

Self-Employed Cry for Help

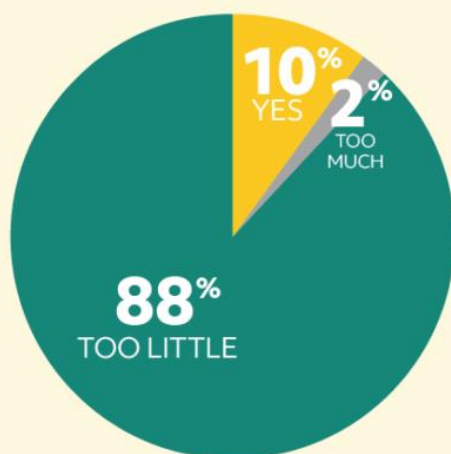


“Being self-employed means you work 12 hours a day for yourself, so you don't have to work 8 hours a day for someone else.” Anonymous

A recent item in the [Human Times](#) reported that a third of self-employed and freelance workers in the UK do not want to continue working as they are. The pandemic, the cited research found, has brutally scarred their earnings with half saying that they had lost between 60% and 100% of their household income in 2020.

It has been a big bone of contention that the self-employed have been at the back of the queue in receiving Government support during the Covid19 crisis.

The conclusion of the polling was that the self-employed have reached the end of their tether with their employment status.



Do you believe that the level of support self-employed and freelance workers received during the pandemic is a fair reflection of their tax contribution?

88% of respondents did not believe the level of support self-employed and freelance workers received during the pandemic was a fair reflection of their tax contributions.

Inquiry into the future of self-employment survey 2020

The [research was commissioned by the trade union Prospect](#), who represent 150,000 professionals across the public and private sectors. Prospect's General Secretary Mike Clancy commented: "These findings should be a massive wake-up call to the Government. These workers have powered our economy in recent years and this flexible workforce were lauded by ministers as key to our prosperity, but the way they have been treated in this pandemic is disgraceful and will have consequences for our ability to recover in 2021 and beyond."

The self-employed represent a significant and growing element of the UK labour market. By the fourth quarter of 2019, there were more than 5 million self-employed people in the UK, up from 3.2 million in 2000.



Self-employment has contributed strongly to employment growth in the labour market, with self-employed people representing 15.3% of employment, up from 12% in 2000.

If the Prospect research represents genuine intentions of the self-employed rather than a cry for help from a beleaguered group, then upwards of 1.5 million people are currently harbouring hopes of entering or re-entering the settled workforce or are seriously considering throwing themselves completely upon the mercy of the state.

That first aspiration of re-entering the settled labour market is unlikely to be a serious proposition. Even if the vaccination programme proves a success and there is an economic bounce back in the second half of 2021, it is generally agreed by most forecasters and experts that the pressure on employment is going to be immense. Although an extended furlough scheme has blunted the worst of the job losses for now, they will still certainly come as companies adjust to forever lost revenues and new ways of workings. Companies and organisations that believe their head counts will be higher in 2022 than they were in 2019 are as rare as hens' teeth.

On the other hand, the self-employed are a resilient force. They have long ago cut free from corporate reins



if they were ever tethered at all. They are used to making their own decisions, organising their own schedules, winning their own customers, and managing their own cash flows. They know how to motivate and discipline themselves. The ‘new normal’ of working from home, Zooming and juggling home and work responsibilities has been de rigueur for them for years. They look on with bemusement at all the fuss and bother about this new world of work.

The likelihood is that the self-employed were making their frustration, fears, and pain clear to the Prospect pollsters because where else can they make their voices heard? They do not have an all-encompassing trade union or trade association representing them. They are not a private company or operate in a single industry and besides, they are genuinely too busy to protest. However, recently, two groups – Excluded UK and Forgotten Ltd – have been set up to give voice to the flexible workforce during COVID. The self-employed need all the help they can get. For example, on top of the struggle to secure Government support on a par with other workers, financial institutions are being reported to having tightened up the financial criteria used in granting mortgages to the self-employed.

It’s a difficult time ahead as it has been in 2020. The immediate health risk should ease but the economic hit



will worsen. Yet, the current self-employed are the group of workers who will most likely weather this storm better than most as they have acquired and earned the skills and built the stamina that will help them survive in the new working landscape that will reveal itself. However, they will soon be joined by hundreds of thousands of the new self-employed adopting this new employment status out of necessity rather than choice.

Martin Knight, Industry Slice

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