# Scotland leads UK in cultural access but class disparities prompt urgent calls for funding



A recent survey conducted by National Galleries of Scotland reveals that Scotland boasts the highest level of cultural access within the UK, with 64% of respondents stating that they feel they have easy access to cultural spaces like museums and art galleries. This figure surpasses that of London, where 54% of individuals reported similar sentiments. In contrast, the findings showed that Wales (38%), the East Midlands (38%), and Northern Ireland (46%) reported much lower access levels.

The survey highlights a significant class divide in cultural engagement. Many individuals from higher socioeconomic backgrounds reported feeling more connected to cultural opportunities, with 59% indicating they have adequate access, compared to only 37% among those in lower socioeconomic groups. In Edinburgh, this disparity is pronounced, with 87% of people in the higher socioeconomic bracket feeling they have easy access to art, while just 68% of their lower socioeconomic counterparts shared this view.

Despite the positive access statistics, the National Galleries of Scotland has called for urgent government investment in a new facility, “The Art Works,” to address these disparities further and ensure that cultural offerings are more widely shared. This facility is designed to enhance Scotland's art collection and support touring programmes not only across the country but also internationally. Anne Lyden, director-general at NGS, emphasised the importance of this project, saying, “The socioeconomic divide in access to culture in the UK is deeply concerning... Our research clearly illustrates that more needs to be done urgently.” The proposed facility aims to unlock the potential of Scotland’s art collection while safeguarding it for future generations.

The broader context reinforces these findings. Data from the most recent Scottish Household Survey illustrates that 88% of adults engaged with culture in the past year, either through attending events or participating in cultural activities. However, participation rates fluctuate significantly across different local authorities and demographic groups. For instance, younger adults and those with higher educational qualifications tend to engage more with cultural activities, underlining the need for targeted efforts to bridge these gaps. Factors such as socioeconomic status and disability also greatly influence levels of cultural engagement, necessitating leadership that is attuned to these disparities.

While the survey points to commendable overall access, it brings to light the pressing need for equitable cultural participation strategies. Further support from both the Scottish and UK governments is critical. A spokesperson for the Scottish Government confirmed that a £9 million investment has already been made towards The Art Works, with plans for additional funding to ensure its completion. They await further clarification on long-term funding from the UK Government, which recently stated its commitment to increasing accessibility to the arts for all citizens.

This growing acknowledgment of cultural engagement as essential not only for community vitality but also for individual mental health is essential. Anecdotal evidence suggests that visits to galleries and museums can be therapeutic, enhancing well-being. Thus, firms like NGS advocate for enhanced funding to guarantee that cultural engagement is not a privilege of the affluent but a universal right accessible to all.

As discussions continue regarding the construction of The Art Works, it is clear that Scotland stands at a critical juncture in its cultural evolution. The challenge remains to ensure that this progress reaches all corners of society, dissolving the barriers that still exist, and guaranteeing that the riches of Scottish culture are available for future generations to cherish.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/scots-have-best-access-to-culture-in-uk-but-class-divide-exists-survey-suggests-QAHTKP7DGVLE5JDULFZFR3K52I/), [[2]](https://www.gov.scot/publications/cultural-engagement-scotland-2023-findings-scottish-household-survey/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/scots-have-best-access-to-culture-in-uk-but-class-divide-exists-survey-suggests-QAHTKP7DGVLE5JDULFZFR3K52I/), [[4]](https://www.gov.scot/publications/cultural-engagement-scotland-2023-findings-scottish-household-survey/pages/8/), [[6]](https://www.gov.scot/publications/cultural-engagement-scotland-2023-findings-scottish-household-survey/pages/4/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/scots-have-best-access-to-culture-in-uk-but-class-divide-exists-survey-suggests-QAHTKP7DGVLE5JDULFZFR3K52I/), [[5]](https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/national-outcomes/national-outcomes/culture/measuring-progress-culture), [[7]](https://www.gov.scot/publications/cultural-engagement-scotland-2023-findings-scottish-household-survey/pages/3/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.gov.scot/publications/cultural-engagement-scotland-2023-findings-scottish-household-survey/), [[3]](https://www.gov.scot/publications/cultural-engagement-scotland-2023-findings-scottish-household-survey/pages/5/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/scots-have-best-access-to-culture-in-uk-but-class-divide-exists-survey-suggests-QAHTKP7DGVLE5JDULFZFR3K52I/), [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/scots-have-best-access-to-culture-in-uk-but-class-divide-exists-survey-suggests-QAHTKP7DGVLE5JDULFZFR3K52I/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/scots-have-best-access-to-culture-in-uk-but-class-divide-exists-survey-suggests-QAHTKP7DGVLE5JDULFZFR3K52I/), [[5]](https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/national-outcomes/national-outcomes/culture/measuring-progress-culture)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/scots-have-best-access-to-culture-in-uk-but-class-divide-exists-survey-suggests-QAHTKP7DGVLE5JDULFZFR3K52I/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/cultural-engagement-scotland-2023-findings-scottish-household-survey/> - The Scottish Household Survey 2023 reveals that 88% of adults in Scotland engaged with culture in the past year, either by attending cultural events or participating in activities. This figure has remained consistent since 2022. However, cultural engagement varies across local authorities, with urban areas generally exhibiting higher participation rates. Factors such as socioeconomic status, education level, and disability status significantly influence cultural engagement, highlighting the need for targeted efforts to ensure equitable access to cultural opportunities across Scotland.
3. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/cultural-engagement-scotland-2023-findings-scottish-household-survey/pages/5/> - The 2023 Scottish Household Survey indicates that 74% of adults participated in cultural activities, with reading being the most common form of participation. However, participation rates differ among various population subgroups. Adults with higher educational qualifications and those living in less deprived areas are more likely to engage in cultural activities. These disparities underscore the importance of addressing barriers to cultural participation to promote inclusivity and equal access to cultural experiences across Scotland.
4. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/cultural-engagement-scotland-2023-findings-scottish-household-survey/pages/8/> - The 2023 Scottish Household Survey concludes that while cultural engagement in Scotland is high, significant disparities exist across different local authorities and population subgroups. Younger adults, individuals with higher educational qualifications, and those residing in less deprived areas are more likely to attend cultural events or participate in activities. These findings highlight the need for targeted initiatives to address these inequalities and ensure that all individuals have equal opportunities to engage with Scotland's rich cultural offerings.
5. <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/national-outcomes/national-outcomes/culture/measuring-progress-culture> - The National Performance Framework's 'Measuring Progress - Culture' indicator shows that in 2022, 73.5% of adults in Scotland attended or visited a cultural event or place in the last 12 months. Attendance rates vary by age, socioeconomic status, and geographic location, with higher rates observed among younger adults, those with higher income, and residents of less deprived areas. These variations highlight the need for policies aimed at increasing cultural access and participation across all demographics in Scotland.
6. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/cultural-engagement-scotland-2023-findings-scottish-household-survey/pages/4/> - The 2023 Scottish Household Survey reveals that cultural attendance in Scotland is influenced by factors such as age, socioeconomic status, and education level. Younger adults and those with higher educational qualifications are more likely to attend cultural events. Additionally, women report higher levels of attendance than men. These patterns suggest that targeted efforts are needed to address barriers to cultural participation, particularly for older adults, individuals with lower educational qualifications, and men, to promote equitable access to cultural experiences.
7. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/cultural-engagement-scotland-2023-findings-scottish-household-survey/pages/3/> - The 2023 Scottish Household Survey indicates that 88% of adults in Scotland engaged with culture in the past year, either by attending cultural events or participating in activities. However, cultural engagement varies across local authorities, with urban areas generally exhibiting higher participation rates. Factors such as socioeconomic status, education level, and disability status significantly influence cultural engagement, highlighting the need for targeted efforts to ensure equitable access to cultural opportunities across Scotland.