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As you may know the Federation of Scottish Theatre is a membership body which advocates for the theatre and dance sector. Since lockdown, FST have been collecting and representing members' experiences, engaging with Scottish Government, alongside Culture Counts, who provides guidance to decision makers in the Government on behalf of the whole cultural sector –which includes arts, screen, heritage and creative industries – as well as engaging with UK partners.

The FST Board of Directors has been meeting weekly - somewhat more frequently than I anticipated when I joined it in September! They are a group of highly committed, dynamic and creative leaders, to which I add my experience as an independent writer and theatre maker.

We know people have been feeling out of the loop and isolated, as though discussions are happening and decisions being taken without them. As I'm in the room, I wanted to give you the lowdown about our activities during this time.

We have heard about: Anxiety about safety. Hard times. Threatened livelihoods. Grief. But also: Love, community, support, ingenuity and creativity. And importantly - appetite for change, more collaboration and honesty than we've probably ever seen.

We know:

- There is very little financial resilience in our sector, for individuals or organisations.
- Social distancing in our buildings is going to be difficult for staff and audiences, with long lead times, to ensure their safety on re-opening.
- Touring will be extremely challenging.
- Risks of re-closure because of spikes in infection, are very high. Insurance will be problematic, but

There aren't any answers yet. The 'road map' doesn't even mention theatres. Phase 4 guidance states that 'physical distancing may still be in place', and no-one can predict how long it will take to get to Phase 4.

People are looking hard at whether they can offer Christmas shows – whether audiences will be able, or willing, to come back - indeed what is the viability of opening? Very little theatre production is expected to take place in buildings, until at least Feb/Mar. Cancelled and postponed programmes may not simply shift forward by a season or a year. Redundancies are being announced and likely that there will be more. Restarting larger productions will require greater consideration. Different kinds of work will become more important in the new context, with digital work increasing and improving; sharing practice, and experience in platforms, which allow people to be paid for that work.

The FST are: Holding some online meetups for non-members like freelance technical and production staff, who don't have other places (like Playwrights Studio), and aiming to engage the wider sector to share the broadest range of ideas.

With a clear mandate from members, FST are working on a new industry strategy - despite present uncertainty, we are committed to exploring how to make things better, especially in areas that were sorely neglected before, but essential for our future, the Environment and Equalities, especially with the deep roots of structural racism so urgently exposed by both pandemic and protest.

With UK and Scottish Government colleagues we are working on re-opening guidance, initially for rehearsal and production; but we know that, just because you are allowed to open doesn't mean you can.

We are thinking about how to properly support people who are vulnerable, or have caring responsibilities, and if opening to smaller audiences is financially viable.

We are working with local and national media, sharing case studies that show why theatre matters, while preserving some capacity for when we can come back, and how, as well as responding and adapting during the earlier phases.

Professional theatre and dance will continue in the future, even if we don't fully know yet how, or when.

But still there's comfort to be had, in knowing that even in these challenging times, when you strip everything back, what remains are our stories.

We are the storytellers, and we will adapt and keep telling our stories, however we may...even if we're still in our pyjamas and flip-flops!