

Nicola Naismith

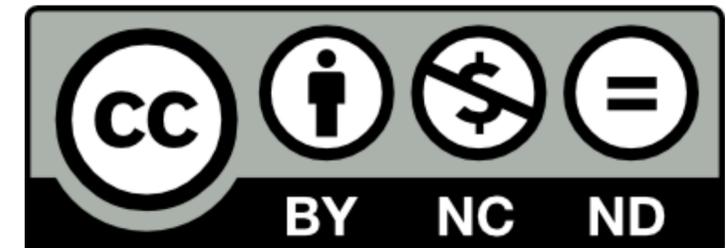
Visual Artist / Clore Fellow / AHRC Researcher

Artists Practising Well

Affective support for creative practitioners working in health and wellbeing
March 2019



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The full Artists Practising Well report
can be read and downloaded via

[https://openair.rgu.ac.uk/handle/
10059/3371](https://openair.rgu.ac.uk/handle/10059/3371)

Introduction to
this version

This document presents key extracts from the Artists Practising Well report.

The full report is available from [OpenAir Robert Gordon University research repository](#)

The synopsis can be viewed via my [LinkedIn](#) page

Aspects of the research were presented at the Culture Health and Wellbeing Alliance Conference in March 2019 with events planned for June 2019 in London and Norwich. If you would like to receive details about these forthcoming events, are interested in hosting or collaborating on future events or would like to share your own perspectives, experiences and ideas please contact me.

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Extracts from the forewords

This research comes at a time in which the arts have opened up to issues of public life, not just in terms of subject matter but also in terms of form, entering into the processes and systems that shape day to day living. Individual artists have, over the past fifty years, pioneered ways of working, creating the expectation and opportunity for art to be present and active in every aspect of life, enriching experience.

Professor Emeritus Anne Douglas, Gray's School of Art, Robert Gordon University

As commissioners, cultural leaders, funders and policy makers we need to step up and enable artists to do their best work. This research report is such an important marker. I look forward to what comes next, and playing a role in helping shape that.

Phillipa Reive, Director, Creative Campus, Snape Maltings

The complete forewords are available in the [full report](#)

About the author

Nicola Naismith is a visual artist and lives in Norwich. In 2017/18 she was the Visual Artist Fellow on the Clore Leadership Programme, where she focused on how people can develop their learning and reflective practice through coaching and action learning sets, researched wellbeing at work through employee engagement, explored arts for health and wellbeing and developed a greater understanding of the working conditions of contemporary artists.

Her practice is socially engaged, working on residencies and research with specialists and professionals from other sectors to identify and communicate common ground across a range of industries including engineering, architecture, museums, archives and ergonomics.

Working in a process-orientated way, Nicola creates visual artworks for exhibition, gives talks, contributes to panel discussions and writes in addition to coaching, mentoring and lecturing. Her work has been exhibited internationally, including Australia and Russia, and closer to home in Scotland, London and Cambridge.

Introduction

There is growing reliable research evidence which supports the claim that the arts are positive for our health and wellbeing. With a clear emphasis on benefits to participants, research reports and good practice guides help with planning and delivery of arts initiatives. This raises a question about how creative practitioners are supported to deliver this work.

Affective support can be used to both protect the wellbeing of creative practitioners and contribute to the best quality provision for participants. The report has been prepared with a wide readership in mind: creative practitioners, arts commissioners and organisational leaders, funders and policy makers.

As far as we can ascertain this is the first piece of research specifically focused on affective support for artists working in health and wellbeing. It therefore opens up the issues and lays ground work for future studies.

Research Questions

- What is the current state of affective support for artists working in health and wellbeing contexts?
- What kinds of affective support could be most useful for creative practitioners working in arts for health and wellbeing?
- Is there a common understanding of what good practitioner support looks like in participatory arts for/in health and wellbeing?

Research Ambitions

- To gather the support experiences of practitioners: what they receive now, what they do for themselves and what they would like in the future.
- To seek organisational perspectives about affective support and explore what other factors may be in play when researching support for artists, including the impact of the gig economy and contract set up.
- To draw attention to what might be in the longer term landscape for arts for health, and within that focus on what artists need in order to do their best work.

Methodology

3 month
research
project

Contributing to
research and practice
of cultural leadership

Supervisor:
Chris Fremantle
Senior Research
Fellow
Grays School of Art

Online Survey

Gathering the support
experiences of creative
practitioners:

what they receive now
what they do for themselves
what they would like in the future.

Literature Review

covering
Arts, Health and Wellbeing
territory

Work, management and
practitioner wellbeing
Practising in non-arts contexts /
artist in public life.

Semi structured interviews

with
cultural leaders, policy makers
and funders.

Additional **unstructured
interviews** with individuals from
arts therapy, supervision, creative
practice and operational
leadership

The literature review explores the complexities of affective support in this context and includes work and management set up, wellbeing at work for creative practitioners and the understanding, value and approaches of creative practitioners working in non-arts contexts.

Creative practitioners have complex histories and working conditions, and yet they seek and carry out significant, life-enhancing work in health and wellbeing settings. The relationship between the artist and the organisation, the ways artists work in non-arts contexts, and what constitutes quality practice are all issues critical both to the growing field of health and wellbeing, and to cultural leadership.

Discussion & Analysis

Using the survey and the interviews, both semi structured and informal, we have looked for common patterns and themes whilst acknowledging complexities and nuances. The survey provides both statistical data and individual thoughts and additional material, through well-used optional text boxes.

The discussion is grouped under the following five headings:

The
territory

Employment
status

The vocabulary
of support

Models of
support

The support
conversation

Discussion
&
Analysis

The Territory explores intentions and motivations, finding that creative practitioners want to work as artists. Organisational leaders are clear that the work is firmly situated within art and artistic experience.

Employment status shows there is support across all types of employment, but it was inconsistent, with some feeling supported only some of the time or not at all. Whatever the employment status, creative practitioners need to be able to access affective support, either through provision from the commissioner, or through a surcharge paid on top of artists fees.

The Support Conversation

explores what practitioners need to do their best work, and where the responsibility for support sits. Co-production, with joint responsibility, would ensure the best work.

Models of support explores the gap between what was offered and what respondents would like, and a re-active approach to support provision from some commissioners. A 'menu of support' could facilitate dialogue between practitioner and commissioner about support options, subject to personal preference and context of work.

The Vocabulary of Support reflects upon the terms used by survey respondents. Establishing common understanding of support terms would aid future conversations between creative practitioners and commissioners.

Conclusion

The landscape of affective support for creative practitioners is mixed, with some receiving good support, while others aren't getting enough or any.

There are many affective support activities from which to draw up a support menu, which when combined with co-production, joint responsibility and shared dialogue will strengthen practice in arts for health and wellbeing.

Recommendations

The report makes recommendations under 7 headings:

Conversation - Co-production - Funding - Leadership - Peer to Peer Learning - Recognition - Support Menu and Vocabulary.

Conversation

Creative Practitioners and Commissioners have equal responsibility to initiate conversations about affective support, reaching agreement about what support is being provided and by whom, at what time and in what form. The Support discussion needs to be on the agenda for all stakeholders as early as possible in the project inception process.

Co-production

Artists need to be at the table in arts for health and wellbeing organisations, for project development discussions and when funding decisions, bids and policies are made and strategies explored, developed and written.

Funding

Affective support needs to be funded in both freelance and employed working. This could be either through provision offered and paid for via the commissioner, or it being recognised as a legitimate cost included in budgets and tenders submitted by artists for health and wellbeing work.

Funders and Commissioners should recognise that these 'overheads' are necessary.

Leadership

Leadership development programmes need to view creative practitioners as artist leaders, supporting their skill development in acting as sector representatives. Further, programmes should work to ensure all leaders, and their teams, understand the importance of support and options available.

Peer to Peer Learning

Supporting Peer networks which recognise different levels of experience, in addition to work in specific sector contexts - for example Hospitals, Care Homes and Social Prescribing - would help practitioners to build self supporting structures for the work they do. Funders need to recognise the complexity and offer appropriate budget support.

Recognition

Creative Practitioners working in Health and Wellbeing contexts want to work as artists, and need to have their work acknowledged and valued.

Support Menu and Vocabulary

Developing a support menu, and a common understanding of the different types and models of affective support and reflective practice, will aid those already working in health and wellbeing contexts, and those interested in developing this work in the future. The support menu can be used to facilitate productive discussions between creative practitioners, organisations, funders and policy makers about support relevant to context, duration and nature of the work; as well as individual preferences.

Selected Bibliography

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Fancourt, Daisy, *Arts in health designing and researching interventions*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017

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Glossary

Affective

Relating to moods, feelings, and attitudes.

Burnout

Physical or mental collapse caused by overwork or stress.

Debriefing

Question about a completed undertaking.

Peer support

Peer support is when people use their own experiences to help each other.

Support

Give assistance to.

Emotional Labour

The process of managing feelings and expressions to fulfil the emotional requirements of a job.

Occupational Health

Occupational Health seeks to promote and maintain the health and well-being of employees, with the goal being to ensure a positive relationship between an employee's work and health.

Reflective Practice

The development of insight and practice through critical attention to practical values, theories, principles, assumptions, and the relationship between theory and practice which inform everyday actions.

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