Building Back Better? Creative Freelancers and Learning from the Covid-19 Experience

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We would like to thank also the Panel Members – listed on page 14 - for their time and highly valued contributions.

Finally, and in particular, we would like to thank the creative freelancers who were interviewed as part of this project – and in possibly the most trying times they and their businesses have ever faced.

The Growth and Diversity of Creative Freelancers

As we ended 2019, a record number of just over five million workers in the UK were self-employed, more than 15% of the employment total. Similarly, of the record number of 6 million businesses in the UK, 4.6 million (76%) did not employ anyone but their owner/s and between 2000 and 2020 the number of non-employer businesses had almost doubled from 2.4m to 4.6m.

Such sustained growth is now understood as part of a wider structural trend within UK employment and business population demographics towards, variously, self-employment, sole trading, freelancing and micro- and small-firm entrepreneurship. Yet the merits of such growth remain the subject of considerable debate – between those seeing a positive feature of a dynamic, entrepreneurial and flexible economy allowing the inclusive possibilities of fractional working (including, for example, highly skilled freelancers[3]) and those highlighting a growing 'precariat'[4] undertaking low paid, precarious and unstable employment in the 'gig economy'. It was within this context that CSRE (2017)[5] noted both the need to recognise the true diversity of the self-employed and to research such diversity.

Such employment trends and debates are central to understanding the substantial growth of the cultural and creative industries. In 2017, the Creative Industries Federation estimated that 47% of all creative jobs in the UK were freelance, roughly triple the rate for the economy as a whole. If the 'gig economy' started in the creative industries, the industry is recognised also for having for a long time employed a mix of project-based production systems, outsourcing, temporary organisational forms and configuring events, (collaborative) networks of freelancers and volunteers and portfolio working[6] as part of the ecologies and economies of the cultural and creative economy[7].

In Spring 2020 we were planning to interview 90 creative freelancers in Coventry city region, London Borough of Waltham Forest and Northumberland County. Led by Coventry University, in partnership with Coventry UK City of Culture 2021, Creative United, London Borough of Waltham Forest, Northumberland County Council and the University of Warwick, we had been funded by the NESTA Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre to investigate the evidence gap of, and provide greater insight into, place-based creative freelancer models. Our research rationale for doing so was to better understand the diversity of creative freelancer business models – from superfused[8] to precarious to simply under-the-radar[9] - and their relationship to and embeddedness in 'place', in order to support locally-based investment and policy proposals.

Then came the pandemic. On March 20th 2020 all bars, pubs, cafes, theatres and social venues were closed, with full 'lockdown' introduced across the UK from 23rd March 2020. Over the period March to May 2020 what undoubtedly is and has remained as 'unprecedented' policy support packages were announced by UK government including the Job Retention Scheme (JRS, 'furlough'), the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) and Coronavirus

[3] *SBRC/IPSE (2018) Self-Employment in the Modern Economy: Exploring the rise of self-employment in the last decade*
[4] Standing, G. (2011) *The Precariat: The new dangerous class* Bloomsbury Publishing: London/New York
[5] CSRE (2017) *The True Diversity of Self-employment: Exploring the rise of self-employment in the last decade*
[6] https://pec.ac.uk/blog/who-is-working-second-jobs-in-the-creative-economy
[7] Fleming, T. and Erskine, A. (2011) *Supporting Growth in the Arts Economy*; Gross, J. et al. (2020) *Managing Creative Economies and Cultural Eco-Systems*
[8] Sapsed, J. et al. (2015) *Brighton Fuse 2: Freelancers in the Creative Digital Economy*
[9] https://pec.ac.uk/blog/counting-craft

Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS, and subsequent Bounce Back Loans). Alongside these very high profile support packages, a range of 'deferral of payment' packages were introduced (such as for tax self-assessment) and, at Local Authority level, rates relief, small grants and other schemes, especially for hospitality, leisure and retail venues of lower rateable value. Soon to follow were a range of civil society hardship funds targeted by vectors such as occupation, household income and location.

In what has been termed a 'culture shock' (OECD, 2020)[10], the cultural and creative sectors have been close to the hardest hit sector in the international economy after aviation and hospitality (and in the UK especially, bricks-and-mortar retail). Venue-based sectors (such as museums, performing arts, live music, festivals, cinema, etc.) have been the hardest hit by social distancing measures, with abrupt drops in revenues, direct lay-offs, the highest usage of versions of 'furlough' schemes across the world and substantial and immediate repercussions for the value chain of their suppliers. Some cultural and creative sectors, such as online content platforms, have profited from the increased demand for cultural content streaming during lockdown, but the benefits from this extra demand have largely accrued to the largest firms in the industry. In contrast, the structural fragility of production networks and ecologies, sole-traders, creative freelancers and micro-enterprises has been made all too visible as 'the lights have gone dark'.

One (immediate) response was at least 22 surveys from the creative sector itself launched in March 2020 alone, in the UK, by creative and cultural industry bodies, associations, unions and funders seeking to understand the issues faced and the potential impact of Covid-19 on individuals working in the creative sector [11]. More broadly, there has been a sustained period of intelligence gathering, advocacy and strategic and policy responses by sector and sub-sector bodies.

For our project, the response has been three-fold.

- First, given the immense and immediate challenges faced by creative freelancers, and in joint discussion amongst the research partners, interviewing of creative freelancers was delayed until July 2020 (and completed in November 2020). In total, 84 paid for interviews were completed, with an average interview length of just over 60 minutes. 'Vulnerability' was intended as one dimension of our semi-structured interviewing of creative freelancers concerning their business models – but only one. Delaying interviewing gave space for interviewees to have responded to immediate and urgent business concerns and, subsequently, to have at least had the possibility to begin to consider their business models in light of recent experiences. The interview process continued its intended focus on understandings of (pre-and post-pandemic) business models, alongside giving room to discuss experiences during pandemic up to the date of the interview.
- Second, an additional series of 5 stakeholder interviews were undertaken in November 2020 alongside the collection of recent Covid-19 responses by sector bodies. This stage was introduced both as stakeholders expressed interest in the project and because of heightened activity by stakeholder groups around the impacts on the sector and (the efficacy of) policy responses.
- Third, and accelerating the project's initial proposed set of local policy workshops to discuss findings, a Webinar and Panel Discussion, *Building Back Better? Creative Freelancers and Learning from the Covid-19 Experience* took place on 30th November 2020 with an invited

[10] OECD (2020) *Culture shock: COVID-19 and the cultural and creative sectors*, OECD September
[11] Comunian, R. and England, L. (2020)' Creative and cultural work without filters: Covid-19 and exposed precarity in the creative economy', *Cultural Trends*, 29:2, 112-128

audience of some thirty participants including national and local policy makers and researchers. The Webinar presented an interim sub-analysis of 33 creative freelancer interviews undertaken in England between July and August 2020, after the first lockdown, after the first major wave of economic policy interventions by the UK Chancellor, and as the targeted £1.57bn investment into the sector had just been announced[12].

The following pages provide:

- The Webinar Powerpoint Slides outlining Findings; and

- Combined short summaries of the stakeholder interviews and Panel comments.

12 https://www.gov.uk/government/news/157-billion-investment-to-protect-britains-world-class-cultural-arts-and-heritage-institutions

Findings: Creative Freelancers during Covid-19

Slide 1 sets out the demographic characteristics, location and sub-sector of our interview sample.

Slide 1: Creative freelancers in this sample

Coventry University

Age	Male	Female
20 – 29	0	3
30 – 39	3	8
40 – 49	4	5
50 – 59	3	5
60 – 69	0	1
70 - 79	0	1
	10	*23*

Interviews conducted July – August 2020

Music, performing and visual arts
Crafts Advertising and marketing Architecture
Film, TV, radio and photography Other
Design and designer fashion More than one sector

Location	
Coventry	12
Northumberland	11
Waltham Forest	10
	33

Sample: 23 White British, 2 White European, 2 White Other, 1 Black British Caribbean, 1 British Indian, 1 White Canadian, 3 did not specify.

When mapped by business structure, the expected characteristic of 'freelancer diversity' was reinforced (Slide 2). The number of clients annually reported by interviewees ranged from 1 to 400 clients. For sole traders this averaged out at around 34 clients, and for limited companies at around 15 clients, per annum.

Overall, 79% of interviewees reported that their freelancer income was not enough to support the household.

Slide 2: Creative freelancers in this sample

Coventry University

Business structures

		"Freelance income not enough to support the household"
Sole trader (only)	22	17
LTD company (only)	5	3
Sole trader plus agency work	2	2
Sole trader plus CIC	2	2
Sole trader plus PAYE work	1	1
CIC plus sole trader	1	1
	33	*26*

"As a freelance producer I'm sometimes attached to particular theatres longer term, but never over 20 hours week with one company – need variety within my work."

"My business is made up of sole trader - 75%, CIC work 20% and zero contract employee through schools - 5%"

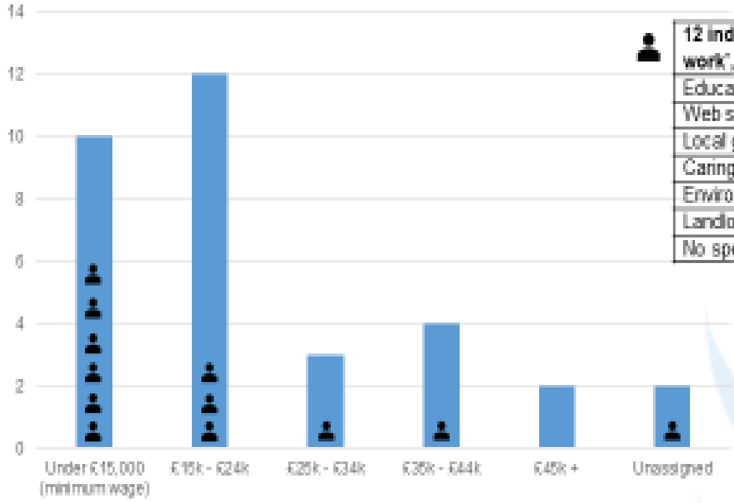
"In some cases I work at a school but the clients are the parents. Working relationships with parents are key as well as students."

"Most of what I do tends to be word of mouth and recommendations – both sides of creative work. Did used to apply for open calls or commissions but now get approached for work. Maybe half my week is freelance and half is PAYE (employed)."

Annual incomes were low (Slide 3). Almost a third of interviewees earned under the annual minimum wage from their creative work with two-thirds earning under the average annual UK earnings. A third were engaged in portfolio working entailing non-creative work.

Slide 3: Creative freelancers range of annual income

Coventry University



12 individuals carried out 'other non-creative work', including:	
Education (primary, higher education)	3
Web support (design and development)	2
Local government	1
Caring for others (elderly, childcare)	2
Environmental / conservation	1
Landlord	1
No specific	2

Slide 4 maps the interviewees against their expected future business plans. The typology ranges from the majority who were 'hanging on and hoping for a return to normality' (Hopefuls), through various shuffles or adaptations to completely switching their business model (Switchers). A minority reported that their freelancing was 'doing ok' under Covid-19.

Overall, over two-thirds were struggling, alongside the many reporting that their annual income achieved by their freelancing was not enough to support the household to start with (Slide 2).

Slide 4: Responses to shock / Covid-19: business plans

Coventry University

We asked about future business plans – five types of approach:

13	**Hopefuls**	hoping 'normality' returns; face-to-face roles/activities	*Actors/performers/theatre roles, musicians, dance teachers, some arts/crafts retail*	Struggling
9	**Shufflers**	reactive shuffling of (diverse) activities/income streams	*Project managers/curators, producers/directors, talent agents, marketing*	Struggling
6	**Virtual Adapters**	developing hybrid of real/virtual activity	*Photographers, clothes designers, multi-taskers with digital skills, online arts sales*	Doing ok
3	**Growers**	low/no Covid-19 impact; reflecting on more 'best work' or seeing new opportunities	*Illustrators/animators, architect, project managers*	Doing ok
2	**Switchers**	exploring alternative work/creative opportunities	*Clothing designer to lecturing; hospitality design to 'drone' imagery work*	Struggling

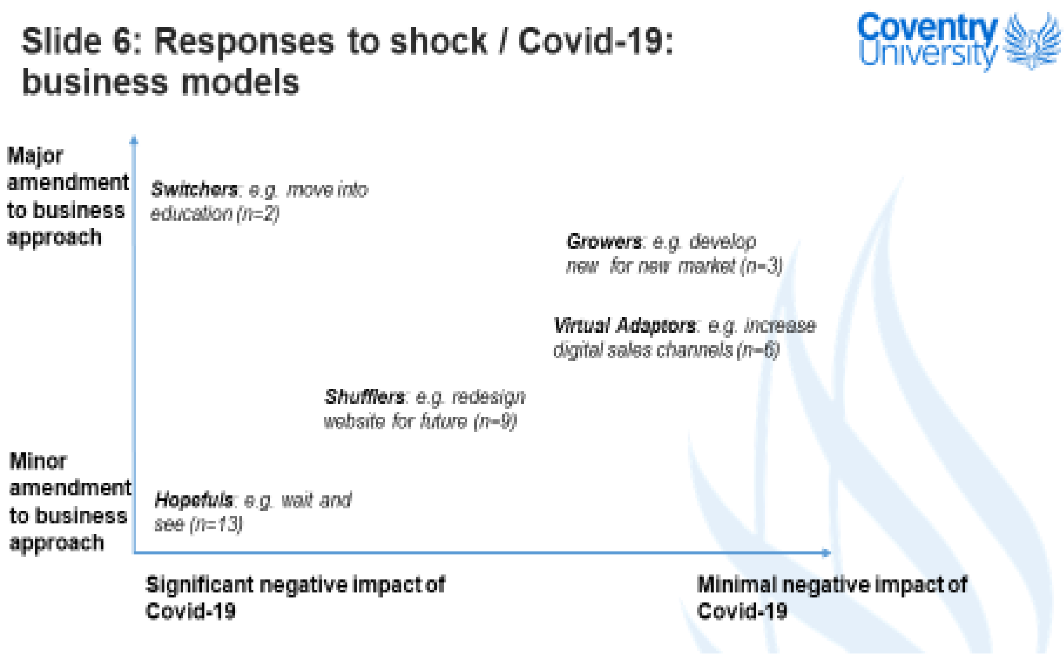
Two thirds struggling... alongside income not enough to start with.

The substantial majority of interviewees were then, at this point in time of July – August 2020, holding to their existing business model (Slide 5). As was seen across the economy, a number of Virtual Adapters had enhanced their use of digital activity significantly in their work.

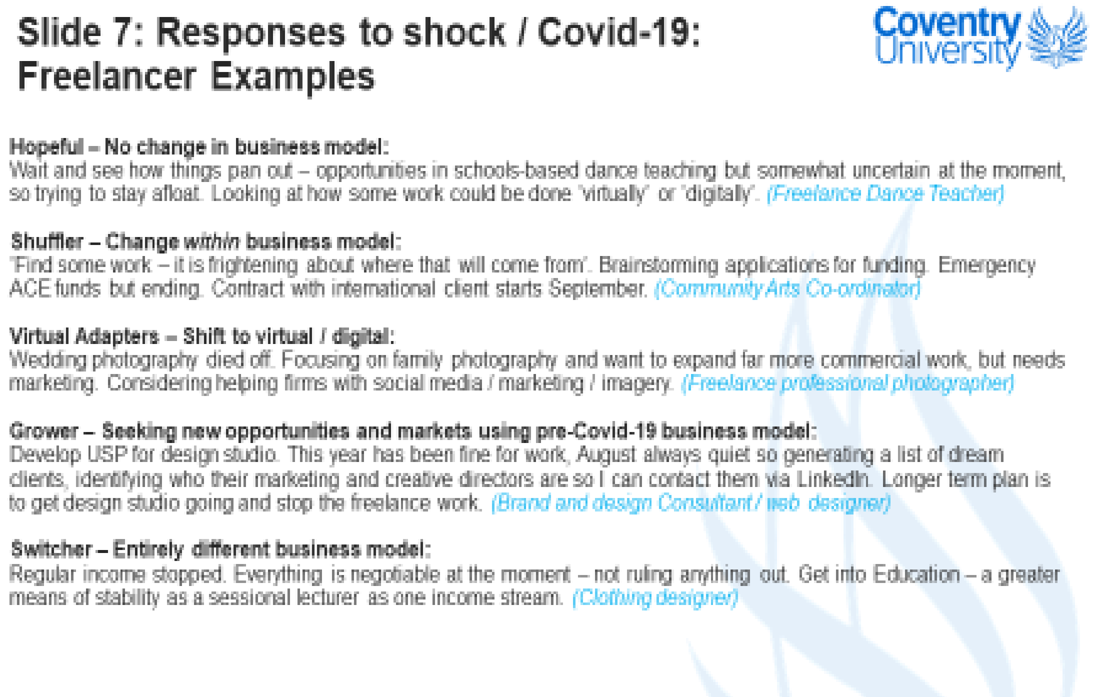
Slide 5: Responses to shock / Covid-19: changing business models?

Type	Change to Business Model?	No.
Hopefuls	No significant change to pre-Covid-19 business model – "waiting"	13
Shufflers	Emphasis on specific workstreams *within* pre-Covid-19 business model (most out of necessity; a few choosing 'best work')	9
Virtual Adapters	Significant shift to virtual / digital / hybrid models of activity	6
Growers	Seeking new opportunities and markets using pre-Covid-19 business model	3
Switchers	Business model changed – switch to alternative work entirely	2

Business model responses can be mapped against the level of (negative) impact of Covid-19 to gain a sense of the differential impacts and responses by these creative freelancers in the face of the challenges of Covid-19 (Slide 6).



Slide 7 below provides greater insight into the creative freelancer sample, their business models and how they were responding to the shock of Covid-19.



At the time of the Webinar and Panel (November 2020), there remained considerable debate - and advocacy- around some of the limitations of the major policy responses to support the economy during Covid-19. Particularly high profile was Excluded UK, a new social enterprise launched specifically to advocate for the estimated 3 million taxpayers – 10% of the UK workforce - who had found themselves excluded from 'meaningful support'[13], even following the subsequent 'winter economy extension' on 24th September 2020[14].

The excluded 3 million comprise: newly self-employed; those earning less than 50% income from self-employment; self-employed with +£50k trading profits; PAYE freelancers; new starters; those made redundant before 19 March 2020; those denied furlough; Directors paid PAYE annually; Directors paid in dividends; Directors of companies not in profit; new businesses; businesses ineligible for Business Grants; those in maternity/parental/adoption leave; those whose personal circumstances have affected entitlement to support e.g. pensions, bereavement allowance, carer's allowance, students.

What is noticeable about the 'excluded' is how such an unprecedented policy response has seen a structural failure to deal with the business dynamics of freelancing, sole trading, early stage entrepreneurship and portfolio working (including homeworking and lack of business premises) - despite as noted earlier its growing and dynamic importance in the UK economy and labour markets.

Given the opening discussion of this paper highlighting how such trading, business and employment forms have been especially prevalent in the recent growth of the creative economy, such exclusions have been especially devastating for creative freelancers and the sectors within which they work[15].

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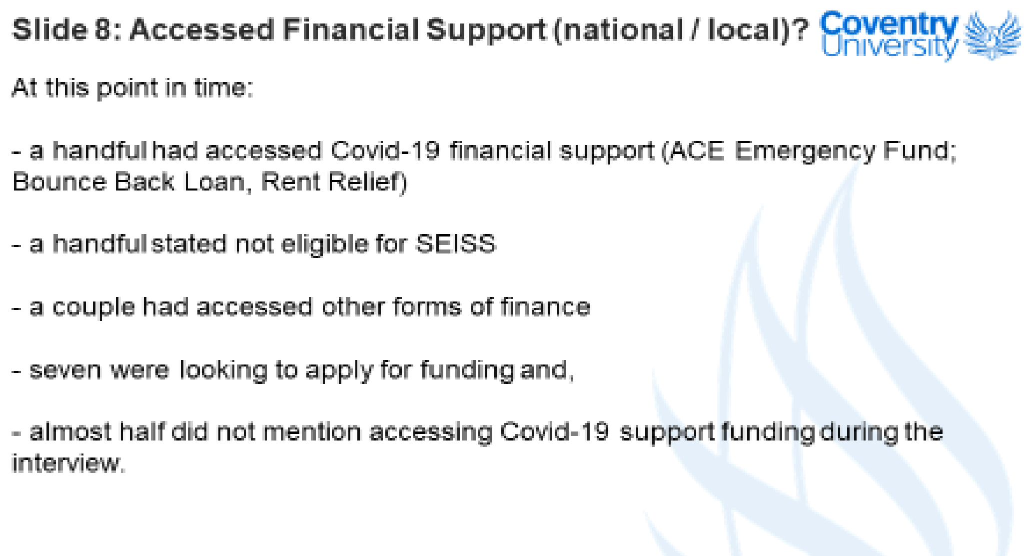
[13] https://www.excludeduk.org/excluded-uk-an-inclusive-alliance-for-the-excluded;

[14] https://www.enterpriseresearch.ac.uk/chancellors-new-measures-leave-3m-entrepreneurs-high-and-dry/

[15] https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmcumeds/291/29102.htm

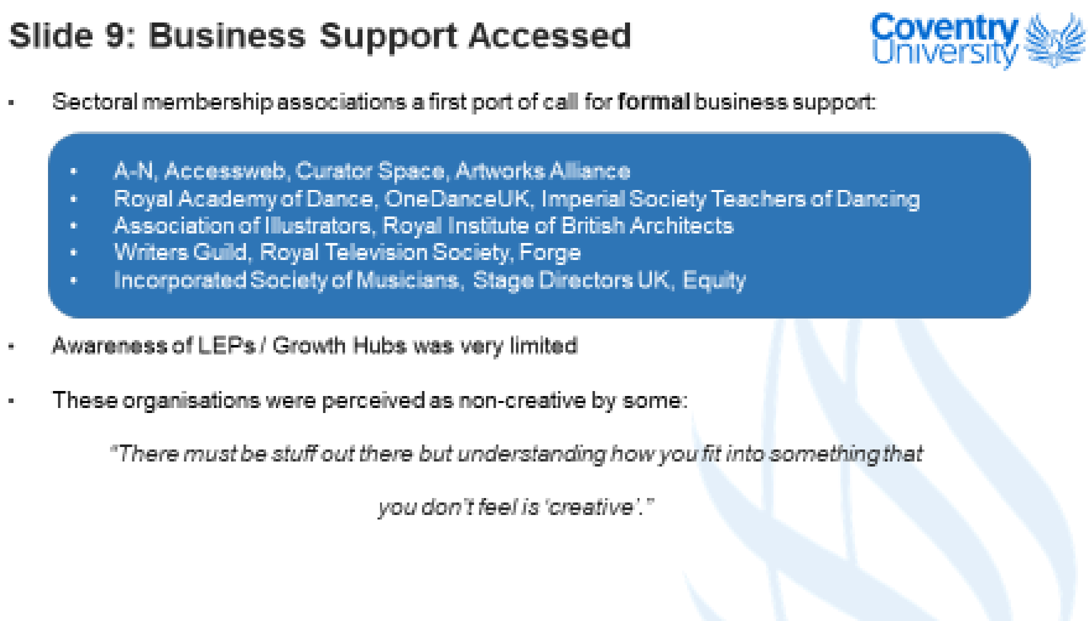
Our interviews in July – August 2020 included coverage of use of financial and business support by interviewees – formal and informal – and at national and local levels (Slides 8 – 10).

Overall, at this relatively early moment in the roll-out of the support system, it was clear that such support was yet to penetrate across our interview sample and that some of the complexities and exclusions of support were already beginning to surface amongst our creative freelancer sample (Slide 8).



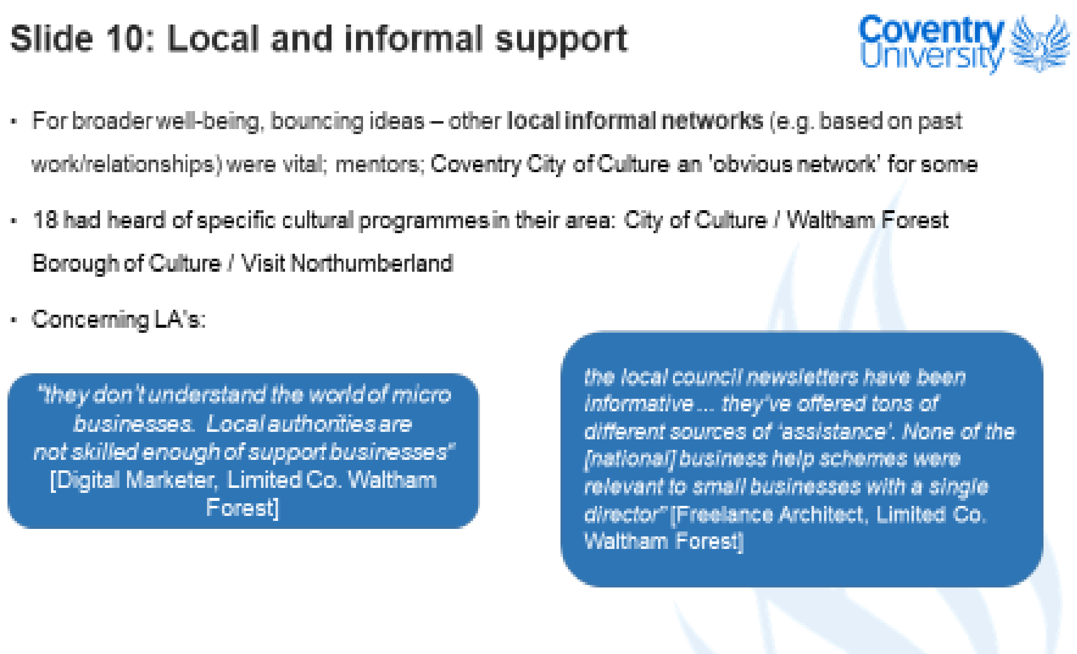
It was clear also that the first choice of support to deal with business and policy support challenges was (sub) sectoral support and membership associations (Slide 9).

There remained a gap in relationships with generic local business support structures[16].

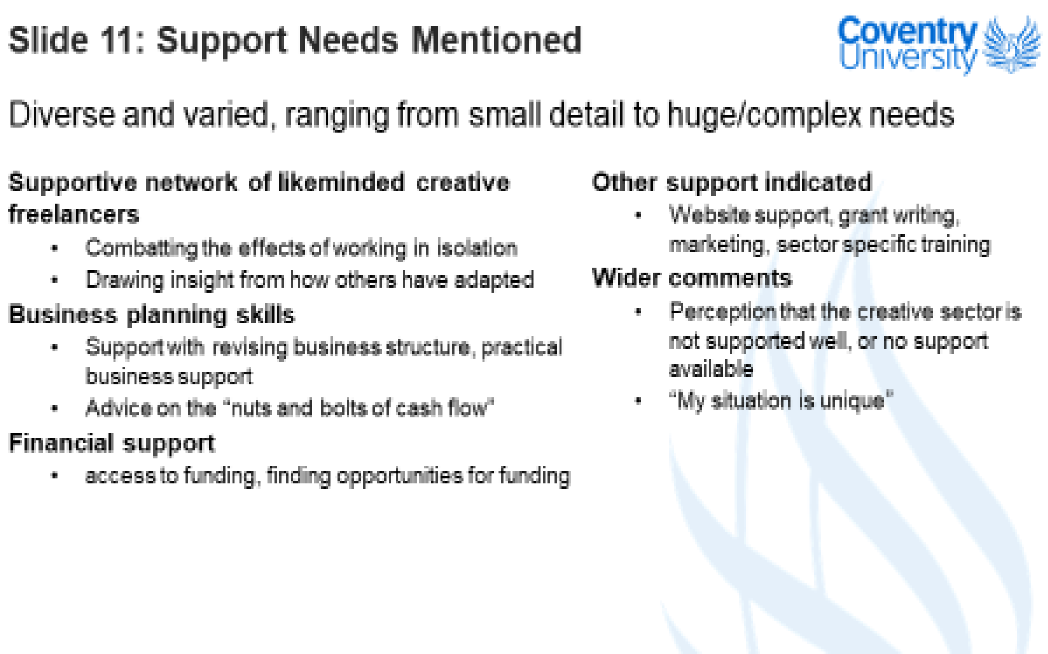


[16] See, for example, https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/research-directories/current-projects/2017/the-prosper-programme-researching-business-support-for-cultural-and-creative-organisations/

More broadly, especially for well-being support, local informal networks were being utilised – and which related also to the work-based freelancer ecologies and ecosystems within which our interviewees sat (Slide 10). Within these, Local Authority activities and their programmes and projects had some recognition by creative freelancers.

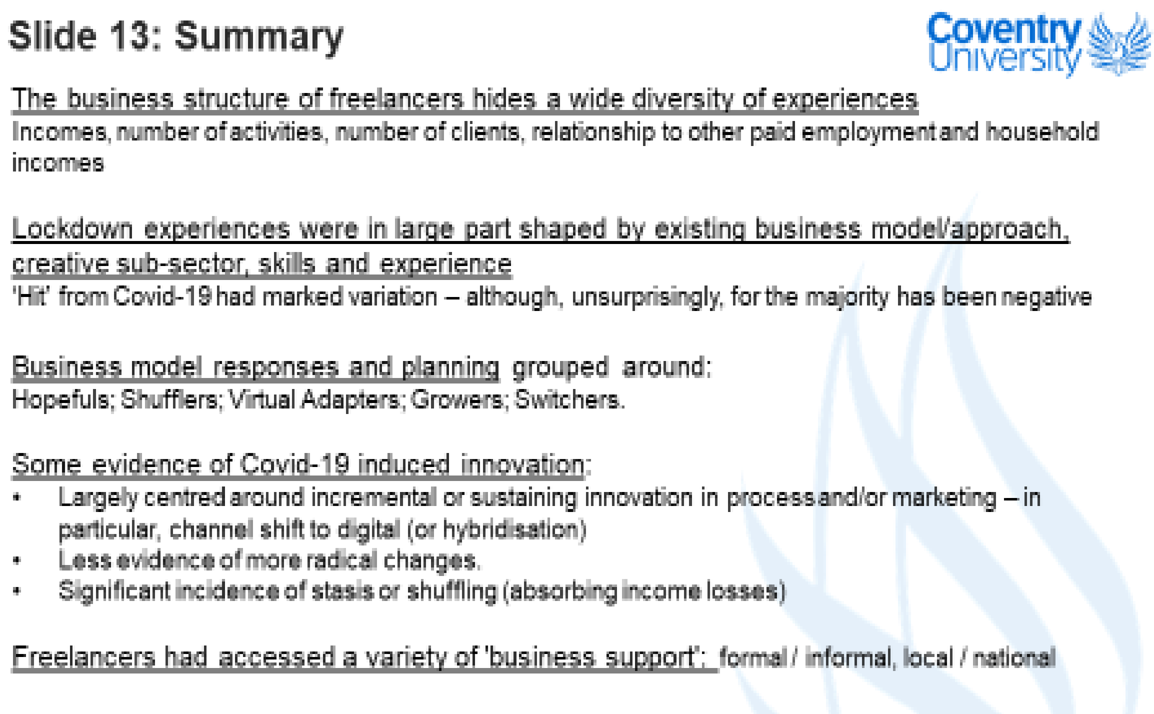


In response to what support needs were felt to be needed, answers were diverse and varied, from small detail to huge/complex needs (Slides 11 - 12).



The potential role of Local Authorities was asked – and expectations did align with current activities (Slide 12).

In summary (Slide 13):



The Findings from this rapid analysis of the experiences of 33 creative freelancers interviewed in July-August 2020, during Covid-19, suggest an initial set of implications for policy focused upon ‘Building Back Better’ (Slide 14).

Slide 14: Implications for Building Back Better?

Coventry University

- Significant pre-Covid-19 issues around fragmentation of work, adequacy and stability of income streams.

These have not gone away. So how to use this ‘moment of reset’ to tackle them. The ‘fair work’ movement?

- Limited recognition of breadth of economic diversity and economic and community value of the sector

As crisis continued, greater recognition of community value (‘place’), different sector supply chains (e.g. B-2-C; institutions as supply gatekeepers/anchors; freelance networks) and their vulnerabilities

- Immediate support needs relating to income maintenance, business sustainability and diversification [working with ‘Covid-19 secure’]
- Longer-term needs sit at the nexus of economic and sectoral development, market making and contracting, and the system of employment relations.

Creative Freelancer Business Models during Covid-19: Stakeholder comments

Forty to sixty minute interviews were undertaken with five sector body stakeholders; four of these formed part of the Panel at the 30th November Webinar alongside a creative freelancer previously interviewed for the project:

- **Deborah Annetts,** CEO at Incorporated Society of Musicians
- **Julia Bennett,** Head of Policy and Research, Crafts Council
- **Fred Hopkins,** Head of Business Development and Membership, One Dance UK
- **Julie Lomax,** CEO, A-N
- **Yvonne Conchie**, freelancer supporting rural communities to become more resilient
- **Caroline Julian,** Director of Policy and Programmes, Creative Industries Federation

Overall, the interviewees were asked to consider:

- What does creative freelancer mean from your perspective in / on the sector?
- What did you see / know to be the main challenges and barriers for creative freelancers pre-Covid?
- Have any of these been reinforced / made more visible by the circumstances around the pandemic?
- Has the pandemic showed up positive elements related to creative freelancers and their business models?
- What do you want to see in the future – structures, processes, or other aspects?
- What else should we know about that relates to our project focus?

The following pages provide key comments drawn from the interviews and/or Panel contributions.

Deborah Annetts, Chief Executive Officer at the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM), https://www.ism.org/

- The Findings align with the ISM experience given its strong focus on dealing with the unequal employment and contracting terms and conditions faced by their membership across the range of employment relationships and contracts.
- Such inequitable conditions are found across the sector – public funded, private funded and not-for-profits – and have been accentuated by the actions of employers and contractors under Covid-19.
- Covid-19 policy responses have reaffirmed that the government does not understand the mechanics of the sector.
- The legal team at ISM has seen a 100% increase in enquiries and ISM membership has increased by 5% during 2020.
- The IP and streaming models which have been developed as one business model response generally do not favour the artists.
- Covid-19 may be suggesting if there is a day of reckoning to be had for the existing system or can we work changes around this to make the system work more fairly? If there are so many freelance / struggling individuals / business approaches that don't work – is that a fair system that needs improving or is that a continued widespread reliance on large-scale exploitation?
- There is a corollary here with manufacturing and other sectors and where if there is a known vulnerability across the 'supply chain' at some point an actor needs to/has taken responsibility for more than just that which affects them. The nature of capitalism is changing – taking account of fair work and responsibilities to support the system (and supply chain) – how is this working with relation to creative sector? All those 'little venues' where young/emerging musicians go to start are under imminent threat, are going out of business, but in another language these are our 'steps in the ladder/R&D'.
- There needs to be an improvement in the training which those who wish to work in the music sector receive outside of musician type skills so that musicians etc. know what constitutes best practice and can take steps to secure better treatment in their working lives. All those who occupy positions of leadership across the music sector should adopt an ethical style of leadership rather than one based on cutting corners and exploiting those who do not have so much economic bargaining power such as performers.
- Similarly, we have encouraged 'portfolio work' as a business model – and now found that is has fallen foul of either the furlough or self-employed income scheme. See also https://www.ism.org/campaigns/makemusicwork
- Brexit will be a nail in the coffin for many.

Julia Bennett, Head of Policy and Research, Crafts Council, https://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/

- Research Findings echo many of the things we recognise in the craft sector.
- 65% of makers identify as portfolio workers.
- The challenge for micro/makers is that they are a person of all trades – as well as their creative practice they are their own business / finance / marketing support.
- Pre-Covid, the skills challenges were around entrepreneurial and business skills.
- Lots of training is focused on those with larger business models and there is scope to provide tailored training for sole traders – even training for SMEs has to be sifted through for its applicability to freelancers and sole traders, who may be reluctant to take time away from creative production.

- Apprenticeships could have potential when grouping support options, but specific issues with the scheme.
- Diversity – access is a real issue for many and needs to be recognised fully
- Creative economy has often led the way for economic models so there is opportunity here – but an issue (still) with statistics and the aggregation of a very small occupational sector of crafts – if you're not counted you're not seen.
- Pandemic has highlighted difficulties in supply chains of materials and exhibition / making space access – the switch to digital is just not possible for some.
- It has compounded isolation for makers with limited supply chain or in individual practice
- Positive outcomes have been that there has been more/different forms of collaboration, especially using digital platforms. Local and peer to peer support has been visible – online markets and networking with independent shops – networking *into* the local area so that that survives as well as the craft business. This ties in with the recent PEC micro-clusters report[17], and that sense of place and buying local have all increased in pandemic.
- There has been a lack of meaningful advice on Brexit which represents a significant 'next' challenge.
- In the future freelance as a mode of working is not visible enough in government figures across the piece – when will this be recognised? Crafts Council sent a survey in November 2020 – rescue packages took so long to come, what was the usage and what will be the fallout of this longer term?
- See also https://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/documents/1280/CC_summary_to_DCMS_on_Covid-19_and_Brexit.pdf

Fred Hopkins, Head of Business Development and Membership, OneDanceUK, https://www.onedanceuk.org/

- The Findings echo the experiences of our members, a mix of independent practitioners within highly segmented markets. Performance is already often secondary in the portfolio to teaching, physio, community work, etc.
- The short term impacts of Covid have been disastrous. Hard to chart income drops in same way as other sectors – but clear that the economic inequalities that existed before are now more visible.
- Carving a niche you can monetise online as an individual is both a challenge and opportunity. The possibility of more balance between live and digital is interesting. But needs knowhow, seed funds and confidence.
- Developing the skills to operate as a freelance professional is frequently missing from artistic training. This can take at least six months and more to learn once graduated and contributes to burn out. In future, we would greatly love to see arts courses having business skills modules in as compulsory as some courses and schools are now doing, and this is something OneDanceUK is looking at.
- Large funds reassessed their funding priorities to support existing organisations and work in direct response to Covid-19 - with a lesser focus on new or emerging work.
- One Dance UK charter is to create a long lasting sector. New research around the state of the sector intends to track across 500 students as they leave education – Year 1 of 3 is underway.
- Brexit is a huge challenge and the sector is anticipating contraction of work.

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

Caroline Julian – Creative Industries Federation, https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/

- CIF is a membership organisation from the largest organisations through to micro. It provides advocacy for freelancers, including as part of the workforce.
- The spectrum of freelancers is very great - sole traders, personal services companies, casual work, short term PAYE, start out self-employed – and the limited understanding of this vital part of sector led to their 2017 report[18].
- Now working closely with IPSE (The Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed) to understand creative self-employment with reference to the wider self-employment community.
- Main challenges for this part of the creative sector is equity of support; for example, sick pay, maternity/paternity leave. Clamping down on late payments is another issue, working with the Office of the Small Business Commissioner.
- Support and access to finance is critical, but generic support is not enough to unlock economic potential – and need to replace with something tailored to the sector.
- It is great to push entrepreneurialism but need to highlight also the issue that it is not secure. CIF have been looking at Germany and France on how to deal with insecurity.
- Covid-19 policy response has seen SEISS revealed as lacking in looking after workforce holistically, and others who are struggling to access and live off Universal Credit have shown the limits of this safety net. Both exemplify challenge of how to address employment and income insecurity in the sector and economy in the medium to long term.
- Digital increase great but not everyone has been able to do that – recovery needs to be equitable for all, including those struggling to pay bills and who haven't been able to pivot business models.
- These challenges are now visible to government and industry – so how do they intend to engage responsibly with their freelance workforce?
- The language of government – full time workers first and freelancers secondary – doesn't send a message that the latter are significant. Almost need a paradigm shift – publicly and in government – to shift thinking on the significance and breadth of freelance working.
- Rather than investing in the needs of employers there could be a shift to thinking about the needs of the individual and their economic contribution
- CIF have joined forces with the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), Prospect and the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self Employed (IPSE) to call for a Freelance Commissioner and Future Workforce Commission, to build more resilience into the UK's self-employed workforce.
- See, also, https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/news/wrapping-2020-blog-ceo-caroline-norbury

[18] https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/sites/default/files/2017-07/Creative%20Freelancers%201.0.pdf

Julie Lomax, Chief Executive Officer – a-n The Artists Information Company, https://www.a-n.co.uk/about/type/about-a-n/

- a-n is the largest artists' membership organisation in the UK with over 25,000 members. Membership does include some arts organisers but mainly visual arts, which covers a wide range of activity and disciplines. a-n's core aim is to support their member's practise and artists' livelihoods.
- They surveyed their members In March 2020, gaining 4,000 responses – 93% of respondents were experiencing a reduction of income at this early stage because of social distancing[19]. Even then a-n could see the vulnerabilities of business models and supply chains becoming clear. For example, residencies are treated too often treated as education – which then is used as an excuse not to pay a fee. And when institutions closed under Covid-19 they should have made good on their contractual obligations to freelance artists but many did not. For a-n, this reinforced their belief that the business pipeline is an increasingly broken one.
- Due to this it is a strategic aim of a-n to understand more about artist reliance on different sources of income and the role of intermediaries.
- In 'building back better' can we look at 'practice first' business models to develop more appropriate business models. Such stage/lifecycle models need to incorporate flexibility to adapt to how working practices, and careers, change over time. This needs to take into account not just how practitioners are making their artistic work but also how that relates to their wider (life) circumstances.
- Models of business that are given as advice to artists early in their careers have been shown under Covid-19 to have compounded the difficulties in artists being able to access support. SEISS is an obvious example, and which had had diversity and inclusion outcomes also – did HMT undertake a proper gender impact assessment in setting this scheme up?
- There has been an element of institutional mourning – and the response was to commodify work previously made, using digital means – but this response came from institutions not artists.
- Positives from the situation have occurred such as peer to peer support and The Artists Support Pledge[20]; there has been more collaboration across the sector.
- a-n looking to work with IPSE on IR35 issues and provide better advice to artists on the changes and implications as part of their broader response

Yvonne Conchie – creative freelancer supporting rural communities to become more resilient, https://conchie.co/

- See ForgottenLTD, ExcludedUK campaigns for examples of how creative freelancers have been failed by policy support.

- There are limits to 'digital pivots' and the capability and capacity to respond with new business skills, from the audiences' sides as well as freelancers', but it can increase participation, particularly for those experiencing geographic exclusion.

- Overall, need to see continued changes in funder priorities toward benefitting people (including practitioners) and not things within the sector.

[19] https://www.a-n.co.uk/research/covid-19-impact-survey/
[20] https://artistsupportpledge.com/

- Have seen an impetus to hyperlocalism, developing local distinctiveness, networks, audiences, and advocacy as ways to increase resilience of communities and economies, whilst reducing infection risks from travel and mixing of populations .
- Three things to pull into building back better:
    - *Pay freelancers* for their time, and do so fairly, Good clients offer up front, so freelancers know they are serious and worth investing time and effort in.
    - Keep and build on the positive digital connections that we have used during the pandemic to increase participation, accessibility and longevity of your work.
    - Focus on the hyperlocal, and its fuller recognition of the economic, social and place-based value of culture and creativity, growing local audiences and advocates in a safer environment.

In March 2021, the *Creative Freelancer Business Models and Place-based Growth* Research Project from which this (interim) Report is drawn will publish its full results.