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## Changing Arts and Minds: A survey of health and wellbeing in the creative sector

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# Changing Arts and Minds

A Survey of Health and Wellbeing in the  
Creative Sector

Gillian W Shorter, Siobhan M O'Neill and Lisa McElherron





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# Changing Arts and Minds

A survey of Health and Wellbeing in the Creative Sector

## **Foreword**

At Inspire our aim is Wellbeing for All. Financial and economic wellbeing are a key element of building a resilient and inclusive society. This report is the first in a series where we explore the connections between economic development, work, employment and wellbeing

Attracting skilled, creative people is a key element of Northern Ireland's economic strategy and the work artists and creatives produce is an important pillar of our tourism offer. At Inspire we specialise in workplace wellbeing and so we were interested in learning more about what it's like to work in the creative industries in NI and identify areas of concern that may need attention and intervention.

The report findings make it very clear that while there might be a popular image of the struggling, tortured artist this image becomes a much less romantic notion when it crosses a line into mental ill health.

We commissioned this report to provide information, evidence and knowledge. The lead authors Dr Gillian Shorter and Professor Siobhan O'Neill excelled themselves at providing that and we are grateful for their professionalism and dedication.

It is its imperative that we continue to focus on how we, as a society, can take the report recommendations forward.

Professor Peter McBride

CEO, Inspire.

March 2018.



## Acknowledgements

We consulted with members of the creative sector prior to survey start to better understand the challenges and rewards the sector offers. As such we are grateful to Anne McReynolds at the MAC Belfast; Adam Turkington from Seedhead Arts; and Charlotte Dryden from the Oh Yeah Music Centre for their insights and contributions throughout. So too, we are grateful to others who took some time to introduce us to trusted gatekeepers who facilitated access and provided contacts to individuals in the industry, in particular, we are grateful to Lyra McKee, David Matchett, Marverine Cole, Janine Cobain, Hugh Mulholland, Clare Gormley, and Corinne Heaney.

For those arts organizations and venues who put the word out, either through their newsletters, email circulars, news items, or otherwise, we are exceptionally grateful for your time and efforts. There are too many of you to mention, but we would not have been able to achieve this without you.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge and extend gratitude to those who completed the questionnaire and told us their stories. This project is dedicated to you.

## Executive Summary

This report offers a view of the mental health and wellbeing of those who work in the creative industries, primarily, but not exclusively resident in Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland. It has uncovered some health and wellbeing concerns for which the sector and wider society need to take some responsibility. Mental health issues, substance use, suicidality were prevalent; but so too, there is evidence of hope and resilience in the sector that can be built upon.

### Key findings:

- Our participants described how their creative output can be uniquely personal, often arising through the processing of their own life experiences, including pain, suffering, and vulnerability. However the conditions of the working environment and the lack of appropriate recognition of the value of the work is conducive to stress and mental health difficulties. As one participant so eloquently put it:

*“I concluded that in order to progress as an artist that it was necessary to embrace one’s shadow and to allow a dialogue between conscious and unconscious. This I concluded, may make the artist very vulnerable and that this should be acknowledged in art colleges etc. The creative process I believe can stir up mental health issues.”*

- Specific characteristics of the creative sector work environment were reported as contributing to the likelihood of developing mental health problems. Examples included pressure to reach high standards (both externally and internally), irregular work (including contracts, financial security, irregular hours, and working outside the sector), the perceived lack of value placed on their work and the inadequate financial rewards for the work.
- Despite these difficulties the majority reported having hope, and most considered themselves happy. Around two-thirds spoke of hope for the future (67.3%) or expected to have many more positive than negative experiences in the next three to five years.
- On average the alcohol use of those working in the creative sector put those at risk of alcohol related harm; there was evidence that some creative sector workers were being paid in alcohol, and that drug use in the past year was more common than in the general population (46.5%).
- Over 20% of those in the creative sector are being paid at a level which is below the poverty line.
- The likelihood of a mental health problem in the sector is three times that of the general population. The most common diagnosed disorders were anxiety (36%) and depression (32%).
- High proportions (60%) reported having had suicidal thoughts, 37% had made a plan for suicide and 16% had made a suicide attempt in their lifetime.
- Around 36% of those had visited their GP for a mental health problem in the past year. Whilst most people said they felt they could admit that they had a mental health, alcohol, or drug problem (63%), those who were concerned about disclosure cited workplace factors, personal factors, service provision and stigma as reasons for not revealing that they had a problem. The vast majority, 88.5% said they would talk to their friend if they were worried about their friend’s mental health.



Consequently, we make the following six recommendations

## **1. Work environment, pay and conditions**

A cultural shift within creative organizations large and small is required to improve the work environment and provide a kinder, more supportive and less stressful, culture across the sector. Groups who represent those working in the creative industries, groups of workers themselves, and indeed employers should work together to ensure that the working conditions and financial recompense is appropriate. The commitments made by governments should and need to be enacted. We need strong leadership in both political and other arenas, to promote the value of the arts and the people who work in them and change the cultural narrative around the importance of the creative sector.

## **2. Emotional support and accessing mental health services**

Consideration should also be given to ways that employer assistance programmes could be expanded to include people working in the creative sector who do not have fixed contracts. Service providers should have an understanding of the pressures of working in the industry in order to appropriately meet their needs. Online, computerized and telephone support services may be of particular value in this sector. Packages and social media groups may connect people and provide social support for stress and mental health/ substance issues. Online, or computerised treatments, with or without, adjunct person to person therapeutic contact, may be helpful for those who are travelling, or who do not wish to attend face to face treatment sessions.

## **3. The role of drugs and alcohol**

It is recommended that we build awareness of the effects of substance use amongst those in the creative industry, focusing particularly on the impact on creativity and health. There should be adequate support including both harm reduction programs and treatment support for those who have more severe problems, and that services are equipped to meet the specific needs of those in the creative industries with an understanding of the nature of the working environment. Cultural factors which encourage or facilitate substance use, such as part payment in alcohol, should be challenged.

## **4. Treatments for anxiety, depression, and suicidality**

In order to be effective for this population, psychological services need to have an understanding of the creative industries. Links with treatment and support services need to be developed, along with targeted interventions, and these need to be widely publicized to those working in the creative sector. These need to be readily available, confidential, and easy to access given the nature of the field. Tailored support and early intervention is required to tackle suicidality in the sector. Consideration should be given to the provision of particular support services to meet the needs of people in the creative sector at particular times of the year, and with particular issues. For example:





help with tax returns prior to the deadlines, debt management and financial issues, such as getting a mortgage, managing family life and unstable/ unpredictable work patterns, and building personal resilience.

### **5. Curriculum development**

Those involved in teaching in the arts should build in classes which identify risk and protective factors, identifying and strengthening social networks, create an understanding of the pitfalls, highlight resources available, and provide protective strategies. Those who teach should be supported to develop this knowledge. Short courses for those already in the sector to help build resilience may be helpful, and as such they should be invested in, and should be widely available.

### **6. Funding and recognition of the role of the sector**

As a society we claim to value the arts, but only those artists who are well known appear to be paid in a way that acknowledges their contribution. There is a responsibility for all of us who consume the arts, and benefit from the arts, in whatever guise, to recognize the people who create the art first and foremost. Artists deserve the same rights to flourish and grow, and they should receive appropriate payment for their hard work and output. Similarly, payment in alcohol or other ‘incentives’ such as ‘increasing exposure’ is inappropriate. Investment in a sector which provides £10 return for every £1 spent should be a priority for governments North and South, and the commitments to the creative sector can only be realized if we take care of those who work in it.

Finally, we leave with a quote from one of our participants “*I hope that it lights a spark in the industry*”. This is our sincere hope too. The evidence has illustrated a need to act on the mental health and wellbeing in the sector, and we invite all of those who read the report, both inside and outside of the sector to make their contribution to a healthy, vibrant creative sector by implementing the recommendations above.



## Introduction

Across Ireland, there is a recognition of the enormous value of the Creative Sector and the Creative Industries to enable society to flourish. The most recent Programmes for Government recognize the importance of the creative sector to the health, wellbeing, culture, and prosperity of Ireland. In Northern Ireland, priorities around the creative industries include commitment to work with creative industries, and artistic and cultural organisations as part of the work of a sitting Executive. In doing so, this work would aim to meet the outcome of creating a Northern Ireland where people want to live and work, to visit and to invest; a place where “opportunity can flourish in economic, social and cultural terms to develop our attractiveness as a home, a tourist destination and a place for business.” pp.39 (1). Similarly, in the Republic of Ireland, the Taoiseach’s most recent Programme for Government also has a strong role for the creative sector. Aside from engaging with the creative sector, there is a priority of publishing Culture 2025, the first national cultural policy listed as a key outcome (2). As such, this policy would aim to conserve, preserve, protect, and present Ireland’s heritage and cultural assets, and the achievements of the sector are a “source of immense national pride” pp.1 (3). The definition of the creative sector can vary; for the purposes of this report, we defined the creative sector along the categories of those supported by the Arts Councils in Ireland. People could be directly employed in the creation of art, or support those who did so through their work. We were deliberately broad in our definition; the landing page for the online study stated “it is for everyone working in the creative industries, artists, performers, support workers, writers, representative bodies, crew, technicians, office staff, and so many others.” The emphasis was to include those who defined themselves as working in the creative sector.

The challenge of addressing mental health priorities and promoting the wellbeing of the population remains central to Government policies in both Northern Ireland (1) and the Republic of Ireland (2). In Northern Ireland, the target to improve mental health is characterized through a reduction in possible mental health problems as measured by the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) (4). Currently, Figures from 2016/17 (5) suggest around 17% of the population of Northern Ireland show signs of a possible mental health problem<sup>1</sup>, with a slightly higher percentage in females compared to males. Furthermore, the role of mental wellbeing in physical health, employment, relationships, community partnership, and social inclusion was noted alongside the figures (1). For the Republic of Ireland, the target to improve mental health is more specific: greater access to mental health services in primary care, ensuring support in crisis, improving youth mental health, supporting service users and their families, and developing and planning future services are priorities (2). At present, the percentage of those indicating they had a possible mental health problem is between 6-10% in the Republic of Ireland (6). It is difficult to compare the two regions, as the measurements used in the two studies are not the same. In Northern Ireland the primary indicator of mental health is the GHQ, and in the Republic of Ireland the Mental Health Inventory-5 is used to measure mental health (7). In addition to the suffering caused by mental illness, mental health and wellbeing

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<sup>1</sup> Indicated by a score on the General Health Questionnaire as 4 or greater (GHQ: (4))



influences many aspects of life, including housing, education, lifestyle choices and loneliness. Addressing the burden of mental illness and requires partnership working across community, health, education, and political sectors.

A key factor in improving mental health is improving conditions in workplaces. Mental health in the workplace is important; employers have a duty of care to promote the wellbeing of staff, to tackle workplace causes of stress, mental illness, and provide support to those who might be experiencing less than optimal health at present (8). This presents a unique challenge to achieve the outcomes for better mental health and a sustainable, active, and engaging creative sector. The work environment of those working in the creative sector is can differ from other sectors. The nature of the job in the creative industries balances great reward, but may also come with challenges that could contribute to poor mental health. For example, many working artists are self-employed or freelancing. This may result in less job security, a lack of a daily routine, minimal management or other support, and an absence of the benefits which promote stability and security, such as sick pay or pension. Creatives working in this way often need to master a range of skills beyond their creative talent, such as accounting, marketing, and sales (9). Other pressures include anxiety about performance or how work is received, a lack of understanding of the pressures from those external to the sector including funders, or recipients of the arts, work overload, underload, a lack of reliability of contracts, career anxiety, a lack of career mobility, irregular working hours, high rates of injury, low financial rewards, maintaining high standards of performance, financial security, and sporadic work (8, 10-13). This may be further complicated by substance use as a feature of the professional artist either as payment, or with substance use as a coping mechanism to relieve the stresses of the job (14-18). Those who choose to work in the creative sector have a higher chance of mental ill-health than the general population (19, 20). There are suggestions the high rates of suicide, or ill health may be related to this interaction between work environment and the creative individual (21). Indeed the stress itself may impact the ability to be creative and generate ideas which may prevent the creative sector worker from continuing in their professional capacity.

## Methods

### Aim

The overarching aim of this project was to understand the current wellbeing of those in the creative sector, and based on the findings, develop recommendations to improve wellbeing and support provision in the sector that acknowledges the type of work in the creative sector.

### Research Questions

1. What is the status of health and wellbeing in the creative sector across Ireland?
2. What is the level of substance use in the creative sector across Ireland?
3. What is the level of service use and help seeking in the creative sector across Ireland?
4. To what extent is income in the creative sector supplemented by work outside the sector?
5. What are the pressures facing the creative industry that may not be present outside the sector?

### Questionnaire

The questionnaire comprised of a range of questions to address the study aims and the factors known to impact on mental health and well-being. It included questions on individuals' background, general and mental health, help seeking, substance use, and questions specific to the creative sector environment. Each of these is considered below. The questionnaire was reviewed and reduced in size to minimize response burden with the help of community representatives from music, performance, and art including those from the Oh Yeah Centre, Seedhead Arts, and the MAC Belfast (the questionnaire is available by contacting the lead author via email [gw.shorter@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:gw.shorter@ulster.ac.uk)).

To assess the health and wellbeing status individuals were asked to rate their health in general, levels of happiness, and their expectations of the future. The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ(4)) was used to detect the possibility of mental health problems in the general population. It has 12 questions about recent levels of happiness, depression, anxiety and sleep disturbance with scores ranging from 0-12. A score of 4 or more indicates a possible mental health condition, and is referred to as a 'high GHQ12 score'. Participants were also asked if they had been diagnosed with a range of mental health conditions including anxiety, bipolar disorder, alcohol addiction, drug addiction, depression, eating disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, psychosis, or other condition. Suicidality was measured using questions on thoughts, plans, and attempts in the respondents' lifetime and in the past year.

In the next section participants were asked a number of questions about services used for mental or other health, and their experience of help seeking. We asked if people had seen their General Practitioner for either physical or mental health issues, or if the individual had been prescribed medication for mental health in the past year. Participants were asked if they would admit to having a mental health problem, and to whom. If they felt they could not disclose, they were asked to comment as to why. In addition, participants were asked about who they would go to for help



with a mental health condition, and if they would intervene if they were worried about the mental health of a friend.

Alcohol use was measured by the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test Consumption questions (AUDIT-C: (22)). This is a three item questionnaire measuring typical frequency, typical quantity, and frequency of heavy episodic drinking (defined as five or more drinks on an occasion). Participants were asked if they felt they should cut down, if they were bothered by people suggesting they should cut down, and if they felt guilt about their consumption. As alcohol can be a frequent occurrence in the workplace, those who took part were asked if they felt pressured into consuming alcohol as part of their work, if alcohol was available at the place they work, and if they have received payment in alcohol for their work in the creative sector. To measure drug use, participants were asked if they had consumed a range of drugs in the past year. Like with alcohol individuals were asked if they felt pressured into consuming drugs as part of their work, and they felt they should cut down, if they were bothered by people suggesting they should cut down, and if they felt guilt about their consumption.

The last two questions address questions specific to the sector. The first questions ask about the number of hours spent working both inside and outside of the sector, and the proportion of earnings in from the creative sector in relation to their overall earnings. The yearly salaries are divided into Euro and Pound Sterling figures. Finally, based on the qualitative findings of the Entertainment Assist report (9), a number of questions were asked about stress factors unique to the creative sector, and the extent to which they were considered stressful. Finally there was a question to allow the participants to tell us anything they had not already mentioned that they would like us to know about mental health and wellbeing in the creative sector. We understand that the questionnaire cannot cover all topics or issues of interest, and this allows the members of the sector to be heard on other topics important to them. Given the qualitative nature of this question, it was analysed using Braun and Clarke's Thematic analysis methodology (23).

### **Procedure**

The survey was hosted online on Ulster University's Qualtrics platform. It was available for the purposes of this report for all members of the industry from July to November 2017. The study was advertised through arts organisations across Ireland. Individuals at these organisations were contacted on their publicly available email addresses and asked to promote the survey via email or social media. Over 200 organisations were contacted. Other methods were employed such as meeting with key influencers in particular industries as recruitment via email to organisations was relatively slow. Twitter (via @gwshorter and @creativesinmind) and Facebook messages sent by the lead author were also used to recruit individuals. We encouraged those who took part to circulate the email or social media to other members of the creative sector. Whilst 574 individuals took part (as illustrated by clicking to proceed to the first questionnaire, the numbers answering each question varied (reasons for this include sections not completed fully, not willing to answer,



answers were not saved by the software, participant missed a question, individuals did not know, or electronic skip patterns in the software). Findings will be presented as mean with range or %.

Ethics approval was granted by the School of Psychology Filter Committee at Ulster University. The application for ethical approval for the survey was submitted 9/6/17, with a request for revisions received on 21/6/17, responded to on 21/6/17, and final acceptance obtained 23/6/17 (Reference: RG3ShorterONeill220617).



## Results

### Characteristics of those who took part

The background characteristics of those who took part are given in Figure 1. On average, those who took part were approximately 40 years of age, with 14 years of experience working in the creative sector. More females than males took part in the survey (69% female: 29% male). The largest Creative Industry domain who responded were those in the Visual Arts, followed by Performing Arts, Participatory Arts, and Literature, Language and Culture. Note that some worked for more than one sector. The largest individual sector within those domains were those working in Drama or Theatre (16.8%), Film and Television (15.1%), and Visual Artists (16.4%). An illustration of the types of roles in which individuals worked is given in the word cloud in Figure 2 (a larger font size indicates a more frequently mentioned word in response to the question).

**Figure 1: Background characteristics of those who took part in the survey**

	Mean (range) Or (%)
<b>Age (n=366)</b>	39.4 (18-75 years)
<b>Years worked in the creative sector (n=367)</b>	13.9 (0-54 years)
<b>Sex (n=368)</b>	
Female	69.3%
Male	29.1%
Trans*	0.5%
Rather not say	1.1%
<b>Creative Industry Domains and Sectors (n=368)<sup>2</sup></b>	
Literature, Language & Culture (n=38)	<b>10.3%</b>
Literature writers/publishers	6.4%
Language arts	0%
Traditional arts including storytelling	0.9%
Journalists	1.5%
Participatory Arts & Arts Community (n=56)	<b>15.2%</b>
Disability and community arts	1.7%
Circus arts	1.3%
Arts therapists	1.3%
Arts organizations specified or unspecified	8.5%
Performing Arts (n=121)	<b>32.9%</b>
Dance	1.5%
Drama/Theatre	16.8%
Music	7.0%

<sup>2</sup> Classification of the sector was based on the classifications used in the Arts Council Northern Ireland and Arts Council Ireland websites (in November 2017). The four overarching domains are Literature, Language, and Culture; Participatory Arts and Arts Communities; Performing Arts; and Visual Arts. Individuals were further classified into sectors under each domain and could belong to more than one domain or sector depending on their answer to the question “Please detail the kind of work you do in the creative sector including the medium(s) (e.g. sculpture, film, dance, opera, interior design, etc.) and your role(s)”







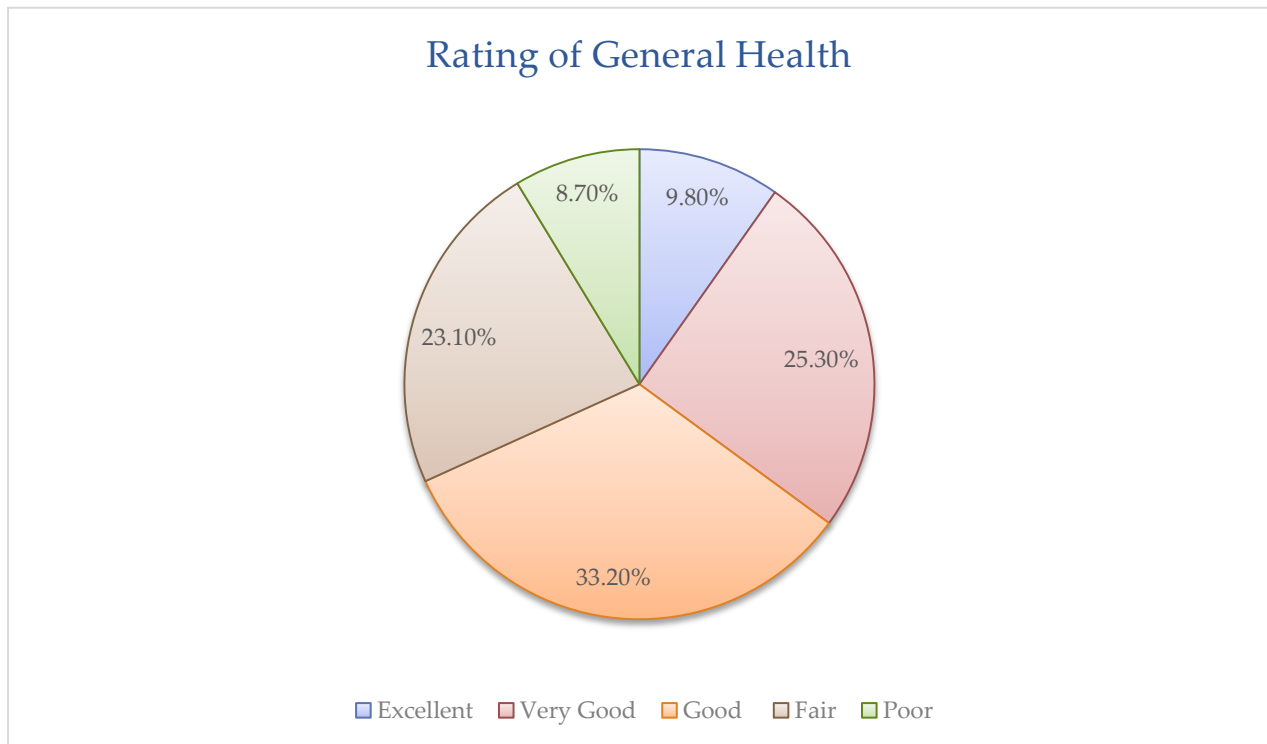
## The status of health and wellbeing in the creative sector across Ireland

### General health

Participants were asked how they would rate their health in general. This includes both their physical and mental health (Figure 3). Around 68% of the whole sample rated their health as good or above. Across the sectors, those in the Participatory Arts and Arts Community sector rated their health as better than any other sector with 73% rating their health as good or better, by contrast, for those in the Literature, Language, and Culture sector, 47% rated their health as fair or worse, the highest percentage in the four groups.

**Figure 3: Participants’ ratings of their health overall**

How would you say your health is in general?	Sample overall N=368	Literature, Language & Culture N=38	Participatory Arts & Arts Community N=56	Performing Arts N=121	Visual Arts N=200
<b>Excellent</b>	9.8%	5.3%	8.9%	10.7%	8.0%
<b>Very good</b>	25.3%	23.7%	25.0%	25.6%	26.0%
<b>Good</b>	33.2%	23.7%	42.9%	31.4%	33.0%
<b>Fair</b>	23.1%	28.9%	23.2%	23.1%	23.5%
<b>Poor</b>	8.7%	18.4%	0.0%	9.1%	9.5%



### Mental health

Based on the General Health Questionnaire, almost 60% of individuals have a probable mental health condition (scoring four or above in total). This is considerably higher than the Northern



Ireland population in general (17%)<sup>3</sup>. The Performing Arts sector has the highest percentage of probable mental health problems, with the Participatory and Arts Community sector the lowest. Per item, the most frequently endorsed problem overall was feeling constantly under strain, and the least, thinking of yourself as a worthless person. By sector, the most commonly endorsed mental health issues were problems with concentration, sleep, and feeling under strain (Literature, Language, & Culture), problems with sleep, feeling under strain, and losing confidence in yourself (Participatory Arts & Arts Communities), feeling under strain, being unable to enjoy day to day activities, and feeling unhappy/depressed (Performing Arts), and finally, problems with sleep, feeling under strain, and being unable to enjoy day to day activities (Visual Arts). A breakdown of the scores for this questionnaire is given in Figure 4.

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<sup>3</sup> Note figures for the Republic of Ireland are not available for comparison as they used a different measure to estimate mental health problems.



Figure 4: Table of scores on the General Health Questionnaire used to indicate potential mental health problems

	All creative sector		Literature, Language & Culture	Participatory Arts & Arts Community	Performing Arts	Visual Arts
	N (%)		N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Been able to concentrate on what you're doing? (less than usual/much less than usual)	167 (45.4%)		25 (52.6%)	25 (44.6%)	54 (44.6%)	91 (45.5%)
Lost much sleep over worry? (more than usual/much more than usual)	177 (48.1%)		29 (60.5%)	29 (51.8%)	53 (43.8%)	100 (50%)
Felt you were playing a useful part in things? (less than usual/much less than usual)	115 (31.3%)		21 (26.3%)	21 (37.5%)	36 (29.8%)	66 (33.0%)
Felt capable of making decisions about things? (less than usual/much less than usual)	122 (33.2%)		16 (42.1%)	16 (28.6%)	42 (34.7%)	66 (33.0%)
Felt constantly under strain? (more than usual/much more than usual)	205 (55.7%)		32 (65.8%)	32 (57.1%)	66 (54.5%)	112 (56.0%)
Felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties? (more than usual/much more than usual)	156 (42.5%)		20 (36.8%)	20 (36.4%)	56 (46.3%)	91 (45.5%)
Been able to enjoy your normal day-to-day activities? (less than usual/much less than usual)	178 (48.4%)		22 (44.7%)	22 (39.3%)	64 (52.9%)	102 (51.0%)
Been able to face up to your problems? (less than usual/much less than usual)	135 (36.8%)		22 (36.8%)	15 (26.8%)	40 (33.3%)	75 (37.5%)
Been feeling unhappy and depressed? (more than usual/much more than usual)	180 (49.0%)		22 (39.5%)	22 (39.3%)	66 (54.5%)	98 (49.2%)
Been losing confidence in yourself? (more than usual/much more than usual)	176 (47.8%)		24 (42.1%)	24 (42.9%)	65 (53.7%)	94 (47.0%)
Been thinking of yourself as a worthless person? (more than usual/much more than usual)	110 (29.9%)		17 (28.9%)	17 (30.4%)	38 (31.4%)	59 (29.5%)
Been feeling reasonably happy, all things considered (less than usual/much less than usual)	149 (40.6%)		16 (36.8%)	16 (28.6%)	55 (45.5%)	85 (42.5%)
	NI figures	Sample overall	Literature, Language & Culture	Participatory Arts & Arts Community	Performing Arts	Visual Arts
<b>TOTAL GHQ scores</b>		<b>N=364</b>	<b>N=38</b>	<b>N=55</b>	<b>N=120</b>	<b>N=199</b>
0	56%	19.8%	18.4%	20.0%	21.7%	19.1%
1 – 3	27%	20.6%	23.7%	23.6%	15.0%	22.5%
4+	17%	59.6%	57.9%	56.4%	63.3%	58.4%

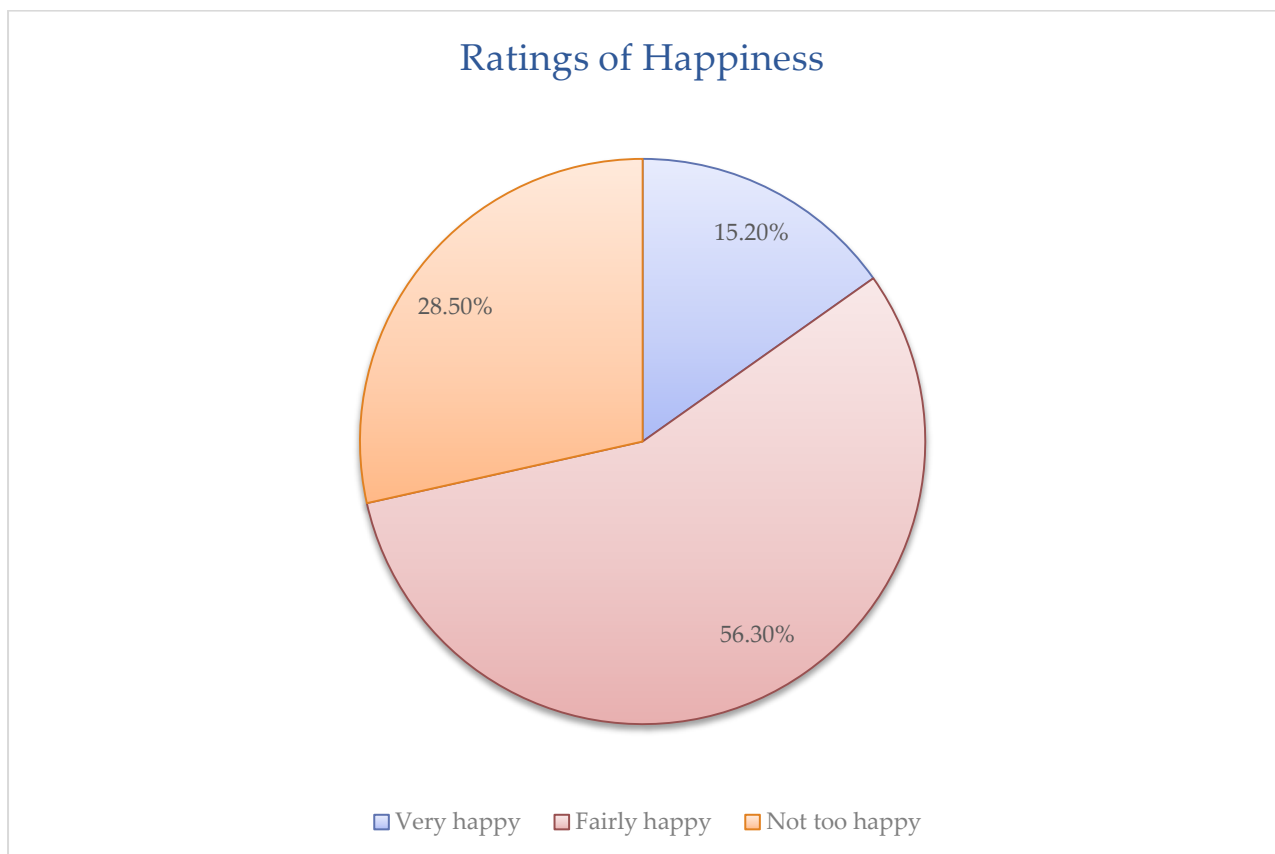


*General outlook on life*

Two questions were asked to understand the outlook on life in the creative industries. The first of these asked those who took part how happy participants felt these days. The majority 56% stated they were fairly happy. The happiest sector (based on percentage stating ‘very happy’) was the Visual Arts sector, paradoxically, they also had the highest percentage of those ‘not too happy’ alongside those in the Literature, Language, & Culture sector (Figure 5).

**Figure 5 Participants’ ratings of their happiness**

Taking all things together, how would you say you are these days - would you say you're	Sample overall N=368	Literature, Language & Culture N=38	Participatory Arts & Arts Community N=56	Performing Arts N=121	Visual Arts N=200
Very happy	15.2%	7.9%	14.3%	12.4%	16.5%
Fairly happy	56.3%	60.5%	60.7%	61.2%	52.5%
Not too happy	28.5%	31.6%	25.0%	26.4%	31.0%



When asked about their faith in a positive future, the majority of those who took part agreed they would expect to have more positive than negative experiences in the next three to five years (27.8%). The Participatory Arts and Arts Community sector were both more likely to endorse any of the ‘disagree’ categories (16.4%) and more likely to endorse any of the ‘agree’ categories (70.9%) for



this statement. Those in the Literature, Language and Culture sector were most unsure with a quarter stating they neither agreed nor disagreed (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Participants’ ratings of their hope for the future**

Over the next 3-5 years I expect to have many more positive than negative experiences	Sample overall N=352	Literature, Language & Culture N=36	Participatory Arts & Arts Community N=55	Performing Arts N=117	Visual Arts N=189
Strongly disagree	2.8%	2.8%	5.5%	1.7%	2.1%
Disagree	5.1%	2.8%	3.6%	5.1%	5.8%
Somewhat disagree	6.3%	8.3%	7.3%	7.7%	5.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	18.5%	25.0%	12.7%	16.2%	20.1%
Somewhat agree	22.2%	27.8%	27.3%	19.7%	21.2%
Agree	27.8%	22.2%	32.7%	33.3%	27.5%
Strongly agree	17.3%	11.1%	10.9%	16.2%	18.0%

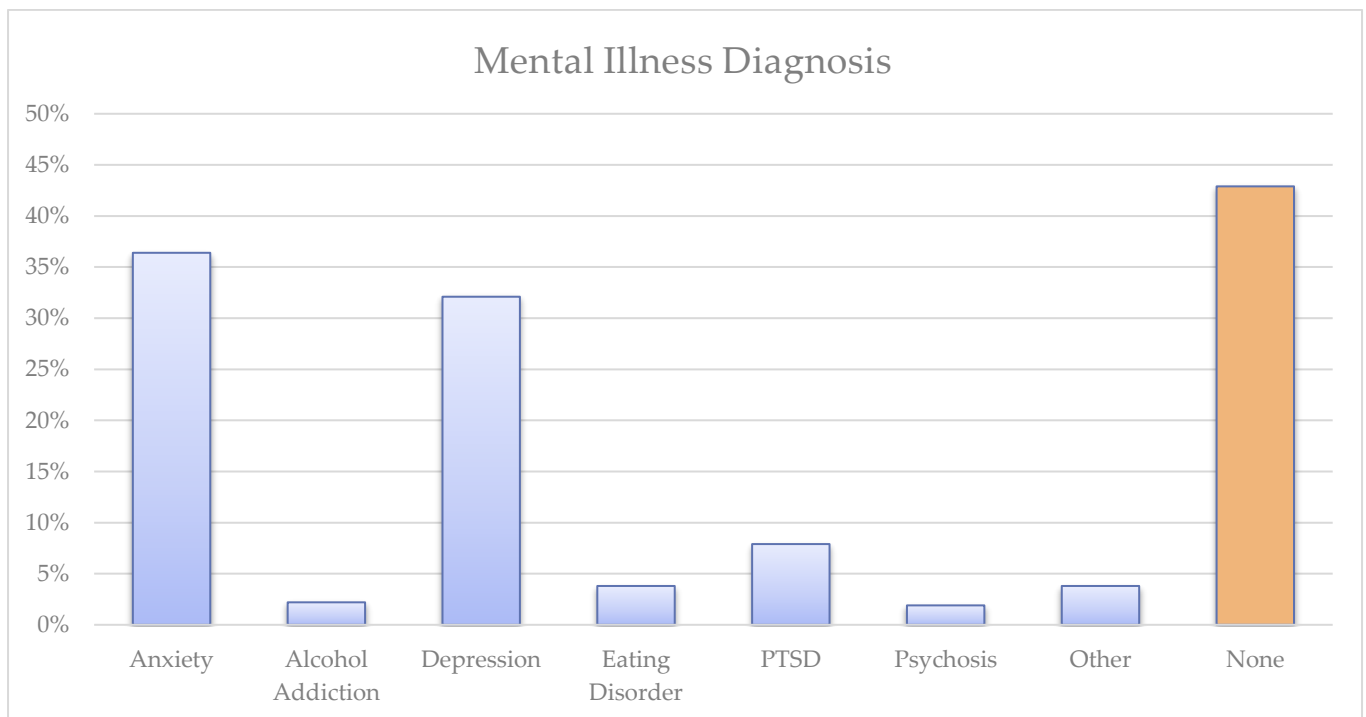
*Mental health specific questions*

The most commonly diagnosed conditions (by a Doctor or Health Professional) were anxiety (36%) or depression (32%); 43% have never been diagnosed with a mental health condition. Across the sector there is a slightly higher anxiety diagnosis in the Performing Arts and Literature, Language, and Culture Arts compared to other sectors. Those in Literature, Language, and Culture Art had the highest proportion of bipolar disorder, alcohol or drug addiction, depression, eating disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and psychosis between the four sectors. This sector was unsurprisingly the least likely to not be diagnosed with any disorder.



**Figure 7 Mental illness diagnoses in the arts sector (diagnosis by a Doctor or Health Professional)**

Have you ever been diagnosed with any of the following conditions (at any time)?	Sample overall N=368	Literature, Language & Culture N=38	Participatory Arts & Arts Community N=56	Performing Arts N=121	Visual Arts N=200
<b>Anxiety</b>	36.4%	42.1%	35.7%	39.7%	32.0%
<b>Bipolar Disorder</b>	0.5%	2.6%	0%	0.8%	1.0%
<b>Alcohol Addiction</b>	2.2%	5.3%	0%	3.3%	1.5%
<b>Drug Addiction</b>	0.8%	2.6%	0%	0.8%	0.5%
<b>Depression</b>	32.1%	39.5%	32.1%	31.4%	32.5%
<b>Eating Disorder</b>	3.8%	7.9%	7.1%	4.1%	4.0%
<b>Post-traumatic stress disorder</b>	7.9%	18.4%	5.4%	8.3%	6.5%
<b>Psychosis</b>	1.6%	2.6%	1.8%	0.8%	2.0%
<b>Other mentioned condition</b>	3.8%	18.4%	1.8%	7.4%	7.0%
<b>None of these</b>	42.9%	36.8%	50.0%	43.0%	42.5%



Not all of those who participated answered the questions on suicide, with only 173 responding. Therefore, these figures should be interpreted with caution. However, levels of suicidality were very high across all sectors, around 60% had thought about killing themselves, with 30% thinking about it in the past year. In the sample, 38.2% had made a plan during their lifetime, with around 16% in the past year. Finally, 17% had made an attempt in their lifetime, with around 2% of sample who answered this question made an attempt in the past year. Information on the levels of suicidality in the sample are provided in Figure 8.



Figure 8: Suicidal thoughts and behaviour in the sample

This question is about thoughts of hurting yourself	Sample overall	Literature, Language & Culture	Participatory Arts & Arts Community	Performing Arts	Visual Arts
<b>In your lifetime</b>					
Had thoughts of killing myself	100 (57.8%)	9 (45.0%)	17 (53.1%)	25 (59.5%)	57 (60.0%)
Have thought about how you would kill yourself or made a plan	66 (38.2%)	6 (30.0%)	14 (43.8%)	16 (38.1%)	35 (36.8%)
Have made a suicide attempt (purposefully hurt yourself with at least some intent to die)	29 (16.8%)	3 (15.0%)	4 (12.5%)	6 (14.3%)	15 (15.8%)
<b>In the past 12 months</b>					
Had thoughts of killing myself	46 (29.9%)	3 (21.4%)	7 (22.6%)	13 (36.1%)	25 (29.8%)
Have thought about how you would kill yourself or made a plan	24 (15.7%)	2 (14.3%)	3 (9.7%)	6 (17.1%)	15 (17.9%)
Have made a suicide attempt (purposefully hurt yourself with at least some intent to die)	3 (2.0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.2%)





### ***The level of substance use in the creative sector across Ireland***

#### *Lifestyle factors including Substance use*

Around 10% of those who took part did not consume alcohol in the past year (Figure 9). Of those who did, the most common frequency of consuming at least one drink was two to three times per week. Those in Participatory Arts and Arts Communities drank most frequently with those in the Visual Arts sector the least. In terms of typical amount of alcohol consumed on an occasion, most just had one or two drinks. Those in Literature, Language, and Culture sector were more likely to consume the higher number of drinks of either five or six or seven to nine than other groups. The most common frequency of heavy episodic drinking, defined as drinking more than five drinks on an occasion, was either never or less than monthly (30.7% and 29.5% respectively). The sum score of these three items (AUDIT-C(22)) was above the hazardous drinking threshold of 4, with the lowest score in those working in the Visual Arts sector.

Those in the Participatory Arts and Arts Community sector were most likely to feel that they should cut down on their alcohol use, with 52.7% believing that they should cut down on their alcohol use. The percentage of people annoyed with others telling them to cut down on their use varied by sector. Overall, 10.1% felt annoyed with people telling them to cut down on their alcohol use. However, this varied from 5.5% in the Visual Arts sector to 25.7% in the Literature, Language, and Culture sector. Around 36% felt guilty about their alcohol use. Again this was highest in Literature, Language, and Culture sector and lowest in the Visual Arts sector.

The role of alcohol in the creative sector work environment was most noticeable in Literature, Language, and Culture and Performing Arts sectors. Alcohol was available 'most of the time' or 'always' for around 25% and 39% respectively in these two sectors. Alcohol was more likely to be used as a substitute for payment in Performing Arts and Participatory Arts and Arts Community sectors, and least in the Visual Arts sector. Overall 21.8% received alcohol as payment for their work in the creative sector. Whilst the majority did not feel that they were pressured to drink alcohol as part of their role; 56.6% said this was never the case, the pressure to consume alcohol was most felt in the Performing Arts sector.





Figure 9: Alcohol use in the arts sector

	All creative sector	Literature, Language & Culture	Participatory Arts & Arts Community	Performing Arts	Visual Arts
<b>AUDIT-C Q1 How often do you drink alcohol?</b>					
Never	36 (10.3%)	2 (5.6%)	2 (3.6%)	10 (8.5%)	21 (11.2%)
Monthly or less	62 (17.7%)	12 (33.3%)	11 (20.0%)	16 (13.7%)	36 (19.3%)
2 to 4 times a month	79 (22.6%)	2 (5.6%)	9 (16.4%)	30 (25.6%)	49 (26.2%)
2 to 3 times a week	112 (32.0%)	13 (36.1%)	22 (40.0%)	39 (33.3%)	52 (27.8%)
4+ times a week	61 (17.4%)	7 (19.4%)	11 (20.0%)	22 (18.8%)	29 (15.5%)
<b>AUDIT-C Q2 How many drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?</b>					
1 or 2	140 (42.2%)	11 (30.6%)	21 (38.9%)	41 (36.6%)	83 (47.4%)
3 or 4	111 (33.4%)	14 (38.9%)	21 (38.9%)	44 (39.3%)	54 (30.9%)
5 or 6	40 (12.0%)	5 (13.9%)	8 (14.8%)	14 (12.5%)	17 (9.7%)
7 to 9	22 (6.6%)	4 (11.1%)	3 (5.6%)	7 (6.3%)	11 (6.3%)
10 or more	4 (1.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.8%)	2 (1.1%)
<b>AUDIT-C Q3 How often do you have 5 or more drinks on one occasion?</b>					
Never	107 (30.7%)	10 (27.8%)	14 (25.9%)	33 (28.2%)	64 (34.2%)
Less than monthly	103 (29.5%)	11 (30.6%)	13 (24.1%)	35 (29.9%)	55 (29.4%)
Monthly	71 (20.3%)	6 (16.7%)	10 (18.5%)	26 (22.2%)	38 (20.3%)
Weekly	64 (18.3%)	7 (19.4%)	17 (31.5%)	21 (17.9%)	30 (16.0%)
Daily or almost daily	4 (1.1%)	2 (5.6%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.7%)	0 (0%)
<b>Total Mean AUDIT-C (Range)</b>	<b>4.8 (0-11)</b>	<b>5.0 (1-11)</b>	<b>5.1 (1-9)</b>	<b>5.0 (0-11)</b>	<b>4.5 (0-10)</b>
<b>Have you ever felt you should cut down on your alcohol use?</b>	156 (45.1%)	13 (36.1%)	29 (52.7%)	59 (50.9%)	77 (41.8%)
<b>Have people annoyed you by criticizing your alcohol use?</b>	35 (10.1%)	9 (25.7%)	8 (14.5%)	12 (10.3%)	10 (5.5%)
<b>Have you ever felt bad or guilty about your alcohol use?</b>	126 (36.4%)	15 (41.7%)	22 (40.0%)	45 (38.8%)	62 (33.7%)
<b>How often is alcohol available for you to drink in the places you do your creative work?</b>					
Never	80 (22.9%)	5 (13.9%)	13 (24.1%)	17 (14.5%)	48 (25.8%)
Rarely	83 (23.8%)	9 (25.0%)	22 (40.7%)	19 (16.2%)	46 (24.7%)
Sometimes	101 (28.9%)	13 (36.1%)	11 (20.4%)	37 (31.6%)	53 (28.5%)
Most of the time	51 (14.6%)	7 (19.4%)	6 (11.1%)	23 (19.7%)	24 (12.9%)
Always	34 (9.7%)	2 (5.6%)	2 (3.7%)	21 (17.9%)	15 (8.1%)
<b>Has alcohol ever been used as a substitute for or percentage of payment?</b>					
Never	273 (78.2%)	28 (77.8%)	40 (72.7%)	78 (66.7%)	161 (86.6%)
Rarely	41 (11.7%)	6 (16.7%)	9 (16.4%)	19 (16.2%)	14 (7.5%)
Sometimes	30 (8.6%)	2 (5.6%)	6 (10.9%)	17 (14.5%)	10 (5.4%)
Most of the time	3 (0.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.7%)	1 (0.5%)
Always	2 (0.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.9%)	0 (0%)
<b>Do you feel under pressure to drink alcohol as part of your work in the creative sector?</b>					
Never	198 (56.6%)	18 (50.0%)	28 (50.9%)	57 (48.7%)	117 (62.6%)
Rarely	57 (16.3%)	9 (25.0%)	12 (21.8%)	16 (13.7%)	30 (16.0%)
Sometimes	67 (19.1%)	8 (22.2%)	12 (21.8%)	27 (23.1%)	29 (15.5%)
Most of the time	22 (6.3%)	1 (2.8%)	2 (3.6%)	14 (12.0%)	9 (4.8%)
Always	6 (1.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.8%)	3 (2.6%)	2 (1.1%)



The majority of those who took part in the survey had not used any illegal drug in the past year (53.5%). The most commonly used drug was cannabis with just over a quarter of the sample reporting using cannabis in the past year. The percentage was highest in the Literature, Language, and Culture sector (31.6%), and least in the Visual Arts sector (23.5%). Ecstasy and cocaine had been used by around 7% and 8% respectively in the sample. The sector most likely to have used ecstasy was Participatory Arts and Arts Community sector, with Literature, Language, and Culture sector the least. For cocaine, Visual arts and Participatory Arts and Arts Community sectors were more likely to have used cocaine, whilst those in Performing Arts had a lower percentage of use in the past year (Figure 10).

Just over 10% felt they should cut down on their drug use in the past year, this was most likely to be the case in the Literature, Language, and Culture sector, and least likely in the Participatory Arts and Arts Communities. Only 3% were annoyed by criticism of their drug use in the past year. Of those surveyed 12% felt bad or guilty about their drug use in the past year; this was highest in the Literature, Language, and Culture and Performing Arts sectors, and lowest in the Participatory Arts and Arts Community sector. Finally almost nine in ten individuals did not feel under pressure to take drugs as part of their work in the creative sector. Visual arts were the least likely to feel pressure to take drugs, and the Performing Arts sector were the most likely to feel some pressure to take drugs as part of their work in the creative sector.



Figure 10 Drug use in the arts sector

	All creative sector	Literature, Language & Culture	Participatory Arts & Arts Community	Performing Arts	Visual Arts
<b>Have you used any of the following substances in the past year?</b>					
Cannabis	96 (26.1%)	12 (31.6%)	16 (28.6%)	34 (28.1%)	47 (23.5%)
Amphetamines	11 (3.0%)	0 (0%)	3 (5.4%)	4 (3.3%)	5 (2.5%)
Ecstasy	27 (7.3%)	1 (2.6%)	8 (14.3%)	7 (5.8%)	13 (6.5%)
Heroin	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Cocaine	31 (8.4%)	3 (7.9%)	5 (8.9%)	8 (6.6%)	19 (9.5%)
Acid	7 (1.9%)	1 (2.6%)	0 (0%)	3 (2.5%)	5 (2.5%)
Magic Mushrooms	4 (1.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.8%)	2 (1.0%)
LSD	6 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.8%)	4 (3.3%)	3 (1.5%)
Tranquillisers	7 (1.7%)	2 (5.3%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.7%)	3 (1.5%)
Benzodiazepines	5 (1.4%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.8%)	1 (0.8%)	3 (1.5%)
Amyl Nitrate	3 (0.8%)	1 (2.6%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.7%)	0 (0%)
Spice	1 (0.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.5%)
Other novel psychoactive substances/legal highs	2 (0.5%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.8%)	1 (0.8%)	2 (1.0%)
Other drug not listed	16 (4.3%)	1 (2.6%)	3 (5.4%)	5 (4.1%)	11 (5.5%)
No drug use in the past year	197 (53.5%)	22 (57.9%)	36 (64.3%)	60 (49.6%)	102 (51.0%)
<b>Have you ever felt that you should cut down on your drug use in the past year?</b>					
Have people annoyed you by criticizing your drug use in the past year?	10 (3.3%)	2 (6.1%)	0 (0%)	5 (5.3%)	3 (1.9%)
Have you ever felt bad or guilty about your drug use in the past year?	36 (12.0%)	6 (18.2%)	3 (6.0%)	15 (16.0%)	17 (10.8%)
<b>Do you feel under pressure to take drugs as part of your work in the creative sector?</b>					
Never	308 (88.5%)	31 (88.6%)	48 (87.3%)	95 (81.2%)	170 (91.4%)
Rarely	27 (7.8%)	3 (8.6%)	5 (9.1%)	18 (15.4%)	10 (5.4%)
Sometimes	8 (2.3%)	1 (2.9%)	2 (3.6%)	2 (1.7%)	4 (2.2%)
Most of the time	2 (0.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.9%)	1 (0.5%)
Always	3 (0.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.9%)	1 (0.5%)

### The level of service use and help seeking in the creative sector across Ireland

#### Health service use

In the past 12 months, 58% of those who took part saw their GP for a physical complaint, with 36% for a mental, nervous, or emotional problem. Those in the Literature, Language and Culture sector were more likely to have visited in the past 12 months for either type of inquiry. By contrast those in the Visual Arts were the least likely to have visited their GP for a mental, nervous, or emotional



problem, and those in the Participatory Arts & Arts Community were the least likely to visit for a physical illness or complaint. Just over a quarter had been prescribed medication for a mental health condition in the past year, with the highest rate percentage of those who had been prescribed medication in the Literature, Language, and Culture sector.

**Figure 11 Past 12 month visits to the GP for physical or mental health problems and mental health prescriptions**

In the past 12 months have you spoken to a GP on the phone or in person about...	Sample overall N=368	Literature, Language & Culture N=38	Participator y Arts & Arts Community N=56	Performing Arts N=121	Visual Arts N=200
<b>A physical illness or complaint?</b>					
Yes	58.2%	65.8%	53.6%	54.5%	57.0%
No	41.3%	34.2%	46.4%	44.6%	42.5%
Rather not say	0.5%	0%	0%	0.8%	0.5%
<b>A mental, nervous, or emotional problem</b>					
Yes	36.1%	52.6%	39.3%	35.5%	33.0%
No	62.8%	47.4%	60.7%	63.6%	65.5%
Rather not say	1.1%	0%	0%	0.8%	1.5%
<b>Has been prescribed medication for a mental health condition in the past year</b>	27.6%	36.1%	22.9%	22.2%	26.6%

*Likelihood of disclosing the presence of, or seeking help for mental health conditions*

Around 63% would admit they had a mental health, alcohol, or drug problem. Those in the Literature, Language, and Culture sector were least likely to tell someone, with those in the Visual Arts sector most likely (Figure 12). Of those who stated they might tell someone 49.7% said they would tell a Doctor or GP, 28% said they would tell a friend, 16.6% a spouse or partner, 18.9% a family member, 13.1% a counsellor/therapist or other health professional, and 4.6% said they would tell an employer. Other sources of help included alternative medicine, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender community support, religious leader, or a University Course Director.

When asked about where an individual would go for help with a mental health, alcohol, or drug problem, 52.6% stated they would go to a GP or other Doctor, 6.8% would go to a friend, 8.3% a family member, 11.7% a family or parent, 1.8% would go to their colleagues or employer, 20.9% would go to a counsellor or other health professional, and 3.7% would use online self-help. Other sources included alternative medicine, LGBT community support, religious organizations, alcoholics anonymous, Samaritans or Lifeline, other mental health organizations, general helplines. All had fewer than ten individuals saying they would use these options.



**Figure 92 Disclosure of a mental health, alcohol, or drug problem**

Would you admit you had a mental health, alcohol, or drug problem? If so, who would you tell, and if not, why not?	Sample overall	Literature, Language & Culture	Participatory Arts & Arts Community	Performing Arts	Visual Arts
<b>Yes</b>	221 (63.3%)	20 (55.6%)	33 (60.0%)	70 (60.3%)	118 (63.4%)
<b>No</b>	57 (16.3%)	11 (30.6%)	11 (20.0%)	16 (13.8%)	29 (15.6%)
<b>Don't know</b>	71 (20.3%)	5 (13.9%)	11 (20.0%)	30 (25.9%)	39 (21.0%)

For those who said they would not admit they had a mental health problem, four general categories of reasons were given. The first of these concerned **workplace factors**. Broadly speaking, there was fear that by disclosing to employers there would be consequences including job loss. For example one individual stated they had a “*fear of losing job as I am employed freelance*” and another stated they would not tell an employer “*because it would affect me financially and it would affect my main source of income*”. For others it was felt there would be consequences in acquiring work;

*“I will tell everyone I meet but will refrain from telling a job application as I fear it would hinder my application”*

*“I would tell anyone I felt it appropriate- I don't hide my anxiety disorder or alcohol issues, but tend to keep it to myself in professional settings”*

There was also some concern about those in work about the consequences in the workplace, some felt they would get “*less respect*” or a disclosure would “*harm my reputation*”. Finally one person noted that their experiences at a previous employer affected their willingness to disclose:

*“I would have a few years ago but since my last job was so stressful I feel a lot more secretive in general. I trust people's motivations a lot less after a year in the <sector name removed for privacy>”.*

The second category of reason why individuals would not disclose related to **personal factors**. One person noted that a disclosure of a mental health, alcohol, or drug problem “*would affect my insurance*”. Another stated that “*I don't really know what to say*” to services. For three individuals there was a sense that they could overcome the mental health issue themselves. Two people said it would be their fault if they could not recover. For example one sector worker stated:

*“Don't want to make a fuss. Many people are worse off than me. I have many good things in my life and, I guess, it is my fault if my mind can't appreciate that”*

Another individual believed they did not require help

*“I would probably (and falsely) believe I could get over it by myself, by choosing to do so”*

The third reason participants would not disclose related to **service provision**. These four accounts are clear they did not believe there was anyone who could offer useful help:



*“Don’t feel like there is anyone who can help”*

*“I feel the services are not there. I waited two years for an ‘urgent’ appointment. Lost faith in the medical system”*

*“I’ve never told anyone and I can’t imagine telling anyone I know as I fear it would change their perspective of me. I have been thinking recently about seeking professional help but its not easy through the NHS I’m aware, and I can’t afford any other route”*

*“There is no help out there I have visited NHS, charities”*

However, one person stated that they had obtained useful help to them, and would not seek help as they could use the strategies they had already learnt.

*“Because I attended therapy where I was given the tools to cope so I’m more likely to try cope on my own.”*

The final reason those working in the creative sector would not disclose related to **stigma and worry what people will think**. One participant stated that they would talk about mental health but not alcohol problems:

*“Mental health would be comfortable talking to close friends and family, alcohol problem would be much more reserved talking about with people due to stigma.”*

Other creative sector workers talked about “shame” or being “stigmatized”. One participant stated that they thought people would treat them differently:

*“I worry people would be worried about setting me off and therefore would avoid me”*

However, another stated that by telling their story they believed that stigma would disappear in time. That they found the disclosure personally helpful to them:

*“My therapist, friends, family, the world! I spent too long not talking and now I don’t ever want to stop sharing this experience. Everyone needs it to be normalized.”*

Finally, participants were asked if they would approach a friend that they were worried had a mental health, alcohol, or drug problem (Figure 13). Nearly all participants said they would approach a friend who they were worried about (88.5%), highest in the Performing Arts (90.4%) and lowest in Literature, Language, and Culture group (75.8%).



**Figure 103: Participants’ willingness to approach friends who they were worried about**

Would you approach a friend that you were worried had a mental health, alcohol, or drug problem?	Sample overall	Literature, Language & Culture	Participatory Arts & Arts Community	Performing Arts	Visual Arts
<b>Yes</b>	255 (88.5%)	25 (75.8%)	39 (88.6%)	85 (90.4%)	133 (88.1%)
<b>No</b>	32 (11.1%)	8 (24.2%)	5 (11.4%)	8 (8.5%)	17 (11.3%)
<b>Don’t know</b>	1 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.1%)	1 (0.7%)

**Financial and Work Conditions**

*Creative sector pay*

The mean number of hours worked both inside and outside of the sector is 40.6 (16.8) hours with a range from 0-120 hours. The mean percentage of hours spent working in the creative sector was 73.8% with a range of 0-100% (n=317). This was highest for the Participatory Arts and Arts Community (78.8%), followed by Performing Arts (77.1%) and Visual Arts sectors (71.8%), and lowest for the Literature, Language, and Culture sector (61.5%). Approximately 71.3% of the income a person who took part in this survey earns comes from the creative sector, again this ranges from 0-100%. This was highest for the Participatory Arts and Arts Community (82.0%), with a decline in percentage for the Performing Arts (72.8%), Visual Arts (69.5%), and the Literature, Language, and Culture sector (55.0%).

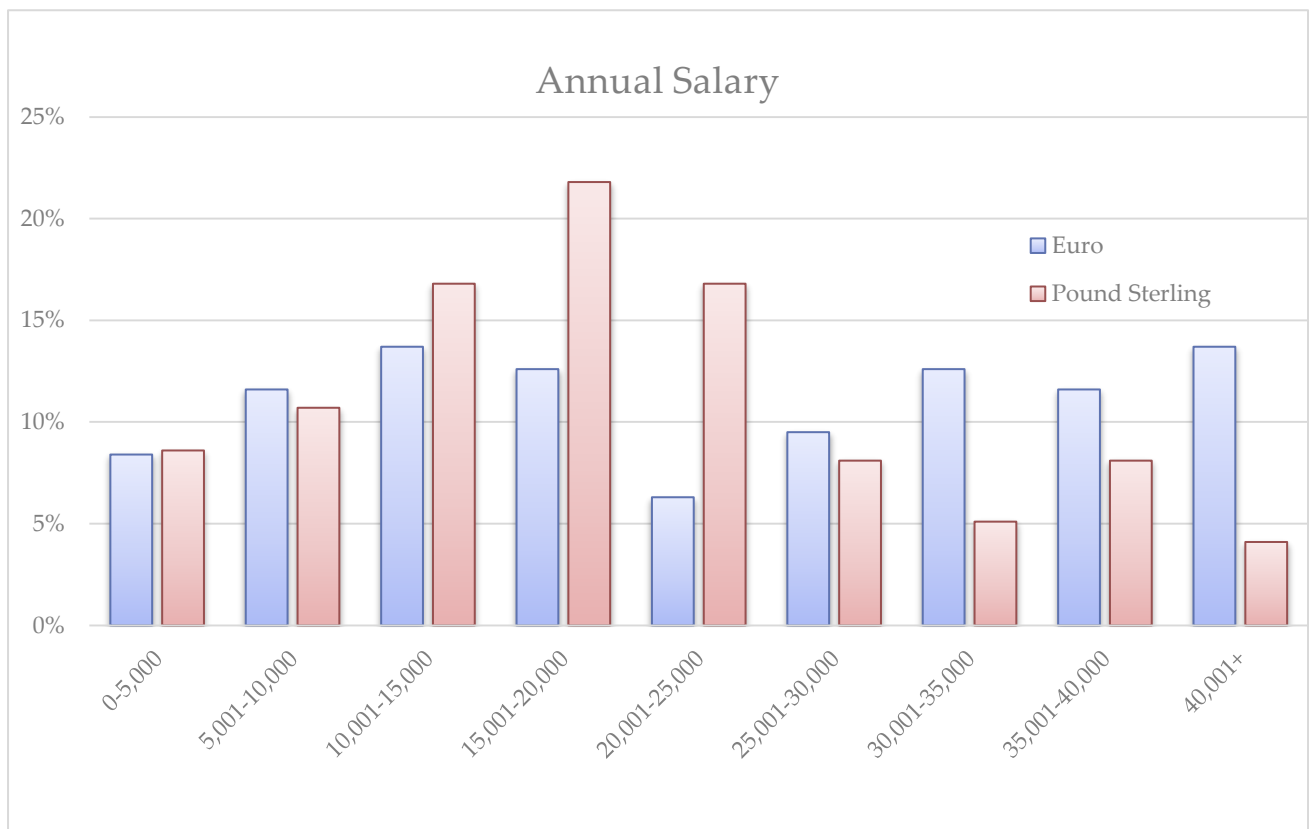
The mean salary of those who took part was is 25,785EUR (standard deviation=16,375) with a range of 0-80,000 EUR or £20,979 (standard deviation=12,792) with a range of £0-85,000. Around 46% of those paid in Euro earned less than 20,001 per year and 58% of those paid in pounds earned less than this amount. The range of salaries reported from the sample are illustrated in Figure 12. Around one fifth of those surveyed earned less than 10,000 EUR or GBP in a year; for those who earned their salary in Euro, the percentage was 20.0%, for those earning in pounds sterling, the percentage was 19.3%. As a guide the poverty line figures for the Republic of Ireland are around 10,894 EUR and for Northern Ireland they are around £13,920. With this in mind, and accounting for the potential variability in the exchange rate between the two currencies, it would appear that salaries in pound sterling (broadly those who are in Northern Ireland, but not exclusively so) are for the most part lower than those in the Republic of Ireland.



Figure 14: Annual salary earned by those taking part in the survey

Salary per annum	Euro	Pound Sterling
0-5,000	8.4%	8.6%
5,001-10,000	11.6%	10.7%
10,001-15,000	13.7%	16.8%
15,001-20,000	12.6%	21.8%
20,001-25,000	6.3%	16.8%
25,001-30,000	9.5%	8.1%
30,001-35,000	12.6%	5.1%
35,001-40,000	11.6%	8.1%
40,001+	13.7%	4.1%

**POVERTY LINE**



*Characteristics of the Creative Sector work environment and stress*

In previous research, such as the similar Entertainment Assist project based in Australia (9), issues were raised around the creative sector work environment as a specific stressor . To determine the effect of the creative sector work environment on the health and wellbeing of its workers we added questions on performance anxiety, irregular working, and the value placed on the arts and the artist as a working professional. Each of these will be discussed in turn below.

Performance anxiety

Individuals in the creative sector appeared most stressed as a consequence of the pressure they put on themselves to reach high standards; the greatest stress was felt in the Participatory Arts and Arts Community sector. Similarly, this sector was most likely to consider the external pressures to reach





high standards was a cause of stress for them compared to the other groups. The mean stress (on a scale of 0-none to 10-extreme stress) was similar for all groups, with a slightly higher level of stress for the internal pressure to reach high standards.

### Irregular working

Regarding working practices and the irregular nature of the job, the largest cause of stress was being able to see themselves working in the creative sector five years from now with just over 80% stating this was a source of stress. This was most keenly felt in the Literature, Language, and Culture sector. However, the intensity of this stress was below the midpoint for all except the Literature, Language, and Culture sector, suggesting this may be more of a long term stress, rather than an acute stress. Just below 60% stated that irregular working and the impact on their relationships was a factor, and slightly higher at 63.9% was the concern about short term contract working. Both Literature, Language, and Culture and Participatory Arts and Arts Community sectors stated the stress level was above seven on the scale. Of the sample, 42.2% stated working uninspiring jobs was a source of stress, with a slightly higher percentage of those in the Participatory Arts and Arts Community stating this was a source of stress (50%).

### Value of creative work and working

The key source of stress relating to the value of creative work and working was the feeling creative work was not financially valued. Overall 72.5% believed this to be a source of their stress, but this was most keenly felt in the Literature, Language, and Culture sector. However, this sector also had the lowest percentage agreement that they felt their work was not valued more generally. Those in the Participatory Arts and Arts Communities were more likely to say that feeling their work was not valued was a source of stress. Finally, there was some variation in the feeling monitored. Around 20% overall felt that monitoring was a source of stress for them, but this was most likely to be the case for the Literature, Language, and Culture sector, and least likely for the Visual Arts sector.



Figure 15: Creative sector stresses in relation to performance anxiety and working conditions

	Sample overall		Literature, Language & Culture		Participatory Arts & Arts Community		Performing Arts		Visual Arts	
	Yes causes stress N %	Mean stress (range)	Yes causes stress N %	Mean stress (range)	Yes causes stress N %	Mean stress (range)	Yes causes stress N %	Mean stress (range)	Yes causes stress N %	Mean stress (range)
<b>Performance anxiety</b>										
- Pressure to reach high standards (external)	273 (74.2%)	6.6 (0-10)	29 (80.6%)	6.5 (0-10)	46 (85.2%)	6.8 (2-10)	94 (80.3%)	6.3 (0-10)	141 (75.4%)	6.7 (0-10)
- Pressure to reach high standards (internal)	93.4%	7.7 (0-10)	94.4%	7.7 (0-10)	52 (96.3%)	7.8 (1-10)	108 (92.3%)	7.6 (1-10)	176 (94.1%)	7.8 (0-10)
<b>Irregular work</b>										
- Working on short term contract basis	326 (63.9%)	6.5 (0-10)	34 (61.1%)	7.0 (0-10)	36 (66.7%)	7.4 (0-10)	77 (65.8%)	5.8 (0-10)	120 (64.2%)	6.3 (0-10)
- Irregular working affects your relationships	223 (58.2%)	5.9 (0-10)	19 (52.8%)	6.5 (0-10)	28 (52.8%)	5.8 (0-10)	69 (59.0%)	6.0 (0-10)	108 (58.1%)	5.8 (0-10)
- I can see myself working in the creative sector five years from now	202 (81.7%)	4.1 (0-10)	33 (91.7%)	5.7 (0-10)	38 (74.5%)	4.6 (0-10)	91 (78.4%)	3.5 (0-10)	157 (84.9%)	4.1 (0-10)
- Working uninspiring jobs in the creative sector to make a living	146 (42.2%)	5.8 (0-10)	16 (44.4%)	6.7 (0-10)	26 (50.0%)	6.4 (0-10)	53 (45.3%)	5.9 (0-10)	75 (40.5%)	5.9 (0-10)
<b>Value placed on creative work and output</b>										
- I feel my work is not valued	173 (49.7%)	6.5 (0-10)	16 (44.4%)	6.0 (1-10)	31 (57.4%)	7.4 (0-10)	60 (51.3%)	6.5 (0-10)	93 (50.0%)	6.6 (0-10)
- I feel my work is not financially valued	253 (72.5%)	7.2 (0-10)	30 (83.3%)	8.3 (4-10)	41 (74.5%)	8.2 (3-10)	89 (76.1%)	6.8 (0-10)	131 (70.4%)	7.1 (0-10)
- I feel overly monitored and untrusted in my work	68 (19.5%)	5.0 (0-10)	11 (30.6%)	4.6 (0-10)	16 (30.2%)	5.9 (3-10)	27 (23.1%)	5.6 (0-10)	27 (14.4%)	4.2 (0-10)

## Other factors of importance identified by the creative sector in the survey

There were four overarching themes in the responses given to the open question “Is there anything else you would like the research team to know about health and wellbeing in the creative sector?” Around one third of individuals chose to comment further (110 of 368 participants). These were analysed using a qualitative thematic analysis using the method outlined by Braun and Clarke (23) There were four key themes arising from their answers, these related to money and income, workplace conditions, wellbeing and health, and the value of art. Each of these will be considered in turn.

### Wellbeing and health

Under the wellbeing and health theme there were three sub themes. These were the high rates of mental health problems in the sector, the effect of substance use, and possible solutions to the issues that impact on mental health problems and help seeking. These are illustrated in Figure 16.



**Figure 16: Illustration of the themes emerging from qualitative comments on wellbeing and health**



*High rates of mental health problems in the creative sector*

There was an indication mental health problems in the sector were widely known by those working in the sector. Several individuals were more general in their comments about how common mental health problems were, e.g. *“everyone I know is emotionally unhealthy”* but some noted specific situations to their own sector including craft and performing arts (music):

*“I’ve discovered that mental health issues and problems are VERY common among creative people and makes of craft, I’ve met so many people who are so creative and talented but struggle massively with anxiety and depression”*

*“I’m OK. But I know others are not. There’s not much out there as support and I worry about some of the artists we see at the venue”*

The impact of stress on creativity

We are reminded by the participants that stress and poor mental health have other implications. Two individuals mentioned how stress limits their creativity:



*“How this kind of worry impacts negatively on your creativity- it kills it if you’re not careful... It seems that dealing with ageing parents and all the problems that entails, uses a particular area of the brain that then shuts off the creative part? I probably need a holiday.”*

*“The worry [about money] stifles a lot of creative energy and potential.”*

Related to this, one individual went further to consider the stress, fear of failure, and pressure may also contribute to poor art practice. Individuals may feel less incentivized, and confident in pushing their art to be the best it could be:

*“This has created a fear of failure so we are not pushing the boundaries as much as we should and therefore stifling our creativity which in turn effects our emotional well-being.”*

Stress as a cause of physical health problems

We are reminded by one participant that we should not just be concerned about the mental health of individuals, but also the physical health issues caused by the job. One participant stated:

*“I have suffered from chest infections for the last 18 months which has been diagnosed as a psychosomatic result of working in a long term chronic stress environment. I see similar health impacts in my arts industry peers. Not all illnesses in work environment are mental health”*

For some their job relied on their physical health. As such physical health can be a source of stress; the individual needs to be well to be able to work. This individual talks about the physical health demands of technical theatre, and mentions how physical health is important in ensuring their mental health. The second account describes this in a more general capacity.

*“Mental health issues are particularly rife in the area of technical theatre. If physical health becomes a problem, there is no way to work around it, the work is extremely physical so if your health takes a dive you are out of work. Working in a freelance manner you also lose contacts & respect if you pull out of jobs.”*

*“Increasingly over the last 10 years I’ve seen people working beyond their physical capacity, doing things that will cause physical damage/injury but not having time to recover”*

The impact of stress on leaving the sector

A number of individuals either noted that others were leaving the industry due to pressures, or that they had done so themselves. One respondent was keen to know the degree to which individuals were leaving and wondered *“what is the rate of leaving the creative sector to work for a living in another sector”*. Unfortunately, that was outside the scope of this study, but others made some indication there were issues with remaining in the sector, and people left frequently.

*“Also the attrition within industry which I reckon to be 30 to 1 for every person that makes it is huge contributory factor especially in music and acting”*

*“The theatre industry (the only part of the creative sector that I have decent experience working in) is so tough physically and emotionally that many young people, myself included, are stepping away from it to pursue less destructive careers.”*



### Substance use

#### Smoking

One individual wished to notify the team about the importance of considering smoking as a risk factor for health in the survey. They attributed the high levels of smoking to a “*nihilist attitude*” towards health risks:

*“Ask about smoking on your next survey. There is a ridiculous amount of smokers in the creative fields, many with a nihilist attitude to the health risks.”*

#### Alcohol and drug use

There were two main points in relation to alcohol. One respondent noted that they used alcohol for stress relief

*“...And then I drink too much to blow off steam.”*

Another individual welcomed the opportunity to discuss alcohol in more detail. They suggested the assessment of individual alcohol use in detail would allow the drinker to understand the consequences:

*“Casual alcoholism exists throughout the industry and privately getting people to calculate their consumption is a good start to them coming to a realization about their situation, I think.”*

However, another individual was concerned the detail on alcohol should have been replicated in the drug section of the survey, specifically that the extent of drug use was not assessed.

*“Specific questions were asked about alcohol use, but drug use was left... hanging. I could be using drugs all the time or once in the blue moon.”*

The role of alcohol and drugs in the industry was only mentioned by two individuals. One person stated that drugs were normal in the sector “*Drugs are rife and “normal” but I never felt pressure*”, whilst another mentioned that drug or alcohol use could affect the creative outputs “*The thin line between genius and madness is crossed if too much alcohol and drugs are involved.*”

### Possible solutions as suggested by participants

We did not directly ask the question about solutions to address mental health problems. However, the participants provided some solutions on what worked for them. Each of those are given below.

#### Meditation, mindfulness, and exercise

One individual praised the role of mindfulness and exercise in promoting their own wellbeing. Furthermore, they suggest that this kind of self-care should be integrated into courses in the creative sector to protect the health and wellbeing of those in the creative industry in the future.

*“Meditation and exercise are very important to me having practiced TM, Zen and Yoga for 30 years. I believe these should be part of every art and music and indeed English or Drama class for people going into creative industry.”*



A change in creative pursuit was helpful to one person. They found the new creative work more meditative and beneficial to their mental health.

*"I feel the sector I am now in i.e. hand sewing/textiles is meditative and good for my mental health."*

### Peer support

There was a role for peer support in supporting those in the creative sector. This may alleviate some of the issues around loneliness. These two accounts in the sector indicate how useful it might be:

*"I have had very little support emotionally coming back to the arts and quite honestly, I feel alone. I love and live to perform but I feel there should be some sort of support for people like me."*

*"It feels like there is no support within the arts community other than "that's awful" being expressed frequently. I don't know where to get help and I'm getting too old to consider outside work - which I'd prefer not to do anyway. I know several other musicians and artists who are in similar situations."*

It has even been suggested by one that it should not take much effort, even *"Acknowledging people's hard work and thanking them for it really goes a long way."* One other individual noted that the lack of peer support was a cause of stress for them

*"The lack of support in the creative industry from people working in it is depressing to say the least."*

Finally one individual noted that peer support could be offered online. To alleviate some of the loneliness in the role, they used both online and real world sources of support.

*"Being an artist can be very solitary and lonely. I work at finding ways to connect both online and real world."*

### Where to go for help

There was an indication in some of the accounts that people were not sure where to go for help for mental health problems. Several indicated a directory to signpost people effectively would help:

*"There needs to be more signpost to point people in the right direction. We also need to open up more and realize that it is OK to talk and support each other but definitely signposts especially in NI."*

However, for others, it was less about knowing which services there were, and more an issue of access

*"Having the availability to counselling known would be a great step forward."*

*"The problem isn't recognizing issues with health and well-being, it's what happens when you go for the help, you're put on waiting lists, which doesn't help the person in need, it makes them feel even less valuable and just another number, and this is from my own experience"*

A sector specific issue was highlighted. It is difficult to access a static service whilst traveling as part of the work. More flexible solutions, or a directory with more than just local options might help this participant.

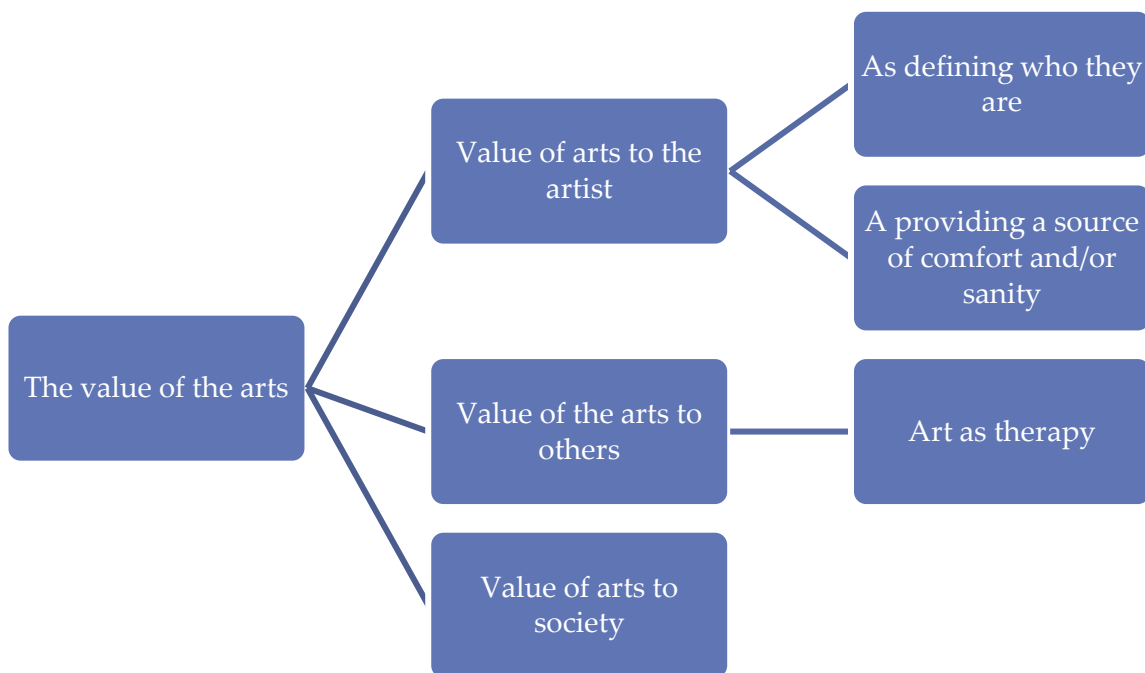


*“Difficult to obtain NHS services for mental health when freelance and touring. It’s very fixed and little communication between services.”*

**The value of the arts**

There were three subthemes illustrating the value of art. These include the value of art to the artist, the value of art to others, and a more general theme about how the arts are viewed and valued by society. An illustration of these themes is given in Figure 17.

**Figure 117: Illustration of the themes emerging from qualitative comments on the value of the arts**



*Value of the arts to the artist*

Art is not just an occupation to those taking part. It provides a useful function in defining the identity of the artist, and provides a source of wellbeing in itself.

*As defining who they are*

Several individuals mentioned that they identify themselves as an artist, and this identity has value to them. However, this was often followed by an explanation that this identity would be linked to a lower income:

*“I strive to earn a living in this sector because it plays a significant role in defining who I am as a person. If my life was just doing a non-descript job that gave me enough money to live I would get depressed over time (I think)”*

*“I teach to substitute my income as an artist. Being an artist means you don’t earn anything.”*



However, the artist identity was also seen as having a negative effect. For one person, they felt they needed to justify their identity; *“prove yourself as a true artist”*. There were also issues with the artist identity highlighted in Northern Ireland in particular.

*“I know artists who feel so relieved when they work abroad because they can say ‘I’m an artist’ to anyone who asks about their work, and not immediately feel apologetic or as if they’re being looked askance at (as they often feel in NI).”*

As providing a source of sanity and comfort

For a number of individuals, working in the creative industries was perceived to have a benefit to their mental health. Some of the comments included:

*“I believe that many people actually come to the creative industries to help with their mental health. Using the industry as a way of connecting with like-minded, creative people, to create and express themselves and their emotional pain.”*

*“As an artist with a chronic health condition creativity is vital to my health and wellbeing”*

*“I feel mentally healthier since job sharing and working more on my own creative practice rather than full time art teacher.”*

*“Art is the only thing that keep me sane”*

*“Creative outlets are invaluable to managing my mental health.”*

One individual noted that their creative pursuits had revealed a darker side to mental health.

Whilst they mention that the creative work can bring matters of mental health to the fore, this was seen as neither bad nor good, but something to be acknowledged and managed. They stated:

*“I concluded that in order to progress as an artist that it was necessary to embrace one’s shadow and to allow a dialogue between conscious and unconscious. This I concluded may make the artist very vulnerable and that this should be acknowledged in art colleges etc. The creative process I believe can stir up mental health issues.”*

### Value of arts to society

There was some concern amongst those who took part that the promises and declarations in programmes for government were not being enacted on the ground. Two individuals stated politics in particular is a problem; politicians need to invest in the creative sector to benefit from the creative industries:

*“I feel one of the main issues with regards to mental health in the creative sector in N.I is the constant lack of funding and the impression given by politicians of all sides that the arts is a luxury that should not be funded.”*

*“The number one thing that affects my mental health working in the creative sector is the chronic undervaluing of the work of arts professionals in Northern Irish society. This lack of understanding and awareness stems mainly from the severe under-investment at a political level, and affects the*





*attitudes of society at large. There's an absurd attitude here that the arts are an over-funded luxury, when they represent a minuscule sliver of the total NI budget and are significantly (10s of millions of pounds) less supported per capita than other regions in the UK & Ireland. It is constantly distressing on a daily basis to be expected to deliver more and more while the sector has been cut by 40% in less than a decade. Lip service to the creative industries as an economic powerhouse and growth industry is not matched with anything approaching reasonable resources to deliver what the sector has the potential to."*

Furthermore, an emphasis on investment in science to the detriment of art was noted. This individual noted that this emphasis is transmitted to children; they are educated that science is all important, yet later, when people engage with the arts, they understand that arts have high value. They suggest that people should not have to experience the arts for themselves to realise the potential and importance of the arts.

*"Overall I have observed that creativity and art practice is much undervalued in our society. There is a lack of understanding or respect for creativity & creative artists in general within (our) society. This is also evident within our education system. (Creativity is undervalued in favour of other disciplines i.e. Science etc.) A lack of understanding of creativity is reinforced from generation to generation. As little, or no, value is given to creativity within education this is then mirrored within society. However those who do come into contact with creativity, or have direct experience of making art or creative processes, do benefit and then they realise the value of art, but only then."*

### **Money and income**

Issues of money and income dominated the narratives given by the participants in this study; many believed *"financial pressures are the key source of stress in this sector"*. There were three subthemes, financial insecurity, low income and the value of creative work, and the value of work set by key gatekeepers. An illustration is given in Figure 18.



Figure 128: Illustration of the themes emerging from qualitative comments on money and income



*Financial Insecurity*

Access to healthcare including GPs and therapists

Aside from the knowledge of where to go to access services, income was perceived to affect the mental health care those in the creative sector can afford. For one individual, they prioritised seeing their GP for health issues which they considered affected their work more such as emergency or urgent care, as they would not be able to afford healthcare treatment for mental health. They stated:

*“I would imagine one of the big difficulties for people in the arts taking care of their mental health would be money-related. I wouldn’t make enough money (definitely not through art alone) to pay for GP visits for mental health check-ups. Can only afford to spend on medical treatment when something*



*is glaringly wrong (like emergency dental work or unidentified fainting - something that physically inhibits your ability to work)"*

Another individual noted that seeing a mental health professional was helpful for them. However, despite saying it was beneficial, they struggled to afford the service.

*"There was no option to say whether you have spoken to a mental health professional. I have as a result of a work situation. I find it incredibly beneficial and feel it is almost a requirement for working in this industry to stay on top of stress but it is also very difficult to afford on a low income."*

Job benefits including caring responsibilities, sick pay or parental leave, and pension. For some individuals there was a lack of security should things go wrong, or if they wished to take time out for family or caring responsibilities. There appears to be no safety net around these issues. For example, the below quotes illustrate the financial pressure around caring responsibilities:

*"I am the closest relative to my 90 year old mother who lives 100 miles away and needs my help for getting to hospital appointments etc. ... again this means cancelling work to accommodate her."*

*"Worries about ageing parent's declining health, having to stop creative freelance work to care for ill parent."*

For others, the issues around security and benefits was an issue for them and the sector as a whole. They spoke of issues with pension, sick pay, and maternity cover, and housing; as such there is concern around long-term financial security. The number of narratives illustrated below is indicative of the degree this affects the sector. They include:

*"I am good at what I do and I am praised for it but it still hasn't led to a secure, permanent job with benefits such as pensions, maternity cover etc."*

*"Getting ill through stress means cancelling work - gigs or classes - and with no work comes no pay and no sick pay. This compounds the stress. I have been very ill for the best part of this year."*

*"As an artist I will have no pension due to irregular paid working patterns & low pay for my work."*

*"...fear that illness, physical or mental will be a stigma when seeking employment, not wishing to take time off to take care of one's physical/mental well-being, as no sick pay (or not enough to pay bills with a family) when one is self-employed."*

*"Scared about money shortage and housing insecurity all the time"*

*"Lack of sick pay after a major operation greatly adds to pressures"*

*"I at times am a bit worried about my future finances, should I not be able to make work or find paid work as an artist... if I get ill, or infirm etc. (No safety net.)"*



### Low income and the value of individuals' work in the creative sector

#### Long hours and low pay

For some the financial pressures were a result of having to work more than one job to earn enough of an income. They noted the long hours required to remain at least partially in the creative sector.

Three individuals explain this below:

*"There is so little income versus the workload that it has to be supplemented by a full time job. This just doubles the overall workload and leaves less time to get projects completed. Usually several months of working till 3am after a full days' normal work. And no guarantee that anyone will hire the piece so I can at least break even on the material costs, never mind the pay for the hours spent makes on it"*

*"The pressure of constantly working with little or no budget, as one person doing 3 jobs, with everyone else in the same position wears you down in the end."*

*"There are highly stressful times (60 -70 hour weeks)."*

There was some indication that people understood the commercial realities of being in the sector. For others' there was an indication that when income came from outside the public sector, the earning potential was more favourable.

*"The economic realities of creating and delivering arts events are very much outside of the traditional commercial models; this will never be a highly paid job - I'm totally clear on that. But to make as little as we do with an utter lack of stability, plus constant cuts, an attitude from the society at large that our contribution is an unaffordable luxury is demeaning."*

*"I love what I do and I can pay the bills doing it. But I have to work incredibly hard with very limited resources to make it happen... I think because my income doesn't come from an ever shrinking public purse is the key to me being better off."*

Finally one individual indicated they did not feel that they would ever earn enough to live on in their role as a writer. They believed that you could only be a full time artist if you had the support of others, or were already wealthy, instead they worked long hours in another job outside the sector.

*"Having written and published two novels... I have yet to make even the equivalent of one month's salary in my part time day job. With two children at home and a partner on an average income, I feel it is financially impossible to stop working in a non-creative job to dedicate myself to writing. This is a source of frustration and stress. I often see blank notebooks retailing at bookshops for more than a novel that has taken me two years to create. Increasingly, it feels like the arts are becoming the preserve of the wealthy-- those who can be supported by parents/partners/pensions/etc. I am lucky that I have a reasonably well paid part time job to subsidise my writing, but the constant juggling and feeling like there is never enough time can be exhausting and depressing."*



### Expectation of working for free

In addition to the low wages reported by other accounts, there was a perception that working for free was a necessary aspect of creative sector working. For two accounts, they suggested there was an expectation that the love of the job, and reward from the creative process was a form of compensation. However, these accounts note their dissatisfaction:

*“I adore my work (“surely that should be enough?” goes the usual saying), but its lack of practical support directly impacts my emotional and mental wellbeing. I’m not afraid of hard work; I’m afraid of hard work not paying off.”*

*“People assume because it’s the arts and ‘something you love’ that these are fine working conditions, but it actually makes it extremely hard to be fully happy in the industry.”*

Others reported that there was an expectation of working for free if you were new to the industry, and in some cases to pay to organise events for which others would benefit (including financially).

*“The industry is set up so that young freelancers must work for free or little to no pay in order to make a name for themselves. You just have to accept this and get on with it or get a boring 9-5 job. There are no other options!”*

*“The funding cuts do not contribute to the well-being of artists of any genre. Many artists/performers are still asked to work for free or pay to organise an event in their venue despite the fact that many businesses profit from the resulting footfall. Culture Night is a prime example.”*

Finally, there was an expectation that some elements would be paid for, but that all the activities of the job in the creative sector were not compensated. This was stated generally and using the example of the demand to attend meetings as a component part of a job without being paid to do so.

*“Creative work is often low paid, short term or voluntary just to ensure that things happen, due to the fact that arts funding is very limited and at best periodic and partial - (I.e. aspects of projects are funded while others not. This puts strain on organising anything.”*

*“It’s demanded that you attend meetings, which are unpaid...”*

### Possibilities for progression

For some, there was concern about the opportunities to progress in seniority and income. The quoted narrative below summarises a range of issues mirrored in other comments. They reported four elements, the long hours, the personal, financial, and/or time resource costs to progression, the high qualification requirements, and impact the lack of progression in pay or status had on decisions in their personal life.

*“Outside of your employed position there is an expectation that you will work on independent projects (or there is a need to at the early stages to progress your career). These are mainly unpaid ... and a huge amount of time, effort, energy (and sometimes your own money) goes into them, which can be very stressful. Another concern is the total lack of pay progression in the industry. Often ... roles ...will require a PHD, but always minimum Masters, however pay is usually around 16-22k,*



*with very little opportunity to move up from this. It makes it hard to ever think about buying a home, having a family or other normal things when you're stuck on such a low wage, yet spend all of your time working."*

Negative feedback, rejection, and being replaceable

Some of the accounts found the possibility of being replaced a source of stress in their work in the creative sector. The last of these three accounts uses the term 'disposable' to indicate their concern about this:

*"It's getting pretty impossible to sustain this type of life. We are over worked, underpaid and expected to achieve miracles with money and find funding that doesn't exist. Yet one foot wrong or if you say anything you are judged as not right for the role, not right for the sector or could lose your contract."*

*"Most of the stress is from being fully aware how easily replaced you are, and I spend most of my time worrying about how I am going to be irreplaceable because of the quality of my work."*

*"No security of employment, even at high level - "fixed term" contracts etc. causes excruciating pressure to perform miracles with insufficient resources, working sometimes 80hrs a week to deliver results leads to burnout and employers just dispose of the employee and bring in a fresh one and it starts all over again. Terrible industry to work in. Just chews you up and spits you out."*

Individuals also noted that rejection was common in the sector. Some suggested they had to apply many times before they were successful for funding. These accounts highlight the ratio of rejection to application, the impact of rejection, and the length of time it takes to apply for funding compared with the time it takes to deliver a piece of work.

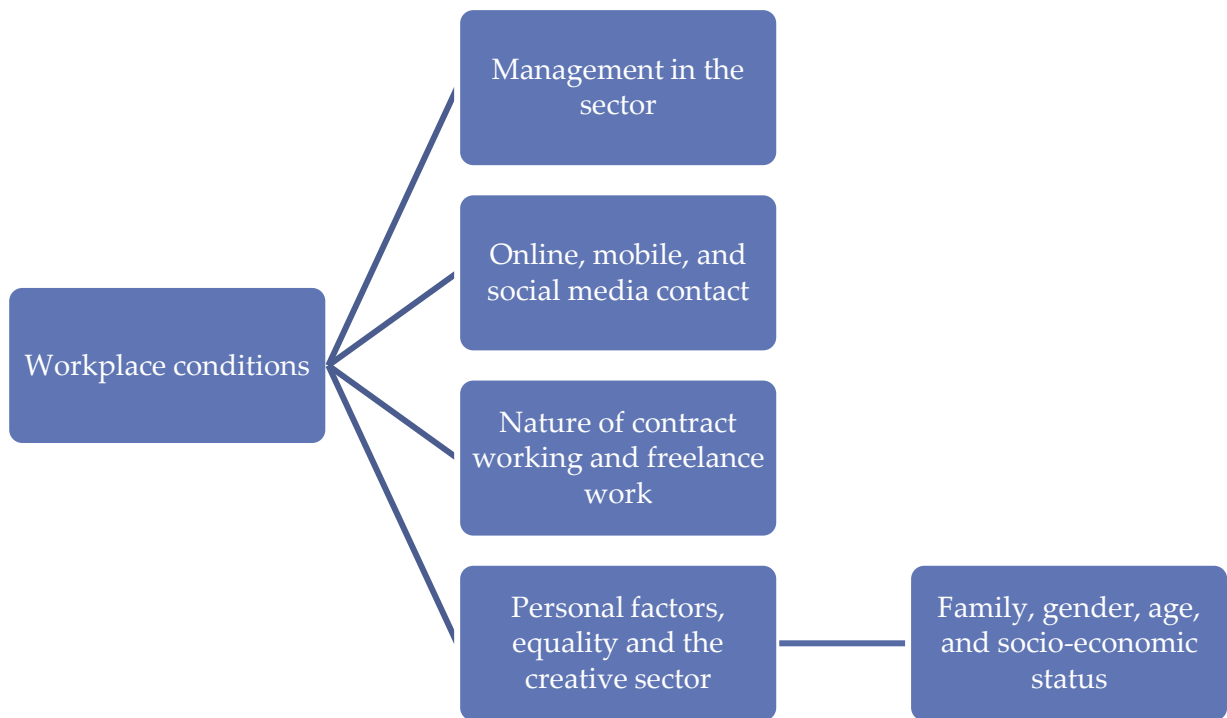
*"You have to constantly apply for stuff and face a lot of rejection. For every ten opportunities you apply for, you might be successful in one"*

*"Writing proposals and receiving rejections has damaged my belief in my abilities and self-worth."*

*"As an artist the application process for any work to be considered is punitive and takes longer than acts of creating work on weeks when such application is required. This limits me due to mental fog from my illness. I wish there was a centralised application form which could be forwarded for relevant opportunities."*



**Figure 19: Illustration of the themes emerging from qualitative comments on workplace conditions**



**Workplace conditions**

Management in the sector

For some individuals, management was reported to be a source of stress. This could be either a line manager or boss, those working at board level, or the HR policies and procedures designed to safeguard staff wellbeing. For example:

*“I had a horrific boss who created a toxic environment to the extent where I sought counselling and colleagues took leaves of absence and were on anti-depressants. I hope my experience was an exception.”*

*“Staff management and development can be poor so even self-motivated people can become highly demotivated.”*

*“Poor support from senior levels – e.g. Board. Small organizations make it difficult to raise concerns. Bullying and harassment has a huge impact on mental health, as do the short term plans due to funding issues.”*

*“There are inadequate HR procedures in most arts organizations. This needs to be addressed.”*

Furthermore, one individual left their particular organization as the management direction affected their creative output, and reduced the quality of their work.

*“I will not take another job for an arts organization as it has made me seriously ill. I feel completely taken advantage of, emotionally and financially and in the end the projects were pathetic, watered down shells of my original plans. A devastating experience...”*



### Online, mobile, and social media contact

Two narratives mentioned the problems they experienced with social media. The first of these two narratives mentions that they cannot leave work behind at the end of the day, nor be honest about their situation as their social media accounts blur the lines between work and personal life.

*“Social media gets me down and stressed, I have a mix of industry and friends. I am never ‘off’. I cannot moan about work or complain because there is no privacy.”*

The second narrative about social media is focused on online bullying, as a journalist, they were subject to negative comments under or about their articles. This was highlighted as a key source of stress for this particular individual, and others they knew:

*“For me online bullying is a real problem. Writing articles, and personal comments under them is pretty horrific sometimes. Really personal, graphic, and nothing to do with the story. Freaks me out a bit. I’ve known others who have it worse than me, who work in more ‘controversial’ fields such as the Northern Ireland troubles legacy cases and those kinds of things, but still it’s pretty bad. Not sure what the answer to this is, but I do find it a worry.”*

Those working in the sector indicated that they felt under pressure to remain in contact with their employer or contractor through email or mobile phone. One noted they were required to be contactable outside work hours, with consequences if they were not, the second indicated they felt their freelance status put pressure on them to be on duty at all times.

*“...pressure to reply to emails outside on work hours (frequently, weekends, evenings, and angry phone calls if you don’t respond until office hours”*

*“yes I feel constant stress as the directors of my organisation often contact me through text, WhatsApp so it is hard to relax outside of work time, because my contract is freelance I am always ‘on duty’”*

### Nature of contract working and freelance work

Many narratives explored the transient nature of work in the sector. For example one individual found this to be the main source of stress:

*“Working in the community art sector is very rewarding except for the uncertainty of when the next project is going to be. Being a freelance can cause some worries but not to the extreme of being unwell so far.”*

However, this was not just expressed as a concern about contracts, but also if they would be fulfilled as promised.

*“Austerity times means anxiety about income, hours. Can people afford to pay me, etc?”*

As part of this uncertainty around contracts, there are pressures to perform multiple functions in the role. One person describes a particular time in which they spent more time on administration than on creating.





*“When we say ‘creative sector’, less than 3 weeks were spent last year on creative work, everything else was admin”*

Others mention the different roles and different activities they are expected to be an expert in. They note that teams working on projects are often small and under resourced, thus the creative sector worker is expected to fill the gaps:

*“In all my jobs I have worked in a small team and therefore had to take on too much - project management, producing, fundraising, reporting, marketing, administration, finance and more. I am seriously considering giving up and changing sector - becoming a civil servant or teacher just for some security and less stress.”*

*“Ongoing pressure intensifying as funding cuts are made. Ridiculous pressure on small staff teams / individuals expected to be experts in numerous areas.”*

*“In general working as an artist is quite a struggle with the amount of overhead costs, competitive bidding structures, contract demands, short term projects with high liabilities or legal responsibilities and bureaucracy.”*

Finally there was an expectation that those working in the sector could not take time off for self-care or to protect their health. This account illustrates some feel unable to take time off and there is a pressure to always be ready to work at a high standard.

*“Well-being of actors is significantly undervalued, especially in situations where there are insufficient covers available. Actors have been put under immense pressure to perform with the alternative being a cancelled show. These situations are very stressful and lead ab actor to feel as though you absolutely can’t take a day off. Furthermore often unless people can see / hear that you are ill you’ll be expected to perform so taking a day off to repair your mental health doesn’t seem to be an option”*

Personal factors, equality, and the creative sector: family, gender, age, and socio-economic status

Some participants suggested the research team should have asked about how family relates to working in the creative sector as part of the survey. Family responsibility influenced their work in relation to in the following ways:

*“I am married with children so this affects my income and some of my other answers.”*

*“Travel and antisocial hours impact on family life”*

*“There’s a lot of pressure in my work. Also I have kids so am often tired!”*

*“Family relationships are difficult when your work is such a priority - spouse and children come after work in terms of priority”*

Furthermore, there was an indication that there were not supports there to help those with children progress in the industry. For one individual, there was pressure never to say no, for another, they were concerned about important after work events that they could not attend due to family responsibilities.



*“I’ve also seen parents struggling in this field as there are so few mechanisms to support them. In a freelance world you often can’t say no and you’re under pressure to never miss a deadline or say you can’t do something. I no longer work fulltime in the sector (I have run organisations and worked freelance). I stepped out to improve my own personal and professional life balance. As a result I feel a lot more stable and less stressed but I also think my long-term work prospects will be affected by that decision.”*

*“Not addressed directly in the survey is the home life / work balance. As a [place redacted] parent of three children working in the arts, their well being is one of my main concerns. At busy periods it’s sometimes impossible to manage them on top of work that falls into unsociable hours. There is little if no support available and I don’t have immediate family to call on. There are a growing number of support groups, but when push comes to shove it’s impossible to get anyone into your home who can cook a dinner and out your kids to bed. This restricts me from socializing after shows and I feel intimidated by that, more than anything else.”*

There was a mixed view of the impact of gender and age on working in the creative sector. One individual suggested that it was “*very hard for women over 50*”, another suggested the threshold was “*any man over the age of 30*”. One individual noted “*most of my stress comes from transphobia*” although did not elaborate further. Finally, there was some indication that working in the arts was a middle or upper class occupation. One individual commented there appeared to be “*no interest in working with working class writers*”. The issue of socio-economic diversity in the sector was evident in the following quote. This individual noted it was not just an issue of status, but also one of geography, with more emphasis required on arts outside London, Birmingham, or Manchester.

*“The creative industries are doing a lot to promote diversity in the workforce but the bigger problem is social disparity. Working in television, a large percentage are from middle class/upper middle class backgrounds. The diversity campaigns are good but they are superficial; the majority of people from ‘diverse’ backgrounds are from urban centres like London, Birmingham and Manchester, where the creative industries are typically based. More needs to be done to provide opportunities for socioeconomically disadvantaged people (I.e. working class) from regional and provincial areas of the country”*

## Conclusions

This study was designed to provide an evidence base to support and direct activities in response to the challenges faced by those working in the creative industries in Ireland. Throughout the research project, the dedication and passion for work in the creative sector was evident in all sectors.

However, this dedication and achievement in the creative industries in Ireland is tainted by the high cost to the individuals who work in the field. There is some way to go to improve conditions in the industry, and provide those who work in it with a positive, nourishing, and supportive work environment. Whilst there are promises made in the programmes for government both North and South, these need to consider the environment in which they hope to achieve their outcomes and partner with the creative sector to realise its enormous potential. This is particularly important in the North, with the history of conflict and division, there is a great opportunity to use the creative sector to bring communities together. There are lessons to be learnt about the nature of the sector, and the time to act is now.

Those who took part were in their late thirties on average, with around 14 years worked in the creative sector across a range of domains. For those who took part, working in the sector involves a degree of survival. The workers who responded can and do flourish under very challenging circumstances including work insecurity, financial pressures, mental health issues, substance use, and suicidal behaviour. Many spoke of the calling to work in the sector; they cannot imagine doing anything else. But we are reminded that the old adage around “suffering for one’s art” is outdated in today’s society. The income levels are low, and around 20% live with income below the poverty line, with the majority earning below 20,000 EUR or GBP per annum.

The characteristics of the working environment as described in this report (irregular, unpredictable hours, frequent travelling, and low income) may create stress that increases the risk of mental illness. Some participants also described negative, unsupportive, and highly competitive work environments, in which a fear of disclosure about mental or other ill health is believed to affect whether they are offered work. Those in the sector should note how common mental health problems are in their sector, and use the figures enclosed to illustrate how frequently mental health problems occur and reduce the stigma of disclosure or help seeking.

Nonetheless, there appears to be a willingness to disclose mental health problems, with around 90% saying that they would speak to a friend if they are worried about their mental health. There is therefore a good opportunity to capitalize on this generosity to improve conditions in the sector and help people with mental health problems or suicidal thoughts obtain treatment and support. It may be useful to improve mental health literacy and the recognition of mental health problems across the sector. Initiatives such as the Mental Health First Aid courses assist ordinary citizens in having productive and important conversations about mental health with a view to protecting life. Much of the suffering could be alleviated by stigma reduction and encouraging people talking with one another about mental health and wellbeing. We could also do more to help people find a way to communicate with each other and help each other to find treatments if necessary.



Many individuals indicated they would be willing to access help in relation to their mental health and wellbeing, but many were unsure as to where to go. There was also the perception that the services that they were aware of were inaccessible or ineffective, and that service providers needed to be aware of the unique pressures facing the sector. Clarity on how to access and find services would therefore be helpful. Services and treatments do not necessarily need to be region specific. There is a role for telephone, online or computerized support to help those who may not want to disclose to others on a face to face basis, and for those who are touring or travelling as part of their work.

The study illustrates the high rates of mental health issues among those working in the creative sector. It may be that people with mental health issues are more drawn to creative occupations and activity, or it could be that factors identified as associated with creative occupations and activities contribute to mental health issues; or indeed the two factors may interact. However, this report illustrates serious health and wellbeing concerns for those who are working in the creative sector. Probable mental health disorders were at least three times higher in the creative sector than in the general population of either Northern Ireland or Republic of Ireland. Alcohol and drug use were a common feature of life in the sector, and levels of suicidal behaviour were far in excess of those found in the general population.

## Recommendations

In order to develop recommendations from the research, the study's findings were presented to a group of people who worked in the creative sector, and they asked for their views on the results and what could be done to address the issues identified. The following recommendations are based on the results from the study and the suggestions made by this group.

### 1. Work environment, pay, and conditions

There is considerable evidence of unhealthy work environments in the sector which undoubtedly contributes to the stress that underlies much of the mental illness that is reported in this study. There is evidence that individuals lack control of their work, working hours may be unpredictable and there is a lack of stable contracts and a predictable income. That there is an “effort and reward” imbalance which contributes to poorer health and wellbeing. People working in the sector are subjected to frequent public critique, which can be emotionally damaging, particularly due to the personal nature of the work that they produce. A cultural shift within creative organizations large and small is required to improve the work environment and provide a kinder, more supportive and less stressful, culture across the sector. Groups who represent those working in the creative industries, groups of workers themselves, and indeed employers should work together to ensure that the working conditions and financial recompense is appropriate.

### 2. Emotional support and accessing mental health services

There was some indication that the participants received social support from family and friends and that there was a willingness to discuss mental health with friends and co-workers. However, there were reports of a lack of support from the industry itself. There are efforts to address this with the development of crisis lines, and campaigns from charities and groups within the sector, and these are to be welcomed. However consideration should also be given to ways that employer assistance programmes could be expanded to include people working in the creative sector who do not have fixed contracts. A sector specific approach is important as participants felt that service providers needed to have an understanding of the pressures of working in the industry in order to appropriately meet their needs. Online, computerized and telephone support services may be of particular value in this sector. Packages and social media groups may connect people and provide social support for stress and mental health/ substance issues. Online, or computerised treatments, with or without, adjunct person to person therapeutic contact, may be helpful for those who are travelling, or who do not wish to attend face to face treatment sessions.

### 3. The role of drugs and alcohol

Drug and alcohol use appears to be common in the creative industries and people who work in this sector in this sector may have higher levels of exposure to substances if they work in places where others go to socialize. It is recommended that we build awareness of the effects of substance use



amongst those in the creative industry focusing particularly on the impact on creativity and health. There should be adequate support including both harm reduction programs and treatment support for those who have more severe problems, and that services are equipped to meet the specific needs of those in the creative industries with an understanding of the nature of the working environment. Cultural factors which encourage or facilitate substance use, such as part payment in alcohol, should be challenged.

### **4. Treatments for anxiety, depression, and suicidality**

There were high levels of anxiety, depression, and suicidality in the sample who responded. As some aspects of the job help drive anxiety, this is an area of concern. The high levels of suicidality reported here are of considerable concern. However lower numbers responded to these sections of the questionnaire and this may be because only those with more experience of suicidal behaviours answered these questions, or that people with suicidal thoughts did not respond due to stigma (or a fear that they might be somehow identified in the survey). Again, it is important to note that these illness are generally regarded as treatable. Suicidal thoughts and behaviour can also be addressed, and that people can be supported to cope with the life crises that often precipitate suicide. Again, in order to be effective for this population, psychological services need to have an understanding of the creative industries. Links with treatment and support services need to be developed, along with targeted interventions, and these need to be widely publicized to those working in the creative sector. These need to be readily available, confidential, and easy to access given the nature of the field. Tailored support and early intervention is required to tackle suicidality in the sector. Consideration should be given to the provision of particular support services to meet the needs of people in the creative sector at particular times of the year, and with particular issues. For example: help with tax returns prior to the deadlines, debt management and financial issues, such as getting a mortgage, managing family life and unstable/ unpredictable work patterns and coping with disappointment and failure.

### **5. Curriculum development**

Many of those working in the creative industries use their own experiences, particularly experiences of pain and mental illness in the creation of their art. In many ways the creation of art may be regarded as therapeutic, however this also means that they are often deeply and personally invested in their outputs. In addition, many people in creative industries and community artists are dealing with difficult issues in their work and are, helping people process difficult issues. They often work with others who have mental health problems. In any other sector a worker with this level of exposure to emotional distress would receive training in how to manage the impact this on their own wellbeing, and also support and supervision. This does not appear to be a feature of the training of those in the sector. Those involved in teaching in the arts should build in classes which identify risk and protective factors, identifying and strengthening social networks, create an understanding of the pitfalls, highlight resources available, and provide protective strategies. Short



courses for those already in the sector to help build resilience may be helpful, and as such they should be invested in, and should be widely available.

## 6. Funding and recognition of the role of the sector

The report began with the commitments made by both Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland government priorities and commitments in relation to the creative sector. Those commitments are not realized in the hearts and minds of those who work in the sector, and there is a dissatisfaction with the low levels of investment in the creative sector workers and the lack of recognition for the value of the arts in general. It is perceived that the arts are dispensable, and that they are the first to suffer cuts in times of austerity. As a society we claim to value the arts, but only those artists who are famous appear to be paid in a way that acknowledges their contribution. There is a responsibility for all of us who consume the arts, and benefit from the arts, in whatever guise, to recognize the people who create the art first and foremost. That they deserve the same rights to flourish and grow, and they should receive appropriate payment for their hard work and output. Similarly, payment in alcohol or other 'incentives' is inappropriate. Investment in a sector which provides £10 return for every £1 spent should be a priority for governments North and South, and the commitments to the creative sector can only be realized if we take care of those who work in it.

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