

Summary of Key Insights from Arts Self-Employed Persons (SEPs) Engagement Session with MOS Low Yen Ling

(3 February 2023)

On 3 February 2023, NAC held an engagement session, hosted by Minister of State, Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth & Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ms Low Yen Ling, with 31 arts practitioners to discuss ideas on how the Arts Resource Hub (ARH) could better support arts SEPs. The participants included arts Self-Employed Persons (SEPs), SEP advocates and representatives from arts organisations that work closely with arts SEPs.

Participants were divided into four breakout groups to discuss two topics: 1. Training, upskilling and accessibility to jobs, and 2. Arts Resource Hub resources and support for arts SEPs. The sessions were co-facilitated by NAC representatives alongside arts SEPs Edward Choy, Mok Cui Yin, Alecia Neo and Jeremiah Choy.

The key points discussed in the breakout groups included:

A. Training and Upskilling

1. Curate more customised training and development programmes

Participants noted that as SEPs have diverse capabilities and development needs across different art forms, the programmes offered by ARH need to be more tailored to their experience and career aspirations. For instance, entry-level SEPs may need more support in navigating the sector and seeking job opportunities whereas mid-career SEPs require more training and exposure in lateral areas to support their careers, such as knowledge in business, producing and marketing. Besides the current suite of talks and workshops rolled out under ARH Connects, ARH can also consider working with other arts groups, training providers and organisations that offer training programmes to complement and broaden ARH's offerings.

2. Facilitate access to mentorships and peer-to-peer learning opportunities

To remain competitive and sustainable in the arts sector, it is important to have knowledge, resource and skills sharing among the different SEP communities to facilitate learning from one another. Participants suggested that ARH can help to link up experienced SEPs to offer mentorships and apprenticeships to others who are new to the arts workforce. For instance, ARH can bridge SEPs who are more digitally savvy to share their expertise and technological know-how and resources with others. Overall, participants felt there could be better recognition and support for mentorships.

B. Accessibility to Jobs

3. Provide easier access to relevant jobs and opportunities in the arts and adjacent sectors
On the current job portal on ARH, SEPs echoed the need for more relevant job listings to the arts sector which are short-term and project-based, as well as provide some opportunities in the international market. As there are presently many disparate avenues and platforms for information on jobs, such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook groups, open calls on Instagram etc, one possibility raised was for ARH to help filter and consolidate the relevant opportunities, including international ones, into a central repository for SEPs to access easily. The repository could also function as a point of exchange for SEPs to share their projects and find collaborators.

C. Working Conditions and Livelihoods

4. Advocate best practices for arts SEPs' employment and working conditions
For better protection of SEPs and for them to build a stable and sustainable career, participants proposed for a set of best practice guidelines to be developed for service buyers who hire SEPs. This would help service buyers understand how to better work with arts practitioners and adopt more reasonable employment practices, as arts SEPs often do not have sufficient leverage to advocate for fair terms as an individual. These could include areas such as instilling fair contracts for SEPs, good practices in areas of timeliness of pay, and workplace protections such as insurance etc. A lack of a guide for remuneration rates in the arts scene also continue to pose a challenge for SEPs, as it can potentially lead to wage disparities and stagnation especially post-COVID-19.

D. ARH Support Resources

5. Allow for more flexible and diverse uses of ARH spaces with stronger publicity efforts
Participants raised the possibility of repurposing ARH's co-working spaces into spaces that support experimentation, sandboxing of ideas, development and showcasing of new works, and for networking with other SEPs. Participants also asked for such spaces to be configurable and flexible to fulfil varied needs of the different art forms. SEPs also called for more targeted publicity efforts to raise awareness of ARH spaces to bridge potential users with the spaces that they need.
6. Enhance the accessibility of spaces available to SEPs to build community and maximise impact
SEPs found that ARH should be actively reaching out to SEPs to meet SEPs where they are at. For instance, to foster a stronger sense of community within the spaces, participants suggested for more human touch and opportunities for organic interactions to occur, including having stronger NAC presence at ARH spaces to build a sense of familiarity and community. This will facilitate more face-to-face interactions and SEPs can also receive more immediate feedback and support. Given the presence of other co-working spaces available, ARH can also consider partnering with external co-working spaces to offer these spaces at affordable rates to ARH subscribers.

7. Review existing repository of digital resources and funding support for SEPs

SEPs agreed that there were a lot of useful resources and templates on the ARH repository. However, the information could be organised more intuitively, and publicity could be stepped up to raise the awareness of available resources such that SEPs can make use of them effectively. Participants also suggested to incorporate features into the online platform that can encourage more interaction, communication, and resource-sharing amongst SEPs. As the work of the arts SEPs evolve, there is also a need to relook existing funding schemes and better support SEPs as they further their practice in different ways, including through the development of new works, or upskilling themselves through courses.

NAC would like to thank all the participants for their feedback and suggestions. We will continue to engage SEPs to be part of the process in the refreshing of the ARH.