CREATIVE WORKFORCE WORKSHOPS

A series of conversations with workers in the UK's creative and cultural sectors

CULTURE COMMONS

February 2023

PLACE

About Culture Commons

We support the creative, cultural and research sectors to design policy, influence decision makers and drive positive change. We build impactful advocacy programmes and campaigns to influence policy makers at the local, national and international levels.

Our team is made up policy professionals, creative and cultural sector leaders, former politicians, grassroots activists, senior civil servants, and parliamentary advisers who all have track records of taking ideas from proposal into law.

Based in London, Manchester and Sheffield, we operate a cross-subsidy and not-for-profit model that enables us to both work with leading creative businesses and research institutions, but also support smaller and grassroots creative and cultural organisations - ensuring that all voices are heard in policy making processes.

We are kindly supported directly and indirectly with project and core grant funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Arts Council England, Arts and Humanities Research Council, Federation of Entertainment Unions and Research England.

You can find out more about us at www.culturecommons.uk

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Foreword

Freelance, self-employed and atypical work has contributed to the dynamism and growth that we see within the UK's creative and cultural sectors. It is the workforce that underpins the success of our globally competitive creative and cultural ecosystem that generated £116bn in GVA in 2019.

Often weaving seamless between organisations, occupations and locations (or SIC, SOC and postcodes), the creative and cultural workforce stitch together the rich tapestry that makes up the creative and cultural life of the nation. We know that the cross-pollinating role and entrepreneurial spirit of creative freelancers can bring about so many benefits to the communities they live and work in.

Nonetheless, freelance, self-employed and atypical work in the creative and cultural sectors can lend itself to variable working patterns, a high degree of seasonality and insecure work; leaving workers exposed to uncertainties around pay, rights and representation. These realities became even more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, when so many workers in our sectors were excluded from UK Government support packages.

Yet, despite the challenges faced by the workforce, the creative and cultural sectors have managed to "bounce back", just as they did after the financial crash of 2007/8. How do we square this? Under-supported yet bouncing back? As research by our partners at the Centre for Cultural Value makes clear, the pandemic and the bounce back, has come at a price for the workforce; the effects of which are yet to be fully understood.

If you speak to trade unions, independent networks, advocacy groups or researchers who've been working to support the workforce through this difficult period, they will all land on a few key themes: freelancers are being asked to do more for less; experienced professionals are leaving; the lack of freedom of movement is making collaborations harder; stress and anxiety is through the roof; and some workers simply don't see a light at the end of the tunnel. The cost-of-living crisis now presents new challenges for workers too.

This is our starting point for the 'Creative Workforce Workshops' programme.

In this, our first in what we hope will be a series, we've travelled to three different parts of England, speaking to individual workers to find out exactly what it's been like to do freelance, self-employed and atypical work in the creative and cultural sectors in different parts of the country. Behind every quote you encounter along the way is a real person trying to make a living, hoping for a better and more stable future for themselves and their loved ones. In bringing many induvial perspectives together, we've observed on a few common themes and

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challenges and begun to point towards some areas that we feel policy makers could really support with.

Through our collaboration with ArtULTRA, we've commissioned three artists to extrapolate the workshop themes and findings into stunning new works of art, which we are thrilled to be publishing alongside this report. We hope these works will help us begin our conversations with policy makers from a different starting point.

The following report, and the [digital project pages](#) are therefore both a written and visual snapshot of how creative and cultural workforce in certain subsectors have responded to the challenges facing them in 2022. Thanks to the support of Arts Council England and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, we've managed to engage with partners on the ground in each place and remunerate creative and cultural sector workers appropriately for their contributions.

We believe this could be the start of a new way of working for Culture Commons - mixing policy with creative practice to find new, participatory and innovative ways of capturing experiences, and finding solutions that unlock the full potential of the UK's creative and cultural sectors.

We'd like to dedicate this report to each of the creative and cultural sector workers we met with on this brief but memorable journey.

Trevor MacFarlane FRSA
Founding Director, Culture Commons

Introduction

If you would like to read an Executive Summary of this report, please find one at https://www.culturecommons.uk/cwwplace

In this section, we'll explore some of the context for the 'Creative Workforce Workshops', situating it within the work we've already done in our wider 'Workforce' workstream. We'll also explore policy shifts at the national level that this work speaks to, including a look ahead to the cost-of-living crisis. We'll then unpack the 'Creative Workforce Workshops' in more detail, outlining the key features, and explain why we've landed on 'Place' as a lens for our first in the series.

The creative and cultural sector workforce: progress so far

Throughout 2021, Culture Commons led the Creative Workforce Pledge[1] (CWP), working with trade unions and Excluded UK to co-develop a 10-point plan designed to assist Metro Mayors across England support the creative and cultural sectors in their region through the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Point seven of the plan explicitly recognised the "*precarity the creative and cultural industries workforces face every day*" and called for a "*New Deal for the workforce*", committing signatories to push for several key things, including the formation of a new 'Freelance Charter' for the creative economy and a national 'Commissioner for Freelancers' to situate workforce issues right at the heart of government thinking. The Pledge also asked that Metro Mayors set up a creative and cultural sector working group on the M11 (the grouping of combined authority leaders), and we're pleased that the reinvigorated 'M11 network' of culture officers and relevant portfolio holders now provides a valuable forum for policy thinking, including on local and national workforce issues.

Between 2020-2022, Culture Commons was part of a major Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded project into the impact of COVID-19 on the creative and cultural sectors. Led by our research partners at the Centre for Cultural Value (CCV) and supported by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) and The Audience Agency, the research itself - the largest of its kind globally - raised some startling and unexpected findings on the pandemic's impact on the 33% of freelance, self-employed and atypical workers who make up the creative and cultural sector workforce overall[2]. During the pandemic, we know that large number of self-employed, freelance, and atypical workers in the creative and cultural sectors were unable to access emergency financial support

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[1] Read the full pledge at https://www.culturecommons.uk/post/creative-workforce-pledge

[2] Rising as high as 70% in sub sectors such as 'music, visual and performing arts': https://www.culturecommons.uk/post/culture-commons-the-centre-for-cultural-value-launch-new-policy-recommendation-report (p9)

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programmes and were generally less supported by the state than cultural workers in other comparable countries.[3] These conditions resulted in substantial numbers of people leaving their profession, and their sector, with signs of only slow recovery some way into 2022.[4]

Following the research phase, Culture Commons worked with the CCV to take the 'Culture in Crisis' thinking on a stage further, producing 12 new policy recommendations,[5] targeted towards national decision makers, designed to help the sectors rebuild more equitably in the face of some of the systematic vulnerabilities and inequalities the pandemic exposed. In these, we doubled down on our call for a nationally supported 'Freelance Charter' and for the UK Government appointed 'Commissioner for Freelancers' to take a detailed look on freelance, self-employed and atypical working conditions across the whole of the economy. We were delighted to launch these recommendations with the Minister for the Arts, and the Shadow Minister for Science, Research and Innovation in the UK Parliament in May 2022.

Since then, colleagues at Creative UK have taken things further still, announcing the 'Redesigning Freelancing' programme in 2022[6], and committing to taking the design of a 'Freelance Charter' forward at the national level - all with the support of the Metro Mayors we lined up through the Creative Workforce Pledge campaign.

The end of 2022 and the cost-of-living crisis

As ever, trade unions representing creative and cultural sector workers continue to represent their members at the highest levels and regularly interface with governments on their members behalf. Nonetheless, as the workers who did not leave these sectors during the pandemic now return to work, their individual and collective capacity to advocate for their needs and support each other will undoubtably reduce without additional support. The underlying and systemic problems identified by our work during the pandemic also continue to complicate, evolve and aggregate under new global economic conditions, including those caused by the current 'cost of living crisis'.

This is why Culture Commons have launched our 'Creative Workforce Workshop' project. We believe that it is important to continue to platform the voices of creative and cultural sector workers, and gather qualitative evidence to show how the workforce is responding to conditions as they develop.

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[3] See the Centre for Cultural Value's report on international policy responses to Covid-19
https://www.culturehive.co.uk/CVIresources/international-cultural-policy-responses-to-covid-19-webinar/
[4] See the Centre for Cultural Value's observations published early in 2022; illustrating how the music, performing and visual arts subsectors lost 40,000 workers since its peak at the end of 2019 and by Q1 2021 has showed slow signs of recovery
[5] https://www.culturecommons.uk/post/culture-commons-the-centre-for-cultural-value-launch-new-policy-recommendation-report
[6] https://www.wearecreative.uk/creative-uk-launches-redesigning-freelancing/

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Supported by Arts Council England (ACE) and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, our 'Creative Workforce Workshops' series sets out to hold conversations with people working across different creative and cultural subsectors, from different demographics and in different places across the UK. It represents the continuation of our mission to communicate and advocate for change, not only to address systematic inequalities revealed by all the research delivered during the pandemic, but to prevent situations from worsening during the economic conditions facing the UK over the next few years.

Local is crucial

Since the UK Government's launch of the 'Levelling Up' white paper[7] and ACE's announcement of 109 'Levelling up for Culture Places'[8], interest in the policy connection between "place making" and the local creative and cultural sectors has increased. By centring culture as part of a 'Pride of Place' agenda and a £4.8 Levelling Up Fund[9], the UK Government has signalled towards a belief in the contribution of creative and cultural activity to the economy of local towns and cities.

Though we have seen several significant changes in the UK Government's administration in recent months, the 2022 Autumn Statement remained committed to releasing the Levelling Up Funds previously agreed, and January 2023 saw a new tranche of funds which included capital funding for several schemes including creative and cultural infrastructure. Nonetheless, what is perhaps less defined, is how decision makers view the role of the creative and cultural sector *workforce* within the context of place-orientated policy.

Since the pandemic, the connection between the creative and cultural sectors, local democracy and the economy of place has gained considerable traction at the local level. During the pandemic, communities engaged with creative and cultural activities much closer to home, and in new ways too. Research also found that those areas with well-networked creative and cultural sectors and ebullient political buy in were better at delivering emergency support to these sectors[10]. It is therefore unsurprising that 2022 saw local leaders becoming more aware of the needs of their local creative and cultural sectors, including the workforce, as well as the wider public.

This new understanding has already resulted in new place-based initiatives and pilots increasing creative and cultural sector relevant skills provision and placing creativity at the heart of wider regeneration plans. In our recent report, commissioned by the University of

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[7] Levelling Up white paper: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom
[8] 100 ACE Priority Places: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/over-100-places-to-see-improved-access-to-culture-and-arts-across-england
[9] Levelling Up Round 1 distribution details: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-fund-first-round-successful-bidders
[10] See p32 : https://www.culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Culture_in_Crisis.pdf

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Manchester, on 'Creative Improvement Districts'[11], we examine a new model of culture-led regeneration proposed by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). In that paper, we identify many exciting examples from the last 10 years of local areas that have already used their existing development and planning powers to support their local economy through the creative and cultural sectors.

The Local Government Association's (LGA) recently published report, 'Cornerstones of Culture' also draws together many case studies and evidence, including from Culture Commons, that confirms the importance of local places when it comes to delivering successful regeneration programmes. Published following an independent commission chaired by Baroness Lola Young, the report concludes: "*that greater collaborative work between councils and cultural partners, combined with streamlined place-based funding from government, is crucial to supporting one of the fastest growing parts of the economy*".[12] As the UK Government continue to reassert a commitment to further devolve decision making, including on culture, to local places and The Labour Party explores yet further 'legislation enshrined' options for devolution, greater local, place-based influence on local workforce and labour conditions seems certain. Therefore, we believe that ongoing evidence of how the creative and cultural workforce engages locally will be crucial in ensuring that local leaders and key stakeholders develop responsive policy that gets this right; maximising the advantages of devolution while promoting better equality, diversity and inclusion.

Local cultural participation

We know that every place is different, and there therefore simply can't be a one-size-fits-all policy approach to meeting the needs of the creative and cultural sectors in different parts of the country. In addition, we believe it is important that the public, not just those who are already highly engaged in the creative and cultural life of their locality, are aware of the challenges and opportunities that the creative and cultural sector workforces face.

At Culture Commons, we've been advocating for the development of new a new 'Culture Forum' programme that could ensure local people, as well as the creative and cultural sector workforces and their representatives, are empowered to participate in decision making on cultural strategies, programmes and investments in their own areas[13]. In recent years, we have seen several other programmes with objectives sympathetic to this approach coming forward, such as the Local Trust's 'Creative Civic Change' which has

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[11] Culture Commons' Creative Improvement Districts paper www.culturecommons.com/posts/creative-improvement-districts
[12] https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/culture-key-recovery-and-prosperity-cornerstones-culture-report
[13] For a full list of Culture Commons' policy recommendations visit: https://www.culturecommons.uk/post/culture-in-crisis

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begun to model new ways of empowering local communities to really take charge of their creative and culture lives[14].

'Creative Workforce Workshops': Place

Our belief in the power of local places to design and deploy tailored programmes of support for the local creative and cultural workforce is why we have centred the first of our 'Creative Workforce Workshops' on 'Place'. We aim to tie the policy questions surrounding place and working conditions within the creative and cultural sectors together by simply asking a small sample of creatives, living and working in three different and unique parts of the country:

What is it like to be a freelance, self-employed or atypical worker in the creative and cultural sectors today?

We wanted to understand if, and to what extent, place matters for creative and cultural sector workers, and whether some experiences are tied to certain places, or place types, or if some might even be more universal. Perhaps most importantly of all, we wanted to turn the policy development process over to workers, recognising where they are right now - coming out of, and perhaps quickly back into, a period of unprecedented change.

The rest of this report

In the workshop write ups later in this report, we bring together evidence we collected by speaking to 30 creative and cultural sector workers. We've captured three discussions in three different locations in a more traditional 'policy report', but we also wanted to capture the sentiments and themes expressed in the workshops in a more dynamic way. We therefore commissioned three professional artists, working across different mediums, to translate each workshop session into a new artwork. We intend for the artwork and qualitative write up to work in tandem to help us communicate our findings and support the advocacy efforts that will follow.

In 'Our Observations' section, we offer our own reflections on what we picked up as policy professionals from each of the individual sessions. While we recognise we cannot draw concrete policy positions from a small qualitative cohort alone, we believe that there are consistent and comparable themes that that are affecting the lives of individual workers that require spotlighting; we hope this will serve to support existing policy work or instigate further research in a variety of important areas.

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[14] See Creative Civic Change for inspiration: https://localtrust.org.uk/other-programmes/creative-civic-change/

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We intend to send this report to key decision makers locally and nationally, as they develop policy and programmes within their jurisdictional remits. We'll ensure that Creative UK receive copies to consider as they develop a national 'Freelance Charter', local Mayors and combined authorities as they develop their place-based work, and of course, central decision makers such as the Creative Industries Council (CIC) and colleagues at The Department for Digital, Culture, Media aNd Sport (DCMS) , as they develop the 'Sector Vision', that will shape funding and support for our sectors for some time to come.

We hope the first of our 'Creative Workforce Workshops' provides fresh insight into place-based working and help keep the lived experiences of the creative and cultural workforce at the centre of the national and local policy discourse. It's our hope that this hybrid project - the words and visuals of which have been shaped by representatives of the industry themselves - will cut through to policy makers at this important moment, fusing policy and art together for maximum impact.

We dedicate this report to the people we met in theatres and arts venue across England. We hope you all find ways to continue to your brilliant journeys and hope, in some small way, this report can help with that.

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Project Design

In this section, we will take you through the design process for the 'Place' focussed 'Creative Workforce Workshops'; from selecting our workshop areas, identifying participants and commissioning our artist rapporteurs. As you will hopefully see, we have done what we can to apply a set of consistent principles across the key decision-making moments; using our experience working with professional researchers to inform our approach.

Selecting Workshop Locations

Given our small project budget, and commitment to appropriate renumeration of all participants, we concluded that we would limit our focus to England, with the express hope of extending 'Creative Workforce Workshops' to the devolved administrations in a future series.

We applied the following criteria-based logic to select three final locations:

1) **The place type –** With 'Place' at the centre of this round of workshops, and with such a mix of urban, suburban and rural working locations across England, we wanted to ensure the working realities of these different types of places were as fairly represented in the workshops as possible. We set out by identifying several regions that would give us a geographic balance across the North, South, East and West of England. As we located towns and cities, we continued to monitor the balance of urban and rural typography, recognising the distinctive differences the creative and cultural sectors experience in these types of locations.

2) **An established yet under-supported workforce** - We felt it was important that chosen places should contain a relatively healthy level of creative and cultural activity to increase the likelihood of the workshops including representation from each of our priority subsectors and a full diversity of workers. In addition, we wanted to hear from parts of England that have historically received comparatively low levels of public investment or engagement for creative and cultural activity – both capital and revenue. In the same breath, we wanted to take the opportunity afforded to us to unearth fresh perspectives from less explored places in the country. We therefore looked at both the ACE 'Priority Places' methodology[15] and the PEC's Creative Clusters/Micro-Clusters[16] work, and combined this with evidence of local cultural activity to identify several potential areas, which we then sifted against our own selection priorities.

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[15] Locating 54 'Priority places' by balancing evidence of creative activity in the area with evidence of social need and where their own historic "investment and engagement is too low": https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/your-area/priority-places-and-levelling-culture-places#t-in-page-nav-2

[16] https://pec.ac.uk/blog/small-engines-of-growth-understanding-creative-microclusters

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3) **Local buy-in** - We firmly believed that partnerships with local creative and cultural organisations and the workforce would be crucial to the overall aims of the project. Therefore, before selecting our final places, we reached out to several local and regional organisations in each place to ask for approval and support before proceeding. In areas where we did not get this, we did not proceed. We are aware that this approach is not ideal, as it may have resulted in the voices of workers in very underserved communities missing out; we'll be considering this if we design any future 'Creative Workforce Workshop' activities. A full list of our final partners and partner organisations is set out in the 'Project Partners' section of this report, but we'd like to give our thanks, upfront, to them for hosting our discussions, sharing with us their approaches to working locally and helping advertise the opportunity to local freelance creatives.

Based on all of the above, we landed on three unique locations across England:

<div align="center">

The City of Truro in Cornwall
The London Borough of Croydon
The City of Rotherham in South Yorkshire

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Selecting participants

What do we mean by the creative and cultural sector workforce?

The UK Government defines the UK's creative sector as *"those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property"*[17]. Similarly, it defines the cultural sector as "*as those industries with a cultural object at the centre of the industry"*[18]. Based on these definitions, DCMS categorise the economic activity generated by the creative and cultural sectors using Standard Industrial Classification 2007 (SIC). This breaks the two umbrella sectors, into 18 subsectors[19] and 51 individual SIC categorised activities that range from of publishing, film, tv and music production to arts and heritage-based activities, to name just a few. The UK's creative and cultural sector generated approximately £116 billion GVA and was responsible for approximately 2 million jobs[20].

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[17] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dcms-sectors-economic-estimates-methodology/dcms-sector-economic-estimates-methodology#definitions
[18] ibid
[19] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dcms-sectors-economic-estimates-methodology/dcms-sector-economic-estimates-methodology#employment-1
[20] Data collected by Creative UK at: https://www.wearecreative.uk/champion/statistics/

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From the latest DCMS sector estimates (April 2021-March 2022), we can see that 32.6% of the total workforce in the creative and cultural sectors are self-employed - over double the proportion across all UK sectors (14.4%)[21]. While a disproportionately high percentage of people working in the creative and cultural sectors are entirely self-employed or freelance, it is also quite common for these workers to fit into 'atypical' working patterns – something of a catch all term we use for those that may have part-time, or a form of semi-regular or fixed employment, which supplements, or is supplemented by, additional self-employed or freelance project-based income. This kind of work was perhaps best summed up by one of our 'Creative Workforce Workshops' participants as: "doing a little bit of everything".

Finding participants representative of the workforce

Given the breath and variance within the creative and cultural subsectors, we decided to limit our focus for this project to a small selection of subsectors with a representative balance of freelance, self-employed and atypical employment working patterns within them. To decide where to focus our advocacy efforts, we balanced the full list of DCMS subsectors against those most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic , thereby prioritising groups that might need more immediate support in the economic uncertainty agead for 2023. [22].

Whilst we wanted to discuss how the pandemic had negatively impacted certain subsectors workforces, we also didn't want to pass up the opportunity to identify opportunities that different ways of working presents; we therefore wanted to make sure we had representation from subsectors that been impacted 'more positively' too. We set out to identify participants from the four subsectors below:

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[21] Data collected and analysed from: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dcms-sector-economic-estimates-employment-apr-2021-mar-2022
[22] https://www.culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Culture_in_Crisis.pdf

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Key sectors selected		
DCMS subsectors	**Sector**	**Pandemic impact**
Music, performing and visual arts / Arts / Crafts	Creative Industries and Cultural Sector	Music, performing and visual arts was a sub-sector that suffered a disproportional loss in terms of both the number of hours lost and those leaving the sector overall, with a slower recovery projected through 2022-2023. Given that this sector has an even higher proportion of freelance, self-employed and atypical workers (estimated at 70%), we knew this would be a key subsectors to target. We therefore paired the Music, Performing and Visual Arts with closely associated sectors of Arts and crafts; thereby focusing our short two-hour discussions issues relevant to similar subsectoral activity for this round of workshops.
Publishing	Creative industries	Conversely, publishing was one the subsectors to see an increase in demand, both in the number of hours worked and the number of people joining the sector since the pandemic. Although the growth in the sector is always encouraging, the 'Culture in Crisis' findings reported several downsides associated with increased demand on the sector, including burnout and associated well-being challenges

Sample Size

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After the past few years of webcam-based interaction, and given our emphasis on making a place-based comparison, we wanted to speak to freelancers face-to-face and make the effort to spend time in the areas we had selected.

Critically, in line with our core belief in paying creative and cultural sector workers for their labour (including the labour involved in contributing to research and studies), we also committed to appropriately renumerating our participants for their time in taking part. We are aware of the potential implications of remunerating individuals on low-incomes as part of one-off activities, including affecting means-tested benefits and other statutory support.

Eventually, we settled on speaking to a small sample size of 10 individuals in each area, for a two-hour workshop including a semi-structured group interview. The questions and approach to facilitating the workshop sessions are set out in the Annex.

Note on terminology

From time to time, we will distinguish between freelance, self-employed and atypical where relevant, but we will use 'freelancer' when referring to most non-traditional PAYE work activity, as well as to the workers we spoke to during our 'Creative Workforce Workshops' programme.

It is worth noting that SIC and SOC weren't mentioned during any of our 'Creative Workforce Workshops', which suggests these more administrative approaches to delineating between different sub-sectors and occupations (primarily for reporting and tax purposes) aren't relevant to the workforce; creative and cultural sector workers tend not to describe their own working lives using these structures on a day-to-day basis.

A Diverse Approach

Research is clear that certain demographic groups, such as women, minoritised ethnic groups, disabled and younger workers were more likely to be impacted in terms of losses to both worked hours and jobs[23].We therefore felt it was important that our workshops represented these groups as much as possible. In selecting our final participants, we aimed to ensure workshops were attended by people who were:

- **Freelance, self-employed and atypical** workers in the **creative and cultural sectors**, or having recently left such work with a view to returning soon

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[23] https://www.culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Culture_in_Crisis.pdf

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- **Diverse** in terms of age, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic background and disabled categories
- **At different stages of their career** (i.e. from grassroots artists, newly graduated, emerging, middle-career and established workers)

Data on Participants

We ran a public facing call for participants between September and October 2022, advertising on our own social media channels and, in-keeping with our emphasis on local, asked several workshop partners to disseminate the opportunity through their networks

Reviewing the applications, we observed that we hadn't been able to reach as many diverse demographic groups as we would have liked, particularly within the LGTBQIA+, minoritised ethnic, younger and disabled categories – those categories most under-supported by the pandemic and generally disproportionately vulnerable to sectoral volatility. Those that applied were predominantly cis female, white British and heterosexual. This was a significant point of learning for us and suggests that in future activities involving the creative and cultural workforces, we'll need to consider concerted methods of reaching a much wider range of individuals. We know that our workshop partners in each locality found this observation helpful when considering their own future programmes and outreach activities too.

Based on the selection criteria we have already outlined, we sifted and weighted the final list of applicants to ensure a more diverse representation, taking into consideration gender, ethnicity and race whilst also targeting our priority subsectors in each location. This resulted in a better balance of gender, sexuality, ethnicity disabled participants and age range. Full data on the demographics of our final workshop participants is set out in the Annex. From all the applications received, we selected our final 30 participants, 10 in each workshop location.

Selecting our artists

At the beginning of our 'Creative Workforce Workshops' project, we decided that it would be helpful to capture the lived experiences of our participants through a combination of written text describing the discussions as accurately as possible (capturing key verbatim material) and some kind of visual representation of the discussion. For us, this wasn't about taking a visual snapshot of the participants in the room, as we often see in more traditional visual reportage; it was about using creative processes to try and capture the sentiments sitting beneath the words. **At Culture Commons, we don't just want to develop policy**

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for the creative and cultural sectors; we believe in the power of artists and creative workers to make and influence policy through their own creative practices too.

To achieve this, we set about finding three artist 'rapporteurs' who would work within their own preferred medium to translate the sentiment, themes, thoughts and feelings bubbling up from each of the three workshops.

Throughout the process, Culture Commons applied each of the relevant principles in the Artists Union England's (AUE) 'Good Practice Charter': we are particularly grateful to AUE for their advice in the early stage of the projects design phase.

Culture Commons collaboration with ArtULTRA

We commissioned artist support organisation ArtULTRA to help us locate and engage with three artists, working and living in our chosen locations. Former Director of the Design Museum in London, Ambassador to the Mayor of London's Cultural Board and Founder of ArtULTRA, Alice Black, explains the process:

"*Both ArtULTRA and Culture Commons were born during the pandemic, from a common realisation that the inequalities that already existed in the artistic and creative sectors were at risk of becoming even more entrenched. At ArtULTRA, we tackle this issue by providing opportunities for emerging artists to find projects, commissions, exhibitions, affordable studios, representation, grants and more. We were therefore delighted to be approached by Culture Commons to contribute to a publication presenting qualitative information about the reality of work in the creative and cultural sectors in England.*

For the project, we wanted to commission artists who represented a cross section of the creative sector, and who worked and lived in or near the communities where the workshops were held, namely Croydon, Rotherham and Truro. Their range of artistic practices would also need to speak to the wide variety of art forms in England today.

*Together with the Culture Commons team, we challenged ourselves to select artists that demonstrated innovative artforms and ambition, while maintaining an inclusive approach by offering all artists an equal opportunity to be considered for the paid commission. We approached partner organisations across all the workshop regions to relay our Open Call through their own networks, in order to reach as many regional creatives as possible. Following a detailed selection process, we were delighted to appoint **Jess Pemberton,** a collage artist working with both analogue and digital mediums; **Tara Kearney**, a movement practitioner working with photographer **Duran 'Dee Dee' Abdullah**; and **Jo Peel**, whose work*
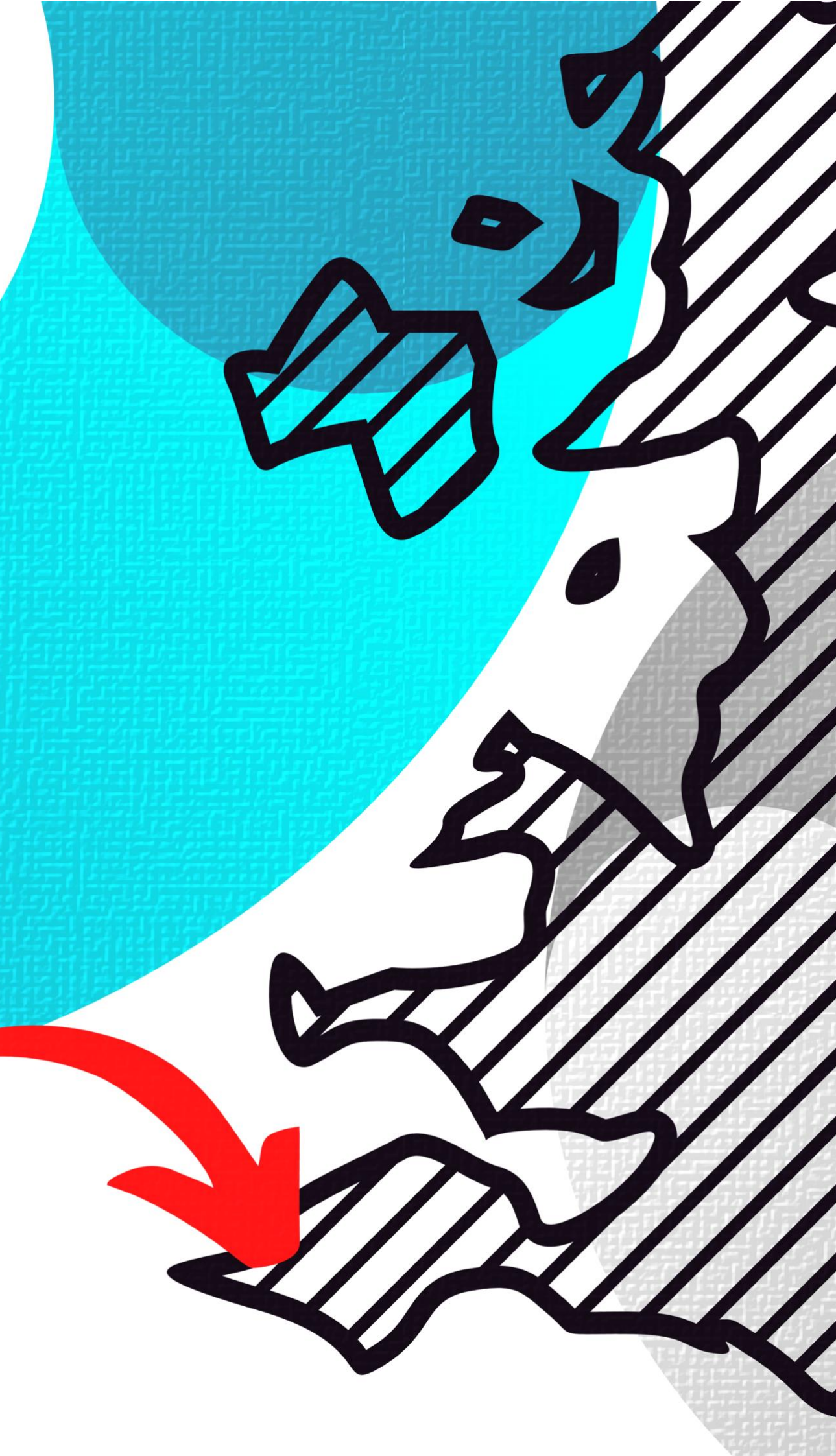
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spans large scale wall murals, paintings on canvas, screen printing and animation themed around urban regeneration.

The outcome of this commission are three stunning new artworks: they are totally different from one another, but remain absolutely committed to relaying the plurality of views expressed in the workshops that took place. Jess Pemberton's piece grounded itself in the locality of Truro, revealing the disjointed networks and infrastructures available to creatives who appear as lonely figures in islands, their heads bursting with creative flow. Tara Kearney used her body and facial expressions to translate the mixed emotions experienced by creative freelancers. The artwork called 'Seize The Space' captured eloquently the challenges of finding one's space in changing and uncertain environments. Finally, Jo Peel created an urban landscape showing how place is intrinsically linked to artistic endeavour. Her piece revealed multifaceted realities of creative practice, its ebbs and flows, with periods of flourishing and construction contrasted with quieter moments of gestation.

We hope that together these pieces demonstrate evidence of a sector which is vibrant and committed, but facing strong headwinds, and will give credence to our conviction that creativity must be nurtured to flourish"

Alice Black, Founder, Art ULTRA

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TRURO CORNWALL

In this section, we provide a quick overview of Truro as a place – the first of the locations we visited on our journey – and draw out some of the main themes that emerged during the workshop with the local workforce.

Cornwall Snapshot

Truro is Cornwall's only city, sitting in the east of the wider local authority area of Cornwall, at the mouth of the Truro River. At the point of the 2021 census, Cornwall it ranked 3rd for total population, out of 309 local authority areas in England, with Truro's population at 4.1% of this.

ONS Census Data 2021	
Size km2	3,563
Population (7.1% increase on 2011)	570,300
Truro population[24]	23,298
Age (%)	
Aged 65 years and over	25.3
Aged 16-64 years	58.4
Aged 15 years and under	16.3
Ethnic group (%)	
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	0.7
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	0.2
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	1.2
White	96.8
Other ethnic groups	1.1
Labour Market (%)	
Economically active	53.3
Inactive	44.2
Industry relevant to CWW (%)	
Publishing activities	0.2
Creative, arts and entertainment activities	1.1
Motion picture, video and television production, sound recording and music publishing activities	0.3
Libraries, archives, museums and other cultural activities	0.5
Travel to Work (%)	
Less than 10km	31.3
10km to less than 30km	17.9
30km and over	8.1
Works mainly from home	24.7

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[24] https://www.citypopulation.de/en/uk/southwestengland/cornwall/E35000778__truro/

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Arts Council England Investment Programme	Total Amount	No of Orgs
NPO/IPSO/Transfer (23-26)	£2,026,166	8
NPO/IPSO/Transfer (22-23)	£1,936,902	7
NPO/IPSO/Transfer (18-22)	£1,901,907	7

Why Truro?

At the far west of the country, Cornwall has a unique and celebrated reputation within the UK's creative and cultural sectors; the region recently made a bold and ambitious bid to become the 'UK Capital of Culture' in 2025 (though unfortunately unsuccessful), hot on the heels of hosting a successful G7 summit in June 2021.

During our research on 'Creative Improvement Districts', we were excited to find out more about Truro's Cultural Compact (Tyller A Nerth) working with the Truro Business Improvement District (BID) which is benefitting the town centre's economy and local creative and cultural sector workers alike. The work of the Compact is also supported by our hosts for the day at Hall for Cornwall; a Truro based live performance venue that recently reopened in 2021 after a three-year £26 million renovation to their Grade II listed building on the former Town Hall site, right in the heart of town[25].

According to the PECs interactive tool for mapping Creative Clusters in the UK[26], Truro appears to be in an interesting spot within the wider Cornwall region. Though outside of the 47 established clusters, which are primarily based on commuting proximity to the nearest urban centre (in Cornwall's case, this would be Penzance), Truro is home to a 'micro-cluster' – a smaller but nonetheless significant clustering of creative and cultural organisations at a hyper local level. Evidence of micro-cluster activity suggests that, despite being isolated from larger areas of activity in the region, there is definitely something interesting happening in Truro.

For all of these reasons, Truro was a perfect fit in terms of exploring our central considerations around place, and given the amount of hard work going on in the area for our relevant sectors, it seemed to warrant a moment of deeper investigation.

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[25] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cornwall-58883552
[26] https://www.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=007e1de4a01a46b196ad2ccaed20eb3b&extent=-20.3307,49.5899,17.1766,59.5069

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RURAL AREAS ISOLATED ?

flexibility
being your own boss

lack
of long term
stability

volitility

fragility

when it's
good it's
good

AGILITY
INNOVATION

FREELANCE

BREAD BUTTER.

limited
grawth

responsibility

not stopping

not paying

TRUST

RESILIANCE
NO SECOND

cultural climate change

small

The Workshop Findings

The workshop participants in Truro consisted of performing art professionals, fine artists, musicians, film directors and community outreach practitioners. As the participants arrived at Hall for Cornwall it was clear that many had worked together on projects before; both with each other and the Hall for Cornwall team. This perhaps reveals something about the nature of the established networks in the area.

As would be the pattern with all three of our workshops, we started by exploring what being freelance had been like in 2022.

Flexibility…to work all the hours anyway

Immediately several participants explained a sense of *"always having to be on"* when it came to their working life. They explained that this was linked both to the often-hidden administration and unpaid work involved in managing a freelance life, but also the general anxiety of lining up the next piece of work. One of the participants commented they enjoyed the flexibility of a freelance lifestyle, but then paused and added, that it was a flexibility *"to work all the hours anyway".* The group agreed that there was a huge level of responsibility associated with this type of working pattern, which required a large amount of *"self-trust"* in one's individual ability to deliver.

A connected Cornwall

"Cornwall itself is artistically really well connected, I think out of every county in the UK"

From the moment the participants started to share their experiences, it was clear that this was a group of highly connected professionals. One of the participants commented that there was a type of *"convergence of creators"* going on in the area because of how geographically isolated they were from the rest of the UK. They explained: *"They always meet each other, and they're always talking, jumping off [each other]…its quite easy to set up meetings…discuss projects and ideas…because of the community…"*

The group agreed that it was common for many of them to meet at the same events, not only those relevant to their subsectors but to support other art forms and practices too, whether that be theatre, galleries or festivals in the area. Indeed, one of the participants who had recently moved to the area from Bristol, commented that he immediately felt much more connected and engaged within the local *"scene"* than he had before in either Bristol or London. As a result of these highly developed ties, the group agreed that there was a form of *"cross-pollination"* between the subsectors going on across the wider area

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which made it easy to form collaborations on inter-disciplinary projects. However, when asked how much of these activities actually went on to take place within Truro itself, the group were less enthusiastic. One of the Truro group told us: *"I actually think most exciting stuff happens outside of Truro. I…feel that Truro lacks a bit of creative soul…And I don't drive so I have trouble getting out all these lovely things that are going on."*

Another one of the participants added: *"We always keep saying Cornwall because actually it's not just about Truro…it's a whole microbial thing…a bit like how you know how fungus is all interconnected…"*

It became clear that the creative freelance, self-employed and atypical ecosystem was sustained by operating across the entire Cornwall region, rather than within Truro itself. As we continued to talk about the practicalities of operating in Truro, the group agreed that it was difficult to get around, access events and shows if you didn't have access to your own car. The more the group discussed the difficulties of using public transport to access cultural venues across the area, it become increasingly clear that there was a contradiction between the close interpersonal ties in the area and the physical disconnection between the adjacent towns and villages and further afield.

Growth in Cornwall: a double-edged sword?

"Here you have the room to grow as an artist, and actually kind of take the helm of projects… But the flip side is that at a certain point, there is limited funding and opportunity."

When we asked the participants about whether they thought local place mattered to the work they made, the participants talked about the physical environment of Truro and the wider Cornwall area with a huge sense of the pride and passion. One of artists spoke about the unique energy of living in this part of the world; something that has attracted and inspired painters, artists and creatives for centuries. A film maker in the group told us: *"I use forests, coastlines featuring sunrise, sunlight…there's a reason big productions come down here…it's world class, and it's all on your doorstep."*

There was a real sense of personal autonomy from operating as a freelancer in the area. Participants described an ability to run with your own projects at an early stage in your career, as opposed to the more 'saturated' experience of living in larger urban centres. Yet, as we continued to talk, the participants also began to unpack the downsides too.

Cornwall is known for its world class locations and attractions, seeing visiting production and projects coming in from right across the UK. However, the group shared a little frustration at the approach of some companies when it came to their level of engagement

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with the local workforce. Some in the group explained that UK and international companies would bring crew and talent with them, bypassing the local workforce in the area: *"It's almost like they don't think we're competent or professional enough"* one of the participants explained. While another shared that sometimes incorrect assumptions are made about the levels of creative talent in the local area, with some visiting organisations incorrectly thinking *"not much is happening…[that] it's a very small, deprived place".*

This lack of interest in creating opportunities for the local creative and cultural workforce from the private sector was particularly disheartening because the most dominant theme emerging from the Truro workshop was a concern about future sources of public funding. Most of the participants agreed that opportunities and sources of public funding were starting to reduce noticeably in the area when compared to previous years. Furthermore, it seemed that repeated opportunities for work, perhaps annual festivals or partnerships with local business or organisations, remained limited to those with very established relationships, leading to high levels of competition locally for a very limited pot of money. As one of the participants put it: *"It's always going to be limited…because it's a setup with a sense of competition, funding and competition for resources".* Another shared: *"The ceiling is definitely a thing, I found more and more that I had to be looking for work outside of county if I wanted to grow at all".*

It seemed that the participants shared that sense of restricted growth in the local area. They agreed that funding opportunities are well targeted to creatives *"just coming in"* or *"starting out"* and that once you'd completed your first project it wasn't easy to get funding again. For professionals moving out of early- and into their perceived mid-points of their careers, it could be a *"sink or swim"* situation.

This was also the concern for some of the creative programmes the participants themselves were running. One, running a parkour training programme for young people, explained: *"We've been working with a young boy, he's never been a problem participant for us, but he's been cited in school…at risk of being expelled…but…there's no infrastructure for us to be able to [continue to] support him without funding from other sources…the legacy aspect is kind of up in the air."*

One of the participants explained that they felt funding had recently been re-focused towards *"practical tangible products"* - particularly in the R&D space - which, for them, meant that funding work that was primarily focussed on developing creatives themselves was *"being stripped back".*

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The fear caused by the direction of travel for future funding of the creative and cultural sectors was dominant in the room. One participant summarised the feelings of the group, stating: *"We're suffering from a cultural climate change".*

Freelancers as societal problem solvers

Talk of climate change prompted one participant to declare that the skills and roles that creative and cultural sector works could play locally was worth considering: *"… thinking of actual climate change; the vast changes that we're going to face…As agile, creative people, I think…as freelancers we are almost uniquely well placed to adapt and move, and to some extent, leap…".*

Whilst many in the group talked about the strains of living a freelance life, one of the most positive elements of being a freelance that kept reappearing was 'agility'. Some in the room suggested that the process of being continuously creative with limited funding or growth opportunities had forced them to lean into their individual creativity. For one of the participants, this agility and continued creativity meant that freelancers were perhaps well placed to respond to pressing societal issues, such as climate change, through creative practice.

Once we finished reflecting on the challenges that 2022 had brought, we explored what 2023 could hold, along with what practical legislative or policy changes might make it easier for them to develop their careers and businesses in Truro.

Bring cultural awareness

When we talked specifically about change at the local level, one of the participants shared that they thought more could be done to foster *"cultural awareness in civic organisations"* from top to bottom. They described that it was very rare that artists get approached to produce projects from such organisations and, more often than not, it was left up to them to pitch collaborations or mutually beneficial events to fill their spaces.

The group mused on what it might look like if local 'civic' institutions like hospitals, schools, and other such council locations and local businesses, fully understood the socioeconomic benefits of commissioning creative freelancers.

Take a chance on us

This provocation prompted the group to circle back to public funding, and how barriers to access might be reduced. One member described how she felt funding requirements put

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her between a bit of a rock-and-a-hard-place. While she understood the need for well evidenced applications, she felt that she needed funding to build this up in the first place. She explained: *"I know that things need to go through a certain process but there's no element of risk…there's no element of faith…You have to prove your worth and sometimes you can't…because you haven't done a project yet…There must be some kind of risk funding almost for somebody who wants to try something new…[or] to get up on their feet"*.

A burning desire to create

As we neared the end of the workshop, we finished with a question that we would ask each workshop group: 'what advice would you give to somebody just starting their freelance career?'. From Truro we got the following response: *"The actual work involved…the instability of the risk, and the terror of it is only outweighed, if you love what you're doing"*. This was a group of artists who with *"a burning desire to create",* compelled to continue their practice from a deep sense of pride, love and belief, not only in their own individual creative careers, but the value this brings to Truro.

Commissioned Artist: **Jess Pemberton**

"The central figure represents the spirit of the creative community's individuals: a proud strength, quality of craft, resilience and a melancholic hope and fear for the future. The land that lays before the core figure reveals the disconnected infrastructure and foundations in which the creative community exists. Paradoxically, there is also a strong network between them: a connection yet disconnection"

www.jesspemberton.com
Insta: @jess_pemberton

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CROYDON

GREATER LONDON

In this section, we outline some key features of Croydon as a place, and zoom in on our workshop activities with creative and cultural sector workers in the area.

Why Croydon?

The London Borough of Croydon sits in the south of the Greater London Combined Authority (GLA) area and includes the southernmost point of the capital city[27]. In the 2021 census, it ranked 16th for total population out of 309 local authority areas in England.

When we first discussed amplifying the lived experiences of freelancers in different parts of England, it quickly became clear that we simply couldn't ignore London. National funding organisations (including arm's length and grant giving bodies) are, in our view, rightly recognising that other parts of the country require a fairer share of investment and better targeted policy interventions to support their creative ecologies. However, London remains the dominant economic centre in the UK and opportunities created in the capital continue to attract creative and cultural sector workers, including freelancers, from across the world. Nonetheless, we also know that London, much like other Core Cities[28], encompasses several significant *within* region disparities[29]. We therefore concluded that it would be appropriate to apply our overall approach of selecting under-explored places to London itself.

Croydon Snapshot

ONS Census Data 2021	
Size km2	87
Population (7.5% increase from the 2011 census)	390,800
Age (%)	
Aged 65 years and over	13.6
Aged 16-64 years	65.9
Aged 15 years and under	20.6
Ethnic group (%)	
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	18
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	22.6
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	7.6
White	48.4
Other ethnic group	3.9
Labour Market (%)	

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[27]
https://hiddenlondon.com/nuggets/southernmost/#:~:text=Coulsdon%20is%20nowadays%20part%20of,southernmost%20location%20in%20Greater%20London

[28] Core Cities are Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield. See the Core Cities UK website: https://www.corecities.com/cities

[29] See Trust for London's striking and revealing 'Borough ratings across key indicators (Q4 2022)' chart: https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/overview-of-london-boroughs/

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Economically active	60.1
Inactive	34.2
Industry relevant to CWW (%)	
Publishing activities	0.5
Creative, arts and entertainment activities	1.3
Motion picture, video and television production, sound recording and music publishing activities	0.6
Libraries, archives, museums and other cultural activities	0.3
Travel to Work	
Less than 10km	30.4
10km to less than 30km	15.2
30km and over	1.6
Works mainly from home	37.5

Arts Council England Investment Programme	Amount	No of Orgs
NPO/IPSO/Transfer (23-26)	£1,618,980	6
NPO/IPSO/Transfer (22-23)	£741,980	3
NPO/IPSO/Transfer (18-22)	£728,573	3

Increased cultural funding for Croydon

In the past five years, Croydon has seen a substantial increase in investment for the creative and cultural sectors from national funding bodies. In 2018, Croydon made a successful bid to the Mayor of London's first wave of 'Creative Enterprise Zones' (CEZ) and was awarded £500,000[30] to deliver a programme to realise the proposed outcomes set out by the CEZ scheme[31]. In February 2020, the GLA also announced the borough's successful bid for 'London Borough of Culture' for 2023, with an additional £1.3 million invested to support a programme designed to reach 250,000 participants, every single school in the borough, 300 volunteers and 1,500 creatives[32].

In 2021, ACE announced 54 priority places, which would see increased spending and support in specific location[33], as part of their overall delivery plan for 2021-24; Croydon was one of just five London boroughs included in this final list. Furthermore, according to the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC)'s interactive tool for mapping the creative industries across the UK[34], while Croydon sits within the wider London commuting zone – the largest of all established creative clusters in the UK , Croydon is also home to one

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[30] https://news.croydon.gov.uk/croydon-named-among-londons-first-creative-enterprise-zones/
[31] https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/arts-and-culture/culture-and-good-growth/explore-creative-enterprise-zones
[32] https://news.croydon.gov.uk/we-did-it-croydon-wins-london-borough-of-culture-2023/
[33] Locating 54 'Priority places' by balancing evidence of creative activity in the area with evidence of social need and where their own historic "investment and engagement is too low"
[34] Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, Creative Clusters: https://www.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=007e1de4a01a46b196ad2ccaed20eb3b&extent=-20.3307,49.5899,17.1766,59.5069

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of 15 micro-clusters within the Greater London area[35] - smaller but nonetheless significant congregations of creative and cultural businesses in a hyperlocal area.

In summary, Croydon is a part of London where funding for the creative and cultural sectors has been comparatively low, but has recently been the focus of renewed focus, investment and ambition. It felt then, in 2022, that Croydon would be a perfect location within the capital to explore conditions for practitioners and get a sense of the impact of these changes were having at the local level.

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[35] https://www.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=007e1de4a01a46b196ad2ccaed20eb3b&extent=-14.1540,50.2654,5.0172,55.4888

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ZERO MONETARY
BENEFITS
unless you do it
yourself sol

Managing your ink
Restrictive applications

COMPETITI
WITH OTHER
FREELANC

FREELANC

RISK

mornin
schedu
ACCESS
BILIT

flexibility
ibility

instability

Managing
energy

freedom
to breath

LONELY
ROAD

POWER

DECISION
MAKING

Build

The Workshop Findings

Most of the creative and cultural sector workers we met in Croydon were in at least two different roles and/or working across multiple DCMS subsectors. We were joined by a musician-turned-games designer, a film maker-cum-cultural venue manager and a jewellery designer-cum-community connector. The participants that joined us in the room were often expressing their creative practices and approaches across several mediums, and most were maintaining side hustles and part-time jobs to sustain a living.

Freedom comes with consequences

When asked the group what being freelance, self-employed and atypical worker had meant to them in 2022, straight away, one of the first answers was: *"a freedom to breathe"*. From there the group was keen to communicate the *"freedom"* and *"power"* inherent in their ability to self-express and explore a *"diversity of routes"* - not just within the creative and cultural sectors, but out in other sectors of the economy too. Several participants explained, for example, how they were planning to use their creative practices to support the health and wellbeing of Croydon residents, an area identified as being of increasing salience to policy makers locally. One participant explained their desire to use their craft making skills to *"bridge the gap"* between the elderly and the young in new intergenerational projects that could facilitate mutual understanding.

As the conversation progressed, it became clear that *"freedom"* in this context didn't just mean freedom of expression or the freedom to explore, but also a freedom to access and participate in work as diverse individuals. One participant explained: *"I didn't go to university…because I didn't do well in that. I loved my college course but…it wasn't me. I tend to work a lot better in the evenings and the world is set to a morning person's schedule. So being a freelancer means that I can, you know, pack my day towards the end, get the heavy stuff at the end"*.

Of course, this freedom came with its downside. Much like the freelancers in Truro and Rotherham, the Croydon participants described the turbulence that comes with not knowing when the next paid project would come, and the exhaustion of constantly generating a pipeline. They also pointed out that operating as an individual freelancer could be a *"lonely road"* and, again, much like the Truro group, they agreed that knowing themselves and the ways they like to work, alongside a self-discipline in workflow management, was vital to staying afloat.

The group also shared some of the challenges associated with running their own payroll (particularly when subcontractors were involved) and the management of contracts that

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can come with freelance life. One of the participants described how they had operated for many years as a successful digital games designer as an external contractor, and had not received appropriate accreditation for their work. Another shared how they struggled to *"be all things"* to their business - the marketing, accounting and project delivery departments all in one – as well as keep on top of their creative work.

Space to live and make

The theme of 'space' dominated our conversation with our Croydon group, who each reflected on how physical space had shaped their careers in quite different ways.

Firstly, it was clear that Croydon, as part of the larger urban network of London, benefited from a connected creative scene. One of the participants explained that getting to events, meeting up and connecting with people had helped them sustain a pipeline of work, but having moved further out of the area very recently, they were now feeling *"increasingly isolated"*. Another participant shared that, in the south London area, she enjoyed a level of support from the creative community that she hadn't experienced in her hometown in Yorkshire, which had encouraged her to stay in the area. However, the sense of connectedness we observed between the participants in the Truro workshop was not replicated in Croydon, and many of the participants had never met, and weren't aware of each other's work, beforehand.

Next, many of the participants shared that the affordability of Croydon in comparison to other parts of London was a huge draw for them. One participant explained: *"I live here because of the kind of work I do…working in contemporary art, it's very hard to live somewhere that isn't London because…[of] that critical mass of other artists…"*. When pressed on "why Croydon?", rather than other possible locations in the capital, he concluded: *"It's affordable [In the pas] there was nowhere else in London where I could have set up a studio"*.

For others, the local area was a source of some frustration. One of the younger participants who had lived in the area for most of her life, explained how she no longer *"felt inspired by the area"*. As a musician, she explained she often went further afield to find recording studios and spaces to create in. She also indicated that, now she was in her 20s, she felt there was far less activity and support for her in the area compared to when she was younger. She told us: *"when I was younger, there was a lot more for me to do… but as I got older, …there's no space for like…18 to 29…I don't know, there's like nothing creative or nowhere creative for us to go. So I go into other parts of London to be inspired…"*

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This participant went on to explain how she felt about events and opportunities for children were reducing, which several other participants in the room strongly agreed with: *"There was so much to do…every week…arts and crafts, acting, dancing…and it was all free it was all government funded…the kids are coming in have to pay now I wouldn't have been able to do that…[there was] no way that my parents could afford for me to sing, dance, act put on musicals, like while also at school… So [now] a lot of my friends parents, they all went in and volunteer because they realise how special it was for like us when we were there…"* One of our participants, a father himself, reflected on the impact of this and wondered if 10- 20 years down the line a reduction in exposure to the performing arts at a young age impact the creative ability and skills of the next generation.

As we continued to discuss the relationship between access to space and 'creative inspiration', it became clear that the participants held a shared frustration at both the lack of long-term, sustainable creative space in the area, but also general spaces and venues that inspire and excite. One freelancer shared: *"there are not so many…dynamic spaces where you can…finish work and go out and see people or interact with others and do what you do…"*

Even when we started to move away from 2022 and into what 2023 year looked like for them, once again the concept of space resurfaced. For many in the room, the lockdown had limited their creative growth: limiting opportunities to take part in professional practice and development, but also physically keeping them at home. One of the younger members of the group spoke on the frustrations of still living at home and the importance of independent space to practice: *"I feel like when it comes to music…I think a lot of people think that it just has to be in the studio, but also like being alone and actually being able to like listen to my thoughts and write that up – [getting] that all out is probably even more crucial than the time I spend in the studio. And my mother is a foster carer…I can't write music…obviously, my mother's job is incredible…[But] at the age of 25, I should be able to like, have my own space in my own one bed flat where I can still be a creative and it'd be affordable."*

For 2023 at least, it appeared that this group shared an underlying ambition: to get out, to move on, to explore and grow. On this need, one of the participants summarised: *"I think sometimes when we're stuck in one place, we create in a certain language in a certain way. So I want to explore my creative being in other spaces…"*

Use the empty spaces

Towards the end of conversation, as we invited views on possible policy responses to the challenges experienced in Croydon, it was therefore no surprise that the group expressed a

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longing for more engaging, creative and community orientated spaces in the area. They spoke about empty and underused spaces in the area and strategised together: *"even if [Croydon Council] rent [spaces] at affordable prices just to get the people in the community in there… it brings people out of their homes and it gets to talk about their experiences and use the new skills and things like that. These empty buildings are just depressing…"*

Work together to avoid the pitfalls

A more experienced freelancer talked of the painful career *"mistakes"* he had made along the way. He explained that, in 2023, he was going to lead his own projects with emerging creatives and ensure they were appropriately credited for their work. He also mused on experiences he'd had where he'd lost work with large clients at the last minute and whether more could not be done to protect freelancers from losing work, for example through more appropriate contracts and other protections.

Indeed, when we asked the group what their biggest piece of advice would be for someone new to the creative and cultural sectors, *"ask for help"* was the firmest, resounding nugget. They all agreed that it was time consuming to develop their own work, so connecting to others, learning from mentors and working together, perhaps even through more formal structures, would be critical for 2023.

Commissioned Artist: **Tara Kearney**

"This has been a project close to my heart. I needed to use my body and my resources to translate the polarities of joy, anger, frustration and freedom experienced by the freelancers interviewed. It felt important that the image be set in a public environment: a park. The conversations at the workshop often circled back to access to space: whether that be a studio, a workshop, an office, or even a home. I named the piece 'seize the space' in the hope that the tenacity of the freelancers would be recognised. I was lucky enough to work with Dee Dee (a dancer, photographer and director) who also experiences the turbulence of an artist's life. It was her editing skills and movement direction that created the ensemble you see before you"

Tara Kearney: Movement Practitioner, Yoga Teacher, Performer:
https://linktr.ee/pranatara

Photo by Duran 'Dee Dee' Abdullah: www.itsduran.com
https://www.instagram.com/duran_deedee/

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ROTHERHAM

In this section, we share a few headline statistics on Rotherham - the last on the 'Place' focussed workshops tour - and pull out some of the main points bubbling up from our discussion with the local creative and cultural sector workforce.

Rotherham snapshot

Rotherham is a large minster and market town, within the wider Metropolitan Borough of Rotherham and South Yorkshire Combined Authority (SYCA). At the 2021 census, Rotherham ranked 61st for total population out of 309 local authority areas in England, which is a fall of seven places in a decade.

ONS Census Data 2021	
Size km2	286.5
Pop (3.3% increase from the 2011 census)	265,800
Age (%)	
Aged 65 years and over	19.6
Aged 16-64 years	61.5
Aged 15 years and under	18.9
Ethnic group (%)	
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	5.3
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	1.1
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	1.4
White	91
Other ethnic groups	1.1
Labour Market (%)	
Economically active	57.8
Economically Inactive	42.2
Industry relevant to CWW (%)	
Publishing activities	0.1
Creative, arts and entertainment activities	0.3
Motion picture, video and television production, sound recording and music publishing activities	0.1
Libraries, archives, museums and other cultural activities	0.2
Travel to Work (%)	
Less than 10km	40.6
10km to less than 30km	18
30km and over	3.5
Works mainly from home	21

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Arts Council England Investment Programme	Amount	No of Orgs
NPO/IPSO/Transfer (23-26)	£568,851	3
NPO/IPSO/Transfer (22-23)	£188,851	2
NPO/IPSO/Transfer (18-22)	185,439	2

Levelling up Fund Round 1	Amount
Rotherham - Leisure Economy	£19,990,000.00
Rotherham Town Centre	£19,549,059.00

Why Rotherham?

When we started exploring regions with a balance of geography and typography across England, there were plenty options to explore within the Midlands and the North. Yet, when we explored places with evidence of cultural and creative growth, Rotherham provided an interesting and representative balance when it came to the criteria set out for our place selection.

As with Croydon, when ACE announced their original '54 priority Places', which would see an increase in creative and cultural spending and support[36], Rotherham was listed as one of 15 areas identified in the North. Furthermore, according to PEC, Rotherham is home to one of three micro-clusters – a smaller but significant pocket of creative activity – within the Sheffield commuting zone and within the much larger established creative cluster.

Additionally, in the past 10 years there has been a wave of innovative creative programming taking place across the borough. Rotherham is set to become to UK's Children's Capital of Culture in 2025 – a co-designed project kick started directly by the children and young people of Rotherham[37]. Furthermore, Rotherham is home to one of the ACE's 39 'Creative People and Places' projects, 'Flux Rotherham'; an action research programme, support by a core group of local partners, who co-design projects with local artists and community groups to increase local engagement in arts and culture.

Rotherham's investment in cultural activity, particularly in grassroots and co-designed projects, is an exciting and potentially transformative platform for the wider economy and the reputation of the borough; we therefore felt it would be a fascinating moment to speak to creative and cultural sector freelancers about if and how this new optimism had translated into their lived experiences.

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[36] Locating 54 'Priority places' by balancing evidence of creative activity in the area with evidence of social need and where their own historic "investment and engagement is too low"

[37] For the full story of the grass roots and co-designed project: https://www.childrenscapitalofculture.co.uk/about/

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Ability to say no

"Yes Yes 'Yes'"

Vs.

*

NON LINEA

LIBERATION fresh view new directions

↑ uncertainty

FREELANCE

SEASONALITY

SELF RESPONSIBILITY (to your clients)

GRIND

OWN HEALTH , , , ,

= ON 24/7 ——→ for the pipeline

The Workshop Findings

In our session in Rotherham, there was a strong 'artistic' representation in the room, with participants specialising in a variety of cross disciplinary forms including installation, social engagement, crit/commentary, puppet making, but also poetry, creative writing and education.

Having your own microphone

Starting the session, we asked what being freelance, self-employed, or atypical had meant to the participants in 2022. They explained that freelance life felt *"liberating"*, provided an ability to take your career in *"non-linear"* directions, to *"cross-pollinate"* creative disciplines and take projects in surprising directions; themes chiming heavily with our workshops in Croydon and Truro. The group explained that being freelance sometimes felt like *"having a microphone"*, being able to speak and create in an authentic and independent voice. However, just like in the other workshops, the participants told us that you must be incredibly *"dynamic and brave"* to operate in these sectors. Freelance life, they explained, creates huge sense of *"responsibility"*, to oneself and to one's clients; this required a good deal of confidence in one's own abilities and a commitment to working with integrity. It seemed that for the group in Rotherham, having the freedom to create was only made possible by an extreme form of dedication to getting there.

Seasonality

From the beginning of our discussion, the concept of seasonal working seemed to be at the front of some participants minds. They explained that seasonal working patterns could feel inbuilt into freelance work, seeing them switching from busier - and sometimes overworked - periods to *"fallow"* or *"dry months"*. Each of the participants expressed the negatives associated with this way of working, including; a lack of regular financial assurance generating a very natural fear and anxiety; a tendency to say *"yes, yes, yes"* to work when it comes in; and the need to continuously horizon scan to create pipeline.

While the group acknowledged that uncertainty was an underlying concern that never really goes away, some pointed to the more positive aspects to alternative patterns of work. For example, one participant explained how working at varying speeds, or focusing on different aspects of their work during different parts of the year, allowed for a more reflective productive creative process for them. One participant, an artistic commentator and critic explained: *"Seasonality I actually find to be quite interesting, because it means that I can sort of channel into what is actually going on in the art world and see how things sort of morph and shift depending on sort of trends you can see…"*

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Another artist explained how 2023 would be a year for them to *"go dark"* with their creative practice; that they would pivot to generating income through their pre-existing commercial skills while *"giving myself that time and space to really interrogate the concepts"*. As the art commentator explained further:

"…artists need a fallow time, sort of time where sort of the nutrients are returned to ourselves. I think that having this idea of rest being an active process of restoration, and healing and necessary development is a conversation that we can bring to the people that need to hear it: the fact that artists and freelancers don't work in a conventional way. And the means by which they gain capital, and hold capital is something that requires unconventional solutions…".

Accessibility

Another reoccurring theme of the Rotherham workshop was the idea of accessibility. One of our participants, a writer and educator, shared that a lack of sick pay for freelancers was a constant source of anxiety and concern. They also explained that, as an individual with Autism and Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), some of the administrative burden of freelancing can be more difficult for those with executive planning challenges: *"…I got my two ASD and ADHD diagnoses and my dyslexia when I was 30. So, there's a lot of people of my generation in the arts who aren't picked up but very often we struggle to fit into large systems of working and [traditional] team structures. And we like to do things in our own way. And we like to innovate in our own way…"*

This was echoed by one of the younger participants who, also an individual with ADHD, after leaving a more structured and disciplined school environment, found the unstructured *"freedom of freelance life"* somewhat overwhelming.

Another of the participants shared her frustration at the continued inaccessibility of project funding application processes. As creative practitioners, she explained, it was frustrating to have to continue to apply in a written format. The group agreed and pondered what it might look like for voice, video and other alternative methods of communication to be more commonplace within funding streams; supporting not only disabled creatives and practitioners more equitable opportunities, but to communicate intention and ambition in a different way.

Interestingly, on the morning of the Rotherham workshop, one of our participants was unable to join due to illness, so we agreed that we'd receive their input separately, via voice note; those reflections have been included in this report.

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A trusted community

As with the other groups, we spent a significant amount of our time talking about what it was like to be a freelancer specifically in Rotherham and the surrounding area compared to other parts of the country. Strikingly, one of our participants made the following observation: *"I'm from South Africa originally and then I moved to London and was there for like eight years…Then I moved to Rotherham in 2006…then I got the opportunity to move to Los Angeles. I wanted to come back to Rotherham, because I felt that [it] was one of the most poignant places in the world that I've ever lived…The art scene here is so different to everywhere else - like everyone here really cares about what's going on…"*

We asked them and the group to explain what made working in Rotherham so special. From the response this discussion generated, it was clear that there was a certain unique strength in the relationships between the individual artists and the support organisations in Rotherham. When we enquired further about how local organisations had supported the participants, they unanimously agreed it was about 'trust'. The youngest participant across all our workshop locations, explained: *"I've been lucky that I sort of had that bit of a head start to get contacts and start to know people… just the trust that… everyone…gave us permission to just sort of go… to do this thing… That was really nice, especially as a young person as well. Because a lot of the time people come to you and go 'oh you're only 20 you've not got the experience', but then because you've not got the experience, you can't find that work. And if you can't find that work, you don't get the experience. So you get stuck within a sort of loop. Just have someone go: here's a project, run with it…"*

Almost all the creative and cultural sector workers in the room who had engaged with ACE National Portfolio Organisations (NPO) locally agreed that the trust they were given was vital to their development as independent creatives. Without a leap of trust and a certain degree of risk-taking from local commissioning organisations, many of these young creatives would not get the experience they needed to develop their portfolio or grow as professionals. For the more experienced participants in the room, where a lack of evidence wasn't a concern, they explained that trust was also extremely important to them. It was a way for them to feel not only validated in their work but empowered to create confidently and expand their practice into new territories.

A spotlight on inclusion

While it was clear that Rotherham arts organisations, in the main, appeared to be engaging well and were trusted by the freelance community, we did spend some time discussing the issue of engagement and participating with minoritised ethnic communities. Participants in our group, from the British South Asian community in the area, described how at times,

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they felt like there were supported or directly engaged due to their ethnicity, rather than for their skill as an artist. One participant described: *"As a young woman, and a person of colour… it always kind of feels like that I never get to lead on things where it's just about doing something, it's always…got a hidden agenda of 'we want you to work with BAME'. I feel like that's a massive thing. But it is quite heavy for me as a person in Rotherham trying to be freelance…"*

Another shared: *"I'm kind of kind 50/50 with it…I want to be a representative of [BAME people] in the arts sector because, growing up, I didn't have that. I didn't have someone to look up to the same as me…the creative space isn't something that's promoted in the South Asian community, generally, from a wellbeing, space, mental health space, or even a career in the arts in any way…But at the same time, I'm a bit like, I don't want to be boxed into that."*

This was an important conversation, touching on the difficulties of developing diverse outreach and engagement activities, as well as work opportunities in an area that is predominately white British, and how such initiatives can be received by parts of the workforce that are underrepresented.

We need feedback

As we neared the end of the workshop, we asked the group for suggestions on what policy changes could make freelance life just that bit easier. As well as re-emphasising the accessibility of funding applications, and support in applying for opportunities, some in the group shared the importance of getting feedback on their work. They explained that sometimes, particularly with larger projects or bigger funding schemes, there wasn't much opportunity for feedback or evaluation once the work was finished. The group seemed to agree that receiving feedback on their work, projects and funding applications - however big or small - was a vital part in supporting them to grow and develop as freelance, self-employed and atypical creative and cultural sector workers.

An 'ear for the region'

The group also agreed that now they were moving into post-lockdown life, they were increasingly relishing opportunities to network again: to meet each other, find out what is going on, and support each other, practically and pastorally too. One participant commented that it was sometimes like *"…we need our own staffroom"* to interact, talk about what's going on and share issues or inspiration with each other. Another mused: *"[we need] somebody who kind of glues things together a bit and encourages connections and communication without agenda… somebody [who] understands the artists on the ground, and to be fuelling the fire of that network…just like the ear of the region."*

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Interestingly, one of the more experienced and established freelancers mentioned that in 2023, he wanted to spend more time offering work to younger artists. They explained; *"I think about how I would've wanted somebody like me in my position now to go, 'Hey, look, we're doing this' and share everything. If somebody was with me not just to help me, but to open that out that would be amazing…".*

This latter observation seems to confirm the former's observation about the need for a wider sharing of opportunities and projects: there was high demand for the more experienced practitioners work, there was room for their organisation to grow and they wanted someone to proactively share it with, but they simply didn't know who might be interested.

As we closed the workshop session, we asked the Rotherham group what their piece of advice would be for freelancers starting a career in their subsectors. One participant recommended: *"don't put your eggs in one basket",* and that new freelances should always consider utilising the full breath of their skills, working across as many sectors and opportunities as possible. Yet, for their final piece of advice, the group resoundingly agreed *"Don't do it alone".* As we heard from the Croydon workforce, freelancers in Rotherham felt that much less of a burden when working and collaborating with others.

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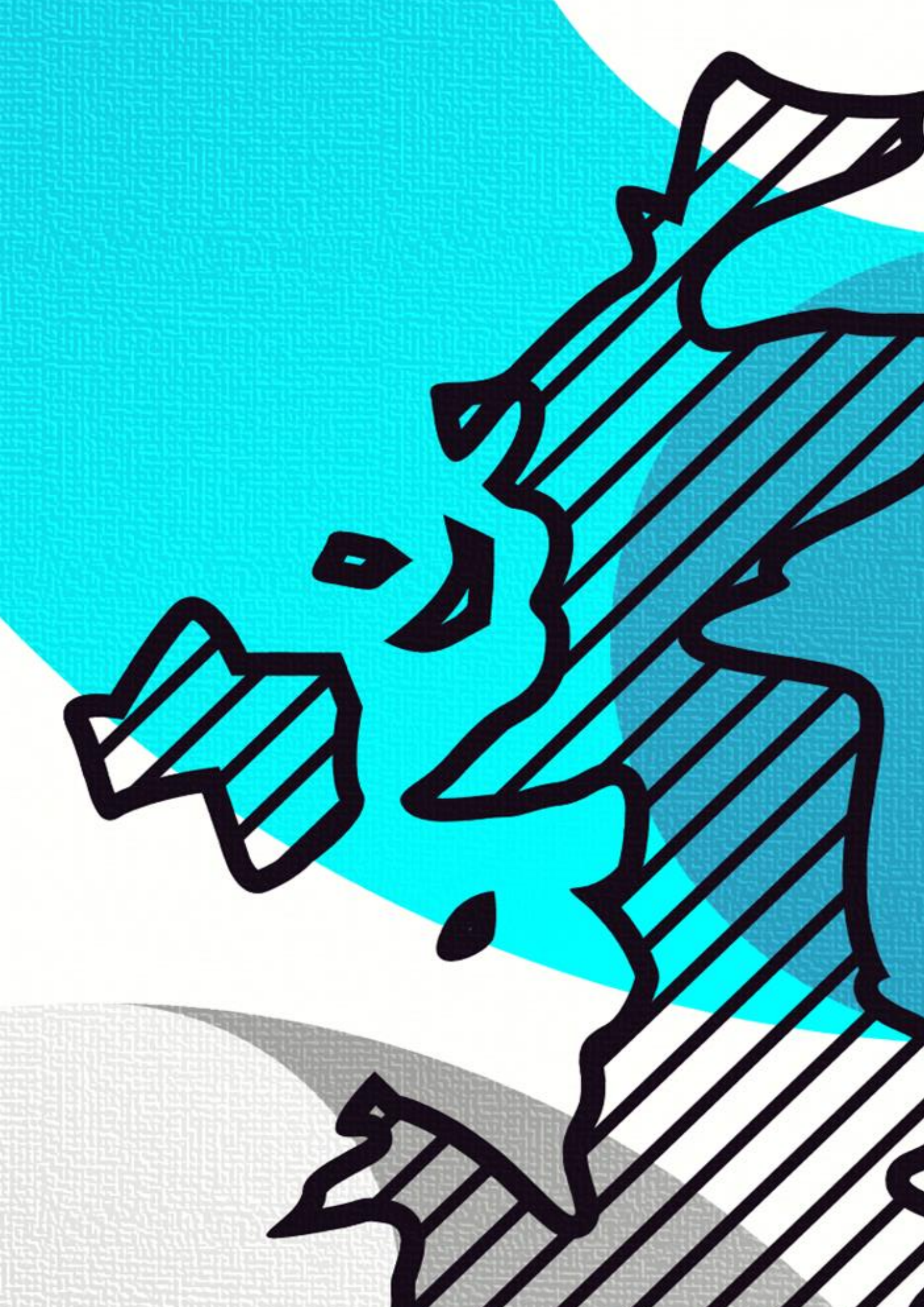
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Commissioned Artist: **Jo Peel**

"A tree reaches over the top of the image and is supported by ropes. The tree is allowed to rest and recuperate whilst the seasons pass by. Seasonality is an important aspect of self-employment, being able to respond to the 'seasonal aspects' of life, working differently and with different levels of focus at different points in the year, including having a fallow time; rest as an actives process of restoration.

The tree at the bottom of the image is held up by a crane, whilst also spilling its guts (depicted as bricks) to represent the struggle of self-employment and the uncertainty that surrounds it. The crane represents the changing life of cities, an ever-present symbol of development. The building and its reflected windows show the multi-facets to creative practice and the reflection gained from time and space. They also reflect images of Rotherham, showing how place is intrinsically linked to practice but that it is also important to look out at a wider context.

The megaphone (shouting about our practice and connecting with people) sits upon a table, held by many different supports, representing the importance of creating networks and "not going it alone", as well as the importance of different facets to your practice and not relying on a singular income stream. The egg is both a recognition of not putting all our eggs in one basket, and also representative of new ideas, allowing them time to gestate during this fragile period of fertilisation - until they are ready for growth!"

https://www.jopeel.com/

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Our Observations

Three places, three conversations and three diverse groups of freelance, self-employed and atypical workers - each with very different perspectives and individual stories to tell.

Although we do not feel it is appropriate for Culture Commons to draw concrete policy positions from a small qualitative cohort at this stage, with the privilege of getting to spend time in each location and in reviewing and comparing the material collected across each workshop, we've been able to identify few consistent themes that suggest common issues affecting the lives of creative and cultural sector workers, irrespective of where they may be located. In addition, we've identified several place-based variances that could help signpost decision makers towards more appropriate policy in the future.

We hope our observations will help to keep new insights on the freelance creative and cultural sector workforce up the policy agenda at the local and national levels, as well as help galvanise the sense of urgency we believe is still necessary from decision makers to support a creative and cultural sector workforce that is fit for the 21st century: innovative and equitable.

1.   *Place matters*

When we asked participants in each of our workshops whether they themselves felt that 'place' influences the ways they work, the resounding answer was: yes.

From the astounding geological assets on display at the world class filming locations in Cornwall, to the relationships of mutual trust and reciprocity being formed between artists and commissioning organisations in Rotherham, we saw evidence of the ways that local assets can, with the right support and approaches, unlock opportunities for local creative and cultural sector workers. Therefore, the most dominant, yet perhaps the simplest of all the observation we can draw from this first series of workshops, is just **how important a local environment (physical, geographical and social) is in shaping the careers and life experiences of freelancers in the creative and cultural sectors.** In an increasingly globalised and post-pandemic world, that sees digital and online policy in the ascendance (particularly true relation to the production, dissemination and consumption of creative and cultural content), we want to emphasise how hyper-local physical infrastructures and programmes of activity will continue to play a critical role in enabling workers in our sectors to reach their full potential.

While the participants did seem to share a 'universal freelancer experience' (for example, all sharing frustrations at the heavy workload and the anxiety associated with finding their next project), in terms of the work they were able to secure and the projects they were

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already involved with, these were **often deeply connected to their local area and the social networks they were able to generate within them.**

Transport and connectivity

There were a several moments across the workshops when participants explained how physical isolation, whether through not having a car or having to move further out of town, actually hindered their opportunities to connect with work and generate income. Geographical isolation was a particular factor in Truro, where participants said they often felt disconnected to other parts of the UK. Interestingly, transport was not raised as a concern by participants in Croydon, perhaps reflecting the comparatively developed transport infrastructure we see linking up the capital locally, nationally and even internationally. The spatial differences we see between Truro and Croydon clearly raises much broader questions about the suitability of national level policy frameworks and programmes that are often structured around more urban areas. **Culture Commons will continue to call for national level policy and funding mechanisms that meet the needs of non-urban and more rural areas.**

Thankfully, we're now seeing increasing evidence and acknowledgements of the contributions that the creative and cultural sectors can make towards the economies of local places. For example, the Local Government Association (LGA) report 'Cornerstones of Culture' brings together a vast wealth of evidence, including from Culture Commons, that the creative and cultural sectors can be crucial drivers of local economic growth and a healthy tourism economy[38]. In addition, Arts Council England (ACE) find that this growing understanding is also moving into the public consciousness, with half of all adults in England now wanting to see more culturally unique experiences on their high streets[39].

Local pride in place

The cultural support organisations in Rotherham, coupled with the comparatively low cost of living in the area, seems to have made for a good mix that has resulted in the most future-positive workshop in this 'Place' series; people born, raised and now working in the creative sectors within the wider South Yorkshire area, as well as those from further afield who now call the area home, seemed to be thriving creatively in the area. Conversely, as we observed in Croydon, if local areas do not support their local workforce appropriately, they could see creatives looking elsewhere for inspiration, and possibly even moving out of the area altogether, taking their talents and potential with them.

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[38] Local Government Associations commission on culture (see pg 15):
https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/12.30%20Culture%20Commission%20Report%20AA.pdf
[39] Local Government Association case studies on culture-led regeneration: https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/culture-tourism-leisure-and-sport/cornerstones-culture/section-two-why-invest-local-culture

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It struck us during the workshop sessions just how well-placed the creative workers we met are in helping local areas, including local authorities, to both understand and articulate their distinctive local identities regionally, nationally and internationally too. The City of Culture programme and other cultural "mega events" often see local creative workforces showcased, but of course smaller interventions that may have less profile but also celebrate local cultural heritage can be equally as important to local people. **We propose that decision makers in local places should continue to experiment with ways to celebrate the creative and cultural life of their area, through locally initiated City of Culture, Borough of Culture or other place-specific models more appropriate to the area, ensuring local people, and the workforce, have an opportunity to contribute to the design, delivery and evaluation.**

2. *Flexible working is the future*

64% of our workshop participants were working in at least two of the subsectors we wanted to focus on for this project. During the workshop sessions, it became clear that many either worked across different subsectors in order to sustain an income from their creative practice, or in different sectors of the economy altogether, for example by working *"day jobs"* for additional sources of income. The group in Rotherham actively recommended this approach to newcomers into their sectors, proposing that it can be helpful not to *"put their eggs in one basket"* when thinking about income security. In this regard, though most of the participants in each location self-identified as 'freelance' when asked as part of the sign-up process, the anecdotal evidence we picked up during the sessions strongly suggests that the representation of our 'atypical' worker category could have been much higher than reported.

Evidence gathered from each workshop suggests interdisciplinary and mixed sub-sectoral working is becoming, and will continue to become, more commonplace. **Local and national level decision makers may therefore want to consider reframing some support programmes for the creative and cultural sector workforce into something more holistic: getting beyond subsector silos towards new subsector-neutral and place-focussed interventions.** This could see innovative and distinctive collaborations sprouting up across the country, making the best use of the local creative workforce in each area and helping to drive innovation. Of course, subsectors-neutral approaches should not replace important programmes that meet the specific needs of different DCMS subsectors: it is our contention that both approaches can, and should, work together in mutually reinforcing ways.

To truly unlock the potential of freelancers in the creative and cultural sectors (and across the economy as a whole) methods for recording occupational data and the tax regime will

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need to be updated to keep up with, the ever-changing working patterns so richly articulated by our workshop participants. This will help the creative and cultural workforce to move across different DCMS subsectors, different sectors of the economy and across different employment statuses without being penalised, for example as some of the freelance, creative and cultural sector workers excluded from UK Government support packages experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic[40].

3.   *Networks make all the difference*

In each of the workshop sessions, participants explained that the often-self-contained nature of freelance, self-employed, and atypical employment can have a detrimental impact on mental health and wellbeing. We continue to see this coming through loud and clear from surveys being run by the sub-sectoral freelance networks that emerged during the pandemic.

Additionally, participants were clear that most of their opportunities came through *"word of mouth"* - *"this person who knows this person, put me in touch with this person"*. Indeed, *"don't do it alone"* was the advice offered up by the Croydon participants. Again, as a simple and general observation across all three locations, this could have been quite easily missed. Whilst it is hard for us to be sure without having explicitly asked each participant about income levels from their creative work, the more connected a participant was in each area, the more positively they described their experience and the more sustainable their operation appeared to be.

However, it was clear that not all the networks were not evenly distributed and further support in network development could help maximise what opportunities that are already there. In Rotherham for example, whilst a more established participant had active collaboration opportunities readily available to share, another younger participant didn't know where to go next to get work, and another commented that she found it hard to reach young people in the area with her service offer. On this, a key recommendation from one of the participants was to have a dedicated 'local networker' acting as an 'ear for the region' to connect and inform local creatives about opportunities

Despite the evidence of the importance of networks, we know that investments for such support activities can be difficult to 'sell' to policy makers given the difficulty in measuring outcomes. **This is why Culture Commons will continue to work with policy colleagues across subsectors, as well as with the research community, to spotlight the critical role that networks play in developing skills and opportunities of creative freelancers.**

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[40] See 'Excluded UK' website for many examples of creative and cultural sector workers being excluded from state support during the Covid-19 pandemic: https://excludeduk.org

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In parallel to informal network development, more formalised structures such as collectives and cooperatives (perhaps facilitated by local and/or combined authorities and key anchor institutions in the area) could work to pool together the skills and resources sitting within local freelance communities in more economical ways. More formalised models of cooperation could also help freelancers to engage more readily with the benefits that accumulate from 'Community Wealth Building' initiatives, including accessing procurement opportunities.

Each of our findings on networks are very much in-line with those of our research partners at the Centre for Cultural Value who found that access to, and involvement in, networks were a significant factor in the ability of freelancers to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. **Together, we have already made several recommendations to UK Government on networks, including the establishment of a new national-level coordinating body that can connect-up, fund and support the many subsector- and place-specific networks that have emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic[41].**

4.   More physical space is needed

While the issue of space came through the loudest in our Croydon workshop, the need for it was absolutely echoed in all the workshops. Primarily, participants were keen to express their need for access to flexible and affordable space on a more sustainable and permanent basis. This wasn't just about getting into more traditional studio or recording space - participants were clearly hungry for places that inspire, facilitate connections with others and where they could find out more about what is going on in the local area. *"We need a staffroom!"* as one of the Rotherham participants described.

Combining the qualitative evidence across all three of the workshops and the mounting evidence we see in the policy arena, **we believe that local leaders should carefully consider increasing investment in tailored workspaces and workspace schemes for freelancers.** Of course, we do acknowledge that each of our three workshop locations have different spatial priorities to contend with, as well as different assets available to them. This means that each area's response to spatial needs will likely look very different in each place. Yet, as our participants told us, space must move beyond *"meanwhile"* uses. **We propose that Community Interest Companies (CIC) and Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIO) with clear asset locks could support longer-term tenancies that enable creatives to base themselves in an area with real confidence.**

Many national level funding opportunities could support this kind of activity, including for the 'Levelling Up Fund', 'Shared Prosperity Fund' and 'Community Ownership Fund' - which

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[41] See this and other recommendations to the UK Government here: https://www.culturecommons.uk/post/culture-in-crisis

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could help local creatives take ownership of key buildings and assets that might otherwise be at risk. We also know that many councils have already used national funding pots to revitalise existing infrastructure to put them to better use[42].

In our recent paper on Creative Improvement Districts (CIDs)[43], we set out how the wider creative and cultural sectors can generate income and footfall to regenerate high streets and town centres. Mechanisms like this are not just about opening up new space to creatives, although this is, of course, an important part of the puzzle; they are also about building a microcosm of mutually reinforcing creative and ancillary sectors (e.g. night time economy, hospitality, retail) to deliver economic and social outcomes in a local community. From what was being shared in each of our workshops, such models could be ideal vehicles for both meeting the spatial needs of creative freelancers, and addressing some of the wider social policy priorities in each place, ultimately securing a longer-term and sustainable hub for the workforce.

5.   *Professional and personal growth must be considered*

From our conversations in Cornwall, it's clear that career progression for mid-level professionals has become a real area for concern. Not being able to access repeat funding, a limited capacity in local opportunities, combined with the feeling of being geographically isolated from other key places means our participants in Cornwall felt at real risk of stagnation. This leads us to the question; what more can be done to grow mid-career creative and cultural sector freelancers in different parts of the country?

A role for the private sector

Participants in Cornwall discussed how many private companies, travelling to the area for location-based work, had often overlooked local talent. Ensuring activity from external companies brings benefits to the local economy, including in employment and skills development this generates, has long been part of the sustainable development agenda and continues to drive many third sector 'green economy' initiatives such as the B-Lab's 'Corp B' assessment framework[44]. **Medium and large companies operating in the UK should continue to consider the sustainability of their operations and how they can better work with the micro and small creative and cultural sector organisations in the area**, **as well as tap into the local workforce through established networks.** Local leaders could also consider locally based schemes, such as 'Good Work' initiatives being

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[42] See Local Government Association recent on culture: https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/culture-tourism-leisure-and-sport/commission-culture-and-local-government/culture-commission

[43] See our 'Creative Improvement Districts' commissioned by University of Manchester: https://www.culturecommons.uk/post/creative-improvement-districts

[44] See the B-Corp website: https://www.bcorporation.net/en-us

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rolled-out by Metro Mayors[45], that spotlight private organisations, whether SME, medium or large, that are already developing inclusive practices. Tailored funding programmes could be part of the mix, especially if delivered by combined or local authorities with a clear skills strategy and in partnerships with creative and cultural sector employers and further education institutions locally.

Developing Bridges

We wondered how 'bridging programmes' could encourage collaborations between workers in different parts of the UK and help in the exchange of knowledge, skills and access to local assets across talent pools. **Thought could be given to 'project exchanges' or domestic 'twinning programmes' that bring networks from one part of the country together with another,** perhaps linked to the legacy activities associated with the UK City of Culture programme or through innovative town-, borough- and region-wide networks and bodies such as the M11 group of combined authorities.

Opportunities in public services

There is an increasing volume of research evidencing the ability of creative and cultural activity to support positive outcomes in physical and mental health, local economic regeneration, educational attainment and intercultural dialogue. But, *"We need to foster cultural awareness in civic organisations"* one participant from Cornwall told us unequivocally. We know that many public sector organisations are, as with the publicly funded cultural sector, under considerable financial strain at the moment. By working together more closely, wider civil society and the cultural sector could deliver both statutory and non-statutory public service in new ways, and closer to home, than ever before.

Building strategic links that extend beyond traditional creative and cultural sectors would not only capitalise on the trends we've seen since the pandemic for the public to want to engage with cultural activity closer to home, but also provide high quality work opportunities for freelancers. **We'll continue to work with our national partners, including the NHS, to communicate the ways in which freelancers in the creative and cultural sectors could play a more central role in social proscribing activities, and with local authorities who are looking to work with creative freelancers to bring creative practices and methodologies into town planning and engagement processes.**

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[45] Just one example of the use of 'good employment' charters including usage in the creative and cultural sector itself, would be West of England Metro Mayor Dan Norris: https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/news/wallace-gromits-makers-aardman-first-to-sign-up-to-metro-mayors-good-employment-charter/

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6. Locally based creative and cultural support organisations should be distributors of freelance opportunities

In Rotherham, it was clear that several ACE are truly connected to many of the participants we had in the room These relationships were clearly vital in offering opportunities that empower local creatives at earlier career stages to deliver projects through relationships of *"trust"* while removing some of the concerns participants had around the levels of risk that national grant giving bodies were willing to take, which was perceived to be increasingly low. Trusting the local workforce seemed to be creating quicker routes into work for creatives needing exposure, experience and development.

From our small collection of conservations, we can say with some confidence that ACE investments for NPOs in Rotherham are generating several positive outcomes for freelancers and we are looking forward to watching how those outcomes compound since an uplift for the area in the ACE's 2023-2026 funding round[46]. On witnessing the effectiveness of trust based approached, **we believe all NPOs and other grant-giving organisations in receipt of, or distributing, public funds should consider how to build-in such trust intensive programmes to *"irrigate"* local creative workforces much more quickly.**

Though few specific national funding schemes were mentioned in the workshops, ACE's 'Developing Your Creative Practice' (DYCP)[47] did surface on several occasions. Importantly, creatives at very different stages of their careers expressed how helpful and straightforward the application process was to access. In some cases, funding obtained through the scheme was being used to help the freelance community to develop more meaningful relationships with local cultural support organisations in their area. **We encourage ACE to maintain, and – where possible – increase funding allocated towards the DYCP programme.** It could also be worthwhile reviewing where take-up of DYCP was low, and the factors involved, with a view to moving the programme towards a non-competition-based model of investment that gets funds to areas, and the local freelance workforce, that would benefit from such investment most.
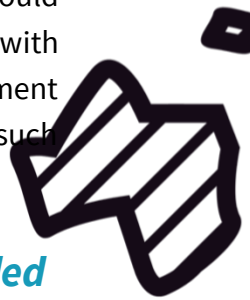
7. Better engagement with under-represented groups is needed

From the demographic profile of those applying to our workshops, **we know there is more to do more to reach and enable particular demographic groups to access these types of policy discussions and research opportunities.**

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[46] See Arts Council England full NPO round announced late 2022: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/news/ps383-million-new-funding-north
[47] Details of the Arts Council England's current 'Developing Your Creative Practice' programme: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/dycp

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In addition, from our Rotherham discussion, it was also reported that the South Asian community felt as if engagement with them was more about their ethnicity than their practice and talents. We didn't have further discussion on race and ethnicity within the other locations, so **we believe it would be beneficial to carry out further discussions to understand how places, particularly smaller towns and rural areas, might ensure authentic, balanced, and representative workforces are engaged and supported in the local creative and cultural sectors.** Given that minoritised ethnic groups were some of the demographics most likely to lose working hours during the COVID-19 pandemic, this form of engagement is vital to get right.

From our discussions with our LGBTQIA+ participants, we were struck at how their creative practice was strongly linked to their sense of identity; with their practice informing and ameliorating their expression of self, gender and sexuality, and vice versa. **We would be interested to work with like-minded stakeholders, to explore the role of the creative and cultural sectors in LGBTQIA+ health and wellbeing; and, in particular, how this varies in different urban and rural places.**

Lastly, during the Croydon workshop, one of the participants noted that working class artists in the area felt increasing pushed out by the slow creep of gentrification and spoke of larger creative and cultural institutions role within this. Recent evidence from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre seems to confirm this, finding that around 200,000 working class creatives are missing from the creative industries[48]. **At Culture Commons we believe that creative and cultural sectors hold the potential to regeneration local economies and high streets. Yet, from our workshop discussions we've been reminded that any cultural strategy aimed at supporting the regeneration of place-based economies must include local working-class people and creatives, guarding against the unintended impacts of gentrification.**

While we touched on issues relating to diversity and inclusion of different demographic groups throughout our workshop discussions, we feel we have unearthed more questions that we had space to address. This is an important stage to be at in of itself, and we therefore believe it would be highly beneficial to conduct further workshops, focussed on different demographic groups.

8.   *Employment structures require a serious review*

We were struck during our discussions that several participants mentioned how, as neurodiverse individuals, they favoured a freelance, self-employed or atypical working

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[48] Creative Industries Policy and Evidence centre research on workers from working class backgrounds
https://pec.ac.uk/news/just-16-of-people-in-creative-jobs-are-from-working-class-backgrounds-and-those-from-privileged-backgrounds-more-likely-to-land-a-job-experience-autonomy-and-progression-and-shape-what-goes-on-stage-page-and-screen

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pattern because it enabled them to work with themselves, rather than against. Participants in Croydon and Rotherham shared that more flexible, even seasonal, working patterns, such as the ability to work different hours, or on different projects helped them not only access employment, but also flourish in their creative practices. However, given that the participants were clear about the downsides of the freelance life, including hidden or free work, anxiety of generating pipeline and no sick or special leave policies, we know that these benefits come with considerable cost and risk, producing, in our view, a zero net benefit for many.

We therefore believe that it is imperative to explore how PAYE structures can be more flexible and responsive to the diversity of 21st century working patterns, alongside how freelancers can be provided with baseline benefits readily available to those in PAYE structures (such as sick pay, maternity and paternity leave, holiday pay etc), to begin to balance out the discrepancies. Unlocking the power of seasonal working, empowering individuals to work to their own strengths, whilst also providing crucial statutory protections and entitlements, could be crucial to unlocking the full economic and social potential of the creative and cultural sector workforce.

Culture Commons will be sharing our observations on employment structures with colleagues at Creative UK in relation to their 'Redesigning Freelancing' programme[49]; the PEC's ongoing 'Good Work Review[50]'; and will be renewing our calls for a UK Government 'Commissioner for Freelancers' so that some of the issues the participants raised in the workshops can be seriously addressed for the benefit of the UK economy and workforce as a whole. We know that the UK's creative and cultural workforce are often at the forefront of the 'future of work', and that the UK economy, and wider society, could benefit substantially if employment practices keep pace with them.

9.   We need to creative more opportunities for local input

During the course of our workshops, we noticed just how many of the participants, in all three areas, strongly welcomed the opportunity to share their option on what was happening in their local area and share their ideas and solutions on what could help. As some of the participants in Truro proposed, as creative thinkers and problem solvers, the creative workforce could support with the realisation of cross-cutting policy challenges faced in an area.

We believe that more should be done, both at the local and national level, to engage the workforce in solving the problems facing their sector. Our proposed 'Culture Forum'

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[49] Creative UK's 'Redesigning Freelancing' activity: https://www.wearecreative.uk/creative-uk-launches-redesigning-freelancing/
[50] Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre's 'Good Work Review': https://pec.ac.uk/news/good-work

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programme could be one way to do support this[51]; locally embedded mechanisms that would see the creative and cultural sectors, the associated workforce, the public and decision makers brought together to co-create a cultural strategy for an area. We will continue to develop this thinking with partners.

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[51] Culture Commons recommendations to UK Government from 2022: https://www.culturecommons.uk/post/culture-in-crisis

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Next Steps

In the early months of 2023, we will ensure key decision makers in government and within the industry, both locally and nationally, receive copies of this 'Creative Workforce Workshops' report on 'Place'. We'll ensure that our findings are shared with Creative UK as they consider their 'Freelance Charter' work and the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre as they continue with their 'Good Work' review, as well as Metro Mayors as we collaborate together ongoing place-based initiatives. We'll also share with the Creative Industries Council and the DCMS as they develop future visions for our sectors that will shape development and funding for some time to come.

At Culture Commons HQ, we'll be keeping each 'Creative Workforce Workshops' report, and the project design, showcased in a digital format that will keep the voice of creative and cultural sectors of 2022 archived for future reference. However, we believe there is a future for the 'Creative Workforce Workshops' in 2023.

The funding profile and values we imbued in our 'Place' workshops has meant that, on this occasion, we were only able to focus on places within England. Furthermore, we've gathered significant learnings from running the 2022 round, including that engagement and outreach is needed to ensure more accurate representation across minoritised ethnic, gender, LGBTQIA+, socio-economic and disabled groups. Given the creative and cultural sectors can be very different in each place, we acknowledge that we have only scratched the surface on differential lived experiences and unique conditions faced by individuals and subsectors.

We are confident that further rounds of 'Creative Workforce Workshops' would add vital colour and depth to the observations and principles we've begun to establish here. We hope that in 2023 we will be able to create further 'snapshots' of evidence across each of the devolved administrations, diverse demographic groups and different subsectors, to capture as representative and accurate a reflection of the lived experiences of the creative and cultural workforce as we are able. This work will continue to feed into our ongoing advocacy efforts on behalf of our clients and partners, and for DCMS subsectors more broadly.

We've been so encouraged by the standard and brilliance of our artist interpretations that we want to continue with our ambition to fuse policy with creative practice. We want to speak to representative groups described above and capture the sentiment of these conversations through increasingly innovative mediums such as dance, music and theatre, and continue to capture this together in living galleries of expression that can support in policy advocacy efforts.

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Our Partners

Arts Council England

Arts Council England are the national development agency for creativity and culture. We have a set out in our strategic vision in 'Let's Create' that by 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. We invest public money from Government and The National Lottery to help support the sector and deliver this vision.

Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Paul Hamlyn Foundation was established by Paul Hamlyn in 1987. He died in 2001 and left most of his estate to the Foundation, creating one of the largest independent grant-making foundations in the UK. We use our resources to support social change, working towards a just and equitable society in which everyone, especially young people, can realise their full potential and enjoy fulfilling and creative lives.

Art Ultra

ArtULTRA supports the development of emerging artists and artistic projects in order to create a more diverse and vibrant art world. ArtULTRA was launched in 2021 by Alice Black, former director of London's Design Museum. Through its digital platform, it gives emerging artists access to an extensive database of opportunities, publishes monthly artist features and has recently launched artwork sales. ArtULTRA also works with businesses and institutions to create artist-led projects.

Tyller A Nerth

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Tyller A Nerth (Cornish for 'A Place of Energy') is Truro's Cultural Compact. We are a collective of 26 strategic partners in Truro and Cornwall that ensure cultural infrastructure and the spirit of collaboration enables everyone to benefit from culture and for the cultural ecology to thrive. We were very pleased to invite freelancers from Truro to the conversation and hope that this report can help up to leverage more support for their excellent work.

Stanley Arts

Stanley Arts is one of South London's premiere arts and performance venues, providing our local community with a vital home for cultural expression and discovery. As a radically inclusive space we seek to foreground under-represented voices, providing artists of colour and LGBTQ+ creatives with a platform to reach out to audiences across South London and beyond.

Children's Capital of Culture

In 2025 Rotherham will become the world's first Children's Capital of Culture, designed and delivered by local children and young people aged 0-to-25. The journey to 2025 has already begun, with inclusive opportunities for young people to develop their skills and talents, arts programmes designed to boost confidence, resilience, and wellbeing, and a diverse range of festivals, performances, and cultural activities for everyone to enjoy. You can find out more about Children's Capital of Culture by visiting: www.childrenscapitalofculture.co.uk

Flux Rotherham

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Flux Rotherham creates art projects and events with communities. From festivals filled with music, dance and outdoor arts experiences to exhibitions, creative workshops and conversations. We are one of 39 programmes being developed across England as part of its Creative People and Places programme. Creative People and Places is a Arts Council programme which focuses on parts of the country where involvement in creativity and culture is significantly below the national average. Each project is completely unique to its area and communities, testing how to grow arts provision in ways that are relevant and lasting.

Hall for Cornwall

As a social enterprise and charity, we're all in backers of creative brilliance. We bring great shows to Cornwall. We make great work. We do it all independently. We bolster schools and communities with projects that let people feel the power of performance. We support artists and practitioners who are creating original work and offer footholds for the next generation of talent to get their unique perspective out to the wider world. We house creative businesses forging the industries future. And we're constantly amazed by what our audiences, collaborators, participants and teams make possible.

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Annexes

Annex A: Interview Questions

Session One: Being a freelance, self-employed, or atypical worker in the Creative and Cultural sectors in 2022?

Your experience of 'Being Freelance'
- What does being Freelance, self-employed or atypical, as opposed to PAYE, mean to you?
- What do you think are the main challenges and main benefits, of your employment status within the work you do?
- Think back to 2019. How would you compare your career today to how it looked then?

Your local place
- Do you prefer to work with clients locally or further afield?
- Are there any local networks or organisations who have supported you in your career?
- Do you think where you live influences the kind of work you do?
- How do you come across opportunities and generate work?

Your word for 2022
- Can you write down one word/phrase that describes how it felt to be a freelancer in your industry in 2022

Session Two: Being a free, self-employed, or atypical worker in the Creative and Cultural Sectors in 2023 and beyond

- What will does 2023 look like for you? [Open]
- What are your main concerns for 2023?
- What are you excited about for 2023?
- What are your ambitions?

Your advice
- If you could get the UK Government, or your local authority, to make one practical change to support you in your freelance career, what would it be?
- What would be your biggest piece of advice for people considering becoming a self-employed or atypical worker in your sector?

Your word for 2023
- Can you write down one word to describe what you hope 2023 will look like for you as a freelancer?

Annex B: Data on Participants

From our shortlist of 29 participants (one of our final 30 did not arrive on the day of the workshop).

- Mostly (64%) worked across several subsectors although:
  - were most active within the Arts Sub sector (78%) and Music, performing and visual arts sub sector (67%)
  - 52% categorised their working pattern as freelance, 41% selected self-employed and 7% atypical

Where data relating to diversity was disclosed:

- 42% identified as Cis Female, 33% Cis Male and 25% identified as either Trans or Non-Binary
- 67% identified as White British/white other, 21% identified as Black or Black British, 8% as Mixed Heritage and 4% as 'other'
- Largest group aged represented was 45-54 (35%) but equally spread across the remaining categories; 15-24 (13%), 25-34 (17%), 35-44 (17%), 55-64 (13%), 65-75 (4%)
- 25% identified as disabled
- 68% identified as Heterosexual but with an LGBTQIA representation of 42%

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Licensing and citation information

This report was produced by Culture Commons Ltd as part of the 'Creative Workforce Workshops' programme – a series of workshops collating evidence of the experiences of the UK's freelance, self-employed and atypical workforce in the creative and cultural sectors.

The full digital version of the project can be found at www.culturecommons.uk

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