
Director General for Regulation

Andrew Mowlah
Director of Research
Arts Council England
(by email)

26 April 2019

Dear Andrew,

Presentation of official statistics on attendance/visitor numbers at National Portfolio Organisations /Major Partner Museums

I am writing to update you on an enquiry we received about your statistics on attendance figures at National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) and Major Partner Museums (MPMs).

These statistics provide insight into the income, expenditure and activity of many arts organisations throughout England.

The enquiry we received raised concerns about a lack of clarity around which organisations may be or may not be included each year in your published statistics. We understand, as you state in the statistics, that the estimated and known attendance figures do have the potential for error, especially if they are not based on a ticketing system; and that these attendance figures can vary year on year. You do include some explanation in one of the tabs in the ACE publication, 'NPO Annual Data Survey – Official Statistic'.

However, in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics, we judge that there is a lack of clarity around some aspects, including which organisations are excluded from the official statistics, what constitutes an 'extreme response' and cut-off points for defining outliers. It seems unclear where it is appropriate to make year on year comparisons and where you advise that this should not be done. Additionally, it is not easy to reproduce the official statistics from the raw data spreadsheets that are also published.

We understand that you are currently in the process of revising these statistics and we look forward to hearing more about your plans. It might be helpful to publish a separate user guide that could address these points. The Government Statistical Service Good Practice Team may also be another useful resource to you in terms of providing advice and guidance on how best to address these points.

In summary, in many respects these statistics do adhere to the Code of Practice. We do however share the concerns raised by the correspondent around the lack of clarity provided in the methodology and about the uses of these statistics.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation