

Evaluation Report

Build Back Better Grant – Kent County Council

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RMR



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Credits: This Evaluation was produced by RMR, embedded evaluation and strategic development specialists.

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Background and Context

This section provides key background and context information for the content of this report. It details what this report covers, outlines our research methods and provides key contextual information about Kent.

About this report

This is an evaluation report for the Build Back Better grant, a Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) prioritising recovery post-Covid, distributed by Kent County Council in 2021, with a series of Case Studies highlighting the success of the grant. It also contains results of a review of the needs of the Kent Creative sector, as well as analysis of the efficacy of communication with the sector, and recommendations are provided.

This report has 5 sections:

- Section 1 appraises the Build Back Better grant application process.
- Section 2 analyses the outcomes of the funding against COMF priorities.
- Section 3 explores the needs of the Creative Sector in Kent and provides our recommendations.
- Section 4 evaluates current and future Communication needs with the Kent Creative Sector and provides our recommendations.
- Section 5 concludes the report by highlighting funding successes in a series of Case Studies.

There is also an Appendix containing more in-depth information on our methodology.

About our research methods

Our approach to data collection and analysis draws on a variety of qualitative and quantitative measures to provide a rich and full picture. Our main data sources used are summarised in the table below:

Data	Collected from	Base (number of responses)
Application forms	All applicants to the BBB from Kent County Council	107
Evaluation forms	Successful BBB applicants	72 (of possible 96 successful applicants)
Creative Sector survey	Successful BBB applicants, unsuccessful applicants and wider Kent sector Creatives	23, 5 and 97 responses respectively, 125 valid responses analysed in total.
Interviews	Successful BBB applicants for Case Studies	10
Focus group	11 members of the Kent Creative sector including some BBB applicants	1 2-hour focus group
Postcode analysis	Indices of deprivation analysis of postcodes from BBB applicants	107 postcodes

More detail about data collection and analysis can be found in the Appendix.

About Kent

Population: Kent is a county in the South East of England, home to more than 1.5 million people, with the population growing steadily year on year through higher births than deaths, as well as increased migration to the county¹. Of the 12 local authorities in Kent, Maidstone is the most populated, and Gravesham the least².

Economy and employment: Three quarters of local authorities in Kent have seen an increase in deprivation in the last seven years compared to other areas in England, with Thanet being ranked as the most deprived local authority in Kent³. All top 20 of the most deprived areas of Kent affecting children are in coastal areas, and 13.8% of children live in absolute low-income families, which is higher than the average for the South East region of 11.6%, although lower than the national average of 15%⁴. Almost 10% of households were reported to be experiencing fuel poverty in 2020⁵, and this figure is likely significantly higher in the current fuel crisis.

Health and welfare: 17.6% of people in Kent report having a long-term health problem or a disability which affects their day-to-day lives⁶. Health outcomes in the place...

The creative industry: There are almost 10,000 people working in the creative industry in Kent⁷. These account for 1.6% of all jobs in Kent, which is below the regional and national averages of 2.6% and 2.3% respectively, but the creative industry in Kent has seen a comparatively larger increase over the last 5 years.

¹ https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/8149/Whats-causing-Kents-population-growth.pdf

² <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/facts-and-figures-about-Kent/population-and-census#tab-1>

³ https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/7953/Indices-of-Deprivation-headline-findings.pdf

⁴ https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/7956/Children-in-poverty.pdf

⁵ https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/135943/Fuel-Poverty-bulletin.pdf

⁶ https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/8181/Disability-in-Kent.pdf

⁷ https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/87429/Creative-Industries-statistics.pdf

Build Back Better Grant

About the Grant



For Kent creatives worst affected by **Covid19**



£425,000 funding budget



107 applications



96 successfully funded (£418k)



11 unsuccessful (not eligible or lack of info)



23% funding to individuals



77% funding to organisations



What people thought of the process



73% of rated the application 'Very good' in at least one area



4/5 average scores for ease of applying, access to info, response times, payments, the application form and overall process

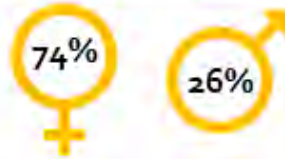
About the Applicants

LGBTQIA+ 14%

Identity



Straight 86%



Ethnicity

White British 80%



Mixed/multiple 5%

White Other 15%

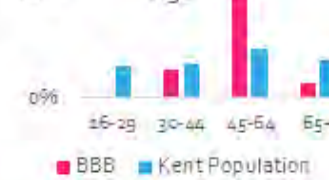
Disability



Identifies as D/deaf or disabled 11%

75%

Age



■ BBB ■ Kent Population

Successful Applicants



19% come from 10% most deprived areas in England



54% have some form of caring responsibility



10% more likely to come from working class backgrounds than other creatives in Kent

Unsuccessful Applicants



Only 10% of applications unsuccessful (not eligible or lacked info)



Less likely to come from a deprived area than successful applicants



More likely to be an organisation than an individual



Kent County Council offered grants from The Build Back Better grant (BBB) of up to £5,000 to aid recovery of the creative sector post-Covid19. This grant was funded by the Contain Management Outbreak Fund (COMF). Outcomes of the BBB grant were assessed against the priorities of this fund. For more, please see the full evaluation report by RM Research. <https://rmresearch.uk/bbb>



63% of wider sector creatives hadn't heard of the grant – could be better advertised in future

1. Build Back Better grant application review

This section looks at Kent County Council's Covid recovery-focused *Build Back Better* grant. It provides an in-depth review of the entire application process, from the form itself, to who applied and who was awarded, promotion of the grant, how successful and unsuccessful applicants felt about the whole process, and the views of the grant assessors on the process.

KCC have been a valued funding partner, not just through actual funds which has allowed us to lever in further funding to run projects, but also through advice from officers and sign posting. KCC funding also acts as a 'kite mark' for other partnerships.

Successful applicant

1.1. About the grant

The *Build Back Better* grant, offered by Kent County Council between 2021 and 22, provided grants of up to **£5,000** to support arts and culture organisations in Kent to recover from the effects of the Covid19 pandemic. It prioritised organisations who had been most affected by reduced attendance and participation due to lockdowns or social distancing, such as theatres, music venues and

festivals, with a focus on encouraging people back into arts and culture events safely post-Covid, especially those disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Funding came from their **Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF)** with a total funding budget of **£425,000**. Importantly, **no match funding was required**.

1.1.1. Evaluation of the grant

In addition to this external evaluation, Kent County Council asked applicants to complete an evaluation form, which covered areas such as income and expenditure, project beneficiaries, outputs and outcomes. **72** forms (75%) were received back from the **96** funded projects. The data from these was analysed and forms part of the findings in this section.

From an evaluation standpoint, the procedures Kent County Council put in place to store and organise their data, such as allocation reference numbers which were used consistently on any and all associated documents, proved an incredibly helpful and efficient way to ensure all data was easy to find and analyse, **and is some learning that other similar grants could take away and apply to their own data procedures**.

One area of improvement that we did note was that unfortunately postcodes were not requested from applicants at the time of application via the form, meaning that the KCC team had to spend additional time sourcing these at a later date. This is key learning for future grant applications.

1.2. Deciding who to fund

Each application was reviewed by one of four assessors. Their views of the process are outlined below in section *1.3 How transparent was the assessment process?*

Initially, applications had to pass five eligibility criteria, with any 'No' answers meaning disqualification. They needed to:

- o Work substantially in the creative sector
- o Put on activity in the creative sector
- o Be based in Kent
- o Be putting on activity above 'business as normal'
- o Complete activity before 31st March, which was later extended to 30th June

Just three applications did not meet these criteria and were excluded. Applications were then scored between 0 and 5 on the following:

- o If their normal activity relied on people coming together as participants and audiences
- o How well their proposal supported Research & Development (R&D), reshaping their business model, product development or project delivery
- o How innovative their activity was
- o If it would be delivered in the time frame

A further eight applications were discounted following low scores in some or all of these areas.

1.3. How transparent was the assessment process?

Here we review how transparent the assessment was, including the views of the assessors themselves.

Three of the four assessors provided us with feedback on their view of the assessment process. Each had a wealth of previous experience in assessment. All felt they were given enough information to make a fair assessment of the applications.

Yes, the guidance / assessment criteria was solid and clear.

Assessor, Build Back Better grant

The rationale and feeling behind the funding being clear to the assessors is apparent, as demonstrated by this quote:

It was clear that the impetus was for KCC to distribute funds where they were most needed i.e to all those facing unfair disadvantage as a result of Covid19, whether part of the arts ecology or not, and with creative individuals and community arts orgs equally respected within that. This was generous, and in the spirit of the time, and the fund.

Assessor, Build Back Better grant

Assessors praised the process for being straightforward and well-managed. Strategies such as sending applications for review in batches was seen to make the process easier. No concerns were raised, other than surrounding the eligibility of some applicants, which the assessor mentions as being resolved by consulting on others, highlighting the importance of their decision to have a team of assessors.

Moderation was completed on projects that had initially received a 'No' decision. For full transparency and fairness of the assessment process we recommend in future that a small sample of ALL applications (successful and unsuccessful) across assessors be moderated to ensure consistency of assessment grading.

1.4. What sort of projects did people apply for?



Figure 1 Word cloud of responses of why people applied to the BBB grant. Base = 27.

We needed to restructure the festival to cope with the challenges caused by Covid.

Broadstairs Folk Week, successful BBB applicants

We wanted to bring people into a physical space post covid and without some improvements to the building we were unable to do so.

Successful BBB applicant

1.5. Who applied, and who was successful?

KCC funding enabled us to significantly grow as an organisation.

Successful applicant

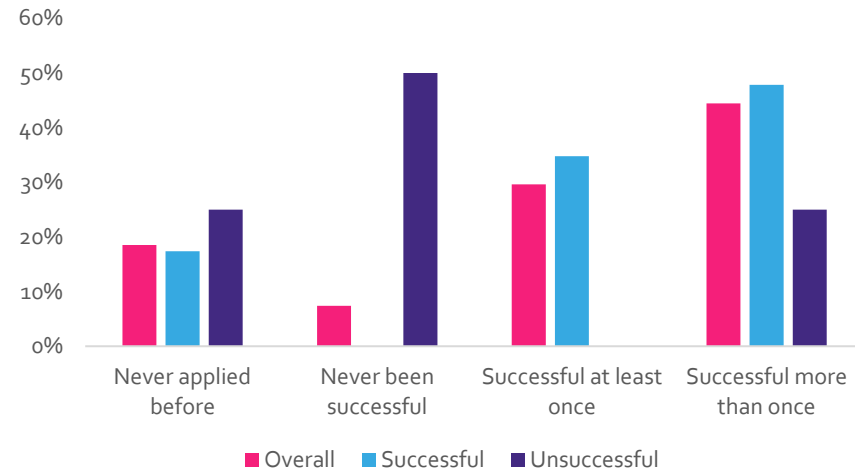


Figure 2 Who had applied for or received funding with KCC in the last 5 years. Base = 27

Kent County Council received **107 applications** for Build Back Better grants totalling more than £466,000⁸. 22% of all applications came from individuals, 78% from organisations. These levels were similar between the successful and unsuccessful applicants,

⁸ Total funding requested £466,693.84



Figure 4 Where Build Back Better projects happened. Base = 72

meaning neither grouped fared particularly better or worse than the other in terms of who successfully secured funding.

Successful applicants: 96 applications were granted funding of almost **£418,000⁹**, with all successful projects receiving the total amount they had requested.

I'm very proud to have received this funding from KCC.

Successful applicant

Unsuccessful applicants: 11 applications, worth almost **£49,000¹⁰** were rejected for failing to meet the criteria of the grant, as highlighted above. Of those who did not successfully secure

funding, one project went ahead as planned whilst securing other funding, two projects are currently still looking for additional funding, and two of the projects did not go ahead.

In the survey, applicants were asked if they have applied for or received funding from Kent County Council in the last five years. Successful applicants are more likely to have applied for funding before than unsuccessful applicants, and almost twice as likely to have been successful more than once.

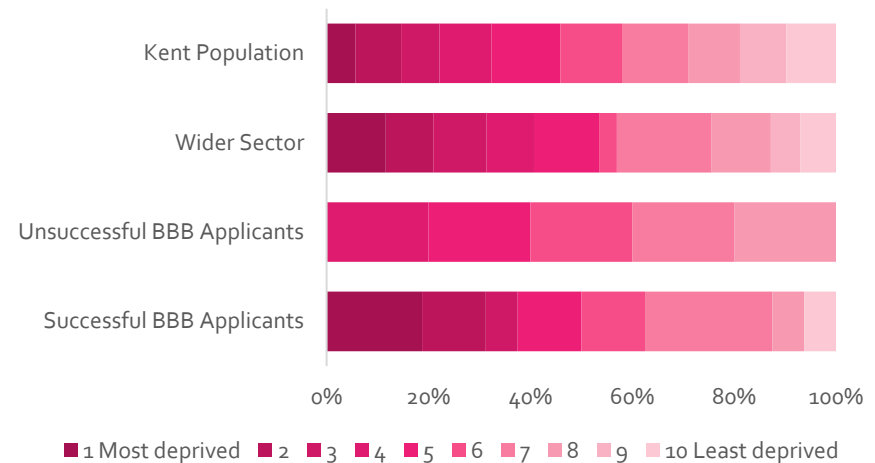


Figure 3 showing levels of deprivation in successful BBB applicants, unsuccessful applicants, and a comparison with the wider creative sector in Kent, via our survey, as well as the Kent population as a whole. Base = 107

1.5.1. Geographic spread

BBB projects were carried out across Kent, with at least three projects happening in each Local Authority district. The most

⁹ Total funding awarded £417,818.47

¹⁰ Total funding rejected £48,875.37

popular areas to carry out the work were Thanet (35% of projects), Canterbury (25%), Folkestone (19%) and Ashford (18%).

1.5.2. Indices of Deprivation

Here we compare the levels of deprivation¹¹ for successful BBB applicants, unsuccessful applicants, and creatives from the wider sector in Kent, as well as the Kent population.

The darker the colour of the bar, the more deprived an area is. This data shows that **19%** of Successful Build Back Better applicants came from some of the 10% most deprived areas in England, meaning **people who successfully received the funding were twice as likely to come from the most deprived areas than on average**. In addition, **successful applicants are over three times as likely to come from the most deprived areas than the Kent population as a whole**. All unsuccessful applicants were from less deprived areas than successful applicants on average. These findings together show that, while this grant money did go to **people and organisations from areas of all levels of deprivation, a good proportion of the funding went to people who need it most** compared to averages for England and Kent.

1.5.3. Creative clusters



Figure 5 Map of postcodes provided by successful BBB applicants to show creative clusters. Base = 94

From the map, lots of creatives are based in the more populous areas such as Margate, Canterbury and Folkestone. Interestingly there is an emerging cluster of creatives who are based in Gravesham as shown by the postcode map, but this is not reflected in the areas in which they work (at least for their BBB projects), as Gravesham was one of the least referenced places in section 1.5.1 Geographic spread above.

¹¹ Indices of deprivation are an official way of measuring levels of deprivation in local authorities in England. They rank local authorities using a number of metrics such as employment, income, health

deprivation and crime. For more on Indices of Deprivation please see <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>

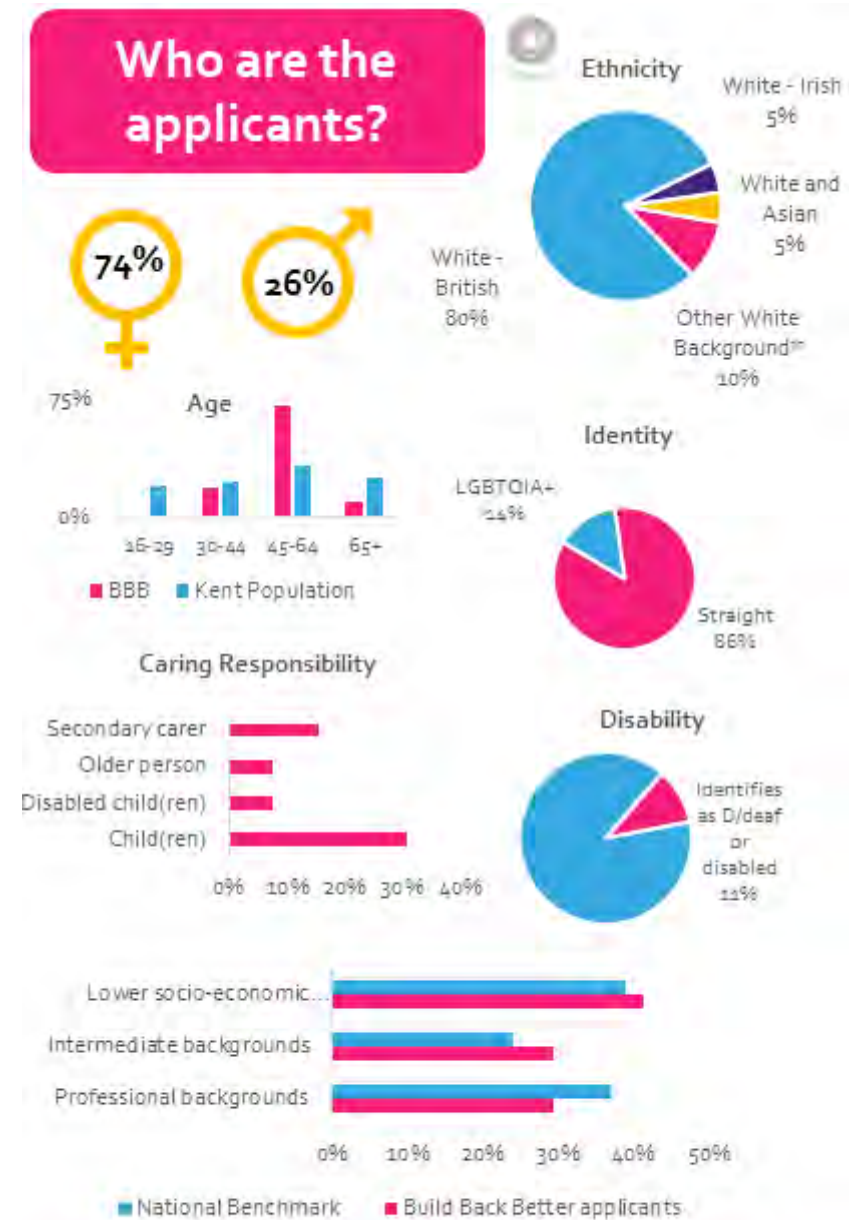
Regarding creative clusters, one thing that applicants want is to know who else has received funding. They felt this would create natural networking opportunities, as well as open doors for cross-media projects and skill sharing opportunities. There was also some who felt this would add transparency to the process.

1.5.4. Diversity

Ethnicity and those who identify as LGBTQIA+ are largely in line with figures for the Kent population in general, although there are slightly less people who identify as disabled within the BBB applicants than the Kent population¹², and this is something Kent could explore in the context of offering support to apply for funding. In addition, far more women have applied than men compared to the Kent population, and in comparison to the results found in the wider sector, presented later in the report.

1.6. How well was it promoted?

The figure below shows how applicants heard about the grant. By far the most successful promotion route was the Kent County Council mailing list, with 62% of applicants hearing about the grant this way. Word of mouth was also a popular option, with 21% of people being told by friends or colleagues, and many of the people we interviewed said they had heard through work, highlighting how important work networking is for finding opportunities like these. Other routes included Arts Job Finder and the Kent County Council team notifying someone directly.



¹² <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/facts-and-figures-about-Kent>

The council [have] been very supportive of our work in the past.

Successful applicant

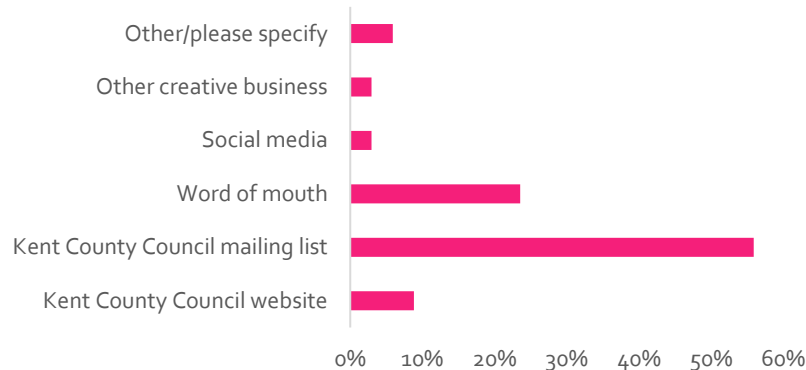


Figure 6 How BBB applicants heard about the grant. Base = 34

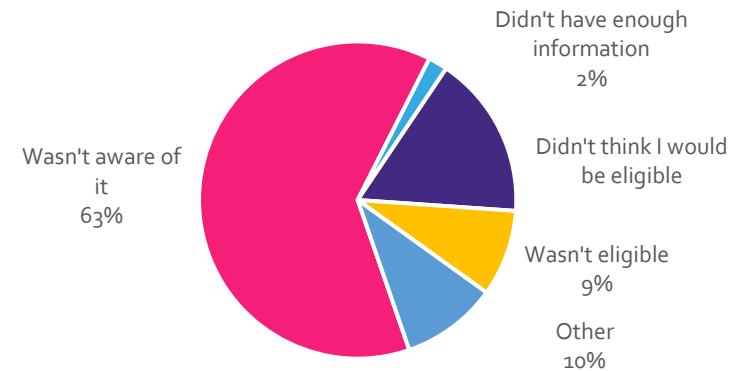
To examine the view of those who did not apply for the grant, the wider creative sector in Kent were polled as part of the survey and asked why they did not apply for Build Back Better funding. The results in Figure 7 show that a large number of them were not aware of the grant at all.

In addition to many creatives in Kent not knowing about the grant, the chart shows that 16% didn't think they would be eligible for the grant, measured separately from the 10% who knew they were not eligible.

I had no idea about the build back better grant, its conditions and whether its applicable to my situation until receiving this survey.

Member of the Kent creative sector, via survey

Members of our focus group, who were members of the wider creative sector in Kent, said they were not sure if the grant applied to them. Some thought it was for small organisations, not sole traders, and felt the wording needed to be clearer.



I've never heard of it, I could have applied for it evidently, it

Figure 7 Why wider sector creatives in Kent did not apply for the BBB grant. Base = 102

could have helped me massively, but communication is key and Kent County Council obviously did not make that known to the creatives in the county.

Member of the Kent creative sector, via focus group

This speaks to some possible lack of clarity over the information surrounding eligibility. This is in part echoed by some comments made by those who were rejected for the grant:

[We needed the grant] to fund a specific element of the project and really felt that we fit the remit.

Unsuccessful applicant

However, with just 11 applications of 107 rejected for being ineligible, it is likely that the information is sufficient, but that a proportion of applicants could do with additional support when making their applications.

10% of people gave other reasons for not applying, such as feeling they had sufficient funding, or already being in debt to funders.

In summary, people either had not heard of the fund, or had incorrectly assumed they were not eligible. These findings suggest that there are two main areas to work on for future grant applications:

- o Getting the grant information out to a wider audience.
- o Making the grant criteria as clear as possible and possibly offering surgeries or information sessions so people can accurately assess their eligibility for the funding.

1.7. What did applicants think of the process?

It was excellent, I couldn't see how it could be improved.

Successful applicant

Applicants were asked to rate various aspects of the application process out of 5¹³. Figure 8 shows the average scores overall, as well as a comparison between scores given by successful and

unsuccessful applicants. Scores were rated between 1 – 'Very poor' and 5 – 'Very good', with a score of 3 showing a response of 'Okay'.

We find that overall, the application process scores highly, with all areas from ease of applying, access to information, response times, payments, the application form and the overall application process all receiving scores of 'Good' or higher on average. Successful applicants were impressed with all aspects, with 73% giving a score of 'Very good' for at least one part of the process. Response times and the processes around receiving payments were rated particularly highly by the successful applicants.

It is simple but effective. Fast payments and you are trusted to deliver the work.

Successful applicant

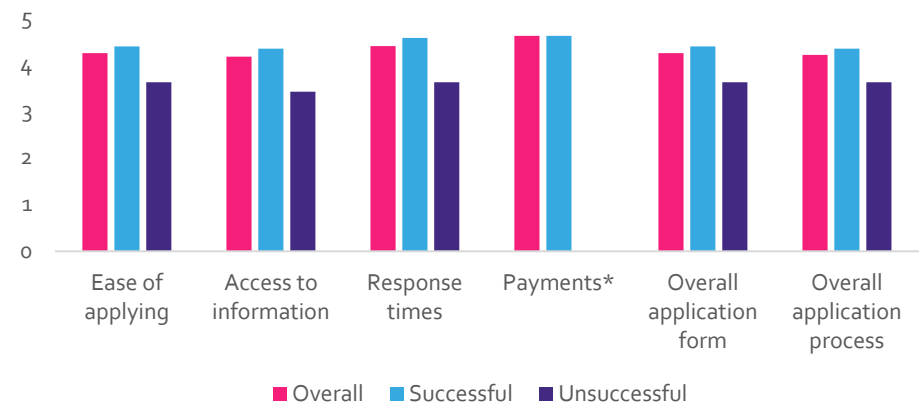


Figure 8 Average scores out of 5 for each of the main areas of the application process, showing overall scores, as well as successful and unsuccessful applicants. Base = 27

¹³ Data from the applicant portion of the survey – 22 successful applicants, 5 unsuccessful, 27 total responses to this question.

[Our festival] depends on grants each year and is very grateful for the support provided by Kent County Council.

Successful applicant

Successful applicants report the application process being straightforward, and the same or easier than applications of a comparative size with other funders. Some specifically mention the BBB application being more accessible, faster, and easier to complete than other applications they have done previously, such as Arts Council England and Lottery funding applications. We explored the application process during our interviews, and people felt the questions were really good for linking parts of their project closely to the aims of the grant.

This feedback is remarkably positive in our experience of evaluating grants giving by local authorities and KCC should endeavour to continue to keep this clear and streamlined approach with future grant giving to remain a good practice example.

Some areas where feedback was not as positive were around timings, such as the delay that led to changing the dates that funding needed to be spent within. Whilst applicants said they received good communication about these changes, and that *'information was really helpful'*, the changing timeline did have a knock-on effect for some in terms of their delivery. A key take home here is that people struggled to know who to contact about this, and would have benefitted from a clear named contact to discuss things with. In terms of timings, people would have appreciated being told of their success sooner in the process, with many assuming they didn't get it having heard nothing beyond the closing date.

Scores on the application process from unsuccessful applicants are around 20% lower than those of successful applicants, (although

still scoring on average over 3 out of 5 for all areas). While this may be due to disappointment, it could also be an opportunity to assess the aftercare and signposting around unsuccessful applications, especially at this time of heightened financial worry.

Naturally some applicants were disheartened by the news that they had been unsuccessful, and their disappointment comes across in their scores as well as their comments:

Please fund us next time, as our work has long term impact.

Unsuccessful applicant

I do feel that funding goes always to the bigger charities who have dedicated bidding staff, it's frustrating as you turn us down and then award it to middlemen who then buy our services. It makes no sense.

Unsuccessful applicant

Despite the disparate scores, 100% of applicants, successful and unsuccessful alike, said they would apply for funding through Kent County Council again in the future. When asked ways in which KCC could improve the application process, the majority of applicants couldn't provide any suggestions, although suggestions included:

- o The ability to save an application as you go along to return to later
- o A chance to discuss the application with a KCC team member before applying
- o Recognition of the efforts of those who have tried to diversify funding streams elsewhere
- o A template or list of questions that can be read before starting the process

- o An earlier advertising and deadline for work completed in the same financial year

Some did feel that the information required in the social media section needed to be updated to fit what is relevant for the sector. For example, some felt that the lack of certain channels, such as Instagram, on the feedback form was asking the wrong questions and didn't reflect the communication methods people are currently using.

Feels like it was written six or seven years ago.

Successful applicant, via interview

We did find it tricky to fairly analyse the social media data requested as part of the required evaluation. We run lots of projects concurrently so it's hard to give clean data - and we wondered why such detail of stats were needed?

Successful applicant

1.8. Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, the feedback shows that BBB was a very effective and well managed grant process, providing needed support with minimal bureaucracy at a time of great need.

It reached into all areas of Kent and reached a wide range of creatives and cultural organisations, from multiple disciplines and backgrounds providing almost £418,000 to support organisations, creatives and the people of Kent to safely reengage with the arts and culture after Covid.

There are some opportunities for improvement and learning arising from the process, particularly around the reach of the information about the grant, and the support given when applying – particularly for those less experienced in applying for KCC grants, and for those who aren't successful.

We recommend:

- o Retain as far as possible the extremely good practice simplicity and access level of the BBB grant form in future funding rounds
- o Grant forms are amended to include postcode as a necessary piece of data for all applicants
- o Consider how to support unsuccessful applicants, particularly in times and locations of financial hardship
- o Build on word of mouth networks which are the main ways creatives hear about opportunities in Kent. Initially use these to get more people to join the KCC mailing list as this is the most effective way for people to hear about funding opportunities
- o Consider running support sessions or online workshops and surgeries to support understanding over eligibility and how to apply for KCC grants
- o Improve clarity over who grant recipients should contact when/if issues arise
- o Moderate a sample of all applications (successful as well as unsuccessful) to ensure consistency of assessment grading
- o Evaluation and feedback forms are adapted to support better reporting of social media data and information and support given on how to measure this sort of reach and impact

HOW COMF FUNDING HELPED TO BUILD BACK BETTER IN KENT

-  **100%** of BBB-funded projects connected with existing audiences in new ways to grow their confidence
-  **100%** brought people back into accessing culture with a new product or activity
-  **100%** reached new audiences
-  **64%** tackled digital poverty or those most disadvantaged by Covid
-  **50%** prepared for future outbreaks
-  **68%** combatted isolation for those experiencing or affected by Covid19

Who benefitted?



3,620
Audience
Under 16



27,573
Audience
16+



2,417
Participants
Under 16



6,209
Participants
16+



Kent County Council offered grants from The Build Back Better grant (BBB) of up to £5,000 to aid recovery of the creative sector post-Covid19. This grant was funded by the Contain Management Outbreak Fund (COMF). Outcomes of the BBB grant were assessed against the priorities of this fund. For more, please see the full evaluation report by RM Research: <https://rmresearch.uk/bbb>

COMF1: Connecting with existing audiences

- Upskilling staff or volunteers
- New or improved equipment or venues
- Time and space without financial risk to experiment with new methods

COMF2: Bringing people back into accessing culture

- Creating safe spaces for people to return
- Additional workshops, sessions or events

COMF3: Reaching new audiences

- More people in Kent had new cultural experiences as a result of this funding
- Projects branched out into new areas/ venues/ schools

COMF4: Tackling digital poverty

- Funding made opportunities for people who would otherwise have missed out, not just on cultural experiences but also being part of their community
- Bringing activities to those who couldn't otherwise afford them

COMF5: Preparing for future outbreaks and combatting isolation

- Flexibility of delivering events online/ in person
- Uncertainty over practical considerations of online delivery (i.e. drumming workshops) and sense of burden of responsibility for people's safety (when needing to consider cancelling events, vulnerable audience members etc)

2. Impact of grant funding against priorities

This section cover analysis of the impact of projects funded by Kent County Council through the Build Back Better (BBB) grants. It discusses who benefitted from the grant funding, and lists the funding priorities of the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), through which Kent County Council funded the BBB grant, against which project impacts have been measured.

2.1. About the Build Back Better grant

The *Build Back Better* grant, offered by Kent County Council between 2021 and 22, provided grants of up to **£5,000** to support arts and culture organisations in Kent to recover from the effects of the Covid19 pandemic. It prioritised organisations who had been most affected by reduced attendance and participation due to lockdowns or social distancing, such as theatres, music venues and festivals, with a focus on encouraging people back into arts and culture events safely post-Covid, especially those disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Funding came from their **Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF)** with a total funding budget of **£425,000**. Importantly, no match funding was required.

2.1.1. Evaluation of the grant

In addition to this external evaluation, Kent County Council asked applicants to complete an evaluation form, which covered areas such as income and expenditure, project beneficiaries, outputs and outcomes. **72** forms were received back from the 96 funded

projects, **75%**. The data from these was analysed and forms part of the findings in this section.

2.2. What are the COMF priorities?

The Build Back Better grant was funded by money from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), to aid recovery of the creative sector in Kent post-Covid19 pandemic, as one of the industries most affected by lockdown and social distancing measures. The table below outlines the main priorities. For the purpose of this evaluation, we have chosen to split what we will refer to here as COMF5 into parts 5a and 5b to allow for more in-depth analysis.

COMF1	New ways of connecting with existing audiences to grow confidence.
COMF2	Developing new activity or products that support audiences and participants back into accessing culture.
COMF3	Reaching new audiences and participants.
COMF4	Reaching audiences unfairly disadvantaged because of the Covid 19 pandemic. e.g. people facing digital poverty without access to online content; people in residential homes.
COMF5a	Prepare for the potential of future outbreaks
COMF5b	Connect to people experiencing Covid 19 or Covid 19 imposed isolation.

2.3. Who benefitted?

Audiences		Participants	
Under 16	16+	Under 16	16+
3,620	27,573	2,417	6,209

2.4. Connecting with existing audiences

The BBB funded projects felt unanimously that their projects connected with their existing audiences in new ways to grow their confidence, with over half feeling strongly about this aspect.

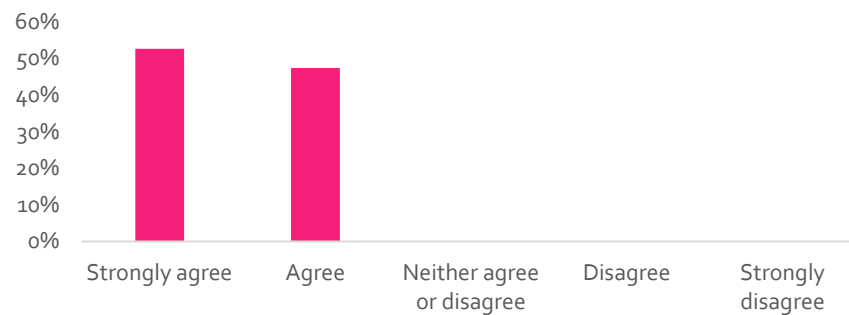


Figure 9 How much successful applicants felt their project connected with existing audiences in new ways to grow their confidence. Base = 19

Exploring this fantastic result further, we find that the COMF funding allowed creatives and organisations to evolve their current offer in a broad range of areas. Several applicants reported using the funding **to upskill their artists or volunteers**, which had a positive knock-on effect on their reach and engagement:

Upskilled existing artists to lead/host the Club sessions. Saw some familiar faces join these in-person sessions (who had previously taken part in online sessions).

Successful applicant

We were able to offer a transformational experience for our volunteers.

Successful applicant

Others highlight the practical aspects the funding has supported, such as new or improved equipment or venues that have allowed them **new ways to connect with their audiences, and increase their confidence to attend cultural events:**

The grant helped the festival to invest in equipment that allows us to reach a wider audience; and to provide access for people unable to attend events in person.

Successful applicant

Footfall is still down compared to pre-covid levels but we did see the confidence of audiences and participants to grow through the activities during the grant funding period.

Successful applicant

Several projects also specifically mentioned how the funding allowed them the time and space **without any financial risk to experiment with new creative working methods:**

The project activity allowed us try out new creative approaches and reach out to new potential cultural and community partners without a financial risk to our core operations while trying out new experimental working methods.

Successful applicant

The funding was actually amazing, because it actually gave us that time.

Successful applicant, via interview

This theme was also mirrored in the applicants that we interviewed, so felt the grants mitigated that financial risk for them, and **allowed them to explore** things they would otherwise not get to.

Overall, the funding allowed people and organisations **to grow and evolve their current work practices**, both through improving staff and volunteer skillsets and also more tangible resources such as equipment, **without the burden of financial risk that many could not afford to carry without funding like this.**

2.5. Bringing people back

All BBB funded projects felt that their projects created new products or activities that brought people back into accessing culture after the Covid19 pandemic, with over 70% strongly agreeing with that statement.

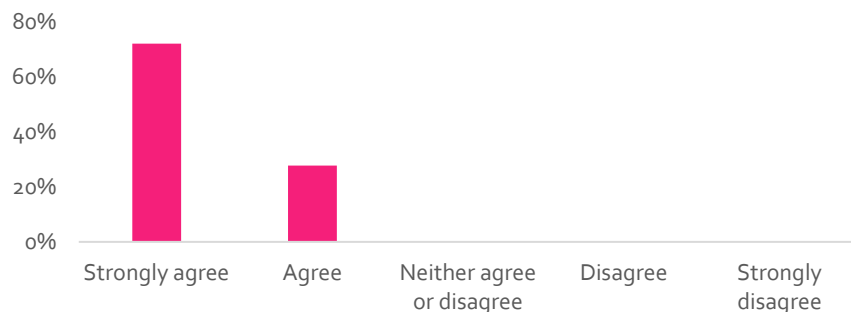


Figure 10 How much successful applicants felt their project brought people back into accessing culture. Base = 18

The majority of people report additional workshops, sessions and events, detailing hours of activity that simply **would not have happened without this funding stream**, a sentiment mirrored by many of the successful applicants we spoke to. Underpinning these events was a need to **create a safe space** for people to return to accessing culture post-pandemic:

Without the funding, we would not have been able to host the art exhibition.

Successful applicant, via interview

We were able to facilitate more light touch activities for small groups and this led for more opportunities for active engagement through 1:1 conversations.

Successful applicant

We worked with residents in care settings who had been most affected by the pandemic and were still hesitant to engage with creative activities with others. It was lovely to be with people we'd never met before.

Successful applicant

[The project supported by Build Back Better] is a good example of what happens when that opportunity and that space is created.

Successful applicant, via interview

There is also evidence of the funding **helping to unlock further opportunities** that people may have struggled to source without the COMF-funded activities that provided a strong foundation:

I have taken new bookings for musical performance as a result of the presenting the video to other arts organisations.

Successful applicant

Indeed, one successful applicant told us of the 'ripple effect' this funding has had for her. She described to us via interview how the Build Back Better project grant allowed her to move her theatre group, set up during the pandemic, into Phase 2, **unlocking further funding** from Arts Council England and allowing her work to connect with more people.

There are also some signs that the **COMF funding allowed people to develop their models** beyond their previous scope:

Sharing ideas and providing support for developing further / sustainable programme models that take into account the hesitation / worries of audiences to return to cultural events.

Successful applicant.

It is likely that other projects have developed in this way, but are less likely to have seen their model as a product in this sense, so we believe this area to be better supported than the data shows.

2.6. Reaching new audiences

The priority most reported by successful applicants was for reaching new audiences, with all projects agreeing that their work met this aim, and almost three quarters (74%) strongly agreeing.

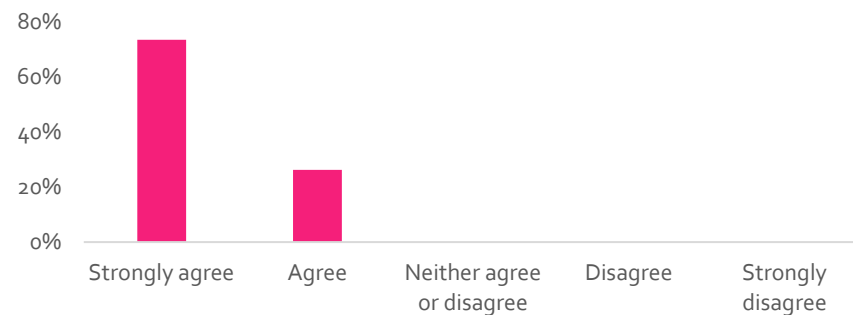


Figure 11 How much people agreed their project met new audiences. Base = 19

There is very strong evidence here that **more audiences and participants around Kent had new cultural experiences** as a result of the COMF funding.

Our audiences came from across the county as well as from the local area. We are engaging with many new schools.

Successful applicant.

We have succeeded in attracting a wide range of people to the space - most of whom are new to the organisation.

Successful applicant.

The project involved workshops in locations we had not visited before.

Successful applicant.

2022 festival had our largest audience figure ever.

Successful applicant.

Given that reaching new audiences is often a goal for most creative organisations, and they may have already been striving to meet this without the COMF funding, it is clear that the grants gave people the resources to make this goal a reality.

One interviewee highlighted how the grant money had enabled them to explore new venues for their VR workshops, such as setting up within shops, allowing them to reach not just a new audience, but people who were not usually engaging with the arts at all.

It brought the volunteers together and it took us out to reach new audiences that we hadn't before.

Successful applicant, via interview

2.7. Tackling digital poverty

Successful applicants were slightly less sure than they had been for the first few priorities around whether their project had tackled

digital poverty and reached people, such as those who live in residential homes, who would have been unfairly disadvantaged by Covid-era online events given their lack of digital access. Overall though, 63% of people felt their project had made a difference in this area.

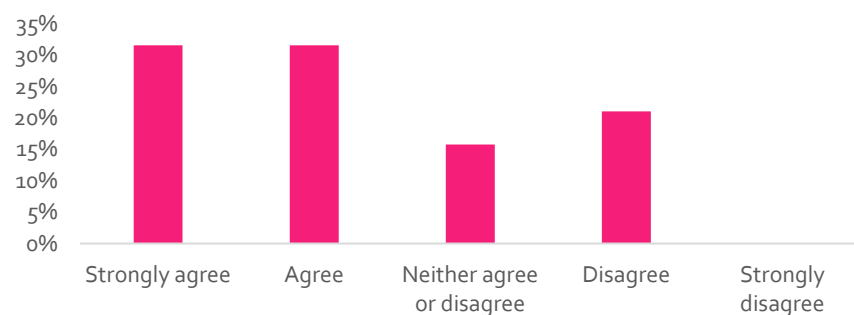


Figure 12 How much successful applicants felt their project had tackled digital poverty. Base = 18

Those who did feel the COMF funding helped them in this area highlight how the money allowed them to give opportunities to **people who otherwise would have missed out**, not just on the cultural experiences but also **being part of the community**:

We had some participants living in low-economic circumstances who wouldn't normally be able to attend craft courses. We also saw local residences attend who could afford/have digital means. It was definitely a way of bringing people together.... whatever your circumstances.

Successful applicant.

You could see that people attending those [online workshops] were vulnerable too. I'm not sure that that's the words they would necessarily have used – but you could tell.

Successful applicant, via interview

Their work details the wide range of people who were at risk of being **unfairly disadvantaged by the Covid19** pandemic, who directly benefited from the COMF funded projects:

Our participants were all people living with some elements of care, and also our volunteers were older people many of whom had been particularly vulnerable during the pandemic.

Successful applicant.

We ran projects with disadvantaged school pupils, and delivered some content online for people unable/uncomfortable attending live events.

Successful applicant.

Our events took place in various venues with disabled access, and also online.

Successful applicant.

These projects provided a **safe and accessible creative outlet** for those who were most at risk of being unfairly disadvantaged by Covid19, whilst bringing them together again with their local communities.

2.8. Preparing for future outbreaks

Only half of projects reported having found ways to prepare for future outbreaks, be that Covid or similar lockdown-inducing incidents, making it the lowest met priority.

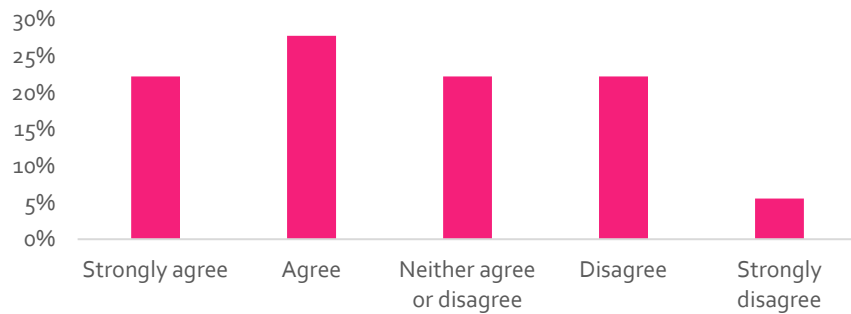


Figure 13 How much people agreed that their project prepared for future outbreaks. Base = 19

Whilst projects did not need to meet all COMF priorities to obtain funding, it is interesting that this was only met by around half of projects. Many were unsure how they could meet this aim. This is best summed up by one applicant's feelings:

How can we prepare for something so unknown?

Successful applicant.

In some sense, there are a few practical ways that projects felt their work was preparing for similar events in the future, mostly around elements that eventually proved successful during lockdowns, such as the shift to online events:

I feel that we could pivot the course to online as well as in person due to this approach. this would provide a culture experience in any future outbreaks.

Successful applicant.

I have connected with new working partners, and developed distance working methods through this project.

Successful applicant.

However, these strategies are not suitable for all creative industries, and in our interviews, people highlighted that some creative specialities will be more suited to online events than others:

You can't do drumming workshops on zoom.

Successful applicant, via interview

One thing we found from our interviews was that some people had had to make difficult decisions around cancelling events leading up to the first Covid19 lockdown. Several mention cancelling events during this time of uncertainty, and several more told us they had gone ahead, but one applicant said it made their "*blood run cold*" when they think about the vulnerable members of their group, and what they know now with hindsight could have happened to them. There is a huge burden here about the responsibility these groups would carry in the event of a similar outbreak.

There is also a sense of unease around the possibility of a repeat of the last few years for the creative industry. This is something felt by the wider creative network in Kent, who feel that **their industry would not survive it**. Indeed, 70% reported **losing revenue** during the pandemic¹⁴, the effect of which is a sector whose **confidence has been shaken**. **Grants such as Build Back Better are providing one of the most tangible ways** in which creative people and

¹⁴ For more see Section 1 in the full report: <https://rmresearch.uk/bbb>

organisations can muster the courage to **face future challenges head on**.

2.9. Combating isolation

The final COMF priority was whether the projects combatted Covid-related isolation, or reached those experiencing Covid19 itself. Whilst few projects referred to this aim in such specific terms, many projects felt they **did indeed tackle isolation in a broad sense** that has been felt since the beginning of the pandemic, both directly because of enforced isolation due to someone having Covid19, but also in a more indirect way that most people will have experienced to some degree of a **loss of community and connection**.

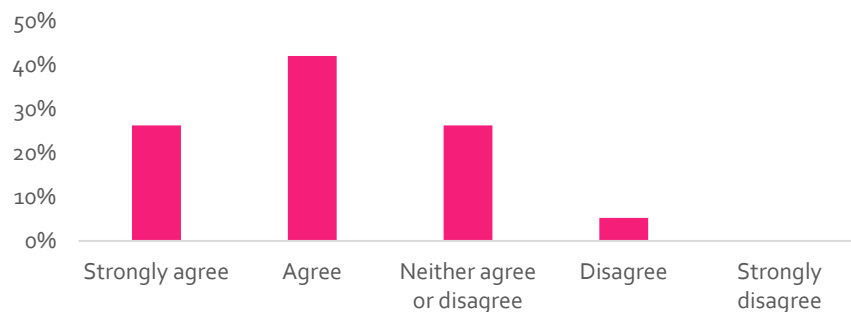


Figure 14 How much people felt their projects combatted isolation and reached those experiencing Covid19. Base = 19

One project mentioned directly reaching people who were **currently experiencing isolation** due to Covid19 symptoms:

I have aired online directly to people who were isolating.

Successful applicant.

Although, some felt that this aim was odd given the timing of the grant being so far after the lockdowns had stopped. Others still highlight meeting this aim in the broader sense as detailed above:

The past two years has been horrendous for the Arts and the lack of access to culture has increased people's isolation so it was good to connect with audiences again in a safe environment.

Successful applicant.

Online content meant there was content available for those in isolation to engage with.

Successful applicant.

Whilst only 68% of projects felt they met this aim, it is clear that the COMF funding enabled projects that made a **big difference to the people of Kent** who have **felt isolated from their communities** either directly or indirectly as a result of the Covid19 pandemic.

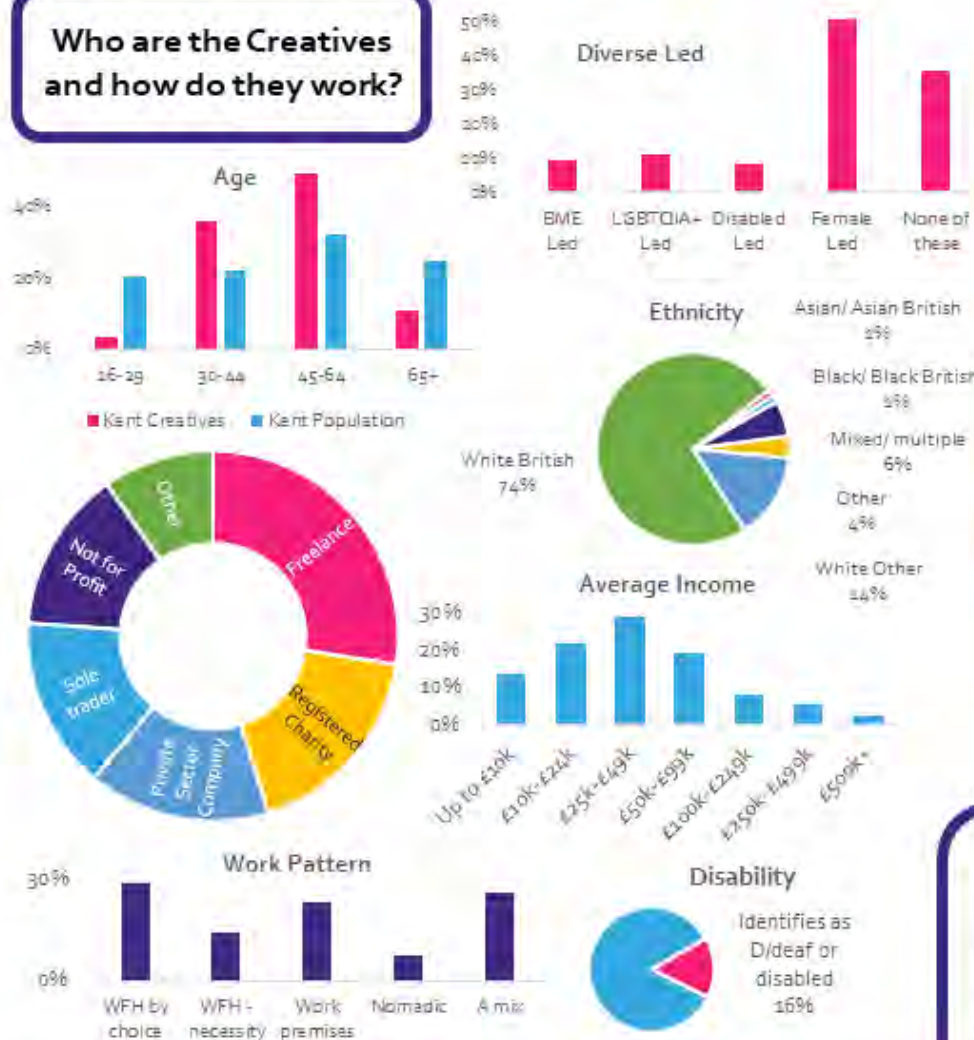
2.10. Recommendations:

From these findings, we recommend:

- o Encourage applications that tackle digital poverty and isolation.
- o Provide suggestions for ways outcomes may be met – such as for 'Preparing for Future Outbreaks' which was the least certain.
- o Consider wording carefully – such as simplifying outcome around combatting isolation to include indirect Covid-related isolation.

What the Creative Sector in Kent Needs

Who are the Creatives and how do they work?



Data from a Creative Sector in Kent snapshot survey conducted on behalf of Kent County Council by RM Research, with 112 valid responses from those working in the Creative Sector in Kent. For more, please see the full evaluation report by RM Research: <https://rmresearch.uk/bbb>

What do Creatives in Kent want?

Creatives want more support to connect and grow

- Venues and Spaces:** general maker space with opportunities to meet other creatives
- Financial support:** grants to support core operation, acquire assets and upskill
- Practical support:** shared tools, data and equipment, childcare, careers advice and training
- Business skills:** fundraising, accounting and legal, data analysis, PR and marketing
- Peer and networking:** peer-brokerage, creative hubs, hybrid workshops and networking
- Mental wellbeing:** addressing areas above would aid this, plus fair pay, supervision and counselling

Our recommendations

Be a broker



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

3. Needs of the Kent Creative Sector

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

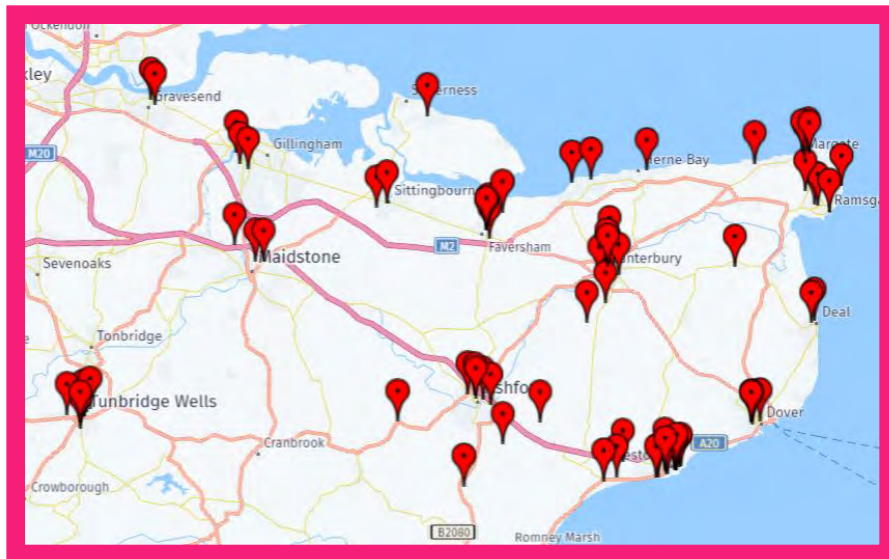


Figure 15 Map of postcodes provided by Kent creatives via the survey. Base = 89

3.1. Shape of the Kent Creative Sector

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

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

3.1.1. Where the creatives are based

Large numbers of survey respondents were from four main areas: Folkestone, Thanet, Canterbury and Swale. Similar ratios were found in the Build Back Better grant applicants¹⁵ and shows evidence of creative clusters in these areas.¹⁶

Figure 16 compares where Kent creatives told us they live, against population estimates for each of the Local Authorities¹⁷, to see if the larger groups are simply due to larger populations in those areas. However, we can see that far larger numbers of creatives responded to the survey compared to the population for the four areas highlighted. This suggests some creative clustering that warrants further investigation. To explore this pattern, Kent County Council could look at developing further creative activity in some or all of these four areas.¹⁸

¹⁵ For more, see Section 1 in the full report <https://rmresearch.uk/bbb>

¹⁶ Please note - this data may be skewed by the word of mouth form of dissemination of the survey and to truly map the geography (and size and value) of the creative sector of Kent, further research should be commissioned to interrogate national statistics using business codes.

¹⁷ https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/14725/Mid-year-population-estimates-age-and-gender.pdf

¹⁸ For more on how to achieve this, see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/115486/Understanding_the_growth_potential_of_creative_clusters_-_accessible.pdf

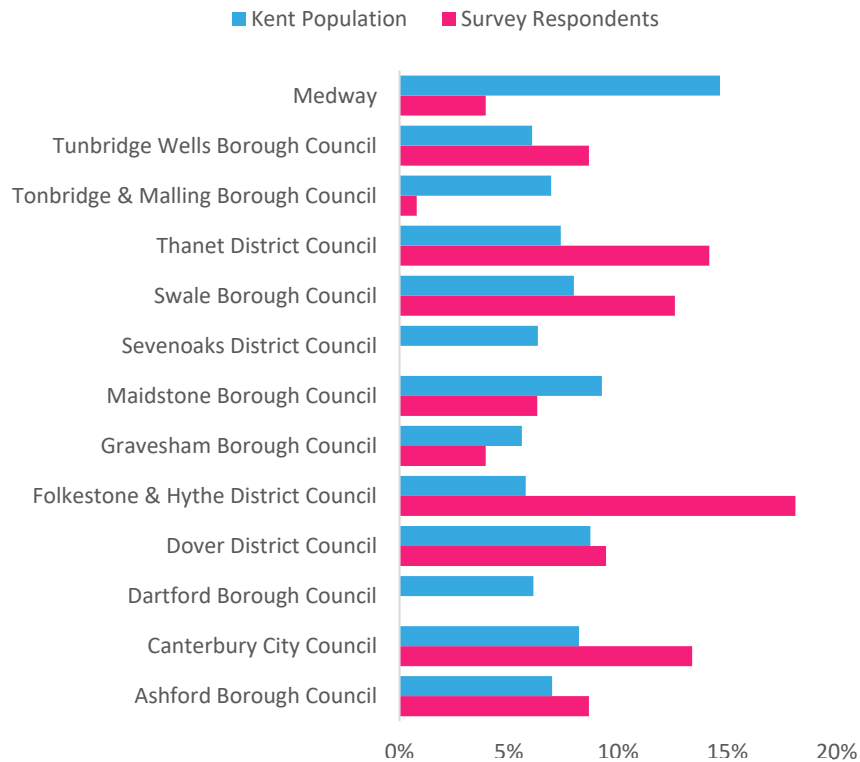


Figure 17 Local authorities wider sector survey respondents are based in. Base = 127

3.1.2. Kent creatives' work patterns

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

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

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

Member of the Kent Creative sector

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

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

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

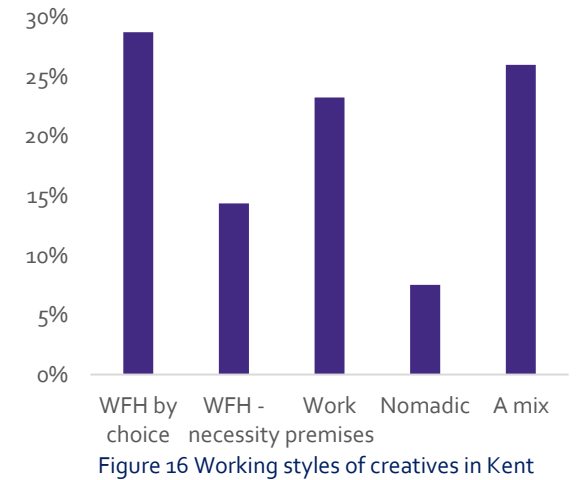


Figure 16 Working styles of creatives in Kent

3.1.3. About their creative business or practice

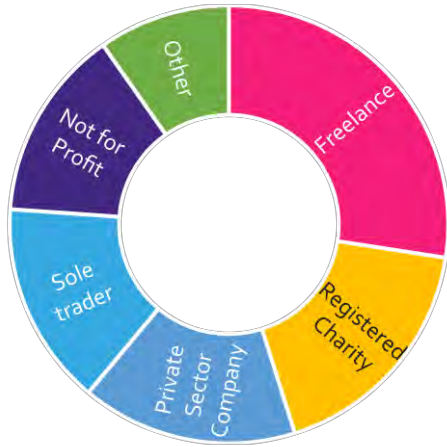


Figure 18 Types of creative practice/ businesses within the creative sector. Base = 113

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

58% of creatives chose more than one creative discipline.

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

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

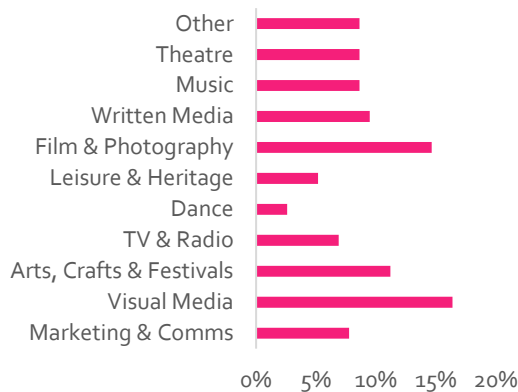


Figure 19 Main creative disciplines of Kent creatives. Base = 232

or business in another way, such as public sector companies or as a creative individual, whose creative practice is not their main business.

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

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



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

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

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

sector companies are turning over the most money. Creative individuals did not report any income or turnover from their creative work.

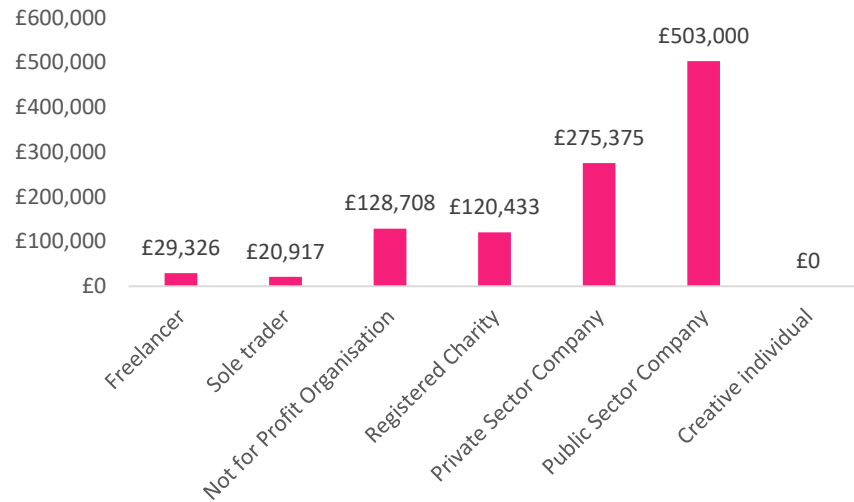


Figure 22 Average annual turnover/income for each creative business/ practice. Base = 85

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

68% of creatives are PAYE employers, most commonly (over 60%) having between one and four employees, or regularly engage with freelancers, with a yearly average of around 13 freelancers. **61% have taken part in a skill development scheme, the most common being enlisting volunteers (32%) and informal mentoring (30%)**, with 83% saying they found

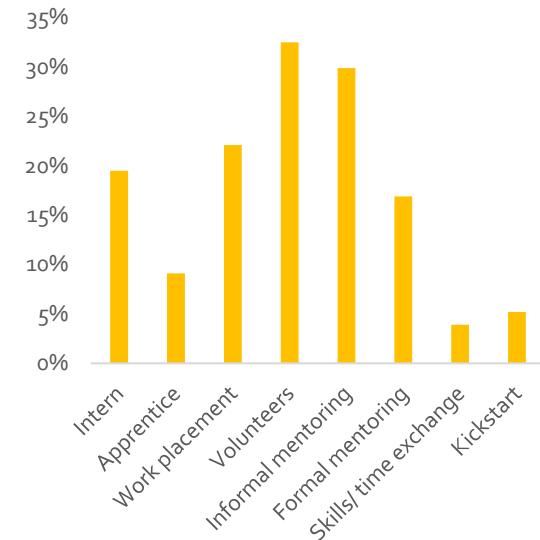


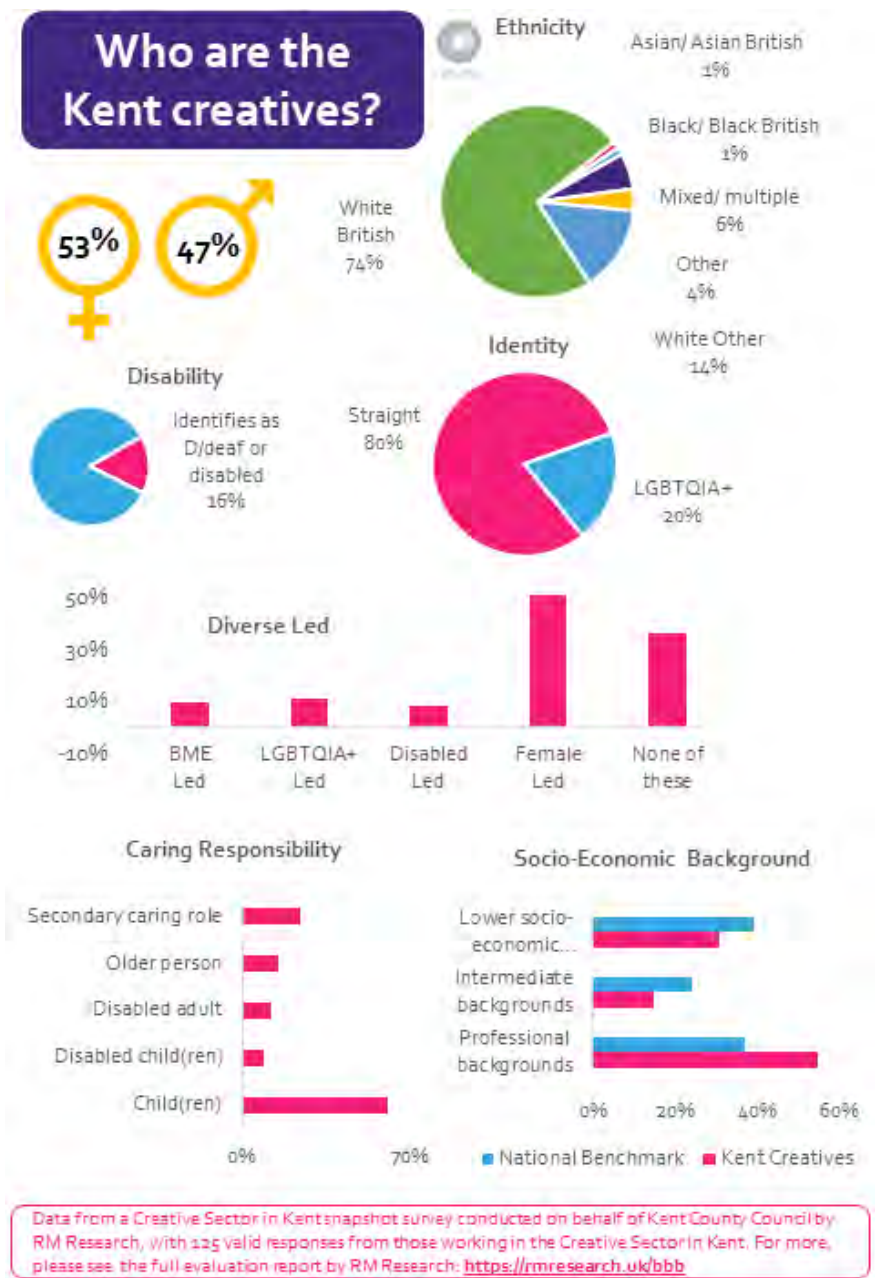
Figure 21 Uptake of skill development schemes. Base = 77, with 107 responses

them useful. Those that hadn't participated most often lacked capacity (20%) or lacked awareness of how to access them (20%).

3.1.4. About the creatives themselves

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

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



3.2. Challenges of the Sector

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

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

Applicant to Kent County Council's Build Back Better grant

3.2.1. Culture of freelancers and volunteers

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

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

Unsuccessful Build Back Better applicant

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

All staff are volunteers and hard to find.

Member of the Kent creative sector

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

Member of the Kent creative sector

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

Member of the Kent creative sector

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

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

Member of the Kent creative sector

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

Member of the Kent creative sector

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

I do not have funds for good quality skills.

Member of the Kent creative sector

3.2.2. Size of creative business or practice

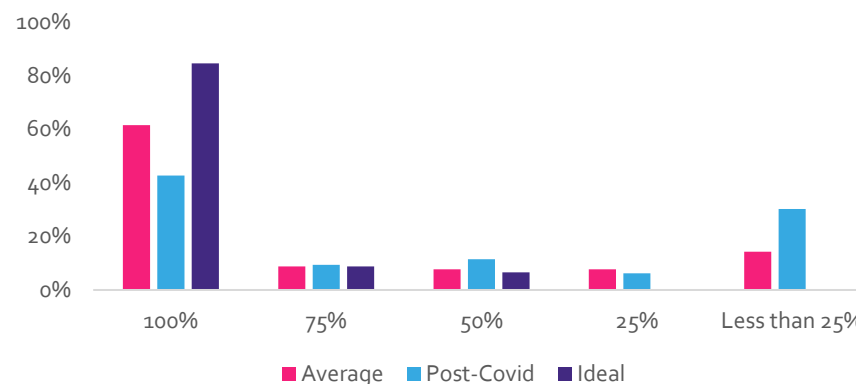


Figure 23 Percentage of turnover/income from creative practice/businesses for an average year, post-Covid, and their ideal ratio. Base = 91, 91 and 96 respectively

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

As noted, a majority of creatives work for themselves or in small teams. Indeed, research has found that 95.8% of creative enterprises in Kent are micro enterprises employing 10 people or less²⁰. There is a feeling amongst creatives that the bigger 'fish' end up with the funding and resources, and the smaller ones are forgotten about.

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

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

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

Member of the Kent creative sector

3.2.3. Impact of Covid19

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

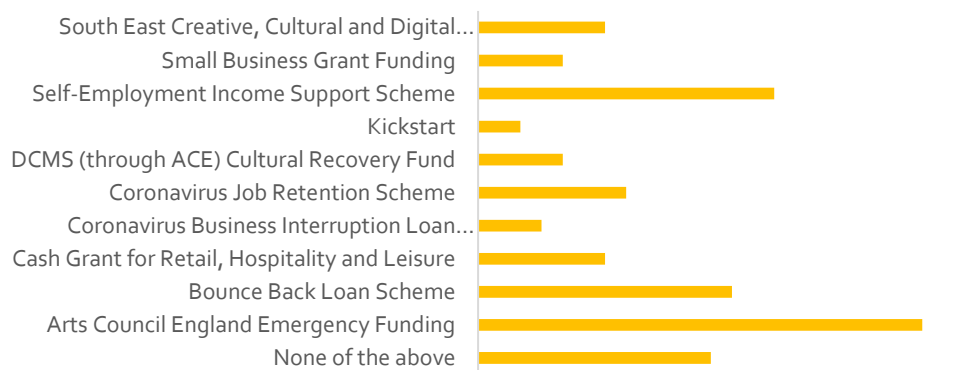


Figure 24 Financial support schemes accessed during the pandemic by the Kent creatives. Base = 90

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

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

Member of the Kent creative sector

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

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

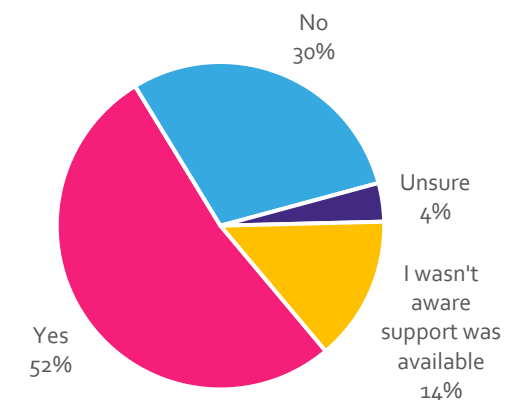


Figure 25 Who received financial support during the pandemic. Base = 105

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

Member of the Kent creative sector

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

Member of the Kent creative sector

3.2.4. Fundraising capacity

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

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

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

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

Unsuccessful Build Back Better applicant

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

3.2.5. Cost of living

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

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

Member of the Kent creative sector

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

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

Member of the Kent creative sector

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

Member of the Kent creative sector

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

3.3. Support requests

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

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

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

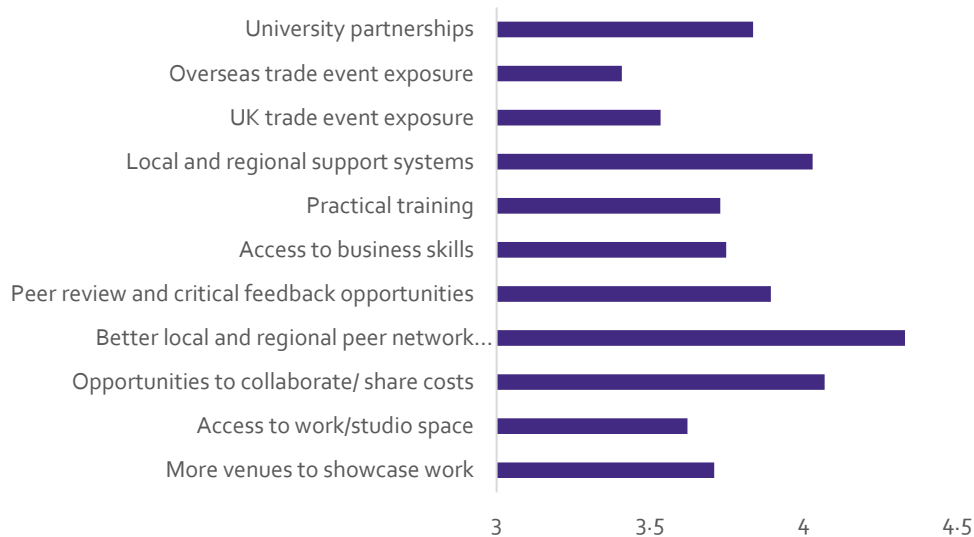


Figure 26 Average scores of support options. Scores range from 1 'Not useful at all' to 'Very useful'. Base = 103

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

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

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

3.3.1. Venues and spaces

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

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

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

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

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

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

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

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

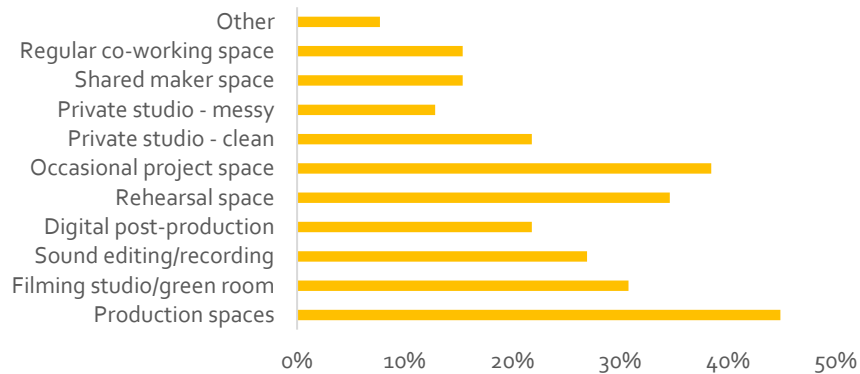


Figure 28 Physical space requests. Respondents were able to give more than one selection. Base = 78, with 211 responses

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

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

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

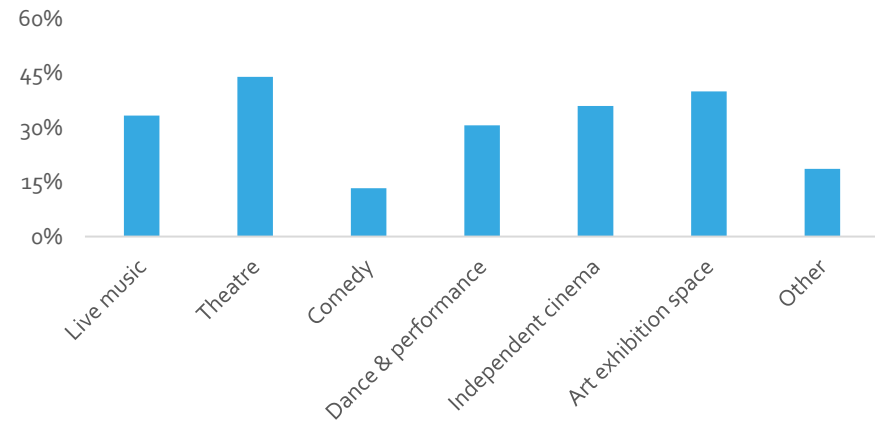


Figure 27 Venue requests. Base = 75, 162 responses

3.3.2. Financial support

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

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

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

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

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

People want:

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

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

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

3.3.3. Practical support

Practical support needs to come from those within the sector.

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

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

People want:

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

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

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

3.3.4. Business skills support

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

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

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

People want support with or to upskill in:

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

3.3.5. Peer and networking support

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

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

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

People want:

- Peer brokerage and hub-based support
- Directory of other artists, freelancers or organisations for partnerships
- Networking events, both professional and informal
- Collaboration networks

- University and large arts organisation-supported events
- Hybrid workshop and networking events
- A networking platform
- More out of hours opportunities

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

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

3.3.6. Mental wellbeing support

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

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

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

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

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

People want:

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

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

Member of the Kent Creative Sector

3.4. Support recommendations

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

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

heterogeneity of the sector, will provide a basis for addressing the support concerns.

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

This could take a number of forms, for example:

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

Take individual issues you know business care about and build high quality information hubs that create these connections. You may have to limit the areas you can cover, but these should be driven by a combination of local business need and KCCs strategic vision for the sector.

- o **Signpost to existing and future support:** Concerns about practical, business and mental health support are not confined to the creative sector. KCC should signpost to the local and national (general) business support available.

Improved communications (as outlined below) with the sector would help with this, offering more opportunities to make businesses aware of the support available. Also there is the potential to more deeply explore partnership possibilities knowing that KCC may not be able to deliver but others can.

- o **Identify need and offer targeted support:** Simply signposting out to others may not meet specific needs. Explore the support issues further to see if there are specific

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

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

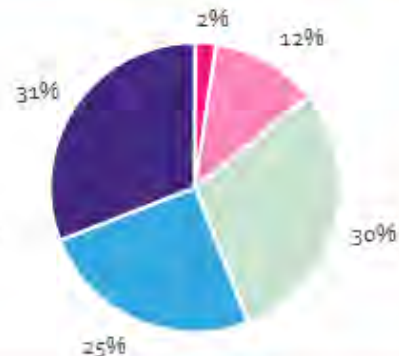
Communicating with the Creative Sector in Kent

What communication channels are Creatives using?



How do Creatives rate Kent County Council's current communications?

- Great - keeps me informed
- Good - no need to change
- Okay - but could be improved
- Not great - needs a lot of work
- No idea - I don't read it or remember it



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

What do Creatives in Kent want?

Creatives want clarity, recognition and a human approach



75% want a dedicated microsite



74% want clear, regular emails



72% want KCC to attend networking events



More visibility of KCC team



Info on grants and opportunities



Monthly or even weekly communications



Clarity of KCC offer, signposting where needed

Our recommendations

Underlying Principles

- Make it human
- Say what's offered
- Explain clearly
- Recognise diversity of sector

Good Practice

- Clear tone of voice and purpose
- Effective and creative style
- Demonstrate appreciate of difference
- Think about the customer journey

Suggested Actions

- Build a dedicated microsite
- Create email marketing with purpose
- Expand networking into a conversation
- Review social media to improve impact

4. Communicating with the Sector

Here we explore the communication needs of the Creative Sector in Kent based on the data collected. We outline the current methods businesses themselves use, list how the sector prefers to communicate and provide recommendations on future strategies.

4.1. What the sector currently uses to communicate

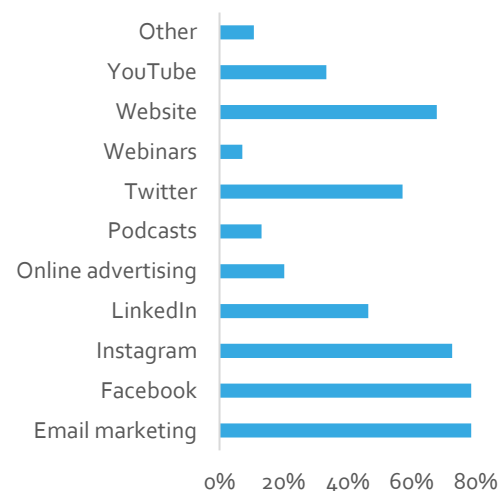


Figure 29 Digital communication methods the creative sector currently use. Base = 84

The sector is already utilising social media and other digital communication methods, and knowing what is popular with creatives will aid reaching them successfully.

From the survey data, we find that Facebook, email marketing and websites are some of the most commonly used digital communications channels. The use of social media in

general was a recurrent theme in the interviews and focus groups.

This is perhaps not unexpected. Neither is Instagram’s popularity as this often attracts businesses with strong visual focus to their marketing and/or products.

Two respondents said that they used Tik Tok – highlighting that chosen channels change quickly dependent on audiences and products.²¹ This suggests it would be beneficial for KCC to regularly monitor how (creative) businesses are communicating and consider their own choice of channels.

Other responses mentioned non-digital channels such as sector conferences, word of mouth, radio interviews, direct marketing, networking and recommendations.

4.2. How the sector wants to communicate

The message from the sector is that they want clear, regular updates on information that is important to them, such as funding and opportunities, and most are happy to receive this via methods Kent County Council are already using, just with some adjustments.

4.2.1. The channels they use

As the chart above shows, when asked how KCC should communicate, the most popular choices amongst creative businesses were a dedicated “creative industries in Kent” microsite, email marketing and attending networking events / public

²¹ For example, fast fashion brand SHEIN’s success is indelibly linked to Tik Tok

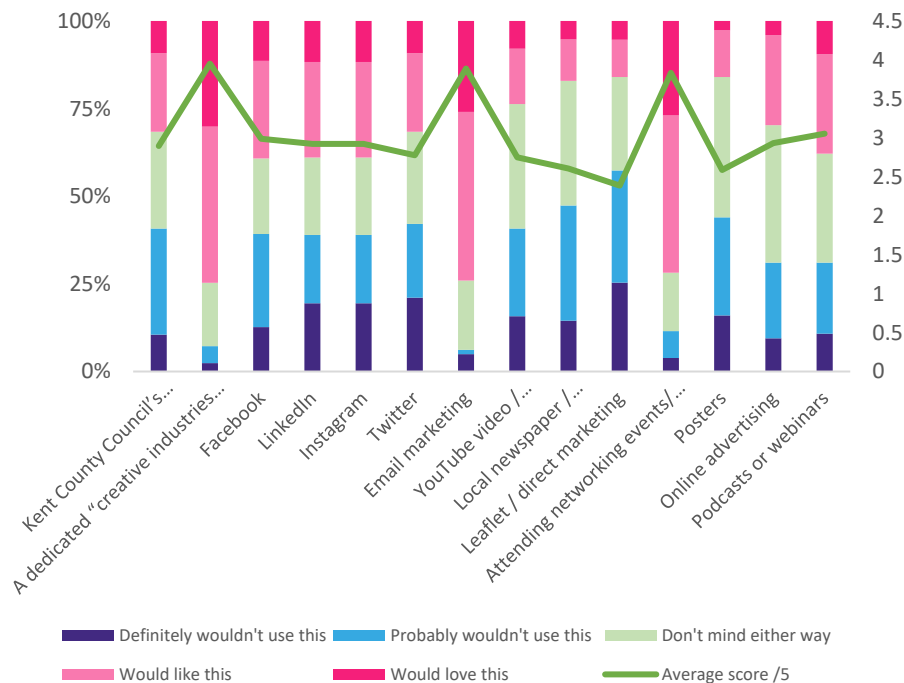


Figure 30 How the creative sector would like to communicate with Kent County Council. Bars show popularity of answers, with 'warm' colours indicating more popularity, line shows average score out of 5. Base 74:83.

discussions. Print media (newspapers, posters and leaflets) were the least popular – showing the shift to digital communications.

4.2.2. What they think of KCC communications

Our survey data shows that only 14% of respondents rate KCC's current communications as good or great. 30% think it needs improvement. A quarter think it's not great. And 31% don't remember it.

- Great - keeps me informed
- Good - no need to change
- Okay - but could be improved
- Not great - needs a lot of work
- No idea - I don't read it or remember it

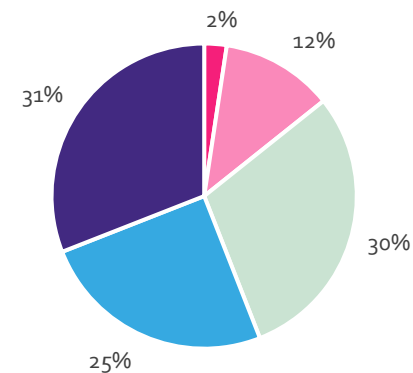


Figure 32 Feelings towards Kent County Council's current communication. Base = 84

Looking at how this breaks down, scores for the wider sector are much lower than for all of BBB applicants – with those who were unsuccessful rating KCC more positively than the wider sector in general.

This may suggest actual communications are fairly well received,

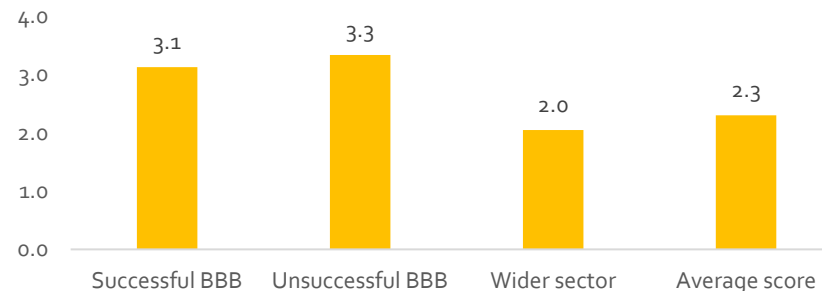


Figure 31 Ratings of Kent County Council's communication, average scores out of 5. Base = 16 successful, 3 unsuccessful, 65 wider sector, 84 total

but they aren't consistently reaching people. It may also reflect the fact that the communications around BBB – rather than more generally – were good and viewed favourably whether or not an organisation was successful when applying for a grant.

Those organisations interviewed voiced concerns around how KCC communicates. To them, KCC felt inaccessible, difficult to contact, and communications lacked “personality”. When businesses knew members of the KCC team, they were seen as very helpful – the problem was seen to be with “the system not the people”.

There was also a feeling that KCC’s digital communications weren’t “modern” and to really reach creative businesses it needed to be exploring other channels (in particular Instagram was mentioned).

4.2.3. Useful content

The chart here shows that a range of content would be welcomed. The most popular choice (over 95% said very or somewhat useful) was updates on opportunities and grants – perhaps not unexpected given the wrap-around discussion of BBB. One successful BBB applicant specifically mentioned *Inside Track*, the KCC newsletter²² that features the latest information on national, regional and local sources of funding. They liked it but wanted it more regularly – it is advertised on the KCC website as monthly but appears less frequent.

The next most popular choice was industry specific news (over 90% said very or somewhat useful).

Debate, listening to sector experts discussing topical issues, also scored highly. Respondents suggested they wanted to know more about what was going on in Kent in the creative sector - “what’s happening, and clear channels to share/ find out what’s going on”.

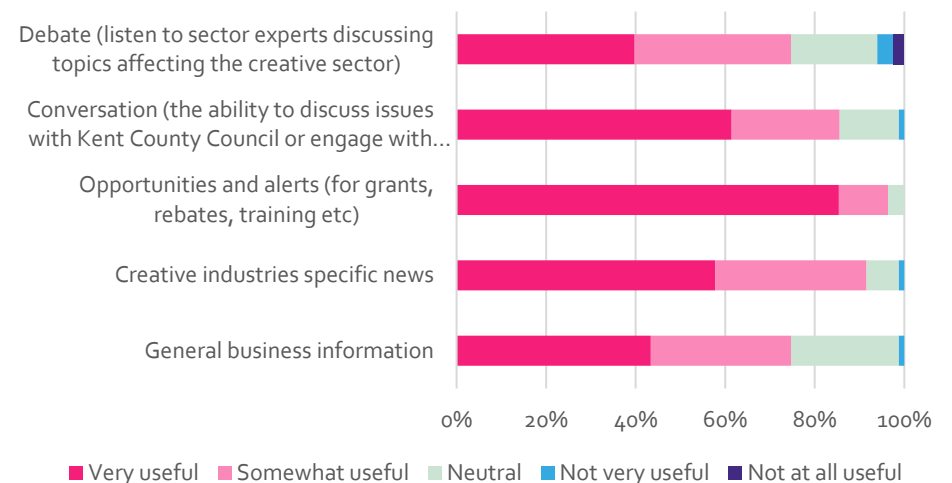


Figure 33 Usefulness of communications. Base = 83

Conversation, the ability to talk to those experts or KCC, also interested respondents. One mentioned wanting to know “how to approach and communicate effectively with LA and council for permits, planning, negotiating red tape, licences etc”.

In the survey (and in the focus groups), there was a strong indication people wanted KCC to be more visible around networking. 64% thought KCC should run more networking events in the creative sector and 38% think it would be useful for KCC to attend creative industries networking or events.

In terms of the frequency of communication, monthly was by far the most popular (67%) – though 26% answered weekly, indicating

²² See <https://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/community-grants-and-funding/help-and-advice/inside-track-newsletter>

a sense people are keen to receive relevant information. Notably, no one said they were not interested in KCC communications.

4.3. Communication recommendations

A few key changes would have a big impact on communication efforts with the creative sector.

Here are our recommendations for improving communications with creative businesses in Kent. These fall into under three headings – **Underlying Principles, Good Practice** and **Suggested Actions**. This is based on the feedback from the surveys and focus groups and our experiences working with this sector.

We appreciate that you may already be thinking about these steps – or may have explored them before. As ever, we also understand there is a balance to be struck between aspiration and resource. However, we think these suggestions would help you better engage with Kent’s creative sector.

4.3.1. Underlying principles

To start, we would suggest adopting four principles to underpin all your communications:

Make it human

Based on the feedback, businesses like dealing with real people. Although they know some of the KCC team, they felt there was a lack of personality to much of the current communications. So we would suggest putting a human face to KCC – don’t be anonymous, be real. Show the team, be clear about what you individually do and how you can help.

Say what’s offered

This is not just about bringing together everything that KCC can offer creative businesses but also being transparent about what can and can’t be done. Be honest about where decisions are made – either nationally or at a district/borough level – so businesses understand what KCC has control over and when to speak to you.

Explain clearly

At one level this is about using simple and jargon-free language. But perhaps more importantly, don’t assume “insider knowledge” – explain issues as not everyone understands everything about the sector. This might mean spending time crafting communications to reference useful background materials or using the web to link out to background materials.

Recognise its a heterogeneous sector

Respect the fact the creative industries in Kent are not homogeneous. Factors like company size, sub-sector, cultural vs. commercial or products vs. services mean that things are complicated. For example, an individual ceramist exporting bespoke work abroad has different needs to a digital advertising SME employing seven people or an art gallery in a tourist town. There may be some common requirements but also specifics.

4.3.2. Good practice

Here we suggest possible good practice that can help develop the communications.

- o **Purpose.** Have a clear tone of voice and purpose behind communications. Think about the audience, what they want and what you want them to do.

- **Style.** Be effective and creative in how you communicate. A lot of creative businesses understand good communications and great visuals – you need to be able to engage them.
- **Partner with others** if the resources aren't available at KCC – clearly signpost to support at different levels.
- **Demonstrate an appreciation of difference.** We've discussed above needing to recognise the heterogeneity of the sector but this needs to be put into practice in your communications and how you work. Be clear when KCC can offer specialist help - or when there is a strategic commitment to support certain creative sub-sectors (film, digital?). Otherwise, signpost to partners or other specialist organisations.
- **Think about the customer journey.** There is value in considering how creative businesses might interact with KCC – and how this “user journey” can be made meaningful and “joined up” for the business and have positive outcomes. This is about consistency (of message, of approach) as well as appreciating the differing requirements of a heterogenous sector.

4.3.3. Suggested actions

From the survey and from the focus groups, it appears there are four communications channels that creative businesses think KCC should use or improve on.

Build a dedicated microsite

In the survey this came top, with 75% saying they would love or like to see it. So, we would suggest a microsite that at the least:

- Brings together all relevant information about the creative industries in Kent
- Presents the team, thereby making you “human”
- Curates useful information and advice for creative industries (both KCC and third party)
- Showcases all the latest opportunities in a user-friendly way
- Presents news relevant to creative businesses in Kent
- Let's people sign up to a newsletter (see below)
- Carries the latest social media posts (see below)

Create email marketing with purpose

A dedicated, regular²³ email newsletter that discusses the latest developments in the sector and carries a set of headlines. Headlines and “teasers” link back to the microsite where people can read the full story.

This should follow best practice email marketing guidelines and be sent to a managed email list. It should look professional and engaging, be written in a clear concise tone of voice and be easy to read, with clear routes to contact the team where appropriate. It's a

²³ Our suggestion from the survey results would be monthly or weekly dependent on team resources, a more consistent output less often would have greater impact.

key way to start (and continue) a conversation with creative businesses.

Expand networking into a conversation

Businesses would appreciate meeting the team. Networking seems an obvious way to achieve this and would add a human touch. This could be simply attending more conferences and events.

But perhaps this should be more aspirational – hosting a set of talks that actively engage creative businesses in a conversation about current challenges and the shape of future needs. This would allow KCC to present an accessible human face, show it listens, develop specific (sub-sector) discussions and “horizon scan”. Or offering surgeries in conjunction with wider business support services where creative businesses discuss their needs.

Review social media to improve impact

Review the current social media in the light of the principles and good practice suggested above. Which channels work best, how do they become more than “broadcasting” and a place to start a conversation, demonstrating personality and understanding.

5. Recommendations summary and Case Studies

In this section, we list our overall recommendations, and introduce our Case Studies.

5.1. Overall recommendations:

5.1.1. Application review recommendations

- Retain as far as possible the extremely good practice simplicity and access level of the BBB grant form in future funding rounds
- Grant forms amended to include postcode
- Consider how to support unsuccessful applicants, particularly in times and locations of financial hardship
- Build on word of mouth networks which are the main ways creatives hear about opportunities in Kent. Initially use these to get more people to join the KCC mailing list
- Consider running sessions to support understanding over eligibility and how to apply for KCC grants
- Improve clarity over who grant recipients should contact
- Moderate a sample of all applications (successful as well as unsuccessful) to ensure consistency of assessment grading
- Adapt forms for better reporting of social media data and support given on how to measure this sort of reach and impact

5.1.2. COMF funding priority recommendations:

- Encourage applications that tackle digital poverty and isolation
- Provide suggestions for ways outcomes may be met – such as for ‘Preparing for Future Outbreaks’ which was the least certain
- Consider wording carefully – such as simplifying outcome around combatting isolation to include indirect Covid-related isolation

5.1.3. Sector needs recommendations

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

5.1.4. Communication recommendations:

- Underlying principles: make it human, say what’s offered and recognise its a heterogeneous sector
- Good practice: purpose, style, partner with others, demonstrate an appreciation of difference, think about the customer journey
- Suggested actions: Build a dedicated microsite, create email marketing with purpose, expand networking into a conversation and review social media to improve impact

5.2. Case Studies

Our Case Studies highlight the successes of the Build Back Better grant against the COMF priorities that the successful BBB projects met, through a variety of art forms, projects and locations.

They can be found here: <https://rmresearch.uk/bbb>

Appendix

Methodology

Desk review: desk review of all 107 application forms, both unsuccessful and successful BBB applicants. Review of 72 evaluation forms gathered by Kent County Council.

Survey received 192 responses. When duplicate and blank responses were removed there were 125 valid responses which were then analysed. 23 respondents were successful Build Back Better applicants, 5 unsuccessful BBB applicants, and 97 wider sector creatives from Kent who had not applied to the BBB grant. Two iPad prizes were issued as an incentive to complete the survey, one to a BBB applicant, and one to a wider sector Creative. People who completed the survey were asked if they would like to be included in further data gathering, and it is from this pool that the attendees of the Focus Group were drawn.

Interviews: 10 interviews conducted with BBB applicants which formed the basis of the case studies, and data from all interviews is threaded throughout the report.

Focus group: 1 2-hour focus group with 11 attendees from the Kent Creative Sector, including some BBB applicants. Focus included wider sector needs and communication with Kent County Council, as well as exploring how well known the BBB grant was within the wider Kent Creatives sector.

Audience and participant/ beneficiary feedback: feedback was provided by successful BBB applicants as part of their evaluation form, as well as through the survey.

Secondary sources: several secondary sources were used as reference material for the survey design, such as the ASELA and South East Creatives reports, provided internally.

Images: images were provided by successful BBB applicants of their BBB-funded projects to be included in the Case Studies, credits for which are listed on each Case Study.

Our main data sources used are summarised in the table below:

Data	Collected from	Base (number of responses)
Application forms	All applicants to the BBB from Kent County Council	107
Evaluation forms	Successful BBB applicants	72 (of possible 96 successful applicants)
Creative Sector survey	Successful BBB applicants, unsuccessful applicants and wider Kent sector Creatives	23, 5 and 97 responses respectively, 125 valid responses analysed in total.
Interviews	Successful BBB applicants for Case Studies	10
Focus group	11 members of the Kent Creative sector including some BBB applicants	1 2-hour focus group
Postcode analysis	Indices of deprivation analysis of postcodes from BBB applicants	107 postcodes