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Government needs to back up its claims about support to arts and entertainment workers

As evidence mounts that workers in the arts and entertainment industries have been unable to access the JobKeeper scheme, their union is calling on the Federal Government to explain its claim that financial assistance of up to \$10 billion will flow through to the sectors.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance says Arts Minister Paul Fletcher must produce the modelling data to back up his claim that the combined impact of JobKeeper and JobSeeker on the arts sector is estimated to be between \$4 billion and \$10 billion.

Recent Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that the arts and recreation sector has been the second worst hit part of the economy since COVID-19 restrictions were introduced in the middle of March.

According to the ABS, employment in arts and recreation has fallen by 27% and wages have dwindled by 17% over that period, yet the Federal Government is steadfastly refused to provide any special relief for the arts and entertainment sectors. And Deloitte Access Economics has forecast that employment in the arts and recreation sectors will not recover back to pre-COVID levels until 2025.

MEAA Chief Executive Paul Murphy said research by the union was in sharp contrast to Mr Fletcher's repeated claim about the level of financial assistance being provided by JobKeeper and JobSeeker.

"Of more than 1000 MEAA members recently surveyed by the union, almost one-in-five said they had been declined access to both JobKeeper and JobSeeker," Mr Murphy said.

"A similar number had been unsuccessful in claiming for JobKeeper but would be able to claim the lower JobSeeker support. In total, 35% of members surveyed had been told they were ineligible for JobKeeper.

"If that is replicated across the entire arts and entertainment sector, it equates to tens of thousands of workers who have fallen through the cracks of JobKeeper, so how can the Minister claim with a straight face that the support being provided to the sector will be anything near \$10 billion.

"The Minister needs to provide the modelling for his claim or we can only assume he has pulled it out of thin air.

"In addition to the clear flaws with JobKeeper in not accounting for the way people are employed in the arts and entertainment, the government has also failed to respond to the pleas for a targeted package of assistance to help the sector recover after COVID."

Other results of the survey of MEAA members paint an equally stark picture of the impact of coronavirus restrictions on their livelihoods. A staggering 68% said they have no paid work, while 24% have some paid work but their hours and opportunities have been reduced.

Sixty per cent said they had no significant income and 30% said their income had been significantly reduced.

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