UK professionals wanting to work in the EU now face different visa systems in each member state, new work permit requirements and the Schengen rules that mean non-EU citizens can spend only 90 days in any 180-day period in the EU. Nearly half of UK musicians report reduced work in the EU since 2021, with more than a quarter losing that work entirely.⁶ For example, average tour earnings have fallen by 45 per cent and 59 per cent of musicians say touring is no longer viable.⁷ This pattern is replicated across other performing arts sub-sectors such as theatre, dance and touring exhibitions.

The financial costs can be prohibitive, especially for emerging artists. Even for established orchestras, costs and red tape are a significant obstacle. Temporary Admission (ATA) carnets - international customs documents, or "passports for goods" that allow instruments and equipment to move temporarily across customs borders - can cost more than £400, with security deposits of up to 40 per cent of value. For orchestras this can mean £2,000-£5,000 per EU tour.⁸

Current cabotage rules restrict UK hauliers to a limited number of stops within the EU, making multi-venue tours more difficult and increasing costs for small music acts and touring productions and exhibitions. EU hauliers also face cabotage restrictions in the UK.

Loss of EU funding and linked opportunities to collaborate with European partner organisations have further weakened the cultural sectors. Between 2014 and 2020, Creative Europe - the EU's flagship funding programme for those sectors - invested €111 million in 376 UK organisations.⁹ Its absence has been most keenly felt by independent producers and by SMEs, who have lost access to research and development opportunities, co-productions, trade fairs and European networks.

There is significantly more that the UK Government can, and should do to



support the cultural sectors, even within its self-imposed red lines on the UK's relationship with the EU, which currently are no return to the single market, the customs union or the freedom of movement of people.

What is needed now is a practical reset. One that delivers on the Government's manifesto objectives for the cultural sector and on the aspirations for improving 'cultural and artistic exchanges' set out in the Common Understanding¹⁰ reached by the EU and UK at their May 2025 summit. The further UK-EU Summit expected in summer 2026 should boost momentum towards a solution enabling musicians, performers, filmmakers and other creatives to flourish across Europe.

To be successful, the Government should adopt a twin-track approach.

Track One – Negotiations with the EU

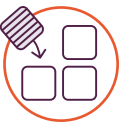
First, the Government should secure structured agreements with the EU that restore access for the UK to its most important market.



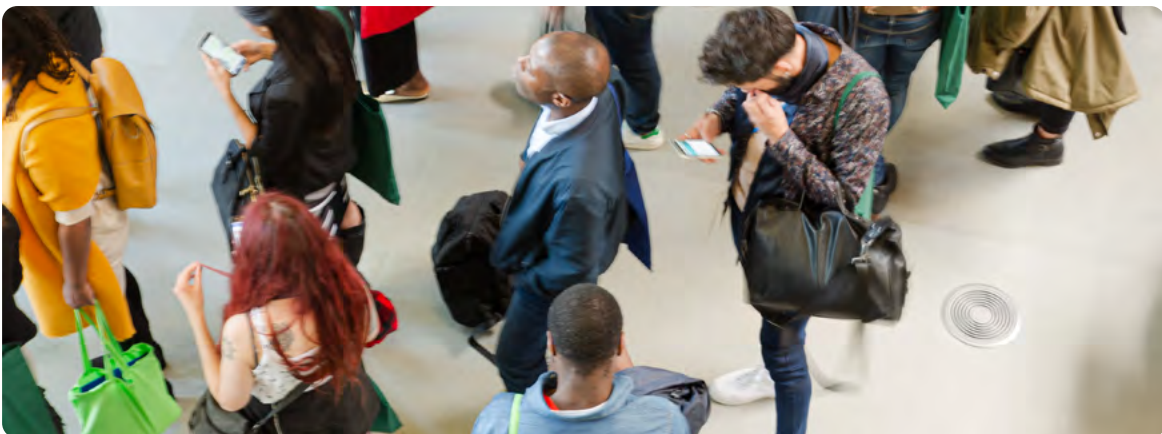
A short-term mobility and work framework for touring performers, creatives and associated staff - or a wider scheme that includes these categories;



A general relaxation or **cultural exemption from cabotage rules**, allowing orchestras, performing arts companies and UK-based hauliers that work alongside touring artists to move equipment freely across multiple EU states without the current three-stop limit;



The UK joining Creative Europe, the EU's current flagship programme. This will restore access to funding, networks and co-production opportunities that are vital for emerging and independent talent. The UK should seek to join for the budgetary year 2027 with a commitment to participate in the new programme currently being negotiated for 2028 onwards (AgoraEU).



The Government should keep an open mind on how to achieve the first objective set out above, so that UK artists can tour more easily in Europe.

On the one hand, this means vigorously pursuing negotiations with the EU under the 'reset' launched at the UK-EU Summit in May 2025.

As a complement to these negotiations, however, the Government will need to monitor, encourage - and where possible take part in - follow-up to the 'Communication' (broadly similar to a UK Green Paper) on Visa Strategy published by the European Commission in January 2026.¹¹

The European Commission Communication set out a potential framework for a multilateral solution to visa-related obstacles hampering non-EU creative artists. That solution would be applicable to all non-EEA member states. If rapid progress can be made on that front - which is not yet clear - then it could lead to a favourable outcome allowing UK touring artists and other cultural professionals to spend more than 90 days in any 180 days in the EU, with the right to work during that extended period.

Similarly, the EU institutions may find it easier, also in other areas, such as customs and haulage rules and recognition of professional qualifications, to bring forward measures that would apply to all non-member states or to a wide range of them, rather than only to the UK.

In addition, while mobility for young people is clearly insufficient to address the issues affecting all age groups discussed in this report, **ongoing negotiations on a reciprocal youth experience scheme between the EU and the UK should take into account the needs of young people working and training in the cultural and creative sectors and in particular those of young performers.**

Furthermore, any future negotiations on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications should take into account the needs of the cultural and creative sectors across the board.

Track Two – UK domestic action

Second, under Track Two, the UK can and should act domestically to remove barriers that make exporting harder than it needs to be. These can be delivered without needing heavy or drawn-out negotiations with the EU.

Domestically, the UK Government should:



Reduce the costs of ATA customs carnets
for instruments and equipment;



Designate, as soon as possible,
St Pancras International station as a port where accreditation can be provided under the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora \(CITES\)](#). This would make it easier for musicians and others to take equipment made from endangered or protected sources temporarily into the EU and beyond;



Meet the 15-day target for issuing A1 certificates
proving that UK performers and cultural professionals are paying UK social security contributions and need not pay into other systems while working temporarily abroad.

Consequences of Inaction

Without action, the UK risks long-term damage to jobs, innovation, exports and international influence. With the right agreements and reforms, the sector can not only recover lost ground but continue to grow as one of the UK's most dynamic and globally visible industries.

These proposals respond directly to the needs of the cultural and creative sectors, focusing on practical measures that remove unnecessary barriers, support growth and exports, and make a meaningful difference to how these sectors operate in practice.

The UK joining the EU single market – the ultimate solution

Notwithstanding the significant benefits that can be obtained by taking the steps set out above, **by far the most substantial positive outcome would come from the UK rejoining the EU single market**, a move which would restore the comprehensive framework needed for frictionless mobility, collaboration and trade across Europe.



02

Introduction

A major boost to the economy

In 2024 the cultural and creative sectors contributed about £145.8 billion in Gross Added Value to the UK economy, roughly 5.5 percent of the economy,¹² and supported more than 2.4 million jobs, around 7 percent of the workforce.¹³

The music sector - the main focus of this report - alone contributed around £8 billion to the economy⁴ and the performing arts sector as a whole over £11 billion.¹⁴

Cultural activity also has a multiplier effect that generates significant wider economic benefits. Cultural organisations invest in local economies and in local workforces. They create revenue from sales, sponsorship and more, and they pay national and local taxes. They attract domestic and international visitors, thus driving additional spending in the hospitality and tourism sectors.

A source of soft power

The UK's cultural and creative sectors also plays a vital role in projecting UK soft power around the world. This helps both to reinforce the UK's global leverage and to attract investment across the UK economy, by raising the UK's international profile and its attractiveness as a place to live and work.

The Government has recognised this by creating the UK Soft Power Council in 2025,¹⁵ bringing together leaders from culture, sport and the creative industries to strengthen the UK's influence overseas.

The impacts of Brexit - a breakdown

The UK once enjoyed seamless cooperation with its neighbours, as an EU Member State.

Cultural professionals could work, tour and share their work freely across borders under one set of rules which UK representatives played a key role in designing. That system has been replaced - for UK citizens - with a patchwork of separate national regimes and requirements when they want to work in the EU:



Mobility is restricted by new visa and work permit requirements;



Equipment must be covered by costly ATA carnets;



Haulage is constrained by cabotage limits, and;



Access to collaboration and funding opportunities such as Creative Europe has been lost.

This fragmentation is more than an inconvenience. It is costly, it is stifling creativity (a cornerstone of the UK's standing in the world) and is economically damaging on both micro and macro levels.

In addition, mutually beneficial relationships between artists and creatives that often helped to build bridges through research, entrepreneurship, experimentation and exploring shared solutions, have been curtailed or (at the very least) made a lot more difficult.

Developments since 2024

In 2024, the Labour government was elected on a manifesto promise to 'reset' the UK's relationship with the EU, including a pledge to "help our touring artists".¹⁶ This was followed by the EU-UK Common Understanding, agreed in May 2025, which stated that both sides "recognise the value of travel and cultural and artistic exchanges, including the activities of touring artists" and that they "will continue their efforts to support travel and cultural exchange."¹⁰ The inclusion of these commitments was important, but it lacks detail and falls short of the kind of structured arrangements that cultural professionals need to thrive.

Despite the Government repeating its long-standing 'red lines' - that it will not enact a return to the single market, the customs union or freedom of movement of people - **securing a better deal for the cultural sector and wider cultural and creative sectors remains entirely possible.**

Now is the time to build on the momentum created by the Common Understanding and to ensure the needs of performers, other creatives and accompanying personnel are firmly on the agenda ahead of the 2026 UK-EU Summit.

Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA)

When the TCA was signed at the end of 2020, it made no specific provision for touring musicians, performers or other creative professionals.

Deborah Annetts, Chief Executive of the Independent Society of Musicians, told the House of Lords European Affairs Committee in April 2025, “we negotiated an agreement that did not mention creatives or musicians. We were led to believe that there would be coverage in the TCA. When it was eventually published, there was nothing about musicians at all. So, we ended up with something called a hard Brexit, which we are still suffering from.”¹⁷

Lord Frost, the UK’s chief negotiator at the time, admitted in 2022 that the UK had been “too purist” in its approach to mobility, and that the challenges facing creative professionals could be resolved without reopening broader questions of free movement.¹⁸ His acknowledgement underlined what many in the sector already knew: that solutions are possible within the UK Government’s current, self-imposed political red lines on the UK’s relationship with the EU.

The TCA also created an extensive governance structure - a Partnership Council, a Trade Partnership Committee and 18 specialised committees, including on areas highly relevant to the cultural sectors.

The Specialised Committee on Road Transport, for example, covers issues such as cabotage. There is a Committee on Customs Cooperation - ATA carnets and CITES would seem to fall within its remit. The Committee on Services, Investment and Digital Trade would cover the movement of cultural professionals among others.¹⁹

There is scope for all of the relevant TCA committees to pay closer attention to the issues facing performing artists and other cultural and creative sectors.

Mobility and visas

Freedom of movement of people and of cultural goods between the UK and EU was the foundation on which many UK creatives built their careers. For many, losing it has been devastating.

The Schengen rule allowing visa-free visitors to the EU to stay for only 90 days in any 180-day period is a serious disadvantage for the UK's cultural sectors. It is unworkable for musicians, performers, curators and other cultural professionals who need to criss-cross multiple countries on extended tours and as part of collaborative projects. A single European run, for example, can quickly exhaust the allowance, forcing artists either to cut shows, cancel tours, or return to the UK mid-run to "bank" days before resuming work.²⁰ The result is that European touring and producing has become shorter, less predictable, and in many cases financially unviable.

On top of this, artists face an array of visa and permit requirements and restrictions that vary from country to country. 20 EU Member states initially allowed limited, short-term, paid cultural work without a visa and this has gradually been expanded to nearly all Member states. Nevertheless, artists must still grapple with widely varying national regulations as each EU Member State applies its own rules for those from non-EU countries, often with different exemptions, conditions and paperwork.

Examples of this include:

Austria

An exemption from a work permit if employed for one day, or up to 8 weeks within an overall artistic production, with organiser notification to AMS.

Independent artists must provide proof of qualifications such as a CV, record of engagements or a degree.

Denmark

Exemptions apply only where the performer is the focal point, or of major significance, to a public artistic event.

Events must be short-term work, permit exemption for performing artists, musicians and support staff for up to 14 days.

Belgium

An exemption from visa requirements for up to three months for foreign artists in Brussels Region and Wallonia.

In Flanders, a narrower exemption of 21 days per quarter only for “artists of international renown”.

Beyond this, a work permit is required. Professional card fees are €140 on application and €90 annually on collection.

Greece

UK performers and accompanying staff are exempt for one-off appearances such as a single concert or television show but require permits for further engagements.

Italy

Artists must complete a “declaration of presence” within three working days of entry.

Cyprus

All third-country nationals require an entry permit for work.

On arrival, artists must register in the Aliens Register, apply for a temporary residence and work permit, and pay associated fees.

Additional requirements include a clean criminal record check and medical tests (hepatitis B/C, HIV, syphilis, tuberculosis).

Slovakia

Performers must report their stay to the Foreign Police within three days of arrival, under the Temporary Residence – Special Activity category. Exemption is available for performers at an art event for up to 30 days per calendar year, with Foreign Police notification within 3 days.

Czech Republic

A work-permit exemption is required for performing artists for up to 7 consecutive days or 30 days in a calendar year; beyond that, a visa/permit route is needed.

Spain

A work-permit exemption is available for performance artists and audiovisual technicians for stays up to 90 days

A Foreigner Identification Number (NIE) may be relevant for tax/contracts, but it should not be presented as the core touring rule.²¹

AMS, Arbeitsmarktservice

Rules are accurate as of December 2024, and they may change, if they have not already.

Touring requirements vary by activity, duration and immigration status; artists should confirm current requirements with national authorities or sector guidance before travel.



03/A

The Twin-Track Approach

After extensive and ongoing consultation with stakeholders in the music and performing arts sectors, we are recommending a twin-track approach to solve many of the post-Brexit issues facing these sectors.

The first track covers areas where solutions can only be achieved through negotiation with the EU. The second track refers to measures that the UK authorities can take unilaterally. Delivering on both tracks would also have major benefits for other cultural and creative sectors.

Track One – Aspects requiring negotiations with the EU

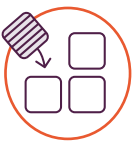
The three main recommendations for negotiation under the first track are:



Agree a short-term mobility framework allowing UK cultural professionals to work more easily in the EU and solving the less extensive, but still significant, problems that their EU counterparts face in the UK;



Relax road transport cabotage rules for the cultural sectors;



Reintegrate the UK in the EU's Creative Europe Funding Programme.

1// A Short-Term Mobility Framework for cultural professionals

The UK Government should work with the EU and individual member states to ensure that touring artists, performers, technicians, production staff and other cultural professionals have clear, consistent and proportionate pathways for short-term paid work across Europe, whether via a sector-specific agreement or wider arrangements.

The options

There are three types of EU-level framework that could achieve the desired result, pending a return to full freedom of movement covering the UK - and with it the solution of almost all mobility-related problems.

Sector-specific and UK-EU specific

The first would be a cultural/performing arts sector specific and UK-EU specific agreement, negotiated between the UK Government and the European Commission (based on a mandate from member states) as part of the next stage of the UK-EU 'reset'.

Sector specific and multilateral

The second possibility is a sector specific agreement, again limited to the cultural/performing arts sectors, but extending beyond the UK to other 'third countries', potentially for example to all of those that - like the UK - currently benefit from a Schengen visa waiver allowing visa-free entry for 90 days in any 180.

The UK is without doubt the non-member country whose cultural and creative sectors are suffering the most from the 90/180 limit, given its size, cultural strengths, geographical proximity and the fact that its artists, performers and linked professions once benefited from free movement of people and have felt the loss keenly.

Nevertheless, touring performers and linked professions from other non-EU countries in Europe - including Ukraine, as well as the other candidates to join the EU - also find the 90/180 rule does not always allow them to work in the EU enough to meet demand from the cultural organisations that employ them and from audiences. Even performers from some countries much further afield - for example the Americas, with deep cultural ties to various EU member states - are adversely affected by the rules.

It might be politically easier for the EU institutions to assume responsibility for negotiating and implementing a deal on mobility for creative sectors if that deal is a multilateral one. There is a risk that a deal exclusively benefitting the UK could lead to other interested countries crying foul.

Building on the EU review of short-stay visa rules

The **third** possible format for a deal on mobility that delivers what the UK cultural and creative sectors needs is via the general review of short-stay visa rules launched by the European Commission with its 'Communication' of January 2026.¹¹ The Communication recognises (p11) that: "some third country professionals who heavily rely on mobility between member states – such as touring artists, athletes attending sporting events, experts working on cross-border projects, work-force supporting the EU industries and services or truck drivers servicing EU businesses – may require access to different member states for more than 90 days within 180 days, without needing long stay or residence in the EU." It is worth noting that the Commission's list is not exclusive and that it already mentions categories additional to performers whose inclusion would benefit the cultural and creative sectors.

The Communication also commits the Commission to "work closely with member states to identify pragmatic solutions to accommodate extended short stays for selected categories of third-country nationals" and to "explore the introduction of new legislation with a specific set of extended short-stay rules at EU level." These would replace current national provisions, thus providing the consistency the for which the UK creative and cultural sectors have been asking.

On the one hand, then, the **pathway set out in the Communication is an attractive one that would do as much or more to solve mobility problems for performers and other cultural professionals as any potential EU-UK deal.**

Furthermore, the European Commission has actively proposed working towards such a multilateral solution and there can be no doubt that proposing and negotiating such a deal falls squarely within its powers and competences. Conversely, negotiating immigration and work permit rules for non-EU nationals from individual non-EU countries has hitherto generally been regarded as a 'national competence' for each member state to undertake as it sees fit.

The need for speed

The disadvantage of this multilateral and multi-sectoral path is its potential political and technical complexity and hence the length of time it might take to bear fruit.

In the end, the most important task is to solve problems rapidly, so that cultural professionals can travel more easily and audiences can see them, regardless of how this is achieved.

This means that the UK Government and the cultural industries and their supporters (including European Movement UK) should keep up the pressure before, during and after the second UK-EU Summit expected in summer 2026.

There is no reason why an agreement with the UK cannot be reached before a wider one with more countries, even if it were later to be superseded and replaced by that wider deal.

However, campaigners will also need to be alert to developments on the EU side, in order to monitor the follow up to the above-mentioned Communication and to lobby as effectively as possible, not only within but also beyond the confines of the 'reset'.

How would mobility arrangements work?

Whatever the route to an agreement allowing UK and EU cultural professionals the mobility they need, it is important to be clear on broadly how such an agreement might work and be policed, and about the correct terminology to use.

It is not accurate to refer, as the media often does, to ‘visa waivers’ for artists or any other category of person. Every UK citizen, along with citizens of over 60 other non-EEA countries, already benefits from a visa waiver when entering the EU - no visa is required to visit for 90 days in 180, merely electronic registration in the Entry Exit System and a passport.

If cultural professionals - or any other limited category of people - are to be allowed to stay for more than 90 days in 180 and to work during that time, they would by definition need to prove their entitlement to this favourable treatment. Mere declaration at the border would clearly not suffice, would be wide open to abuse and the chances of the EU - or indeed the UK for EU citizens - accepting this are nil.

So beneficiaries will, by definition, need some form of documentation that in effect constitutes a visa. The specific and advantageous characteristics of this type of visa would be threefold compared to the standard extended-stay visas everybody can apply for, and for three main reasons:



First, relative ease and speed of application and obtention;



Second, conditions of entry that would specifically be tailored to the needs of artists and cultural professionals and last, but not least;



Third, the right to work short-term.

In its Communication on Visa Strategy referred to above, the European Commission pledges to “Identify options for multiple-entry visas with longer validity”. This would seem to be suitable terminology.

Much to gain

It should be emphasised that the objective here is not to recreate free movement of people, but to remove disproportionate friction affecting a high-value, project-based sector that depends on cross-border activity.

Creating a short-term mobility framework covering UK performers and associated professions would restore the viability of multi-country European tours, support freelancers and SMEs, strengthen export growth, and enhance people-to-people cultural ties, all without breaching the UK Government's stated red lines.

It would in addition provide an economic boost to the creative and cultural sectors in EU countries, by allowing them to host UK performers more easily and often at a lower overall cost. Furthermore, while EU performers do not face as much difficulty in touring the UK as UK artists are experiencing in the EU (see p. 24 'Conditions for EU cultural professionals in the UK'), Brexit has nevertheless created barriers they did not have to deal with before. Any deal would self-evidently be reciprocal, so would also benefit EU artists.

Finally, the clear need to work towards an EU level solution for touring and residencies exceeding 90 days presence in any 180 days should not preclude the UK Government from continuing to pursue bilateral or multilateral arrangements directly with key EU member states.

Taken together, changes at EU level and agreements with member states - pending implementation of those wider changes and possibly in addition to them - can offer a practical and politically achievable route to restoring sustainable mobility for the sector.



Conditions for EU cultural professionals in the UK

The UK has created several visa and entry routes for EU cultural professionals since leaving the EU. These include:



Permitted Paid Engagement (PPE) route – allows up to 30 days of paid work in the UK without a visa;



Creative Worker visa – valid for engagements of up to 12 months in the creative sector;



Global Talent visa – for recognised leaders or emerging leaders in their fields;



Temporary Work – International Agreement route – for those coming to work under international contracts or agreements.

Perhaps even more significantly, the UK's general visa waiver for EU visitors allows 180 days consecutive presence, rather than the rolling 90 days in 180 applicable on the EU side.

Together, these provisions provide a significantly broader set of options for EU cultural professionals wishing to perform in the UK, than their UK counterparts enjoy in the other direction.

Nevertheless, they do not replicate conditions pre-Brexit. In particular, some of these routes involve significant financial cost. Arrangements for EU cultural professionals working in the UK could and should be improved as part of a reciprocal deal with the EU.

Making existing UK rules work better for EU cultural professionals

EU cultural professionals entering the UK can, in principle, use the Permitted Paid Engagement (PPE) route, which allows artists to work for up to 30 days without a visa if invited by a UK client and paid by a UK source. This was designed to provide a straightforward pathway for cultural exchange.²²

In practice, enforcement is inconsistent and there is widespread confusion around documentation requirements, with support staff often deemed ineligible for the PPE route even when their presence is essential. At least 30 per cent of PPE applicants face refusals or mishandling of their applications, leading directly to cancelled concerts.

In one case, the Czech Philharmonic was wrongly told at Heathrow that they needed a carnet for hand-carried instruments and export licences, despite these not being required.²³ The PPE and the Tier 5 Certificate of Sponsorship (authorising short-term work) are also single-use, requiring artists and their teams to repeat the process for every engagement.

The problem lies not in the law but in its application, with UK Border Force officers frequently misapplying the rules. A lack of training and clear guidance has left frontline staff uncertain, creating unnecessary risks for organisers and reputational damage for the UK's cultural and creative sectors.

The Home Office should issue clear public guidance on the PPE route, provide training for Border Force staff, and ensure that cultural professionals and organisations have access to an interactive service for rapidly obtaining information and advice, thus preventing avoidable refusals.



Emerging artists

The cumulative impact of visas, carnets, CITES certificates, mobility restrictions and VAT compliance falls disproportionately on emerging artists and smaller businesses.

For large productions or international orchestras, these costs are frustrating but often absorbable. For emerging artists, they are prohibitive. PRS for Music recorded a 27% decline in small and medium-sized UK live performances in the EU (under 5,000 capacity) between 2019 and 2023 - a collapse that has cut off vital first steps into European markets.²⁴

The Independent Society of Musicians and the Musicians' Union have documented cases of bands cancelling their first European tours because the cost of red tape alone would have wiped out any potential earnings. Many younger artists have either relocated abroad, particularly to Germany, or abandoned touring altogether.

These obstacles strike at the heart of the UK's creative pipeline across all sectors. For the music sector in particular, it is at the grassroots level - the small venues, independent labels and first international tours - that new talent is nurtured. If these routes are cut off, the entire ecosystem suffers, with fewer acts breaking through to become the next generation of UK cultural exports.

The barriers created by the TCA fall hardest on emerging talent. For many early-career artists, the cost and complexity of visas, permits and logistics make EU touring simply unaffordable.

2// Relax cabotage rules for the cultural sectors

The ability to move instruments, art, design and craft exhibitions, and associated equipment across borders is as vital to touring productions as the mobility of the artists themselves. Yet under the TCA, UK hauliers may carry out only two further operations within the EU - limited to one cabotage movement within a single member state and one cross-trade operation between member states - within seven days of entry.²⁵ This is wholly inadequate for cultural touring, where a single orchestra, band, or theatre or dance production may need to make multiple stops across several countries.

Cultural organisations with their own trucks

The problem is especially acute for orchestras, opera companies and other artists which own specialist “own-account” trucks designed to carry fragile and high-value instruments. These vehicles, purpose-built to ensure the safety of cellos, double basses and other delicate equipment, are caught by the same restrictions as commercial freight. The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra invested in a new specialist truck designed for European touring, only to find that the TCA rules now prevent it from being used for multi-stop tours in the EU.²⁶ Orchestras and touring companies now face prohibitive costs hiring EU-registered trucks instead - sometimes up to £20,000 per tour - undermining the financial viability of international engagements.²³

The UK also imposes restrictive cabotage rules on EU hauliers.²⁶ It has introduced a dual registration scheme for events and cultural hauliers, allowing them to switch between UK and EU registrations if they have or can set up a base in both jurisdictions. In theory, this can benefit both UK and EU specialist hauliers. However, access to the scheme is for many operators – and in particular for “own account” vehicles - not an option, for practical and financial reasons.

Given the shorter distances and often shorter periods involved, cabotage restrictions may be a lesser problem for EU touring organisations in the UK, than they are for UK organisations in the EU.

Nevertheless, for multi-venue tours, it could still constitute a substantial inconvenience. There seems to be potential for a reciprocal deal and that possibility would be enhanced if cultural operators on the EU side were to join UK organisations in lobbying for it. Such an agreement reciprocally relaxing cabotage rules on “own account” trucks could be reached relatively rapidly and would be fairly easy to administer and enforce, based on licensing specific vehicles and drivers.

A general problem with a general solution

Cabotage rules present difficulties not only for cultural touring organisations, but for all UK exporters and hauliers working in the EU, as well as for many EU operators in the UK.

The UK temporarily relaxed its rules in 2021 to combat a domestic labour shortage in the haulage sector and there is **a strong argument that cabotage rules should be permanently and reciprocally relaxed for all EU and UK (and indeed other) hauliers, whatever their cargo.** This would help prevent - in a world of high fuel prices, potential shortages and urgent environmental challenges - lorries often making long journeys empty as a result of having to comply with cabotage regulations, limiting the number of deliveries they can make. Any general relaxation would benefit the cultural sector along with many others, and the chances of this happening may have become greater since the latest conflict in the Middle East took hold.

Road transport cabotage rules in general may be a potential subject for the summer 2026 UK-EU Summit and/or for subsequent negotiations, and the cultural and creative sectors should welcome that.

A specific exception for cultural equipment

However, the UK Government should in parallel pursue with the EU the possibility of an exception covering all hauliers, specifically when they are contracted to transport equipment belonging to cultural organisations. That would be more complex than an exception limited to “own account” vehicles. Both sides would, no doubt, want to design it carefully to prevent any loopholes allowing such an exception to be exploited for the transport of non-eligible freight. However, the potential benefits to touring organisations on both sides, make it worth investing effort and negotiating time in this issue.

The Government introduced a dual registration scheme in July 2022 to ease the pressure on specialist event hauliers, allowing operators with bases in both the UK and EU to switch vehicles between UK and EU licences.²⁷ However, this is only practical for larger firms that can afford to set up and comply with EU operating requirements. For most small and medium-sized UK hauliers, the burden of establishing an EU base and securing an EU Community Licence is prohibitive: around £8,500 upfront, followed by annual costs in the region of £12,000 to £20,000, with further charges of about £2,150 every five years.²⁸

The UK and the EU - pending any general relaxation of cabotage rules - should agree a specific exemption for the cultural industries or at least for specialist hauliers operating on an ‘own account’ basis. These firms are not in competition with general freight operators but provide a niche service transporting instruments, sets and staging for cultural productions. An exemption would allow them to operate across multiple EU countries – and more easily in the UK - without breaching cabotage limits, helping to restore the viability of touring.

Merchandise

The process for UK artists wishing to sell merchandise on tour has become significantly more complicated. They must register for an Economic Operators Registration and Identification (EORI) number. For consignments worth more than £1,500, a full export declaration is mandatory, which must be lodged and approved before goods can leave the UK. On arrival in the EU, commercial goods worth over €1000 must be declared.²³ Merchandise must also comply with EU customs procedures: completing detailed customs forms, providing rules of origin certificates, assigning duty commodity codes, paying duties where applicable, and in some cases registering for VAT in every EU country where merchandise is sold.

Requirements for EU artists bringing merchandise into the UK post-Brexit are also onerous. The declaration process is somewhat simplified for goods worth less than £2,500, but VAT must still be paid and rules of origin certification and other documentation provided.²⁹

These requirements have had a profound impact on the viability of smaller tours, where merchandise sales often outweigh ticket income. Merchandise can be the difference between an artist breaking even and running at a loss.

Some documentation and potential VAT liability calculated at the rate in the destination country exists, even in transporting and selling merchandise within the EU - and EU rules have recently been somewhat tightened. In addition to this, Brexit has generated additional paperwork and costs that for some artists are prohibitive. A Musicians' Union survey in 2024 found that 68 per cent of artists no longer take merchandise on EU tours, describing the process as too complicated and expensive.²⁵

The UK should work with the EU on reciprocal arrangements to further streamline customs and VAT procedures for small consignments of merchandise that touring artists bring with them in their baggage. These arrangements could take the form of specific provisions restricted to cultural touring or a wider framework also covering other small quantities of merchandise transported by their owners.



3// The UK joining Creative Europe

Access to European projects under the EU's Creative Europe programme was once an important element in the UK's creative success, particularly in respect of experimentation and innovation.

Now, post-Brexit, UK organisations can occasionally still join Creative Europe projects as, in effect, junior partners. But they need to obtain alternative funding to cover their costs - no easy task - and are excluded from leadership roles.

Financial support under Creative Europe is valuable to participants but is relatively limited in cost to the taxpayer - it amounted to about 1% of the total public funding available to the arts sector in the UK, pre-Brexit. This in turn means that **the financial contribution the UK would need to make to return to the programme as a non-EU state would be affordable**, far smaller than the cost of association to the Horizon research and innovation programme or to Erasmus+, both of which have been successfully negotiated, providing clear and relevant precedents. Those show that participation in EU programmes is possible where there is mutual benefit and shared objectives, based on a fair UK financial contribution.

The benefits of returning to Creative Europe would far outweigh such a financial contribution. Participation in Creative Europe and its predecessors from 1990-2020 gave British organisations visibility, collaboration opportunities and the ability to lead international projects. Between 2014 and 2020, Creative Europe supported 376 UK organisations (609 projects involving UK beneficiaries) and helped distribute 196 UK films across Europe.⁹ The UK received around €111 million in all, supporting hundreds of projects in film, television, performing arts and publishing.³⁰



That money has not been replaced, other than very partially for film distribution under the UK government's Global Screen Fund, which provides £7 million annually. But even more importantly, ending UK membership of Creative Europe has largely sidelined UK organisations from a major element of European cultural collaboration, which is not just about finance but about networks, reputation, influence and shared problem solving. UK voices are no longer at tables where decisions are made, where markets are shaped and where new talent is discovered and nurtured.

The Fabian Society has recommended that the UK rejoins Creative Europe.³¹ As have Creative UK who, in their recent manifesto, stated:

"It's also important that we rejoin vital programmes for the Cultural and Creative Industries, including Erasmus, Creative Europe (CULTURE and MEDIA strands) and the Eurimages scheme of the Council of Europe."³²

The UK should seek to rejoin Creative Europe's cooperation strands, following the precedent set by Norway and other non-EU participants, and commit to participation in the forthcoming AgoraEU programme that will replace Creative Europe - the exact format and funding of AgoraEU is currently the subject of negotiations between the EU institutions.

In parallel, the Government should ensure that adequate funding and European collaboration opportunities are available through domestic mechanisms, for example the Arts Councils, British Council and the Global Screen Fund.³³ These should cover music, theatre, dance, literature, publishing and visual arts as well as film and television, to ensure that the UK remains visible and competitive on both the European and global stage.

Broadcasting and digital

The UK remains a global leader in film, television and digital production. British works are currently treated as “European” under the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) because the definition extends to all Council of Europe members. This status is vital as it allows UK productions to count towards the 30% European content quotas imposed on broadcasters and video-on-demand platforms across the EU.³⁴

However, the UK’s position is not guaranteed. The Directive is due for review in 2026, and some member states have argued that “European work” should be redefined to cover only EU, candidate countries and those with a ‘close connection’ to the EU. Were this change to be adopted, UK film and television content might no longer qualify, excluding it from quotas.

The British Screen Forum warned that this could have a serious impact on inward investment by international broadcasters. Between October 2023 and September 2024, the UK attracted £4 billion of inward investment in film and high-end television production, accounting for 85 per cent of total production spend.³⁵ Netflix, Disney, Apple and Amazon have all expanded their UK studio operations because content made in Britain currently qualifies as “European” for quota purposes and much of their content is designed for pan-European distribution.³⁶

The UK should work proactively with the EU to preserve its “European work” status under AVMSD during the 2026 review and seek assurances that UK productions will continue to count towards quotas. As such, the UK joining Creative Europe would help make the case towards maintaining the UK within AVSMD.



New European Bauhaus (NEB)

The **New European Bauhaus** brings together scientists, creative practitioners, architects, designers and communities to translate environmental objectives into high-quality, sustainable and inclusive places. The NEB programme cuts across several EU funding programmes, including Creative Europe but also regional and environmental programmes, and the Horizon research and innovation programme, to which the UK is associated and through which it participates in the NEB.³⁷

However, the UK's absence from the other EU programmes linked to the New European Bauhaus initiative has limited opportunities for structured collaboration linking climate ambition with culture, design and the built environment. **The UK Government should therefore explore with EU institutions how UK practitioners from fields not covered by Horizon - and in particular from the cultural and creative sectors - might be able to contribute further to the NEB.**

This deeper collaboration would align closely with the UK Government's Green Prosperity Plan, supporting clean growth, regional regeneration and the creation of skilled jobs through design-led innovation.

Culture Moves Europe/European Networks

A word here on two specific schemes funded through the EU's Creative Europe programme.

Culture Moves Europe is a research and development fund, open to individual artists and organisations, that opens the doors for early-stage project development.³⁸ It gives grants for artists and cultural professionals to travel and carry out a project in another Creative Europe country. **European Networks**, meanwhile, provides coordinated mechanisms for policy dialogue, knowledge exchange and cross-border engagement.

While the UK's Arts Councils do provide funding for international activities by groups and individuals,³³ this does not offer the same range of opportunities and support found within Creative Europe.

Due to the UK leaving Creative Europe we have, for example, seen European networks and platforms move their bases in the UK to EU countries.

03/B

The Twin-Track Approach

**Track 2 –
Issues that can be resolved in the UK**

For Track Two of the proposed approach

pertaining to what the UK can deliver domestically without needing heavy or drawn-out negotiations with the EU, there are three recommendations. Acting on these would deliver immediate and significant improvements for the sectors affected:



Reduce the cost of ATA carnets for instruments and equipment;



Make it easier to obtain CITES certificates for instruments made from rare materials;



Clear the backlog in issuing touring cultural professionals with A1 National Insurance Certificates exempting them from paying social security contributions for work abroad.

1// Reduce the costs of ATA carnets for instruments and equipment

For any non-portable instruments or equipment taken into the EU, UK performers must now obtain an ATA – or Temporary Admission - carnet. This requires detailed inventories, with every item listed by serial number and origin, and it comes at significant cost.

A single carnet can exceed £400, with a refundable security deposit of up to 40% of the equipment's value or a smaller but non-refundable insurance premium. For large ensembles, such as orchestras, the total bill can reach between £2,000 and £5,000 per tour.⁸ The process is also time-consuming: artists often lose days securing the necessary customs stamps, and in some cases, shows have been cancelled when carnet procedures caused delays at the border. One UK band, White Lies, for example, was forced to cancel a Paris concert in 2022 after being held up at customs.³⁹

Issuance fees are lower throughout much of the rest of Europe - where ATA carnets are also required if instruments are being taken outside the EU for all or part of a tour. For example, they start at €70 (about £61 in Austria⁸ and €100 (£87) in Portugal.⁸ The Independent Society of Musicians has highlighted that: "Governments in some countries subsidise the cost of the guarantee for their ATA Carnets, to support financially, as well as to encourage more international trade."⁴⁰

The Government should take steps to reduce the cost and complexity of ATA carnets for UK artists.

Without similar support, UK performing artists face significantly higher costs, even for touring outside the EU, than their European Union based counterparts (who by definition face zero carnet costs for touring inside the EU). Brexit has thus placed UK artists at a structural disadvantage.

The Government should also work with issuers to ensure that processing and issuing of carnets is accelerated, so that artists are not delayed or forced to cancel performances.

2// Make it easier to obtain CITES certificates

Many instruments containing restricted materials such as ivory, tortoiseshell or certain varieties of rosewood (though most rosewood instruments are exempt) require a Musical Instrument Certificate (MIC) under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). These rules were designed for regulating the trade in exotic goods, not for musicians travelling with personal instruments.

Certificates must be checked and endorsed on both exit and re-entry, are valid for only three years, and can take up to a month to obtain - making last-minute engagements almost impossible. **Every possible step should therefore be taken to facilitate the application and issuance process.**

Designate St Pancras as a CITES port

A further problem is the limited number of ports where certificates can be processed. St Pancras International, once one of the most convenient and lower-carbon routes into Europe, is not designated as a CITES port.

Musicians with affected instruments therefore cannot travel on Eurostar and are instead pushed onto more expensive and less sustainable options such as ferries or air freight.

Designating St Pancras would provide a practical, straightforward solution that supports both the creative industries and the Government's net-zero commitments. The cultural and creative sectors have already highlighted this as a priority and it could be delivered without requiring changes to the TCA.

The UK Government should urgently work with Eurostar, Border Force and DEFRA to review its earlier position that space, partly because of the current introduction of the EU's Entry Exit System (EES), does not allow the designation of St Pancras International as a CITES port of entry and exit. Every effort should be made to find the necessary space immediately. In any event, the amount of space required for EES should decline relatively quickly as the system beds in, so more space will become available in the relatively near future.

3// Clear the backlog of A1 certificates and meet the 15-day service target

An A1 certificate is issued by HMRC to confirm that a worker remains within the UK's National Insurance system while temporarily working in the EU. It exists to prevent "double charging" of social security: once in the UK and again in the host country. For musicians and other creative freelancers, it is often non-negotiable, as promoters and venues routinely require a valid A1 before confirming contracts or releasing payment.⁴¹

Delays have turned this safeguard into a barrier. HMRC were in late 2025 often taking up to six months or more to issue A1 certificates, leaving artists with lost bookings, withheld fees and cancelled tours.⁴⁰ The creative workforce is overwhelmingly freelance and depends on short-notice engagements; if certificates cannot be issued quickly, both income and professional credibility diminish.

The Government must deliver in its commitment to cutting processing times to within service standards (Service Level Agreement), and process online applications within 15 working days.⁴² It should also work to develop a route allowing short-term creative engagements to be automatically covered, removing unnecessary barriers to creative work.





04

Conclusion



Britain's cultural and creative sectors are among our greatest national assets: economically powerful, culturally distinctive and central to our global influence. The music and performing arts sectors - the main focus of this report - are central to that. They contribute £11 billion to the economy every year.¹⁴

Yet since leaving the EU, too many of the foundations that made this success possible have been weakened. What was once a rich and seamless system for touring, collaboration, cultural diplomacy and cultural exchange has become a patchwork of barriers, costs and lost opportunities.

Almost half of UK musicians report less EU work since 2021 and one in four have had none at all.⁴³ Grassroots artists can no longer afford to tour, orchestras have been priced out of bringing their own vehicles, and bands are losing thousands of pounds in merchandise sales. Theatre and dance companies are equally impacted, as are visual arts producers. Beyond the performing arts, museum, film, media, literary, publishing and other professionals have seen their own opportunities, and their potential to create economic growth and opportunities for others, curtailed.

Notably - but not only - through the loss of access to the Creative Europe programme, UK organisations have lost access to the networks that once allowed them to lead, innovate and collaborate in Europe.

While UK rules for EU cultural professionals are somewhat less onerous than those their UK counterparts must deal with in the EU, European partners still face significant barriers to working in the UK and sometimes also have to overcome confusion at UK borders.

These are not abstract policy issues. They are the difference between a thriving industry which can support viable careers and a shrinking sector with diminished entry points for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. They are the difference between the UK being a cultural leader in Europe or becoming a marginal player.

As a result of a hard Brexit, we risk diminishing the power of the creative sectors, losing talent to other countries, damaging the domestic talent pipeline and depriving UK audiences of the chance to see some of the best the rest of Europe has to offer.

The only comprehensive solution to these challenges and for the UK to regain the influence it should have on European cultural policy is for the UK to join the European Union. European Movement UK and others are campaigning vigorously for just that. It is the only way fully to remove the barriers created by the UK's changed relationship with the EU and deliver the scale of benefit the cultural sector - and many other sectors - require to truly thrive internationally.

However, joining the EU or even just the single market and/or customs union - enough to alleviate most day-to-day problems - would take a significant amount of time, even if the Government, as it should, sought to start the process at once.

In the meantime, there is clear value in practical steps that bring the UK and EU closer. The proposals in this report provide a workable path forward: reducing barriers, rebuilding cooperation and delivering tangible benefits for artists, businesses, supply chains and audiences on both sides of the Channel.

Taken together, the measures set out in this report would reduce friction, support growth and improve the day-to-day ability of the music, performing arts and other cultural sectors to operate across Europe.

These are targeted, realistic steps.

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