

# New research points to a looming creative economy skills shortage across the UK

- New report shows 'severe' decline in creative further education participation

**Embargoed 17 July 00.01 BST**

A looming creative economy skills shortage is feared in a new report published today by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC). *Creative Further Education in the four UK nations: 2024* - the first report to look at student participation in creative further education (FE) across all four UK nations - shows a 'severe' drop in participation, indicating a pipeline shortage for the UK's growing creative economy, which is predicted to create 300,000\* new jobs over the next five years. As demand for skills grows this is not being met by growing participation in creative learning.

The report - which brings together 31 datasets to provide the most comprehensive picture yet of the state of creative further education - was prepared by education specialists Work Advance for the Creative PEC, funded by the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). It is part of the Centre's new 'State of the Nations' series which provides regular reporting on the creative industries to help inform policy interventions.

The new report shows:

- Creative FE enrolments are declining in all parts of the UK, and at a faster rate than average across all subject disciplines.
- A 57% drop in creative subject FE enrolment in England between 2014/15 and 2022/23 (aged 19+) - compared with a 31% drop across all subjects.
- A 68% drop in creative learning at FE institutions in Wales between 2012/13 to 2022/23.

- A 20% decline in college students studying Creative FE in Scotland (full time equivalent) over the same decade.
- A 28% fall in enrolments on creative subjects at FE institutions in Northern Ireland from 2017 to 2022.

The decline is across a range of subjects:

- A 68% drop in ‘performing arts’ FE participation in England.
- A 52% drop in ‘languages, literature and culture’ England.
- Very low take up creative industries apprenticeships across all four nations – despite policy attempts to enhance work-based learning earning options.
- Creative FE remains highly concentrated in more urban cities and regions – Glasgow, Edinburgh, Belfast, Cardiff, Swansea, London, the South East, the West Midlands – with much more limited provision in rural areas.

All four nations have creative industries and cultural growth strategies, which include a focus on creative FE as a key route to upskill the talent pipeline, yet the new report indicates a misalignment between the economic growth of the sector over the last decade and dramatic falls in student participation that risk intensifying already chronic skills shortages in the creative industries.

**Bernard Hay, Head of Policy at the Creative PEC says:**

“We have a real opportunity to accelerate one of the UKs high-growth sectors through a renewed and ambitious approach to creative FE - both as a route to work and to further study. This report by our partners at Work Advance shows the scale of the challenge: a decade of steep decline in creative subject enrolments, mixed learner outcomes, and lack of diversity in the creative FE student population.

As all four UK national governments look to the creative industries as a driver of economic growth, a renewed focus on creative FE will be essential. We need long-term creative skills strategies that not only aim to boost access and provision, but also raise the bar on learner outcomes and diversity where these are flagging. That many of the

trends highlighted in the report are UK-wide also shows the importance of sharing existing good practice.”

**Heather Carey, Co-Director of Work Advance, who produced the report for the Creative PEC says:**

“The growth potential of the creative industries and their value to the economy has been recognised by Government in each of the four UK nations. For the first time our report brings together over 30 datasets to provide an overview of the ‘state of creative further education’ in the UK. As we compare and contrast policy developments in each nation, it will be important to share lessons on ‘what works’ to improve the design, delivery and relevance of creative skills programmes, in particular through stronger industry engagement.”

The research also reveals very low take up creative industries apprenticeships across all four nations. Whilst UK governments have indicated an expansion in apprenticeships will help tackle barriers to opportunity, the data points to the scale of the challenge with take up starting from a very low levels in creative arts and design. The share of all apprentices aligned to the creative industries range between 1.7% (Wales) and 8.7% (England). The apprenticeships picture is dominated by information and communications technology (ICT) meaning that apprenticeship numbers in other creative disciplines (e.g. creative arts and design) are very low indeed.

In May, the Creative PEC launched a widely discussed report on the arts, culture and heritage workforce which showed huge socio-economic disparity in terms of who works in the sector with working class employees in some sectors such as ‘Film and TV’ making up just 10% of the workforce. The fear is the marginalisation of creative education in the state sector could further compound inequalities seen later in the pipeline.

The report will be launched by Creative PEC at the Royal Society of Arts at 3pm on Wednesday 17 July with guest speakers including Cath Sezen, Director of Education Policy, the Association of Colleges, Sara Whybrew, Director of Skills and Workforce

Development at the British Film Institute and Paul Moore Director, Future Screens, Northern Ireland alongside co-directors of Work Advance Heather Carey and Lesley Giles with event Chair Lilli Geissendorfer, Deputy Director, Creative PEC.

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Download the report: [https://pec.ac.uk/state\\_of\\_the\\_nation/creative-further-education/](https://pec.ac.uk/state_of_the_nation/creative-further-education/)

(live from 00.01 Wednesday 17 July 2024, BST)

The report *Creative Further Education in the four UK nations: 2024* is published by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, which is led by Newcastle University with the Royal Society of Arts and funded by the UKRI **Arts and Humanities Research Council** (AHRC).

The report authors are Heather Carey, Lesley Giles and Ben Hickman (Work Advance)

**The research team and spokespeople for the Creative PEC are available for comment and interview.**

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## Notes to editors

\* Creative UK / Oxford Economics 2021

### 1. State of the Nations reports

The report is the fourth in the Creative PEC's new 'State of the Nations' series, which uses the latest data to inform policymakers on how best to support the creative sector across four thematic areas. Regular reports on each area will be published annually over the five years of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funding period.

### 2. About the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC)

Creative PEC works to support growth of the UK's Creative Industries through the production of independent and authoritative evidence and policy advice. Led by Newcastle University with the Royal Society of Arts and funded by the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Centre comprises a core consortium of; Newcastle University, Work Advance,

Sussex University and the University of Sheffield. The PEC works with a diverse range of industry partners.

For more details, visit <http://www.pec.ac.uk> and @CreativePEC

### **3. About The Arts and Humanities Research Council**

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), part of UK Research and Innovation, funds internationally outstanding independent researchers across the whole range of the arts and humanities: history, archaeology, digital content, philosophy, languages and literature, design, heritage, area studies, the creative and performing arts, and much more. The quality and range of research supported by AHRC works for the good of UK society and culture and contributes both to UK economic success and to the culture and welfare of societies across the globe.

4. 'Creative Further Education in the four UK Nations: 2024' was designed by Mike Green at Green Doe Graphic Design