

Lord Agnew of Oulton
Minister of State at the Cabinet Office and Her Majesty's Treasury
House of Lords
London
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cc:

Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP (Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport)

Rt Hon Stephen Barclay MP (Chief Secretary to the Treasury)

John Glen MP (Economic Secretary to the Treasury and City Minister)

Alok Sharma MP (Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy)

19 March 2020

COVID-19 and the creative industries

Dear Lord Agnew

As I am sure you are aware, COVID-19 is having a dramatic impact in particular on those who have zero-hour contracts or who are self-employed. There are an estimated two million jobs in the creative industries – and over 70% of those working in music, writing, performing and visual arts are self-employed.

Although the Chancellor's recently announced £330bn package for businesses is welcome and will go some way in supporting venues and small businesses, robust financial support must be put in place to support the crucial workforce, which is the backbone of the music and creative industries, worth £5.2bn and £111bn per year respectively to the UK economy.

The current welfare system is just not devised for a situation where the Government is strongly advising that the creative industries cease to work. Much of the workforce is not entitled to any notice or redundancy pay. It is entirely dependent on one-off engagements such as concerts, gigs, theatre shows and in the case of musicians, peripatetic teaching. If they do not work, they do not get paid. The welfare system is just not structured in a way that will support the vast number of musicians and creatives who are immediately out of work overnight.

Other countries, such as Italy and Canada, have put in place emergency funds to support the self-employed in these uncertain times. The Chancellor last night announced a funding grant for small businesses of up to £25,000 to cover costs due to COVID-19 – the self-employed also operate in a similar way to these small businesses. If the Government could consider a similar grant or emergency fund to assist the self-employed and those on zero-hour contracts with the loss of earnings, that would go some way in making up for the income that has been and will continue to be lost.

The Government must also extend Statutory Sick Pay to all workers who are affected by COVID-19.

It is currently unclear how long the COVID-19 crisis will continue to impact the world. Workers who are self-employed and on zero-hour contracts urgently need clarity and reassurance that they will be supported by the Government. Otherwise, this workforce – through no fault of their own – will not be able to cover basic living costs, such as food or rent.

Yours sincerely

Nick Trench - Earl of Clancarty
Kay Andrews – Baroness Andrews
Joan Bakewell – Baroness Bakewell
Floella Benjamin – Baroness Benjamin

Michael Berkeley – Lord Berkeley of Knighton
John Birt – Lord Birt
Guy Black – Lord Black of Brentwood
Jane Bonham-Carter - Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury
Melvyn Bragg – Lord Bragg
Deborah Bull - Baroness Bull
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Michael Cashman – Lord Cashman
Tim Clement-Jones – Lord Clement-Jones
Charles Colville – Lord Colville of Culross
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Don Foster – Lord Foster of Bath
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Helena Kennedy – Baroness Kennedy of the Shaws
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Tom McNally – Lord McNally
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Lola Young – Baroness Young of Hornsey
Tony Young – Lord Young of Norwood Green