

Future Arts Centres

Sector Insight Report
2026



Executive Summary

Arts centres are distinctive cultural organisations: multi-artform, rooted in the places and communities they serve. They develop, commission, produce and present artistic work, support artists and create opportunities for people to experience, participate in and shape culture.

Future Arts Centres has grown organically from 120 to 200 members in just four years, without proactive recruitment. This growth reflects a growing recognition of arts centres as a sector, with organisations recognising a shared model that combines artistic ambition, strong relationships with communities, civic purpose and an entrepreneurial approach to sustaining their work.

Those relationships are central to how arts centres work. On average, each arts centre holds 28 cross-sector partnerships, across health, education, local government, the voluntary sector and other areas of civic life. Their buildings are places for culture, but also for community activity. Together our members record 30.7 million visits a year, with almost 60% taking place beyond the ticketed programme – reach that is largely invisible through box office data alone.

This extends into sustained participation and community activity. Arts centres support thousands of community groups, provide more than a million hours of participatory and community-led activity, and work with more than 4,300 schools. FAC's Model of Change, built from personal stories of significant change from people engaging with arts centres across the UK, shows how this work can build confidence, create a sense of safety and belonging, support wellbeing, and help people through periods of transition and progression.

Underpinning all of this is a mixed-income business model. Arts centres generate income through trading and commercial activity alongside public investment and philanthropy. But despite the strength and diversity of this model, financial pressures are intensifying. Across the financial dataset, the gap between income and expenditure widened to £10m in 2024/25, with income of £283.9 million against expenditure of £293.9 million. Unrestricted reserves also fell, with 30% of organisations reporting negative reserves or less than £100,000.

The picture is of a sector generating substantial cultural, civic, social and economic value while operating with limited financial headroom.

The Arts Centre Sector

Future Arts Centres (FAC) now has 200 members across the UK, which has risen from 120 just four years ago. Significantly, this growth has been largely organic rather than recruitment-led.

While FAC's profile has undoubtedly grown, the increase also points to a wider shift within the cultural sector: more organisations are choosing to identify as arts centres and recognising themselves as part of a distinct and increasingly confident sector.

It reflects a growing appreciation of the arts centre model – its ability to combine artistic ambition with diverse income streams, deep relationships with communities and audiences, and a breadth of cultural and civic activity that is difficult to replicate elsewhere.

The growth of the network therefore tells us something important about the sector itself: arts centres are increasingly recognising the value of what they have in common, as well as the strength that comes from identifying collectively.



CULTURE HOUSE IN SUNDERLAND OPENED IN SEPT 2026,
JOINING FUTURE ARTS CENTRES AS OUR 200TH MEMBER.

What is an Arts Centre?

Arts centres are public-facing, building-based cultural organisations rooted in and shaped by the places and communities they serve. Rather than being defined by a single artform, their programmes and activities are driven by the needs, interests and ambitions of their communities.

This responsiveness typically results in a multi-artform offer, bringing together performance, visual arts, participation and community-led activity, often alongside learning, wellbeing and other civic or social programmes. Crucially, arts centres take an active curatorial role: they develop, commission, produce and present artistic programmes with a clear artistic purpose, rather than simply providing space in which cultural activity can take place. Their freedom from a single artform or traditional audience expectations creates space for artistic risk and innovation, bringing artists, ideas, artforms and communities together in new ways.

Arts centres are also typically multi-space buildings: rather than being organised around a single theatre, gallery or other dedicated artform space, they bring together different spaces for performance, exhibition, participation, making, learning and social activity under one roof. These buildings act as cultural and community hubs - places where people can experience art, make and participate in it, meet others and feel a sense of belonging.

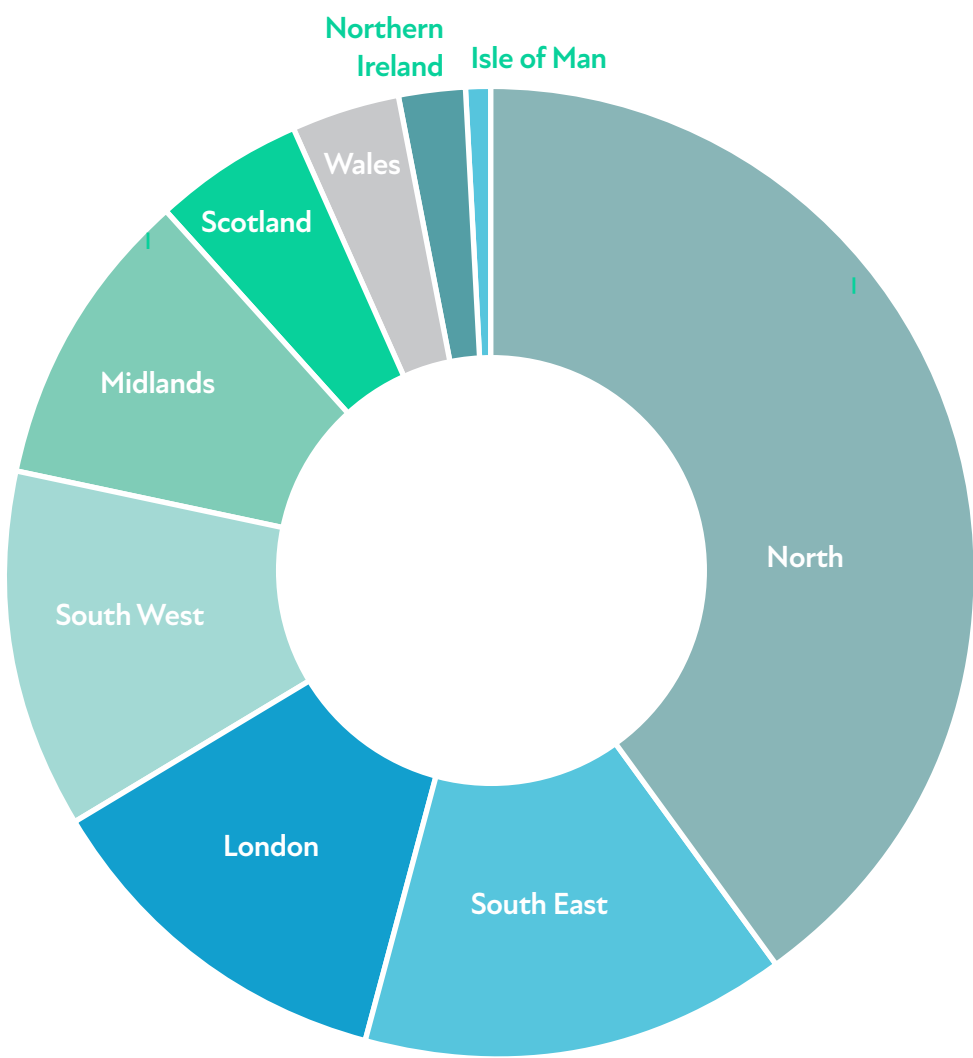
Because their starting point is the needs of their communities and places, arts centres frequently work across traditional sector boundaries. They build sustained partnerships with local authorities, schools and colleges, health and care services, charities, community organisations and other local partners, using culture and creativity to contribute to wider priorities including health and wellbeing, education, social connection, skills and local regeneration.

Their business models reflect this breadth of purpose and activity. Arts centres typically operate as social enterprises, combining public investment and fundraised income with significant levels of earned income from ticket sales, hospitality, hires, memberships and other commercial activity. Income generated through these activities is reinvested in their artistic and social purpose, enabling them to balance cultural ambition, community benefit and financial sustainability.

There is no single model, and arts centres sit on a spectrum, with individual organisations reflecting these characteristics to different degrees. What connects them is not a particular combination of artforms or activities, but a shared approach: using culture and creativity in response to their communities and locality, and allowing that relationship to shape what they do.

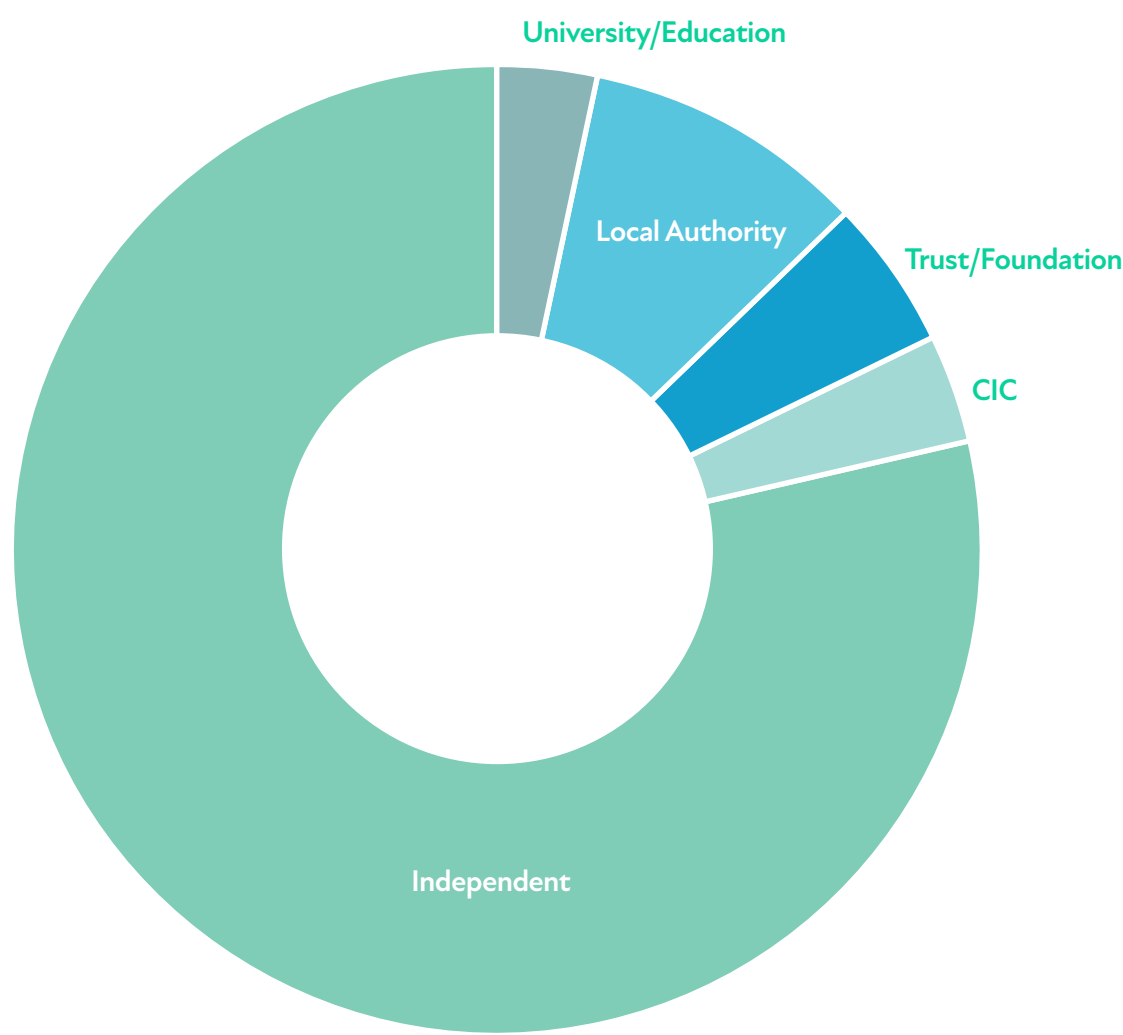
Our Members

FAC currently has 200 members across the four nations:



Location of FAC members

25%	North	6.5%	Scotland
18%	South East	4.5%	Wales
15%	London	2.5%	Northern Island
15%	South West	1%	Isle of Man
12.5%	Midlands		



Operator Type

3.5%	University/Education
9.5%	Local Authority
5%	Trust/Foundation/group
3.5%	CIC
78.5%	Independent



Artistic and Cultural Role

Artistic ambition is at the heart of the arts centre model, with arts centres developing, commissioning, producing and presenting work across artforms, supporting artists at different stages of their careers and creating opportunities for people to experience, participate in and shape culture.

Being multi-artform gives arts centres a particular artistic freedom, because they are not bound by the conventions of a single artform or by traditional expectations of what audiences want, allowing them to take artistic risks, experiment with different forms of practice and bring artists, ideas, artforms and communities together in ways that can lead to genuinely new work.

Their relationship with communities is an important part of this artistic practice, enabling artists to develop work in direct relationship with people and place, and allowing arts centres to make work with, rather than simply for, the communities around them, while at the same time

introducing audiences to artists, ideas and experiences they might not otherwise encounter. Being responsive to a community does not mean being less ambitious artistically; it can be the starting point for experimentation, innovation and new work.

The breadth of spaces within arts centres also supports this freedom, with performance spaces, galleries, studios, cinemas, workshops and informal public areas allowing different kinds of creative practice to sit alongside one another, encouraging exchange between artists and artforms and creating opportunities for audiences to encounter culture in different ways.

This combination of artistic freedom, the ability to work across artforms and a close relationship with people and place gives arts centres an important role within the wider cultural ecology, supporting artists to develop their practice, enabling new work to emerge and providing space for artistic experimentation and risk.

Arts Centres as Social Infrastructure

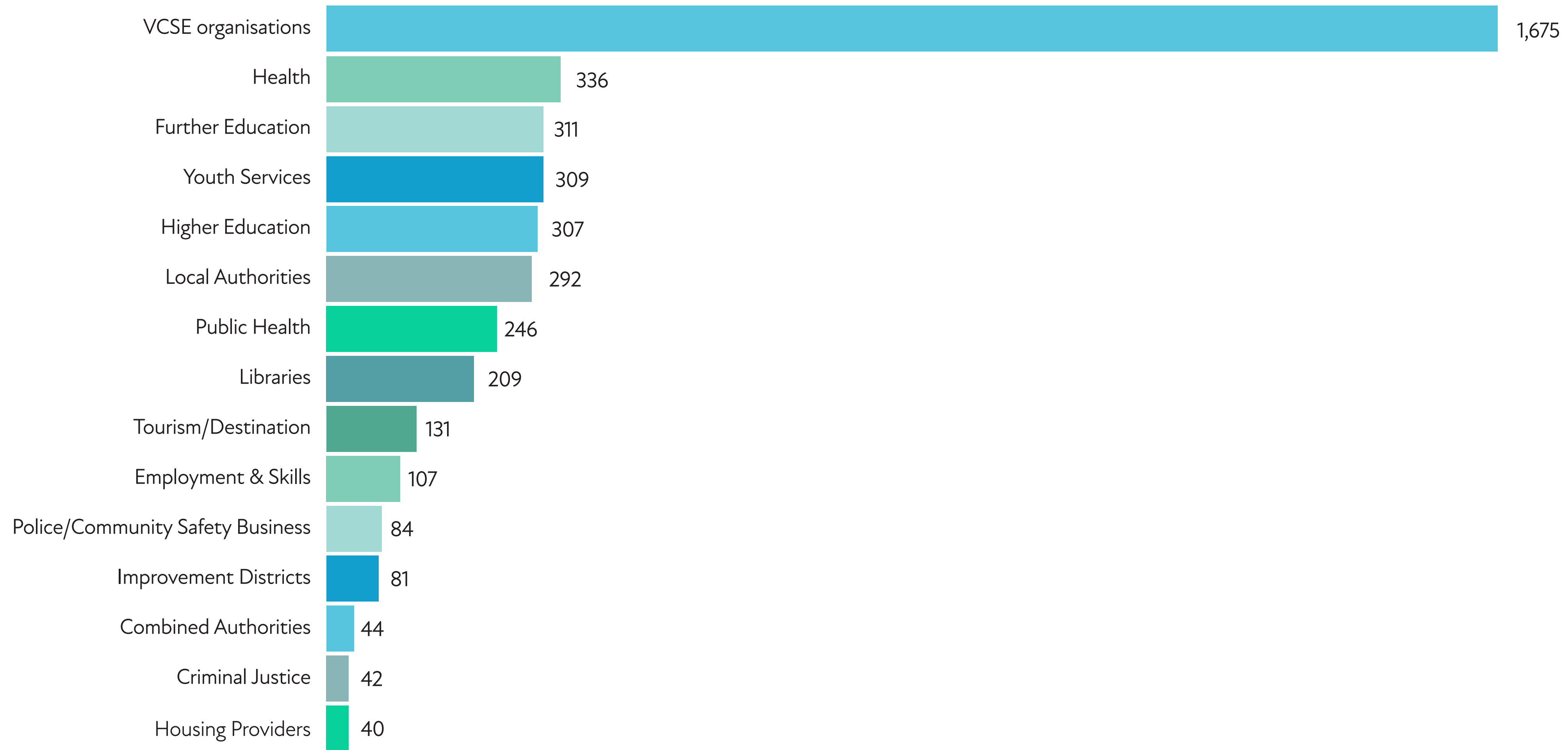
The artistic and cultural role of arts centres creates relationships that extend into wider civic life. Rooted in their communities and responsive to local need, they bring people together and connect creative activity with wider social and economic priorities.

FAC's Model of Change helps us understand how this happens. Drawing on more than 200 stories of significant change from people engaging with arts centres across the UK, the research suggests that arts centres create the conditions in which change can happen. Welcoming and safe spaces, sustained relationships and consistent presence, combined with creative experiences, can enable people to build confidence and connections, express their identity and develop a greater sense of agency. This is particularly significant in understanding arts centres as civic organisations: their impact comes not only from what they programme, but from the relationships, environments and experiences they create over time.

Those relationships extend far beyond the walls of the arts centre, with each member maintaining an average of 28 cross-sector partnerships, connecting them with organisations across almost every part of civic life.



Cross Sector Partnerships



TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTNERSHIPS HELD ACROSS THE MEMBERSHIP

The scale and breadth of these relationships demonstrate how embedded arts centres are within their local civic ecosystems, often acting as connectors and convenors: bringing together residents, artists, community organisations and public services, and providing a bridge between communities and institutions.

FAC's recent Creative Democracy research highlights their potential as trusted spaces in which dialogue, community voice and participation in decision-making can take place.

Their civic role is also inseparable from their physical presence. As multi-space, public-facing buildings, arts centres are places people can use in different ways and for different reasons, often throughout the day and evening. On average, arts centres are open **11 hours per day, seven days a week**. In some centres this goes further, with public, voluntary and community services sharing or operating from the building itself – estimated to be in excess of **175 services** across the membership.

Taken together, their creative practice, partnerships, relationships and buildings position arts centres as a critical part of the UK's civic and social infrastructure as well as its cultural infrastructure.



Reach

Across the FAC network, arts centres record 30.7 million visits each year. Of these, 12.4 million are attendances captured through ticketed programmes, while a further 18.3 million visits - almost 60% of total footfall - take place beyond the ticketed programme.

Historically, this second group has been much harder to understand. It includes people using cafés and shared spaces, attending community activity or meetings, accompanying friends and family, or simply spending time in the building. But the new data also reveals the considerable amount of cultural engagement that takes place without a ticket.

FAC members host more than 12,000 non-ticketed events, attracting almost 795,000 attendances, alongside more than 2,000 free exhibitions generating an estimated 9.5 million attendances across almost 70,000 exhibition days. While these figures should not be added together to create a measure of unique individuals, they demonstrate the extraordinary scale of cultural engagement that can remain invisible when reach is measured primarily through ticket sales and box-office data.

This is particularly important for arts centres because free and informal access is intrinsic to the model. People do not always need to plan a cultural experience in advance, buy a ticket or even arrive

intending to take part in something cultural. They can encounter an exhibition on their way to a café, come across a performance in a foyer, participate in a free event or simply spend time in a building where creative activity is happening around them.

The result is a form of reach that is considerably broader than ticketing data alone suggests. Arts centres combine 12.4 million recorded ticketed attendances with millions of additional cultural encounters and everyday visits, creating opportunities for people to engage with culture with a very low threshold for participation.

Reach is not only about the number of people visiting arts centres, but the depth of engagement that takes place within them. Members report 6,440 community groups using their buildings each year, alongside 347,000 hours of community-led activity and almost 780,000 hours of participatory activity. Together, community-led and participatory programmes account for more than 3.4 million attendances.

Arts centres also have a substantial relationship with formal education. Members report engagement with 4,359 schools and settings and more than 217,000 pupils, through activity delivered both in arts centres and in schools, visits to performances and exhibitions, teacher development and longer-term partnerships.

Reach

30.7m

VISITS

12.4m

TICKETED VISITS

18.3m

NON-TICKETED VISITS

Financial and Economic Contribution

Arts centres are significant economic enterprises. Across the 131 organisations in our financial dataset, total income in 2024/25 was £283.9 million, with an average annual income of £2.17 million. The dataset encompasses organisations operating at very different scales, from Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre, with income of around £34,000, to the Southbank Centre at £58.2 million. Removing the Southbank Centre as an exceptional outlier reduces average income to £1.74 million.

Total Income

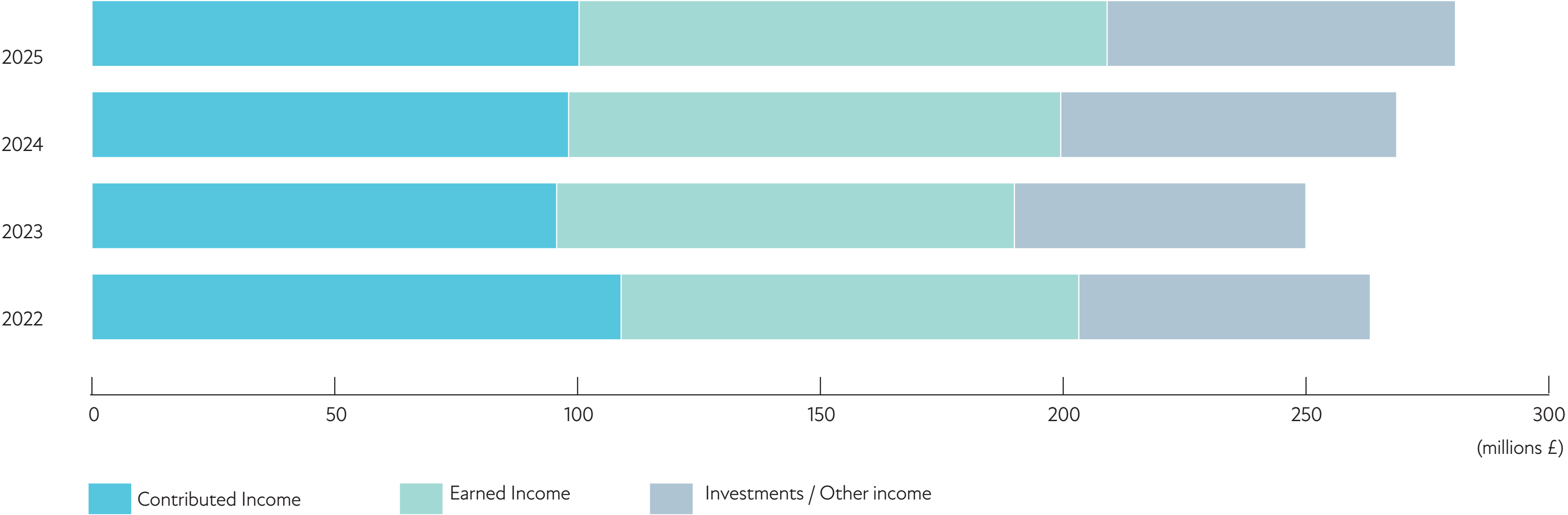


Total Expenditure



A Mixed Income Model

Arts centres generate income through a wide range of activities, reflecting the entrepreneurial nature of the model.

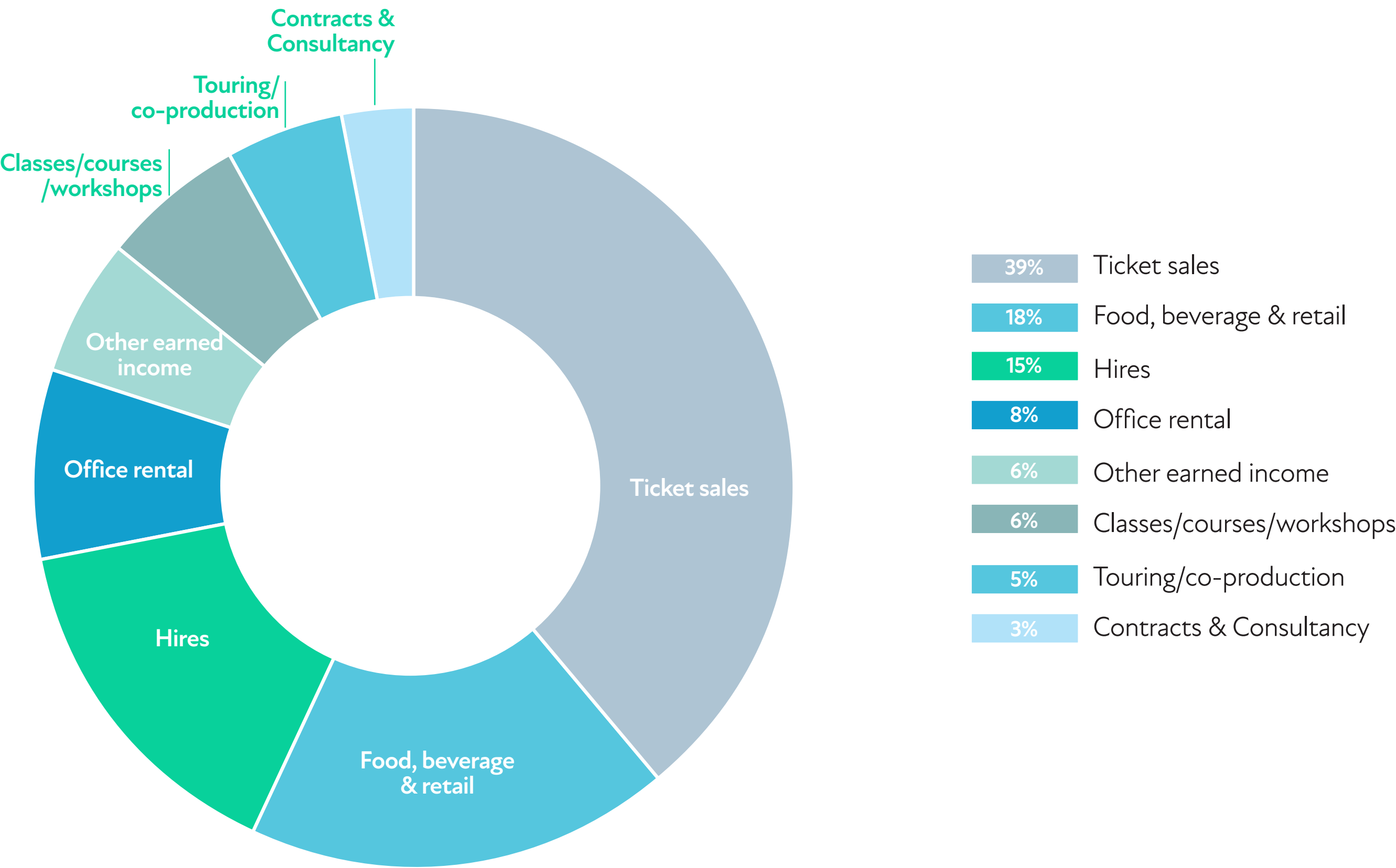


Earned Income Breakdown

This diversity is a defining feature of the arts centre model. Multi-purpose buildings allow organisations to generate income through cafés and bars, workspace and venue hire, classes, events and other services alongside their cultural programmes. This spreads income across multiple sources rather than relying predominantly on ticket sales.

It also distinguishes arts centres from more conventional venue-based business models. Their buildings are cultural spaces, but they are also working assets: generating income through the same mix of spaces and activities that enables them to operate as community and civic hubs.

Separate analysis of earned income shows that ticket sales account for 39% of earned income, while the majority - 61% - is generated from other sources.

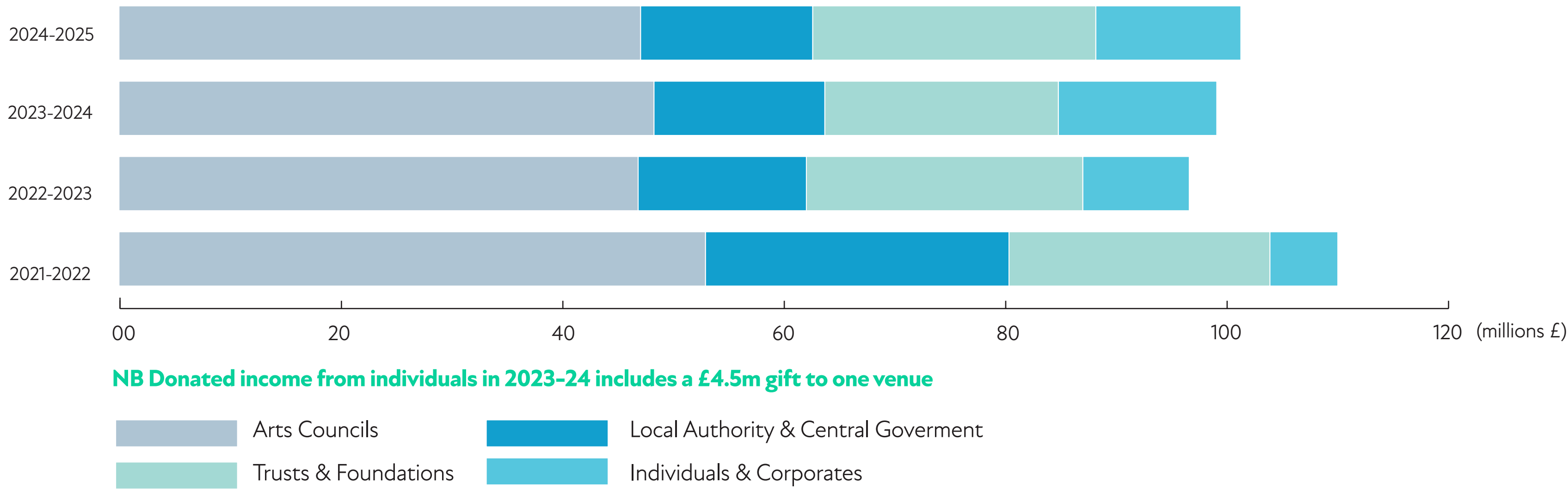


Public Investment and Contributed Income

Public investment remains an important part of the mixed-income arts centre model. 61% of arts centres receive funding from their national arts council, while 63% receive funding from a local authority, despite only 9.5% being directly operated by one.

Alongside public investment, arts centres attract significant support from trusts and foundations and individual giving. This combination of public, philanthropic and earned income is characteristic of the sector’s mixed-income model.

Breakdown of contributed income



Taken together, this reinforces the distinctive nature of the arts centre funding model. Public investment sits alongside earned income, philanthropy and other forms of contributed income, enabling organisations to draw resources from multiple sources to support their cultural and civic role.

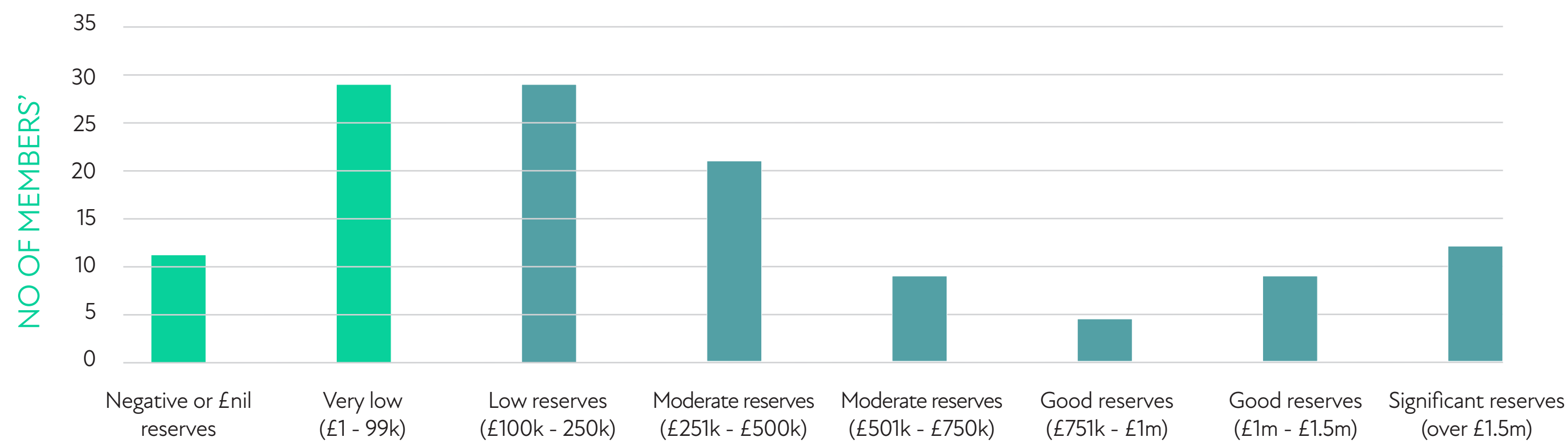
Financial Resilience

Despite the scale and diversity of their income, financial pressures are intensifying. After signs of movement towards break-even in previous years, the gap between income and expenditure has widened again, reaching £10 million in 2024/25.

Unrestricted reserves have also fallen, from £73.0 million to £69.6 million. Beneath the aggregate figure, the position is more concerning: 9% of arts centres report negative unrestricted reserves, while a further 21% have less than £100,000.

This means almost a third of arts centres have little or no financial cushion with which to absorb further increases in costs, reductions in funding or unexpected expenditure.

2024/25 Unrestricted Reserves



Economic Contribution

Arts centres use public investment to unlock income from a wide range of sources. Across our 2024/25 financial dataset, for every £1 received from Arts Councils and local authorities, arts centres generated a further £3.50+ through trading, philanthropy and other sources.

This continues to demonstrate the significant leverage created by public investment in arts centres. The figure is not directly comparable with the £6 reported in our previous Sector Insight Report, as this year’s analysis covers a larger and differently composed group of organisations, including some of the UK’s largest publicly funded cultural institutions.

Their economic contribution extends directly into the communities they serve. As locally rooted employers and purchasers, arts centres support jobs, retain skills and direct spending into their local economies.

Together, these figures demonstrate the wider economic effect of investment in arts centres: public funding helps organisations leverage additional income while supporting employment and keeping expenditure within local economies.

An average arts centre:

£370k
annual spend with
suppliers within 50
miles

26
full-time equivalent
jobs supported

43
local people employed



Social Impact

Over the past three years, Future Arts Centres has supported arts centres across the UK to strengthen how they understand and evidence their impact. Through training and peer learning in the Most Significant Change story-based methodology, members have been supported to capture rich, structured accounts of the difference their work makes in people's lives.

For the first time, this has enabled us to aggregate impact evidence at scale across our network. While each story reflects an individual experience, taken together they form a powerful qualitative dataset, revealing consistent patterns of transformation across geography, artform and community context.

More than 200 stories collected across the network underpin FAC's Model of Change, revealing consistent patterns in the changes people experience and the conditions and relationships that enable that change to happen. The analysis presented here is based on detailed thematic coding of 104 of these stories, with the percentages showing how frequently each theme appeared within that group.

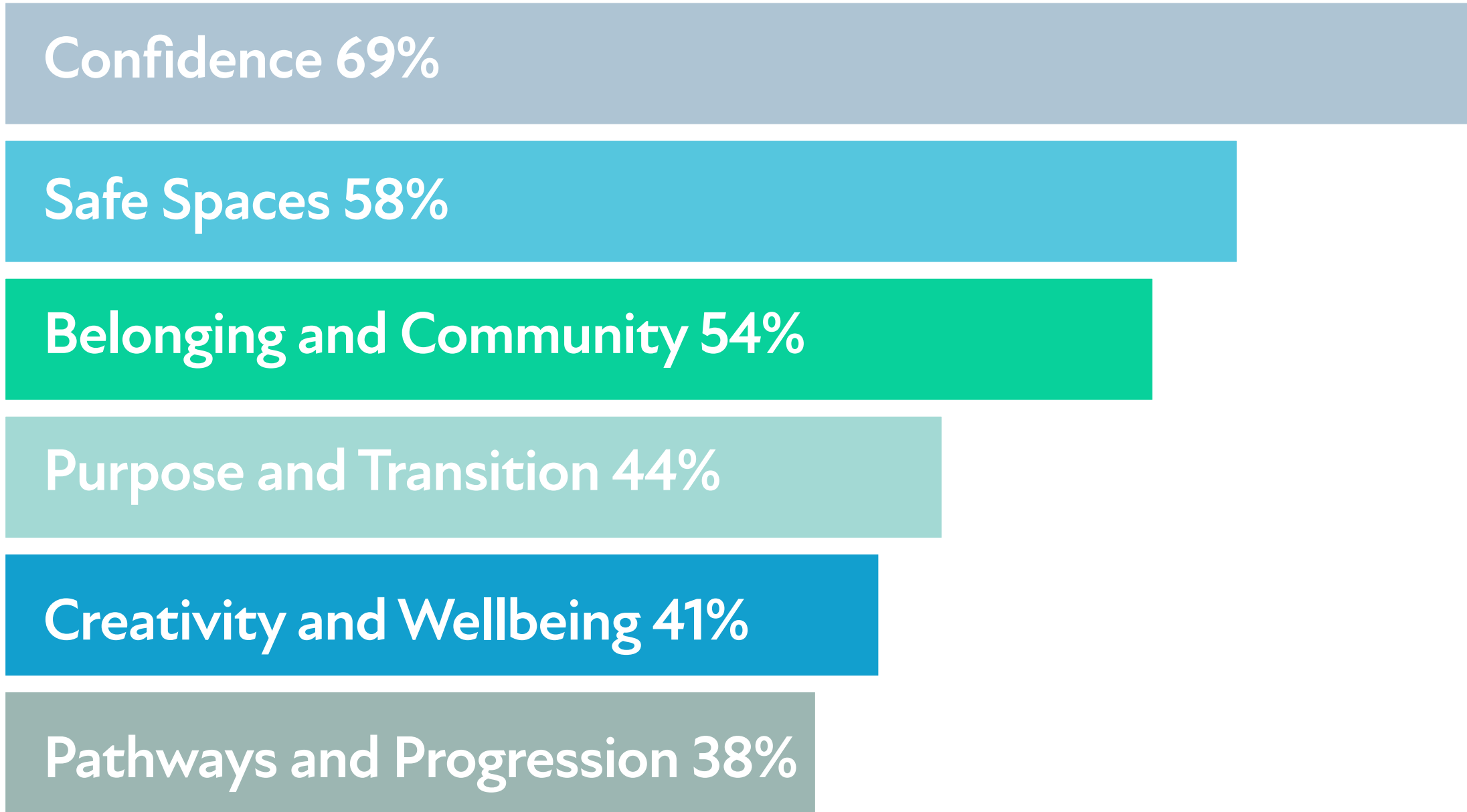
Confidence is the strongest and most consistent theme, appearing in more than two thirds of the stories and often at a pivotal moment in someone's life. People describe applying for further education or pursuing creative careers, performing publicly for the first time, taking on leadership roles, travelling independently, speaking up in governance spaces or returning to activity following illness or grief.

This is not simply about people feeling more confident, but feeling able to do things differently. For young people, it can mark the point where they begin to see a future for themselves; and for older adults, it can mean renewed independence. For people moving into positions of responsibility, it can mean owning their authority rather than doubting it.

Arts centres are places where confidence becomes action.

“I have grown as a person, I
have come such a long way, I
love talking to new people, my
mental health is absolutely fine
now and I no longer need a
carer or job coach”
JUNCTION, GOOLE

Prevalence of Themes in MSC Stories



Safe Spaces

More than half of the stories refer to safety, acceptance or being able to be oneself, something that is particularly evident in the experiences of neurodivergent participants, young people excluded from mainstream education, refugees and asylum seekers, people experiencing mental ill-health and women navigating leadership roles.

People describe environments where there are no right or wrong answers, where facilitation is collaborative and where staff are consistent and non-judgemental.

Safety emerges as an important enabling condition within the Model of Change, because confidence, creativity and connection are able to develop when people first feel secure and accepted.

Belonging and Community

More than half of the stories also describe reduced isolation or a stronger sense of belonging.

This sense of belonging is connected to tangible changes in people's lives, including volunteering, sustained participation, civic pride and informal peer support, showing how the relationships created through arts centres can strengthen connections between people as well as their connection to the places in which they live.

The evidence demonstrates that arts centres function as social infrastructure, often described as second homes, community hubs, places where generations mix or where cultural identities are visible, creating opportunities for relationships to develop and communities to become more connected.

“They encourage us to express ourselves and they don’t judge our ideas...”

ST MARGARET’S HOUSE, TOWER HAMLETS

“I met new people, very different people from who I grew up with prior but I realised that they were my kind of people.”

QUEEN’S HALL ARTS CENTRE, HEXHAM

Purpose and Transition

Arts centres appear repeatedly in stories about significant periods of change, providing structure, community and a sense of future during retirement, migration, illness, career change, leadership transition or recovery from educational exclusion.

For some people this restores self-worth, while for others it redirects a career, creates a new sense of purpose or opens up a different part of their life, but across the stories there is a consistent sense of the arts centre providing continuity and connection at a point when other things may be changing.

“During that transitional period of my life, Storyhouse gave me an anchor in the storm, something to cling on to and make sure that not every part of ‘me’ was lost.”

STORYHOUSE, CHESTER

Creativity and Wellbeing

Creativity and wellbeing are closely connected within the stories, with people describing creative activity as healing, therapeutic, medicinal, a source of routine and a way to manage anxiety.

This is preventative rather than clinical, with creative engagement supporting people to stay well, build relationships and maintain routine, particularly during periods of stress or transition. What comes through strongly is that the impact is not necessarily created by a single activity or intervention, but through having somewhere to return to, relationships that develop over time and continuing opportunities to be creative alongside other people.

“It’s healing really, because we meet people, we speak, we express our feelings, and it stays in our memory.”

RIVELINCO, SHEFFIELD

Pathways and Progression

More than a third of the stories describe progression into work, education, leadership or sustained professional practice, including young people moving into creative careers, volunteers gaining transferable skills and participants becoming facilitators.

Many of these stories span years of engagement with a particular arts centre, with people moving from attendee to contributor and from learner to leader, showing how long-term relationships and repeated opportunities to participate can create positive trajectories over time.

Creating the Conditions for Change

Taken together, these stories show that the different elements of the Model of Change are closely connected rather than operating as separate outcomes. Feeling safe and accepted can create the confidence to participate; participation can build relationships and a sense of belonging; creativity can provide purpose and support wellbeing; and sustained engagement can lead to greater agency, new responsibilities and progression.

What is striking across the stories is the importance of the conditions arts centres create around the creative experience: welcoming spaces, consistent relationships, opportunities to return and take part over time, and the freedom to contribute without judgement. It is the combination of these conditions with creative activity that enables change to develop, often gradually and over a period of years.

The Model of Change therefore helps us to understand the wider social and civic impact described throughout this report, showing how the artistic work of an arts centre, its building, its relationships with communities and its role within a place come together in people's lives. Arts centres are not just cultural amenities; they are embedded social and civic infrastructure.

“The role introduced me
to something new that
eventually changed the course
of my career and it taught me
to be confident in myself.”

THE ALBANY, LEWISHAM



Data Sources and Methodology

This report draws on several sources, including published accounts, surveys of FAC members, detailed insight data collected from a representative group of arts centres, and qualitative evidence from our Model of Change work. As the reporting base varies between these sources, figures should be understood in the context of the methodology described below.

Financial Data

Our financial analysis is based on the 2024/25 published accounts of 131 FAC members and is used to understand income, expenditure and financial resilience. Unless otherwise stated, financial totals and averages relate to these 131 organisations.

Insight Data

For activity that is not consistently captured through published accounts or national datasets, FAC has collected detailed data from 20 member arts centres, selected to represent the breadth of the membership in terms of scale, geography, operating model and type of arts centre.

FAC uses a matched extrapolation approach to estimate equivalent activity across the full membership. Rather than applying a single multiplier or simple average, each of the 20 arts centres is matched to a group of comparable FAC members, with its data multiplied by the number of organisations it represents before the weighted figures are combined. This recognises the diversity of the sector and means, for example, that a large city-centre organisation is not assumed to be representative of a smaller rural or market-town arts centre.

This methodology is used for measures including footfall, ticketed and unticketed activity, community use, participation, schools engagement, partnerships, local spend, employment, opening hours and co-located services. Figures derived in this way are modelled estimates of activity across the FAC membership rather than direct counts from all members.

Member Surveys

FAC also undertakes targeted surveys to explore particular areas of members' activity in greater depth. The earned income analysis in this report is drawn from a survey of 49 organisations carried out in April 2026 and reflects the organisations responding to that survey rather than the full membership.

Model of Change

FAC's Model of Change draws on more than 200 personal stories of significant change, collected across the network using the Most Significant Change methodology. The percentage findings presented in this report are based on detailed thematic analysis of a subset of 104 stories, identifying recurring patterns of change across the experiences described.

The percentages indicate how frequently each theme appeared within those 104 stories and should not be interpreted as prevalence rates across all participants or audiences.

Taken together, these different sources provide a fuller picture of the sector than financial or ticketing data alone, capturing its economic and cultural scale alongside participation, community use, partnerships and social impact.





2 Feb - 9 Mar 2024

Catherine Seymour | David Lefebvre
Zoe Arshamian | Rob Godman | David Horsant

Bowland Beth

This is a collaboration between King's College London choreographers and film maker David Lefebvre. Catherine Seymour and Zoe Arshamian, two of the dancers, are inspired by the story of Bowland Beth, a woman who lived in the 18th century. The story is based on a poem by David Horsant, which is a retelling of a true story. The story is about a woman who was accused of murdering her husband. The story is a collaboration between King's College London choreographers and film maker David Lefebvre. Catherine Seymour and Zoe Arshamian, two of the dancers, are inspired by the story of Bowland Beth, a woman who lived in the 18th century. The story is based on a poem by David Horsant, which is a retelling of a true story. The story is about a woman who was accused of murdering her husband.

Evening hours:
10-5pm

Future Arts Centres

Future Arts Centres is a national network of 200 arts centres across the UK. We strengthen the sector through leadership and organisational development, peer networks, research and advocacy, championing the essential role arts centres play in communities. We also provide strategic consultancy and facilitation to arts organisations and other partners, drawing on decades of experience supporting cultural organisations to lead change, build resilience and deliver greater impact. Together, our members reach millions of people each year through arts, culture and creative participation.

Annabel Turpin & Gavin Barlow
Co-Directors
futureartscentres.org.uk

With thanks to all our members who have contributed to the data, especially Aberystwyth Arts Centre, ARK, artsdepot, Blackfriars Arts Centre & Theatre, Bridport Arts Centre, Colchester Arts Centre, Crescent Arts Centre, Kirkgate Centre, Lauderdale House, Lyth Arts Centre, Midlands Arts Centre, Queen's Hall Arts Centre, RivelinCo, Stanley Arts, Storyhouse, Taunton Brewhouse, The Met, The Spring Arts & Heritage Centre, Tramshed and Trinity Theatre & Arts Centre.