

Case Study

Workforce Support Webinars: Do we really want to ‘bounce back’?

Background

“I ended that event laughing and crying at the same time, which I think is a good thing. It was great and I don’t want the conversation/ the feeling of that space to end.”

Participant

The disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on creative and cultural freelancers has been evidenced by the [Centre for Cultural Value](#). The impacts on employment and opportunity are particularly concerning given that freelancers are so important to the creative economy, representing a high proportion of the workforce.

A partnership between East Sussex County Council, Rother District Council, South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) and Cultural Baggage sought to provide support to the creative and cultural freelance sector in Sussex during the pandemic.

Their objectives were to address the sense of isolation felt by many freelancers, and to ensure that the partnership understood the critical issues facing the sector in order to better lobby and advocate on their behalf.

A series of webinars and round table discussions were held, featuring a variety of speakers and facilitators to explore not only the impact of the pandemic, but what our collective ambitions were for recovery.



The project

A [Museums Association Survey in 2020](#) demonstrated that many people choose to go freelance for greater flexibility and work-life balance, but the survey also showed that a significant proportion did so out of necessity. This was due to a variety of factors, including furlough and redundancy, but also the impacts of ableist recruitment practices and a broader lack of equitable opportunity. This has resulted in a freelance sector not only vulnerable to employment impacts, but comprising high numbers of creative and cultural professionals who represent women and / or people with health conditions, or those juggling childcare or carer responsibilities.

The project focused on the delivery of four facilitated sessions, focusing on critical issues for the freelance creative and cultural sector. They covered a range of themes, including pay parity, equity, opportunity and impact. The central focus was to explore what sector recovery might look like, and how strategic organisations, cultural leaders and venues, and the freelance sector collaborate more equitably in the future.

Speakers and facilitators included Jenny Williams BEM (Take the Space), Ash Bowmott (The Uncultured), Roy Williams OBE (playwright), Le Gateau Chocolat, Paule Constable (Make Theatre Work) and Tarek Elmoutawakil (Marlborough Productions) among others. The role of the speakers and facilitators was critical given some of the subject matter was emotive and personal for participants, particularly during such a critical time when the existing inequalities facing the freelance sector were intensified by the pandemic.

The South Downs National Park Authority contributed £3,000 to the programme.

“There is so much that was said today that I resonated with, ideas that I share and insight that I will be taking to my artistic practice.”

Participant

The outcome

Some of the principle impacts of the programme were:

- The creation of safe spaces where individuals felt able to contribute equally with others.
- The development and delivery of a programme of support that reached beyond ‘the usual suspects’, providing support to people who may otherwise have felt isolated in crisis.
- Providing expertise through the speakers and facilitators that provoked debate and discussion, as well as exploring the possibility of positive change as part of recovery planning.
- The opportunity to bring together the creative and cultural freelance sector with cultural leaders, representing the wider ‘ecology’ of the sector.

The real strength of the programme was the wide range of cultural leaders engaged to act as speakers and facilitators, which brought with it a strength and quality to the discussion sessions.

Cultural Baggage are currently working on some legacy proposals to take forward outcomes from the discussions. Additionally, the outcomes of the programme have fed into a review of Culture East Sussex by Oxford Cultural Associates on behalf of East Sussex County Council.

“I was really glad I was able to make it, very powerful, thought-provoking and moving testimonials and questions.”

Participant

The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP) 2020–25 sets out a shared vision for how we all would like the National Park to be in the future. It includes 10 long-term outcomes, and provides a framework for communities, landowners, charities, businesses and public bodies to work together to make this vision and these outcomes a reality.

This project supported the delivery of the following PMP outcomes:

Outcome 4: Cultural heritage of the National Park is enhanced and widely understood and enjoyed.

southdowns.gov.uk/partnership-management-plan/

The future

The programme was a powerful and emotive exploration of the creative and cultural sector – the heavy reliance on freelancers, who are in themselves often the most vulnerable to disparity in pay and opportunity.

Bringing together creative and cultural leaders as facilitators and speakers ensured participants were heard at a time sector support and conversations about pandemic recovery felt like they had left the freelance sector behind.

We should never forget that the freelance creative and cultural sector are the backbone of multiple priorities for both society and the economy – from creative arts engagement for social impact to the work of artists and creatives to enliven place. The freelance creative and cultural sector comprises important partners in our ambitions to engage more people with the South Downs, to foster and encourage socially engaged artistic and creative practice inspired by it, and to support our local economy.

For further information, please contact:

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September 2021