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THE **SML** ART MARKET TALENT REPORT 2025

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

ArtTactic®

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements
We would like to thank the following people:

Copy: Louise Yeowart
Design: Adam Nice & Martin Disley

FOREWORD

A LETTER FROM SML

Welcome to the second edition of our cross-sector talent report, now under a new title: the *SML Art Market Talent Report*. This year, we present an expanded, in-depth analysis of the evolving talent landscape within the commercial art market, developed in collaboration with leading research experts at ArtTactic. Beyond enhancing transparency in pay, this report aims to provide actionable insights for both employers and employees supporting greater equity and success across the sector.

This edition comes at a time of significant challenges. Recent political shifts, including new leadership in both the United States and the United Kingdom, have created uncertainty, prompting businesses to delay long-term planning. In the UK, the Labour Government's Employment Rights Bill has had unintended consequences, discouraging hiring rather than promoting job security.

Economic downturns have led to widespread redundancies and reduced revenue. Financial pressures and shifting market dynamics have forced many organisations to restructure, making talent retention and job satisfaction increasingly difficult.

At the same time, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives are being scaled back by major international corporations, often unfairly positioned as a scapegoat for broader challenges.

However, while the art sector is not immune to geopolitical and economic turbulence, its resilience is well established. The global nature of the market continues to generate opportunities for growth as businesses explore new markets, diversify revenue streams and refine operational models.

Despite the strains of recent years stretching resources thin, cultivating a vibrant and inclusive art world remains more crucial than ever. Top professional talent must be supported in entering the industry and empowered to sustain long-term careers. This report reinforces SML's commitment to providing valuable insights and guidance to make this possible.

Our collaboration with ArtTactic has enabled us to offer a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective on the realities of the market and its workforce than ever before. We are grateful to all respondents who contributed to these efforts and shared their views. Without your contributions, this report could not exist. With your continued input, our long-term vision is to enhance our coverage with each edition, broadening its geographical reach and building a robust dataset that will reveal more trends over time.

One employee, in response to our outreach, described the damaging effect of "a lack of processes, structures, and policies around employee satisfaction, retention, and acquisition..." This succinctly highlights what we are seeking to address.

Beyond serving as an open reference for salaries in the art world, this report aspires to help businesses attract and retain top talent by encouraging a more informed and proactive approach to hiring and career development. It serves as a benchmarking tool for those working in the commercial art sector, identifying best practices and working towards a fairer, more sustainable professional environment. We hope it proves to be as valuable as our last.

Rosie Allan
Managing Partner

Rachel Johnston
Managing Partner

FOREWORD

A LETTER FROM ARTTACTIC

We are delighted to have partnered with SML on this project, joining them in their mission to deliver a comprehensive analysis of employment within the commercial art market. By generating concrete data and providing practical advice, we aim to empower those working in the industry – as well as those aspiring to enter it – with the insights they need to navigate employment more effectively.

At ArtTactic, our work is rooted in data, transparency, and education across the global art market. We are committed to impartiality, rigour, and depth in our research, and these principles have guided our approach here. By applying our art market analysis expertise, we have ensured that the findings in this report meet the highest possible standards, offering a clear and reliable reflection of the industry.

SML, as the market-leading talent specialists, bring an unrivalled understanding of the people who shape the sector. We believe that the market is defined by those who work within it, and to truly understand it, we must also understand its people.

Following a positive reception in its inaugural edition in 2023, the *Art Market Talent Report* now returns in an expanded second edition. Our collaboration has allowed us to significantly enhance the depth of the data underpinning the findings.

In an evolving industry, fresh approaches are essential. We hope this partnership highlights the power of collaboration in supporting positive change across the art world.

L Dewar

Lindsay Dewar
COO & Head of Analytics

OVERVIEW

KEY FINDINGS

1. Salaries in the United Kingdom grew between 2022 and 2024 despite employer concerns about the market. However, employee satisfaction with remuneration declined by 19.6%. In the United States, earnings appeared to decrease, with satisfaction falling by 25.7%. In contrast, salaries across Europe rose in 2023 but stabilised in 2024, with employee satisfaction experiencing the smallest decline at 19%.

2. The data shows that salaries rise with business size, with large companies offering the highest pay with employees in Europe earning up to 20% more than medium-sized firms.

3. White professionals consistently earn the most, suggesting greater access to better-paid positions and career advancement. Black professionals have the lowest median salaries in both the UK (£26,000) and the US ($67,000). On average, men are the highest earners.

4. Higher education does not always lead to higher earnings, particularly in the UK and Europe, where PhD and master's degree holders often earn the same as – or even less than – those with bachelor's degrees.

5. Most art world jobs remain primarily on-site, with 62.6% of respondents working in offices or on location most of the time. Among different roles, gallery employees are the most likely to work in person, with 82.7% based on-site. The majority of art world employees have fixed working hours, with galleries offering the least flexibility – 64.5% of staff work fixed schedules. Auction houses follow closely, with 59.6% of employees on set hours.

6. The UK offers the fewest remote work opportunities, though availability remains low across all regions. Europe provides the most flexibility, with 35.1% of employees working on flexi-time, compared to 22.9% in the US and just 13.2% in the UK.

7. Employees reported the highest satisfaction with autonomy and independence in their roles, with around 60% stating they were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied."

8. The global outlook for the market notably improved by the end of 2024 with negative hiring perceptions across the US declining from 36% to 25%.

INTRODUCTION

METHODOLOGY

The insights and trends presented in this report are based on data collected throughout 2023 and 2024, with reference to findings from 2022.

Increased participation in our surveys and the continued expansion of our global operations, means we have been able to incorporate a broader range of perspectives for this edition, particularly from Europe and, anecdotally, Asia, alongside our established focus on the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US).

We have expanded the scope of our reporting to provide a more comprehensive analysis of employees' satisfaction within their roles and organisations, as well as providing detailed insights into pay and benefits. Departing from 2023's approach, this report primarily draws from two rounds of public surveys, which took place at the start and close of 2024, developed and distributed in collaboration with ArtTactic.

Alongside the public surveys of employees, two concurrent surveys of employers were conducted to gain deeper understanding of employer confidence in the art market. These surveys were also developed and distributed in collaboration with ArtTactic.

Overall, the surveys generated **1,590** responses from commercial art world employers and employees across **40** geographies. Of these, **150** were responses from employers across **19** geographies. The quotations featured throughout are comments from those who took the time to participate.

The data is further supplemented by remuneration packages we have negotiated and secured for candidates successfully placed in art businesses throughout 2023 and 2024, as well as recruitment budgets shared and published via SML, or public listings.

In total, the report references over **6,900** data points, offering a robust and well-rounded view of the evolving employment landscape within the commercial art sector.

REPORT DEMOGRAPHICS

Region

Our data is primarily sourced from the UK and US, with the US accounting for approximately half of the total. While this reflects SML and ArtTactic's primary geographic focus, our reach continues to expand as survey participation grows. We hope this report inspires broader engagement, strengthening future editions with even greater global insights.

Business Type

The strong representation of respondents from commercial galleries and auction houses likely reflects their prominence as key players and major employers in the commercial art market.

Notably, this edition saw increased participation from professionals in institutions and non-profits. While our report remains commercially focused, SML is expanding its engagement in this area, and we anticipate more collaborations that bridge the public and private art sectors in the future.

Specialism

The data covers roles across the sector, with particularly strong representation from professionals in administration, operations, and sales.

Operations and administration roles form the backbone of most businesses, though their specific responsibilities vary depending on the company's structure and needs. Given their fundamental role in sustaining day-to-day functions, it is unsurprising that these two specialisms account for a significant share of the data. Additionally, our insights indicate that sales remains one of the most prevalent job categories.

The 'other' category in our dataset includes more niche specialisms, often encompassing roles with less clearly defined responsibilities.

People

Survey respondents were profiled by gender, age, race, disability, education as declared.

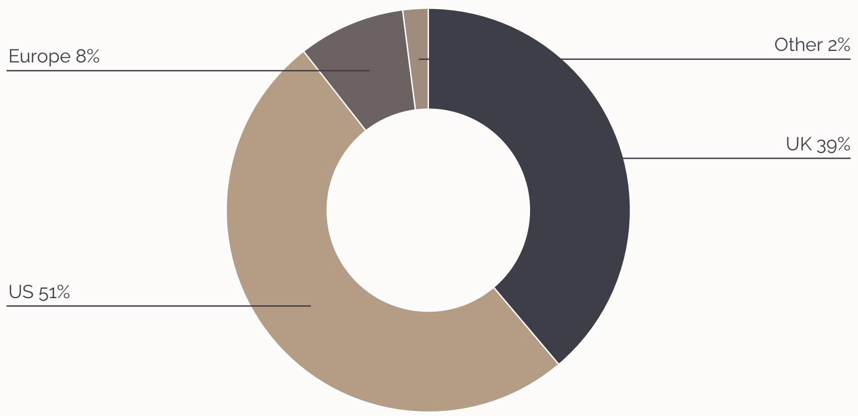
The majority identified as white, female, and at least educated to BA level, with no reported disabilities; in fact, female employees made up nearly 80%. The workforce is also predominantly young, with most respondents aged 26-40. Those over 50 made up about 4%, while individuals over 60 represented just 2%. However, this may be attributed to slower survey participation among older employees.

The greatest number of people responding to the survey work for medium-sized companies but there is substantial company representation across all of the categories.

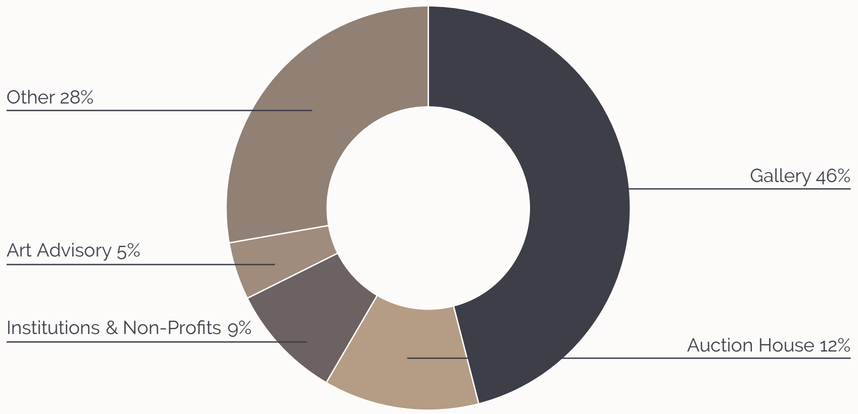
The data underscores the current lack of diversity within the sector. This report seeks to offer insights into key areas such as pay, benefits, and employment practices, enabling employers to refine their strategies, stay competitive, and attract and retain top talent, particularly through more inclusive approaches.

INTRODUCTION

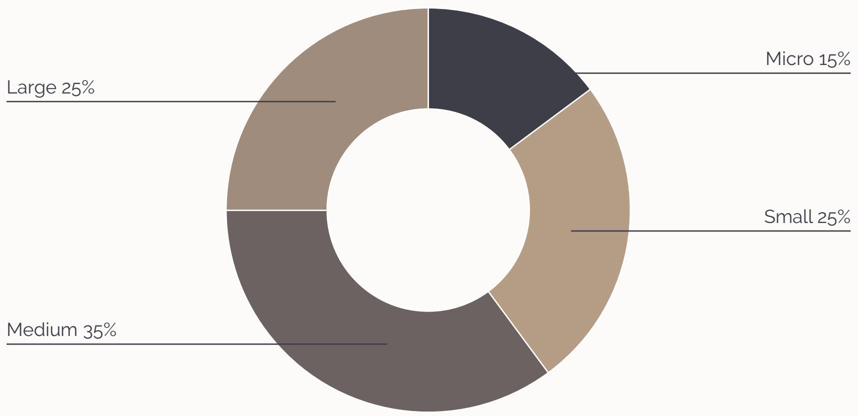
Region



Organisation

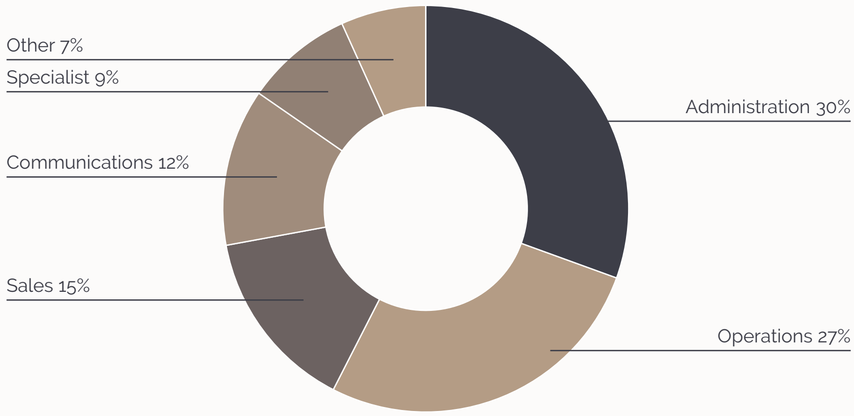


Size of Business

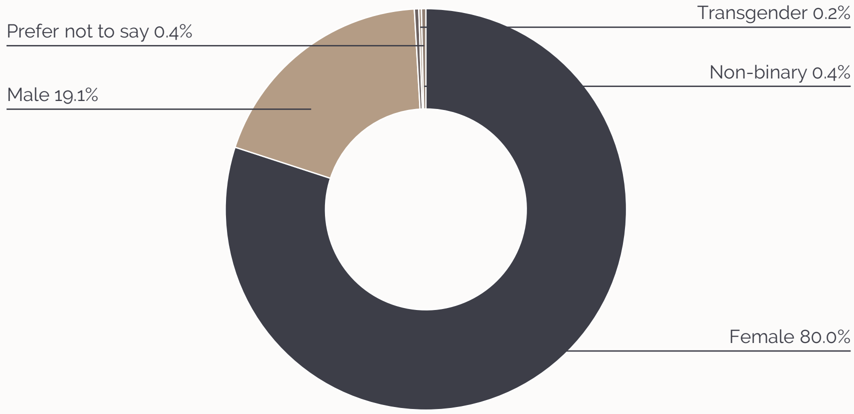


INTRODUCTION

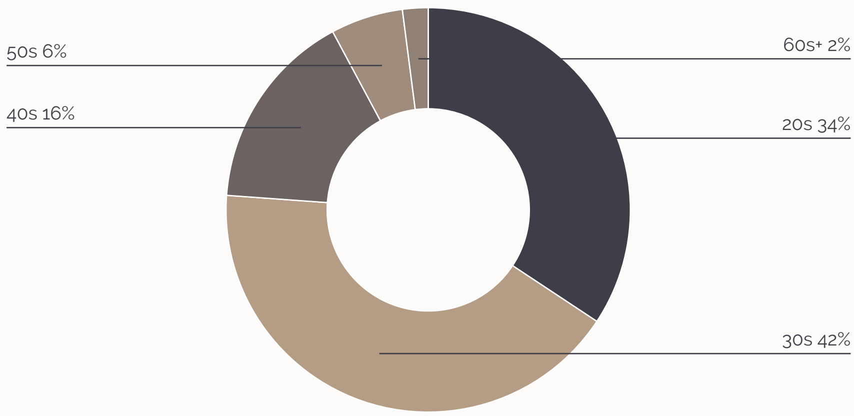
Specialism



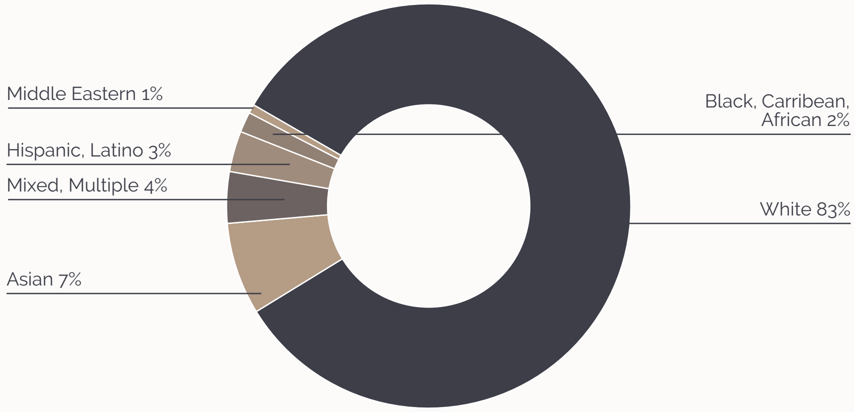
Gender



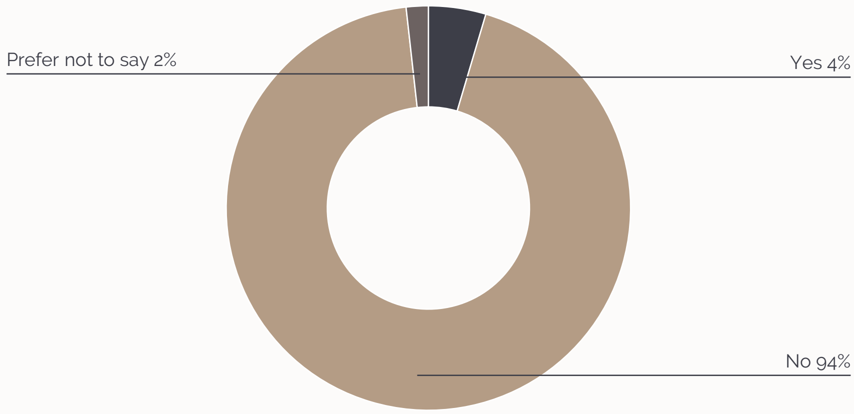
Age



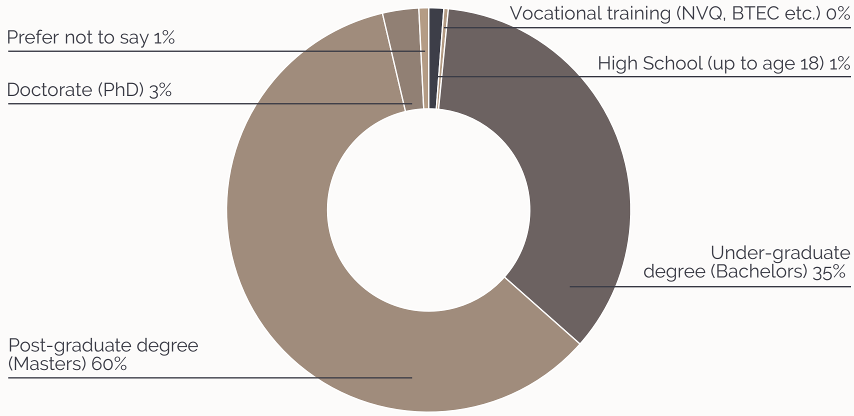
Race



Disability



Education



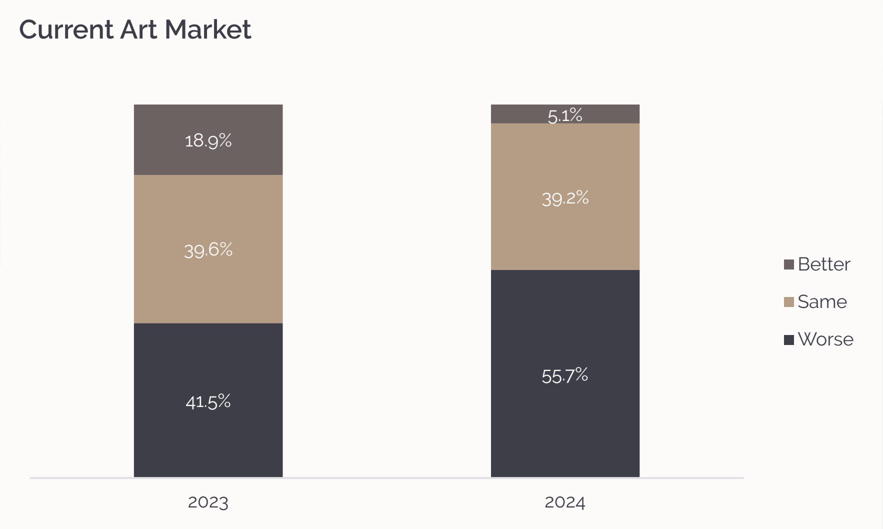
ART WORLD (TALENT) LANDSCAPE

Employer Confidence in the Art Market

Our data indicates that confidence in the current art market has been low among employers but is expected to improve this year.

When asked to forecast their perceptions of market conditions in 2025 compared to 2024, employers remained optimistic despite economic challenges.

The sharp economic downturn in 2024 resulted in mass layoffs and significantly reduced turnovers. Unsurprisingly, then, employer sentiment about 2024 was largely negative. 56% believed conditions had worsened compared to 2023, while 39% described them as unchanged.



However, results show a notable shift in outlook. By the end of 2024, optimism had risen significantly, with 80% of auction house respondents expecting market improvement in 2025, up from just 38% the previous year. Galleries and art advisors echoed this renewed confidence. Optimism among galleries rose from 14% to 41%, while confidence among art advisors increased from 14% to 32%.

ArtTactic's *Global Art Market Outlook 2025* report, published in January 2025, found that 23% of art market participants anticipated global market growth.[1] Additionally, ArtTactic's Confidence Indicator surged from 24 to 54 in just six months[2], marking the first return to positive sentiment since early 2022. This suggests growing trust among both buyers and sellers, potentially signalling the end of a two-year market decline. That said, sentiment varies by region.

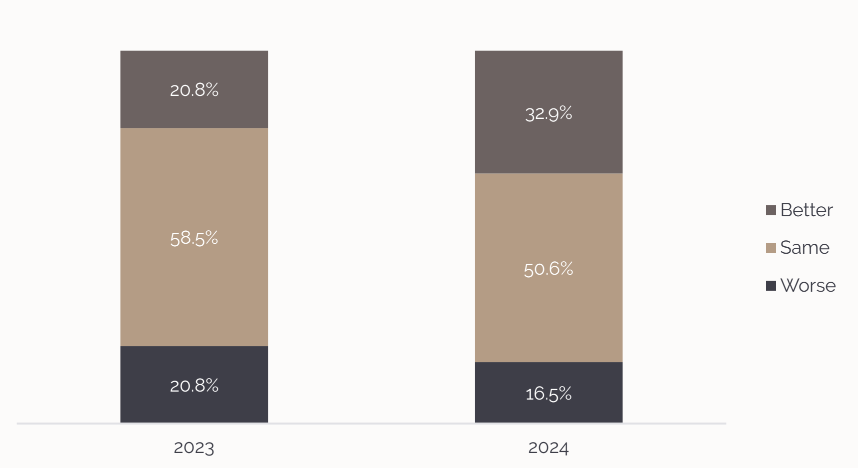
"WORK LIFE BALANCE IS EVERYTHING"

In the UK, only 21% expected improvement in the next 12 months, down from 25% the previous year, despite rising optimism about economic conditions (up from 21% to 29%). In the US, confidence grew significantly, possibly driven by political shifts, with 44% expecting a better art market in 2025, up from 22% in last year's forecast. Economic optimism in the US also rose from 26% to 39%. Europe, which had been previously pessimistic, showed signs of renewed confidence, with both market and economic optimism increasing from 0% to 27%.

1 ArtTactic, *Global Art Market Outlook* 2025 (London, ArtTactic 2025), p4
2 ArtTactic, *Contemporary Art Market Confidence Report* January 2025 (London, ArtTactic, 2025), p3

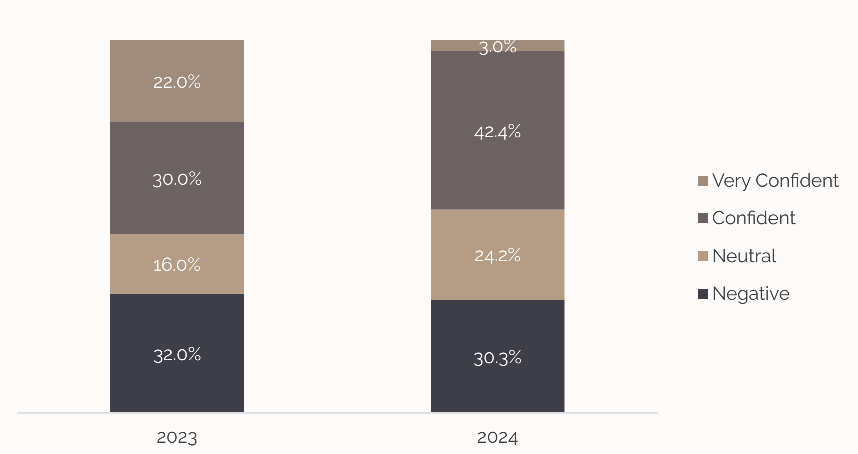
INTRODUCTION

Future Art Market



Impact on Hiring

Attracting Candidates



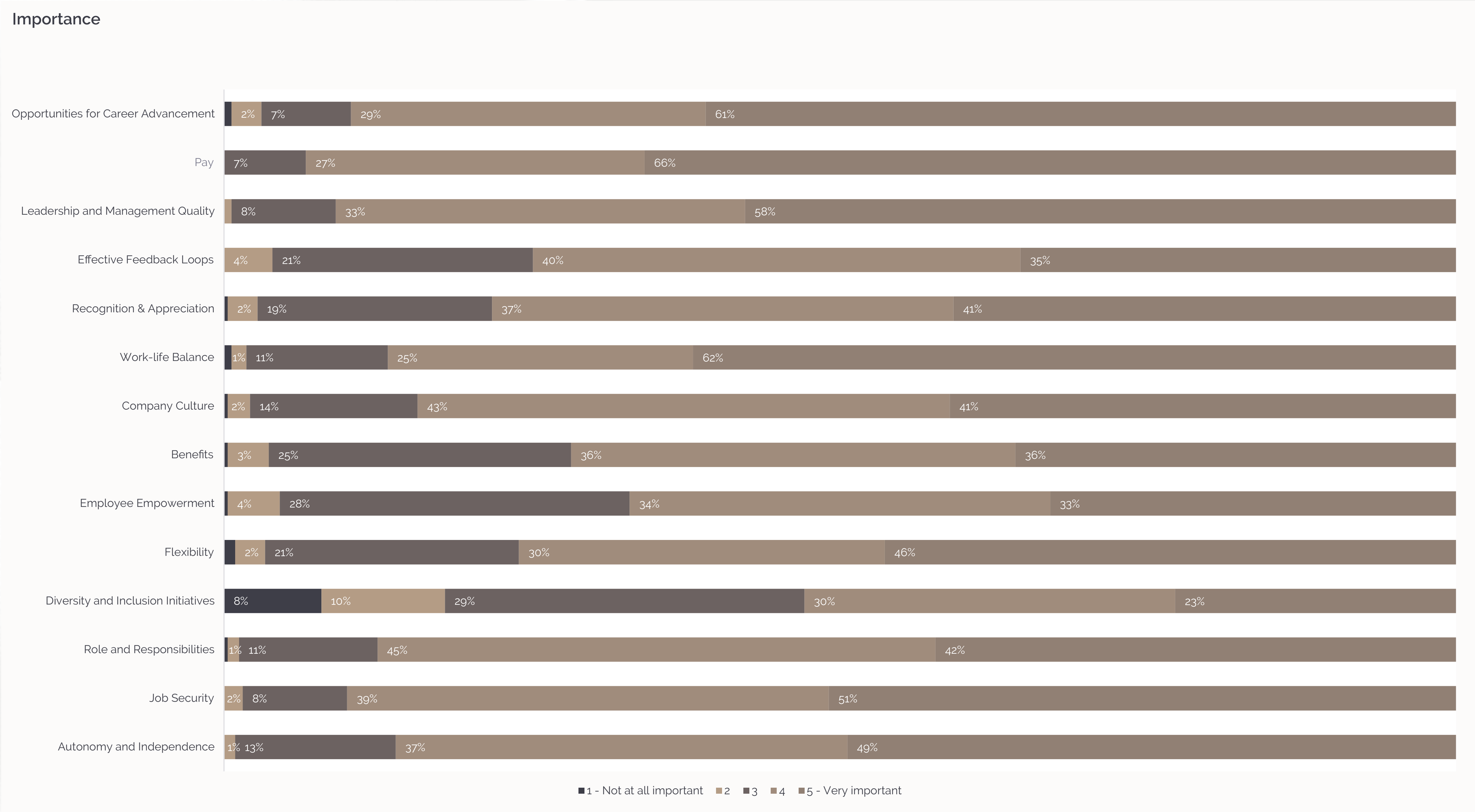
"THERE NEEDS TO BE MORE TRANSPARENCY IN THE ART WORLD ABOUT PATHS TO [CAREER] GROWTH"

In 2024, confidence in attracting qualified candidates fell from an average of 4.2% to just 1.8% in 2024. Despite a positive trend in wages (See Pay & Benefits on page 21), UK employers were particularly concerned, with 36% worried about team growth – up from 27% in 2023. In contrast, sentiment in the US improved, as negative hiring perceptions declined from 36% to 25%.

Ultimately, employers remain split, navigating a mix of cautious optimism and persistent challenges. Whilst some have expressed a struggle to attract and retain talent, especially at a senior level, others are seeing signs of an employer-driven market, benefiting from larger pools of well-qualified professionals made available by recent corporate restructuring.

Our sense is those who seize the opportunity to think creatively and strategically, aligning their growth plans with talent availability and investing in strong development programs for both new and existing staff, are achieving the greatest success.

Employee Sentiment



"WE NEED TO BUILD BETTER PATHWAYS OF ACCESS FOR ALL PEOPLE WHO WANT TO WORK IN THE ARTS, AND ALSO MAKE IT FINANCIALLY POSSIBLE FOR THEM TO STAY THERE"

We asked employees to rate various aspects of their working conditions on a scale from "not at all important" to "very important."

For UK and US respondents, pay emerged as the most important factor. In the UK, this was closely followed by opportunities for career advancement, while in the US, leadership and management quality ranked second. In Europe, however, work-life balance was identified as the top priority, followed by autonomy and independence. Work-life balance ranked as the second most important factor overall.

Opportunities for career advancement were rated as most important by younger workers, ranking first for those in their 20s and second for those in their 30s. Meanwhile, leadership and management quality rose in importance the older respondents were, perhaps corresponding to their increased seniority and experience -those in their 30s and 40s ranked it third.

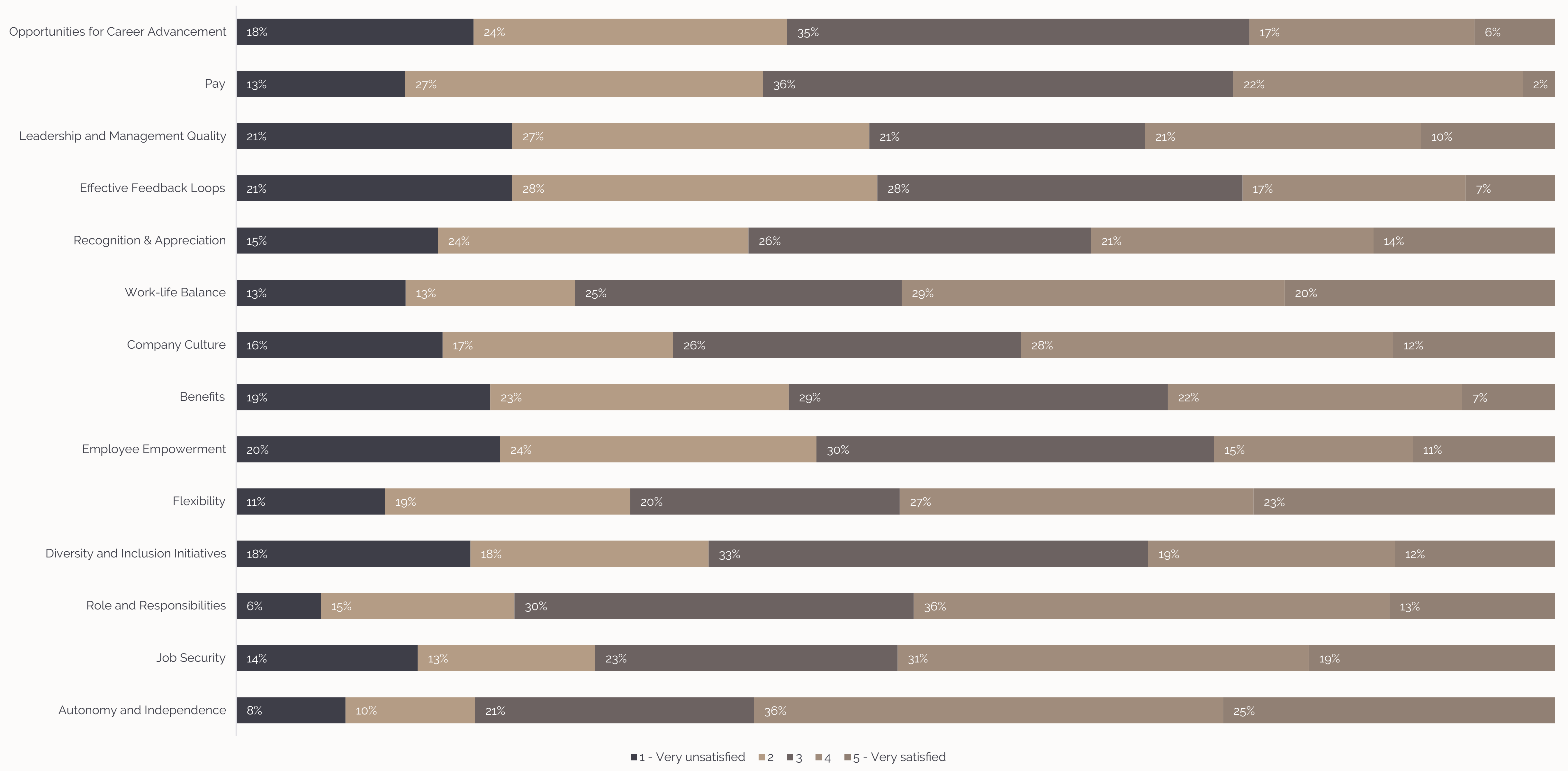
When averaged across the UK, US, and Europe, employees consistently rated diversity and inclusion initiatives as the least important factor. This may be due to the economic downturn affecting the sector, leading employees to prioritise pay and career progression over DEI initiatives.

Some organisations are shifting their focus from dedicated DEI strategies to focus on broader company culture initiatives and merit-based promotion, perhaps indicating an approach that could go some way towards explaining this trend. Nevertheless, this is a disconcerting finding. The art world needs to continue to embed DEI into all areas of business activity and challenge the established norms that have traditionally favoured a privileged few.

INTRODUCTION

Employee Sentiment

Role Satisfaction



"A LACK OF PROCESSES, STRUCTURES AND POLICIES AROUND EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION, RETENTION AND ACQUISITION HAS BEEN DAMAGING TO THE ORGANISATION DUE TO LOW MORALE."

To further assess employee satisfaction, we asked respondents to rate various aspects of their current role, ranging from "very unsatisfied" to "very satisfied". This was done alongside the evaluation of their working conditions. Our findings reveal a disconnect between what employees consider most important and their overall satisfaction with these factors.

On average, employees expressed the highest satisfaction with the autonomy and independence in their roles, with around 60% reporting they are either "satisfied" or "very satisfied". Conversely, they are least satisfied with pay (UK) and effectiveness of feedback loops (US/Europe), such as opportunities to receive and give feedback in their roles.

Reflecting the overall trend, employees in their 20s described themselves as being most satisfied with their autonomy and independence at work, followed closely by job security. They expressed the least satisfaction with their benefits, followed by pay.

Employees in their 30s and 40s were also most satisfied with the level of autonomy and independence in their roles, followed by the clarity of their responsibilities. However, they reported the lowest satisfaction with the effectiveness of feedback loops.

In addition to ranking work-life balance as a top priority, our data reveals that nearly half of all respondents were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their work-life balance. While there is still room for improvement, this presents a slightly more positive outlook than was reported last year, when most gallerists in North America were found to have a poor work-life balance compared to their European counterparts.[3] Our findings suggest that while achieving work-life balance remains more challenging for gallery workers, many roles in other parts of the sector offer better working conditions.

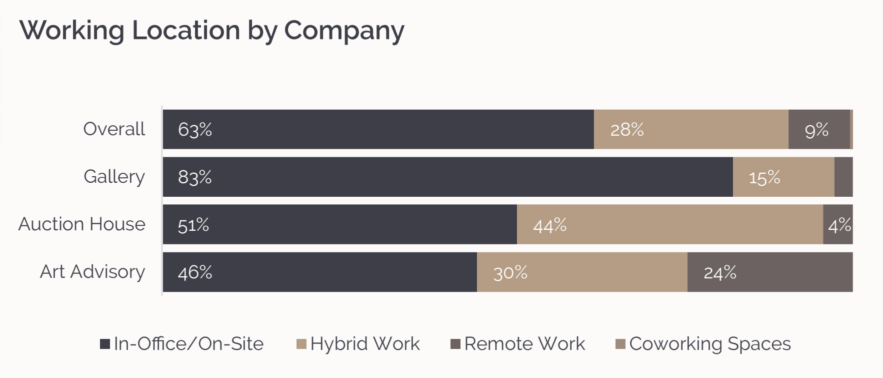
3 Tim Schneider, "Over 50% of gallerists have a poor work-life balance, with those in the US most acutely affected," *The Art Newspaper*, 12 September 2024.

Working Locations

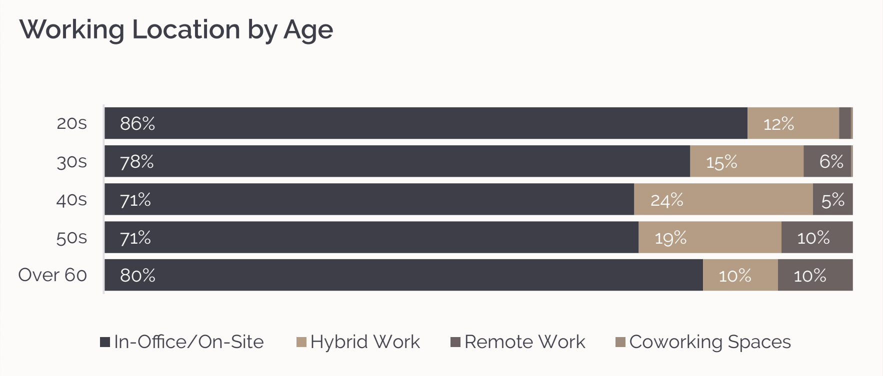
The majority of art world jobs remain primarily on-site according to our latest data, with 62.6% of respondents working in the office or on location most of the time. Among the various roles in the sector, gallery employees are the most likely to work in person, with 82.7% based on-site.

Though there has been a rise in the development of digital tools such as online viewing rooms in recent years, the art industry continues to revolve around physical artworks that are best experienced in person. Additionally, client-facing and public exhibitions, events, and the handling and conservation of artworks all necessitate in-person interactions. This makes a widespread shift away from on-site work unlikely in the near future.

Some roles within the art sector do offer greater flexibility. Art advisories, in particular, provide the highest level of remote or hybrid work opportunities, with more than half of employees working outside a traditional office setting.

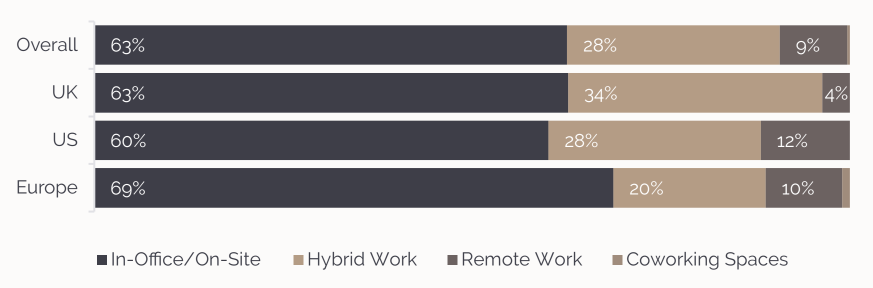


Hybrid work was most common among professionals in their 40s, making up 23.8% of respondents. This trend may be driven by the need to balance work with other responsibilities, such as caregiving, as well as the greater autonomy of senior employees who require less supervision.



INTRODUCTION

Working Location by Region

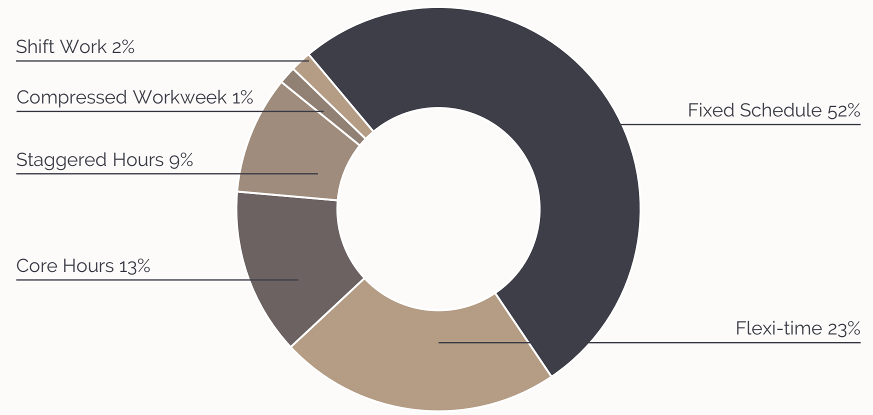


Regionally, UK-based businesses offer the fewest remote opportunities, though figures are low across all territories. Whilst 6.8% work remotely in the US and 4.8% in Europe, just 2.3% reported working remotely in the UK.

Working Hours

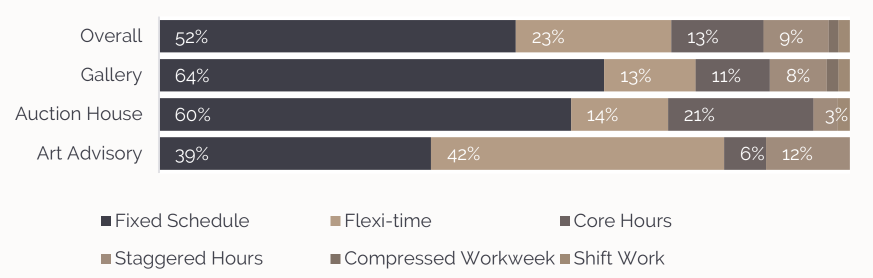
The majority of art world employees have fixed working hours, which again comes as no surprise given the client-focused nature of the industry. Staggered hours, compressed work weeks, and shift work are relatively rare across the sector. Despite this, our insights from working with candidates indicate that a four-day work week is now widely expected to be approved if requested for caregiving obligations and is not considered a special perk or something to be earned over time.

Working Hours



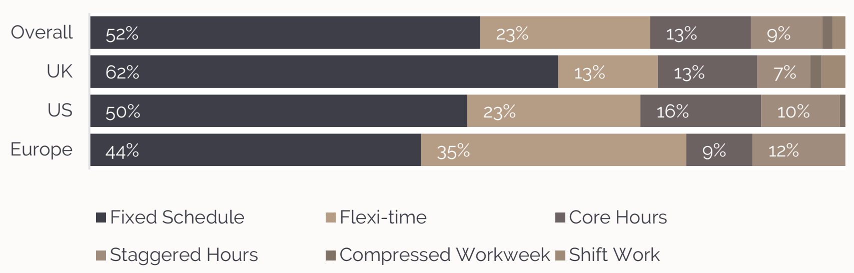
Galleries offer the least flexibility, with 64.5% of staff working fixed hours. Auction house employees follow closely, with 59.6% working set schedules.

Working Hours by Company



Regionally, Europe offers the most flexibility, with 35.1% of employees reporting they work on flexi-time compared to 22.9% in the US and just 13.2% in the UK.

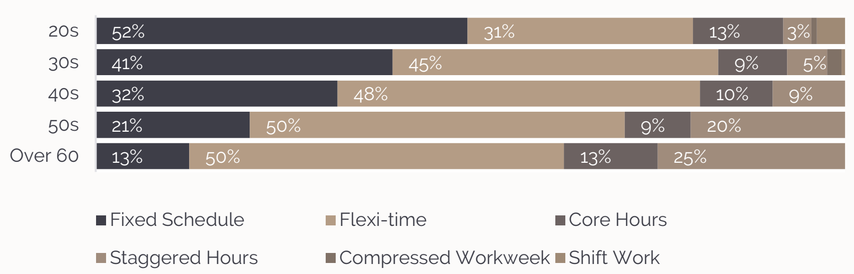
Working Hours by Region



Younger employees reported the least flexibility, with 52% of those in their 20s having a fixed schedule. As before, age appears to play a significant role in flexible work conditions, with flexibility in working hours increasing as employees get older. Among those in their 30s, 40.6% reported that they have fixed hours whilst only 32.3% of those in their 40s are on a set schedule.

The data also highlights trends across age groups in terms of preferred working hours, with flexi-time being most popular among those over 50, accounting for 50%.

Working Hours by Age



INTRODUCTION

Remuneration
Between 2023 and 2024, employee satisfaction with remuneration fell, decreasing from 44.6% to 35.1%. The largest fall was in the US, which was down by over a quarter at 25.7%. In the UK, it fell by 19.6% and in Europe by 19%.

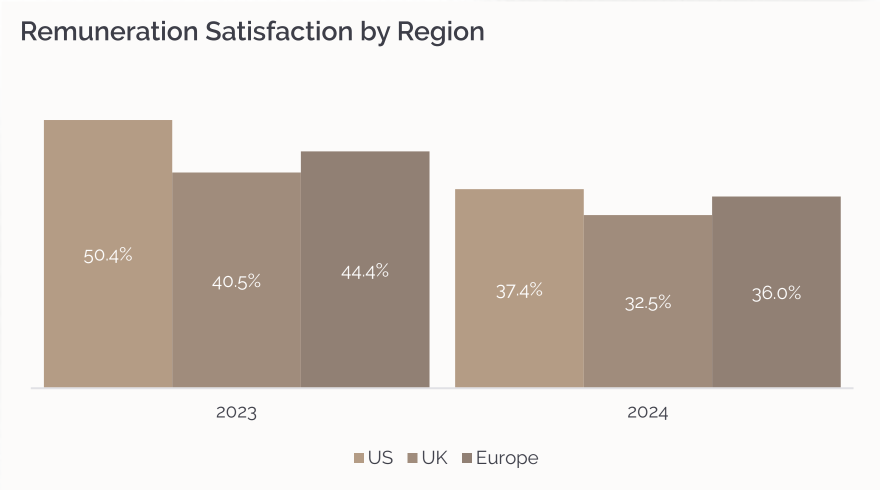
This decline in satisfaction was likely driven by factors such as stagnant wage growth failing to meet employees' expectations, particularly as they gain experience and industry standards evolve.

Our findings also show that the older an employee is the less satisfied they reported being with their remuneration. Those in their 50s reported a decrease in satisfaction by a significant -46.7% in this period. In contrast, satisfaction with remuneration remained most stable amongst the youngest employees, where satisfaction rose by 3.4%.

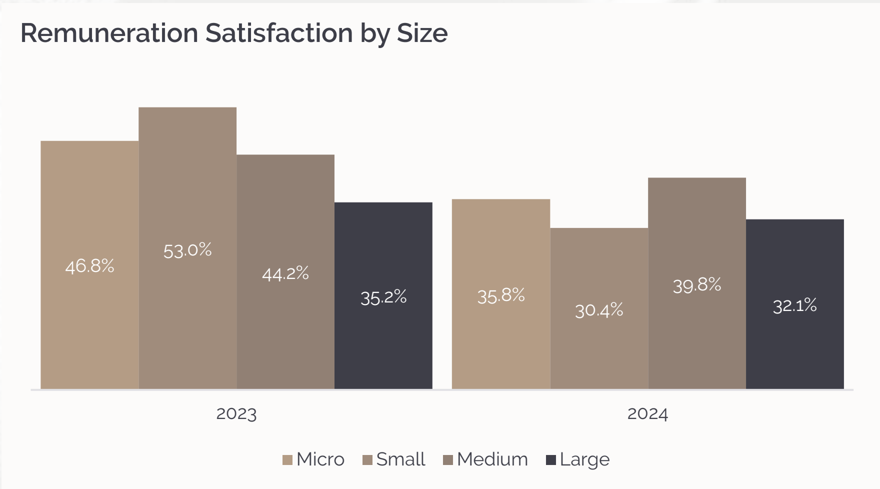
Whilst the rising cost of living affects everyone, older employees may be feeling the impact more acutely due to additional financial commitments such as mortgages and retirement planning, perhaps explaining this finding. In some cases, salary growth slows as employees reach senior positions, particularly in industries with limited career advancement opportunities, which may also be a factor. If promotions or pay rises are infrequent, employees may feel undervalued. Older employees may compare their earnings with those of newer hires or industry peers and feel that their compensation does not adequately reflect their tenure, experience, or contributions.

Conversely, the stability and slight increase in satisfaction among the youngest employees could be attributed to lower initial expectations, particularly if early-career professionals feel they are gaining valuable experience and networking opportunities. These professionals may also see more potential for upward mobility and salary increases, leading to greater optimism about their financial trajectory.

"IT'S A SHAME THE FIELD LOSES SO MANY PASSIONATE INDIVIDUALS FOR BEING UNDERVALUED AND UNDERPAID"



Whilst satisfaction with remuneration was down across the board, employees working at larger businesses expressed more satisfaction than those at medium and small companies. This may point to more formalised review processes. Satisfaction fell by 9% at large companies compared to 9.9% at medium sized companies.



"I THINK SALARIES NEED TO BE SERIOUSLY INCREASED. THERE SEEMS TO BE A HUGE DISPARITY BETWEEN THE AMOUNT OF EXPERIENCE COMPANIES ARE LOOKING FOR VERSUS WHAT THEY ARE WILLING TO PAY."

Although the majority of respondents were dissatisfied with their salaries, our 2024 data shows that employees whose salaries had been reviewed more recently reported greater satisfaction with their compensation, underscoring the positive impact of regular review processes in making employees feel supported and valued.

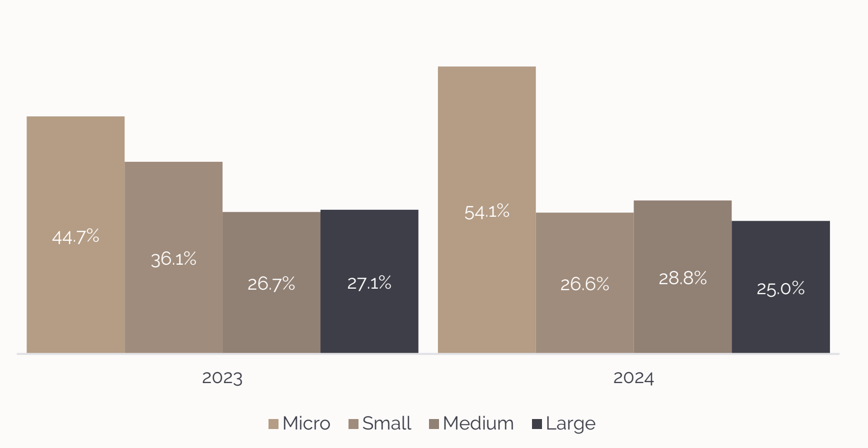
INTRODUCTION

Supplementary Income

Additional work provides professionals with opportunities to increase their income while also allowing them to pursue a passion or explore entrepreneurship without the risk of leaving their primary job. For some respondents, having a side hustle was essential, providing crucial supplemental income.

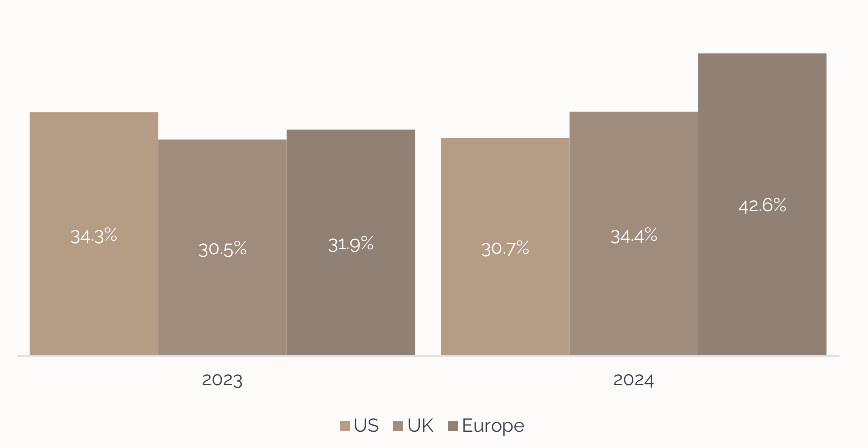
The trend for supplementing income is particularly pronounced among micro-sized businesses with fewer than five employees, where employees taking on additional work is on the rise. In fact, 54.1% of individuals working in micro businesses reported adding to their base salary with extra paid work, a possibility that may be facilitated by more flexible contracts.

Supplementary Income by Size



Our data shows having a supplementary income is becoming more common in the UK and Europe, where numbers rose from 30.5% to 34.4% and 31.9% to 42.6% respectively.

Supplementary Income by Region



We noted the number of employees in their 30s with a side hustle is growing as dissatisfaction with salaries increases, now accounting for a third of respondents.

Respondents shared a wide range of side hustles, many of which were connected to the art world. One of the most popular choices was freelance art advisory services, while others included writing and editing, social media content creation, curating, teaching and mentoring.

PAY & BENEFITS

INTRODUCTION

Here we provide information into remuneration trends across the commercial art world.

Drawing on median salary data from our research, it serves as both a reference and valuable guide to industry compensation standards.

Where referred to, business sizes are defined as:

Micro: 1 to 5
Small: 6 to 20
Medium: 21 to 250
Large: 251 to 1000+

Given the diverse nature of roles within the commercial art world, we have structured our analysis around three core job levels clarity and comparability:

Administrator, encompassing support and coordination roles with limited decision-making authority; **Manager**, responsible for client and project management with direct operational involvement; and **Director**, focusing on strategic oversight, leadership, and high-value transactions.

All salaries presented here refer to base salary only and do not account for guaranteed or discretionary bonuses, commissions, or other variable compensation. Additional earnings can fluctuate significantly depending on company policies, calculation methods (e.g., net vs. gross earnings), individual or group performance, and other discretionary factors.

More details on bonus schemes and commission structures typically observed across the art world can be found in our 2023 Art Market Salary Report.

Any gaps in our reporting result from limited data. We remain committed to closing them and providing increasingly detailed breakdowns as survey participation grows.

PAY & BENEFITS

TRENDS

Annual Trends

	2022	2023	2024	Median
UK	£35,000	£38,000	£40,000	£38,000
US	$75,000	$70,000	$70,000	$70,000
Europe	€43,500	€50,000	€50,000	€50,000

Our findings indicated that UK earnings have steadily risen, despite the difficult conditions faced by many.

US salaries declined and then plateaued in line with a slowing market but now appear to have stabilised. The election last year was likely a contributing factor, as businesses adopted a cautious approach while awaiting the outcome. Since the tail end of last year, we have observed an increase in hiring activity and a boost in positive sentiment.

Across Europe, salaries experienced strong growth in 2023 but levelled off in 2024, potentially in response to global economic factors slowing upwards momentum following heightened demand for commercial art professionals in Europe after 2022.

Earnings by Business Size

	UK	US	Europe
Micro	£35,000	$65,000	€ 40,000
Small	£38,000	$65,000	€ 48,000
Medium	£40,000	$73,500	€ 50,000
Large	£40,000	$76,038	€ 60,000

The data indicates that salaries increase as business size grows, with large companies offering the highest pay across, while micro-businesses offer the lowest.

By region, the UK shows a modest rise as business size increases, with the most significant jump occurring between micro and small businesses. However, the gap closes between medium and large firms.

In the US, salaries remain the same for micro and small businesses but increase significantly at medium and large firms. This reflects the greater financial capacity of larger US companies to offer higher wages.

European salaries, meanwhile, follow a consistent upward trajectory as business size grows, with the most substantial increase, up to 20% more than medium-sized firms, observed at larger organisations.

For professionals in micro or small businesses, our findings indicate that transitioning to a larger company may provide better salary growth opportunities, particularly in the US and European markets. In the UK, however, salary growth slows at medium-sized firms, meaning that moving to a large company may not result in a significant pay increase.

It has long been thought that salaries in the US (particularly New York) are much higher than their UK counterparts. Whilst, this is still true on the face of things, cost of living goes some way to balancing out the perceived extremes.

PAY & BENEFITS

Cost of living data (March 2025) suggests that it is currently 32.8% more expensive to live in New York compared to London. Based on renting accommodation, an individual would need around £13,281 ($17,112) in New York but only £10,000 ($12,885) in London for the same standard of living.[4]

Freelancing is most prevalent among art advisory and marketing and communications professionals. For those looking to establish themselves independently in these areas in particular, there are clear opportunities available once sufficient experience has been gained.

Earnings by Demographics

Age

	UK	US	Europe
20s	£34,000	$65,000	€ 30,000
30s	£46,150	$95,500	€ 46,800
40s	£52,000	$105,000	€ 48,000
50s	£54,500	$150,000	€ 65,000

To maximise earning potential in the commercial art world, individuals should prioritise gaining experience and advancing into leadership roles by their 40s and 50s.

The data shows that salaries increase consistently with age, reflecting career progression and accumulated experience.

Salaries in the US rise steadily for professionals in their 20s through to their 40s, followed by a significant spike in earnings in their 50s compared to those in the UK or Europe – $150,000 compared to £54,500 and €65,000, respectively. In fact, the rate of salary increase for those earning in the US between their 20s and 50s is 130%, compared to 60% for those in the UK and 117% for those in Europe.

Race

	UK	US	Europe
White	£41,375	$90,000	€ 43,200
Asian	£31,500	$70,000	€ 70,000
Mixed, Multiple	£33,000	$84,000	€ 31,200
Hispanic, Latino	£36,250	$79,000	€ 37,200
Black, Caribbean, African	£26,000	$67,000	€ 48,300
Middle Eastern	-	$80,000	€ 28,200

There is still much work to be done to achieve parity in the commercial art sector. The earnings gap revealed by this data highlights the need for businesses to prioritise the expansion of equal access to opportunities and address disparities through initiatives such as salary transparency, fair hiring practices, and mentorship.

4 This calculation uses Numbeo's Cost of Living Plus Rent Index to compare the cost of living and assumes net earnings (after income tax). See Numbeo, "Cost of Living Plus Rent Index," *Numbeo*, March 2025.

PAY & BENEFITS

The differences in earnings point to structural disparities in access to high-paying roles. White professionals consistently earn the most, suggesting they may have greater access to better-paid positions and career progression. Black professionals earn the least in the UK (£26,000) and US ($67,000). In Europe, black professionals' earnings are relatively higher, ranking third among all groups with a median salary of €48,300.

Asian professionals have strong earnings in Europe, where they earn more than any other group, with a median salary of €70,000. However, they earn less in the UK and the US, ranking second lowest in these territories.

Gender

	UK	US	Europe
Female	£40,000	$85,000	€ 38,400
Male	£45,000	$105,000	€ 62,500
Non-binary	£70,000	$44,000	-
Transgender	-	-	€ 42,000

On average, despite positive findings in our operations report with Convelio[5], men are still the top-earners when taking a broader view of the commercial art world. This is most pronounced for those in Europe, where men earn over 60% more than women, highlighting a significant gender pay disparity. In the US, the gender pay gap is smaller but still notable, with men earning 23% more than women. This disparity is likely due to men predominantly occupying senior or executive roles in the commercial art world, despite our findings indicating that a larger number of women work across the sector overall.

Whilst our data set was smaller in these categories, the discrepancy in salaries for non-binary employees highlights possible widerspread disparities in pay structures across different markets.

“GENDER PAY EQUITY IS AN ISSUE”

There is limited data available for those who identify as transgender, but in Europe, this group's income ranks slightly above that of female professionals and below that of males, at €42,000. The lack of data for those identifying as non-binary or transgender may reflect underrepresentation in leadership roles or barriers to entry.

Overall, these pay gaps underscore the need for greater transparency and fair pay policies across the sector. Structural changes in hiring, promotions, and salary negotiations are some of the ways in which gender disparities can begin to be addressed.

5 Convelio x SML, Art Operations Talent Report, (London, SML & Convelio, 2025), p14

Disability

	UK	US	Europe
Yes	£36,000	$76,500	-
No	£40,000	$87,500	€ 42,500

Non-disabled individuals appear to earn more than those with disabilities. While the gap is modest, it still indicates inequality in earnings, suggesting barriers to employment opportunities, career progression, and wage equality.

Those who reported having a disability earn lower median salaries of £36,000 and $76,500, compared to £40,000 and $87,500 for non-disabled individuals.

Education

Median Salary by Race	UK	US	Europe
High School (up to age 18)	£52,000	$40,000	€ 69,100
Vocational training (NVQ, BTEC etc.)	£33,000	-	-
Under-graduate degree (Bachelors)	£45,000	$80,000	€ 42,000
Post-graduate degree (Masters)	£38,500	$90,000	€ 42,500
Doctorate (PhD)	£45,850	$112,500	€ 40,800

Higher education does not always guarantee higher earnings in the commercial art sector, particularly in the UK and Europe, where holders of PhDs and master's degrees earn similar or even less than those with bachelor's degrees.

High school graduates can earn competitive salaries in UK and Europe, with median earnings of £52,000 and €69,100, suggesting that real-world experience and industry connections may matter more than formal education in these regions.

However, high school graduates earn less in the US than any other group. In the US, higher education appears to have more value, with PhD holders earning the highest salaries, indicating that PhDs are more financially viable in the US commercial art sector. Despite this, US PhD holders still earn amounts comparable to those with bachelor's degrees in the UK and Europe.

Those with vocational training recorded the lowest salary in the UK. This may indicate that vocational training needs to be better recognised as a viable alternative to university degrees, especially since high school graduates are earning relatively well.

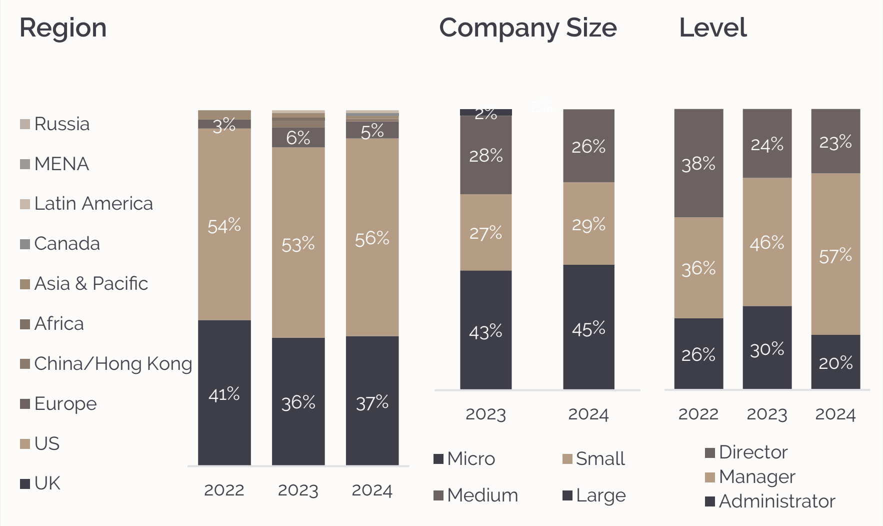
"IT'S MORE ABOUT CONNECTIONS THAN EDUCATION"

PAY & BENEFITS

ART ADVISORIES

Art advisories operate at the highest level of the market, offering ultra-high-net-worth collectors expert guidance in estate management, endowments, and acquisitions. They specialise in helping clients secure high-value artworks, preserve inheritance, and leverage collections as financial assets. Many also provide expertise in the creation of private museums and facilitate exclusive acquisitions.

Employee Demographics

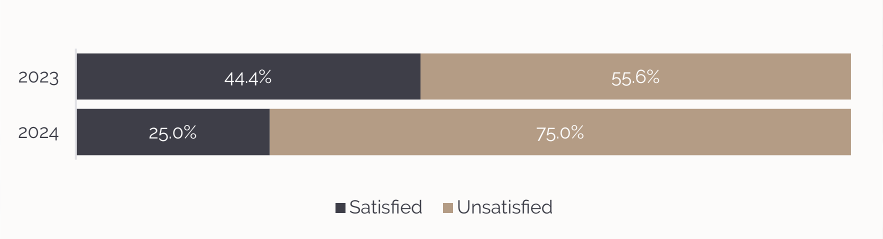


While workforce growth within art advisories remains stable, it has fallen short of previous expansion predictions. According to our latest data, 68% of firms expect no change to their workforce in 2025, with only a modest 1.6% average projected growth.

Despite limited hiring, employers have indicated that they anticipate increasing staff salaries by 4.8%. However, confidence in attracting top talent has significantly declined, from 10% in 2024 to just 1.5%. One possible explanation for the expected salary increase is a heightened focus on retention. In a challenging market, businesses will be keen to retain their top performers, even if they are restructuring or downsizing other areas of their teams.

Advisories are prioritising professionals with strong market intelligence and academic expertise, often recruiting from other areas of the art sector, such as auction houses. Highlighting the sector's reliance on boutique operations and trusted personal connections, the majority of advisories are micro-sized, particularly in the US and UK markets, where our latest data shows similar numbers of active companies.

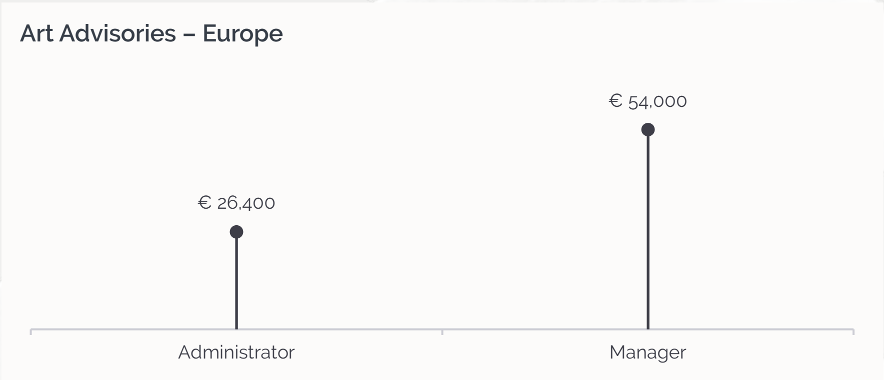
Remuneration Satisfaction



Our analysis found that the vast majority of employees at art advisories were dissatisfied with their pay in 2024 (75%), marking a year-on-year decline from 56% in 2023.

PAY & BENEFITS

Salary Guide



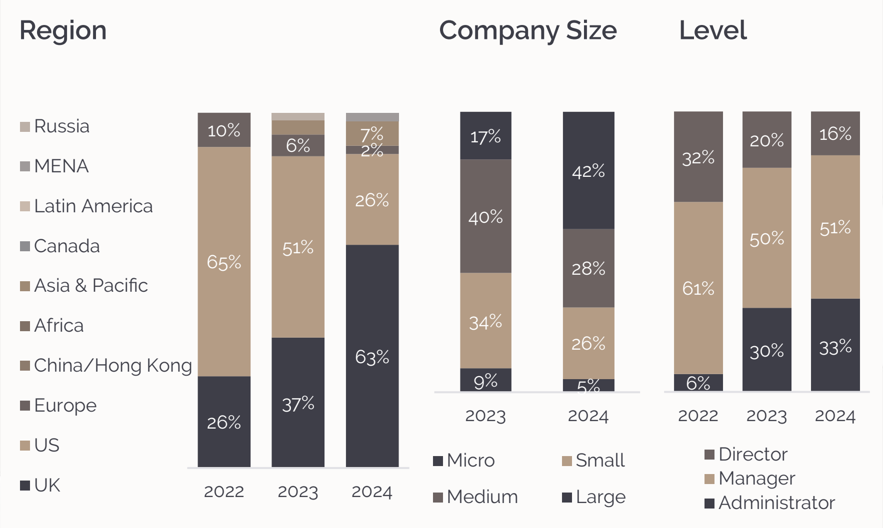
ART FAIRS

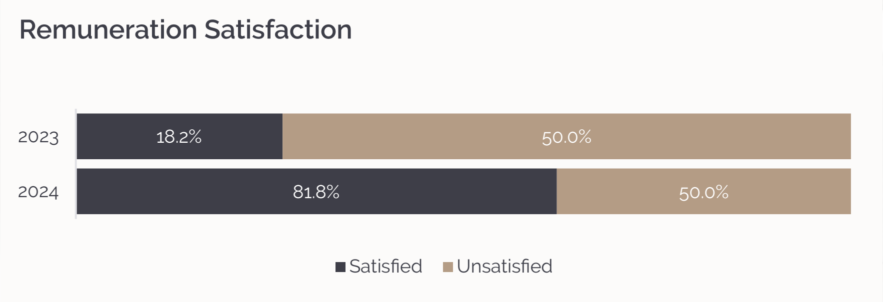
Art fairs are the cornerstone of the global art market, bringing together leading artists, galleries, collectors, and industry professionals. To maintain their competitive edge, top fairs now operate year-round in key cultural hubs, generating revenue from exhibition booths. Dedicated teams handle sales, logistics, client relations, and sponsorships.

The industry has expanded, with larger fairs consolidating their influence and creating job opportunities, further establishing art fairs as major market drivers. In the aftermath of the pandemic, online fairs emerged, though their momentum seems to have plateaued, likely because nothing compares to the experience of viewing art in person.

Seasonal demand drives temporary roles in hospitality and event management, offering valuable entry-level experience. Fair organisers tend to favour candidates with broad market knowledge and transferable skills, making these roles attractive entry points into the industry.

Employee Demographics





Satisfaction with remuneration at art fairs in 2024 was evenly split, with 50% of professionals satisfied and 50% dissatisfied – a significant increase in satisfaction compared to just 18% in 2023.

PAY & BENEFITS

Salary Guide

Art Fairs – UK

Art Fairs – US

Whilst the data reveals a significant difference in Director earnings between the UK and US, this outcome is unexpected. The result may have been influenced by a higher participation rate of top-earning US Directors from major companies in our anonymous survey compared to the UK, potentially skewing the data.

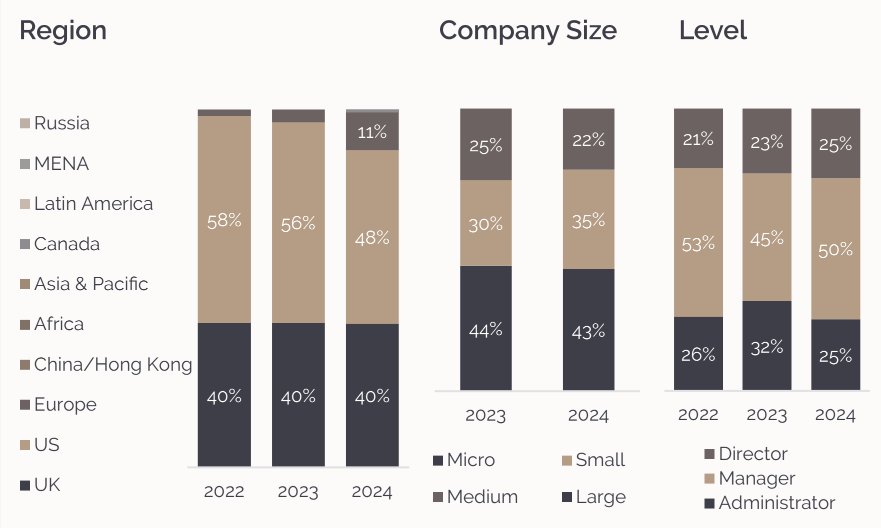
PAY & BENEFITS

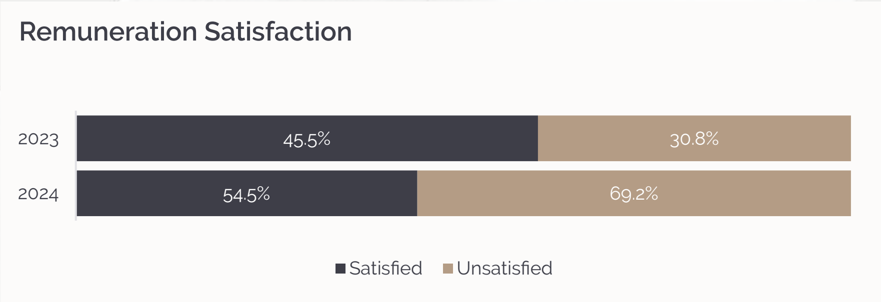
ARTIST STUDIOS

Artist studios vary greatly in size and structure, evolving with an artist's career stage and industry demands. Early-career artists often work independently or with a small, flexible team, bringing in specialists as needed while relying on galleries for commercial management. Mid-career artists typically employ a few assistants and a studio manager to oversee daily operations, whereas high-profile artists run larger studios with dedicated administrative staff, project managers, and a studio director managing production, finances, and gallery relations.

As international galleries expand their artist rosters and move away from hands-on career management, many studios are strengthening their in-house capabilities, hiring specialised professionals to manage operations more independently.

Employee Demographics





Mirroring the trend seen across other parts of the sector, satisfaction with pay is falling within employees of artist studios – just 31% were happy with their remuneration in 2024, which is down from 46% in 2023.

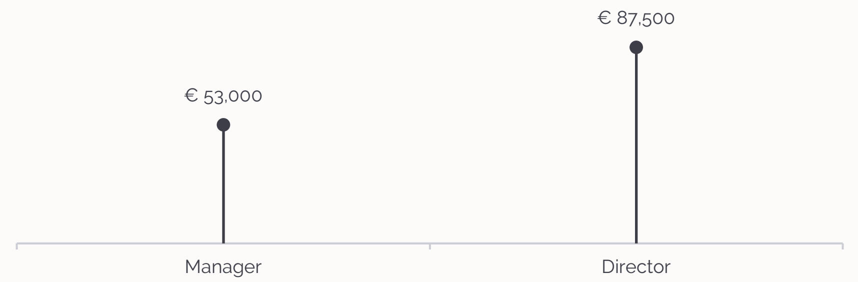
PAY & BENEFITS

Salary Guide

Artist Studios – UK

Artist Studios – US

Artist Studios – Europe



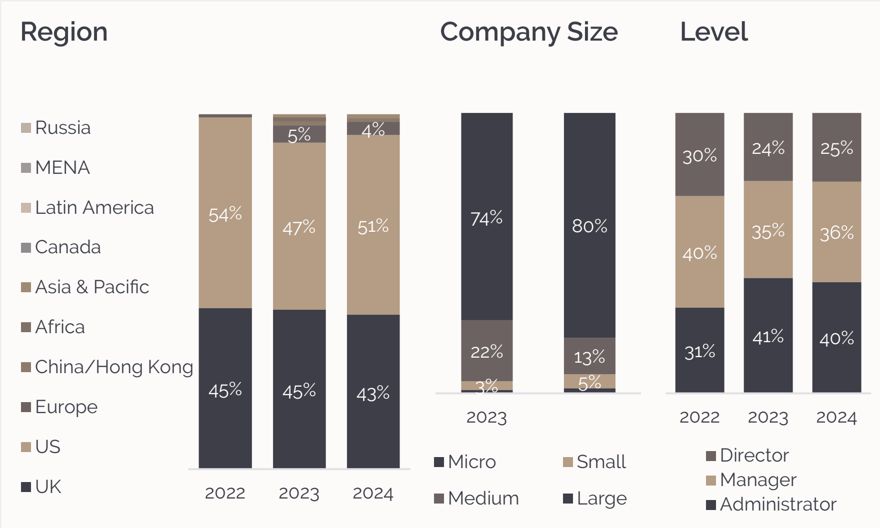
As noted in our findings on art fairs, the pronounced earnings gap between Directors in the UK and US is likely influenced by the dataset. We suspect that a higher proportion of top-earning Directors from larger US companies participated in the anonymous survey compared to those in the UK.

PAY & BENEFITS

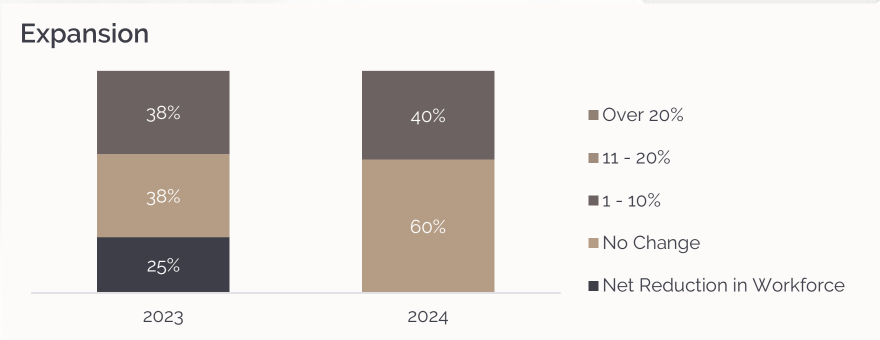
AUCTION HOUSES

Auction houses, dominated by a few major international firms, operate through specialist departments that vary in size based on auction scale and profitability. Entry-level roles include cataloguers, who conduct research and create sales content, and sale coordinators, who manage logistics. Business functions span from communications managers handling PR to business directors driving sales and growth. Larger auction houses maintain extensive teams with highly specialised roles, while smaller departments may consist of just a department head and a few staff. Job titles can also vary significantly between organisations, leading to broad experience-based salary brackets.

Employee Demographics



Despite ongoing market challenges and financial downturns at major auction houses, our latest data offers a cautiously optimistic forecast for employment and compensation for the year ahead. While auction houses suffered mass redundancies in 2024[6], no survey respondents anticipated further contractions in 2025. Instead, 60% expected staffing levels to remain stable, with an overall projected workforce growth of 2%.

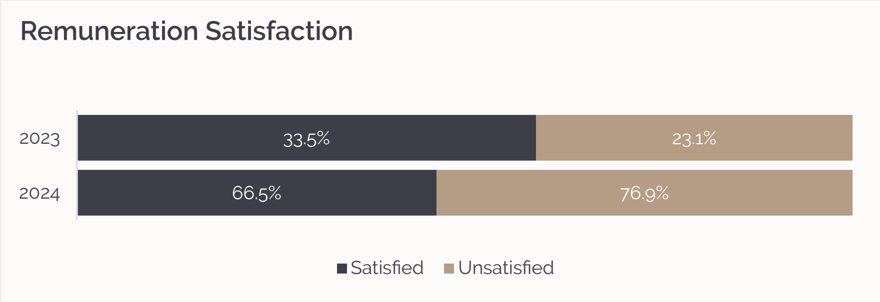


Compensation trends also show signs of recovery. While 13% of respondents expected pay cuts in 2024 – following a reported 88% decline in core earnings at one major auction house in the first half of the year[7] – no further reductions are projected for 2025.

6 Anny Shaw, "Fuller picture of Sotheby's mass layoffs emerges," *The Art Newspaper*, 16 December 2024.
7 Robert Smith, "Sotheby's earnings plunge as art market catches a chill," *Financial Times*, 30 August 2024.

PAY & BENEFITS

Instead, wages are expected to rise by an average of 3%, signalling a shift from last year's flat outlook. Hiring confidence is also improving, with optimism about securing qualified talent rising to 2.5%, up from -4.3% in 2024.

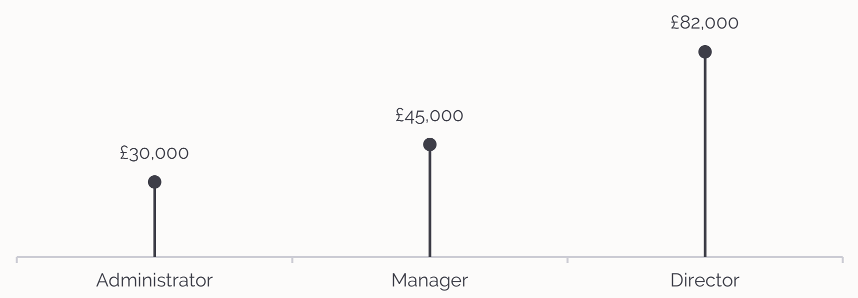


Employees at auction houses report the lowest levels of satisfaction with their remuneration in the art market, with only 23% satisfied in 2024, down from 34% in 2023.

PAY & BENEFITS

Salary Guide

Auction Houses – UK



Auction Houses – US

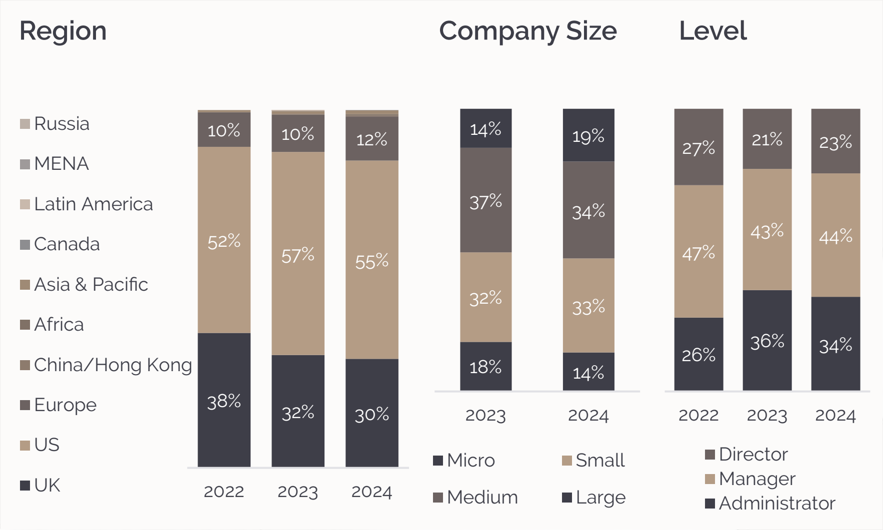
Auction Houses – Europe

GALLERIES

Commercial galleries vary widely in size and structure, with top-tier blue-chip galleries dominating the market through consolidation and specialised in-house teams. Sales professionals drive business growth, with expertise in art valuation and a strong client network as their most valuable assets. When hiring, galleries prioritise candidates who can unlock new markets, often seeking multilingual professionals with insight into regional buyer trends. Entry-level roles remain largely administrative, while mid-tier galleries rely on generalist managers to handle daily operations, contributing to salary disparities.

Logistics also play a crucial role, with in-house registrars managing shipping and operations directors overseeing registrars and technicians to ensure smooth exhibitions and fair participation. Many gallery employees receive performance-based bonuses in addition to their base salaries, particularly in sales, where commissions and bonuses significantly impact earnings.

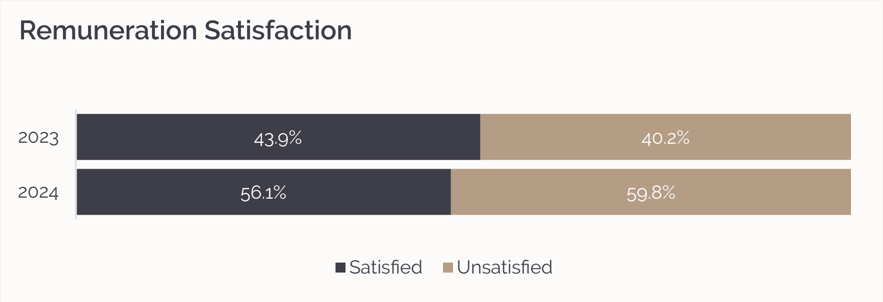
Employee Demographics



59% of respondents from galleries anticipated no planned changes to workforce size this year and expansion is projected to be minimal at just 1.2%, a decline from the 3.8% growth predicted in 2024.

PAY & BENEFITS

Remuneration mirrored this, with 47% of respondents stating wages will consolidate around the same levels as 2024. Average salary growth is expected to be capped at 2.6%, reflecting a more conservative outlook than in previous years, and hiring confidence has also dipped, with galleries expressing less optimism about attracting qualified candidates – falling from 7.9% in 2024 to just 2% in 2025.



Satisfaction with remuneration in the gallery sector has remained relatively stable; however, overall satisfaction is low, with only 40% of gallery employees happy with their pay in 2024, down from 44% in 2023.

PAY & BENEFITS

Salary Guide

Galleries – UK

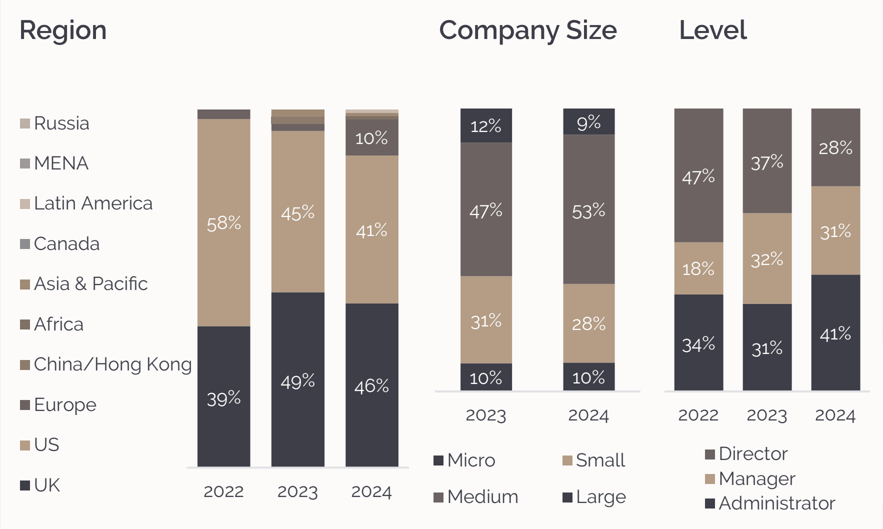
Galleries – US

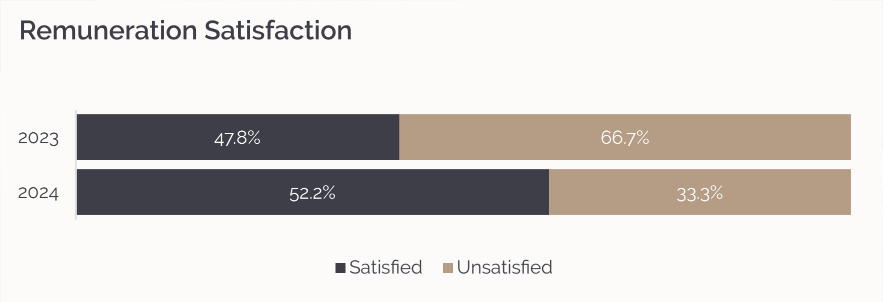
Galleries – Europe

COMMUNICATIONS AGENCIES

Communications agencies in the art world offer dynamic career paths, providing exposure to both public and private sector clients. Whilst some have offices around the world, others focus on specific territories. They also have varying client bases, offering particular expertise to clients in different parts of the sector. Entry-level professionals gain valuable industry experience and networking opportunities, with a clear progression from account coordinators to account executives and, eventually, leadership roles like account director. Senior executives often specialise in crisis communication and client leadership, while company directors focus on business development. Many professionals transition in-house to galleries or auction houses, and as digital platforms continue to expand, demand for experts in online campaigns remains strong.

Employee Demographics





Unlike much of the art sector, satisfaction with pay among communications employees increased in 2024, with two-thirds expressing satisfaction – up from 48% in 2023.

PAY & BENEFITS

Salary Guide

Communications Agencies – UK

Communications Agencies – US

Communications Agencies – Europe

PAY & BENEFITS

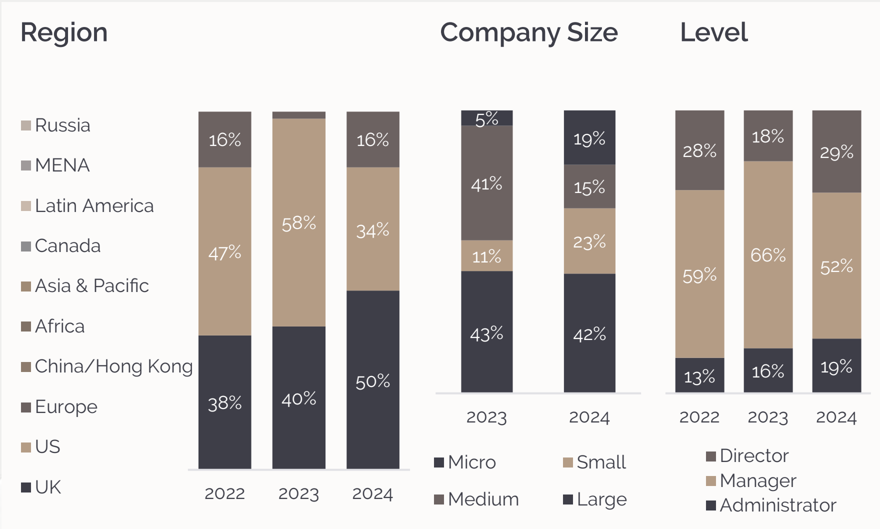
PRIVATE WEALTH (COLLECTIONS, MUSEUMS & FOUNDATIONS)

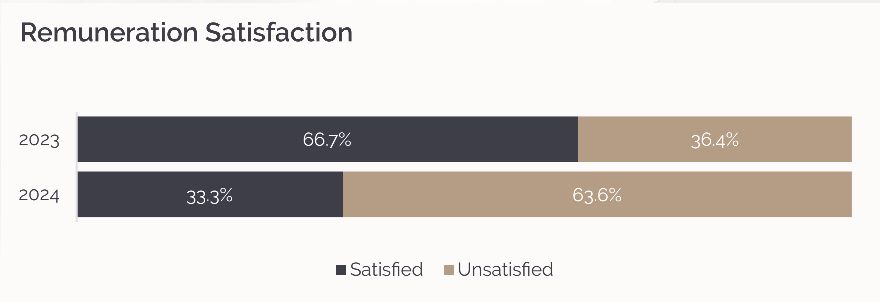
Major collectors continue to play an influential role in the art industry, driving employment and shaping market trends. With private collections often spanning multiple properties or storage facilities, the role of Collection Manager has become essential, encompassing responsibilities such as archiving, cataloguing, conservation, and valuations. These professionals are typically employed by private family offices or serve as external consultants, occasionally taking on curatorial duties, advising on acquisitions, and managing estates.

Many collectors further cement their legacy by establishing private museums or foundations, which not only offer tax advantages but also create competitive employment opportunities. However, hiring practices in this sector remain discreet, making salary data challenging to obtain.

Corporate collections, such as those owned by major banks, make up a smaller portion of the sector, but employment opportunities within them are highly sought-after.

Employee Demographics





The majority of those working for private collections were dissatisfied with their remuneration in 2024, with 64% expressing dissatisfaction – a significant decline from 2023, when two-thirds were satisfied with their pay.

PAY & BENEFITS

Salary Guide

Private Wealth (Collections, Museums & Foundations) – UK

Private Wealth (Collections, Museums & Foundations) – US

Private Wealth (Collections, Museums & Foundations) – Europe

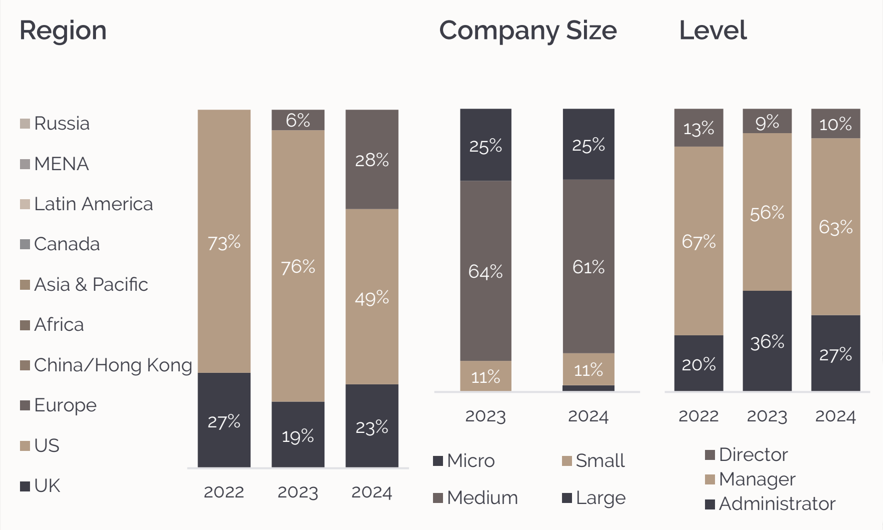
PAY & BENEFITS

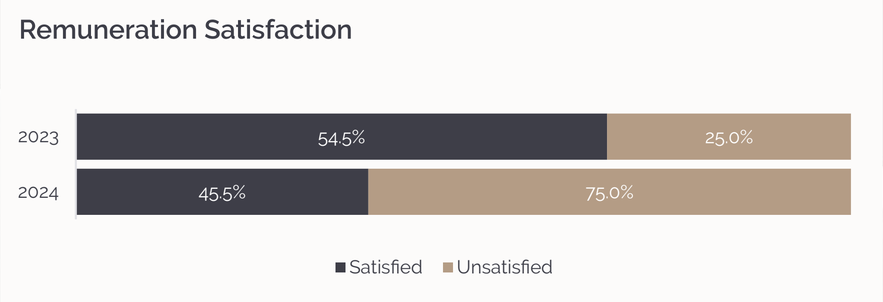
SHIPPING & LOGISTICS

Art shipping companies are essential to the global movement of artworks, managing logistics, customs, and legal requirements for galleries, collectors, and auction houses. Their services span planning, storage, transit, delivery, installation, and insurance. Digital solutions are also an expanding part of the market, offering services that range from providing a single digital platform to manage shipments, to AI-powered inventory management.

Many professionals focus on account management and client relations, with logistics expertise highly valued. Registrars oversee artwork placement, customs compliance, and inventory management. Some firms are also embracing sustainability, improving packaging methods to reduce carbon emissions.

Employee Demographics



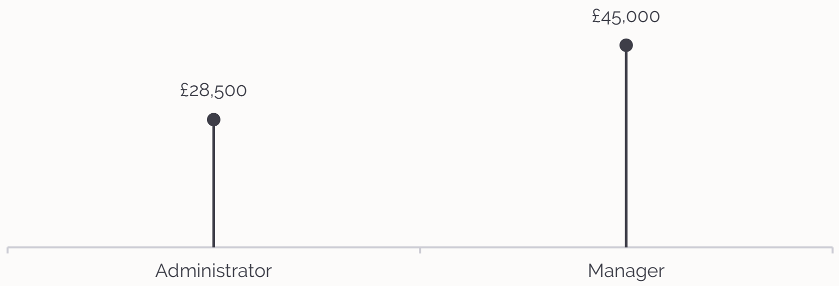


There has been a noticeable decline in satisfaction levels regarding pay within the shipping sector of the art market. In 2024, only 25% of employees in shipping and logistics reported being satisfied with their remuneration, a significant decrease from 55% the previous year.

PAY & BENEFITS

Salary Guide

Shipping & Logistics – UK



Shipping & Logistics – US

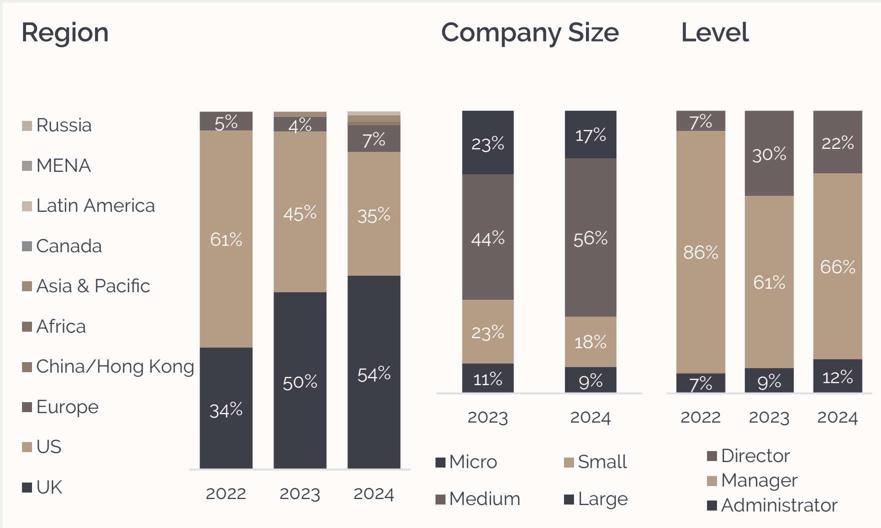
Shipping & Logistics – Europe

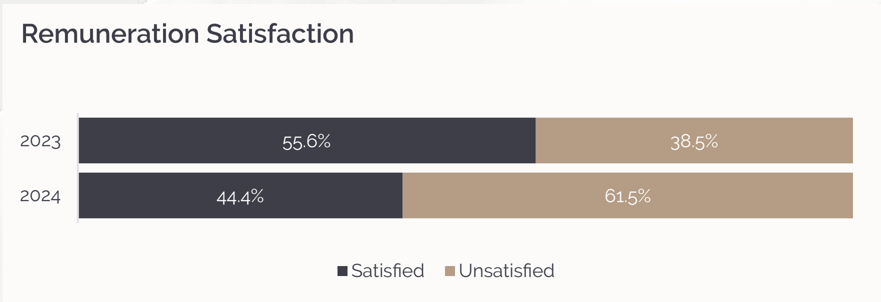
PAY & BENEFITS

START-UPS & TECHNOLOGY

Technology has revolutionised the art world, driving innovation across creation, conservation, and commerce. The rise of Artificial Intelligence, cryptocurrency, blockchain and NFTs, has enabled a shift from analogue to digital, with tech firms addressing key industry needs in transport, storage, sales, and authentication. Some companies are introducing virtual reality for immersive experiences, while blockchain enhances security and provenance tracking. Digital technology is also being positioned to support environmental goals, for example by reducing emissions if galleries adopt hybrid models to showcase works both physically and digitally. This evolving sector is attracting professionals seeking growth and flexibility, with start-ups offering high earning potential and equity-based incentives.

Employee Demographics





Satisfaction with pay declined in 2024 for those working in start-ups and technology companies within the art market. While 56% were satisfied with their remuneration in 2023, this dropped to just 39% in 2024.

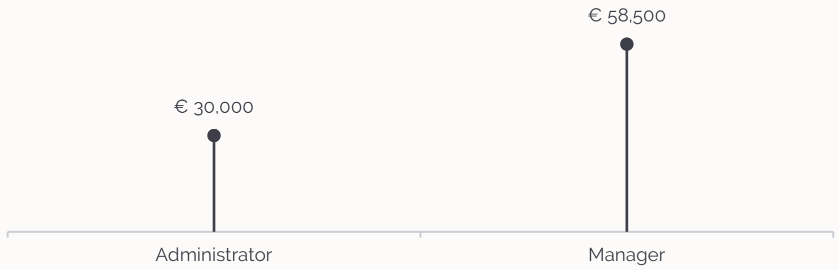
PAY & BENEFITS

Salary Guide

Start-Ups & Technology – UK

Start-Ups & Technology – US

Start-Ups & Technology – Europe



PAY & BENEFITS

VARIABLE PAY & BENEFITS

This section brings together our data with insights from Parallel, London's leading employee benefits adviser in the creative, media, tech and art sectors.[8]

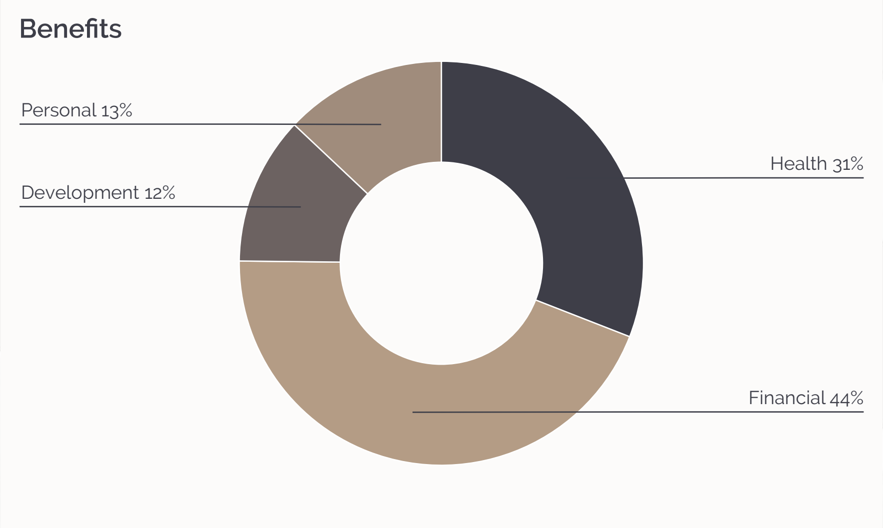
While employee benefits may not be the top priority for everyone, they remain a crucial factor in overall job satisfaction. Benefits such as private healthcare, pension schemes, paid leave, wellness programmes, and perks like gym memberships or childcare support can enhance employee loyalty, improve well-being, and provide financial security. For some individuals – particularly those with families or specific health needs – the right benefits package can be just as important as, if not more important than, salary.

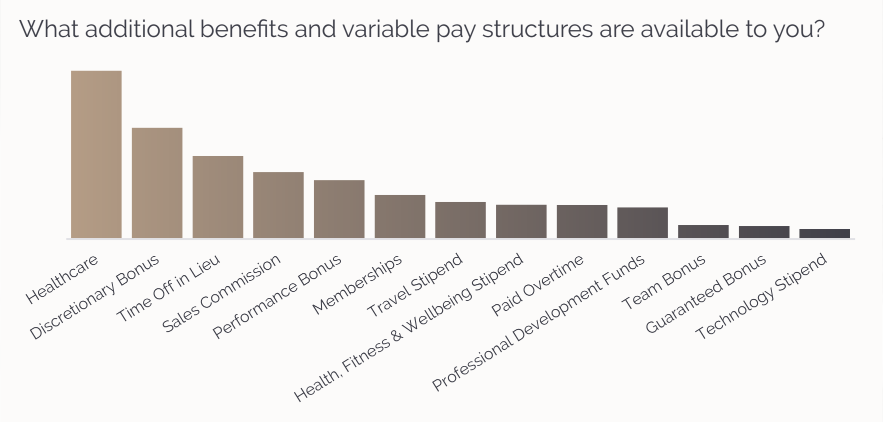
For businesses, benefits serve as a powerful tool for strengthening employer branding and attracting top talent. By aligning their offerings with the values and needs of the workforce, companies can differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive job market.

Variable Pay Structures and Benefits Available to Staff

The findings shows that the most popular benefits in the commercial art sector are financial, accounting for 44%, followed by health insurance which accounts for 31%.

By far the most consistently available benefit is healthcare, followed by a discretionary bonus.

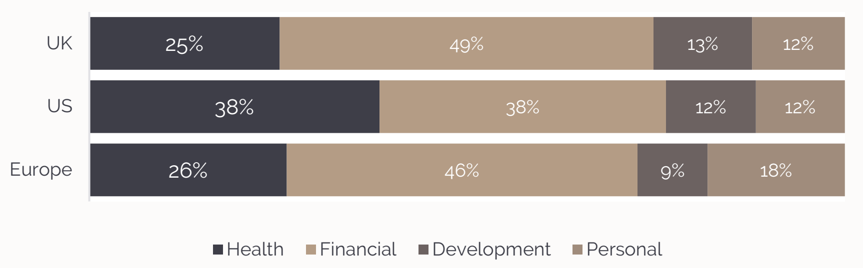




8 Parallel, as an official partner for London & Partners, the UK Trade & Investment Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) agency, is highly versed in benefits as they pertain to the UK and connected with specialist partners for information and guidance on other territories.

PAY & BENEFITS

Region

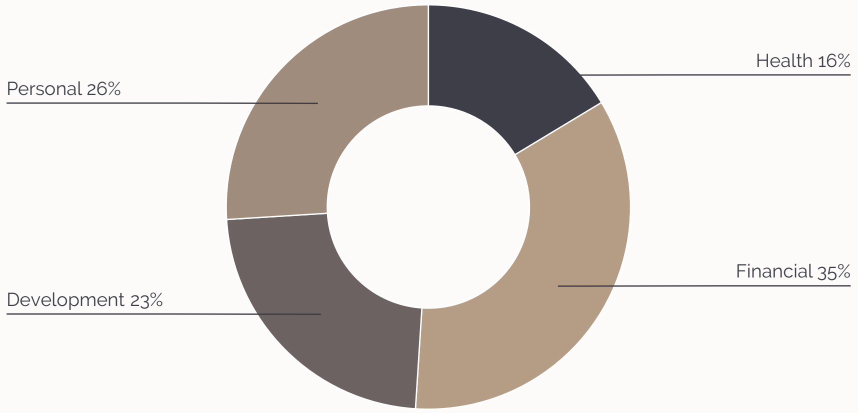


Health benefits are more prevalent in the US, where 38% of employees receive them, compared to 25% in the UK.

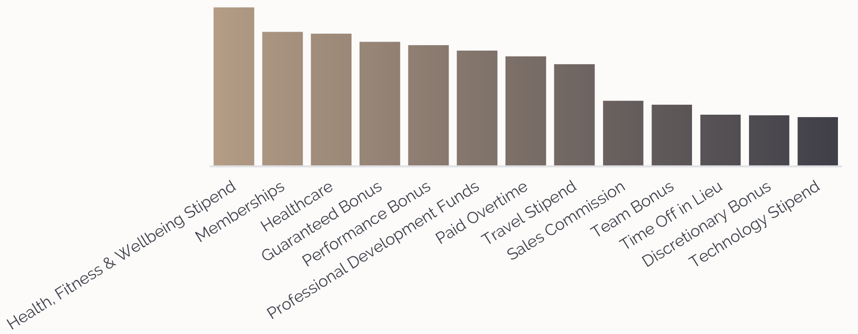
In the UK, strong public trust in the NHS may explain this, as historically private medical insurance has been viewed as a supplementary benefit rather than a necessity. Comparatively, in the US, employer-sponsored insurance is the primary means of accessing healthcare, stemming from historical tax incentives and the absence of universal state-led coverage.

Variable Pay Structures and Benefits Staff Would Like to Receive
Employees would like to receive more financial (35%), personal (26%) and development benefits (23%).

Benefits



What additional benefits and variable pay structures would you like to have made available to you?



PAY & BENEFITS

Employers seeking to balance their financial and non-financial offerings should first consider their business objectives.

If the goal is to attract talent, the benefits policy should be well balanced between financial and non-financial offerings and should be comparable to, or slightly better than, those of competitors.

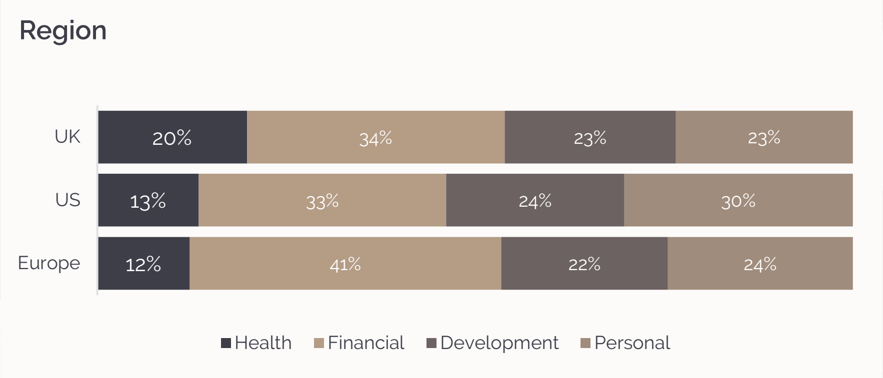
For a retention strategy, the focus should be on enhancing non-financial benefits while also improving employees' understanding of their pay and benefits. This can be achieved through total reward statements and educational sessions on the value and use of benefits.

However, in sectors where pay is below the national average, employers should prioritise financial benefits that directly impact employees' take-home pay.

To remain competitive, employers must also be aware of the benefits offered by their peers and competitors. A comparable salary but superior benefits elsewhere may prompt employees to move to a competitor.

Region

Highlighting the importance of tailoring benefits to maximise employee engagement, our data reveals a difference in the benefits most valued by employees in the UK and the US. In the UK, 23% of employees would like access to personal benefits, and another 23% prioritise development-focused benefits. In comparison, 30% of US employees favour personal benefits, and 24% value development benefits.



Broadly, Parallel has observed the following trends in terms of what is most important to employees in different regions.

In the UK, mental health benefits are highly sought after, particularly since the pandemic. Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and counselling services are common especially given the wait times for services through the National Health Service.

In countries like France, Germany, and Scandinavia, there's a heavy emphasis on work-life balance. Generous parental leave and vacation policies are also common. Much like the UK, mental health is also a growing priority, with companies offering employee assistance programs (EAPs) and access to mental health services. European companies are focused on improving retirement plans, especially as the aging population grows.

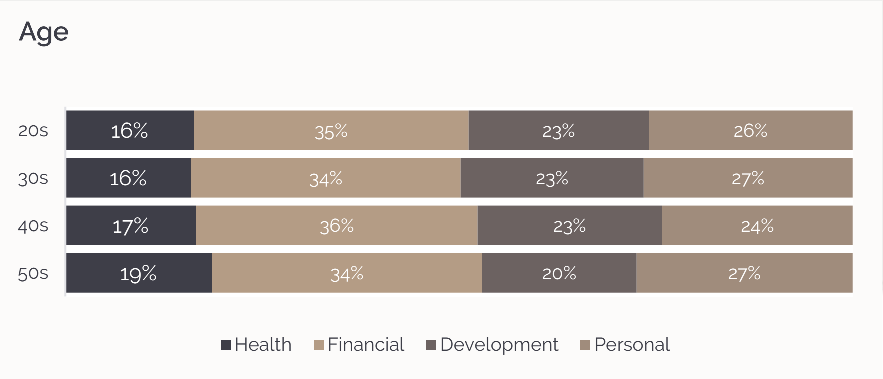
The US remains focused on providing comprehensive healthcare benefits. There is a growing focus on mental health support, including coverage for therapy or counselling. Though not federally mandated for all, there is also an increasing push for paid family leave and sick leave benefits, especially in tech and progressive

PAY & BENEFITS

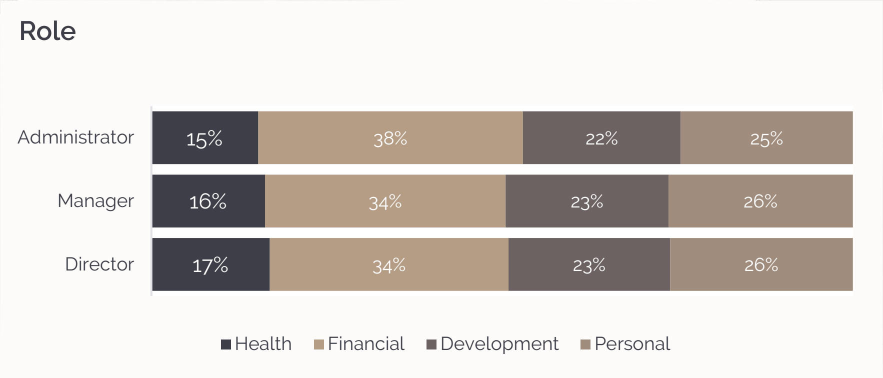
industries. Prompted by the rising student loan crisis, many companies are now offering student loan repayment assistance as part of their benefits package. 401(k) plans and employer contributions remain key, but there's a trend toward offering financial wellness programs.

Across Asia, particularly in countries like Japan, Singapore, and China, employers are increasingly offering comprehensive health insurance and wellness programs. Countries like Japan and South Korea are introducing more progressive parental leave policies to address demographic concerns. Flexible hours and remote work have started to gain ground, especially in the more urbanised and tech-forward sectors. Pension systems and retirement benefits are also a growing focus in many Asian countries as aging populations become a concern.

Age
Tailoring benefits applies not only across different regions, but also within different parts of the commercial art sector and across different levels of seniority.



The data shows continuity between different ages about what they most desire in terms of additonal benefits and variable pay. Financial benefits rank most highly for all ages, followed by personal benefits, then development benefits. Health benefits rank last.



Our findings show continuity between different levels of experience about what benefits they would most like to have access to, with financial benefits being most important. However, whilst the categories might be the same, typically, companies will vary benefits for different levels of seniority; for example the private medical scheme offered to a gallery assistant would likely differ from that provided to a senior, high-performance client sales professional.

PAY & BENEFITS

Parallel advises that, in a competitive labour market, enhanced pension contributions (e.g., above the statutory minimum) can be an effective tool for attracting and retaining talent, particularly for senior roles. Employers can also introduce more flexible pension options, allowing employees to tailor their contributions based on their financial circumstances and retirement goals.

With the UK National Insurance increase in April 2025, Salary Sacrifice schemes are regaining popularity as a tax-efficient way to boost employees' take-home pay while generating NI savings for employers.

Pensions are increasingly being integrated into broader financial wellbeing strategies, alongside savings tools, debt management support, and financial education. To further support employees, more employers may offer financial coaching or digital tools to help them navigate retirement planning alongside other financial priorities.

Developing a Benefits Strategy

An attractive benefits package can play a decisive role in securing skilled professionals. Employers can enhance their appeal by:

- Tailoring benefits to meet employee needs
- Creating a comprehensive and competitive package
- Fostering a positive company culture
- Offering unique and differentiating benefits
- Clearly communicating the value of benefits

Additionally, clear education and communication around benefits have become fundamental expectations. While digital access is highly valued, employees also appreciate the option to speak directly with someone when needed.

Demographic and geographic factors, alongside business needs and people strategy, should inform how companies tailor their benefits offerings. By understanding workforce demographics, regional cost-of-living variations, and business objectives, employers can design benefits that are both relevant and impactful. A well-aligned people strategy ensures that benefits support employee retention, engagement, and overall wellbeing while remaining aligned with organisational goals and budgets.

Beyond core benefits, the SME sector has seen increasing demand for 'non-core' perks, including cycle-to-work schemes, support for electric vehicle (EV) purchases or leases, nursery benefits, and fertility health options. Employers are also revisiting incentives such as retail discounts and shopping vouchers, which gained popularity in the early 2000s and are now experiencing a resurgence. These trends are starting to be seen in the creative industries too.

However, employees can quickly recognise when 'added value' perks fail to provide meaningful benefits. Ultimately, a well-structured core benefits package – effectively promoted and clearly communicated – remains the foundation of a successful benefits strategy.

ADVICE

ADVICE

As of early 2025, the commercial art sector's talent landscape is being shaped by legislative changes, economic pressures, and shifting market dynamics. The UK's Employment Rights Bill marks a significant overhaul of employee rights, while high shipping costs, a lasting effect of Brexit, continue to challenge the industry. In the US, the election of a new president has created a rapidly shifting political environment. These factors have prompted organisational restructuring, affecting talent retention and job satisfaction.

Employers are facing financial constraints, declining consumer spending, and rising operational costs, leading to team downsizing, role redefinition, and cost-saving strategies. At the same time, they are adapting to an increasingly interdisciplinary market that demands hybrid skill sets blending traditional expertise with commercial acumen.

Employees, in turn, are grappling with job insecurity, limited career progression, and concerns over pay equity, resulting in lower satisfaction and higher turnover. Although recent progress has been made with clearer career paths and improved professionalism, many still face long hours, high expectations, inconsistent pay progression, and the need for continual upskilling.

Despite these challenges, confidence in the art market is stabilising. The sector stands at a crossroads, offering an opportunity for both employers and employees to position themselves for future success. As the industry professionalises, employers must adapt to stay competitive.

ADVICE

ADVICE TO EMPLOYERS

We are currently in an employer's market, and companies can strengthen their position by using this time to refine their hiring and retention strategies. Following last year's downsizing, now is the time to assess current teams, ensure the right people are in the right roles, cultivate attractive working environments and capitalise on the availability of skilled talent.

Prioritise Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives

Before recent shifts in political mandates, organisations were actively advancing DEI efforts, striving for broader representation. From a recruitment perspective, this work not only promotes greater equity within the sector but also strengthens businesses by fostering more dynamic workforces with diverse viewpoints, experiences, and skills.

To sustain progress, organisations must continue to enhance DEI initiatives, ensuring inclusive recruitment processes and prioritising ongoing education and training programmes that cultivate inclusive workplace cultures.

Purely merit-based systems often fail to be truly objective. Without DEI initiatives, unconscious biases related to gender, race and socioeconomic background can persist, disadvantaging underrepresented groups. Our findings demonstrate the value of transparency around career progression to businesses in retaining staff; having a DEI policy helps businesses to create clearer, more objective, evaluation criteria and can proactively address existing pay disparities.

Such initiatives must also be embedded at every recruitment level. Diverse leadership and mentorship schemes are vital as these create pathways for underrepresented groups and ensure long-term inclusivity in decision-making roles. However, internships must also be properly compensated as inadequate pay can discourage underrepresented groups from entering the industry. Building a diverse junior talent pool that gains the necessary experience to progress their careers will contribute to a more inclusive industry in the long run.

Implement strategic hiring and career growth opportunities

Companies should align their hiring strategies with their core values and long-term objectives, ensuring recruitment supports both immediate business needs and sustainable growth. Clearly defining critical roles and identifying the necessary skill sets helps create a more strategic and effective hiring process.

Our findings show that what attracts and retains top talent is competitive compensation, benefits, and supportive and transparent work environments. Employers are encouraged to reflect on how these areas can be optimised within their businesses, as this is essential for building a thriving workforce.

While compensation packages, including wages and benefits, should align with industry standards, employers can also adopt innovative strategies to ensure employees feel valued, especially in light of challenging economic conditions. Where they are unable to offer the highest salaries for example, providing flexibility to enable employees to supplement their income could be an advantage.

Developing comprehensive job descriptions clarifies expectations, improves hiring efficiency, and ensures each role integrates seamlessly within the team. Additionally, a structured and consistent review process is necessary for supporting employee development and reinforcing that businesses value and invest in their staff.

ADVICE

Businesses are increasingly utilising benchmarking services to establish what they should be paying their staff and ensure they are offering competitive packages. SML's benchmarking service encompasses tailored advice and recommendations based on geography, specialism and size.

Strengthen internal structures to optimise workforce satisfaction and efficiency
Employers can explore various areas to enhance workplace effectiveness, such as upskilling managers to optimise their workflows and take a more human-centric approach to working with junior staff. This could be supported by assessing the current situation, for instance, through an 'employee satisfaction survey.'

Other areas might include implementing career development programmes such as offering educational workshops to improve employees' skill sets, professional development stipends, membership to industry associations, introducing well-being initiatives to promote work-life balance, and providing opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, such as through interdepartmental collaborations.

Navigating legislative changes, such as the Employment Rights Bill, can be made easier with the support of recruitment partners, who can help businesses identify the best and most cost-effective hiring solutions.

During transitional periods or as part of specialised company development projects, employers may also benefit from engaging expert consultants in temporary senior placements, ensuring continuity and innovation without the long-term financial commitment of permanent hires.

Utilise internal and external communications to support business goals
Effective communication is a vital tool for employers, enhancing transparency between leadership and teams, reducing uncertainty, preventing bottlenecks, and streamlining onboarding processes.

Candidates consistently highlight the importance of clarity regarding their role and perception within an organisation, as poorly managed transitions pose risks for both employees and employers alike. Thoughtful internal communication helps ease these adjustments, ensuring smoother integrations for new hires. Internal communications can also be utilised to recognise employees' contributions.

Externally, clear and strategic messaging is equally important – effectively positioning a company's brand and articulating its values can be a powerful tool for attracting top talent.

ADVICE

ADVICE TO EMPLOYEES

For professionals in the commercial art sector, navigating career uncertainty requires careful planning, proactive skill-building, and adaptability. Industry employers are working to improve and professionalise their practises creating a more open and equal employment landscape for art world professionals. To stay competitive and find fulfilling opportunities, employees at all stages of their careers should consider the following strategies:

Take time to reflect on career priorities

When evaluating a company and a role, employees should consider what truly matters–career progression, salary, company culture, work-life balance, or alignment with personal values. Reflecting on these priorities can help guide decisions and ensure long-term job satisfaction. It is also important to keep a degree of flexibility, staying open to different opportunities that may arise. Employees should assess whether their current or prospective employer provides meaningful growth opportunities and a work environment that supports their professional and personal goals.

Invest in skills development and professional growth

Pursuing additional training, certifications, or workshops can help enhance skill sets and keep employees competitive in an evolving job market. Digital fluency is increasingly valuable in the art world, particularly in areas such as digital marketing, online sales, and virtual curation.

Expanding beyond core areas of expertise by cross-training in business, technology, or finance can help develop a well-rounded skill set, making employees more adaptable to industry shifts and future opportunities.

Stay informed and adapt to industry trends

Staying informed about industry news, market reports, and professional networks is essential in order to anticipate shifts and identify emerging opportunities.

Keeping an eye on evolving business models, such as digital art sales, blockchain applications, and alternative art market platforms, will provide valuable insights into the future of the industry. AI developments are already impacting art sector roles, making it crucial to stay abreast of their implications and how they may influence individual's skillsets.

Build a strong professional network

Building strong relationships with industry peers, mentors, and recruiters can provide valuable insights, career advice, and potential referrals. Engaging with professional associations and art-focused groups can further expand employees' networks, generating information about new job opportunities and industry developments.

Actively participating in these communities enhances visibility and can open doors to new career prospects. It is crucial to remember that networking is an ongoing process, and developing meaningful relationships requires time. We recommend providing value upfront before seeking anything in return, whether that be offering advice, sharing resources, or making introductions.

ADVICE

Gain insights into compensation

Understanding market salaries and standard benefits is essential to ensuring fair compensation. Employees should be prepared to negotiate their salary and benefits based on industry benchmarks and their unique skill sets, to help secure a more competitive package. Additionally, taking on side projects or freelance work can provide valuable supplementary income while expanding professional experience.

Maintain work-life balance and well-being

The art world is known for its demanding hours and high-pressure environments, making it essential to prioritise mental health and well-being for long-term success. Setting healthy work boundaries and being mindful of burnout is particularly important in fast-paced commercial roles. Seeking positions with supportive leadership and career development opportunities can help create a more balanced and fulfilling professional experience. By taking a strategic and flexible approach, employees can navigate the evolving art industry with confidence. Remaining adaptable, continuously learning, and proactively shaping one's career trajectory are key to sustaining long-term success in this dynamic field.

LOOKING AHEAD

INTO 2025

To stay competitive, businesses must proactively anticipate industry challenges and opportunities. The following key trends and developments are expected to shape the commercial art sector's employment market, impacting hiring strategies and compensation discussions in the year ahead.

Emerging art hubs and global expansion

The international art market is seeing a geographic shift, with regions such as Europe and the Middle East attracting more galleries, collectors, and art fairs. Favourable tax regimes, strategic locations, and growing collector bases in cities like Paris, Milan, Dubai, and Riyadh are encouraging expansion beyond traditional hubs like London and New York. As a result, demand for regional market specialists, multilingual sales professionals, and cultural consultants is already rising, as businesses look to navigate these new opportunities.

The impact of legislation on hiring

Regulatory shifts are set to reshape hiring priorities, particularly in the UK and EU, with compliance and legal expertise becoming more essential than ever.

The UK's new anti-money laundering (AML) and sanctions reporting requirements will place added compliance responsibilities on galleries, auction houses, and dealers. To remain compliant, businesses will need professionals with expertise in financial regulation, risk management, and corporate governance, driving increased demand for compliance and legal experts.

Meanwhile, greater efforts toward pay transparency, underpinned by legislation in the UK, EU and US, will help align salary expectations and improve hiring efficiency, ensuring a fairer and more competitive job market.

The UK's Employment Rights Bill introduces significant measures to enhance workers' rights and improve working conditions. These include Day-One Rights, protecting employees from unfair dismissal from their first day of employment, a ban on exploitative zero-hours contracts, and an extension of statutory sick pay and bereavement leave, among other reforms. To navigate these changes effectively and secure the best talent, businesses may benefit from partnering with recruitment specialists.

Opportunities for those affected by market disruptions

Industry shake-ups, whether due to economic downturns, regulatory shifts, or environmental crises, often create opportunities for professionals to pivot into new roles or sectors. Market disruptions could create an opportunity for businesses to recruit experienced professionals who may not have been previously available. Hiring from this newly available talent pool will allow organisations to bring in fresh perspectives, innovation, and diverse skill sets.

Freelance and consultancy work are also becoming viable alternatives for professionals seeking flexibility while leveraging their expertise. Unless detrimental to businesses, employers should also consider permitting staff who wish to take on supplementary income as it is becoming more prevalent.

Employers can also consider short-term or project-based contracts as a way to benefit from industry expertise without committing to long-term hires.

LOOKING AHEAD

Art market on the path to recovery

After a challenging period for the art market, recent New York auction sales signal a potential recovery, reflecting renewed confidence among collectors and investors. As stability returns, businesses are expected to rebuild their teams, capitalising on the opportunity to recruit professionals who may not typically be available or who bring expertise from different areas of the sector. Adopting a more holistic hiring approach, organisations will move beyond niche specialisations in certain roles to secure talent with broader, more adaptable skill sets, which could drive innovation and future growth.

THANK YOU

THANK YOU

Thank you for reading the SML Art Market Talent Report. This report is the result of a collaborative effort, and we extend our sincere gratitude to our partners for their contributions.

As the leading experts in talent across arts and culture, SML is committed to delivering best-in-class service to our clients and candidates, supported by valuable insights that strengthen the industry, drive positive change, and foster a more inclusive and dynamic sector for all.

We are always looking for ways to expand our impact. If you are interested in working together or would like to learn more about the data and insights we can provide, please do not hesitate to reach out to our team.

Robyn Orovwuje-Forbes
Associate Director, Insights & Strategy

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With over twenty years of experience as a long-term partner to the world's most prominent art world institutions, SML has an established track record of strengthening businesses by providing unique industry insights, candid organisational advice, and unrivalled connections to talent at the forefront of the international art market.

From reinforcing leadership to strengthening core teams to starting from the ground up in new territories, our international presence makes us particularly well-placed to guide the most resilient people-centric operations through periods of growth and change.

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ABOUT US

ArtTactic

ArtTactic is a leading art market research and analysis firm, founded in 2001. Specialising in data-driven insights, ArtTactic combines qualitative and quantitative research to offer in-depth reports on global art market trends. The company provides professional training, research-led consultancy services, and in-depth reports and analysis on the art market, helping art businesses, collectors, and institutions navigate the dynamic art ecosystem. ArtTactic plays a pivotal role in bringing transparency and data intelligence to the art market.

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Rawlinson & Hunter has been at the **forefront of the provision of tax and accounting advice to the art world** since our formation almost ninety years ago. We act for **leading artists, galleries and dealers** on their underlying businesses and specific transactions. Many of our private clients are also avid collectors and we advise them regularly on transactional practicalities.

We **provide intelligent, well thought out and practical advice** on the financial aspects of art transactions. Our **unrivalled experience** in advising on complex issues, often involving a number of jurisdictions with their associated tax and VAT implications, has given us a **unique understanding** of the requirements of those at the business end of the art world, as well as collectors.

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The Visual Arts Group, working collaboratively with its global network from a number of our core practice areas, **advises on all matters arising within the sector**, including:

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For more information on how Sheridans can assist you, please contact Ray Wann at ray.wann@sheridans.co.uk.

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Our team expertly guides clients through structuring transactions, drafting representation, consignment, license, and advisory agreements, as well as managing damage claims and litigating fraud and title disputes. We also support galleries and artist studios with employment law matters, including hiring, compliance, and litigation.

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