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Employers in arts, entertainment and media need to re-hire stood down workforce

Employers in the arts, entertainment and media sectors should begin re-hiring their workforces in the wake of today's announcement of an income subsidy for most Australian workers, says their union.

Those thinking about shedding workers should now not take that step and keep their employees and contractors.

MEAA's call follows the federal government's move to implement 'jobkeeper' income support payments. This scheme is the direct result of campaigning by Australia's trade union movement.

The \$1500 fortnightly subsidy, along with other measures already in place to support businesses suffering from the coronavirus downturn, will assist employers to keep their permanent and long-term casual staff on the payroll.

While more detail is needed, it seems that sole traders and freelancers will be eligible for the \$1500 a fortnight income subsidy.

But casual workers who have been employed in the same job for less than 12 months will miss out and have no choice but to apply for welfare support. This is a large cohort within the arts, entertainment and media sectors. MEAA believes the 12-month limit should be reduced to a more equitable period of time.

"The vast majority of workers in the arts and entertainment industries are employed in insecure jobs," said MEAA Chief Executive Paul Murphy.

"Freelancers normally rely on income from job to job and gig to gig. This precarity meant that COVID-19 threatened to push them out of our industries and into the never-never.

"An income subsidy is vital to keep these people engaged with their regular places of work and to ensure the arts and entertainment industry is best-placed to rebound quickly once the current crisis is over.

"While more detail is required about how the income subsidy will operate, MEAA does welcome that the government has listened to concerns and ensured that sole traders/freelancers are not left on the outer.

"We now call on employers in the industries MEAA represent to urgently re-employ staff they have let go since the pandemic began to have an impact on the industry.

"We are all in this together, and when they combine the income subsidy with other forms of business support including payments to boost cash flow, employers should pull out all stops to keep workers on their payrolls."

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