

By email

19 November 2020

The Impact of Covid 19 on Illustrators

I am writing from The Association of Illustrators. The AOI is a membership organisation with 2,700+ members, founded in 1973 to support and sustain illustrators and the illustration industry. The AOI is based in London, with members across the UK and a small percentage globally.

The majority (est. 98%) of illustrators are freelancer operating as sole traders or limited companies. Our members work across the creative industries- in publishing, editorial, advertising, gaming, animation, medicine and research etc. They are sought by commissioners in the UK and worldwide and many are recognised as leaders in their field.

In May 2020 we asked our membership about the impact of the pandemic on their lives, with a particular focus on the financial impact. You can read the report [here](#).

That survey was undertaken just as the Government's support measures were being announced.

In October 2020, when we understood the support measures to be ending (though they were in fact extended), we held a second survey to follow up on these questions and understand the value of the Governments support measures, and the ongoing impact of the pandemic.

The surveys highlight:

- 70% report a decrease in their income since the pandemic began
- 48% of respondents have not been eligible for the SEISS scheme. At least three quarters are unable to find support through other mechanisms.
- There is a significant negative impact on wellbeing which suggests potential long term challenges and industry

The AOI survey findings chime with the [evidence captured](#) by Society of Authors. Taken together the surveys describe a startling picture of 2500 creative freelancers failed by the Government and impacted financially and emotionally by the pandemic.

This evidence is of huge concern short and long term. The financial and diplomatic benefits of the creative industries must be valued as we navigate a post Brexit, post pandemic landscape. The negative impact of the pandemic threatens wellbeing not only at an individual and industry level, but also threatens the creative brilliance and diversity of our industry.

We have [consistently communicated](#) with Government on these issues, via Treasury, DCMS and BEIS consultations, raising particular concerns;

- The extension to the SEISS scheme is welcome, but as clearly evidenced, it is very far from the Government's stated aim of reaching 95% of self-employed workers. **Remedial action must be taken** to retrospectively reimburse unintentionally excluded creatives.
- We need the **SEISS scheme to be reviewed urgently**, so the upcoming grants include the intended recipients. In particular to allow creative freelancers who
 - Have become self-employed on or since 6 April 2019;
 - Recorded a non-trading profit of more than 50% as a result of other (usually low-paid, part-time) work;
 - Have other income such as pension, investment or rental income and/or savings in excess of the Universal Credit threshold (currently, £16,000);
 - Have recorded a 'lumpy', if inconsistent, trading profit of £50,001 (or more) during the qualifying period as a result of a strong-selling and/or one-off work; and/or
 - Have taken parental leave during some or all of the qualifying period.
- We need the Government to listen and understand the diversity and nuance of the creative freelance community, and communicate back, through a mechanism such as the **UK Creators Council**.
- We need to **protect the diversity** within our industry. This can only be done with fair financial remuneration, enabling risk taking and creative investment. This can be achieved through a **Universal Basic Income**.
- We need ringfenced resource to provide **specialist mental health support** for creative freelancers.

We have not heard back from these consultations in any meaningful way. We are writing to you, to inform you of this situation, and to open a dialogue so that we can work together to successfully support and sustain our industry.

You can read the report in full [here](#). I welcome the opportunity to speak further on this,

Yours Sincerely

Ren Renwick
CEO