

COVID-19 impact survey

a-n The Artists Information Company



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Foreword Julie Lomax, CEO, a-n The Artists Information Company

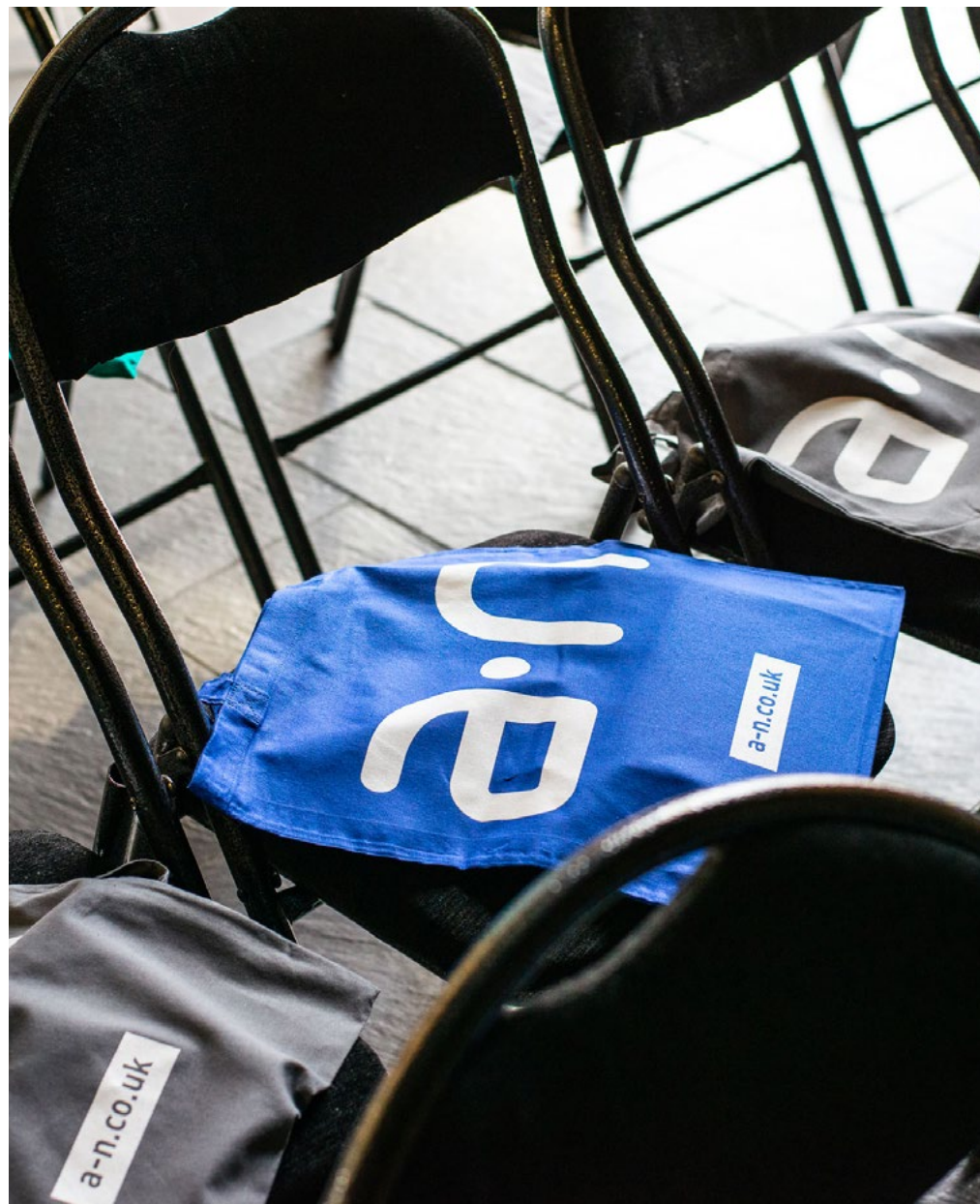
The world in 2020 has changed. COVID-19 and the challenge it presents for artists and the visual arts sector marks a significant juncture in a-n's 40-year history. We conducted this survey because we wanted to know more about the impact of COVID-19 on artists' livelihoods and creative practice.

The results are a stark reminder of precarity in the arts. Artists have long been asked to navigate and shape-shift through a complex set of structures, relationships and arrangements that are both global and local, often for little to no pay. What starts in the studio as a mostly solo creative practice is reliant on a thriving visual arts sector, audiences, relationships and connections. When these break down so does the ability to sustain creative practice.

This independent research is a valuable snapshot in time and forms part of our ongoing advocacy and research programme to support and benefit artists. It will also inform our work as we respond to a dynamic and changing environment. I hope that the research is a valuable tool for artists and the visual arts sector, providing information that can be used to make the case to safeguard artists' livelihoods.

We have listened and there is much to do. We have developed Time Space Money in partnership with Arts Council England to provide funding to artists and arts organisers, we have used this research to advocate for our members to Government, and we are providing information, advice and support for our members. On behalf of a-n Board and Artists Council I want to thank everybody who contributed to this research. We are passionate about artists and care about your future.

'a-n members are part of a community that will get artists through this challenging period and will create the resources that artists need to thrive in the future.' Jayne Knight, Chair, a-n



Key Findings

- This survey, with over 4,000 practitioners and curators, provides robust insights into the emerging impacts of COVID-19 on the visual arts sector.
- Artists and curators are seeing stark impacts of COVID-19 on their practice, business and lives. The vast majority have already had work, events and exhibitions cancelled.
- Income is clearly the main immediate concern for artists. **Artists' livelihoods** are dependent on spaces being open and events happening. Around 60% of those surveyed anticipating a reduction in income of over 50% this year. Those working in craft and applied arts and performance, as well as those based in rural locations, predict the greatest reduction.
- Commissions, grants and awards are also important. Evidence suggests there is some uncertainty on the impact of COVID-19 on **grants and awards** – some artists are unsure if awards will be honoured when activities are no longer possible due to COVID-19. Clarity from funders around this would be valuable.
- Although less immediately pressing, access to **studio space** needs consideration. Sixty-five per cent of respondents anticipate an impact on studio space as a result of the virus in the longer-term. This is likely to have a knock on effect on studio space providers.
- **Artists still want to connect**, but social distancing and the more recent complete lockdown, has made face to face networking impossible. There is a role for sector support organisations to provide opportunities for virtual connection and support.



Context and approach

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a-n and BOP Consulting designed a survey to understand how the virus outbreak is impacting artists and arts managers across the UK and what support they need.

The survey was open for five days, from Thursday 19 March to Tuesday 24 March 2020.

The survey received a total of 4,070 responses, covering approximately 15% of a-n members and providing a large data set from which we can draw robust findings.

The vast majority (94%) of these were a-n members.



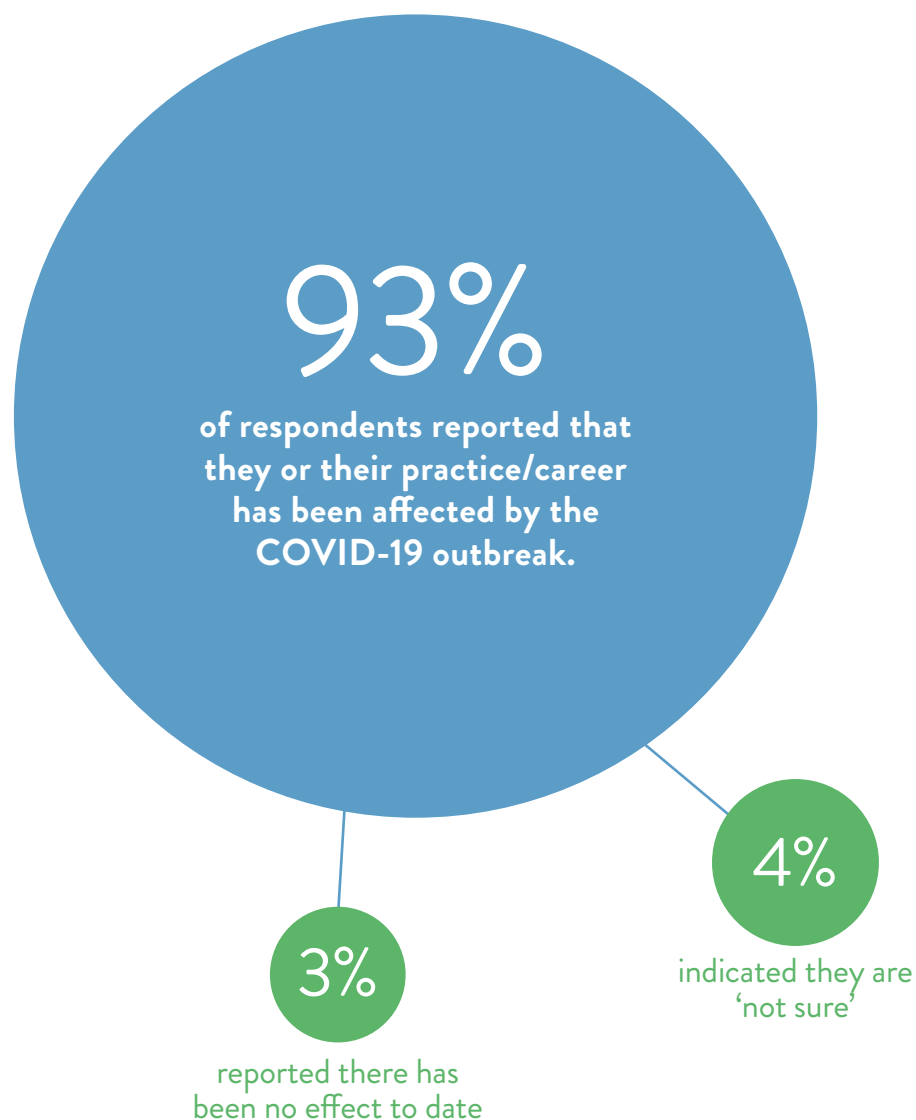
Profile of respondents

Respondents reflect the overall make up of a-n's membership. They...

- **Include a range of experience levels.** 38% of respondents define themselves as mid-career, 33% are emerging artists and 28% are established. Just 1% are students.
- **Mostly work in fine art and craft/applied arts.** The most common practice areas are fine art (37%) craft/applied arts (29%), interdisciplinary art (10%), photography (3%) and project management (3%).
- **Slightly more from urban centres** – 41% of respondents are from cities. One third are based in towns (29%) and a further third in village/ rural locations (30%).
- **The vast majority are a-n members** – 81% of respondents hold an a-n Artist membership. 8% have a joint Artist and Arts Organiser membership and 4% have an Arts Organiser membership. Just 1% have Student membership.



Immediate impacts of COVID-19



Since the initial Government guidance to social distance and self-isolate...

82% of respondents have had upcoming work cancelled, including events, performances and public activities.

59% of respondents have cancelled their own upcoming work, events, performances or public activities.

9% of respondents reported other immediate impacts, which include having to close their studio, not being able to travel to their studio to make work and moving their teaching online.

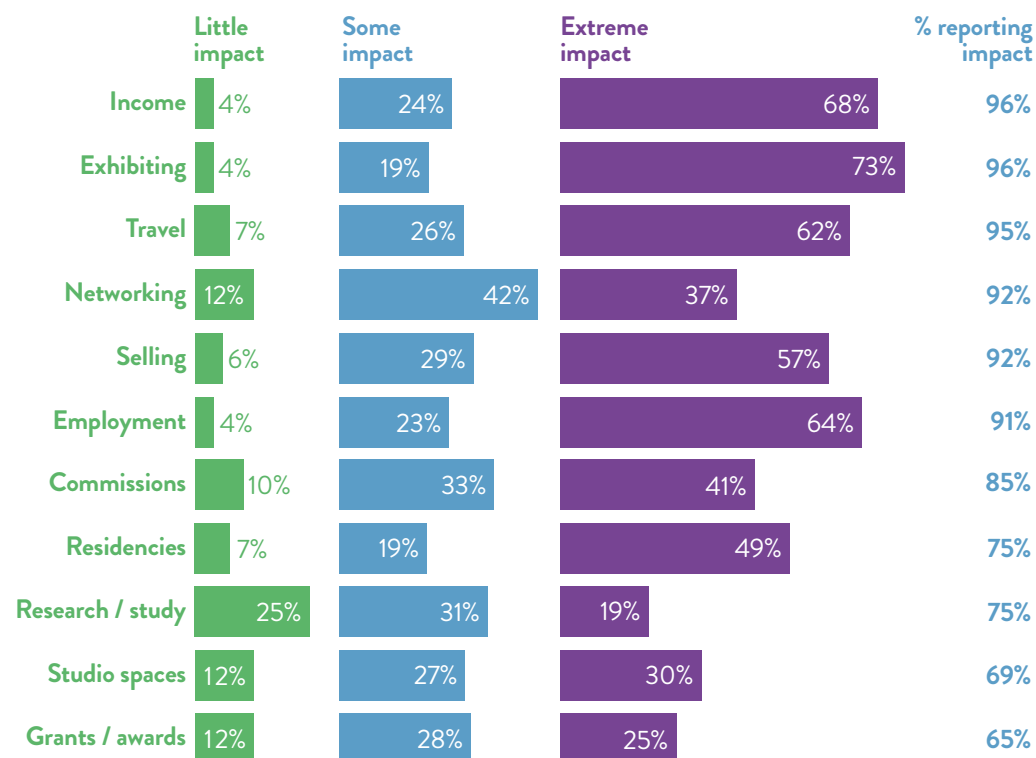
*'I am an environmental artist and rely on workshops, residencies, grants and personal experiences. **Social distancing = zero work.**'*

*'**All events, fairs, exhibitions have been cancelled** causing massive loss (including all accommodations booked in order to attend events) all workshops have been cancelled which would normally amount to 1/3 of all earnings. Sales on Etsy have dropped. Increasing online profile but so is everyone else.'*

Immediate impacts of COVID-19

- There have been significant immediate impacts on **a wide range of areas**.
- **96%** of respondents indicate **income reduction** as a significant immediate impact of COVID-19.
- The majority indicate an impact on the key mechanisms through which artists earn a living such as exhibitions, selling work and employment (which is often supplementary to their practice).
- The way people work and connect has been affected, including **92% indicate a significant impact on networking**.
- **69%** of respondents identify an immediate impact on their **studio space**. Also, COVID-19 is having an immediate and significant effect on **grants and awards for 65%** of respondents.
- Unsurprisingly, there is still a **great deal of uncertainty, even about the near future**. This is particularly the case for **grants and awards where 22% indicate that the immediate impact of COVID-19 is not yet known**. Clear communication from funders and those making awards may help to reduce uncertainty.

Immediate impact of COVID-19 (% reporting impact)

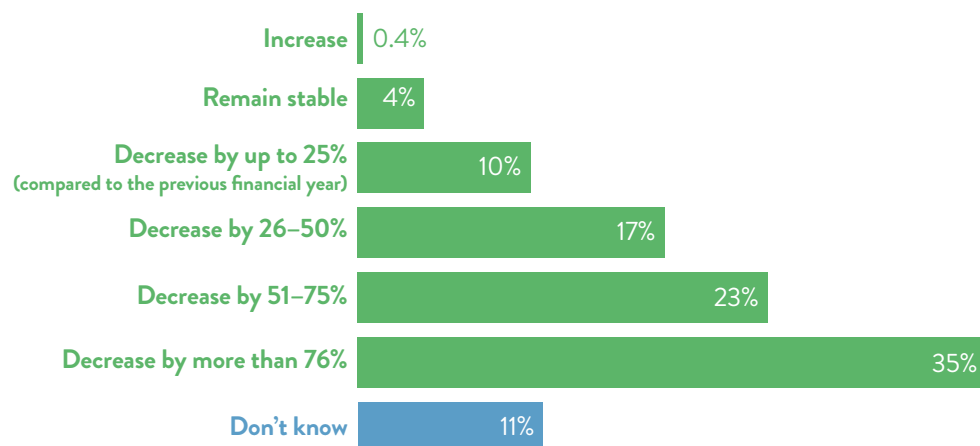


Longer-term impacts of COVID-19

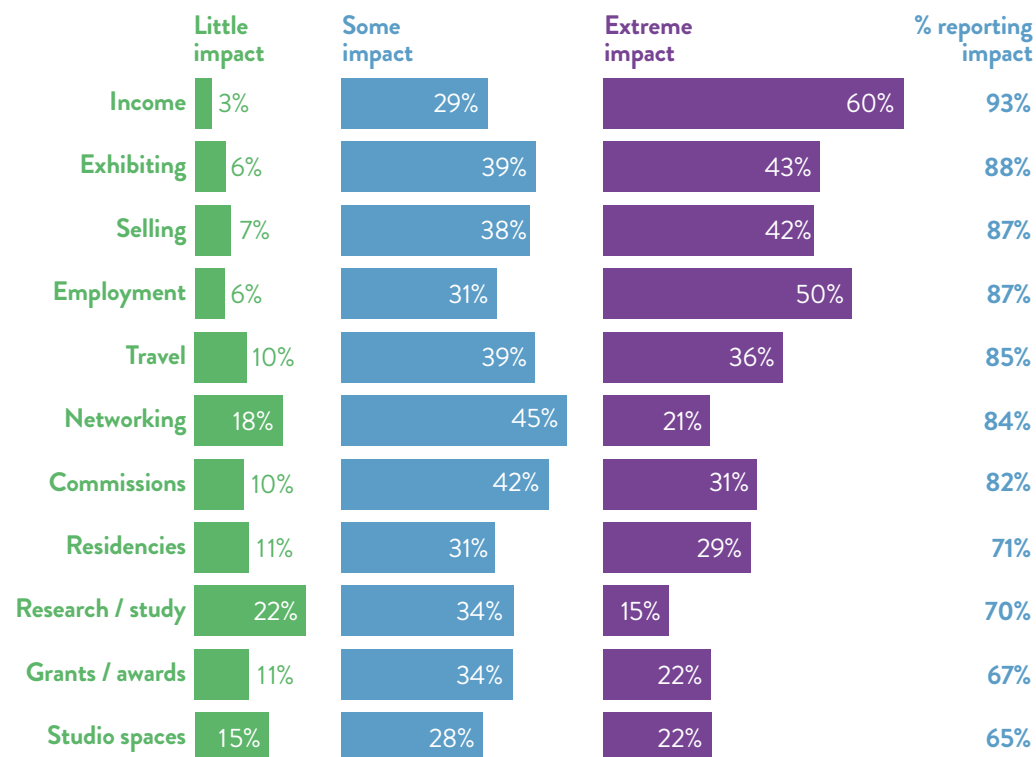
Nearly 60% expect income to be down over 50% in 2020

One in three (35%) respondents predict that their income will decrease by more than 76%. Just 4% predict their income to remain stable.

Change in income due to COVID-19 (% respondents)



Longer-term impact of COVID-19 (% reporting impact)



Respondents foresee a **continued impact on all the areas** we tested. Income, exhibiting and selling work are expected to be the most common areas susceptible to long-lasting impacts of COVID-19.

Longer-term impacts of COVID-19

‘The arts are going to be in a really dire position in 6-18 months’ time if artists and arts workers are not supported through this financially. As well as income replacement schemes, I also would like to see funding and support for arts projects that explore the issues that the pandemic has brought to prominence in society.’

‘I work in a single room studio and have very little contact with other artists. The current situation has made me **feel very anxious** and at times I’ve wondered whether **I should even keep going with my creative career.**’

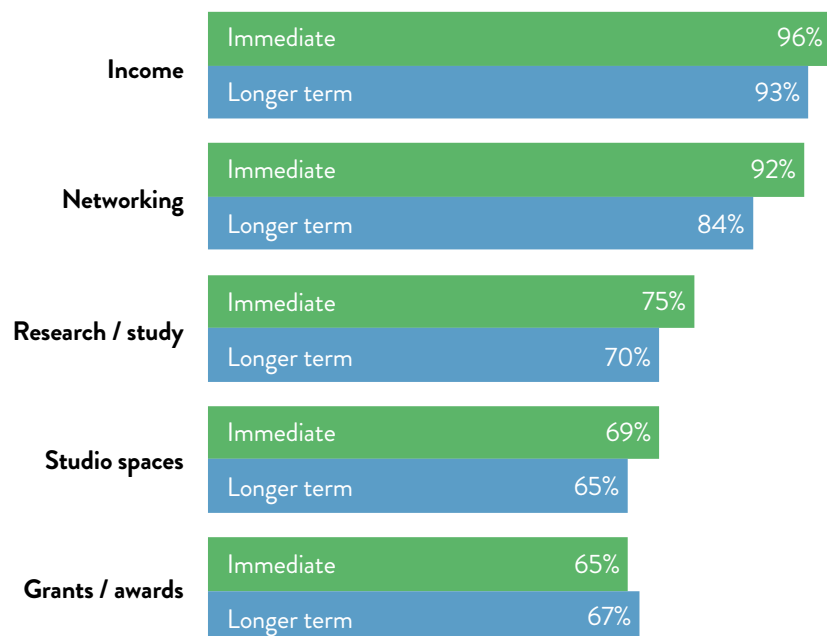
‘Loss of income and commissions has **a trickled-down effect.** Two of my large projects that got cancelled mean that 9 people I have hired to work with me on them... are also out of work. I personally – as much as I would like to and think it would be the right thing to do – cannot bankroll those projects myself and cannot pay people. If the original commissioning partner does not honour my agreements, I cannot even pay people I have sub-contracted.’



Comparison of immediate and longer-term impacts

For most impacts, the **effect of COVID 19 is anticipated to fall slightly over time, but not greatly** (Figure 4). Grants and awards is the one area where this is not the case, suggesting concern over the long term fiscal impact and spending on arts and culture.

Comparison of immediate and longer term impact (% reporting an impact)

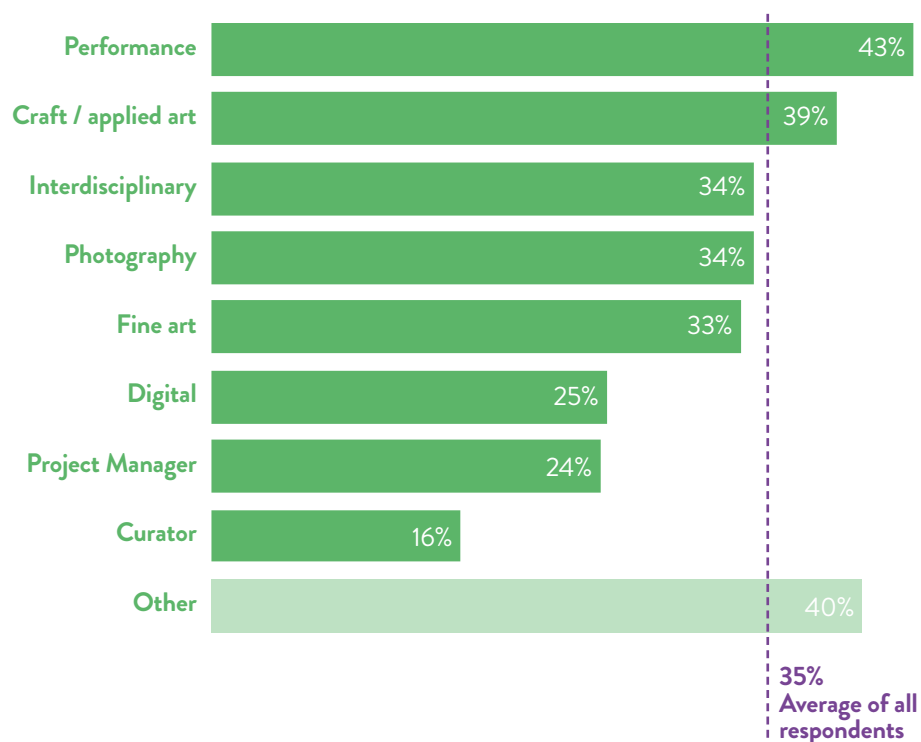


*‘Given the restrictions on social distancing, isolating, general collapse of the economy, high unemployment, increased poverty in the next few months, the longer term recovery will need consideration... **buying art will be even more of a luxury now and galleries may never re-open,** particularly in places like rural Wales where I and my group of fellow artists live... It was hard enough to find venues after 10 years of austerity and the devaluation of the contribution of the arts to society already... The Tate et al will survive **but the local independent galleries probably won’t.**’*

Income impact across different groups

The most dramatic reduction in income (over 76%) is expected **within craft and applied arts and performance practice**, with curators, digital and project managers comparatively less vulnerable.

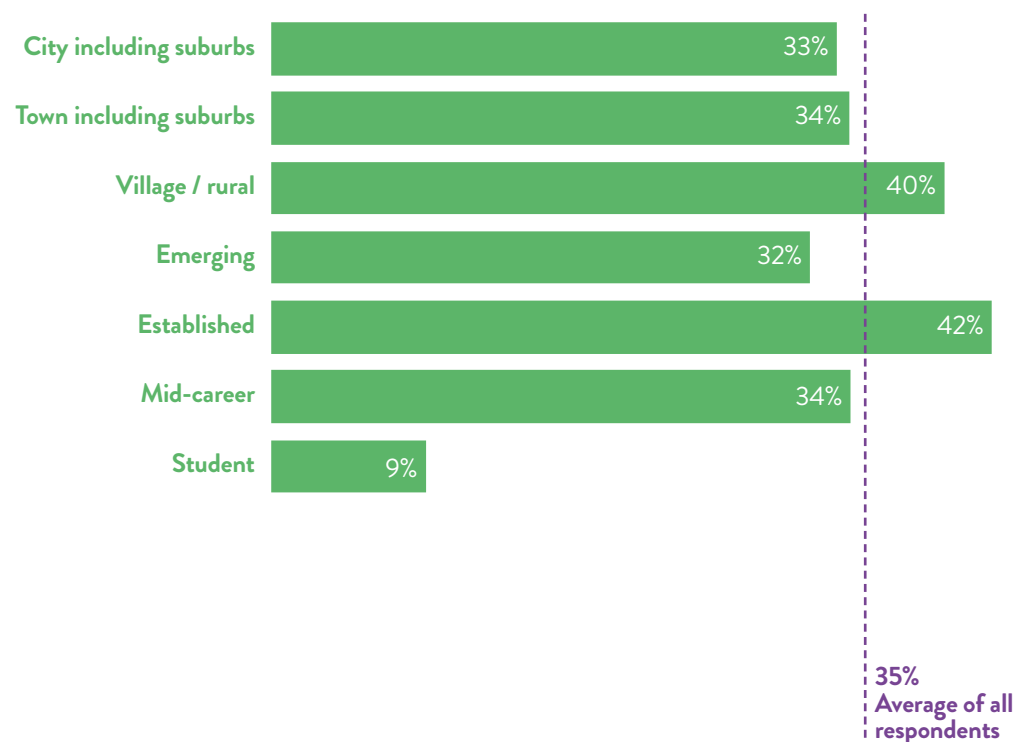
% of respondents whose income is predicted to reduce by over 76% in 2020 – by artform



Source: BOP analysis of a-n's COVID-19 survey (n=69-1,391)

The data suggests that artists based in **village / rural settings and established artists are facing comparatively larger falls**.

% of respondents whose income is predicted to reduce by over 76% in 2020 – by geography and stage of career/practice



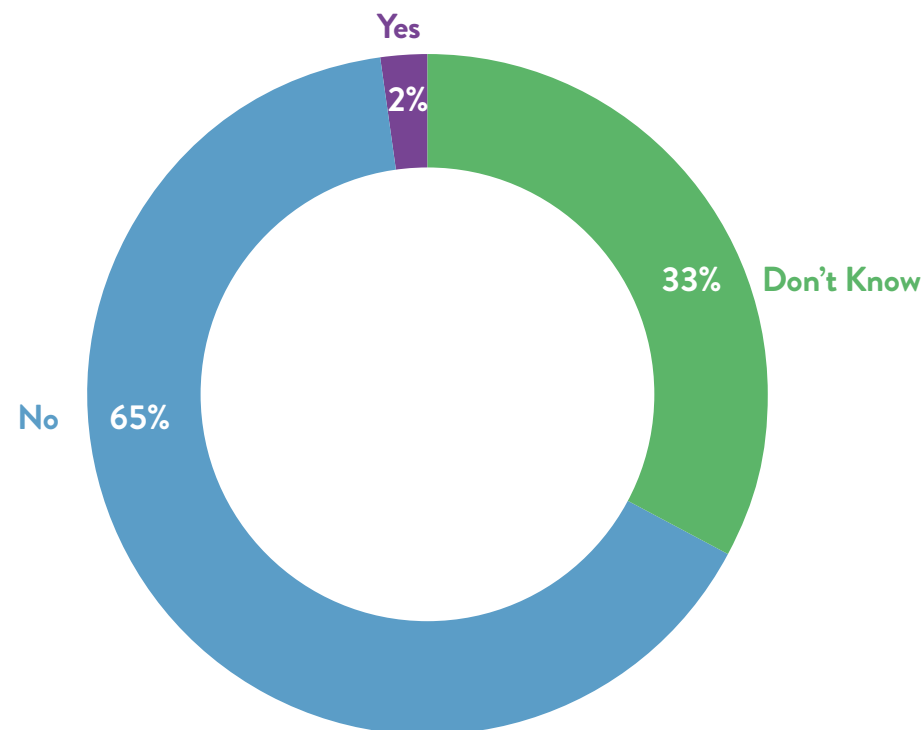
Source: BOP analysis of a-n's COVID-19 survey (n=55-1,554)

Reflections on the Government's response

Respondents identify support from government needs to focus around income and finance. Aspects of this include:

- **Financial support to replace lost income.** Identified mechanisms include universal basic income, payment of 80% of self-employed earnings (which has subsequently been announced by the Treasury), sick pay for lock down and hardship/emergency funds for artists.
- **Cancelled events, fairs, exhibitions and work.** Many have had events cancelled with no compensation. Others have invested in travel or accommodation for events which are non-refundable. Some respondents suggest support to recoup the costs or investments that COVID-19 renders futile.
- **Help with business costs.** Mechanisms which could help include; rent holidays for studio spaces, tax holidays (e.g. VAT) and support for energy bills. Suggestion that business grants in government support measures should be extended to charities.
- **Advice and guidance on what support is available.**

Is the Government doing enough to support of artists and arts organisations to help mitigate the potential impact of COVID-19?



'Financial support to cover basic living costs.'

'Acknowledgement that we exist would be a start. Financial help. Tax breaks council tax breaks. Guidance and information.'

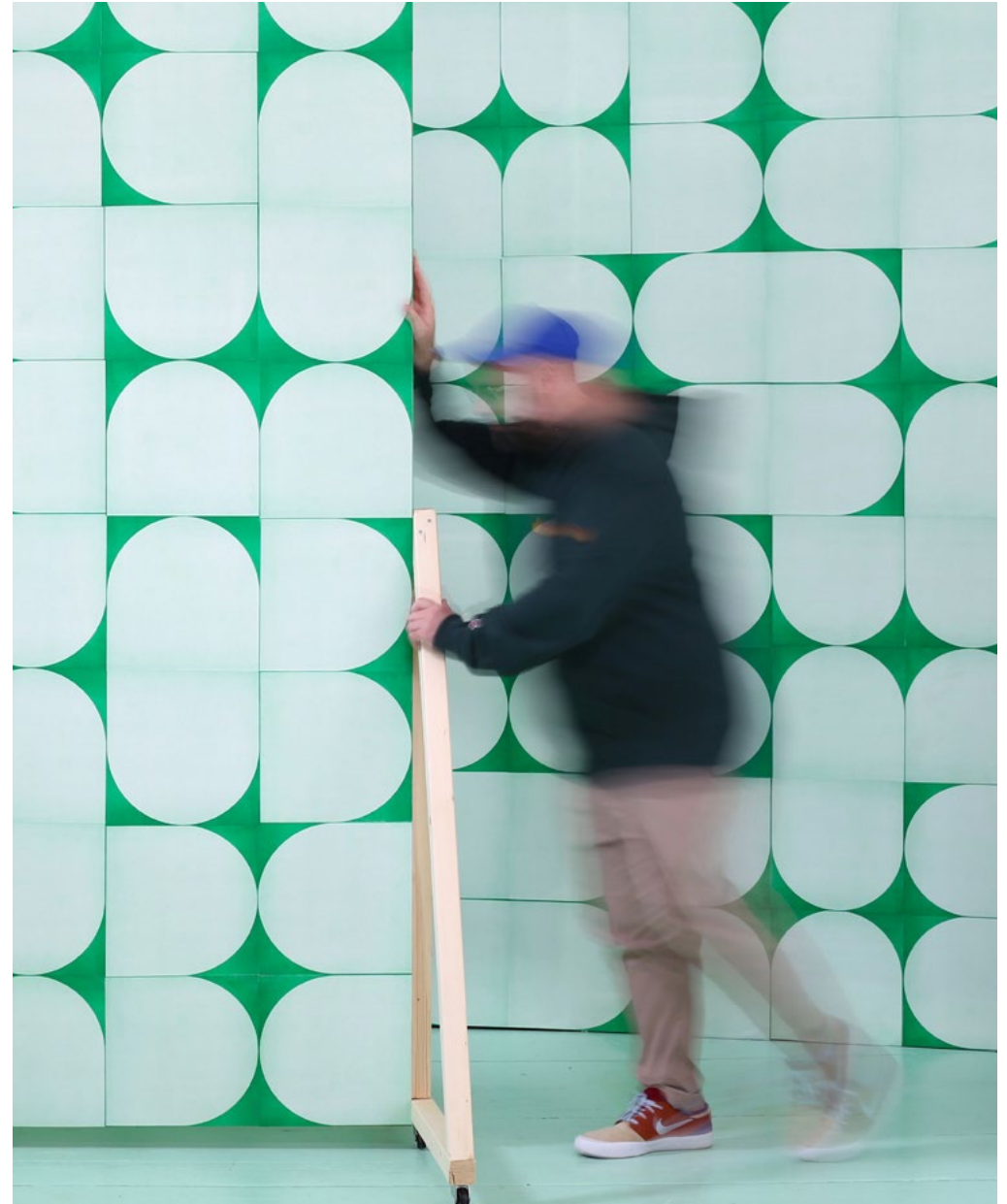
Reflections on the Government's response

*'If we are self employed, we are still paying tax and NI and **deserve the same protections to income as everyone else.***

*'**A relief in the payment of my studio rent.***

*'Attention to public funded opportunities for **digital networking**, commissioning of artwork, support for students graduating.'*

*'Difficult as self employed and each year earnings and opportunities are different. **Hopefully artists will be recognised in the same way as other self employed people** and given support to pay their bills etc.'*



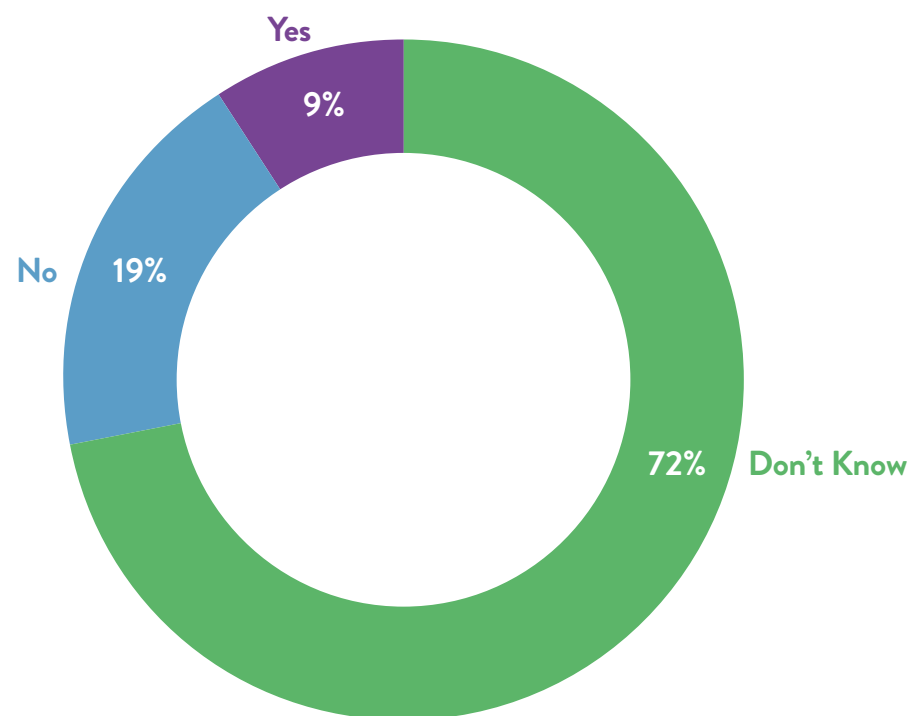
Reflections on the response from Sector Support Organisations

The vast majority of respondents are **not sure if Sector Support Organisation (SSOs) are doing enough to support artists and arts organisations**. This may reflect a lack of awareness of the work being done, genuine uncertainty as to the scale and possible response to the pandemic; or an unwillingness to criticise these organisations.

Artists see a role for SSOs to advocate and ensure:

- **Certainty about commissions and grants.** Some artists are finding commissioners are not clear whether fees will be honoured. SSO can ensure clarity on their own awards and advocate for greater clarity from others.
- **Funding still continues** to community based arts projects and a commitment to more commissions after the pandemic.
- **Studio space providers pass on business rate holiday**
- **Representation of freelancers and self-employed** in government policy responses to COVID-19 and more generally for mechanisms such as universal basic income.

Are sector support organisations doing enough to support artists and arts organisations to help mitigate the potential impact of COVID-19?
(% of respondents)



*'Some [commissioners] are doing amazing and honouring booked work, and putting together support packages, others seem **to be closed up both literally and in terms of communication.**'*

Reflections on the response from Sector Support Organisations

Without face to face events, opportunities for **networking** have been reduced. Degree final shows and exhibition openings have been cancelled. There is a need for more support for **digital networks**.

Some identify how the sector grants and support could be used to support productivity in the sector during this enforced 'downtime' caused by isolation through funding **R&D** to be undertaken now.

'Funding to support networks already in place and start up networks.'

*'The arts are going to be in a really dire position in 6-18 months' time if artists and arts workers are not supported through this financially. As well as income replacement schemes, I also would like to see **funding and support for arts projects that explore the issues that the pandemic has brought to prominence in society.***

*'To support and generate opportunities for artist/applied artist to use time productively, i.e. to develop/explore new ways of working... in the form of **small grants for materials and equipment.***



Reflections on how a-n can help artists and arts organisers

Respondents identify support from a-n needs to focus around financial support, lobbying, advice, training and keeping members connected. These include:

- **Financial support and discounts.** Free or discounted membership, adapting insurance cover, small capital grants for short-term equipment rental (e.g. laptops).
- **Speaking on behalf of the sector to policy makers.** Campaign and lobby government for pay-outs which meet the immediate and long-term needs of artists and arts managers, leveraging their scale, position and data (i.e. this survey).
- **Providing relevant advice and training.** Guidance for transitioning to online working, funding, tips for relaunching their business and building resilience for future challenges.
- **Keeping artists connected.** Respondents desire online ways to reach out and connect with others going through similar challenges – for emotional comfort, as well as sharing knowledge and skills.

‘Perhaps offer training/networking & development online so we can keep growing during this challenging time.’

‘Join the lobby petitioning the government to adequately support creatives who are directly/indirectly losing income due to the pandemic.’

‘Keep us updated as to potential funds, and keep us connected!’



a-n The Artists Information Company is the largest artists membership organisation in the UK with over 25,000 members. We support artists in practical ways, acting on behalf of our membership and the visual arts sector to improve artists' livelihoods. Founded in 1980 we have a reputation for providing compelling insights and playing a catalytic role in influencing and informing cultural policy.

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