



Guide for SDGI Members on Social Welfare for Professional Directors Directors' Access to Jobseeker's Allowance/ Social Welfare

There is a distinct scheme that acknowledges the professional status of directors applying for Jobseeker's Allowance. The scheme has been developed in partnership between the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media as part of a key commitment to directors under the Creative Ireland programme.

The Screen Directors Guild Ireland is approved to certify the professional status of directors through their respective professional membership schemes.

If you are unemployed or experiencing periods of very low income, you may be paid with either Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) or Jobseeker's Benefit (JB). Both payments are paid by the Department of Social Protection (DSP). Jobseekers Benefit offers entitlements to those who have PAYE income and have credits that can be drawn upon. Jobseekers Allowance is based on means testing.

Under this scheme, the criteria for Jobseekers Allowance remains the same, but professional directors who are self-employed will be able to have the title "Director" as their primary profession. This has not been recognised in the past and has been difficult to access for directors who are registered as self-employed. The new system now makes this easier and directors will no longer have to hide their primary profession to access support.

To access the Department of Social Protection Scheme a director must:

- Be registered as self employed
- Satisfy a means test with 50% earnings from work as a director
- Be an active member of SDGI

You will need to be able to give evidence that you are a professional director. An up to date SDGI Professional Membership Letter will be delivered to members and will be an accepted way to prove that a person is a professional director. The reason a SDGI Professional Membership Letter is accepted is because DSP have recognised that directors must give evidence of meeting professional status criteria when applying to SDGI. They will accept membership of the representative body for directors in Ireland as proof, rather than the social welfare staff making that assessment. Front line officials for Social Welfare are not in a position to assess if an applicant is a professional director or not and will err on the side of caution. This is the reason that they have decided to use the SDGI letter as valid proof.

Directors must be registered with Revenue as self-employed to avail of this scheme.



Means Test and Self-Employment

Jobseeker's Allowance is means tested and your means must be below a certain level to qualify. When being assessed for the scheme directors will be means tested as self-employed individuals. To find your total means, your means under the various headings (for example, cash income, employment, capital, benefit and privilege) are added together. Most social welfare payments are not taken into account. Total earnings are assessed as gross income, less work-related expenses over 12 months. There is no exhaustive list of all expenses allowed because expenses vary with the nature and extent of the self-employment.

However the following are the main allowable expenses in most cases:

- Materials (supplies costs)
- Motor running costs (portion applicable to practice)
- Insurance relating to the practice
- Telephone (portion applicable to practice)
- Bank charges
- Any other costs associated practice

Your expected annual earnings from self-employment is divided by 52 to find your weekly means from self-employment, 50% or more of a directors earnings must be from their work as a professional director. This includes income from all forms of work that a director undertakes, for example: films – sales and director fees, commissions, juried competitions, funding awards, workshop facilitation, masterclasses, guest lecturing, specialist panels, public speaking & director talks, etc. For more details on means testing visit Citizens Information:

- Means Testing: citizensinformation.ie/means_test_for_jobseekers_allowance.html
- Self-Employment: citizensinformation.ie/en/self_employed_and_unemployment.html

Types of Work

Like all Jobseekers, directors must be available for work and actively seeking work. You must also be genuinely seeking work to qualify for Jobseeker's Allowance – and you must be able to show evidence of this to the Department of Social Protection. This scheme now allows directors to include as evidence the following activities that form the everyday life of a director; applications for film advancements, funding, education and outreach opportunities and any other examples you have of actively pursuing opportunities related to your practice that could potentially generate income. DSP have specified that being available for work now takes into allowance the range of work that directors undertake.

Arts Council policy states that all of their funded organisations must pay directors, this income qualifies as being paid for work. We have to also understand that some directors volunteer. It is clear that such voluntary work may become difficult if it is placed before Social Welfare as a block to being available for work. There is no easy answer here and it will depend on each individual's interaction with Social Welfare to understand how and what volunteering can be done.



Moving onto Scheme from other Social Welfare Payments

You may get Jobseeker's Allowance if you don't qualify for Jobseeker's Benefit or if you have used up your entitlement to Jobseeker's Benefit.

Citizens Information have stated that individuals can move from an existing Jobseekers Allowance claim to the scheme if they meet the eligibility criteria. They will need to be means tested as a self employed individual.

For any questions on your personal situation and moving from a different claim to the scheme contact Citizens Information in your local office or on their call their nationwide service that can be reached on 0761 07 4000, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm.

So, finally, what the scheme is:

- This recognises directors as professionals.
- This scheme is designed to support directors during times when their incomes are low and to provide support to develop income opportunities.
- It is designed for directors who have no other means of approaching Social Welfare, ie Credits etc.

What this Scheme is not:

- This scheme is not a replacement for disability allowances, carer's allowance, or other specialist social welfare supports.
- This scheme is not a state pension
- This scheme is not a replacement for gaining specific supports from funding bodies.