



Impact of the new touring restrictions on Bectu members

John Rogers, Lighting Operator, Designer, Programmer, CAD Product Specialist and Lecturer

I am an award nominated Lighting Operator, Designer, Programmer, CAD Product Specialist and lecturer. I've been working in lighting for 18 years. I am a self-employed sole trader.

I spend about half my working time in the UK and the other half abroad, usually working in Europe either on tour or at music festivals. In the last four years I have worked in 18 different European Countries – Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden & Switzerland - most of them multiple times in one year. Sometimes I have found myself entering, leaving and re-entering a particular country for shows on the same tour. This is not even considering countries that I may pass through in transit on a tour bus without stopping to work.

The administrative overhead to facilitate visas for each of these countries will be a significant addition of working hours. Worse still, it will be a significant financial outlay that, for example, my Dutch or German colleagues will not cost a touring production. All the work I have done building my expertise and reputation in my field over the last 18 years will not be enough to mitigate prohibitive visa costs incurred by my nationality. Put simply, as a British worker I will have become priced out of my own job due to the loss of the ability to work in Europe. I will be offered less work by my former and prospective clients alike. If a tour of six European countries is planned, I would need visas for at least five of them. Before we get to the countries issuing visas asking "why can't you employ one of our nationals to do this" the production will look at the cost of the visas hiring me entails and all the administration that goes with it, and then compare it to the zero cost that an EU worker would incur by comparison. How are British workers expected to compete with that?

There is also the factor of moving equipment originating in Britain around Europe. Currently manifests of equipment, or carnets, in the touring party are only required for Switzerland and Norway. Now they are required for any European country, with it being one carnet covering the whole of the EU. So a quick one off show in Paris now requires a carnet. Or a festival in Germany. There's that administrative overhead again. Why spend the money hiring lighting and staging equipment from British companies to take around Europe when it comes with such baggage. Better to use a Belgian company and not have to provide a carnet for tours or festivals that don't take place in countries requiring them.

Furthermore, the difficulty of moving equipment between the UK and the EU could have a detrimental impact on the quality of productions in the UK. This is because some productions on a EU and UK tour will take the option of not administrating the extra lights, effects and set pieces into the UK and will instead do a cut-down show with a modest hire local to the UK for only a fraction of the tour to cut down costs. This means less money spent on British equipment and as a knock on, fewer British workers required to prep, deliver and operate it for a shorter number of working days. It also means less impactful shows in the UK, with the better experience found abroad for the same act. This affects music tourism, which is a significant boon to the UK economy. This then also effects my work as a house technician at

various venues and festivals around the UK. Fewer shows with less equipment on stage means less work for British workers both at home and abroad. This is not scaremongering or hyperbole. Already I have seen job advertisements for technicians in Europe that would usually be seeking to hire British techs stating "those without the right to work in the EU need not apply."

Now is not the time to jeopardise the significant cultural cache afforded by our industry on the world stage. I have built my livelihood on the ability to work in Europe at a moment's notice and without friction at borders. The loss of this is absolutely devastating both on a personal level and to the industry as a whole.

Ben Ellis, Musician and Head of Sound

The government and the EU seem to think that the provision to be able to work 90 out of 180 days as an artist or tech visa free in Europe will be fine. It will not. Most touring techs and musicians can only survive by working for more than one artist. We cannot survive if we can only work for 90 out of every 180 days. That will potentially mean that we can't work for half of the time in our biggest, closest market which is Europe.

Most European tours are between 30-60 days. But artists rely on festival appearances which are a few days here and there and other one-off type gigs. It takes months to rehearse a band and to train sound, lights and guitar and drum techs. If one member of a touring party uses up their 90 day allowance working for another artist in Europe – which is the only way to survive - then it will mean that booking a festival or a tour becomes fraught with uncertainty about the personnel being available to do it. This will mean simply that artists will book less gigs and there will be less work around for everyone.

We need to campaign for a visa free musician and tech passport in all European territories. The complications of the 90 day rule applying in some and not other territories for some crew and musical members of a band is massively complicated and it means UK musicians and techs will suffer massively.

The other major worry is the customs limitation for selling merch in European countries on tour. This is the only way that many tours are financially viable. But if the touring group has to stop for customs checks at every European border and pay import and export duty on everything, the repercussions are huge.

Every time you go in and out of Switzerland you have to allow for potentially 6 or 8 hours for a border check for merch and carnet. If this happens at every European border we won't be able to route tours and play gigs every night. There will be extra travel days added, you will need extra bus drivers for the extra potential hours at the wheel, there will be loads of paperwork that will be beyond most musicians and way too much work for one tour manager. It will make most small to medium tours non viable financially and it is super important that this issue is also addressed.

Callum Vernon, Live Front of House & System Technician

I'm a Live Front of House & System Technician with 9+ years in the industry. I've spent the last 5 years touring for more than 8 months at a time around the EU, specifically Germany & France as the Head of Sound for one major production.

The latest news on requirements for working visas will impact me dramatically, as already the Production Company have said there will be a strong possibility they won't be able to hire me. I have seen this be true with other companies like TUI tours, Creative Technologies, PRG and more.

As this Production provides me with most of my year round work, this is a massive set back both in terms of my career, and financially. Not only does this have a huge impact on me, but the companies who hire me too. They rely on my knowledge to get the job done on their behalf and have now lost expertise in that field. They will have to spend the time and resources finding someone else who might be suitable for the job.

The impact will also affect the UK economy directly. I bring back money into the country in the form of tax, and a high tax bill if I might add. Taking away the opportunity for people like me to work will be affecting a huge amount of money the Government relies on.

A lot of people like myself work abroad in the EU, and if all these people are now looking for work here in the UK, it will further increase unemployment, using up unnecessary taxpayers money and increasing the demand for other employment here in the UK.

The answer is simple, and it is that we need Visa free work permits to be granted, as was promised before any Brexit trade deals were discussed. The government made this promise and didn't stick to it, bringing back absolutely nothing to the table.

Myles Hayden Sound Engineer

I am a sound engineer. I work in live entertainment, touring, in local venues, conferences, corporate parties/entertainment, weddings, the list goes on. I have been in the industry for 16 years and have worked right across the world, probably averaging around 15 countries a year. Most of my work however is in the UK and the EU. Covid-19 has devastated my industry, I am hopeful that with the support packages from the government we can bounce back to where we were in 2019. Brexit however is looking to damage my line of work irreparably post-Covid.

Around a third of my work comes from American bands and production companies. They use Britain as a hub for their work in Europe due to our high levels of infrastructure, expertise, and access to the EU. The new legislation that has come into play due to Brexit has made me and my colleagues uncompetitive against our rivals in the EU, particularly from production houses in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Poland. The cost of visas, carnets, the time scale of the administration, the uncertainty of my ability to travel (especially at short notice) will quite simply, make me as a freelancer and the companies I work for an unviable option.

The hard and upsetting truth is this: any companies from outside the EU that want to put on a multi-stop event across the EU are much better served using companies and staff based in the EU. As Britain is no longer in the EU, I with my colleagues will lose these jobs and we will lose our great international working relationships, which we have worked on often for decades.

For me personally I stand to lose around 33% of my annual income, and I will not be alone in this. The event industry in the UK prospers because of its access to the EU, sadly, with these new rules there will be huge swathes of redundancies right across the industry. Whilst we have unemployment at home, our EU-based counterparts will thrive as a result of our loss. Due to the scale of redundancies it will inevitably be difficult to make up my 33% of loss income, I won't be in a position where I can make up this revenue in another area of the market. The work will have gone away and there will be nothing to replace it with.

Needless to say, job losses affect everyone in society. When tens or maybe hundreds of thousands of people lose such a significant part of our income, we pay less tax, we eat out less, we spend less on clothes, housing, groceries, holidays the list goes on. Which in turn means those businesses have less income, the cycle continues...

I strongly urge anyone with the power to amend this legislation to do so and as quickly as possible. Please let me keep my job and don't let my industry lose its standing amongst the very best in the world. Britain has an events industry that is second to none, truly world beating but once this work leaves these shores, it will be very very difficult to get back.

Gareth Barton, Freelance Event Production

I have worked self-employed as a sole trader in live events in various roles from Lighting and Sound Engineer, Rigging and Stage and Production Management for over twenty years. I have worked extensively throughout Europe and the Middle East so I'm pretty concerned at the moment as are many of my colleagues.

The largest venue in the Middle East (QNCC) Qatar National Conference and Exhibition Centre repeatedly flew in large numbers of us technical freelancers from the UK to do events like the huge UN COP 18 event amongst many others. Highly skilled workers in live events have been exported all over Europe and the world. I have recently started to see job adverts for companies asking for 'Non UK passport holders'. It's so much easier for employers to overlook us now due to the added complications. It's great for live events staff based in the EU, who will no doubt, benefit greatly. I've heard of touring staff being asked by previous employers of their status to work in the EU although it has not happened to myself. These barriers make us less competitive and puts us at a massive disadvantage.

I've toured throughout Europe as Chief LX and Lighting Operator with many UK based organisations and shows like Wired Ariel Theatre and their outdoor spectacle 'As the World Tipped' more recently a 20+ arena tour across France and Switzerland with Gary Mullen and the Works (One Night with Queen) tour in Jan/Feb 2020. I was supposed to go back out in September and then Jan 2021 but unfortunately these dates keep being pushed back due to the pandemic. Who knows how these tours will go ahead in 2021 with such uncertainty surrounding touring arrangements in the EU but I'm pretty worried as are the rest of the team.

Under post-Brexit rules there are different visa requirements for Third Country Nationals in each of the member states. In the countries that relate to the majority of my work, for example, I am allowed to go into the EU for 90 days in any 180 day period, permit free because of the current exemptions. This would be okay for an artist on a tour less than 90 days but many event production staff will come off a tour and jump right on multiple other tours. I presume this will now not be possible under this 90 day arrangement without arranging further visa and work authorizations. Ultimately this could mean many companies will be forced to look away from the UK for staff, the fact that visiting multiple countries could also involve multiple lengthy applications also makes it more appealing to just hire from the EU.

For EU citizens to work or tour the UK they have to apply for a Tier Five Creative and Sporting Visa (£244pp) or a Paid Engagement Visa (£94) and the usual carnet application costs (£365 + security deposit). I don't know how the UK government can ask for free visa travel and carnet exemptions whilst demanding incoming visitors from the EU to have expensive visas and carnets?

Unfortunately, I don't know what the answers are but I think the way forward calls for a reciprocal agreement that promotes and nurtures collaborative and cultural exchange between the EU and UK, something that creates conditions for the arts industries to continue to flourish and be mutually beneficial for both the UK and EU.

Nadgy Khirat, LD

I have the luck to be a French citizen so the visa issue will not apply to me directly, however it could impact simply by the sheer reduction of work in the EU as a result of the visas and

everything that will stem from it. Even in terms of taxation, the unknown and diversity that will come to deal with different state and their tax policy will rebuke some bands to even try to go play abroad.

We could make a direct parallel to how touring the US currently is, where the vast majority of bands do it as a loss on extremely reduced crew (usually 1 or 2 instead of 5+) as I think it will look exactly like it. I have been part of many UK /EU tours that had to ship me home after the last day of the European tour because they could not afford to take me over to the US, I suspect the same will happen for the EU leg of the tour if we can't find a solution. Which represent usually anywhere between a week and a month or more worth of dates and tour.

Joe Peet, FOH Sound Engineer

The majority of live shows I have worked on in Europe have been either jazz/world music festivals or headline shows promoted as independent events. These have mostly involved London-based musicians, management and agents and local promoters.

Many music genres are well-loved across the world by a small, dedicated audience; however, the margins for non-mainstream culture can be tight at the best of times.

The juggernaut of popular/mass entertainment will no doubt thunder along, despite extra bureaucracy and expense. But culture on the fringes, hi-brow, alternative or emerging new forms is likely to be hit hardest by the new travel restrictions in Europe for UK artists and crew.

Lucinda Potter, Sound Engineer and Technician

I am a sound engineer, house technician and general technician. I work in small and large venues, and independent venues across Manchester. I tour with smaller bands, normally UK bands, in and around the UK with the odd tours outside the UK, but generally my responsibilities to the venues (and budget of smaller/local bands) restrict my movements - not always, but sometimes.

One issue with ending free movement is small bands barely make money going on tour, so the introduction of visa or restrictions when it comes to budgets basically means that it ends European touring for all those bands. The more people that the band take, the more money they need.

If we take Manchester and it's musical history, a lot of its roots are from DIY style cultures and underground scenes. These scenes are incredibly creative, and break barriers, challenge 'norms' and think outside the box a lot of the time. Because of this, there is not necessarily that much money in it. These bands and underground movements reach so much further than the UK mainstream and a lot of these styles are supported in other EU countries. These albeit small bands for us, play independent festivals across Europe and bring back money into our economy, take other UK artists and creatives back out with them, further supporting our artists and creative sector. This is how our art is travelled. This also obviously affects the European bands coming to us too, however, I feel the way to adequately get across the financial impact of this would be to use the US/ UK example.

The UK is renowned for its skill set in this sector. There is a reason we have a mass export of skill to Europe and entire productions are created using UK based workers (irrespective of their nationality) and bring that money back to the UK economy! The US uses primarily UK based staff/companies to produce it's shows. To put it bluntly, the new restrictions mean that the 'perk' of the UK is gone. With this isolation there is little to no appeal to hire a UK production team. It's not financially beneficial, we are no longer a gateway into a European tour. With this, fewer US dates will be planned (for financial reasons) and UK tour dates will lessen, impacting every venue across the UK. The odd London show, maybe Glasgow, that's

it. Realistically, a 10-20 date UK tour will now be reduced to 2 or 3 shows. Venues will be less busy or close because smaller bands/less high profile acts can't play and the venues simply cannot afford to stay open.

If productions are forced to leave most of their show at a border to save money and only fly the band, the odd crew members (+2 instead of +5) and use 'house equipment' [NB: What is already in the venues as a standard show package] the impact and aesthetic of the show will be completely different from the rest of the tour and will not live up to the same standard. This creates inconsistency and an unreliable experience for both the band and the audience. Audiences will go to fewer gigs and may even travel elsewhere - it is only a short journey to France, a plane ride to Germany or Spain, and they get a few days holiday with it. Instead of going to independent venues throughout the week and spending thousands on a week off to go to Glastonbury/Reading/Leeds, the public will spend their money going away for gigs and festivals, rather than feeding the UK economy and supporting UK based, home grown talent.

It's so easy to underestimate the importance of gigs and live events, networking, working relationships, and business nights/ corporate events. On a personal note, with things moving so fast, I think a step back to see the bigger picture, realising the joy, the friends and social opportunities the industry creates and the atmospheres that make real life memories is so important... I personally do not want to live in a 2D world. Nor do I want to return to a world where music and the arts is picked on and crucified because it is seen to be lesser, or easier; nor do I want the industry to become an exclusive privilege for the higher pay brackets.

Music is inclusive, inspiring and unifying. A true universal constant. Sound is the first thing we hear and experience from the very beginning, it should be something everyone can always hear and be a part of no matter where you are or your situation. I am part of the 48% and wear it proudly. We are responsible for helping create people's memories. I for one, do not take that lightly, nor should anybody else.