Understanding the Impact of ‘Meanwhile’ Spaces on the Ecology of Artists’ Studios in Scotland







A Scoping Review

February - July 2026

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Credits

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This research project and analysis of the data was undertaken by a team of researchers from Newcastle University, who take responsibility for the findings and any errors contained therein.

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1. Foreword

The growth of meanwhile spaces as provision for artists and creative people across Scotland has been nothing short of remarkable. This ecology evolved in response to the economic and social impact of the pandemic on artists' practice and livelihoods. The unprecedented number of empty commercial properties that became available at the time created an opportunity for collaboration and cultural renewal.

A growing number of providers across Scotland have matched artists with vacant commercial property on a scale that has not existed in Scotland before and are now cumulatively the largest provider of spaces for artists and creative people in Scotland. These providers offer temporary studios and project space to artists working across a wide range of disciplines.

By offering spaces free of charge, on a first come first serve basis and without any prescribed outcomes, artists are able to test new ways of working, expand their practice and foster new collaborations.

However we are aware that the very nature of this space provision, the reliance on vacant space, is not without its challenges and the precarity of these spaces causes its own problems.

This report will provide us with an insight into the nature of the growing ecology of provision of creative spaces in Scotland. We hope that it will be a useful advocacy tool for the continuing need for increased provision of affordable space for creativity in Scotland.

Creative Scotland recognises the need to be ambitious. Some of the report's recommendations are significant and would take time, energy and investment to come to fruition. However, we believe that Scotland's artists deserve fair access to space to create, safe working conditions, and the ability to choose the workspace that is right for them.

Andrew Leitch, Creative Scotland

2. Executive Summary

This scoping review was funded by Creative Scotland in response to the rapidly changing nature of artists' studio provision across Scotland.

In its 2016 review of the visual arts sector, Creative Scotland reported artists' deep concerns over access to secure and affordable space, at a time when meanwhile arrangements were far less prevalent. Over the past 10 years, meanwhile use has grown dramatically. While artists' studios are notoriously difficult to map, our research indicates that there are, conservatively, around 1869 artists in meanwhile studios in Scotland today, making the 'meanwhile model' one of, if not the, dominant model for studio provision. At the time of writing, the locations with the largest number of artists in meanwhile studios are Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen.

This rapid expansion has brought key benefits, not least new studio spaces available at low to no cost, something repeatedly described as a 'game changer' by artists and art workers. Throughout the project, we heard how meanwhile studio spaces enabled work to be made that would not have been possible otherwise, fostered new connections and collaborations, and supported artists at key moments in their careers. Local authority staff saw a range of positives too, particularly where otherwise empty buildings were (or could be) repurposed to support place-based strategies.

We also heard, however, concerns about poor working conditions and the impact of sudden closures upon artistic practices and individual wellbeing and health. This builds on existing knowledge of the precarity of artists' space[1]. Participants also shared their worries about the impact of meanwhile studios on other models of provision, and for long-term investment in cultural infrastructure.

This review sets out those benefits and concerns, as identified by artists, art workers, studio providers, staff from local authorities and interested others as part of a 5-month long research project undertaken by researchers at Newcastle University. In total, the project engaged with 192 participants across Scotland via a series of surveys, workshops and recorded conversations.

As a scoping review conducted over a short period of time, the findings presented and discussed below are limited in some respects. We recognise the need for further research – particularly in terms of a year-by-year mapping of studio provision, longitudinal data collection, and in-depth analysis of stakeholder experience. We also note that many of the benefits and challenges discussed in this review will not be unique to meanwhile studios, and that research is needed across a broader range of models.

What we hope this review will do is start a national conversation about meanwhile provision in the cultural sector.

No single model of studio provision is right for every artist, at every stage of their lives. We argue that studio provision works best when it takes the form of a 'mixed ecology', with multiple providers and options, enabling multiple forms of practice, and, crucially, allowing artists to select the type of provision that is right for them. This means that there needs to be continued investment into a variety of studio provision and critical discussion of a range of models, including creative land trusts, independent spaces, artist-run collectives, domestic spaces, commercial providers and so forth.

For artists and art workers to have real choice, artists' studios must be both available and affordable. While this review explores both issues, we note that affordability often animates decision-making in a context where artists' incomes are far lower than the average salary in Scotland and often below the living wage[2]. Yet while the low/no cost of meanwhile studio provision was viewed by many as removing financial barriers to access, for others it indicated a tiered model of access, where only those who could afford to pay (or pay more) could access secure studios.

Our research touched on other important debates too, such as Scotland's uneven cultural infrastructure (e.g. as provided by a range of art organisations and artist-run initiatives, education providers, cultural resources and facilities and so forth), persistent vacancy on the high street, and the (potential) role to be played by local authorities, central government and other bodies in terms of the provision and management of artists' studios across a range of models. At the moment, it is often unclear where responsibilities, provisions and access lie, how the various stakeholders, models and options differ and intersect, and who is, or should be, responsible for providing workspace.

In this review, we try to untangle some of these complexities. We would like to thank all of those who participated in the project for sharing their time and experiences with us. We recognise that this was often an act of trust in the team and we hope that this review acts as a stimulus for renewed understanding, action and investment.

Dr Emma Coffield, Dr Paul Richter, Gareth McMurchy, Katee Woods

3. Key Findings and Terms

This scoping review is based upon a research project that ran from February – July 2026, with an active data collection period from March-May, as undertaken by a team of researchers from Newcastle University. In total, the project engaged with 192 participants and identified 1,869 artists in meanwhile studio spaces in Scotland as of July 2026.

The key findings from the project are:

- **Meanwhile studio provision has boomed over the last 10 years.** We conservatively estimate that as of July 2026 there are 1,869 artists in meanwhile studios provision in Scotland. The geographical spread of this provision is uneven, however, and this figure does not account for studios that have already closed.
- **There is persistent confusion around the 'meanwhile model'.** The key terminology, time periods, responsibilities and factors that animate meanwhile use were not well-established within any group we spoke to.
- **Meanwhile studios have clear benefits:** For some artists and art workers, meanwhile studios have been 'a game changer' in terms of enabling access to studios they often could not have afforded otherwise, with the result that they could make work (including larger or more experimental work), develop supportive peer networks, and/or establish artistic careers. Local authority staff further noted benefits as associated with place-making strategies and the rejuvenation of the high street.
- **Meanwhile studios are not right for everyone:** Our research confirmed that while some artists found meanwhile studios to be "transformative", others indicated that they had no choice but to take up meanwhile studios, even if they did not suit their current needs. Affordability and the lack of alternatives were most often cited as animating factors.

- **Meanwhile studios have detrimental impacts:** While some artists spoke very positively about meanwhile studios, others noted a range of concerns, most commonly associated with poor working conditions, feeling unsafe, and the impact of building closures (e.g. in terms of the disruption to work in progress, planned commissions, exhibitions and events, as well as to the ability to plan for the future). Concerningly, artists at times spoke candidly about deteriorating wellbeing and mental and physical health as a result.

- **Artists, art workers and local authority staff tend to articulate both positive and negative impacts:** While some of those we spoke with articulated very clear positive or negative experiences with meanwhile studio use, most placed themselves somewhere in the middle. We explore the potential reasons for this in more detail below. In addition, it was noticeable that staff in local authorities tended to have differing priorities to those expressed by artists and artworkers, although there was overlap in some cases.

- **There is a continued need to think long-term:** Many of those we spoke to expressed concern about the fragility of the 'meanwhile model', its potential impact on existing studio provision, and what changes in the sector meant for long-term investment.

Our recommendation:

Meanwhile provision has resulted in a boom in the number of artists' studios in Scotland and now provides much needed space for 1869 artists, often at no/minimal cost. This access to space has been transformative for many artists. However, meanwhile space is not suitable for everyone, and there are growing concerns and key areas of confusion. This review highlights those benefits and concerns and argues for **a shift towards a 'mixed ecology' model of studio provision, where artists are able to choose the provision that best suits their needs.**

We provide a number of recommendations to support this in the final section, where these recommendations include the need for a national conversation around studio provision, research and knowledge sharing that leads to legislative and policy change, investment, and a co-designed code of conduct for meanwhile provision that would enable artists to identify quality provision.

3.1 Terminology

Throughout this review,
we use the following terms:

Artists and art workers.

We recognise that these terms are debated, mean different things to different people, and that individuals may identify themselves in more than one way and/or will have multiple roles at any given time. In this review, we use the term ‘artist’ to refer to anyone who makes artworks (or would like to) across a variety of disciplines and media, including, but not limited to, the visual arts, performance, theatre, music, sound, craft and so forth. We use the term ‘art worker’ to describe those who work in supportive or enabling roles (e.g. as a studio manager, director etc.). We further use these categories to help anonymise participants (e.g. where discipline-specific information would be identifying).

Artist’ studios.

By this we mean the physical space in which artworks are made. We recognise that this will look very different for different people, and will include home studios, sheds, informal working spaces (e.g. bedrooms, the kitchen table), co-working facilities, individual as well as shared studio spaces of various kinds, and may require access to additional facilities and equipment (e.g. darkrooms, printing studios, kilns, sinks, dance floors, rehearsal space, meeting space, storage space and so forth).There are also multiple ‘models’ for organised studio provision, including those offered via creative land trusts, independent studio providers, commercial providers and others. In this project, we focus on meanwhile studio spaces only, which we define and describe below, although we try to situate this model within the broader ecology of studio provision in Scotland.

Meanwhile use/space.

In this review we define meanwhile use/space as vacant sites repurposed for a variety of uses in-between other forms of development. In what follows, we discuss the history of this term, what it means in practice, what the model relies upon, and some of the key benefits and limitations.

Ecology.

We use the term ‘ecology’ within this review to acknowledge the interplay between various studio providers and models, including domestic and informal studio spaces, and the relationships within and between them. We aim to situate the ‘meanwhile model’ within this broader ecology.

4. Meanwhile Use:
A Quick Introduction

4.1 Where Does the Idea Come From?

This scoping review focuses specifically on the impact of meanwhile use on artists' studio provision in Scotland. But what is meanwhile use?

Meanwhile use is generally understood to be a form of temporary urbanism, where vacant or underused buildings, spaces within a building, and/or areas of land are brought back into use in-between longer-term developments. Crucially, it is the interim nature of meanwhile use that sets it apart from, say, pop-up or short-term leases, which tend to have a pre-determined end point. With meanwhile use, the end point is often unspecified. As a result, the timescales involved in meanwhile use are extraordinarily varied and difficult to predict, with some sites 'recalled' at very short notice after a few weeks or months, while others may span decades, albeit on a rolling basis.

Meanwhile use can also take many forms. This can include cultural, community and charitable use as well as a range of more commercial activities. Meanwhile uses can be arranged and/or managed via a specialist provider (or broker) or via one-off, personal and informal relationships. The exact costs and contractual arrangements can also differ quite substantially. In this sense, while it is possible to speak of a 'meanwhile model', there remain a number of important variables.

4.2 What is Meanwhile Use?

The key idea (e.g. using vacant buildings and land between other uses) is nothing new, and artists have long been using sites in ways that we might today term meanwhile. However, 'meanwhile use' as a specific form of practice tends to be dated to the period just after the 2008 financial crisis in the UK (see Ferreri 2025) and the formation of the Meanwhile Project in 2009 (later the Meanwhile Foundation) (see also ARUP for The Greater London Authority, 2020).

Since this time, meanwhile use has boomed, often encouraged by local and national governments and managed by specific operators (e.g. the Meanwhile Foundation, East Street Arts and so forth), as a way to reanimate vacant sites – particularly in urban areas like high streets and city centres.

4.3 How Does it Work?

The key mechanism driving much meanwhile use is commonly known as **rate relief.** Most commercial properties pay **business rates** (also known as 'non-domestic rates'). Business rates are a form of property tax set by the Scottish Government but administered and paid to the local authority. When a commercial building becomes vacant, the owner can apply for **empty property relief**. This is set by the local authority and usually applies only for a given period (e.g. 3-6 months). After this, the building owner is generally liable to pay increased/full business rates again. However, if the property were to be occupied by a registered charity, the charity could apply for **charitable rate relief** via the local authority. Charitable rate relief can be up to 80% of the full cost. Local Authorities can also additionally apply **discretionary relief** to top this up to 100%, and some offer 100% discretionary rate relief to other non-profitable organisations too (e.g. Community Interest Companies or CICs).

There are important exceptions to the above, including for listed buildings (which can be eligible for much longer periods of empty rate relief), and/or to mitigate the impact of building and improvement works, partial vacancies and so forth. There are also variations in practice across Scotland in terms of what is offered by each local authority. The application period for charitable rate relief can similarly be difficult to predict.

However, generally speaking, the substantial reduction in business rates means building owners can offer vacant sites at low/no rents to charitable groups and still make considerable savings in terms of their on-going costs. Template 'meanwhile use leases' tend to stipulate that the site can be returned to the owner at any point, usually within 30 days. Additional benefits include a reduction in vandalism/security costs, ongoing building management and an ability to 'showcase' the property when occupied.

4.4 Meanwhile Artists' Studios

There are many ways that meanwhile use can be employed within the cultural sector, including to support festivals and events, as exhibition venues, and so forth. In this scoping review, we focus on **artists' studios** as made available via meanwhile leases or which adopt agreements that are similarly interim in nature and reliant upon cycles of vacancy and development only.

5. What We Did

The project employed a mixed-methods approach to data collection combining surveys, workshops and informal conversations with desk research and literature reviews over a period of five months. All four members of staff worked on the project in a part-time capacity. Limitations in terms of time and resource meant that the research team aimed to arrive at a scoping review that would identify key shifts, trends and patterns in studio provision in relation to meanwhile use, rather than detailed, granular or longitudinal data.

Ethical permission for the project was granted by Newcastle University on 9th February 2026 and the project adopts a range of measures to inform and protect those involved, including, but not limited to: informed consent, the right to withdraw, safe data storage, and a variety of options around anonymity in terms of how participants might be 'named' within this review and any further publications. All participants, in-person and online, were required to read key information about the project and complete a short consent form.

In total, the project engaged with 192 participants over a three-month period of data collection.

5.1 Methods

The project involved:

1. An online survey for local authority staff;
2. A series of online and in-person workshops with artists, art workers and interested others;
3. An online survey for artists, art workers and interested others;
4. A series of informal conversations with meanwhile and other providers of artists' studios as well as interested others.

5.2 Online Survey for Local Authority Staff

This online survey asked ten open and multiple-choice questions designed to gauge the level of engagement with / awareness of meanwhile studios, as well as perceptions of the model and key benefits and limitations. 150 potential respondents were identified from 32 local authority webpages in various roles, including those involved in the arts and culture but also place-making, city centre strategy, planning, events, policy, and building standards.

The survey gathered 23 responses from 13 local authorities, including: Aberdeen, Argyll and Bute, Dundee, East Ayrshire, Edinburgh, Falkirk, Fife, Glasgow, Moray, Orkney, Renfrewshire, West Dunbartonshire, and West Lothian.

5.3 Workshops

The team planned five two-hour long workshops for artists, art workers and interested others, which involved a series of small-group exercises based around key terminology, the provision of a variety of spaces, and the impact of that provision. Participants were also asked two final questions: what one change they would like to see, and what could the Scottish Government do to help?

Each participant at the in-person workshops was also given a ‘blue slip’ with questions to complete, including statistical information (e.g. age, gender), artistic practice, access to space(s), and individual reflections on the key benefits and challenges associated with those spaces.

Workshops were held in Dundee (in collaboration with Creative Dundee), Edinburgh (in collaboration with Outer Spaces), Glasgow (in collaboration with Strange Field) and online. A planned event in Dumfries was cancelled owing to a lack of interest. Workshops were limited to 40 participants. Each workshop had ten bursary places for artists paid at Scottish Artist Union rates of pay.

- Dundee: 19th March. 29 participants.
- Edinburgh: 23rd April. 31 participants.
- Glasgow: 30th April. 24 participants.
- Online: 13th May. 6 participants.

Workshops were audio recorded, edited into sections, transcribed and coded. Workshop materials (e.g. collaborative drawings, post-it notes etc.) were photographed, typed up, and coded. ‘Blue slip’ data was transferred to a spreadsheet.

5.4 Online Survey for Artists, Art Workers and Interested Others

This separate online survey ran from 7-22nd May 2026 and asked 16 questions over six sections that sought similar data to the ‘blue slips’ (described above). For ease of reference, we refer to this survey as the artist survey throughout the review.

- 75 participants completed the survey.

5.5 Conversations

The lead researcher carried out six informal conversations, which lasted around 60 minutes each and took place online. These conversations sought more detail on key aspects of the research. Two conversations were requested by the project team at the suggestion of Creative Scotland. Four were initiated by participants, who contacted the project team directly.

5.6 Who Participated?

Of the 192 participants in the project, 144 shared demographic data with us.

Overall, the majority of participants identified as women (65%), followed by 24% of participants identifying as men and 8% as other (including: non binary, trans, and gender fluid). The final 3% of participants did not specify their gender identity or otherwise left this field blank.

With regards to employment status, freelance or self-employment was the most common at 47%. However, it is important to note that a considerable number of those who indicated this as their employment status combined it with another form of work. Of this 47%, 20% also indicated part-time employment and 4% stated full-time employment. This broadly correlates with findings from the Independent Culture Fair Work Task Force (2025: 14) which noted higher levels of self-employment and freelance work in the cultural sector than in most other sectors.
Over half of surveyed participants (56%) stated their highest educational achievement as a postgraduate degree, followed by around a third (32%) having an undergraduate degree. The remainder went to college (8%), with a smaller percentage having completed secondary school (1%). The final 3% did not specify.

Almost half of participants (46%) were 45 years or older, followed by an equal split between 25–34-year-olds (22%) and 35–44-year-olds (22%).

The demographic least represented in our data are 18–24-year-olds at only 8%. 2% of respondents chose not to specific their age. Across the workshops, we also noticed changes in terms of who participated. In Dundee, Glasgow and in the online workshops, for example, artistic practices were broad and varied, whereas ‘painting’ emerged as a key practice in Edinburgh.

5.7 What Do We Know About Meanwhile Users?

Of the 144 participants who shared demographic data with us, 67 indicated use of meanwhile space. The vast majority of these users (63%) identified as women, with 21% identifying as men, and 13% identified as other gender identities. Meanwhile users who identified as women mostly indicated a postgraduate degree as their highest educational level (69%), followed by 28% with an undergraduate degree, and 3% with a college level qualification. 57% of those identifying as men held a postgraduate degree, followed by 29% holding an undergraduate degree. The remaining 14% was equally split between college level qualifications (7%) and unspecified (7%).

5.8 How We Use Data in This Review

As part of the project, we spoke to artists and art workers who held, or had held, studios with EP Spaces, Outer Spaces, Hypha and other meanwhile providers, as well as those with other types of studio space and none at all across Scotland. In what follows, we do not identify by name specific studios, providers, some geographic locations, or any artist, art worker or staff member from a local authority, in order to protect the identify of those who participated.

While we spoke to as many people as feasible within the project timeframe, we recognise that our sample is not representative of any broader population and will not cover every possible aspect of meanwhile studio use.

We provide a large number of quotations within this review to give voice to those who participated. In-text quotations are signified via “” marks.

6. The Importance of Artists' Studios

Throughout the project, there was one point on which almost everyone we spoke to agreed: **artists' studio provision was vital and in high demand.**

6.1 Studio Provision is Vital

Artists' studios were almost universally considered to be a vital element in Scotland's cultural infrastructure, without which thousands of artists would simply be unable to make work at all. There was also widespread recognition that demand vastly outstripped supply (see the Scottish Artist Union 2024, Hapworks 2025) and that this demand was more acute in some geographical areas or for certain art forms (see below for more detail). This reflects previous research, including that carried out by the Scottish Artists Union (2024: 2), which found that 38% of survey respondents 'would like to rent a studio or workspace but don't have that option'.

While the role and value of artists' studios was clear within our project, there was concern that these spaces remained 'invisible' within wider debates and were not always considered to be a priority (e.g. for investment) in comparison to more publicly accessible cultural spaces (e.g. art museums, galleries).

6.2 Studio Provision Shapes Artistic Practice

A key point throughout this review is that access to studio space (and the lack thereof) can significantly shape the work produced. For example, we heard repeatedly that access to larger studio spaces had enabled the production of large-scale or messy work not practically suited to domestic settings, or where access to technical facilities (e.g. computers, printing studios, darkrooms and so forth) enabled work that could not have been produced otherwise. At the same time, we heard from artists who could no longer produce certain kinds of artwork because their studio space could not accommodate certain materials, processes or lacked key facilities.
We also heard about studios in such poor condition that works were damaged. We return to all these points below.

While studio space is vital, there is no one 'perfect' space suitable for all. Studios of varying shapes and sizes can enable, restrict and shape artistic practice in different ways. Indeed, the same studio may be well suited to one artist while being an unsuitable arrangement for others. This complexity, and potential, of studio space is an animating feature in much of what follows.

7. Mapping Artists' Studios In Scotland

One of the key challenges the project faced was attempting to map artists' studio provision across Scotland over the past 10 years.

Studio provision is notoriously difficult to track. Many artists' studios are domestic and/or individual (e.g. where this term would apply to home studios, sheds, garages, attics, the kitchen table and so forth). For obvious reasons, there exists no public record of such spaces. For example, the Spring Fling Open Studios in Dumfries and Galloway listed 111 studios, many of which were home studios that would not otherwise appear in desk/internet-based searches (Spring Fling 2026). Likewise, a recent Scottish Artist Union survey found that 28% of artists have a home workspace (Scottish Artists Union 2024).

In addition, studio provision can vary greatly over time as new studios open or close, or as individual studio holders join, leave or decide to share their spaces. Some studio provision is arranged informally between friends or is not widely 'advertised'. Some artists have multiple spaces. Many studio providers do not make their capacity public knowledge. Meanwhile use, which can change very quickly, makes this kind of 'mapping' of studio provision even harder, as large numbers of artists may be given access to a site, or asked to vacate a site, within a matter of days.

As a result, what follows is indicative rather than exact. The figures we present below rely upon a mixture of literature reviews, web searches, data drawn from the project workshops, online surveys, and information compiled and shared with us by studio providers. As such, it needs to be treated with caution, as we were not able to verify all the data shared with us. Moreover, for the reasons described above, we recognise this data will be out-of-date very quickly and there will be important omissions and gaps. Nevertheless, we feel it is important to highlight, even somewhat broadly, the changing picture and scale of artists' studio provision. We would like to thank all those who collated records and sent them to us to aid in this exercise.

7.1 The ‘Meanwhile Model’ in Scotland Varies

While we make reference to the ‘meanwhile model’ throughout this review to refer to artists’ studios that are arranged on an interim basis, there is some (at times considerable) variance between the meanwhile providers operational in Scotland today, and at times between different sites as operated by the same provider, or as established over time.

For example, while some meanwhile studios are advertised as being free, others involve a small on-going cost. Some meanwhile studios are arranged on a one-to-one basis (e.g. by groups of artists themselves), while others form part of a property portfolio managed by a key provider, and this provision can vary in terms of overall scale, the specific buildings and/or sites acquired, the numbers of artists’ studios within each site, day-to-day maintenance arrangements, the additional support offered and so forth. Likewise, while some providers specialise in meanwhile use, others operate a variety of sites and models with differing contractual arrangements (e.g. including meanwhile but also pop-up, permanent, long lease and/or short-term studios). This variance is significant and means that the benefits and challenges identified in the review will not correlate exactly with, or apply to, every meanwhile studio in Scotland. Similarly, many of the key points raised in what follows will apply to other models of provision.

7.2 Key Meanwhile Providers in Scotland at a Glance

- **EP Spaces.** Established 2018. Today: 337 artists in 40 active locations across 10 local authority areas in Scotland (data shared by EP SPACES 2026).
- **Outer Spaces.** Established 2021. Today:1297 artists in 43 locations across 11 local authority areas in Scotland (data shared by Outer Spaces 2026).
- **Hypha Studios.** Established 2021. Today: 3 sites in Scotland, total number of artists unknown. 2476 supported artists and 43 sites across the UK. (Hypha Studios 2026).

7.3 The Ecology of Studio Provision Has Significantly Changed

We estimate that there are, as of July 2026, 1,869 artists in meanwhile studios across Scotland, where the vast majority of these studios were simply not in existence ten years ago. Moreover, this figure is conservative and likely to be an underestimate (see the above). The total also does not take into account meanwhile studios that have already come and gone.

Importantly, the figures listed above indicate considerable shifts in provision. For example, Wasps, a creative land trust established in 1977, has long been considered Scotland's largest provider of creative space and currently provides for over 1000 artists and 33 cultural organisations across 18 locations (Wasps 2026). Today, both EP Spaces and Outer Spaces have a larger property portfolio, and Outer Spaces provides for a greater total of artists, arguably making it the largest studio provider in Scotland today[3].

Interestingly, our research also identified around 200 artists using meanwhile studios that were not managed by any key provider listed above, and which tended to be arranged on a one-off basis by groups of artists and art workers themselves, as part of independent studio provision, or by providers with much smaller property portfolios (e.g. 1-3 sites).

Of course, the volatility of meanwhile space means that these figures are likely to change and change very quickly. Our research identified at least 681 artists using meanwhile studios that closed in 2025 and 231 using spaces that had opened in the first six months of 2026 alone. We note research by the Scottish Artists Union in 2024, where only 7% of respondents to their survey indicated they had access to temporary or meanwhile studio space (where 56% were renting a studio) – suggesting either a sudden increase in meanwhile provision over the past two years, and/or that artists and art workers did not know what type of provision they had at that point in time.

While the exact figures are thus in flux, it is clear the meanwhile model has significantly altered the ecology of studio provision in Scotland.

7.4 Geographical Differences

While meanwhile use is booming, it is also geographically uneven. A key issue here is that the meanwhile model tends to be building-led rather than demand-led and is reliant upon a particular kind of urban infrastructure – usually vacant retail or office spaces that fell out of use post-COVID. As might have thus been expected, meanwhile studios tend to be concentrated in urban areas, with the majority located in Edinburgh, then Glasgow, and then Aberdeen. In 2026, significantly smaller numbers of artists (between 40-69) were noted in Fife, North, and South Lanarkshire, Dundee and Highlands. Minimal numbers of artists in meanwhile studios (between 1-23) were reported in East Ayrshire, Renfrewshire, Falkirk, Inverclyde, and East Lothian. We understand that there are artists in meanwhile studios in other locations but could not confirm these numbers during the timeframe of the project.

Noticeably, this geography does not map onto known artist populations. For example, the recent State of the Nation report into audiences and workforce in arts culture and heritage sectors in Scotland from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (O'Brien et al., 2026) lists the top three council areas with the highest proportion of artists as, respectively: Na h-Eileanan Siar, the Orkney Islands and the Scottish Borders - all areas with next to no meanwhile provision.

Our research similarly found a single meanwhile site in the Highlands, with provision for 31 artists, suggesting a lack of provision here. On the other hand, in Aberdeen, we located 191 artists in meanwhile studios spread over 21 sites, with an additional 90 artists using other models and forms of provision, where this density of provision and lack of alternatives amplifies the risk to individual artists and art workers should sites close.

7.5 Parity of Access.

The disparity of access to meanwhile studio spaces was commented upon by artists and art workers – and particularly those located outwith Edinburgh and Glasgow. For example, multiple artists noted that they either had to pay more for other models of provision or travel long distances to find studios at low/no cost. The sparsity of provision also made relocation, in the case of a building closure, harder.

"The next available space is too far away for me to get to quickly after work [...] I'm waiting in hope that they will find somewhere close." (Artist)

"In the Highlands, people will travel up to an hour [...]. So, I just think we need a range of spaces in smaller locations as well. Everything we've had or have been offered is [...] like large ex-retail and what we'd love is something city-centre, shopfront. So, we're not getting that range up here. And there's, yeah, there's just not enough." (Artist)

7.6 Local Knowledge

Many artists, art workers, and local authority staff found it difficult to precisely identify meanwhile artists' studios. In our survey for local authority staff, 61% of respondents said that they did not know how many meanwhile studios were in their region, and those that guessed often underestimated studio provision (in comparison to the data collected by the project team). Staff in Planning and Policy were more likely to under-estimate in comparison to those working in the Arts and Creative Projects.

7.7 Continued Demand

Despite a considerable increase in the overall number of artists' studios, our research indicated that there remained considerable demand for new spaces. This was particularly noticeable in our online survey for artists and art workers, where many respondents mentioned being on (at times multiple) waiting lists.

"It will have a huge impact when I can get a space. Right now, I am limited to working on 2 paintings at a time and limited on size and materials space [...] I wish there were more spaces available!" (Artist)

"I am only on the list- have not been offered a space yet. Plan is to be able to work on a larger scale than is possible in my workshop." (Artist)

"We could not exist if there wasn't a need [...] We have, you know, over a thousand on our waiting list and we cannot, we cannot get enough space for everybody [...] So I think that recognition [...] there is a lack of cultural infrastructure for making." (Studio provider)

8. The Benefits of Meanwhile Artists' Studios

Throughout the project we heard from artists, art workers and staff in local authorities who had described the benefits and value of meanwhile studios, where these studios not only enabled artwork to be made in a practical sense but had "turbo-charged" the development of artistic careers, enabled experimentation and risk-taking, fostered collaborations, and resulted in a range of broader place-based benefits. In the majority of cases, those who articulated such benefits were aware of the potential limitations to meanwhile studio use (see the next section) but felt that access to low/no cost studio space was worth it.

8.1 Access to Space

The most commonly cited benefit was perhaps the most obvious: that a great many artists now had access to either individual or shared studio spaces that enabled them to make work. The profound importance of this was clear in our survey, with artists describing their meanwhile studios as, for example, "invaluable", "wonderful", or "perfect for my practice". Multiple artists, when asked what their 'ideal' studio space would be, replied that their meanwhile studio already fit the bill.

"I have it. This is my ideal." (Artist)

"Having access to my own studio space has profoundly impacted my practice. Having somewhere to work feels amazing." (Artist)

"The space has allowed me to focus on my work in a way that I wouldn't have been able to [otherwise]" (Artist)

"The space I have [...] is ideal for the present." (Artist)

"Meanwhile space has made it possible for me to continue to be an artist after losing my studio community and space [...] 3 years ago." (Artist)

8.2 Affordability

A key theme throughout many such responses concerned affordability. Artists frequently noted the financial cost of studio space, where the low/no cost model of provision offered by meanwhile studios was a crucial factor in enabling artists to take on a studio at all – and in some cases, for the first time ever. This was particularly pronounced for those facing economic hardship, who were balancing multiple responsibilities, who couldn't afford the types of spaces best suited to their practices, or who were simply 'priced out' by existing provision in a given geographical area.

"I am bowled over by the fact I've been able to finally secure space to work in Edinburgh. [...] I am paying only a small (voluntary) contribution for the space[...] I feel VERY lucky and VERY grateful!!!" (Artist)

"Given the lack of studio space available in Edinburgh prior [...] and therefore the difficulty of even obtaining working space, never mind the costs and my other commitments, it's unlikely I would have taken on a studio. So, the impact of having easy access to a free space is significant, and has opened up a lot of possibilities for me." (Artist)

"This has given me a great opportunity to work freely without risk to my family finances." (Artist)

"There are a lot of artists in positions like myself where paying rent is untenable [...] like a rented space wouldn't be workable right now [...] And [...] the only other option you have [is] working from home, which is [...] not ideal." (Artist)

8.3 Establishing an Artistic Practice Beyond the Home

For many artists, access to a studio was not simply about dedicated space to make work, but all the additional affordances and opportunities that came with studio provision. For example, within our data we identified multiple artists, all of whom had transitioned from domestic spaces to meanwhile studios. This group tended to speak explicitly about the "vital" benefits of having a dedicated studio space away from the home, often in very practical terms (e.g. in terms of being able to stop-and-start without tidying materials away, as providing additional storage, and/or in enabling larger and more ambitious work to be made).

Other benefits included an increased ability to focus and a clear 'boundary' between home and work. For this group, the pathway from domestic space to artists' studio was almost always articulated in strongly positive terms; as enabling and supporting artistic practices that were previously "restricted" and as having potentially "huge" personal and professional impacts.

"[Having a meanwhile studio] has allowed me to create work that doesn't have to be restricted to a bedroom scale." (Artist)

"These spaces allow me to have studio space other than my home/living space. Apart from the practical advantage of space to make work, the psychological /emotional impact is important in enabling me to create, experiment and think." (Artist)

"The impact is huge. It has completely changed the scope of my practice (for the better) and meant more space to think and create [...] Having a clear boundary between work and home is hugely positive especially as a neurodivergent artist who needs space to shut off from work so as not to burn out." (Artist)

"The pandemic exposed all the inequalities and access to space was the single biggest issue because all the buildings closed, no one had anywhere to make any work or if they did it was very compromised and all the kind of social networks and professional networks just disappeared [...] it was very isolating [...] And I just realised that you just can't make work on a screen on your kitchen table or in your bedroom. You just can't." (Studio provider)

8.4 The Development of Professional Practice: Experimentation Without ‘Risk’

Similarly, we heard from artists who described their practices as being “turbocharged” via access to meanwhile studios. The comparatively large scale of many meanwhile studios was a key factor here, allowing for a significant ‘scaling-up’ of work, and/or for experimentation and exploration with materials impossible under other circumstances.

Many artists indicated new developments in their artistic practice or spoke of the “galvanising” impact of studio space more broadly, while others made a direct connection between the work made in their meanwhile studios and new exhibition opportunities, commissions, and so forth.

“I think certainly for me I can do bigger things. I’ve got more space to do bigger things. That’s been really nice to have that.” (Artist)

“I had started making these big [artworks] that I could never make anywhere before because they take up a lot of floor space. And also having carpet on the floor means that you can make work on the floor without breaking your knees. You know, just the comfort level has made a huge difference. So I was able to work on big commissions with lots of parts in a large area and test things out and balance stuff and see. And I would never have been able to do that in any kind of studio I could afford. So it has been really good.” (Artist)

“Having access to this space has turbocharged my practice. I have become way more productive and inspired and have been able to produce more and bigger works.” (Artist)

“For me it was just the ability to make a mess. To actually make a big mess. I had a Jackson Pollock moment myself. It was fabulous because I had a big space and it was completely safe to do that. It was great.” (Artist)

“Without my space I would not of been able to develop my work or identity as an artist, as I would not of had anywhere to experiment. Having a dedicated space ended up having a noticeable impact on my creativity, as physical space allows you to begin to take more risks and envision the work differently. From using my space regularly, I have been able to contribute to events such as Glasgow Doors Open Day, and make work for various exhibitions including my own solo show” (Artist)

Indeed, some artists spoke candidly of how access to low/no cost studio space had enabled them to take risks and experiment without worrying about the financial implications (e.g. if artwork failed to sell).

"It's priceless. It allows me to spend more time making art while taking off the pressure to recoup rising studio fees through selling my work." (Artist)

"I've found that lenient community spaces [...] has been a real lifesaver, particularly meanwhile spaces, have given me the opportunity to explore creativity in a way that doesn't require me to have a brief or get paid for it." (Artist)

Artists and art workers also spoke of the flexibility and opportunities provided by meanwhile studios, where, for example, studios might be used as an additional space over a short period in order to be able to facilitate a particular piece of work, or to accommodate a change in artistic practice or lifestyle shift.

"The opportunity for someone to get access to 500 square foot of space, which they may only need for a few months, as opposed to renting the same 180 square foot of square footage all year round. You know, there is a real potential in that." (Art worker)

8.5 Collaboration and Connection

For many artists, meanwhile studio spaces were additionally valuable for their ability to connect people. This was clear in both the workshops and the artist survey responses, where the importance of a supportive community was frequently commented upon and where meanwhile studios were held to act as a gateway to new social connections, at times spanning generations. Indeed, many artists told us how they had gone on to form new collaborations or projects as a result of meeting each other in the building; others highlighted feelings of increased motivation, involvement and belonging.

"I was really struggling to make new work or find community during and post Covid having moved home from abroad and working from a home studio, and getting a [meanwhile] studio [has] provided both of these things." (Artist)

"Transformational, at a time when I had not been able to maintain an art practice for about 20 years, access to meanwhile spaces, [...] at no cost to me has enabled me to create work to exhibit, as well as gaining a public commission and become involved the wider arts community where I live." (Artist)

"Working outside of the home has established a greater work life balance. I've also been able to meet lots of new people and from this, new projects have been born." (Artist)

“Having this shared, communal meanwhile space also provides an opportunity for building a connection with fellow artists of differing age groups” (Artist)

“While I was in a space in [location], meanwhile space made it so much easier to like build a collective. [...] And I don’t think that would have been possible in the same way without that space.” (Artist)

8.6 Transitioning From Study to Practice

While our data did not capture significant numbers of students and recent graduates (potentially owing to the timing of the research phase of the project), this group were nevertheless repeatedly singled out as a prime example of a meanwhile user group, where the low/no cost of studio space was held to be enabling of the shift from study to professional practice. In addition, art workers and studio providers pointed to the scale of some meanwhile provision as enabling new forms of support (e.g. where graduate cohorts might be allocated an entire floor of a building, so that they could remain in close proximity). This, in turn, was hoped to ‘retain’ graduates in particular locations, particularly where access to suitable cultural infrastructure had proved a barrier in the past.

“There’s never been a time before, I don’t think, when, you know, a whole kind of cohort could graduate from art college and then find themselves working in the same studio space. There’s something, there’s something really exciting about that, I think, something really, really positive that can shape the kind of scope and ambition of how people work” (Art worker)

“But the students would be so grateful because I have been talking to like students now [...] and they are very much of the opinion that [Higher Education Provider] does not support people after they graduate. They just feel like they’ve just been kicked out and with no support…” (Artist)

8.7 Greater Wellbeing

Importantly, many of the artists we heard from, and particularly those who took part in the survey, reported increased feelings of wellbeing as directly linked to having a meanwhile studio space. For some, these feelings were linked to a sense of relief or excitement at having found an affordable studio in the first place, and/or the new communities and friendships formed. Others spoke of the satisfaction they derived from developing artistic practices, where studio space had enabled them to be more "productive" or to establish a better work-life balance. At times, artists spoke explicitly of the link between the studio space and improved mental and physical health, where this link was particularly pronounced for those who mentioned feeling isolated previously. At times, these impacts were significant, with multiple artists describing their meanwhile studio as "life-changing", "life-saving" or as having a "transformative" impact.

"Having a meanwhile space has been life-changing" (Artist)

"It's AMAZING! It's provided space to think, grow, experiment and build a community. It has helped with my personal work, my business and also my mental health (cos it's fun and also a big stress relief)" (Artist)

"It's allowed me to practice much more often. This has led me to feel more motivated and encouraged." (Artist)

"Better mental health, less isolation, healthier habits keeping active walking to the space every day." (Artist)

8.8 Managing Change: Keeping Things Fresh

Meanwhile studios are by their nature an interim measure and it was not uncommon to hear from artists who had moved studios 3-5 times in the past few years. While not a frequent response, we heard from artists who used these periods of change as a stimulus, where a studio in a different building or a new part of town was viewed as an opportunity to keep things "refreshed" and might prompt new ways of working. Others spoke of the protection offered by some meanwhile providers (e.g. the offer of a new space in a different location) as cushioning periods of change or providing a kind of "safety net".

"I'm used to the novelty of new spaces [...] being in one place I find really tough so even just like working from home, I can't even sustain focus at this point, I almost like need that new environment to make me feel refreshed and I get too used to the same environments as well" (Artist)

"As to my individual work, it varies with the space and its situation, which I like. Different spaces offer different ways of working and thinking. You need to adapt... this can be productive." (Artist)

"From my experience [...] you're not necessarily staying in the same place, but you are at least [in] some kind of bubble which protects you. If, say, the space is no longer available, you will be transported to somewhere else. And sometimes that's not as convenient, but I think there is at least like a safety net where you're consistently, you know, you will at least have some space to work in." (Artist)

8.9 Wider Place-Based Benefits

While the artists and art workers who participated in our project tended to note benefits that were directly applicable to themselves and/or to peer groups, local authority staff often pointed to a wider range of priorities. For example, just under a third of respondents to the local authority survey explicitly noted the benefits of meanwhile studios for artists and art workers, where the demand for studio space, the low/no cost of meanwhile studios, and the ability to "experiment" and "cluster" were all commented upon. In addition, one respondent spoke of meanwhile use as a means by which to trial locations and models before committing to more "permanent infrastructure".

In addition, however, local authority staff also spoke positively of the way in which meanwhile use might "activate" previously vacant properties and/or "animate" the high street, with a range of potential spillover benefits including economic and social gains (e.g. to nearby properties and businesses), the reduction of negative or anti-social behaviours, increased footfall, and a changed sense of place. There was a strong sense, in this data set, of meanwhile studios as a quick, "low capital investment" that might nevertheless yield a wide variety of positive outcomes, particularly when "strategically applied".

"Artists need spaces. If there are buildings going through a transition and [...] meanwhile space makes productive use of the space and keeps the building in use - that is positive" (Local authority respondent)

"Activation of otherwise vacant units which creates a sense of vibrancy. Allows artists/businesses to test their ideas out in a relatively risk-free way (not tied into long contracts)." (Local authority respondent)

"There are economic benefits for creatives, landlords and nearby facilities. There are also social benefits and reduction of anti-social behaviour when vacant spaces are animated" (Local authority respondent)

"If done well it can completely reposition how a town centre and neighbourhood is viewed. It minimises vacancy and helps maintain retail units in a good state of repair... by bringing creatives together and supporting their clustering it helps create a 'scene' which can grow." (Local authority respondent)

"Provide short term, low cost space for artists and small organisations who struggle to secure permanent premises, particularly in the city centre [...] Bring activity, footfall and cultural presence into vacant or transitional buildings, helping maintain vitality during periods of economic or physical change. [...] Reduce vacancy and blight while longer-term redevelopment or disposal options are progressed. [...] Deliver visible cultural and place based outcomes with relatively modest capital or revenue investment. [...] Can contribute to regeneration, wellbeing, participation and city centre recovery objectives when strategically applied." (Local authority respondent)

8.10 ‘Worth the Risk’

While many artists and art workers were explicit about the challenges and limitations of meanwhile use (see the next section), a core group, particularly to the artist survey, suggested a generally positive experience overall. We discuss this in more detail below, but it is worth stating that many artists and art workers felt that the risks of meanwhile studio space were outweighed by the advantages, where access to space and the low/no cost of meanwhile provision were again highlighted as having particular significance.

“Problems are outweighed by the advantage of having access to free studio space.” (Artist)
“I am happy to cope with limitations such as no wifi or heat as long as the space is safe, quiet and low cost.” (Artist)

“It’s clear from the outset that the spaces are temporary and self-managing, and you just have to take that on board. If you have to move-out at short notice, that’s part of the deal. It means you sometimes have to use them lightly [...] there can be practical issues - you just have to work through these - it’s a free space ffs” (Artist)

“The critical conversations around me [...] don’t diminish that people are coming into [meanwhile studios] aware of the limitations and that they might need to move, but they’re still getting a lot of benefit from just the provision of space itself” (Arts worker)

9. Key Challenges, Points of Tension and Confusion

While many artists, art workers and staff in local authorities were enthusiastic about the benefits of meanwhile studio provision (see previous section), we also heard from those with concerns or whose experiences had been much more negative. In addition, we noted a sustained confusion over key terminology and processes, and some areas of potential tension.

9.1 Confusion Over Key Terminology

Despite the documented boom in meanwhile artists' studios, there remained sustained confusion over the model and associated terminology. This confusion often stemmed from the variability of timescales involved and the specifically interim nature of meanwhile use. For example, meanwhile uses were regularly conflated with terms such as 'temporary' and/or 'short-term', while meanwhile venues that had existed for several years (albeit on a rolling basis) were mistaken as having longer-term and/or permanent lease agreements.

Throughout the project, it was clear that it was difficult to recognise meanwhile use in practice, and that what was considered 'short-term' or 'temporary' for artists (generally a period of between 6-12 months) could vary considerably for other stakeholders. For some artists, in addition, the term 'meanwhile' was new, unexplained, or was introduced via our project - and was treated with a degree of scepticism. There was thus some concern that artists and art workers may sign up to meanwhile studios without full understanding.

"It's a term that we've used a lot, but I don't think I have a clear definition myself" (Art worker)

"I used to work in London and it was a very used term and then I moved here and it was like councils were kind of using it slightly clumsily, kind of when they should just be saying temporary [...] I think a lot of people use meanwhile use when they should just be saying temporary." (Art worker)

"I'm getting the feeling that means the same as temporary, but it might also be different" (Artist)

"I think meanwhile is new for me as well" (Artist)
"'Short term' definition could vary. For instance, a lease agreement for 2 years is short term in the tenancy world." (Local authority respondent)

"Something can be on a short-term lease for ten years." (Artist)

9.2 Concerns Over Safety and Working Conditions

By far the most common concern raised in the project was the condition of the studios themselves, where these tended to be located in buildings designed for other purposes (e.g. empty shops, office blocks) and, in some cases, had been vacant for some time. The majority of respondents to the artist survey, for example, including those who were otherwise very positive about their studios, noted at least one building fault, including a lack of running water, heating, lighting, and electrical sockets, the lack of natural light, non-functioning toilets, windows that couldn't be opened, blocked doors, broken locks and a lack of kitchen facilities.

Local authority staff likewise reported concerns over safe and suitable working conditions, while artists and art workers in the workshops pointed to the absence of suitable disposal facilities for artists' materials or suitable guidance on how to dispose things safely. Multiple artists told us that their studios were uninhabitable under certain conditions (e.g. very cold or hot temperatures) or were difficult for disabled artists to access; a smaller number reported damage to their work. In many cases, there was a sense of a disconnect between the artists inhabiting the building and those responsible for managing it, and it was felt key information (e.g. around repairs) was not shared widely or promptly.

"There is no ventilation as none of the windows open so working with oil paints does not seem healthy [...] In winter, the space was bitterly cold and it looks like it will be baking hot on a sunny summer's day. A lot of the [...] building[s] are these glass cubes that would have had air-conditioning for the office workers but not for us" (Artist)

"When the building flooded and our floors were flooded with ingress water, none of us were notified [...] Lots of my stuff and artworks were damaged by the flood water." (Artist)

"The spaces are often inaccessible to those with enhanced mobility needs, resulting in inequity of opportunity for disabled artists compared to purpose built and maintained premises with on-site operational support staff." (Artist)

"Very cold in winter. There seems to be an issue with water leaks in some parts of the building. It's unclear if these are being fixed. I'm concerned that this issue may escalate." (Artist)

"The spaces are unheated, uncleaned, not maintained, often inaccessible, and not always suitable workspaces." (Local authority respondent)

Safety was another key issue, with many artists, art workers and local authority staff voicing concern. For some, this was directly tied to the condition of buildings (see above). Others indicated feeling unsafe, where lone working and theft were raised as particular problems. Again, many artists highlighted the particular impact of this upon disabled artists.

"There's also a sense that sometimes meanwhile spaces are less safe in terms of the heating or the lighting or the security of the buildings at times where people feel being in them on their own feels unsafe compared to a purpose-built studio with round the clock key access and staffing." (Art worker)

"I had a big theft when I started. Yeah, that was really nasty… in a perfect world, it would be nice to actually lock the studio" (Artist)

"There were regular issues with reliable heating, water, electricity [...] Both places also had issues with security as doors were left open. These things make people feel unsafe and often unable to carry on using the space." (Artist)

"If you're in an abandoned building and the fire safety risk assessment is not quite right and there's no investment in building management. That's a huge risk if you're in a wheelchair. And it's… 'Oh actually this lift isn't a fire lift but no one told us'. Stuff like that. Just the management side of it." (Artist)

In the data set, there was a strong sense of artists and art workers 'playing down' such concerns, often through humour or coping mechanisms. At times, it seemed that poor working conditions were largely accepted as part of the 'meanwhile deal' and that low standards had been widely normalised. Similarly, workshop participants spoke of putting up with inconsiderate co-tenants or incompatible artistic practices because "it's for free" and "that's the payoff".

9.3 Limitations to Practice

A second key concern was that many meanwhile studios had restrictions in place, which acted to limit practice and access. For example, artists told us that they were not allowed to make mess, use materials like plaster, or engage in processes such as soldering, while art forms like dance and music relied upon equipment that was rarely feasible to install (e.g. dance floors, soundproofing) and income-generating activities (e.g. the direct selling or artworks) were generally not permitted.

Artists and art workers similarly pointed to a lack of access at certain times of day or noted restrictions around entry and exit for guests (e.g. project participants, preview attendees etc.). While some of these restrictions drew from safety policies such as fire prevention, or from the type of lease, others appeared to be concerned with the condition of the building at the point of return to the landlord or responded to the interim nature of use.

As a result, while some artists were able to access relatively low-cost studio space, others were effectively "locked out". Similarly, there were omissions when we compared the 'blue slip' information, most notably for theatre, dance and sound-based practices, that suggested these art forms only rarely found accommodating meanwhile studios.

"Messy and materially intensive practices can often be locked out of use - resulting in a tiered access by form of practice." (Artist)

"You can't use power tools; that you can't plug things in; that you can't really do much with the fabric of the building, so it's very limiting in terms of the type of practice that you can have in that space" (Artist)

"Actually these meanwhile spaces, if you're a painter, and that's your main art form, they're pretty decent. Or if you [...] do clean textiles practice – brilliant.[...] [But] there could be a better balance like achieved between having the right practices in the right spaces to be honest." (Artist)

"Actually, they are, and I tried, they are highly inappropriate spaces for programming, for public events [...] there are endless logistical limitations [...] who wants to sign in and out everyone turning up to a private view? [...] There were all sorts of limitations spatially." (Artist)

"Halfway through my time there, the agreement changed and we weren't allowed to use it [in the] evenings anymore [...] so we didn't have evenings or weekend access, which basically eliminated about 90% of the work that we had programmed. Which sucked." (Artist)

9.4 The Impact of Building Closures: Instability, Fear and Lowered Expectations

Along with poor working conditions, a frequently noted concern pertained to the meanwhile model itself, where the instability of space and short notice periods given (at times around seven days) were a regular feature of both the workshops and artist survey. As mentioned previously, it was not uncommon for artists and art workers to have had between 3-5 studios in the past few years, or to have moved multiple times in a single year.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many artists and art workers shared accounts of severe disruption to their practices, often compounded by the practical, physical and financial realities of relocation, where this was more pronounced for those with lots of materials (e.g. equipment and furniture), as well as for those using the space as a base for arts organisations and initiatives.

"Physically moving was a challenge for me." (Artist)

"I moved quite a lot and it's just so hard." (Artist)

"It's always like very physical." (Artist)

"I am unable to settle in to work on a longer-term project without knowing the space is secured for long enough to complete the project." (Artist)

"[Between] vehicle hire and support worker time, each eviction costs me around £450, which I have to find at 7 days." (Artist)

"We cannot really make plans in the space because we do not know if we will be there for three months or three years.[...] we are lucky that we have thirty days, but if we were given seven days, I have no idea how we would manage. Like we have collected a lot of stuff in our space [...]. Where would we put that in seven days? How would we even get a moving van in [location] in seven days, let alone a place to put that stuff? [...] Even having 30 days to suddenly move out would be a huge catastrophe for us" (Art worker)

"Our artists, I think, have had better experiences[...] at the end of this [...] they just had to pick up their easel and take it out of the building [...] it wasn't that they had moved their entire operation into the space, whereas organizations are running out of a space. So, I think our experiences are different." (Art worker)

Throughout the project, multiple artists and art workers described feeling fearful and uncertain, where the threat of closure was suggested to “loom” over them, at times actively preventing artists from engaging in longer-term or more ambitious work, taking on new contracts, programming in advance, and/or developing social relationships.

Others suggested that the instability of the model worked to lower expectations of, and trust in, studio provision. Staff in local authorities likewise raised concerns about the “here today, gone tomorrow” mentality of meanwhile use, but did not indicate an awareness of the full impact of relocation/ closure upon artists.

“The uncertainty of having to move out at short notice looming over us artists from, practically, day 1 - which, I know, is part of the deal.” (Artist)

“There’s something about the instability of meanwhile spaces that it’s like you can’t put down roots, you can’t make plans” (Artist)

“The first time round it was terrible and we were asked to leave very quickly and it really stopped us from moving in the second time properly and committing because... Yeah, we all felt a bit unsettled by it [...] it was such a sort of burnt fingers exercise [...] [I] didn’t trust it at all to start with” (Art worker)

“We are concerned. The amount of stuff we’ve got, like what happens to it if we can’t get out in seven days?” (Art worker)

9.5 Impact on Personal Health and Wellbeing

For many of artists and art workers, this instability was felt to have negative impacts on personal health and wellbeing. For example, artists who responded to the survey commonly described feeling anxious, stressed and "destabilised", particularly with reference to the period of notice (and even where this had not yet been enacted). Negative impacts on wellbeing and health were also more pronounced for those who had relocated multiple times, were structurally disadvantaged in some way, and for artists and art workers in positions of responsibility with regards other artists in the building (e.g. who ran an arts-based organisation or initiative from the meanwhile studio space, or acted as an informal 'manager' or recognised point of communication)

"[It] creates a sense of anxiety and an inability to really settle and build community within the spaces." (Artist)

"The looming threat of being turfed out without any notice is destabilising, and is likely to hit practitioners with lived experience of unstable housing conditions harder, with mental health impacts." (Artist)

"I do live in fear of the day that we get told to move [...] I'm in a constant state of anxiety [...] because I feel very responsible for the organisation and also for the artists." (Art worker)

"I had enormous amount of like stress and this instability [...] I wasn't very well myself mentally [...] being actually ready to probably wrap up the project because I just could not see the way out of it" (Art worker)

"The mental health impact of losing the space was even worse, because we'd taken on the entire floor of a building with like this implicit suggestion that when we lost the space they would help us like moving out. But that turned out not to be the case and we got six days notice." (Artist)

9.6 Affordability: Towards a Tiered Mode of Access?

There was a clear sense throughout the project that high sector demand, the increased cost of living (potentially including increased studio fees), and low pay for artists were all contributing factors driving the demand for meanwhile use. However, how meanwhile studios were positioned within this debate varied. For some (see previous section) the low/no cost offered by the meanwhile model opened up potentially life-changing opportunities for artists and art worker, and access to studios that would have been financially unaffordable otherwise.

For others, there were concerns that meanwhile use established a tiered model of access, where only those who could afford to pay (or pay more) could access stable and secure facilities, and that artists and art workers who were unable to afford other options were thus 'stuck' with interim or temporary studio spaces, with potentially detrimental long-term effects.

Indeed, artists, art workers and some local authority staff shared concerns that even low/no cost meanwhile studios could nevertheless involve a range of 'hidden' costs, from individual insurance, donations, compliance costs and transportation, to the costs required to make poor quality buildings habitable – where some if not all of these costs can be passed on to artists, and where some artists were far better placed to accommodate those costs than others.

It is the only studio that I can afford" (Artist)

"Obviously the studio is free, but I still had to spend a whole bunch of money on…buying the tarpaulins to cover the floor, buying the dust sheets to cover the tarpaulins, buying flat things so the tables don't wobble once you put the stuff on top of the carpet, PAT testing, transport, and that's before you get into actually the materials you're using for your art" (Artist)

"We invested, it wasn't free, we invested our own money into renovating it, buying furniture, renovating the walls" (Art worker)

"Fit out, storage, insurance and compliance costs are often absorbed by occupants, with little protection if access ends abruptly" (Local authority respondent)

"I know a lot of people [...] students, young people haven't got much money but want to keep in the city, they want to keep making things, they want to practice. [Studio provider name] functions because it's free and they're able to do it. But then when the precarity comes in, you're not able to sustain that practice." (Art worker)

"…you could suggest that because there's not a lot of space available everyone should just be grateful for what is available. Not that you can't complain but you feel like 'Ahh well, I've got that and it's not great but there's nowhere else." (Artist)

"In Germany they've got a phrase: if it's free it's too much for me. It's like well it's free but there's so many hidden costs that are not communicated or even obvious, until you've been in the building and 'Oh! there's no fire risk assessment', 'Oh! actually we can't get your wheelchair in', like stuff that becomes apparent. But it's because it's free space it feels like you don't have any leverage and you don't have any means to resolve it." (Artist)

Underlying much of the tension around meanwhile studio use then, was the issue of artist income and how this restricted artists' ability to make decisions over their studios. This was not lost upon the artists in our workshops, who, when asked to identify potential changes, suggested that the Scottish Government introduce Universal Basic Income (or UBI) twenty-one times over three in-person workshops, with a further seven artists and art workers asking for fair payment for artists. At the same time, some artists were clear that an initiative like UBI for artists would be politically contentious.

"It's so deeply unethical in my opinion, yet we have to sign these contracts because we have little other choice." (Artists)

"The bigger issue is artist income" (Local authority respondent)

"I think it's been brought up in all these other workshops about the UBI for artists in Ireland. I don't know what the conversation generally is in Scotland but that'll be highly scrutinised, the idea of giving artists free money. And that will be a political football as well." (Artist)

"And it will also become a whole thing of who's an artist and who isn't." (Artist)

9.7 Growing Unease

For the reasons and concerns outlined above, there was a sense of growing unease with the meanwhile model, particularly during the workshops with artists. At times, these discussions further expanded to include a critique of the use of rate relief and those who were felt to financially benefit from the 'meanwhile model' (e.g. property agents/brokers and landlords).

While this emerging debate seemed to be gaining traction amongst some groups of artists and art workers, however, by contrast, staff who responded to the local authority survey indicated that a key issue was availability (e.g. identifying and persuading property agents and landlords to allow meanwhile use), with no indication that rate relief was becoming contentious elsewhere.

"The biggest challenge is identifying rights holders and decision makers to allow use of spaces" (Local authority respondent)

"I'm concerned that meanwhile spaces are providing tax relief for landlords who should be contributing to our communities, by improving buildings and actively regenerating the city." (Artist)

"We're getting this building for free because it's benefiting the landlords at that point. It enriches the building. If you've got a building lying empty, that's a liability. If you've got people in it, that keeps it active and it actually brings footfall to the area. So the artists are doing a service to these landlords. I feel like sometimes it seems like artists are getting, expecting something for free, but we're actually getting diddled." (Artist)

9.8 Concerns Over Long-term Sustainability of Artists' Studios

While many of the concerns shared with the project team, perhaps necessarily, focused on the day-to-day realities of meanwhile studio space and/or the near-future threat of closure, a small number of artists, art workers and local authority staff took a longer view. The fragility of the meanwhile model, as reliant upon cycles of urban development as well as tax breaks and financial incentives, all of which could easily be withdrawn or change rapidly, and where those changes could result in the sudden collapse of the model entirely, was a key concern.

Others spoke of what they saw as an increasing reliance upon the 'meanwhile model', to the extent that this threatened the allocation of resources, energy and time to other models of provision, and particularly those that operated and invested in the long-term. Indeed, some artists and studio providers voiced concerns that low/no meanwhile studios acted to undercut existing provision, where this had the potential to alter tenancy across the sector (e.g. as artists moved towards lower cost options).

"There will become a tipping point where there will be so many artists in meanwhile space that people won't pay for studios. And then that cultural infrastructure will start to deteriorate because there won't be enough support for it" (Studio provider)

"It's almost like it's not in [meanwhile studio provider's] remit to think about it. So they don't. So it's like 'we'll deal with the during bit; how you get there in the first place and then what happens afterwards is none of our concern really'." (Art worker)

"There are anxieties that its proliferation may result in lowered investment in fixed and sustainable cultural production spaces." (Artist)

"I just worry that we're not thinking even the five years down the line [...] What's at risk? [...] Are we asking ourselves enough questions about what this means for the future?" (Studio provider)

"[There is a] risk of normalisation. Over reliance on meanwhile provision can mask the absence of sustainable, long term cultural infrastructure" (Local authority respondent)

10. Future-Scoping the Meanwhile Model: Towards a ‘Mixed Ecology’ of Artists’ Studio Space

The project identified some clear areas of agreement and consensus. Almost everyone who participated noted that **studio provision was vital for artists and art workers and that there needed to be more of it to support growing demand.**

However, **artists’ and art workers’ experiences of meanwhile studios differed markedly.** For some, access to meanwhile studios was described as transformative and even “life changing”, with an array of professional and personal benefits. Others spoke of desperately poor working conditions and recurrent instability as linked to damaged artistic practices and deteriorating physical and mental health.

As noted in the previous section, **many artists did both simultaneously, with a tendency to at once acknowledge poor working conditions and the instability of the model, while simultaneously expressing gratitude for access to the space.** In this sense, our research did not identify key providers or sites that were straightforwardly poor, while others were straightforwardly good. Rather, there was a continual sense of dissonance, where more negative aspects were routinely considered ‘part of the deal’.

Similarly, **the issue of affordability was contested.** For some artists and art workers, the low/no cost associated with meanwhile studios acted as a vital remedy to low rates of pay and financial precarity, enabling access to studios that they could not have afforded otherwise. Others voiced concerns over the emergence of a tiered model of provision, where mid-/long-term studio contracts were only available to those who could afford to pay (or pay more), leaving some artists and art workers feeling as though they had no real choice.

Finally, there were important **discrepancies and potential tensions** in terms of the discussions held by artists and art workers, and those within and between local authorities - particularly in relation to rate relief, the role of brokers and landlords, and artists’ experiences of instability.

10.1 Towards a ‘Mixed-Ecology’ Model

In this section, we make a series of recommendations that aim at a **mixed ecology** model for artists’ studios - where multiple operators, models and forms of provision are active and supported in any given area, allowing artists to select the type of provision that is right for them. We do so for the following reasons:

Artists need access to workspace if they are going to make work and sustain their practices. Artists’ studios (and other forms of provision) are essential cultural infrastructure.

Artists need choice. Just as every artistic practice is different, so will the spaces artists need at any one time differ. Artists should be able to select from a variety of models and providers to ensure that they have access to the space(s) that best suit their needs and values at that point.

Balanced provision is required. Choice relies upon the availability and affordability of a range of models and studio providers across Scotland, where multiple types and forms of provision are supported simultaneously.

Long-term thinking is crucial. Short-term, meanwhile and temporary options, while beneficial in many respects, are fragile. Sustainable artistic careers depend upon a variety of spaces, at least some of which must operate in the mid- to long-term.

“I think everyone deserves to be able to choose” (Studio provider)

“The meanwhile model absolutely suits some people and not others. But I think I think the point that’s important is that these things happen alongside each other and not instead of each other, or perhaps not because of each other either. I hope it is understood more widely outside of the kind of cultural sector that, you know, different kinds of studio provision need to exist.” (Art worker)

“I feel strongly that this is this is not the only solution for artists and should never be the only solution for artists in Scotland. You need a pipeline of spaces so artists can have more security as they develop their practice. These spaces offer a bridge from education into developing a practice and into industry, it’s a place and valuable opportunity for artists to have somewhere where they can develop their practice and their work. But it shouldn’t be seen as a permanent solution for studio space as the model doesn’t allow for this. It continues to be important to invest in permanent spaces for artists across Scotland.” (Studio provider)

11. Recommendations

In making the following recommendations, we recognise the wide range of stakeholders and deep complexities involved and associated with meanwhile studios. We further note, however, a generosity of spirit and a willingness to engage and explore from all participants to the project. Many examples of good practice already exist and might be more widely shared. Indeed, artists, art workers, studio providers and local authority staff across the board spoke of their wish to know more, understand differing perspectives, and to come together to resolve key issues.

In addition, while this report has concentrated upon meanwhile provision, we consider it likely that some of the key benefits and challenges raised here are widespread (e.g. the benefits of making work outside the home, working conditions), and are by no means limited to this single model.

Meanwhile artist studios have developed at considerable pace in Scotland over the last ten years. Today, there is an opportunity to pause and reflect upon what is working and what is not. We hope that the following recommendations act as both an exemplar of good practice in the sector and as an accelerator for further discussion and collective action.

We also recognise the need to be ambitious. Some of the recommendations below are significant and would take time, energy and investment to come to fruition. However, we believe that artists deserve fair access to studio space, safe working conditions, and the ability to choose the workspace that is right for them. In working towards changes to meanwhile and other types of studio provision, we work towards a fairer and stronger cultural sector for all in Scotland.

Based on the data collected and analysed within this project, we make the following five recommendations:

11.1 One: Fair Working Conditions

Our research indicated widespread concern over poor working conditions as well as the instability caused by meanwhile use. To address this, we recommend:

- **A debate around the baseline standards for any meanwhile studio building.** This cross-sector debate should result in agreed minimum standards for the sector (see recommendation five).
- **Prompt reporting mechanisms** for faults and building improvements. Reporting mechanisms should clearly identify the person(s) responsible, the steps that will be taken, and include regular communication with studio holders.
- **Clear guidance on the use of the studio space,** including safe disposal and complaint procedures, for noise, lone working policies etc.
- **A longer notice period** moving towards an industry standard of 21 days at minimum.
- **Exit packages of support** for artists and art workers when asked to vacate the studios, potentially including: a clear timeline, regular updates, support with moving costs and arrangements, 'first refusal' for nearby/new studio spaces, and lists of alternative providers and resources. For closures that fall under the 21 days suggested, we would recommend significant support to be organised by the provider (e.g. a booked moving service, storage space and so on).
- **Mediation,** as delivered by a third party, to support all parties in the case of conflict.
- **A co-designed code of conduct.** This should act as a recognised standard for artist-centred meanwhile provision in Scotland, explicitly setting out the key responsibilities and arrangements for all involved parties and helping artists and art workers identify quality meanwhile provision.

"It would be good if someone could mediate the situation [...] that there's someone who we can legally, like, you know, actually ask to mitigate the situation and to mediate a conversation because quite often we don't have direct communication, neither with landlords nor with whoever [is] handling it. We just got an email and that's it." (Artist)

We always have to be really clear with artists when they come to us that this is the deal that we've got, and the reason why we can offer these affordable spaces at such low cost is because we're taking them on the basis that if the landlord chooses to, they could develop it." (Studio provider)

11.2 Two: Cross-Sector Knowledge Sharing

The project identified key tensions and areas of confusion, where increased cross-sector communication and knowledge sharing would be beneficial to all parties. To build upon the momentum of this project, we recommend:

- **Establishing a quarterly forum for artists' studio provision in Scotland.** This should be run by a third party (e.g. Creative Scotland, a Higher Education Institution) and involve a range of stakeholders (e.g. studio providers from a variety of models, artists, art workers, local authority staff, and so on).
- **Cross sector discussion.** The forum should enable debate around urgent topics and encourage regular discussion and an exchange of perspectives. Discussion should explore a broad range of studio provision, rather than concentrating on any one type or model, identifying the underlying mechanisms, incentives and trade-offs in each case (e.g. in the case of meanwhile use, the role of rate relief).
- **Compiling an evidence base.** The forum should gather and distribute an evidence base, drawing on existing and new research and case studies from across Scotland but also international work, to highlight the value of artists' studios, share best practice and aid future decision-making. This could include pulling together short guides or FAQs for different stakeholders (e.g. artists, art workers, local authority staff, developers) as well as considering the potential of creative land trusts, Community-Right-To-Buy powers, Section 75 agreements (e.g. as part of new housing developments), property 'match-makers' as employed elsewhere in the UK, and so forth.
- **Developing a cultural strategy for studio provision.** The above should feed into a new strategy document specifically targeted at studio provision across Scotland.

"They [the Scottish Government] need to understand the benefits of having creative work and creative space and creative activity in towns, communities, cities, islands, rural areas, urban areas across Scotland [...] they have to understand what it means for education, what it means for wellbeing, what it means for placemaking and I hope that [...] we can continue to build those messages" (Art worker)

"There's almost no consensus or strategy or plan [for studio provision]" (Studio provider)

11.3 Three: Investment into Artists' Studios

Artists' studios are vital cultural infrastructure but existing provision is often hampered by a lack of capital and revenue investment. To promote a shift towards a mixed ecology of studio provision, we recommend:

- **Research into new models and funding options** to support artists' studios, drawing on best practice across Scotland as well as international examples, to ensure that funds are resourceful, agile, and have the best possible return for artists and art workers.
- **Capital and revenue funding suitable for artists' studios to be advertised and ope**n to all models and types of provision. The co-designed code of conduct for meanwhile studios to act as a benchmark for investment.
- **Raising the profile of artists' studios** to generate wider sector understanding of their role and value within the cultural sector and support investment.
- **The creation of a new multi-year public fund** specific to artists' studios and cultural workspaces (of all models), used to improve, expand or secure provision across Scotland.

"You've got people in the city that really know how to do this work and how to access the kinds of support and resource and grants and so on to make it happen [...] So there's a bit of a conversation about whether people who are already doing it well should have access to more resources to be able to duplicate the number of spaces available or to enhance the provision in the city" (Art worker)

11.4 Four: Further Research

While this review has captured some of the key issues and emerging areas of challenges and tension around the 'meanwhile model' for artists' studios in Scotland, there is a great deal that we do not know. To support evidence-based decision-making into the future, we recommend:

- **Detailed mapping of artists' studio provision across Scotland,** where this captures a broader range of models and in-depth data (e.g. a year-by-year breakdown across local authorities, for all models of studio provision).
- **Critical examination of a range of models of studio provision** inclusive of the relationships between various models (e.g. creative land trusts, independent spaces, domestic studios and so forth). This should include exploration of underlying funding and ownership models within Scotland and further afield (see recommendation four).
- **Longitudinal data collection** that seeks to identify shifts over time and for a variety of stakeholders, with particular attention to the experiences of structurally disadvantaged groups.

11.5 Five: Legislative Empowerment

Finally, we recommend that much of the above be underpinned via increased legislative powers, in order to expand the legal framework and protections for artists and art workers across Scotland. We recommend:

- **The identification of a range of potential policy and legislative changes** (e.g. beyond copyright, moral rights, resale and so forth). These changes should be identified by cross-sector stakeholders within the quarterly forum and could include: a review of rate relief (e.g. as leading to standard procedures and rates for cultural use across Scotland, potential 'fast tracking' for meanwhile and temporary cultural uses, protections for meanwhile cultural use against rate changes, linking rate relief to length of tenure); increased powers and support to enable local authorities to take over persistently vacant and vacant buildings for cultural use (e.g. via Community Right To Buy, High Street Auctions, Compulsory Purchase Orders), increased rights for studio holders in line with those offered to commercial tenants and sub-let properties (e.g. with regards safety in the workplace) and so forth.

- **The identification of policy and support targeted at inequalities in studio provision,** where these inequalities apply to disabled artists and art workers, those from lower income brackets as well as geographic disparities and so forth.

- **That appropriate working conditions be integrated into research and policy-change around fair work in Scotland** and the UK more broadly, where this has tended to focus on issues of fair minimum payment standards, worker exploitation and the issue of affordability (as per Creative Scotland's Fair Work First scheme, the Independent Culture Fair Work Task Force (2025), research by the Scottish Trades Union Congress (2025) and the Scottish Artists Union (2024) as well as research by Ehlinger et al., (2024), Arts Professional and Baker Richards (2025) and so on).

- **A debate by the Culture Minister** into the general legislative environment, shaped by the identified key points and evidence assembled.

12. Endnotes

1. Biddlecombe (2022) found that 50% of surveyed Scotland-based artist-run initiatives (ARIs) have short term leases or non-secure tenure and that ‘security of space issues’ is ranked among the key challenges faced by ARIs in Scotland.

2. The CREATe (Ehlinger et al., 2024: 4) report, funded by the Design and Artists Copyright Society (DACS), on UK visual artists’ earnings and contracts, for example, put the median income for visual artists at £12,500 a year; 47% lower than a full-time minimum wage income, with women ‘typically earning 40% less’ than men and a ‘70% pay gap between disabled and non-disabled visual artists’.

3. In addition, both Outer Spaces and EP Spaces also run programmes of support and/or other models of studio space. EP Spaces has additional studio provision in Edinburgh which supported 370 artists and creatives at the time of writing, for example, while Outer Spaces reported supporting 83 artists through paid commissions, awards, residencies, production support and fellowships, had provided 38 studio bursaries to support artists moving into new spaces, and had launched a responsive programme of professional development, networking and public engagement.

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