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visual artists in shared workspaces
– resources and facilities

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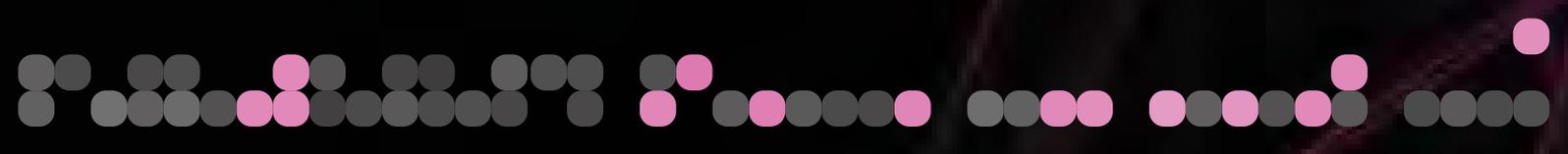
Acknowledgements

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We also wish to thank the studio-holders and their representatives around the region that took time out to take part in the survey work.

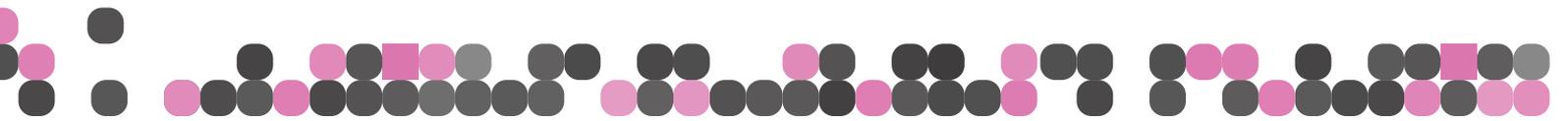


Yorkshire Alive with Opportunity!





White bottle forms 2004.
Ceramic artist Penny Withers.
Photo: Tim Smith



Foreword

Arts Council England is delighted to be associated with this new regional report on the shared workspaces used by visual artists and craftspeople. This Creative Yorkshire research summarises the economic characteristics of workspace and addresses the significant issues associated with this valued provision for creative businesses in Yorkshire and the Humber.

The report profiles shared workspace facilities together with the range of related services. It examines the activities and professional motivations of artists, their earnings in the visual arts economy and the priorities for the development of shared workspace. Also explored are the benefits of shared workspaces, their organisational and management structures and their impact on the local economy.

The report and its findings will be of interest to those making and delivering policy in the visual arts and crafts, to those in related arts organisations, to economic development and regeneration agencies seeking to support creative communities and the development of the creative industries locally, regionally and nationally. Greater clarity is provided about the sometimes invisible role of workspace in the work of a particular group of practitioners in the creative industries. Some of the tensions and potential opportunities that involve workspace are highlighted.

Workspace is a key issue for any business and artists are no exception. 2003 saw three high profile national conferences on aspects of studio development for artists. These conferences demonstrated the steady growth and maturity in this key subsector of the economy. The report on all three conferences, *Supporting artists' workspaces* is available at www.artscouncil.org.uk. Ongoing resources developed from the conferences are available at www.makingspace.uk.net and www.openingdoors.uk.net. This research endorses our ambitions for the arts in supporting artists to gain access to premises and equipment. Artists' workspace was one of the priorities for our 2004 capital programme and almost 90 per cent of the awards went to projects which included space for creating art.

We are challenged by this report to understand and work with arts practitioners who may not have conventional career patterns or business motivations. The visual arts and crafts contribute to the supply chains of creative economy and have much potential to contribute further to the creativity agenda through their outreach and education roles. Their individual contributions to local identity, to a sense of place and to cultural vibrancy all stem from the wide diversity of arts practice that feeds creative sustainable communities. Shared workspaces as clusters of creativity and enterprise have much potential for growth and are key spatial elements in the creative economy.

We thank all the studio holders and their representatives who contributed to the report, the research team and the Creative Yorkshire Steering Group for these insights into the regional creative economy.

Andy Carver, Executive Director, Arts Council England, Yorkshire



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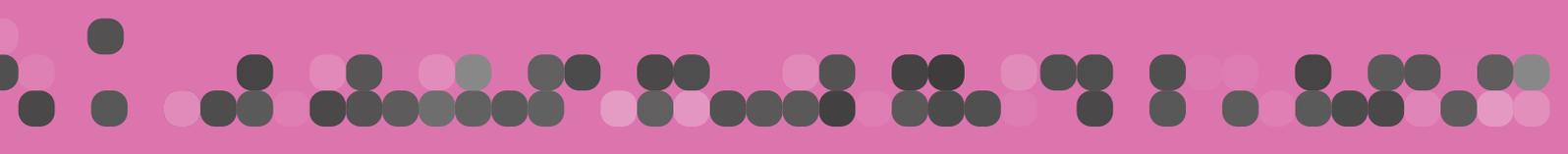
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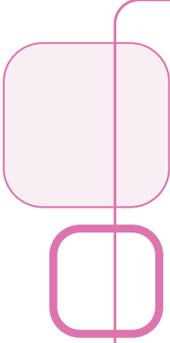
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Executive summary

Workspace facilities in Yorkshire and the Humber

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- The study identified 25 shared workspace facilities in Yorkshire and the Humber, providing spaces for approximately 400 visual artists.
 - The organisation of shared workspaces tends to be undertaken on social economy principles rather than in more commercial formats.
 - There is a tendency towards informal self-administration in shared workspaces. Few have external board members.
 - Most workspaces that responded to the survey are situated in converted buildings. Many exist in unrefurbished former industrial premises. The majority of buildings are leased from private landlords.
 - Whilst some social and professional benefits exist in sharing workspaces through the pooling of resources, ideas and information, very few of them provide or are linked up with business development services.
 - According to studio representatives, artists' workspaces impact on their localities by providing education and outreach activities and by contributing to the cultural vibrancy in the area.
 - Studio representatives see the key benefits of studio space as shared resources, opportunities to collaborate and to receive support and advice.

Activities and motivations

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- Studio-holders are primarily motivated by the opportunity to express and communicate ideas and achieve personal satisfaction.
 - They are less motivated by a desire to be involved in participatory work with local communities.
 - Low rental costs for workspaces are important to the majority of artists.
 - The vast majority of studio-holders have no involvement in the running of workspaces. The operational day to day administrative work falls on a few individuals in each shared workspace.

Earnings in the visual arts economy

- As a whole, visual artists have portfolio careers spending less than half of each year making work. The remainder of their time is split between working in another occupation, in other creative work, eg workshops, and in general business administration. Unemployment accounts for a very small percentage (1%).
- The average gross annual income for over 83% of visual artists surveyed in Yorkshire and the Humber is less than £20,000. For a small number (6.5%) this figure is in the region of £31,000-£40,000. (Gross annual income represents the turnover ie total revenue before any deductions are made for expenses on items such as materials or tax).
- Other than in the very early years of business, there is no general correlation between experience and time spent in business and turnover.
- Creative work accounts for only 62% of income. Although relatively little time is spent on other types of employment (18%), higher earnings from this non-creative employment subsidises creative activity.
- The average net income for 83% of respondents is less than £10,000. (This figure represents turnover minus deductions for expenses such as rent and materials). Nearly 40% of artists make a loss from their creative activity.

The future development of shared artists' workspaces

- Two thirds of the sample of studio-holders suggest they are currently satisfied with their workspace. The major causes of dissatisfaction are practical issues such as size of space, lack of heating or the state of the building.
- Business development considerations outweigh workspace development considerations. Access to independent representation, someone to advocate and facilitate on their behalf, is seen as a priority issue by studio representatives and individual studio-holders alike.
- The majority of tenants would like to see better basic facilities within workspaces, eg heating and running water. Of less importance was improving interaction with residents in its locality.
- Studio representatives identified the priority areas for potential improvement as improving workspace facilities and becoming more involved with the public. Better access to buildings was seen of prime importance.



Artist Kate Bennett at work in her studio at East Street Art's new visual arts centre, Patrick Studios, in Leeds.
Photo: Jerry Hardman-Jones

Inset: The Gable End of Patrick Studios overlooking York Road, Leeds.
Photo: Jerry Hardman-Jones

Introduction

The aim of this report is to summarise the principal findings of an investigation into the economic characteristics of and issues associated with the provision of shared workspaces for visual artists. The findings are to be used to inform the development of strategy for the use of shared workspaces as a development tool for the visual arts economy.

The main objectives of the research were to:

- Profile shared workspace provision and related services available to visual artists across the region.
- Characterise the activities and professional motivations of shared workspace based visual artists.
- Identify the typical earnings characteristics of shared workspace based visual artists including possible under-employment and multiple job holding.
- Identify development priorities for visual artists based in shared workspaces.

Previous studies of the creative economy have indicated that artists' labour markets differ from other types of labour market. Artists generally do not aspire to a nine to five working culture and are often not motivated by financial reward:

“Their careers are characterised by a lack of structure in the traditional sense, a lack of commercial drive, and a high psychic income”

(Honey S, Heron P and Jackson C, 1997).

Research into artists' incomes has indicated that in general they earn very little. In 1994/5 over one third of artists earned less than £5,000 gross, and over 80% earned less than the average wage (Allen K and Shaw P, 1996). What is less clear is whether or not this relatively low earning power is a reflection of real market conditions or results from the presence of some other factor such as the relatively under-developed state of enterprise within the sector.

In order to continue creating, artists have historically been required to be very flexible. Much of their work, particularly on commission, is short-term and so they typically work on more than one project at once. Additionally, many need to work in other non-creative jobs in order to achieve a more realistic level of earnings. Careers take time to develop and artists often work for a considerable length of time, sometimes as long as ten years, before achieving much commercial success (Honey S, Heron P and Jackson C, 1997).

However, studies have demonstrated that despite this artists can be business minded and suggest that the help they need from development agencies is very practical. Assistance with tax and insurance, assuring property rights are established and advice and assistance in marketing their work have all been cited as basic professional requirements (Towse R, 1996).

As a potential focus for sector development, shared workspaces constitute, in many cases, sizeable clusters of visual artists. Whilst there are clearly visual artists who work independently of other artists (both socially and geographically), the shared workspace

provides the opportunity for intervention in a more coordinated and targeted way as well as benefiting from economies of scale. This study therefore focuses on the labour market characteristics of visual artists based in shared workspaces across the Yorkshire and Humber region.

The report is divided into five sections:

Section one profiles the current workspace provision across the region. It looks specifically at the location of studios, their organisational and management structures, ownership and the range of facilities that are provided to tenant visual artists. The section also examines the degree to which artists see themselves as contributing, either independently or jointly, towards the growth and regeneration of their localities. Clearly, the case for intervention would also need to consider the wider impact of improving the labour market position of visual artists, for example by improving rent levels.

Section two focuses on the activities and motivations of artists based in shared workspaces. The aim here is to describe the professional motivations of visual artists who share workspace. The section also identifies the degree to which artists are actively involved in the running of workspaces, as an indicator of the presence or absence of a potential developmental capacity.

Section three looks at the financial economics of working as a visual artist in shared workspace. The section summarises earnings data including averages and ranges of earnings, the typical sources of income and the relationship between time spent in creative activity and total income. Here the research aims to establish the degree of self-employment, under-employment and multiple job holding characteristics of visual artists who occupy shared workspaces.

Section four concludes the report with a summary of issues identified by both workspace tenants and studio group representatives concerning the future development of workspaces. It aims to identify the level of dissatisfaction, sources of problems and to present the suggestions for improvement as prioritised by tenants and workspace representatives.

This section is then followed by a brief set of recommendations for priority consideration.

Definition of visual artist

The definition of visual artist used in this report was supplied by Arts Council England, Yorkshire and it broadly corresponds to Standard Occupational Classification 1990, unit group 381 with the addition of some activities classified under unit groups 384, 386 and 591. The broad definition of visual artist includes the following activities:

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- Painting
 - Printmaking
 - Artists' film and video
 - Bespoke furniture
 - Glassmaking
 - Jewellery and precious metals
 - Traditional crafts
 - Drawing
 - Artists' photography
 - Sculpture
 - Ceramics
 - Textiles
 - Mixed media
 - Art in public places

Methodology

The work was designed, in consultation with Arts Council England, Yorkshire, as a two-stage process with an initial pilot and feasibility stage, followed by data collection and analysis.

Stage one

The first stage involved secondary desk research into the typical earnings of visual artists in the region. Using the principal unit group code 381, the new earnings survey was interrogated. This data is used below to provide a comparison against which to locate the earnings of shared workspace based visual artists.

Twenty self-employed artists were identified to form a small sample representing different visual art specialisms, different stages of career and different geographical bases in the region.

A semi-structured interview schedule was designed to establish an appropriate methodology for the data collection stage. Interviews were then undertaken with six of the selected sample to pilot questioning styles and survey content. The purpose here was to reduce any misunderstandings about the purpose of the survey and eliminate misunderstanding in its interpretation. This initial stage took place in 2002. The artists taking place in the pilot were members of studio groups based in Calderdale, Sheffield, Leeds and Hull.

Stage two

After the pilot stage the research team, in conjunction with Arts Council England, Yorkshire, took a decision to formulate two surveys. The *Workspaces and Facilities* survey contained questions about the workspace itself, covering such issues as facilities, organisational structures and studio group development plans. It was designed to be completed by a representative from each studio group. A total of 25 workspaces and facilities surveys were sent to the named studio representatives.

The second survey, titled *Visual Artists and Workspaces*, enquired about artists' activities and earnings, and aimed to gauge their satisfaction with current provision and elicit suggestions for improvements. This survey was sent to every shared studio holder that could be identified and for whom contact details could be obtained. Each studio group in the region was contacted and requested to supply the names and contact details of individual studio-holders. Twenty studio groups supplied artists' names and a total of 397 visual artists and workspaces surveys were sent to studio-holders. This survey was undertaken concurrently with that aimed at studio representatives.

Fifteen workspaces and facilities surveys were returned, representing a good response rate at 60% of the potential sample. A total of 77 visual artists and workspaces surveys were returned representing a higher than average response rate at almost 20% of the potential sample.

The returned surveys were analysed using SNAP-5 professional survey software.

In the following presentation of findings it is important that the reader distinguishes between the responses of studio representatives and those of the tenants.