Policy approaches to tackle precarity in freelance cultural work:
How are campaign organisations, labour unions and policymakers
approaching the precarity in cultural freelancing in the UK?

By Dr Sana Kim, Professor Hye-Kyung Lee, and Kirsty Warner

This report is delivered as part of Theme 2 of the Sustainable Cultural Futures (SCF) research project. We interviewed 17 representatives from four groups of stakeholders across the UK cultural sector: **campaigners/campaign group representatives**; **trade union representatives**; **policymakers**; and **researchers in cultural labour and the creative industries**. We asked them to discuss their prioritised policy solutions to the issue of cultural freelancer precarity. Based on this data, the report finds:

1. **There is a lack of consensus among the stakeholders on concrete policy solutions and specific policy measures for the issue**. This highlights an urgent need for further research looking into the required conditions under which such consensus would emerge.

2. **A range of pervasive challenges falling into three categories – societal, labour market, and sectoral conditions – continue to contribute to and perpetuate precarity**. Consequently, it is impossible to successfully tackle precarity without acknowledging, understanding, and addressing these diverse issues. For example, an important (societal) condition that contributes to precarity is the lack of value our society attributes to culture and the arts as well as artists and cultural workers. Given the continuous undervaluation of culture and the arts – which prevails despite the ongoing cultural value debate that has been unfolding in the UK over the past 20 years – this finding spotlights the need to revisit discussions around cultural values and find ways to reinvigorate them.

3. **There is an urgent need to involve cultural freelancers in policy- and decision-making as well as to find and develop new, more sustainable ways of such involvement**. We report on the many difficulties, barriers and sacrifices freelancers must face to engage in policymaking.

4. **There is a need for a 'complex ecological approach' to precarity – one that is both deeply *collaborative* and *comprehensive***. Given the complexity of the issue, it can only be resolved with help, involvement, and *collaboration* among all stakeholders, namely: freelance artists and cultural workers, employers, trade unions, groups and associations, universities, researchers and policymakers. Also, given the diversity of challenges feeding into the precarity issue, it is too intricate to be resolved through cultural policy alone. Therefore, the issue requires a *comprehensive* approach converging multiple policy domains: cultural, labour, social and economic policy. **Within this complex ecological approach, we argue that cultural policy could be a mediator, facilitating conversations with other policy domains and catalyses the latter's responses**.

5. Despite the lack of a clear consensus on the specific policy solutions expressed by our interviewees, **the report identifies several potential policy directions to explore in the future, including, but not limited to: innovative funding frameworks, fiscal policy interventions, income support schemes and representing freelancers in policy making (e.g., Freelancer Commissioner)**.