Creative Industries
Policy & Evidence Centre
Led by nesta

Discussion Paper 2021/05

Creating Value in Place: Understanding the Role, Contribution and Challenges of Creative Freelance Work

Henry, N., Barker, V., Sissons, P., Broughton, K., Dickinson, P., Lazell, J. and Angus, T.

May 2021

Coventry University

ISBN: 978-1-913095-35-2

Supported by Arts & Humanities Research Council | UK Research and Innovation | Industrial Strategy

A research project funded by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC), which is led by Nesta, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

About the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre

The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) works to support the growth of the UK's Creative Industries through the production of independent and authoritative evidence and policy advice.

Led by Nesta and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of the UK Government's Industrial Strategy, the Centre comprises a consortium of universities from across the UK (Birmingham; Cardiff; Edinburgh; Glasgow; Work Foundation at Lancaster University; LSE; Manchester; Newcastle; Sussex; Ulster). The PEC works with a diverse range of industry partners including the Creative Industries Federation.

About the authors

Nick Henry is Professor of Economic Geography, Faculty Research Centre for Business in Society, Faculty of Business and Law, Coventry University

Dr Victoria Barker is FBL Visiting Fellow, Faculty of Business & Law, Coventry University

Paul Sissons is FBL Visiting Professor, Faculty of Business & Law, Coventry University

Dr Kevin Broughton is Assistant Professor, Faculty Research Centre for Business in Society, Coventry University

Peter Dickinson is Senior Research Fellow, Warwick Institute for Employment Research

Jordan Lazell is Research Assistant, Faculty Research Centre for Business in Society, Coventry University

Dr Tim Angus is Visiting Fellow, CBiS, Coventry University

Summary

Almost one third of the creative industries workforce is made up of freelancers, double that across the UK more broadly (DCMS, 2021), and which reiterates earlier estimates by the Creative Industries Federation (CIF) (Easton and Cauldwell-French 2017). The CIF reported how little had been written on the working lives of the UK creative freelance workforce and that the role of creative freelancers in the economy remains poorly understood.

This Discussion Paper reports our investigation on the contribution of creative freelancers to the economic and place-based impacts of the creative industries. The aim of the research was to develop new understandings of the role, contribution and challenges of creative freelance work by examining the experiences and different business models of creative freelancers.

The research included the development of an analytical framework as the basis for a more integrated and systemic understanding of the diversity of creative freelancers. We also carried out interviews with 84 creative freelancers who lived and/or worked in Coventry, Waltham Forest and Northumberland. These freelancer interviews examined five themes:

- Aspects of Motivation to become freelance
- Position in the Production Ecosystem
- Human Capital
- Social Capital
- The relationship to Place and Space

The freelancers in the sample were generally highly skilled and qualified, and were using a variety of networks for collaboration, business development and new ideas. For some, these networks were strongly place-based.

Interviewees had varying motivations for becoming (and remaining) freelance. These included the desire for control over the creative work they were involved in. There were high levels of reporting of the importance of creative practice and values, alongside a desire for flexibility in the times and ways work was undertaken, for example for reasons of work-life balance). Freelancer motivations also revealed different forms of value as motivations, including financial, creative and cultural and society.

However, freelancer experiences were also often typified by structured or constrained autonomy, being strongly shaped by wider structural factors in the labour market. For example, the dominant ways of working and contracting in the creative sector and sub-sectors, and their roles within the production system. The interviews also provide numerous examples of low earnings from freelance work and the degree to which employment insecurity shaped their decision making.

Two core themes follow from the interview analysis.

The first discusses how creative freelancers, their roles, and business models, generate value in multiple and different ways – including multiple layers and levels of **economic, cultural and social value; all of which are valuable to place and places.**

Secondly the findings present **six different types of creative business models**, encapsulating the diverse experiences of freelancers and their contribution to economy and society. These are described as:

- Creative Entrepreneur
- Creative Contributors
- Creative Work-Life Balancers
- Precarious Projecteers
- Creative Ecologists
- Community Creatives

Finally, we identify the policy implications of our analysis. These include the critical role of the national government in setting the wider conditions for 'good work' (including freelancing) and addressing precarity. At sector level, intermediary institutions and stakeholders within the creative and cultural sectors play a critical role in shaping the conditions of employment which some freelancers experience. Their practices have a central role to play in addressing issues such as being 'freelance by default', and the normalisation of fragmented contracts and unsustainable practices. The wider funding for the arts, culture and creativity clearly also shapes practices. The research provides implications for place-based policies which need to be developed holistically to address the varied issues of business support, creative infrastructures and funding models, but also to consider fully the wider cross-cutting value generation of creative freelancers in support of place-based outcomes.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre led by Nesta and our Research Partners Coventry City of Culture Trust, Creative United, London Borough of Waltham Forest and Northumberland County Council for funding, logistics support and their insights.

In particular, we would like to thank the creative freelancers who were interviewed as part of this project – and in possibly the most trying times they and their businesses have ever faced.

The contents are the views of the authors listed above. All are members of and/or Visitors of the Centre for Business in Society, Coventry University, except for Peter Dickinson from the Warwick Institute of Employment Research.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Creative Freelancers

Almost one third of the creative industries workforce is made up of freelancers, double that across the UK more broadly (DCMS, 2021), which reiterates earlier estimates by the Creative Industries Federation (CIF) (Easton and Cauldwell-French 2017).

The CIF reported how little had been written on the working lives of the UK creative freelance workforce and, in 2021, AEA Consulting (2021) continued to report that, along with micro-enterprises, the role of creative freelancers in the economy remained poorly understood and under-represented. Such a lack of knowledge has been laid bare by the devastating impacts of Covid-19 on creative employment and freelancing, and the fragmented support that freelancers received compared to what has been widely recognised to be unprecedented Government support to the economy.

If the scale and growth of creative freelancers in the economy has begun to be recognised in recent times, understanding of their relationship with and contribution to the economy has remained limited. On the one hand creative freelancers are celebrated as innovative models of 'superfusion' (Sapsed et al. 2015), independent 'makers' in the modern economy,[1] and epitomising a highly skilled dynamic, entrepreneurial and flexible economy (IPSE 2018). On the other hand, the non-standard or atypical work lives of creative freelancers have been held up as forms of flexploitation, false or pseudo self-employment typified by precarity (Murgia et al. 2020).[2]

This first Discussion Paper reports on our investigation of the contribution of creative freelancers to the economic and place-based impacts of the creative industries. The objectives of the research were to:

- develop an understanding of the diversity of different creative freelancer 'business models', and the factors influencing the practices and economic roles of creative freelancers
- examine the economic relationships and dynamics of different models of creative freelancer working
- investigate the role of place in creative freelancer business models
- provide insights supportive of locally-based investment and policy responses

The research was informed by interviews with 84 creative freelancers who lived and/or worked in Coventry city region, Waltham Forest and Northumberland, and was conducted between July to November 2020. Coventry has been awarded the UK City of Culture 2021 as part of its 10-year Cultural Strategy, Waltham Forest was London Borough of Culture in 2019 and Northumberland County Council has

---

[1] See a decade of work by the Crafts Council on 'makers and measuring the craft economy'; https://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/about/research-and-policy.

[2] Flexible working to the substantial detriment of the worker.

undertaken a sustained investment into its heritage, arts and culture assets, including as part of its rural development activity. Reflecting characteristic, Coventry is a mid-sized city with strong regional linkages, Northumberland a rural county and Waltham Forest sits within London, the UK's largest concentration of creative industries.

Our project Partners were Creative United, Coventry City of Culture Trust, London Borough of Waltham Forest and Northumberland County Council, all of whom have a strong and demonstrated policy interest in supporting the contribution of creative freelancers nationally and in their local places. Interviews focusing on the business support available to the creative sector (in general) and freelancers (in particular) were also undertaken with the respective policy leads in the three areas.

Researching Creative Freelancers (during Covid-19)

This paper is written as we enter a second year of Covid-19 restrictions on the UK economy, and when creative freelancers possibly hold as high a profile in the public consciousness as they have ever done before. Arts and culture, festivals and events have been decimated by Covid-19 restrictions. First to close on 20 March 2020, a year later they remain amongst the last parts of the economy planned to be 'unlocked'. Venue-based sectors (such as museums, performing arts, live music, festivals, cinema) have been amongst the hardest hit by lockdown and social distancing measures, with abrupt drops in revenues, direct lay-offs, significant usage of furlough schemes and substantial and immediate repercussions for the value chain of their suppliers, including creative freelancers (Tobin 2020, OECD 2020).

Meanwhile, society has learnt about the size, dynamism and potential vulnerability of the self-employed, sole trader and non-employer businesses in the UK economy. At the end of 2019, a record number of self employed workers existed in the UK economy and in the creative industries.[3] The self-employed have been the target of one of the four major economic planks of Government pandemic support; through the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS). However, the forms of freelancing often present within creative freelancing, such as portfolio working, payment through dividends, and regular variations in profit and turnover, have meant that many freelancers have been excluded from this support.[4]

In combining both creative work and freelancing, creative freelancers have been in the 'eye of the storm' (Department for Culture Media and Sport Select Committee 2020, Comunian and England 2020, Ernst & Young 2021). In the six months following the beginning of lockdown it is estimated that approximately 110,000 people left the

[3] At the end of 2019, just over five million workers in the UK were self-employed, more than 15% of the employment total. Of the 6 million businesses in the UK, 4.6 million (76%) did not employ anyone but their owner/s and between 2000 and 2020 the number of non-employer businesses had almost doubled from 2.4m to 4.6m

[4] See https://www.excludeduk.org/excluded-uk-an-inclusive-alliance-for-the-excluded

creative industries; moreover, this was accompanied by a collapse in working hours with substantial increases in weekly zero hour working (Owen et al. 2020).

Study Methodology

The original study design which was to be undertaken throughout 2020 comprised four phases: a rapid literature review; freelancer interviews; data analysis; and 'Findings' workshops and reports.

The research began in early 2020 with a rapid academic and grey literature review on creative freelancer business models.[5] Findings from the literature review informed the analytical framework (detailed below), and the interview schedule for the main activity of creative freelancer interviews. Our response to the uncertainty caused by the pandemic was three-fold:

1. Given the immense and immediate challenges faced by creative freelancers interviewing was put back until July 2020. With the support of our project Partners, led by Creative United, a communications campaign ran for 8 weeks to recruit creative freelancers to be interviewed.[6] Pilot interviews took place in late July and interviewing was completed in November 2020. Delaying interviewing gave space for interviewees to respond to their immediate and urgent business concerns and, subsequently, to have had the possibility to begin to consider and reflect upon their business models in light of recent experiences.
2. An additional series of five sector trade association and membership body stakeholder interviews were undertaken in November 2020. This stage was introduced both as stakeholders expressed direct interest in the project and because of heightened activity by stakeholder groups around the impacts on the sector, the efficacy of policy responses and their desire to inform on the role and nature of creative freelancing in the economy.
3. Accelerating the project's initial proposed set of local policy workshops, a Webinar and Stakeholder Panel Discussion, *Building Back Better? Creative Freelancers and Learning from the Covid-19 Experience* took place on 30th November 2020 to present an interim sub-analysis of 33 creative freelancer

[5] Limited to studies published since 2000, 129 peer reviewed papers, 56 reports and seven books were identified initially based on keyword screening of titles and abstracts. Keywords used included: Freelancer OR Creative freelancer AND Business model AND "firm" OR "microbusiness" OR "Organisation" OR "supply chain" OR "contracts" OR "R&D" OR "working patterns" OR "lived experience".

[6] See Annex 1 for further details

interviews undertaken in England between July and August 2020 (Henry et al. 2021).[7]

In total, 84 (predominantly Teams/Zoom) interviews were completed with creative freelancers evenly balanced across the three localities. These semi-structured interviews sought to explore the concept and aspects of (often implicit) individual 'creative freelancer business models' and their relationship to place.[8]

This Discussion Paper is the first output comprising analysis of these 84 interview

Creative Freelancer 'Business Models'

Our initial literature review undertaken at the start of this project highlighted a slowly accumulating set of academic materials on creative freelancers. The main starting point has been a number of studies of particular creative freelancer occupations, and organisational forms in particular sectors within the creative industries. Early studies covered film and journalism (Blair 2003, Nies and Pedersini 2003); more recently, other occupations studied have included musicians, actors and artists (Eikhof and Haunschild 2006, Watson and Beaverstock 2016, Woronkowicz and Noonan 2019). The growing influence of digital technologies has seen increasing interest in areas such as IT and media, digital creative, web designers and games (Wright 2015, Oliva Abarca 2018, Nemkova et al. 2019). The majority of these studies have sought to document and make visible the lived working experience of these entrepreneurs, workers and sole traders.

In documenting the lived experiences of work, the other common and critical theme throughout many of the studies has been to seek understanding of the motivations, contexts and structuring forces which underpin freelance working. It is in this context that creative freelancing has been interrogated as an emerging organisational form in the economy – with creative freelancers recognised as a significant economic segment of the economy.

Yet it is at this point also that the conceptual challenge has been most evident. Are freelancers to be understood as part of the rapid expansion and motivational force of (forms of) entrepreneurship in modern economies? Or as new types and legal forms of (non-employing) businesses? (Giupponi and Xu 2020). They could be another expression of the expansion of 'non-standard' workers in the economy, or

---

[7] See https://www.coventry.ac.uk/globalassets/media/global/08-new-research-section/cbis/projects/pec-covid-and-building-back-better-report-final.pdf

[8] The average interview length was just over 75 minutes and total interview time recorded amounted to 107 hours. Each interview was written-up initially by the interviewer and was then checked by a second researcher. The interviews were analysed in Nvivo.

the result of ever more complex and differentiated systems for organising the production of (creative) goods and services?

Long argued to be at the forefront of such new forms of organisational form and production system (Lash and Urry 1994, Hewison 2014, Mould et al. 2014, Dovey and Pratt 2016), creative industries studies have included, for example, project-based production systems (Grabher and Ibert 2011), outsourcing, temporary organisational forms and configuring events (Schüßler and Sydow 2015), portfolio working (Giuliani et al. 2020), and (collaborative) networks.

As the range of organisational forms identified have proliferated, the production systems of cultural and creative industries have increasingly been argued to be better understood in the sense of 'ecologies' or 'ecosystems'. These are networks of inter-linked (anchor) organisations, (micro) businesses and forms of freelancing (O'Connor 2010, Fleming and Erskine 2011, Easton and Cauldwell-French 2017, Gross et al. 2020). This is in contrast to dominant metaphors of global production networks structured through heavily-tiered supply chains such as in automotive, IT hardware, pharmaceuticals or fast fashion.[9]

A summary of the key findings from the rapid literature review includes:

- There are few examples of business model articulation explicitly in studies of creative freelancers (i.e. to understand the development and functioning of their business model).[10]
- It is the role that creative freelancers take within the economy through which the literature seeks to interpret the personal passions, ambivalences and structural positive and negative paradoxes of creative freelancing. This economic role is forged by the goals, motivations and values of the freelancer ('to supply and on what basis').
- The freelancers' economic role is mutually determined by how value is assigned to that individual's output by the production system based on what is produced (activity), how it fits into the particular value chain (sector), and under what terms and conditions it is inserted (industrial organisation).
- Creative freelancers articulate very strong value-orientation towards culture and creativity.
- The diverse roles freelancers take in the creative production system have been described in numerous ways and in different categorisations.[11]

---

[9] One ongoing example of this approach is the Cicerone Project which has mapped the value chains of eight different sub-sectors (architecture; archives, libraries and cultural heritage; artistic craft; audio-visual; design; festivals, performing and visual arts; music; and publishing).

[10] For a recent example on business models (in organisations) in the sector see (Rex et al. 2019).

[11] For a range of descriptions of creative freelancers, see, for example: 'idealists v entrepreneurs' (Mathisen 2019); as 'mentees', 'networkers', 'motivators' and 'reluctant

- The sheer diversity of creative freelancer type and range of economic outcomes - from highly skilled, autonomous and fulfilled working lifestyles to the income and lifestyle anxieties of the 'gig economy' – can be seen to stem from the duality of freelancer motivations meeting and intertwining with the structural characteristics of the economy (and/or ecosystem).

Building an Analytical Framework

Building from this quite disparate existing literature our aim has been to construct a more integrated and systemic understanding of the diversity of creative freelancer business models. In summary, in the existing literature the idea of creative freelancer business models tends to be implicit in the description of what creative freelancers do and why. This includes both the 'active and obligatory' constructions and outcomes of freelancer motivations meeting and intertwining with the structural characteristics of the economy. Following from this, to us understanding creative freelancer 'business models' requires analysis of the factors which influence how the creative freelancer economic role is created, and how this is able to be implemented by creative freelancers.

While a business model development tool might identify sources of revenue, customer base, or products, through a formal process of mapping, our definitional position here is more intrinsic. The freelancers' approach and mode of operation , the frame and parameters for mapping possible business specifics, has already been strongly set. Drawing from Rex et al. (2019: 6) here the 'business model' is how individual freelancers…define their own business models which embody their values, objectives, and calculated possibilities of positioning within their chosen creative ecosystem of production. It is within these parameters and pre-sets that goods and services are generated, clients materialise, and income streams are expected to flow.

Our review led us to an analytical position concerning two sets of interrelated factors as determining the economic activity and role ('business model') of the creative freelancer. First, those factors associated with the freelancer – their motivations, rationales, abilities, experience, networks and contexts for choosing to be a freelancer. Secondly, the production system and organisational environment which enables, constrains and frames the possibility of role, and terms and conditions that a freelancer might attain. Sitting alongside, potentially shaping, and even co-defining these factors is the role of space and place; for example, through home-working, local labour markets and networks, and how value chains are organised across (regulatory) borders.

---

soloists' (Brown 2017); as 'taste-makers' (Scott 2012); as drivers of 'fusion' (Sapsed et al. 2015); and with labels such as makers, culturepreneurs, bohemians, and portfolio workers amongst others.

Bringing these factors together in a more integrative analysis provides a framework of five factors for 'creative freelancer business models' – recognising also that each factor could entail a number of dimensions, each of which are explored briefly below.

Motivation

The factor of motivation is key to becoming a freelancer and is a common construct for entrepreneurship research more broadly. Two examples of motivation are an ambition realised ('pull') or a response to redundancy ('push'). Previous work has described how creative entrepreneurship and freelancing has been 'accidental', 'reluctant' or even 'forced', 'false' or 'pseudo' (Coulson 2012, Haynes and Marshall 2018). 'Reluctance' reflects a particular dynamic within the creative industries which has long been articulated as the tension between cultural and artistic value and development afforded by freelancing, balanced against the economic dimensions and rewards, including the demands of commerciality.

Freelancing can allow the freedom, time and space for, and choice of, creative practice (Raunig et al. 2011). In contrast, a more common 'entrepreneurial' driver is economic opportunity, but here too motivation can vary between, for example, from 'being paid to do what I love' to 'making enough', to the ambition to achieve strong financial returns (Eikhof and Haunschild 2006). Much of the literature has discussed the tensions that exist between these different creative, entrepreneurial and financial motivations.

Production ecosystem

The freelancer's role in the production system is shown within the literature to be a key determinant of the form and possibilities of creative freelancing. The term ecosystem is sometimes used in recognition of the more fluid and multi-dimensional relations which influence the role of the creative freelancer and their working patterns. This includes the labour market (employment relationships including dominant and particular norms), nature of and position in value chains (creation, production, dissemination, etc.), and (sub) sector and industrial organisation (including the potential mix of public, hybrid and private organisations and businesses). This factor also includes legal forms of contracting and business type.

Human capital

Human capital is commonly used to refer to the 'knowledge, skills and abilities' of individuals in an economic and organisational context. Here, human capital is explored across a realm of skills relevant to creative freelancers: creative, business, digital, project, etc. Human capital includes not only the original acquisition of skills but the refreshing and updating of those skills through formal, non-formal and informal mechanisms, including the role of business support organisations.[12]

Social capital

Social capital points to the networks and shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups. Initially orientated to the working of society and community, it has been used within the economic and productive sphere to reflect the social networks and relationships which support economic activity, and which transcend formal and contracted positions. Social networks such as friends and family, former colleagues, communities of practice and so on have been argued to provide further support and assets ('capital') for different types of economic activity. This has been identified especially for entrepreneurship, for network, ecology and ecosystem-type production systems of multiple short duration and repeat relationships and collaborations, and for creative communities and freelancers who share values of culture, creativity and craft.

Place and Space

In recent decades, culture and creativity have been related strongly to place and space, including place-based policy and development models such as urban regeneration, creative clusters, creative cities and various articulations of quarters, districts, and hubs (AEA Consulting 2021). Similarly, articulations of place, space and geography are inherent, if not always explicit, in previous work on creative and cultural networks, ecologies and ecosystems (Blackstone et al. 2016, Barker 2019, Gross and Wilson 2020). Whilst the substantial international and cross-border economic relationships of creative freelancers should not be underestimate, it is work on 'micro-geographies', such as working spaces, which has captured the relationships and location factors of creative freelancers to place, especially through models such as home-based, studio co-operatives and co-working spaces. The spatial nature of networks and ecologies might be articulated through discussions on a 'local scene', 'communities of practice' and the often dominant role of key organisations and venues, as well as through the more common business location methodology of mapping supplier, collaborator and customer locations.[13]

[12] Formal learning is always organised and structured, and has learning objectives, and from the learner's standpoint, it is always intentional. Informal learning is never organised, has no set objective in terms of learning outcomes and is never intentional from the learner's standpoint. Often it is referred to as learning by experience. Mid-way between these two is non-formal learning which is organised and intentional but takes place outside formal learning environments.

[13] https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/statistics

Interview approach

Using this analytical framework, our approach to map ‘business model descriptions and conversations’ against these factors and dimensions. We used evidence from freelancer interviews which provided detailed description by the creative freelancer of their rationale, working activities and lived experience of freelancing.

For the interviews a detailed schedule was developed which we mapped against the framework (see Table 3.1). Discussions included the why of becoming and being a freelancer and the articulation of the freelancer’s (pre-and post-pandemic) business model by talking through projects, activities and economic relationships. Those experiences included discussion of any use of Government and local economic and sector policy responses to the pandemic, use of other (informal) forms of support and any expressed needs looking forwards.

Table 3.1: From analytical framework to interview guide

FACTOR	DIMENSIONS	EXAMPLE INTERVIEW THEMES
Motivation	Economic rationale; Creative rationale; Value/s generated by activity	‘Why are you a freelancer’ ‘Pathway to freelancing’ (including household position)
Production Ecosystem	Labour market/relations; Value chain (and position); Industrial organisation Legal structures/status	‘Discuss what it means to be a creative freelancer in…’ ‘Talk us through your last project before lockdown – and a typical one’ ‘Context: How do you get work, who are your clients, how are you valued, what are the (sectoral) norms’
Human Capital	Skills / Competences (technical, transferable, business, etc.) Acquisition, utilisation and development	“What would you consider to be your creative skills/competencies. Other non-creative skills you hold and/or use.’ ‘How were these attained/are updated’ ‘Need for further skills to develop business’
Social Capital	Relationships of production; network memberships; role played in networks and ecologies	Sources of ideas, opportunities, support Networks of collaboration, contracting, competition, clients and suppliers (Value to) ways of working
Place and Space	Relationships to place and space	Evidenced through answers and conversations including language used (home, local, commute, etc.), typical projects and clients, descriptions of position in and relevance of ecosystem, acquisition channels and use of human and social capital. ‘As a freelancer what would you miss, if anything, if you did not live/work in this place?’

Understanding Creative Freelancer Business Models: Interview findings

In this section we outline the findings from the freelancer interviews. We begin by providing some contextual information on our sample before moving to more detailed findings.

Our creative freelancer sample

A key objective of the project has been to explore and unpack the diversity of economic roles held within the common concept of 'creative freelancers'.

Recruitment of our sample began with individuals actively responding to the recruitment campaign (Annex 1) by self-identifying as creative freelancers.[14] This self-identification was a key criteria of importance, creating a potential target group who have chosen to be invested in the label or identity. To be eligible the respondents had to be generating an amount of income from creative practice/work, within or outside of DCMS-defined creative industries, through 'working for themselves'.

Interviewees were asked to describe their creative activity and job title. They could be self-employed, sole traders, directors of limited companies, subcontractors, working in multiple jobs ('portfolio'), including a main or secondary job where they received a wage or salary. In a very few cases the sample included a specialist freelancing but non-creative function deliberately and repeatedly undertaken to support creative activity (see Production Ecosystem below). It should be noted that the recruitment process was not designed to provide a representative sample – and given the limited understanding of this group this would be extremely challenging to achieve.

The sample was evenly spread across the three study areas (Table 4.1). In the recruitment survey respondents were asked to identify their relationship with their locality in one of three ways – only live in the locality, live and work in the locality, only work in the locality. In Coventry and Northumberland the slight majority of freelancers both lived and worked in the area (with a relatively even split of the remainder between live only and work only). In Waltham Forest, the slight majority lived in the Borough but worked elsewhere. This probably reflects the larger London labour market for creatives within which Waltham Forest sits.

[14] This is similar to the approach taken by ONS to the self-employed – 'those who define themselves as working for themselves, rather than receiving a wage or salary from and employer'; Coronavirus and self-employment in the UK - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

The sample included more individuals who self-identified as women (59) than men (25) – whereas patterns of employment more broadly in the creative industries suggest only a third of the workforce is female.[15]

Table 4.1: Interview sample by locality and self-reported gender identity

		Live	Live and Work	Work	Total
Coventry	**Total**	**7**	**17**	**6**	**30**
	Female	*7*	*13*	*3*	*23*
	Male	*0*	*4*	*3*	*7*
Northumberland	**Total**	**4**	**15**	**4**	**28***
	Female	*3*	*12*	*1*	*18*
	Male	*1*	*3*	*3*	*10*
Waltham Forest	**Total**	**15**	**8**	**3**	**26**
	Female	*11*	*5*	*2*	*18*
	Male	*4*	*3*	*1*	*8*
Total		**26**	**40**	**13**	***84****

* *5 respondents were gained through snowballing and did not complete the recruitment survey pre-interview*

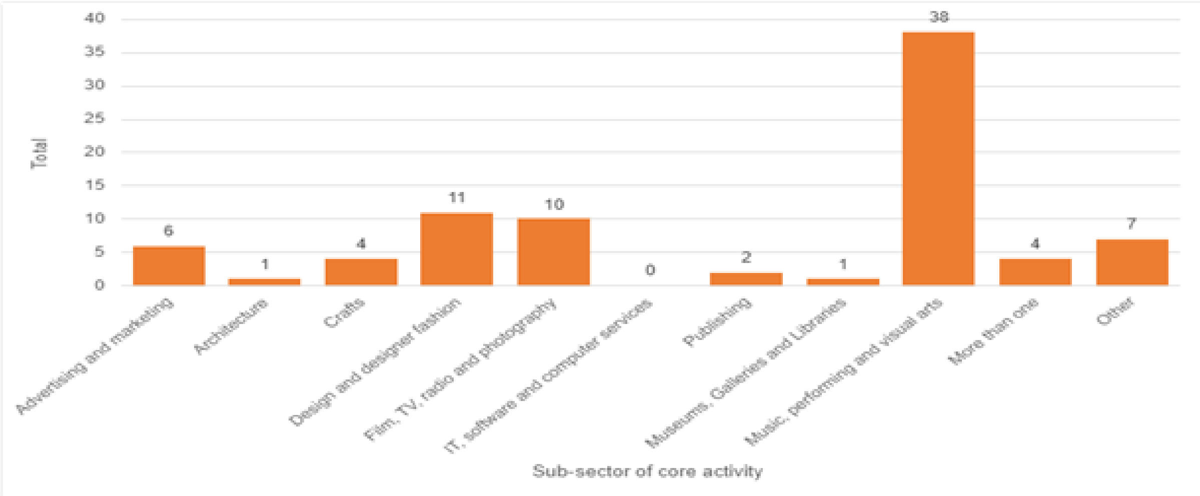
Respondents self-reported their ethnicity and this was coded against census categories. The reported ethnicity of interviewees was very substantially white (90%), and overall mirrored observed patterns of employment in the creative sector.[16] The age spread of interviewees was broad, from 18 – 74 years old, with almost a third in the 35 – 44 years old bracket.

15 https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dcms-sectors-economic-estimates-2019-employment

16 https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dcms-sectors-economic-estimates-2019-employment

In the sample we distinguish between the sub-sector of the creative industries that best captures the core activity of the interviewee (Figure 4.1). Close to half the interviewees in the sample carried out a core activity classified within the Music, performing and visual arts sub-sector. The next most frequently reported sub-sectors of core activity were Design and designer fashion, and Film, TV, radio and photography.

Figure 4.1: Sub-sectors of core activity reported across freelancer sample



Earnings and income

The economic profile of the creative freelancers was relatively mixed, but overall was skewed towards relatively low incomes. Around one-third of interviewees reported total earnings of less than £15,000 in the year preceding the pandemic; half had earnings under £20,000. By way of comparison the Real Living Wage outside London in 2019/2020 was £9.30 an hour, which if working 35 hours a week over 52 weeks would equate to an annual salary of £16,926. Less than a fifth of interviewees earned over £40,000 in the preceding year.

A sizeable minority (around a quarter) of all interviewees reported having additional non-creative jobs. This included a range of different forms of work undertaken in order 'to pay the bills', for example in childcare, reception roles, hospitality and security work. Around half the freelancers overall reported that their household also had another form of income, typically the earnings of a partner. Slightly over half of the sample reported earning sufficient income from their creative work alone.

In discussing their roles and activities, there was an almost equal split between those who focused on only one type of creative role and those who reported an activity profile entailing undertaking multiple creative roles.

Our interviewees demonstrated considerable longevity as creative freelancers. Of those providing data, just over half had been freelancing for over 5 years and a quarter for 11 years or more.[17]

Aspects of motivation to become freelance

The motivations behind becoming, and remaining, a freelancer in the creative industries were quite heterogeneous across the interviewees. It is worth highlighting at the outset that motivations were not necessarily constant over time, and the balance of motivations would change as careers developed and in response to life changes.

Interviews identified six areas of motivation in becoming a freelancer. These motivations include factors which are linked to individual control and autonomy of the creative or work process, wider structural factors in the labour market, and dominant ways of working and contracting in the creative sector and sub-sectors.

The literature on the creative industries often highlights individuals' prioritisation of creative endeavour or creative practice values as being a core, and in some accounts a unique, feature of the creative and cultural sectors. Regarding freelancers this commitment to creative practice and values can operate at two levels. Firstly, at the level of the sector where the individual chooses to work in a creative field. Secondly, within this field, the individual can 'choose' between different employment forms, including freelance work, recognising that this may be the 'norm' in certain creative sectors (for example, theatre).

Overall, we found high reporting of the importance of creative practice and values by the freelancers interviewed (echoing existing studies). Creativity was a core part of their business offer. The nature of creativity varied across the freelancers in relation to, among other things, the type of creative activity, for example whether they were engaged in producing a creative product or content or were working predominantly in a system around supporting this production, or in the dissemination of creative and cultural content.

For many of the freelancers it was clear that creativity was core to *what* they did (their occupation or vocation). There was somewhat less of a clearly defined link to *how* they did their work (i.e. their choice to do their creative work as a freelancer). Underpinning this were a number of different processes that linked being a creative worker with being a creative freelancer.

A relatively large proportion of the freelancers interviewed identified **the idea of autonomy** as being an important part of their motivations to be freelance. This includes aspects of autonomy in the creative process as discussed above (the ability

[17] It is known that around one-in-five start-ups fail in year one and around two-thirds within five years though, of course, our recruitment survey will only have captured those who have remained as freelancers.

to develop creative production in an individual and unencumbered way); in respect of creative autonomy, being freelance meant, in theory, the ability to choose projects, clients and types of commitment which chimed with their creative values.

> *"I like the freedom in terms of having a lot of my own personal input into the work that I'm doing, much more so than when I do work [while] employed for an organisation, and I don't feel I have that much creative freedom with what I'm doing."* Cf-C-27

Equally as important to many freelancers was the idea of autonomy in the work process (flexibility in the how, when and where of performing work tasks). In fact, for some freelancers it was this aspect of autonomy that was a core driver. This autonomy allowed freelancers to work in a particular way and to prioritise work at particular times and other activities and interests at other times. For a small number of interviewees working as a freelancer was an enabler for balancing work and household commitments (typically young children, flexibility and family). It was clear in many cases however that the experience was one of structured autonomy, whereby autonomy was balanced against the need to generate sufficient income (particularly given the generally low levels of earnings generated). In this context the dark side of autonomy also includes the absence of work benefits (sickness pay, holidays, etc).

The ability to exercise some autonomy on timings and patterns of work was important to the interviewees for a number of reasons. For some the ability to work as a freelancer enabled them to prioritise, or at least build-in to their other activities, what they really valued. Here the idea of value captures a range of ideas over and above creative expression. For some freelancers this was predominantly about economic value, the ability to target new markets, to innovate to develop new products and services, to create diversity of income streams, and to show resourcefulness, following what is usually described as an entrepreneurship orientation. One group where this was often apparent was those involved in teaching as a portfolio strand which provided the stability to enable them to try out other additional creative pathways (side-lines) to generate income. Other forms of value were also discussed by many of the interviewees. For some freelancers generating social, cultural and or community value was an important aspect of their freelance work. The flexibilities of freelance work supported them to engage with other activities around the dissemination, participation in and democratisation of culture and/or to engage in community building activities.

Linked to the expression of economic values, especially profitability goals and business growth, was a relatively small group of freelancers who reported explicitly that going freelance was felt to be the best option for financial gain. For another small group economic value was expressed rather more directly as the financial necessity of freelancing in terms of an approach to generating household income.

It is important to note that sector and sub-sectors' structures, patterns and norms also strongly shaped the decision to be freelance in some of the cases. Interviewees discussed how in some sub-sectors the norms of working and contracting were such that working in the sector predominantly meant to them having to work freelance (i.e. there were few opportunities to work in the sector that involved a standard employment relationship).

> *"The necessity of being a freelancer goes hand in hand with the arts"* CF-N-06

Interviewees reporting this were located largely in particular sub-sectors including Music, performing and visual arts and Film, TV, radio and photography. In these cases, by making a choice to work in the sector the interviewees were almost tied to adopting a freelance model. These ideas are expanded on in considering the production ecosystem.

To further explore factors around motivation interviewees were also asked about their definitions of success as a creative freelancer. Overall, around half of interviewees highlighted income generation as an important factor, yet this was most often framed around sufficiency of income to support the continuation of their creative work, rather than expressed primarily in terms of income growth or maximisation of profit. Indeed, virtually every interviewee who mentioned income generation set it alongside other success factors such as being able to choose the work undertaken, client satisfaction, personal growth and reward in work. In addition, almost half of the freelancers defined success in terms of creative reputation, the quality of their creative work or its impact.

> *"It's about balance, between a good income and not feeling overwhelmed and stressed, being in control of my own time."* CF-WF-13

> *"Success is being able to pay your bills, "survive financially while still pursuing the artistic endeavours that you want to"* CF-C-29

Production ecosystem

Respondents identified a broad range of how and where creative freelancer work fitted within the overall production system of the creative sector. Core aspects in which the interviewees differed were distinctions between the extent to which the freelancers' activities were firmly located solely in the creative sector or the extent to which they cross-cut sectors and contributed to economic activity in other parts of the economy. There were also differences in terms of the specialism of skills and their input to the production system. Finally, there was a distinction in terms of the extent to which the freelancers were creating their own work, or were competing for work to commission or brief.

Drawing on the interviewee responses we identified four different types of position in the creative industries system:

- ***Creative – self-directed***: Freelancers who carry out one or a number of specialist creative functions without a brief or commission to produce original goods or services – for example, specific craft work. Around one-fifth of interviewees were in this group.

- ***Creative – working to commission***: Freelancers who carry out a specialist creative function within a larger production or value chain, and who are working to a specific agreed brief with a contracting firm or organisation. This group covers a diverse range of roles, for example actors and some designers. This was the largest group among our interviewees.
- ***Creative – enabler***: Freelancers who use a specialist creative skill to enable other parts of the creative process to function, or in work with non-specialist audiences or communities. Examples include a stage manager and community dance teacher. This group comprised less than a third of interviewees.
- ***Creative sector – enabler***: Freelancers - a handful of our interviewees - who have a specialist but non-creative function which enables other creative activity to take place, for example a fundraising consultant specialising in creative funds.

The work outputs of virtually all the freelancers interviewed were being delivered first and foremost within the (DCMS) creative sectors (i.e. they were working in a creative occupation and their work was located in a creative sector). However, a sizeable minority were undertaking creative work outside the creative sector as well, including for example in the hospitality, retail or health sectors. Only a handful of our interviewees were working solely outside of the creative sectors, mostly using design or marketing skills in commercial sectors outside the creative industries themselves.

The slight majority of interviewees had less than 20 clients a year, and just under half less than 10 a year. Of those who answered, a small minority engaged in regular sub-contracting but, overall, this was the exception (for example, musical collaborations). In contrast the slight majority of respondents reported collaborations during a freelancing year.

Within the creative and cultural sectors an important role in the production ecosystem is played by, often large, cultural institutions (museums, theatres, concert halls, art centres, etc). Such institutions play a gatekeeping role in coordinating (public) funding for the creative sectors, as well as influencing creative trends. A sizeable minority of the freelancers in our sample had a high dependence on cultural or sectoral institutions either as direct contractors or through involvement in sub-contracted or collaborative funded or procured activities.

Human capital

The interviews highlighted the high level of skills which underpin the economic role of freelancers in the creative sector. These skills include formal academic qualifications and technical creative/performance skills. A large majority of interviewees had academic qualifications equivalent to degree level or above. Within this, there was a mixture of those for whom their academic studies were a precursor and formal training for entry into their current sector (around 7 in 10), and those for whom their previous qualifications were only partly, or not at all, related to their current activities (around 3 in 10).

Overall, the picture presented is of a freelancer group who are highly qualified academically with a related 'bundle' of skills around IT and business management to at least some extent. In most cases, high level baseline skills had been honed and developed by several years' experience in sectors/occupations in which they now operate. A large majority of individuals had generally worked in the sector/occupation of their current business area (in some cases transitioning from employment to freelance).

Approaches to skills development were however quite varied. There was some strategic skills development, where individuals identified particular needs or new products/markets. There was also some formal learning, typically linked to the availability and affordability of local or online options. There was quite significant non-formal (self-taught, YouTube) and informal (through practice, experience and collaboration) skills acquisition which encompassed creative skills and to a lesser extent business skills.

Two-thirds of interviewees were continually updating their creative skills. However, a substantially smaller proportion were updating their business skills regularly. The formal sources for information on business skills included a sizeable range of sector-specific bodies as well as more general business support sources.[18] A common response was the belief that more generic business support was unable to 'fit' with the specific needs of creative freelancers and businesses – a large majority of interviewees had no or only low recent usage of business support, which aligns with recent literature (Henry et al. 2017). One specific area of expressed demand was for business mentoring type support (either formally or informally); this demand was mostly for peer mentoring by someone in the field who had 'been there and done it'.

Barriers to acquiring new skills included childcare, Covid-19, time and cost and, essentially, a value-for-money calculation ('time spent learning and not earning'). There are some regulatory and expected skill and competence requirements in particular sub-sectors – including licence to practice (e.g. RIBA professional requirements for architects), Equity union membership, and/or DBS checks for working with young / vulnerable groups.

Social capital

18 https://www.coventry.ac.uk/globalassets/media/global/08-new-research-section/cbis/projects/pec-covid-and-building-back-better-report-final.pdf p.10 for an indicative list

Networks played an important role in the development and sustainability of many creative freelancer business models. Most of the interviewees actively discussed networks and the vast majority of these reported them as of high importance.

> "It's really crucial, I don't know what we'd do without other people seeing the work or talking about the work – it's everything... I see networks as meaning people and everyone we are surrounded by. We wouldn't have a product if there wasn't a network." CF-C-19

Over half of the respondents discussed their network as being connected to securing work (i.e. using the network and recommendations as a source of work opportunities). Here some interviewees also identified the risk or negative aspects of strong networks, noting that if you are not already 'in' it can be very difficult to gain access. Networks also featured in information exchange and how freelancers developed new ideas or business. This included using sector-specific networks (physical and virtual). For a small group of interviewees networks were mentioned as a form of personal support.

Interviews highlighted the importance of trust in networks. Some freelancers had a very small number of clients and an overriding reliance on these. In such cases the freelancer might work with just a couple of firms to provide specific inputs (for example, design) to particular projects. In some cases, the freelancer had previously been an employee at one of their key clients. Networks of collaboration were fundamentally important to many of the freelancers, although several interviewees noted that frequently 'no two projects were the same' and that there was significant variety in the numbers and types of collaboration both within and across projects.

Where interviewees were able to offer an estimate of the number of collaborations, there is some variation across sub-sector. The maintenance of collaborative relationships is seen as an investment, sometimes for creative reasons, sometimes to bring skill sets and deliver as a team. There was relatively little subcontracting by freelancers and where this did happen the process was a mixture of the formal and the relatively informal (based on trust and existing relationships).

Place and Space

A number of questions were asked directly to identify the role of place and space in creative freelancer business models. Overall, there was a strong sense that interviewees were conscious of the particular relationships they had with the places they lived and worked.

More than half of the interviewees worked from home. A significant minority worked in client and project locations - including client houses, schools, community centres, theatres, rehearsal rooms, recording and design studios, or multiple locations (for example, wedding photographers or other peripatetic roles). Others referred to having a regular workspace beyond home, and this covered rented studios, hot-desking or other co-working space, coffee shops and galleries. A handful suggested that they could and did work anywhere, including on public transport.

Localities were identified and valued as containing client sites, especially institutions, and as the expression of networks and work relationships. In the case of the latter this was often directly as the key to winning and delivering work or more broadly that 'others in my sector work here'.

> *"Had I not had formative years and experiences in Coventry with its networks and companies, all working and living in Coventry, I might not have gone on to see that as a career path."* (CF-C-11)

A further group highlighted that living in the place provided connections to access work elsewhere, including where local connections were not sufficient.

> *"It is a nice place, good access to the tube. Access to London is the main thing. Also good for getting to Stratford and into the Thames Estuary which is good for the current job."* (CF-WF-18)

Others were clear that it was the lifestyle attributes of the place which they valued highest and recognised that this may have implications for their work opportunities.

> *"By living here we miss out on massive opportunities that cities would provide – yeah – absolutely. Having lived in London, I know what it's like to live in a big city. But I would always trade living in a place that I want to live with getting less work."* (CF-N-08)

A final small group – equally spread across our locations - did not see place as important.

Creative Freelancers Value and Business Models: Discussion

Two important points of discussion arise from the interview findings. The first is concerned with value, and the multiple forms and constructions of value which creative freelancers are engaged with, at both the economic and societal level. Creative freelancers provide innovation, and skilled and specialised inputs into creative production. They also support wider cultural, community and social value.

The second discussion point relates to the plurality of modes of operating (their business models) among creative freelancers which the interviews revealed. These models reflect the combination of individual motivation factors and characteristics as well as wider labour market and sector specific structuring factors. In some cases these business models also relate back to, and are informed by, different notions of value.

Understanding and generating value

Evidence from the interviews shows how creative freelancers generate value in multiple and different ways – including different types and levels of economic, social and cultural value.[19] Collectively the sample of freelancers were generating value across all of these different types; although at the individual level the relative weight given to different forms of value clearly varied.

The first value is economic – the contribution of creative freelancers to the economy and economic growth. Based on our interviews, there are a number of forms of economic relationship through which this value is constructed.

The first we would identify as business entrepreneurship, connected to seeking financial gain and possibly growth-orientation, but more so to undertaking the independent and profitable delivery of creative goods and services. This reflects the dynamics of entrepreneurship seen across the national economy in recent decades (e.g. the expansion of self-employment), whilst noting the above-average rates of entrepreneurship of the creative industries.

The second form is as a specialised and skilled input into creative sector production chains. In economic terms some freelancers are providing (often high) value added functions of significant importance to the operation of the production chain to which they contribute.

Input of capacity and capability comprises a third form, whereby the freelancer is providing capacity and capability in the creative production system to support the generation of economic value, for others, albeit that their labour can potentially be substituted with greater relative ease.

A fourth form is where the creative input is supporting cross-sector growth; creative freelancers' skills are being utilised ('embedded') within non-creative sectors across the wider economy. Statistics on the 'creative economy' provide an example of this, counting not just creative activity and occupations in the (DCMS) creative industries but, also, creative occupations and activities across the economy.

A fifth form identified through the interview process is what might be thought of as market-making in the economy. Creative freelancers contribute in different ways to the economy through new products, services, experiences and performances and developing the markets for these as the basis for emergent economic value generation. These activities are often small-scale or micro-level activities.

The second value is cultural – the difference to people's lives and society made by engagement with arts and culture.[20] Creative freelancers express their goals here as to support the intrinsic contribution of culture and creativity to the self and the

[19] For an extensive, global and deeply argued consideration of the creative economy and value discourses see the DISCE Literature Review on sustainable growth for the creative economy (Wilson et al. 2020).

[20] See (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016). We recognise that we are using a 'narrow' sense of the term here.

individual, and to a greater concept of society. Activity is motivated by the recognition of the generation of cultural value through individual creative practice and the shaping of reflective (groups of) individuals through their engagement with and experience of creative products and services. More broadly is the sense of contributing to a cultural ecology, and relationships of flow and movement of ideas, product and content valorised more by shared cultural development and activity than economic value.

Building from cultural value, the third form of value articulated is what we would term as social value – defined here as wider articulations of the impact of creative activity on individuals and communities. In these instances, creative freelancers value an array of social benefits generated through their practice. Policy frameworks might identify such benefits as supporting citizenship and community outcomes such as civic society, inclusion and cohesion, environmental awareness, etc. through, say, the activities of artistic and musical workshops for (seldom-engaged) groups attracted through these channels. The growth of socially engaged practice provides other examples, focused as it is on the process of participation rather than the creative output per se, to address social issues such as well-being. Part of a broader movement towards participatory arts, it has been noted elsewhere how such practice has grown as a delivery arm of intervention services.[21]

In summary, even though starting from an economic business model context, what has been delineated through our interviewing is a variety of different value generation positions and perspectives put forward by creative freelancers. Furthermore, we know also that these may combine and overlap, setting the scene for how individuals define their own modes of operating (business models) to embody their values and objectives, to which we move below.

Nevertheless, whilst able to identify the different contributions of value generated by creative freelancers, in economic valorisation terms the message is rather starker. Overall, a group of individuals with high-level, graduate skills have seen these convert into comparatively low, and often insecure, incomes.

Types of creative business models

Our integrative analysis has put forward the idea that the diversity of creative freelancer business models may be understood in ways that relate to the combination and balancing of individual motivation factors and characteristics with a set of wider labour market and sector-specific structuring factors. In certain instances combinations do appear to cluster, and here we summarise forms of business models derived from the interview findings.

[21] See (Belfiore 2021) ArtsProfessional article on moral failure of cultural policy.

Creative Entrepreneurs

"I'd like to be expanding… I suppose I'd like to be 'small to medium' one day. I'm not sure I ever wanna be a 'large' business, you know, I think that probably takes a lot of the fun out of it."

This group of creative freelancers express relatively strong entrepreneurial motives around financial gain through creative activity. At least sufficient income is a characteristic key success factor. They seek profitability and potentially business growth and trade through production relationships and networks which support this ambition and motivation. They work within and beyond the creative industries, tending to choose the independence of freelancing (or accommodating this as the sectoral expectation). Independence is valued although the freedom of satisfying work conditions and choosing clients is balanced against financial motivations. Updating of skills, especially creative, and beyond their initial discipline, is seen as a characteristic of the model. An array of creative products, inputs and services are delivered by creative entrepreneurs – for example, from craft to graphic design to social media influencers.

Creative Contributors

"I wasn't interested in running a business, I just wanted to be an illustrator! I was quite happy having somebody pay me to be an illustrator."

This group is characterised as a broad array of freelancers 'doing creative things' in the economy everyday, delivering, within and beyond the creative industries. Their inputs vary in value depending on their own level of skills but possibly more so related to the production chain and/or sector to which they input. In general they have found and managed their economic contribution as freelancers into the production or value chain for creative goods and services. Whilst income generation is clearly important, success is as likely to be framed around other success factors, such as choosing the work undertaken, client satisfaction, and personal growth. Other sources of income may support this position, such as other household income (partner earnings) or portfolio working. Networks are important to maintaining their freelancing role, but usage of business support tends to be negligible and skills updating sporadic. For a few, the struggles of the pandemic have raised searching questions as to the continued income rewards of being a creative contributor.

Creative Work-Life Balancers

"I can be here when kids come back from school and can arrange meetings around that. I'm in charge of my own time, I don't need anybody's permission to do the things I want to do. It's great."

This group of creatives tend to be very clear in their current motivation; it is to achieve a work-life balance alongside their creative activity. Characterised by valuing the importance of autonomy in the work process (flexibility in the how, when and where of performing work tasks), this autonomy allows these creative freelancers to work in a particular way and to prioritise work at particular times and other activities at different times. In some cases this includes caring for family and, typically, for young children. Sufficient income can be created from freelancing alone, characteristically through commissions but, equally, there are likely to be other income streams into the household.

Precarious Projecteers

"This is the only way I can do the job I want to do, there is no alternative"

The scenario is of less ability to choose projects and clients to achieve sufficient income or to choose the terms and conditions on which work is accepted and undertaken. This form of working has most closely associated creative freelancing with the emergence of the 'gig economy' and project-based working, whereby creative inputs are brought together for short periods of time to deliver a particular output before disbanding. Networks are often critical. They are the pool through which project inputs are brought together. In some instances the constancy and trust of regular and repeat contractual relationships are sufficient, too often it is more akin to freelancers having to take what they can get and win (including, for example, absorbing the costs of multiple bidding).

In worsening freelancer scenarios this is about uncertainty, anxiety and competition for work, including the pressure on, for example, day rates and contracting terms. In some scenarios there is dependency on very few clients and a form of pseudo-self-employment. For some, the struggles of the pandemic have raised searching questions, and anger, around the fairness and personal sustainability of projecteering.

Creative Ecologists

"I would find it very hard to get out of bed to do something I didn't care about. I've been obsessed with the arts and cultural industries all my life. I believe this makes a proper contribution to the community, to the world."

The characteristic motivation for this group is their creative practice and output and, more broadly, contributing to the cultural ecology of society. Often connected to the projects and commissions of cultural institutions, with a tendency to be embedded deeply in networks, including internationally, those who achieve stronger cultural reputations are likely to achieve sufficient income also. Choice of client exists but working terms and conditions are generally a given. Those with weaker connections to institutions may exhibit more precarious working lives, potentially supported by other income streams, but remain committed to freelancing given the creative autonomy it allows. This group tends to show commitment to continuous creative skills development, building directly upon previous qualifications in their creative discipline. Their commitment to cultural ecology may be related to a tendency to live and work in the same locality.

Community Creatives

"I work with a group of stroke survivors and to be able to see them return every week and to enjoy what they do and to really feel part of that group... Letting groups have their own identity – I never call myself a teacher, I am part of the mix. Learning from each other. Not about earning – the earning bit is not realistic in the arts world."

The characteristic motivation for these creative freelancers is social, using their creative skills and methods to achieve social impacts ('beyond the cultural') on others and communities. They enable and facilitate participation through their creative practice with the aim of achieving social benefits such as social inclusion, well-being, human rights, community development, etc. Success is understood as their impact on others, even if sufficient income is not always achieved as a freelancer. This group is as likely to work outside of the creative industries as inside. Their enabling role may see a tendency to practise across creative disciplines and characterised by a greater likelihood to partake in creative skills development. Their commitment to social value can be related to a tendency to live and work in the same locality.

Creative Freelancers and Place: Policy Directions

This Discussion Paper has considered the working experiences of creative freelancers, their business models, and their contribution to economy and society. This contribution is framed by their motivations concerning the types of value generation they seek and their ability to achieve this within the wider structures and environment set by the labour market, sectoral and business environment. Creative freelancers provide economic dynamism and skilled inputs, but many also experience low and insecure incomes, and occupy an economic niche that remains something of a policy blind-spot. Here we identify the policy implications of our findings for national government, creative and cultural sector institutions and local place-based policy.[22]

Policy Domain One: Recognising, Embracing and Supporting Freelancers in a Changing Labour Market

Creative freelancers have suffered disproportionately from the pandemic – both in terms of sector shut-down and lack of coverage of support - but even pre-pandemic, the sector was characterised by significant employment insecurity and low incomes for many.

Their experience speaks to the wider question of the changing nature of the labour market and the extent to which existing systems of employment policy, tax and welfare are suited to these shifts. These systems set the framework in which creative freelancers operate.

Any approach to 'building back better' needs to prioritise the idea of good work – including in self-employment and freelancing. National government has a critical role in setting the conditions which frame the prospects for good work – including regulatory, business support and social security mechanisms required to support a comprehensive and positive vision and environment for dynamic and agile models of employment such as freelancing.

Current examples of specific recognition for freelancing within the national policy system would be Class 2 National Insurance Contributions for the self-employed and IR35 'intermediaries' legislation' which has the aim of clarifying if you are a 'genuine' freelancer in a contract relationship with your client (rather than 'disguised employment'). There are substantial debates about how such policy examples

[22] We offer these indicative policy suggestions as emerging implications from our initial analysis and as part of the ongoing, and fast-moving, discussions on the creative industries and post-pandemic policy.

encourage and support or hinder the ability to undertake creative freelancing or work with the full dynamics of the changing labour market.[23]

The pandemic has also highlighted important issues in relation to freelancer access to income and employment schemes in the immediate term. In the longer-term, there is a need to assess the potential of new forms of income support schemes which recognise and support management of the potentially volatile income flows of precarious and project-based work.[24]

In other areas such as skills policy there is a need to recognise and understand the business models of freelancers to maximise their productive contribution to the economy and society to invest substantially in the needs of the individual (as well as employers). Recent visions recognise how a system of adult skills and lifelong learning could be designed to support individual contributions to the economy and community throughout the diversity of individual life courses.[25] Through mainstreaming such an approach, such a system could be more supportive of individual creative freelancer business models, including how they change over time (start-out, start-up, mid-career, breaks, fallow periods, growth, portfolio, etc.)[26]

Policy Domain Two: Enacting Good Freelancer Employment and Procurement Charters

While the Government sets a framework around good work, and public funding settlements partly frame what is possible, it is often intermediary institutions and stakeholders within the creative and cultural sector who play a critical role in determining the conditions of employment which freelancers experience. Many freelancers are contracted by funders, institutions, organisations and businesses who determine the processes of procurement and the terms and conditions of contracts.

---

[23] CIF have joined forces with the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), Prospect and the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self Employed (IPSE) to call for a Freelance Commissioner and Future Workforce Commission, to build more resilience into the UK's self-employed workforce.

[24] A number of Universal Basic Income schemes have been trialled recently in European countries, including Scotland. See, for example, https://www.newscientist.com/article/2242937-universal-basic-income-seems-to-improve-employment-and-well-being/ and https://www.basicincome.scot/. See also *Intermittence de Spectacle*, the long running French scheme targeted explicitly at intermittent working in the performing arts, https://www.etui.org/publications/art-managing-intermittent-artist-status-france

[25] See the recent House of Commons Education Committee (2020) A Plan for an Adult Skills and Lifelong Learning Revolution HC278, 19 December, London.

[26] Although it should be noted that the recently launched National Skills Fund falls substantially short of this vision, for freelancers, and especially in support of the skills, competences and qualifications of creative freelancing.

‘Building Back Better’ requires a focus on better business practices in the sector and its array of contracting organisations.[27] They can and do play a core role in setting the environment for and practices of procurement (including costs and barriers) and contract terms and conditions (not just simply onerous but also, for example, hidden labour and late payments). A broader challenge is that they also influence the role of freelancers in the production system and the employment opportunities afforded to them, with the suggestion that freelancing in some sectors is ‘by default’. Contracting organisations have a central role to play in addressing the normalisation of myriad and repetitious project-based and fragmented contracts as an inevitable organisational mode for the creative freelancer.

There is clear evidence that active discussions on business and organisational practices have been enacted within the sector as part of post-pandemic responses[28]. These reflect stronger, broader and more urgent moral and ethical debates across the economy about shareholder and stakeholder responsibilities of organisations to their employees and, also, to their supply chains, customers and communities of impact. Such breadth of debate is required given the sheer diversity of organisational clients for creative freelancers. For example, museums, theatres, hospitality venues, churches, care homes, universities, cultural institutions, publishing houses, NHS, studios and conservatoires. The creative freelancer ecosystem will require multiple developments in Industry Charters, ‘funders as agents of change’, social value procurement, anchor stewardship, responsible business and responsible supply chains and other similar initiatives in order to achieve comprehensive and widespread use of responsible, thoughtful, innovative and inclusive contracting (including in support of creative freelancing as a sustainable supply chain model). Critically, and part of the problem to date, freelancers should be actively supported to enable participation in these debates and the structures within which they take place and subsequent actions are enacted.

Such developments, and the position of recognition creative freelancers should attain within them, should be understood as a part of the broader agenda for the creative industries to meet the substantial challenges of diversity and inclusion in order to enable a full array of inclusive talent pipelines and supply chains.[29]

---

[27] See the Big Freelancers Report (Freelancers Make Theatre Work 2021) for a detailed picture of the contracting world for creative freelancers.

[28] See, for example, the launch by the Creative Industries Federation of their Freelancer Champions

[29] See, for an early-stage example, the recently launched Creative Industries Council Diversity Charter https://cic-media.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/media/533578/creative-industries-council-diversity-charter-final.pdf.

Policy Domain Three: Place-Based Policy and Creative Freelancers

There is a long tradition of place-based organisations such as Local Authorities and local economic development institutions investing in both their cultural ecologies and creative economies. Whilst the contribution of creative freelancing has been increasingly recognised and celebrated in recent years, arguably the pandemic crisis has highlighted the current weaknesses and vulnerabilities of this critical ecosystem of economic infrastructure, supply chain systems and talent pipelines.

Given the place-based and micro nature of much creative freelancing, our interviews continued to communicate the importance of, and expressed needs for, locally-targeted investment for creative freelancers. The diversity of creative freelancer business models implies a range of local policy domains that have impact or potential traction on the business lives of creative freelancers, including domains beyond local cultural and economic policy.

- **Provision of appropriate business support**: There is a known sectoral issue of limited and patchy engagement with business support programmes (including start-up and access to finance), poor understanding of the generic agencies and delivery channels and concerns amongst creative freelancers about 'relevance' and lack of understanding of creative and freelancer drivers. There was evidence in our interviews of usage of bespoke, targeted and 'like-minded' schemes; entailing communities of practice and (sub) sector associations, and schemes developed with as well as for creatives. Demand was expressed for social capital and network-based approaches to professional development, investments in people, based upon, for example, mentoring, coaching and peer models of support.
- **Use of appropriate funding models:** Current funding ranges from the dominance of capital and organisation-driven funding schemes and growth funds through to the burden of short-term, small scale project and commissioning competitions. New initiatives, including bidding support and training in call-outs, longer duration fellowships, residences and service level agreements, team-based R&D&I projects, payment for engagement and co-creation participation, front-loading of payments, all reflect examples which could be expanded entailing recognition of the distinctive characteristics and operating modes of creative freelancer business models.
- **Creative freelancer infrastructures**: in this instance we refer to the 'hard infrastructures of creative freelancing' which support the 'soft infrastructures' such as those above. Moving through scales this includes: supporting and managing (the spaces of) homeworking – access to ubiquitous broadband speeds and 5G, cheaper energy, equipment, planning consent, care provision; the highly flexible provision of co-working/network spaces and hubs, hot-desking, studios, showcase spaces (galleries to the street, markets, pop-ups, high streets, etc.); supporting the critical role (and best practice) of the institutions of the cultural ecology and (pipeline talent and R&D) venues;

and management of the night-time economy as safe and sustainable creative marketplaces, including the provision and costs of transport.

Cutting across local policy domains, the policy themes above reflect the possibilities of policy integration driven by creative freelancer roles and business models. Policy integration is both the critical challenge and possibility of new approaches to and models of 'place-based policy' which are emerging in the (post-pandemic) search for more prosperous, fairer and resilient places. Such policy looks to enact and build that 'place matters', seeking to fully recognise, work with and across the social, cultural and institutional frameworks that combine in generating (intended and unintended) place outcomes through their footprints, and including the potential to move beyond narrow concepts of 'grow first, (re)distribute later'.[30]

Place-based policy has the potential to recognise, fully value and, in turn, fully invest against the value generation of creative freelancers in support of place-based outcomes. Our findings have detailed the range of place-based value generated by the activities and business models of creative freelancers – economic, cultural and social – and also their generation of 'value combinations' through the enactment of their economic role and lived experiences as creative freelancers.

Returning to our types of creative business models set out in Section 5 the potential of place-based policy to use and maximise the value of creative freelancing can begin to be imagined. For example: how targeted and tailored growth-orientated business support to Creative Entrepreneurs can be invested against through the place-based rationale of contribution to economic and cultural value, how Creative Work-Life Balancers demonstrate an existing inclusive growth mechanism, enabling participation in employment and therefore a contribution to place-based productivity which is combined with the additional delivery of further mixes of social and cultural value dependent on how these individuals choose to use their unpaid hours (household care, volunteering, creative practice, etc.); or, in the face of continual cuts in local cultural and creative investment, a reinforcement and renewed emphasis on how Creative Ecologists support prosperity, 'place-buzz' and well-being in their places.

In contrast, our business model types show the limits to place-based policy also. It is clear that for Precarious Projecteers we are likely forced to look to the national labour market and employment policy first, and institutions and stakeholders second. It is in the latter that we can begin to see the possible traction of place-based policy makers as anchor institutions in their own rights and as funders capable of enacting good freelancer employment and procurement policies in their local ecosystems. In contrast again, for Community Creatives there is much interest in the emerging role

[30] Examples include the 'inclusive growth agenda' (Evenhuis et al. 2021) but also theories, concepts and movements such as doughnut economics, the foundational economy, community wealth building and impact investing.

of arts in social prescribing but, for example, engagement with the institutions of care, health and well-being and their professional disciplines presents a hybrid and complex array of local, regional and national commissioning and contracting groups to be navigated to achieve their full contribution to economy and society.

In conclusion, this study began with debates on how the diversity of creative freelancers continues to hinder policy responses which reflect both their full contribution to economy and society, and their on-going vulnerability as sustainable business forms central to the growth story of the UK creative industries. Through extensive interviewing with those individuals who identify themselves as part of the UK's dynamic population of creative freelancers we have sought to set out a deeper understanding of their roles, contributions and value in place. It is on the basis of such understanding that we argue how one can begin to sketch out the potential and possibilities for, and challenges of, a policy environment that understands, values and responds to the creative freelancers of today's place-based economies.

References

AEA Consulting (2021) *The Relationships Between Cultural Organisations and Local Creative Industries in the Context of a Cultural District: Final Research Report*. London

Barker, V. (2019) 'The Democratic Development Potential of a Cultural Ecosystem Approach'. *The Journal of Law, Social Justice and Global Development* (24), 86–99

Belfiore, E. (2021) 'A Moral Failure in Cultural Policy'. *ArtsProfessional* [online] February. available from https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/article/moral-failure-cultural-policy

Blackstone, M., Hage, S., and McWilliams, I. (2016) 'Understanding the Role of Cultural Networks within a Creative Ecosystem: A Canadian Case-Study'. *Journal of Cultural Management and Policy* 6 (1), 13–29

Blair, H. (2003) 'Winning and Losing in Flexible Labour Markets : The Formation and Operation of Networks of Interdependence in the UK Film Industry Author (s): Helen Blair Published by : Sage Publications , Ltd . Stable URL : http://Www.Jstor.Org/Stable/42856569 Winning'. *Sociology* 37 (4), 677–694

Brown, J. (2017) 'Curating the "Third Place"? Coworking and the Mediation of Creativity'. *Geoforum*

Comunian, R. and England, L. (2020) 'Creative and Cultural Work without Filters: Covid-19 and Exposed Precarity in the Creative Economy'. *Cultural Trends* 29 (2), 112–128

Coulson, S. (2012) 'Collaborating in a Competitive World: Musicians' Working Lives and Understandings of Entrepreneurship'. *Work, Employment and Society* 26 (2), 246–261

Crossick, G. and Kaszynska, P. (2016) *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture: The AHRC Cultural Value Project* [online] available from https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/publications/cultural-value-project-final-report/

Department for Culture Media and Sport Select Committee (2020) *Impact of COVID-19 on DCMS Sectors: First Report* [online] available from https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmcumeds/291/29102.htm [13 April 2021]

Dovey, J. and Pratt, A.C. (2016) *Creative Hubs: Understanding the New Economy*. London

Easton, E. and Cauldwell-French, E. (2017) *Creative Freelancers*. London

Eikhof, D.R. and Haunschild, A. (2006) 'Lifestyle Meets Market: Bohemian Entrepreneurs in Creative Industries'. *Creativity and Innovation Management* 15 (3), 234–241

Ernst & Young (2021) *Rebuilding Europe: The Cultural and Creative Economy before and after the COVID-19 Crisis*.

Evenhuis, E., Lee, N., Martin, R., and Tyler, P. (2021) 'Rethinking the Political Economy of Place: Challenges of Productivity and Inclusion'. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 14 (1), 3–24

Fleming, T. and Erskine, A. (2011) *Supporting Growth in the Arts Economy*. London

Freelancers Make Theatre Work (2021) *The Big Freelancer Report*.

Giuliani, G., O'Brien, D., and Brook, O. (2020) *Who Is Working Second Jobs in the Creative Economy?* [online] available from https://pec.ac.uk/blog/who-is-working-second-jobs-in-the-creative-economy [13 April 2021]

Giupponi, G. and Xu, X. (2020) *What Does the Rise of Self-Employment Tell Us about the UK Labour Market?* [online] available from https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/15182#:~:text=In%201975%2C8%25 [13 April 2021]

Grabher, G. and Ibert, O. (2011) 'Project Ecologies: A Contextual View on Temporary Organizations'. in *The Oxford Handbook of Project Management*. ed. by Morris, P.W.G., Pinto, J.K., and Soderlund, J. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Gross, J., Heinonen, J., Burlina, C., Comunian, R., Conor, B., Crociata, A., Dent, T., Guardans, I., Hytti, U., Hytönen, K., Pica, V., Pukkinen, T., Renders, M., Stenholm, P., and Wilson, N. (2020) *European Policy Brief: Managing Creative Economies as Cultural Eco-Systems* [online] available from https://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/policy_briefs/impact-ev_pb_122015.pdf

Gross, J. and Wilson, N. (2020) 'Cultural Democracy: An Ecological and Capabilities Approach'. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 26 (3), 328–343

Haynes, J. and Marshall, L. (2018) 'Reluctant Entrepreneurs: Musicians and Entrepreneurship in the "New" Music Industry'. *British Journal of Sociology* 69 (2), 459–482

Henry, N., Barker, V., Sissons, P., Broughton, K., Lazell, J., and Dickinson, P. (2021) *Building Back Better? Creative Freelancers and Learning from the Covid-19 Experience*. Coventry

Henry, N., Broughton, K., Hastie, C., and Barker, V. (2017) *Business Support and the Cultural and Creative Sector in England and Scotland: A Review*. Coventry

Hewison, R. (2014) *Cultural Capital: The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain*. London: Verso

House of Commons Education Committee (2020) *A Plan for an Adult Skills and Lifelong Learning Revolution: Third Report of Session 2019-21*. (December)

IPSE (2018) *Self-Employment in the Modern Economy* [online] London. available from https://www.ipse.co.uk/resource/exploring-the-rise-of-self-employment-in-the-modern-economy-pdf.html

Lash, S. and Urry, J. (1994) *Economies of Signs and Space*. London: Sage

Mathisen, B.R. (2019) 'Entrepreneurs and Idealists — Freelance Journalists at the Intersection of Autonomy and Constraints'. *Journalism Practice* 13 (8), 1003–1007

Mould, O., Vorley, T., and Liu, K. (2014) 'Invisible Creativity? Highlighting the Hidden Impact of Freelancing in London's Creative Industries'. *European Planning Studies* 22 (12), 2436–2455

Murgia, A., Bozzon, R., Digennaro, P., Mezihorak, P., Mondon-Navazo, M., and Borghi, P. (2020) 'Hybrid Areas of Work Between Employment and Self-Employment: Emerging Challenges and Future Research Directions'. *Frontiers in Sociology* 4 (January), 1–8

Nemkova, E., Demirel, P., and Baines, L. (2019) 'In Search of Meaningful Work on Digital Freelancing Platforms: The Case of Design Professionals'. *New Technology, Work and Employment* 34 (3), 226–243

Nies, G. and Pedersini, R. (2003) *Report: Freelance Journalists in the European Media Industry*. (October), 1–41

O'Connor, J. (2010) *The Cultural and Creative Industries: A Literature Review (2nd Edition)*.

OECD (2020) *Culture Shock: COVID-19 and the Cultural and Creative Sectors* [online] available from https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/culture-shock-covid-19-and-the-cultural-and-creative-sectors-08da9e0e/ [13 April 2021]

Oliva Abarca, J.E. (2018) 'The Cultural Entrepreneur: Constitution, Organization and Ways of Operating'. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Knowledge* 6 (1), 5–15

Owen, G., O'Brien, D., and Taylor, M. (2020) *A Jobs Crisis in the Cultural and Creative Industries* [online] available from https://pec.ac.uk/blog/how-covid-19-is-impacting-the-cultural-sector-with-the-loss-of-55-000-jobs-in-the-arts [13 April 2021]

Raunig, G., Ray, G., and Wuggenig, U. (2011) 'Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the "Creative Industries"'. *Gene* 234

Rex, B., Kaszynska, P., and Kimbell, L. (2019) *Business Models for Arts and Cultural Organizations: Research Findings from Creative Lenses. Project Report*. Lund

Sapsed, J., Camerani, R., Masucci, M., Rajguru, M., Jones, P., and Sussex, W. (2015) *Brighton Fuse 2: Freelancers in the Creative Digital IT Economy*.

Schüßler, E. and Sydow, J. (2015) 'Organizing Events for Configuring and Maintaining Creative Fields'. in *Oxford Handbook of Creative Industries*. ed. by Jones, C., Lorenzen, M., and Sapsed, J. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 284–300

Scott, M. (2012) 'Cultural Entrepreneurs, Cultural Entrepreneurship: Music Producers Mobilising and Converting Bourdieu's Alternative Capitals'. *Poetics* 40 (3), 237–255

Tobin, J. (2020) *In Focus - Covid-19: Impact on the UK Cultural Sector* [online] available from https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/covid-19-impact-on-the-uk-cultural-sector/ [13 April 2021]

Watson, A. and Beaverstock, J. V. (2016) 'Transnational Freelancing: Ephemeral Creative Projects and Mobility in the Music Recording Industry'. *Environment and Planning A* 48 (7), 1428–1446

Wilson, N., Gross, J., Dent, T., Conor, B., and Comunian, R. (2020) *Re-Thinking Inclusive and Sustainable Growth for the Creative Economy: A Literature Review*.

Woronkowicz, J. and Noonan, D.S. (2019) 'Who Goes Freelance? The Determinants of Self-Employment for Artists'. *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice* 43 (4), 651–672

Wright, A. (2015) 'It's All about Games: Enterprise and Entrepreneurialism in Digital Games'. *New Technology, Work and Employment* 30 (1), 32–46

Annex 1: Recruiting and Interviewing Creative Freelancers

In July 2020, with the support of our project Partners and led by Creative United, a communications campaign ran for 8 weeks to recruit creative freelancers to be interviewed. The campaign began with a Press Release, and led to a range of media coverage including interviews with Free Radio, local newspaper coverage such as in the Coventry Telegraph and traction with numerous sector media boards and newsletters such as the Music Industries Association, ArtWorks Alliance, Crafts Council, The Dots Ask page and Headway Arts (Northumberland). It was this campaign which led to the additional engagement with and interviewing of sector association stakeholders. A twitter campaign was run also (Figure A1).

Figure A1: The Creative Freelancer Recruitment Campaign

Social media engagement from:
British Council Creative Economy twitter page (16.1K followers)
NESTA Policy and Evidence Centre (4.5k followers)
Freelancers Make Theatre Work (6,528 followers)
One Dance UK (10.2K)
Craft Council (105.5K)
Incorporated Society of Musicians (17.9k)
Arts Council North (25.4K followers)
Visual Arts in Rural Communities, Northumberland (1,262 Followers)

The communications campaign directed creative freelancers to a 2-minute, 6 question survey to create a sample population for the interview process.

It required individuals to self-identify as creative freelancers, identify the nature of the freelancer's relationship with one of the three localities. Either, to live in the locality, live and work in the locality, or work in the locality. It then asked if they had undertaken any business planning for the year ahead. Finally, they were asked if they would be willing to be contacted for an interview. A total of 206 survey completions were achieved. Connection to one of the three target localities and willingness to be interviewed provided a sample of 108 potential interviewees (see Table A1).

Table A1: Engagement Survey responses

Relationship to place	Potential pool to sample
I live and work in the Coventry city region	18
I live in the Coventry city region	12
I work in the Coventry city region	10
I live and work in the London Borough of Waltham Forest	14
I live in the London Borough of Waltham Forest	27
I work in the London Borough of Waltham Forest	4
I live and work in the County of Northumberland	16
I live in the County of Northumberland	5
I work in the County of Northumberland	2

In the case of Northumberland, the list of potential interviewees did not translate fully into the desired number of interviews. The final few were achieved through a process of snowballing contacts with original interviewees.