Heritage sector is resilient to the pandemic, despite



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Organisations have a positive financial and strategic outlook, but concerns remain over staffing and the uncertainty of the economic climate.

Attachment	Size
PDF View UK Heritage Pulse survey 1 - summary of findings as PDF(487.01 KB)	487.01 KB

In our first UK Heritage Pulse survey – which ran from 4–27 February 2022 – we asked the UK's heritage sector about their confidence, the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, including on staffing, and their strategic priorities.

COVID-19 restrictions in England had just lifted when the survey launched. Restrictions in Northern Ireland lifted half-way through, while Scotland and Wales restrictions were in place throughout.

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>
> *Anne Young, Director of Strategy and Innovation at the Heritage Fund*

What we found

Confidence

From the 230 complete and 47 partial responses to the survey, we found that confidence in the viability of heritage organisations was strong.

On a scale of 1 (not at all confident) to 5 (very confident), respondents rated their confidence to survive beyond the next six months at an average of 4.3.

53% of respondents said that without generating any further income, they had cash reserves to last them more than six months.

They rated confidence in visitor or customer demand at 3.8 out of 5.

Negative impacts

Not surprisingly, there was only a small proportion of respondents (9%) who had not been affected by COVID-19 restrictions and the Omicron wave, which reached a peak in some parts of the UK during the survey period.

73% of respondents had made COVID-19-related adaptations, 72% experienced event or other booking/order cancellations, and 75% had to deal with staff or volunteer absence. 40% of participants reported that recruitment of specialist staff had been so challenging that it had an impact on their operations during the past six months.

In a marked change from the sentiment of 2020, most respondents (84%) felt the risk from another COVID-19 wave like Omicron would be low or moderate.

Strategic priorities

When we asked survey respondents to tell us their top strategic priority, financial and organisational resilience was high among the list of aims. But it was accompanied by some important wider ambitions, including contributing to a sense of place and community.

Asked which three areas had the most relevance to their strategic priorities, participants answered:

- contribution to a sense of place and community: 67%
- financial and organisational resilience: 62%
- wellbeing (employees, volunteers and visitors): 55%
- access, diversity and inclusion: 51%
- environmental sustainability: 45%
- organisational skills development: 45%

However, many organisations also told us that they face a transitional period now before they can deliver on these strategic priorities or run new projects with confidence.

Anne Young, Director of Strategy and Innovation at the Heritage Fund said: “The UK’s heritage sector has faced its gravest threat since the Second World War over the past two years. To know that organisations are emerging confident

and with a stronger financial outlook is good news. But it's also clear that our respondents face challenges to achieving their ambitions in the current economic climate. This survey gives us invaluable insight into those issues and how we might be able to help."

Anne cautioned that the 277 responses to this first survey were not completely representative of the whole UK heritage sector – and we had particular gaps in the devolved nations – but it was still interesting and informative.

"This is a great first step in our aim to better understand the sector and use what they tell us to shape our strategy and funding approaches during this uncertain time."

Your voice heard

Our survey also asked what more the Heritage Fund and our partners could do to support participants' organisations. We received a wide range of responses, many of which focused on the challenges in running projects. The views from this and future surveys will feed into the planning for our new long-term organisational strategy, which our Chair, Dr Simon Thurley, announced at Heritage Alliance's Heritage Day event in March.

Find out more and take part

Explore more of the findings by downloading the report from this page.

UK Heritage Pulse is a collaborative research project to collect the views and experience of the UK's heritage sector, and help influence our work.

Visit the UK Heritage Pulse site to register to see the full results, take part in future surveys and participate in quickfire polls on live topics for our sector.