

Interview with Tom Kiehl



By IHAV Youth Ambassador
Jessica Hartley

Tom Kiehl is the Deputy CEO and Director of Public Affairs at UK Music. 'UK Music is the collective voice of the UK's world-leading music industry. With the voice that we have, we represent all sectors of our industry (the creator organisations, record companies, music publishers and the live sector) – bringing them together to collaborate, campaign, and champion music.'

Did you always know what you wanted to do when you were younger?

As a teenager, working in the political arena wasn't really something I had ever considered, as I was more geared towards the arts. I loved amateur dramatics and performing music.

However, a pivotal moment was the 1997 General Election. There was a big period of change going on within UK politics. I was working towards my A Levels (History, Politics and Media Studies) and so was really interested in these changes. I also realised that the skills I'd been developing from amateur dramatics had transferable elements and maybe politics could be in my future.

At University, I studied European politics and I was working for a political party for a number of years before starting my current role. But before working with Parliament and then in public affairs directly, I did lots of volunteering, internships and lots of 'ad hoc' roles to strengthen my ability to work in politics. In my summer holidays, I would volunteer and do campaigning work which put me in a good position to take my passion forward.

What's a day in the life like for you?

Every day is different and my role is very varied. I do lots of work with MPs - trying to support them when they have debates in Parliament, making sure that they're fully briefed on the issues in the music industry. We also provide the Secretariat for the All Party Parliamentary Group for Music.

I need to be quite reactive to what's going on within the parliamentary schedule, and because we are a membership organisation we need to communicate back to our members about what's going on in parliament, as well as explaining what's happening if a new law or policy has been put in place.

Of course some days might be slower than others. The government might be doing a consultation on a particular topic, so I'll have to arrange meetings with members to get their views on a particular proposal about something that the music industry wants to support or not. Therefore, my day would be planning ahead for those meetings, reading those documents to check I fully understand what's being proposed and then maybe on the back of that writing up a draft response, sending it round to members and seeing if they're in agreement.

As the Deputy CEO, I also support the CEO with his work and other projects. A varied day is the fun part of the job!

Has there been a standout moment in your career?

When I worked in Parliament I got really involved in a campaign which developed a proposed piece of legislation known as the 'Live Music Bill'. It was a Private Member's Bill – so not a government bill, but it was something that backbench MPs were supporting. It was an attempt to make it easier to put on live music performances without requiring local authority licences – particularly for small venues or small impromptu music performances. I was involved in coming up with the idea for a Live Music Bill and then ran the campaign (which got lots of momentum) and eventually we were successful - it became a law.

This experience helped me in the role I'm in now because I was able to demonstrate how I had taken something forward from start to finish, and that I'd been able to make a difference in the music industry.

Quick Fire Questions

Favourite Book?

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams.

Favourite Film?

'If' by Lindsay Anderson (1968). 'It's about breaking down the system and challenging whoever is in power. I find it inspiring because it's about rising up against oppression.'

As you work in the world of music, what song best describes you, and why?

The song title itself wouldn't best describe me but it's a song called 'Cigarettes and Alcohol' by Oasis. I don't smoke and don't drink that much alcohol but the refrain 'Make it happen!' is an approach I try to have in life and specifically in my working life. If I have an idea, I want to make it happen.

Finish the sentence 'I have a voice...'

...And it's the most powerful tool I have.

Tom's Top Tips:

- Always persevere (especially if you have a particular goal or ambition.)
- Blend your passions and personal interests. The more you can speak enthusiastically about a topic, the more attractive you can be to future employers.
- Always be nice to people. You never know if you'll be dealing with them in another environment, or in your career.

Tom

