

# Connecting, Collaborating, Creating.

The **experiences** of  
**Creative Freelancers**  
in **Edinburgh** in 2022



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# Foreword & Acknowledgements

The last few years have been both interesting and challenging for creative freelancers in Scotland. Given the constraints caused by the Covid pandemic, Brexit, and rising inflation and the cost of living, many freelancers have found themselves having to rethink their practice, strategies and life choices. While this unprecedented period hasn't yet come to an end, it has highlighted the importance of the creative industries to the creative economy more than ever before.



At Creative Edinburgh, we strive to help creative practitioners develop and thrive throughout their journey, and we have done this for over a decade. It is essential for us to understand more about the community that we represent and freelancers play an important role in this large group of creatives. We seek to create a roadmap which will help Creative Edinburgh, but also other sector support agencies, to plan ahead to better support freelancers in the future.

Launched by Creative Edinburgh, the largest creative membership organisation in Edinburgh (5400+ members), with support from Creative Informatics, an ambitious research and development programme based in Edinburgh, this report was developed in collaboration with local creative freelance professionals, academic researchers and partnering organisations interested in valuable data relating to the sector, as the activity and growth of the creative sector evolves.

Focussed on freelancers and Creative Industry professionals living and working in Scotland, the information collected through this research provides a unique insight into the current status of the local sector, with the effects of Covid-19 and Brexit starting to make an impact. It raises a number of important issues which will be reported to the Scottish Government, City of Edinburgh Council, Creative Scotland and other stakeholders in view of improving available support and resources.

Creative Edinburgh is grateful to the wonderful team behind this research, especially Linz Connell, the lead researcher, as well as colleagues from Creative Informatics, the University of Edinburgh, and Edinburgh Napier University.

Many thanks goes also to all the creatives who participated in and contributed to the research. It is our community which makes our work so important.



**Ola Wojtkiewicz**  
Executive Director Creative Edinburgh  
August 2022

# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1 Background and Introduction

In collaboration with partners from Creative Informatics, the University of Edinburgh, and Edinburgh Napier University, Creative Edinburgh has undertaken research to better understand the experiences and needs of creative freelancers living and working in Edinburgh, Scotland, and beyond. Considering the challenges presented by COVID-19 and Brexit, this has allowed us to explore and analyse the situation across the creative economy, gathering recommendations for change and shaping a sustainable, supportive culture in which to work and collaborate, underpinned by the lived experience of creative freelancers. This report aims to provide recommendations which can be used as guidance for organisations, local authorities and national policymakers.

## 1.2 Why Freelancers?

We were interested to understand in what ways Brexit and the pandemic had impacted upon creative freelancers and what could be done to support recovery and regrowth. Creative freelancers make up around 32% of the creative workforce in Scotland and 16% of the UK creative workforce and this report aims to identify in what ways creative freelancers in Edinburgh (providing a snapshot of Scotland as a whole) have been affected and provide informed recommendations to support the recovery of creative freelancers and thus the creative economy as a whole.

## 1.3 How are we defining Creative Freelancers?

We are defining 'Creative Freelancers' in line with Creative Informatics' definition -

A freelancer might refer to someone who is registered with the HMRC as a PAYE (Pay As You Earn), freelancers (a model often used in the film industry for example, where freelancers work for film companies who pay tax and NI on their behalf for the duration of the making of a film, before moving onto the next project), or they are registered sole traders (a model used by writers or crafts people for example) who pay their own tax at the end of the tax year through Self-Assessment and are allocated a Unique Tax Reference (previously known as Schedule D) but are not required to register with Companies House, or finally they might operate as one person companies (perhaps used by musicians or dancers where there might be a benefit in being a Company).

## 1.4 Mixed Methods

A mixed methods approach resulted in 108 survey responses from creative freelancers based in Edinburgh and Scotland more widely and 7 focus groups exploring 7 key themes which emerged from the survey analysis.



## 1.5 Key Messages

### Net Zero Economy/Sustainability

With Scotland's target of achieving Net Zero by 2045, creative freelancers are committed to developing a sustainable practice and would benefit from a package of training and support. Consideration must be given to Scotland's infrastructure in order to ensure that it is reliable, cost-effective and accessible. This will support creative freelancers to meet sustainability targets, widen access to opportunities and boost the economy.

### Fair Work

Our research illustrated a significant need for the fair work principles to be embedded by employers and contractors. Affordable, accessible rehearsal/venue/working space is a key requirement as is a stronger understanding and working knowledge of freelancers rights and the co-production of a strategy of how to implement these into the workplace. There is also a strong need to collectively identify barriers to accessing the Creative Industries and develop strategies to tackle these and widen access to the diverse pool of skilled, talented creatives living and working in Scotland.

### Freelancer's Wellbeing

Our research has shown that loneliness and isolation has increased as a result of the pandemic and we would recommend revisiting the objectives of 'A Connected Scotland' and developing updated solutions as necessary. A hybrid approach to working has been hugely valued by creative freelancers, especially those who may have disabilities and/or caring responsibilities and we would recommend continuing this flexibility for all freelancers as required.

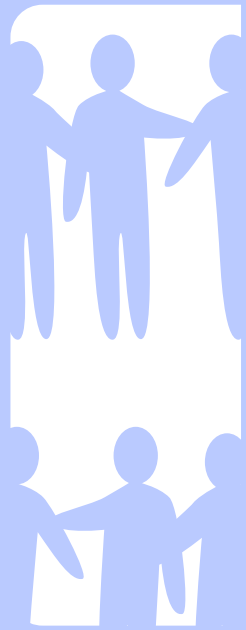
Digital literacy and connection are now a way of life and it is vital that the infrastructure supports this and that individuals have access to relevant technologies and software. This connection will benefit partnerships, provide opportunities and support the economy.

### Internationalism

It was felt that the creative community is supportive and welcoming of international creatives and families and this is something to be praised and continued. Being a festival city presents a wealth of opportunities for creative freelancers but it also presents issues in terms of sustainability targets and available accommodation. It is important that we acknowledge these issues and seek to address them. International creatives face an administrative burden and it is important that we support them to tackle this and successfully integrate while providing the infrastructure to continue developing and nurturing international partnerships.

### Diversity and Inclusion

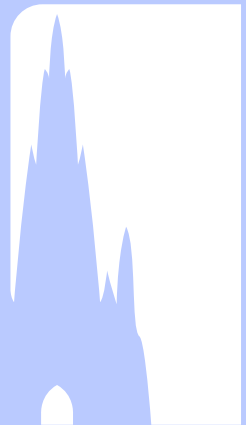
Widening access to the Creative Industries was one of the key recommendations from this section of the research. Work needs to be urgently undertaken to better understand the barriers and develop sustainable solutions. We also need to regularly review our practice at all levels, genuinely engaging with the creative workforce to ensure that our culture is fully inclusive and accessible and is representative of the diverse and highly skilled workforce that exists in Scotland.



### Creative Communities

Widening access is something that needs to be done internally within the Creative Industries as well as externally. Opening doors to allow different parts of the creative sector to come together would allow further opportunities for collaboration. We also need to ensure that opportunities for decision-making are fully inclusive and representative of the diverse workforce.

It would also be beneficial to explore what is happening in other parts of the UK and share knowledge, opportunities and best practice. There is a need for adequate funding and technology to support this.



### Membership & Services Across The City

Creative freelancers would prefer to continue with a hybrid model of working as the sector re-connects. They recognise the value of having a membership body and a collective voice and any membership model must be accessible and inclusive. There is a desire for learning and development opportunities and a wish to connect with employers to develop new partnerships and gain future work.

## 1.6 Next Steps

The report, findings and recommendations will be shared with relevant stakeholders for comment.

# 2

## Creative Informatics' Mapping Exercise

Creative Informatics have undertaken research that looks to better understand the geography of the Creative Industries in Edinburgh and the South East of Scotland City Region Deal, and fill in some of the gaps (outlined in the following section). The mapping exercise focuses on six local authority areas in Edinburgh and South East Scotland Region (Edinburgh, Fife, the Lothians [Mid, West and East Lothian] and Borders) and aims to identify where the gaps might exist. The map allows creative businesses to check if they are already included, and if not, to add themselves to the map. This provides creatives with agency in the data collection process which is currently lacking.

The map was drawn from publicly available data that has big data gaps on freelancers - most data on businesses is routinely collected through Companies House which excludes most freelancers. There are currently few routine data collection methods on freelancers.

The map aims to capture a representative picture of the Creative Industries in those areas and support policymakers and strategic leads to make informed decisions and ensuring that creatives are fully represented. The map itself shows which areas creative freelancers tend to work in, in the city, which may also help planning for support and community building. However, the map is mostly a critique on the lack of consistent data collection as it is evident to most working in the sector that there are big gaps in and on the map, mainly freelancer data gaps. Thus this survey is timely in that it tries to address this data gap by contacting local creatives directly through the Creative Edinburgh membership mailing list.

# 3. Methodology

## Survey & Focus Groups

An extensive survey was designed using Typeform and disseminated between February and March 2022 by a working group consisting of representatives from Creative Edinburgh, Creative Informatics, the University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh Napier University. The survey was hosted online and was live between February and March 2022. It was subsequently disseminated throughout the sector, via social media, email lists, and outreach to partner organisations. It received 108 responses. Following this, we conducted seven virtual focus groups in April 2022, meeting with groups of creative freelancers, to share discussion around the following themes:

- Membership & Services Across the City
- Net Zero Economy
- Fair Work & Freelancing
- Freelancers' Wellbeing
- Internationalism
- Connections with wider creative communities and industry.

Each focus group consisted of 4-7 creative freelancers, a facilitator and a member of staff from Creative Edinburgh. The focus groups were an hour long and discussed questions that further developed themes initially explored in and emerging from the survey. With the consent of participants, all focus groups were recorded to allow subsequent analysis.

38% of survey respondents were between 25 and 34; 13.3% between 50-59 and 4.8% between 60-64. 25% have worked in the sector for over 20 years with the most popular sectors being Visual Art (30.6%), Performing Arts (28.6%) and Digital Media (26.5%). 58.8% identified as women; 32.4% identified as men and 7.1% identified as non-binary.

The gender findings were interesting in that a report from the First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls (NACWG) found that in 2019, women made up 35.8% of the Creative Industries Workforce. Future work could explore how many of these could be identified as freelance. We asked respondents to state their nationality and ethnicity as opposed to choosing an option from a drop-down menu. The outcome was that 35% respondents identified as Scottish, followed by 29% identifying as British. In terms of ethnicity, 71% identified as White. Our focus groups were much more effective at capturing the experiences and voices of the international community in Edinburgh (Greek, American, Kazakhstani, Italian and French voices were present). Future work could explore diversity within survey uptake. 71% of respondents were resident in Edinburgh, at the time of the survey.

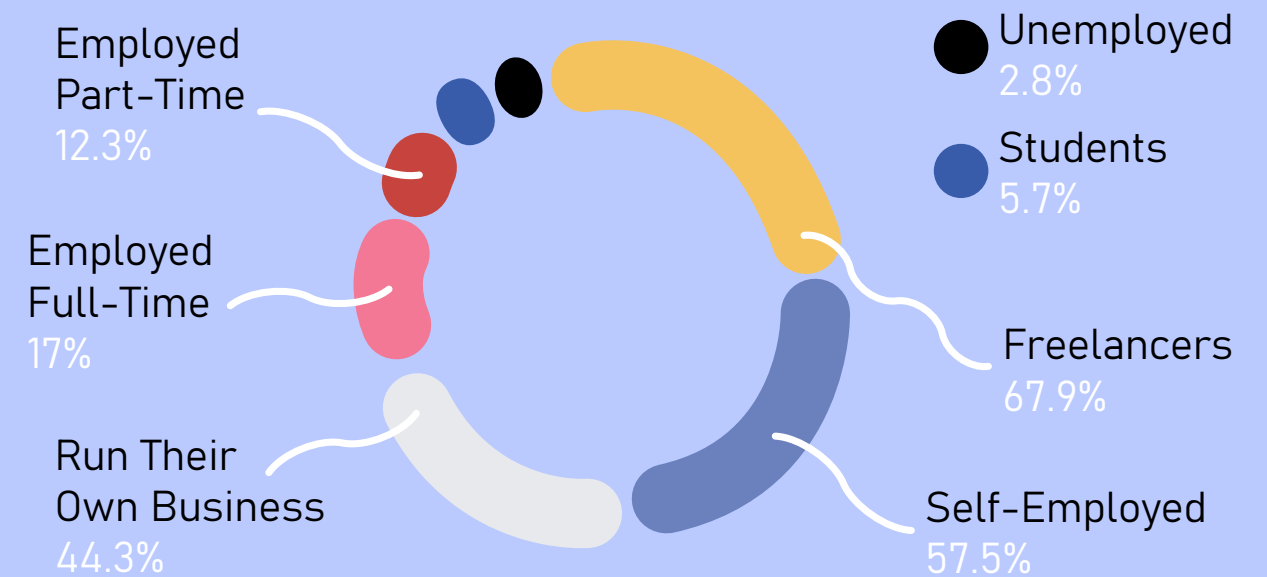
# 4. The Data Gap

Our survey generated 108 responses, which, although providing useful qualitative information, cannot claim to represent all voices within the freelance creative economy. We are aware that survey fatigue is prevalent at this moment, and this may go some way to explaining the relatively low response rate. However, it is interesting to reflect upon the gaps in uptake. As Panneels (2020) notes in 'The Trouble with Data',

It was recognised two decades ago, in the DCMS Creative Industries Mapping Documents report (2001) that the provision of robust data on creative industries at both regional and sub-regional level was of utmost importance for informed policy making but that there were inconsistencies across the board.

We therefore hope that the qualitative responses provided here can help in discussing the major issues that are confronting freelancers, at this point of time, particularly given we are more than two years into the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our survey asked creative freelancers about their employment status:



It is likely that some freelancers will have multiple status in that they might be both full-time employed and a sole trader (undertaking freelance contracts in addition). When promoting our focus groups, we received some responses from individuals wanting to participate but they were unsure as to whether the term 'freelance' applied to them as they undertook either full-time or part-time employment in addition to freelance contracts. We explained that they were very much eligible to take part. Yet, the question arose as to whether there need to be clearer definitions about what being a freelancer currently might look like (an individual juggling multiple roles, some of which might be on employed basis; an individual with multiple freelance contracts who is a registered sole trader; an individual who has one freelance contract who is registered with HMRC but is below the threshold for paying tax etc).

There is also the question of businesses who are too small to appear in any government statistics and those who will be missed from mapping exercises as they will not see themselves in definitions or categories. One of the recommendations of this report will be to look at how we can address this.



# 5. Key Findings

## 5.1 Survey & Focus Groups

As part of a global effort to tackle the growing impacts of climate change, Scotland has set a target to achieve Net Zero by 2045. In practice, this means reducing emissions by changing the way we work, travel and live –

*“Being ‘Net Zero’ will help transform the way we live for the better, making Scotland a healthier, cleaner, safer, fairer place for us and for generations to come. We must all act now to achieve it.” (Net Zero Nation, n.d.)*

In our survey we asked Creative Freelancers how ready they felt for a net zero economy – the results showed that above a quarter of respondents (27.5%) felt somewhere in the middle (choosing a 5 on the scale) and 11.8% of respondents felt fully ready. We also asked respondents whether they would consider attending training regarding sustainable creative practice and circular economy. 83.9% of respondents said they would. This was echoed in our net zero themed focus group whereby the majority of participants felt that they would benefit from training, workshops and accreditation opportunities on achieving a sustainable practice.

*“It will help me know more about sustainability [and] gaining accreditation will help me have courage in approaching potential employers because I have the knowledge.”*

When discussing barriers to sustainability, participants felt that cost and infrastructure are the main concerns. It was noted that while public transport is better for the environment, it comes at a cost. A single, off-peak, weekday rail fare to Glasgow from Edinburgh is currently priced at £14.00, nearly 4% more than last year (and nearly a 40% rise in the last decade!). This rise is detrimental to the environment and sustainability goals as accessibility is reduced and people will be more inclined to take cars.

The Edinburgh tram works were also mentioned – while the long-term, positive impacts are widely acknowledged, currently they are creating barriers to accessing events and opportunities. One freelancer stated

*“Of course Edinburgh is awful with its public transport at the moment with the tram construction, I was literally on a bus for an hour and then I had to only pop in and say hello and then get to work”*

While these works mean that more freelancers are choosing to work and network remotely, with many working from home, further reducing the carbon footprint, it would be worth conducting detailed impact assessments on any future plans for the implementation of sustainable infrastructure (i.e. trams) on wellbeing and accessibility. Reasonably priced accommodation and access to reliable broadband were also key concerns both in terms of increasing sustainability and social connections.

## 5.2 Fair Work

We asked focus group participants to share their experiences of being a freelancer in Edinburgh and further afield (some of our participants said they were based in London) in line with the Fair Work Principles (effective voice, opportunity, fulfilment, respect and security). The main themes that emerged were access to opportunities and space, fair pay and workload. We will explore the workload aspect further in the following section (7.3).

*I remember when I first started out, you could get the back room of a pub for a workshop for free and basically all the places now that we used to run shows and workshops and things now charge something per hour. In 2019 you were being asked £20/30 an hour so a lot of those costs went up*

With regards to opportunity, the need for discounted or affordable rehearsal and venue space was a theme that arose in the focus group on Membership & Services Across the City. This built upon evidence from our survey which highlighted financial barriers in accessing appropriate places to work. Respondents felt that prices were too high and that their incomes were not sufficient to cover these costs. Edinburgh is fortunate with organisations such as CodeBase and The Melting Pot, which offer affordable hotdesking space. Through their membership packages, these organisations offer advantages such as networking opportunities, ‘lunch and learn’ and the social and professional benefits of ‘colleagues’; even though you are not necessarily working for the same organisation. The opportunity to connect with others and return to a collaborative space is something that has been valued as we emerge from the pandemic, alleviating some of the issues caused by long periods of lone working. Lone working is addressed further in section 6.3. However, it is vital that organisations like these remain accessible not just to small charities and social enterprises, but to freelancing creatives.

**28.6%**  
Partner with the Charity and  
Voluntary sector



Our survey showed that 28.6% of respondents partner with the charity and voluntary sector and ensuring that collaborative spaces are accessible would allow these effective partnerships to develop and flourish, benefiting individuals, organisations and society as a whole.

In terms of how the Fair Work principles are applied to creative freelancers, participants felt that that commitment and culture should come from the venue or the organisation commissioning the work. One participant stated -

*It would be nice to know if you sign a contract with somebody, you've got somebody who's going to watch your back and ensure that contract will be paid out.*

**DUE**

**68.5%**  
Experienced Late  
or Non-Payment

**RIGHTS**

**55%**  
Not Well-Informed  
of their Rights.

In terms of security, our survey highlighted that 68.5% of respondents had experienced late or non-payment for their work and over 55% do not feel well-informed of their rights.

The development and publication of [‘The Illustrated Freelancer’s Guide’](#) has been well-received as it clearly defines what the rights are for freelancers in the creative industries and provides simple, informed solutions for how to resolve a number of administrative tasks and issues including tax returns, late payments and protecting yourself (sick leave, maternity pay etc). The illustrations embedded in the publication make the information more accessible and help freelancers to see themselves in the resource.

The focus group highlighted that a narrative still exists whereby freelancers must work for little or no pay in order to get fairly paid roles (either now or later on in their careers). There appears to be no time limit on when this 'probation' expires, nor recognition of the skills and experience gained. One participant stated -

*A lot of us have been presented with the opportunity of this is good for experience or exposure and it's either been low paid or no pay and the assumption is you have to do that and even after working in this area for ten years, ten plus years, you still find that people are saying that to you which is always a bit frustrating.*

Negotiating payment rates and terms was one of the most prevalent issues in our research and some participants mentioned connecting with their union. It was noted, however, that some creative freelancers may not have a union that is specific to their trade or practice and participants agreed that -

*It would be lovely if there was some sort of freelancers' union so not necessarily for a specific industry but just as a freelancers' thing [...] I think knowing that there's a place you can reach out towards would make a big difference.*

In terms of respect, the issue of equity in access to opportunities was raised again. There is a definite need to widen access to the creative industries in a fair and equitable way to ensure we are fully representing and supporting creative freelancers -

*I think knowing that you can be hired for a job whether you know the people already there or not. I know so many people who get work cos they already know the people or because they fit a particular criterion that individual wants...*

*...Unfortunately on the comedy scene in Edinburgh, there's a lot of old white men whose bills are featuring lots of other old white men and so I think in terms of respect knowing that you've got that diverse mixture and no matter what group(s) you fall into, you can get work and you can be represented and seen.*

With regards to fulfilment, feelings of 'overwhelm' emerged from this focus group whereby a participant expressed that "sometimes the work is overwhelming, but you have to continue, cos it's what you love". Another participant reiterated this sentiment -

*It's not been that easy but due to the passion of what you love, sometimes you get exhausted but you have to do [it].*

Our research shows that creative freelancers are going above and beyond in order to get and secure work. It is vital that employers evaluate the culture and ensure that they have strategies in place to prevent burnout and exhaustion.

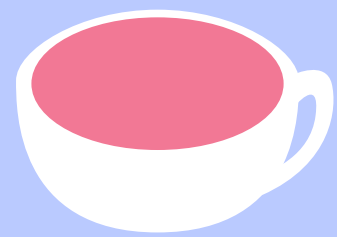
Lastly, in terms of having an effective voice, our survey shows a high proportion of respondents (57.1%) will turn to friends or peers for advice around their work.



There was also a call for mentoring which Creative Edinburgh reminded participants was available through their mentoring scheme (available to members). Participants felt that mentoring would be beneficial in supporting them to address some of the challenges that creative freelancers face.

## 5.3 Freelancers Wellbeing

Our survey highlighted that most respondents' creative practice takes place at home (65.7%) with 19.4% of respondents working from a café or a public space.



**65.7%**  
Working  
from Home



**19.4%**  
Working from a Café  
or a Public Space

The survey also illustrated that most respondents work alone (71% said 'It's just me!') and 17.6% work alongside 2-5 people.



**71%**  
Work  
alone



**17.6%**  
Work alongside  
2-5 people

Our focus group explored the issue of lone working in more detail with participants unanimously agreeing that the isolation had a profound, far-reaching impact on their physical and mental wellbeing and on their abilities to create and earn -



*I found that Covid affected both my mental and physical wellbeing – the isolation, and also because I'm a textile designer I look for ideas outwith Edinburgh for my new designs and obviously there was the restriction on travel so I found it quite difficult not being able to travel to come up with new ideas. I often would travel around Scotland for new ideas, for new designs so I found that Covid really impacted in that way – the sort of physical limitations as well as having to stay at home and not get out. It impacted on my ability to design and I suppose my ability to stay well because I couldn't get out and about as much [...]. That physical restriction had an impact on me both as a person and as a designer.*



Prior to Covid-19, social isolation and loneliness had recently been identified as a cause for concern. In 2018, the Scottish Government published 'A Connected Scotland: our strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger connections'. This cross-sector strategy aimed to identify the underlying reasons for social isolation and loneliness and implement proactive, considered solutions. The Zubairi report 2018 provides an informed, intersectional insight into the circumstances that can result in chronic loneliness and isolation and what can be done, at all levels, to address these.

The focus group illustrated the depth of impact that the restrictions and isolation had taken with one participant stating -



*I would echo everyone who said that the isolation was really hard – luckily for me I was working part-time at that point in my life so I wasn't out of work as a freelancer, but I can see how, especially if you were surviving on freelance contracts. I believe there was a lot of difficulties in getting help from the government if you were a freelancer compared to being on a salary. The stresses of that, financially, must have been beyond imaginable.*



One of the action points of the Connected Scotland strategy was to improve digital connections. The pandemic illustrated the power of digital in maintaining connections and essentially went some way to alleviating the enforced isolation that many were subject to. However, our survey findings showed that there are still gaps in digital literacy with the response showing an average of 7.4. The focus group also highlighted that digital connection was not successful for everyone -



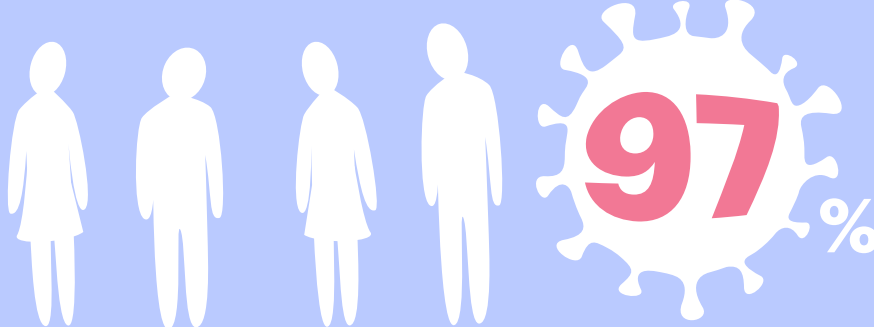
*I work in the textile industry, and it was really difficult for me to connect online. There was no socialising online. Zoom worked really well to allow some to connect but it was really difficult for me.*





The mental load of the restrictions was discussed at length in that they impacted the availability of work, people's ability to work and their opportunities to connect with friends and colleagues. Participants felt that they couldn't plan for anything as the rules were constantly changing and you had to be ready to respond. The uncertainty was described as "very anxiety inducing".

In our survey we asked creative freelancers about the impact (either positive or negative) that Covid-19 had had on their business. 97% reported a negative impact including loss of income, loss of clients, inability to travel and inability to work due to poor mental health. However, positives included the ability to connect with fellow creatives based internationally, more time for practice and professional development and a greater understanding of the needs of those with disabilities or caring responsibilities.



Reported a Negative Impact that Covid-19 had on their Business

The pandemic has been a key player in people's mental health and wellbeing, but it has also taught us lessons in terms of recovery. As we rebuild, recovery should not be about looking back but about seizing this opportunity for change. In the last two years people have adapted and discovered new ways of working, connecting and living -

*It had a monumental impact on livelihoods, on financial wellbeing, on emotional wellbeing, lost work, lost connections and the numbness that came out of the isolation and 'stay at home' mantra. We are now two years into this unprecedented situation and we made an extraordinary effort to adjust, to adapt our lifestyle and I can say that the pandemic gave us lessons. It taught me many things - exhausted resources but also helped me personally discover, rediscover inner strength I was not aware of, to fight back.*

In our survey we asked creative freelancers if their day-to-day work activities are limited because of a health issue, learning difficulty or disability, 18.5 % of respondents said yes and 69.4% said no. In undertaking any future research, it would be useful to know how this aligns with the Creative Scotland survey (2016) which places 30% of their respondents (out of 1500) as having a health issue or disability and whether creative freelance roles lend themselves to the needs of neurodivergent individuals.

In terms of what creative freelancers require as we emerge from the pandemic, our research shows a real desire to connect and collaborate with the wider industry and to be supported in the return to work - continuing hybrid working to ensure accessibility, support around childcare and caring responsibilities and strategies for re-generating business -

*I would love post-covid training on how to sell and export products to Europe now, as since Brexit I've lost 25% of my customers. How do I get them back?*

It is essential that we use the lessons learnt from the pandemic to develop a culture that supports the mental health and wellbeing of all our creative freelancers, that enables them to gain and sustain opportunities and that makes them feel valued.

## 5.4 Internationalism

We wanted to better understand the landscape for international creative freelancers working and living in Edinburgh, their experiences of a festival city and any opportunities or challenges that had presented as a result of Brexit.

Our survey showed that 24% of respondents identified as non-UK. Our focus group asked about their experiences of being an international creative living and working in Edinburgh and responses were positive -

*I feel really welcome here as a foreigner, in Scotland. I have experience of living in Moscow for 7 years and I can definitely say to collaborate with people, to assimilate with the creative community, it's more open and a really welcome society here.*

Participants felt that the creative community was open and supportive to them and that they were able to access opportunities both in Edinburgh and more widely. They felt that the freelance lifestyle allowed them to effectively balance work and family/caring commitments. Creative Edinburgh was praised for hosting relevant events that support creatives with families (Creatives with Children).

It was reported that being a creative freelancer in Edinburgh provides opportunities to collaborate with an international workforce but also to effectively participate as an audience, learning and engaging in an international capacity -

*As a creative person I think I've got some opportunities to do some freelance work and also to get experience that was really important to me. I came from Kazakhstan and my husband is studying a PhD here in Edinburgh University so I didn't find a proper job for work in an organisation because we have a child so the freelance work was the perfect thing for me to see the city life and as a challenge in the beginning I had some language difficulties to being a part of the Creative community...*

*...but then step by step I started to realise different organisations like Creative Edinburgh and other small groups. I pushed myself to participate [in] all the events happening, organised by that organisation. In the second year, for the Fringe, I was totally prepared. I checked the programme, tried to find some people I could work with and it was a really good thing for my career. I think I've got really good experience as a freelance worker and as a participant as well as I learnt a lot. I also participated in the COP conference which happened in Glasgow, so I think it's a really good opportunity for us to be part of worldwide events.*

Participants felt that the Edinburgh festivals present an opening to a series of work opportunities for Creative Freelancers both in Edinburgh and more widely, and once connections are established, these lead to long-standing, continuing partnerships.

Although the majority of participants felt that the festivals are an integral part of the city and they are vital to diversifying its culture, they expressed concerns about the environmental impact and how that plays into sustainability targets and Net Zero. There were also concerns around the gentrification that comes with living in a festival city and of subsequent 'art washing' -

*portraying artists and shows as a 'cool spectacle' that is at best stereotypical, at worst capitalistic forces to commercialise all this.*

'Artwashing' is a process by which artists on low incomes tend to stay or live in relatively low-cost areas, create and display in their area making it more attractive or trendy resulting in property becoming more desirable and the area developing and becoming more expensive. It has been suggested that housing developers are deliberately capitalising on this and encouraging creatives to live in areas that they have plans to develop (Francis 2017).

In terms of challenges that international creatives have faced, participants discussed issues around setting up as a freelancer. These included negotiating the likes of Companies House, tax returns and settled status administration -

*I was born in Greece; I have an EU passport. Post-Brexit I have to settle my status. There was some uncertainty, but a community group helped me with the paperwork.*

A participant mentioned that it would be helpful to have support with these issues as part of the Creative Edinburgh membership. They also praised the 'Raise Your Game' initiative and stated that it would have been useful to have done that at the beginning as part of their integration process. It was noted that while it may be useful to have an 'international creatives' resource as part of a welcome pack, there were some concerns around being singled out or categorised as an 'international creative' -

*What I really want is to mingle with local creatives, to observe, to learn from them, to get that specific cultural element, artistic vocabulary practices that help me enormously to enter into the industry, to integrate, to be part of this community [...] without othering*

One participant shared how they experience internationalism in the city - "the co-existence of different lifestyles, side by side, experienced every day, every moment."

They shared their commitment to maintaining their language and culture while simultaneously connecting with the culture they are resident in and how technology has made that process easier. This led on to a discussion about how speaking more than one language may influence or impact upon their creative practice -

*It makes me more humble, to listen, to observe, to ask questions - once, twice, thrice until I get it, not to rush and then to interpret it through the lens of my own experience...*

*...I work with neurodivergent groups that communicate not necessarily in English but in body language, drawings and that makes me more attentive to what and how is being said and in what cultural framework because culture is a big thing. What is encoded as a message, how is it delivered and how is it interpreted [...] and it's a slow process*

A common theme with our fair work focus group was around what is required to access opportunities - after initial discussion it transpired that some participants had started out as volunteers before getting paid roles and some had undertaken extra work in order to get the position -

*They asked for one design, so I gave them two. It was a difficult position where you need to prove your professionalism.*

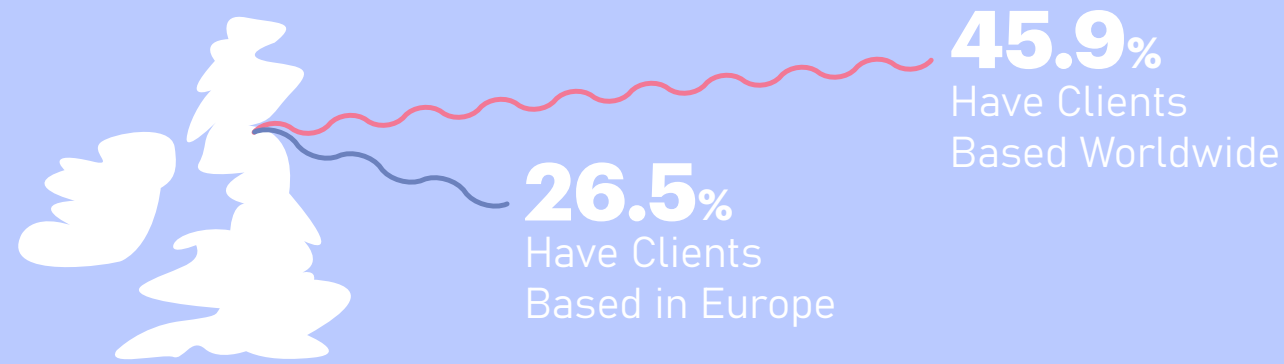
This adds to an earlier statement by a participant who stated that "burden of proof is higher for us, we have to work harder."

In terms of the impact of Brexit, it was thought that the full impact may be felt more keenly by other sectors at present (for example Science which is more reliant on EU grants). However, there was a sense of loss at the departure of the UK from the Erasmus programme and participants felt that Scotland's overwhelming vote to remain showed a sense of solidarity with non-British living in Edinburgh and Scotland more widely which was a comfort to the international community. There has been positive community collaboration from organisations such as Creative Lives and the Transnational project which tackles themes which have arisen out of Brexit including identity and immigration. It was emphasised that regardless of legislation, we must continue to support and collaborate with our international peers and nurture those relationships -

*There must be a way to maintain and preserve these bridges, people to people, creative to creative through this legal arrangement.*



Our survey illustrated an international client base for creative freelancers in Edinburgh – 26.5% have clients based in Europe and 45.9% have clients based worldwide.



Despite Brexit, there was a commitment from participants to continue these international partnerships and mentioned technology as a window to opportunities and the need for continuous funding in order to develop and sustain relationships. International collaboration is key to the future and diversity of the Creative Industries.

## 5.5 Diversity & Inclusion

Participants felt that they hadn't necessarily experienced equality, diversity and inclusion issues in terms of race, gender or other protected characteristics. However, drawing upon previous discussions, our research thus far has highlighted significant barriers to freelancers who are attempting to enter the Creative Industries. It is important that we continue to regularly engage with and consult the workforce to ensure that our leadership and culture is inclusive, diverse and provides a safe space for all creatives to connect and collaborate.

We need to find a way to widen access to creatives who are at the start of their creative careers, those without the connections or those entering the workforce later (whether that's mature graduates, apprentices or those who are changing careers later in life). The 'entry level' positions requiring multiple years of experience are outdated and need to be revised post-pandemic to allow for a greater variety of emerging creatives and talent.



*I've spent a lot of my working life away from the Creative Industries. It's only recently that I've become a full-time creative. There seems to be a lot of opportunities for under-represented creatives across the board in the UK, especially in Scotland and I think that's quite good; there are two areas that concern me with that – the first is the general term 'underrepresented' because I think that tends to mean different things for different people, so I as a woman over 50, am I underrepresented? Because I think I am but I'm not sure I'm included in what they're looking for as 'underrepresented'. [...] The other thing is I think there are a huge number of opportunities for underrepresented people, including working-class, which is great, that are in a start-up position. However very little for people who have started and got past the first rung on the ladder but can't get much further because there are no opportunities there so I think there's a sticking point. There's a lot of opportunities for new people in certain areas. People who are established tend to have really good networks and can get their feet back on the ladder that way, but there's that in-between ground that I think we have an issue with.*



Participants discussed the length of time it took to get into the Creative Industries. One stated that she started out 22 years ago and only entered the sector 9 years ago. In the meantime, she had to take a corporate role and build up her experience, despite having extensive qualifications and relevant connections. Another talked about having to work multiple roles in order to pursue creative projects, building up a portfolio of experience, attending events and long-term networking (all of which takes a lot of time and is unpaid). Participants described the hoops you are required to jump through as 'soul-destroying' and needing a lot of 'resilience'.



Our survey highlighted that 28.3% of respondents are parents and the balancing of work and family responsibilities was a key message in our focus group –



**28.3%**  
Of Respondents  
are Parents

*I moved to Scotland 8 years ago [...] and was lucky enough to start a new family and that was my anchoring in this city, in the community and I had to reinvent myself professionally and to invest in the sector of creativity and arts with a degree that more in new media and humanities and English as a second language with an accent preceding and following me. Doing community work helped a lot and opened doors, creating opportunities. However, many of them I couldn't make use of, especially networking, because of late hours, tight deadlines and family – irreconcilable with family schedules, especially little ones.*

The impact of the pandemic, being forced to work from home if you could, meant that there was an opportunity to revisit the needs of the workplace and also the expectations of our employees to keep their personal and professional lives separate, rather than seeing home lives as something to be invested in and supported –

*When the pandemic hit, forcing us to work from home, all these personal circumstances came to the surface and arts organisations and funders recognised these hidden realities – for instance needing extra support with childcare, stronger bandwidth for wifi and I now feel more self-confident to in pitching ideas to them – I have two little ones, my partner works irregular shifts, I'm working from home but at the same time I have caring duties so please help and I see that they are more sympathetic now compared to the pre-pandemic times when I started.*

As we move forward, we must ensure that those of us who are responsible for supporting creative freelancers look at the whole picture, taking into account family and caring responsibilities and providing flexibility and support as required.

This discussion touched further upon digital exclusion – despite being essential to freelancers, not everyone has access to various types of technology (i.e., computers, software or associated hardware such as printers or scanners) or the internet; all of which are vital to social and professional inclusion, not to mention the fair work principles (effective voice, security).

When asking participants how they ensured their voices were heard, one highlighted the importance of social media in promoting voices and collective action –

*Social media was a way to let my voice permeate but also doing workshops and seminars and being part of a discussion.*

Self and collective advocacy was identified as being essential to creative freelancers, especially when negotiating access into the Creative Industries. Our research has highlighted a clear theme in that it can be exceptionally challenging to gain entry, and once you are in, you may be required to weather conditions that are not yet in line with the fair work principles. One participant reflected on her experience stating that –

*I didn't recognise that there was a problem or that the problem was systemic or what I could have done and now I'm still like what is the solution to that now. I think we're in a better place in terms of where government policies are supporting diversity and inclusion, we still have a long way to go but there's the language that's out there that people can reflect on. [...] I think it's about exploring, who is doing the work out there to represent diversity and inclusion and the voices collectively speak louder than maybe an individual which is sad because an individual's experience shouldn't be dismissed [...] but find your group, your tribe, your clan, [...] that makes you feel safe and connected to move forward.*

## 5.6 Creative Communities

Our participants felt that connections with the wider creative sectors took many forms – business connections, longstanding partnerships, mentors, friendships. It was felt that those living and working in Edinburgh, or in Scotland more generally, were warm and welcoming which made meaningful connections, both personal and professional, possible.

However, it was felt that as a freelancer, it can be quite hard to connect with other fields within the creative sector, especially those that may be part of a larger industry (i.e. music, tv, radio). There was some reflection that smaller industries may group together purely due to the fact that they are smaller. Participants would welcome the opportunity to widen connections within the creative industries but would need support in identifying 'connecting points'.

Participants felt it would be useful to know what is happening in other UK cities, how creative communities survive and thrive, and what opportunities are being presented. It was suggested that this could be through online events and perhaps hosted by Creative Edinburgh.

In the last couple of years, the dependence on technology has increased our connections with other creatives in the UK and also our ability to seek roles elsewhere. One participant raised the fact that while she is based in Edinburgh and has work here, she also works with textile organisations in Russia and Kazakhstan. Another works in Edinburgh, but lives in Wales. As a suggestion for further research, it would be useful to further explore how creative freelancers work now, post-pandemic – have their opportunities increased geographically? Is this collaboration or fragmentation? Is remote working normalised and becoming permanent?

When reflecting upon creative collaborations, participants felt that they were incredibly useful and fruitful in terms of opening doors to other opportunities but also in terms of developing and refining skills –

*There is a collaborative process there that has evolved very naturally and [...] before I started working with him I could share something I'd written with friends and family who I loved very dearly, who I knew very well and they wouldn't get it, wouldn't get where the final vision was going and it was different expertise on their part. They liked the final product I showed them but they couldn't envision from draft to final place and with X we just seemed to be on the same wavelength and similar way of thinking about literature and he's the only person I'd enjoy sending my work to.*

*I've been collaborating here with a Russian artist, based in Summerhall. I helped her in the beginning as a social media manager to find some clients but I ended up starting to draw in her studio to help her to do art stuff so that was really interesting as well. I was thinking about doing some art and craft stuff but I didn't really have the entry points and when I started to help her with social media then she taught me some techniques and I started to do some art stuff as well which I wanted to do before but I didn't know how to start.*

Participants felt that connecting with other creative freelancers is integral to their creative practice as it introduces them to like-minded individuals, increases knowledge and opens up opportunities for further collaboration -

*The Living Libraries initiative is a concept that is meant to promote human rights, the format is a variety of humans telling stories based on lived experiences, interacting with visitors of this library, engaging into conversation – questions and answers, and we are curating this living library for people with lived experience of mental health conditions. 3 people that started as facilitators at an event, meeting in the real world, creating bonds and this resulted as a collaboration.*

Participants felt that peer-to-peer events and sessions are an incredibly useful tool in their creative practice. As touched upon in the Fair Work section, 57.1% of our survey respondents turn to peers to discuss issues such as setting rates, tax issues and contract negotiations. The focus group illustrated how sessions like these turn acquaintances into friendships, easing some of the chronic loneliness and insecurities that can come with being a freelancer. It can be a very useful tool to showcase some of your work and receive constructive feedback.

However, one concern was that often at these sessions, it is the same people attending and thus it can be hard to make progress on certain issues as you may need other voices or decision-makers round the table. This echoes the issues raised on diversity and inclusion and it is vital that we open up and promote sessions in such a way that ensures all creatives feel able and welcome to attend and contribute.

## 5.7 Membership & Services Across the City

Our survey found that the priority areas for their membership organisation were identified as the following:

- Learning and Professional
- Events and Networking
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Advocacy
- Accessibility
- Policy and Campaigns

In this focus group, it was discovered that as we reconnect, a hybrid model of engagement would be most valued. Creative freelancers are keen to return to in-person networking and events but also to have the option of online engagement. Participants discussed the need for employers to be present at networking events -

*it would be more popular and more fruitful if there were employers there as well*

In terms of accessibility, the need to consider timings for events and workshops was raised. Half the group felt that early morning was an optimum time for networking whereas the other half had a preference for evening sessions due to other commitments or travel barriers. This ties in with points raised in the sustainability and wellbeing sessions – many of these issues intersect and are present in multiple policy areas. We must look at this picture and any solutions as a whole, not as separate entities.

Membership models were also raised and a sliding scale (examples of this model are currently implemented by organisations such as Equity) was suggested in order to ensure that cost is not a barrier to advocacy and resources. Participants felt that membership should be promoted as an investment and that it should be a platform for members to access opportunities such as mentoring, networking and rights resources and workshops as well as support with advertising and marketing. One participant raised the need for more diverse case studies and success stories – it is vital that creative freelancers are able to see themselves in their membership organisation and this is an effective way to support this.

The need for learning and development opportunities has been touched upon throughout this research. Creative freelancers want and need the opportunity to reconnect with potential clients, upskill in order to meet targets and to invest in their own creative practice, seeing themselves, and their skillset as an investment. One participant talked about their own experience of engaging with an Angel investor via Creative Bridge –

*using the model of Creative Bridge as a strategy to get a benefactor who would then invest in an artist and be a patron of them and support them to see the fruition of a project. This enabled me to take a creative sabbatical which [...] I'm still benefitting from that, it was invaluable as a person, as an artist, as a creative freelancer, as a practitioner. I just grew exponentially, and I learned that from Codebase, which is a partner of Creative Edinburgh, of Creative Informatics.*

Creative freelancers are an asset to the Creative Industries and to the other sectors that they partner with. The Creative Bridge programme illustrates their value and promotes them as something worth investing in, allowing the individuals to grow and develop and to produce projects which have a significant cultural and potentially economic impact.

Opportunities for business support and development were viewed as vital to the needs of freelancers – support with funding, taxes and marketing/advertising were mentioned. Creative Edinburgh highlighted their partnership with the British Library on business development opportunities which was welcomed and mentioned the upcoming workshops with Creative Scotland on funding and grant support.

Both the survey and the focus groups drew upon the work that Creative Edinburgh is undertaking and provided recommendations for the future. Creative freelancers participating in this research felt that Creative Edinburgh has a very good, wide-reaching network and is integral to starting out in the Creative Industries. Creative Edinburgh and other membership bodies have a crucial role to play in ensuring the rights, needs and wellbeing of Creative freelancers in Edinburgh (and Scotland more widely) are met and in partnership with other stakeholders, including other similar membership groups across Scotland, can strive for a sector that is sustainable, accessible and thriving.



# 6 Recommendations & Opportunities for Further Research

The creative freelancing workforce is vital to the cultural, social and economic success of this city and Scotland more widely. The workforce is diverse, skilled and resourceful but the challenges of the last few years have put the sector under immense strain. There are a wealth of talented individuals willing to invest their time and skills in Scotland's creative sector, but we need to develop and implement an informed, sustainable package of support that will look after those already working and attract new creatives. It is important to note that some of the issues highlighted in this report were pre-existing and have not necessarily been caused by the pandemic, but they are exacerbated by it. However, any recovery strategy must sustainably address these. From the results of our research, we have developed the following recommendations:

## 6.1 Net Zero Economy/Sustainability

Sustainability and digital connections and skills are priorities for the future and the wellbeing of the Creative Industries. Costs and accessibility must not be barriers to this and we must work collaboratively, across sectors, to find solutions that empower creative freelancers and support them in developing and maintaining a sustainable, connected practice. This will require systemic change and the application of an intersectional lens. If we focus on measures of wellbeing, we will simultaneously support economic growth.

Providing access to reliable, high-speed broadband and regularly reviewing travel costs to allow creative freelancers to move more freely would support sustainability goals and increase work opportunities, thus contributing to a sustainable economy.

We would recommend providing adequate resources to offer creative freelancers training, workshops and accreditation opportunities on achieving a sustainable practice.

## 6.2 Fair Work

Fair work principles must be embedded and upheld by all those working with, partnering and supporting creative freelancers – this includes companies, organisations, charities, local and national government. Employers or contractors have a responsibility to support their freelancers and provide a healthy and supportive working culture. It would be useful for employers to be provided with sufficient information and training on the fair work principles and freelancers' rights and how these can be implemented in a genuine, sustainable way.

There is a clear need for affordable and accessible rehearsal/venue/work space. We would recommend identifying suitable spaces within the city and signposting creative freelancers. This would boost opportunities, partnerships and the economy.

There is a definite need to identify barriers to accessing the Creative Industries and to tackle these to widen access; ensuring we are fully representing and supporting the diversity of the creative workforce.

## 6.3 Freelancers' Wellbeing

We would recommend that further work must be undertaken to explore the intersections of impact on freelancers across the Creative Industries due to the pandemic. A common theme from all our focus groups was that it has not solely impacted on creatives' health, it has had far-reaching effects on financial wellbeing and the potential for future work-related opportunities and connections. Creative freelancers will require specific support to help them tackle these challenges and organisations working with freelancers must be adequately resourced to provide this.

We would recommend revisiting the 'A Connected Scotland' strategy, consulting with relevant stakeholders (including freelancers) and revising solutions, taking into consideration the significant impact of the pandemic but also some of the ways that communities adapted to support each other - digital literacy and tackling loneliness and social isolation are more important now than ever.

We would recommend supporting the continuation of hybrid working to support neurodivergent freelancers and those with disabilities and/or caring responsibilities.

## 6.4 Internationalism

It is important that we acknowledge the 'extra burden' that international creative freelancers face and we would recommend undertaking a collective responsibility to support them with administrative tasks such as tax returns, settled status and any involvement with Companies House or other similar organisations.

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of effective technology. We would recommend the provision of adequate, continuous funding, resources and training to improve digital literacy, to strengthen relationships and to identify opportunities.

## 6.5 Diversity and Inclusion

We must support all our creatives, without othering, to connect, to collaborate and to integrate. This will require us to find a variety of ways to engage with and understand the workforce, co-producing resources that are fully in line with their needs.

It is vital that we regularly reflect upon practice at all levels (including leadership) and ensure that we are promoting a diverse and fully inclusive culture that empowers and values each individual within the creative workforce.

We recommend identifying the barriers to accessing the Creative Industries and finding ways to remove them so as to allow a diverse range of creative freelancers to enter the creative workforce and undertaking Equality and Impact Assessments (EQIA) where relevant, early on in project development planning, to identify issues that may restrict or harm those with protected characteristics and seek methods to address them.

## 6.6 Creative Communities

We would recommend the development, resourcing and facilitation of joint sessions with other creative organisations across the UK and further afield in order to share knowledge, best practice and develop and maintain strong international partnerships.

It is important that we identify and tackle any internal barriers (as well as external) and provide clear connection points so that sectors of the Creative Industries may collaborate more freely.

It is important that there is a diverse range of voices around the table so there must be a focus on relationships and partnership building as well as extensive, genuine consultation so that all creatives feel confident to participate and that their contributions are valued.

## 6.7 Membership & Services Across The City

Membership organisations and services supporting creative freelancers must engage with, collate and promote a diverse range of case studies and success stories, sharing experiences of good practice and how best to tackle challenges and inequalities.

Adequate funding and resources must be provided to those organisations providing business development, support and learning opportunities for creative freelancers as these are vital to their current practice as well as any future opportunities and collaborations.

Organisations supporting the development of creative freelancers must engage regularly with their membership or stakeholders to identify any needs and ensure their programmes are as accessible and cost-effective as possible, allowing a wide variety of creative freelancers to participate and attend. These organisations must be sufficiently funded and resourced in order to meet the needs of their membership base.

## 6.8 Future Work

We would encourage further research into the impact of Brexit on creative freelancers and on the creative workforce as a whole and how collectively we can support them to rebuild their businesses.

In order to be fully inclusive and representative, it would be useful to further explore the data gap and attached methodologies to ensure we are capturing as many creative freelancers as possible. It would be worthwhile reviewing the terminology so that individuals and small businesses clearly recognise themselves in definitions and categories.

It would also be useful to conduct more extensive research into workforce demographics and to review the proportion of neurodivergent freelancers/ those with a disability and their experiences.

It would be useful to further explore the current working patterns of creative freelancers, post-pandemic – has geography provided more opportunities? It is vital that we do not confuse collaboration with fragmentation. Are we returning to communal spaces or is remote working becoming more normal and is here to stay? If so, how are we supporting creative freelancers wellbeing and their opportunities to connect, collaborate and create.

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