
Artist and Artworker Survey Report 2024

**VISUAL
ARTS
SOUTH WEST**

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Introduction

Visual Arts South West (VASW) is a sector support organisation. Our role is to advocate for people in the visual arts, connect artistic communities, raise visibility, campaign for diversity and build resilience to enable the South West visual arts sector to thrive.

Our vision is one of justice, inclusion, success and celebration for all across the visual arts. One of our core aims is to tackle structural and systemic issues and we want to see sustainable and progressive change in the South West. To do this, we listen and respond to the needs of our community to directly shape our work in response to research and the feedback we receive.

In Summer 2023, VASW appointed independent consultant Mandy Fowler to work with the team on a new survey to better understand the needs and experiences of artists and artworkers in the South West. The survey was designed to gather key data around pay, employment and funding so that we can understand and articulate the make-up of the region (who lives and works here). It was sent out via VASW's mailing list and promoted on social media, including many reposts by other organisations and individuals.



The Clay Picnic, Francesca Anfossi at Jamboree 2018. Photo Amdy Ford courtesy of LOW PROFILE



This report was created from the 318 survey responses that were received from across the region. It gives us a picture of the South West visual arts sector's diversity and barriers to inclusion; and highlights that there is much work to be done to support artists and artworkers and make careers sustainable. This information will inform our programme and work with the Contemporary Visual Arts Network (CVAN), who advocate for policy change at a national level.

The data from the survey is not just applicable to the work of VASW. We want this report to be of use to organisations and individual artists and artworkers so that you can make a case for better investment in your work. We have created '[Strengthening Your Funding Applications](#)', a resource which gives examples of how this report can be used to strengthen funding bids and applications.

A huge thank you to everyone that took the time to complete the survey and shared it with your networks. Our work is not possible without this collaboration, and we really appreciate your contribution to this process.

We will run the survey on a biennial basis to ensure that data is up to date and relevant. The next survey will be circulated in September 2025.

Who Completed the Survey

318 people completed the survey

Geography

Almost 40% (38%) stated that they have moved to the South West to be involved in visual arts in the region, with almost 60% of respondents having studied at a South West art school, suggesting that there is a vibrancy of both inward mobility to the region and graduate retention.

24% of survey respondents filled in their postcode. There are some gaps in geographic reach within the 24%, which possibly maps to where there is a lack of visual arts activity.

Demographic Profile

Responses suggest a sample that is largely representative of the demographic of the South West, with an overall higher Global Majority Heritage representation (although there is an absence of data from people of Asian heritage). Responses came from a slightly lower percentage of Disabled people than are part of the UK workforce, but a far higher representation of Neurodivergent people than thought to work in the creative sector nationally. There was also a lower representation of people who identify as being from low socio-economic backgrounds.



Exhibition Spike Island by Candice Lin © Dan Weill Photography

35% of respondents are Neurodivergent

Far higher than national data. It was reported in the Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) Select Committee Inquiry into the Impact of COVID-19 ^[1], that approximately 14% of the population and 20% of the creative labour force identify as Neurodivergent.

1% are Black

This is in line with the South West's population. Nationally 4% of the UK population are Black.

Most people are aged between 30-69

27% of respondents are LGBTQ+

Far higher than the Arts Council England's NPO workforce data (11%) ^[2].

4% of respondents' gender identity differs from their registered birth sex

This is far higher than the UK population (0.5%).

70% of respondents are female

In comparison, 51% of the UK's population are female; however, according to the Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the creative economy employs a lower proportion of women than the wider UK economy, with 37% of jobs in the creative industries filled by women.

81% of respondents are White

This is in line with UK data (national census and the South West census 2021) ^[3], which shows that 93% of the South West population is White (combined across all sub White categories), whilst nationally this is 82% of the population.

20% of respondents are D/deaf, Disabled, or have a long-term health condition

This is a lower proportion than the national workforce where the Office for National Statistics ^[3] percentages demonstrate that 23% of the population are D/deaf, Disabled or have a long-term health condition. Still, it is higher than Arts Council England's sector workforce data, which demonstrates that only 7% of the sector workforce identifies as D/deaf, Disabled or have a long-term health condition.



Spike Island Open Studios 2022 © Dan Weill Photography

Employment and Income

27% of people make 100% of their income through visual arts

The survey demonstrates that making income from working within visual arts is challenging. 36% of people make less than £5k per year from their visual arts work, and only 20% make above £20k per year. Only 15% of those who make 100% of their income through visual arts make over £30k per year.

71% described their main (and secondary) source of employment or involvement as independent artist/maker/designer/photographer/filmmaker with over ten years experience

36% make less than £5k income through visual arts in a year

With only 11% stating that they make more than £20k per year.

29% stated that less than 20% of their income is related to their work in visual arts

27% stated that they make 100% of their income through the visual arts.

36% stated that their visual arts income has increased in the last two years

30% that it has stayed the same, and 29% that it has decreased.

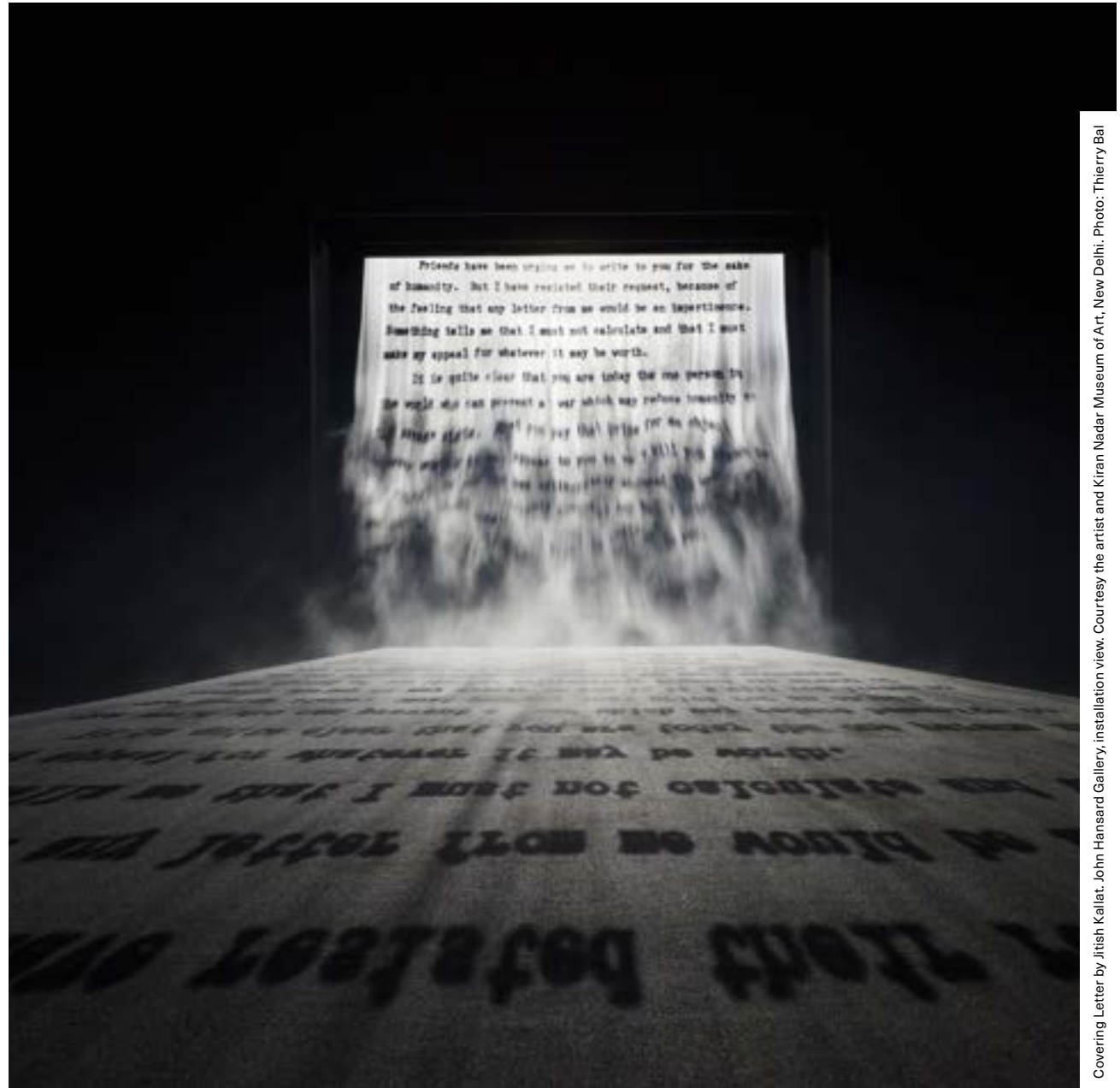
51% (161) stated that they have secondary employment outside of the visual arts

The most common being arts/design/media. 26% have a pension, private income or are unemployed. Of the 33 people who responded with their employment details, there was a mix of coaching, marketing, teaching assistant, care/social work and gardening roles

Career Routes

Over 50% have worked in the sector for ten years or more

An academic route through art college or University was the most common route into the visual arts as a career, with 59% having studied in the South West. The most common academic institutes listed were The University of West of England (21%), Arts University Plymouth (14%), Falmouth University (11%), Bath Spa University (8%) and University of Plymouth (5%).



Covering Letter by Jitish Kallat. John Hansard Gallery, installation view. Courtesy the artist and Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi. Photo: Thierry Bal



John Hansard Gallery's Community Takeover 2022. Photo: Nosa Malcolm

Engaging with the Visual Arts

79% primarily work from home or within ten miles of their home

29% (the majority) stated that they mainly engage with visual arts within ten miles of their home. There are fewer people that travel more than 50 miles to engage, therefore a localised physical visual arts offer is important to them. However, 20% of respondents engage with visual arts online.

60% state that they spend more than half of their week engaged in working in the visual arts

83% stated that they would like to spend more than half of their week engaged in working in visual arts.

70% find out about visual arts activity through social media

This includes arts organisations own websites (53%) and word of mouth (50%).

64% found out about the survey through VASW

One-third outside of VASW, suggesting there was good circulation of the survey study in the wider visual arts community.

58% stated that they had engaged with VASW previously

Respondents mentioned a number of ways that they have engaged, with VASW's monthly newsletter and online What's on, Opportunities and Directory being the most common; followed by VASW's events.

Who We Didn't Reach

The survey does not effectively represent the views of emerging and early career artists and artworkers, or people under 30.

The survey demonstrates that it does not represent the South West's Asian or Dual Ethnicity populations. None of the respondents to our survey are from an Asian background and only 5% of survey respondents are Dual Ethnicity.

12% of respondents are from lower socio-economic backgrounds whereas the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre research (2020) ^[4], demonstrates that 16% of people in creative jobs are from low socio-economic backgrounds. Occupations considered to be lower socio-economic markers are semi-routine occupations, routine occupations or long-term unemployed (these are defined by The National Statistics Socio-economic classification) ^[3].

Most respondents are female. National research has shown that women are more likely to respond to surveys than men, which could account for the higher percentage of women who have responded to the survey.



The Funding Landscape in the South West



Future Proof event: 2019 © Chelsey Cliff

Funding experiences

43% of survey respondents have applied for funding in the last year

51% of those who applied were successful (22% of overall respondents).

Of those who received funding

67% are independent artists/makers/designers/
photographers/filmmakers

4% are independent curators/producers/facilitators, 4% are part of artist collectives, 9% work for National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs), 3% work for Higher Education Institutions, 13% work for an organisation whose income or business model is in receipt of frequent grants for specific projects.

Of those who were unsuccessful,
65% of the funding applications were for Arts Council grants

33% state that **100% of income comes from visual arts**

38% of these people have accessed Arts Council England (ACE) funding.

57% had more than ten years' experience in the sector

20% had between five and ten years.

21% stated that between 81 and 99% of their income comes from visual arts

13% stated that between 50 and 80% of their income comes from visual arts.

48% received funding from Trusts and Foundations

12% received funding from Local Authorities and 11% received Arts Council England (ACE) funding.

Of those who secured funding in the last year and earn 100% of their income from visual arts:

10% earn between £10-20k

7% earn between £20-30k

6% earn between £30-40k

4% earn between £5-10k

4% earned under £5k.

81% are White British, 23% are Disabled, and 49% are Neurodivergent

23% earn under £5k

21% earn between £5k-10k, 27% earn between £10-20k, 10% earn between £20-30k and 10% earn between £30-40k.

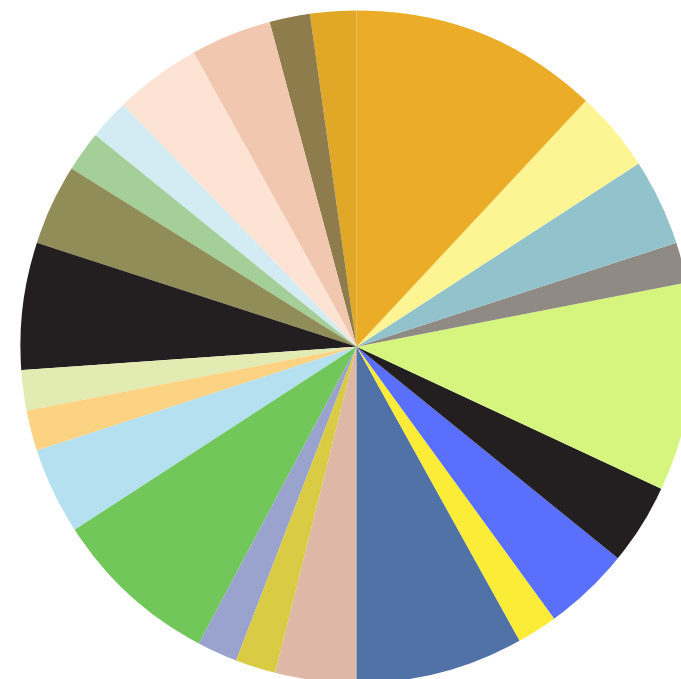
Arts Council Project Grants

Analysis of Arts Council England funding from March to December 2023 indicates that 50 visual arts grants have been given through the National Lottery Project Grants funding stream, amounting to £1,230,342.

Compared to the other Arts Council regions, the South West receives the least investment in England.

Arts Council region	No. of National Lottery Project Grants awarded (total 339)	Total amount awarded (overall total £11,650,202)
South West	50 (15%)	£1,230,342 (11%)
London	72 (21%)	£3,307,218 (28%)
Midlands	60 (18%)	£2,207,729 (19%)
North	82 (24%)	£2,871,176 (25%)
South East	76 (22%)	£2,033,737 (17%)

The allocation of National Lottery Project Grants across the South West demonstrates that the most investment has been in Portsmouth, Bristol, North Somerset and Cornwall.



- Portsmouth (6)
- Test Valley (2)
- Eastleigh (2)
- Plymouth (1)
- Bristol (5)
- South Hams (2)
- Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole (2)
- New Forest (1)
- North Somerset (4)
- Somerset (2)
- Winchester (1)
- East Devon (1)
- Cornwall (4)
- Isle of Wight (2)
- West Devon (1)
- Dorset (1)
- North Devon (3)
- Gloucester (2)
- Teignbridge (1)
- Cheltenham (1)
- Wiltshire (2)
- Exeter (2)
- Southampton (1)
- Bath & North Somerset (1)

Developing Your Creative Practice (DYCP) Arts Council Grants

Analysis of Arts Council England Developing Your Creative Practice Grants (DYCP) funding from March to June 2023 (DYCP rounds 16 and 17) indicates that 37 visual arts grants have been given through the DYCP funding stream, amounting to £579,833.

Compared to the other Arts Council regions, there is low investment in the South West (the lowest number of awards and the second lowest financial amount awarded).

Arts Council region	No. of National Lottery Project Grants awarded (total 271)	Total amount awarded (overall total £2,819,965)
South West	37 (13%)	£388,932 (14%)
London	75 (28%)	£820,174 (29%)
Midlands	39 (14%)	£350,645 (12%)
North	67 (25%)	£689,702 (24%)
South East	54 (20%)	£570,512 (20%)

The allocation of DYCP across the South West demonstrates that most investment has been in Bristol, Stroud and Cornwall.



Other Funders

The survey respondents were asked to give details of which other funders they were accessing funding through. Three people stated Artist Newsletter (A-N), two stated the West of England Visual Arts Alliance (WEVAA) and each of these funders were mentioned once: ArtFund commission grant, HE university Knowledge & Exchange funds, Dorset Council, The Gane Trust, CAMP (Devon & Cornwall) and Goldsmiths University research grant.

The National Picture

In November 2023, McKinsey & Company published 'The Arts in the UK: Seeing the big picture - a perspective on how to gauge and sustain the UK arts sector's full impact' ^[5]. The report states that the arts industry in the UK was worth £126 billion in 2022. This is despite the backdrop of austerity and the impact of Covid and the cost of living crisis, which have led to high numbers of job losses and people leaving the creative industries. The number of filled roles in music, performing and visual arts fell from 311,000 to 276,000 between April 2022 and March 2023 (12% nationally), according to government statistics. The figure forms part of DCMS published economic estimates (2023), which tracks employment levels across the department's remit.

The report continues to share the value and positive impact of the creative industries on well-being, health, community cohesion and crime reduction, as well as how essential working together is for the health of the cultural ecosystem.





ACE's dataset categorises their 2023-26 National Portfolio investment into five geographical regions. According to House of Lords research into 'Arts Council England: Funding and regional distribution' (Dec 2022), total annual investment for each region for 2023–26 is

London £152 million

North £128 million

Midlands £84 million

South East £46 million

South West £37 million

ACE Project Grant data covering the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 reveals £11,955,278 was invested in the South West, of which £1,230,342 was for visual arts (10%). The average grant was £25K, and 6 were over £30K applications.

As a comparison, in London, £23,829,767 was awarded in total, with £3,307,218 for visual arts (14%) with an average grant of £46K, and 12 were over £30K apps.

Commissions and Professional Development



Modern Conversations displays at Tate St Ives, 2021. Photo © Kirstin Prisk

42% of survey respondents have been commissioned to make new work in the last year.

71% have more than five years' experience working in the sector and 77% have successfully received funding.

Of those have been commissioned

The majority felt that

Commissioning fees are too small

There are no fee guidelines

Artists have to negotiate fees

People often use their fees to cover production costs

Around a third of the comments stated that they found the fees to be fair.

25% state that **100%** of **income comes from visual arts**

4% of these have accessed ACE funding.

53% have more than ten **years' experience in the sector**

18% have between five and ten years.

49% are **White British, 21% are White Irish, 1% Black Caribbean, and 8% from a range of Dual Ethnicity backgrounds**

83% are **independent artists/makers/designers/photographers/filmmakers**
4% are independent curators/producers/facilitators, 2% are part of artist collectives, 5% work for educational establishments, and 3% work for an organisation receiving regular grants for specific projects.

35% earn **under £5k**

20% earn between 5-10k

23% earn between 10-20k

8% earn between 20-30k

3% earn between 30-40k

2% earn more than £40k per year

19% are **Disabled and 43% are Neurodivergent**



Spike Island studio holder Katy Connor © Martin Parr

Professional Development

41% have undertaken Continued Professional Development in the last year

Examples given were specific skills development, such as printmaking and ceramics techniques, mentoring, attending the WEVAA online programme, artist associate and alternative development programmes (including Spike Associates, Open School East and the Turps programme) and workshops (specifically funding workshops).

Barriers to Working in the Visual Arts

Survey respondents were asked if they experience any barriers to working in and making visual art and how they would describe those barriers. 85% of survey respondents responded to this question.

Responses were mainly from people with protected characteristics, whose development needs require support. The responses to this question were analysed using a classification of the words and themes that were used the most.

31% related to a lack of finance or financial return on creating work

Several people mentioned having to find other employment to make a living and support their work and a lack of success with funding applications and opportunities.

18% related to a lack of opportunity for their work

Few accessible opportunities, a lack of open calls and the same artists being given the opportunities for work. People also referred to “gatekeeping” by selecting institutions.

13% related to a lack of space to create work

A lack of studio spaces, especially affordable studio spaces, and space within their own homes to create work.

10% stated that they have caring responsibilities

For children or parents/older people that is a barrier to being able to create work.

6% stated that their disability or physical and mental health is a barrier

Comments were around experiencing ableism in the sector. One person stated that they experienced racism within the South West sector.

Other comments talked about lack of access to a community of artists to discuss work with others, a lack of networks and limited skills to apply for opportunities and funding.

Setting Priorities



Bath Art Depot event. Photo: Trystan Buckland

Your Priorities

Survey respondents were asked to describe their or their organisations' top three priorities over the next three years.

These priorities were analysed using a classification determined by themes in the responses. The majority of comments were around funding and increasing income streams to sustain practice from selling and commissions. Beyond that, there were comments around producing work, gaining more of a profile and exhibiting.

Priorities for a Visual Arts Network

Survey respondents were also asked to identify the top three things a regional Visual Arts Network should prioritise over the next three years.

The comments largely fell into seven categories, ranked in order of number of mentions. The first four were mentioned far more times than the other three.

Top Four Priorities

Artist development, training, support and advice

Specific priorities were support for funding applications and artist opportunities, self-employment skills, selling/pricing work, identifying marketplaces for work and mentoring.

Funding and opportunities

People want more funding in the region and support to enable artists to access opportunities.

Advocacy for the region and artists

Respondents commented on fair pay for artists and on making the region more visible.

Networking

Comments included being able to network with other creatives in the region, especially to provide mutual support, and being able to network with galleries.

Priorities Mentioned Less Frequently

The creation of physical spaces and facilities

New studio spaces, facilities and physical resources for making work, as well as exhibiting spaces.

Communications

Making opportunities across the region and artist profiles more visible.

Accessibility

Support for artists from Global Ethnic Majority, Disabled, Neurodivergent and lower socio-economic backgrounds, and older artists. Comments included making funding and opportunities more accessible, as well as making people's work more visible.

A similar survey was undertaken by Mandy Fowler for New Art West Midlands in early 2023 (not published). The survey had fewer respondents but similar results, identifying the same categories. This would suggest that these categories are not just specific to the South West region

Our Other Research

In 2021, VASW was supported by Artfund to work in partnership with 'a space' arts, Aspex, CAMP, Isle of Wight Creative Network, Somerset Art Works and Spike Island to develop a regional, collaborative programme of professional support for artists across the region.

The group worked together over a 12 month period to meet and share knowledge, experience and ideas around artists professional development; as well as initiate new research into the identified needs of artists.

From our research and conversations we have devised new initiatives for a cross-region programme of support which we are currently fundraising for.

Our research into engagement with associate schemes told us that

The main reason artists are part of associate schemes (and what they like best about them) is peer support / community and networks

Artist's priorities for associate schemes are opportunities for more meetups, exhibitions and support in rural areas

Artists most want mentoring and exhibition / presentation opportunities through a cross-regional programme



Modern Conversations displays at Tate St Ives, 2023. Photo © Kirstin Prisk.

Acknowledgements

VASW would like to sincerely thank everyone who completed the survey. We know that completing surveys takes time and energy and for this we are very grateful. It is really vital that we gather this information so that we can help to advocate for better conditions and investment in the visual arts and work in response to your needs; your voice and experiences help us to do just that.

We would like to thank Mandy Fowler who worked with us as an external consultant to help us develop the questions for the survey and analyse the findings.

The VASW team worked closely with our fantastic Steering Group who gave feedback on the survey and helped to circulate it to their networks.

Thank you to all the artists, art workers and organisations who shared the survey with their networks; posting about it on social media, via your newsletters, through messages and conversations. We really appreciate your support in helping us to get the survey to reach as many people as possible.





Izzy Mooney (2020). Dreamtime fellow at Spike Island, supported by Luke Jerram. Photo Rebecca Goldman

Thanks to our partners who worked with us on evaluating artist development programmes in the South West and devising ideas for future cross-regional activity

Georgia Newman
(Deputy Executive Director)
 Island Collection, Isle of Wight

Carmen Juliá
(Curator)
 Spike Island, Bristol

Mary Cork
(previously Artist Development Curator)
 a space arts, Southampton

Sophie Mellor
(previously CAMP Coordinator)
 Contemporary Art Membership,
 Devon & Cornwall

Ricardo Reverón Blanco
(Curator & Programme Manager)
 Aspex, Portsmouth

Zoe Li
(programme Associate)
 Somerset Art Works

Saphia Abrahamovitch-Venner
(Assistant Curator: Artist Development and Engagement)
 Spike Island, Bristol



Art Fund_

Endnotes

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