

Written evidence submitted by Jacky Colliss Harvey

I am writing to ask for your help over the gaps in the Government plan for the self-employed and freelancers, such as authors, during the Coronavirus crisis. Under the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS), I'm afraid it has become clear that many freelancers will be left unprotected. I'm one of them.

Like many self-employed people I had structured my affairs so that I could draw down my income in dividends from limited, personal service companies. This group currently have no support under JRS or SEISS, but include a large part of the UK's creative workforce – the same people, incidentally, who are doing so much in this extraordinarily difficult period to help keep everyone sane. Most of us are not by any means high earners and being forced to rely on Universal Credit cannot be just. We're being left completely out in the cold. The Government should correct this unfair exclusion as soon as possible.

Personally I am baffled by this state of affairs. I can provide three years' worth of accounts and statements from HMRC (which altogether, over all three years, incidentally, amount to nothing like the Chancellor's guesstimate of '£200k a year'). It would be perfectly possible to average out a monthly income for me from my last three years' tax returns, just as is being done for others, and make the support available to them available to me - and to so many others like me. Please don't allow us to be discriminated against like this. We can provide all the financial information HMRC need to assess us, just the same as those the government *will* be supporting.

As of March this year, I became self-employed. Again I find myself put at a disadvantage here. The Chancellor should allow people to submit a 2019-20 return early and have their income assessed on this basis. I also, incidentally, have ongoing costs for my workplace and equipment, for which again I have no support.

In addition, SEISS' £50,000 upper threshold is unfair, when there is no equivalent in JRS. Many in the creative industries in London and the South East can earn over this, without by any means being 'super rich' or having large savings. We understand the wish to exclude high-earners but this arbitrary threshold captures people facing hardship and with no current prospect of work. Given the £2,500 cap, we really should not suffer simply to exclude a very wealthy few.

We are grateful for the support the Government has offered, but believe it can be improved to help self-employed and freelance workers, such as authors and writers, against the impact of COVID-19.

I've written to Rushi Sunak about this, and to my own MP in Tower Hamlets, but the Treasury's voice on this issue would be invaluable. Please ask the Chancellor to reconsider. Please help and support us too.

May 2020