

Redundancies in the museums sector after one year of Covid

A review of Museums Association
Redundancy Tracker data

Contents

03	Background
04	Total redundancies
05	Organisations impacted
07	Rate of redundancies
09	Job types
11	Trade union representation
11	Non-permanent staff
13	Methodology
13	Equalities impact
13	Redundancy Hub

Background

Museums in the UK have been hit hard by the Covid crisis. Like most other organisations, museums have been forced to close for long periods with extremely damaging effects. Despite the support of governments via the Cultural Recovery Fund and the furlough scheme, many museums have restructured and implemented redundancies over the past year.

We have been tracking redundancies in the sector as a symptom of the damage caused by the pandemic and as a barometer of the health of the sector. We have published a running total of redundancies on a regular basis on our website, and this document takes a closer look at the data that we have collected and the impact on the sector.

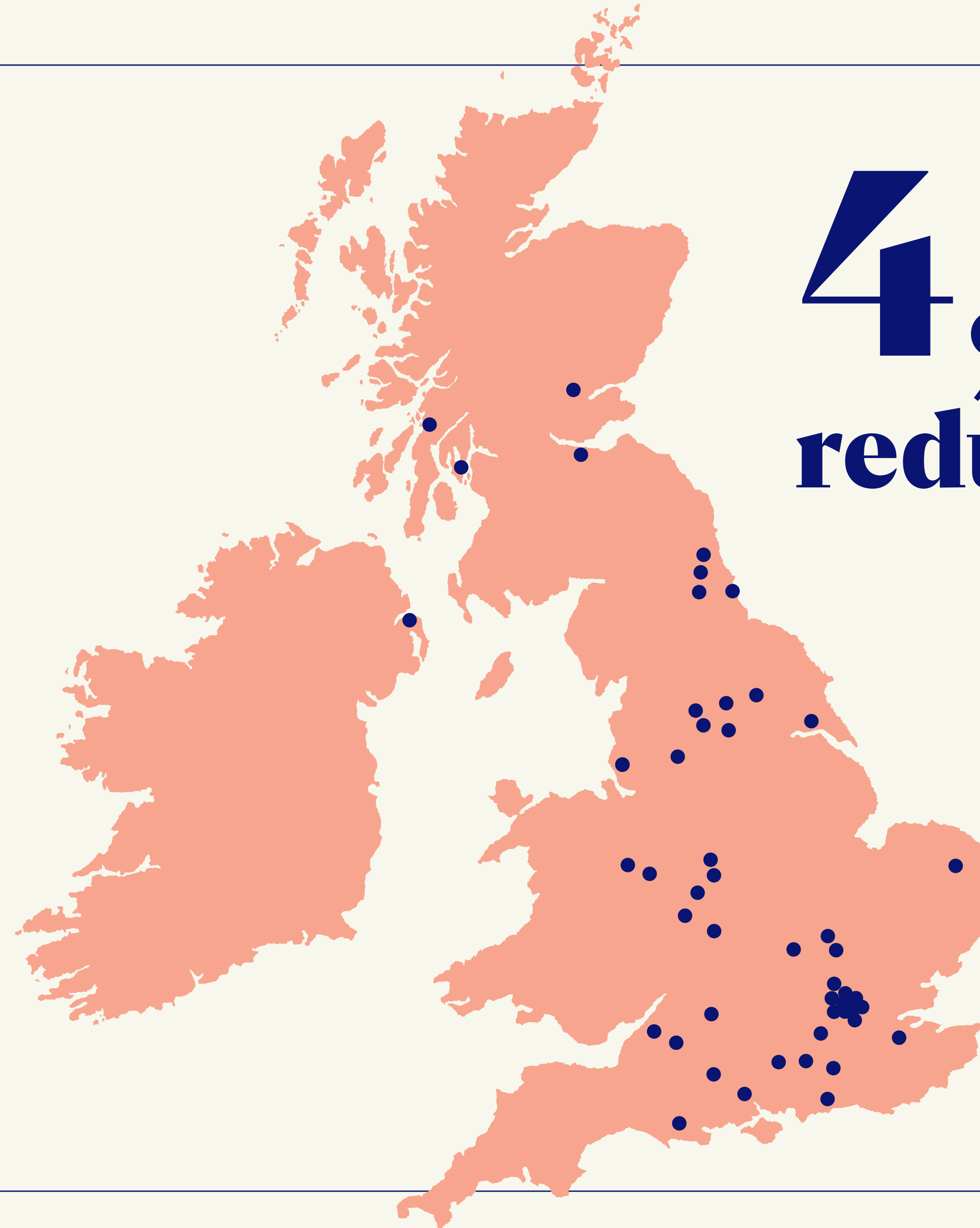
Total redundancies

As of 28 April 2021, there have been 4,100 redundancies in the museum sector in the UK. This includes 1,850 proposed and 2,250 confirmed redundancies across all job types and types of employment.

ONS figures for 2019 show that the museums and heritage workforce across the UK was estimated at 50,300 people. We believe this may be slightly underestimated, as the ONS collects separate figures for other roles that may be based in museums, such as in 'Cultural Education'.

If one accepts the ONS estimate, the loss of 4,100 jobs from the museums sector accounts for approximately 8% of all employment in museums across the UK.

02



4,100 redundancies

Please follow the link to
explore the map further
[www.museumsassociation.org/
campaigns/workforce/
redundancy-tracker/](http://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/workforce/redundancy-tracker/)

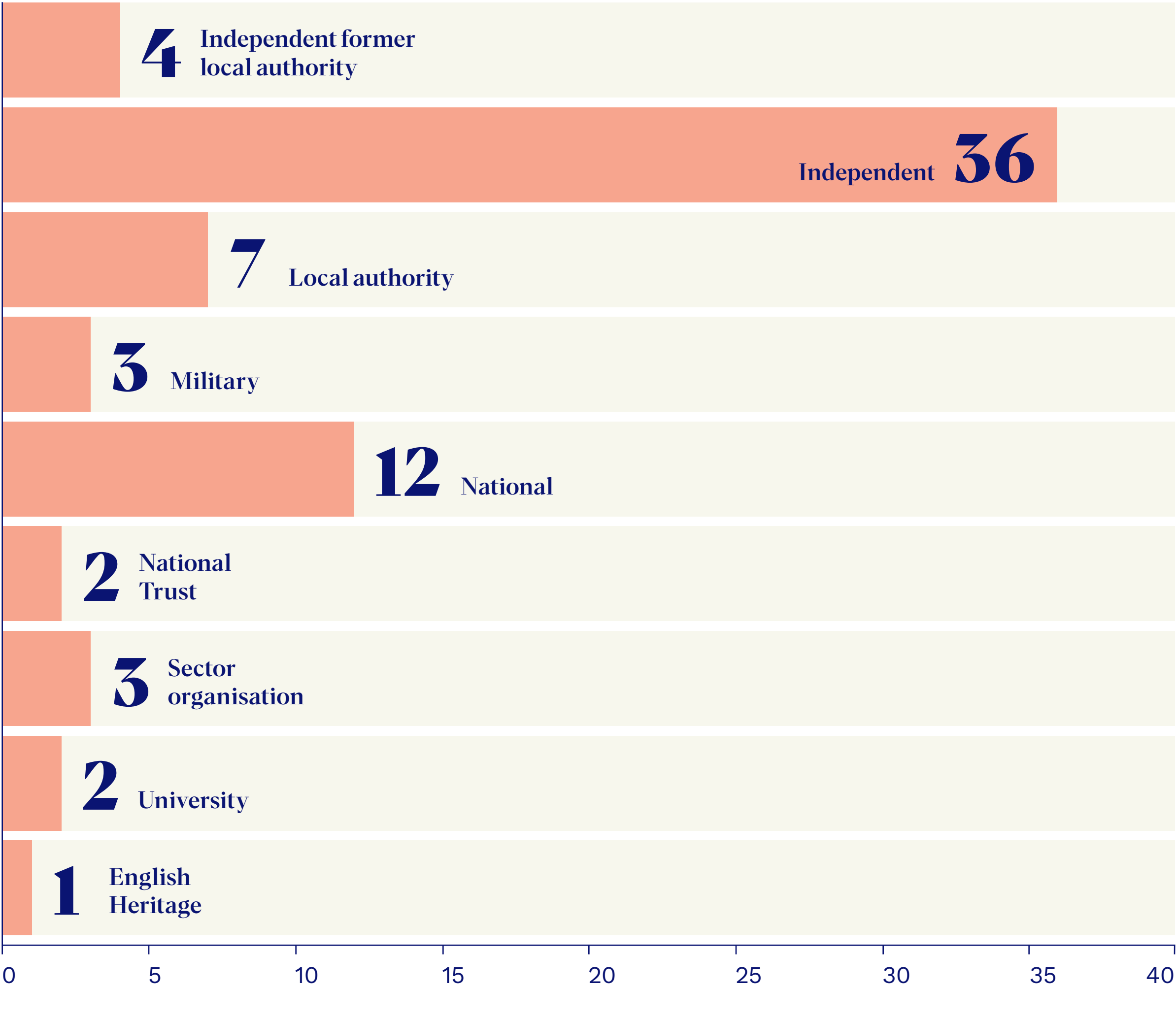
Organisations impacted

The redundancy data in this document comes from 70 organisations across the UK. This includes four organisations not published on the online Redundancy Tracker map for range of reasons, including request for anonymity.

Independent and national museums have been hardest hit by redundancies according to our data. Independent museums often have smaller reserves, are more reliant on earned income and are more vulnerable to sharp changes in economic conditions. National museums, which are increasingly reliant on international visitors and earned income, have implemented substantial staffing cuts following the Covid outbreak.

03

Number of organisations reporting redundancies by type of museum

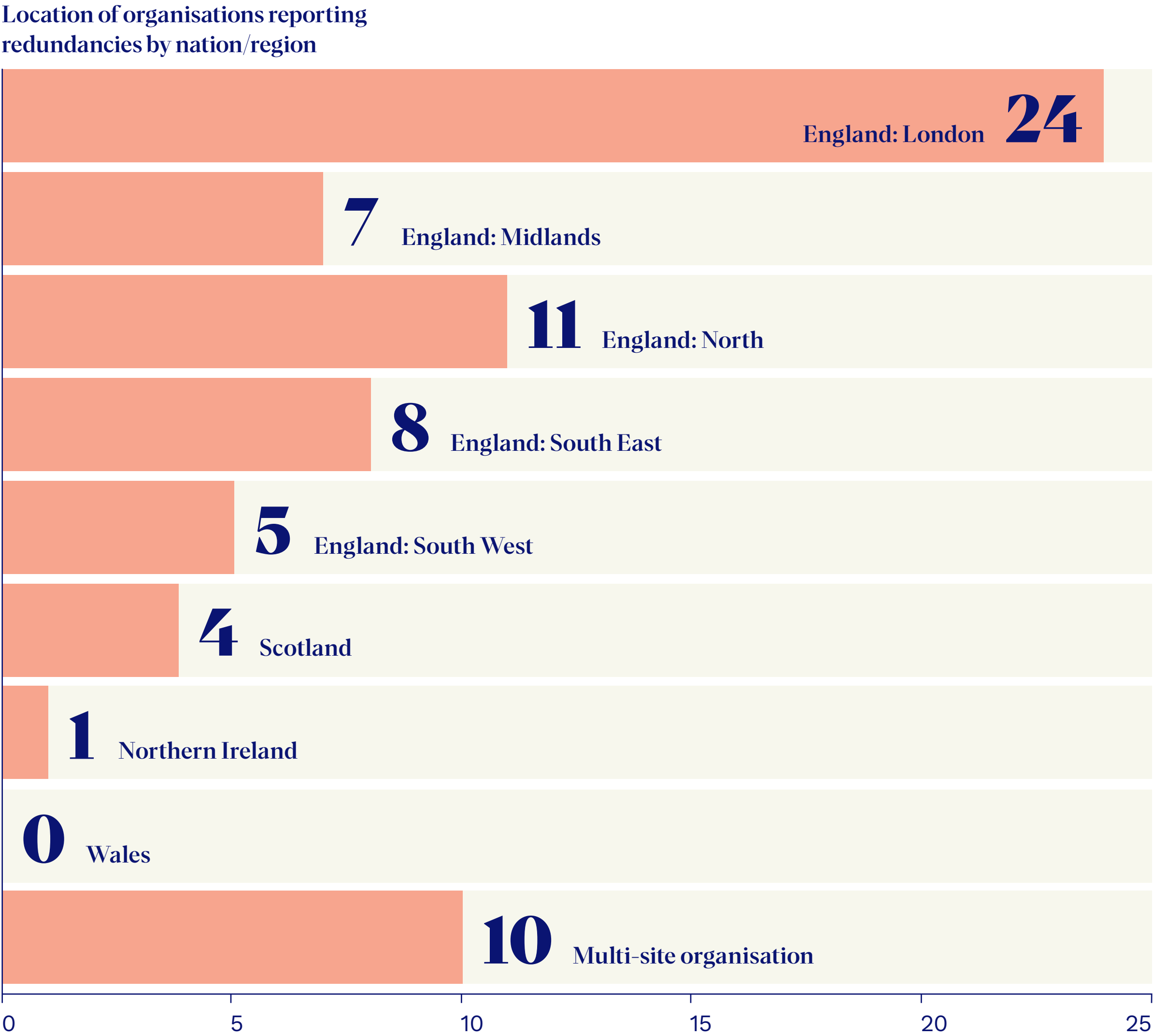


“The [redundancy] process has been rushed and painful for staff who have not been given the information necessary to submit alternative proposals to save jobs. The consultation was in name only. We are being made redundant with the least amount of redundancy payment that is legally possible. Calculations of these payments do not include any of the long-term and consistent over-time/after hours work that staff have done to top-up their low wages.”

Respondent from an Independent Museum

Organisations Impacted Continued...

This table demonstrates that London is the area worst affected by museum redundancies since the beginning of the pandemic. This is likely to be due to the high concentration of national and independent museums in the city, and its substantial reliance on international tourism. Note that while Northern Ireland and Wales both report low numbers of organisations implementing redundancies, some multi-site organisations reporting redundancies include sites in devolved nations.



“Management is ... extremely top down, causing favouritism, bullying, and mental health issues for staff, and making it difficult to work in teams because everyone is overly-focused on their own survival.”

Respondent from a National Museum

“I believe during this horrible time museums have not been supported as much as they should have been. I feel the support has focused more within bigger or known museums. And that smaller or independent museums who do just as well have not been helped a lot or enough.”

Respondent from an Independent Museum

Rate of redundancies

This data looks at the rate of redundancies by month since the beginning of the pandemic.

This data shows a high rate of proposed redundancies from May to July, including many major announcements from organisations such as the National Trust, Tate Enterprises and Birmingham Museums Trust.

There is then another peak of redundancies in the autumn, including at the Royal Collections Trust and Historic Royal Palaces. These occurred in the run-up to the first proposed end of the Job Retention Scheme at the beginning of November. The lack of clarity about the continuation of the Job Retention Scheme in the autumn resulted in job losses that could have been avoided or postponed.

The Job Retention Scheme was subsequently prolonged into 2021, and the rate of proposed and confirmed redundancies since autumn 2020 has slowed, although the announcement of cuts at the V&A Museum in February demonstrates that redundancies have not stopped altogether during this period.

It is clear from the above figures that the Job Retention Scheme has played a vital role in protecting jobs in the sector, and that the winding down of the scheme presents the risk of further redundancies if organisations are not sufficiently financially secure at the end of the scheme.

Time period	Proposed Redundancies		Confirmed Redundancies	
	No. orgs	Total redundancies	No. orgs	Total redundancies
April 2020			1	5
May 2020	1	232	1	6
June 2020	2	337	3	6
July 2020	8	1,894	3	22
August 2020	2	46	18	240
September 2020	8	483	7	122
October 2020	6	207	5	1,463
November 2020	2	100	4	367
December 2020	1	120	1	8
January 2021	1	7		
February 2021	1	140	1	4
March 2021	1	45	2	7

* Note that in the figures above, proposed redundancies includes figures for organisations that later confirmed figures.

“At the start of lockdown there was exemplary support from the centre - access to online training etc. However, we were unfurloughed and... then told that the entire team were to be made redundant. The ‘consultation’ was botched with managers giving us conflicting information and promises about support which was never provided.”

Respondent from an Independent Museum

“This organisation remains fully funded by the Arts Council whilst also benefiting from furlough scheme enormously. These redundancies have been made for “structural reorganisation” rather than cost cutting.”

Respondent from an Independent Museum

“I believe that the 2020 changes are not solely the result of Covid-19-related revenue loss, but part of an organisation-wide practice of regular restructures.”

Respondent from an Independent Museum

Job types

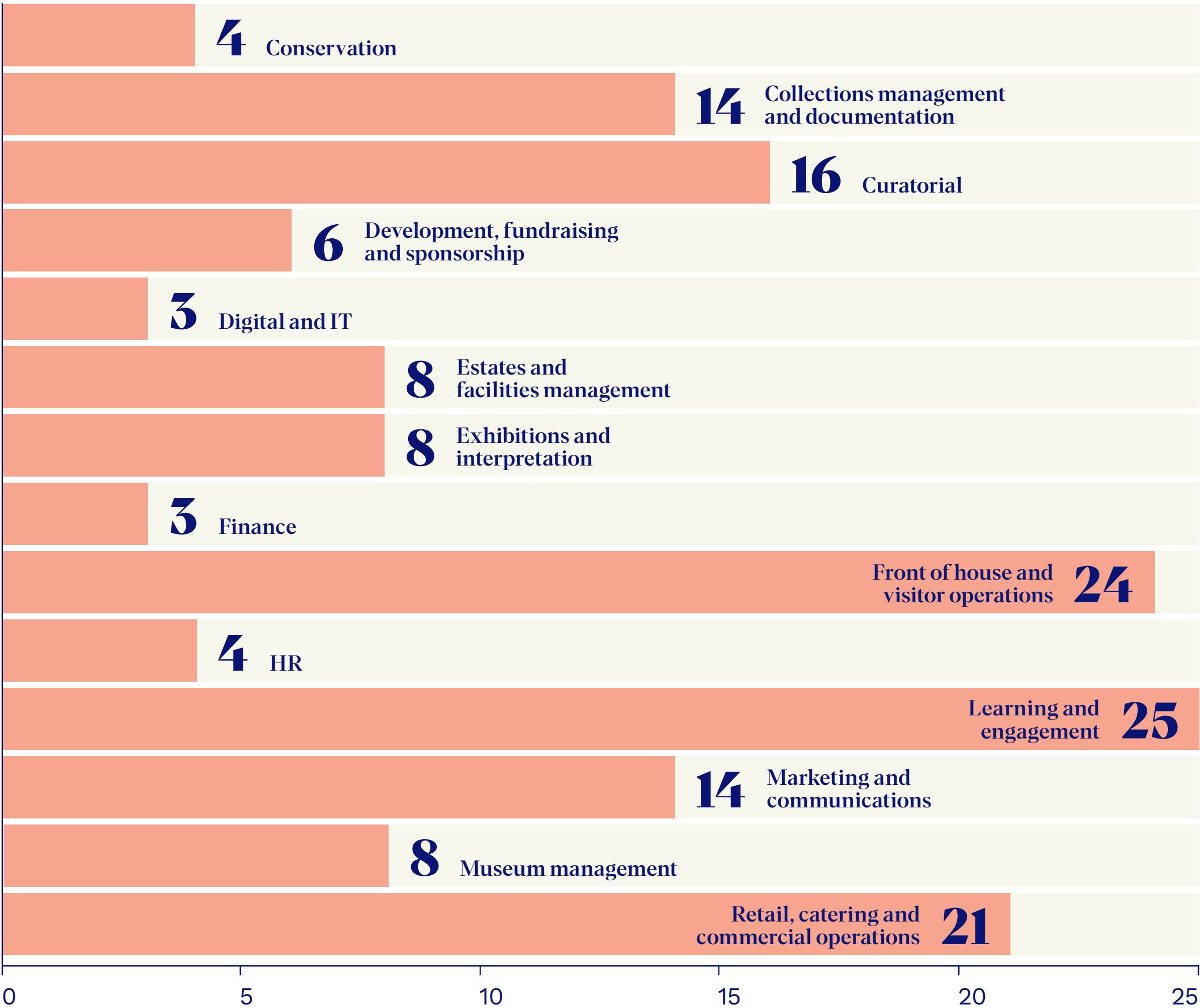
This table indicates the number of museums that report job losses in the following job types. Note that respondents could respond to as many job types as necessary.

This data shows that job losses have occurred across all job types in museums, but some areas of employment have been more affected than others. Learning and engagement, front of house and retail and catering roles are most likely to have been impacted by redundancies, while digital, IT, finance, HR and conservation roles have been least likely to be impacted.

This reflects decisions to make cuts in those areas most constrained by Covid restrictions. While it is possible that front of house and retail and catering roles might reappear when museums reopen, the Covid cuts have caused a huge loss in expertise and knowledge in these roles. There are also serious questions about the long-term impacts of Covid on established areas of museum practice such as learning and engagement.

05

Number of museums reporting at least one confirmed redundancy



“Due to these redundancies the whole learning programme (schools & families) has been stopped. The organisation, despite being an educational charity, no longer has a learning specialist on staff or the means of delivering its learning strategy without recruiting new staff.”

Respondent from an Independent Museum

“It’s heart wrenching. Casuals offered no furlough. Seemingly almost entirely FoH facing redundancy - management seem to all be in place still. Very sad and very poor communication, making it even harder for staff in already impossible situations”

Respondent from an Independent Museum

“Friends who have been made redundant in other museums have seen the same trend of trustees & CEOs expressing a view that FoH and catering are relatively unskilled and easy to replace in better times (!), and for education roles ‘they can just get a grant’ in the future and replace the education team/person without having to pay. I wish there was a way to discourage that thinking... The lack of empathy has been disheartening.”

Respondent from an Independent Museum

Trade union representation

This table sets out the unions involved in representing staff in organisations affected by redundancies since the beginning of the pandemic.

There is limited data on the presence of recognised trade unions in museums affected by redundancies, with three-quarters of all respondents providing no information on a recognised trade union, and seven reporting no recognised union.

Union (responses listed)	No. orgs
GMB & PCS	1
None / None recognised	7
PCS	1
PCS & Prospect	1
PCS & Unite	1
Prospect	6
Prospect & USDAW	1
Unison & GMB	1
No info. provided	51

Non-permanent staff

Our data includes 41 organisations reported to have made cuts to non-permanent staff. Non-permanent staff include those on fixed or short-term contracts, zero-hours contracts, regular freelancers, and agency staff.

Our data on these cuts is limited. However, we can observe that:

- of the 41 orgs reported to have made cuts to non-permanent staff, 23 organisations provided data for number of job losses to non-permanent staff with a **total of 326 job cuts to non-permanent staff**
- 13 organisations stated ‘no’ to cuts to non-permanent staff
- 15 organisations had no data for this question.

We believe that the true picture of cuts to non-permanent staff is likely to be significantly higher than the numbers reported to the MA, and our survey shows that those on agency, fixed-term or zero-hours contracts often bore the brunt of budget and staff cuts.

“All zero hours have had no pay since July.”

Respondent from a National Museum

“[Ours were] not technically redundancies, as these were so-called Non-Permanent Labour contracts, which means they were contracted through an agency rather than employed. However, most of these members of staff had been on these contracts for more than one year (some for 3 or 4 years) working de facto permanent jobs in business critical roles. This practice has been a problem in the museum for years, and when the agencies refused to pay NI contributions for staff members on furlough at the end of July, and the museum was unable to pick those up and refused to find another solution, scores of colleagues were let go. Since it doesn’t technically count as redundancies, these have not been documented. None of these colleagues chose to be on this type of contract out of their own accord.”

Respondent from an Independent Museum

Methodology

We have collected data on redundancies from a variety of sources. The data in this report has been crowdsourced through our reps, members and partners, including via an online form on our website.

The data covers redundancies affecting all types of roles based on a museum site across the UK, including direct employees, those employed through trading companies and external contractors. We are also recording all redundancies related to multi-service heritage organisations, recognising the cross-cutting nature many roles play in our sector.

The data in this document is based on the latest available information on redundancy processes – many of which are ongoing. This means that in some cases, the data reflects the intended

number of redundancies at the beginning of a process, while in other cases the data reflects the final number of redundancies at the end of a process.

The report is therefore a snapshot of sector redundancies after one year of the pandemic. It is likely that we have under-reported redundancies in some areas, while in some individual cases the total number of redundancies in an organisation will be less than originally proposed.

The anonymous quotes throughout this document were collected via our website, and demonstrate the fear, frustration, anger and sense of injustice caused by the mass redundancies of the past year, as well as the loss of knowledge and expertise from the sector.

Equalities impact

At present we are unable to determine the impact of redundancies on specific and underrepresented groups (e.g. gender, ethnicity etc) as this data is generally not available until the completion of the redundancy process and in some cases is not gathered by museums. As a sector we must collect this information in future, and we are encouraging all museums to conduct an Equalities Impact Assessment of any redundancy process to ensure that no group is discriminated against in the process. An example template of an EIA developed by the UKRI can be found here: <https://bbsrc.ukri.org/documents/equality-impact-assessment-guidance-template-pdf/>

Redundancy Hub

We have committed to supporting the sector at this difficult time. We urge all organisations to approach redundancy as a last resort and if it is necessary to carry out the process according to clearly defined and communicated guidelines, in line with our Code of Ethics, and with the involvement of the relevant trade union.

We are supporting individuals across the sector with issues relating to redundancy. If you are affected by a redundancy in any way, please visit our Redundancy Hub for advice, guidance and support: www.museumsassociation.org/careers/redundancy-hub/

