

Policy Brief: Arts, Culture and Heritage: Recent Trends in UK Workforce and Engagement in England

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Overview

Five years after the Covid-19 pandemic, engagement and employment in the arts, culture and heritage (ACH) sectors are showing signs of recovery, with cultural engagement trends increasing across a range of activities between 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 and workforce rates stabilising across England between 2019-2024. However, demographic and geographic disparities persist, requiring targeted policies to build a more inclusive and accessible cultural sector.

This briefing summarises findings from *Arts, Culture and Heritage: Recent Trends in UK Workforce and Engagement in England*, our latest State of the Nations report based on new Local Authority-level data across England from the DCMS Participation Survey. The report looks at cultural engagement between 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 for those aged 16 and above, and updated data on ACH occupations from the UK-wide ONS Labour Force Survey (LFS) data between the years of 2019 and 2024.

These findings are shared during a political period focusing on increasing opportunities, supporting place-based development and the further devolution of decision making in England. However, significant challenges remain, with local authority budgets for culture falling, the uneven distribution of public investment and persistent inequalities across cultural workforces and audiences. This brief offers critical insights when the geography of opportunity is central to these disparities, especially in the context of devolution.

Key Findings

Key findings on arts, culture and heritage workforce trends across the UK

- **There has been a period of stability across the ACH occupations, suggesting more consistent rates following the pandemic period. However, this means that the entrenched social inequalities across the ACH workforce are persisting:** Analysis shows no statistically significant changes in employment type (i.e. employed/self-employed), gender, ethnicity, disability or class. Rates of workers joining and leaving ACH occupations also remain consistent.

However, representation of marginalised groups across the occupations remains unequal – for example, estimates from this latest 2024 dataset show no statistically significant differences in representation of social class backgrounds across any of the ACH occupations, with 60% of workers in film, TV, video, radio and photography occupations coming from managerial and professional backgrounds.

Key findings on arts, culture and heritage engagement in England

- **Findings indicate a growth in post-pandemic cultural engagement in England, with an increase in the proportion of people engaging in almost all cultural activities over the 2022/23 to 2023/24 period:** Responses for 2022/23 reflecting engagement during the 12 months prior to the survey, capturing behaviour during the pandemic period. Increases are particularly large in the cases of attendance at cultural events (e.g. theatre attendance increasing 30% to 39%), indicating a continued growth in attendance to in-person events following the pandemic period. Increases in participation for activities like art making (14% to 19%) and crafts (15% to 19%) are also positive given that in-person restrictions were far less restrictive for these activities.
- **Increases in visits to heritage sites in England show a more mixed picture:** There have been increases in heritage site visits to National Trust (51% to 61%) and UNESCO sites (7% to 10%) but decreases at visiting a city or town with celebrated historic nature (45% to 37%) and historic buildings open to the public (32% to 28%).
- **Despite ACH engagement growing, it is not occurring equally across demographic groups, with some inequalities becoming wider over the last year:** for example, increases in the percentages of groups engaging with most cultural activities have been smaller among people in working class households, and among Black people. However, there are exceptions - the increase in attending libraries was larger for Black people (21% to 34%) than for other ethnic groups (e.g. 19% to 24% among White people).

Key findings on place-based arts, culture and heritage engagement in England

- **Novel analysis of both the Participation Survey and LFS datasets identified a relationship between arts, culture and heritage engagement, and occupations at a local authority scale, highlighting various patterns of concentrations across different types of cultural activity:** These findings support the importance of the relationship between audiences and workforces

as part of an arts, culture and heritage ecosystem and can be explored through [our accompanying interactive dashboards](#), which will be of value to policymakers at the local, regional and national level.

- **Engagement is not consistently distributed across the country and varies by place and activity – for example, only 13 Local Authorities in England saw over 50% attendance at an art exhibition over the last 12 months, with all of these authorities based within London:** Local authorities outside of London where this figure is high are Brighton and Hove (49%), Oxford (46%) and York (37%), indicating where places may have more cultural infrastructure, as well as possible reflections of the socioeconomic makeup of an area.
- **Areas with higher rates of engagement with ACH sectors tend to show higher proportions of workers in ACH occupations, indicating a relationship between the location of ACH audiences and workforces:** However, the strength of this relationship varies significantly according to the specific form of engagement in question, with more analysis required to confirm causation.

Policy implications and considerations

- 1) **Persistent inequalities in both arts, culture and heritage engagement and occupations demand further and continued targeted inclusion strategies by government, funders and individual organisations:** Ongoing unequal access to the ACH sectors threaten the government's ambition of broadening access to culture and breaking down barriers to opportunity. Persistent inequalities in both arts, culture and heritage engagement and occupations suggest that the strategies of major public funders of culture and heritage, including arms-length bodies like Arts Council England and Historic England, should continue to prioritise efforts to address this issue.
- 2) **Policymakers at the local, regional and national level should utilise the strong evidence on arts, culture and heritage audiences and workforce to align investment with the data and to inform tailored place-based policies and strategies:** We advise policymakers to utilise the interactive dashboards developed to accompany our report, which provide insights into ACH engagement, demographic breakdowns and explores the relationship between cultural audiences and workforces within a place, as well as our dashboard on the creative self-employed workforce in England and Wales (*please see p4 for links*).
- 3) **Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) targets need to be further embedded into all place-based arts, culture and heritage interventions:** The collection of evidence on the diversity of audiences engaged and those working in ACH occupations within cultural programmes is ever critical, especially in the context of the continuation of and possible development of new place-based interventions given the renewed focus on place and creative regions across central government.

Citation and further resources

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To access Creative PEC's interactive data dashboards, please follow these links:

- [Arts, culture and heritage engagement in England \(2025\) dashboard](#) - the accompanying dashboard for our latest State of the Nations report, this includes visualisations on local authority level ACH engagement, demographic breakdown, activities breakdown and the relationships between ACH engagement and occupations. A video explaining how to use this dashboard can also be found [here](#).
- [Arts, culture and heritage: Audiences and Workforce \(2024\)](#) - the accompanying dashboards for our previous State of the Nations report on this topic, covering two topics: *Diversity in the labour market within the UK's ACH occupations* and *ACH occupations by location* (England and Wales only).
- [Creative self-employed workforce in England and Wales \(2025\)](#) - this dashboard visualises the distribution of the self-employed workforce in the wider creative industries at both the Local Authority and Combined Authority level using data from the Census 2021.

About the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre

The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC) works to support the growth of the UK's creative industries through the production of independent and authoritative evidence and policy advice.

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