

# Studio Practice Fund

## Part One: Analysis

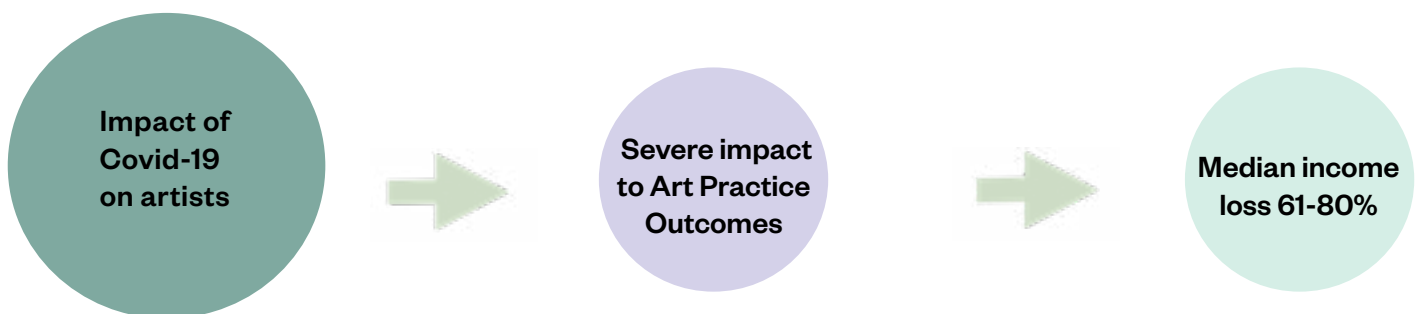
March 2021

## Studio Practice Fund Analysis

This report provides insight into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020 on studio-based non-commercial fine artists and their ability to continue their art practice. These insights were obtained from Acme artist tenant applications for financial support from Acme's Studio Practice Fund. Acme's Studio Practice Fund round 1 was supported by the Mayor of London's Culture at Risk Business Support Fund and the Creative Land Trust. Round 2 was funded by the Cultural Recovery Fund, provided by Arts Council England and DCMS.

**“...in spite of all of this continual struggle, I still believe in myself. Having the Acme studio confirms this to me and without it, I would be artistically and mentally adrift.”**

### Key Findings



Artists' resilience and commitment to their practice are evident in our findings, they have fought to maintain an artistic space in the face of almost insurmountable challenges with over 30% of respondents indicating their artistic practice was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of respondents experienced severe financial hardship with a median income loss between 61-80%. Several of the hardest hit respondents did not receive external funding.

- 264 (211 in round 1 and an additional 53 in round 2) artist studio tenants in extreme financial need applied to the fund.
- 59 artists in 56 studios were financially assisted in round 1 and an additional 205 artists in round 2.
- Using a mixed method approach (both qualitative and quantitative) meant that we were able to understand the stories underlying the statistics.
- Employment is often tenuous for respondents, with zero hour contracts and sudden terminations common.
- **Studios** are a source of **continuity, meaning** and **purpose** during the pandemic.
- **Financial stability** is seen as valuable because it **allows artists to access their studios**, obtain art materials and continue their work.

## 1. Background

Supporting artists since 1972, Acme is a charity based in London which provides affordable studios, work/live space, and a programme of artist support. Acme is the single largest provider of permanent affordable artist studios in England, and this year we will support 805 individual artist tenants and a further 31 artists through our residencies and awards programmes across 16 buildings in Greater London. As an affordable artist studio provider, we are aware of the precarity of artists even in the best of circumstances, and as the pandemic spread Acme began investigating ways to support our most vulnerable artist tenants.

During 2020 Acme offered two self-financed initiatives to support artist tenants:

- An **interest free rent payment break of up to three months**, repayable to Acme over periods of up to two years. In September 2020 (the period during which data relating to this was gathered), at least 137 artists had benefitted from Acme's deferral offer. Acme permitted rescheduling of £145,905 worth of studio rent payments for artist tenants.
- A non-repayable **rent relief grant providing 50% rent reduction for a period of three months**. 172 artists received rent relief grants at a cost of £92,019 to Acme.

After exhausting internal resources, Acme applied to the Creative Workspace Resilience Fund. Acme was awarded £97,500 from the Fund, which is supported through the Mayor of London's Culture at Risk Business Support Fund and the Creative Land Trust. With this financing Acme created the 'Studio Practice Fund' in October 2020 with the intention of supporting Acme artist tenants struggling to continue with studio practice. **Artist tenants could request a rent free period of up to six months**, with a maximum financial equivalent of £2000 per studio. Based on these parameters it was anticipated that approximately 50 Acme studio artists could be supported. In the end, out of 805 eligible artist studio tenants, 211 in extreme financial need applied to the fund and 59 artists in 56 studios were financially assisted. In May 2021 Acme secured funding via the Cultural Recovery fund and was able to support a further 205 artists via the Studio Practice Fund by which artists could apply for an Acme studio rent free period of up to three months, with a maximum financial equivalent of £1000 per studio totalling support of £ 43,529.

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## 2. Methodology

Artists were asked to consider a number of categories when assessing the impact of the pandemic. Their anonymised responses were analysed using qualitative and quantitative methods, providing a holistic insight into these artists' precarious circumstances.

Applicants were required to complete an application form, which included three qualitative questions offering insight into the impact of COVID-19 on their ability to fund and maintain their studio practice. Artists were also asked to indicate the percentage of income reduction they were experiencing, and identify what funding support (if any) they had received from alternate avenues. A copy of the questions is included in Appendix 1.

In order to encourage consistent responses, applicants were provided with a number of guidelines or categories of impact to consider. The guidelines (a full list of which are included in Appendix 1) covered the following topics:

- **Studio Access and Affordability**
- **Materials**
- **Financial difficulties**
- **Employment/ income loss**
- **Shielding and self-isolation**
- **Caring commitments**
- **Transport**
- **Arts practice outcomes (Residency, Exhibitions, Performance, Commissions, Sales, Other)**
- **Technology**
- **Housing**
- **Health and wellbeing (Mental health and Physical health)**
- **Other**

Completed applications were considered by the funding panel, anonymised and compiled into the raw data for this report. **264 complete responses represents approximately 31% of all Acme’s studio artists.** For qualitative analysis, this is a substantial sample size. The immediate impression could be that only 31% of artists required financial help. A more in depth look at responses suggests that this is not the case; artists seem to be self-selecting for non-financial reasons. These include not feeling entitled to funding, feeling that in applying they may be taking funding from artists with greater financial need, feeling that their situation is not ‘bad’ enough for support, and taking pride in ‘finding a way’ without external help. Many of these self-selection effects were more pronounced because of the competitive nature of the award. This conclusion is evidenced by quantitative data. In July 2020, Acme conducted an Artist Needs Survey. Findings from this indicated that a sizable proportion of **artists who were experiencing financial hardship (31%) nevertheless did not apply for support from Acme funded initiatives.** This was despite the fact that this funding was not competitive and therefore would have been subject to less self-selection.

Financial hardship (%)	Application submitted (%)	
	NO	YES
NO	81	19
YES	25	75

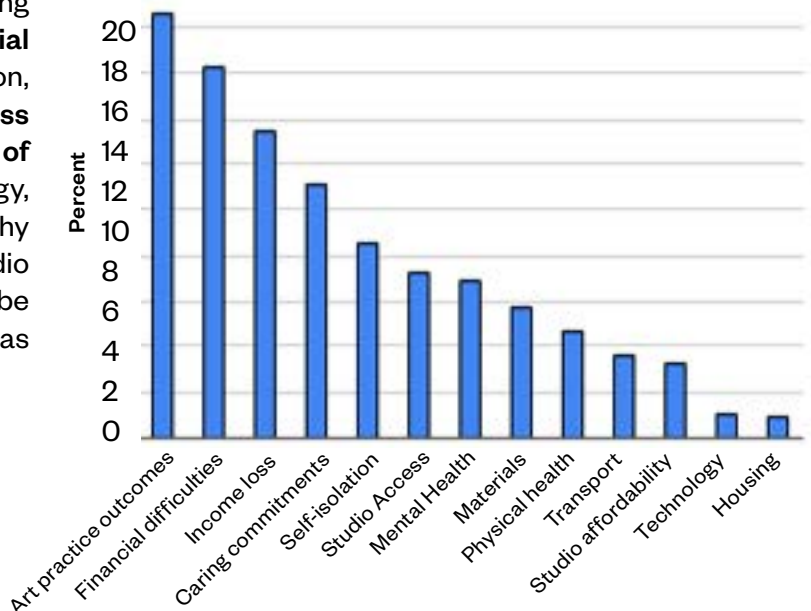
Evidence suggests a **complex relationship between artists’ perceptions of hardship and worthiness for financial aid:** noneconomic factors influence artists’ likelihood to apply for financial support irrespective of their ‘need’. For future funding, understanding the extent of these factors will be important in minimising self-selection and **ensuring a more equitable distribution of funds.**

The data analysis consisted of two phases. Firstly, references to each guideline category were tallied. Secondly, an analysis was conducted of the main themes in each category. Together, this provided an indication of the prevalence of each category in the overall sample, as well as insights into their specific impact on the respondents’ experience. Having qualitative data meant that we were able to make sense of the quantitative responses, and add insight and meaning to artists’ experiences.

### 3. Findings

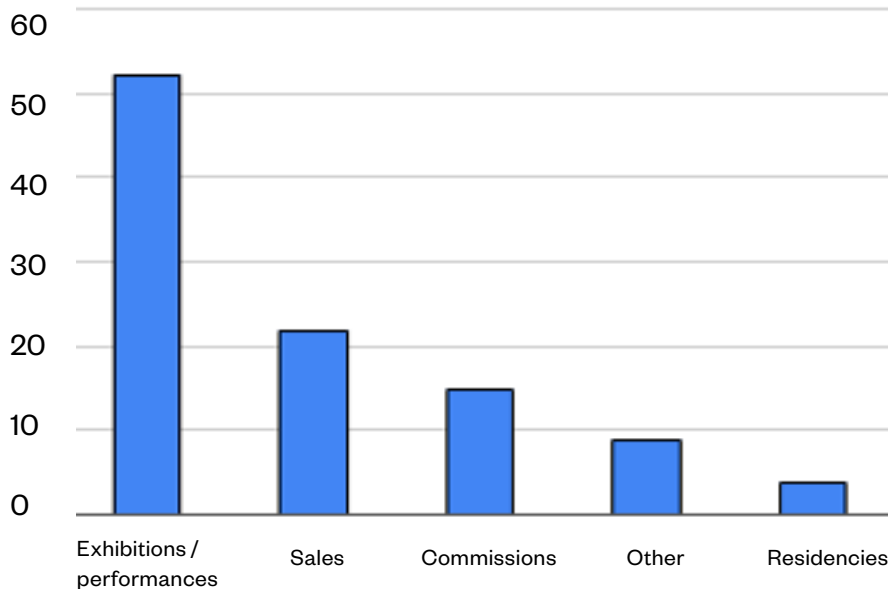
**The economics of artists’ studio practice dominate the responses** with 19% of respondents indicating impact to their art practice outcomes. **Psychosocial factors** (caring commitments, shielding, self-isolation, and mental and physical health) and **studio access** (studio access, transport) are in the **mid range of responses.** ‘Infrastructure’ (materials, technology, housing) received fewer responses. It is noteworthy that, while economic issues are dominant, studio affordability was rarely mentioned. This may be implied by the other economic categories and was not therefore specifically mentioned in responses.

Plot 1: Responses across all guideline categories



## Art practice outcomes

This category refers to the impact of the pandemic on artists' ability to generate income or engage in career development. Examples include disrupted or **cancelled opportunities to exhibit, present, or publish work, or other outcomes usually related to art practice**. The following plot indicates how the Art Practice Outcomes category was broken down.



Plot 2:  
Percentage of Art Practice Outcomes

### Exhibitions / Events

“ **Not only have live, vocal events been banned but I have missed out on other opportunities** to show work that would usually arise naturally (through meeting people, or people attending my performances) over a year.

The loss of local, national and international exhibitions, events and commissions dominated this category. **Many artists reported preparing for exhibitions and events only to have them cancelled** or postponed indefinitely. In some instances, galleries did not close completely, but scaled back their content. In others, they limited the length of the exhibitions with artists not having time to properly prepare or market their exhibits. Some artists could not deliver their work from the studio to the exhibition due to transport restrictions. In most instances, the artists had invested time and money to prepare for these exhibitions in anticipation of commissions or sales. As a result, they face a considerable financial loss.

### Commissions

“ **A commission for a gallery in London, a big step up for my career, has been postponed since April 2020, the payment for which has also been delayed.**

In many cases commissions have been severely curtailed. The impact of this is exacerbated by uncertainty as to how long the situation will continue. In some instances, artists have not been able to access suitable subject matter for commissions because of the lockdown. **Some artists find that they have produced commissions but are not being paid.** This category also includes a small number of performance artists, who were particularly hard hit due to their unique reliance on social interactions.

## Sales



The pandemic has also **significantly impacted opportunities to exhibit my work**, engage with residencies and symposia and contribute to public programmes relating to my practice. This has **negatively impacted my ability to generate revenue from my practice** through artwork sales, project fees and commissions. In addition, two important opportunities to present my research practice at symposia events have now been cancelled due to Covid-19.

The lack of exhibitions, events and commissions compounds artists' inability to make artwork sales. Very often, artwork sales form a vital part of respondents' income, which supplements payment from more formal employment such as teaching or workshops. These financial arrangements have very little resilience, and **the loss of a few sales is often enough to undermine an artist's financial security.**

Some artworks had already been created, and sales agreed, but **as a result of the pandemic payment is now withheld.**

## Residency

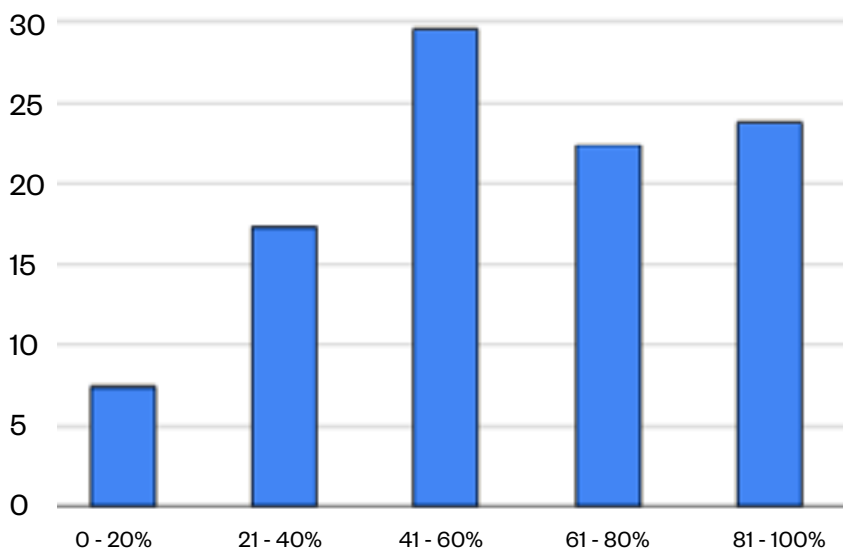


This year I was due to do a fully funded residency with artist fee in Sweden that would have been incredibly beneficial to my practice. Unfortunately this has been cancelled.

A number of artists indicated that their residencies had been postponed or cancelled. This is in line with a recent **Res Artis/UCL Covid-19 Impact Survey** on the Arts residencies field reporting that **54% of planned residencies** have been modified, cut short, postponed or **cancelled due to COVID-19.**

## Financial difficulties

Respondents were asked to indicate their percentage income loss (below). **The median loss is severe, between 61 and 80%.**



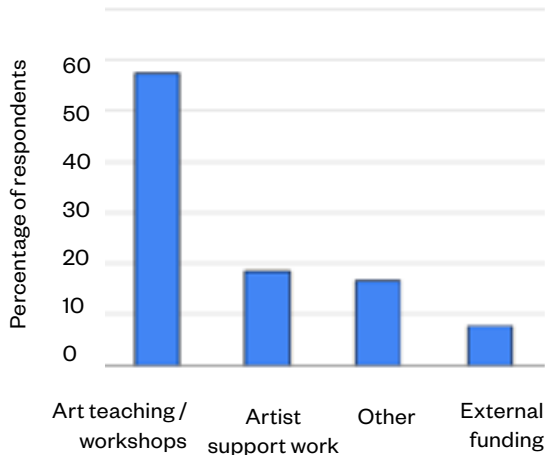
**Plot 3:**  
Percentage Income Loss

Respondents were also asked about applying for COVID-19 related funding. (The results are presented in Appendix 1). When considered alongside each other, income loss and funding received indicates that **those who report highest income loss also report the lowest success in gaining other funding.**

### Employment / Income loss

Respondents indicated sources of income or employment that had been lost due to the lockdown, and which they had relied upon to finance their art practice. The most frequently cited employment sources were divided into the following categories: external funding, artist support work (work in support of the art industry such as gallery technicians, art technicians, AV technicians, etc), and art teaching and workshops (at art schools, universities, or private) with a reported 50% loss of income from cancelled teaching opportunities. The frequencies of employment income loss are represented below.

**Plot 4: Employment / Income loss**

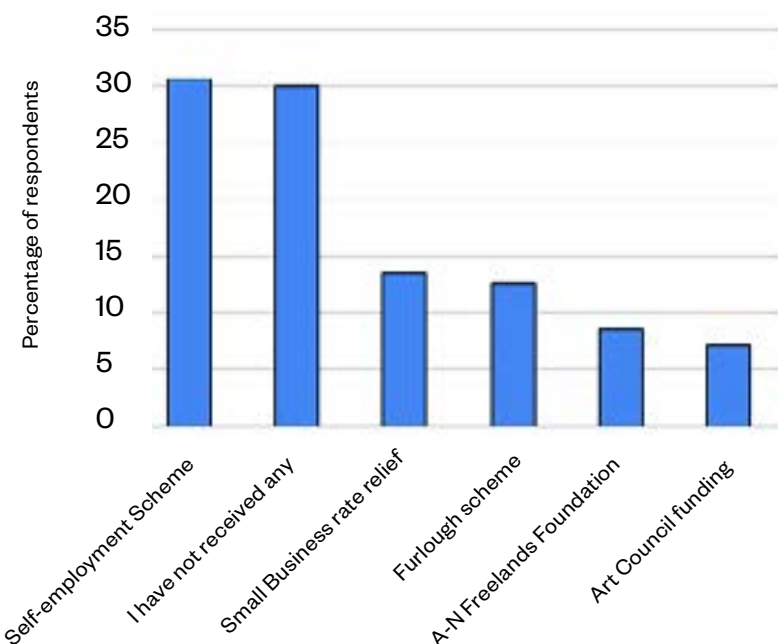


The majority of these employment roles were precarious, relying on zero-hour or temporary contracts, in which artists did not receive employer protection.

### External funding (not including government/ other covid help schemes)

**“ The collapse of the arts sector has hit everyone extremely hard.** Under normal circumstances I would be applying for exhibition funding or planning projects and thinking ahead over the year. Galleries are now unable to plan programs and uncertainty over the future has meant that all **my proposals and funding options have become highly speculative.**

External funding has in most cases been discontinued, with no clear indication of when it will be reinstated. This has impacted artists who structure their livelihoods around funding cycles. In addition, the funding bodies that artists rely on (such as galleries), have also had income reduced.



**Plot 5: Other Funding Applied For**

## Employment / Income loss

Artist support work is reliant on institutions and a high degree of social interaction. Under COVID-19 restrictions, these institutions were forced to close or scale back, and **with no option of remote work, this has placed artists in an untenable financial situation.**

Respondents indicated that they rely heavily on art teaching or workshops in order to fund their art practice. These took place in a range of contexts. Some were university lecturers, others were tutors, while others ran private workshops and teaching. Those working formally were typically contractually insecure, employed on zero-hour or temporary short-term renewable contracts. These artists found themselves excluded without any compensation.

“ In normal life, if I was not making sales of my work, I would be able to pick up gallery technician work which I have always done, but work is scarce at the moment, and a health risk.

Furthermore, the nature of art teaching does not lend itself to the online environment, those offering workshops are not able to transition their income to the lockdown restrictions.

Artists who were able to keep their employment during lockdown have found that creating online materials and learning new software has required significantly longer time commitments.

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## Caring Commitments

“ I had to prioritize childcare for my two children in a family where I am the sole earner. Any painting commissions and orders for work have been seriously reduced as a result.

Caring commitments included childcare, looking after older people, and people with existing health conditions who were shielding. Travel to and from caring for adults (typically elderly relatives) often incurred an extra financial cost to artists. In some instances, artists who lost income took on more caring commitments in order to enable their partner to work. In these instances, artists were forced to give up their practice at least until restrictions lift.

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## Studio Access

“ In the first lockdown I was unable to use my studio at all, as I can't get there without public transport. I'm still cautious, taking a longer route on overground and walking.”

Studio access has become challenging due to the dangers of transmission on public transport. Artists have taken to alternative means of accessing studios, such as walking longer distances, cycling, or renting cars. For many respondents, walking or cycling long distances was not possible due to age or medical reasons. Some, in this circumstance, found themselves too tired to work properly once arriving at their studio.



## Physical and Mental Health

“ Covid-19 and lockdown has prevented studio visits, forced me to stop inviting clients, galleries and curators to the studio so these relationships have become strained or ended completely. **This overwhelming loss and isolation has led to a mental health crisis** for which I am now receiving psychotherapy.

**A significant theme in the applications related to the onset of adverse mental health symptoms** during the pandemic, typically anxiety and mood related. These included **the exacerbation of pre-existing conditions as well as new onset symptoms**. In all instances, whether or not the respondent experienced mental health concerns before lockdown, the pandemic was identified as responsible for the emergence or intensification of symptoms. Respondents describe the causes as being worry, fear and uncertainty about the future. Many artists find these circumstances to be a **significant impact on their ability to focus and to be creative**.

A minority of respondents, with pre-pandemic mental health conditions, find themselves confronted by complex challenges. Not only are their symptoms exacerbated, but their **existing support structures have been undermined**.

In the majority of instances, artists made it clear that their studio practice was vital to their coping with the pandemic.

Physical health was affected in two ways. Firstly, there were those with pre-existing health issues that became an issue because of COVID-19 and the associated lockdown. In many cases treatment for non-covid ailments was delayed. Secondly, there were instances in which artists were previously able to maintain their art practice despite a chronic health condition, but pandemic restrictions undermined this. In most instances this related to an inability to access studios due to public transport no longer being a viable option.

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## Materials

“ **I couldn't afford to buy new materials** since spring and have used up studio stock that's nearly exhausted now.

Artists have not been able to purchase materials for two main reasons. One is the lack of funds of materials, and the other is the inability to access shops or providers of art supplies because they are closed. Many artists reported reusing old materials (e.g., painting over existing paintings) or changing their art practice to what is available. In some instances, caring commitments or self-isolation meant that they could not leave home in order to access materials.

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## Transport

“ By bus it takes an hour to go to my studio and an hour to go back to my flat. I am concerned about using public transport because it can become congested, making it very difficult to maintain physical distancing from other commuters which can be very stressful.

Many respondents rely on some form of transportation to carry on their art practice. This relates not only to getting to their studios, but also transporting artwork, and obtaining art materials. The majority of these use public transport, or sometimes bicycles. With the restriction of public transport, and the increased risk of using public transport, these respondents have found their art practice undermined. A minority have been able to improvise, arranging to cycle or trying to travel outside of high traffic times. A few use rental cars or taxis, but the cost is not sustainable. Overall, however, they have not been able to find ways to mitigate the restricted transport and this has had an impact on studio access and availability of materials.

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## Studio affordability

“ I am now deeply worried about affording my studio rent and maintaining my practice into 2021.

It is unsurprising that the various strains and burdens illustrated by this report should have a significant impact on studio affordability. The studio is seen as essential rather than a luxury by artists. The affordability of the studio is, in many instances, tightly bound up with continuing an art practice and identifying as an artist.

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## Technology

“ I have had to learn to use technology which I don't find easy at all. It seems I have to increase my use of online teaching and publicity which means I need to get WiFi installed in my studio. I haven't had the funds to do that at the moment. I need to upgrade my equipment to do this as well which I can't afford.

Adapting to new technological demands has created a number of challenges for respondents. Artists reported additional costs, inexperience with technologies, as well as limited access to computers. For example, those with children reported prioritising home schooling over their own computer access.

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## Housing

A small proportion of artists referenced housing concerns including increased pressures due to overcrowding (with all household members at home) and concerns regarding transmission within households.

In comparison with studios, artists' domestic spaces seemed largely unsuitable as a location for artistic practice. This was the result of caring commitments, small living space, or shared accommodation. Artists were, in many instances, not able to move their art practices to their homes.

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## Future Discussion

Whilst the artist respondents here have identified themselves as being in particularly precarious positions, the findings indicated in this report provide a wealth of insight into artists' experience of the pandemic. We have explored the precarity of artists' experience further in the accompanying discussion paper with the intention of beginning a conversation.

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## Appendix 1: Guidelines for applicants and analysis categories

		Category breakdown
<b>Studio Access and Affordability</b>	Impact on artists ability to access the studio or afford studio rent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Studio access</b></li> <li>• <b>Studio affordability</b></li> </ul>
<b>Materials</b>	Artists ability to access or afford materials.	
<b>Financial</b>	Lost work, job opportunities, furlough or redundancy. Inability or unsuccessful access to external funding, governmental or otherwise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Income loss: External funding, Artist support work, Art teaching/ workshops, Other</b></li> <li>• <b>Financial difficulties</b></li> </ul>
<b>Shielding</b>	Periods of shielding , self-isolation or quarantine for artists or their dependents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shielding</b></li> <li>• <b>Self-isolation</b></li> </ul>
<b>Caring Commitments</b>	Increased caring responsibilities, e.g. childcare.	
<b>Transport</b>	Impact on travel to and from the studio.	
<b>Art Practice Outcomes</b>	Impact on usual ability to derive income or career development. Eg. presenting, or publishing work, or other outcomes usually related to art practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Residency</b></li> <li>• <b>Exhibition / performances</b></li> <li>• <b>Commissions</b></li> <li>• <b>Sales</b></li> <li>• <b>Other</b></li> </ul>
<b>Technology</b>	Difficulties related to increased reliance on computers and technology, social media and software since the pandemic began.	
<b>Housing</b>	Impact on living arrangements which in turn impacted studio practice. Eg. changes to rent or living cost affordability.	
<b>Health and wellbeing</b>	Impact on health.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mental health</b></li> <li>• <b>Physical health</b></li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>	Any other ways in which the pandemic had adversely affected their finances, studio access, productivity, or ability to continue studio-based art practice.	

## Appendix 2: Studio Practice Fund Application Questions

Applicants were invited to reference the guidelines and to describe their circumstances in as much detail as possible.

**Question 1:** Please write a short (1500 to 2000 character) description of how COVID-19 has adversely affected your ability to maintain your art practice in your Acme studio. Please refer to The Guidelines to help you describe how you have been affected, and to help you us to obtain as much insight into your circumstances as possible.

**Question 2:** Please write a short (1500 to 2000 character) description of how this support would help you to navigate the issues you mentioned in Question 1, and sustain the continuity of your studio practice into the longer term.

**Question 3:** Have you received any Covid related funding support? Are you likely to receive any future funding from Covid support schemes? (This may include any of the government or local authority schemes, i.e., self-employed scheme or furlough scheme, or any other source during lockdown.) If so, please indicate below, and tell us why you need additional support from this scheme.

**Question 4:** What percentage of total income loss do you estimate you have experienced this year due to the ongoing effects of the pandemic? (eg. the difference in your 2020 income as compared to 2019).

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