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Education and skills reforms essential for Government to achieve new Creative Industries ambitions, says new research

The creative industries are identified as a key sector for the UK's economic growth ambitions in the Government's - just published - Industrial Strategy. Today, a new report from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC) suggests that reforms will be essential to achieving the Strategy's ambitions to increase creative employer engagement in the skills system.

The report written by Work Advance for Creative PEC, highlights that, despite interventions and efforts, creative industries employers are less likely to recruit workers over 50 and are less likely to engage with training routes like apprenticeships than the UK employer average. It also highlights a range of barriers holding back creative employer engagement with the skills system, such as time, cost, and the difficulty in customising them for the sector.

With the creative industries experiencing considerable growth over the last decade combined with rapid technological advances and an ageing population, today's research points to the need to build a more robust talent pipeline and invest in lifelong learning.

Key findings:

- 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.
- Creative industries employers are more likely to recruit graduates to their first job compared to school or college leavers.
- 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 adequately prepared for the role, which is significantly higher than 14% of employers across all industries.
- Creative industries employers are more likely to have had someone on a work placement 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 are however 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 then employed (vs 13% across all sectors), rising to 24% of graduates (vs 28%).
- 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)
- 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.
- 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 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).

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

“With the UK Government's devolution agenda progressing, there is renewed focus on the importance of place-based approaches to skills provision aligned to the industrial Strategy. Given the challenges identified in this report around broadening entry into the sector and low creative employer engagement in the skills system, continued focus should be given to how effective local skills partnerships and delivery can be developed, supported and scaled. These can ensure new initiatives meaningfully involve local firms and training providers and are responsive to local need. Ensuring these are effectively supported will of course require effective coordination with national governments and skills bodies, building on recent commitments like the forthcoming Creative Sector Skills Forum announced in the Creative Industries Sector Plan last month.”

Co-Director of Work Advance, Lesley Giles says:

“Our research shows that whilst current policy reforms acknowledge the need to engage employers in the skills system to support greater take up and relevance of training, it is hard to achieve in practice. The picture of creative industries employer engagement varies with different skills programmes and the breadth, depth and sustainability of work experience and work-based learning opportunities remains more limited overall.

As skills strategies across the UK are repurposed, following the recent spending review, and the launch of the Industrial Strategy, there is room to reinvigorate partnerships with the creative industries and skills providers to better articulate changing skills needs and shape the training response. This is crucial to enhance

entry routes and career pathways into the sector and widen work-based learning activities to supply more industry-relevant skills."

The report is the latest in Creative PEC's State of the Nations series which is designed to provide robust data and evidence to inform policy to support the creative industries. There were 30 citations for Creative PEC research in the Government's new Sector Plan demonstrating the importance of data to help the creative industries compete on the same playing field as other major industrial sectors. Creative PEC is led by Newcastle University with the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

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Download the report: 'Creative industries employers' perspectives on skills initiatives: 2025' https://pec.ac.uk/state_of_the_nation/creative-industries-employers-perspectives-on-skills-initiatives-2025/ (live from 11am Wednesday 8 July 2025, UK time)

The report 'Creative industries employers' perspectives on skills initiatives: 2025' is published by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, which is led by Newcastle University with the Royal Society of Arts and funded by the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

The report authors are Lesley Giles, Director of Work Advance and Heather Carey, Director of Work Advance.

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

Press contacts are Alice Kent alice.kent@pec.ac.uk (Monday-Wednesday) and Simon Jones (Thursday - Friday) simon.jones@pec.ac.uk

Notes to editors

1. State of the Nations reports

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

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

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

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

3. About The Arts and Humanities Research Council

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

4. 'Creative industries employers' perspectives on skills initiatives: 2025' was designed by Mike Green at Green Doe Graphic Design.

