Northumberland Audience Research Project

A research project delivered by NGI

Table of Contents

Introduction

A collective of eight cultural organisations based in Northumberland commissioned NGI to deliver research examining their audiences and potential future audiences. In addition to this, the group also wanted to identify and understand more about those in county they are currently not reaching.

These organisations are:

- o November Club
- o Museums Northumberland
- o Mortal Fools
- o Queens Hall Arts
- o Berwick Film and Media Arts Festival
- o Headway Arts
- o Alnwick Gardens
- o Maltings Berwick

The organisations are keen for the research to answer and address the following key questions and themes regarding culture in Northumberland:

- o Are cultural habits changing and if so, how?
- o Are people viewing cultural offers differently now?
- o With what frequency do audiences engage in cultural work?
- o Where do audiences look to find out information on cultural events?
- o How do audiences in Northumberland want to be communicated with?
- o The perception of digital work and what audiences engage with. Can digital be used as a gateway to new audiences and live work in Northumberland?
- o What benefits do audiences receive from culture?
- o How does the sense of place operate in Northumberland? Is there a Northumberland audience, or do audiences relate more to their local areas?

There are also specific audiences that the group wanted to gather further insight on. These include:

- o Young People: The group are keen to learn more about the best ways to engage and communicate with young people in the county, as well and identifying barriers to engagement and solutions to overcome them.
- o Learning Disabled: The group would also like to understand who the audiences are for work produced by a Learning Disabled company, and again what are the main barriers for the Learning Disabled in engaging with culture and cultural works, and how can they help enable people to overcome these barriers.
- o Rural Audiences: How rural audiences engage with live work and can digital engagement work in rural Northumberland.
- o Audiences from low-income backgrounds and deprived areas: How to access more deprived areas of the county and engage with those audiences.

Methodology

NGI took a four-pronged approach to gathering the data needed for this project. This included:

Desk Research

Several of the organisations involved in the project had existing audience data which was shared with NGI to begin the process of analysing current audiences. This data was then compared with Northumberland's demographic data gathered from ONS, NOMIS, and Northumberland Knowledge to identify who in Northumberland the group are currently not reaching.

Museums Northumberland commissioned Tri-Colour Associates to conduct a separate piece of research with some crossover, including a demographic analysis of Northumberland's population. NGI and Tri-Colour Associates met to agree a consistency of approach and to avoid any duplication of work. The demographic analysis of Northumberland's population can therefore be credited to Tri-Colour Associates.
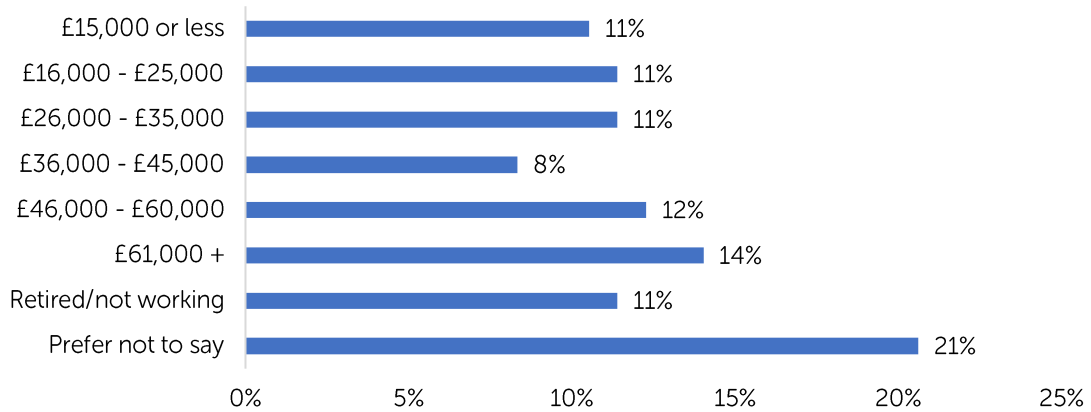
Online Survey – Over 21s

NGI carried out two online surveys, one aimed at adults (over 21s) in Northumberland, and another aimed specifically at young people (under 21s) in the county.

The online survey aimed at adults was designed to gather a combination of qualitative and quantitative data on the questions and themes mentioned above. The online survey garnered a total of 335 responses meaning the group can be over 90% confident that the data at an overall level has a variance of no more than +/-5% accuracy.

The demographics of respondents were also captured:

- o The majority (93%) described themselves as White British/English/Scottish/Welsh/Northern Irish. 3% preferred not to say, and 2% identified as any other white background.
- o 76% identified as female, and 20% as male. 1% preferred not to say, and 3% identified as other.
- o 30% stated they have a long-term health condition or disability, and of that 30%, most (62%) were physical and 20% were mental. 6% stated neurological.
- o In terms of household income:

Household Income

Income	%
£15,000 or less	11%
£16,000 - £25,000	11%
£26,000 - £35,000	11%
£36,000 - £45,000	8%
£46,000 - £60,000	12%
£61,000 +	14%
Retired/not working	11%
Prefer not to say	21%

Postcode analysis of respondents:
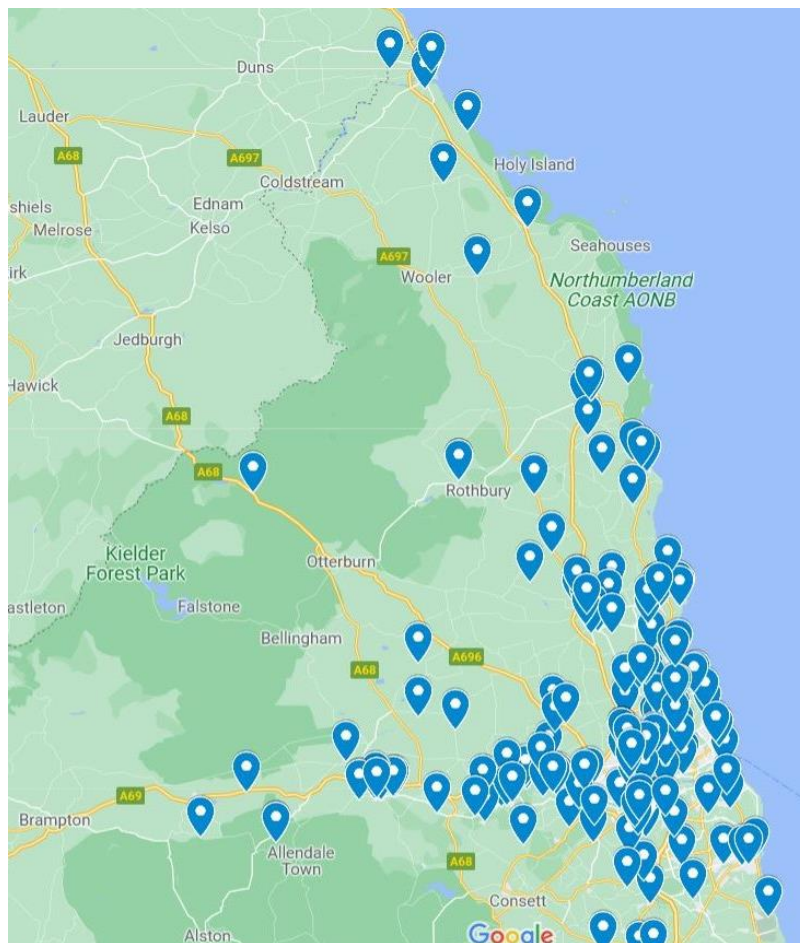
Online Survey – Under 21s

The young persons' survey was designed to build on the feedback we received from the young persons' focus group. In total 33 young people competed the online survey, providing additional quantitative data.
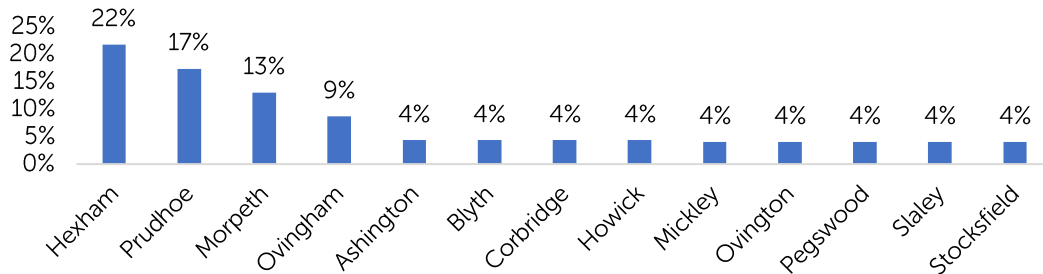
The demographics of the young people are found below:

- 15% were under the age of 10. 30% were aged between 10-15, and 27% were aged between 16-18. A further 6% were aged between 19-21.
- 64% identified as female, and 28% identified as male.

Where in Northumberland do you live ?

Hexham	Prudhoe	Morpeth	Ovingham	Ashington	Blyth	Corbridge	Howick	Mickley	Ovington	Pegswood	Slaley	Stocksfield
22%	17%	13%	9%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%

Focus Groups

NGI conducted four focus groups as part of the project, three of which were in person, and one online due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

The aims of the focus groups were to gather in-depth qualitative data from specific audiences in Northumberland:

1. The first focus group was carried out at Headway Arts in Blyth and was with members of the community with Learning Disabilities, as well as their families and those who work with or care for them.
2. The second focus group was with young people, and again carried out in Headway Arts in Blyth.
3. The third focus group was carried out in Berwick-upon-Tweed with the public/residents of Berwick and other nearby areas in Northern Northumberland.
4. The fourth and final focus group was moved online due to the work-from-home guidance from central government. This focus group was with residents of Northumberland whose household income was lower than the county's average, as well as those who live in rural areas.

In each focus group, participants were asked questions on the themes outlined in the introduction, and were encouraged to discuss at length topics such as barriers to engaging in culture in Northumberland, how easy or difficult it is to find information on things to do in the county, where they go for information on cultural events, whether their cultural habits have changed since the Covid-19 pandemic, and in what ways the cultural offer in Northumberland could be improved.

Market Days

To build on the data gathered through the online surveys and the focus groups, colleagues from NGI's research fieldwork team attended market days in Ashington, Morpeth, and Blyth to speak to residents of Northumberland about the cultural offer in the county.

In total, across the 3 markets, members of NGI's fieldwork team spoke to 100 Northumberland residents gathering a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data on

barriers to engagement, ease of finding information, perceptions of the cultural offer in the county, what events and productions residents would like to see more of, frequency of engagement, and the role of digital in accessing and engaging in culture and cultural works.

The demographics of those spoken to across the market days are as follows:

- 49% identified as male, 51% as female.
- 80% described themselves as White British/English/Scottish/Welsh/Northern Irish. 4% described themselves as White Irish, 3% as Indian, 2% as Black/Black British, 1% as Pakistani, 1% as Bangladeshi, and 1% as Arab.
- In terms of household income, 20% earned £15,000 or less, and 29% earned between £16,000-£25,000. 5% earned more than £46,000, and 16% were retired.

Where do you live?
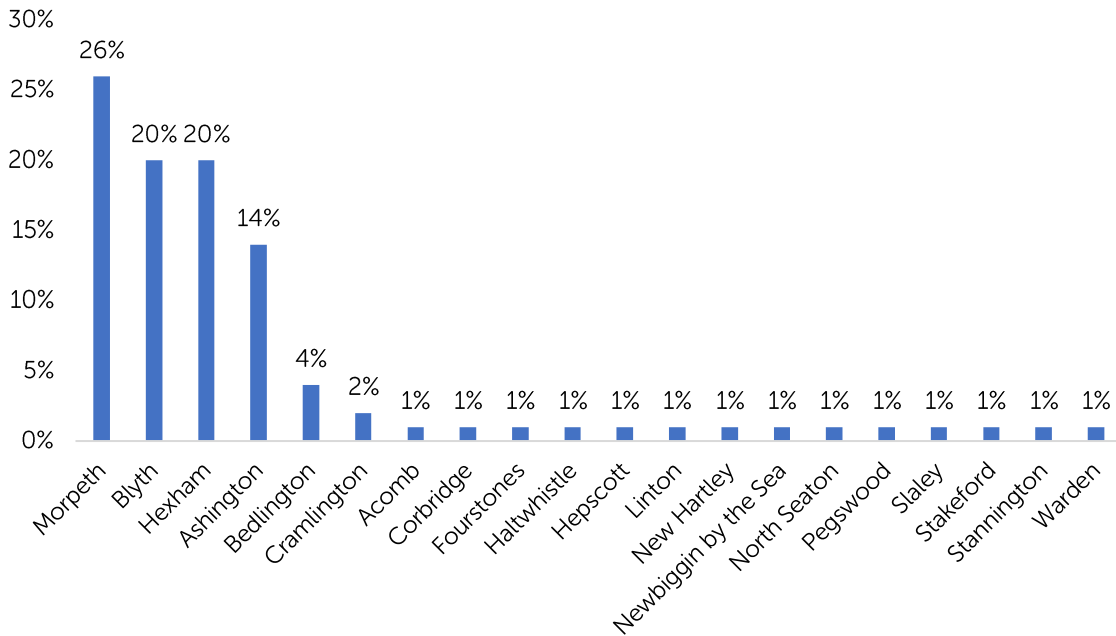
Northumberland Demographics

Northumberland's Demographics

The ONS estimates a population of Northumberland (county) of 323,820 people (165,796 female and 158,024 male, 51.2%/48.8%) in 2020. With an estimate of 67.081 million people in the UK in 2020, Northumberland makes up 0.48% of the UK population. In 2017, the population density for England was 427 people per sq km, but for Northumberland this figure was 64 per sq km. This is due to 97% of its land area being classed as rural.

Population estimates are based on 2011 Census data which calculated Northumberland (county) to have a population of 316,028. The following demographic statistics are from this 2011 Census data.

Gender (Northumberland)

	count	%
All usual residents	316,028	100.0
Males	154,124	48.8
Females	161,904	51.2

Residents of Northumberland are generally older than the average population of England (which has a mean of 39.3 years and a median of 39 years). Northumberland has a greater proportion aged 45 and older (50.3%) compared to the whole of England (41.8%).

The life expectancy at birth for males was estimated at 79.2 years and 82.6 years for females in Northumberland (2016). In 2016, the age-standardised mortality rate (ASMR) for Northumberland was 1012 deaths per 100,000 population compared to 959 for England.

Age (Northumberland)

	count	%
All usual residents	316,028	100.0
Under 15 (Children/youth adolescents)	53,866	17.0
Age 16-24 (Youths)	30,847	9.8
Age 25-44 (Adults)	72,343	22.9
Age 45-64 (Older Adults)	95,668	30.3
Age 65+ (Seniors)	63,304	20.0
Mean Age	42.8	
Median Age	45.0	

Compared to the whole of England, residents of Northumberland have higher proportions of being married/partnered (52.3% compared to 46.8%), and higher proportions of being widowed (8.2% compared to 6.9%).

Marital and civil partnership status (Northumberland)

	count	%
All usual residents aged 16+	262,162	100.0
Single	72,424	27.6
Married/Civil partnership	137,012	52.3
Separated/Divorced	31,170	11.9
Widowed	21,556	8.2

Looking at ethnicity, there is a greater proportion of white residents (97.2%) compared to the rest of England (at 85.4%). The next highest ethnic group is Asian/Asian British at 0.8%.

In Northumberland, 98.7% of households have all people aged 16+ with English as their main language, compared to 90.9% of all households in England.

Ethnic group (Northumberland)

	count	%
All usual residents	316,028	100.0
White	311,066	97.2
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	1,692	0.5
Asian/Asian British	2,658	0.8
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	338	0.1
Other ethnic group	274	0.1

While the proportion of those with religion for Northumberland (69.7%) is similar to that of England (68.1%), there is a higher proportion of Christians in Northumberland (68.6% compared to 59.4%).

Religion (Northumberland)

	count	%
All usual residents	316,028	100.0
Has religion	220,24	69.7
Christian	*216,673*	*68.6*
Buddhist	*578*	*0.2*
Hindu	*335*	*0.1*
Jewish	*169*	*0.1*
Muslim	*1,018*	*0.3*
Sikh	*494*	*0.2*
Other religion	*980*	*0.3*
No religion	75,620	23.9
Religion not stated	20,161	6.4

The health trends in the table below are similar to those of the whole of England. However, 49.9% of adults in Northumberland achieve at least 150 mins of at least moderate-intensity physical activity per week, lower than the England figure of 57%.

Health (Northumberland)

	count	%
All usual residents	316,028	100.0
Day-to-day activities limited a lot	30,940	9.8
Day-to-day activities limited a little	34,558	10.9
Day-to-day activities not limited	250,530	79.3
Very good health	138,990	44.0
Good health	108,458	34.3
Fair health	48,580	15.4
Bad health	15,641	4.9
Very bad health	4,359	1.4

Northumberland residents generally have slightly more cars or vans (78%) compared to England (74.2%). There are 0.53 cars/vans per resident of Northumberland, compared to 0.48 per England resident. 88.6% of households in Northumberland reside in whole house or bungalow (ie. not flats), compared to 77.5%.

Car or van availability (Northumberland)

	count	%
All households	138,534	100.0
No cars or vans in household	30,543	22.0
1 car or van in household	60,875	43.9
2 cars or vans in household	36,916	26.6
3 or more cars or vans in household	10,200	7.3

Looking at household composition, there is a greater proportion of one-person households of residents aged 65 and over in Northumberland (14.0% compared to 12.4% in the whole of England). There are more one-family households in Northumberland (66.3% compared to 61.8%).

Household composition (Northumberland)

	count	%
All households	138,534	100.0
One person household	41,406	29.9
Age under 65	*21,999*	*15.9*
Aged 65 and over	*19,407*	*14.0*
One family household	91,809	66.3
All aged 65 and over	*14,239*	*10.3*
Couples/parents with dependent children	*34,501*	*24.9*
	43,069	*31.1*
Couples/parents without dependents	5,319	3.8

Northumberland only has slightly less residents who are economically active (67.9%) compared to the whole of England (69.9%), More of Northumberland's residents are retired (18.8%) compared to the whole of England (13.7%).

Economic activity (Northumberland)

	count	%
All usual residents aged 16 to 74	233,224	100.0
Economically active	158,268	67.9
Part-time employee	*34,368*	*14.7*
Full-time employee	*86,380*	*37.0*
Self-employed	*22,063*	*9.5*
Unemployed	*10,329*	*4.4*
Full-time student	*5,128*	*2.2*
Economically Inactive	74,956	32.1
Retired	*43,897*	*18.8*
Student	*8,108*	*3.5*
Long-term sick or disabled	*10,321*	*3.6*
Looking after home or family	*8,368*	*4.4*
Other	*4,262*	*1.8*

Occupations in Northumberland follow a similar trend to that of the whole of England.

Occupation (Northumberland)

	count	%
All usual residents aged 16-74 in employment	146,901	100.0
1. Managers, directors and senior officials	15,459	10.5
2. Professional	22,807	15.5
3. Associate professional, technical	16,827	11.5
4. Administrative, secretarial	16,891	11.5
5. Skilled trades	19,038	13.0
6. Caring, leisure, other service	15,579	10.6
7. Sales and customer service	12,688	8.6
8. Process plant and machine operatives	11,390	7.8
9. Elementary occupations	16,222	11.0

## Current Audience Demographic Data

Several organisations involved in the project shared their own audience data via their surveys, customer lists, visitor data, and past evaluation projects. By amalgamating the demographic data together and comparing the findings with Northumberland's demographic breakdown, we can identify those audiences not being reached.

When looking at the typical profile of those currently engaging in Northumberland's cultural offer, we can see 16–24-year-olds & 25–34-year-olds are the least likely to access and engage in culture in Northumberland. As discussed later in the report, findings in the focus groups and online survey include feedback from these age groups and their perception that Northumberland currently caters for either very young audiences or older audiences but offers little for young adults:

Age

| Under 16	16 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 54	55 - 64	65 or older
10%	3%	5%	14%	18%	31%	19%
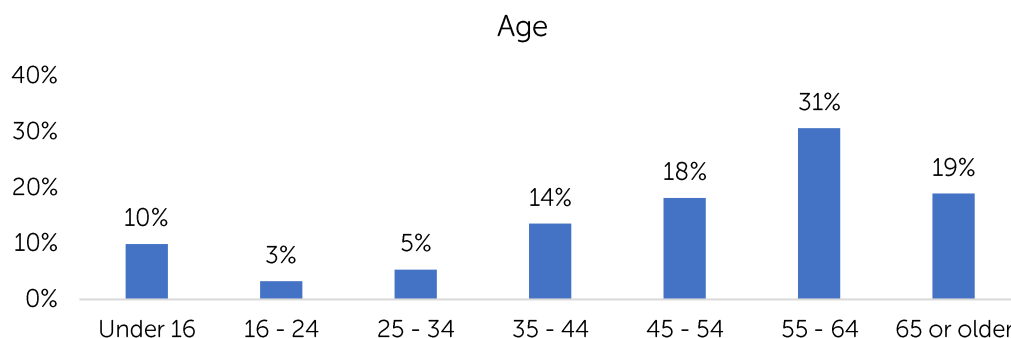
Similarly, when looking at the gender of those currently engaging, there are a higher proportion of females than males. ONS data does indicate there being more females in the county (51.2%/48.8%) however what we can see below is under a third of the currently engaged audience is male.

Gender

Female — 69%
Male — 31%
Prefer not to say — 0%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80%
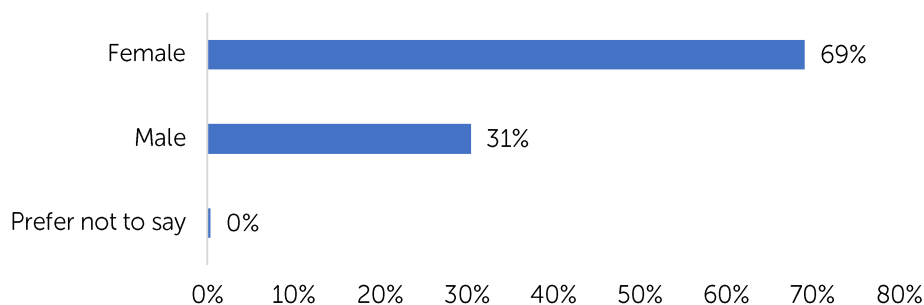
With regards to ethnicity, White residents account for 97.2% of the entire population of Northumberland, with the next most common being Asian/Asian British (0.8%) and this is mirrored almost like for like for those currently engaged In Northumberland's cultural offer.

Ethnicity

White — 98%
Prefer not to say — 1%
Asian — 0%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%
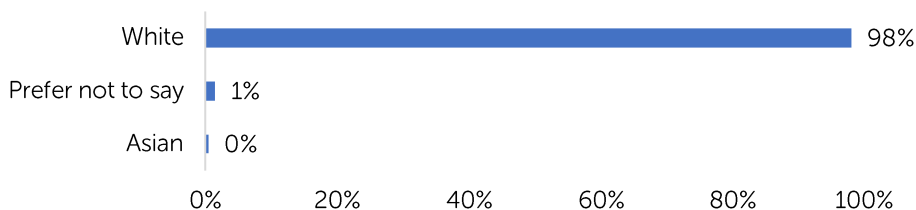
As mentioned above, the ONS estimates that just over 1 in 5 residents of the county have health related limitations on their day-to-day activities (10.9% limited a little, 9.8% limited a lot). In comparison, less than 1 in 10 of those engaged in Northumberland's cultural offer described their day-to-day activities as being limited due to a health condition (s) (7% limited a little, 2% limited a lot).

Limitations Day to Day Activities:

Yes, limited a lot — 2%
Yes, limited a little — 7%
Prefer not to say — 6%
No — 86%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%
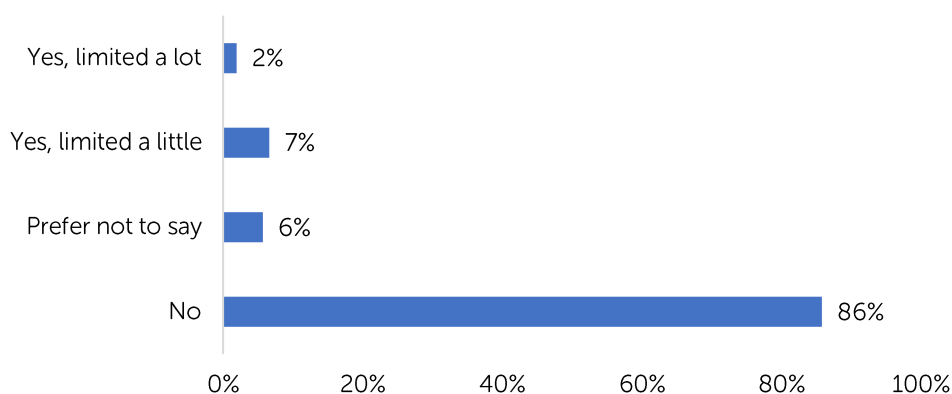
Specific Audiences

The next three chapters look specifically at three audiences the organisations were keen to learn more about. The first is young people, the second is the learning disabled, and the third is those from rural and deprived areas.

Young people

As the brief explained, the organisations wanted to consider their work with young people in the county and how they reach and communicate with them.
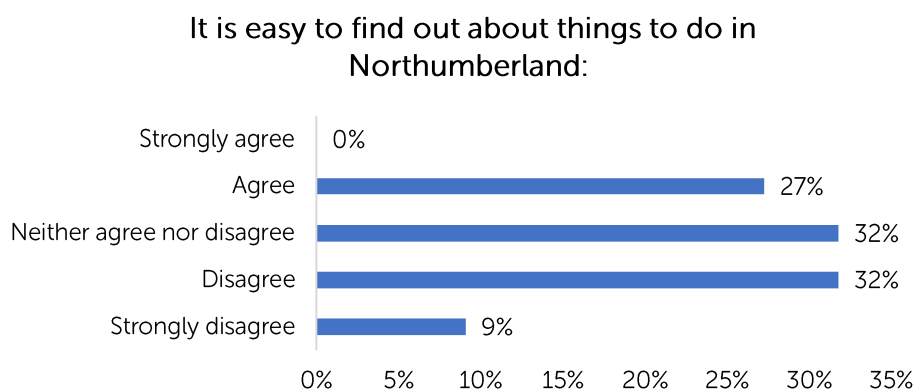
Through a combination of focus groups and online surveys we asked young people in the county how they access information on cultural events in Northumberland, whether they felt it was easy to find out about things to do, what barriers there are to accessing and attending cultural events and venues in the county, and what they would like to see more of in the future.

Awareness and Sources of Information

In terms of accessing information about culture and cultural events in Northumberland, young people in the focus group in Blyth believed it was difficult to find out about things to do in the county and they had little knowledge of the cultural offer in Northumberland. When asked if they could name some museums, festivals, theatres, or other cultural venues or events, the young people in Blyth were aware of some venues in their immediate locality such as the Phoenix Theatre in Blyth and the Links Art Gallery in Whitley Bay. They were also aware of some major venues and events due to take place in Newcastle such as UK Pride 2022, the Theatre Royal, and the Discovery Museum. However, aside from that, their knowledge of cultural events and venues tended to relate to major annual music events outside the region, such as Reading & Leeds festival and Creamfields festival. Ultimately, the young people in Blyth had a low level of awareness of the county's cultural offer.

When comparing what young people told us at the focus group in Blyth with the findings from the young persons' online survey, there are some key learnings to takeaway. In the young persons' survey 41% disagreed or strongly disagreed that it is easy to find out about things to do in Northumberland, reinforcing what the young people in Blyth had told us:

It is easy to find out about things to do in Northumberland:

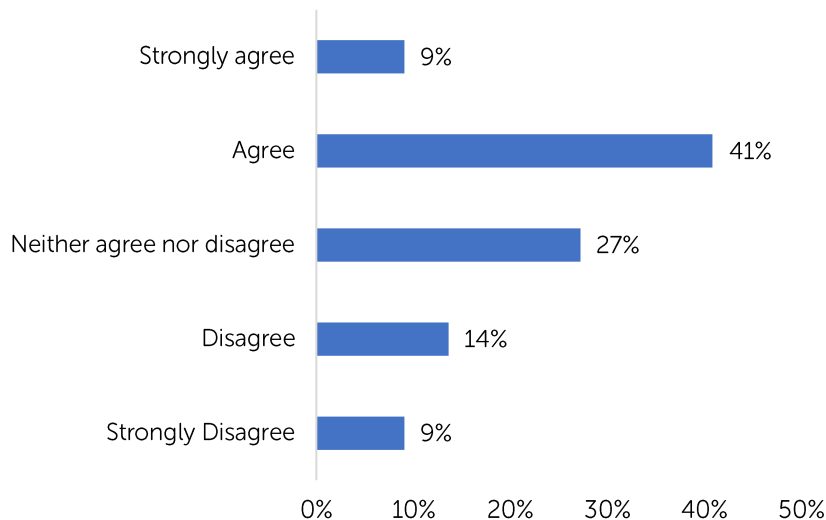| Response	Percentage
Strongly agree	0%
Agree	27%
Neither agree nor disagree	32%
Disagree	32%
Strongly disagree	9%

However, when asked on the young person's online survey, whether they would agree that, if they wanted to attend a theatre, museum, or festival in Northumberland they would know where to look, those who disagreed fell to 23%.

Our findings suggest this is because young people believe they know what tools to use to find information (and how to use them) – in the focus group in Blyth for example, they stated if they wanted to find more information about an event they have heard about or a venue they already have some levels of awareness of, they would use google searches or go on specific venues' websites/social channels.

However, the challenge for young people is this isn't exposing them to new cultural events or venues that they are not aware of, hence why earlier 41% believed it is not easy to find out about things to do in the county.

If i wanted to attend a theatre, museum, or festival in Northumberland i would know where to look for information on them:

Response	Percentage
Strongly agree	9%
Agree	41%
Neither agree nor disagree	27%
Disagree	14%
Strongly Disagree	9%

In terms of the awareness of Northumberland's cultural, in the young persons' survey we provided a list of venues and events in the county, combined with some events and venues that were mentioned in the focus group in Blyth, to understand general awareness levels and to compare main drivers of awareness:

Have you ever heard of any of the following:

Venue/Event	Percentage
Alnwick Garden	72%
Beamish Museum	69%
Bamburgh Castle	62%
Discovery Museum	59%
Leeds Festival	45%
Hexham Old Gaol	41%
Queens Hall Arts	41%
Reading Festival	38%
Utilita arena Newcastle	38%
Woodhorn Museum	34%
Mortal Fools	31%
This is Tomorrow Festival	21%
Berwick Museum and Art Gallery	10%
Morpeth Chantry Bagpipe Museum	10%
Phoenix Theatre Blyth	10%
November Club	7%
Headway Arts	7%
Maltings Berwick	7%
Berwick Film and Media Arts Festival	3%
None of the above	3%

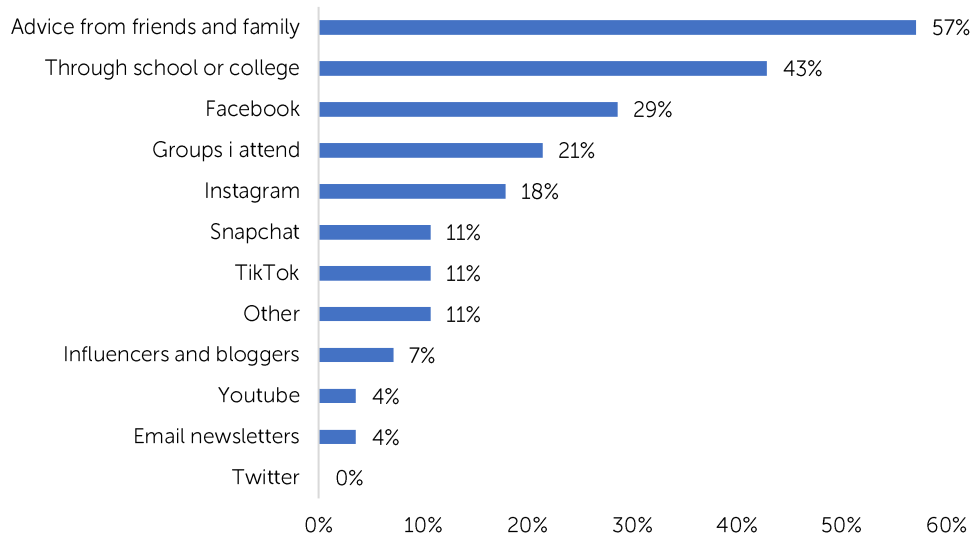To build on this, we also asked young people in both the focus group and the online survey where they typically find out information about things to do in Northumberland. When asked where they go to find out about cultural events and venues, the young people in Blyth said:

- o **Social Media** – Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok. The young people in Blyth said they look at where their friends or peers have visited via sharing pictures and videos on those platforms.
- o **Word of Mouth** – In addition to this, they get a lot of information via word of mouth recommendations from their family, friends, and peers.
- o **Schools and other venues they attend** – They also get information about cultural venues and events through school and the venues they currently attend such as Headway Arts and the Phoenix Theatre.
- o **Google & Search Engines**– The young people stated that once they have heard about a cultural event or venue that they're interested in, they typically use search engines such as Google or visit their specific social media pages to find more information.

The results of the online survey were consistent with what the young people in Blyth told us. Of those 11% that selected other, they stated google search:

Where do you usually find out information about things to do in Northumberland?

Advice from friends and family	57%
Through school or college	43%
Facebook	29%
Groups i attend	21%
Instagram	18%
Snapchat	11%
TikTok	11%
Other	11%
Influencers and bloggers	7%
Youtube	4%
Email newsletters	4%
Twitter	0%

From this, we can learn that the main drivers of awareness of cultural events and venues in Northumberland for young people are:

Geography & Ease of Access – younger people are more likely to be familiar with venues that are close to them geographically, or are of easy access via public transport, with the exception of major out of region annual events such as Reading and Leeds festival. In Blyth, the young people had an awareness of cultural venues in their immediate locality, as well as some events and venues in Newcastle, because they are able to access these easily via public transport. They had little awareness of major cultural venues in areas such as Hexham, Morpeth, and Bamburgh, as existing public transport links makes it very difficult for them to travel around the county.

Peer Networks & Social Media – younger people are exposed to new cultural events and venues in the county via social media and through word of mouth from their friends. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok are key social media platforms that young people use. Often they will be exposed to new events or venues by seeing their peers post on social media about it, or by word of mouth recommendation from their peers.

Exposure via School & Other Institutions – both the online survey and the focus group demonstrate that schools and other clubs and venues that young people attend play a pivotal role in exposing them to new cultural activities, venues, and events in the county. As demonstrated on the online survey, 43% get information from school or college, and a further 21% from groups they attend.

Barriers to Accessing Culture

Both the focus group in Blyth and the online survey reveal the main barriers preventing young people from accessing cultural events and venues in Northumberland are as follows:

Awareness - As outlined in the previous section, awareness can be a key challenge, especially in accessing cultural events and venues that are outside of their locality and elsewhere in the county. 24% of young people that completed the online survey cited not knowing about events and venues as a key barrier.

Across both the online survey and focus groups, young people had spoken about ways to overcome the challenge around awareness. In the online survey one young person said,

> 'I'd like to see more stuff going on through/connected to schools as that would get lots of people involved.'

It's clear from the findings that to overcome the awareness challenge for young people, social media (Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok) and word of mouth are key – engaging with young people on these platforms and encouraging them to post about their visit on their social media (i.e. creating organic content) will drive awareness amongst their peers. Developing relationships with institutions that work with young people such as local schools and other organisations will also help overcome those barriers and expose young people to new cultural activities and experiences.

Interest – 15% of young people that completed the online survey stated that Northumberland's current programme of cultural events and venues that they are aware of aren't interesting to them. This was echoed in the focus group in Blyth. Participants in the focus group believed that there is a lot for audiences with families and particularly young children, and there were cultural venues and events for older people, but nothing that was appealing to them as teenagers. For example, their perception of Northumberland's museums among young people were that they would be full of 'old stuff in glass boxes that we can't touch'.

When asked what cultural activities or events would interest them, the young people in Blyth said they'd be interested in attending interactive and immersive experiences. Beamish museum was given as an example of a museum where one young person had previously been and enjoyed. Another young person cited themed events that are immersive, and mentioned the Psychopath Fair Ground event that occurred during Halloween. These types of venues and events are immersive in the sense that they can engage with venue and actors in various ways, but they are also geared towards organic content creation, which as mentioned above, is a key driver of awareness and engagement for young people. Another suggestion in both the focus group and through the online survey was for venues to have taster days for younger audiences.

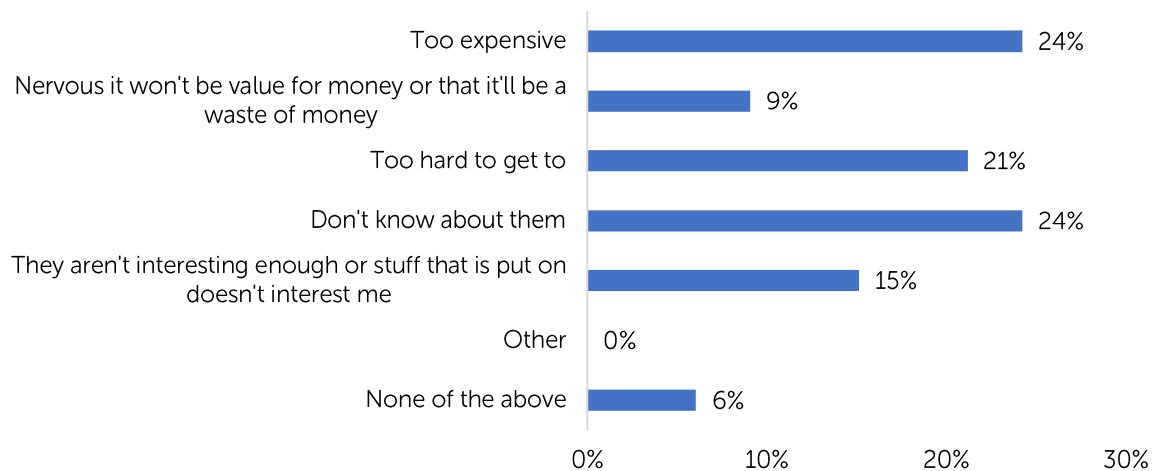**Travel** - A further 21% stated that venues and events are hard to get to in Northumberland, highlighting the difficulty young people in Northumberland face when trying to travel around the county. The perception from young people is that the county isn't well connected, and without a car getting around is very difficult. Public transport in Northumberland is seen as unreliable and expensive by young people.

In the focus groups it was acknowledged that there's not a great deal individual venues can do relating to connectivity around the county. There was the idea of working with local organisations such as schools and transport firms to help make cultural events and venues more accessible.

Expense & Value for Money – 24% of those that completed the online survey stated that accessing culture and cultural events is too expensive. A further 9% said that they are nervous they won't get value for money, meaning 1 in 3 young people in Northumberland see finances as a key barrier to accessing culture. We spoke in depth with the young people in Blyth about this, and they said the cost of travelling to venues that are outside of Blyth, combined with the cost for tickets/entry, and the cost of transport back to Blyth puts them off. They also stated that they don't want to risk wasting their money on new venues or experiences they haven't attended before elsewhere in the county in-case they don't enjoy it.

At the young persons' focus group there was mention of a pass which gets them free cinema visits and they stated if there was something similar for other cultural venues they would at least try them once or twice. One young person said they go to see films they aren't that interested in because they have the free pass, and they sometimes enjoy films they wouldn't have gone to see if they needed to pay full price for it.

Barriers

Barrier	%
Too expensive	24%
Nervous it won't be value for money or that it'll be a waste of money	9%
Too hard to get to	21%
Don't know about them	24%
They aren't interesting enough or stuff that is put on doesn't interest me	15%
Other	0%
None of the above	6%

Learning Disabled

Headway Arts works with Learning Disabled People. A key aim of the research was to understand who the audiences are for work produced by a Learning Disabled Company, and again what are the main sources of information for the Learning Disabled and what are the main barriers preventing them from engaging in culture and cultural works.

To gather this information, we held a focus group in Blyth with the Learning Disabled, as well as their families and those who work with or care for them. We also

asked questions relating to work produced by artists with disabilities on the online survey.

Awareness and Sources of Information

Levels of awareness amongst those with learning disabilities who attended the focus group can be described as restricted to specific types of culture. Most of the group could name a lot of venues and institutions from across the North East, but they tended to be larger cinemas, theatres, and some of the region's major museums.

When asked specifically where they go to find information on cultural events and venues in the county, YouTube was a very common answer, particularly amongst those who often visit the cinema in Cramlington. Others get information from leaflets through the post, TV advertisements of new movies and tv shows, local newspapers such as the Chronicle, groups they attend such as Headway Arts, and again word of mouth was seen as a main source of information.

When asked whether they believe it is easy to find out about new cultural events and activities, initially the group thought it was quite easy. After some discussion, they agreed that it is easy to find out about certain cultural activities, such as new movies, TV shows, and to a lesser extent, theatre productions, but to find out about other cultural activities in Northumberland it can be difficult.

When asked why they believe it is difficult to find out about new cultural events, activities, and venues in Northumberland, one participant mentioned that often information isn't brought to them, and if they want to find out about new things, they'd have to go looking themselves. It was mentioned by a participant that rather than sharing information about new cultural events and activities with the Learning Disabled, those who work at the supported housing schemes can occasionally gatekeep this information and this has been a challenge in the past. A family member of a Learning Disabled participant also mentioned that it can be difficult to find out about local cultural productions, events and activities going on in the North East as:

> 'Everything else is drowned out by the big streaming platforms, and this has become even worse during the pandemic.'

Barriers to Accessing Culture

A key goal of the research was to understand what main barriers are preventing the Learning Disabled from accessing and engaging in cultural events, activities, and venues in Northumberland. Our findings show:

Awareness – As outlined above, excluding cinemas and some of the larger theatres and museums, awareness of the county's cultural offer amongst the Learning Disabled remains a key challenge. The challenge isn't as simple as presenting the relevant information to the correct audience, it's also about presenting it in the correct format and making the information accessible.

To overcome this challenge, in the Learning Disabled focus group, there was the idea of having a curated newsletter specifically for the Learning Disabled, providing them with all the information from one source. It was noted that, when sharing

information, it can't be too word heavy, and it should be available in different formats. The idea of a Northumberland Cultural YouTube channel specifically for the Learning Disabled where they could watch trailers of upcoming events, productions, and exhibitions was suggested and gathered support across the room. This was suggested after it was noted how effective advertisements in the cinema were. Linked to this was another popular suggestion, allowing members of the Learning Disabled to make their own videos reviewing the venues and exhibitions.

In addition to this, one of the family members of a participant with Learning Disabilities said:

> 'Could venues and supported housing schemes work together to share information and encourage people to get involved in productions and events. Joining groups together might help.'

Infrastructure & Attitudes – Another key barrier the Learning Disabled face is infrastructure and attitudes. A family member of a participant gave the example of going to see Take That at the Utilita Arena where the facilities were not very good. He mentioned that despite this being outside the county bad experiences can put them off going to other venues and events. He also said:

> 'You get the impression sometimes that you are a burden, and it should be the other way around, it would be nice to feel embraced rather than saw as a burden. It should be more the merrier rather than the opposite...having a named contact at every venue would also really help.'

As well as having a named contact at every venue, up-skilling and training staff to be able to assist those with additional needs was suggested as a solution. There was also the idea of productions having specific dates and performances for audiences with Learning Disabilities.

Covid-19 Safety – Another key barrier discussed in the focus group was the perceptions of safety and nervousness relating to the pandemic and Covid-19. Almost three quarters of those in the room said yes when asked if the Covid-19 pandemic makes them afraid to go out and visit venues.

In order to overcome this, it was suggested that organisations could offer out taster days to show those with additional needs around the venue. This would help them rebuild their confidence after being locked down for so long, and it would make them feel reassured and welcomed.
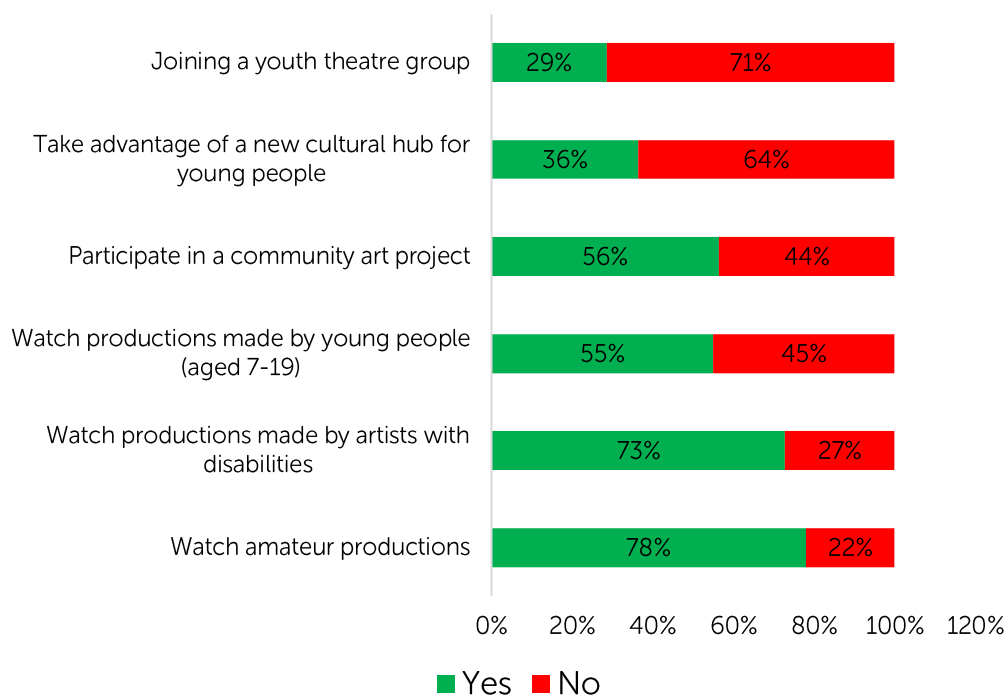
Benefits of Accessing Culture

Those at the focus group were keen to stress the benefits they get from accessing cultural venues and activities, and it was clear from their responses these venues play a key role in supporting people with Learning Disabilities to develop life skills and independence.

One participant said she enjoys attending venues and getting involved in cultural activities at Headway Arts as it helps her develop her independence and other life skills, which boosts her confidence. The skills gained at these venues are then transferable to other areas of her life. This sentiment was echoed by others across the room. For example, for some attending these venues provides them with travel skills, increasing their independence, and they also stated that being involved in productions makes them feel important and it feels good to be a valued member of the group.

Interest in Work Produced by Learning Disabled:

As part of the online survey, we asked respondents whether they would be interested in the following:

	Yes	No
Joining a youth theatre group	29%	71%
Take advantage of a new cultural hub for young people	36%	64%
Participate in a community art project	56%	44%
Watch productions made by young people (aged 7-19)	55%	45%
Watch productions made by artists with disabilities	73%	27%
Watch amateur productions	78%	22%

73% of those that completed the online survey said they would be interested in watching productions made by artists with disabilities, which was second only to watching amateur productions at 78%.

We have analysed the data to understand the profile of respondents who said yes to being interested In watching productions by artists with disabilities:

Gender – 83% identified as Female. 13% identified as Male. 5% preferred not to say.

Age – The majority were over the age of 35. Almost a third were between the ages of 56-66.

Age
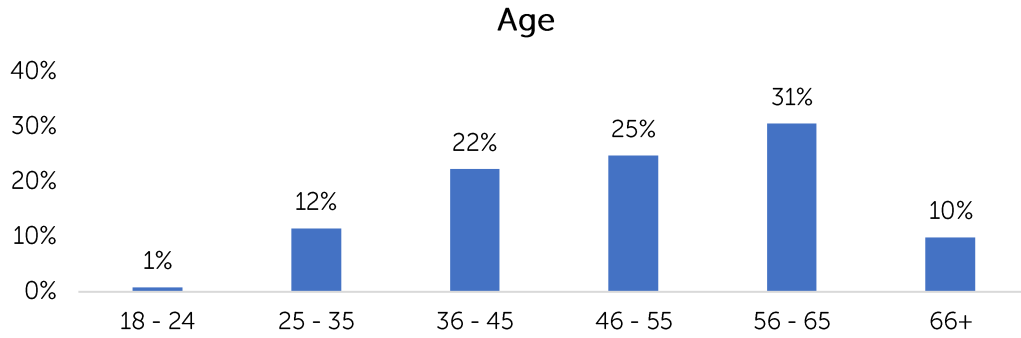
Geography – Over a quarter reside in the South East of Northumberland, and almost 30% in the west of the county.

Where do you currently live?

Location	%
West (Hexham, Prudhoe, Ovington, Riding Mill, Stocksfield, Allendale, Haltwhistle)	29%
South East (Ashington, Blyth, Cramlington, Seaton Sluice, Seaton Delaval, Seghill, Bedlington)	26%
Morpeth, Longhirst, Pegswood	21%
North (Berwick, Alnwick, Amble, Lowick, Longhoughton, Warkworth)	21%
Felton, Guyzance, Longhorsley	4%
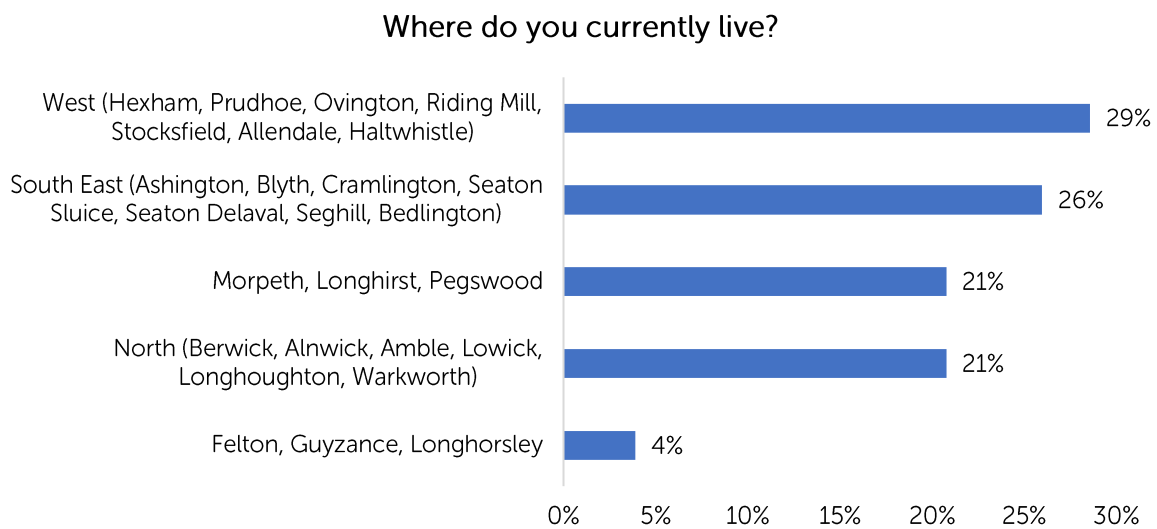
Long term health conditions or disabilities – two thirds of those who expressed an interest in watching productions made by artists with disabilities stated they have no long-term health conditions or disabilities.

Do you have any health conditions or disabilities which have lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?
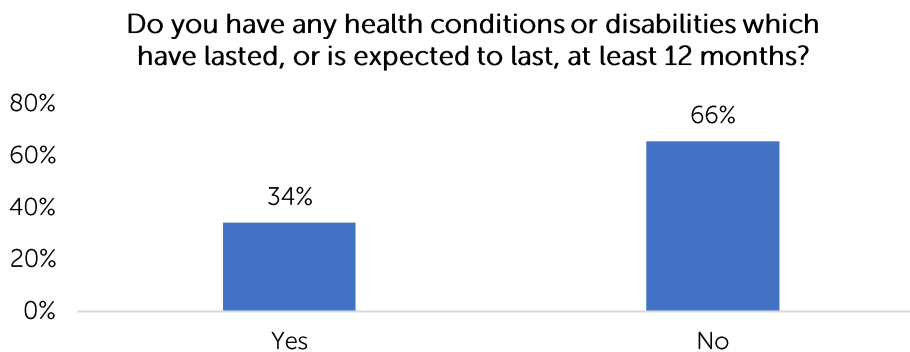
Household Income – In terms of household income of those that stated they'd be interested, there was a real spread, as shown below:

Household Income

Bar chart showing Household Income:
- £15,000 or less: 8%
- £16,000 - £25,000: 17%
- £26,000 - £35,000: 13%
- £36,000 - £45,000: 5%
- £46,000 - £60,000: 13%
- £61,000 +: 16%
- Prefer not to say: 21%
- Retired/not working: 8%
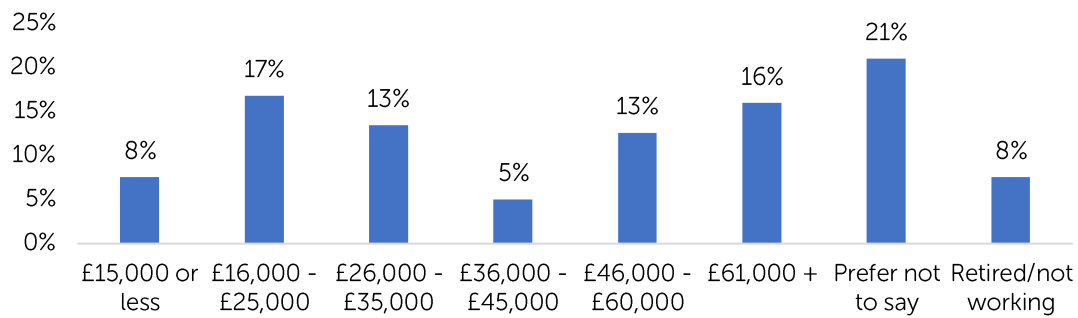
Future Programming

We also asked those at the Learning Disabled focus group what they would like to see more of in Northumberland:

- o There was consensus among the group for more interactive shows and events. They'd like to see more venues where they can get involved in the exhibitions or shows and get immersed in the experience. Examples of previous trips were given where they could join in and interact with actors, and touch and interact with the exhibits.
- o They also said they would like to see more people on stage that reflect them and their community.
- o There was also support from some for more outdoor events in the summer, with the Family Festival in Bedlington given as a good example.

Rural & Low-Income Audiences

As outlined in the brief, the organisations would also like to learn more about how rural and low-income/audiences from deprived backgrounds access and engage with culture in Northumberland.

To gather data on these audiences, we asked specific questions relating to demographics on the online survey and at the market days (such as income and geography), and then isolated their answers for analysis. In addition to this, we held a focus group specifically with those whose household income is lower than the county's average, as well as those from rural areas of Northumberland.

Engaging with Low-Income and Rural Audiences in Northumberland

To get a sense of whether these audiences want to connect with culture, at the market days, we asked respondents whether they would describe themselves as being interested in culture and cultural events. 76% said yes:

Would you describe yourself as being interested in culture and cultural events?
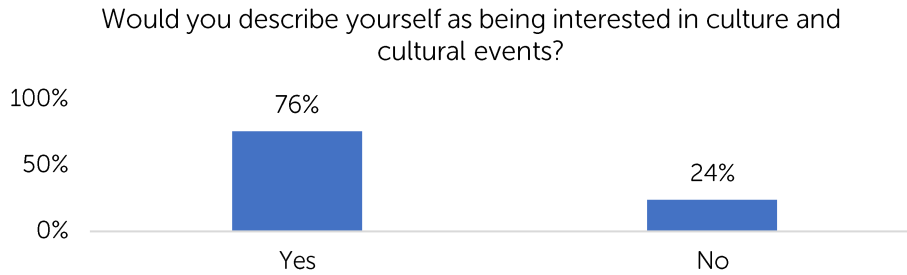
We asked those who said no, why not. Of the 24% that said no, 80% said they are just not interested in cultural events, activities, or venues:

Why Not?
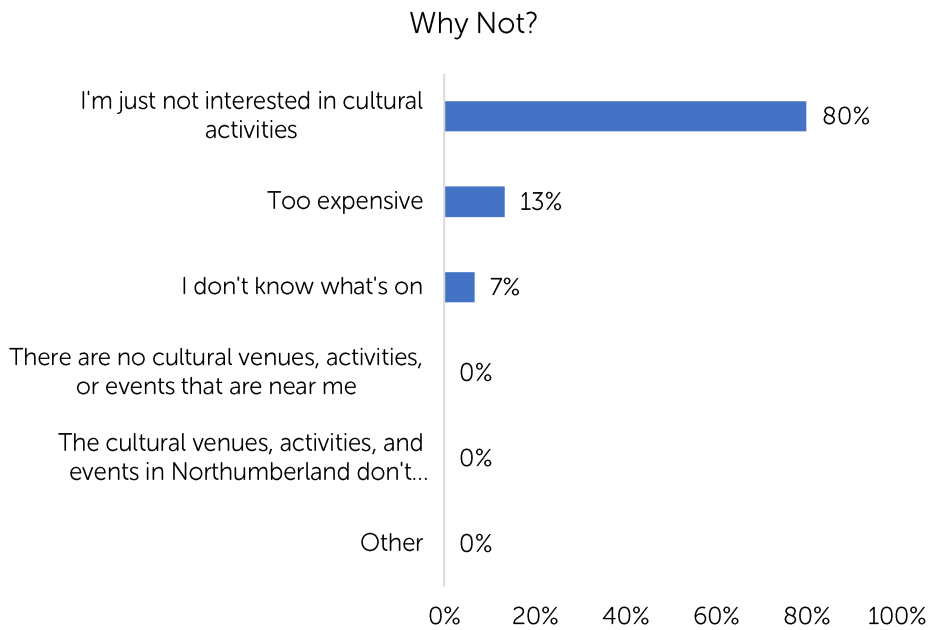
When asked to go into more detail, responses included them being more interested in sports than museums or theatres, and others said Northumberland's cultural offer doesn't appeal to them:

> 'If there were decent music festivals here or a decent gig venue, I would go but there aren't.'

Another respondent added:

> 'It's quite rural so you don't really expect the same culture as a city. If I want museums theatre or art I go to a city.'

As the chart above shows 13% said they aren't interested in culture and cultural events in Northumberland as it is perceived as too expensive and costly. One respondent said:

> 'Having children at home and a low budget makes it very difficult'

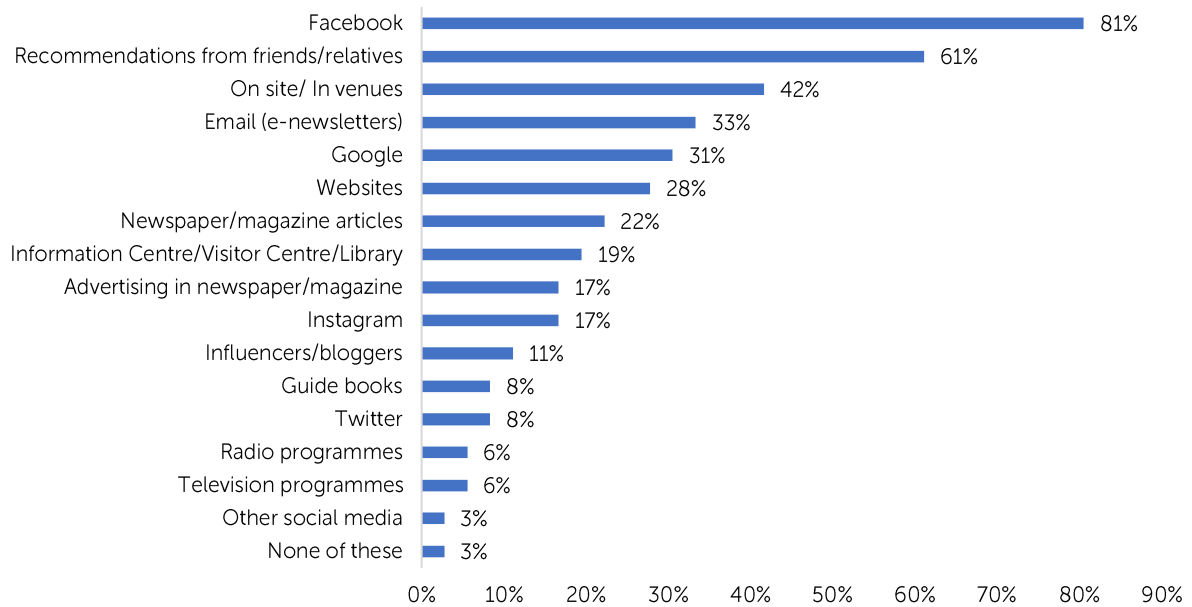7% also stated a lack of awareness as a main reason for not being interested in cultural events and activities.

To gain further insight on where rural and low-income audiences go to get their information on cultural events, venues, and activities in Northumberland, we cut the online survey data by income and geography. We found that typically these

audiences get their information from Facebook, recommendations from friends and relatives, onsite/in venues, and to a lesser extent email newsletters and google searches:

Where do you typically find out about cultural activities, events, and venues in Northumberland?

Source	Percentage
Facebook	81%
Recommendations from friends/relatives	61%
On site/ In venues	42%
Email (e-newsletters)	33%
Google	31%
Websites	28%
Newspaper/magazine articles	22%
Information Centre/Visitor Centre/Library	19%
Advertising in newspaper/magazine	17%
Instagram	17%
Influencers/bloggers	11%
Guide books	8%
Twitter	8%
Radio programmes	6%
Television programmes	6%
Other social media	3%
None of these	3%

To build on this, we also asked the same question in the focus group. There was a similar pattern, with recommendation from friends and relatives, internet searches, and on site/in venues given as key methods of accessing information.

We also wanted to understand how easy these audiences feel it is to find information on cultural events and venues in Northumberland. In the online survey, we asked respondents whether they agree or disagree that it is easy to find out about cultural venues, events, and activities in Northumberland. 47% disagreed or strongly disagreed:

It is easy to find out about cultural events, activities, and venues in Northumberland

Response	Percentage
Strongly agree	8%
Agree	28%
Neither agree nor disagree	17%
Disagree	39%
Strongly disagree	8%
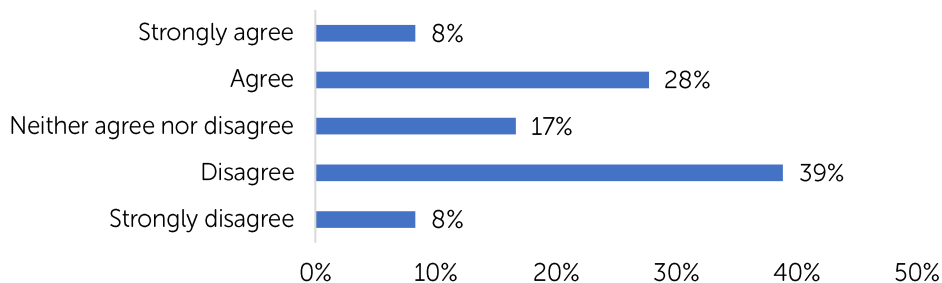
This was also backed up in the focus group, with one participant stating that since the pandemic began, it is harder to get information. Another participant agreed, adding that prior to the pandemic he relied on his network of friends and family to find out about things going on in the county, but since the pandemic this has become more difficult, as he doesn't see them as often as he used to, especially

given the uncertainty of the new variant and the guidance to limit social contact as much as possible.

The reliance on getting information from recommendations from friends and relatives and on site/in venues may explain why some feel it has become harder to find out about Northumberland's cultural offer since the pandemic began. Venues have been closed for large amounts of time and some have not reopened at all and the government has advised limiting social contact, which has severe ramifications for word-of-mouth recommendations.

As well as understanding where these audiences look for information and how difficult they feel it is to find out about Northumberland's cultural offer, there was also feedback both on the online survey and the focus group around ways to reach these audiences and ways to encourage them to get involved in Northumberland's cultural offer.

As saw on the online survey, 42% of this audience get their information about cultural events and exhibitions in venues they already attend. One attendee to the online focus group suggested venues across Northumberland collaborating to co-promote each other for the benefit of the county's cultural offer:

> 'Once you know the places to look, you can find out about good events. Woodhorn Museum for example if you go on their website, you can see lots of things are going on and upcoming at the museum. But that doesn't necessarily lead you on to other venues... I've struggled to find out about new things. I go to the things I know about and they're good at telling you what's upcoming at their venue, but more signposting about events at other venues In Northumberland would help.'

Another participant to the focus group added:

> 'I really want to be able to find new places (smaller artist led spaces) so sharing resources or some of the larger venues lifting up some of the smaller venues, for the benefit of the arts in Northumberland would be good.'

At the online focus group there was also a discussion about the perceptions of the cultural offer in Northumberland, and whether it could be seen as more inviting to new audiences. One attendee said:

> 'Culture in Northumberland is not very welcoming or inviting.'

The attendee gave a specific example of a visual arts exhibition in Northumberland that she attended, and she said it was not very welcoming, and it felt like it was created by a very exclusive group of people, for a very exclusive group of people.

Another attendee to the focus group talked about how people are greeted and the entrances to venues and potentially making them more inviting for all audiences:

> 'If you don't come from an arty background, some of these venues are really intimidating. It can put people off. How you enter spaces and how you draw people in is really-important.'

Digital Engagement

At the focus group we were keen to understand how these audiences engage with culture digitally and whether digital engagement can work in rural Northumberland.

Participants were asked whether they engage digitally with culture in Northumberland, and if so, how often. To be specific, we defined engage digitally with culture in Northumberland as attend, stream, or participate in virtual events, performances, tours, or exhibitions put on by any of Northumberland cultural organisations.

Most participants had engaged digitally with culture in Northumberland at least once over lockdown, but most tended to be sporadic. The consensus among the group was that that digital engagement for them was merely a substitute for engaging in culture whilst they couldn't attend venues in person. One participant said:

> 'Some online performances have been really good, but you do really miss the audience and the atmosphere'

This was backed up by another participant, who added:

> 'Streaming is better than nothing, but it definitely isn't the same'

The results from the online survey confirm the above. As we can see below, the proportion of people who engaged with culture online on a weekly basis grew from almost 1 in 10 to 1 in 3 during lockdown, but then this falls back down to 6% since reopening.

How frequently you engage with culture online:

Daily: 6% (Pre-Pandemic), 6% (During Lockdowns), 6% (Since Reopening)
Weekly: 9%, 33%, 6%
Fortnightly: 3%, 6%, 16%
Monthly: 3%, 3%, 16%
Bimonthly (once every 2 months): 12%, 3%, 10%
Once every 3-4 months: 15%, 9%, 10%
Half yearly (once every 6 months): 15%, 0%, 10%
Yearly: 3%
Less than once a year: 9%, 3%, 3%
Never: 27%, 33%, 23%

■ Pre-Pandemic (prior to March 2020) ■ During Lockdowns (March 2020-May 2021)
■ Since Reopening (May 2021 onwards)
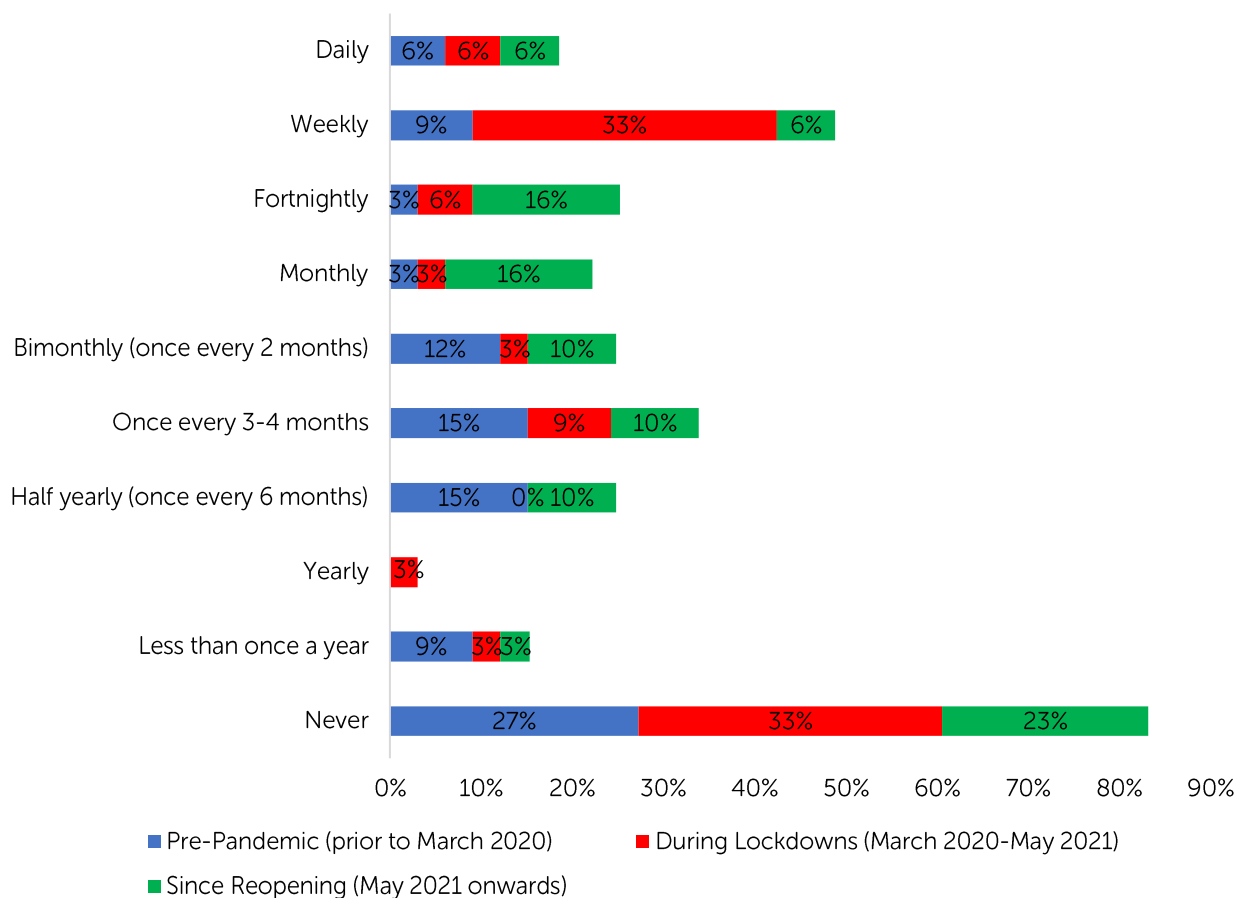
When asked which platforms they use to engage with culture digitally, 42% said YouTube, 42% said watch a pre-recorded event on playback, and 39% said watch live stream performances on Facebook Live:

Platform	Percentage
Watch live stream performances on YouTube	42%
Watched a pre-recorded event on playback	42%
Watch live stream performances on Facebook live	39%
I don't engage with culture and cultural works online	28%
Other	14%
Watch a live stream performance on Instagram	8%
Watch a music stream on Twitch	3%
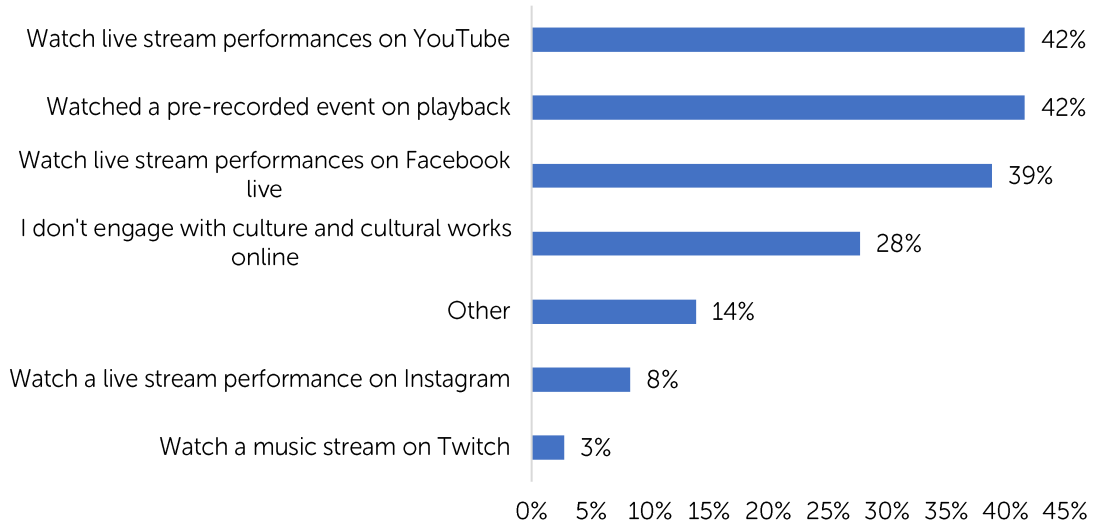
When asked if they had accessed content online that they previously wouldn't have been interested in seeing in person, 44% said yes:

Have you accessed content online that previously you wouldn't have been interested in seeing or accessing in-person?

Response	Percentage
Yes	44%
No	41%
Not sure	9%
N/A	6%
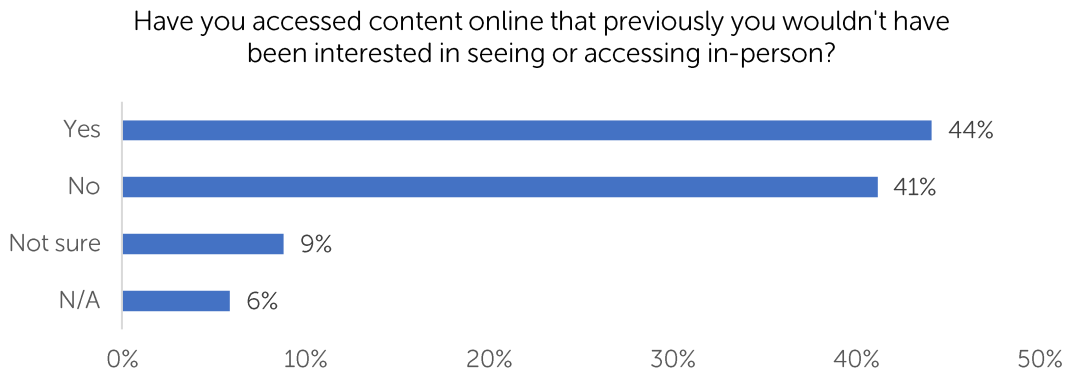
Of those 44% that said they have accessed content online that they previously wouldn't have in-person, 53% said as a result of accessing that content online, they would now be interested in visiting/going to see it in person:

If yes, as a result of accessing content online, would you now go see it in person?

Response	Percentage
Yes	53%
No	20%
Not sure	27%
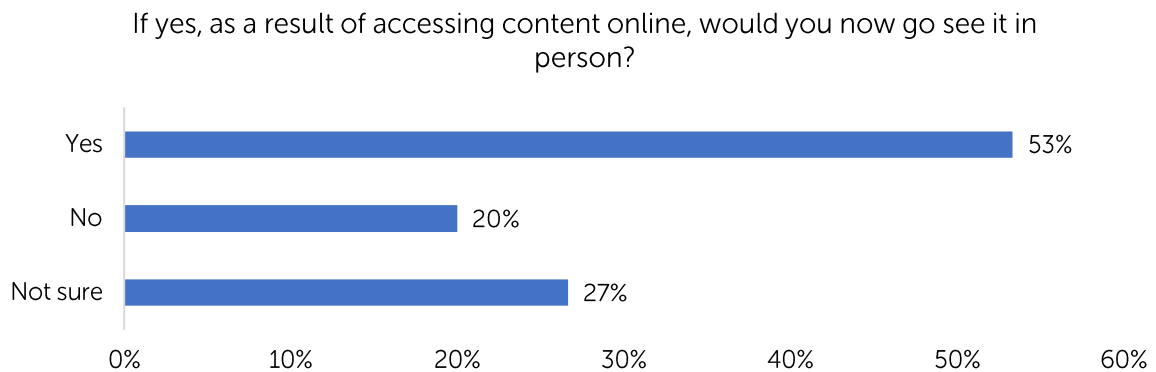
Key Themes and Questions

The following section examines key themes identified in the brief. Data in this section comes from a combination of the online surveys, the four focus groups, and the data gathered across the market days.

Cultural Habits

The group were keen to understand people's cultural habits and whether they have changed since or because of the Covid-19 pandemic. In particular, whether travel patterns and habits have changed, and what people would like to see more of in the future.

Travel Habits

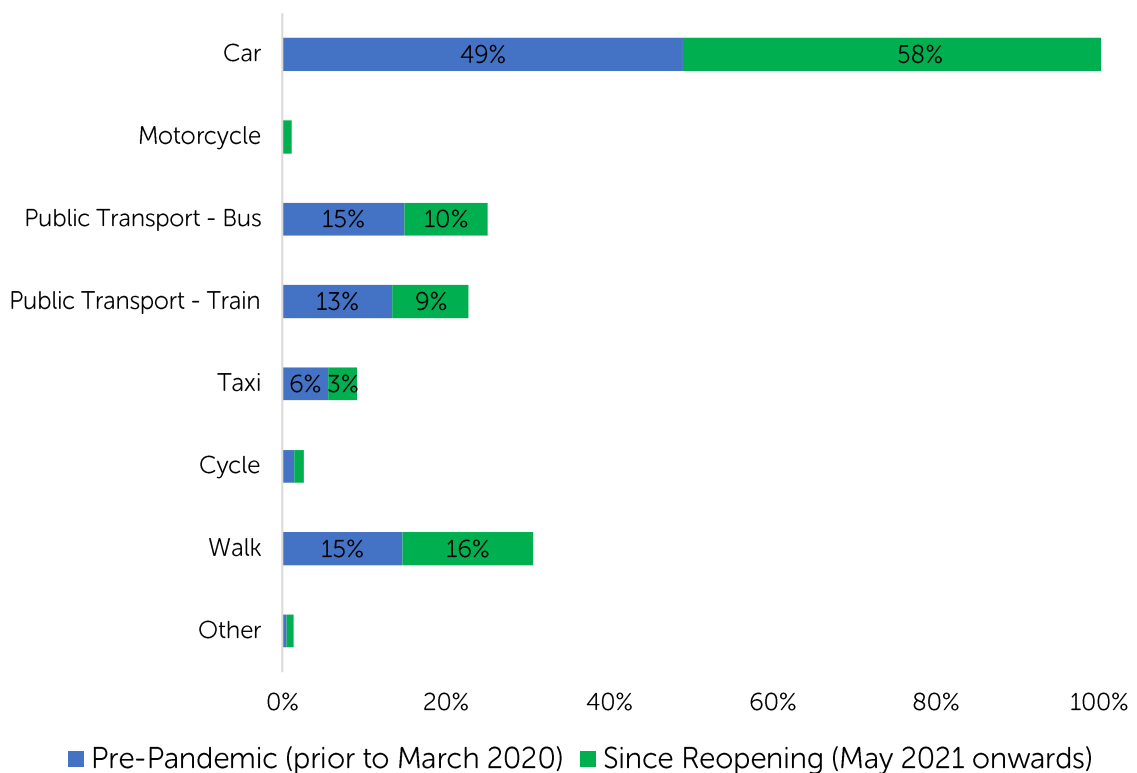In the online survey, we asked respondents to select which methods of transport they would typically use to access cultural venues and events in Northumberland, both before the pandemic and since reopening. We can see even before the pandemic a large proportion of people relied on their car, and this has increased by 9% since the beginning of the pandemic. The percentage of people who would formerly use public transport has also decreased:

Legend: ■ Pre-Pandemic (prior to March 2020) ■ Since Reopening (May 2021 onwards)

Method	Pre-Pandemic	Since Reopening
Car	49%	58%
Public Transport - Bus	15%	10%
Public Transport - Train	13%	9%
Taxi	6%	3%
Walk	15%	16%

When asked to explain why their travel patterns have changed, the majority of those on the online survey explained that they no longer feel comfortable using public transport due to Covid-19. One respondent wrote:
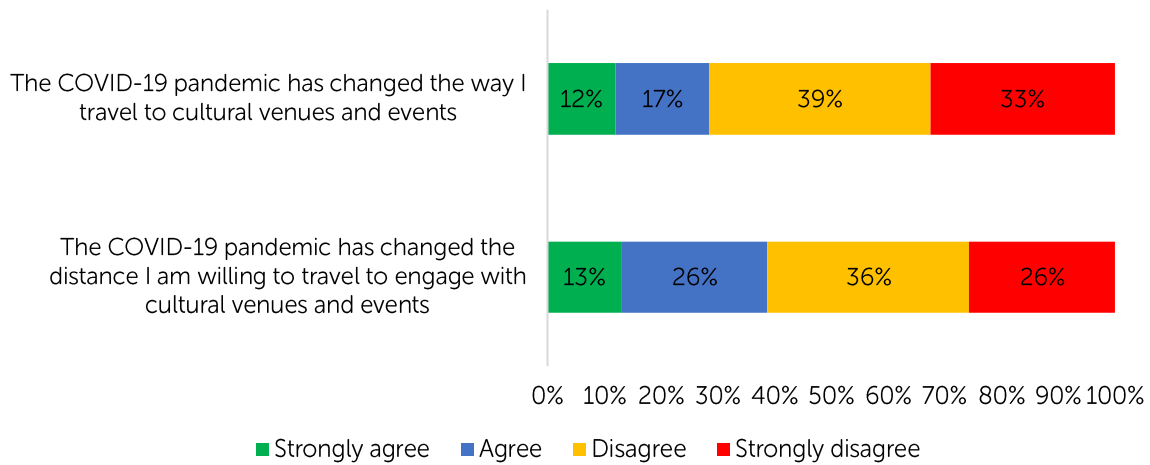
> 'Try not to use public transport but expect to do so when there is less COVID around eg 2022?'

Most comments on the survey were along the same lines, with another respondent adding:

'By travelling by car I feel less vulnerable - it is a safer option.'

The trend to travel privately and avoid public transport as shown above was also confirmed across the online focus group and the focus group in Berwick, with participants adding that since the start of the pandemic they have avoided public transport as much as possible due to safety concerns.

We also presented respondents with two statements relating to travel and asked them to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statements. Over a quarter of people agreed or strongly agreed that the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way they travel to cultural venues and events. Furthermore, over a third agreed or strongly agreed that the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the distance they are willing to travel to engage with cultural venues and events:

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way I travel to cultural venues and events: 12% Strongly agree, 17% Agree, 39% Disagree, 33% Strongly disagree

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the distance I am willing to travel to engage with cultural venues and events: 13% Strongly agree, 26% Agree, 36% Disagree, 26% Strongly disagree

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Of that 39% that agreed the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the distance they are willing to travel to access cultural venues and events, 84% stated that they now prefer to stay local and travel less distance away from home:

You now prefer to stay local and travel less distance away from home: 84%

You now prefer to access cultural venues and events that are a bit further away from home: 4%

Other: 12%
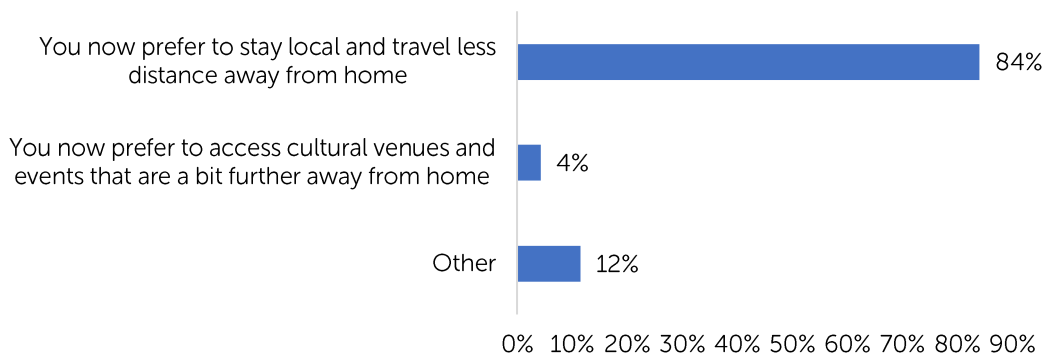
Future Programming

Respondents to the online survey and those who attended the focus groups were asked what they think is missing from the cultural offer and what would they like to see more of in Northumberland.

There is a diverse range of suggestions from the online survey, the most common being more live music and theatres. However, there were lots of other suggestions

including dog friendly art events, pop up history events, art workshops and creative sessions, independent cinema, stand-up comedy, and dance shows to name a few.

There were also comments from some on the online survey that they believe Northumberland is well served and punches above its weight as a county:

> 'We have lots of culture in Northumberland. We don't need more just more ambitious advertising.'

> 'Just more of what there is. I think we are quite well served.'

> 'Just "more of"- but promoted as a whole.'

> 'We are a large county with more sheep than people. Overall, I think we do quite well given the size of audience.'

A reoccurring theme throughout the focus groups was to make use of empty buildings and units that are no longer occupied due to the pandemic. One respondent at the focus group said:

> 'After the pandemic there are lots of empty shops. There will be lots of spaces that could be used as pop up spaces. Have galleries, performances, and use them to educate people.'

The idea of repurposing existing empty/unused buildings received support from all participants across the focus groups, including those at the young person's session in Blyth. There was also the suggestion to make use of some of the castles or other historic sites and tying them in with music and art to tell the story of Northumberland.

Frequency of Engagement

To understand with what frequency audiences engage in cultural work, and whether this has changed as a result of the pandemic, we asked those who completed the online survey to select how often they attend events, venues, and activities both before the pandemic and since reopening:

Frequency	Pre-Pandemic (prior to March 2020)	Since Reopening (May 2021 onwards)
Daily	2%	1%
Weekly	18%	5%
Fortnightly	16%	7%
Monthly	28%	16%
Bimonthly (once every 2 months)	14%	14%
Once every 3-4 months	11%	14%
Half yearly (once every 6 months)	6%	15%
Yearly	1%	5%
Less than once a year	2%	11%
Never	2%	11%

■ Pre-Pandemic (prior to March 2020) ■ Since Reopening (May 2021 onwards)
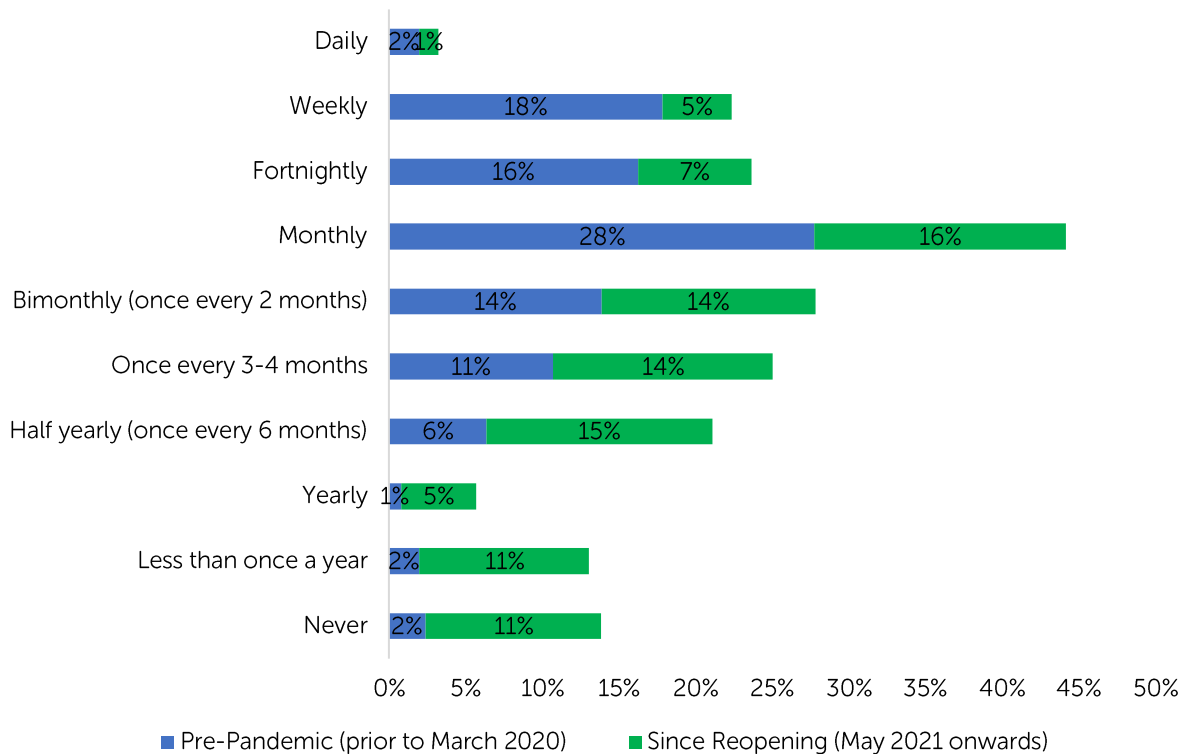
The chart above shows a trend of people not accessing cultural events & venues as often as they were before the pandemic.

This was a topic of discussion at both the focus group in Berwick and the online focus group. One participant to the online focus group said:

> 'I used to go to things far more often before the pandemic. But it is largely to do with things not being open now, and the amount of things that have disappeared. Especially the smaller artists led spaces.'

A similar point was made in Berwick, with one participant explaining that he doesn't attend as many events as before the pandemic, but this is because the volume of events is nowhere near where it was prior to the pandemic. He explained the appetite is there, and he wants to start visiting venues, exhibitions, and events again but there are no longer as many around.

Our evidence suggests while audiences are not attending cultural events, activities, or venues as often as they were pre-pandemic, this is not due to a loss of interest or appetite, but rather due to challenges around awareness, information sharing, and covid safety concerns.

Digital Engagement

In terms of digital engagement, a key aim of the research was to understand the perception of digital work and what audiences engage with, and whether digital is used as a gateway to new audiences and live work.

In the online survey, we asked respondents to select how often they engage online with culture in Northumberland before the pandemic, during lockdown, and since

reopening. Again, by engage digitally we defined this as attend, stream, or participate in virtual events, performances, or exhibitions from any of Northumberland's cultural organisations:
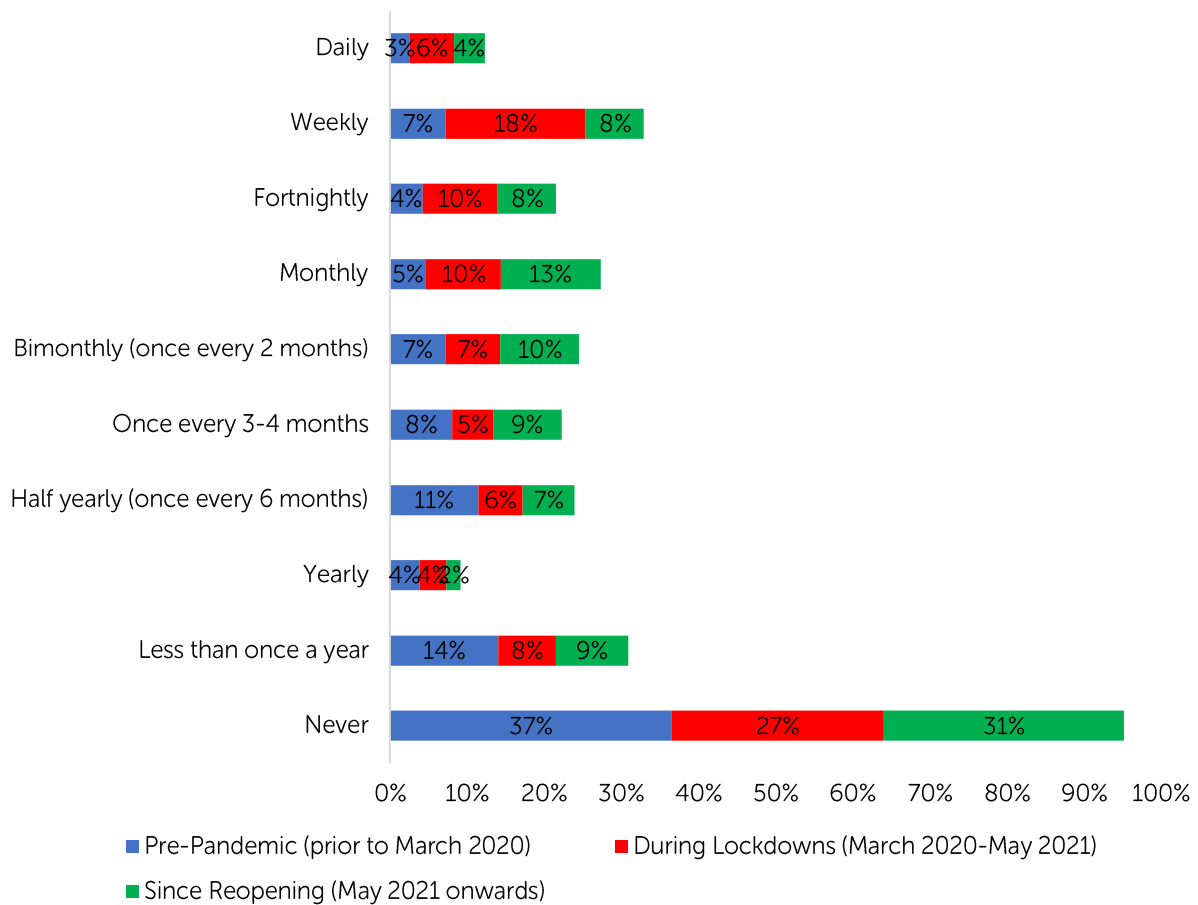
As shown by the chart above, people were engaging digitally/online more often during lockdown, and the percentage of those that never engaged online has fallen by 6% from 37% before the pandemic to 31% since reopening.

Of those that engage digitally with culture, we asked how they typically engage online:
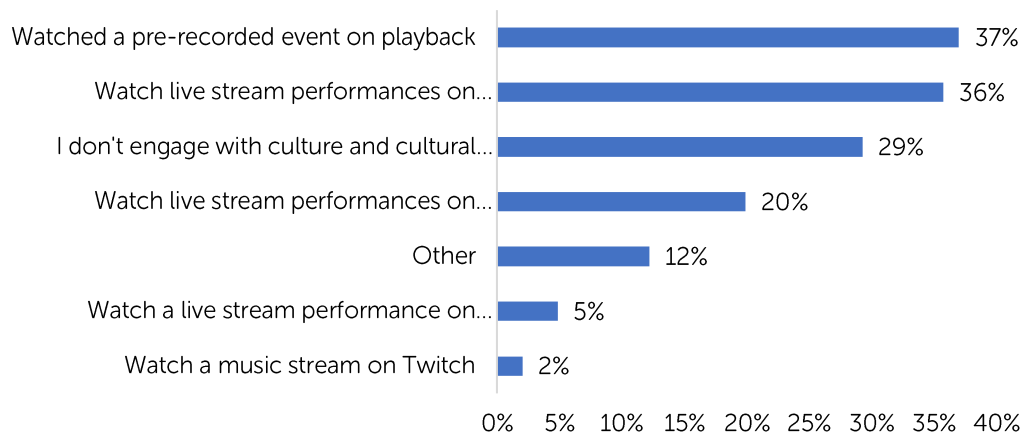
In addition to this, we also asked respondents on the online survey whether they have accessed content online that previously they wouldn't have been interested in seeing or accessing in person:

Have you accessed content online that previously you wouldn't have been interested in seeing or accessing in-person?

Yes	39%
No	48%
Not sure	6%
N/A	7%

We then asked those who said yes they have accessed content online that they previously wouldn't have in person, as a result of accessing it online, would they now go see it in person:

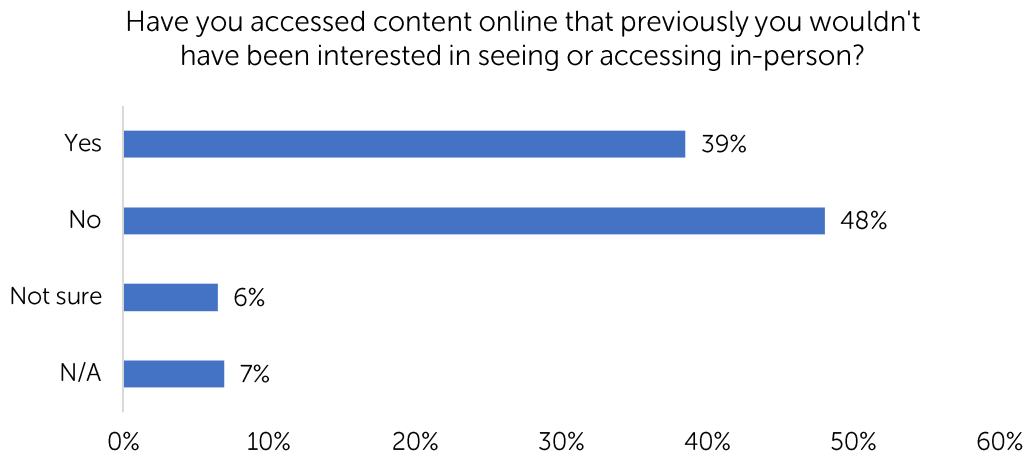**If yes, as a result of accessing content online, would you now go see it in person?**

Yes	60%
No	10%
Not sure	30%
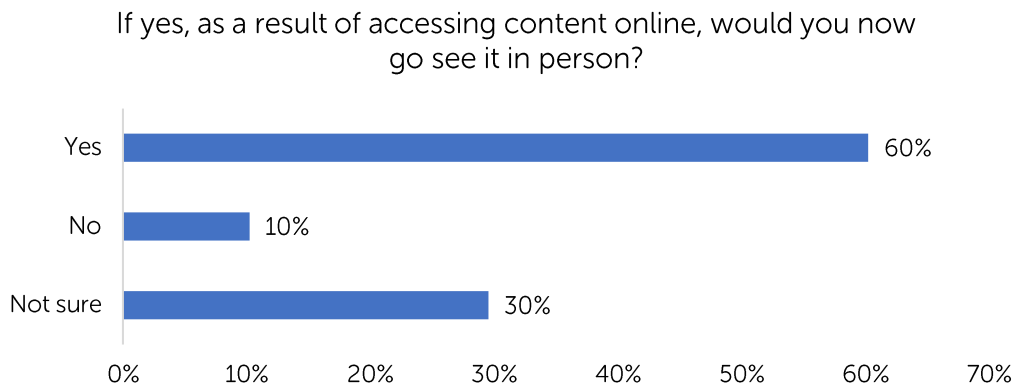
Benefits of Accessing Culture

When asked on the online survey, 75% agreed that they benefit from Northumberland's cultural offer.

I feel I benefit from Northumberland's cultural offer

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
17%	58%	20%	5%
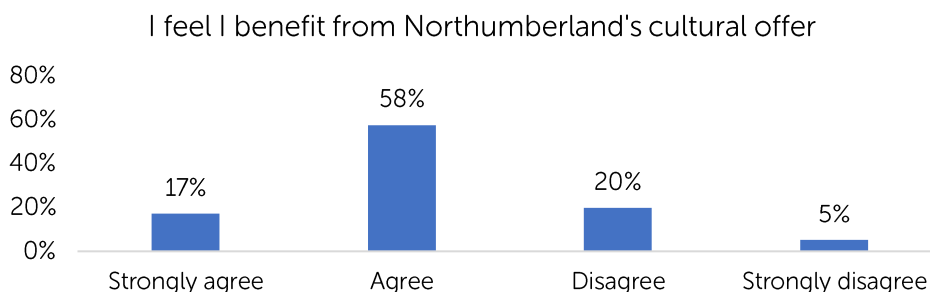
We followed up by asking respondents to explain how they benefit from Northumberland's cultural offer. There were several themes that emerged from the feedback;

Connecting with family & friends – One of the main benefits residents of Northumberland believe they get from Northumberland's cultural offer is the ability and opportunity to connect and make memories with family, friends, and other liked-minded Northumbrians. One participant responded by saying:

> 'I benefit by experiencing with my family these events and having memories to share.'

Another respondent explained:

> 'As a family it offers my children the chance to experience new things and give them inspiration of things they would like to try in the future. It also helps to tell the story of the county they are from, which is something which is really important to me.'

Education & life skills – Another benefit that was commonly mentioned was culture's role in educating local people, giving them the opportunity to learn about their home and heritage. One respondent wrote:

> 'It makes me feel involved in the place I live, it gives me interest , it helps me put the place in context, it gives me stability and enjoyment , excitement and fun.'

Another agreed, adding:

> 'Things to see do and experience. Understanding of my heritage - joy, meaning and quality of life'

One respondent replied with simply:

> 'Head and heart enriched.'

Culture also plays a key role in providing people with opportunities to develop their talents and learn new skills, as outlined in the Young Persons and Learning Disabled chapters.

Improving wellbeing & quality of life – A significant number of those who said they benefit from culture in Northumberland stated that the county's museums, theatres, festivals, gardens, cinema's and other venues play a key role in maintaining their physical and mental wellbeing. One respondent wrote:

> 'Enjoyment! Life isn't just for working, it's for having fun too. Social and emotional wellbeing.'

Linked to this was culture's role in improving the quality of life for Northumberland's residents. Comments included:

> 'I am actively involved as a volunteer and this enhances my life. I truly believe that the outputs of the organisations with which I am involved enhances the lives of others.'

> 'It's an absolute joy to be able to attend a brilliant theatre near where I live.'

> 'It just lifts one spirits and plays a part in maintaining a high quality of life.'

> 'Benefits include: socialising, exercise, learning new things, mental health support, empathy/looking outside of own concerns.'

Sources of Information

Through the online surveys, market days, and focus groups, we have gathered data relating to ease of accessing information, which source of information audiences use, and ways and means audiences would like to be communicated with.

45% of those who completed the online survey agreed or strongly agreed that it is easy to find out information on cultural events, venues, and activities in Northumberland. However, over a quarter disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

It is easy to find out infomation about cultural events, activities, and venues in Northumberland:

Response	%
Strongly agree	5%
Agree	40%
Neither agree nor disagree	29%
Disagree	22%
Strongly disagree	4%
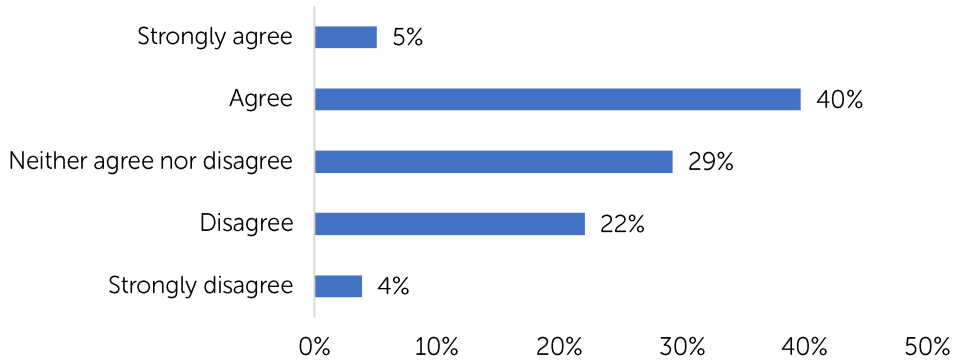
Respondents to the online survey were also asked where they usually go to, to find information on cultural events, venues, and activities in the county. Facebook was the most popular, followed by recommendations from friends and family, websites, google searches, and then on site/ in venues. 35% of respondents also stated that they get information from email newsletters:

Where do you typically find out about cultural activities, events, and venues in Northumberland?

Source	%
Facebook	61%
Recommendations from friends/relatives	60%
Websites	41%
Google	38%
On site/ In venues	35%
Email (e-newsletters)	35%
Information Centre/Visitor Centre/Library	30%
Newspaper/magazine articles	26%
Advertising in newspaper/magazine	17%
Television programmes	14%
Twitter	11%
Radio programmes	10%
Instagram	9%
Guide books	6%
Influencers/bloggers	4%
Other social media	2%
Other	2%
None of these	1%
Tik Tok	0%
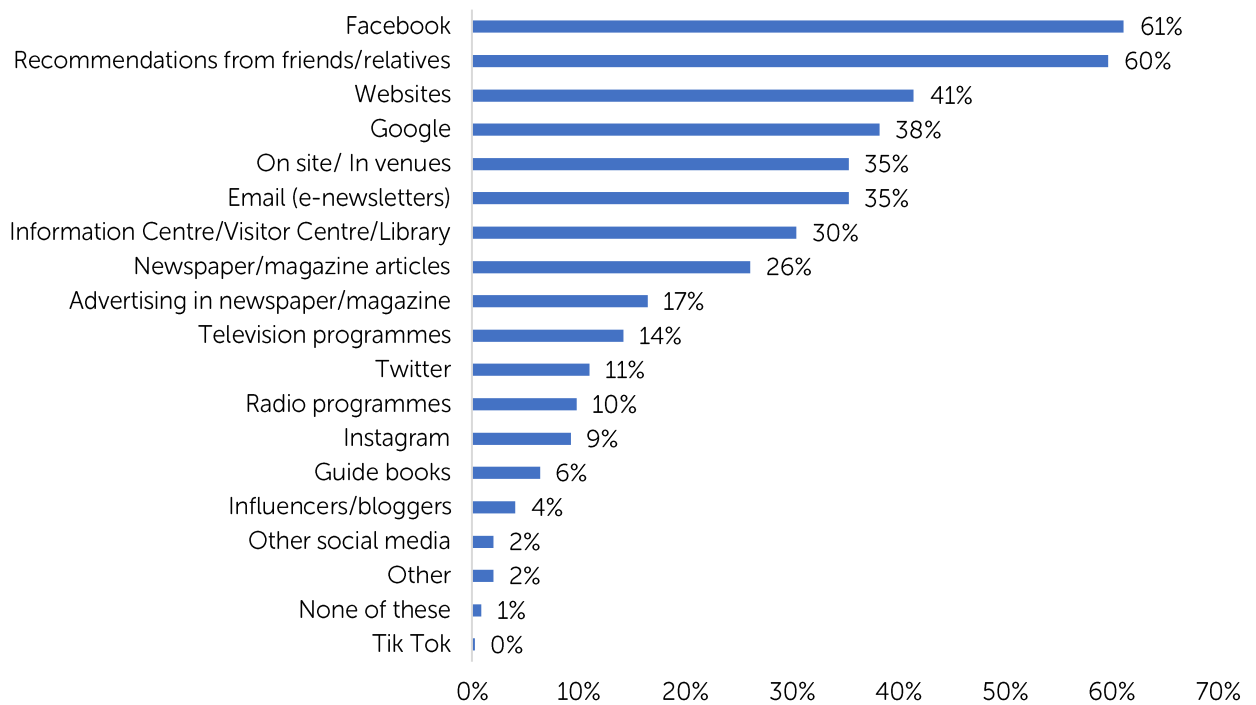
We then asked for specific examples from each of their selections:

- o For websites, common responses included the National Trust, English Heritage, and Visit Northumberland. There were also references to specific venues such as Alnwick Playhouse, Queens Hall Hexham, and the Alnwick Garden. This was echoed in the focus groups, participa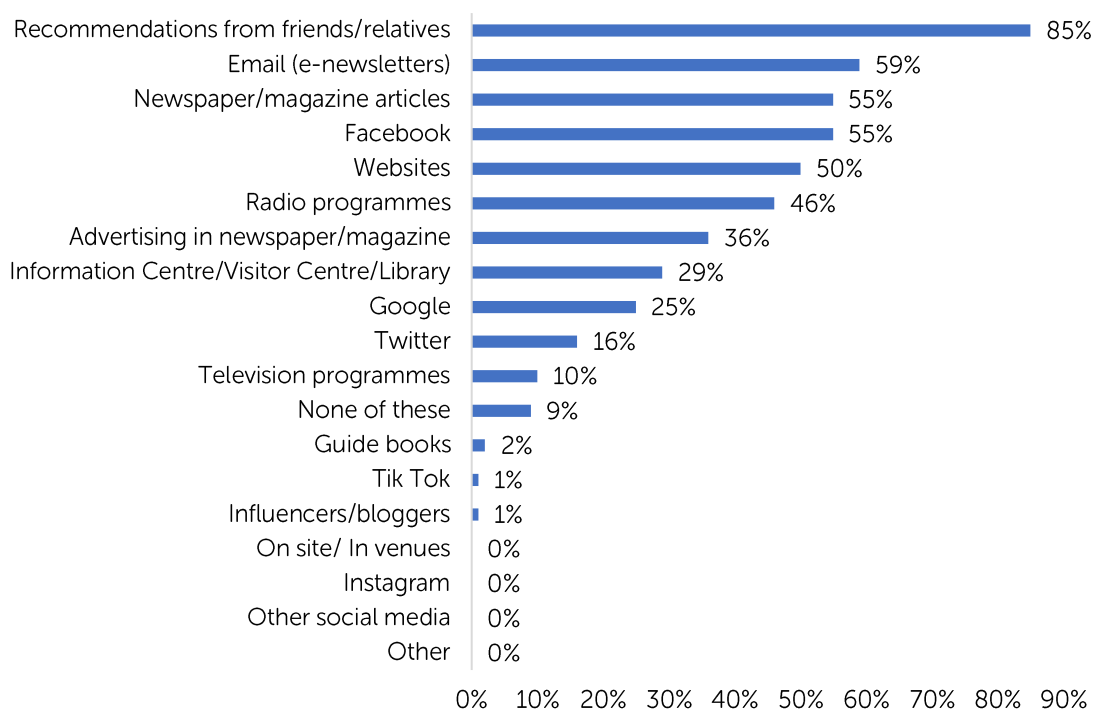nts mentioned they will usually go to the venues specific website to find out if there are events or exhibitions upcoming.
- o For newspapers, the Chronicle, the Northumberland Gazette, the Journal, and the Hexham Courant were all common responses.

We asked the same question at the market days across Ashington, Blyth, and Morpeth, and 3 out of the top 5 most popular ways of getting information on the online survey, were consistent across the market days. These were, recommendations from friends and relatives, Facebook, and Websites. Interestingly, for the market days, Newspapers and Magazines, and Email Newsletters appeared slightly higher. Similarly, 3 of the bottom 5 are consistent on both the online survey and the market days:

Where do you typically find out about cultural activities, events, and venues in Northumberland? (Market Days)

Source	Percentage
Recommendations from friends/relatives	85%
Email (e-newsletters)	59%
Newspaper/magazine articles	55%
Facebook	55%
Websites	50%
Radio programmes	46%
Advertising in newspaper/magazine	36%
Information Centre/Visitor Centre/Library	29%
Google	25%
Twitter	16%
Television programmes	10%
None of these	9%
Guide books	2%
Tik Tok	1%
Influencers/bloggers	1%
On site/ In venues	0%
Instagram	0%
Other social media	0%
Other	0%

To gather more qualitative data on the subject of sources of information, in the focus groups we conducted, we asked participants how venues could make accessing information easier.

There were some common themes and suggestions across all focus groups that would benefit all audiences.

One suggestion was for venues across the county to work closely together to co-promote their productions, exhibitions, events, and activities. This would help break down the barrier of lack-of-awareness that some audiences face. There were some comments that currently the cultural offer in Northumberland is quite fragmented,

and venues from across the county would benefit from a more joined up approach to the promotion of the county's cultural offer. 'Cross-Fertilisation' was a common phrase that was brought up in both the online focus group and the focus group in Berwick.

An attendee to the focus group in Berwick explained:

> 'I think venues and those involved in putting on events and productions should be working together to promote each other. Could they pool their resources and efforts together to support the cultural ecosystem of the county?'

Across all 4 focus groups there was an appetite for a central resource that shows what cultural events and activities are taking place across Northumberland:

> 'There's not one central resource to find out what's going on... that would be good. At the moment it seems very fragmented. It would be nice to have one central resource.'

In the online survey, there was also a suggestion of one central resource in the shape of a map of venues in Northumberland:

> 'There was an art map made of venues in Newcastle. There's nothing like that in Northumberland. Lots of people haven't heard of wood horn museum or queens hall for example. They need better signposting and things that are easy to get to. Maybe offer family tickets and socio-economic benefits for those who don't earn enough / may struggle.'

There was also agreement in Berwick that, usually most productions aren't around long enough to gain word of mouth momentum, which they believe is the most powerful marketing tool. The attendee explained:

> 'If things are on longer, that would allow time for word of mouth to spread and gather momentum. Unfortunately, at the minute by the time you find out about things happening they've been and gone.'

This point also came through on the online survey, with two examples below:

> 'I've lived here a year and often only hear about events after they've happened! More marketing and advertising needed.'

> 'The issue for me is that shows (theatre/music) are often only on near me for one day and if I'm not free on that day, I miss the show. When you compare Northumberland to Newcastle, shows in Newcastle often have a week's run. I do understand that we don't have the audiences in the smaller towns and villages of Northumberland to provide longer runs, but it is frustrating as an audience member.'

Barriers to Accessing Culture

A main objective of the project was to understand barriers to accessing culture in Northumberland. We explored barriers in all 4 of the focus groups, across the online surveys and in the market days.

The online survey showed the following key barriers:
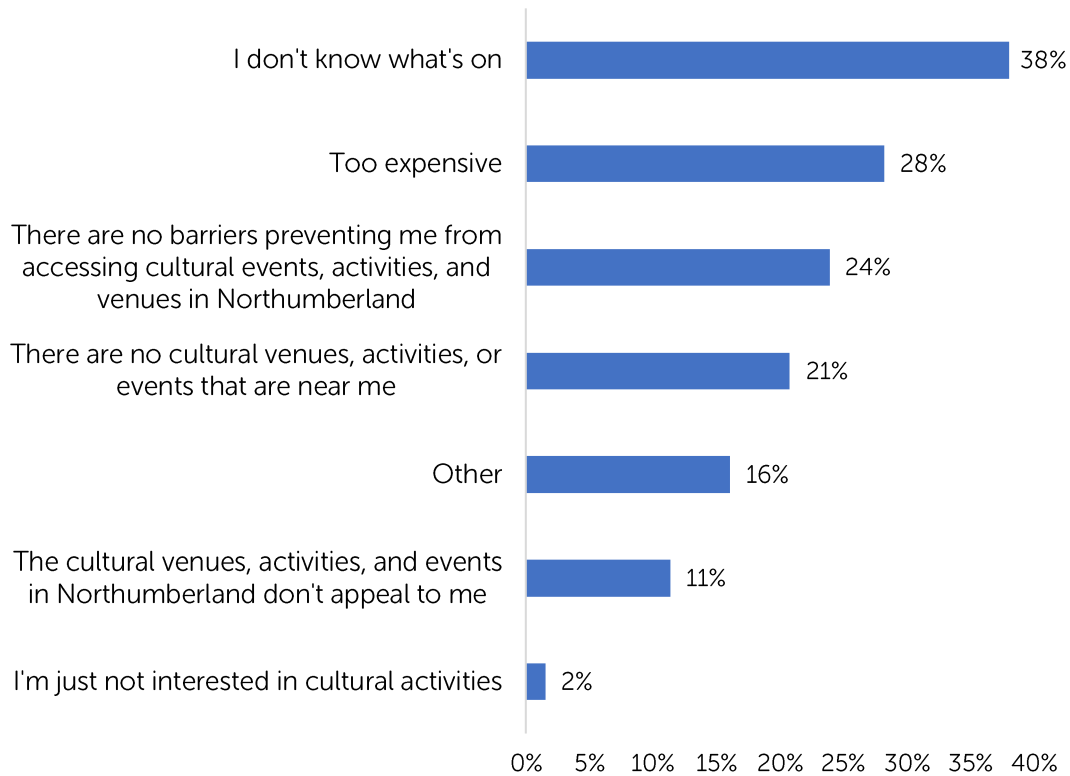
For 38% of respondents, a lack of awareness is a key barrier to them accessing culture and cultural venues in Northumberland. One respondent on the online survey wrote:

> 'There's also issues with transport and marketing to people in Northumberland. I find these days unless you know someone going or someone in it and they share it on Facebook it's hard to see when things are on. Are you in an area? Have you put posters in the local shops/fliers through the doors/a banner? Lots of companies are missing new audiences and attracting locals by missing this.'

28% of those that completed the online survey said accessing culture is too expensive. In the focus group in Berwick, one participant mentioned that it is particularly expensive for families, especially If there are two adults and then multiple children.

The financial barrier is causing people to rethink how they engage with culture. One participant to the online focus group said:

> 'Attending the larger theatres has become quite expensive, I've started to look for cheaper things to do now, and you discover other theatres and concerts and pubs that have live music and that aren't as expensive'

Of the 16% that selected other, the majority said transport and connectivity was a main barrier. Responses included:

> 'Transport especially at night is no good.'

> 'Poor public transport stops, I want to be able to get off a bus and straight into the location.'

One respondent described the realities of getting around the county to attend cultural events, and the decisions and thought processes when planning to go elsewhere in the county:

> 'I live in Alnwick and I work four days a week, including a 30 minute commute when I work in the office. As far as evening events are concerned, I don't want to travel more than 20/30 minutes at the end of a late night show and I also have to factor eating into my evening. That can make a night out expensive, so it has to be something I know is good. If I am commuting, I also have to factor that into my decision of where can I get to by when. There is limited late night public transport so I invariably have to drive if I go anywhere other than Alnwick.'

In addition to awareness, finances, and, connectivity, and there were also comments from respondents around feelings of safety due to Covid-19:
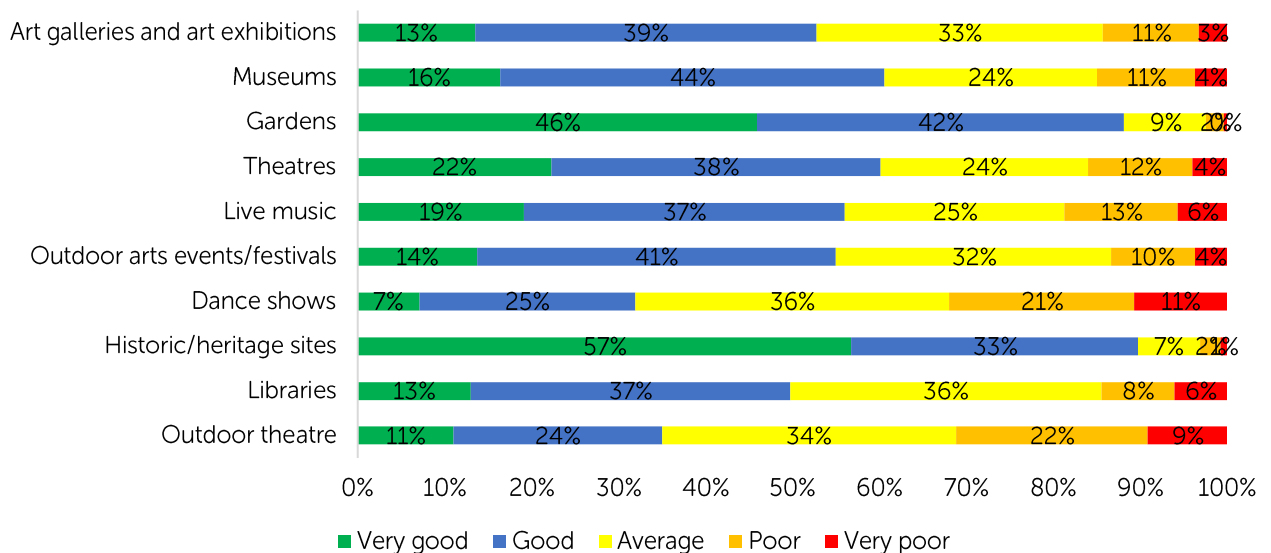
> 'We still prefer to avoid large crowds and indoor events currently due to high covid numbers plus lack of covid measures in most venues.'

Some participants at the focus group in Berwick mentioned Covid-19 being a main barrier to accessing culture in Northumberland. Several participants mentioned that they now travel across the border to access cultural events & venues as the perception is Scotland is safer than England due to the higher take up of mask wearing and the increased level of restrictions in Scotland.

Perceptions of Northumberland's Cultural Offer

Through the online survey we gathered data relating to people's perceptions of Northumberland's cultural offer. In the first instance we asked people to rate the quality of various elements of Northumberland's cultural offer, with Gardens and Historic/Heritage Sites rated very highly, followed by Theatres and Museums.

How would you rate the quality of the following elements of Northumberland's cultural offer:

Element	Very good	Good	Average	Poor	Very poor
Art galleries and art exhibitions	13%	39%	33%	11%	3%
Museums	16%	44%	24%	11%	4%
Gardens	46%	42%	9%	2%	0%
Theatres	22%	38%	24%	12%	4%
Live music	19%	37%	25%	13%	6%
Outdoor arts events/festivals	14%	41%	32%	10%	4%
Dance shows	7%	25%	36%	21%	11%
Historic/heritage sites	57%	33%	7%	2%	1%
Libraries	13%	37%	36%	8%	6%
Outdoor theatre	11%	24%	34%	22%	9%

As well as the quality of the cultural offer in the county, we were also keen to understand people's perceptions with of the quantity & range of cultural activities to

to choose from. Again, Gardens, Historic/Heritage Sites, and Museums performed well:

How would you rate the quantity/choice (range to choose from) of the following elements of Northumberland's cultural offer?

Category	Very good	Good	Average	Poor	Very poor
Art galleries and art exhibitions	10%	30%	33%	19%	8%
Museums	11%	34%	35%	17%	3%
Gardens	30%	45%	20%	5%	1%
Theatres	14%	26%	33%	18%	8%
Live music	13%	27%	32%	21%	6%
Outdoor arts events/festivals	8%	28%	35%	22%	7%
Dance shows	7%	15%	31%	35%	12%
Historic/heritage sites	46%	41%	9%	4%	0%
Libraries	9%	31%	40%	14%	6%
Outdoor theatre	7%	17%	34%	31%	12%

■ Very good ■ Good ■ Average ■ Poor ■ Very poor
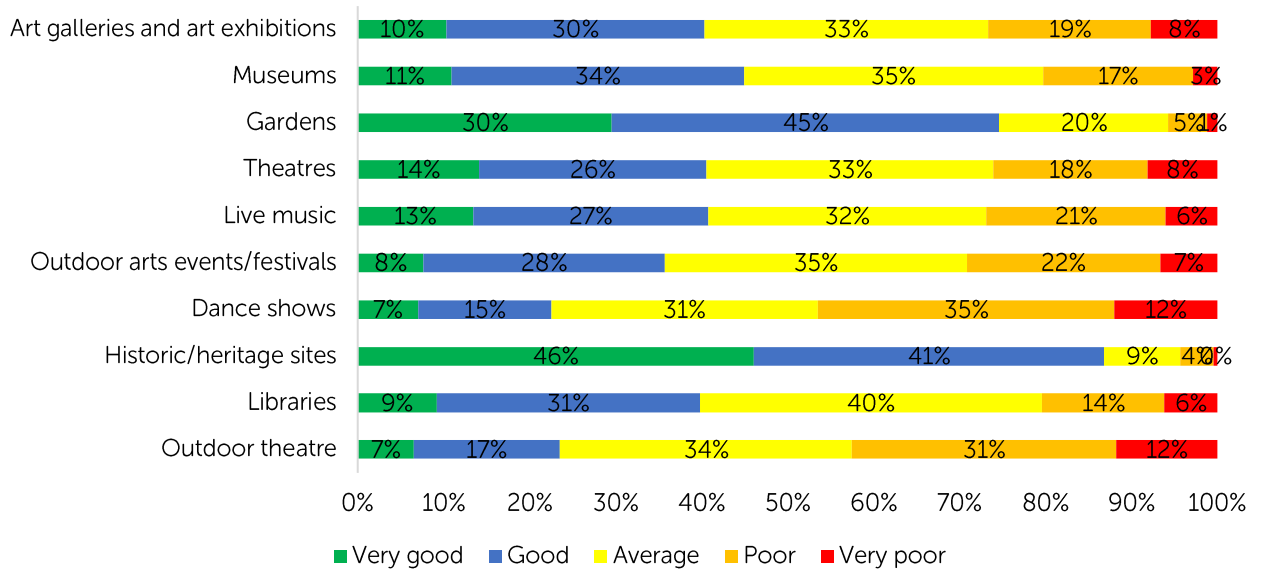
In addition to this, we also provided respondents with a series of statements relating to Northumberland's cultural offer, and asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with those statements:

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
There are cultural events, activities, or venues in Northumberland that are accessible to me	27%	66%	6%	1%
There are cultural events, activities, or venues in Northumberland that appeal to me	25%	64%	10%	1%
I see myself and/or my community reflected in Northumberland's cultural offer	15%	54%	25%	6%
I see people like me involved in the creation of Northumberland's cultural offer	15%	45%	32%	8%
I think there are opportunities for people like me to be involved in the creation of Northumberland's cultural offer	15%	41%	37%	7%
There are lots of cultural activities, venues, and events in Northumberland for young people to get involved in and visit	7%	33%	43%	17%
There are lots of cultural activities, venues, and events in Northumberland for families to get involved in and visit	12%	62%	20%	6%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Strongly agree   ■ Agree   ■ Disagree   ■ Strongly disagree

We asked those who disagreed with the statement 'there are opportunities for people like me to be involved in the creation of Northumberland's cultural offer' for more information. There were three reoccurring themes:

The first was around people having the free time to volunteer or get involved, one respondent wrote:

> 'A lot of opportunities are volunteer based therefore are only accessible for those who have time / money. I feel a lot of retired people are able to engage whereas young people have to work.'

Another respondent stated the same:

> 'There seem to be activities for families or for older people but not so much for working, young professionals.'

The second theme was focused on the challenge of raising awareness of the available opportunities for local people. Responses included:

> 'I'm not aware of what might be available locally.'

> 'I haven't come across any opportunities.'

> 'I don't know how or have seen anywhere advertising input for local people.'

> 'I have disagreed as I never see anything advertised so I am unsure as to what is around and where to start looking for events etc. So I feel more advertisements would be useful.'

Finally, the last theme focused on accessibility & inclusivity. Comments included:

'Accessibility is a very real issue for people with mobility issues.'

'As a Black Woman, without a car and particular health issues, I do not see anything aimed at people like me, or that reflects my life in general.'

'Working Class people have no seat at the culture table.'

'There's no Queer representation for families.'