



To: Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas MS, Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism
By email

22nd October 2020

Dear Deputy Minister,

Further to your letter to the creative unions via Siân Gale of the 20th October, I have been asked to write again by the combined creative unions here in Wales to thank you for your continued support through the Cultural Recovery Fund for our members who, as you know, are predominantly freelance with many falling through the schemes put in place by Westminster. Recovery in this industry will be a long-term process and an investment both now, and in the weeks and months to come, is we believe essential to restore this key industry to the economy in Wales, and throughout the UK.

We know that for those members who were able to gain access to the help available through Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Freelancers Fund that the grants will be extremely useful. There are, as you know, those that have been unable to access these funds because of the levels of applications in some local authority areas where the grants were oversubscribed and closed in less than a day in both phases. We know that the intention is to use the unallocated funds from other local authorities, and we await details of how this process may be administered to avoid the first come first served basis used in Phase 1 and Phase 2 and to provide the targeted help needed. It is, of course, difficult to know exactly how many people missed out in those areas in Phase 1 and Phase 2 which is compounded by the acknowledged issue of not having an accurate total of how many freelancers work in this sector in Wales as a whole, and each local authority. As the creative unions we know that combined we represent over 5,000 members across all disciplines, but we are acutely aware that not all disciplines covered by the fund necessarily fall within our membership as well as some not being a member of a union.

Although the above is a lifeline for many of our members at this difficult time the total sum of £2,500 cannot be compared to the JRC or SEISS as it does not provide a guaranteed monthly income and over for e.g. 5 months from October – March it would equate to £500 a month or from March 2020 to March 2021 £250 a month.

We would ask you and your fellow ministers within the Welsh Government to urge the staff at Business Wales to look closely at the next round of the ERF for the self-employed to ensure that it does not discriminate against freelancers/small limited companies in the creative sector, albeit unintentional, and we also await further details of the discretionary grants for the self-employed which have recently been announced.

You have acknowledged in your letter that there is a huge demand for support and we call on Welsh Government to continue to explore options for providing additional support for the sector and further resources for the Freelancers Fund in addition to the initial £7m, especially from within other parts of the £53m Cultural Recovery Fund that have been undersubscribed which could release essential funds.

Whilst the financial support is welcome, the continued closure under the regulations of Theatres and Concert Halls places even more uncertainty on when things may be able to resume. We are, of course, aware of the upcoming firebreak and continued concerns for public health but we feel it is now an urgent requirement to put in place a much needed roadmap that builds on the successful open air pilot events at Theatr Clwyd and provides the venues for the freelance work force to return to. We know that there will be some venues who will not be able to open because of their economic model, or the size of their facilities, but there will be many that can and should be allowed to within the regulations. The ability to gather an audience in any venue, including within a hospitality situation, should not be forgotten about once the firebreak is finished. We feel all of this must be addressed in any review within the 21-day cycle as a matter of urgency.

We believe all the following experience and examples of good practice are also transferable into discussions within Wales. The Welsh Government, in conjunction with ACW and other stakeholders, have already put in place a robust set of measures which can provide a phased return to rehearsal and performance, but the industry lacks the ability to implement them.

- We can learn from those theatres in Wales that are able to open to show films and operate as cinemas. They have been able to demonstrate that they can maintain strict social distancing and regulation compliance. It is, to be honest, ridiculous that these venues can open their auditoria to operate at reduced capacity for a film screening, but someone cannot be on stage performing in the same circumstances.
- We can learn from the experiences in Film and TV in Wales, and elsewhere, where stringent Covid compliance has allowed them to remain open during the firebreak despite the closure of hospitality venues, for example.
- We can look across into England and see that even in Tier 3 areas of lockdown the theatres and live venues, where they have been able to open, can continue to offer live performance in a safe environment to a socially distance audience. We have seen examples of live theatre being performed where the cast have been 'bubbled' to allow close cohort work and an experience close to performance pre-Covid, alongside new explorations of live streaming and the opportunities this presents to organisations and audiences.

The more work that can be created in a Covid secure workplace, the less reliance and demand there will be for financial help from the government in Cardiff and London. By the theatres and venues not being allowed to open even for rehearsals and live streaming, and essentially being forcibly closed, the chance of recovery is diminishing. As unions we believe the sector cannot simply be left in mothballs during the winter, especially with many of our members still not being able to access any of the UK Government's schemes and for those who can access them facing reductions in the assistance being offered from the UK

Government and the severe detrimental impact effect this will have on our members and their wellbeing and ultimately Wales' culture, economy and citizens too.

We will continue to work in Social Partnership with the Welsh Government both on identifying the issues and challenges, but also in developing the cultural contracts and the Freelancers Pledge Working Party, so that our members within the freelance community in Wales can be better represented at the heart of sector and there be a better understanding, as you say, of their significant contribution to Wales' economic and cultural landscape. Alongside that, however, we need a plan to get the sector open for business.

Yours sincerely

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On behalf of

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