Artists’ earnings trends: 2022 to 2024

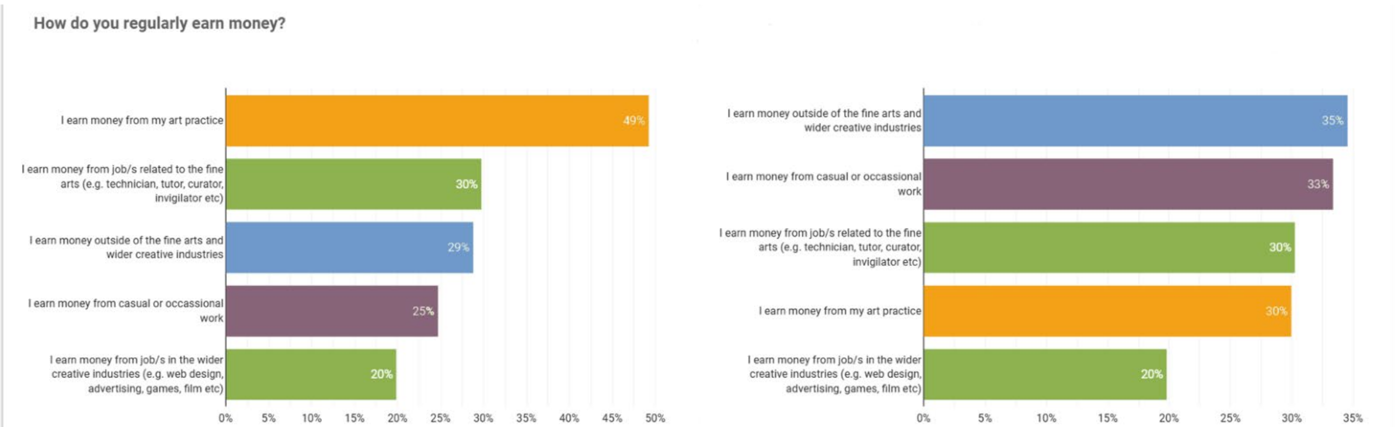
The Applied Partnership has been collecting data to generate insights into how artists live and work since 2017. Each year, we analyse our data to monitor trends and identify challenges in artists' working lives. This article, part of our Applied Insights series, explores shifts in how artists have earned between 2022 and 2024.

Key findings

From 2022 – 2024:

- 20% fewer artists report regularly earning money from their practice
- More artists look for financial stability outside of their arts practice - 6% more earn regularly outside the arts and creative sector, making it the most common source of regular income for artists.
- Employment for artists has become more precarious – casual and sporadic work has increased 8% making it now the second most common form of regular income for artists.
- 20% more artists rely on income from friends and family, risking growing inequity in the sector.
- Artists earn one-off income from a greater range of sources, contributing to precarity of practice.

Decline in practice-related regular income



2022 **2024**

In 2022, nearly half (49%) of respondents reported earning regular income from their artistic practice, making it their most common source of steady earnings. **However, by 2024, this figure had dropped sharply to just 30%—a decline of almost 20%.**

For further info contact programme manager, Russell Martin at r.d.martin@arts.ac.uk or visit artquest.org.uk/research/applied/.

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Instead, the most common source of regular income for artists in 2024 came from work outside the creative industries, reported by 35% of respondents. This represents a 6% increase from 2022, suggesting that **more artists are seeking financial stability in non-artistic fields.**

Additionally, casual or occasional work has become a more significant income source. In 2022, 20% of artists reported earning through sporadic work; by 2024, this figure had risen to 33%, making it the second most common source of regular income, indicating that **employment has become more precarious for artists in the last two years.**

Interestingly, income from jobs directly related to the fine arts (30%) and the broader creative industries (20%) remained unchanged, suggesting a lack of new employment opportunities within these sectors. Indeed, Arts Professional reported nearly 3% drop in employment in the cultural sector based on DCMS figures while the Office of National Statistics cite an overall growth in the UK workforce of 5% between 2022 and 2024. This supports the idea that artists might need increasingly to look outside the creative sector for regular income.

The role of medium in income trends

One possible explanation for the decline in artists earning regularly from their practice is a shift in their primary media. Painting remains the most popular artistic medium, seeing a slight increase from 26% in 2022 to 29% in 2024. However, photography—previously the second most common medium at 15%—saw a dramatic decline, dropping to just 5% in 2024.

In 2022, 59% of photographers reported earning regular income from their practice. So, could the drop in the number of artists earning regular income from their practice be the result of fewer photographers completing the survey? With all media included in the data, in 2022 49% of artists said they earned regularly from their practice vs 30% in 2024. If we exclude photographers from the data, in 2022 46% of artists said they earn regularly from their practice vs 30% in 2024. This suggests that the decline in photography as a primary medium would not have significantly contributed to the broader decrease in regular earnings.

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Changes to sources of income

Where have you received income from over the past year?

Answer	Responses
Freelance work	42.0%
Part-time work	37.6%
Studio sales	20.2%
Grants, bursaries, prizes and awards	16.1%
Online sales	15.4%
Full-time work	15.0%
Casual / temporary work	15.0%
Pension	15.0%
Personal savings / private income	14.8%
Partner support	14.0%
Licensing / royalties from copyright	13.2%
Private commissions	11.8%
Sales via commercial gallery	11.0%
Student loans	10.9%
Family or friends support	9.9%
Other state benefits	8.4%
Exhibition fees	6.9%
Public commissions	6.1%
Residency fees	5.3%
Artist resale right	5.1%

2022 (top 20)

Answer	Responses
Freelance work	43.0%
Part-time work	41.3%
Family or friends support	32.3%
Grants, bursaries, prizes and awards	30.5%
Partner support	29.4%
Student loans	28.5%
Casual / temporary work	26.1%
Personal savings / private income	24.6%
Private commissions	24.6%
Studio sales	23.5%
Sales via commercial gallery	15.4%
Full-time work	15.2%
Online sales	15.2%
Exhibition fees	14.8%
Participatory practice / education projects	10.7%
Other state benefits	9.7%
Pension	9.5%
Public commissions	9.4%
Residency fees	8.9%
Income from property rental	6.2%

2024 (top 20)

Freelancing remained the most popular income source, with 42% of respondents citing it in 2022 and 43% in 2024. Part-time work also saw a slight increase, rising by about 4% over the same period.

However, the ranking of other income sources changed significantly. In 2022, the most common additional sources of income were:

- Studio sales
- Grants, bursaries, and prizes
- Online sales

By 2024, however, financial support from friends, family, and partners had overtaken both studio and online sales. This shift suggests that **more artists are relying on personal networks for financial stability rather than earning directly from their work.** Artists with more wealthy personal networks can better sustain and develop their careers. In a sector already beset with inequity, this reduces social diversity in the arts.

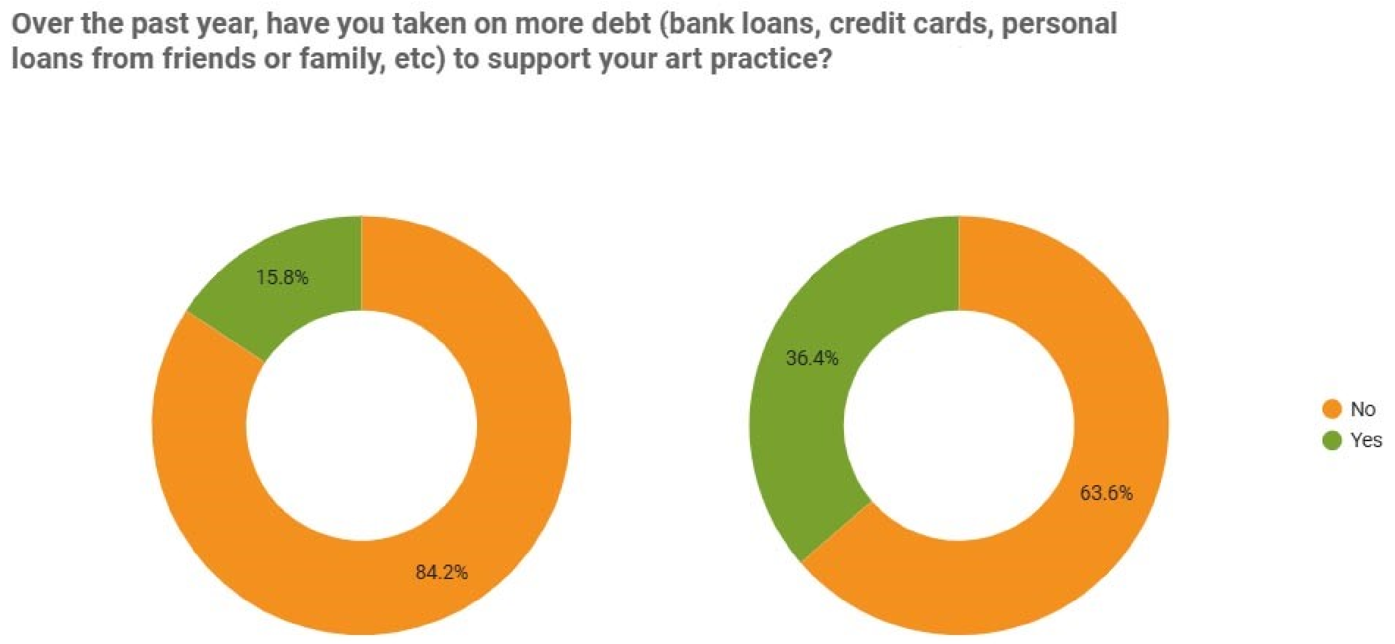
Higher one-off earnings, lower regular income

While regular income for artists went down, one-off income has gone up for several artists. Notably:

- Income from exhibitor fees more than doubled, reported by 7% of artists in 2022 and 15% in 2024.
- Grants and awards were received by 16% of artists in 2022 and 31% in 2024.

How do we explain these increases alongside the drop in regular earnings? One key factor is that these figures capture all sources of income, not just those providing steady earnings. The rise in exhibitor fees and grants suggests that **while more artists are securing one-off financial boosts, these do not necessarily translate into sustained income.**

Debt



2023 **2024**

In the six months to December 2023, 16% of surveyed artists reported taking on more debt to support their practice. By the same period in 2024 this proportion had more than doubled, rising by 20%. **As of December 2024 36% of artists report having taken on more debt to support their practice.**

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Final thoughts

The data reveals a stark and deeply troubling reality for artists in 2024. Fewer and fewer are able to sustain themselves through their creative work, forcing many to seek income outside the arts. More artists now rely on friends, family, and partners just to get by—an alarming sign of growing financial instability and deepening inequality favouring artists with relatively more wealthy support networks. This is not just an economic issue; it's a cultural crisis.

While grants and exhibitor fees have increased, they offer only temporary relief. They do not address the fundamental problem: the lack of sustainable, long-term, stable income sources for artists. If this trend continues, only those with independent wealth will be able to sustain an artistic career, leaving us with a homogenised, shallow artistic landscape—one that fails to reflect the full richness and diversity of society.

Russell Martin, Artquest's director, said:

"The situation has been worsening since at least 2010, but our analysis highlights a new low. Artists have been clamouring for decades for their labour, as well as their art works, to be properly valued. But the situation is clearly getting worse. Arts Council England, public and private funding bodies, the commercial sector and arts organisations must step up to provide co-ordinated, real, lasting financial support — through enforced fair pay, strategic funding, and policies that recognise and value artistic labour. The arts, and the UK's wider creative industries, cannot meet its potential if only a the relatively more privileged can afford to participate with the majority of creative practitioners trapped in precarious careers. It's time to act before we lose the voices that make our culture truly vibrant and meaningful."

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