# Creative industries workforce
# Workshop

January 2023

## 1.   Background

**1.**     In July 2022, the Senedd's Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sports and International Relations Committee launched an inquiry into the challenges facing the creative industry workforce.

**2.**     As part of this inquiry, the Committee held a workshop on 10 November 2022, hosted by the University of South Wales with the purpose of exploring and better understanding the challenges with the sector's workforce.

**3.**     Members of the Committee discussed issues affecting the creative industries workforce with a range of stakeholders from across the creative industries. The conversations were loosely structured around the inquiry's terms of reference.

**4.**     Discussion topics included: the health of the sector's workforce, financial stability and pay and working conditions equality, diversity and inclusivity in the sector; skills and training opportunities; as well as the impact of government support. The views shared during the workshop were collected anonymously by Committee officials.

**5.**     This report summarises the workshop's findings.

# 2. Participants

**6.** The workshop held in partnership with the University of South Wales welcomed individuals from the following areas within the creative industry workforce across Wales:

- Animation

- Creative co-working workspaces

- Dance

- Design

- Drama

- Fashion

- Games

- Higher education

- Marketing

- Music

- Photography

- Special effects

- Theatre

- Training

- Video production

**7.** A list of organizations is included in Annex 1.

# 3. The workshop

**8.**     On 10 November 2022, Members of the Committee welcomed individuals from many areas within the creative industry workforce across Wales, for discussions to explore and better understand the challenges with the sector's workforce.

**9.**     The workshop was organised in two discussion sessions, with participants equally split in two different groups. Each session ran for approximately 50 minutes with time for feedback.

**10.**     Delyth Jewell MS (Committee Chair) and Alun Davies MS (Committee Member) were present and engaged with participants from the creative industries workforce.

**11.**     Participants were asked to discuss and give feedback to the following questions:

- 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?

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

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

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

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

# 4. Key themes

## 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?

**12.** General impacts of both Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic were shared across the board. At the same time, those involved in screen areas, particularly those accessed from home, shared positive outcomes, innovation and new possibilities emerging.

**13.** Participants involved in the gaming industry shared:

> *Content production continued during the pandemic, and there were opportunities for some businesses to grow.*

> *Games and animation transitioned to the pandemic fairly seamlessly.*

**14.** Other industries with shared experiences such as cinemas and theatres – struggled:

> *40-50 per cent of audiences have not returned to cinemas, and there have been closures across UK. There is an unfair perception that cinemas are not COVID safe. There is a need to protect shared cultural experiences.*

> *Lots of people left theatre. Many took on alternative jobs which they have stayed in. Smaller theatre companies folded. There has been a slow creep back for theatre audiences.*

**15.** There were however, largely shared negative impacts of Covid-19. Especially when referring to its impacts on freelancers, the industry's reliance on them,

access to support schemes and particular challenges with an "exodus" of the Welsh language workforce:

> *Sector is heavily reliant on freelancers. In periods of lockdown, everything stopped then started up again. A number questioned whether or not to return to the sector. For example, some roles in the screen industries (e.g. hair and make-up) experienced longer working hours during the pandemic because of mitigation measures. This led some people to leave the industry.*

> *Lack of eligibility of new freelancers for Self Employed Income Support Scheme was problematic.*

> *Welsh Government freelancers support was timely but limited, and easier for people in the know. There were access issues in how the support for freelancers was distributed. This process led to a "survival of the fittest".*

> *'Among those who have left the industry, we have particularly our Welsh speakers. There is a struggle to find trainers, mid-level people, who know what they are doing. Finding experienced people to take up these positions is proving to be a difficult challenge.'*

> *'We are talking about skills etc but not talking about people that are leaving the sectors. Not addressing some of the key questions around mass exodus.'*

**16.**   A number of areas represented shared views that the pandemic only highlighted existing issues within the industry, not necessarily created them. Challenges faced by the industry prior to the pandemic and that came to surface when it hit:

*'Covid was not necessarily the cause of issues in the creative sector. It highlighted what was already an issue. The lack of investment and sustainability.'*

*Government did not appreciate extent to which COVID would change society and therefore the creative industries.*

**17.**    There were concerns regarding early career freelancers, especially among young people in the creative industries, those without strong and supportive networks and those without access to means of transport in order to access remote locations where work takes place:

*'There are two types of freelancers. The experienced and well established freelancers who are doing well and charging high rates due to high demand and there are the industry starters, those who are either just starting or have just started freelance creative work. The latter, are the ones currently struggling, usually have 2 jobs or work weekends.'*

*'The creative workforce, especially those young struggle with transport. Not all drive nor have cars. Public transport is expensive and not great. Now there is even a backlog for driving classes.'*

*'When it comes to the current climate, where kids are going home and listening to parents talk about how they are going to pay their bills, it is not helping them think about working in a financially unstable sector.'*

## Financial stability

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

**18.**    When addressing the financial stability of the sector, there was a focus on how to access funding and how it is more challenging for small businesses within the creative industries. Concerns were raised with regards to the level of bureaucracy involved with applications, and the speed in which they were processed:

> *Welsh Government funding should be easier to apply for and, once approved, should be provided more quickly.*

> *'Delays can cripple small initiatives.'*

> *'Access routes to funding are difficult in Wales, especially when those in the creative industries aren't known by their ability to handle technical paperwork, some are dyslexic, some neurodivergent, etc, nor have help to process applications. Often, big organisations find it easier to apply for funding due to having dedicated staff, which is different for small businesses. Creative Wales has paved helpful routes, but small businesses need more help with it.'*

> *'Every funding application is considered a new application, so every time a small business is applying, it needs to prove itself again. It would be fantastic to have a system that remembers applications and history.'*

**19.**    The impact of working conditions on the mental health of the workforce were a major theme. Those present highlighted toxic behaviour, bad practices and unawareness of how to report. These problems are exacerbated by a very interconnected industry and lack of capacity to deal with mental health issues:

*There is a problem with toxic behaviour in senior screen creatives, and a lack of understanding in the workforce of how to report bad behaviour.*

*Hierarchy within Welsh language theatre. Artistic Directors holding too much power and highly ego driven, can lead to a toxic workforce.*

*Creative directors are gatekeepers of productions, and can create negative environments which are hard to challenge.*

*A small, connected industry world makes reporting bad behaviour difficult.*

*Micro-businesses (which dominate the screen sector) often don't have HR advisors, so struggle to help with employees' welfare. Shared services would be helpful.*

*'More innovative HR processes are needed. Processes are currently set up to protect organisations not to support staff/communities.'*

**20.** It was noted that less than ideal working conditions have a particular impact on young people:

*Mental health issues are common in young people entering the industry.*

**21.** Participants also shared creative ideas for engagement with schools and the issue of funding for creatives. One that particularly stood out was the [1]Room 13 initiative:

> *'The creative sector needs to engage better with schools. We need artists back in schools, having 'meet-the-maker' sessions and artists in residence. The industry needs to reach students and inspire them at a young age. It is not easy to get to schools as teachers are often busy and unsupported. Some school related projects don't get a legacy because they are also based on funding, which disappears A fantastic opportunity to look at is the Room 13 initiative, which helped keep creatives close to the schools.'*

## Equality, diversity and inclusion

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

**22.** Several workshop participants shared worrying perspectives on matters regarding equality, diversity and inclusion in the industry. Although it was recognised that data gathering needs to improve, participants commented on issues such as tokenistic representation without proper development and the under-representation of disabled people, especially in senior positions:

> *Tokenistic representation takes place rather than structural change. People are recruited for visibility, but not developed. Organisations are not held accountable for equality, diversity and inclusion.*

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[1] Room 13 is a Highland-based arts organisation focused exclusively on providing free, high quality, visual arts opportunities and experiences for the 8-25 age group. It offers safe and welcoming spaces for young artists to work alongside professional artists-in-residence, with free access to tools, equipment and materials.

The first Room 13 was set up in Lochaber, Scotland, in 1994 as an art studio run by a group of children and their Artist-in-Residence, Rob Fairley, in a spare classroom in Caol Primary School. The idea was adopted by artists and young people around the world. As a result, Room 13 Caol became the centre of a movement promoting visual literacy, creativity and enterprise among young people in school and community spaces worldwide.

*Disabled people are under-represented in the screen industries. There are very few disabled people in senior positions. Screen productions should have to sign up to a standard of equality, diversity and inclusion for Welsh Government funding.*

*There is a lot of imposter syndrome in the creative sector, 'I know a lot of people who are on anti-depressants due to the stress and deadlines.'*

**23.** Other issues in this area emerged when discussing the lack of support for working women with young children as well as children from disadvantaged economic backgrounds:

*There is insufficient support for women working with young children.*

*'Children from lower economic backgrounds don't compete in the same circumstances. So same opportunities may not help. They need more support.'*

**24.** It was noted that geographical barriers need to be removed if people outside of Cardiff were going to be able access the industry::

*'Big and established UK artists only play in Cardiff. It would be phenomenal if there was encouragement for big acts to go and play in Newport, Swansea, etc. We would need investment and incentive for them to go to these areas. Investment not just from the Welsh Government but potentially creative ways to look into it.'*

# Skills and training opportunities

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

**25.** In addition to discussing the historical challenges facing the creative industries, participants also commented on the recent changes regarding skills and training for creatives:

> *Some sectors lacked the skills to transition to digital delivery.*

> *Dance online is not fit for purpose.*

> *People need multiple skills nowadays.*

**26.** A number of participants mentioned that STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) focused education has not benefited the creative industries.

> *Education needs understanding of what a career in the creative industries look like. Too much targeting towards at STEM in the past. Point towards to the growth of the economy in Wales in this sector.*

> *'Push towards STEM has left creatives behind, despite the economic contribution of the businesses present here today. The balance is shifting back towards this sector and we need to grasp the opportunities.'*

> *Higher education needs to look at equality, diversity and inclusion to prepare people before they enter industry.*

**27.** At the same time, participants also highlighted the important of featuring recent success and growth in previous years in order to encourage people to see opportunities in the creative sector.

> *'We had 22 alumni nominees in the Oscars this year. How many pupils in schools or people in general know these facts? Government can help promote a cultural creative identity.'*

## Support from public bodies

What has been the impact of support from public bodies such as the Welsh Government? Is further support needed?

**28.** When discussing the role of the Welsh Government and support for creatives, there was an eagerness to see more engagement with the industry:

> *The role of government is to be a catalyst for something to happen, and the approach needs to for the long term, rather than the short-term.*

> *The Welsh Government should have more risk-appetite to help companies generate intellectual property.*

> *Creative industries are not sufficiently recognised in grant schemes which aren't focused on creative industries.*

> *Longer-term funding is helpful.*

**29.** When asked how the Welsh Government can help, many commented on the importance of long-term investment, planning for the future and a passion to see substantial industry growth.

*'It's about passion and about long term planning. It can't be about 3 months' worth of funding, but actually 10-15 years into the future. Government needs to provide opportunities.'*

*'Government can help by creating opportunities as well as allowing visibility. Creating an environment where young people can engage with creatives.'*

*'It isn't about flooding the sector with money, but investing it in the right places, it is about also encouraging creative ways.'*

*'The Welsh Government has the great opportunity to use the creative sector for PR. Use the amazing projects and films currently in Wales.'*

*'The Welsh Government can help by taking creating industries with them to global fairs, like New York. Government has the power to amplify the creative industry in Wales.'*

# Annex 1: List of individuals and organisations.

The following individuals and organisations participated in the workshop held at the University of South Wales.

| Name | Organisation | Industry |
|---|---|---|
| **Lauren Orme** | Lauren Orme Films | Animation |
| **Ben Cawthorne** | Cloth Cat Animation | Animation |
| **Julia Harris and Sarah Valentin** | The Sustainable Studio | Creative workspace |
| **Matthew Gough** | University of South Wales | Higher education - Dance |
| **Steve Wright** | University of South Wales | Higher education - Fashion, Marketing and Photography |
| **Emma Marshman** | University of South Wales | Higher education - Games, Design and Children's books |
| **Lucy Squire** | University of South Wales | Higher Education - Music and Drama |
| **Dr Damon Minchella** | University of South Wales | Higher education - Music |
| **Prof Paul Carr** | University of South Wales | Higher education - Music |
| **Dr Richard Hurford** | University of South Wales | Higher education - Performing Games Animation and Music |
| **Tom Ware** | University of South Wales | Higher education - Media Transformation and Partnerships |
| **Dan Harris** | Focus Shift Films | Production company |
| **Dr Helen Davies** | Media Cymru | Screen Skills Innovation |
| **Sally Lisk-Lewis** | University of South Wales | Higher education - Skills and training |
| **Carmela Carubba** | Real Sfx | Special Effects |
| **Elgan Rhys** | Theatr Iolo | Theatre |
| **Dan McGowan** | Hijinx | Theatre |
| **Nick Patterson** | Storm and Shelter | Video Production |
| **Richard Moss** | Gorilla group | Media post production & VFX |