



SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT: CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

CALL FOR EVIDENCE ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SCOTLAND'S CULTURE AND TOURISM SECTORS

28th January 2021

SUBMISSION FROM: Scottish Artists Union

Introduction

1. Scottish Artists Union (SAU) represents 1600 members across Scotland. Our members are visual artists and makers. Our aim is to improve artists' rights and working conditions, to represent their interests, to lobby and campaign to make life as a professional working artist, realistic and sustainable.

We believe that artists should be valued as the root of creativity in our communities and in wider society. Value starts with recognition of artists as creative and highly trained individuals whose skills and experience underpin arts organisations, infrastructure and activities. Despite the pressures caused by the Covid-19 outbreak our membership has been steadily increasing, showing the growing need for solidarity and support for what are often isolated practitioners.

Gathering Evidence:

2. Since the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak, SAU has been gathering evidence from its membership on immediate impacts and needs and has fed this back to funders and government on a regular basis. Throughout the pandemic we have worked collaboratively with the other STUC culture unions, Scottish Government and culture bodies, meeting regularly to raise and discuss issues.

Scottish Contemporary Art Network (SCAN) and Scottish Artists Union (SAU) wished to collate information on behalf of the visual arts community in Scotland about the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, to understand and advocate for the needs of the sector. Between December '20 and January '21, we undertook a workforce survey with SCAN, working with an Independent researcher, Ruth Stevenson, who designed, managed and analysed a web survey to gather this information.

Those in self-employment were asked to tell us what impact Covid-19 has had on their self-employment working conditions since March 2020.

- 92% of those in self-employed roles told us that Covid-19 has had an impact on their self-employment working conditions.

The impacts were most often working fewer hours (54%), having contracts cancelled (51%) and having contracts postponed (47%). 'Other' impacts included galleries being closed, exhibitions cancelled and studio space unavailable.

- 87% had gaps in income caused by Covid-19.
- 30% said the available financial support had not been effective in covering gaps in income.
- 65% expected to make a loss in 2020 compared to pre-Covid expectations.
- 10% had been forced to sign up for Universal Credit or Government benefits as a direct result of Covid-19.
- 5% had left the sector altogether.

Groups most likely to anticipate a loss were: zero hours workers, sessional workers, self-employed workers, artists or makers, disabled people, and those with caring responsibilities.

Overall, 22% across the sector estimated that they would lose more than half of their expected income in 2020 due to Covid-19.

Across all respondents, including PAYE, the average annual income prior to Covid-19 was £16,783 of which, on average, 78% came from working in the arts.

Equalities

3. SAU are concerned about the disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 on carers. 43% of the respondents said that they had caring responsibilities. Of these, 68% said that their caring responsibilities had been negatively affected as a direct result of Covid-19.

“Caring responsibilities became my priority, and I was unable to work. I have essentially stopped being anything other than mum.”

SAU/SCAN Workforce Survey 2020

In addition, artists who identified as having a disability were significantly impacted. Of the 28% of respondents who said that they felt they had “fallen through the cracks” and been ineligible for adequate financial support during Covid-19, 35% of them identified as disabled.

“How can we expect young people and people from diverse backgrounds to become artists if the reward is zero hour contracts, precarity and instability. Approaches to our funding hierarchies and our freelance/gig economy must structurally change if we want to be an inclusive and representative workforce’.”

SAU/SCAN Workforce Survey 2020

Hidden Redundancies

4. We know that over 80% of SAU members are self-employed, therefore experiencing far more precarious working conditions than the regular working population. They are often balancing a combination of income streams, with a mix of PAYE, freelance, zero hours contracts, income from sales and exhibiting. Often glamourised and described as a ‘portfolio career’, the day-to-day reality is unpredictable, stressful and unsustainable for many without back up from savings, or family support.

The survey outlines the high number of artists who are currently relying on support from family and friends to get by during the pandemic. 72% of the survey respondents told us that they had made use of at least one of these other forms of support since March 2020. The forms of support most often used were savings (43%), friends and family (30%) and studio rental holiday / reduction (15%). This effect does not show up in traditional redundancy figures due to the nature of the employment.

The results from the survey show that Covid-19 has had a substantial and ongoing negative impact on the visual arts workforce in Scotland. The vast majority of individuals had a negative experience with only a small number of people experiencing positive aspects of an improved work/life balance. This further illustrates the precarity of the sector and the need to focus on plans for more sustained support to enable recovery in the medium to long term.

Visual artists and makers were already experiencing low incomes before the pandemic. The SAU member survey carried out in 2018 showed that 61% of members had a turnover of less than £10k from their practice. Economic inequality is generally top of the list of concerns from our membership.

A Sector Disproportionally Affected

5. In 2020 the Scottish Trade Union Congress (STUC) published a briefing paper - 'The impact of Coronavirus on Hospitality and Creative Workers'. The paper showed the disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 on PAYE workers in the Creative Industries. Those that were furloughed were also more likely to be in low paid work where their wages were not topped up to 100% by employers. Many artists work in the hospitality sector to support their art practice, and these artists tend to be young graduates or artists at the beginning of their career.

'While 11% of the workforce was furloughed as of August 31st, this rose to 27% for workers in the accommodation and food sector and 33% of workers in arts, entertainment and recreation.'

'The STUC and its member unions are reporting an increasing number of workers reporting concerns about working in both the creative industries and hospitality and facing an uncertain future.'

Recovery and Sustainability

6. Universal Basic Income Trials
In June 2020 SAU created a survey to find out what our members think about the idea of Universal Basic Income, and how it might impact on their career prospects and working lives. 90% of members were in support of the principles of UBI.

In line with the recommendation in 'Putting Artists in the Picture', artists should be included in the proposed Universal/Citizens Basic Income pilot and as an interim Covid-19 measure, given UBI for one year. The results of this, including costs, should be compared to the costs of the current application process administered by Creative Scotland. We believe that self-employed people within the cultural sector could contribute more to the sustainable economy if they are supported by a UBI, or a similar sector specific scheme.

Fair Work Principles

88% of our members do not consistently receive contracts and only 11% receive industry standard rates of pay for freelance employment. Advocating for fair work practices and a living wage for the cultural and creative workforce would assist in moving the sector to a more sustainable footing.

Sector Specific Support

7. **Immediate:** An extension of bursary and grant funds from Creative Scotland such as The Bridging Bursary and the Freelancers Hardship Fund - that were accessible, simple to apply for and immediately distributed.

Additional investment in the Culture Collective programme to employ artists who work in socially engaged settings.

Medium/long term: Targeted support for diversity and inclusion should be on the agenda. Paid internships focussed on tackling those excluded and under-represented in the sector, supporting diversity and intersectionality on the other side of this crisis.

Support to stimulate demand and encourage public to take part in arts activities, recognising the health and wellbeing benefits like an 'Art Prescription' and, to aid return to studios and galleries e.g., a voucher scheme - a culture version of 'Eat Out to Help Out' - where vouchers could be used by the public to take part in arts activities, attend galleries and museums, and also purchase artwork. Current purchasing models exist, such as the Own Art scheme - a national initiative that makes buying contemporary art and craft more affordable by providing interest-free loans for the purchase of original work.

Councils could be encouraged to buy the work of artists living in their areas and create artists residencies, e.g., Glasgow Life's Artist In Residence initiative with an 'Artist in every Ward'.

Targeted training, mentoring and support for graduates from Scotland's arts schools, colleges and universities.

Restarting the Enterprise Allowance Scheme / MSC Created Job Schemes - that helped us out of the previous employment crisis.

With so much activity moving online during Covid-19, there is an ongoing need for funding to support digital inclusion, access to internet, training and hardware.

Summary:

"I feel like I'm vanishing - unrecognised and with apparently little value. I have no wish to become dependent on benefits, but things feel horribly precarious"

SAU/SCAN Workforce Survey 2020

The SAU are very concerned about the impact of the pandemic on our fragile arts infrastructure. If Scotland wants to be proud of its reputation to support artists and makers, it needs to make some drastic changes to reverse the current situation. Further decline will have an impact on public benefit, local economies and the wider cultural workforce.

Scotland's artists have shown resilience, adaptability and creativity in their response to Covid-19. We should be recognising that we can build on these qualities and invest in their futures to the benefit of everyone in our communities.

Lynda Graham
President
On behalf of the Executive Committee