

Creative Freelancers: Shaping London's Recovery

Facilitation Team



Advisory Group



Partner Organisations

Lasting Legacy

Evaluation of the *Creative Freelancers: Shaping London's Recovery* programme for the Greater London Authority

December 2021

Lasting Legacy

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Morris Hargreaves McIntyre were commissioned to undertake an **independent evaluation** of the Creative Freelancers: Shaping London's Recovery (CF: SLR) programme.

The programme brought together **50 diverse freelancers** from across the performing arts and 50 leaders of **cultural organisations** for six months to explore and **make recommendations** on the future of freelancing. The programme was funded by the **Mayor of London**, Sadiq Khan.

This evaluation aims to **measure** the success of the **programme** in order to establish a **sustainable legacy**.

Methodology overview:

MHM delivered an evaluation which measured the success of the delivery of the programme against the following aims:

- To build upon Fuel's learning about the freelancer group working to date - maximising positive impacts and addressing challenges;
- To foster positive, collaborative experiences and form lasting relationships;
- To enable delivery on the programme aims;
- To establish a sustainable legacy.

We engaged with the following groups during the research:

- 50 members of the CF: SLR freelance cohort (three online surveys at the start, middle point and end of the programme)
- 50 Partner Organisations (end of the programme)
- 10 Advisory Group members (start and end of programme)
- 5 members of the Fuel team

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

Summary recommendations

The **Creative Freelancers**: Shaping London's Recovery programme delivered an **impressive** and **wide-ranging** series of **recommendations** for the future of freelancers in the creative industry. Implementing some **key learnings** will ensure that any future programme maximises the key benefits to **improve** the **process** for all involved.

#1 Set a positive, inspiring tone with recruitment

The recruitment for the Creative Freelancers: Shaping London's Recovery was a clear success. It was widely seen as fair and transparent and it brought together a diverse group in demographics, disciplines and experiences.

And it was also energising, sparking high hopes for what might be achieved and helping set up enthusiasm to get started.

#2 But be transparent about how things work and what is feasible

There is a risk of setting hopes too high however, particularly when there is significant appetite for change within the sector. Freelancers feel strongly about improving conditions in the sector but change can't happen overnight. As a funder, be clear about what level of progress is expected in the time, and what the next steps would then be.

#3 Have a clear output that everyone can visualise and work towards

Giving autonomy to the cohort to decide what specific issues to focus on and how to go about identifying solutions was the right one. It put decisions on what was most pressing in the hands of freelancers.

But a large group need a clear goal of some kind to create shared purpose and visualise what they are working towards. While the over-arching aims go some of the way to achieving this, clarity on what kind of output was expected – e.g. a clear set of recommendations, supported by evidence – would have given just enough direction to enhance productivity rather than restrict.

#4 Do something simple, social and sharing to get started

Bringing 50 people to work together for the first time, particularly when all interactions are virtual, will always have teething problems. And yet, many freelancers formed valued, lasting connections during their time in the cohort.

An opportunity was missed to take this even further – a more relaxed session to allow the cohort to meet new people, share experiences and form connections at the start. This could have been delivered as an early all-cohort session but with 'ice-breaker' breakouts built-on to allow small group conversations.

#5 Ensure everyone has the right skills

Given that the majority of the work delivered throughout the programme was research-based, training the cohort in practical research skills would have set everyone up for success and ensured that some professional development outcomes were achieved for all.

This might also have given more confidence to the group in knowing what they were working to produce – research to deliver actionable recommendations.

#6 Keep large group meetings to a minimum, well planned in advance

For any group more than 10 people, Zoom meetings bringing everyone together are always going to be a challenge. They need to be thoughtfully structured and planned, with clear advance communication so that everyone knows what to expect and all access needs are met.

The only way to do this is to allow plenty of time in between and to ensure they each have a clear purpose. Therefore, a small number of focused meetings at critical milestones is needed.

#7 Set an early deadline for forming smaller, focused working groups

The smaller working groups – where freelancers can form real connections and focus on issues they are passionate about – are where the real value happens. Getting into these groups should be an immediate priority after set up.

The more time spent in large meetings tends to breed negativity while the productive nature of the smaller groups sets more positive relationships and pride in the work.

Set these up quickly and with clear intent so that the programme is credited with the outcomes.

#8 Create a simple pragmatic framework for group decision-making, and stick to it

While the desire for empowerment is noble, in reality a framework is needed to enable 50 people to make decisions and not everyone will be happy with the outcomes all the time.

The framework should ensure that everyone has the opportunity to feed in ideas and all voices are heard, and then allows for swift action to proceed.

For example, a system that crowd-sourced ideas for the working group ‘topics’, then quickly invited the cohort to ‘sign-up’ for the group(s) of their choosing might have sped up the process.

#9 Don’t over-complicate with additional stakeholders and make input clear

Navigating the roles of the Facilitation Team and the Advisory Group – even with clear job descriptions – took some time but did come together.

However, the lack of clarity around the role of Partner Organisations remained throughout and didn’t necessarily feel like an organic part of the programme.

Be clear what’s expected from additional stakeholders and keep it light touch unless it’s crucial to the delivery of the programme aims, so as not to waste anyone’s time.

#10 Create a celebration and share widely

When the programme concludes, don’t lose momentum. There is clear appetite from the cohort to hear what’s next and to see their findings shared more widely with the sector.

The cohort signed-up with a genuine desire to make change, share openly how the result will be used. Make it a positive celebration of the good work produced but also be transparent that things might work slowly.

#11 Involve freelancers in next steps

The CF:SLR programme rightly gave ownership to freelancers to shape what the cohort produced but there is some reservation now about ‘handing over’ this hard work. Keep freelancers involved where possible in moving recommendations forwards and creating the changes.

A programme for change

Creative Freelancers: Shaping London's Recovery is a six-month action research programme that brought together up to 50 diverse freelancers to **make recommendations to improve conditions** for London freelancers working in the creative sector.

A London-wide action research project

Creative Freelancers: Shaping London's Recovery (CF:SLR) was a city-wide research project, supporting the future of freelancing in the capital. It provided immediate employment for the cohort, with a mandate to create recommendations to help remove the inequalities facing creative freelancers, who were hugely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. (In the first 12 months of the pandemic, up to 60% of the city's freelancers lost all their income). The programme was funded by the Mayor of London.

Building on their experience of setting up and running the Freelance Task Force in 2020, the Greater London Authority approached Fuel to administer the programme.

This included recruiting a freelance facilitation team to support the cohort, who would then run the programme.

Bringing a diverse cohort together

The program brought together 50 performing arts freelancers across a range of creative disciplines and roles.

The group selected were also diverse across different demographic factors in order to ensure a range of experiences and perspectives were represented within the cohort.

The programme ran between May and November 2021. Each freelancer received a fee of £4000. A full list of freelancers included in the cohort is included as Appendix 1.

To work towards three strategic aims

The Mayor of London set three over-arching strategic aims for the programme to explore:

- 1** Improving job conditions, creation and retention for creative freelancers;
- 2** Advocating for an improved statutory position for creative freelancers;
- 3** Establishing skills and training opportunities for creative freelancers.

The cohort of freelancers were given freedom in what specific issues to focus on within these

aims, and how they went about addressing them.

And make actionable recommendations

The result was an extensive set of actionable recommendations made by the cohort. 22 working groups (of varying sizes) were formed amongst the cohort, each focusing on a specific topic. Each working group delivered a research project throughout the programme, making recommendations to address specific issues. The recommendations range from quick wins to longer-term investments, aimed at a range of audiences including funders, policy-makers, cultural organisations and advocacy organisations.

Supported by wider network

The cohort was supported by the CF:SLR Facilitation Team, employed by Fuel to bring the cohort together and guide the creation of the working groups. An Advisory Board of Creative Industry Experts was also created to provide advice and support to the programme. Each freelancer was also paired with a cultural organisation.

Note: a separate report that collates and summarizes the outputs and recommendations produced by the CF: SLR cohort is also available. Please see:

[\[link to be added\]](#)

Recruitment seen as fair and transparent

The **recruitment** process for the CF: SLR programme was broadly seen as **fair** and **transparent** and resulted in a **diverse group** of 50 freelancers working together, sharing experiences and **broadening** their **perspectives**. The majority of freelancers agreed that the recruitment process set up a **positive tone** for the programme.

There was a broadly positive response from all to the recruitment process

The CF: SLR programme got off to a positive start in June 2021 as the call-out to creative freelancers got underway. One of the learnings from Fuel's previous Freelance Task Force (an initiative that informed much of the development of CF: SLR) was the need for more time to plan a more fair and open recruitment process, and it is clear this was taken on board. The process for the freelancers to join the cohort was well planned and thought out and resulted in a diverse range of 50 freelancers recruited

into the cohort. The overall consensus from stakeholders was positive.

The cohort generally agreed that recruitment was fair and transparent

Overall, 79% of the freelancers agreed that the criteria for recruitment of the CF: SLR cohort was transparent and clear (26% strongly agreed). Just 6% of the cohort disagreed with this statement.

A slightly lesser 51% agreed that the recruitment process was fair, but 47% of the cohort weren't sure (2% disagreed) likely as they were not part of behind-the-scenes decision-making and therefore felt they could not make an assessment.

The responsibility and commitment involved in the programme were clearly laid out in the Call Out for Applications.

'Recruitment was good and I entered the cohort with a strong sense of excitement and optimism.'

The criteria for recruitment of the CF: SLR cohort was transparent and clear



The recruitment process was fair



Creative Freelancers: Shaping London's Recovery

Freelance Cohort Call Out for Applications

We are looking for a diverse group of freelancers in the performing arts to come together to explore and make recommendations on the future of freelancing.

Deadline for applications: **10 am Friday 4th June**

Further key dates

- **7-22 June:** shortlisting and selection process
- **24-25 June:** freelancers notified
- **29 June:** deadline for freelancers to confirm
- **TUESDAY 6 July:** first cohort day

About the programme

Creative freelancers, particularly those in the performing arts, have been hit hard by COVID-19. From the very start of restrictions, up to 60% of freelancers had lost all of their work, and it is estimated that at least 200,000 Londoners have been excluded from any Government support. The pandemic has also highlighted existing inequalities facing creative freelancers – including a lack of security at work, unequal access to freelance opportunities, and a lack of a basic safety net.

This new programme will enable a diverse group of freelancers in the culture sector to come together to explore and make recommendations on the future of freelancing.

Creative Freelancers: Shaping London's Recovery (CF:SLR) will amplify the voices of the self-employed in the culture sector, giving space for freelancers to shape and demonstrate their role in the recovery of London's creative and cultural industries, as well as in wider civic spaces.

The programme brings together 50 diverse freelancers from across the performing arts, including performers, directors, writers and designers, with 50 leaders of cultural organisations, funders, councils and other key decision makers.

How will it work?

In collaborate with a cultural partner organisation, each freelancer will receive a fee to complete a six-month research project in targeted working groups, supported by a freelance facilitation team.

It has been enabled by Fuel, and funded by LEAP, the London Economic Action Partnership.

Programme aims

This project will empower creative freelancers in the performing arts sector to make recommendations for London's recovery from COVID-19 in distinct areas:

- Improving job conditions, creation and retention for creative freelancers
- Advocating for an improved statutory position for creative freelancers
- Establishing skills and training opportunities for creative freelancers

This programme will support the civic role of creative freelancers in London's recovery from COVID-19, in policymaking and in delivery.

Freelancers Cohort Call Out for Applications (page 1 of 3)

Credit is due to the facilitation team on achieving this

It was a clear achievement to get 50 freelancers on board, within the timescales of the project. The involvement of the Access

Manager at this initial stage ensured that diversity and accessibility were clearly at the forefront of the planning process.

'I felt that the selection process was rigorous, clear, and exciting.' Freelancer

And the result was clear - a diverse group was achieved

The end result was that a diverse group of individuals came together from across different art forms and roles within the performing arts to share their experiences, skills and hopes for change.

Diversity in people, perspective and experiences was prioritised

The data collected by the team for monitoring purposes demonstrates that diversity was considered in both the short listing process and final selection. This enriched the experience for many of the freelancers, ensuring a multiplicity of experiences were represented.

'I have learnt there are many different people in different creative roles in the sector in similar positions as me but also some far worse off. Accessibility and inclusively still has a long way to go in our industry. I've connected with people I otherwise wouldn't have.'

Freelancer

Freelancers appreciated the opportunity to hear from other perspectives

The opportunity to hear other voices, with different experiences and viewpoints, was invaluable to many of the freelancers, who cited it as a positive outcome of their involvement in the programme.

'I have gained valuable understanding from different perspectives of a wide range of diverse freelancers and organisations and speakers about how to address change and some insight as to why freelancers often get a bad deal.' Freelancer

Range of disciplines allowed those involved to broaden horizons...

The breadth of disciplines represented within the cohort and was acknowledged by many freelancers who appreciated spending time with freelancers from different backgrounds.

‘The programme introduced me to a wonderfully diverse group of freelancers in the sector. It enabled me to broaden my perspective of the industry and have conversations with people with very different experiences to my own.’ Freelancer

It was a rare opportunity for freelancers to make new connections with people they would not otherwise have come into contact with and find common ground.

‘I met an incredibly diverse range of freelancers and found really useful solidarity with them on a range of experiences and learned from them about areas that were new to me.’ Freelancer

‘The CF: SLR galvanised tremendous energy and brought together such a diverse group of freelancers and organisations; the conversations were inevitably hugely insightful and useful.’ Partner Organisation

The recruitment and set up process set a positive tone for the CF: SLR programme



This all set a positive tone and bold aspirations

The time taken to create a fair and transparent recruitment process was an important step in setting up for success. 70% of the freelancers agreed that the recruitment set up process set a positive tone for the CF: SLR programme.

‘I think the tone, support and vibe of the programme is very positive and supportive.’

Freelancer

While there certainly some challenges along the way in co-ordinating 50 individuals to make practical steps towards high-level aims (see later chapters) it is worth noting that confidence in the ability to make a positive contribution was broadly maintained.

At the midway point, 63% felt confident that they could make a positive contribution towards the programme.

Managing expectations from outset is key

There was a **huge desire** from the creative freelancers for **significant change** within the industry, from both lived experiences and **feelings of responsibility** to make change for others. This created big hopes and expectations, some going **beyond the remit** of the initial programme.

But **uncertainty** around the **outputs required** from the group during the initial phase **created tensions** and reservations around what could actually be achieved and **slowed** down the **progress** of the group.

Creative freelancers have a huge desire for change

It is clear from reading the freelancers' hopes and expectations of the programme that the desire for change within the industry was huge.

Past experiences mean freelancers really want to see change

The experiences of freelancers within the creative industry are diverse and wide-ranging, but with some consistent issues throughout, which the cohort were trying to address.

Some of the freelancers referred to some negative past experiences which were driving them to make this real and meaningful change. They spoke of an acceptance within the freelance community and wanted to address that.

'Everyone working in theatre has been so gruelled down that they think bad working hours, pay and conditions are just how it is. I hope the cohort can push the idea that its not.' Freelancer

The ongoing pandemic meant that it had been a tough year for everyone and it is likely that had impacted upon everyone's mindset going in to the programme.

Many felt a sense of responsibility to other freelancers in the industry

For many freelancers, this passion for change came with a real sense of responsibility to other creative freelancers within the industry. Right from the outset they were keen to get started and concerned that they would not be able to meet their hopes and expectations within the timescale.

'Meaningful change. Concrete actions. A more sustainable sector.' Freelancer

The recruitment pitch reinforced this hope for big changes

Whilst the recruitment process set up a positive tone for the project and energised some excitement amongst the group, it also set up big expectations. There were different interpretations of individual and collective purpose and what the collective achievements would be.

Many felt that they had been recruited based on big ideas and to make real change and expected to realise this change within the time frame of the programme.

'We were recruited based on big ideas to make real change for freelancers, but once we began the project, we were told that we would simply be creating a Charter. This feels like a very watered-down version of what we thought we were being recruited for, and whilst I don't deny it might be a useful thing to have, I fear it is simply not enough. A charter does not in itself involve any actual action at all.' Freelancer

And therefore hopes for what the programme could achieve were high...

Many freelancers hoped that their time in the cohort would result in actionable recommendations, tangible solutions and the ability to influence policy going forward.

Most freelancers talked about wanting to influence change and to make meaningful and lasting impact upon the sector.

'A clear Manifesto for actual change and a profile to deliver it longer term.' Freelancer

..in some cases, perhaps higher than what was realistic

For some, the inspiring recruitment set out too bold a picture. Whilst the drive to achieve real change for the industry was important and set up a positive tone for working together, some hopes for what could be achieved within the framework and timescale were perhaps too ambitious.

'Perhaps in some ways my hopes were initially too radical/idealistic for what this project can deliver. I think also I was hoping that somehow this project would culminate in some real and immediate changes, whereas now it seems more that we are delivering recommendations which policy makers can choose to implement or ignore and that most likely the necessary funding won't be attainable to deliver the changes we recommend.' Freelancer

For others, there were underlying reservations about what was possible

Amongst the cohort there was a feeling of urgency to get started and dig into the big issues set out in the aims, and for some, there were also reservations about whether or not it was realistic, even from the start.

'I am confident I can make a positive contribution towards the programme, but I am not sure if it will have a sustainable impact for the creative freelancers in the bigger picture and the longer run. The programme seems too short for what needs to be done to cause change and not invent the wheel...therefore most of us are working or tend to work overtime, because the cohort really wants to change things!!' Freelancer

The start of the project provided an opportunity to bring everyone on to the same page, with clarity on what the programme could achieve and what might be a longer-term ambition.

It seems that an assumption was made (with good intentions) that everyone was on the same page, but with multiple stakeholders involved (the CF:SLR cohort, facilitation team, partner organisations, the GLA), different assumptions were made about the end picture.

On reflection, the cohort needed to be explicitly told what they were aiming to realistically achieve, within the timeframe, and this was best placed coming from the GLA, as the funder of the programme.

‘I wanted to make some tangible changes to improve job conditions for Creative Freelancers, rooted in personal experience...’ Freelancer

And some anxiety around what the real impact would be

In addition to hesitance on what was possible for the freelancers to achieve, there was also some concern around what the impact would be. The cohort didn't implicitly trust that whatever recommendations they made would be taken on board and were uncertain about how the decision-makers would be held to account over any recommendations made.

‘I feel like the ask was to come with huge changes in mind for the industry and maybe I had higher expectations of what I could do within the process to make my suggestions a reality. There was some anxiety around what the impact would be.’ Freelancer

‘Lack of direct line of communication to GLA and the final decision making team compiling and publicizing the Freelance Charter. Lack of commitment to upholding recommendations - how will those in positions of power and ‘agents of change’ be held to account?’
Freelancer

There was some expectations, based on the call out application, that there would more opportunities for direct access to policy makers.

‘Creative Freelancers: Shaping London’s Recovery is a six-month action research programme that brings together up to 50 diverse freelancers...with up to 50 leaders of cultural organisations, funders, councils and other key decision-makers.’

When it became clear this was not the case, there was disappointment that they may not be able to influence as much as they had expected

‘I really thought that within this cohort, given that we were working with the Mayor of London and the GLA, we would have the power to recommend and actuate real changes. However I think that we can only make recommendations, and whether or not those are taken up or even seen by the right people is almost totally beyond our control,

which is a little disappointing compared to my expectations.’

These big aspirations, which had initially brought the group together in a shared purpose, led to frustration when not realised.

‘I have a sense of it being a gesture of good intention rather than having any real world impact.’ Freelancer

Visualising a clear ‘end point’ would have helped bring everyone together

There was a sense of frustration from the freelancers during the first half of the project because they didn’t understand what the outputs of their work would be. They wanted clarity on what was expected of them and what they were working towards. The group couldn’t visualise what the tangible outputs would be, which resulted in the momentum of the project being lost.

‘I arrived with priorities and ready to collaborate, and now feel sort of confused about how to go about that and what the tangible outcomes of the programme might be.’ Freelancer

Autonomy is the right approach, but it needs some parameters

There was a desire to empower the freelancers to collectively decide how they wanted to present their recommendations. In the original Freelance Task Force, there was much debate around the issues of empowerment and autonomy and a real desire to maintain the freedom to make decisions amongst themselves. But the reality of making this happen for the collective group, who were mostly unknown to each other is challenging.

Total freedom worked for some...

The space to design was acknowledged by a few as an important part of the process.

‘You gave us space to create our own working process and align our goals. You allowed us to arrange extra talks, meetings, gave us the space to work in our own ways. I personally prefer the autonomy, I can see that many

needed guidance earlier on but for me this worked very well.’ Freelancer

But most needed some clear direction on how to achieve the goals

But the majority needed more guidance about how to achieve their goals. And this was remained a point of confusion throughout much of the first half of the project, creating a barrier to moving forward.

‘It is still not clear to me how the Facilitation team and the Advisory team want us (the freelancers cohort) to achieve the goals.’ Freelancer

Total freedom on what they would deliver seemed to cause the groups to stall, rather than mobilise. When bringing people to work together for the first time, just a little more clarity of direction would have helped. A ‘end point’ that everyone could visualise and plan their work towards.

Fear of not meeting the GLA's needs prevented the group from moving forward

The group didn't feel empowered as a collective to take control and make a firm decision on what to work towards, for fear of it not meeting the needs of the GLA. The sense of responsibility they all felt to achieve meant that the fear of failure was real.

'For quite a while at the beginning of our time together, many of us were unclear of what the end result was going to be. Indeed, it was only after a sub-meeting with the GLA that it was made clear to us that the recommendations were going to be in a two-page document and that not everything we wanted would be included.' Freelancer

It took a long time for the group to get clarity on what the final output would be, and therefore start making progress towards it.

'The goals and structure of the programme have been confusing. I never quite understand what we're working towards or how we go about it. Sure, I get we're going to submit recommendations for a Charter, but the method by which we go about doing that has been extremely nebulous and confusing.' Freelancer

Funders should set a clear expectation on the deliverable

The GLA did not want to put restrictions on what a group of creative individuals might come up with in response to the brief – instead keeping the possibilities open. However, for a group of 50 people – who had not worked together before – to come together in a short space of time stronger direction would have been beneficial.

The group needed the reassurance that what they were going to produce would be taken seriously and clarity on what GLA were expecting at the end of the programme could have solved this. The cohort could have retained decision-making on the specific content, and how they went about delivering it.

Accessibility requires planning and clarity

The **diverse group** of freelancers had a range of **access needs** and the recruitment of a part time Access Manager was a positive step. But the **challenges of time** meant that there were many **inconsistencies** with how these needs were addressed. In particular, the **frequency** of the large **all cohort meetings**, meant that many struggled to **absorb information** in the time allowed and some found it **difficult** to get their **voices heard**.

Diverse range of access needs were not always met

Overall, despite the planning that went into the provision of support for those with access needs, these diverse range of needs were not always met and some freelancers ultimately felt let down by how the programme was delivered.

There were a range of access needs within the cohort

The cohort was made up of individuals with many different accessibility needs and considerations to take into account.

This included individuals who identified as a disabled person; learning disabled; neuro diverse; having a long-term disability; a mental health condition or a chronic illness affecting everyday life.

Around 30% of the cohort agreed that the Equality's Act's definition of being disabled applied to them.

Recruitment of an Access Manager was a positive step

The recruitment of an Access Manager one day a week was a positive action, aimed to address these needs from the start.

A document was produced for the group, which laid out the support available and there appears to have been much good practice in place during the planning of the programme and learnings from the original Task Force were taken into account.

'Access needs did seem to be accommodated at the start - there was a helpful document which laid out the support.' Freelancer

But there were some inconsistencies about how these needs were met

There was reflection by many freelancers that things were put in place from the outset to address accessibility issues, but many others were aware that the large meetings were not meeting everyone's needs.

And more importantly, there were freelancers with specific access needs who felt that their needs were not being accommodated at all.

'As a learning disabled person, this programme was just so inaccessible, and I do have to admit that my access needs were not met.' Freelancer

Overall, around one half of the cohort agreed that the programme had been responsive to their access needs and 16% disagreed.

The proportion who disagreed with this statement increased over time (from 6% at the start of the project to 25% at the end).

More than half of those who identified as disabled disagreed with this statement by the end.

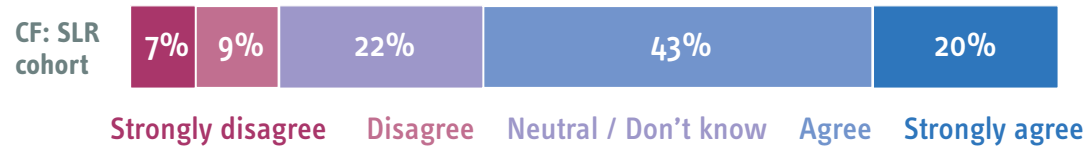
Losing the Access Manager had an impact

Due to unforeseen personal circumstances, the Access Manager had to leave her role within the support team in the latter half of the project. There was not enough time to recruit a replacement to this specialist role for the remainder of the project.

This put additional pressure upon the facilitation team, who did not have the required time to pick up this role.

The freelancers could see that the team just did not have enough time to address these needs, especially once the Access Manager left.

The CF: SLR programme has been responsive to my access needs



‘The Fuel team did not have enough time to address everything required. While they were extremely supportive and understanding in themselves, for a culture to be positive and supportive the supporting team needs to be supported and have enough time, and I do not believe this was the case. Furthermore, the accessibility specialist left and was not replaced.’

Freelancer

Individual care from the team was appreciated

But the lack of time did not mean that the facilitation team were not there for the freelancers. There were a number of comments about individual support provided by the team when freelancers reached out.

‘When I was unwell, the facilitation team were kind, supportive and understanding.’ Freelancer

All-cohort meetings should be few and far between

The main cause of dissatisfaction with accessibility related to the all-cohort meetings. The support team felt it necessary to bring everyone together on a weekly basis to enable communication with the cohort, but the reality was that these regular meetings put undue stress upon both the support team and the freelancers.

The continued pandemic necessitated that all meetings took place online

It's important to note that the Covid-19 pandemic, which motivated the formation of the Freelance Task Force was still prevalent in 2021 when the CF:SLR programme started up. Bringing 50 freelancers together for a face-to-face meeting was not a consideration at any time throughout the programme, so meeting online over Zoom was the only practical solution.

50-person meeting make it very difficult to get things done

The size of the group was an issue for many, who found the full cohort sessions too large to engage with.

Bringing 50 people together (and in some cases partner organisations were also included) in a virtual meeting space is innately challenging and requires careful planning and management, for which there wasn't time with weekly meetings.

'It felt that the same voices were heard in each meeting and that there wasn't a notable adjustment to change or level this. It would have been useful to have more interactive or visual ways of participating in the whole group sessions.' Freelancer

The constant time pressures on the team meant that there didn't seem to be an opportunity to pause, reflect and make changes to accommodate people's needs.

'They were very stressful and not conducive to equitable participation - captions were good, but there was no time for mental processing, no established routine...too many people in a zoom at once.' Freelancer

And means voices aren't heard equally

Well planned break out rooms and other ways of more inclusive engagement should be used to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have their voice heard.

Some freelancers felt that their voices could not be heard in this forum. And the anxieties which had embedded - the urgency to get things done - meant that sometimes these meeting became more reactive than proactive and quite stressful for some.

'The meetings seemed to be stressful, more for some and less for others, and it seems to me less nourishing as they could have been...Sometimes it took a while afterwards to digest everything and calm down. I always felt though that I could voice my struggles and concerns within the meeting or afterward with the organisers, which is great, however they were not always heard or there was no time to find what's needed to change things around.' Freelancer

The full cohort meetings should be kept to essentials only

The sessions were also too long for many of the freelancers who found the experience quite draining. Consideration was given to this at the start of the project, with planned breaks, but it seems that as time went on these were cut short as the team felt the pressure to fit everything in.

Whilst bringing everyone together in one space was an essential element of the programme, having less frequent meetings with more time to thoughtfully design, organise and share an agenda would have worked better.

‘Things such as breaks in sessions were gradually reduced as the programme moved on, sometimes we were expected to take breaks when we needed them (instead of set times) which meant missing part of the session, and it was often left to us in breakout rooms to advocate for ourselves. All of this

meant that I found the cohort sessions very draining.’ Freelancer

Time is needed for mental processing

Time for mental processing is an important consideration for meeting individual needs and the needs of different neuro types. Time to process content in advance of the meeting as well as well as time to reflect afterwards is essential.

Sending out agendas well in advance of the meeting and including the objectives of the meeting would enable those who needed more time to process information equitable opportunity to participate.

But time pressures of everyone involved meant that this was not achieved

However the frequency of these meetings and the part-time nature of the support team’s roles, meant agendas and communications related to the meeting were often sent out without enough time for the cohort to absorb

the information or prepare for any additional requests.

And the nature of creative freelancing meant that everyone was working different working patterns in between the set working day for the cohort, meaning that inevitably some struggled more than others to find time to pick up emails in between meetings.

‘I felt that too often, information (meeting agendas, changes in remit and project focuses) were given to the cohort with too little time for us to prep or to have any adequate time to respond, leading to things being more fraught than they needed to be.’

Freelancer

A clearly articulated purpose for each meeting would have helped to relieve some stress

Confusion and lack of clarity appears to be the main cause of stress felt by some of the

freelancers. Alongside a clear output, the all-cohort meetings could have been designed to fit around a small number of key milestones. A clear purpose and agenda for each meeting, delivered well in advance would have helped to dispel some of the tension surrounding these meetings.

This would also have enabled better advance planning of internal communications, and helped to relieve some of the pressure on the team and enable them to be more proactive, rather than reactive.

‘When I asked what was expected of us I was simply given the project plan. This did not address my neuro type which needs to know where it is expected to head.’ Freelancer

Improved communication processes were still overwhelming for some

In the Freelance Task Force, many freelancers felt overwhelmed by the number of different communication channels which developed throughout the process.

There were clear improvements with the appointment of a part-time Communication and Administration Coordinator who was aware of the need to keep channels of communication to a minimum.

But during the course of the programme, other channels developed, such as a Discord channel, created by the freelancers. And whilst these different means of communication probably served a valid purpose and were optional to use, it did mean that some freelancers felt that there were too many channels to keep up with. Simplicity where ever possible will help to alleviate the overwhelm which is so easy to feel in such a large group.

‘The inconsistency in the way we communicated with each other - email, Whatsapp, Discord, Google drive, Miro. It was totally exhausting and felt like a massive barrier to work.’ Freelancer

Future improvements will help to ensure a more positive community is created

It is clear that the affects of the pandemic had resulted in a tough year for many of the freelancers, and while it was hoped that the cohort would create some solidarity (as we saw in the Freelance Task Force), this only happened for a minority.

The cohort had a positive impact on wellbeing for some, but not for many. Given the challenging times and the context which brought everyone together, providing a nurturing and positive environment was always going to be difficult. And as we will explore further, there are steps which can be taken in the future to help build a positive community for all.

Desire to empower held up momentum

The facilitation team had to hit the ground running and needed **more time to plan** before the cohort joined the programme. There was also a **missed opportunity** at the outset for the cohort to **get to know** each others' hopes and interests. This would have laid **important foundations** for the formation of the working groups.

The **ambition to empower** the freelancers to make decisions for themselves ultimately **held up** the **momentum**, stalling the formation of working groups and caused some tensions within the group.

A short 'set up' would allow for sharing and learning

The initial induction phase provides an ideal place for collaboration with the group and to share documents which, with more lead in

time, could have been created in advance for collaboration and refinement.

Facilitation team had to hit the ground running

The facilitation team had a big remit when they joined, to create the framework for the programme as well as designing the recruitment for the cohort. They had to hit the ground running to get everything ready for the start of the programme.

There was a lot to achieve in a short space of time and a longer run in period was needed in order to stay ahead of the programme. The team were playing catch-up and didn't have quite enough time to get ahead.

'I felt consistently like the Facilitation Team had an impossible job and were working miracles with the limited time available.' *Advisory Board member*

And whilst there was acknowledgement from freelancers that the team had a lot to achieve in the time they had available to them, this in turn caused some frustrations as the cohort felt that the programme should have had

more of a structure in place before they signed up.

Freelancers were looking for the reassurance of structure and processes to support them. Some referred to the challenges of juggling the one day time commitment in an industry which was starting to open up again and therefore needed to arrive at the cohort on a Tuesday with certainty and direction.

Efforts to set a Code of Conduct were appreciated but took too long

For example, the creation of a Code of Conduct was done in collaboration with the freelancers, and whilst it was seen as a positive move generally, because of the pressure that many of the freelancers had put upon themselves to get going with the research, some felt it was time wasted and it could have been done with more speed.

'Co-creating a 'code of conduct' was an excellent idea, but took longer than needed.'

Time and space to bond and share would have laid important foundations

The opportunity for the freelancers to get to know each other at the start of the project was an important recommendation, to allow connections to be made and to build confidence within the group. It was a missed opportunity and one which would have helped the cohort to start working together sooner, with a shared purpose.

This would have inevitably become an easier prospect if a face-to-face meet-up had been possible.

‘Communication is key. The time to establish that is the beginning of a collaborative relationship, not the middle or end.’ Freelancer

And would have enabled relationships to be forged and networks created

A common hope amongst freelancers was networking opportunities and meeting a diverse range of people within the sector.

‘Networking, understanding different perspectives.’ Freelancer

And, although for some this was an important outcome of their time in the cohort, for others, realising this was difficult outside the working groups, leading to some feeling like it was a missed opportunity. Enabling these connections to be made early on would have made networking across working groups easier to imagine.

‘I hoped to develop more relationships and build a network, but it did not mature. I am happy about the connections made with my working groups, but aware there were so many other freelancers on this programme I never got to meet or connect with.’ Freelancer

Research skills would have been relevant training

There was time dedicated to training and skills development at the start of the programme, which was appreciated, but there was feedback that this could have been more applicable to the programme. Practical training, such as research methods – skills which could then have been used during the programme – would have been a good use of time in the initial phase and would have helped to build confidence.

‘Huge amounts of time were spent on activities such as creating the Code of Conduct document...that could have been better spent training the cohort in research methods, gathering qualitative and quantitative evidence and policy making, and helping us understand what we need to consider at the beginning to enable a successful outcome of this process.’

Freelancer

‘I think there are many who are needing support with research and much of the structure of the cohort meetings on a Tuesday have made getting on with research harder for the cohort.’ Freelancer

Group decision-making needs a pragmatic framework

There was a clear and well-intentioned desire to give as much ownership as possible to the cohort – to ensure that the issues addressed by the cohort were those that freelancers themselves felt were most pressing, and to tackle these issues in the way they wanted.

But with limited time and a large number of people some pragmatic decisions needed to be made.

Collaboration and ownership is important

The cohort structure was fiercely debated in the Freelance Task Force and the decision to avoid traditional hierarchy with the CF: SLR cohort was one which the freelancers largely acknowledged as a positive decision.

The cohort wanted to be empowered to take ownership of their own workloads and to collaborate between themselves. But it takes time to collaborate fairly and to ensure that every one has a voice.

And the desire to empower freelancers to make decisions together meant that the programme lost some momentum and time spent on agreeing ways of working may have been better spent getting started on the task at hand.

There was a noble desire to let the cohort ‘lead’

The facilitation team wanted to empower freelancers to form working groups in a more organic way, hoping to ensure that everyone was able to work on the areas they were most invested.

‘I witnessed many times, the facilitation team with good intention saying they would be guided by the cohort but it’s virtually impossible for 50 individuals plus 50 organisations, over this period of time, to be able to make decisions and self organise. Self organising networks often evolve - but this network was selected and didn’t have the timescale to be able to find better ways of working.’ Partner Organisation

But pragmatism from the start was needed

But in practice, there wasn’t the time for this level of community building to find natural shared interests.

There was an opportunity at the start of the programme for the information gathered during the recruitment process (on topics of interest) to be used to form the working groups. More should have been made of this opportunity to ‘jump start’ the formation of the working groups, while still allowing the space for new ideas to form.

While it might have resulted in some topics that emerged later were missed, it would have ensured the groups made progress and felt productive, faster.

The switch to ‘doing the work’ needed to happen faster

The transition from the planned induction period to working together on the goals of the project needed to happen faster.

The lack of movement at this point conflicted strongly with the freelancers’ sense of urgency to deliver positive change. There was a real impatience amongst the cohort to get started on the work. This in turn caused some negativity amongst the cohort and some resistance to the initial planned programme.

And aware of the limited time-frame for those big ambitions to be realised, some felt discouraged with the progress.

‘By doing so much of the introduction when we could have been actually working on the project, many felt disenfranchised and discouraged.’

Freelancer

Getting into working groups seemed to be a challenge

But getting into the working groups took longer than intended, with some feeling that they were forced into them in the end, which was not the intended outcome.

‘The general structure was not effective for 50 freelancers and 50 organisations who had never met. The goal seemed to always be for us to communicate and organise ‘organically’ but that’s not really possible when you don’t know the other participants already.’

Partner Organisation

The necessary change of approach came late in the day

The facilitation team recognised that things weren’t working and understood the need for this process to move quicker. They therefore changed direction and asked freelancers to sign-up to working groups. In hindsight, it

was agreed that this should have happened sooner in order to keep the momentum of the programme going.

‘Needed working groups to be imposed or at least if they were to be self forming, we needed clear facilitation early in the programme to be able to do this. I have felt a lot of responsibility for us not being able to come together more quickly into meaningful groups to actually drill down into the work. But in reality, I now believe that with 50 professionally diverse people it is a major task to ask us to completely self organise and come up with meaningful output in a 5 month period.’ Freelancer

But the delay had allowed some negativity to seep in which was hard to shift

The delays in getting going on the research and the confusion over what was expected of them, meant that some negativity grew within the cohort and this was difficult to shift.

This made the all cohort meetings more challenging and perhaps less productive than they could have been.

Some freelancers acknowledged the negativity which was reflected back to the Facilitation team when the cohort felt under pressure. Many could see that the team were working hard in challenging circumstances and felt uncomfortable participating in some of the communication forums.

‘You did very well in the face of a lot of unnecessary negativity from many cohort members. You tried to empower us and let us get on with our own research and methods of working.’ Freelancer

‘I also think the facilitation team really cared about making the programme work for us, and were adaptable when we had issues. On the negative side, I don’t think that respect was extended to the facilitation team...that kind of behaviour should have been called out and nipped in the bud, because it was allowed to fester and grow and made the facilitation team’s job all the harder.’ Freelancer

Once working groups got underway, clear progress made

Once freelancers were working effectively together on shared goals, the programme started to move along and the freelancers started to feel empowered to self-organise *within* the groups to achieve what was being asked of them.

‘There was a certain blitz spirit that sped up bonding in the cohort, the ability to self organise around subjects we were passionate about meant that we met with like minded people. The care, collaboration and shared facilitation in the working groups was really strong.’ Freelancer

‘I enjoyed networking with my fellow cohort members and particularly within working groups.’

But the credit for this wasn’t always given to the programme

Because the transition into working groups was slow and challenging, many seemed unclear that it was always part of the plan. It gave an impression that the cohort formed the groups out of necessity, rather than as a supported part of the intended plan.

‘As a cohort we formed strong connections, often in adversity and managing the individual projects ourselves.’ Freelancer

‘I think if we’d been clear from the outset that we needed to form working groups, and those groups needed to research and then make a report, then we could have gotten more done, more efficiently, with fewer issues.’ Freelancer

Roles outside the cohort need more clarity

Despite **job descriptions** for all roles, there was some **uncertainty** by Partner Organisations and **Advisory Group** members about how they could **fully engage** with the process and make their involvement count.

Many **Partner Organisations** could see strong **benefits** of the programme for individual **freelancers** and the **sector** as a whole and learnt much from the process, but some couldn't articulate **their purpose** within the programme.

Partner organisations were not fully clear on the purpose of their role

Partner Organisations reflected upon some positive working relationships with freelancers and acknowledged the benefits to their organisation of gaining a better

understanding of the challenges that freelancers faced.

But some didn't fully understand what the purpose of their inclusion in the programme was beyond this engagement with their partnered freelancer.

'As a partner organisation I felt that our role beyond supporting the individual freelancer assigned to us was not really clear and much of the time we were passively listening to very long presentations at each of the meetings with very little time for discussion or real involvement.' Partner Organisation

An agreed 'lighter touch' remit might have been beneficial for all

There was some uncertainty about how they should engage with the programme and particularly the all cohort meetings, leading some to feel that they were not a necessary part of the process.

'I felt like the experience for freelancers was good, and that they made good achievements through the process. As a partner organisation and as an individual representing my organisations, I didn't feel like I was that important to the process.'

Partner Organisation

And for some organisations, it was difficult to find time to fully participate in activities (especially as the amount of meetings and tasks ramped up towards the end of the project), as well as keeping up with their usual workload.

'I witnessed the culture of urgency more and more and then being asked to be at long meetings with short notice was just not possible and made me feel that I was not supporting the project properly. Most of the work was squeezed in October and November which is always a complicated season in our sector and this year.' Partner Organisation

An agreement on what was expected of Partners – with a realistic time estimate – would have helped.

One of the Advisory Group members reflected on how some partner organisations hadn't engaged as much as they could have and noted that the programme had mainly been driven by the freelance cohort. This highlights the need for more clarity on how the partner organisations could have engaged further and ultimately what their purpose was.

'My perception of the work has shown more engagement from the cohort than the partner organisations. Whilst some partners engaged very well and in depth, I feel others have not made their presence felt, and this is likely to be reflected in the outcomes, reports and recommendations coming out of the programme. The cohort of freelancers has been the main driver of progress within the process.' Advisory Group

Some thought that freelancers would fit in to their work

One partner organisation noted how they had expected the freelancers to be able to feed into some of their existing work. Whilst this may have been a misunderstanding, it highlights the need for all involved to have a clear, shared purpose for participation from the outset.

As an organisation we felt that we'd fundamentally misunderstood the nature of the project, and that the freelancer we were matched with would have the opportunity to feed into some of the existing work of our organisation, as part of their research. This may have been partly our error, however anecdotally it appears there were other mismatched views between perception/initial understanding and reality among both partners and freelance cohort members.' Partner Organisation

And the need for a more equitable investment in the outcome was apparent in some of the responses.

'I think this process can work well if the freelancer and partner are equally engaged with each other. If not, as in my experience, the partner organisation can feel slightly redundant to the process. I felt that most of the positive outcomes of the programme were gained by the freelance cohort in their own weekly meetings.' Partner Organisation

The opportunity to learn from freelancers' experiences was invaluable to many

Other organisations didn't have any specific expectations of what they wanted to get out of the experience and were happy to offer support and to learn.

'Myself and my organisation didn't approach it with specific expectations. We just wanted to lend our support and be in a position to learn from the activity, and we hoped that recommendations and insight would emerge that would help freelancers, and help us work more equitably with freelancers.' Partner Organisation

And many could see the work that had gone into making the programme happen.

'I think it's been a really difficult job and the organisers have done amazingly well. It's a big group to coordinate and there are many differing ideas and needs so perhaps it could have been made clearer at the very beginning that this was an untested way of working and there were bound to be moments when comms and decision-making environments were tricky.' Partner Organisation

Advisory board members were initially unsure how to engage in practice

There was also some teething problems with the role of the Advisory Group and their working relationship with the facilitation team.

‘The original structure and roles for each element of the programme was not clear enough and led to confusion around what the Facilitation Team were meant to be leading on, and what the Advisory Group were meant to be leading on.’ Advisory Group

The Advisory Board had job descriptions but were unsure how to fit in to the programme

Although job descriptions were clearly written, the roles were new and took some working through with the team. Some time was needed to see how all the pieces fit together.

More time to plan in advance of the programme would have helped the Advisory Group to become more engaged with the cohort and partner organisations and therefore more supportive to the Facilitation Team.

‘I feel a lack of prior planning and consultation on how the process was going to work from day one has had an impact on the ability of the Advisory Group to be fully engaged from the beginning. There have been areas where this interaction has been better than expected (i.e. particularly in the latter stages of the process), but it felt as if a clear direction for how the Advisory Group would engage with the wider cohort and partners was somewhat overlooked.’ Advisory Group

Therefore expectations were often not met

Because of some of the uncertainty around how to engage with the wider programme, there was some reflection that the Advisory Group could have played a more pivotal role, had their participation been clearer from the start, causing some frustration amongst the group and varying levels of engagement overall.

‘We didn’t have contact with the cohort for a considerable length of time at the start of the programme, and I feel the Advisory Group could have played a more pivotal role if they had known how they would connect. Overall, I still feel the process has been fruitful and very much necessary.’ Advisory Group

And some members were less engaged than others

There were different levels of engagement within the members of the group. Some were more proactive at lending support to the facilitation team and understanding the dynamics of the group, whilst others were remained more distant from the progress.

‘While the fortnightly Zooms were able to happen during working hours, I was not able to do the preparatory and reading work on working time and this fell to evenings.’ Advisory Group

An opportunity for a powerful legacy

In the end, there was **much pride** for what was achieved **by the cohort** within the timescale of the programme. The **scale** of the **work** was vast and the eventual **recommendations** were seen as **actionable** by all involved.

But there was **some scepticism** about the next steps and whether the work of the cohort would be taken forward to **impact change** in the wider sector. Freelancers would like to **be involved** in taking these recommendations forward.

There is pride for what each working group achieved

Once the working groups were established and the freelancers were clear on what they were producing for the GLA, progress was made and some significant outcomes achieved.

By the end of the process, half of the freelancers agreed that the cohort as a whole had delivered on its aims and objectives (around one third weren't sure) and 15% disagreed.

'I thought that we worked brilliantly as smaller autonomous groups and between us have come up with an impressive array of wide ranging solutions to existing problems.'

Many were confident that they had achieved their goals of working towards real change for the industry. There was clear pride in the personal contributions of the working groups towards the bigger picture, by making clear recommendations.

'I feel we've generated excellent recommendations, from feasible quick-wins to more radical concepts that need longer term support. Implementing and means testing our recommendations will require more time and funding, which now lies beyond the limits of this period.'

The cohort put in a lot of work and the scale of the outputs is impressive

In a relatively short timeframe, the cohort worked together to produce a huge amount of research and reach conclusions on a range of topics. All stakeholders could see that some impressive outputs had been created.

'I think that in the end, people pulled together to produce some really great work in their chosen specific topics. And are happy they achieved something.' Freelancer

Partner Organisations were impressed with the actionable recommendations

Partner Organisations were also impressed by the sheer scale of the work produced at the end. They had observed the bumps along the way and they were impressed that it had all come together into some actionable insights.

‘The reports I have read so far have been clear, concise and contained real actions, many of which feel achievable.’ Partner Organisation

‘I think the cohort of freelancers did really brilliant work. A lot of the working groups managed to shape unwieldy conversations into clear recommendations.’ Partner Organisation

And the Advisory Group also saw that progress had been made

The Advisory Group members could also see the progress that had been made during the course of the programme and many were confident that the recommendations being

made could be taken forward by policy makers and funders.

‘The final presentations from the cohort working groups was hugely impressive in it’s breadth and detail, and strength of research underpinning it...These recommendations and suggestions can be actively taken forward and taken on by policy makers and funders with the power to advocate and support change; the recommendations for how organisations and employers should behave are also tangible and, subject to the will, entirely possible to enact.’ Advisory Group

One Advisory Group member reflected that the power of this success was the autonomy that they had once they were in the working groups, enabling them to research freely within these broad aims.

‘The work that the cohort produced was stunning. Well thought through, tested and SMART.’ Advisory Group

‘The final presentations from the cohort working groups was hugely impressive in it’s breadth and detail, and strength of research underpinning it.’ Advisory Group

‘The three goals were ambitious and aligned with the Mayor of London and the London Economic Enterprise Partnership goals They were not easily translatable to everyday artists experiences. However, by enabling the freelance cohort to zoom out from these, research freely etc. before zooming in again, I think a powerful set of recommendations against each goal has been arrived at.’ Advisory Group

I believe the work of the CF: SLR programme will have a positive impact on the sector



Cohort are keen to know ‘what’s next?’

Although the cohort were generally pleased with the outcomes of the programme, the questions on everyone’s mind were around the next steps. What would be done with their recommendations? Would they be taken seriously and who would be taking them forward?

After months of work there is some scepticism about ‘handing over’

Because of the slow start to the working groups, some freelancers felt that the end had come too soon. They were frustrated with the need to down tools and hand over their work. They felt a loss of control and were sceptical that the recommendations would be taken forward by the right owners.

‘I feel a bit unsure if our perspectives will really be included in the Charter produced as we are not actually writing it ourselves - something which came as a surprise to me (might have been my own fault for not realising this sooner). I have worries that ultimately this might produce some best practice documents and another report but not affect the real and radical changes needed.’

And the hours of work that the group put in meant that some felt frustrated that their work had been distilled into a summarised version to hand over to the GLA.

‘We delivered watered down versions of what was hours and hours of results, research and interviews. We have zero visibility (really) over what happens next.’ Freelancer

Many want to continue progress and be involved

This frustration at the programme ending is not surprising considering the big hopes and expectations that the cohort had to change the industry for the better.

And for many of the freelancers, their journey would not be ending. There were hopes to be involved in the next steps and to drive the cohort’s recommendations forward. But some also intended to take their mission into their own work outside of the programme.

‘I intend to take this mission into all my work in the industry and I’m mentoring a few early career artists with all the work as a backbone. I now need to see it through to the next stage - the actualisation is where the learning really is for me and it would be against the aims of the programme if we weren’t the ones to lead on putting these recommendations into action. We should be employed to do this and to be part of the decision making teams and advisory boards for institutions - you should build on what we have developed as people and both use and nurture it.’ Freelancer

Many were clear, that freelancers needed to be involved in the next stage in order to impact change.

‘The programme will only impact the sector going forward if freelancers are involved. The fear is all this work will just become another report and the relevant bodies who need to impact change will not. There’s a feeling that there’s a culture of passing responsibility in the sector and no one really making anyone accountable.’

Freelancer

Now is the chance to really shout about the work and keep up momentum

There is an opportunity to really celebrate the achievements of the group and to share the recommendations more widely. After a number of challenges, the programme ended on a more positive note as the breadth of work was shared. Build on this further.

Freelancers wanted to see that the work shared widely across the sector

Right from the outset, freelancers had wide expectations of a sector-wide roll out of the outputs of the programme. Their hopes included reaching the wider sector with their messaging and the implementation of policy change.

‘I hoped that the cohort would be able to usher in a widespread campaign for educating freelancers on their rights, which could be referred to by people at all levels of their career. I also hoped that the cohort could have a wider impact on long lasting policy change that improves both the sector and the working lives of freelancers.’ Freelancer

‘That the outcomes will become part of a sector roll out managed by those in power - a sliding scale of easy wins, recommended best practice and policy change.’ Freelancer

But external communications during the programme were limited

Due to the large amounts of time spent on internal communications with the freelancers and partner organisations, limited time was spent on external communications.

This was a frustration for both the facilitation team and the freelancers and compounded the feelings that the work could be brushed under the carpet.

‘I hope that the work will make an impact on the sector, but I’m not confident. I think communication about the work with the wider sector has been poor, and most people don’t even know that the project exists, which will make it very easy for the GLA to sweep more ambitious recommendations under the rug.’

Freelancer

‘I think the impact on the sector will hopefully come in the future, but right now i think there was a missed opportunity to reassure freelancers that we are a community for them. We should have done town hall meetings, talks, so much more. But if the change comes through our work and it helps them, I’ll be happy.’

An opportunity to celebrate the achievements and communicate the next steps

So now is the time to really celebrate the achievements of the group and to share the recommendations more widely.

There has already been a commitment by the GLA to compile and publish the recommendations of the group. And discussions have taken place about how to communicate the next steps.

A range of individual outcomes achieved

The personal and **professional hopes** and expectations of the cohort were wide ranging and the overall experience **fell short** for some. The **challenges** faced along the way meant that some hopes were not realised. But **many personal and professional outcomes** were **achieved** and 8 in 10 freelancers agreed that they had formed **new connections** or networks through the programme. **New skills** were learned and many intended to continue their **mission** after the end of the programme.

Personal outcomes were as diverse as the hopes of the cohort

The personal and professional outcomes shared by the cohort were as diverse the hopes and expectations which they expressed at the start of the project.

Some of these hopes for the programme included:

- Networking / making connections: both personal and professional; to reconnect with the industry; engage with policy-makers
- Gaining a better understanding of freelancers' experiences and to have a voice for those under-represented within the industry
- To listen and contribute to important conversations: to be a part of the bigger picture

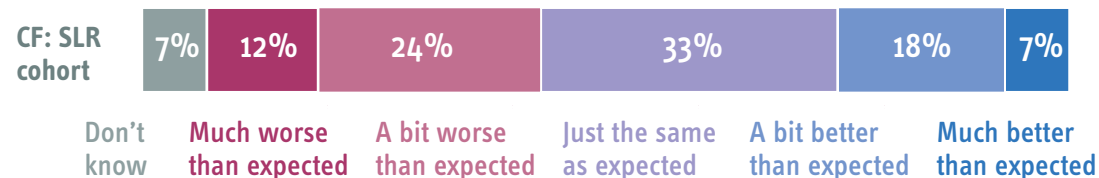
- To deepen knowledge through research; gain new personal skills and contribute to personal development
- To have a sense of purpose; to influence positive and impactful change for the wider sector
- To create real world impact

As previously discussed, some of the hopes and expectations for the cohort as a whole were perhaps too ambitious for the timescale and remit of the programme and there were some frustrations around the overall outcomes of the programme as a whole.

Personal hopes



Professional hopes



Professional hopes were met for one quarter of the cohort

Professional outcomes were more positive. For one quarter, the experience as a whole was better than their professional hopes and expectations. For one third it was just as expected, meaning over half had their professional expectations met or more.

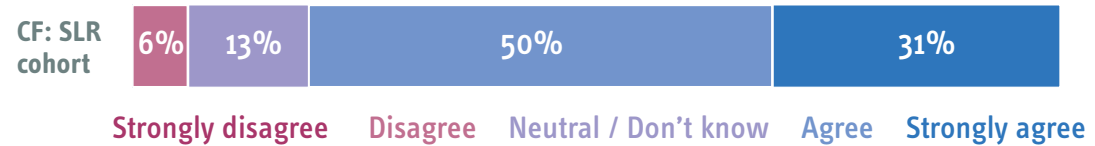
The overall experience fell short of personal expectations

The experience was more likely to fall short of personal expectations however.

Around two thirds of the cohort thought that the experience as a whole was worse than they had expected in terms of personal benefits, reflecting the challenges that the group faced along the way.

For 17%, it was as expected, and for 13% the experience was better than expected. This further highlights the need to manage expectations so that the programme can realistically deliver.

I have formed new connections and networks through the CF: SLR programme



Valuable, lasting connections were made

But many personal and professional hopes were realised within the programme and many freelancers reflected on positive outcomes.

Similar to the experiences of those in the Freelance Task Force, connections made during the programme were particularly valuable, on a number of difference levels.

‘The connections I have made will hopefully last way into the future and I do hope that this will not be the end of this cohort.’ Freelancer

Learning about other freelancer roles was important to many, enabling better communication with colleagues in the sector generally.

‘I have learnt more about different creative freelancer roles and what they require which can improve how I communicate when I work with such people in the future...’ Freelancer

And the appreciation of different perspectives was particularly important for this cohort of freelancers.

‘I think I learned most from hearing the different perspectives of the individuals in the cohort and their range of freelance experiences.’

Freelancer

Connections with partner organisations were strong

Both the freelancers and partner organisations valued the connections made through the programme and many intended to continue working together after the programme ended.

‘My partner organisation were incredible. I think that I achieved a lot of work simply through their support.’ Freelancer

‘Having 1:1s with a freelancer and discussing topics from both sides of the fence has been great for both parties and I hope it continues.’

Partner Organisation

Partner organisations benefited from gaining a better understanding of key issues

There was a genuine appreciation from partners organisation who had gained a better understanding the key issues facing freelancers and there was an appetite for continuing the conversations.

‘For us, the key outcome is a better understanding of how to set freelancer fees - this was the focus of the freelancer we were paired with and in our meetings we explored this in depth.’ Freelancer

Many freelancers felt listened to

Importantly, many freelancers felt listened to and respected, by all involved in the project. And they felt part of important conversations.

‘I feel that whatever I have said has been listen to and I have been very proud to have been a member of this cohort and played a small part in the recommendations that have gone forward.’ Freelancer

‘The cohort members, as well as the facilitators, all partners and partner organisations listened to our thoughts, questions, needs, suggestions. The debate and generated conversations were serious, deeply engaged and engaging, and respectful.’ Freelancer

Interest for advocacy was a surprising outcome for some

Through the work of the cohort, some freelancers spoke of a new interest in advocacy and policy related work and intended to continue their professional development outside of the programme. For others it was about gaining an awareness of the importance of arts activism.

'I feel that this programme has encouraged my professional development because I'm now really eager to take on some more advocacy/policy-related work. And I feel that through this process, I've come to understand and learn what's really needed to make strong recommendations.' Freelancer

'I feel lucky to have been part of the cohort even though parts of it have been tough, and it has given me a stronger interest in arts activism, and reminded me why its necessary.'
Freelancer

Others spoke of valuable lessons learned in how to challenge with fairness and clarity. And they felt more empowered to stand up for their ideas when challenged.

'I learnt how to challenge figures of authority with fairness and clarity. I learnt how to push back effectively when someone finds holes in your idea. I learnt so much more about the mechanisms of organisations as businesses, and little tricks freelancers have picked up to make the industry work for them.' Freelancer

'I learned how to better articulate my rights and the sociopolitical context in which my work and labour conditions as a freelancer sit.' Freelancer

Over half felt it increased professional development

Overall, around half (52%) felt that the CF:SLR cohort had encouraged their professional development (23% were neutral and 25% disagreed).

'This project has supported my leadership ambitions and will form the base of work and philosophies moving forward.' Freelancer

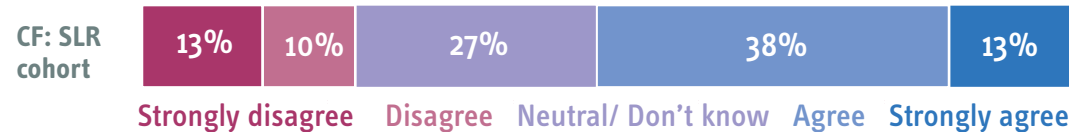
Especially early stage career

Many cohort members spoke of learning from other freelancers, either those at a different stage in their career, a different discipline or job role. The diversity of the group enabled freelancers to learn new perspectives. It was especially beneficial for those in the earlier stages of their career, to make connections with so many difference creative freelances.

Being part of the CF: SLR cohort has encouraged by professional development



I have learned new skills or ways of working through the CF: SLR cohort



‘On a professional level, it was amazing for me. I’m earlier in my career than some cohort members. I found that this was such a great thing for me to do in this stage of my career, because I learned so much from working with other artists in the sector, especially those with more experience and/ or those from different areas that I don’t usually work in...I got to dust off the research and writing skills I hadn’t used since

graduating university. I felt like I was working towards something I was interested in, passionate about, and had the potential to make a positive difference in my sector.’ Freelancer

New skills or ways of working developed for half of the cohort

Overall, around half of all freelancers felt that they had learned new skills or ways of working through their time in the cohort.

These included skills such as research, project management and public speaking.

‘I have learned a lot about research and ways of working from other cohort members and have made strong connections. This has been very positive for my professional development, and a lot of the work challenged me and made me think which was also positive.’ Freelancer

For others, the and skills and confidence that they gained during their time with the cohort would be invaluable moving forward in their career.

‘I learned: project management skills, improved my presentation and public speaking skills, practised the collation and communication of disparate work streams and forged new connections. I will be able to take much forward from this work into my next jobs...I am very grateful to have been part of the programme and would choose to join a similar one in future, but would be better prepared for the challenges of working in such a large nebulous group in the future.’ Freelancer

Challenging thinking and solidarity with others provided hope

But ultimately, for some freelancers, it was the solidarity of a group coming together with the shared purpose of improving working conditions for freelancers that made the experience worth while.

‘I learned how to better articulate my rights and the sociopolitical context in which my work and labour conditions as a freelancer sit. I met an incredibly diverse range of freelancers and found really useful solidarity with them on a range of experiences, and learned from them about areas that were new to me. It felt like a small positive shift in the dial for our working conditions and sector to have so many organisations and stakeholders gathered to (hopefully) listen to this coalition of freelancers, and it’s hopeful that there’s collective will behind the need for things to be better.’ Freelancer

And with improved processes, a strong community could be achieved for all

But it’s important to reflect that not everyone experienced this outcome because of the challenges that they faced along the way, navigating their way around the large meetings and the stress caused by uncertainty.

With time to create structure and improved processes, more freelancers could benefit from this shared experience and a more positive, lasting community could be created.

‘Being a member of the cohort has helped me immensely and has had a very positive impact on my working life and life in general. I have learned so much, not only from the workshops and talks we’ve been given over the last few months, but also from talking to others – both freelancers and those in organisations. It has inspired me to continue to learn new skills myself and continue to work towards a better and fairer society for freelancers.’ Freelancer

Appendix 1

List of freelancers involved in the CF: SLR programme:

Seifeldin Abdel Salam	Ellese Elliott	Gaël Le Cornec	Cory Shipp
Emily Beecher	Tanja Erhart	Del Mak	Lauren Silver
Shaniqua Benjamin	Richard Evans	Sarah Meadows	Kunal Singhal
Laura Caldow	Sarah Farnsley	Cole Morrison	Beth Sitek
Jessica Carter	Alex Fernandes	Olivia Munk	PJ Stanley
Emma Clark	Jonathan Glew	Aston New	Hannah Tookey
Emily Collins	Fauzia Habib	Seeta Patel	Shamira Turner
Rhys Cook	Ali Hunter	Mary Paterson	Eve Veglio-White
Natasha Davis	Tash Hyman	Joanna Pidcock	Krista Vuori
Stefano Di Renzo	Caroline Jeyaratnam-Joyner	Sarah Poekert	Beth Watson
Sara Doctors	Chloe Kennedy	Megan Prescott	George Williamson
Eleesha Drennan	Anne Langford	Nancy May Roberts	Kyley Winfield
Carole Edrich	Nathalie Alison Layton-McIntosh		

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.



‘Learning from the last 20 weeks and going on to make the freelance world a better place, I feel privileged to have been part of this cohort and a small part of the work that has been done. Thank you all for a wonderful opportunity. I hope this will not be the end of our work together – here’s to the future!’

Freelancer

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