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# **Curriculum Review Call for Evidence**

**Submission from the  
Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre**

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## Introduction

This document contains Creative PEC's limited response to the Curriculum Review. While our work has not historically looked at curriculum issues in detail, we believe in the importance of creativity to a balanced curriculum. Our response therefore draws on our work around diversifying the talent pipeline into the creative and cultural sectors, as well as the importance of a definition of creativity that acknowledges its importance across domains and subjects.

## Responses

### **12. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation (class ceilings) for learners experiencing socio-economic disadvantage?**

Working class people are significantly underrepresented in the creative industries, accounting for just 27% of the creative industries workforce versus 40% of the wider economy<sup>1</sup>. Of the nine subsectors that comprise the creative industries, only Crafts perform better than the workforce average.

There is evidence that this socioeconomic disadvantage begins at school, with pupils from working class backgrounds being less likely to participate in creative subjects at GCSE level<sup>2</sup>. The participation gap in different creative subjects (i.e. the percentage point difference between the entry of non-disadvantaged and disadvantaged pupils within a given subject, divided by the percentage entry of non-disadvantaged pupils) is 20.1% for music, 15.9% for drama, 14% for Arts and Design, and 12.7% for Media, Film and TV Studies<sup>3</sup>.

The Creative PEC also has qualitative evidence indicating that working class pupils lack visible role models in creative careers, with a recurrent theme being that creative jobs are not for "people like me". These perceptions are reinforced by individuals in positions of influence, including parents, teachers and careers advisers<sup>4</sup>.

These inequalities at school mirror structural inequalities later on in Higher Education this matters because around three quarters of people working in the creative industries are educated to degree-level or equivalent, much greater than in the rest of the economy. As the Making the Creative Majority (2023) report commissioned by the APPG for Creative Diversity puts it: "a degree will not guarantee an individual a job in the creative industries,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/PEC-GWR-Job-quality-in-the-Creative-Industries-v7.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/PEC-and-ScreenSkills-report-Screened-Out-FINAL-April-2021.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/PEC-and-ScreenSkills-report-Screened-Out-FINAL-April-2021.pdf>; see also the data in <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/PEC-report-Social-mobility-in-the-Creative-Economy-Sept-2021.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/PEC-and-ScreenSkills-report-Screened-Out-FINAL-April-2021.pdf>

but an individual is unlikely to get a creative industries job without a degree.”<sup>5</sup> The same piece of research shows that over half of all applications (57%), offers (58%) and acceptances (57%) onto creative degrees are from those with a managerial or professional background, compared to around 20% for those from intermediate or semi-routine/routine backgrounds. These findings have recently been reinforced in a report from the Sutton Trust, which shows that the proportion of intake of working-class students (NS-SEC VI-VIII) to Russell Group institutions into creative degrees is 11%, vs 37% from upper middle class backgrounds (NS-SEC I)<sup>6</sup>.

Given that working class individuals are less likely to go to university in the first place to study *any* subject, the issue of their representation in creative industries roles is thus compounded.

Data from the Creative PEC on Further Education (FE) in England for those aged 19+ shows that enrolments in creative vocational courses were down by nearly a third (31%) in 2022/23 compared to 2014/15, though creative apprenticeship enrolments have risen by around 29% in the same period – though the absolute numbers remain very low at just under 23,000 in 2022/23<sup>7</sup>.

Given there is evidence that vocational education can be a valuable instrument in diversifying the workforce, the government's pausing of the proposed winding down of BTECs is welcome given that many working-class pupils take these vocational qualifications on their journey into higher education and beyond<sup>8</sup>. BTECs remain especially relevant for high-growth, digital creative sectors like videogames and thus provide an important pathway for pupils wishing to pursue well-paid, technology-oriented careers<sup>9</sup>.

Raising regional growth rates while reducing levels of socioeconomic inequality requires a skills system that is responsive to both local learner and employer needs. Research highlights how better engagement between schools, industry and local government can have a transformative effect on learners from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly in the context of the UK's creative clusters which are engines of creative industries growth<sup>10</sup>.

International examples are particularly valuable in this context, for example, Rotterdam City Council's BRIDGE project that actively encouraged young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to apply for vocational pathways in growing parts of the regional economy<sup>11</sup>. BRIDGE saw the local council working closely with industry to partner with schools and

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/resources/reports/making-the-creative-majority-2023/making-the-creative-majority-policy-recommendations.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/A-Class-Act.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Creative-Further-Education-in-the-Four-Nations-Creative-PEC-State-of-the-Nations-report-1.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> See <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/PEC-and-ScreenSkills-report-Screened-Out-FINAL-April-2021.pdf> and <https://www.smf.co.uk/half-white-working-class-black-british-students-england-get-university-vocational-qualifications-btecs/#:~:text=In%20the%20north%2Deast%2C%2035,children%20progressing%20to%20higher%20education>

<sup>9</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Improving-young-peoples-access-progression-in-work-in-Film-TV-and-games-PEC-Mission-44.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Beyond-growth-promoting-inclusive-development-of-creative-clusters-in-the-UK-Creative-PEC-Research-Report-July-2024.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Beyond-growth-promoting-inclusive-development-of-creative-clusters-in-the-UK-Creative-PEC-Research-Report-July-2024.pdf>

raise awareness of the changing world of work and skills demands. They also engaged directly with parents and young people to provide careers resources and mentoring. The Creative PEC's Beyond Growth report also showcases other similar initiatives from Skillnet in the Republic of Ireland to Switzerland's VET system<sup>12</sup>.

Research shows how support for pupils looking to make it into the creative industries, such as careers guidance, can be especially challenging to navigate, including in potential high-growth sub-sectors like screen and videogames. Ensuring that industry and different levels of government work closely together is therefore crucial for making the full range of opportunities available<sup>13</sup>.

The Creative PEC's Social Mobility in the Creative Economy report highlights that rebuilding local institutional infrastructure to support creative education will be key, 'providing long-term investment in local brokerage agencies, such as Bridge Organisations, Cultural Education Partnerships, and Creativity Collaboratives in England, that provide a vital link and support coordination between schools and local arts and culture organisations'<sup>14</sup>.

The same report also advocates for investing in a network of Creative Learning Centers in 'under-served' areas, with the aim of providing free, local public spaces 'for children to be creative and engage in cultural activities.' Existing models that could be adapted include the Digital Schoolhouse and Northern Ireland Creative Learning Centres. Finally, while the Arts Premium was never implemented, a similar funding model should at least be explored to cover 'social mobility cold spots.'

### **13. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation which may disproportionately impact pupils based on other protected characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnicity)?**

Research shows that those from minority ethnic backgrounds are significantly underrepresented in most creative industries sub-sectors with the exception of, IT, Software and Computer Services, despite the fact that these sectors tend to cluster around more ethnically diverse parts of the UK<sup>15</sup>. For example, the percentage point difference in representation compared to the wider economy is -6% for Crafts, -5% for Music, Performing and Visual Arts, and -2% for Screen. Given that those from minority ethnic backgrounds are also underrepresented at university, and that having a degree is almost a prerequisite for a creative career (as noted in Q12 above), it is clear that there is a pipeline issue with its roots in school-age education<sup>16</sup>. 82% of applications, offers and acceptances to HE-level creative courses in UCAS 2022 were from White pupils, compared to around 6% for Asian and Black pupils<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Improving-young-peoples-access-progression-in-work-in-Film-TV-and-games-PEC-Mission-44.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/PEC-report-Social-mobility-in-the-Creative-Economy-Sept-2021.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/PEC-GWR-Job-quality-in-the-Creative-Industries-v7.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/resources/reports/making-the-creative-majority-2023/making-the-creative-majority-policy-recommendations.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/resources/reports/making-the-creative-majority-2023/making-the-creative-majority-full-report-2023.pdf>

Our own research has indicated that there may also be a benefit to improving representation of minority ethnic (and other minoritized) creators in the classroom through partnership with creative firms and practitioners, allowing pupils to see themselves in potential creative career paths<sup>18</sup>. The Runnymede Trust has also highlighted this through their recent report on Race and Inclusion in Secondary Arts Education by calling for strengthening partnerships between galleries and schools in the context of arts education, not to mention ensuring that curricula represent diverse artists and voices<sup>19</sup>. Creative PEC research has also called for the development of a network of 'industry ambassadors' from diverse backgrounds to represent bring creative careers to life, potentially leveraging existing programmes such as Discover Creative Careers, Speakers for Schools and the BFI's Skills Clusters<sup>20</sup>.

#### **14. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers in continuing to improve attainment, progress, access or participation for learners with SEND?**

There is evidence that SEND pupils disproportionately pursue creative subjects. Our Creative Further Education report shows that disabled people in England are more likely to be taking creative subjects during post-compulsory education, with 27% of learners in creative further education (age 19+) taking creative subjects, compared to 22% of the wider FE population<sup>21</sup>. This is particularly noticeable for Arts, Media and Publishing subjects (33%) and Languages, Literature and Culture (28%). There is also similar evidence in creative higher education, with HESA data showing just under 20% of students with disabilities taking creative degrees, versus 15% for the wider student population, though outcomes for disabled graduates after graduation remain low compared to non-disabled peers<sup>22</sup>.

In contrast, recent analysis of audiences and workforce in arts, culture and heritage subsectors found that disabled people were more likely to say that they have not engaged in any arts activities in the DCMS Participation Survey, though this varied significantly depending on the type of activity<sup>23</sup>. However, consistent with the education figures above, the report found that a slightly higher proportion of workers in arts, culture and heritage subsectors reported having a disability, at 21% vs 18% of the wider workforce.

This research should be taken as incomplete however, as there is no solid evidence on why disabled people are seemingly more likely to opt for creative pathways, though there is indication that some neurodiverse people (such as those with ADHD) may have a particular propensity for creative thought<sup>24</sup>. While it is tempting to suggest that creative subjects may be more attractive to disabled pupils for reasons inherent to the subjects

<sup>18</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/PEC-report-Enhancing-Creative-Education-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> [https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/61488e50132da098d2dd729b/65e6182ba9a49e6d304e16a8\\_Visualise-Race%20and%20Inclusion%20in%20Secondary%20School%20Art%20Education\\_Master\\_Digital.pdf](https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/61488e50132da098d2dd729b/65e6182ba9a49e6d304e16a8_Visualise-Race%20and%20Inclusion%20in%20Secondary%20School%20Art%20Education_Master_Digital.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Improving-young-peoples-access-progression-in-work-in-Film-TV-and-games-PEC-Mission-44.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Improving-young-peoples-access-progression-in-work-in-Film-TV-and-games-PEC-Mission-44.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Creative-Further-Education-in-the-Four-Nations-Creative-PEC-State-of-the-Nations-report-1.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/resources/reports/making-the-creative-majority-2023/making-the-creative-majority-full-report-2023.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <https://umusic.co.uk/Creative-Differences-Handbook.pdf>

themselves, it is also possible that they end up on these pathways for other reasons, such as encouragement from authority figures. Disentangling this will be important for constructing good policy interventions for disabled pupils taking creative (and non-creative) subjects in order to ensure that pathways remain equitable.

### **31.To what extent do the current curriculum (at primary and secondary) and qualifications pathways (at secondary and 16-19) ensure that pupils and learners are able to develop creative skills and have access to creative subjects?**

There is now an extensive body of evidence showing that creativity, problem solving, and original thinking are fundamental skills that are increasingly valued by employers<sup>25</sup>. As employer demands change in the face of rapid and disruptive technological process, it is vital that creativity is placed alongside literacy, numeracy and digital literacy as foundational to a well-rounded education<sup>25</sup>.

Creative skills are in high demand from employers in the whole workforce<sup>26</sup> and skills shortages remain a consistent problem for creative firms, with recent research highlighting that 24% of creative industries firms' vacancies were due to skills deficiencies<sup>27</sup>. This problem is likely to get worse due to increasing skills demand, with organisations like the BFI highlighting that High-End TV production alone would require between 15,130 and 20,770 additional employers by 2025<sup>28</sup>.

Participating in creative subjects will not only serve to prepare pupils for the creative economy, it is also shown to improve cognitive ability and character traits like resilience which are increasingly important<sup>29</sup>. While creativity is traditionally associated with artistic and technical subjects (art, design and technology, dance, drama and media studies), it can and should be seen as a fundamental skill in all subjects, including STEM<sup>30</sup>. Indeed, research has found that there is a positive relationship between creativity and solid groundings in foundational subjects like literacy and numeracy<sup>31</sup>.

Analysis of the UK job market has highlighted that creativity is projected to be an increasingly important skill and jobs requiring creative skills will likely grow as a percentage of the workforce by 2030<sup>32</sup>. Of the 39 transferable skills identified by our researchers, the mention of "creativity" in job specifications is the most significant predictor of an occupation's chance of growing. Crucially, creative skills are not the preserve of "traditional" creative work and will be important across the economy.

Despite a wider understanding that creative skills are integral to the future of work, the

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[the\\_future\\_of\\_skills\\_employment\\_in\\_2030\\_0.pdfhttps://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_FOW\\_Reskilling\\_R evolution.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_FOW_Reskilling_R evolution.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> [https://pec.ac.uk/research\\_report\\_enr/creativity-and-the-future-of-skills/](https://pec.ac.uk/research_report_enr/creativity-and-the-future-of-skills/)

<sup>27</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/PEC-Skills-Monitor-FINAL-July-2020.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.bfi.org.uk/industry-data-insights/reports/bfi-skills-review-2022>

<sup>29</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/PEC-report-Enhancing-Creative-Education-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> [https://pec.ac.uk/blog\\_entries/differences-in-creativity-across-art-and-stem-we-are-more-alike-than-unalike/](https://pec.ac.uk/blog_entries/differences-in-creativity-across-art-and-stem-we-are-more-alike-than-unalike/)

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1871187111000447> and

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ750778.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Creativity-and-the-Future-of-Skills-report.pdf>



past decade has seen creativity effectively “expunged” from the curriculum in England<sup>33</sup>. The neglect of creativity is a policy choice, one that is reflected, for example, in the previous government's decision not to participate in the OECD's worldwide PISA Creative Thinking assessment in 2022, which sought to understand students' capacity for creativity in their work. A total of 64 countries participated in the study, which was the first to comprehensively and scientifically assess creative thinking among school-age pupils<sup>33</sup>. The systems in countries including Finland, South Korea and Canada demonstrate creative thinking well above the OECD average and across OECD countries a positive correlation was found between high performance in creativity and high performance in literacy, numeracy and science<sup>34</sup>.

Creative PEC made the case in 2019 for the UK's participation in the study, arguing that creative thinking skills like problem solving and original thinking are increasingly in high demand from employers<sup>35</sup>. However, none of the four UK nations opted to take part in the study, with the result that there is a significant gap in our understanding of where the UK's education system fits internationally when it comes to the development of creative thinking among its young people. This sits at odds with politicians' stated ambitions for the creative industries and the UK's international competitiveness.

While the PISA study has been completed, the UK should undertake its own study, modelled on the methodology on the OECD's, thereby permitting cross-country comparability. This would provide a further analytical foundation to work from in building a creative curriculum fit for the future based on a current understanding of pupil's capabilities.

Ensuring that pupils have access to good-quality creative education will be crucial for building the talent pipeline into creative careers. The past fifteen years has seen a decline in the number of pupils taking creative subjects at both KS4 and KS5, including drama, music and design and technology<sup>36</sup>, and similar trends can be observed for Further Education<sup>37</sup>. As Nesta, Ian Livingstone and Alex Hope argued in their landmark Next Gen skills report, reforming the EBacc to include creative subjects would remove a disincentive for pupils (and schools) and would act as an important signal to educators on the increased importance DfE and industry place on creative skills<sup>38</sup>.

While the decline in “traditional” creative subjects remains a concern, creative skills are an essential element of digital literacy and the curriculum should aim to represent “Createch” (a portmanteau of *creative* and *technological*) skills across all relevant subject domains<sup>39</sup>. In addition to their relevance to inherently tech-oriented jobs like creatives working in videogames, digital skills are increasingly of importance to other creative professions such as graphic designers, audiovisual technicians and traditional visual artists. Research by Nesta using tens of millions of job adverts highlights 20 key digital skills closely associated with creativity, which included:

<sup>33</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Creative-PEC-The-State-of-Creativity.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/765ee8c2-en.pdf?expires=1731340280&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=91B2A6F8539B4FE241FF827B43E24B53>

<sup>35</sup> [https://pec.ac.uk/blog\\_entries/an-opportunity-for-england-to-learn-about-the-creativity-of-its-people/](https://pec.ac.uk/blog_entries/an-opportunity-for-england-to-learn-about-the-creativity-of-its-people/)

<sup>36</sup> [https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Durham\\_Commission\\_on\\_Creativity\\_04112019\\_0.pdf](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Durham_Commission_on_Creativity_04112019_0.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Creative-Further-Education-in-the-Four-Nations-Creative-PEC-State-of-the-Nations-report-1.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/next-gen/>; see also

<https://www.nsead.org/news/newsroom/nsead-survey-report-2015-16/>; see also

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/14740222231156893>

<sup>39</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/The-Creative-Digital-Skills-Revolution-the-PEC-and-Nesta-24-Oct-2019.pdf>

- A suite of Adobe programmes (Photoshop, InDesign, Illustrator, Creative Suite)
- Graphic design
- Creative design
- Typesetting
- Digital design
- Animation
- Website design
- Motion graphics
- Video editing
- Photography
- Video production
- Cinema 4D<sup>40</sup>

The Creative PEC is undertaking new research using online job adverts to investigate the demand for creative skills brought about by the rapid adoption of Generative AI tools which we will feed into the second phase of the Curriculum Review in 2025.

Creative PEC research has also focused on issues of access to creative learning. Recent consultation with creatives as part of our work on the Northern Creative Corridor with the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), for example, highlighted two areas where the curriculum may currently be disadvantaging pupils pursuing creative pathways. Stakeholders emphasised that the move toward traditional end-point assessment across the curriculum at KS4 is at odds with the portfolio work common in creative sectors<sup>41</sup>. We also heard that there was a perceived disconnect between what creative subjects currently teach and what is expected in creative industries jobs, a skills mismatch that has been identified in our large-scale quantitative work as well<sup>42</sup>.

Our Enhancing Creative Education report presents survey and qualitative evidence that close collaboration between schools and local creative firms and/or individual practitioners can help to strengthen creative pathways in schools<sup>43</sup>. This report contains a number of different case studies showing best practice in creative education, demonstrating that pathways are especially effective when teachers can leverage external expertise, for example:

- Camden STEAM Hub: connected art teachers with local employers, student interns and STEM teachers to design classes and share resources.
- This is Creative Enterprise (TICE): gives pupils the opportunity to participate in different projects focused on different creative careers, including music, photography and animation.
- Video Games Ambassadors: a network of games industry professionals who provide in-school support to pupils interested in videogames

Raising awareness of such programmes and the effectiveness of direct school engagement with industry should sit alongside any changes made to the curriculum. Leveraging these links may also go some way to helping ensure availability of T-Level placements at KS5.

<sup>40</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/The-Creative-Digital-Skills-Revolution-the-PEC-and-Nesta-24-Oct-2019.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Insights-from-the-Northern-Creative-Corridor-Workshops-Creative-PEC-Policy-Brief-July-2024.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/PEC-Skills-Monitor-FINAL-July-2020.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/PEC-report-Enhancing-Creative-Education-FINAL.pdf>



## About Creative PEC

The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC) supports the growth of the creative industries in the UK and internationally through the provision of authoritative research and policy advice. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and hosted by Newcastle University with the Royal Society of Arts, Creative PEC works with policymakers and industry to enable a thriving sector that plays a central role in generating growth and innovation. Our research is led by consortium partners at Newcastle University, the University of Sheffield, the University of Sussex, and Work Advance.

For more details visit [www.pec.ac.uk](http://www.pec.ac.uk) or our social channels on [Bluesky](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

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### **For further information please contact:**

Bernard Hay, Head of Policy, [bernard.hay@pec.ac.uk](mailto:bernard.hay@pec.ac.uk).