

Tuesday 14 April 2020

Dear Minister Madigan,

I am writing to you again to highlight the fact that we believe that artists and arts workers are disproportionately unsupported by the Government's current pandemic arrangements and to call on the Government to make some specific supports available to all workers in the arts sector. Many artists in the PAYE sector are outside the eligibility criteria for the pandemic unemployment payment (PUP). The fact that they were not working immediately before March 13th and were not made unemployed at that point in disqualifies them. The reality is however that many would have been due to start work very shortly after this date or over the course of the summer. This planned work has now disappeared as a direct result of covid 19 and along with it, planned income has disappeared, but Government support is still unavailable.

There are also up to 100 performers working across the cast of Fair City within RTE who face this same dilemma and are not being paid any monies by RTE but are also not eligible for the PUP if they were not engaged on or before March 13th even though the nature of their work means that they are engaged for a number of weeks at time over the course of the year and not always consecutively engaged. This is made additionally difficult by the protracted discussion with RTE about the nature of their employment (employment v self-employment) even though Eversheds were engaged months ago to assist in the resolution of this problem.

Artists who are over 66, of whom there are many, are also precluded from claiming the PUP despite the fact that they work and perform regularly. Artists continue to work long after the age of 66 because they often have poor pension coverage and because art often needs to reflect society and that includes the participation of older performers.

Artists and arts workers are also disproportionately affected in the private rental sector. They are in a proven low pay sector in general and it is recognised that they work in a very precarious environment. Consequently they are more likely to be renters rather than home owners. While the banks have agreed to create a mortgage pause for home owners, no such relief has been created for renters. The elimination of almost all forms of paid work in the arts sector has had a devastating effect on incomes that people would have planned for and relied on for rent and other outgoings over the coming months. Consequently artists and arts workers are at an increased risk of homelessness as a direct result of covid 19.

It is clear therefore that the Government needs to do more for artists and arts workers to ensure they have enough support to survive this crisis and return to work in their professions.

One way of doing this would be to expand the scope of the current self-employed artist social protection scheme to achieve the following.

To include all professional artists and arts workers in the scheme whether PAYE or Self employed
To lift the existing payment to the level of the Covid 19 pandemic unemployment payment
Most importantly, - to understand that a longer term view needs to be taken in respect of the capacity of artists and arts workers to return to work immediately upon the easing of current restrictions. The arts sector does not have the elasticity to bounce back like other parts of the economy. Rebuilding audiences, creating work, accessing finance and putting the pieces back together again will take a bit more time. Accordingly, if numbers 1 and 2 above were achieved we could engage with Government collectively to agree how the covid 19 payment could be phased out in a balanced way over an agreed period of time while the sector recovers.
Implementation of the EU Copyright Directive would also be useful in creating additional income streams for performers and artists whose work is streamed online as this Directive provides for better and more transparent payments for artists.

I have attached for your information a copy of the rejected application of an arts worker who was not accepted for the PUP payment for reasons outlined in the opening paragraph to this letter.

Given the seriousness of the current situation, we would appreciate a prompt response.

Regards

Karan O Loughlin
Irish Equity/SIPTU