

Visual Artist and Craft Maker Awards Evaluation 2023

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Prepared for Creative Scotland by
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Summary

Background

The Visual Artist and Craft Maker Awards (VACMA) are a programme of small grants schemes delivered in partnership with local authorities and art agencies across Scotland. VACMA is designed to support Scotland-based visual artists and craft makers in their creative development. Creative Scotland provides funding and supports the overall coordination of the VACMA programme. Local partners provide co-funding and are responsible for administering the scheme in their area. Funding decisions are made by local panels which typically include artists, makers and other creative practitioners based in the area.

VACMA was originated by the Scottish Arts Council and has been overseen by Creative Scotland since it was established in 2010. An evaluation of VACMA was published in 2018.

Evaluation Brief

To provide Creative Scotland and VACMA partners with a clear understanding of how VACMA has evolved over the last 5 years and the benefits (or otherwise) of the programme to artists, makers and partners.

Changes to VACMA

In recent years there have been the following changes to VACMA:

- changing from allocating grants of £500-£1500 to the introduction of fixed bursaries of £500 (early-career) and £750. This was introduced during COVID-19 and reflected the restrictions on artists and makers in terms of access to residencies, facilities and courses at that time
- stronger collective marketing and shared deadlines
- refinements to guidelines and application form
- increase in number of partners participating
- shift to online panels during the COVID-19 pandemic
- stronger emphasis on Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and environmental sustainability as part of the application process.

Evaluation methodology

Data analysis included Creative Scotland budget data, VACMA application/award data and information collected about applicants as part of the application process.

An online survey was conducted with artists/makers. This was designed with Creative Scotland and promoted via Creative Scotland channels and by VACMA partners. The survey was live between January-March 2023. 367 people started the survey with 319 completed responses. The survey was promoted as being appropriate for anyone who had applied for (or considered applying for) VACMA.

86% of responses were from VACMA applicants. 52% of responses were from VACMA recipients and 30% from unsuccessful applicants. The largest number of responses were from people who had applied to Edinburgh (25%) with 18% having applied to Glasgow, 12% East Lothian and 10% South of Scotland. There were responses from all partner areas (base VACMA applicants 308).

Consultation was held with VACMA partners with all current VACMA schemes covered (excluding West Dunbartonshire which had not yet held its first round of applications). 20 interviews were held in total. The interview guide was developed with Creative Scotland.

Benefit to artist/makers

The vast majority of VACMA recipients identified the positive benefits to their practice from their award:

- 97% said VACMA was beneficial to their practice overall with 73% saying it was very beneficial
- 95% agreed that receiving a VACMA award made them feel more confident about their practice.
- 93% agreed that receiving a VACMA award enabled them to do something that they would otherwise not have done with their practice.
- 70% made new contacts as a result of VACMA with 49% making new contacts in the local area and 40% outwith this area.

The primary focus for applicants was on the development of new work (52% main focus), followed by skills development (36%). Visual artists were more likely to apply for the development of new work (59%) and makers for skills development (55%). In addition to the direct benefit of the VACMA, 86% of VACMA recipients identified other opportunities unlocked with the highest being exhibition opportunities (47%). In the open comments it is clear that in addition to the direct benefits, VACMA creates a snowball effect generating compound benefits through skills, sales, partnership, opportunities and confidence. VACMA overcomes the financial and time barriers which can prevent artists/makers from developing their practice.

Benefit to VACMA partners

The benefits to partners were operational, developmental and strategic.

On an operational basis the VACMA process allowed partners to have a better understanding of the artists and makers working in their area. On a more developmental level some partners used this initial contact as an opportunity to nurture the relationship with artists/makers.

Strategically VACMA allows partner local authorities to demonstrate that the arts are supported in their local area with this being confirmed by 77% of artists/makers agreeing that the VACMA programme makes them feel that visual arts/crafts are valued in their local area.

The partnership with Creative Scotland was very positively described. Operationally Creative Scotland were consistently described as being supportive and helpful. The national partnership provided an endorsement which is strategically and reputationally important.

Some partners valued the peer group network in improving practice and allowing them to build contacts and feel connected.

There was a sense that the recent developments in VACMA had been positive and that change had been achieved through collaboration with partners. This meant that there were no major changes required by the majority of partners with a number identifying no adaptations at all.

Trends in VACMA

Trends in partnerships and finance

The number of VACMA partnerships has risen from 12 in 17/18 to 17 in 21/22. The set up of VACMA is not the same across Scotland. Some operate on a partnership covering more than one local authority area. Different types of organisations (local authority, ALEO and independent organisations) are involved in the delivery of VACMA. There are six local authority areas where it is not possible to apply for VACMA.

Creative Scotland has increased its funding for VACMA from £111k to £130k (+17%) between 17/18 and 21/22. There is no direct link between the number of applications by area and Creative Scotland's budget allocation.

The level of contribution made by partners is not fixed or consistent over time. Over the period the level of partnership funding reduced from 40% to 35% of the VACMA budget. Two areas have stopped making a contribution. Within the context of pressure on public funding generally, partners report that their VACMA budget is not under specific pressure. This reflects the fact that VACMA is valued, strategically important and a model of collaboration and income generation.

Trends in applications and awards

The number of applications grew from 426 in 17/18 to 649 in 21/22. Within this there was a dip in 19/20 and a significant rise in 20/21. The highest number of applications in 21/22 were for Glasgow (208), Edinburgh (93) and Highland (which incorporates Moray and CnES) (64). The lowest number of applications were for Forth Valley (8) and North Lanarkshire (8). Growth has not been consistent across all areas.

Despite the number of applications growing, the amount of funding requested has reduced. The average value of each award has reduced from over £800 in 17/18 to £650 in 21/22. This reflects the change to the bursary model where the awards are both capped at a lower level than the previous maximum and early career artists are directed to the lower value option.

The success rate for applications in 21/22 was 42% which is higher than in 18/19 (35%). In 21/22 there was significant variation in the success rate for applications from 89% in Renfrewshire to 17% in Glasgow.

The number of awards increased from 148 in 17/18 to 274 in 21/22. There was a big jump in 20/21 when the model changed to a bursary. The highest number of awards were made in 21/22 in Edinburgh (48) followed by Glasgow (36). Generally, there is a consistency between the proportion of applications received and the proportion of awards. The significant exception is Glasgow which receives 32% of applications but represents 13% of awards.

Over the whole trend period 72% of applications were from visual artists and 28% from craft makers. Applications by visual artists are always the majority of applications. There was significant variation across Scotland in the proportions of applications from craft makers with this highest (in 2021/22) for Angus (62%) and lowest for Aberdeenshire (9%).

A bursary model has been applied since 2020/21 and is welcomed by partners. Applications from Early Career artists have been 40% in both years. Over half of applications in 2021/22 were from Early Career artists in Aberdeen (69%), Dundee (56%), Angus (54%) and Glasgow (51%). 46% of

early career VACMA recipients were aged under 30. 88% of applicants for an Early Career award (base 66) said that having an Early Career option encouraged them to apply.

Partners thought the introduction of the Early Career bursary was a positive development within VACMA. The recognition in the award of VACMA was felt to be particularly important for Early Career artists. The Early Career scheme allowed new artists to be targeted which was strategically significant for some partners. Partners thought the level of the Early Career bursary (at £500) was good and appropriate. There were mixed views on whether the £750 level was appropriate. More partners felt it was lower than appropriate.

13% of artists/makers had received Creative Scotland Open Funding. This is higher for recipients of VACMA (18%). Visual artists were more likely to have applied for Open Funding successfully or unsuccessfully than makers (25% compared to 11%). 19% had applied for other Creative Scotland funding including COVID-19 funding.

Responses to changes in VACMA

People find out about VACMA through Creative Scotland the most (46%), followed by the local authority partners (25%) and informal networks (25%). More early career applicants heard from their own networks (38%) with partners identifying that education institutions and networks were important for wide promotion. There is positivity about the Creative Scotland resources which are considered to be clear, helpful and make promotion easier.

Information sessions are considered to produce better and more successful applications, but some partners lack the capacity to deliver these. 72% of artists/makers agreed that the pre-application support and advice was helpful to them. There was stronger agreement by people receiving an award at £750 than £500. There is interest from partners in Creative Scotland leading generic promotional workshop sessions with partners being able to supplement these with more specific advice slots.

65% of applicants agreed that it was helpful to them that deadlines are coordinated across the VACMA programme. Partners were positive about the coordinated deadlines which affirmed VACMA as a national scheme. Some partners had issues with the specific dates of October and February. Not all partners had delivered two rounds each year with organisational capacity being a significant factor.

67% of artists/makers agreed that the application process (including decision making process) was clear to them. 72% agreed that the application form was straightforward. Unsuccessful applicants were more likely to disagree that the process was clear and the application straightforward. Craft makers were more positive about the process and application form than visual artists. A small number of artists/makers asked for greater clarity in what could be funded and some provided feedback that the application was long in relation to the level of funding.

Partners mostly thought the application was appropriate and that the guidelines were good. Some partners felt that there could be greater clarity about the core purpose of VACMA. There was an understanding by some partners that the application could be challenging for some artists/makers. There were specific challenges around images from both the partner and applicant perspective.

58% of applicants agreed that the post-application feedback was useful to them. 30% of people who had not yet been awarded VACMA identified the question about feedback as not being relevant (indicating they had not received feedback) and this group was also less likely to rate the feedback as being useful compared to successful applicants.

72% of applicants agree that they understood what was required from the EDI and environmental sustainability questions with the biggest improvements for applicants being more examples. Partners found the response to the questions was variable and often poor. It was felt that some applicants lacked the language and tools to respond and this was a place where examples and training could be beneficial. Most (but not all) partners were in favour of keeping the questions because of their strategic benefit. Some partners identified lacking the training to respond to EDI disclosures and the emotional labour involved in this aspect of the selection process. Connected to this, partners were unclear on the implications for the overall application of a poor response to these questions.

75% of VACMA recipients agreed that the end of project monitoring report was straightforward to complete. While valuing the information provided by recipients, the majority of partners were not actively using the data and queried the purpose of some of the information collected. There was felt to be an opportunity to showcase VACMA recipients more however capacity was the biggest barrier.

Collating the application and award data identified gaps in information; there is a need to identify required management information and rationalise data collection.

The changes suggested by some partners included: increasing the level of the artist bursary from £750, making the core purpose of the fund clearer and amplifying the brand with more showcasing.

Issues identified by some partners related to the consistency/lack of consistency across Scotland. While partnership contribution was measured by financial input, some partners highlighted the level of time input from their organisations and the importance of factoring this into the assessment of partnership contribution.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

VACMA is beneficial for recipients, generating new work and skills; allowing development that would not otherwise have happened and building confidence. It supports wider compounded benefits in artists/makers' practice and careers.

Partners benefit from their involvement, building on the ground knowledge with VACMA (for some) being the starting point for relationship development. VACMA is valued by partners which makes partnership funding relatively secure (within the current context).

The collaborative and consultative approach of Creative Scotland is welcomed and has been beneficial in creating change which is supported.

Demand has grown especially since the change to a bursary model. The Early Carer bursary encourages applications and has a younger age profile.

There is general satisfaction with the VACMA application process. Application advice and feedback is considered to be impactful where available.

VACMA is not consistently set up across Scotland in terms of partnership structure or contribution. There is no direct association between budget allocation and level of demand. There are areas with no VACMA scheme in place.

Demand is not consistent across Scotland which generates inconsistent success rates. Success rates also relate to both Creative Scotland and partnership contributions.

There has been a reduction in the average value of VACMA awards since the introduction of the bursary despite an increase in the cost of living. Related to the level of the bursary, there are additional challenges for artists/makers who need to travel to access provision.

There are some issues with images (from both the partner and applicant perspective) which impact the quality of applications. Partners have capacity issues which increase their appreciation of centralised resources with interest in more, such as information sessions and showcases.

For EDI and environmental sustainability there is a gap between applicants (who identify that they understand what is required) and partners (who report questions often poorly answered). There is not a consistency in how the answers to these questions are used in the assessment process with some partners identifying a lack of training to respond to EDI disclosures.

Recommendations

Some changes to VACMA emerged as a consequence of Covid. The evaluation has identified that these changes, such as the bursary model, have been positive and are supported going forward. As we emerge from the pandemic there would be a value in revisiting and refreshing the core purpose of VACMA including:

- Reviewing the objectives of VACMA including the strategic question of whether VACMA should be consistent across all partnership areas or whether the strategic imperative to have national coverage outweighs this
- Re-establishing the principles of partnership working, including the level of financial contribution required
- Re-establishing the principles of Creative Scotland budget allocation across partnerships in line with demand and core objectives
- Reviewing what data is required, the process of collation and using data effectively to monitor and manage the programme.

The collaborative model of partnership working should be continued with the most pressing question being the value of the £750 award. Other opportunities to explore would be shared information sessions and showcases to minimise the requirements for individual partners and amplify the VACMA brand.

Training for partners in EDI and environmental sustainability should be explored to increase consistency in the assessment of applications and support partners in the selection process. Training for artists/makers in this area would also be beneficial.

Visual Artists & Craft Maker Awards Evaluation Report

This report integrates:

- Budget and application data provided by Creative Scotland
- Survey data from artists and makers
- Consultation with partners

VACMA partnerships

In 2022/23, artists/makers from 26 local authority areas were able to apply for VACMA. To apply to an area applicants must live, work or hold a studio in that area. Six local authority areas (East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, Midlothian, South Lanarkshire, West Lothian) do not participate in VACMA.

Some VACMA schemes are operated on a partnership basis – Ayrshire (includes East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire, South Ayrshire), Forth Valley (Stirling and Falkirk), South of Scotland (Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway). There are also programmes where artists/makers from some geographical areas are able to apply via a neighbouring area: Moray and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (via Highland), Perth and Kinross (via Fife) and Clackmannanshire (via Forth Valley) without that area making a financial or administrative contribution.

The operation of VACMA is delivered by a range of different organisations including directly by local authorities, by ALEOs and by independent organisations including Fife Contemporary, Shetland Arts, CHARTS, Uplands and DG Unlimited.

There were 12 participating programmes in 17/18 which had risen to 17 in 21/22. This reflected that since 17/18 8 partners have joined the scheme and 2 have left/merged with other areas (1 partner both joined and left). West Dunbartonshire joined VACMA in 2022/23 and is not represented in this data. COVID-19 impacted VACMA in 19/20 and 20/21 with North Lanarkshire for example not operating VACMA in 20/21.

Number of Rounds	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
Aberdeenshire	2	2	2	1	1
Aberdeen	2	2	2	2	1
Angus			1	2	2
Argyll and Bute			1	1	1
Ayrshire (East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire, South Ayrshire)			2	2	2
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	1	1			
Dundee	2	2	2	2	2
East Lothian	1	2	1	2	2
Edinburgh	2	2	2	2	2
Fife (includes Perth and Kinross from 20/21)	2	2	2	1	2

Number of Rounds	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
Forth Valley (Falkirk, Stirling, Clackmananshire)		1	1	1	1
Glasgow	2	2	1	1	2
Highlands (includes CNeS from 19/20 and Moray)	2	2	2	2	2
North Lanarkshire			1		1
Orkney	1	1	2	1	2
Perth and Kinross		2	2		
Renfrewshire			3	2	2
Shetland		3	2	3	2
South Ayrshire	2	2			
South of Scotland (Dumfries and Galloway, Scottish Borders)	2	3	2	1	2
Number of participating scheme	12	15	18	16	17
Number of rounds	21	29	31	26	29

VACMA budgets

VACMA exists as a partnership between Creative Scotland and the organisations that deliver the local programmes who each provide a financial contribution. There is not a consistency in the level of partnership funding provided by each partner with greater flexibility from Creative Scotland during the Covid period. Since 20/21 Creative Scotland has provided 100% of the budget for Aberdeenshire (£4k per year) and Fife and Perth (£8-10k per year).

In addition to the VACMA awards the budget covers (in some cases):

- Panel fees
- Advertising fees
- Workshop fees
- Mentoring costs (prior to 20/21)

Where the budget is not fully spent in one year, this unallocated budget can be recouped by Creative Scotland but is more commonly carried forward which leads to readjustments of the overall budget allocations for the following year.

Partner consultation

The majority of partners identified that there was no specific pressure on the VACMA budget in their area. This was in the context of general pressures on local authority budgets so did not indicate a guarantee of future funding, or that the funding would not be reduced under local authority wide funding reductions (e.g. 5% cuts). Generally, however the position was that the VACMA budget had not specifically been identified as an issue. The reasons for this were:

- VACMA being a flagship programme which was strategically well supported and valued. It was a good news story for the partners. The commitment to the programme was highlighted.

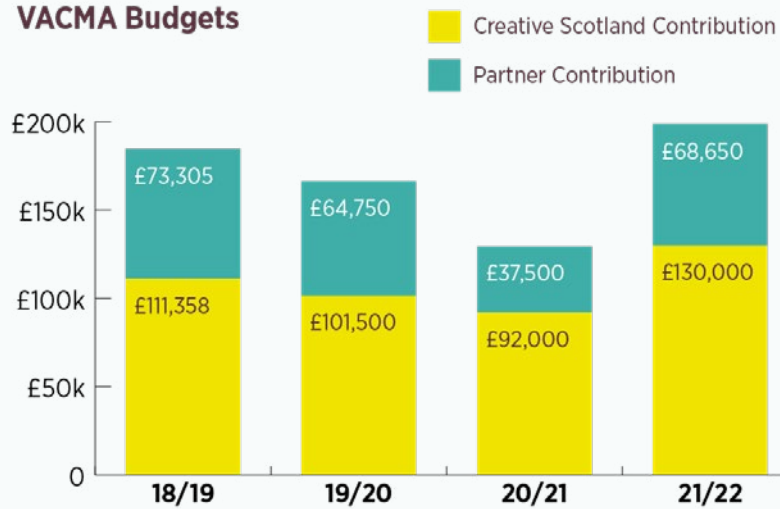
- As a partnership with Creative Scotland, VACMA is a model of collaboration and a source of income generation to the local authority which makes it easier to argue the case in terms of benefit and impact.

Those partners where the VACMA partnership contribution had been withdrawn or was under pressure expressed concern about what this meant for their future participation. The level of administration support and time input that partners deliver was identified as a significant in-kind contribution.

The overall level of funding from Creative Scotland for VACMA was 17% higher in 2021/22 than 18/19. Rising from £111k to £130k.

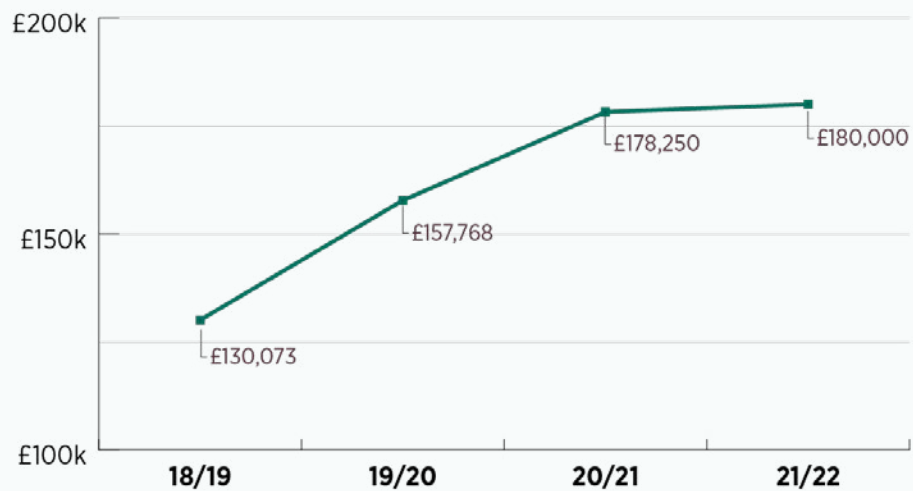
The level of partner contribution (including external funding such as HIE) took a considerable dip in 20/21. The overall trend period was down -6% (from £73k to £69k).

VACMA Budgets



The value of awards overall rose from £130k in 18/19 to £180k in 21/22 (38%). While there was consistent growth for the first three years this has flatlined in the last year.

Value of VACMA Awards Made



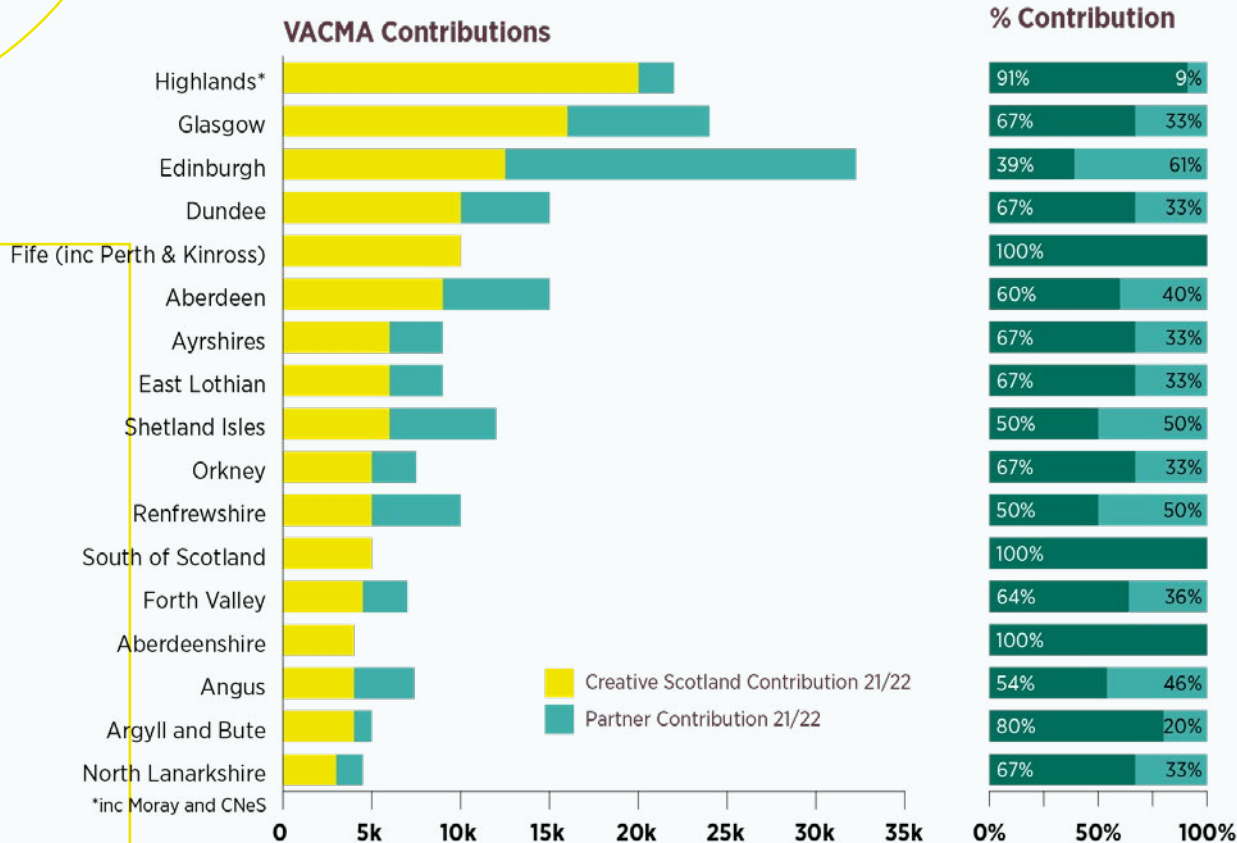
Over the period, 9 partners provided a lower contribution in 21/22 than 18/19 with only one providing more. In some cases, where funds were not fully allocated in one financial year, the contribution from the partner was rolled forward to the next year.

- Aberdeenshire and Fife have not made a financial contribution to VACMA since 18/19.
- Edinburgh made a significant increase in its match funding in 19/20.

Out of 17 partner areas (in 21/22):

- 2 made no contribution with 1 (South of Scotland) carrying forward the contribution from 20/21
- 2 made a contribution of 20% or less
- 7 contributed 30-36%
- 5 contributed 40%+ including Edinburgh at 61%

The allocation of Creative Scotland funding to each partner has not been consistent throughout the trend period. The budget has been adapted to take account of the funding request from partners and to accommodate carry forward. There were several instances of multi-year funding awards to partners. Highland, Glasgow and Edinburgh have typically had the highest allocations of Creative Scotland funds.

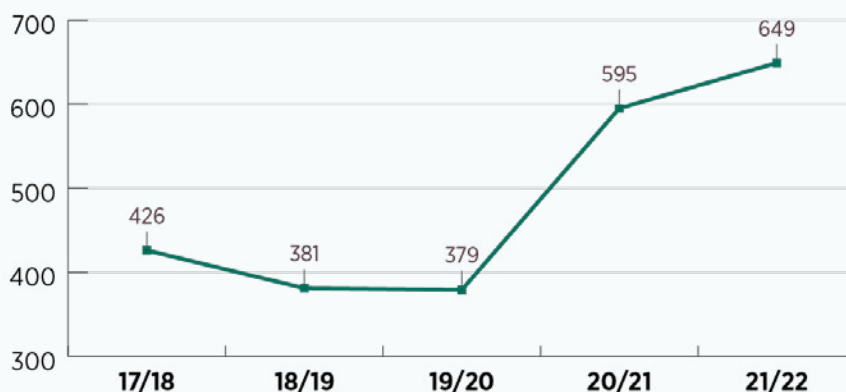


Applications

The number of applications grew by over 50% from 426 in 17/18 to 649 in 21/22. Within this there was a dip to 379 in 19/20 and a significant rise in 20/21 (to 595),

The bursary model was introduced in 20/21 as a result of Covid and the change in the number of applications may reflect both/either of the change to bursary or the increased demand for funding as a result of the Covid pandemic.

Total Number of Applications

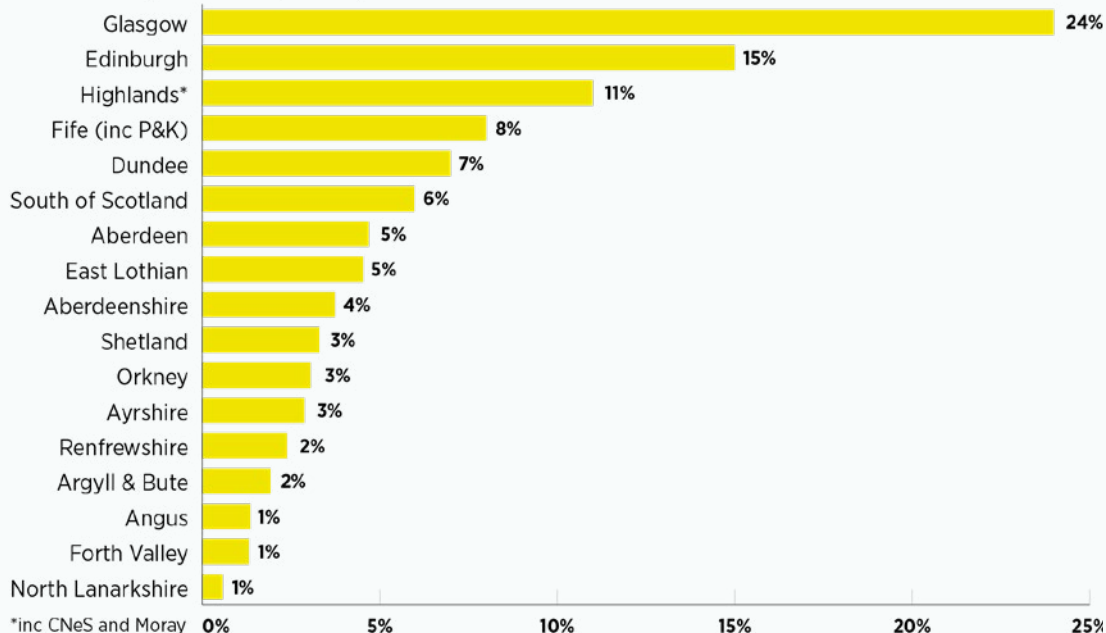


The highest number of applications in 21/22 were for Glasgow (208), Edinburgh (93) and Highland (which incorporates Moray and CnES) (64). The lowest number of applications were for Forth Valley (8) and North Lanarkshire (8).

The general growth in applications is not consistent in all partner areas, 3 areas have fewer applications in 21/22 than in 17/18: Aberdeen (from 26 to 16), Aberdeenshire (from 32 to 11) and Dundee (from 44 to 32). At the same time there has been considerable growth in 2 areas: East Lothian (17 to 41) and Glasgow (from 99 to 208). The numbers in Edinburgh have also grown from 60 in 17/18 to a peak of 109 in 20/21.

Over the period 17/18 to 21/22 a quarter of all applications were to the Glasgow VACMA and 15% to Edinburgh.

% Applications 17/18 to 21/22



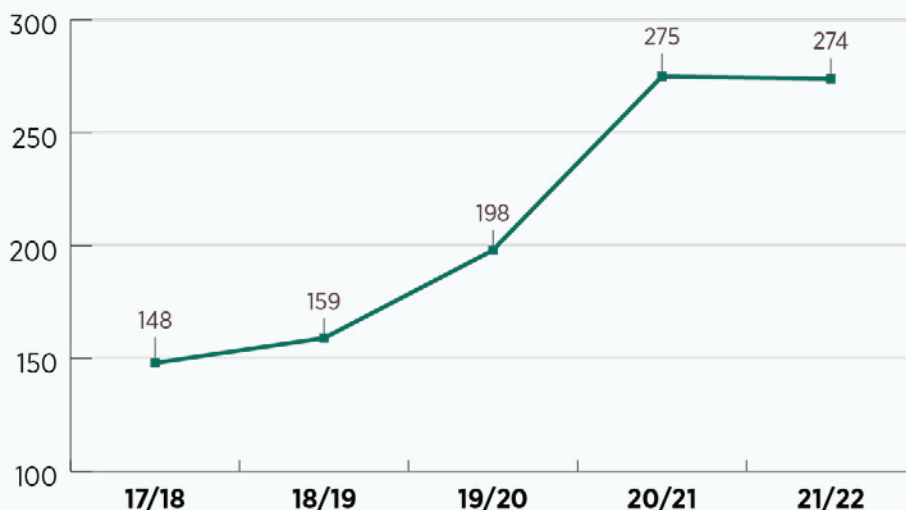
Partner consultation

There was a mixed perspective in the consultation with partners about the levels of demand for their specific VACMA programme. A small number found that demand was low and they had 'struggled to get the money out of the door'. More partners reported healthy and/or growing demand. For some this created problems with selection and potentially with equity across the country.

It was suggested Covid funding was perceived to have satisfied need at the time. Some noted an increase in demand since Covid potentially linked to artists/makers engaging with public funding for the first time during this period. It was also highlighted that there was greater demand where there were engaged Higher Education establishments.

The number of awards grew by 85% from 17/18 to 21/22 from 148 to 274. This is higher than the rate of growth of applications (52%). There was continuous growth in awards from 17/18 to 20/21 with the biggest jump in 20/21 when the model changed to a bursary. There has been virtually no change in the last year.

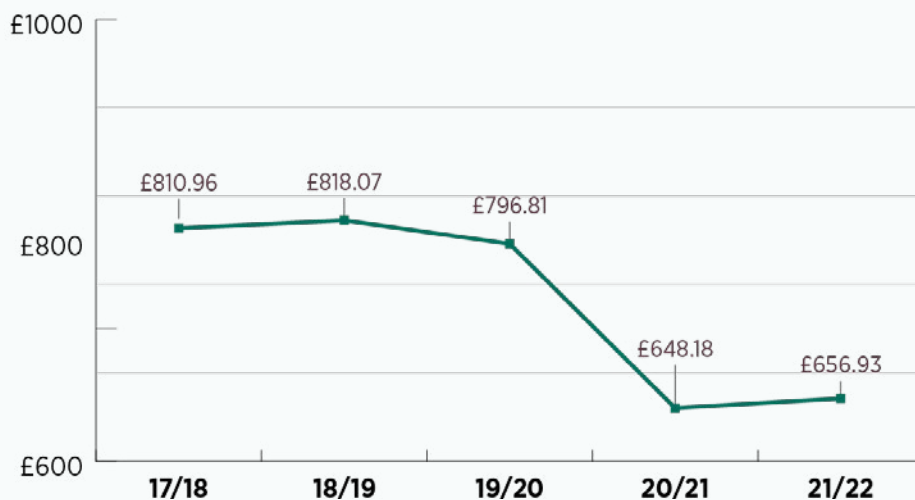
Number of Awards Made



Despite the number of applications growing, the amount of funding requested has reduced by 12% from £477k (17/18) to £419k (21/22).

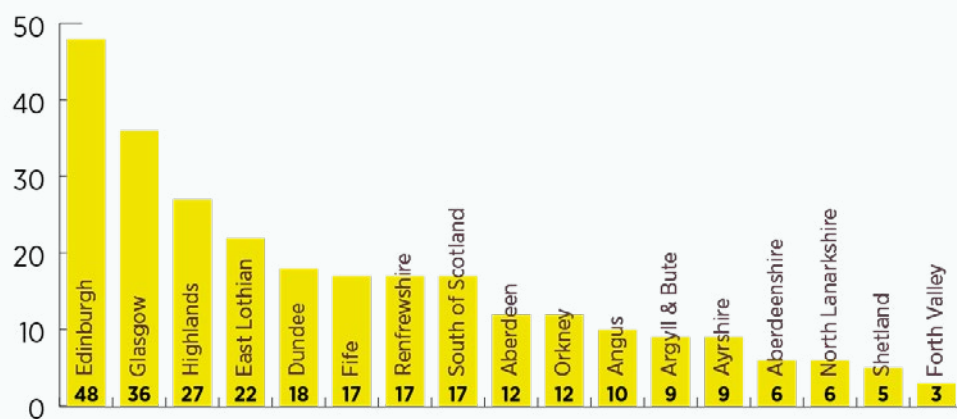
The average value of each award has reduced from over £800 in 17/18 to £650 in 21/22. This reflects the change to the bursary where the awards are both capped at a lower level than the previous maximum as well as early career artists being directed to the lower value option.

Average Value of VACMA Awards



The highest number of awards were made in 21/22 in Edinburgh (48) followed by Glasgow (36). Six areas made fewer than 10 awards in 21/22.

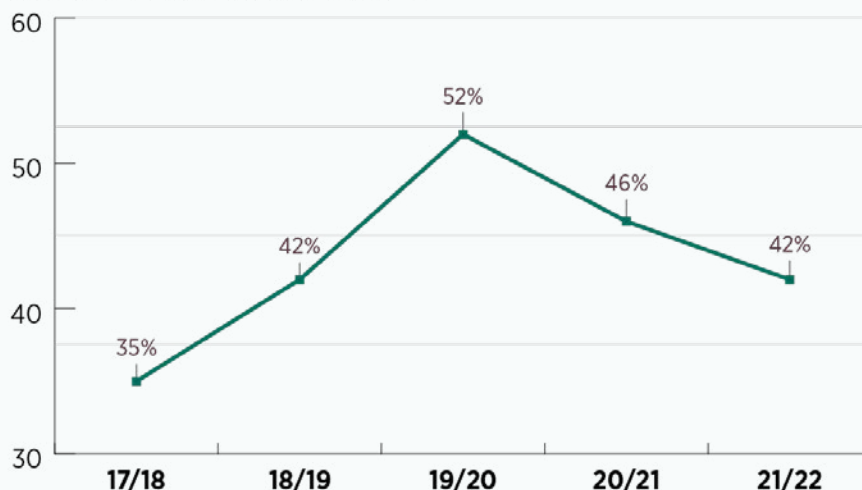
Number of Awards 21/22



Application success rate

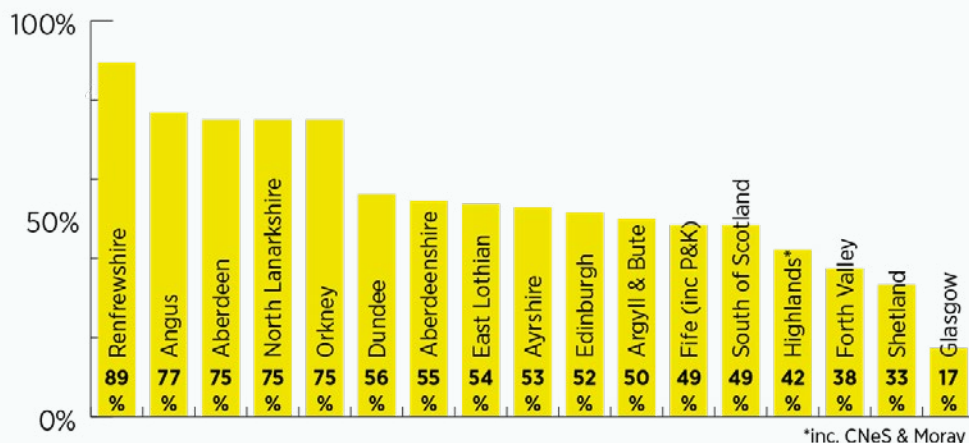
The success rate for applications in 21/22 was 42% which is higher than in 18/19 (35%).

% Success Rate for Applicants



In 21/22 there was significant variation in the success rate for applications from 89% in Renfrewshire to 17% in Glasgow.

Success rate 2021/22



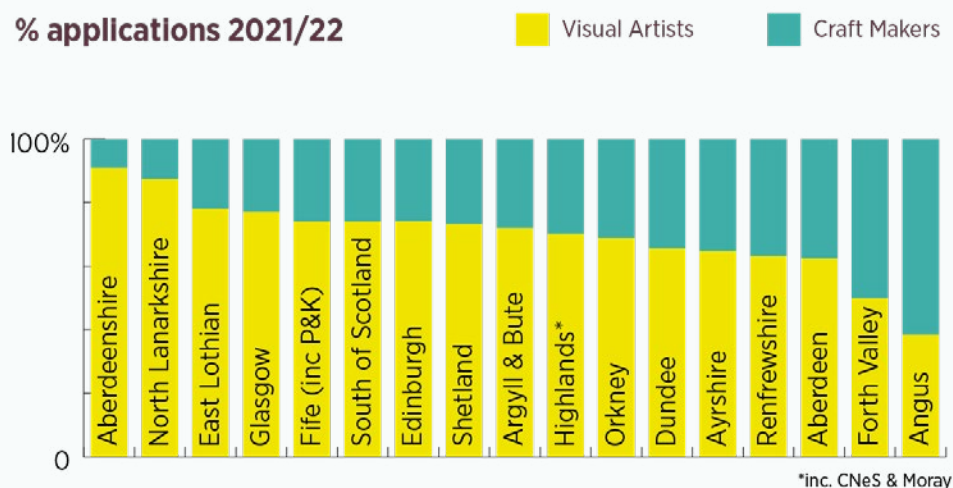
While Glasgow has always had a lower than average success rate, it has not always been significantly lower than all other areas. Within some areas (such as Aberdeen or Forth Valley) there has been significant variation in success rates across the partnership areas over the trend period.

Generally, there is a consistency between the proportion of applications received and the proportion of awards. The significant exception is Glasgow which has 32% of applications but represents 13% of awards. Edinburgh had 14% of applications and 18% of awards. Renfrewshire accounts for 3% of applications and 6% of awards. Each of Aberdeen, Orkney and Angus account for 2% of applications and 4% of awards. Success rates relate to the overall budget for each area which is a factor of both Creative Scotland funding and partnership contribution.

Artform and bursary level

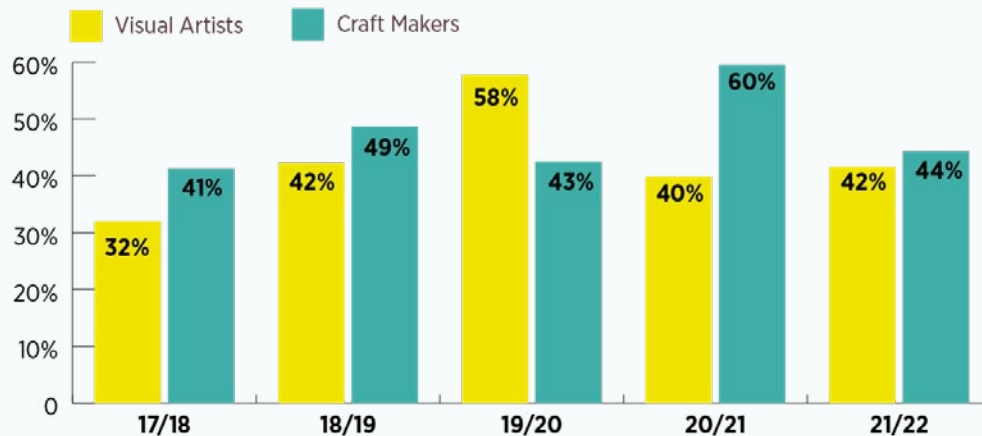
Over the whole trend period 72% of applications were from visual artists and 28% from craft makers. Applications by visual artists are always the majority of applications with this varying from 63% to 78% over the 5 years. There was significant variation across Scotland in the proportions of applications from craft makers with this highest (in 2021/22) for Angus (62%) and lowest for Aberdeenshire (9%).

% applications 2021/22



There has been no consistency in the different success rates for visual artists and craft makers. Over the period the success rate for crafts (47%) was higher than visual arts (42%). Over the whole trend period 69% of awards were made to visual artists and 31% to craft makers. This has varied between 64% and 72%.

Success rates by Visual Arts and Craft Makers



VACMA changed to a bursary model in 2020/21. The proportion of applications have been around 40% applying for the Early Career bursary in both years.

65% of VACMA awards in 21/22 were at the £750 level with this reflecting the higher success rate at £750 (45%) than at £500 (38%) in 2021/22.

Over half of applications were from Early Career artists in Aberdeen (69%), Dundee (56%), Angus (54%) and Glasgow (51%). There were proportionately fewest Early Career applications in Argyll and Bute (18%), Ayrshire (18%) and East Lothian (22%).

Applications by level 2021/22



Profile of artists and makers

Artist and maker survey

Artists were equally split in their length of practice: up to 5 years (24%), 6-10 years (25%), 11-20 years (23%) and 20+ years (27%). There were more 20+ years artists/makers than 2017 (22%) when the previous evaluation was conducted.

The biggest group of respondents was in the 45-54 age group (45%). There was no significant difference in age profile between VACMA recipients and others. 46% of Early Career VACMA recipients were aged under 30. Over half of those receiving the artist bursary were aged 45-65.

Age	All respondents (319)	Applied for Artist Bursary of £750 (191)	Applied for Artist Bursary of £500 (61)
16-30 years	14%	5%	46%
30-44 years	32%	37%	26%
45-65 years	45%	51%	26%
65+ years	5%	4%	-

75% of respondents were female, 19% male and 2% other.

73% identify as White Scottish/White British with a further 14% from other White ethnic groups or backgrounds. 3% identified as being from a mixed/multiple ethnic groups and 2% as Asian/Asian Scottish/Asian British.

37% of all respondents identify as having one of the listed conditions lasting at least 12 months. The highest were long term chronic conditions (15%) and mental health conditions (12%).

Do you have any of the following conditions which have lasted, or are expected to last, at least 12 months?	(Base 319)
Other long term/chronic condition	15%
Mental health condition	12%
Cognitive or learning disabilities	9%
Physical disabilities	4%
Hearing impairment/deaf	3%
Visual impairment	2%
Other	4%

13% of respondents had received Creative Scotland Open Funding. This is higher for recipients of VACMA (18%) and those who have had a practice for 20+ years (20%).

8% had applied for Open Funding (but not yet been successful) with this more likely amongst people who had not yet been awarded VACMA (12%).

Visual artists were more likely to have applied for Open Funding (successful or unsuccessful) than craft makers (25% compared to 11%). Makers were more likely to say they had not heard of the Open Fund (43% compared to 28% of visual artists).

48% had considered applying for Open Funding whereas 31% were not aware of the Open Fund.

19% had applied for other Creative Scotland funding. These included COVID-19 funds, Create:Inclusion, hardship funds, Made in Scotland, Nurturing Talent, Place, professional development and research funding and YMI. COVID-19 funding was the most common.

Benefits for artists/makers

Survey of artists/makers

- 73% of artists/makers said VACMA was very beneficial to their practice with 97% saying it was beneficial overall. This compares with the 2018 evaluation when 68% rated VACMA as very beneficial. No-one said VACMA had no benefit.
- 95% agree (with 58% agreeing strongly) that receiving a VACMA award made them feel more confident about their practice.
- 93% agree (with 57% agreeing strongly) that receiving a VACMA award enabled them to do something that they would otherwise not have done with their practice.
- 70% made new contacts as a result of VACMA with 49% making new contacts in the local area and 40% outwith this area.
- 77% agreed (with 40% agreeing strongly) that the VACMA programme makes me feel that visual arts/crafts are valued in my local area. A lower proportion of respondents who applied to Glasgow (base 54) agreed strongly (22%).

The primary focus for applicants was on the development of new work (52% main focus, 36% secondary focus), followed by skills development (31% main focus, 38% secondary focus). Visual artists were more likely to apply for the development of new work (59%) and makers for skills development (55%).

What was the primary focus for your VACMA application?	Primary Focus (299)	Other Focus (294)
Development of new work	52%	36%
Skills development	31%	38%
Research	7%	27%
Reaching new audiences	3%	17%
Mentoring	3%	10%
Residency	2%	5%
Presentation	1%	10%

86% of VACMA recipients identified other opportunities unlocked by their VACMA award. The highest was exhibition opportunities (47%).

Did you feel receiving the VACMA award unlocked other opportunities?	Base 175
Yes - exhibition opportunity	47%
Yes - other	30%
Yes - sales opportunity	22%
Yes - commissions	17%
Yes - funding	15%
Yes - other paid work	13%
No	14%

Partner consultation

Partners reflected that one benefit of VACMA for recipients is that it is an award of national status and demonstrates Creative Scotland recognition which boosts recipients' confidence and adds to their CV leading to other opportunities. VACMA was considered to have an important place as a lighter touch application which bridges the gap to Creative Scotland's Open Fund.

VACMA is identified by partners as a rare opportunity in that it comes with 'no strings attached' in terms of outputs or requirements.

It was recognised that although a relatively small amount of funding VACMA can make a big difference and support considerable progress.

Survey of artists/makers

In an open question about wider opportunities generated from VACMA (120 responses) there was a theme of compound benefits with VACMA being described as having a snowball effect. For example, by creating new work, the recipient generates exhibition opportunities, sales and increased profile. The new work creates evidence of development of practice which can become the basis for future applications. Another example might be learning a new skill that leads to new partnerships and broadens the range of opportunities available. Again, receiving a VACMA award helps build a CV and can lead to further funding, generating an increase in confidence. Examples are given below:

- “ The opportunities are still ongoing. My work is stronger for undertaking the course. As a result, I am more confident about my work and have plans to seek other opportunities to show my work”
- “ Following on from receiving a VACMA I was very lucky to receive Creative Scotland Open Funding. I believe that without this stepping stone, knowledge and confidence gained, this may not have happened.”
- “ My VACMA awards have played a vital role in enabling me to take the paths I need to follow. With no financial reserves or safety net of any kind, VACMA has been essential in giving me the chance to take up opportunities I've worked hard to bring about.”
- “ I was able to make more ambitious work for an exhibition. The skills feed into my own creative practice but also have broadened the range of skills I can offer to others in terms of workshops, etc. It has given me more to offer in terms of projects/residency applications.”

Respondents were asked an open question about the main benefit they gained from VACMA (168 comments). Some answered this practically identifying new work (73), skills (46) and research (22). The wider comments identify the wider impacts which are about investment in time (38) and VACMA unlocking an opportunity that would otherwise not be possible because of a financial barrier (e.g. to equipment or training) or the financial need to create commercial work. This links to beneficiaries identifying experimentation (17) and making progress (13). Increasing confidence and validation (23) were also identified as wider impacts. The comments show that the benefits were wider than the initial investment with ongoing and compounded benefits. The benefits were also significant in that they released a development of practice that often would not have otherwise happened.

- “ It has given me the time to develop an essential area of my practice. I would not be able to do this without the funding as I'd have to focus on immediately financially viable work.”
- “ I received the award right after graduating from art school. This was a significant support in keeping my art practice going in the very early days, and gave me the opportunity to create a new series of work for one of my first exhibitions.”
- “ It allowed me to do something I would not have been able to do otherwise, and this impacted my confidence positively and enabled me to reach new audiences. It fostered professional development and was a catalyst for the production of new ideas and future work.”
- “ I learnt new skills; was able to get peers' feedback ; those led to new opportunities to show my work and helped me with my confidence.”
- “ I felt really encouraged and valued as an artist. On the back of winning the VACMA award, I went on to win another grant. Winning a VACMA award was invaluable to my early arts career.”
- “ Feeling like I'm worth supporting or investing in has been transformative. For the first time, I actually feel like what I do is worthwhile.”

Benefit to partners

Partner consultation

The benefits to partners were both operational, developmental and strategic.

On an operational basis the VACMA process allowed partners to have a better understanding of the artists and makers who are working in their area. Partners identified that each round they would get applications from artists they had been unaware of.

On a more developmental level some partners used this initial contact as opportunity to nurture the relationship with artists/makers. Some partners (with a development function) used knowledge about artists/makers practice to explore further opportunities such as exhibitions and to cascade information. Again, partners with a developmental function were able to use the information from VACMA to identify challenges, gaps and needs from the local sector which could inform their activity. Some partners identified VACMA as a reason for artists to engage with them. The feedback aspect of VACMA was a factor that was mentioned in that it allowed partners the opportunity to engage with applicants so that future applications for funding would be improved and more likely to be successful. Feedback could also be used to signpost unsuccessful applicants to other relevant resources and opportunities.

Strategically VACMA allows partner local authorities to demonstrate that the arts are supported in their local area. It was strategically important for some that artists are supported to build careers locally. Areas without significant production or exhibition provision identified VACMA as being an important factor in demonstrating local opportunity. Areas where cultural investment tends to gravitate to larger organisations, valued VACMA as supporting the cultural ecology at the individual level.

The partnership with Creative Scotland was described very positively. Operationally Creative Scotland was consistently described as being supportive, helpful and responsive. For those without a specific visual arts/crafts background, Creative Scotland was seen as being expert and adding value on panels.

Strategically the partnership was valued as adding 'credibility' to the partner. The national partnership provided an endorsement which was considered 'reputationally important' and allowed some partners to make the case to stakeholders for their continued investment in VACMA. There was some call for this 'halo' effect to be magnified through more national showcasing of VACMA and its recipients.

Partners acknowledged that the partnership also had value for Creative Scotland allowing it to have reach nationwide including to 'fringe' communities. It also allows Creative Scotland to have an insight into what is happening on the ground for artists/makers and provide important context.

There was acknowledgement that Creative Scotland had evolved VACMA and taken a consultative approach with partners in that development.

More partners were positive about the benefit of the VACMA peer group partnership than negative. For the majority of partners who valued the network, the main benefit was in being able to hear from others about how they operated VACMA which allowed them to identify ways they could improve their practice. It also built up knowledge about the visual arts and crafts. Some talked about being isolated and that the VACMA network allowed them to build contacts and feel connected and supported. For the smaller number of partners who said the network was of no benefit, this related to: their lack of capacity to engage, having strong networks already and, not having commonality with other VACMA partners.

Response to VACMA changes

Early Career and Artist bursary

88% of applicants who applied for an Early Career award (base 66) said that having an Early Career option encouraged them to apply.

Partner consultation

Partners thought the introduction of the Early Career bursary was a positive development within VACMA. There was a feeling that the Early Career bursary had encouraged artists and makers to apply knowing that the scheme was specifically for them and they were not being assessed against established artists. The recognition in the award of VACMA was felt to be particularly important for Early Career artists: 'it should not be underestimated how good it feels to have an organisation say you can be funded – making an investment in them, validating practice and increasing confidence'. The Early Career scheme allowed new artists to be targeted which was strategically significant for some partners.

Partners thought the level of the Early Career bursary (at £500) was good and appropriate.

There were mixed views on whether the £750 level was appropriate. More partners felt it was lower than appropriate. Those who felt it was too low highlighted that, based on the Scottish Artist Union day rate, £750 did not allow time for a significant project to be developed. The gap between £500 and £750 was considered by some to be too low. Partners located in more remote locations and where artists/makers would have to travel considerable distances to access training and workshop provision, argued that VACMA no longer covered the costs of travel ruling out this type of application particularly for island communities.

Those partners who felt the level of bursary was appropriate argued that they had not heard complaints from applicants, and they would rather support more artists/makers at a lower level than support fewer applications. This includes (but is not exclusive to) areas with high demand.

Coordinate deadlines

Artist and maker survey

65% of applicants agreed that it was helpful to them that deadlines are coordinated across the VACMA programme with 22% agreeing strongly (base 299).

Partner consultation

There was positivity from partners about the co-ordinated deadlines. The benefits of this were showing clearly that the local VACMA programme was part of a national scheme. It also allowed partners to signpost artists to other schemes, share with regional artist/maker networks and supported planning ahead.

There were some reservations about rounds in October and February with these being seen as close together and February being close to the financial year end.

Some partners had not taken part in two rounds each year. The main reasons for this were lack of organisational capacity which also intersects with the amount of annual funding available. One advantage of two rounds (mentioned by one partner) was that it allowed unsuccessful applicants the opportunity to re-submit quite quickly after feedback on their initial application.

Application process

Artist and maker survey

72% agreed that the pre-application support and advice was helpful to them with 29% agreeing strongly (base 294). More people who received an award at £750 (32%) agreed strongly than those who received £500 (17%).

67% agreed that the process (including decision making process) was clear to them with 25% agreeing strongly (base 326).

72% agreed that the application form was straightforward with 25% agreeing strongly (base 324).

- There was more positivity from VACMA recipients than those who had not yet been successful (base 109) where 27% disagreed that the process was clear and the application form straightforward.
- Craft makers (base 55) were more positive about the process and application form than visual artists.

58% of applicants agreed that the post-application feedback was useful to them with 19% agreeing strongly (base 297). The feedback is most relevant to unsuccessful applicants however 29% of people who had not yet been awarded VACMA identified the question as being not applicable to them which suggests they did not receive advice. Only 27% of non VACMA recipients agreed that the feedback was useful compared to 60% of awardees.

In the additional feedback on the application process (100 comments) there were the following themes:

- People commenting that they had not received feedback (19)
- Seeking greater clarity on the funding including what could be included (15)
- Positive feedback (15) as well as positive comments about the support that applicants had received (6)
- The application being too long in relation to the level of funding (15)
- Difficulty in completing the application related to access issues in particular dyslexia or neurodiversity (6)
- Questions or concerns over the selection/panel process (6)
- 5 people had specific comments about the form and 2 about the image requirements.

Partner consultation

The majority of partners consider that the current application is appropriate in terms of level of information requested of applicants. It was described as a ‘good and gentle’ starter application process for early career artists. Partners identify that the guidelines are good and they can tell the difference when applicants have reviewed the guidelines. The majority point of view is that the questions are well answered. There is a consensus that more examples might help give applicants a steer including quality expectations, case studies and image guidelines.

Issues identified by partners in terms of the application process included:

- The level of effort required in relation to the amount of money.
- Clarity about the purpose of VACMA and the desire to reduce the number of misdirected applications.
- There were felt to be barriers in the written application for people who have specific learning needs such as dyslexia. There was also felt to be a barrier for those less experienced in public funding particularly in talking about their practice and creative development.
- Some partners described problems with the actual submission of the application in terms of file formats and images. Some of these are technical barriers with local authority systems and fire walls preventing some from receiving certain file formats or accessing file sharing services.
- Partners report poor images as well as images that do not relate to the proposed activity which are a barrier to funding an application. Most partners supported standardising and restricting the file format, DPI and size of images.
- There is a variation in the level of capacity that partners have to resolve application issues for example following up when images are not supplied or are poor quality.

EDI and environmental sustainability

Artist and maker survey

72% agreed that they understood what was required from the EDI and sustainability questions with 25% agreeing strongly (base 324). Those who disagreed were asked a follow up. The main responses were that examples would help (10). Some questioned the relevance of the question in relation to their practice (4) and others would prefer that the questions were not asked (3).

Partner consultation

There is a consensus that the response to the EDI and sustainability questions are at best varied and more typically not well answered. Partners report a split with more experienced applicants and those with specific training being able to answer the questions effectively. There was a feeling that many applicants had not thought about their practice through this lens and lacked the language to respond.

Some partners report that the sustainability question is better answered than EDI question but others remarked that sustainability was not relevant for some applicants.

There was some concern that the EDI question leads to disclosures that the partners are not trained to deal with and generates emotional labour for those involved in processing this information and making decisions.

There was also a query about how the responses to EDI and sustainability questions should contribute to the assessment and the implications of a poor or non response. One partner identified that they had never seen the response to these questions 'sway a funding decision' while another said the opposite in that a poor/missing response could count against an applicant if it was a marginal decision.

Mostly partners supported the inclusion of the questions to encourage artists and makers to think about their work through the lens of EDI/sustainability. VACMA was perceived as a gateway fund to further public funding sources and therefore it was good training for more substantial applications. It was important for some that Creative Scotland was taking the lead in this area.

Again, this was an area where examples were thought to be of benefit as well as offering artists and makers the opportunity for specific training to upskill them.

Monitoring data

During the period under analysis (2017/18 to 21/22) there have been changes in personnel and systems at Creative Scotland and the reporting templates for partners. Collating the activity data for this evaluation identified issues with data systems. Some data being collected from applicants/recipients is not being utilised including satisfaction data. There is a need to identify data requirements and establish better systems.

Artist and maker survey

75% of VACMA recipients agreed that the end of project monitoring report was straightforward to complete (grant recipients only 171) with 43% agreeing strongly.

Partner consultation

The majority of partners identified that they had to chase recipients for the completed end of project monitoring form.

The majority of partners did not actively use the data from the form although valuing it. There was some question about how the end of project data was being used and responded to for VACMA as a whole such as the satisfaction data.

Two partners used the information in their stakeholder reporting and two used it to create public case studies. Other partners appreciated the information in showing the impact of VACMA and in adding to their knowledge about artists and their practice.

Several partners identified the desire to showcase VACMA beneficiaries and stories but that there was a capacity issue, a 'gap between intention and reality'.

Promotion

Artist and maker survey

People find out about VACMA through Creative Scotland the most (46%), followed by the local authority partners (25%) and informal networks (25%). VACMA recipients were more likely to find out from the local authority partners (30% vs 15%). Visual artists were more likely than craft makers to hear from their own networks (29% vs 14%). More Early Career applicants heard from their own networks (38%) and fewer from the local authority partners (6%).

How did you find out about the VACMA opportunity?	(Base 349)
Creative Scotland News and Opportunities email	46%
Via your local authority/partner	25%
Via your own informal networks	25%
Social media	22%
Via an artist/crafts maker membership organisation or network	20%
Other	3%

Partner consultation

There was a sense from partners that applications in their local area were mostly the result of their promotional activity. Network partners were reported to be important in promoting VACMA beyond existing databases. A small number of local authority partners identified additional challenges in marketing resulting from restrictive local authority systems.

Some partners identified a halo effect from national promotion by Creative Scotland particularly in reaching new artists/makers. There was considerable positivity about the resources Creative Scotland creates to promote VACMA. These were considered to generate brand consistency for VACMA, raising awareness and becoming a recognisable brand. The resources were described as clear and helpful, making promotion easier for partners.

The majority of partners talked about their plans to improve their promotion and awareness within the local community. A small number were concerned about doing more promotion because they had limited resources and would be stimulating more demand than they could meet.

Many partners referenced providing information sessions for potential applicants currently or previously. There was a reflection that these sessions helped generate better and more successful applications and could be good opportunities for networking. Some reported low turnout and information sessions have not restarted across the board since the COVID-19 hiatus. Some partners were clear that they lacked the capacity to deliver these sessions or that delivery would come out of the VACMA budget. There was therefore positivity about Creative Scotland providing national online guidance sessions which could then be supplemented with local engagement and answers to specific individual questions.

Areas of change

Partner consultation

There was a sense that the recent changes in VACMA had been positive and had been achieved through collaboration with partners. This meant that there were no major adaptations required by the majority of the partners with a number identifying no changes at all. Instead the consultation identified small shifts rather than major issues or frustrations.

“ There has been a consultative and evolutionary partnership approach to change; it has been a good process. VACMA has evolved for the better, that shows in the number of applications and repeat customers.”

The change identified by the highest number of partners (7) was an increase in the level of the Artist Bursary (not Early Career) to around £1,000-£1,500. Linked to this (but potentially separate) was a suggestion of a travel fund for more remote communities for applications that require travel/accommodation to access provision not available locally.

Another change was making the purpose more clear and highlight exclusions better. This related to a consistent feeling that some applicants are wasting their time on an application which will not be funded.

Another theme that had some traction was Creative Scotland taking the lead in amplifying the brand and partnership through case studies and showcases as well as pre-application workshops that also celebrate the impact of VACMA.

An issue that was raised was an interest in extending the VACMA model to other artforms.

There was some concern from a small number of partners about EDI in terms of the specific questions on the application form and also the role of EDI considerations in panel decision making.

An aspect of VACMA that was raised was the time input from partners in delivering VACMA and the acknowledgement of this particularly from the independent organisations that deliver VACMA without any direct funding.

The issue of consistency across VACMA was identified as an issue. There was a variation in the response to this:

- For some – particularly non metropolitan areas without an art school infrastructure - there was a request to acknowledge that quality standards will not be the same across the country
- In areas where demand significantly outstrips the amount of funding, there was recognition of greater pressure with the suggestion of a more regional approach
- For the areas that border VACMA schemes with higher demand there was a question about supporting applicants who meet the eligibility criteria but whose practice does not benefit the area.

A small number of partners were interested in restarting the mentoring aspect of VACMA.

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