

GRASSROOTS MUSIC VENUES (GMVs) – DEFINITION

This definition is the one contained in the Mayor of London's Music Venues Rescue Plan (October 2015) and agreed at Venues Day 2015 (October 2015) by leading figures from within the music industry and from government. The definition is being used by Arts Council England and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport in discussions surrounding the future of music venues. It is based upon extensive audits and surveys of UK music venues, and is comparable to the EU-wide definition of similar music venues implemented by Live DMA in more than a dozen European countries. The definition of Grassroots Music Venues contained in this document comprises the only widely accepted measures and parameters for describing dedicated music venues, and its creation in 2015 was welcomed by the Culture Minister Ed Vaizey and the head of the BPI Geoff Taylor. We are not aware of any other definition of this sector.

DEFINING GMVs - CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ROLE

We define the cultural and social importance of a grassroots music venue (GMV) by testing its reputation, role and activity against six criteria:

1. The elephant test

Musicians and audiences in the town/borough/city think that is the grassroots music venue.

2. Focus on cultural activity as its main purpose and its outcomes

The venue's raison d'être is the music it programmes.

3. It is a music business, run by music experts

An organisational focus on music. Other ancillary services (alcohol, food, merchandise) subsidiary or dependent upon music activity.

4. It takes risks with its cultural programme, and that risk taking is the ignition system of the engine that is the UK music industry

Programmes artists that deserve audiences with no expectation of direct financial reward; as a result of this loss-making activity, significant economic returns become available to the UK music industry.

5. A Beacon of Music and key generator of night-time economic activity

The presence of a grassroots music venue (or venues) provides a central beacon of music activity that inspires towns/ boroughs/cities to be musical, and the absence of one causes a dearth of music activity. By programming and reputation, GMVs attract audiences who add significant value to other aspects of the night-time economy (restaurants, pubs, bars, clubs, transport).

6. Plays nicely with others

Occupies an important role within its local community and is open to further networking.

A Grassroots Music Venue displays some or all of these characteristics, dependent upon factors such as location, economic climate, or seasonal variations.

DEFINING GMVs - ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

We use capacity, activity, employment and financial return to seek to categorise GMVs in three bands:

SMALL GMV:

- less than 350 capacity
- over 144 live music events per year, providing opportunities for more than 180 micro-businesses (bands)
- entry level musicians, some limited activity in established acts
- 3 to 10 direct FTE jobs (programming, lighting, sound, bar, security etc)
- significant number of unpaid roles/volunteers
- high running cost to capacity ratio
- little if any profit potential

MEDIUM GMV:

- 351 to 650 capacity
- over 96 live music events per year, providing opportunities for more than 144 micro-businesses (bands)
- mix of new and established acts
- 5 to 15 direct FTE jobs (programming, lighting, sound, bar, security etc)
- some unpaid roles/volunteers
- medium to high running cost to capacity ratio
- propensity to programme non-live music (such as club nights) to support live music programme
- limited potential for profit

LARGE GMV:

- 651 plus capacity
- over 72 live music events per year, providing opportunities for more than 108 micro-businesses (bands)
- programme of mainly established acts
- 10 to 20 direct FTE jobs (programming, lighting, sound, bar, security etc)
- internships and apprenticeships
- may be profitable dependent upon external factors (location, additional uses, ownership)

These bands and activities are flexible. Final definition of a GMV within these bands should include variable factors such as location, economic climate, competition, or programming.

DEFINING GMVs – AMENITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Has a fixed or temporary stage, or as a minimum an area defined as a stage, and exhibits at least one other structural hallmark conducive to live music, such as:

Defined audience space, sound booth, ticket hatch, sound proofing, room adapted to enhance acoustics, stage facing or elevated seating, dressing room, photo pit, external poster frames for advertising gigs, overnight band accommodation

2. Possess a mixing desk, PA system, and at least one other piece of equipment to facilitate live music, such as:

Stage monitors, lighting rig, drum kit, back line, stage microphones, stage box & snake, spare instruments, instrument consumables, signal processors, recording rig, smoke machine

3. Employs or otherwise utilises at least two of the following (they may be the same person):

Sound engineer, booker, promoter, cashier, stage manager, security personnel

4. Applies a cover charge to some live music performances and incorporates promotion within its activities, such as:

Publishes printed or electronic gig listings, issues printed tickets, utilises on-line ticketing, produces displays and distributes posters, advertises gigs involving original music via local media