

Policy Brief: HEarts Professional

The Hhealth, Economic and Social impact of COVID-19 on Professionals in the ARTs *Findings and policy implications for cultural recovery*

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KEY INFO

Research questions

1. What is the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on arts professionals' health, wellbeing and livelihoods?
2. How have different arts professionals' experienced, perceived and responded to the changing situation due to COVID-19?
3. In what ways has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted upon use of technologies to create, consume and engage with the arts, and what are the implications of this for the future?

Policy area or themes

- Creative Industries
- Arts & Health and Social Prescribing
- Skills and Training

Methods: Longitudinal surveys ($n = 1500$) and interviews with arts professionals across the sector, including those working in music, dance, circus arts, theatre, film, visual arts and literature. Wider population and public health surveys ($n > 15,000$).

Summary of the research

Research on the Hhealth, Economic and Social impact of the ARTs (HEarts) has demonstrated the crucial importance of the arts for societal health and wellbeing, from alleviating loneliness to enhancing social connectedness.^[1-4] While the pandemic has highlighted the role of the arts in public health, it has also accelerated a crisis among the cultural workforce providing these valuable services. HEarts Professional has examined the experience of professionals across the creative industries during the pandemic, as well as ongoing challenges faced across the sector in maintaining wellbeing, livelihoods, and diversity in a post-pandemic cultural environment. These include (i) the acceleration of the financial and mental health challenges that creative workers faced before and throughout the pandemic and potential drivers to nurture resilience and wellbeing, (ii) the experiences and changing priorities of early career professionals, including the growing importance of social responsibility in artistic practice, and (iii) the changing expectations of arts audiences in regard to technological innovation, with exciting possibilities to create more diverse and wide-reaching models for consumption and dissemination. These findings build on our £1M AHRC-funded HEarts project, which has elucidated the central role of the arts for health and wellbeing among the general population.^[1-4] HEarts Professional has confirmed the ongoing importance of creative engagement beyond COVID-19 and the need to protect and support those who play such a vital role in its delivery.

Policy recommendations

Outcomes from our research have identified how the pandemic has accentuated many underlying systemic problems within the arts and creative sectors. We have identified three issues for policymakers to address:

Recommendation 1: Reformed funding models. Long-term, sustainable funding models that focus on individuals and local arts infrastructure are required to mitigate the financial precarities of work for freelancers and arts workers and address the inequitable distribution of funding. This includes **(i) a basic guaranteed income, (ii) minimum pay protections for creators** and **(iii) targeted tax relief**. Providing this stability will enable greater creative freedom that reaches beyond establishment and elite arts, promote wellbeing among artists, as well as providing the conditions to support a more diverse workforce.

Recommendation 2: Arts in health. Integration of artists in health and community settings to provide support for health and wellbeing initiatives that benefit both artists and the wider population. This includes **(i) expanding social prescribing** to support wellbeing and create valued workforce opportunities in this area, **(ii) investing in creative education** to broaden access to the benefits of arts in health across socioeconomic groups and **(iii) funding creative health research** to enable implementation and scaling up as well as scrutiny of mechanisms of change. Policies in this area can help alleviate factors including the social isolation experienced by professionals, while also responding to the growing mental health crisis.

Recommendation 3: Virtual and hybrid performance. Specialised training and funding routes that focus on freelancers are required to promote the expansion of virtual and hybrid performance capabilities. This includes **(i) upskilling arts workers in digital modes of delivery, (ii) clearer fair pay and online creative content protections** and **(iii) preserving hybridity** for cultural centres to deliver both online and offline options. This will help artists respond to changing audience priorities and technologies, while also promoting greater accessibility to the cultural sector for disenfranchised groups.

Key findings

- We have found interconnecting pressures including financial hardship, poor health and isolation that continue to impact on professional artists' wellbeing and their creative proactivity. In addition to providing sufficient financial supports, building resilience among arts professionals through physical activity and social connectedness have been observed to be key factors in mitigating the negative impacts of the pandemic.^[5,6]
- Our results show that early career professionals, while most at risk of experiencing depression and financial hardship, have shown high levels of adaptability. Their experiences during the pandemic have disrupted their artistic practice. This includes developing a greater sense of social responsibility, prioritising the role of arts in health and commitment to the technology-driven future of the arts.^[7]
- There have been clear shifts in both public and artists' increased uses of technology to engage with the arts during the pandemic, particularly online. We have found a lack of spending in relation to these new, online avenues of consuming the arts which raises concerns for their ongoing financial viability. There is a need for professional upskilling in using technology to help artists connect with audiences and each other through virtual means. This will contribute to greater access to the arts and build a sustainable recovery into a hybrid, post-pandemic artistic future.^[8]
- Overall, our findings highlight the opportunities to challenge long-standing issues such as inequality of access to the arts, not only through enhanced technological dissemination that can reach more people but also through changing priorities, values and expectations within the cultural industries, led by those who will be the future of the workforce.

Further information

- [1] Tymoszuk U, Spiro N, Perkins R, Mason-Bertrand A, Gee K, Williamon A (2021), Arts engagement trends in the United Kingdom and their mental and social wellbeing implications: HEartS Survey, *PLOS One*, 16 (e0246078) <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0246078>.
- [2] Tymoszuk U, Perkins R, Fancourt D, & Williamon A (2020), Cross-sectional and longitudinal associations between receptive arts engagement and loneliness among older adults, *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 55, 891-900 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-019-01764-0>.
- [3] Perkins R, Mason-Bertrand A, Tymoszuk U, Spiro N, Gee K, & Williamon A (2021), Arts engagement supports social connectedness in adulthood: findings from the HEartS Survey, *BMC Public Health*, 21 (1208), 1-15 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11233-6>.
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- [5] Spiro N, Perkins R, Kaye S, Tymoszuk U, Mason-Bertrand A, Cossette I, Glasser S, Williamon A (2021), The effects of COVID-19 lockdown 1.0 on working patterns, income, and wellbeing among performing arts professionals in the United Kingdom (April–June 2020), *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 4105 <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.594086>.
- [6] Spiro N, Shaughnessy C, Waddell G, Perkins R, Williamon A (in preparation), Work, wellbeing and professional expectations among arts professionals in the context of COVID-19 in the United Kingdom (April–June 2020 and April-May 2021).
- [7] Shaughnessy C, Perkins R, Spiro N, Waddell G, Campbell A, Williamon A (2022) The future of the cultural workforce: perspectives from early career arts professionals on the challenges and future of the cultural industries in the context of COVID-19. *Humanities and Social Sciences and Humanities Open*, 6, (100296), 1-12 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2022.100296>
- [8] Waddell G, Ppali S, Shaughnessy C, Laloti V, Spiro N, Perkins R, Williamon A (in preparation), Changes in technology use to engage with the arts among the UK public and arts professionals in lockdown.

Find out more

Visual reporting of our findings from our first survey^[5] can be found here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Lr0dF5PZrY>

HEartS [Grant ref. AH/P005888/1]: <https://PerformanceScience.ac.uk/hearts/>

HEartS Professional [Grant ref. AH/V013874/1]: <https://PerformanceScience.ac.uk/heartsprofessional/>

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