

Have you ever wondered...

Taking Part survey briefing No. 5

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Dance participation and attendance in England

Findings from the Taking Part survey

What can Taking Part tell us about dance?

Taking Part is a population survey. The survey can tell us a lot about how many and what type of people among the English adult population (aged 16 and over) attend dance events and participate in dance activities. But it cannot tell us about patterns of attendance at individual venues.

This briefing is based on 2005/06 Taking Part survey data on whether in the past 12 months the respondents have (and if so, how often):

- attended three types of dance events:
 - ballet
 - contemporary dance
 - African, South Asian or Chinese dance
- and participated in two types of dance activities:
 - ballet
 - other dance (not for fitness)

How many people?

The figure below shows the rates of attendance at the three dance event types and participation in the two dance activities, among the English adult population. Some key observations:

- attendance at all dance events is very low
- most of those who attend dance events do so relatively infrequently
- participation rates are also low – less than 1% of adults have participated in ballet and around 8% in other types of dance activities at least once a year.

Note on categorisation

The artform categories in the Taking Part survey were defined, after careful testing, in such a way that people understand what is being asked. Some of the resulting categories are fairly broad – for example 'other live dance'. Therefore, the figures capture overall trends very accurately, at the expense of preventing analysis by specific subtypes of dance activity.

Figure 1: Attendance at dance events¹

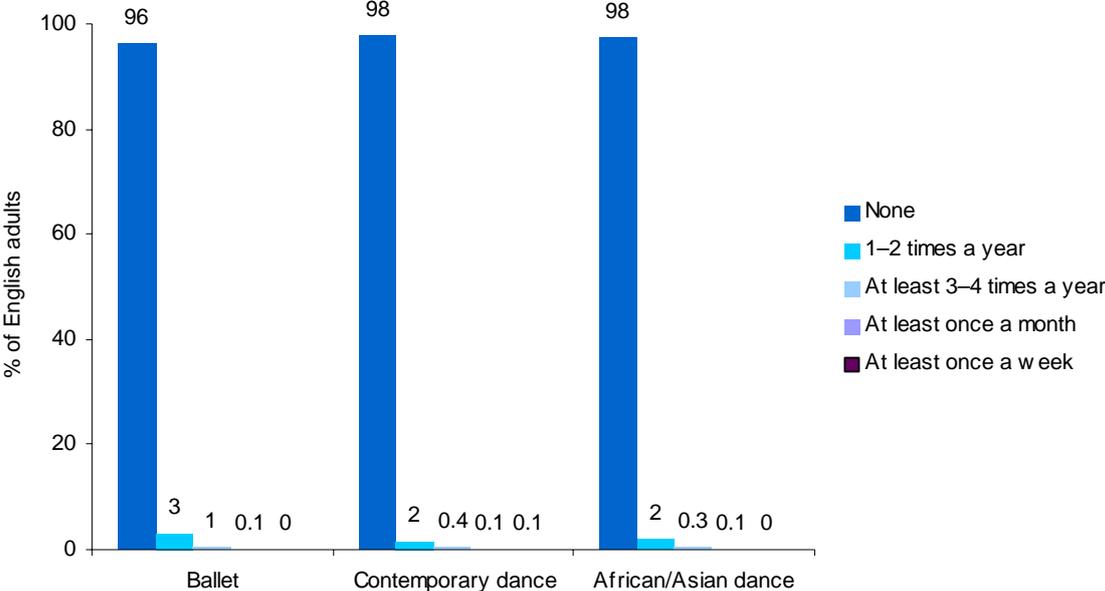
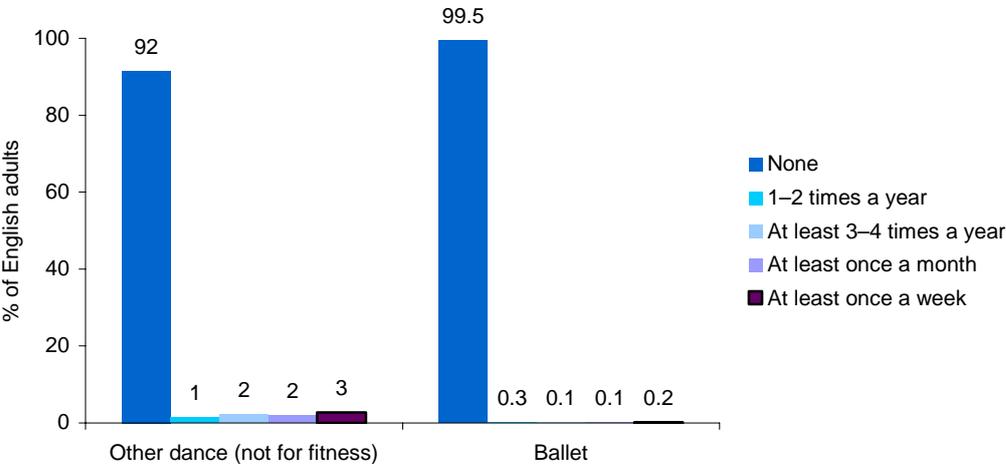


Figure 2: Participation in dance activities



There is of course overlap between these audiences. For example, around a third of those who had attended contemporary dance had also attended ballet in the past 12 months².

¹ Not all figures add to 100% due to rounding. Figures are rounded to the nearest per cent, except for percentages less than 0.5% which are rounded to one decimal place.

Taking this into account, 7% of English adults have attended at least one these types of dance events in the past 12 months, while 9% have participated in at least one dance activity. The **combined reach** of dance through either attendance or participation is 14%, around one in seven people.

In comparison with other arts events, dance events are among the most poorly attended events surveyed in Taking Part, alongside opera (4% attended at least once in the past 12 months) and video/electronic art events (4%). The rates of active participation in ballet are also low in comparison with participation in other arts activities.

Influencing engagement – what are the important factors?

Taking Part also asks those respondents who have attended or participated their motivations for engaging, and those who have not engaged why they have not done so. The reasons that people cite are, however, very general – for example the most commonly cited reason for participating is ‘enjoyment’, while the most commonly cited barriers to engagement are ‘lack of interest’ and ‘lack of time’.

Another way to approach the question is to examine which socio-demographic factors correlate with higher or lower rates of attendance and participation even when all other factors have been taken into account (multivariate analysis). This provides an insight into the barriers that are related to people’s upbringing and social circumstances.

Holding factors constant – an explanation

Previous analysis of Taking Part data has shown that certain groups are more likely to attend and participate in the arts than others. For instance, on average those who define their ethnic group as Black are less likely to attend and participate than those who define themselves as white. However, socio-demographic factors are interrelated. For example, it may be that people from a Black ethnic group are more likely to have lower incomes, and that it is income, rather than ethnicity, that effects arts attendance.

An analytical method called ‘multivariate analysis’ can be used to find out which factors have an effect, even when all the others are held constant. For example, we find that ethnicity is a significant factor even after all other things are taken into account. This means that a Black person would be less likely to attend the arts than a white person even if the two had an otherwise identical demographic profile (same income, educational level, job type, etc).

² See *Exploring audience overlap*, Taking Part briefing No. 3, www.artscouncil.org.uk/takingpart.

For dance we have found that even when **holding all other factors constant** the following factors still have a significant association with an individual's likelihood of attending and/or participating in dance.

Education

People whose highest educational qualification is GCSEs or below are significantly less likely to have attended ballet, contemporary dance and African/Asian dance than those with higher educational qualifications. However, education does not have a consistent impact on the likelihood of participation in dance activities.

*Social status*³

The higher one's social status, the more likely one is to attend ballet and contemporary dance events, as well as to participate in 'other dance' activities. One's social status has no significant effect, however, on one's likelihood of attending African/Asian dance events or participating in ballet.

Gender

Gender has a consistent impact on the likelihood of engaging with dance: even when holding other things constant, women are significantly more likely than men to have attended all types of dance events and participated in all dance activities surveyed in Taking Part.

Ethnicity

Even when holding all other factors constant, white adults are significantly more likely to have attended ballet than those who are Black or Asian. An opposite pattern can be observed, however, in the case of the other dance events and activities: those from Black ethnic backgrounds are significantly more likely to attend African/Asian dance events and to participate in 'other dance' activities than those who are white.

Confidence in the findings – how robust is the Taking Part Survey?

The Taking Part survey asks nearly 29,000 adults (aged 16+) in England about their arts attendance and participation. It is the biggest ever survey on arts engagement in England. The survey sample has been specially designed to be representative of the population, including people in every region, from every type of social group.

We can therefore be confident that the findings in this briefing are an accurate reflection of the levels of dance attendance and participation in England.

³ For more details on the difference between class and status see Chan, T.W. and Goldthorpe, J.H. (2007). *Class and Status. The Conceptual Distinction and its Empirical Relevance*. *American Sociological Review*, 72(4), 512-532.

Age

Ballet attendance is associated with a clear age pattern: those aged over 40 are significantly more likely to attend, with the highest likelihood being observed among those aged 60–69. In the case of contemporary dance and African/Asian dance events, those aged 50–59 have the highest likelihood of attending. The age pattern is the opposite for active participation: younger adults aged 16–29 are more likely to have participated in ‘other dance’ activities than those aged over 40. Age appears to have no impact on one’s probability of having done ballet, but the lack of significant results may be due to the small sample size of ballet participants.

Health

Those who define their level of health as bad or very bad are significantly less likely to have actively taken part in ‘other dance’ activities and to have attended ballet, as compared with those in good health.

Region

Even when all other demographic factors are held constant, those living in London are significantly more likely to have attended ballet and contemporary dance events than those living in other English regions. For African/Asian dance the pattern is less consistent, however, with only those living in the North West or the West Midlands being less likely to have attended than those living in London. There are no significant regional differences in dance participation rates when other factors have been taken into account.

Children in the family

Other things being equal, having children aged 5–10 is associated with a higher probability of attending African/Asian dance events and ballet, and of participating in ballet.

Social class vs social status?

Social class, measured by NS-SEC (National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification) groups together people who are involved in similar employment relations. Thus employers, self-employed workers and employees are distinguished and, among the latter, those who have typically salaried conditions of employment are distinguished from those who typically work for wages. NS-SEC is directly predictive of a range of individuals’ economic life-chances, such as their risk of job loss and of unemployment and their future income prospects.

In contrast, the status scale, while also based on occupation, brings together individuals who are likely to engage with each other in more intimate forms of social interaction – in particular, close friendship – and thus to treat each other as status equals, and in turn to share in a common life-style.

Which factors are not important?

Notably, once other factors have been taken into account, the following no longer have a significant impact on attendance and participation in dance:

- social class (NS-SEC)
- disability status
- area type (urban/rural areas)
- tenure (social rental/private rental/owner-occupier)

Also one's level of personal **income** has no significant impact on one's probability of engaging with most of the dance events and activities, once other things have been taken into account. The only exception is **ballet attendance**: those on higher incomes are significantly more likely to go to the ballet than those on lower incomes.

Unique trends?

Many of the above trends apply to engagement with several arts events and activities examined in the Taking Part survey. However, some of the dance events and activities in this briefing buck the general trends.

One unique feature relates to **ethnicity**: while arts engagement is generally lower among those from Black or minority ethnic backgrounds, Black adults are more likely to have participated in 'other dance' activities and attended African/Asian dance events, as compared with those who are white.

Ballet is also one of only five arts events for which **income** is a significant predictor of attendance once other factors are held constant. The others are street arts/circus, play/drama, art exhibitions and cinema.

What do these findings mean?

These findings present important challenges, opportunities and further questions.

From the headline attendance rates it is evident that at present the vast majority of English adults have no encounters with the professional performing dance sector; and those few who do attend tend to do so relatively infrequently. Also those taking part in dance activities represent a very small minority.

Furthermore, the multivariate analysis tells us that there are many persisting socio-demographic inequalities in the levels of engagement with dance.

This is particularly true in the case of attendance at contemporary dance and ballet. Attendance at these events is low and the attending minority are typically white, well-educated Londoners of high social status; and in the case of ballet also on a high income. Conversely, those who display numerous markers of social disadvantage are significantly less likely to attend: those with a low educational level, low status, minority ethnic background, low income and poor health. Those in poor health are also less likely to be active participants in dance activities.

It seems, therefore, that there are a number of barriers preventing people from attending dance events or participating in dance activities. Some of these appear to be primarily practical in nature, such as poor health and fewer arts opportunities outside London. Others, however, appear to be more attitudinal in nature. For example, the persisting low levels of ballet and contemporary dance attendance among those of lower social status, lower educational level and non-white ethnic background suggests that these types of dance events are not seen to be relevant or accessible to a majority of the population. This is backed up by findings from the arts debate, which showed that a large number of people believe that the arts are 'not for people like me'. A range of different strategies are therefore required to overcome both the practical and attitudinal barriers to engagement with dance.

How to find out more?

A full report, *From indifference to enthusiasm: patterns of arts attendance in England*, contains more information on the nature and level of arts attendance in England. This report can be downloaded from www.artscouncil.org.uk/takingpart.

Similar briefings on the patterns of attendance and participation in other types of arts events and activities are also available to download at this location.

You can also contact the Arts Council's research team at takingpart@artscouncil.org.uk if you have any questions about this research or suggestions for further work.

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