

# CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEY



7 May 2025

[info@socialmarketresearch.co.uk](mailto:info@socialmarketresearch.co.uk)  
[www.socialmarketresearch.co.uk](http://www.socialmarketresearch.co.uk)



3 Wellington Park  
Belfast  
BT9 6DJ



02890 923362

# Executive Summary

In November 2024, the Arts Council commissioned Social Market Research (SMR) to undertake a client satisfaction survey. The purpose of the survey was to provide the Arts Council with an overall measure of client satisfaction, as well as generate client feedback on specific areas such as the grant funding application process, staff contact, and the Arts Council website. The survey also sought client views on Arts Council's strategy, its role and values, and how clients can be further supported. The survey was conducted using an online methodology. A total of 602 clients took part (*440 individual artists and 162 artist organisations*), and the survey had response rate of 23%. Fieldwork was conducted in February and March 2025 and in accordance with Market Research Society guidelines and ISO20252: 2019 of which SMR is fully accredited.

## Key Findings

### Client satisfaction

**64%** of clients are satisfied with the Arts Council (*16% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 20% are dissatisfied*).

Satisfaction is significantly higher among those who had their most recent grant funding application approved (**80%**) compared with those who had their most recent funding application rejected (**28%**).

### Applying for funding



- **71%** of clients are satisfied with how Arts Council staff handled their most recent funding application (*14% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 15% are dissatisfied*).



- **54%** of clients had applied for funding in the last 12 months, and 44% had applied for funding more than 12 months ago (*more artist organisations [72%] had applied in the last 12 months compared with individual artists [49%]*)



- **68%** of recent applicants had their funding application approved (26% had their application rejected)



- Individual artists with a disability (**61%**) were significantly less likely to have had their application approved compared with non-disabled artists (**73%**)



- Most applicants were satisfied with the following aspects of the funding application process: communicating funding opportunities (**71%**); the Guidance Notes provided being easy to understand (**66%**); advice provided by Arts Council staff on the application process (**66%**); the length of time taken to get a decision on their application (**59%**); and, the ease of applying for funding (**57%**).



- Compared with non-disabled artists (**13%**), those with a disability (**31%**) were significantly more likely to be dissatisfied with the ease of understanding the Guidance Notes supporting the application process

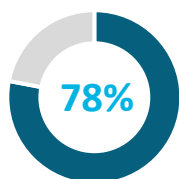


- **22%** of unsuccessful applicants were satisfied with the explanation given for their unsuccessful application.

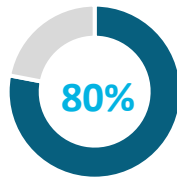


- No or limited feedback / poor communication (**24%**) was the most common reason why clients were dissatisfied with the funding application process, with a more simplified application process the most common suggestion for improving the funding application process (**19%**).

## Client contact with Arts Council staff



78% said their most recent contact with the Arts Council was via email (*phone, 14%; face-to-face, 4%; social media, 0.4%*)



80% of clients are satisfied with Arts Council staff (12% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 8% are dissatisfied).

- Clients reported high levels of satisfaction with Arts Council staff across a range of metrics: staff professionalism (89%); staff expertise in doing their job (88%); staff handling their queries effectively (85%); staff getting back to them when they said they would (84%); staff responsiveness to queries (82%); being able to contact the right member of staff (81%); and, staff knowledge of the Arts (77%).
- Staff not getting back to clients (30%) was the most common reason why some clients are dissatisfied with Arts Council staff, with Arts Council staff meeting clients face-to-face (15%) the most common suggestion for improving client experience of staff.

## The Arts Council website



- 69% of clients are satisfied with the Arts Council website (*24% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 6% are dissatisfied*).



- 90% of clients had visited the Arts Council website in the last 12 months (*40% had visited in the last month*).



- Among visitors to the website, 73% had visited to get information on funding programmes (*to apply for funding, 29%; to get information on current news about the Arts, 29%; get contact details for staff, 23%; get information on research, 6%*).



- 85% of visitors to the Arts Council website found what they were looking for.



- Finding the website difficult to navigate (29%) was the most common reason why a small number of clients were dissatisfied with the website, with rebranding / redesigning the website the most common suggestion for improving the website (25%).

## The Arts Council's strategic objectives



Most clients are satisfied that the Arts Council is delivering on the following strategic outcomes: more people from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences (61%); a sector that is more valued across society and government (55%); and, a sector that contributes to social and economic benefits and cares about the environment (52%).



Less than half of clients are satisfied that the Arts Council is delivering on the following strategic outcomes: a sector that is better supported to develop through experimentation and innovation (48%); a sector that is more valued across society and government (47%); and, a more financially stable arts sector (43%).

## The role of the Arts Council

- **58%** of clients are satisfied with the role of the Arts Council (*20% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 22% are dissatisfied*).
- Most clients are satisfied that the Arts Council is: acting as an advocate for the Arts (**60%**); communicating the Arts Council's objectives clearly (55%); and, managing expectations about the support the Arts Council can provide (52%).
- Relatively lower levels of satisfaction were recorded by clients for the role of the Arts Council in: organising networking and knowledge exchange events for people in the arts (**41%**); enabling innovation and artistic risk taking in the arts sector (45%); and, producing research and evaluation about the sector (45%).
- The view that the Arts Council should be more of an advocate for art (**21%**) was the most common reason why some clients are dissatisfied with the role of the Arts Council, with more money from government and more money distributed to the arts (28%), the most common suggestion for improving the role of the Arts Council.

## Arts Council values

- **65%** of clients are satisfied that the Arts Council is committed to diversity in the arts sector, with 65% satisfied that the Arts Council is committed to being inclusive and accessible to all.

## Relationships, perception, further supporting clients and communication



- **49%** of clients believe they have a strong relationship with the Arts Council (*41% say they do not and 10% are undecided*) [*artist organisations [64%] are more likely to say they have a strong relationship compared with individual artists [43%]*].



- Supportive and helpful were the most dominant themes when clients were asked to describe the personality of the Arts Council.



- **50%** of clients believe the Arts Council can better support them as clients, with more money from government / distribution of money to the arts (11%), and being open to applications from different projects / people (10%), the most common suggestions on how clients can be better supported.



- **52%** say that email communication from the Arts Council is most important to them.



- In terms of wider perception of the Arts Council, most clients agree that they: trust the Arts Council to work for the arts sector (**70%**); the Arts Council has a positive impact on them or their organisation (69%); and, the Arts Council works in a fair and transparent manner (58%).



- Slightly less than half of clients agree that: the Arts Council is an efficient and effective organisation (**49%**); and, the Arts Council listens to them (48%).



## Conclusions

On the key indicator of overall satisfaction, most clients say they are satisfied with the Arts Council. This should be seen as positive given that overall satisfaction is significantly associated with the outcome of grant funding applications, with successful grant applicants almost three times more likely to be satisfied compared with unsuccessful grant applicants. This link between client satisfaction and outcome of grant funding application is a consistent pattern across all survey measures, with unsuccessful applicants for funding less satisfied.

As with overall satisfaction, the survey shows that regardless of outcome of their funding application, a majority of clients are satisfied with specific aspects of service such as the funding application process, contact with Arts Council staff, and the Arts Council website. Although most are satisfied across these key areas, clients made suggestions on how services can be further improved including improved communication of the reasons why an application has been unsuccessful, staff getting back to clients, and improved navigation of the Arts Council website.

In terms of strategy, most clients are satisfied that the Arts Council is delivering on key outcomes such as more people from all backgrounds enjoying arts experiences, a sector that is more valued across society and government, and a sector that contributes to social and economic benefits and cares about the environment. However, fewer clients are satisfied that the Arts Council is delivering in terms of a sector that is better supported to develop through experimentation and innovation, a sector that is more valued across society and government, and a more financially stable arts sector.

Most clients are satisfied with the role of the Arts Council. In terms of specific aspects, although most are satisfied with the role of the Arts Council as an advocate for the arts, clients score the Arts Council lower on organising networking and knowledge exchange events for people in the arts, and enabling innovation and artistic risk taking in the arts sector. In terms of values, almost two out of three clients are satisfied that the Arts Council is committed to diversity in the arts sector, and that the Arts Council is committed to being inclusive and accessible to all.

Although almost half of clients believe they have a strong relationship with the Arts Council, a significant number believe they do not. Further strengthening of relationships with clients is critical to client satisfaction, given the finding that those who believe they have a strong relationship with the Arts Council are more likely to report a higher level of satisfaction. The survey provides strong evidence of further opportunities to strengthen relations with clients, with half of clients of the view that the Arts Council can better support them as clients.

Finally, although slightly less than half of clients agree that the Arts Council is an efficient and effective organisation and, that the Arts Council listens to them, most say they trust the Arts Council to work for the arts sector, most agree the Arts Council has a positive impact on them or their organisation, and most agree that the Arts Council works in a fair and transparent manner.



# Introduction

## Background

In November 2024, the Arts Council for N Ireland commissioned Social Market Research (SMR) to undertake a client satisfaction survey. This report presents the findings from this survey and it is anticipated that the findings will further support the Arts Council in terms of its '*...mission to broaden and deepen engagement with the arts and to address critical societal issues, such as poor mental health and social isolation, through arts funding*'. Moreover, it is expected that the results from this survey will help signpost the Arts Council in terms of identifying areas where it can better support and strengthen its relationship with clients.

## Survey Aim and Objectives

The survey aim was to:

*'...understand the experience of our clients, gather their feedback, and assess how well ACNI has met their needs and expectations'.*

Within this overall aim the survey had a number of attendant objectives focusing on:

The grant funding application process;

- Client contact with ACNI staff;
- The ACNI website;
- ACNI's strategic objectives;
- The role of ACNI and its values;
- Client relationship with ACNI;
- Communication with clients;
- Client perception of ACNI;
- Client demographics.

## Research Methodology

The survey was sent by e-mail to 2,647 unique organisations / individuals who had applied for funding in the last three full financial years. A total of 602 responses were received.

## Note on Reporting

Where differences between client subgroups (*e.g. between individual artists and artist organisations*) are alluded to in the report commentary, these differences are statistically significant at the 95% Confidence Interval.

## Sample Profile

Table 1 presents an overview of the achieved sample profile.

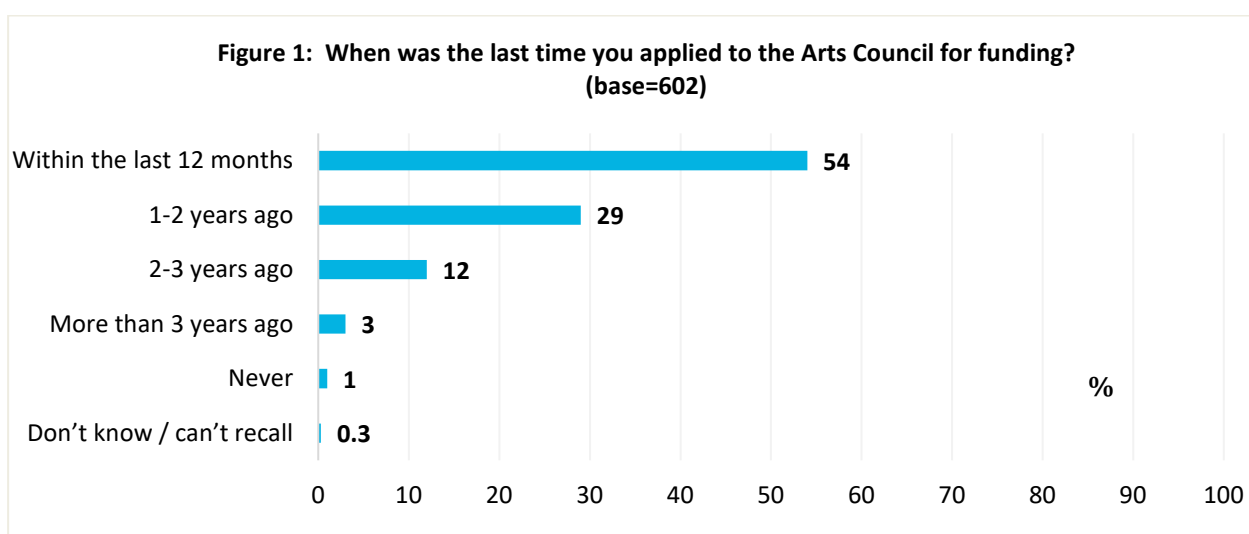
Table 1 Sample Profile (n=602)			
		%	n
Client type	Individual	73	440
	Organisation	27	162
Gender (individuals only)	Male (including trans men)	45	
	Female (including trans women)	45	
	Non-Binary (e.g. androgyne)	1	
	Prefer not to say	9	
Age (individuals only)	Under 40	33	147
	40-50	32	142
	Over 50	34	151
Disability (individuals only)	Yes, limited a lot	5	
	Yes, limited a little	18	
	No	71	
	I'd prefer not say	6	
Ethnicity (individuals only)	White	91	399
	Chinese	0.7	2
	Indian	0.5	2
	Black Caribbean	0.5	2
	Black African	0.5	2
	Black Other	0.5	2
	Other	9	30
Area	Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council	7	
	Ards and North Down	7	
	Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	6	
	Belfast	37	
	Causeway Coast and Glens	5	
	Derry and Strabane	7	
	Fermanagh and Omagh	4	
	Lisburn and Castlereagh	4	
	Mid and East Antrim	5	
	Mid Ulster	5	
	Newry, Mourne and Down	9	
	Republic of Ireland	1	
	Other	1	
Settlement type	City	50	300
	A town	18	111
	A village	10	60
	Rural or countryside	19	117
	Regional organisation	2	14
Funding programme recent grant relates	Annual Funding Programme	9	
	Arts and Older People	3	
	Cathedral Building Fire Funding	0.2	
	Health & Safety Capital Programme	0.2	
	Musical Instruments	12	
	National Lottery - Project Funding	5	
	Rural Engagement Arts Programme	3	
	SIAP	44	
	Small Capital Programme	1	
	Small Grants Programme	4	
	YP and Wellbeing Arts Prog	0.5	
	Other (please specify)	4	
	Not applicable / not received grant	14	

# Survey findings

## Applying for Arts Council funding

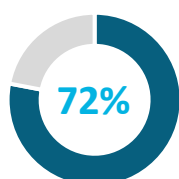
### When applied for funding

Figure 1 shows that most clients had applied for Arts Council funding within the last 12 months (54%), 29% had applied in the last 1-2 years, 12% in the last 2-3 years, and 3% had applied for funding more than 3 years ago. One percent had never applied for funding, and less than 1% couldn't recall the last time they had applied for funding.

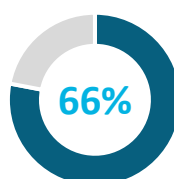


### Statistically significant differences

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)



More organisations (72%) compared with individuals (49%) applied for funding within the last 12 months



More non-SIAP grant applicants (66%) compared with SIAP applicants (42%) applied for funding within the last 12 months.

#### Individuals only

More clients aged under 40 applied for funding within the last 12 months (under 40, 56%; 40-50, 52%; over 50, 39%)

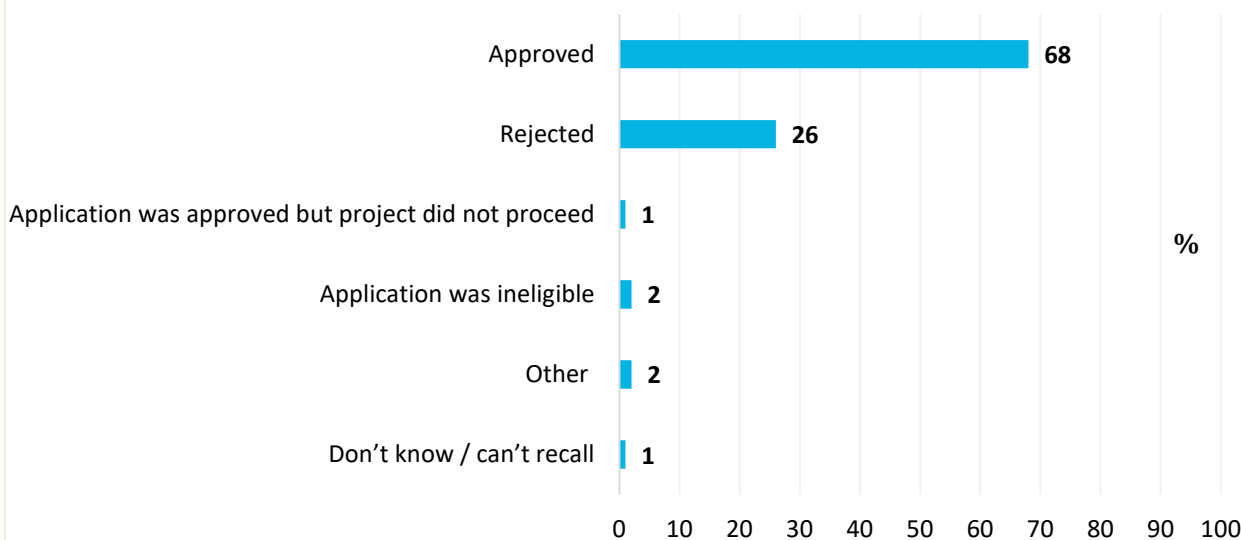


## Outcome of funding application

Among those who had applied for funding (n=598), most had their application approved (68%), with approximately one quarter (26%) saying their application had been rejected.

One percent of clients said their application had been approved but their project did not proceed, two percent said their application was ineligible, and two percent cited other outcomes<sup>1</sup>. One percent couldn't recall the outcome of their most recent application for funding.

**Figure 2: Thinking about the last occasion that you applied for funding, was your application approved or rejected? (base=598)**



## Statistically significant differences

### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- There were no significant differences in application outcome

### Individuals only

- Those with a disability (61%) were less likely to have had their application approved compared with non-disabled clients (73%)



<sup>1</sup> Included: still awaiting the outcome (n=5); first time applying (n=1); approved with revised budget (n=1); one application approved and one rejected (n=1); rejected the approved (n=1); Arts officer needs to approve – told too many applications (n=1); funding was closed early without warning (n=1).  
[www.socialmarketresearch.co.uk](http://www.socialmarketresearch.co.uk)

### Satisfaction with different aspects of the funding application process

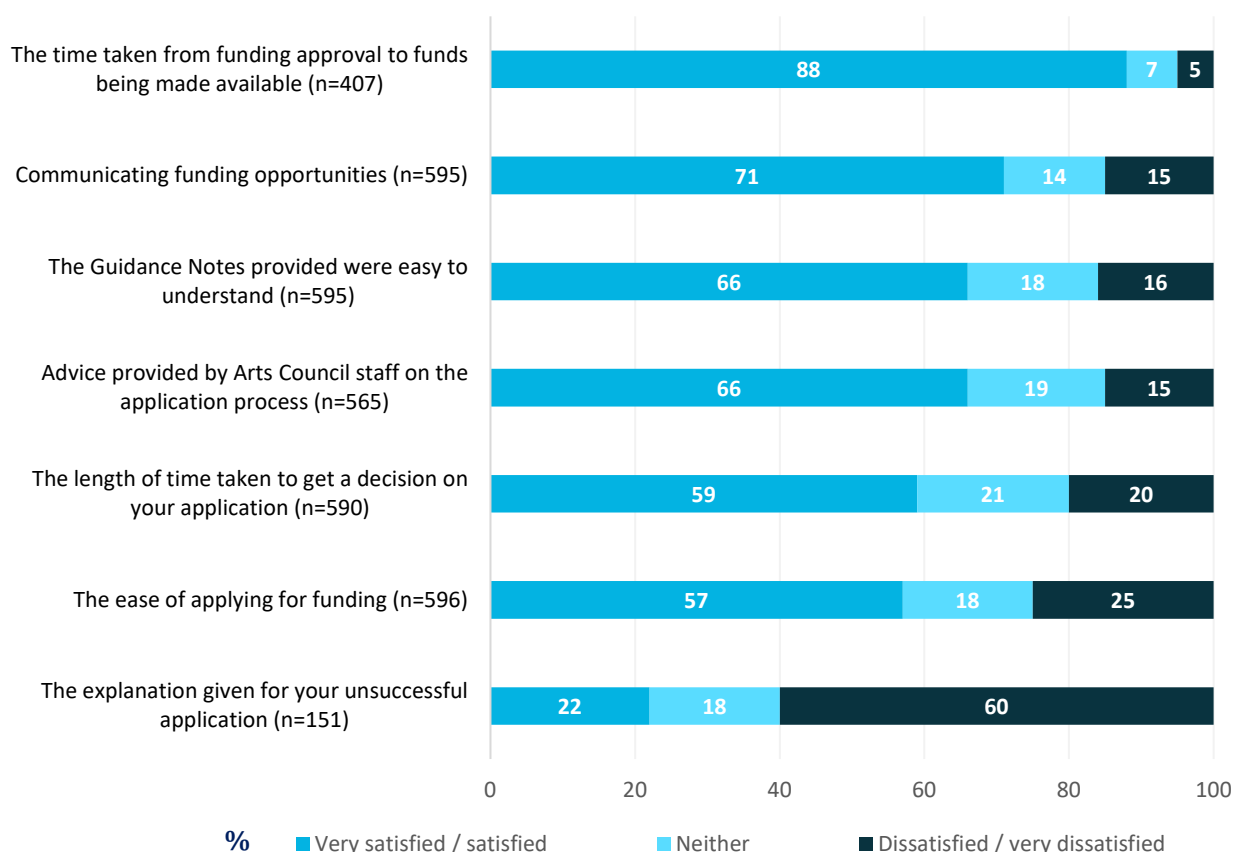
Clients were asked to think about the last occasion they applied for funding, and to say how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with different aspects of the application process.

Figure 3 shows that clients who had their application approved recorded the highest level of satisfaction for the time taken from funding approval to funds being made available (88%).

Most clients reported to be satisfied with other aspects of the funding application process: communicating funding opportunities (71%); the Guidance Notes provided being easy to understand (66%); advice provided by Arts Council staff on the application process (66%); the length of time taken to get a decision on their application (59%); and, the ease of applying for funding (57%).

In contrast, just 22% of those who had their most recent application rejected were satisfied with the explanation given.

**Figure 3: Again, thinking about the last occasion that you applied for funding, please say how satisfied or dissatisfied you were with each of the following..?**



# Statistically significant differences

## Communicating funding opportunities

### All clients (individuals and organisations)



Higher dissatisfaction among clients in urban areas (18% vs. urban, 8%)



Higher dissatisfaction among clients applying for funding more than 12 months ago (19%) [last 12 months, 12%]



Higher satisfaction among clients who had their application approved (82% vs. 46%)

### Among individuals only



Lower satisfaction among those aged under 40 (under 40, 62%: 40-50, 70%: over 50, 76%)

## The ease of applying for funding

### All clients (individuals and organisations)



Higher dissatisfaction among clients in urban areas (28% vs. urban, 18%)



Higher satisfaction among clients who had their application approved (66% vs. 34%)

## Advice provided by Arts Council staff on the application process

### All clients (individuals and organisations)



Higher satisfaction among clients who had their application approved (78% vs. 37%)

### Among individuals only



Higher dissatisfaction among those aged under 40 (under 40, 22%: 40-50, 14%: over 50, 10%)

## The length of time taken to get a decision on your application

### All clients (individuals and organisations)



Higher satisfaction among clients in rural areas (65% vs. urban, 56%)



Higher dissatisfaction among clients applying for SIAP grants (17% vs. 8%)



Higher satisfaction among clients who had their application approved (67% vs. 42%)

## The Guidance Notes provided were easy to understand

### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher dissatisfaction among individual applicants compared with organisations (19% vs. 7%)
- Higher satisfaction among clients who had their application approved (77% vs. 41%)

### Among individuals only

- Higher dissatisfaction among those with a disability (31%) compared with non-disabled clients (14%)

## The time taken from funding approval to funds being made available

### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- No significant differences

### The explanation given for your unsuccessful application

- No significant differences

## Reasons dissatisfied with explanation for rejection of most recent funding application

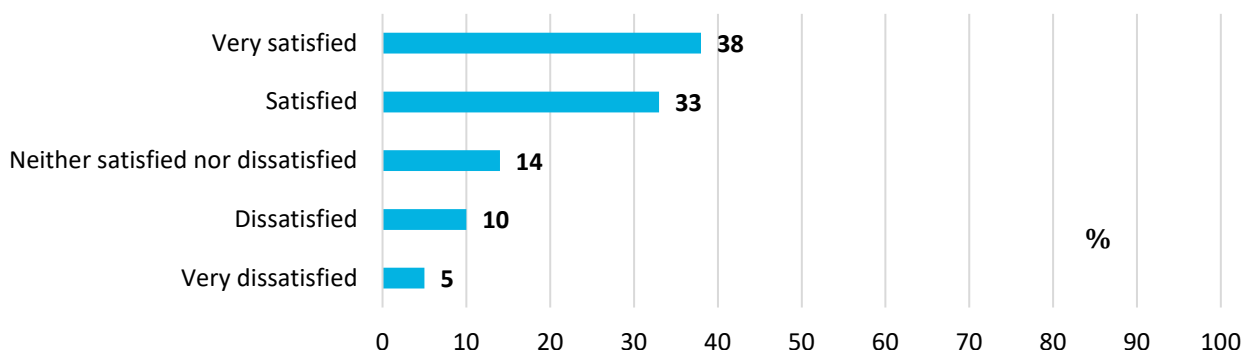
Among those who had their application rejected (n=90), and who were dissatisfied with the explanation given, the most common reason for their dissatisfaction was a lack of feedback – just a generic response (21%). Other common reasons for dissatisfaction among this group included: would have liked advice on how to improve future applications (9%); requesting feedback on their application but never receiving feedback (8%); only providing feedback which said there was high demand (8%); feedback being unclear and unactionable (4%); limited explanation for rejection given (2%); and, not receiving a follow up call from Arts Council staff to resolve issues and avoid the application being rejected (2%).



## Overall satisfaction with how Arts Council staff handled most recent funding application

Approximately seven out of ten (71%) clients said they were either very satisfied (38%) or satisfied (33%) with how Arts Council staff handled their most recent funding application. Fourteen percent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 15% were either dissatisfied (10%) or very dissatisfied (5%).

**Figure 4: Overall how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with how Arts Council staff handled your most recent funding application? (base=602)**



## Statistically significant differences

### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (88%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (30%)

### Among individuals only

- Higher dissatisfaction among those with a disability (22%) compared with non-disabled clients (12%)

## Reasons dissatisfied with how Arts Council staff handled most recent funding application

Among clients (n=93) dissatisfied with how Arts Council staff handled their most recent funding application, the most common reasons for their dissatisfaction included: no or limited feedback / poor communication (24%); taking too long to hear the decision (11%); guidance should be easier to read / understand (5%); lots of work put into application but failed on a simple technicality (5%); hard to get a response / help with pre-application / with reports (4%); and, responses not very clear / conflicting advice (4%).

## Suggestions for improving the funding application process

Clients were invited to make suggestions on how the funding application process could be improved. Among those who commented (n=475), the most common suggestions included: a simpler application (reporting in terms of budgets) [19%]; clearer guidelines, guidelines checklist, videos, post award instructions [16%]; more help from staff (i.e. improve communication, more workshops, more one-on-one guidance, have a mentorship program etc.) [11%]; a calendar showing what dates various grants will be open for applications throughout the year (and workshops) [6%]; a custom built online application form / more modern / more simplified / more user friendly / work on all browsers/platform [6%]; more money from the government [6%]; ensure greater clarity and transparency around the decision making process [5%]; and, speed up delay between applying and finding out if you are successful [5%].

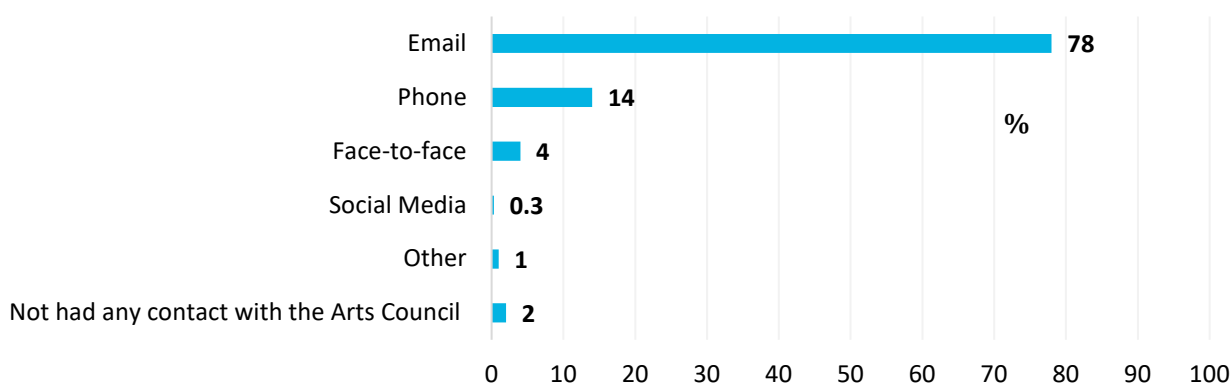


# Contact with Arts Council staff

## Most recent contact with the Arts Council

Almost eight out of ten (78%) clients had used email in their most recent contact with the Arts Council, with phone used by 14% of clients, and face-to-face used by 4% of clients. Less than 1% had used social media, with 1% using other<sup>2</sup> modes of contact. Two percent of clients said they have had no contact with the Arts Council.

**Figure 5: Was your most recent contact with the Arts Council via face-to-face, phone, email, social media or some other way? (base=602)**



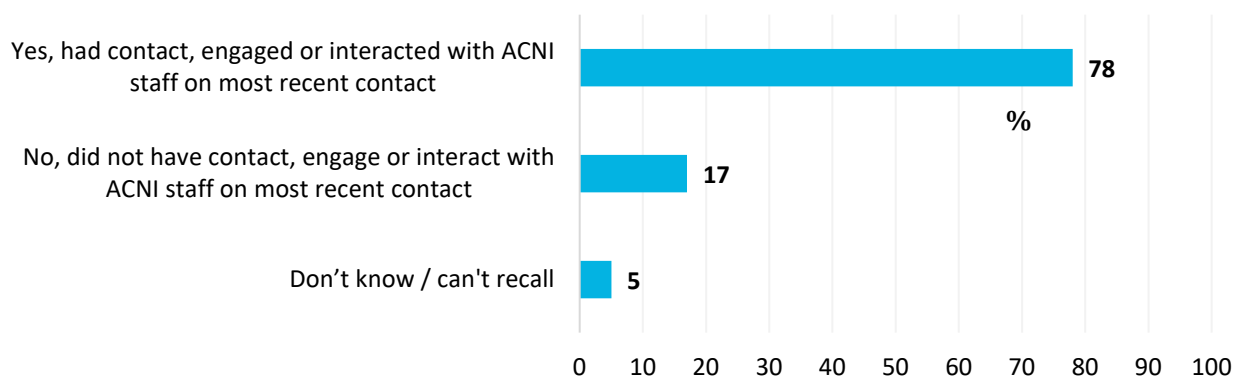
### Statistically significant differences

There were no significant differences

## Contact, engagement or interaction with Arts Council staff

Among clients who had contact with Arts Council (n=588), most (78%) said had contact with, engaged or interacted with Arts Council staff. Seventeen percent did not have contact with Arts Council staff, and 5% couldn't recall if they had contact with Arts Council staff or not.

**Figure 6: During your most recent contact with the Arts Council did you have contact with, engage or interact with any Arts Council staff? (base=602)**



<sup>2</sup> Included: checking the ACNI website (n=1); and, ZOOM / Teams (n=3).

## Statistically significant differences

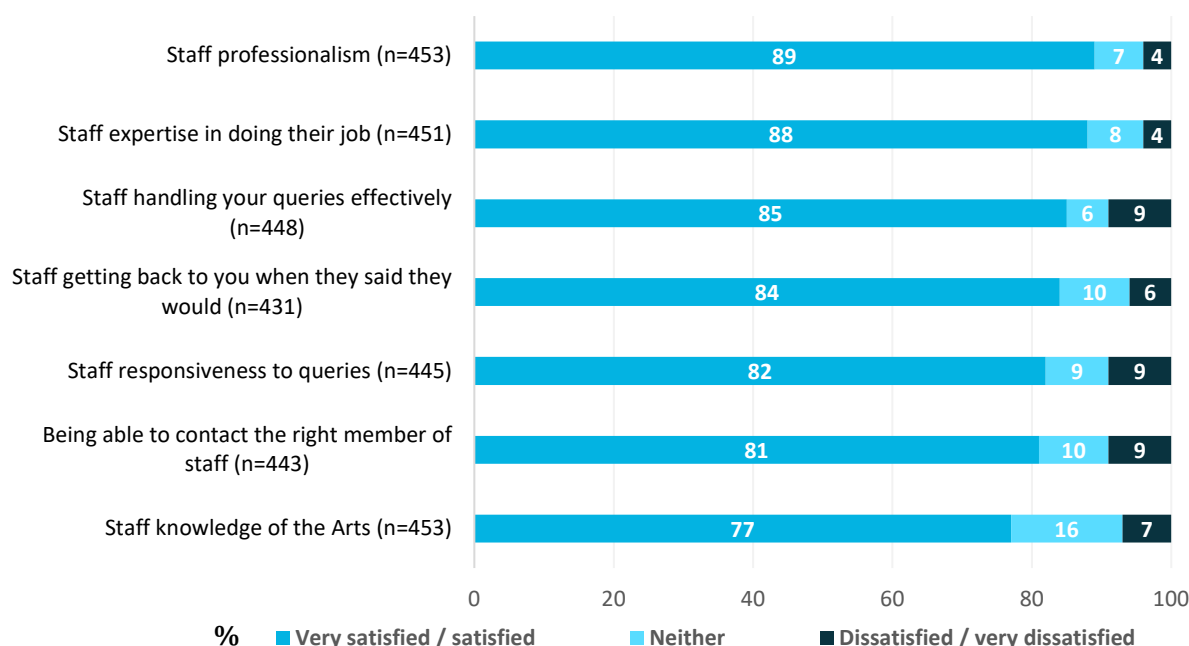
### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Those who had their application approved (84%) compared with those who had their application rejected (62%) were more likely to have had contact, engaged or interacted with Arts Council staff

### 2.2.3 Satisfaction with Arts Council staff

Figure 7 shows that clients reported high levels of satisfaction with different aspects of their engagement with Arts Council staff, with more than eight out of ten satisfied with: staff professionalism (89%); staff expertise in doing their job (88%); staff handling their queries effectively (85%); staff getting back to them when they said they would (84%); staff responsiveness to queries (82%); and, being able to contact the right member of staff (81%). Approximately three out of four were satisfied with staff knowledge of the Arts (77%).

**Figure 7: Thinking about Arts Council staff you engaged with, please say how satisfied or dissatisfied you were with each of the following?**



## Statistically significant differences

### Staff expertise in doing their job

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (95%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (66%)

### Staff knowledge of the Arts

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants 83%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (54%)

### Staff professionalism

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (93%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (76%)

#### Individuals only

- Higher dissatisfaction among those with a disability (10%) compared with non-disabled clients (3%)

### Staff handling your queries effectively

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (93%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (61%)

### Being able to contact the right member of staff

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (89%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (55%)

### Staff responsiveness to queries

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher dissatisfaction among those applying for non-SIAP grants (10%) compared with SIAP grants (4%)
- Higher satisfaction among clients who had their application approved (89% vs. 61%)

### Staff getting back to you when they said they would

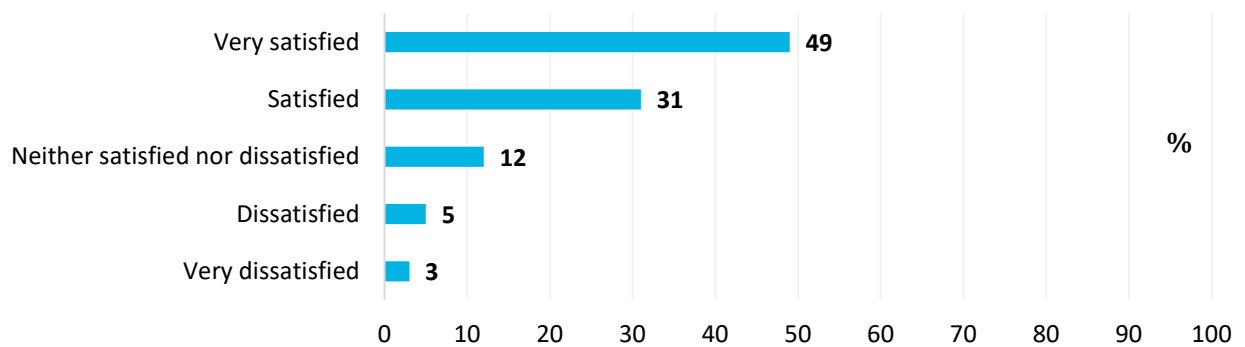
#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher satisfaction among those applying for SIAP grants (90%) compared with non-SIAP grants (82%)
- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (90%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (64%)

## Overall satisfaction with Arts Council staff

Overall, eight out of ten (80%) clients said they were either very satisfied (49%) or satisfied (31%) with Arts Council staff they contacted, engaged or interacted with. Twelve percent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 8% were either dissatisfied (5%) or very dissatisfied (3%).

**Figure 8: Overall how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with Arts Council staff who you contacted, engaged or interacted with? (base=573)**



## Statistically significant differences

### All clients (individuals and organisations)

Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (89%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (59%)

### Individuals only

Higher dissatisfaction higher among clients with a disability (13%) compared with non-disabled clients (5%)

## Reasons for dissatisfaction with Arts Council staff

Among those dissatisfied with Arts Council staff (n=46), the most common reasons for their dissatisfaction included: staff not getting back to them (30%); preferring that the staff member they were speaking to had more insight into their work and project (9%); no response to invites to their project (7%); found the Arts Council to be unsupportive (4%); won't answer the phone (4%); staff didn't seem to understand or empathise with certain scenarios or situations (4%); staff not clear on the funding criteria which leads to confusion (4%); and, a belief their arts officer does not understand the sector (4%).

## Improving client experience of contacting, engaging and interacting with Arts Council staff

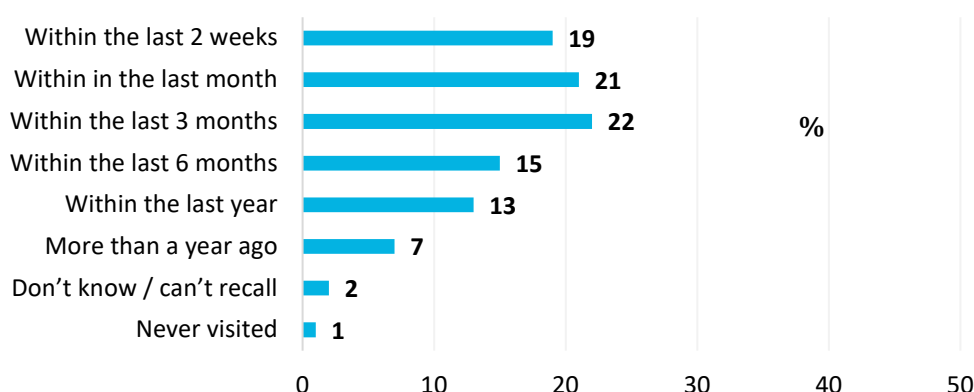
Clients were invited to make suggestions on improving their experience of contacting, interacting and engaging with Arts Council staff, with the most common suggestions including: meet face-to-face, drop in during office times (15%); improved contact details for staff, deputies if one is out-of-office (15%); a faster response time (to emails) / any response (to emails) (9%); more contact from the Arts Council to applicants (8%); more assistance from staff / more availability of staff (8%); empathy, understanding, friendly, personal staff interactions (7%); staff attending our events (5%); improved website (current information, live chat) (5%); having more staff, easing the burden, reducing the stress on staff (4%); better guidance notes - provide links to notes (4%); and, knowing who the best person to contact would be helpful (4%).

# Arts Council website

## Visits to the Arts Council website

Nine out of ten (90%) clients had visited the Arts Council website in the last 12 months (*within the last 2 weeks, 19%; within the last month, 21%; within the last 3 months, 22%; within the last 6 months, 15%; and within the last year, 13%*). Seven percent had visited the Arts Council website more than a year ago, 2% were unable to recall when they had last visited, and 1% had never visited.

**Figure 9: When was the last time you visited the Arts Council website? (base=602)**



## Statistically significant differences

### All clients (individuals and organisations)



- Individuals (52%) compared with organisations (38%) were more likely to have visited the Arts Council website within the last 3 months



- Those in who had applied for non-SIAP grants (51%) compared with SIAP applicants (35%) were more likely to have visited the Arts Council website within the last 3 months



- Those who applied for a grant in the last 12 months (50%) compared with those who applied more than 12 months ago (30%) were more likely to have visited the Arts Council website within the last 3 months

## Reasons for visiting the Arts Council website

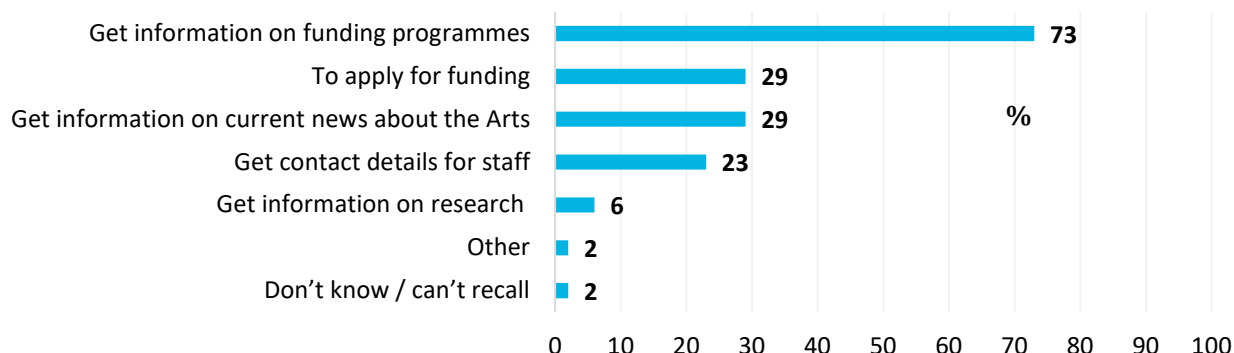
Getting information on funding programmes (73%) was found to be the most common reason why clients visited the Arts Council website.

Other reasons for visiting the website included: to apply for funding (29%); to get information on current news about the Arts (29%); get contact details for staff (23%); and, to get information on research (6%). Two percent of clients listed other reasons<sup>3</sup> for visiting the Arts Council website, with 2% unable to recall why they had visited the website.

<sup>3</sup> Included: job search (n=11); end of project report / funding report (n=6); to get logos (n=4); completing surveys (n=2); to access previous applications (n=2); catch up on emails (n=1); toolkits (n=1).



**Figure 10: On the last occasion you visited the Arts Council website, what were your reasons for doing so? (base=583) [multiple response question]**

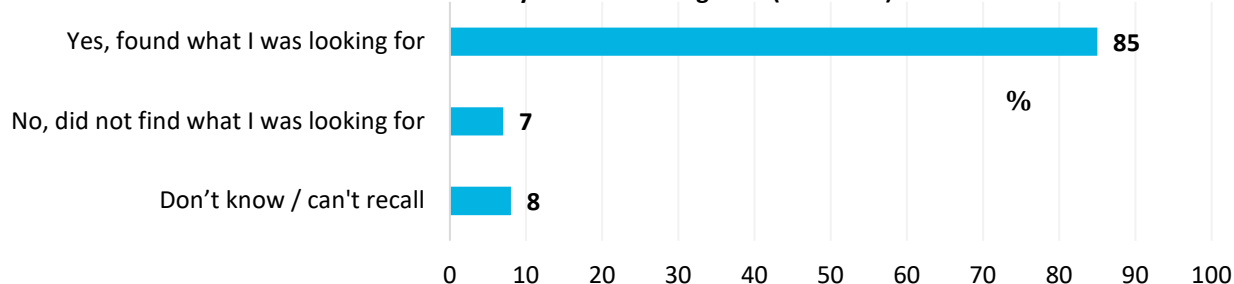


## Finding what you were looking for on the Arts Council website

More than eight out of ten (85%) clients visiting the Arts Council website said they found what they were looking for.

Those who had applied for funding in the last 12 months (90%), compared with those who had applied for funding more than 12 months ago (80%), were more likely to say they had found what they were looking for on the Arts Council website.

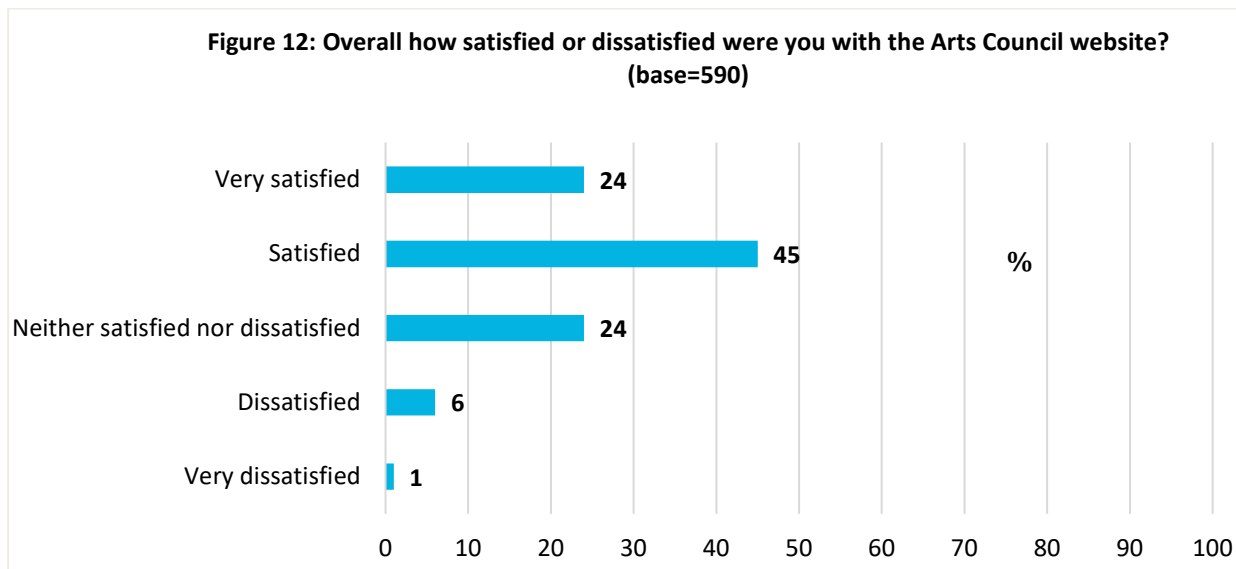
**Figure 11: On the last occasion that you visited the Arts Council website, did you find what you were looking for? (base=598)**



Those clients (n=40) who said they couldn't find what they were looking for on the Arts Council website were asked what it was they were looking for. Most commonly these clients said they were looking for information on the funding calendar (open and closing dates for applications) [n=15] and contact details for Arts Council staff (n=7). Other items clients couldn't find on the website included: contact details for staff / helpline (n=1); guidance for applications (n=2); notification that a document submitted has been received (n=1); reporting form (n=1); logo's and information for a co-funded grant (n=1); promoter details (n=1); jobs (n=3); training opportunities (n=1); and details about upcoming events (n=1).

## Overall satisfaction with the Arts Council website

Overall, 69% of clients said they are either very satisfied (24%) or satisfied (45%) with the Arts Council website. Almost one in four (24%) are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 7% are either dissatisfied (6%) or very dissatisfied (1%).



## Statistically significant differences

### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher satisfaction with website among those in rural areas (76%) compared with urban areas (66%)

### Individuals only

- Higher satisfaction with the website among males (77%) compared with females (64%)
- Higher dissatisfaction among those with a disability (13%) compared with non-disabled clients (5%)

## Reasons why some clients are dissatisfied with the Arts Council website

The reasons why some clients (n=41) are dissatisfied with the Arts Council's website included: hard to navigate / hard to find information you are looking for (n=12); outdated / basic / clunky / cumbersome website (n=10); no contact details for staff (n=5); didn't have the information I required (n=4); no funding available / not many offers published (n=3); text heavy (n=3); funding application needs simplified (n=3); it's very slow to load (n=3); unclear guidance (n=1); hyperlinks are often not working (n=1); it is flagged by a security wall as insecure (n=1); not a useful resource for artists (n=1); hard to find dates about funding programmes (n=1); the application portal is not obviously accessible from the main page (n=1); and, the opening date for travel award funding was inaccurate (2023) (n=1).

## Suggestions for improving the Arts Council website

Among those (n=227) who made suggestions on how the Arts Council website could be improved the following were most common: rebrand, redesign, more colour, more modern, better layout, better menus, faster loading (25%); an easy to navigate website (9%); details about grant winners (how much, for what, where are they based, case studies, testimonies) (8%); a timetable/calendar of funding programmes and open/closing dates (8%); a single directory for staff (6%); better/updated guidance notes / easier to find (5%); make funding applications easier, up-to-date (5%); alerts about funding, mailing list, link to sign up (4%); better signposting to resources, better resources (3%); more focus on celebrating achievements of the sector up front on the website, rather than having to navigate to a blog (3%); and, a more clear events/listings section which goes beyond Arts Council funded events (3%).

## Arts Council's strategic objectives

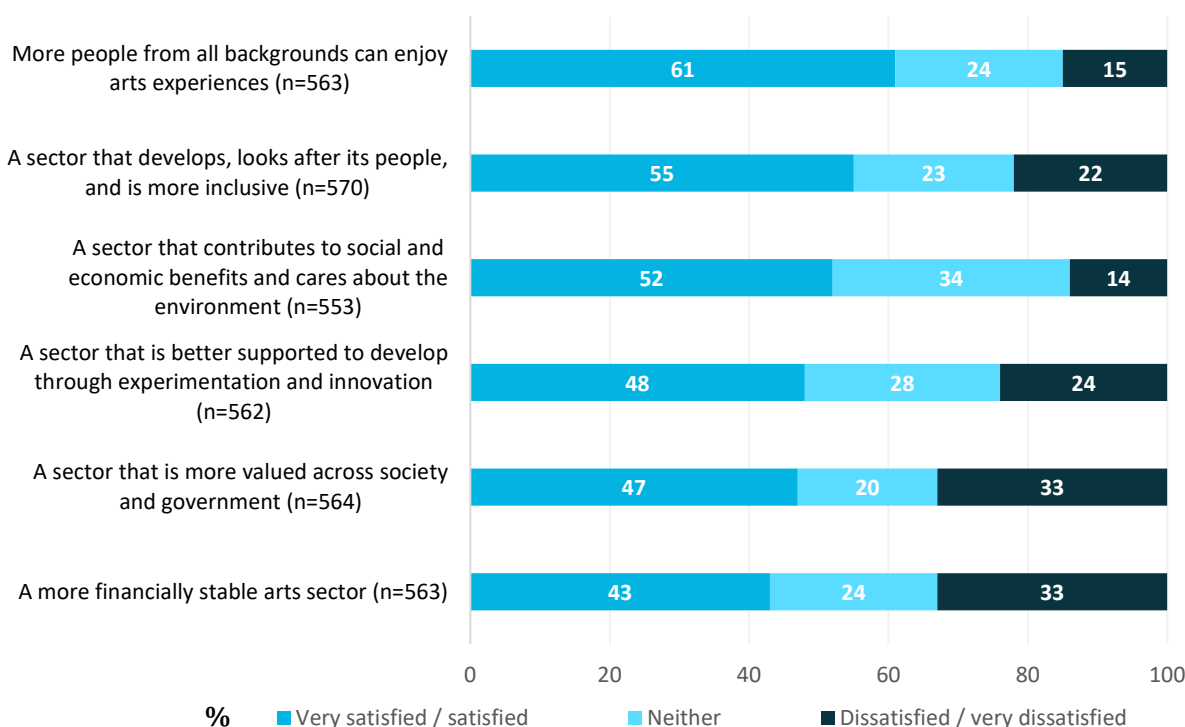
### Satisfaction that the Arts Council is delivering on each of its strategic outcomes

Clients were informed that The Arts Council's Strategic Plan (2024-2034) [<https://artscouncil-ni.org/what-we-do/our-strategy>] sets out a commitment to achieve 6 outcomes between now and 2034. With this information, clients were then asked what extent they are satisfied or dissatisfied that the Arts Council is delivering on each of these outcomes.

Figure 13 shows that a majority of clients are satisfied that the Arts Council is delivering on the following outcomes: more people from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences (61%); a sector that is more valued across society and government (55%); and, a sector that contributes to social and economic benefits and cares about the environment (52%).

In contrast, less than half of clients are satisfied that the Arts Council is delivering on the following outcomes: a sector that is better supported to develop through experimentation and innovation (48%); a sector that is more valued across society and government (47%); and, a more financially stable arts sector (43%).

**Figure 13: Please say to what extent you are satisfied or dissatisfied that the Arts Council is delivering on each of these outcomes. (base=602)**



## Statistically significant differences

### A more financially stable arts sector

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher dissatisfaction among those in urban areas (37%) compared with rural areas (25%)
- Higher dissatisfaction among clients who had applied for SIAP grants (37%) [non-SIAP grants, 24%]
- Higher dissatisfaction among unsuccessful applicants (47%) compared with successful applicants (28%)

#### Individuals only

- Higher dissatisfaction among females (41%) compared with males (28%)

### A sector that develops, looks after its people, and is more inclusive

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher dissatisfaction among individuals (25%) compared with organisations (15%)
- Higher dissatisfaction among those who had applied for SIAP grants (24%) [non-SIAP grants, 14%]
- Higher dissatisfaction among unsuccessful applicants (39%) compared with successful applicants (16%)

#### Among individuals only

- Higher satisfaction among males (61%) compared with females (49%)

### A sector that is better supported to develop through experimentation and innovation

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher dissatisfaction among individuals (26%) compared with organisations (17%)
- Higher dissatisfaction among clients in urban areas (27%) compared with rural areas (16%)
- Higher dissatisfaction among those who had applied for SIAP grants (24%) [non-SIAP grants, 16%]
- Higher dissatisfaction among unsuccessful applicants (39%) compared with successful applicants (18%)

### A sector that contributes to social and economic benefits and cares about the environment

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (58%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (37%)

### More people from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher dissatisfaction among those who had applied for SIAP grants (16%) [non-SIAP grants, 8%]
- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (66%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (47%)

#### Individuals only

- Higher dissatisfaction among Females (19%) compared with males (10%)

## A sector that is more valued across society and government

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher dissatisfaction among individuals (37%) compared with organisations (24%)
- Higher satisfaction among those in rural areas (57%) compared with urban areas (43%)
- Higher dissatisfaction among those who had applied for SIAP grants (38%) [non-SIAP grants, 23%]
- Higher dissatisfaction among unsuccessful applicants (47%) compared with successful applicants (27%)

#### Individuals only

- Higher dissatisfaction among females (42%) compared with males (28%)





# Role of the Arts Council

## Satisfaction with the role of the Arts Council



Clients were also asked about the role of the Arts Council and to say how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with different aspects of its role.

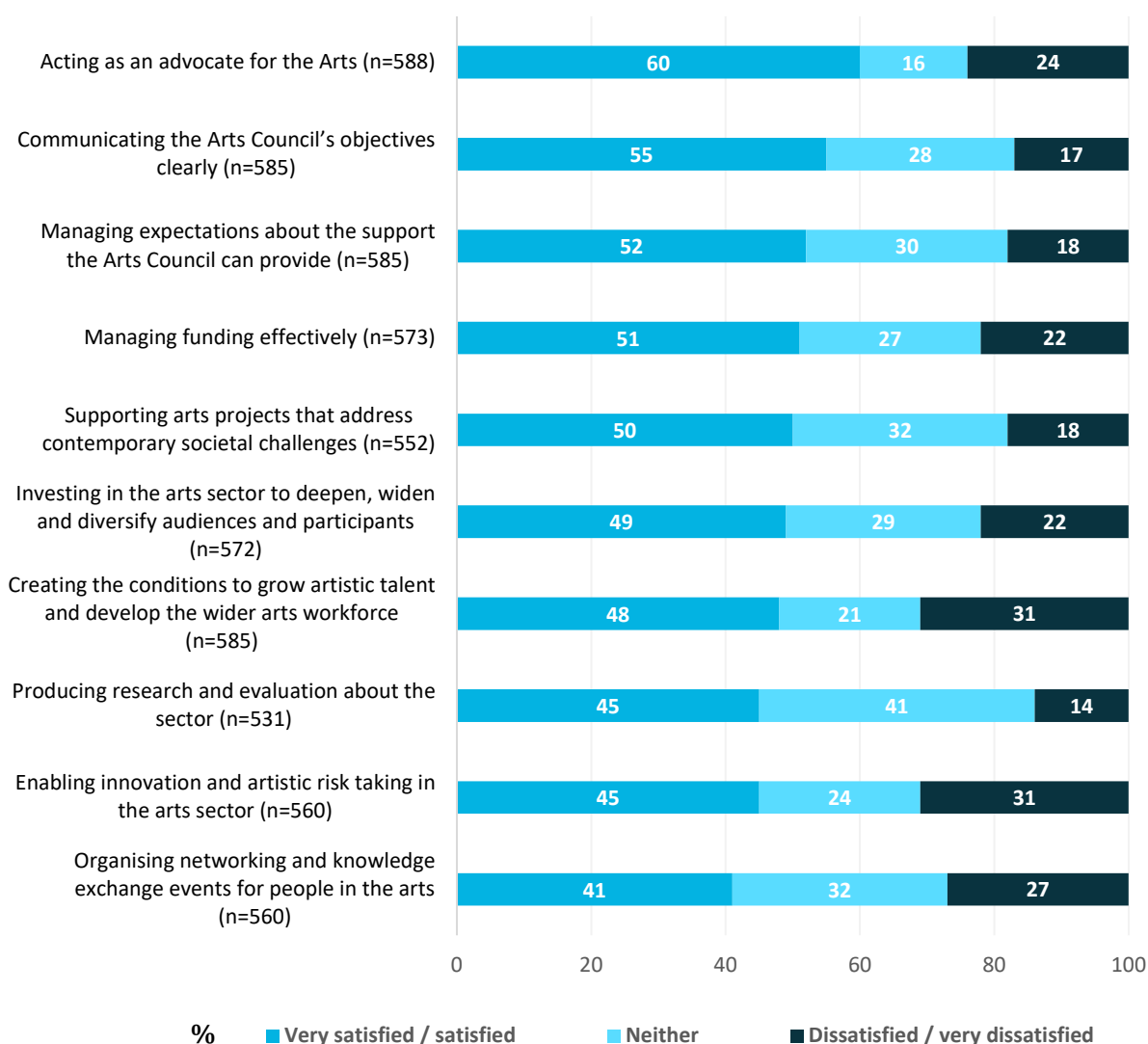


Figure 14 shows that relative to other aspects, higher levels of satisfaction were recorded by clients for the role of the Arts Council in: acting as an advocate for the Arts (60%); communicating the Arts Council's objectives clearly (55%); and, managing expectations about the support the Arts Council can provide (52%).



Conversely, and relative to other aspects, relatively lower levels of satisfaction were recorded by clients for the role of the Arts Council: organising networking and knowledge exchange events for people in the arts (41%); enabling innovation and artistic risk taking in the arts sector (45%); and, producing research and evaluation about the sector (45%).

**Figure 14: Please say how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the role of the Arts Council in relation to each of the following? (base=602)**



## Statistically significant differences

### Acting as an advocate for the Arts

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

Higher dissatisfaction among those in urban areas (27%) compared with rural areas (16%)  
Higher dissatisfaction among unsuccessful applicants (39%) compared with successful applicants (17%)

#### Individuals only

Higher dissatisfaction among clients with a disability (34%) compared with non-disabled clients (22%)

### Communicating the Arts Council's objectives clearly

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher satisfaction among organisations (64%) compared with individuals (52%)
- Higher dissatisfaction among those in urban areas (20%) compared with rural areas (11%)
- Higher dissatisfaction among unsuccessful applicants (33%) compared with successful applicants (11%)

#### Individuals only

- Higher dissatisfaction among females (23%) compared with males (13%)

### Managing expectations about the support the Arts Council can provide

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher dissatisfaction among those applying more than 12 months ago (22%) [less than 12 months, 14%]
- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (61%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (28%)

### Creating the conditions to grow artistic talent and develop the wider arts workforce

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher dissatisfaction among those in urban areas (35%) compared with rural areas (23%)
- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (54%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (25%)

### Enabling innovation and artistic risk taking in the arts sector

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher dissatisfaction among those in urban areas (35%) compared with rural areas (20%)
- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (56%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (28%)

#### Individuals only

- Higher dissatisfaction among those aged under 40 (under 40, 40%: 40-50, 27%: over 50, 29%)

## Managing funding effectively

### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (62%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (26%)

## Supporting arts projects that address contemporary societal challenges

### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (57%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (35%)

## Investing in the arts sector to deepen, widen and diversify audiences and participants

### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (58%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (29%)

### Individuals only

- Higher dissatisfaction among clients with a disability (35%) compared with non-disabled clients (18%)

## Producing research and evaluation about the sector

### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher dissatisfaction among those in urban areas (16%) compared with rural areas (8%)
- Higher dissatisfaction among those applying more than 12 months ago (19%) [less than 12 months, 9%]
- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (51%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (29%)

## Organising networking and knowledge exchange events for people in the arts

### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Lower satisfaction among individuals (51%) compared with organisations (37%)
- Higher satisfaction among applicants for non-SIAP grants (51%) compared with SIAP applicants (39%)
- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (47%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (28%)

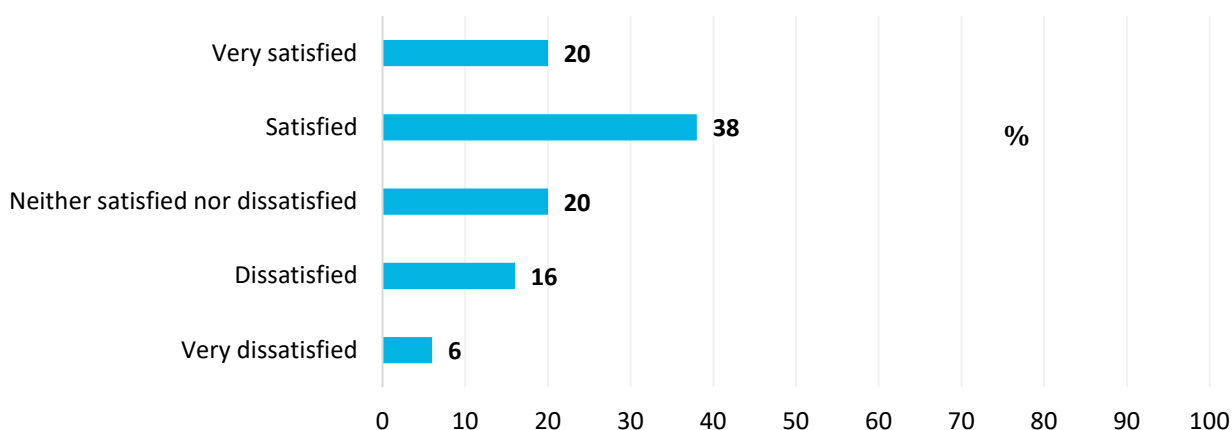
### Individuals only

- Higher satisfaction among males (46%) compared with females (33%)

## Overall satisfaction with the role of the Arts Council

Overall, 58% of clients said they are either very satisfied (20%) or satisfied (38%) with the role of the Arts Council. One in five (20%) are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 22% are either dissatisfied (16%) or very dissatisfied (6%).

**Figure 15: Overall how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the role of the Arts Council?**  
(base=602)



## Statistically significant differences

### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher dissatisfaction among those in urban areas (25%) compared with rural areas (15%)
- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (69%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (34%)

### Among individuals only

- Higher dissatisfaction among clients aged under 40 (under 40, 32%; 40-50, 21%; over 50, 19%)
- Higher dissatisfaction among clients with a disability (32%) compared with non-disabled clients (19%)

## Reasons dissatisfied with the role of the Arts Council

Among those dissatisfied (n=131) with the role of the Arts Council, the most common reasons for their dissatisfaction included: Arts Council should be advocates for art (21%); lack of funds from the government (15%); only helps specific groups (races/ethnic group/those that they know/those in Belfast) [14%]; appears to function as an administrative / financial organisation not as a creative arts body (7%); gets harder and harder to successfully apply for funding - have tried many times and can't / rarely get any funding (6%); it doesn't meet the needs of the population - not fit for purpose (6%); staff not available for meetings or to attend performances (6%); inability to engage with grassroots Arts groups (5%); certain art forms take precedence over others (5%); questionable decision making processes (5%); claims to support innovation and experiment but not substantiated (5%); gets harder and harder to successfully apply for funding - have tried many times and can't / rarely get any funding (5%); and, too much focus on Belfast - no presence outside of Belfast/urban areas (5%).

## Suggestions for improving the role of the Arts Council

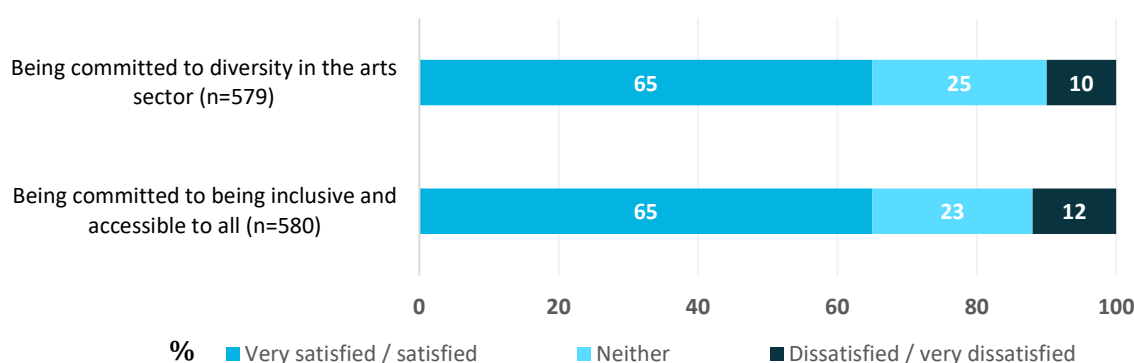
Clients were again invited to make suggestions on improving the role of the Arts Council. Among those who made suggestions (n=436), the most common included: more money from government, more money distributed (28%); be open to applications from different projects (16%); be a greater advocate for the arts (9%); be open / open communication / more communication / approachable (7%); be more visible - attend events (5%); more staff - change of staff / leadership (3%); increased awareness / publicity (3%); easier funding application process (3%); less Belfast centric funding (3%); and, face-to-face meetings / interviews / workshops (3%).

## Arts Council values

### Satisfaction with the Arts Council values

In terms of the values of the Arts Council, most clients are satisfied that the Arts Council is committed to diversity in the arts sector (65%), and that Arts Council is committed to being inclusive and accessible to all (65%).

**Figure 16: Please say how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the Arts Council in terms of..? (base=602)**



## Statistically significant differences

### Being committed to diversity in the arts sector

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (74%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (43%)

#### Individuals

- Higher dissatisfaction among clients with a disability (17%) compared with non-disabled clients (7%)

### Being committed to being inclusive and accessible to all

- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (73%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (44%)

#### Individuals

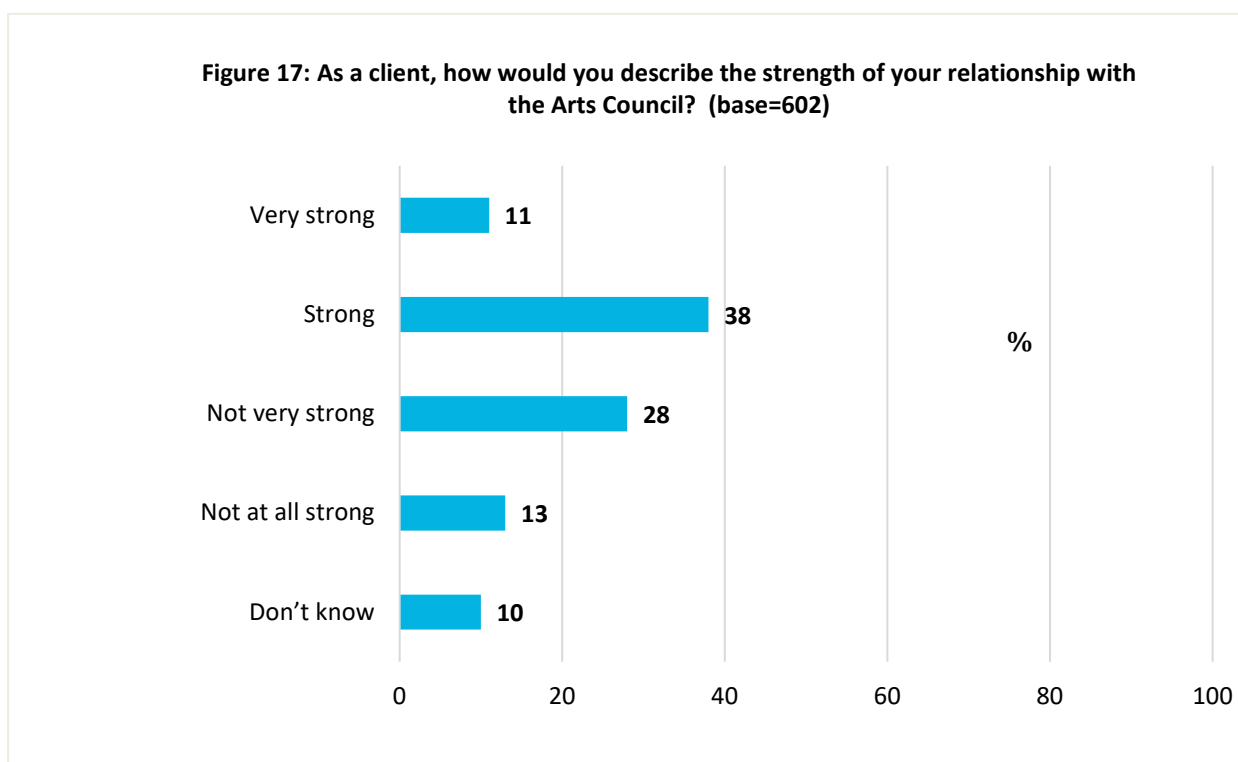
- Higher dissatisfaction among clients with a disability (20%) compared with non-disabled clients (9%)



# Relationships, supporting clients, communication and perception of the Arts Council

## Strength of relationship with Arts Council

Clients asked to describe the strength of their relationship with the Arts Council, with 49% perceiving their relationship to be either very strong (11%) or strong (38%), and 41% perceiving their relationship to be either not very strong (28%) or not at all strong (13%). One in ten (10%) clients were undecided.



## Statistically significant differences

### All clients (individuals and organisations)



- Organisations (64%) compared with individuals (43%) were more likely to say they have a strong relationship with the Arts Council



- Successful applicants (60%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (20%) were more likely to say they have a strong relationship with the Arts Council

### Individuals



- Clients with a disability (32%) compared with non-disabled clients (48%) were less likely to say they have a strong relationship with the Arts Council

Clients were invited to share their perception of the Arts Council and were asked if the Arts Council were a person, what single word or phrase would they use to describe its personality. Using a word cloud, Figure 18 shows that the most dominant themes to emerge included supportive, helpful, distant, professional, friendly and approachable.

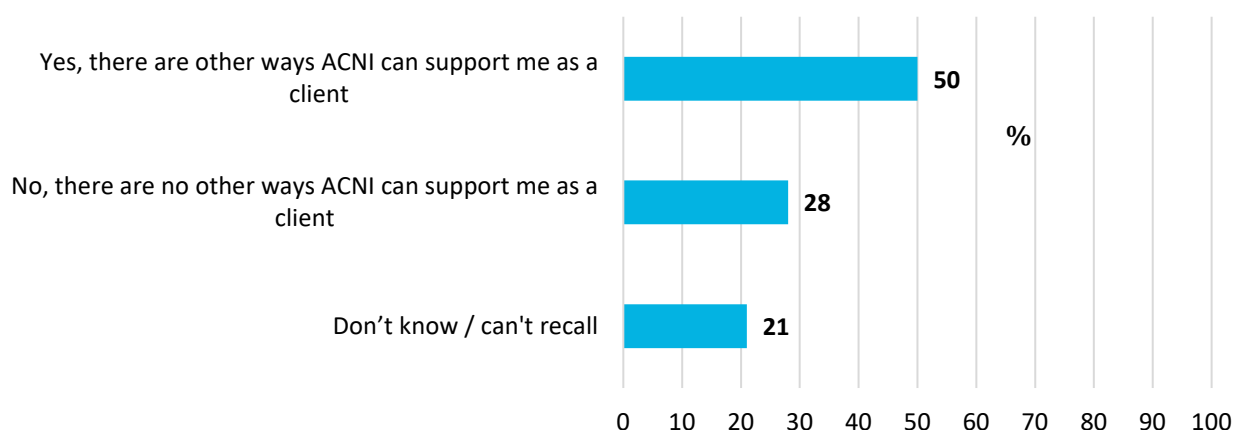
**Figure 18: Word Cloud**



## Arts Council further supporting clients

Half of clients (50%) believe there are other ways that the Arts Council can better support them as clients. Twenty eight percent felt they couldn't be further supported by the Arts Council, with 21% undecided.

**Figure 19: Are there any other ways you feel the Arts Council could better support you as a client? (base=602)**



## Statistically significant differences

### All clients (individuals and organisations)



- Organisations (52%) compared with individuals (47%) were more likely to say there are other ways that the Arts Council can better support them as clients



- Those who had their application rejected (67%) compared with applicants who had their application approved (43%) were more likely to say there are other ways that the Arts Council can better support them as clients

### Individuals only



- Females (55%) compared with males (47%) were more likely to say there are other ways that the Arts Council can better support them as clients

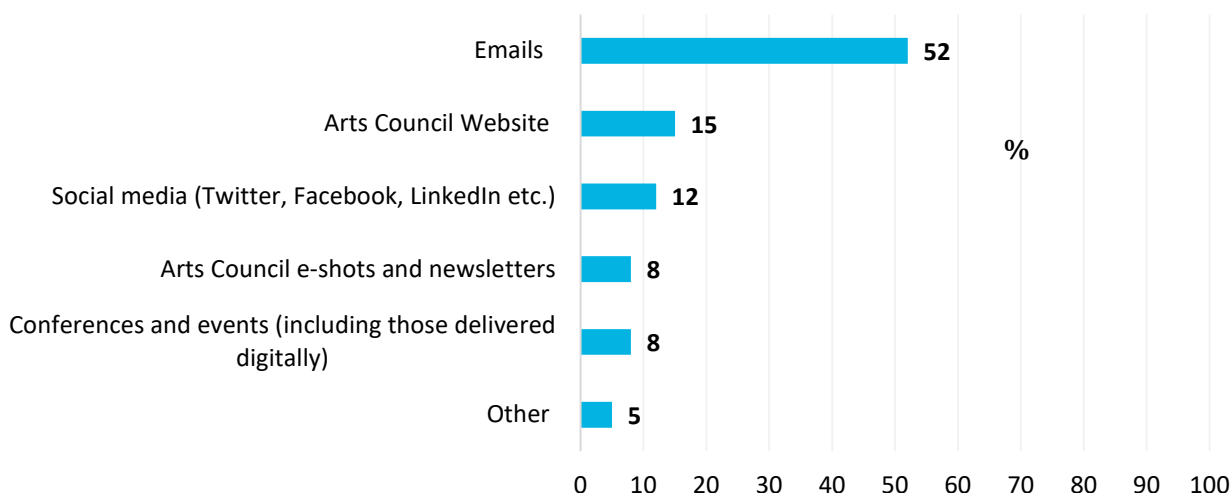
## Suggestions for better supporting clients

Those (n=303) who believe there are other ways that the arts council can support them as a client made a number of suggestions, with the most common including: more money from government, more money distributed (11%); be open to applications from different projects / people (10%); be open / open communication / more communication / approachable (8%); face-to-face meetings / interviews / workshops (8%); listen to artists - recognition - acknowledgement – engagement (8%); networking for artists (7%); being more visible - attend events (6%); easier funding application process (5%); training artists on funding applications / sustainable practice (5%); be more supportive (4%); calendar / timeline of upcoming funding / awareness of funding / email alerts about funding (4%); more frequent funding opportunities (4%); and, be a greater advocate for arts (4%).

## Most important way of communicating with clients

Just over half (52%) of clients said that of the different ways that the Arts Council uses to communicate with them, email is the most important. Other ways that the Arts Council communicates with clients were seen as important by relatively fewer clients: Arts Council website, 15%; social media, 12%; Arts Council e-shots and newsletters (8%); and, conferences and events (8%). Five percent cited other forms of communication<sup>4</sup>.

**Figure 20: Of the different ways that the Arts Council uses to communicate with clients, which is most important to you? (base=602)**



### All clients (individuals and organisations)



- Organisations (60%) compared with individuals (49%) were more likely to say that email communication from the Arts Council is most important to them

### Individuals only



- Males (54%) compared with females (43%) were more likely to say that email communication from the Arts Council is most important to them

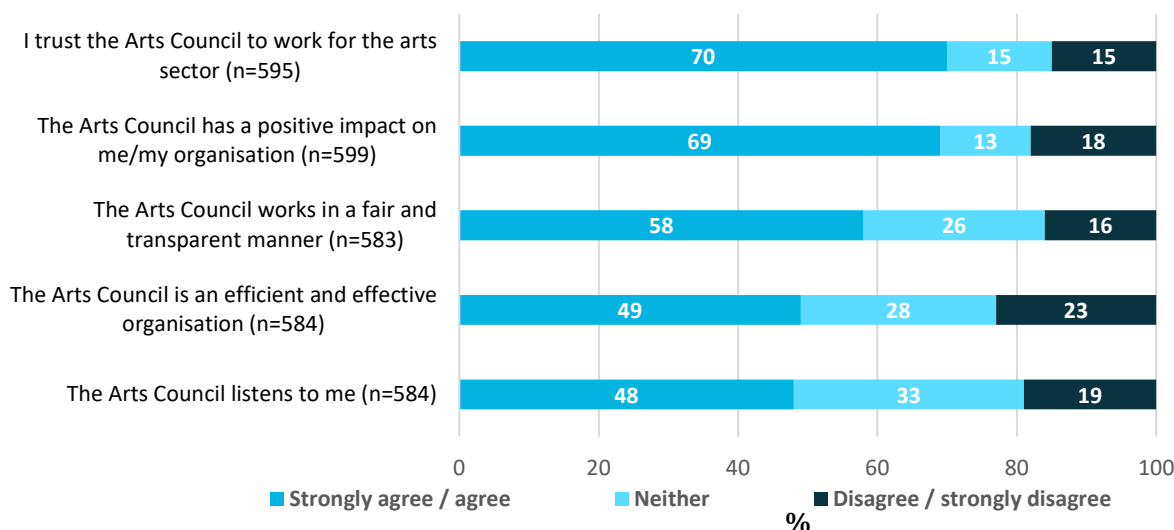


<sup>4</sup> Included: face-to-face meetings / direct engagement (n=16); phone calls (n=8); conference / forums / events (n=3).

## Perception of the Arts Council

The survey included a number of questions aimed at gauging client perception of Arts Council. Figure 21 shows that most clients either strongly agreed or agreed with the statements: I trust the Arts Council to work for the arts sector (70%); the Arts Council has a positive impact on me/my organisation (69%); and, the Arts Council works in a fair and transparent manner (58%). Slightly less than half of clients either strongly agreed or agreed with the statements: the Arts Council is an efficient and effective organisation (49%); and, the Arts Council listens to me (48%).

**Figure 21: Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the Arts Council? (base=602)**



## Statistically significant differences

### I trust the Arts Council to work for the arts sector

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher agreement among those applying in the last 12 months (73%) [more than 12 months ago, 65%]
- Higher agreement among successful applicants (79%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (47%)

#### Individuals

- More disagreement among clients with a disability (24%) compared with non-disabled clients (13%)

### The Arts Council works in a fair and transparent manner

#### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher agreement among clients in rural areas (68%) compared with clients in urban areas (54%)
- Higher agreement among those applying in the last 12 months (63%) [more than 12 months ago, 53%]
- Higher agreement among successful applicants (69%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (34%)

#### Individuals

- More disagreement among clients with a disability (31%) compared with non-disabled clients (12%)



## The Arts Council listens to me

### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- More disagreement among unsuccessful applicants (42%) compared with successful applicants (8%)

### Individuals

- More disagreement among clients with a disability (29%) compared with non-disabled clients (16%)

## The Arts Council is an efficient and effective organisation

### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- More disagreement among clients in urban areas (26%) compared with clients in rural areas (15%)
- Higher agreement among successful applicants (59%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (26%)

### Individuals

- Higher agreement among males (59%) compared with females (42%)
- More disagreement among those aged under 40 (under 40, 31%; 40-50, 22%; over 50, 18%)

## The Arts Council has a positive impact on me/my organisation

### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher agreement among those applying in the last 12 months (74%) [more than 12 months ago, 63%]
- Higher agreement among successful applicants (84%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (32%)

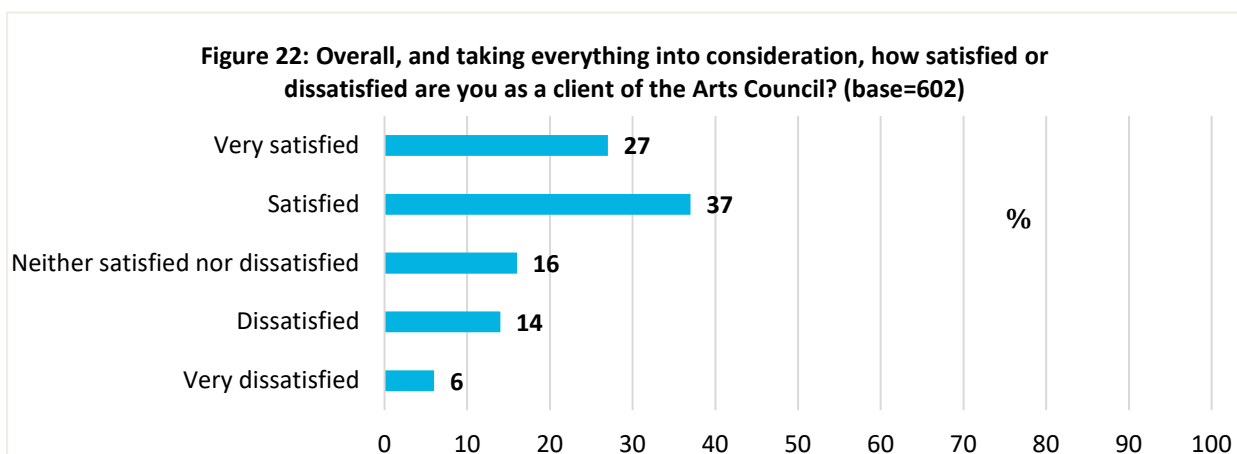


# Overall satisfaction with the Arts Council and additional comments

## Overall satisfaction with the Arts Council



Overall and taking everything into consideration, 64% of clients said they are either very satisfied (27%) or satisfied (37%) with the Arts Council. Sixteen percent (16%) are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 20% are either dissatisfied (14%) or very dissatisfied (6%).



## Statistically significant differences

### All clients (individuals and organisations)

- Higher satisfaction among successful applicants (80%) compared with unsuccessful applicants (28%)
- Higher satisfaction among clients who believe they have strong relationship with the Arts Council (90%) compared with applicants who believe that their relationship with the Arts Council is not strong (35%)

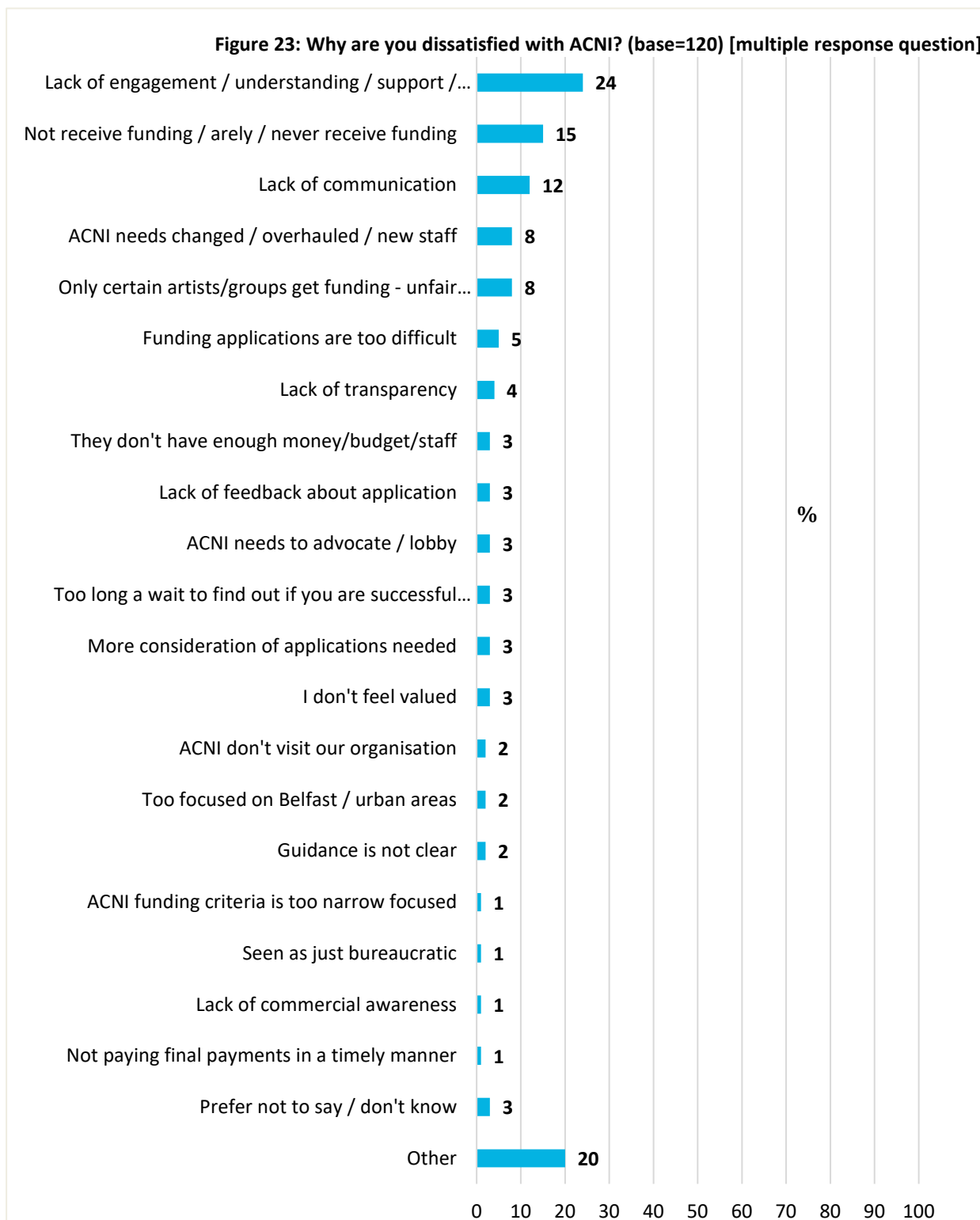
### Individuals

- Higher dissatisfaction among clients with a disability (27%) compared with non-disabled clients (16%)



## Reasons for being dissatisfied with the Arts Council

Finally, the most common reasons why some clients (n=120) are dissatisfied with the Arts Council included: lack of engagement/ understanding/ support/artistic vision (24%); not receiving / rarely receiving funding (15%); and, lack of communication (12%). Other reasons for dissatisfaction were cited by relatively fewer clients.



## Additional comments on the Arts Council

At the end of the survey clients were invited to provide any additional comments on the services provided by ACNI or make suggestions on further service improvements. Clients commented on a number of different themes including strengths and suggestions, as well areas for improvement.

### Strengths and suggestions



**Personal impact:** Many artists and organisations express deep appreciation for the role ACNI has played in sustaining their practice or organisation. One called it “an asset to me in my writing career,” while another said they were “delighted (and humbled)” by the support received.



**Positive perceptions of staff:** ACNI staff are described as “helpful,” “considerate,” “patient,” and “very effective.” Even among some critical comments, there is recognition of the professionalism and goodwill of staff members. This is consistent with the high satisfaction figures we see in the quantitative section of the report. One person wrote: “the ACNI staff that we have dealt with are also a delight. Helpful, considerate, patient, understanding of us/our place, and very effective in what they do. Cherish them!”



**Support for small or local groups:** ACNI is praised for acknowledging the needs of smaller charities or community-based organisations, particularly in the disability sector: “A great organisation that understands the issues smaller charities face in the disability sector”.



**A repeated suggestion is to increase** personalised and timely communication, including regular email updates, a public funding calendar, and more clarity about application decisions.



**Respondents** also want greater visibility of ACNI staff at events and in underrepresented regions like Derry or rural areas.



Many call for the return of multi-annual funding for organisations and freelancers to reduce the administrative burden and allow for sustainable planning.



**Other suggestions** include improvements to the website (e.g. searchable ‘Who We Funded’ page), making the application portal more accessible and disability-friendly, and simplifying application forms with features like auto-calculating finance sections. Some point out that the ACNI’s limitations are tied to its political and funding context, suggesting systemic underinvestment in the arts rather than ACNI failings per se. One comment states: “We value deeply and seriously the role of ACNI and the importance and independence of such an Arm’s Length Body supporting the arts and the broader arts and cultural ecology”.

### Areas for improvement

Many respondents feel that funding goes to the same people or institutions, with one noting “certain individuals get regular funding whilst others get none.”

There’s criticism of a rigid definition of art, with concern that ACNI acts as a gatekeeper, privileging certain styles or academic expectations over artistic experimentation or market viability.

A common frustration is the lack of detailed feedback on unsuccessful applications. Clients feel that even after extensive effort was invested, there is limited feedback about their applications. These comments suggest that this discourages reapplication or artistic development.

The application process is frequently described as onerous, particularly for small groups with limited admin capacity. Calls for simpler applications, longer lead times, and more pre-application support were widespread.



Similar to the results from the Working and Living Conditions of artists in Northern Ireland, some clients warn of artists losing faith or leaving Northern Ireland due to a lack of support or perceived exclusion.

- Some comments highlight perceived inequalities between disciplines (e.g. circus and literature vs. theatre) and suggest better understanding of ethnic or cultural diversity, including differences in artistic language and expression.

