

Funding; A Game of Chance

**Kelly Best and Georgie Grace**

*Kelly Best is a Cardiff-based artist and Jerwood Arts [Artist Adviser](#) who has worked with the organisation on a number of selection processes, including [Jerwood Collaborate!](#) in 2019. She first got in touch with us about the potential of random selection approaches and their success in other areas of funding distribution in 2020. We emailed Kelly, along with around ten other Artist Advisers over the summer, to let them know what we were planning and to invite their feedback. As Kelly and Georgie have an existing collaboration, which began through a Jerwood Arts-funded project, they asked to write the text collaboratively. Georgie is a queer digital artist and interaction designer. Through various forms of playful correspondence, Kelly and Georgie explore their shared interests in memory, rules, relationships, and technology. Their text was written before the 1:1 FUND opened for applications.*

And the winner is...

This is feeling a bit too academic and so maybe we should change the beginning, make it a little softer, more inviting? Great idea. Good morning. How did you sleep? Very deeply, but with weird dreams. I woke up, mind already chocka with really good phrases and words to use in this text. Lost them all again when I went to make breakfast! Scrambled eggs, in fact. A bit like how my head feels about funding applications.

Last summer I was listening to Malcolm Gladwell's podcast, Revisionist History. The episode, [Powerball Revolution](#), was looking into lotteries, and how it might be a fairer way to make decisions in electing student councils and allocating medical research funding. At that point we were well into the chaos and unpredictability of the Covid-19 pandemic. Overnight, people lost jobs and financial security. Events were cancelled or postponed, for the unforeseeable future or indefinitely, and many artists and other creative practitioners fell through the vast cracks in the support that was made available by the government and other funding bodies. *Powerball Revolution* brought me back to thinking about the current unsatisfying, overcomplicated and biased models for awarding arts funding in the UK and I began to feel curious about a new potential. What if funding for the arts was awarded by a lottery? THIS IS WOULD BE EXCITING!!!

We met through an open call in 2014. Jerwood 3-Phase was in itself a pilot and we were the chosen fyunue pigs (guinea pigs if you type from memory with your eyes closed, and turn off autocorrect). We applied separately and made our own work for that project, but ended up building a collaborative practice as well as a friendship; two unexpected outcomes. Can you imagine ever writing on an Arts Council evaluation form that one of the most significant outcomes was friendship? Maybe one day! We can dream. Friendship isn't quantifiable and it might only be an engagement with one or two other people but it can significantly help us sustain ourselves and our practices in general, but even more so through difficult times.

I know that at this point of writing we are already embedded into a system. After being successful in one application (Jerwood 3-Phase), we felt equipped and supported to apply for Jerwood Arts funding to create our own residency in 2016 that did away with outcomes, called *Do Without*. This was also awarded funding. We had the track record of 3-Phase and an existing working relationship with Jerwood Arts which gave us the confidence to ask for what we actually needed and valued, which was real time and space to spend together and not have to promise anything in return.

Since then we've had a lot of conversations about being funded, trying to get funded, and how we write in service of these processes. Examining *what makes an application useful to an artist, not just to the selectors?* seems to be at the core of these conversations. Being able to create our own proposal for the funding for *Do Without* helped us explore some questions around how we speak, and how we ask. So often it feels like there's a secret way to ask successfully, with secret language, and we're all chasing it. We're asked to provide so much pre-work and pre-thought in the application process so funders can attempt to accurately predict whether a project deserves funding. These processes create problematic access barriers and we all end up sounding the same, and losing our authentic voices. Trying to fit into different boxes that each funder requires and adapting each time. It's exhausting. And funders don't want risk. They want security and predictability. How many people undersell what they really want to do for fear of rejection? That takes confidence on the part of the artist. For me, it feels like all this pre-justification and speculation is antithetical to how the creative process would unfold in ideal conditions. We need space for the unknown. I don't think we can always predict if our work will be good, and neither can funders. And Malcolm Gladwell's interviewees seem to agree -- voters are not the best predictors of who will be a good leader, and funders aren't the best predictors of who will produce useful, relevant medical research. It's a guess. A gamble. So we may get better results, widen access, and save a lot of unproductive labour (for both artists and funders), by using randomness to make these choices.

Anyone want to play?

What's the game?

So, Jerwood Arts are piloting a bursary that will select awardees using a random number generator, which is essentially a lucky dip. There's minimal info required in the form of an eligibility checklist and a small description of what you'd like to explore in collaboration. This feels refreshing in so many ways, including the infamous 'light touch' that you see bouncing around. Actually making something light touch is very appealing. When is this really possible though and not just another buzzword? I think there is beginning to be some acknowledgement of the time involved in doing applications. But there is not much acknowledgement of the emotional toll. So true! I wonder how the feel of randomness will apply to random selection in a funding situation? It becomes a kind of human-computer interaction, instead of a personal evaluation. Will it feel different to be rejected randomly, rather than personally? In the process of writing this we've dug into a lot of the feelings that come up around existing application processes. In addition to the time it takes, we have to ask ourselves: do we have enough emotional energy to invest and risk? Are we willing to put this idea into someone else's hands to approve or discard? Do we have enough resilience to recover from getting rejected? How will we know if our work is even seen or given the respect it deserves? And feeling like we need someone else to validate our work doesn't equip us with confidence. Who have you worked with before, who will you work with in the future? Who will be your referee? This always feels more about the other person's status than our own merit, work or ideas. If we are randomly rejected, will this be easier to recover from, or will it still feel as difficult? Will it at least feel less onerous if there's less time investment in the process?

I love the fact that this new bursary is supporting collaborative exchange. Yes! We've talked a lot about how progressing in the/a art world/s is like playing a game of poker and hedging your bets. Working in collaboration has been so important for me. I think it started earlier than we think, when we were working individually during 3-Phase. We were able to lean on each other when we secretly didn't feel as confident as we thought we should, or as confident as we thought the funders expected us to be. It has helped us work through the rules that exist and rewrite our own new ones. Do you think working in collaboration is a human version of a random generator? Thinking of our collaboration, thinking of writing this. We turn up, we input, we shake it all together and something (random) comes out that is unpredictable and previously unknown or underdeveloped. That's creativity. That's exciting. And there's play. There's an invitation to let go of control. When we collaborate, we deliberately do things together where we have less control, and invite more random elements. We forget who wrote what. It's energising. It feels less personal, more freeing.

Place your bets now please.

I'm really interested in control here. How does having a computer decide feel in terms of sense of control over your success rate or chances? The idea of being in control of your own destiny is seductive. How might that feel if it is taken away from you? The feeling that you cannot influence it in any way, or the belief that you might be able to influence the outcome if you worked harder, or made better (and bigger / more ambitious / more) work, or if you were in a more socially visible or privileged group. I think we need to accept that randomness is a bigger factor than control.

Control, in part, comes down to visibility, being seen, and having enough opportunities to be able to progress your work, or even having time and money to spend making work. And how by being very early career, or still very rough around the edges with little exhibiting experience, a small amount of funding can be a catalyst for potential, for time, for conversation, for introductions (to another collaborator or an institution which may feel out of reach or unapproachable). How do you get your first break? I think there's real value in awarding funding to people that might be at a really early stage in their practice or less able to articulate ideas well in writing, or struggle to decipher the code of what each funder is looking for, for this very reason. If you haven't yet had the opportunity where someone has decided to take a risk on you, or you've been unable to finance your work, or been unable to make any creative or institutional connections, you aren't then given the opportunity to progress. And this looks even more bleak if you are from a marginalised group.

What I find most exciting is that some people will get selected that might not have done through the old process. A random number generator for a new generation.

The new Jerwood Arts 1:1 fund is a small fund for a small chance for a small amount of labour. At least in the application process. I think it's important to acknowledge here the amount of labour that goes into a practice to get to the point of being eligible to apply. Basically you need to be talking the talk, or walking the walk. But the walk usually looks more like a hike or a steep climb up a cold, dark, rocky mountain without shoes to soften the journey or a flash light to guide the way. Fumbling around in the dark trying to make progress when you have no idea if the direction you've taken will be useful or helpful, especially for writing funding applications. So a small chance (or a small torch) sometimes makes a big difference.

A small fund for a small chance for a small amount of labour. This isn't to be underestimated in terms of potential impact. The reality of this fund might be that it buys a few days of collaborative conversation or experimentation. Whilst the output might not necessarily be much physically, there may be other valuable

outcomes which are often overlooked, less measured or undervalued. Some that we've personally experienced include increased confidence, peer support and learning, new professional and personal relationships, shared experiences (recreational and project based) and feeling more able to take risks. And don't forget, getting better at poker.

Are you all in yet?

Was it you who said that you resubmitted your unsuccessful application to ACE, having been advised (not necessarily by ACE. But maybe!) to put the words HIGH QUALITY in front of almost everything, then it would probably get selected? Hahaha. I remember who it was now. It wasn't you but it's a good story. Well, it's not good, it's got too much truth surrounding it for comfort, but it helps highlight our point. I think it was then selected - doh! Haha I wish it was me. Maybe it could be me, now I know the secret words.

We need to remove ~~the secret words, buzzwords.~~ Immediately!

Oh, hi quality. Didn't see you over there! I often wave to quality. Sometimes from a distance, sometimes from up close. Sometimes we shake hands and other times it's an awkward kiss on the cheek, neck, or lips if I'm really unlucky?! Once I actually kissed someone's ear during one of these exchanges! That was inappropriately cringy. Sometimes quality is so out of reach as a concept I stand at its feet, crick my neck and squint my eyes to try and catch a small glimpse of it but I can't, it's head is so far up it doesn't even need to be hidden in the clouds. Quality. Quali-tea? Fancy a nice cuppa?

How many cups of tea has it taken to write this text? How many cups of tea does it take to select applications? You've been on the other side as an Artist Adviser for Jerwood, maybe you know? I'm wondering if you're all sitting around with tea together, or whether it's remote and asynchronous these days. It's probably still remote tea. One of the methods Jerwood currently uses is to invite Artist Advisers into the selection process. It is a positive step in broadening experience, background and opinion from outside of their own circle. But maybe all this does is make the circle wider, rather than changing the shape of it altogether. Maybe the shape needs to be in flux, constantly evolving into new forms, as needs and climates change.

From being on the other side, I do know that many applicants in these processes are equally qualified. There's just such a huge need for financial support. It's a massive responsibility being a decision maker, especially since the pandemic, where a decision that really only helps a handful of people disappoints many, many others. And every person who is successful feels guilty if their friends are unsuccessful. Panels and peer review can be a minefield and I've not really felt qualified myself to be able to make judgements or decisions in this very situation. It's quite a lot of pressure. And of course, unconscious and conscious bias plays a large part too. It's awkward when you have friends applying for opportunities, something that must only increase the longer you are in the game. I've not felt very equipped to be able to remove myself from those relationships or that position of power (I feel gross even saying that phrase) and might have even done a disservice to their work so as to not come across as biased. At the same time it is very natural to want to support friends or people working in your field or hometown, especially if there is underrepresentation there, be it geographical, gender, racial, sociopolitical or class. And in a world where there are very few opportunities, if you do find yourself in that privileged position, you want to try and take others with you. It feels very wrong, and not supportive if you aren't able to do this.

And the winner is.... George Best and Grace Kelly.

Right! But can we trust computers more than we can trust human judgement, especially when they have been programmed by humans in the first place? I think these are separate questions: we're not talking about programming computers to "select" (like if we wrote an algorithm to detect HIGH QUALITY by machine-reading the applications). We're only asking the computer to pick numbers at random, which correspond to anonymous applicants. The trust point is with the institution in this case: we need to be sure that each number is only entered once, and the random number picker program is run without human intervention.

What if we entered and we were selected?

And the winner is... Kelly Best and Georgie Grace.

That wouldn't look very random.

Often random generation doesn't end up looking or feeling random, or like even distribution. I've seen this problem implementing random selection in programming a game: you expect to get a variety of the items in your set, then when you run the program you get a bunch of the same things, and it feels broken. But it's just the nature of maths. Over time it will give you an even distribution, but on a per case basis it may look unbalanced. Here I'm thinking about how a pilot such as the Jerwood 1:1 fund might need to have some longevity in order to really be worthy of all this effort and thinking. It is really important that Jerwood Arts utilises this randomised selection process multiple times to ensure that it has any real chance of being properly evaluated as a new model. There's a very real chance that the random generator will select mainly, or all, straight white cisgendered men. What happens if this is the case? Will there be more or less trust in this idea or system? Will we feel more let down by the system if we are placing all our trust in this method to produce a truly representative selection and it doesn't appear to do so? That might depend on whether there is true representation entering in the first place. And, if Jerwood Arts decided to run the programme again, what would happen if the outcome was the same? There's a real risk of loss of control here which might feel daunting from an institutional point of view. Everyone has a complicated relationship with control.

Going back to our own experience, whilst our work and ideas must have had potential for development to have been selected for Jerwood 3-Phase, I feel like there was also a huge amount of luck that led up to that point. And the same with other opportunities. The luck of where you were born, the education system you were part of and whether or not that worked for or against you, the colour of your skin, your gender, your socioeconomic background, any caring responsibilities, or chance meetings along the way. It's total chance that we even met.

What is the difference between luck and privilege? Am I lucky if someone who likes my work already is on the selection panel — or is this privilege, or something else? Am I lucky, or privileged, if writing applications is in my skill set? What if I'm dyslexic? Or great at writing but terribly anxious in an interview (like the friend you mentioned). Is a painter at a greater disadvantage than someone who works with text in their practice, because they aren't honing the same skill set that is required for an application? Side thought, I always feel like painters fall through the funding cracks.

Which skills are we really selecting for? With ACE it feels like a lot of spin and correct language use, because there's usually no portfolio or other material involved in the process. It's all pitch. That's kind of mad now I am thinking about it. In a random selection, everyone has equal access in the sense that they have the same odds. If you're eligible, you have the same chance as anyone else. It should eliminate any barriers. Thinking about

painting and painters again, they don't often collaborate, and it feels much harder to secure funding, but maybe this is an opportunity to join up with another painter to discuss painting?

Getting more speculative now... if we decentre the dominant concept of merit by using more random selection, will we become more obsessed with luck? Will we become more superstitious? Is there potentially more scope for bribery and corruption? How do we ensure that the computer can be trusted? And what does this say about trust between humans? That's a really interesting point. We place trust high up on our lists of qualities that we value in society, maybe it's even top in many cases, but how can we trust if it is based on such a wide set of variables and experience and bias? Trust and confidence; what's the relationship between these two? Is there a difference? Can we trust ourselves and our own judgements?

I like your thoughts about trust. Random selection feels really exciting. It feels more democratic than democracy. As highlighted in the podcast, voters are not very good predictors; a louder candidate isn't necessarily more competent, but we continue to demand this. We demand candidates perform for us. In elections the performer will win. What does this say about personality types and do these problems cross over to our sector? Does this have any influence over how selections are made? Especially in current applications, you have to be really loud about something you do not already know (outcomes) and not so loud about what excites you, which might hopefully be the unknown. Lotteries feel fairer and give a truly representative selection of leaders (or practitioners). Yes, imagine if elections were chosen by random selection. Half of our leaders would be women! As long as you can ensure that there is no tampering and embedded bias in the method of selection or technology. And this also comes down to trust.

I had an aha moment yesterday. I realised that the model of project development we're frustrated with is really out of date. In software development, people stopped planning the whole project in advance and trying to deliver that plan about 20 years ago. That model was replaced with a more cyclical approach: you don't plan the whole thing in advance, instead you gather requirements or needs, plan and deliver a first step, then get feedback. You evaluate how it's going and whether it works, you make changes as needed, then you plan the next step. Back to the evolving shape idea then. In software the main concern is to allow for user requirements to change, but I feel like it's equally applicable for creatives who are exploring unfurling questions and need the plan to adapt to what they discover.

I wonder why the arts are still using an outdated model of project management? Would it be easier for applications if people were only asked to propose a first step? Maybe there's only one question: what are you curious about? Curiosity is key! That's a starting point for working with funders for feedback and support as you evolve your plan more cyclically during the project once it's funded. I like this a lot and combining it with a random generator would free up a lot of time for organisations. It could help facilitate relationships between organisations and practitioners because they wouldn't be wasting time and emotions on all the admin and rejections. More time for wine tasting than timewasting. Haha! More space for the unknown. Yes please.

-----the end-----

for now.

## A Response to the 1:1 FUND

### **Sam Metz**

*Sam Metz is an artist based in Hull who researches, creates and reflects on the concept of what they refer to as choreographic objects. Sam has collaborated with the performance artist David Clarkson to create body-based live art, and has been a member of Guerrilla Art Lab, a queer, feminist, live art, performance collective since 2016.*

*As an emerging curator Sam is influenced by disability-led approaches to interpretation, particularly focusing on sensory modalities of understanding neglected in traditional forms of art museum interpretation, such as touch. Sam explores methods of providing art historical, social, material interpretation– that different people can use in different ways to help them make meaning from what they are looking at.*

*Sam emailed the team shortly after the 1:1 FUND call for entries was launched in September, enquiring about the updated process and expressing concern that some of the more relational and responsive elements of our recent processes – such as individual feedback – would not feature within this new approach. We invited Sam to write this commission to document their concerns and suggestions as expressed in our email correspondence. Sam has specialist knowledge of inclusive and disability-led practice, and have been part of selection processes as part of the PANIC! Steering Group through The Tetley in Leeds. Sam’s text was written after the 1:1 FUND opened for applications.*

Jerwood Arts’ pilot application process and use of a random generator for its 1:1 FUND aimed to solve a number of very real problems, including the near impossibility of selectors being able to offer meaningful feedback to the many hundreds of applicants for a vanishingly small number of prestigious awards. Artists’ work is, by and large, not only precarious but also dependent on repeated cycles of grant applications that result, with mathematical inevitability, in more rejections than acceptances. To require artists to invest unpaid time in an application that they know is not just unlikely to be accepted but unlikely ever to be read feels like a damaging shift away from an understanding of the application process as relational – a critical conversation between practitioners.

Their solution – a much-abridged initial application, with artists then shortlisted via a random number generator – may address issues of capacity and free staff to work more closely with selected artists but risks sacrificing the care and consideration due to those on the other side of that process. The random generator applied was also pitched to remove bias from selection. Something that, for me, is best achieved by diversifying selection panels, which Jerwood Arts already works to do in relation to other funds. Critically, for me, the pilot approach does very little to support artists who don’t know that a fund like this is for them. As a disabled artist, when I see a disabled artist on a panel I am immediately reassured. Diversifying the panel can mean seeing yourself reflected in the organisation and reassured to apply. Receiving feedback from artists can therefore be pivotal.

My knowledge of Jerwood Arts’ previous excellent practice, and my own experience of having worked with, and been funded and supported by them, means that I hugely respect the organisation and have no doubt that their intentions for the pilot are good. What I would like to do here is simply to voice my personal understanding of the value of the application process for artists, particularly those in the formative stages of their career, and how that is in danger of being lost.

For me, something about diminishing agency through a random generator didn't seem to be caring. A call out has the potential to be relational: a dialogue between you, the organisation and other artists. A philosophy of interdependence recognises the need to both receive and give care; essentially, the care taken to construct an application feels like it needs care at the other end. This philosophy (introduced in the recent publication by the Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto*) also reminds us that interdependence cuts through social hierarchies, so that renowned artists are reliant on support as much as emerging or underrepresented artists. Feedback from respected peers emphasises learning transmission between more and less-experienced artists as bi-directional, horizontal and communicative. Jerwood are in many areas of their work diminishing individualism and favouring coproduction, peer support and collaborative knowledge exchange. The random generator for me, by contrast means the 'other end' is a dead end, not a more modern one that shares practice among artists and organisations and which enables a diversification of voices.

I think that it can be possible to develop confidence and ability through the application writing process – but only if there is meaningful feedback. As a disabled artist who receives application support it feels problematic to engage support in a proposal that is likely not to be read and to not value my collaborator. As a practising artist who is still an emerging artist, the opportunity presented by a fund can sometimes be exposing, where you feel forced to share an idea before it is ready because you don't know when funding will be available again or conversely where you are confident in an idea or approach but don't know if it is the kind of work that matches the funder and the needs of the fund. This position can be underscored by precarity, isolation and disenchantment. Precarity is the position of working with unstable income streams in a society in the UK that has seen austerity followed by a pandemic and cuts to the arts. Isolation is widespread, particularly for disabled artists, like myself, who might be unable to access peer support, accessible studios and events. Disenchantment (inevitably) follows because to situate yourself as an artist responding to call-outs, commissions and opportunities can mean repeated rejection. Post education, finding space for creative knowledge exchange and collaboration can be rare; it's hard to know what your peers think about your work. Receiving considerate written feedback about your practice forms a necessary part of lifelong learning and development.

Personally, despite all the inherent risk of being an artist, I sometimes find it motivating to be able to send out work to a panel of artists. You hope that your written application acts as a proxy for the conversation you might have with them were you to meet. Not being able to gauge peers' interest in your work risks barriers to future engagement, due to a lack of reassurance about the value of your work, but it also reduces the ability to have critical conversations between practitioners.

I wonder if it would possible to engage the random generator approach again utilising a simple expression of interest, with no requirement to describe or advocate for your work, and then support selected people throughout the whole application-writing process. An approach of that kind would enable feedback and care for both the team and applicants, restoring the relational process and becoming a real opportunity for artist development.



Time to think about meritocracy and precision-madness

**Mark Robinson**

*Mark Robinson is the founder of Thinking Practice and the author of the book, [Tactics for the Tightrope](#) (Future Arts Centres, 2021) as well as several collections of poetry. His poem 'The Infinite Town' is carved on a large plinth on Stockton High Street, from which emerges a steam train at 1pm every day. He has been an individual applicant as writer and small press publisher, a member of many panels, and a decision-maker working for Northern Arts/Arts Council England.*

*Mark [tweeted positively](#) about the experiment when it was announced in September and has since been in email correspondence with Lilli. Mark's text was written after the 1:1 FUND opened for applications.*

It is hard to disagree with the starting point of the 1-1 FUND's design: that arts funding for individuals is broken. Open programmes have failed to respond to massive competition. Jerwood Arts' own success rates have plummeted, and other funders report similar patterns. Yet this competition – or choice, to look at it another way – has not made the funded much more representative. Disparities around race, gender, disability and class persist.

Such low levels of success are a massive 'hidden' cost to the sector. Jerwood Arts' Live Work Fund received 1,283 applications in 2020, with 1 in 40 successful. Let's estimate each application took two days. That's 2566 working days – over 10 working years. Let's then say assessment and decision-making processes took two days per application. That makes 20 working years spent on unsuccessful applications. To one fund. Now multiply that by the numbers of funds individual artists might apply to. The sector is spending centuries on applications that never get funded.

Now, of course, these are rhetorical and challengeable calculations. But the system damages through its inefficiency. What could we do with that time if it wasn't spent developing detailed applications and often even more detailed assessments and feedback? How much more could artists do? How much stress and strain could funders remove from the system to everyone's benefit? These are urgent matters given the lack of 'slack' in the system, the exhaustion and burn-out. So I welcome this experiment.

Research in the science field suggests traditional methods are flawed in finding the best ideas. Nobel Prize-winning scientist Sir James Black has suggested peer review has two main drawbacks. It favours 'well-advanced', fashionable or 'endorsed' practice over the speculative and new. It also teaches people how to successfully play a broken system.

Too much well-intentioned effort goes into justifications for choosing between a surfeit of good bids whilst maintaining the status quo. These justifications are, if not fictions, often codes for 'too many good applications, try again later'. Our illusion of control, choice and meritocratic 'excellence' makes us reluctant to say or hear this. Deliberative decision-making leads to ever-finer distinctions, what I have seen described as ['precision-madness'](#). I have seen and felt this in action, from both ends.

The use of a random number generator is, in some ways, not much more random than the processes of selection and diary availability that lead to a particular group of people making decisions about eligible applications against a particular budget. Replace one or two people with others, and decisions easily end up different. Random selection could lead to more representative selections across any set of characteristics, over time, as it would be less prone to bias. It would also be more transparent and perhaps even fairer than group decision-making.

[One study looking at science](#) describes grant-giving as an example of a merit system that is essentially a lottery. But many in the arts are reluctant to accept this applies to us. Grant receiving has a 'status-endowing' function, for individuals and organisations: a grant from certain funders serves as a quality kite market as well as cash. It is often said to be as valuable for the confidence it gives as for the money. (Conversely a rejection can knock confidence.)

But it also plays into the myth of meritocracy in the sector highlighted in recent years. As [a paper by Dave O'Brien and Mark Taylor](#) puts it, the belief that 'Culture is a meritocracy' may reinforce social inequality, especially as the more successful you are, the more likely you are to believe it. Being part of panels, part of grant-giving, may deepen that feeling.

Such panels bring current, practice-informed insight. People take their roles seriously, in my experience. They feel the responsibility for their choices. [Long, intense, deliberation is often a point of honour](#). But panels can also have a normalising, mainstreaming effect. The panel can work as a store of the social and cultural capital of its members.

Often it boosts it – I know this was part of my own experience as a young member of the Northern Arts Literature Panel. There was an exchange of 'legitimacy', and I gained new networks, alongside genuine learning. But we also know that such networks tend to exclude or marginalise people from certain backgrounds. Be that bit too awkward, and you may not be asked back. (I've had that experience, too.)

The panel process can be part of fitting into a broken system. Just as hiring is, to quote O'Brien and Taylor, sometimes 'a form of cultural matching rather than a meritocratic exercise', so is grant-making.

Being selected by one's peers can boost confidence but feeds the meritocracy myth. Will being selected by the random number generator from a set of equally deserving people lead to less confident artists, not as thrilled to be funded? Will it lead to a lack of the endorsement effect in commissioners or even the public, who studies show have less faith in randomised decisions?

Time will tell: but at least more people may have time to think about it.

In response to the 1:1 FUND

**Jannat Ahmed**

*Jannat Ahmed is an occasional writer, poet, illustrator, and also editor-in-chief at Lucent Dreaming, an independent magazine of fiction and poetry based in Cardiff. She has worked for Poetry Wales where she launched Poetry Wales Pamphlet Competition, Wales Poetry Award and Wales Young Poets Award. She hopes to launch Lucent Dreaming in 2022 as Wales' first book publisher led by two full-time editors of colour.*

*Jannat got in touch with us via the Jerwood Arts inbox shortly after the 1:1 FUND call for entries was launched, expressing serious concerns about random selection as an approach, and particularly the ways it might dehumanise or 'gameify' a process which already has little returns for the artist. Jannat is also concerned that this approach was misguided around notions of 'equality' and represents a step backwards from important positive action work. Lilli Geissendorfer, Director of Jerwood Arts exchanged emails with Jannat. They had a meeting to discuss this further, and Jannat was invited to document her perspective through this commission. The text was written after the 1:1 FUND opened for applications.*

I was angered to see that Jerwood Arts, an organisation that is lauded for its schemes for artists, offering funds and professional development to its grant recipients, would pivot so dramatically in the name of 'fairness'. The reason this pilot scheme is so disappointing is because Jerwood Arts has previously outdone other funding organisations in terms of care for the artist. Jerwood Arts is known in recent times for offering what all artists [from under-represented backgrounds] actually need: access to sustained and significant funding direct to the artist over a comparatively long period, with human-led positive action.

There are so many ways in which this pilot model for the 1:1 FUND is structurally bad; it feels like the outcome of board meetings and academia rather than conversations with artists who are already doing work about equity and access in arts funding. Let me outline two of the main issues that I've found:

1. Unpaid time, no returns.

There are two sides to this. Firstly, the fund didn't indicate on its landing page what the application form looked like, e.g. how many words are expected, what questions need to be answered, how long it might take to complete. Given the nature of the fund, it put off those who need to weigh up if they can make time to apply. This fund requested a partnership, which is a significant amount of work for the non-networked artist.

Secondly, this funding model offered no feedback to its applicants, an anomaly for Jerwood Arts applications, and implied that only lottery-selected applications are read. It suggests that for funding to be more 'accessible', and reach beyond middle-class audiences, the dramatic increase in workload for arts organisations can be addressed with a lottery-style selection process. It's upsetting that the white middle class have always been awarded funding as humanised individuals, with their words actually read, and the offer of feedback and connection. However, when 'Diverse Background' artists are given a 'fair' opportunity to apply for funding, the solution is to dehumanise as much of the process as possible. The gameification of the process, and robotic distance as a solution to bias and imitation of 'fairness' is not a good reflection on Jerwood Arts. Are arts organisations saying that other funding is so inaccessible that this volume of applications is not anticipated, or is it that they're implying other funding is more worth the person-power of the art worker? My fear is that because Jerwood Arts is doing it, other arts organisations will follow.

A lottery-style process isn't a long-term solution to bias against new, untested artists, nor against racism; a lottery-style process means art workers, who are in their vast majority white and middle class, will never unlearn their own biases. What's needed is for art workers to cultivate an ethos around giving new, untested, Black artists and non-Black artists of colour, intersectional artists and working-class artists, multiple chances to learn and develop their craft, chances that, say, a white male writer/director at the BBC for example, always has. Conscious changes behind the scenes are how we make the arts space better.

Time is finite for all, but a low-income artist cannot delegate their job nor responsibilities the way a middle-class artist might, so why is it that this model disrespects the already limited time of artists who would benefit most from funding and feedback? There is a human cost to the lottery, and instead of the paid art-worker, it is the underpaid artist who loses out. The time of low-income artists is thrown directly in the bin, never to be recovered, for the benefit of the paid staff in an arts organisation.

## 2. The traditional applicant is still at an advantage.

If middle-class artists have had decades of opportunities to learn about the application process, and to develop the networks that make funding opportunities available, this pilot scheme does nothing to address that imbalance.

Jerwood Arts can boast having received over 1800+ applications for this fund, but what does that mean when the new shortened application form is not the one newer artist-applicants will find elsewhere, putting them on the back-foot in terms of being able to apply for other funds? A larger quantity of white middle-class artists applying increases the likelihood that more white middle-class artists will be selected. It's not fair because there are so many non-white, non-middle class, artists who, structurally, are kept from knowledge about arts funding. If lottery-style selection must happen, it should happen after all applications are screened, feedback is provided, and conscious decisions by art workers are made about what funding is ringfenced and why, and then to draw from the hat in those categories for variety. But it cannot ever be the only model.

On the human level of respect, speaking to power, I ask: Would Arts Council England's existing 800 National Portfolio Organisations like it if they had to submit—suddenly unpaid for the whole duration, with no ability to delegate their existing work and responsibilities—a 1-in-10,000 application form—that might never be read—to be put through a lottery-style selection process, for the slightest chance of being awarded funding? I think not. Imagine, then, how it feels for the rest of us applying against all odds.

You cannot use straightforward models of 'equality' or 'fairness' in funding models when there is no equality in society. It's unworkable. Funding from all organisations must be equitable; Jerwood Arts, and other arts and funding organisations, need to engage with living artists who understand the nuances of socio-economic inequality in human terms in order to pilot future schemes, not source their models from white middle-class academia whose research and scientific approach doesn't prioritise or perceive the human cost of these games, nor meaningfully understand the intersectional, structural, affective ways that art does or does not happen. White middle-class, often ableist and racist thought, structures organisations and academic research takes priority over what artists of colour and disabled artists actually say they need long-term from arts and funding organisations to succeed, and that ultimately needs to change.