



a-n The Artists Information Company and AIR Council

Activity Report

Advocacy work

Paying Artists

In 2015/16 our advocacy activity reached 950 individuals in person, 176 politicians and over 175,000 through social media, bringing the total number of individuals consulted with since 2014 to almost 2,000. We published two consultation and research reports, and a [free-to-download](#) advocacy toolkit for artists.

This consultation led to the successful launch of Exhibition Payment in October 2016, providing a consistent approach to exhibition payments in publicly-funded organisations across England, Scotland and Wales. This promoted Visual Artists Ireland's own payment guidelines and acknowledged their constructive and essential involvement in the consultation and development process (with VAI's guidance already referenced in Northern Ireland).

- [Consultation report](#)
- [Exhibition Payment](#)
- [Artist-led Manifesto](#)

Broad sector advocacy

Broadening a-n's advocacy activity, we (with UK partners) led the Visual Arts Submission to the government's Treasury spending review, bringing together 11 sector support organisations to make a joint, compelling statement about the value of the visual arts in economic terms.

This saw government investment into culture retained at a steady rate (the positive result of whole sector campaigning), and a visual arts recommendation for Exhibition Tax being debated by government to be in place from 2017.

Support for artists

As part of our ongoing support for our professional artist membership we delivered 13 tailored training events across the country to 213 artists.

In January we announced the first [Clore Visual Artist Fellowship](#), supported by a-n, in recognition of the importance of investing in the next generation of leaders, and developing visual artist role models specifically.

We distributed £69,331 of company profits back to our members through artist bursaries enabling 83 artists to undertake self-determined professional development and travel, providing vital support at a critical time.

Bursary recipients shared their experiences via [a-n blogs](#), giving insights into artists'

working lives and supporting the learning of others.

A new [Writer Development Programme](#) supported five members to develop their skills in writing about art, increasing their ability to write confidently and critically about work being made and presented, with two of the participants going on to write for a-n and others in the sector after the end of the course.

Our website continued to support artists in promoting their own artwork and critical writing directly to their audiences via 1,200 blog posts, hundreds of reviews and events listings. Across the website a-n published over 630 items of editorial content (including news, research, and new and refreshed resources), over 670 staff-posted listings and 5,625 member contributions.

Recognising that 15% of a-n's membership identifies as disabled or with a long term health issues, working partnerships with Unlimited and Disability Arts Online were established to progress and support high quality diversity-led projects across the visual arts.

Research

Arts Council of England commissioned a-n (with research partners) to deliver a large scale mapping of Visual Artists' Livelihoods in England, the first study of its kind in over 10 years. The research began in Dec 2015 and is due for publication in December 2016. a-n built a sector steering group comprising 17 visual arts support organisations to facilitate the research survey which was delivered in spring 2016, achieving over 2,000 respondents.

Current and future challenges

EU Referendum / Brexit

The EU referendum on 23rd June 2016 returned a vote narrowly in favour of leaving the European Union.

Out of an electorate of 46,500,001, the results were:
37.5% Leave, 34.7% Remain, 27.8% did not vote

This translated into a 48.1% vote for Remain, and a 51.9% vote to the Leave campaign. Beyond what was a surprise result for many, the referendum has left in its wake a highly unpredictable political and economic climate, and heightened social and cultural tension as the population comes to terms with the result.

Following the EU Referendum, a-n targeted a [survey](#) to its membership which was open for completion throughout July 2016. It comprised of five questions and was completed by 1,378 respondents with 454 open submissions by email.

Overall, the survey respondents were overwhelmingly dismayed by the Leave result. Many cited a philosophical commitment to the arts as an "inclusive and outward-looking" sector. There was considerable anxiety and concern about potential changes to issues such as freedom of movement, and import and export taxes, the right to remain, and the general practical impact on their art practices. The main concerns that were voiced can be grouped under these headings:

- General uncertainty and anxiety
- Anxiety about potential changes to freedom of movement
- Immediate impact on income or professional opportunity

- Potential loss of European partners, relationships and funding
- Fear of impact on international residencies, EU exchanges and working abroad
- Anxiety about the right to stay in UK for non-UK passport holders
- Concern about potential loss of EU protective regulation
- Anxiety about impact of further financial recession

a-n is working with AIR Council, stakeholders and campaign partners to develop strategies (in murky territory!) to support its members in the short term. Long term planning is difficult while there is no clear political direction and varying views across UK countries.

Social Security status of artists in the UK

Artists in the UK, for the purposes of tax and social security, are treated as self-employed workers, except where directly employed by an organisation in a permanent role. There are no exemptions or support schemes for self-employed artists that offer any form of welfare protection or tacit acknowledgement of the vicarious nature of an artist's practice.

Additionally, access to benefits for artists can be restricted because of the requirements to accept non-art related employment in order to qualify for certain types of support.

All self-employed workers are liable to pay National Insurance (N.I.) contributions based on their earnings, although these contributions do not confer automatic entitlement to all benefits or forms of state pension. A number of social security payments available to artists are therefore discretionary and income-related.

For instance, statutory Maternity Benefit is only available to employees and so the self-employed must claim Maternity Allowance. The award of this benefit is dependent on having paid a sufficient amount of Class NI contributions in the 66 weeks leading up to the birth and varies according to the amount of contributions paid in this period.

Self-employed tax reporting changes

Proposed changes to the annual declaration of income by self-employed workers to a fully digital and online system that requires monthly input is currently under consideration. These changes, if implemented, will mean an increased bureaucratic burden for all but the lowest paid self-employed artists (with a turnover of less than £10,000 a year) and the possibility of increased accountancy costs. At the very least, it will mean that artists will have to spend a significant number of (potential working) hours every single month uploading their income and expenditure into the system.

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