

Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives

To whom it may concern,

Further to your call for evidence on the Government's financial response to Coronavirus I would like to bring to your attention the plight of many professional freelance genealogists.

I am Secretary of the Association of Genealogists & Researchers in Archives which is the accrediting body for Professional Genealogists in England and Wales. There is an equivalent body in Scotland (The Association of Scottish Genealogists & Researchers in Archives). The Association represents over 170 members.

Almost all our members are freelance self employed workers being sole traders and not limited companies, our income derives from Clients who pay us to research family trees for historical and legal purposes.

We rely on access to records kept in archive repositories, the majority of which are Government, Local Authority or University owned, some are in private hands.

Most of our working lives are spent inside repositories where we gather information and evidence for our Clients. Within the last week we have seen every repository close down due to the current situation thus cutting off our access to resources that are our bread and butter. As a consequence we are unable to complete projects we currently have in process and are unable to commence any new projects. Although there are digital archives and online historical records available which we can use, most of our members rely on being able to visit archive repositories.

This situation has caused income for the majority of professional genealogists to dry up and drop to zero in the course of just one week with the prospect of no future income for the foreseeable future.

We are just one of group of the large population of self employed freelancers who have currently no prospect of financial support whatsoever.

So far the Government's response has been to drop the Universal Credit minimum income floor for self employed people to enable a means tested claim for benefits, but only if a person is sick or self-isolating. The majority of self employed are neither, they have just lost all their income revenue.

On behalf of our professional freelance members and the wider self employed community I would implore the Government to develop a strategy to help us as they have for the larger business world and employed people. Failure to do so will devastate the hard working people who have built up their own independent businesses from start up over many years, only to be placed in a position where they will no longer be able to sustain themselves as sole traders and most likely have to become benefit claimants for many months and even years to come.

If you require further evidence of individual cases I am sure that members of our association would be only too pleased to co-operate.

Yours faithfully,
Cathy Soughton
AGRA Secretary