

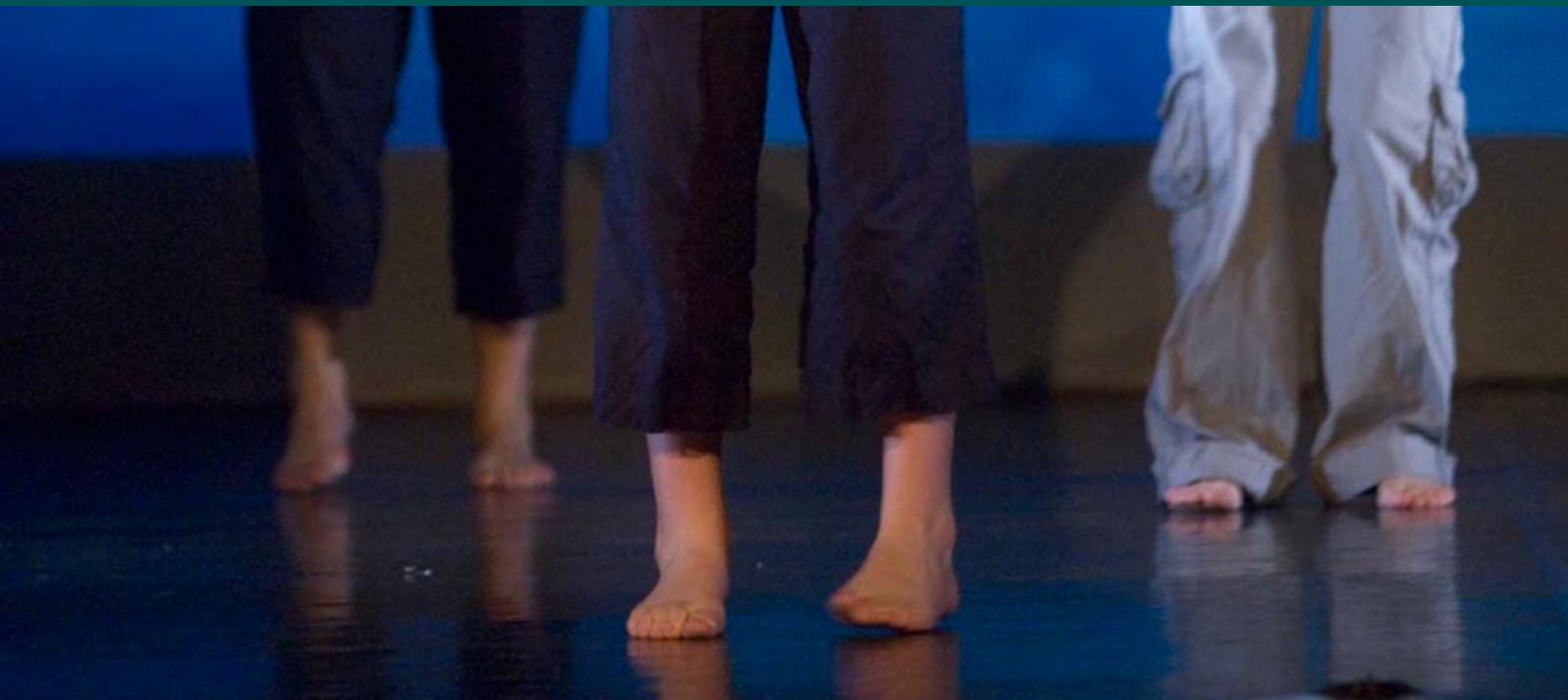


## **Encourage children today to build audiences for tomorrow**

Evidence from the Taking Part survey on how  
childhood involvement in the arts affects arts  
engagement in adulthood

March 2009

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## Headline findings:

- being encouraged to get involved in the arts as a child increases the chances of being an active arts consumer as an adult
- the effect of childhood experience is very strong, nearing in magnitude the effect of education – the strongest predictor of arts engagement
- the level of parental encouragement differs by family background and personal demographics: parents of high social status are more likely to encourage their children to engage in the arts; girls and white children are more likely to receive encouragement than boys and children who are not white
- this research highlights the importance of initiatives such as Find Your Talent, which ensure all children have an opportunity to engage in the arts
- further research is needed on the relative importance of family and school in influencing life-long patterns of engagement

# 1 Introduction

Arts Council England is committed to getting great art to everyone by championing, developing and investing in artistic experiences that enrich people's lives. Developing a strong evidence base of who engages in the arts and why, and the barriers that prevent those who do not currently engage from doing so, is crucial to achieving this ambition.

In recent years, we have learnt a lot about arts engagement patterns and how these vary among different groups of people from Taking Part, a large-scale survey of cultural participation. We have found that the strongest and most consistent predictors of individuals' chance of engaging with the arts are their **level of education, social status** and **ethnicity**<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See *From indifference to enthusiasm* report (2008) and accompanying artform briefings, available at [artscouncil.org.uk/takingpart](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/takingpart)

## About the Taking Part survey

Taking Part is a continuous survey of adults in England that has been running since 2005. It is commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in partnership with Arts Council England, Sport England, English Heritage and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. Every year it collects information from thousands of adults (aged 16 and over) in England about their engagement in culture, leisure and sport in the 12 months prior to interview. Respondents are asked about their attendance at a wide variety of arts events, museums, galleries, libraries and heritage sites, and about their participation in creative activities and sport. The survey also asks about motivations and barriers to cultural attendance and participation, and collects a large quantity of socio-demographic information such as each respondent's age, occupation, income, health and ethnicity.

However, while we know a lot about the effect of an individual's current social and economic characteristics on arts engagement, we do not yet fully understand the effects of their past experiences.

This briefing looks at one very important area of experience: childhood exposure to the arts (sometimes referred to by sociologists as 'cultural socialisation'). It uses data from the 2005/06 Taking Part survey (a sample around 13,500 English adults aged 16 or over) to explore the relationship between a respondent's current arts engagement and whether their parents, or other adults in their household, encouraged them to engage in the arts when they were 'growing up' (defined as being aged 12–15)<sup>2</sup>. To do this we study the effect of the following on current engagement:

- **attending arts events with parents** – how often people were taken to arts events (including museums or art galleries, theatre, dance or classical music performances) by parents when growing up
- **being encouraged by parents to participate in arts activities** – how much encouragement people received from parents to participate in arts and creative activities (including drawing/painting, writing stories/poems/plays/music, playing a musical instrument, acting, dancing or singing) when growing up
- **demographic variation** – whether the level of parental encouragement varies according to factors such as gender and age

These and other terms used in this report are defined in more detail in the glossary (see page 18).

We analyse the data using 'multivariate analysis'. This is a class of methods that allows us to isolate the unique or net impact of childhood experience when other factors (for example education, age, gender, social status) have been taken into account. In other words, if we find a childhood experience effect, then we could say that childhood exposure is indeed associated with higher levels of arts engagement, and not simply because individuals who were encouraged as a child are also more likely to come from high-status

<sup>2</sup> All analysis is weighted to ensure that the results are representative of the adult population in England. We only report findings that have a high statistical level of reliability (significant at the 95 per cent confidence level).

families, or because they display other characteristics associated with higher rates of engagement.

For ease of analysis, rather than analysing the impact of childhood experience on each artform we look at its effect on two composite measures of engagement: 'arts attendance' (going to at least one arts event in the past 12 months) and 'arts participation' (taking part in at least one arts activity at least once in the past 12 months).

## 2 The findings

### Consistent evidence of impact

Our analysis indicates that encouragement to attend and participate in the arts when growing up is associated with significantly higher chances of being an active arts consumer as an adult. Being taken to arts events when growing up significantly increases the chances of both adult attendance and participation. Similarly, receiving encouragement to participate in the arts when growing up makes one more likely both to participate in arts activities and to attend arts events as an adult<sup>3</sup>.

These effects are present even after a range of other socio-demographic factors (the respondents' age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, health, age of children in household, region, education, social class, income, social status) as well as the social status of the respondents' parents (head of household, usually father) have been taken into account.

To illustrate this we can use the example of two women with an otherwise similar socio-demographic profile. They are of the same age, ethnicity and occupation. If woman A was taken to arts events at least once a year by her parents when growing up, while woman B was not, woman A would be significantly more likely to be actively engaged in the arts today.

<sup>3</sup> To tease out any differences between age groups, we also repeated the analysis among three different age cohorts in addition to the full sample: 16–39, 40–69 and 70 or over. (These age groups were selected to reflect patterns in arts attendance: the highest levels of engagement are found among the 40–69 age group, while engagement decreases significantly in the 70 and over group.) The results indicate that the effects of cultural socialisation are present across the age range – the results were reasonably consistent in analyses of the three age groups individually.

## A strong effect

We know that a number of other socio-demographic factors also have a significant impact on individuals' likelihood of engaging in the arts, including age, gender, ethnicity, health, family structure, region of residence, social status and education. Of these factors, education has the strongest and most consistent effect<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> See *From indifference to enthusiasm* report (especially pages 40–60), [artscouncil.org.uk/takingpart](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/takingpart).

How strong is the impact of childhood arts experience in comparison to the other factors? To address this question, Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate the relative impact of childhood experience, alongside that of education – the strongest factor. In this example, other demographic factors have been fixed (as shown below the graphs) to allow us to compare the net impact of childhood experience and education only.

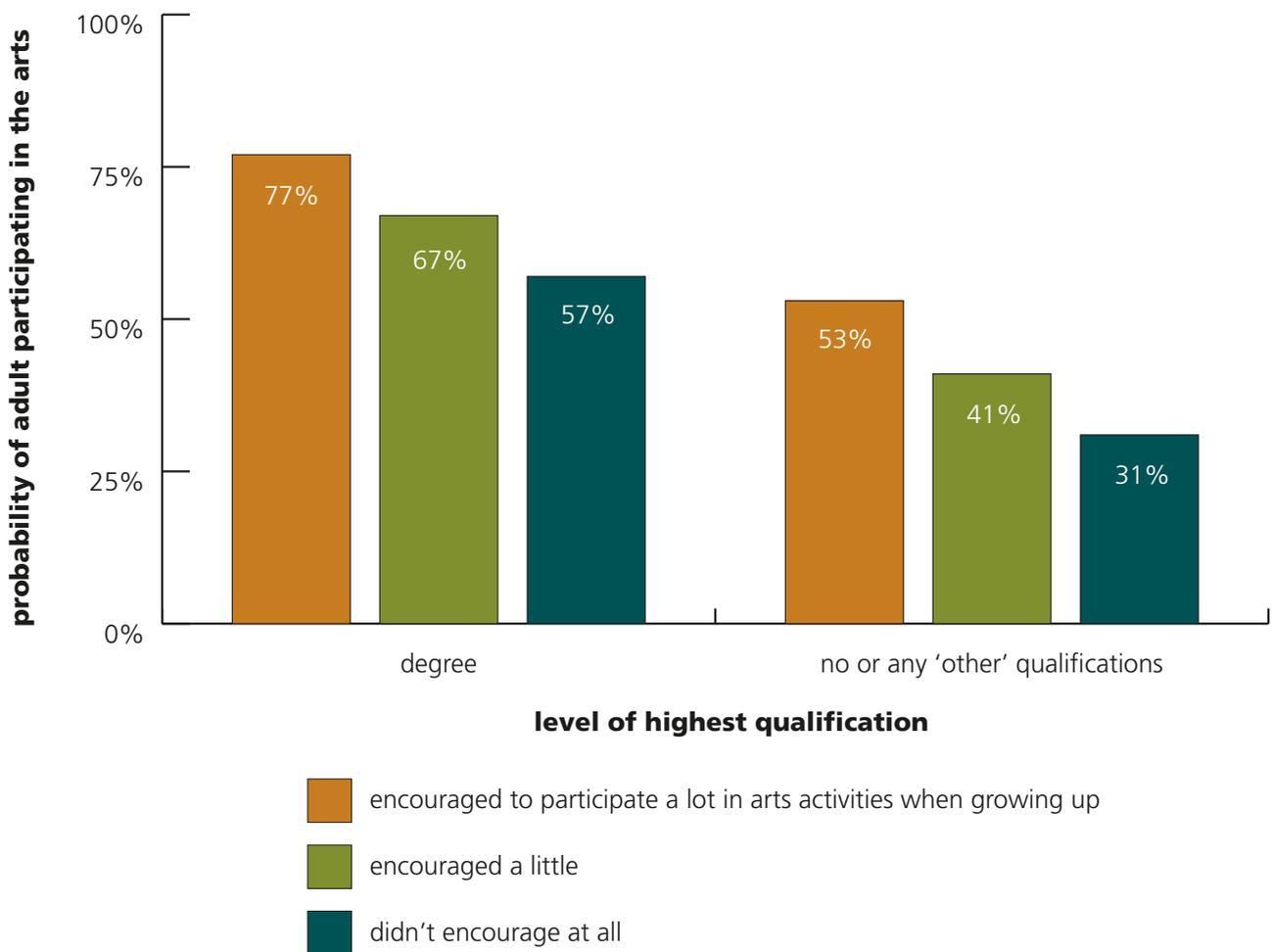
Figure 1 illustrates the effect of education and of being encouraged to participate in arts activities as a child on participation as an adult. It shows that someone who received a lot of encouragement to participate in the arts when growing up is significantly more likely to be an active arts participant than someone who received less encouragement. At degree level education, those receiving a lot of encouragement would be 20 percentage points more likely to participate in the arts as an adult than someone not encouraged at all. At the lowest level of education the difference is 22 percentage points.

Notably, the maximum impact of childhood experience is slightly lower than that of education, but not by very much. This can be examined by comparing columns of the same colour in Figure 1. A degree-holder who had received a lot, little and no encouragement to participate in the arts when growing up would be 24, 26 and 26 percentage points respectively more likely to participate in the arts than someone with no formal educational qualifications.

The same pattern can be observed for arts attendance. Figure 2 illustrates the effect on adult attendance of education and of being taken to arts events as a child. Those taken more frequently are significantly more likely to attend the arts than those who were taken less frequently or never. At degree-level education, those taken at least once a year would be seven percentage points more likely to

attend the arts as an adult than someone not taken at all. The effect on attendance is the strongest at the lowest level of education, with a 15 percentage point difference between those who were taken to arts events at least once a year when growing up (77 per cent) and those who were never taken (62 per cent).

*Figure 1: Probability of participating in arts activities, by level of highest qualification and level of parental encouragement to participate in arts activities when growing up*

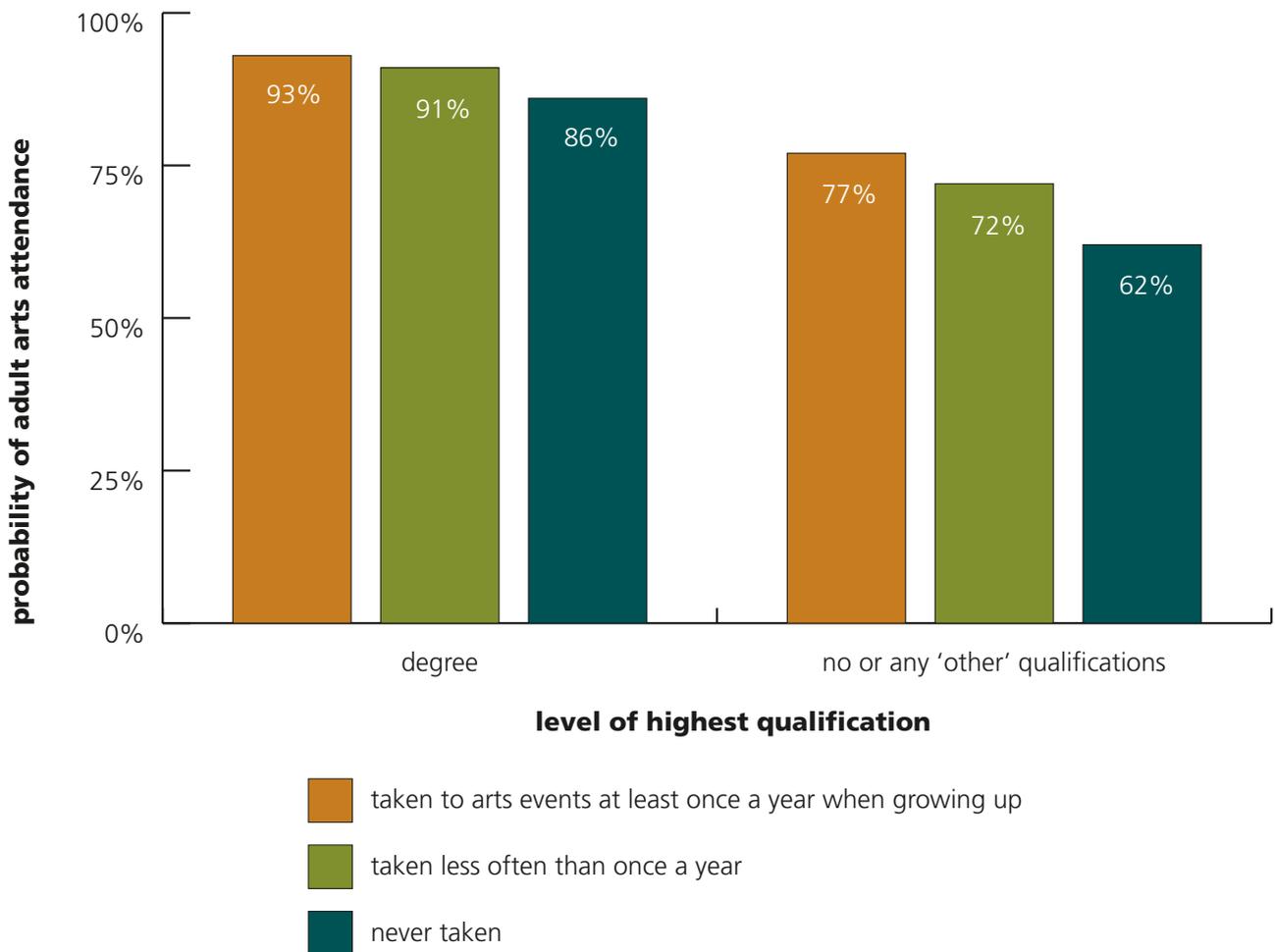


*Other factors set as follows: female, Londoner, white British, in her 40s, in very good health, owner-occupier, living with a partner without any children, medium social status level, income of £25,000 per annum*

The maximum impact of childhood experience is similar in overall magnitude to that of education, although education remains more clearly the stronger of the two factors in the case of arts attendance. For example, in our case study, a degree-holder who had been taken to arts events at least once a year, less often and never when growing up would be 16, 19 and 24 percentage points respectively more likely

to attend arts events than someone with no formal educational qualifications. This is higher than the maximum impact of childhood experience observed above, 15 percentage points.

*Figure 2: Probability of attending arts events, by education level and frequency of being taken to arts events by parents when growing up*



*Other factors set as follows: female, Londoner, white British, in her 40s, in very good health, owner-occupier, living with a partner without any children, medium social status level, income of £25,000 per annum*

### 3 Varying levels of childhood encouragement among demographic subgroups

Knowing that childhood exposure to the arts has such a strong impact, it is also important to understand what proportion of people, and what kind of people, currently receive encouragement to engage in the arts while growing up.

Overall 22 per cent of English adults were taken to arts events by their parents at least once a year when growing up, while 16 per cent were taken less often than once a year and 63 per cent were never taken (Table 1). As for participation, similar proportions of people received 'a lot' and 'a little' encouragement to participate when growing up, with 59 per cent not receiving any encouragement at all (Table 2).

*Table 1: Frequency of being taken to arts events by parents when growing up*

	<b>% of English adults</b>
At least once a year	22.3
Less often	15.6
Never	63.2

*Table 2: Level of parental encouragement to participate in arts activities when growing up*

	<b>% of English adults</b>
A lot	17.7
A little	23.8
Not at all	58.5

However, the level of parental encouragement differs considerably by family background and personal socio-demographic characteristics – for instance social status, level of education, ethnicity. We have used multivariate analysis to help us understand which of these many characteristics affect the chances of somebody receiving parental encouragement to attend and participate in the arts when growing up.

The variable with the strongest correlation is parental social status. Parents of high social status are significantly more likely to take their children to arts events and to encourage them to participate in arts activities, as compared with parents of lower social status. This is true even after accounting for various other factors.

There are also significant differences between ethnic groups. In comparison with white respondents, people who define their ethnic background as Black, Asian, Mixed or 'Other' are significantly less likely to have been taken to arts events by their parents when growing up. The effect is particularly marked among people from Black and Asian ethnic backgrounds. People from Black, Asian and 'Other' ethnic backgrounds are also less likely to report having been encouraged to participate in the arts.

The level of parental encouragement to engage in the arts also varies by the gender of the child. The overall pattern is clear and consistent: parents are significantly more likely to encourage and foster arts engagement among girls than among boys. When holding other factors constant, women are significantly more likely to report having been encouraged to participate in the arts 'a lot', or at least 'a little', by their parents when growing up and to report having been taken to arts events at least once a year, as compared with male respondents.

Finally, there is a distinct and consistent age pattern: younger respondents are significantly more likely to report having been taken to arts events and encouraged to participate in arts activities when growing up, as compared with older age groups. This suggests a cohort effect: parenting habits appear to have changed along with the changing social, economic and cultural landscape, with each successive generation of parents appearing to be more likely to take their children to arts events and encourage them to participate in artistic activities. We should bear in mind, however, that the ability to recall childhood experiences could decrease with age, and therefore some differences in the responses of different age groups might in fact be due to recall bias by age rather than true cohort differences.

## 4 Why might childhood encouragement have an impact?

There are several possible reasons why receiving parental encouragement to engage with the arts while growing up might have such a strong positive impact on an individual's chances of engaging with the arts as an adult.

Some of the impact is likely to be attributable to the fact that engaging with the arts as a child provides a basic familiarity with the arts experience – what it is, how one goes about getting involved, what happens, how people are expected to behave. Qualitative research suggests that for many these concerns act as a very real barrier to engagement with the arts. The 'arts debate', a large-scale programme of qualitative research among English adults conducted in 2006–07, found that many people were concerned about 'the rules' for engaging with the arts: they were uncertain about what they should wear, how they should behave or what they could expect, particularly when attending arts events<sup>5</sup>. Childhood experience of the arts is likely to play an important role in removing these kinds of barriers.

Furthermore, children who are encouraged to engage in the arts when growing up are likely to learn to consider the arts an appropriate activity for 'people like them'. Early exposure can demystify the arts and make them an attractive, or at least not unusual, possibility for one's leisure time. *Parental* endorsement of arts events and activities as beneficial might have a particularly strong impact on children, since, in the period when children live at home at least, parents tend to be a key influence on the development of child's knowledge, values and sense of social norms. For those children who do not receive such parental endorsement of the arts and have fewer or no opportunities to experience the arts as a child, then, the arts remain a more distant sphere – for some, a sphere that they actively associate with elitism, pretence and exclusion. Qualitative research suggests that such psychological barriers linked to feelings of exclusion are a reality for many people. The 'arts debate' research found a strong sense among those who were less engaged with the arts that they felt the arts were 'not for people like me'<sup>6</sup>.

5 Creative Research (2007). *The arts debate: findings of research among the general public*. London: Arts Council England.

6 Creative Research (2007). *The arts debate: findings of research among the general public*. London: Arts Council England.

The strong effect of childhood engagement could also be argued to be linked to the cognitive aspects of experiencing the arts as a child. For arts participation, becoming familiar with the practices of particular arts activities and gaining firsthand experience as a child in the specific tasks and skills required to play, sing or draw is key to giving an individual confidence and motivation to continue participating throughout their life. Similarly for arts attendance, being taken to classical music concerts, theatre or dance performances or museums and galleries allows a child to become familiar with different artforms. They might understand the content of the artforms better, including what to look for and how to respond. The increased aesthetic familiarity and cognitive confidence may result in enhanced ability to appreciate and gain enjoyment from the arts experiences, and thus a higher chance of actively choosing to engage with the arts as an adult.

## 5 What it means for the Arts Council

This research adds to our evidence about children and young people's engagement with the arts and supports the current direction of policy in this area.

Enabling children and young people's engagement with arts is high on the political agenda. In the Children's Plan, published in December 2007, the Government pledged that by 2011 all children and young people in schools will be entitled to five hours of quality arts and cultural activity every week. A programme of ten pilot programmes – 'Find Your Talent' – was launched in 2008 to turn this ambition into reality<sup>7</sup>. More recently, in the 2008 Labour Party Conference the Government announced that it intends to give a million free tickets to young people to encourage them to experience live theatre<sup>8</sup> – resulting in the recently launched 'A Night Less Ordinary' campaign<sup>9</sup>.

Children and young people are also one of the four priority areas in the Arts Council's plan for 2008–11<sup>10</sup>. This commitment will build on a long history of Arts Council work to meet the needs of children and

<sup>7</sup> See DCMS Corporate Plan 2008, p.7. [culture.gov.uk/images/publications/DCMS\\_Corporate\\_Plan\\_2008\\_PDF.pdf](http://culture.gov.uk/images/publications/DCMS_Corporate_Plan_2008_PDF.pdf) and [findyourtalent.org/content/about.html](http://findyourtalent.org/content/about.html)

<sup>8</sup> See [culture.gov.uk/reference\\_library/media\\_releases/5479.aspx](http://culture.gov.uk/reference_library/media_releases/5479.aspx)

<sup>9</sup> See [anightlessordinary.org.uk](http://anightlessordinary.org.uk)

<sup>10</sup> See [artscouncil.org.uk/plan](http://artscouncil.org.uk/plan)

young people, including programmes and initiatives such as Creative Partnerships, Arts Award and Artsmark<sup>11</sup>.

The underlying assumption behind these initiatives is that engaging children and young people with the arts is good both for the young people themselves and for society more broadly. The potential positive outcomes that are often mentioned can be grouped under three broad types:

- *immediate* positive educational, emotional and behavioural benefits for the children and young people themselves (for example, enjoyment, self confidence, communication skills, creative thinking)
- potential *short-* and *long-term* benefits to wider society (for example, reduction in crime or anti-social behaviour, an improved economic situation due to more skilled workforce)
- potential *long-term* impact on children's attitudes towards and engagement with the arts, with potential benefits for the children (enabling life-long enjoyment of the arts) and the arts sector (building arts audiences and practitioners for the future)

The evidence in this briefing underpins some of the assumptions in the third category. The analysis shows that being exposed to arts events and encouraged to participate in arts activities when growing up indeed makes a positive contribution to the chances of people developing a life-long interest in and active relationship with the arts. The strength of this effect is significant, nearly comparable in magnitude to that of education – one of the strongest predictors of arts engagement.

These findings are particularly relevant in the light of existing evidence on the 'greying' audience base of many arts events. Once other factors (such as health and income) have been taken into account, older people are significantly more likely to attend most arts events – classical music, opera, theatre, ballet and dance – than younger adults, with video arts events and carnivals being the sole exceptions to the rule<sup>12</sup>. Increasing engagement by young people could thus be crucial in ensuring that the arts are able to survive and

<sup>11</sup> See [creative-partnerships.org](http://creative-partnerships.org), [artsaward.org.uk](http://artsaward.org.uk), [artscouncil.org.uk/artsmark](http://artscouncil.org.uk/artsmark)

<sup>12</sup> See Taking Part artform briefings (No. 4–9) available at [artscouncil.org.uk/takingpart](http://artscouncil.org.uk/takingpart) and Keaney, E. and Oskala, A (2007). 'The golden age of the arts? Taking Part survey findings on older people and the arts', *Cultural Trends*, 64 (4), 2007, 323-355.

flourish in the future, if it leads, as the evidence suggests, to their continuing engagement in the arts as they get older.

In this context, the age group differences in the level of childhood encouragement to engage in the arts might give us some cause for optimism. The data suggests that in the course of the 20th century, the proportion of parents who encourage their children to engage in the arts has increased. If the correlation between childhood encouragement and adult arts engagement observed in this briefing continues to hold (that is, if the people who are encouraged to engage when growing up continue to engage in the arts as adults at a level higher than the current average), we might expect the level of arts engagement to be at least maintained in the future and possibly to increase. Other ongoing social changes, such as the increasing number of people gaining higher educational qualifications – a feature that tends to correlate with higher levels of arts engagement – might further support this trend.

The same pattern might of course *not* hold in the future, due to a range of reasons. For example, young people today are also exposed to a wide range of other experiences, which might have a more significant impact on their future tastes and preferences than engagement with the types of activities looked at in this report.

In any case, the demographic analysis suggests that the social inequalities in the take-up of arts opportunities are not about to disappear – they are connected to long-lasting social norms, lifestyle and behavioural patterns and are perpetuated from one generation to another, partly mediated by parents. We have seen that boys (as compared with girls) and children from Black or minority ethnic backgrounds (as compared with white children) are less likely to be taken to arts events by their parents or to receive parental encouragement to participate in arts activities when growing up, reflecting and perpetuating the current gender and ethnicity inequalities in the take-up of arts opportunities.

Providing more opportunities for children to engage in the arts outside the family context, and targeting particularly those children who are less likely to receive parental encouragement, might be

one way to ensure that a larger number of people have a chance to experience and become familiar with the arts when growing up. This could take the form of activities in school lessons, after-school activities organised by the school or other evening and weekend activities in community venues. The ongoing Find Your Talent pilots will provide important insights on the relative merits of different delivery methods. Further research is needed, however, to fully understand the relative role and potential of the family, the school, peers, the media and other external agencies in the shaping of children's attitudes, values and preferences when it comes to arts and culture. We do not know, for example, whether attending a school trip to the theatre would have the same impact as being taken to the same show by one's parents.

<sup>13</sup> See *From Indifference to enthusiasm* report, pages 65–67, [artscouncil.org.uk/takingpart](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/takingpart)

In addition, the Arts Council, alongside our partners in government and the arts community, will need to continue to work to improve the accessibility and approachability of current arts opportunities for both adults and children. The lessons from previous research suggest that it is important to tackle both practical and psychological barriers to arts engagement<sup>13</sup>. Practical barriers such as cost and access could be tackled by offering reduced cost or free of charge taster sessions, providing family-friendly events and ensuring even provision of arts opportunities across the country. Psychological barriers – the feelings of exclusion, uncertainty and nervousness – are much harder to tackle. Arts organisations need to continue to work to be welcoming, accessible and provide a range of experiences relevant to a wide range of people, reflecting the richness and diversity of contemporary society.

Participants in the 'arts debate' research suggested that information and marketing could also be a part of the solution: more people might be persuaded that the arts are for 'people like them' if they had more information not only about the artistic content but also about the practicalities of taking part, such as dress code and etiquette. Arts Council England is currently in the process of planning a large-scale national participation campaign that aims to break down some of these barriers to engagement and to encourage the broadest range of people across England to enjoy artistic experiences.

## 6 Suggestions for further study

The Taking Part adult survey only collects broad indicators of childhood arts experiences within the family, and it cannot answer all questions. One key area for further research is the relative impact of family, school and other agencies at various stages in people's lives. A better understanding of the particular role that educational institutions can play in building children and young people's cultural resources would be of particular policy importance, since most policy initiatives and programmes aimed at children operate through the state school system.

We hope that some of these questions can be answered in future studies, using data from the newly-available Taking Part child survey, which collects data on arts engagement in and outside of school hours among a sample of 11–15-year-olds.

## 7 Finding out more

See [arts council.org.uk/takingpart](https://arts council.org.uk/takingpart) for results of our other analyses of arts engagement patterns using Taking Part survey data.

You can also contact us at [takingpart@arts council.org.uk](mailto:takingpart@arts council.org.uk) with any questions or suggestions for further study.

## Limitations of the data

Due to the question setting and survey methodology, the data has certain limitations that should be borne in mind when considering the findings:

- it is possible that the effects of 'childhood encouragement' are in fact only proxies for other factors for which we do not have information, for example education level of parents. The observed net effect of childhood experience might disappear or be reduced if these factors were taken into account
- as with any retrospective survey, Taking Part is also reliant on accurate recall by participants. This could affect results in a number of ways:
  - ▶ those who are currently engaged in the arts may be more likely to remember early arts experiences as they resonate with current interests
  - ▶ the ability to recall childhood experiences could decrease with age. Therefore differences in the responses of different age groups might in fact be due to recall bias by age
- the types of childhood experience that the survey asks about are very broad and only provide indication of overall levels of childhood encouragement to engage with the visual or performing arts, rather than with specific activities or events

## Glossary

### Arts attendance

Attending at least one of the following at least once in the past 12 months:

- exhibition or collection of art, photography or sculpture
- craft exhibition
- video or electronic art event
- event connected with books or writing
- street arts or circus (not animals)
- carnival
- culturally-specific festival
- play or drama
- other theatre performance (such as musicals, pantomime)
- opera or operetta
- classical music concert
- jazz performance
- other live music event
- ballet
- contemporary dance
- African people's dance, South Asian and Chinese dance
- other live dance event

### Arts participation

Participating in at least one of the following at least once in the past 12 months:

- ballet
- other dance (not for fitness)
- rehearsing/singing to an audience
- rehearsing/playing a musical instrument to an audience
- playing an instrument for pleasure
- writing music
- rehearsing/performing in a play or drama
- rehearsing/performing in an opera
- painting, drawing, etc
- photography
- making films or videos
- creating original artworks or animation using a computer
- textile crafts
- wood crafts
- other crafts
- writing stories or plays
- writing poetry

### Childhood encouragement to attend

The 'encouragement to attend' variable is derived from answers to two questions in the Taking Part survey. The questions ask about the frequency with which the respondent's parents or other adults in their household took them to 'museums or art galleries' and to 'the theatre or to see a dance or classical music performance' when they were growing up (defined as aged 12–15). People are coded based on the highest response given to either question.

### **Childhood encouragement to participate**

The 'encouragement to participate' variable is derived from answers to two questions in the Taking Part survey. The questions ask about the level of encouragement the respondent received from parents or other adults in the household to 'draw or do painting, write stories, poems, plays or music' and to 'play musical instrument(s), act, dance or sing'. People are coded based on the highest response given to either question.

### **Multivariate analysis**

#### ***Multivariate analysis – an explanation***

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

An analytical method called 'multivariate analysis' can be used to find out which factors have an effect, even when all the others are held constant. For instance, we find that for arts attendance overall, ethnicity is a significant factor even after all other things are taken into account. This means that a Black person would be less likely to attend the arts than a white person even if the two had an otherwise identical demographic profile (same income, educational level, job type, family structure and so on). The specific method we have used in this study is called multinomial logistic regression.

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Cover image: Telford Culture Zone: *City of Fires* performance at The Place, Oakengates Theatre, Telford, 2007

Photo: Adrian Burrows