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DCMS Consultation: Impact of COVID-19 on DCMS Sectors

I write as a self-employed Landscape Architect who also has experience working in other Creative Industry sectors including theatre & screen. I am based in North Devon.

This submission focusses on the position of the self-employed, freelancers and micro-companies who make up **89.46% of the UK workforce** (*ONS_ukbusinessworkbook2019*) and **94% of the Creative Industries as a whole** (*Understanding the future of productivity in the creative industries – SQW 2016*) of which 47% are self-employed. (*Creative Industries Federation 'Creative Freelancers Report 2017'*)

In Landscape Architecture, just under 50% of the Landscape Institute membership are micro enterprises with 14% self-employed; 13% sole traders and 17% in micro companies of less than 9 (*State of Landscape. AHC 2017*)

The Creative Industries across the board have been devastated by the impact of COVID-19. largely because Government has no comprehensive strategy that addresses the fact that by far the majority of workers in the sector work alone or in small teams, most of whom have little or no financial resilience to withstand the ramifications of lockdown and other impacts of the pandemic.

In Landscape Architecture, as with the rest of the UK workforce, the hardest hit by Covid-19 in the short term have been those who slipped through the net for the Government support initiatives including freelancers working on short-term contracts, people who did not have the right level of contributions to qualify for the self-employed scheme or were employed at the time of lock-down but for one reason or another could not be furloughed and were temporarily or permanently laid off.

Projects that were at the design stage at the beginning of lockdown and have not been cancelled or suspended have been able to continue, with designers working from home and attending virtual online meetings. However, once the economy starts again there will be an inevitable hiatus as clients decide whether or not to proceed to construction stage, and there will be many who will not have the resources to see projects through, so it is here just at the point when Government support is being phased out where the hardship will be felt most strongly.

The immediate financial support provided by the Government has played its role and a role that has been essential for many.... but NOW is the time to start thinking about the long term, change some of the old approaches and develop strategies that address the needs of the smaller business types across the whole Country and the whole Economy

If this is done for all parts of the economy then the Creative Industries could quickly be in a position to undertake one or more pilot programmes for a strategy that is then rolled out across the Country.

Investment

- The creation of a new seed funding grant mechanism for creative individuals and micro-companies - via Arts and Craft Councils, Screen Agencies and Games Agencies. But it's important not to just rely on grant programmes, change is also needed in the investment community.
- Investors and Banks are reticent to support both creative enterprise and small scale enterprises. A new investment scheme working with the Angel co-fund, British Business Bank and the BBB Regional Fund together with LEPs and District Authorities could support local networks or portfolio schemes
- Incorporate realistic marketing spends as part of all production/distribution grants, and financing in the screen-based sectors.

Export Opportunities

- Create a marketing fund for freelancers, sole traders, and micro-companies to export digitally to global audiences.
- Support the Creative Industries Council [International Strategy beyond 2022](#).
- Create of online [Export Tool Kits](#) for all sectors of the creative industries targeted at freelancers, sole traders and micro-companies.

Government

- Create a [UK Creators Council](#) to advise government on all issues relating to creative freelancers, sole traders and micro-companies.
- Make self-employment, across all sectors, part of the DCMS, BEIS, and DIT, ministerial briefs.

Read Also the new Creative Industries Federation Report [Economic Impact of Covid-on the UKL Creative Industries](#)