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Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
Her Majesty's Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
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16 December 2021

Dear Chancellor,

I am writing on behalf of the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) to express our concern regarding the impact of the Omicron COVID-19 variant on musicians and their livelihoods. The ISM represents over 11,000 members and is the largest non-union representative body for musicians.

At the end of September both the Coronavirus Income Support Scheme and the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme came to an end. As you know, these schemes have been a lifeline to many businesses and individuals working in the creative industries, which has been one of the hardest hit sectors by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating for musicians, with many being unable to work or to earn due to the public health restrictions.

The emergence of the Omicron variant has been concerning to everyone. There is genuine fear within our sector and among our membership that the progress that has been made in the second half of 2021 in getting the live performance sector back up and running will now be lost.

Although the current restrictions do not directly restrict access to events, outbreaks of COVID-19 are likely to lead to more events being cancelled and concern about the variant has already impacted the actions of audiences.

In the light of the new variant and restrictions, and considering how difficult a period this has been for our members, I write to ask you to consider the following:

Targeted financial support for musicians: furlough, SEISS and the uplift in the Universal Credit all helped to support musicians – although many have reported falling through the net of the support packages available – however, there has been no indication that these schemes are to return. There is genuine concern in our industry that the potential for working and earning in the coming months will be greatly restricted. Please consider introducing targeted financial support for those whose occupations are most at risk, including musicians.

Expanding the reinsurance scheme: while the reinsurance scheme secures events that can no longer go ahead if another lockdown is required, it does not protect against shows that become financially unviable due to social-distancing requirements or outbreaks of COVID-19 among the cast and crew. We believe that now is the time to urgently reconsider these limitations and expand the scheme to cover the most likely COVID-19-related cancellations.

Culture Recovery Fund: the Culture Recovery Fund is currently receiving applications for its last round of funding (£300m). The resources available in the fund were decided long before the emergence of the Omicron variant. We believe that the amount of funding should now be increased to aid our creative and cultural industries during this difficult time, and that it should be expanded to allow creative freelancers including musicians to apply and receive support directly from the fund.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best wishes



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