

Large Print format: An evaluation of the Freelance Task Force initiative December 2020



Making connections

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(Please note that the percentages in this report may not always add to up to 100% due to rounding.)

The Freelance Task Force (FTF) was created in April 2020, in response to the **Covid-19 pandemic** national lockdown and the crisis facing **freelance** theatre and live performance makers across the UK.

The act of creating the **Task Force** sent a clear message, demonstrating **solidarity** with freelancers and offered much needed **financial support** in a very challenging time.

The strength of support created a collective which was large for **constructive discussion** and the communication became overwhelming, but the **smaller working groups**, with shared purpose, had many **positive outcomes**. A range of valuable outputs were produced as well as a range of **softer outcomes**

Methodology overview

MHM were commissioned in October 2020 to undertake an independent evaluation of the initial phase of the Freelance Task Force (FTF).

MHM undertook a phased approach to the evaluation, starting with a gap analysis of existing data. This was followed by primary data collection, using three main mechanisms for feedback, with additional options provided for those with specific access needs.

We engaged the following groups during the research: Freelancers who were part of the FTF; sponsor organisations; freelancers from outside of the Task Force.

The evaluation was measured against the following 4 broad aims:

- A message of solidarity
- Increase communication and connection
- Representation, transparency, autonomy
- Financial support

This report synthesises the main findings of the research, with recommendations for any future iteration of the Task Force.

Executive Summary

The Freelance Task Force delivered **clear successes**, with significant evidence to support a **second iteration**. There are however **key learnings** to take on board in order to **maximise the benefits** and avoid repeating missteps.

Creating a national Task Force

The Freelance Task Force was created in April as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic national lockdown. Initiated by Fuel, 150 sponsor organisations joined together as a show of support for freelance theatre and live performance makers.

The Task Force offered paid work for 13 days over 13 weeks, for 169 freelance theatre and performance workers across the country. A message of solidarity and a commitment to increased communication were also included in the aims of the Task Force.

An objective, representative evaluation

While the difficult situation for our sector and self-employed people continues, there is also a need to pause and reflect. An external, robust evaluation was needed to assess what worked well and what could have been done differently.

MHM were commissioned to deliver a clear, actionable review of the Task Force process and outcomes in order to learn and shape any potential future Task Force activity. 100 Task Force Freelancers, 116 wider industry freelancers and 66 organisations took part.

A clear message of hope and solidarity

The act of creating the Task Force sent a clear message, demonstrating solidarity with freelancers in a very challenging time. The majority of freelancers felt that it was a sign of the sector coming together.

It was widely acknowledged that the sheer scale of the Task Force was ground-breaking: bringing together freelancers across the country and disciplines for the first time.

While experiences of the Task Force were very varied, there was a common sense that community and relationships between freelancers and organisations were further strengthened.

‘Taking hope from the solidarity that was present at the beginning of the process. The opportunity to lead discussions about the future and how to make things better.’

FTF Freelancer

Financial support small but crucial

The Freelance Task Force offered much needed financial support to a group of freelancers in a time of crisis. There was also some increased awareness on how to access support, but that did not reach freelancers outside the Task Force to the same extent.

There was broad confidence both within and outside of the Task Force that advocating for financial security was happening, but less clarity on its impact.

Fast set-up was essential but missed a step

The urgency of the situation, as venues closed and projects were cancelled, required the Task Force set-up to happen quickly. This was understood and appreciated, however it was also widely agreed that with more time the recruitment process could have been more open and fair.

Ownership was quickly handed over to the Task Force, however it seems that in the interests of ensuring autonomy, a key step of agreeing goals and priorities was missed.

There was a lack of clear overall shared purpose, which led to some tension, with differing perspectives on the most pressing needs: balancing the current crisis with tackling bigger, long-term issues.

A mechanism for agreeing and setting realistic, both short and long-term goals, is needed for any future activity.

Recommendation: second iteration, better funded, could reach further

The financial support provided by the Task Force was, for some, critical help during a crisis. It went some way towards filling a gap left in income for freelancers, when there were few other mechanisms to do so.

While much has changed since April, the challenging times are far from over. A future iteration of the Task Force, with greater funding, could increase and widen the reach of that support. It could also give some stability to a group who have been particularly impacted by the consequences of the pandemic.

Recommendation: full, fair open recruitment

A full, open recruitment process should be employed, with slightly longer lead time in a future iteration.

Alongside this, the representation/tracking process was successful in ensuring a diverse group and should be used again

Recommendation: a mechanism for setting shared, realistic priorities

With clearer over-arching goals in place, a process to set internal priorities is needed and must be accessible and democratic to ensure all voices have equal opportunity to be heard. This could be through elected leadership or a more formal process to vote on key short and long-term priorities. This process could be set-up by organisers of any future Task Force and paid-for staff may be able to aid in facilitation. However, it is recommended that ownership of and responsibility for internal priorities and realistic timelines for delivery is then taken on by members of the Task Force.

The momentum took on a life of its own

As ownership was handed over to the group, it seems there were conflicting views within the Task Force about whether or not to adopt any kind of traditional hierarchy. In the end, a hierarchy was rejected.

However, the group was too large for constructive discussion without any agreed structure or processes, and the desire to collaborate led to an overwhelming volume of communication that was difficult to keep up with or navigate. This pace was particularly challenging for those with additional access needs.

The choice to reject any formal hierarchy led to a natural one forming, but it was suggested that this gave more influence to those with privilege, while other voices went unheard. Furthermore, it meant no one was able to take full responsibility for necessary functions.

Recommendation: make administrative support an official, paid-for position

Greater structure and admin support/ coordination is needed to ensure the Task Force can function effectively at the same (or larger) scale. This should not be a person 'in charge' to set direction, but someone to facilitate, take responsibility and drive things forward. A formalised structure is also needed to allow decision-making and discussion in a large group to encourage shared value and purpose, whilst also allowing the diverse working groups to continue to progress their work without a consensus on all issues.

Recommendation: create a culture for autonomy and setting boundaries

Autonomy was a clear goal of the Task Force but this doesn't just happen naturally. A culture needs to be created to allow freelancers to feel able to set boundaries on their time and choose the level to which they can get involved, without feeling left behind.

This can be encouraged by the organisers and staff of any future Task Force iterations, but also needs to be something the Task Force members recognise and buy-in to.

Recommendation: create streamlined channels for communication

Communication needs to be streamlined. There needs to be greater differentiation between ‘need to know’ communications and optional active discussion, with opportunities for individuals to get involved in the issues they are most suited for/passionate about.

Administrative support provision should be the conduit for essential, Task Force-wide communications, through an accessible platform – potentially simply by weekly email. Other optional platforms can be used for ongoing discussion on specific topics.

Recommendation: ensure access needs are considered from day one

The addition of an Access Manager to the Task Force was a positive move. Any future iteration should have this kind of support built in from day one, with access needs considered in all communication. A formal induction to include access to resources, such as accessibility toolkits should also be considered.

Personal connections and have more impact

As discussed, the full Task Force was overwhelming in size, and without structure, interactions as a full group were at times viewed negatively. However, the smaller working groups with shared purpose had many positive outcomes. By creating personal connections, these groups allowed for peer support, listening, idea generation and progress on agreed issues.

Those actively involved in smaller groups were also much more easily able to feel satisfaction with their own contribution, while those only involved at a full Task Force level found it harder to see what they were trying to achieve, and therefore what was achieved.

Recommendation: retain working group model, maximise opportunities for personal interaction

Opportunity for personal connection should be maximised. Smaller working groups are well placed to enable optional discussion and progress on specific, focused issues that can then be fed back through central communication channels as needed. They can also be places for shared experiences, listening and support. Encourage freelancers to join a small number of working groups in order to gain personal benefits and satisfaction on achievement

Immediate impacts enhanced by long-term potential

In the 13-week duration, the Freelance Task Force produced a wide range of valuable outputs on a range of topics.

Organisations noted having read and shared these outputs and planned to take action based on their recommendation. However, there was definitely scope to increase awareness of these outputs amongst the full Task Force.

There was also a range of softer outcomes for some individuals (such as improved confidence, exposure to different ways of thinking and learning around accessibility needs).

The Task Force has sown the seeds for a lasting network, the benefits of which could outlast the immediate crisis.

Recommendation: external funding, with structure, will allow greater independence

Performance organisations should still be involved in future iterations of the Task Force, to build on relationships and solidarity, but additional external funding will also empower freelancers more to have their own voice and direction.

Recommendation: plan now for future-proofing

Make plans now for both the ongoing crisis and the longer-term - to ensure progress continues to be built on. Future-proofing should be considered in the next phase so that long-term benefits can be maximised. For both organisers and members of the Task Force, the legacy of this work should be an ongoing consideration.

Recommendation: create a central, lasting repository for outputs

A lot of excellent work was undertaken by the Task Force that remains unknown. The volume was too big for it all to be shared, recognised and actioned immediately.

A longer-term solution for sharing is needed – a central online platform widely accessible for all to search and view all outputs in their own time.

Creating a national Freelance Task Force

The Freelance Task Force was created in April as a response to the COVID pandemic **national lockdown**. Initiated by Fuel, 150 sponsor organisation joined together as a **show of support** for self-employed theatre-makers and creatives.

The Task Force offered **direct employment** for 13 days over 13 weeks, for **169 freelance theatre and performance workers** across the country.

A message of solidarity and **increased communication** were also aims.

A time of significant uncertainty

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a very difficult time for the performing arts sector, and in particular for freelance theatre and live performance makers of all kinds.

As national lockdown meant venues closing and projects being cancelled, self-employed workers were left without support.

Through listening to its network of freelancers, Fuel observed a need to increase communication, show solidarity and push for financial support.

An urgent need to increase communication and hope

Joined by 150 theatre and performance companies and venues, an open letter was issued to self-employed theatre makers in the UK as a message of support. The letter suggested the creation of a national Task Force, aiming to ensure that:

- self-employed people's voices are heard in conversations about the future
- organisations are talking to self-employed people about what their needs are.

The Task Force provided much-needed financial support

Each sponsor organisation promised to support a self-employed person to join the Task Force, and they would be paid for their time.

AIMS: The Freelancer Task Force was set up...

1 A message of solidarity

To send a message of support to freelancers in the performance and theatre sector; with the aspiration of creating a feeling of hope and solidarity

2 Increase communication and connection

To increase communication between organisations and freelancers, to connect freelancers with each other nationally and provide a platform for freelancers to speak for themselves in crucial conversations

3 Representation, transparency, autonomy

To create a network that was representative and accessible, to operate transparently and to ensure autonomy for freelancers on how and what the Task Force delivered

4 Financial support

To offer short-term, and advocate for longer-term, financial support for self-employed theatre and performance makers

The Open Letter issued April 2020

This is a letter to self-employed and freelance theatre and performance makers in the UK. To the actors, playwrights, directors, choreographers, stage managers, designers, stage crews and set-builders to name just a few.

We really miss being with you during this period of lockdown. Making theatre and performance is a collaborative endeavour, so we are particularly affected by having to be apart from one another right now. We're not able to come together, in the same space, to share the experience of a live performance.

We're not able to practise and enjoy our art form in its most basic form. It's now looking increasingly likely that won't be possible for months to come, and we recognise that many freelancers face real uncertainty about if and how they will be able to continue to work in theatre. 70% of people who work in theatre and performance in the UK are freelance or self-employed, and it's for this workforce, in all its diversity and complexity, that the impact of the current situation is most acute.

During these past weeks we have had conversations with many of you to understand your needs and the ways you have been affected. We are writing to express our support for you, and to lay out some practical steps we are taking to improve the situation based on these conversations. As well as exploring ways of producing work with freelancers during lockdown and using this time to develop new projects with freelancers for the future, we are also working together to coordinate our response to the government, to articulate clearly what we can offer and what we need.

Most urgently, we are calling for the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme to be extended in line with furloughing, for all self-employed workers, and in the specific case of theatre and performance workers, until theatres are able to safely reopen. We also want to see criteria removed from the scheme which are stopping legitimate and much-needed claims.

Some of you are already involved in these conversations. We welcome your voices and need to hear from more of you in the conversations to come. Your unique networks, skillsets, perspectives, and ideas are vital to the entire sector, and we need to work with you in our response to this crisis.

Each of the organisations who've signed this letter are committed to reaching out to their family of self-employed and freelance theatre makers; listening to how this is affecting your work and lives, and to your needs and ideas for the future.

More than that, we want to facilitate the establishment of a national task force of self-employed theatre and performance makers. The purpose of the task force is to strengthen the influence of the self-employed theatre and performance community. It would create ongoing points of connection between freelancers and organisations and amplify the voice of the self-employed in the conversations to come. To help establish the task force, each of the organisations signing this letter will support a freelancer to join the group, ensuring they are paid for their time.

We want to offer a message of hope and solidarity. Our well-practised ability to work together, to form connections, and build relationships will help us through this. One day, hopefully soon, we will all be able to meet together, as people have done for centuries, in a shared space, for a shared experience. In the meantime, we remain committed to working for you and with you towards a sustainable future for theatre and performance.

Swift action with commitment to transparency

The urgency of the situation drove swift action. The Task Force was set up fast, and gained momentum. In total 169 freelancers were recruited by sponsor organisations to the Task Force for a period of 13 weeks.

Over 30 different job roles were represented.

For necessary speed, recruitment processes and terms of contract were set by individual organisations, rather than a standardised Task Force approach. However, this was done with a commitment to transparency.

While not consistent across all involved, the terms of participation – including fees – were shared openly

Founded on principals of representation

A tenet of the Task Force was to ensure representation across a range of factors: age, gender (and gender identity), ethnicity, discipline, sexual orientation, and disability.

To achieve this, a representation tracker was set up – monitoring key profile details of freelancers as they were recruited.

Freelance Task Force demographic profile

Ethnicity

White	50%
Black/Black British	20%
Asian/Asian British	11%
Mixed race	6%
Other ethnicity	19%

Disability

Disabled	21%
Neuro-diverse	8%
Learning disabled	under 1%
Non-disabled	71%

Age

19 and under	-
20-34	53%
35-49	40%
50-64	8%
65+	0%

Class (self-identified)

Upper	-
Upper Middle	1%
Middle	36%
Working	62%
Lower	1%

Gender(identity)

Female	69%
Male	29%
Trans	2%
Non-binary	under 1%
Other identity	under 1%

Geography

London	46%
South West	11%
South East	8%
Wales	7%
Scotland	6%
East Midlands	6%
Yorkshire & the Humber	5%
North West	4%
West Midlands	3%
North East	3%
East Anglia	1%

The Freelance Task Force summary in numbers

1 national Task Force

169 self-employed theatre makers

150 sponsor organisations

More than **20** working groups

13 weeks

343 days of employment

£333k budget

13 central meetings

Substantial and wide-ranging outputs produced

Once part of the Task Force, members had flexibility on how they would participate. There was a standard contract for engagement but no set criteria for taking part. There were regular meetings they could attend and ongoing communication amongst the group. Working groups on specific regions, identities or topics were available to join and these groups often produced reports or resources. Task Force members were also able to run independent projects with their time if they chose.

An objective, representative evaluation

While the difficult situation for our sector and self-employed people continues, there is also a need to **pause and reflect**. An external, robust evaluation was needed to assess the **successes, challenges and learnings**.

MHM were commissioned to deliver a clear, actionable review of the Task Force **process and outcomes** in order shape any potential future Task Force activity. **100 Task Force Freelancers**, 116 wider industry freelancers and 66 organisations took part.

A need to reflect, learn and plan for the future

As the initial planned run of the Task Force concluded, there was a need to reflect on how it had evolved.

It was clear that there had been both invaluable successes and significant challenges in the set up and ongoing operation of the Task Force.

Fuel recognised the need to evaluate and learn before proceeding with, or advocating for, any further activity.

External perspective and expertise was required

It needed an external partner to bring fresh eyes and an impartial perspective to the Task Force evaluation.

The right expertise was also required to bring together data from a range of sources into a clear analysis of what happened, and why. Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (MHM) were commissioned as impartial, skilled and experienced evaluators.

A thorough, phased approach

To balance both the need to move quickly, and the requirement for thorough, robust insight, MHM undertook a phased approach, offering all involved a choice of three mechanisms for feedback: a short online survey, a video Q&A or a simple 'message board'

Freelance Task Force evaluation process

Phase 1 - Existing data review and gap analysis

Task Force meeting minutes

Mid-point freelance survey

Background context documents

Notes from organisation meeting

Reports produced by working groups

Phase 2 - Multiple options for new data collection

Short online survey

Video Q&A

Simple shared Google Sheet

1-2-1 interviews or email to meet access needs

Phase 3 - Analysis, interpretation and insight

All synthesised into one over-arching summary report and recommendations.

A strong response, broadly representative of the Task Force

There was a strong response to the survey and 100 FTF freelancers provided feedback on their experience (equating to 59% of the overall Task Force).

The majority of responses were made via the online survey (79 in total).

A further 21 were received either via the shared Google sheet, using a simple word template or through a one-to-one chat using Zoom (offered to those with specific access needs).

A diverse sample of responses

The profile questions were only asked to those who completed the online survey, in order to keep the alternative options as simple as possible.

The sample of 79 freelancers who completed the survey was broadly representative of the Task Force as a whole, with good representation from across the UK and by job role.

Age range, gender and gender identity was closely matched to the representation of the Task Force, while the proportion of responses by BAME freelancers was slightly under (42% vs 50%).

The proportion of responses by those identifying as part of the LGBTQI+ community was slightly higher in our sample (38% vs 21%).

One fifth of respondents of the online survey identified as having a disability (vs 29% within the Task Force itself), but we know this sample is likely to be higher once we take into account the additional 21 responses not gathered through the survey.

Valuable insight from organisations and the wider industry

Overall, 66 responses were received from organisations, covering a good geographical spread across the UK (a sample of 44%).

A shorter version of the FTF freelancer survey was also sent to freelancers outside of the Task Force and 116 responses were received.

The survey was distributed via existing networks and via the Fuel Twitter feed. This means that the sample is not representative of the self-employed industry in any way, but the responses have been interpreted to be indicative of an external perspective.

A clear message of hope and solidarity

The act of creating the Task Force sent a **clear message**, demonstrating **solidarity** with freelancers in a very challenging time. The majority of freelancers felt that it was a sign of the **sector coming together**.

It was widely acknowledged that the sheer scale of the Task Force was **ground-breaking**: bringing together freelancers across the country and disciplines for the first time. While **experiences** of the Task Force were **very varied**, there was a common sense of community.

Relationships between freelancers and organisations were **strengthened**.

The act of creating the FTF immediately showed solidarity with freelancers

The creation of the Task Force at such a challenging time in the industry, had the immediate effect of providing some hope and solidarity amongst the freelance community. It was clear action in a moment of uncertainty.

More than half of the of Task Force freelancers (58%) agreed that the FTF made them feel that the sector was coming together in support (23% were neutral). 43% of freelance respondents who were not part of the Task Force also agreed, indicating that the existence of the Task Force itself showed some solidarity, even to those not actively participating.

46% of the Task Force agreed that the FTF made them feel more hopeful about their place in the sector.

Similarly, just under half (46%) agreed that the FTF made them feel more hopeful about their place in the sector (28% were neutral). While this was not a universal feeling, it's important to remember the timing of all live performance being put on hold.

'Taking hope from the solidarity that was present at the beginning of the process. The opportunity to lead discussions about the future and how to make things better.'

FTF Freelancer

It provided an opportunity for purpose: to support a wider network of freelancers

Many freelancers within the Task Force also appreciated the opportunity to provide advocacy and support to colleagues outside of the Task Force, giving a sense of purpose and service.

'Being able to be 'of service' to freelancers outside of the FTF. To feel like I was making a difference at a crucial and challenging moment in time.

FTF Freelancer

Organisations wanted to listen and enable freelancers to be heard

Sponsor organisations appreciated the opportunity to provide, not only the financial support, but also some emotional support and amplification to freelancers, recognising the power imbalance that exists in the sector (as freelancers do not often have a voice in larger conversations).

Being involved with the FTF gave them the opportunity to listen to the issues that freelancers faced, whilst enabling a platform for them to have their own voice. Some organisations also recognised the opportunity for bold ideas to be expressed, independently from organisations and buildings.

‘To both help a freelancer financially, to raise the profile of freelancers in the sector and amplify the conversations that were happening about the vital and overlooked role (and unequitable position) of freelancers in our sector.’

FTF Freelancer

Fuel was praised for its leadership and trusted communication

Organisations acknowledged Fuel’s leadership, enabling the initiative to happen. They recognised the speed which was needed to get the FTF together and they appreciated the excellent communication from trusted colleagues.

'Fuel were the right organisation to make the invitation, trusted by both organisations and freelancers it seemed. Very good information, created quickly and under pressure, and good contact throughout.'

FTF Freelancer

The scale was ground-breaking – connecting freelancers nationally

The groundwork done to make the group as representative as possible was recognised and highlighted the scale of the freelance sector across the country.

Those involved in the Task Force, as well as some freelancers on the outside, recognised that this was the first time that a disparate group of freelancers, from diverse disciplines across the arts and across the country, had come together to collaborate.

This kind of network had not existed on this scale before and created connections that can have lasting impacts.

‘Bringing a diverse section of the sector together, allowing a voice and representation across the board; allowing the industry to move forward in an inclusive and representative way.’

FTF Freelancer

There were some challenges with having a national representation however, and it was noted by some that the diverse needs, situations and differing government responses of the four devolved nations of the UK were not accounted for (consideration of the Welsh language, for example).

The Task Force provided a mechanism for a collective voice for freelancers

The FTF provided an important platform for the collective voice of freelancers at a time when their voice really needed to be heard.

It ensured that the industry did not forget about them and allowed many voices to feed in.

'We had a voice in the important industry meetings. This gave us, as freelancers, a grounding - a way we could stand up for freelancers and say that we were part of the freelance Task Force. [That] felt like it gave us a level of recognition.'

FTF Freelancer

It opened up important conversations within the industry

Just under two thirds (63%) felt part of important conversations and informed about the future.

Representatives from the Task Force also became the voice for freelancers in conversations with funders and policy makers, to which they would not normally have access.

'The opportunity to meet with representatives of sector organisations (Equity, SOLT/UK Theatre, ACE, etc.) as they were engaged in time-sensitive conversations with Government was invaluable and enabled the groups that I was involved with to communicate important information quickly to freelancers outside of the Task Force.'

FTF Freelancer

This was also felt by organisations who hoped that freelancers would find a unified voice, both nationally and regionally, which would impact more widely.

63% felt part of important conversations about the future.

Solid freelancer/organisation relationships were strengthened

Both the sponsor organisations and freelancers felt that they already had good working relationships, however there is evidence this process has in many cases strengthened these relationships further.

'It was strong, supportive and productive. We gave our freelancer space to do what they wanted to - offered guidance where it was needed but really wanted them to lead their work in a supportive environment... We intend to continue the working relationship beyond the taskforce.'

Sponsor organisation

This inspired more honest, open communication

The process removed some barriers and allowed for more honest communication.

Many sponsor organisations felt that conversations within the Task Force had given freelancers the opportunity to raise issues and push for discussion. This was also felt by some freelancers.

'I feel more confident that I can voice concerns or questions I have due to the fact that they have signed up to the 5 Guiding Principles [report produced by the Task Force], so I can use that as a support mechanism if I see issues that do not line up with those principles.'

Sponsor organisation

Financial support small but crucial

The Freelance Task Force offered **much needed financial support** to a group of freelancers in a time of crisis. There was also some increased awareness on **how to access support**, but that did not reach freelancers **outside the Task Force** to the same extent.

There was **broad confidence** both within and outside of the Task Force that **advocating for financial security** was happening, but **less clarity on its impact**.

The FTF created some financial support amidst the crisis

The practical support from organisations was felt amongst the group, who valued the immediate financial support, amongst so much uncertainty.

Around one fifth felt more positive about their own financial security since joining the Task Force (41% were neutral), however it was noted to be a critical help at a time where it was much needed.

‘The payment for the FTF ended up being a real-life saver for me, I believe a lot of work was done and continues to go on regarding the financial security of freelancers... Whilst my industry continues to be in crisis, I believe the time with the FTF helped me feel more grounded, less fragile and gave me access to many resources. Other work has come out of the FTF for me.’

FTF Freelancer

22% felt more positive about their own financial security

It generated additional support through relationships

A few also noted that the additional networking opportunities and closer relationships with organisations provided some additional work for them.

‘They have been really keen on supporting the work. They have given us support for our bid for the continuation of the work, and have paid me some extra days to continue work in the interim period.’

FTF Freelancer

Increased awareness of how to access financial support by those involved

Around 6 in 10 (59%) freelancers agreed that the Task Force increased their awareness of how to access financial support during these challenging times.

There were some reports of individuals sharing advice outside of the group, but without a central communications platform, those outside of the group were less clear where to go for information or progress on what the group was achieving.

'I feel like I was able to make my fellow freelancers aware of grants available to them and financial support which was being offered.'

FTF Freelancer

But a clearer mechanism for outside of the Task Force was needed

62% of freelancers outside of the task force disagreed that the FTF increased their awareness of how they could access support. This sample of freelancers is not representative of the wider freelance cohort overall, but demonstrates that improvements could be made to enable the group's work to be shared. Although the Task Force put some mechanisms for external communication in place, such as Twitter and the website, there didn't appear to be a process in place to enable agreement for these mechanisms to be widely used by the group. While it was not an explicit mandate of the group to share widely outside of the Task Force, this was perhaps a missed opportunity.

Comments suggest that those closer to Task Force members or those actively following the Twitter account were more likely to have some awareness of how to access support than those with no connections.

'I only recall seeing a few tweets from task force members about such topics, but they seemed to be personal opinions rather than any official advocacy or support from the task force as a body.'

Industry freelancer

There was broad confidence that the Task Force was advocating

67% of The Task Force and 59% of freelancers outside of the Task Force agreed that the Task Force was advocating for financial security for freelancers. There was a general confidence and hope that the group was having an influence on conversations around funding for the arts and it seemed apparent to most that positive steps had been made in opening up conversations.

'This is something I think the FTF has definitely had an impact on. Already organisations are paying freelancers to attend interviews now. I had never seen something like this before.'

Industry freelancer

But were less certain that the collective voice of the group was being heard

Although the group had confidence that some advocacy work was being done by the group, they were less sure whether the collective voice of the group was being heard by funders and policy-makers. Around one third (34%) agreed that the collective voice of the FTF was heard by funders and policy-makers (47% were neutral). Many did not feel that the Task Force was operating with a single and unified voice and some felt that this led to a missed opportunity.

'It's difficult to assess whether the 'collective voice' was heard, because FTF did not operate with a single and unified voice. It is not clear that it could. However, when presented with an opportunity, individual members of the Task Force were clear and forceful in their arguments to funders and policy-makers about the precarity which has been the foundation of our sector.'

FTF Freelancer

34% agreed that the collective voice of the task force was heard by funders and policy-makers

Recommendations for future:

A second phase, better funded, could reach further

The financial support provided by the Task Force was, for some, critical help during a crisis. It made some way to fill a gap left in income for freelancers, when there were few other mechanisms to do so.

While much has changed since April, the challenging times are far from over. A future iteration of the Task Force, with greater funding, could increase and widen the reach of that support and give some stability to a group who have been particularly impacted by the consequences of the pandemic.

Fast set-up essential but missed a step

The **urgency** of the situation required set up to happen **quickly**. This was appreciated, however it was also widely agreed that with **more time** the **recruitment process** could have been more **open and fair**.

Fuel and the sponsor organisations were keen to **empower** the Task Force to **act autonomously** and **ownership** was quickly handed over. But it seems that this aim led to a key step of **setting goals** and priorities to be **missed**. There was a lack of clear overall shared purpose, which led to some **tension**, with differing perspectives **balancing** the **current crisis** with talking about bigger, **long-term issues**.

A mechanism for agreeing and setting realistic **both short and long-term goals** is needed for any future activity

The urgency of the situation required a fast set up

It's important to remember that the FTF was created in an unprecedented time, not only in the industry, but nationally and globally.

The individual pressures which many people were facing were substantial. The uncertainty, anxiety and lack of connection required a quick response, which was delivered by Fuel and partners very successfully.

However, this did mean moving ahead with limited time to plan. Whilst freelancers generally appreciated the need for fast action, many felt some impact from the hasty set-up.

'I recognise that FTF was set up with urgency and with kindness towards the freelance community. However, the haste may have led to difficulties for those who ended up taking part in FTF.'

FTF Freelancer

'It felt a tricky balance to recruit and have a process which seemed fair and equitable in a short space of time.'

Sponsor organisation

Organisations who joined later felt rushed

Whilst the need for a fast set-up was understood, some organisations (especially those who joined later on in the process) felt that the process was rushed.

'We heard about the idea very close to the first deadline, so our recruitment process was rather rushed and not done in the way I would have liked had we had more time. I totally understand that Fuel were trying to respond to and manage a very fast changing situation but it wasn't the ideal start for those who joined the initiative later.'

Sponsor organisation

With more time, recruitment could be more open and wide-reaching

Some organisations appreciated the flexibility within the timescale to implement different approaches to recruitment.

‘For us, it worked well, we were able to consult with freelancers to devise and agree a recruitment strategy.’

Sponsor organisation

But others noted the inconsistency and many commented that they would adopt an open hire approach if they were to do it again. Some also felt that there could have been more clarity from the start about what was required of them.

‘Recruitment was confusing - we weren’t sure if we were meant to get on with it or if there was a structured, equitable process across all participating organisations.’

Sponsor organisation

Feedback suggests that there was a general understanding from freelancers about why the recruitment process was quick and not consistent across organisations.

But around half (52%) disagreed that the process and criteria for recruitment of the FTF was transparent and clear. A similar proportion of freelancers from outside of the group (50%) also disagreed with this statement. The differing fees paid by organisations also caused some initial friction within the group. This could be addressed with more time, planning and a consistent recruitment approach.

'There was an issue which arose early on about how each member of the Task Force was being paid a different amount and being expected to work the same amount of hours. I found this problematic.'

FTF Freelancer

After initial set up, ownership was quickly handed over to the Task Force

Once the freelancers and organisations had signed up to the process, to enable complete autonomy, the ownership of the FTF was quickly handed over to the collective. There was a desire from the organisations involved to empower the Task Force to make decisions, rather than giving direction.

This again emerged from a desire to recognise the power imbalance and give more autonomy to freelancers.

'We liked the arms-length aspect of the Taskforce. We felt that it was important to empower our freelancer to use the opportunity as they saw fit given their own circumstances, needs and wishes. We avoided making any organisational demands upon them. We thought that light touch oversight was really important.'

Sponsor organisation

The desire for autonomy also meant the group was set-up without structure. Instead, around 30 freelancers volunteered to facilitate the initial meeting to get things moving, but also created tensions as there was no opportunity for agreement.

A crucial step of agreeing shared purpose was perhaps missed

Feeling of urgency and need to get going meant that the group did not commit time to agreeing a shared purpose or setting any explicit goals.

67% of Task Force members disagreed that they were clear on the goals of the FTF and how they could contribute

A list of burning questions was collated in the second week, as a mechanism for setting shared priorities, but without an agreed plan to take these forward they did not transform into action.

The size of the group, without a formal structure also exacerbated this issue (explored more in the next chapter).

This resulted in a lack of clarity over the collective priorities, the overall direction and how individuals could contribute to the bigger picture.

Around two thirds (67%) disagreed that they were clear on the goals of the FTF and how they could contribute (20% were neutral).

In future, the desire to create autonomy should be paired with some parameters or mechanism for decision-making: real empowerment requires some boundaries rather than total freedom.

Some organisations also recognised the need for a session on shared goals and realistic targets that the group could consider collectively.

‘Although we didn’t want to dictate a process to the freelancers, a session on shared goals and realistic targets would have been good (if potentially frustrating).’

Sponsor organisation

Leading to uncertainty about the collective power of the group

The lack of shared goals appeared to result in confusion over whether or not the group was a ‘force’ to speak as a unified voice or to drive change. Many were unclear on the commonality of the many different strands of work which developed throughout the process. This is a clear learning for any future activity – setting shared goals can increase community, purpose and feeling satisfaction over own contribution.

‘It felt like we were being described as a force, then an experiment and it wasn’t so clear on our directions. Even if we didn’t have to have one voice, it would have been great to still have a commonality.’

FTF Freelancer

Lack of commonality led to internal pressure and tension

The vast extent of talent and creativity within the group meant that, inevitably, there would be some ambitious ideas and agendas set.

‘The things I have most valued have been...being involved in radical thinking about changes to the sector, and a feeling of connection and activity across the long months of this year.’

FTF Freelancer

But some of these long-term aspirations created an internal pressure to achieve within the 13-week timescale. This pressure was not set externally by Fuel or sponsor organisations but instead generated by the momentum of the group. Realistic short-term goals, balanced with longer-term aspirations would help address this.

An opportunity for radical thinking or a time to work with the industry?

Whilst much of the work initiated laid solid foundations for future collaboration and positive change within the industry, this led some to question whether it was the right time for such ambitious agendas.

There appeared to be some tension within the group between those who saw an opportunity to be bold and radical and those who wanted to use the time to address the more immediate concerns, as a collective.

Some freelancers saw an opportunity to grow through the crisis and to work towards radical change to the theatre ecology. They didn't necessarily see this as a priority which required a unified voice, but one which could be worked on within the sub-groups, with like-minded people.

‘The Task Force missed an opportunity to address the immediate crisis, and I (and others I spoke to within the Task Force) felt incredibly alienated as a result.

‘Some people were really radical and wanting to make radical changes to the ecology of the industry, forgetting that the industry was on the verge of collapse and there was a more immediate problem.’

FTF Freelancer

Fair Pay was also an issue which divided the group’s priorities

There were some similar challenges around whether it was the right time to be discussing issues such as fair pay, when the industry was in such crisis. Again, setting clear, realistic common goals for the collective (whilst still allowing for ongoing conversations around longer-term change) would help create a balance and address this tension.

With the lack of agreement around the overall purpose of the group and the many different agendas set, there were some who thought it was not the right time to be addressing these issues.

34% agreed that progress had been made in advocating for fair pay/practice within the sector

'All this talk about fair pay from an industry in an enforced coma, where staff are being made redundant in droves, where they have no box office income and their buildings are closed to the public, I honestly don't understand if this is the right time to be discussing fair pay. Fair pay for a show you can't make or operate?'

FTF Freelancer

However, around a third of Task Force members agreed that progress had been made in advocating for fair pay, indicating that despite the tension, useful conversation appear to have been had.

Recommendation: full, fair open recruitment

A full, open recruitment process should be employed, with slightly longer lead time in a future iteration.

Alongside this, the representation/tracking process was successful in ensuring a diverse group and should be used again.

Recommendation: a mechanism for setting shared realistic priorities

With clearer overarching goals in place, a process to set internal priorities is needed and must be accessible and democratic to ensure all voices have equal opportunity to be heard. This could be through elected leadership or a more formal process to vote on key short and long-term priorities. This process could be set-up by organisers of any future Task Force and paid-for staff may be able to aid in facilitation. However, it is recommended that ownership of and responsibility for internal priorities and realistic timelines for delivery is then taken on by members of the Task Force.

The momentum took on a life of its own

As ownership was handed over to the group, it seems there was a vocal desire within the Task Force to **avoid** any kind of **hierarchy**.

However, the group was **too large** for constructive discussion and the desire to collaborate led to an **overwhelming** volume of **communication** that was difficult to keep up with or navigate. This pace was particularly **challenging** for those with additional **access needs**.

The lack of formal hierarchy led to a **natural one** forming, but it was suggested that this gave **more influence** to those with privilege, while other voices went **unheard**. Furthermore, it meant no one was able to take **full responsibility** for necessary functions.

A noble desire within the group to avoid hierarchy

The desire to avoid traditional hierarchy within the structure of the FTF was a noble intention, which recognised the power balance sometimes experienced by freelancers and organisations. It intended to create an autonomy to be creative, independent of organisations.

‘A non-hierarchical approach was incredibly inspiring...’

FTF Freelancer

No mechanisms in place for constructive discussions and decision-making

Despite the immediate feelings of solidarity felt by bringing 169 freelancers together in one place to discuss the shared challenges, the lack of any formal structure meant that there were no mechanisms in place for constructive discussions and decision-making.

There were also differing opinions within the group about whether or not a traditional hierarchy was needed.

Some freelancers argued that it was possible for effective progress to be made without agreement from the whole Task Force and that a unified voice was not necessary for all issues, yet it seems that without an overall shared purpose the large group meetings were not constructive.

52% disagreed that the structure allowed for inclusion and shared, equal participation.

30% disagreed that their voice was heard and reflected within the FTF.

'There seemed to be an agenda of deconstructing power that limited the collective power of the group.'

FTF Freelancer

Meaning not all voices were heard

The challenges which the lack of structure brought to a group of this size, as well the absence of a central communications process from the outset, made it impossible to enable all voices to be heard. Around half of the Task Force freelancers (52%) disagreed that the structure of the FTF allowed for inclusion and shared, equal participation.

'I never felt listened to, hence my job was therefore to listen....The size of the taskforce was probably challenging - possibly should have been divided into smaller groups from the off.' **FTF Freelancer**

51% disagreed that the structure of the FTF enabled effective ownership by the freelancers.

A perceived natural hierarchy, based on power or privilege, emerged

Whilst the intention of autonomy and a freedom to work without hierarchy was acknowledged by many as brave and necessary, the lack of a formal structure and need for decision-making, meant that a natural hierarchy formed within the group.

There was a perception by many freelancers that this hierarchy was based upon those who had the most time, technical ability or those who were able to make their voices heard. Some felt that the pace and expectations were therefore set by those most privileged.

'I also felt that there was a slight class problem at the start, with people insinuating 'poorer' people didn't need to do the work if they didn't have time, this felt like an attack and felt like only privileged people should be leading because they had the capacity.'

FTF Freelancer

The lack of structure meant that finding a way to engage in the Task Force was a job in itself

Without a formal structure in place, and the rapid pace of change, some felt unsupported in the set-up process. Some freelancers felt that significant efforts were undertaken at the start of the process to ensure a more equitable way of working.

The Open Space model which was put in place at the start of the process was seen as effective for early exploration, creativity and inclusion but was viewed by others as ineffective for decision-making.

With no clear accountability

With no elected or appointed leadership, there was a lack of clarity on ownership of what was delivered, as well as no clear central point of contact for fielding enquiries or addressing issues or concerns.

A small group of freelancers formed an administrative team at the start of the process and worked hard to create communication channels and help to ensure that meetings were accessible.

But this was a difficult ask. On reflection, many freelancers commented that clearer structure and framework for decision-making from the outset would have saved a lot of effort spent on admin and provided more time for creativity.

'If this were to happen again I hope more care, time and resource can be put in by the organisations to ensure this doesn't fall to freelancers in the cohort, who then spent their 13 days simply administrating the structure, rather than being able to engage in it.' **FTF Freelancer**

Coordination and administrative support should be considered as a paid-for role in future iterations, allowing the wider group to use their time in other ways.

A desire to collaborate resulted in overwhelming communications

The noble intentions of the group to be fully collaborative and keep everyone informed, resulted in high volumes of communication in many directions. This left many feeling that it had become chaotic and overwhelming, and some felt excluded because they couldn't keep up with the fast pace.

'Even whilst able to access these methods of communication, I found the opening few weeks completely overwhelming - it was like trying to run a tech and perform a show at the same time.'

FTF Freelancer

What was seen as a collective energy for some, was overwhelming for the majority.

'I am neurotypical but still felt overwhelmed by the volume of emails and pace at which the Task Force was working.'

FTF Freelancer

Multiple communication platforms made it difficult to keep up with conversations

This was exacerbated by the many communications platforms involved (e.g. Twitter, email, Slack, WhatsApp). Conversations were happening at different paces with different groups and across many different communication platforms.

This meant that when they did have the time to catch-up, some were not sure where to look first.

Slack in particular, chosen by the group as a platform for conversations, was found to be overwhelming and not always a safe space.

‘Often people with other skillsets were spending an inordinate amount of time on administration of their own meetings/initiatives etc - learning to navigate Doodle Polls, Zoom, Slack.’

FTF Freelancer

Lack of structured working hours is a common challenge freelancers face

Many respondents noted that the overwhelming pace of internal communication created a pressure to over-deliver. It wasn't always possible to keep on top of activity during the one day per week that was paid, resulting in some working unpaid hours.

It was noted by many that this is an issue commonly faced by freelancers in the sector.

'I felt that a culture of working all hours and for low pay, as a badge of honour, was replicated within the Task Force. I received emails, slack notifications and WhatsApp messages every day at all hours. There was no clear boundary between working and not working and one day a week was spread across seven.'

FTF Freelancer

Lack of structure is also a common experience for freelancers.

‘Without any scope of aims, or anyone to guide and provoke - to begin with we were all just at sea. I kind of liked this because it was a very obvious example of the issues that freelancers face day-to-day – we don’t have our own structures and therefore we face barriers when required to connect to others’ internal structures, or to be able to offer anyone else that we work with a sense of structure to lean upon.’

FTF Freelancer

Streamlined communications channels are needed

There is a need for streamlined communication. Fewer channels and an ability to distinguish between ‘need to know’ information and optional ongoing discussion would allow members of the Task Force to navigate the flow of communications more easily.

Setting personal boundaries should also be encouraged within the group

Again, this pressure to over-deliver was not set by any external expectations but by the rapid pace and volume of activity within the group. Some respondents noted that the experience of the Task Force encouraged them to be bolder in setting their own terms.

37% agreed that the FTF was responsive to their access needs

'I valued the space and time to be part of the conversation, to feel like my voice as a freelancer was valued. We often work from a place of gratitude - In some ways my biggest take away from my time on the taskforce is, on a personal level, I now feel more confident to ask for what I need and set my own terms for work.'

FTF Freelancer

But others felt unsupported. As well as additional structure and support, this suggests a need to establish a shared internal culture encouraging personal care and boundaries.

Some freelancers noted that when they were able to take a step back and focus on a specific goal, they were able to feel more satisfied. A small subset also found satisfaction once they detached themselves from the main group and did their own lobbying at a more local level.

'After trying to connect with a few different subgroups, I finally found my place when I started to think more locally and think in terms of smaller change... I saw myself as a conduit for information and support.'

FTF Freelancer

Sponsor organisations found it hard to keep up too

Organisations appreciated the good communication and welcomed check-ins from Fuel, but some also found it difficult to keep up with the information flow coming out of the Task Force. In particular, the lack of coordination of the communication arising from the working groups. Whilst the many outputs were seen as impressive, the number of emails and requests for information or feedback from the different groups was hard to maintain when many staff were on furlough and resources were stretched.

‘One of the challenges of lockdown has been the number of surveys, networks and reports that have been produced. Not only by the FTF but others as well. During the work of the Task Force we discussed that the freelance community is multi-faceted and made up of differing opinions and approaches – but perhaps there’s a need to look for some commonality across everything that’s been produced.’

Sponsor organisation

Support mechanisms were put in place for those with access needs

There was a general feeling amongst the group that provision of access requirements, such as BSL, captioning and voice notes made the meetings accessible, but it was also noted that these access provisions should have been in place from the outset.

This provision also helped to raise awareness amongst the group of the importance of holding accessible meetings.

But the pace and length of meetings was challenging

However, the pace and length of the meetings (set by the group itself) meant that people were getting left behind, despite the support being put in place. This included meetings being scheduled at very short notice, which caused challenges for putting in place additional support for those who needed it.

'While the Task Force did do well with ensuring voice notes, BSL, captioning and other support, it always felt chaotic and overwhelming and did not account for pace and different speeds of work, the need for time to process information...a more sophisticated discussion about access and inclusion is needed, beyond communication tools.'

FTF Freelancer

Any future model should ensure access support is provided from the outset.

Bringing in the Access Manager was seen as a very positive move which benefited the group as a whole as well as individuals, but, some felt that more of the support could have been in place from the start.

More than one third (37%) agreed that the FTF was responsive to their access needs (56% were neutral).

Recommendation: make administrative support an official, paid-for position

Greater structure and admin support/coordination is needed to ensure the Task Force can function effectively at the same (or larger) scale. This should not be a person 'in charge' to set direction, but someone to facilitate, take responsibility and drive things forward. A formalised structure is also needed to allow decision-making and discussion in a large group to encourage shared value and purpose, whilst also allowing the diverse working groups to continue to progress their work without a consensus on all issues.

Recommendation: create streamlined channels for communication

Communication needs to be streamlined. There needs to be greater differentiation between 'need to know' communications and optional active discussion, with opportunities for individuals to get involved in the issues they are most suited for/ passionate about.

Administrative support provision should be the conduit for essential, Task Force-wide communications, through an accessible platform – potentially simply by weekly email. Other optional platforms can be used for ongoing discussion on specific topics.

Recommendation: create a culture for autonomy and setting boundaries

Autonomy was a clear goal of the Task Force but this doesn't just happen naturally. A culture needs to be created to allow freelancers to feel able to set boundaries on their time and choose the level to which they can get involved, without feeling left behind. This can be encouraged by the organisers and staff of any future Task Force iterations, but also needs to be something the Task Force members recognise and buy-in to.

Recommendation: ensure access needs are considered from day one

The addition of an Access Manager to the Task Force was a positive move. Any future iteration should have this kind of support built in from day one, with access needs considered in all communication. A formal induction to include access to resources, such as accessibility toolkits should also be considered.

Personal connections built communities

As discussed, the full Task Force was **overwhelming** in size, and **without structure**, interactions as a full group were at times viewed negatively. However, the **smaller working groups** with shared purpose had many **positive outcomes**. By creating personal connections, these groups allowed for **peer support**, listening, idea generation and **progress** on agreed issues.

Those actively involved in smaller groups were also much more easily able to **feel satisfaction** with their own contribution, while those only involved at a **full Task Force level** found it **harder** to see what they were trying **to achieve**, and therefore what was achieved.

169 people is an exciting but overwhelming size of group

The scale of the Task Force was noted earlier as unprecedented and exciting. But it was largely felt that the full meetings of the collective group via Zoom were too much for most individuals.

The *full* group meetings did not help with mental health in challenging times

Within the challenging context of the pandemic, this resulted in some finding it a burden to join the larger group meetings. For others, the meetings became over-complicated and overwhelming.

This does seem to have improved slightly throughout the run of the Task Force but building structure from the start would save on potentially wasted time.

24% agreed that being involved in the FTF had a positive impact on their mental health, 52% disagreed

'I only felt useful within the last few weeks where the structure of the meetings changed to a more open space where we would take set amount of times to discuss topics and only use the chat features at certain times so everyone's voice could be heard.'

FTF Freelancer

Around half (52%) of the Task Force freelancers disagreed that being involved in the FTF during challenging times had a positive impact on their mental health.

This is not to say that it necessarily had a negative effect (though comments suggest that this was the case for some) but that the absence of an agreed structure and support mechanisms within the Task Force did not lend itself to emotional support.

There were some reports of some problematic behaviour within the larger group, leaving some freelancers feeling excluded. Issues like this could have been addressed at the time, with appropriate support structures in place.

Smaller groups enabled connection and improved mental health for some

Around one quarter agreed that being involved in the FTF had a positive impact on their mental health. In such unprecedented times this highlights that for some, the community which built up within the smaller group was a much needed support network.

Feedback suggests that the evolution of smaller working groups was critical for many.

A small sample of working groups

- Dance Task Force
- Deaf, Disabled and Neuro-diverse
- South Asian Task Force
- Burn It Down – Radical Task Force
- Early Career Artists and Practitioners
- Theatre For Young Audiences
- The Better Representation Group
- Producers Working Group
- North East Working Group

A full list is not currently available. We would recommend that the website is updated to reflect the full scope of working groups.

Valuable friendships and personal connections were made, restoring mental health at a time when many were feeling isolated with the lockdown.

'Having 'co-workers' and meeting new disabled, queer, working-class and local freelancers was positive for my mental health at a time when I've been isolated. Talking with other multiply-marginalised disabled people in my communities who were facing similar struggles to me was also good for my mental health.' **FTF Freelancer**

'It had a positive impact on my life at that time. Despite all of the frustrations and challenges of the pandemic - and of dealing with such a large group - it gave me hope and a chance to connect to with other like-minded people. It was a positive and flawed experience.'

FTF Freelancer

Support networks formed, delivering valuable community

The groups, formed of diverse, but like-minded people, provided an essential support network for some freelancers when meetings and communications with the entire Task Force together became overwhelming.

A sense of community developed as people supported each other and learned from each other.

'I have found a supportive network of people that have helped me through several conundrums and new friends from different areas of the UK and different roles. That has helped a lot.'

FTF Freelancer

Those in smaller groups were more able to see their own contribution

Personal sense of achievement was very varied within the group. Some freelancers found it difficult to appreciate what their role had been within the FTF as a whole but the smaller working groups enabled powerful conversations to take place and empowered freelancers to feel value and contribution. These groups delivered both specific outputs (see following chapter) and intangible benefits.

'I value the connections that have been made. The exposure to different ways of thinking and working that have been challenging and enlightening. The way I work will be forever changed by this process.'

FTF Freelancer

'The working groups were focused and achieved great things, work that we are all continually proud of. The FTF enabled me to make connections with freelancers I would never have come into contact with otherwise and I will be forever grateful for that opportunity.'

FTF Freelancer

Interests aligned and many engaged with like-minded individuals

It was important for many freelancers to find a group of colleagues whose interests aligned with their own. The working groups provided an opportunity to engage with like-minded individuals and to collaborate – either at a regional level, by art form or shared interest.

For some this was a much-needed focus which they were unable to find within the larger collective. For others these groups were also a reflection of the diversity of interests and opinions, which they felt was as important as achieving a 'unified voice' within the Task Force.

'I think that being a part of the dance group created a natural support group that was much needed. We ranged in ages from 20s to late 50s and it was a meeting I looked forward to attending. We became friends and I have only met two of them in person in the past. It was and remains a very special group... we were lucky.'

FTF Freelancer

The positive momentum resulted in some continuing projects in their own time after the 13 weeks.

Local results were easier to feel than contribution to overall Task Force results

Some freelancers who were not part of a formal working group found it difficult to appreciate what their role had been within the FTF. They felt detached from the FTF itself and didn't feel valued.

But some found satisfaction once they removed themselves from the pressure they felt being part of the whole Task Force meetings and communications and did their own lobbying at a more local level.

'I feel that I worked best alone or in a small group and was able to achieve things by working in this way. I feel that I contributed to larger group discussions from the inception of the Task Force but I quickly recognised this was having a detrimental effect on my mental health, so I had a rethink about a more sustainable way for me to work within the Task Force.' **FTF Freelancer**

More informal networking, creativity and advocacy was also undertaken

As well as the more explicit connections and agendas as part of working groups, there were also many valuable informal networking opportunities happening. Many additional shared or individual projects were also undertaken that have not been shared formally as an output.

'I valued the core of people I worked with across a number of different groups. I valued their insight and personal wisdom and hurt strength and solidarity.'

FTF Freelancer

Those who didn't feel heard found value in listening to others

Although some freelancers did not feel that their voice was heard even within the smaller groups, some found benefit from listening, learning and taking time for self-reflection.

There were clear learnings from this experience which will be taken out into the industry (discussed more in the next chapter).

There were many personal skills demonstrated by individuals which contributed to the overall success of the working groups and the communities which developed.

'My role was to listen. I was very happy to listen and learned a lot from those whose voices are not normally heard. Personally, I felt I achieved nothing within the taskforce and could not find a way in or a way to invite people to listen or hear my offerings. It did, however, buy me time to reflect on my own practice and make enquiry into issues I think are important.'

FTF Freelancer

'Mediator, facilitator and friendly disrupter. I spent a lot of emotional energy trying to ensure people were included in the FTF.'

FTF Freelancer

More consideration to the structure and future legacy of the Task Force may enable more freelancers to find a sense of place within the group and find some personal benefits from the collective, whilst continuing to be independently creative within their own region.

The working groups reflected the diversity of the group

It is clear from the feedback that there were differing opinions on the overall priorities that the Task Force should have been working towards as a group. Although it is important that individuals understand the collective, shared, goals and values of any future iterations of the Task Force, the working groups enabled diverse interests to be taken forward, independent of the collective.

Recommendations: retain working group model, maximise opportunities for personal interaction

Opportunity for personal connection should be maximised. Smaller working groups are well placed to enable optional discussion and progress on specific, focused issues that can then be fed back through central communication channels as needed. They can also be places for shared experiences, listening and support. Encourage freelancers to join a small number of working groups in order to gain personal benefits and satisfaction on achievement.

Immediate impacts with future potential

In the 13-week duration, the Freelance Task Force produced a wide **range of valuable outputs** on a range of topics.

Organisations noted having read and shared these outputs and **planned to take action** based on their recommendation. However, there was definitely scope to **increase awareness** of these outputs amongst the full Task Force.

There were also a range of softer outcomes to the Task Force. The Task Force has **sown the seeds for a lasting network**, the benefits of which could outlast the immediate crisis.

Important industry-wide issues highlighted

The diverse range of working groups which formed during the 13-week period was reflective of the well-represented group as a whole.

1:23 The focus of the working group discussions covered a wide-range of subjects, from fair pay, mental health to the immediate crisis facing the industry. The groups allowed a space for these issues to be discussed, debated and shared.

Extensive documents, resources and toolkits were produced

We've listed examples of outputs that were shared more widely within the Task Force and with sponsor organisations and that have been collated following requests for feedback.

Despite efforts to collate a comprehensive list, however, it's likely that we are not aware of everything that was produced and there may be other useful documents and resources which haven't been picked up by this evaluation.

- The 5 Guiding Principles: A Fair Trade Model for Freelancers
- Dance in Wales report
- A Manifesto for (Better) Representation in U.K. Performing Arts
- The Freelancers support menu
- Mental Health Cards and Toolkit
- A film made by a group of artists/ performers to highlight issues faced by those who have a learning disability.
- Research on the essential contribution that freelancers make to the industry

(A list of all the outputs shared with the evaluation team can be found at Appendix 4)

Many organisations have taken the guidance on board

Many organisations reported that they were intending to act on the various outputs that have been shared with them.

Around 8 in 10 organisations agreed that they had improved or planned to improve practices based on the outputs of the FTF.

'We have been going through them at fortnightly meetings and reflecting on them in smaller groups. Many have made strong impression and led to us making changes in our own working practices.'

FTF Freelancer

Some noted that they were planning on improving policies and practice based on some of the advice to come out of the group. Others planned to include the freelancers more in strategic planning and strategy moving forward – maintaining strong links and having a more artist-centred approach to planning.

'We are now applying for funding to create a role for a freelancer to work with us in a consultancy, collaborative, advisory way. We are using the documents to feed into our planning with an aim to take on-board learning from them in all planning for future work.'

Sponsor organisation

'There is an open and ongoing exchange - and I hope they will join our board!'

Sponsor organisation

Other organisations were dealing with the immediate crisis and may revisit later on

For other organisations, pressures with staff on furlough and the many other challenges currently facing the industry meant that for some the timing wasn't right to consider the outputs. There is a need to ensure these outputs are not lost in time, but are saved in a central repository, so the sector can return to them.

'It's too soon for us to look at these properly and consider how to integrate this into future practice - we've been implementing a restructure and reacting to a second lockdown, so we're still fire-fighting.'

Sponsor organisation

'As we start to develop for delivering work post-covid we'll have the opportunity to think about how we can integrate these.'

Sponsor organisation

It highlighted the sometimes under-used skills and value of freelancers

From the outside, some organisations were able to appreciate the wider positive impacts of the Task Force even more than some within the group. They acknowledged the breadth of skills of the freelancers that sometimes goes under-utilised.

80% agreed that their organisation has improved, or plans to improve, it's practice based on outputs of the FTF

'I have been struck by how much under-used potential there is both in the freelancer cohort - how if you do give people the money, time and space to think about things and come up with ideas, they really, really do. It's been an opportunity for me to see our freelancers as leaders and thinkers as well as performers.'

Sponsor organisation

Could have even more impact with a central repository for sharing

Without a central repository for information, it became difficult for others to get their work heard. A central resource is needed, which can also be accessed externally by the freelance community. This can ensure the outputs of the Task Force have a full and lasting impact.

'There wasn't a central place to put information so the work you did could very easily go under the radar and not be picked up.'

FTF Freelancer

The Task Force did set up a website during this initial phase, created as a platform for sharing information externally. However, the website was not completed or kept up-to-date, but with more resource and structure could be developed further.

It seems that issues around gaining consensus from the group on what could be published meant that this was abandoned as a communication platform.

It was also noted in the feedback that a shared Google Drive was created for the purpose of sharing documents, however this was not taken up by the group as a whole.

Freelancers outside of the Task Force didn't feel informed of progress and outcomes

Three quarters of freelancers outside of the group disagreed that they were aware of outcomes of the group and around half (51%) disagreed that they felt informed about the current situation and the progress being made by the Task Force.

This indicates that while the activity of the Task Force was very visible on Twitter and other channels, the valuable outputs of the group did not reach high levels of awareness outside of the Task Force group.

51% of freelancers outside of the Task Force disagreed that they felt informed about progress

Again, a central repository to showcase the resources created would address this.

'Followed all accounts and kept myself close to the process but still have no idea what it did and what it achieved.'

Industry freelancer

'I haven't found the outputs clear and I'm surprised, as I was very aware of the FTF activity going on by being on Twitter, which seems to be a very important and vocal space for the activity. I feel for (but also envy) those who aren't on Twitter and cannot keep up or were even unaware this was happening.'

Industry freelancer

In addition to outputs, many softer outcomes were achieved

The benefits of being involved in the working groups went beyond the tangible outcomes shared with the group.

By the end of their experience, and perhaps after some self-reflection, many freelancers were able to articulate many valuable, meaningful (and in some cases life-changing) benefits to their involvement.

Exposure to different ideas, thinking and practices

Some freelancers reflected on having the opportunity for lively debate; a chance to be radical with like-minded individuals. For others it provided personal development opportunities and a chance for self-reflection on their career. And for many freelancers, it provided a platform to advocate for change and support others in the industry.

'Within the working groups I was part of, we had an abundance of ideas, skills, knowledge, goodwill and care - ensuring that everyone who wanted to be part of those conversations felt heard and safe to engage.'

FTF Freelancer

The Task Force has highlighted the issue that the freelancer role can be quite isolating.

Coming together in the working groups and the networking opportunities enabled freelancers to be exposed to many different ways of thinking and working and many freelancers appreciated this invaluable opportunity.

'I value the connections that have been made. The exposure to different ways of thinking and working that have been challenging and enlightening. The way I work will be forever changed by this process.'

FTF Freelancer

Connections built skills and confidence

There were also accounts that the increased exposure and connections with the industry, built personal skills and confidence.

'I felt more connected to the bigger industry and built my public speaking confidence, connecting with brilliant like-minded people.'

FTF Freelancer

And the confidence to speak out and address any imbalance or barriers.

'In some ways my biggest take away from my time on the taskforce is (on a personal level) I now feel more confident to ask for what I need and set my own terms for work. A lot of the projects I took part in and saw coming out of other subgroups seemed to be working towards addressing this power balance. To place value on artists and audiences and create space where we are enabled to make our best work.'

FTF Freelancer

'I believe lots of us learnt a lot about access (least of all how to approach a zoom in an inclusive way) and this has certainly augmented my knowledge.'

FTF Freelancer

It was an opportunity to be included

For some freelancers, the opportunity to be represented and included in conversations was invaluable.

'Being mixed race, foreign and disabled I usually don't sit on the table where decisions are made. I feel that I have a lack of understanding of how the system works. I felt that I was learning a lot and very fast.'

FTF Freelancer

77% agreed that they were aware of good practice shared within the Task Force around access needs in the sector

Important learning about accessibility needs was shared

The Task Force provided an effective mechanism for learning and sharing good practice around access and inclusion. There were several tangible outputs on this subject and some freelancers noted a much better awareness of accessibility issues within the sector which they could take with them. Around three quarters (77%) of freelancers agreed that they were aware of good practice that has been shared within the Task Force around access needs in the sector.

59% agreed that they had seen positive mechanisms for change with regards to access and inclusion within the sector

'I learned huge amounts about how to work accessibly. I know that this meant that other people had to - directly or implicitly, through doing - do that teaching.'

FTF Freelancer

Many outputs regarding access and inclusion were shared with organisations and important conversations were initiated.

Around 6 in 10 freelancers (59%) agreed that since joining the FTF they had seen positive mechanisms for change with regard to access and inclusion within the sector.

'We've taken on board most elements of the 'Making better conditions for Neuro-divergent Freelancers.'

Sponsor organisation

The Task Force created building blocks for longer-term change

Although this evaluation has highlighted that the personal benefits of involvement were mostly felt once people came together in smaller groups, many freelancers also felt the impact of coming together as a diverse and representative collective.

'The greater success is that freelancers from all disciplines and across the nation came together and realised that our voice is a powerful one, powerful lobby.'

FTF Freelancer

'A collective energy for rebalancing and reimagining our sector.'

FTF Freelancer

The groundwork has been set for the longer-term impact as a collective voice. There is clear potential to continue the success of this first iteration and be a positive force for change within the industry, through awareness-raising, advocacy and sharing creativity.

Feedback indicates that many of these working groups have continued to meet and some have secured further funding for their work.

'It felt like a spotlight was shone on our significant plight and I felt heard. It was galvanising and thus lessened the potential for desolation!'

FTF Freelancer

Wales Freelance Task Force is a good demonstration of the legacy of this initiative.

During the initial 13 week period, the group were responsible for lobbying for direct freelance funding from the Welsh government, resulting in £10m, dispersed as £2.5k grants to freelancers across Wales, demonstrating the real impact of effective stakeholder engagement. Members of the Task Force now sit on the Welsh Government's Freelance Pledge Working Group (2020-21).

In December 2020 the group secured additional funding from the Arts Council Wales to continue their work in 2021.

Big conversations are getting started

Many important issues have been raised and discussed within the group and with industry bodies outside of the network.

It's important now to keep this momentum going and to not lose the groundwork that has been done and the connections that have been made.

Limited progress could be made in the initial 13-weeks but building on the conversations started will mean this progress is not wasted

'Starting a conversation with so many people from vastly different backgrounds and perspectives - naming a problem.'

FTF Freelancer

'We were heard, but that doesn't necessarily create change.'

FTF Freelancer

'I think the greatest success is the broad support and action to support and value freelance colleagues at a time of stress. It was both a challenge and a rallying cry to organisations to acknowledge that even though Covid was a moment of crisis our shoulders are still broader and we should be actively supporting freelancers now and taking care of them.'

Sponsor organisation

The power balance has been tipped slightly for freelancers

There is evidence that the opportunity for freelancers to form a collective voice, despite challenges, has made some small progress on giving freelancers more power in the sector.

'I do think the ability to open up the conversation and organisations showing clearly that they are now willing to listen is a step in the right direction, however I don't view it as progress until there are tangible results for freelancers.'

FTF Freelancer

External funding can ensure the benefits evolve and outlast the crisis

There is an opportunity for this shift to continue with a further iteration of the Task Force and more time to address issues. Additional external funding, paired with a more formalised structure and support would also help give freelancers further autonomy from organisations.

'Making a case for better representation, being paid fairly, meeting wonderful people and making new friends, being a part of a network, building a relationship with organisations, creating useful documents and being part of conversations that will continue for years after.'

FTF Freelancer

Recommendation: create a central, lasting repository for outputs

A lot of excellent work was undertaken by the Task Force that remains unknown. The volume was too great for it all to be shared, recognised and actioned immediately. A longer-term solution for sharing is needed – a central online platform widely accessible for all to search and view all outputs in their own time.

Recommendation: plan now for future-proofing

Make plans now for both the ongoing crisis and the longer-term - to ensure progress continues to be built on.

Future-proofing should be considered in the next phase so that long-term benefits can be maximised. For both organisers and members of the Task Force, the legacy of this work should be an ongoing consideration.

Recommendation: external funding, with structure, will allow greater independence

Performance organisations should still be involved in future iterations of the Task Force, to build on relationship and solidarity, but additional external funding will also empower freelancers more to have their own voice and direction.

Appendix 1

Sponsor organisations who signed the open letter to theatre and performance makers

1927

Candoco

Doncopolitan

Inc Arts

Access All Areas

Cast

Donmar Warehouse

Jaivant Patel Dance

Action For Children's Arts

Chichester Festival Theatre

Eden Court Highlands

Jermyn Street Theatre

Activate Performing Arts

China Plate

EGO

Jerwood Arts

Actors Touring Company

Chinese Arts Now

Emergency Exit Arts
Kali
Akademi
Citz Glasgow
English Touring Opera
Kiln Theatre
Akramkhan Company
Clean Break
English Touring Theatre
Kiota Bristol
ArtsAdmin
Clod Ensemble
Everyman Playhouse
Kneehigh
Artsdepot
Complicite
Farnham Maltings
Leeds Playhouse
Associations of Lighting Designers
Coney
Fio
Leicester Curve

Barbican Theatre Plymouth

Contact

Frozen Light Theatre

Lift

Battersea Arts Centre

Coventry City of Culture Trust

Fuel

Little Angel Theatre

Belgrade Theatre

CPT

Gate Theatre

Mercury Theatre

Birmingham Repertory Theatre

Curious Directive

Graeae

MIF

Blue Elephant

Dance Base

Hall For Cornwall

Mimbre

BOP theatre

Dance East

Headlong

Miracle Theatre

Boundless Theatre

Dance Umbrella

Hijinx

Mortal Fools

Brighton Dome & Brighton Festival

Dance West

HOME

National Dance Company Wales

Bristol Old Vic

Derby Theatre

Improbable

National Theatre of Scotland

Brixton House

Diverse City

In Good Company

National Theatre Wales

National Youth Theatre of Great Britain

Regional Theatre Young Director Scheme

Taking Flight Theatre

Theatre Centre

November Clu
Rose Theatre Kingston
Talawa Theatre Company
Theatre Peckham
Northern Stage
Roundhouse
Tall Stories
Theatre Rites
Nottingham Playhouse
Royal & Derngate
Tamasha
Theatre Royal Plymouth
Ockhams Razor
Royal Exchange
Tangled Feet
Theatre Royal Stratford East
Octagon Theatre Bolton
Royal opera House
Tara Arts
Tiata Fahodzi
One Dance UK
Rubicon Dance

The Almeida Theatre

Turtle Key

Open Clasp

Sadler's Wells

The Bush Theatre

Unfolding Theatre

Oxford Playhouse

Shakespeare's Globe

The Cockpit

Unicorn theatre

Pagrav Dance Company

Sheffield Theatres

The National Theatre

Unlimited

Paines Plough

Smart Entertainment

The New Wolsey Theatre

Wales Millennium Centre

Pavilion Dance South West

Soho Theatre

The Old Vic

Wassail Theatre

Pentabus

Spare Tyre

The Royal Court Theatre

Wildworks

Pitlochry Festival Theatre

Spin Arts

The Royal Shakespeare Company

Wise Children

Pleasance Theatre

Stellar Quines

The Yard

Wolsey Theatre

Polka Theatre

Strike A Light

Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru

New Earth Theatre

Ramps on the Moon

Studio Wayne McGregor

Theatr Iolo

Regent's Park Open Air Theatre

Take Art

Theatre Bristol

Appendix 2

Members of the Freelance Task Force

Aaron Jeffrey

Beth Sitek

Ellie Williams

Ibrahim Ismail

Ailsa Dalling

Bethany Wells

Ellen Yilma

Isabelle Kabban

Alessandro Babalola

Bradley Travis

Emily Alden

Jack Nurse

Alice Theobald

Brodie Arthur

Emma Bettridge

Jackie Clune

Alister O'Loughlin

Caroline Parker MBE

Emma Jayne Park

Jaivant Patel

Althea Burey
Catherine Lake
Ffion Campbell-Davies
Jamie Fletcher
Amanda Parker
Chanje Kunda
Fiona Fraser
Jane Crawshaw
Amantha Edmead
Charlene Salter
Freya Stokka
Jennifer Jackson
Ammar Haj Ahmad
Charlotte Kransmo
Fubunation
Jessica Rice
Amy Clare Tasker
Chris Peterson
Garrin Clarke
Jessica Thanki-Grogan
Angharad Lee
Clare Perkins

George Francis
Jessica Wright
Anjali Mya Chadha
Coral Brookes
Georgia Bird
Jo Paul
Anna Alvarez
Daisy hale
Gillie Kleiman
Joana Nastari
Annie-Lunnette Deakin-Foster
Dan Ayling
Gitika Buttoo
Joyce Henderson
Arran Pallan
Darren Pritchard
Glesni Price-Jones
Joyce Omotola
Ashleigh Bowmott
David Munns
Grace Goulding
June Gamble

Ashley Jordan
David Webber
Grania Pickard
Karen Traynor
Assis Carreiro
Deborah Light
Greg Cullen
Kate O'Connor
Athena Stevens
Deepraj Singh
Hannah McPake
Kate Waters
Beccy D'Souza
Divya Satwani
Hannah Quigley
Kate West
Becky Minto
Ellie Mason
Hannah Stone
Katie Bosomworth
Keiren Hamilton-Amos
Mele Broomes

Philip Harland
Shannon Martin
Kim Simpson
Michelle Payne
Polly Jerrold
Sian Armstrong
Krystal S. Lowe
Milton Lopes
Rachael Nanyonjo
Simeon Miller
Laura Sweeney
Mimi Doulton
Rachel Mars
Simisola Majekodunmi
Leeza Awojobi
Miranda Henderson
Rafia Hussain
Sonny Nwachukwu
Leigh Toney
Miss Jacqui
Rhys Thomas
Sophie Woolley

Leo Wan

Mumba Dodwell

Romy Foster

Steffan Donnelly

Lily Einhorn

Nadia Emam

Rosie Elnile

Steve Ryan

Lisa Mellor

Naomi Obeng

Rosie Jones

Susie McKenna

Liv Hunt

Naomi Oppenheim

Rosy Roberts

Tom Lee

Lora Krasteva

Natasha Chivers

Russel Martin

Urja Desai Thakore

Louie Whitemore

Natasha Player

Sadeysa Greenaway-Bailey

Valeria Isaiah Sadoh

Louise Anderson

Nessah Muthy

Sam Dunstan

Victor Esses

Lou Brodie

Nick White

Sandra Alland

Vijay Patel

Lucy Sheen

Nicole Behan

Sara Templeman

Viv Gordon

Maia Kirkman-Richards

Omar Khan

Sarah Argent

Whiskey Chow

Mariah Louca

Parbati Chaudhury

Sarah Shead

Xana

Marius Arnold-Clarke

Paul Christian

Sarah Travis

Zorazelda King

Mathilde Lopez

Paula Varjack

Sasha Milavic Davies

Matilda Ibini

Pauline Mayers

Segen Yosife

Appendix 3

Disciplines represented within the Freelance Task Force

Access supporter/ Creative enabler

Multi-disciplinary design

Actor

Musical Director

Applied Performance Artist

Performer

Artist

Press Rep

Arts Manager

Producer

Arts Practitioner

Production Manager

Cabaret Performer

Project Manager and Programmer

Casting Director

Puppet Maker

Choreographer

Puppeteer

Comedy Performer

Set Designer

Community & Education Arts Facilitator & Artist

Singer

Composer

Sound Designer

Costume Designer

Stage Crew

Dancer

Stage Manager

Director

Technician

Dramaturg

Theatre Director

Fight Director

Theatre maker

Independent Arts Leader

WHAM (Wigs, Hair and Makeup)

Lighting Designer

Writer

Movement Director

This is a list of outputs shared by freelancers with the evaluation team. We are aware that there will be many more examples:

- A Film made by a group of artists/performers with learning disabilities
- A Manifesto for (Better) Representation in U.K. Performing Arts
- A Mental Health Toolkit
- A Menu of More Transparent and Accessible Recruitment Processes for Organisations & Freelancers
- A Report Examining the Effect of Covid-19 on Opera Freelancers
- A Statement on behalf of Early Career Artists & Practitioners

- An Open Letter Making the Case to Better Support Neurodivergent Freelancers
- Dance in Wales report
- Adroddiad Dawns Yng Nghymru
- Early Career Artists and Practitioners Survey Results
- Freelance Supporters Menu (version 2)
- Reject Better (a collective of art makers who believe that the best way to support unsuccessful applicants is to offer constructive feedback)
- Rebalancing and Reimagining: Wales Freelance Task Force (also available in Welsh/BSL/large print and easy read formats)
- RTYDS Report by Gitika Buttoo

- The 5 Guiding Principles: A Fair Trade Model for Freelancers
- The Joint Campaign for Data Collection
- The Mighty Creatives Open Letter and Response from the Minister for Culture, Media and Sport
- Theatre and Performance Producers Survey Report
- What do you need as a freelancer to do your best work (Theatre for Young Audiences subgroup)
- What do you need as a freelancer to do your best work (large print)
- Website for the Freelance Task Force:
www.freelancetaskforce.co.uk

Research parameters

This study was carried out by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre. It was commissioned in October 2020.

Target group for the research: Freelancers who were part of the Freelance Task Force (FTF); sponsor organisations; wider industry freelancers.

Sample size: 100 FTF freelancers; 66 sponsor organisations; 116 wider industry freelancers.

Date of fieldwork: 10 - 17 November 2020.

Data collection methods: Online survey; online video platform; simple message board; one-to-one chats.

Weighting procedures: The quantitative data has not been weighted, but the sample of FTF freelancer respondents is broadly representative of the Task Force overall.

Morris Hargreaves McIntyre is an international consultancy. We work with charities, heritage and cultural organisations of all sizes. We're fascinated by what makes people and organisations tick. Our strategic thinking, insight and creativity transform how our clients see their world.

Our clients use our work to connect more people, more deeply with their causes, fuelling their success.

'The greatest thing about it was that it happened. The fact that freelancers were able to come together as one voice was something I've always hoped for.'

FTF Freelancer

'It's heartening to now see so many connections and initiatives spring from this initial commitment - it will be really interesting to measure the legacy of this project over the coming years.'

Sponsor Organisation

This report was prepared for Fuel in December 2020.