

How family-friendly are arts organisations as employers?

Executive Summary

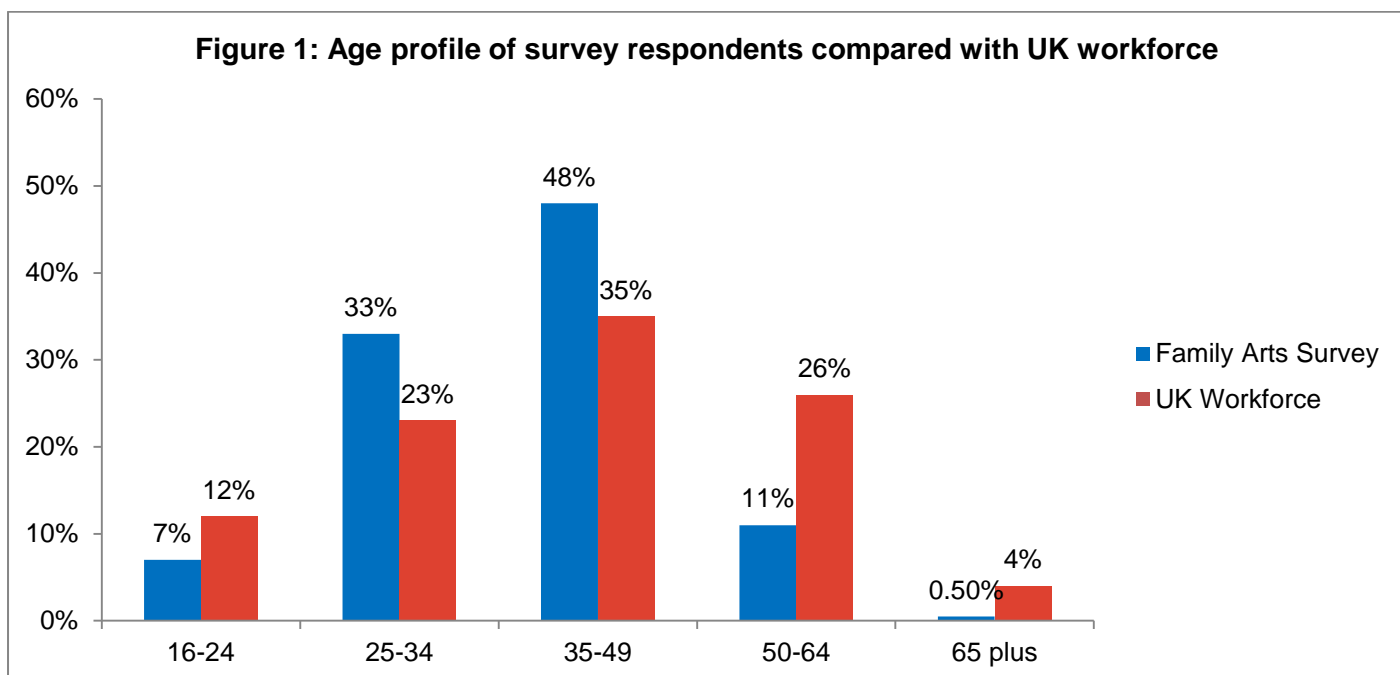


In spring 2015, the Family Arts Campaign worked with the Family & Childcare Trust to develop a survey, questioning employees of arts organisations across the UK about their views on how family-friendly the arts sector is as an employer. The survey covered issues of importance to those with caring responsibilities, including communication between employer and employee, parental leave, and perceptions around flexible working opportunities.

The online survey was aimed at arts professionals employed directly by arts organisations, at all stages of their career. It was promoted for six weeks to those engaged with the Family Arts Campaign; by partners of the Campaign (UK Theatre, Society of London Theatre, Independent Theatre Council, Contemporary Visual Arts Network, Dance UK, The Audience Agency and the Family & Childcare Trust); and the media, including Guardian Culture Professionals Network, Arts Professional and The Stage.

The respondents

There were 382 responses to the survey: 101 male respondents (26%) and 270 female respondents (71%), with 11 who preferred not to say or did not answer the question. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of respondents' ages compared to the overall UK workforce, indicating a higher proportion of 25-49 year olds responding to the survey than in the overall UK workforce, according to the Labour Force Survey, 2014. This highlights the issue of self-selection amongst respondents: people who identify with having issues in the workplace about their caring responsibilities were more likely to respond than those who don't.



Sources: Family Arts Survey, 2015 and the Labour Force Survey, 2014

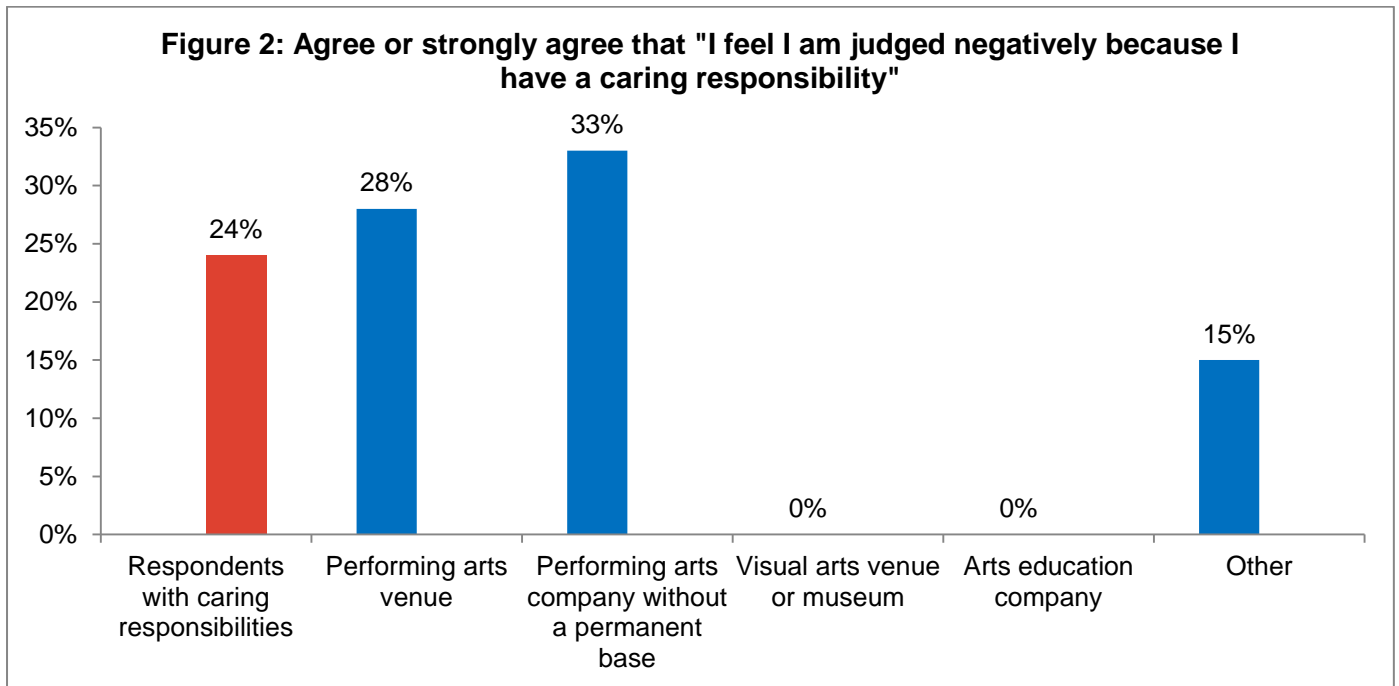
The majority of respondents work as managers or supervisors (52%), with 13% at Chief Executive or Director level and 21% are support staff without managerial or supervisory responsibility. 46 respondents indicated that they are self-employed; as this survey focused on employees of arts organisations, these responses were disregarded.

211 respondents indicated that they consider themselves to have caring responsibilities (55%).

Key findings

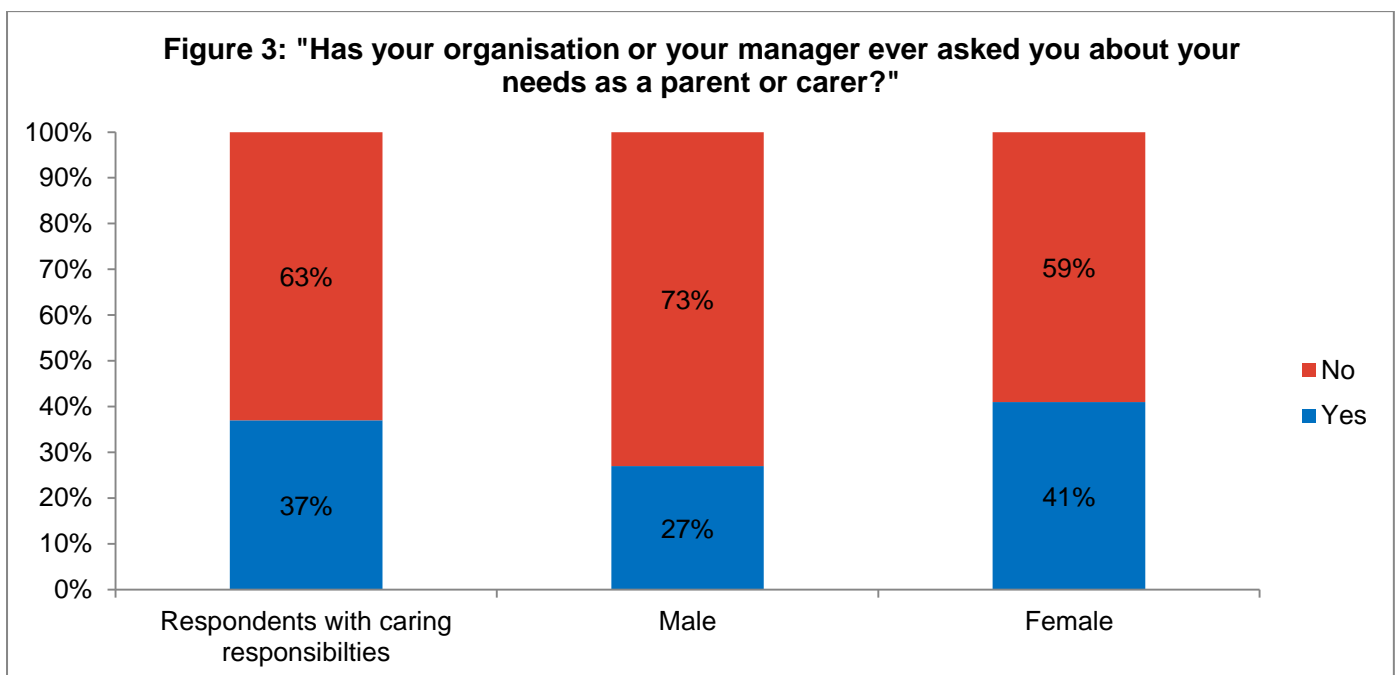
One in four respondents with caring responsibilities (24%) feel they are judged negatively because they have a caring responsibility.

Strikingly, those working in performing arts venues or performing arts companies without a permanent base (e.g. touring theatre or dance companies, orchestras, etc.) found this was more of a problem than those working in galleries, museums or other exhibition spaces, or arts education companies (figure 2).



Source: Family Arts Survey, 2015

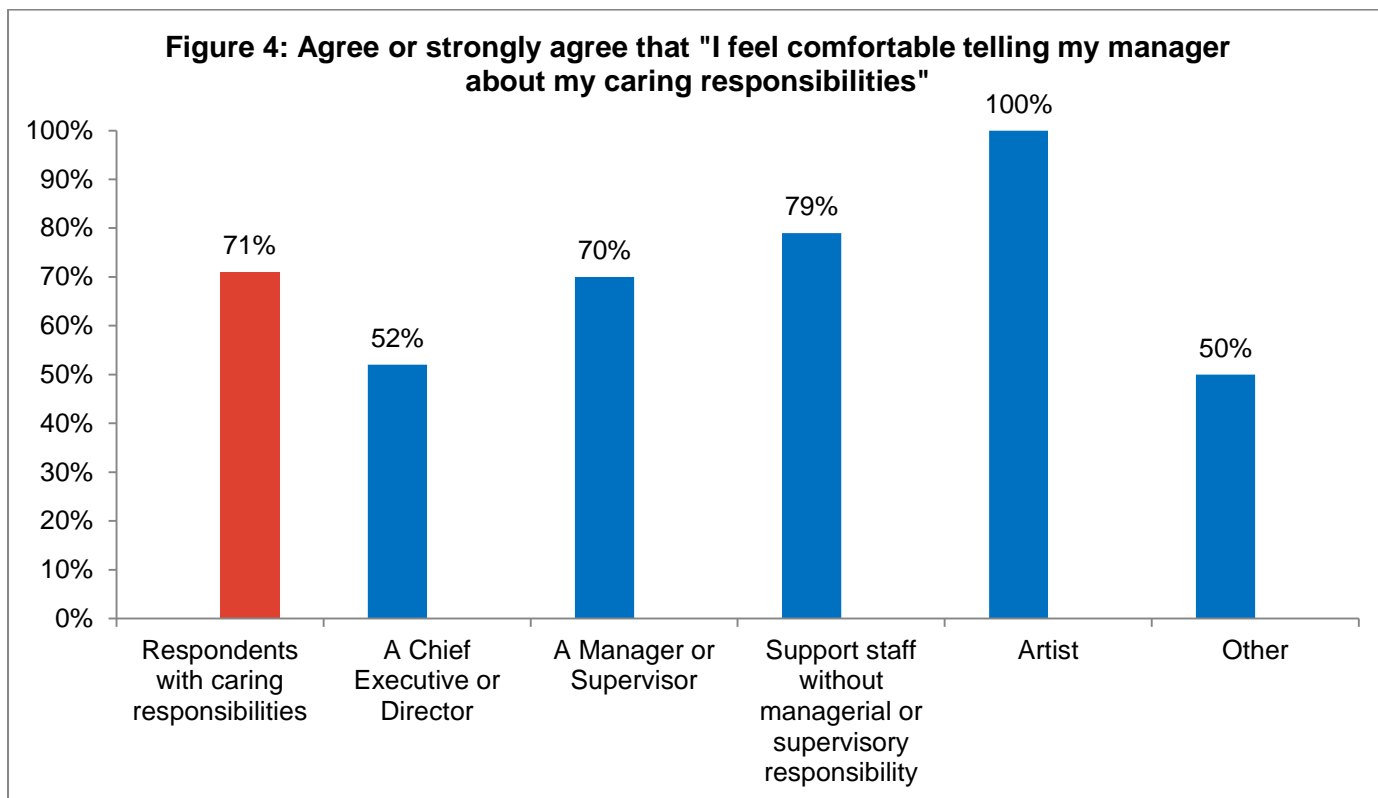
Almost two thirds of respondents with caring responsibilities (63%) have not been asked by their organisation or manager about their needs as a parent or carer; a figure which rises to 73% when considering only male respondents (figure 3).



Source: Family Arts Survey, 2015

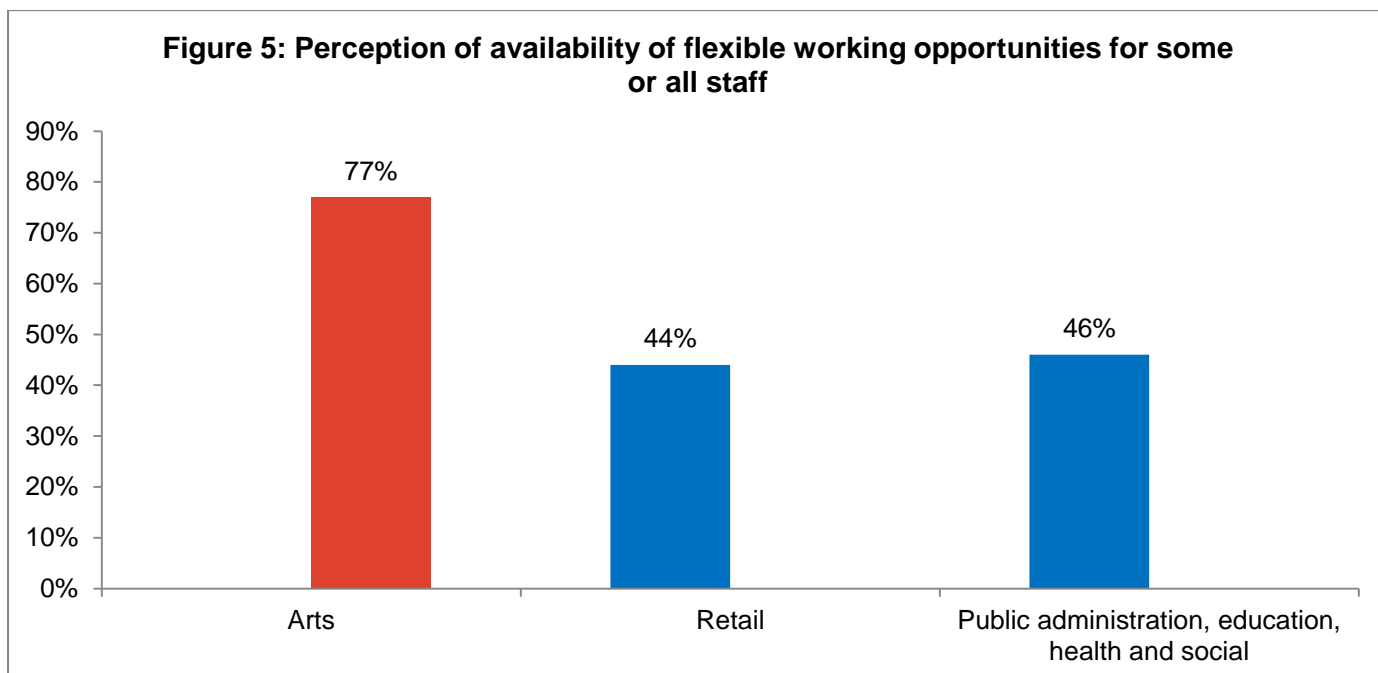
However, seven in ten respondents with caring responsibilities (71%) feel comfortable telling their manager about those caring responsibilities.

Figure 4 indicates that seniority within organisations makes this conversation harder: 79% of support staff feel comfortable, compared to 70% of managers and 52% of chief executives or directors.



Source: Family Arts Survey, 2015

Another positive finding is that flexible working opportunities are perceived to be more available to arts professionals than in other comparable sectors such as retail or public administration, education, health and social (figure 5), according to the Work-Life Balance Employee Survey, 2011.



Sources: Family Arts Survey, 2015 and Work-Life Balance Employee Survey, 2011

If you could ask your employer for one thing to make your organisation more family-friendly, what would it be?

“It would be nice to see the organisation actively acknowledge staff's parental responsibilities with discounts and offers to our events or related cultural events. It would also be useful if young men and women in the office had a clearer idea of the company's maternity and paternity arrangements, before they might need to use them.”

“Opportunities for flexible working”

“A willingness to recognize and value the skills and loyalty of the lowest paid workers in the organization and not to just treat them as easily replaceable when a degree of flexibility about the way they work would enable them to remain employed. Where I work it's one rule for managers and supervisors and another rule for the rest of us.”

“I run my organisation - as well as being employed by it! I think we should formalise our policies and consider actively what our aims to be family friendly are, and what we can/ can't accommodate. We mostly focus on paying the bills, as a project funded independent organisation with two people.”

“On-site childcare”

“Recognition that a culture that continually expects additional hours over the contracted ones as standard is not attainable for those with fixed caring responsibilities”

“Policies are in place but not publicised and often you are thought of badly for taking up these things - e.g. requesting flexible working for family reasons would be a black mark.”

“Rotas more than a few days in advance”

“Have a coaching rather than directive approach to staff management - supporting parents to find solutions, rather than seeing them as the problem.”

“My organisation is exceptionally and unusually brilliant to work for as a parent which is why I now work for them. Once I became a parent I found I was no longer able to work for the same organisation I had been working for because of their inflexible attitude to parents. The irony being that I now work for ... a small independent theatre company with a core staff of only ten people and I previously worked for ... a large, highly subsidised organisation.”

Conclusion

As expected, the picture is mixed across the arts sector in terms of communication, opportunities and perceptions: on the one hand, many employees are comfortable telling their manager about their caring responsibilities and flexible working opportunities are perceived to be more widely available in the arts than other sectors. However, that almost a quarter of employees feel they are judged negatively because of their caring responsibilities and that so few have been asked about their needs is truly worrying; as a sector we must actively work towards improving these statistics, focusing on learning from those who do it well both within and outside the arts.

Further analysis of the data is needed to determine areas of particular positivity or concern, and now that a baseline has been established the conversation should be widened to other people involved in the arts: the self-employed and particularly those who have felt compelled to leave contracted employment due to their caring responsibilities.