

What do you need as a freelancer to do your best work?

A space for freelancers to share and organisations to listen

An event was held online on 24th August 2020, with the aim of bringing freelancers and organisations together and allowing freelancers to share their experiences, requirements, needs and wants in a face to face meeting. It was planned and facilitated by a group of members of the Freelance Task Force: Althea Burey, Hannah McPake, Hannah Quigley, Hannah Stone, Jane Crawshaw, Maia Kirkman-Richards, Mimi Doulton, Miss Jacqui, Naomi Oppenheim, Sadeysa Greenaway Bailey and Sarah Argent.

We invited the freelancers at the Zoom to answer the question **‘What do you need to do your best work? These could be practical or financial things, or communication, or emotional support that makes you feel creatively empowered and valued’**.

We then asked organisation representatives if they heard anything which surprised them, or for any other observations on what the freelancers said, and both freelancers and organisation representatives to share any examples of best practice they had experienced or know about from organisations.

Finally, we invited everyone to answer the question **‘What might you do to take forward the thoughts, reflections, ideas, comments and good practice that have come up today?’**



Responses are sorted into categories, which are grouped under ‘values based’ and ‘practical’. Each category includes first responses to the initial question from freelancers, then any responses from organisations, and then any relevant examples of best practice which were shared. The responses have been anonymised.

To keep the length of the report more manageable, we have cut down or summarised some answers, and where several comments covered the same point we haven’t included everyone’s individual words. At the end is a summary of the main themes of the freelancers’ answers within each category.

The last section collects all of the freelancers’ and organisations’ responses to the question ‘What might you do to take forward the thoughts, reflections, ideas, comments and good practice that have come up today?’

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COLLECTED RESPONSES

VALUES BASED

Collaboration and a Sense of Community

Responses from Freelancers

What I need is to feel a sense of connection to the organisation. I find myself much more energised, connected and creative when I feel engaged with the organisation and have an ongoing relationship with them. Where I have an ongoing relationship with them I want to give more of myself - I challenge myself more, I take risks. If they don't stop and give you that time you don't feel safe - you just knock out what you can but you don't have the best of yourself. Transparency - having a greater collaboration between freelancers and organisations.

Being invited to socials like Christmas parties, feeling part of an organisation's community and having the opportunity to spend time with other freelancers.

Regular working time and opportunities to talk, think, be together with other creatives both freelance and inside organisations, and producers. Time to share concerns, successes, ideas, difficulties etc. This lockdown period is the most I've ever been around freelancers in my whole working career, in terms of having space to have conversations, to talk. We don't have that 'office' equivalent, to get those water cooler moments to share stories of our experiences.

Engagement with freelancers in your immediate area to get to know the cities and who you have in your immediate catchment area. Work will become more regional/localised - get to know freelancers in the locality.

Inviting all freelancers into your space, without having to buy tickets, they shouldn't have to buy anything. Just an opportunity to have random chats with other freelancers and organisations, almost like an Open Day.

I'm not a theatre maker or artist. My relationship tends to be working in the office - front of house, technical etc., and my main work is project managing projects with young people - practical things. Number one is being introduced to people, Artistic Director and teams - knowing who you need to go to, being part of team meetings. That factored into freelance contracts - you're paid for this project and you can come to this meeting - you are part of the team and whatever is being said in that meeting you do need to know about.

Collaboration and clear transparent processes and gateways.

Being part of networks, being on the radar (and communicated with) by venues... the opportunity to present work created, alongside the space and opportunities to create.

Often you feel quite alone as a freelancer - disconnected from people who work there - feel very transient. Sometimes you're there for months and you still don't know anyone. So it

would be helpful if there is an opportunity for everyone from the building to meet the people involved in the show; when this has happened I felt very connected and knew everybody.

I would like to work with a happy company who have ambition and energy.

Best practice definitely comes from an open and honest conversation with the company of people you're working with at the time. Clear collaboration and participation from the seeds of a project make for a more rounded and fulfilling experience for everyone involved.

More events online during this time (the pandemic) that have been specifically directed at deaf and disabled freelancers have helped us to get to know each other - both other freelancers and representatives within organisations.

I think there's a real opportunity for freelancers and organisations that have never met. The buildings can't yet open to the public, but they can to the industry practitioners, and creatives and freelancers who can help those buildings come alive from the inside out. There's a massive opportunity for freelancers and non-building based organisations to work together really closely.

Responses from Organisations

We need to remember the human element and that organisations are human too.

Freelancers are not a commodity, we don't just get them on board when we have a project. They need to be involved in the process which leads up to it.

Should each regional theatre take responsibility for hosting regional freelancers at a Christmas party? Seeing their community of freelancers as one big sector rather than just the people they've worked with.

We are a company, there isn't a them and us. It's just me on payroll and we build a community with our freelancers.

Comments on Best Practice

Feed everyone in the evening breaks of tech rehearsals. Hugely bonding, relieving not to have to go out and find food in the dark or cold. Actors can keep wigs on etc. Easier for the creative team to have those chats and meetings as we get the full break and get fed. Also, full company attending disability awareness training on day one of rehearsals. Not sure if this is exactly the kind of thing you are looking for in answer to this question but I had such a great experience of working there.

Let's have a consultation between communities, audiences and venues about what they would like to see in theatres. It could rethink everything - embedding artists in communities.

One Midlands theatre's Zoom meeting I attended was an open invitation and very open to taking advice, and at the end of the meeting the organisation hosting offered everyone a £10 credit to see one of their shows.

People in the organisation knowing about the productions / sharing events etc. Everyone knowing about what you're up to. Making all employees in the venues aware of your presence and encouraging them and you to go and see pieces.

At the beginning of any production being held, coffee and cake with everyone in the building - a welcome, made you feel like a part of the family.

Theatre companies looking after their own. It has been a bit of a comfort and a sense of care for those freelancers.

Theatre companies and venues reaching out to wider freelance community, providing opportunities for discussion, information sharing and opportunities to ask questions.

Communication and Respect

Responses from Freelancers

Clarity about expectations before we start a project.

Clear breakdowns of budgets, payment and hours expected, what is expected of me and my delivery, a clear schedule, and the chance to ask lots of questions. I often wonder, how did they arrive at this number? How did they work out this fee? Should I say something? I never really know because I'm representing myself.

Transparency and honest communication about opportunities and what "meetings" or "conversations" are about - whether you are just chatting to me as a potential candidate for the job or chatting to multiple people.

Thinking about from the very start of a potential project - INFORMATION. For an availability check to come through with dates, fee, other people on board, any logistics that I need to be aware of. Often an Availability Check can just be dates and it's nerve wracking to have to go back and forth to ask for the basic information that I need in order to put any job through the juggling machine of money / dates / childcare. Transparency if that information is not yet known.

To be met on an equal footing, trusted and respected.

Timely responses to emails or phone calls. Lack of responses has a knock on effect which causes barriers to come up and a feeling of not wanting to reach out again. Replies to emails even if (especially if?) the answer is no.

When working as an assistant director, I would like greater clarity around what is expected from me, as it's an ever-changing and sometimes under explained role. I think this clarity could come from both organisations plus the director on a show - working together.

A greater understanding of the precarious economic and emotional life of a freelancer and the resilience required, so that communication is done face to face when needed and not by email especially when delivering 'bad' or difficult news.

A reasonable dialogue about who else is on the creative team. Depending on the parameters, I sometimes do my best work with people I know and sometimes with new collaborators. Feeling like my opinion and experience on this is important / deserves to be heard.

Sorry if I'm banging the same drum but this sense of communication - lots of organisations have been really great at sharing info with me through networks that I'm attached to; that has been a really pleasant blessing - getting a sense of what is going on - what the industry is up to, everything is at arms-length, someone distilling info and sharing - more of that please! Can that continue?

Gender inclusion. I've worked with a lot of Queer festivals, venues that have lots of Queer work on, and sometimes they will ask for pronouns in an email or as part of the application form, but then they will not have briefed the front of house or bar staff, and it will be an entirely non-binary company being all addressed as 'madam' as soon as they walk in the

venue. Or the cafe/bar space will be a different management to the theatre space, and they'll say "no you can't put up these gender neutral signs on the toilets", and you're suddenly like "oh my god, we've invited this audience which is like highly gender diverse, and you've said the space will be trans inclusive, and then suddenly the venue is not! And it's quite difficult to have that conversation in the middle of a tech day, or a get in, or you're just trying to do the artistic work.

Freelancers often come in with a lack of experience of what is going on behind the scenes in venues, whereas venues either deal with freelancers on a very regular basis, more regularly than freelancers are in venues, or they were freelancers themselves. It puts organisation workers in a much better position to anticipate what freelancers' asks are going to be, and to put methods in place for saying things like "if you need more space, here's what to do." An experience I had is that we've been doing audience discussion groups after performances in theatres for several years before somebody in a venue said to us "and how much do you charge for that?" We had no clue that someone could be paid for writing an engagement activity into a funding application quite easily, or accessing a venue's pot of money. So pro-activity is important.

Financial - basic stuff like reading terms for payment and abiding by them!

Ensuring our requirements to do our work are met and speaking to us the artists to let us know how we can help.

Communication with organisations and funders in order to understand the bigger picture of our industry - what they are grappling with and what we need to be thinking about in order to shift and expand our practice in order to continue to be relevant

Being able to absorb Zoom as a great tool for communication.

Being kept in the loop.

Being in the room when key decisions / any decision or plan is being made.

To find ways of being fully involved in debriefing our work - rather than this falling to the organisation's staff and performers / stage and production management who might still be on contract.

Clarity on who is being paid and for what. Especially marginalised voices.

Responses from Organisations

Thinking about how we might break down a freelancer's fee, how we come up with the offer. Maybe that should always be a formal part of the offer - a kind of breakdown of what work is expected and how the fee has come about.

How do organisations best communicate with freelancers in a meaningful way? How do I think about that?

Open, outward communication is important; sometimes organisations feel the need to have a press release before saying something, but it's useful just to let people know what they are thinking about and working on.

I know that people feel they need more communication, but it's hard to know what channels to do that through. We haven't had any good news and haven't wanted to put out more bad news. For example, perhaps more blogs - so it all doesn't feel so terrifying and unknown?

Trying to work out the barriers to the type of engagement that we all want - is it to do with our attitude or systems? If it's about our attitude, is that real or the way we are perceived?

When I talk to people who don't work in the sector they cannot believe the simplest things, like people not responding to emails, it just wouldn't fly if you were working at the Bank of Scotland or wherever.

We have a good relationship with all of our freelancers, there is communication, they come to us and tell us what they'd like or want to do. They can ask for more if they wish to, because they have that dialogue with us, and if we've got it we give it. They get invited to everything. We invite our freelance companies to come to our season's launches.

Freelancers shouldn't have to be 'pushy' as this exacerbates a bad power dynamic and leaves freelancers in a vulnerable position. This puts all the responsibility back on the freelancers, rather than a shared responsibility and mutual understanding.

What was said about the gender fluidity and the toilets, what I think we all need to do our best work is the ability to have safe and challenging conversations with each other. And those challenging AND safe conversations are not possible if anybody feels the presence of microaggressions or they have to fight for their patch, or their bit the landscape, or their bit of the resources. So for me this is about fundamentally changing the power dynamic. That's what it's about really.

Comments on Best Practice

Being made clear how to get into contact and who to get into contact with?

Regular updating on issues.

Restorative justice, holding open space with freelancers who feel injured or excluded.

Turning-up and engaging in debate, action, and conversation.

Taking a real position on arts / culture and speaking from a personal position (not just organisational).

I'm working with a new company who are experienced writers producing for the first time. The budget is tiny but we met and had that open discussion about the best way to arrange the creative team and what I would expect/need and they would be able to afford - in the end everyone got what they wanted (and then the show got Covid cancelled.. but still..)

For our Voices as Freelancers to be Heard and Valued

Responses from Freelancers

I would like freelancers to be paid in an ongoing way to be 'at the table' when an organisation is planning its programming, working out how to work going forward, And for that freelance involvement to be ongoing and fluid so that lots of freelancers get to be at that table and introduce themselves to the company.

Being included in relevant team meetings within organisations eg. COVID-19 recovery strategy meetings

Boards - if we are inviting freelancers on to boards we need to be mindful of the skills. What is the purpose - what is my role here, how do I contribute? - there is often no space to talk, de-colonise the structure of the board meeting. Are we there for conversation or consultancy?

There used to be Equity members on boards - but it did mean they couldn't work for the company.

Organisations welcoming freelancers coming to them with ideas.

To feel valued by those salaried people in organisations we work with...

Responses from Organisations

I've just had to write a cultural recovery bid, I have included a session with a freelance team on how to manage COVID.

Comments on Best Practice

Having a team of freelancers who are artistic associates.

Organisations need to allow freelancers to be in the rooms when both critical and non-critical decisions are being made. It's helpful because then both parties get a chance to understand any difficulties that are being faced.

Functioning boards with a real culture of listening, acting, strategising.

To be Represented and Work in an Environment Without Racism

Responses from Freelancers

Representation. Seeing people 'like me' in the building.

A diversity of people across the entire organisation

The burning issue for me is one of representation and inclusion, whether that's to do with race, religion, or sexuality. We are still struggling to have the actuality of modern day UK represented in our theatres, and on stages.

Investment/Commission. Work that includes British East Asian artists (actors, writers, designers, sound etc.) As opposed to work or artists who are of East & South East Asian heritage but are not resident / citizens of the UK.

As a director I make work about my heritage. I feel anxious about putting that work out there (pitching, discussing) due to some comments I've received from some organisations about that work not having an audience. Would like to see more open-ness to stories from cultures who haven't yet been seen onstage, and more people from Middle East/North African heritage working in theatres (whether onstage or as employees/leaders of companies.)

I want to be able to come into work on a show as a designer and get on with that work as normal, without having to worry about / battle racist micro-aggressions from the venue or organisation. It would be great if there's some sort of kite mark that venues have to achieve that shows they're adhering to industry standards in terms of combating racism in their venues, so artists know in advance they're walking into a safe space, and can make informed choices when choosing work.

Responses from Organisations

The sector prides itself on being liberal and creative and not like a job, and actually I think when we're talking about personnel and Human Resources, we have to be like businesses, that there have to be processes in place for dealing with bad and harmful practices and microaggressions.

We are often going into majority white buildings having to justify and explain our work, and I recognise that feeling of wanting to be included and welcomed, introduced to people and have them understand what we are working on.

Something that was said about writing about your heritage and being told that that's not got an audience, that's not surprising but it is horrifying. Whenever I'm told that I can't do something or it doesn't have an audience I kind of say eff you, and then go and do it and there will be an audience. And the people who have said maybe, they were not the right people to be working with on it.

Comments on Best Practice

Some productions are starting to make it mandatory that all company members for each show undergo unconscious bias training. Which in a particular case for a West End show was said to make a massive difference to the rehearsal and tech process for everyone involved.

Empowerment

Responses from Freelancers

Ways for the relationship to feel more “two-ways”, I currently feel I’m always at the mercy of the organisation offering me work, but I don’t know how to change that to be honest

The question about why freelancers don’t feel empowered to push for X, Y and Z - I had an interesting conversation the other day about this. A lot of people are talking about invoices, making sure invoices are paid within 30 days of the date received with some kind of a guaranteed payment date and, if that isn't met, then there are repercussions. A freelancer is legally within their rights to start charging a late fee, and then a fee to collect that debt etc.

Nobody wants to be actively attacking a system that you're trying to work towards but it also it feels that, as an individual, you're fighting against that system and the reality of the situation is, if you were ever to push for something in the extreme and for example take it to court, as an individual freelancer you will feel powerless in that kind of situation, so I think it's about acknowledging where that support can come from. Is it an independent body like Equity or is it someone within the organisation who stands independently, who can facilitate that kind of communication, so it doesn't end up being, “I'm taking you to small claims court because you haven't paid my invoice”. It just feels like there needs to be a level of power for a freelancer to feel comfortable engaging in those conversations and feeling like they have a space to say those things.

Calling out bad practice - I think it's almost impossible to do that. You're protecting your own reputation as a freelancer, so if you're somebody that's talking about people who've treated you really badly or someone else really badly, you're going to end up with a reputation where people aren't going to want to work with you. Obviously you want the work and Wales in terms of the arts is very small - it's a big area but it's a very small network. I think as freelancers we do often end up putting up with a lot of things that you don't speak out about because you can't really.

To feel empowerment.

Feeling valued & that an organisation is interested in your work and supporting you to develop as an artist.

Responses from Organisations

As freelancers, you don't want to come across as difficult people. It's a relationship of coming up, cup in hand - “please employ me” - as organisations, we need to keep ourselves open at all times to what has created that situation.

What I think we all need to do our best work is the ability to have safe and challenging conversations with each other. And those challenging AND safe conversations are not possible if anybody feels the presence of microaggressions or they have to fight for their patch, their bit of the landscape or the resources. This is about fundamentally changing the power dynamic.

Absolutely right about the power struggle, that feels wrong in all sorts of ways.

I'm sure many of you have been looking at employing freelance practitioners on a longer term basis for community participation work, and I wonder if there's some kind of model there? If 70% of our theatre workforce are freelance, there must be a way to integrate that freelance workforce into organisations more permanently or semi-permanently somehow? I suppose those freelancers may become connected to a venue and not so freelance. I just wonder whether there's a way to upend that power struggle, and to make people feel like they have a home that's more than a series of relationships, so they're able to make more change in a venue.

PRACTICAL

Access & Childcare

Responses from Freelancers

A big part of it is the practical things that people can do to help you with, but it's also an atmosphere of understanding and not having to explain yourself, and it being a personal kind of battle every time you start a new project or work with a new company to have to go in and fight for those things. I'm sure that goes across a lot of access requirements. I've certainly felt that as a freelancer, you have to go in and, on a personal level, almost ask a favour of people all the time. It's really difficult especially if you're trying to start a new relationship with a company or organisation; you don't want to be a needy person. So, a pre-emptive offering of help, an offering of understanding of what everyone's access requirements might be.

When approaching any freelancers for any project - access requirements should be asked of anybody who is being hired, not just the ones 'presumed' to have an impairment. For many there can be a sense of discomfort when having to remind a creative space that we may not be able to participate in the 'traditional' sense. Instead strive to create a 'new norm'.

Tailoring people's working experiences to their access requirements - be those temporary: such as child-care or long term: such as physical or mental disabilities. It's important to have those conversations, especially if someone works freelance, and you are deciding to engage in a contract with them.

Inclusivity, and being more accessible in your building, because you can say that you have audience information, e.g. you have x many seats that can accommodate wheelchair users, or we do x many captioned performances a year, but it's not that accessible if you're a disabled artist coming in, because often there'll be dressing room spaces that aren't wheelchair accessible. Or they'll ask you (the artist), to organise any access stuff to do with your production, which is great if you're a really experienced producer, whereas if you're just starting out ...if someone in a venue had said to me "we've got the technology to do captioning, it'll be this much on your budget", I could have just gone "yes please!" It'd be so much easier as an artist to add that on your production as standard without having to tell the venue "we would like to do/we would like to include".

Childcare that works within the schedules of our industry! Venue-based creches/ad-hoc childminders, that are flexible.

Responses from Organisations

We're currently working on training that's specifically about talking with Deaf and disabled artists and creating a post(s) where an associate artist is paid a retainer.

We are making sure all our work is captioned - making sure that people are able to access it.

Graeae has a book on making work more accessible: <https://graeae.org/r2bgraeae/>

More callouts for work with better access provisions. National Theatre Scotland do it in the 3 national languages.

Making applications possible in various formats/mediums - allows a more creative process. Apply with a paragraph on your idea and a CV and go from there

Comments on Best Practice

Organisations who are willing to think outside the box on accommodation - rather than insisting on 'the usual' accommodation, those who have been prepared to let me have the 'usual' fee for it and top it up myself so that I can arrange somewhere for my family to come and stay / be with me at weekends (or throughout, when my son was a baby!)

Time and Space

Responses from Freelancers

What really helped me, when you work alone a lot, is when you get the opportunity to work with people. Like whenever I do a show that's lucky enough to have a few days research & development, I think it always makes for a better show when all the creatives, from sound to lighting, directors, actors, are all in the room at the same time. I think problems that I'm trying to solve with making a model for that first sort of scratch model meeting with the director, those meetings that I love and are really helpful, but that sort of building a show in the room together (e.g. 4 days of research & development, then a bit of a break, then another research & development period), I know that's almost a luxury. However, I think working collaboratively in the early foundations of a show is really fantastic and helpful to me as a freelancer.

Space to work which we can make our own and is suitable for the work we're doing. A desk where you can leave your belongings in a building where you're working - knowing you've got somewhere comfortable where you can sit and work. Not needing to ask for it personally as a favor of someone "Could you ... can you ... is there a bit of space here? Could you move your stuff out of the way so I can work?". That really helps.

Going into a rehearsal room - a bit of empty space for you with a power point, where you can sit and make your notes goes a long way to making you feel really comfortable. Often you haven't been in that space before; you're coming in, maybe, for the first time, and to come in and have to move everybody out the way and make a bit of a fuss doesn't make you feel comfortable and that you belong there. In bigger buildings having somewhere that is for you to go. There's often not that space. You often end up perching in the corner of the stage-management office.

Would be great not to have to clear everything into cupboards at the end of the day.

I would like to be involved much earlier on in the process of a production. Research & development stage early in the design process, so I can collaborate with the set designer and the director to inform the initial design and start my own creative processes, rather than being tacked on at the end. And crucially, for my fee to reflect this involvement! - *(This answer was also given by lighting designers, designers, movement directors.)*

For breaks to be breaks and not the time when the rehearsing stops and everyone else pounces on the director and deputy stage manager with questions.

I think we need to re-evaluate the model, by having that research & development period, having a break to think and reflect, and then maybe having a second research & development period, and then go into the actual production of it, whether that might be a more sustainable way to work. There is a monetary factor involved in that, but if we're not back-loading so much work, do we actually save money, is it a happier, healthier environment for people to work in?

There've been a lot of conversations about tech periods, about whether the three session tech period is absolutely essential, and is that the most healthy way for us to work sustainably, keeping everyone on board and happy?

Requests for things like brochure copy or written interviews to come in with more than 24 hours notice of reply needed.

Space to take risks and make mistakes. Willingness to take creative & financial risks, and to invest long term.

Space is something I've been able to get from venues, but I've had to be proactive. In one venue, the space was included in the deal they were offering, and they offered a specific time and place for research & development, and because I didn't feel I was quite finished, I asked if there was more space available at the end of the week. It turned out there was, but if I hadn't asked I would have been in my living room, stressing out, trying to finish. And it took half a day's deliberation and worry to send that email asking for one more day's space, and if that venue had some sort of function to say "we have a couple of extra rooms free this week, so if you wanted to add a few more hours on", that would really help. Sometimes it's not anticipated what artists want and need, even though it's often the same thing for a lot of companies.

There's possibly a missed opportunity at the minute, - the support the venues could give to local artists as things move forward to be able use space or develop work or use outside space. Buildings that have got all these huge empty spaces - could I just go by myself and use the studio for two hours and do something.

Space - physical and intellectual/artistic space and time.

This leads to the need for investment and investment in kind. Space to be able to collaborate with other people.

Rehearsal space and financial support - to be able to have the time and space to focus on making theatre.

Time - research & development is always useful. There's often pressure to get things out there but the best work is created when there's less time pressure.

Applications take time. Shorter applications. Applications by video or audio file options rather than paper.

Space for backstage practitioners to do research and development which may or may not include actors but is an exploration of backstage craft and disciplines.

Access to messy workspace for backstage practitioners. Studio space can be very expensive so access to space, where designers and makers have space to expand an idea which no longer fits on their kitchen table and isn't suitable to do in swish coffee shops. Messy workplace is important.

Responses from Organisations

I kept hearing "the luxury of research and development", and it made me really sad, because research and development shouldn't be a luxury. As producers, it's in our best interests to provide circumstances and an environment in which the best work is possible, and research and development is essential to that.

There's something around our industry standard. No matter the projects, we always apply the 4 week rehearsal period, 3 day tech, 3 session tech. I wonder what it would take to have a more bespoke approach and take each project individually, so there are different ways of building our contracts, which could be tricky in terms of unions and things, but could help address some of the ways in which I feel like freelancers are being robbed of what they need.

Something I've been questioning, and we need to look at, is bringing facilitators into the process earlier and having more of an ongoing relationship with them.

Something that has struck me is that it's so hard to get funding and there are so many other elements, like having time to really engage with people you're working with, we should build in funding for time to allow communication. We are all hiding from the reality that we are not properly funded.

There are lots of examples where there is a mechanism and a structure available to give space to freelancers in the region locally. We could create a model of how these programmes for the sharing of space work, and give that to other organisations / venues to roll out?

Regional National Portfolio Organisations that dream up talent development opportunities or ways of being generous with their resources, could be more generous with sharing the ways they are working.

We're a very small venue. We are volunteer-led with two part-time staff, we rely totally on freelancers to do everything for us in terms of our management. They have space in our venue should they wish to use it; we are home to a number of small, local, independent, presumably freelance companies. We provide space for them for free, and the only condition that we put on that is that, if they are making an application for funding, they put into their funding application rehearsal space, so at some point (should they be successful), there is some financial return to us.

Comments on Best Practice

As a freelancer and lone-worker, my front room's lovely but it's not the best place to be creating in terms of family dynamic etc. I've got a really supportive arts centre near me, and, if they've got space, they'll give space to me, which is fantastic. I don't know if that happens everywhere, but I'd really encourage other venues to do that. That is something that I really, really value, because it gives me the ability to do something before I have the funding in place, to nurture an idea at the beginning.

A paid break [after two weeks' rehearsals] - I had this on one of my first big puppet things and I thought it was normal. Normally I rehearse for two weeks and then perform to an audience straight away. I remember how great it was to have that and then do the schools' shows where we learnt so much more - we had experience of doing it and it was one of the best times as it felt very much like it was about the product.

Money

Responses from Freelancers

Money - enough to pay yourself / for a project properly, and being paid on time without having to chase up invoices.

Remuneration for time working on a project; including team meetings, site visits, bid writing etc. If financial is not possible, a conversation about what else might be possible.

To not be asked to give time and ideas for free.

Free work/tickets are never valued!

To be paid well enough on each project that I don't have to have several jobs overlapping all the time, so I can give my best to each show with real creative thinking and dreaming time. Ideally we would be able to live off the wage we get for just 1 show, and work on 1 show at a time, which could be possible if venues did not try to always negotiate down our fees. If I am your first choice, why are you negotiating with me? Ask what my fee is, and set your budget / pay based on that. Constant negotiating makes it as tiring getting onto a project as it is going through a technical rehearsal week.

It often feels like we are racing to a preview, or racing to a tech. Sometimes when we work at pace, it's really inaccessible. So how do we foster more economic access, and physical access into how we create together.

Security of on-going income/work (otherwise I personally spend more time of the day applying/seeking work than delivering my best work for a one off 1 day job)

I would like to be paid according to recognised fees.

Time, because if you're doing things before you get paid it's quite tricky to pay your bills. So that idea of time is about paid time where possible, and valuing the work that goes into things, even before they're a finished product. I don't know how all the organisations can support that, I'm aware organisations are always scraping about for cash to run themselves. Even if it's partnerships on funding?

Being able to collaborate properly with the creative team, which tends to be about having enough time and financial support to do so. It would be great if coming out of this there would be an opportunity for all departments, especially producers, those with the purse strings to understand what's involved in the process both creatively and practically in creating a lighting design. It is time-consuming and this is never (so far) acknowledged in a fee and, even after this long in the industry, the fee can be way less than minimum wage. Also it would really help having a budget for an assistant or associate Lighting Designer ☐

I really like remote meetings. I tried to do them whenever possible before Covid because a meeting costs me time and money to get there. This was often met by resistance because someone in an office invariably liked to get out into the café. However a meeting that is an hour for someone in an organisation costs me two hours, petrol, parking and inevitably the coffee.

Responses from Organisations

Do pay structures need to be reviewed? If, for example, freelancers were paid more for their time, would they be open to having a stronger time commitment to that project exclusively / being on first call, so they wouldn't be balancing as many projects and the project would have a stronger relationship with freelancers?

We strive to pay ITC rates as a minimum but ideally more than that, close to or above living wage.

Our fees are guided by the ITC, although we pay above their minimum requirements, because that's something we believe we should be doing. But some of the more ad-hoc arrangements aren't necessarily covered by the guidelines, and I agree there's potential for clarifying that a bit more.

We lost our entire program within the space of a week, so freelancers lost all their core work in the space of a day - we worked very hard to keep them in work, adapted funding plans and honoured all contracts.

It's been crucial that we keep our artists during lockdown and safeguard them. I am looking to be able to pay our freelance artists a basic wage between now and when we get our full programme back. I need to keep them and have them be here at the end of this.

We don't actually have to travel long distances to facilitate the sort of meetings that we would have as part of a setup of a project with our freelancers. And I think I could certainly see a future for us that involves far more meetings via Zoom in the planning stages, and even to some extent in research and development.

Project Development - we're pushing for there to be some actual funds to develop projects at the present time. The only funds that are currently coming through to organisations are recovery and rescue packages to prevent insolvency and redundancies, and officially none of that money that's come through from DCMS is to go towards actual activity. Any activity that we create has to be project funded and, without any project funding currently available, we're in limbo.

We're ready to do stuff and bring in freelancers and we want to do that, but without any lottery funding or other funds coming through towards activity, we can't make work, which means we're not able to bring in our freelancers. So what I'm really keen to push for is that there is some form of funding, both for individuals and organisations, that will create some activity when venues reopen and as we come slowly out of this pandemic, we can work together on something.

Comments on Best Practice

After several booked gigs were cancelled due to COVID, there was support - a percentage of fees were paid in advance. Ongoing relationships, longer term commitment.

Funding Application and Technical Support

Responses from Freelancers

I think the new wave of ACE funding encouraging individuals to apply along with no match funding could be a way for organisations/buildings to help in kind and work with freelancers.

I've been thinking about relationships I've had with venues over the years during lockdown and thought "how could that have gone better?" And a lot of that is to do with proactivity from venues and organisations. I was thinking back to the first ever show that I produced, and it was a massive project, with 20 artists, creating short plays and staging them all at once, creating 7 different pieces. I said to the venue, "I'm going to be applying for Arts Council funding". I had never applied for Arts Council funding before, I didn't have a clue. I obviously didn't get it, and then had a massive rush to raise all the funds to pay all the artists and get the show on all at the same time. And I just think - if in that first meeting they'd said to me "have you done that before? Can we help you with that?", it could have saved my life and years of overdraft.

Support with funding applications and technical support for both experienced and emerging practitioners.

Responses from Organisations

Great to hear that what we are doing, in helping with bid writing, dramaturgy, tips on comms and PR, and trying to support people with human comforts, is something people want.

Comments on Best Practice

Very recently there have been a number of online funding advice sessions involving Arts Councils and consortiums of organisations or in partnership with a venue. There have been a number that have also had access provided of BSL interpreters and captioning. More of these and more advance notice and advertisement on websites would be helpful.

Emotional and Safeguarding Support

Responses from Freelancers

Better understanding and emotional support.

My work is usually quite therapeutic / community focused and so having access to genuine support / supervision / management of some kind is also helpful in terms of emotional safety and safeguarding.

A pack when you arrive, telling you exactly what's going on would be really helpful, and make you feel more supported in the environment, including contact information and wifi passwords etc.

Knowing who to go to with safeguarding questions.

Responses from Organisations

One big takeaway is about COVID planning, and the example of asking a specific practitioner to be responsible for safety is something we would seek to avoid.

Now we are able to do more research and development projects, it's our responsibility to create a safe environment for people to work in.

Comments on Best Practice

Providing access for a number of freelancers and employees to Mental Health First Aid Training.

Development and Training Opportunities

Responses from Freelancers

Before I became a movement director I was a performer so I had crossovers with creatives and venues. What is available for emerging directors and writers?

Could there be other emerging lighting designer schemes, mentorships? - these could extend to other departments.

Mentoring - it would be great to not have to find my way so blindly through things. All the networking and trying to work out who's going to be useful and helpful and happy to help you - there's not a lot I can give necessarily right now, so knowing who's got that time to support me and mentoring schemes would be really useful. Due to the age I am, people assume I know what I'm doing, so it would be really useful to find those people who would be able to hold my hand a little bit along the way.

Opportunities appropriate to your career stage/skill level.

Affordable training and development opportunities (whilst working on a project and not)

Responses from Organisations

One thing I've really been thinking about a lot: training, ongoing training. What do people feel about how organizations might support you better?

Comments on Best Practice

One thing I did have was a local theatre that provided opportunities - it gave early career artists small pots of cash, space, opportunity to share something, network and meet with others, sharing of resources, made it clear that we had the space to fail and that was massive. I would want to give that to early career producers.

I'm right at the beginning of my career in a lot of ways, and any feedback is useful feedback. I've done a few scratch performances with my local arts centre and that's been really invaluable, so they're the things that are really useful for me.

Work Opportunities

Responses from Freelancers

The main thing for me is that organisations and companies look at ways to create work opportunities for freelancers at this time (I know a lot are already).

Support for either project work or ways to create performance; as freelancers we always have ideas but not the resources to put ideas into practice.

I'm based in the North, and work in the North quite a bit. A lot of theatres locally are doing open castings, which is great, but they tend to happen as a one-off, or once a year, and obviously the numbers they can accommodate don't reflect the numbers of local actors available who want to be seen and to meet the producers or the company.

So that's just my thought, to have a dedicated programme of such meetings, and not just for acting, for casting, in that I do a lot of creative engagement work as well, so just a chance to meet, but not so restricted so that it feels embedded, rather than lip-service paid to meeting the local talent.

Fewer permanent long-term roles and more fluidity is needed. Instead of using the same pool of freelancers, organisations should find ways to expand and look in different places.

A system which doesn't insist on competition between artists for jobs and funding; space to work; space to share work and audiences for work. Enough resources to make work as imagined, including marketing resources to ensure that audiences see the work.

It feels very much like there's an old guard. I know people like their teams but it feels like there's a wall at times and maybe this COVID time has changed those walls slightly.

Promote the work of freelancers - our work is our currency. Credit us on social media rather than describing a production as "our production". Often no-one knows from social media which artists have been involved.

Create different ways for your organisation to get to know a range of freelancers in relation to paid work opportunities.

As a freelancer you know when you've dropped off somebody's list, if you've worked with a company for a long period of time, but there's somebody new in the office, and you so happen to not work in that time period that they've started working in, you find yourself drop off that contact list. So it's about retention, and the fact that that pool should get bigger not just be a revolving door. And I understand that capacity may be different, but if there are ways of keeping in contact with people, and people are still feeling that level of love and connection with wider networks, that's a really beautiful thing.

Comments on Best Practice

One of the most helpful easy free things is that organisations shout about me as a freelancer - some organisations are protective and don't want to share us.

SUMMARY

A short summary of the freelancers' answers in each category.

VALUES BASED

Collaboration and Sense of Community: Having opportunities to collaborate and form long term connections with other freelancers and organisations outside of specific projects. Being invited to events like Christmas parties. Continuation of the kind of events (venues holding online town halls etc.) which have been enabling connection during COVID. Organisations actively reaching out to find freelancers in their local area and providing space for freelancers to connect with each other. When freelancers come into spaces, making sure they are introduced to the people who work there and feel at home in the space.

Communication and Respect: Giving us as much information as possible - at the start of a project or when availability checking - including: budget, how fees are worked out, schedule, what work is expected from us, exactly what our role on a job will be, and who else is involved. The opportunity to ask questions and be involved in decision making. Transparency about opportunities and what 'meetings' or 'conversations' are about. Timely responses to communication, getting back to us every time even if the answer is no. Organisations openly sharing any information they have on what is happening in the industry in general.

When collecting information on things like preferred pronouns or access requirements, making sure this information is communicated to everyone who needs to have it and acted on. Actively offering help where freelancers may not know that something might be available (eg. information about available space they could use) - empowering freelancers to be able to ask for resources.

For our Voices as Freelancers to be Heard and Valued: For example, freelancers being paid to be at the table for relevant meetings in organisations (eg. programming and COVID recovery); including freelancers on boards, being mindful of why they are there and how they can contribute; organisations publicly and actively welcoming freelancers coming to them with ideas.

To be Represented and Work in an Environment Without Racism: A diversity of people across the entire organisation, representation of the modern day UK in theatres and arts organisations, seeing people like ourselves in the building. Knowing we will be able to come to work and do our jobs without needing to worry about racist micro-aggressions. Investment, commissions and belief in the value of, and audience for, work from people of every background, and stories from cultures which aren't often seen on stage.

Empowerment: Not feeling we are at the mercy of organisations, making it possible to call out bad practice without jeopardising our future work. Feeling valued, and that organisations are interested in helping us develop as artists.

PRACTICAL

Access and Childcare: Creating an atmosphere of understanding of access requirements and tailoring people's working experience to them. Asking questions relating to 'access' to anyone working on a project, not just people assumed to be disabled. Making buildings accessible, and having resources like captioning, BSL, audio description and access support available. Organisations offering childcare options like creches or childminders.

Time and Space: A working process which is unhurried and includes research and development time for all members of the creative team to work together. Considering building in a break to think and reflect between development periods. Venues actively offering freelancers the use of their space if it's available. Shorter and more accessible and flexible application processes.

Space to work (a desk or a room away from rehearsals) which we can make our own and is suitable for the work we're doing, whether clean or messy. Not needing to clear everything into cupboards at the end of the day. Not being expected to have meetings or answer questions during breaks.

Money: Being paid for all the work we do, not asked to work or consult for free, paid for meetings and travel time, and paid enough to work on one project at a time. Enough paid time to collaborate and plan properly. Being paid on time and not having to chase invoices. Income security. Making use of online meetings instead of in-person meetings which cost us time and money.

Funding Application and Technical Support: Organisations sharing expertise and supporting freelancers with funding applications and technical help.

Emotional and Safeguarding support: Understanding and genuine emotional support and management supervision where appropriate. A pack when we arrive with clear information (contact details, wifi password etc) to make us feel supported in the environment. Knowing who we can go to with questions.

Training and Development Opportunities: More mentoring availability, and mentoring and emerging artist schemes in more disciplines. Affordable training and development opportunities suitable to our career level.

Work Opportunities: Organisations maintaining relationships with people they have worked with, but also actively looking to expand their pool of freelancers and meet more artists in their local area, holding open events regularly. Finding ways to create work opportunities for freelancers at this time, and promoting freelancers to other people. Enough resources to make and promote work without a system which insists on competition between artists for jobs, funding and space.

What might you do to take forward the thoughts, reflections, ideas, comments and good practice that have come up today?

Responses from Freelancers

Make clearer demands and requests from potential venues/clients

Listen & learn about better practice, pushing for well-being & access support for those that need it

Not to be afraid to ask, demand things that I know are standard in PAYE and other contracts. To be bold

I will aim to continue these discussions with fellow freelancers, venues and theatre companies

Not feel like we have to partake in a fictitious hierarchy

Support marginalised people in the industry as much as I can

I will definitely be passing on today's conversation to other freelancers in my area. Really interesting, thank you and amazing to see so many people!

Communicate clearly with venues I work with what I need from them. Connect with the UK freelance community on a more regular basis

Seek out more ways to use the facilities from venues and companies to stimulate new work and further my own development

Reach out to other puppeteers to check in how they are moving forward especially when accepting news jobs in a safe way.

Connect more with freelancers and ask from organisations what they do to accommodate freelancers.

I will forward the notes and thoughts from this meeting to those freelancers in my various networks, both those who know about the Task Force and what's happening and those who don't. If there are recommendations raised by the Task Force for working with freelancers I'll look to embed that in Paper Balloon practice. Thank you very much for today

I will feedback this experience to my Actors Co-Op agency!

I will ask for what I need and find ways to keep in touch with other freelancers.

agree about connecting more with other freelancers

I run a weekly emerging directors online meet up. I will circulate findings and conversations from this session to them

To ensure I stay connected with and empowered by other freelancers / freelance networks.

Talk to other freelancers about today and engage with local organisations and find out what they are doing for freelancers.

I'll find more ways to connect with other freelancers, & since I asked for proactivity from organisations, I will also try & be more proactive in asking & advocating for myself & others

Thank you everyone, an immediate moving forward is knowing as a freelancer that there will be any financial support the government grants if you're not a director, performer or writer. It feels hard to know how to express what I do ?

Responses from Organisations

Commit to staying connected

Take a number of the ideas/thoughts from today into our senior management meetings for action: info packs, transparency on pay, invites to press nights, example contracts on the website...

Transparency is really crucial I think.

Thanks everyone, for a really interesting conversation! I'm going to strive to keep finding ways to make the resources that we have available for our freelancers to access all year round, not just when they're on a project with us.

I'm going to make sure we have a welcome pack of sorts for our freelancers and that it is up to date. Plus look at different ways we can form more long-term, meaningful relationships with our freelancers - like the idea on retainers

Keep banging on that people rather than buildings are the infrastructures we are all dependent on

Re-focus what our offer is to freelance and emerging artists and demonstrate an openness to ideas.

- 1) Feed back this session's valuable contributions to our wider team .
- 2) Ensure that we communicate our COVID protocols to all freelancers - theatre makers, artists, and off stage talent
- 3) Maintain and continue to develop our culture of 'welcome'

Continue the discussion within the company, and think about a Christmas party!

Look at our communication strategy (especially with a reduced team): how do we keep in conversation with our freelancers; how do we update our pro dance community on the decisions we are thinking about / have made in light of the conversations that have taken place over the last few months; how do we rebuild trust and connection in the dance community and move forward together.

Make sure that we find a way to embed freelancers into our organisation that they are part of the process not just the product.

Loads to think about but some particularly practical thoughts to feed into my thinking around transparency around pay and processes

Formalise more thoroughly our commitment to the freelancers we work with. I look forward to the recommendations from this and will implement them and will add them to our current induction process. I will also continue to meet all freelancers who request a meeting.

Pass on our conversations to the rest of our team, keep reaching out, try to break down the sense of power struggle, maintain transparency and openness, embed our freelancers.

For us to recognise that freelancers may not feel empowered to ask explicitly for what they need in order to succeed – and so we will always offer in advance the full range of support and conditions we are able to offer – and where we can be flexible and are able to discuss in an adult and on a peer to peer level what could be possible – to actively foster of culture of peer to peer conversation rather than a perceived power structure