

Women in the Arts Survey

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The first survey in a 5 year Women in the Arts research
project

WOMEN IN THE ARTS 2026



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INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This survey is the first survey in the new 5 year Women in the Arts research project.

The 5 year Women in the Arts research project follows the 5 year Women in Theatre research project, which was led by myself and run in partnership with The Writers' Guild of Great Britain, Equity, WOW, Sphinx Theatre, Black Womxn in Theatre, ERA 50:50, University Women in the Arts, the Women in Theatre Lab, Parents and Carers in Performing Arts and Aurora Metro Books amongst other partners.

The 5 year Women in Theatre research project led to the break-through moment of Arts Council England agreeing to launch a year long task and finish group to investigate discrimination against women in the arts as a result of our research.

This research report will be passed to Arts Council England's task and finish group and will be followed by future surveys to ensure every woman working in the arts has had the opportunity to have her thoughts heard.

New partners, in addition to the original partners outlined above, include Fashion Roundtable so we can ensure we reach out to women across the arts over the course of the 5 years.

The project coincides with the launch of Women in the Arts and Women in Theatre, the new organisations supporting women working in the arts in the UK which are also the next stage of the 5 year Women in Theatre research project.

Key findings from this first survey include:

- Only 2.7% of respondents believe that there is not gender inequality in the arts. This suggests that urgent action is needed.
- Key findings in terms of reasons for gender inequality in the arts include sexism/unconscious bias, issues of trust, age discrimination, leadership issues and caring responsibilities.
- Only 10.81% of respondents felt that opportunities for women have increased post-pandemic, despite pandemic promises to take action on issues like the majority of caring responsibilities falling on women, which the pandemic shone of a light on.
- Key findings in terms of reasons for the lack of increase in opportunities include actions haven't matched words, more women have lost their jobs as



a result of the pandemic, lack of a clarity on what action has been taken, unconscious bias, perceptions of risk.

- 87.84% of respondents feel class/socio-economic background affects women's career success in the arts. This suggests that action must be taken to ensure support does not accidentally benefit primarily women from more privileged financial backgrounds who might have more time to write applications etc. We looked at this area based on the 5 year Women in Theatre research project's findings that this is a recurrent issue.
- 68.92% of respondents feel age affects women's career success in the arts. In terms of this area, there was a significant difference between those respondents who worked in artistic roles and those in management roles. 100% of those working in artistic roles stated age affects women's career success in the arts versus 52% of management, suggesting further research into the difference of perception between these two groups would be useful.
- 86.49% of respondents felt parenting affects women's careers in the arts more than men's. Again, there was a significant difference between artistic roles (with 100% of these respondents feeling parenting affects women's careers in the arts) compared with management (76%). This suggests further research into the difference between these two groups and whether providing male and female managers with statistical information on other roles and providing organisations with information on how to address issues could be a helpful solution to close this gap.
- In terms of challenges, over 75% of respondents had experienced sexism/unconscious bias.
- In terms of useful solutions, funding for women (68.49%) and leadership programmes for women (64.38%) were the most popular potential solutions.

Based on this research, our recommendations are as follows:

1. **Research** - for further research to be carried out on the difference in perception between male and female managers and those in other roles in the arts and what information funders and policymakers could provide to organisations to close this gap of perception, for example our findings suggest providing information on challenges facing different roles and statistics would be helpful.



2. **Parenting** - for programmes to ensure support is provided to primary caregivers to avoid issues seen in other industries where parenting programmes have accidentally benefitted primarily those providing the lesser amount of care as they had more time to write applications for schemes etc.
3. **Taskforce** - for Arts Council England's taskforce to lay out tangible outcomes to address these issues. Funding for women and leadership programmes were highlighted by respondents as particularly desired outcomes. Sexism and unconscious bias was highlighted as a particular problem, suggesting ACE providing guidance to funded organisations on unconscious bias and/or on it's website would be useful. Our research into practices in other countries, such as Australia, has found many organisations providing funding require applicants to meet targets (often population parity as a fair measure of ensuring fair representation). In terms of discrimination, we recommend Arts Council England collects data on experience in addition to representation and it is surprising ACE only collects data on representation. We also recommend a UK equivalent of Australia's creative equity website, which provides open access to tools to improve representation and discrimination, and highlight Creative Scotland's call for applicants to trial best practice ideas to improve parenting as a project which could be replicated in terms of women more generally. We are currently developing these final two recommendations and would recommend ACE partners with us on these measures.
4. **Policy** - for policymakers, ACE and the government to consider sexism/unconscious bias as a challenge being experienced by over three quarters of women who work in the arts and how best to address this issue via providing information on unconscious bias, targets where appropriate, training and other measures. Although quotas remain controversial, countries like Australia request those applying for funding often meet targets (for example population parity where targets are set according to percentages of the population is seen as one fair way of addressing issues). Leadership programmes and funding for women was also the most wanted forms of support and mentoring has been shown to benefit women at all stages of careers. Collecting data on experience (such as discrimination) as well as representation would also help address this issue.
5. **Pandemic promises** - for policy makers, the government and Arts Council England to consider how to deliver on pandemic promises of improving opportunities for women in the arts and women in general.



6. **Age** - for age discrimination to be addressed, particularly given the new challenge of AI which other research has found is often prejudiced against older women as it looks for past hiring trends, with the danger that past roles have often been occupied by men and thus older women are being eliminated by AI filters. The potential of AI's use in hiring to exacerbate age discrimination in terms of women is an urgent issue in need of addressing, as well as other measures to specifically address age discrimination in the arts.

This report is the first report in a new 5 year Women in the Arts research project, expanding our previous research project to cover all forms of the arts. We hope these findings are useful for the Arts Council task and finish group, the government and other policymakers, arts organisations and others.

Dr Jennifer Tuckett

CEO, Women in the Arts and Women in Theatre on behalf of the Women in the Arts and Women in Theatre research projects



KEY FINDING ONE

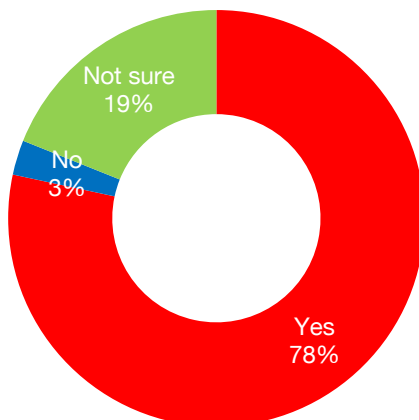
Only 2.72% of female respondents believed there is not gender inequality in the arts.

78.32% thought there is gender inequality (as in, things not being equal) and 18.92% were not sure.

If looked at by roles, 95.45% of respondents who said they worked in artistic jobs felt there is gender inequality in the arts (as in things not being equal).

These are shocking figures indicating nearly all respondents feel things are unequal and suggest urgent action is needed to address gender inequality in the arts.

Is there gender inequality in the arts?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure



KEY FINDING TWO

In terms of why gender inequality is occurring, via a process of coding, the following key themes were identified from respondent's responses:

1. Sexism and unconscious bias:

Examples of this from respondents include:

"I made an entire musical on my own and yet the men involved went above and beyond to try and diminish my involvement and my legal rights. I had to fight tooth and nail to regain control of 100% of my rights."

"I know, have always known, from personal experience that girls and women don't get the same opportunities as boys and men. I am a life long feminist and I'm 75 now. I have a really successful career as an artist, which is ongoing - and yet every single step is a battle and I have never, despite my success, achieved parity of esteem or parity of opportunity compared to my peers, and younger people. I'm proud my work inspires women, old and young, but having to battle so hard, never winning awards, ceaselessly being underestimated and patronised is SO BORING! I'm cheerful by nature and won't give up - but I'm weary of misogyny, hidden or exposed. I could say more, so glad to have this chance to take part in research."

"I have always been treated differently as a woman... patronised, bullied etc"

2. Issues of trust:

Examples of this from respondents include:

"Both practical and systemic: a lot of male writers are trusted on larger stages in comparison to women, we also value 'traditional' artforms over the more experimental, female experience or storytelling"

"Men are able to fail upwards whereas female playwrights are not trusted on bigger stages and often told there's not an audience for our work. Also we are often encouraged to make our female characters more likeable instead of having complex multi faceted women - this isn't the same about male characters."

3. Age discrimination:

Examples of this from respondents include:



“Men's voices seem to be heard more, women are experiencing difficulty getting roles over the age of 55, large theatres predominately have men in artistic roles.”

“Women and particularly Global Majority artists are not platformed enough, their stories are not commissioned as regularly. Even worse when combined with ageism”

“I’m an actor and there are twice as many roles for my male colleagues as there are for me. There are even fewer roles for actresses over 50.”

“From my personal experience whilst we have seen a few more females entering into the arts in top positions such as Artistic Directors or Co-Artistic Directors, film directors and writers there are not enough especially I feel in the older ages of 60 onwards especially new writers or artists that have expanded their artistic reach or are looking to expand their skillsets and artistic practices”

4. Leadership issues:

Examples of this from respondents include:

“Often men still in managerial roles”

“Whilst the sector seems to have more women workers, those earning the most in the sector are still predominantly male. The impact of caring responsibilities still falls mostly on women, impacting career progression unless truly flexible working practices can be adopted.”

“Because parenting and working in the leisure sector are challenging to combine. In particular if you are touring, or in leadership. There is a basic assumption that a 40hr week in leadership is actually a 50-60hr week, because the jobs have in the past mostly been done by men without children, or those who could afford that amount of time because someone else was looking after the home. I have been phoned by recruitment consultants for leadership roles and when I asked if they would consider a job share, they have phoned back to say the trustees think that isn't possible at c-suite level. Happily, that seems to be changing (e.g. RSC, WNO), but that was only 4 years ago. I stayed at the same salary level from 27 years old to 37 years old - unsurprisingly the decade in which I had two children. It was only with COVID when working from home became the norm that I was able to increase my hours and take a corresponding leap up the ladder. Work part time, if not a career killer, is absolutely a career staller in my experience.”

“I think women don’t see representation at leadership levels and women seem to suffer more from imposter syndrome”



“Because men always rise to the top, despite the arts being dominated by women. Less experienced and talented men often get senior roles over more experienced and talented women. And men are still paid more for the same roles.”

5. Caring responsibilities:

Examples of this from respondents include:

“Childbirth and rearing, (where women are the primary carer) and medical issues specific to women make it difficult to meet the expectations of a 24/7 sector.”

“Greater recognition of male choreographers. Perceived 'easier' pathway into performance roles/ education streams for men. 'Timeline' on female performers who want to have children. Male-led organisations with female subordinates.”

“Whilst colleagues are supportive and I am not made to feel unequal as such, the infrastructures and habits of the art world are still geared to non-caregiving males and often exclude female caregivers.”

“It's like most other sectors. There is a systemic imbalance in representation, in pay, and in recognition. Male practitioners overwhelmingly dominate key creative roles, and caring responsibilities mean that women are disproportionately forced to turn down leadership roles due to for example, a lack of flexible working.”



KEY FINDING THREE

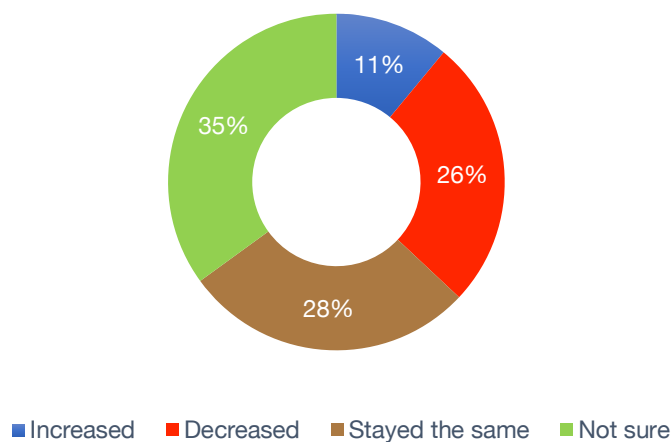
In terms of whether opportunities for women have increased, stayed the same or decreased since the pandemic, only 10.81% of respondents felt opportunities had increased.

25.69% felt opportunities had decreased, 28.38% felt opportunities had stayed the same and 35.14% were not sure.

This is significant given pandemic promises that areas like the majority of caring responsibilities falling on women, which the pandemic had shone a light on, would be addressed.

This suggests that urgent action needs to be taken to address pandemic promises.

Do you feel opportunities for women have increased, stayed the same or decreased since the pandemic?





KEY FINDING FOUR

In terms of why opportunities haven't increased, the following key themes were identified:

1. Action hasn't matched words:

Examples of this from respondents include:

"Whilst there is more public championing of female work, the reality is that the pay is low, hours unsociable and careers have no stability. Still fewer female leaders at the major organisations."

"Conversations and consultation sessions with organisations through lock-down (all unpaid time as freelancers, in discussion with those on a pay-roll), assured that we would "come back better" as an industry - casting is more last minute, communication is poorer, and wages have not reflected the general economic conditions."

2. More women lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic:

Examples of this from respondents include:

"I don't have statistical data to rely on but it certainly feels like more men are being employed at a senior level in arts centres and more women are leaving."

"women were at the forefront of the pandemic with unpaid caring responsibilities and this remains an issue. There have also been funding cuts and hiring freezes which have impacted women and their career progression."

3. Lack of clarity:

Examples of this from respondents include:

"It still isn't clear where adjustments that meet the needs of women are and what support is on offer. Judgement affecting women's abilities to both ask for support and organisations ability to deliver remain unclear at the point of recruitment."

4. Unconscious bias:

Examples of this from respondents include:



“The centre ground, and gate keepers, are so often men, or people with privilege, who don't know what they don't know about other peoples lives. They are aware, and feel uncomfortable, about the changes that need to happen.... . and women, mothers, girls so hugely disliked or not understood - there isn't a box for us.”

“When Artistic leaders and producers are working within financial insecurity they make programming decisions they see as less risky. This often means reviving existing plays written in periods of greater sexism. They also choose to employ creatives they see as a "safe pair of hands" which often means male creatives as previous decades had less opportunities for women to build a track record”

5. Perceptions of risk:

Examples of this from respondents include:

“Overall opportunities have gone down, and with fewer opportunities why take either the one considered a risk or the one that needs flexibility!”

“Opportunities for female writers are viewed as a risk. Since the pandemic budgets have squeezed and studios take less risks. Women apparently are niche. So we are now a no-go area.”

6. Ageism:

Examples of this from respondents include:

“This is from my perspective as an older female Asian actor; I can certainly feel the dearth of roles year on year. The prospect looks even bleaker looking ahead.”

“Speaking personally as a female over the age of 60, of the global majority and from a minority within the British minorities I feel that opportunities for people like or similar to myself have decreased”

7. Working from home has helped however:

Examples of this from respondents include:

“WFH has made the juggle easier and possible to deliver higher quality work with a more flexible approach”

“Because organisations are more open to flexible working requests and working from home. Where prior to COVID there was just an assumption that if you were not



at work, you were not working - there has been a fundamental shift in understanding around how productive home workers can be. Flexible working has enabled me to return to a full time leadership role that I would not have considered pre-COVID.”



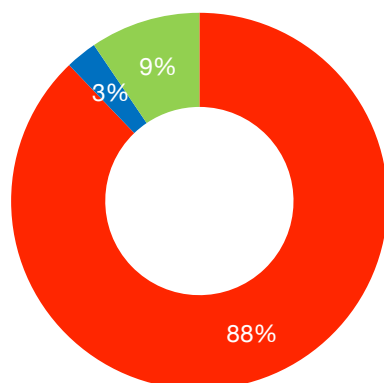
KEY FINDING FIVE

We looked at three problem areas identified by the 5 year Women in Theatre research project. The first of these areas was the impact of class/socio-economic background.

87.84% of respondents felt class/socio-economic background affects women's career success in the arts. Only 2.70% felt it doesn't and 9.46% were not sure.

These are shocking findings which suggest initiatives to support women must make sure this additional challenge is taken into account to ensure it is not just those from a more privileged financial position, with potentially more time to spend on areas like applications forms, who benefit from support.

Do you think class/socio-economic background affects women's career success in the arts?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure



KEY FINDING SIX

Key themes in terms of why class/socio-economic background affects women's careers in the arts included:

1. The problem of the arts and financial precarity:

Examples of this from respondents include:

"It really pays to have money if you're going to attempt a career in the arts."

"It's literally impossible to make a living in the arts early on. Without savings, parental support, partner support or other financial backing, you're unable to take time off from work. Early on, then, it's necessary to work full time and try to create in the evenings, weekends etc. In my early years, I was working 90+ hours per week to try and make a career because I didn't have any additional income. It was both financially and mentally devastating."

2. Inequality in terms of class in the arts:

Examples of this from respondents include:

"I work in drama schools and note that there is still inequality regarding working class students. I led on a Conference for Drama Schools report on Diversity in the industry about 12 years ago and received much anecdotal evidence about lack of inclusion."

"Women from working class backgrounds don't have the same social capital nor understanding of fundraising adequately nor the language to be trusted in the arts. Not the ability, just the language, and networks."

3. The combined impact of socio-economic disadvantage and gender:

Examples of this from respondents include:

"Due to access in the arts and costs being so high for working class females. Numbers are increasing of interest into the theatre which is fantastic but the opportunities are slimming due to already established or more wealthy women."

"Most Women I see in leadership roles have come from more privileged backgrounds, there are very few women from working class backgrounds represented."



“Barriers to entry are greater and access is more difficult. Women from more resource constrained backgrounds are also unlikely to have been exposed to the arts in education, extra curricular, etc. as it's quickly deprioritised.”

“Because many women need to earn more than a lot of jobs in the arts can pay.”

“It's always a help - this situation no different - but probably harder. Intersectional issues VIP to consider - eg woman/black/disabled.”

4. The impact of children and caring:

Examples of this from respondents include:

“I personally feel if I was to have children I wouldn't be able to continue working in this industry because of the long hours and low pay. The salary I am on at the moment wouldn't feel enough to provide for a family as it is a struggle with the rising costs of living at the moment.”

“Absolutely - women have to be more available to carer for parents, children etc, and those without financial means to allow for this have to sacrifice careers.”

“Staying afloat on low income and precarious work is difficult for anyone from a working class background. Working class creatives often have to work multiple jobs to supplement their income from creative work in a way that an artist from a higher socio-economic background does not. If a woman wants to start a family as a freelancer there is no work place Maternity leave. So being a mother and creative is increasingly impossible. Taking time out to start a family with a more secure financial footing has an impact on women's career trajectory.”

“If every spare minute is filled up getting enough money to pay for food, school uniform leisure activities for your children bills, cooking cleaning laundry and then trying to look after your own body and mind, where on earth is the space to be Creative? This is absolutely a wealth/class issue. I am a highly educated and successful writer, who as soon as single parent Hood hit sold the difference. I've now been a single parent since my child was two – he is 15 now. The environment in which we work has changed, but wealth and free time would definitely have kept my neck above water.”

5. Access to the arts at school:

Examples of this from respondents include:



“Access to arts from a younger age impacts potential aspiration for arts career. Those not accessing creative subjects through education/ extracurricular activities will be unaware of creative careers and potential.”

“Most creative careers will have started through exposure to the arts and creativity in childhood. If someone comes from a family experiencing economic disadvantage, it is less likely that money will have been prioritised for creative engagement. The only balance to this is a vastly improved commitment to creative education in schools.”

“In fashion there has always been a high proportion of people from high socio-economic backgrounds and the STEM education agenda in state schools has exacerbated what I call “the Downton Abbey effect”, which leads to the arts drawing from a pool of privately educated talent.”

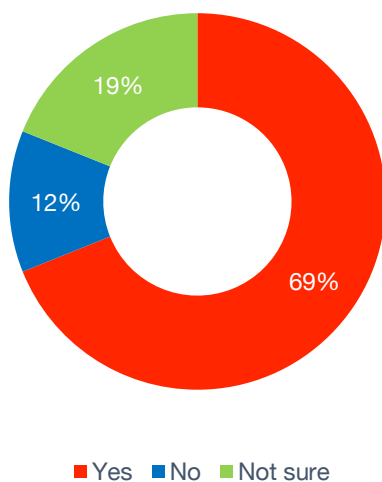


KEY FINDING SEVEN

In terms of whether age affects women's career success in the arts, 68.92% of respondents felt it does. 12.16% of respondents felt it doesn't and 18.92% of respondents weren't sure.

There was also a notable difference between those respondents working in artistic and management roles with 100% of those respondents in artistic roles feeling age affects women's career success in the arts whilst only 52% of those respondents in management roles felt appearance affects women's career success in the arts.

Do you think age affects women's career success in the arts?





KEY FINDING EIGHT

In terms of why age affects women's careers in the arts, the following key themes were identified.

1. The importance placed on appearance for women:

Examples of this from respondents included:

"The way a woman looks is scrutinized heavily."

"Women are under more pressure to look young. Often younger actresses are cast to play opposite men who are older for parts that are supposed to be the same age."

2. Age discrimination:

Examples of this from respondents included:

"There are less opportunities for older women."

"I note my friends in our 60s and I often refer to 'being too old' for certain jobs. This may not be based on evidence but it is significant we feel it. I have noted redundancies in universities or drama schools, or a cutting of hours. This affects women."

"Too young to be experienced, too old to be current/competent, or potentially popping out a child soon' (not actual opinion- just societal perception of generally women at work!)."

"Older women are sort of hated, uncool, angry, annoying."

"Too inexperienced, then too experienced."

"Young women are not taken seriously and older women are ignored. It seems there is a very small age range where a woman can be relevant"

3. The impact of caring responsibilities:

Examples of this from respondents included:



“The pressure to provide and build a family or home in your 30-40s - it feels impossible to have an 'adult' life as an artist. It's like you either have to commit to being a poor, unstable artist or a regular, run of the mill mother. I don't know how you do both.”

“Depending on circumstances it isn't always possible to have it all whilst working in such a demanding sector where work can be across all hours of the day/night. Progression is difficult when you can't be at the beck and call of your organisation - it remains an expectation.”

“In the period of our lives when we might want to have children, we could be taking critical steps to furthering our careers. Our sector favours people who are 'hot' - coming off another big job, working full time, the next big thing. It also favours youth - the youngest, the best under 35 or 40. It is very, very hard to compete with that when coming back from maternity leave or a caring break.”

4. Experience not being valued:

Examples of this from respondents included:

“It is harder to find roles the older you get. There is a perception that only young people are worth investing in and wisdom/experience is not valued in society as much as innovation.”

“I think it affects success in many areas as well as arts careers. Recruiters rarely recognise the value of experience and loyalty (which working class women often give in spades as well, due to the need to keep earning). In marketing (my area) there is currently a focus on digital/social, for example, and the belief that only young people can bring an understanding of these areas.”

“Look how often the words Young and emerging are used for any blurb about any initiative. Marketing and PR fixate on it. There seems to be absolutely no celebration of experienced, seasoned, insightful, adult, et cetera. It's always fresh. As if anything that isn't fresh is mouldy.”

5. Lack of flexibility in the workplace:

Examples of this from respondents included:

“Lack of flexibility can drive you away.”



“I see a lot of women who drop out of the workforce and become coaches. Or drop out of full time work to become freelance. I am not too sure if that is due to parenting, perimenopause symptoms or people falling out of love with the industry.”

6. Emphasis on young schemes:

Examples of this from respondents included:

“Writers's schemes favour young people even though older women often have more to say about the world based on experience.”

“Many emerging artist initiatives are aimed at young, graduating artists and not at developing later life-stage artists beginning careers.”

“Casting opportunities drops off at 39 years! Concepts of "early-career" = young. As a performer who has moved into directing (therefore early career), I have not been given the opportunities to assistant direct, despite having all the relevant skills.”

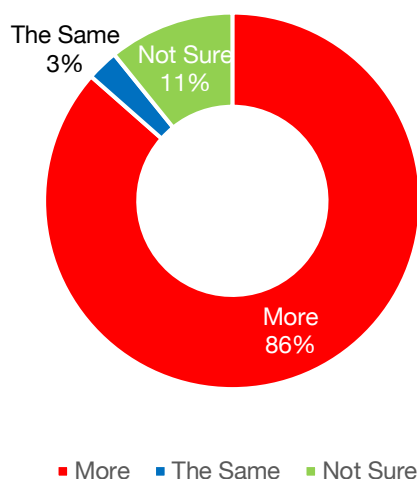


KEY FINDING NINE

In terms of whether parenting affects women's careers in the arts more than men's or the same, 86.49% of respondents felt parenting affects women's careers in the arts more than men's. Only 2.70% of respondents felt it doesn't and 10.81% weren't sure.

There was again a significant difference between artistic respondents and management respondents. 100% of those in artistic roles felt parenting affects women's careers more than men whilst 76% of those in management roles felt this was true. This suggests further research on the difference in perception between these groups and why it is occurring would be useful.

Do you think parenting affects women's careers in the arts more than men's or the same?





KEY FINDING TEN

In terms of why respondents felt parenting affects women's careers in the arts more than men's or the same, key themes were identified as:

1. Societal expectations:

Examples of this from respondents included:

"People expect the woman to be the primary caregiver."

"Goes without saying, doesn't it? Women are expected to do unpaid care."

"Women are generally the default parent and the expectation to raise families as though they don't work and work as though they don't have families is very real."

"Because of societal norms that see women taking on the main care-giver roles - more likely to go part-time after maternity leave for eg and choose to stay in a role or local job while the children are young"

2. Women are still often the primary care-giver:

Examples of this from respondents included:

"obviously pregnancy but also childcare issues. It is usually Mum that has to sort things out."

"Women shoulder most of the caring responsibilities."

"Women are more likely to take on a caring role, particularly when children are young."

"Absolutely more - women are physically needed more at the early stages and this sets up a precedence for the rest of their young lives."

"In life women take most of the burden of parenting, physically initially and then by expectation."

"Despite being 2026, women are still expected to handle household tasks (i.e. laundry, kids, dinner, etc.) while also working and having caring responsibilities for elderly parents. Mothers need to deal with a bigger mental load. If a mother takes



her child to the doctor's, it's to be expected. If a father takes his child to the doctor's, he's applauded for it as a 'good father.'"

3. Hours and nature of work in the arts:

Examples of this from respondents included:

"Many shows are in person, in the evening. Hours can be very anti social. We still assume that the woman will be more of the care giver."

"I feel women have additional responsibilities with babies and younger children like breast feeding for example and they take longer maternity leave to be with their babies which could affect their ability to get back into work. Also, as a technician I would struggle to do a lot of the tasks which are in my job description if I was pregnant."

"Private views are often evenings or weekends. Residencies (out of area) are difficult to participate in with families. Working from home (studio) brings family related distractions."

"Having worked in the creative sector my whole life, I know that the erratic hours necessary to get ahead, are deeply incompatible with pregnancy and motherhood. This is also true for my colleagues in similar positions."

"Absolutely, lots of talented, incredible women have left the sector as the work and hours are not compatible. Even with job share and flexibility."

"Something unique to our sector that other sectors don't have to face so much is events cycles and scheduling. All sorts of events, including but not limited to performances, require evening and weekend working for those both in front of and behind the scenes. This is difficult for a range of different groups but I imagine it's a particular struggle for women with young children. Not being able to attend or work at events for childcare reasons can mean career changes and that they're not in the room where relationships are built and decisions are made."

"I am a mother in the arts and having children has significantly impacted my career vs that of my partners and friends who are fathers. This is due to the traditional rehearsal structures and working hours not being family friendly."

4. The impact of time off:

Examples of this from respondents included:



“Many women/birth parents still take on the bulk of parenting responsibilities. Also the impact of taking time off for maternity/parental leave, not only the gap in working and coming back, but also the impact on salary and how that plays out within a couple. UK parental leave is inequitable.”

“I am a mother and whilst I have a very supportive partner, I am the default for pick ups and phonecalls from school etc. It took me a good few years to resettle back into work post maternity leave and in that time, colleagues of mine had been promoted and gone onto other things.”

“If a woman is either a single mother or a mother in a relationship with the father, still most of the care responsibilities rests with the mother. This will impact their decisions to go for promotion, this then impacts earnings and pension and the numbers of women in leadership roles.”

“Women clearly have to take more time off work.”

“You have to take more time off.”

5. Impact of pay:

Examples of this from respondents included:

“Often paid less, thus default carer and hours ref working evenings.”

“Lots of people working in the arts are self-employed and this is a challenge when it comes to maternity leave.”

“It is a challenge to keep a career going while pregnant/raising a family. As freelancers, we have no maternity leave etc.”

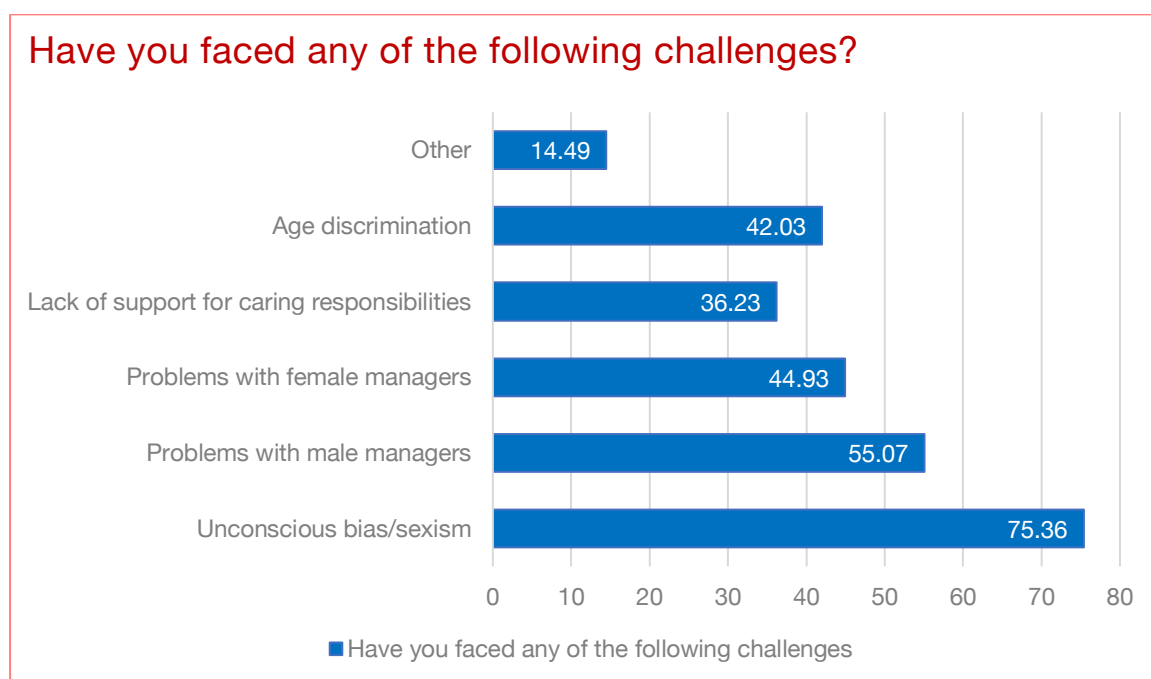


KEY FINDING ELEVEN

Respondents highlighted that they had faced the following challenges.

Unconscious bias/sexism was the most common challenges experienced by 75.36% of respondents.

As over three quarters of respondents have experienced this issue, this suggests urgent action is needed in particular on this issue.



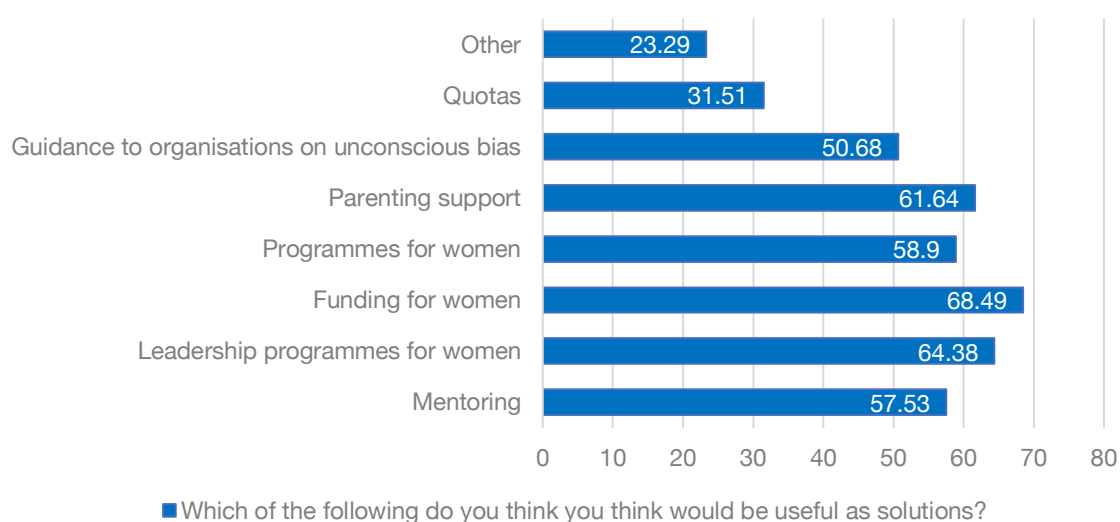


KEY FINDING TWELVE

Respondents highlighted the following as useful solutions.

Funding for women (selected by 68.49% of respondents) and leadership programmes for women (selected by 64.38% of respondents) were the most popular potential solutions.

Which of the following do you think you think would be useful as solutions?





CONCLUSION

This survey is the first survey in the new 5 year Women in the Arts research project.

The 5 year Women in the Arts research project follows the 5 year Women in Theatre research project, which was led by myself and run in partnership with The Writers' Guild of Great Britain, Equity, WOW, Sphinx Theatre, Black Womxn in Theatre, ERA 50:50, University Women in the Arts, the Women in Theatre Lab, Parents and Carers in Performing Arts and Aurora Metro Books amongst other partners.

The 5 year Women in Theatre research project led to the break-through moment of Arts Council England agreeing to launch a year long task and finish group to investigate discrimination against women in the arts as a result of our research.

This research report will be passed to Arts Council England's task and finish group and will be followed by future surveys to ensure every woman working in the arts has had the opportunity to have her thoughts heard.

New partners, in addition to the original partners outlined above, include Fashion Roundtable so we can ensure we reach out to women across the arts over the course of the 5 years.

The project coincides with the launch of Women in the Arts and Women in Theatre, the new organisations supporting women working in the arts in the UK which are also the next stage of the 5 year Women in Theatre research project.

Key findings from this first survey include:

- Only 2.7% of respondents believe that there is not gender inequality in the arts. This suggests that urgent action is needed.
- Key findings in terms of reasons for gender inequality in the arts include sexism/unconscious bias, issues of trust, age discrimination, leadership issues and caring responsibilities.
- Only 10.81% of respondents felt that opportunities for women have increased post-pandemic, despite pandemic promises to take action on issues like the majority of caring responsibilities falling on women, which the pandemic shone of a light on.
- Key findings in terms of reasons for the lack of increase in opportunities include actions haven't matched words, more women have lost their jobs as



a result of the pandemic, lack of a clarity on what action has been taken, unconscious bias, perceptions of risk.

- 87.84% of respondents feel class/socio-economic background affects women's career success in the arts. This suggests that action must be taken to ensure support does not accidentally benefit primarily women from more privileged financial backgrounds who might have more time to write applications etc. We looked at this area based on the 5 year Women in Theatre research project's findings that this is a recurrent issue.
- 68.92% of respondents feel age affects women's career success in the arts. In terms of this area, there was a significant difference between those respondents who worked in artistic roles and those in management roles. 100% of those working in artistic roles stated age affects women's career success in the arts versus 52% of management, suggesting further research into the difference of perception between these two groups would be useful.
- 86.49% of respondents felt parenting affects women's careers in the arts more than men's. Again, there was a significant difference between artistic roles (with 100% of these respondents feeling parenting affects women's careers in the arts) compared with management (76%). This suggests further research into the difference between these two groups and whether providing male and female managers with statistical information on other roles and providing organisations with information on how to address issues could be a helpful solution to close this gap.
- In terms of challenges, over 75% of respondents had experienced sexism/unconscious bias.
- In terms of useful solutions, funding for women (68.49%) and leadership programmes for women (64.38%) were the most popular potential solutions.

Based on this research, our recommendations are as follows:

7. **Research** - for further research to be carried out on the difference in perception between male and female managers and those in other roles in the arts and what information funders and policymakers could provide to organisations to close this gap of perception, for example our findings suggest providing information on challenges facing different roles and statistics would be helpful.



8. **Parenting** - for programmes to ensure support is provided to primary caregivers to avoid issues seen in other industries where parenting programmes have accidentally benefitted primarily those providing the lesser amount of care as they had more time to write applications for schemes etc.
9. **Taskforce** - for Arts Council England's taskforce to lay out tangible outcomes to address these issues. Funding for women and leadership programmes were highlighted by respondents as particularly desired outcomes. Sexism and unconscious bias was highlighted as a particular problem, suggesting ACE providing guidance to funded organisations on unconscious bias and/or on it's website would be useful. Our research into practices in other countries, such as Australia, has found many organisations providing funding require applicants to meet targets (often population parity as a fair measure of ensuring fair representation). In terms of discrimination, we recommend Arts Council England collects data on experience in addition to representation and it is surprising ACE only collects data on representation. We also recommend a UK equivalent of Australia's creative equity website, which provides open access to tools to improve representation and discrimination, and highlight Creative Scotland's call for applicants to trial best practice ideas to improve parenting as a project which could be replicated in terms of women generally. We are currently developing these final two recommendations and would recommend ACE partners with us on these measures.
10. **Policy** - for policymakers, ACE and the government to consider sexism/unconscious bias as a challenge being experienced by over three quarters of women who work in the arts and how best to address this issue via providing information on unconscious bias, targets where appropriate, training and other measures. Although quotas remain controversial, countries like Australia request those applying for funding often meet targets (for example population parity where targets are set according to percentages of the population is seen as one fair way of addressing issues). Leadership programmes and funding for women was also the most wanted forms of support and mentoring has been shown to benefit women at all stages of careers. Collecting data on experience (such as discrimination) as well as representation would also help address this issue.
11. **Pandemic promises** - for policy makers, the government and Arts Council England to consider how to deliver on pandemic promises of improving opportunities for women in the arts and women in general.



12. **Age** - for age discrimination to be addressed, particularly given the new challenge of AI which other research has found is often prejudiced against older women as it looks for past hiring trends, with the danger that past roles have often been occupied by men and thus older women are being eliminated by AI filters. The potential of AI's use in hiring to exacerbate age discrimination in terms of women is an urgent issue in need of addressing, as well as other measures to specifically address age discrimination in the arts.

This report is the first report in a new 5 year Women in the Arts research project, expanding our previous research project to cover all forms of the arts. We hope these findings are useful for the Arts Council task and finish group, the government and other policymakers, arts organisations and others.

Dr Jennifer Tuckett

CEO, Women in the Arts and Women in Theatre on behalf of the Women in the Arts and Women in Theatre research projects



METHODOLOGY

This survey used both quantitative and qualitative questions, inspired by the work of Professor Dawn Bennett whose studies of women in the creative industries have led the way in Australia.

The survey used snowball sampling, including articles in The Stage and Arts Professional in order to reach women working in across the arts, the use of social media and distribution via project partners including The Writers' Guild of Great Britain and Fashion Roundtable, our new partner for fashion.

The survey sample size was 76, which exceeded the central limit theorem of 30, with a 95% confidence level and 11% margin of error, meaning we can be 95% sure results would be around the same (within 11%) were all women working in the arts surveyed.

This initial survey was open from May to June 2026, lays the foundation in terms of discovering areas which need addressing, and will be followed by longer studies of women across the arts over the next 5 years.