

Arts Council England Response to Artist Livelihoods Report

This report is the product of a collaboration across the visual arts by many parties who are keen to understand better the changing environment that individual artists work in. It was funded by Arts Council England to be of use to the wider sector as well as to inform our own thinking.

With diminished public investment it is more important than ever that sector leaders work collaboratively to address problems and issues. The steering group for this project has strong national reach and considerable expertise in many areas of specialist support for artists. We hope that the research provides a baseline to inform future collaboration, to share intelligence and make the most of limited resources.

Previous studies have, by and large, reinforced the broad stereotype of the “starving artist.” This study looks beyond the stereotype, giving us a firm set of figures drawn from a wide, national sample. There are both national trends here but also regional variations. This includes differences in artists’ cost of living and working, access to opportunities and sources of income.

The research work highlights the role of unpaid work and the reliance of many artists on financial support from family and friends. It shows a spectrum of experience. It confirms that the average artist earns less than the national living wage and that many practitioners become trapped in a working cycle that involves multiple jobs and gives them less time to develop artistically. This is a major barrier to success. However, it also reveals optimism; many artists reported higher income than in the previous year and despite the economic challenge, 94% of respondents intended to continue practicing.

The survey provides data around sector diversity in terms of race and disability, and differences in terms of gender and changing factors which arise at different career stages. We hope that this informs the ongoing discussion about pathways into the sector and how visual arts organisations develop and promote talent. There is strong consensus amongst artists that exhibiting organisations should retain a commitment to artist development and career progression, including opportunities such as bursaries and residencies. This reinforces the importance of our ongoing conversation with funded organisations about the quality of support they give individual practitioners.

The survey shows that art-derived income can come from many different sources: early and mid-career artists are more likely to have non-commercial sources. Practitioners such as performance artists and those who do participatory work may be more reliant on commissioning from local authorities. The study reinforces the fact that few artists earn substantial amounts from commercial sale of their work and underlines the importance of their efforts [to be properly paid](#).

It is an important time for this research at Arts Council England. We are nearing the end of our existing 10-year strategy, Great Art and Culture for Everyone, and are now engaged in a conversation with the sector about what our strategy should be for the next ten years. Having insight into perspectives from individual artists continues to inform our thinking about how we can best support artists in future. This research report has informed our recently launched fund aimed at supporting artists: Developing Your Creative Practice, designed to support individuals at key stages of their careers.

We are grateful for the many artists who took the time to complete this survey. We want to thank a-n, the project team and steering group for their commitment to this work and their support for visual artists.

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