A Community of Practice for Independent Researchers: Scoping NCACE's Independent Researchers Network (IRN)

Author: Funmi Adewole-Elliott
Edited by: Suzie Leighton

National Centre for Academic and Cultural Exchange

Cover artwork: Lucía Merlo Studio.

1. Executive Summary

This scoping report sets out how NCACE's Independent Researchers Network (IRN) can strengthen cross-sector research culture across the arts, culture, community and higher education ecosystems. It draws on: (i) NCACE's track record of convening effective collaboration; (ii) a Roundtable Consultation with independent researchers; and (iii) a Network Mapping Exercise across academia, arts and cultural organisations, community initiatives and funders.

What we learned

- **Need and context:** Precarity and fractional work are reshaping research careers. Independent researchers (artists, scholars, and community-based practitioners) lack consistent access to research infrastructure, recognition, and routes to dissemination.

- **Differentiated barriers:**

  - *Academically aligned independents* cite gaps in ethics pathways, conference access and peer review.

  - *Arts-based and community practitioners* highlight lack of recognition, visibility, and ownership/citation of practitioner-led research.

- **Landscape gaps**: Infrastructure and shared language for **artistic research within academia** are underdeveloped relative to support for independent scholars and citizen/community researchers in other disciplines.

Recommendations for what the IRN should do

- **Focus the programme around clear research questions** that surface and stabilise cross-sector concepts (e.g., SHAPE framing) and make collaboration more intelligible in practice.

- **Provide practical tools for dialogue and participation:** shared categories for interests/challenges; explicit articulation of the IRN's domain of practice; prompts for positionality; and signposting to publishing and sharing routes.

- **Hold the line on scope:** identify adjacent needs (advocacy, training, large-scale infrastructure, publishing) as out-of-scope for now to protect delivery.

Priorities for delivery:

- **A visual map of the IRN's domain of practic**e spanning: academic, citizen, organisation-based and arts-practice researchers.

- **Three initial research questions** on theorising arts research in professional (non-academic) contexts; cross-sector case-study needs; and how interdisciplinary discourse (e.g., SHAPE) supports independent practice.

- Programme alignment: a series of network meetings/workshops (four-year arc; two-year review) and an **NCACE Associates pilot** to test recognition/support models for independent researchers.

Value

By clarifying concepts, targeting practical gaps, and convening peers, the IRN aims to improve the capacity of independent researchers and enable better research collaboration between universities, artists, cultural organisations and communities.

2. Introduction

NCACE has become increasingly aware of the widespread precarity facing independent researchers and practitioners across multiple contexts within the higher education sector and cultural and creative industries. The challenging operating environment presents shared difficulties that impact all practitioners, but these challenges disproportionately affect freelancers, those working on fractional contracts, and individuals within very small organisations where teams often comprise freelance and part-time workers. This evolving landscape may have fundamentally altered the position of academics within the cultural sector and is changing the nature of employment within higher education—especially within the arts and humanities and conservatoire sectors, which have historically been an important source of stable employment for artists.

Where freelance work was previously dominated by artists, the sector now encompasses a broader range of practitioners, including academics who increasingly find themselves operating as independent professionals. This shift has made cross-sector collaboration essential rather than optional. Practitioners must now work across disciplinary boundaries and industry sectors not merely for creative enrichment, but as a necessity for securing sustainable livelihoods. These developments highlight an urgent need for new frameworks to support collaborative practice among independent researchers. NCACE designed the Independent Researchers Network (IRN) to provide a cross-sectoral community of practice (CoP) that supports independent practitioners during this time of change and challenge.

2.1 Proposed Programme of Work and Its Challenges

The NCACE Independent Researchers Network will enable NCACE to explore new ways of supporting independent researchers and will offer them a context for networking and developing the scope and impact of their work. It will:

- Organise and run a number of network meetings over a four-year period, with a review after two years.

- Pilot a Research Associates scheme designed to explore new ways of recognising and supporting independent researchers, while also strengthening NCACE's work and research.

- Undertake research into the changing nature of employment for independent researchers.

Though this programme of work is straightforward, certain challenges are evident. A cross-sectoral approach is widely recognised as a strong way of addressing problems by drawing on the strengths of multiple individuals. However, such approaches can be difficult to deliver, as they bring together participants with diverse perspectives and needs, sometimes making projects overly broad and outcomes vague.

The challenge facing the IRN is situated in a terrain that is in flux, during a time of unprecedented difficulties. Moreover, it brings together practitioners from different fields, for whom research carries different definitions and occupies different positions within their work. NCACE has previously commissioned an action research report that confirms this situation. *The NCACE Action Research Report: Skills and Capacity for Knowledge Exchange with the Arts and Cultural Sector* (2021), written by Dr Kayla Rose, notes that although collaboration and co-design of programmes and knowledge are increasingly seen as best practice for fostering engagement between these sectors, in reality they are often only partially implemented. It explains that this is because cross-sectoral relationships demand significant commitment from both sides, yet what this commitment entails for each party is still not clearly defined (NCACE, 2021, p. 8).

Suzie Leighton, Co-Director of NCACE, proposed that research questions be formulated to guide the activities of the IRN. It was envisaged that the outcomes of the scoping exercise would produce these research questions and support NCACE in mitigating the challenges posed by the lack of clarity around conceptual issues that hamper collaboration, increasing the potential for the IRN to serve as an infrastructural intervention with lasting impact.

2.2 Aim and Approach to the Scoping Exercise

This report shares the insights and outcomes of a scoping exercise undertaken to gather intelligence to refine the proposed programme of work that NCACE has outlined for the IRN and to address the challenges that cross-sectoral working might bring (APM Body of Knowledge, 8th Edition). Through a practice of self-reflexivity, I bring my experience of working in various positionalities in the arts and culture sector—as an independent scholar, full-time academic, and independent artist—to the project (Appendix 4).

We designed a scoping exercise in which reflective inquiry plays a significant role, to engage with the conceptual challenges that the IRN would be broaching. Suzie Leighton (Co-Director, NCACE) and I co-designed a scoping exercise with three parts:

1. A reflection on NCACE's track record of cross-sector work, envisaged to reveal working practices that the IRN could adopt or adapt.

2. A Roundtable Consultation event for independent researchers to identify interests and concerns for the network.

3. A Network Mapping Exercise to identify the gaps that the IRN would be able to fill in the ecosystem that supports independent researchers.

Overall, the project aims to produce research questions that the programme of work delivered by the IRN would address. Below, an overview of each part is provided, along with the insights gathered.

3. NCACE's Track Record in Cross-Sector Collaboration

The National Centre for Academic and Cultural Exchange (NCACE) has a proven track record of building effective frameworks for collaboration between higher education and the arts and cultural sector. Building on the pioneering work of The Culture Capital Exchange (TCCE), NCACE Directors have developed models of knowledge exchange that have positioned arts and humanities research as central to cross-sector innovation.

Through Creativeworks London, for example, they piloted collaborative R&D schemes linking universities, SMEs, artists and cultural organisations, generating valuable evidence of the social and economic impacts of practice-led research. In the Arts Council England-supported Boosting Resilience project—working in collaboration with City, University of London; St George's, University of London; and Manchester Metropolitan University—they helped arts-sector leaders understand and engage their creative assets and IP.

More recently, NCACE has extended this expertise through national programmes such as the Knowledge Impact Network (KIN) and Evidence Café series, which foster peer-to-peer spaces and communities of practice. NCACE was also a partner in the AHRC-funded research network *Future Ecologies: Performing Dance Network (FE:PDN)*, which explored how to conceptualise Producing Dance as an academic discipline and mapped changes required to develop a sturdy ecosystem for independent dance. It also commissioned the 2021 NCACE Action Research Report (Dr Kayla Rose), which identified structural gaps in the field, and has established the wider NCACE Collection as an important source of evidence and knowledge in this area. These initiatives demonstrate NCACE's knowledge base and distinctive ability to convene diverse constituencies, facilitate knowledge sharing, and create resources that enable practitioners and researchers to articulate their own practices and work across disciplinary and sectoral boundaries.

3.1 Insights from NCACE's Track Record

With this track record, NCACE is able to address some of the gaps identified in the aforementioned Action Research Report by Dr Kayla Rose. Significantly, the report points out that although collaboration and co-design of programmes and knowledge are increasingly seen as best practice for fostering engagement between sectors, they are often only partially implemented. It explains that this is because cross-sectoral relationships demand significant commitment from both sides, yet what this commitment entails for each party is still not clearly defined.

NCACE's national role and credibility across academia, the arts, and the wider cultural industries can help tackle this challenge. As a trusted intermediary, it can connect the realities of freelance and cross-sector practice with broader policy and funding agendas. Its approach is

grounded in co-design and reflective practice, ensuring that initiatives are shaped with and by the communities they serve. Its accumulated experience shows that it can create the discursive and practical tools required for independent researchers to gain recognition, build partnerships, and develop sustainable professional pathways. One research question the IRN could broach is: how can interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral discourse (e.g., SHAPE) support the experiences and practices of independent researchers?

4. The Roundtable Consultation Event

The Roundtable Consultation event was organised to hear from potential members of the network about the challenges they were facing as independent researchers and the kinds of support their work requires. Prior to the event, Suzie Leighton and I drafted Terms of Reference (Appendix 1), which were circulated with the event advertisement. The draft ToR proposed two concepts to be fine-tuned through the proceedings:

1. For the IRN, an *independent researcher* is not a job title but an indication that research is an important aspect of a person's work, irrespective of background.

2. The domain of practice for the IRN—labelled 'research in and with the arts and cultural sectors'—would be further elaborated. The domain of practice is the common focus that defines a Community of Practice (CoP). A CoP is not defined by teamwork but by a common area of interest that brings participants together. Participants are free to work alone or in various configurations on agreed tasks or tasks of their choosing, but which are related to the domain of practice (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 5).

Considering that 'research in and with the arts and cultural sectors' references research from different work and disciplinary backgrounds, the question that arises is: what concepts would help this domain be easier to understand and support cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary discussions?

The event was advertised to all NCACE collaborators and networks—including past and recent organisations and collaborators involved in citizen research, support for artistic practitioners and independent scholars—and via social media platforms such as LinkedIn. As part of the registration process, attendees were asked to provide a brief overview (around 100 words) to support event preparation.

The event took place online on Thursday, 19 June, from 2:00 pm to 3:30 pm. It began with Suzie Leighton and I introducing the proposed programme of the IRN and its draft Terms of Reference, which defined what an independent researcher is in the context of the IRN and the domain of practice. This was followed by 10-minute talks by the presenters and two breakout discussion sessions. Three independent researchers were invited to speak—Rita Sebestyén, Birungi Kawooya, and Susan Jones (see Appendix 2). They were chosen because, together, they covered a broad spectrum of independent practice in the academic, community, and arts and cultural fields.

The breakout sessions focused on:

- **Breakout Room Discussion 1:** How do you use research in your work? What challenges do you face in carrying out your research in and across different sectors or disciplines?

- **Breakout Room Discussion 2:** What do you think the key areas of focus/activities should be? Within available resources, what support would you like to see prioritised?

Participants were invited to write their thoughts on a Padlet that was made available.

4.1 Insights from the Roundtable Consultation Event

Of the 63 who registered, 31 indicated that they worked in both academia and the arts and culture sectors. Thirteen described their field as being solely in 'arts and culture', and eight as solely in academia. However, most people in these groups combined fractional employment with self-employment. The remaining 11 described their work as a mixture of arts and culture, academia, and other work—suggesting they operate in a highly interdisciplinary context.

Talks by the presenters—Rita Sebestyén, PhD; Birungi Kawooya, visual artist and well-being consultant; and Susan Jones, PhD—highlighted the different positionalities of independent researchers. Sebestyén is the founder of a community theatre group and works across academic, local government and community projects. Kawooya, a visual artist and well-being consultant with a degree in Business Studies, researches and delivers African heritage visual and well-being workshops. Jones is an independent arts researcher, writer and consultant who applies her knowledge of the social and political environment for visual arts to her work with individual artists, artist-led ventures, professional development programmes, and arts and cultural policy development (Appendix 2). Their talks showed the different kinds of social goods and wider impacts independent researchers might deliver and the infrastructure they require to carry out their work across overlapping sectors.

Breakout Room Discussions also highlighted differences in concerns across types of researchers. The challenges highlighted in Discussion 1 indicate clear differences between those working primarily in academia and those based in the arts and cultural sector. Academics face barriers related to limited access to essential research infrastructure—such as ethics approval processes, conference participation, and opportunities for peer critique. In contrast, practitioners in the arts and cultural sector often struggle with issues of visibility, recognition, and ownership of their research.

Discussion 2 reinforced the expectation that higher education institutions (HEIs) should extend access to their research infrastructure for independent researchers, while also granting greater recognition to research undertaken by artists. On the academic side, there is a strong desire for support with ethics approval, conference participation, peer networks, and dissemination of findings. For artists, the emphasis lies in ensuring proper citation of their work and acknowledging artistic research conducted within the context of professional practice.

Notably, several points raised by participants could be understood as requests for advocacy and representation. This highlights the need to develop cross-sectoral narratives that reflect the realities of today's workplace. Such narratives can strengthen collaborations and support the next generation of independent researchers, academics, and artists. (See Appendix 3 for further details of the breakout discussions.)

4.1 Insights from the Roundtable Consultation Event

5. The Network Mapping Exercise

The Network Mapping Exercise was carried out to situate the IRN among other organisations and projects involved in supporting independent researchers in the fields in which NCACE operates: academia, the arts and cultural sectors, and community and local government initiatives. Its purpose was to articulate the impact that the IRN could make, where it could build capacity and what gaps it could fill. Six organisations were identified: UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO), Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) and its programme Vitae, the Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF), the British Academy, Arts Council England (ACE), and the UKRI Community Research Networks programme. The exercise shows that the IRN is well-positioned to impact research culture for independent researchers, building bridges to help them navigate their careers.

5.1 Insights from the Network Mapping Exercise

The Network Mapping Exercise revealed areas where the IRN could contribute to building a stronger ecology for independent researchers. Significantly, it showed that the discourse for independent researchers who are professional artists requires the greatest input. Though artists are funded to research—most notably through Arts Council England's Develop Your Creative Practice initiative—there is little infrastructure to develop a language for artistic research culture. Independent scholars and community or citizen researchers have comparatively more infrastructural support. The mapping also revealed several initiatives to support independent scholars/academic researchers, suggesting that this area is better supported than practitioner led independent research.

6. Recommendations

At the start of the scoping exercise, NCACE suggested that an important output would be the identification of research questions to guide the activities of the IRN. Considering the reflective insights from the scoping exercise and the issues around definition raised by the NCACE Action Research Report, three recommendations are made:

1. Formulate research questions that address the strategic aims of the IRN.
As the IRN will contribute to evolving the research culture between academia and the arts and cultural sectors, research questions that make this terrain tangible and conceptually easier to grasp will be useful. Drawing on discourses such as SHAPE (championed by the British Academy) would be beneficial.

2. Devise tools to facilitate cross-sectoral dialogue.
Facilitating cross-sectoral dialogue will be a central function of the IRN. The following actions are recommended:

- Create categories that support researchers in expressing their interests and challenges from their specific context.
- Clearly explain the domain of practice as the common conceptual space that researchers share.
- Support researchers to articulate their positionality (how they approach research and where they're coming from).
- Signpost researchers to appropriate platforms for sharing their work.

3. Avoid scope creep.
Scope is a potential problem as the area in which the IRN is working is in flux and the demand for support from independents is high. Identifying research questions and activities which at this point are beyond the scope of the IRN but are of wider relevance to higher education and the arts and cultural sector as employment paths and patterns change was seen as important. It could be that NCACE is able to address these questions in the future, or work in collaboration with other organisations to address them. These **out-of-scope** activities could include in future:

- Advocacy work and career pathway design
- Supporting artistic product development
- Running publishing platforms
- Providing formal research training
- Building large-scale infrastructure or mentorship schemes
- Further mapping/monitoring of the independent research landscape
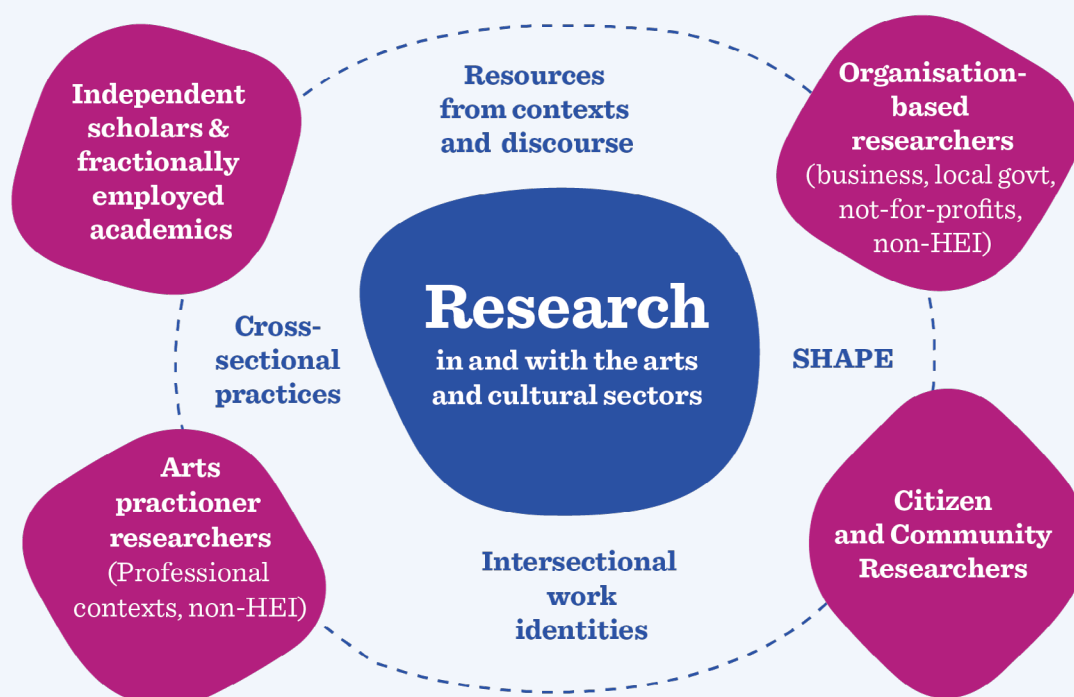
7. Outcomes of the Scoping Exercise

The following actions were taken to inform how the IRN will deliver its programme of work:

1. Visualisation of the domain of practice of the IRN.

Based on the Roundtable Consultation event and the Network Mapping Exercise, this visualisation provides a clear outline of the community of interest for the IRN. The categories of independent researchers were created with an awareness that some researchers might see themselves as belonging to more than one category and that the conceptualisation of the domain of practice might evolve over time. The visualisation therefore operates as a starting point for facilitating discussion and will be iterated as the IRN matures. The independent researchers were grouped into four main categories:

- Academic researchers
- Arts practice researchers (outside academic contexts)
- Citizen researchers
- Organisation-based researchers
  (e.g., community organisers, local government, charity sector)

Diagram 1: IRN domain of practice

Independent scholars & fractionally employed academics

Resources from contexts and discourse

Organisation-based researchers (business, local govt, not-for-profits, non-HEI)

Cross-sectional practices

Research
in and with the arts and cultural sectors

SHAPE

Arts practioner researchers (Professional contexts, non-HEI)

Intersectional work identities

Citizen and Community Researchers

2. Proposed research questions.

- How can arts research in professional (non-academic) contexts be theorised?
- What do case studies of independent researchers operating across sectors reveal about their support needs?
- How will interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral discourse (e.g., SHAPE) support the experiences and practices of independent researchers?

3. Strategic alignment of activities with research questions.

The proposed programme of work of the IRN will be aligned with the above research questions over the initial four years of the IRN's operation.

- **Network meetings and workshops:** A number of network meetings will be organised over a four-year period with a review after two years. They will be designed to address research questions 1 and 2, as well as issues of concern identified by independent researchers. Peer-to-peer workshops will also be introduced.
- **NCACE Associates pilot scheme:** The scheme is being designed to explore new ways of recognising and supporting independent researchers, while also strengthening NCACE's community of practice and research. It could therefore engage with questions 2 and 3.

By addressing these questions, the IRN will be able to produce a language and sense of the parameters required to enhance collaboration within and beyond the arts and cultural sectors.

8. Conclusion: Revisiting the Strategic Vision of the IRN

The scoping report aimed to provide recommendations for developing the IRN's proposed programme of work, aligning with the strategic vision of NCACE. Building on NCACE's track record, the IRN is positioned to intervene by developing a discursive foundation that addresses the lack of definition which has hindered cross-sector collaboration. Reflective practice has been central in developing this scoping paper, drawing on the history and track record of NCACE and gathering insights from both a Roundtable Consultation Event and a Network Mapping Exercise, to test and fine-tune the programme of work that the IRN will deliver.

The recommendations propose ways the IRN can address capacity gaps in knowledge exchange and research culture through generating a discourse around SHAPE and contributing to more collaborative ecosystems for cross-sector researchers. The outcomes include the conceptual tools produced to support the IRN in delivering its programme of work: three research questions, a diagram depicting the IRN's domain of practice, and a list of activities identified as future possibilities. The report also points out that NCACE, through the IRN, has the potential to address several other pressing research questions at the intersections of art, academia, and community engagement, which might form the basis for future projects.

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Appendices

Towards a Cross-Sector Independent Researchers Network

NCACE is expanding the Knowledge Impacts Network (KIN) to develop a cross-sector Independent Researchers Network.

Invitation to a Roundtable event

NCACE invites independent researchers to help co-design the purpose and direction of this new network. Our upcoming roundtable will contribute to shaping the network's aims and principles, defining its terms of reference and identifying initial research questions of shared interest. Our presenters will offer short provocations, followed by breakout discussion groups. We foresee this event as part of the formation of the Independent Researchers Network (IRN). Below is the premise we are working from.

Overview

The Independent Researchers Network is being developed for researchers and research-engaged practitioners who are self-employed, freelance, working outside academia, or engaged part-time across various industries. Independent practitioners and researchers working in and with the arts, culture, and voluntary sectors face a distinct set of challenges compared to those employed within institutions—particularly in accessing the infrastructure and peer support that research requires. A cross-sectoral approach is being adopted due to the reduction of funding across the board and to promote collaboration and joined-up thinking across sectors. It is being designed to meet the challenges facing the arts and culture sector and arts and humanities research at this time of growing precarity and uncertainty.

A broad definition of 'independent researcher'

NCACE embraces an expansive and inclusive understanding of research and who a researcher might be. Research exists across disciplines and professions: from independent scholars and artists to writers, community organisers, voluntary-sector workers, and citizen researchers. We welcome anyone who identifies as an independent researcher, emphasising that this designation is not a formal job title but rather an indication that research is a meaningful component of their practice.

Towards a Community of Practice (CoP) structure

We envisage the Independent Researchers Network as operating as a Community of Practice (CoP), where the common domain for participants will be 'research in or with the arts and

culture sector'. This structure will allow for flexibility. For many—especially artists and community leaders—research is embedded in creative or social processes, often without formal recognition or traditional outputs like journal articles. A performance, workshop, book, or public action often represents the culmination of deep inquiry. For scholars, research is an output in its own right. Despite the different ways research is situated in different practices, we envisage that all independent practitioners will require infrastructure and peer support for the research aspect of their work.

Appendix 2: **Roundtable Presenter Biographies**

Susan Jones, PhD

An independent arts researcher, writer and consultant, Dr Susan Jones brings nuanced knowledge and insight on the social and political environment for contemporary visual arts to her work with individual artists, artist-led ventures and professional development programmes, and when contributing to arts and cultural policy development. Major independent research programmes include *Measuring the experience: the scope and value of artist-led organisations* (1994–96); *Artists in arts policy* (2015–2023); *Artists in the pandemic: a study of artists' conditions in a time of great social and economic upheaval* (2021–23); and *Artists' lives: ecologies of resilience* (2024–25). Her writing and commentary have been published by *Arts Professional, Art Monthly, Art Review, Corridor 8, Sluice, Cultural Trends, Engage Journal, The Guardian, The Double Negative, TransArtist*s, a-n The Artists Information Company, and Thames & Hudson.

Birungi Kawooya

As a well-being researcher, Birungi Kawooya's mission is to support self-discovery through art. Working with paper, sculpture, and natural fibres indigenous to Uganda has inspired her to investigate the conditions for liberation and to imagine ways of living better with others—a freedom everyone deserves. Through her practice, she seeks to help those who are burnt out and marginalised reclaim their humanity, using the powerful uncertainty of "what if" to find alternative resolutions and process complex emotions. Inspired by Black feminists, Afro-somatic movement, and nature, her art is rooted in collective engagement and a passion for understanding how well-being can be nurtured in community. These themes are central to her series *Sisters Need Sleep*, which portrays the comfort, safety, and divinity of Black sisterhood. During her five-month residency in Uganda with the Njabala Foundation and 32° East (funded by Arts Council England), she invited womxn to rest, using natural fibres and sculptural installations to explore trauma resolution and well-being through self-portraiture.

Her public artworks honouring Black womanhood include *Peckham in Bloom* (2022) and *Black Womxn at Rest* (2023)—both informed by community workshops and commissioned by The World Reimagined and Kensington and Chelsea Art Week respectively. Her most recent artwork, *A Space for Resistance and Renewal* (2024), was commissioned for and is currently installed at the Science Gallery London. Whether surrounded by plants, water and woodland in her Thamesmead workshop, or within the safe spaces of community commissions, she has hosted individuals, students and groups including Healing Justice London, University of the Arts London, Black Mind, Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre, Colours of Redbridge, Royal Borough of Greenwich, and Peckham Platform. Through her work, she invites others to reclaim the space to rest, explore their curiosity, and take pride in who they are.

Rita Sebestyén, PhD

A versatile and impact-driven professional in interdisciplinary and international research and in project design and management. She has successfully spearheaded mid- and large-scale projects across diverse sectors in the UK, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Greece, Portugal and Hungary. She is an expert in developing and managing matrix-style collaborative networks that drive organisational success, and has been published in Canada, New Zealand, Switzerland and the USA.

Her recent achievements include research and completion of the first Racial Equity Scorecard in the UK public markets (2024) and evaluation reporting for funding 20 small, mid- and large-scale projects on cultural placemaking as an external expert for the EU Commission: EACEA and Horizon (2024). Across her career, activities include contributing to the development of over 11 EU projects (receiving critical acclaim from the Danish Ministry of Culture and media organisations across the world, with a budget over €2 million); developing and delivering modules in Comparative Studies and Cultural Studies for the HE sector in Denmark, Hungary and Romania (experience with face-to-face, remote and hybrid learning environments); and launching the first intercultural periodical in Performing Arts (published in Romania and Hungary), which celebrated its 10th year of existence in 2022.
Publication list: https://sebestyenrita.com/publication-list/

Appendix 3: **Summary and Grouping of Responses from Roundtable Breakout Discussions**

Please see NCACE's IRN Padlet for the original contributions.

Breakout Room Discussion 1: *How do you use research in your work? What challenges do you face in carrying out your research across different sectors or disciplines?*

Academic perspectives - Lack of contact with peers; conference attendance is too expensive. - Funders and research tenders require formal institutional affiliation. - The space for 'research' has to be protected; it is being squeezed by other agendas. - As an independent scholar, where do you apply for ethical approval? - The demand for quantitative methods can threaten qualitative approaches commonly used by arts practitioners.

Arts and cultural sector perspectives - Lack of clarity about where to find funding or long-term employment for those carrying out research in dance or in the arts and cultural sectors. - Artists' names being removed from their work when discussed in academic publications, presentations, reports or findings. - Artistic work being ignored by politicians and policymakers; a reminder that art is often made to evoke empathy and social understanding.

Breakout Room Discussion 2: *What should the key areas of focus/activities be? Within available resources, what support should be prioritised?*

Academic perspectives - Connect independent researchers with HEIs to support dissemination and publication of research outputs. - HEIs to share best practice with researchers outside institutional structures. - Information sharing on where to get funds and how to secure ethical approval. - Improve access to publications, journals and written resources for independent researchers.

Arts and cultural sector perspectives - Avoid a single, universal definition of 'research'; definitions must be contextual to be effective. - Artists/arts can be treated as 'capital' in academia, which may mute artists' voices.

Advocacy requests - Will research funders support independent researchers who form non-standard structures such as cooperatives? - How will best practice and pay be represented on behalf of freelance researchers? - Industry players (e.g., Google, Adobe) are promoting AI within the cultural and creative industries; how can practitioners keep abreast of these changes?

Additional concerns - Ownership of research and copyright when independent researchers have intersecting identities or artistic backgrounds; separation of researchers' names from their work across sectors; positioning independent researchers peripherally in projects to which they have substantively contributed. - Crumbling academic structures should not be perpetuated; young people in the arts should not be promised career paths that do not exist. Alternative conceptions of artistic and independent practice are needed and should be supported. - Signposting research that takes place in the charity sector to other groups; highlighting relevant organisations in the charity sector.

Appendix 4: **Author Biography 'Funmi Adewole-Elliott**

'Funmi Adewole-Elliott holds an MA in Postcolonial Studies, a Professional Graduate Certificate in Education, and a PhD in Dance Studies. She worked in journalism and TV production in Nigeria before transitioning into performance after relocating to Britain in 1994. She toured for a decade with mainly physical theatre and African dance-drama companies while working as a dance advocate within African and diasporic dance and the independent dance scene. She began writing academic articles as an independent scholar during this time.

She played a key role in the Association of Dance of the African Diaspora (1994–2016), serving in various capacities, including Programme Manager and Chair. In recognition of her contributions to reshaping perceptions of Black dance in the UK, she received a Lifetime Achievement Award from One Dance UK in 2019. Following her PhD, 'Funmi lectured in dance at De Montfort University for eight years. Her research interests include Dance as a profession, Black British choreographers, African cultural production, embodied creativity, and storytelling as performance.

Having returned fully to professional practice in early 2025, she works as a freelance dramaturg, guest teacher and international speaker. She is also developing a one-woman children's show. She is an Honorary Fellow of the Centre for Dance Research at Coventry University and continues to publish academic articles. Her latest article is "S. Ama Wray and Robert Hylton choreographing in the early 2000s: The cultural politics of choreographic fusion in the United Kingdom" (2025).