

December
2025

State of Dorset Leisure and Culture



Recent data reveals that nearly 9 out of 10 adults engaged in the arts at least once in the past year, highlighting the widespread appeal and importance of cultural activities. Additionally, two-thirds of people visited a heritage site, and a third visited a museum or gallery.⁰

While activity rates among Dorset's young people have improved in recent years, challenges remain. Almost half of Dorset's children and teens are still not active enough, and nearly a third are overweight. Staying active isn't just about physical health; it's also linked to better mental wellbeing and a lower risk of many health problems.³

Big Numbers Box

£47m

Value of the arts to our economy⁴

62%

adults overweight or obese³

£4m

Funding from ACE 2024/25

68%

adults are physically active³

3,000

Dorset Youth Football League players

76%

say arts and culture make them happy

Box 1: Health and wellbeing value

- Arts and cultural interventions can have a positive impact on specific health conditions such as dementia, Parkinson's and depression¹. The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and 'Arts in Hospitals' partnership saw the BSO performing live for patients living with dementia to increase their wellbeing. The project found that dementia patients benefited through fewer falls, reduced medication, and reduced hospital stays.⁷
- Nearly half of older people (43%) say that accessibility is an important factor when they choose arts venues to attend.²
- Overall 76% of people aged 65+ say that arts & culture are important to making them feel happy. And nearly as many (69%) say that arts and culture are important in improving their overall quality of life.²

76% of older people say arts & culture makes them feel happy



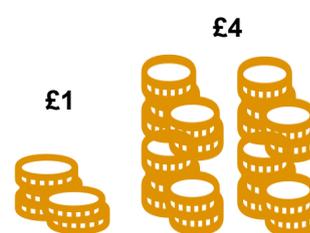
Sources

- 0 Participation in the arts, culture and heritage, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 23/02/24
- 1 Create, Arts Council England, December 2015
- 2 <http://www.comresglobal.com/polls/arts-council-england-older-people-poll/> [Accessed 03/07/18]
- 3 Public Health Fingertips 2023/2024 (3 year range)
- 4 Regional gva (balanced) by industry in current prices, SIC 90-91, Table 3b, ONS, 2022
- 5 BRES Employment, Office for National Statistics, 2023

Box 2: Engagement & Economic Value

- Research has shown that Artsreach, a Dorset-based arts organisation, enhances public funding by an estimated 93%. This significant impact is largely due to the 'volunteer multiple,' which brings additional time, commitment, and expertise to arts administration in Dorset.⁶
- There are 11 competitive youth football leagues operating across Dorset as well as hundreds of youngsters playing in non-competitive leagues.⁹
- Dorset was awarded just under £4m across 28 awards from Arts Council England for 2024/25.⁸
- Creative Industries employment in Dorset grew by over 14% between 2015 and 2023—far outpacing the 3% growth seen across all industries.⁵
- For every £1 invested in the Arts Development Company by the council, there is a return of £4 secured in external investment into the area.⁷
- Dorset Art Weeks is one of the longest-established art events, having first started in 1992. Last year saw over 260 venues featured, celebrating fine art, craft, and making.¹⁰ From 2026, the event will take place annually.¹¹

Every £1 spent locally is matched four times over in external benefit to Dorset



Box 3: Play matters¹²

- In 2025/26 Dorset Council will be working closely with residents and communities to produce a Play Strategy.
- Play matters because it's proven to support children's health, learning, and wellbeing. When children play, they're more active, happier, and better prepared for school.
- Research from the national Everything to Play For report¹³ shows outdoor play has declined by 50% in a generation, and this decline links to rising childhood obesity and mental health issues.
- Investing in play now can reduce future costs in health and social care, improve school readiness, and create stronger, safer communities. It's about making the most of our spaces and ensuring every child has the time and freedom to enjoy being a child.
- Dorset Council's 'Children, Young People and Families Plan' wants every child to have safe spaces to play, welcoming communities, and the freedom to enjoy childhood.

Sources

6 Artsreach

7 The Arts Development Company

8 National Investment Dashboard, Arts council England, (Accessed 23/09/25)

9 <https://www.dorsetyouthfootballleague.co.uk/> (Accessed 23/09/25)

10 <https://dorsetvisualarts.org/about-us/daw> and <https://dorsetvisualarts.org/about-us> (Accessed 02/10/24)

11 <https://dorsetartweeks.co.uk/> (Accessed 23/09/25)

12 <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/news/play-matters-building-a-brighter-future-for-dorset-s-children> (Accessed 24/09/25)

13 Everything to Play For, Centre For Young Lives, June 2025