

WOR CULTURE: FREELANCING

Welcome to this reflection of our fourth *Wor Culture* event which focused on **Freelancing**. Here, we'll give the key points from our presentations, reflect some of the discussions, provide some (hopefully) useful links and resources, and let you know what's happening next.

For those of you who couldn't be with us for our zoom gathering, further information on what *Wor Culture* is about can be found at the end of this document. Please get in touch if you'd like to contribute, have any suggestions, or would like to share any links or resources. We look forward to welcoming you to one of our events.

The #WorCulture team,

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Our event was kicked off with three presentations from **Leila D'aronville (Tyne and Wear Cultural Freelancers)**, **Karen Traynor (Actor | Freelance Theatre Director)** and **Annabel Turpin (CEO & Artistic Director - ARC Stockton)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8tDvnBXCS8&t=5s>

[If you click on the Presentation menu there is an option to view with subtitles]

Chat

During the event the chat function was used to allow people to share comments and ask questions. We've grouped some key points of discussion into the headings below:

A freelancer as a business

Alan Butland : Karen makes a key point about being an effective business, invisible but unpaid work that keeps you going. Also, how many times are freelancers expected to provide services for free?

Susan Spencer : Thinking about the emotional labour and energy drain of that invisible work

Maria Giacchetto : Yes I fully agree as someone in my first year of my career. I feel like I need to understand business something I never thought about before graduating.

Emma Coffield Newcastle Uni : I really like the 'aggregation of marginal gains' and the importance of this - but what might we be able to do as a group, strategically, to protect and support freelancers in the NE?

Claire Hills-Wilson : I felt very similar to Karen when starting off. I also didn't feel I had been set up from my university to deal with that "unpaid essential work" and being an "effective business" Very well articulated Karen.

Andrea Henderson : There could be some great shared learning from the wider VCSE sector on the issues around operating as a business given the steep learning curved many groups have undergone over the past 10 years due to a push to be self-sustaining and reduced funding.

Gretel : Hi! Gretel Dixon from the START UP team @ Newcastle Uni. We support students and graduates who want to work for themselves, so if anyone has more comments into what kind of topics surrounding "freelancing education" would be useful, I would really appreciate your insights!

Freelancers and venues

Kate Craddock : Great point Annabel about not putting artists and organisations against each other in this moment - and wanted to also acknowledge how brilliant ARC have been at communicating with the sector and with audiences about their ongoing plans throughout this all! ARC leading the way as always.

Helen Fussell : In case anyone didn't see this, Arts Council England have announced financial support for freelancers working in the performing arts. Applications open today <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-open-funds/benevolent-funds>

Bex Bowsher (she/her) : As an addition to Annabel's point: disabled artists who are low income aren't entitled to access to work so also have to cover access in their costs

Ellie Tait : Always pay up front! Day rates here. There is also a tool to adjust for your personal circumstances. https://static.a-n.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Guidance_on_fees_and_day_rates_for_visual_artists_2018.pdf

Dave Pritchard : It strikes me that Leila's earlier point about "perceiving the freelance workforce as a community" is one thing that has strengthened as a result of current circumstances. Do organisations need to embrace this shift of perception more strongly too, and look in a more systematic way at the advantages of working with freelancers (eg the fresh insights we bring, our freedom of movement across different institutional contexts and the cross-fertilisation that offers, etc...)? And thus think about support in a systematic way too (eg policy advocacy).

BREAKOUT ROOMS

After the presentations we split into Breakout Rooms (smaller discussion groups) themed on:

- Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Organisations
- Retaining Talent
- Voice of the Freelancers

Here's a summary of the key points from those groups

Mental Health and Wellbeing

The people in the room agreed that this was a real problem for everyone at the moment, but especially bad for freelancers and the main connections they would make would be outside of their “work” in other connected situations e.g. after shows/bumping into people informally. As creatives during a time when we are not able to work in our normal way, our purpose and place is lost.

- Immediate Stress Response – Surge People have been dealing with their stress at the global situation with short term adrenaline and surge response. Now that we know the virus isn't going away we need to build ourselves up to prepare for longer term stress responses for our health and wellbeing.
- Wellbeing and work As creatives we draw on ourselves to create – this is put in jeopardy when our wellbeing is damaged so it is clear that wellbeing is an immediate issue – we need to work together to gather solutions now. “you make from your state of mind”
- Personal Strategies People shared the things they have done to try and protect their mental health.

> Getting outside – change of scene from their house

> Running

> Taking part in training – Mortal Fools resilience training “lean in to your vulnerability and ask for help!”

The group talked about other resources e.g. Brene Brown TED talk about vulnerability, Caroline Pearce and Amanda Drago Walk and Talk @ Green Croft on the Wall, Mortal Fools resilience training. It was agreed everyone needed to build up their own arsenal of responses/strategies.

- Connecting in the Real World Are we ready for this yet?

The feeling was that some creatives etc were ready for this...but how can we work together to make it happen. One of the group had been asked to do an in person workshop and although it felt anxiety inducing, it also felt like a good step in the return to living life.

- Organisations

There were questions around how organisations could support their freelancers – posed by an organisation member. They felt that normally they would be really connected to their workforce, however although they were honouring payments they felt disconnected from them. Can organisations support by providing space and training (Mortal Fools resilience training was part of Northern Stage's Workforce support programme and was open to freelancers).

- Supporting Each Other

As well as looking out for ourselves, if we are able we can try and reach out to other – friends and colleagues – to take collective responsibility for our mental health. Possible walk and talks whereby people can reconnect.

Organisations

Discussed the importance of kindness

- One group had a fascinating conversation about disaster recovery and the role of arts in helping to rebuild communities. Important to make information available to freelancers about what helps rebuild communities, drawing on that knowledge to help everyone prepare and play a role in that.
- Talked quite a lot about the power imbalance and the need to acknowledge that imbalance.
- In communication, make sure people understand their contractual rights and on an interpersonal level, acknowledging and valuing people's time.
- How we can support beyond the basic legal and HR requirements of issuing contracts and paying people, but what are the other ways that we can support.
- Organisations need to make sure that staff involved in employing freelancers really understand what being freelance means, they might not have that experience themselves. It is important to really understand what that means and in particular clarity around what freelance pay has to cover. If you're paying someone an hourly rate then understanding that that has to also cover their travel and their preparation time, pension, holiday pay and sick pay, all those kind of things that salaried staff won't necessarily think about when they're just looking at someone's hourly rate.
- A really good point about whether organisations can help fill that gap in business skills for freelancers, acknowledging that freelancers aren't getting that as part of their education in terms of how to operate as a business and whether that's something that organisations can help them with.
- Freelancers are not always getting contracts and it was discussed whether freelancers have issued their own and whether that was something that we could facilitate if you're not being sent a contract, then send the organisation one. You don't have to accept everything that's in a contract, you can negotiate.
- Acknowledging imbalances and cancellation clauses where organisations can cancel and freelancers can't with the same period of notice isn't fair, it is important to be assertive and challenge that.
- Recognising the vulnerability people feel about the risk of losing work. There is a need from the organisation side to find ways of enabling freelancers to be more assertive about what they need in the positions they are in.
- Importance of paying invoices on time and within larger institutions and organisations that sometimes the structures can make that challenging or difficult. This can be true from experience in higher education being really hard to get freelancers paid quickly and so what can be done to lobby within those larger organisations to change that?
- Organisations might not be best to prescribe menus of support for freelancers, but actually anything that's offered should be done through dialogue and in conversation with freelancers.

- At the moment the ability to pay up front where possible instead of 30 or 15 day terms is crucial, this is starting to shift in terms of some organisations at the moment.
- How do we account for people's time that it takes as a freelancer behind the scenes, just to survive and how do we cost that into our own work as freelancers
- Discussed specific examples of websites that people have been set up like culture Northumberland where all opportunities have been pulled together, and people coming together collectively to make those opportunities and grants more available.
- Upcoming support from Creative Fuse Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange (CAKE) events that will hopefully help people develop skills in tech and working in more immersive environments, as people are grappling with how to change their practice if I want to change my practice.
- Would there be potential interest through the university or through creative fuse to offer action learning sets where freelancers can come together to share learning
- A key point that came up is that organisations could be doing more to support freelancers to lobby for universal basic income as this is again is a lot of unpaid lobbying from freelancers.

Retaining Talent

- Urgency - As Leila's presentation made clear, we are already losing people, and will have lost 37% by the end of September. So for our group this wasn't a 'what to do in the future' kind of question, but how do we act immediately and with urgency, recognising the situation as it is now, and how it will impact BAME freelancers first.
- Unsticking the sector - mega obvious, but freelancers need money and work to be able to survive. How do we get cultural venues up and running sustainably again (e.g. sharing new and innovative models for practice like outdoor events, taking theatre to new audiences) and keep the work going even if the venue is shut?
- Advocacy - we can work individually and at an organisational level to effect change. But we also need advocacy - lots of those organisations employing freelancers don't understand the precarity of this type of work, and we are continually having to justify set rates of pay etc. How can we help (e.g. through brokerage) to make this common knowledge, so that freelancers are paid properly, automatically. This needs to be at the national level too - freelancers in the cultural sector were last to be offered any kind of package, and many missed out entirely. Perception here of a lack of worth. How do we use our work / connections as a conduit to those national level conversations?
- Value - In a related point, how do we recognise and promote the value of freelancers - so that they aren't a 'nice add on' if you have some extra funds, but a core part of the team?
- Developing and attracting talent - need to support what already is happening in the NE. Possible influx of London-based practitioners, which is an opportunity, but also need to continue to recognise the value of local practitioners (whose CVs might not sound as impressive, but whose work is just as good) and take into account the class/mobility gap here in terms of who has been able to take up what in the past.
- We didn't discuss this, but I also heard lots about freelance networks of support throughout the event - which seems fairly vital.

Voice of the Freelancers

- feeling that the freelance community already have an 'internal support system' ie. freelancers help each other out- a feeling that there is a stand off between organisations and freelancers- "how do freelancers articulate their voice?" Organisations are easier find and therefore communication with that freelancers- The idea of freelancers as a business; problematic idea of 'growth' in a business sense as an artist- PAY: freelancers need to be in conversation with orgs and need to be paid to be in the room make more transparent why freelancers have such a 'large' day rate ie. to include sick pay/travel/pension/holiday etc- Local Enterprise Partnership (peer to peer network was raised as a support but recognised a problem with issuing to freelancers- recognition that there needs to be a 'space' for freelancers in order for them to have stability
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RESOURCES/READS/SECTOR NEWS

This is not a comprehensive list (and many sources will have been updated or have become outdated by the time you read this). It is what we've come across, what people have been reading recently, and resources suggested by yourselves.

Tyne and Wear Cultural Freelancers <https://www.culturalfreelancers.org/>

North East Freelance Task Force <https://twitter.com/FreelanceNe>

Over 120 organisations call on government to extend freelancer support for creative sector <https://completemusicupdate.com/article/over-120-organisations-call-on-government-to-extend-freelancer-support-for-creative-sector/>

Culture shock: COVID-19 and the cultural and creative sectors <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/culture-shock-covid-19-and-the-cultural-and-creative-sectors-08da9e0e/>

Arts world warns of 'exodus of talent' from creative industries due to coronavirus <https://www.classicfm.com/music-news/coronavirus/arts-world-exodus-talent-urgent-freelance-support/>

Cultural industries to receive boost from researchers to help recover from Covid-19 <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/nr/covid-19-cultural-sector-help-recovery-plans-support-sheffield-uk-1.905435>

Arts Council Benevolent Funds <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-open-funds/benevolent-funds>

Guidance on fees and day rates for visual artists 2018 [https://static.a-n.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Guidance on fees and day rates for visual artists 2018.pdf](https://static.a-n.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Guidance_on_fees_and_day_rates_for_visual_artists_2018.pdf)

If you have any other resources you would like to add to this list please email bob.allan@ncl.ac.uk

Finishing Notes - in case you are wondering...What is Wor Culture?

Wor Culture is a forum for discussing issues relating to the culture and creative sectors in the North East, and contribute to shaping its future. The gathering is facilitated by Newcastle University but we strongly encourage you to propose topics for discussion, join in the debate, or offer to lead a session.

At the moment, due to COVID19, this is an online gathering using Zoom. We will be looking at alternative formats in due course.

How is the programme put together?

The sessions focus on topics suggested by you. You can also suggest speakers (or offer to do a presentation or provocation) and/or host a session (we'll support you!). All suggestions to: bob.allan@ncl.ac.uk

What is the format of the event?

Normally the event follows a format where we have a series of short presentations (c. 10 minutes) to help establish the context for the discussion. This is followed by a Q&A. We then have a series of breakout groups each focused on a different theme or topic. You choose which one you want to join beforehand. Breakout groups are smaller, focused discussion groups. After this each group feeds back into a general discussion.

There is a function in Zoom called the 'Chat' function which is like texting or messaging. We use this to gather questions and comments. Participants can also use it to contribute or send a private message to the host if they do not want to speak using their video.

What is expected of me?

We warmly welcome everyone who would like to come along to the event. How you participate is entirely up to you.

At the beginning of the event we ask everyone to mute their microphones and turn off their video to try to avoid any problems with background noise and videos crashing. You can listen, keeping your video and microphone off; you can contribute to the discussion via the chat function; you can contribute by turning on your video and asking a question; you can have your video on in the breakout rooms or not; and you can decide whether you want to come along to

the coffee social. **We would love to hear your voice and have your thoughts** but there is absolutely no pressure to contribute.

What if I can't join in or come along to the Zoom gatherings?

We are very aware that digital gatherings are not accessible for everyone for many reasons. We are working to make our sessions as accessible as possible (if you have any ideas or suggestions let us know) but we are still conscious that they still will not be accessible to everyone. If you would like to contribute to any of the sessions but cannot attend the zoom gathering, we'd be happy to talk to you beforehand by whatever means is best for you, you could contribute in writing or by submitting a short video, and we can feedback to you after the event. Or, if you have any other ideas, do let us know.

What happens after the event?

After each event we will produce a reflection of the event including information from the presentations, insights and questions drawn from the conversation on 'chat', information from the breakout room discussions, and any useful resources participants might have shared or we've discovered that are relevant to discussions. This might take a little time as we're a small team but bear with us! We will then circulate this to participants, regional networks, colleagues in local authorities etc. so they can see what your thinking is.

We will also look at the information and issues raised and, where possible, feed these into future sessions.

Want to be kept in the loop?

For information on future sessions you can sign up [here](#) and view our blog at <https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/culturencl/>