

Increasing inequality in arts and culture revealed by new research

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A new report from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC) provides fresh insight on arts, culture and heritage workforce and participation following Covid, and shows that while engagement is up across England, inequalities have increased. The new research shows a widening gap by class and ethnicity in terms of who engages with arts and culture and significant regional discrepancies. The report makes clear the scale of the challenge facing policymakers. For the first time the research also points to a relationship between places with high levels of people working in arts and culture and areas with higher participation.

Stark inequalities in the workforce continue. People from more middle-class backgrounds continue to dominate the sector and fresh policies are needed to truly shift the dial. For audiences, the report points to a worsening picture with widening engagement gaps in class and ethnicity over the last year. Perhaps the most significant findings are the variations in terms of engagement by locality within England.

Key findings by place:

- There are only 13 English local authorities where over 50% of the population has been to an art exhibition in the last twelve months – **all 13 are in London**.
- The local authority with the highest percentage of residents visiting an art gallery in the last 12 months is the City of London, at 70%; the local authority with the fewest is Boston, Lincolnshire at 11%.
- Other local authorities where the figure is high are Brighton and Hove (49%) and Oxford (46%); outside of the south of England, the highest figure is for York (37%).

Key findings by demographics:

- There has been a widening gap in the last year between who engages with arts and culture by socio-economic background (comparing 2022/23 - with 2023/24). For example, there has been a 9% increase in the gap between 'middle class' and 'working class' people attending a live music performance, and a 7% increase in the gap for 'attending an art exhibition'.
- There is large variation in engagement in cultural activities by socio-economic background e.g. 51% of people in 'managerial/professional households' have been to the theatre in the last 12 months the figure for 'semi-routine / working class.' is 26%.
- The class differences are largest for museums and galleries, with 54% for managerial/professional and 31% for semi-routine/working class. In nearly all cases Black and Asian people are less likely than people in 'other ethnic groups' to have engaged in the DCMS categorised arts, culture and heritage activities for example 23% of Black people and 19% of Asian people had attended live music, compared with 42% of White people.
- Local authorities with more people working in arts, culture and heritage also have greater rates of engagement in most forms of arts and culture. For example, six out of the ten local authorities with the largest percentage of people working in arts, culture and heritage occupations are also in the ten local authorities with the largest percentage of people having visited an art exhibition.
- The activities most strongly associated with people working in Arts, Culture and Heritage and people 'engaging' are visuals arts (attending exhibitions) literary events and live dance.
- The majority of areas showing this relationship are London boroughs with the next highest areas outside of London being Cambridge, Brighton and Hove, Oxford, Bristol and Waverley (in Surrey).

Bernard Hay, Head of Policy, Creative PEC says:

"Place based approaches to supporting culture are high on the agenda, especially in England as new Strategic Authorities and local powers unfold. Our latest report highlights that local areas with higher rates of cultural engagement also tend to have a higher proportion of people working in the sector, suggesting a possible relationship between the two.

As policymakers and cultural bodies develop locally responsive culture and heritage strategies, this research adds further weight to the idea that such plans should aim beyond solely boosting engagement for local communities. In addition, they should also

consider how opportunities within the local arts, culture and heritage workforce can be nurtured and sustained as a part of a more holistic approach."

Dr Mark Taylor, Lead Report Author, University of Sheffield says:

"In some respects, our research points to good news; rates of participation and attendance in arts and culture significantly increased between 2022/2023 and 2023/2024. However, this post-pandemic recovery has not been experienced equally. The increases have been smaller among people in working class households, and among Black people meaning some inequalities have become wider. This shows the scale of the challenge for policymakers interested in addressing cultural inequalities between places across the country and between different groups."

Also published today alongside the report is a series of dashboards showing how engagement with different forms of arts, culture and heritage varies by characteristics, and how this changed between the survey years. They also show how rates of engagement vary across English local authorities. These provide unprecedented insight for local authority policy makers across arts, culture, economic growth and regeneration to make data informed interventions in their areas.

The report findings will be explored during an online event at 12 noon UK time on Wednesday 7 May.

The report 'Arts, Culture and Heritage: Recent Trends in UK Workforce and Engagement in England' is by Professor Dave O'Brien, University of Manchester and Dr Mark Taylor and Dr Ruoxi Wang, from the University of Sheffield. The report is published by Creative PEC which is funded by the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

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Download the report: https://pec.ac.uk/state_of_the_nation/arts-culture-and-heritage-recent-trends-in-uk-workforce-and-engagement-in-england/
(live from 00.01 Wednesday 7 May 2025, UK time)

The report: 'Arts, Culture and Heritage: Recent Trends in UK Workforce and Engagement in England' published by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, which is led by Newcastle University with the Royal Society of Arts and funded by the UKRI **Arts and Humanities Research Council** (AHRC).

The research team and spokespeople for Creative PEC are available for comment and interview.

Press contacts

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Notes to editors

1. State of the Nations reports

The report is part of Creative PEC's 'State of the Nations' series, which uses the latest data to inform policymakers on how best to support the creative sector across four thematic areas. Regular reports on each area will be published annually over the five years of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funding period.

2. About the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC)

Creative PEC works to support growth of the UK's Creative Industries through the production of independent and authoritative evidence and policy advice. Led by Newcastle University with the Royal Society of Arts and funded by the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Centre comprises a core consortium of: Newcastle University, Work Advance, Sussex University and the University of Sheffield. Creative PEC works with a diverse range of industry partners.

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3. About The UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), funds internationally outstanding independent researchers across the whole range of the arts and humanities: history, archaeology, digital content, philosophy, languages and literature, design, heritage, area studies, the creative and performing arts, and much more. The quality and range of research supported by AHRC works for the good of UK society and culture and contributes both to UK economic success and to the culture and welfare of societies across the globe.

4. 'Arts, Culture and Heritage: Recent Trends in UK Workforce and Engagement in England' was designed by Mike Green at Green Doe Graphic Design