

Written evidence submitted by Equity

Equity represents over 47,000 actors and creative workers including directors, designers, choreographers, dancers, singers, entertainers, comedians, stage management and audio artists. Our members work across the UK's arts and entertainment industries – from theatre and live entertainment through to film, television and audio. A majority of Equity's members are self-employed for tax and NI purposes but are workers with regard to employment rights.

How effective is the Government support to businesses and individuals across different regions and sectors? Does the effectiveness of the Government support vary across different regions?

The pandemic has hit the entertainment sector badly, and in doing so has further exposed and exacerbated the existing economic precarity they already faced. The vast majority of Equity's members are self-employed for tax and welfare benefits purposes, and very little permanent work exists in the sector. This status, and the fact that many of Equity's members rely on part time work in other industries, has meant that many have fallen through the well-documented gaps in the Self Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS). Many have received no help from either scheme, despite limited opportunities to work since March 2020.

Equity's most recent membership survey, which took place throughout September and October 2020 has found that:

- 27% of our members have not been managing well financially since March 2020.
- 23% of our members are already working outside the industry, a further 23% are currently applying for jobs outside the industry.
- 40% of our members have not received help from the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme.
- Over 1 in 5 (22%) of our members are applying or have applied for Universal Credit since March.
- A further 33% of members are ineligible for Universal Credit assistance – this could be for a range of factors, including having savings in excess of the £16k limit which many of our members will have accrued in order to pay tax bills.
- 76% of our members feel negative about their employment prospects over the next 6 months (in the arts and entertainment), 58% feel negative about their chances of finding any form of work over the next 12 months.

These challenges have led 1 in 4 of Equity members to be considering leaving the industry permanently.

How should the Government best support the economy if intermittent lockdowns become a feature over the next year?

Equity calls for a Basic Income Guarantee for Creative Workers to mitigate against the problems faced by workers in our industries in our existing welfare provisions and additional Coronavirus support schemes.

In Equity's demands to the Chancellor in the lead up to the Spending Review announcement, we called for part of the underspend from the Cultural Recovery Fund to be urgently used to demand a such a scheme.

Such a scheme would:

- Offer creative workers financial stability, enabling them to remain in the sector through the pandemic
- Ensure that creative workers are free to take work when it arises without fear of losing other forms of support and protection
- Ensure that those from backgrounds which are already under-represented in the industry are not forced out of entertainment work, and that new entrants to the profession are not deterred
- Protect an industry which is worth £112 billion per year to the UK, in addition to providing immense social and cultural value.

Equity notes with interest the Irish Government's announcement to introduce a pilot of a basic income scheme for creative workers. The scheme will provide a tax-free payment for up to 55,000 workers.

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