State of the Nations research series

ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE: RECENT TRENDS IN UK WORKFORCE AND ENGAGEMENT IN ENGLAND

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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. Led by Newcastle University, with the Royal Society of Arts and funded by the UKRI's Arts and Humanities Research Council, Creative PEC comprises a core consortium of Newcastle University, Work Advance, the University of Sussex and the University of Sheffield.

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About the State of the Nations reports

Creative PEC's 'State of the Nations' series analyses the latest data across four thematic areas to inform the development of policies relating to the creative industries. Their scope is the whole of the United Kingdom, and wherever possible data is presented for all the nations and regions. Regular reports on each area will be published annually over the five years of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funding. The themes and corresponding Research Partners are:

- R&D, Innovation and Clusters (University of Sussex)
- Internationalisation (Newcastle University)
- Arts, Culture and Heritage Sectors (University of Sheffield)
- Education, Skills and Talent (Work Advance)

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors. If you have any questions about this report, please contact Dr Mark Taylor at **m.r.taylor@sheffield.ac.uk**

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State of the Nations research series

Contents

Foreword

Regular readers of our State of the Nations series will have spotted a common theme, namely the importance for policymaking of tracking data on a longitudinal basis. There are a number of reasons for doing this.

One is to understand causal relationships between economic variables as opposed to correlations. For example, it might be the case that economically more prosperous regions in the UK have more vibrant creative industries, but how policymakers respond to that depends critically on whether those regions are more prosperous because they have stronger creative industries or whether their greater prosperity accounts for the strength of their creative sector. Perhaps both of these are true. The pattern might also be a reflection of some common third factor, such as the quality of the workforce, which accounts for both strong regional and creative economies. The Creative PEC's new Creative Business Panel, a partnership with the CoSTAR Foresight Lab, is collecting longitudinal survey data from all parts of the creative industries, including the arts, culture and heritage sub-sectors, to enable precisely this type of causal relationship to be understood.

Another reason for tracking longitudinal data over time is that it says something about whether policy goals are being met, or indicate whether there may be need for further action. This is the main reason why a function of our State of the Nations publications is to present regular updates over time on key statistics on the creative industries.

In this report, we show that inequalities in the UK arts, culture and heritage workforce that we have exposed in previous work have persisted in the most recent data. And that while Participation Survey data for England shows that the public's engagement in arts and culture increased in 2023/2024 (the picture is more mixed for heritage), inequalities in engagement along class and ethnicity lines have increased back to pre-pandemic levels. This should be of concern to policymakers.

Making use of newly available data at local authority level in England, for the first time we are also able to map in fine-grained detail the inequalities in engagement with arts, culture and heritage, which is important as despite the well documented cuts in funding over time, local authorities remain critically important sources of funding and policy support.

Please also check out the interactive data dashboards we are making available alongside this report, and reach out to us with your comments and feedback on our findings!

Professor Hasan Bakhshi,
Director, Creative PEC

Executive summary

What has happened to the arts, culture and heritage sectors since the Covid-19 pandemic? In our last report, *UK Arts, Culture and Heritage Audiences and Workforce* (McAndrew et al 2024), we investigated the workforce in arts, culture and heritage occupations, changes in arts, culture and heritage engagement, and the make-up of audiences. This report updates that evidence with the most recent data, allowing us to analyse the post-pandemic trends further.

In addition to these updates, this report presents a deep dive into the geography of audiences for arts, culture and heritage in England. The analysis also highlights the relationship between the different forms of attendance and the participation in the arts, culture and heritage workforce in each local authority. This focus on England is due to data availability, as surveys addressing arts, culture and heritage engagement are collected separately in the four nations of the UK.

Accompanying this report is a series of dashboards that extend the analysis presented. These focus on the Participation Survey. They show how engagement with different forms of arts, culture and heritage varies according to many characteristics, and how this changed between the survey years 2022/2023 and 2023/2024. They also show how rates of engagement in different forms of arts, culture and heritage vary across English local authorities. These dashboards extend those published by other organisations by including additional characteristics – for example, data by English local authority for multiple forms of arts, culture and heritage.

The arts, culture and heritage workforce

Our analysis of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) extends and updates our previous report, in which we analysed the composition of groups of arts, culture and heritage occupations across the UK and the rates of entry to and exit from these occupations. This analysis takes place in the context of declining response rates to the LFS, and therefore we have higher rates of uncertainty around our estimates than in the past.

Overall, this analysis shows stability. For example, large percentages of people working in arts, culture and heritage jobs grew up in managerial and professional households, and less than half of people working in performing, music and visual arts occupations were employed as opposed to self-employed, with no statistically significant differences over the period we cover.

Arts, culture and heritage audiences: Evidence from across England

Based on analysis of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Participation Survey, we see that in England, rates of participation in arts and culture activities and attendance at arts and culture events significantly increased between 2022/2023 and 2023/2024. In some cases, these increases were large, such as the percentage of the population attending a theatrical performance (from 30% to 39% of the 16+ population) and writing, playing and performing music (from 6% to 10%). For attending heritage sites, the picture was more mixed, with increases in the percentages of people attending some types of site, including National Trust sites (from 51% to 61%) and archaeological sites (from 24% to 27%), and decreases in percentages visiting others, including cities or towns with celebrated historic nature (from 45% to 37%) and historic buildings open to the public (from 32% to 28%).

The recovery in participation and attendance in arts and culture has not been experienced equally in different groups. The increases in engagement have been smaller among people in working-class households and among Black people. This has meant that some of the inequalities that we highlighted last year have become wider, returning to pre-pandemic patterns. However, this was not uniformly the case: the increase in attending libraries was larger for Black people (from 21% to 34%) than for other ethnic groups (for example, from 19% to 24% among White people). For attending heritage sites, any changes were similar across groups. We also do not see significant changes between men and women, or between disabled people and people who are not disabled.

Arts, culture and heritage audiences: Understanding differences across English local authorities

Drilling down into consumption data at local authority level in 2023/2024 further illustrates the broader patterns of inequality in the national picture. Taking attending art exhibitions as an example, this was the activity most strongly associated with several other types of cultural engagement, and there were only thirteen English local authorities where over half of the adult population attended an art exhibition in the twelve months prior to completing the survey. These thirteen were all in London, which likely reflects, at least in part, the large number of museums, galleries and other cultural bodies in the capital, as well as socioeconomic differences in the population. Other local authorities where this figure was high are Brighton and Hove (49%) and Oxford (46%); outside the south of England, the highest percentage was for York (37%). This is a prime example of the relationship between place and cultural consumption. It shows the scale of the challenge for policymakers interested in addressing cultural inequalities between places across the country.

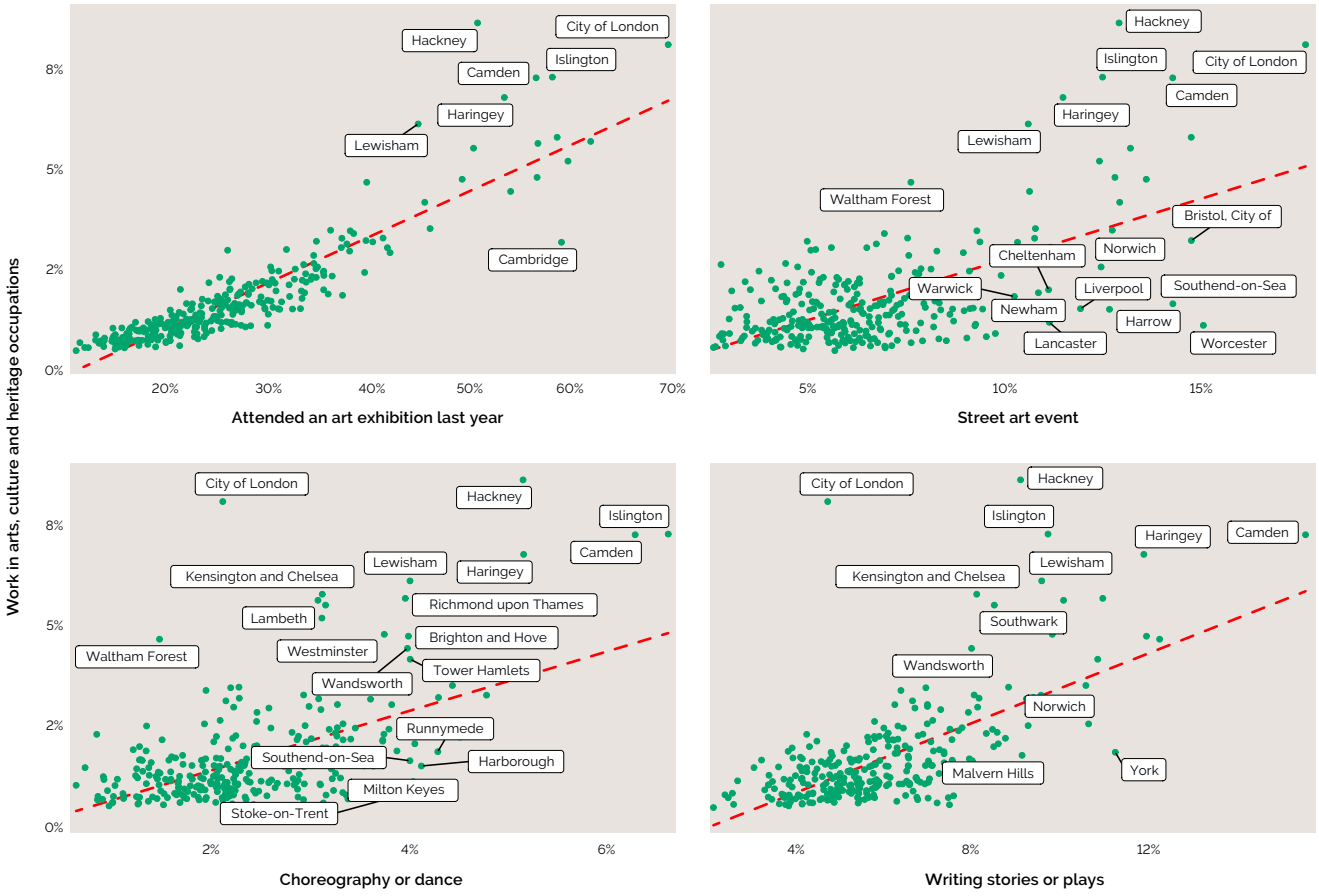
Not all activities exhibited similar geographic patterns, and we draw attention to three where there were differences: attending a comedy event; participating in crafts; and playing video games. For comedy events, rates were high in Mid Sussex and Stockton-on-Tees (both 22%). The high rates in Stockton-on-Tees are particularly noteworthy given the much lower rates of engagement in other activities in the town. Participation in crafts was much more evenly distributed across the country, with the highest rates in more rural areas. Finally, rates of playing video games were very evenly distributed across England, across both urban and rural areas.

For museums and galleries, libraries and heritage sites, the patterns were similar but not identical to the patterns for attending arts and cultural events. For heritage sites, rates of attendance were relatively low for London boroughs and particularly low in the West Midlands. By contrast, London boroughs had very high rates of people attending museums. Library attendance was fairly evenly distributed across the country, with a maximum engagement rate of 36% and a minimum of 12%.

The areas with higher rates of engagement with arts, culture and heritage also tended to be the ones with higher proportions of workers in arts, culture and heritage occupations. However, the strength of this relationship varied significantly according to the specific form of engagement in question. Even for those activities where the relationship was strong, there were exceptions. Examples are attending art exhibitions in Cambridge (59%), attending street art events in Worcester (15%), Southend (14%) and Liverpool (12%), and participating in choreography and dance in Stoke-on-Trent (6%) and Milton Keynes (5%).

These relationships are illustrated in the figure below, which highlights the importance of thinking of audiences and workforces together. The key to genuine policy impact on place and levels of engagement cannot be separated from who works in arts, culture and heritage in different places. These correlations do not imply causation: they may be mutually reinforcing or they may represent consequences of a third common factor. The relationships we show provide opportunities for further analysis of how these dynamics persist and are reproduced, and how they may be changed.

Scatterplots of the relationships between people engaging in a range of arts, culture and heritage activities and people working in arts, culture and heritage occupations, by local authority



Source: Authors' elaboration based on the DCMS Participation Survey 2023/2024 and Office for National Statistics (2023). Occupations of those in employment, by local area, working pattern, employment status and disability status, England and Wales, Census 2021. Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2022.

1 Background

The year since our last State of the Nations report on audiences and workforces has seen significant changes in the political landscape. The general election of July 2024 saw a change of government, with a new set of 'missions' guiding the administration (10 Downing Street, 2025). The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, across several speeches and public statements (Nandy, 2024, 2025a, 2025b), signalled a desire to address participation gaps in the workforce and engagement gaps in the audience.

As the arts, culture and heritage sectors await the outcome of the government's three-year spending review, a focus on engagement and participation is clearly central to the direction of future cultural policy.

At the same time, there are severe challenges for the arts, culture and heritage sectors. Cultural policy in devolved nations provides an example (Bakare, 2024; Thorpe, 2024). As funding cuts and possible closures bite, a sense of crisis has emerged for specific art forms and specific organisations.

These challenges for art forms and organisations are matched by policy and public discourses about the sectors' workforce. Inequalities have continued to feature prominently in media discussions about the arts, culture and heritage sectors, from sector-wide issues of lack of access for a variety of under-represented groups to individual examples of bullying, sexual harassment and discrimination (Nisbett et al, 2025).

The backdrop of concerns over participation and funding is not a new phenomenon. Where there has been a new emphasis is recognition of the importance of place and geography. The prominence of place in public policy sits alongside extensive academic work on the close relationship between arts, culture and heritage audiences and workforces (Brook, 2016; Mak et al, 2020; Widdop and Cutts, 2012).

In the UK context, the research literature – both academic and policy research – has long suggested the importance of the relationship between arts, culture and heritage and place. Place is directly relevant in shaping access to attendance of cultural events and participation in cultural activities; place has a similarly huge impact on work in the arts, culture and heritage sectors. The idea of place-based 'everyday' consumption and the spatial inequalities associated with the UK's cultural infrastructure have highlighted both the possibilities and the problems of place in the context of arts, culture and heritage (Dorling and Hennig, 2016).

Recent analysis has identified particular centres and peripheries in institutional cultural provision. Although these centres and peripheries do not map exactly to the broader set of creative clusters in research commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) (Frontier Economics, 2022) and discussed in the recent Creative PEC Geographies of Creativity report (Siepel et al, 2023), there is clearly a connection between cultural production and cultural consumption in key urban centres in the UK. This relationship also reflects the level of public funding to arts and culture, which is significantly unequal across English local authorities and has decreased, primarily as a consequence of significant cuts in local authority funding (Di Novo and Easton, 2023; Campaign for the Arts and University of Warwick, 2024).

The importance of place was also reinforced during the Covid-19 pandemic given the hyper-local focus of people's lives during lockdown. Here, key organisations' civic role came to the fore, as did a more challenging set of questions about organisations' relationship to their local, particularly freelance, workforce.

Policy discourse has responded in a variety of ways to the ongoing role of place in cultural inequalities. Place is prominent in the government's industrial strategy, which has highlighted creative industries as a growth sector. The priority regions for creative industries have been announced as the North East, Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, West Yorkshire, the West Midlands, Greater London, the West of England, South Wales, Glasgow, the Edinburgh–Dundee corridor and Belfast (Nandy, 2025a). The English Devolution White Paper expects the new strategic authorities, along with existing regional governments, to play a significant role in how funding is allocated and in delivering growth from the cultural sector. The forthcoming sector plan is also expected to foreground place, connecting directly to the approach outlined in the English Devolution White Paper. Finally, combined authorities' local growth plans – such as West Yorkshire's plan – are identifying art, culture and heritage as core sectors.

Much of the focus of interventions and discourses in the context of DCMS policy has been around the balance between London and the English regions (Nandy, 2025a). The recent announcement of £270 million of funding for cultural infrastructure took the theme of 'Arts Everywhere', indicating the centrality of place-based approaches to Labour's cultural policy.

Cultural policy discussions over funding levels and various policies and practices to equalise access beyond the capital, alongside a more general attempt to map key places that are seen as underserved (Arts Council England, 2024), have seen significant continuity over the last decade. This is despite the high churn of DCMS ministers under various Conservative governments and the change of emphasis since Labour's election victory in 2024. Place matters for arts, culture and heritage. Policy and research understand this. However, effective change has proved much more difficult than demonstrating and acknowledging the problem.

In what follows, our analysis of existing datasets as well as data available for the first time allows us to connect broad patterns in labour markets and audiences to the particular dynamics of individual places. Our previous State of the Nations report on audiences and workforces (McAndrew et al, 2024) paid particular attention to what Census 2021 tells us about where arts, culture and heritage workers are based. New local authority-level data from the DCMS Participation Survey means we can do similar granular analysis for audiences. Most notably, there are new possibilities generated by thinking about workforces and audiences together, a connection that has been prominent in recent academic research but has yet to be foregrounded in policy thinking.

Our new analysis speaks directly to an academic and policy context that has highlighted continuity and stability among arts, culture and heritage workforces and audiences. As we showed in our previous State of the Nations report on audiences and workforces (McAndrew et al, 2024), a significant transformation is needed in arts, culture and heritage policy if the long-standing and well-evidenced issues confronting these sectors are to be addressed.

This report is structured as follows. In sections 2 and 3, we continue our consistent reporting of key statistics on arts, culture and heritage. In section 2, we revisit data on people working in arts, culture and heritage occupations across the UK, including data for all four quarters of 2024. In section 3 we revisit data on audiences for arts, culture and heritage in England.

Section 4 provides a deep dive into audiences for arts, culture and heritage across different English local authorities, both highlighting differences in particular activities and illustrating relationships between activities at local authority level. In this section, we also show the relationships between the percentages of people engaging in different forms of arts, culture and heritage and the percentages working in arts, culture and heritage occupations at local authority level.

The analysis in sections 3 and 4 is supplemented by online dashboards, which include data on engagement according to a variety of characteristics as well as maps for all the different forms of engagement included in this report and a full set of relationships between these different forms of engagement.

2 The arts, culture and heritage workforce: Evidence from the Labour Force Survey

We begin by updating the workforce estimates published in our 2024 report on audiences and workforces (McAndrew et al, 2024), based on more recent waves of data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). In the 2024 report, we presented data on people in four groups of arts, culture and heritage occupations: film, television, video radio and photography; museums, libraries and archives; music, performing and visual arts; and publishing. We showed the composition of the workforce by employment, disability, ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic background. These estimates were based on the quarterly LFS data. We also showed, on a quarter-by-quarter basis, the percentages of people staying in arts, culture and heritage occupations, people joining these occupations and people leaving these occupations. These estimates were based on the Two-Quarter Longitudinal Dataset. We continue to use these same data sources.

In our last report, we highlighted increasing uncertainty associated with estimates derived from the LFS. This increasing uncertainty reflects the well-known issue of decreasing response rates: people approached to participate in the survey are less likely to agree than in the past, and this trend accelerated significantly following the Covid-19 pandemic. This trend has continued since our last report, to the extent that in Office for National Statistics (ONS) publications on the labour market based on LFS data, the statistics now have the status of 'official statistics in development', as opposed to official statistics (Office for National Statistics, 2025). This means that in the estimates we present, represented by confidence intervals around trend lines, the level of uncertainty is greater for the most recent quarters.

As in our last report, the occupational categories we use are made up of a number of more precise Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes. For the data from 2021 onwards, the occupational groups are made up of the codes listed below, based on SOC 2020. The estimates for the period prior to 2021 are based on SOC 2010, where the classification is very similar but not identical; for this reason, we include a dotted line in figures to denote where the classification changed.

Film, television, video, radio and photography:

- Managers and directors in the creative industries
- Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators

Publishing:

- Newspaper and periodical editors
- Newspaper and periodical journalists and reporters

Museums, libraries and archives:

- Librarians
- Archivists and curators

Music, performing and visual arts:

- Artists
- Actors, entertainers and presenters
- Dancers and choreographers
- Musicians
- Arts officers, producers and directors

2.1 Changes in the composition of the arts, culture and heritage workforce

Figure 2.1 shows how the composition of the four groups of arts, culture and heritage occupations has changed over the period 2019–2024. This updates the equivalent figure in our previous report by including data from 2024. Each quarter is based on an estimate of between around 600,000 and 670,000 people working in these occupations.

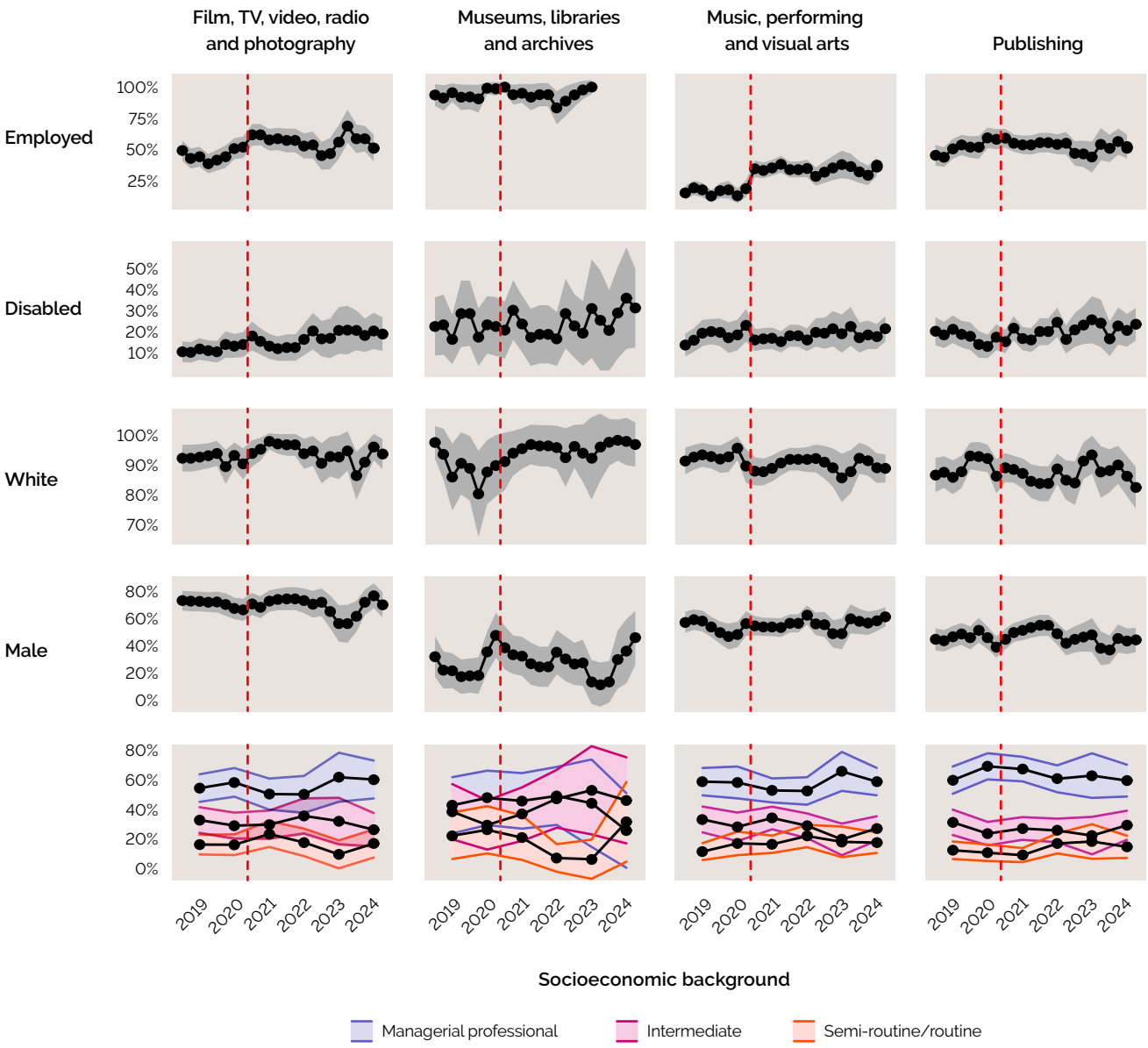
There were no statistically significant changes among any of these occupational groups in relation to employment, disability, ethnic group, gender or social class background. While this partly reflects the level of uncertainty associated with these estimates, noted above, in most cases the differences were actually small. We draw attention to a selection of key estimates to illustrate this further.

In our previous report, there seemed to have been a decrease during 2023 in the percentage of film, television, video, radio, and photography occupations held by men, with a decrease from around 70% to around 60% and even below. The data from 2024 shows a reversal in this trend, with the estimates from the most recent quarters returning to the pre-2023 levels of around 70%. A similar pattern can be seen for people working in museums, libraries and archives, where a slight decrease in the percentage of men had reversed by later in 2024.

Similarly, our previous report indicated that the percentage of people working in publishing occupations who were employed, as opposed to self-employed, slightly decreased during 2023. The data from 2024 shows a reversal of this trend, with estimates close to 50%.

Because the question on social class is not included in every wave of the LFS, we only have estimates for the percentages of people from different social class backgrounds in the third quarter of each year. The estimates from 2024 show no statistically significant differences from 2023 in any of the occupational groups. Attention has been drawn particularly to the low percentages of people from semi-routine and routine backgrounds in film, television, video, radio and photography occupations (see, for example, Stephenson, 2024). Figure 2.1 shows that these percentages were relatively stable over the period 2019–2024, and while the estimate for 2024 was higher than for 2023, the difference was within the margin of error. Crucially, the percentages of people in these occupations who are from managerial and professional backgrounds was relatively stable at around 60%.

Figure 2.1. Changes in employment, disability, ethnic group, gender, and socioeconomic background in different sectors of arts, culture and heritage occupations in the UK, 2019–2024



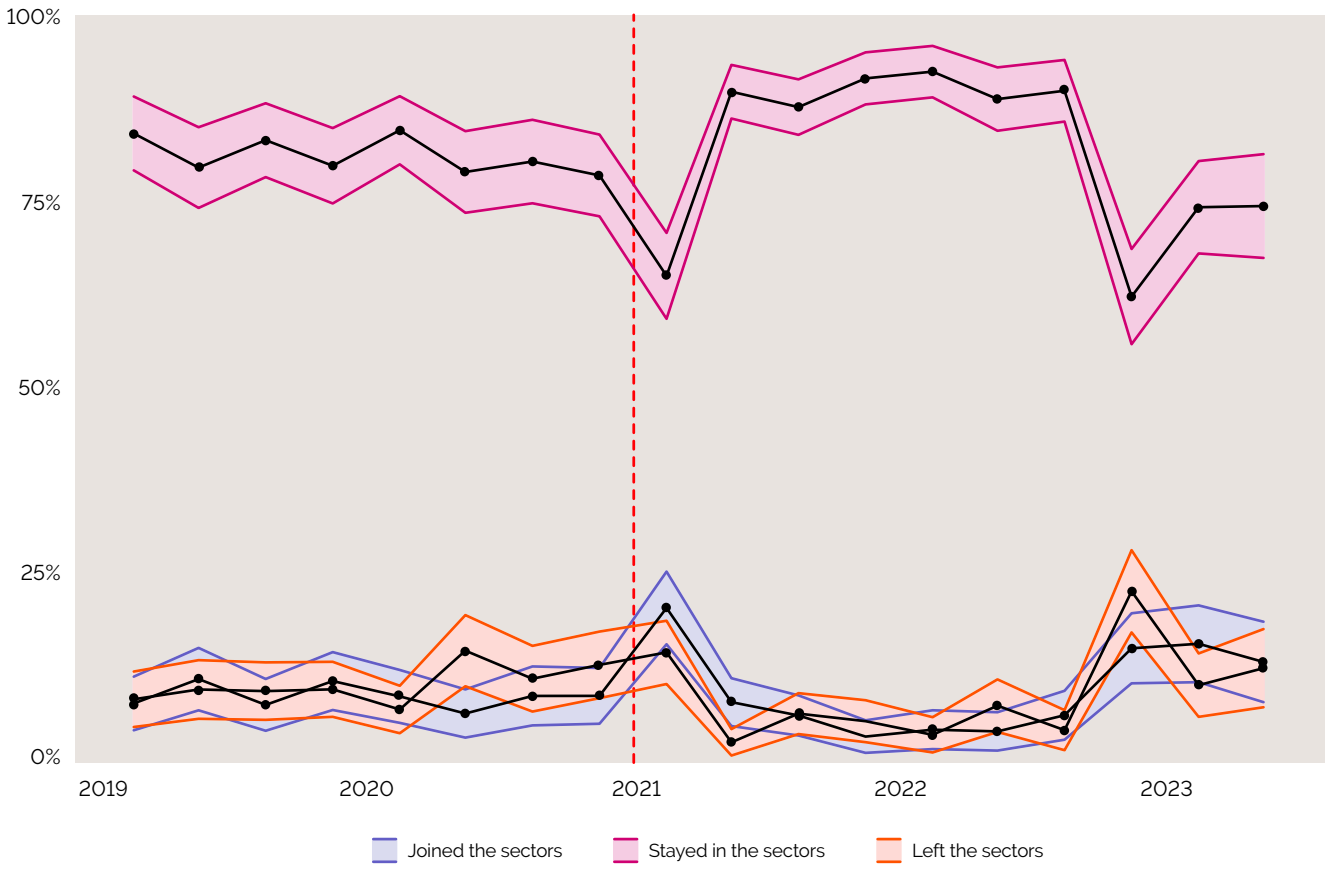
Source: Authors' elaboration based on Quarterly Labour Force Survey, January–March 2019 to July–September 2024 inclusive.

2.2 Transitions into and out of arts, culture and heritage occupations

Figure 2.2 shows consistency and change in employment in arts, culture and heritage occupations over the period 2019–2024. If someone worked in an arts, culture and heritage occupation in two consecutive quarters – including if they changed role (such as working as a musician in one quarter and an arts officer in the subsequent quarter) – they are classified as having 'stayed in the sectors'. Someone working in an arts, culture and heritage occupation in one quarter but not the next is described as having 'left the sectors', while someone working in an arts, culture and heritage occupation in only the second quarter is described as having 'joined the sectors'.

Figure 2.2 does not distinguish between different groups of arts, culture and heritage occupations. This is because the response rate challenges associated with the LFS are even more pronounced in the longitudinal element of the survey.

Figure 2.2. Continuity of employment and transitions into and out of arts, culture and heritage occupations, 2019–2024



Source: Authors' elaboration based on Labour Force Survey Two-Quarter Longitudinal Dataset, October 2018–March 2019 to July–September 2024 inclusive.

Figure 2.2 shows that the level of stability of employment in the sectors during the latter part of 2023 and in 2024 was similar to the level during the earlier part of 2023 (there was a dip in the level of stability in the third quarter of 2023). Our previous report was based on data up to the middle of 2023, and none of the more recent quarterly figures are statistically significantly different from the figures in the earlier report.

This level of stability during 2023 and 2024 was noticeably different from the period covering 2021 and 2022. For much of the 2021–2022 period, the percentages of people staying in the sector quarter-on-quarter were around 90%, while for most of the period from 2023 onwards, the figure was closer to 75%. However, the 2023–2024 percentages were relatively similar to those for 2019 and 2020.

For the most part, figures 2.1 and 2.2 show consistency in the arts, culture and heritage workforce during the course of 2024. There were no statistically significant changes in the demographic profile of the workforce, nor in the percentage of people working as employees compared with being self-employed. In addition, the percentage of people staying in, joining and leaving the sectors remained relatively consistent.

These figures complement similar data published by DCMS (2024a). DCMS publishes economic estimates based on the cultural sector, whose scope is similar to our definition of arts, culture and heritage, with the crucial difference that these estimates are based on industries rather than occupations. DCMS's most recent economic estimates – covering the demographic composition of these industries, their size and the numbers of people who are employed and self-employed – do not show statistically significant differences between 2022/2023 and 2023/2024.

3 Arts, culture and heritage engagement: Evidence from across England

This section summarises the rates of engagement with different forms of arts, culture and heritage across England, based on the 2023/2024 Participation Survey. It refreshes the 2024 State of the Nations report (McAndrew et al, 2024) with this more up-to-date data.

Our focus in this section is on the percentages of the adult population (those aged 16+) engaging in different forms of arts, culture and heritage. The results cover: arts attendance and participation; attendance at heritage sites; and attendance at museums and galleries and in-person and online use of libraries. We present brief statistical descriptions of each of the modes of engagement; the full descriptions of each of these are available in DCMS's main report on the survey (DCMS, 2024b). The activities we focus on are those that were included in the 'arts participation' and 'arts attendance' sections of the survey in 2022/2023, as well as those in the 'heritage visits' section, and those on museums, galleries and libraries. This is to ensure comparability with our previous report (McAndrew et al, 2024). Two additional activities have been included: reading a printed newspaper and attending an event associated with video games. For these activities, we cannot offer a comparison with the previous year due to the novelty of the questions. Our focus on engagement in different activities addresses both the overall population and differences between groups. Here, we look at disability, sex, ethnic group and social class.

While we did not expect to find significant differences over time for the data on the arts, culture and heritage workforce, presented in section 2, we did anticipate differences in engagement between 2022/2023 (the focus of our 2024 report) and 2023/2024. This is because the Participation Survey asks respondents about their activity in the twelve months prior to completing the survey. People interviewed in the spring and summer of 2022 were, therefore, being asked about periods that included parts of 2021, during which activity was at times restricted as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, with restrictions having concluded in July 2021. The impact of the pandemic on cultural engagement is discussed in greater detail in DCMS (2021) and Walmsley et al (2025).

The 2023/2024 Participation Survey included a significantly larger sample of respondents than the previous waves of the survey. This was so that estimates could be drawn at the local authority level; we return to local authorities in section 4. This larger sample size also means that the uncertainty associated with estimates is smaller than for the previous rounds of the survey. For this reason, we were able to identify where one group's engagement with a given activity – whether this is attendance at an event or participation in an activity – was overall higher than another's. This significantly larger sample size, where estimates can be drawn at the local authority level, was reflected in the complex survey design. Estimates are reflective of this survey design, with both weights and (local authority) strata.

This focus on England reflects the fact that the collection of cultural statistics is devolved and surveys are structured differently, with different availability, in each of the four nations of the UK. We aim to do further deep dive research in other home nations of the UK in future State of the Nations reports.

3.1 Trends in cultural engagement

We start by comparing engagement in different activities, based on data from the Participation Survey in 2022/2023 and 2023/2024. Figure 3.1 shows the rates of engagement in a range of different activities, where 'engagement' is defined as attending or participating at least once in the twelve months prior to completing the survey.

Activities are labelled as 'attendance' and 'participation', reflecting a distinction made in the survey. The narrower, solid bars reflect the figures for 2023/2024, while the wider, semi-transparent bars reflect the figures for 2022/2023. 'Reading a printed newspaper' was a new item in 2023/2024. Confidence intervals are shown in each case as black lines overlapping the ends of the bars.

For almost all these activities, a higher percentage of the 16+ population engaged in the twelve months prior to completing the 2023/2024 survey compared with the twelve months prior to completing the 2022/2023 survey. These increases were particularly large in the cases of attendance. For example, the percentage of people attending a theatrical performance increased by 9 percentage points, from 30% to 39%; for live music, there was an increase of 8 percentage points, from 31% to 39%.

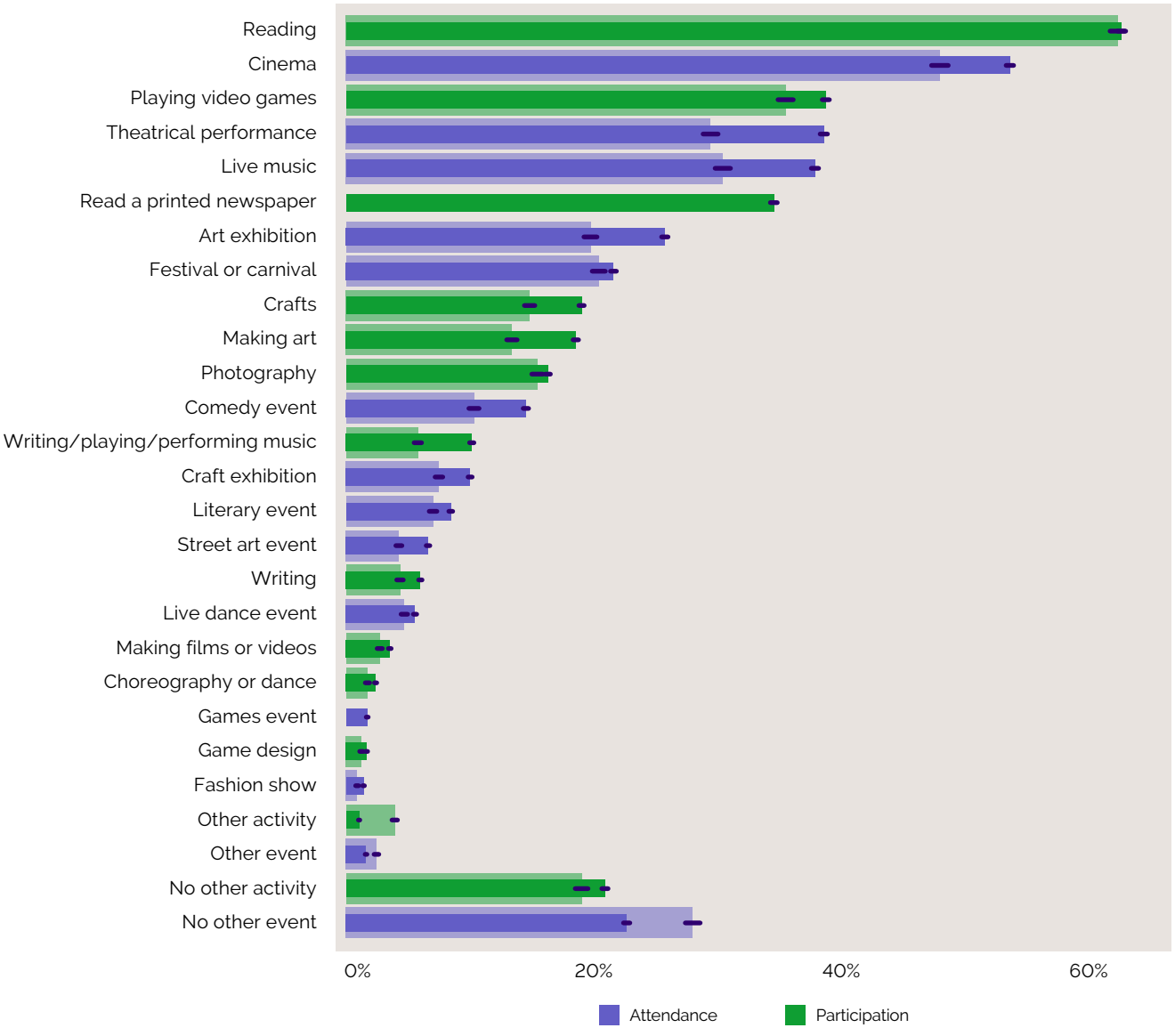
Large overall increases were not limited to attendance. The percentage of the 16+ population making art – for example, painting or drawing – increased by 5 percentage points, from 14% to 19%, while the equivalent for doing crafts was a 4 percentage point increase, from 15% to 19%. These increases cannot be explained by the removal of restrictions associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, as it was possible to participate in these ways throughout the periods when restrictions applied.

For most of these activities, less than half of the 16+ population engaged; the two exceptions were reading for pleasure (64%) – which includes reading books, graphic novels and magazines – and watching a film at the cinema (55%). For eleven of the twenty-five activities, the engagement rate was below 10%. For this reason, it is important to highlight relative differences as well as absolute differences.

The largest relative difference was in writing, playing and performing music, where the percentage almost doubled, from 6% in 2022/2023 to 10% in 2023/2024. There were also large proportional changes in attending street art events (from 4% to 7%) and comedy events (from 11% to 15%) and participating in choreography or dance (from 1.8% to 2.4%).

The only forms of engagement that saw decreases were the general 'other activity' and 'other event' categories. This can explain why, despite the increases in every single named form of participation, there was a slight increase (from 19% to 21%) in the percentage of people claiming they did not engage in any form of participation.

Figure 3.1. Rates of attendance and participation in cultural activities in England (16+), 2022/2023 and 2023/2024

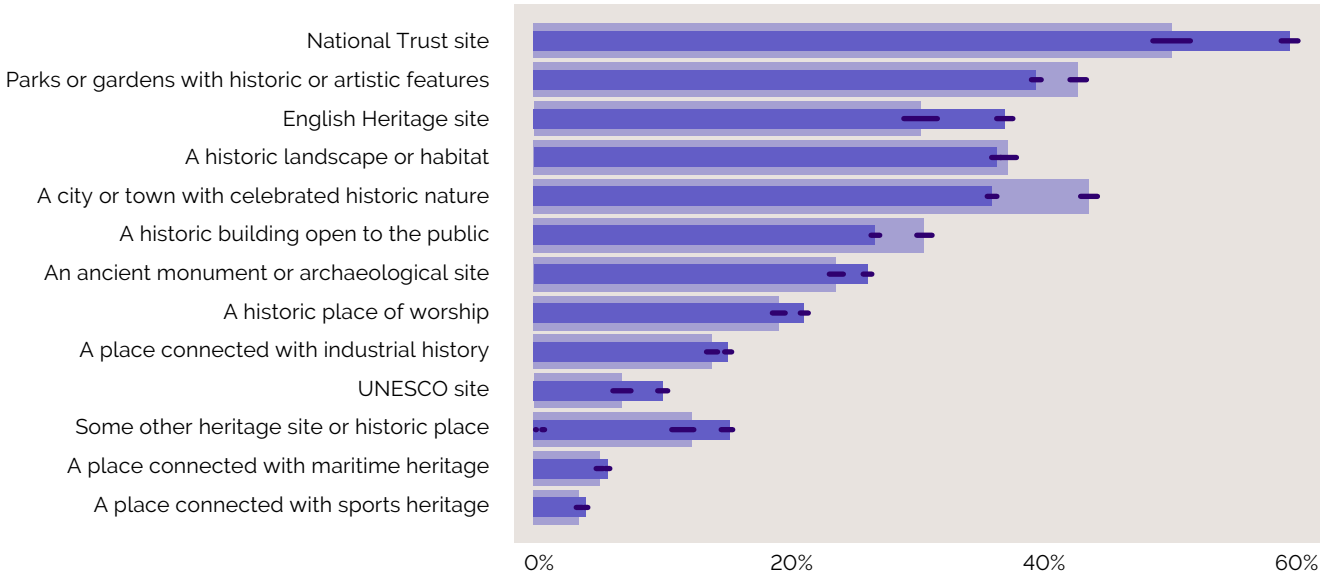


Source: Authors' elaboration based on the DCMS Participation Survey 2022/2023 and 2023/2024. The narrower, solid bars reflect the figures for 2023/2024, and the wider, semi-transparent bars reflect the figures for 2022/2023. The black lines show confidence intervals.

Figure 3.2 shows attendance at heritage sites. While engaging in arts activities – both attendance at events and participation in activities – saw increases across the board, this was not the case for attendance at heritage sites. There were statistically significant decreases in four of the thirteen types of site shown in Figure 3.2. The largest decrease was for visits to a city or town with celebrated historic nature, going from 45% to 37%. This was followed by visits to a historic building open to the public, from 32% to 28%.

Several types of heritage site saw statistically significant increases in the percentage of the 16+ population who visited at least once in the twelve months prior to completing the survey. The largest increase was for National Trust sites, with an increase of 10 percentage points, from 51% to 61%. This was already the type of site that people were most likely to visit. The largest proportional increase was for UNESCO sites, with the percentage visiting these sites rising from 7% to 10%.

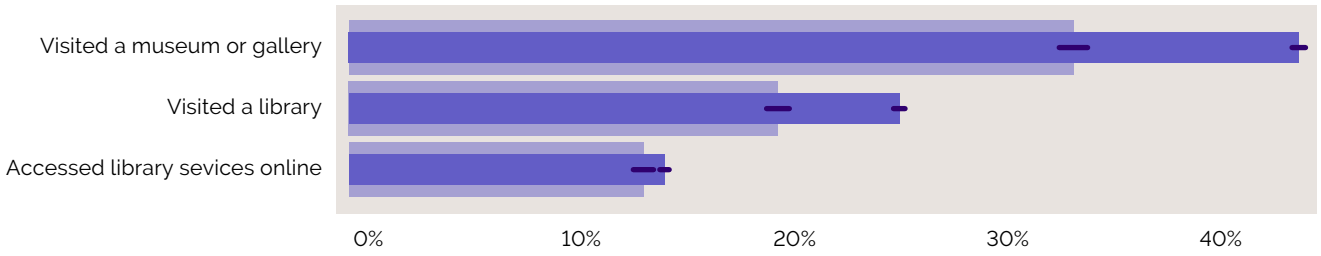
Figure 3.2. Rates of attendance at different heritage sites in England (16+), 2022/2023 and 2023/2024



Source: Authors' elaboration based on the DCMS Participation Survey 2022/2023 and 2023/2024. The narrower, solid bars reflect the figures for 2023/2024, and the wider, semi-transparent bars reflect the figures for 2022/2023. The black lines show confidence intervals.

Finally in this section, Figure 3.3 shows the percentages of people visiting museums and galleries, and using libraries in person and online. For all three, there were statistically significant increases from 2022/2023 to 2023/2024. For visiting a museum or gallery, this increase was very large, from 33% to 43%. For visiting a library, the increase was from 19% to 25%, while for accessing library services online, it was from 13% to 14% – a smaller difference, but statistically significant.

Figure 3.3. Rates of attendance at museums and galleries and in-person and online use of libraries in England (16+), 2022/2023 and 2023/2024



Source: Authors' elaboration based on DCMS (2025). The narrower, solid bars reflect the figures for 2023/2024, and the wider, semi-transparent bars reflect the figures for 2022/2023. The black lines show confidence intervals.

3.2 Diversity in cultural engagement

We now move to understanding how these headline figures varied between different groups during 2023/2024. We also draw attention in the text to where any differences between groups may have changed, or remained stable, between 2022/2023 and 2023/2024.

As section 3.1 shows, there were statistically significant changes in the overall rates of engagement with different forms of arts, culture and heritage in these two periods, and we should not assume that these changes were evenly distributed between groups.

Because of the number of comparisons this entails, we do not present figures comparing 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 for each and every group in this report. The dashboards that accompany the report show the relevant figures in each case.

3.2.1 Disability

Figure 3.4 shows the percentages of people engaging in different forms of cultural activities in 2023/2024, distinguishing between disabled people and people who are not disabled.

Similar to 2022/2023, there were large differences between disabled people and people who are not disabled in terms of attendance at some cultural events. For example, for attending a film at a cinema, there was a 14 percentage point difference between disabled people and people who are not disabled (45% and 59%, respectively). Other large differences were found for attending a theatrical performance (34% and 43%, respectively) and live music (32% and 42%, respectively).

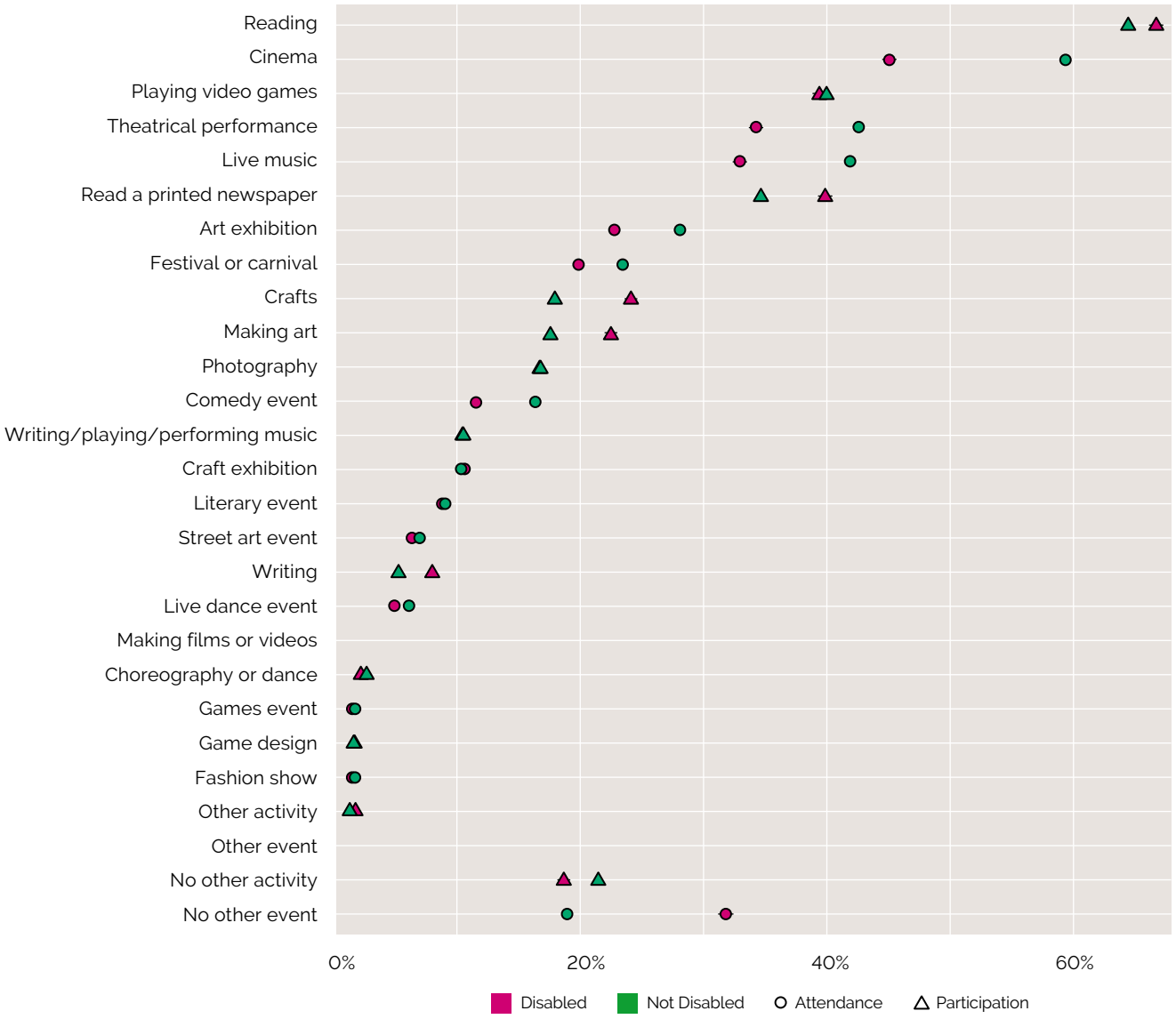
The pattern was reversed for some forms of cultural participation. Disabled people were more likely to participate in crafting compared with people who are not disabled (24% and 18%, respectively), making art (23% and 18%, respectively) and writing (8% and 5%, respectively). For many forms of engagement, there were no statistically significant differences – this included attending craft exhibitions, participating in photography as an artistic activity and making films or videos.

The majority of these differences are similar to those found in McAndrew et al (2024), though the overall percentages of people engaging in each of these activities has increased in most cases. However, there are some exceptions. These are largest for the percentages of people who did not attend any of the specified events or participate in any of the specified activities in the twelve months before completing the survey.

In 2023/2024, disabled people were statistically significantly less likely than people who are not disabled to have participated in none of these activities – 19% compared with 21%. In the previous year, the pattern was in the other direction, with 20% of disabled people and 18% of people who are not disabled reporting that they had not participated in any of these activities in the twelve months prior to completing the survey. This difference was also statistically significant. In the case of attending events, the difference between disabled people and people who are not disabled narrowed from 39% and 24% – a difference of 15 percentage points – in 2022/2023 to 32% and 19% – a difference of 13 percentage points – in 2023/2024.

In most cases, the change in the engagement gap between disabled people and people who are not disabled was less than 1 percentage point. Where this was not the case, generally the difference became smaller over time because disabled people were more likely to engage in a given activity. For example, in 2022/2023, the figure for reading a book for pleasure was 65% for both disabled people and people who are not disabled, while in 2023/2024 the figure was 67% for disabled people and 64% for people who are not disabled.

Figure 3.4. Rates of attendance and participation in cultural activities in England (16+) by disability status, 2023/2024



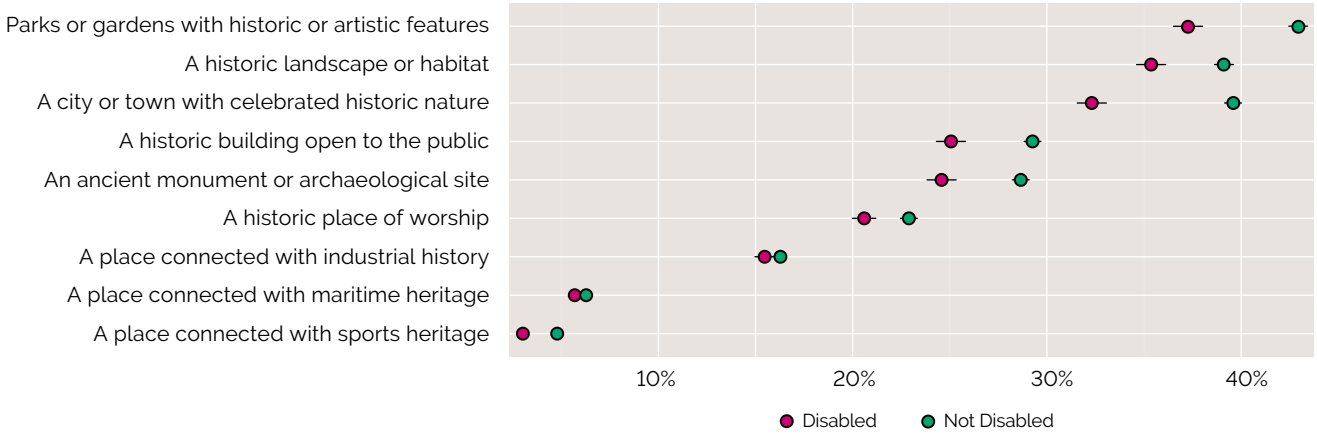
Source: Authors' elaboration based on the DCMS Participation Survey 2023/2024.

Figure 3.5 shows the equivalent figures for attending different heritage sites. Disabled people were less likely to have attended each type of heritage site than people who are not disabled, though the differences were very small for places connected with industrial history and places connected with maritime heritage.

The largest difference was for visits to a city or town with celebrated historic nature, with 40% of people who are not disabled reporting this form of engagement compared with 32% of disabled people. There were moderate differences (of around 4 percentage points) for parks or gardens with historic or artistic features, historic buildings open to the public and ancient monuments and archaeological sites.

Compared with 2022/2023, the differences between disabled people and people who are not disabled were relatively consistent. For example, both years saw an 8 percentage point difference for a city or town with celebrated historic nature.

Figure 3.5. Rates of attendance at different heritage sites in England (16+) by disability status, 2023/2024

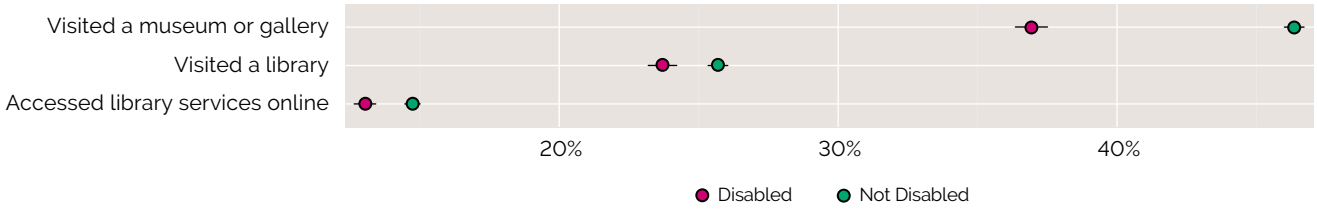


Source: Authors' elaboration based on the DCMS Participation Survey 2023/2024.

Finally in this section, Figure 3.6 shows the differences in engagement with museums and galleries and with libraries by disability status. It shows a difference of around 2 percentage points for both visiting a library and using library services online, with disabled people less likely to engage in both cases. For visiting a museum or gallery, the difference was larger: 46% of people who are not disabled reported attending in the twelve months prior to completing the survey, compared with 37% of disabled people.

In the case of visiting a library, the difference increased slightly between 2022/2023 and 2023/2024. In 2022/2023, 20% of people who are not disabled compared with 19% of disabled people visited a library, while in 2023/2024 the percentages were 26% and 24%, respectively. For visiting a museum or gallery, the difference remained consistent at 9 percentage points.

Figure 3.6. Rates of attendance at museums and galleries and in-person and online use of libraries in England (16+) by disability status, 2023/2024



Source: Authors' elaboration based on the DCMS Participation Survey 2023/2024.

3.2.2 Sex

This section shows the differences between men and women in their engagement in different forms of arts, culture and heritage in 2023/2024.

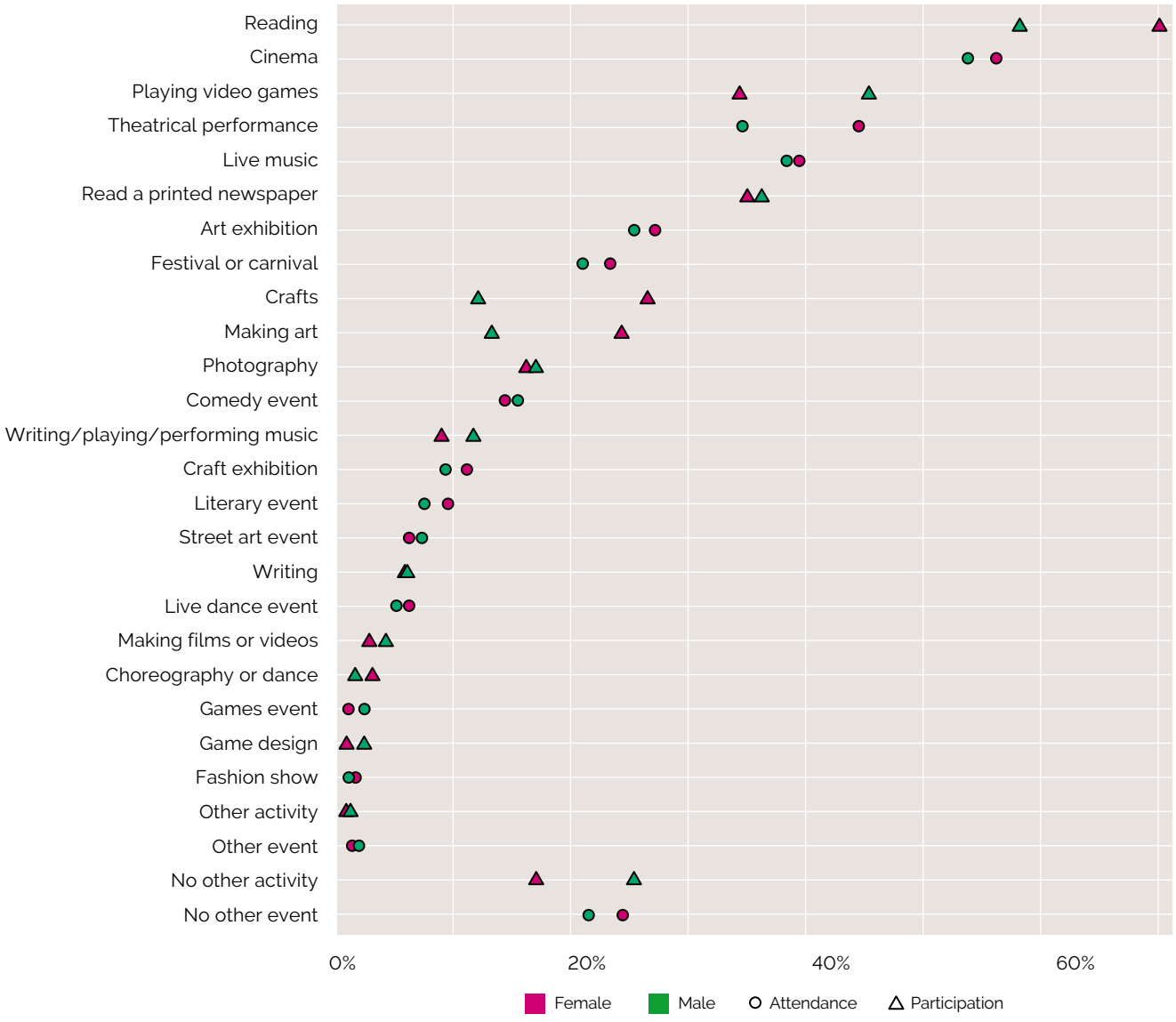
The measurement of sex and gender changed between the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 surveys. For this reason, DCMS advises against direct comparison of these two years. We therefore only highlight changes between the two rounds of survey data where they are very large; any smaller changes may be consequences of the change to measurement, as opposed to genuine changes in the population.

Figure 3.7 shows the percentages of men and women who engaged in different forms of culture in the 2023/2024 period. It illustrates that, for most activities, differences between men and women were small, of the order of a percentage point or two.

Larger differences between men and women can mainly be seen with respect to cultural participation, particularly that which often takes place at home. The difference was largest for crafts, with 27% of women and 12% of men participating. Also with greater engagement by women, there were large differences for reading (70% of women and 58% of men), making art (24% of women and 13% of men) and attending theatrical performances (45% of women and 35% of men). In the opposite direction, there was a large difference for playing video games, with 34% of women and 45% of men participating in this activity. All of these differences were statistically significant.

The differences between men and women in the 2023/2024 survey, measured through the Government Statistical Service's question on sex, were almost identical to the differences between men and women in the 2022/2023 survey, which were measured in a different way. This suggests that the differences were relatively consistent over the two years.

Figure 3.7. Rates of attendance and participation in cultural activities in England (16+) by sex,[1] 2023/2024



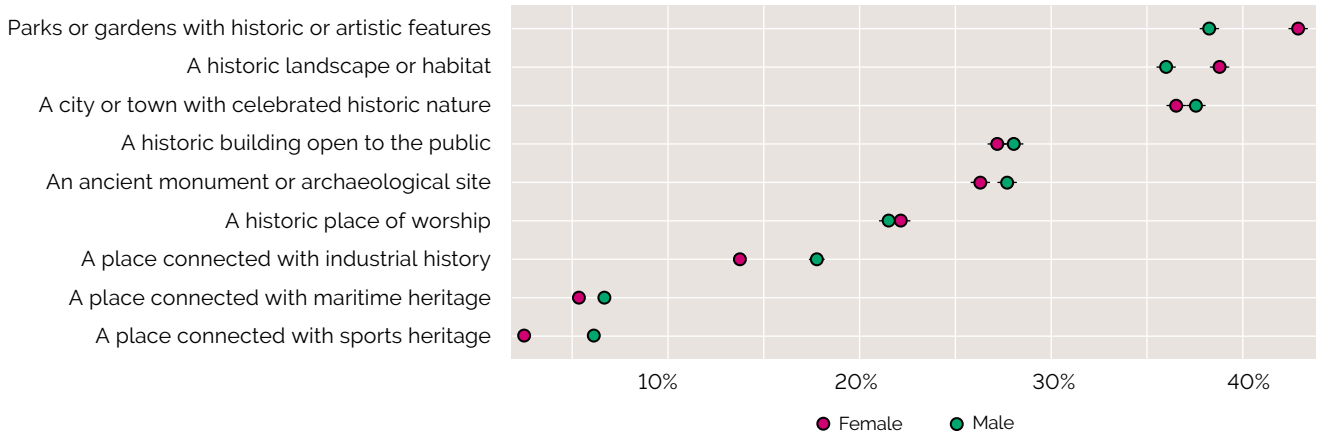
Source: Authors' elaboration based on the DCMS Participation Survey 2023/2024.

1. In the 2022/2023 questionnaire, a custom question was asked: 'Would you describe yourself as...', with the response options being, in this order, Male, Female, Prefer to self-describe and Prefer not to say. The 2023/2024 questionnaire used the Government Statistical Service's harmonised questions on sex and gender identity – the questions used in Census 2021. The current advice is against combining the responses from these questions to produce a derived gender variable, thus comparisons cannot be made.

Figure 3.8 shows differences between men and women with respect to attendance at different heritage sites. In most cases, the differences were small. There were some moderate differences in relation to parks or gardens with historic or artistic features and sites with historic landscape or habitat, with women more likely to have attended (43% of women compared with 38% of men, and 39% of women compared with 36% of men, respectively). There were also differences with respect to places connected with industrial history and places connected with sports heritage, with men more likely to have attended (18% of men compared with 14% of women, and 6% of men compared with 2% of women, respectively). In all these cases, the differences were statistically significant.

As with arts and cultural activities, these differences are broadly identical to those we highlighted in our 2024 report, though they are based on data that used different measurement of sex. The exception is places connected with sports heritage, where the difference between men and women has increased, based on a slight increase in the percentage of men visiting and a significant decrease in the percentage of women visiting these sites.

Figure 3.8. Rates of attendance at different heritage sites in England (16+) by sex, 2023/2024

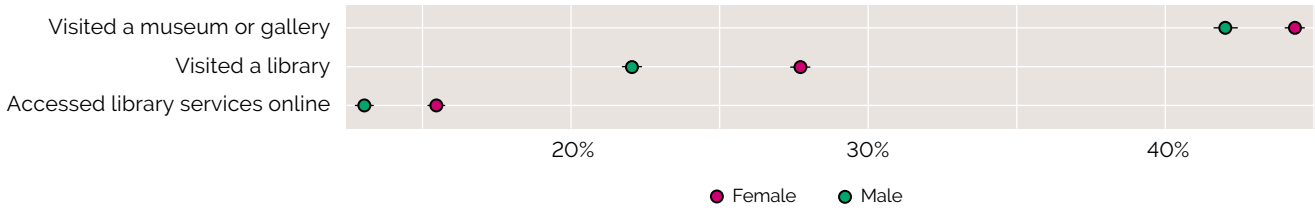


Source: Authors' elaboration based on the DCMS Participation Survey 2023/2024.

Finally in this section, Figure 3.9 shows the percentages of men and women who visited museums and galleries and used libraries in person and online in the twelve months prior to completing the survey. Women had higher rates of engagement in all three categories, with the largest difference being for visiting a library (28% of women compared with 22% of men).

Once again, the differences we see between men and women are almost identical to the differences we highlighted in our report based on the 2022/2023 data. This suggests that the overall increase in engagement with museums and galleries and with libraries that we saw in Figure 3.3 was made up of similar increases for both men and women.

Figure 3.9. Rates of attendance at museums and galleries and in-person and online use of libraries in England (16+) by sex, 2023/2024



Source: Authors' analysis of a tailored dataset provided by Jisc

3.2.3 Ethnic groups

This section highlights differences between ethnic groups in engagement in forms of arts, culture and heritage.

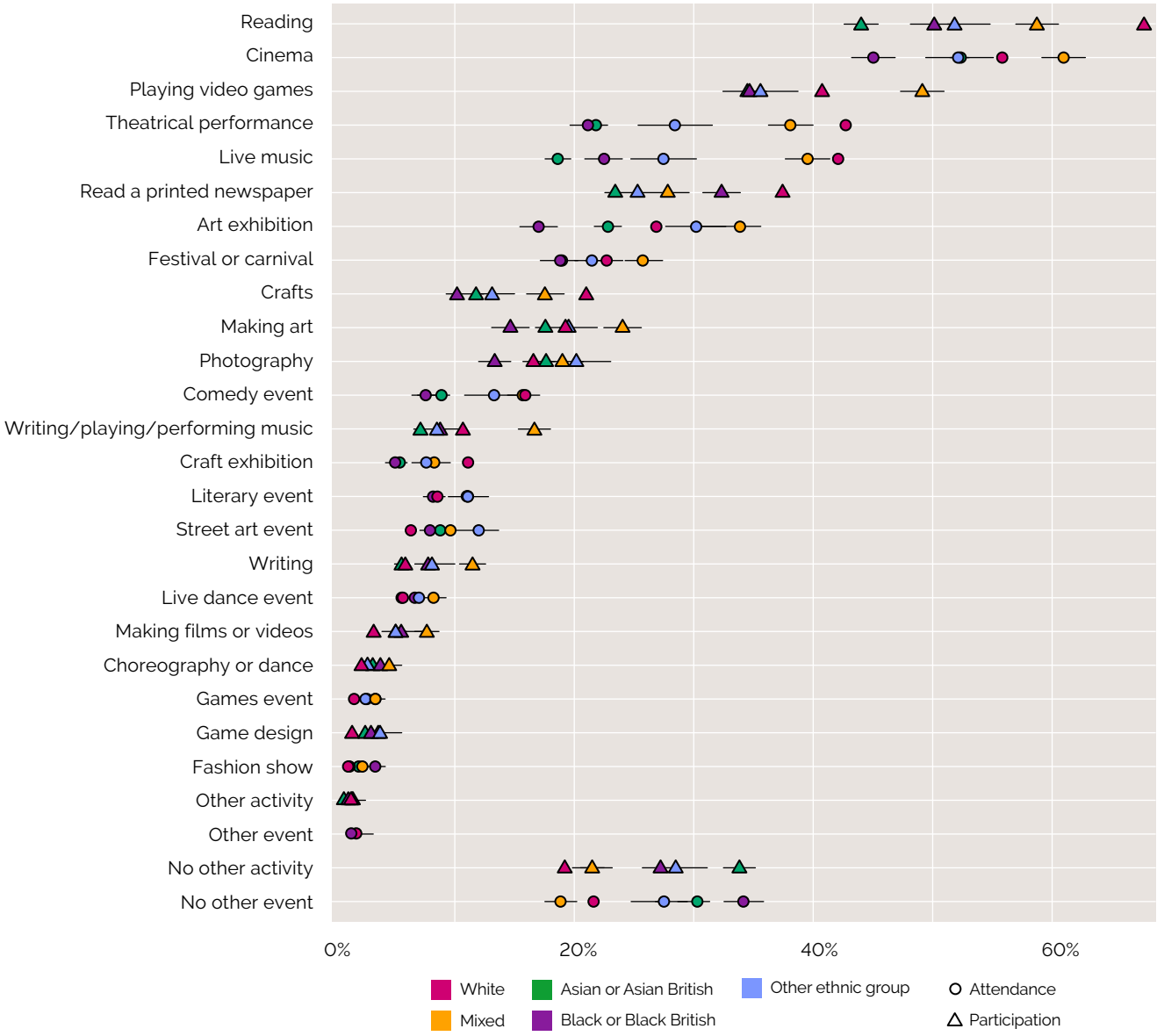
Because the sample size for the 2023/2024 Participation Survey was much larger than the sample for the 2022/2023 survey, the uncertainty around estimates for different ethnic groups was less and the related confidence intervals were smaller. For this reason, we were more likely to be able to identify where differences between groups were statistically significant.

Figure 3.10 shows rates of engagement by different ethnic groups in forms of cultural activities in England. In almost all cases, people in either the White or the Mixed categories were the most likely to report having engaged in the twelve months prior to completing the survey, and in most cases the differences between groups were statistically significant. For example, people in the White group were the most likely to have read for pleasure, attended theatrical performances and attended live music, while people in the Mixed group were the most likely to have gone to the cinema, played video games and attended an art exhibition.

For most activities, Black and Asian people were statistically less likely than people in other ethnic groups to have engaged. For example: 23% of Black people and 19% of Asian people attended live music compared with 42% of White people; 15% of Black people and 18% of Asian people reported making art compared with 24% of people with mixed or multiple ethnic groups. By contrast, 3% of Asian people and 4% of Black people reported participating in choreography or dance, compared with 2% of White people, and 5% of both Asian people and people in the Other ethnic group category reported making films or videos, compared with 3% of White people.

Some of the differences that we see based on the 2023/2024 data are larger than the equivalents in the 2022/2023 data. For the activities with the largest increases between 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 – attending a theatrical performance, attending live music and attending an art exhibition – the increases for Black people were the smallest of any ethnic group. For example, the percentage of Black people attending a theatrical performance rose from 17% to 21%, while the equivalent increase for White people was from 33% to 43%. However, the percentage of Black people who reported not attending any of these events saw a larger decrease than for Other ethnic groups, from 40% to 34%.

Figure 3.10. Rates of attendance and participation in cultural activities in England (16+) by ethnic group, 2023/2024



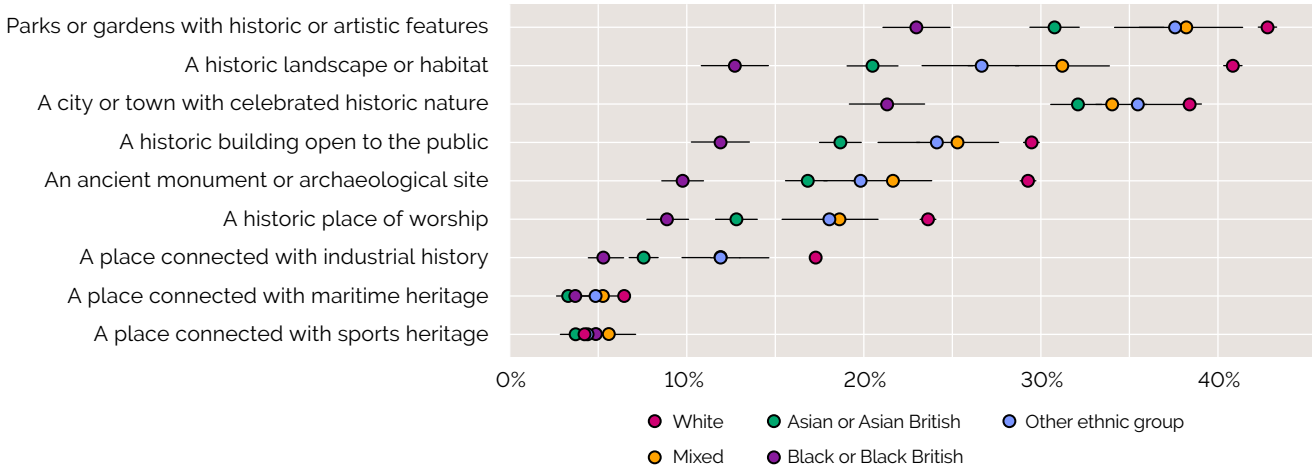
Source: Authors' elaboration based on the DCMS Participation Survey 2023/2024.

Figure 3.11 shows the percentages of people in different ethnic groups who reported attending different heritage sites during the 2023/2024 period.

As for the data from 2022/2023, we see some very large differences. Black people were statistically significantly less likely to have attended every type of heritage site, except for places connected with maritime heritage and with sports heritage. By contrast, White people were the most likely to have attended all types of heritage site with the exception of places connected with sports heritage. In all but three cases, these differences were statistically significant. The difference was largest for historic landscapes and habitats, with 13% of Black people and 41% of White people reporting that they attended this type of site.

The differences between ethnic groups in attendance at different heritage sites were similar in the 2023/2024 data and the 2022/2023 data. This is a notable difference from the data on engagement in arts and culture activities, where some of the differences in the 2023/2024 data were larger than the equivalents in the 2022/2023 data.

Figure 3.11. Rates of attendance at different heritage sites in England (16+) by ethnic group, 2023/2024



Source: Authors' elaboration based on the DCMS Participation Survey 2023/2024.

Finally in this section, Figure 3.12 shows the percentages of people from different ethnic groups who reported visiting museums and galleries and using libraries in person and online in 2023/2024.

It shows that people in the Mixed and Other ethnic group categories were the most likely to have visited a museum or gallery, with both at just over 50%. White people were the next most likely, at 44%, just ahead of Asian people at 42%, with Black people the least likely to attend, at 32%.

In terms of engaging with libraries, White people were the least likely to have visited a library (24%) and accessed library services online (13%). Other ethnic groups were not statistically significantly different from one another, with rates of around a third for visiting and around a quarter for accessing services online.

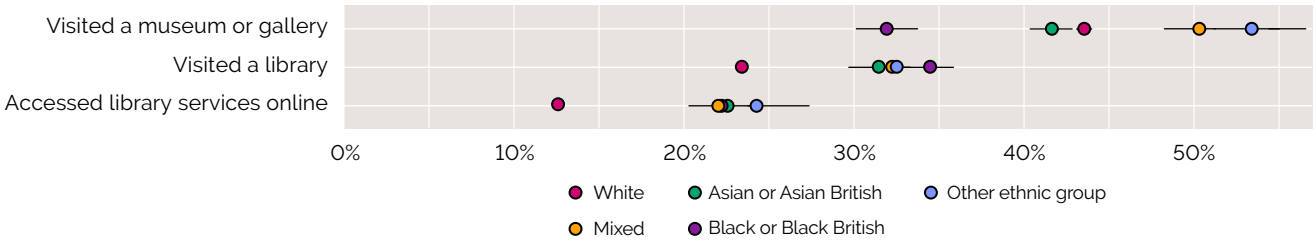
Visits to museums and galleries and visits to libraries increased significantly between 2022/2023 and 2023/2024. These increases varied between different ethnic groups.

For visiting libraries, the percentage increase was largest for Black people, with an increase of 13 percentage points, from 21% to 34%. The percentage of Asian people increased by 6 percentage points, from 25% to 31%. For White people, there was a 5 percentage point increase, from 19% to 24%.

The differences for accessing library services online were not statistically significantly different.

The increases in visiting a museum or gallery were similar for most ethnic groups, at around 11 percentage points. The exception was for Black people, with an increase of 5 percentage points, from 27% to 32%.

Figure 3.12. Rates of attendance at museums and galleries and in-person and online use of libraries in England (16+) by ethnic group, 2023/2024



Source: Authors' analysis of a tailored dataset provided by Jisc

3.2.4 Social class

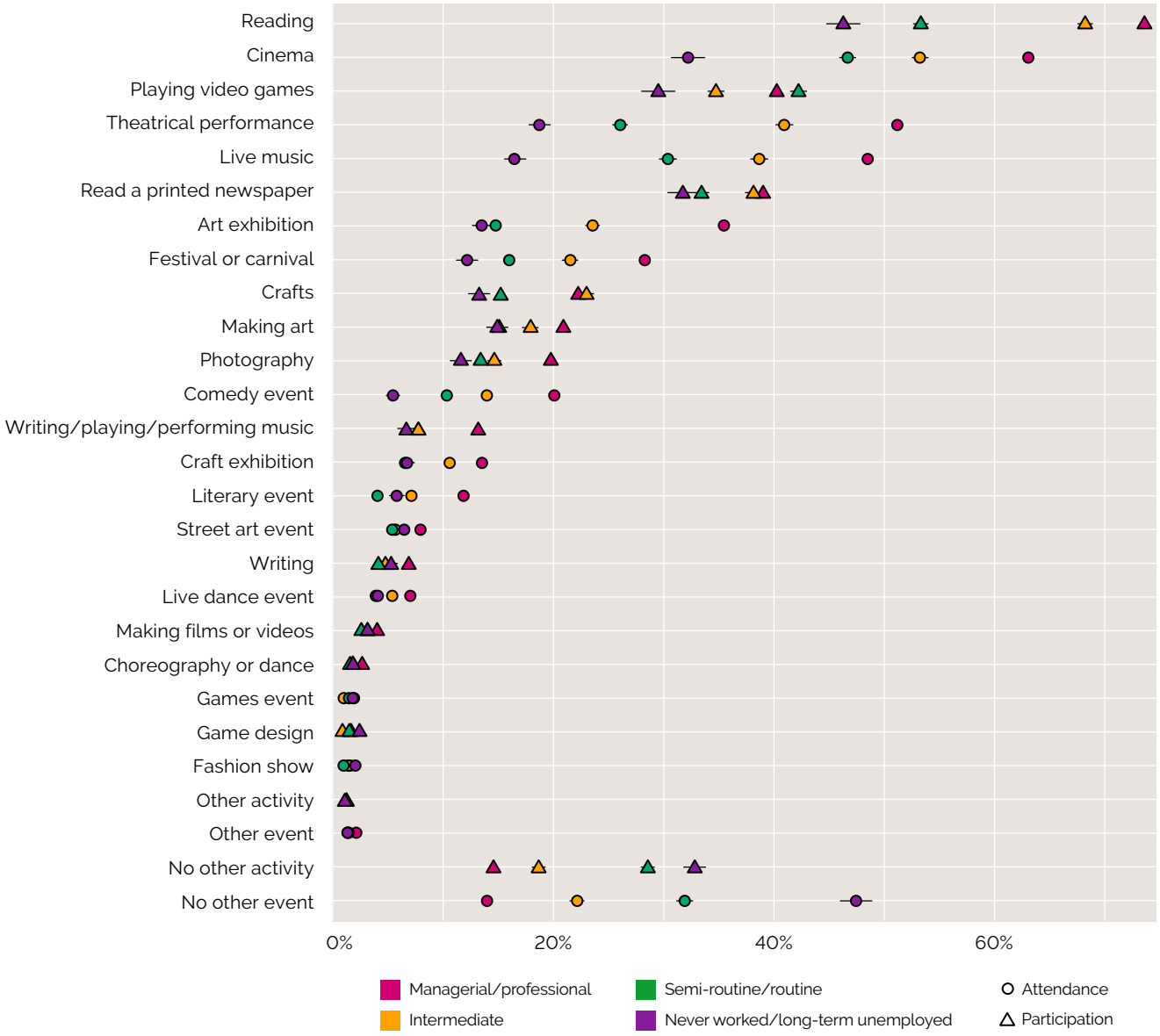
Our final focus in this section is on social class, operationalised using the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification. As in the previous section, the significantly larger sample size for the 2023/2024 data compared with the previous year provides us with greater certainty around the estimates for the different groups.

Figure 3.13 shows that the rates of engagement with cultural activities varied between social class groups. In some cases, these differences were very large. For example, 51% of people in managerial/professional households reported having attended a theatrical event in the year prior to the survey, while the equivalent share for those in semi-routine/routine households was 26% and for never worked/long-term unemployed households was 19%. For live music, the differences were similar, at 49% for managerial/professional households, 30% for semi-routine/routine households and 17% for never worked/long-term unemployed households. There were also differences for forms of participation, with 13% of people in managerial/professional households writing, playing and performing music, around double the percentage in each other group. Also 20% of people in managerial/professional households reported making art compared with around 15% of people in both semi-routine and routine households and never worked/long-term unemployed households.

Not all the differences were large, and managerial/professional households were not always the most likely to engage. People in semi-routine/routine households were the most likely to play video games, at 42%, with people in managerial/professional households slightly behind at 40%. People in intermediate households were the most likely to participate in crafts, at 23%.

Compared with 2022/2023, class differences in cultural engagement have in most cases increased, with the differences between people in managerial/professional and intermediate households and those in semi-routine/routine and never worked/long-term unemployed households having widened. For live music, the increases were, respectively, 9%, 8%, 5% and 3%; for art exhibitions, they were, respectively, 7%, 7%, 3% and 3%. This pattern also applies for different forms of participation. For writing/playing/performing music, the figures were, respectively, 6%, 3%, 2% and 2%; for making art, they were, respectively, 6%, 5%, 4% and 2%. The full set of figures can be found online in the dashboards accompanying this report.

Figure 3.13. Rates of attendance and participation in cultural activities in England (16+) by National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification, 2023/2024

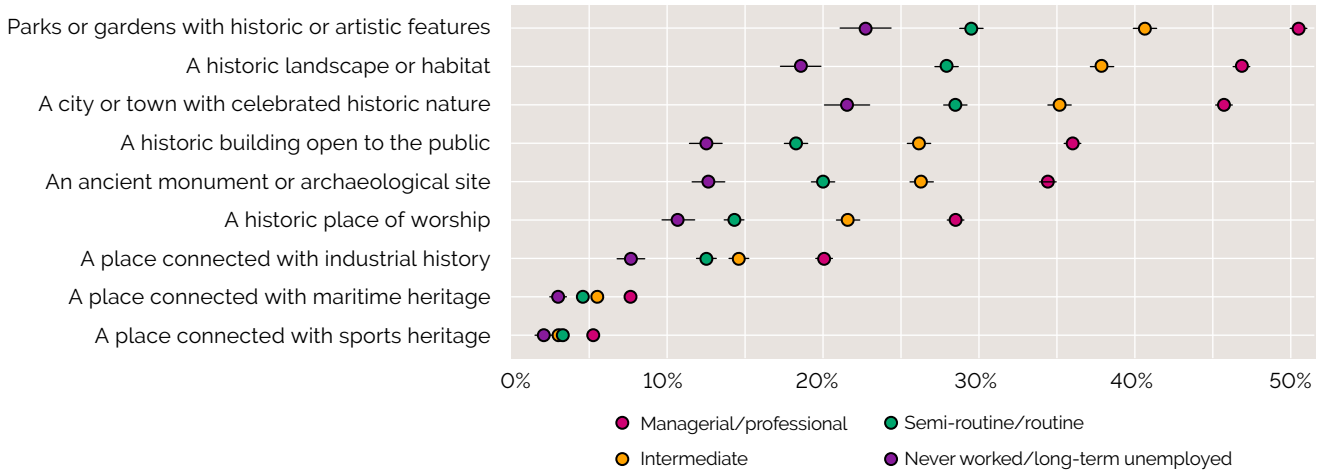


Source: Authors' elaboration based on DCMS (2025).

Figure 3.14 shows how rates of attendance at different heritage sites varied between different social class groups. In this case, there were statistically significant differences between each group on every item (with one exception), with a pattern of the highest rates for managerial/professional households, followed by intermediate households, semi-routine/routine households, and finally never worked/long-term unemployed households. The exception was sports heritage, where the difference between intermediate and semi-routine/routine households was not statistically significant.

As we showed in Figure 3.2, some types of heritage sites saw increases in the percentage of people having visited, while others saw decreases. The differences that we show in Figure 3.14, while large, are generally similar to the equivalent figures for 2022/2023. Taking the greater uncertainty with the data from 2022/2023 into account, we do not see any statistically significant changes between groups over time, with any increases or decreases being relatively similar between different socioeconomic groups.

Figure 3.14. Rates of attendance at different heritage sites in England (16+) by National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification, 2023/2024

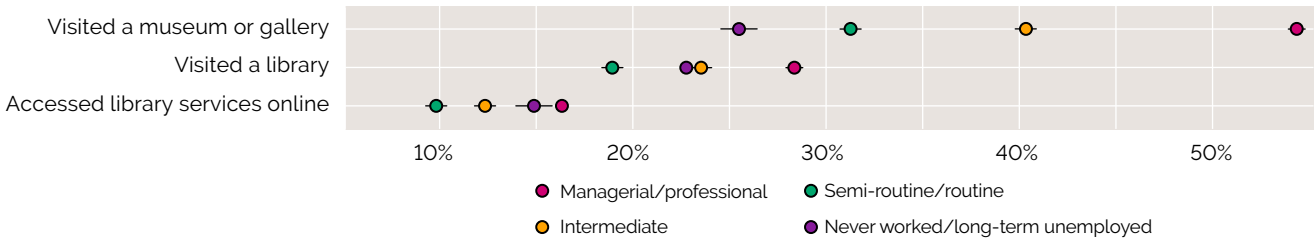


Source: Authors' elaboration based on the DCMS Participation Survey (2025).

We conclude our analysis of differences between groups by comparing different social class groups' attendance at museums and galleries and in-person and online use of libraries. Figure 3.15 shows that people in managerial/professional households were the most likely to have visited a museums, galleries and libraries, and also the most likely to have accessed library services online. People in semi-routine/routine households were the least likely to have visited a library or accessed library services online. The differences were greatest for museums and galleries: 54% of people in managerial/professional households visited museums and galleries, compared with 41% of people in intermediate households, 31% of people in semi-routine/routine households and 25% of people in never worked/long-term unemployed households.

For engaging with libraries, both in person and online, the differences we see in 2023/2024 are similar to those for 2022/2023. However, for visiting a museum or gallery, differences between social class groups widened over this period. The percentages of people in managerial/professional and intermediate households visiting a museum or gallery increased by 11 percentage points in both cases. For people in semi-routine/routine households, the increase was 7 percentage points, and for people in never worked/long-term unemployed households, it was 5 percentage points.

Figure 3.15. Rates of attendance at museums, galleries and libraries in England (16+) by National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification, 2023/2024



Source: Authors' elaboration based on DCMS (2025).

4 Arts, culture and heritage engagement: Understanding differences across English local authorities

The 2023/2024 Participation Survey data has a sufficiently large sample size for estimates by local authority of the percentages of people engaging in each of the cultural activities we have presented so far. This section presents a deep dive into how engagement varies across the country.

The number of activities that people completing the Participation Survey are asked about is very large. For this reason, we do not include maps for every single activity in this report. Maps showing the percentages of people who have engaged in each activity in the twelve months prior to completing the survey broken down by local authority are available in the online dashboard to this report.

In order to select some activities to highlight, we start by showing the relationships of the percentages of people engaging in each cultural activity – both attendance at events and participation in activities – across local authorities. Figure 4.1 is a correlation matrix of these percentages, with local authorities as the unit of analysis. We present the correlation matrix to highlight the relationships between local authorities, rather than between individuals. The items in the matrix have been re-arranged so that activities that are strongly correlated are presented more closely together. For example, the strong correlation between art exhibitions and literary events means that local authorities with larger percentages of residents visiting art exhibitions tend to also be local authorities with larger percentages of residents attending literary events.

It is important to highlight the ecological fallacy here: just because there may be a strong correlation between the percentages of people in different local authorities engaging in a pair of activities, it does not follow that people who do one activity are more likely to do the second activity. For example, if two activities were perfectly correlated – say, in every single local authority, the percentage of people doing the first activity was double the percentage of people doing that second activity – it is possible that nobody actually does both activities.

It is also important to note that there is some uncertainty associated with these estimates. While the large sample size for the Participation Survey allows estimates at the local authority level, the margin of error around these estimates can be as high as 5 percentage points, depending on the underlying estimate, where estimates closer to 50% have greater uncertainty.

Figure 4.1 shows a number of very high correlations between different activities based on the percentages of people engaging in them at the local authority level. The strongest correlation is between attending an art exhibition and a literary event, at 0.89. This is followed by the correlation between reading for pleasure and attending live music, which is 0.82. Of the 300 correlations in the figure, 19 are greater than 0.7, and 96 are greater than 0.5. This shows substantial overlap between a large number of activities when measured at the local authority level.

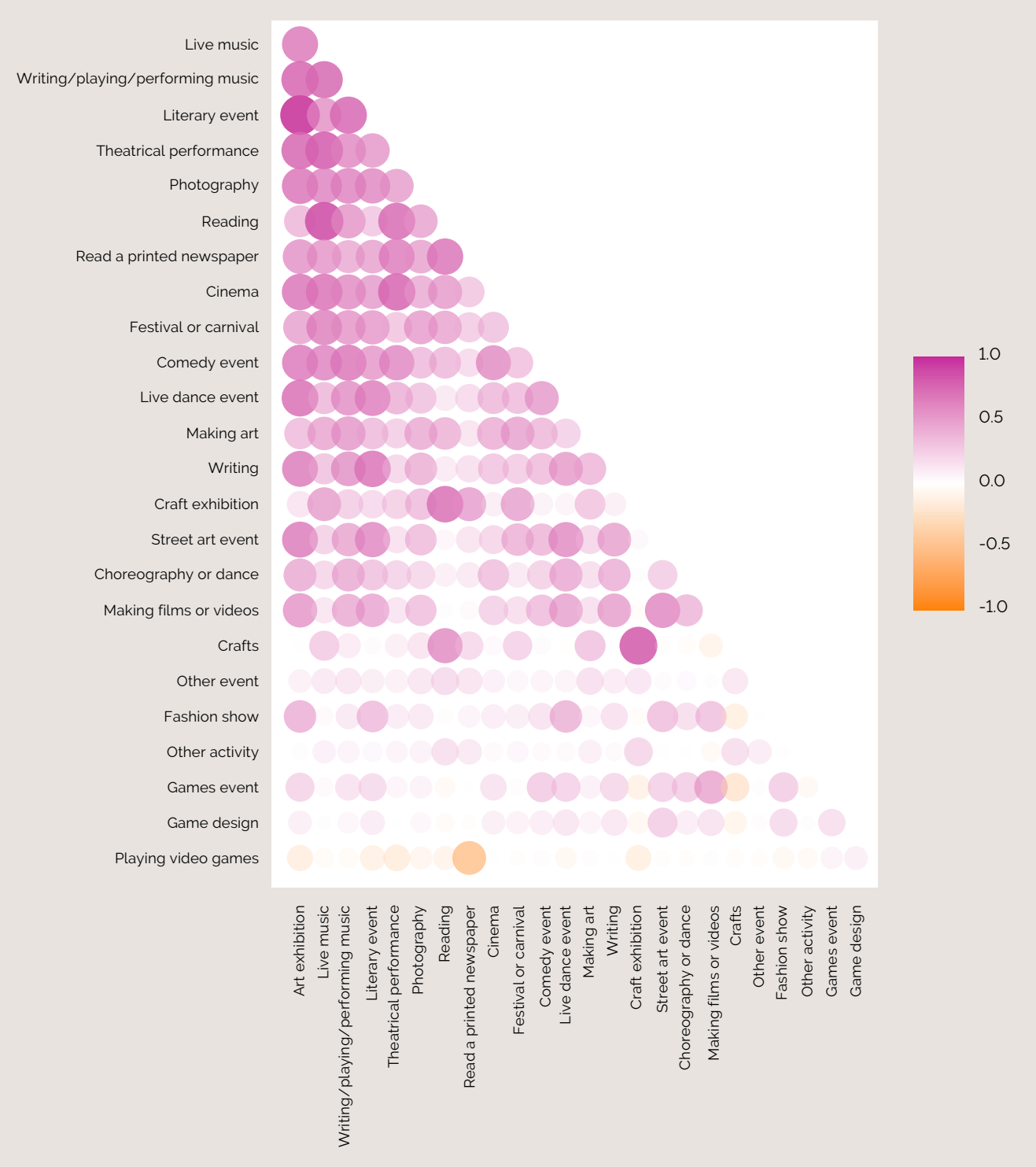
Attending an art exhibition is more strongly correlated with other activities, with a mean correlation of 0.51. It is highly correlated with a number of activities, each of which is highly correlated with each other, including attending live music, writing, playing and performing music, and attending literary events. It is noteworthy that this group of activities includes both participation and attendance. However, there is significant variation within this category. For example, the correlation with participating in crafts is just 0.02, while the correlation with playing video games is negative, at -0.30.

In addition to this large group of activities, each of which is strongly correlated with others, there is another set of activities that exhibit distinctive patterns. We expect the local authorities with higher and lower rates of engagement in these activities to be different from those where the first of activities (in the paragraph above) are strongly correlated with each other. In this second set of activities, participating in crafts is strongly correlated with attending crafts exhibitions (0.79) and with reading (0.65); it is also moderately correlated with making art (0.47). There are several types of event where the correlation with crafts is less than 0.1.

Attending comedy events has moderate-to-high correlations with some other events, such as live music, theatrical performances and attending the cinema, but is more weakly correlated with other forms of performance, particularly associated with choreography and dance.

The activity that is most negatively correlated with many activities is playing video games. The correlations are negative in 18 out of 24 cases. Of the six cases where correlations are positive (though weak), two also relate to games – participating in game design (0.23) and attending a games event (0.19). The other four positive correlations are even weaker, at less than 0.1. This suggests that the areas where larger percentages of people play video games tend to be areas where smaller percentages of people attend and participate in most of the other forms of culture specified here. This is in some ways not surprising: for most players, games do not require physical infrastructure in the way other forms of cultural participation do – for example, participating in choreography or dance will in many cases involve a rehearsal space.

Figure 4.1. Correlation matrix of percentage of people (16+) per local authority engaging in different arts and culture activities



Source: Authors' elaboration based on DCMS (2025).

On the basis of this analysis, we present Figure 4.2. This includes two different forms of attendance – at art exhibitions and at comedy events – and two forms of participation – crafts and playing video games. These activities have been chosen as they are relatively distinct from one another in their patterns of correlations with other activities. The dashboards accompanying this report present the equivalent figures for all the activities presented so far.

Before discussing the details of geographical differences in different forms of cultural attendance and participation, we should first make explicit that we are not drawing attention to the reasons for these differences. For example, in several cases, there could be a particular infrastructure in place that might encourage greater engagement, such as an annual festival, a large number of cultural venues or an educational institution associated with a given art form.

Starting with art exhibitions, we see that the range of values was very wide. The local authority with the largest percentage of residents visiting art exhibitions was the City of London, at 70%; the local authority with the fewest was Boston, at 11%. More generally, we see a strong concentration of attending art exhibitions among the London local authorities: all thirteen of the areas where more than half of residents had visited an art exhibition in the twelve months before completing the survey are in London. The local authorities outside London where the figures were highest were Brighton and Hove (49%) and Oxford (46%). Outside the south of England, the highest percentage was in York, at 37%.

There were 87 out of 296 local authorities where less than 20% reported having visited art exhibitions in the twelve months prior to completing the survey; these are denoted in purple in Figure 4.2. While these areas were found in most regions of the country – with London as a notable exception – they were less likely to be found in the South West and South East. Exceptions include Swindon and Luton, where the percentages were 14% at 15%, respectively.

Moving to attending a comedy event, the patterns were very different. The range of values was much narrower: the smallest share of people attending was in the Isles of Scilly, at 6%, followed by Walsall, at 9%, while Brighton and Hove had the highest share, at 29%. Figures were still high for several London boroughs – Lambeth, Hackney and Islington all had over 25% – and we see high rates of engagement in several areas in West Sussex, with Adur, Worthing and Mid Sussex all in the top ten. Stockton-on-Tees was particularly distinctive here – at 22%, it was in 13th place out of the 296 local authorities, while it was in 288th place in terms of visiting an art exhibition.

In twelve local authorities, less than 10% of people reported having attended a comedy event in the twelve months prior to completing the survey. There was significant variation among these, with some more urban (such as Wolverhampton and Burnley) and some very rural (West Devon and Fenland). One surprising local authority in this case is Leicester (10%), which hosts a large and well-regarded annual comedy festival. More generally, the spatial patterning of attending comedy festivals was very different from the pattern of attending art exhibitions, with local authorities with high rates of attendance bordering those with much lower rates.

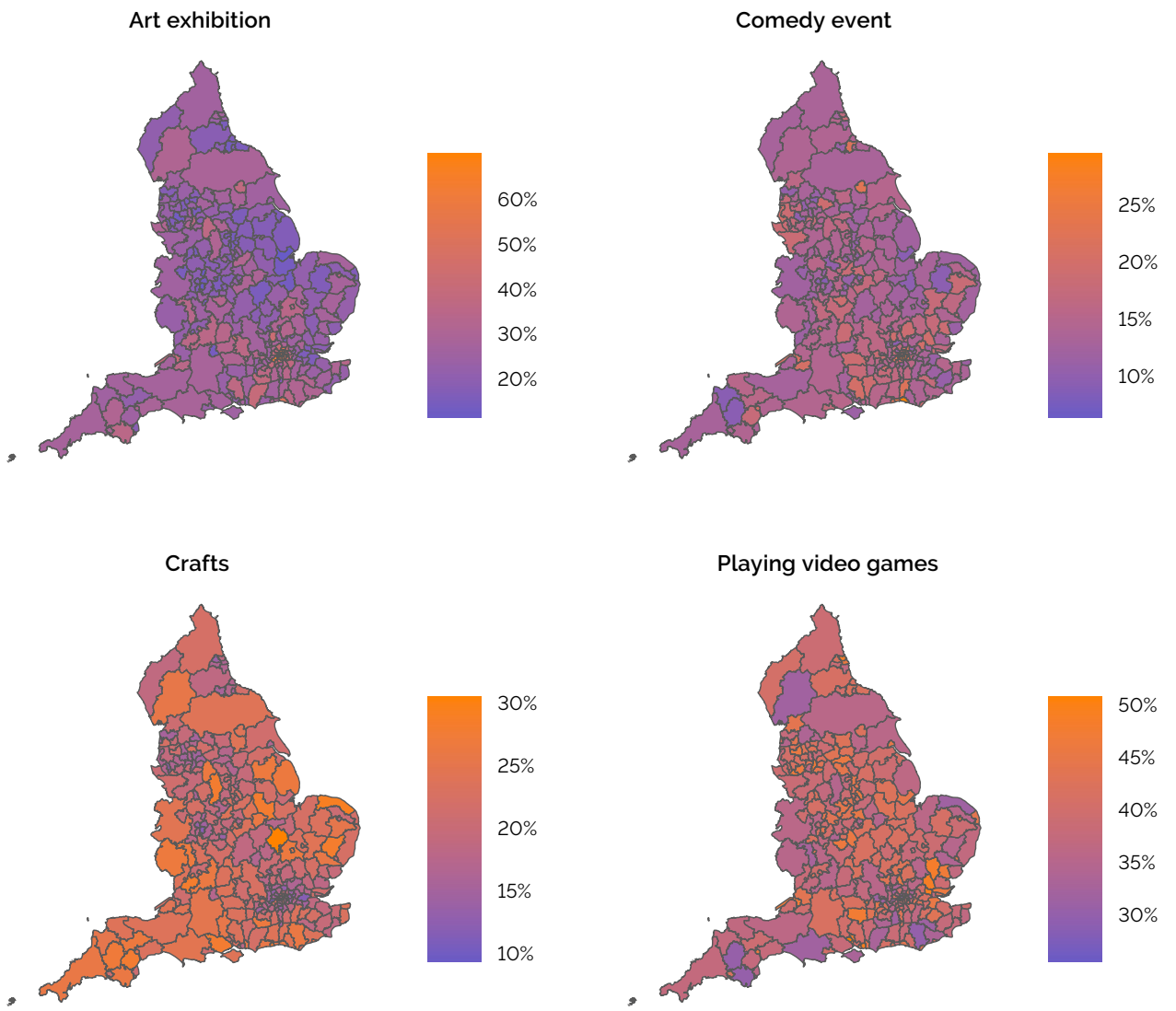
Moving from attendance to participation, the patterns in relation to crafts are very different again. The range of values (from 30% to 9%) was similar to that for attending a comedy event. However, the local authority with the lowest share of people participating was the City of London, the same local authority with the largest number of people attending art exhibitions; the local authority with the highest share was Huntingdonshire. In 151 local authorities – more than half – the percentage of people participating in crafts was greater than 20%. The top ten reflected a wide variety of local authorities across different regions of the country, but these tended to be in more rural parts of the country. The city with the highest percentage of people participating in crafts was Brighton and Hove, at 26%, putting it in 24th place; among London boroughs, it was Richmond upon Thames, at 22% and in 91st place. Overall, we see an urban–rural divide.

Six of the ten local authorities with the fewest people reporting participation in crafts were in London, with a further two (Thurrock and Slough) immediately bordering it. The areas with the fewest people participating in crafts were all urban and generally parts of large metropolitan conurbations. For example, the remaining two local authorities among these ten were Sandwell and Knowsley.

Our final activity is playing video games, which was the activity negatively correlated with most other arts and culture activities in Figure 4.1. The range of values here was again relatively narrow, from 25% (City of London) to 51% (Southampton). The areas with the largest percentages of people playing video games do not have a great deal in common, other than not being rural: they include smaller towns (Basildon, Chelmsford), large cities (Portsmouth, Manchester) and parts of larger city regions (North Tyneside), covering different regions of the country. As with crafts, relatively few London boroughs have large shares of people playing video games (although for Bexley the percentage was 42%, and for Waltham Forest it was 41%). This may partially explain the negative correlations with other activities.

Areas with low percentages of people playing video games were mixed. To reiterate, some were in London, and others were in more rural areas, such as South Hams (30%) and North Norfolk (31%). However, the more striking trend is that in 157 of the 296 local authorities, the percentage of people playing video games was between 30% and 40%, showing that this was relatively evenly distributed geographically, more so than for other activities.

Figure 4.2. Maps of percentages of people (16+) engaging in four different forms of arts and culture, by local authority



Source: Authors' elaboration based on DCMS (2025) and Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0.

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In Figure 4.3, we move to highlighting differences between local authorities in the percentage of residents who visited heritage sites, museums and galleries, and libraries in the twelve months prior to completing the survey.

The local authority with the highest share and the one with the lowest share of residents visiting heritage sites were both in London: the City of London had the lowest percentage (44%) while Richmond upon Thames (86%) had the highest. None of the other local authorities where 80% or more residents visited a heritage site were in London – these were Cambridge, Waverley (both 83%), St Albans (82%), Bath, North East Somerset (both 81%) and York (80%). The share was greater than 75% in 39 local authorities located across different regions, including High Peak, Shropshire and Northumberland.

In 19 local authorities, less than 55% of residents reported visiting a heritage site. These were mostly towns and cities outside London, with the City of London (43%) and Barking and Dagenham (49%) the exceptions. This was not uniformly the case, with some coastal local authorities that do not contain cities, including North East Lincolnshire (46%) and Great Yarmouth (51%), having relatively few visitors to heritage sites. Rates were also low for several contiguous local authorities in the West Midlands: Walsall (50%), Sandwell (52%), Wolverhampton (53%) and Birmingham (57%).

For visiting a museum or gallery, Richmond upon Thames was once again in first position, with 76% of its residents having visited a museum or gallery; Sandwell had the smallest share, at 23%. Unlike visits to heritage sites, residents of London local authorities were particularly likely to have visited a museum or gallery: 16 of the 19 local authorities where more than 60% of residents had done so were in London, with the exceptions being Cambridge (74%), Oxford, and Brighton and Hove (both 61%).

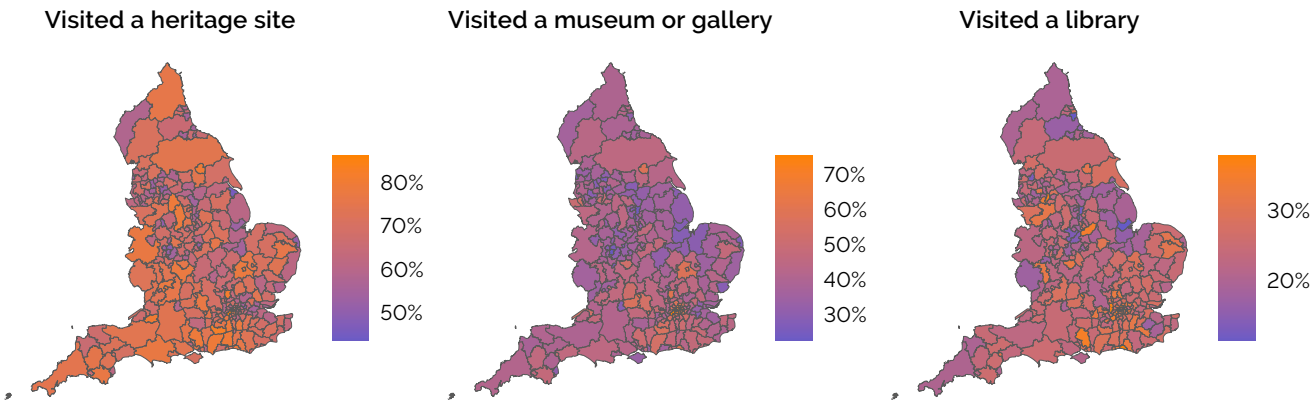
The local authorities with the lowest share of residents visiting museums and galleries were similar to those with the lowest share of residents visiting heritage sites, with low rates in several local authorities in the West Midlands and in coastal local authorities in the East Midlands and East of England. Of the twenty local authorities where the share was 30% or less, there was only one city, Wakefield (30%).

Overall, the key similarity between visiting a museum or gallery and visiting a heritage site was in the local authorities where percentages are relatively low, whereas the local authorities where percentages were relatively high differed between the two types of site.

Finally in this section, we look at visits to libraries in more detail. Here, the range of values was much narrower, from 38% (Brighton and Hove) to 12% (Boston, which was also the local authority with lowest share of residents visiting art exhibitions). There was overlap in the local authorities with high engagement in this case and those with high engagement in other activities: the local authorities where more than one third of residents visited a library included Camden, Hillingdon, Manchester (all 37%), Cambridge (36%) and Oxford (35%).

The local authorities with the lowest share of residents visiting libraries were, again, a mix from across the country, including Bolsover, Preston (both 13%) and North West Leicestershire (14%). Most of these local authorities were towns, although there were also small percentages for Sunderland (12%) and Hull (18%).

Figure 4.3. Maps of percentages of people (16+) visiting heritage sites, museums and galleries, and libraries, by local authority



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Our final piece of analysis in this report addresses the relationship between engagement and arts, culture and heritage occupations by local authority. We have previously drawn attention to the importance of the relationship between audiences and workforces as part of an arts, culture and heritage ecosystem, and existing research on place has highlighted the importance of this relationship.

In Figure 4.4, we show, for four activities, the relationships between engagement and people working in arts, culture and heritage occupations by local authority. The online dashboards provide analysis of this relationship for all activities discussed in this report.

We have selected four activities for particular focus: attending an art exhibition; attending a street art event; participating in choreography or dance; and writing stories or plays. In selecting these activities, we aim to present some overlap with our previous section – attending an art exhibition being the activity most highly correlated with other forms of cultural engagement– and to include forms of engagement that cover different art forms.

In each case, we present these relationships using scatterplots with the percentage of people engaging in each activity on the x-axis and the percentage of people working in arts, culture and heritage occupations on the y-axis. We also include trend lines that summarise the relationships. We highlight any local authorities that significantly deviate from the trend lines.

As with our other analysis, it is important to note the uncertainty associated with each estimate of cultural engagement in each local authority.

Starting in the top left panel, we see a very strong relationship between the percentage of people who attended an art exhibition in the twelve months prior to completing the survey and the percentage of people working in arts, culture and heritage occupations, with an R2 value of 0.86. The majority of local authorities can be found in the bottom left of the scatterplot – this represents local authorities with less than 2% of people working in arts, culture and heritage occupations and less than 30% of people attending an art exhibition – but even within this section of the plot, the relationship is relatively strong.

Moving to the top right part of the plot, some areas had larger percentages of people working in arts, culture and heritage occupations than would be expected given the percentages of people attending an art exhibition. These were the London boroughs with the highest percentages of people working in arts, culture and heritage occupations. Lewisham was a moderate outlier, with a very large percentage of people working in these occupations relative to the percentages of people attending an art exhibition.

On the other side, Cambridge had a much higher percentage of people visiting an art exhibition than would be expected from its – already moderately high – percentage of people working in arts, culture and heritage.

The relationship between the percentages of people attending street art events and working in arts, culture and heritage occupations is much weaker, with an R2 of 0.39. The range of values for people attending street art events by local authority was narrower, ranging from 2% to 18%.

Once again, the local authorities where the percentages of people working in arts, culture and heritage occupations were substantially greater than would be expected given the percentages of people attending street art events are all in London.

The local authorities highlighted in the bottom right panel are those where the percentage of people attending street art events was higher than would be expected given the percentage of people working in arts, culture and heritage occupations. While these are largely urban to some extent, they do not appear to have anything else in common geographically, covering a range of different regions in England. Some, such as Bristol, have a history of and reputation for street art. Others are more surprising – for example, the percentages of people in Worcester attending a street art event were among the highest in the country.

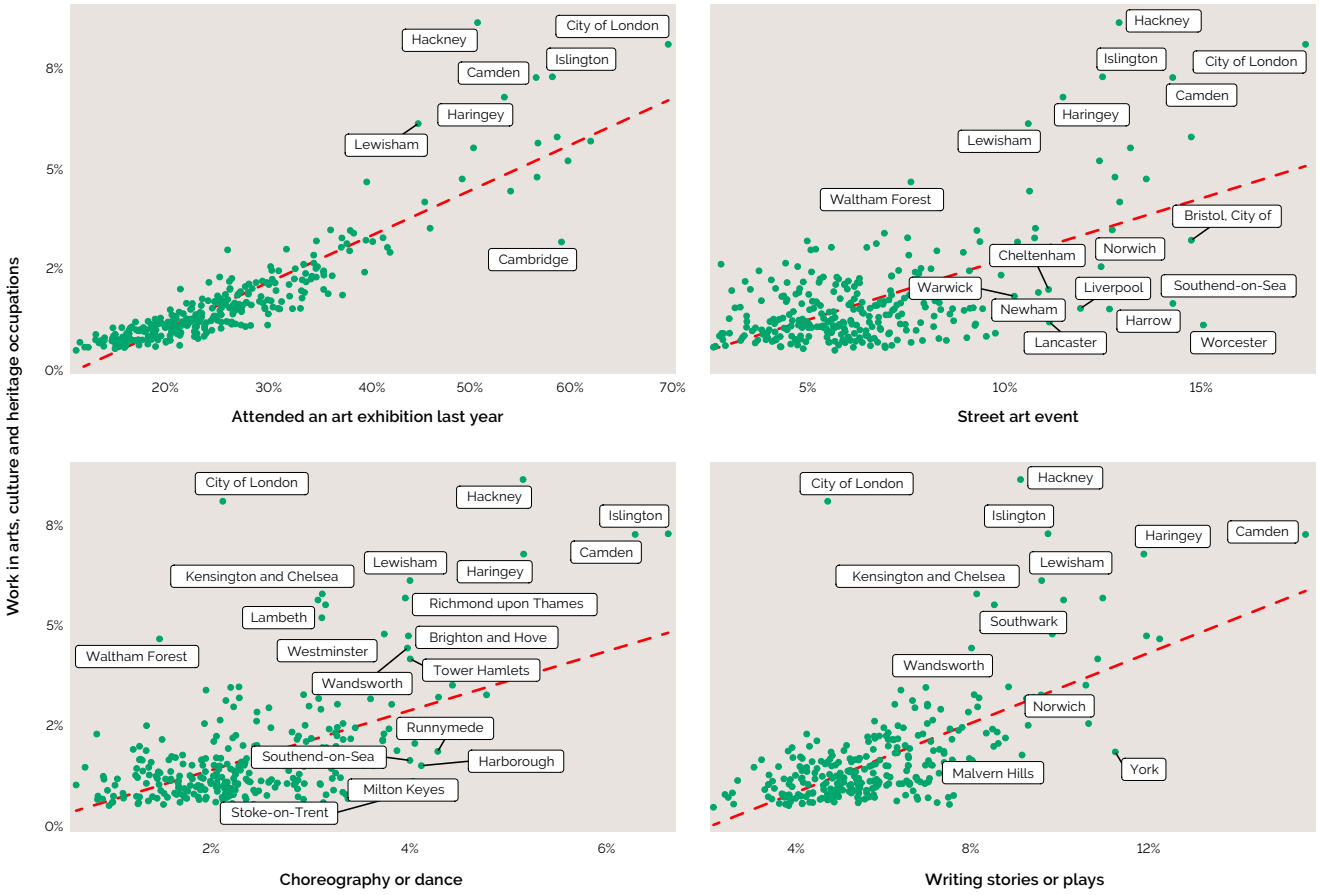
Moving to participation, the relationship between the percentages of people in each local authority participating in choreography or dance and working in arts, culture and heritage was weaker again, with an R2 of 0.34. Almost every local authority with a relatively large percentage of arts, culture and heritage workers had significantly fewer people participating in choreography or dance than would be expected given this baseline. This applied primarily to London local authorities, but it was also the case for Brighton and Hove.

On the other side, several local authorities had moderate levels of people participating in choreography or dance while also having very small numbers of people working in arts, culture and heritage occupations. This was particularly the case for Stoke-on-Trent, which had a very low percentage of people working in arts, culture and heritage, but also Milton Keynes, Harborough, Runnymede and Southend-on-Sea. These local authorities are not geographically concentrated. Harborough, in particular, had a relatively high proportion of people participating given its profile on other dimensions.

The final activity we focus on is writing stories or plays. The relationship here is stronger, with an R2 of 0.48. As with all these other activities, several London boroughs had significantly larger numbers of people working in arts, culture and heritage occupations than would be expected based on writing stories or plays alone. In this case, the City of London was particularly striking, with a below-average percentage of people writing stories or plays despite its very large percentage of people working in arts, culture and heritage occupations.

With this stronger relationship, there were fewer local authorities with substantially more people participating in writing stories or plays than would be expected given the percentages of people working in arts, culture and heritage. However, Norwich, Malvern Hills and particularly York stand out. Norwich houses the National Centre for Writing, highlighting the significance of writing for the city.

Figure 4.4. Scatterplots of the relationships between people engaging in a range of arts, culture and heritage activities, and people working in arts, culture and heritage occupations, by local authority



Source: Authors' elaboration based on the DCMS Participation Survey 2023/2024 and Office for National Statistics (2023). Occupations of those in employment, by local area, working pattern, employment status and disability status, England and Wales, Census 2021. Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2022.

5 Conclusion

In our 2024 report on audiences and workforces in arts, culture and heritage (McAndrew et al., 2024), we began the conclusion by drawing attention to the importance of high-quality data on audiences and workforces in the sectors, analogous to data on supply and demand in other industries. We established a set of baseline measures, which this report has updated. These measures show consistency in some cases and changes in others.

The data on the arts, culture and heritage workforce based on the quarterly LFS shows no significant changes on any metric in 2023/2024 compared with 2022/2023. In each of the groups of occupations we highlight, the percentages of people who were freelancers, who were men, who were disabled, who were White, and who were from different class backgrounds remained similar. The churn in the sector was also relatively stable.

In England, the recovery in attendance at arts and cultural activities and at museums, galleries and libraries following the Covid-19 pandemic has continued. Our last report showed significant increases in several cultural activities from 2021/2022 to 2022/2023, and this report shows a continuation of this trend. The increases were particularly large for in-person activities, such as live music and theatrical performances. However, we also see increases in different forms of participation, such as making art and writing, playing and performing music.

However, that recovery has not been equal between all groups. In many cases, class differences in attending arts and cultural events and venues have increased, as have differences between different ethnic groups. This uneven recovery invites questions about why some groups have felt more comfortable returning to attending cultural events than others have.

The recovery in attendance at arts and cultural activities in England is not echoed in the percentages of people visiting heritage sites. While more people have visited some types of heritage sites, attendance has decreased for other types. The differences between groups in attending different heritage sites have remained fairly consistent. In some cases, these differences were very large, with the percentages of Black people attending several types of heritage sites remaining very low.

Our analysis of differences in rates of engagement with different forms of arts, culture and heritage across the different local authorities in England has highlighted similarities and differences. For several activities, the patterns are very similar. We have drawn particular focus to attending art exhibitions, as this was the activity most strongly correlated with other forms of engagement with arts and culture. In this case, rates were especially high in London and in other cities in the south of England. This comes after several years of interventions into arts and cultural funding to address spatial inequalities, and in a context where it continues to be a major priority within DCMS. That the differences remain so large highlights the scale of the challenge.

While there are similarities in the spatial distribution of engagement with arts and culture, there are also exceptions. We have drawn attention to some of these. The local authorities where relatively large percentages of people have attended a comedy event were not the same ones where relatively large percentages of people have attended an art exhibition. Differences between local authorities in the percentage of residents participating in crafts were much smaller than for other activities. It is important to keep the specificities of particular activities in mind, rather than only discussing spatial inequalities in arts, culture and heritage in general terms.

We have reinforced the significance of analysing audiences and workforces together by illustrating the relationships between the percentages of people working in arts, culture and heritage occupations and the percentages engaging in different forms of attendance and participation. For some activities, the relationship is extremely strong – once again, we have drawn attention to arts exhibitions, which had the highest correlations of all. However, it is as important to highlight the cases where this relationship was not as strong, and where there were individual local authorities representing exceptions. In the case of choreography or dance, there were particularly high rates of participation in some local authorities, including Stoke-on-Trent, Milton Keynes and Harborough. For writing stories or plays, there were especially high rates in York, Norwich and Malvern Hills.

England has high rates of engagement with arts, culture and heritage, but this engagement is unevenly distributed. It is unevenly distributed by geography, and it is unevenly distributed by demographics. Arts, culture and heritage policy has long sought to respond to this uneven distribution, but little seems to have changed over time. While it is crucial that the varieties of tastes and practices across England are recognised by policy, the ongoing inequalities in attendance and participation suggest an urgent need for radical action if policy is to deliver on its aims of opening up opportunities to all places and communities across the country.

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Data statement

All Labour Force Survey datasets used in this report are safeguarded, meaning that the risk of identifiability is remote due to the anonymisation treatment applied to the data and the licence under which they are made available. They were accessed via the lead author's account at the UK Data Service. The authors remain responsible for any errors or omissions in the analysis.

The analysis of the Participation Survey presented in this report is based on the annual data tables produced by DCMS, and on an ad hoc statistical release, both of which are freely available at the links in the Data reference list.

The Census 2021 data used in this report is freely available via the links in the Data reference list.

Glossary

A **census** is an official count of a population, usually within a given country.

Census 2021 refers to the censuses that took place in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland in 2021, continuing a pattern where censuses take place every ten years. In Scotland, the census was delayed by a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Creative industries refers to the industries which have creativity at their core. Definitions of creative industries vary in different countries.

Cultural engagement is defined in this report as any form of engagement in culture, whether through attendance or participation. We adopt the definitions used in major surveys to aid comparison.

Cultural attendance is the part of cultural engagement that involves attending. It includes attending performances (for example, live music) and visiting sites (for example, a historic building).

Cultural participation is the part of cultural engagement that involves activity. It can take place either at home or elsewhere. It includes activities in groups (for example, singing in a choir) and on one's own (for example, practising music at home). The boundaries between cultural attendance and cultural participation are not always clear: for example, in the Participation Survey, reading for pleasure is part of cultural participation.

Local authority is a general term for an administrative district, capturing units including unitary authorities, London boroughs and metropolitan districts. These are often referred to as councils. In England, the average size of a local authority is around 170,000.

The **National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification** provides a measure of socioeconomic position based on an individual's occupation and employment status. It is a nested classification, with fourteen-class, eight-class (analytical), and three-class (simplified) versions.

A finding is **statistically significant** if it would be very unlikely to be the case under the null hypothesis. In our analysis, we refer to statistically significant differences: that is, we only draw attention to difference where it is unlikely that they are due to survey sampling, rather than due to genuine differences in the population. All references to statistically significant differences are at the 95% level.

A **survey** is a data collection method in which a sample of people are asked a series of questions. The surveys we use in this report are National Statistics, meaning that they adhere to a set of guidelines set by the Office for National Statistics. This means that their results can be generalised to the relevant population.

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