



# North East Artists' Fund

Final report  
2023-24

October 2024



## Support for the region, from the region

The North East Artists' Fund has received a fantastic response since its launch for a second year in July 2023 — both in terms of the volume and quality of applications, and the perceived value and strengths of the fund.

The question for us is no longer whether the fund should remain but how it might be scaled up to meet demand, and deliver against longer-term strategic objectives.

This report offers a **Summary** (page 3), **Facts & Figures** (pages 4 – 5) alongside an in-depth **Analysis** (pages 6 – 12) and both quantitative and qualitative data on **Outcomes** (pages 13 – 18).

## Summary

With two years' data now in place, it is clear that the North East Artists' Fund is not only useful but vital to the continuing development of artists in the region. But with our newest data showing that almost half of respondents' households are under the UK poverty line, there has never been a greater sense of urgency for the fund to exist.

The fund is unique for its distributed approach in which partners – arts organisations and local authorities – contribute to a central resource which ensures support can reach those who need it most, across the region.

The cost of living crisis, together with dwindling arts funding in real terms – and the resulting increased competition around accessing it – has affected individual artists disproportionately, whose livelihoods were already precarious. That the need for an intervention like the North East Artists' Fund still exists is not in question, arguably: rather, how

might it help more of those in need, and ensure it is doing so in a way which best fits all, whether in rural north Northumberland or inner-city Newcastle.

For its third year, we would like to see the fund make steps to move from a crisis intervention to a key component of a healthy and thriving visual arts sector in the North East. We want to plan a longer-term future for the fund post-2025. To do so will mean greater investment but crucially also a commitment over a longer period in order to enable a more strategic approach.

*Below: Bursary recipient Filiz Sustam Oylum at home with some of her ceramics, Newcastle upon Tyne (Photograph: ANNE)*



# Facts and figures

## Applicants and awards ↑↓Change on 2022-23

**453** ↑46%  
Applications  
*of which 431 eligible*

**94** ↑57%  
Awards

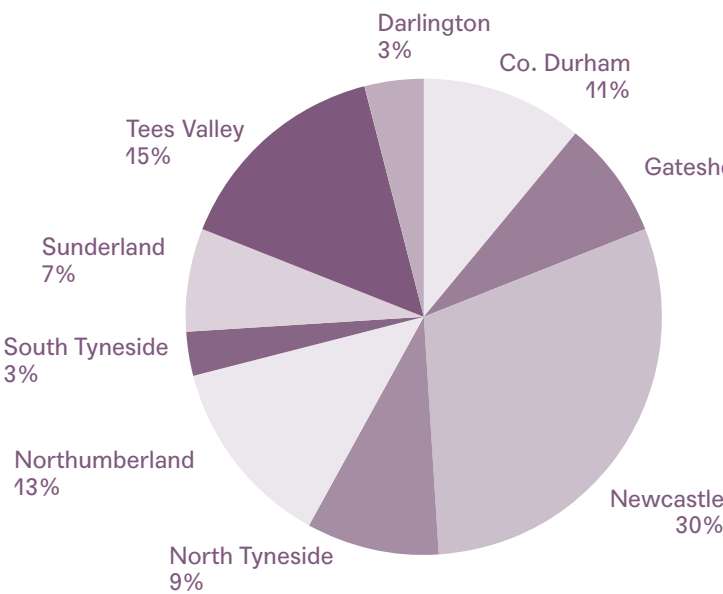
**£189** ↑5%  
Average award

**£124.4k** ↑67%  
Total funds requested

**£17.8k** ↑65%  
Total funds awarded

**17%** ↓43%  
Had never applied for  
funding before

## Geographical spread as % of total



## Applications vs. awards by type

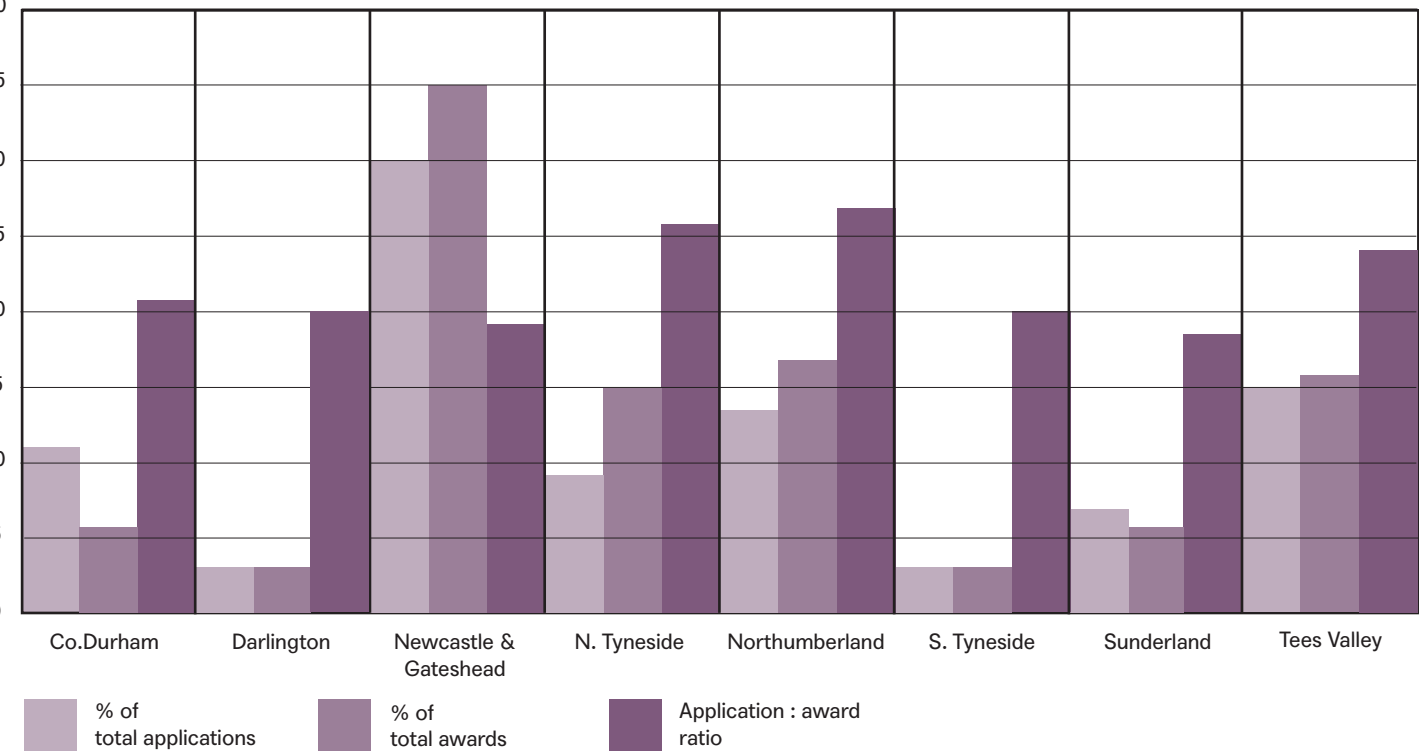
### Applications



### Awards



## % Geographical spread: applications and awards combined

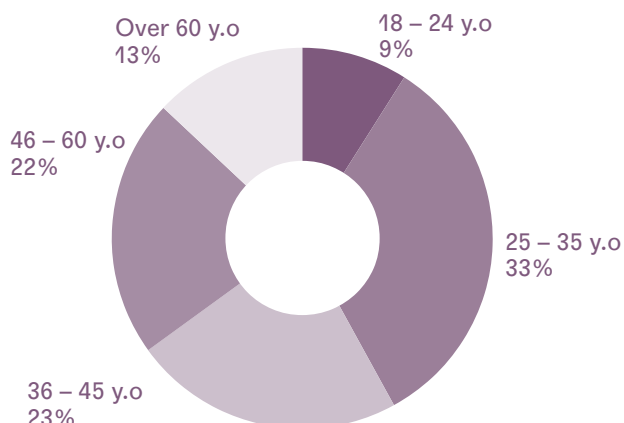


# Demographics

## Age

**Almost half (42%) are 35 years old or younger**

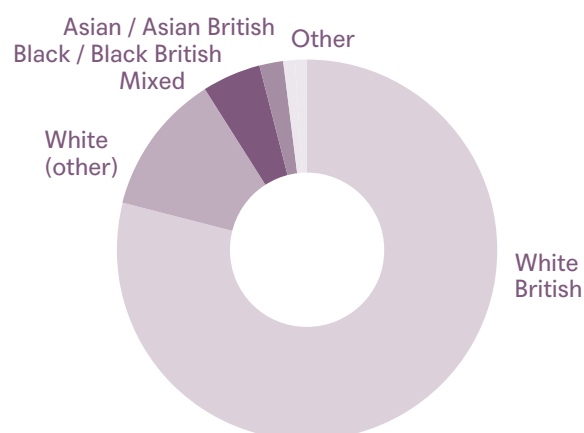
2021 Census, North East England 40.6%



## Ethnicity

**Almost a quarter (21%) are not White British**

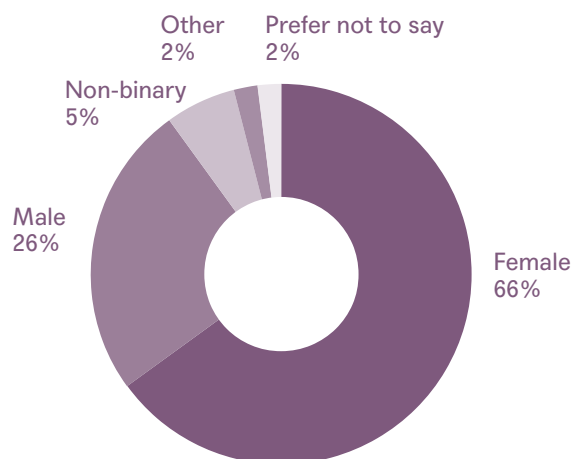
2021 Census, North East England 9.4%



## Gender

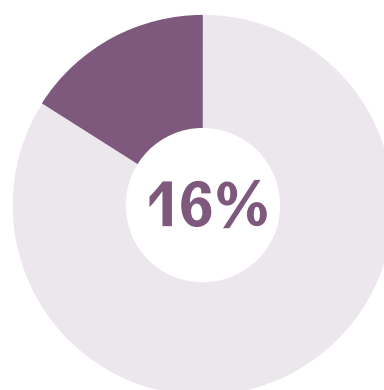
**Three quarters (74%) are non-male**

2021 Census, North East England 51.2%



**16% of respondents' gender identity is different to that which it was assumed to be at birth**

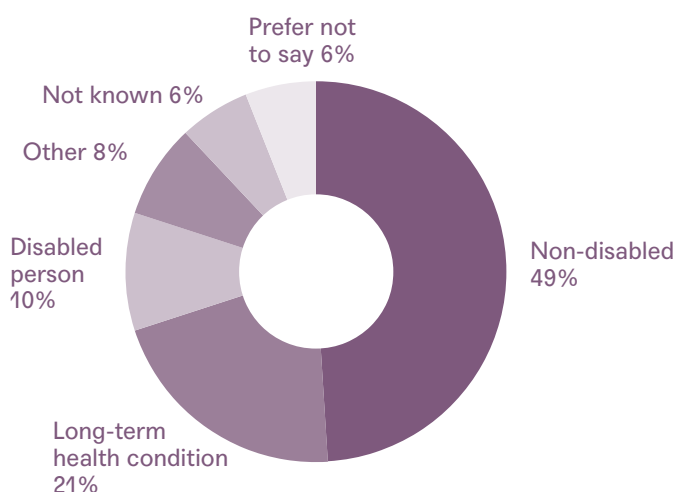
2021 Census, North East England 5.2%



## Disability

**39% identify in some way as disabled**

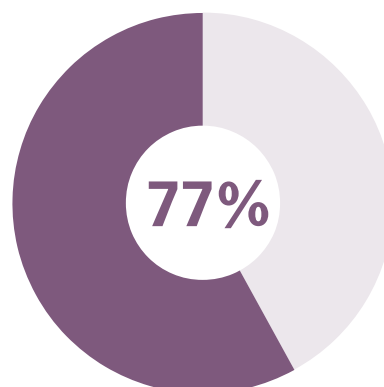
2023 North East Combined Authority (working age) 28.8%



## Income

**Over three quarters of our respondents' household income is less than £30,000 p.a...**

UK poverty line £21,900 (47% of our respondents report a household income of less than £20,000)



**...and almost half are under the UK poverty line.**

# Analysis

|                                     |        |
|-------------------------------------|--------|
| <b>Geographical distribution</b>    | 7      |
| <b>Key strengths</b>                | 8      |
| <b>Data: key facts</b>              | 8      |
| <b>Outcomes, not outputs</b>        | 9 – 10 |
| <b>Benchmarking</b>                 | 11     |
| <b>Challenges and opportunities</b> | 12     |
| <b>Learning</b>                     | 13     |

*Below: Bursary recipient Almudena Rocca in her home studio, Ashington (Photograph: ANNE)*



## Geographical distribution

The graph on page 6 shows data for applications and awards as percentages of the total for each, while the application-to-award ratio describes the percentage of applications that were successful in each area.

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I am delighted at the efficiency of this whole fund: a five-minute application, an invoice, a five-minute questionnaire, a small evaluation incoming... Amazing!

— Bursary recipient, 2023-24

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The ratio of applications to awards is broadly similar across all parts of the region apart from a noticeably higher rate in Northumberland. This was due to the discrepancy in funding level: Northumberland County Council's contribution was proportionately greater.

As last year, earlier in the specific areas – in particular the Tees Valley – was addressed successfully by more active publicity, helped by project partners.

As in 2022-23, some areas tend to generate much fewer applications per capita than others. This year, the volume of applications from the Darlington Borough Council area is lower than we'd hoped.

Our new website – central not only in terms of providing access to the application form and guidelines but to our wider visibility – was launched in Autumn 2023, and we have tracked the benefits in terms of increased exposure.

We expect that in 2024–25, with the website supporting the fund from the start, this will reap benefits in terms of diversity and volume of applications.

## Investment by area

Quotas for each area were agreed with our partners at the start of the project reflecting the investment made.

We expected high numbers of applications from Newcastle and Gateshead, but for Round 1 were disappointed by takeup from the Tees Valley and Sunderland, in particular. There is a significantly high award rate in North Tyneside, which is due to the relative quality of applications from residents there, which we hadn't predicted.

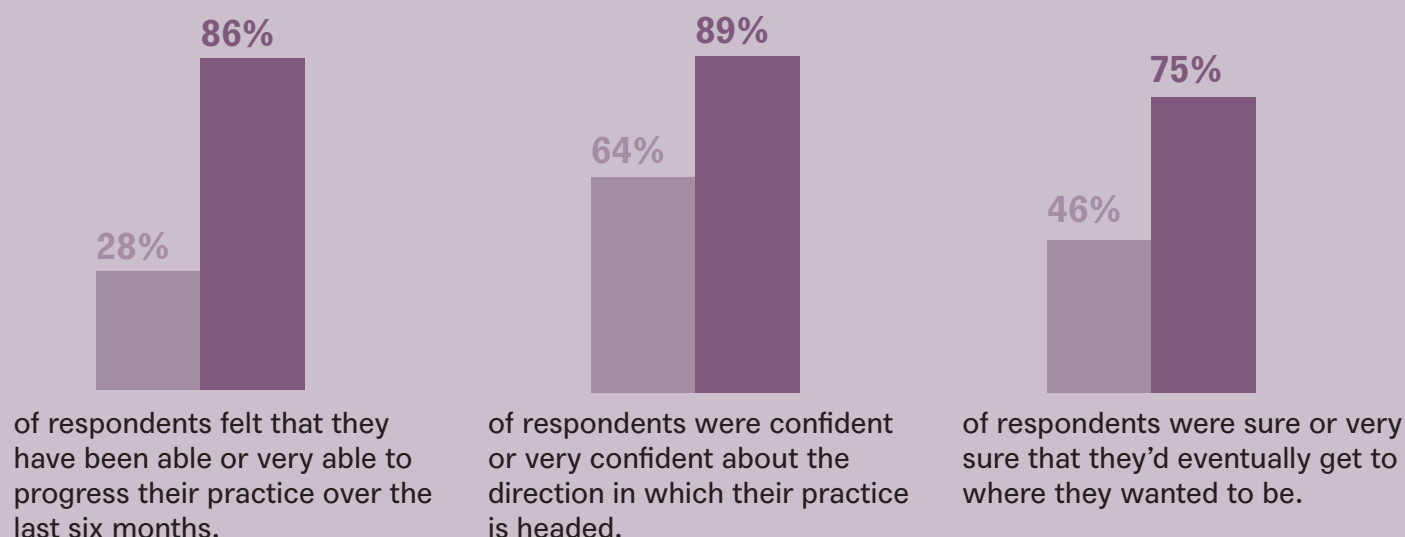
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“It's a really easy process, which was refreshing compared to usual art applications, where the application eats into your practice time. I really hope you continue to get funding for future rounds — it's a great thing for artists in the North East.” — Bursary recipient 2023–24

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## Before and after

We asked artists how they felt about their practice before and after completing their activity.



## Data: key facts

As last year, without surprise, there remains a palpable sense of need and demand, evidenced by the volume of applications and the type of support for which funds were requested. The qualitative data we solicit are key to building a picture of the personal impact of the fund. But quantitative data from our diversity monitoring survey, new for 2023–24, augments this with insight into applicants' social and economic situation.

## Income

Having included a diversity survey for the first time this year, one startling statistic that has emerged is that almost half (47%) of all awardees are subsisting below the UK poverty line of £20k p.a. income per household — and over three quarters (77%) on below £30k p.a. Beyond being shocking on its own terms, this rather underlines the need for interventions like the fund — and, more, that they should be greater in number and better-resourced to meet the considerable demand.

## Disability

Also of note is the fact that 39% of respondents identify in some way as disabled — and this is borne out by the volume of applications we receive which ask specifically to address access issues.

## Age, gender and ethnicity

Census data correlates almost exactly (40.6%) with the 42% of our respondents under the age of 35.

Respondents are overwhelmingly (almost three-quarters, or 74%) non-male, which perhaps represents the wider demographics of the sector — but with 21% reporting as non-White British, our awardees paint a more ethnically diverse picture than official statistics for the region, with census figures suggesting that 90.6% of the region is White British.

This report gives headline figures about applications and awards to date, with comparisons where appropriate to last year's data, alongside feedback from awardees and points of analysis which will help to inform the fund in future.

## Impact

The North East Artists' Fund aims to improve outcomes for individuals in the North East. We do not ask for or measure outputs, but instead,

monitor outcomes by asking awardees about their perception of key areas — both structural, relating to the sector itself, and personal.

Asking these questions once would allow us to build a snapshot of awardees' opinions, but would not enable us to measure any impact that the award has made on their practice. For this reason, we survey awardees twice: once on award, before the activity or purchase that the award has enabled; and again after 3 – 4 months when they have completed their activity.

This allows us to track changes — of awardees' perception of the sector, of their own practice, of the extent to which they feel confident or otherwise about prospects for the future.

The questions we ask, and respondents' answers, are laid out on pages 15 – 20.

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“The application seemed to put faith in the artists applying instead of ‘challenging’ them as I feel many applications do. I respect that. I would highly recommend it to other artists in the North East.” — *Bursary recipient*

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## Key strengths

Our applicants tell us time and again that key elements of the fund are all signal strengths:

- Ease of application: 98% found the process easy or very easy
- Speed of decision
- Lack of requirement for specific outputs
- Range of eligible costs, in particular small capital costs.
- Trust placed in artists to best know their needs and use the funds as requested

Incidentally, these qualities are also all unique to the North East Artists' Fund: it remains the only option for many people, for several reasons:

- Lack of confidence, experience or time required to complete other funding applications
- It offers support for activity which isn't output-based
- It offers support for capital purchases
- It offers a lower level of support than the minimum threshold for other programmes.



Above: Bursary recipient David Kenney, Stockton-on-Tees (Photograph: ANNE)

Many applicants explain that they just can't find the help they need elsewhere. Other funding is either too large in scale, asks too much in return, forbids certain expenditure, or takes too long to apply for or wait for a decision from.

### Outcomes, not outputs

The focus on outcomes, not outputs, is perhaps the fund's biggest single strength. It flies in the face of the accepted logic that in order to receive funding, something concrete must be *made* and *given back*, which is a rather transactional and reductive way of viewing the world.

This notwithstanding, a formula of exchange can still apply, with that which is *given back* the increased skill, confidence, capability and resilience of the individual to the sector: even if it is viewed in entirely economic terms, the more *outcomes* that are improved by the fund's interventions, the less the load on other services which demand outputs — and, if prospective applicants for, say, Arts Council England's Project Grants are more confident and more focused when they do end up approaching those funds, the better for ACE that it has to field fewer ineligible applications.

If we project further from this, we might — based on data over the two years the fund has run, and

on anecdotal or unsolicited feedback — suggest that there are three key ways in which improved outcomes for artists in the North East help both individuals and region alike, and all address confidence.

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“A lot of funding pots I've applied to previously have had caveats that you can't spend the money on materials / equipment, or that you can't spend over a certain percentage of the total amount on materials/equipment.

While I understand the value in that, it is really helpful to have a fund which will cover the costs of the actual stuff I need to experiment and develop prototypes. It has been a huge help in a very direct and practical way, and I think that is particularly because it's something which is harder to get funding for, in my experience.”

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— Bursary recipient, 2023-24

## Validation is crucially important

Though the North East Artists' Fund awards according to need, not artistic merit, applicants nevertheless take a successful award to be a validation of their project or even wider practice — not unreasonably, given the difficulty of securing any funding at all.

Though not predictable, and not something the fund could have planned to effect, this outcome is singularly important: the £100 for a train fare to complete the final piece of research required for a new body of work may not go far or last long, but the sense that the project which might have otherwise been delayed, changed or shelved is valid, after all, is a major psychological boost which often delivers way beyond the very modest financial impact of the sum awarded.

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“I would just like to say a big thank you to everyone behind the North East Artists' Fund. The fact that my practice was deemed worthy of support from the fund has been a real confidence boost.”

— *Bursary recipient*

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## Improved confidence and skills means a lessened load on other programmes for inappropriate activity

As noted, many funds do not support applications for small sums (below £1k), activity which is not output-based or small capital purchases, for instance, but some artists, desperate for what might be quite minimal funding, will concoct an application nevertheless for much larger sums in order to meet minimum thresholds (and account for the relative increase in labour associated with making the application in the first place), attempting to craft a case for support which builds a much wider project around the activity they actually need to fund. These speculative applications invariably end in rejection.

## A gateway to further fundraising equals increased investment in the region

For many an application to the North East Artists' Fund is their first attempt at gaining funding. The relatively low threshold and probability of success — compared to other, larger funding programmes — alongside the deliberately friendly, jargon-free, quick process acts as a soft introduction to funding applications.

A successful application gives applicants the confidence to believe in both the validity of their project or practice, and their ability to write funding applications.

This in turn, over the longer term, means successful applicants are more likely to apply to other funding programmes. Though many might never otherwise have considered applying to ACE Project Grants, for instance, where they are successful, they represent new investment — in their practice, but also in the region.

## Small in size, big in stature

We're not unaware that despite what we see as crucially important qualities, the fund is tiny and the sums it awards artists, in many cases, almost negligible. But, first, it punches above its weight and delivers far greater returns — in terms of impact on individual careers — than the initial investment would suggest; and second, the size of the individual awards is not necessarily something which would need to be scaled up, were there greater overall investment on the table.

An improved fund with a larger overall pot and strategic agreements in place for three years could and should consider a slightly higher ceiling for applications, but since a large part of the point of the fund is to offer an alternative to the red tape and reporting requirements of other programmes, which award far more, it should avoid the obligation to evaluate and account for spending that would accompany greater awards, and keep to a modest level. It would be sensible, perhaps, to meet the minimum threshold of ACE Project Grants of £1k and award up to this level below ACE level.

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“The fund is a really fantastic idea. It could help grow so many practices in the region and allow for exploration without a fear of failure. The application process was quick and easy which is much appreciated, as so often you spend a day applying for an opportunity that's unsuccessful.”

— *Bursary recipient, 2023-24*

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*Above: Rosie Morris in her studio with the sewing machine bought with an Artists' Fund bursary, Newcastle upon Tyne (Photograph: ANNE)*

### **Benchmarking**

Using data from Arts Council England for awards via its Developing Your Creative Practice (DYCP) programme (comparable Project Grants data is not available split by local authority area), we have compared success rates with the North East Artists' Fund as both a benchmarking exercise and to test our own predictions about confidence in applying for funding by area, across the region.

For DYCP applications from 2018 to 2024, County Durham and Teesside scored markedly worse than Tyneside LAs, with Middlesbrough scoring a 0% success rate, Hartlepool 5.9%, Redcar & Cleveland 9.1% and County Durham 13.6%. Sunderland also performed poorly, with only a 5.9% success rate. Gateshead and Newcastle upon Tyne, meanwhile, scored 30% and 26.8% respectively.

This is no surprise given the concentration of artists in Newcastle and Gateshead and the relative strength of the artistic infrastructure there. But, in tandem with our data, it would seem to point strongly to a relative lack of confidence and skill at applying for funding.

Without doubt, a programme of events around making applications in target areas would help start to address this lack of confidence — but

the underlying reasons might be harder to tackle, particularly if they involve a mistrust of funds and funding to some degree.

Meanwhile, success rates for DYCP applications across the ACE North region show a trend across time which is not entirely explainable at first glance but would certainly bear further study. From a low of 13% in 2018/19, the success rate more than doubled to 29.9% in 2020/21 before dropping again towards 20.3% in 2023/24. The total sum awarded in 2020/21 was £1,580,342 — almost triple that of the £683,727 in 2023/24. The pandemic certainly plays a part, but we would welcome the chance to interrogate the data behind these figures further if it becomes available, as it will inform our own thinking.

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*“Having the freedom to buy what I see is needed for a particular project brings about a freedom to create and carry out the vision of the project without the worry of cost and potentially not continuing it to its fruition.”*

*— Bursary recipient, 2023–24*

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## Challenges and opportunities

### Year-on-year agreements

The most immediate challenge is posed by the security of partnership agreements, which at the moment are formed on a year-by-year basis. This exposes us to fluctuations in the size and composition of the fund; maximises the administration load; and minimises the extent to which we can plan strategically.

With Northumberland County Council not able to commit to the fund's third year, from 2024-25, we are left in the position that the North East Artists' Fund cannot cover the whole of the North East.

The continued administration of these informal year-by-year arrangements is also proving a burden that the fund cannot continue to face if it is to become more strategic and sustainable.

Beyond 2024-25 it would be expedient – indeed is probably the only sustainable option – to move to a multi-year agreement with partners.

### North East Mayoral Combined Authority

We are awaiting the final framework of the new North East Mayoral Combined Authority. It would make most sense, for the fund and for the region, if a direct partnership with the CA on behalf of,

or in addition to, individual stakeholders could be brokered.

### ANNE membership

Art Network North East has plans to introduce a membership structure in the next six months. One possibility is that application to the North East Artists' Fund is restricted to ANNE members — or a version of this, in which either one application stream is reserved for members or a new stream devised for their use.

Such a move would undoubtedly reduce the number of ineligible, speculative applications we receive, which have been increasing in number. We would like to assess whether it would be desirable to implement such a policy, and as such would consider trialling it at some point over the next year, but would welcome feedback first.

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“Thanks for the opportunity. I really appreciated your clear and honest communications throughout the process. You are doing important work, thank you.”

— Bursary recipient, 2023-24

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*Above: Middlesbrough-based artist Emma Bennett, for whom the fund paid for weaving lessons (Image via Instagram, courtesy the artist)*



## Learning

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**What we learned** It worked well to have three funding rounds, but it did add disproportionately to our workload.

With the increased total fund for 2023-24, it made more sense to split it across three (as opposed to the previous year's two) rounds. It was better for applicants as it offered more chances to apply for £100+ awards. Nevertheless, this meant we needed to organise more funding panels, and it was tougher to find panelists this year.

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**“I will continue to direct people towards the fund as I believe it to be the most fair and accessible funding application in the region.”**

— Bursary recipient, 2023-24

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**What we'll do** We should revisit our own processes around selection to ensure they're fit for purpose and as flexible as possible.

It would make panel recruitment easier, and increase the scope of the panel, were we able to invite freelance members onto the panel. However, for unsalaried panelists, we would need to offer a fee probably equal to a day's work (shortlisting and panel attendance), and if this were to be taken from partners' contributions, it would decrease the size of the fund further. We will keep this aspiration for an enlarged fund post-2024 and hope to implement it in future years.

We have developed a robust and accountable system. As in 2023–24, funding panels should balance a mixture of partners and independent members, and record all conflicts of interest.

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**What we learned** To continue with ringfenced quotas per area, funding needs to match demand.

In 2023–24, with local authorities joining arts organisations as fund partners, we agreed to divide allocations according to the contributions per area. In theory this approach is sound, but only if contributions match demand in each area of the region.

Since we stipulated no size – absolute or relative – for partner contributions but rather worked with

each partner's existing budgets, we had to try to match likely demand by the number of contributors for each area of the region. For this reason, in Newcastle and Gateshead, we worked with Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead Council and Creative Central:NCL, where in Darlington our sole partner with Darlington Borough Council.

In practice this approach worked reasonably well. Each partner's contribution remained tied to their area, but to try to ensure funds were as fairly distributed as possible, and to mitigate unforeseen spikes in demand, we top-sliced a nominal 10% from most contributions to create a 'global' pot for any extra applications — and not least to cover the fact that South Tyneside, in particular, was not represented by a partner.

A continued flexibility along these lines remains key to the success of the fund in future. However, the disproportionate volume of applications from Newcastle, while entirely predictable, is not matched by that of contributions. The challenges we still face for a third round of the fund lie with this mismatch in volume. With Northumberland County Council not able to contribute for 2024-25, this also leaves a significant hole, and with the prospect of no contribution from a Northumberland-based organisation at all, calls into question the mandate of a 'North East' fund which doesn't include its largest county.

**What we'll do** We will continue to top-slice contributions as before, but ultimately need a more realistic model for the fund which either brings in more partners in order to meet the comparatively higher demand in key areas, or pools contributions more equitably.

South Tyneside Council joins us for the first time as a partner in 2024-25, which is good news and will mitigate load on the fund by areas not represented by funders. For Northumberland, we are continuing conversations with prospective partners to try to find a way to plug the gap left by Northumberland County Council.

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**“The award will allow me to receive constructive feedback and guidance for the direction of my practice, build confidence in presenting myself and my work, and allow me to overcome some communication difficulties I experience due to being autistic.”** — *Bursary recipient*

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# Outcomes

|                                                        |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Opportunities                                          | 15 |
| What's stopping artists?                               | 16 |
| Changing perceptions                                   | 17 |
| Outcomes, not outputs                                  | 18 |
| How will the micro-bursary<br>most help your practice? | 19 |
| In five years' time...                                 | 20 |
| Anything else?                                         | 21 |
| What did the funds fund?                               | 22 |
| What's next?                                           | 23 |

*Below: New moving image work (centre) by Deborah Bower in the exhibition No Last Dance at Newcastle Contemporary Art, 2024. The North East Artists' Fund contributed to the cost of film stock and processing in order to realise the work. (Image: NCA)*



# Outcomes Opportunities

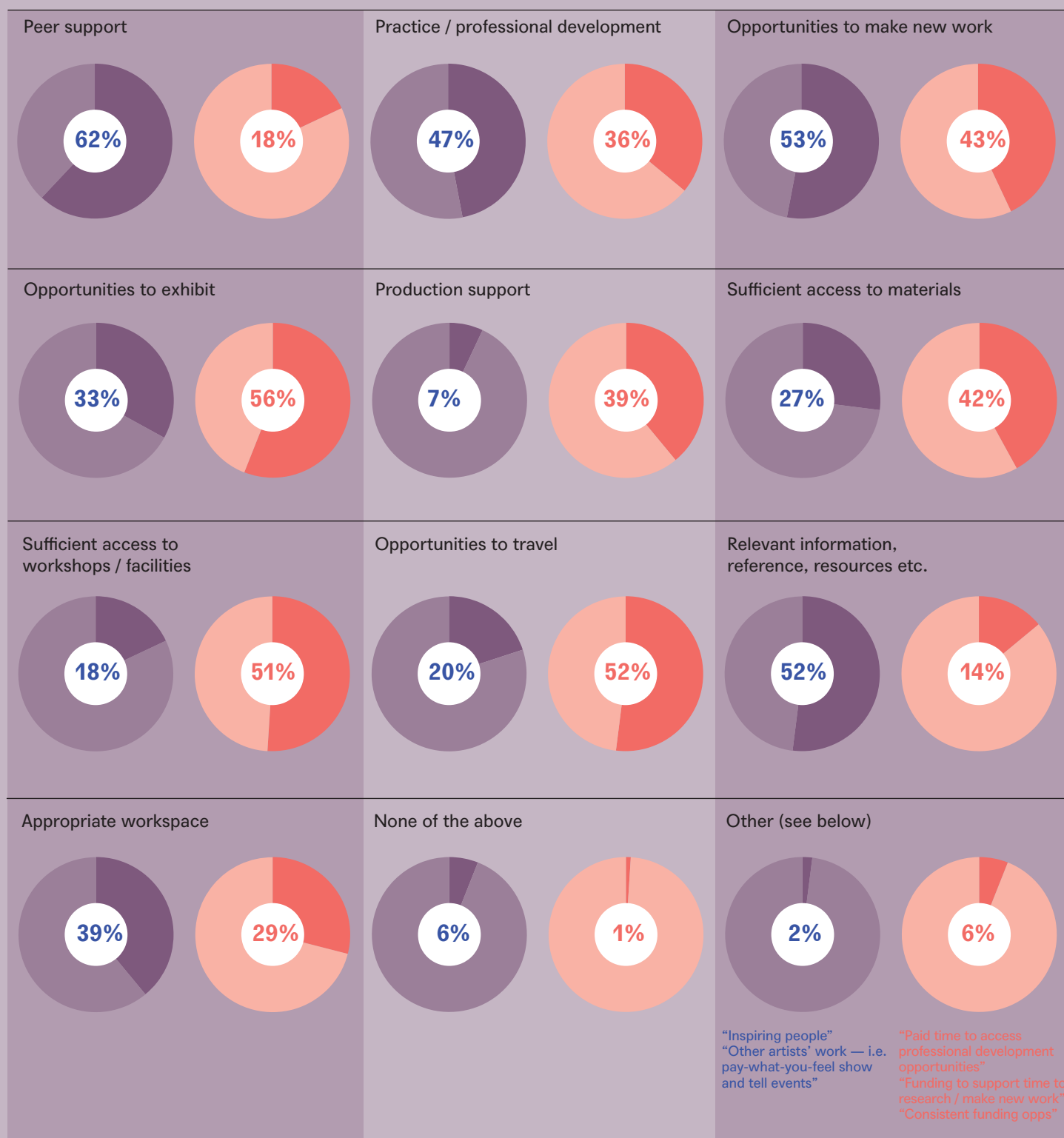
How many of the following do applicants feel they currently enjoy access to...  
...and for those they didn't select, which would they most benefit from access to?

In general, though the results below are broadly similar to 2022-23, there is a perceptible increase in the extent to which artists feel they have the support they need.

This is perhaps in part due to the after-effects of the pandemic, and the gradual return to an equilibrium of some sort which is still in progress.

Notwithstanding this, in both statistics and qualitative feedback, respondents repeatedly cited the broader political situation and cost of living crisis as a significant factor in throttling ambition and limiting access.

For 2023-24, though we kept all previous questions, one asking about workspace was added.



# Outcomes

## What's stopping artists?

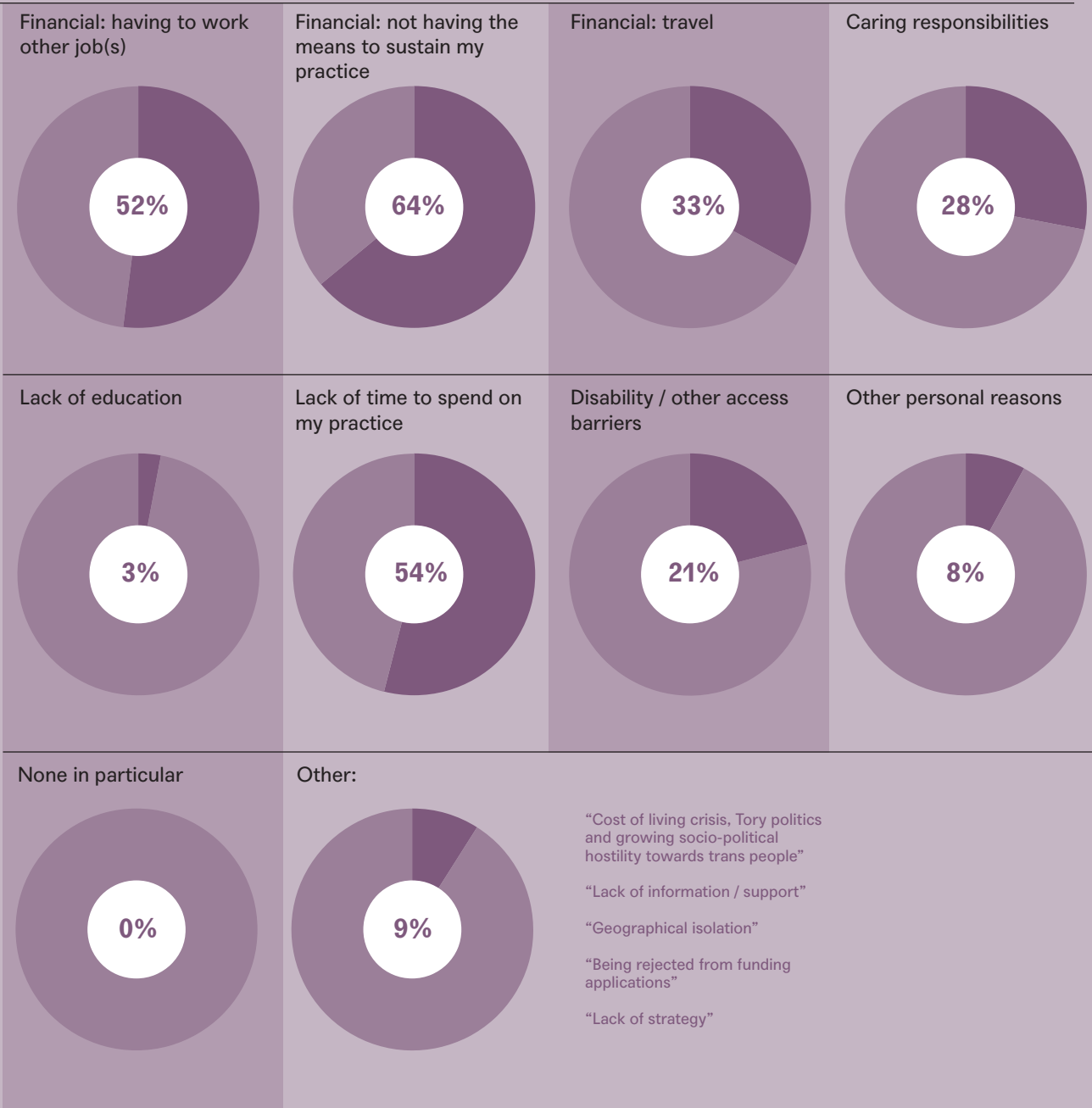
Ignoring the North East Artists' Fund and their particular application, what do applicants consider the biggest barriers to their practice right now?

As in 2022-23, while it is unsurprising that financial factors rank highest as barriers to artists' career development, a lack of time is similarly significant.

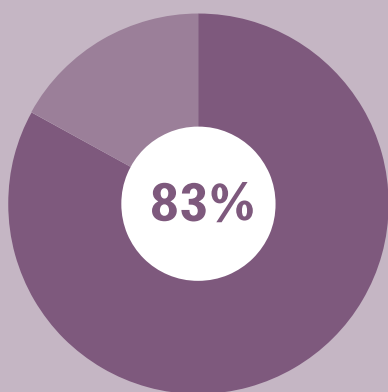
This is inevitably, in 99% of cases, also due to limited finances as artists are compelled to seek other employment, often working several part-time jobs, or else take on caring responsibilities.

“The funding didn’t just permit me to buy stuff, it also enabled confidence to connect with a scientist for advice. Many thanks!”

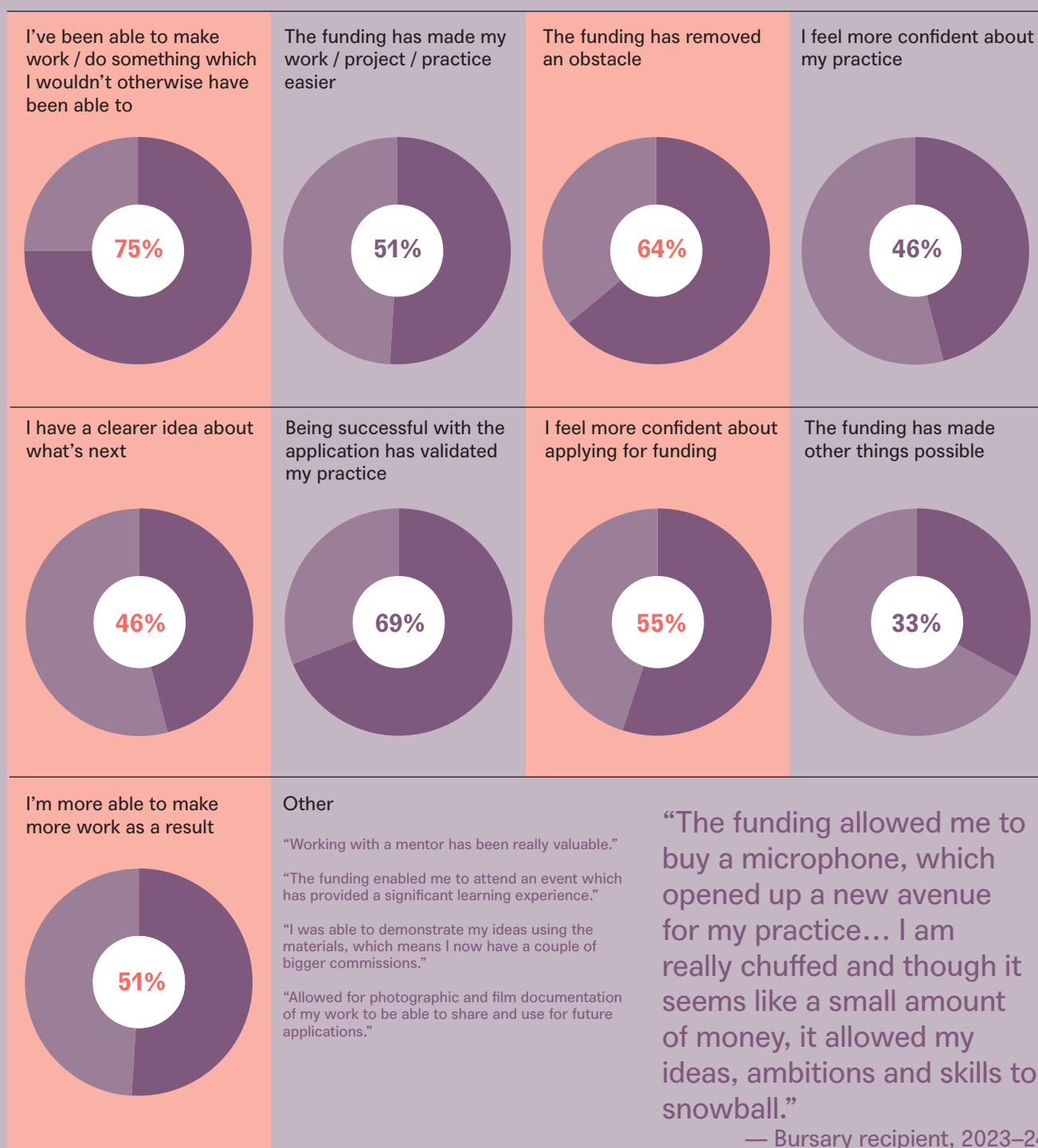
— Bursary recipient, 2023–24



## Outcomes Changing perceptions



83% of respondents say the way they feel about their practice has changed as a result of their North East Artists' Fund award — in the following ways...



# Outcomes

## How will the micro-bursary most help your practice?

### Asking questions

It's going to help me understand if MDF or plywood is the right material.

Just to know that someone in some way for whatever reason believes in me and the cause to make artwork enough to give me some money. That's a really nice feeling.

### Self-worth, self belief

It will help with confidence to get back on track and time to work without the pressures of taking on additional work.

### Getting it finished

It'll help me cover my first public art show.

It will help complete my exhibition. Even though it is a modest amount it gives me the confidence to complete my work.

It will give me the chance to explore something new without the financial risk of it not working perfectly the first time.

This bursary will most help my practice by being able to have access to more materials to be able to produce and realise performance work that I want to do and that would not be possible without the funds.

It will allow me to purchase a sewing machine giving me the tools to experiment and justification to find the time to so this with a sense of direction. It will be a great tool going forward to making and realising future ideas.

I've been stuck doing small-scale works for the last year or so and it's affecting my practice. The micro-bursary will allow me to return to larger-scale works that I really want to develop.

### Scaling up and taking risks

I hope it will give me an opportunity to meet new people and have new ideas, which ultimately will lead to new projects.

The bursary will allow me to take my work to Spain for the first time, which I hope will be important for networking and exposure. It will allow me to take low-emission travel between Newcastle and Madrid. Travelling in this way is important but it is not always possible for financial reasons.

It will enable me to travel and widen my national network, leading to future opportunities.

### Making friends and influencing people

It will allow us to meet key people involved in our project and spend time at the exhibition locations outside of the region. This will have a notable positive affect on our ability to plan the project, build confidence and provide a stronger foundation for the longer term outcomes of the project.

It will help me to re-evaluate my practice and examine motifs that have ran through my work, to help sustain and develop my future practice.

### Breathing space and time to focus

The bursary will allow me breathing space for my practice. It also allows me to be a little selfish and think about myself and my practice and its direction without worrying about needing to make sure I push for extra work, or am focusing on other people's projects for income.

It will help me make connections with people, to be able to share my work, ideas and hopefully generate opportunities.

It will support my work to reach new audiences.

It will enable me to acquire tools to expand the scope of my practice in terms of scale and ambition.

### Learning new skills, using new tools

I am currently developing having my own gallery and I don't have my own space, so I am having meetings around the North East. I don't have a laptop to take with me, so have to wait until I'm home to work — so this laptop will benefit greatly with time management as I can sit and work away on bids, business plans and having zoom calls that look more professional than on my phone.

I am going to use it to learn a totally new skill that I've been hoping to develop for ages! The bursary gives me the resource, and also some sense of personal accountability (someone else has given me money to make this happen) for my personal development.

It means I can focus all of my attention on my art for a week.

It will free up some of my regular income to pay for living costs.

# Outcomes In five years' time...

I would love to be able to sustain myself doing a job I find more stimulating, such as being an art installation technician.

I would hope that in five years time I'd be able to live off my practice, or at least support my practice with my practice. I'd settle for my practice making up around half of my income.

With the generous support of the bursary, I am not only equipped with the necessary materials and tools to elevate my creative practice, but also to step further towards a journey that adds to my artistic evolution over the next five years.

I'd like to be making work that I feel happy making and can share with others.

I am hoping we are in a better financial situation as a sector.

I would like to get my book into as many hands as possible. I am so proud of it and hope to see it in mental health creative spaces: to see it used in the NHS.

I'd like to have built a sustainable bridge between my large-scale sculpture and my collage practice to allow me to be more flexible.

I want to scale up my projects, have worked internationally and in languages other than English.

I hope to have a fully self-sustaining practice.

I'd hope that I am able to give the support to others that I didn't have.

To be able to receive money for my work, to have recognition, to have better time management and be able to collaborate but not feel shadowed or constantly exhausted.

To have more faith in my voice as an artist.

I hope that I can return to full-time arts practice

I want to continue to build networks with art / making / weirdos supporting weirdos.

I hope to be making a living on the income from just my art practice without the need of subsidiary jobs.

I really hope that I have in some way got my art out into the community to reach people who typically don't go to view art.

I'd like to have been able to try new things and not be working in exactly the same way — and be able to put my own projects ahead of client work.

I'd hope that my time and attention is spread across fewer roles and is instead dedicated to one part-time, salaried job which feeds into my practice (and vice versa).

I'd like to be able to experiment.

I'd like to have expanded my network in the local area in order to collaborate and give and receive peer support and feedback.

I'd like to have a self-sufficient art practice where I have total control over the outcome and finish of my works.

I would like to be excited about the future.

By honing my craft, expanding my network, and seizing opportunities for growth, I am laying the groundwork for a future where my artistic practice flourishes.

I am so eager to have a solo show somewhere outside of Newcastle, and want to continue to work on the scale of my pieces toward this.

I'd want to have a strong network around me, where we support each other — and that I am able to give the support to others that I didn't have.

# Anything else?

The application seemed to put faith in the artists applying instead of 'challenging' them as I feel many applications do, I respect that. I would highly recommend to other artists in the North East.

There has been a physical and mental barrier removed. I can now make larger work, and can think differently about the scale of work I can make, where I was previously constrained in my thinking.

I will continue to direct people towards the fund as I believe it to be the most fair and accessible funding application in the region.

You are doing important work, thank you.

This is an incredibly valuable scheme for artists, especially as the climate feels so very difficult at the moment.

Thanks for the opportunity. Really appreciated your clear and honest communications throughout the process.

The bursary allowed me to experiment and try something new, which otherwise would feel like a risk or burden.

Thank you for such an easy and transparent fund.

I would just like to say a big thank you to everyone behind the North East Artists' Fund. The fact that my practice was deemed worthy of support from the fund has been a real confidence boost.

The funding allowed me to buy a microphone, which opened up a new avenue for my practice... I am really chuffed and though it seems like a small amount of money, it allowed my ideas / ambitions / skills to snowball.

Before the funding I had a sketchbook full of ideas, with no means of bringing them to life, I'm now in the process of making those ideas a reality — and new sketchbook pages are being filled with new ideas.

The funding helped my practice at a time when I was experiencing financial hardship

If I hadn't gone to the Liverpool Biennial I wouldn't have been able to edit an important article about some of the work on show. I was very broke when I applied so thank you!

Thanks for making the whole process so easy!

The metal I applied for the funds to buy was used to make a sculpture which is now in a gallery's permanent collection.

Keep up the good work :)

It would be great to see more funds such as this in future for the North East.

I'd just like to say thank you. I've had a very difficult seven months with illness. The funding meant that I could continue and complete my project which enabled me to shift my focus and enjoy myself — a welcome break from the other stuff going on in my life.

The fact the application process is simple and stripped back takes some of the fear out of applying for funding and also the information provided for who's eligible and what you can apply for is explained well makes it less daunting compared to other applications alongside the time factor of not having to spend days/ weeks writing it.

The grant, though small, allowed me to make work I couldn't have without it. I hope you are able to continue offering artists flexible and strategic grants. Thanks!

I am a carer for my mum which is a constantly-moving situation, and this funding opportunity was sent to me when I really didn't have time for a lengthy application. I wouldn't have applied had it not been so easy!

# Outcomes What did the funds fund?

As the chart below shows, the micro-bursaries funded a large variety of different activity — from practice development and research to tools and materials. Some applications concerned immediate obstacles, while others looked ahead to costs connected with upcoming projects, or else long-standing barriers which investment in particular equipment could help to remove.

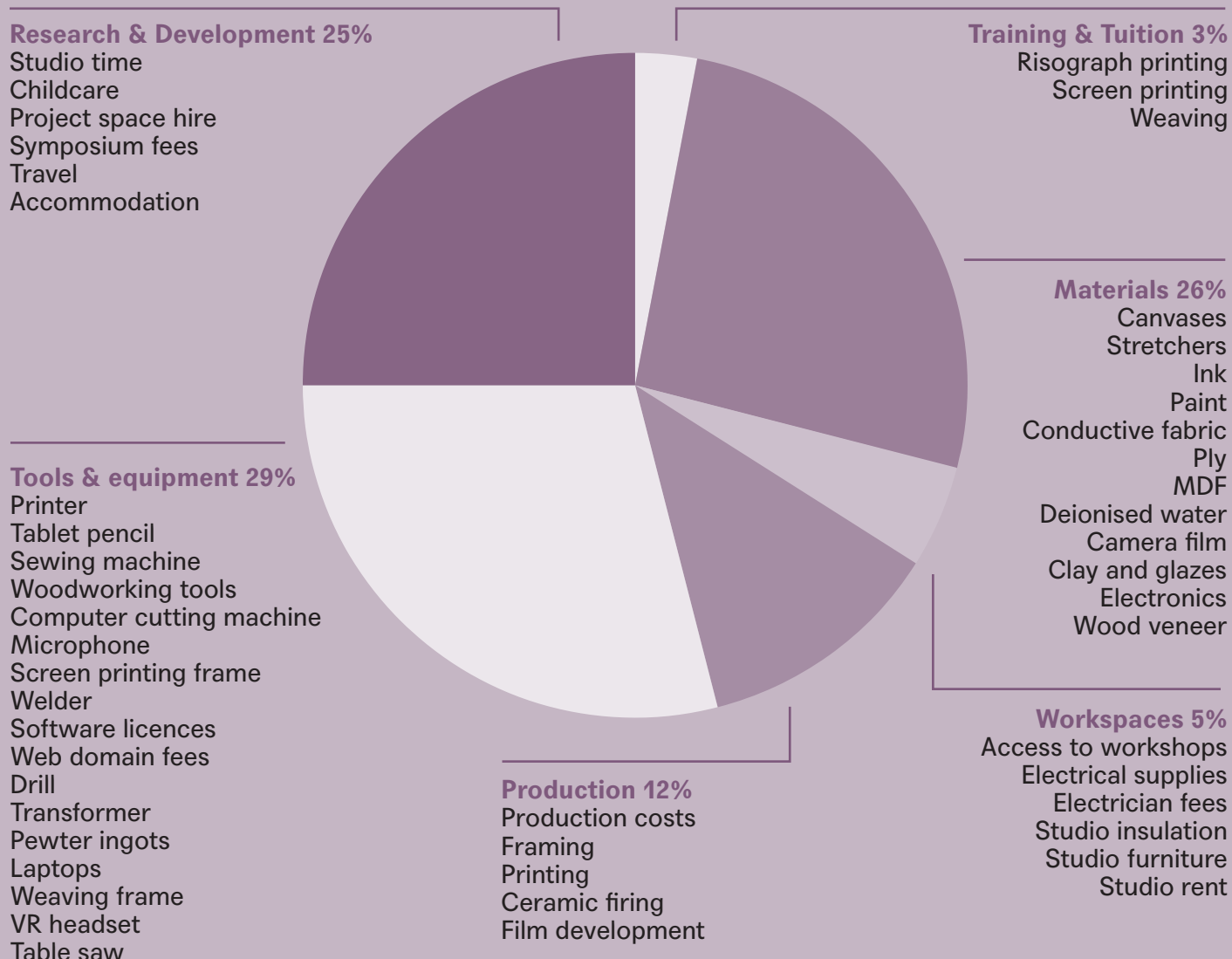
From VR headsets to conductive fabric, symposium fees to studio rent and weaving lessons to pewter ingots, what connected all awards was a sense of preparation for the future: a future which stretches from solving tomorrow's problem with an immediate fix to investing in a three-year plan with longer-term, potentially multiple outcomes.

Already a key theme of last year's data, feedback from awardees this year underscores the fact that the freedom to choose what they spent the money on is a signal strength of the fund. Where their applications concerned capital purchases, we hear

time and again that this is their only opportunity to do so, as scant other funds allowed this. Similarly, though R&D costs — from specific expenses such as travel, or more speculative or indirect costs such as childcare and time away from day jobs — are covered by schemes such as ACE's Developing Your Creative Practice programme, this exists at a scale that is either inappropriate for small, experimental or one-off costs, or perceived as inaccessible due to high levels of competition and an involved application process.

Two things are palpably clear: first, that small interventions can have a disproportionately large positive impact on artists' careers, and second, that artists know what they need and generally have a good sense of how to get there.

If such relatively tiny investment can have such impact, it led us to imagine what support on a larger scale might unlock.



# What's next?

We'd like to be able to continue the North East Artists' Fund for a third year. Most partners have already signalled their continued commitment, but we'd love to develop the fund further and welcome new contributors. With your help, we could help even more practitioners across the region.

## Key dates for 2024-25

| Planning                                                                           | Applications                           | Evaluation                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Partners 2024-25<br>in place by 14 October                                         | Survey 1<br>Open 1 November – 30 April | Interim report published<br>February 2025 |
| Fund opens November 2024                                                           | Survey 2<br>Open 1 January – 31 May    | Full report published<br>July 2025        |
| Round 1 November – December<br>Round 2 January – February<br>Round 3 March – April |                                        |                                           |

## About Art Network North East

Art Network North East is an advocacy and development organisation for the visual arts, working with individuals and organisations across the region to support existing activity, effect change where it's needed, and raise the profile of the North East nationally. We're part of the England-wide Contemporary Visual Arts Network and receive funding for salary from Arts Council England. Find out more at **anne.art**

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## Partners 2023–24

**NORTH  
OF TYNE**  
COMBINED  
AUTHORITY



**MI  
MA**



North  
Shields  
Cultural  
Quarter



**The NewBridge  
Project**

**BALTIC**



**Gateshead  
Council**

**Newcastle**  
City Council

**Northumberland**  
County Council

**Culture House  
Sunderland**



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