RESEARCH INTO FREELANCE PRACTITIONERS
REPORT TO THE ARTS COUNCIL OF NORTHERN IRELAND

MARCH 2021
Arts Council’s response to this report

This important piece of research highlights the vulnerability faced by freelance artists working in Northern Ireland which has been deepened and brought into sharper focus by the Covid-19 pandemic. This report identifies the need to find new ways to support the development, creation and production of small to mid-scale work, on an independent basis.

We would like to extend our thanks to the 58 artists who contributed their time to completing the survey, the findings of which provided an extremely vivid and detailed picture of life during the pandemic and clarity in terms of the supports need as we emerge from lockdown.

The Arts Council is working closely with funders and sector bodies to develop a responsive and realistic programme of supports that meets the range of needs identified in the report and will publish further details later in the year.
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INTRODUCTION

THE BRIEF

Annabel Jackson Associates Ltd was appointed to carry out this research in January 2021. The brief was to explore the needs of freelance artists seeking to develop, create and produce small to mid-scale work on an independent basis.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology consisted of:

- A brief review of the literature on the impact of Covid-19 on freelance artists in the UK.
- Consultation with Arts Council officers and the Freelance Theatre Collective to clarify questions and practical possibilities.
- A survey of artists to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the operational possibilities. The original plan was to interview 10-15 artists. However, an initial call for interviewees received 58 responses, so we decided to move to an online survey so that everyone was included.

These were the questions used in the consultation:

- What are the drivers for this change? To what extent are they about a desire for artist voice, greater environmental consciousness and improving the wellbeing of artists as well as the financial aspect? To what extent are they about crises caused by the pandemic and to what extent about long term corrections needed in the sector?
- What are you envisaging? What are the different elements, conditions and consequences? Is this one vision or many?
- Where do audiences fit? Is your vision strengthened or diluted by a focus on new audiences (new defined in terms of geography, age or background)?
- Where does artistic practice fit in? What new approaches will be enabled by this approach? Where are the limitations i.e. what kinds of work would not suit this approach?
- Are there any practical issues that need to be addressed in the design of the programme?
- What would/should be different about this programme compared to other sources of funding?
- What would make the best possible case?
BACKGROUND ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

Statistics and stories about the impact of Covid-19 on the arts emerged from early 2020. Not all reports state the month in which they were produced, which is needed to interpret the results. Research carried out early in the year is likely to substantially understate the impact of the pandemic since the scale of the lockdowns was not yet clear.

Where reports refer to the differential impact across the artforms, comments tend to emphasise that the situation was most severe for the dance and theatre sectors and for freelancers.

IMPACTS ON ARTISTS

Detailed interviews with 65 UK dance artists that we carried out last summer for Pavilion Dance SE and Surf the Wave¹ suggested Covid-19 had three main effects on artists:

▪ Exposed artists’ vulnerability. The portfolio lifestyle was no protection from Covid-19 because financial losses were comprehensive. Artists lost income from cancelled events, closure of colleges or teaching establishments, lost ticket sales, reduced commercial income, withdrawal of sponsorship, inability to travel and take up residencies, and low or no reimbursement for shows that were distributed online. Even payments that were in the system were delayed where staff were furloughed. Artists lost working time to home schooling and the demands of retraining for new approaches or platforms. They incurred additional costs from acquiring and learning about new software or ways of working. Emergency funding only reached a small number of freelance artists and was often at the expense of project grants that artists had relied upon.

▪ Give time for reflection. Some artists realised their previous lifestyle, especially touring, was unsustainable. There was a feeling that the system is reliant on artists contributing time well beyond that for which they are paid. A feeling of powerlessness, or not being valued, has led to increased activism and a demand for artists to have more control over the production process, e.g. more artists on boards, a greater focus on artists’ wellbeing, and more scope for artists to mentor, present or support each other². Artists also reached out for stronger local relationships (with venues and audiences) in part because of growing concerns about the environmental impact of touring.

▪ Stimulated innovation. This was inevitably about working digitally or virtually but also, in opposition to pressures to work online, about creating more direct relationships with audiences.

¹ Surf the Wave Impact Evaluation Report.
² See for example, Joe Moran’s project Artist-Curator-Leader; the aspirations of Freelancers Make Theatre Work; and Stage Directors UK’s project on Supporting a Freelance Creative Workforce.
The Artists Information Company quantified the severity of the impact from early in the pandemic, March 2020: a survey of 4,070 artists (concentrated on the visual arts) found that: 82% had already had upcoming work cancelled; 96% had lost income; and 92% reported a significant loss of networking.

ACNI received 329 responses to its survey of artists and arts organisations in April 2020 (60% from artists). Even at this stage, the average loss of earnings for the three month period was £3,756. Freelancers were particularly affected and many were unable to pay their rent or support their dependents.

**IMPACTS ON ARTS ORGANISATIONS**

Ernst and Young, who were appointed by The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Éalaíon to analyse the economic impact of Covid-19 on the arts, identified three separate classes of shock: a health crisis restricting the way businesses operate and the way people move; a recessionary effect that reduced consumer purchasing power; and a behavioural shift that is changing individuals’ consumption of products and services, including a shift to digital approaches. They conclude that: “The Arts sector was one of the first to be hit and is likely to be one of the last to recover from COVID-19.”

Oxford Economics, who carried out an economic impact analysis of the creative industries in July 2020 concluded that the combined loss in turnover would be some £77 billion. From 2021 respondents, 38% predicted an annual income fall of more than 75% in 2020 compared to 2019, and 73% predicted a fall in annual turnover of more than 50%. Among self-employed respondents, 42% expect a 75%+ loss and 78% a 50%+ loss. At this stage, the model predicted the greatest drop would be experienced in the second quarter of the year with very modest improvements over the third and fourth quarters, which presumably didn’t happen because of the second wave. The greatest impact was on freelancers, with 33% reporting that all their freelance contracts had been cancelled.

**IMPACTS ON AUDIENCES**

A large number of surveys have been carried out to measure the impact of the pandemic on arts engagement. Broadly, these show a sharp drop in attendance because of lockdowns, a shaking out of existing and new audiences in terms of digital engagement, and a strong appreciation of the importance of the arts post-pandemic.

ACNI’s own survey published in November 2020, found that attendance at an arts activity or event fell from 76% in the year prior to lockdown to 23% in the period between lockdowns.

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3 [Covid-19 Impact Study](#).


5 For example, [Understanding the impact of Covid-19 on cultural participation](#) | Creative Scotland; [Creative Scotland report on Public Intentions on Returning to Audience Members](#). After the Interval.

6 [Survey to establish arts and culture engagement levels in Northern Ireland during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).
60% of respondents said they had participated in or viewed online arts activity. Among those engaging with the arts during lockdown, 13% did so for the first time, 25% engaged more than they used to, 32% less than they used to, 20% engaged to the same level and 9% were unsure. Looking forward, 55% of respondents agreed with a statement that ‘since lockdown, I’ve really missed the opportunity to go to cultural events and venues’; 48% agreed that ‘since lockdown, I have a greater appreciation of the role the arts can play in my life’; and 44% agreed that ‘since lockdown, the arts have had a positive impact on my mental health and wellbeing.’

THE RANGE OF SUPPORT NEEDED

UNESCO references four ways states have supported artists during the pandemic:7

- Improving artists’ access to social security, pensions and other social benefits.
- Commissioning and purchasing works of art.
- Compensating for lost income and/or enabling artists to continue creating.
- Offering grants for skill development or free online training.

These are in addition to support for arts organisations such as accelerated payment of grants, temporary relief from regulatory obligations or taxes, compensation for business interruption losses, preferential loans, support for digital platforms and promotion of new business models. UNESCO identified three gaps in the measures so far taken by governments: a need for greater understanding of the impact of challenges and measures on women, since they are over-represented in the arts sector, especially in the most vulnerable roles; a need – once lockdowns are lifted – to support the free movement of artists so they are not prevented from taking up international residencies; and a need to ensure that digital distribution supports the diversity of cultural expression.

Other analysts8 emphasise the importance of ensuring that the vulnerability of arts organisations post-pandemic does not reduce their focus on diversity, especially in terms of socio-economic background.

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7 Culture in Crisis: Policy guide for a resilient creative sector | Diversity of Cultural Expressions (unesco.org)
8 For example, Hold on, Diversity and Managing in the Arts.
CONSULTATION WITH THE NI THEATRE COLLECTIVE

OVERALL ARGUMENT

This is my notes of a meeting with six members of the NI Theatre Collective on 4th February 2021. My aim is to present their views as clearly and succinctly as possible, not to add my own perspective.

Northern Ireland is missing an essential and usual piece of the funding jigsaw, project funding to individual artists, and this is having a detrimental effect on individual artists, audiences, and the arts sector. The pandemic drew attention to the unequal position of artists in NI, but the weaknesses are systemic not short term.

The Collective is concerned particularly with the situation for theatre, but many of these comments would apply to other artforms as well.

IMPACT ON ARTISTS

The lack of project funding means that theatre artists feel that they have no autonomy because they are dependent on venues and theatre companies to apply for funding. The lack of project funding affects the amount of work artists can create in NI, the scope to tour or bring work into NI, as well as the type of work they can make in NI. The lack of project funding means that artists cannot have access to their own work because when they work through venues or theatre companies the rights are often passed over. The lack of opportunities affects artists’ morale and feeling on connection to NI. It can even affect where artists can live as theatre is currently strongly focused on Belfast and Derry.

Providing project funding would give work a life beyond its original presentation. If NI artists were able to tour then the higher profile would benefit the province as well as the artists.

IMPACT ON AUDIENCES

The lack of project funding means that work is necessarily the vision of a small number of artistic directors, often people who have been in position for a long period of time and come from a narrow demographic. The lack of project funding means that only a narrow range of stories are being told. The artistic directors act as gate keepers and have sometimes dismissed ideas that arise from community experience as being irrelevant or not professional. Artistic directors are often themselves frustrated by directions set by boards, which tend to have more representation from businesses than from artists.

Providing project funding will enable artists to strengthen the connections with the communities in which they are embedded, to tell their stories and potentially bring new
audiences, especially working class or rural audiences, to theatre. Providing project funding will allow artists to take theatre to non-traditional spaces and create site-specific work.

**IMPACT ON ARTS SECTOR**

The lack of project funding is limiting ACNI’s connection with the full range of artists and potentially reducing its ability to communicate the vibrancy and range of work in NI. Broadening the support would increase the dynamism and variety in the sector and better demonstrate its relevance.

Providing project funding would strengthen the ecosystem by enabling individual artists to initiate work, to collaborate, to share and build on each other’s skills, resources and networks. Artists often have international networks that venues do not.

**WHAT THE COLLECTIVE WOULD LIKE**

In its simplest form, the Theatre Collective would like accessible, inclusive and substantial project funding.

The funding system needs to be broadly advertised using a wide range of channels.

The application process needs to be transparent and written in plain English so that artists with different backgrounds, levels of experience, learning styles, and neuro-diversities can understand it. A template budget could be provided so that artists know what to do. The definition of artist needs to be clear and inclusive. The eligible (and non-eligible) costs should be clearly listed. Even the word ‘project’ might need to be explained. Alignment with strategic objectives should be inferred from simple questions rather than asking artists to talk about a policy environment that is alien to them.

Artists might need support to write and manage budget. This could be organised through specific training, a budgeting service, or shared process across a group of artists. There is an innate fear from artists that how they fill in an application process is seen as a judgement about the quality of their art.

Project funding should not replace SIAP. Developmental support is still needed.
SURVEY OF ARTISTS

INTRODUCTION

I received 64 responses, which gives a detailed source of data.

This chapter is a report of survey. The role of an evaluator is to represent the views of the respondents as fairly as possible, which means that:

- The views are not necessarily those of the evaluator. One of the principles of evaluation is that reporting of findings should be separated from the evaluator’s conclusions.
- The views are not necessarily consistent between respondents or even in the same respondent. Respondents often contradict themselves and representing this complexity is part of presenting a nuanced evaluation.
- The interviewees’ voices are important. Rather akin to Verbatim Theatre, I use quotes from interviewees to illustrate not just the responses to the questions but also the background to the responses, for example the mechanisms (how a particular outcome was created), importance (why an activity or outcome matters to the respondent), the emotions attached to the response, and the language used by the respondent (including their use of metaphor). This is a lot of detail, and I analyse open questions using content analysis, which picks up themes and patterns. In some cases, the comment is the same as the theme (i.e. no further detail is given) so no quote is listed. These themes are, of course, my own rather than the respondents. Quotes are given to illustrate individual themes, but many have wider relevance beyond the specific place I have listed them. The quotes I use are not all the answers I receive, but a selection chosen to illustrate different elements and perspectives.

LIMITATIONS

Artists were asked, aside from Covid-19, what are the limitations of working as a freelance theatre practitioner in NI? Answers had these themes:

- Lack of funding for freelancers and limited budgets for companies, which means that work cannot be made, or the artist goes into debt or uses crowdfunding to make it, or the artist works through a venue/theatre company and loses control of the work.

“"The lack of contracts. The continuous search for work. There are no grants or support of the individual artist to actually create work. SIAP is the only funding and it wouldn't even support you for three months of the year.""

“"NI is the only place in the UK and Ireland where an individual artist cannot apply for project funding, which severely limits their career potential, and progression in comparison to their counterparts across the UK and island of Ireland, and the rest of mainland Europe for that matter.""
“The biggest limitation is access to funding. As a freelance dance artist, I endeavour to make dance that will be performed to an audience on a stage. The current funding pool for independent artists allows for initial R&D or artist development but not to work with collaborators to realise a piece of dance ready for the stage. Therefore NI audiences are not seeing the talent and work of many dance makers as it cannot be professionally produced and performed. The dance sector around the world is made up of individual artists. It seems obvious, but in order for the dance sector to exist in NI, individual artists must be supported to actually make dance!”

“The main limitation is the access to adequate individual funding schemes that provide financial assistance to both provide a personal income and allow you to create work.”

“My work as a writer is dependent on finding a director/producer. There is also little funding for touring outside NI. Lack of funding also means most of my work has to be written for one or two actors.”

“Because so many of the companies here are working within such tight budgets and finance it can be hard to take risks and experiment with new technologies which can make progressing design practice difficult.”

“A major limitation for me is the lack of access to funding to take work up to full production - unlike funding made available by other Arts Councils in the UK and I believe in the ROI. This means to create work I have often gone into personal financial debt.”

“Without the opportunity to deliver projects, you cannot sustain career growth. Dance is essentially art made out of individuals, the demands are very different to theatre and especially in NI. The lack of commissioning opportunities, also impact both choreographers and dancers to live and work here. Self-funding and producing have been the only option.”

“Being unable to access city council funding for individual projects. Community projects have to be done through a bigger organisation, even when all the artistic outcomes are created and delivered by the freelance artist.”

“A very small amount of financial support is allocated to dance which does not reflect the number and quality of freelancers who are the fuel of NI’s dance eco-system.”

“A lot of opportunities I have received have come off the back of me personally funding/crowdfunding my own work because as a freelancer there are fewer options for ACNI funding. There are very few open calls from theatres or companies that allow freelancers to receive ACNI core funding through them. Crowdfunding isn’t a negative thing however it shouldn’t be the only way for artists to get a start on their career.”

“Not being able to produce work and apply for funding outside of a registered company structure.”
“The size of grant awards tends to be small. Lack of adequate incentives and opportunities for cross-border/ international collaboration.”

“Lack of funding has a significant knock on effect in terms of support and opportunity in that the services providing these/organisations offering commissions are stretched to breaking point. It is creatively and psychologically stifling to face an uphill battle when trying to get projects off the ground or even just to get to the discussion and percolation stage to see if something is worth pursuing.”

- Difficulty hearing about and accessing work opportunities, which leads artists to assume that contracts are not advertised publicly.

“Breaking into currently established working relationships as a new or often passed over artist.”

“Isolation within our own areas of expertise. I feel although there is a great sense of community within the work that is produced in NI, as a designer there is no visible platform for us to collaborate in ways that are outside of the normally perceived ways of working. The onus is very much on individuals to establish themselves and their working relationships.”

“Working as a freelance dance artist in NI there is huge limitations in getting work due to a lack of open calls! There is professional dance work happening in NI but I very rarely, if ever, see an open call for professional performance work. How does an artist get work without open calls? I have been lucky to receive numerous teaching opportunities during my time in NI however I have never had any opportunity to perform and this is my first primary love.”

“Accessing funding outside of the gatekeeping theatre and production companies currently in place.”

“Difficulty even locating work - organisations and companies are not transparent about auditions and most definitely show favouritism in terms of who knows about what opportunities.”

“Work is few and far between and given priority to “friends” in the industry.”

“In the past it has been difficult to ‘get seen’ for auditions within established theatres and with established theatre companies. I feel this is changing now which is very positive.”

“Lack of opportunities to even be considered for roles or auditions.”

“Access to auditions is severely limited by the small number of agent gatekeepers. The lack of open audition processes reduces opportunities for many practitioners who are excluded by the agents’ view on what is ‘commercial’.”

“Often, it feels like job postings either aren’t advertised, or when they are there is someone already in mind for them. A lot of the work I have got I have generated myself, or have got
because I’ve known the right person. I’ve benefitted from this model but I don’t think that it’s fair. I think if someone wants to work with you because they have seen your work and know what your results are like, that is understandable, however this limits opportunities for emerging creatives."

“Trying to make connections and build relationships within the arts sector. Contacting companies and artists to work with and receiving no communication back. It’s heartbreaking when you’ve spent the past 10 years trying to work your way through unpaid work, creating your own opportunities. Whilst the arts community in Belfast is so small and tight knit this is also to their detriment.”

“You have to be prepared for a lot of rejection, which sometimes can feel personal so therefore you have to learn to be resilient. Unless very established as a freelance practitioner and in the public eye it can be difficult to secure work as it is a very competitive market. Work is not guaranteed and can fall through out with your control.”

“Hard to build working relationships with theatres.”

“Lack of opportunity - not being in the "in" crowd/being known. I think it's hard to break in.”

“There are a small number of companies that have a few projects throughout the year but this is not enough to sustain performers or incorporate new talent into the sector.”

“Your socio-economic circumstances (and background) affect your opportunities in the arts. In NI, many freelancers believe that your job opportunities are affected by who you know in the arts as opposed to the work that’s listed on your CV.”

- Lack of preparation for a freelance life, especially in terms of university/college education.

“The lack of training opportunities, most creatives come out of education and are thrown into the industry with no support as a freelancer. I feel that a lot of people are put off developing their practice early in their career as they are not supported, or are put off by having to start by working on extremely tight budgets with small companies that have no infrastructure to support them.”

- Exploitation in terms of pay and terms of employment.

“As a very green designer straight from education I have many memories of being 'set designer' on projects where I was expected to build, paint, project manage, stage manage and in some cases fund from my design fee the labour that should have been a separate budget line on labour. While all of these elements of being designer are to be expected in some respect it can be overwhelming when working as an emerging designer with low budgets on small design fees to find yourself being expected to work 24hrs to complete all elements of the production of a show all whilst shouldering all the additional labour as well as the design responsibilities. There is no regulation or industry standard in terms of the
expectations of what the designer’s role and contribution should be and it is all too easy to burn out early on and for young designers to leave the industry. There is no signposting for young designers/practitioners to what the expectations should or how to read contracts/what to expect to see in their contracts. Without an agent representing them this area of being self-employed can be very hard to navigate.”

“I have been working as a freelance actress writer and director for many years and I always feel like I am starting at the bottom. If I am engaged by a film or theatre company, either as cast in a show or as director, wages have not been raised in real terms for years.”

“Lack of legal protection against lack of payments. Lack of communication between local practitioners regarding models of best practice. Having to negotiate my own working conditions for every project.”

“Another key limitation of working within the sector is correct rates of pay. As the income I receive from the arts is not enough to support me financially, I have another job in the health and social care sector. Many others within the sector have to do this in order to survive. Arts and culture is a part of everyday life for most of NI however why is this not reflected in our rate of pay? The arts are seen as a hobby, not a stable, respected career path. I feel this is greatly due to dance in schools being non-existent. It starts from the grass roots up and until this changes I feel the industry will never fully be respected.”

“Not being valued in the wider community.”

- Lack of support for older artists, but also lack of support for emerging artists, and some feeling of competition between the two.

“More flexibility is needed to recognise the needs of more mature artists, who are at a crucial stage in developing their freelance practice. The need for more security (to contribute to their fundamental health and well-being and quality of life such as a long term home, holiday, sick pay and pension) will mean either that they either have to leave NI, become a company, or work even harder on increasing income streams which in the end is not sustainable as sole traders. Support to help sustain these artists is paramount to dance as an art form having visibility and developing its potential contribution to the community in NI. We cannot risk losing their expertise.”

“Opportunities for older artists, there are lot of opportunities and training for anyone under 25 after that...pretty much nothing.”

“Northern Ireland being the smallest arts sector across this island means that early-career/emerging theatre-makers are often pushed to the side in exchange for their more tenured colleagues.”

“Artistic Development schemes which are often aimed at early-career/emerging artists almost always are getting filled by people who have been working in the industry for a number of years. It’s disheartening to see that a lot of people in my situation aren’t given
that one chance - what is the point of having these schemes if they're just going to be filled by someone who has 5-10 years more experience?"

- Weak infrastructure, especially for dance.

“There is nothing to draw graduates to stay or train here; not only are the professional opportunities restricted/non-existent, training opportunities are severely lacking across music, dance and drama. If I were living in a mainland UK city or in a city in the Republic of Ireland, I am confident I could find skill training and development opportunities with ease, meanwhile I struggle to even find an affordable, open dance class for adults that is at an appropriate level.”

“Access to free or low cost appropriate, safe and professional dance studio space.”

“Although there are some great theatres here, few have sprung floors and the cost of renting good spaces is only possible for very short periods due to expense.”

- Lack of support for people with disabilities.

“To be honest, I am still lost and not able do my own freelance work because arts fund application forms do not all have British and Irish Sign language access. They are still huge barriers for Deaf and sign language users living in NI. A lot of audition spaces aren't fully disabled accessible.”

- Short planning horizons because of the one-year funding time frame.

“Inability to plan more than 12 months in advance and the inability from most funders to carry projects from one financial year to the next.”

“Financial uncertainty depletes a lot of available creative 'headspace' - short-term nature funding - three-year funding would help with planning.”

“Insecurity of income. Lack of career progression. Precariousness.”

- Preference for artists outside NI and lack of interest in retaining artists in NI.

“Gatekeepers of theatre industry have little respect for artists who are actually based in Belfast and not working frequently in London/Dublin.”

“The limitations and lack of risk-taking within the industry is just going to see a mass exodus of our talent across to places like London and the continent - there isn't an attempt to try and retain these artists.”

“One of the most frustrating things about being a practitioner from NI is that wherever you are in the world when you meet a fellow practitioner from here you can almost guarantee raw talent, fierce passion and discipline in their art. However when we look at our
environment at home, once you leave school, there is no infrastructure in place to nurture creative and artistic development with authenticity. Therefore most of our freelancers flee for greener pastures to realise their creative ambition in more supportive communities. We need to demand more funding to be pumped into the practice and habits of artists without the immediate pressure to produce a ‘commodity or product’. We require less ‘fast fashion theatre/art’ and more means for exploration, collaboration that will inevitably widen the variety of what we see and enhance the quality of what we produce as a collective. We need to have a platform that values process over product where artists can come and explore together, with chosen mentorship and realise their full potential.”

- Isolation.

“There definitely is a hub of freelancers I have met through various events (mostly online) who are friendly and supportive. However, apart from these short coffee-morning-style events hosted by smaller, often underfunded, organisations, there is nothing done on a large scale to unite a wide and diverse sector.”

“It can be isolating, it feels like I am the only person working in this area of dance and health.”

**BENEFITS**

We also asked artists about the benefits of working as a freelance theatre/dance practitioner in NI. Answers have these themes:

- The artistic community, in part because of the small size of the theatre/dance sector in NI.

“The creative community here is inspirational. Time and again the brilliance shines through and lifts the heart and soul.”

“There is very much a sense of community in NI theatre. We all see each other grow in our practise and are well connected with each other.”

“Close network, good access to cheap rehearsal/studio spaces, positive can-do sector attitude.”

“The industry is tight knit group and very supportive of each other.”

“Freelancers supporting each other to create work and make the best of the funding structures available. Companies and the Arts Council pooling resources to support freelancers.”

“I think there are really exciting artists here, a creative buzz and in dance especially a community that supports each other. But most of all are motivated to cultivating and
growing the dance ecology here, however it is extremely challenging, due to lack of opportunities and you need to be really driven to stay here and work here.”

“Belfast has a beautiful community and is full of raw energy.”

“Having worked in the Republic of Ireland and a small bit in London, my experience in NI is although small, we have a significantly supportive arts community.”

“We produce great work, tell great stories and have really supportive people who work in the arts here. We definitely have a community spirit within the arts here but that can be improved upon.”

- The pleasure of the work, including the creativity, variety and flexibility of working freelance, and NI heritage.

“I love working as a freelance dance practitioner as I love what I do!”

“The rich heritage of arts in a place of such a small size.”

“The joy of being able to work on different types of projects.”

“Being able to collaborate across art-forms. I can respond quickly to opportunities that arise.”

“Fulfilling childhood ambitions and retaining wonder. The joy of unlimited creativity.”

“Having the ability to express your creative spirit. Being self-employed, being able to create the work that you feel passionately about. Having a pride in yourself and your work. Having the freedom to work alongside other like-minded artists.”

- The resilience of the artists and the relevance and quality of the work.

“There are a lot of interesting companies and directors and a spirit that can make great work from a tight budget. Also, we have a lot to write about in NI, given how politics is currently in flux with Brexit.”

“Great pool of artists. Incredibly resourceful individuals.”

“Level of talent amongst freelancers; it is joyful seeing peers create brilliant work.”

“As a freelance practitioner, we can be very flexible and respond to needs of wider sector and community quickly (as seen during this pandemic). Great opportunity to work with a wealth of other very talented freelance practitioners in a wide variety of fields and often generate very new and inventive ideas.”

“The work feels more relevant and vital for our society.”
• The freedom of creating your own work, and seeing it through with support from other artists.

“Working on a project from the start to then see it on the stage in front of an audience.”

“The freedom to create my own work - the absolute grace under pressure and camaraderie I have experienced when working as an actor, teacher, director or writer. I have been honoured to take part in projects that are often small scale and not hugely publicised but you know that they have hit home with an audience.”

“Can be adjusted to fit your agenda. Be your own boss.”

“I can decide when and for who to work. I can create my own classes. I can take holidays during school times.”

“Freedom to work various jobs with different companies. The ability to run with an initiative without being held back by swathes of administration.”

“I get to mainly pick my work, or create work that I’m incredibly passionate about. I don’t feel censored when working for myself and I feel like I have more room to experiment as I’m usually not answering to a company.”

“It’s freeing, independent theatre making means you can create what you like for people like yourself with an authentic Irishness to it, highlighting issues within society.”

• Visibility, compared to a larger place.

“I’d have to answer this as the joys of working as a freelancer. The NI part sadly can be restrictive. However, as a smaller pond there are ways to be seen if you are good at what you do. That is a positive and a negative.”

“Knowing, personally a very high percentage of all potential employers.”

“Ease of accessibility to all potential employment sites/working places.”

“Ability to work across several skills areas rather than being forced to specialise … due to less competition.”

• The potential for improvement and the relative ease of enacting change across such a small sector.

“They are sparse in comparison to Dublin, Edinburgh, London, Berlin, Paris, Barcelona, Madrid or Chicago. I guess a benefit is that the pond is so small that with unified direction large changes and benefits can be achieved efficiently.”

• Low cost of living.
“Lower living costs (rent etc).”
“NI is so cheap to live in, so it is easy to get by on our terrible freelance wage.”

- None.

“Haven’t found much working here to be frank, having worked in London and comparing the support given.”

“Precarious working conditions aren’t something to be joyful about. It means balancing survival work on top of your passion.”

**CHANGES NEEDED**

I asked to what extent the current situation requires new ways of working e.g. artist leadership models and what kinds of changes are needed. Answers had these themes:

- Higher priority to the arts in general and freelancers in particular.

“Complete rethink of the priority of the arts.”

“There needs to be a serious overhaul of the way we conduct our work here, we need a mass increase in public funding for the arts and easier access to this money through ACNI.”

“Freelance artists need to feel that their input is valued and important. I cannot stress enough how it was the freelance artists that were able to respond quicker and more effectively to the needs of the community in offering entertainment, connection and much needed relief from the pain of lockdown for many, many people.”

“This is an opportunity to start all over again. We need to make charges to give more respect to freelance artists. At the moment, many freelance theatre workers will tell you in private that they are treated with contempt.”

- Supporting freelancers to make work.

“The current model of the theatre companies being the gatekeepers through whom freelancers must go to see anything but a very small project realised is outdated at an international level and hugely restricts the amount of innovative theatre and performance.”

“The funding structure should be changed to allow freelancers in good standing to apply for larger sums of investment in ambitious, innovative shows that are held back for institutional reasons by the current gatekeepers.”

“The pandemic showed that individual artists are in a better position to react quickly to situations and so therefore should be able to produce their own funded work. These models exist throughout the rest of the UK and Ireland and so should be introduced here.”
“Give us the support and autonomy to create our own work.”

“The administrative burden on artists to prove the public benefit of what they do and the governance attached to their ‘companies’ is a major hindrance. Individual freelancers should be able to apply for much more money without a company structure in place.”

“The most important part of being an artist is getting work produced, to a high standard. To do this access to project funding is vital. There could be funding limits depending on experience etc models like ACE’s that connect an artist with an organisation are great and successful but the £5000 awarded is not enough for a dance artist to make a project.”

“Dance artists need continued support and recognition for their worth. Somehow we are at the bottom of the food chain. There needs to be some dance is residence opportunities - some sort of opportunity that is funded for the year, so that you have the time or evolve your practice and create work that will actually make it to the theatre/full production.”

“Access to small grants for theatre and dance. I feel as independent artists we are not trusted.”

“There is most definitely a new pathway needed where more funding is allocated to independents, especially in the dance sector. A tiered system, for example a large project award £50,000, a small project award £15,000. The SIAP and travel award should continue for professional development (for artist only, not collaborators, etc.) Residency Awards (in collaboration with a venue/organisation) are also essential for dancers to develop their practice and engage with that space/community. There are many successful examples of this across the world.”

“The current situation needs to focus on supporting and developing the artistic voice of the makers in the sector. People want to make work, artists want to develop audiences and want to their work to be seen and the current infrastructure does not support that.”

“In most of Europe the independent artists are a majority of programmed work in theatres and if that happened here it would allow theatres to develop relations and new working models for makers at different stages of their careers (residencies, platforms to show work in progress, feedback, development work and premiere) and would employ local performers.”

- Faster funding.

“It would help if funding for theatre projects was quicker, so writers could write about the political current situation.”

- Greater publicity of support.
“A monthly newsletter and a database specific to theatre / dance etc within the NI industry to improve the visibility of training/support programmes, opportunities and calls for collaboration etc would be great.”

- Structures to support artists to produce and present their own work.

“We need to find new ways of working and delivering productions and projects. Suitable outdoor venues could be provided/ funded to encourage outdoor theatre which is covered.”

“A guide and fund available to self-produce or collaborate without having to get a big company on board.”

“The government-funded social platform where artists can engage, communicate and discuss how best to move forward.”

“Guidance on how to get self-produced work 'out there' or how to partner with both arts and non-arts organisations.”

“I feel Northern Ireland is full of lots of 'mid level' artists. Artists receive funding, such as SIAP etc, to create a piece of work however what happens next? There should be platforms that allow artists to share their work and be seen by producers or a further fund that allows for developing and touring costs to be considered.”

“Platforms to encourage creatives to develop ideas and work outside of the traditional 'production company' model. Calls not just for scripts to develop new work but also design led or space for ideas to develop would be beneficial. Higher profile for the schemes that already exist such as the MAC hatch programme.

We do need to find new ways of working and delivering productions and projects. Suitable outdoor venues could be provided/ funded to encourage outdoor theatre which is covered.”

“A government-funded social platform where artists can engage, communicate and discuss how best to move forward.”

“Guidance on how to get self-produced work ‘out there’ or how to partner with both arts and non-arts organisations.”

“We do need to find new ways of working and delivering productions and projects. Suitable outdoor venues could be provided/ funded to encourage outdoor theatre which is covered.”

“A guide and fund available to self-produce or collaborate without having to get a big company on board.”

“Ideally for isolated multidisciplinary artists like myself and many others the government would fund collaborative creative residencies in order to strengthen the artistic network on a practical and innovative manner. For example, one large rep company of multidisciplinary professionals who lead workshops and projects in their desired fields with the option of calling in mentorship from leading practitioners in the field. Or maybe smaller groups of 2,3 or 5. An antidote to the isolation that existed long before Covid and this is what community art REALLY means, we must support the artists that have already dedicated their lives to their craft and provide platforms and support for them to work together. We need a platform for talented artists to come together, work together and ‘do their thing’, a hub and incubator where art is born, nurtured and can thrive - a break away from the mainstream ‘fast fashion theatre’ a focus on process, collaboration, (arts) community and craft.”

“One needs to look at the productions which are being put out into the community, thinking outside the box. Stage management and artistic directors need to increase training in Risk Assessments, PPE, First Aid. There needs to be a greater care, kindness and understanding for those artists who maybe are not yet comfortable to meet/rehearse in person/aren't fully IT literate.”
“The current situation creates opportunity to break down the restrictive fund holders formal structures.”

“Creatives create by necessity regardless of the social conditions or perhaps in response to them. Artists have always led but their strategies have often been ignored by the bodies set up to support them. The onus is on the funders to recognise the value of the artist’s approach, the collaborative & international forum where artists find inspiration & sustenance.”

“Supported platforms and festivals for dance artists to show work in progress or finished works.”

- More attention to freelancers’ rights, including more open recruitment processes, perhaps a wage for artists, and time for reflection.

“I think in the relationship that we have with major venues and companies we need to be listened to more. We have a strange situation in NI - the theatre scene is quite close knit and gives the appearance that everyone knows or is a friend with everyone else. That might close some people off from access. We need clear professional working parameters - especially over the issue of expectations around casting, self tapes, informing actors when they haven’t got work. Theatre is often a hierarchical structure and whilst there have been greater safeguards against bullying and harassment in the work place by unions such as Equity not every company is a union company and freelancers have far less rights enshrined in law than their full time work counterparts have. Artist leadership starts with legal protections and clear parameters being set on all sides.”

“The current situation should enable massive change to create a more open and level sector. Given the amount of freelancers who are currently unemployed, opportunities from organisations and funders need to be made more transparent and fair. In my own personal opinion, if a theatre or dance company apply for Arts Council funding they should be required to have an open call for their projects. This means that maybe a freelancer might not get funding they desperately need, but at least there is an opportunity to secure work with an organisation who can fill that financial gap. Lots of organisations repeatedly using the same artists and never opening up their applications despite being funded by the ACNI.”

“We have very little transparency when it comes to casting/employment and application processes - this needs to change as too many people are excluded from creative professions and this contributes to the mental health crises.”

“We need to have a look at government support much like the south are looking into with a wage for artists.”

“Having the freedom to think, plan and breathe life into an idea is a luxury but it should be the norm. This needs to be paramount for those making strategic and funding decisions. It should be less about what we produce for the money but what can get started.”
• More understanding of audiences in developing product, and more attention to accessibility and diversity.

“The sector needs to continually involve the public/community as we need to offer what people need and want not what we think they need and want. With social isolation and distancing, fear of leaving house, fall in confidence we need to reassure the public and introduce Covid-19 safety measures, as well as think of new ways to bring our art forms out into the community. Also a fear that there will be an urgent need to only produce work that will be commercial and make money when in fact the smaller projects may not generate a lot of money but the benefits to the community can be even more valuable.”

“One thing I am still awaiting for provide access to sign language (Both BSL & ISL) in Arts council NI. That means myself as a Deaf artist can apply for funds/grants to develop my project.”

“One thing I am still awaiting for provide access to sign language (Both BSL & ISL) in Arts council NI. That means myself as a Deaf artist can apply for funds/grants to develop my project.”

“Lack of diversity on boards and steering committees needs to be challenged.”

“More focus on emerging artists, giving everyone a go. Actively encourage working class people and POC to get involved.”

• Training in, and equipment for, working virtually.

“As the virtual world is open the competition is bigger as a freelance we don’t have the same resources as big companies. We need to retrain and to get new models of delivering my work in my case dance classes and performances.”

“Skills development in digital delivery and artform outside activity.”

“Use of technology, running classes from kitchen or bedroom isn't great, are there studios with camera etc kit?”

• Multi-year funding.

“Companies should be able to plan for multi-year funding and create strategies with longer time lines.”

• New ways of working are not needed.

“The lack of opportunities in the current situation needs to be survived. The theatre industry does not need new ways of working, it requires theatres to be open.”

IMPACT

More than half the respondents said that NI is “mixed” as a place to work as a freelance theatre/dance practitioner. Comments suggest that artists feel they need to leave NI to find the training and funding they need.
"We are massively underfunded in comparison to Ireland and rest of Great Britain."

"It is difficult to 'break in' to the sector and become established in NI as a freelance practitioner, to get noticed or given opportunities. You need to be stubborn and focused."

"Being a professional performing artist, you have to create work for yourself because of the lack of funding others are receiving."

"It is a frustrating place to produce work. There can be a siege mentality that means venues, festivals and companies fail to work together and compete pointlessly. This is because the sector is starving. It is a miracle of human kindness that so much cooperation and collaboration occurs despite inadequate funding and inflexible funding structures. The Arts Council is part of this miracle (very hard working staff doing their best) but more needs to be done."

"I feel I am so lucky to work as a creative freelancer in NI, I have had to make this space for myself, I created this environment and I feel after 10 years my work is now part of the fabric. I just feel that we have to travel to England to train and sometimes our expertise is overlooked for those in mainland UK. I also feel that more funding and priority is given to dance and health projects in England and there is more support for that work. I feel I can be paddling my own canoe here. However I do love my job and the people I get to work with."

"The opportunity to earn a proper living as a freelancer especially as a dancer is almost impossible without having to teach and that just doesn’t suit everyone."

"It is a great place to work, when there is work and the work being made is here important, but there is not enough work of career prospects to stay here in the long run."
“The insistence that art has to serve community due to the legacy of the Troubles. Art is made to serve rather than to lead in Northern Ireland. It is rich with poets, musicians and visual artists.”

“I am only young so the opportunities I have gathered so far suit me, but I’ve never created my own work and I fear I’ll not be able to achieve that here.”

“With 500 members of Equity and at least 1,000 artists there is not enough varied work to go around to make a decent living.”

86% of respondents have considered relocating from NI, and 65% have already lived outside NI at some stage.

FIGURE 2: HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT OF RELOCATING FROM NI?

“I lived in London for two years and was treated with more respect. I was actually treated with more respect by some companies in Belfast before I moved home.”

“This is an ongoing dialogue as there are such limited opportunities here the only tools for progression are outside NI.”

“The very well subsidised arts sectors in Germany and Denmark feel like another planet, and of course their models offer far more efficiency as artists are effectively ‘on call’ to the public and must create regular high quality product.”

“I’m relocating to London in May because once the real economic downturn from Covid begins to show its face, this place is doomed.”

“I lived in New Zealand but it was too far from home to be a long term option. I’m considering applying for work in Ireland or UK because I don’t see myself being able to earn a sustainable income in NI.”
“After graduating from Uni all I did was apply for jobs in England because there were no opportunities in NI for theatre directing in particular and that hasn’t changed within the past 10 years.”

“Talked about it during the height of the Troubles, and many did leave, but I always felt it was better to stay and try to be part of a solution.”

“I studied in England, came back for financial reasons but intended to go back, however realised I could have a career and a better quality of life here.”

44% of respondents said they had work that you couldn’t make in NI (before Covid-19).

The most commonly mentioned barrier was lack of funding.

**FIGURE 3: IF YOU HAVE WORK THAT YOU COULDN’T MAKE IN NI (BEFORE COVID-19), WHAT STOPPED YOU?**

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty marketing the work</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of interest from NI venues/companies</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of funding</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of partners</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of an audience</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for support/mentoring</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing wasn’t right</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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“I have a number of dance projects that I got SIAP’s for and did the initial research time, they were exciting but never got produced because I couldn’t get funding. This is incredibly difficult as it feel like a waste of time and really impacts your mental health.”

“I have gone to Australia to finish development and fully realise a piece because funding stops after brief development periods which is not conducive to excellence in theatre and performance.”

“Over the years I worked on research for pieces with choreographers and that will never become a production because there isn’t the means to do so.”

“I didn’t have the free time before Covid to push my creative career and I was working in a bucket load of ‘facilitation/dance teacher’ roles to pay the mortgage.”
“I have a number of projects that the scale is impossible to finance on the current funding models available to me in NI.”

“I have to pursue design work in order to survive despite wanting to create my own multi-disciplinary events. The lack of funding for individual artists makes this virtually impossible.”

39% of respondents said they have work that you wanted to tour to or from NI and couldn’t (before Covid-19). Again the main barrier mentioned was funding.

**FIGURE 4: IF YOU HAVE WORK THAT YOU WANTED TO TOUR TO OR FROM NI AND COULDN’T (BEFORE COVID-19), WHAT STOPPED YOU?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty marketing the work</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of interest from NI venues/companies</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of funding</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of partners</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of an audience</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for support/mentoring</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing wasn’t right</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than half of respondents (53%) said they have international connections that they would like to strengthen through touring. The countries mentioned are:

- Australia
- Belgium
- Chile
- Czech Republic
- France
- Germany
- India
- Lithuania
- Mexico
- Netherlands
- New Zealand.
- Peru
- Poland
- Portugal
- Prague
- Republic of Ireland
- Serbia
- Singapore
- South Africa
- Spain
- Sweden
- UAE
- USA

**GAPS IN PRODUCT**

I asked what type of dance/theatre is not being made in NI (ignoring Covid-19). Answers included:

- Experimental or innovative work.

  “There is a real lack of any kind of experimental work.”

  “Pieces that can include larger casts and longer periods of development and are made by marginalised people. Especially those that are disruptive of normative forms and modes of performance.”

  “Experimental/innovative multimedia works, avant-garde theatre, and very little quality new writing.”

  “Theatre made by individuals who are not part of a company. Since individuals have no access to decent funding, we aren’t able to make high quality work and attract large audiences. In my opinion, it means that very little high quality but experimental work is being made here. Theatre in NI tends to play it very safe, which can be perceived as boring. Particularly to younger audiences.”

  “Experimental theatre & dance that challenge the art forms are very limited. Contemporary dance has shifted up a gear with Oonagh Doherty’s work but where are her peer companies. Theatre is dominated by small cast productions, very few companies making classical repertoire shows & rarely do NI companies cross over genres in theatre productions. Covid has forced companies to move into filmed events which is good for shaking up perceptions of what theatre is however the live quality had largely been lost in this enterprise.”
“The current structure where companies are given majority of the funding is problematic as we are not seeing as much diversity, new innovation or new/young collaborations materialising as we would if independents were better supported and funded.”

“Funding for projects has to be through theatre companies, an individual artist with an idea cannot drive that project forward without it being judged through the lens of one of the artistic directors. It means that only about six points of view are expressed on our stages.”

“It feels like such a closed shop and that the people in positions will never leave and will only hire and rehire the same handful of people. This means there is little change in output. Little access. And a tired scene. It needs to be rejuvenated. Companies have to be accountable and more outward looking. We’ve had enough Troubles plays. There is so much going on in the world. Let’s be bold and interesting and innovative and not stick to the same format year in year out. Experimentation is good, change is good, debate is good. Fresh ideas, more positivity. More openness.”

“Theatre exploring themes of Sexuality. New avant garde theatre. Experimental theatre. Working class theatre from working class voices (not Troubles related). International collaborations bringing different cultures and languages to the NI stage.”

- New writing.

“Intellectual new writing about Northern Ireland.”

“There is a complete vacuum of new writing being produced in this part of the world.”

- Cross artform work e.g. with music, dance, poetry.

“Gig theatre where new writing meets local musicians, immersive theatre that is multi-disciplinary from its inception, plays that challenge capitalist, patriarchal in ways that are imaginative, inspiring and so far unseen in Belfast representing minority voices from here and far in all their authenticity including works with unique creation processes. More feminine work, more ground-breaking feminine work and spaces. Brave work that sets out to imagine the spectacular (inc. Circus).”

- Political theatre and political satires.

- Classical theatre.

“Sufficient Shakespeare.”

- Physical theatre.

“There needs to be more physical theatre. We are renowned for the written word but there is a world to explore from Forced Entertainment to Complicite that could add so much to our understanding of how theatre is made and stories told.”
“The very physical approach of much of continental theatrical forms is only just beginning to open up.”

- Immersive theatre.
- Musical theatre.

“I would like to see NI based theatre companies produce more musical theatre productions.”

- Educational theatre.
- Verbatim theatre.
- Open air theatre
- Intercultural dance
- Accessible theatre.
- Solo performance work.
- The full range of genre in dance.

“I feel the only style of dance being made professionally in NI is contemporary however there are so many more styles out there!”

“There is a good provision for the contemporary dance market. There isn't much as a professional ballet dancer, jazz dancer, tap dancer, musical theatre dancer.”

“Jazz, story-telling modern and hip hop styles.”

“There is very little dance made in NI so a lot is missing! Examples which come to mind: So much dance work is lacking diversity, whether its disabled dancers or even culturally diverse dance, even work with a fusion of dance styles (e.g. Irish dance and contemporary/breaking and contemporary, etc.). We do not see any big dance productions being made (i.e. more than 4 in the cast!!) This surely would seem crazy to a theatre director, most plays have more than 4 characters”

- Site specific dance.

“Site specific dance that can encourage more new audiences to dance.”

- Dance for new audiences.

“New dance work is not being produced to enough a high spec and scale that can entice and engage new audiences.”

“Dance work that can tour schools or rurally so it reaches audiences who would never go to the theatre. Dance can speak to everyone but lack of invest in dance and individual artists
access to providing funding with venue and theatre support has made the growth of dance audiences really difficult.”

“High quality dance that's accessible to low income persons.”

- Nothing.

“We are a small population and our breadth of work reflects that.”

ROLES

Respondents have had many different roles in the sector. The “other’ responses are: freelance co-director of a small theatre company, rehearsal director, dance artist in Health and the Community, board member of a theatre company, video and lighting tech, live Modelling, stand-up comic, administrator, project manager, props, costumes, street performer, production manager, captioner, and adjudicator.

FIGURE 5: WHAT ROLES HAVE YOU HAD IN THEATRE/DANCE IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS?
The figures suggest that respondents would on average like to have less involvement in facilitation, teaching, front of house, but also interestingly in production.

**FIGURE 6: WHAT ARE YOUR PREFERRED ROLES IN THEATRE/DANCE?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backstage</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choreographer</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composer/Sound Designer</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramaturg</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancer</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designer</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front of House</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resource Management</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing/PR</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement Director</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playwright</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producer</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Manager</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/Tutor</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Stage Management</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The income that respondents lost through Covid-19 varies widely.
Nearly half (46%) of respondents said they got 80-100% of their theatre/dance work through NI venues or theatre/dance companies.

80% of respondents said they have applied to ACNI for funding, and 75% said they have received funding, mainly SIAP, IERP, Resilience Funding, and travel awards.
84% of respondents had not received funding from another arts council. The ‘other’ responses referred to Australian and Mexican funding.

**FIGURE 10: HAVE YOU EVER RECEIVED FUNDING FROM ANOTHER ARTS COUNCIL?**

- **No**: 84%
- **Yes, Creative Scotland**: 0%
- **Yes, The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaion**: 5%
- **Yes, Arts Council of Wales**: 0%
- **Yes, Arts Council of England**: 3%
- **Other**: 8%

**BACKGROUND**

This survey was not intended as an audit of theatre/dance practitioners. So questions about background were included to test the reach of the sample, not to profile the wider sector.

The sample included artists with different lengths of time working in theatre/dance. Background has some diversity, especially in class. Only 10% of the respondents live in rural areas.
FIGURE 11: HOW LONG HAVE YOU WORKED IN THEATRE/DANCE?

More than half the sample have studied outside NI.

FIGURE 12: DO YOU HAVE A DEGREE/QUALIFICATION IN THEATRE/DANCE?

Three respondents self-identified, as agender/questioning and genderfluid.
**FIGURE 13: WHAT IS YOUR GENDER?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-binary</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would prefer to self-identify</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 14: WHAT IS YOUR SEXUAL ORIENTATION?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Man</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Woman / Lesbian</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual / Straight</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURE 15: DO YOU HAVE A DISABILITY OR LONG TERM HEALTH CONDITION?

- Yes: 11%
- No: 84%
- Prefer not to say: 5%

FIGURE 16: WHAT IS YOUR AGE?

- 0-15: 0%
- 16-24: 13%
- 25-34: 33%
- 35-44: 25%
- 45-54: 10%
- 55-64: 15%
- 65+: 5%
- Prefer not to say: 0%
FIGURE 17: WHAT IS YOUR ETHNICITY?

![Ethnicity Diagram](image)

- **White**: 93%
- **Irish Traveller**: 0%
- **Chinese**: 0%
- **Indian**: 2%
- **Pakistani**: 0%
- **Bangladeshi**: 0%
- **Other Asian**: 0%
- **Black Caribbean**: 0%
- **Black African**: 0%
- **Black Other**: 0%
- **Mixed Ethnic Group**: 3%
- **Other Ethnic Group**: 0%
- **Prefer to self-describe**: 2%

FIGURE 18: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CLASS?

![Class Diagram](image)

- **Upper class**: 2%
- **Upper middle class**: 2%
- **Middle class**: 46%
- **Lower middle class**: 10%
- **Working class**: 41%
FIGURE 19: IS THE AREA WHERE YOU LIVE RURAL OR URBAN?

- **Rural**: 10%
- **Urban**: 59%
- **Suburban**: 31%
CONCLUSIONS

DEMANDS

This research demonstrates clear demand from theatre and dance freelance artists for project funding. Artists make a strong case that project funding would support their own development, but also bring more varied and experimental work to NI, which could help to broaden and diversify audiences. However, creating an effective and fair project based programme will take careful thought and planning. The different requirements placed on any future programme would be to:

- Distribute substantial sums of money, but also have a simple accountability system.
- Treat artists as leaders, but also avoid giving them responsibilities, especially production responsibilities, they do not want.
- Be widely publicised so that all eligible artists hear about it, but also avoid wasting artists’ time in having a low acceptance rate.
- Move beyond the existing structure of venues and companies, but also strengthen artists’ connections to and status with these organisations.

I suggest these principles for a possible freelancer project programme:

CLARITY

The programme will need clear criteria so that artists can see if their work will fit, no mean feat given that the aim is to encompass work that has not yet been delivered or even thought about before. Narrowing down could be achieved by having themes, which could be about place (e.g. rural locations) or format (e.g. outdoor or non-traditional venues).

CUSTOMISATION

The programme will need the ability to combine financial support with advice, mentoring, and possibly access to equipment or space. It will need to embrace different structures e.g. artist collaborations, but also extended relationships with venues.

CONTEXTUALISATION

The programme will need to work within, and help to develop, the rest of the performing arts ecosystem. The challenges that the artists describe are not just about the lack of project funding, but also about other challenges, the result of years of chronic underfunding to the Arts Council and the arts in Northern Ireland. For example, venues and companies might benefit from: guidance on good practice around procurement, contracts with freelancers and pay; encouragement to produce strategies for how they will work with freelancers; and leadership development. Local authorities might benefit from: support in recruiting and
working with artists; help in broadening and diversifying audiences for their venues; and encouragement to programme more experimental work. HE colleges might benefit from further discussions about how to prepare students for a freelance life, although this has been considered for many years, with some action resulting. The Arts Council might benefit from: a more explicit priority to the wellbeing of artists; a reframing of touring to encompass longer term relationships between venues and artists with a more central role for, and strategic approach to, building new audiences. This was one of the recommendations from my Evaluation of the Strategic Touring Programme for Arts Council England. Overall, the whole initiative would benefit from evidence and argumentation (which might be forthcoming from the projects themselves) to raise the status of artists in NI.

My brief was to research freelancers in theatre and dance. However, some of these conclusions might apply to freelancers in other artforms, and to cross-artform working.