COMMISSIONED TEXT IN RESPONSE TO THE 1:1 FUND

[1:1 FUND]

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.