



# Calm and collected

*Museums and galleries:  
the UK's untapped  
wellbeing resource?*

Art Fund\_



# INTRODUCTION

## From Stephen Deuchar, director, Art Fund

Art Fund has always believed that art can help us see, think and feel differently.

Since 1903 we have helped museums and galleries add art to their collections and increase access to the treasures they hold, with the conviction that these spaces are vital to society's wellbeing.

Today we work to ensure that as many people as possible benefit from the UK's wide array of institutions and collections. We do this by, for example, encouraging the sharing of works of art through tours and displays, by supporting the commissioning of new work that will have a lasting public impact, and by

offering the National Art Pass, which gives Art Fund members free and reduced-price entry to hundreds of museums, galleries and historic houses across the country.

A lot has changed in a hundred years, and in our present time of great uncertainty – economic, political and technological – we feel more than ever that people need places where they can relax, learn, contemplate and wander, whether together or alone. And as the news cycle seems repeatedly to remind us, the varied pressures of modern life can contribute to a heightened sense of worry, stress and anxiety for many.

Wanting to learn more about the advantages of museum-visiting in this context, in August 2018 we commissioned research to investigate how regularly engaging with museums and galleries could contribute to an individual's sense of wellbeing. We're very happy to share outcomes which indicate that visiting more frequently can have a positive effect on our overall sense of balance and fulfilment.

While we know that finding the time to visit amid increasingly busy lives is easier said than

done, it is heartening to find that our belief in the UK's public art collections as sources of inspiration and uplift is confirmed by many respondents' experiences.

As the national fundraising charity for art and a passionate advocate of UK museums and galleries, Art Fund is now more convinced than ever of the potential of the nation's collections – and the creative organisations that bring them to life – as places where we can all reflect, learn and find time to care for ourselves.

*We feel more than ever  
that people need places  
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and wander*

# FOREWORD



By Paul Dolan, professor of behavioural science at the London School of Economics and Political Science, expert on human behaviour and happiness, and author of bestselling book *Happiness by Design*

The topic of happiness hasn't just defined my career, it also defines how I try to live my life. As somebody who has researched the subject for a couple of decades, I would like to think that I'm good at managing my time in ways that strike a balance between pleasure and purpose.

It's not easy, though, and like everyone else I get caught up in the grind of daily life. I am often juggling lots of competing demands and, at the same time, sometimes feel stuck in a rut.

We could do with taking a step back from time to time and assessing what really makes us happy and miserable – and then implementing a plan that will make us happier overall.

This study by Art Fund highlights two of the big areas that impact upon our happiness: how we use our time, and how stressed we feel. These findings – that more leisure time is better for us but we don't do a very good job of planning our down time, and that anxiety is

a real problem – are obvious, but they are also overlooked.

Changing our habits is a very difficult thing to do. We need to build good practices into our daily routines and then persist with them for a couple of months before they stick. The results in this report reinforce my contention that we would all benefit from finding 30 minutes a day to do something that makes us feel good, irrespective of how happy we are right now.

Most of us have the time; we just don't find the time. We need to start by finding out just what does bring us happiness and misery in daily life, and then put in place small and detailed plans to implement changes that reorient us away from misery and towards happiness.

One finding from the research that was more surprising

was the impact that regular attendance at museums and galleries can have on our happiness. Perhaps it's a sign of the pace of the modern world that we live in, but any activity that helps us take a break from our day-to-day lives is a good thing and something we should do more of. This research does support the idea that those who visit regularly are happier with their lives than those who don't visit at all, notwithstanding the fact that other variables could be at play.

So, once you've read this paper, especially if you're one of the 51% who said they would like to visit museums or galleries more regularly, my advice is to make a plan to go, and to do just that. You'll be all the happier for it.

## Executive summary

Across the country, millions of people value their free time as an opportunity to relax and escape from the stresses of modern-day life. But as a nation, we're overwhelmed by life's pressures.

The research that informs this report shows that we are anxious about our workload, our financial situations, health issues and social isolation, to name a few – and we struggle to find enough time to pursue activities that could contribute to our wellbeing, such as visiting museums and galleries.

The results of two stages of research – a UK-wide representative survey, and a qualitative social study in which participants were encouraged to visit museums and galleries once a week with a National Art Pass and keep a diary of their activities

– suggest that engaging with the nation's art collections more frequently can help improve our wellbeing. It is an activity that can bring people together, and over time it can become part of an approach to life that people may find healthier and more balanced.

In the survey, those who say they regularly visit museums and galleries as part of their overall lifestyle choices tend to feel much more satisfied with their lives, and in the social study, those who visit at least once a week report a range of benefits, from learning new things to finding space to reflect.

Yet only 6% of us regularly take advantage of our national art collections. While 51% of those surveyed say they would like to visit museums and galleries more regularly – and 63% say they have at some point visited specifically to 'de-stress' – only 6% of us actually visit at least once a month.

Overall, both the quantitative survey and the qualitative social study suggest that museums and galleries are a significant untapped resource at our disposal that can help us achieve a greater sense of wellbeing when we take time out for ourselves.



Pehchaan: Art from Another India, Tramway, Glasgow, featuring works acquired through Art Fund's Renew scheme within a space designed by Gabriella Marcella, 2016. Photo © Andy Smith



# The stress and anxiety issue



Wellbeing is a much-discussed topic. It covers our happiness and our satisfaction with our lives, but stresses and anxieties are also central to our overall wellbeing.

As a society, we are feeling the strain. We may increasingly know more about what's good for our wellbeing, but we often don't do anything about it.

*40% of adults  
feel anxious at least  
some of the time*

## An anxious society?

At times we all face anxiety. There are plenty of stressful situations we find hard to avoid, and our hectic modern lifestyle is often responsible for making us feel even more anxious. Our energy, time and focus can get pulled in several directions, with home, social and work lives in constant competition with each other.

This research reflects what similar research has shown; that feelings of anxiety are widespread across the UK. In the survey, over half (53%) of adults said they had recently felt some level of anxiety on any given day, with more than a third (34%) describing that anxiety as being at a 'high level'. Of course, anxiety can be short-term, but for many it can be an ongoing issue; 40% of adults surveyed said that they feel anxious at least some of the time.

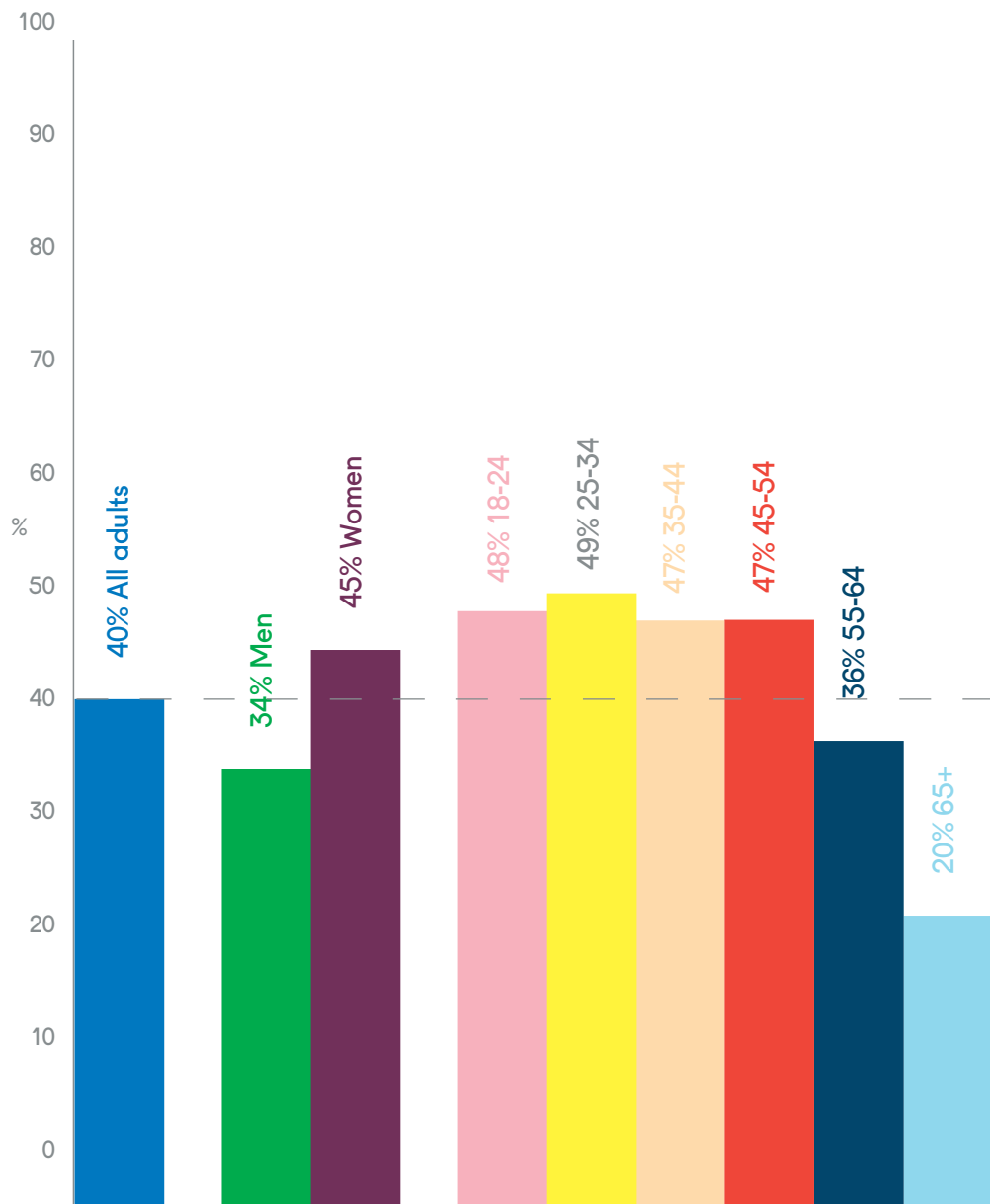
Anxiety is something that affects every group in society. However, it is especially felt by those of 'working age'; we see that the number of people feeling anxious only starts to drop as people reach their mid-50s, and it then steadily falls for those of retirement age.

Similarly, women tend to experience high levels of anxiety, as do parents of school-aged children. Perhaps unsurprisingly, areas with large urban populations have the highest levels of stress and anxiety, with Greater London reporting the most at 45%.

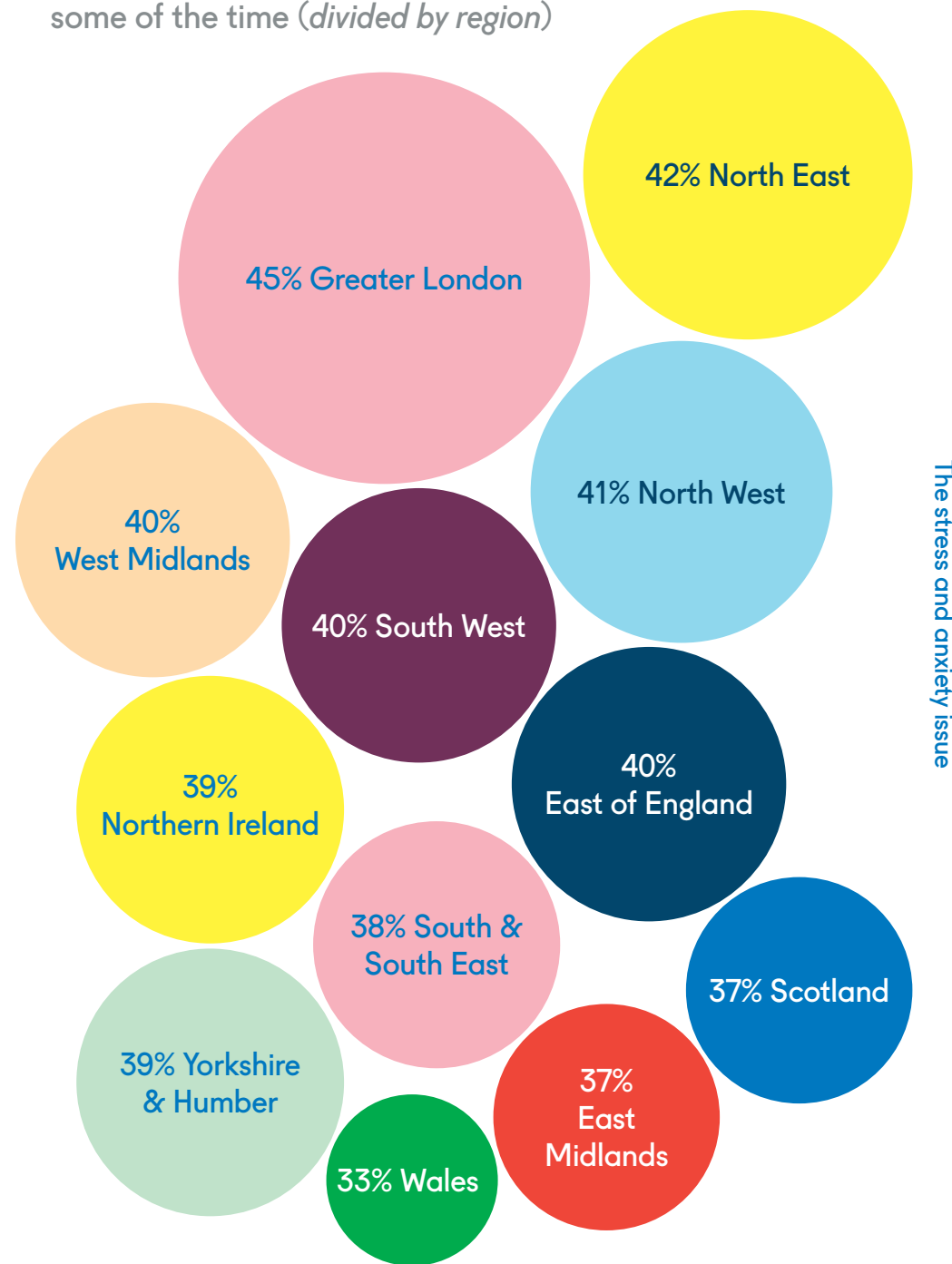
Each generation or region may have different levels of anxiety, but few demographics remain completely unaffected.



% of adults saying they feel anxious at least some of the time



% of adults saying they feel anxious at least some of the time (divided by region)



The stress and anxiety issue

## Control and contradiction

Wellbeing is more than just an absence of anxiety. It encompasses how we feel about our lives overall – and that can change depending on whether we're focusing on the present or the future.

According to the survey, 81% of us have some level of satisfaction with our current lives, and over half (56%) rate

our current level of happiness as high – which is certainly something to feel positive about. However, when we look to the future those numbers drop – less than half of us (47%) feel in control of our future or feel optimistic about it. Even more significantly, 32% of us feel like we're out of control of our lives and are just 'passengers'.

*72% of adults  
feeling anxious  
say life's pressures  
are overwhelming*

## Cause and effect

Stress and anxiety can emerge from all sorts of circumstances: relationships, finances, work, and health issues, to name just a few.

The effects are widespread. We can find it hard to focus on the things we want to do, which makes it harder to achieve the goals we've set for ourselves. A third (33%) of us say we find it hard to focus on the things we're supposed to be doing, and 37% of us find it hard just to switch off or relax.

Anxiety is also giving us sleepless nights: 44% of us have trouble sleeping, but for those who experience anxiety that rises to 60%.

While not always easy to do, making time for ourselves or taking time out with others can help us cope with stress and anxiety. This research shows that museums and galleries can be helpful in this context. For some they provide a sense of calm; for others they are a source of stimulation and inspiration. Over half of people surveyed who visit museums and galleries regularly (56%) do it to 'get away' from their daily routines.

*'My husband and I love each other, but we don't get time to do things together.'*

*Patsy, professional, Manchester*





# Time-poor people

Making time for ourselves might sound straightforward, but for many of us there's a sense that there just isn't enough time any more.

More than a quarter of us (28%) think we're time-poor, and in those who report feelings of anxiety that increases to 43%.

Unsurprisingly, it's people who work and those aged 25-44 who have young children who report being the most time-poor, juggling the many challenges of modern life.

So what do we do to prevent feeling overwhelmed, when we have so much going on?

## Where does the time go?

When we do have time to ourselves, we don't always choose activities that directly contribute to better wellbeing. The research reveals that, after work and sleep, we spend on average over 3 hours a day watching TV, and nearly 2 hours a day using social media. That figure rises to 3.6 hours for younger generations as we move into an 'always-on' culture, with smartphones and devices helping us interact with each

other in different ways but on a more constant basis.

This sense of 'busyness' can leave us without a clear sense of purpose and control as we juggle our priorities. These priorities can vary depending on the demographic – for example, millennials spend more time at work, and parents spend more time caring for family members, in addition to the rest of their daily tasks.

*'Quite often in the evening I'm cooking dinner, answering an e-mail, helping my daughter with homework and changing a nappy all at the same time.'*

Emily, professional, Cambridgeshire



## 27% of adults feel guilty about taking time for themselves

This phenomenon of 'triple shifting' – juggling work life, home life and social life – is giving us less and less time to ourselves to relax. It's especially hard for parents, with almost a quarter of parents (24%) saying they feel they don't have enough time to spend with their kids.

But family isn't only important to parents. Overall, over half of us (55%) say spending time with friends or family is our

priority, and over a quarter of us (27%) feel guilty about taking time for ourselves as we try to prioritise others around us.

## Getting it right

The good news is that when we do make time for ourselves, we engage in a wide variety of activities that can improve our wellbeing, from taking a bath to pursuing a hobby or socialising with friends.

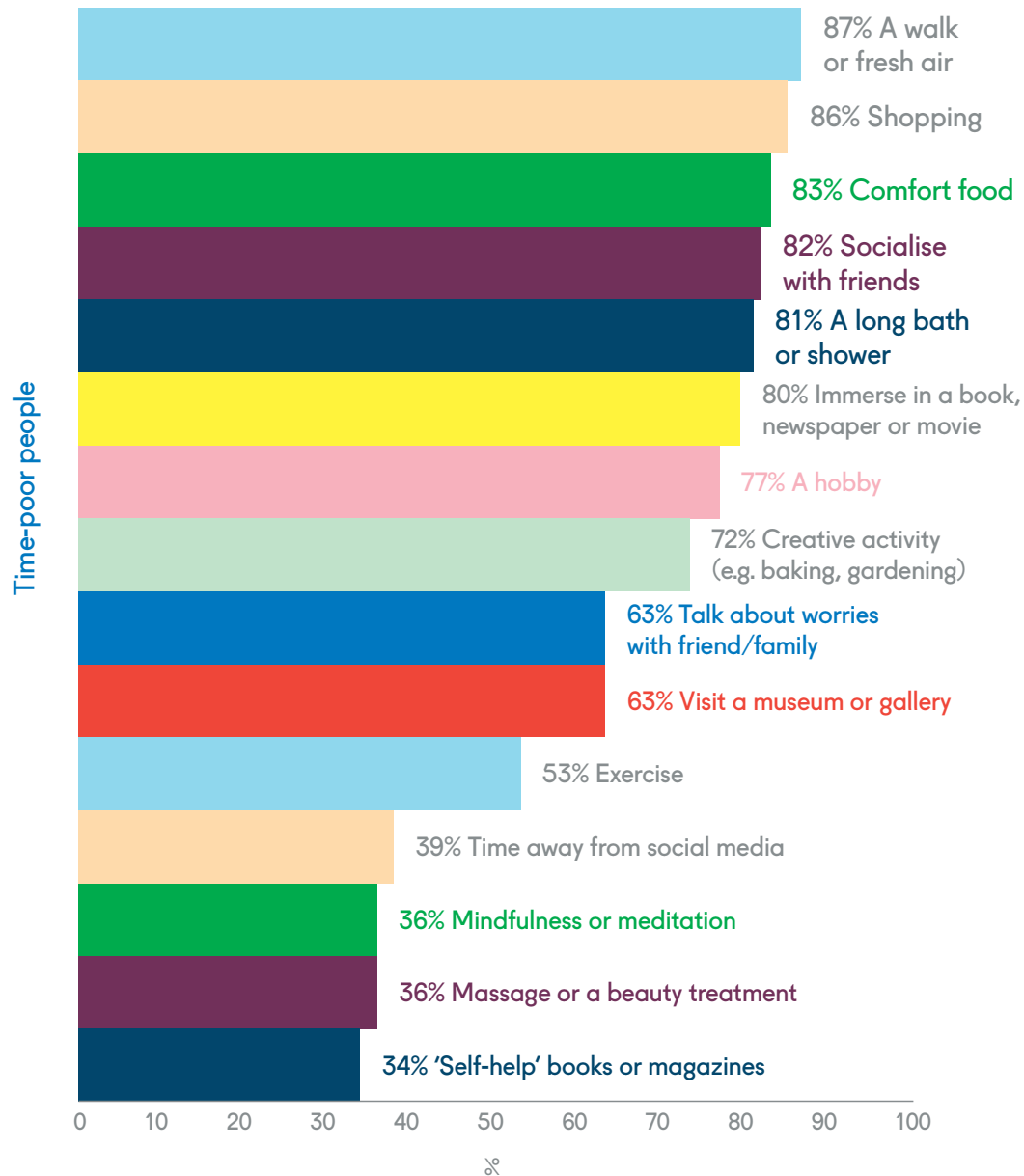
Our most popular leisure activities tend to take place at home, or close to it – we mostly listen to music, cook, read or go shopping.

However, with only 43% of adults saying that they make deliberate choices to give their lives meaning, and only 41% saying they have a hobby or activity that they regularly make time for, there is still plenty of scope for improvement – and that's where art can play a more significant role.

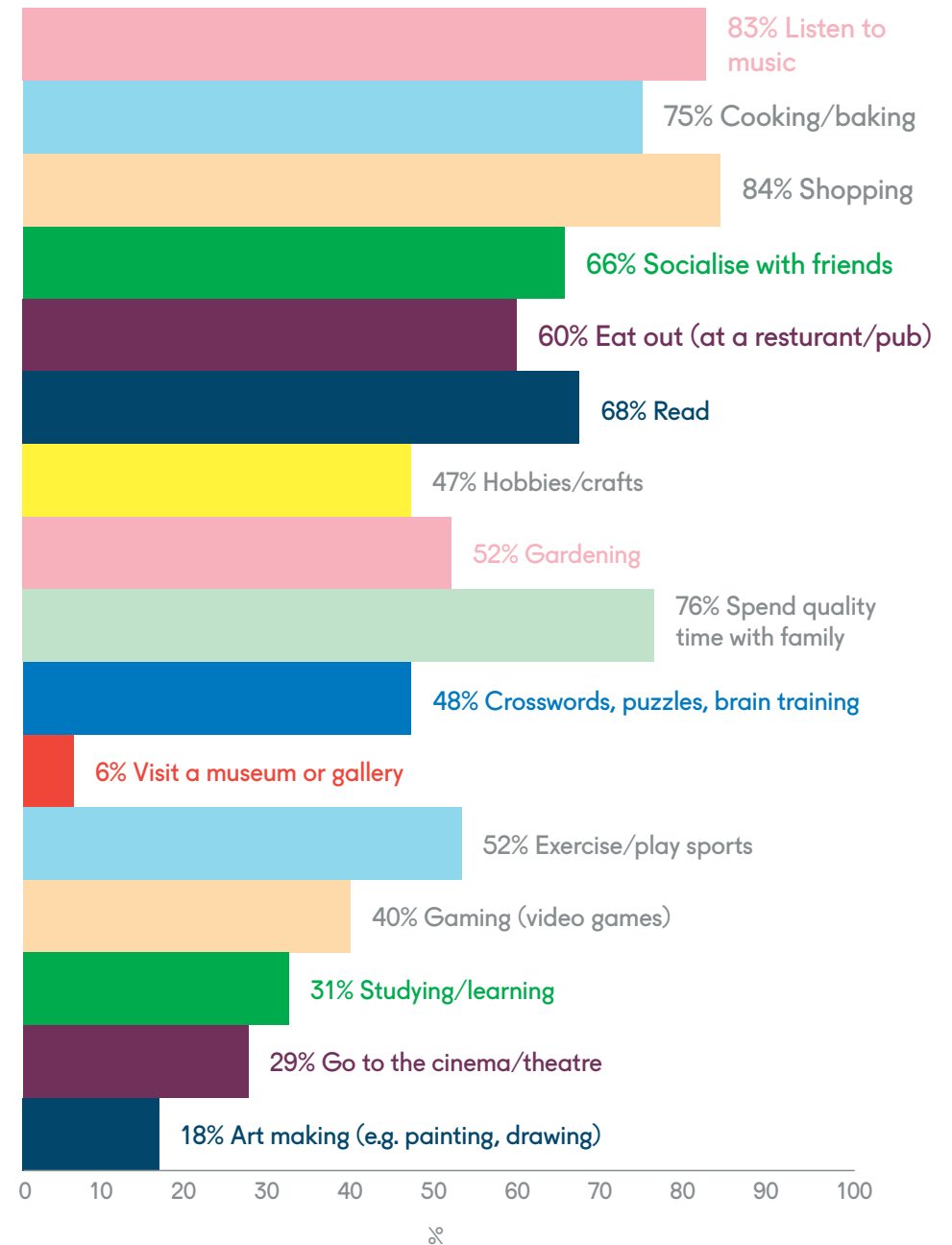


The Design Museum, 2017. Photo © Andy Smith

## Activities people do as a way of dealing with anxiety or stress



## % of adults saying they do these activities at least monthly





As the survey responses on the previous pages show, 63% of us have at some point used a visit to a museum or gallery to 'de-stress'. However, only 6% of us visit a museum or gallery regularly.

Therefore, there is potential for visiting museums and galleries to play a bigger role in helping us cope with stress and anxiety.

63% Visit a museum or gallery to de-stress

6% Visit a museum or gallery monthly

*Only 43% of adults say they make deliberate choices to give their life meaning*

*'It's too easy in a hectic world to not think about who you are. I've wanted to visit that museum for 10 years and have never actually done it! Now I have!'*

Flora, professional, Cardiff



National Portrait Gallery, 2018. Photo © Andy Smith

# Investment in self





As a nation we have a pretty good understanding of the benefits of leisure activities. Over two thirds of survey respondents (67%) agree that taking time out for ourselves and choosing to pursue a leisure activity is good for our personal wellbeing.

Even more encouragingly, most of us agree that this gives us a sense of control and purpose. The problem isn't so much a lack of understanding of what is good for us – it's being able to make the time and find the headspace to make changes in our lives.

## Seeing the benefit

It's perhaps an obvious thing to say, but some of the biggest benefits to our wellbeing come from doing the things we love. Most of us (59%) understand the power of our leisure activities to take us away from the everyday routine; we value them as an important part of our lives and believe that they help us feel more positive about life in general. And in regaining a sense of balance across all aspects of our lives, we feel an increased sense of control and purpose.

While not implying that leisure activities are the sole reason for a greater sense of wellbeing, this research does show that those who engage in one to two hours of leisure activities a day report a

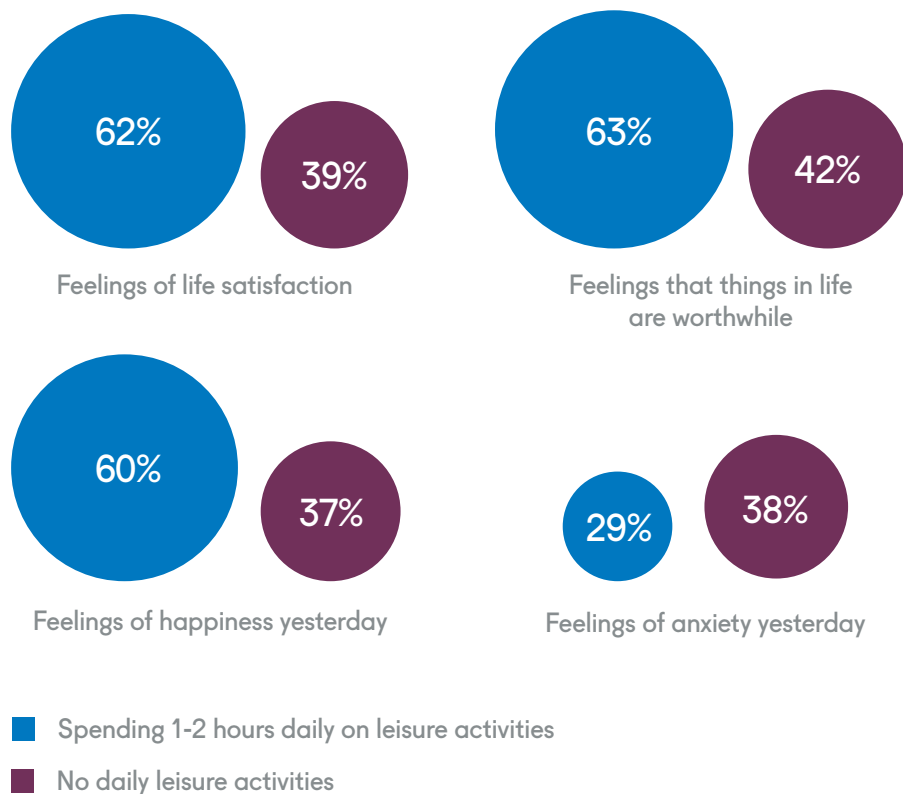
greater sense of satisfaction with their lives, and a greater sense that the things they do in life are worthwhile. Those same people also indicate a greater sense of overall happiness.

A hobby or leisure activity isn't a magic wand; those who undertake a regular leisure activity report only slightly lower levels of anxiety compared to those who don't. But survey respondents do recognise this as a positive way to deal with feelings of stress and anxiety. Over half (53%) of adults say their leisure activities help them deal with life's ups and downs, rising to 74% among those who specifically make time for these activities.



## The benefits of spending 1-2 hours on daily leisure activities vs no daily leisure activities

Investment in self



*'The museum was so interesting.  
I felt I really came away having  
learned something. I told  
everybody afterwards.'*

Tommy, professional, Hertfordshire



National Museum Cardiff, 2017. Photo © Andy Smith

## The role of museums and galleries

According to this survey, almost two thirds (63%) of us have at some point visited a museum or gallery to deal with stress and anxiety. Half (49%) of us visit a museum or gallery at least once a year, but only a few (6%) do this regularly (at least once a month).

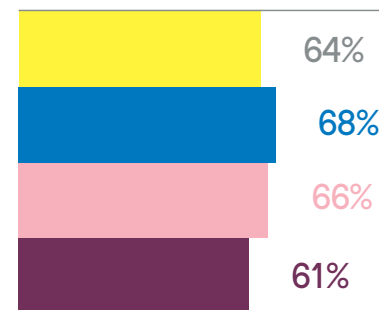
People who say they do regularly visit museums and galleries report a greater

sense of satisfaction with their lives than those who have never visited – as well as a greater sense of their lives and what they do being worthwhile. People who regularly go to museums and galleries say that they prefer to visit at least every two to three months, and that spending an hour or more on each visit really increases the benefit they feel.



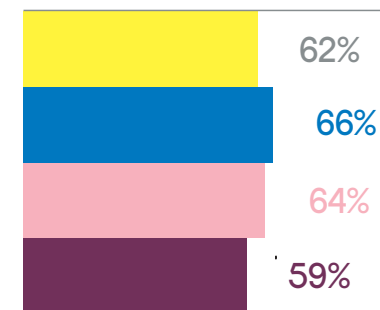
The Postal Museum, London, 2018. Photo © Andy Smith

## % The impact of frequent museum and gallery visits on our sense of wellbeing



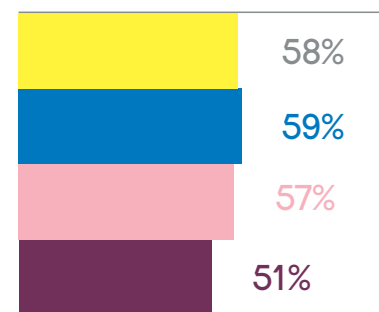
Visit once a month or more

Life satisfaction  
Things in life are worthwhile

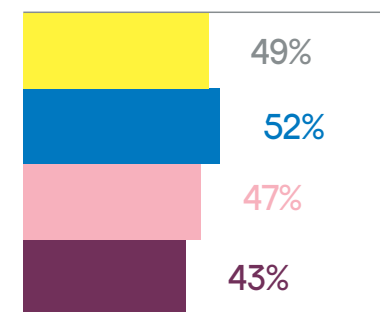


Visit every 3 months or more

Happiness yesterday  
Sense of purpose



Visit less than every 3 months



Never visit



## What do museums and galleries offer us?

Museums and galleries can offer an oasis of peace and tranquillity, or an array of stimulating new ideas.

Visiting is something we can do alone but we generally prefer to go with others, allowing us to strengthen our relationships and spend time with loved ones in a different environment.

The outcomes of the social study conducted alongside the survey, in which seven participants visited a

museum or gallery at least once a week, demonstrated that visiting more regularly can impact our lives in many ways – such as by giving us additional topics of conversation within our social circle, helping us learn new things in a fun way, and giving us moments of calm to reflect. Participants in the study also reported that the sense of purpose which came with being asked to make regular visits had a lasting positive effect.

*'It's almost similar to the way I feel when I go to the gym. You can relax and just look at what's on the wall. You come out to hustle and bustle, but while you're there it's just you and the painting.'*

Freda, career break, London



Pehchaan: Art from Another India, Tramway, Glasgow, featuring works acquired through Art Fund's Renew scheme within a space designed by Gabriella Marcella, 2016. Photo © Andy Smith



## The untapped resource

What is stopping us spending more time in museums and galleries?

From the survey, we know that people tend to spend their free time close to home – and among the hundreds of museums and galleries across the UK, many are closer to home than we may think. In fact, as reported in the Mendoza Review, a government-funded review of museums in England published in 2017, ‘55% of the English public live within walking distance of at least one museum’.

We also know that many of us want to make more time for ourselves in our ‘always-on’ world – and from the social study we know that, when given the direction to visit museums and galleries more regularly, people are positively impacted in a number of different ways.

As professor Paul Dolan reminds us, ‘this study highlights two vital areas that impact our happiness – time and stress. Taking the time to relieve everyday stress and anxiety is crucial for wellbeing. While most of us have the time, we simply don’t take it.

*‘I’ve got so much more out of [taking part in this study] than I could have imagined. The trips have been really fun and I probably wouldn’t have done them [otherwise].’*

Emily, professional, Cambridgeshire

This is a symptom of the pace of the modern world that we live in, but any activity that helps us take a break is a good thing and something everyone should do more of. Taking just 30 minutes a day for a leisure activity – a wellbeing allowance – can work wonders in helping to manage the stresses of modern life.’

Art Fund is championing wellbeing through an inspiring call to action: for people to

take back time to do what really matters to them, and to consider the benefit of museums and galleries as a great option.

And with over half of people surveyed (51%) saying that they want to make more use of museums and galleries in the future, these places clearly represent an untapped resource to help us cope with feelings of anxiety or the juggling act of modern-day life.



Courtauld Gallery, London, 2016. Photo © Andy Smith

# ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The 'calm and collected' study was conducted by [Delineate](#), a strategic insights firm, and their sister company [opinion.life](#), an international market research company.

The research included both a quantitative survey and a qualitative social study.

## Quantitative phase

- An online survey was conducted among a nationally representative sample of 2,521 UK adults in August 2018.
- Respondents were selected from online consumer panels and invited to complete the online survey by mobile or computer.
- Respondents were eligible on the basis of age and region, with representative quotas set according to published statistics for each country.

- The Margin of Error for a sample of  $n=2,521$  is  $\pm 1.9\%$  at the 95% confidence level.

## Qualitative social study

- A total of 9 respondents participated in a four-week diary study.
- During this time 7 participants went on to visit a museum or gallery at least once a week, while the remainder ('control sample') continued with life as normal.
- Respondents participated in regular in-depth interviews and completed questionnaires and diaries of their activities.

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