

ALD Response to Commons Treasury Committee

23March20 DRAFT

I thank you for inviting responses providing information about areas where more support from Government might be required during the current crisis.

I write on behalf of the members of the Association of Lighting Designers, a professional body representing those working in the field of lighting for the entertainment industry - theatre, concerts, live events, , film, television, corporate productions and more - while also supporting the tools these practitioners require in, for example, negotiations over EU Ecodesign and related regulations.

The model of our industry is that most working in this field are self-employed, either as sole traders ('freelance') or through their own limited companies. They are then employed short-term on projects as required by those creating the shows or other projects. The duration of these projects might be anything from part of a day for setting up a

one-off 'gig' to a few months for setting up complex new theatre productions. The work encompasses everything from tiny events to the biggest shows in the world - shows such as *Les Misérables*, *Billy Elliot*, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* and countless others which have contributed enormous amounts to the British economy over the years.

The leading members of our organisation are some of the best known names in the field, traditionally in demand worldwide. Those members also support, encourage and mentor the up-and-coming new generations of practitioners.

With the shut down of the entertainment industry in the UK and the rest of the world over the last few weeks, all of our members have seen their current and future work collapse: they have no work now, they have no confirmed work looking forward. No new work will appear until theatres and other places of entertainment are allowed to re-open, and even then it will take time for new productions to get underway again.

While we recognise and admire the enormous efforts the UK Government is currently putting in to supporting the UK workforce, currently our members feel like they are being treated as second class citizens compared to those who hold full time employment with companies.

- as freelancers, they cannot claim Statutory Sick Pay for coronavirus related illnesses or self-isolation, only New Style Employment and Support Allowance, which is a smaller payment that is more difficult and slower to access.

- as freelancers, many cannot claim all or some portion of Universal Credit because the savings they hold ready to pay the next installment of their self-assessment tax bill is counted for the purposes of Universal Credit assessment. While the proposal to allow the next tax payment to be deferred is helpful in terms of immediate cash flow, it is actually unhelpful in terms of savings counting against access to Universal Credit.

- as freelancers, they do not have access to the up to £2500 per person the government is promising to companies for 'furloughed' workers. This feels the most disappointing: this support seems designed to allow companies to hold their workforce together, standing ready for the passing of this crisis. No equivalent support is being offered to freelancers who have seen their work collapse because of circumstances which are the right choices for fighting coronavirus, but over which they have no control. They too should be supported to stand ready to return to action.

- and for those working within their own limited companies - effectively employees and directors of those companies - there is currently no clarity at all about whether they will be able to access the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

We believe that freelance and self-employed workers are being treated substantially less well than those who are currently employees of larger companies. This feels unjust and contrary to the spirit of us all being in this crisis together. We do not believe the

support being offered to the self-employed, who form such an important part of the workforce, is sufficient.

We would suggest that what is required during this crisis is some form of Universal Basic Income - a set amount paid to everyone to help them survive, regardless of whether they are employed, self-employed or freelance. That would allow everyone to be ready to resume their activities once the crisis passes, all with any savings or other circumstances having been affected by roughly the same amount.

If we can help with any additional information about our membership or the work they do which may be useful to your research, please do get in touch.

Yours,

Johanna Town

Chair, The Association of Lighting Designers

on behalf of the membership of the ALD: www.ald.org.uk.