

### **Written evidence submitted anonymously**

I am aged 55, have a doctorate from Oxford, and was a full-time University Lecturer for over 20 years. In 2013 I decided to make a career change to the screen industries, and with that in mind I switched to part-time lecturing (at KCL), which I did from 2014-2017. I saved carefully during that period and underwent self-funded professional re-training, during which I did not claim any benefits (nor have I, ever).

Finally, I got my first contract as a PAYE freelancer, working on a feature film as a Production Assistant (on minimum wage) from 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019 to 12<sup>th</sup> February 2020. Because of the end date of my contract, I was not eligible for the JRS. I had a number of applications in train for my next contract when the virus shut down all production.

My only income now comes from a tiny studio flat I own and rent out, and that income barely covers half my own rental costs, let alone food and utility bills. However, because this studio flat is considered by DWP as an "asset" – even though I cannot now legally evict my tenants even if I wanted to sell it – my application for Universal Credit has been refused. The lady who rang was very kind, acknowledged it was very unfair, but told me there was nothing she could do as those are the rules.

I then applied for JSA, but that also was refused. The letter gave no reason other than "legal" reasons but I'm assuming it's because of the one-year (2018-19) gap in my 20+ years of NI contributions. I find it deeply ironic that this gap occurred because I thought the socially responsible thing to do was to support myself during career retraining rather than claim benefits.

Of course I've tried to find other work during lockdown, but job websites are over-subscribed and I am also considered over-qualified, too old, or both.

I am now surviving on handouts from family and friends. This is not only deeply humiliating for someone with my career history, but that support will also cease after the end of this month (June).

The screen industries brought around £100 billion into the UK economy last year. And our work has been helping people stay sane during lockdown. Production is supported by low-paid people like me who work on short PAYE contracts and are not covered by any of the current schemes currently on offer. We are not likely to be able to return to work until sometime in the autumn at the very earliest. Many are desperate, suffering serious mental health problems and some on our "Excluded" Facebook group are clearly close to suicide, to the point that admins have had to engage specialist counsellors.

There are thousands in my situation, and an estimated 3 million in the UK overall who've been left out of any existing schemes. Please help us, if not for humanitarian reasons, for economic ones. We need to survive in order for the creative sector to be able to regenerate.

*December 2020*