



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

The Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP
Secretary of State for Digital,
Culture, Media and Sport

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BY E-MAIL

20 October 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

CULTURAL FREELANCERS

I am writing to you, on behalf of the Scottish Parliament's Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee, with regard to recent evidence we have taken, on the Scottish screen sector. On 8 October 2020, the Committee heard evidence from representatives of three production companies based in Scotland on the role of Public Sector Broadcasters within the industry. For reference, I attach a copy of the Official Report from the meeting below:

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12887>

In our discussions with representatives from the production industry, the role of freelancers was highlighted, something which the Committee has taken an interest in throughout this Parliamentary session. In evidence, the Committee inquired about the impact the COVID19 pandemic was having on the sector. Claire Mundell, Director of Synchronicity Films, stated that—

“Covid has been devastating for the freelance community. There are many crew members who have not earned a penny for six months. That will change the shape of the talent base here—some people will leave the industry, because no one wants to be exposed to that level of risk again.”

The Committee appreciates that many sectors of the economy are experiencing significant challenges as a result of the pandemic. However, cultural freelancers are often contracted to projects on a temporary basis and this makes them particularly

vulnerable to economic shocks, especially where lockdown restrictions have resulted in a sector wide reduction in employment opportunities.

The Committee welcomes initiatives such as the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme and the £97m of 'Barnett consequentials' resulting from UK Government funding, announced in July, to support the cultural sector during the pandemic. However, longer term, we remain concerned that without further income support, freelancers will be forced to find alternative means of employment, leading to a reduction in the talent base nationally.

Scotland's production sector has shown steady growth in recent years, supported by the introduction of the new BBC Scotland channel and work of the national screen agency, Screen Scotland. Much of this success can be attributed to the talent of Scotland's freelance crew base, the loss of which could have profound consequences for the sustainability of the sector.

Given the challenges facing the freelance community, the Committee would be interested to know what measures, financial or otherwise, the UK Government plans to introduce to support cultural freelancers over the next year.

The Committee would appreciate a response to this letter by Friday 30 November 2020.

Yours sincerely,

Joan McAlpine MSP
Convener, Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee