

IWA Response to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee's Consultation on the challenges facing the creative industry workforce in Wales

30 September 2022

About the IWA

We are a think tank and charity, independent of government and political parties.

By bringing together experts from all backgrounds, we conceive ambitious and informed ideas which secure political commitments to improve our democracy, public services and economy. We provide platforms for debate, opportunities for people to make their voices heard and agenda-setting research. We are funded by our members, income from our events and training sessions, and supported by trusts, foundations and other funding bodies. We are a proud Living Wage employer.

Our vision is to create a Wales where everyone can thrive.

1. What is the current health of the sector's workforce, including the impacts of the pandemic, Brexit and cost of living crisis? Have workers left the sector, and what impact has this had?

1.1. Welsh Government's chief concern should be to address the systemic precarisation of the workforce. With 50% of the cultural workforce in Wales working as freelancers, a key aim should be to rollback the generalisation of what Kuba Szreder (2021) has called the '[projectariat](#)': a class of creative workers whose careers are determined by short term funding, resulting in the overall degradation of their working conditions.

1.2. Cultural Freelancers' Wales' [Road to Recovery](#) report paints a dire picture of the state of affairs for cultural freelancers in Wales, highlighting that freelancers report a loss of income of 76% in 2020 due to cancelled opportunities, slowing down investment in new equipment and training. Action should target these workers as a matter of priority to enable them to remain afloat as the cost of living crisis is likely to affect opportunities, particularly for those workers in unstable positions.

1.3 The health of the creative industries should be a key concern to guarantee media plurality and showcase Welsh talent and culture. Welsh Government should continue to monitor the sector, with annual data collection surveys to assess the state of the workforce. In particular, more information is needed to assess retention issues in the sector.



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2. How financially stable is the sector and how suitable are pay and working conditions?

2.1 The high proportion of freelancers in the cultural sector poses sector-specific challenges to working conditions, alongside high levels of inequality between workers in stable positions and those reliant on irregular short-term opportunities. Cultural Freelancers Wales' Report [notes](#) with great concern that 'working conditions for freelancers do not allow for the same career progression as might be expected amongst traditional employees', resulting in low pay and unstable working conditions. These conditions ripple throughout the sector with a particular impact on already marginalised people: Cultural Freelancers Wales particularly highlight 'women and freelancers with caring responsibilities'.

2.2 Given this, Welsh Government should not only consider support packages directed at workers but also maximise incentives targeted at cultural organisations and businesses that employ freelancers to deliver a baseline of support and rights for contracted workers, including paying for travel, access to benefits, training and skills development and better working conditions, in addition to diversity targets of the kind used by Ffilm Cymru. Efforts should also be made to develop employers' awareness of the adverse impact of unstable working conditions for creative industry freelancers, perhaps in the form of targeted advice and awareness campaigns channelled through services to employers such as [Healthy Working Wales](#).

3. How equal, diverse and inclusive is the sector? How can this be improved?

3.1. Inequalities in the creative industries reflect disparities in other areas of economic activity. A 2021 report from the [Policy and Evidence Centre](#) found that 52% of the workforce in the sector came from a wealthier background, compared to 38% across all industries in the UK. *Road to Recovery* also highlights that, by and large, women, disabled people, people from ethnic minorities and/or people with caring responsibilities are also likely to be on a lower income. Existing structural inequalities are likely to be reinforced by the informal working and hiring practices prevalent in the sector: the [Screen Survey Wales 2021](#) found that 77.7% of companies and 76.9% of freelancers mentioned word of mouth and networking as part of their recruitment and job search strategies. While remote work has been shown to improve access to opportunities for workers located outside urban areas, digital working conditions may result in diminished opportunities for entrants to the sector to develop mentoring relationships needed for career development.

3.2. Additionally, a lack of appropriate infrastructure risks hampering professionals in the creative industries. While *Road to Recovery* highlighted that 41% of cultural freelancers in Wales, respondents to the survey highlighted a lack of broadband access and difficulties in access to transport could prove a barrier when considering work opportunities. The [Screen Survey](#) points out that a 'lack of strategic connectivity and infrastructure deficits continue to limit opportunities for learners, workers, and firms in the film and TV production sector'.



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4. How sufficient are skills and training opportunities? Are there gaps, and how should they be filled?

4.1. The Annual Population Survey shows a low rate of participation in training among workers employed in the creative industries (18%) which risks capping career progression. Funding opportunities for workers in the creative industries tend to be dispersed, with short application windows that can penalise workers wishing to plan their career and progress. The *Road to Recovery* report also highlighted a lack of signposting, making it challenging for less experienced freelancers to locate opportunities for further training and development. The recent announcement of a [Creative Skills Fund](#) will hopefully support projects likely to contribute to workers' skills developments. However, its short application window is unlikely to result in long-term, structural changes, including access to training and support for workers in more precarious positions.

4.2 The *Screen Survey* uncovers significant opportunities for further collaboration between creative industry companies and higher and further education providers, with only 40.7% of companies working in collaboration at the time of the survey. In this respect, Welsh Government's *Creative Skills Action Plan* includes many welcome measures to foster such collaborations, with entry-level recruitment and placements and the new curriculum named as priority areas. Yet recent research into career progression within the film and television industry in the UK ([van Raalte / Wallis, 2022](#)) highlights that emphasis on bringing new talents into the workforce conceals staff retention issues, with experienced workers leaving the creative industries to escape poor working conditions.

5. What has been the impact of support from public bodies such as the Welsh Government, and is further support needed?

5.1 Covid-19 made the sector's workforce's reliance on Welsh Government and other public bodies' support more evident: while only 8% of respondents to Cultural Freelancers Wales' *Road to Recovery* report had applied for a support scheme prior to the pandemic, their number rose to 91% during the pandemic. The Welsh Government's Freelance Fund (Cultural Recovery Fund), Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, and Universal credit were noted as particularly effective. However, the same report also noted that more recently established freelancers, who also were the most likely to be less established in the creative sector, were the least likely to be eligible for some support grants such as the Arts Council of Wales schemes while simultaneously being less aware of existing sources of support and funding.

5.2 The creative industries are already dealing with the challenges raised by decarbonisation, and these challenges are likely to be compounded by the composition of its workforce. Clwstwr's report [Green Innovation for the Screen Sector](#) highlights the importance of balancing out the needs of a growing sector against net zero imperatives. Combined with a lack of opportunities for development during the pandemic, this change in paradigm may result in leaving smaller

companies and freelancers unable to adapt their working practice behind. Incentives should therefore be in place to encourage and support creatives in upskilling and future-proofing their business to allow them to remain competitive and support a successful, greener and fairer creative economy.



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