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Creative Crossroads: Sustainability and Well-being in Wales' Creative Sector



Photo credit: Chillee Noir



About the author

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The event [Creative Crossroads: Well-being and Sustainability in the Creative Industries](#) was supported by Creative Wales. [Creative Wales](#) is a Welsh Government agency providing support to the creative industry in Wales.



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Background

This paper reports on an event organised by the Institute of Welsh Affairs with support from Creative Wales at the Millennium Centre, in Cardiff, on 7 November 2023. Titled 'Creative Crossroads: Well-being & Sustainability in the Creative Industries', the event explored the challenges of funding, persisting precariousness, and sustainability in the creative sector in Wales. It was organised to coincide with the launch of a Memorandum of Understanding between Creative Wales and the Arts Council of Wales, which articulated areas of collaboration between the two organisations.

In Wales, public funding for the creative sector falls under the jurisdiction of two distinct organisations: the Arts Council of Wales, set up after the Second World War, and Creative Wales, a Welsh Government agency set up in 2020. The purview of Creative Wales includes areas such as: 'Film and TV', 'Music', 'Games', 'Animation', 'Creattech', 'R&D' and 'Publishing', a [list appended with the note that](#): 'Fine art, dance, theatre and poetry fall outside of our remit', a distinction seemingly based on a separation between the 'Arts' and the 'creative industries'.¹ The complexities of administering funding to the creative sector and to do justice to the areas that compose it are reflected in the Memorandum of Understanding's articulation of cross-cutting themes: artistic experimentation and risk-taking are said to fall under the scope of the Arts Council; a 'ground-breaking film or novel' on the other hand would be funded by Creative Wales.

This separation has an impact on creative practitioners, some of whom fall between funding categories or have no stable source of income between projects, resulting in lasting professional and personal precarity. The Senedd's Culture, Communications, Welsh Language and Sports Committee's [report *Behind the Scenes: The Creative Industries Workforce*](#) claimed that 'the creative industries is really a tale of two creative industries' with fundamental disparities between high-revenue sectors like the screen industries and other creative areas (the report cites the arts, culture and music sector) struggling amid worsening economic conditions.

The event was therefore intended to recognise the above challenges and highlight creative solutions and advances to protect workers, while playing the role of 'critical friend' to the key creative bodies in Wales. It brought together a broad spectrum of voices from across the creative industries and beyond: government officials, public body employees, trade union representatives, freelancers, employees of creative industry companies, and academics.

The event included four panels: the first two panels delved into the Memorandum of Understanding between Creative Wales and the Arts Council, the next panel looked at the creative sector's approach to sustainability, and the fourth was a discussion of workers' well-being, with a focus on holistic solutions such as well-being facilitators. At the end of the day, participants were invited to feed into small group discussions around three questions, responding to the previous discussions and offering up solutions to key challenges:

- How do we sustainably fund the creative and cultural industries?
- How do we make art in a climate crisis?
- How do we prioritise workers' wellbeing in the creative and cultural industries?

Panel Speakers

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Dawn Bowden MS | <i>Deputy Minister for Arts, Sports and Tourism, Welsh Government</i> |
| Gerwyn Evans | <i>Deputy Director, Creative Wales</i> |
| Maggie Russell | <i>Chair, Arts Council of Wales</i> |
| Dafydd Rhys | <i>Chief Executive, Arts Council of Wales</i> |
| Derek Walker | <i>Future Generations Commissioner for Wales</i> |
| Professor Sara Pepper | <i>Director of Creative Economy, Cardiff University</i> |
| Auriol Miller | <i>Director, Institute of Welsh Affairs</i> |
| Rachel Jones | <i>Chief Executive, Arts and Business Cymru</i> |
| Yvonne Murphy | <i>Artistic Director and Executive Producer, Omidaze Productions</i> |
| Dr Simon Dancey | <i>Independent researcher</i> |
| Tilly Ashton | <i>Sustainability Coordinator, Severn Screen</i> |
| Jacob Ellis | <i>Director for External Relations and Culture, The Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales</i> |
| Judith Musker-Turner | <i>Portfolio Manager, Arts Council of Wales</i> |
| Jess Mahoney | <i>Director, Creative Cardiff</i> |
| Simon Curtis | <i>National and Regional Official for Wales and South West England, Equity</i> |
| Joanne West | <i>Culture Connect</i> |
| Ndidi John | <i>Director, Go-Go Well-being</i> |
| Michelle White | <i>Co-Director, 6 Ft from the Spotlight</i> |
| Shirish Kulkarni | <i>Research Fellow, Media Cymru</i> |
| Mohammad Fez Miah | <i>Director of Communications, Urban Circle</i> |

Executive Summary

The creative and cultural sector, the creative economy or the creative industries - regardless of the name used to label them - remain a key part of the UK economy and, in the last few years, have been hailed a Welsh success story, with a reported turnover of '£1.7 billion in 2021, an increase of 14% from 2017.'² Yet, the impressive success of a number of film production companies in generating local employment opportunities while enhancing Wales' worldwide visibility is in sharp contrast to the challenges faced by other sectors in a sector highly reliant on freelance labour. Discussions highlighted that, often, the instability of working teams and the individual nature of freelance careers places the industry in the paradoxical position of incubating the most innovative ideas, while being at risk of replicating old structures of inequality.

This report starts and ends with the crucial importance of funding the creative sector adequately. If funding is to remain one of the core foundations of creativity, it needs to reflect the needs of the people it purports to serve. It needs longer term thinking and planning that would not only support artists with the necessary resources to create art, but also equip them with the means to do so sustainably. Several participants called for funding that would not only enable creativity, but also increase capacity and support.

Another key to the success of the sector lies in ensuring that its workforce is equipped with the required skills to rise to the challenges that await. Discussions highlighted the potential impact of new roles such as sustainability coordinators and well-being facilitators, which can help direct holistic thinking to restructure productions, and make the industry a more sustainable and equitable place.

Another key point of this report is that funding bodies and structures in Wales are not simply monolithic entities, but they must and are finding new ways to collaborate and partner together. Several participants commented that the Memorandum of Understanding between Creative Wales and the Arts Council of Wales was not only welcome but overdue. This belated arrival is symptomatic of the underlying tensions that continue to affect policy making about the arts, and the way that it is funded.

This report makes the following recommendations arising from those discussions:

- Welsh Government should continue to support and expand the well-being facilitator scheme.
- The Arts Council of Wales, Creative Wales, and relevant funding bodies should direct efforts at funding capacity and well-being, by making funding available for networks of care and collectives.
- Funding bodies should aim at reforming funding in order to make it more accessible, by deemphasising outputs.
- The Arts Council of Wales and Creative Wales should coordinate the creation of a one-stop cultural freelancers' directory, listing freelancers in the creative sector in Wales.
- Welsh Government should set up a pan-Wales funders' directory, listing available sources of funding for cultural freelancers.

How do we fund the creative and cultural industries?

The first part of the discussion at the event was dedicated to the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) issued by the Arts Council of Wales and Creative Wales.³ The document sets out areas for collaboration between the two organisations, at a challenging time defined by a discrepancy between creatives' needs and available funding, as well as a high staff turnover rate, with professionals leaving the industry.

The MOU, while intended as a 'living document', aims to clarify how the different organisations forming the sector can work together, establishing a number of mechanisms such as regular meetings. However, as several participants noted, the organisations forming the creative sector also need this and further discussion to communicate their functions and the way they articulate together better, not only to high level stakeholders but also to freelancers.

The Arts Council of Wales, Creative Wales and the definition of the creative economy

The creation of Creative Wales as an arms-length body dedicated to the area grouped under the term of 'creative industry' sets Wales apart from the other devolved nations. In Scotland, a single organisation, Creative Scotland, administers funding from Scottish Government and the National Lottery, and [encompasses](#) 'the arts, screen and creative industries'.⁴ In Northern Ireland, the Arts Council Northern Ireland's areas include the arts and the creative industries but remains distinct from Northern Ireland Screen. In discussions, one panellist suggested that the Welsh model risked emphasising a neoliberal narrative around the arts furthered by the MOU, separating it into 'arts for art's sake' and economically profitable forms of creativity. One participant observed that the emphasis on the economic value of some disciplines was particularly felt through language, and in the distinction in language between the so-called 'arts' and 'creative industries' – with 'pathways' into the arts as opposed to creative industries' 'pipelines'. The divisiveness of the language used to describe the activities included in the creative sector, and of the concept of creative economy, was a topic frequently brought up throughout each panel at the event.

It is worth acknowledging that part of the complexity of the discussion around the creative economy is due to the complexity of its economic definition. This was strongly felt by participants and practitioners in the room, with one attendee noting that, as an immersive filmmaker, she often found that her subject area did not always easily fit the criteria set out by the key Welsh funding bodies. One panellist also noted the profound effect of austerity on youth arts. Although publishing was not represented in our discussions on the day, this sector illustrates the economic disparities that currently characterise the creative sector.

Out of necessity, organisations have had to become skilled at making the case *for* the arts as an economic force or a driver for social change. Organisations such as Media Cymru are advocating for the value of the broader definition of the 'creative economy' in fostering economic development, but it was felt several times that 'we have yet to tell the story of the creative economy' in Wales. Professor Sara Pepper pointed out that the term 'creative economy' offers a

framework to reconsider and redefine not only creative sectors, but also occupations, including those which spillover into other parts of the economy.

The representatives of the Arts Council of Wales, meanwhile, also acknowledged a disparity in the quantum of available funding, noticeable in the outcome of the Investment Review,⁵ and current demand. It was stressed that the Council's work had led them to reach out to 'organisations with people from ethnically diverse backgrounds and disabled backgrounds and [...] communities with strong Welsh language presence', but that the Investment Review could not 'answer all strategic goals', particularly when 'applications are not coming from certain areas'. However, as a panellist later noted, even some opportunities addressed to so-called 'diverse communities' seem to remain, in effect, tokenising and risk missing the groups they purport to address. There remains a need for a language that could speak both to the so-called 'arts' and 'creative industries', but also to reflect the diversity of experience and identity in Wales.

However, as several participants reflected, the arts also have an intrinsic value which is to be valued and cherished, in addition to their positive effect on life outcomes, well-being and health. They are, as heard in discussions, what 'kept us sane' during Covid, and are now a crucial medium in helping combat misinformation about the climate crisis and come to terms with multiple crises Wales is facing. The discussion crystallised the fact that arts organisations, funders and public bodies currently appear to hold different, and possibly conflicting conceptions of the role of the arts in society, but also of the material impact of this divide on artists, which is not only linguistic, but also one of resource.

Governance, culture-led regeneration and the creative sector

The event highlighted the interlocking levels of governance that structure arts funding, with a government agency (Creative Wales) and an arms level body (the Arts Council). Achieving 'a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language' is also one of the National Well-being Goals set out by the Well-being of Future Generations Act. However, participants reflected that this goal is far from achieved. The Future Generations Commissioner noted that the Culture and Welsh language Well-being Goal is currently 'bottom but one in terms of the goals that the public bodies give attention to in thinking about their well-being objectives', a status quo *Cymru Can*, the Commissioner's new strategy, sets out to rectify.⁶

Partnership plays a key role in this process, and several participants in the conversation suggested harnessing the power of the public sector through the Well-being of Future Generations Act to communicate and enhance the role of culture in communities in Wales through involvement mechanisms. It was felt that culture is too often 'seen as an addition, a nice to have' rather than a crucial component of decision making, particularly in a context of downward budgeting. In addition to the MoU between Creative Wales and the Arts Council, a number of organisations in Wales have taken part in similar initiatives to commit to cross-sector partnership: the Arts Council has signed and renewed its Memoranda of Understanding with the [NHS Confederation](#)⁷ and [Natural Resources Wales](#).⁸ The discussion mentioned [Hynt](#),⁹ a Wales scheme aimed at providing consistent access to venues to disabled people and their carers, which is now being rolled across the UK [via All in](#), as an example of good practice made in Wales.¹⁰ The New Curriculum for Wales was mentioned as an opportunity to embed culture in decision making in the public sector.

The event brought up the potential for culture to play a role in revitalising communities. One example was the [Creative Industries Cluster Hubs](#),¹¹ with investment in Rhondda Cynon Taf, Newport and Monmouthshire intended to help creatives in these regions, possibly through the creation of shared physical spaces in order to facilitate collaboration and upskilling between local creatives, and create long-term opportunities in areas around South Wales. One panellist praised the city of Bilbao, in the Basque Country, as an example of good practice in consultations and centering culture in decision-making processes.¹² Such an approach, however, must be embedded in holistic [placemaking](#) considering the needs of inhabitants, if it is to benefit a region's residents, as heard from several participants, and needs clear leadership from the key organisations in order to enhance and support the industry.¹³ There was however a sense that some sectors - like the youth arts sector - had suffered through underfunding, and that it remained challenging to fund and sustain creative safe spaces for marginalised communities in Wales.

Funding the arts sector

Funding cuts have affected the creative sector, and the scarcity of funding continues to govern decision-making in the sector. During our workshops, several participants called for a greater public funding allocation, but also for funding to be targeted at building 'capacity, networks, and social capital', 'networks and collectives', 'capacity and operational costs' as well as creative outputs. Participants called for the redistribution of funds to smaller and grassroots organisations, and for more sustainable funding, with an observation that funding often seemed to end at key points for projects instead of enabling them to embed themselves in the long term. The issue of funding was linked to environmental sustainability, another key topic in our discussions, with participants calling for a 'Green Revolution investment fund'. There was also a sense of a need to attract more sponsorship and funds from the private sector, with examples like Arts and Business Cymru's work to pair up businesses and creatives cited as an example of initiatives to connect the creative industries with other sectors. Some participants also felt the need to position creativity as a skill, and to broaden the perceived value of culture to move beyond a single sector action.

Participants also mentioned the possibility of seeking out innovative forms of cultural funding, looking to international examples for inspiration. One example given was that of the French cinema subsidy, which raises a [10.72% tax on cinema tickets](#), and protected the industry's so-called 'cultural exception'.¹⁴ The foremost French audit institution, the Cour des Comptes, has however recently issued [recommendations](#) to simplify the subsidy system, noting a disconnect between a higher production rate and lower ticket sales for French films in cinemas.¹⁵ In addition, as several participants noted, more could be done to support the visibility of Welsh freelancers and facilitate collaborations with the public sector, with one participant noting that 'visibility is priceless. If the art we make never reaches anybody it's pointless.' In our workshops, several groups suggested the creation of pan-Wales procurement hubs and databases in order to help freelancers to be put in touch with the public sector and create opportunities. Creative Wales' representative acknowledged the lack of data and ability to 'harness the skills of our freelance community in Wales', noting: 'When we were asked to design the freelancers' fund for Covid, the data to do this work wasn't there so we had to start from scratch'. As heard at the event, this lack of investment is also reflected in the dearth of support for freelancers' well-being.

How do we make art in a climate crisis?

The second question put to panellists and attendees at the event was about the sustainability of the creative sector. The conversations took a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, panellists brought up examples of sustainable innovations to lower the sector's carbon footprint and current innovations in this space, as well as the skills required to achieve this. On the other, the discussion dived into the role of culture in helping think through the permacrisis, and the role of the creative sector in devising solutions and offering narratives offering a way forward.

Sustainable solutions, sustainable skills

Discussions around sustainable approaches to creativity often revolved around the film industry and sustainable approaches to procurement across the supply chain. However, it is worth noting that ongoing discussions in music, theatre, and publishing, for example, have also raised the issue of sustainability as a preoccupation that should underpin every aspect of creative work, with artists exploring solutions to lower their carbon footprint. Solutions (reusing elements of the set and costume, sourcing second hand and sustainable materials, looking for more energy efficient solutions in venues) exist but, as one panellist noted, this remains a challenging discussion to hold for sectors with highly complex supply chains. For example, a sector such as fashion is now often held as an example of the ways that Western countries offset their carbon footprint to countries in the Global South with devastating environmental and social consequences for workers.

By contrast, a panellist made the case for moving from offsetting to insetting carbon emissions when considering sustainable solutions, and to consider global as well as local priorities. While carbon offsetting compensates for pre-existing emissions, insetting embeds carbon reduction in the supply chain, trying to reduce those emissions in the first place. Workshop participants similarly expressed the need to see sustainability reframed as an enabler, rather than an inhibitor or an add on. Sustainability challenges link up the creative sector with others, with the lack of public transport one of the obstacles to creative industry practitioners in Wales, where film productions, for example, use up more diesel than in the rest of the UK.¹⁶ As one panellist noted at the beginning of the day, skills will be key to this discussion, as 'most jobs for the future don't exist yet'. There is therefore an opportunity to think about the sustainable skills needed for new entrants into the sector, and for inventing new roles.

Sustainability in the screen sector

It is perhaps logical that, given its economic and environmental footprint in Wales, the screen sector was one of the key creative areas discussed during panel sessions. In 2021 alone, Netflix's carbon emissions were estimated at 1.5 million tonnes of CO₂.¹⁷ The event heard, in particular, about the positive role of having on-set sustainability coordinators to advocate for better practices and hold together the various threads of weaving sustainability into creative approaches.

There was a notable optimism in the room about the potential of scaling up innovative sustainable solutions, with an observation that 'the most sustainable solutions on film sets are

also often the most cost-effective', and examples like waste management (including food waste) and increasing recycling cited as ways to lower a production's carbon emissions. The discussion also brought up the role of innovative circular economy-led approaches to filming, with a panellist emphasising the importance of leveraging a positive 'ripple out' effect when considering the effects of carbon emissions across the supply chain in the creative sector, from transport to catering. It was also agreed that building community connections could play a crucial part in helping advance a green approach to filmmaking and creativity generally, with shorter supply chains remaining one of the key ways to lower the carbon footprint.

For this work to be effective and sustainable, however, it needs to be capacitated: the role of sustainability coordinator is new, and recent industry entrants are not currently adequately skilled or resourced to uphold the sustainability standards required to lower the industry's footprint and achieve Net Zero globally. As a result, on the ground realities of embedding sustainability in production can be challenging, and there is a need for all production crews to have an understanding of how sustainability plays out on a set and of Environmental Social Governance regulations. As with funding, the lack of linked up data was brought up by participants as an obstacle, with an audience member suggesting the need for a database signposting freelancers to more sustainable practices and suppliers.¹⁸ The Screen New Deal,¹⁹ in which Wales is the first UK nation to take part, outlined steps to lower carbon emissions in productions.²⁰ The albert certification scheme, awarded to productions that complete a 'Carbon Action Plan' to reduce their emissions, was cited as a positive example of embedding more sustainable ways of working across the screen sector.²¹ In the theatre sector, the Theatre Greenbook provides guidelines to make productions, venues, and associated services such as catering less carbon intensive.²²

Creating through a permacrisis

Overall, the panellists and audience expressed faith in the ability of the arts and creative sector to play a positive role in enabling a culture change to face the realities of climate change, and in advocating for societal transformation. Early research on the impact of climate change on culture shows its potential risks for communities in Wales, where 60% of residents live near a coastline, and who are put at an increased risk of flooding by global warming and extreme weather events.²³ Here, several participants strongly felt that a global approach was needed, and the Arts Council is in the process of devising a new Strategy for Climate Justice in the Arts, a piece of work led by Judith Musker-Turner. The event heard the ongoing challenges faced by the residents of the island of Maui, in Hawaii, where wildfires have destroyed major cultural heritage sites, devastating the historical town of Lahaina.²⁴ Research led by Dr Lana St Leger at Cardiff Metropolitan University is currently investigating the impact of climate change on indigenous languages, including Welsh, as communities are destabilised or displaced by extreme weather events or changes in their environment.²⁵ This has ramifications in the creative sector: the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee's Behind the Scenes report warns of challenges with hiring Welsh-speaking staff for mid-level roles.²⁶

The arts were seen as a key tool for change, depicting and inviting reflection on the climate crisis. Several participants mentioned the importance of climate change narratives that would not simply focus on the crisis per se but also embrace the fact that humanity is living through a

permacrisis and focus on its effects on individuals. Here, opportunities exist for joined up work with other sectors: one example given in discussion was the Memorandum of Understanding between Natural Resources Wales and the Arts Council of Wales, with an aim to help promote the sustainable management of Wales' landscapes and natural environment through the arts. This collaboration is starting to bear fruits, with the nominees of the Future Wales Fellowship tasked with producing work reflecting on their connection with nature in partnership with Natural Resources Wales, the Elan Valley Trust and the National Trust.²⁷

How do we prioritise workers' wellbeing in the creative and cultural industries?

With almost 50% of the UK creative sector workforce being self-employed, workers in the creative sector face specific challenges bound up in short-term contract and funding, long and irregular working hours, and evidence of persistent malpractice, with bullying one of numerous concerns articulated on the day.²⁸ So strongly was this issue felt by those in attendance, that several workshop participants later observed that the question of well-being should have been the first on the agenda.

The conversation on well-being included a blend of freelancers, union representatives and well-being specialists. In particular, the conversation platformed the role of well-being facilitators to help bring about change in the industry. The conversation also foregrounded the intersectionality of the issues faced by freelancers, where global majority and disabled practitioners, for example, continue to suffer multiple forms of marginalisation. The discussion evinced an understandable sense of frustration at the lack of progress made in this area from the perspective of many creative workers and freelancers, although it was agreed that there were 'no quick fixes'. One panellist noted a disappointment at the post-pandemic period ('coming out of the pandemic, there was a hope that we would build back better. I don't think anybody would actually agree that that's happened'). Overall, participants strongly articulated the need for pathways into the industry but also for more sustainable working conditions, enabling workers not only to enter the creative sector, but to remain and thrive in it.

Work dynamics

Precarity is a key concern, with creatives struggling to establish themselves, create sustainable income opportunities, and make a career, not to mention outside perceptions of creative work as 'a hobby'. In addition to poor rates of pay, one panellist noted that there was often a gap between well-written, detailed policy guidelines, and their application on the ground, with poor recruitment structures and unfavourable terms and conditions. As noted by one panellist, 'we often are looking at fixing the symptoms, we're not looking at the root cause of what actually drives quite a lot of the poor mental health within the sector'. Those poor conditions, coupled with lack of funding, propel a situation in which people do not invest in new talents or hire new voices, with an overreliance on networks to secure new jobs and a tendency to rely on traditional recruitment methods through platforms such as Spotlight, for example. It was mentioned that small budgets got in the way of having HR services in the creative sector, although, as a panellist added, building a diverse workforce is not only a question of money, but also of building time to engage with newcomers.

Retention also poses challenges in the sector: 'There's no shortage of people coming into the sector, but we lose them.' As a result, the Welsh Government's Creative Skills Advisory Panel is working to bridge the gap between higher education and the sector, with entrants underprepared for the world of work in the creative sector. The Creative Wales Industry Survey found that 17% of those surveyed had found their job through word of mouth.²⁹ Several panellists

pointed out the importance of better signposting to show that the sector can supply viable careers, but one participant noted that 'it's a live question about whether it *is* a viable career', and another noting that when she entered the industry, she was not sure which way to go to find a job and acquire the right skillset.

Freelancers face added pressures, especially if the cause of their issues is a permanent member of staff, and may be concerned about making a reputation as a 'troublemaker' for speaking out. But these issues are compounded by intersectional factors for people of colour, people from a low socio-economic background, disabled people, people with caring responsibilities, women and people from the LGBTQ+ community. Discussions emphasised struggles with childcare, transport, or being the only person from a global majority background on set or on a panel. One speaker also noted that advertising roles on websites and social media is not enough to recruit people from diverse backgrounds, and that there was a need to go into communities and reach out. This comes with a need to ring-fence resources to dedicate to reaching outwards, and attract people from marginalised and underrepresented communities. However, several speakers of colour also noted that they also often felt tokenised, whether through being invited or hired due to their race in otherwise all white spaces, and expressed a range of emotions from anxiety to exasperation.

Unfortunately, as one participant noted, many diversity schemes have also failed due to funding being cut short, with emerging artists supported by said schemes 'not getting the memo' and getting 'dropped' unexpectedly, and 'nothing to secure their development'. One panellist observed that the industry should 'take responsibility and plough their resources' in order to foster new talents, as there was a risk of overreliance on short-term funded programmes. As a result, it was noted that trainees often felt isolated when joining the sector. Another participant noted the importance of building entrants' confidence, and creating spaces to learn how to network. On this front, one Black speaker noted that, as a Black creative, there was sometimes a pressure to 'do it all' herself, and acknowledged insecurities that might come with sharing issues with one's employer or line manager in a highly competitive environment. There was consensus that the sector needed to create dedicated, stable safe spaces for freelancers to seek support, as they were likely to work across very different teams from one project to another.

Well-being facilitators

The well-being facilitators programme funded by Creative Wales is the result of a partnership between CULT Cymru, the Creative Unions Learning Together programme, and 6ft from the Spotlight CIC. The programme was first rolled out with positive feedback from industry participants, and the pilot funding has been renewed for a second phase.³⁰ From the outset, one well-being facilitator present stressed the importance, and challenge, of securing producers' buy-in to enable the role to perform its function on sets and in venues, noting 'people see well-being as a spare wheel, as opposed to the steering wheel, they don't use it to drive themselves forward', and that their role was sometimes weighed up against the time constraints inherent in creative productions. As another speaker said, 'ideally, we would support the design of a more mentally healthy production with the production team and the leadership team'. Instead, however, well-being facilitators were often 'parachuted in' and used as 'firefighters' when things had already gone wrong. Further, another challenge faced by well-being facilitators was to drive deeper thinking and cultural change, which a participant noted required going beyond the paperwork

to include a broader reflection about recruitment culture and processes, for example. At the same time, having a well-being facilitator provided an 'opportunity space', and it was felt that safe spaces do not 'happen by default' but have to be the result of concerted action to help them come into existence.

Well-being and funding

The material conditions of creative work are key to a healthy workforce. The day's discussions frequently emphasised the issue of systemic income inequality, and the fact that workers' well-being is inextricably linked to funding conditions. In a landscape of funding scarcity, while participants often called for additional funding to the sector, there were also several discussions about how to deliver funding better, and in a way more attuned to workforce needs. In workshops, participants stressed the importance of supporting artists to create, experiment and fail, with the possibility of 'no strings attached' funding. A number of workshop discussions pointed out that grants often put emphasis on outputs, and were critical of current conditions that favour short-term, project-oriented grants. Some participants also felt there was a need for more accessible and less onerous funding processes that risked being a barrier to freelancers. They highlighted that funders should also aim to simplify funding applications, with several freelancers mentioning the [Covid Cultural Recovery fund for freelancers](#) as an example of accessible, short application, which attendees expressed they were grateful for.³¹ They also suggested that funders could put more focus on funding to build capacity, set up networks and collectives, and emphasise the need of funding favouring exploration and giving artists and creatives the capacity to try new things and fail. Further, several participants suggested tying the obtention of funding to organisations achieving specific wellbeing standards, which should be clearly set out to form the basis of regulations across the sector. As a panellist observed, levers do exist: the Well-being of Future Generations Act, for example, encompasses fair work, and there is also potential to draw on social partnership.

Conclusion and next steps

The discussions paint a picture of a contrasted sector, with those most likely to suffer from inequitable working conditions still struggling to take part in conversations to devise a different way forward. As heard from participants, however, the contributions made by artists and creative workers of all horizons to society in Wales are innumerable. Not only does the sector generate material and symbolic benefits for Wales, it also, as seen from the examples of sustainability coordinators and well-being facilitators, incubate innovative solutions. As heard, however, these will need longer term investment and rethinking of the role, quantum, and structure of funding conditions which continue to prove particularly challenging, two months on from the event.

Finally, the conversation was intended to be inclusive, with representatives from senior layers of the creative sector and freelancers forming part of the conversation. As many participants observed on the day though, this comes at a risk - of extracting knowledge from freelancers without compensating them for their labour. While the event was free to attend, it was not possible to offer supported places for participants that would have compensated freelancers for a day of work. As a result, while the summary aims to reflect not only the key discussions in panels but also the discussions held during the workshop that closed the day, voices are still missing from the conversation: the voices of those who, for income or other reasons, were unable to attend the day's discussions. As heard, this limits freelancers' ability to attend events and training, and to take part in meaningful discussions.

The IWA makes the following recommendations on the basis of this event:

- Welsh Government should continue to support and expand the well-being facilitator scheme.
- The Arts Council of Wales, Creative Wales, and relevant funding bodies should direct efforts at funding capacity and well-being, by making funding available for networks of care and collectives.
- Funding bodies should aim at reforming funding in order to make it more accessible, by deemphasising outputs.
- The Arts Council of Wales and Creative Wales should coordinate the creation of a one-stop cultural freelancers' directory, listing freelancers in the creative sector in Wales.
- Welsh Government should set up a pan-Wales funders' directory, listing available sources of funding for cultural freelancers.

The IWA would like to thank all those present for their contribution to those conversations.

Notes

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