

# COVID-19: Routes to recovery

## AN EVIDENCE BASED STUDY OF THE FREELANCE THEATRE WORKFORCE

### INTRODUCTION

The reputation and success of UK theatre depends on the strength and health of its freelancers, a group comprising 70% of the total theatre workforce. We make the plays, musicals and live experiences that are part of the fabric of British life.

We are a workforce of 200,000+ playing to a theatre-going public of 34 million. We are the point of connection with audiences up and down the land and the engine of the industry's economic growth. We work in partnership with each other and with theatres, commercial organisations, charitable trusts, schools and local groups.

This crisis has forced financial hardship on all parts of the sector. But that hardship has fallen disproportionately on the freelance theatre workforce.

For all our centrality to the story of UK theatre, very little data has been collected on this workforce. Aware of the urgency of the situation, a group of freelancers representing a coalition of interests has come together to generate fresh insight into existing data and to create a new survey of over 8000 freelancers.<sup>1</sup>

The findings we present here include the following central observations:

- 1 in 3 of the freelance workforce received no support from SEISS / CJRS
- 1 in 4 of the freelance workforce have been unable to access emergency income of any kind
- 1 in 3 say they are likely to leave the theatre industry

### THE CHALLENGES

Our analysis suggests that the freelance theatre workforce is currently facing three distinct challenges:

- A. **Emergency Relief:** For 1 in 3 of us, the income emergency never ended. We are about to lose a diverse generation of unique promise that was to power the next phase of our growth and to play a crucial role in the Arts Council's *Let's Create* strategy.
  - Early career theatre workers are in immediate jeopardy
  - D/deaf and disabled workers have suffered disproportionately
  - People of colour have been worse-affected than the white workforce
- B. **Sustaining the workforce:** The cultural landscape we return to will not look as it did on 23 March. Forging new connections with our audiences and communities will require us to adapt our models of creation, operation, and engagement. There is a case to be made for wide scale workforce investment which requires:
  - A redefinition of what it means to be 'active' whilst unable to work in traditional ways
  - A broadening of the historical Arts Council 'client base' to include more specialisms
- C. **Recovering together:** It is unlikely that the sector will be returning to pre-COVID-19 levels of production for the foreseeable future. In a diminished marketplace we need to safeguard employment for the freelance workforce. We support utterly the measures outlined by SOLT and UK theatres to shore up the recovery of the commercial sector and the NPO theatres. But their recovery must be our recovery too.
  - Our data evidence points to threats around diversity, regions and innovation
  - Safeguards may be required to ensure that NPO benefit becomes workforce benefit

<sup>1</sup> *The Big Freelancer Survey: SDUK, Freelancers Make Theatre Work, Curtain Call. June 2020 (publication pending)*

## THE COMPOSITION OF THE FREELANCE WORKFORCE

Freelancers create: the set and the soundscape, the signed performance and the sword fight, Macbeth's armour, Prospero's staff, the canes and the canvas that the world knows as Joey the Warhorse, the Dame in the panto and the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games. But we also create the IP that drives reinvestment and the leaps in stage technology that begin on our stages and are sold on the global market.

Our skills are hard won: our early careers in which we hone our craft in near poverty, subsidising ourselves with temp jobs and unpaid 'work experience' is the investment we make in our mid and late careers. And as our skills develop and we are able to command higher fees, we pay our younger selves back. This trajectory has fed and fuelled the success of the sector for over 70 years. It's what binds together the recent graduate and the Tony winner, it's the pipeline which keeps the commercial organisations, NPOs, independents, small scale touring circuits and village halls supplied with the world leading art and entertainment of which we are all rightly proud.

The ultra-specialism of our diverse skill sets is central to our value, it is what makes our writers, actors, directors and designers the envy of the world. But many in a workforce this specialised will struggle to transfer those hard won skills to other sectors such as film and TV.

## 36% OF FREELANCERS WERE INELIGIBLE FOR GOVERNMENT SUPPORT OF ANY KIND<sup>2</sup>

Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS) was designed to help self employed workers sustain themselves whilst unable to operate. And whilst it has been effective in many sectors, the complexity of our working patterns has rendered a significant proportion of the freelance workforce ineligible.<sup>3</sup>

## THE SUPPORT NEEDED TO FUEL WORKFORCE RECOVERY

To fully undo the effects of the 'rescue deficit' experienced by our sector across the 65000 - 70000 workers impacted (33.1% total workforce), would require a figure of around £672m. We acknowledge that is an unachievable scale. Instead we recommend that measures are put in place to address:

- A. **Emergency relief:** Attend to the most vulnerable members of the workforce who were ineligible for CJRS and SEISS. By necessity, and made more urgent by what this paper establishes, it must prioritise those who identify as D/deaf and disabled workers, and BAME and early career workers.
- B. **Sustaining the workforce:** Retain skills and jobs whilst theatres are closed, enabling freelancers to rebuild skills and develop new practice, specialisms and business models that are of benefit to the public and the renewed life of the sector
- C. **Recovering together:** Ensure that the recovery benefit directed to organisations in connection with COVID-19 is able to be shared by freelance workers.

Like all within the industry, we hope for an announcement by government on the financial measures to support the return of UK theatre as a world-class cultural and economic force. However, a recovery package that supports buildings and organisations without safeguarding the future of the freelance workforce would constitute an incomplete recovery and lead to irreparable sector decline.

On the following pages we outline the specifics of each of our challenges and describe practical steps towards their mitigation.

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<sup>2</sup> The omission of the terms such as 'artist' in this document is deliberate. Freelancers of every specialism have been equally impacted by the pandemic. At the heart of the sector case to government is the intricacy and interdependence of our ecosystem: that principle must hold good for the freelance workforce too.

<sup>3</sup> The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) did not manage to pick up the slack here as only 11% of the workforce were eligible to apply.

# Emergency relief

## The challenge

For many of our workforce the emergent need never ended. Despite swift and decisive implementation of SEISS and CJRS, measures that have enjoyed broad success in other sectors, the freelance theatre workforce is facing a significant 'rescue deficit'.

- 1 in 3 freelance theatre workers received no emergency income cover from either scheme
- 1 in 4 didn't receive financial support of any kind (ACE Emergency Fund, Universal Credit, charities)

This precarity isn't evenly distributed. It spikes around D/deaf and disabled workers, workers of colour and emergent talent.

- 51% D/deaf and disabled workers were ineligible for SEISS / CJRS
- 92% of recent graduates were ineligible for SEISS / CRJS
- 42% D/deaf and disabled workers reported as likely to leave the theatre industry<sup>4</sup>
- Early career workers are the most ethnically diverse group, they are also the most likely to leave
- Of those ineligible for SEISS, only 9% exceeded the £50K ceiling
- 1 in 3 have applied for Universal Credit: only 1 in 5 received it

There is an immediate risk that we are about to lose a generation of unique promise that was to power the next phase of our financial and creative growth and to bring us closer to ensuring that "this country's diversity is fully reflected in the culture it produces".<sup>5</sup>

## The case

The necessity for intervention to alleviate hardship is a matter of sector survival. We are in danger of losing a generation of specialist skill and emergent talent that would take a decade to win back. For years the DCMS, the Arts Council and sector leaders have worked to address historical exclusions from arts and culture. It was getting better. As a result we were lining ourselves up for a more representative, more commercially viable future.<sup>6</sup>

These individuals are primed to play a key role in the next chapter of the UK Theatre story. Each new generation of theatremakers creates its own audience: emerging talent is vital in the development of new markets. Increasingly, diversity IS the business model.

The most effective measures in tackling this 'rescue deficit' are likely to be based around a direct, up front cash benefit to members of the following cohort, those who are:

- Ineligible for SEISS / CJRS
- Members of one or more of the 3 groups our data has identified as most vulnerable

That those who are most vital to the future success of our sector should also be the most vulnerable requires immediate attention.

<sup>4</sup> Compared to an average of 32%

<sup>5</sup> Let's Create, Arts Council England Strategy 2020 - 2030, p6

<sup>6</sup> 'Unless we address this, the cultural sector will fail to achieve its potential, and the global competitiveness of this country's creative industries will come under threat.' Let's Create, Arts Council England Strategy 2020 - 2030, p41

# The provision of emergency relief

## THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

Our data suggests that 65000 - 70000 of the workforce were ineligible for SEISS / CJRS. An intervention designed to remedy the situation would cost £672m. Nobody expects a measure on this scale to be forthcoming.

Focusing emergency relief on those who belong to one or more of the groups our survey identifies as most vulnerable:

- D/deaf and disabled workers
- People of colour
- Early career workers

shrinks that cohort to around 30000 individuals. A tailored support scheme designed to award a one off grant of £5000 to each of them would need to be funded at £150m.<sup>7</sup>

However, this is not an argument for doing nothing. The scale of the problem cannot defeat a collective and inclusive will to address it.

The RSC's most recent Romeo is British Asian actor Bally Gill. He is currently back living with his parents in Coventry and retraining as a TEFL teacher. His loss to the cultural landscape will be significant: previous RSC Romeos include Sean Bean, David Tennant and Sir Ian McKellen.

## A RECOVERY FUND

The simplest and most efficient way to minister to the income emergency would be a fund:

- Single point of access
- Simple eligibility criteria
- Accessible by all the identified cohort regardless of job title (i.e. technician as eligible as playwright)
- Simple application mechanism
- Paying out a direct one off grant which is not conditioned upon activity

A single point of access recovery fund would provide a direct cash injection at a time of great precarity. Nor do we feel it appropriate to evidence work experience, excellence, promise, industry mentors or awards. We outline potential eligibility criteria in appendix A. It will not capture everyone, but it could work strategically to address the issues we have identified. Once we gain a clearer perspective on the scale of the Treasury provision relative to the scale of sector need, further consideration can be given to the inevitable funding gap.

We have envisaged a number of ways in which a recovery fund might be organised and shaped:

### OPTION 1: ADMINISTERED BY THE ARTS COUNCIL

The 1624 grants<sup>8</sup> awarded as part of ACE's swift and intelligent Emergency Support Scheme model one way of approaching emergency relief provision. Their impact on the recipients is likely to be profound, but due to the size of the fund from which they were drawn<sup>9</sup>, the grants reached only 0.8% of the workforce.

Should the fund find its home at ACE the scale and contours of the problem would require that this round of income support be accessible by a far larger cohort than the last.

<sup>7</sup> Dropping to £60m if the basic award was fixed at £2000

<sup>8</sup> Average award: £2216

<sup>9</sup> £3.6m

## **OPTION 2: ADMINISTERED THROUGH AN EXISTING FUND**

At the beginning of the pandemic, the film industry made a bold decision: they repurposed a small existing fund (the Film and Television Charity) to great effect<sup>10</sup>, redeploying staff from other organisations<sup>11</sup> to create a vastly expanded and rapidly trained administrative staff, allowing them to administer grants quickly and efficiently.

The confidence of that gesture in turn attracted support from BBC, Netflix, BFI, Sky, WarnerMedia and high net worth individuals, boosting that fund to the point where it was able to multiply its reach.

The story in our sector is rather different: our data shows that only 4.5% of freelance theatre workers applied to the industry's 22 benevolent funds. There was not sufficient organization and communication to make a tangible difference. A 'single point of access' model similar to that implemented in the film sector should be considered:<sup>12</sup>:

- Empower an existing benevolent fund such as the Theatre Development Trust or Theatre Artists Fund
- Migrate workers from other organisations over to create a temporary corps of administrators
- Encourage voluntary donations from 'heroes' across the industry and beyond

- 0.8% total workforce benefitted from ACE Emergency Funding<sup>13</sup>
- 4.5% workforce applied to a charitable or benevolent fund during lockdown
- Applications to benevolent charities were 50% higher among people of colour than white cohorts
- But some funds attracted no applications at all from people of colour, raising questions around groups with higher need not being able to find funds available to them

## **OPTION 3: THE ROLE OF THE COMMERCIAL THEATRE SECTOR**

It is possible that a transfer of public funds to the commercial sector by way of long term investment, loans or an increase in theatre tax relief is about to occur as SOLT / UK THEATRE have suggested. It seems unlikely that this transfer will be accompanied by conditioning which includes a 'workforce recovery' stipulation. Should the commercial sector be offered a stimulus package without provision being made to pass a benefit on to freelance workers, the rescue deficit will widen.

It is widely understood that these businesses must be allowed to control the timetable of their re-entry into the marketplace, and yet their return has a direct impact on the creation of employment opportunity.

This might be mitigated if:

- Theatre owners and producers were asked to make a direct up-front contribution to a recovery fund
- Theatre owners and producers were asked to pay into that fund on the 'back end' once in profit again
- This could be expressed as a percentage of profits per show

We see a recovery fund as having the potential to open up a decisive role for the commercial sector in workforce renewal, not to mention great legacy value. Once it has served its initial purpose, give it a new name: The Futures Fund. Recipients agree to 'kite mark' their credits on production programmes, websites and digital work with an acknowledgement of that support, an idea borrowed from the American theatre. They become the Futures Fund generation and the sector inherits a mechanism with great legacy value.

- A thousand smaller awards a year for the next decade
- An instrument through which to run black leadership programmes or sector wide access initiatives

The fund becomes a powerhouse for the change we hope and intend to see.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://filmtvcharity.org.uk/covid-19-help-advice/covid-19-relief-fund/>

<sup>11</sup> BFI, Film4, BBC Films

<sup>12</sup> This model presupposes that the transfer of Treasury funds to a charitable organisation for the purposes of administration is legal.

<sup>13</sup> Our survey captured 964 of the 1624 individuals benefiting from the ACE Emergency funding, suggesting a cohort of respondents highly aware of possible rescue mechanisms. This survey may therefore be vastly over reporting the scale of sector rescue achieved.

# Sustaining the workforce

## The challenge

The freelance workforce is the engine room of the UK theatre sector, but significant innovation underway pre-COVID has necessarily stalled. A workforce with a net earning potential of £5bn<sup>14</sup> has thus far been reliant on SEISS, but that is provisioned to end on 23 September. The workforce then faces a further hiatus in employment that may well last for five months or more.

It has become clear that some of our theatres will never open their doors again. And yet even those who are able to stage a recovery will find themselves

- producing significantly less on its stages and beyond,, both by volume and resource
- managing a backlog of shows and commitments to freelancers
- being rightly cautious about new commissions and partnerships

We cannot mistake the reopening of the theatres for the 'solving' of the workforce problem.

Nor is direct employment by a producer or NPO the only business model for the working freelancer. The Arts Council has a proud history of backing work created independently, which is then 'sold' to theatres or touring networks. But it will be months before those who initiate projects in this way are able to bring work to the market at scale.

**The workforce is primed to play a decisive role in securing the cultural wellbeing of the country but there is a very real challenge that some of the best, the brightest and the most vulnerable will lose 'the waiting game'.**

Workers in the following regions report as the most likely to leave the theatre industry:

- |                                |                                   |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| • North (ACE)                  | 36% reported as 'likely to leave' |
| • Scotland (Creative Scotland) | 40% reported as 'likely to leave' |
| • North Wales (ACW)            | 35% reported as 'likely to leave' |

Those reporting as most likely to leave include

- Stage and Company Management
- Specifically, 47% of all Stage and Company Management who identify as people of colour
- Black, Asian, Minority ethnic sound, video and lighting designers

## The case

A funding injection now will repay later. Measures taken to:

- stabilise the workforce, retain skills, sustain jobs
- encourage innovation and entrepreneurship (with the ultimate goal of more job creation)
- lay the foundations for future growth throughout the sector
- invite the big ideas which drive the principles outlined in *Let's Create*

will ensure that public funds are invested in ways which allow us to 'build back better'.

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<sup>14</sup> £5.13bn based on survey reporting of lost income in 3 months of COVID-19 lockdown

## THE PROBLEM WITH PROJECTS

The traditional mechanism by which the Arts Council has invested in the innovation, creativity and potential of the freelance workforce is the Project Grant. This mechanism, whilst it has been responsible for so much of the past success of UK theatre, does not meet the needs of the moment:

- Project grant applications require 'partners' in a moment where there are none
- They require that an initial funding pot is already in place at a moment when it is not
- They bring with them an administrative 'drag factor' in a moment when speed is of the essence

If project grants become the only means by which a freelancer is able to access funding for basic subsistence, the result is likely to be a raft of 'bad faith' projects. It is questionable whether projects created in this spirit would have much legacy value, moreover their sheer number could threaten to overwhelm potential project partners, damaging relationships which have been carefully nurtured over the course of whole careers.

Although it is imperative that the project funding mechanism is reactivated as soon as it is feasible, project funding alone will not sustain and retain a workforce in the months ahead. At this key moment, the workforce is the project.

## A NEW SEED FUNDING STRAND

The ACE project grants have been created, shaped and refined over many years. At this moment, however, we need something more like 'quick and dirty' seed funding:

- expand the existing definition of 'creative practitioner' to include all skilled theatre workers
- pay out a direct one off grant conditioned according to an expanded definition of 'activity'
- include simple eligibility criteria, a single point of access, a straightforward application mechanism<sup>15</sup>
- the fund is for self-employed business support, not audience-facing project development
- the fund is a tool for adaptation designed to support not to replace ACE Project Grants
- require no impact study, and no track record with ACE
- encourage applications from individuals regardless of the ratio of self-employed to PAYE income

In order to sustain the entire workforce at its current level, a monthly sum of £427m would be necessary

For comparison, the previous round of ACE Emergency Funding directed a total fund of £3.6m to theatre workers.

It is impossible to imagine a scheme on the scale required, so careful thought would need to be given to the way funds were administered. Much depends on how the 'rescue deficit' (detailed on p3) is addressed.

## JUMPSTART LET'S CREATE

Let's Create launched in January and found an immediate resonance with the freelance community. Activity could be encouraged in three of the ACE priority areas:

- Inclusivity and relevance
- Environmental responsibility
- Dynamism
- Ambition and quality

Managed well, this moment represents an opportunity to jumpstart the Let's Create agenda.

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<sup>15</sup> Considerations of possible application processes outlined in Appendix 2

The testimony presented on p18 of this document represents a fraction of the responses we have received around the ‘activity’ which seed funding might encourage. Suggestions include:

#### **Inclusivity and relevance**

- The actors who want to engage with local schools and ‘catch up’ the pupils with their English curriculum
- The director who wants to set up digital play reading project for writers of colour
- The stage manager who wants to help their local community centre with its social distancing practices
- The lighting programmer who wants to use stories to combat social isolation in care homes

#### **Environmental responsibility**

- The young lighting designer who wants to seek out best practice in other fields and report back
- The production manager who wants to design an ‘environmental audit’ structure for productions

#### **Dynamism**

- The costume maker who wants to invest in their own equipment to become more sustainable
- The rigger who wants to set up a facilities hire company to generate work and employ their colleagues
- The technician who wants to undertake working at height training in order to increase their employability

#### **Ambition and quality**

- The experienced designer who wants to set up a skill-sharing practice with colleagues in Europe
- The movement director who wants to train in new disciplines
- The costume maker who wants to learn original practice costume making from a specialist
- The deputy stage manager who wants to learn to read music to allow them to work on musicals
- The award-winning actor who wants to mentor promising young talent in local youth theatres

# Recovering together

## The challenge

It seems clear that the sector will not be able to return to pre-COVID-19 levels of production for months, if not years. In a contracted marketplace, the safeguarding of employment opportunity for the freelance workforce is vital. We support utterly the measures being outlined to shore up the recovery of the commercial sector and the NPOs. But their recovery must be our recovery too.

Theatre is not the only sector facing significant challenge and it would be naive to suggest that every job can be saved. We know that our colleagues in theatres throughout the UK are currently engaged in complex and painful company restructures and redundancies. Freelancers cannot be the saving that the NPOs make in order to survive as organisations. There needs to be a structured, conditioned rebalancing if we are to preserve the work that so many in theatre have done on diversity, inclusion, growth and equality.

It is unlikely to be the intention of government to implement a strategy which shores up these organisations without conditioning provision for the workforce, nor would that represent value for money for the taxpayer.

## The case

Our evidence suggests that the threat to the ecology in the ‘new normal’ might be categorised in three ways:

### INACTIVITY THREAT

Inactivity (or ‘mothballing’) is disastrous for the workforce and poor value for public money, representing nothing less than the total withdrawal of employment opportunity. A strategy designed to mitigate the threat of inactivity would disincentivise mothballing and reward plans to encourage ‘activity’.

Diminished activity is dangerous too: the submissions we have received speak of a fear that the programming of our theatres will become more conservative, more cautious, that monologues will be preferred to large cast plays, that ‘austerity aesthetics’ on stage will obviate the need for many design jobs. It is felt that this will disproportionately affect more experimental work led by younger teams of freelancers, a reliance on ‘names’, on ‘safe pairs of hands’. The workforce would benefit from any NPO recovery plan which also demonstrated a commitment to creative risk, new talent and emerging craftspeople.

### DIVERSITY THREAT

Any recovery plan which fails to safeguard employment opportunity for freelancers will have a direct impact on progress made in diversity and representation. *Let's Create* foregrounds the importance of “those from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds who have traditionally had least access to our resources”.<sup>16</sup> Our analysis of Arts Council data<sup>17</sup> has revealed that, of those reporting:

- Freelancers constitute 86% of all people of colour employed by NPOs

This figure has been stable for the last 3 years. Therefore a stimulus package that is pointed at institutions without freelance conditioning will target money directly towards an 82% white identifying permanent workforce and away from the group which contains 86% of all people of colour working in NPOs.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Let's Create, Arts Council England Strategy 2020-2030*, p 26

<sup>17</sup> ACE data 2016-2019. ONS list of ethnicity categories, list is not exhaustive

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix 3: Data

## REGIONAL AND COMMUNITY THREAT

Our evidence suggests that ‘mothballing’ or low levels of activity would be felt most acutely outside of London and across the communities of the UK. Over the past 74 years, clusters of freelancers have congregated and settled around our great regional producing theatres. Often the local NPO is ‘the only game in town’.

This workforce really work:

- 91% of those surveyed from outside of London had work booked, at a total of £18.9m<sup>19</sup>

If the local theatre ceases operation, or chooses to diminish its activity below a certain rate, these freelancers will suffer disproportionately and a local economy that has sprung up around an area of creativity will collapse at the same time.<sup>20</sup>

## Recovering together: NPOs

The challenge of mutual recovery might be best looked at in two complementary ways:

### SHARING NPO BENEFIT WITH FREELANCERS

We recommend a set of clear and specific conditions which ensure NPO benefit is shared:

- That NPOs protect their ‘freelance spend’ as a percentage of their turnover<sup>21</sup>
  - That NPOs are required to maintain diversity targets at pre-COVID-19 levels
- That recovery plans are required to contain provision for creative risk and emerging makers
- That theatres are discouraged from or even disincentivised from ‘mothballing’
- That theatre boards begin to include trustees who are freelancers

We know that many of these organisations are managed by individuals who ‘get it’, who were themselves freelancers for many years. But each theatre’s plan will need to be ratified by its board who will need to balance the perception of risk with their fiduciary duty.

We have conducted research into the make up of the boards of every ACE NPO organisation, to better understand where the perspective of the working freelancer sits in relation to governance. We have discovered:

- Freelance theatre workers average 3.6% of board membership across the ACE portfolio<sup>22</sup>

Specific provisioning would turn a ‘nice to have’ into a ‘have to have’ and make it more likely that we recover together.

### SHARING FREELANCERS SKILLS WITH NPOs

Many theatres are desperate to create activity on their stages but find themselves in circumstances which make that impossible. These same theatres have spent years developing audiences who cherish the experience of live performance and are as loyal to their ‘local’ as any football fan is to their club. The appetite, mission and need to reconnect theatres to communities has never gone away but the challenges of reopening make the ‘main stage’ a difficult space to plan for.

<sup>19</sup> ACE regions: North, Midlands, South East, South West

<sup>20</sup><https://www.nesta.org.uk/press-release/creative-industries-are-driving-economic-growth-across-the-uk-on-track-to-create-one-million-new-creative-industries-jobs-between-2013-and-2030/>

<sup>21</sup> The ‘Big 12’ regional theatres report that percentage at 20%

<sup>22</sup> Freelance board membership of NPOs receiving more than £1m a year: 6.3%  
Freelance board membership of ‘Big 12’ regional theatres: 12%

Here is where freelancers could help. Inspired by the Public Theatre's Mobile Unit,<sup>23</sup> our NPOs might want to engage teams of local freelancers (a producer, writer, designer, rigger, stage manager, director and a group of actors) to take work into schools, community centres, car parks, shopping centres, parks and covered markets. Scene Change<sup>24</sup> are doing some great modelling in this area and a significant number of our survey respondents proposed a version of a 'mobile unit' working to reconnect theatre makers and their communities. Both of these measures describe the goal of 'recovering together', the spirit of which is going to be key to sector survival in the years ahead.

## Recovering together: Commercial

It should go without saying that we respect the expertise of theatre owners and commercial producers in determining when it makes sense for them to resume operations, whilst noting that as the largest employer of freelancers in the sector their timelines have a direct impact on our economic recovery.

Our chief recommendation is that the commercial sector is encouraged to ringfence part of its own benefit either up front or once in profit again and to deploy it to maximum effect in a single fund designed to shape the next decade of sector development.

It is possible that without subsidy commercial theatres will be less able to use their stages and other idle spaces before re-opening. It would be beneficial to the whole sector if ways could be found to allow freelancers to use these spaces for developmental or community-based work.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://publictheater.org/programs/mobile-unit/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.scene-change.com>

# Appendix 1: Emergency relief

## Data and notes

- The survey had over 8000 respondents representing every role, every region, every employment status, every level of experience and every salary bracket
- There are, of course, many ways to identify the most vulnerable: ours is just one.
- We would be happy to open up the data set to derive other aggregations of ‘hardest hit’
- We did not collect data around ‘social class’ as we are aware that this is a metric which has yet to enter the mainstream of our sector’s conversation around representation, we would like to be part of how this work evolves
- We collected data on those who identify as Trans or Non Binary, but the data set was too small to produce stable conclusions
- The average salary of a freelance theatre worker was reported as £23,442, lower than £30,000 which is understood to represent the national average.
- The highest earning freelancers earn more than 100 times the lowest earning freelancers
- 2.9% have been in the workforce for less than a year
  - 38% are seeking alternative employment
- 33% are identified as ‘early career artists’ (we acknowledge the instability of this term)
  - This is the group who scored the second highest in our ‘wellbeing impact’ category
- 12% identify in an ethnicity group other than white groups.
- 8.5% identify as D/deaf and disabled workers
  - Scoring the highest in our ‘wellbeing impact’ category

## Notes

- An award of £2000 has meaning, but a grant of £5000 has genuine utility
- We have modelled a future iteration of the fund in which 100 of the UK’s most respected ‘freelancers’ each nominate 10 recipients a year, a tip of the hat to the 2012 Opening Ceremony in which Steve Redgrave passed the flame to a new generation of athletes
- We would note that the Film and Television Charity also provide:
  - A 24 hour support line
  - Financial advice for freelance workers
- Engaging with freelance workers on the basis of need alone is problematic. Many factors play into the low uptake for charitable support thus far, not least being the stigma that has often been associated with seeking ‘a hand out’ and how that maps upon endemic narratives around failure and success in our workforce culture.
- We need a mechanism which addresses the need of these individuals but rewards the promise of their future activity: a clear signal in a society determined to ‘level up’ that this sector is interested in what these workers can bring to the conversation, not just the diversity statistics.

# Appendix 2: Sustaining the workforce

## Data

Although the Arts Council do not separate freelance specialisms into 'eligible' and 'ineligible' for traditional funding streams, in practice their client base consists of individuals who 'initiate' work (and employ their colleagues later).

To get a sense of the challenge ahead in terms of assuring all freelance theatre workers that they are allowed to apply for a 'sustain' package, we might look at applications to the ACE Emergency Fund by specialism:

Specialism	% who applied
Producer	39
Choreographer / movement	37
Director	36
Education / outreach worker	26
Writer / dramaturg	24
Fight director	22
Set / costume designer	20
Sound / LX / video designer	20
Composer / musical director	16
Actor / performer	13
Casting director	12
Production manager	11
Craftsperson	11
Stage worker	9
Access worker / BSL translator	6
Technician / operator	5

We might reasonably expect a future round of funding to map in a similar way: senior practitioners from the freelance community are willing to act as ambassadors for a scheme in order to ensure it is widely publicised and seen as open to all.

## Notes

- Considering mechanisms of eligibility:
  - Union or professional body membership
  - Diploma / Degree / Accreditation / NVQ
  - Evidence of work in theatre (payslips / contracts).
- In France, *Intermittents du Spectacle* are required to demonstrate that they worked 507 hours in 10 months to be eligible for 8 months of the payment. A possible route to exploring an instrument of Evidence Measurement here might be to look at the size of an award as it relates to average freelance theatre worker monthly earning (£2105.53, from the Survey Data). ie. 50 hours work in any of the past 3 years to give 1 month of award, which would be an award of £2105.53, in this example. This example is given to demonstrate that simple and relatively frictionless mechanisms of delivery can be generated.
- Savings are a freelance theatre worker's reserve. Multiple income-streamed livelihoods over many years require reserves as part of a prudent business model. The presence of such savings have made freelance theatre workers ineligible for Universal Credit.
- Previous receipt of emergency funding might be a tool of eligibility.
- It might be interesting to consider joint bids (see Metro Company application for Enterprise Allowance Scheme in 1980s).

# Appendix 3: Recovering together

## Data

- Many of our calculations in this section are derived from the following findings:
  - Average monthly salary of a freelance theatre worker is: £2105
  - Those at the top of the earning groupings earn more than 100 times those at the bottom
  - 89% workers had work cancelled during this exceptional period
  - There is evidence of a gender pay gap
  - D/deaf and disabled workers are among the lowest earners
  - The ethnicity pay gap is most pronounced over £50K annual earnings
- Permanently employed people in NPOs who identify in groups other than white represent just 2% of the total NPO workforce
- We have tried to find accurate figures to express the % of turnover spent by NPOs on freelance fees and wages. This data point is currently not collected by ACE for its reporting (although we suggest that it might be a useful report line for the future).
- The 20% figure offered by the 'Big 12' regional theatres in a spirit of collaboration might bear more scrutiny as it is a complicated figure to derive and not all organisations will have used the same aggregations of data to establish it.
- We don't see the value of calculating spend on freelancers as a function of percentage of NPO Arts Council funding (i.e. 'we spend more on freelancers than we receive from our ACE grant') as that doesn't accurately represent the full picture of an NPO's finances. It does not align with the argument made by NPOs about the money theatre returns to the economy and government grant as investment. As 70% of the workforce, and the majority IP generators, freelancers are part of the economic success, not the public grant.
- We have completed a Board make up analysis for:
  - Arts Council England NPO organisations
  - Arts Council Wales portfolio organisations
  - Creative Scotland portfolio organisations
- We would be happy to share the data set and would note that for the purposes of considering representation on Boards we have defined 'freelance theatre worker' as an individual currently working in the theatre sector in possession of a skill set relevant to the workforce as a whole. We don't feel that inviting a novelist or sculptor onto the board as an 'artist' is the same as inviting someone from the 'shop floor' of the industry to scrutinise decision making and ensure that freelancers are imagined into decisions being made.
- We would also recommend a comprehensive programme of 'governance education' for freelance board members, so that they are equipped to enter the conversations and debates necessary at board level, and understand their fiduciary duties, the charitable status of NPOs, and the guidance of the Charities Commission. Being the only freelancer on a Board can generate opinion isolation so we would recommend multiple occupancy to produce breadth of view and support structures.
- We recognize that there has been an historic reluctance for ACE to influence the make-up of boards and a caution around The Charity Commission's remit. However at this exceptional time, and given the crisis faced by the industry in representation, fairness and diversity, we believe the time has come to address this.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/governance/board-responsibilities/legal-duties-of-trustees>