

# Methodology for identifying priority places

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September 2021



# Context

The Delivery Plan sets out a three-pronged approach to working in place:

- **a universal offer that is accessible to all parts of the country**
- **continued work in places where joint investment in culture and opportunity to work with our partners and other arm's-length bodies across heritage, sport, film, tourism and civil society are relatively high**
- **priority places in which cultural engagement and our current investment are too low, and where, as a result, opportunities for creative and cultural engagement are underdeveloped.**

This document deals with the third of these prongs – priority places. Primarily it sets out the methodology we used to identify priority places but, to provide context, begins with a brief outline of what will happen now that places have been identified.

Fifty-four places across England have been selected as priority places. They will remain our priority places for the duration of the Delivery Plan 2021-24.

We will study local strategic plans and consult with key stakeholders in each place, including communities, local authorities, and cultural organisations, to understand their aspirations and how they connect with our Delivery Plan for 2021-24.

Once we have worked with priority places to identify shared aspirations, we will support places to achieve them by increasing our investment and allocation of staff resource. There is no specific budget or fund allocated to priority places,

so this will be achieved by increasing the amount of funding going into them from existing funds. In particular, we would expect priority places to benefit from the new Place Partnership Fund. We will also seek opportunities to invest in new National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) in priority places, increase investment in existing NPOs in priority places and incentivise other NPOs to undertake more activity in priority places. So that we can understand and report on progress towards achieving shared aspirations in each priority place, we will design and implement a robust impact framework.

As well as supporting priority places, we'll continue to invest in other places across the country through our universal offer and sustain our commitment to continuing to work in places of high investment where opportunity for partnership working is high.

# Methodology – Summary

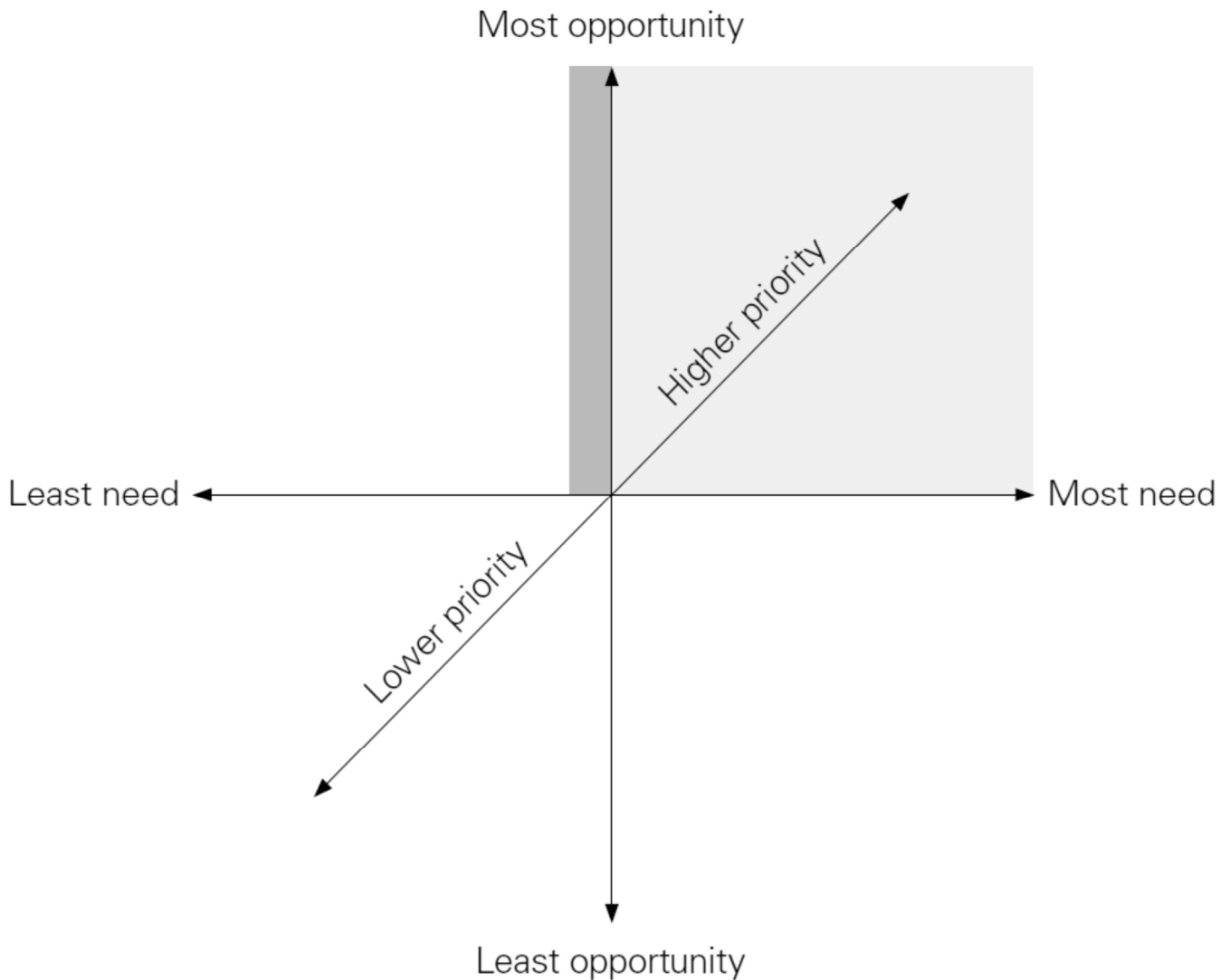
Priority places have been identified at **local authority district level** (<https://www.gov.uk/understand-how-your-council-works>), as that is the most detailed level at which Active Lives data is available. In the case of combined authorities, the methodology was applied both to the constituent local authorities and the combined authority giving a separate and independently calculated score for each.

Each of our **five Arts Council areas** (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/your-area>) identified up to 15 priority places (note 1).

The methodology for identifying priority places was implemented separately but consistently across each area. This means that priority places have been selected by comparison with other places in their area, not other places nationally.

Within each area every local authority was given a score for need and opportunity. Need was defined by engagement and investment levels, plus other data sources, and opportunity (the capacity and ambition at this moment in time to increase engagement) was defined by a scored set of prompts. These two scores were then plotted onto the graph shown below.

Places that scored highly for both need and opportunity (those in the amber and green zones of the graph) went forward to a balancing process to ensure that the final list of priority places for each area included places within each sub region, and different types of place such as urban and rural. In addition, places in which need for increased opportunities for children and young people was particularly high, and places that would help us achieve our equality objectives were also taken into account.



[Page 2 of the standard print version shows a graph split into four quarters. The left of the x axis is labelled **Least Need**. The right of the x-axis is labelled **Most Need**. The top of y-axis is labelled **Most Opportunity** and the bottom of the y-axis is labelled **Least Opportunity**.

The top left section of the graph is labelled Least Need and Most Opportunity. The top right section of the graph is labelled Most Need and Most Opportunity. The bottom left section of the graph is labelled Least Need and Least Opportunity and the bottom right section of the graph is labelled Most Need and Least Opportunity.

Some of the top left hand quarter **Least Need** and **Most Opportunity** has been shaded in amber. The amber shaded area is against the y-axis, moving left. Around an estimated 10% of this quarter is shaded.

The entire top right quarter **Most Need** and **Most Opportunity** has been shaded in green.

A diagonal line bisects the graph moving between the bottom left quarter **Least Need** and **Least Opportunity** to the top right quarter **Most Opportunity** and **Most Need**. The part of the line in the bottom left quarter **Least Need** and **Least Opportunity** is labelled Lower Priority. The part of the line in the top right quarter **Most Need** and **Most Opportunity** is labelled Higher Priority.

End of diagram description]

Note 1: You can view a breakdown of the regions, counties and major towns included in each Arts Council area here:

**[https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Map\\_area\\_boundaries.pdf](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Map_area_boundaries.pdf)**

# Methodology – Detailed Approach

Our methodology is based on assessing need and opportunity.

By **need** we mean specific types of need that we have stated we will address in our **Delivery Plan 2021-24**

(<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/lets-create/our-delivery-plan-2021-2024>).

By **opportunity** we mean factors that make it likely a place would be able to use increased investment and staff resource to effectively achieve impacts that align with the Delivery Plan. The following table shows how the measures were used to identify need and opportunity.

## Priority places – identification

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We will support different types of place including **rural and urban**.

- **Establishing need:**
- **Establishing opportunity:**
- **Balancing criteria:** Areas supplied with Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs' (Defra) scale of rurality score for each local authority

We will publish a set of named priority places in which our **current investment and cultural engagement are too low**, and where, as a result, opportunities for creative and cultural engagement are underdeveloped.

- **Establishing need:** Cultural engagement, as per '2015-17 Active Lives Survey, any arts or museum engagement, three or more times in past 12 months'.  
Average annual Arts Council England investment per capita over three years (2017/18 to 2019/20)
- **Establishing opportunity:**
- **Balancing criteria:**

We will support communities to recover from the pandemic and rebuild themselves economically, socially and in terms of their health and wellbeing.

- **Establishing need:** Red Cross Covid-19 Vulnerability Index
- **Establishing opportunity:**
- **Balancing criteria:**

We will support delivery of the government's **levelling up** agenda.

- **Establishing need:** Indices of multiple deprivation – percentage of **Local Super Output Areas** (<https://ocsi.uk/2019/03/18/Isoas-leps-and-lookups-a-beginners-guide-to-statistical-geographies/>) in each place that are within the bottom two deciles.
- **Establishing opportunity:**
- **Balancing criteria:**

We will support **places that work in partnership** with local government and local organisations, and that take into account the aspirations and requirements of local people.

- **Establishing need:**
- **Establishing opportunity:** Prompts re:
  - cultural partnerships
  - other partnerships
  - evidence of appetite for culture from local community
- **Balancing criteria:**

We aim to ensure that all **children and young people** are given more opportunities to realise their creative and cultural potential.

- **Establishing need:** Create a composite score using:
  - proportion of children and young people eligible for free school meals
  - proportion of children and young people with SEN
- **Establishing opportunity:** Prompts re:
  - **Local Cultural Education Partnerships**  
(<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/children-and-young-people/working-partnership>)
  - youth consultation
  - **Artsmark** schools (<https://www.artsmark.org.uk/>)
  - presence of groups and organisations that support the creative lives of children and young people
- **Balancing criteria:** Areas supplied with the children and young people scoring

We will work with our partners and other arm's-length bodies across heritage, sport, film, tourism and civil society to **respond to particular moments or initiatives** including **Stronger Towns** (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/stronger-towns-fund>) and UK City of Culture.

- **Establishing need:**
- **Establishing opportunity:** Prompts re:
  - engagement with arm's-length bodies and government funds
  - specific moments
- **Balancing criteria:**

We will aim to build capacity through supporting **Cultural Compacts** (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/review-cultural-compacts-initiative>), cultural partnerships and the creation of locally relevant cultural strategies in more places. In all this work we plan to link more of our investment to evidence that local communities have been engaged in helping to shape their local cultural offer

- **Establishing need:**
- **Establishing opportunity:** Prompts re:
  - involvement of local people in developing cultural strategy
  - presence of cultural compact or cultural partnership
- **Balancing criteria:**

We will ensure a more equitable distribution of our investment to improve opportunities for everyone, especially those from under-represented protected characteristic and disadvantaged socio-economic groups.

- **Establishing need:** Population data from the 2011 census on ethnicity and disability/long term health conditions. Socio-economic disadvantage incorporated via Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and free school meals data.
- **Establishing opportunity:**
- **Balancing criteria:** Areas supplied with nuanced demographic data re ethnicity and disability/long term health condition, plus socio economic data (IMD and free school meals)

We will invest in inclusive cultural organisations whose leadership, governance and workforce – and the independent creative practitioners they support – represent the diversity of contemporary England.

- **Establishing need:**
- **Establishing opportunity:** Prompt re inclusivity of local cultural organisations
- **Balancing criteria:**

We will invest in a cultural sector that is more relevant to all of England's communities, especially those that have been historically underserved by public investment in culture.

- **Establishing need:** Population data from the 2011 census on ethnicity and disability/long term health conditions. Socio-economic disadvantage incorporated via Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and free school meals data.
- **Establishing opportunity:** Prompt re relevance of local cultural organisations
- **Balancing criteria:** Areas to be supplied with nuanced demographic data re ethnicity and disability/long term health condition, plus socio economic data (IMD and free school meals)

## Establishing need

A single need score for each place was calculated by combining a series of scores related to the Delivery Plan commitments and Equality Objectives.

As a general principle, when looking for datasets to establish need, we looked for data that is:

- **relevant** – to an intention specifically set out in the Delivery Plan
- **recent** – ideally within the last four years
- **replicable** – datasets that will be updated annually or bi-annually are ideal
- **reliable** – based on sound methodology with reasonable sample sizes
- **readily available** for every local authority district in England

Where a dataset that meets all of these requirements did not exist or couldn't be accessed, we identified the best available alternative.

Further detail about the datasets used to establish need against each of the Delivery Plan and Equality Objectives commitments can be found in the technical information section of this document.

Places were categorised as low, medium or high need based on their overall need scores. High need was defined as above the mid-point of the range of need score in the area. Medium need was defined as the next 10 per cent of the range after the mid-point.

## **Establishing opportunity**

High and medium need places were then scored for opportunity. A single opportunity score for each place was created by adding together three individual scores for Ambition, Capacity, and Timing, based on a series of prompts:

### **Ambition**

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- To what extent do we know this place is ambitious about cultural development?
- Do we know if they have or if they are developing a cultural strategy? If so, is there evidence that local people, including children and young people, have been consulted and that it is inclusive?
- Is there local authority buy-in?
- Are there local politicians that are ambitious for culture?
- Is the local cultural sector keen to grow?
- Is there anything else that can demonstrate ambition in the place?

## Capacity

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- Is there any known arts development capacity?
- Are there any cultural assets or organisations to work with? If so, are they inclusive and relevant to their local community?
- Is there a local Cultural Compact, cultural partnership or Local Cultural Education Partnership?
- Are there any non-arts assets or potential partners (examples could include but are not limited to housing associations, social prescribing consortia and youth services). If so, are they inclusive and relevant to their local community?
- To what extent do other arm's-length bodies (National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic England, British Film Institute etc) see this place as a priority?
- Are there community groups, charities, grassroots organisations, and youth and voluntary sector partners that support the creative lives of local children and young people?
- Is there a high proportion of Artsmark schools?
- Is there anything else that demonstrates capacity in the place to make a difference with our funding?

## Timing

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- To what extent is there likely to be the opportunity for collaborative cultural development in this place over the next three years?
- Is there a danger of momentum being lost if there is not additional investment in this place over the next three years?
- Is there a moment like City or Borough of Culture, or connected investment such as Stronger Towns Fund that makes this a critical moment for investment (within the next three years)?
- Is there anything else that makes this an important moment for investment?

## Balancing

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Balancing is a process that considers the portfolio of priority places within an area as a whole. Simply selecting the highest scoring places, rather than going through balancing, could have unintended results such as only supporting one type of place (for example rural or urban), or failing to support our Equality Objectives.

Through the balancing process, each area considered a portfolio of priority places using the following criteria:

- geographical spread
- type of place
- potential impact on children and young people
- our Equality Objectives

Medium need places could only be selected as a priority place if their selection was critical to address one or more of the balancing criteria.

## Governance

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The methodology for identifying priority places was approved by Area Councils in April 2021. Final lists of priority places for each area were endorsed by Area Councils in June 2021.

# Methodology – Technical Information

## Need scoring

In order to identify the most robust datasets to use for each measure, we consulted with our data and research teams, our Chief Data Officer, and the originators of a number of datasets.

Technical details related to each dataset are set out at the end of this section, including any adjustments made to account for boundary changes since the dataset was created.

The datasets are based on a range of units of measurement including pounds, percentages, and ordinal scales. They had to be standardised in order for each dataset to have an equal impact on the total need score. This was achieved by calculating the standard deviation of each data point from the mean in the relevant Arts Council area. For this reason, the same number in the raw data could translate into a different need score in different areas. Combined authorities were not included within the mean calculation. Extreme outliers were removed from the average annual Arts Council England investment per capita before calculating the mean.

Having standardised each dataset to create Z scores, an assessment was made of whether each dataset should have equal weighting. The Delivery Plan states that priority places are places in which cultural engagement and our investment are low. In order to ensure this, the average annual Arts Council investment per capita and Active Lives data were given a weighting of 1.5. The two datasets regarding children and young people were combined to give a composite score which was given a weighting of 1. Datasets related to ethnicity and disability were layered in separately and each given a weighting of 1.

Overall need scores were then calculated by adding together each of the component scores at their allocated weighting.

In most cases the component need scores for combined authorities were calculated in exactly the same way as scores for local authorities and did not therefore rely on averages (the exceptions being Active Lives and Red Cross Vulnerability Index). This has the effect of flattening some of the extremes in individual local authorities and, as a result, the overall scores for some combined authorities are higher/lower than any of their constituent parts.

Places were categorised as low, medium or high need based on their overall need scores. High need was defined as above the mid-point of the range of need scores in the area. Medium need is defined as the next 10 per cent of the range after the mid-point.

## **Opportunity scoring**

Each place that scored medium or high for need was then given a score for opportunity. Scores were arrived at by area teams giving each place a score between 1 and 5 against each of the three criteria: ambition, capacity and timing. Each criterion was weighted according to its relative importance for successful cultural development: ambition 1.25, capacity 1, and timing 1.5.

Each score was multiplied by its weighting and the three resulting numbers were added together and rounded to the nearest whole number to give a total opportunity score. Once this method was applied, the lowest possible score was 4 and the maximum possible score was 19. Places were then categorised as high opportunity or low opportunity based on their overall opportunity score. The line between high and low opportunity was set at half-way between the lowest possible score and the highest possible score (11.5) rounded down to the nearest whole number (11).

## Combining need and opportunity scores

Need and opportunity scores were not designed to be added together. Instead, each place was plotted onto a graph with both a need axis and an opportunity axis. This means that there was no linear ranking of places once both scores were applied.

## Datasets – technical details and links

**Factor:** places in which our current investment is too low

**Dataset:** average annual Arts Council investment per capita (AAIPC) for the years 2017/18 to 2019/20.

**Weighting:** 1.5

Unless stated otherwise, awards are allocated to places based on the postcode of the applicant, within the financial year the funding decision was made. Projects are not necessarily wholly completed within this local authority, and project expenditure may have taken place during subsequent years. The exceptions to this are:

- Creative People and Places investment which has been allocated according to area of benefit (local authority district).
- Music Education Hubs investment which has been allocated by applying to local authority districts the same formula that the Department for Education use to allocate funding to upper tier local authorities. This may not be exactly how Music Education Hubs spend their funding, but it serves as an indicator for this exercise.
- Awards over £500,000 that have been made to consortia and are not focused on a single local authority have been split between the consortium partners.
- Capital awards over £100,000, Bridge organisations and Sector Support Organisations are excluded.

To calculate AAIPC, all eligible investment for each financial year is divided by the relevant mid-year population estimate to achieve the investment per capita for that year. The average of 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20 investment per capita is then taken to get the three year average. We are using the AAIPC as we will want to compare future years investment to the data used within this process, and will likely wish to do so on a year-by-year basis, before we have a full three years of data. We would not be able to compare data for one financial year to that which is spanning three years.

The national average was calculated excluding extreme outliers at the top end. In order to comply with our commitment to prioritise places in which our investment is too low, further steps were taken in places where the investment was above the national average. Places with AAIPC above the national average had their AAIPC score changed to 4.2. Places with AAIPC more than 10 per cent above the national average had their AAIPC score changed to 8.4. These figures derive from the range of Z scores for AAIPC and are intended to give further weight to their AAIPC score.

**Factor:** places in which engagement is too low

**Dataset:** 2015-17 Active Lives Survey, any arts or museum engagement, three or more times in past 12 months

**<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/participating-and-attending/active-lives-survey#section-2>**

**Weighting:** 1.5

The scores for combined authorities and local authority districts that have merged since the data was collected (Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole; Buckinghamshire; Dorset; East Suffolk; North Northamptonshire; Somerset West and Taunton; West Northamptonshire; and West Suffolk) are averages of their constituent parts, so should be treated as an estimate. Testing

was carried out using both the highest and lowest Active Lives scores within these places to identify if any place would be disadvantaged by the use of averages in the need scoring process.

**Factor:** supporting delivery of the government's levelling up agenda

**Dataset:** English Indices of Deprivation 2019 by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

**<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>**

**Weighting:** 1

The specific measure used from this dataset was the percentage of each local authority's local super output areas that were in the lowest two deciles of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Using the IMD data in this way also limits the degree to which places with significant pockets of high need are masked by local authority wide data.

**Factor:** supporting communities to recover from the pandemic and rebuild themselves economically, socially and in terms of their health and wellbeing

**Dataset:** Red Cross Vulnerability Index by Local Authority District by British Red Cross Society

**<https://britishredcrosssociety.github.io/covid-19-vulnerability/>**

**Weighting:** 1

While there are many datasets related to the impact of Covid-19 on places, the situation and its impact were fast-changing and prone to fluctuations at the point at which priority places were being selected. To address this challenge, we used data collated by the British Red Cross to give an indication of the vulnerability of places to the wide range of impacts of Covid-19.

The British Red Cross Covid-19 Vulnerability Index brings together a wealth of datasets relating to clinical vulnerability, other health/wellbeing needs, economic/financial vulnerability, and social vulnerability.

The dataset includes local authority districts as they were named in 2019. The scores for combined authorities, Buckinghamshire, North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire are averages of their constituent parts, so should be treated as an estimate.

**Factor:** children and young people are given more opportunities to realise their creative and cultural potential  
**Dataset:** the school census for academic year 2019/20, created by the Department for Education <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>  
**Weighting:** 1

A composite score based on:

- proportion of children and young people in the local authority district eligible for free school meals
- proportion of children and young people in the local authority district with special educational needs.

Pupils are recorded by school before being grouped by local authority district. A proportion of pupils may live in a different local authority district to the establishment that they attend. These figures show the proportion of pupils, within these groups, attending educational establishments within a given local authority. A small number of schools will not be represented in our figures, as their local authority district was not identified within the original dataset.

**Factor:** we will ensure a more equitable distribution of our investment to improve opportunities for everyone, particularly those from under-represented protected characteristic and disadvantaged socio-economic groups, and we will invest in a cultural sector that is more relevant to all of England's communities, especially those that have been historically underserved by public investment in culture

2011 Census data on Ethnicity and Long-term health problem or disability, from Nomis on 17 March 2021

<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>

Proportion of population – life impacted by disability or long-term health condition

**Weighting:** 1

Proportion of population – ethnic minority

**Weighting:** 1

Audience Agency data shows that, nationally, audiences from Black, Asian, and ethnically diverse backgrounds, and disabled audiences are being underserved by public investment in culture.

We explored a wide range of datasets related to race and disability but ultimately most were not sufficiently robust at local authority district level. Upon consultation with the Office for National Statistics, the only dataset with a large enough sample size to be considered robust enough for this process was population data from the 2011 census related to race and disability.

Population data was not broken down into specific ethnicities at this stage because the nature of the tool is that it adds any separate factors together to create one combined need score.

At the balancing stage a more nuanced breakdown was provided.

Audience Agency data included within our **diversity report** (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/equality-diversity-and-creative-case-data-report-2019-20>) also indicates that audiences from more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are significantly underserved by public investment in culture. As data related to socio-economic deprivation has already been included within the scoring (Indices of Multiple Deprivation and free school meals) no further datasets were added at this point to avoid double counting.

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