FREELANCERS MAKE THEATRE WORK

OPEN TO ALL,
BUT NOT OPEN ALL HOURS
Hope and fears for the future of the UK's entertainment industries

Big Freelancer Survey 2022 report, September 2022

The Big Freelancer Survey 2022 (BFS2) Team

The Big Freelancer Survey (BFS) team consists of Freelancers Make Theatre Work members of staff and volunteers; Josie Underwood, Alistair Cope, Mimi Doulton, and Paul Carey Jones. The team also included Matt Humphrey, Curtain Call and Melissa Tyler, co-director of the Future of Creative Work group in the Centre for Work, Organization and Society at the University of Essex. The aim of the survey is to provide an evidence base for FMTW's work in lobbying for a fair and sustainable future for freelance workers in the UK's theatre and entertainment industries. 1497 freelancers took part in BFS2, which included a mix of pre-coded and free text questions. The total qualitative data set in response to three free text questions was 92,994 words (185 pages) of text. The survey was designed and analysed by the survey team, in consultation and collaboration with the wider FMTW community.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In the midst of the COVID pandemic, Freelancers Make Theatre Work (FMTW) conducted a survey of the UK's freelance theatre workforce, the Big Freelancer Survey (BFS) 2020. FMTW plans to conduct five annual surveys in total, from 2020 to 2025 to obtain a big picture of the acute and chronic impact of COVID, and to understand how the pandemic intersects with other issues such as Brexit, pre-existing inequalities, the climate crisis, and the growing cost of living in the UK. This interim report covers issues highlighted by the second in this series of Big Freelancer Surveys undertaken by FMTW, conducted in Spring 2022. The first survey in 2020 focused on the acute crisis brought about by the COVID pandemic. The second survey highlights issues relating to the ongoing impact of COVID and the working conditions and environments that theatre makers have returned to as venues and events re-opened following successive periods of lockdown. While it captures both a 'moment in time', it also highlights the effects of inequalities and vulnerabilities that pre-existed COVID, as well as providing insight into how unprepared the UK's freelance entertainment workforce are to cope with a growing cost-of-living crisis. The second (2022) survey also includes a broader range of workers than the first, with participants based in sectors that span the full breadth of the UK's entertainment industries. The report shines a light on the hopes and fears of freelance workers and is more than a research study – it is a call to the creative industries and arts sectors not to lose the unprecedented opportunity that COVID has provided to think about how to future-proof the entertainment industries by building an infrastructure that is fair and sustainable – open to all. It is also a call to put an end to exploitative and unsustainable practices that undermine job security and the wellbeing of the freelance workforce on which the UK's world-renowned entertainment industry depends. Through the honesty and generosity of the survey participants, we are able to present informed recommendations that provide insight into what working in the entertainment industry is currently like for the 90% of its workforce who are freelancers, and to make clear proposals for what it might be in the future.

Total responses
1497
from

England 87%
Scotland 7%
Wales 5%
Northern Ireland 1%

A MULTI-FACETED CRISIS:
SECURITY, SAFETY, HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION, AND RETENTION

Our findings highlight widespread concerns about career security, with over half (55%) of all respondents saying that they feel 'quite' or 'very' insecure about their jobs. This figure rises to 65% for respondents who identified as living with a condition that they view as impacting on their working lives (e.g. a disability or other condition); 60% amongst respondents who identified as being part of the global majority, 65% who identified their backgrounds as working class, 60% who identified as women, and 61% who identified as parents and/or carers. When asked to indicate how safe they currently feel in their workplace 20% of all respondents said that they felt 'quite' or 'very' unsafe, with this figure rising to one third (34%) for respondents who identified as living with a condition that they view as impacting on their working lives (e.g. a disability or other condition); 31% who identified as being part of the global majority, and just over one fifth (23%) of those who identified as women. 27% of all participants reported that their debt levels had increased since the outbreak of the pandemic, and 52% said that their savings had decreased. Linking the two together, 60% of all participants said that their savings had decreased, debt had increased or both. For those who self-identified as being from working class backgrounds, this figure increased to 66%; for those who self-identified as being part of the

global majority it increased to 64%. 65% of working parents and/or carers reported that their debt levels had increased, savings had decreased or both, and for those living with a condition that they view as impacting on their working lives, the figure was 65%.

53% of all respondents reported that they had witnessed one or more forms of harassment and/or discrimination in the past twelve months. The incidents witnessed totalled 1701, including unfair treatment (25%), sexism (19%), bullying (18%) and racism (10%). 48% of those who had witnessed an incident stated that it had not been reported, and 25% reported that they didn't know if it had or not. Of those who answered 'yes', the incident had been reported, 48% stated that the incident had not been appropriately dealt with and 26% didn't know whether it had or not (totalling 74%). Compared to the 53% of all respondents who said that they had witnessed one or more incident that they would describe as harassment and/or discrimination in the past twelve months, 70% of those who identified as belonging to the global majority reported that this was the case, and 70% of those who identified as living with a condition that they viewed as impacting on their working lives. Amongst those who self-identified as women, the figure was 59%; amongst respondents who

self-identified as LGBTQIA+ the figure was 61%, and amongst those who identified their gender as different to that assigned at birth, this figure rose to 70%.

16% of survey respondents said that they were considering leaving the entertainment industry in the next twelve months.

Of note in that of those who said they were still working in the industry, 35% said that this was likely to be a temporary situation, or they were unable to say whether it was temporary or permanent.

Despite our efforts to reach those who have left the industry we only recieved nineteen responses. These nineteen were asked a follow-up question on their reasons for leaving; the most common answers were 'not enough work, job insecurity, not enough pay, and mental health'.

16%

of all respondents were considering leaving the industry.

A further

35%

still working in the industry but considered this a temporary situation, or unable to say whether it was permanent.

55%

of respondents said they felt quite or very insecure about their jobs.

52%

said that their savings had decreased

COVID AS A MISSED OPPORTUNITY?

A widespread view is that 'for an industry that professes to be forward thinking and open it isn't!' Almost all responses referred to this issue as worsening post-COVID, with some new problems emerging (e.g. skills shortages) and more chronic problems (e.g. ongoing financial precarity, job insecurity, inequality) being considerably accentuated – as one respondent put it, **'the industry has never felt more economically challenging to survive in'**. The disproportionate effect on those who were already disadvantaged pre-pandemic means that as one respondent put it, *'it feels like survival of the fittest in our industry'* – and this was a widely held view (i.e. that COVID had not brought about, but had dramatically accentuated, chronic inequalities across the industry, notably relating to socio-economic background, gender, race, age, regionality and disability). Freelancers were widely perceived as the 'backbone' of the industry, but as perpetually financially precarious and existentially vulnerable in an environment summed up by one respondent as 'fractured and divided': *'Freelance creatives are often zero hours and on very insecure terms, if any. They are the backbone of the industry but face an existential threat'.* Many reported being faced with the dilemma of needing to earn money but being unable to live and work in London on what freelance jobs paid ('having to pay to work') – one wrote

'it is simply too costly to exist'. In addition to financial precarity, concerns were raised about the entertainment industry being *'a very toxic and aggressive place to work'*. Some freelancers struggling to remain in the industry described feeling 'tired, sad and anxious', others referred to their need to leave as a very difficult one: '*I feel heartbroken about going through the process of retraining to leave the industry. But I can't see that I will be able to provide for my family if I remain in the arts. Jobs are badly paid'*. Widespread feelings of despondency were summed up by one respondent who said, *'I'm tired. I'm so so tired. I've had to … take on work I wouldn't otherwise, hustle hustle hustle. I need a break. I need security for my children, something has to give'*. Another described feeling 'enormous sadness', adding **'my heart has been regularly lifted and broken by the sector I work in, now it's numb'**. One participant summed up what they saw as the freelancer's work cycle: *'work for exposure and experience, burn out and leave',* going on to say, *'we need to break this destructive cycle'*. The opportunity for a critical review that COVID might have brought about was widely linked to pay: *'[we need] pay that reflects the hours worked and the world we live in. A better understanding of what our job actually entails. I do not want to return to the version we had, this is our chance to fix so much'*.

There was widespread concern that this opportunity was being lost, however. As one participant put it: *'I had hoped that the break of the pandemic would have created the headspace for a review on practices but it seems like things have become only more deeply entrenched'*. Some felt that COVID was being used strategically to drive pay and conditions down, and to further exploit workers desperate to stay in the industry, often requiring freelancers to take on multiple roles, e.g. *'I'm really afraid that the pandemic has taught venues nothing about how to maintain relationships with their freelancers (i.e bad time management, poor pay, treating people as expendable are all getting worse)'*.

Some felt that positive changes had come about because of COVID and cited the need to retain some of what has been learnt/changed: *'making the industry more accessible, providing better support for freelancers particularly in relation to mental and physical health'*. Skills-sharing in order to maintain more inclusive work practices (e.g. for work colleagues with different needs) was raised as an important consideration. But concerns were raised about COVID being a 'missed opportunity' for the industry to properly take stock in a fundamental way, and to re-build in a way that recognizes e.g. the value and contribution of freelancers: *'my hope is that freelancers are actually recognized for their contribution to the industry, paid and looked after properly. A lot was said in 2020, not much of that has been actioned since'*. The lack of optimism in this final point was widespread. One respondent said: 'I'd love to see all the build back better ideas/promises from theatre companies and the wider live arts industry actually come about!', and another said, *'I feel like all the lovely talks we had during lockdown about creating a fair industry have now been forgotten'*. References to COVID as a missed opportunity to 'build a better industry' were widely made, e.g., '[I worry] that is it being propped up by low paid or temporary workers who work more hours in unsafe conditions that they aren't fairly paid or credited for. Basically, that the sector doesn't use the opportunity presented by the pandemic to build a better industry. The same people will get the opportunities and the same people will leave the industry as they aren't supported well enough to thrive'. One respondent referred to the pandemic being a missed opportunity to 'shake things up': *'the pandemic seemed like a good opportunity for things to have been shaken up in the theatre sector, and so far I haven't seen this to be the case. Many people have left, and those of us who are left are being overworked and underpaid'*. Another respondent

> *'My hope is that freelancers are actually recognised for their contribution to the industry, paid and looked after properly. A lot was said in 2020, not much of that has been actioned since.'*

COVID AS A MISSED OPPORTUNITY?
CONTINUED...

referred to a widely anticipated (dreaded) retention crisis as a consequence of COVID being a missed opportunity to tackle chronic, structural inequalities across the industry and the lack of recognition of creative labour as work, and of the central role played by freelance workers:

> *The industry had two years to reflect on its flaws and shortcomings. There was a huge amount of positive talk, openness to ideas, and the traditional barriers of hierarchy breaking down. The sad reality, as theatres have reopened, is that the industry by and large seems to have slipped back into bad habits, and in many cases made them worse. The existence of freelancers is more precarious than ever, and freelance artists are being asked to bear the financial burden of squeezed budgets, even though we were the ones hit hardest by the impact of the pandemic. The industry needs to wake up to the fact that we are professionals doing a job, not amateurs playing dress-up and "living the dream", and that we are all supposed to be working together, with proper pay and conditions, to serve our audiences and the communities from which they're drawn. The theatre industry is in a freelance retention*

crisis, often silent and unnoticed, and once those decades of expertise are lost, they cannot be replaced. It's five minutes to midnight ...
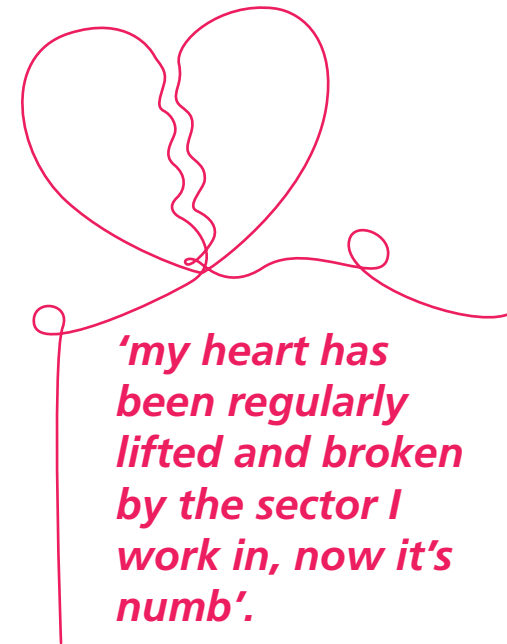
> *'my heart has been regularly lifted and broken by the sector I work in, now it's numb'.*

THE SHOW MUST GO ON, BUT NOT 'NO MATTER WHAT'

There was a widespread feeling that 'the show can't go on' as is was pre-COVID, and shouldn't, with many references to the toxic effects of this as an unsustainable ethic. One participant summed up the hopes of many by wishing for 'Better working hours, proper breaks, proper staffing, more accessibility to all, no bullying or discrimination, equal opportunities. Less of the show must go on no matter what attitude'. Another said, "The show must go on" is a lovely sentiment … but it must only go on if it is safe to do so, with properly paid workers both on and off stage, who aren't working outside of their skillset or comfort zone'. Another summed up widespread concerns about pressure to take on work beyond the necessary experience or skill set, or pay,

saying that the requirement to 'take on roles [you are] not trained/qualified for or basically work above and beyond without financial recognition' is ubiquitous, compromising safety and accentuating precarity. Another said, 'I fear that many theatres are currently prioritising profit over people … 'the show must go on' attitude is damaging and exclusionary'.

> *'I fear that many theatres are currently prioritising profit over people...'*

TACKLING INEQUALITIES AND UNDER-REPRESENTATION, AND IMPROVING PAY AND CONDITIONS

The most widespread calls were for greater equality, fair pay and improved working conditions, including greater parity with those who are employed by venues/ productions. The chronic financial precarity widely experienced by freelance workers was seen as being very closely connected to persistent structural inequalities, as summed up by one respondent who noted that efforts to tackle problems associated with under-representation are unlikely to succeed unless/until the problem of underpayment is addressed:

> *I suspect the biggest barrier to making theatre and the arts workforce more representative is the unrealistic levels of pay, which put off people from low-income backgrounds (including those from diaspora heritages), parents (especially mothers), and disabled and neurodivergent people. So while many cultural institutions have tried hard to make their spaces more welcoming to under-represented groups (with varying degrees of success, thoughtfulness and sincerity), without more creative thinking as to how they can pay the freelance workforce more fairly I fear these efforts will ultimately have little substantive effect.*

To give an example of the combined impact of COVID and inequality, one of the respondents who self-identified as disabled said they would be paying off the debt accrued during the pandemic for years:

> *I am currently having to survive on disability benefits that equate to less than 1 week's professional fees, which has to last me a month. That, I feel is representative of the value I apparently have to the society we live in. Despite being well qualified and previously very successful, I felt financially abandoned during the pandemic ... leaving me with 4 hours income a week from an Arts Council Grant. I worked*

90.7%
of respondents were from White British, White Irish or other White backgrounds,

7.4%
were from Global Majority backgrounds.

for free online to keep myself sane during 2 years of shielding and used all our company's limited resources to pay our freelancers instead of myself. I will be paying off the debts for years, and I am ashamed of the way our government abandoned us on both fronts, firstly as disabled people and secondly as creatives, but I am proud to be a theatre practitioner, I am proud of the way this crisis has brought us all so much closer together, I just hope the connections stay once it's over ... because despite them trying to tell us covid isn't a thing anymore, this fight for survival is still a long way from being over for most of us.

The problem of low pay was a key concern, with widespread calls for 'minimum wages being raised and [being] non-negotiable'. Freelancers who identified as being from working class backgrounds highlighted precarity as a major barrier to entering and remaining in the industry, e.g. 'I'm very seriously considering retraining and leaving the arts altogether. I have worked in the arts for 16 years and my freelance income was my only income for several years before the pandemic. Freelancers, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, have so many barriers to participation beyond money. But money is the biggest barrier for many of us and we need more support and security to stay. I'm encouraged by orgs like Strike A Light committing to employing artists for a year. More organizations should be looking to support freelancers in ways like this'.

Many respondents linked low/no pay to overwork as an endemic problem. As one respondent put it, 'I've never paid tax and that's not because I have a great accountant - it's simply that I work ... 50 hours a week on average on minimum wage or less. It's just totally unsustainable without support'. The personal and financial impact on individuals and on the industry were summed up by several respondents including one who said, 'The entertainment industry as a whole fosters an ethic of working 'til you drop, with the excuse that our work is our passion, and we're expected to eat, breathe, shit the work with no downtime. 6-7 day work weeks should not be the norm. 14-hour days should not be the norm .... There's no clear way to continue in this field and have any quality of life, so I've just about reached the limit of what I can take'. Another said simply, 'The way the industry works in this country is shameful. It is based on exploitation ... I love what I do but not like this'. Feeling 'lost and uninspired', this freelancer summed up a widespread feeling of toxicity and resentment:

Due to persistent under payment leading to over working, I was already at the end of my tether and thoroughly burnt out by Feb 2022. I had no energy to come to theatre's rescue ... It felt like the end of a toxic relationship where the distance of the pandemic finally made us realise what we had been subjected to under the premise of 'normal'. Now that we are 'back' I'm finding it so hard to make work whilst having acknowledged all of the industry's flaws. That sense of resentment has changed my enjoyment of the job.

TACKLING INEQUALITIES AND UNDER-REPRESENTATION, AND IMPROVING PAY AND CONDITIONS *CONTINUED...*

Tackling 'rampant' class, gender, and racial inequalities, a 'burn out' culture and the creation of a supportive environment across different stages of the life course in an industry deemed to be 'riddled with ageism', and mired by 'rampant sexism and racism', inaccessible to those with a range of access and disability related needs, were all noted as priorities. Inter-sectional inequalities were also noted as being in urgent need of recognition. And concerns were raised about how the demographic contours of inequality intersected with regional disparities perpetuating barriers to entry and disadvantage across the entertainment industry e.g. based on unequal access to opportunities for training, exposure, networking, funding, etc. The need for a different kind of ethic underpinning the future of creative work, one based on more of a sharing economy, and on greater transparency (e.g. about pay inequalities, jobs being advertised widely, outside of paywalls) was widely raised. Improved access and communication was also widely referred to, as was better and more widespread use of job shares for those who need more flexibility to accommodate caring and other responsibilities. More accessible methods of recruiting staff were also raised, including references to better advertising beyond established networks that perpetuate existing inequalities, and more video/online based applications than forms e.g. 'I would love to see more opportunities for the neurodiverse community including less form applications and more availability of video applications'. Suggestions were widely made that funding bodies should assess applications for evidence of 'fair pay' in proposed budgets, with follow-up checks being made. Concerns were raised about budgetary shortfalls disproportionately impacting on freelance workers, with budgets not covering adequate time for rehearsals resulting in freelancers being expected to 'do more for less', an ethos that many felt should be replaced by a 'fairer is better' way of working underpinned by greater respect for the value of freelance work and workers:

> *I hope the industry wakes up to the value of freelancers and treats them with respect and not as disposable workers who have to work all the hours under the sun to complete incorrectly budgeted programming.*

Concerns were also widely raised about the regressive effects of COVID on fair pay and working conditions, with views being expressed that a social justice agenda has been set back '10-15 years', and that 'we have not only gone back to how it was pre-pandemic but in fact got worse because there is less money, less jobs and harder working conditions'.

EQUALITY AND INCLUSION – BEYOND RHETORICAL COMMITMENTS

Rhetorical commitments to equality that were not borne out in practice and remained 'empty statements', or 'false promises about accessibility' were also widespread concerns, e.g. 'some of the positive "actions" and declarations made by organisations, venues and producers, agents etc, such as being "allies" and to be for example "anti-racist" or practicing a "mental health positive culture" are empty statements. How can companies claim to care about mental health and well-being and then in practice do things like never informing actors if they have been successful in auditions? (Professional ghosting)'. Others said simply, 'diversity is just tokenism'. Suggestions made to tackle this included compulsory unconscious bias, micro-aggression, and equality awareness training for ALL employees, including the most senior staff (e.g. as part of compulsory health and safety assessments/certification and/or funding mechanisms), and the widespread adoption, enforcement and monitoring of codes of conduct/good practice guidelines. One respondent said, 'In 19 years I've had zero training at work or offers of career advancement in any aspect of the work I do'. A more proactive approach (e.g. meeting disabled and neurodivergent people's needs as universal accommodations rather than 'ad hoc' or on request adjustments), and advertising

these as part of recruitment processes was also suggested. The importance of, and need for, fully funded training and development opportunities for all freelance workers was widely referred to, including to raise awareness of workplace rights. And many suggested that these support mechanisms should be better targeted at career stages, e.g. 'there needs to be more support out there for young freelancers in the arts in terms of setting their rates and knowing their worth. That's something I have really struggled with and still do! More help is needed on this'. The need to seriously evaluate the potential introduction of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) was widely raised, as was the need for greater pay transparency, fair pay, and a funding review to tackle persistent inequalities; as one participant put it, 'the funding model needs ripping apart'. Some participants felt that this should be part of a fundamental review of the industry, e.g. 'the entire industry needs to be dismantled and rebuilt from the ground up. This is not about small changes. The industry is broken'. Another said, 'we have to do something about it, reinvent, recalibrate and reconfigure'. One respondent said that his annual wage hadn't improved for twenty years:

I'm working with students currently who are

"I am earning the same now as I did 20 years ago, not relatively but actual figures'

EQUALITY AND INCLUSION – BEYOND RHETORICAL COMMITMENTS *CONTINUED…*

'as a performer we need to freelance for flexibility around auditions and work, but the instability of it can be so stressful. My mental health has suffered immeasurably, and it feels like there's no other option or support. I got nothing from the government during the pandemic and I've worked and paid tax for 17 years'.

training to become theatre professionals and I really hope we can create an industry that looks after them better than it has looked after people in the past. We need fairer wages and schedules that don't mean a 12-hour day is considered normal. I, like most people in our industry, work really hard, often juggling several jobs at once, and my annual wage hasn't improved since I graduated twenty years ago!

Another also said, 'I am earning the same now as I did 20 years ago, not relatively but actual figures. This is not enough to support a family'. UBI was (as one respondent put it), 'a big wish'. Funding for entry schemes and organizations like PiPA (that support working parents/ carers) was also flagged as a priority. Many felt that what is badly needed in order to make a fair and sustainable recovery from COVID is, as one participant put it, 'a strong infrastructure that supports creativity'. Traditional working methods and processes, established pay structures and inequalities were widely perceived as not working:

I would like freelancers to be better enumerated for all of their labour, … I hope that venues and companies will draw on the creativity

of freelancers to reimagine how they might structure and run their institutions. I am keen that freelancers are consulted by public bodies and subsidised companies in a more meaningful way and that their advice is demonstrably taken on board and used to guide future decision making. I am desperate for wage transparency and transparency in recruitment processes - applicants should be able to see who is shortlisted and why. Freelance Company Wages are not realistic (less than £25K per year if you are fortunate enough to be in full-time work). I want theatre businesses to be better run.

Again, concerns about the regressive impact of COVID on wage transparency and equity, and on funding systems and financial support were widespread, with COVID being seen as an accentuation of an existing 'lucky for what we can get' model: 'if anything, things have gotten much worse as competition for / desperation for work has increased. A 'lucky for what we can get' mentality is understandably but depressingly common amongst freelancers. If we don't address the terrible pay and conditions … we are exacerbating structural inequalities about who can make work. I have stopped actively

pursuing theatre work and pitching, I'm so disillusioned with the practical conditions of making an art that was once my primary passion'. Widely referred to was the idea of post-COVID potentially bringing about opportunities for 'a new equilibrium' in the entertainment industry's economy. One respondent said: 'I hope the lessons learned will be retained and implemented. I hope the Arts will be properly appreciated, respected and above all financially protected and supported so that the creative industries can get back on their feet after the body-blows of the last couple of years'. Learning was a widely used discourse, e.g. 'I'm very concerned that some organisations won't learn from changes brought about by working post pandemic'. Another participant suggested, 'I hope that those in higher positions will start seeing their employees as people and not dispensable robots. The insane working hours and lack of mental health care in this industry is honestly driving people to the edge and nothing is being done. I sincerely hope that better work life balances are encouraged, in part by hiring more staff and spreading workloads', highlighting both the need and the opportunity for greater 'stability and equity'. Working hours were widely noted as problematic, with concerns being raised about fair and safe scheduling across sectors and work groups (BECTU's review was referred to and welcomed). One suggestion made was that commercial producers who don't adhere to safe working hours and practices 'should be listed by SOLT'. And concerns were also raised about being on call on days away from work as both unfair and detrimental to a safe, healthy work environment. And productions that only pay after the contract has finished were raised as an ongoing concern. Some solutions to concerns about a growing mental health crisis were simple e.g. 'I'd like every venue to have a quiet break room, just to be able to take a breather'; others more fundamental: 'I'd like to not have to fight all the time'. References to the combined impact of chronic precarity and COVID were widely made, e.g. 'as a performer we need to freelance for flexibility around auditions and work, but the instability of it can be so stressful. My mental health has suffered immeasurably, and it feels like there's no other option or support. I got nothing from the government during the pandemic and I've worked and paid tax for 17 years'.

AN INDUSTRY BUILT ON THE BODIES OF EXHAUSTED FREELANCERS?
POST-COVID WORKING CONDITIONS

Another recurring theme relating to concerns about pay inequalities, scheduling practices and unfair and/ or unsafe working conditions was that of numerical and functional flexibility. The former was framed as a concern with the ongoing uncertainty and insecurity around hiring and scheduling, the latter the demand, believed to be accentuated post-COVID, for freelancers to be multi-skilled, often being required to take on more roles and responsibilities than are fair or safe, e.g. 'more people taking on jobs that are really 2/3 people's jobs'. Concerns about the expectation that people would be willing and able to take on jobs combining a number of roles and responsibilities that they may/may not be trained, experienced, skilled, suited and/or paid for were widespread, e.g. 'given the current staff shortages across the board with non-returners post Covid I'm very worried about safety - in that the risk of an underqualified or underexperienced person getting a job in a role which is too much for them has massively increased'. Another said similarly, 'too many highly skilled people have left the industry. I fear that unqualified and inexperienced people will be working at a level they are not skilled [for], which has huge safety implications'

Rolling multiple roles into one post was seen largely as

a cost-saving measure, one that could be detrimental to safety and wellbeing. One respondent summed up concerns, referring specifically to stage managers: '[We need] fair wages reflected in the amount of work expected. Since the pandemic I think this has got considerably worse. Stage management are now expected to cover even more roles than before … We've seen a massive move to combine very different highly skilled jobs into one, so as not to hire the separate people needed to do that work. Combine that with the frankly insulting pay that is offered. It's not surprising there are so few technical people still around in the theatre sector'. Also referring to stage management and wardrobe roles, another said:

> *One thing that worries me is the number of jobs advertised that join two or more professional roles into one, the current favourite appears to be Stage Management and Wardrobe. It is appalling to expect the SM team to look after costumes, Wardrobe staff are highly trained and experienced in their profession and it is insulting to both parties to expect SMs to take on this job especially when no extra money is given. The excuse that the producers are just trying to get back to producing theatre after the pandemic*

Would you say that you still work in the industry?

1497
responses

Of those who said they were still working in the industry,

369/1065 (34.6%)

said this was a temporary situation or they were unable to say whether it was temporary or permanent

No - I've completely left
19 (1.3%)

I've moved sub-sector (e.g. theatre to TV)
33 (2.2%)

I do a mix of work - some in the sector
146 (9.8%)

Yes, but I'm considering leaving
234 (15.6%)

Yes, I'm still here
1065 (71.1%)
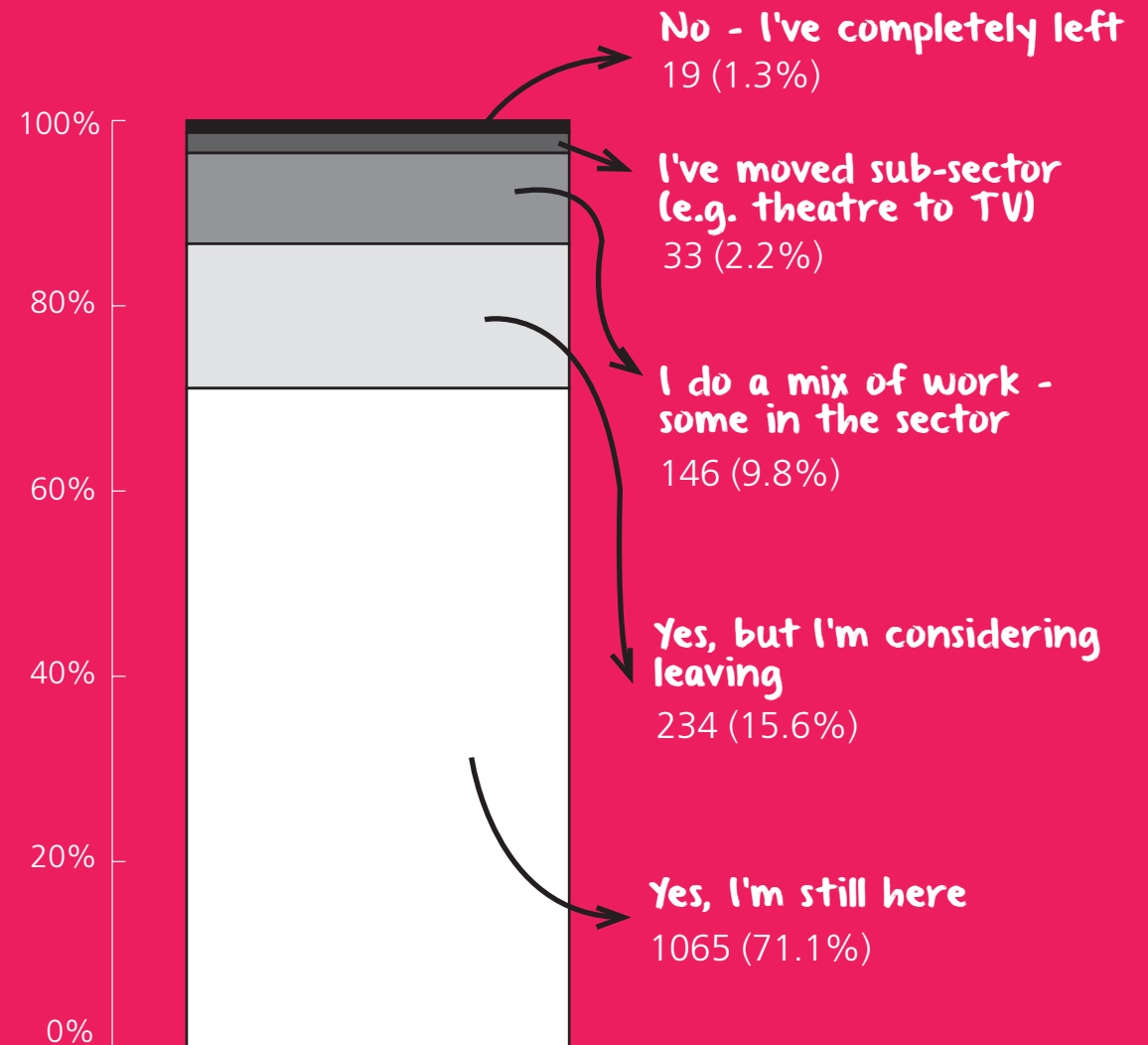
16%
of freelancers considering leaving the industry.

35%
still working in the industry but considered this a temporary situation, or unable to say whether it was permanent.

AN INDUSTRY BUILT ON THE BODIES OF EXHAUSTED FREELANCERS?
POST-COVID WORKING CONDITIONS *CONTINUED…*

doesn't wash (pun intended). If you can't afford to staff the show properly then you can't afford to put the show on.

These kinds of concerns were widely linked to calls for a proper review of funding models and employment relations, e.g. 'lack of skills and experience will lead to accidents. It will never get better unless we have a proper review'. In part this was because alongside the concerns raised above about the immediate and long-term impact of a skills shortage were concerns about a persistent lack of opportunities for those trying to break into the industry, and whose careers had been derailed by COVID; in particular, the widespread 'lack of training and opportunities for new entrants', and of mentoring opportunities, were raised as ongoing issues urgently needing to be addressed. Not surprisingly, the burden of chronic over-work and under-funding was seen to disproportionately impact on freelancers, as noted above, a problem which many connected to leaving the industry, to persistent inequalities, and to a growing mental health crisis, e.g. 'Every year the fees seem smaller, and the budgets seem even worse. My fear is that a lot of the best people in the industry, people who create amazing work and are a joy to collaborate with, are finding their skills

better valued elsewhere. The industry should not be built on the bodies of exhausted freelancers'. One participant said their expectation for the future of the industry is that 'funding will reduce, opportunities [will] decline, pay will be squeezed, people will be exploited', and another said, 'so many people have left - the negative effects will be felt for years'. For many, these issues pointed to grave concerns about recruitment and to the prospect of a 'devastating' retention crisis in the industry, one deemed 'not robust enough to support people through times of crisis', now or in the future, e.g.

When I couldn't get work during the pandemic, I got a job in a cafe and every day felt the same threat and employment insecurities in that sector. The only sectors that felt stable were sectors that would have required a total upheaval of direction and many would have required a completely new set of skills and qualifications, of which the routes to obtain these skills were unattainable during a period of personal economic fragility. It was a worrying time and I am concerned that the industry is not robust enough to support people through times of crisis if they aren't already established. There will be many industry workers

who will have to choose to move on from the industry and leave it behind in pursuit of stability. The exodus of talent and missed opportunities within new (not necessarily younger) generations of industry workers will be devastating. We need to do more to encourage more people into the industry and to retain them.

Investing in recruitment, access and mentoring opportunities was widely deemed to be vital to the industry's future, e.g. 'I worry that we're just not doing enough to train and invest in the next generation of artists and creatives. We have to offer a better environment or people won't stay. Worse than that, they won't even start'. Some raised concerns that failing to address this fundamental problem would perpetuate others (e.g. inequalities across the sector). Referring to the industry as a whole, one participant said they feared:

That it will squander the good intentions and motivation of 2020-21 and slide back into its stressful, poorly remunerated, exploitative habits. That the current talent drain and skills shortages will distract from the longer-term endeavour to address failings and injustices and improve the working environment. That the money will be spent on firefighting instead. That the industry will be so taken up with the "urgent" it will neglect the "important".

And concerns about a growing skills deficit and longer-term recruitment and retention crisis, resulting in a potential 'generational loss', were linked to the implications of Brexit, and ongoing problems associated with workload and stress, e.g. 'I see a huge skills deficit now, especially in the technical disciplines. People without enough experience and training are crushed by increased workloads and stress. This is a generational loss that will take many years to recoup. I see the UK becoming more insular and preoccupied with itself, through the defunding of a thriving and questioning creative national life, and artists cut off from work opportunities in Europe'.

'Every year the fees seem smaller, and the budgets seem even worse. My fear is that a lot of the best people in the industry, people who create amazing work and are a joy to collaborate with, are finding their skills better valued elsewhere. The industry should not be built on the bodies of exhausted freelancers"

BETTER REGULATION/ENFORCEMENT AND ACCESS TO HUMAN RESOURCES (HR)

For some, the need for greater respect and recognition goes hand in hand with better regulated work environments. Several respondents highlighted the need for more accessible advice and HR support, linking this to the need for improved contractual arrangements and working conditions, with clear routes to advice and enforcement for non-compliance with relevant legislation, policy, and good practice guidelines. An 'enforcement gap', with limited recourse for freelancers to tackle it individually or collectively was widely noted. Many respondents raised the point that freelancers should have access to training and development opportunities, holiday and sick pay, and paid maternity/parenting leave on a par with PAYE employees. For some, a better regulatory and support structure was identified as a possible route to tackling some of the worst excesses of persistent inequalities, e.g. 'Poor and working class artists are unable to sustain knocks and uncertainty and need practical, financial support to ensure the industry doesn't lose their talent. Making sure artists are paid for meetings, that they are given clear briefs and told upfront how much they can expect to get paid, and most importantly that they are paid in a timely manner should be the bare minimum of what organisations can do to help'. Some respondents reported concerns that even when they spoke up informally, or even made formal complaints to those with line management responsibilities, problems such as harassment and bullying were not being dealt with properly, e.g. 'a cast member was a known bully. I complained to the producers and asked that their agent be informed and the cast member [be] told that their behaviour was not acceptable. I was told to be the bigger person and let it go because they were the lead in the show. I find this attitude appalling and I had hoped that it had changed and am extremely disappointed to find that producers will still accept bad behaviour from actors and expect stage management to put up with it'. Others said that they worried about the repercussions of raising concerns about harassment, bullying and unfair or unsafe practices, e.g. 'you worry, will I ever work again'. The lack of an adequate safeguarding system across the industry (with venue/sector variability) was noted by several respondents as a concern, e.g. 'I've been part of a support circle for abuse survivors for a few years now, and have had a number of situations where I've been part of advocacy for people speaking up about MeToo. We do not have a safeguarding system in our industry, it just doesn't exist. We need to'.

One respondent provided an example of how vulnerable they felt as a freelancer with no recourse to enforcement in a perceived case of unfair dismissal:

My experience last summer was that of working really hard on a freelance producing gig for

around 6 weeks, only to be told that I wasn't efficient enough and that my face didn't fit and that they were letting me go. After an acrimonious fight, I got paid 3 days' notice pay. This left me with no work and no income for close to 5 months as people were still not hiring much post-pandemic. The project I was working on was funded by ACE money, so I got in touch with them. I also spoke to lawyers and got other advice, however, ultimately, there was nothing to be done. It really woke me up to just how vulnerable I am as a freelancer. The dismissal was unfair - I had proof of my effectiveness in the role - but ultimately, the boss didn't like me, it was a personality clash or whatever, and I had no recourse and no money. This has put me off continuing a career as a freelancer and I am pursuing other avenues.

Some of those who had left the industry said this was because they were 'burnt out' and had sought better job and pay security: 'I am burnt out with freelancing and have taken employment in a related area. Freelancing was already difficult, with opaque processes, blurred professional boundaries and expectations of massive input for very little (often late) pay. The pandemic heightened many aspects. I am now grateful to work somewhere with a HR department and a guaranteed payday each month'.

?

Thinking of your work overall, which of these best describes how safe you currently feel in your workplace?

1497 responses

👍 **Very safe** - 346 (23.1%)

Quite safe - 861 (57.5%)

Quite unsafe - 232 (15.5%)

👎 **Very unsafe** - 58 (3.9%)

19.4% Overall quite or very unsafe

A HEIGHTENED AWARENESS

A HEIGHTENED AWARENESS OF THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL AND GOVERNING BODIES

BECTU and other professional bodies were referred to as being key to bringing about improvements to working conditions and job security for freelancers, particularly in relation to the risks associated with employers forcing down pay rates as events/venues reopen. Calls for better enforcement of fair pay and decent working conditions were widespread, and professional bodies were seen to play an important role in this, but also as needing to do more (e.g. in terms of enforcement): *'We need stability, and safer working conditions, and better communications between governing bodies in the industry are the only way to bring this about'*. Calls for better support for freelancers were widespread e.g. 'I wish for the government to take the time to understand the nature of freelance work in the entertainment industry and put in place significant changes to how we are supported when the worst happens. We shouldn't need to rely on grants and charity donations to survive if we become ill, or need to care for a relative'. Unions and other professional bodies, as well as support networks, were seen as playing a key role in securing more adequate support, especially fair pay, better guidance on pay, and more secure working conditions, including contractual arrangements: 'I hope that more freelance workers in the arts will become members of unions, associations and other support networks in order to keep the conversations around unfair pay, working and contractual conditions

alive and I wish for further engagement from our unions to push for these changes with the government, producers, promoters, venues and all other engagers, to make the arts a prosperous, safe and fair creative industry for all to be a part of'. Some said, 'a decent freelancers union and pay rate card is desperately overdue', and 'freelancers need a dedicated union, a federation that unites and promotes the fair treatment and rights of practitioners across the arts'. Others emphasized the need for collective action on pay and working conditions, e.g. 'we all need to lobby for sick pay, holiday pay, bereavement leave, maternity and paternity pay, pensions and mental health days that employed staff benefit from'.

Calls were made for professional bodies to play a more proactive role in making the industry 'get its act together': *'[I hope] that the UK theatre industry gets its act together and starts co-ordinating around an ecosystem wide regulatory body for improved working conditions and protections for its freelance workforce. Its current employment practices are unethical. Covid-19 didn't put me in the position I am now in... 20 years working in UK theatre did'*. There was a widespread desire to hear 'freelancers voices heard, hours and work load respected more'. One participant reported an example of unfair practice that was similar to that noted by many others: 'I recently did a mid scale

tech. Actors and SM were all on Equity time frames and weekly fees, creatives worked an 85 hour week, and even then per diems were questioned, comps were not given, and freelancers had to ask many times to be reimbursed. How is this tenable post pandemic?' Calls for a review of self-employed/freelance income were also widespread: [I hope] for the government to stop discriminating against self-employed creatives by removing the minimum income floor from Universal Credit and find ways to support freelancers instead'. Support specifically for those new to the industry/ early careers was noted as a priority, with calls for 'more support for new graduates … so for example having finance classes, mentorship and focus groups to make contacts'. Some were concerned that the discussions held during the pandemic, and the level of engagement that was possible, might stall, however, e.g. 'I fear that as we all get back to work and the industry gets 'back to normal' we will become 'too busy' to continue the good work that has been started over the pandemic in terms of union and industry engagement of freelance workers'.

'I hope that more freelance workers in the arts will become members of unions, associations and other support networks in order to keep the conversations around unfair pay, working and contractual conditions alive and I wish for further engagement from our unions to push for these changes with the government, producers, promoters, venues and all other engagers, to make the arts a prosperous, safe and fair creative industry for all to be a part of'

THE NEED FOR RESPECT AND RECOGNITION ACROSS THE INDUSTRY

Calls for greater recognition and respect were widespread, with 'lack of recognition … of the value of the creative industries in society, whether economically, socially or culturally' being noted as an endemic problem. One participant summed up widespread concerns about the 'problem' of recognition: '[I worry] that the industry is losing highly skilled and experienced staff due to poor wages, overworking being assumed as the norm and lack of recognition. Where is the support and mentoring for less experienced/new starters in the industry? People are leaving in droves because what they do is not being recognised'. Calls for better recognition referred variously to professional status; roles; the impact of the pandemic (including, but not limited to 'recognition of the fact that people in their 20s and 30s missed out on vital time and opportunities to make connections and get work and are now considered too old to be emerging'); smaller/fringe productions; younger and older workers; trans people; the demands of the creative process (and the need for fair pay to reflect the time and skills needed), and the needs of working parents and carers. In general, widespread calls were made for 'better recognition of the situation and needs of freelancers, including by those in employed roles', for 'more recognition, better security and fair pay for freelancers', and for recognition of the importance of the entertainment industries 'both in the cultural and in the mental health and spiritual health of the country. We

know we are needed. Now we need to make it work'. One participant said simply, 'I would like recognition … that we should be given better/fairer pay and better/safer working conditions'. Recognition was linked to social and cultural appreciation, and to fair recompense: 'recognition needs to come through the financial lens as well'. 'A more robust social prescribing agenda for the benefit of communities' was highlighted as an important way in which the social and cultural value of entertainment, especially theatre, could be better recognized. Calls for improved investment in providing access to entertainment and the arts for children and young adults for under-privileged backgrounds, including via music education in state schools (see below) were widespread, with concerns being raised that without this, 'society and the industry will suffer in the long term'. For many, recognition of the value of the arts and entertainment sectors 'beyond the bottom line', was vital to its future, e.g. 'we need to take competition, market forces, value for money and anything else to do with finance away from the arts and [put] in its place a recognition of a different value for our lives, not one based on money'. COVID was deemed by many to have provided some respite from the chronic and widespread problem of non-recognition but most who raised this point believed this to be relatively temporary, e.g. '[I worry] that despite a temporary recognition of the value of arts within wider society during lockdown, we will continue

to be undervalued, under-resourced and overstretched and that this undervaluing begins with government and trickles down to the general populace'. The impact of this problem of non-recognition was summed up by one participant's description of their expectation of what is likely to happen to the arts and to freelance workers in the next few years: 'that we'll be gone and nobody will care'. The need for a new ethos based on mutual respect, and a desire for collaboration and recognition was summed up by one respondent as the need: 'To be valued. To be seen. To be respected. To have job security. To have better pay.' Some suggested that freelance work, underpinned by a collaborative ethos, could result in new ways of working, if funding infrastructures could support this (e.g. through creative hubs), e.g. 'for theatre especially, the ability for collectives of artists to band together for single large projects without forming a company, and the flexibility to co-create work beyond the national boundaries of the UK would be revolutionary. Neither are possible in the current structures of Arts Councils but this could bring about real, creative change'. Respect and recognition were seen as key to the future of a fair and equitable industry, and to realizing the potential that respondents identified in the possibilities attached to collaborative ways of working: 'I want to work in an industry where I am respected, everyone around me is respected and properly compensated. I want to get rid of gaslighting people/bullying people into believing that unsafe and underpaid work is okay. I want people to

value themselves and their skills'. One respondent said simply, 'we need a more respectful industry'. The need for better recognition across the industry was also widely referred to, with one respondent's main hope for the future being 'that we continue to move forward to improve diversity, equality, fair pay and recognition for all staff, not just creatives. That government finally recognizes the work we do as valuable, socially and morally; and also the financial contribution our sector makes'. In general, there was a widespread call for the value of freelance work, and the skills and expertise of freelance workers, to be recognized, respected, and fairly compensated in a future industry that is 'more accessible and supportive to freelancers, valuing them as much as full time PAYE staff'. One participant summed up what many viewed as the ethical needs of the industry, by highlighting that 'a new arts ecology has to be developed which is mutually supportive, generous and without fear'. The need for greater recognition and respect was also linked to the pressure to work when unwell as one that is 'ingrained' in the industry as part of a wider ethos according to which fatigue, burnout and working through illness is worn as a 'badge of honour' (in an industry that demands physical and mental endurance): 'The pressure put on performers and freelance show staff to soldier on no matter what is so ingrained in theatre culture. Management expect you to work when they wouldn't expect office staff to work with the same level of illness/injury. Show staff are made to feel responsible for keeping the show on

RESPECT & RECOGNITION

the road … The stress and anxiety of this was the final straw that pushed me to look for permanent work outside the industry'. Calls for better support for smaller-scale productions to tackle this problem were widely rasied e.g. 'More adequate support [is needed] for small scale work if cast/crew get ill. As someone who is often the only technical team member on a touring production if I were to be ill, the show is over, so I have to make more sacrifices to avoid getting ill/feel under more pressure'. One person related this specifically to the need for a 'more life-friendly' industry', noting ' we need less of a "the show must go on" attitude that makes people work beyond what is healthy', a concern that was widely raised in relation to physical and mental health. This 'soldiering on' mentality, and the pressure it creates, was linked to wider issues of concern relating to inequality:

> *Companies responsible for hiring crew for events need to make more of an effort to diversify and support their workforce. Education should be a priority as should removing all forms of outdated and harmful mindsets. CEOs, trustees and board members of corporations involved in live events need to do more to facilitate necessary changes … I hope that it will be a safer, more welcoming, fairer and more diverse workplace than it's ever been. I hope we can figure out a better way of recruiting for roles than word of mouth, which is inefficient, unfair and perpetuates the boys' club and gatekeeping that has been holding our industry back. I hope we can find a better work-life balance than before and stop thinking that soldiering on no matter how sick or exhausted you are is a badge of honour.*

For some, this mentality was a key driver, combined with financial precarity, of their felt need to leave the industry: 'This is unsustainable for me. Because I basically have to choose between my work and my health. I have told very few people in the industry about my [chronic health] condition because I fear it will work against me. I am currently doing very well and am more than capable of achieving my job's objectives but I fear our industry is not very tolerant of anyone who shows any kind of weakness or isn't prepared to be available 24/7. I've worked so hard to get where I am and now I think it may be soon all over'. One participant explained why she had left, describing the destructive effect the industry had had on her self-esteem and the lack of government support leaving her feeling 'completely worthless': 'I am retraining as a journalist but have lost the self-esteem and confidence to return to the industry that defined me for 30 years plus. The zero

government support made me feel completely worthless. Retraining at 50 I have also had zero support no UC nothing and am in thousands and thousands of pounds of debt with my life savings of £16k wiped out. I wish and hope for the industry for it to pay workers and freelancers equally with the same benefits and with respect for all that they do'.

'People are leaving in droves because what they do is not being recognised'.

'We know we are needed. Now we need to make it work.'

'We need to take competition, market forces, value for money and anything else to do with finance away from the arts and [put] in its place a recognition of a different value for our lives, not one based on money.'

'I've worked so hard to get where I am and now I think it may be soon all over'.

'PALER, STALER AND MALER'?
SOCIAL CLOSURE, INACCESSIBILITY, AND SAFE PROGRAMMING

Concerns about a lack of openness and the problem of social closure were raised particularly by respondents who were migrants to the UK, one of whom described feeling 'alienated and isolated': 'I wish there was more transparency and openness in the theatre industry. I am not British and moved to the UK just before the pandemic and I have no idea how to 'break into' the sector here. Add on 2 years of erratic lockdowns and I just feel alienated and isolated from the theatre industry in the UK'. Another said, 'The UK theatre industry feels like a very closed shop at the moment'. And another said,

Most freelancing is incredibly intense work, and I usually don't have enough hours in the day to make it work financially, so I supplement with teaching, admin, general management, translations etc. I am close to burn out although I have also been luckier than most during/after the pandemic. I also got burned badly by an unethical concert producer which affected my income and motivation. It still feels like the Wild West when that kind of thing can happen. So back to the question - it would be amazing for this industry to be recognised as a valuable one, one where you can forge a career even when you don't come from money, or the right schools/universities, and to thrive.

In sum, there was a widespread feeling that adequate recognition needed a full review of the way the industry is funded and organized:

I think there need to be big changes to the industry - the freelance system just doesn't work, most freelancers are having to take other work, or are working non-stop juggling multiple projects/roles at unsustainable levels. Burnout is common, exhaustion is also common, and projects aren't receiving the support they deserve. In some cases, the skills shortage is leading to potentially dangerous staff shortages. We need to really reconsider how things work - at the level of pay, precarity, and even in terms of respect. UBI might be a solution to part of this, but I think there's a bigger problem about how some freelancers (particularly those in technical and production) are viewed and their roles seen as disposable or less valuable than 'artists'.

And 'safe programming', underpinned by an indirectly discriminatory risk aversion, was raised as a widespread concern, as was a lack of consistency in practicing blind casting across the industry: 'producers can't afford any risks in this climate so only familiar faces are getting hired or cast. It's very frustrating for new graduates, or emerging artists. I hope that this changes and more is

I use other language
18 (1.2%)

Non-binary
26 (1.8%)

Male
656 (44.6%)

Female
772 (52.4%)

I prefer not to say - 25

done to include fresh faces, to open the doors and provide opportunities for open recruitment and casting and active reconsideration of industry practices that exclude and create/maintain inequality within the sector'. Referring specifically to casting, one respondent said, 'The opening-up of casting opportunities, as opposed to cliques, is happening much too slowly', and another said *'only those who can afford to work for nothing for some or a lot of the time can afford to stay. It means the arts are only for the privileged few. It's so sad'*. The use of 'celebrity casting' to entice audiences into theatres and boost ticket revenue was widely noted, and understood, but was also a cause of major concern, not least in terms of perpetuating pre-COVID inequalities. Many participants noted that 'there seems to be a risk averse mentality growing, we have always been a risky business, and without visionaries prepare to take risks we wouldn't be where we are now, don't throw it all away for the sake of the bottom line'. Many were concerned about the risks that safe programming would perpetuate a lack of representation and voice for under-represented audiences and creative workers, as summed up by one participant, who said that 'safe, commercial decision making leads to further marginalisation of voices that need to be heard'. Another said their fears were that safe programming would lead to an entertainment industry in the UK that 'will become paler, staler and maler', another said, referring to the theatre in particular, that 'it is becoming even more of a rich man's game'. And for another respondent, the funding crisis that pre-existed COVID but

which is widely perceived to have been worsened by it, 'will leave only the most elite and traditional creative forms, able to survive and thrive', the result being, as another respondent put it, 'a major resurgence of elitism'. Some participants were concerned about the racial discrimination perpetuated by the regressive effects of safe programming and a narrow, 'blinkered' view of diversity: 'It seems that theatres are too scared to take any risks and this means that those who are considered the majority are in line for all the work. Those who are in a minority do not get a look in as we're considered 'too risky' because of our skin colour. I am sad that the industry seems to be going backwards in terms of diversity. There seem to be new opportunities for beautiful black males and light skinned females but not for darker skins, south Asians, East Asians, Latin X, and other minorities. The vision of diversity is too blinkered. It's depressing, and far worse than when I entered the industry in the late 90's'.
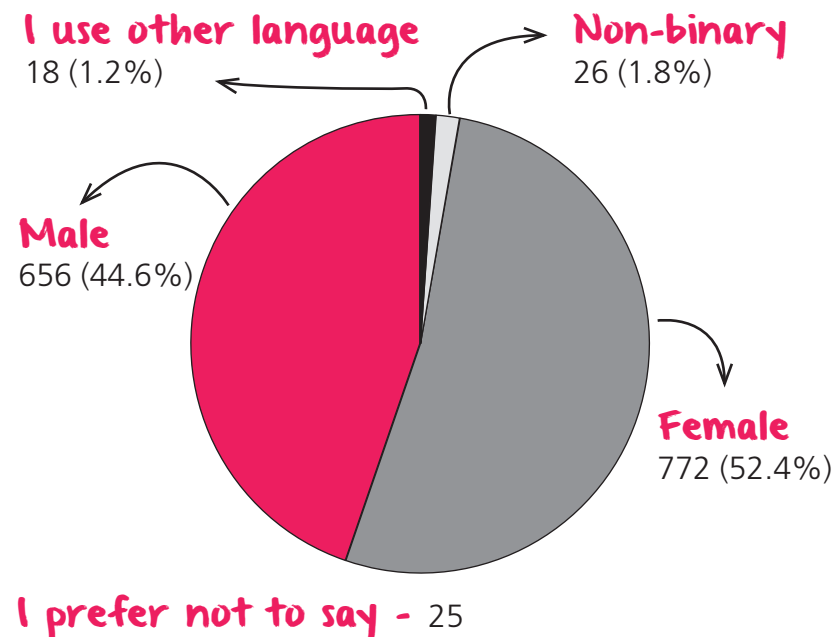
'WE'RE TOTALLY SCREWED'?
THE POST-COVID COST OF LIVING CRISIS

future of the industry as a whole, with concerns about regression on pay and equity, working conditions and power relations being widely raised, with one participant describing the whole sector as 'a slowly sinking ship'. Referring to the rising cost of living and the longer-term impact of COVID, one participant said, [I fear] that the challenges of the pandemic, which some organisations have been able to weather to a greater or lesser degree, will look minimal compared to the incoming challenges of the next few years'. Another respondent summed up a widespread feeling of being 'totally screwed':

> I have very little optimism. I am being paid less in real terms than I was 10 years ago. There is not enough money going into the industry for enough to pass on. If set designers who sit high in the pyramid are complaining about how much they get paid those of us lower down are totally screwed. I am also tired of directors being given too much power and control over things they don't understand and holding unfair control over our lives. I am done.

Referring specifically to the increasing cost of living, another participant said, 'The cost of living is spiralling out of control. My fees haven't gone up in the last 10 years but everything I have to pay for has. I'm searching for more and more work just to keep going, I can't afford not to work but can't afford to live on what I'm paid either'.

SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

A sustainable future was cited as being of paramount importance to the industry, often in ways that connected social/financial sustainability to environmental awareness/impact: 'For the industry to treat everything in a more sustainable way - put treating people well first above everything else and reduce the amount of skilled people leaving the industry. And to think sustainably for the environment and …. the wider impact on the world [of] how productions are created'. For the industry not just to recover but to flourish, many respondents felt that what is needed is 'a real industry reset', involving 'fair pay for fair work'. One respondent expressed their hope that the industry would begin 'to make theatre in a financially and environmentally sustainable way. Making theatre which doesn't exploit creatives by under paying them repeatedly and expecting long unpaid hours of work.' A spirit of generosity underpinned many of the calls for stability, with one respondent highlighting a wish for more stability for freelancers and better training for those coming into the entertainment sector: 'It's such a great industry to be part of, I've loved the 22 years I've been in it, it has opened my mind, I have travelled the world and met the most incredible people. I want other people to have those experiences and beyond.' And many cited the need for the industry to be greener/more environmentally conscious, and accountable, as vital to its future, with calls to recognize the value of re-using and re-purposing materials (e.g. sets and props):

We need to be more environmentally friendly much faster than we currently are working. It's hard to create an exciting theatre design without the need for new scenery pieces to to built and painted, new lighting practicals etc. But we need to change the way we think and the way we design. Magic can be created with so little - surely we can learn to reuse and adapt more; to work more with existing features, props, etc. and importantly, to recognise and applaud the shows that do it.

Better support for regional theatre and subsidised ticket prices for London-based theatre ('ticket prices are very concerning in terms of exclusion'), were widely noted as being important to building a more accessible and sustainable future, particularly as many participants considered moving beyond a London-centric entertainment industry as vital to the industry's revivification: 'regional theatre is where most young people will encounter their first form of live entertainment, for instance their local panto'. As one put it, '[we need to] move away from thinking the West End is the be all and end all of theatre'. For London-based entertainment, ticket prices were raised as a concern, with West End theatres being referred to e.g. as 'elitist fortresses' for audiences and workers. Suggestions were made by many respondents that prices should be controlled/subsidised more to improve accessibility and sustainability,

SUSTAINABLE FUTURES
CONTINUED…

and to protect jobs in the future, especially in the context of concerns of the longer-term impact of live streaming/screening during COVID. As one participant put it, *'I study and work in theatre yet can't actually afford to go'*. Another said, *'I can't afford to take my godson to see a West End show and I have worked in the industry for over 10 years. Freelancers are the lifeblood of the industry but can't afford to engage in it - says it all really'*. And these concerns were simply illustrative of a more widespread, deep seated financial precarity. As one participant reported, 'After 14 years of experience, and a fair amount of recognition in the industry as a dancer, performer and choreographer (Best Female Dancer from the Critic Circle Award), I still can't afford my own flat or have a family. My hopes are for financial independence and sustainability for performers who choose to stay in the industry'. Another also referred to life choices being constrained by precarity within the industry, and to problems of exhaustion and ill health: 'I am not sure if freelancing in the industry will allow me to provide for a family. I am worried that the constant competition for work in an underfunded sector will leave people exhausted and ill'.

As well as a more equitable, financially sustainable infrastructure, many participants expressed their view that investment in technology is needed in order to 'future proof' jobs and the industry should another pandemic or

similar situation arise. The belief that 'virtual and hybrid events are here to stay' but are likely to complement rather than replace live arts was widespread. This was seen as an important opportunity to improve accessibility and to secure jobs should another lockdown happen. As one participant put it, 'I hope to see more protection for freelance workers in the future, if something like the pandemic happens again it would be nice to know that the support structure is already there, including the technology. I'm hoping that more companies will make use of technology in the future, there were many places which didn't take on board the advances in media and technology to try to keep projects going and I hope that this might change in the future'. This latter issue was also linked to environmental and financial sustainability, and to accessibility: 'technology might mean that more people can access live events in future', and 'I would also like technologies to be more fully embraced and invested in to allow the different ways of working to be much more easily accessible and accepted'. Another participant said, '[I hope] that we retain [the] accessibility opened up via digital - be that performances or the ability to meet without travelling. I hope that we don't forget about those unable or unwilling to leave their homes. I hope that accessibility in all its forms improves further through what we've learnt'. Digital working elicited a range of views, with some raising concerns about platform-based working

and funding models (e.g. 'tip jars' rather than pay). Others were concerned 'that digital will outshine live and human', raising points such as 'the digital platform will reduce the deep love and community and empathy that comes with human contact'. Others, as noted above, however, were more concerned that online working which became more popular (for many, out of necessity) would cease post-COVID, with producers and organizations 'insisting on "being in the room"; many felt that 'where digital work is possible it should be supported, enabling better access'. In combination, these issues were summed up by one participant who said, 'I wish for a more diverse, inclusive and supportive industry. One that actively seeks to diversify the industry in every way. I also wish for a basic income for our industry freelancers so we are paid fairly for the work we do'. Another said simply, 'I wish that "reset better" wasn't just empty words'. With another noting, '[I hope] that we are brave enough as an industry to take the lessons we have learnt and turn the experience of the pandemic into a positive driver for change', but with many expressing feelings of despair and the desire to leave: 'My hopes are shattered, I'm looking for a way out of the sector'. But many held out hope that the industry would continue to play a vital social and political role, and that it could become a fairer work environment in the future: 'I wish it to be a fairer, more honest, decent, exhilarating, unbiased, unprejudiced, and happier industry. I wish it to bring joy and pleasure to all who experience it as participants in whatever form. I hope it can continue to entertain, educate, explain, inform, protest, challenge, object, oppose and to encourage thought, conversations and debates'.

For this participant, the future of creative work depends on recognition of its intrinsic value:

We desperately need more secure and fairly paid employment contracts and legislation that protects freelancers who fall between traditional employee protections … I hope for a government that understands the value of the arts and those who work in the arts and the important role they play beyond the economy. People were making art, dancing, making music and telling stories long before we invented money. The arts are a fundamental part of the human condition, they bring us together, help us to challenge assumptions and systems that are not working in society, they make us think critically and bring joy, unity and comfort through difficulty and adversity. Surely that is an essential job? … My dream is that the true value of this work (from backstage to front) is recognised and all workers in the sector are paid accordingly.

Another participant who identified as having a disability said that their main hopes were: 'to be appreciated for the work I do, and to be made to feel that I am knowledgeable. To be paid appropriate to my worth. To not be bullied. To not have to continue to explain my disability. To enjoy what I do again'.

'IT'S NOT WHAT YOU KNOW …'
ONGOING CONCERNS ABOUT INTERSECTIONAL INEQUALITIES

The sense that things won't change for the better, or may get worse, was widespread, particularly in relation to references to pre-pandemic inequalities, and the ongoing struggle experienced by those not from privileged socio-economic backgrounds. As one participant said, 'I fear that things won't change, that people of underrepresented identities and from underprivileged socioeconomic backgrounds will still have to fight for everything, and that nepotism amongst society's more privileged will continue to determine trends in arts and culture'. Another said they feared that 'the current economic and political situation means it will become impossible for marginalised/economically disadvantaged people to gain access to the industry and it will narrow to only being available for a privileged few. That big institutions will only pay lip service/box ticking efforts to working on systemic issues. That freelancers and low-waged staff e.g. Front of House will be left in the lurch again if there's another national crisis'. As well as social class, some participants raised concerns about ongoing gender inequalities across the industry, again expressing this as a fear that 'nothing will change':

> *I fear that nothing will change for women in this industry and that theatres will be allowed to get away with that. Women are always the last thing on the agenda because to address this problem, means taking away a larger percentage*

of the pie. So venues use diversionary tactics and improve their other diversity programming whilst still keeping the work 80% male. I fear the problems caused by the Covid pandemic will be used as an excuse by theatres to keep things as they are and maintain the status quo. We are 50% of the human race, and 60% of audience members are women, we deserve the same opportunities as the boys. Let us in the room.

The data reveals a widespread view that, in short, 'if you are poor, you will fail', with many participants expressing the sense that without fundamental changes, working in the industry will 'become a minority pursuit that only the independently wealthy can afford to participate in'. This view was linked to concerns about a lack of revivification in the industry (connecting to the points about safe programming and risk aversion, noted above), and about the marginalization of emerging artists and other creative workers, e.g. 'lack of funding means big theatres are scared to give new artists a chance'. And these concerns were also linked to those relating to social closure and nepotism, noted above. As one participant put it, 'I'm worried that the only people who will be able to make theatre are people who do not need to live off the wages offered or who will kill themselves trying and burnout. I'm worried about the cultural impact of an enormous

talent drain and that as buildings fight to protect themselves and their structures amidst dwindling audience figures that freelancers will, as always, be the last in line to be considered financially'. On the context and impact of safe programming, one participant said, 'I fear that financial considerations will result in 'safe' productions of popular work featuring the same familiar names and faces, and that it will be ever harder for unknown talent to be considered or promoted'. And concerns were widely raised about freelance workers being disproportionately exploited by the pressure to juggle between 'exposure' (no/low pay) work, and 'survival' jobs, a challenge that many felt COVID had accentuated in ways that were leaving freelance workers with no choice but to leave what was perceived as a 'damaged' industry, e.g.

> COVID has left our industry damaged and so we freelancers will take further hits with decreased fees and working conditions … I feel that those of us who were working class/barely scraping by financially are being put in a tough spot as the 'no fee/low fee' gigs start returning. Our desire to create often puts us in a position of "do I take this job and live on beans on toast for the credit to have one to add to my CV or do I say no and hope something else comes along?" we've already lost a lot of talent during the lockdowns to non-industry jobs for survival I really worry we'll lose more if we return to the broken ways of the past.

As well as inequalities being shaped by and linked to demographic groupings, intersectional inequalities, and disparities in people's living circumstances (what sociologists call social and affective capital e.g. access to a supportive social infrastructure/network, and emotionally or financially supportive circumstances at home), were raised by many respondents as being of significance. Examples include:

> Ageism, particularly for women, is rife. The industry has become more youth focussed and accumulation of skills through life seem to be ignored except for the few who have been able to sustain a career in the public eye. The industry needs to be more inclusive and representative of the population its stories are supposed to reflect. Some small inroads are being made for those with disabilities with as yet a huge way to go. To survive the industry nowadays requires a partner or family who can support you financially and in other ways.

> I am very lucky to have a husband who works in a stable sector and a family who have been able to support me when work has been scarce. I work with care experienced people, young people living in poverty and those with mental ill health - these people don't have the security I have and don't see our sector as a viable career option. That is terrifying as they are brilliant, talented, engaged and we need their voices if we're going to be truly representative of the country that we live in. By making the sector accessible to them it makes it more accessible to everyone.

'nepotism amongst society's more privileged will continue to determine trends in arts and culture'.

'SUFFERING IS OFTEN HIDDEN': A GROWING HEALTH CRISIS IN THE INDUSTRY AND THE URGENT NEED TO TAKE 'RIGHTS, RATES AND RESPECT' SERIOUSLY

Participants were concerned about the effects of what many saw as an endemic problem of bullying, harassment and of the ongoing impact of this, combined with chronic financial precarity, on people's wellbeing, with one participant saying that 'suffering is often hidden'. References to a 'silent epidemic' of mental illness were made by many, e.g. 'I really do think the toll on mental health is a silent epidemic in the industry - so many people are suffering in silence because if they are seen as not being able to cope, or not being resilient, they are scared they will not be hired for future projects. This 'tough' exterior is absolutely wrecking people and causing people to either leave or consider leaving. I also really fear that the industry is pushing out a lot of people out, as only those that shout the loudest seem to get ahead'. Many believed bullying to be a widespread problem across the industry, with workers having little meaningful recourse e.g. 'Bullying is still rife. Actors are being paid less and hung out to dry when things go wrong'. Many participants were worried about a reversion to, or worsening of, a culture of non-reporting (noted above), e.g. 'the fear is that theatre will not change and we go back to not reporting issues that arise in fear of being sacked or penalised'. Many people's concerns were summed up by one participant who said, 'we are very vulnerable in this industry, both financially and mentally'. Connecting to suggestions that a thorough review of the industry's funding models is needed were calls for a parallel overhaul

of its values and practices: 'The entire industry needs an overhaul of the outdated and toxic attitudes that have been allowed to go unchallenged for so long. We are at risk of dying out entirely unless more is done to eliminate abuse and harassment and more needs to be done to promote education and support'. Many people were very despondent, feeling 'lost', disengaged and disrespected e.g. with regards to the future of the industry, and their role in it: 'Right now, I am feeling quite lost … I am in a position where I can hear conversations around the planning of a production and what I am hearing is not good for the freelancers … talk of long hours, not looking into how to be more inclusive, expectation of freelancers signing contracts that have cancellation clauses that I feel are unfair. It's a lot. I am also currently experiencing (as someone who has quite a lot of experience and therefore contacts) a lot of people asking me if I am available for work, then not hearing back from them for weeks. I have no idea what to say yes to, or how long to wait … It has knocked my confidence and made me feel disengaged with the sector and disrespected'. Lack of hope was a widely reported feeling, with many raising concerns that they had lost faith that the industry would or even could improve, e.g. 'So many people have left the industry, to find that their new work has better hours, pay, and general quality of life. I am so happy for them, and I have considered following them. What if this industry never changes for the better, and the people still working

on it are holding onto dead hope?' Another said simply, 'my biggest fear? That it will all stay the same'. Another participant framed their concerns in terms of feeling that the industry is no longer a safe space: 'I worry that the current level of pressure that we are all working under at the moment is completely unsustainable. We've lost so many highly skilled and experienced people and replaced them with people who are inexperienced that it no longer feels as if we are all being held in a safe space. Also I worry that Covid will continue to be the reason/excuse that we are not financially compensated for our skills and hours'. Others felt that workplace safety and a lack of security in an industry that was already chronically precarious was being further compromised 'in response to decreased budgets and unstable production schedules', with many making points like, 'I worry that we have actually taken a step backwards as an industry'. Brexit was widely referred to as an ongoing concern, particularly relating to travel and availability of work in the EU, e.g. 'My greatest concerns are the negative effects of Brexit on our industry and the reduction or removal of the freedom to travel and work in the EU', and 'prior to Covid and Brexit approximately 70% of my work was in EU countries and further afield and for the foreseeable future it is now 5%'. Cross-cutting ongoing concerns about the impact of Brexit were worries about the increasing cost of living combined with the ongoing possibility of another wave of COVID/similar situation arising in the future, e.g. 'I fear that another pandemic or similar global catastrophe could come along at any time and knock us all back to square one, with no changes made to the existing support systems, which would cripple so many more people and further create a divide between those who can afford to work in the arts and those who cannot'. In sum, one participant said that what is needed, going forwards, to learn from the pandemic and to future-proof the industry as much as possible to is a fundamental re-prioritization of 'rights, rates and respect'. Focusing particularly on theatre, one participant said:

Theatre has a colossal problem in being inaccessible at so many points. Much of it is wildly expensive, and as such people who should have access to this art form do not. When an audience is too frequently populated by the liberal elite who can afford a ticket, theatre becomes exclusionary but it also stops being part of the national and societal conversation. It is impossible for an art form that is only seen by a few to create societal change. As a result, theatre fails to play the role it should in society. Trying to draw audiences in has become a mainstay of many west end shows, and as a result we end up with casts full of celebrities/big name TV and Film actors. These castings justify enormous ticket prices but make theatre as a whole all the more inaccessible. It also tames it as a mechanism for change …Theatre is faced with an ugly future where it exists only for the rich elite (with some notable exceptions like pantomime) and where it fails to attract and nurture the talent it surely needs in order to grow, to speak, to find voice, to explore, to matter, to contribute to our society.

788 (52.6%)
had witnessed one or more forms of harassment and/or discrimination

709 (47.4%)
had not

Incidents witnessed totalled 1701 including:

unfair treatment **(25%)**

sexism **(19%)**

bullying **(18%)**

racism **(10%)**

(edited)

THE CHALLENGES AND DISCRIMINATORY EFFECTS OF LONDON-CENTRISM

Many references are made in the data to London, and to West End theatre. Key themes include tackling London-centrism and investing in regional/local venues and events; concerns about ticket prices making London theatre inaccessible to many, including those who work in it, and ongoing concerns about the accelerating costs of living/working in London, particularly for freelance workers. The latter was summed up by one participant who said,

This year lots of my friends have had to leave the industry because of money and job insecurity, and I don't know if I can afford to live in London anymore. I'm scared the industry will go backwards in terms of representation, since all the people less able to afford to stay, or marginalised already, will be forced out. This would be crushing, and have a bad effect on the work produced. I am trying to work out how I can move into TV, because I can't face more years of struggling financially, and I need to get some sort of work life balance, because I have had to be a workaholic to get anywhere at all. This shouldn't be the case.

Many were concerned that the industry remains London-centric but that pay and conditions make it unfeasible to live and work in London, e.g. 'At the moment it is not financially viable to live in London and work in theatre. Especially now that most newcomers are saddled with debt from having to do a degree just to get on the first rung in the industry … My biggest fear is that we know this, but nothing will change'. This chronic problem was noted as a reason why many leave the industry, or find it inaccessible: 'people, practitioners and freelancers leave the industry as it's not affordable to work and live (particularly in London). [Then] it becomes inaccessible to the next generation and … the best jobs go to those that can afford to go to London to train'. With reference to London-centrism, one participant said, 'no one seems to care [about theatre] outside London'. The exclusionary effects of regionalism were a widespread concern, e.g. 'the theatre industry is intensely regionalist with auditions and rehearsals taking place in London for regional tours. It's absurd and discriminatory'. One participant said simply that their biggest fear for the future of the industry is that 'it stays tethered to London', for the reasons cited above.

PRECARITY, INFLATION AND THE COST OF LIVING

Widespread concerns were noted about the combined effects of chronic (pre-pandemic) precarity, the financial impact of COVID, Brexit and the rising cost of living, particularly in terms of the need for a substantial financial review of funding models across the sector, contractual/agreement compliance, (the lack of) enforcement of nationally agreed fee structures and the lack of recourse, advice and support for freelancers when low fees are. Fees not keeping page with inflation, or being adequate to cover travel and living costs were widely noted, as were the longer-term impact of this situation of people's life plans (e.g. being unable to afford to move in with a partner, plan a family, take a holiday, or even take time off when too ill to work – including with COVID). As one respondent put it, 'financially, people are not being looked after. And that's an understatement'; another said, 'it's in crisis, and is just getting worse'. Aside from the human/social cost of this, many respondents raised concerns about a 'massive skills loss' that is 'not currently recognized', combined with 'exhaustion and disillusionment [amongst] those remaining in the industry'. These concerns were also widely related to concerns about growing inequality across the industry, with 'exclusionary conditions worsening - shutting people out of the sector through poor pay and conditions', and a widespread perception that the government 'absolutely does not care'. Summing up the

concerns of many, one respondent said, 'budgets are driving people to the bottom … leading to underqualified staff and/or people being dramatically underpaid and exploited. I am fearful that this unsustainable approach to funding … will result in reduced quality of life, an exploited and undervalued workforce, lower quality performances, and potentially even a more hazardous workspace'. Some respondents reported how chronic problems of over-work/under-payment had become particularly acute as venues/events started to re-open post-lockdown and staff and skills shortages combined with financial pressures and the need to take on whatever work was offered, what one summed up as a 'more cuts, less safety' culture, resulted in excessive hours and unsafe work environments, e.g. 'I [was] been booked last December on 20 hr days and … then 5 hours later booked on another job by the same production company. I probably shouldn't have taken it but desperate times and short staffed felt you owed it to the companies giving work after such a difficult time and can't really complain about having too much work after the times we have been through'. While concerns for those leaving the industry were widely raised, therefore, there were also widespread concerns for those remaining in the industry, e.g. 'the loss of skills and funding [is] really putting a lot of pressure on the ones who continue to work in the industry, those continuing to work through the quagmire

PRECARITY, INFLATION &…

PRECARITY, INFLATION AND THE COST OF LIVING
CONTINUED…

of what is left behind, not really knowing how bad things have been, and are for them'. The continually uncertain context in which the industry exists was widely cited as an ongoing cause for concern, as summed up by one respondent, who said their biggest fears were, 'that in an increasingly unstable climate the industry becomes an impossible option for anyone who isn't established in the industry to survive in. The threat of war, climate change, economic instability and rising inflation, the housing crisis, refugee crisis, long term impact of Brexit and of course the continued uncertainty that comes with a pandemic (or the possibility of future pandemics) make the entertainment industry and its sector workers extremely vulnerable'. This vulnerability was

worsened by the extent to which other sectors were also affected: 'the secondary jobs that freelancers turn to to support their work in the sector are also often in industries which are deeply affected and vulnerable - hospitality being a significant one'. In short, there was a widespread view that, as one respondent summed it up (referring to working in the entertainment industry) post-COVID, 'there is a worry that so many people feel it is financially unfixable as a career'; another said, 'as it is, in its current form, it's not sustainable'.

'EDUCATION NOT EXCLUSION': CUTS TO ARTS EDUCATION, TEACHER TRAINING AND GRASSROOTS INVESTMENT

One participant summed up a widespread view that the value of the arts and creative sectors had been amply demonstrated during COVID, yet this same participant also highlighted widely shared concerns about a lack of support for and investment in Arts education:

> *I think it's amazing that the Arts managed to keep going at all through the pandemic. They demonstrated their value as never before, bringing comfort, connection and distraction to a traumatised nation. I believe that we need to put Music, Art & Drams back into schools as mandatory subjects, not only because it is every child's right to explore their creativity, but because if we don't, we will lose our audiences within a generation. I want to believe that the Arts will be supported and promoted as they should be going forward, but … I fear for the future.*

References to widely expressed concerns about cuts to arts education included phrases such as 'decimation', 'devastation' and 'destruction'. Respondents raised concerns that 'not enough attention [is] being paid to grass roots musical education', with several making suggestions such as 'I'd like to see every child being given an instrument when they start in secondary education, and that all instrumental/singing teaching in state schools should be free'. These grave concerns were linked to social closure/exclusion, and to ongoing concerns about chronic, and worsening, precarity in the industry, e.g. 'the many amazing pockets of great education are reducing with every year..... and of course, just living is becoming a terribly expensive business for people ... it's bound to affect the development of new artists and creative work within communities. The effect is likely to decimate our industry'. Linking to points noted above about a lack of recognition of creative work as 'real' work, a problem deemed to perpetuate financial precarity and the devaluation of creative work and freelancers' work in particular, another said, 'I fear that the emphasis on science in education will devalue creative subjects, and that all 'art' (music, theatre, writing, all performance, creative art) become[s] merely a "hobby" and is not fully valued as an essential ingredient of a healthy society'. Another respondent, referring specifically to working in the theatre, said 'the theatre industry is undervalued by the government but also within the industry there is still a sort of misconception that creatives love what they do so it's not a valid 'job' that needs to be paid for as such. I make a living doing this, well try to make a living but actually struggle to live, I did pre pandemic, during and now post as I constantly argue to be paid a fair 'wage' for my

'the emphasis on science in education will devalue creative subjects, and that all 'art' (music, theatre, writing, all performance, creative art) become[s] merely a "hobby" and is not fully valued as an essential ingredient of a healthy society'.

time and skill'. Another said similarly that 'arts education in schools is seen as "non-essential" and is being reduced to [an] out-of-hours activity'. Linking this specifically to social closure, noted above, another respondent said, 'arts education and training [is becoming] only available to the wealthy'. Any many respondents were deeply concerned that arts education 'will slip off the education radar altogether if [arts-based] teacher training disappears or becomes even further reduced/dismissed'. And this was connected, in many people's perception, to a wider de-valuation, even 'demonisation' of the arts: e.g. 'singing has been demonised and needs support and investment to rebuild'. The feeling was very widespread that the arts are 'very under-valued in education' and that lack of support and investment, in education especially, would result in a loss of the very basis of the entertainment industry: 'losing the foundations of our industry through lack of support, especially at an education level, is a very real possibility now'.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Funding to subsidise better accessibility, including for those who work in the industry. As one participant put it, 'I study and work in theatre yet can't actually afford to go'. Another said, 'I can't afford to take my godson to see a West End show and I have worked in the industry for over 10 years. Freelancers are the lifeblood of the industry but can't afford to engage in it - says it all really'. Better support for regional theatre and subsidised ticket prices for London-based theatre ('ticket prices are very concerning in terms of exclusion'), deemed to be vital to building a more accessible and sustainable future, with West End theatres being referred to e.g. as 'elitist fortresses' for audiences and workers. Suggestions were made by many respondents that prices should be controlled or subsidised more to improve accessibility and sustainability.

2. Better and more consistently regulated work environments, with improved enforcement and more accessible advice and HR support, improved contractual arrangements and working conditions, with clear routes to advice and enforcement for non-compliance with relevant legislation, policy, and good practice guidelines. An 'enforcement gap', with limited recourse for freelancers to tackle it individually or collectively was widely noted. One suggestion made was that commercial producers who don't adhere to safe working hours and practices 'should be listed by SOLT'.

3. Guarantees of a fair, safe and healthy work environment. For the industry not just to recover but to flourish, many respondents felt that what is needed is 'a real industry reset', involving 'fair pay for fair work'. Concerns were also raised about being on call on days away from work as both unfair and detrimental to a safe, healthy work environment. Productions that only pay after the contract has finished were raised as an ongoing concern.

4. Access to training and development opportunities, holiday and sick pay, and paid maternity/parenting leave on a par with PAYE employees. The most widespread calls were for greater equality, fair pay and improved working conditions, including greater parity with those who are employed by venues/productions. For some, a better regulatory and support structure was identified as a possible route to tackling some of the worst excesses of persistent inequalities, e.g. 'making sure artists are paid for meetings, that they are given clear briefs and told upfront how much they can expect to get paid, and most importantly that they are paid in a timely manner should be the bare minimum of what organisations can do to help'.

RECOMMENDATIONS
CONTINUED…

5. Better investment in and support for digital work, in the interests of accessibility and sustainability e.g. 'where digital work is possible it should be supported, enabling better access'. As well as a more equitable, financially sustainable infrastructure, many participants expressed their view that investment in technology is needed in order to 'future proof' jobs and the industry should another pandemic or similar situation arise. The belief that 'virtual and hybrid events are here to stay' but are likely to complement rather than replace live arts was widespread. This was seen as an important opportunity to improve accessibility and to secure jobs should another lockdown happen. As one participant put it, 'I hope to see more protection for freelance workers in the future, if something like the pandemic happens again it would be nice to know that the support structure is already there, including the technology.

6. Greater financial and environmental accountability e.g. by recognizing the value of re-using and re-purposing materials (such as sets and props) – 'surely we can learn to reuse and adapt more; to work more with existing features, props, etc. and importantly, to recognise and applaud the shows that do it?'

7. More creative, collaborative ways of working and funding infrastructures to support creative hubs, e.g. 'for theatre especially, the ability for collectives of artists to band together for single large projects without forming a company, and the flexibility to co-create work'.

8. The importance of, and need for, fully funded training and development opportunities for all freelance workers was widely referred to, including to raise awareness of workplace rights. And many suggested that these support mechanisms should be better targeted at career stages, e.g. 'there needs to be more support out there for young freelancers in the arts in terms of setting their rates and knowing their worth. That's something I have really struggled with and still do! More help is needed on this'. Support targeted at those new to the industry/early careers was noted as a priority, with calls for 'more support for new graduates … so for example having finance classes, mentorship and focus groups to make contacts'.

9. An adequate, industry-wide safeguarding system was noted as a priority (with venue/sector variability being of concern).

RECOMMENDATIONS
CONTINUED…

10. Some solutions to concerns about a growing mental health crisis were simple e.g. 'I'd like every venue to have a quiet break room, just to be able to take a breather'; others more fundamental: 'I'd like to not have to fight all the time'.

11. Better voice and representation for freelancers e.g. 'I am keen that freelancers are consulted by public bodies and subsidised companies in a more meaningful way and that their advice is demonstrably taken on board and used to guide future decision making'. Calls for a freelancers union were widely raised: 'A decent freelancers union and pay rate card is desperately overdue', and 'freelancers need a dedicated union, a federation that unites and promotes the fair treatment and rights of practitioners across the arts'. Others emphasized the need for collective action on pay and working conditions, e.g. 'we all need to lobby for sick pay, holiday pay, bereavement leave, maternity and paternity pay, pensions and mental health days that employed staff benefit from'. Calls were made for professional bodies to play a more proactive role in making the industry 'get its act together': '[I hope] that the UK theatre industry gets its act together and starts co-ordinating around an ecosystem wide regulatory body for improved working conditions and protections for its freelance workforce. Its current employment practices are unethical. Covid-19 didn't put me in the position I am now in… 20 years working in UK theatre did'.

12. Meaningful action on equality: Rhetorical commitments to equality that were not borne out in practice and remained 'empty statements', or 'false promises about accessibility' were also widespread concerns, e.g. 'How can companies claim to care about mental health and well-being and then in practice do things like never informing actors if they have been successful in auditions? (Professional ghosting)'. Suggestions made to tackle persistent inequalities included compulsory unconscious bias, micro-aggression, and equality awareness training for ALL employees, including the most senior staff (e.g. as part of compulsory health and safety assessments/certification and/ or funding mechanisms), and the widespread adoption, enforcement and monitoring of codes of conduct/good practice guidelines. One respondent said, 'In 19 years I've had zero training at work or offers of career advancement in any aspect of the work I do'. A more proactive approach (e.g. meeting disabled and neurodivergent people's needs as universal accommodations rather than 'ad hoc' or on request adjustments), and advertising these as part of recruitment processes was also suggested. Greater

RECOMMENDATIONS
CONTINUED…

clarity and consistency in practicing blind casting across the industry was widely called for.

13. The need for greater transparency (e.g. about pay inequalities, jobs being advertised widely, outside of paywalls) was widely raised, as was better and more widespread use of job shares for those who need more flexibility to accommodate caring and other responsibilities. More accessible methods of recruiting staff were also raised, including references to better advertising beyond established networks that perpetuate existing inequalities, and more video/online based applications than forms e.g. 'I would love to see more opportunities for the neurodiverse community including less form applications and more availability of video applications'.

14. Calls for a funding review that takes the possibility of UBI seriously were widespread in the data as were calls for funding for schemes and organizations like PiPA (that support working parents/carers). Many felt that what is badly needed in order to make a fair and sustainable recovery from COVID is, as one participant put it, 'a strong infrastructure that supports creativity'. Established working methods and processes, and pay structures were widely perceived as not working. The need to seriously evaluate the potential introduction of UBI was widely raised, as was the need for greater pay

transparency, fair pay, and a funding review to tackle persistent inequalities; as one participant put it, 'the funding model needs ripping apart'. Some participants felt that this should be part of a fundamental review of the industry, e.g. 'the entire industry needs to be dismantled and rebuilt from the ground up. This is not about small changes. The industry is broken'. Another said, 'we have to do something about it, reinvent, recalibrate and reconfigure'. Suggestions were widely made that funding bodies should assess applications for evidence of 'fair pay' in proposed budgets, with follow-up checks being made. Concerns were raised about budgetary shortfalls disproportionately impacting on freelance workers, with budgets not covering adequate time for rehearsals resulting in freelancers being expected to 'do more for less', an ethos that many felt should be replaced by a 'fairer is better' way of working underpinned by greater respect for the value of freelance work and workers e.g. 'I hope the industry wakes up to the value of freelancers and treats them with respect and not as disposable workers who have to work all the hours under the sun to complete incorrectly budgeted programming'.

FREELANCERS MAKE THEATRE WORK

Big Freelancer Survey 2022 report, September 2022