



The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer  
11 Downing St  
Westminster  
London  
SW1A 2AB

06 October 2020

Dear Chancellor

We are writing in response to the Government's 'Winter Economy Plan' and your recent speech at the Conservative Party Conference. We fully support the Government's commitment to turn around the economy and put people first. With this in mind we are writing to you on behalf of the thousands of musicians and the associated workforce who have been unable to work since March 2020. We would like to offer you workable solutions for a sector worth over £5.2bn which currently finds itself on the brink of catastrophe.

We know that you recognise these are unprecedented times. We welcome the steps taken by the Government earlier this year including the £1.57bn Cultural Recovery Fund but little of this money will reach the freelancers who work in the sector and much more needs to be done to support the freelance music community if disaster is to be averted.

As the UK's oldest professional representative body for musicians set up in 1882 with a membership of over 10,000 from all parts of the music sector, the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) understands the unique challenges which musicians face. We have now joined forces with the 'Musicians Movement', which has over 16,000 supporters and together we are campaigning for a bespoke package in the form of a 'Freelance Performers' Support Scheme', which would enable venues and performance spaces to apply for grant funding for live music events.

The 'Freelance Performers' Support Scheme' would facilitate the reopening of music venues within social distancing guidelines, enable the return of live performances, and provide a guaranteed fee for performers. This would be coupled with a cultural exemption on VAT for all tickets in both the commercial and non-commercial sector, offering a lifeline to a sector which has seen 23% of businesses reporting moderate to severe risk of insolvency, and 51% of its employed workforce furloughed. We would be delighted to speak with you in more detail about the proposed scheme which we believe would not just be of benefit to musicians but would also make a major contribution to the well-being of the communities they work in.

Freelancers form the bulk of our internationally acclaimed music sector, and for those talented musicians who contribute to this vibrant and world-renowned industry, the debate in Parliament last week around supporting 'viable' jobs was profoundly distressing. This distress was further compounded by comments made by the Secretary of State for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, urging those in jobs deemed unviable by the Government to move into 'better' jobs. A similar proposal was set out by Therese Coffey yesterday (05 October).

While we are sure that the Secretary of State misspoke when he suggested that creatives could move into 'better' jobs, work in the music sector is hugely viable. The UK's creative industries was growing at five times the rate of the economy as a whole prior to the pandemic and employment was growing at four times the rate of the UK workforce as a whole. Crucially, these are sustainable jobs in the long term – unlike some of the 1.5 million jobs at high risk of automation in the future according to the Office of National Statistics (ONS). Music also plays such a crucial role in the UK's worldwide influence. So far from music jobs being unviable, they are in fact essential to the health of the economy.

However, because of government restrictions most musicians cannot work at present, which has had devastating consequences. Recent ONS figures found that the arts, entertainment & recreation is the sector worst affected by coronavirus. We are therefore calling on the government to deliver targeted financial support for our sector. This starts by ensuring genuine parity between the employed and self-employed, maintaining the existing level of support, and expanding the eligibility criteria to meet the particular needs of creative freelancers, and those musicians whose income is derived from a mixture of employed and self-employed work.

This should be seen as a bridging scheme until the music sector can go back to work and start to contribute fully once more to the economic and cultural health of the country. It is an investment worth making. Unfortunately, the Winter Economy Plan is simply not sufficient to address the very real hardship currently facing musicians. The recently announced new scheme has reduced the amount which can be claimed from 70% to a mere 20% of average monthly trading profits and given that most musicians cannot work at present this means that the scheme will simply not help musicians.

As we saw recently at the BBC Proms, live music is vital at this time of national crisis. Music is an indispensable part of who we are as a country and has a vital role to play in the regeneration of our cities and towns. It also positively impacts on both mental and physical well-being. On so many levels music makes a positive contribution to our society. So far from being unviable, music is essential and therefore we ask that the Government gives serious consideration to the proposals set out above.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with at your earliest convenience to develop the 'Freelance Supporters Scheme', so that musicians can start performing and earning again.

Yours sincerely



**Deborah Annetts**

Chief Executive

Incorporated Society of Musicians

deborah@ism.org



**Christopher Barrett and Phil Meadows**

The Musicians' Movement's Managing Directors

info@musiciansmovement.co.uk