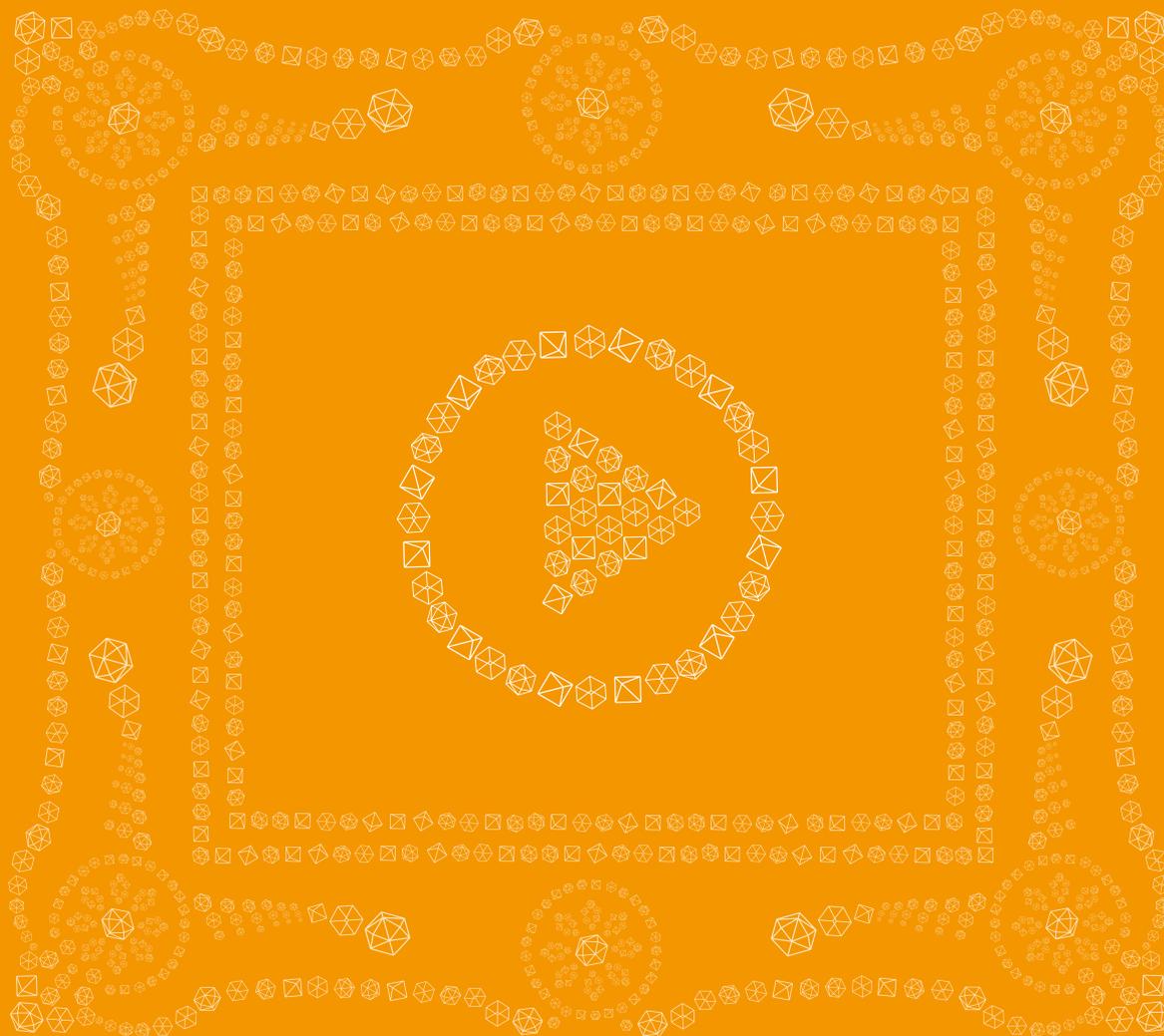


An analysis of applications for the Digital R&D Fund for Arts and Culture

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An analysis of applications for the Digital R&D Fund for Arts and Culture

1. Introduction

The Digital R&D Fund for Arts and Culture aims to connect arts and cultural organisations with technology companies in a way that can benefit the wider sector. Specifically, the fund invites arts and cultural organisations and technology companies to submit proposals to test propositions about how digital technologies can be used to broaden, widen and deepen audience engagement and/or enable new business models.¹ The results are then made available to the wider sector.

Applications for the pilot fund opened on 7 June 2011 and closed on 2 September 2011. £500,000 was made available to arts and cultural organisations,² with the research component of the projects separately funded. The funding partners – Arts Council England, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and NESTA – held five workshops throughout the country ('Digital Days') to promote the fund to arts and cultural organisations and to technology companies.³ As a collaborative R&D fund, arts and cultural organisations were required to connect with technology companies when putting together their proposals. Aside from the Digital Days, the funding partners offered no assistance in brokering relations between arts and cultural organisations and technology companies.

There was an overwhelming response from the sector. The fund received 494 applications, of which 393 (seeking over £24 million in total) were judged eligible by the funding partners. This suggests that there is a high demand for digital R&D in the arts and cultural sector. This paper explores the nature of the demand by reporting some descriptive analysis of the applications.

2. Which arts and cultural organisations applied?

Figure 1 shows that 30 per cent of applicants defined themselves as performing arts organisations. Almost the same number described themselves as commercial arts/cultural organisations or creative businesses. Roughly 19 per cent classified themselves as either galleries or visual arts organisations. Ten per cent of applicants were museums. Archives, libraries, literary organisations and public bodies (including universities) made up the remaining 13 per cent.

3. Where did the applicants come from?

Arts and cultural organisations applied from many different parts of England. There was a predictably high concentration in London (167). Other pockets of applications included: Manchester (22), Newcastle (12), Sheffield (11), Liverpool (10) and Birmingham (10). There were fewer applications from Bristol and Brighton than might have been expected given that Digital Days were held there. Figure 2 plots the geographical spread of applications by postal district. Figure 3 shows the equivalent map by Arts Council England region.

1. By 'business models' we mean the mechanisms by which a business intends to manage its costs and generate its outcomes – in the case of for-profits, the outcomes are primarily revenues earned, and in the case of non-profits, the outcome is primarily the public good created. (Falk and Sheppard 2006: 18)

2. In the event, £569,407 was awarded to the successful arts and cultural organisations.

3. The Digital Days were held in: London, Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester and Brighton. All the presentations (including digital R&D case studies) were made available immediately afterwards on NESTA's website.

Figure 1: All applications by organisational type

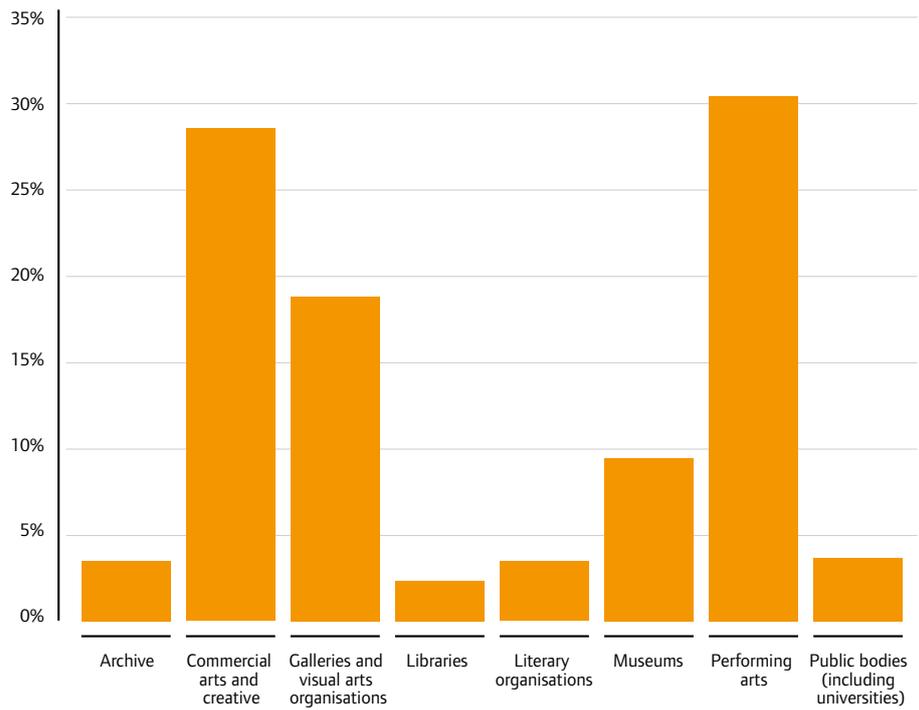


Figure 2: All applications by postal district

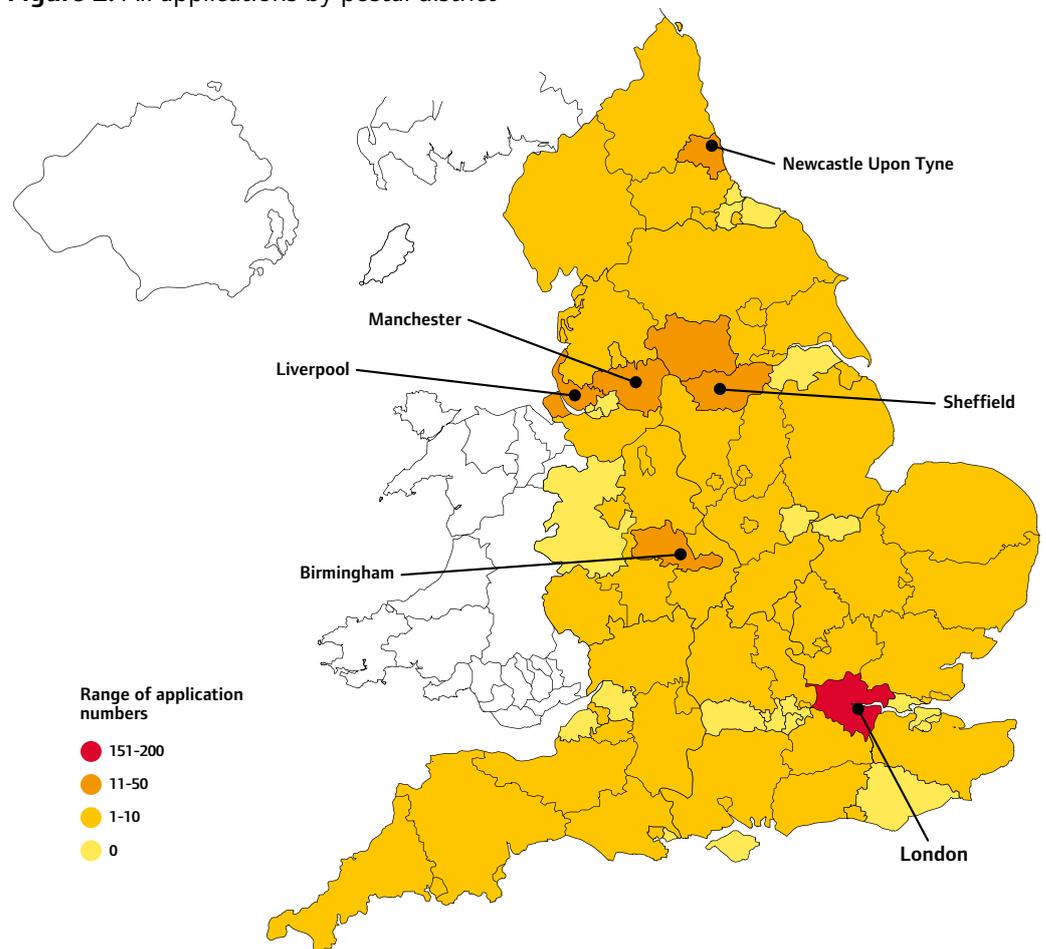
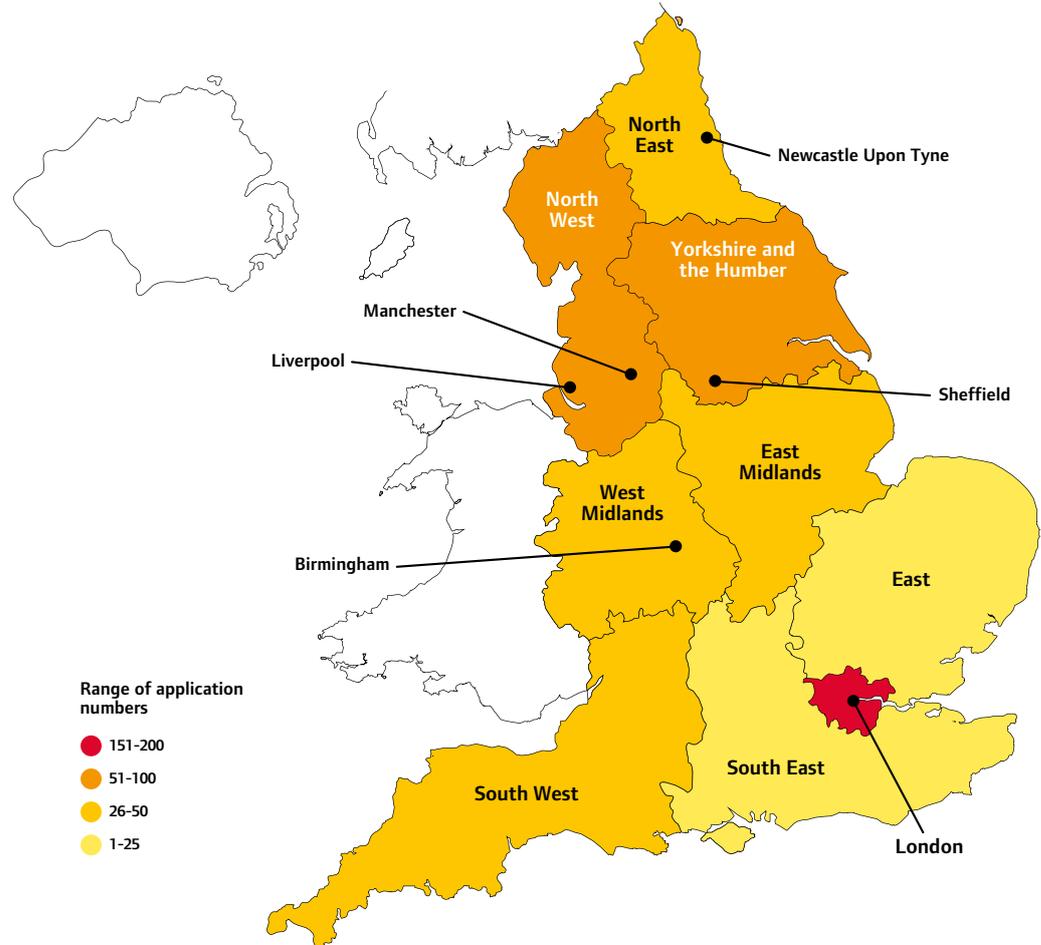


Figure 3: All applications by Arts Council England region



4. What size budget did the applications have?

Figure 4 shows that the majority of applications from all types of organisation were in the £50,000+ region (Figure 4 looks only at eligible applications and excludes organisational types where there were fewer than ten applications in total). There were relatively few applications in the less than £24,999 range. No doubt this partly reflects the funding partners' expectation – publicly communicated – that they would fund only five to ten projects in the pilot (with an overall stated budget of £500,000, this implied an average project budget of between £50,000 and £100,000). The median budget was highest for commercial arts/cultural organisations and creative businesses, and lowest for literary organisations.

5. Which digital themes did the applications have?

Figure 5 shows that the most popular thematic areas were user-generated content and social media and mobile, location and games. But Figure 6 shows that the aggregate numbers mask the importance of other themes for specific organisational types. For example, the importance of education and learning for museums, or data and archives for archives.

Figure 4: Eligible applications by size of budget

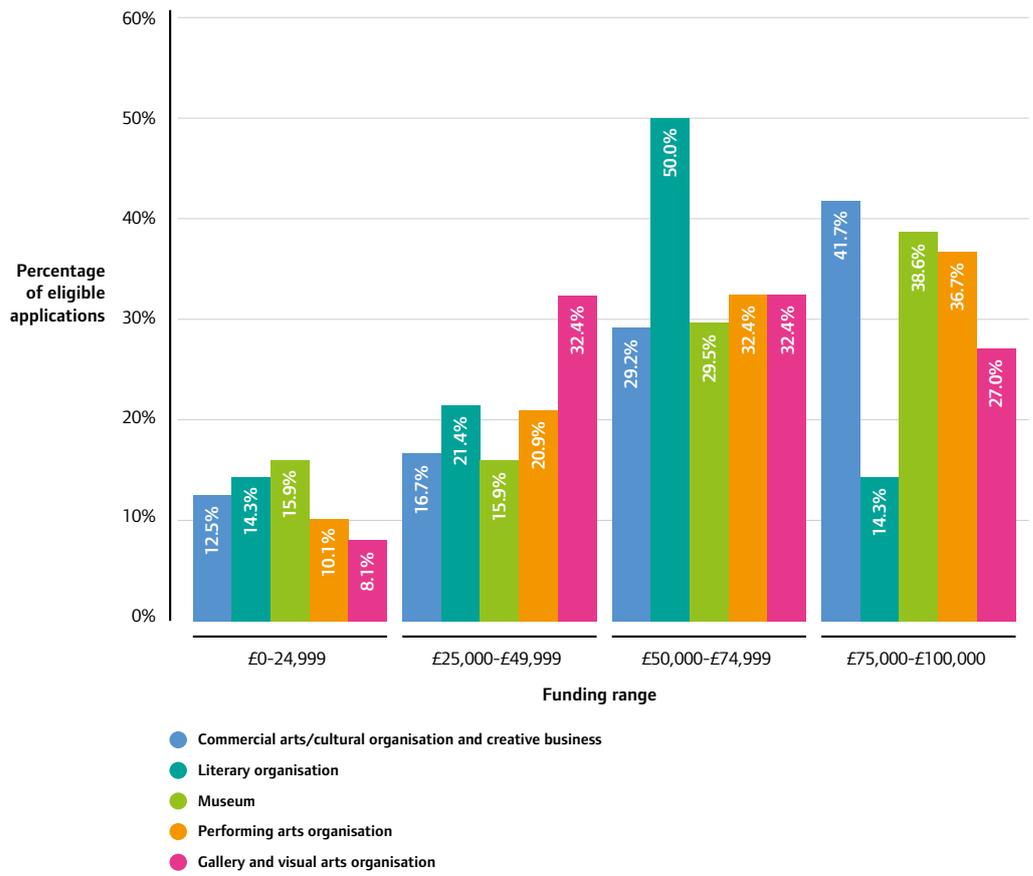


Figure 5: Eligible applications by thematic area

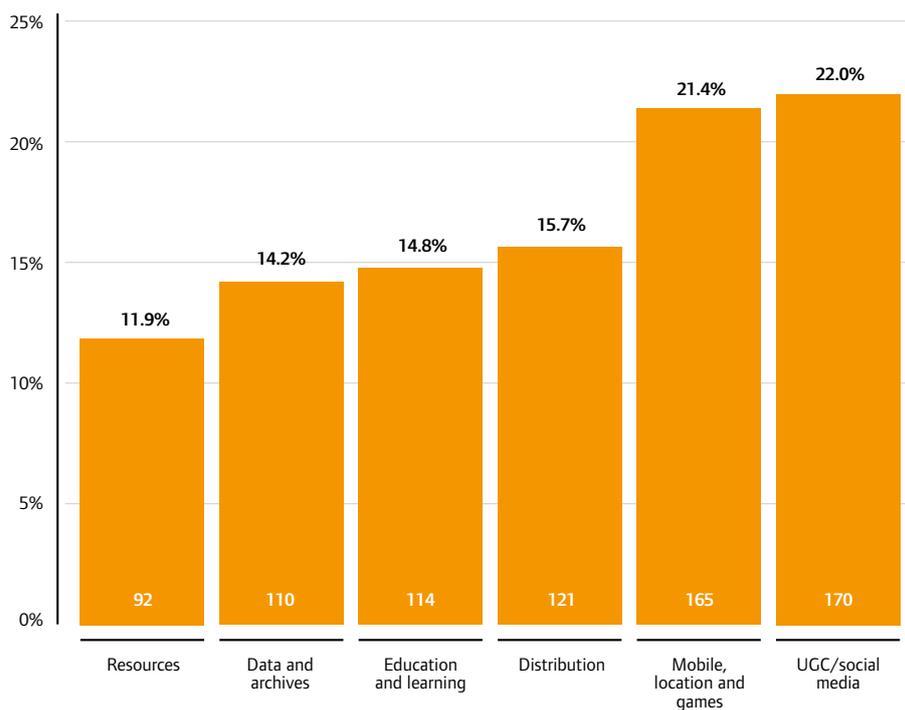
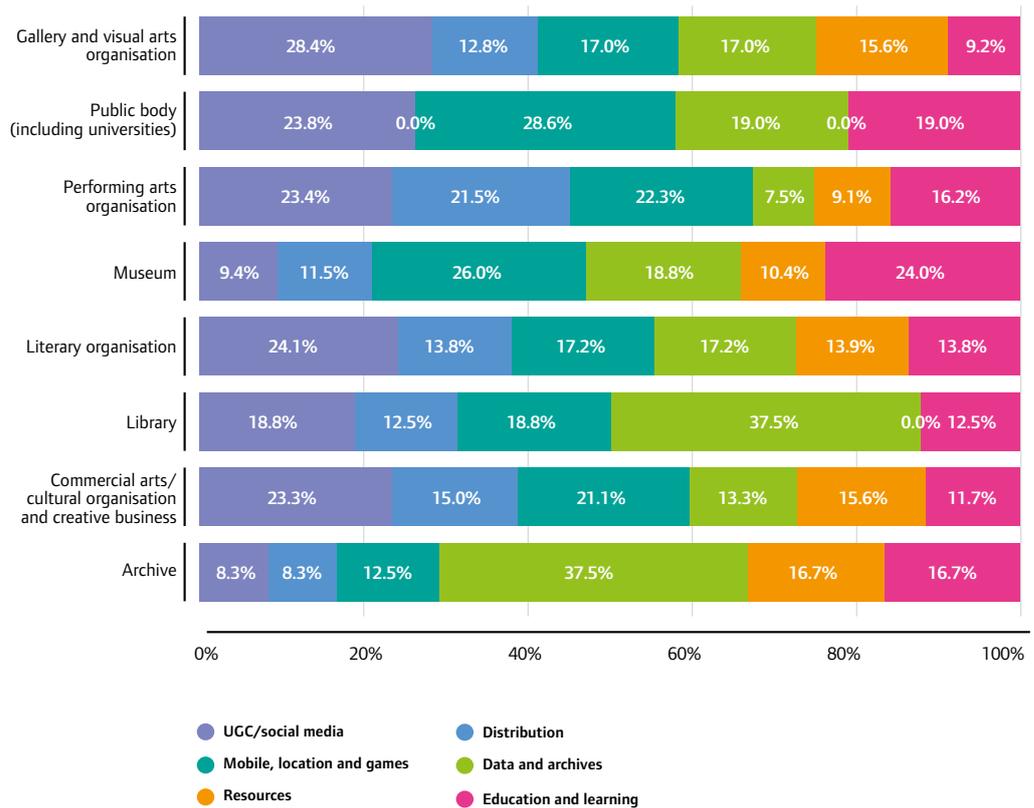


Figure 6: Eligible applications by thematic area for different organisational types



- 4. The fund was only promoted to researchers working in the arts and humanities fields.
- 5. When a product would lead only to an exhibition/production/installation it was not considered a new product or service. However, when there was evidence that the product or service would be transferable, as for education purposes for example, we coded it as a new digital product or service.

6. How many applications built evaluation into the technology provision?

The fund’s structure – with its parallel calls for proposals from arts and cultural organisations and technology companies on the one hand and for researchers on the other – assumed that a technology partner would offer a digital service, and that the evaluation would be provided by the researcher. In fact, it turned out in the pilot that the majority of applications from arts and cultural organisations and their technology partners had built some level of evaluation of their innovation into their projects. In the case of museums, as many as nine in ten of eligible applications arguably had some form of evaluation embedded in their proposals (Figure 7).

Judging by the eight projects awarded R&D grants by the fund, the evaluation methodologies proposed by technology companies and those suggested by academic researchers differ greatly from each other. This partly reflects differences in the qualitative methodologies used by arts and humanities researchers and the quantitative methods that technology companies tend to use.⁴ As a result, the evaluations should in principle be more rounded than would be the case if either technology companies or researchers were to evaluate the research projects alone. Nonetheless, it does suggest there may be a gap in the use of quantitative methods that academic researchers in, say, the social sciences use.

7. How many applications proposed to develop new products and services?

Most of the applications involved proposals to build new digital products and services.⁵ If anything, this appeared to be even more the case with subsidised arts and cultural organisations than with commercial arts and cultural organisations and creative businesses (Figure 8). This suggests that, although the R&D fund’s primary aim is to support innovation in arts and cultural organisations

Figure 7: Eligible applications with some element of evaluation embedded in their proposals

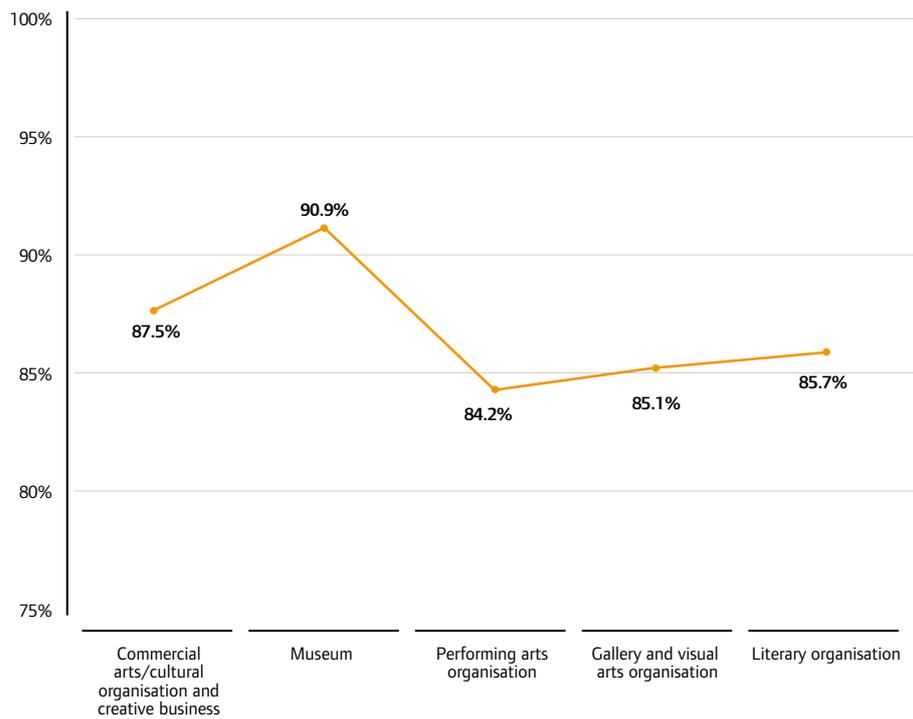
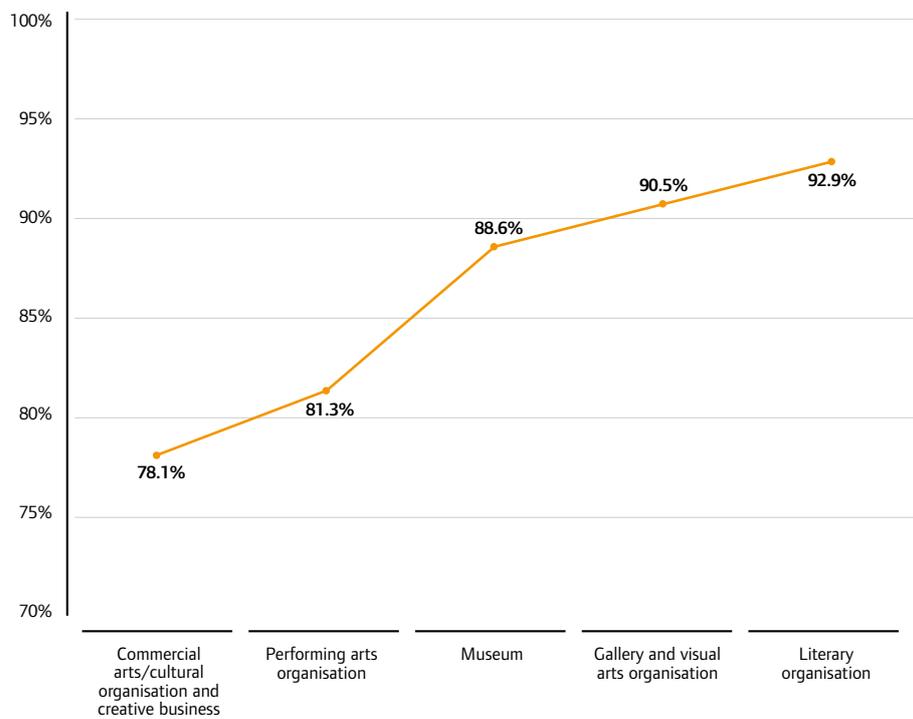


Figure 8: Eligible applications offering new products and/or services



through the creation of valuable knowledge, the possibility that the fund also supports the generation of valuable intellectual property or potentially commercially viable services cannot be discounted.

8. Conclusions

The Digital R&D Fund for Arts and Culture appears to have uncovered a high demand from arts and cultural organisations to explore how digital technologies can expand their audience reach and enable new business models. Applications came from organisations representing a broad spread of arts and cultural forms and covering all six of the fund's designated digital themes. The majority of applications were for projects with budgets in the £50,000+ area but this no doubt reflects signals from the funding partners that they expected to support no more than five to ten projects in total. Applications came in from all parts of England, but the arguably disproportionate number from London suggests that greater efforts will be needed to encourage strong applications from other parts of the country.

As a pilot, the high levels of demand suggest that the funding partners are right to consider how the fund could be scaled-up in future to meet the digital R&D needs of a larger set of arts and cultural organisations.

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