

Crafts Council

Researching Craft

January 2023



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Introduction

This briefing is to:

- Help you as organisations and individuals working in craft to improve your access to research evidence
- Gather an evidence base on which to make decisions;
- Know how to use the evidence base in making the case for craft; and
- Reassure you that you can do it!

This is not about how you evidence the effectiveness of your own work or project.

What is research evidence?

Research evidence is information that supports a belief. It's uncertain and can be challenged and it's not always the same as proof. It might be, for example:

- An organisation's count of the proportion of local craft businesses that are exporting
- The number of participants in a learning programme who demonstrated they'd applied their learning
- A university research paper that shows an activity like cultural participation has contributed to improved wellbeing.

Many things can count as data to use in evidence, including both qualitative (stories and narratives) and quantitative (numbers). But they must have been gathered using a recognised method that someone else can check. Published data are often gathered in different ways, so we have to check whether the different data sets are comparable – either they are collected using the same definition or collected with a consistent method.

Why use research evidence?

Evidence can strengthen your case by helping to support your arguments and inform decision making. This body of evidence that an organisation gathers is often called the 'evidence base'.

Makers, craft organisations, funders, education institutions, researchers, governments etc all use evidence. It can help you to:

- Give you some background about craft to share for an event
- Make a funding application
- Understand your materials or practice better
- Improve the sector and make it more inclusive for all
- Arrive at a policy position (or an organisational view) about an issue
- Plan a project, course of action or business
- Illustrate the value of culture or craft businesses to others
- Persuade other organisations to support craft.

What is useable research evidence?

An argument or proposal is likely to be taken more seriously if the source or method for the evidence is seen as credible. To verify the quality of the research, it's important to look at, for example,

- Is the research method explained and can the findings be attributed to a method widely used in other research?
- Are the findings based on a large enough number of participants or activities, so that you can be confident of the wider applicability of the findings?
- Can you check the findings in more than one source of data?
- Who has undertaken and published the research? Is it a funded organisation (for example, a charity or a higher education institution) whose purpose is known and recognised?
- Can you use evidence published by the organisation you're trying to influence, so that they have confidence in it?

What kind of information might be useful on craft?

This will depend on what you're trying to achieve. You may, for example, want to understand,

- The craft economy – the value of craft to the economy, the number of businesses, professional makers or participants in craft, the value of craft exports, craft supply chains, the role of craft galleries, markets, fairs and events
- International comparisons about the sector or comparisons with other creative or cultural sectors
- Who buys craft, where and what is popular
- Formal education routes into craft
- The history of craft or about endangered or heritage crafts
- The numbers and characteristics of people who do a craft in their spare time and the popularity of different craft disciplines
- The sustainability of craft practices and businesses
- The health and wellbeing benefits of craft participation
- User data from audiences or participants at craft events
- Knowledge about materials, techniques and processes in craft practice.

Where can you find useful evidence about craft?

There are many useful external sources that we've grouped by area of interest below.

The economy

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) [Research and Statistics](#) section and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) are useful for the economy (including trade).

- [DCMS Sectors Economic Estimates](#) – the regular bulletins contain statistics on the contribution of DCMS sectors to the UK economy, measured by gross value added (GVA), employment, imports and exports of services and goods and the number of businesses. DCMS 'sectors' include the 'creative industries' and the 'cultural sector', both of which show (often the same) data for craft. However, with the exception of imports and exports (see below), the craft data are based on fewer industries and occupations than we would recognise as craft and so do not give a full picture¹.

- Craft imports and exports are shown in [DCMS Sectors Economic Estimates 2020: Trade](#) with full breakdowns by year and country of export/import in the 'Trade in Goods' table. Crafts Council worked with DCMS in 2018 to revise the product codes to more accurately reflect the breadth of crafts.

- [The Office for National Statistics](#) (ONS) UK holds data on businesses registered for VAT and PAYE with regional breakdowns, including data on size (employment and turnover) and activity (type of industry). It is based on the [Inter-Departmental Business Register](#), using high level categories, such as 'Arts; entertainment; recreation and other services' and therefore does not show data specifically for craft

Arts engagement and participation

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) [Research and Statistics](#) section is also useful for arts engagement and participation (including craft).

The datasets most relevant to craft are:

- The [Participation Survey](#) The data tables show levels of arts engagement and participation, including
 - o the number of adults who have attended a craft exhibition (not a crafts market; crafts include for example textiles, woodworking) in the last 12 months (Table 1a); and
 - o the number of adults who have participated in crafts (textile, ceramic, sculpting, carving, woodwork) (Table 1a); and
 - o adults' engagement with the arts in the last 12 months by demographics (Table 1b).

Previously the [Taking Part Survey](#) included the same questions but data cannot be compared directly with the Participation Survey.

- [Taking Part Survey: Ad-hoc statistical releases](#) which include [Adult \(aged 16+\) craft participation by key demographics, area level variables and education, England, 2017/18 and 2018/19](#) requested by the Crafts Council.

1.

Craft has always been one of the DCMS creative industries, but its contribution has not been reflected in official statistics. In 2013 Crafts Council commissioned a review of how craft was measured and DCMS accepted and used our approach in its subsequent economic estimates for the creative industries. However, DCMS only included a partial figure for craft, acknowledging that this is a significant under-estimate of the scale of the 9 full craft industry.

Education

The Department for Education (DfE) [Research and Statistics section](#) (and now also the DfE's [Explore Education Statistics](#) site) has datasets on exam entry and achievement and student numbers, art teachers and hours the arts are taught in [school workforce in England](#), data on attainment and demographics in the [National Pupil Database](#) and overall [student cohort numbers](#).

Note that public examinations and graduate labour market data on these pages are sometimes too 'high level' to be useful to craft or creative education – they don't show craft-related or creative subjects separately. More useful are the examination board datasets that show participation in craft-related public exams (see below).

- Art teachers and hours the arts are taught in [school workforce in England](#), data on attainment and demographics in the [National Pupil Database](#) and [overall student cohort numbers](#)
- GCSE, A-level and Diploma entry (Art & Design and Design & Technology subjects) on the [Joint Council for Qualifications](#) website. (Have a look at briefings from the [Cultural Learning Alliance](#) who regularly publish good analyses of exam entries.)
- Analysis of GCSE and A Level grades on the [Ofqual](#) website.
- Statistics on participation and learner outcomes in the further education and skills sector are on [government websites](#) and on the size and shape of the

Education

sector from the [Association of Colleges](#).

- Higher education student enrolments by subject (*design, creative arts and performing arts*) on the [Higher Education Statistics Agency \(HESA\)](#) website. Higher education student applications and acceptance rates to full-time undergraduate courses on the [University Central Application System \(UCAS\)](#) website
- For [apprenticeships & traineeships](#) and further education & skills you can create your own data on the DfE's [Explore Education Statistics](#) site.

Many national cultural and creative industries organisations hold a wide range of research and information, for example:

National Cultural and Creative Industries Organisations

- [Arts Council England \(ACE\)](#), a non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) set up by government that publishes reports on the wider context of arts and culture -
- The contribution of the arts and culture to the national economy
- How public investment in arts contributes to growth in the creative industries
- Cultural and creative spillovers (benefits to localities) in Europe
- How to engage more people
- [Crafts Council](#) – as a sector development body, [our research pages](#) publish findings on, for example, [the market for craft](#), [maker needs](#), [measuring the craft](#)

National Cultural and Creative Industries Organisations

[economy](#), the [lived experiences of women makers of colour](#). A full list of our research publications is [here](#).

- [Creative UK](#), an umbrella and membership organisation for the creative industries with [statistics on the industrial sector](#) and research about the creative economy; education, jobs and skills; social mobility and inclusion; and access to finance
- [Creative Industries Council](#), a Government and industry body that holds facts and figures on [craft](#) and the [creative industries](#) more generally (Crafts Council is a member)
- [Cultural Learning Alliance](#), which champions a right to art and culture for every child. It holds [statistics on the arts in England's schools](#) and the case for cultural learning
- The [Disability in British Art Research Group](#)
- [Heritage Craft Association](#), which has published a series of [research reports](#) including the [Red List of Endangered Crafts](#)
- Higher education institutions regularly publish research on craft – and this may, for example, cover economics, geography, anthropology, cultural, materials etc. Some research papers are available online (using a focused search on eg Google Scholar) and others have to be accessed through academic contacts. Key higher education research organisations are:
 - o [The Policy and Evidence Centre](#). It provides independent research and policy recommendations for the UK's creative industries ([See national statistics](#)

National Cultural and Creative Industries Organisations

[on the creative industries](#) for an overview); and other [Centre for Cultural Value](#) which holds resources on practice, participation, workforce, health and wellbeing etc

- Museums (eg [Derby Museum of Making](#)), galleries (eg [The National Centre for Craft & Design](#)), guilds (eg [Surrey](#), [Gloucestershire](#), [Wessex](#)) and associations (eg [The UK Fashion & Textile Association](#) and the [Craft Potters Association](#) hold information and resources about collections or materials).

- Networks such as [The Queer Heritage and Collections Network](#).

- Regional and local craft providers and organisations will hold their own data on participation and their own go-to information on craft, eg [Manchester Craft and Design Centre](#), [MAKE Southwest](#) and other [Craft UK](#) organisations.

- Sector support organisations, such as [The Audience Agency](#), [Shades of Noir](#) that are collecting the largest Black and minority ethnic education and creative database, and [Arts Council Bridge](#) organisations that connect the cultural sector and education sectors

- Trades unions (eg [National Society for Education in Art & Design](#))

- All-Party Parliamentary Groups eg the [All-Party Parliamentary Group for Craft](#) and the [All-Party Parliamentary Group for Art, Craft and Design in Education](#).

- International organisations such as [Design & Crafts Council Ireland](#), [American Crafts Council](#), [World Crafts Council](#), [European Union culture section](#)

Where can you find useful evidence about craft?

Or in your own work you may have –

- Audience and participation data from events you have held. This may include numbers of participants, experience of the event or information about the impact of it afterwards on participants
- Internal reports about the delivery of your activities
- Anecdotal evidence, for example from participants, which can be used to illustrate a point (as long as you describe it as anecdotal to be clear)
- Done your own research to find out more about an issue. Makers will often record data about eg material capability, firing, sales etc. Citizen Science is the idea that scientific research is conducted, in whole or in part, by amateur or nonprofessional scientists who crowdsource their contributions as part of a wider research project (see [Nesta](#) for more on this).

How do you find accurate evidence and how do you use it?

It's important to -

- Use a focused search engine when you're researching online: Google Scholar is a dedicated, free search engine that only searches scholarly literature
- Come up with a question that you want to research and break your this down so you're clear what you're asking. Limit your search to a particular time frame. It's useful to keep a record of your search terms and the ones that take you to information you've found useful. You can also get in touch with the authors who are often willing to talk about their research
- Be open to evidence gathered outside the craft sector, for example, in visual arts, the creative industries, culture, education or psychology
- Consider commissioning research evidence – however, collecting robust evidence can take time and cost a lot. It may be useful to form a steering group of interested individuals and organisations to offer advice on the approach and how to interpret findings.

What might good or bad research questions look like?

 <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Good</p>	<p>Often begins with how, why, what Can be found from facts, data and accessible research</p> <p>For example: In what ways do craft activities improve people's quality of life?</p> <p>How many craft businesses are there in Burnley?</p>	<p>Can only be answered with an opinion Has a 'yes' or 'no' answer</p> <p>For example: Do craft activities improve people's quality of life?</p> <p>How many craft businesses are there?</p>	 <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Bad</p>
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Let's look at some examples and possible sources of evidence. In each case, signing up to organisations' newsletters and searching on Google Scholar are good ways to find original research.

Be aware:

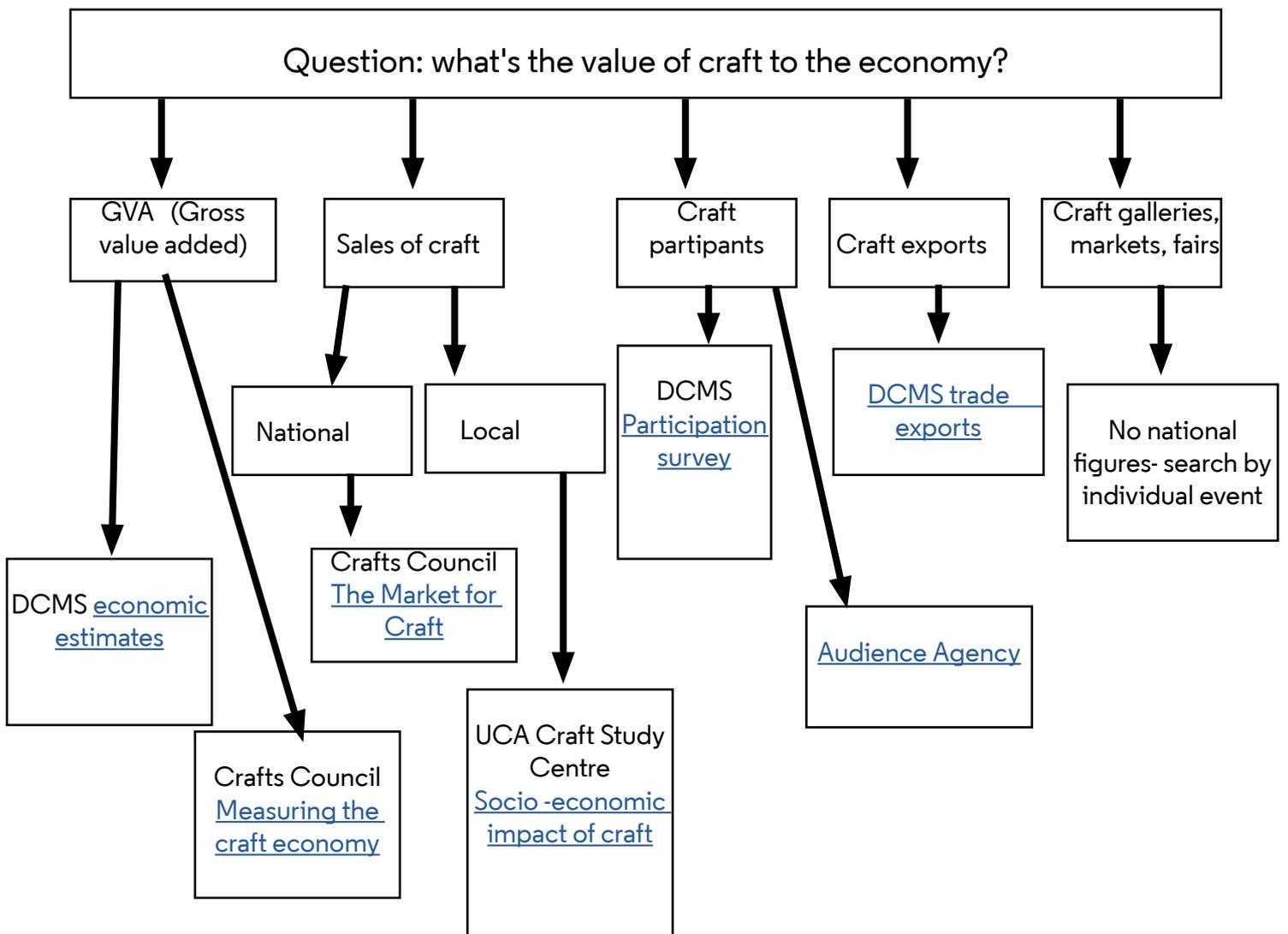
- Craft is a relatively small sector so there is a limited amount of information and not many studies out there. Sometimes we have to look wider for the benefits of creative activity or cultural participation and use this to support our arguments about craft
- Data sets that measure craft may only cover part of the picture, for example, the Crafts Council regularly makes the case to DCMS and ONS that they are only counting some of the industry and occupational codes (SOC and SOC codes) that measure craft (noting that this has improved from a low point a few years ago)
- Sometimes you have to be creative and construct the best picture you can, acknowledging its limitations!

Example 1: The Craft Economy

If you want to understand the craft economy you may be seeking, for example,

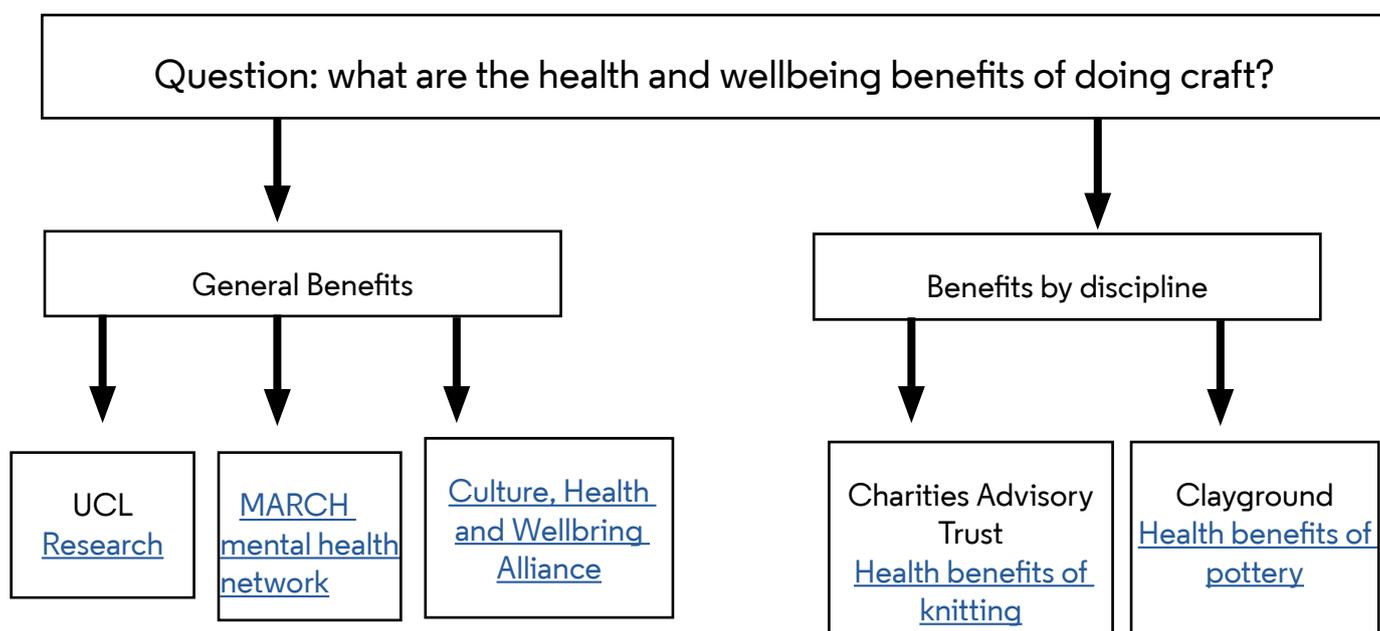
- the value of craft to the UK (or other) economy
- the number of businesses or participants in craft
- the value of craft exports or craft supply chains
- the role of craft galleries, markets, fairs and events

Data is available from different sources using different methods. In each case it's important to state your source and how they measure this aspect of the economy.



Example 2: Health and wellbeing in craft

Most of this data will be gathered through an analysis of the quality of the participant's experience and, in universities, by comparing participation in craft (or culture) with other factors affecting the participant's life, for example, happiness, loneliness, frailty etc.



Other useful resources

- [The Cultural Learning Evidence Champion's Handbook](#) from the RSA
- [Engaging with Evidence Toolkit](#) from Nesta

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