**ESRC Addressing inclusivity in the spatial and social impacts of COVID-19 on the self-employed in the UK Research Project**

**Participant information**

*What’s involved?*

The interview will be arranged at time and using a method (phone interview or video call) that is most convenient for you. It will last for no more than about 40-50 minutes and will be conducted by a member of the project team. No preparation for the interview is required as the purpose is to find out about your experience during the Covid-19 health crisis.

*What is the purpose of the research?*

Our aim is to understand the experiences of self-employed people as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, working in different activities and ways and in different places across Britain,

The study, which includes advice from an expert panel of advisors and policy makers, aims to produce recommendations for the ongoing development of policy to support the self-employed. The research seeks to ensure that policy is regionally representative and socially inclusive, and which supports a rapid and robust recovery of this vital sector of the national economy.

We have three broad research questions:

1. How has the epidemic influenced the economic status of the self-employed across different sectors, regions and social characteristics during and after the lockdown?
2. How will the different prospects for recovery impact on regional inequalities in rates and sectoral composition of self-employment, and thus on entrepreneurship potential?
3. Who is more likely to leave self-employment and transition into paid employment or not return to employment, and what will be the consequences for the social composition of self-employment? Specifically, if some groups are hardest hit, will they be more discouraged from future self-employment?

*How did I get chosen to participate?*

You were contacted because you were working as self-employed at the start of 2020. The project aims to interview a number of self-employed people, across both business owners and freelancers, from a range of backgrounds, broadly representative of the wider self-employed population in terms of gender, age and ethnicity. Your name will have been suggested either because you took part in an earlier survey or because your name was suggested by one of the small business/self-employed membership bodies.

*Who is funding and who is carrying out this study?*

This project has been funded for a period of 18 months from July 2020 until January 2022 by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). ESRC is one of the six constituent Research Councils of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), the government-funded body which provides research funding to universities and other research organizations. UKRI has been allocated additional funding to research the medical and social implications of the Covid-19 health crisis, and this project is one of many which it has chosen to fund.

The project is directed from the University of Southampton, and also involves Cardiff University and the Open University. Cardiff University are taking the lead on one-to-one interviews with self-employed people. The project team is led by Dr Darja Reuschke, Associate Professor in Human Geography at the University of Southampton. The other team members are Professor Elizabeth Daniel, Professor of Information Management at the Open University, Professor Andrew Henley, Professor of Entrepreneurship and Economics at Cardiff University, Dr Mark Lang, an independent researcher based in Cardiff who has worked closely with Cardiff University on a range of projects and Ms Victoria Price, a PhD student at the University of Southampton. Overall the team comprises a highly experienced group of social researchers with a substantial previous track record of undertaking social science research using a wide range of methods.

*Does the project have ethical approval?*

All the research being undertaken during the project has been approved under the strict ethical research regulations of the three universities involved. Cardiff University, who are leading on the participant interviews, has provided specific ethical approval for this element of the project. Only those staff involved in the project will have access to any personal data provided by you (for example name, contact and other personal details). All staff responsible for your data are subject to a duty of confidence, and that they take appropriate measures to ensure the security of processing your responses and will comply with the UK Data Protection Act, and General Data Protection Regulation. The project has an explicit data management plan which has been approved by the funding body, the ESRC, and is available on request.

We will use the information that you provide strictly for scientific research only. No information that you provide will be sold to third parties, nor will it be used for any marketing purposes.

The researchers will analyse data from all respondents and aggregate findings, i.e. we will not analyse or publish any data from single individuals. Any publications will only contain aggregate findings and no personal information from individual participants.

Anonymised research data will be stored at a repository recommended by the project funder (the UK Data Service) in a secure format after the completion of the project in 2022, for a period of ten years, as per funder policy. Your data will be made available for future research projects if you have given consent.

*Will my participation be confidential?*

Yes. We will comply with the Data Protection Act, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) EU)2016/679). Interview recordings will not include any personal information and will be deleted at the end of the project. Any interview transcripts will only be identified by a reference number and any identifying information will be redacted. No records of contact details will be retained, unless you wish to provide those for the purposes of receiving a copy of any published reports. Published material will not include any information from which an interviewee might be identified, such as specific age or detailed location information.

*What are the intended outputs from the project?*

We will produce a final report from our research, as well as other shorter reports and research papers for academic publication. We will be delighted to share these with our project participants for those interested in reading about our findings.