



Information for Freelancers and Self-employed Workers in the Performing Arts Sector

Updated: 29/04/20

We are very aware that many people are worried about their situation – particularly freelancers and independent artists. Below is an overview of information and some of the support that is available. The information includes links to benefits available, information from the Arts Council Northern Ireland, and support around health and wellbeing.

Jump to a Section

[1. Health and Wellbeing](#)

[2. Government Support/Benefits and Arts Council of Northern Ireland Updates](#)

[3. Additional Financial Support Options](#)

[4. Other Useful Industry Links](#)

[5. Get in Touch](#)

1. Health and Wellbeing

If you are currently experiencing anxiety or distress, please remember TheatreNI members have access to a 24/7 helpline.

Click [here](#) to access information on TheatreNI's Member Assistance Programme (MAP).

Other Health and Wellbeing links

- [Public Health Agency guidance](#)
- [Department of Health](#)
- List of [NI Helplines](#)
- NHS list of UK [Mental Health Helplines](#)
- [Coronavirus and your wellbeing: Plan for staying at home or indoors](#)

2. Government Support/Benefits and Arts Council of Northern Ireland Updates

Government Support and Benefits

The Department for Communities (DfC) regularly updates its information page about COVID-19. [Click here](#) for information about DfC services, claiming benefits, accessing the COVID-19 freephone helpline and more. We have summarised some key information below.

Freephone helpline

A freephone helpline has been established to assist those in vulnerable groups to access information, advice and guidance in relation to COVID-19. The helpline, which is managed by Advice NI, is open 9am to 5pm, 7 days per week, the number is 0808 802 0020. Alternatively you can text ACTION to 81025 or email: Covid19@adviceni.net.

Finance Support Service

If you are in a crisis situation you can apply for financial help by contacting the Department's Finance Support service on 0800 587 2750 (Freephone) or 0800 587 2751 (textphone for customers with hearing difficulties).

Statutory Sick Pay and Universal Credit

If you work on a short term contract or a zero hours contract, you may be entitled to sick pay. You can get £94.25 a week Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) for up to 28 weeks.

If you are not eligible to receive sick pay you can apply for Universal Credit and/or New Style Employment & Support Allowance. For ESA, you must have paid NI Contributions over last 2-3 years.

For Universal Credit the minimum income floor restriction is suspended.

Anyone self-isolating who is self-employed can apply for Universal Credit or new-style Employment & Support Allowance. You can also apply for these if you are prevented from working because of a risk to public health.

If claiming Universal Credit, you can also apply for a Universal Credit Contingency Fund grant by contacting the Finance Support Service and choosing option 2.

UK Government Self-employment Income Support Scheme

You can use this scheme if you're self-employed or a member of a partnership in the UK and have lost income due to coronavirus. You can claim if you're a self-employed individual or a member of a partnership and you:

- have submitted your self-assessment tax return for the tax year 2018 to 2019
- traded in the tax year 2019 to 2020
- are trading when you apply, or would be except for coronavirus
- intend to continue to trade in the tax year 2020 to 2021
- have lost trading profits due to coronavirus

For more information [click here](#).

Call for Introduction of Temporary Universal Basic Income in British Parliament

Several MPs including some NI members have called on the British Government to introduce a temporary universal basic income or an emergency measure to help freelancers and the self-employed effected by the covid-19 outbreak. Click [here](#) for information.

Statutory Sick Pay Petition

[Sign this petition to give self-employed people Statutory Sick Pay.](#)

Bill to Protect Private Renters Passed by Assembly

The Private Tenancies (Coronavirus Modifications) Bill was introduced into the Assembly 21 April 2020 and had its final stage on Tuesday 28 April.

It will mean that landlords will be required to give tenants a 12 week notice to quit period, ensuring tenancies are protected throughout this period.

For more information about the bill [click here](#).

If you have difficulties accessing available benefits, please contact Citizens Advice Bureau: Click [here](#)

HMRC

If you run a business or are self-employed and are concerned about paying your tax due to coronavirus, you can call HMRC's helpline for help and advice on **0800 0159 559**.

Emergency Funding announced for NI Artists and Arts Organisations

Minister for Communities, Deirdre Hargey MLA, announced on Monday 27th April a new Creative Support Fund totalling £1.5 million to support the arts sector in Northern Ireland during the Coronavirus crisis.

The Department for Communities is contributing £1 million to support arts organisations and the Arts Council is contributing £500,000 from its National Lottery Fund to support freelance artists, creative practitioners and performers.

The Creative Support funding package comprises two strands. Both funds will be administered by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

Artists Emergency Programme

- £500,000 Arts Council National Lottery funds to support artists and freelancers
- Individual grants of up-to £5,000
- This programme supports the research, design and future presentation of events, performances and other artistic projects, including resources to help artists develop their artistic practice.
- AEP will buy artists creative time to develop their skills and practice during these difficult times, for future presentation of work.
- This is a rolling programme, opening today until further notice, for proposals ending March 2021.

Application forms and Guidance Notes for the Artists Emergency Programme are now available from the Arts Council [here](#).

Organisations Emergency Programme

- £500,000 to support small- to medium-sized arts organisations with individual grants of up-to £25,000
- £500,000 held to monitor demand across the Organisations and Artists Emergency Programmes and allocated as projects develop.
- This is a rolling programme, co-designed by the Arts Council and DfC.
- Programme opens: May 2020

Application forms and Guidance Notes for the Organisations Emergency Fund will be available from the Arts Council in May. Please watch [Arts Council website](#) and social media for application opening announcement.

Arts Council Statements Archive

Video Message from ACNI Chief Executive – 3rd April

The Chief Executive of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland posted a video message on 3rd April to the arts sector. The video is available to view [here](#).

ACNI issued the following statement on 16th March 2020

Full statement is available [here](#).

ACNI will keep their social media channels updated as and when guidance and information changes.

If you have a specific concern about your organisation or project and the effects of Coronavirus, please contact by email your [Art Form Development Officer](#). If you do not have an Art Form Development Officer, email info@artscouncil-ni.org. They will respond to any enquiries as soon as possible.

“Arts Councils priority is to support people who work in the arts through the challenges they may face over the coming months as a result of Coronavirus.”

Existing funding awards:

- Arts Council will honour all grants already made in 2019/20 (including but not limited to: Annually Funded Programme, Lottery Project Funding, Small Grants, Rural Needs and Support for the Individual Artist) and will work flexibly with you should you need to reschedule events and/or tours.
- They will aim to issue any remaining balance of payments for 2019/20 as a matter of urgency.
- They will work flexibly with you on contracts for next year, 2020/21 (for example Annually Funded Programme and organisations in receipt of Lottery Programme funding). This may include advancing grant payment to assist with cashflow.
- Funded arts organisations, in exchange for Arts Council support, are asked to continue as far as possible to honour agreed contracts with artists and freelancers.
- Arts Officers and Assistants are currently talking to arts organisations to ascertain the impacts and cost implications for organisations.
- Arts Council are in discussion with their parent department, the Department for Communities, and are assessing what additional support might be offered to the arts sector.”

3. Additional Financial Support Options

- [a-n The Artists Information Company](#) is offering bursaries of £500 – £1,500 to help support those whose livelihoods have been impacted by coronavirus.
- [Acting for Others](#) – Provides financial and emotional support to all theatre workers in times of need.
- [Actors Children's Fund](#) - ACT gives money and advice to actor-parents and their children.
- [Dance Professionals Fund](#) – Financial grants to dance professionals of all ages.
- [Equity Children's Trust](#) - Helps all Equity members and professional performers and their dependants.
- [Evelyn Norris Trust](#) - the Trust provides holiday grants to those who are convalescing, undergoing treatment, are in poor health or need a longed-for break.
- [The Ralph & Meriel Richardson Foundation](#) - The Foundation has made grants for wheelchairs, for hospital treatment, residential care, surgeons fees, medication and a variety of short-term help to a large number of those seeking assistance.
- [The Royal Theatrical Fund](#) - The Royal Theatrical Fund provides support to those that have worked professionally in the entertainment industry, for seven years or more, that are unable to work due to illness, injury or old age.
- [Safety Curtain](#) - An international lifeline for performers at risk.
- [The Theatrical Guild](#) - The UK charity for backstage and front of house workers, with over 125 years' experience helping people.
- [Tinderbox Solo Art](#) - a solo art fund to help freelancers by Tinderbox Theatre Company.
- [Women's Resilience Fund](#) - grants and support for women on low incomes who have specific needs and are struggling to make ends meet or trying to overcome financial problems.

4. Other useful Industry Links

- [Equity](#)
- [NI Screen](#)
- [Creative Industries Federation](#)
- [Law Centre NI](#) - Advice website for information on social security, employment, health and social care, immigration or asylum issue

Get in touch with [Advice NI](#) for help with business and debt.

To speak to an adviser about business debt contact our FREEPHONE helpline: 0800 083 8018 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

For help accessing FREE money and debt advice call 0800 028 1881 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

To speak to an adviser about tax and benefits contact our FREEPHONE helpline: 0800 988 2377 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

To speak to an adviser about welfare changes contact our FREEPHONE helpline: 0808 802 0020 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

5. Get in Touch

Please get in touch by email so we can keep this information up to date and accurate. We may be slower than normal at getting back to you as we are working remotely.

Contact information:

Kieran – admin@dancersourcebase.org

Molly – projects@theatreni.org

Niamh - director@theatreni.org

Orla – info@dancersourcebase.org

Stay safe and we look forward to seeing you all again soon.