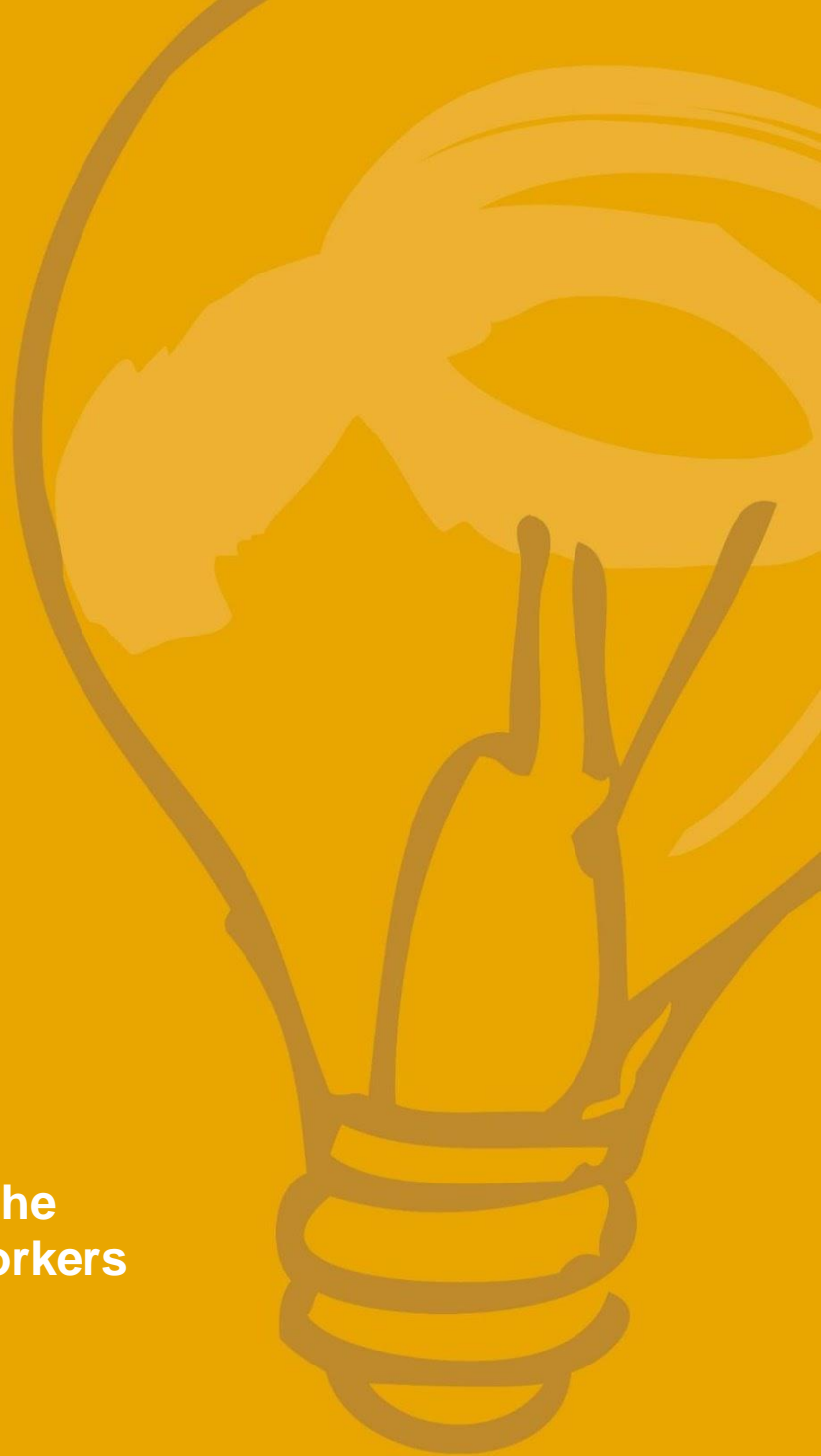


Impact of the Pandemic on the Livelihood of Visual Arts Workers

Research Overview Report

September 2021





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Introduction

Contemporary Visual Arts Network (CVAN), working with other UK based visual arts sector support and professional bodies, commissioned a UK wide study into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related lockdown on the sector. This is the second study of its type and a follow on from the study conducted last year during the pandemic and related lockdown in the UK. In May 2020 the first study acted as a rapid action tool to understand the position of the workforce dependent on freelance gig economy in the visual arts sector in the UK at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. This second study provides evidence on the current situation of the workforce in the visual arts sector in the UK. In addition to the impact of the lockdowns and restrictions, the study also investigated the response of the sector to emergency sector support measures announced by *Arts Council England (ACE)* and *HM Treasury*.

The study was delivered by *Earthen Lamp* and funded by *CVAN Contemporary Visual Arts Network England*, *Artquest*, *Red Eye - The Photography Network*, and *Visual Arts Group Wales*. Further in-kind support was provided by a-n, The Artist Information Company and it was distributed by the Visual Arts Alliance of sector support organisations. As key sector support organisations working to support the visual arts in its broadest sense, the findings from the study aim to inform how best to deploy their capacity and resources over the challenging time ahead. The findings will also act as an evidence base to advocate for artists and arts professionals in a position of hardship over the coming months and to gain a better sense of the economic and non-economic position of the sector's key workers. This study included responses from a range of individuals that work in the visual arts sector - from artists and makers to technicians and fabricators, from curators to consultants. The overview of the findings from this study have been compiled in this report.

Methodology

The study was conducted through an online survey available in English and Welsh. The survey, hosted by *Earthen Lamp*, was circulated nationally to visual arts workers through established networks of the partner organisations. The online survey was live for 37 days from 2 August 2021 to 7 September 2021 and a total of 674 completed surveys were received in that period. This report presents a broad overview of the key findings from the survey based on the overall data set. Please note that some level of duplication has been noted in the data set and all quantitative findings have a margin of error of $\pm 2\%$.

More nuanced analysis of the data can be conducted to meet specific purposes and for more in-depth analysis of the findings by region or specific demographic definitions. Please get in touch if this is of interest to you.



Summary of findings

Key findings

- 41% of respondents reported loss of contracted work because of the pandemic and related lockdown
- 48% reported that the pandemic had an impact on their ability to get future contracts and commissions
- 28% of respondents indicated that they have applied for income support and were successful while 7% were not successful. A further 25% of respondents found themselves ineligible for support
- 34% were satisfied with the support measures announced by strategic bodies in response to the pandemic and lockdown, while 66% felt that other support measures were needed
- 70% were not aware of non-economic measures in place by professional bodies and support organisations. 18% were aware of training resources, 17% knew about new skills programmes while 9% were aware of financial management advice
- 70% of respondents indicated that their income had reduced as a result of the pandemic while 7% indicated that their income had increased as a result of the pandemic
- 34% indicated that they had lost more than £10,000 in income as a result of the pandemic
- 28% indicated that they had lost income of between £1,000-£5,000
- 48% indicated that the pandemic had affected their international connections and opportunities. Respondents reported the cancellation or postponement of performances, exhibitions, or projects abroad, general inability/difficulties in travelling abroad, as well as a negative impact on communication, collaboration, and networking
- 7% had to give up their studio and/or office space
- 13% managed to keep their studio and/or office space due to rent break. 2% funded this through the Cultural Recovery Fund
- Respondents identified a variety of issues as the wider impact of the pandemic on their artistic practice. A third of respondents pointed to loss of work, income or opportunities. However, mental health struggles were also frequently mentioned
- Many positive and unexpected impacts were noted, e.g. increased engagement with digital and online connectivity as an outcome of their experience, and time to reflect on creative practice
- 69% of respondents were artists or makers while 11% were photographers and 9% curators, producers and project managers
- 74% have worked in the visual arts sector for ten years, while 6% have for less than three years
- 41% were fully dependent on the visual arts sector for their income, while 19% were dependent on it for less than a quarter of their overall income
- 29% of respondents were between 55-64, 26% were between 45-54, and about 8% were younger than 35
- 74% of respondents identified as White (English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British)
- At least 19% of respondents identified as deaf or disabled
- 57% of respondents are happy to be contacted in the future for further research

Comparative findings from Phase 1 (2020) and Phase 2 (2021)

Phase 1 of the study into livelihoods of Visual Arts Workers was delivered at the start of the pandemic and lockdown in May 2020. This study had 1,045 respondents across England. Just over a year on, Phase 2 of the study in some sense examined the reality as compared to the anxieties expressed in Phase 1 and the perception of level of usefulness of the support measures announced in May 2020. Some of the comparative findings are presented below

- Satisfaction with the support measures has increased. This can be evidenced by 66% of the residents in 2021 (as compared to 74% of respondents in 2020) requesting other types of support measures.
- A larger percentage of respondents were not looking for economic support now (as compared to the start of the pandemic). In May 2020, 8% of respondents were not looking for support. In August 2021 this had increased to 17%.
- The percentage of respondents who faced the indefinite postponement of contracted work had dropped from 51% to 35% (see figure 1). This indicates that some projects that were postponed at the start of the pandemic were now taking place or had now been rescheduled.
- Some interesting trends can be seen with regards to the economic support measures announced by strategic bodies for Visual Arts Workers (see figure 2). Having had the economic support in 2021 more respondents found it useful than originally perceived (33% in 2021 as compared to 24% in 2020).
- Interestingly, a larger percentage of respondents in 2021 perceived the support measures as not at all useful to them (a rise from 15% in 2020 to 25% in 2021).

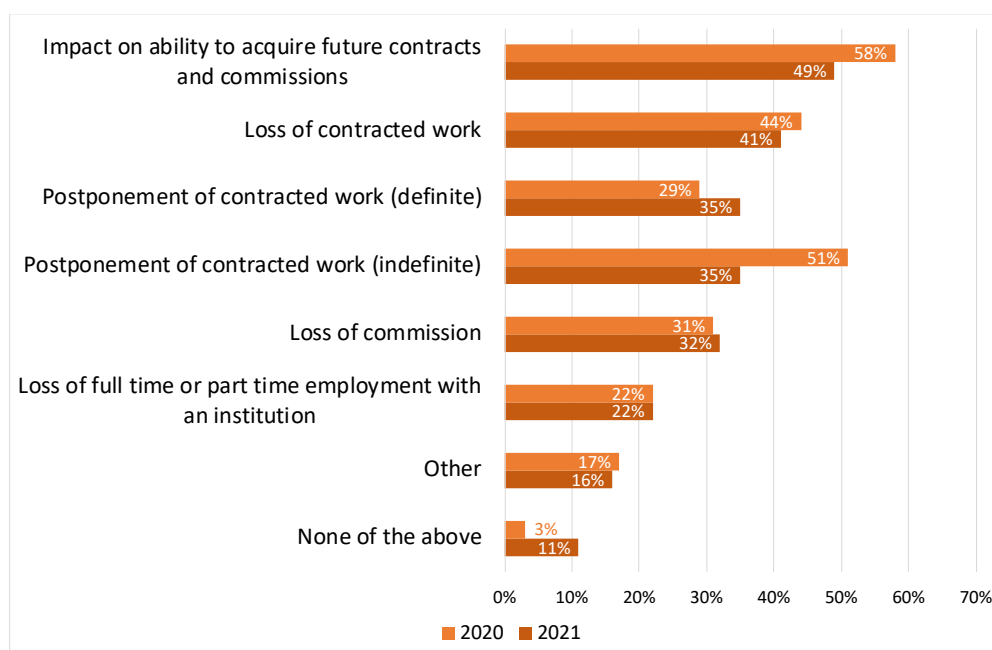


Figure 1: Effects of pandemic and related government announcements on visual arts work in 2020 and 2021



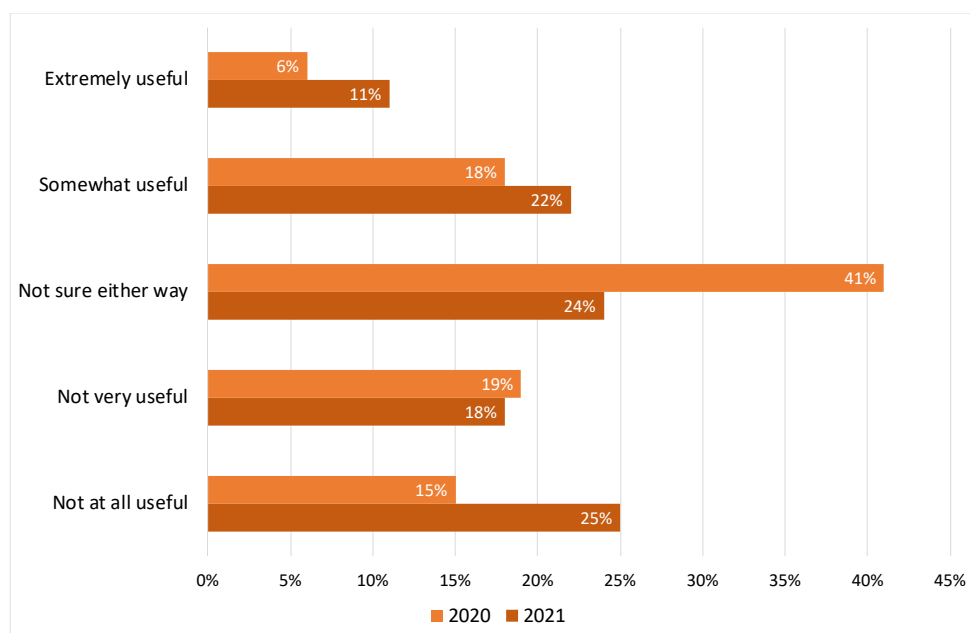


Figure 2: Perceived usefulness of sector support measures in 2020 and 2021

Detailed findings

Impact of pandemic and related announcements

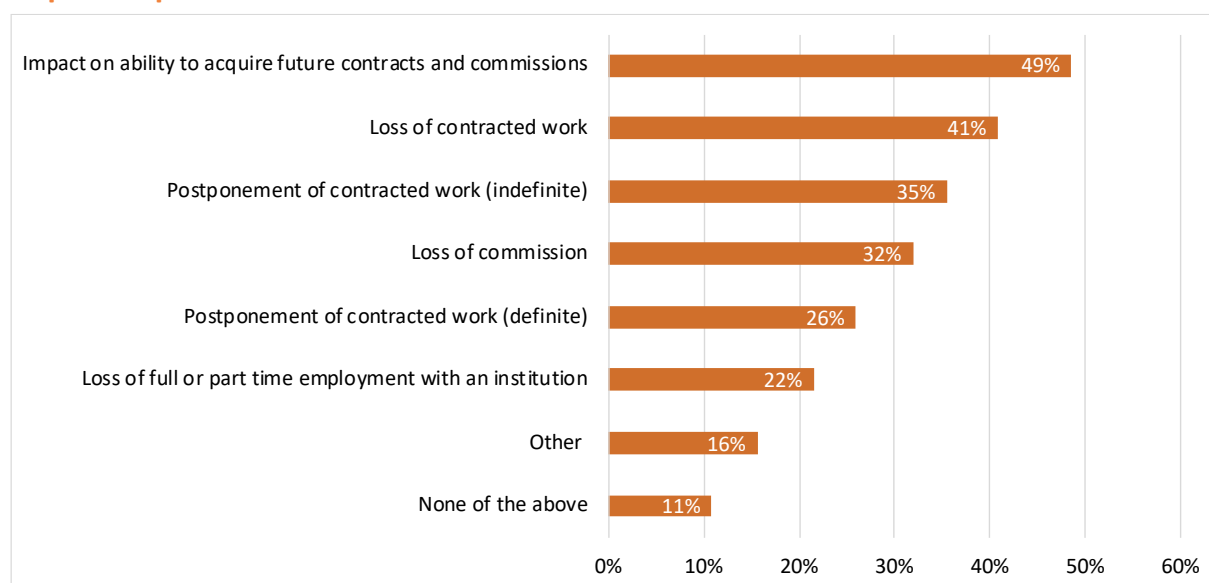


Figure 1: Effect of pandemic and related government announcements on visual arts work

Please note that respondents were able to select more than one response to this question.

Respondents were asked to indicate how the pandemic had affected their work. While some respondents increased their workload during the pandemic, most suffered a loss of income with, “greater competition for funding from ACE and other organisations” and “loss of sales”. Loss of venues such as galleries and studios

compounded this issue, and networking and communication were negatively affected. A number of respondents reported that their wellbeing has suffered.

“I lost all my income over night. It’s massively affected my mental health & confidence.”

Others struggled with the effects of physical ill health including COVID-19. Some respondents felt that the government and Arts Council England were not supportive of the sector. While some respondents were able to adapt to new ways of working, this was not always viewed positively as it could create “pressure”. Some artists welcomed the opportunity to have time for reflection, but others struggled to juggle work and family responsibilities. Some also felt that the challenges of the pandemic negatively affected their creativity.

“Lost ability to think creatively.”

Accessing sector support measures

With regards to sector support measures announced by professional bodies, respondents were asked which of the following statements applied to them.

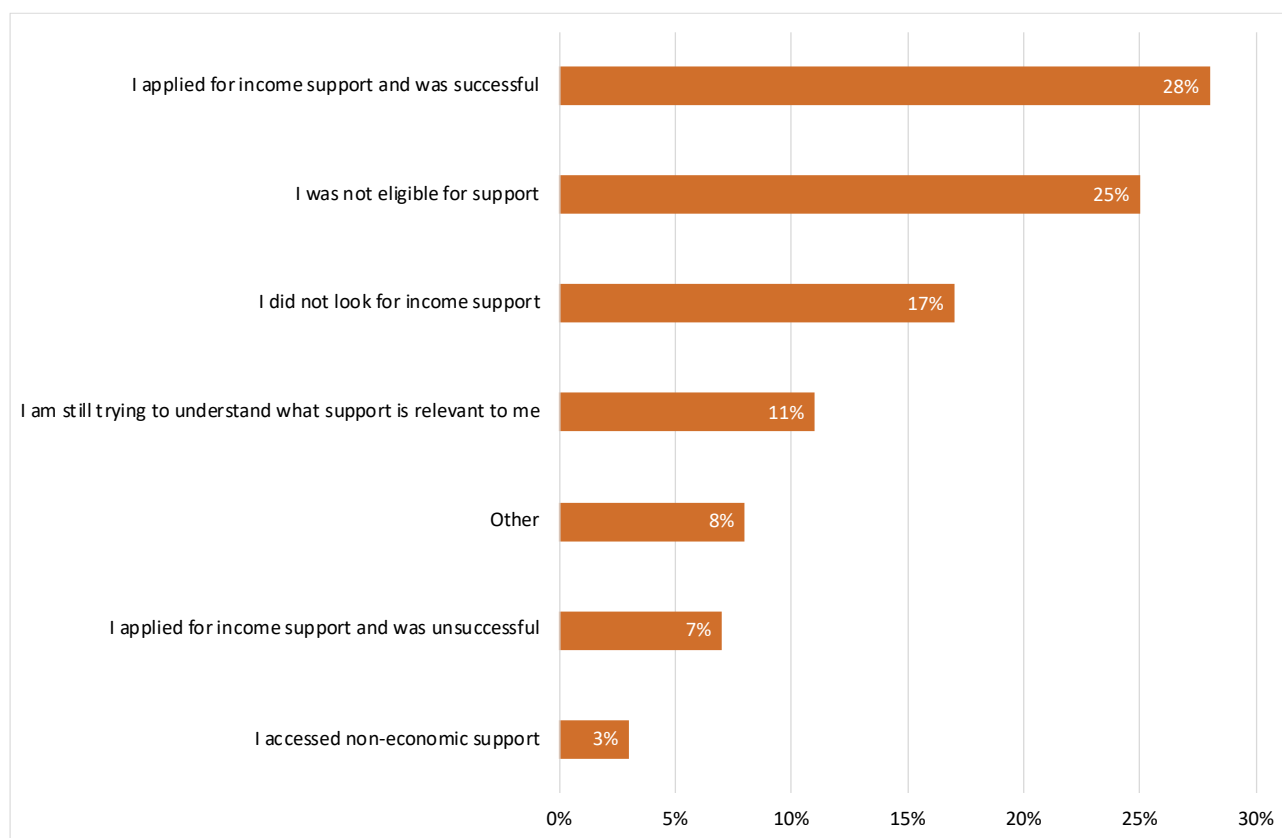


Figure 3: Accessing sector support measures

A quarter of respondents found themselves ineligible for support because their income from self-employment in the qualifying period was under the threshold for various reasons, e.g. due to other part-time employment, long term medical treatment or only became self-employed shortly before the pandemic started. 17% did not look for support and 11% were still in the process of figuring out what type of support they could apply for.

The perception of the support measures varied. Many respondents reported that they applied for several different grants and were successful. However, the amount of funding granted was often described as very



small and drastically less compared to potential earnings before the pandemic. Some respondents relied on the furlough scheme and self-employment support.

Relevance of the support measures

Respondents were asked to indicate which of the pandemic support measures announced by the government and related bodies since 2020 were applicable to them.

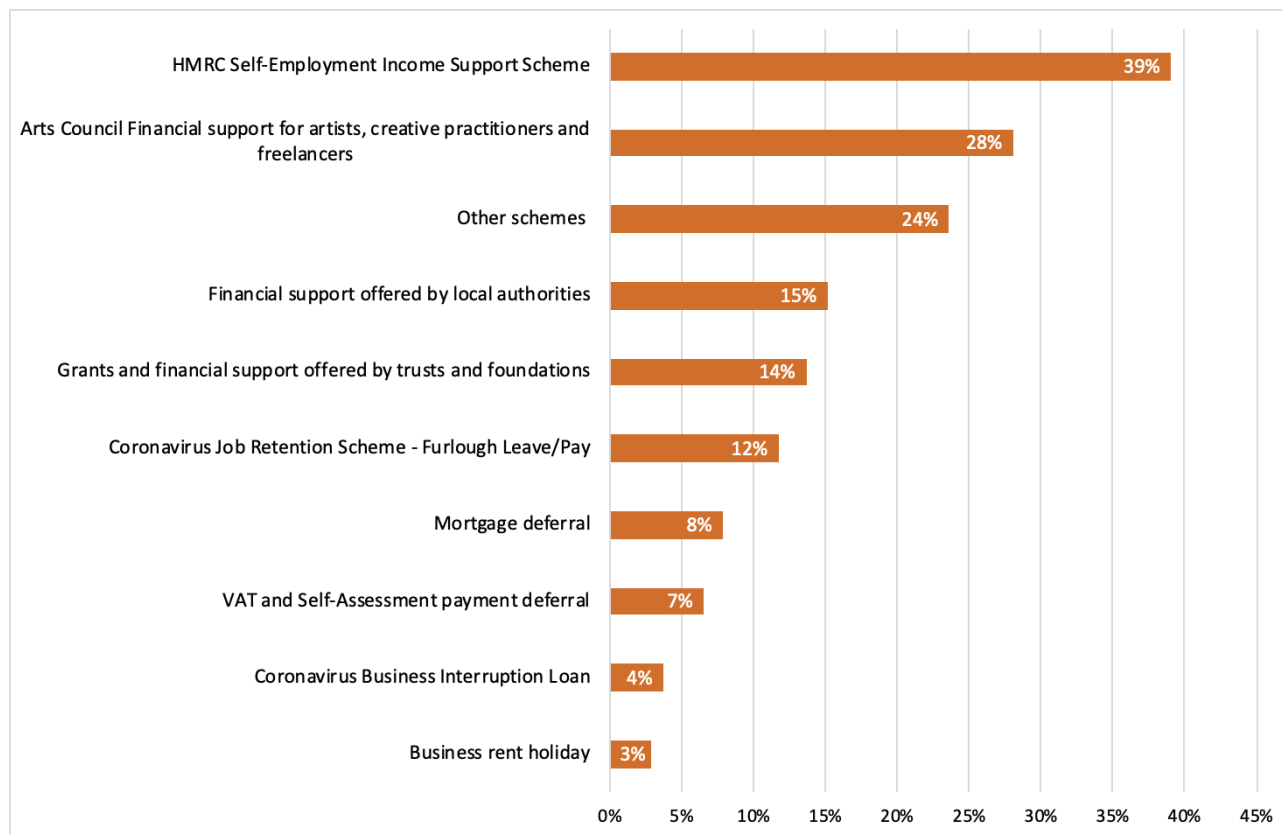


Figure 4: Applicable support measures

A number of respondents applied for and received grants including those from Arts Councils in their nations, bounce back loans, or business support as well as some from individual art institutions. Many respondents did not, however, receive any support at all, with some having applications turned down, some not applying for any support, and others believing that there was no relevant support available.

Some respondents did access general, non-COVID related support from the government such as Universal Credit or relied on personal incomes such as pensions or savings during the pandemic and lockdown.

Usefulness of sector support measures

Respondents provided information about the degree of usefulness of the sector support measures to help with their creative practice and work in visual arts.

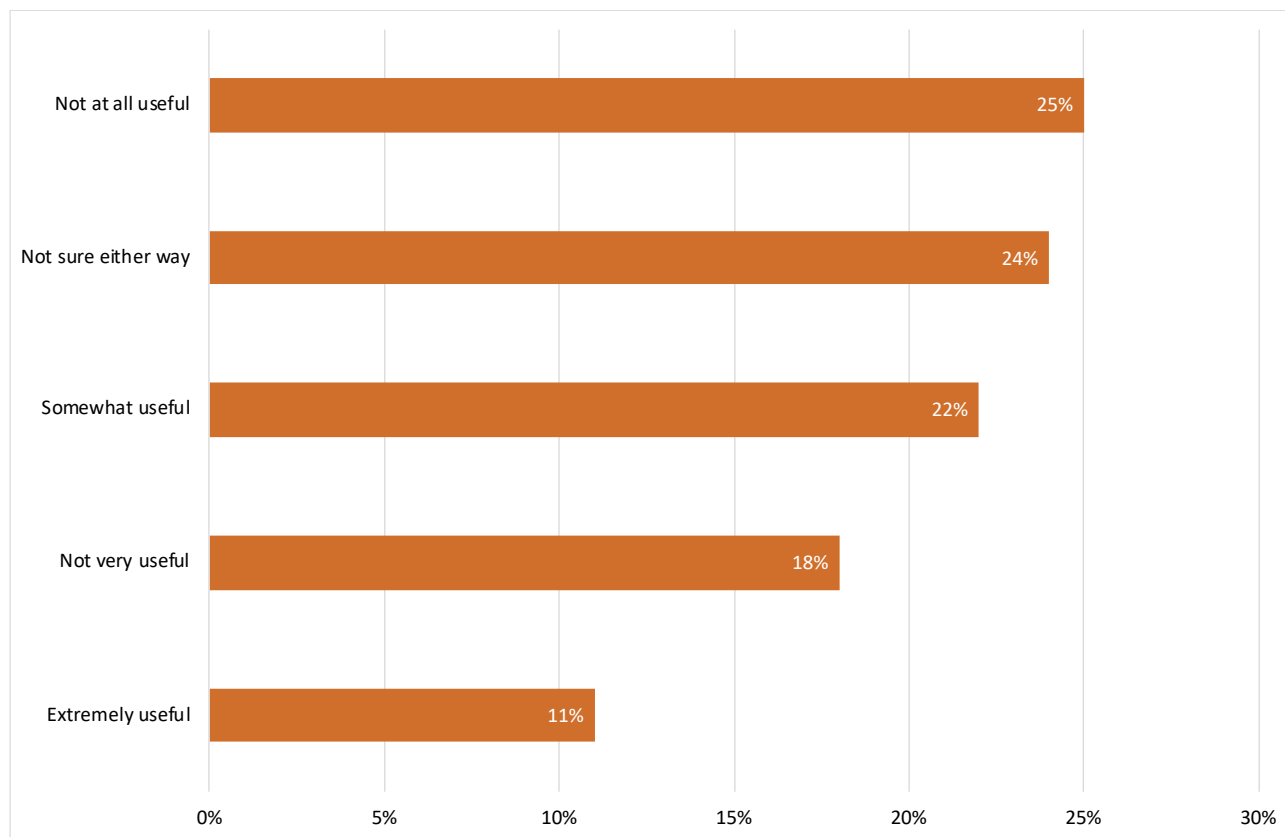


Figure 5: Usefulness of sector support measures

A third of all respondents found that the sector support measures were useful for supporting their artistic practice and work in the visual arts sector while a further quarter were not sure if these were useful to them in this way.



Satisfaction with the level of support

Respondents indicated their level of satisfaction related to the variety of options offered by Arts Council England and other professional bodies. The data indicates that two-thirds of respondents were satisfied with the options provided.

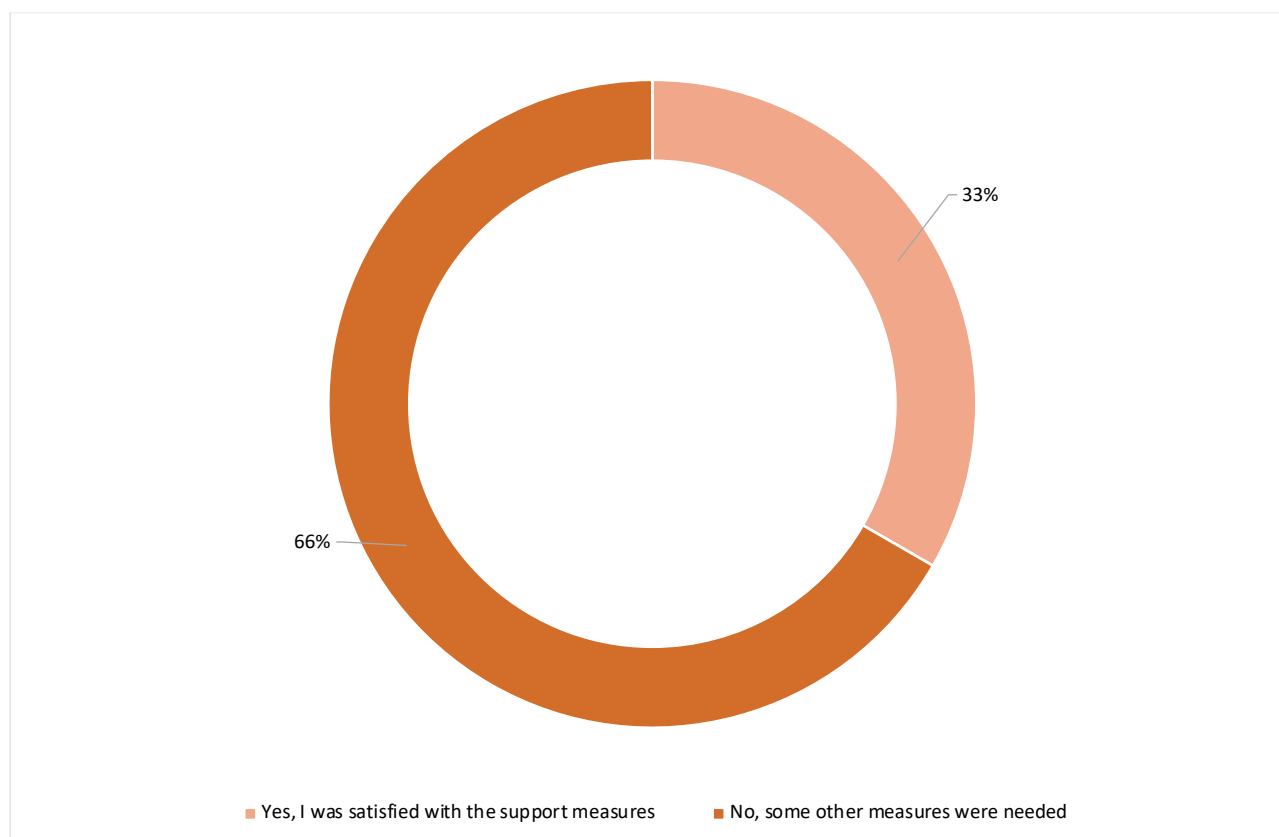


Figure 6: Level of satisfaction with the current support measures

Suggestions for other support measures

Respondents were asked to share their ideas for further support measures that would be useful to visual arts workers. While 236 respondents did not supply an answer to this question, there were 439 responses which were thematically coded as well as being read through individually for tone and sense. Percentages discussed below refer to the 439 completed entries against this question.

Around 20% of those who offered a response (82 entries) referred to the challenges faced by ineligibility of support, with many expressing the difficulties faced by freelancers. Many of these comments reflected the wish of respondents for more understanding of their individual circumstances.

"I am sure there was many people like me, unable to cross the right boxes, therefore unable to claim anything."

"I wasn't eligible for any of the support I saw available. I did find there to be a lot of support out there however, which was amazing to see, I just wasn't eligible as someone who lost my zero-hour job and went freelance during the pandemic."

In terms of financial support, 10% (43 respondents) simply expressed a general need for more, with some requesting funding for specific types of work. An improved application process for funding was requested by 8% of respondents (35 individuals).



“Further financial help to help with the future without confirmed arts related work, commissions or successfully funded projects.”

“I have never been successful for Arts Council funding and always felt like I needed an English degree to get it. It should be easier to access.”

Advice and guidance, in a wide range of areas, was deemed potentially useful by 7% of respondents (32 individuals).

“I would have liked information regarding dealing with landlords - paying full studio rent during lockdown was crippling.”

A similar number of comments related to the need for better information about support available, or a simple lack of awareness of what was out there.

“First clear communication about what was available. Who could apply. When. I was home-schooling two kids and trying to hold down the last bit of work I had. A friend forwarded an email with Arts Council support - I found it impenetrable...Most [people] I speak to can't fathom the application process.”

“I did not know what Arts Council support was available to me so better publicity would have been good.”

There was a general feeling, expressed by 6% of respondents (25 individuals), that individuals needed to be direct recipients of financial support from the government and strategic bodies, rather than receiving support via other cultural organisations.

“ACE gave one emergency grant to freelancers but spent millions on supporting institutions - many of whom went on to cut front of house roles despite this investment. This was supposed to 'trickle-down' to equate to support of freelancers but many of us have received very little from these institutions.”

“Arts Council supports organisations not individuals. Time that changed.”

While some respondents expressed that they needed more support, many (5%, 24 individuals) felt that support ought to be more equitably shared between artists. Some of these comments reflected the view that some funding decisions were unfair. Some respondents (4%, 19 individuals) were not sure what would help them or just wanted any help available.

“Too be honest I'm not sure. I'm not really a fan of relying on welfare but as this has gone on so long and everyone else seems to be getting financial support it seems a bit unfair how little financial support creative people received. Myself included.”

Few comments (18) referred to the need for ongoing support. Likewise, a similar number (17) referred to the need for more work or opportunities to support the recovery of visual arts workers now and after the pandemic.

“Given the scale of grant from ACE, I was expecting this to be a recurring opportunity, supporting artists as the pandemic became long term.”

The suggestion of a regular or universal basic income was made by around 3% of respondents (13 individuals).



“Universal basic income for artists - guaranteed income, not one-off small fee for select individuals.”

Around 2% of respondents expressed a need for positive changes for those working across the sector. Some individuals commented that more support for established artists was needed; whereas a similar number felt that it was emerging artists and venues who needed this support. Local support would have been welcomed by some respondents. Others felt that an individualised assessment of financial needs, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, would be best. Training and learning in a range of areas was also requested. A similar number (2% of respondents, 77 individuals) expressed that they either did not need further support or did not want any.

Other suggestions from smaller numbers of respondents (<2%,) included more networking opportunities, separate support for those ineligible for government support, support for small organisations/venues, support for those with families, and coaching/mentoring.

Wider impact of the pandemic on artistic practice

Respondents were asked to illustrate the wider impact of the pandemic and lockdown on their practice. 43 respondents to the survey did not supply an answer to this question. There were 633 responses which were thematically coded as well as being read through individually for tone and sense. Percentages discussed below refer to the 633 completed entries against this question.

Almost one-third of those who offered a response (202 entries) referred explicitly to a loss of work, income or opportunities or entire businesses.

“I had an international exhibition cancelled. All my commercial work is at about 10% as it was before. I’m the breadwinner for my family and we’re struggling to pay the bills.”

In terms of financial support, 5% (34 respondents) commented on a lack of support or ineligibility for support; 3% (20 respondents) noted that they had received some financial support, though many of these commented that this was still not enough.

“I was able to keep my practice going, but it was harder to make a living and grants became more competitive than ever since everyone was desperate and applying for them. I teach private classes which needed to be much smaller but didn't qualify for aid I think because my income is low, and I end up pay little taxes.”

“I was lucky to pick up casual lecturing, without which it would have been extremely difficult. I managed to get ACE emergency funding, but most other funded opportunities asked applicants to ‘respond to the pandemic’ - the last thing I or many of my colleagues wanted to do.”

The highest percentage of comments (39%, 244 responses) related to learning, adapting and new ways of working, showing the adaptability of artists to changing circumstances. These responses include comments relating to forced change, but also to positive aspects of learning new skills, development of practice, and the ability to access learning opportunities online.

“A plus has been online access to talks, seminars, training sessions. Even some art events - often free. Use of a computer has increased exponentially, unfortunately.”

“Has pushed me to develop working online and develop my technical skills - thus reaching to a wider audience.”



However, 6% of respondents (40 individuals) commented on the challenges and limitations of moving online, such as issues related to technology and the inability for virtual viewing of art to replace the experience of viewing it directly.

“What work I've had during the pandemic has proven that some things can move online but has also reinforced my belief that digital/online is a substitute (i.e., better than nothing) and not a replacement for my actual practice.”

Mental health and wellbeing of respondents and peers were referred to in 33% of comments (206 entries). While a few of these related to no change in wellbeing, or an improvement, the vast majority expressed challenges relating to deterioration of mental health explicitly or to factors linked to poor mental health such as isolation, stress, worry, or loss of confidence and self-esteem.

“My mental health has gone downhill, seriously downhill. I miss, so much, friends, company, and communication with art directors etc. We are all social beings...missing other social beings.”

“Mental health, self-worth, self-value, loss of identity.”

Some of these responses are linked to the isolation felt by artists who expressed the negative impact of restrictions on travel and face-to-face contact caused by COVID-19 on communication, collaboration, and networking. Such difficulties and the knock-on negative effect on building relationships, support networks and future sales were expressed by 17% of respondents (109 comments).

“It's been so much harder to connect and network with others as connecting digitally just isn't the same. This has definitely had an impact on my mental health with an increased sense of loneliness.”

“The pandemic has made collaboration impossible. My art involves highly technical application (Physics and laser safe studio space) and I work with scientists and researchers. All have been out of bounds, so I have not been able to meet and discuss themes or produce anything at all.”

On the other hand, 6% of respondents (38 individuals) commented that they had found opportunity to communicate more easily with others, particularly due to the move online which broke down geographical barriers.

“I have acquired new galleries as a result of galleries being online more, in particular galleries outside of my geographic area. I also entered into a project with a fellow artist that was a response to the pandemic which was fulfilling and led to other things. Because I had good networks before the pandemic, I was able to utilise those but in new ways, online.”

“Led to connecting online with international collaborations, making global possibilities for my practice more accessible and my confidence growing with personal introductions and shared visions.”

The loss/inaccessibility of venues/facilities was included in the comments of 8% of respondents (49 individuals), with the closures of galleries and loss of studios due to financial difficulties represented, as well as difficulty in accessing venues due to travel restrictions and, in one case, the loss of the respondent's home.



“Collaborative work and networking have been stifled. Exhibitions of my work cancelled and indefinitely postponed. Travel restrictions meant non-access to studio facilities & to other necessary facilities, e.g., print workshops, limiting production of artwork & closure of training opportunities.”

Time to reflect on practice or to work without disruption was cited as a positive outcome of COVID-19 restrictions by 8% of respondents (53 comments).

“On a positive note, having more studio time did give me chance to evaluate my practice, exploring my medium more and trying new styles of work.”

“I had time to develop some new skills and time to stop and think about my practice. These were good things that made me realise how little time I have for this normally.”

However, other individuals (6%, 39 respondents) found that the situation had a negative impact on creativity, inspiration, or focus, often due to the impact on their mental health.

“Huge impact on mental health which affected my creativity amongst other things. I was unable to fully participate in the projects I took part. The constant need of looking performative online and on social media was a cause of stress which led to unhealthy comparisons to my practice.”

“Work that I rely on to give me an income was non-existent with workshops and fairs cancelled. Unable to make any sales. I switched off from my creative practice. Unable to concentrate.”

The challenge of juggling family responsibilities with work was expressed by 4% of respondents (28 individuals), a particular difficulty for carers and those home-schooling children.

“Having to home-school and then also take on care of elderly parent after death of mother has meant I have just about covered my overheads but not taken any income from my work...I feel I’m in survival mode rather than using the time to develop new work which would have put me in better position once exhibition opportunities open up again. The home-schooling and care work has meant that I haven’t had the headspace to learn new technical skills that would have helped me teach online.”

“Home schooling my children took 80% of my time that I should have been working on my creative practice. And whilst I enjoyed my children being at home it was extremely difficult to focus when I did have time ‘to myself’.”

Some participants (3%, 22 individuals) expressed that they were contemplating or actually changing career/working more outside the sector due to the challenges of being an artist.

“I’ve had to look for other work and put being an artist on hold. It’s broken my heart.”

“Not sure if there is anything for me to return to! Work has ground to a halt and funding is even more competitive than ever. After 30 years I’m seriously wondering about a career change although I also can’t imagine where else I would want to be. It’s more than a job! Impact on women has been huge and I’m very concerned to see how that materialises in arts practice down the line.”

Other issues raised by smaller numbers of respondents (<2%) were feeling undervalued, damage to career progression, difficulties caused by Brexit, the view that artists need to be proactive to find work/funding, and the useful support of the Artist Support Pledge.

Positive or unexpected impacts and initiatives

Respondents were asked to illustrate positive or unexpected impacts of the pandemic and lockdown. 111 respondents to the survey did not supply an answer to this question. There were 565 detailed responses which were thematically coded as well as being read through individually for tone and sense. Percentages discussed below refer to the 565 completed entries against this question.

Around one-fifth of those who offered a response (113 entries) clarified that they had experienced no positive impacts from the pandemic or lockdown. This is broadly in line with the proportion of respondents to the earlier survey (in May 2020) who felt that there were no positive or unexpected outcomes of the situation. As with the previous survey, respondents approached the question in relation to both personal and professional aspects of their experience.

Over one-third of respondents (35% or 197 responses) made some reference to positive impacts of, or engagement with, digital and online connectivity as an outcome of their experience. Of these responses, the majority referred to the positive outcomes as the development of new skills, increased professional networks, and carrying out work online. For many, the ability to connect with other artists and creatives as part of a peer support network was equally as important as maintaining professional connections. This helped individuals to cope with the frequently cited mental health impacts of the pandemic, lockdown, and associated uncertainties.

"I have participated in and organised international online peer groups, which have provided peer support and a sense of connections/community whilst feeling very isolated. I have developed my skills to be able to work with different kinds of online contexts and platforms."

Whilst the shift to online was not the primary option for many artists' ways of working, there were several examples of respondents who had discovered how to make online formats work (well enough) for their practice. Some had adapted to teaching online, others made new connections with commissioners and audiences.

"Catapulted from a state of fear into a world I knew nothing about - I'm a hands on, intuitive artist thriving on the human experience - working face to face with people of all ages and abilities... to becoming confident and natural with Zoom, Teams, Meet etc - turning this into a confident, happy, joyful, productive experience. Learning to find my own way and style through all of this, to reflect as close to my live events as is possible."

Support schemes were noted as positive aspects by several respondents, including having received grant funding (3% of responses) and the boost provided by the Artists Support Pledge (2%).

Some noted that their income had increased due to a combination of online work, new commissions and grant support (8% of total responses / 47 individuals).

"Weirdly, 2020-2021 was my most financially successful year yet as a freelancer. This is down to a mix of low (zero) transport costs and being able to access a range of emergency funding opportunities (e.g. zero match funded ACE Project Grants & work on ACE Emergency Grant Funded projects) alongside picking up extra freelance work at particular moments. However, it has also led to complete over-work / feeling of burnout."



As in the previous survey, 'time' was frequently mentioned as an unexpected or positive outcome. This was spread across a range of examples, from unexpected time (and focus, in the context of the continued pandemic circumstances) to make new work, to the ability to address issues of work/life balance, through to reflecting on career opportunities, accessing training and professional updating, or simply rest and the health benefits that this afforded.

Where respondents discussed training and development, only a small proportion had accessed formal education or qualification routes (1%), with most referring to the ability to access high-quality talks and workshops online, both locally and further afield. Several sector-specific coaching or mentoring schemes for freelancers were mentioned.

Some respondents also noted the positive aspects of increased attention to issues of access and equality. However, this was not without cynicism, as one response pointed out:

"...when non-disabled people and people who live in major cities needed remote access, it was amazing how quickly accessibility, adjustment and understanding of how tough it is to work from home emerged. I don't think it will last though."

The sustainability of increased support to the creative sector, to artists and freelancers, and to specific demographic groups, was questioned by a number of respondents, despite recognising this as a positive at present. There were several examples of peer-generated support networks and advice sharing, both within professional circles and community focused.

"I set up with other AUE members the Artists' Union England Solidarity Fund which offers small scale instant access grants to members who need assistance with basic living expenses. I became more locally engaged - involved in setting up a Tenants & Residents Association on our estate. I did what I could to help the communities I am part of."

Finally, as with the previous survey, respondents saw a positive outcome of the pandemic in the increased interaction with their community. This included volunteering and fundraising, but also the establishment of support schemes (as above) and being able to work creatively and locally in new ways.

Feeling about the reopening of the sector and your work

Respondents were asked how they were feeling about the reopening of the sector and their work, which resulted in 643 responses. Just over one-third of these (35%) were broadly positive, with respondents saying they were keen to return to studios, galleries, and other spaces; and excited to make and share work.

Around 4% of the responses noted that they had not been particularly affected by either sector closure or reopening – due to working in isolation already, or because they lived and worked in an area with different guidance in place. The remainder of the responses were tentative or negative about the realities of returning to an open sector, with 28% of responses referring to anxiety in some way. Where this was explored in more detail, some respondents made a distinction between health anxiety due to underlying concerns or conditions, and social anxieties about compliance with guidance, or the impacts of future lockdowns.

Where respondents felt positive about reopening, this was often qualified with statements around confidence in the support and measures in place to manage risk. Across all responses (positive and negative) there were also comments around the nature of working in the sector, the support available within it, and the need for change.

"I want to get back to work and I'm not unduly worried about the virus. I'm much more concerned that the arts sector's business as usual, which its leaders are so eager to go back to, is totally unjust, unsustainable, unequal and relies on systemic, deliberate overworking and underpayment."



The precarious and structurally unequal nature of the sector was also highlighted in the previous survey. In this set of data there are continued inequalities in relation to people's experience of the pandemic, which is connected to their response to the reopening of venues and events. For those with more direct experience of health impacts or caring responsibilities, the reopening of venues and events is not as straightforward, and the experience of social distancing has not been wholly negative.

"The attitude of mask wearing by most people means I will continue to maintain as little social contact as possible. I was shielding for most of 2020 and quite like having the space to think and work."

Some respondents discussed their anxiety and uncertainty in the context of mixed guidance, variable interpretation of safety measures, and the possibility of rapid changes or 'pings' meaning that venues or activities might have to close or be reprogrammed at short notice. As above, there was anxiety around managing social interactions, combined with the additional planning requirements of these rapid changes to guidance - on top of over twelve months of uncertainty. The cumulative impacts of this were a source of concern for some respondents.

"I feel anxieties re COVID have eased now. But I am feeling stressed from heavy workload versus too little income."

Whilst many respondents noted positive aspects to the availability of online talks and professional updating, and some had used a fallow earning period as a chance to access formal training, the impacts on income have been significant and stressful. In the previous survey, respondents had noted the significance of medium-to-longer term challenges to practice and funding, and this appears to be playing through in responses discussing the difficulties in accessing support in the context of a struggling sector.

"I feel the sector to be at exhaustion point and working to NPO deadlines and short turnaround emergency funding bids is demanding additional hours that add to exhaustion."

Connected to the difficulties faced by the sector as whole, and the inequalities within it that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, some respondents are considering leaving the sector altogether. This was a small proportion of this sample (2%).

"I have concerns of returning to a sector where fewer commissions, or contracts are available to freelancer practitioners, or where people are handpicked for jobs. I'm considering a change of career in order to be in a position to contribute equally to my household financial demands."



Impact on rented studio or office space

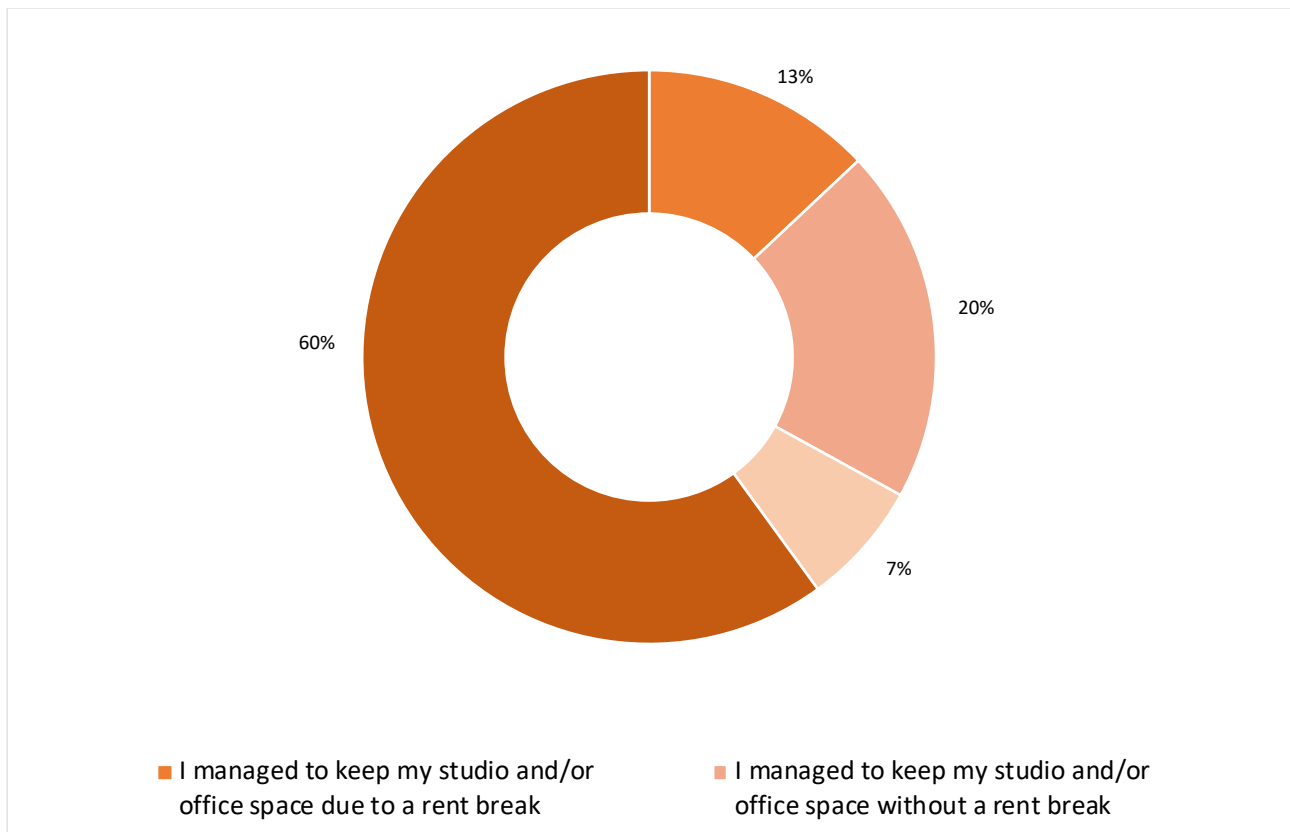


Figure 7: Impact on rented studio or office space

Respondents that rented their place of work i.e. studio or office space were asked to comment on how these were maintained during the pandemic.

Out of those who have accessed a rent break for their studio or office space, less than one fifth reported that it was funded through the Cultural Recovery Fund.

Economic impact of pandemic

Respondents were asked to respond to the following statements in relation to the impact of the pandemic on their overall income. Seven out of ten respondents noted a reduction in income.

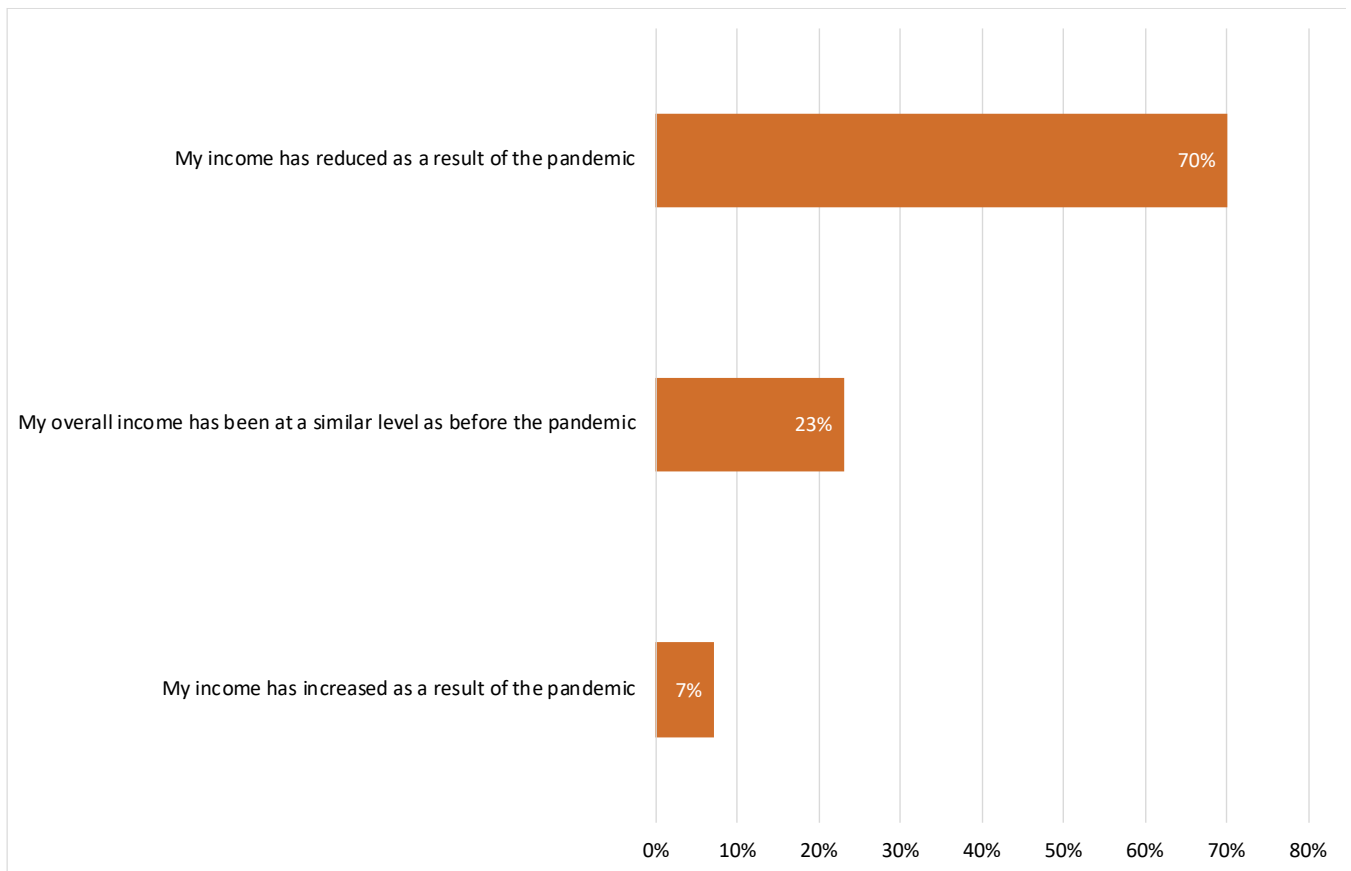


Figure 8: Impact on overall income



Financial loss due to pandemic

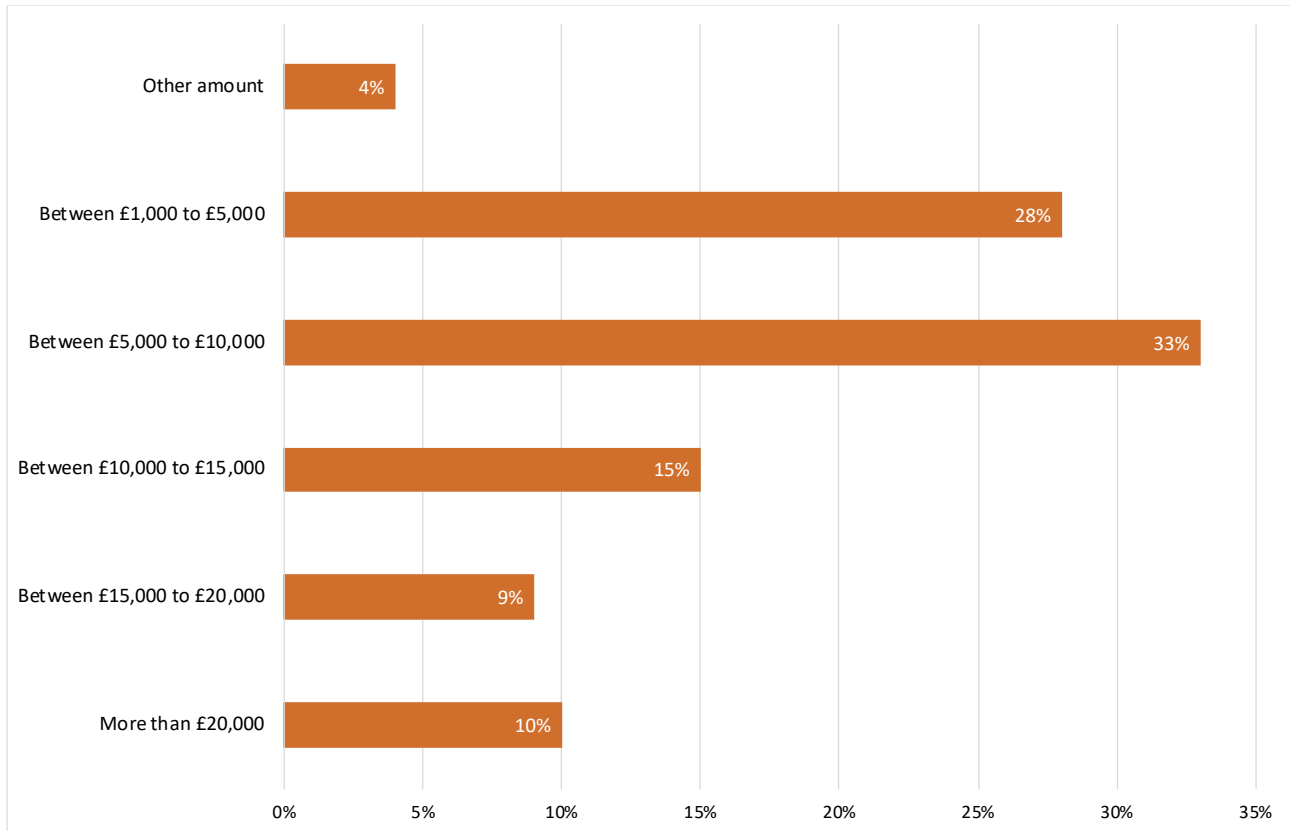


Figure 9: Financial loss due to pandemic

Respondents were asked to estimate how much their income had been reduced in the last year due to the impact of the pandemic. We find that around a third of all respondents lost between £5,000 and £10,000.

Awareness of non-economic support measures

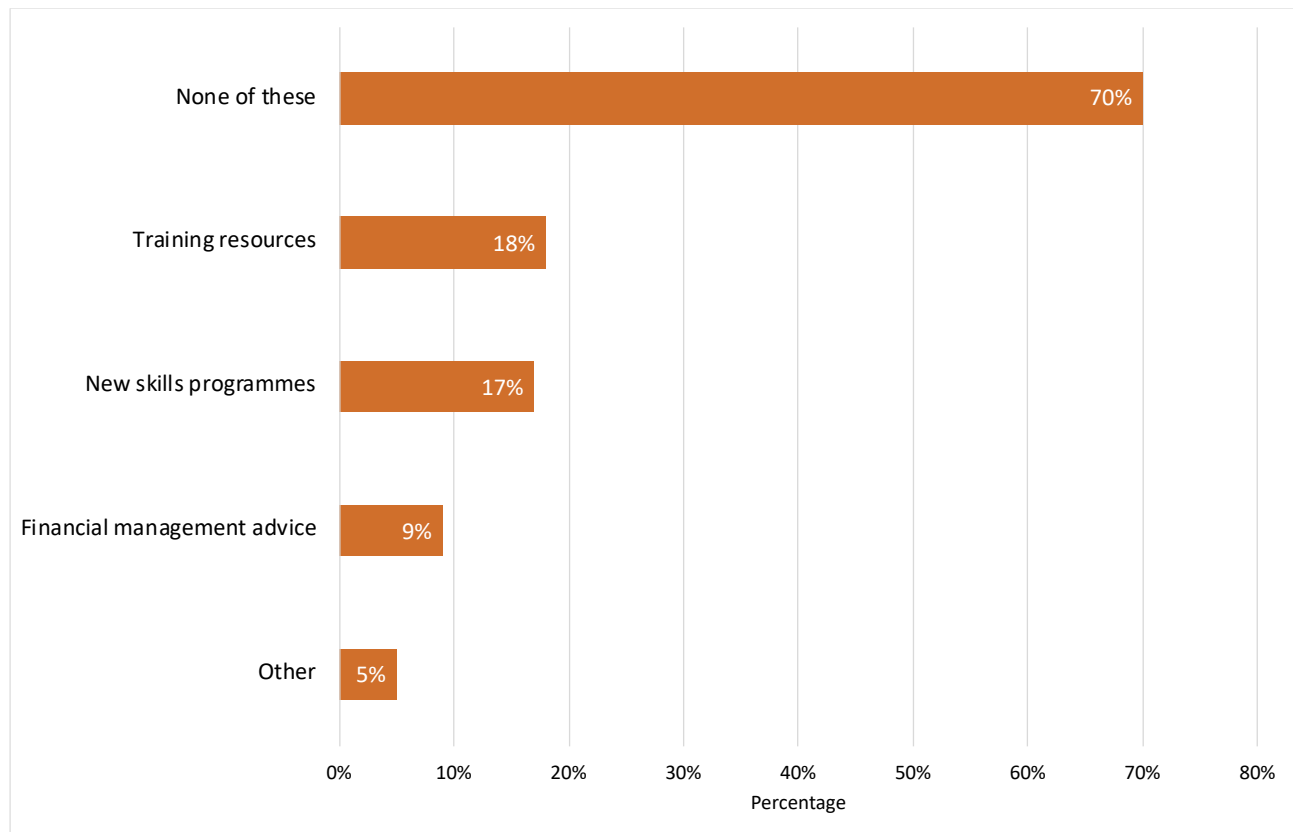


Figure 10: Awareness of other support measures

Please note that respondents were able to select more than one response to this question.

When asked about other measures put in place by professional bodies to support them during the pandemic 70% of respondents indicated that they were not aware of any such measure. Some of the measures mentioned by respondents that they were aware of included information sessions about how to apply for grants and mentoring and networking programmes.

International connections and opportunities

Respondents were asked to indicate negative and positive impacts of the pandemic on their international connection and opportunities. Interestingly, under half of all respondents indicated that the pandemic and related lockdown had indeed made an impact in this area.



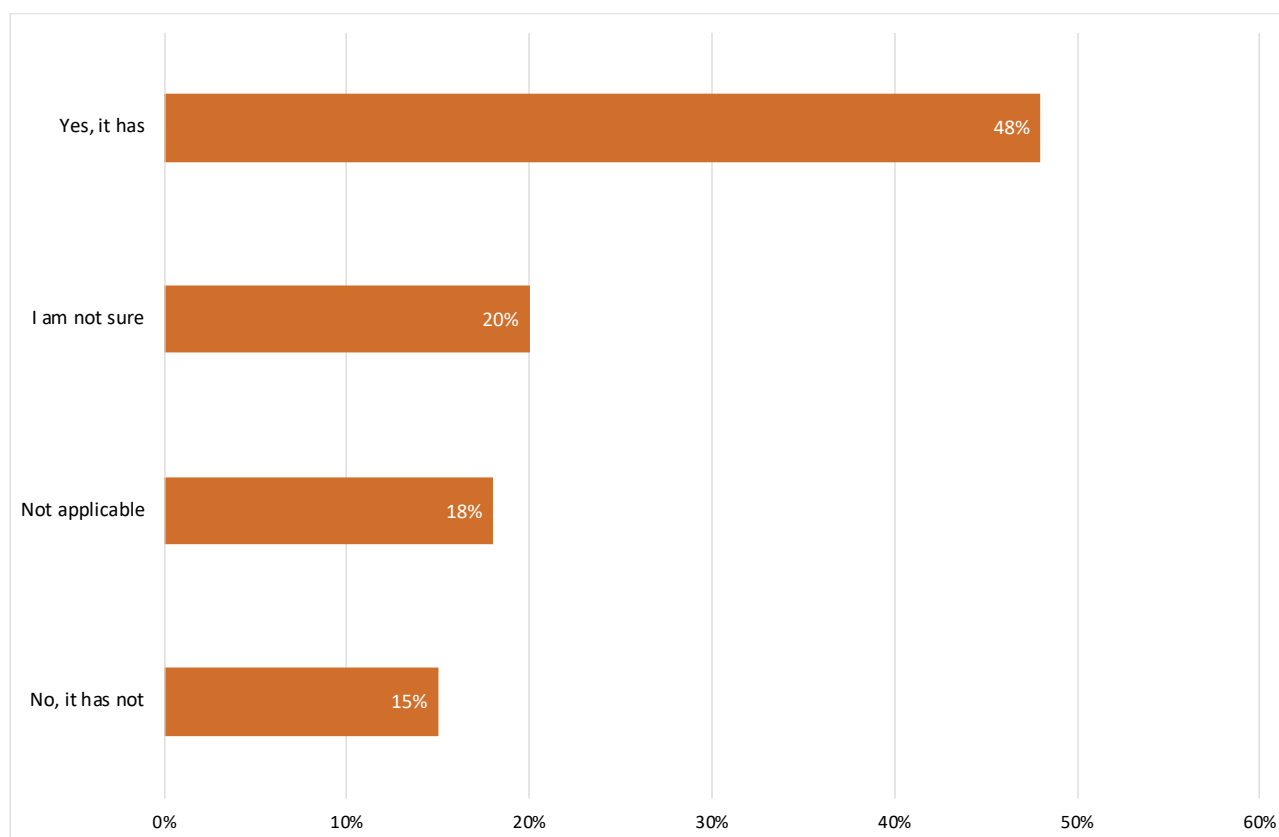


Figure 11: International connections and opportunities

Some of the recurring topics related to negative effects included the following:

- Brexit: impact on travel and costs
- Cancelled or postponed performances, exhibitions, or projects abroad
- Funding/rates of pay directly affected
- Inability/difficulties in travelling abroad: general
- Loss of possible future work/opportunities abroad
- Negative impact on communication, collaboration, and networking
- People unable to travel to UK

The inability to travel with ease, or at all, led to the cancellation and postponement of work for many respondents, and curtailed opportunities for future work. The lack of face-to-face contact was deemed to have a negative impact on communication, collaboration, and networking. A number of respondents asserted that this has led to a loss of international clients and sales, either due to their inability to travel outside of the UK or clients' inability to enter the UK. Brexit was also cited as a factor contributing to a loss of opportunities, primarily due to increased paperwork and international shipping costs. Some respondents also missed travelling as they would usually gain inspiration from visiting foreign countries or from attending events such as conferences. Some respondents also commented that they had received a direct cut in funding, with royalty rates being reduced or uncertainty about grants.

Some respondents felt that the pandemic had a positive impact on international connections as people were communicating through Zoom and they were able to take advantage of international opportunities which might otherwise not have been possible.

Other positive effects can be categorised under the following themes:

- Improved international connections and communication
- New international opportunities
- Improved sales or exposure

Some respondents found that the move to people spending more time online globally led to increasing exposure or to an increase in online sales. It also led to an increase in communication, particularly with other artists worldwide, over Zoom or through social media. Some artists benefitted from opportunities such as mentoring from someone in another country, being able to take on roles abroad, or being able to attend international events which they would not previously have been able to attend due to geographical or financial restrictions.

Related comments offered

Respondents were asked if they had any final comments they wished to add. Almost three quarters (72%) indicated that they didn't; the remaining responses have been summarised thematically below, with quotations drawn from the survey to illustrate particular points.

A significant number of respondents criticised local and national authorities' responses to the pandemic, specifically with regards to the visual arts sector. In particular, respondents felt that support and funding were in many cases not made available quickly enough, that requirements were often extremely strict, and communications were confusing and frequently shifting. Some respondents also felt that the visual arts sector, and culture in general, had not received the appropriate support and consideration during the Covid-19 emergency.

"Many of the help initiatives were too little too late - The creative arts commercial or otherwise were I feel largely forgotten and left out. There was an utter lack of understanding of our industry and the support was woeful."

Additionally, many responses highlighted how Arts Council and government guidelines had precluded certain groups from qualifying for financial support, despite this being urgently needed in some cases. Examples drawn from participants' experience often highlighted how having multiple income strands, which is often essential for individuals to be able to make a living in the sector, was a complicating or sometimes disqualifying factor, despite work in all areas coming abruptly to a halt.

"I had to go on benefits (job seekers) temporarily for the first time in my working life because I fell between the gaps of the self-employment grants - I hadn't been self-employed long enough to claim and had left a job some months prior."

"On average, in 7 out of 10 years ... My creative practice income tends to be less than teaching post. Due to this for artists like myself, that are 'self-supporting' from teaching income plus 20-30% sales but no ACE funding, had no personal access to rent support or grants."

More broadly, respondents felt that current funding and business models within the sector are unsustainable and had been so even before the pandemic; they often cited the short-term nature of projects to which grants tend to be awarded, which leads to precarious conditions for individuals and the wider visual arts ecology. Funding was also perceived to be largely awarded to arts organisations and venues rather than individual artists, with the latter often being excluded from immediate, vital support over the course of the



pandemic. These issues were exacerbated by the extremely high levels of competition for funding and work in the last year and a half.

"I have been an artist for 45 years subsidising my practice with teaching and freelance work, what the pandemic has done is exposed the shortfalls in arts practice, how it relies on grants and prizes instead of a social arts policy, essentially the arts are run now as always instead of being seen as an industry. Huge money at one end and artists chasing rainbows at the other."

"It's been really tough, and I was let down dramatically by an NPO although I understand why they cancelled work. It showed to me how fragile the visual arts economy is and that the money available seems weighted to specific areas. No public body was there for me professionally. I have had success with public bodies more constantly in the past. I empathise but it has all felt rushed and chaotic at times and has left me feeling deeply cynical of public sector arts programmes."

In addition to the issues outlined above, respondents felt in many cases increasingly isolated from their networks, which proved to be a significant disadvantage at both the personal and professional level. Disabled individuals faced severe challenges, with work being cancelled, employers not providing the necessary flexibility and adjustments, and the return to in-person activities potentially causing the exclusion of those who are clinically vulnerable.

"I suffer with migraines, chronic fatigue syndrome, anxiety and depression, so full-time work is very difficult for me, and part-time work seems to mostly be physically challenging (waiting tables, cleaning, warehouse work etc) that is also difficult with my health, and all are very low paid. [...] Throughout my life, my health condition has made work difficult, but the pandemic has made it impossible. I went freelance as I couldn't do anything else, but it is very difficult to get commissions. I am still looking for a part-time job alongside this. [...] I feel as though the arts sector has been completely forgotten about by the government, and I don't think my long-term health conditions fall under the officially recognised disability guidelines either, despite the problems they cause."

Many respondents were also concerned about issues such as recent cuts to public funding for arts education, Brexit (which has had a significant impact on the cost of shipping artworks), and the climate emergency. Respondents worried about the long-term effects of these problems in conjunction with the pandemic, with several pointing out that they are still struggling and, in some cases, had given up on working in the sector altogether. They also expressed concerns about the future of the next generation of artists and arts professionals.

"The effects of the pandemic are far from over, but support has ended. In-person workshop bookings haven't even started yet, and when they do, they'll be booked months in advance. So earning potential is bound to suffer in the interim. I'm taking part in a group exhibition in October. The venue isn't even sure until nearer the time if we can hold a Private View, due to Covid restrictions. Yet most of our sales happen at the PV. People assume we can just go back to work, but half of the opportunities still aren't there."

"In the longer term I am very worried about the economic impact of the national debt that has been racked up during the pandemic. I'm worried about the exacerbation of inequality and the unequal financial exposure of those with less financial resilience,



particularly freelancers. As I live in the South West, I am very concerned that the move towards home working, combined with people's re-evaluation of what's important in life, is already causing migration from the cities to more 'desirable' rural areas. I already cannot afford a house in the county I grew up in (Devon) and the accelerating influx of people who have sold houses for high prices in the cities and bought in Devon is pushing my chance of a decent home ever further beyond my reach, even while I work extremely hard to try to improve culture and wellbeing in the area."

On the other hand, some respondents highlighted some positive outcomes of the pandemic, such as opportunities to connect online and for artists and the public to engage in creative activities. They also expressed their gratitude for the support received from CVAN and other visual arts organisations, as well as for data gathering and advocacy efforts. Some, however, noted that they had already taken part in a number of similar surveys, and they were worried this would not result in significant, tangible outcomes.

"I would not have coped with lockdown if it were not for the cultural organisations to continue to financially support me. And I certainly would not have been able to keep mentally healthy if it were not for the creative projects and activities that were available to me during lockdowns."

"It's great that you are doing this survey - I have filled in lots of surveys over the last year or so. I would like to see the direct action/support/lobbying and direct support for freelancers now! Before more people who don't have the privileges of inherited leave the sector. I fear it that this sector will become a place for the middle-class white/POC privileged which is already, but it will just make that gap wider."

Finally, some respondents made practical suggestions and requests; these included partnerships working with the commercial, health, and social care sectors, and mentoring and coaching schemes to help artists manage the financial side of their practice.



Willingness to participate in future research

Around 57% were willing to participate in further research in this area which is indicative of their willingness to stay involved in this area of work and the positive experiences of contributing to this study.

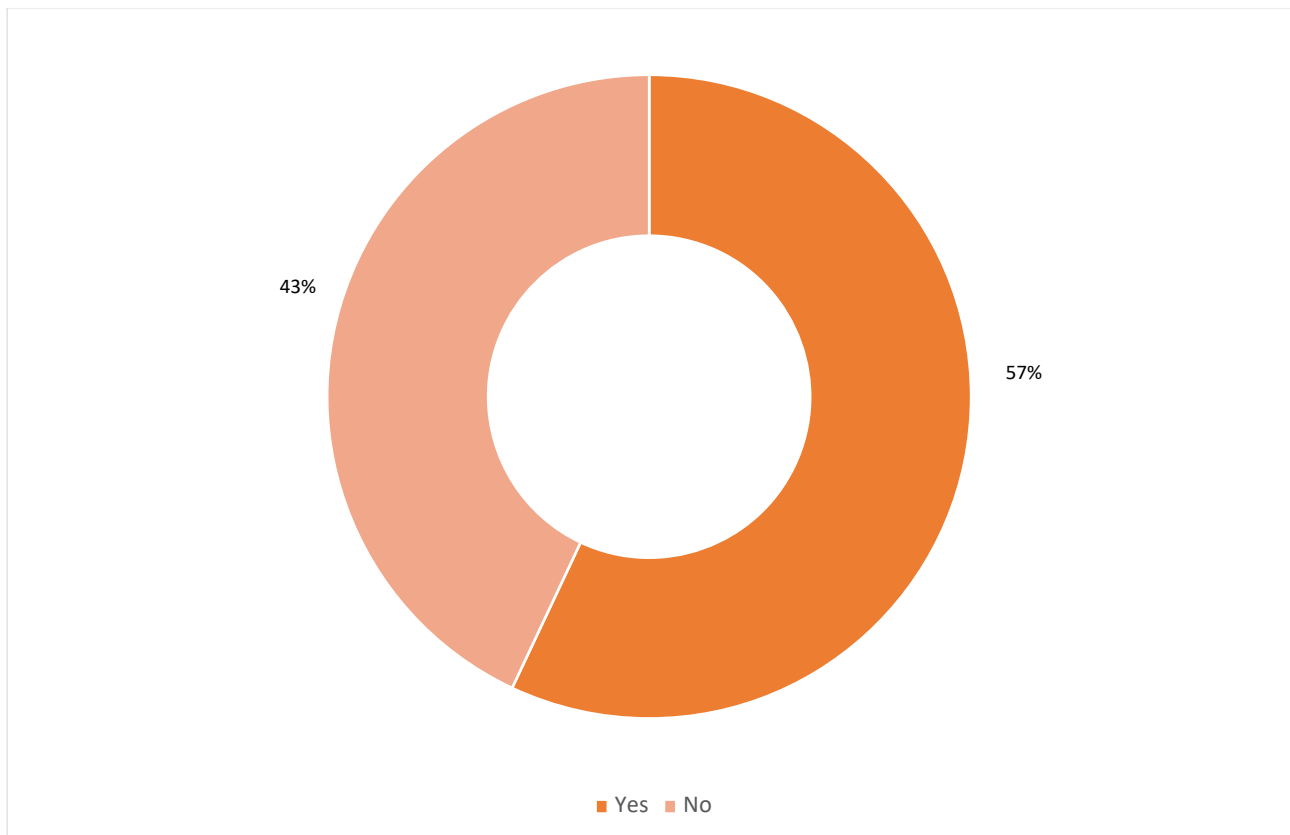


Figure 12: Willingness to participate in future research

Sample description

The data below provides an overview of the sample including an understanding of the demographic variable, geographic distribution, and level of experience of the respondents. These variables can be used to provide more nuanced analysis of the data set.

Role within the sector

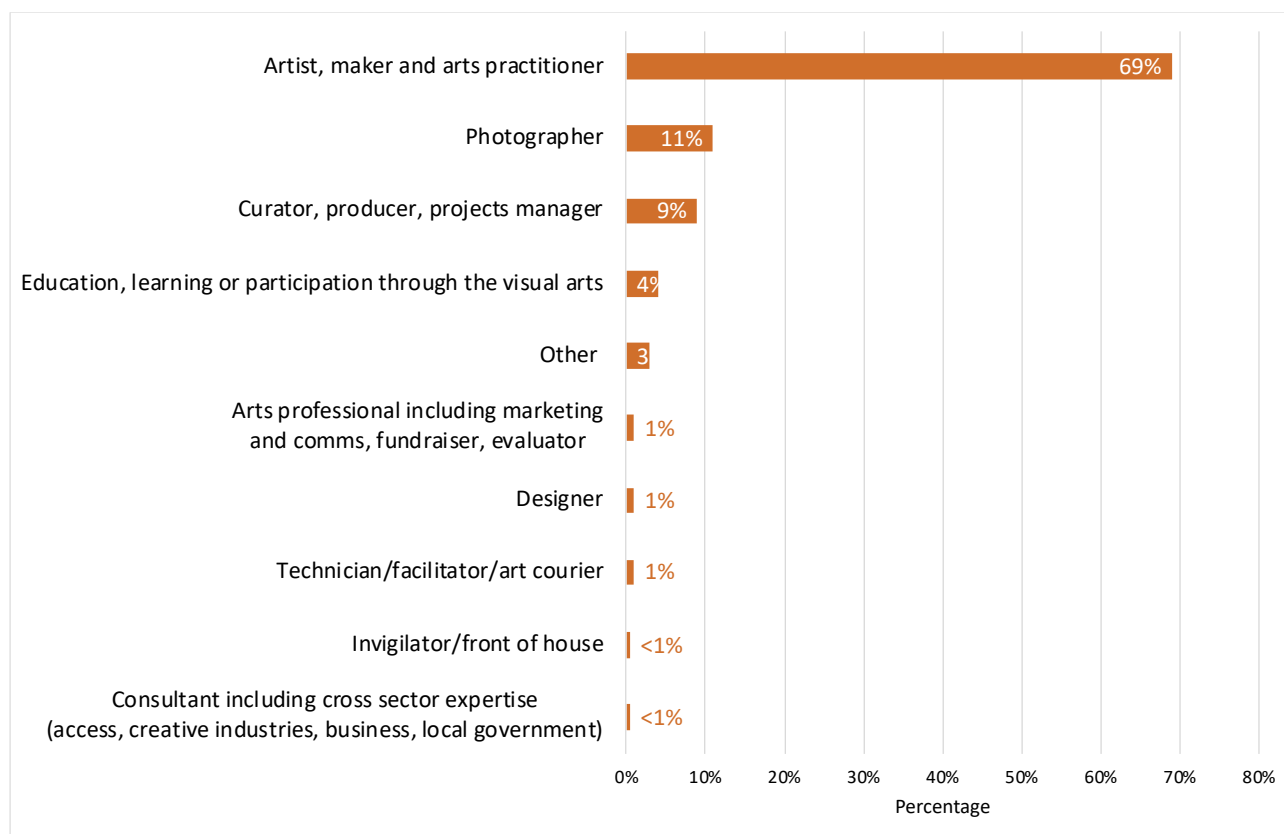


Figure 13: Sample distribution – primary role in the visual arts sector

The data above relates to the primary role the respondents identified with. Most of the respondents who selected the 'other' option reported that they fulfilled several of the roles listed and were not able to select just one as their primary role. Other options indicated by respondents included:

- Art provenance researcher
- Art psychotherapist
- Arts administrator
- Commentator
- Illustrator (x2)
- Independent advisor
- Life model
- Mentor
- Performer
- Researcher (x2)
- Voluntary board member and Chair
- Writer



Experience in the Visual Arts Sector

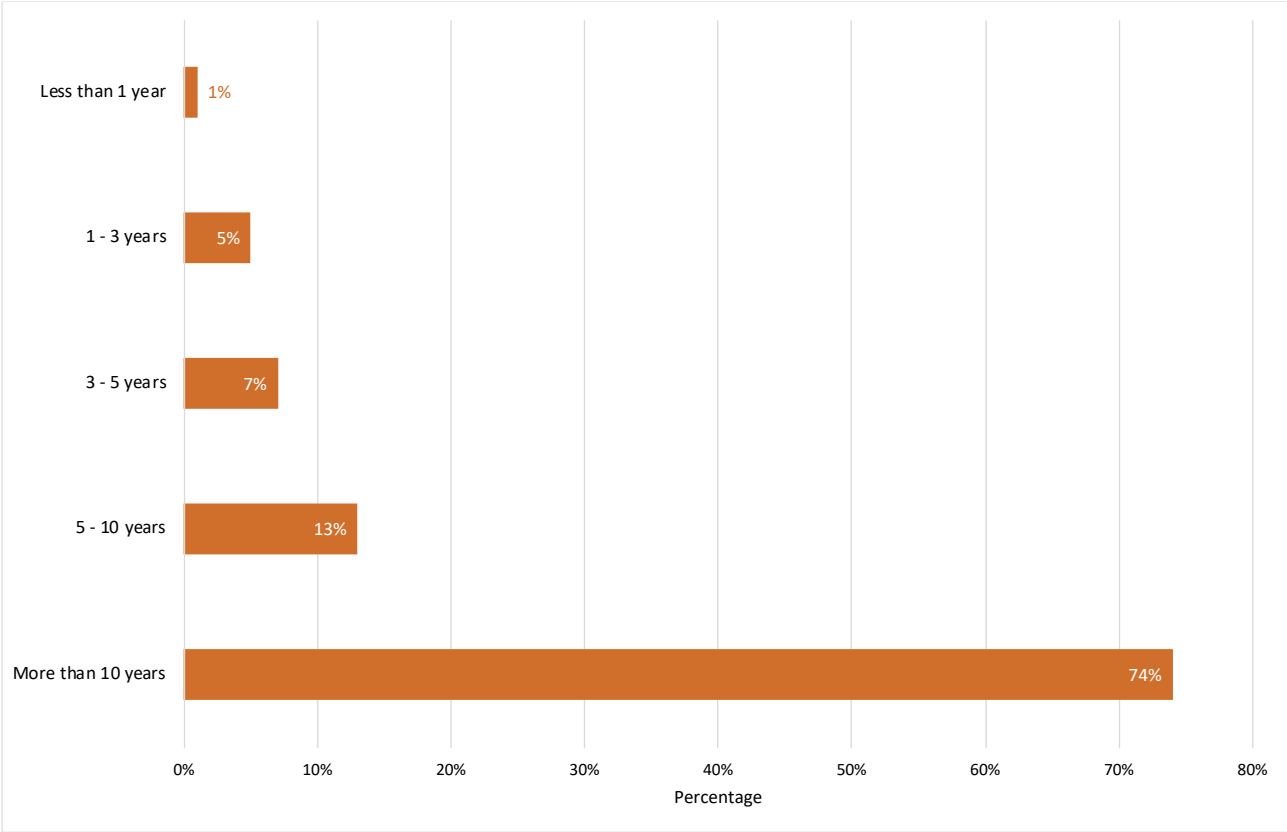


Figure 14: Sample distribution – level of experience in the visual arts sector

Dependence on visual arts sector for livelihood

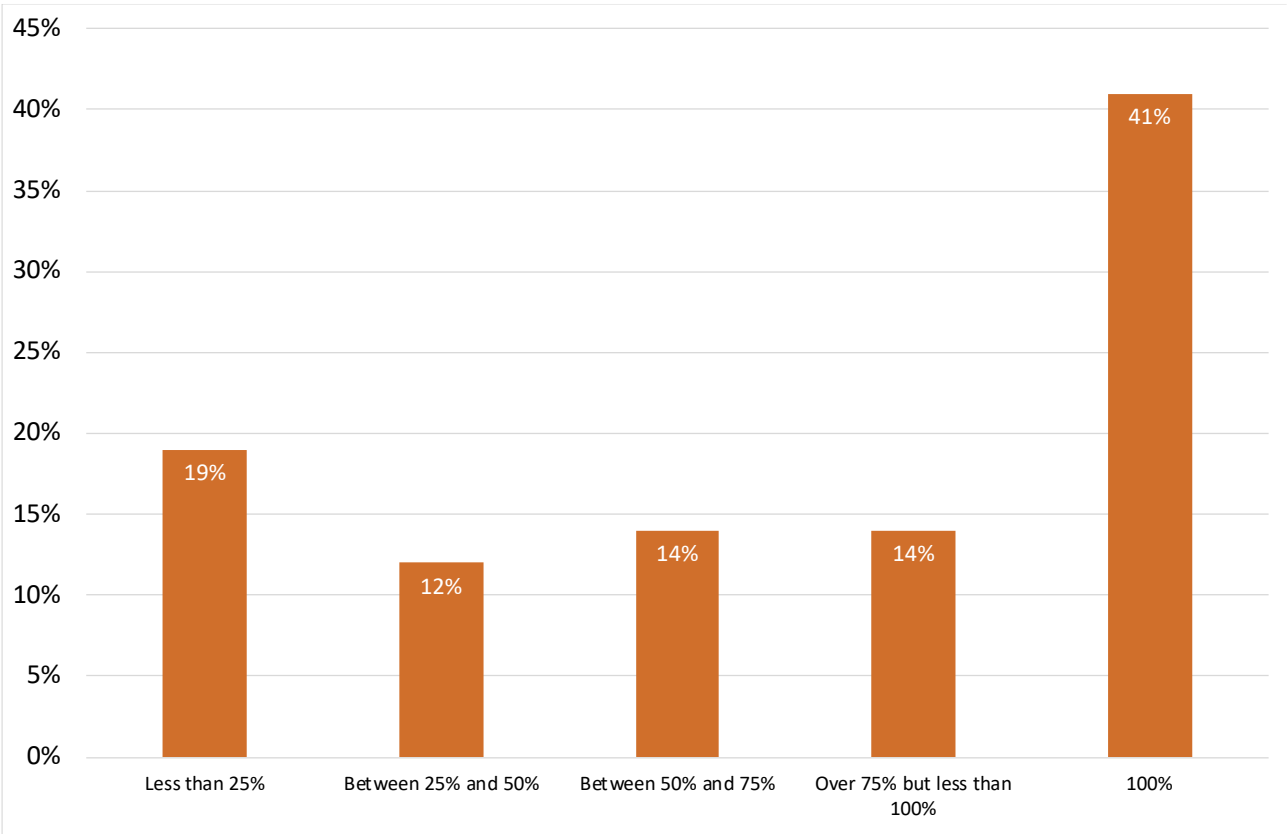


Figure 15: Sample distribution - dependence on visual arts sector for livelihood



Regional distribution of participants

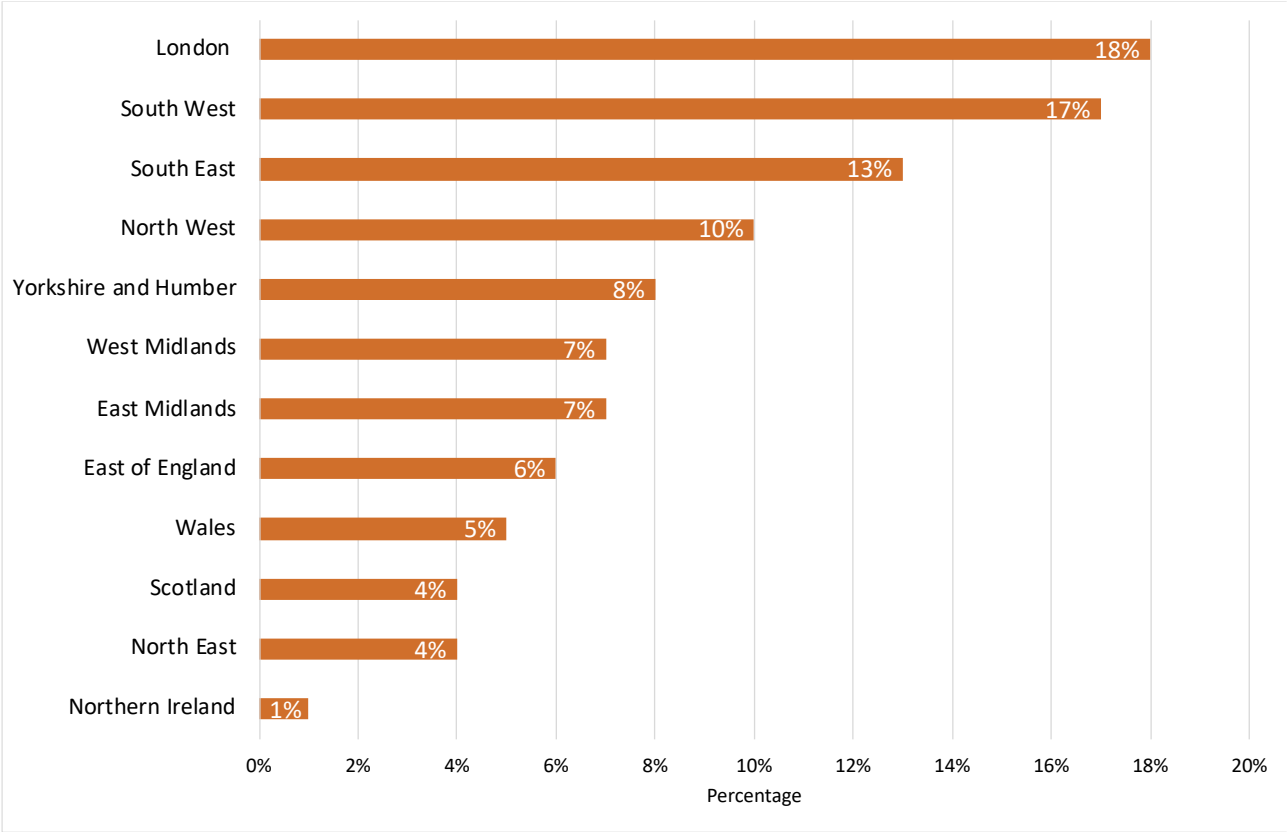


Figure 16: Sample distribution - region

Age group distribution

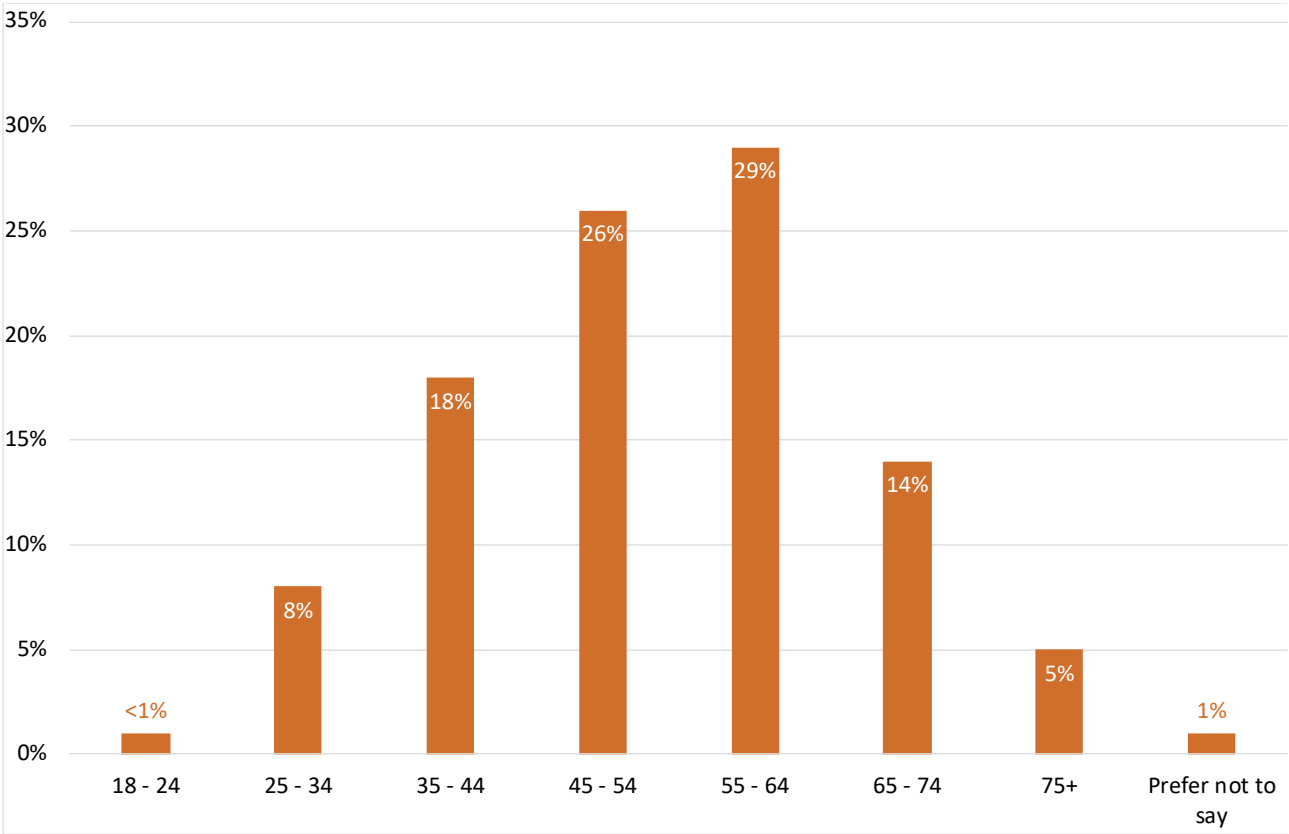


Figure 17: Sample distribution - age groups



Ethnicity distribution

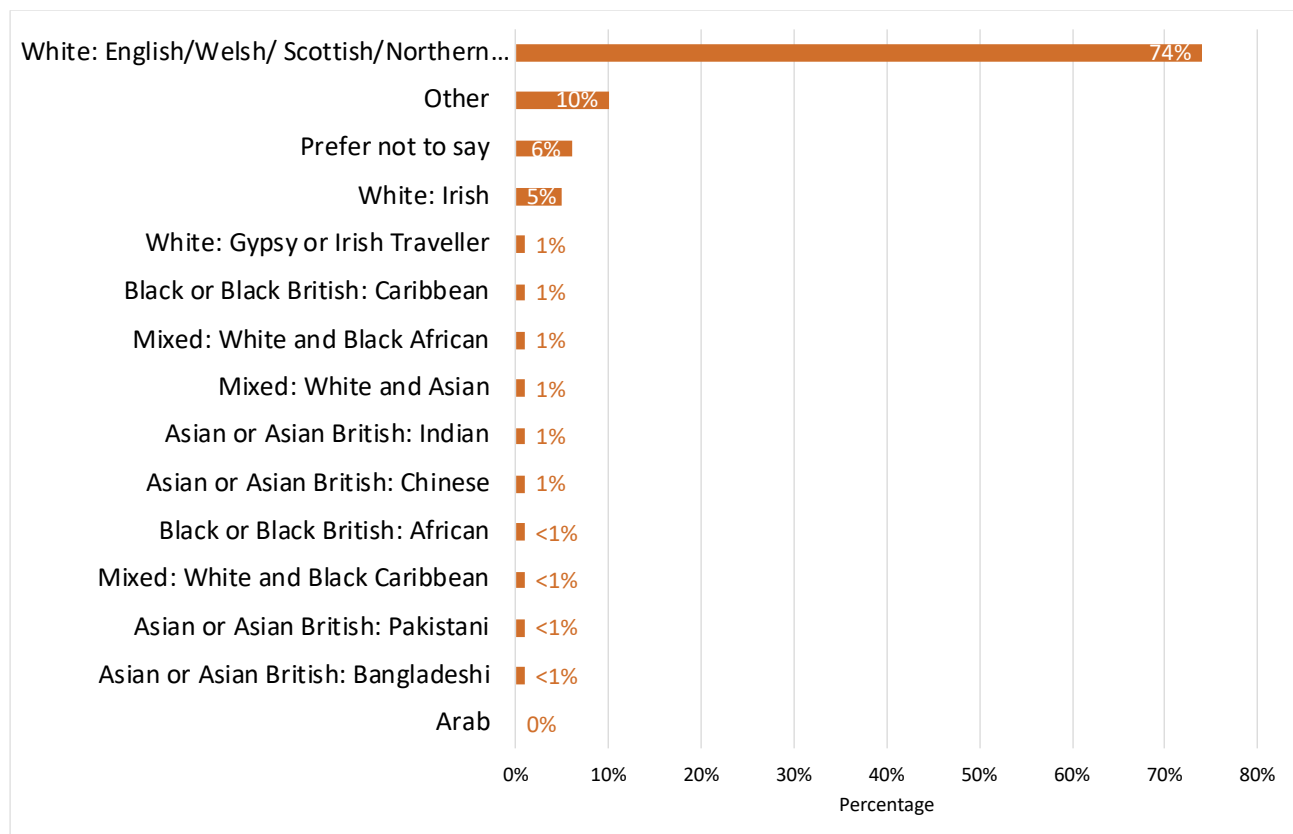


Figure 18: Sample distribution – ethnicity distribution

Other ethnic groups mentioned by respondents included:

- British / Iranian
- Central Asian
- Cornish
- European (x2)
- Japanese
- Jewish Spanish and Portuguese
- Latin American
- Mediterranean
- Mixed White (x2)
- Pakistani and Indian
- Polish
- Semitic
- South American
- Sri Lankan
- White American
- White: English/Jewish/South African

Disability or long-term health condition

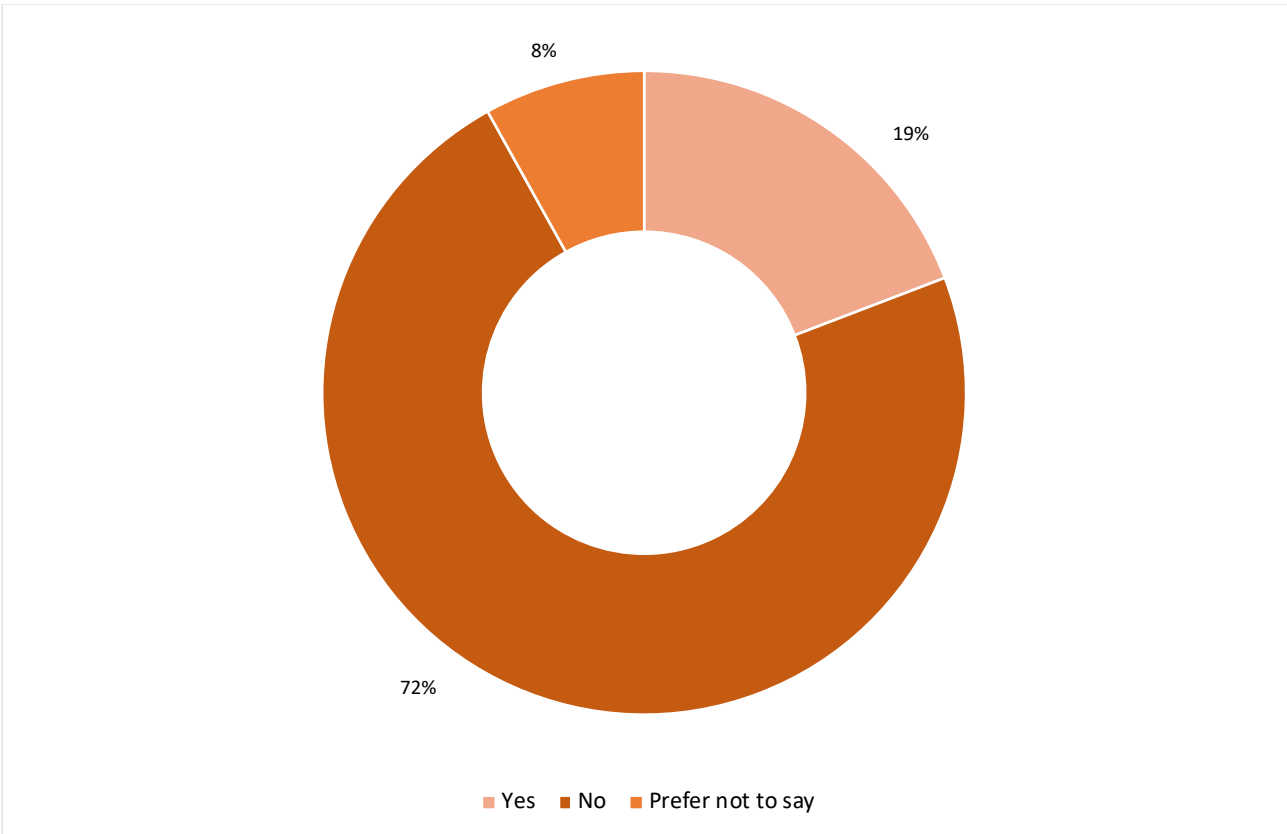


Figure 19: Sample distribution - disability or long-term health condition



Appendix I: Data tables 2020/2021

	August 2021		May 2020	
	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents
Impact on ability to acquire future contracts and commissions	48%	327	58%	604
Postponement of contracted work (indefinite)	35%	239	51%	531
Loss of contracted work	41%	275	44%	459
Loss of commission	32%	215	31%	320
Postponement of contracted work (definite)	35%	175	29%	305
Loss of full time or part time employment with an institution	22%	135	22%	227
Other	16%	105	17%	175
None of the above	11%	73	3%	36

Table 1 Effect of pandemic and related government announcements on work

	August 2021		May 2020	
	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents
I am still trying to understand what support is relevant to me	11%	74	47%	488
I am not eligible for support	25%	169	20%	204
I am in the process of applying for income support	-	-	17%	181
I am not currently looking for support	17%	112	8%	86
Other	8%	55	5%	47
I am in the process of applying for / accessing non-economic support	-	-	3%	32
I applied for income support and was successful	28%	191	-	-
I applied for income support and was unsuccessful	7%	50	-	-
		674		1038

Table 2 Application of sector support measures

	August 2021		May 2020	
	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents
Not at all useful	25%	166	15%	157
Not very useful	18%	118	19%	202
Not sure either way	24%	163	41%	426
Somewhat useful	22%	150	18%	190
Extremely useful	11%	77	6%	63
		597		1038

Table 3 Usefulness of sector support measures

	August 2021		May 2020	
	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents
Yes, I am satisfied with the support measures	33%	232	26%	275
No, some other measures are needed	66%	442	74%	763



Table 4 Satisfaction with the level of support

	August 2021	
	Percentage	Respondents
My income has reduced as a result of the pandemic	70%	474
My overall income has been at a similar level as before the pandemic	23%	154
My income has increased as a result of the pandemic	7%	46

Table 5 Impact of pandemic on overall income

	August 2021	
	Percentage	Respondents
More than £20,000	10%	49
Between £20,000 to £15,000	9%	45
Between £15,000 to £10,000	15%	70
Between £10,000 to £5,000	33%	156
Between £5,000 to £1,000	28%	133
Other amount	4%	21
		474

Table 6 Estimate income reduced in last year because of pandemic

	August 2021		May 2020	
	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents
HMRC Self-Employment Income Support Scheme	39%	263	54%	564
Arts Council England Financial support for artists, creative practitioners, and freelancers	28%	189	49%	504
VAT and Self-Assessment payment deferral	7%	44	31%	326
Mortgage deferral	8%	53	25%	263
Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme - Furlough Leave/Pay	12%	79	16%	166
Other schemes	24%	159	16%	162
Business rent holiday	3%	19	6%	66
Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan	4%	25	6%	66
		674		1038

Table 7 Awareness of economic support measure



	August 2021		May 2020	
	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents
Artist, maker, and arts practitioner	69%	463	69%	715
Designer / photographer	11%	84	11%	113
Curator, producer, projects manager	9%	62	8%	85
Education, learning or participation through the visual arts	4%	29	5%	51
Other	3%	21	3%	32
Technician/ facilitator/art courier	1%	5	2%	20
Arts professionals including marketing and comms, fundraiser, evaluator	1%	5	1%	11
Consultant including cross sector expertise (access, creative industries, business, local government)	0%	3	1%	10
Invigilator/front of house	0%	2	0%	1
		674		1038

Table 8 Primary role in visual arts sector

	August 2021		May 2020	
	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents
Less than 1 year	1%	6	2%	24
1–3 years	5%	32	8%	81
3–5 years	7%	48	8%	86
5–10 years	13%	85	17%	180
More than 10 years	75%	503	64%	667
		674		1038

Table 9 Experience in the visual arts sector

	August 2021		May 2020	
	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents
Less than 25%	19%	129	13%	139
Between 25% and 50%	12%	84	14%	146
Between 50% and 75%	14%	93	13%	134
Over 75% but less than 100%	14%	93	15%	151
100%	41%	276	45%	468
		674		1038

Table 10 Dependence on visual arts sector for livelihood

	August 2021		May 2020	
	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents
London	18%	124	28%	289
South East	13%	89	14%	141
South West	17%	114	14%	141
West Midlands	7%	49	13%	136
Yorkshire and Humber	8%	54	9%	91
East of England	6%	40	6%	66
North West	10%	66	6%	65
North East	4%	26	6%	62
East Midlands	7%	48	5%	47
		674		1038

Table 11 Regional distribution

	August 2021		May 2020	
	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents
18 – 24	0%	3	2%	20
25 – 34	8%	52	15%	154
35 – 44	18%	119	20%	206
45 – 54	26%	172	28%	287
55 – 64	29%	193	27%	278
65 – 74	14%	94	6%	66
75+	5%	31	2%	16
Prefer not to say	1%	10	1%	11
		674		1038

Table 12 Age group distribution

	August 2021		May 2020	
	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents
White: English/Welsh/ Scottish/Northern Irish/British	74%	498	72%	749
Other	10%	67	10%	108
Prefer not to say	6%	42	7%	73
White: Irish	5%	32	5%	50
Mixed: White and Asian	1%	5	1%	13
Asian or Asian British: Indian	1%	6	1%	11
Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi	1%	1	1%	8
Asian or Asian British: Pakistani	1%	2	0%	5
Asian or Asian British: Chinese	1%	4	0%	5
Mixed: White and Black Caribbean	<1%	3	0%	4
Black or Black British: African	<1%	2	0%	4
Black or Black British: Caribbean	<1%	4	0%	4
Mixed: White and Black African	<1%	4	0%	2
White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller	1%	4	0%	1
Arab	0%	0	0%	1
		674		1038

Table 13 Ethnicity distribution



	August 2021		May 2020	
	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents
No	72%	488	79%	818
Yes	19%	130	15%	155
Prefer not to say	8%	56	6%	65
		674	100%	1038

Table 14 Disability or long-term health condition distribution

	August 2021		May 2020	
	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents
Yes	57%	387	63%	655
No	43%	287	37%	383
		674	100%	1038

Table 15 Willingness to participate in future research

Earthen Lamp exists to bring bright thinking to cultural and heritage organisations and creative businesses. What sets us apart is our straight-talking approach, our experience, and attitude to tackle any challenge with gusto. We believe that simple ideas and solutions can light up the darkest corners and solve complex issues.

If you would like to discuss the dark corners in your organisation or business, or just fancy a chat to see how we can help, drop us a line.



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