Working Class Creatives on Experience, Access and Inclusion.

Report Overview

The Working Class Creatives Database (WCCD) is a volunteer-led platform aimed at supporting and representing working-class creatives across the UK. This report is based on a survey conducted in October 2023 among WCCD's 900+ members. The survey explored members' experiences in art and the creative industries, focusing on issues related to access, inclusion, and professional development. The findings of this survey have guided WCCD's goals and actions for 2024, including the creation of tailored opportunities, residencies, and support programs.

Key Findings:

- **Education:** Members highlighted both the transformative impact of art education and the significant barriers they face, including financial constraints, lack of connections, and imposter syndrome.
- **Post-Education Challenges:** After completing their education, many working-class creatives felt unsupported, facing challenges in finding jobs and building industry connections.
- **Employment:** Participants often feel like outsiders in the creative industry, struggling with financial stability, exclusion, and a lack of confidence.
- **Inclusion and Confidence:** The need for more inclusive and accessible art spaces was emphasized, with participants calling for more diversity and support within the industry.

Goals for 2024:

- Strengthening mentorship programs and industry advice sessions.
- Expanding opportunities for residencies, exhibitions, and workshops.
- Addressing regional imbalances by facilitating more events outside London.
- Collaborating with institutions and organisations to enhance support for working-class creatives.

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What is Working Class Creatives Database?

WHO ARE WE?

The Working Class Creatives Database (WCCD) CIC is a volunteer-led platform that highlights the work of working-class creatives in the UK. It was founded in 2020 to provide a platform for working-class creatives, to establish a strong community between working-class artists around the region and tackle classism within the arts by improving accessibility, engagement and opportunities.

WHAT WE DO:

The WCCD platforms working-class creatives of all fields and stages, whether career or hobby. We are also an expanding, vital resource for researchers and programmers. As Co-Directors, we promote members' work both online and in exhibitions, host events and workshops, run residencies and takeovers, share opportunities with our members in our biweekly newsletter. We offer members the opportunity to join our reading groups and critical feedback sessions, and members meet regularly, chatting sharing and discussing over WhatsApp and Zoom which helps build connections for working class creatives across the region.

WCCD also provides the option to sign up as a supporter. We currently have thirty-four supporters who are professionals in the creative sector. Supporters offer to share their skills and expertise with our members.

Art is an important part of our society and provides an alternative way of communicating and expressing personal experiences and histories. It enhances connections and networks and provides a stronger sense of place, identity, and heritage.

Our core values are ensuring working-class creatives have equal access to the arts and it's opportunities, not just those who can afford it.

What unites WCCD members is the culture formed from the difficulties of not having the same level of support to thrive in modern society as those from upper- or middle-class backgrounds. The Working-Class Creatives Database acts as this network and support system for working class creatives and is an essential response to sector recognition that social class is the most significant barrier to people aspiring to a career in the arts. This has been rigorously evidenced by Weston Jerwood and the 2018 report Panic - It's an Arts Emergency, funded by the AHRC and delivered in partnership with the Universities of Edinburgh and Sheffield, with Arts Emergency.

'The Working Class Creatives Database aims to facilitate a space that puts working-class creatives at the forefront; A space for conversation, connections, and sharing of opportunities, skills, and knowledge.

This database is about creating a community amongst working-class artists and encouraging greater representation of the working-class experience within the arts.'

Seren Metcalfe (Founder of WCCD)

How do WCCD define the term 'Working-Class'?

We recognise that the term 'working-class' has been notoriously hard to define as a characteristic and people may find it difficult to define themselves. We have taken into consideration both the government's guide to measuring socioeconomic background and Cultural Hive's guide to Socioeconomic diversity and inclusion in the arts which focuses on parental qualifications: parental occupation and the type of school attended by parents.

We have also considered Marxists' and Socialists' definitions of the working-class: those who have nothing to sell but their labour, power and skills.

Additionally, one can define class by asking the following questions:

How much of a margin of error do you have?
How much do you have to fall back on?

The stakes are high for a working-class person who wants a career in the arts and doesn't have a support system around them.

We believe working classness is made from the intersection of various diversities, histories, places, and identities. And that, class-based inequalities are inextricably linked with gender, racial, disability and spatial disparities, as earlier research by the PEC has shown these factors interact to compound disadvantage.

Our
Team

Since established in 2021, The Working Class Creatives Database has been voluntarily, run and managed by Seren Metcalfe and Chanelle Windas. Attending two of the most prestigious art universities in London, both creatives felt the struggle of alienation because of their class background; they wanted to create a space to unite creatives who struggle with connections, relatability, and access.

WCCD has a voluntary team of members who support Seren and Chanelle with administrative tasks, running events, and evaluating guiding principles which ensures our approach is intersectional. These members are Kat Outten, Izzy Jones, Ross Hammond, Wes Foster, Kat Outten and Zoe Everett.

Thus far, the WCCD has been running with zero funding; everything we have achieved has been out of a passion to make a change in the arts and in society for working-class people. With funding, we will strengthen our mission of making arts opportunities and engagement easier for working-class creatives, whilst showcasing working-class narratives and histories.

WCCD is currently seeking funding to support its running costs, such as website maintenance and administrative expenses. <u>Donations and support from professionals in the creative sector are welcomed.</u>

2023 Overview

We started off the year with an exhibition and series of events at <u>87 Gallery in Hull</u> showcasing the work of WCCD Members. Alongside the exhibition we had a film screening of <u>Sam Batley's 'One day at a Time'</u>, a proceeding talk and further workshops. This started the beginning of our curation journey.

Later in the year we curated the show <u>'Gatherings' at SET Woolwich</u> with 28 of our members. We also worked with SET, Yorkshire Sculpture Park and Aspex Portsmouth to provide 5 Creatives with Residencies to develop their artistic practice.

Directors Seren Metcalfe and Chanelle Windas have taken part in panel talks discussing themes of class and inclusion in the arts at Lighthouse, Brighton and Central St Martins. Core Members also organised an exhibition with Hypha Studios in London.

We were unsuccessful with three funding applications this year and have been reflecting on other ways to get funding. We have opened up our PayPal to donations, and started selling <u>limited edition prints</u> of members' work with a model of sale we hope other institutions will follow.

2023 has been a year of realisations for us as a CIC, nurturing connections, discovering how we want to develop and a lot of forward planning for exciting opportunities in 2024.

2023 Overview - continued

In 2023 we created a members survey to find out more about our 900+ members and help further develop our outputs as a CIC for 2024 and beyond. We want to make sure we are fulfilling our aims of being a community and network for working class creatives, providing a platform for their creativity, creating opportunities and breaking classist barriers within creative industries.

The survey questions were carefully crafted to delve into the journeys of our members in the realm of art and to gain insights into the circumstances that have shaped their current positions.

A significant number of our members have pursued higher education and are already integral parts of the art landscape in various capacities. This exploration into our members' backgrounds not only aids in understanding them better but also sheds light on their needs and desires. As a dynamic database, our mission is to align with the aspirations of our community and ensure that we are progressing in the right direction.

Analysing the gathered data has been instrumental in refining our goals for 2024.

Essentially, our primary objective is to foster a deeper connection with our members, comprehending their unique journeys and providing the support they require. This emphasis on understanding our community better underscores the pivotal role their voices and opinions play, not only in shaping their personal experiences but also in influencing the broader landscape of creative industries.

As directors, our commitment is to amplify the importance of our community's voice and actively respond to their needs, thereby strengthening our collective impact on the ever-evolving world of art.

Demographics of participants

As mentioned in our manifesto Working classness is made from the intersection of various diversities, histories, places, and identities. This was reflected in our survey where members represented a wide variety of different backgrounds, whether that be gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion.

Over 50% of members surveyed are disabled, have a long term health condition or access requirements and 35 percent of those surveyed are parents/ carers.

Most participants grew up in the South East of England or Yorkshire and Humberside, with others growing up in a variety of different areas in the UK.

50+
14%

AGE
GROUP

20-24
53.3%

35-49
32.7%
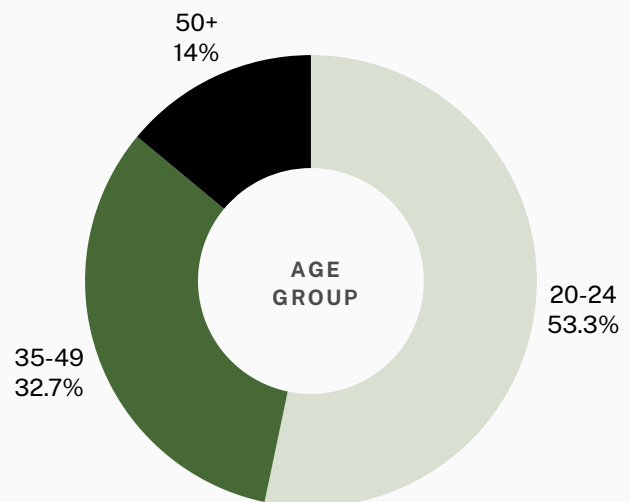
Overall we have members based all across the UK and beyond with a large portion of members based in London as well as cities such as Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield, Birmingham, Liverpool, Newcastle, Edinburgh and Glasgow. All members' locations are mapped on our members map.

A deeper dive into our members backgrounds

'Did you attend any of the following, in the area/areas you grew up in?'

Legend: MEMBERS SURVEY RESPONSES

Bar chart values (approximate):
- None: 24
- Art Gallery: 17
- Art Classes: 3
- Community Centre: 9
- Local Museum: 12
- Local Theatre: 9
- Youth Club: 19
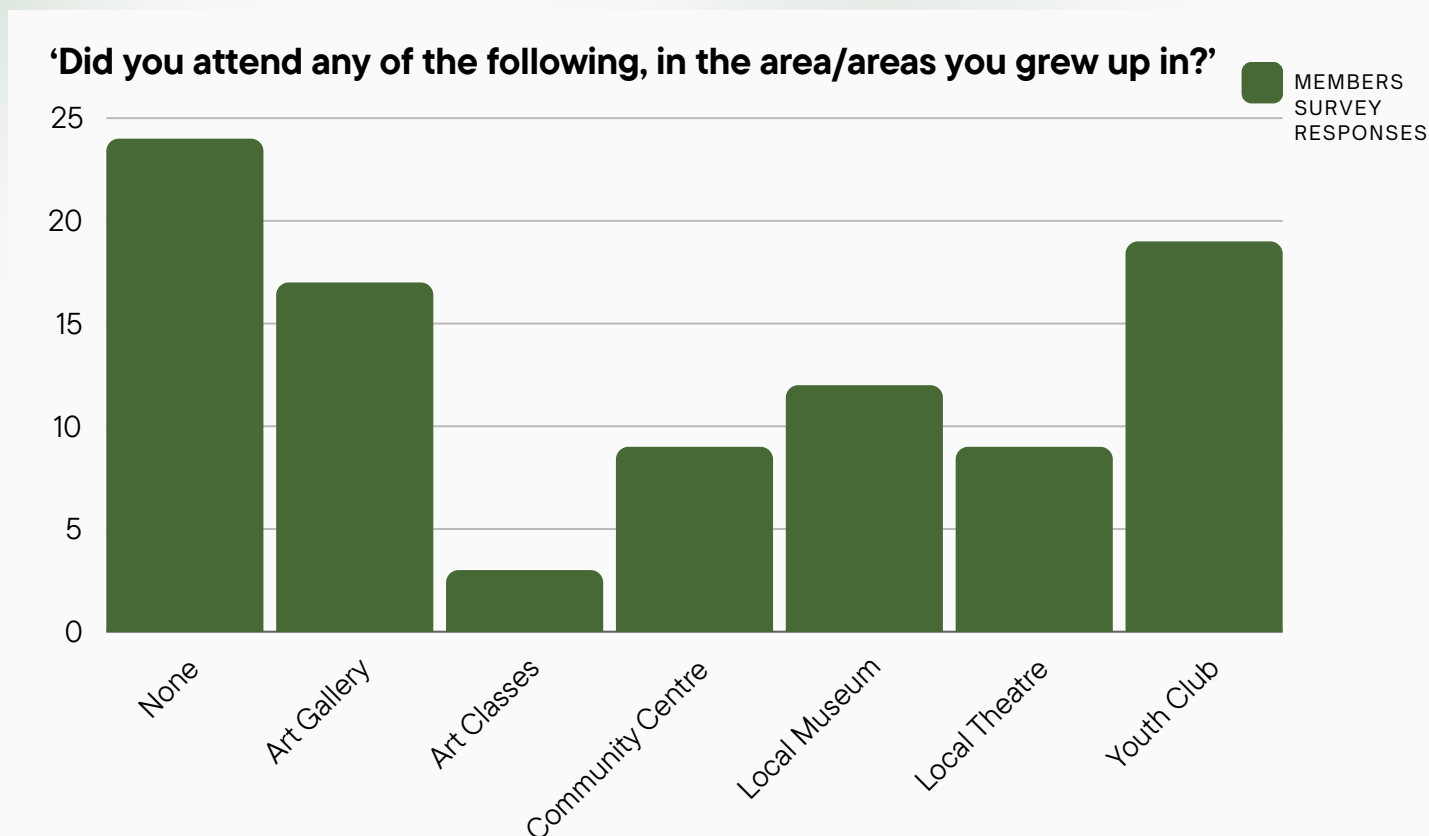
How would you describe the art scene in the area where you grew up? Has it evolved or changed over the years? What is it like now?

The overall consensus regarding the art scene in the area where the respondents grew up is one of limited accessibility and varying degrees of development.

Many describe a lack of a cohesive art scene during their childhood, with some places even experiencing a decrease in access to the arts. Some individuals were unaware of the existence of artists in their community, while others mentioned the presence of small, stagnant galleries or underfunded art spaces.

Comments reflect a disparity in access, with mentions of a small art scene catering mainly to the middle class and older individuals. The predominant theme is a dearth of opportunities for engagement in the arts, particularly for those in rural areas, with activities often geared toward wealthier families.

Some areas have witnessed increased activity driven by individuals taking initiative for their communities. There are mentions of galleries, theatres, and open mic events, contributing to a more communal atmosphere.

One respondent noted that there are less opportunities for young people than before in their area and slightly more engagement catered towards adults. Another respondent acknowledged the existence of good and helpful organisations but highlighted their initial inaccessibility and the drain on local funding, making it challenging to support smaller non-organisation projects alone.

Overall participants experienced a lack of access to the arts in their areas growing up and whilst some saw positive changes throughout the years others did not.

Does anyone else in your family practice art?

Yes
19.2%

No
80.8%
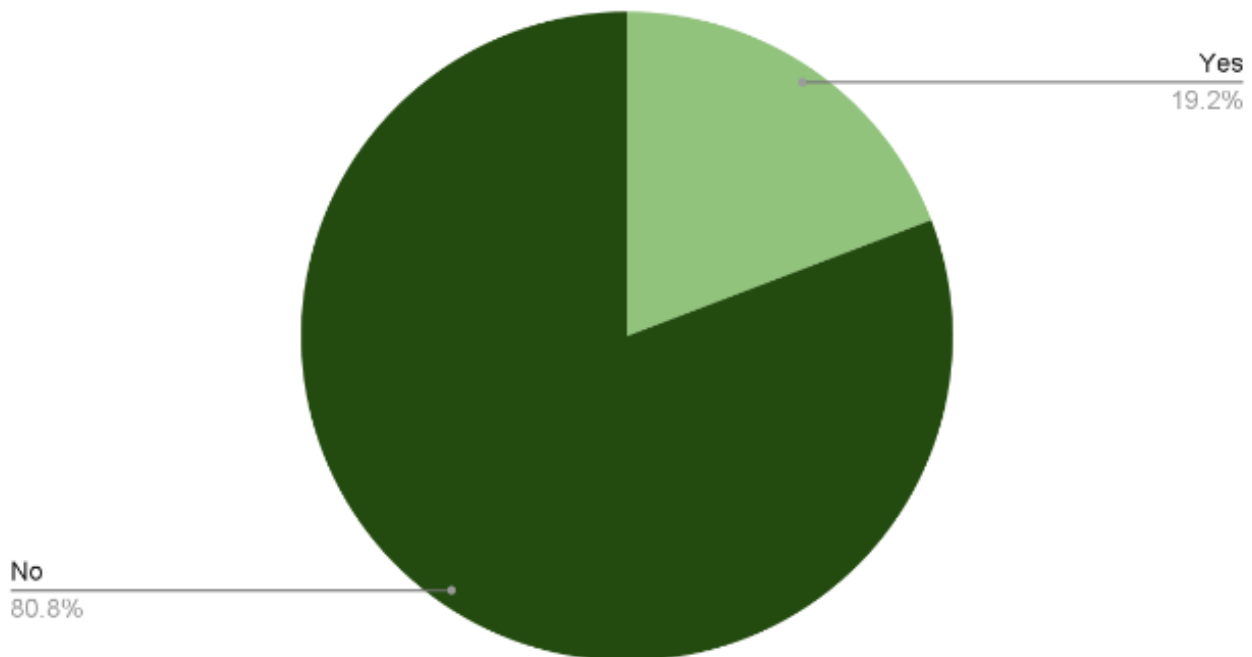
Members were also asked about their families and whether they practice art, with the majority responding no.

For those who said yes, comments reveal a variety of artistic pursuits within families, including painting, singing, songwriting, crafting, sculpting miniatures, and playing musical instruments.

Some family members engaged in creative activities for personal pleasure, while others turned their artistic passions into businesses. Several comments highlight the impact of family members on fostering creativity, with instances of encouragement and shared artistic experiences. Stereotypical creative gendered roles that would be considered low art such as DIY and Craft/ Sewing and the value of this as art making were also mentioned. The responses also indicate a recognition of the challenges and struggles within the art world, as well as a mix of artistic endeavours pursued both professionally and as personal hobbies.

Educational background

Did you pursue higher education?

PHD 1.3%
MA 18.7%
No 13.3%
BA 66.7%
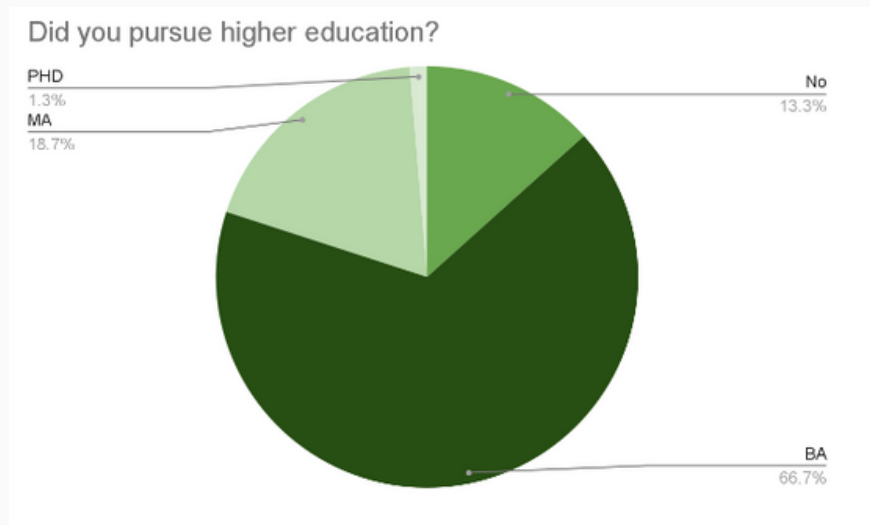
Members were asked if they had pursued higher education and, if so, what was the level of study. BA was the most popular answer, with PhD coming in at just above 1%.

As well as asking about degrees, members were asked if they had pursued alternative educational activity including evening classes, short courses, and training.

Have you ever taken a short course, evening class or alternative educational/ training activity?

N/A 1.8%
No 34.5%
Yes 63.6%
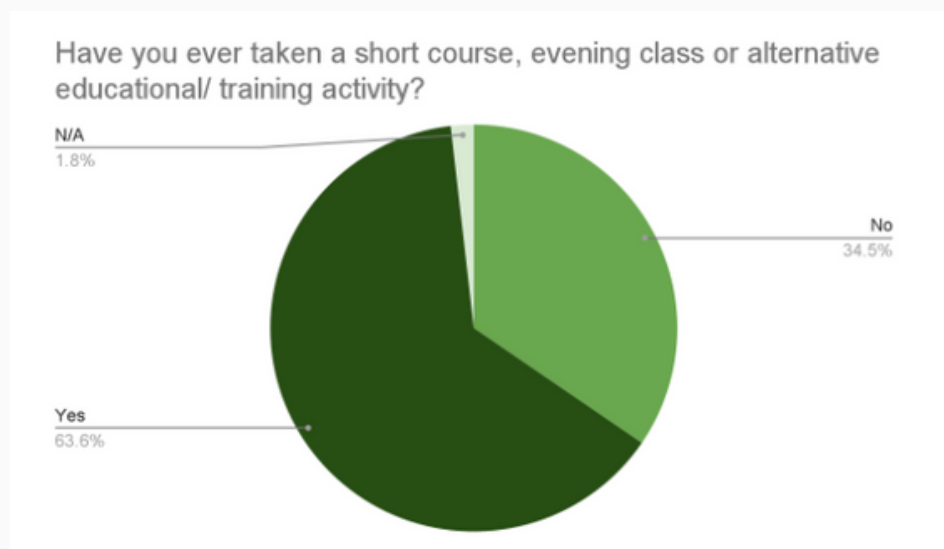
Participants noted that they couldn't afford or didn't know where to look for funding for MA and PHD courses. Participants noted that they had attended free courses such as community education art classes through local councils helping build portfolios, others attended paid courses to develop skills such as acting classes for confidence, pottery and photography. Others mentioned feeling out of place at short courses and many being too expensive to attend. Alternative MA courses were also mentioned such as School of the Damned and The Other MA.

Describe your experience with art in school, including access and education

The experiences with art education in school vary widely among respondents. Several individuals describe inadequate facilities and underfunded art departments, with some expressing the discouragement they faced from teachers and a lack of support for pursuing art as a career. Limited extracurricular opportunities and financial constraints caused many to drop out of art-related courses.

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On the positive side, many respondents credit inspirational art teachers who recognised their potential and guided them towards exciting opportunities in various art forms. However, others highlight the reduction of creative subjects, such as drama, art, and music, due to school budget cuts or restrictions on the number of creative subjects allowed at the GCSE level.

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Some respondents express regret about not pursuing art earlier in life, attributing their delayed entry into art education to misconceptions, lack of awareness about galleries, or pressure to focus on more academic subjects. Others detail their journeys into art education later in life, overcoming obstacles like undiagnosed learning disabilities, financial constraints, or societal expectations. Many highlighted the importance of Access to Art courses.

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The university experiences also vary, with instances of negative environments, racism, sexism, and a lack of encouragement to explore individual creative voices. However, positive experiences at universities that fostered a supportive and accepting community are also mentioned, emphasising the importance of a conducive environment for artistic development. The overall factor for a positive experience for participants was having a role model, and someone who believed in them fostering their confidence to pursue their creativity.

How has your educational background influenced your artistic journey?

Participants in higher education encountered diverse experiences, ranging from institutions providing a comprehensive understanding of the art world and theoretical approaches to exposure to various making skills. Building networks with peers and teachers emerged as a common theme, fostering collaborative communities among classmates and contributing positively to their artistic journeys. **............................**

However, challenges related to class issues were prevalent, with some participants facing struggles as artists without connections and financial resources. The heightened awareness of class disparities shed light on the difficulties faced by those without privilege. Tutors played a crucial role in providing support, mentorship, and a critical framework for participants, acting as instrumental figures in their educational journey.

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Different educational settings presented varying environments, with art universities being perceived as more inspiring and experimental than commercial-focused institutions. Participants experienced different degrees of difficulty and support across these settings, and some underwent a shift in their artistic approach towards more experimental and refined practices.

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Engaging in MA programs proved transformative for individuals, fostering development over an extended period. However, accessing and funding education beyond a BA posed challenges for many. Instances of class snobbery, discrimination, and lack of support were noted, negatively impacting the overall educational experience.

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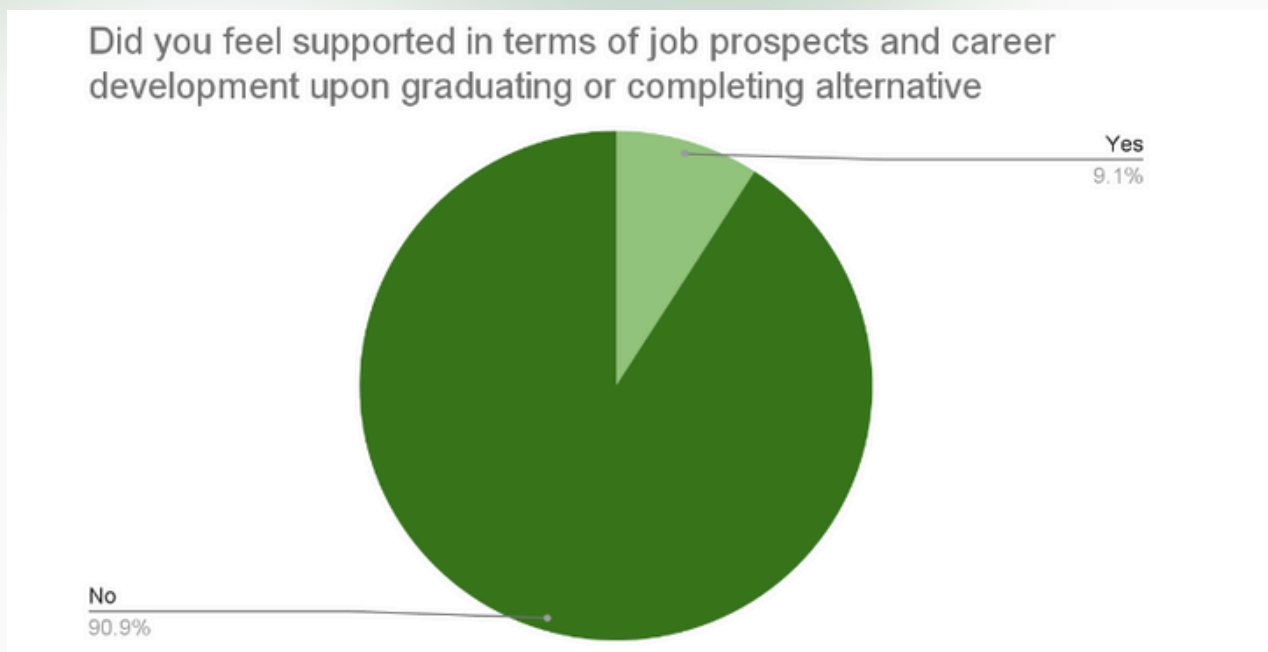
Limited opportunities and challenges faced by the working-class students were shared, with networking and building creative circles influenced by factors such as free time, financial resources, and institutional support. Challenges such as limited time and energy for networking, financial constraints, and burnout were identified, particularly among those from working-class backgrounds.

Imposter Syndrome was a shared experience upon entering higher education, with individuals questioning the viability of a career in the arts and feeling a distinct sense of difference from their privileged peers, impacting their confidence.

Despite these challenges, participants highlighted the transformative impact of supportive tutors who believed in them, provided mentorship, and instilled a sense of belonging and confidence. This positive influence played a crucial role in encouraging them to persist in their artistic endeavours.

A significant shift occurred as many participants began creating art centred around their personal identity while attending university. This change marked a turning point in their artistic journey, reflecting a deeper exploration of self-expression and individual
narrative within their work.

Post-education

Did you feel supported in terms of job prospects and career development upon graduating or completing alternative

Yes
9.1%

No
90.9%

Post-studies challenges at a glance

Financial challenges	**Lack of support and guidance e.g. in finding jobs/opportunities**	**Sense of disconnection from peers and lecturers (urgency to find a job difficult to convey)**
Lack of industry connections and networks	**Absent alumini prospects**	

Participants shared a common sentiment of feeling unsupported after completing their education, facing a lack of guidance in finding jobs. Many resorted to previous day jobs or lower-skilled positions like cleaning, whilst peers secured jobs or internships with financial support.

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Financial challenges, especially in securing housing in London, left working-class participants isolated and struggling to convey the urgency of job security, rent, and basic needs to their peers.

Disconnection with lecturers, who represented different backgrounds, fueled feelings of inadequacy, exacerbated by the perceived reliance on personal connections for employment.

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The absence of alumni prospects and the realisation that others found jobs through connections led to a loss of confidence, making it challenging to establish industry connections, notably in contemporary art.

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One participant acknowledged the need for independent job-seeking but criticised the prevailing capitalist notion that disregards the impact of existing connections in various industries.

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In the competitive field of contemporary art, participants questioned if a nomadic career path was expected for genuine progression. Overall, responses conveyed frustration with the lack of support, representation, and networking opportunities post-education.

Have you ever received industry advice, mentorship, or guidance?

Yes
41.7%

No
58.3%
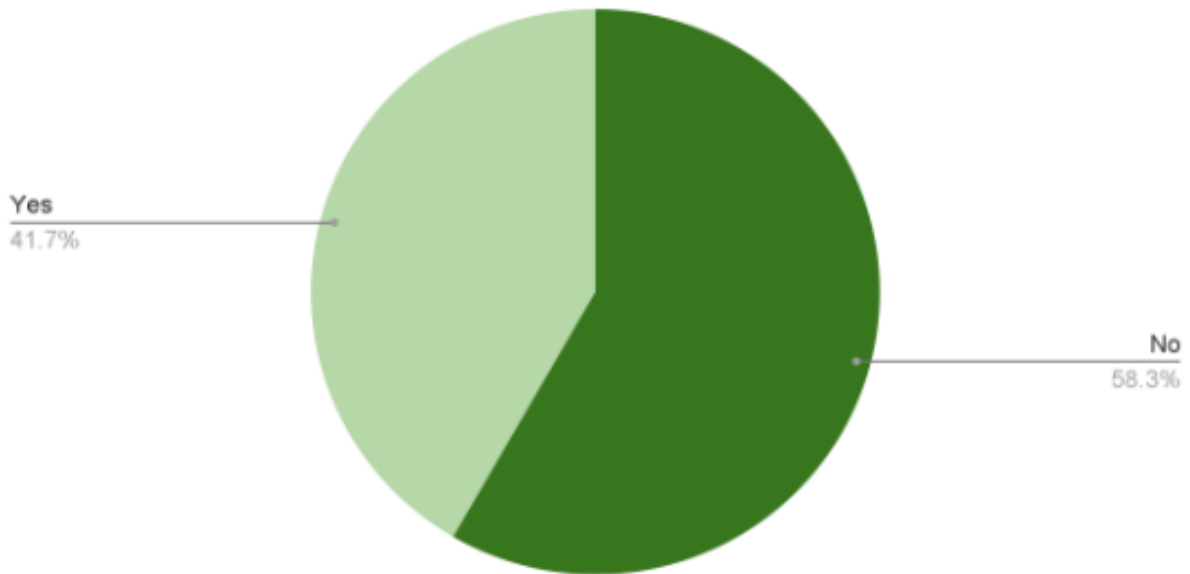
Resources for advice, mentorship and guidance

Participants received industry advice, mentorship and guidance through University, Awards, Bursaries and noted the following names:

Shape Arts

Surrey Disability Arts

Creative Youth Opportunities

Helix Arts

New Writing North

**Grain and Format Festival**

Our Voices by Creative Scotland

Areas for further advice/guidance

Participants were asked if they would be interested in the below suggestions and all expressed interest.

- Industry advice sessions

- Freelance job opportunities

- Mentoring

- Practical art school advice

- Practical freelancer advice

- Advice in applying for funding and grants

- Advice for getting jobs with galleries such as curators and advisors

- Advice for approaching galleries and getting representation/selling work

- Advice for applying for further education

- Advice for artists experiencing neurodiversity

- Advice for organising exhibitions and events

- How did you get there type talks, looking at different careers and how creatives got there

- Workshops discussing imposter syndrome and confidence

Employment

Are you currently employed?

Not Employed
17.6%

Freelance
32.4%

Full Time
27.9%

Part Time
22.1%
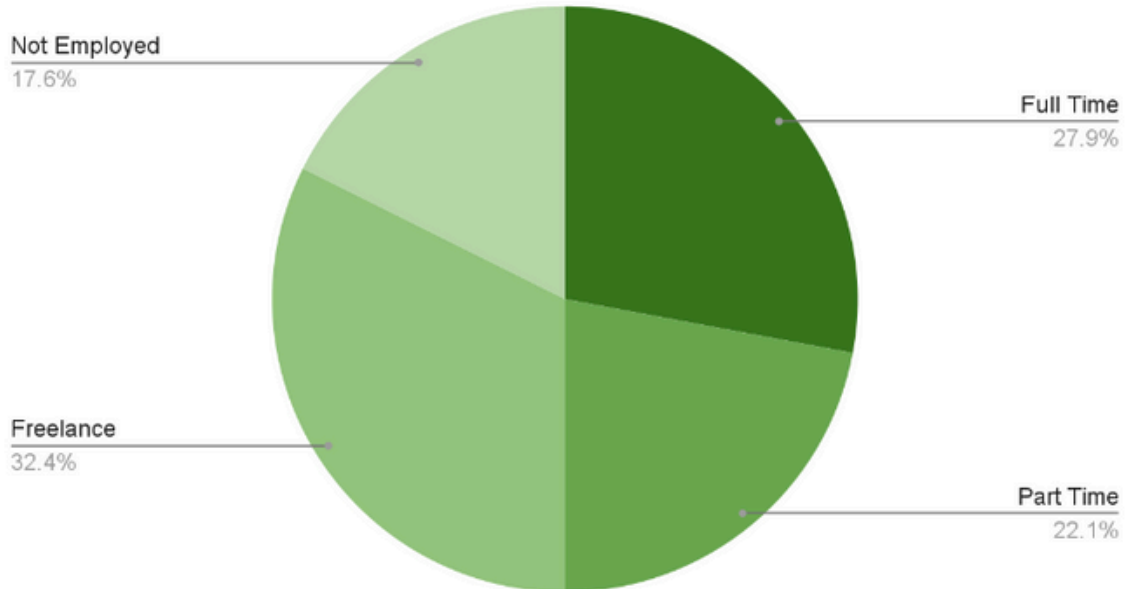
Are you employed within a creative industry?

No
36.4%

Yes
63.6%
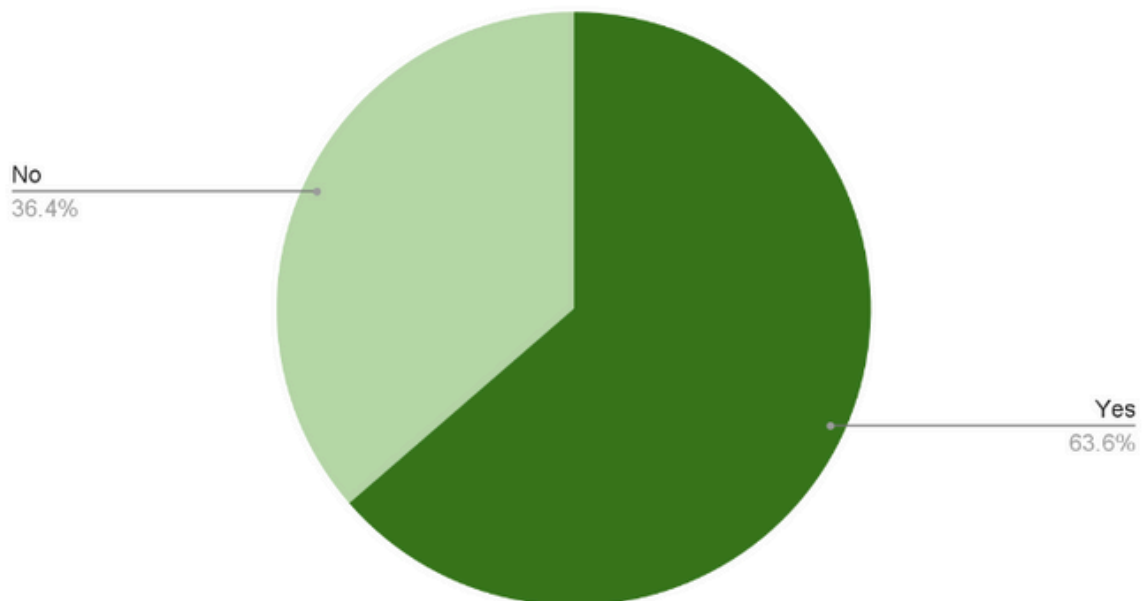
What has been your experience as a WC individual within creative employment?

The experiences of working-class individuals within creative employment are characterised by a pervasive sense of feeling like outsiders. Participants note the challenges of breaking into the industry, facing difficulties in securing creative roles with fair pay. Some feel patronised and excluded, citing instances where their background led to exclusion from certain client meetings or the need to conform by masking aspects of their identity such as accent.

The struggle with financial stability, underpayment, and the demand for unpaid labour intensifies the pressure, particularly for those juggling multiple jobs and artistic practices. The prevalence of imposter syndrome, a lack of acceptance without higher education, and the influence of nepotism in hiring practices are recurring themes. Despite being highly educated individuals in the room, these creatives often resort to freelance roles and non-art-related jobs for financial support, highlighting a pervasive sense of not fitting into the creative work environment.

Do you consider art your career, hobby, or both? Please provide more insight into your answer.

Both
43.3%
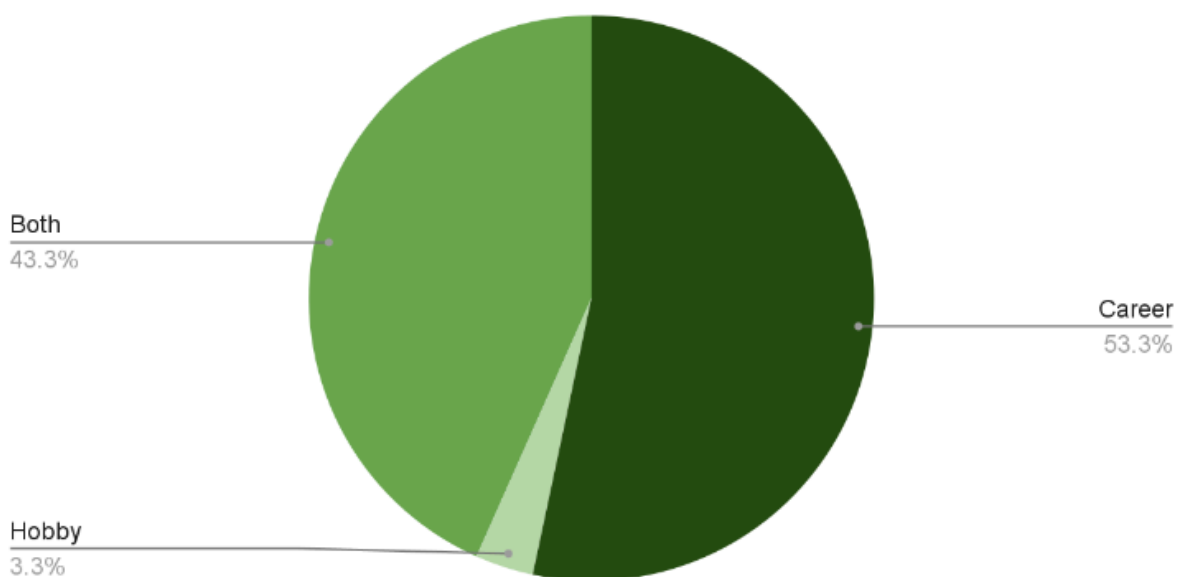
Career
53.3%

Hobby
3.3%

The responses reveal a diverse range of perspectives on whether art is considered a career, a hobby, or a blend of both for the individuals surveyed. Some participants express a deep connection to their artistic practice, considering it an inherent part of who they are, transcending the categorisation of a mere hobby. Despite not receiving a full and sustainable wage for their artwork, they hope for it to be a career in the future, emphasising the limitations of financial terms in defining their commitment to art.

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For some, engaging in art is more than a career; it's a vocation, a calling that goes beyond financial remuneration. This sentiment is echoed by those who view art as their life and religion, devoting most of their waking life to the creative process and considering it a serious pursuit. On the other hand, practical constraints, such as being the breadwinner or having to work full-time jobs, pose challenges to fully dedicating time to their art, blurring the line between a career and a hobby.

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Several participants acknowledge the financial realities of their art practice, with some relying on freelance roles or other jobs to support themselves. For others, the pursuit of art as a career has been a resilient and determined effort, overcoming obstacles to set an example for others and make their art worthwhile.

The responses collectively illustrate the complex nature of the relationship between art and professional identity. While financial considerations play a role, a significant number of participants emphasise the intrinsic value of their art, making it clear that their creative pursuits go beyond the conventional definitions of a career or a hobby.

How do you support your art practice?

Most participants work outside the industry to support their art practices. Some who work in the industry stated they worked in front of house roles at galleries or as teachers. Another participant mentioned they don't get a chance to work full time due to having caring responsibilities.


How do you financially sustain your art practice?

- Working outside the industry
- Freelance many creative jobs or full time/part job in creative industry
- I don't
- Borrowing money
- Universal Credit
- Using found, cheap or second hand materia
- Selling art
- Grants and Funding
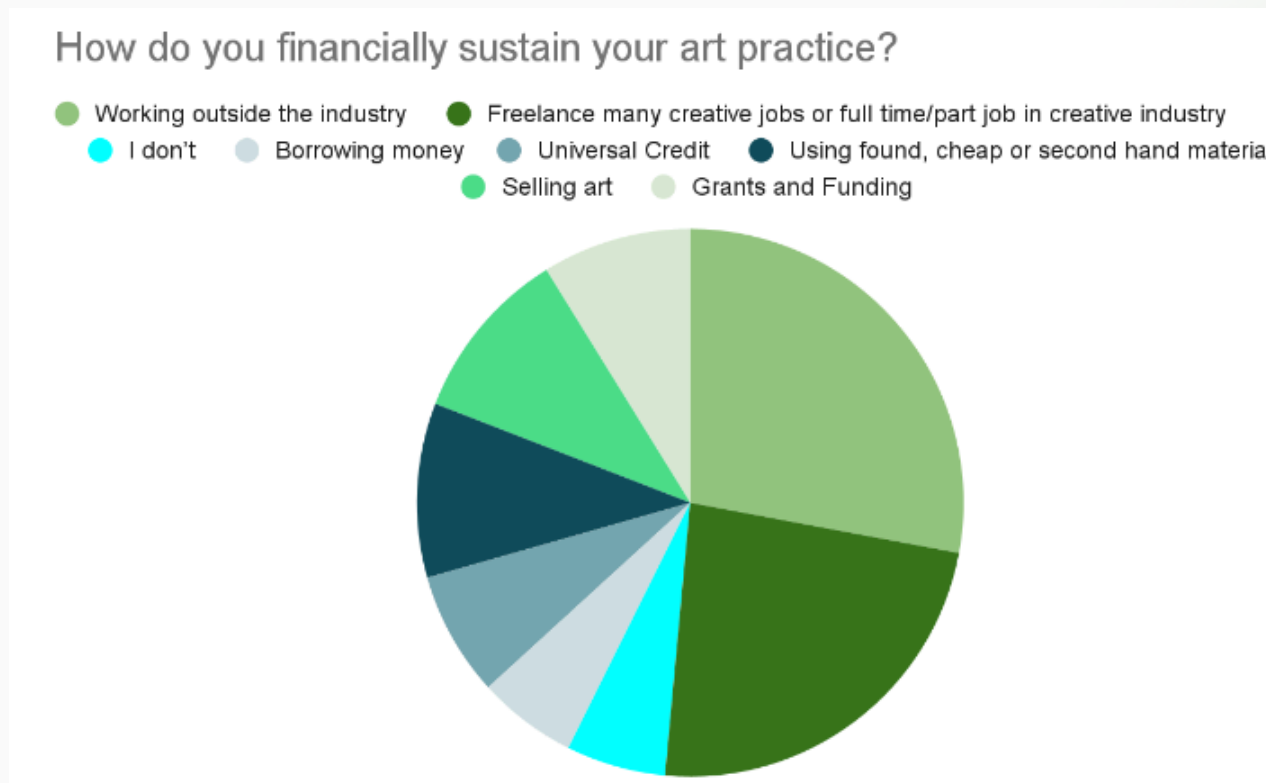
Participants were also asked if they had ever benefited from art funding via Trusts, Foundations or Arts Council, with the majority of those responding they had not.

Do you/have you ever benefited from Funding from trusts, foundations, Arts Council?

Yes
39.3%

No
60.7%
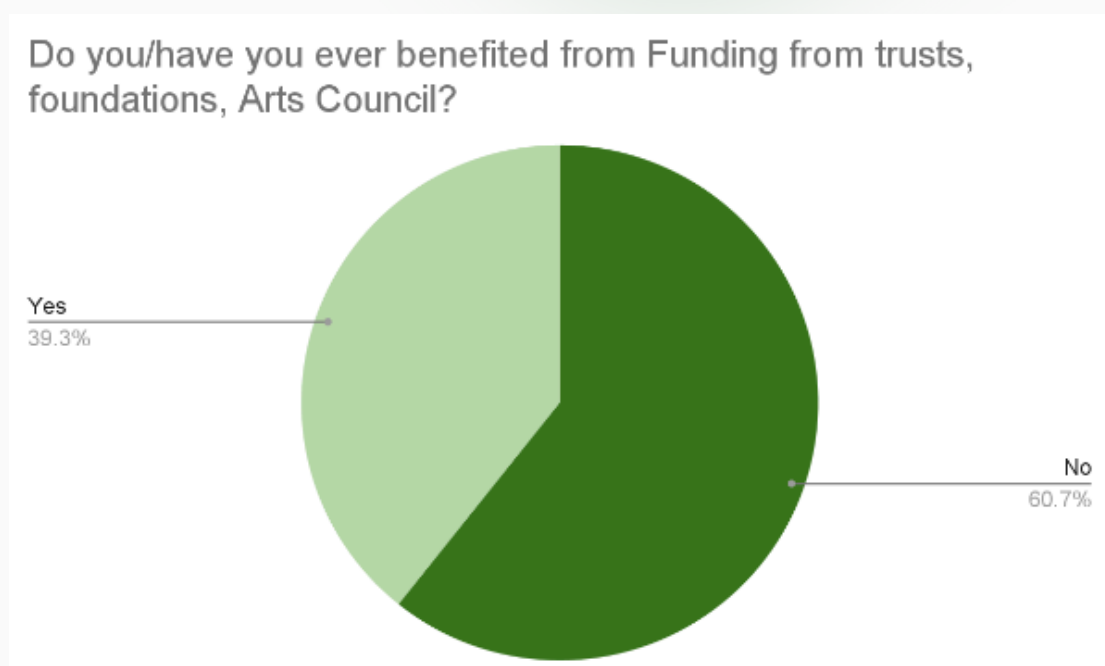
What is your view of a sustainable art career? Should it rely on supplementary employment, or can art fully support itself financially?

The responses showcase a spectrum of perspectives on the sustainability of an art career. Some participants express skepticism about the feasibility of being a full-time artist, emphasising the necessity of supplementary employment to navigate financial challenges. The notion that art should be supported by entities with deep pockets is highlighted, acknowledging the historical collaborative funding approach seen, for example, in the Church.

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Others share their personal journeys, detailing the sacrifices made to focus solely on their art practice, often facilitated by external funding or living arrangements that minimise outgoing expenses. Some artists find that working outside the realm of art keeps them grounded and their work rooted in reality. There's also a call for greater transparency regarding financial support in the art world to challenge the prevalent toxic environment where artists feel embarrassed to discuss their financial realities.

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The consensus appears to be that, ideally, art should be able to fully support itself financially, but the current reality often necessitates supplementary employment. Many point out the difficulty in achieving financial independence through art alone, with challenges like limited opportunities, funding structures, and the pervasive influence of familial wealth or connections.

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In conclusion, the view of a sustainable art career is multifaceted, incorporating a mix of external funding, side jobs, and changes in the industry's mindset to allow artists to make ends meet without compromising their artistic integrity. The dream of art fully supporting itself financially is acknowledged, but the prevailing reality often requires additional sources of income for artists to thrive in their creative pursuits.

Corporate art world

An overwhelming proportion of participants who filled in the survey were/are unrepresented by an agency or gallery.

Are you currently represented by an agency or gallery?

Yes
7.9%

No
92.1%
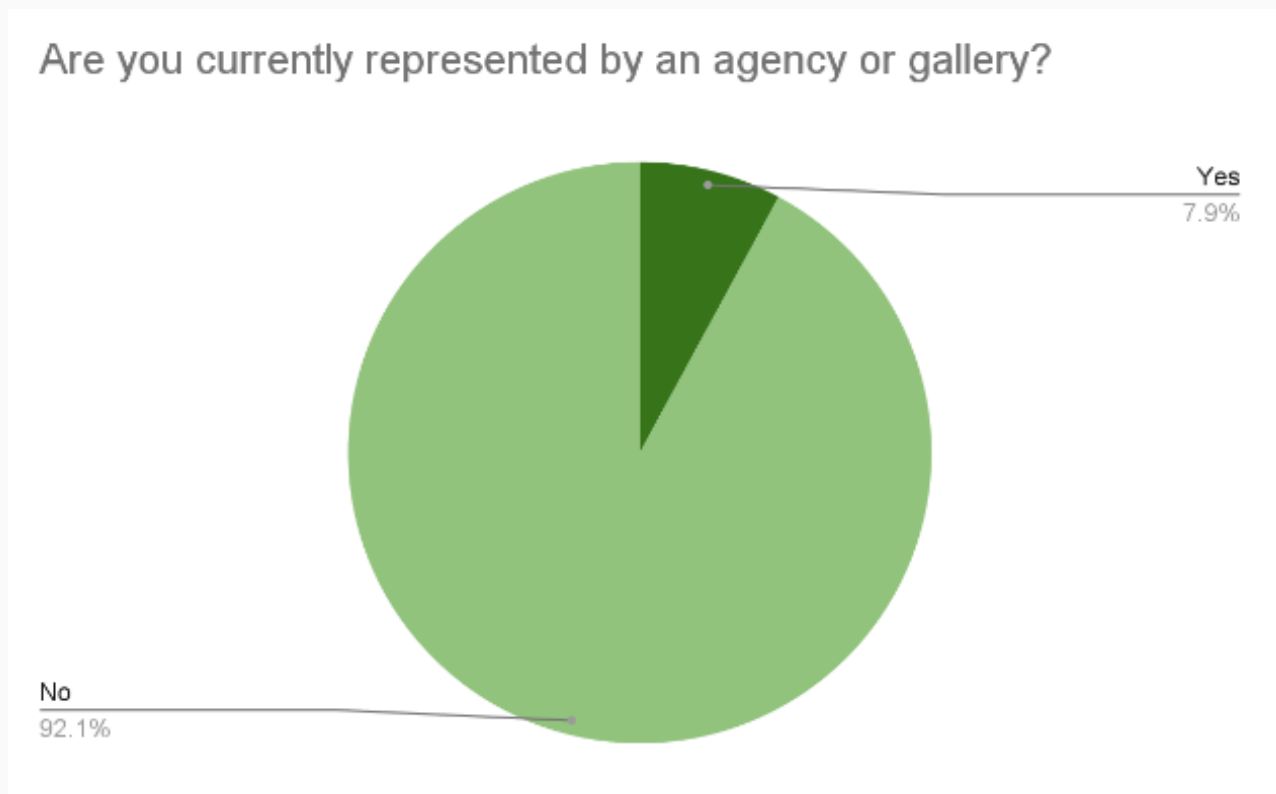
What, in your opinion, constitutes best practices to ensure artists are offered fair opportunities when galleries represent them?

Considering the survey responses from various participants, best practices to ensure fair opportunities when galleries represent artists involve multiple facets, including:

- Transparency and inclusivity are crucial
- Blind applications that conceal personal details
- Promoting equal chances for artists without favouring established networks
- Removing submission fees/keeping them minimal enhances accessibility
- Acknowledging the financial constraints artists might face.

Diversity and intersectionality emerge as key themes, emphasising the importance of galleries representing artists from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Beyond financial considerations, galleries should actively champion and support their represented artists, going beyond mere commission-taking to create an environment where artists feel valued and nurtured.

In terms of financial arrangements, adhering to industry standards in compensating artists and providing necessary professional support is essential. This ensures fair remuneration and acknowledges the broader support artists might require.

Lastly, the welcoming atmosphere of galleries is paramount. Artists and the communities they represent should feel embraced, creating a space that is genuinely inclusive and supportive. By implementing these practices, galleries can contribute to dismantling systemic issues within the art market and foster a more equitable and welcoming artistic community.

Importance of art

As well as focusing on the practicialities of being an artist/creative, participants were also asked questions attaining to the importance of art to them and how it impacts their lives.

What inspired you to become an artist?

The diverse responses from our survey participants reveal a multitude of inspirations that led them to become artists. For some, art is an intrinsic part of their identity, a passion that brings joy and serves as a means of communication. Teachers and lecturers, particularly an inspiring art teacher, played a significant role in guiding individuals towards pursuing art, providing encouragement and inspiration.

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Others found inspiration in a desire for social change, viewing art as a powerful medium to communicate, challenge perspectives, and instigate conversations. For many, being an artist was not a conscious choice but a calling, akin to an inherent identity, much like one's sexual orientation.

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Childhood experiences, such as escapism and the recognition of artistic talent as a means of avoiding a predetermined path, were pivotal inspirations. Some participants credited specific individuals, like a drama teacher who saw their creative potential and encouraged them to persist despite societal perceptions.

The love for visual language, the tactile nature of working with hands and brain, and the universality of art as a language that transcends barriers were also cited as inspirations. Many participants found solace and expression in art, using it as a medium to process emotions and experiences.

In essence, the journey to becoming an artist is deeply personal and varied, with influences ranging from internal passions and talents to external figures and societal aspirations.

Why is art personally important to you?

Art holds personal importance for survey respondents due to its multifaceted roles. It serves as a means of communication, especially for those who find traditional communication challenging. Additionally, art offers a space for deep contemplation, providing an avenue to play with materials and share experiences socially. Many see art as a transformative force, transcending ideas and language, and offering alternative value systems to economic models. Supporting underrepresented artists and facilitating exhibitions contributes to personal fulfilment. Art is fundamental to processing learning, experiences, and the world, becoming a core aspect of how individuals live their lives and express themselves. The therapeutic aspect of art is highlighted, offering a way to shut off the mind and work through complex feelings and experiences. Ultimately, art plays a crucial role in personal expression, connection, and navigating the complexities of life.

How does art impact your life and perspective?

Art significantly impacts the lives and perspectives of survey respondents in diverse and profound ways. For many, art is not just a creative outlet; it's a transformative force that shapes their entire approach to life. It instils an open-minded mindset and teaches the value of listening and communicating with others. The impact of art extends beyond personal expression to contribute to overall well being, serving as a source of hope, passion, and energy.

Art is described as a constant state of self-improvement, offering a healthy space for personal projects. The empowerment derived from taking ownership of both successes and failures is emphasised, providing a sense of control and autonomy. Respondents express that art has been a lifeline, rescuing them from challenging circumstances and preventing drastic actions. It is considered a force that enriches life, gives it meaning, and serves as a powerful coping mechanism.

The social impact of art is evident as well, fostering connections, inspiring discussions, and creating friendships. Art is seen as a platform for radical kindness, bringing together a community of individuals who share a passion for creativity and expression. It exposes individuals to diverse perspectives, cultures, and expressions, challenging entrenched beliefs and fostering personal growth. For some, the impact of art extends beyond personal practice, influencing how they navigate the world, encouraging playful connections, and making life more meaningful.

In summary, art is not just a form of expression; it's a life-altering force that shapes perspectives, provides solace, and creates a vibrant and interconnected community. The impact of art is profound, influencing not only personal creativity but also how individuals approach relationships, navigate challenges, and find meaning in their lives.

Class: a recurring theme

Is the concept of class a recurring theme in your artwork?

Unsure
5.3%

No
15.8%

Sometimes
36.8%

Yes
42.1%
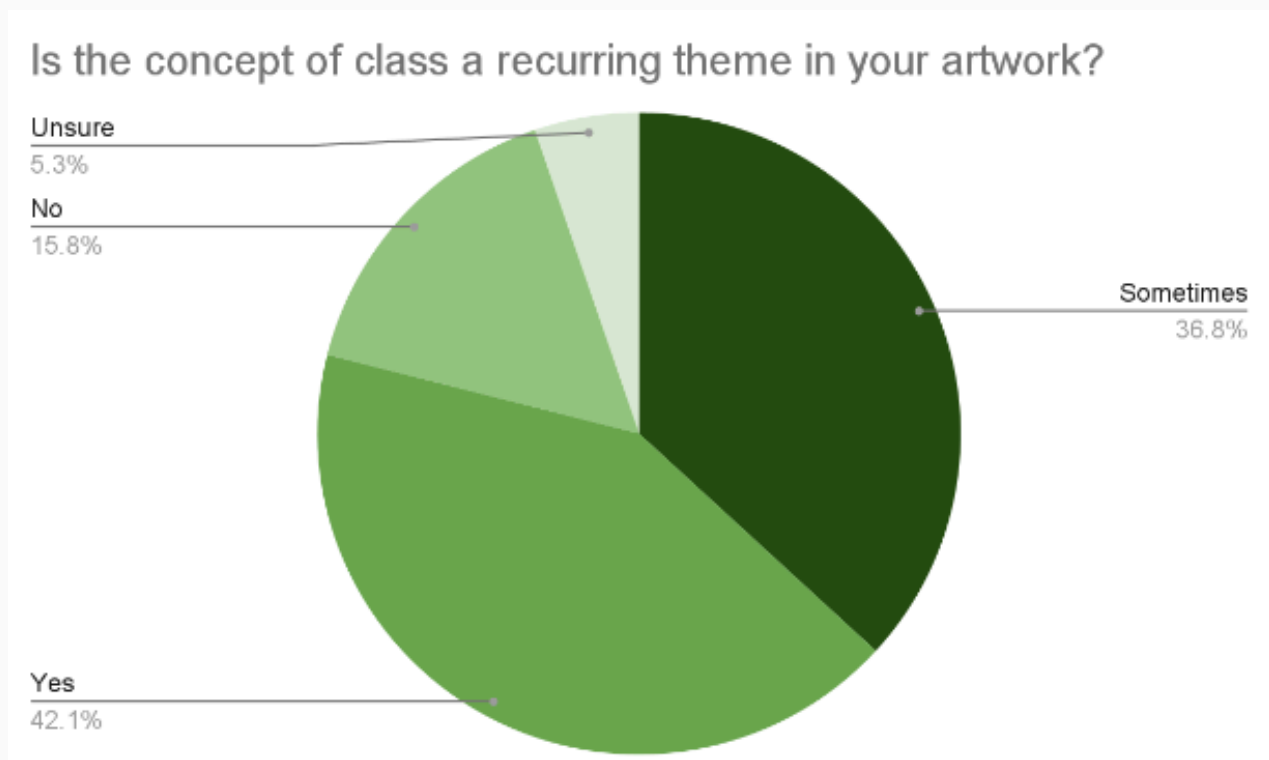
The concept of class resonates as a recurring theme in the artworks of survey participants. While not always overtly political, many express the profound influence of their class background on their artistic expressions. For some, creating abstract and conceptual art becomes a form of liberation, freeing them from societal expectations to conform to specific themes associated with their class and status. The act of engaging in such art, even without overt political messages, is considered a political statement in itself, challenging norms and expectations.

The theme of class vulnerability is a nuanced exploration in these artworks, revealing the allure of promises to escape poverty and join the wealthy. Although the theme may not always take a central position, it consistently lingers in the background, reflecting the complex interplay between personal experiences, societal pressures, and artistic freedom.

In summary, the collective artworks demonstrate a shared recognition of class as a central theme, with participants weaving their unique experiences into a tapestry that delves into the intricacies of social class and its profound impact on their lives.

Aspirations as an Artist

Participants were asked where they envisioned their artworks to be located/acquired, with renowned museums proving to be the least popular and community galleries narrowly higher than community spaces and public institutions.

Can you envision your artwork in private collections, public institutions, community galleries or renowned museums?
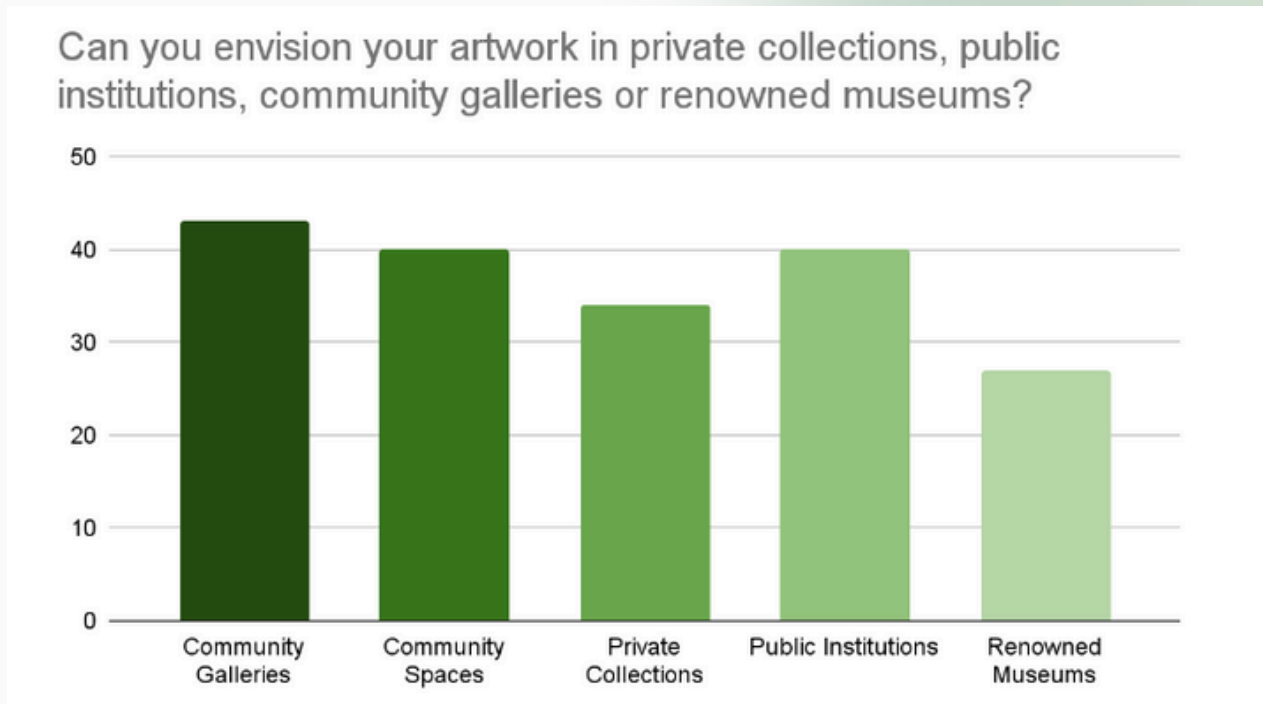
Networking Events and Private Views

Participants were asked *'if typically they felt welcome at networking events in the art community'* and *'if they felt welcome at private views or exhibitions?'* The majority of participants answered no to these questions.

What improvements would make these spaces more welcoming for you?

Participants highlighted the need to address the perception of elitism in the art scene. This involves challenging intentional elitism by dropping exclusive terms and fostering open conversations among attendees, discouraging clique-like behaviour. The emphasis is on creating spaces that are welcoming to individuals from working-class backgrounds, promoting inclusivity and diversity.

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A crucial aspect involves the creation of neuro-affirming spaces that focus on future prospects rather than constant comparison of achievements. This includes fostering a welcoming vibe and offering support for individuals who may feel excluded or uncomfortable. Accessibility and inclusivity are also emphasised, with recommendations to improve wheelchair accessibility, provide clear information in advance about events, and accommodate specific needs, such as those who are deaf.

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To promote diversity and inclusivity, participants suggested encouraging a variety of attendees and contributing artists, moving beyond lip-service to actively represent and value all participants. Networking opportunities should be designed to promote interactions and discourage exclusive groups. Designating "ambassadors" to greet and connect audiences, especially newcomers, is seen as an effective way to create a welcoming atmosphere.

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Consideration for family-oriented attendees is vital, with recommendations to schedule events at times suitable for people with children and ensure the presence of individuals who share similar backgrounds in visible roles. Lastly, participants recognised the importance of online accessibility for those who may not be able to attend physical events, acknowledging the need for a more inclusive and diverse art community.

Inclusivity in the Art World

Participants were asked if they felt included in the traditional 'art world', with the majority responding no.

They were then asked what experiences or factors contributed to their sense of inclusion and exclusion, with some of the key concerns outlined below.

⭐ The influence of class and economic factors, with participants feeling that the current structure favours the wealthy and poses barriers for those with financial limitations

⭐ Middle-class representation and power dynamics were highlighted, leading to a perception of having to conform to middle-class norms for acceptance.

⭐ Ageism, networking challenges, and elitist behaviours were noted as additional hurdles to involvement, while cultural capital, educational background, and identity-related factors played roles in exclusion

⭐ Expectations around prior experiences and exposure to specific cultural elements created challenges for those with non-traditional backgrounds.

Despite these challenges, some participants expressed a desire for greater representation and visibility, emphasising that seeing people with similar backgrounds contributed to feelings of inclusion. Confidence issues and upbringing influenced perceptions of engaging with larger organisations or institutions. The potential for change was acknowledged, with a belief that continued visibility of the working class within these spaces could drive transformation.

How does confidence play a role in your artistic journey? Have you faced challenges related to self-confidence and creativity?

Confidence plays a pivotal role in participants' artistic journeys, with unanimous agreement on its significance. Many participants initially struggled with self-confidence, experiencing doubts, and confronting emotions like jealousy. Some expressed feeling entirely defeated by their lack of confidence, while others cited anxiety as a significant challenge, hindering their ability to showcase their work and engage with others.

Participants highlighted the impact of poverty of vision and a lack of confidence, often redirecting their focus towards supporting others rather than promoting their own work. Several participants admitted to initially faking confidence, emphasising the need for a forced veneer in networking and self-promotion. Over time, this artificial confidence evolved into a genuine sense of self-assurance. However, challenges were noted, including the pressure to maintain an outward appearance of confidence and the limited space for introversion and uncertainty in the competitive art world.

In your opinion, what measures could make the art world more inclusive and accessible for all?

Participants provided diverse perspectives on making the art world more inclusive and accessible. Some expressed scepticism about the current art world system, desiring to build something different. Recommendations included more sharing of work beyond cliques, teaching art to a higher standard in schools and universities, fostering a friendly atmosphere, and eliminating elitism. Working-class voices were urged to be prioritised, and measures such as more funded opportunities, lower commission rates, and bursaries for working-class artists were proposed.

Desire for change

Participants listed suggestions for how they would like to see improvement in the art world including:

Creating open and accessible ways to connect with institutions	Diversifying representation in galleries and museums	Challenging the dominance of highly educated, wealthy individuals in decision-making roles.
Need for awareness of class, equal access to opportunities, and dismantling systemic issues were emphasised	Building alternative spaces and platforms for working-class artists	Fostering community support
Promoting events that are financially accessible and providing online events	More transparent practices	Diversity in decision-makers, and reconsidering who gets Arts Council grants
Acknowledging class	Lessening reliance on certain economic models	An overhaul in education, equal representation, and addressing systemic issues such as wealth disparities

Specific measures suggested included making events more detailed and accessible, paying for interviews and prototypes, using non-academic language, and increasing representation in governance bodies. Recommendations also touched on the importance of inverting platforms, offering funding to diverse groups, creating accessible spaces for artists to organise their shows, and reducing wealth concentration in the art world. Education reform, including equal representation and encouraging critical thinking from a young age, was highlighted as a key step in fostering inclusivity.

Determining Art's Value

Participants were asked for their opinion in who or what determines the value of art and whether it is subjective or objective.

According to survey responses the value of art is predominantly subjective, emphasising resonance, emotional responses, and personal experiences as crucial factors. While acknowledging potential objective standards like craftsmanship and design, participants leaned towards the idea that the significance of art is deeply rooted in individual interpretation and connection. The nuanced view suggests that subjective experience, influenced by emotions, personal context, and societal perspectives, plays a central role in determining the value of art.

Participants were also asked to share any community artworks that they find/found impactful; examples included:

One Day at a Time Boys
Grange Farm Estate
Kirsty Makay – The fish that never swam
Joanne Coates – Lie of the land
Julia Heslop – Protohome
The Covid Chronicles
Jeremy Deller Procession
Huw Locke's The Procession
Regina José Galindo "Who Can Erase The Traces?"
Dolly Sen
Yinka Ilori – Playground

The survey also asked respondents to highlight their favourite galleries/organisations, with some of the answers below.

Nu Art, Aberdeen
Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool
The Tetley, Leeds
Humber Street Gallery, Hull
87 Gallery, Hull
Henry Moore Institute, Leeds
Yorkshire Sculpture Park
OUTPUT Gallery, Liverpool
Studio Voltaire, London
Guts Gallery, London
Focal Point Gallery, Southend
Towner, Eastbourne
Workplace, London
Public Gallery, London
Outpost Gallery, Norwich
Transmission, Glasgow
Camden Arts Centre, London
MK Gallery, Milton Keynes
Wolverhampton Art Gallery
New Art Gallery, Walsall
Eastside Projects, Leeds
Leeds Art Gallery
Spread the Word
New Writing North
Screw Gallery, Leeds
Bermondsey Project Space
Queer Circle
Harlesden High Street, London
Kunstraum, London
Grain, Midlands
Revolv Collective
The White Pube

South London Gallery
The Photographers Gallery, London
Jerwood Arts
Saul Hay Gallery, Manchester
Gallery Oldham
Globe Art Studio, Slaithwaite
The Sculpture Lounge, West Yorkshire
Arts Emergency
Stockton Arts Centre
Pineapple Black, Middlesbrough
The Biscuit Factory, Newcastle
City Arts, Nottingham
The Sculpture House, Paisley
Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop
Yorkshire Artspace
New Art Exchange, Nottingham
Backlit, Nottingham
Spike Island, Bristol
Jelly, Reading
OHOS, Reading
Resort Studios, Margate
Shape Arts
Metal

Survey participants highlighted various aspects that make galleries and art spaces admirable. Key factors include a commitment to community engagement, creating welcoming and approachable environments for families. Good accessibility, diverse programming showcasing new creatives, and a sense of openness that makes creatives feel welcome were also appreciated.
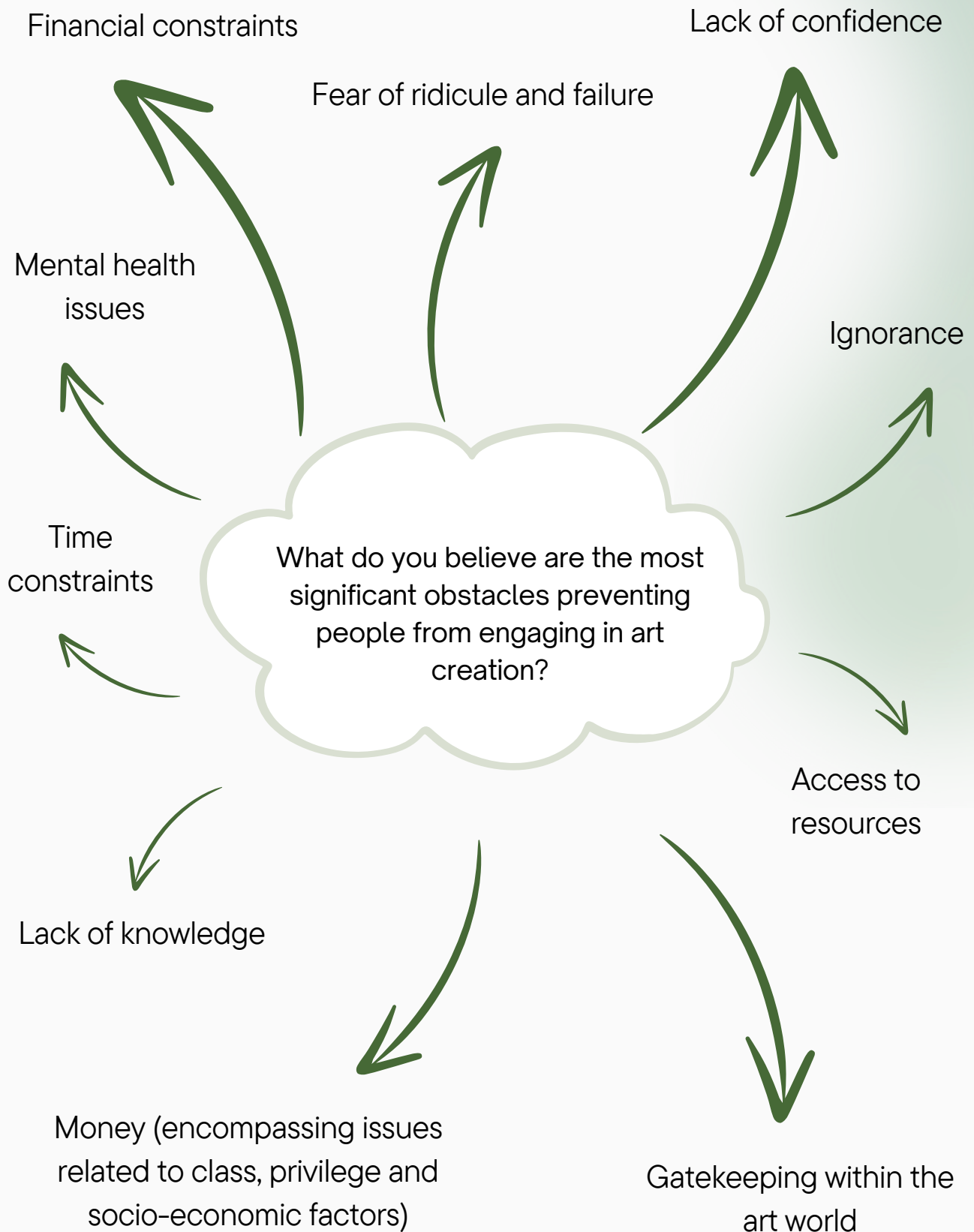
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Respondents valued institutions that are generous with shared resources, actively engage with up-and-coming artists, and host interesting exhibitions. Some participants praised organisations that fill gaps left by funding cuts while maintaining high standards and community engagement. Others pointed to self-funded entities providing artist studios, exhibition spaces, and a broad range of art classes, serving the community for over 20 years. These spaces were recognized for high-quality classes across disciplines and a reputation for attracting nationally acclaimed works. Other admired spaces focused on support for access and inclusion, particularly for underrepresented artists post-exhibition.

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Non-traditional layouts, a willingness to experiment, and a full range of artists and writing events were also appreciated. Integration with communities, proper payment, environmental sustainability, and a welcoming environment for local creatives were additional highlights.

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The surveyed participants valued contemporary, relevant art, strong community outreach, and consistent support for emerging artists, offering varied workshops and activities. In summary, participants admire galleries and spaces that transcend traditional roles, actively contributing to communities and fostering creativity inclusively.

Financial constraints

Lack of confidence

Fear of ridicule and failure

Mental health issues

Ignorance

Time constraints

What do you believe are the most significant obstacles preventing people from engaging in art creation?

Access to resources

Lack of knowledge

Money (encompassing issues related to class, privilege and socio-economic factors)

Gatekeeping within the art world

The list of obstacles emphasises the interconnected nature of factors like finance, education, and social perceptions that collectively impede broader participation in art creation.

Motivation for joining WCCD

Participants were asked what their motivation was for joining the WCCD, with all joining for the below reasons:

- Networking and Connections with other working class creatives

- Opportunities such as exhibitions and residencies

- Networking and connections with industry professionals

- Accessing resources and support

- Sharing and promoting via IG and website

- Community Development

Participants were also asked if there were any specific opportunities or resources they were interested in knowing more about. Below are the collected answers.

1. Funding and Opportunities:

Funding strategies and grant applications
Opportunities and exhibition/residency possibilities
Support for writers and filmmakers
Artist mothers' support

2. Professional Development:

Work review and mentorship
Paperwork guidance (self-employed/freelance)
Networking for sustainable careers
Further education advice

3. Navigating Art Spaces:

Approaching organisations, galleries, and people
Running workshops
Bringing creative work to rural areas

4. Career Paths and Confidence:

Job applications and career guidance
Building confidence and resilience

5. Online Presence:

Social media success for artists
Creating a professional online presence

6. Post-Graduation:

Next steps after graduating

WCCD Membership

Participants were asked to share their experience as a Working Class Creative Database member; if they felt part of the WCCD community; and have they felt supported, gained opportunities, or made connections.

Many WCCD members have shared positive experiences, emphasising a sense of community, support, and numerous opportunities gained through their affiliation. The community has facilitated the building of relationships, with members meeting new people and engaging in day-to-day discussions and feedback. Professional connections and assistance with research have been notable benefits. Common ground, shared experiences, and discussions about art and class have created a feeling of belonging. Members appreciate being part of a network that prioritises knowledge and skill sharing, providing a level playing field and a sense of solidarity within the industry.

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In-person events and exhibitions have been crucial for the development of creative practices. IG takeovers and exhibitions have opened doors for artists, offering social boosts. Free submissions such as the submissions for Exposure Festival have provided opportunities for members to showcase their work. However, some members have not participated in events or the WhatsApp group, raising concerns about inclusivity. Those surveyed also mentioned the community being London-centric, suggesting a need for more events in other parts of the UK with multiple mentions of Scotland.

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Feedback suggests that communication and awareness of resources can be improved. A welcome video explaining WCCD's mission and available resources, increased promotion of WhatsApp groups and online mentors, and actively promoting members' projects were suggested. Some members expressed challenges fitting in due to persistent poverty. WCCD is encouraged to focus on what is within its capacity to help and collaborate with external entities for broader support.

Concerns were raised about the lack of opportunities for filmmakers. It was recommended to broaden communication channels through social media, newsletters, and WhatsApp, ensuring inclusivity for all creatives. Some members reported little communication, lack of opportunities, and uncertainty about engagement, suggesting the need for a video explaining WCCD's volunteer-run structure, sharing WhatsApp chats on IG, and sending regular email and IG round-ups.

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Members expressed disappointment about missed opportunities, prompting the suggestion of supporter-led advice blog posts, including topics like "How to apply for opportunities and boost your chances at getting them." Confidence emerged as a significant barrier to engagement, prompting consideration of confidence-building conversations within the community.

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In summary, while many members have positive experiences with WCCD, there are opportunities for improvement in communication, inclusivity, and resource awareness. Suggestions include a welcome video, increased promotion of resources, addressing regional imbalances, and providing guidance on confidence-building and application strategies.

Suggested changes and improvements for the WCCD

WCCD members express a desire for increased collaboration with brands, festivals, and galleries, acknowledging the organisation's successful efforts within existing limits. Some suggest more direct communication, including personalised emails and group applications for exhibits. There's a call for additional online meetups and the potential for locally organised in-person events. Improving response times to emails and enhancing inclusivity and access are also highlighted.

Members appreciate the current use of WhatsApp for staying informed about trends and art-related activities, but some wish for more opportunities to exhibit their work and receive direct emails about available opportunities. Suggestions include implementing Covid-safe practices for member events, providing more invitations, and facilitating exclusive opportunities for WCCD members.

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There's a recognition of WCCD's challenges in offering more opportunities due to resource limitations, but members express a desire for increased in-person activities, critiques, and more digital initiatives for disabled and rural access. The need for fairness in opportunity distribution, especially outside London, is emphasised. Members also suggest more representation and connection in Scotland, along with links to established organisations for networking.

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In summary, improvements could include enhanced communication, both in direct emails and group applications, increased regional focus beyond London, more in-person and digital activities, and efforts to facilitate connections among members for networking and collaboration.

Conclusions

This survey serves as a valuable document, shedding light on our members' perspectives within the arts and creative industries. It not only reinforces our existing knowledge but also guides our future endeavours in 2024. The findings underscore the persistent lack of access to the arts in participants' upbringing, especially in rural areas, emphasising the critical need for local arts funding and increased accessibility. This comes as no surprise considering the amount of data that supports the decline in Arts funding in the UK. A 2007-2018 analysis of the health of England's arts sector recorded that local government funding for the arts has fallen 43% from 2008 and overall funding has fallen more than a third since 2010. Report on youth Service spending by the YMCA stated that 4,500 youth work jobs have been cut and 750 youth centres closed.

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Recognising the limitations of our team in addressing every aspect of class-related challenges, we acknowledge existing organisations like Arts Emergency, Creative Opps, Creative Youth Network, and Make Bank, and plan to collaborate and support their missions in providing access to arts for young people. We want to form a discussion group around arts education and access to the arts with focus on rural areas and those with the lowest arts engagement.

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Our focus will be on supporting creatives aged 18 and above, spanning from early arts education to employment in the creative industry. The survey brings attention to the multifaceted role of art in individuals' lives even for those who are not interested in pursuing creative careers. Art provides a form of expression, social change, escapism, and mental well-being. Art, beyond being a medium of personal expression, shapes perspectives, fosters connections, and aids in navigating life's complexities.

Key takeaways include the importance of mentorship and role models, which have proven pivotal in many members' creative journeys. To enhance our support, we aim to develop a robust supporters' program, offering mentorship, advice sessions, and blog posts/ guides written by our supporters.

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Our commitment extends to collaborating across the UK, providing opportunities like residencies, exhibitions, and grants to build artists' portfolios and confidence. Additionally, we plan to facilitate in-person meet-ups, online show-and-tell sessions, and WhatsApp discussions to create a supportive community for working-class creatives.

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The survey highlights the need for practical guidance, covering topics from funding strategies and grant applications to navigating traditional academic and gallery spaces. We aim to address these through industry advice sessions, freelance job opportunities, and workshops discussing imposter syndrome and confidence. We want to provide knowledge, connections and a much needed support group for our members throughout their journey in education and employment.

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As we move forward, our goals for 2024 include exploring diverse funding avenues, focusing on WCCD Editions and Merch which promote a unique funding model giving back to local initiatives. We will also collaborate with institutions and non-profit organisations with established funding. The importance of a welcoming event atmosphere is emphasised, aiming for inclusivity and support within the artistic community.

The outlined plans encompass a comprehensive approach, covering funding and opportunities, professional development, navigating art spaces, career paths and confidence, online presence, and post-graduation guidance. The goal is to foster a vibrant and interconnected community while addressing the specific needs of working-class creatives across various aspects of their creative journeys.

We are volunteer run and we are currently looking for funds to support our running costs such as our website, Zoom and administration costs. If you have enjoyed reading our report please consider donating to help us keep our community going!

If you are a professional in the creative sector please consider signing up as a Supporter to offer your skills and mentorship to our members.

If you are a working class creative you can join the working class creatives database here

Thank you!

✉ workingclasscreativesdatabase@gmail.com