Dear [[This link](https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/contact-an-mp-or-lord/contact-your-mp/) tells you how to find your MP.]

I am a freelance illustrator living in your constituency.  I am a member of Association of Illustrators (The AOI), the professional organisation which represents my industry and supports myself and my peers in our work.

The Pandemic has been particularly challenging for creative freelancers and I would like to bring your attention to the detail of this, and ways in which they can be mitigated.  These are three challenges that I have personal experience of, but are also evidenced in reports by the AOI [here](https://theaoi.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Summary-Responses-AOI-Illustrator-Survey-May-2020.pdf) and [here](https://theaoi.com/2020/11/19/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-illustrators/).

**Challenge 1: Decrease in Income**Illustrators’ income has decreased due to cancelled events, sluggish commissions and diminishing fees. This comes to a fragile industry without the financial resilience of other sectors.  This impact of this will disproportionally affect the diversity of our workers and compromising the growth of this profitable industry.

**Challenge 2: Lack of Government Support**

Around half of freelance writers/ illustrators are not eligible for the SEISS support for the following reasons:

-Have become self-employed on or since 6 April 2019;
-Recorded a non-trading profit of more than 50% as a result of other (often 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.

The changes to UC are not applicable to over 98% of illustrators and non-Governmental support is not applicable in around three quarters of cases.

**Challenge 3: Mental Health Crisis**

There is an impending mental health crisis which not only impacts health budgets, but threatens to paralyse the creative industries. Creative practise is not like some traditional office jobs as it involves the whole person to commit.  If you are unwell, this is an impossibility.

**What we need**

 The AOI are asking Government to implement the following changes to address these challenges;

1. Take**remedial action** to retrospectively reimburse creative freelancers unintentionally excluded from the SEISS scheme.
2. Urgently **review the SEISS scheme**, so the upcoming grants include the intended recipients.
3. 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**.
4. Establish a **UK Creators Council**, which will allow the Government to listen and understand the diversity and nuance of the creative freelance community, and communicate back.
5. We need ringfenced resource to provide **specialist mental health support** for creative freelancers.

You can read the AOI reports evidencing these challenges here and here.  If you would like further information on this please do not hesitate to contact Ren Renwick, CEO of the Association of Illustrators at ren@theaoi.com.  The AOI are proactive, pragmatic and committed to securing a thriving creative industry for the future.