



Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport  
100 Parliament Street  
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20 September 2021

Dear Secretary of State

I am writing to congratulate you on your recent appointment to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport. I look forward to working with you to enable the creative industries to thrive and support the country's post-pandemic recovery.

### **About Bectu**

Bectu is the union for creative ambition, representing over 30,000 staff, contract and freelance workers in the media and entertainment industries. Our members work in non-performance roles in live events, broadcasting, film and cinema, digital media, independent production, leisure, theatre, and the arts. We have responded to the changes of an increasingly self-employed workforce and are the UK's largest union for freelancers. We have long fought for better working conditions in the creative industries and will continue to campaign tirelessly to better the working lives of our members. Since 2017 Bectu has been part of Prospect union which also represents members working in museums and galleries.

### **Importance of creative industries**

The creative industries are an essential aspect of the social fabric of the UK, home to highly skilled creative workers whose talents are recognised across the globe. This talent is matched by economic success; prior to the pandemic, the creative industries contributed £116 billion gross value, which is greater than the aerospace, automotive, life sciences, oil and gas industries combined. In 2018, the sector exported £36 billion in services worldwide, accounting for almost 12% of UK exports. The industries employ over 2 million people in the UK and are projected to create an additional one million jobs by 2030. The arts clearly make a vital contribution to the economy and the cultural foundation of the UK, and I hope you agree that it is imperative that government policy supports such a lucrative sector.

### **Effect of the pandemic**

Covid-19 sadly brought devastation to much of the industry. In economic terms, the sector was hit eight times as hard as the whole economy, with halting production and performances leaving thousands out of work. In March 2021, we surveyed 4000 members to assess the impact of one year of the pandemic. Key findings included:

- 21% were not able to access a government support scheme
- 77% experienced a drop in income (including income from government schemes)
- 40% had considered leaving the creative industries at some point since the pandemic

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[bectu.org.uk](https://library.prospect.org.uk/id/2023/00892)

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As you will no doubt be aware from constituents, the pandemic was a terrifying time for self-employed workers, especially those unable to access the government support schemes. The exclusion also exposed a worrying gap in the government's own data on different categories of worker. This experience has been a catalyst for our members campaigning to secure a new deal for freelancers, which recognises their status in the economy and tackles long hours culture and unpaid overtime.

### **Post-pandemic role**

The sector will play a key role in rebuilding the economy and revitalising culture, with the highly anticipated full reopening of live events, venues, and theatres promising the public a path to normality. Prospect/Bectu analysis of ONS data demonstrates that the creative arts and entertainment sector was at the forefront of the UK's post-2008 economic recovery. Our analysis shows that 'creative, arts and entertainment activities' grew by three times the UK industry average and specifically the film and TV sector grew by six times as much as the economy. Just as importantly, our sector provides a necessary and welcome ray of hope during dark times. We hope you will work with the industry to ensure we can boom during this recovery as well.

### **Supporting the creative industries**

This year, Bectu has run a multitude of campaigns in the interest of supporting the creative workforce. I would be grateful for your support in the following areas:

#### ***Sustain the commitment to tackle bullying and harassment in the creative industries***

Following high profile incidents of bullying, sexual harassment and abuse, the previous culture minister Caroline Dinenage recently hosted a roundtable discussion with industry stakeholders, to underline a duty of care that will provide a safe working environment. Bectu has called for three steps to deal with the widespread problem of bullying, sexual harassment and abuse in the industry:

- A clear policy and process for complaints across the industry
- Safeguarding Officers on all productions
- The establishment of an external reporting body to look at historical complaints and to deal with problems that are not resolved by the first two steps

We hope that as Secretary of State, you will commit to continuing these discussions and giving your support to tackling this endemic issue.

#### ***Support for workers and businesses until the end of covid interruptions***

Although the majority of restrictions have lifted, the arts and entertainment industry is still living with regular interruptions due to the continued prevalence of the virus. This comes at a financially precarious time, following 18 months of closures. With the furlough and the SEISS schemes ending imminently and in the continued absence of a suitable insurance scheme for the sector, we are inviting you to look again at targeted support to ensure a safe and successful recovery and avoid mass redundancies in the run up to Christmas.

#### ***Support for the heritage sector and protection of the UK's museums and galleries***

Our parent union Prospect represents thousands of members in the heritage sector, an industry that has suffered greatly at the hands of the pandemic. A recent survey from Historic England found that 76% of respondents in the heritage sector lost work due to Covid-19, and 58% lost generated income. Our museums and galleries are a huge part of Britain's identity, and must be protected at all costs.

#### ***Being the voice in Cabinet of freelancers and the self-employed***

Freelancers and the self-employed make up a large proportion of the workforce in the cultural industries, many of whom were not eligible for government support schemes. We are keen that the

experience of the pandemic is used as a springboard for securing reform and I hope that DCMS can be a champion for the self-employed and freelance workforce in government.

***Work with the creative industries and support a thriving British industry***

The UK's cultural sector is the envy of the world and the skillset of our talented workforce is recognised on an international scale. It is an economic powerhouse, drawing billions in inward investment. Authentic British stories are enjoyed the world over thanks to our highly successful broadcast, film and TV industries. We are concerned at some recent rhetoric which seems to undermine rather than celebrate the enormous contribution of our institutions to Global Britain, in particular we have deep reservations about government plans to privatise Channel 4 and concerns about its plans for the BBC. I hope that you will use your role as Culture Secretary to celebrate and enhance the contribution of our successful cultural industries.

***Support our touring professionals***

The EU Trade Deal has made it impossible for the UK's leading touring professionals to work across EU member states due to visa restrictions. Live events workers have been out of work for over a year due to Covid-19 and their post pandemic recovery will be hampered if the government does not negotiate a free cultural EU work permit and carnet exception for all touring professionals. The live events industry is part of a cultural ecosystem that provides billions to the UK economy and jobs across all corners of the country. As it stands, the EU Trade Deal will seriously damage such an important cultural sector and a key component of Global Britain.

The creative industries are a hugely successful beacon of global Britain, recognised internationally for the skillset of its workforce, who consistently create outstanding content, enjoyed by the British public and global audiences. I hope that we can work together to provide encouragement, support and stability to an industry that has already lost so much at the hands of the pandemic.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Philippa Childs". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Philippa Childs

Head of Bectu, a sector of Prospect Union