

Help Musicians

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helpmusicians.org.uk



09 April 2020

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

Dear Chancellor

Survey of Musicians: Self-employment Income Support Scheme

Help Musicians, originally known as the Musicians Benevolent Fund, was founded by Edward Elgar in 1921. For nearly a century the charity has provided help, support and opportunity to empower musicians through all stages of their lives. In 2019 we had over 14,000 interactions with emerging, professional, and retired musicians, from all musical genres and our direct charitable expenditure increased to £5.6m, a new all-time high for the charity. We aim to provide a lifetime of support, when it's needed most, addressing the creativity, health & welfare, and business needs of professional music performers, composers/creators and those in roles requiring a high level of musical skill.

The scale of the crisis for musicians is immense, but many in the music industry are responding with energy and creativity

On Wednesday 25 March Help Musicians launched a hardship scheme for musicians offering a one-off £500 payment to those suffering significant financial hardship. In the two weeks since launch we have received over 17,000 applications for help. This is unprecedented. We have put in £5m of our own reserves to fund this and, thanks to significant donations from a number of major organisations within the world of music, hope to have processed and paid all eligible applications within the next fortnight. Other organisations, such as the Musicians' Union and PRS, have also opened large hardship schemes.

At the same time we are experiencing much higher demand for our regular range of programme (from complex casework to creative funding), through which we not only hope to help musicians survive but also to flourish. And across the music industry we see many organisations and individuals doing likewise (for musicians and for the many others on whom the music ecosystem relies, from small venue and studio owners, to entrepreneurs, freelancers and employees). Yet the Incorporated Society of Musicians reported yesterday that over 80% of the music sector had been badly hit by Covid 19 and that a third of music businesses are already at risk of failing imminently. The scale of the crisis means many are not currently getting the help they need.

We need the government to listen to the specific needs of the industry and respond decisively

We are sure that you, like the vast majority of the UK's population, are inspired at how music and musicians are connecting the isolated and providing joy at this worrying time.

We were pleased to hear you announce your income support scheme for the self-employed. This was an important step and you are to be commended for it. We note your comment at the time that the scheme "would cover 95 per cent of self-employed workers". Many of our friends, including UK Music, the Musicians' Union and the Incorporated Society of Musicians, have written to you to explain the gaps in this scheme through which musicians can fall; in particular those who have been self-

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employed for less than a year (or have not yet made a profit), who are part self-employed (at less than 50% of their total annual income) or who earn just above the £50,000 cap.

A quarter of self-employed musicians will not qualify for the Self-employment Income Support Scheme

We ran a survey for all musicians a few days ago which had over 2,000 respondents in three days. 87% identified as self-employed and of those 25% said they would not be eligible for self-employed support (for the reasons listed above). This is highly significant. It represents tens of thousands of musicians and is probably indicative of a wider problem across the self-employed within the entire creative industries and beyond.

In addition, only 5% of those responding said they felt the government's current guidance about the Self-employment Income Support Scheme is clear.

Whilst we agree that “the perfect should not be the enemy of the good”, our survey evidence today proves that the good is not yet good enough. Therefore we urge you, in the strongest possible terms, to reconsider the rules and thresholds within your proposals in order to bring all self-employed musicians into the scheme, which they so desperately need.

With many thanks for your hard work and leadership at this enormously difficult time. And please pass on our good wishes to the Prime Minister, whom we hope will speedily recover.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Graham Sheffield".

Graham Sheffield CBE
Chair
Help Musicians

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Ainscough".

James Ainscough
CEO
Help Musicians