

Freelands Foundation The Freelands Artist Programme

How can we support
Emerging Artists?



In 2016 Freelands Foundation commissioned a piece of qualitative research to explore the current landscape of post-university support for emerging artists in the UK, and to gather ideas for enhancing this provision. This research has helped to inform and underpin the development of the Foundation's latest funding initiative: The Freelands Artist Programme. The broad findings of the research are summarised below.

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Research Background

One of the Foundation's core ambitions is to target funds where they are most needed, and to offer opportunities to artists at critical stages in their careers. Freelands Foundtaion also seeks to tap into existing organisational expertise and where possible to support nascent arts ecologies in different regions around the UK. This research was commissioned with these aspirations in mind, and was guided by the following key questions:

1. What are the major areas of need for artists living and working in the UK today?
2. What is the most impactful way of giving to an artist to support them?
3. What are the models of best practice and how can we learn from them?
4. Where are the opportunities for intervention?

Methodology

In-depth interviews were conducted with fifteen practitioners, including artists, funders, lecturers and leaders from organisations dedicated to supporting artists. A number of other funders offered feedback over email. The individuals interviewed were approached on the basis of their ability to provide insight into the current status of artists' support, and to think strategically about gaps in provision. Most of those interviewed work closely with artists on a regular basis, and are professionally invested in championing and mentoring creative practitioners. This qualitative research represents a relatively small sample of opinions, however many of the interviewees speak for wider communities of practitioners and cultural workers.

The research also drew upon a range of recent literature and included a survey of current public and private funding schemes, institutional residencies, bursaries and commissions, as well as exhibition showcases and prizes aimed at early career, UK-based artists. This online research also involved a survey of current opportunities and initiatives offered by universities and art colleges (both during BA courses and after graduation).

Key Findings

What is life like
for emerging/
early career
artists today?

- It is widely cited that artists in the UK earn on average £10,000 or less per year (Jones, 2015). In Scotland for instance, it is reported that approximately 80% of artists earn less than £10,000 per year through their artistic practice, while two thirds earn less than £5,000. Only 2% of artists are reported to make over £20,000 – which still represents a relatively low wage (Creative Scotland, 2016). Recent research indicates that the picture is worsening.

“The need is getting more and more acute. The number of unpaid opportunities for artists is increasing while the average fees paid to artists are decreasing. And on their shoulders rests a \$50 billion a year market. It’s just insane.”

Russell Martin, Director, Artquest

- The cost of surviving as an artist after art school continues to rise, particularly because many artists determine that they need to live in London in order to access the capital’s cultural institutions and contacts.
- The first few years after graduating are pivotal for many artists.

“I think after university there’s a big drop-off of people who never make art again, or they move into ways around making the work. So I think those 2 to 5 years are really critical. Where you’re probably struggling financially, trying to network and meet people, you’re still part of quite a big pool of people who are also at that level in their career, you are trying to get to know how things work, trying to get work shown. I think it’s a really hard period and some people shoot out and get elevated, and for other people there’s more of a

slow slog.”

Rose Cupit, Senior Film London Artists' Moving Image Network (FLAMIN) Manager

- Financial pressures can mean that talented artists are diverted from pursuing their practice.

“When I was mentoring for New Contemporaries, I would say of the eight artists that I mentored, six or so were living back at home [with their parents]. And the ones that weren't were literally on minimum wage waitressing, and sadly had no time to think about making work – they were exhausted.”

Manick Govinda, Head of Artists' Advisory Services, Artsadmin

- Many artists also feel pressure to complete a postgraduate degree as a matter of course. The growing expectation for artists to take Master's courses has coincided with a period of rapidly increasing fees. While government-backed postgraduate loans are now available, most students still have to face the burden of mounting debt.

“I think a lot of graduates don't quite acknowledge the support that they receive beyond formal teaching when they're on the course, because it's subliminal. So they do have those corridor conversations, they do have those peer conversations. And then suddenly they go back home and they haven't got a job immediately, and their support structure is missing. I think there's probably a moment... because they're so intent on graduating,

particularly our students in the third year – they can't think of anything else except the degree show at the end. It's an intense amount of work and it's a good degree show because of it. But there tends to be a moment when you can drop off the 'end' once you've graduated."

Andy Pepper, Senior Lecturer, Fine Art, School of Art & Design, Nottingham Trent University

- Studio provision in large cities is suffering as a result of rising rents and limited availability. It is claimed that London is set to lose 3,500 artist studios in the next five years – which constitutes a third of its creative workspaces (Hutchinson, 2016).
- There is a constant gap between perception and reality with respect to artists' living and working circumstances. The unpaid labour and precarious existence involved in maintaining a practice is rarely fully recognised, even by institutions working closely with artists. Many opportunities that emerging artists undertake offer enticing prospects for exposure, but few include fees that reflect the time spent on making. Research conducted in 2013 showed that in the UK, 71% of artists did not receive fees for their contributions to publicly funded exhibitions (Paying Artists, 2015).

"Artists are not getting fair fees from commissions, from box office splits, for the work they're putting in for commissions. They're working long hours for no money. And I hear time and time again how difficult that is."

Jon Opie, Deputy Director, Jerwood Charitable Foundation

“You’re always expected to do things for a small fee. Everything’s always seen as an opportunity.”

Joceline Howe, artist, project curator and lecturer

- There is also growing evidence that the demographic profile of artists is becoming less diverse and more middle class, as practitioners increasingly rely on parental help to survive (Maclean, 2016).

“We’re open to artists who are in the final year of undergraduate study, any year of postgrad and those one year out of college. The demographic of that group is going to narrow as time goes on. We’re already seeing it narrowing and it will continue to do so as the costs associated with study continue to rise.”

- Artists are sometimes the targets of negative public perceptions because they are not always considered to be productive citizens in a market-driven culture. This has contributed to a focus on professionalisation and enterprise in the visual arts sector and has prompted concern about the loss of support for less commercial practices.

“There’s a real stigma attached to being an artist, and that still exists and it’s quite heart-breaking.”

Laura Eldret, artist

“There is a public perception about the artist sitting in the garret and still being middle and upper class and self-financing. But there’s a degree of truth in that which we’re really deeply concerned about. Anecdotally if you look at the patterns of student intake [...] it feels very different now to 25–30 years ago.”

Leonie Bell, Director, Arts & Engagement,
Creative Scotland

- Time, space and money are the three most precious resources for visual arts practitioners, but these are often in short supply due to the factors highlighted above.

Key Findings

The existing
funding and
support
landscape

- Provision for graduating visual arts students differs substantially across institutions. While BA Fine Art courses offer access to careers advice and some run professional practice modules and international exchanges, our website search revealed that only around 25% promote additional provision such as awards, bursaries, graduate studio space and residencies. These findings are corroborated by recent research carried out by Q-Art, which showed that targeted methods for preparing graduates for life after art school vary widely from institution to institution (Rowles, 2016).
- There are a large number of existing graduate showcase opportunities. These play an important role in the funding ecology for individual artists, although as standalone initiatives their impact on individuals can be limited. Many of these platforms now offer mentoring and other opportunities to add value to the experience of exhibiting in graduate shows.

“While the annual exhibition is still hugely important as a professional development opportunity, existing solely as a platform for graduate work doesn’t really cut it anymore. There are now many other opportunities for emerging artists’ work to be seen. What is important for us is to offer a significant level of commitment to emerging practitioners. In doing so, we have tried to carve out a position that is subtly different to what other organisations are doing, and that addresses the current concerns and needs of emerging artists.”

Kirsty Ogg, Director, New Contemporaries

- There are also numerous prize funds available to graduating artists. In a similar way to graduate shows, these provide

critical moments of recognition and the bigger funds can have a significant impact on an artist's career. Awards that offer a package of support (including studio space, mentoring or connections to institutions) are likely to hold most value for artists. The drawback to these prizes is that they often focus resources on a very small number of individuals and encourage competition rather than collaboration. Many schemes offer prize funds of under £3,000, although there are several exceptions.

“It's not just giving the grant and seeing what's happening at the other end. It's sharing our contacts and giving guidance along the way. That does seem to be valuable.”

Rose Cupit, Senior Film London Artists' Moving Image Network (FLAMIN) Manager

- Public funding bodies offer very few targeted schemes for emerging artists, and budget constraints mean there is enormous pressure on existing funds, so artists without an established track record are less likely to secure these grants (particularly if there is a requirement to secure match funding).
- Some funding opportunities for artists are hard to find. Modest budgets and skeletal staffing structures mean some smaller trusts are unable to cope with demand so they do not promote their schemes very widely.
- Many opportunities for emerging artists are concentrated in London, and the increasing cost of living in the capital is accelerating the need and motivation to bolster strong cultural communities in other regions. London does nevertheless continue to represent an important space for exposure.

“London is getting more and more expensive, with high living costs and studio rents pushing artists out of the Capital.”

Sarah Rowles, Director of Q-Art

- The Scottish model of devolving some funds into regions (through the Visual Artist and Craft Maker Awards) supports local authorities to develop expertise around commissioning and funding artists, which has the potential to have a lasting effect on communities. In England and elsewhere, local authority funding for artists appears to be more ad hoc, and the loss of arts officers in councils means the infrastructure for sustaining arts support is depleted. In 2016 it was reported that 37% of local authorities in England and Wales had no arts officer or direct arts service (Romer, 2016).
- Only a limited number of organisations are open to awarding funding to artists to simply sustain their ongoing practice, buy equipment or fund a studio for instance, even though these interventions may have a dramatic impact on an artist’s trajectory. The Artists Fund – a new community interest company led by Artquest, DACS and a-n the Artists Information Company has been piloting a small value grants programme for individual artists, in response to this perceived gap.

“When you say to someone there are no strings – there is disbelief.”

Russell Martin, Director, Artquest

- Outset’s Studiomakers scheme is also seeking to address the loss of affordable workspace in London, in collaboration with creative partners, property developers and regional governance.

- Some of the most successful bursary schemes strive to facilitate contact between recipients through social/public events and informal introductions. This can encourage practitioner dialogue and help artists to escape isolation. A recent survey of creative freelancers by the Creative Industries Federation also found that for visual artists, access to co-working spaces and artist networks were key priorities (Easton and Cauldwell-French, 2017).

“In the end the strongest thing of all is having a strong peer group [...] I suppose it gives you greater flexibility and durability if things don’t go the way you want, which can be the case. You might get one opportunity [...] a year, but knowing you’ve got a relationship with a curator or a successful artist, or knowing you’ve got a peer group of friends means you can make work or make a show happen.”

Gabriel Birch, artist

Key Findings

Funding Processes

- Funders can cultivate a good reputation by allocating fair fees for artists, by building trusting relationships with grant recipients and by offering feedback on rejected applications where possible. Good funding practice also involves being transparent about the composition of any nominators' pools or judging panels and ensuring these panels are diverse.

“With artists, you pay them a tiny amount of money and they spectacularly over-deliver and get really anxious that they’ve not done enough. So I have no problem trusting artists. And trusting them is the really important thing.”

Russell Martin, Director, Artquest

- Funders can build up institutional allies across the UK who might advocate for their schemes and recommend artists.
- Emerging artists are often reluctant to apply for opportunities where there are only single recipients, or a very small number of recipients. Assumptions are often made (even when a grant programme targets emerging artists) that these funds are out of reach for professionally inexperienced artists.

“When you’re quite young and unconfident, if you apply [to an opportunity] and don’t get it, that can put you off.”

Joceline Howe, artist, project curator and lecturer

- Older artists who are at an early stage in their creative careers also often feel deprived of opportunities due to their age (Matarasso, 2017).
- Devolving or delegating funding schemes can mean such initiatives get caught up in administrative bureaucracy,

but if managed well these arrangements can utilise local knowledge and networks.

- There is a strong desire in the visual arts sector for low-admin, light-touch application processes. If an open application process is in place, work needs to be done to encourage applications from a diverse range of applicants, and to make that process worthwhile, accessible and straightforward for artists.
- Art-form-specific funding can provide emerging practitioners with resources and expertise that are appropriate to their area of work, while channelling funds towards underrepresented practices. Schemes targeting specific groups (such as disabled artists) can also address the underrepresentation of particular artists and communities. Dynamic and inclusive funding models can try to achieve these goals without imposing identities upon recipients.
- There is a strong argument for supporting students with schemes as they leave university, in order to create a bridge between art school and the 'real world' and to capitalise on the momentum generated by peer networks. Providing funding at this stage can help to encourage artists to remain in their city of study, rather than return to parental homes where they lose their structures of support. However opinion varies widely as to the value of allocating funding for new graduates. Many funders and organisations clearly feel that their money is best invested in practitioners who have demonstrated commitment beyond higher education and developed a track record. Others feel this closes down opportunities for graduates with less familial or financial support.

“Recently it has become obvious that the proliferation of all forms of arts higher education is producing a large surplus of people who might have careers as artists but [also many] who, in reality, will not. The consequence of these fundamental changes is that we are now concentrating on assisting those who have completed their training and have clearly committed themselves to a career in some way.”

Stephen Morris, Chair, The Fenton Arts Trust

“I think it’s fine to give funding straight away – that sink or swim period of 2–5 years – who’s going to prove themselves? Either it’s going to be the people who can afford it, or it’s going to be the people who really can’t afford it, and then live really quite unhealthy, difficult lives. And I don’t think either are fine really.”

Sarah Rowles, Director of Q-Art

“We’re aware through all of our activities that there’s still a major need to help people at that really challenging time, just after they finish their education, whatever that might be. They aren’t known, they don’t have the support networks, they don’t have the track records, and they don’t have the earning potential to sustain a practice. And they’re still working out what’s important and what they want to do. And I know a lot of support now is focused towards early career artists, and a lot of mid-career artists are complaining about it drying up. So we’re really aware that there’s

also a drop-off that can be really challenging for people who have made some headway in their 20s.”

Jon Opie, Deputy Director, Jerwood Charitable Foundation

- Opportunities that cover an extended period of time and have few constraints or targets are said to be of most benefit to artists, because they encourage the development of relationships and enable ideas to be tested and explored without major pressure to produce outcomes.

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Jon Opie, Deputy Director, Jerwood Charitable Foundation

“The important thing is the trust – that the organisation that distributes the funding does it in as light-touch a way as possible.”

Leonie Bell, Director, Arts & Engagement,
Creative Scotland

- The majority of organisational practitioners interviewed described administering only very minimal, short-term evaluation for funding schemes. This is largely for the benefit of the artist recipients. However this means there is a relative lack of formal longitudinal work looking at the long-term impact of grants and opportunities on artists' careers.

Key findings

Opportunities for Intervention

- A consistent theme across several of the interviews was the idea of peer support across artist communities. There is a clear willingness among artists to help peers, but a relative lack of formalised infrastructure to enable this.
- Funding placements for new graduates to work alongside, or shadow mid-career artists in their studios, could provide a way of giving artists ‘real world’ experiences of being a practicing artist. Mid-career artists sometimes feel underserved by funding and support opportunities, so any scheme that can benefit different generations of artists (while also targeting emerging artists) would be welcome.

“I see students coming up to London and seeing shows, and if they’re lucky they might be able to get an artist to come and meet them at a show, but they rarely get in to an artist’s studio. I just think it’s a real gap. Observing the culture of a studio and the ebbs and flows of it. I think there could be something really beneficial if there’s a sort of project happening, that there’s a network or scheme with practicing artists that new graduates can apply to. The challenge is an artist has to make a living, so an artist’s studio opens the doors for curators, people who might want to do a show with them – they open doors for patron schemes.”

Laura Eldret, artist

- Peer networking, mentoring and professional advice provision for recent graduates and other early career artists is underdeveloped and more funding and mechanisms are needed to enhance current provision, particularly beyond London.

- There are a significant number of established organisations and agencies whose core mission is to nurture the development of early career artists through residencies, bursaries or exhibition/production programmes. Self-organised artist-run galleries and studio spaces also often act as breeding grounds for emergent art scenes in various regions. These different organisations require regular investment to sustain their activities and can act as useful conduits through which to direct resources.
- A small value grants scheme that allows freedom, and affords trust to emerging artists, is something that the sector could really benefit from. There are also existing initiatives, which facilitate the awarding of small value grants to artists and which similarly require financial support.

“When I worked at the Scottish Arts Council we used to give a lot of small value grants, and they do two things – one, they give much needed financial support, and [two,] it’s that thing of confidence. Somebody has recognised what you’re doing, somebody is trusting you. [...] The money was important, but it was the confidence, the profile, and everything else that went with them. Small amounts of money given easily, given with trust, without complex criteria and frameworks, they unlock so much.”

Amanda Catto, Head of Visual Arts, Creative Scotland

“Small-scale interventions have the opportunity to be really transformative.”

Russell Martin, Director, Artquest

- Subsidised studio provision is in danger of being lost in many of the UK's major cities. Support for these initiatives can directly affect emerging artists.
- Some art courses around the UK are doing exemplary work in encouraging graduates to forge connections with cultural and education provision in their locality and to self-organise collaborative ventures. Seed funding could help to strengthen this type of activity, which could also have a lasting impact on towns and cities.

“In some places you need to create the ecology that new artists can tap into.

Laura Eldret, artist

“A set of graduates that remain in the city can have a great effect on the culture in that city. It's a moment when you can almost see it change around you as you speak, and that's a really exciting place to be. Whereas in Glasgow, London and larger cities, your agency is less. So you can have a great effect in a city like Plymouth. The right people are here now and we're garnering that national and international notice around what we're doing here in terms of creative education. [...] It's about making the place sticky – so there's enough going on here that they feel it has a currency.”

Stephen Felmingham, Programme Leader: BA Painting, Drawing & Printmaking, Plymouth College of Art

- International travel opportunities are seen as essential to many artists' early development, and yet funds can be hard to secure in some regions.
- Many emerging artist awards and opportunities appear to be taken up by artists who work individually. While dedicated support for individuals is crucial, there is a gap in provision for artists who work collaboratively with other artists, or as part of collectives. Disabled artists are sometimes disincentivised from applying for funds because of concerns that assistance costs may not be covered.
- Partnerships with other arts organisations and private or public funders can maximise the impact of funding programmes for artists and the cultural sector. The validation earned through association with a cultural organisation is essential for many artists.

“[Working with institutions] is worth its weight in gold – worth more than the money. Meeting an institution that wanted to work with us. Because actually finding a way to make contact with curators and directors and institutions is very difficult.”

Gabriel Birch, artist

- Multi-sited funding initiatives also have the potential to help connect regional cultural scenes across the UK.

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