

Engagement findings

Inquiry into the challenges facing the creative industry workforce in Wales

1. Background

1. In September 2022, the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee decided to carry out an inquiry into the challenges facing the creative industry workforce.
2. To support this inquiry the Citizen Engagement Team ran a series of one-to-one interviews with workers from different areas of the creative industry workforce
3. This report summarises the Citizen Engagement Team's findings.

2. Participants

4. To gain a wide breadth of evidence from people with lived experience, the citizen engagement team worked with people in the following areas of the creative industry workforce across Wales:

- Animators
- Videographers
- Sound Technicians
- Actors with a disability

- Welsh language creative workforce
- Scriptwriters
- Lighting Designers
- Stage Managers
- Live Music Venue Management
- Gaming producers

We would like to thank all participants for taking the time to feed their voices into this inquiry.

3. Engagement and Methodology

5. In November 2022, the Citizen Engagement Team facilitated 13 interviews with individuals representing different areas of the creative industry workforce across Wales. 8 of these interviews took place virtually on Microsoft Teams whilst 5 were conducted face to face.

6. The objective of the engagement was to gather the views and experiences of different areas of the creative industry workforce in Wales who have/had lived experience of working in their specific area of expertise as noted above.

7. The format of engagement was largely comparable between sessions but varied slightly to meet participants' needs.

8. Participants were asked to discuss the following questions that reflect relevant themes within the inquiry's terms of reference:

- What is the current health of the sector's workforce, including the impacts of the pandemic, Brexit and the 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?

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- 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 emerging

9. Whilst nuanced personal issues arose from individuals, there were several over-arching themes which emerged from discussions. These themes affected individuals from across different areas of the creative industry workforce.

The health of the workforce: Impact of Covid-19 on the Creative Industry Workforce

10. The impact of Covid-19 was undoubtedly felt to some degree across the industry. Whilst some participants shared positive outcomes that emerged from having to re-think their work, others were forced to leave the industry for roles in other sectors. The enormous scale of the industry undoubtedly meant that whilst some areas profited, others - in particular, freelancers - struggled.

11. Some participants explained how Covid-19 made them busier than ever:

'I don't think anything really slowed down for gaming. I think things only slowed down when people actually got COVID, you know, and had to take some time off, but generally, I think the games industry in general just kept ticking over, kept moving because it could - we were very busy'

'We were ridiculously busy, to be honest, TV companies and the like were desperate for content and we were at the forefront of work. It's a hard thing to say in a way, because I know plenty of workers and organisations who struggled but from my point of view, professionally speaking it was great'

12. There were also several notable examples of the negative impact of Covid-19, with several individuals referencing

colleagues that had left the sector due to financial constraint and lack of opportunities:

'Roeddwn ni yn lwcus ac yn gallu cario mlaen a gwneud fy ngwaith, ond roedd pobl eraill yn y sector...stage managers, freelancers, techies...ffrindau agos, yn gorfod gadael y sector, never to return, it was so catastrophic for that'

'Meddwl am y freelancers roeddem ni yn gweithio efo, off top fy mhen mae un wedi gadael i fod yn paramedic, un arall wedi symud ymlaen i fod yn plumber - doedd dim gwaith, dim digwyddiadau byw, a doedden nhw ddim yn ffitio mewn i'r cultural recovery fund - felly dim arian'

'Dwi yn gwybod for a fact fod nifer o pobl yn y sector wedi gorfod mynd i weithio i Asda/Tesco etc, ac mae nifer heb ddod nol. I was lucky, right place, right time, right networks'

Obviously we all know the hours are irregular and the pay isn't great, but I think a lot of people were forced into a more (for the want of a better term) 'normal life' by the pandemic, going to work for ALDI or wherever they went to work. People's careers and livelihoods were changed overnight'

13. A strong message emerging was how companies and individuals had to think on their feet, adapt their ways of working and in some cases learn entirely new skills almost overnight. Many of the interviewees noted now flexibility and having a diverse skillset became paramount to be able to survive and thrive whilst working in the sector during the pandemic:

'Covid hit and crewing took a huge hit - we lost £60/70k of work overnight. At the time we had 7 full time staff and our bread and butter was taken away from us. Covid without a doubt caused us to diversify our product- we can look back and say it was a success in the end but it came with a lot of panic and stress'

'Pan ddaeth Lockdown - I had no work so what the hell do I do? Do I need a job? Lwcus fod rhai o networks fi yn wneud gwaith ar lein a dechrau streamio yn syth. I fod yn onest I didn't know much about streaming so I had to learn fast. Os doeddet ti ddim yn gallu addasu roeddet mewn trwbwl'

'I am bit of a jack of all trades within the industry, technical , production management, rigging etc - this became a blessing during Covid as flexibility was the key in order to keep working'

' On i mewn nifer o gyfarfodydd yn ystod yr amser yna - ac roedd mor drist clywed y problemau oedd rhai pobl (efallai efo sgiliau llai hyblyg) yn mynd trwyddo - I think flexibility became the must have skillset' in the industry

14. Several more experienced workers mentioned they would not have survived if this had happened earlier in their career, and many felt extremely fortunate that they were in a place in their career where they had strong networks to support them:

'I bobl oedd yn dechrau mas it could have been awful. Meddwl nol, os fysa covid wedi digwydd pan oeddwn i yn prifysgol it would have changed my entire life and career'

'So many people left the sector - young people especially, if they were in the first year or two of freelancing work they were in trouble. I was lucky... I am older, been around the block, and have strong networks, but even I found it tough. If this had happened ten years ago I would probably not be the same person'

'Yn od i fi, wnaeth Covid hitio pan roedd fy career fi on the up, so financially I was ok oherwydd roedd sgripts etc wedi ei gomisiynu - fel ysgrifennwr ti dipyn bach mwy lwcus na 'freelancers' eraill.. Os fysa hyn wedi digwydd 10 years earlier it would have been a different story'

15. As well as people leaving the wider sector altogether there were several examples to be had of people crossing over from live performances (gigs and theatre) to work in TV and film which seemed to offer a more stable environment for certain skill sets. There was a constant messaging throughout the engagement that film and TV were thriving:

'People have left the sector - some people used it as a reset button to change careers but the majority didn't have a choice. It does feel like there was a change in the landscape. Film and TV feels a bit more stable moving forward and lots of people moved into that area'

'Mae mwyafrif faswn i yn ei ddweud wedi symud draw at y sector ffilm a teledu. Roedd y sector yna mor brysur yn ystod y pandemic - mwy na erioed. Roedd cwmnïau ffilmio yn dweud ar y pryd ei fod yn galw am mwy o weithiwr, ar cyflogau mwy, ac ar contracts hirach...no brainer i weithiwr'

16. A number of the interviewees noted that whilst the success of film and TV was great, the industry in general needed to be aware that live performances still mattered and whilst not drawing in as much income as TV and film, had its role to play:

'TV stuff doesn't exist without live performance - both the creative side of content but also the skills needed from technical staff. Both need to be healthy - you can't have one healthy at the cost of the other. It does feel like there is an inequality between Creative Wales and Arts Council of Wales for example'

'Going forward, it's really vital that things are seen a bit more equally. I sometimes get the impression that yes... film and TV, that's terrific. They're easy examples to present of the sort of creative industries and what and what they bring - especially financially. But there are other areas of creativity out there, where does the content for film and TV come in? Where does the workforce, the animators etc cut their teeth in the creative industry?'

Financial stability of sector

17. The clear differences in financial security between working within film and TV and working on live performances including gigs and theatre was made clear during several of the interviews:

'One of the problems with live performance is it's really underpaid, and unstable work compared to telly. So, during covid, technical staff and freelancers with crossover skills went to TV and I know so many who are making more money, doing less hours, when you spell it out it sounds like a no brainer right?'

'Mae y sector ffilm a teledu, hyd yn oed yn Cymraeg yn very viable I'd say - cymharu hwnnw efo'r live sector...It's another world. I fi, dwi yn mwynhau'r live element - nothing beats that, so it's a pay off-mind the pun - with working conditions and pay'

'The impact film and TV can have on the live performance workforce is potentially worrying. It feels we are reaching a climax where the issues and gaps are going to become apparent'

18. The impact of Brexit and the cost of living crisis also came up in discussions with issues arising across the sector. Venues and individuals found it tough with the cost of living crisis.

19. Many explained how Brexit-related bureaucracy caused big problems:

'Brexit had huge impact on us. An example, we had a TV shoot for S4C in the Netherlands, the queuing time is huge. Because I have a camera in a campervan I get classed as freight. We have to pay for it and it adds hours upon hours on to the journey - it's not cool...'

'I mean, the main Brexit problem for us is that a lot of bands aren't bothering to come to the UK anymore because it's not as simple as it used to be. Why would they bother with the whole other bit of paperwork just to do a couple of dates on a small, cold, wet island? So that's the main Brexit impact'

for us and, the cost of beer from our supplier keeps going up. It's going up every three months!'

'Where do I begin, Brexit, the pandemic, cost of living... It can be sometimes difficult to pinpoint what's hurting us as a company most because it's a perfect storm'

20. Cost of living was a clear issue in the sector, with energy bills, accommodation prices and transport costs proving problematic for different areas of the sector:

'As a venue, our costs are going up every couple of months. We seem to be getting constant letters from suppliers. The energy crisis is ridiculous. Our electricity is now three times the price it was. But we can't put the prices up to pass that on to customers because they don't have the money to pay for, you know, a £6 pint.'

'Hotels are a big problem, they are too expensive so leads you to staying further away which is then an issue with petrol - a company can't afford to put you up in places anymore'

'It's all coming in different waves, for example venues putting rates up 50/60% - we are very vulnerable to those kind of changes as a touring live performance organisation. I feel we see the cost of living hits from all angles'

Equality, Diversity an Inclusivity

21. Issues affecting the Welsh language workforce, disabled people, gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status in the workforce, emerged through various discussions. Some people spoke positively around what they felt was a positive change in their areas of the workforce:

'Being a young graduate person with an accent who is a woman, there's a lot of times that people are a bit more patronising. I don't think there's necessarily discrimination I have come across, maybe it's a little bit more of the underlying culture of techies that needs to change'

'Lots of work environments now want to diversify, so there's almost like in some aspects like a positive discrimination within the sector. I think a lot of work has been done in line with the Black Lives Matter movement and the Me Too campaign. It's slow progress though'

22. Several of the interviewees worked closely within the Welsh language sector and commented on the difficulties found across that area - with a particular focus on lack of Welsh language people with appropriate skills within the sector. There was also discussion that Welsh educators needed to do more to promote the language as a positive for work:

'Mae y prinder yn y gweithlu Cymraeg yn sgeri. Mae skill shortages mawr yn yr ochr techies a rheoli llwyfan'

'Mae'r Welsh language yn majorly under-represented. Mae gymaint o broblemau gael techies a designers etc sydd yn siarad Cymraeg. Stage managers, production managers yr un peth'

'Dwi ar bwrdd llywodraethwyr ysgol uwchradd ac yn trafod TGAU ac Lefel A Cymraeg a cyn lleied o blant sydd yn astudio . Mae nhw dal yn astudio y gododdin etc - pam ydi lefel A Cymraeg ddim yn gwneud I bobl meddwl am copywriting neu stage management neu swyddi yn y sector? Dydi o ddim yn digon da''

23. Several people commented on the belief that the workforce in general had a lack of representation from across the global majority - whilst there was also a clear worry that people's socio-economic status was a barrier to people working in the sector:

Dydi grwpiau o'r global majority a pobl anabl dim yn cael ei cynrychiol from y byd technegol - I haven't met many techies/stage managers, lighting designers'

'There isn't a huge representation or proportion of global majority people in the industry, I also noticed it in my training recently. I am only recently out of University and I think class plays a

big part in getting roles in certain sectors - TV and film in particular.'

'I remember speaking to people in some training recently where they had good drama facilities in schools and access to opportunities which if you're from a more working class council estate background you're not going to be exposed to , and then won't be inclined to go into it as a career.'

'Dwi yn meddwl fod issue efo pobl low-income yn gweithio neu dim yn gweithio yn y sector - mae yn anodd pinpointio hyn , mi fysa yn diddorol gweld ond dwi yn meddwl ei fod yn broblem ar hyd sector, efallai fwy yn y Gymraeg'

24. Some participants spoke of welfare concerns, and examples of poor treatment on film and TV sets given. Another person noted how there were welfare concerns in the creative industry sector which could be problematic for the workforce:

'Dwi wedi cael profiadau drwg mewn teledu - welfare was a bad thing, staff were not looked after. Basic things like catering for staff, crew treated badly, gradually getting worser and worse over the course of a contract. The directors and producers would be eating pizzas etc on company card...we get water and some fruit if we are lucky.'

'I have lost count the amount of times I have seen people being verbally abused on set. The egos of directors is a real thing and I have to be honest it does not make for a pleasant working environment - from other people I know, I would say it's probably a common occurrence in the industry.'

'Egos are enormous in the sector - and in some areas and spaces can be intimidating for workers. Directors, producers...those people in charge can cast a large shadow over a company that might lead some workers, freelancers in particular to stay away.'

25. Clear issues emerged when talking to experts who engaged with actors with learning disabilities. Issues around support and

benefits packages meant that paying actors was an issue and was an obvious wall when discussing inclusivity in the sector:

'Each individual actor that we work with has their own individual support/benefits package, many of which will have a permitted earnings cap. This means that they aren't able to earn more than £152 per week - if they do then they have their benefits removed and it can take months of wrangling to get their benefits reinstated.'

'This issue around support, payments, benefits and navigating how to pay our actors with a disability is front and centre and needs to be discussed in detail. We want to pay our artists fairly and it's hard. We would welcome discussion with Welsh Government- even though benefits is not a devolved issue'

26. It was noted that whilst other areas of 'inclusivity', such as more opportunities for actors with autism or actors with learning disabilities were improving the issues around pay and benefits meant that these improvements didn't tell the full story. Many noted that until the issue was rectified the opportunities within the sector weren't ever going to be truly inclusive:

'In terms of inclusivity in the creative industries - this is a massive wall - it ultimately can't be inclusive because people and families don't have a safe and secure route to earn money.'

'The concern is this increase demand of inclusivity, which at one level is great - but it can only go so far - from the actors' point of view it can have too much of a worrying impact, and from production point of view it's a huge additional tangle of work that needs to be done.'

Skill shortages and training needs

27. There was a clear message emerging around the number of people who had left the live performance sector and thus creating large skill gaps and several roles that were difficult to fill. The issues around Covid-19 meant that a wealth of experience left at

once and an enormous amount of knowledge was lost which was having a huge impact:

'The problem right now is everyone's working too much because there isn't enough experience. So we might have a team of 20 people like we always did, but only four of them know what they're doing. So actually, those four people are physically tired, they're emotionally tired because all they're doing is teaching on the job or correcting mistakes.'

'There wasn't a normal transition phase where they would be training someone up because everyone left overnight, almost because of Covid. There was no way of passing any knowledge on. So they've taken it and it's never coming back.'

'Directly for us - it affects us since we perform at venues so we have the impact on us but also those venues have been short staffed - it's been a nightmare. Those workforce issues across Wales have affected us wherever we go. Our production manager had to re-do work done by venues due to the lack of experience those teams within venues - doubling his work basically.'

28. Numerous people mentioned the lack of experience within live theatre and performance workforce due to the number of people leaving to work for film and TV companies. Several noted that this had been a shock to the workforce and that people were being promoted to roles they lacked the experience for, and that safety was becoming a real issue:

'Every time I walk into a theatre or a live performance now, the first thing I do...look up. I think safety is a real concern, simply because you have people in roles they are not trained to do because of massive skill shortages due to people leaving the sector on mass during Covid. You may think I am joking but over the last few months I have heard multiple near miss stories involving safety and falling equipment.'

'I have been a deputy stage manager, which is something that as a graduate, you don't really expect to do until a couple of years in the industry. There are people in roles they aren't equipped to handle.'

'Basically everyone's a job or two above where they should be, that's what it feels like. So it's great for young graduates etc, but the problem is they don't have experience, they're making mistakes that we learned not to make a long time ago that haven't been passed down. So it feels like we've gone back ten years and there's a skipped generation of skills.'

29. Others commented further on the specific skills shortage in Wales. This included specific technical roles and a general shortage of skills needed for the gaming industry which forced employers to look further afield:

'Mae yna shortage mawr mewn female camera operators. I think there is a lot of interest but it's a struggle to get experience. TV Crews have got this history of being a male environment and it needs to change.'

'Mae skill shortages in general mewn gaming yng Nghymru - ond mae hybrid working yn meddwl fod ni yn gallu cyflogi pobl o America er enghraifft i ddod i weithio ar gem Cymraeg - so it spreads the word for the industry here I guess.'

'Mae skill shortages yn huge mewn technical yng Nghymru. Er enghraifft mae rigging yn beth mawr, does dim digon o bobl yn gwybod sut i riggio'

30. Whilst some people noted that young people and graduates were having more opportunities due to the gaps in the workforce, others felt that much more needed to be done to support a young person's progression into the creative industry:

'Dwi ddim yn gweld llawer o pobl ifanc yn dod fyny yn y ranks, tyfu fyny, growing into roles a cael profiad. Ges i apprenticeship - that was my route'

into the business. Cael dysgu o rhywun profiadol and get the hands-on experience'

'Mae lot o bobl yn mynd i colegau, yn dod allan and don't really know what they are doing - meddwl fod absence o apprenticeships a pobl yn gweithio ei hyn i fyny yn meddwl fod huge gap yn y gweithly.'

'I was talking to a respected colleague, and we were just trying to think, well, where are the emerging voices? It's true for artists, animators, creatives across the sector and obviously part of that is because people lost so much through Covid.'

31. The lack of relevant opportunities in schools was brought up on several occasions. Many people commented on young people not being given enough direction or information on the number of careers available within the sectors, and opportunities such as apprenticeships not being maximised to their fullest:

'I see young people being held back because they don't have those nuts and bolts skills they need. So the whole apprenticeship thing is perhaps something that could be applied to my sector (animation and creative arts) a little bit more than it is. I have seen it work well in TV and film but maybe other areas need to be a bit more proactive here.'

'Problem mwyaf yn fy marn i yw does dim digon o gyfleuon mewn ysgol - dim digon o wybodaeth am y technical careers os and ydi pobl ifanc yn rili gwthio am y cyfleuon - meddwl fod llawer yn disgyn trwy y cracks'

'We need to focus on young people in the creative industry. That is true for the entire sector, but for me - we need to let children be creative and artistic and not worry about failing. Get them into apprenticeships and learn! Money should be spent in this area.'

'My daughter got a job in TV and I was really relieved when she announced that she wanted to do this apprenticeship. I kind of think that film and

TV, is flying in Wales and that's wonderful. And again, you know, we have Welsh Government to thank I think for it. I guess the question is how do other areas replicate that success.'

Impact of Welsh Government funding

32. The majority of participants spoke very positively about the Welsh Government's financial support during the Covid-19 pandemic - with several people noting how the Cultural Recovery Fund ultimately helped them, and their colleagues survive during this period. Many commented on the ease of the applications and the speed of receiving much-needed support:

'Fel cwmni roedd y Cultural Recovery Fund yn god-send i ni, roedd staff efo furlough ac wnaetho ni ddefnyddio y CRF i talu ein debt ac galluogi ni cario mlaen fel cwmni.'

'Lots o bobl self-employed yn dweud they could have done more, ond fel cwmni it was a pleasant experience ac roedd yn life-jacket when we really needed it.'

'I was working for Music Venues Trust at the time, so I was actually helping all the venues in Wales get it. And I witnessed first hand the English Cultural Recovery fund applications, and the Welsh form was absolutely fantastic. The English one was a nightmare. So you know the Welsh one was great, absolutely great.'

'Ges i bounce Back loan gan y Llywodraeth, it was a breeze for me, ges i furlough ac wedyn ges i cultural recovery fund. Rhaid ei fod wedi helpu fi am tua 20k, I was very thankful and happy, the process was straight forward - I was really pleasantly pleased and it probably saved my career.'

'Ar gyfer artistiad llawrydd roedd y culture recovery fund yn eithaf araf yn y dechrau, ond trwy edrych yn ôl dwi yn meddwl ei fod yn broses da, ac proses gwell na beth efallai oedd yn digwydd mewn sefydliadau eraill yn Mhrydain'. Roedd artistiaid yn sort of ok ar ôl dallt y cultural recovery fund.'

33. Whilst praising the Cultural Recovery Fund and the speed and ease with which funds were accessed, there was a consensus that more support was needed as the sector recovers - not only financially but looking at specific ways to support areas outside of film and TV:

'Mae diiffyg ymwybyddiaeth o'r sywddi sydd ar gael ar draws y sector, yn general ac yn enwedig yn y iaith Gymraeg. Mae angen positive comms campaign ar ôl covid ac mae angen perswadio pobl ei bod yn dal yn sector da i weithio ynddi - and it is rewarding...if not always financially.'

'Every venue in Wales that we've spoken to says the same thing, it's dramatic but you know, we're all a bad week away from bankruptcy - that's just the current landscape we find ourselves in - I think Government needs to think creatively around support, it's not just about money.'

'It would be really, really easy to just say money, but I don't think that it's possible to just keep throwing money at things forever and then just hoping that one day they get better. For live music and venues to be successful I think one of the big things at the moment is public transport is a massive issue. The public transport across Wales is terrible and there are no late trains. Let's get practical solutions in place to support the industry.'