

COVID-19 Statement from [Designers + Cultural Workers](https://www.designersandculturalworkers.org.uk)

For more information, contact us at: dcw@uvwunion.org.uk

We organise precarious workers in the creative industries. Our membership is broad and cross-sector, including graphic, fashion and product designers, curators, film-makers, illustrators, writers and educators.

The Coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated precarity and inequality in the creative industries, exposing unsustainable practices that have been strategically ignored by employers for too long. For example, one in four creative workers in the UK are self-employed. Self-employment, often framed positively as ‘flexible working’, has become the new normal within the cultural sector, with workers doing project work on a temporary basis, in more than one workplace, for different clients.

The current government intervention – providing statutory sick pay from day 1 of self-isolation rather than day 4 – does not go nearly far enough in affording workers financial stability in these uncertain times. It shouldn’t need stating that in the UK today £94.25 a week is not enough to live on.

Even more pressing for cultural workers is **that self-employed workers do not qualify for SSP**, presenting a two-fold risk:

- Self-employed workers are more likely to continue going into work, putting their own health and others at risk.
- If we are to become ill or unable to work due to closures, we receive little to no rights, pay, or protections.

We have already seen a number of events, performances and festivals cancelled, leaving creative workers who are reliant on gig work out of pocket and unable to rely on forecasted future income. The likelihood that the government will ban public gatherings in the near future will significantly impact creative workers' ability to generate income, as galleries, museums, universities and other institutions close for a number of months.

Cultural production is entangled within a globalised economy. International production and distribution, including residencies, funding rounds, biennales, and fashion shows have been severely disrupted. COVID-19 will impact all art workers: those selling tickets, invigilating exhibitions, running educational workshops, cleaning spaces, graphic designers working on projects, and the artists and staff producing, curating and commissioning work.

In light of the evolving circumstances, UVW-DCW is calling on employers and studio providers to recognise the seriousness of the situation and act responsibly and in the best interests of the country by:

1. Facilitating the transition to remote working, as soon as possible.

Workers' health and wellbeing should take priority over productivity and financial motives. We demand that all employers and clients make arrangements for remote working and provide suitable equipment, software, services, training, and patience for this transition. Also, many of us will need to care for loved ones, including our parents and children.

2. Implementing a rent freeze across all studio spaces

Not all creative workers will have the ability to work from home. Many live in shared houses with little space for work, or require particular facilities due to the specialist nature of their practice.

We ask that studio providers begin discussions immediately with both their landlords and their studio occupants, with the recommendation of rent freezes for all studio spaces. Workers must be allowed to return to their site of practice as soon as it is safe to do so.

3. Ensuring full salary sick pay for those not able to work because of COVID-19

If a worker has to self-isolate, either because they are experiencing Coronavirus symptoms, or they risk spreading / contracting the virus, they should receive their full salary as Occupational Sick Pay for the duration of the NHS recommended self-isolation period. We call on employers to take responsibility for their flexible workers, allocating freelancers compensation for lost earnings by honouring timetabled days and project kill fees. Whatever their contract, workers should experience no detriment or unfair dismissal because of Coronavirus.

Statutory Sick Pay must, with immediate effect, be extended to self-employed workers. Additionally, our branch is in support of a government issued **Pandemic Basic Income**, for all workers affected by the crisis, that should include freelance / self-employed workers. This, combined with a rent freeze across both housing and studio space, is the only way to protect cultural workers in the difficult months to come.

We must use this crisis as an opportunity to reframe our industry. Our sector has committed to the prevailing logic of individualisation and competitiveness, to the detriment of its workforce. The status of creative work is increasingly casualised, in the interest of distributing profits unevenly to those at the top. A moment of disruption creates a chance for our industry to be re-assembled in the interests of its workers, with solidarity, community, equality, self-education and care at the centre of all future cultural production.

As a branch, we will continue to **collect the [stories and experiences](#) of our members**, to ensure employers are putting the health and wellbeing of their staff first. We will also be **archiving useful resources through this [Are.na channel](#)**.