

State of the Nations
research series

MIGRATION IN UK CREATIVE OCCUPATIONS AND INDUSTRIES

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15475282
ISBN: 978-0-7017-0288-5

Dr Sara Maioli, Dr Daniel Simandjuntak,
Dr Jonathan Jones, Professor Giorgio Fazio
(Newcastle University)

June 2025

**Creative Industries
Policy and
Evidence Centre**

Led by



**Newcastle
University**

Business
School

with



About the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre

The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC) works to support the 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's Arts and Humanities Research Council, Creative PEC comprises a core consortium of Newcastle University, Work Advance, the University of Sussex and the University of Sheffield.

For more details visit www.pec.ac.uk, [in creative-pec](#) and [creativepec.bsky.social](#)

About the State of the Nations reports

Creative PEC's 'State of the Nations' series analyses the latest data across four thematic areas to inform the development of policies relating to the creative industries. Their scope is the whole of the United Kingdom, and wherever possible data is presented for all the nations and regions. Regular reports on each area will be published annually over the five years of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funding. The themes and corresponding Research Partners are:

- R&D, Innovation and Clusters (University of Sussex)
- Internationalisation (Newcastle University)
- Arts, Culture and Heritage Sectors (University of Sheffield)
- Education, Skills and Talent (Work Advance).

Authors

Dr Sara Maioli, Reader in Economics, Creative PEC and Newcastle University Business School

Dr Daniel Simandjuntak, Research Associate, Creative PEC and Newcastle University Business School

Dr Jonathan Jones, Senior Lecturer in Economics, Creative PEC and Newcastle University Business School

Professor Giorgio Fazio, Chair of Macroeconomics and Creative PEC Research Director, Newcastle University Business School

Editorial board

Hasan Bakhshi, Tom Cahill-Jones, Jonathan Sapsed (Chair), SJ Gorman, Nik Gunn, Simon Jones, Alice Kent.

Report design

Mike Green, Green Doe Graphic Design Ltd.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Editorial Board of the series, the anonymous reviewers, the stakeholders who have been consulted at various stages of the process, and Creative PEC Comms and Policy teams. Any errors or omissions are ours alone.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors.

Citation

If the information in this report is used in any subsequent research and/or publications, please cite as follows:

Maioli, S., Simandjuntak, D., Jones, J. and Fazio, G. (2025). Migration in UK Creative Occupations and Industries. Creative PEC State of the Nations Research Series. Zenodo. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.15475282.

MIGRATION IN UK CREATIVE OCCUPATIONS AND INDUSTRIES

State of
the Nations
research
series

Contents

Foreword	4
Executive summary	5
1 Introduction	11
1.1 Motivation and context	11
1.2 Overview of this report	13
2 Show me your visa: Work routes into the UK for foreign creative workers	15
2.1 The visa data that is reported	15
2.2 An overview of the visa routes for creative workers	17
2.3 Evolution of creative visa types by year and by quarter	22
2.4 Origins of visa holders for creative occupations through different routes	33
3 Migration trends in the creative economy: Labour Force Survey analysis by occupation and industry	49
3.1 Creative occupations	50
3.2 Creative industries	60
4 UK's restrictiveness to inward movement: An international comparison	74
5 Summary, policy considerations and future research	77
5.1 Visa evidence from the Immigration System Statistics	77
5.2 Evidence from the Labour Force Survey	80
5.3 Evidence on inward restrictiveness to the movement of people	81
5.4 Future research	82
5.5 Policy considerations	82
Glossary	84
References	85
Data reference list	87
Data statement	87
Endnotes	88

Foreword

As the dust settles on the UK government's immigration White Paper, *Restoring Control Over the Immigration System*, the creative industries reflect on what the tighter restrictions on immigration will mean for them. Requiring an exceptionally highly skilled workforce, but facing big skills gaps and shortages, the creative industries employ disproportionately high numbers of migrant workers. As one of the Government's priority growth sectors, it is vitally important that the migration system is calibrated to meet the sector's needs.

Tracking what impact the changes in policy will have on the creative industries and the wider creative economy (including individuals employed in creative occupations outside of the creative industries) needs good baseline data, which is what we offer in this State of the Nations report. We trawl through the available Immigration System Statistics to present trends in visas granted by occupation, supplemented with Labour Force Survey statistics on immigration trends by industry and occupation. Among other things, we show that since 2021 there has been a disproportionate increase in temporary visas for creative occupations compared with non-creative occupations, consistent with the ending of free movement (of creative workers on temporary assignments) in Europe. By contrast, visas issued for longer stays have grown proportionately much less for creative compared with non-creative occupations over the same period.

The Immigration System Statistics do not alas provide information on what industries visa holders work in – a gap in the statistics which must be addressed if the UK is serious

about industrial policy – but data on the sector of sponsoring organisations is available at the 1-digit Standard Industry Classification level. While this evidently does not permit the number of sponsoring organisations in the creative industries to be gleaned (since these are defined at the 4-digit level), it nonetheless shows increases in the number of visas sponsored by organisations in the Arts, entertainment and recreation and the Information and communications sectors, which is commensurate with the sharp increase at the aggregate level, indicating a sustained appetite in creative industries firms for recruiting foreign talent to meet their long-term employment needs.

Surprisingly, to date, the topic of migration and the creative industries has received little attention in the research literature. By opening this new seam in the evidence base, we hope this report helps to stimulate more researchers to turn their attention to this critically important area.

Professor Hasan Bakhshi,
Director, Creative PEC

Executive summary

Designing a suitable migration system has been a priority for successive UK governments. A new White Paper, *Restoring Control Over the Immigration System*, was published on 12 May 2025 with the stated objective of reducing net migration (Home Office, 2025). However, this objective has to be carefully balanced with the Government's growth mission (Department for Business and Trade, 2024). In the White Paper, the Government recognises this by stating: 'As part of our mission to promote growth, we will go further in ensuring that the very highly skilled have opportunities to come to the UK and access our targeted routes for the brightest and best global talent' (Home Office, 2025, p. 28). Indeed, any modern migration system must achieve sustainable net rates while allowing strategic sectors to attract the global talent needed to foster innovation and growth. This balancing act is made even more difficult by pressures that have cross-sectoral and cross-regional dimensions.

As one of the fastest-growing parts of the UK and the global economy, and one of the eight priority sectors in the UK government's Industrial Strategy (Department for Business and Trade, 2024), the creative industries share a pressing need for a supportive migration system. The sector has some distinctive features that should be taken into account. Compared with the rest of the economy, it has greater reliance on freelance and project-based work, it thrives on diverse and international talent to foster innovation, it hosts a higher share of micro-businesses than other sectors, and it experiences acute skills shortages given its exposure to technological shocks (see Bakhshi and Spilbury, 2019; Di Novo et al., 2020; Haddoud et al., 2023; Giles et al., 2025). Hence, a modern migration system for the sector must be flexible enough to provide for the complementary international skills needed to foster growth and incentivise local employers to upskill domestic workers. More than a series of successive reforms, what is needed is a system with built-in capacity

to adjust to the effects of ever more frequent technological shocks and to global and domestic labour market adjustments. Accurate and regularly updated data is key to inform such a modern and dynamic migration system. This report makes use of different sources of publicly available data to provide the latest statistics and portray the current state of play on migration in the UK's creative occupations and industries.

First, to look at migration in creative occupations, we use the Immigration System Statistics and analyse the trends in new visas granted to sponsored foreign workers who applied from outside the UK under the new points-based immigration system in the post-Brexit period from the first quarter of 2021 to the first quarter of 2024, for which data is available with a consistent classification of occupations at granular level. Then, we look at migration in the creative occupations and industries by delving into quarterly data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) from the beginning of 2014 to the end of 2024.

This allows us to investigate, separately, workers in creative and non-creative occupations, and workers (creative and non-creative) in creative and non-creative industries. Given the recent concerns about the representativeness of LFS data, we supplement our analysis of non-UK workers with data from the Census 2021 for England and Wales and show that this corroborates our findings. Finally, we tap into the component of the Services Trade Restrictiveness Index (STRI) produced by the OECD that scores countries on their restrictiveness on the movement of workers. The degree of openness

or restrictiveness of the UK to the international mobility of workers is typically more important for trade in services than for trade in goods because the former is typically more labour-intensive than the latter and we know how the creative industries have benefited from a surge in trade in services (Fazio et al., 2024).

This report aims to fill the evidence gap in what is currently a scant, partial and dated picture of migration in creative occupations and industries by offering descriptive statistics on trends, rates of growth, immigrants' countries of origin and their geographical distribution in the UK. A summary of the key findings follows.

Trends in visas granted post Brexit and post the Covid-19 pandemic

► Visa type and duration

- Since 2021, half of workers entering the UK for a creative occupation have used the **Skilled Worker visa (50%)**.¹ This was followed by the **Creative Worker visa (20%)** – a temporary visa² – and the **temporary Global Business Mobility visas (15%)**.³
- Since 2021, there was a 70% increase in temporary visas for creative occupations vs a 13.5% increase for non-creative occupations.⁴ **The share of Temporary Worker visas granted to creative workers jumped from 10.5% in 2021 to 15.0% in 2023.** During the same period, across all types of (longer stay) Worker visas, those granted for creative occupations increased by only 8% and those for non-creative occupations by 233% (by 106% when excluding Health and Care Worker visas).⁵ **The share of Worker visas granted for creative occupations shrank from 21.5% in 2021 to 8.2% in 2023.**
- Hence, this period saw a change in the composition of long- vs short-term

visa types for creative and non-creative occupations. These opposite trends in visa type and duration could be due to a number of reasons, including the spike in visas for non-creative occupations (in particular in health and care) and the higher visa costs leading non-UK creative workers to pursue longer-tenured jobs only if these are well-paid. The increase in temporary visas could also be due to the post-Brexit visa system making the movement of EU temporary workers visible, along with a post-pandemic rebound in temporary creative occupations.

- At the same time, the number of organisations registered to sponsor Skilled Worker visas grew by five times between the third quarters of 2020 and 2024, while those registered to sponsor Temporary Worker visas flatlined between the first quarter of 2014 and the third quarter of 2024. So, **demand for international talent** does not show signs of slowing down; on the contrary, it **has become more acute, particularly for work that requires longer stays.**

► Sectoral composition

- Of all visas granted to creative workers, 65% were in Department for Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS's) 'IT, software and computer services' creative occupation group.⁶ These workers entered mainly through Worker visa routes, rather than Temporary Worker visa routes.
- The next most common creative occupations sponsored by visas are 'Actors, entertainers and presenters' (7.5% of all visas granted to creative workers), 'Musicians' (5.5%), 'Marketing associate professionals' (4.6%), 'Arts officers, producers and directors' (3.9%), 'Marketing and sales directors' (3.1%), 'Graphic designers' (2.2%) and 'Artists' (1.6%). Among these, only 'Marketing associate professionals' and 'Graphic designers' tended to have longer visa types, while the opposite is true for the other creative

occupations. All the 'arts'-based creative workers⁷ entered predominantly with a Creative Worker visa (or its predecessor, the Creative and Sporting visa), except for 'Authors, writers and translators', who mostly entered the UK with a Skilled Worker visa, allowing them to stay for longer. This may reflect the time-limited project-based nature of demand for talent in these occupations, but it could also reflect the substantial jump in visa costs at the six-month threshold.

► Nationality of origin

- Almost two-thirds of non-UK creative workers granted a new visa were from Asia (62.6%), followed by the rest of Europe (16.8%), Africa and the Americas (both 9.1%). More than half of the new creative visas were granted to people coming from India (53%), with the next country, the United States, accounting for just 5%.

Trends from the LFS

► Creative occupations

- From 2014 to 2024, the share of non-UK workers in creative occupations has risen rapidly from 11% to 16%. This trend was bucked in 2024, however, with a year-on-year decline of 4.3% in the number of non-UK creative workers (while the number of UK creative workers expanded by 0.6%).⁸ In 2014 and 2024, the largest creative occupations (defined by the thirty-one 4-digit DCMS Standard Occupational Classification codes) kept a similar ranking in terms of employment of both UK and non-UK workers, highlighting consistency over time.

- Thirteen creative occupations have a Occupation Migration Quotient above 1, which indicates that the occupation relies on non-UK workers more than all other occupations. This indicator gauges the degree of penetration of non-UK workers in a given creative occupation relative to UK workers, while accounting for the overall size of the non-UK and UK workforce. 'Programmers and software development professionals' stand out as having the largest quotient as well as the largest share of non-UK workers, at 23%.

► Creative industries

- In 2024, 16% of workers in the creative industries were non-UK nationals. The average over the 2014–2024 period was 15%, with the highest average proportion of non-UK workforce for the 2014–2024 period found in 'IT, software and computer services' (19%) and 'Publishing' (17%).
- There is a relative degree of specialisation of non-UK workers within a small number of creative occupations for each creative sub-sector. This means that when analysing the creative industries, this phenomenon is, to some extent, related to particular creative occupations.
- The 'IT, software and computer services' sub-sector employs the largest share of both non-UK and UK workers in the creative industries, accounting for over half of the non-UK creative workforce in the creative industries in 2024. Compared to the total non-UK workers in creative industries, the share of non-UK workers employed in this sub-sector expanded between 2014 and 2024. The same happened for the share of UK workers out of all UK workers in the creative industries.
- The Industry Migration Quotient shows a higher likelihood of working in the creative industries for non-UK compared to UK workers, highlighting **the greater attractiveness of the creative industries for overseas workers and the reliance of the sector on these workers**. However, Industry Migration Quotient varies across creative sub-sectors as well as within the various activities within the sub-sectors.
- **The growth in the non-UK workforce has occurred across the UK regions**, but with different patterns within the creative sub-sectors. **London attracts most of the non-UK creative workforce in terms of volume**, but generally this workforce has higher growth rates elsewhere, highlighting the regions' ability to attract global talent and providing **evidence of the growing interplay between the UK regions and the creative industries**.
- **EU workers represent the largest share of non-UK workers**, and the presence of EU workers is less concentrated in creative industries than in non-creative industries. For both the creative and non-creative industries, **the share of EU workers has fallen in the post-Brexit period, and they now account for less than half of the total non-UK workforce**. The LFS data confirms evidence from the visa data of a **recent increase in the share of workers from Asia**, with Asian workers accounting for a larger share of the creative workforce than in the non-creative workforce, which is correlated with the growth of the 'IT, software and computer services' sub-sector.⁹
- Workers from Asia, Oceania and North America are also relatively important across a range of creative sub-sectors, such that, **overall, a broad range of world regions are important for where the UK creative sector draws its non-UK workforce and the associated diversity on which the sector relies for its continued creativity**.

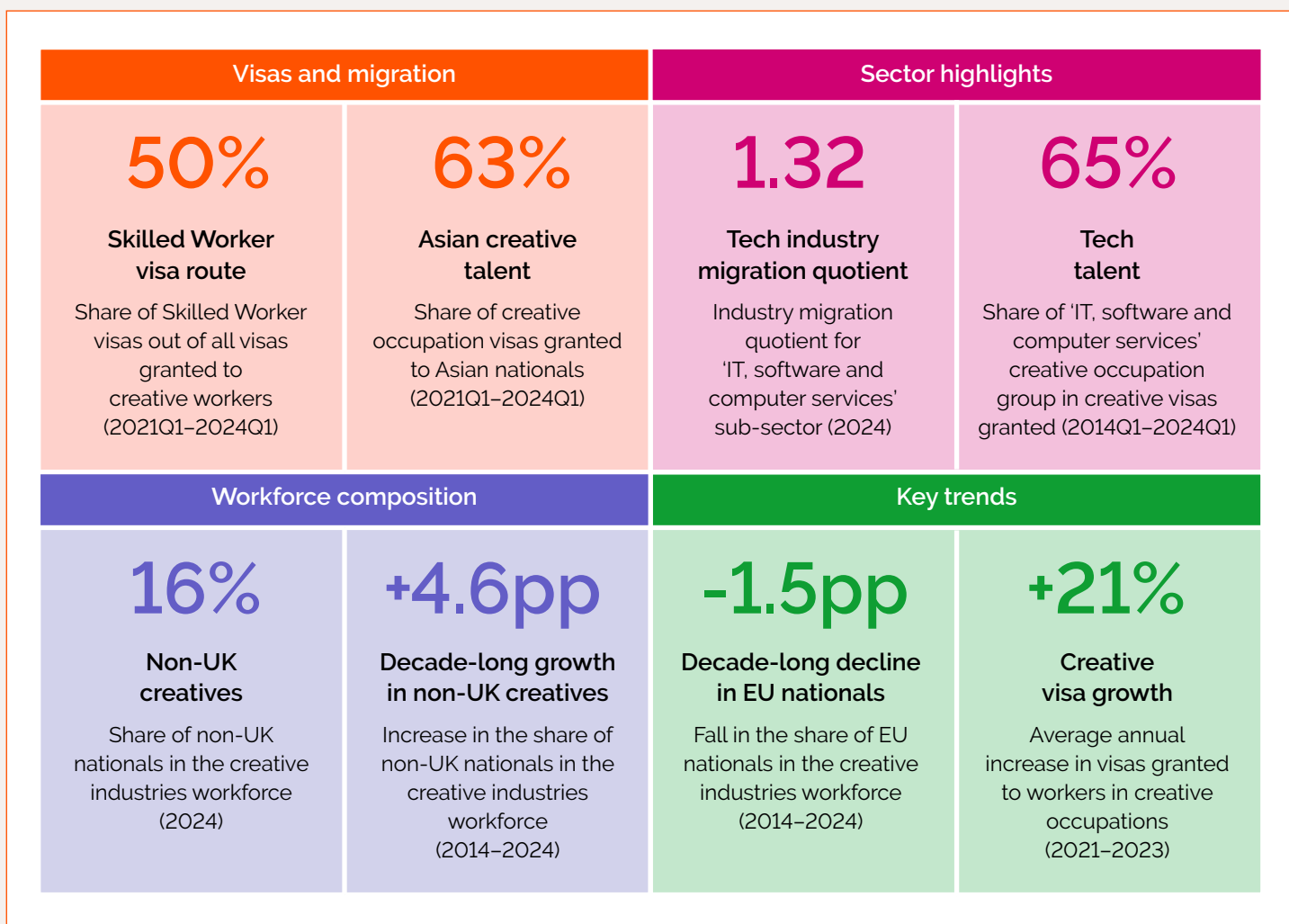
From the international comparison of restrictiveness to the movement of people, as measured by the OECD Service Trade Restrictiveness Index, we can see that the UK has an average score, lying in the middle of the distribution for a list of comparator countries.

Small adjustments could be made to make the UK even more open to business mobility.

However, this could be achieved together with greater international access to foreign markets for UK workers as part of the negotiation of international agreements and would typically require some concessions in terms of greater access **on a reciprocal basis**.

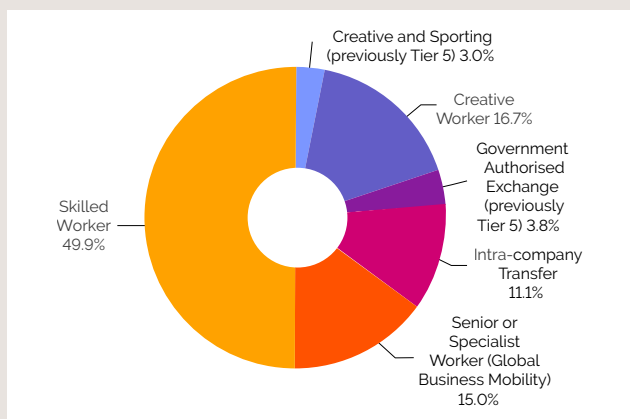
Arguably, the analysis presented shows that the creative industries have a vibrant international and diverse workforce. Along with an increase in visas and international

workforce, the recent period has seen a change in composition in terms of type and duration of visas and a post-Brexit, post-pandemic reduction in EU workers in favour of Asian workers. The fast-paced growth of the sector and its value to the ongoing digital and artificial intelligence revolution, paired with the looming skills shortages, warrant careful consideration in the required continuous fine-tuning of the migration system. With net migration rates already showing signs of decline, the resulting breathing space should be exploited to consider a system where societal, public finance and growth objectives are all well balanced and the sector can keep contributing to the UK's economic growth. As usual, timely labour and industry data will be key, including improving current visa data, whose challenges are noted in this report.

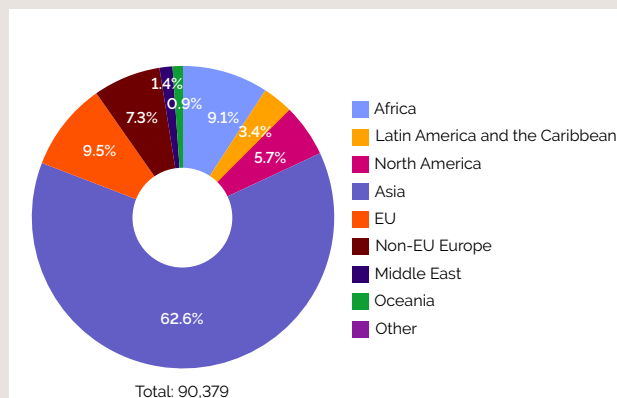


Visas granted across DCMS-defined creative occupations, 2021Q1–2024Q1

a: Visa subgroup types

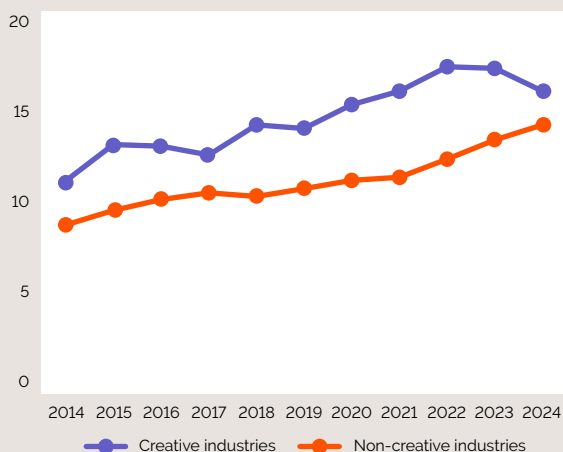


b: by world region of nationality



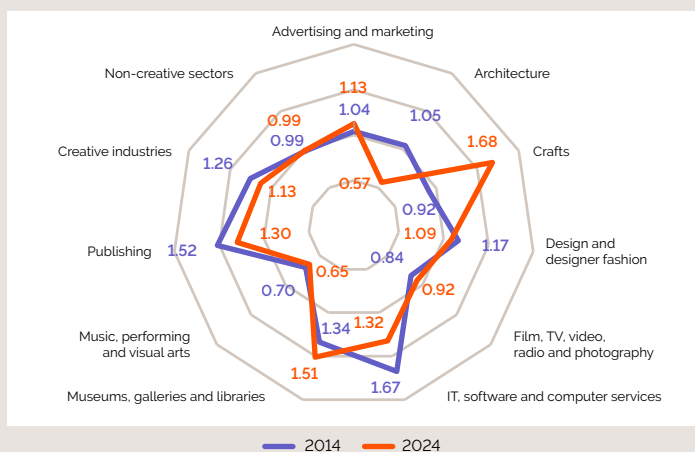
Source: Authors' calculation based on Home Office Immigration System Statistics, year ending March 2024

Share of non-UK labour in creative and non-creative industries, 2014–2024



Source: Author's calculation based on the LFS, 2014–2024

Industry Migration Quotient by creative industry sub-sector, 2014 and 2024



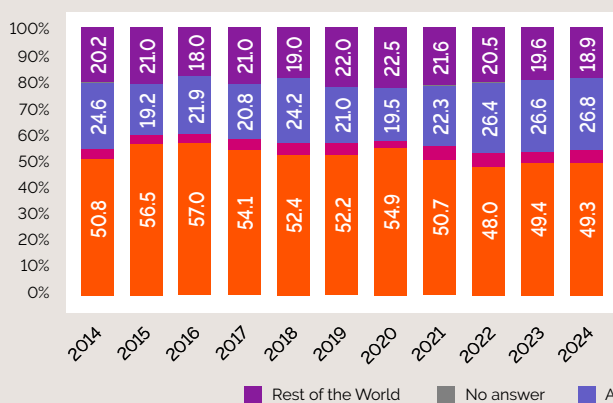
Source: Authors' elaboration based on the LFS, 2014–2024

Note: Industry Migration Quotient is calculated as:

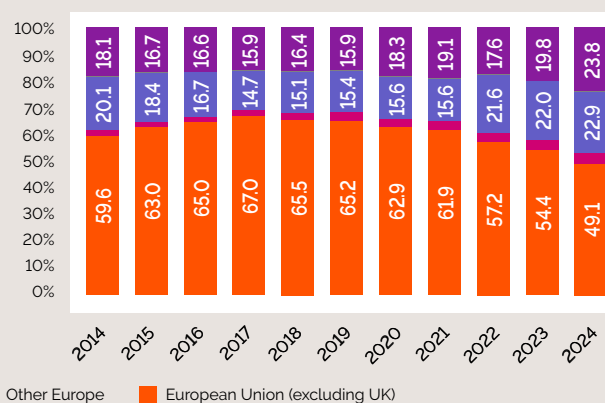
$$\frac{\text{Non-UK nationals in specific industry} / \text{Non-UK nationals in all industries}}{\text{UK nationals in specific industry} / \text{UK nationals in all industries}}$$

Non-UK labour by supranational origin, 2014–2024

a: Creative industries



b: Non-creative industries



Source: Authors' calculation based on the LFS, 2014–2024

1 Introduction

1.1 Motivation and context

The creative industries sector is one of eight growth-driving sectors the UK government will prioritise in its industrial strategy to be published along with a sector plan in 2025.

According to Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS, 2025) estimates, between 2010 and 2023, the creative industries had a higher rate of growth in gross value added adjusted for inflation compared with the UK economy, with an increase of 35.4% compared with an increase of 22.3% for the UK economy. The UK's creative industries have also seen impressive growth in trade (especially services) (Fazio et al., 2024) and remain a very attractive destination for foreign direct investment (Jones et al., 2024).

At the same time, such strong national and international performance should not be taken for granted in the face of increasing global competition. The sector faces a series of challenges in obtaining the finance needed to support growth (Siepel et al., 2024; Bakhshi et al., 2025) and in remaining attractive to foreign investment and making sure this investment is spread across all nations and regions (Jones et al., 2024). Among these challenges is the need to hone skills to keep up with continuous technological shocks. When the skills of the domestic workforce do not match the needs of employers (Giles et al., 2025), businesses may have to look outside the UK for the skills required for hard-to-fill vacancies (Windsor et al., 2016). However, attracting and retaining the

best talent from around the world is not just a temporary fix to address skills gaps, but a long-term necessity to ensure that the UK creative industries – which are international in nature – maintain their global competitive edge (Creative Industries Federation, 2017). A few studies have shown the positive role of creative immigrants on the growth of creative industries. For example, Borowiecki and Graddy (2021) shed light on the topic by analysing the very long-term effect of immigrant artists on the growth of artistic occupations in US cities, using data for the period from 1850 to 2010. They find that immigrant artists (covering visual arts, literary arts, music and performing arts) 'crowd in' native artists, not just in relation to domestic migration but with a sizeable uptake of artistic jobs by locals, since a 10% higher relative growth rate of the immigrant artistic population increases the relative growth rate of locals in arts occupations by up to 11.9%. This result could be due to economies of scale and scope in artistic production and infrastructure, and as such it is in line with the argument on global flows of talent made by Kerr et al. (2016) that high-skilled immigration produces knowledge and clusters of talent. A similar argument is made by Serafinelli and Tabellini (2022), whose analysis of historical data on the localisation decisions of creatives in Europe shows the importance of institutions and political freedom in promoting, and maintaining, the creation of clusters of creativity and innovation.

The strategic objective of attracting talent has to be considered against the political context where successive UK governments have, in recent years, prioritised the reduction of net migration flows, leading to deep changes to immigration rules. Evidence published in November 2024 by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows that net migration was four times higher than it had been five years earlier, driven by record levels of overseas recruitment. At the same time, the one in eight young people currently not in work, education or training (Department for Work and Pensions, 2025) and the chronic skills shortages (James, 2025) have become pressing concerns for the current Labour government. The newly published immigration White Paper, Restoring Control Over the Immigration System (Home Office, 2025), sets out the Government's plans to reduce net migration. One of the key elements of the Government's approach is to link immigration with skills policy, the hope being that boosting skills domestically will support the domestic workforce and bring down net migration. One way of doing this in the future could be to require that employers sponsoring migrant workers are also committed to upskilling the domestic workforce. However, the Government also states: 'As part of our mission to promote growth, we will go further in ensuring that the very highly skilled have opportunities to come to the UK and access our targeted routes for the brightest and best global talent' (Home Office, 2025, p. 28).

The Migration Advisory Committee's 2024 annual report cautions that linking immigration and skills policy is not a one-size-fits-all approach and different circumstances within sectors and occupations should be considered. This includes diagnosing whether shortages are genuinely driven by a lack of skills or due to poor pay and conditions in certain roles. Importantly, the report also notes that domestic workers are not always direct substitutes for foreign ones and that employers may continue to look overseas for what they regard as the

most suitable candidates (Migration Advisory Committee, 2024). Therefore, the overall impact of reducing net migration on the wider UK economy and its economic growth has to be considered, particularly in those key sectors identified by the Government for growth. The creative industries is one such sector.

Creative PEC has contributed to the topic of migration in the creative industries in previous research. Bakhshi and Spilsbury (2019) analyse data from the Creative Industries Council's survey of employers, which covers 700 employers in the creative industries, and provide estimates of the migrant labour force and skills gaps and shortages across the creative industries. They estimate that 9% of those employed in the UK's creative industries are non-UK nationals. This is smaller than the Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimate of 12% at the time of the study because the latter also includes workers who are self-employed, which we know to be present in a higher proportion than in other industries, especially as freelancers. The authors also look at jobs that are afflicted by skills issues and held by migrant labour and find that these are primarily in higher-level occupations and, in particular, in: (1) Creative ICT, typically Programmers and software development professionals and Web design and development professionals; (2) Architecture, including both Architects and Architectural technicians; and (3) Design, including Product, clothing and related designers and Graphic designers. In another Creative PEC study, Di Novo et al. (2020) find that both domestic and international talent and skills are important for the creative industries. The authors highlight that creative industries are skill-intensive, with 60% of workers holding a degree. The issue of skill intensity is also related to that of attraction of foreign talent. They note: 'Foreign workers are important to support sector employment growth, specifically in: "Publishing"; "Architecture"; and "IT, software and computer services"' (Di Novo et al., 2020, p. 24, Fact 10c).

After the UK left the EU, the free movement of people between the EU and the UK ended on 31 January 2020 and a points-based immigration system was introduced on 1 January 2021. This system prioritises skills and talent over nationality, aiming to attract highly skilled workers from around the world. Under this system, when a foreign national is moving to the UK for work, in most cases they need a visa and sponsorship by an employer, both of which come with paperwork, processing time and financial costs. Haddoud et al. (2023) explores the impact of Brexit on the UK's creative industries, focusing particularly on the challenges of hiring foreign talent. The authors conducted 38 interviews with managers of small and medium-sized enterprises operating in the UK creative industries and performed a quantitative analysis using data from a survey

of creative industries firms with 147 responses. They highlight the lack of creative skills in the UK market as a significant challenge with, at times, severe consequences for business growth. They note that Brexit has had an impact on the number of job applications received from outside the UK, which seem to have dramatically declined due to both a damaged reputation for the UK and complex and costly visa processes.

There is currently very little quantitative evidence on the recent migration in the UK creative industries or creative occupations to draw any general conclusions on migrants' contribution to the creative industries. Therefore, this report aims to gather such evidence and provide novel analyses using publicly available data, which we describe in the next section.

1.2 Overview of this report

The time is now ripe to assess the migration trends in the UK's creative occupations and industries and fill the current evidence gap with robust and extensive data. We provide a novel and comprehensive review of migration statistics drawn from three publicly available datasets. Immigration System Statistics provide quarterly data for the UK in the post-EU-exit period. We analyse data on visas granted from 2021Q1 to 2024Q1. While information can be broken down into 4-digit Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2010 codes¹⁰ to highlight creative occupations, it is only mapped to 1-digit Standard Industry Classification (SIC) codes. This means that we can precisely identify creative occupations that migrants are sponsored for when they move to the UK, but not their employer's industry at a sufficiently granular level. Information is also provided on migrants' nationality of origin and their entry routes by type of visa granted. The visas data thus allows

us to answer questions like: How many creative migrants have come to the UK to work since the new immigration system was introduced after Brexit? Where have they come from? Which creative occupations have sponsored temporary foreign creative workers and which ones have sponsored foreign workers for longer stays?

To track foreign workers over a longer period, also covering the pre-Brexit period, LFS data from 2014Q1 to 2024Q4 is used. The LFS covers the whole of the UK and allows identification of the individual's creative occupation at the 4-digit SOC 2010 or SOC 2020 codes, along with their employer's 4-digit SIC code. By using this source, we can precisely identify creative occupations and creative industries and track their evolution over a long time span. Some caveats apply. First, being a survey, it covers only a sample of the population. Second, in 2024 the LFS was criticised for the possible reduction in representativeness due to a plunge

in the response rate in the recent period, with many people failing to complete the survey (see, e.g., Strauss, 2024). The ONS responded by launching a new and transformed LFS with a shorter questionnaire. In December 2024, the ONS reweighted the LFS estimates on the size and composition of the UK population, incorporating information from new population estimates and projections, based on updated assumptions taking account of higher levels of net migration and the results of Scotland's 2022 Census. This reweighting exercise creates a discontinuity between December 2018 to February 2019 and January to March 2019, when there is a step change in LFS estimates. To mitigate these issues with the LFS, we also use data from the Census 2021 for the whole population of England and Wales.¹¹ We use the publicly available data that allows a granularity of up to 3-digit SOC 2010 codes for creative occupations and up to 2-digit SIC codes for creative industries. Information on nationality of origin is used to identify the migrants.

The analysis of the LFS allows us to answer similar questions to those covered in the visa sections but for a longer period, and in addition, since it allows the precise identification of UK/non-UK workers in creative/non-creative occupations working in creative/non-creative industries, this has made the calculation

of the Occupation Migration Quotient and Industry Migration Quotient possible. On this index, a score higher than 1 indicates that a creative industry (occupation) is employing proportionally more creative non-UK workers than is found overall in the total UK workforce.

Finally, we look at the degree of openness or restrictiveness of UK rules for the international mobility of workers, which is especially related to trade in services. To this end, we use the component of the Services Trade Restrictiveness Index (STRI), produced by the OECD, that scores countries on their restrictiveness of movement. While these rules usually apply to all foreign nationals regardless of their nationality, a country can decide to give preferential access to nationals from another country as part of an economic integration agreement. Reciprocal access is one of the pillars of EU membership, for example. When the UK left the EU, it abandoned most but not all these rules of reciprocal access, as set out in the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement. While the UK has relatively low restrictions to foreign workers (especially business workers), better access can be negotiated for UK workers in foreign countries. This, however, is usually done as part of cooperation agreements that require some degree of reciprocity between the UK and prospective partner countries.

2 Show me your visa: Work routes into the UK for foreign creative workers

This section analyses quarterly visa data from the Immigration System Statistics for the post-Brexit period from 2021Q1 to 2024Q1 covering the whole of the UK. Creative occupations can be identified precisely since the data is coded at the 4-digit SOC 2010 level.¹² However, data on the employers sponsoring the visas is only available at the 1-digit SIC level.¹³

There is, therefore, a caveat to the statistics presented here: on one hand, the foreign creative workers entering the UK will in most cases be employed by a creative industries employer, but not always (e.g. a musician entering with a skilled visa to take up a job as a music teacher in a school); on the other hand, the creative industries may employ migrants who are not creative workers (e.g. accountants), so there is not a perfect overlap between migrants in creative occupations and migrants in the creative industries.

2.1 The visa data that is reported

The Venn diagram in Figure 2.1 summarises the main types of visa routes for creative workers, concentrating on those that cover the highest numbers of granted visas, namely the Skilled Worker visa, the Creative Worker visa and the Global Business Mobility visas. While the Skilled Worker visa is a Worker visa allowing the worker to remain in the UK initially for the duration of the sponsorship and up to five years (extendable as many times as needed thereafter), the Creative Worker visa is a Temporary Worker visa that can be given for a period of up to twelve months initially (extendable for up to twelve more months). The Global Business Mobility visas can be granted as a Worker and as a Temporary Worker visa, depending on the subtype. They can all be

renewed as long as the eligibility conditions remain in place.¹⁴ For this report, we focus only on visas granted to sponsored non-UK workers who applied from outside the UK (new visas), rather than extension visas, where the workers who apply are already on UK soil.

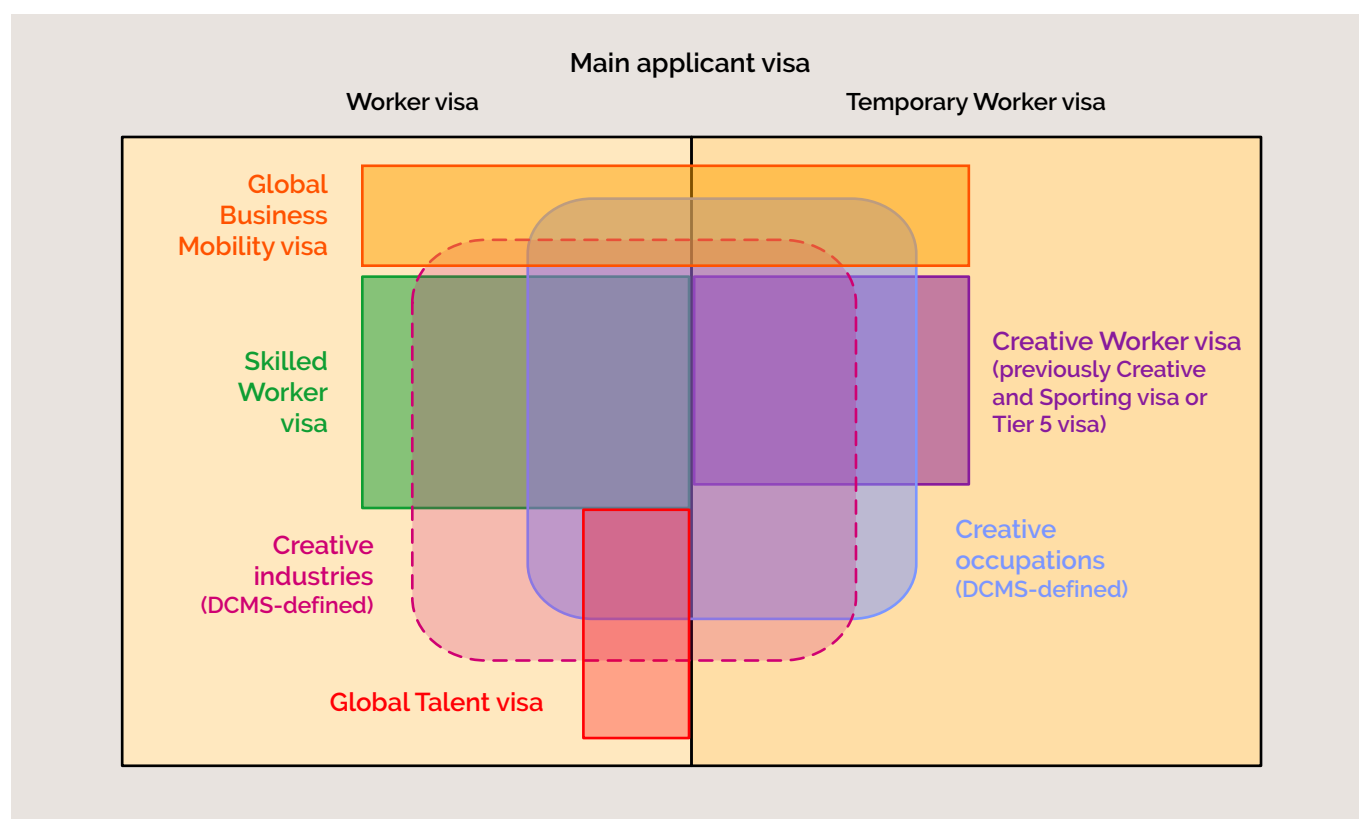
There are also other visa routes for foreign creative workers, but, unfortunately, data for these is not publicly available with the granularity needed to distinguish creative occupations. One example is the **Global Talent visa**, which is a Worker visa that, as pointed out by Easton (2024), covers a limited number of visa holders and lacks spread across the creative industries, particularly for design and crafts. Non-UK workers can also enter the UK

using other visa routes discussed by Easton (2024), namely the **High Potential Individual visa**, the **Innovator Founder visa** and the **Youth Mobility Scheme visa**, but here again there is no creative occupation dimension in the available statistics because, as is the case for the Global Talent visa, a job offer is not needed to apply for these visas. The lack of granular data means that our analysis is missing data on several visa routes that non-UK creative freelancers potentially use. In addition, adults who are professional artists, entertainers or musicians can be invited for a '**permitted paid engagement**' if they have a written invitation from a UK-based organisation or client for a pre-arranged event or other permitted engagement (like a performance) and they can demonstrate they are experts in their profession. In these circumstances, the rules for **Standard Visitor** status apply and, depending on the individual's nationality, either a Standard Visitor visa or an

Electronic Travel Authorisation is needed, or neither of them.¹⁵ Non-UK creative freelancers can use the permitted paid engagement route to work in the UK, but since the available statistics do not allow for a breakdown by occupation, it is not possible to gauge how the new immigration system has affected their ability to offer their labour services in the UK. Another inflow of workers not covered by the data is the one entering through non-work routes (e.g. students, students' dependents, workers' dependents, citizens from Ukraine since the war, or Hong Kong British national citizens). These groups can work in the UK (in any job) and may well have taken up work in creative occupations.

In the sections that follow, we list the other types of visa that cover creative occupations according to the collected data, but we do not go into much detail on these as they cover relatively small numbers of granted visas.

Figure 2.1 Venn diagram of visa routes for foreign creatives entering the UK, 2021Q1–2024Q1



Source: Authors' illustration

Notes: Not all visa subgroups are included. Users should note that this does not give an indication of the magnitude of overlap.

2.2 An overview of the visa routes for creative workers

The UK's new points-based immigration system, designed to attract skilled workers from around the world, was introduced one month before the end of the freedom of movement between the UK and the EU on 31 December 2020. Since 1 January 2021, all non-UK residents, including EU and non-European Economic Area (EEA) nationals coming to the UK, are subject to immigration control and need to apply for permission to work in the UK. They need to accumulate 70 points to be eligible. Creative workers can gain work in the UK under different immigration routes, each with their own visa requirements, depending on personal circumstances and the duration of the work. We profile the main routes next.

2.2.1 Worker visa: Skilled Worker visa

The Skilled Worker visa replaced the Tier 2 (General) work visa for skilled workers on 1 December 2020. The Skilled Worker visa, like its predecessor, requires sponsorship from a licensed employer, approved by the Home Office, with a valid sponsorship licence, which comes at a cost (see Table A1 in the Online Supplementary Material).

There are complex rules establishing the minimum salary for immigrants to qualify for the Skilled Worker visa, depending on the type of job. The 'standard' salary rate must be at least £38,700 per year (this increased from £26,200 per year on 4 April 2024) or the 'going rate' for the job they are offered – whichever is higher. Each job eligible for the Skilled Worker visa is assigned a going rate, which is based on a 37.5-hour working week.¹⁶ Table 2.1 shows the going rates for creative jobs. If the Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) was issued on or after 4 April 2024, then the 'standard going rate' is applied. If the CoS was obtained before 4 April 2024 and the worker has continually held one or more Skilled Worker visas since then, the 'lower going rate' is applied. For example, the standard going rate for 'Artists' (SOC 3411), is £32,800 (£16.82 per hour); for 'Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators' (SOC 3417), it is £30,960 (£15.88 per hour).

Table 2.1 Skilled Worker visa: Going rates for eligible creative occupations

SOC2020 code	Job type	Annual salary (per hour in brackets)	
		Standard going rate	Lower going rate
1132	Marketing, sales and advertising directors	£83,000 (£42.56)	£55,600 (£28.51)
1133	Public relations and communications directors	£79,900 (£40.97)	£62,800 (£32.21)
1137	Information technology directors	£80,000 (£41.03)	£58,800 (£30.15)
1255	Managers and directors in the creative industries	£42,000 (£21.54)	£29,700 (£15.23)
2133	IT business analysts, architects and systems designers	£51,700 (£26.51)	£39,300 (£20.15)
2134	Programmers and software development professionals	£49,400 (£25.33)	£36,300 (£18.62)
2141	Web design professionals	£41,300 (£21.18)	£29,000 (£14.87)
2142	Graphic and multimedia designers	£30,960 (£15.88)	£25,100 (£12.87)
2451	Architects	£45,900 (£23.54)	£38,800 (£19.90)
2452	Chartered architectural technologists, planning officers and consultants	£36,600 (£18.77)	£27,200 (£13.95)
2491	Newspaper, periodical and broadcast editors	£40,400 (£20.72)	£32,900 (£16.87)
2492	Newspaper and periodical broadcast journalists and reporters	£40,800 (£20.92)	£31,800 (£16.31)
2493	Public relations professionals	£35,400 (£18.15)	£29,100 (£14.92)
2494	Advertising accounts managers and creative directors	£43,700 (£22.41)	£35,000 (£17.95)
3411	Artists	£32,800 (£16.82)	£25,900 (£13.28)
3412	Authors, writers and translators	£33,800 (£17.33)	£28,700 (£14.72)
3413	Actors, entertainers and presenters	£30,960 (£15.88)	£23,200 (£11.90)
3414	Dancers and choreographers	£31,200 (£16.00)	£30,000 (£15.38)
3415	Musicians	£35,300 (£18.10)	£30,400 (£15.59)
3416	Arts officers, producers and directors	£37,500 (£19.23)	£31,300 (£16.05)
3417	Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators	£30,960 (£15.88)	£25,500 (£13.08)
3421	Interior designers	£33,300 (£17.08)	£25,600 (£13.13)
3422	Clothing, fashion and accessories designers	£40,500 (£20.77)	£27,600 (£14.15)
3429	Design occupations not elsewhere classified	£31,800 (£16.31)	£26,700 (£13.69)
3554	Advertising and marketing associate professionals	£30,960 (£15.88)	£25,900 (£13.28)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on tables provided at the following links: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skilled-worker-visa-going-rates-for-eligible-occupations/skilled-worker-visa-going-rates-for-eligible-occupation-codes>; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skilled-worker-visa-immigration-salary-list/skilled-worker-visa-immigration-salary-list>

Notes: The codes are SOC 2020 rather than SOC 2010 codes, as the live going rates use the latest DCMS creative occupation classification. The occupations on the Immigration Salary List are highlighted in pink.

If the immigrant is sponsored for a job on the Immigration Salary List – which is a list of skilled jobs with lower salary requirements – then the minimum salary becomes £30,960 per year or the standard going rate – whichever is higher.¹⁷

Table 2.1 highlights in pink the creative jobs that are on the Immigration Salary List. These jobs are: all 'Graphic and multimedia designers' (code 2142), all 'Artists' (code 3411), skilled 'Dancers and choreographers' (code 3414),¹⁸ skilled 'Musicians' (code 3415)¹⁹ and all 'Arts officers, producers and directors' (code 3416). The immigration White Paper published by the Home Office (2025) proposes to abolish the Immigration Salary List.

It might, however, still be possible to apply for a Skilled Worker visa if the type of job is eligible but the offered salary is less than the standard salary requirement of £38,700 or the job's standard 'going rate'. In such cases, the immigrant can be paid between 70% and 90% of the standard going rate for the job if the offered salary is at least £30,960 per year and the worker meets one of the following criteria: (1) the worker is under 26, studying or a recent graduate or in professional training; (2) the worker has a STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) PhD-level qualification that is relevant to the offered job (if a relevant PhD-level qualification is held in any other subject, the salary must be at least £34,830); and (3) the worker has a postdoctoral position in science or higher education (depending on the job code, the minimum salary in this case can be from £30,960 to £33,390).²⁰

The cost of obtaining a visa may be non-trivial for the worker. Table A1 in the Online Supplementary Material reports further details and the costs for both the employer and the visa applicant.²¹ In particular, Skilled Worker visa sponsors also have to pay an Immigration Skills Charge every time they issue a CoS. This charge is payable only for non-UK workers staying for

at least six months, except for some professions, but none of these are creative as per the DCMS definition. Importantly, the Immigration Skills Charge (ISC) was introduced in 2017 to encourage employers to invest in training and upskilling the resident workforce to increase UK productivity. The revenue generated from the ISC is purportedly used to address skills gaps in the UK workforce, reducing reliance on migrant workers.²² Under the recent proposals in the immigration White Paper, the Immigration Skills Charge will be increased by 32% to bring it in line with inflation. The funding generated is to be used to support skills funding for priority sectors (Home Office, 2025).

2.2.2 Temporary Worker visa: Creative Worker visa

This visa requires a CoS by a licensed sponsor at the application stage and has a duration of up to twelve months or the time written on the CoS plus up to 28 days – whichever is shorter.

The Creative Worker visa holder can have multiple jobs while in the UK, but only with a gap of up to 14 days between each job. The worker, however, can leave the UK and come back, in which case their time away will not count towards those 14 days. The sponsor can give the worker a certificate that covers the entire length of stay if the worker has multiple engagements. If the worker works for more than one sponsor, they can get a certificate from each sponsor.

While holding a Creative Worker visa, the worker can study, work for their sponsor, do a second job in the same sector and at the same level as their main job for up to 20 hours per week, or do a job on the Skilled Worker Immigration Salary List for up to 20 hours per week, but they cannot get public funds (benefits) or start their own business. Further details on this type of visa are found in Table A1 in the Online Supplementary Material.

If the creative migrant comes to work in the UK for three months or less, they can avail themselves of the Creative Worker visa concession, which allows them to enter the UK without applying for a visa in advance; instead they must obtain, if eligible, an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA).²³ However, they still need to meet the Temporary Work – Creative Worker visa eligibility requirements and have a valid Creative Worker CoS of Sponsorship, and they must not need a visa to enter the UK as a visitor.

2.2.3 Global Business Mobility visas

The Global Business Mobility visas encompass several categories of visa. These apply to creative migrants only when they do a job among the eligible creative occupations listed in Table 2.1, but excluding 'Artists' (code 3411), 'Authors, writers and translators' (3412), 'Actors, entertainers and presenters' (3413), 'Dancers and choreographers' (3414), 'Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators' (3417), 'Interior designers' (3421), 'Clothing, fashion and accessories designers' (3422), 'Design occupations not elsewhere classified' (3429) and 'Advertising and marketing associate professionals' (3554).

A **UK Expansion Worker (Global Business Mobility) visa** allows workers to come to the UK for up to twelve months to set up a branch of an overseas business that has not started trading in the UK yet. They must already work for the overseas business as either a senior manager or a specialist employee.

If the business is already trading in the UK, the rules for a **Senior or Specialist Worker (Global Business Mobility) visa** apply. The criteria are similar to those for the UK Expansion Worker visa, but the Senior or Specialist Worker visa allows a maximum total stay of five years in

any six-year period or nine years in any ten-year period, depending on the worker's salary. Notably, beyond the Skilled Worker visa, this is the only type of visa that requires the sponsor to pay the Immigration Skills Charge.

A **Graduate Trainee (Global Business Mobility) visa** allows a worker to work for up to twelve months for their overseas employer in a UK branch as part of a graduate training programme for a managerial or specialist role.

For further details and costs associated with the Global Business Mobility visa routes, the interested reader is referred to Table A1 in the Online Supplementary Material. This table serves as an eagle-eyed view of the costs associated with migration. The legislation covering the entry requirements for non-UK workers is very complex, involving multiple routes with frequent updates of the visa rules²⁴ and several weeks of processing time for the application. The cost of acquiring a sponsorship falls not only on the worker but also on the sponsoring organisation, which needs to get a licence to be officially recognised as an eligible sponsor and must pay for the CoS, whose cost changes with the duration of stay and the visa type. The applicant's costs are non-trivial when considering the visa application fee, the required proof of savings and the payment of the Immigration Health Surcharge, which has to be disbursed in advance of taking up the job unless the visa is applied for from outside the UK and for up to six months only. The IHS can become prohibitive for workers with dependents and a low-paid job, as is often the case in creative occupations (see the Immigration Salary List, discussed earlier).

As part of the Global Business Mobility visas, there are also the **Service Supplier visa** and the **Secondment Worker visa**, which we do not describe given that they cover a small number of creative migrants.

2.2.4 Other types of entry route for creative migrants

There are other entry routes with different visas that creative migrants can apply for, which are described briefly here.

The **Government Authorised Exchange visa** is a Temporary Worker visa that allows its holder to come to the UK for a short time for work experience or training, an Overseas Government Language Programme, research or a fellowship through an approved Government authorised exchange scheme. It requires sponsorship. Depending on the scheme applied for, the visa can be granted for a maximum of twelve months or twenty-four months.

The **Scale-up Worker visa** is granted to a worker doing an eligible job²⁵ for a fast-growing UK business (sometimes called a 'scale-up business'). A CoS is needed, and the maximum stay is up to two years, though the visa can be extended by three years as many times as needed as long as the eligibility requirements are still met.

Finally, we only mention the following visas, which have all been found to cover small numbers of creative migrants in the statistics that follow on in this report: **Charity Worker visa, International Agreement visa, Minister of Religion visa (Tier 2), Religious Worker visa, Health and Care Worker (Skilled Worker) visa and International Sportsperson visa.**

In the next section, we present statistics on visas granted between 2021Q1 and 2024Q1.

2.3 Evolution of creative visa types by year and by quarter

Table 2.2 shows the total number of visas granted by year during the 2021–2023 period, broken down by Temporary Worker and Worker visas and their respective subgroups. These numbers cover workers in all occupations. Between 2021 and 2023, the total number of Temporary Worker visas grew from 43,316 to 51,748, a growth of 19.5%. In the same period, Worker visas grew from 79,995 to 227,806, a growth of 184.8%; however, excluding the Health and Care Worker (Skilled Worker) visa, the growth was 71.4%.²⁶ So during this period, the growth in foreign workers who came to the UK for longer stays was nearly ten times the growth of migrants who came to work for short stays.

The Creative Worker visa (a temporary visa) has grown in importance, being granted to 1,001 workers in 2021, 6,396 in 2022 and 7,207 in 2023. However, during this period, the visa rules changed. In October 2021, the Creative and Sporting visa (a temporary visa) was superseded by the Creative Worker visa and the International Sportsperson visa. We can see that 4,101 Creative and Sporting visas were granted in 2021 and 9 were granted in 2022 (most likely due to lengthy processing times to grant this superseded visa type).

Table 2.2 Granted occupation visas by visa types and subtypes, 2021–2023 (all occupations)

Visa type	Visa type subgroup	2021	2022	2023	Total
Temporary Worker	Charity Worker (previously Tier 5)	1,156	1,380	1,600	4,136
	Creative and Sporting (previously Tier 5)	4,101	9		4,110
	Creative Worker	1,001	6,396	7,207	14,604
	Government Authorised Exchange (previously Tier 5)	5,769	8,894	7,680	22,343
	Graduate Trainee (Global Business Mobility)		225	473	698
	International Agreement (previously Tier 5)	431	456	469	1,356
	Religious Worker (previously Tier 5)	1,349	1,231	1,409	3,989
	Seasonal Worker (previously Tier 5)	29,509	34,414	32,657	96,580
	Secondment Worker (Global Business Mobility)		11	10	21
	Service Supplier (Global Business Mobility)		15	20	35
	UK Expansion Worker (Global Business Mobility)		39	223	262
	Total (Temporary Worker)	43,316	53,070	51,748	148,134
Worker	International Sportsperson	87	1,868	1,875	3,830
	Intra-company Transfer	12,485	6,941	6	19,432
	Minister of Religion (previously Tier 2)	436	523	595	1,554
	Scale-up Worker			33	33
	Senior or Specialist Worker (Global Business Mobility)		13,612	15,404	29,016
	Skilled Worker	35,363	65,876	65,147	166,386
	Skilled Worker – Health & Care	31,537	76,034	144,746	252,317
	Sportsperson (previously Tier 2)	87			87
	Total (Worker)	79,995	164,854	227,806	472,655
Grand Total		123,311	217,924	279,554	620,789

Source: Authors' calculation based on [Home Office Immigration System Statistics](#)

Table 2.3 compares the distribution of granted visas in DCMS-defined creative and non-creative occupations. The Creative Worker* visa is marked with an asterisk to indicate that the figures are for either the Creative and Sporting visa in existence up to October 2021 or the Creative Worker visa that replaced it. While there was a big growth of 84.6% between 2021 (with 3,649 visas) and 2023 (with 6,736 visas) in Creative Worker* visas granted for creative jobs, during the same period there was a contraction of the same visas granted for non-creative jobs by 67.6% (from 1,453 to 471 visas). This contraction was most likely due to the splitting of the Creative and Sporting visa into the Creative Worker visa and the International Sportsperson visa, which means that sports-related occupations are no longer sponsored under the Creative Worker visa. In a more similar

fashion to the Creative Worker* visas granted for creative jobs, the other Temporary Worker visas during this period grew across both creative occupations (from 899 to 1,014 visas, a growth of 12.8%) and non-creative occupations (from 37,315 to 43,527 visas, a growth of 16.7%).

Taken together, the visas granted for creative occupations across all types of Temporary Worker visas expanded from 4,548 in 2021 to 7,750 in 2023, a growth rate of 70.4%. In comparison, the visas granted for non-creative occupations across all types of Temporary Worker visas expanded from 38,768 in 2021 to 43,998 in 2023, a growth rate of 13.5%. This means that the visas granted for creative temporary occupations jumped from 10.5% of the total Temporary Worker visas in 2021 to 15.0% in 2023.

Table 2.3 Visas granted for Worker and Temporary Worker routes for DCMS-defined creative and non-creative occupations and growth rates, 2021–2023

Visa type	Visa subgroup		2021	2022	2023	2021 to 2023 growth rate
Temporary Worker visa	Creative Worker visa or Creative & Sporting visa	Creative Worker* visa (Temporary Worker) in creative occupations	3,649	5,954	6,736	84.6%
		Creative Worker* visa (Temporary Worker) in non-creative occupations	1,453	451	471	-67.6%
	Other Temporary Worker visa	Other Temporary Worker visa – in creative occupations	899	1,667	1,014	12.8%
		Other Temporary Worker visa in non-creative occupations	37,315	44,998	43,527	16.6%
Worker visa	Skilled Worker visa	Skilled Worker visa (Worker) in creative occupations	10,866	18,677	12,906	18.8%
		Skilled Worker visa (Worker) in non-creative occupations	24,497	47,199	52,241	113.3%
	Other Worker visa	Other Worker visa in creative occupations	6,337	10,302	5,676	-10.4%
		Other Worker visa in non-creative occupations	38,295	88,676	156,983	309.9%

Source: Authors' calculation based on Home Office Immigration System Statistics (accessible at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67458510ece939d55ce9304e/occupation-visas-datasets-mar-24.xlsx>) with occupations under the SOC 2010 framework

Note: * The Creative Worker visa figures include visas granted under the Creative and Sporting visa and then the Creative Worker visa, which (along with the International Sportsperson visa) superseded the Creative and Sporting visa on 11 October 2021.

Among the Worker visas, the Skilled Worker visas granted for creative occupations grew from 10,866 in 2021 to 12,906 in 2023, a growth of 18.8%. In comparison, the Skilled Worker visas granted for non-creative occupations more than doubled from 24,497 to 52,241, reaching a growth of 113.3%. Finally, the other Worker visas granted for creative occupations shrank from 6,337 to 5,676 in the same period, a contraction of 10.4%, while the other Worker visas granted for non-creative occupations more than quadrupled from 38,295 to 156,983, a remarkable growth of 309.9%.

Taken together, the Worker visas granted for creative occupations across all types of Worker visas increased from 17,203 in 2021 to 18,582 in 2023, a growth rate of 8.0%, whereas the Worker visas granted for non-creative occupations in the same period went from 62,792 to 209,224, a growth rate of 233.2%. This means that out of all Worker visas, the share granted to creative foreign workers shrank from 21.5% in 2021 to 8.2% in 2023.

A picture starts to emerge where, for temporary workers on short stays of up to twelve or twenty-four months, creative jobs expanded at a high rate while non-creative jobs contracted (under the Creative and Sporting visa or the Creative Worker visa routes) or expanded in a similar way to non-creative jobs (under other Temporary Worker visas routes). On the other hand, for the longer-stay Worker visa holders, creative jobs either grew a small fraction of the non-creative jobs growth (under the Skilled Worker visa route) or even shrank when non-creative jobs boomed (under the other Worker visas routes).

Using the more detailed information by quarter in Table 2.4, it is possible to observe that Worker visa holders in creative occupations grew every single quarter from 2021Q1 to 2022Q3 and then shrank quarter-on-quarter until 2024Q1. In comparison, Worker visa holders in non-creative occupations grew quarter-on-quarter from 2021Q1 to 2023Q1; subsequently, they had a dwindling trend of three drops interspersed by one expansion. The Creative Worker visa holders in creative occupations grew in number from 2021Q4 (which is when this visa came into effect) to 2022Q1 and remained at similar levels throughout the remainder of the period shown, with peaks in the third quarter of both 2022 and 2023. Holders of other Temporary Worker visas who were employed in creative occupations had a varying trend over this period, with expansions and contractions and a notable peak in the second quarter of 2022.

With some exceptions, for both the Creative Worker and the Creative and Sporting visa holders, 'Actors, entertainers and presenters' were the most common creative professions declared by temporary workers entering the UK. For the Creative Worker visa, this was followed by 'Musicians' in second place, and 'Arts officers, producers and directors' in third place. The exceptions were the last three quarters of 2023 when 'Musicians' became the largest group and 'Actors, entertainers and presenters' were the second-largest group, and 2021Q4 when 'Arts officers, producers and directors' became the second-largest group. For the Creative and Sporting visa holders, 'Musicians' was the third-largest group in 2021Q3 and the second-largest in 2021Q4, but only the fifth-largest in 2021Q2 and the sixth-largest in 2021Q2.

The breakdown by creative profession is combined across Creative Worker and Creative and Sporting visa holders in Table 2.5, displayed alongside other visa types (including the Skilled Worker visa) and pooled across all the available data from 2021Q1 to 2024Q1. Over this period, 90,379 visas were granted to creative workers, the bulk of which (76% or 68,772) were under the Worker visas, while less than a quarter (24% or 21,607) were under the Temporary Worker visas.

The Skilled Worker visa represented the most common route for creative workers to enter the UK for work, with 45,135 visas granted – that

is, half of the total number of visas granted to all creative workers. The Skilled Worker visa also represented two-thirds of all Worker visas for creative workers, while the 'Other' types of Worker visas accounted for one third of Worker visas and 26% of all the visas.

The Creative Worker or Creative and Sporting visas covered 83% of Temporary Worker visas for creative workers, and 20% of the total number of visas for creative workers, while Other Types of Temporary Worker visas covered 17% of Temporary Worker visas for creative workers, and 4% of the total number of visas for creative workers.

Table 2.4 Visas granted for Worker and Temporary Worker routes for DCMS-defined creative and non-creative occupations by quarter, 2021Q1–2024Q1

Visa type subgroup	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1
TOTAL GRANTED	19,030	30,560	36,701	37,020	40,518	60,749	63,082	53,575	68,510	78,022	76,876	56,146	45,653
Worker	13,271	14,898	24,462	27,364	30,724	35,646	50,181	48,303	57,848	54,549	66,790	48,619	31,486
DCMS creative occupation	2,416	3,096	5,519	6,172	6,417	6,954	8,960	6,648	5,322	4,595	4,571	4,094	4,008
DCMS non-creative occupation	10,855	11,802	18,943	21,192	24,307	28,692	41,221	41,655	52,526	49,954	62,219	44,525	27,478
Temporary Worker	5,759	15,662	12,239	9,656	9,794	25,103	12,901	5,272	10,662	23,473	10,086	7,527	14,167
Creative Worker	0	0	0	1,001	1,524	1,286	2,054	1,532	1,603	1,807	2,189	1,608	1,606
DCMS creative occupation				919	1,411	1,166	1,915	1,453	1,542	1,697	2,007	1,490	1,517
Advertising and public relations directors				-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Programmers and software development professionals				1	-	-	2	-	11	1	8	-	1
Web design and development professionals				-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Information technology and telecommunications professionals n.e.c.				1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Architects				-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-
Archivists and curators				1	1	5	1	1	3	-	-	1	2
Journalists, newspaper and periodical editors				1	-	-	1	-	1	-	3	1	-
Public relations professionals				1	-	-	-	2	2	-	2	1	2
Artists				50	126	53	163	145	78	72	165	124	47
Authors, writers and translators				6	17	6	11	5	5	11	7	11	2
Actors, entertainers and presenters				326	634	416	662	542	739	549	619	461	660
Dancers and choreographers				64	50	106	58	69	44	91	86	85	79
Musicians				168	287	370	605	372	321	590	778	506	488
Arts officers, producers and directors				218	189	133	296	237	250	275	231	213	166
Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators				48	57	56	77	60	64	72	88	62	56
Graphic designers				19	26	8	4	4	5	13	4	5	3
Product, clothing and related designers				15	23	12	34	16	18	22	16	19	11
DCMS non-creative occupation	-	-	-	82	113	120	139	79	61	110	182	118	89
Creative and Sporting (previously Tier 5)	966	1,005	1,592	538	4	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
DCMS creative occupation	400	624	1,212	494	4	2	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Programmers and software development professionals	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Information technology and telecommunications professionals n.e.c.	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Archivists and curators	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Journalists, newspaper and periodical editors	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Public relations professionals	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Artists	23	24	48	17	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Authors, writers and translators	4	5	13	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Actors, entertainers and presenters	185	354	369	129	2	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dancers and choreographers	3	48	63	76	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Musicians	13	29	266	126	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Arts officers, producers and directors	116	107	288	99	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators	32	35	120	29	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Graphic designers	2	16	14	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Product, clothing and related designers	15	6	28	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Marketing associate professionals	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DCMS non-creative occupation	566	381	380	44									
Others	4,793	14,657	10,647	8,117	8,266	23,815	10,844	3,740	9,059	21,666	7,897	5,919	12,561
DCMS creative occupation	67	490	165	177	239	892	340	196	228	488	173	125	171
DCMS non-creative occupation	4,726	14,167	10,482	7,940	8,027	22,923	10,504	3,544	8,831	21,178	7,724	5,794	12,390

Source: Authors' calculation based on Home Office Immigration System Statistics (accessible at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67458510e0ce939d55ce9304e/occupation-visas-datasets-mar-24.xlsx>) using the SOC 2010 framework

Notes: n.e.c.: not elsewhere classified. The Creative Worker visa came into effect in 2021Q4, as indicated by the grey cells. The totals rows are highlighted with darker shades.

Table 2.5 Visas granted across visa routes by DCMS-defined creative occupations, 2021Q1–2024Q1

Visa type	Temporary Worker visa		Worker visa		All visa types
Occupation	Creative Worker or Creative and Sporting	Other types	Skilled Worker	Other types	
1132 – Marketing and sales directors	0	81	1,968	735	2,784
1134 – Advertising and public relations directors	2	6	199	36	243
2135 – IT business analysts, architects and systems designers	0	269	9,252	11,481	21,002
2136 – Programmers and software development professionals	25	1,382	20,194	7,274	28,875
2137 – Web design and development professionals	1	29	2,185	133	2,348
2139 – Information technology and telecommunications professionals n.e.c.	9	120	2,936	3,603	6,668
2431 – Architects	2	67	504	12	585
2432 – Town planning officers	0	0	25	1	26
2435 – Chartered architectural technologists	0	6	5	0	11
2451 – Librarians	0	12	20	0	32
2452 – Archivists and curators	16	76	54	0	146
2471 – Journalists, newspaper and periodical editors	8	49	303	114	474
2472 – Public relations professionals	11	129	404	49	593
2473 – Advertising accounts managers and creative directors	0	5	532	47	584
3121 – Architectural and town planning technicians	0	35	128	0	163
3411 – Artists	1,137	27	309	0	1,473
3412 – Authors, writers and translators	106	31	175	3	315
3413 – Actors, entertainers and presenters	6,649	43	68	1	6,761
3414 – Dancers and choreographers	922	4	27	0	953
3415 – Musicians	4,919	44	28	1	4,992
3416 – Arts officers, producers and directors	2,821	100	551	38	3,510
3417 – Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators	856	27	101	1	985
3421 – Graphic designers	127	52	1,814	0	1,993
3422 – Product, clothing and related designers	244	36	381	10	671
3543 – Marketing associate professionals	1	1,121	2,965	98	4,185
5441 – Glass and ceramics makers, decorators and finishers	0	0	7	0	7
Totals	17,856 (20%)	3,751 (4%)	45,135 (50%)	23,637 (26%)	90,379 (100%)
	21,607 (24%)		68,772 (76%)		

Source: Authors' calculation based on [Home Office Immigration System Statistics](#) with occupations under the SOC 2010 framework

Note: n.e.c.: not elsewhere classified.

2.3.1 Creative occupations (based on visas granted) during 2021Q1–2024Q1

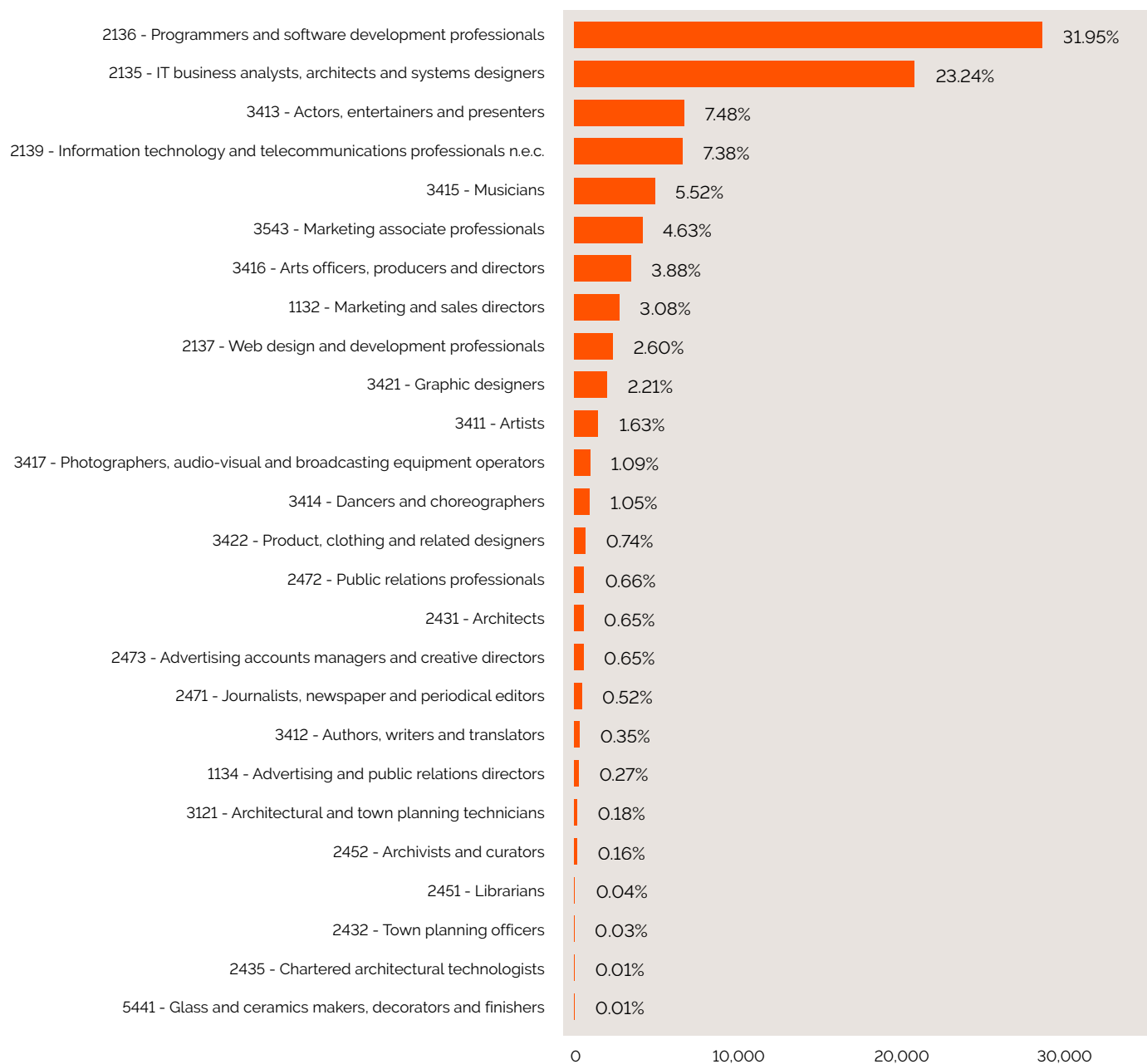
We now turn to describe which occupations were taken up by non-UK creative workers. From Table 2.5 and Figure 2.2, it is plain to see that two groups of visa holders are dominant in the creative professions. Over the 2021Q1–2024Q1 period, more than half of all visa holders in creative professions were 'Programmers and software development professionals' (28,875 visas or 31.9% of all visas) and 'IT business analysts, architects and systems designers' (21,002 visas or 23.2%). Together, these groups were granted 49,877 visas in this period. If we add to this group the 'Information technology and telecommunications professionals n.e.c.' (not elsewhere classified) (the fourth-largest group with 6,668 visas or 7.4%) and the 'Web design and development professionals' (2,348 visas or 2.6%), we obtain the total of 58,893 visas granted for workers in the 'IT, software and computer services' creative occupations group, or 65.2% of all the visas granted to creative workers. These workers enter mainly through the Worker visa routes, rather than the

Temporary Worker visa routes, meaning that they reside in the UK for longer periods.

The third-largest group of visa holders was 'Actors, entertainers and presenters' (6,761 or 7.5%), while in the fifth to eighth positions were, respectively, 'Musicians' (4,992 or 5.5%), 'Marketing associate professionals' (4,185 or 4.6%), 'Arts officers, producers and directors' (3,510 or 3.9%) and 'Marketing and sales directors' (2,784 or 3.1%) and in tenth and eleventh positions were, respectively, 'Graphic designers' (1,993 or 2.2%) and 'Artists' (1,473 or 1.6%). Among these groups, only 'Marketing associate professionals' and 'Graphic designers' tend to reside for long periods in the UK, as they mainly enter the country with a Worker visa rather than a Temporary Worker visa. The opposite is true for 'Actors, entertainers and presenters', 'Musicians', 'Arts officers, producers and directors' and 'Artists', perhaps not surprisingly given the more temporary and insecure nature of these jobs.

In each of the other DCMS-defined creative occupations, less than a thousand visas were granted over the 2021Q1–2024Q1 period.

Figure 2.2 Visas granted across Worker and Temporary Worker types by DCMS-defined creative occupations, 2021Q1–2024Q1



Source: Authors' calculation based on [Home Office Immigration System Statistics](#) with occupations under the SOC 2010 framework

Note: The percentages sum to 100%.

2.3.2 Visa routes into creative occupations (based on visas granted) during 2021Q1–2024Q1

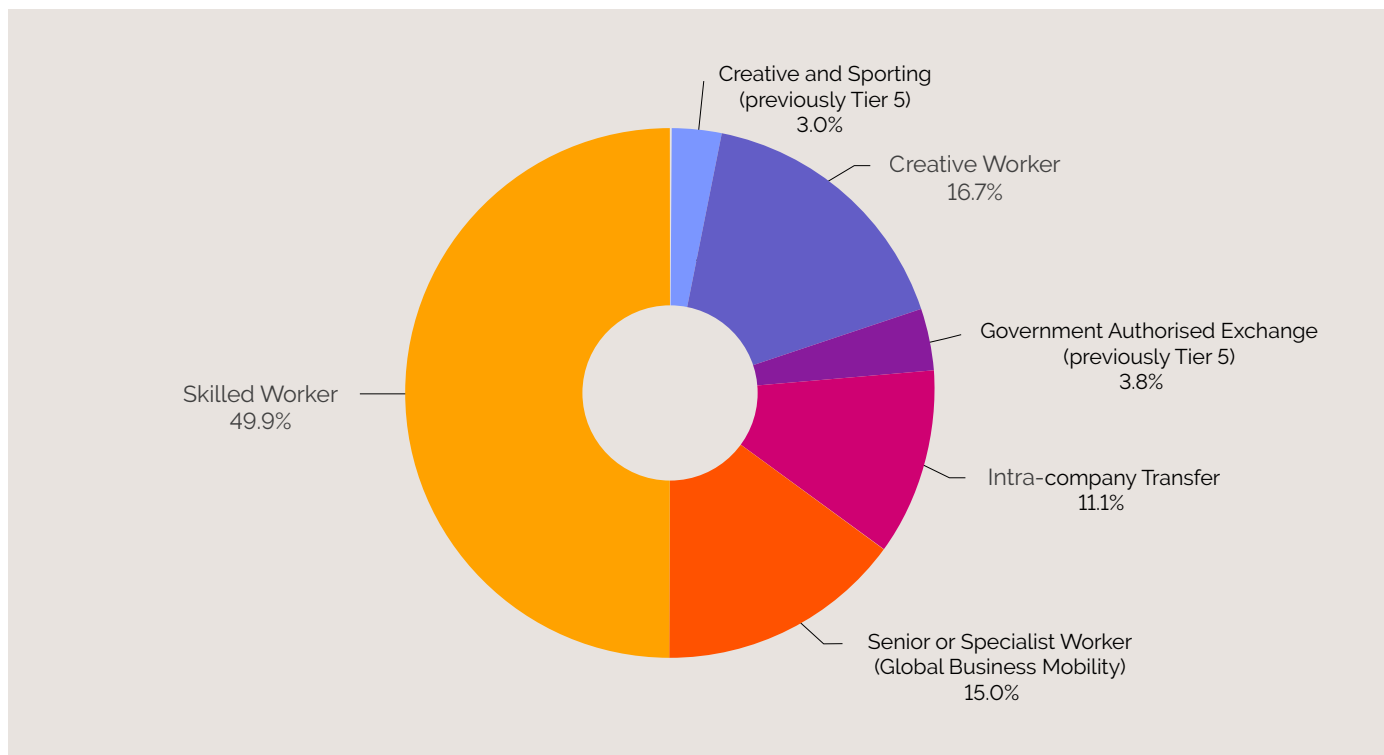
Figure 2.3 shows the main visa routes into creative occupations, based on the granted visas count for 2021Q1–2024Q1. As noted earlier, the Skilled Worker visa was the most common route, with 49.9% of all visas; the Creative Worker visa was the second most common route with 16.7%, followed by the Senior or Specialist Worker (Global Business Mobility) visa with 15.0%, the Intra-company Transfer visa with 11.1%, the Government Authorised Exchange (previously Tier 5) visa with 3.8% and the Creative and Sporting (previously Tier 5) visa with 3.0%. All the other routes accounted for negligible percentages.

Table 2.6 shows the visa count for each type of visa and each DCMS-defined creative occupation. The 'IT, software and computer services' creative occupations group (codes 2135, 2136, 2137 and 2139) sponsored foreign workers mainly through the Worker visa

routes of the Skilled Worker visa, the Senior or Specialist Worker (Global Business Mobility) visa and the Intra-company Transfer visa, which was replaced by the Senior or Specialist Worker visa, although for 'Programmers and software development professionals', the Government Authorised Exchange (previously Tier 5) visa, which is a Temporary Worker visa, was quite common too.

'Architects', 'Town planning officers', 'Architectural and town planning technicians', 'Journalists, newspaper and periodical editors', 'Public relations professionals', 'Graphic designers', 'Product, clothing and related designers', 'Marketing and sales directors', 'Advertising and public relations directors', 'Marketing associate professionals' and 'Advertising accounts managers and creative directors' mainly entered the UK with the Skilled Worker visa. This was also the case for 'Librarians', but not 'Archivists and curators', who mostly entered with the Government Authorised Exchange (previously Tier 5) visa.

Figure 2.3 Visas granted across DCMS-defined creative occupations by visa subtypes, 2021Q1–2024Q1



Source: Authors' calculation based on Home Office Immigration System Statistics

Note: Visas with less than 1% share of total visas granted are not labelled: Charity Worker (previously Tier 5), 0.103%; Graduate Trainee (Global Business Mobility), 0.091%; UK Expansion Worker (Global Business Mobility), 0.084%; Religious Worker (previously Tier 5), 0.063%; International Agreement (previously Tier 5), 0.025%; Scale-up Worker, 0.017%; Health and Care Worker (Skilled Worker), 0.012%; Secondment Worker (Global Business Mobility), 0.007%; Service Supplier (Global Business Mobility), 0.001%; International Sportsperson, 0.001%; and Minister of Religion (previously Tier 2), 0.001%.

Most of the arts-based creative worker groups – that is 'Musicians', 'Artists', 'Actors, entertainers and presenters', 'Dancers and choreographers', 'Arts officers, producers and directors' and 'Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting

equipment operators' – entered the UK with a Creative Worker visa (or its predecessor, the Creative and Sporting visa). The exception was 'Authors, writers and translators', who mostly entered the UK with a Skilled Worker visa.

Table 2.6 Visas granted for Worker or Temporary Worker types by DCMS-defined creative occupations by visa subtypes, 2021Q1–2024Q1

Count of visa granted	Visa type: Temporary Worker										Visa type: Worker						
Occupation (by SOC2010)	Charity Worker (previously Tier 5)	Creative and Sporting (previously Tier 5)	Creative Worker	Government Authorised Exchange (previously Tier 5)	Graduate Trainee (Global Business Mobility)	International Agreement (previously Tier 5)	Religious Worker (previously Tier 5)	Secondment Worker (Global Business Mobility)	Service Supplier (Global Business Mobility)	UK Expansion Worker (Global Business Mobility)	International Sportsperson	Intra-company Transfer	Minister of Religion (previously Tier 2)	Scale-up Worker	Senior or Specialist Worker (Global Business Mobility)	Skilled Worker	Skilled Worker – Health and Care Worker
1132 – Marketing and sales directors	0	0	0	12	1	4	0	0	0	64	0	303	0	1	431	1,968	0
1134 – Advertising and public relations directors	0	0	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	17	0	0	19	199	0
2135 – IT business analysts, architects and systems designers	0	0	0	249	17	0	0	0	0	3	0	4,833	0	3	6,641	9,252	4
2136 – Programmers and software development professionals	0	1	24	1,362	12	1	0	6	1	0	0	3,192	0	9	4,067	20,194	6
2137 – Web design and development professionals	1	0	1	26	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	71	0	2	60	2,185	0
2139 – Information technology and telecommunications professionals n.e.c.	2	7	2	96	17	1	0	0	0	4	0	1,489	0	0	2,114	2,936	0
2431 – Architects	2	0	2	64	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	0	0	8	504	0
2432 – Town planning officers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	25	0
2435 – Chartered architectural technologists	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0
2451 – Librarians	2	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	0
2452 – Archivists and curators	6	1	15	70	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	54	0
2471 – Journalists, newspaper and periodical editors	0	1	7	42	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	35	0	0	79	303	0
2472 – Public relations professionals	3	1	10	116	3	6	1	0	0	0	0	20	0	0	29	404	0
2473 – Advertising accounts managers and creative directors	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	22	0	0	25	532	0
3121 – Architectural and town planning technicians	0	0	0	35	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	128	0
3411 – Artists	9	114	1,023	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	309	0
3412 – Authors, writers and translators	1	25	81	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	175	0
3413 – Actors, entertainers and presenters	9	1,041	5,608	0	0	0	34	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	68	0
3414 – Dancers and choreographers	3	190	732	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	0
3415 – Musicians	22	434	4,485	3	0	0	19	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	28	0
3416 – Arts officers, producers and directors	1	613	2,208	99	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	18	0	0	19	551	0
3417 – Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators	8	216	640	15	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	101	0
3421 – Graphic designers	3	36	91	48	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,814	0
3422 – Product, clothing and related designers	0	58	186	36	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	1	381	1
3543 – Marketing associate professionals	15	1	0	1,075	29	1	1	0	0	0	0	44	0	0	54	2,965	0
5441 – Glass and ceramics makers, decorators and finishers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0
Grand total (2021Q1–2024Q1)	93	2,739	15,117	3,413	82	23	57	6	1	76	1	10,059	1	15	13,550	45,135	11

Source: Authors' calculation based on [Home Office Immigration System Statistics](#).

Note: n.e.c.: not elsewhere classified.

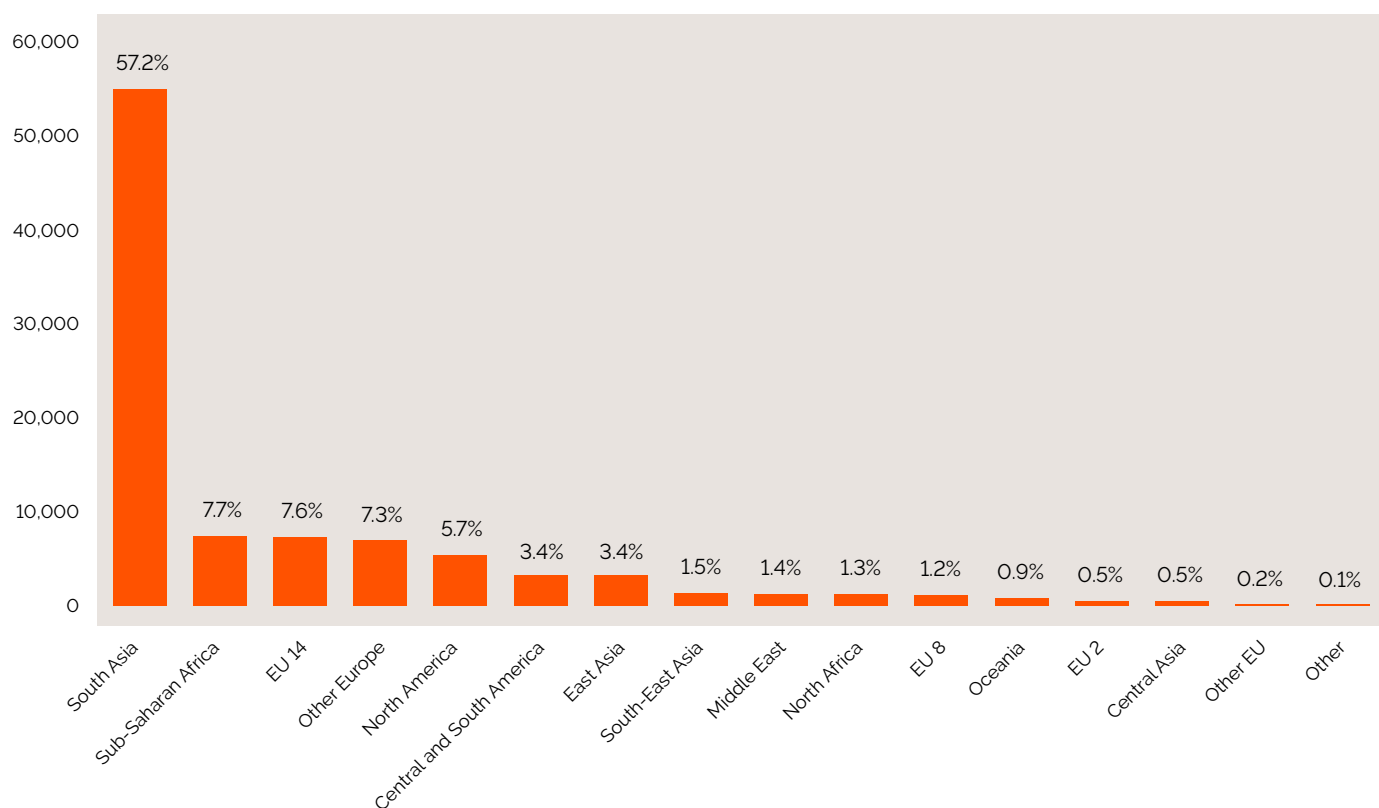
2.4 Origins of visa holders for creative occupations through different routes

Where do the creative migrants come from? Figures 2.4 and 2.5 illustrate the answer.

Figure 2.4 shows that for the 2021Q1–2024Q1 period, more than half of them were from Asia (62.6%). Specifically, 57.2% came from South Asia, 3.4% from East Asia, 1.5% from Southeast Asia and 0.5% from Central Asia. The second-largest continent of origin for creative migrants was Europe with a 16.8% share of migrants,

broken down into 9.5% from the EU and 7.3% from other European countries. Next, Africa accounted for a 9.4% share, broken down into 7.7% from sub-Saharan Africa and 1.7% from North Africa. America accounted for a 9.1% share of migrants, broken down into 5.7% from North America and 3.4% from Central and South America. Finally, 1.4% of creative migrants came from the Middle East, 0.9% came from Oceania and 0.1% were in the 'other' category.

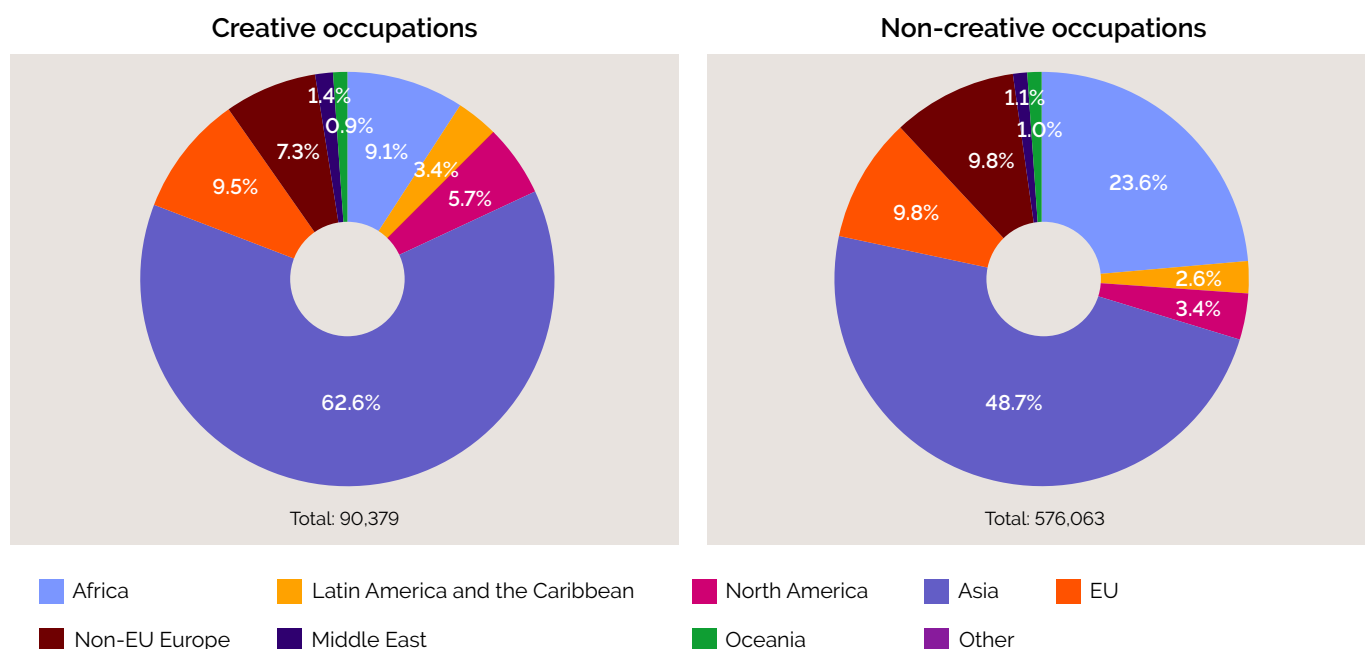
Figure 2.4 Visas granted for DCMS-defined creative occupations by region of nationality, 2021Q1–2024Q1



Source: Authors' calculation based on [Home Office Immigration System Statistics](#) with EU groupings

Notes: The EU 14 are the 14 countries that joined the EU before 2004: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the Netherlands. The EU 8 countries, which joined the EU in 2004, are: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. The EU 2 countries, Bulgaria and Romania, joined the EU in 2007. The EU Other category is made up of Cyprus and Malta, which joined the EU in 2004, and Croatia, which joined in 2013. The percentages sum to 100%.

Figure 2.5 Visas granted for DCMS-defined creative and non-creative occupations by world region of nationality, 2021Q1–2024Q1



Source: Authors' calculation based on [Home Office Immigration System Statistics](#)

Table 2.7 provides the counts of visas by DCMS-defined creative occupation and macro-region of nationality of migrants. It can be observed that South Asia was the biggest contributor of migrants to creative jobs overall in the UK, having a total of 51,706 granted visas during the period. The green cells in the table indicate the highest number of visa holders in each creative occupation. South Asia had the highest number of visas granted in just over half of the occupations. It was the macro-region of nationality for the highest number of visa holders working as 'Programmers and software development professionals' (18,048 granted visas), 'IT business analysts, architects and systems designers' (16,840), 'Information technology and telecommunications professionals n.e.c.' (5,510) and 'Web design and development professionals' (1,720), with no other macro-region a close follower in these occupations, perhaps not surprisingly given the comparative advantage of India in IT and software development. But South Asia was also the biggest contributor of migrants for 'Actors, entertainers and presenters' (1,832

granted visas, closely followed by Sub-Saharan Africa with 1,676), 'Arts officers, producers and directors' (1,741), 'Marketing associate professionals' (1,276), 'Graphic designers' (874), 'Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators' (577), 'Product, clothing and related designers' (247), 'Dancers and choreographers' (244), 'Authors, writers and translators' (80) and 'Chartered architectural technologists' (8).

Most of the 'Musicians' came from Sub-Saharan Africa (2,078 granted visas), followed by South Asia (1,581). In comparison, much smaller numbers of visas were granted to musicians originating from 'Other' European countries (i.e. non-EU European countries) (569), Central and South America (383), North America (35) and the closest EU countries, the EU 14 (only 33).

North America was the biggest source of visa holders for 'Marketing and sales directors' (632), 'Public relations professionals' (165), 'Advertising accounts managers and creative directors' (157), 'Advertising and public relations directors' (84) and 'Archivists and curators' (55).

Table 2.7 Visas granted for Worker or Temporary Worker types by DCMS-defined creative occupations and macro-region of nationality, 2021Q1–2024Q1

Occupation (by SOC2010)	Africa North	Africa Sub-Saharan	America Central and South	America North	Asia Central	Asia East	Asia South	Asia South East	EU 14	EU 2	EU 8	EU Other	Europe Other	Middle East	Oceania	Other
1132 – Marketing and sales directors	27	90	100	632	5	375	399	52	627	16	39	6	193	69	154	0
1134 – Advertising and public relations directors	1	21	8	84	0	8	15	15	45	2	2	1	22	4	15	0
2135 – IT business analysts, architects and systems designers	143	694	220	671	25	353	16,840	194	871	47	110	12	600	116	106	0
2136 – Programmers and software development professionals	603	899	769	939	225	833	18,048	403	2,077	311	450	77	2,579	488	166	8
2137 – Web design and development professionals	11	134	50	94	10	51	1,720	33	98	6	13	4	75	38	11	0
2139 – Information technology and telecommunications professionals n.e.c.	49	142	65	154	4	126	5,510	66	232	14	45	18	163	51	29	0
2431 – Architects	14	13	45	44	1	54	80	27	157	8	19	3	75	37	8	0
2432 – Town planning officers	0	3	0	4	0	3	4	0	4	1	0	0	0	1	6	0
2435 – Chartered architectural technologists	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
2451 – Librarians	0	2	0	9	0	2	0	0	17	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
2452 – Archivists and curators	2	7	4	55	1	9	5	1	50	0	0	1	4	3	4	0
2471 – Journalists, newspaper and periodical editors	9	29	16	130	8	90	51	4	63	2	7	0	26	26	11	2
2472 – Public relations professionals	6	35	20	165	6	64	67	19	112	1	7	3	40	22	26	0
2473 – Advertising accounts managers and creative directors	8	27	37	157	0	39	88	14	117	3	2	1	41	11	39	0
3121 – Architectural and town planning technicians	1	5	8	15	0	20	27	6	41	7	4	0	18	9	2	0
3411 – Artists	11	194	92	45	20	46	392	28	163	10	12	2	420	27	9	2
3412 – Authors, writers and translators	5	10	8	59	0	30	80	6	63	0	12	0	27	8	7	0
3413 – Actors, entertainers and presenters	122	1,676	813	297	105	481	1,832	180	174	8	24	0	901	62	58	28
3414 – Dancers and choreographers	12	171	139	73	24	42	244	9	45	1	4	0	174	1	13	1
3415 – Musicians	85	2,078	383	35	7	60	1,581	44	33	0	2	0	569	101	5	9
3416 – Arts officers, producers and directors	21	399	73	696	5	42	1,741	30	275	3	18	3	119	32	52	1
3417 – Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators	0	102	32	118	0	35	577	11	42	0	5	2	45	1	13	2
3421 – Graphic designers	33	50	73	72	9	49	874	47	513	14	40	4	158	33	24	0
3422 – Product, clothing and related designers	1	23	11	71	2	48	247	9	177	2	6	1	47	11	15	0
3543 – Marketing associate professionals	50	168	111	544	17	251	1,276	131	883	25	258	10	275	125	61	0
5441 – Glass and ceramics makers, decorators and finishers	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grand total (2021Q1-2024Q1)	1,214	6,973	3,077	5,165	474	3,111	51,706	1,330	6,884	481	1,079	148	6,572	1,277	835	53

Source: Authors' calculation based on Home Office Immigration System Statistics.

Notes: n.e.c.: not elsewhere classified. The green cells correspond to the macro-regions contributing the largest number of migrants for each creative occupation and across all of these occupations.

The EU 14 countries were the major source of migrants for 'Architects' (157), 'Architectural and town planning technicians' (41), 'Librarians' (17) and 'Glass and ceramics makers, decorators and finishers' (3).

'Other' European countries represented the largest source of migrants for 'Artists' (420), followed closely by South Asia (392), while Oceania topped the list for 'Town planning officers' (6).

The EU (EU 14, EU 8, EU 2 and EU Other) was the second-largest macro-region of nationality for creative workers, with 8,592 granted visas during the 2021Q1–2024Q1 period, spread across all the creative professions, particularly in IT and software, marketing, the arts, architecture and graphic design.

North America was the third-largest contributor of visa holders for creative jobs with 5,165 visas granted for professions covered mainly by Worker visas. If North America is considered together with Central and South America, then the number of granted visas rises to 8,242, a similar number to the EU.

Taken together, this data shows that the UK was heavily reliant on South Asia for creative workers, whether they gained access to the UK job market with Worker visas or Temporary Worker visas (which as we saw from Table 2.6, have different preponderances across occupations). With 51,706 granted visas, the number of creatives originating from South Asia was around six times the number from the next biggest contributor of creatives, the EU.

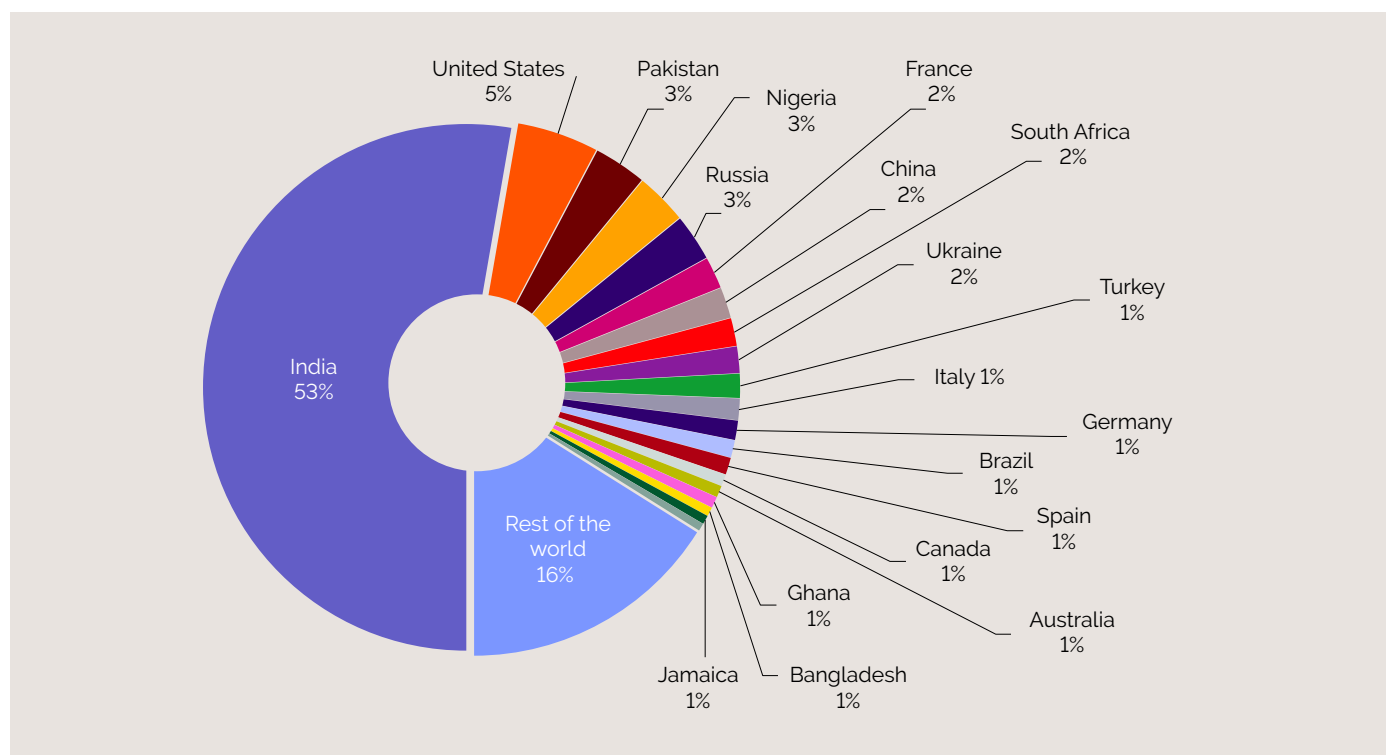


2.4.1 Nationality of visa holders for DCMS-defined creative occupations

Figure 2.6 depicts the share of visa holders in DCMS-defined creative occupations by nationality for the top twenty countries by number of granted visas during the 2021Q1–2024Q1 period. More than half of the creative immigrant workers came from India (53%), and all other countries in comparison represented a tiny share, with the United States accounting for 5%; Nigeria, Pakistan and Russia each

accounting for 3%; China, France, South Africa and Ukraine each accounting for 2%; and Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Ghana, Italy, Jamaica, Spain and Turkey each accounting for 1%. The rest of the world accounted for 16% of creative immigrants. India's major share during this period is testament to the success of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and the UK on the migration and mobility partnership, which covers mobility of skills and talents, signed on 4 May 2021.²⁷

Figure 2.6 Share of visas granted for DCMS-defined creative occupations for the twenty countries with most visas granted, 2021Q1–2024Q1



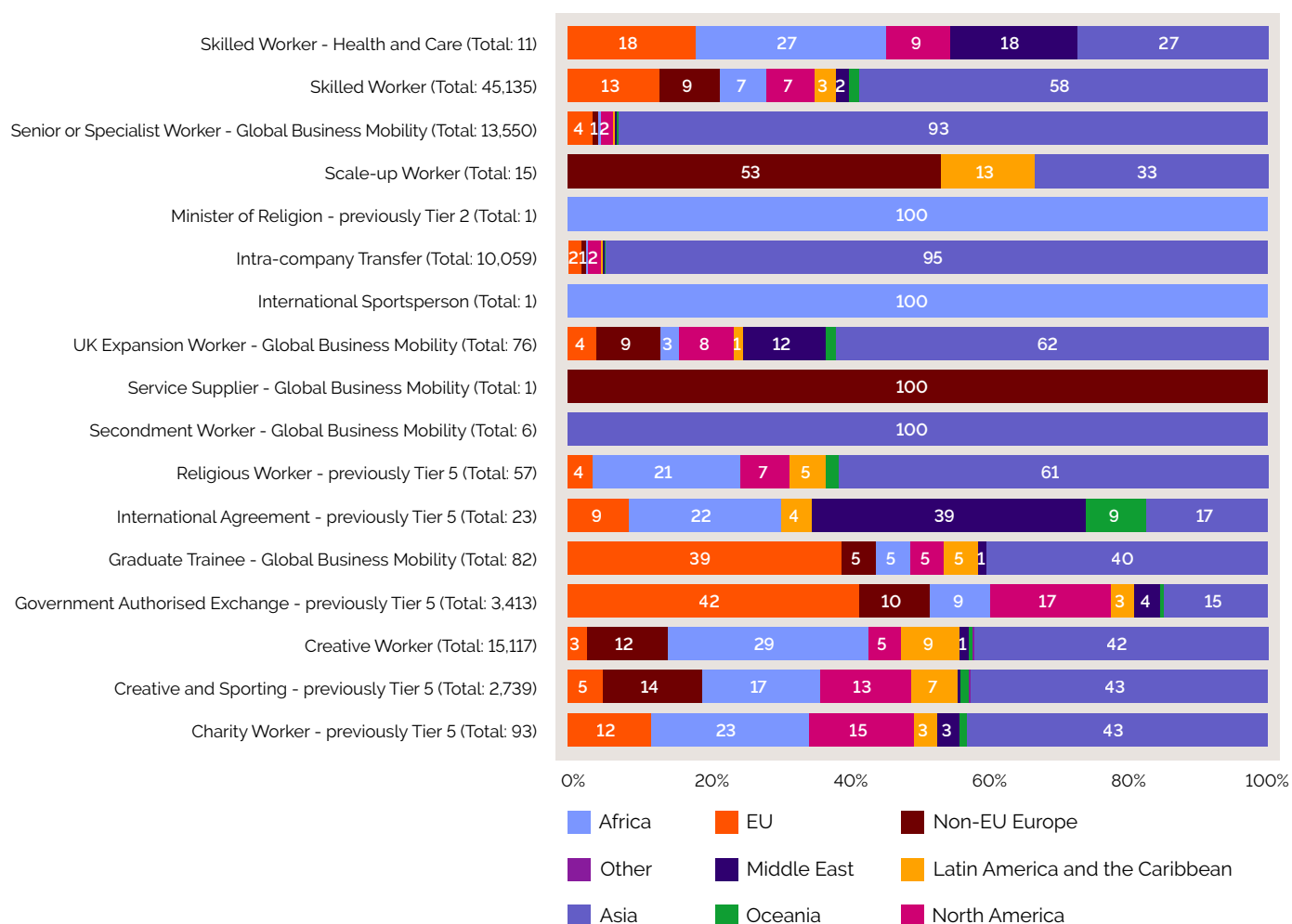
Source: Authors' calculation based on Home Office Immigration System Statistics with occupations under the SOC 2010 framework

2.4.2 Visa routes for foreign workers in creative occupations by world region of nationality

As discussed in Section 2.1, creative workers can enter the UK through different visa routes. This is illustrated by Figure 2.7, which shows the share of visas granted for creative occupations by visa type and world region of nationality during 2021Q1–2024Q1. Commenting on the most common routes, it is notable that more than half (58%) of the Skilled Worker visas were granted to Asian creative workers. Asian creatives made up 95% of the holders of the Intra-company Transfer visa and 93% of the holders of the Senior or Specialist Worker (Global Business Mobility) visa. EU creative

workers had a similar share to Asian workers (39% and 40%, respectively) for the Graduate Trainee (Global Business Mobility) visa route, while EU workers had the highest share of any region (42%) for the Government Authorised Exchange (previously Tier 5) visa route, although both these entry routes cover smaller numbers. The Creative Worker and Creative and Sporting (previously Tier 5) visas were more mixed in the nationality of origin, having, respectively, 42% and 43% from Asia, 29% and 17% from Africa, 12% and 14% from non-EU European countries, 9% and 7% from Latin America and the Caribbean, 5% and 13% from North America and 3% and 5% from the EU, plus very small percentages from the other regions. signed on 4 May 2021.

Figure 2.7 Share of visa holders in DCMS-defined creative occupations by visa types and world region of nationality, 2021Q1–2024Q1



Source: Authors' calculation based on Home Office Immigration System Statistics with occupations under the SOC 2010 framework

2.4.3 Visas granted for Worker or Temporary Worker types by creative occupations by world region of nationality and year during 2021–2023

We now look at the evolution over the 2021–2023 period of migrants according to their world region of nationality and whether they entered with a Worker visa or a Temporary Worker visa.

Figure 2.8A, focused on Worker visas, shows that the Skilled Worker visa for creative occupations had a peak in 2022 and then a contraction in 2023 for migrants coming from all world regions. This drop could be related to the changes to how the 'genuine vacancy test', applied for Skilled Worker visa applications, has been assessed since November 2023 (Migration Advisory Committee, 2024).

Figure 2.8B, focused on the Temporary Worker visas, shows that the Creative Worker and the Creative and Sporting Worker visas granted to creative migrants from Asia and Africa kept growing over the period, although at a slightly lower pace in 2023. Visas granted to creative migrants from non-EU Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and Oceania followed a similar pattern to the Skilled Worker visas – that is, peaking in 2022 and then dropping or flatlining in 2023. Visas to creative migrants from North America dropped in 2022 and flatlined in 2023. Visas to creative migrants from the EU dropped steadily over the period.

Figure 2.8C, focused on other types of visas for creative occupations, shows that there was a peak in 2022 for migrants from all world regions. Notably, for Asians, numbers in 2023 dropped below the numbers in 2021. This was also the case for those from non-EU Europe, though the peak was less pronounced.

Figure 2.8A Skilled Worker visas granted for DCMS-defined creative occupations by world region of nationality, 2021–2023

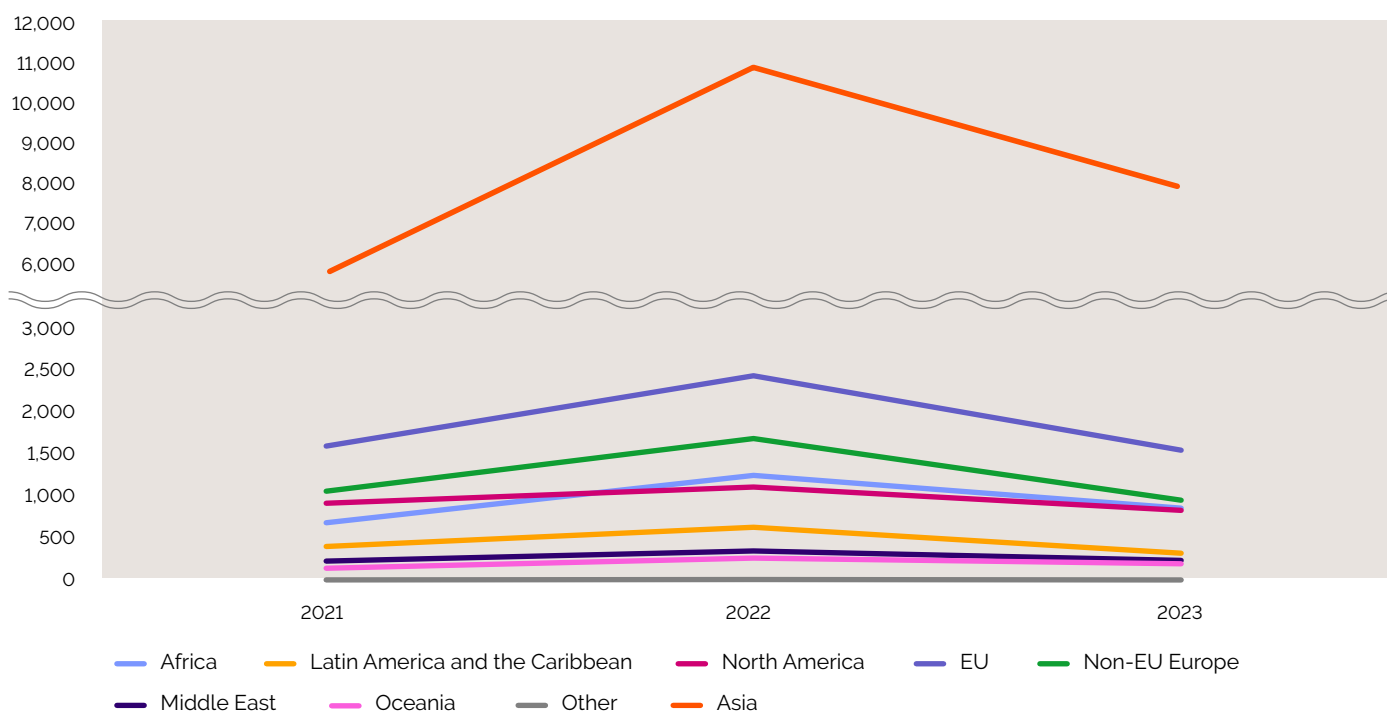


Figure 2.8B Creative Worker or Creative and Sporting visas granted for DCMS-defined creative occupations by world region of nationality, 2021–2023

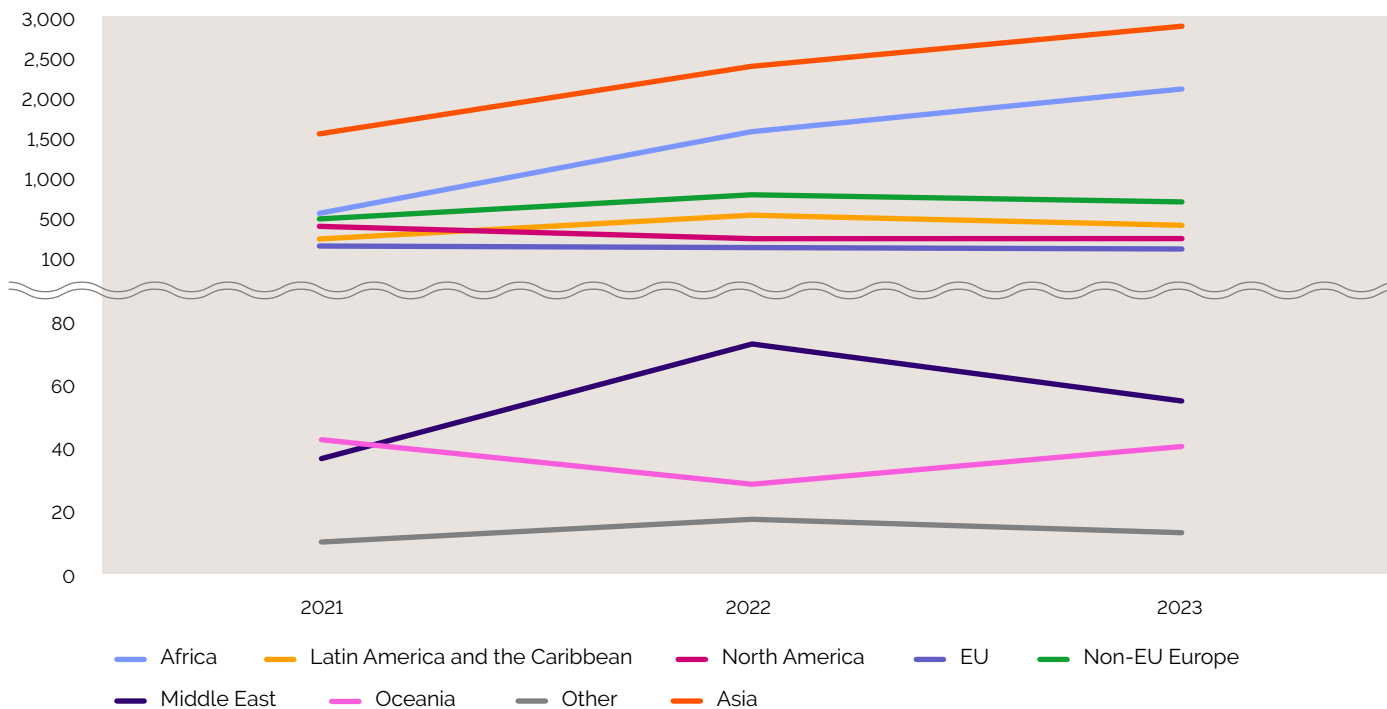


Figure 2.8C Visas other than Skilled Worker or Creative Worker or Creative and Sporting visas granted for DCMS-defined creative occupations by world region of nationality, 2021–2023

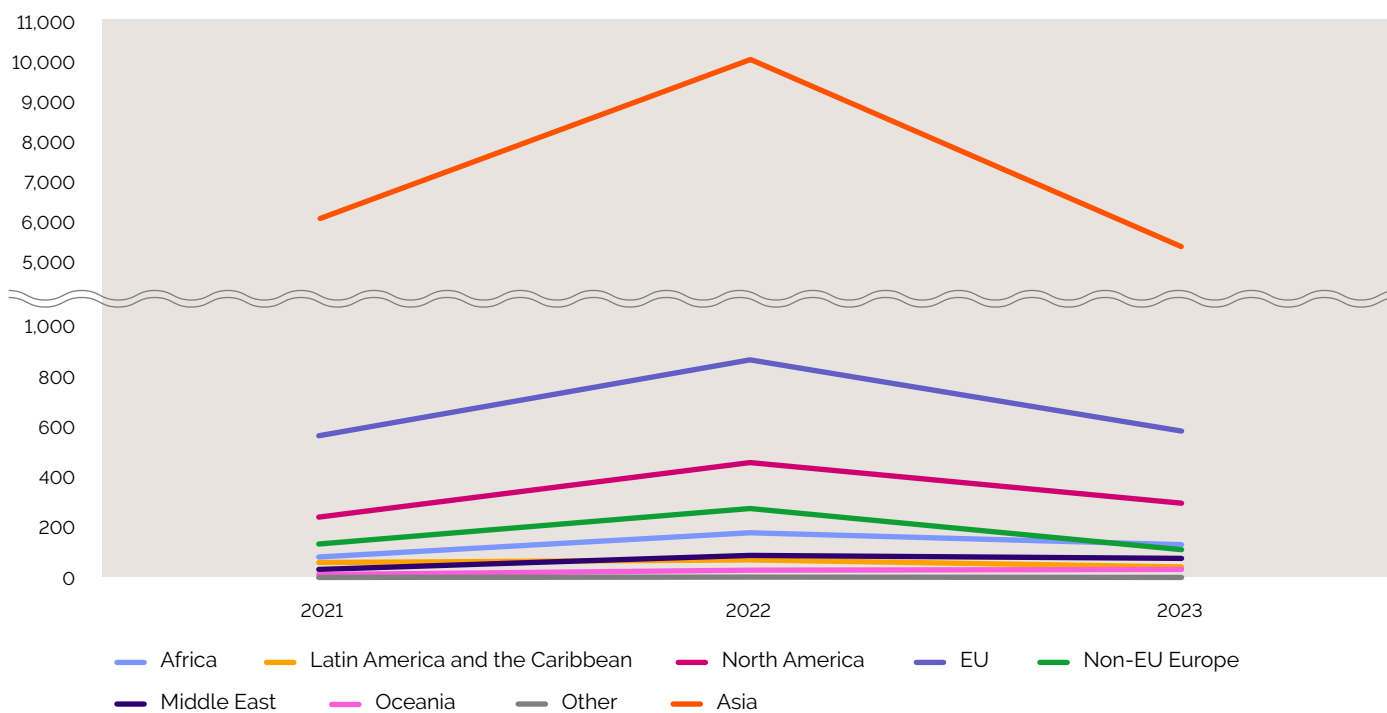
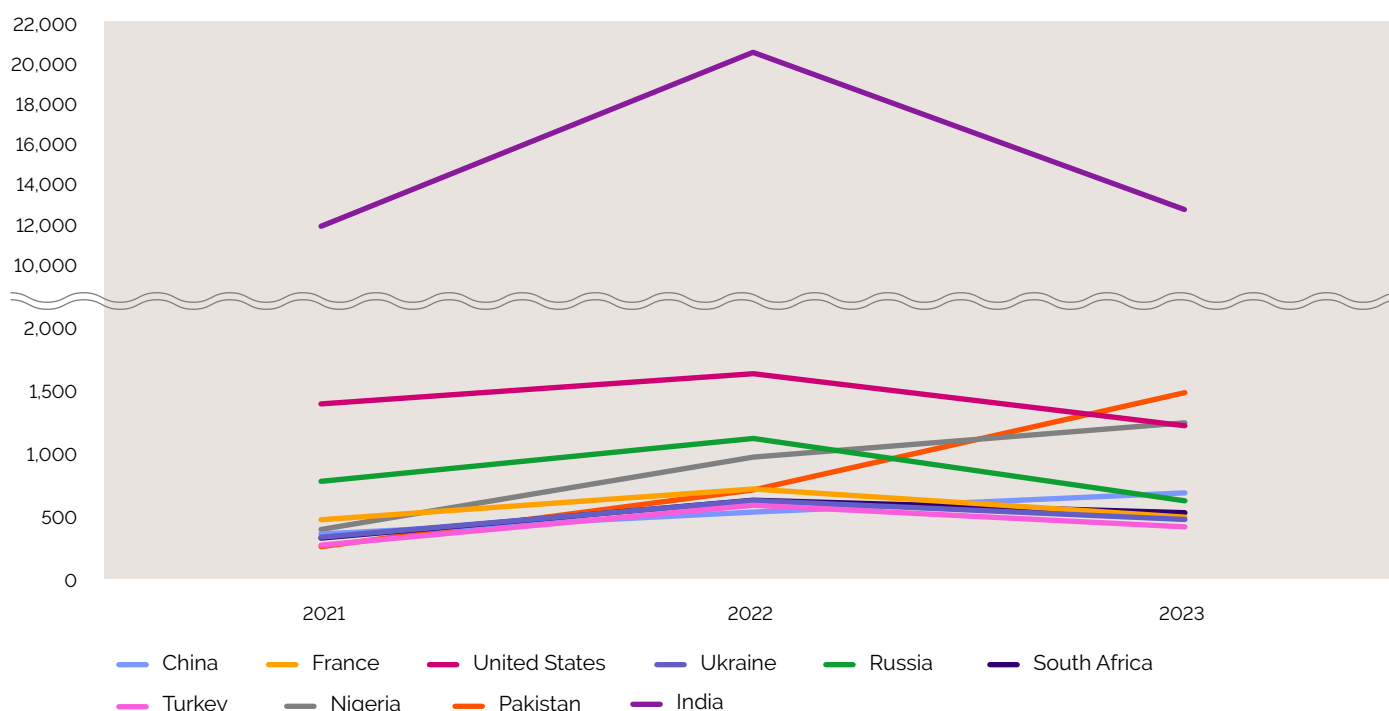


Figure 2.8D All visas granted for DCMS-defined creative occupations by top ten countries of nationality, 2021–2023



Source: Authors' calculation based on Home Office Immigration System Statistics (accessible at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67458510ece939d55ce9304e/occupation-visas-datasets-mar-24.xlsx>) with occupations under the SOC 2010 framework

Pulling together the data for all types of visa granted to creative workers, we observe in Figure 2.8D that the top ten nationalities of migrants in 2021 were India, the United States, Russia, France, Nigeria, China, South Africa, Ukraine, Turkey and Pakistan. While seven nationalities had a peak in 2022, migrants from Pakistan, Nigeria and China grew in both 2022 and 2023, changing the running order of nationalities in 2023, with Pakistanis working in creative occupations becoming the second nationality after Indians; these were followed by Nigerians, North Americans, Chinese, Russians, South Africans, French, Ukrainians and Turks.

2.4.4 Visas for creatives granted during 2021–2023

The evolution of granted visas during the period 2021–2023 is depicted in Figure 2.9, showing the growth rates by year and creative occupation. Table A4 in the Online Supplementary Material produces the count by year and creative occupation. Overall, visas granted for all DCMS-defined creative occupations, across all visa routes, grew from 21,751 in 2021 to 36,600 in 2022, a growth rate of 68%, but contracted to 26,332 in 2023, a drop of 28%. In comparison, the visas granted for non-creative occupations grew from 101,560 in 2021 to 181,324 in 2022, a growth rate of 79%, and they expanded again to 253,222 in 2023, a growth rate of 40%. Comparing the number of creative migrants against the number of non-creative migrants across the three years, the creative migrants group went from being 21% of the size of the non-creative migrants group in 2021 to 20% in 2022, and only 10% in 2023.

Figure 2.9 Year-on-year growth of visas granted for Worker or Temporary Worker routes by DCMS-defined creative occupations, 2021–2023



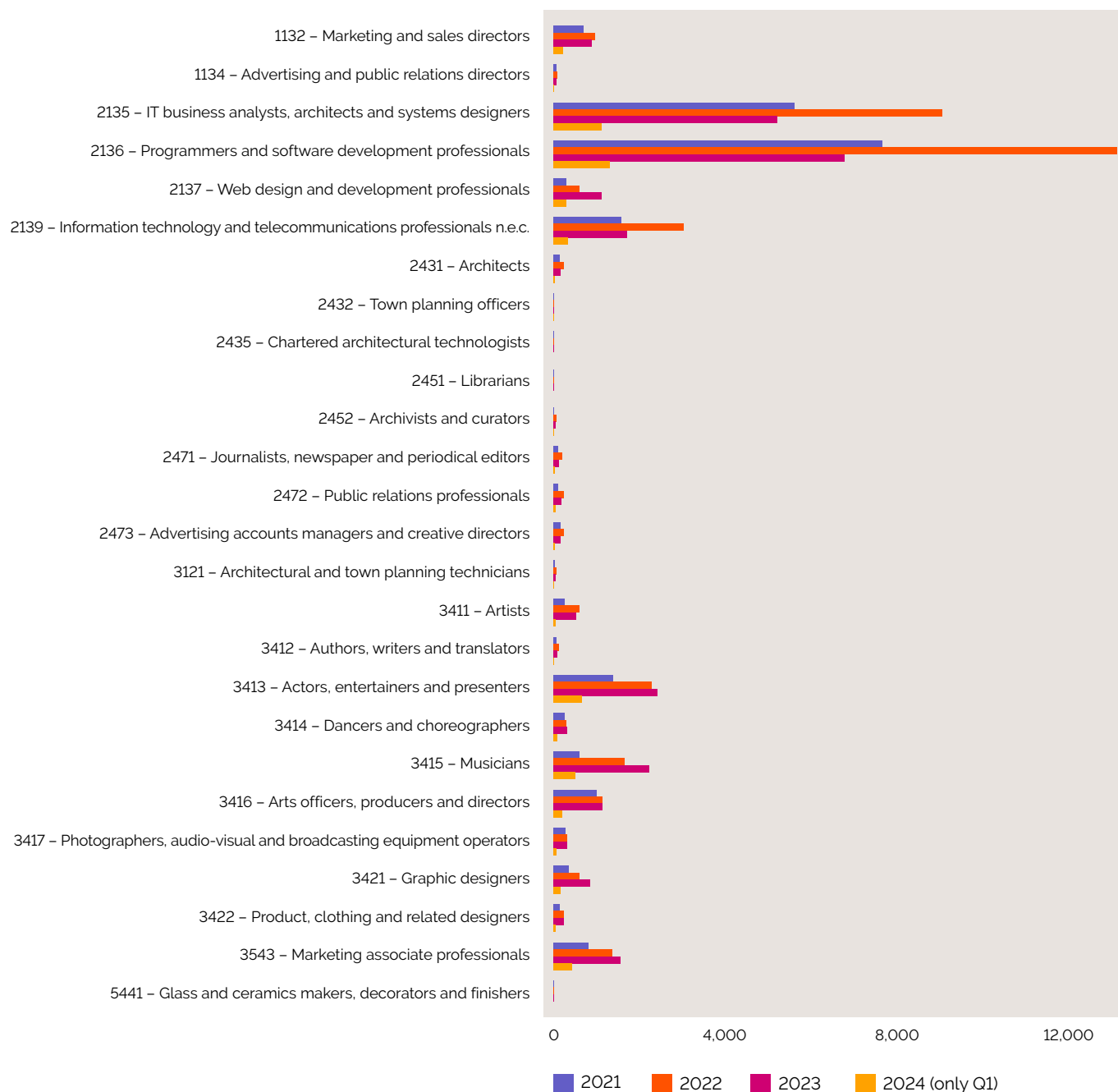
Source: Authors' calculation based on Home Office Immigration System Statistics (accessible at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67458510e939d55ce9304e/occupation-visas-datasets-mar-24.xlsx>) with occupations under the SOC 2010 framework

Note: n.e.c.: not elsewhere classified.

This trend in creative migration has been driven only by a few creative occupations, as Figure 2.10 depicts. Notably, the two creative occupations attracting the highest number of foreign workers – that is, 'Programmers and software development professionals' and 'IT business analysts, architects and systems designers' – had a substantial peak of foreign creative workers in 2022, having, respectively, 71% and 61% more visas granted in 2022 than 2021, but falling back in 2023 to levels similar to those in 2021 (a contraction of 48% and 42%, respectively). Other occupations that saw a big growth in 2022 followed by a big contraction in 2023, though with smaller numbers of migrants, were 'Information technology and telecommunication professionals n.e.c.' (a growth of 93% and a drop of 43%), 'Architects' (+69% and -24%), 'Advertising accounts managers and creative directors' (+49% and -37%) and 'Journalists, newspaper and periodical editors' (+73% and -33%).

Creative occupations that saw growth both in 2022 and 2023 were 'Web design and development professionals' (+106% and +83%), 'Actors, entertainers and presenters' (+64% and +6%), 'Dancers and choreographers' (+12% and +6%), 'Musicians' (+170% and +35%), 'Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators' (+10% and +7%), 'Graphic designers' (+68% and +41%) and 'Marketing associate professionals' (+69% and +13%). All the other creative occupations saw some growth in 2022 and a small contraction or stable visa numbers in 2023. Table A8 in the Online Supplementary Material reports the growth rates for 2022 and 2023 for all creative occupations.

Figure 2.10 Visas granted for all visa types in DCMS-defined creative occupations, 2021Q1–2024Q1



Source: Authors' calculation based on Home Office Immigration System Statistics (accessible at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67458510e939d55ce9304e/occupation-visas-datasets-mar-24.xlsx>) with occupations under SOC 2010 framework

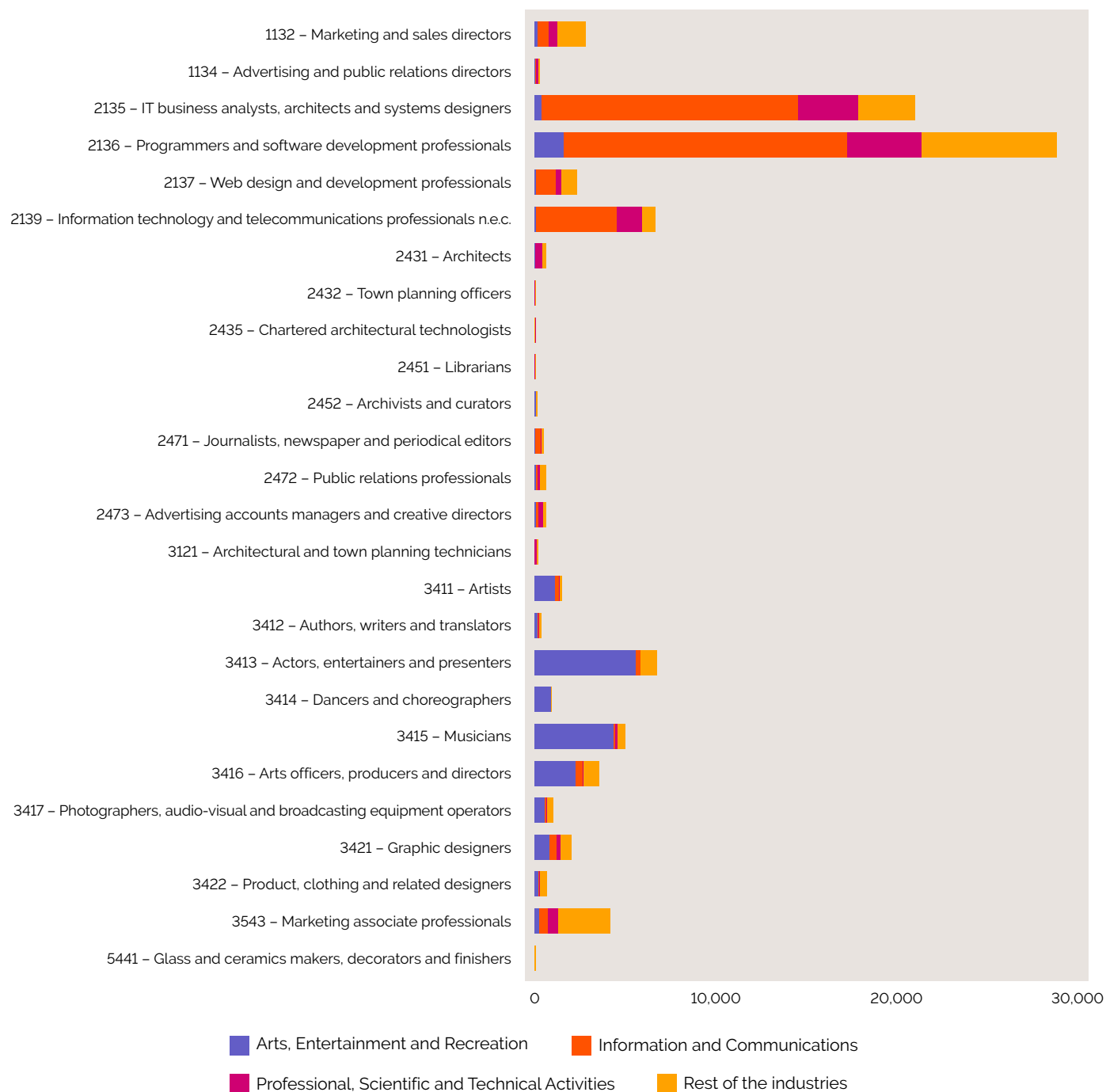
Note: n.e.c.: not elsewhere classified.

2.4.5 Number of visas granted by sponsors in the Arts, entertainment and recreation sector

The data on visas does not provide information on what industries the workers end up working in; it is only possible to know whether the sponsors of the visas belong to three industry groupings – 'Arts, entertainment and recreation', 'Information and communications' and 'Professional, scientific and technical activities' – so all other sponsors fall with the 'Rest of Industries' category. None of these groupings identifies creative industries exclusively.

Figure 2.11 shows the visas granted during 2021Q1–2024Q1 by creative occupation and by industry grouping. Not surprisingly the 'Information and Communications' industry grouping mostly sponsored creative workers in IT-related industries, but also some in marketing, while the 'Arts, entertainment and recreation' grouping sponsored workers in all the arts industries in addition to 'Programmers and software development professionals', 'Graphic designers' and some 'IT business analysts, architects and systems designers'. 'Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities' industry sponsored workers in similar creative occupations as the 'Information and Communications' industry. It is interesting to note that the 'Rest of Industries' grouping sponsored workers in every creative occupation, showing the importance of the wider creative economy and the contributions of non-UK workers to it. Table A10 in the Online Supplementary Material reports the count of visas by occupation and industry grouping for the interested reader.

Figure 2.11 Visas granted for Worker and Temporary Worker routes in DCMS-defined creative occupations by industry of sponsoring organisations, 2021Q1–2024Q1



Source: Authors' calculation based on Home Office Immigration System Statistics (accessible at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67458510e939d55ce9304e/occupation-visas-datasets-mar-24.xlsx>) with occupations under the SOC 2010 framework

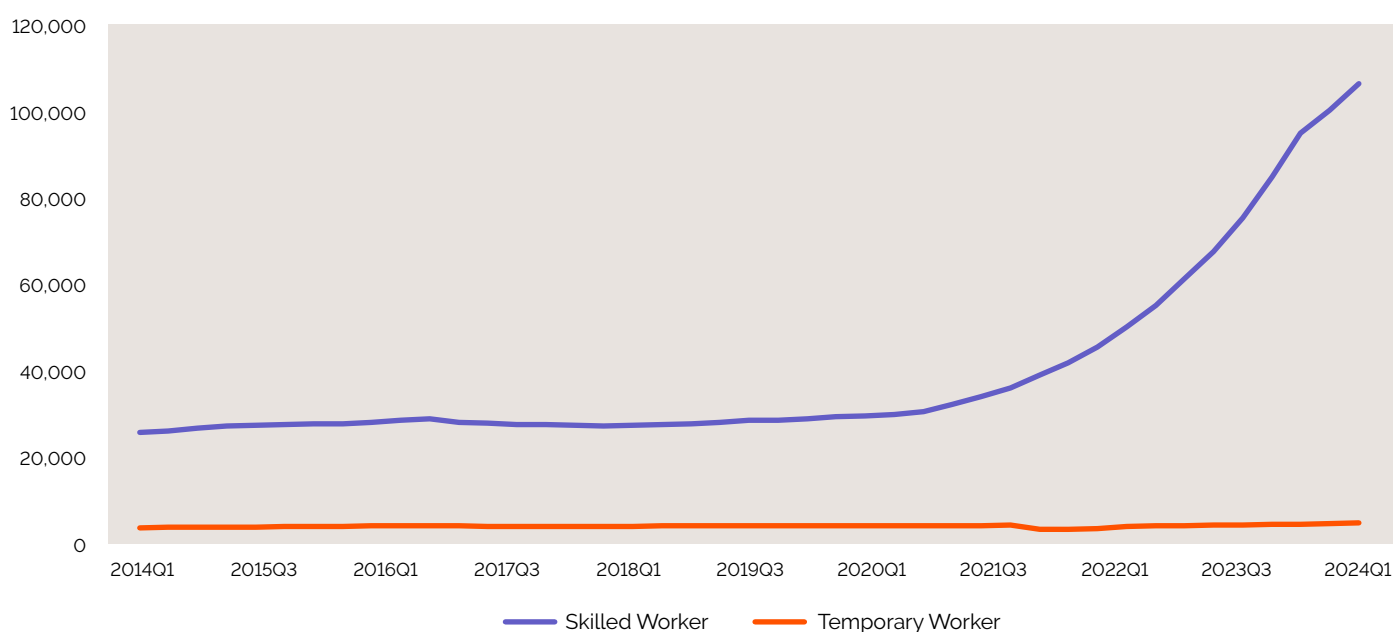
Note: n.e.c.: not elsewhere classified.

2.4.6 Number of new sponsor applications for work visas

As depicted in Figure 2.12, the number of sponsoring organisations registered to sponsor foreign workers with a Skilled Worker visa grew by around 3.5 times from 2020Q3 to 2024Q3, whereas the sponsors registered for Temporary Worker visas flatlined over the entire period

from 2014Q1 to 2024Q3. This can be explained by two main factors. First, employers who previously employed only EU migrants now need to engage with the work visa system, and a wider range of jobs are now eligible for work visas. Second, this trend could point to an exacerbation in employers' difficulty in recruiting skilled workers after the pandemic, a finding that we already mentioned in the introduction regarding the creative industries.

Figure 2.12 Number of sponsoring organisations registered to sponsor an overseas national in Skilled Worker and Temporary Worker visas

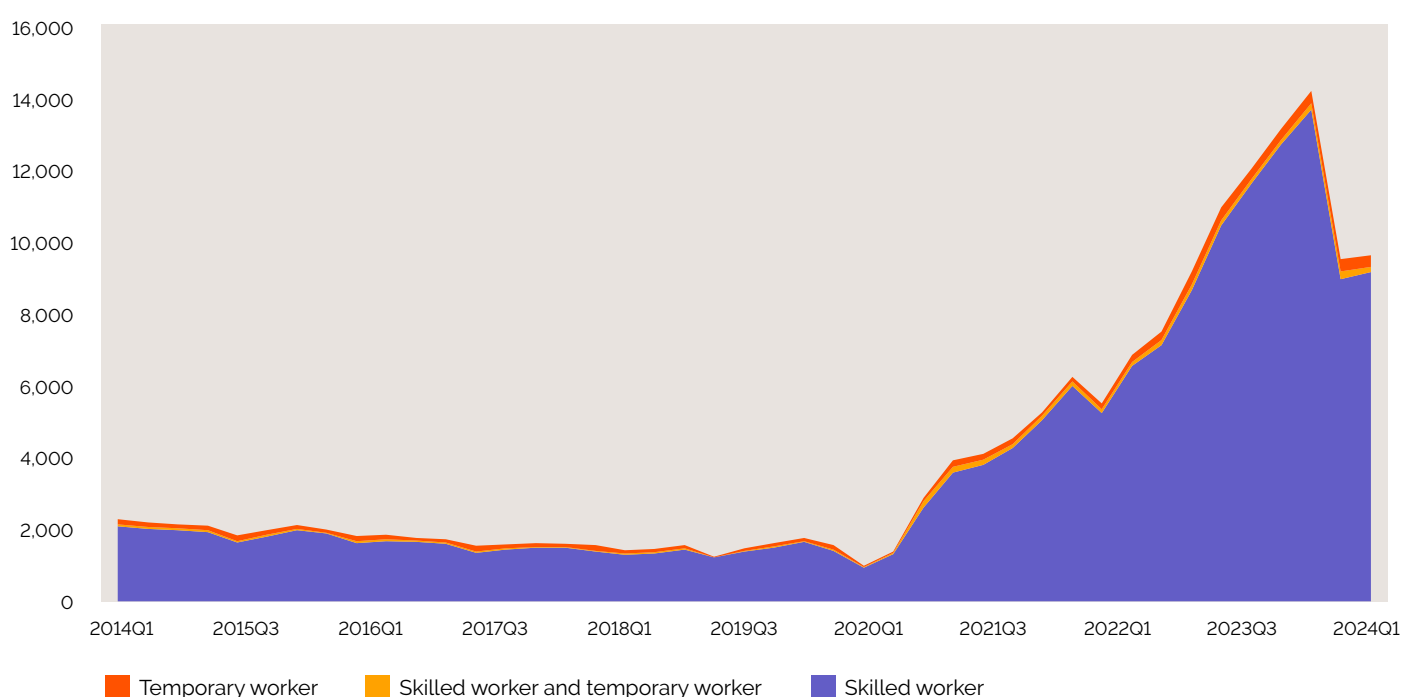


Source: Authors' calculations based on Sponsorship transparency data: 2024Q3 (available at [Sponsorship transparency data: Q3 2024 - GOV.UK](#))

Finally, Figure 2.13 shows that the number of applications by organisations to become a new sponsor changes over time, distinguishing between organisations wanting to employ only foreign workers with a Skilled Worker visa, those applying only to sponsor workers under the Temporary Worker visa and those applying to sponsor both types of visa. The number of

applications by sponsoring organisations going for only Skilled Worker visas ranged between 86.7% and 96.7% of all applications throughout the whole 2014Q1–2024Q3 period and these applications for only Skilled Worker visas grew by more than ten times between 2020Q3 (1,309 applications) and 2024Q1 (13,663 applications).

Figure 2.13 Number of applications by organisations to become new sponsors for working visas



Source: Authors' calculations based on Sponsorship transparency data: 2014Q1–2024Q3 (available at [Sponsorship transparency data: Q3 2024 – GOV.UK](#))

Even though the lack of more granular data means we cannot distinguish between sponsoring organisations in creative and non-creative industries, this aggregate data still

provides valuable insight into the rapid growth in recent years of UK employers' applications to sponsor foreign skilled workers for non-temporary employment.

3 Migration trends in the creative economy: Labour Force Survey analysis by occupation and industry

To gain further insights into the nature of non-UK workers in the UK's creative sector, the UK Labour Force Survey (LFS) can be utilised.²⁸ The advantage of the survey is that it decomposes the workforce according to both the occupations of the workers and the industries in which the workers operate, at the level of the 4-digit SOC and SIC, respectively.

It therefore allows for detailed disaggregated insight into the extent to which non-UK workers are involved in the UK creative economy. Further, the survey provides a long-term evaluation of the creative workforce and is used here to analyse the evolution of the creative occupations and creative industries over the decade from 2014 to 2024. As the UK LFS has been scrutinised with regard to the representativeness of the sample and the

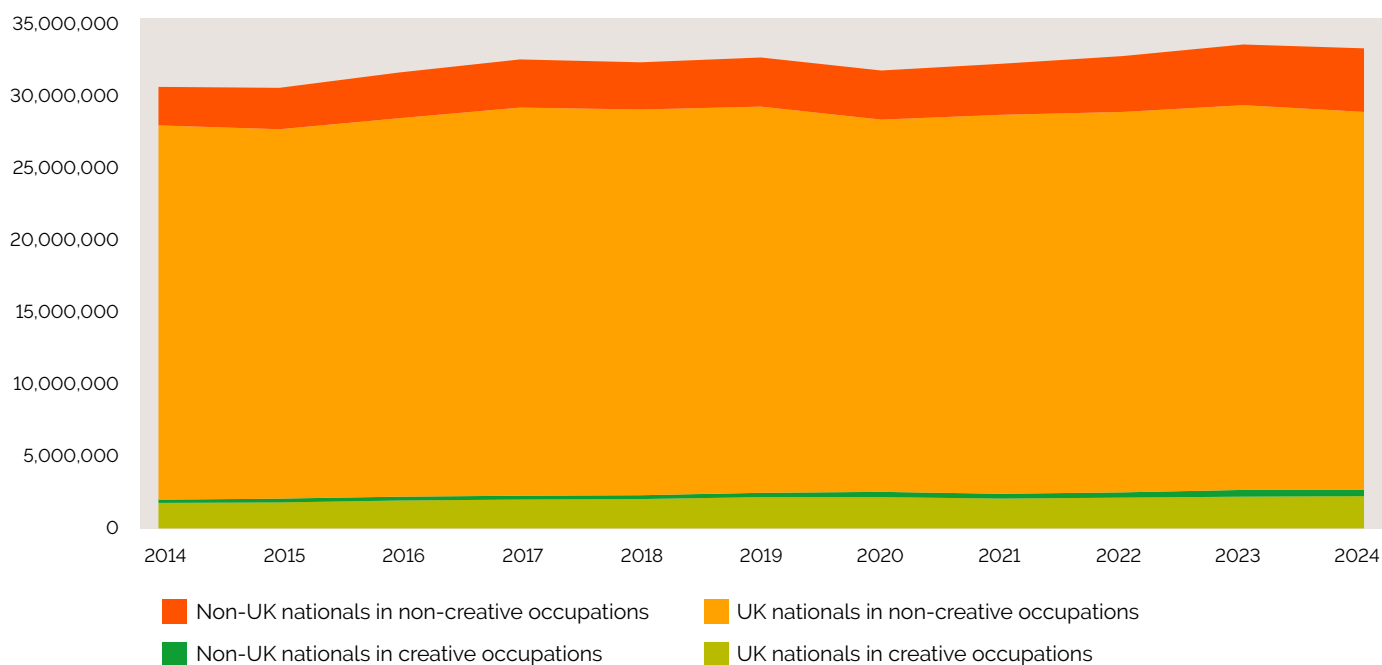
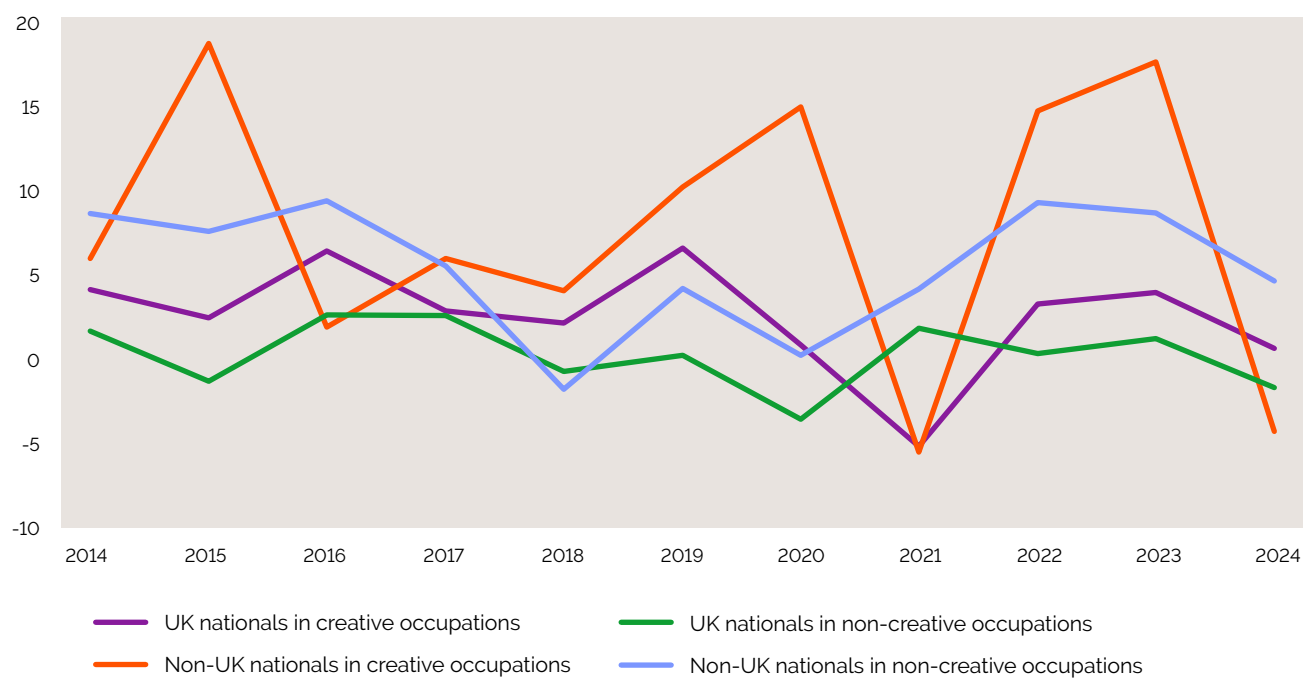
response rates, a comparison was made with the 2021 Census data for England and Wales in the Online Supplementary Material; the general findings are consistent with the findings based on the LFS data.²⁹ The sections that follow analyse the LFS first for creative occupations and second for the creative industries,³⁰ comparing non-UK and UK workers across both creative and non-creative occupations and industries.

3.1 Creative occupations

3.1.1 Size and growth of the creative workforce

The evolution of the size and growth of the non-UK and UK labour force for both creative and non-creative occupations is shown in Figure 3.1(a). For both creative and non-creative occupations, there was a large increase in the number of non-UK workers over the decade from 2014 to 2024, with non-UK workers having more than doubled for creative occupations and almost doubled for non-creative occupations. Non-UK workers in 2024 accounted for 16% of the overall creative workforce and 14% of the non-creative workforce compared to 11% and 9%, respectively, in 2014.

The annual growth rates, as shown in Figure 3.1(b), show that year-on-year growth in non-UK creative occupations across the decade experienced large increases of over 10% in multiple years. Notable growth also occurred for creative occupations as a whole, and they accounted for 8% of all occupations in 2024 compared to just over 6% in 2014. This highlights the overall and growing importance of the creative occupations in the UK in the decade and the significant role of non-UK workers in this growth. There was, however, a drastic decline in the growth of the non-UK creative workforce in 2024, with negative growth of 4.3%. This contrasted with the non-UK non-creative occupations, where the period of relatively strong growth from 2021 continued in 2024.

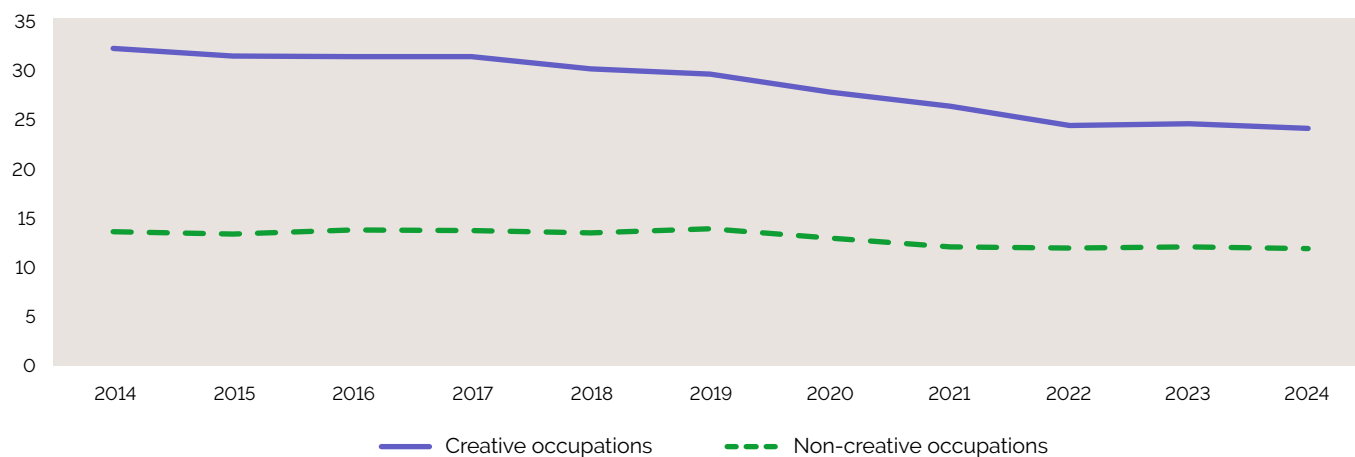
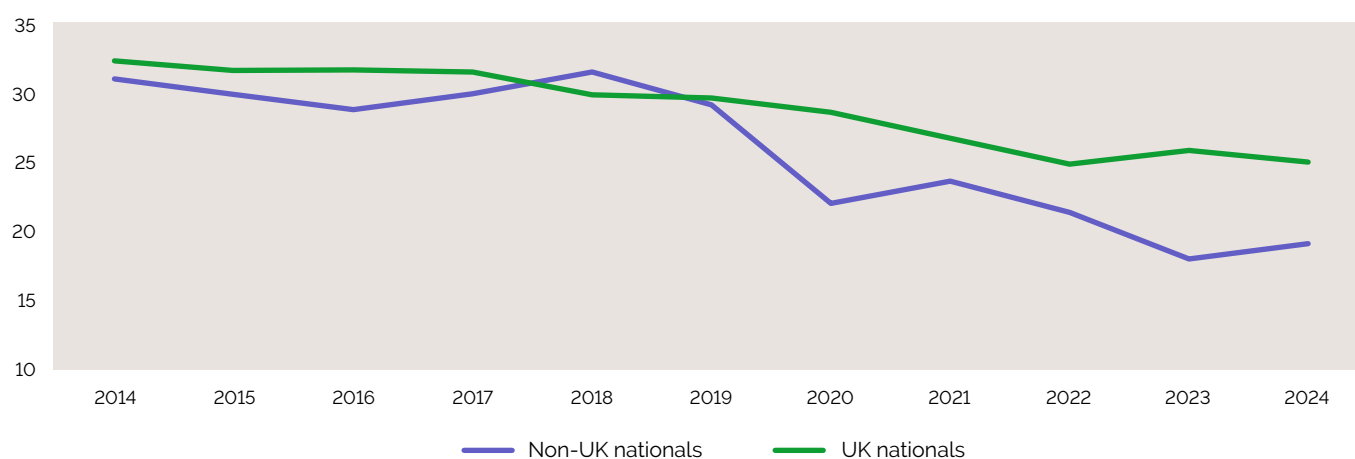
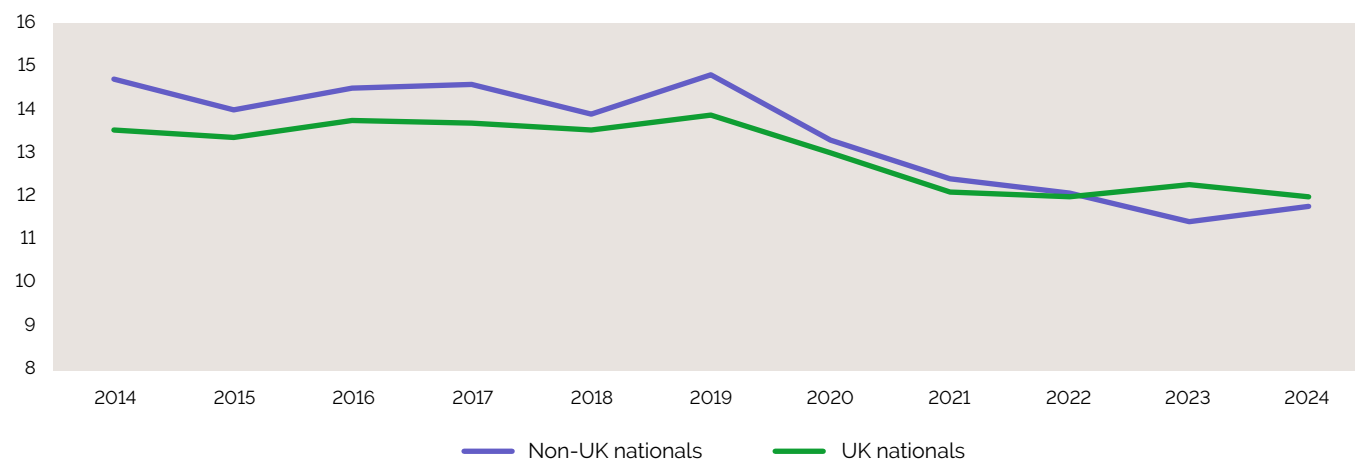
Figure 3.1 Non-UK and UK labour force in creative and non-creative occupations, 2014–2024**a: Size of labour force****b: Annual change in labour force (%)**

Source: Authors' calculation based on the LFS, 2014–2024

Notes: The figure is based on the non-UK and the UK labour force by count at the 4-digit SOC code level. Yearly figures are averages of quarterly estimates.

The composition of the workforce can be broken down further by self-employed and employed. Figure 3.2 focuses on self-employed. Figure 3.2(a) shows the greater percentage of self-employed in creative occupations compared to non-creative occupations. However, this percentage fell sharply over the decade for creative occupations (from 32.3% of the workforce to 24.1%) with a lesser decline experienced for non-creative occupations (from 13.6% in 2014 to 11.9% in 2024).

Further, Figure 3.2(b) shows that both UK and non-UK self-employed workers in the creative industries made up a smaller share of the total creative occupations workforce in 2024 compared to 2014. This was especially marked for non-UK creative workers, with a decline from 31.1% of the total creative workforce in 2014 to 18.2% in 2024. Figure 3.2(c) shows that there was also a decline in self-employed in non-creative occupations, but to a much lesser extent.

Figure 3.2 Self-employed in creative and non-creative occupations, 2014–2024**a: Percentage of workers who are self-employed****b: Percentage of self-employed in creative occupations****c: Percentage of self-employed in non-creative occupations**

Source: Authors' calculation based on the LFS 2014–2024

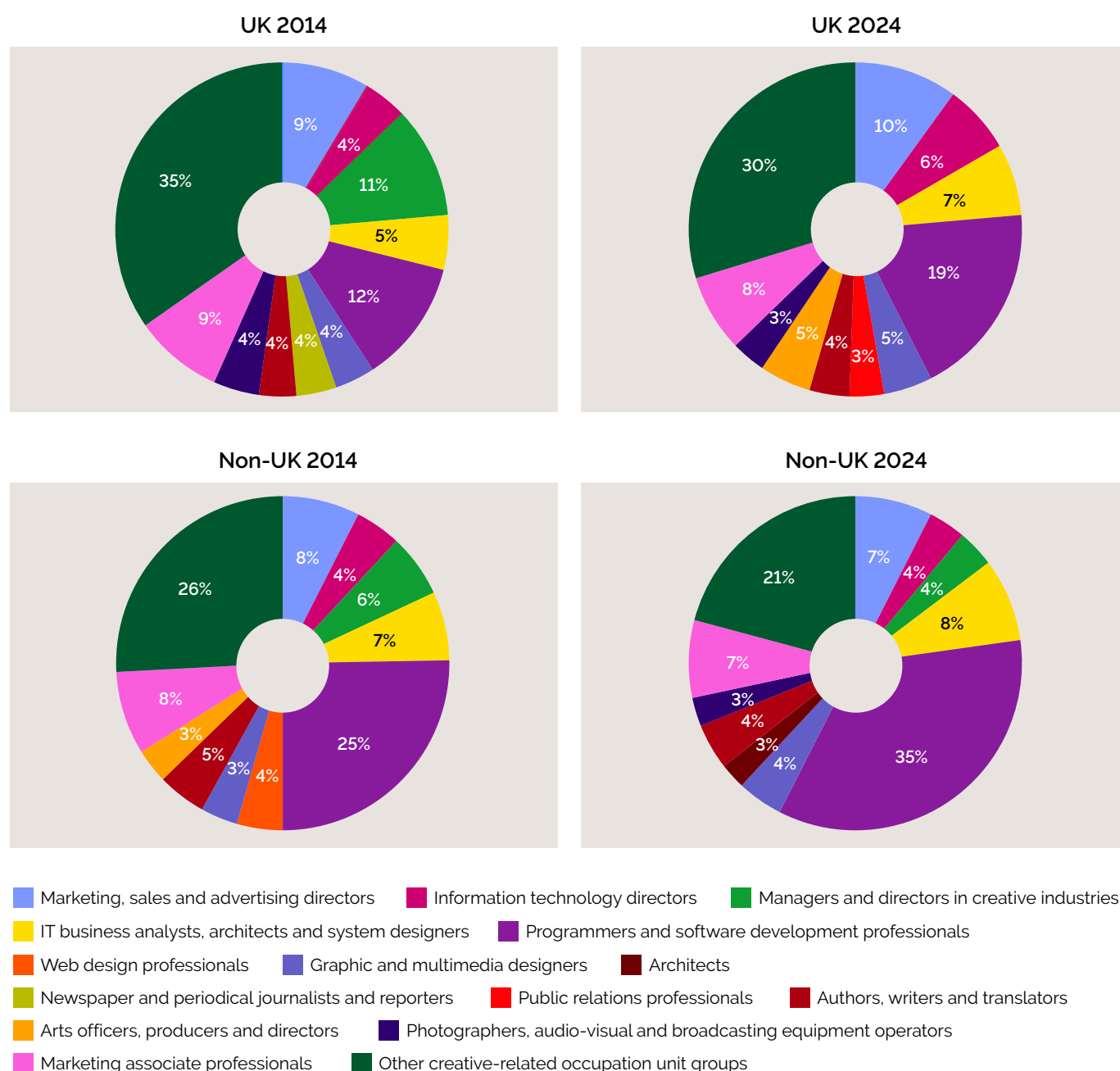
Notes: The figure is based on the non-UK and the UK labour force by self-employed and employed status, by count, at the 4-digit SOC code level. Yearly figures are averages of quarterly estimates. Employed covers employees, including government employees, and those in unpaid family labour.

3.1.2 Migration and the creative occupations

Further detail within the creative occupations can be explored by disaggregating these into thirty-one subgroups at the 4-digit SOC level. The largest groups are shown in Figure 3.3 and compared across UK and non-UK workers for the beginning and end of the time period. In 2024, the largest group for both non-UK and

UK workers was 'Programmers and software development professionals', although this was a more dominant occupation among non-UK workers, accounting for 35% of the non-UK creative workforce compared to 19% of the UK creative workforce. Compared to 2014, the proportion of workers in this occupation increased, from 25% of the non-UK and 12% of the UK creative workforce, highlighting the large growth in this occupation.

Figure 3.3 Creative occupations by subgroups, 2014 vs 2024



Source: Authors' calculation based on the LFS, 2014–2024

Notes: The figure is based on the non-UK and the UK labour force in the largest creative occupations by size at the 4-digit SOC code level for 2014 and 2024. Due to imperfect matching of SOC 2010 to SOC 2020, 'Newspaper and periodical journalists and reporters' for 2014 also includes 'Editors', and 'Managers and directors in creative industries' includes 'Managers and proprietors in other services'. Estimates are less precise (due to small sample sizes) for the non-UK labour force in: (1) 'Newspaper and periodical journalists and reporters' (both years), (2) 'Public relations professionals' (both years), (3) 'Architects' (2014), (4) 'Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators' (2014) and (5) 'Web design professionals' (2024).

Of the 31 different occupational subgroups, seven of the top ten ranked occupations were the same in the non-UK and UK categories in both 2014 and 2024. As shown in Figure 3.4, these were: 'Programmers and software development professionals', 'IT business analysts, architects and system designers', 'Marketing associate professionals', 'Marketing, sales and advertising directors', 'Authors, writers and translators', 'Graphic and multimedia designers' and 'Information technology directors'. This highlights a consistent group of occupations that account for the majority of the overall creative workforce (70% of the non-UK creative workforce in 2024). For the non-UK occupations, 'Programmers and software development professionals',

'IT business analysts, architects and system designers', 'Graphic and multimedia designers', 'Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators' and 'Architects' all doubled in sized over the period, and the latter two occupations were among the top ten creative occupations for non-UK workers in 2024. Conversely, 'Web design professionals' were one of the occupations that suffered a fall in non-UK workers over the period.³¹ For the UK creative occupations there was a large fall in the number of 'Managers and directors in creative industries' who were ranked as the second highest occupation in 2014 but fell to twelfth largest in 2024, although this is in some part explained by the change in classification for this category in 2024.³²

Figure 3.4 Top ten ranked creative occupations in the UK and the non-UK labour force, 2014 and 2024

Rank	UK		Non-UK	
	2014	2024	2014	2024
1	Programmers and software development professionals	Programmers and software development professionals	Programmers and software development professionals	Programmers and software development professionals
2	Managers and directors in creative industries	Marketing, sales and advertising directors	Marketing associate professionals	IT business analysts, architects and system designers
3	Marketing associate professionals	Marketing associate professionals	Marketing, sales and advertising directors	Marketing associate professionals
4	Marketing, sales and advertising directors	IT business analysts, architects and system designers	IT business analysts, architects and system designers	Marketing, sales and advertising directors
5	IT business analysts, architects and system designers	Information technology directors	Managers and directors in creative industries	Authors, writers and translators
6	Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators	Arts officers, producers and directors	Authors, writers and translators	Graphic and multimedia designers
7	Information technology directors	Graphic and multimedia designers	Web design professionals	Information technology directors
8	Newspaper and periodical journalists and reporters	Authors, writers and translators	Information technology directors	Managers and directors in creative industries
9	Graphic and multimedia designers	Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators	Graphic and multimedia designers	Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators
10	Authors, writers and translators	Public relations professionals	Arts officers, producers and directors	Architects

Source: Authors' calculation based on the [LFS](#), 2014–2024

Notes: The figure is based on the non-UK and the UK labour force in the ten largest creative occupations by size at 4-digit SOC code level for 2014 and 2024. Due to imperfect matching of SOC 2010 to SOC 2020, 'Newspaper and periodical journalists and reporters' for 2014 also includes 'Editors', and 'Managers and directors in creative industries' includes 'Managers and proprietors in other services'. Estimates are less precise (due to small sample sizes) for the non-UK labour force in the following categories: (1) 'Newspaper and periodical journalists and reporters' (2014), (2) 'Public relations professionals' (2024), (3) 'Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators' (2014) and (4) 'Web design professionals' (2024).

A further comparison between non-UK and UK creative occupations can be made using the Occupation Migration Quotient, which calculates if non-UK workers are more likely to be in a given creative occupation relative to UK workers (accounting for the overall size of the non-UK and UK workforce).³³

The creative occupations' scores on the Occupation Migration Quotient are shown in Table 3.1, with occupations ordered according to the size of the quotient. Where a creative occupation has a quotient greater than 1, this implies that, in that occupation, the non-UK workforce (as a percentage of the overall non-UK workforce) is greater than the UK workforce (as a percentage of the overall UK workforce). Thirteen occupations had quotients greater than 1 for the 2014–2024 period, and seven of these appear in Figure 3.3 as creative occupations with the largest number of non-

UK workers. In particular, 'Programmers and software development professionals' stand out not only because this was the largest group of non-UK workers, but also because non-UK workers were more likely to be in this creative occupation compared to UK workers (after accounting for the overall size of the non-UK and UK workforce). The importance of non-UK workers to this occupation is also seen when non-UK workers as a percentage of all workers is calculated, also given in Table 3.1. For this occupation, this is 23.4%, meaning that non-UK workers accounted for nearly a quarter of the overall workforce in the occupation.

The extent to which the overall creative workforce relies on non-UK workers is also evident from Table 3.1, with the Industry Migration Quotient for creative industries at 1.18 and 21 of the 31 creative occupations having over 10% of the workforce made up of non-UK workers.

Table 3.1 Occupation Migration Quotient and non-UK workers as a percentage of all workers in the occupation by creative occupations, 2014–2024

Creative occupation	Occupation Migration Quotient	Non-UK workers as % of all workers in the occupation
Programmers and software development professionals	2.29	23.4
Authors, writers and translators	1.76	19.1
Architects	1.61	17.8
Web design professionals	1.6	17.6
Stonemasons and related trades	1.46	16.4
IT business analysts, architects and system designers	1.39	15.7
Interior designers	1.27	14.5
Advertising accounts managers and creative directors	1.23	14.2
Design occupations nec	1.22	14.0
Clothing, fashion and accessories designers	1.17	13.6
Marketing associate professionals	1.07	12.5
Graphic and multimedia designers	1.02	12.0
Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators	1.01	11.9
Newspaper and periodical editors	0.99	11.7
Public relations and communications directors	0.92	10.9
Actors, entertainers and presenters	0.88	10.6
Furniture makers and other craft woodworkers	0.88	10.5
Information technology directors	0.87	10.4
Arts officers, producers and directors	0.87	10.4
Glass and ceramics makers, decorators and finishers	0.86	10.3
Artists	0.85	10.2
Marketing, sales and advertising directors	0.79	9.6
Public relations professionals	0.78	9.5
Other skilled trades nec	0.78	9.5
Musicians	0.77	9.4
Chartered architectural technologists, planning officers and consultants	0.73	8.9
Newspaper and periodical journalists and reporters	0.71	8.7
Managers and directors in creative industries	0.66	8.1
Archivists and curators	0.63	7.8
Librarians	0.52	6.5
Dancers and choreographers	0.45	5.7
Creative occupations	1.18	13.7
Non-creative occupations	0.99	11.7

Source: Authors' calculation based on the LFS, 2014–2024

Notes: n.e.c.: not elsewhere classified. Creative occupations are at the 4-digit SOC code level. The Occupation Migration Quotient is calculated as:
$$\frac{\text{Non-UK nationals in specific occupation} / \text{Non-UK nationals in all occupations}}{\text{UK nationals in specific occupation} / \text{UK nationals in all occupations}}$$

Quotients are calculated for the overall period 2014–2024.

3.2 Creative industries

3.2.1 Creative occupations and creative industries

Table 3.2 explores the relationship between the creative occupations and the creative industries for non-UK workers by examining the composition of these industry sub-sectors by occupation.³⁴ The highest proportion of creative occupations for non-UK workers was in the 'Publishing', 'Film, TV, video, radio and photography' and 'Music, performing and visual arts' industry sub-sectors, with each having around two-thirds of the workforce accounted for by creative occupations. The lowest share of creative occupations for non-UK workers was in the 'Museums, galleries and libraries' sub-sector, although these workers still accounted for a third of the overall workforce in this sub-sector.

Table 3.2 can be compared with Table 3.3, which shows the composition of the industry sub-sectors by occupation for the UK workforce. Generally, similar patterns are evident, although in six of the nine sub-sectors the share of creative occupations in the creative sub-sectors was greater for non-UK compared to UK workers. These were the 'Advertising and marketing', 'Architecture', 'Film, TV, video, radio and photography', 'IT, software and computer services', 'Museums, galleries and libraries' and 'Publishing' sub-sectors. A notable exception was the 'Crafts' sub-sector, where a much greater proportion of UK workers were in creative occupations.³⁵

Table 3.2 also highlights the relative specialisation of non-UK workers within a small number of creative occupations in each creative sub-sector. This means that when analysing the creative industries, they are to some extent synonymous with particular creative occupations. For example, 'Architects' accounted for 39.8% of the 'Architecture' sub-sector; 'Programmers and software development professionals' accounted for 31.9% of the 'IT, software and computer services' creative sub-sector; and 'Authors, writers and translators' accounted for 35.7% of the 'Publishing' sub-sector, and this may well be driven by the translator occupation. There were differences between UK workers and non-UK workers in the distribution of creative occupations in these creative sub-sectors, and there was a lesser degree of specialisation for UK workers, as seen in Table 3.3.

Other creative sub-sectors had a more varied range of creative occupations for both non-UK and UK workers, less concentrated on a single creative occupation. For example, 'Arts officers, producers and directors' and 'Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators' were the main occupations in the 'Film, TV, video, radio and photography' sub-sector; 'Graphic and multimedia designers' and 'Clothing, fashion and accessories designers' were the main occupations for the 'Design and designer fashion' sub-sector; and there was a much wider array of creative occupations within the 'Advertising and marketing', 'Music performing and visual arts' and 'Museums, galleries and libraries' sub-sectors. For the latter creative sub-sector they were also composed of a greater proportion of workers in non-creative occupations for both non-UK and UK workers.

Table 3.2 Composition of creative industries by creative occupations for the non-UK labour force, 2014–2024

Creative Occupation	Advertising and marketing	Architecture	Crafts	Design and designer fashion	Film, TV, video, radio and photography	IT, software and computer services	Museums, galleries and libraries	Music, performing and visual arts	Publishing	Non-creative industries
Marketing, sales and advertising directors	9.79%	0.51%	0.00%	2.21%	0.61%	1.33%	0.81%	1.18%	2.07%	0.46%
Public relations and communications directors	4.14%	0.00%	7.65%	0.00%	0.52%	0.13%	0.00%	0.00%	0.05%	0.06%
Information technology directors	1.70%	0.00%	0.00%	0.54%	0.41%	3.69%	1.40%	0.00%	0.37%	0.19%
Managers and directors in creative industries	0.49%	0.81%	0.00%	0.68%	3.33%	0.22%	4.22%	1.25%	4.41%	0.26%
IT business analysts, architects and system designers	0.21%	0.12%	0.00%	0.00%	1.02%	5.85%	0.44%	0.00%	0.59%	0.37%
Programmers and software development professionals	4.54%	0.48%	0.00%	0.00%	3.69%	31.91%	7.30%	0.93%	5.22%	1.20%
Web design professionals	1.58%	0.19%	0.00%	0.52%	0.55%	2.59%	0.74%	0.00%	1.23%	0.13%
Graphic and multimedia designers	3.69%	0.00%	0.00%	21.08%	3.64%	0.54%	1.03%	0.71%	3.17%	0.11%
Architects	0.00%	39.83%	0.00%	0.24%	0.00%	0.09%	0.00%	0.00%	0.76%	0.10%
Chartered architectural technologists, planning officers and consultants	0.00%	9.13%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.08%	0.34%	0.00%	0.00%	0.06%
Librarians	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	4.52%	0.26%	0.00%	0.03%
Archivists and curators	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.14%	0.00%	4.92%	0.00%	0.16%	0.02%
Newspaper and periodical editors	0.52%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.22%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	3.18%	0.00%
Newspaper and periodical journalists and reporters	1.48%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	3.14%	0.01%	0.00%	7.57%	6.54%	0.02%
Public relations professionals	7.04%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.69%	0.25%	1.70%	0.38%	0.22%	0.09%
Advertising accounts managers and creative directors	5.69%	0.31%	0.00%	2.16%	0.79%	0.15%	0.53%	0.47%	1.03%	0.09%
Artists	0.44%	0.00%	0.00%	2.16%	1.69%	0.02%	0.54%	11.27%	0.91%	0.04%
Authors, writers and translators	2.09%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.62%	0.30%	0.00%	6.09%	35.70%	0.10%
Actors, entertainers and presenters	0.66%	0.00%	0.00%	0.42%	3.36%	0.00%	0.00%	6.41%	0.25%	0.06%
Dancers and choreographers	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.21%	0.00%	0.01%
Musicians	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.11%	0.00%	0.00%	13.91%	0.00%	0.02%
Arts officers, producers and directors	3.65%	0.43%	0.00%	0.00%	15.89%	0.16%	6.21%	6.67%	0.07%	0.06%
Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators	1.12%	0.50%	0.00%	1.30%	21.86%	0.05%	0.00%	2.69%	0.00%	0.08%
Interior designers	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	4.09%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.03%
Clothing, fashion and accessories designers	0.11%	2.80%	0.00%	19.45%	0.29%	0.31%	0.00%	0.12%	0.11%	0.08%
Design occupations nec	0.18%	0.00%	0.00%	1.67%	0.00%	0.07%	0.00%	0.00%	0.07%	0.03%
Marketing associate professionals	11.44%	0.00%	22.71%	0.65%	2.46%	0.79%	0.00%	0.70%	1.30%	0.51%
Stonemasons and related trades	0.00%	0.47%	0.00%	0.69%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.02%
Glass and ceramics makers, decorators and finishers	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.77%	0.00%	0.03%
Furniture makers and other craft woodworkers	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.21%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.10%
Other skilled trades nec	0.06%	0.00%	12.62%	1.65%	0.00%	0.13%	0.00%	1.09%	0.08%	0.09%
All creative occupations (column total)	60.62%	55.57%	42.98%	59.71%	66.02%	48.66%	34.70%	64.69%	67.50%	4.45%

Source: Authors' calculation based on the LFS, 2014–2024

Notes: n.e.c.: not elsewhere classified. Percentages are the workers in a creative occupation (at the 4-digit SOC code level) as a percentage of the total number of workers in the sub-sector.

Table 3.3 Composition of creative industries by creative occupations for the UK labour force, 2014–2024

Creative Occupation	Advertising and marketing	Architecture	Crafts	Design and designer fashion	Film, TV, video, radio and photography	IT, software and computer services	Museums, galleries and libraries	Music, performing and visual arts	Publishing	Non-creative industries
Marketing, sales and advertising directors	8.73%	0.37%	0.00%	1.49%	1.20%	2.22%	0.18%	0.54%	3.09%	0.64%
Public relations and communications directors	5.54%	0.00%	0.00%	0.17%	0.30%	0.12%	0.27%	0.22%	0.42%	0.06%
Information technology directors	1.30%	0.06%	0.00%	0.24%	0.26%	7.74%	0.90%	0.13%	0.40%	0.21%
Managers and directors in creative industries	1.12%	2.66%	0.25%	2.79%	2.86%	0.49%	3.32%	1.37%	7.34%	0.41%
IT business analysts, architects and system designers	0.41%	1.19%	0.00%	0.30%	0.50%	4.80%	0.79%	0.01%	0.51%	0.31%
Programmers and software development professionals	0.80%	0.15%	0.00%	0.06%	1.00%	22.56%	2.00%	0.06%	1.49%	0.58%
Web design professionals	0.89%	0.13%	0.00%	0.30%	0.43%	3.11%	0.49%	0.13%	0.91%	0.07%
Graphic and multimedia designers	4.95%	0.73%	0.00%	29.22%	1.55%	0.81%	0.43%	0.55%	2.36%	0.11%
Architects	0.02%	28.82%	0.00%	0.21%	0.03%	0.03%	0.04%	0.04%	0.16%	0.06%
Chartered architectural technologists, planning officers and consultants	0.07%	14.51%	0.00%	0.09%	0.01%	0.04%	0.01%	0.00%	0.15%	0.08%
Librarians	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.03%	0.07%	0.01%	7.53%	0.17%	0.00%	0.06%
Archivists and curators	0.02%	0.00%	0.00%	0.02%	0.07%	0.01%	10.05%	0.34%	0.01%	0.02%
Newspaper and periodical editors	0.67%	0.00%	0.00%	0.01%	0.47%	0.01%	0.00%	0.29%	3.13%	0.01%
Newspaper and periodical journalists and reporters	1.88%	0.00%	0.00%	0.03%	4.12%	0.07%	0.00%	6.75%	15.99%	0.03%
Public relations professionals	6.90%	0.10%	0.00%	0.06%	0.86%	0.15%	0.48%	0.53%	1.16%	0.14%
Advertising accounts managers and creative directors	5.36%	0.35%	0.00%	2.14%	1.44%	0.27%	0.38%	0.59%	2.04%	0.05%
Artists	0.48%	0.00%	0.00%	1.94%	0.60%	0.09%	0.51%	14.05%	0.63%	0.03%
Authors, writers and translators	3.43%	0.00%	0.00%	0.07%	0.98%	0.19%	0.23%	7.56%	16.88%	0.08%
Actors, entertainers and presenters	0.27%	0.00%	0.00%	0.20%	2.49%	0.02%	0.09%	6.94%	0.12%	0.07%
Dancers and choreographers	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.03%	0.03%	0.00%	0.00%	4.31%	0.00%	0.02%
Musicians	0.03%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.14%	0.03%	0.07%	11.78%	0.02%	0.05%
Arts officers, producers and directors	3.15%	0.04%	0.00%	0.45%	2.11%	0.26%	0.84%	5.89%	0.36%	0.07%
Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators	1.13%	0.38%	0.00%	0.37%	20.32%	0.03%	0.52%	3.30%	0.56%	0.07%
Interior designers	0.07%	0.16%	0.00%	3.71%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.06%	0.01%	0.02%
Clothing, fashion and accessories designers	0.38%	0.87%	4.29%	13.98%	0.39%	0.10%	0.05%	0.50%	0.42%	0.10%
Design occupations nec	0.00%	0.12%	0.00%	0.71%	0.22%	0.05%	0.00%	0.48%	0.14%	0.03%
Marketing associate professionals	9.25%	0.13%	1.13%	0.63%	1.12%	0.78%	0.84%	0.50%	2.22%	0.51%
Stonemasons and related trades	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.01%
Glass and ceramics makers, decorators and finishers	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.05%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.42%	0.00%	0.04%
Furniture makers and other craft woodworkers	0.06%	0.02%	0.00%	0.54%	0.00%	0.00%	0.04%	0.11%	0.04%	0.11%
Other skilled trades nec	1.32%	0.12%	51.35%	1.92%	0.39%	0.00%	0.03%	0.73%	0.03%	0.11%
All creative occupations (column total)	58.22%	50.91%	57.02%	61.77%	63.01%	43.98%	30.11%	68.32%	60.60%	4.16%

Source: Authors' calculation based on the LFS, 2014–2024

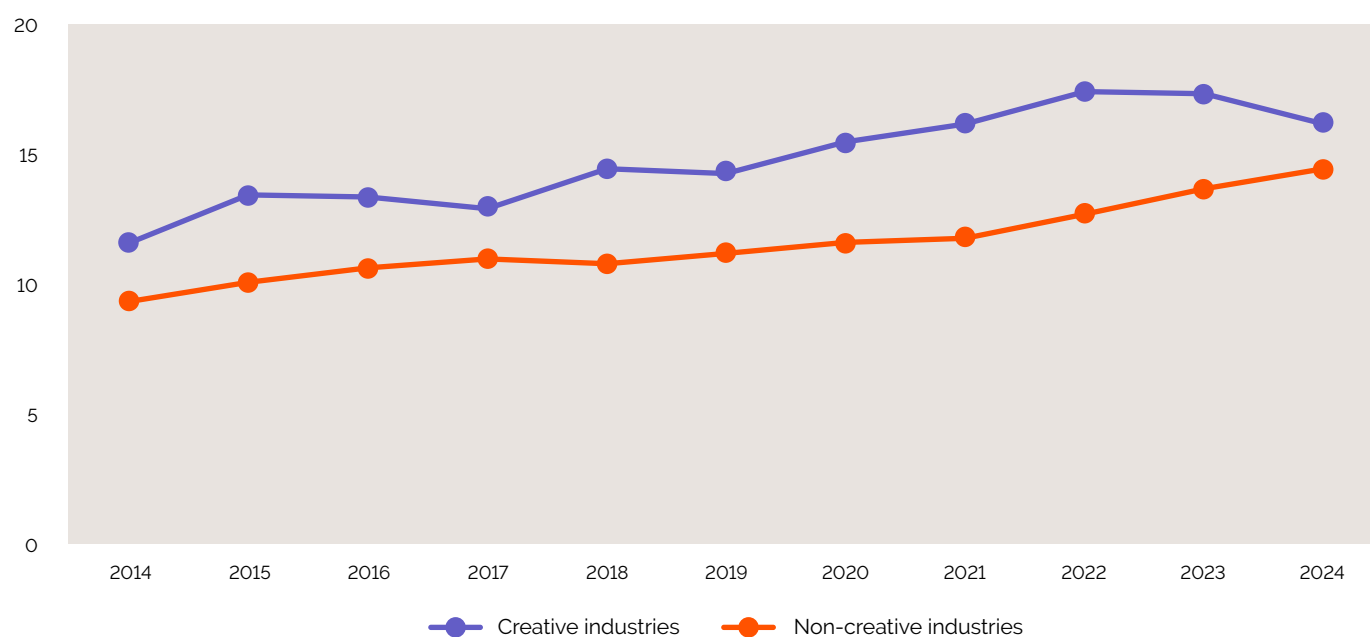
Notes: n.e.c.: not elsewhere classified. Percentages are the workers in creative occupations (at the 4-digit SOC code level) as a percentage of the total number of workers in each sub-sector.

3.2.2 Migration in the creative industries

The growth of non-UK workers in the creative and non-creative industries over the decade from 2014 to 2024 is shown in Figure 3.5. It reflects the growth also found in the creative occupations, although this time aggregated at industry level. In 2024, 16.2% of the creative industries were accounted for by non-UK workers compared to 11.6% in 2014. The share of non-UK workers has also been increasing in the non-creative industries, with 14.4% in 2024

compared to 9.3% in 2014. In the last two years of the period, the share of non-UK labour in the creative industries fell, in contrast to the non-creative industries where growth continued. This reflects the decline in growth of non-UK workers found in the creative occupations. As was the case for the creative occupations, a breakdown by self-employed and employed is possible for the creative industries, and this reveals a similar pattern to that in Figure 3.2, with self-employed workers in the creative industries declining over the decade, particularly with regard to the non-UK self-employed.

Figure 3.5 Share of non-UK labour in creative and non-creative industries, 2014–2024

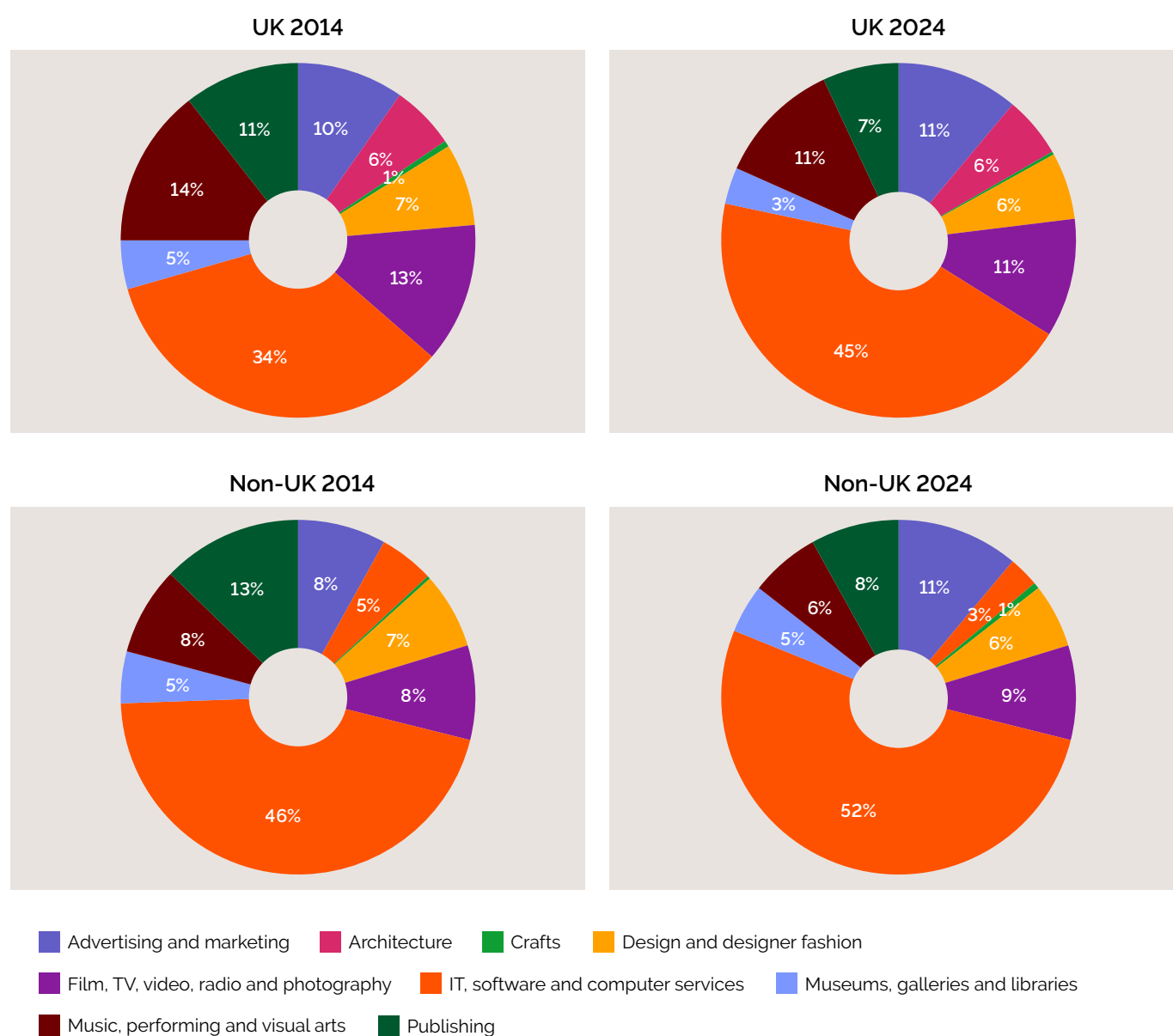


Source: Authors' calculation based on the LFS, 2014–2024

The relative size of the different creative sub-sectors for non-UK and UK workers is shown in Figure 3.6. There was a relatively similar pattern for both categories of worker. The figure highlights the size and growth of the 'IT, software and computer services' sub-sector. Across both groups of worker, this sub-sector accounted for a greater share of the creative

industries in 2024 compared to 2014.³⁶ There was, however, a smaller share for non-UK workers compared to UK workers in 'Music, performing and visual arts', 'Film, TV, video, radio and photography' and 'Architecture', and a larger share for the 'IT, software and computer services' and 'Publishing' sub-sectors.

Figure 3.6 Non-UK and UK labour force within the creative industries, 2014 vs 2024



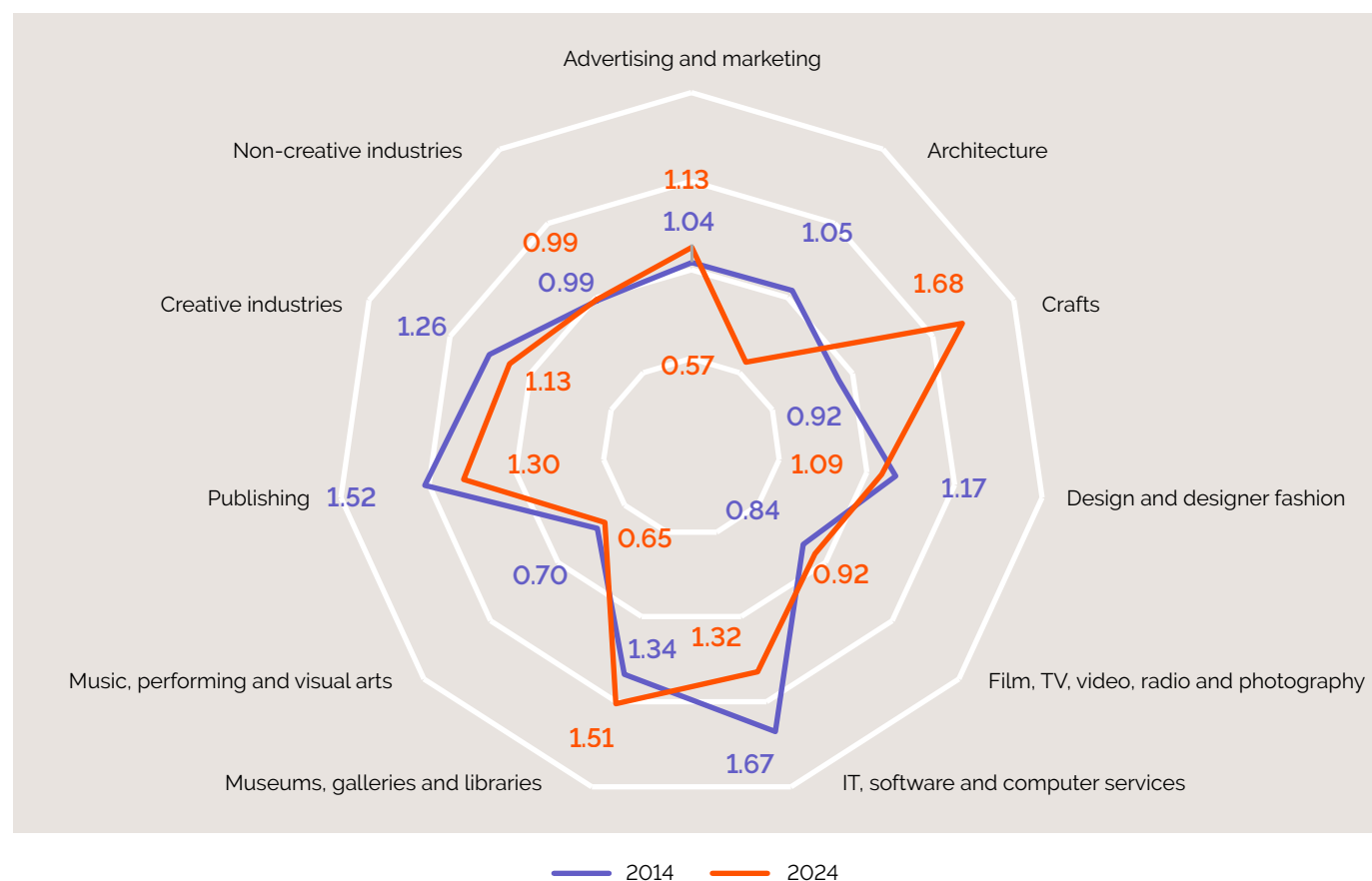
Source: Authors' calculation based on the LFS, 2014–2024

Notes: The figure is based on the non-UK and the UK labour force in the creative industries in 2024. The DCMS classification of the creative industries is used. Estimates are less precise (due to small sample sizes) for 'Crafts' 2014 for non-UK, 2024 for both UK and non-UK.

To capture the likelihood of a non-UK worker operating in the creative industries compared to a UK worker, the Industry Creative Quotient can again be utilised, and the results are shown in Figure 3.7.³⁷ For non-UK workers, there was a higher likelihood of working in the creative industries compared to UK workers (after taking into account the relative size of the overall non-UK and UK workforce). This emphasises the attractiveness of the creative industries to overseas workers, but also the skills gaps that may exist in the UK workforce. However, this quotient declined at the end of the period compared to 2014, reflecting the recent falling share of non-UK workers in the creative industries workforce. As of 2024, 'IT, software and computer services' 'Advertising and marketing', 'Museums, galleries and libraries', 'Crafts', 'Design and designer fashion' and 'Publishing' all had quotients greater than 1, while 'Music, performing and visual arts' and 'Architecture' were the sub-sectors with a quotient clearly less than 1 in value.

The industry quotients have remained relatively stable over the period, apart from the quotient for 'Crafts', which saw a large rise (although the shares of both non-UK and UK workers in the sub-sector are very small) and 'Architecture', 'Publishing' and 'IT, software and computer services' experienced a fall in the quotient. This reflects the declining share in the 'Architecture' and 'Publishing' sub-sectors for non-UK workers and the smaller growth in the 'IT, software and computer services' sub-sector for these workers compared to UK workers. However, the industry quotient for 'IT, software and computer services' remained one of the largest and in 2024 a non-UK worker was 1.3 times more likely to be employed in the sub-sector (compared to other industries) than a UK worker (compared to other industries). The industry quotient for the non-creative industries remained stable at just under 1, meaning that a non-UK worker was less likely than a UK worker to be employed in the non-creative industries relative to all industries.

Figure 3.7 Industry Migration Quotient by creative industry sub-sectors, 2014 and 2024



Source: Authors' calculation based on the LFS, 2014–2024

Note: The Industry Migration Quotient is calculated as:
$$\frac{\text{Non-UK nationals in specific industries} / \text{Non-UK nationals in all industries}}{\text{UK nationals in specific industries} / \text{UK nationals in all industries}}$$

The Industry Migration Quotient can be further disaggregated within sub-sectors – that is, to the 4-digit SIC level – to highlight the more specific activities within the creative industries. Table 3.4 shows, for example, that all activities within 'Crafts' and 'Design and designer fashion' had quotients greater than 1. For 'IT, software and computer services' it was 'Other software publishing', 'Computer programming activities' and 'Computer consultancy activities' that had quotients over 1, while 'Publishing of computer

games' had a quotient below 1. The activity with the highest quotient was 'Translation and interpretation activities' within 'Publishing'. Within 'Film, TV, video, radio and photography', a sub-sector that had a quotient less than 1 (as shown in Figure 3.7), the 'post-production' and 'distribution' activities had quotients much greater than 1, indicating the important variations within the different activities of the creative industries.

Table 3.4 Industry Migration Quotient by creative industry sub-sectors, 2014–2024

Creative industry sub-sector	Industry Migration Quotient
Advertising and marketing	
Public relations and communication activities	0.95
Advertising agencies	1.12
Media representation	1.31
Architecture	
Architectural activities	1.07
Crafts	
Manufacture of jewellery and related articles	1.16
Design and designer fashion	
Specialised design activities	1.24
Film, TV, video, radio and photography	
Motion picture, video and television programme production activities	0.87
Motion picture, video and television programme post-production activities	1.21
Motion picture, video and television programme distribution activities	1.79
Motion picture projection activities	0.77
Radio broadcasting	0.55
Television programming and broadcasting activities	1.02
Photographic activities	1.08
IT, software and computer services	
Publishing of computer games	0.69
Other software publishing	1.82
Computer programming activities	1.67
Computer consultancy activities	1.75
Museum, galleries and libraries	
Library and archive activities	0.93
Museum activities	0.96
Music, performing and visual arts	
Sound recording and music publishing activities	1.13
Cultural education	0.82
Performing arts	0.77
Support activities to performing arts	0.69
Artistic creation	0.76
Operation of arts facilities	0.81
Publishing	
Book publishing	1.09
Publishing of directories and mailing lists	0.61
Publishing of newspapers	0.52
Publishing of journals and periodicals	1.33
Other publishing activities	1.15
Translation and interpretation activities	5.41
Non-creative industries	0.98

Source: Authors' calculation based on the LFS, 2014–2024

Note: The Industry Migration Quotient is calculated as:
$$\frac{\text{Non-UK nationals in specific industries} / \text{Non-UK nationals in all industries}}{\text{UK nationals in specific industries} / \text{UK nationals in all industries}}$$

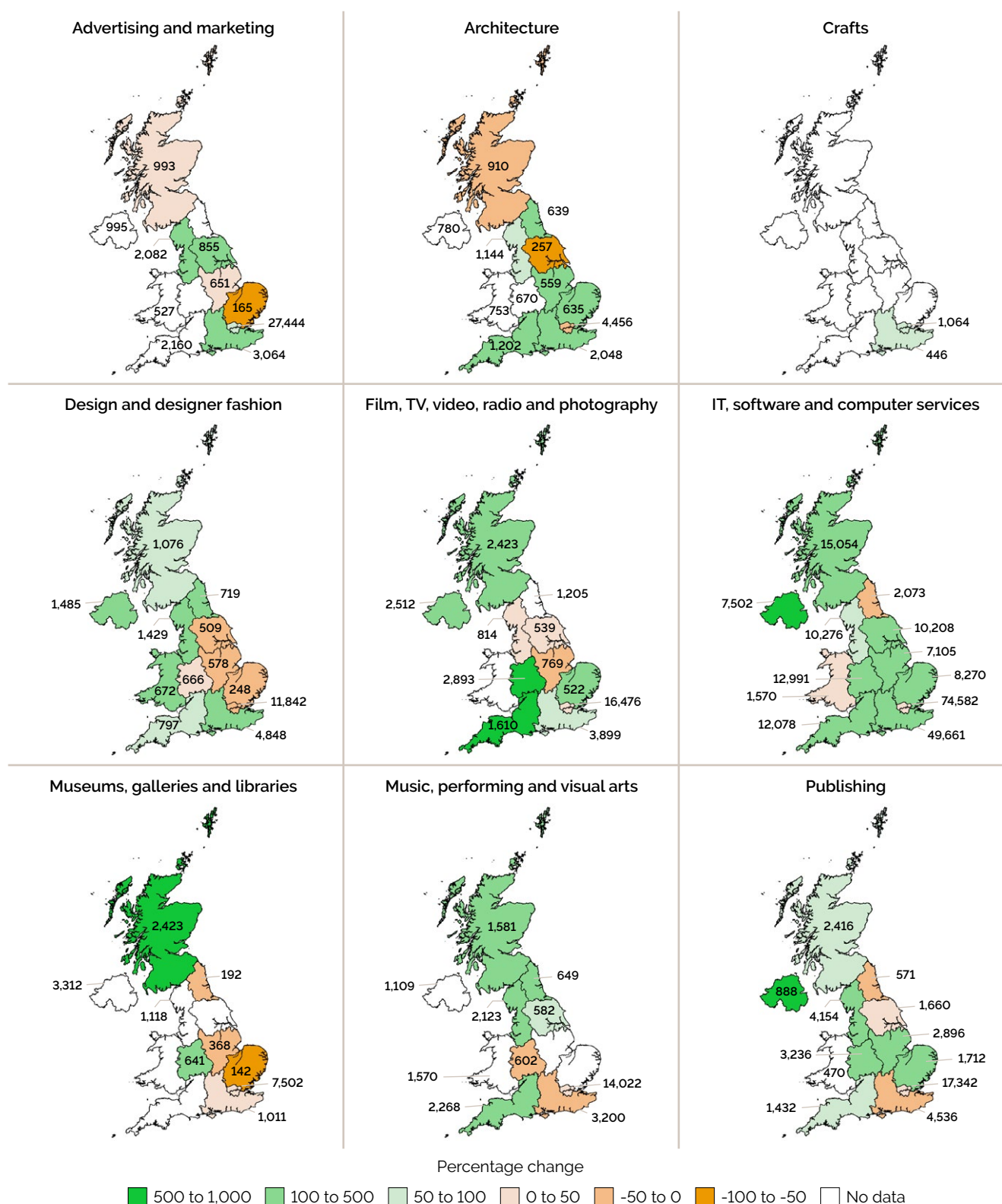
3.2.3 Non-UK creative workforce and the UK regions

The location of the non-UK creative workforce across the UK regions is explored in Figure 3.8 for each of the creative sub-sectors. The figure shows the growth or decline of the non-UK workforce in each region over the period 2014–2024 by creative sub-sector. It highlights that within the creative sub-sectors, growth and decline in the non-UK workforce occurred across the regions. Growth was most evident for the 'IT, software and computer services' sub-sector, with a positive growth rate for eleven out of the twelve UK regions over the period.

London attracts most of the non-UK creative workforce, although higher growth rates generally happened elsewhere. Strong growth rates were experienced in specific industry-

region combinations, such as 'IT, software and computer services' and 'Publishing' in Northern Ireland and 'Film, TV, video, radio and photography' in the South West and the West Midlands in England. Indeed, a greater number of regions across the sub-sectors experienced an increase rather than a decrease in the non-UK workforce over the period, so overall the non-UK workforce is attracted across the geographic spread of the UK regions and across the creative sub-sectors. This highlights the regions' ability to attract global talent and provides further evidence for the importance of the interplay between the UK regions and the creative industries, as has been noted previously in the case of foreign direct investment (Jones et al., 2024), exporting behaviour (Fazio et al., 2024) and clusters of economic activity (Siepel et al., 2023).

Figure 3.8 Regional changes in non-UK labour by creative sub-sectors, 2014–2016 vs 2022–2024



Source: Authors' calculation based on the LFS, 2014–2016 and 2022–2024

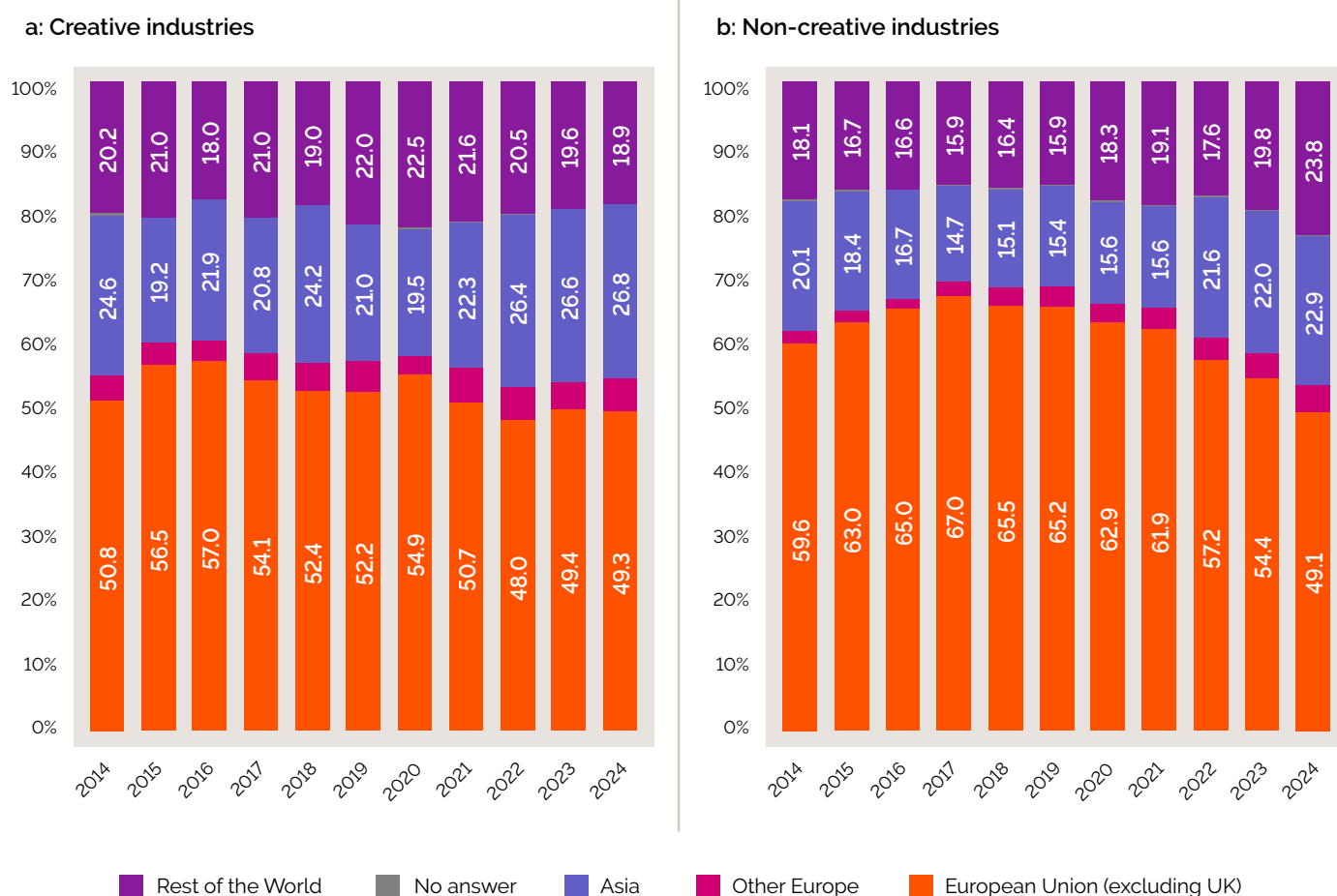
Notes: Colours indicate the percentage change in the average labour force between 2014–2016 and 2022–2024. Numbers inside the map area indicate the average labour force during 2022–2024, where available. All calculations include less precise estimates (due to unweighted sample sizes under 27 over the calculated periods), except for: (1) all sub-sectors in London; (2) 'IT, software and computer services' in the East, East Midlands, North West, Scotland, South East, South West, West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside; (3) 'Design and designer fashion' in the South East; (4) 'Film, TV, video, radio and photography' in the South East; (5) 'Music, performing and visual arts' in the South East; and (6) 'Publishing' in the South East.

3.2.4 Origin of the creative workforce

The origin of non-UK workers in both the creative and non-creative industries is shown in Figure 3.9. This highlights for both cases that the EU is a dominant source. For the creative industries, the percentage of non-UK workers from the EU reached a peak of close to 60% in 2016 (Figure 3.9(a)), while for the non-creative industries, there was a peak of close to 70% in 2017 (Figure 3.9(b)). For both the creative and

non-creative industries, the share of EU workers fell in the post-Brexit period, whereby in 2024 they accounted for less than half of the non-UK workforce. This can be compared to the rising share of workers from Asia over this period. Asian workers also accounted for larger shares of the creative workforce compared to the non-creative workforce in each of the years from 2014 to 2024, although this gap narrowed from 2022 to 2024.

Figure 3.9 Non-UK labour by supranational origin, 2014–2024



Source: Authors' calculation based on the LFS, 2014–2024

The nationality of the creative workforce can also be decomposed by each of the creative industries. Figure 3.10(a) shows the extent of the non-UK workforce within the creative industries sub-sectors with 'IT, software and computer services' (19%) and 'Publishing' (17%) the two sub-sectors with the largest percentage of non-UK workers within their overall workforce. Across the creative industries, non-UK workers accounted for 15% of the overall workforce over the 2014–2024 period.

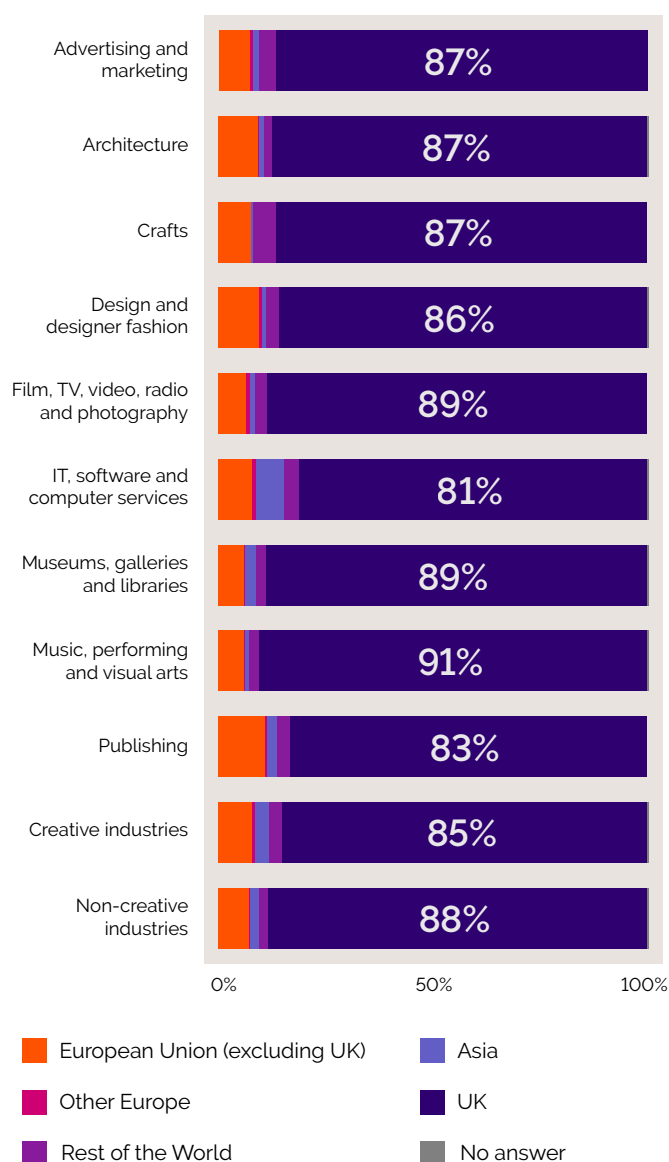
A breakdown of the origin of workers by supranational region in the creative sub-sectors is provided in Figure 3.10(b). This again highlights the extent to which Europe is the major source region. For each of the creative sub-sectors over the 2014–2024 period, Europe was the main source of non-UK workers. The majority of the European workers came from the EU 15, with on average 65% of European workers from these countries. This was a much higher share than for non-creative industries where 44% of European workers were from the EU 15. There was also variation across sub-sectors, with 'Architecture' and 'Design and designer fashion' having over 70% of non-UK

workers from Europe while 'IT, software and computer services' gained less than 50% of its non-UK workforce from the region.

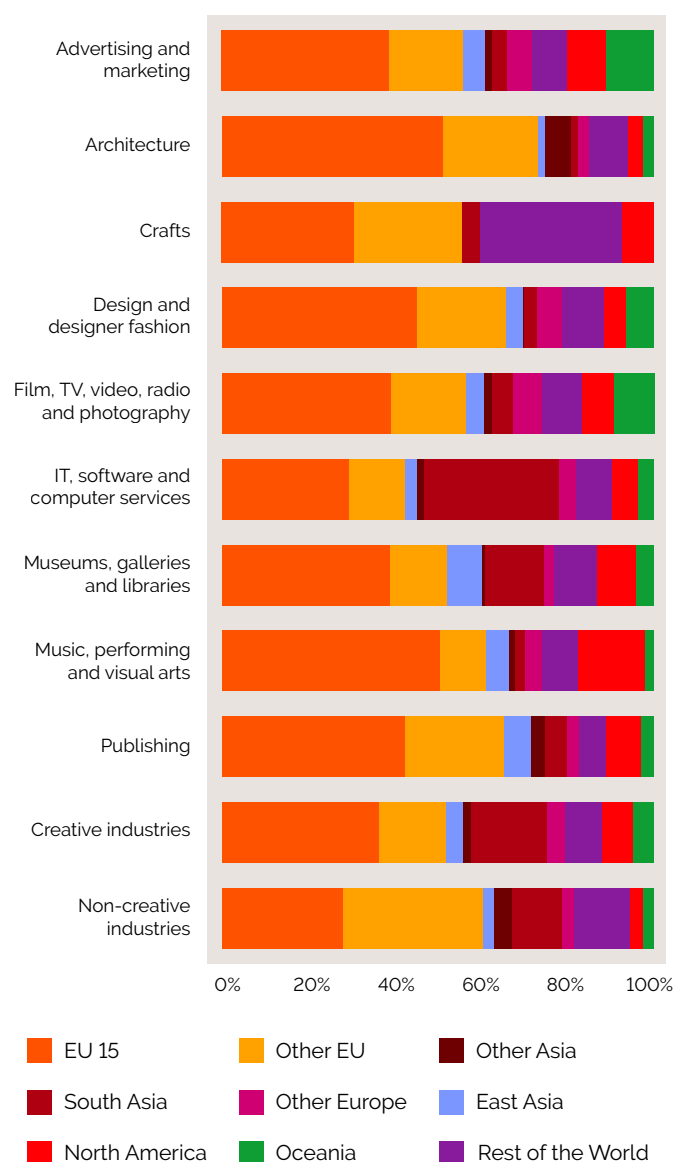
For the 'IT, software and computer services' sub-sector, Asia was the second-largest contributor of the non-UK workforce, with over a third (36%) of foreign workers. For the remaining sub-sectors, Asia accounted for smaller proportions, although 'Museums, galleries and libraries' (23%), 'Publishing' (15%) and 'Film, TV, video, radio and photography' (11%) still had relatively sizeable shares of the workforce coming from Asia. Within Asia, the largest share was from South Asia (75% of Asian workers), although East Asia was relatively more important for the 'Advertising and marketing', 'Design and designer fashion', 'Music, performing and visual arts' and 'Publishing' sub-sectors. North America and Oceania accounted for the remaining largest shares of non-UK workers, with notable sub-sectors being 'Music, performing and visual arts' (with 15% of non-UK workers from North America), 'Advertising and marketing' (with 11% of non-UK workers from Oceania) and 'Film, TV, video, radio and photography' (with 9% of non-UK workers from Oceania).

Figure 3.10 Supranational origin of labour by creative sub-sectors, 2014–2024

a: Proportion of UK vs other macro region of nationalities



b: Within other major region of nationalities (excluding UK and no answer)



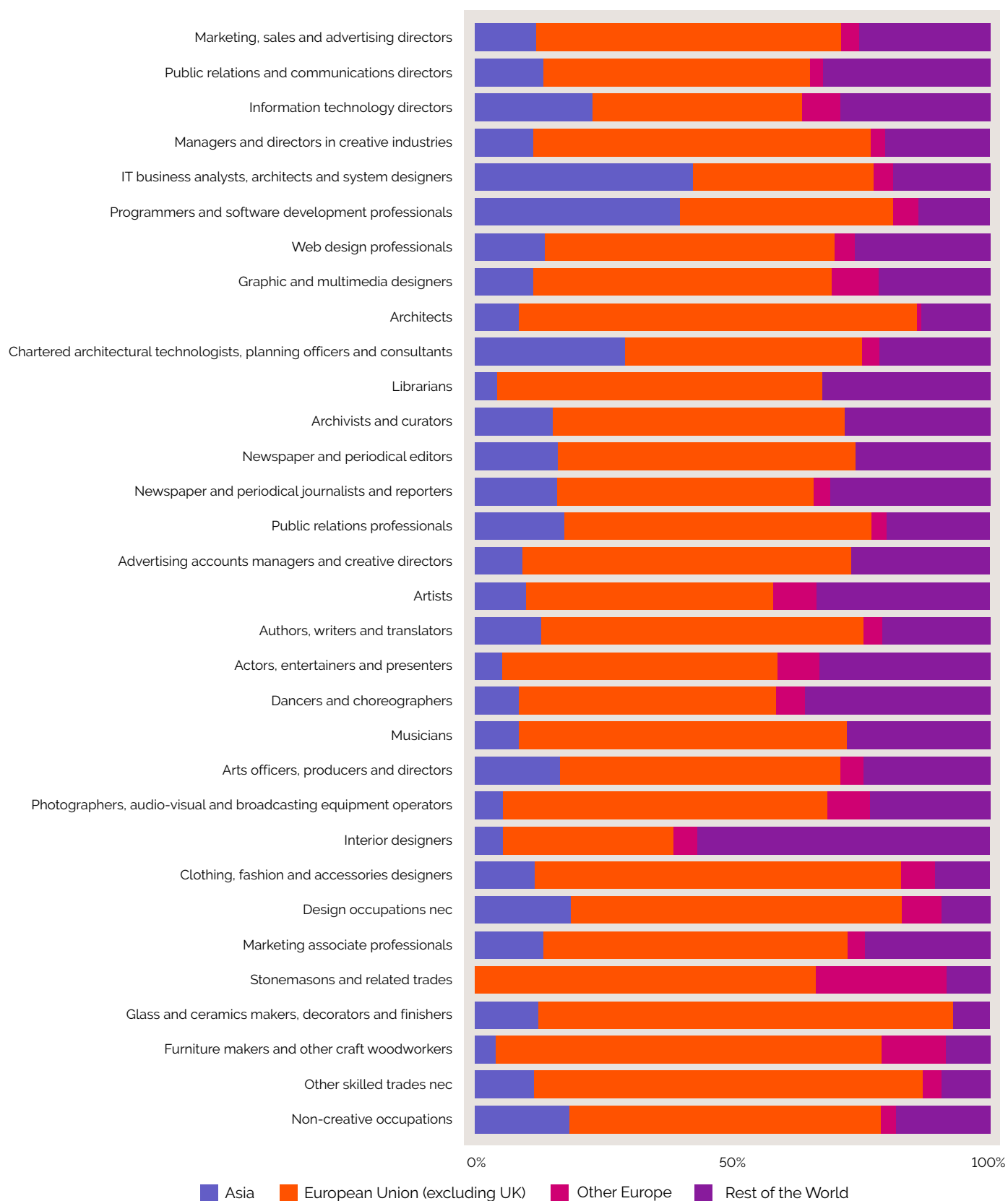
Source: Authors' calculation based on the LFS, 2014–2024

Note: Estimates are less precise (due to small sample sizes) for: (1) Advertising and marketing (Other Asia), (2) Architecture (all Asia, Other Europe, North America, Oceania), (3) Crafts (all regions), (4) Design and designer fashion (Other Asia, South Asia), (5) Film, TV, video, radio and photography (Other Asia), (6) Museums, galleries and libraries (East Asia, Other Asia, Other Europe, Oceania) and (7) Music, performing and visual arts (Other Asia, Oceania).

For comparison with the creative industries, a similar breakdown by origin of non-UK workers can be undertaken by the creative occupations, as shown in Figure 3.11. As expected, similar patterns emerged in the industries and the occupations, with the EU generally the main source of labour and Asia important within the

IT activities. A range of other countries outside these main regions were also prominent across the creative occupations. Overall, this highlights the broad range of supranational regions from which the UK creative sector draws its non-UK labour and the associated diversity on which the sector relies for its continued creativity.

Figure 3.11 Supranational origin of non-UK labour by creative occupation, 2014–2024



Source: Authors' calculation based on the LFS, 2014–2024

Notes: n.e.c.: not elsewhere classified. Estimates are less precise (due to small sample sizes) in all creative occupations except: (1) 'Marketing, sales and advertising directors', (2) 'Information technology directors', (3) 'IT business analysts, architects and system designers', (4) 'Programmers and software development professionals', (5) 'Graphic and multimedia designers', (6) 'Authors, writers and translators', and (7) 'Marketing associate professionals'.

4

UK's restrictiveness to inward movement: An international comparison

Thus far, the report has presented detailed data on migration in UK creative occupations and industries. However, from a macroeconomic point of view, international comparison of where the UK sits regarding the degree of mobility and openness to trade in talent is also important. This is because this element contributes to the ability of countries to compete economically. In addition, recent geopolitical events, including wars, have made the migration policy of several countries the subject of intense scrutiny and change, so this is a policy space that is and will keep changing. Therefore, reporting on the current outlook seems important.

The ability for businesses to move workers across borders is critical for international trade in services and for the effective functioning of multinationals. Nations either set rules of access vis-à-vis all other countries (multilateral rules) or negotiate preferential access as part of trade and investment agreements, usually under the principle of reciprocity. However, even when very comprehensive agreements are in place, as is the case in the EU, some restrictions may still apply. For example, there may be restrictions to the activities that foreign workers can perform. This is typical of regulated services, like those requiring a professional qualification. Also there may be a requirement to register businesses or individuals in the destination country so that they can do business. When the UK left the EU, some access provisions were agreed for short-term business visitors doing permitted activities, for the temporary transfer of intra-corporate employees to subsidiaries or branches, and for contract service suppliers and independent professionals (see [Annex 22, UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement](#)).

How open is the UK, relative to other countries, in terms of the movement of people? To answer this question, we used information provided in the Services Trade Restrictiveness Index (STRI), which is produced by the OECD. As the name suggests, this index scores countries' restrictiveness or openness to mobility based on the existence of the following:

- quotas on intra-company transferees, contractual services suppliers, independent services suppliers;
- labour market tests or similar economic considerations on intra-company transferees, contractual services suppliers and independent services suppliers;
- limitation on duration of stay for intra-company transferees, contractual services suppliers and independent services suppliers;
- requirement for a licence or authorisation to practice;
- other restrictions to the movement of people.

Using the STRI, it is possible to draw a comparison for five broadly creative sectors: 'Architecture services', 'Broadcasting', 'Computer services', 'Motion pictures' and 'Sound recording'. Table 4.1 shows that in

these five sectors, the UK was never the most open among the list of comparator countries presented, sitting instead near the sample average.

Table 4.1 STRI values (at 3 decimal places) in the component of restrictions to the movement of people for the UK and selected trade partners by creative-related sectors, 2024

Country	Architecture services	Broadcasting	Computer services	Motion pictures	Sound recording
UK	0.057	0.012	0.058	0.022	0.036
Australia	0.041	0.009	0.044	0.017	0.027
Canada	0.041	0.006	0.029	0.011	0.018
China	0.041	0.018	0.044	0.033	0.055
France	0.097	0.015	0.073	0.028	0.046
Germany	0.041	0.012	0.058	0.022	0.036
Ireland	0.073	0.021	0.102	0.039	0.064
Italy	0.162	0.012	0.058	0.022	0.036
Korea	0.041	0.009	0.044	0.017	0.027
USA	0.049	0.012	0.058	0.022	0.036
Average	0.064	0.013	0.057	0.023	0.038
Min	0.041	0.006	0.029	0.011	0.018
Max	0.162	0.021	0.102	0.039	0.064

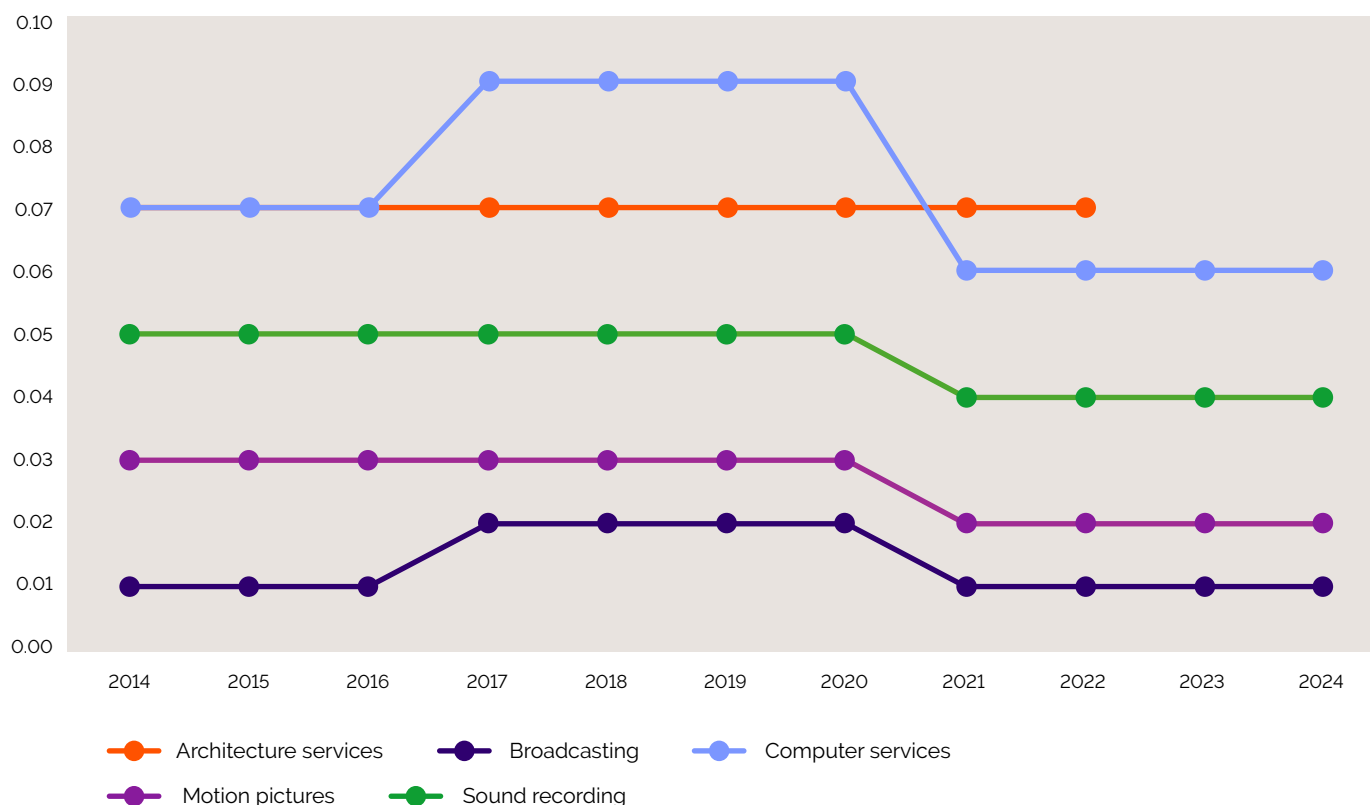
Source: Authors' elaboration, based on the [OECD STRI Simulator](#)

Note: STRI indices range from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating the highest level of restrictiveness. The STRI index is the sum of (positive) STRI values from its five components of restrictions.

It is also interesting to consider the evolution of scores over time for the UK (Figure 4.1). While changes are rare and quite small (between 0.01 and 0.02 points), it can be seen that, after an increase in restrictiveness in 2017 for two sectors ('Computer services' and 'Broadcasting'), all sectors saw a reduction

in restrictiveness in 2021. Again, it should be emphasised that the changes are small. However, even small policy changes should be considered carefully as they could lead to big differences in terms of boosting trade and attracting foreign direct investment.

Figure 4.1 STRI values (at 2 decimal places) for the component of restrictions to movement of people for the UK by creative-related sectors, 2014–2024



Source: Authors' elaboration based on the OECD's STRI (Dataset Detail | Prosperity Data360 | Prosperity Data360) appended with 2023–2024 data (OECD Data Explorer • Services Trade Restrictiveness Index by services sector)

Note: Data on 'Architecture services' is only available up to 2022.

It is worthwhile to summarise some takeaways and policy messages from this section. First, the restrictions to the movement of people represent a small part of the index, yet they could lead to large differences in terms of additional trade and foreign direct investment. Second, these rules are multilateral – that is, they apply to all foreign nationals and multinationals regardless of their country of origin – and keeping an open stance on business workers' mobility enhances foreign direct investment and trade, with benefits for the domestic economy. However, it is also

crucial for a country to gain access to foreign markets for its workers and businesses to facilitate both outward foreign direct investment and trade. Critically, this access is negotiated in bilateral trade and investment agreements and is especially important for the expansion of trade in services and cross-border investment. It is critical that future economic agreements take these restrictions into consideration, and with these being on a reciprocal basis, international access for domestic businesses and their workers will require loosening of the restrictions to foreign businesses and workers.

5

Summary, policy considerations and future research

Migration has surged to the forefront of policy attention in recent years, with the UK government aiming to upskill the domestic workforce while reducing reliance on migrant labour (Home Office, 2025). However, while pursuing these objectives, the UK's creative industries sector, a priority sector in the upcoming industrial strategy, still needs to be able to attract top international creative talent to sustain and enhance growth ambitions. This report provides a systematic review of recent trends in migration in creative occupations and creative industries, using two main sources of data: the Immigration System Statistics and the LFS. A further focus on the UK's restrictiveness to the movement of people in comparison to other countries is provided using information collected from the OECD's STRI. In what follows, we summarise the key findings and offer some policy considerations and suggestions for future research..

5.1 Visa evidence from the Immigration System Statistics

Data covering all occupations shows that during the post-Brexit period 2021–2023 the growth in foreign workers who came to the UK for longer stays was nearly ten times the growth of migrants who came to work for short stays.

Over the 2021Q1–2024Q1 period, 90,379 visas were granted to creative workers, the bulk of which (76% or 68,772) were under the Worker visa, while less than a quarter (24% or 21,607) under the Temporary Worker visa. The Skilled Worker visa represented the most common route for creative workers to enter the UK for work, with half of the total number of visas granted to all creative workers. The Skilled Worker visa also represented two-thirds of all Worker visas for creative workers. The Creative Worker visa and its predecessor, the Creative and Sporting visa, covered 83% of Temporary Worker visas for creative workers, and 20% of the total number of visas for creative workers

For temporary workers on short stays up to twelve months, visas granted for the creative jobs expanded more (under the Creative Worker visa) or similarly (under other Temporary Worker visas) than for non-creative jobs. On the other hand, for the longer-term staying Worker visa holders, visas granted for creative jobs either grew a small fraction (under the Skilled Worker visa) of the non-creative jobs growth or even shrank (under the other Worker visas) when those for non-creative jobs boomed. This points to likely barriers to attracting and retaining creative talent in the UK in the longer term. For both the Creative Worker and the Creative and Sporting visa holders, 'Actors, entertainers and presenters' were the most common creative profession declared by temporary workers entering the UK, followed by 'Musicians' in second place, except for all quarters of 2021

where 'Arts officers, producers and directors' became the second largest group, and during the last three quarters of 2023 where 'Musicians' became the largest group and 'Actors, entertainers and presenters' were the second largest group.

More than half of all visa holders in creative professions were employed as 'Programmers and software development professionals' (31.9% of all visas) and 'IT business analysts, architects and system designers' (23.2%), making up together 49,877 visas granted over the 2021Q1–2024Q1 period. Including also the 'Information technology and telecommunications professional not elsewhere classified' (fourth largest group representing 7.4% of all visas) and the 'Web design and development professionals' (2.6%), we conclude that the 'IT, software and computer services' creative occupations group covered 65% of all the visas granted to creative workers. These workers were entering mainly through the Worker visa routes, rather than the Temporary Worker visa routes, meaning that they reside in the UK for longer periods. The third-largest group of visa holders across all types of visas was the 'Actors, entertainers and presenters' (7.5%), while in the fifth to tenth position were 'Musicians' (5.5%), 'Marketing associate professionals' (4.6%), 'Arts officers, producers and directors' (or 3.9%), 'Marketing and sales directors' (3.1%), 'Graphic designers' (2.2%) and 'Artists' (1.6%). Of these, only 'Marketing associate professionals' and 'Graphic designers' tend to reside for long periods in the UK as they mainly enter the country with a Worker visa rather than a Temporary Worker visa, while the opposite is true for 'Actors, entertainers and presenters', 'Musicians', 'Arts officers, producers and directors' and 'Artists', perhaps not surprisingly due to the more temporary and insecure nature of these jobs.

When considering all the visa routes into creative occupations and using the granted visas count for the 2021Q1–2024Q1 period, we found that the Skilled Worker visa was the most common route, representing 50% of all visas, the Creative Worker visa was the second most common route with 17% share, followed by the Senior or Specialist Worker (Global Business Mobility) visa with 15% share, the Intra-Company Transfer visa (11%), the Government Authorised Exchange (previously Tier 5) visa with 4%, and the Creative and Sporting (previously Tier 5) visa with 3%. All the other routes accounted for negligible shares.

Regarding the region of nationality of foreign creative workers, more than half of them were from Asia, in particular, 57.2% were from South Asia, 3.4% from Central Asia and 1.5% from Southeast Asia. The second-largest continent of origin for creative migrants was Europe with a 16.8% share of migrants, broken down into 9.5% from the EU and 7.3% from other European countries. This means that creatives originating from South Asia were six times as many as the next biggest contributor of creatives, the EU. America accounted for a 9.1% share of creative migrants, broken down into 5.7% from North America and 3.4% from Central and South America. Africa had the same share as America, with 9.1%, broken down into 7.7% creatives coming from Sub-Saharan Africa and 1.7% from North Africa. Drilling down to country of origin, granted visas during the 2021Q1–2024Q1 period show that more than half of the creative immigrant workers came from India (53%), followed by a long way by the United States accounting for 5%; Pakistan, Nigeria, and Russia for 3% each; France, China, South Africa and Ukraine for 2% each; Turkey, Italy, Germany, Brazil, Spain, Canada, Australia, Ghana, Bangladesh, and Jamaica for 1% each. The rest of the world accounted for 16% of creative workers.

Are non-UK workers equally likely to specialise in creative vs non-creative work? Asia was disproportionately represented in creative occupations (62.6%) compared to non-creative occupations (48.7%), driven by the strong presence of the 'IT, software and computer services' creative occupations group. The EU was represented in equal measure (9.5% for creative occupations and 9.8% for non-creative occupations), while African workers represented a much smaller share (9.1% in creative occupations than in non-creative occupations (23.6%).

South Asia was the macro-region of nationality for the highest number of visa holders working in the 'IT, software and computer services' creative occupations group, with no other macro-region a close follower, perhaps not surprisingly given the comparative advantage of India in these industries. But South Asia was also the biggest contributor of visa-holding creatives working as 'Actors, entertainers and presenters' (closely followed by Sub-Saharan Africa), 'Arts officers, producers and directors', 'Marketing associate professionals', 'Graphic designers', 'Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators', 'Product, clothing and related designers', 'Dancers and choreographers', 'Authors, writers and translators', and 'Chartered architectural technologists'.

Most of the visas granted to 'Musicians' instead were to Sub-Saharan Africans, followed by South Asians. North America was the biggest source of visa holders for 'Marketing and sales directors', 'Public relations professionals', 'Advertising accounts managers and creative directors', 'Advertising and public relations directors', and 'Archivists and curators'.

The EU 14 countries were the major source of migrants for 'Architects', 'Architectural and town planning technicians', while non-EU Europe sent the highest number of 'Artists'.

Regarding the evolution over time of granted visas for all DCMS-defined creative occupations and across all visa routes, they grew from 21,751 in 2021 to 36,600 in 2022, a growth rate of

68%, but contracted to 26,332 in 2023, a drop of 28%. In comparison, the visas granted for non-creative occupations grew from 101,560 in 2021 to 181,324 in 2022, a growth rate of 79%, and they expanded again to 253,222 in 2023, a growth rate of 40%. Creative migrants went, therefore, from being 21% of the non-creative migrants in 2021 to being 20% in 2022, and only 10% in 2023.

This trend in creative migration has been driven only by a few creative occupations. Notably, the two creative occupations attracting the highest number of foreign workers – that is, 'IT business analysts, architects and system designers' and 'Programmers and software development professionals' – both had a substantial peak in 2022, but fell back in 2023 to similar levels to those in 2021. Similarly, other occupations with smaller numbers of granted visas that saw a big growth in 2022 followed by a big contraction in 2023, were the 'Information technology and telecommunication professionals n.e.c.' visa holders, 'Architects', 'Advertising accounts managers and creative directors' and 'Journalists, newspaper and periodical editors'. Creative occupations that, instead, saw growth in granted visas both in 2022 and 2023 were 'Web design and development professionals', 'Actors, entertainers and presenters', 'Dancers and choreographers', 'Musicians', 'Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators', 'Graphic designers', and 'Marketing associate professionals'. All the other creative occupations saw some growth in 2022 and a small contraction or stable visa numbers in 2023.

Important visa data gaps regarding the lack of information on occupations in the available statistics have been discussed. These gaps mean that it is currently not possible to gauge how the new immigration system has affected non-UK creative freelancers' ability to offer their labour services in the UK. Given that the issue of a drop in non-UK freelancers has been frequently reported by the creative industries, the inability to track freelancers' movement to the UK is a sticking point, for which evidence would be needed.

5.2 Evidence from the Labour Force Survey

Statistics from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) allow us to monitor both creative occupations and creative industries. In reference to the former, there was a large growth of the non-UK creative workforce in creative occupations between 2014–2024, with the number of non-UK workers more than doubling during the period. Non-UK workers in 2024 accounted for 16% of all creative occupations compared to 11% in 2014. This highlights the importance of non-UK workers to the overall growth of creative occupations in the UK over the decade.

There has, however, been a recent decline in the growth of the non-UK creative workforce, with negative growth experienced in 2024, which was contrary to the growth for non-UK non-creative occupations, where there has remained relatively strong growth over the past few years. This could be interpreted as evidence that, at least for creative occupations, the new visa system is working, if the objective was to reduce dependence on migration.

As seen from the visa statistics, the creative occupation with the largest number of non-UK workers pertains to the IT sector, as 'Programmers and software development professionals' accounted for 35% of the non-UK creative workforce in 2024. This occupation also experienced large growth over the decade, increasing from 25% of the non-UK creative workforce in 2014.

Of the 31 different creative occupational subgroups, seven of the top ten ranked occupations, in terms of workforce size, were the same for non-UK and UK workers in both 2014 and 2024. This highlights a consistent group of occupations that account for the majority of the overall creative workforce (70% of the non-UK creative workforce in 2024).

Occupation Migration Quotients can be used to calculate if non-UK workers are more likely to be in a given creative occupation relative to UK

workers (accounting for the overall size of the non-UK and UK workforce) – this was found to be the case for thirteen creative occupations where seven of these also have the largest number of non-UK workers. In particular, 'Programmers and software development professionals' stand out as having the largest occupation quotient and also the largest share of non-UK workers to the overall workforce in the occupation with 23% of workers in the occupation non-UK.

When we look at the creative industries workforce, the highest proportion of creative occupations for non-UK workers were in the 'Publishing', 'Film, TV, video, radio and photography' and 'Music, performing and visual arts' creative industries sub-sectors, with around two-thirds of the workforce accounted for by creative occupations. A similar pattern arose for the UK workforce, although in six of the nine creative industries sub-sectors there was a greater percentage of creative occupations in the creative sub-sectors for non-UK compared to UK workers.

There is relative degree of specialisation of non-UK workers within a small number of creative occupations for each creative sub-sector, so that when analysing the creative industries this is to some extent synonymous with particular creative occupations. There is, in general, a lesser degree of this specialisation for UK workers in these sub-sectors so that the distribution of creative occupations for UK workers is not the same for non-UK workers in the creative sub-sectors.

There has been growth of non-UK workers in the creative industries over the past decade, reflecting the growth in the creative occupations. However, the share of non-UK workers in the creative industries has fallen since 2022, reflecting the recent decline in the growth of non-UK workers in the creative occupations.

The 'IT, software and computer services' creative industry sub-sector had the largest share of both non-UK and UK workers. In 2024, the IT sub-sector accounted for over half of the non-UK creative workforce in the creative industries and across both groups of workers the sub-sector accounted for a greater share of the creative industries in 2024 compared to 2014.

There was a higher likelihood of working in the creative industries for non-UK compared to UK workers (after accounting for the relative size of the respective workforces), and this emphasises the attractiveness of the creative industries to overseas workers. For the largest creative sub-sector, 'IT, software and computer services', a non-UK worker was 1.3 times more likely to be employed in the sub-sector (compared to other industries) than a UK worker in 2024.

The Industry Quotient varies across creative sub-sectors as well as within the various activities within the sub-sectors. This indicates the important variation that exists within the different activities of the creative industries.

The growth in the non-UK workforce has occurred across the geographic spread of the UK regions, but with different patterns within the creative sub-sectors. London attracts most of the non-UK creative workforce in terms of volume, but higher growth rates generally happen elsewhere, highlighting the regions' ability to attract global talent and provides

further evidence for the importance of the growing interplay between the UK regions and the creative industries.

The dominant source of non-UK workers in the creative industries is the EU, although this is less concentrated when compared to the non-creative industries. For both the creative and non-creative industries, the share of EU workers has fallen in the post-Brexit period so that they now account for less than half of the non-UK workforce. In comparison, there has been a recent increase in the share of workers from Asia, where Asian workers account for a larger share of the creative compared to the non-creative workforce.

For each of the creative sub-sectors over the 2014–2024 period, Europe was the main source of non-UK workers, of which the EU 15 accounted for the largest shares for the majority of the creative sub-sectors. For the 'IT, software and computer services' sub-sector, Asia was also a notable source, accounting for over a third of non-UK workers in the sub-sector, in particular from South Asia. Workers from Asia, Oceania and North America were also relatively important across a range of creative sub-sectors, so that overall a broad range of world regions are important for where the UK creative sector draws its non-UK workforce and the associated diversity on which the sector relies for its continued creativity.

5.3 Evidence on inward restrictiveness to the movement of people

Analysis of the degree of restrictiveness to the movement of people from the STRI reveals how the UK is average relative to comparator countries. Small changes could imply a non-trivial impact in terms of international trade in services and foreign direct investment. The changes in the immigration system anticipated in the White Paper (Home Office, 2025) should be mindful of these impacts. It is also critical to note that gaining further access for UK businesses

and workers requires negotiations in bilateral agreements. For the five creative sub-sectors and list of countries covered, the restrictions to the movement of people are not the most important component of the STRI, and other types of restrictions play a more significant role. This creates an opportunity, as small concessions in this area could lead to greater concessions in other areas restricting services trade.

5.4 Future research

While the report has tried to be as comprehensive as possible, data limitations still apply. Future research could involve acquiring data on the Global Talent visa and delving into the LFS, hopefully after some of its limitations have been fixed, to do a deeper place-based analysis of UK/non-UK creative workers. Also, while this report provides important statistical evidence on migration in creative occupations and industries, more advanced econometric modelling is needed to understand the causal impact of non-UK creative workers on

innovation, skills, productivity and growth of creative industries. We limited the analysis to new visas since data granularity for visa extensions is limited to nationality and visa type, but if such data became available in the future at the 4-digit occupation code level, this could allow for a richer analysis of migration. Another interesting dimension to explore would be the transitions from study to work, obtaining data from the Home Office on graduate visas for foreign UK graduates.

5.5 Policy considerations

The UK remains an internationally attractive creative powerhouse, especially in occupations and industries related to IT and software. However, the other creative occupations and sub-sectors also exhibit an internationally diverse workforce typical of a globally oriented industry. Maintaining this attractiveness while ensuring the domestic pipeline will be key to sustaining the growth of the sector. After all, the domestic workforce will be the primary beneficiary of further growth in the creative industries. This balancing act could also be achieved by specifically targeting visas around hard-to-fill vacancies as defined by Giles et al. (2025). However, given the pace of technological progress and the speed at which the sector is moving on a global scale, constant monitoring and good data will be required to ensure that the UK has a fit-for-purpose immigration system that serves, rather than hampers, the creative industries.

This report uncovered that in the three years since the start of the new points-based immigration system, there has been a remarkable increase in Temporary Worker visas and a significant shortfall in Worker visas granted to creatives compared to non-creatives.

This shortening of the duration of stay in the UK for non-UK creative workers is likely the result of three factors. First, the temporary EU workers' movement, which before Brexit was invisible due to the unrestricted worker mobility, has become visible due to the new visa system. The new system also came into force immediately after the Covid-19 pandemic, during which temporary workers' movement was severely affected, so the surge we observe in creative temporary occupations held by non-UK workers could be a rebound effect after the pandemic. Second, the MoU on the India-UK migration and mobility partnership that came into force in May 2021 served well to increase Indians workers moving to the UK and made India the largest source of migration for both creative and non-creative occupations, though in particular we saw a spike in the latter for nurses and care workers on Worker visas. Third, the increase over time in costs associated with obtaining a visa, the way such disbursements are collected upfront or the way they kick in only for stays longer than six months, like the Immigration Health Surcharge, are likely to disproportionately and negatively impact workers in lower-paid creative occupations, who cannot afford longer stays. Costs like

the Immigration Skills Charge, payable only for a Skilled Worker or Senior or Specialist Worker (Global Business Mobility) visa when the duration is longer than six months, also disincentivise sponsorship for a longer period, unless the jobs are well remunerated (and generating higher income for the employers) to make the sponsorship worthwhile.

This means that while the new points-based immigration system, introduced following the UK's departure from the EU, has created parity of treatment for work and study migration between all third countries and has offered greater opportunities than hitherto to non-EU migrants, it is probably not serving all creative industries in the same way. There seems to be a polarisation between arts-based workers entering the UK mostly through temporary visas and IT-related workers entering through longer-stay visas, possibly due to the visa costs borne by both workers and employers, which jump substantially at the six-month threshold and make the international relocation worthwhile only when the occupation is relatively well-paid and offers stability.

Temporary visa routes remain important for creative occupations, especially outside the IT and software occupations. Ensuring that these routes remain competitive will be key to boosting the success of the creative industries, where business models and the successful completion of projects often require the combination of different skills and reliance on short-term work from freelancers. Enhancing the competitiveness of the current system entails weighing the visa costs associated with each visa route and potentially reducing the costs for hard-to-fill occupations that are on the Immigration Salary List. This could be achieved by, for example, allowing the Immigration Healthcare Surcharge to be spread over a period of time, rather than requiring the visa applicant to pay it wholly upfront when applying for the visa. The employing organisations could be charged with collecting it through deductions from workers' pay. Not only would this be beneficial for workers in the lowest-paid creative occupations, but it would also make

the recruitment of international talent more inclusive of those who have the necessary skills but do not have big savings to accept a UK job.

Another important policy consideration pertains to the need to improve the data availability needed to monitor the system and inform about the timely changes that may be needed in a fast-changing international environment. For example, although data on non-UK freelancers is partially covered by information on the Temporary Worker visa routes reviewed here, there remain other visa routes that are not covered by official data, either because the data is not released with sufficient granularity by occupation (Global Talent visa) or because the worker's visa does not depend on a job offer (High Potential Individual visa, Innovator Founder visa, Youth Mobility Scheme visa and Permitted Paid Engagement under the Standard Visitor visa rules). Better tracking of freelancers would help to understand the difficulties claimed by the industry in recruiting this type of worker, something for which no official monitor exists.

At the same time, it is also important that the UK pursues access to international markets for UK workers. Services trade particularly relies, among others, on factors like business workers' mobility and mutual recognition of qualifications. This access is often reciprocal and negotiated in bilateral agreements. One example is the treatment of intra-corporate transferees, which is related to the attraction of foreign direct investment. Another example is touring. Brexit made it more costly and more difficult for performing artists to tour in the EU. Systematic data on touring is, unfortunately, lacking. A coordinated effort to collect such data at the national level is essential to monitoring the post-Brexit costs for performing artists and supporting the creative industries that rely on touring.

Overall, maintaining a welcoming stance on non-UK creative workers is going to remain key to the sector's success, while the need to nurture domestic talent must be balanced with the growth needs of the creative industries, using sufficient flexibility.

Glossary

Creative occupations refer to job roles that often require the use of imagination and artistic ability in generating novel ideas and enhancing products or services (e.g. software developers, musicians, graphic designers).

Migration Quotient is an index that shows how dependent an occupation or an industry is on non-UK workers, relative to its overall size and the national labour force.

Creative Worker visa is a temporary visa for individuals working in arts and entertainment, that is often used for project-based or short-term engagements.

Freelance/project-based work is a work model common in the creative industries, characterised by short-term contracts, which influences visa and migration policy needs when work opportunities involve frequently crossing national borders.

Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a sample survey used to track trends in employment that is representative of the UK population.

Micro-businesses are small enterprises with fewer than 10 employees. These dominate the creative sector and often lack the capacity to sponsor visas.

Net migration is the difference between the number of people entering and leaving a country.

Points-based immigration system is used by the UK in the post-Brexit system for non-EU immigration by assigning points based on skills, salary, and language proficiency.

Skilled Worker visa is a type of visa for non-UK nationals to work in the UK for a fixed duration while being sponsored by an employer.

Visa sponsorship is a legal process by which a UK employer supports a foreign worker's visa application under government-approved conditions.

Some Abbreviations

CoS	Certificate of Sponsorship
EEA	European Economic Area
ETA	Electronic Travel Authorisation
IHS	Immigration Healthcare Surcharge
ISC	Immigration Skills Charge
LFS	Labour Force Survey
NEC	Not Elsewhere Classified
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QLFS	Quarterly Labour Force Survey
SIC	Standard Industry Classification
SOC	Standard Occupational Classification
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
STRI	Services Trade Restrictiveness Index

References

Bakhshi, H., Siepel, J., Carmona, L. and Tarr, A. (2025) *Unleashing Creativity: Fixing the Finance Gap in the Creative Industries*. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. Available at https://pec.ac.uk/research_report_entr/unleashing-creativity-fixing-the-finance-gap-in-the-creative-industries/ (accessed 23 May 2025).

Bakhshi, H. and Spilsbury, M. (2019) *The Migrant and Skills Needs of Creative Businesses in the United Kingdom: Findings from the January 2018 Creative Industries Council Migration and Skills Survey*. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. Available at <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/The-Migrant-and-Skills-Needs-of-Creative-Businesses-in-the-United-Kingdom-REPORT.pdf> (accessed 20 March 2025).

Borowiecki, K.J. and Graddy, K. (2021) Immigrant artists: Enrichment or displacement? *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 121, 785–797.

Creative Industries Federation (2017) *Global Talent Report: Why the UK's World-Leading Creative Industries Need International Workers and How to Attract Them*. Available at: <https://www.a-n.co.uk/research/global-talent-report-uks-world-leading-creative-industries-need-international-workers-attract/> (accessed 7 May 2025).

Department for Business and Trade (2024) *Invest 2035: The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/invest-2035-the-uks-modern-industrial-strategy/invest-2035-the-uks-modern-industrial-strategy> (accessed 16 May 2025).

Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) (2016) *Creative Industries Economic Estimates Methodology*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-industries-economic-estimates-methodology> (accessed 23 May 2025).

Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) (2025) *DCMS Economic Estimates: Annual GVA 2023 (Provisional)*. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dcms-economic-estimates-gva-2023-provisional/dcms-economic-estimates-annual-gva-2023-provisional> (accessed 23 May 2025).

Department for Work and Pensions (2025) *Biggest shake up to welfare system in a generation to get Britain working*, press release, 18 March. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/biggest-shake-up-to-welfare-system-in-a-generation-to-get-britain-working> (accessed 23 May 2025).

Di Novo, S., Fazio, G. and Vermeulen, W.N. (2020) *12 facts about the UK's International Trade in Creative Goods and Services*. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/research_report_entr/12-facts-about-the-uks-international-trade-in-creative-goods-and-services/ (accessed 20 March 2025).

Easton, E. (2024) *Keeping the UK's Creative Industries Globally Competitive: A Playbook to Protect our Future Prosperity and Security*. University of Arts London: Erskine Analysis. Available at: https://www.arts.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0024/436047/UAL_EA_Fullreport.pdf (accessed 23 May 2025).

Fazio, G., Jones, J., Maioli, S. and Simandjuntak, D. (2024) *UK Trade in a Global Creative Economy*. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. Available at: <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/UK-Trade-in-a-Global-Creative-Economy-Creative-PEC-State-of-the-Nations-March-2024.pdf> (accessed 20 March 2025).

Giles, L., Carey, H. and O'Brien, D. (2025) *Skills Mismatches in the UK's Creative Industries*. Creative PEC State of the Nations Research Series. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/state_of_the_nation/skills-mismatches-in-the-uks-creative-industries/ (accessed 23 May 2025).

Haddoud, M.Y., Fillis, I. and Murphy, T. (2023) *Post-Brexit Migration and Accessing Foreign Talent in the Creative Industries*. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/research_report_entr/migration-talent-and-the-creative-industries-after-brexit/ (accessed 20 March 2025).

Home Office (2025) *Restoring Control over the Immigration System*. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6821f334ced319d02c906103/restoring-control-over-the-immigration-system-web-optimised.pdf> (accessed 15 May 2025).

James, R. (2025) Education Secretary pledges to tackle 'chronic' skills shortages, *The Standard*, 25 February. Available at: <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/bridget-phillipson-england-laura-trott-skills-education-secretary-b1213235.html> (accessed 23 May 2025).

Jones, J., Simandjuntak, D., Maioli, S. and Fazio, G. (2024) *Foreign Direct Investment and the UK's Creative Industries*. Creative PEC State of the Nations Research Series. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.14045803. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/state_of_the_nation/foreign-direct-investment-in-the-uks-creative-industries/ (accessed 23 May 2025).

Kerr, S.P., Kerr, W., Özden, Ç and Parsons, C. (2016) Global talent flows. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 30(4), 83–106.

Migration Advisory Committee (2024) *MAC Annual Report 2024*, December. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/677d0204d721a08c006654e2/Migration+Advisory+Committee+_MAC+_annual+report_+2024.pdf (accessed 23 May 2025).

Office for National Statistics (2024) Labour Force Survey. 2014-2024. 11th Release. UK Data Service. SN: 2000026, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-Series-2000026> Serafinelli, M. and Tabellini, G. (2022) Creativity over time and space: A historical analysis of European cities. *Journal of Economic Growth*, 27(1), 1–43.

Siepel, J., Ramirez-Guerra, A. and Rath, S. (2023) *Geographies of Creativity*. Creative PEC State of the Nations Research Series. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.10245530. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/state_of_the_nation/geographies-of-creativity/ (accessed 23 May 2025).

Siepel, J., Rath, S. and Cowling, M. (2024) *Growth Finance for the Creative Industries*. Creative PEC State of the Nations Research Series. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.13889750 Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/state_of_the_nation/growth-finance-for-the-creative-industries/ (accessed 23 May 2025).

Strauss, D. (2024) ONS faces fresh scrutiny over flawed UK labour market data, *Financial Times*, 21 November. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/7d3de81f-b845-490b-804f-af0aa4f76fe3> (accessed 23 May 2025).

Windsor, G., Bakhshi, H. and Mateos-Garcia, J. (2016) *Skilled Migration and the UK's Creative Industries*. NESTA. Available at: https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/skilled_migration_and_the_uks_creative_industries.pdf (accessed 23 May 2025).

Data reference list

Home Office Immigration System Statistics

Data on visas granted is publicly available in the Immigration System Statistics data tables (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables>)

Labour Force Survey (LFS)

Quarterly datasets are safeguarded and available to approved researchers through the UK Data Service (<https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/series/doi/?id=2000026>)

Census 2021 (England and Wales)

Data are publicly accessed using the custom dataset table builder and the national identity (detailed) and occupation (current) can be downloaded from <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/create/filter-outputs/164e8726-f1b5-4596-aca3-d8e2166d975b#get-data>

OECD Services Trade Restrictiveness Index

Services Trade Restrictiveness Index values for restrictions to movement of people are publicly available in the Services Trade Restrictiveness Index Simulator (<https://sim.oecd.org/>)

Data statement

Aside from LFS data, datasets used in this report are freely available via the links provided.

Endnotes

1. The Skilled Worker visa, like all Worker visas, is for the duration of the sponsorship and limited to a duration of five years before it can be extended.
2. A Temporary Worker visa is granted for up to twelve months initially.
3. A Global Business Mobility visa can be granted as either a Worker or Temporary Worker visa. The former accounts for 0.18% and the latter for 14.99% of all visas granted to workers in creative occupations.
4. The other Temporary Worker visa routes for creative workers that we refer to include the Creative and Sporting, the Charity Worker, the Government Authorised Exchange, the Seasonal Worker, the Religious Worker and the International Agreement visas. Before the new points-based immigration system came into force on 1 December 2020, these were subcategories of the so-called Tier 5 visa, which covered temporary workers. They have been replaced by the Temporary Worker visa routes.
5. The other Worker visa routes for creative workers that we refer to include the International Sports person, the Intra-company Transfer, the Scale-up Worker, the Minister of Religion (previously Tier 2), the Sports person (previously Tier 2) and the Health and Care Worker (Skilled Worker) visas.
6. These include: 'Programmers and software development professionals'; 'IT business analysts, architects and system designers'; 'Information technology and telecommunications professionals n.e.c.' (not elsewhere classified); and 'Web design and development professionals'.
7. That is 'Musicians', 'Artists', 'Actors, entertainers and presenters', 'Dancers and choreographers', 'Arts officers, producers and directors', and 'Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators'.
8. Also, in 2021 there was a negative growth of 5.5% for non-UK creative workers, but in this post-pandemic year there was a 5.2% contraction of UK creative workers as well.
9. The gross value added of the 'IT, software and computer services' sub-sector grew by 58.3% during the 2010–2023 period (DCMS, 2025).
10. Data up to 2024Q3 is available at 3-digit SOC 2020 codes also, but this is based on modelled estimates that convert SOC 2010 to SOC 2020, except for 2024Q4, which has data on the actual count of visas granted at 4-digit SOC 2020 codes. We therefore adopt the SOC 2010 classification to have the more granular 4-digit level coded count of visas granted from 2021Q1 to 2024Q1, and we exclude from our analysis subsequent quarters due to the change in SOC classification.
11. We accessed the publicly available data, and due to the size of the population, and privacy and confidentiality concerns, the Census data for Scotland and Northern Ireland do not report granular data on creative occupations or industries worth reporting for the purpose of the present report. Future research could access granular data in a Secure Research Service environment. The robustness checks using Census data are reported in the Online Supplementary Material.
12. The SOC classifies jobs, defined as a set of tasks or duties to be carried out by one person and recognised primarily by the associated job title. Jobs are classified in terms of their skills level and skills content. More information and the codes associated with each occupation included in SOC 2010 can be found at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/standardoccupationalclassificationsoc/soc2010>
13. The current SIC is used in classifying business establishments and other statistical units by the type of economic activity in which they are engaged. For a list of SIC 2007 codes, see: https://onsdigital.github.io/dp-classification-tools/standard-industrial-classification/ONS_SIC_hierarchy_view.html
14. For further details on extending the visas, the interested reader can refer to the following web pages: <https://www.gov.uk/skilled-worker-visa/extend-your-visa> <https://www.gov.uk/global-talent/extend-your-visa> <https://www.gov.uk/creative-worker-visa/extend-your-visa>
15. The cost for the Standard Visitor visa is £127 if staying up to six months. If visiting the UK regularly, it is possible to apply for a long-term Standard Visitor visa instead, which allows visits lasting up to six months in a period of up to two, five or ten years, with a fee of £475, £848 or £1,059, respectively. All rates in this report are valid in May 2025.

16. Depending on the visa applicant's working hours, the going rate may require a pro rata calculation in order to determine the correct level of salary to be recorded on the certificate of sponsorship presented for the visa application.
17. In April 2024, the Immigration Salary List replaced the Shortage Occupation List (SOL) compiled by the Migration Advisory Committee and the Government abolished the 20% 'going rate' discount, previously a benefit of placing an occupation on the SOL.
18. Only skilled classical ballet dancers or skilled contemporary dancers who meet the standard required by internationally recognised UK ballet or contemporary dance companies are on the immigration salary list. The company must be endorsed as internationally recognised by a UK industry body, such as the Arts Councils (of England, Scotland or Wales).
19. Only skilled orchestral musicians who are leaders, principals, sub-principals or numbered string positions and meet the standard required by internationally recognised UK orchestras are on the Immigration Salary List. The orchestra must be a full member of the Association of British Orchestras.
20. Different rules apply for visa extensions (where the individual stays in the same job with the same employer) or visa updates (where the job or the employer change). For a list of minimum salaries for immigrants under 26 and studying, training or in a postdoctoral role, see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skilled-worker-visa-eligible-salary-if-youre-under-26-studying-training-or-in-a-postdoctoral-role/skilled-worker-visa-minimum-salary-if-youre-under-26-studying-training-or-in-a-postdoctoral-role>. For the job codes applicable for postdoctoral positions, see: <https://www.gov.uk/skilled-worker-visa/when-you-can-be-paid-less>
21. For further details, see: <https://www.gov.uk/skilled-worker-visa/how-much-it-costs>
22. See paragraphs 7.1 to 7.3 of the Immigration Skills Charge regulations at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2017/9780111154663/pdfs/ukdsiem_9780111154663_en.pdf
23. The ETA currently costs £16. Some exceptions do not require a visa or an ETA to enter the UK – examples include having Irish citizenship or travelling with a British overseas territories citizen passport. The ETA was introduced for EU (except Irish), EEA and Swiss citizens on 2 April 2025. Before this date, they did not need one if staying for periods shorter than six months. For full details, see: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-an-electronic-travel-authorisation-eta>
24. For details of all changes in visa rules, see the immigration rules archive at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/archive-immigration-rules#2025>
25. For the list of eligible jobs with going rates for the Scale-Up Worker visa, see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scale-up-going-rates-for-eligible-occupations>
26. The reason for providing the growth excluding healthcare workers is that the market forces in healthcare are very different from most sectors, and the salary thresholds in health (as well as in education) roles are set according to the amount on the nationally agreed pay scales, not £38,700 or the going rate. Also, the number of Health and Care Worker (Skilled Worker) visas granted for 'senior care workers' has seen an anomalous growth since it increased from 3,219 (2021) to 15,742 (2022) and 16,570 (2023), while for 'care workers and home carers' it went from zero in 2021 to 19,864 (2022) and 88,814 (2023).
27. Simultaneously, the number of visas granted to Indian nationals for work in non-creative occupations under the Health and Care Worker (Skilled Worker) visa increased in the 2021–2023 period: for 'senior care workers', the number rose from 1,951 in 2021 to 6,582 in 2022, though it dropped to 5,279 in 2023; for 'care workers and home carers', the number rose from zero to 3,714 to 18,538; and for 'nurses', the number rose from 8,665 to 11,739 before dropping to 11,278.
28. The UK Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a sample survey that asks individuals about their work circumstances (ONS, 2024). Details of the survey can be found at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/methodologies/labourforcesurveyuserguidance>. This study includes economically active individuals – those who are (1) working as an employee, (2) self-employed, (3) in Government employment and training programmes or (4) working as an unpaid family worker, indicated by the variable INECAC05 in the LFS. Output from the LFS is quarterly since 1992.

29. We also checked the consistency of LFS data against HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) Pay As You Earn data and found that, when comparing the number of workers who are not self-employed, the LFS underestimates the non-UK workers while still being broadly in line with the HMRC patterns.
30. Occupations are defined according to the SOC 2020: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/standardoccupationalclassification/soc/soc2020>. Occupations classed as creative relate to the DCMS definition of creative occupations at the 4-digit SOC level, while creative industries are based on aggregations of 4-digit SIC codes and defined according to the DCMS methodology (DCMS, 2016).
31. Other non-UK creative occupations that declined over the period were 'Musicians', 'Other skilled trades n.e.c.', 'Clothing, fashion and accessories designers', 'Dancers and choreographers' and 'Public relations professionals'. With the exception of 'Public relations professionals', this was also the case for UK workers in these occupations.
32. 'Managers and directors in creative industries' is a new category in SOC 2020 that is now separate from 'Managers and directors in other services'.
33. The Occupation Migration Quotient is calculated as:
$$\frac{\text{Non-UK nationals in specific occupation} / \text{Non-UK nationals in all occupations}}{\text{UK nationals in specific occupation} / \text{UK nationals in all occupations}}$$
34. The creative industries are defined as those that 'have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property' (DCMS, 2016, p. 6).
35. These include occupations such as 'Human resources and industrial relations' and 'Other administrative occupations n.e.c.'
36. The large size of the 'IT, software and computer services' sub-sector is driven by the 'Programmers and software development professionals' occupation grouping.
37. The Industry Migration Quotient is calculated as:
$$\frac{\text{Non-UK nationals in specific industry} / \text{Non-UK nationals in all industries}}{\text{UK nationals in specific industry} / \text{UK nationals in all industries}}$$
38. This is at the International Territorial Level (ITL) 1, which divides the UK into twelve regions: London, South East, East, South West, West Midlands, East Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside, North West, North East, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. For information on International Territorial Levels, see: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/ukgeographies/eurostat>

Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre

Led by



with



www.pec.ac.uk

 [creative-pec](#)

 [@creativepec.bsky.social](#)

Newcastle University, 2 The Helix, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE4 5TG

The Royal Society of Arts, 8 John Adam Street, London, WC2N 6EZ

ISBN: 978-0-7017-0288-5



9 780701 702885 >

