

Policy Brief: Creative Industries Employers' Perspectives on Skills Initiatives: 2025

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Overview

The Government's new [Industrial Strategy](#) sets a long-term, sector-focused approach to skills, aiming to boost opportunity, support economic growth, and ensure a strong pipeline of talent for priority sectors like the creative industries. In line with this, the [Creative Industries Sector Plan](#) sets out a commitment to creating a "high quality, responsive, inclusive and targeted" skills system that will meet the needs of sector employers, supported through a new Creative Sector Skills Forum and Digital Skills Council that will work closely with industry partners in building training pathways.

This policy brief provides key insights from our latest State of the Nations report *Creative Industries Employers' Perspectives on Skills Initiatives: 2025*, drawing on the Employer Skills Survey 2022 to give insight into employer engagement in the skills system and explore different aspects of their journey.

The creative industries' significant growth over the past decade came amid rapid technological change and structural shifts like an ageing population, underscoring the need for training that builds a strong talent pipeline and supports lifelong learning. UK and devolved governments have begun to focus efforts on building better career pathways and opportunities for work-based learning.

The research summarised here focuses on creative employers' experiences of skills initiatives that are sector-focused and work-based. This encompasses apprenticeships, HTQs and T-Levels. This brief outlines some of the headline findings from the report, as well as policy considerations encompassing broadening training pathways, strengthening industry engagement with the skills system, and leveraging devolution in skills development.

Key Findings

Recruitment practices

The creative industries recruit young people (under 25) and older people (50+) at a lower rate compared to other sectors. 57% of creative industries employers had recruited young people aged under 25 in the past 2-3 years, compared to 64% across all sectors. Older workers aged 50+ are less likely to be recruited, despite 93% of creative employers reporting they were happy with their work readiness when they did draw talent from this group.

Only a minority of creative industries employers had recruited education leavers¹ at all in the past 2 – 3 years. 70% of creative industries employers had not recruited education leavers in the past 2-3 years, in line with all industries at 68%.

Creative industries employers are more likely to recruit graduates to their first job compared to school or college leavers. Across the whole economy, employers were more likely to recruit school or FE leavers compared to the creative industries. Just over a fifth (22%) of creative industries employers had recruited HE leavers compared to 14% across all sectors. However, creative industries employers report that 21% of graduates recruited are not prepared for their role, which is higher than 14% of employers across all industries.

Work placements

Creative industries employers are more likely to have had someone on a work placement² compared to all industries. A total of 37% of creative industries firms had offered any type of work placement, which compares to 30% across the economy. Creative industries firms suggest that giving learners experience and helping with recruitment decisions are the primary reasons for offering placements.

¹ An education leaver encompasses anyone who is taken on in their first role after leaving school, college or university.

² The ESS survey divides work placements into various different categories, encompassing work experience, work trials for potential new recruits, and (both paid and unpaid) internships, see: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/672a2743094e4e60c466d160/Employer_Skills_Survey_2022_research_report__Nov_2024_.pdf

Capacity and firm size are the main reasons for not offering placements. Creative industries employers are more likely to say that capacity (in terms of time and resources) is the main reason for not offering a placement, at 28% vs 19% across all industries. Other barriers included placements not being suitable due to the size of the business (16% vs 10% across all industries) and no work being available due to changing work patterns caused by Covid-19 (16% vs 19%).

Creative industries firms are less likely to offer employment after a placement compared to all sectors. This varies depending on the level of education leavers: only 6% of school leavers taken on for a placement with a creative firm are taken on (vs 13% across all sectors), rising to 24% of graduates (vs 28%).

Technical and work-based training

Awareness of skills interventions and qualifications among creative industries employers remains variable. For example, awareness of T-Levels in England was at around 60% for creative industries employers, but 57% suggested they were “not very” or “not at all” interested in providing placements for the qualification (in line with other sectors). 64% said that it was “fairly” or “very” difficult to provide placements for T-Levels.

Fewer creative industries employers provide accredited training linked to formal qualifications compared to UK employers overall. Only 16% offered training towards a Nationally Recognised Qualification, compared to 26% of employers across the whole economy. They cite low demand, poor relevance, and cost as key barriers to accredited training.

Awareness of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) is very low across the creative industries and wider economy. Just over 80% of both creative industries employers and all-sector employers had not heard of HTQs, despite their introduction in England in 2020 to address higher-level skills gaps.

Apprenticeships

Awareness of apprenticeships is nearly universal, but detailed understanding is limited. 99% of creative industries employers had heard of apprenticeships, yet only 46% reported having some knowledge of what they involve. Creative industries employers are more familiar with apprenticeships than the wider economy.

Despite this, most employers in the sector were unlikely to use apprenticeships in future. 63% said they were unlikely to engage with apprenticeships going forward, compared to 57% across the wider economy.

Creative industries engagement with apprenticeships remains low and less sustained over time. Only 5% of employers currently have apprentices, with another 3% having

offered them in the past. Both these figures are below the national average (11% and 8%, respectively).

Creative industries employers primarily use apprenticeships to recruit new staff, not train existing employees. In line with the national average, 89% of creative employers use apprenticeships for new hires.

Policy considerations

1. Broaden entry routes to boost inclusion in the creative industries

Expanding vocational and technical pathways for learners is an important way to broaden access to job opportunities in the creative industries. However, traditional recruitment practices seem to be persistent, with most firms relying on recruitment of workers in middle age (25–49 years old). It is important that the sector learn from those employers who are providing work experience and report benefits from hiring more diverse groups who are well-prepared for work. There is an opportunity to better connect potential workers of diverse ages with creative firms by building on effective practices across the four nations, such as the Youth Guarantee in England, including through developments such as the Youth Guarantee in England, following Scotland and Wales, or reformed employment support in Jobcentres.

2. Strengthen industry partnerships to deepen employer engagement

Employer engagement in skills programmes remains limited in scope and consistency. Better partnerships between industry and training providers will help to embed expertise within the skills and training system. Employer engagement in the skills system can be strengthened through recognition of core industry partners, encompassing professional and trade bodies. International examples, including those recently highlighted by the OECD, show the power of industry partners in helping to build capacity and networks between learners, industry and training providers.³ This is essential to build capacity, especially in a sector with many micro businesses and SMEs, and encourages working towards shared skills goals.

3. Enhance industry-led skills design and delivery

Co-design of skills programmes is essential to ensuring they meet industry requirements and give learners preparation for work. Central to this is the creation of industry-endorsed training networks that have accreditation and can offer high-quality provision, as well as incentives to encourage employer investment in technical training programmes. Improving coordination of publicly regulated training (like apprenticeships) and industry-regulated programmes (such as the occupational licensing and accreditation schemes used in journalism) may also enhance engagement.

³ https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/12/pooling-our-strengths_30744fd2/b73697cb-en.pdf

4. Use data to guide skills reforms in the creative industries

Government-backed surveys have a vital role to play in helping policy makers understand where employers are on their engagement journey. Where there are different levels of knowledge around particular initiatives, both government and industry can better target awareness-raising campaigns. This is especially important when trying to understand the transition from awareness to knowledge (e.g. HTQs) to full engagement (e.g. apprenticeships) with different training products. The insights provided around challenges with apprenticeship provision can also be utilised to more effectively customise the forthcoming Growth and Skills Levy.

5. Leverage devolution to strengthen local and national skills systems

The Government's devolution agenda reinforces the importance of place-based approaches aligned with the Industrial Strategy, creating opportunities for national and local governments to coordinate efforts and trial tailored skills interventions to better meet the sector's needs. The Growth and Skills Levy offers policy makers a chance to explore how to better leverage employer investment in skills and ensure flexibility. Industry bodies can develop and pilot sector-specific initiatives at the local level, providing a basis for continued iteration and refinement of skills programmes. In England, Local Skills Improvement Plans can serve to further develop existing initiatives such as the British Film Institute's Skills Clusters.⁴

⁴ https://www.worldskillsuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Screen-Industries-Report_FINAL.pdf

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