

# Turtle Key Arts: Freelancer Manifesto

*A guide to best practice between Turtle Key Arts,  
collaborating companies and freelance artists.*

The following document is an agreement between Turtle Key Arts (TKA), collaborating companies and artists (AIK Productions, Amici Dance Theatre Company, Ockham's Razor, Sadiq Ali Company and Open Sky), and freelance workers, setting out a series of actions and practices to be implemented with a view to improving access to work, representation, diversity, inclusion and wellbeing within the TKA freelance workforce. A commitment to ensuring optimum working conditions for freelancers to do their best work and continue to grow as professionals whilst working with TKA and their collaborating companies and artists.

TKA and its collaborating companies and artists acknowledge that this is only the first step in a long journey for freelancers working within the industry. This manifesto is a statement of intent. We know there is more work to do and we look forward to continuing the conversation with freelancers to create a more 'freelance-friendly' and inclusive working environment going forward.

Freelancers should be advised that this is an ongoing document and that some of the issues raised will require actions beyond the capacities and capabilities of TKA and collaborating companies and artists alone.

## **Commitment to pay pledge**

Turtle Key Arts, along with its collaborating companies, are committed to a pay pledge for freelance artists, revised annually. This includes minimum rates of pay. See Appendix.

## Listen and act

A promise to listen and act. Turtle Key Arts and their collaborators want to hear from freelance artists within the industry about the challenges faced. We understand that freelancers hold much of today's cultural landscape together. We want to ensure over time that freelancers can thrive but know there is some way to go. We are committed to supporting this cause through lobbying opportunities whenever possible.

## Ensure access, equality & inclusion

A commitment to access, equality & inclusion. By ensuring fair pay, flexible hours, extra support where required and an accessible working environment to suit each individual. To ensure barriers to inclusion are removed.

## Training and skills sharing

A commitment to share skills and training opportunities. Some training opportunities can be provided to freelancers by TKA as well as skill shares for its collaborating companies and artists plus hosting networking opportunities.

## SECURITY

Acknowledging financial insecurity and lack of clarity as contributors to freelancers' sense of vulnerability, Turtle Key Arts and collaborating companies and artists pledge:

- To standardise minimum half-day, whole-day and weekly rates across all activity.
- To review all rates of pay on a yearly basis.
- To recognise that The Independent Theatre Council's (ITC) 'Recommended Rates of Pay' document is a minimum, and will pay above this rate whenever possible <sup>[1]</sup>
- To pay invoices within 14 days where possible
- To work with freelancers to identify what course of action could be taken together to bring issues related to pensions, holiday and sick pay to funders, unions and relevant governmental departments <sup>[2]</sup> We are committed to support this cause through lobbying opportunities whenever possible.
- To work with freelancers to explore whether it might be possible to include a payment as surrogate for pension, holiday pay or sick pay in

the absence of any current contractual arrangements (to adopt social pay model).

<sup>[1]</sup> Companies acknowledge that ITC minimum is not a sustainable wage in the long term but also wish to state that for early career companies and artists, the level of funding available to them might prohibit paying higher than the recommended ITC minimum. Any increase in wages needs to be set within the framework of funding ecosystems / guidelines.

<sup>[2]</sup> Non-payment of pension, holiday and sick pay contributions is a defining feature of freelancing, and currently there are contractual limitations as to when it is possible for companies to make these contributions to freelancers. However, given the incredible number of freelancers nationally without pensions, and the evidence suggesting that many freelancers work when sick and injured, Turtle Key Arts and collaborating companies and artists believe that a discussion needs to be opened as to how this significant deficit in freelancers' security and wellbeing can be improved.

## WELLBEING

To ensure that physical and mental health needs of freelancers will always be valued above the requisites of any job, Turtle Key Arts and collaborating companies and artists pledge:

- To state, enshrine and implement what a safe working environment means for artists and freelancers
- To ensure every freelancer completes a wellbeing form before undertaking work to ensure to company can best support the individual
- To plan schedules with wellbeing in mind, giving additional attention to contributors to injury, sickness and mental health difficulties
- To ensure core staff have first aid and mental health first aid training
- To share key information from the mental health training among staff
- To implement check-ins and supportive systems to ensure wellbeing is valued before work and no worker is sacrificing health to “get the job done”.

## ACCESS / DIVERSITY / INCLUSION

In order to ensure inclusivity is the norm and barriers to participation are reduced or removed. Turtle Key Arts and collaborating companies and artists pledge:

- To ensure core staff have training in access, diversity and inclusion <sup>[3]</sup>

- TKA to offer one paid training placement per year to someone of an underrepresented group<sup>[4]</sup> to be reviewed annually. TKA's collaborating companies and artists to aspire to offer this although we understand fundraising and project planning is required.
- To regularly evaluate to ensure that the scheme to offer paid training opportunities to underrepresented groups is meeting its aims and targets
- To address the "word of mouth" culture, as this often leads to exclusivity and workforces mirroring employers' ethnic, social and economic groupings by creating links with organisations who can access underrepresented groups rather than solely advertising and hoping for the best
- To ask all freelancers about access needs prior to each job and to adjust planning to accommodate wherever possible
- To include time in the planning stages of any project to specifically address and implement any strategies to increase access, diversity and inclusion
- To encourage and support people with children or caring responsibilities within their work by discussing needs prior to planning
- To commit to offering and accepting varied application formats such as video applications, telephone/zoom interviews etc.
- To ensure preparation requirements for auditions are reasonable
- To offer an expenses bursary available by application for auditionees facing financial barriers
- To reimburse performers for recall expenses
- To ensure freelancers are represented at organisational board level
- To have a clear policies around complaints, grievances and bullying and harassment and for this to be issued at contract stage
- To commit to act under The Social Model of Disability.

<sup>[3]</sup> Turtle Key Arts through its broad range of projects offer and run a number of training sessions which are offered out free of charge to freelancers within our network. These include training for working with people living with Dyslexia, Autism, Dementia, HIV.

<sup>[4]</sup> An 'underrepresented' group/person could be defined through their; social class, ethnicity, age, gender, disability, location and/or access.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To ensure that professional development opportunities are available to freelance workers, TKA, collaborating companies and artists, pledge:

- To offer early career development by providing support, skills & knowledge sharing
- Access to ITC training and development courses at a discounted rate through TKA membership
- To invest in freelancers by sharing the skills base of TKA and collaborating companies and artists to develop new skills and improve existing ones
- To actively participate in sharing networking events for freelancers to network and support other people within the TKA's freelance community.
- To offer freelancers training events to share skills as members of the TKA community
- To offer opportunities for evaluation and reflection at the end of each project
- To offer advice/support for freelancers who might wish to sit on the board of a company

## WORKING CONDITIONS <sup>[5]</sup>

To ensure that optimal circumstances for freelancers to do their work are guaranteed, Turtle Key Arts, collaborating companies and artists pledge:

- To ensure workers get breaks in accordance with the legal stipulations
- To plan for a realistic balance between tasks and time allocated to do them
- To ensure in advance that facilities and staffing levels reflect the professional standards required to do the job safely and communicate these requirements and standards in advance of any agreement with venues and establishments
- To communicate plans and schedules to freelancers alongside issuing contracts. With detailed schedules to follow as soon as available.
- To ask all freelancers what they need to do their best job
- To ask all freelancers if they have a particular working methodology that enables them to work at their best and to fulfil and accommodate these where possible

- To guarantee that complaints will be dealt with seriously and confidentially.

<sup>[5]</sup>The elements needed to fulfill the pledges outlined in the Working Conditions section will vary according to the nature of the work being undertaken, and as such we have not stipulated here what the various requirements might be. The needs of a technician or performer for a circus show will be different to someone delivering a storytelling workshop, and equally the needs of a freelancer on tour will be different to a freelancer doing a half-day job.

## SUSTAINABILITY

In order to reflect the feedback of freelancers that issues related to climate change and environment are important to them, Turtle Key Arts, collaborating companies and artists pledge:

- To agree sustainability targets, short term and long term for energy usage, travel, reducing waste, recycling etc., accounting for current budget restrictions.
- Pledge to use 'green riders' when touring
- To be held accountable to the company's Green Pledge

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## APPENDIX

### Freelancer Pay Pledge 2026/2027

*These rates vary in scale with the minimum and maximum scale of pay that is achievable for the size of the organisations involved. The rate payable will be determined by scale of project, available budget and funding, and role within the project. All projects managed by TKA will adhere to this and all partner companies /artists which TKA work directly with will adopt this policy. These currently include: Ockham's Razor, Open Sky Productions, Sadiq Ali Company, AIK Productions and Amici Dance Theatre Company.*

RATES	FEE	NOTES
Daily- Full working day	£140 up to £250	* A full day is defined as 8 hours plus breaks, not exceeding a 12-hour day
Half Day/ Session/ Workshop / Rehearsal / Planning (In person)	£100-£175	*Half days rehearsal/workshop (no more than 3 hours incl travel)
Half Day/ Session/ Workshop / Rehearsal / Planning (online)	£85-£150	* No more than 3 hours
Production/Project Meetings-online	£50- £70	* Outside of contractual agreement i.e. This only applies to those being engaged on a daily rate basis. Minimum 1 hour- Maximum 2.5 hours.
Production/Project Meetings-in person	£60-£100	* This only applies to those being engaged on a daily rate basis.
Weekly	£640 up to £800	* 5 days in a row. Any additional days will be agreed in advance and paid at a additional daily rate
Travel day	£100	* A full day's travel (over 3 hours in one direction)
Half travel day	£55	* Where the journey time is expected to be less than 3 hours in one direction

<b>PER DIEM</b>		<b>* Per diems will be paid directly into the freelancer's bank account via BACS</b>
Per diem on tour (where breakfast is provided)	£26	* If you do not wish for the company to provide you with breakfast on tour (where possible) please state at the beginning of the tour.
Per diem on tour (where breakfast is not provided)	£36	
Full Travel Day per diem	£20	*Only where travel time is expected to be over 3 hours
Per diem on tour per week when staying in self-catered accommodation 5-7 days	£150	
<b>ACCOMODATION</b>		
Accommodation will be booked by the company unless discussed otherwise. When booked by the Company accommodation will be a minimum of 3 Stars. If staying in shared accommodation (i.e. Airbnb/theatre digs) you will have your own room you will not have to share a bathroom with more than 2 other people.	Booked by company	* please note often our accommodation is mixed unless discussed otherwise. *In line with our environmental policy, we will book the most ecologically sound accommodation within the availability of our budgets. *where food allergies are present please notify TKA as soon as possible so we can accommodate accordingly.
Daily accommodation allowance where company member stays with friends (not own home)	£29 per night	*Please note this doesn't include staying with partners or immediate close family- this is to be discussed with the company involved.
<b>CREATIVES</b>		
Creative Fees- (Directors/ Designers/ Choreographers/ Writers/ Lighting Designers/ Sound Designers/ AV Designers/ Movement Directors and Productions Managers)	Varying	* We will discuss and negotiate with the freelancer and agent, as appropriate, based on the demand of the role and experience. We guarantee to pay in accordance with the <a href="#">ITC rates of pay</a> and above when possible.

