

NOTE OF WHAT NEXT? FREELANCE FUTURES SESSION – SUPPORTING THE FREELANCE CULTURAL WORKFORCE

25.05.2022 – 08:30 – 09:30

About this note

This is a note of a one-hour Zoom session which was delivered as one of What Next?'s contributions to the Freelance: Futures symposia: www.freelancefutures.org.

The meeting was attended by approximately 180 colleagues from across the UK.

Meeting goal

Arts Council England (ACE): Supporting the Freelance Cultural Workforce

At this meeting, the What Next? team was joined by Michelle Dickson, Director Strategy at ACE, and Erica Campayne, Senior Manager, Combined Arts & Individuals to ask participants the following question: 'As an individual, what do you want from your National Development Agency?'

Summary of the meeting discussion

The freelance workforce is diverse, and freelance practice can look very different in different professions, stages in career, or locations. Not all freelancers have similar experiences. However, there are significant issues in the cultural and creative industries which mean that conditions for the workforce are not equitable. These have existed for a long-time and have been made more visible by the pandemic.

Attendees shared that they wanted the voice of freelancers to be more closely fed in when policies, strategies and funding programmes are being developed, or on sector governing bodies, because colleagues are not paid for their time and expertise, or are not asked to participate in ways that work around their employment. There are specific barriers to colleagues with lived-experience of discrimination.

Arts Council England is looking to make freelance participation in consultation and design of its programmes consistent and sustainable across the whole organisation and across its governance.

Attendees fed back that it can be difficult for freelancers to apply for Arts Council England project funding. Individuals have to spend time researching their project fully and are expected to have all the skills of a small business: from accountancy, to marketing and communications. The time spent applying for funding is unpaid. This is a problem for everyone, but especially for early career artists. The language used in the guidance is often geared towards organisations, and doesn't make sense for individuals.

Arts Council England has just refreshed the project grant process, and is undertaking a review of the funding programmes to make them more accessible. ACE is asking freelancers to get in

touch with them on the e-mail provided to let them know what doesn't work and what could be improved.

Most benchmarks for freelance pay are too low, are not transparent, and have not been adjusted for decades. Arts Council England does not suggest appropriate rates and many people don't know where to look to find benchmarks. Organisations are not currently paying fees that cover holiday / sick / maternity pay, travel, insurance, training and office costs. The cost of living and inflation rises have made this disparity worse. There is no increase in overall money in the sector, but the cost of making work is much higher.

Arts Council England recognises the current economic reality and urges colleagues to submit funding bids which reflect the real costs of making work. It recognises that this will mean that there will be less work made overall.

Arts organisations can do more to support freelancers, both in clarity of contract, conditions and pay, but also in thinking through the needs of the workforce in their locality and offering training, development, workspaces, networking and support. ACE has asked arts organisations who are applying for funding in this National Portfolio Round to clarify the kinds of support that they will offer.

Local authorities can help to develop creative clusters and are major employers. They would like more clarity on pay and on procurement procedures.

There is a real fear of recrimination for freelancers in calling out bad-practice or making discrimination visible. Colleagues feel that they will be seen as difficult and not hired again in future contracts, their career will be impacted negatively, and they will not progress. Collective action can help with this.

Networking and skills-sharing are very much needed by freelancers. Colleagues are calling for communities of practice, and for access to central support: from finance and marketing to HR and legal advice. Freelancers also need support to champion their freedom of artistic expression and manage reputational risk. Being a freelancer can be isolating and lonely. There is a recognition that most grass-roots networks and organisations are under-funded or are voluntary, and are not sustainable.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the freelance workforce, with many individuals leaving the profession because they could not make it financially sustainable. This talent-drain is having real consequences for the sector now, as well as being extremely concerning for the future. Both long-term policy change and short-term solutions are needed to address this.

Offers from ACE:

- To listen to freelancers about ways that Project funding process and application can be improved, and to make changes
- To embed consistent, equitable freelance consultation and engagement across policy, strategy and programme development across all areas of the organisation

- To hold a joint conversation with sector partners about talent-drain in the freelance workforce and its immediate impact on the sector

About What Next?

What Next? is a free-to-access movement that brings freelancers, policy makers, academics and small and large organisations together to debate and shape the future of arts & culture <https://www.whatnextculture.co.uk>

Sign-up here to register for our UK-wide meetings: <https://whatnextculture.us16.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=e68315dd39f97787827c1ef00&id=2ae989185d> and here to join (or start!) a local chapter: <https://www.whatnextculture.co.uk/chapters/>

Resources from Arts Council England

ACE has created a landing page on its website, where individuals can go and see the full range of support that it provides: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-creativity-and-culture/supporting-individual-creative-and-cultural-practitioners>

Arts Council England produces a ten-year strategy for the creative and cultural sector. The current one is called Let's Create <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/letscreate> and runs until 2030. This includes the vision and priorities for its work and its funding.

To focus the work and achieve the strategy, ACE creates delivery plans for three-year periods. The current delivery plan runs from 2021 – 2024 <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/letscreate/delivery-plan-2021-2024>. This page breaks that delivery plan down for freelancers: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/themes-actions/increasing-our-support-individuals>.

The ACE team has created this 10-minute video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9T4VK30jK0>. It sets out the ways that ACE currently works to support individuals and freelancers. The video is around 10 minutes long.

This information sheet sets out Arts Council's expectations for all cultural organisations who work with creative and practitioners. It suggests good practice approaches to consider, and other resources organisations could refer to: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Supporting%20Practitioners%20information%20sheet..pdf>

Chief Executive Darren Henley has written this blog explaining why the time is now to think about freelance equity, and the role we all have to play in bringing about change: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/blog/time-change-working-freelance-creativity-and-culture>

Freelancers can contact the ACE team to talk about issues of freelancing in the arts, or make suggestions for changes by e-mailing individuals@artscouncil.org.uk . (N.B. queries about funding applications will still go to the enquiries team).

Funding

Arts Council England offers:

- National Lottery Project Grants: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/ProjectGrants> and has recently refreshed the process to make it easier for individuals and for early career artists to access funding and support.
- Developing Your Creative Practice: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/DYCP> Grants of between £2,000 – £10,00 for research, development or for making new work. This fund is for individual practitioners only.
- You can also see if you are eligible for access support to help you make your application to these funding programmes. <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/access-support>