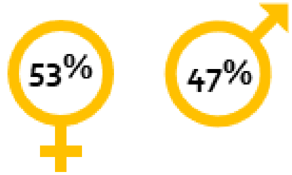
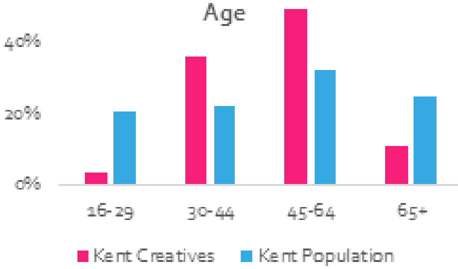
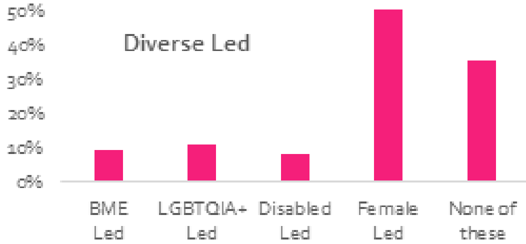
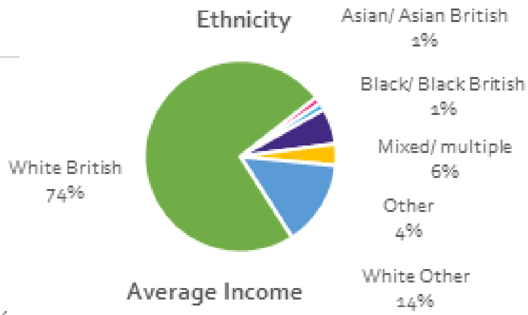
What the Creative Sector in Kent Needs

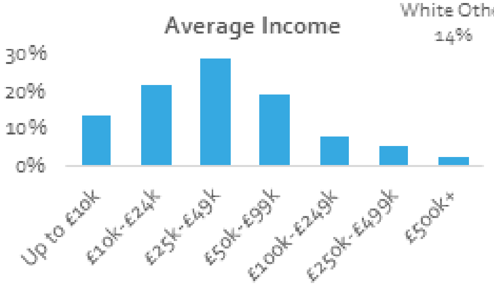


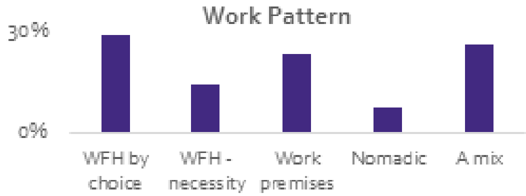
Who are the Creatives and how do they work?

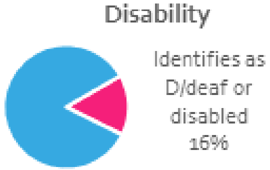












Data from a Creative Sector in Kent snapshot survey conducted on behalf of Kent County Council by RM Research, with 125 valid responses from those working in the Creative Sector in Kent. For more, please see the full evaluation report by RM Research: https://rmresearch.uk/bbb

What do Creatives in Kent want?

RMR

Creatives want more support to connect and grow

Venues and Spaces: general maker space with opportunities to meet other creatives

Financial support: grants to support core operation, acquire assets and upskill

Practical support: shared tools, data and equipment, childcare, careers advice and training

Business skills: fundraising, accounting and legal, data analysis, PR and marketing

Peer and networking: peer-brokerage, creative hubs, hybrid workshops and networking

Mental wellbeing: addressing areas above would aid this, plus fair pay, supervision and counselling

Our recommendations

Be a broker

- Link up national, regional and local initiatives with businesses/ creatives in Kent
- Signpost to existing and future support
- Identify need and offer targeted support

Needs of the Kent Creative Sector

This section draws on data from our survey, interviews and focus group to consider the needs of the Kent Creative Sector, outlining the shape of the sector and its challenges, presenting requests for support from creatives and their businesses in Kent, and provides a series of recommendations based on these.

Figure 15 Map of postcodes provided by Kent creatives via the survey. Base = 89

1.19. Shape of the Kent Creative Sector

The Kent creative sector is broad and diverse, with evidence of creative clusters around more populous areas of the county, drawn to Kent for the quality of life and opportunities available.

Many of these figures are compared with a similar recent survey from the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA), from which the survey questions were based. For more on this, see the Appendix.

1.19.1. Where the creatives are based

Large numbers of survey respondents were from four main areas: Folkestone, Thanet, Canterbury and Swale. Similar ratios were found in the Build Back Better grant applicants[15] and shows evidence of creative clusters in these areas.[16]

Figure 16 compares where Kent creatives told us they live, against population estimates for each of the Local Authorities[17], to see if the larger groups are simply due to larger populations in those areas. However, we can see that far larger numbers of creatives responded to the survey compared to the population for the four areas highlighted. This suggests some creative clustering that warrants further investigation. To explore this pattern, Kent County Council could look at developing further creative activity in some or all of these four areas.[18]

[15] For more, see Section 1 in the full report https://rmresearch.uk/bbb
[16] Please note - this data may be skewed by the word of mouth form of dissemination of the survey and to truly map the geography (and size and value) of the creative sector of Kent, further research should be commissioned to interrogate national statistics using business codes.

[17] https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/14725/Mid-year-population-estimates-age-and-gender.pdf
[18] For more on how to achieve this, see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1115486/Understanding_the_growth_potential_of_creative_clusters_-_accessible.pdf

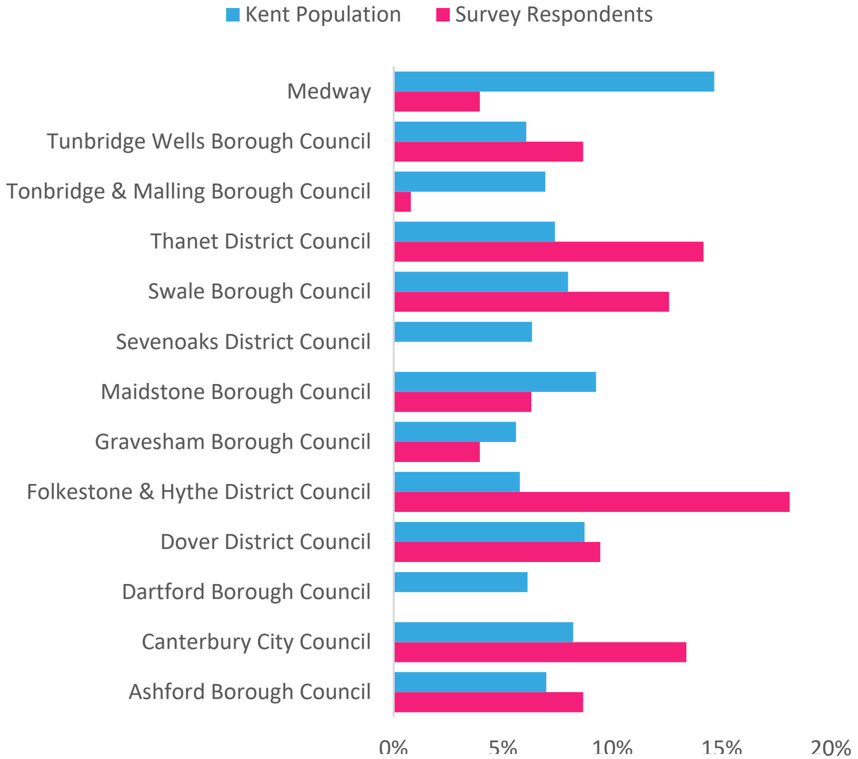


Figure 17 Local authorities wider sector survey respondents are based in. Base = 127

1.19.2. Kent creatives' work patterns

The creatives of Kent report a variety of workplace location – whether by choice or financial or practical necessity.

23% of people in the Kent creative sector travel to their work premise, such as a studio, workshop or office, compared with 43% in the ASELA survey. 8% have adopted a 'nomadic' work practice – travelling between coffee shops, trains, and co-worker spaces. 43% of people are working from home (WFH), 29% out of choice, and 14% out of necessity. 26% combine a mix of these working styles.

I mostly work from home until I am needed on set/location

Member of the Kent Creative sector

Of those who work from home, either by necessity or by choice, 41% find that it suits them, or is convenient, 13% do so because they have caring responsibilities.

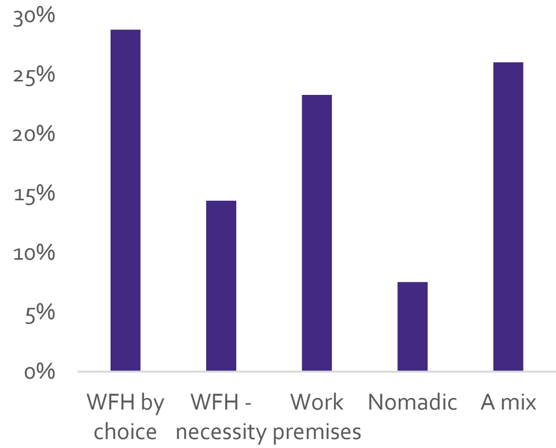


Figure 16 Working styles of creatives in Kent

17% would like to have a work premises but everything is too expensive for them, less than the 27% in the ASELA survey, and 21% would like a work premises but their income is not sufficient enough yet to warrant this, meaning overall 19% of creatives are held back from securing a premises due to cost.

Other considerations include that their home is warmer than their studio in winter, likely to be a bigger issue this year due to the fuel crisis than in previous years.

1.19.3. About their creative business or practice

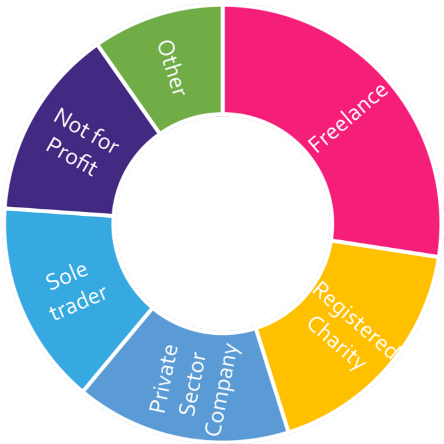


Figure 18 Types of creative practice/ businesses within the creative sector. Base = 113

Kent Creatives operate across most disciplines, with clusters around film, visual media and art, crafts and festivals.

58% of creatives chose more than one creative discipline.

42% are freelancers or sole traders, with another 32% working for not-for-profit organisations.

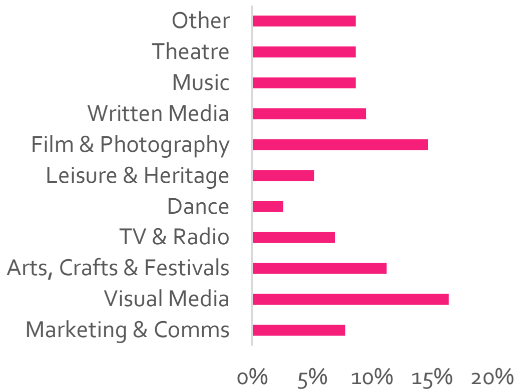


Figure 19 Main creative disciplines of Kent creatives. Base = 232

The creatives in Kent reported coming from a wide range of types of creative practices or business, but the clear majority, 42%, work for themselves, either as a sole trader or in a freelance capacity. 32% represented either registered charities or Not for Profit organisations. 10% described their practice or business in another way, such as public sector companies or as a creative individual, whose creative practice is not their main business.

On average, the creatives in Kent have been practicing for 16 years, although this ranged from as little as 1 year, to as many as 50.

57% of people started their creative business in Kent, with 4% saying they move around based on the best opportunities for their practice or business.

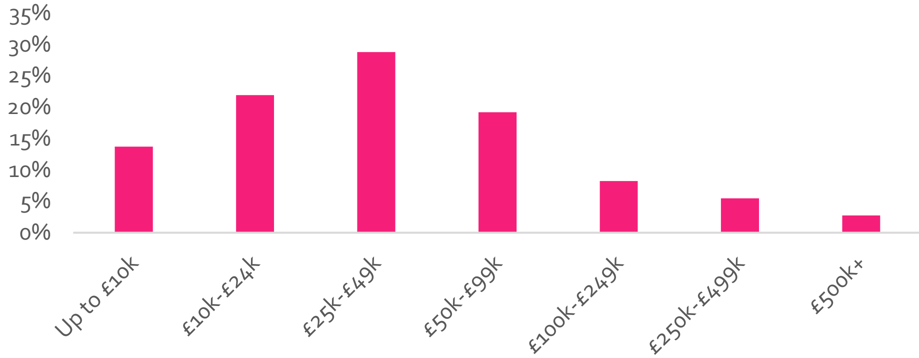


Figure 20 Average annual turnover/income from creative business/ practice. Base = 85

40% have been operating from Kent for at least some of the time, with half moving to Kent for the quality of life on offer, just over a third for family reasons, and 13% for the business opportunities.

Creative income or turnover ranged from £100 a year, to £1.1 million, with an average of nearly £120,000. The chart above shows a breakdown of average annual turnover/income from creative practice, which shows a good distribution of responses from across the breadth of the sector. The chart below shows a comparison of average turnover between types of Creatives and businesses. There are three natural stages: freelancers and sole traders are earning the least, Not for Profit organisations and Registered Charities are in the middle band, and private and public sector companies are turning over the most money. Creative individuals did not report any income or turnover from their creative work.

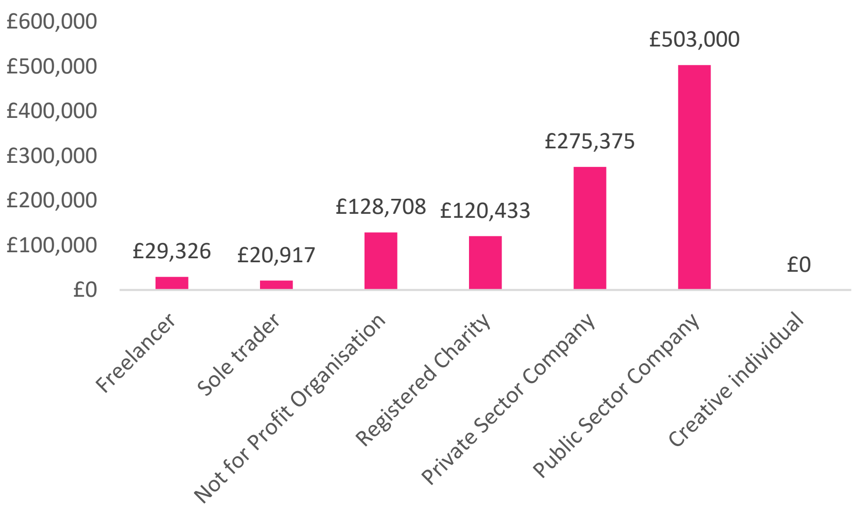


Figure 22 Average annual turnover/income for each creative business/ practice. Base = 85

38% regularly use physical production facilities outside of their own workspace or studio, 22% in Kent, 11% in London, and 5% elsewhere, including the rest of the UK, Europe, and beyond.

68% of creatives are PAYE employers, most commonly (over 60%) having between one and four employees, or regularly engage with freelancers, with a yearly average of around 13 freelancers. **61% have taken part in a skill development scheme, the most common being enlisting volunteers (32%) and informal mentoring (30%)**, with 83% saying they found them useful. Those that hadn't participated most often lacked capacity (20%) or lacked awareness of how to access them (20%).

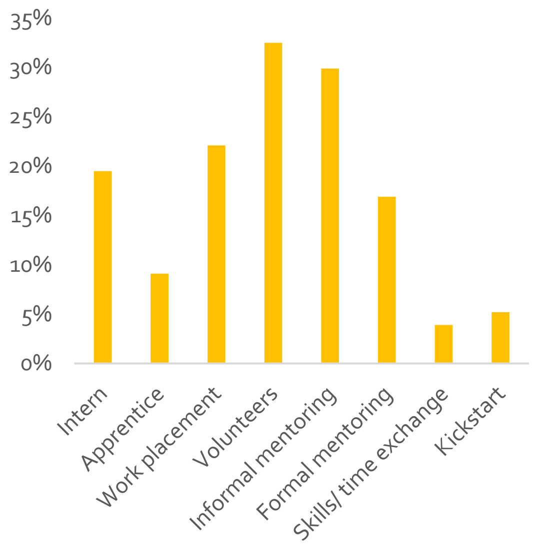
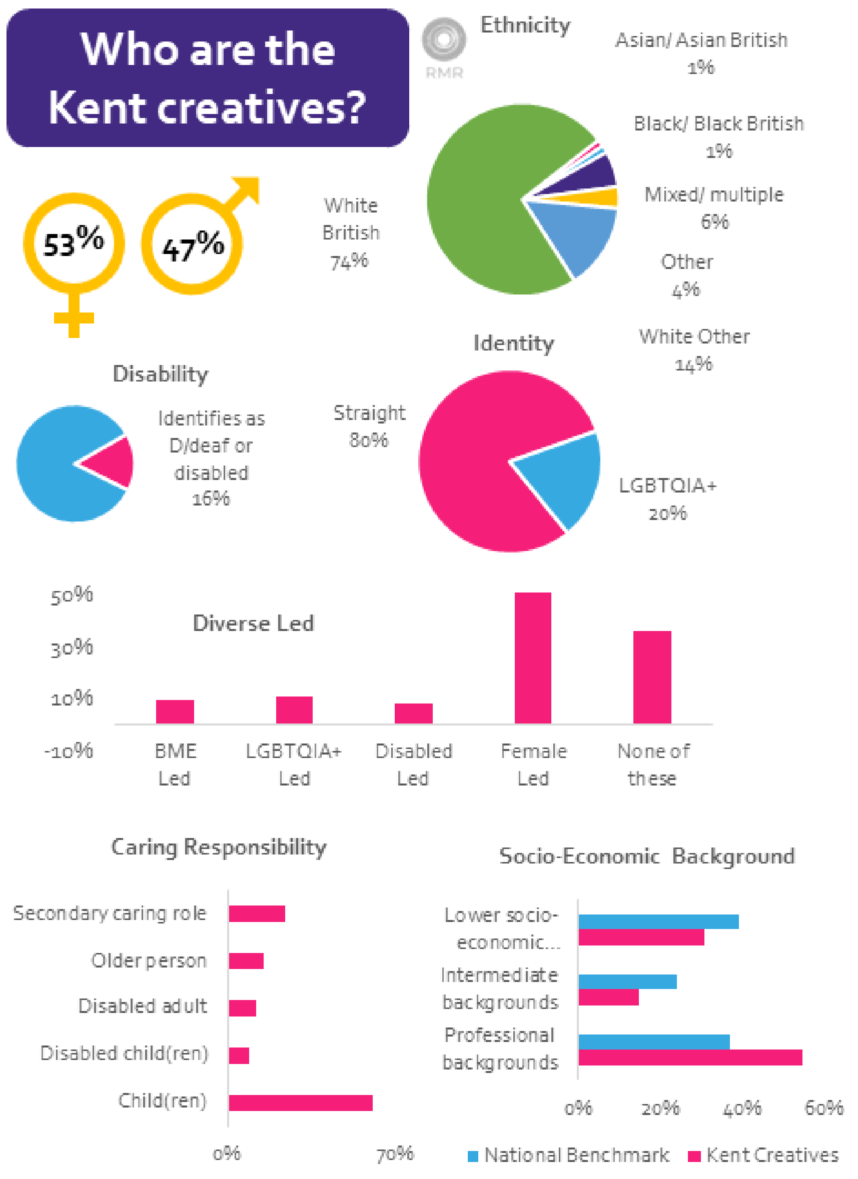


Figure 21 Uptake of skill development schemes. Base = 77, with 107 responses

1.19.4. About the creatives themselves

The infographic here provides an in-depth look at the demographic information provided by creatives in Kent. These demographics are largely in line with those for Kent, although more people identify here as LGBTQIA+, and there is a larger global majority, or less White British, than found in the Kent population in general. [19]

[19] https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/facts-and-figures-about-Kent



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1.20. Challenges of the Sector

We find a sector still reeling from the lockdown restrictions of the Covid19 pandemic, now thrust into a cost-of-living crisis, only exacerbating existing challenges such as the inherent culture of freelancers and volunteers in the creative sector and issues around size and capacity of these creative businesses and practices.

KCC needs to have more face to face meetings - even if only on Zoom in order to understand what organisations are going through to try and survive.

Applicant to Kent County Council's Build Back Better grant

1.20.1. Culture of freelancers and volunteers

68% of creatives polled employ people or engage regularly with freelancers. Of these, just 3% are purely PAYE, with 57% contracting freelancers and 41% doing a mix of both. These findings highlight the culture of freelancer work within the sector, which provides certain opportunities and flexibility, but in exchange for financial insecurity, risk of isolation, and less access to sufficient capacity and resources.

Grant reliant organisation, all bid writers are volunteers. We submit funding bids whenever time allows.

Unsuccessful Build Back Better applicant

Only 43% of the creatives felt they were able to find employees or freelance collaborators with the skill set, training and experience they needed. Some feel there are a lack of people with the experience or skills they need, especially in the local area:

All staff are volunteers and hard to find.

Member of the Kent creative sector

Music theatre professionals are mainly based in London and musicians with relevant experience can be hard to source in Kent.

Member of the Kent creative sector

Most of the experienced crew I need are clustered in London or other major cities.

Member of the Kent creative sector

One person highlighted that they feel like the creatives are out there, but they lack the networking opportunities to meet and collaborate with them.

Well, it's difficult to find other creatives to collaborate with. the skills are there but it is the networking and culture of collaboration I struggle to find.

Member of the Kent creative sector

We hoped to take a kickstart trainee but couldn't find anyone suitable.

Member of the Kent creative sector

A further problem raised is the cost of good quality skillsets:

I do not have funds for good quality skills.

Member of the Kent creative sector

1.20.2. Size of creative business or practice

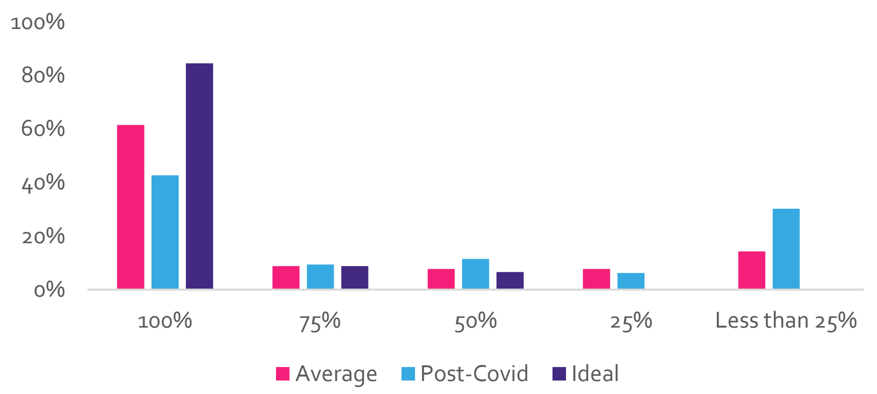

Figure 23 Percentage of turnover/income from creative practice/businesses for an average year, post-Covid, and their ideal ratio. Base = 91, 91 and 96 respectively

Figure 23 shows the average, post-Covid and ideal percentages for creative practitioners and businesses. These findings show that people are taking far less than before the pandemic, and far less than is their ideal, mirroring findings in the ASELA survey.

As noted, a majority of creatives work for themselves or in small teams. Indeed, research has found that 95.8% of creative enterprises in Kent are micro enterprises employing 10 people or less[20]. There is a feeling amongst creatives that the bigger 'fish' end up with the funding and resources, and the smaller ones are forgotten about.

A great deal of funding across the region goes to larger cultural organisations that have a large admin base, which

[20] https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/87429/Creative-Industries-statistics.pdf

uses up cultural money, which should support arts across the region. It would be helpful if funding was more evenly distributed, and a similar percentage went to smaller organisations, which is often where the real training and skills development is nurtured.

Member of the Kent creative sector

1.20.3. Impact of Covid19

Members of the creative sector were asked to estimate the percentage of their turnover or income that comes from their creative practice or business. They were asked to do this for an average year, such as 2019 due to it being before the pandemic, for the financial year 2021-2022, and what their ideal ratio would be. As noted the chart in Figure 23 shows that income from creative practice has reduced for a sizable proportion of creatives during the pandemic, with almost 20% now having to supplement their creative income with other sources compared to pre-pandemic rates. In fact, 70% of the creatives felt that their creative income had been negatively affected by the pandemic. Relating to this,

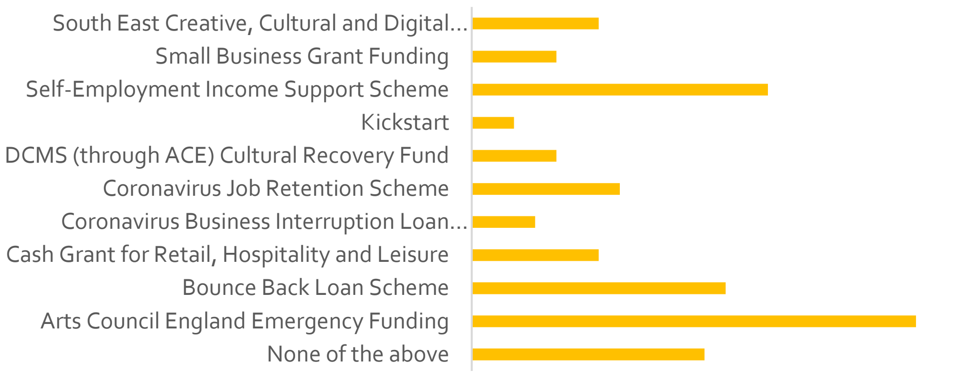

Figure 24 Financial support schemes accessed during the pandemic by the Kent creatives. Base = 90

people have shared the lack of available staff and collaborators with sufficient skills in the post-pandemic world:

Due to Covid many AV technicians changed careers so the ones that are left are now in huge demand. We can't run our business without them!

Member of the Kent creative sector

The data also highlights that none of the creatives want to earn less than 50% of their income through creative practice, and many more, almost half of the creatives we polled who were not already doing so, would like to move to solely supporting themselves with their creative income.

52% received financial support, with the most popular schemes being Arts Council England's Emergency Funding, and the government-funded Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) and Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBLS). 14% weren't aware that support was available to them, which is a similar proportion of people who were not aware of Kent County Council's Build Back Better grant, highlighting that around one in seven members of the creative sector are not receiving enough information to make informed decisions about their financial position.

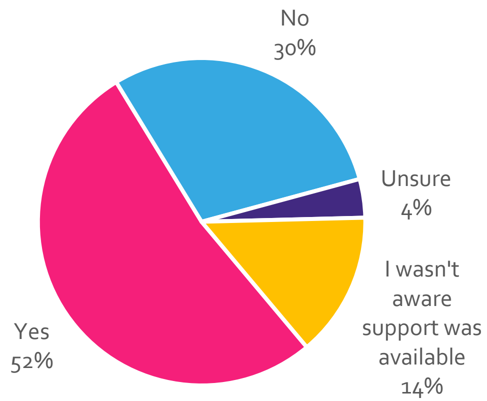

Figure 25 Who received financial support during the pandemic. Base = 105

I run a youth arts charity & we are closing at the end of Sept. The struggle to raise core costs in the post pandemic world has finally sunk us.

Member of the Kent creative sector

I was about to begin an internship programme before the pandemic.

Member of the Kent creative sector

1.20.4. Fundraising capacity

Small organisations don't always have the resources to go see and to network, as they are constantly either raising funds for project, or delivering their programmes. Project funded organisations cannot compete with core funded organisations, who have time to network and know where their next funding is coming from, so are able to plan longer term.

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

Some challenges that arose from the Build Back Better grant survey included capacity and ability to write grants. Several felt ill-equipped to write funding bids, either because of a lack of time within their team, or a lack of experience.

You assume that CIC have "bidding departments" who have time to bid and nothing else to do but for some of us, there are just one person who is running sessions and workshops and trying to bid for funding.

Unsuccessful Build Back Better applicant

Likewise, members of the focus group felt that funding tends to be project-based, and that this is not a sustainable model for career and talent development.

1.20.5. Cost of living

Creatives are suffering the double blow of the Covid19 pandemic followed all too quickly by the current cost of living crisis, not having had chance to recover in between.

Our costs are all going up, our workflow and cashflow haven't yet bounced back to pre-pandemic levels, and the 'cost of living crisis' isn't helping.

Member of the Kent creative sector

Many discussed ways they are trying to mitigate this, with several outsourcing to London, which could be a troubling financial and creative problem for Kent in the long run.

I have company registered in London due to cheap registered address services.

Member of the Kent creative sector

It is cheaper to rehearse in London - due to fare costs and venue costs.

Member of the Kent creative sector

Creatives also felt it was important that the effect of inflation on programming budgets was highlighted and recognised.

1.21. Support requests

Support requests are as varied as the creatives and their businesses themselves, but a core theme running through them in the need to connect and grow.

We need "officers" within the district council (and possibly county council) who are more creatively minded.

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

Figure 26 Average scores of support options. Scores range from 1 'Not useful at all' to 'Very useful'. Base = 103

Although all support options appealed to the group, the most popular ones revolve around being able to connect more and in more meaningful ways with other members of the creative industry, such as through local and regional support systems, and better local and regional peer networks.

I think peer review, 'coopetition '(ie cooperation and competition) is important for growth and developing the area as a creative hub or clusters etc. More links and co-operation between the various Kent areas. Artist quarters would be great.

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

1.21.1. Venues and spaces

We need a venue as KCC are trying to close the current venue at The Roundhouse Theatre.

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

21% of creatives did not feel that they needed additional physical production spaces, but of the 79% that did, the most popular were permanent or occasional project spaces, as well as some more industry-specific spaces like rehearsal space and filming studies.

Although Tunbridge Wells is renowned to be a creative area for freelancers, there is little or no work for me here. The film industry is not promoted, there are no nearby studios for producers to work in.

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

As a body of amateurs, we always suffer from a lack of venues in which to practice and musical training which do not incur unacceptable expense.

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

Likewise, 23% did not feel that they needed additional venues to support their creative practice. Of the 77% that did, almost half wanted further theatre and art exhibition spaces, and a third felt they would benefit from more live music, dance and independent cinema venues.

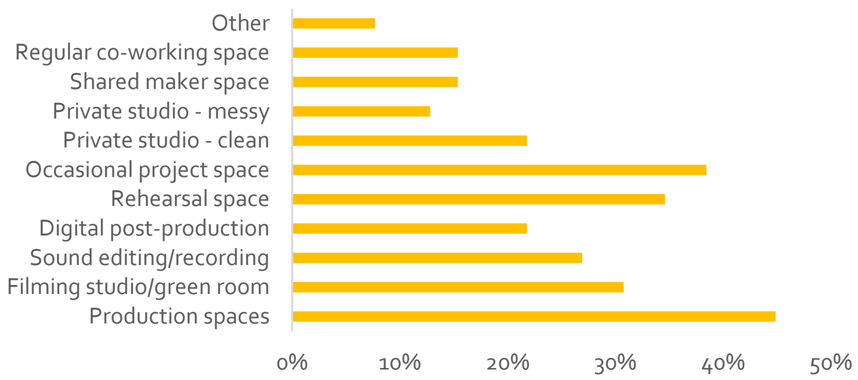

Figure 28 Physical space requests. Respondents were able to give more than one selection. Base = 78, with 211 responses

A major problem for me is finding space to present work or host events, particularly empty/meanwhile spaces with good footfall on e.g.high streets. Many liminal spaces have gone now...

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

Interestingly, the request for additional theatre venues is not related directly to the creative industries of the respondents – theatre was not one of the most common industries amongst the creatives we polled.

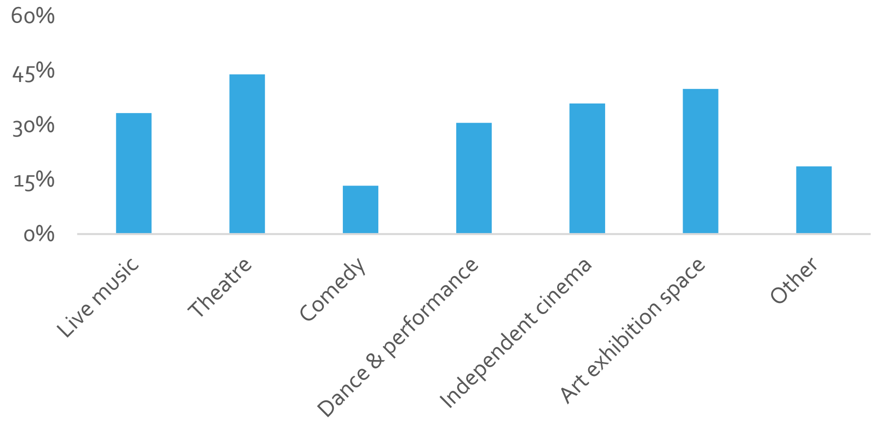

Figure 27 Venue requests. Base = 75, 162 responses

1.21.2. Financial support

Having the opportunity to apply for funds that reflected a more 'strategic partnership and supported some core costs would support sustainability, particularly at the more fragile end of the sector. As a delivery partner, it would also embed KCC's strategy in our work - and it would be important leverage for other funding applications, drawing more investment into Kent.

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

Whilst this was understandably one type of support that almost no one said they didn't want, financial support requests did vary widely across the sector, reflecting the varying nature of the challenges the creatives of Kent are facing in this post-pandemic, cost of living crisis landscape.

I've had to downsize my work through lack of financial support.

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

People want:

- Core funding grants, as opposed to more project or delivery-focused grants
- Help to be less grant-reliant
- Asset acquisition grants – such as obtaining a building as a community asset
- Grants for up-to-date equipment to support business growth
- Staffing/ freelancer cost grants
- Grants for training to upskill creatives, or subsidised places on Local Authority training courses
- Funded prizes for competitions to promote engagement
- Sponsorship-in-kind – such as accountants
- Funding to bring projects to Kent, or incentives to use local Kent resources rather than London-based
- Long-term and multi-year funding streams
- Zero- or low-cost lending opportunities

A recognition of the need for investment in organisational infrastructure - project-funding alone does not create successful, stable, effective and well-governed organisations.

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

1.21.3. Practical support

Practical support needs to come from those within the sector.

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

Given that the focus of many creative businesses or practices is their more artistic pursuits, many of them reported feeling like they lacked the skills or capacity to perform the more day-to-day tasks needed to thrive in the creative sector in Kent. Here we outline the practical support requests received from the creatives of Kent.

People want:

- Affordable and accessible workspaces
- Long-term admin support (project management, accountancy, design, marketing, cyber security)
- Outreach programmes, such as for local writers at theatres
- Access to shared tools and equipment
- CV, careers and job application support
- Childcare
- More help recruiting volunteers and board members
- Shared data and research repository
- More access to training and coaching

I need help/confidence on how to present myself and my skills to others, and how to value this work financially.

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

1.21.4. Business skills support

Business skills training has to be really specific to the needs and abilities of small scale creative industries, it's often too difficult to engage with as not 100% relevant.

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

Where practical support covers areas that people would like others to support them in, this section outlines where people would like to improve their own skills to support and grow their creative business or practice.

People want support with or to upskill in:

- Fundraising and lead generation
- Pensions, insurance, legal contracts, governance
- PR & advertising
- Time management
- Accountancy
- Social media, general IT skills, data analysis

1.21.5. Peer and networking support

It would be great to have a county wide support network.

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

Arguably the most popular offer of support after financial, most people felt some form of peer or networking support would be beneficial to either their creative business or practice, or to them personally.

People want:

- Peer brokerage and hub-based support
- Directory of other artists, freelancers or organisations for partnerships
- Networking events, both professional and informal
- Collaboration networks
- University and large arts organisation-supported events
- Hybrid workshop and networking events
- A networking platform
- More out of hours opportunities

Personally, I find it difficult to attend networking events because few fall outside of normal working hours (a lot of opportunities seem to be during the day, when I'm on the clock for my clients).

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

1.21.6. Mental wellbeing support

Personally I find relentlessly plugging my own work extremely tiresome given the limited interest by local bookshops, etc. which are all big chains and show no interest in helping local people sell their wares.

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

A lot of the creatives who discussed their mental wellbeing needs with us felt that this area could be addressed by putting support in place in other areas, such as practical, financial and peer and networking support. Issued raised here are more of a symptom of lack of support in other areas, leading to feelings of burnout and anxiety, rather than the route of the problem. Further, some felt this issue could only truly be tackled on a national scale with a substantive shift in mental health provision in this country.

The landscape is currently the main stressor and without immediate support to stabilise organisations will become intolerable.

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

People want:

- More financial security and fair pay
- Regular informal meet ups or coffee mornings to promote support and discussion with other creatives
- Support for counselling
- More signposting to available resources
- Clinical supervision
- Training in emotional intelligence
- A better work/life balance

I think we do OK on this front - possibly because we're a supporting partnership and we're not working in isolation? There's probably people who need this much more than us.

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

1.22. Support recommendations

Given the challenges in the sector and the country as a whole, the difference between support requests and what is possible is inevitably huge, however we feel there are some key changes which could be made to enhance efficiency and thus increase support without huge cost. As such our recommendations focus around these…

Our recommendation around communications (see 4.3 below) are the foundation on which to build better sector support. Making KCC more 'human' and approachable, explaining where you can (and can't) help, being clear in communications and recognising the heterogeneity of the sector, will provide a basis for addressing the support concerns.

Fundamentally there is one overarching principle which would help in providing support - becoming a better connector – a broker of information relevant to the creative sector in Kent.

This could take a number of forms, for example:

- **Link up national, regional and local initiatives with businesses**: For example, with the issue of venues, ensure creative businesses are aware of regional initiatives like SECEN's Creative Open Workspace Masterplan and Prospectus project and local development opportunities.

  Take individual issues you know business care about and build high quality information hubs that create these connections. You may have to limit the areas you can cover, but these should be driven by a combination of local business need and KCCs strategic vision for the sector.
- **Signpost to existing and future support**: Concerns about practical, business and mental health support are not confined to the creative sector. KCC should signposted to the local and national (general) business support available.

  Improved communications (as outlined below) with the sector would help with this, offering more opportunities to make businesses aware of the support available. Also there is the potential to more deeply explore partnership possibilities knowing that KCC may not be able to deliver but others can.
- **Identify need and offer targeted support**: Simply signposting out to others may not meet specific needs. Explore the support issues further to see if there are specific

creative sector needs that are not currently addressed. In be clear about where you can help, you both better define your offer and also manage expectations.

Look for opportunities to offer something targeted at the creative sector on which KCC can lead (or work with partners on), for example consider running (online, real world) surgeries for creative businesses with colleagues and partners who provide wider business support. This would meet the concerns expressed above, allow for more signposting but also give KCC visibility in the creative sector. This could include supporting grant applications or signposting to others who could. There may also be a benefit in building a toolkit for those advising and supporting creative businesses.