# CREATIVE INDUSTRIES SKILLS AUDITS

## Creative Industries Summary Report

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Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre
Led by Newcastle University Business School with RSA

work advance

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## 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 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,**
**creative-pec** and **creativepec.bsky.social**

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As ever, any errors or omissions remain the responsibility of the authors.

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# Executive summary

**Throughout the course of 2025 and early 2026, the Creative PEC and Work Advance collaborated on a UK-wide skill audit process for the creative industries – a 'first of its kind' study seeking to systematically examine the most pressing skills challenges and skills priorities of creative employers across eleven different creative sub-sectors. The overarching aim of the study has been to provide an evidence base to enable the creative industries to speak with a united voice on current and future skills needs; the most pressing skills shortages and gaps; and the barriers and enablers creative employers face with workforce upskilling.**

Through the Creative Industries Skills Audits we have reviewed hundreds of reports, examined thousands of data points and embarked on a wide-scale programme of engagement, seeking to foster a genuine discussion across the industry on what jobs and what skills will be needed for future growth and what measures would ensure these are better developed in the skills system and through upskilling in creative workplaces and among the creative workforce.

The primary focus of this research has been on the demand for skills in the creative industries. At the centre of the study sits new primary research – the Creative Employer Skills Survey (CESS) – through which we have explored the views of over 1,300 creative employers across the UK. This survey provided robust and up-to-date evidence on the recruitment difficulties and skills shortages firms faced when hiring employees or freelancers, where they see skills gaps among their existing workforce, and how they expect jobs and skills needs to evolve in future.

However, what really sets the study apart is the process of validation and enrichment the research team has worked through, with the Project Board including the Creative Industries Council (CIC), Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Skills England; with a wider Steering Group, comprised of representatives of each creative sub-sector and UK nation; and through four national and eleven sub-sectoral roundtables. In total, we have engaged over 200 employers, freelancers, policymakers and industry stakeholders from across the UK. The value of these activities has been immeasurable, ensuring the Skills Audits present an evidence-based, industry-backed picture of the most pressing concerns in each sub-sector.

The conclusions drawn from this process operate on two levels.

First, a key aim of the Skills Audit process has been to provide granular and detailed insights on the critical jobs and skills needed in different creative sub-sectors and to present this in a consistent and comparable manner. This offers rich, 'bottom-up' Labour Market Information (LMI) to complement the national data and research being progressed by Skills England and LMI partners in the devolved nations. These detailed level findings are set out in the eleven sub-sector Skills Audits available to download here and through many of the detailed tables and charts presented in this report.

But another core purpose of the Skills Audits has been to look across the eleven sub-sector Skills Audits to draw higher-level conclusions about what, together, they tell us about the current picture of skills challenges across the creative industries, about what will matter most in future, and about what needs to shift – in the skills system and in industry practice – to ensure that the creative industries are equipped with the talent and skills for future growth.

This is the focus of this Creative Industries Summary Report, where we identify five key insights and five key priorities for ensuring the creative industries have the skills needed for growth. Together, these actions mark nothing short of a reorientation of the skills system to better align with the needs of the creative industries and a new chapter of partnership between government, industry and educators, working together to develop the talent and the skills the creative industries need to drive productivity, innovation and growth in the years ahead.

# Five key takeaways from the Creative Industries Skills Audits

## 1 Skills matter most

The creative industries require an alchemy of technical, digital, transversal and business critical skills.[1] In 2025, one third (32%) of creative industries employers that had recruited in the past two years reported difficulties filling vacancies, and most commonly this was due to candidates lacking this vital mix of skills, rather than specific qualifications. Further, while sometimes the skills that are hardest to find are highly specialised technical skills or advanced digital skills, the Skills Audits often find the problem is a lack of vital transversal or critical business skills.

**72%** of employers with hard-to-fill vacancies suggest the main cause was candidates lacking the skills required for the role. **19%** point to a lack of qualifications.

## 2 The skills half-life is short

The pace of change, and particularly innovation and technological advancement, means the skills needs of the creative industries evolve rapidly. This is driving skills gaps among the existing workforce and future upskilling needs. Employers across the sector widely expect a need to upgrade workforce skills – including technical, digital, transversal and critical business skills – in response to new technology, not least AI, and to achieve their organisation's sustainability goals.

**32%** of creative firms report skills deficiencies among their workforce and **23%** of those that do suggest skills gaps are driven by new technology.

## 3 Skills challenges are most acute at mid-career level

Despite an ongoing focus in the policy discourse on entry pathways, the Skills Audits suggest that in many creative sub-sectors, skills shortages and gaps are most acute among mid-career talent. This mid-level talent problem is often attributed to the effects of technology (including AI) and the rapid pace of career advancement in some creative sub-sectors, often without training necessary to develop the skills required in more senior roles.

**42%** of employers with skills shortages and **37%** of those with skills gaps suggest their skills challenges concern experienced staff.

1. Please see the Glossary for a definition of technical terms used throughout this report.

## 4 Skills challenges threaten to undermine growth potential

In 2025, more than four in ten (43%) employers in the creative industries reported either skills shortages or skills gaps. Among those that did, 69% suggested these skills challenges were having an impact on their business, often increasing the workload of other staff or hindering delivery capability. However, in the context of the UK Industrial Strategy, it is particularly concerning that one in five firms with skills challenges suggest these are hampering innovation and growth.

**21%** of employers with skills challenges suggest these are hindering innovation and **19%** said they were having to scale back growth or investment plans.

## 5 Structural features hinder skills investment and collaboration

A range of factors hinder skills investment and principal among them are time and cost constraints. The fast pace of the sector, the dominance of micro-sized firms and propensity for project-based, freelance work all make it difficult to cover the cost and carve out time for development. Further, while creative firms are keen to collaborate with other businesses to shape skills provision, other research suggests few achieve this in practice.

**36%** of employers lack funds for training and around **15%** suggest managers are too busy to organise training and workers lack the time to participate.

These findings place considerable onus on the skills system to meet rapidly evolving needs of the creative industries. They also point to a need for employers and workers to invest in ongoing skills development and training to ensure workforce skills remain relevant now and in the future. The Skills Audits point to five skills priorities that would help to achieve this – illustrated overleaf.

# Five skills priorities for the UK creative industries

## 1 Produce forward-looking, three-dimensional skills intelligence

The pace of change across creative sub-sectors, driven particularly by technological advancement and high levels of innovation activity, means data and insight need to be updated on a regular basis, widely disseminated and actively embedded into the decision-making processes of policymakers, providers, employers and individuals.

The development of future LMI for the sector should consider both demand side (i.e. jobs and skills needs) and supply side (i.e. skills provision) issues, the latter of which were outside the scope of this research. It should also be three-dimensional: integrating national LMI, granular sector data, and place-based skills assessments.

➤ **1A: Ensure national LMI provides regular, robust data and forecasts for the creative industries, alongside other priority sectors, as standard.**

Skills England and key LMI partners in the devolved nations should continue to strengthen and provide regular, robust data and forecasts with data disaggregated for the creative industries and, where possible, creative sub-sectors, as standard. Key data assets such as the Department for Education's Employer Skills Survey should also include questions related to the engagement of freelancers and self-employed workers.

➤ **1B: Develop a rolling programme of 'bottom-up' LMI, founded on sub-sector data collection and research, the Creative PEC's Creative Business Panel (CBP), and three-yearly Creative Industries Skills Audits.**

CIC should facilitate a robust and collaborative skills audit process for the creative industries on a three-yearly cycle, working in partnership with DCMS, national LMI partners and creative bodies, and sub-sector trade bodies and skills bodies. The Creative PEC will track a headline indicator of skills mismatches on an annual basis through the CBP.

➤ **1C: Undertake place-based assessments of creative industries skills needs in UK cities and regions to inform local skills planning.**

Local, regional and national governments should undertake place-based creative industries skills assessments which were beyond the scope of this research. This should align with the assessment of sector skills priorities underpinning Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) in England and skills assessments conducted by LMI partners in the devolved nations. The Creative PEC will also develop a new toolkit to support greater consistency and comparability in place-based Creative Industries Skills Audits.

## 2 Embed transversal, digital and sustainability skills across education and skills provision to develop the 'alchemy' of skills needed by the sector.

The creative industries require a striking mix of skills. Alongside specialist technical skills shortages, more than half (56%) of creative industries employers with skills shortages surveyed suggested applicants lacked vital transversal skills such as planning and organising. Employers also reported significant future demand for skills related to working with AI and to environmental sustainability. Critical business skills such as fundraising were also regularly highlighted in stakeholder engagement. There is a need to ensure national education and skills systems better develop the diverse blend of skills required in the sector.

### ➤ 2A: Strengthen transversal, digital and sustainability skills in schools through new resources and assessment guidelines for creative subject provision and enrichment opportunities.

National Governments and education providers should prioritise initiatives to strengthen transversal, digital and sustainability skills development in schools. In England, the UK Government should take forward recommendations from the Curriculum and Assessment Review to incorporate these in creative subject curricula, such as embedding sustainable design skills and knowledge into the Design and Technology curriculum. In addition, the National Centre for Music and Arts Education should develop resources, assessment guidance and training opportunities for teachers to embed these skills into formal learning and enrichment opportunities.

### ➤ 2B: Ensure transversal, AI and sustainability skills are more consistently embedded in creative Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE).

Training providers at FE and HE level should be supported to embed wider skills development into programmes, learning from examples of best practice such as Middlesex University's MDX Studios, West College Scotland's project-based delivery models or UAL's climate action framework. UK Government should work with industry and HE to explore opportunities to increase industry placements for teacher CPD, and work experience opportunities for learners.

### ➤ 2C: Integrate critical business skills such as sales, marketing and IP into education at every level, including through a new "Entrepreneurship Framework".

Industry-relevant business skills such as in sales and fundraising, marketing and IP, should be integrated into creative subject delivery, supported by a new 'Entrepreneurship Framework', modelled on the IP Education Framework but with a focus on embedding critical business skills across education stages.

## 3 Strengthen and diversify talent pathways into key creative industries jobs

The Creative Industries Skills Audits identified a range of occupations that will be critical to future growth in the sector, including Architects, Graphic Designers, Software Developers and Advertising Executives. Many of these occupations are subject to skills shortages today and will be in future demand. Stakeholder engagement through the skills audits process highlighted the need to strengthen a range of talent pathways into these occupations, with employers suggesting the need for more flexible forms of training.

### ➤ 3A: Safeguard and strengthen higher education (HE) for the creative industries, including more flexible, modular, industry-relevant provision.

With three-quarters of the creative workforce holding a degree or other HE qualification (DCMS, 2026), there is a need to address concerns about deteriorating finances of HE providers (Office for Students, 2025). Measures include directing Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG) funding in England to creative courses and ensuring creative modules at levels 4-6 are eligible for the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE).

### ➤ 3B: Maximise the potential for technical education reforms to diversify pathways and unlock more funding and investment in skills.

CIC and industry stakeholders should assess how current developments in the English skills system can be best leveraged for the sector, such as through expanding apprenticeships in areas such as Crafts and Music and developing new Apprenticeship Units in areas such as Sustainable Design and in relevant applications of AI. The UK Government should also work with industry to mitigate potential risks with current reforms to post-16 technical and vocational qualifications, including the 'switching-off' valued routes into the creative industries such as Applied General Qualifications and de-funding of Level 7 Apprenticeships, including Management Apprenticeships, which provide valued routes into priority occupations in subsectors such as Architecture, Tech and Advertising and Marketing.

### ➤ 3C: Widen the talent pool from which creative industries employers' recruit, including young people, those disadvantaged in the labour market and diverse talent.

The socio-demographic profile of the creative industries workforce still does not reflect the diversity of the UK population, and the Skills Audits highlight the ongoing use of informal recruitment methods which are known to reinforce inequalities (Carey, Giles & O'Brien, 2023). For instance, 46% of creative employers surveyed rely on word-of-mouth to recruit. Employers must continue to adopt more open and inclusive recruitment practices and give equal parity of esteem to technical routes, adhere to the Standards set out by the Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority (CIISA) and engage in the Good Work Industry Support programme as part of the government-industry response to the Creative PEC Good Work Review.

### ➤ 3D: Preserve immigration routes that enable employers to respond to temporary shortages and access the brightest international talent.

Data from this and subsequent Creative Industries Skills Audits should continue to play an important role in informing decisions about the inclusion of occupations in the Migration Advisory Committee's Temporary Shortage List, with the Skills Audits highlighting skills challenges and future demand in relevant occupations such as Marketing Associate Professionals and Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators. In addition, stakeholders engaged highlighted the need to preserve important visa routes into jobs in the sector, such as the Innovation Founder, Global Talent Visa and Skilled Worker Visa.

## 4 Precision upskilling that drives innovation and growth

While efforts to strengthen education pathways into the creative industries are important, the prevalence of skills shortages and gaps at mid- and senior-level found in the Skills Audits suggest a need to reorient focus in the skills system towards retention, progression and upskilling of the existing workforce. The productivity dividend associated with precision upskilling of the creative workforce – highly-targeted training, coupled with management development that can ensure these skills are put to good use in the workplace – could be substantial.

### ➤ 4A: Improve signposting and kitemarking of high-quality, industry-recognised training that offers maximum return on skills investment.

30% of employers surveyed in the Skills Audits suggested kitemarking and accreditation would enable them to offer more training in future, highlighting a need for clearer signposting of industry-recognised or certified training. The Creative Industries Council should work with industry trade bodies and sector skills bodies to further expand and promote alignment between existing industry certification and kitemarking of quality-assured CPD, promoting shared standards, branding and resources, including a single 'shop window' for accessing industry-endorsed training.

### ➤ 4B: Foster a stronger, more strategic focus on talent management, skills activation and developing a learning culture within creative firms.

While many creative firms are already taking important steps to develop their workforce, there is scope for this practice to become more widespread and for a more strategic and impactful approach to upskilling the workforce. Sector bodies should develop new Skills Toolkits to help employers diagnose workforce development needs and training options. DCMS should work in partnership with the CIC and place-based partners in key creative clusters to co-design a new, subsidised "Skills 4 Growth" management programme focused on future talent management, skills activation and fostering a learning culture in organisations.

### ➤ 4C: Empower creative workforce upskilling through clearer competency frameworks, stronger careers guidance, and new Skills Passports.

Sector bodies should curate a package of support to empower the creative industries workforce – employees and freelancers – to invest in their skills throughout their careers, including clearer competency frameworks and stronger careers guidance. The development of Skills Passports, as set out in the Creative Industries Sector Plan, will provide the vital digital infrastructure to enable learners to recognise and record industry-recognised training, and should be extended to capture learning activities that strengthen technical, digital, business critical and sustainability skills.

## 5 Strengthen partnership working between government, education and industry

The Skills Audits find that nearly four in ten creative industry employers are keen to collaborate with other businesses and providers to develop relevant provision, but only one in ten achieve this in practice. The potential benefits of unlocking the appetite for collaboration evident amongst creative industries employers are considerable but will require substantive shift in the institutional landscape and a new chapter of genuine partnership between government, education and industry.

### ➤ 5A: Commission an independent review of skills governance arrangements for the creative industries.

CIC and DCMS should review skills governance arrangements and institutions in the creative industries, examining the existing landscape of sector bodies and exploring alternative options for strengthening the institutional infrastructure, with due consideration of alternative funding models that would safeguard financial sustainability, including the potential expansion of sector skills levies.

### ➤ 5B: Give the new Freelance Champion a clear mandate for skills.

Building a skills system that incentivises and enables up and reskilling amongst creative freelancers is a critical concern. The Freelance Champion should work with Sector Bodies to curate a coherent package of interventions needed to support a step-change in skills investment, including measures that promote access to mainstream skills programmes, coupled with targeted interventions that address the distinct challenges creative freelancers face to training. There is a pressing need to review how to unlock the value of the Growth and Skills Levy (GSL) and LLE in England and wider workforce development funds and careers guidance in each UK nation.

### ➤ 5C: Develop a new Creative Industries Pact for Skills to galvanise employer investment.

The CIC should initiate a new Pact for Skills, emulating key features from the European Commission's Pact for Skills, with the dual aim of enabling the creative industries to coordinate efforts in relation to skills while demonstrating commitment to the government's growth and opportunities mission. Signatories to the Pact would commit to specific, measurable activities to advance the skills agenda, such as offering work placements, careers inspiration activities, apprenticeships, training days for staff and mentoring opportunities, for example.

### ➤ 5D: Develop new Technical Excellence Networks to address advanced technical skills.

Partnerships between industry employers and education providers in specific places can help to create more agile, responsive skills systems. National governments should develop and fund a new suite of place-based Technical Excellence Networks to address advanced technical skill areas such as createch, green design, sustainable fashion, technical production, screen heritage and AI.

In England, the networks could feature new Technical Excellence Colleges but connected with HE institutions to reflect the higher-level skills needs of the creative sector. These Technical Excellence Networks could undertake horizon scanning and foresighting to identify emerging skills needs; pioneer new technical pathways from levels 3 to 7; develop targeted short courses to support precision upskilling of the creative industries workforce; offer Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teaching professionals; and facilitate place-based teacher-industry exchange schemes.

# 1 Introduction

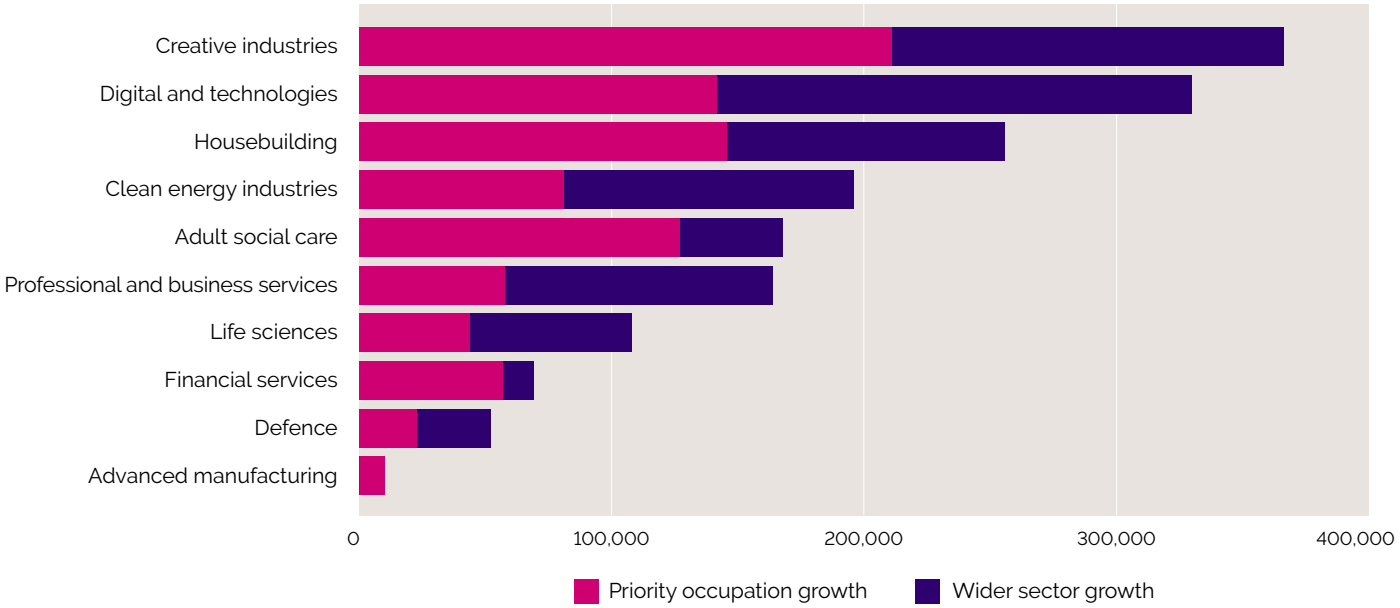
## 1.1 Background

**The UK's creative industries have been a major driver of economic growth over the past decade. According to DCMS, employment in the creative industries grew at around four times the rate of the UK economy and generated an additional 600,000 jobs between 2014 and 2024 (DCMS, 2025d). This growth reflects the global competitiveness of UK creative content and services, alongside continued innovation across areas such as screen, music, design, advertising and emerging digital formats.**

As a result, the creative industries are firmly embedded as a priority sector across the UK's economic policy landscape. They are identified as one of eight priority sectors in the UK government's Industrial Strategy and the accompanying Creative Industries Sector Plan sets out their role in driving productivity, exports and regional growth (UK Government, 2025b, 2025c). Devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland similarly position the creative industries as central to their economic strategies, recognising their contribution not only to economic output but also to cultural identity, soft power and the UK's global trade balance (Northern Ireland Executive, 2022; Scottish Government, 2023; Welsh Government, 2023).

Skills and talent are fundamental to sustaining this success. The creative industries are highly skills-intensive, relying on a workforce that combines technical expertise, creative capability and entrepreneurialism. Demand for labour is projected to increase significantly in the coming years. Skills England projections suggest that the creative industries will require nearly 366,000 additional workers between 2025 and 2030 – exceeding demand in sectors such as housebuilding, digital and technology, and adult social care, and far surpassing life sciences and advanced manufacturing (Skills England, 2025b). A substantial proportion of these roles are expected to be in priority occupations and require high-level skills, underlining the sector's dependence on a highly skilled workforce.

**Figure 1.1: Additional employment demand projections, 2025-2030**
Skills England planning scenarios based on sector-level projections




Source: (Skills England, 2025b)

Notes: Sector-level projections are based on differing assumptions and some sector definitions overlap (including creative industries and digital and technologies). These estimates should be treated as indicative and with caution.

Yet there is growing evidence that skills shortages and gaps are already constraining the sector. Research by the Creative PEC finds that 65% of hard-to-fill vacancies in the creative industries are attributable to skills shortages, compared with 41% across the wider economy, with shortages particularly acute in high-skilled roles (Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025). Skills England's skills assessment for the creative industries highlights a range of structural challenges underpinning these shortages, including rapid technological change, fragmented training pathways, underinvestment in workforce development, and persistent barriers to entry and progression that limit the diversity and supply of talent (Skills England, 2025c). Evidence from the devolved nations reinforces this picture. In Scotland, Skills Development Scotland's Sectoral Skills Assessment for the creative industries highlights ongoing skills shortages, the need for higher-level technical and digital skills, and challenges in aligning training provision with industry needs (Skills Development Scotland, 2024). In Wales, the Creative Wales Industry Survey finds that employers report difficulties filling roles due to skills shortages, alongside gaps in sector-specific and technological skills and barriers in accessing relevant training (Creative Wales, 2025). In Northern Ireland, economy-wide evidence points to persistent skills shortages and mismatches affecting priority and emerging sectors, including the creative and digital economy (Ulster University and Department for the Economy, 2025).

With skills pinch points already posing a challenge for creative businesses, and with demand set to rise sharply, there is a risk that skills constraints could limit future growth. Addressing these challenges will require coordinated action from government, industry and the education system. Crucially, it also requires a more granular understanding of the specific jobs and skills that will be critical in the years ahead. The Creative Industries Skills Audits are designed to meet this need, providing detailed, actionable insight to inform policy, investment and workforce planning across the sector.

## 1.2 Research aims and scope

**Throughout 2025, the Creative PEC and Work Advance embarked on a UK-wide Skills Audit for the creative industries and its sub-sectors. Originally a commitment in the Creative Industries Sector Vision (DCMS and CIC, 2023), reaffirmed in the Creative Industries Sector Plan (UK Government, 2025c) and funded jointly by DCMS and CIC, the Creative Industries Skills Audits had one very clear aim: to provide an evidence base to enable the creative industries to speak with a united voice on: current and future skill needs; pressing skills shortages and gaps; and the barriers and enablers creative employers face with workforce upskilling. Within this, the Skills Audits sought to answer three research questions:**

1. What is the current picture of skills needs, shortages and gaps in different creative sub-sectors? In which occupations are skills shortages and skills gaps most acute and which skills are hardest to find? What impact are these skills shortages and gaps having on employers in these sub-sectors?
2. How are skills needs across the creative industries expected to change in future? Which occupations and skills are expected to become more important over the next three to five years? What are the underlying causes of skills challenges and what factors will drive a shift in the skills needed in different sub-sectors in the years ahead?
3. What is the current picture of employer training? What barriers do employers face to providing training for their workforce and what measures might unlock greater employer investment in skills in future?

In emulating good practice approaches to labour market assessments, the Creative Industries Skills Audits were underpinned by a robust Labour Market Framework. It was agreed during a scoping phase that the Skills Audits would focus largely on the demand-size, with selected indicators of skills mismatch, prioritising analysis of labour demand; occupational structure; current and future skills needs; drivers of change; skills shortage and gaps.

The study has been UK-wide, while recognising that skills is a devolved policy area and hence the issues, evidence, and policy context differ between the UK nations. The Skills Audits have systematically examined the evidence in eleven creative sub-sectors, utilising an adapted version of the DCMS definition of the creative industries.[2] They have considered both creative and non-creative roles in these sectors, and the broad skillsets needed to operate effectively in these roles, including technical, digital, transversal and business skills. While the Skills Audits primarily focus on employer perspectives on skills issues, the work has sought to examine skills needs, shortages and gaps among employed and self-employed workers, wherever possible.

The Skills Audits have been overseen by a Project Board comprised of the project funders, Skills England and members of the research consortium and informed by a Steering Group which included representatives of government in each UK nation and every creative sub-sector.

2. The DCMS definition has been adapted to disaggregate Video games from IT, software and computer services; and to disaggregate Music from Performing and visual arts, in response to feedback from the project Steering Group.

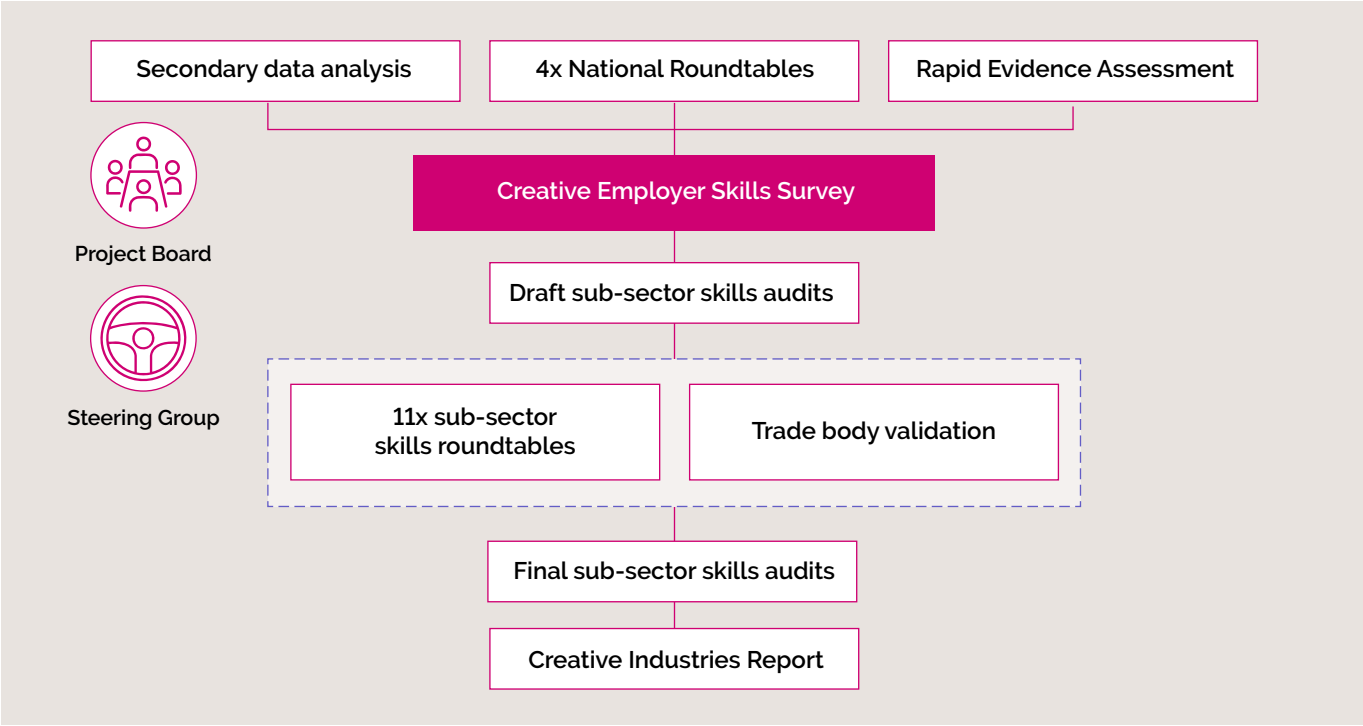
## 1.3 Research methodology

**The research team deployed a mixed-method approach to conducting the Creative Industries Skills Audits (see Figure 1.2). The work began with an analysis of government sources of LMI (or 'top-down' LMI) to provide a robust, consistent and comparable baseline, and a rapid review of evidence on skills issues across the creative industries, in different UK nations and sub-sectors, produced by government, industry stakeholders and the research community.**

At the centre of the Skills Audit process was CESS, an establishment-based, telephone survey of creative industries firms with two or more employees. Through CESS 2025 we explored the views of over 1,300 creative industries employers, touching on topics like recruitment and recruitment difficulties; skills deficiencies among the workforce; future jobs and skills needs; the impact and their response to skills challenges; and the barriers to and potential enablers of skills investment. Wherever possible, questions mirrored those used in the Department for Education's Employer Skills Survey, with adjustments made to reflect the distinct characteristics of work in the creative industries (i.e. asking employers about both employees and agency staff, self-employed or freelancer workers); to offer greater granularity and specificity on job roles and skills needs; and to maximise the number of employers responding to questions about skills challenges. This means CESS 2025 is a novel survey, not directly comparable to statistics for the whole economy or other sectors derived from other surveys. Quotas were applied to achieve minimum sample bases for firm size, sub-sector, and nations and regions. The data was then weighted so that it is representative of the creative industries population. A limitation of this data is that, due to sample size and weighting, data from CESS 2025 is presented at the UK-level only, although consideration has been given to variation across the UK nations through secondary and qualitative research undertaken as a part of the Skills Audits. Further information is set out in the Technical Annex.

Alongside the primary and secondary research was a widescale programme of engagement. This commenced with national roundtables – one in each UK nation – hosted in the spring of 2025. Yet, one of the distinctive features of the Skills Audits has been an ongoing process of dialogue with industry, facilitated by the project Steering Group. The draft findings from the Skills Audits were tested and enriched through a series of eleven sub-sector roundtables and the draft sub-sector Skills Audits were subsequently shared with Trade Body representatives on the project Steering Group for validation. This extensive process helped to both validate and enrich the Skills Audits, ensuring they captured the most pressing concerns and contextualising the findings with in-depth industry insight.

Figure 1.2: Mixed-method approach to the Creative Industries Skills Audits




## 1.4 Research outputs

**The final suite of Skills Audits are undoubtedly data-led but also draw on important sub-sector skills research and the insights from the national and sub-sector roundtables. They provide rich 'bottom-up' LMI for eleven creative sub-sectors and are available to download here.**

This Creative Industries Summary Report has sought to look across the detailed sub-sector Skills Audits to consider where there are shared issues and where there are differences. It aims to promote greater consensus on the most pressing skills challenges and the skills priorities for the future. It is structured as follows:

**Section 2**: contextualises the research by examining the overall shape and structure of the creative industries, employment trends, the distinct features of creative work, jobs and skills in the sector.

**Section 3**: explores the prevalence and patterns of skills shortages in the creative industries and the occupations and skills hardest to find in the labour market.

**Section 4**: examines skills deficiencies among the creative workforce, the skills that need improvement and the main causes of skills gaps.

**Section 5**: looks to the future, to examine employer expectations for hiring, occupations in demand, the factors driving shift in skills needs, and the skills expected to become more important in future.

**Section 6**: considers the impact of skills challenges on creative firms, the steps they are taking in response and the extent of, barriers to, and enablers of employer investment in skills.

**Section 7**: concludes by setting out five key takeaways and five skills priorities for the future.

# 2 Jobs and skills in the creative industries

## Introduction

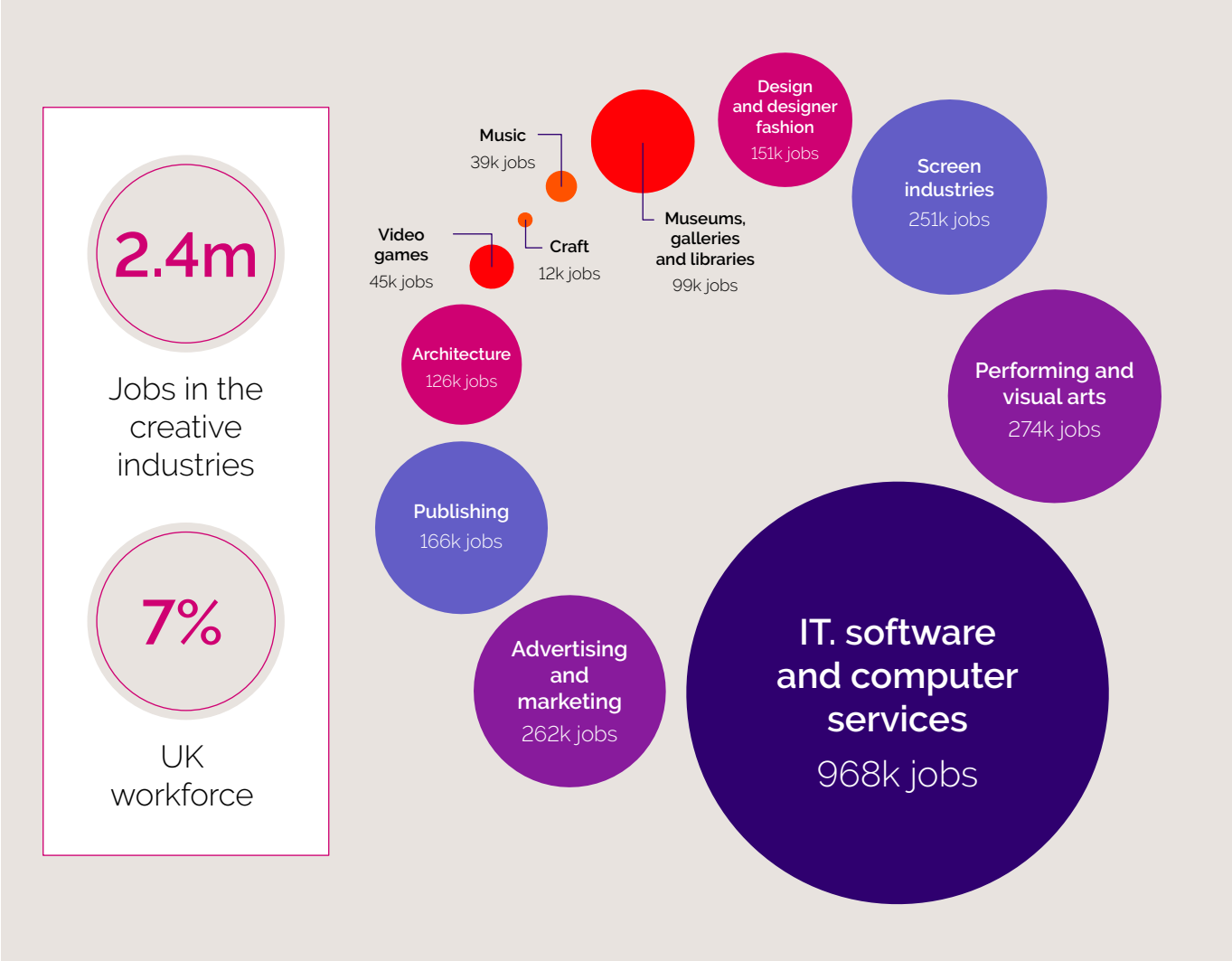
**In this first chapter, we set out key features of work in the creative industries, the jobs and skills most important in creative sub-sectors and the latest employment trends, which provide the backdrop for our assessment of current skills pinch points and future skills needs in the creative industries.**

## 2.1 Employment in the creative industries

**In 2024, the creative industries employed over 2.4 million workers – around 7% of the UK workforce. IT, software and computer services accounts for the largest share, providing nearly one million jobs: equivalent to over 40% of total creative industries employment. Three additional sub-sectors – performing and visual arts; advertising and marketing; and the screen industries – each make up over 10% of employment in the sector (DCMS, 2025d).**

These are followed by smaller sub-sectors such as publishing (166,000 jobs or 7% of the total); design and designer fashion (151,000 workers or 6%); architecture (126,000 or 5%); and museums, galleries and libraries (99,000 or 4%). The music and the video games industries each account for around 2% of the creative industries workforce. The craft sector, though officially estimated to employ just under 12,000 people, is likely undercounted due to definitional and data limitations (see TBR, 2014, for more details).

## Figure 2.1: The creative industries in 2024




Source: DCMS, 2025a

Notes: Employment is total filled jobs, including second jobs and both employees and self-employed workers in all occupations.

Employment in the creative industries has grown strongly over the past decade, expanding at around four times the pace of the wider UK economy. From 2014 to 2024, total jobs in creative sectors rose from 1.8 million to 2.4 million: an increase of 600,000 jobs, equivalent to growth of 2.9% per annum over the period, compared with 0.8% growth of the UK workforce (DCMS, 2025d).

This growth has been driven in large part by IT, software and computer services, which added 400,000 jobs over the period, equivalent to growth of 5.4% per year (see Figure 2.2). The advertising and marketing industry has also expanded significantly, with employment increasing by nearly 95,000 (4.6% annually). Other creative sub-sectors have also contributed significantly to the expansion of the creative industries. The video games industry has expanded rapidly over the period, with the number of jobs in the sector nearly doubling over the past decade, reaching 45,250 in 2024. Performing and visual arts, architecture, and the screen industries have also each created more than 20,000 jobs over this period.

However, across many of these sectors, creative firms have experienced considerable headwinds in recent years. Businesses in the advertising and marketing industry, for example, face challenging trading conditions resulting from geopolitical uncertainty, taxation changes, inflationary pressures, subdued consumer confidence and weak domestic growth (Institute of Practioners in Advertising, 2025). In the screen industries, the rapid expansion in production activity during the latter stages of the Covid-19 pandemic has been followed by sizeable economic challenges posed by strikes by the WGA and SAG-AFTRA unions in the US and cutbacks in streamer commissioning (Ampere Analysis, 2025; Screen Sectors Skills Taskforce, 2023). The global video games industry contracted in 2024 and the UK sector has not been immune, with major studios announcing job cuts, alongside longer term shifts in consumption that continue to challenge commercial models in the sector (Ukie, 2025).

Growth of jobs in museums, galleries and libraries (1.6% per annum) and design and designer fashion (1.0%) has been more muted, although still exceeding the average rate of growth across the UK workforce (0.8%), with cuts to public funding (for the former), the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit weighing heavily (Ashton et al., 2024; Di Novo and Easton, 2023; UK Fashion and Textile Association and Oxford Economics, 2023). Figures for crafts and the music industry are highly volatile, given the scale of these sectors, and hence should be treated with caution.

## Figure 2.2: Employment (total jobs), 2014-2024


Source: (DCMS, 2025d)

Notes: Employment is total filled jobs, including second jobs and including both employees and self-employed workers in all occupations. The shaded confidence band represents the plausible range around the central estimate (95% confidence interval). It reflects the uncertainty in the data: when the band widens, the estimate is less precise; when it narrows, the estimate is more reliable. Given data limitations, data is presented for the DCMS definition of Music, performing and visual arts.

## 2.2 Characteristics of work in the creative industries

**In addition to its rapid expansion, work in the creative industries is also characterised by quite distinctive patterns of employment, organisational structures, and working conditions. Indeed, many creative roles differ markedly from jobs in other sectors of the economy in terms of contract nature, work patterns, firm size, and reliance on creative talents and intellectual property. Figure 2.3 sets out some of the defining characteristics of work in the creative industries.**

Over one in four (29%) jobs in the creative industries are filled by self-employed workers: nearly double the economy-wide average of 15%. In certain sub-sectors[3] this rises dramatically: in music and in performing and visual arts, around two thirds (62% and 67%, respectively) of jobs are self-employed, as are 62% in design and designer fashion and 46% in the screen industries, often reflecting the high propensity for project-based, freelance work. By contrast, sub-sectors like architecture or IT, software and computer services have more traditional employment structures and lower self-employment rates.

The creative industries are overwhelmingly composed of micro and small businesses. In 2024, 93% of creative firms had less than ten employees: a higher proportion than across the economy (89%). Only a tiny fraction (<1%) are large firms. This is true across all creative sub-sectors, with the exception of museums, galleries and libraries, where there is an above average share of medium and large organisations (10% compared to 2% across all industries) (DCMS, 2025b).

Creative activity is highly concentrated in certain cities and regions, particularly London where three in ten of all creative jobs are located. Creative businesses also concentrate in hubs such as Manchester, Glasgow, Bristol, forming regional "creative clusters" which account for high proportions of regional creative industries employment (Siepel, Ramirez-Guerra and Rathi, 2023). However, some sub-sectors are more geographically distributed. For instance, video games development has around 80% of its workforce outside of London (TIGA, 2023), while crafts and performing arts have more presence in rural or smaller city contexts (craft studios or regional theatres). Further Creative PEC research has identified over seven hundred micro-clusters across the UK, many of which are located in smaller towns as well as in rural and coastal areas (Siepel, Ramirez-Guerra and Rathi, 2023).

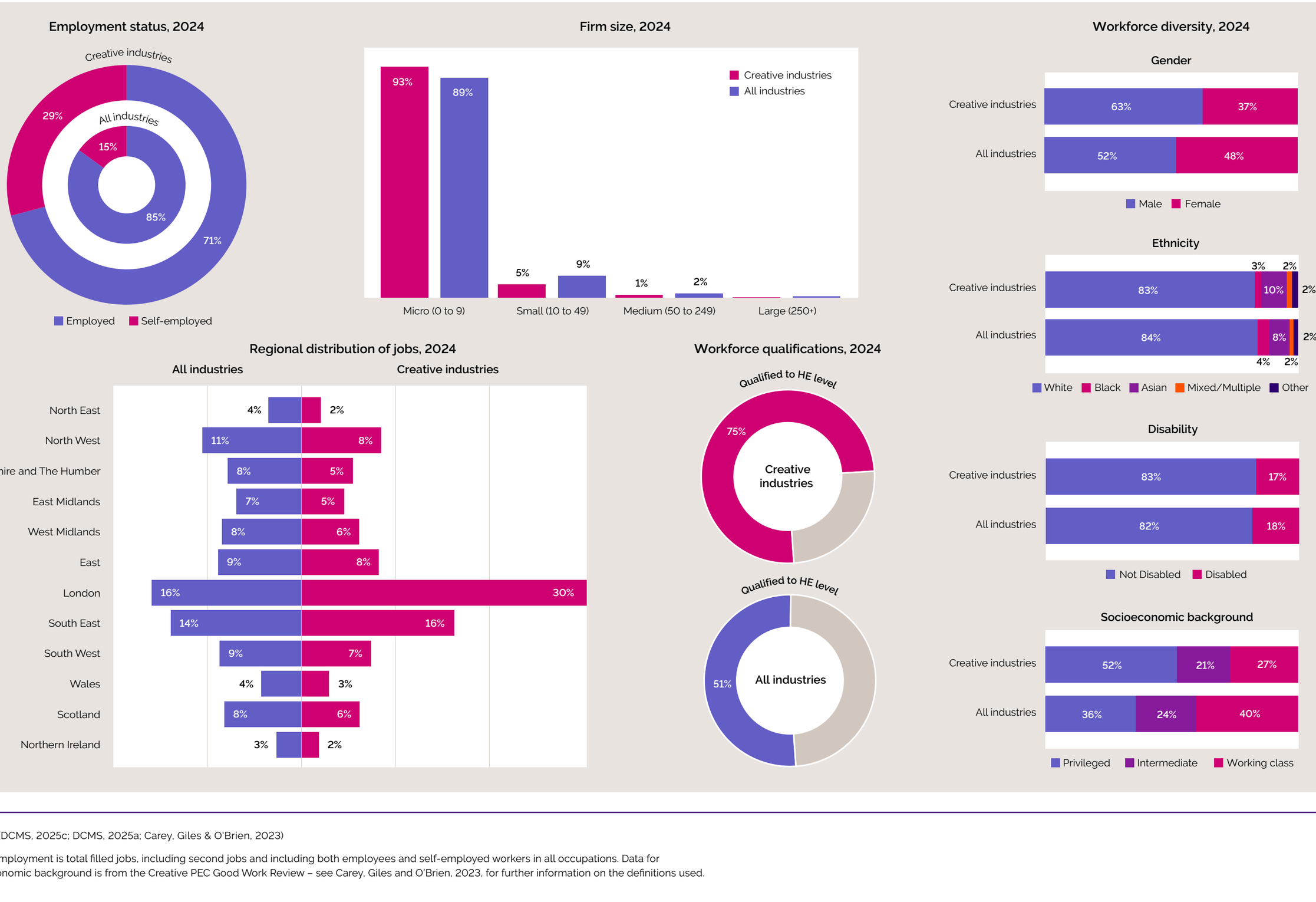
Creative roles generally demand high skills and often HE. Three quarters of jobs were filled by people with a degree or other HE qualification, compared to just over one half (51%) of jobs across the UK economy, and this is a consistent trend across creative sub-sectors. Creative workers also benefit from higher rates of pay. Average annual pay (before tax) is £42,400 in the creative industries – around one third higher than the UK average (£31,600). However, there is considerable variation between creative sub-sectors, with average rates of pay higher in IT, software and computer services; architecture; screen; advertising and marketing; and publishing, while in other sectors like music; performing and visual arts; design and designer fashion; and museums, galleries and libraries pay is much more in line with median earnings across the economy (DCMS, 2024a). Existing research also reports significant pay disparities within sub-sectors (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023).

3. Data for sub-sectors is drawn from a three-year pooled sample of the Labour Force Survey 2022–24 to enhance the statistical robustness of the data at a sub-sector level (DCMS, 2025a).

While the creative industries offer a wide and growing number of jobs, these opportunities are not equitably distributed. A lack of workforce diversity continues to be a key challenge for the sector, where disabled people and those from working class backgrounds are significantly underrepresented in the workforce, and women and people of colour are less likely to hold senior positions and also experience substantial wage differentials (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023). In addition, in some parts of the creative industries, challenges with job quality persist, particularly for creative freelancers (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023).

## Figure 2.3: Characteristics of work in the UK creative industries

% jobs




Source: (DCMS, 2025c; DCMS, 2025a; Carey, Giles & O'Brien, 2023)

Notes: Employment is total filled jobs, including second jobs and including both employees and self-employed workers in all occupations. Data for socioeconomic background is from the Creative PEC Good Work Review – see Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023, for further information on the definitions used.

## 2.3 Occupations and job roles

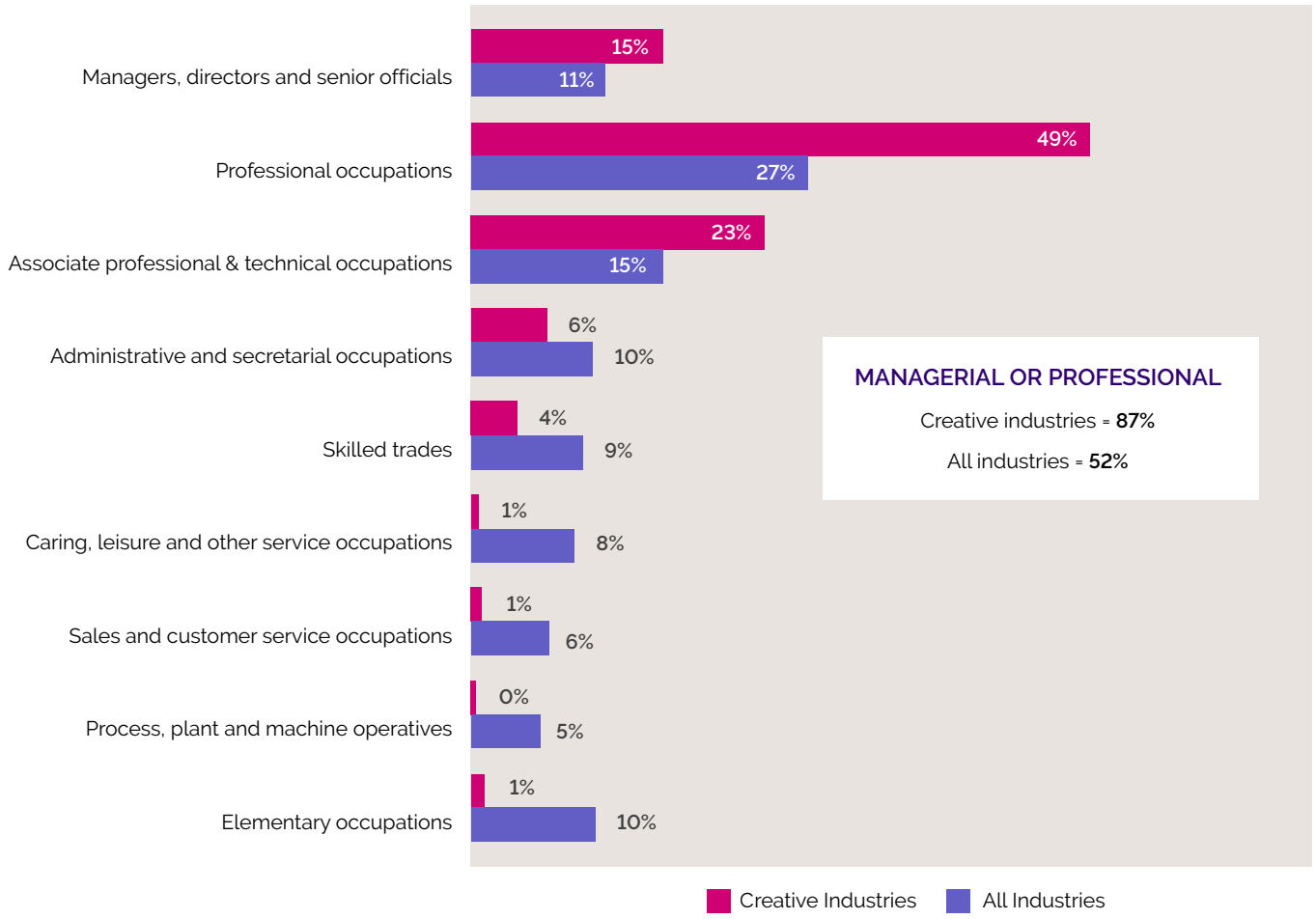
**Most of the creative workforce work in managerial, professional or associate professional jobs – 87% of creative industries workers compared to just over a half (52%) of workers across the economy (Labour Force Survey 2023). Past research suggests that around half of those working in the creative industries are employed in creative occupations, and half work in non-creative roles, for example, sales and administrative staff, project managers, HR or finance professionals (Giles, Spilsbury and Carey, 2020). Further, there are many people working in creative occupations – graphic designers, marketing professionals, digital roles, for example – that work in other sectors; the so-called "creative economy" (Giles, Spilsbury and Carey, 2020). This means that when recruiting for these roles, creative industries employers often compete with employers from other sectors for talent.**

When exploring the occupational profile of the creative industries workforce, the picture can be somewhat skewed by the dominance of the IT, software and computer service sector (see Section 2.2). While nearly all parts of the creative industries offer highly skilled, professional roles, employment can be concentrated in occupations quite specific to the industrial context.

In architecture, for example, over 40% of the workforce are employed as architects or architectural technologists. In publishing, one in four work as authors, writers and translators; in IT, 27% are programmers and software developers; in screen, 22% as Audio Visual (AV) equipment operators. There are, however, areas of commonality, for example, designers in varying forms account for a considerable share of employment in design and designer fashion but also work across many creative sub-sectors (and indeed other sectors of the economy). Figure 2.5 sets out some of the key occupations in each creative sub-sector.[4]

4. While utilising Standard Occupational Classifications (SOC) lends credibility and promotes comparability, sometimes these descriptions don't always align well with how job roles are understood in real life contexts. As such, the Creative Industries Skills Audits have utilised more granular classifications and reference specific job roles, wherever possible.

**Figure 2.4: Occupational profile of the workforce, 2023**
% workers employed in these occupational groups




Source: Labour Force Survey, 2023

Notes: Employment is total filled jobs, including second jobs and including both employees and self-employed workers.

**Figure 2.5: Top five occupations in each creative sub-sector, 2022-24**
% jobs

### Advertising and marketing

1. Marketing, sales and advertising directors (11%)
2. Marketing associate professionals (10%)
3. Public relations professionals (8%)
4. Advertising account managers and creative directors (5%)
5. Graphic and multi-media designers (4%)

### Video games

1. Programmers and software development professionals (39%)
2. Graphic and multimedia designers (8%)
3. Arts officers, producers and directors (5%)
4. IT operations technicians (4%
5. IT directors (3%)

### Screen industries

1. Photographers, AV and broadcasting equipment operators (22%)
2. Arts officers, producers and directors (21%)
3. Graphic and multimedia designers (4%)
4. Actors, entertainers and presenters (4%)
5. Managers and directors in the creative industries (3%)

### Publishing

1. Authors, writers and translators (24%)
2. Newspaper and periodical editors (11%)
3. Newspaper and periodical journalists and reporters (6%)
4. Managers and directors in the creative industries (6%)
5. Marketing, sales and advertising directors (3%)

### Music

1. Other teaching professionals
2. Dancers and choreographers
3. Managers and directors in the creative industries
4. Arts officers, producers and directors
5. Marketing, sales and advertising directors

### Archtecture

1. Architects (24%)
2. Chartered architectural technologists, planning officers (18%)
3. CAD, drawing and architectural technicians (6%)
4. IT business analysts, architects and systems designers (4%)
5. Production managers and directors in construction (3%)

### Design and designer fashion

1. Graphic and multimedia designers (27%)
2. Painters and decorators (17%)
3. Interior designers (10%)
4. Clothing, fashion & accessories designers (5%)
5. Managers and directors in the creative industries (3%)

### IT, software and computer services

1. Programmers and software development professionals (27%)
2. Other information technology professionals (8%)
3. IT directors (7%)
4. IT managers (6%)
5. IT business analysts, architects and systems designers (5%)

### Museums, galleries and libraries

1. Library clerks and assistants (13%)
2. Archivists and curators (10%)
3. Sports and leisure assistants (6%)
4. Managers and directors in the creative industries (4%)
5. Programmers and software development professionals (3%)

### Music, performing and visual arts

1. Artists (12%)
2. Musicians (11%)
3. Actors, entertainers and presenters (9%)
4. Newspaper and periodical journalists and reporters (8%)
5. Authors, writers and translators (7%)

Source: DCMS 2026

Notes: Employment is total filled jobs, including second jobs and including both employees and self-employed workers. Occupations are four-digit Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2020 codes, where figures in parenthesis represent share of the sub-sector workforce working in these occupations. Given limited sample size data presented for Music, Performing and Visual Arts and data for Craft suppressed.

## 2.4 Skills for jobs in the creative sector

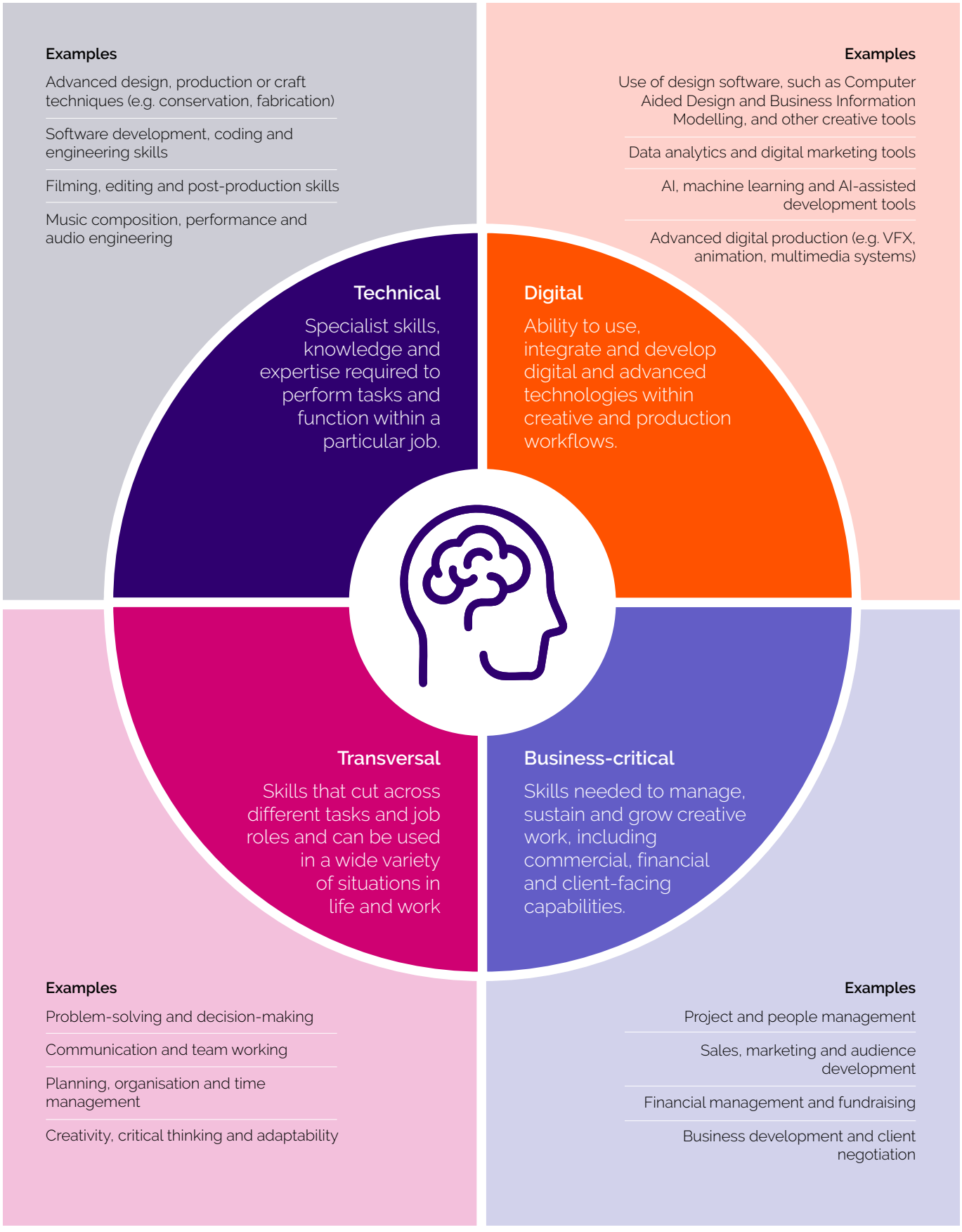
**In the context of the Creative Industries Skills Audits, a critical question is what skills are needed by those working in these roles. Often, there is a tendency to focus only on the technical skills required in different occupations, but in practice the skills needed to operate effectively in these roles are much more wide-ranging.**

In the creative industries, arguably more so than in other parts of the economy, there is a need for an alchemy of skills, combining deep technical or craft expertise with digital skills, transversal skills and business acumen. Many sub-sectors emphasise the continued importance of specialist craft and technical skills – from design, production and heritage conservation to advanced software and engineering – alongside a growing requirement to integrate these with digital tools and workflows. Employers engaged through the Skills Audit process highlighted the need for hybrid professionals, blending core creative practice with digital skills such as data, AI, and software use, reflecting the increasing fusion of creative and technological processes.

At the same time, transversal skills – particularly problem-solving, communication, collaboration and adaptability – are consistently identified as critical, underpinning the ability to work in multidisciplinary teams and respond to rapid change. Alongside these, there is strong demand for business and commercial skills, including project management, client engagement, marketing, and income generation, as creative workers are increasingly required to operate across multiple roles and functions and given the high propensity for freelance work in parts of the creative industries.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that success in the creative industries depends not on any single skillset, but on the ability to combine creative, technical, digital and commercial capabilities in integrated ways, enabling workers to navigate complex, evolving and often project-based work environments. Figure 2.6 illustrates the alchemy of skills required in the creative industries.

## Figure 2.6: The 'alchemy' of skills needed in the creative industries




Source: Authors' elaboration

# 3 Recruitment difficulties and skills shortages

## Introduction

**The rapid expansion of the creative industries coupled with the very diverse skills needs can mean finding suitable candidates to fill vacancies can be a considerable challenge for employers. Past research suggests that creative employers in all UK nations and a multitude of different sub-sectors experience recruitment difficulties, and that often this is a consequence of applicants lacking the required skills, qualifications or experience for the role (Creative Wales, 2025; DCMS, 2025e; Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025; Skills Development Scotland, 2024).**

In this section, we draw on new evidence from CESS 2025 to examine the prevalence and patterns of skills shortages across creative sub-sectors. We explore the difficulties creative employers face when recruiting, including for freelance talent, and what factors underlie hiring difficulties. Crucially, we look in-depth at the roles most affected and the skills – technical, digital and transversal – that employers are finding hardest to find when looking for talent in the external labour market.

## 3.1 Recruitment activity

**According to CESS 2025, two thirds (65%) of employers across the creative industries had recruited staff over the past two years, including paid employees, agency staff, self-employed or freelancer workers.**[5]

As would be expected, recruitment activity generally increased with firm size. For example, less than half (49%) of businesses with between two and four employees had actively recruited over the past two years compared to the vast majority (97%) of businesses with over 100 employees.

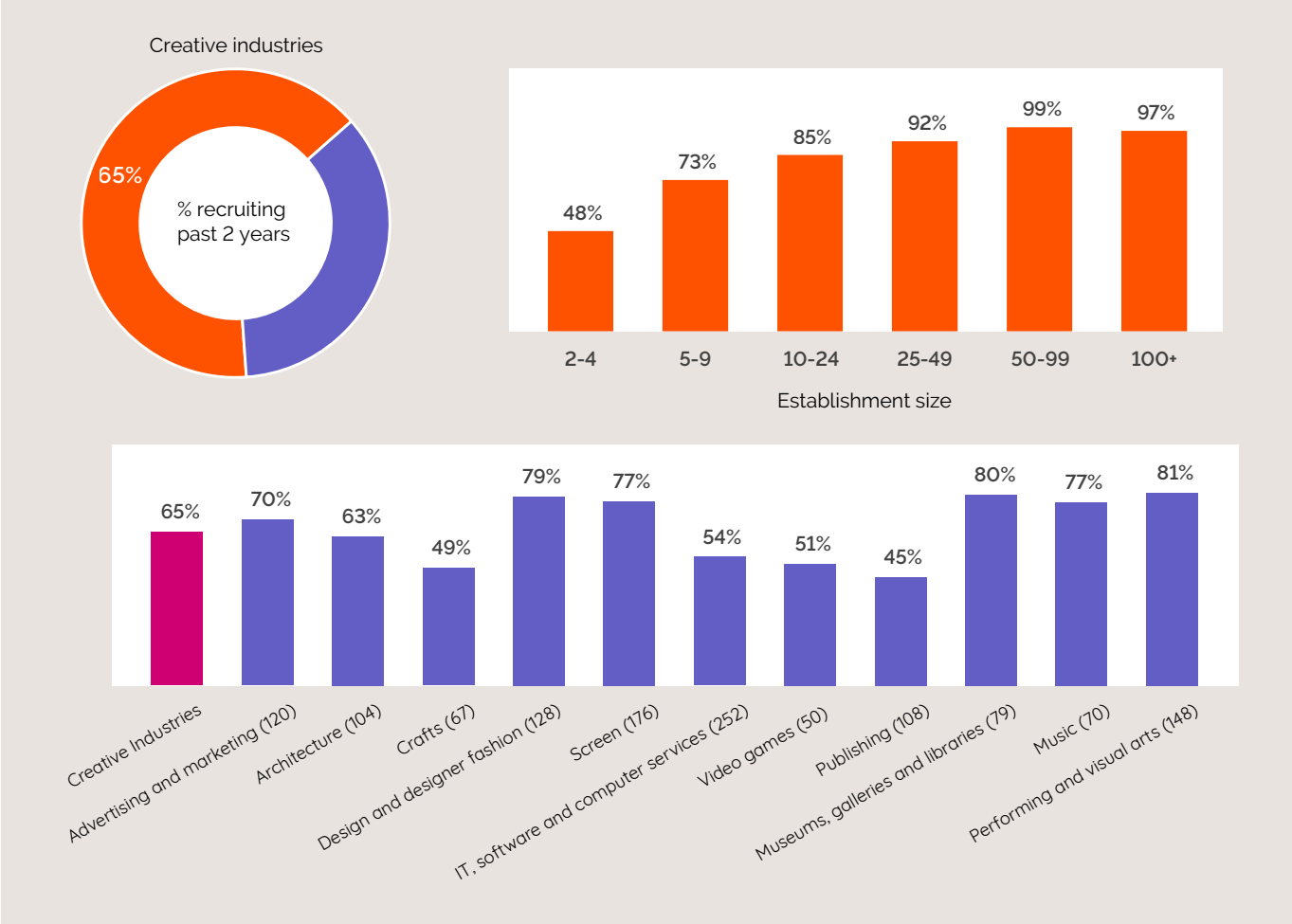
5. This is a significantly higher proportion than reported in the Department for Education's Employer Skills Survey (ESS) 2022, reflecting a range of differences in the survey design and labour market context. In particular, ESS excludes the recruitment of self-employed, freelance and agency workers (an important source of labour for creative employers); measures recruitment activity in the past twelve months; and was conducted at a time when the creative industries were only just emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic.

There is also considerable variation in recruitment activity between different creative sub-sectors. CESS 2025 shows that over the past two years, a greater share of employers had recruited in: performing and visual arts (81%); museums, galleries and libraries (80%); design and designer fashion (79%); music (77%); and screen industries (77%) – indeed, they all displayed higher rates than the creative industries average. In contrast, several sectors displayed lower levels of recruitment activity, including publishing (46%); crafts (49%); video games (51%); and IT, software and computer services (54%).

It is important to note, however, that multiple factors will influence the extent of recruitment activity, including the growth of firms, staff turnover and the propensity for project-based work. Indeed, as noted earlier, the share of the workforce that are self-employed varies considerably between creative sub-sectors. Hence in some sub-sectors, like screen industries, where economic activity has been subdued over the past two years, recruitment activity will remain strong as employers look to appoint freelancers to work on projects (see the sub-sector Skills Audit for the screen industries for further discussion).

**Figure 3.1: Recruitment activity, 2025**

% of employers recruiting employees, agency staff, self-employed or freelancer workers in the past two years




Source: CESS 2025

*Q: Has this site recruited anyone, including any paid employees, agency staff, self-employed or freelancer workers, in the past two years? [n = 1,302 for the creative industries].*

Figures in parenthesis indicate sample size in creative sub-sectors.

Employers use a range of methods when recruiting. Across the creative industries, the most popular approach was to advertise vacancies on online platforms or websites, cited by a little over half (52%) of creative employers that had recruited in the past two years.

In the context of increasing reliance on Online Job Adverts (OJAs) as an indicator of labour demand (see, for example, Skills England, 2025c) it is noteworthy that 48% of recruiting employers in the creative industries had not utilised such platforms, suggesting that OJA data will only provide a partial picture of hiring activity in the creative industries.

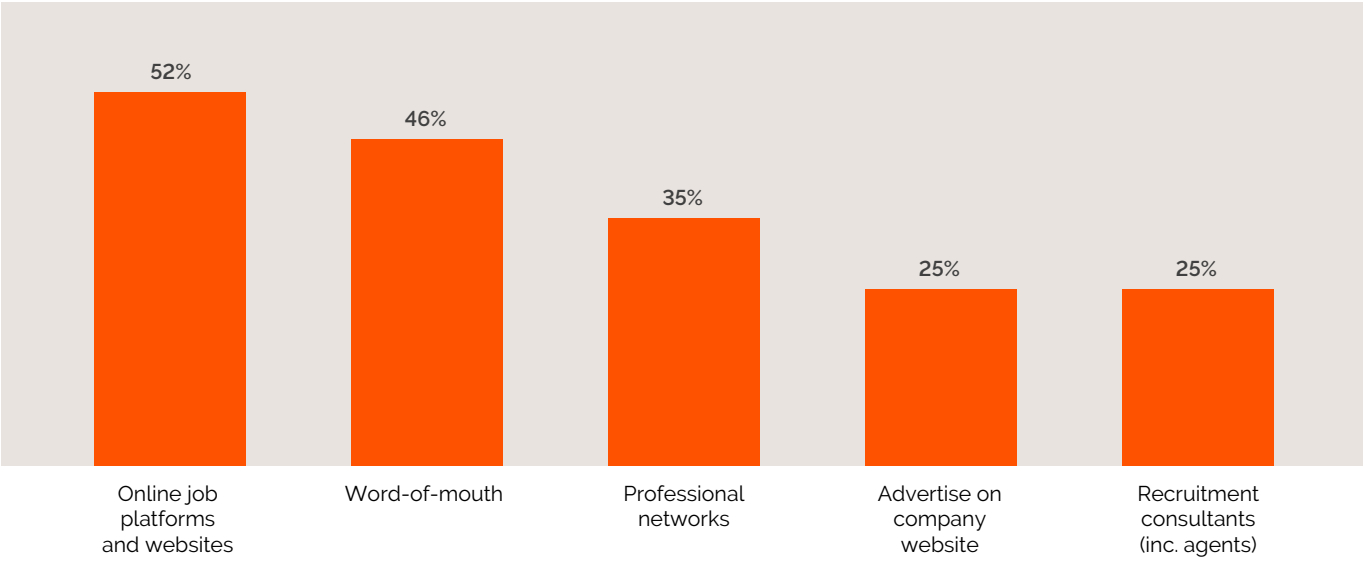
Another concern is the continued use of informal hiring practices in the creative industries, which previous Creative PEC research has shown to be a key barrier to equality and inclusion in the sector (Carey, O'Brien and Gable, 2021).

Nearly half of creative employers had hired for roles using word-of-mouth (albeit potentially alongside wider methods). The picture does, however, vary between creative sub-sectors, with word-of-mouth more commonly used in music, crafts, screen, games and architecture, while employers in museums, galleries and libraries, and publishing were more likely to use wider practices, including posting adverts on online job platforms and websites.

Creative industries employers also looked to wider methods. More than one third (35%) had looked to their professional networks and one quarter (25%) had advertised on their company website or appointed recruitment consultants or agents to assist their talent search.

Nearly one third (31%) of recruiting employers reported using 'other' methods. These included social media; engaging with or advertising on the jobs boards of universities and colleges; advertising through newspapers, trade press or specialist publications; and using industry or company talent databases.

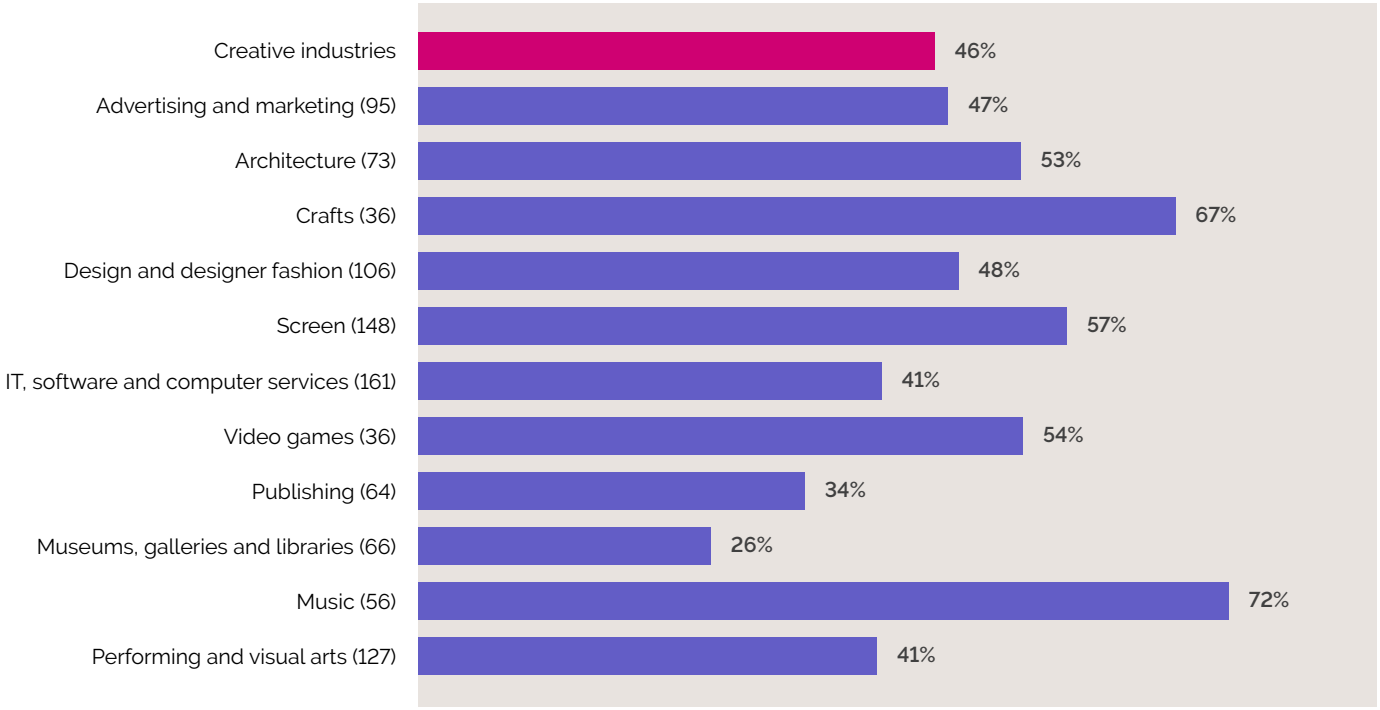
**Figure 3.2: Recruitment methods, 2025**
% recruiting employers using this method when hiring




Source: CESS 2025

*Q: What recruitment methods do you use to fill vacancies at this site? Base = establishments that have recruited in the past two years [n = 968 for the creative industries].*

**Figure 3.3: Informal recruitment, 2025**
% recruiting employers hiring via word-of-mouth




Source: CESS 2025

*Q: What recruitment methods do you use to fill vacancies at this site? Base = establishments that have recruited in the past two years [n = 968 for the creative industries].*

Figures in parenthesis indicate sample size in creative sub-sectors.

## 3.2 Recruitment difficulties and their causes

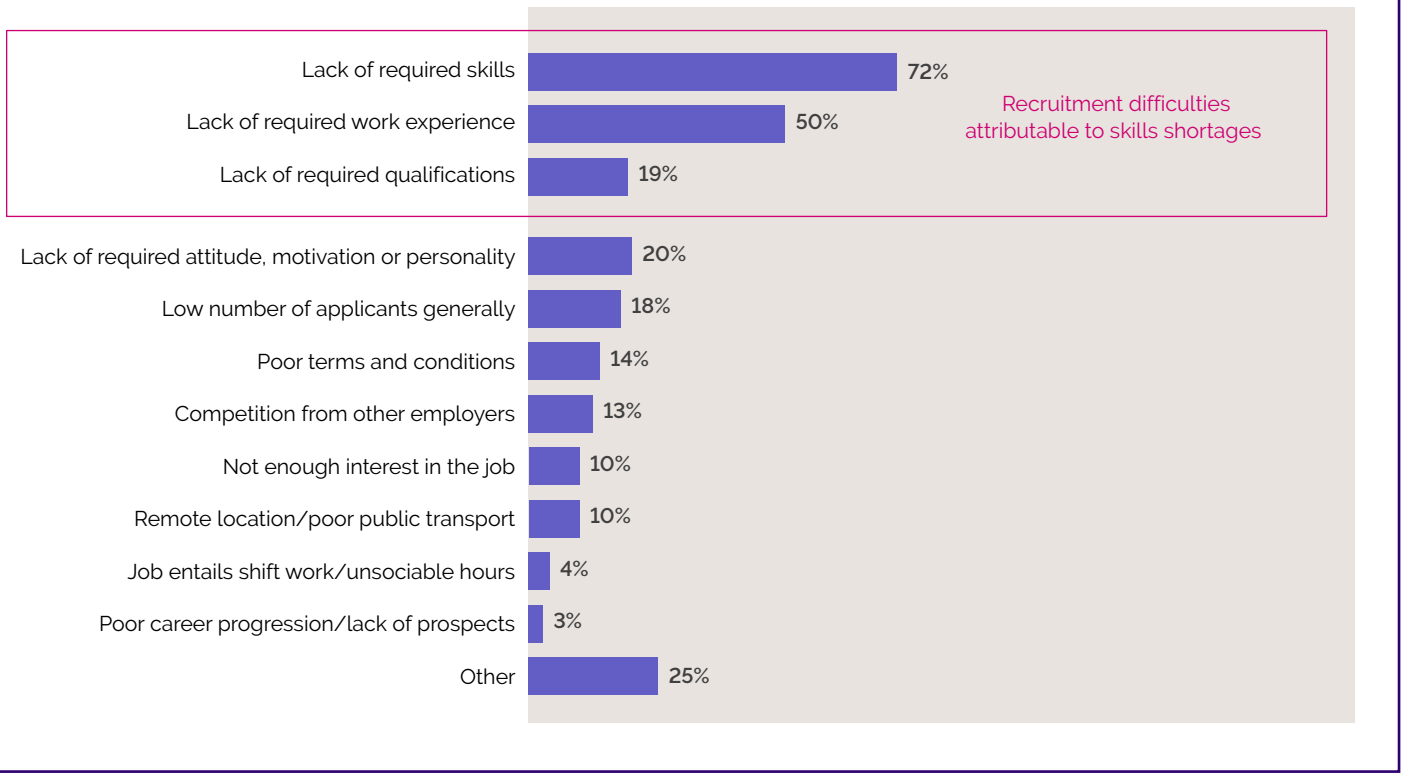
**One third (32%) of those creative industries employers that had recruited over the past two years suggested vacancies were hard to fill. This means that, in total, recruitment difficulties affected one in five (21%) creative businesses in 2025.**

Employers in each creative sub-sector experience hard-to-fill vacancies (see Figure 3.5). This is the case even in sub-sectors where trading or funding conditions have been challenging, where recruitment difficulties and skills shortages in some areas can sit alongside labour surpluses and job shedding in others. Recruitment difficulties were particularly acute in the tech sector, video games, architecture, publishing, and museums, galleries and libraries.

Creative industry employers attribute recruitment difficulties to a range of issues (Figure 3.4). In line with past research (DCMS, 2025e; Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025) we find recruitment difficulties were most likely to be a consequence of a lack of applicants with the necessary skills (72%), work experience (50%) or, to a lesser extent, qualifications (19%) required for the role. Taken together, nearly eight in ten (79%) creative industries employers reporting with hard-to-fill vacancies suggested these were mainly driven by skills shortages, although it is also noteworthy that finding candidates with the right skills is a much bigger challenge for creative employers than finding candidates with the right qualifications.

This picture is broadly consistent across creative sub-sectors, with skills shortages the primary driver of recruitment challenges, albeit with some nuance. In advertising and marketing, for example, employers were twice as likely to suggest applicants lacking the required attitude, motivation or personality, while in museums, libraries and galleries, employers were more likely to point to poor terms and conditions (including pay) as a key reason they struggled to fill posts.

**Figure 3.4: Main causes of recruitment difficulties, 2025**
% employers citing these causes




Source: CESS 2025

***Q: What were the main causes of your vacancies for [Occupation] being hard to fill?***

Base = establishments with hard to fill vacancies. [n = 361]

**Figure 3.5: Recruitment difficulties in different creative sub-sectors, 2025**
% recruiting employers that had experienced difficulty filling vacancies


Source: CESS 2025

*"Q: Did any of the vacancies you had at this site in the past 2 years prove hard to fill?"*

Base = establishments that have recruited employees, agency staff, self-employed or freelancer workers in the past two years. N indicates sample size for each sub-sector.

## 3.3 Hard-to-fill occupations

**CESS 2025 also sought to understand the jobs that employers in creative sub-sectors struggled to fill.**

Looking across the creative industries, skills shortages are most acute when recruiting for experienced workers (those with five to ten years of experience) – cited by more than 40% of employers facing skills shortages – and with a further 14% pointing to the difficulty finding suitably skilled candidates for expert-level roles.

One in three suggested skills shortages were associated with early-career roles. In contrast, less than one quarter (23%) of employers with skills shortages suggested these vacancies were for entry-level positions.

While caution must be exercised when analysing the survey data for some creative sectors where the sample bases are low, we find the picture to be quite nuanced and varied across creative sub-sectors.

**Figure 3.6: Seniority of skills shortage occupations, 2025**
% of employers with skills shortages suggesting roles were at this level


Source: CESS 2025

*"Q: How would you describe the level of experience or seniority of the candidates sought for skills shortage occupation vacancies?"*

Base = establishments with skills shortage vacancies. Figures in parenthesis indicate sample size in creative sub-sectors – some estimates are based on a small sample size and should be used with caution.

The 'mid-level' talent problem appears evident in several creative sub-sectors, particularly acute in advertising and marketing, screen industries, video games and design – something strongly reinforced by stakeholders engaged through the Skills Audit process. Stakeholders suggested that the impact of technology and the advancement of AI was reducing demand for junior level talent and driving competition for mid-level and senior positions – a concern given particular weight in tech and advertising and marketing.

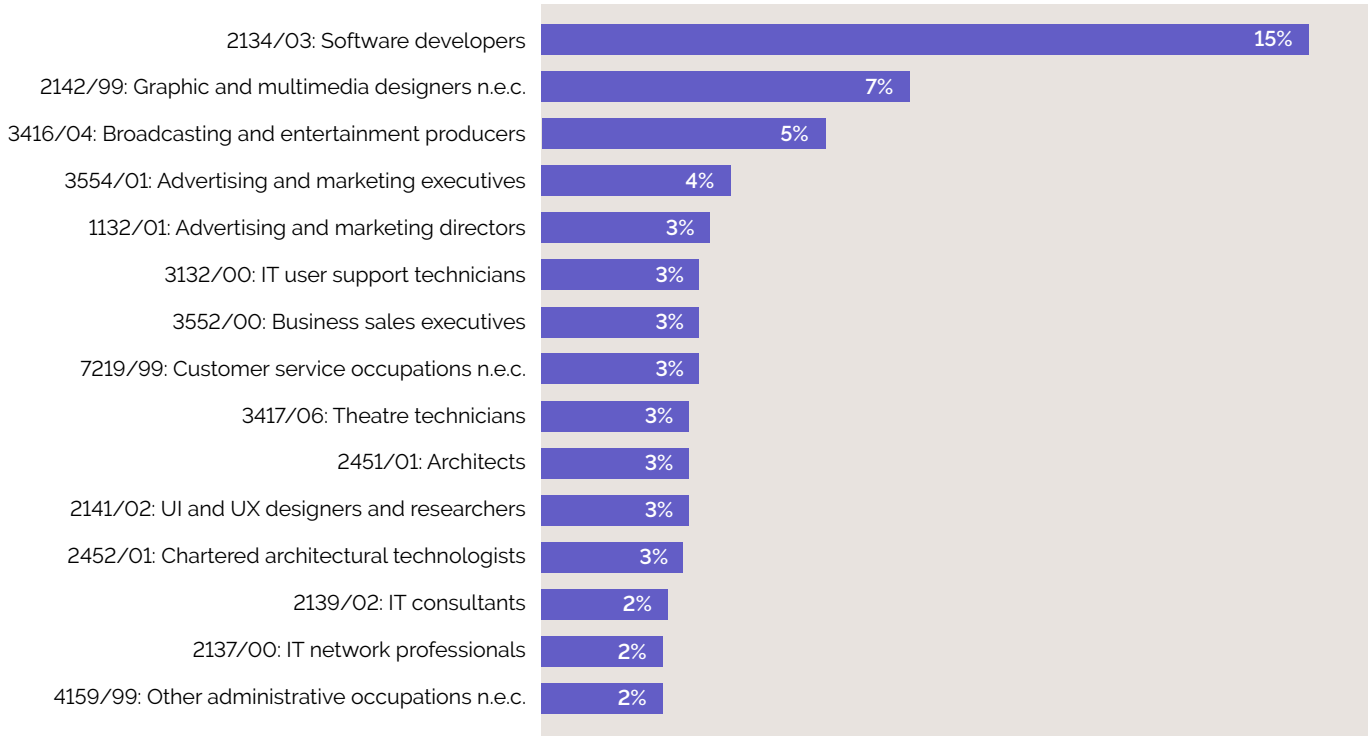
In contrast, employers in museums, galleries and libraries; publishing; and performing and visual arts more commonly suggested skills shortages were associated with new entrant positions or early-career roles. In music, skills shortages were apparent in entrant, early-career and experienced roles in broadly equal measure. In craft, skills challenges lie at either end of the scale: a shortage of technical mastery in many craft areas coupled with a significant shortfall on new entrants coming into the industry, reflecting an ageing workforce and the deprioritisation of craft areas in schools (Crafts Council, 2025; Heritage Crafts, 2025).

Creative industries employers outline a wide range of occupations that were proving hard to fill. In looking at the top fifteen occupations reported across the creative industries, the most common were specialist digital and technological roles, particularly for software developers (15%) but also digital operations: IT user support technicians (3%), IT Consultants (2%), and IT network professionals (2%). Design roles were also a key area of shortage, particularly graphic and multimedia designers (7%), as were broadcasting and entertainment producers (5%) and advertising and marketing directors (3%) and executives (4%).

This ranking will, however, in large part reflect the relative size of different creative sub-sectors and the prevalence of occupations across different parts of the creative industries. Indeed, the occupations hardest to fill varies considerably between different sub-sectors, as illustrated by Figure 3.8. Often, the roles that top the list are technical, specialist roles specific to the sub-sector: architects in architecture; newspaper, periodical and broadcast editors in publishing; or theatre technicians in performing arts, for example.

Some occupations, however, are among the hardest to recruit in several sub-sectors. Design occupations (including graphic and multi-media designers; CAD technicians) appear in design and designer fashion, but also in advertising and marketing, architecture and crafts. There is strong overlap between hard-to-fill occupations in video games and the wider tech sector, but also in the digital production parts of screen, such as post-production, animation and visual effects. Broadcasting and entertainment producers also feature in a range of sub-sectors, encapsulating producers in screen, games and music. Cross-cutting business roles were also frequently cited by a range of creative industry employers, including sales and marketing roles, business development or fundraiser roles, business administration, and finance.

**Figure 3.7: Top fifteen hard-to-fill occupations in the creative industries,, 2025**
% employers reporting hard to fill vacancies for these occupations



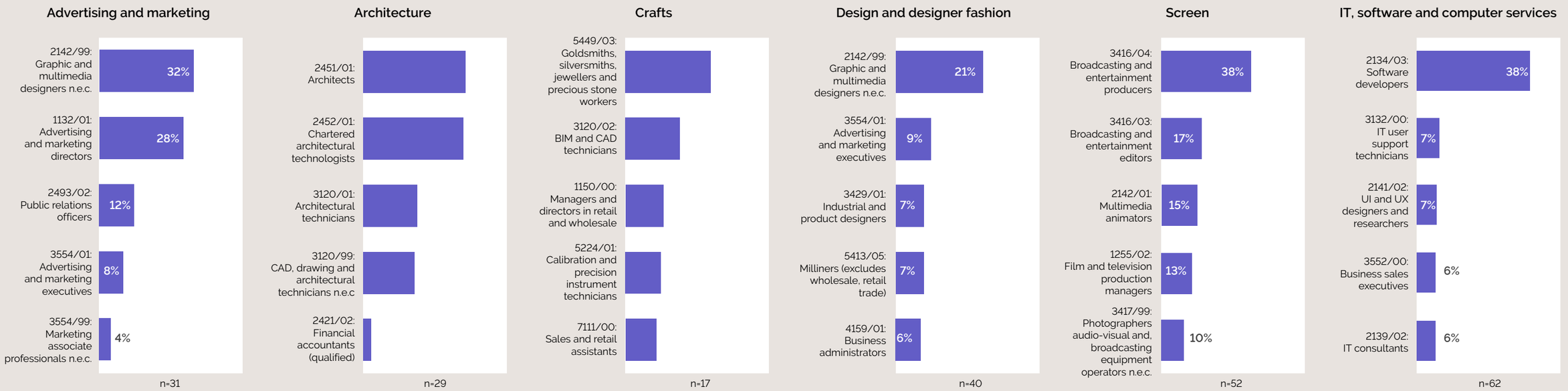

Source: CESS 2025

***Q: In which specific occupations did vacancies at this site prove hard to fill? Top fifteen occupations cited.***

Base = establishments with hard to fill vacancies. [n = 361]

## Figure 3.8: Top five hard-to-fill occupations in different creative sub-sectors, 2025

% of recruiting employers that had experienced difficulty filling vacancies




Source: CESS 2025

***Q: In which specific occupations did vacancies at this site prove hard to fill? Top 5 occupations cited. Base = establishments with hard-to-fill vacancies. N indicates sample size for each sub-sector.***

Figures have been suppressed where the sample size is <30.

## 3.4 Skills shortages

**In addition to exploring the most difficult roles to recruit for, the Creative Industries Skills Audits have sought to examine the skills employers most commonly say are lacking among candidates, including technical, digital and core skills.**

Figure 3.9 summarises the technical skills or knowledge employers identified as key skills shortages in each sub-sector.[6] As might be expected, sometimes these skills were highly specialised to the role. For example, millinery skills in fashion design; 3D printing and casting in craft; or journalistic skills in publishing.

However, there are also areas where skills shortages are common in different parts of the creative industries, often in adjacent industries where business activities require similar skillsets. For example, there is a shortage of technical production skills – sound, lighting, AV equipment, stage/sets – in the screen industries, performing arts and music (particularly live events). Design skills of varying forms (graphic design, CAD, UI/UX design) are also a common area of shortage across many creative sub-sectors.

Given the propensity for project-based work, employers in a wide range of creative sub-sectors point to applicants lacking the project management skills required for the role, from music and the performing arts to publishing, IT, screen and games. In client-facing sectors like advertising and marketing and design, employers struggled to find candidates with the skills to manage clients.

Employers in all creative sub-sectors struggled to find critical business skills, particularly commercial skills like sales, business development and fundraising (depending on the sub-sector); marketing (often digital marketing); business administration, finance and people management. A lack of candidates with sufficient industry knowledge was also widely cited as an issue when recruiting.

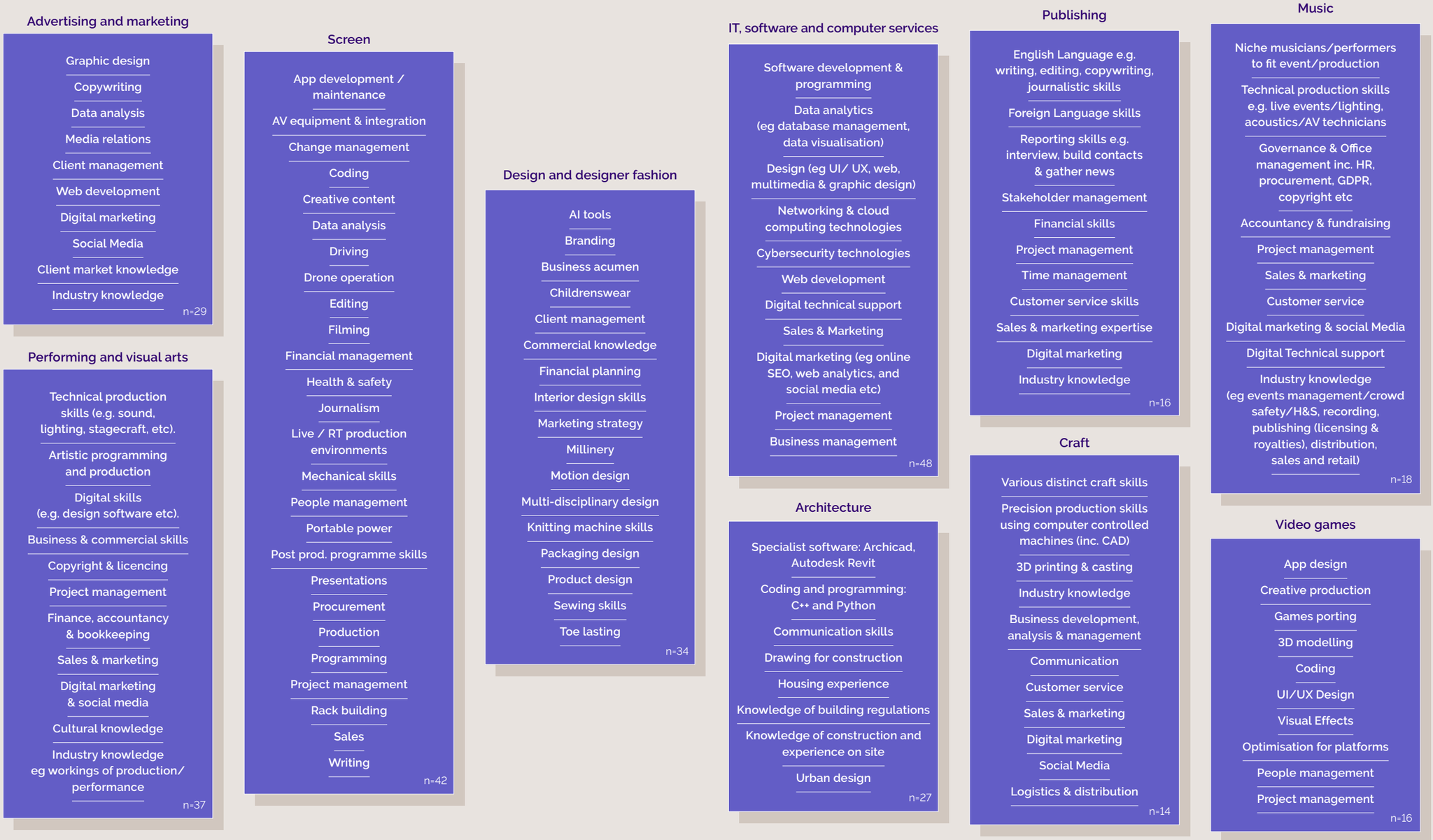
Data and digital skills was another area of acute shortage for many creative industry employers. Far from limited to the tech sector, employers in advertising and marketing, screen, games, music and the performing arts were struggling to access a range of such skills, including coding, programming, data analysis and web development.

CESS sought to look explicitly at the basic and advanced digital skills that employers were struggling to access while recruiting (see Figure 3.10). Indeed, 45% of employers with skills shortages across the creative industries suggested digital skills were lacking among candidates, rising to more than half in games (52%) and two thirds or more in the tech sector (66%).

Often, digital skills shortages are associated with specialist software or hardware for the role, cited by nearly one in five creative industries employers with skills shortages. Sometimes this was highly specialised to the sub-sector – for example, a shortage of applicants able to work with BIM software in architecture or Digital Asset and Collection Management Software in museums, galleries and libraries, for example. However, employers in different creative sub-sectors often had a shared shortage of specialist software skills. For instance, programming languages like C# or C++ were referenced by employers in the tech sector, the games industry and digital production parts of screen.

6. Data is presented as lists, given low sample bases in some areas. Skills listed were cited by employers responding to the survey and subsequently validated through the sub-sector roundtables.

**Figure 3.9: Technical skills shortages in different creative sub-sectors, 2025**
Skills referenced by employers with skills shortages




Source: CESS 2025

*Q: Have you found any specialist skills or knowledge needed to perform the role difficult to obtain from applicants for skills shortage occupation vacancies? If so, what specific specialist skills or knowledge have been lacking?*

Base = establishments with skills shortage vacancies. N indicates sample size for each sub-sector. Data for museums, galleries and libraries has been suppressed due to small sample size.

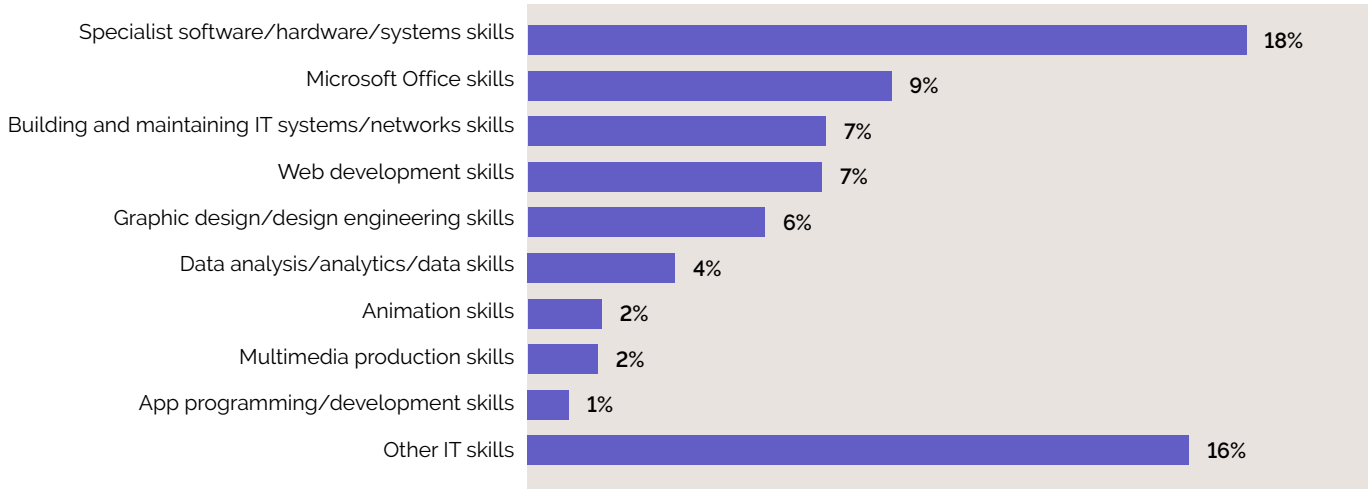
Specialist animation software was an area of shortage far beyond the animation industry, referenced by employers in advertising and marketing, for example. CAD software of varying forms was very widely cited in design, but also architecture, crafts, and performing and visual arts. Adobe Creative Suite was widely referenced by employers across the creative industries as an area where applicants needed stronger skills, while nearly one in ten of those reporting skills shortages suggested candidates applying for job roles needed strong Microsoft Office Skills.

However, skills shortages weren't limited to technical and digital skills areas, and employers responding to the survey and those who joined both the national and sub-sector roundtables emphasised that candidates often lacked vital transversal or 'core' skills.

Across the creative industries, more than one third of employers with skills shortage vacancies suggested applicants needed stronger planning and organising skills. Many stakeholders emphasised that the project-based nature of work in the creative industries meant advanced planning skills were needed to operate effectively in the sector. This was also seen to place particular onus on interpersonal skills, yet more than one in four (27%) creative industry employers with skills shortages suggested candidates needed stronger teamworking skills.

**Figure 3.10: Digital skills shortages, 2025**

% of employers with skills shortage vacancies suggesting skills lacking among applicants




Source: CESS 2025

*Q: Have you found any basic or advanced IT skills difficult to obtain from applicants for skills shortage occupation vacancies. If so, what specific IT skills have been lacking?*

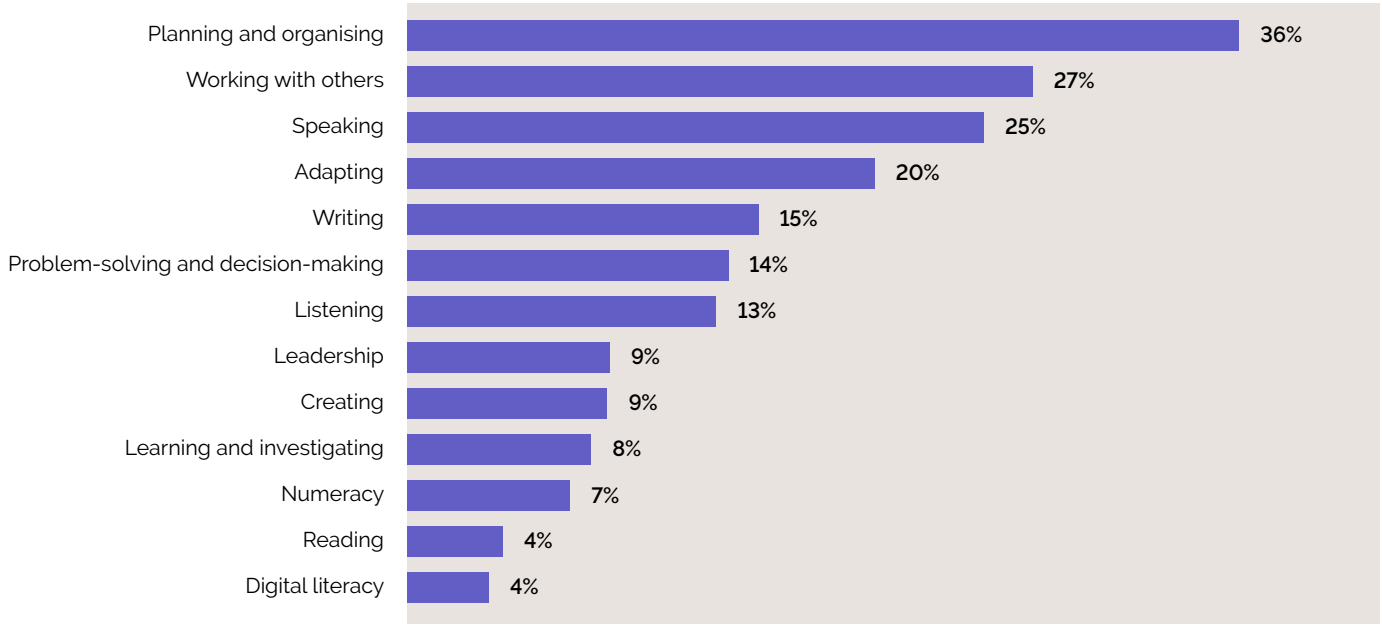
Base = establishments with skills shortage vacancies. [n = 297]

Applicants were also frequently reported to lack communication skills. Several of those engaged through the Skills Audit process across various creative sub-sectors suggested that verbal communication was a key area of weakness, which some attributed to the after-effects of Covid-19 and the shift towards communicating via devices and digital platforms.

One in five (20%) creative employers pointed to candidates lacking adaptability. This was seen by many as a vital skill to operate effectively in the rapidly shifting creative industries, where workers need to 'wear multiple hats' in small firms, work effectively in varying contexts and be resilient in the face of constant disruption. Yet many questioned whether sufficient weight was given to the development of these skills in the education system.

**Figure 3.11: Core skills shortages, 2025**

% of employers with skills shortage vacancies suggesting skills lacking among applicants




Source: CESS 2025

*Q: Have you found any core or 'transversal' skills difficult to obtain from applicants for skills shortage occupation vacancies. If so, what specific core or transversal skills have been lacking?*

Base = establishments with skills shortage vacancies. [n = 297]

# 4 Skills deficiencies among the workforce

## Introduction

**The knowledge, skills and competencies required in the workplace are continually evolving, driven by factors including technological advancement, shifts in patterns of consumption, developments in production processes, and changes in how firms are organised. Without sustained investment in upskilling and reskilling by employers and individuals, workforce skills can rapidly become outdated, contributing to persistent skills gaps and labour market mismatches.**

In addition to exploring the skills shortages creative employers face when looking for talent in the external labour market, the Creative Industries Skills Audits have also sought to examine skills deficiencies among the existing workforce. In this section, we draw on new evidence from CESS 2025 to examine the prevalence and patterns of skills gaps, looking in-depth at the roles most affected and the skills – technical, digital and transversal – that employers suggest needed upgrading among the creative industries workforce.

## 4.1 Skills gaps and their causes

**According to CESS 2025, one third (32%) of creative industries employers reported skills deficiencies among their workforce. This is at higher levels to those seen in the Employer Skills Survey 2022, where just over one in ten (11%) employers in the creative industries reported skills gaps (DCMS, 2025e; Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025), but in part this will reflect the broader assessment of the workforce. Indeed, CESS captures agency staff, the self-employed and freelance workers, in addition to employees, when reviewing the existence of skills gaps.**

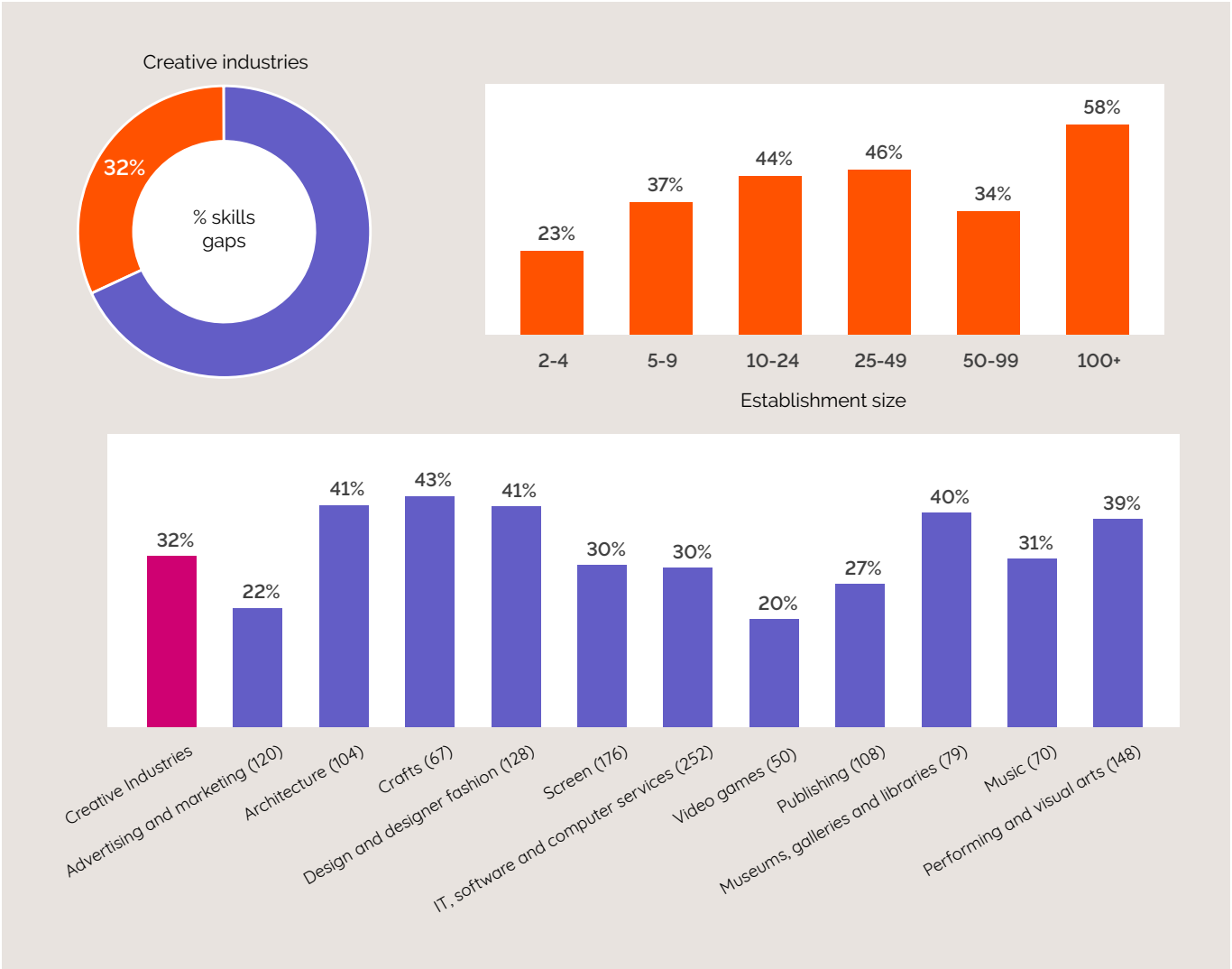
As would be expected, the incidence of skills gaps suggest that these are more of a problem for larger firms in the sector (see Figure 4.1). For example, the highest share of creative industries employers reporting skills gaps is those with over 100 employees (58%) compared to the smallest businesses with between two to four employees (23%). Furthermore, the proportion of businesses experiencing skills gaps generally increases with the size of businesses, with the share of employers reporting skills gaps exceeding the average for the creative industries for those businesses with ten or more employees.

There is also significant variation between the different sub-sectors of the creative industries in terms of the experiences of skills gaps. Indeed, the highest shares of employers reporting skills gaps among their existing workforce are crafts (43%); architecture (41%); design and designer fashion (41%); museums, galleries and libraries (40%); and performing and visual arts (39%).

In contrast, a lower share of employers report such internal skills deficiencies in video games (20%); advertising and marketing (22%); publishing (27%); IT, software and computer services (30%); and film, TV, video, radio and photography (30%)..

**Figure 4.1: Skills gaps, 2025**

% employers reporting skills deficiencies amongst their workforce




Source: CESS 2025

***Q: Thinking about your current workforce (including employees, agency staff, self-employed or freelance workers), approximately what percentage would you regard as fully proficient at their job? = <100%.***

Base = all establishments. [n = 1,302 for the creative industries] Figures in parenthesis indicate sample size in creative sub-sectors.

There are a variety of factors contributing to skills gaps (Figure 4.2). The most common causes are short-term and transitory, and exist because individuals are new to their role (39% of creative industries employers) or have only partially completed the training required for their position (27%). These findings are in line with wider evidence such as the Employer Skills Survey 2022 (DCMS, 2025e; Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025). In addition, skills gaps may reflect a growing business ambition and hence are an indicator of the positive ongoing business development, innovation activity, and transformation. Examples of this include evidence that employers report skills gaps are a consequence of the introduction of new technology (23%); new working practices (16%); and developing new products and services (8%).

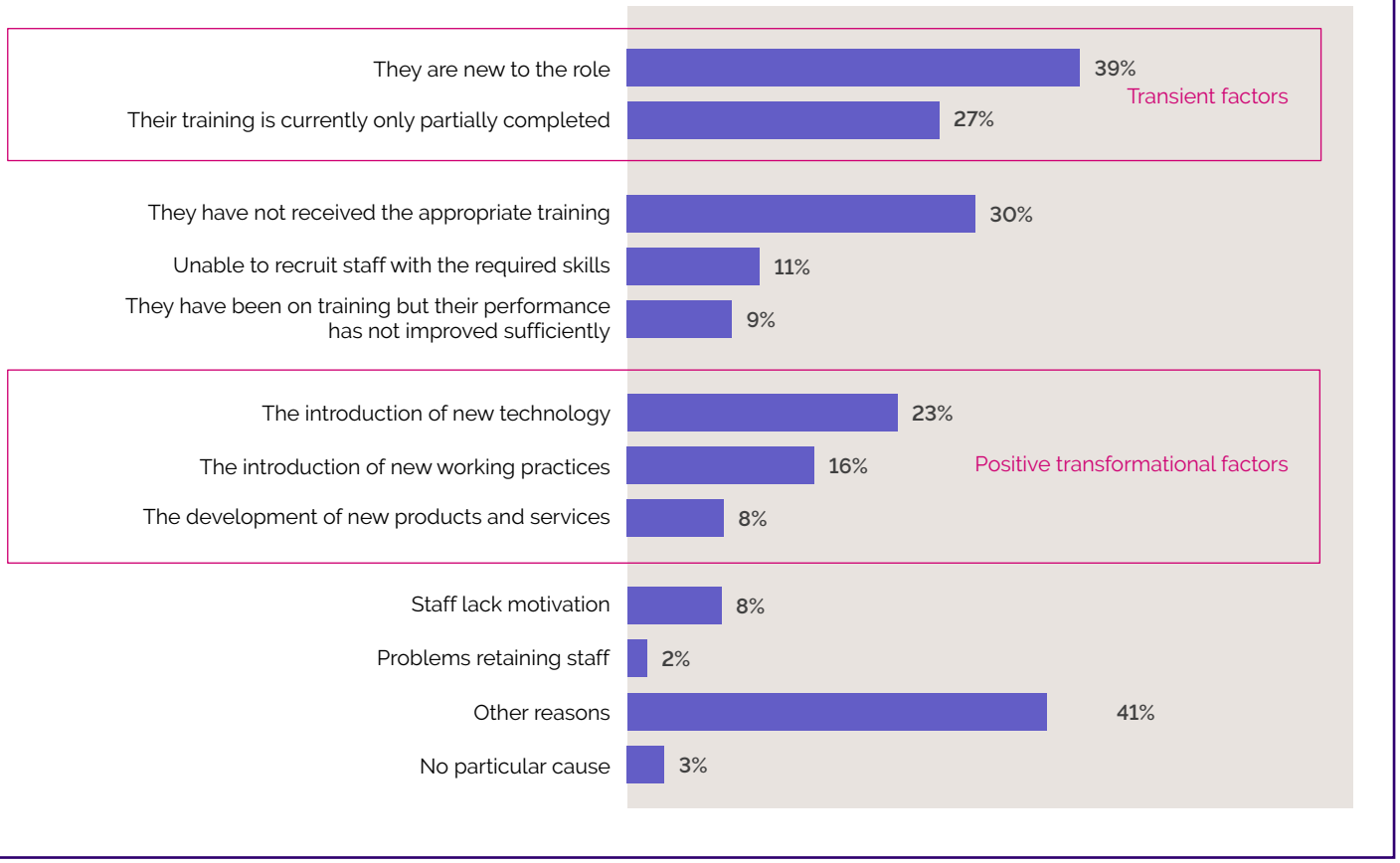
Indeed, the Skills Audits echo wider work in demonstrating the prolific impact that technology has on the skills demands of the creative workforce, both in its use of changing technologies and the high levels of innovation activity undertaken in the sector (Nana-Cheera and Roper, 2025; Wang, Baksy, Bakhshi, & Siepel, 2026). Previous research has highlighted that creative businesses are more likely than those in other sectors to use specialised innovation skills associated with technology like multimedia and web-design, software development and data science, which can often require continual upgrading and change in response to new software or innovation projects (Nana-Cheera and Roper, 2025).

In design and the screen industries, stakeholders pointed to the need to almost continually upgrade skills in line with updates to software and technical equipment. In the tech sector, employers also emphasised the breakneck speed of technological innovation and the need for workers to continuously maintain proficiency in key specialist areas as technologies, languages and tools evolve. Attendees at the games roundtable spoke of the challenge posed by the 'skills half-life' in the industry, where the knowledge and skills acquired during front-loaded education diminishes rapidly in value or relevance over time, as technical skills needs are evolving so rapidly in the sector.

The effects of technology are also felt indirectly where technological advancement is driving shifts in creative production or consumption. In craft, for example, employers highlighted the need for new craft technology hybrid roles, which integrate traditional handcraft skills with digital and technology skills, such as CAD. In publishing, employers suggested new technology had driven heightened need for digital capability across a range of roles, as they respond to new content formats and digital publishing platforms, for example. Responding to the impact that technology has on workflows and business models was seen to place great emphasis on business management and commercial skills (discussed further below).

Yet, at the same time, skills gaps can also be an indication of wider skills issues such as a failure to provide the appropriate training for workers (30%), not being able to recruit staff with the required skills (11%), and training being insufficient to improve the performance of some individuals (9%).

**Figure 4.2: Main causes of skills gaps, 2025**
% employers with skills gaps identifying these causes




Source: CESS 2025

*Q: What are the main causes of staff in [skills gap occupation] not being fully proficient in their jobs…?*

Base = establishments with skills gaps. [n = 476]

## 4.2 Skills gap occupations

**CESS 2025 also sought to understand the occupations where employers most commonly felt staff needed to upgrade their skills.**

Often, skills shortages experienced when recruiting can have a knock-on impact, where employers appoint candidates that don't have the full range of skills required for the role, thus creating skills gaps among the workforce. As a result, we would expect to see some degree of consistency between the roles affected and indeed, as for skill shortages, skills gaps appear to be most acute among experienced workers.

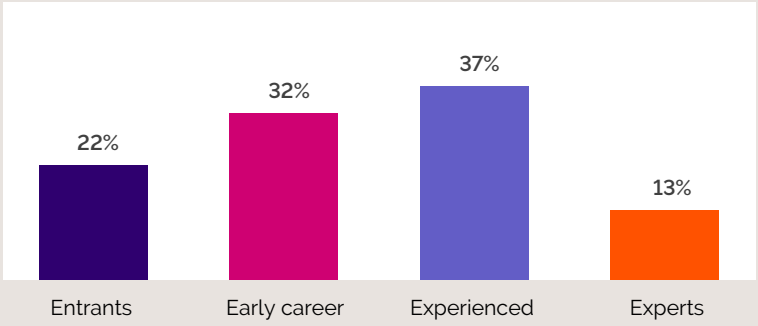
Across the creative industries, 37% of employers experiencing skills gaps suggest these are prevalent among experienced members of their workforce. Again, this mid-level talent problem was felt most acutely in advertising and marketing, the tech sector, screen industries, and design and designer fashion.

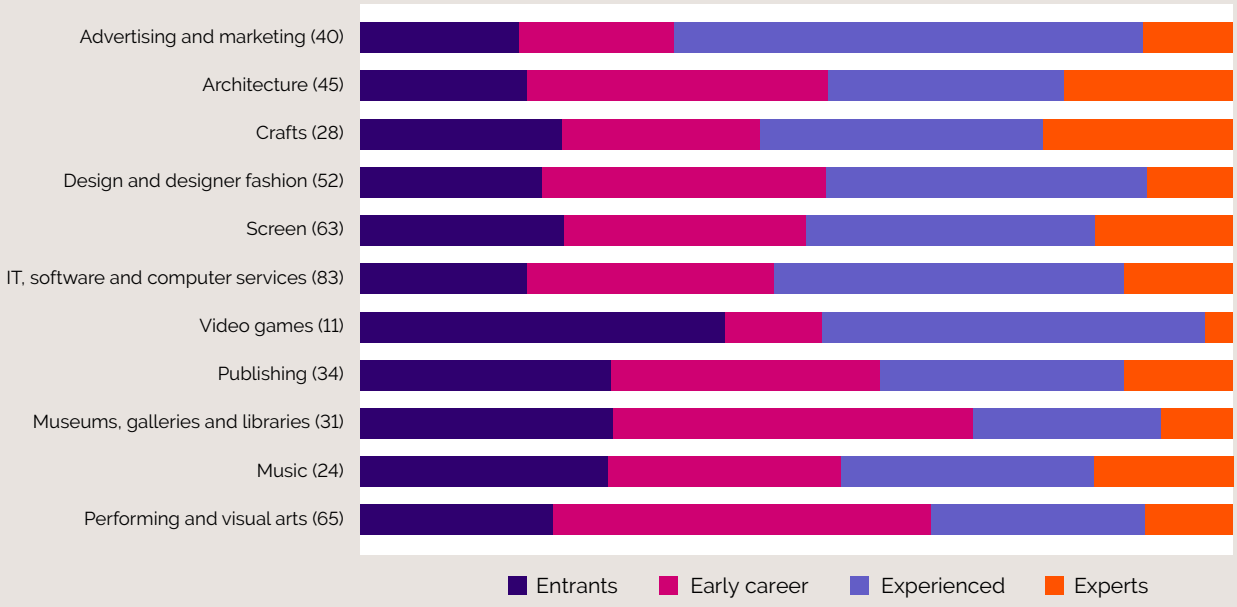
This resonated strongly with employers at the sub-sector roundtables. In advertising and marketing, participants pointed to the rapid pace of advancement, often without the training necessary to develop skills required in more senior roles. Indeed, this 'stepping up without skilling up' was a recurring narrative across many creative sub-sectors, including screen and performing and visual arts.

However, one third (32%) of employers with skills gaps suggested workers early in their career weren't fully proficient for their role. One fifth (22%) pointed to skills gaps among new entrants. In Architecture, employers suggested workers needed to build experience on construction sites and with clients.

**Figure 4.3: Seniority of skills shortage occupations, 2025**
% employers with skills gaps suggesting roles were at this level

| | Years post full-time education |
|---|---|
| Entrants | < 2 years |
| Early career | 2-5 years |
| Experienced | 5-10 years |
| Experts | 10+ years |




Source: CESS 2025

*Q: How would you describe the level of experience or seniority of the staff working as [skills gap occupation]?*

Base = establishments with skills gaps. Figures in parenthesis indicate sample size in creative sub-sectors – some estimates are based on a small sample size and should be used with caution.

With technology a key driver of skills deficiencies among the creative workforce, it is perhaps unsurprising that the roles that top the list of skills gap occupations are those most exposed to technology. Across the creative industries, the most commonly reported were specialist digital roles, including software developers (9%); computer analysts and scientists (5%); IT user support technicians (4%); IT project managers (2%); and programmers and software development (n.e.c.) (1%). Graphic and multimedia designers not elsewhere classified (n.e.c.) (3%); broadcasting and entertainment producers (3%); architectural technologists (3%); advertising and marketing executives (2%); and theatre technicians (1%) also feature – again roles where the use of technology is embedded in creative production. However, we also observe a number of generalist business roles such as business sales executives (4%), accounting clerks and bookkeepers (3%), other administrative roles (3%), and marketing associate professionals (2%).

There is, however, considerable variation between creative sub-sectors (see Figure 4.5). This might be expected given the mostly commonly cited skills gap occupations will, at least in part, be driven by the predominant job roles in these sectors. As for skills shortages, often the roles that top the list of skills gap occupations are highly specialised to the sub-sector, for example goldsmiths, silversmiths, jewellers and precious stone workers in crafts, or museum and heritage assistants in museums, galleries and libraries.

Digital roles feature widely across sectors, particularly in the tech sector, games, design, and advertising and marketing. Interestingly, sales and fundraising roles appear in almost all creative sub-sectors and managerial positions also feature frequently, together pointing to some important areas where creative employers point to a pressing need to upskill the workforce (discussed further in Section 4.3).

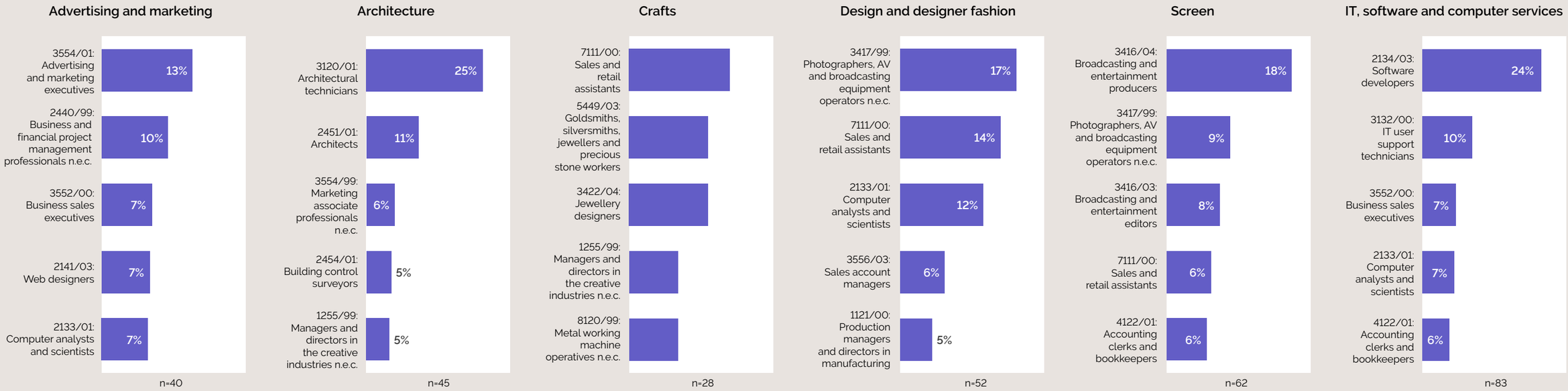
**Figure 4.4: Top fifteen skills gap occupations in the creative industries, 2025**
% of employers reporting skills gaps among these occupations


Source: CESS 2025

*Q: In which specific occupations are staff not fully proficient for their role? Top fifteen occupations cited.*

Base = establishments with skills gaps [n = 475]

**Figure 4.5: Top five skills gap occupations in different creative sub-sectors, 2025**
% of employers reporting skills gaps among these occupations




Source: CESS 2025

***Q: In which specific occupations are staff not fully proficient for their role? Base = establishments with skills gaps. N indicates sample size for each sub-sector.***

Figures have been suppressed where the sample size is <30.

## 4.3 Technical, digital and transversal skills gaps

**As for skills shortages, when examining skills deficiencies among the existing workforce we consider the technical, digital and core skills that employers suggest need improving.**

Often, skills gaps were rooted in technical competencies needed for the role, and these varied considerably between sub-sectors, as summarised in Figure 4.6.[7] Some were highly specialised, for example, the need for those working in museums, galleries and libraries to have greater knowledge of object maintenance and repair, and archive and collections management. In music, employers highlighted a need for workers to have stronger industry-specific knowledge with reference to technical areas like licensing and royalties. In architecture, employers pointed to conservation and construction techniques and subject matter expertise in historic buildings. In craft, technical skills gaps included fine hand skills and dexterity, casting, fine metal-working and welding, polishing and finishing, stone setting, and weaving techniques.

Yet, there was also some commonality in skills gaps across creative sub-sectors. Employers in a range of sectors pointed to the need for workers to have stronger design skills of varying forms, for example. Technical production skills are again a shared concern for employers in music, performing arts and screen.

The need to strengthen commercial skills resonated strongly across a range of sectors, with employers and stakeholders engaged in the Skills Audit process seeing these as vital to enable creative firms to navigate shifts in technology, creative production, patterns of consumption and business models. In screen, this meant responding to the rise of non-traditional platforms like YouTube and TikTok; in games, the shift to digital delivery, subscription-based models and monetising free-to-play games across multiple platforms; and in publishing, generating revenue from a variety of published and digital formats. The issues were almost always nuanced but the need for strong commercial skills – sales, business development, negotiation, client management, digital marketing, social media, data strategy – were very much shared.

Skills to work effectively alongside constantly evolving technologies featured very widely: technical production in music and the performing arts; 3D printing and casting in craft; and advanced 3D modelling in architecture, for example. Skills gaps relating to the use of a range of business and financial systems were also widely referenced, including customer relationship management (CRM), enterprise resource planning (ERP), human resource (HR) and financial management. Employers in the tech sector emphasised the need for continuous learning capability to adopt new technologies like quantum computing, blockchain technology, ACTs and AI. Further, the need to upskill the workforce to respond to and capitalise on the opportunities presented by AI was very much front of mind for employers across the creative industries (discussed in Box 5.1).

When asked explicitly about digital skills gaps, one third (33%) of creative employers reporting skills deficiencies among the workforce suggested staff needed stronger basic or advanced digital skills. The need to improve Microsoft Office skills topped the list, cited by 13% of employers (see Figure 4.7), albeit often this was considered interchangeable with other operating system tools (e.g. Google Workspace and Apple's iWork suite). Skills deficiencies associated with specialist software, hardware or systems was cited by one in ten creative industries employers with skills gaps. Employers across several sectors pointed to Adobe Creative Suite and CAD software, but often workers were reported to lack the skills to work with highly specialised technologies. For instance, in design, employers referenced 3D garment design software (CLO3D); in screen, specialist post-production software (Avid, Daylight); or in museums, galleries and libraries, specialist Database and Collection Management Software such as ResourceSpace and MuseumPlus, for example.

7. Data is presented as lists, given low sample bases in some areas. Skills listed were cited by employers responding to the survey and subsequently validated through the sub-sector roundtables.

**Figure 4.6: Technical skills gaps in different creative sub-sectors, 2025**
Skills referenced by employers with skills gaps


Source: CESS 2025

*Q: Do any of your [skills gap occupation] lack full proficiency in terms of specialist skills or knowledge needed to perform the role? If so, what specific specialist skills or knowledge are they lacking full proficiency in?*

Base = establishments with skills gaps. N indicates sample size for each sub-sector. Data for video games has been suppressed due to small sample size.

Yet sometimes there was a degree of consistency between sectors. This was particularly the case for the video games industry and the virtual production, animation and VFX parts of the screen industries, where employers in each sector point to workers needing stronger skills to work with games engines (e.g. Unreal) and animation software (e.g. Maya, Spine).

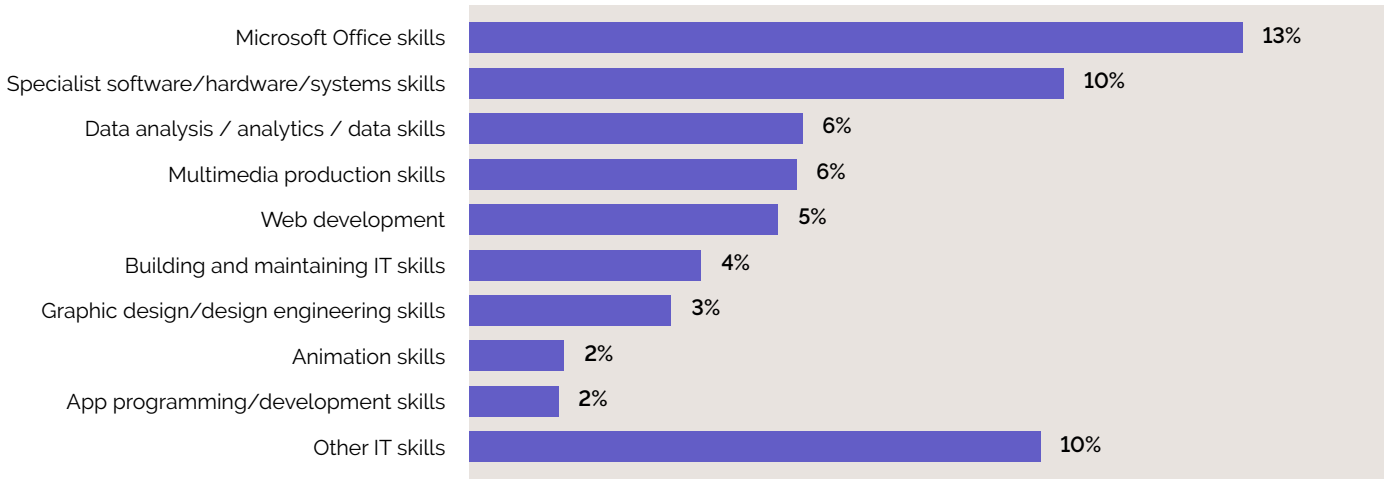
Creative industries employers also suggested that workers needed stronger data analysis and data science skills (cited by 6% of those with skills gaps), multimedia production skills (6%), and web development skills (5%).

However, skills gaps weren't limited to technical and digital skills, and transversal or 'core' skills were frequently cited as an area where employers felt workers' skills needed improvement.

One in four (25%) suggested creative industries employers with skills gaps suggested workers needed stronger planning and organising skills, which resonates with the finding that project management skills are often viewed as a technical skills gap among the workforce (Figure 4.6). Teamworking, adaptability, communication skills and problem solving were also viewed as key areas of skills deficiencies among the workforce.

**Figure 4.7: Digital skills gaps, 2025**

% of employers with skills gaps suggesting skills lacking among their workforce




Source: CESS 2025

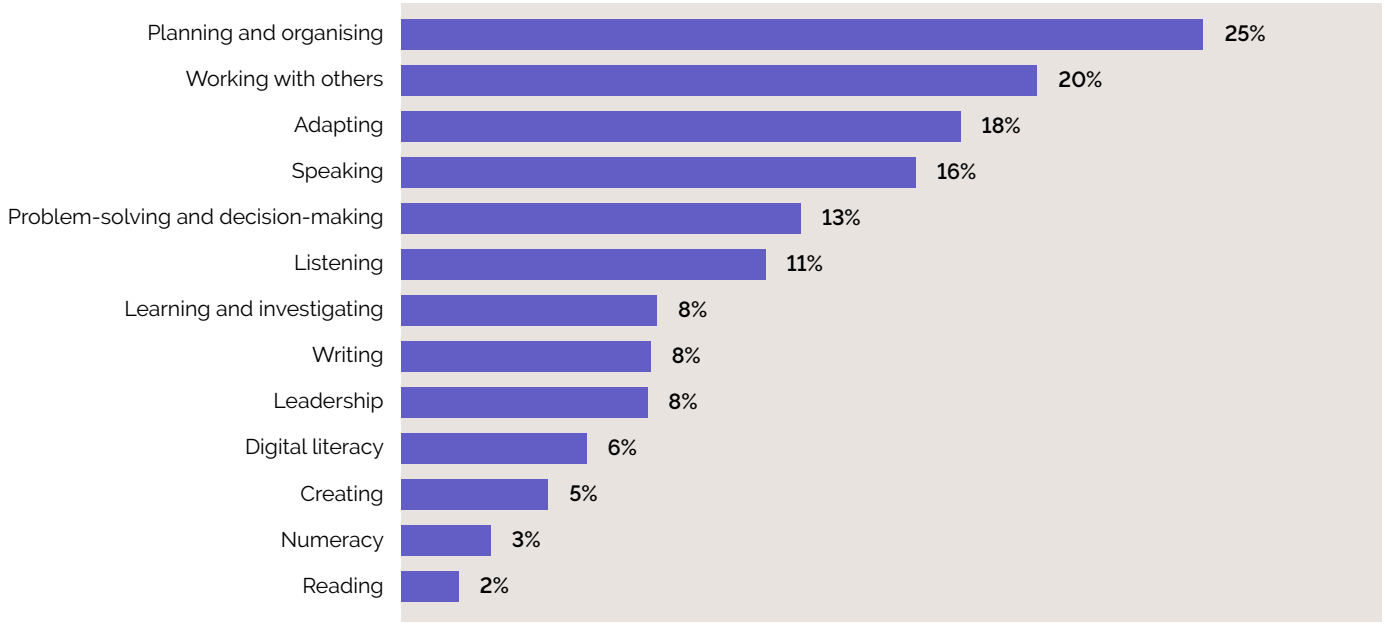
*Q: Do any of your (skills gap occupation) lack full proficiency in terms of basic or advanced IT skills? If so, what specific IT skills do you feel need improving?*

Base = establishments with skills gaps. [n=476]

Just under one in ten (8%) felt workers needed stronger leadership skills. This issue was given considerable focus during the roundtables, with stakeholders consulted across many creative sub-sectors – advertising and marketing, screen, video games, publishing, music, and performing arts – pointing to a management deficit among their workforce, often linked to staff advancing into more senior positions without the pre-requisite training. This was then viewed to contribute to a lack of vital management skills, including strategic planning, budgeting, and people management, including in relation to practices that would promote greater equality, diversity and inclusion among the workforce.

**Figure 4.8: Core skills gaps, 2025**

% of employers with skills gaps suggesting skills lacking among their workforce




Source: CESS 2025

*Q: Do any of your [skills gap occupation] lack full proficiency in terms of core or transversal skills? If so, what specific core skills do you feel need improving?*

Base = establishments with skills gaps. [n = 476]

# 5 Skills for the future

## Introduction

**The future of the UK creative industries looks set to bring transformation and employment growth, driven by rising global demand for creative content, rapid advances in digital and immersive technologies, and the growing application of creative skills across the wider economy (UK Government, 2025c). From AI-enabled production and virtual worlds to design-led innovation and place-making, creativity is increasingly viewed as central to economic growth and competitiveness (World Economic Forum, 2025).**

Governments in each UK nation expect the creative industries to be a major engine of growth and forecasts suggest that the number of jobs in the UK creative industries will expand rapidly over the next decade (Skills Development Scotland, 2024; Skills England, 2025b; Ulster University and Department for the Economy, 2021). A range of occupations are expected to be in growing demand within these forecasts, from IT directors, programmers and software development professionals to graphic and multimedia designers, architects, advertising account managers and creative directors. These occupations are highly skilled and in demand across other sectors of the economy, which may also lead to competition for skilled talent across industries (Skills Development Scotland, 2024; Skills England, 2025b; Ulster University and Department for the Economy, 2021).

There will, however, be considerable variation in the picture of labour demand between creative sub-sectors and a need to complement these 'top-down' sources of LMI with more granular data on the job roles and skills creative employers will need in future. This chapter presents new evidence from the Creative Industries Skills Audits on employer expectations for the next three to five years. This includes hiring expectations, the occupations that will be in greatest demand in future, and the extent to which the existing workforce will need to upgrade their skills in the years ahead.

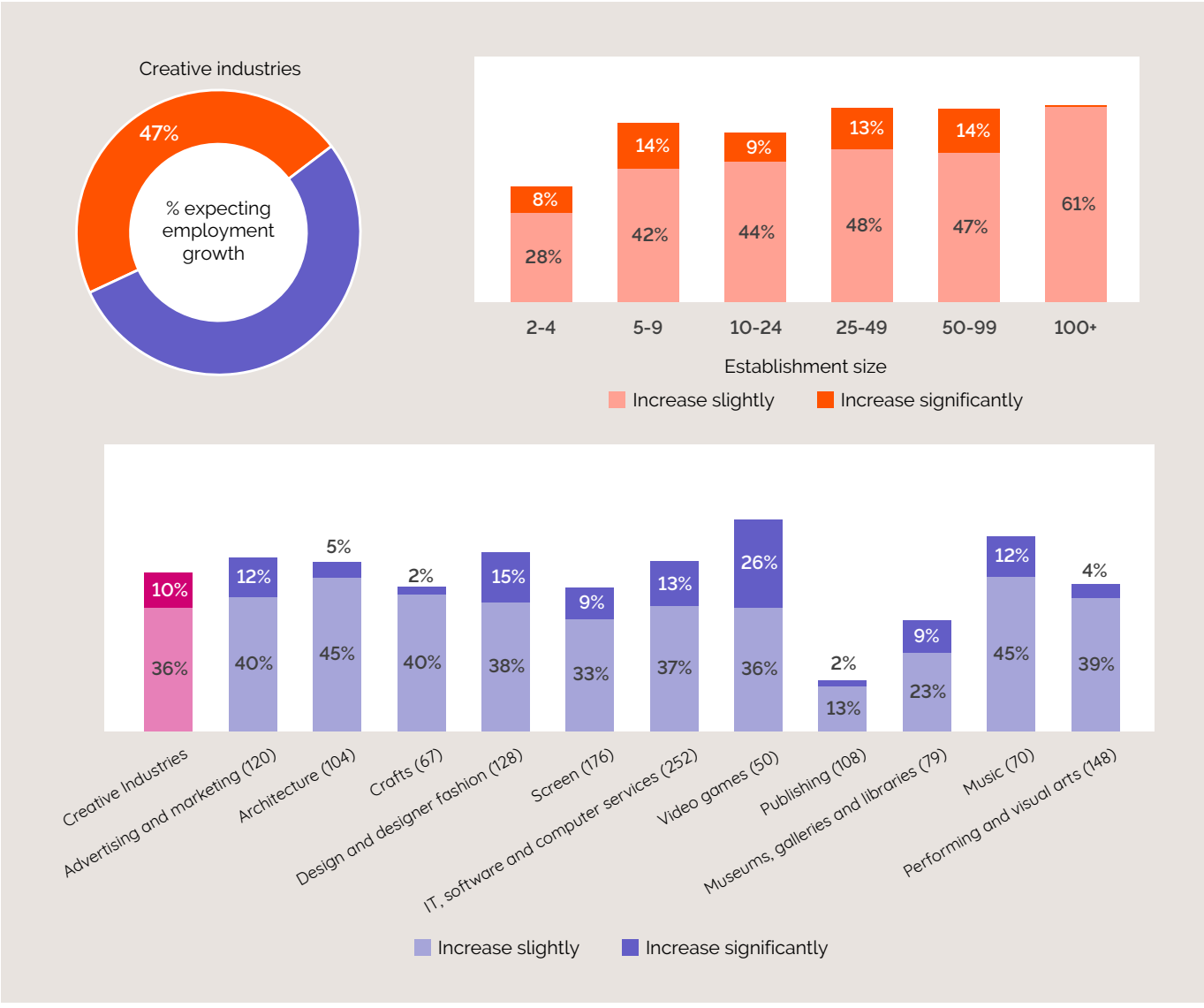
## 5.1 Future jobs

**CESS 2025 sought to explore employers' expectations for the future, in particular whether they anticipate the need to increase levels of employment and/or upskill their workforce in the next three to five years.**

Looking across the creative industries, we find employers are ambitious for the future, with nearly half (47%) expecting to expand their workforce (including freelancers and agency staff). This was particularly the case among businesses in the video games and music industries, as well as in design, advertising and marketing, architecture, and tech, suggesting that even in sectors facing challenging trading conditions today, employers remain optimistic for the future.

In other sub-sectors, like screen, and performing and visual arts, employment expectations were also relatively high, albeit at least in part reflecting the high propensity for project-based, freelance work that creates an ongoing need to hire. Employers in publishing and museums, galleries and libraries were notably more cautious about the outlook, likely reflecting ongoing structural shifts and funding uncertainty.

**Figure 5.1: Growth expectations for the next three to five years, 2025**
% of employers expecting to increase the size of their workforce




Source: CESS 2025

***Q: Over the next 3–5 years, how do you expect the number of staff (including employees, agency staff, self-employed or freelance workers) at this site to change?***

Base = all establishments. [n = 1,302 for the creative industries]

CESS 2025 also takes a detailed look at which job roles will become in increasing demand among creative employers over the next three to five years.

One striking finding is that many of the roles that are subject to skills shortages and gaps in the creative industries today are expected to be in growing demand in future. This is particularly true for software developers; graphic and multi-media designers; and advertising and marketing executives, which feature in the top five occupations in growing demand (Figure 5.2) and the top five hard-to-fill occupations (see Figure 3.7).

Further, several of these occupations, including roles like IT user support technicians and business sales executives are occupations in critical or elevated demand across the economy (Skills England, 2025c).

**Figure 5.2: Top fifteen occupations in growing demand in the creative industries, 2025**
% employers expecting to increase staff numbers in these occupations


Source: CESS 2025

*Q: In which specific occupations do you expect the number of staff to increase over the next three to five years?*

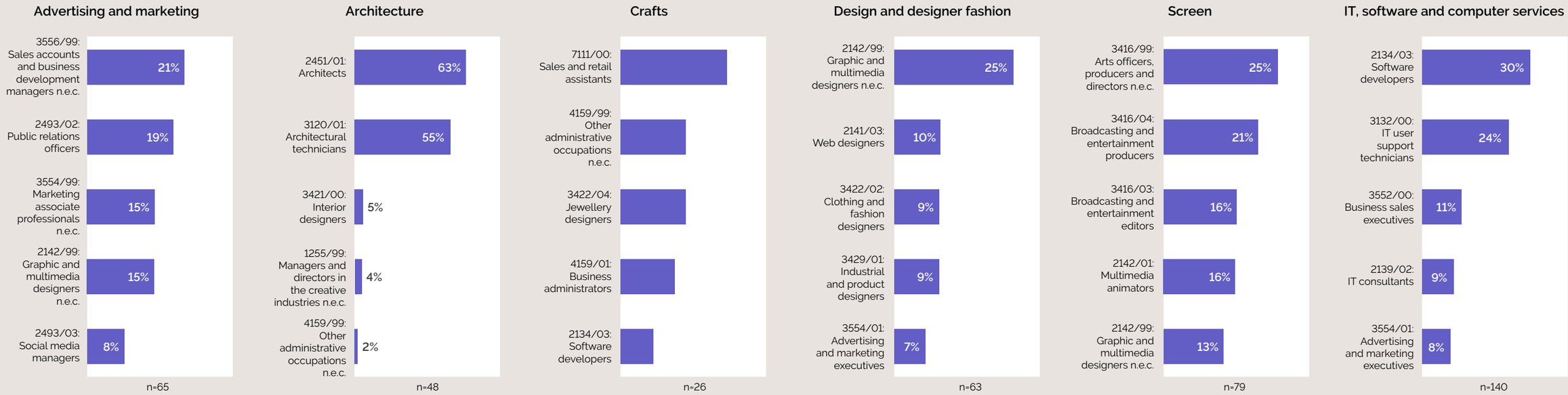
Top fifteen occupations cited. Base = establishments expecting to increase staff numbers (n = 598)

Any pinch points caused by heighted demand for these occupations across the economy will likely impact a range of creative sub-sectors. For instance, software developers are expected to be in growing demand in the tech sector, but also in the video games industry and craft sector. Similarly, graphic and multimedia designers and other design occupations are expected to be in growing demand in many creative sub-sectors.

Specialist technical roles often quite specific to the sub-sector also feature in the top five occupations in growing demand. For example, in architecture, employers anticipated a need to recruit more architects and architectural technicians; in screen, roles like producers (including series/line/assistant producers), directors and assistant directors and editors featured; in publishing, newspaper journalists and reporters; managers and proprietors in museums, galleries and libraries; sound engineers in music; or actors in the performing arts. These findings echo wider research, including by Skills England (Skills England, 2025b). But at the same time, employers in many creative sub-sectors also suggested a need to expand commercial roles, including advertising and marketing executives, and sales and fundraising roles.

Notable by their absence are junior roles which do not generally feature in the list of occupations where employers expected a need to expand staff numbers. Stakeholders engaged in some sub-sector roundtables highlighted this as a potential area of concern and avenue for future research, amid growing debate around the displacement effects of AI on entry-level opportunities across the wider economy.

**Figure 5.3: Top five occupations in growing demand in different creative sub-sectors, 2025**
% employers expecting to increase staff numbers in these occupations




Source: CESS 2025

***Q: In which specific occupations do you expect the number of staff to increase over the next three to five years?***

Base = establishments expecting to increase staff numbers. Top five occupations. N indicates sample size for each sub-sector. Figures have been suppressed where the sample size is <30.

## 5.2 Upskilling needs

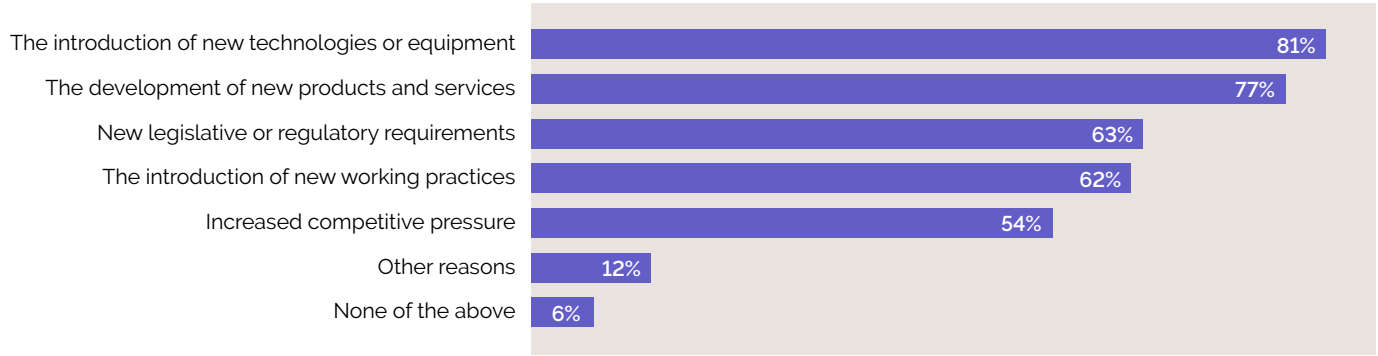
**CESS 2025 also explored how employers expecting to increase staff numbers also anticipated a need to upskill their workforce in the years ahead.**

Technology continues to be a key disrupter, with more than eight in ten creative employers that expect to grow staff numbers also suggesting the introduction of new technologies or equipment will drive upskilling needs. The technologies cited were numerous and often specific to sub-sectors, for instance the need to upgrade skills to work with new games engines in the video games and screen industries or the use of VR and AR technologies to enhance digital experiences in museums, galleries and libraries, for example. However, front of mind for employers and stakeholders alike was the transformative effect of AI across the creative industries (discussed in Box 5.1).

Previous research has highlighted the extent to which creative businesses are more likely to use specialised innovation skills than other sectors, with skills needs often changing rapidly to address new innovation challenges (Nana-Cheera and Roper, 2025). Unsurprisingly, skills for innovation were also seen as important in future, with more than three quarters of creative employers that expect to grow staff numbers also suggesting the development of new products and services will create a need to upgrade the skills of their workforce.

The introduction of new working practices was also seen as a key driver, as was new legislation or regulatory requirements, to varying degrees. These were particularly prominent issues in the architecture sector, for example, where employers pointed to the recent Build Safety Act, National Planning and Infrastructure Bill, and the government's housebuilding target as key drivers. Sector research highlights how an ageing population and climate change is expected to require new design solutions and drive considerable shift in labour demand and skills needs (Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), 2024).

**Figure 5.4: Drivers of upskilling needs, 2025**
% growth of firms that expect to upgrade workforce skills because of these drivers




Source: CESS 2025

*Q: Over the next three to five years do you expect that any staff at this site will need to acquire new skills or knowledge as a result of the following?*

Base = establishments expecting to increase staff numbers in future. [n = 607]

## Box 5.1: A watershed moment for AI in the creative industries?

The use of AI technologies is growing rapidly across the globe (McKinsey, 2025; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2026). 2025 was seen by many as a 'watershed' moment, with significant advancements in Large Language Model (LLM) based generative AI (GenAI) shifting AI technologies from technical domains into mainstream use. Foundational models, like Open AI's ChatGPT-5 and Anthropic's ClaudeOpus-4, have vastly extended capabilities (coding, complex reasoning, ideation) while specialised models can now generate text, video, images and music and create immersive interactive 3D environments (UK Government, 2026).

The Creative Industries Skills Audits were undertaken against this backdrop. And while the research was designed prior to these developments and has not looked explicitly at the impact of AI, it is clear these new technologies are already having a prolific impact on the sector.

As is the case across the economy (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2025; Skills England, 2025a; UK Government, 2026), we find creative sub-sectors are at different positions with regards to the scale of AI impact and the extent of AI adoption.

In advertising and marketing, for example, AI was already seen to be driving industry transformation, with dramatic shifts in content creation, workflows and commercial models, and major industry restructuring. In museums, galleries and libraries, AI tools are increasingly used for collection inventories, documentation and archival work. Research by RIBA found that 60% of the 500 architects surveyed were using AI in their work, in design, bid creation, project management, report writing and environmental sustainability analysis (RIBA, 2025). In screen, the Skills Audits suggest growing use of AI across a very wide range of industry processes – from administrative tasks to idea generation, filming, digital content creation and in post-production, echoing research by the CoSTAR Foresight Lab. It reported screen sectors were at the vanguard of AI use and experimentation, though often beneath the surface, was widespread. (Finney, Tarran and Coupland, 2025). In games, AI technologies are increasingly viewed as a tool for creators but are also being used to augment gaming experiences. In contrast, the Skills Audits suggest that some sub-sectors are earlier in the journey. For instance, in craft and performing and visual arts, fewer employers highlighted AI and stakeholders engaged through the process suggested the industry was just beginning to understand how to apply these new technologies.

A shared concern across all creative sectors is the risk that AI poses to creator rights and commercial models. At the time of writing, the UK government is currently re-assessing its policy position (UK Parliament, 2026) following the recent House of Lords Communication and Digital Committee's report, which concluded the unlicensed use of protected works, and limited transparency from developers on how their models are trained, leaves rights holders unclear on how their content has been used and unable to enforce their rights (House of Lords, 2026). The Skills Audits suggest many creative firms see a pressing need to build awareness across their business of IP and copyright protection and wider work is calling for further guidance and support for freelancers to navigate AI, particularly around rights, income, and practical use of tools (Creators' Writers Alliance (CRA), 2025; Institute for the Future of Work (IFOW), 2025).

Alongside concerns surrounding creator rights, there was considerable discussion about the impact of AI on jobs and skills in the creative industries.

Some highlighted the risk that AI might displace entry-level opportunities. Employers, particularly in advertising and marketing and video games, raised concerns that AI had the potential to displace junior workers, noting that few of the occupations expected to be in demand in future were junior roles, and warned this risked choking off the supply of talent to the creative industries and exacerbating the mid-career talent problem in later years. Further, in the tech sector, employers and stakeholders suggested increased use of AI for coding tasks, coupled with growing offshoring, was reducing demand for entry-level positions in software development and programming.

More generally though, employers and stakeholders consulted throughout the Skills Audit process reported that AI was shifting the skills needs of the creative workforce. Echoing wider research (Skills England, 2025a), the Skills Audits find that these skills generally fell into three categories:

1. **AI literacy** – employers across a range of creative sub-sectors emphasised the need for workers across their business to develop the skills to work effectively with foundational GenAI models such as ChatGPT and CoPilot. These featured heavily in the 'Other' responses offered by CESS 2025 respondents when asked about current skills gaps or future upskilling needs.
2. **Ethical, legal and governance** – employers and stakeholders also stressed the importance of strengthening the knowledge and skills of both business leaders and the workforce (including freelancers) with regards to IP, copyright and licensing. This included improving understanding of how to work safely and ethically with these new technologies and how to licence and protect creative work.
3. **Specialised technical applications** – alongside these broader skillsets were a range of highly specialised technical applications of AI technologies in the creative industries, with frequent reference to the need for workers to be able to deploy specialised AI models for content creation and, in sectors like tech, games and screen, AI programming skills.

   As the use of these new technologies becomes more pervasive, many felt this would give greater weight to workers having strong, distinctly human skills, such as critical thinking, imagination, creativity and interpersonal skills. This echoes recent research by the Creative PEC which suggests AI adoption does not diminish the value of creativity skills but rather amplifies the need for human creative input (Wang et al., 2026).

However, while AI may be front of mind for many, stakeholders consulted during the Skills Audit process and previous research undertaken across the creative industries suggests a lack of technical skills is holding back AI adoption (Cox, 2025; Major Players, 2025). Research by Skills England found that many freelancers and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are using AI tools without structured training, leading to concerns about quality assurance, originality and reputational risk (Skills England, 2025a). Altogether this suggests that investment in AI must be matched by investment in the skills needed to effectively use these new technologies.

### Examples of AI adoption in selected creative sub-sectors

#### Advertising and marketing

AI is used to generate ad copy, images and video variations at scale, test and optimise campaigns in real time, and automate audience targeting through predictive analytics. Emerging practices such as GenAI optimisation (GEO) reflect a wider industry shift towards marketing in AI-mediated search and content environments.

#### Architecture

AI is used in generative design (rapidly producing and iterating building options), automated report and bid writing, and project planning. It is also applied to simulate energy use, carbon impact and environmental performance to inform sustainable design decisions.

#### Design and designer fashion

AI is used to generate visual concepts, create design variations, and support prototyping through image and pattern generation tools. It is also used to analyse trends and consumer data, informing product development and personalised design.

#### Screen

AI is used for script drafting and story development, automated editing and scene assembly, visual effects generation (e.g. de-aging, background creation), and post-production tasks such as colour grading and sound processing. It is also used in virtual production environments.

#### IT, software and computer services

AI is used to build and deploy machine learning models, automate coding through AI assistants, detect anomalies in cybersecurity, and analyse large datasets. It underpins applications such as recommendation engines, natural language processing and predictive systems.

#### Video games

AI is used to create adaptive gameplay (e.g. non-player character behaviour, difficulty scaling), generate assets such as environments or dialogue, and streamline development workflows. It also supports analytics on player behaviour to refine game design and monetisation.

#### Publishing

AI is used for automated editing (grammar, style, summarisation), translation, and content generation for articles or marketing copy. It also supports recommendation systems, audience analytics and the production of multimedia formats such as audiobooks and interactive content.

#### Museums, galleries and libraries

AI is used to catalogue and tag collections (e.g. image recognition), support archival research (e.g. text analysis), and develop interactive exhibits or personalised digital guides. It also underpins recommendation systems and audience insight tools.

#### Music

AI is used to generate melodies, harmonies and sound textures, assist mixing and mastering, and create adaptive soundtracks for games or virtual environments. It also supports remixing and real-time audio manipulation in live or digital settings.

## 5.3 Technical, digital and transversal skills in need of improvement

**When examining the skills that growth firms anticipate will need upgrading over the next three to five years, technical skills feature heavily.**

As summarised in Figure 5.5 overleaf, some priority areas for upskilling were highly specialised to the sub-sector. For instance, campaign strategy in advertising and marketing; technical drawing skills aligned to industry standards in architecture; technical production skills like lighting, sound, electrical and AV in the performing and visual arts; or screen heritage skills such as restoration among those working in film archives.

However, as we found when examining skills shortages and skills gaps, often the areas where creative employers are expecting a need to upskill their workforce are shared.

There is an almost ubiquitous need for stronger business and commercial skills across the creative industries. Employers pointed to a need to upgrade these skills in a range of areas, including sales, business development and fundraising; marketing (particularly digital and social media); IP; accounting and finance; client management and customer service; legal and compliance; and HR. The need to strengthen management and leadership capability was also regularly cited and stakeholders engaged throughout the Skills Audit process also emphasised that business leadership, strategic planning and commercial skills would be vital to enable creative businesses to pivot and expand revenue streams in the face of ongoing market disruption and evolving consumer trends.

Employers and stakeholders in several sectors highlighted the increasingly blurred boundaries between artistic disciplines and technology, creating growing demand for a 'fusion' of creative and digital skills (Easton and Djumalieva, 2018; Hopkins, Williams and Hay, 2026). For instance, in music, audio engineers and music programmers were expected to increasingly work with AI tools to compose and enhance music. In publishing, the shift from print to e-books and audiobooks is driving a need for enhanced multimedia content production and digital design skills. In craft, stakeholders anticipated a growth in craft technology hybrid roles, alongside the increased use of precision production skills using computer-controlled machines.

Employers across many creative sub-sectors expect a need to upgrade the digital skills of their workforce. In the tech sector, employers highlighted a need to strengthen a plethora of advanced digital skills, including software development, AI and machine learning, data science and analytics, cyber security, cloud architecture and wireless communication. In the games industry, many of the specialist skills viewed as important by employers in future are advanced digital skills, including programming languages to work with games engines; UI Design; 2D and 3D art; visual effects and animation; VR programming and systems development – many of which also expected to be in high demand in the screen industries. In architecture, employers highlighted the growing use of advanced digital modelling techniques and environmental simulations.

Indeed, when asked explicitly about digital skills, nearly two thirds (63%) of firms that expect to grow and upskill their workforce suggest a need to strengthen these skills in the years ahead. Often, this concerned skills to work with specialist software, hardware or systems – cited by nearly one quarter (24%) of employers (Figure 5.6). This included a vast array of often sector-specific software. Employers also pointed to a need for workers to have stronger skills to work with Microsoft Office (or equivalent Google or Apple tools); web development; graphic design and design engineering; data analysis and data science; multimedia production skills; and app programming and development.

**Figure 5.5: Specialist skills needs over the next three to five years in different creative sub-sectors, 2025**
Skills referenced by employers with upskilling needs


Source: CESS 2025

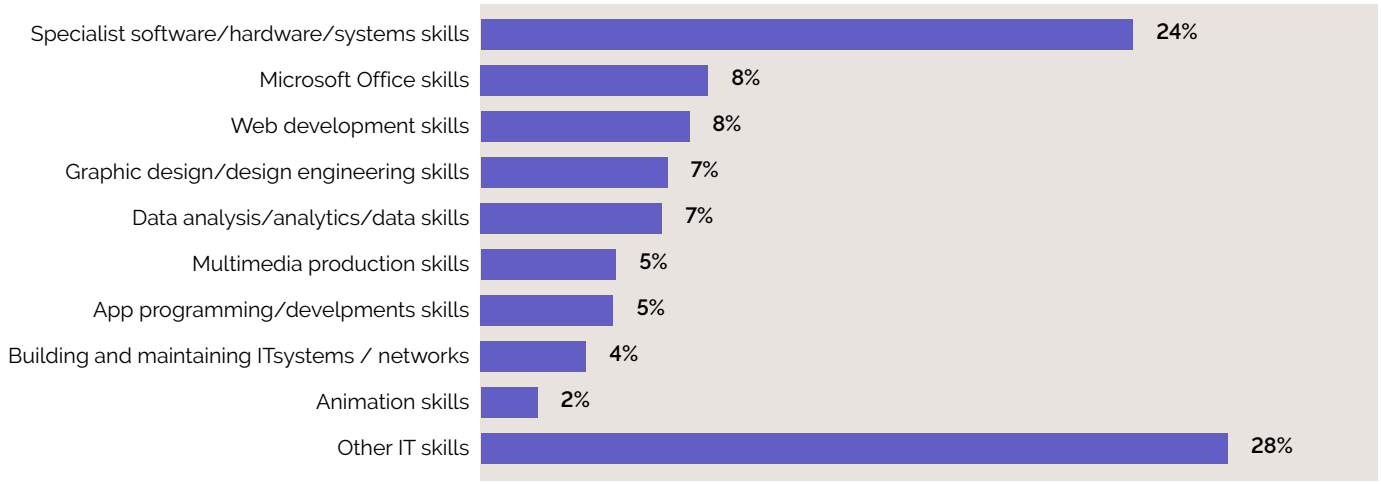
*Q: Which, if any, specialist skills or knowledge do you feel will need improving over the next three to five years?*

Base = growth firms with upskilling needs. N indicates sample size for each sub-sector. Data for museums, galleries and libraries has been suppressed due to small sample size.

However, more than one in four (28%) creative employers with upskilling needs pointed to 'other' IT skills, and often this related to AI. As discussed in Box 5.1, employers in many creative sub-sectors emphasised the importance of strengthening their workforce's ability to work with AI. This was multi-dimensional, including enhancing awareness and the ability to use AI; highly technical applications of AI often very specific to the sub-sector or role; and broader skills to put in place the controls to manage copyright and ethical concerns. Indeed, several employers emphasised that AI was driving a need for creative businesses to have the skills to ensure their IP was protected. Others suggested that AI was placing greater emphasis on human creativity and core skills, particularly critical thinking, seen as vital to effectively utilise AI tools, validate the information they provide, and to consider how to serve clients, customers or communities who are increasingly making use of AI agents.

**Figure 5.6: Future digital skills, 2025**

% of employers with upskilling needs suggesting skills need improving in their workforce



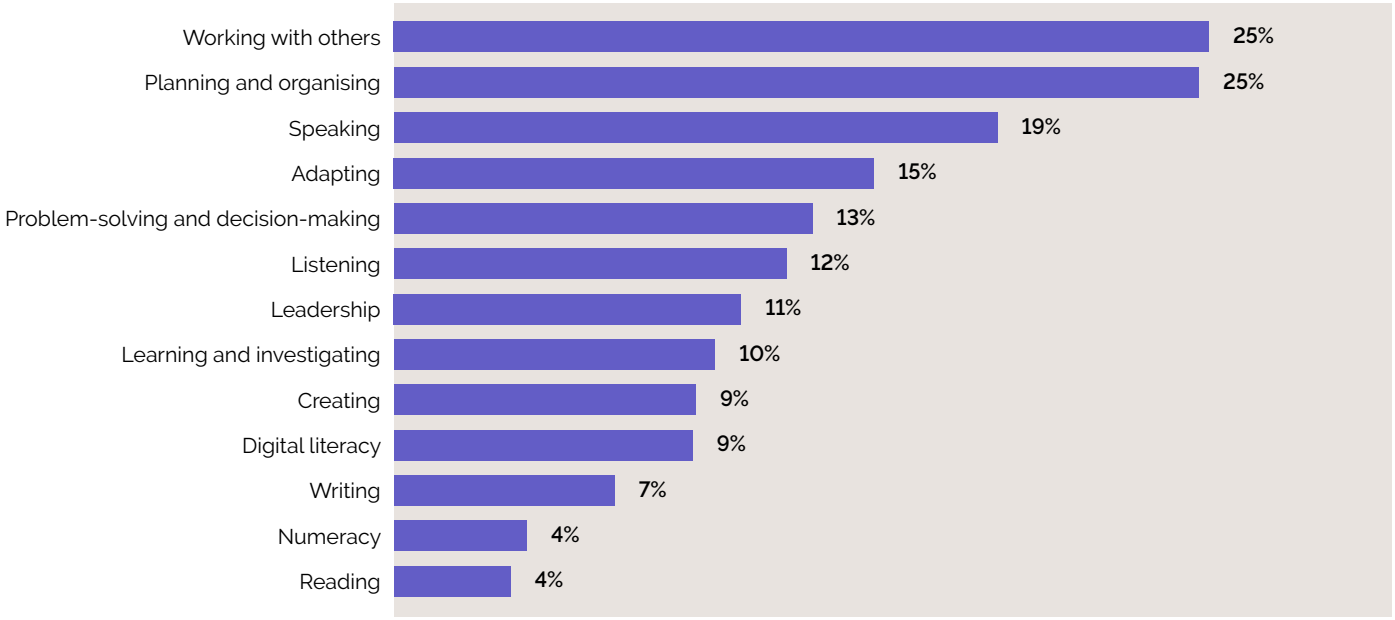

Source: CESS 2025

***Q: do you expect staff to need to acquire new IT skills over the next three to five years? If so, which specific IT skills do you feel will need improving?***

Base = growth firms with upskilling needs. [n =570]

**Figure 5.7: Future core skills, 2025**

% of employers with upskilling needs suggesting skills need improving in their workforce




Source: CESS 2025

*Q: Which, if any, core or 'transversal' skills do you feel will need improving among your staff over the next three to five years?*

Base = growth firms with upskilling needs. [n =570]

Creative industry employers emphasised a wide range of other core or transversal skills expected to need strengthening in future. Again, teamworking and planning and organisation were seen as key areas for improvement, mirroring the picture of skills gaps seen in the current creative industries workforce. Employers also suggested their workforce would need stronger communication skills, adaptability, problem-solving and decision-making.

Finally, the Skills Audits sought to explore skills for sustainability in the creative industries, including examining the presence of skills shortages and gaps today and the extent to which employers expected a need to upgrade the skills of their workforce in future as a result of business ambitions to become more sustainable or carbon neutral.

As discussed in Box 5.2, while sustainability or 'green' skills are viewed as important by many employers now, they are set to become even more important in future.

## Box 5.2: The growing importance of sustainability skills needs in the creative industries

Climate change and biodiversity loss are major drivers of transformation for businesses across the economy, with many organisations globally increasing their actions to reduce their carbon emissions or adapt to climate change (World Economic Forum, 2025). This is also the case in the UK's creative industries, which have been recognised in the UK government's Creative Industries Sector Plan for the role it can play in driving a green transition and helping the UK to achieve its climate and net zero objectives (UK Government, 2025c). Across creative sub-sectors, we can see examples of awards, strategies and coalitions seeking to address the environmental impact of the sector, from the Screen New Deal Transformation Plan for Wales (British Film Institute (BFI), 2023), to the Design for Planet Skills Initiative (Design Council, 2024) and the international Gallery Climate Coalition.

Across creative sub-sectors, organisations and networks are taking action to respond to the climate and biodiversity agenda. However, as is the case across the economy, creative sub-sectors and organisations are at very different positions in shifting their business models and operations for environmental benefit (BOP and Julie's Bicycle, 2022). This range is reflected in the varying levels of skills challenges employers highlight in relation to decarbonisation and broader environmental impacts.

Within CESS 2025, one in ten employers in the creative industries with skills shortages suggested that recruitment difficulties were associated with candidates lacking sustainability or 'green' skills. Nearly one in five (19%) of employers with skills gaps identified these skills as needing improvement among their existing workforce. This is slightly higher than earlier data from the Employer Skills Survey (2022), which finds that the incidence of skills gaps associated with sustainability for the creative industries was 14%, similar to the 13% found across all industries.

The drivers of skills challenges related to environmental sustainability vary across creative sub-sectors, business models and size. For example, in architecture the sector continues to respond to environmental legislation, sustainability standards and certification, and growing client demand. In design and designer fashion, as well as in craft, there have been new business models associated with circular economy principles such as the clothing repair and resale market (Schneider, 2023), as well as growing consumer interest in ethical and environmentally sustainable products (Crafts Council, 2025). Within museums, galleries and libraries, we see a keen focus on decarbonising often historic buildings in response to high energy costs. And across the arts and in the screen sector, environmental reporting requirements attached to public funding and production procurement from bodies like Arts Council England, Creative Scotland, BFI, BBC and Channel 4 are also incentivising organisations to upskill in this area.

As discussed throughout this report, a further driver of skills needs across the creative industries is innovation activity by organisations. While creative industries firms (ten or more employees) are less likely than the industry average to engage in innovations for environmental benefit, those in the architecture, design and designer fashion, and craft sub-sectors are more likely to engage in such innovation, both with respect to their own business processes and in developing new goods and services for clients (Nana-Cheera and Roper, 2025).

The exact nature of sustainability skills needs also varies considerably, which is unsurprising given the diverse business models, value chains and practices across creative sub-sectors. In responding to CESS 2025, many employers across sub-sectors pointed to the need to embed more sustainable practices. These included skills related to reducing energy use; minimising travel and transportation; embedding circular economy principles related to repair, reuse and recycling; and use of alternative materials or digital tools to minimise direct emissions. Creative employers across a range of sectors also highlighted the need to strengthen their skills in carbon calculation, including in relevant data collection and analysis techniques, and in using relevant tools and frameworks such as albert's carbon calculator in screen, Julie's Bicycle's Creative Climate Tools in museums and visual arts, and the Theatre Green Book. In addition, many highlighted a need to improve general knowledge and understanding of climate change within their workforce. In other cases, sustainability skills needs were highly technical and specific to the sub-sectoral context. This included things like advanced knowledge of sustainable building materials in architecture, environmental certifications and accreditation standards (such as B Corp); and sustainable design principles.

With growing awareness of the need to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss by governments, businesses and society; the proliferation of environmental standards or certification; and the increased use of mandatory environmental reporting by regulators, funders and commissioners, sustainability skills are widely expected to become more important in the years ahead.

More than one in four (28%) creative industries employers that expect to increase staff numbers and upgrade workforce skills suggest upskilling needs relate to business goals to become more sustainable or carbon neutral. In some sub-sectors where a relatively small share of employers identify sustainability skills gaps today, like screen, music, and advertising and marketing, the growth in demand for sustainability skills could be great, with a much higher share of employers expecting a need to upgrade these skills in future. Employers and stakeholders across all sub-sectors emphasised the importance of resources, tools and training in embedding more sustainable practices in future and enabling the creative industries to play a central role in the green transition.

### Future sustainability skills needs across example creative sub-sectors

#### Advertising and marketing

Organisations in advertising and marketing highlighted future skills needs related to increasing environmental awareness and general understanding of climate among workers; knowledge of green markets such as renewable energy; sustainable procurement and production practices; and knowledge of regulation, including that related to mandatory and voluntary ESG reporting requirements, including those associated with AdGreen and B Corp Certification.

#### Architecture

Organisations in architecture highlighted future skills needs related to data collection, analysis and use of carbon calculation tools and biodiversity matrices; knowledge of how to apply to relevant regulation and legislation, such as the Buildings Safety Act or RIBA standards; circular economy principles such as recycling and reuse; sustainable design methods; Passivhaus skills and certification; use of BIM software to assess potential carbon usage; and use of relevant technologies, such as thermal imaging devices.

#### Craft

Organisations in craft highlighted future skills needs related to embedding circular economy principles such as recycle, reduce and reuse of materials; energy use reduction techniques; and sustainable packaging.

#### Design and designer fashion

Organisations in design and designer fashion highlighted future skills needs related to communication skills; carbon calculation and environmental reporting; carbon offsetting; skills associated with B Corp Certification; knowledge of regulation such as Right to Repair; sustainable procurement practices; sustainable transport; circular economy principles such as reducing material use; life cycle assessment; sustainable use of AI; and sustainable website design.

#### Screen

Organisations in screen highlighted future skills needs related to sustainable transport (including working with EVs and hybrids); sustainable procurement; use of renewable and 'green' energy on productions (e.g. hybrid generators); buildings management and reduction of waste and energy use; environmental awareness; carbon calculation (data collection, analysis and reporting); sustainable use of AI in film production and post-production; adherence to B Corp standards; and requirements of BAFTA albert certification.

#### IT, software and computer services

Organisations in the tech sector highlighted future skills needs related to energy reduction measures in the use of digital tools and technologies; carbon calculation (data collection, analysis and reporting); ESG reporting requirements and knowledge of compliance with relevant standards such as B Corp and ISO 14,000; sustainable use of AI; environmental awareness; and repair and recycling practices associated with electronic devices.

#### Music

Organisations in the music sector highlighted future skills needs related to environmental awareness; use of virtual technologies to support hybrid working; sustainable procurement; carbon calculation (data collection and analysis), including use of Julie's Bicycle's Creative Climate Tools; sustainable transport; sustainable buildings management (e.g. energy use reduction); repair/recycle/reuse; sustainable event production; and sustainable use of AI.

#### Performing and visual arts

Organisations in the performing and visual arts sector highlighted future skills needs related to waste management and recycling practices; sustainable buildings management (e.g. decreasing energy use); management of retrofit projects; environmental awareness; carbon literacy; and carbon calculation (data collection and analysis).

# 6 Employer investment in skills

## Introduction

**Ensuring the creative industries have access to the talent and skills they need will be vital to achieving the growth ambitions set out in the Creative Industries Sector Plan (UK Government, 2025c). As the skills needs of the sector evolve rapidly in the face of technological advancement, innovation, market shifts and the climate transition, employer investment in the skills of the workforce will be key. Yet past research has found that employers in the creative industries are less likely to provide training for their workforce. When training is offered it tends to be less intensive and unaccredited, and rates of work-related training for creative workers are among the lowest in the economy (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023; Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025).**

With skills shortages and gaps widespread across the creative industries, this chapter seeks to explore the impact these skills challenges are having on creative firms and what steps they are taking in response. Further, it provides up-to-date evidence on employer training provision, the barriers creative businesses face in providing workforce development, and the factors that might unlock greater investment in skills in future.

## 6.1 The impact and response to skills challenges

**In 2025, more than four in ten (43%) of creative industry employers reported either skills shortages when recruiting or skills gaps among their workforce. Among those that did, 69% suggested these skills challenges were having an impact on their business, rising to more than three quarters (77%) of mid-sized firms (employing between 50 and 100 people).**

There is also substantial variation in the impact of skills challenges between creative sub-sectors (see Figure 6.1 overleaf). Employers in publishing, design and designer fashion, advertising and marketing, and performing and visual arts were more likely to suggest that the skills challenges they face are having a business impact.

In contrast, firms in the craft sector; museums, galleries and libraries; architecture; and video games were slightly less likely to do so, albeit caution needs to be exercised given small sample bases in some cases.

**Figure 6.1: Impact of skills challenges, 2025**
% of employers with skills challenges that suggest these are impacting their business


Source: CESS 2025

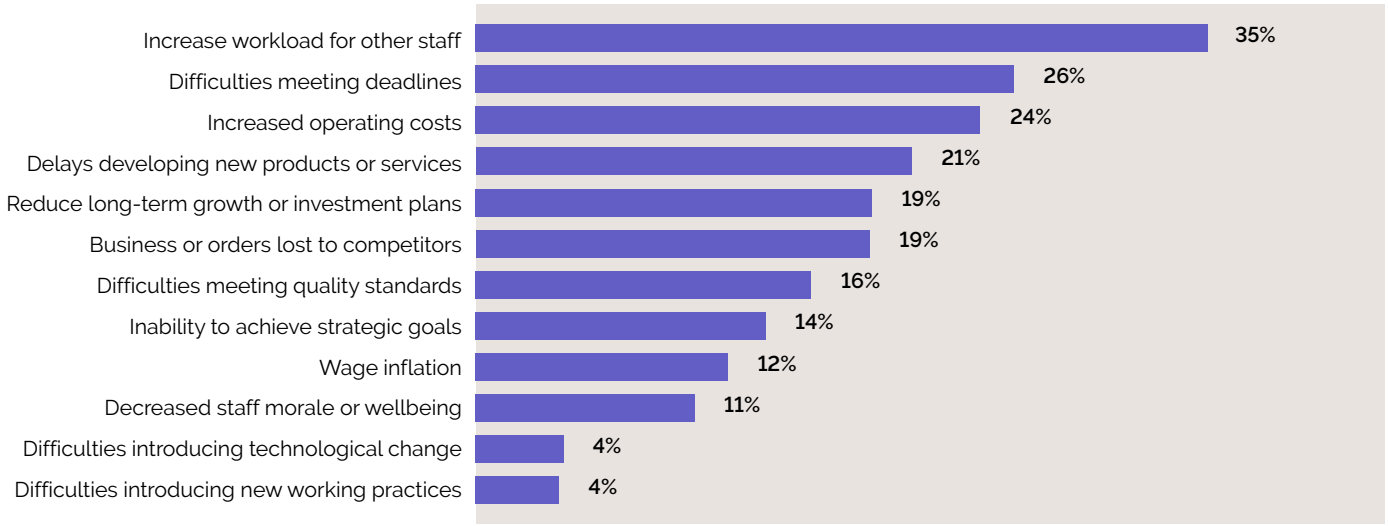
***Q: Thinking now about all occupations in which you have skills challenges – that is, either where you cannot recruit someone with the right skills or where the people doing these jobs do not have all the skills that they need – what impact are these skills issues having on this site…?***

Base = establishments with skills shortages or skills gaps. [n = 644 for the creative industries]. Figures in parenthesis indicate sample size in creative sub-sectors.

Across the creative industries, employers most commonly suggest the skills challenges they face are leading to an increase in workload for other staff – cited by 35% of creative industry employers that experience either skills shortages or skills gaps (see Figure 6.2 overleaf).

Skills challenges are also hindering the delivery capability of creative firms. Around one quarter of employers with skills challenges report difficulties meeting deadlines (cited by 26% of firms with skills challenges) and increased operating costs (24%).

**Figure 6.2: Impact of skills challenges, 2025**
% of employers with skills challenges citing these impacts




Source: CESS 2025

***Q: Thinking now about all occupations in which you have skills challenges – that is, either where you cannot recruit someone with the right skills or where the people doing these jobs do not have all the skills that they need – what impact are these skills issues having on this site…?***

Base = establishments with skills shortages or skills gaps. [n = 644 for the creative industries]

Of particular concern in the context of the government's growth mission is that skills challenges are hindering growth and innovation in the creative industries, which has also been highlighted by past research (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2025; Nana-Cheera and Roper, 2025).

One in five creative industry employers experiencing skills shortages or gaps suggest these are delaying them developing new products and services (21%), causing them to scale-back long-term growth or investment plans (19%) or hindering their ability to compete (19%).

Skills challenges are also presenting wider challenges for creative industry employers, such as undermining quality standards, hindering their ability to achieve strategic goals, driving wage inflation or reducing staff morale or wellbeing.

Skills challenges are, however, impacting different sub-sectors in different ways. For instance, employers in advertising and marketing and design and designer fashion were much more likely to suggest the skills challenges they face are hindering growth and innovation.

Skills shortages and gaps were also reported to be hampering innovation in the screen industries, but most noteworthy is that nearly one in five (18%) screen employers with skills challenges suggested these were negatively impacting staff morale and wellbeing. This echoes wider research evidencing long working hours and mental health and wellbeing concerns in film and TV production (Film and TV Charity, 2025; Swords et al., 2022).

The impact of skills challenges on staff morale and wellbeing was also a particular concern in performing and visual arts, with employers in this sub-sector also most commonly suggesting skills shortages and gaps were hindering their ability to introduce new technology.

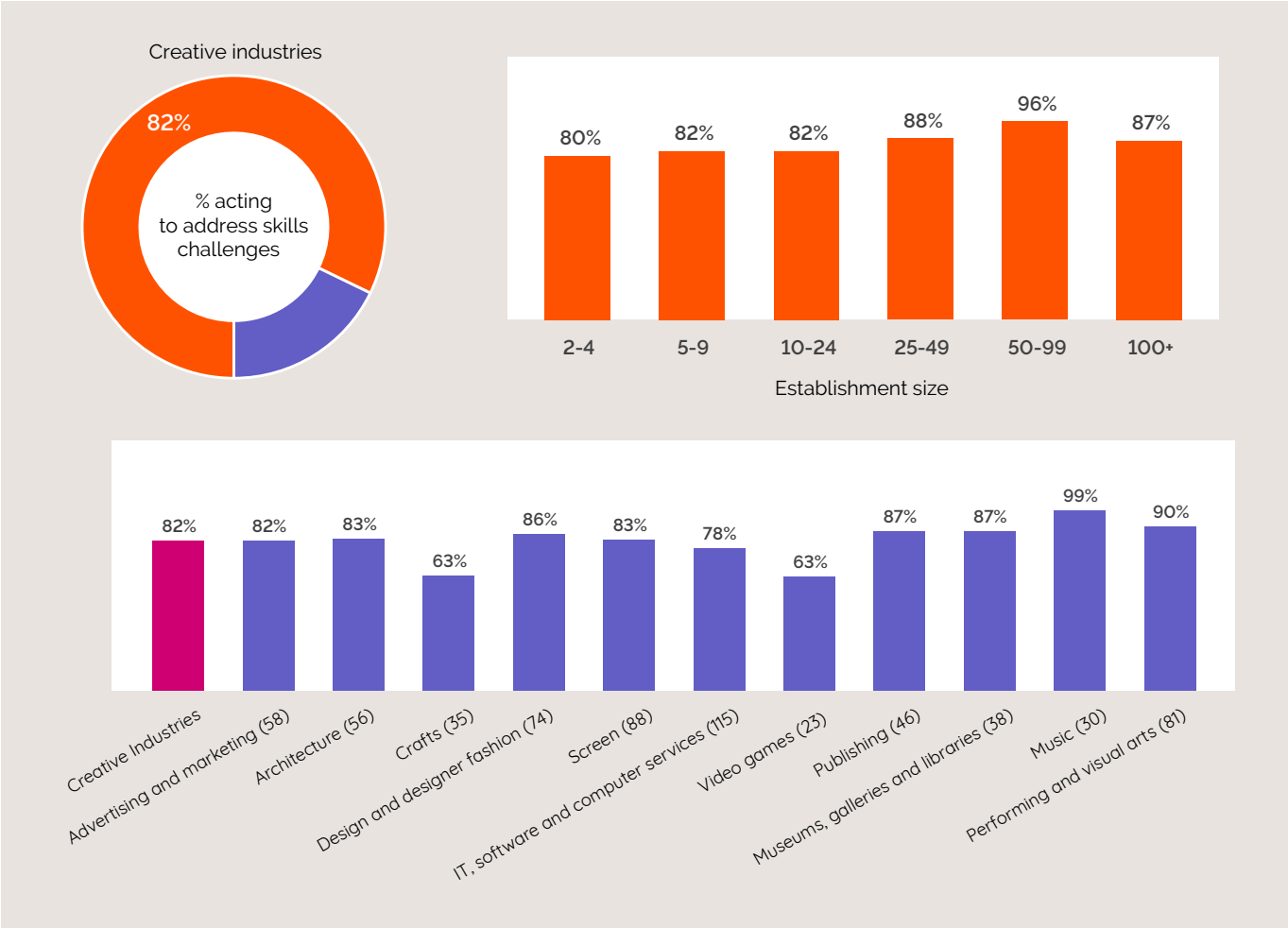
In contrast, employers in publishing highlighted the impact of skills challenges on the workload of other staff, their competitive position and wage inflation.

CESS 2025 also sought to explore the steps that creative businesses were taking to address skills shortages and gaps. We find the vast majority (82%) of employers with skills challenges in the creative industries were taking action in response.

As might be expected, creative firms most likely to report skills challenges were having a business impact were also more likely to be taking steps to address these concerns. For instance, nearly all mid-sized firms (50–99 employees) with skills challenges were taking action. Similarly, employers in publishing, design and designer fashion were also implementing measures to address skills shortages and gaps, with employers in music, and performing and visual arts most likely to be taking action in response to the skills challenges they face.

Across the creative industries, the most common response to skills shortages and gaps was to provide training for the existing workforce – cited by nearly half (47%) of employers with skills challenges (see Figure 6.4 overleaf).

**Figure 6.3: Response to skills challenges, 2025**
% employers with skills challenges taking action

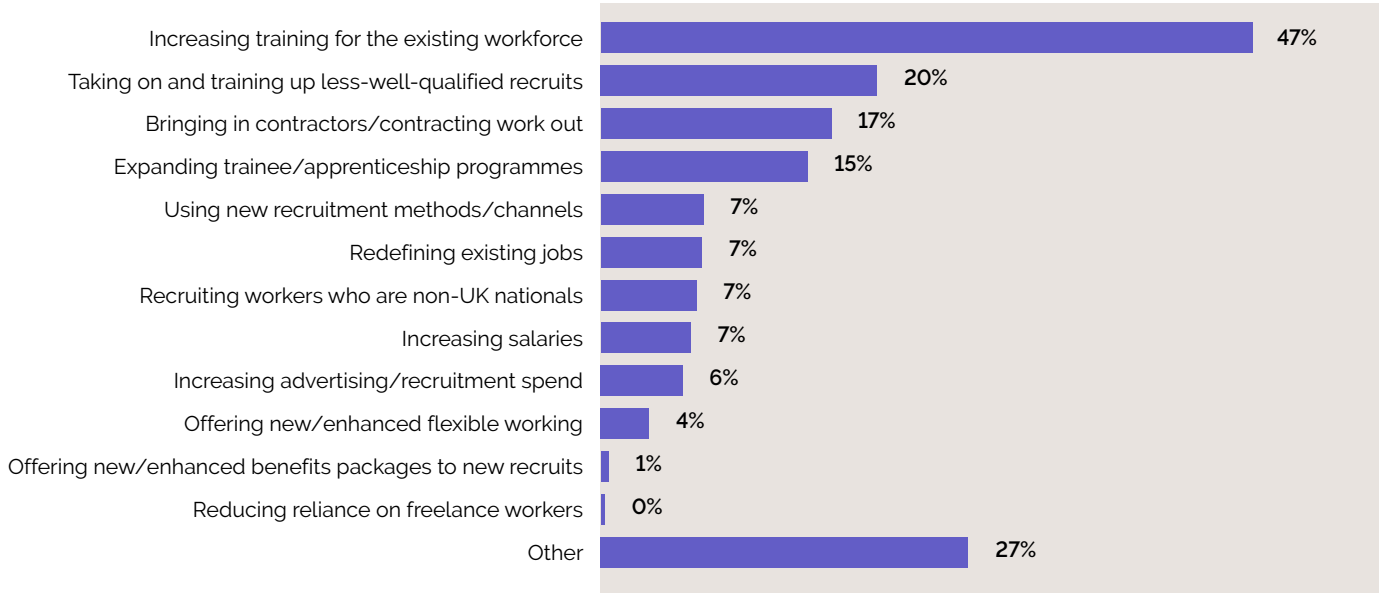



Source: CESS 2025

***Q: What, if anything, is your site doing to overcome these skills challenges?***

Base = establishments with skills shortages or skills gaps. [n = 644 for the creative industries]. Figures in parenthesis indicate sample size in creative sub-sectors.

**Figure 6.4: Response to skills challenges, 2025**
% of employers with skills challenges citing these actions




Source: CESS 2025

***Q: What, if anything, is your site doing to overcome these skills challenges?***

Base = establishments with skills shortages or skills gaps. [n = 644 for the creative industries].

One in five creative industries employers with skills shortages or gaps had taken on staff without the full complement of skills needed with a view to training them up. This approach was particularly popular among employers in music, and performing and visual arts.

More than one in ten (17%) had brought in contractors or contracted work out – a response more common in design and designer fashion – and 15% of those with skills shortages or gaps had expanded trainee or apprenticeship programmes in response to skills challenges.

A small number of creative employers had adapted recruitment methods or increased advertising recruitment spend, albeit this was a more popular response in advertising and marketing. Further, relatively few employers across all creative sectors (just 7%, on average) had looked to recruit overseas workers in response to skills shortages and gaps.

However, more than one in four creative industry employers with skills challenges pointed to 'other' responses. These included a promising array of examples of the steps creative firms can and are taking to address skills pinch points, including:

- Strengthening hiring practices, by widening recruitment channels and more clearly stating skills requirements (including transversal skills) in job ads;
- Better matching workers to specific roles, projects or client briefs that are well-aligned to their skillsets;
- Strengthening HR practices, developing careers maps, competency frameworks and training plans for workers and leadership development opportunities for managers;
- Providing non-formal and informal learning opportunities in the workplace, for example through 'lunch and learn' sessions, panel talks and events;
- Promoting peer to peer learning, through job shadowing and mentoring; and
- Collaborating with other businesses, sector bodies and local skills providers to develop relevant training.

## 6.2 Extent, barriers and enablers of employer training provision

**In addition to examining the response to skills challenges, CESS 2025 also looks more widely at training provision by creative employers over the past year.**

The survey finds that more than three quarters (77%) of employers in the creative industries had provided training for staff. This suggests higher levels of training than indicated by wider surveys (see for example the Employer Skills Survey 2022 in Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025), potentially reflecting the wider definition, including training provided for agency staff, the self-employed or freelance workers, alongside employees.

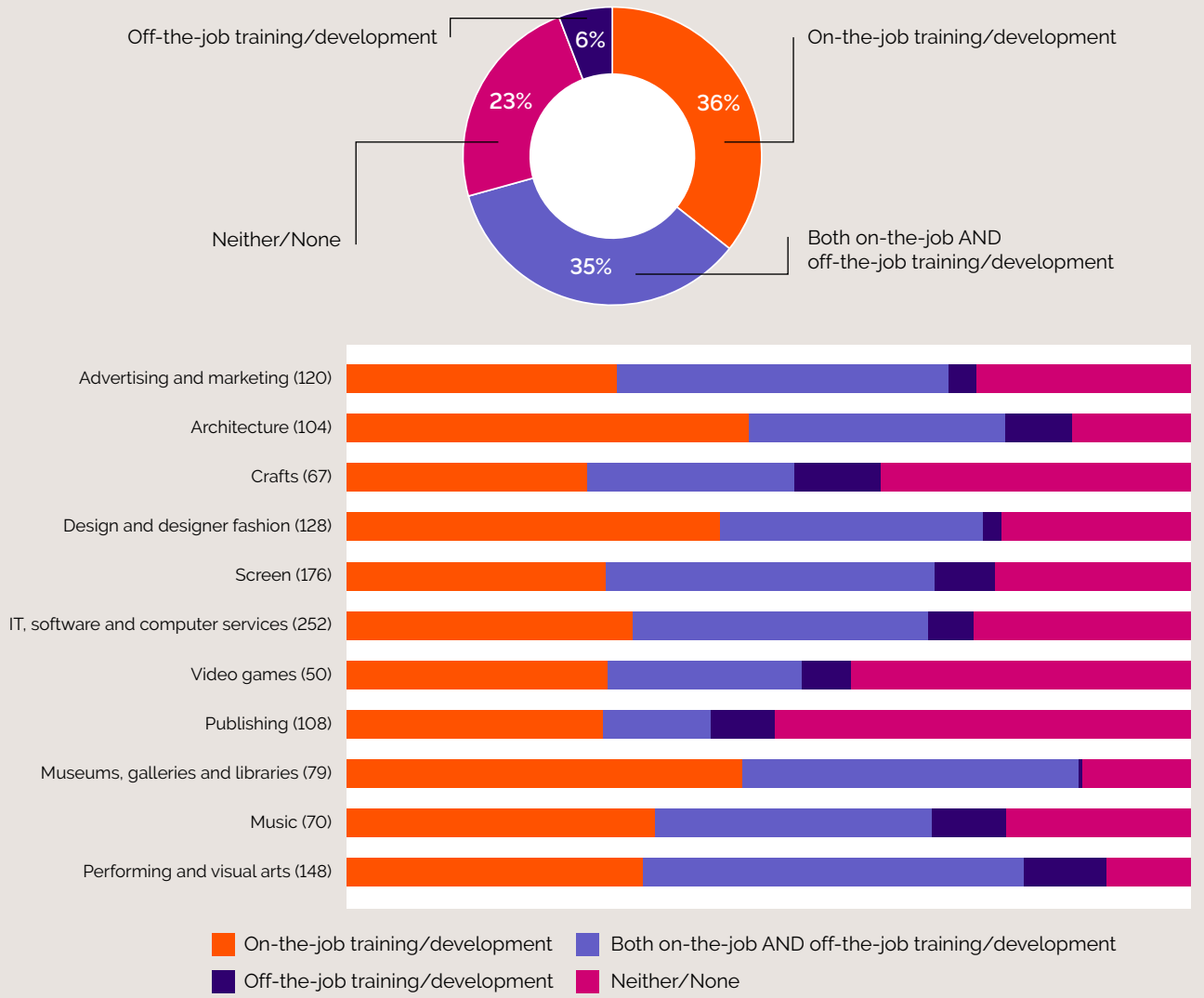
Rates of training were particularly high in architecture, likely reflecting training requirements for some occupations in the sector (ARB, 2021), as well as among employers in museums, galleries and libraries, and performing and visual arts. In contrast, only around half (51%) of employers in publishing had provided training for workers over the past year, with rates of training also notably lower in video games and crafts.

Across all sub-sectors, training is often 'on the job', as provided by one in three (36%) creative industry employers.

While important, wider research highlights the benefits of off-the-job training too, in developing transferable, accredited skills attainment that supports individual progression and labour market mobility (OECD, 2019). In line with wider research, we find only a very small proportion of employers in the creative industries provide only off the job training (6% and 6% respectively).

In contrast, rates of training are notably lower in publishing, video games and crafts.

**Figure 6.5: Employer training provision, 2025**
% of employers providing training over the past year




Source: CESS 2025

***Q: What, if any, training has your organisation arranged or funded over the past twelve months?***

Base = all establishments. [n = 1,302 for the creative industries] Figures in parenthesis indicate sample size in creative sub-sectors.

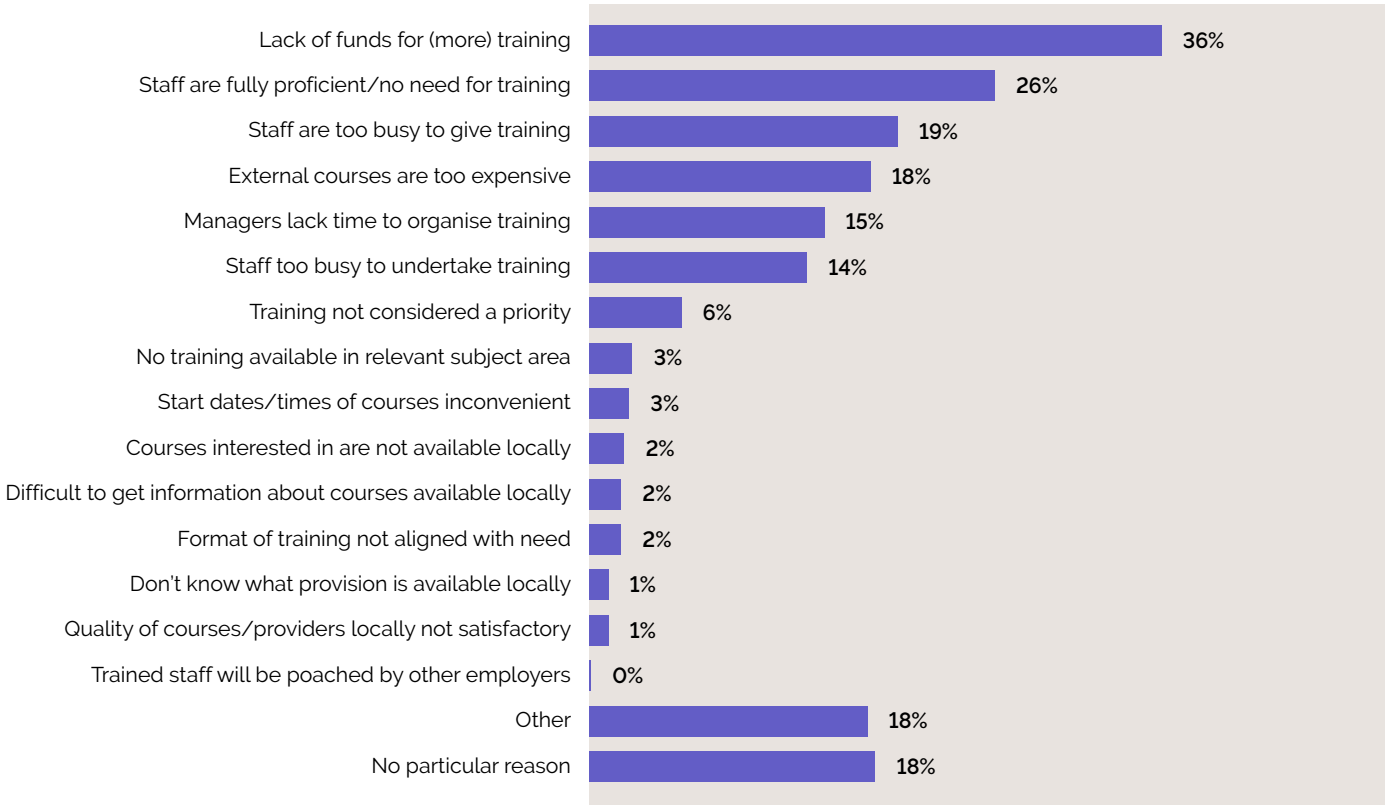
In the context of current skills challenges and future upskilling needs, CESS 2025 examined what factors inhibited employers from offering more, or indeed any, training for workers, and what measures might enable greater skills investment in future.

While around one quarter (26%) of employers don't offer training because they consider staff to be fully proficient, this means three quarters (74%) of employers in the creative industries report barriers to training of some form (Figure 6.6).

Financial and time constraints feature heavily. More than one third (36%) of creative industry employers suggested they lacked funds for training and nearly one in five (18%) felt external courses were too expensive. The general pace of the industry, the project-based nature of work in some contexts and the predominance of micro-sized firms means finding the time for training is a challenge. Around one in five creative industry employers suggested staff were too busy to give training (19%), managers too busy to organise it (15%) and staff too busy to participate (14%).

Stakeholders consulted through the research suggested that time and cost pressures were likely to be felt more acutely by smaller firms who lack funds and cover for staff while they conduct off site training. Others emphasised a spatial dimension to this, with creative firms based in rural areas disproportionately feeling the burden to travel costs and time off site. There was also some degree of variation between creative sub-sectors (see Figure 6.7 overleaf).

**Figure 6.6: Barriers to training, 2025**
% of employers citing these constraints




Source: CESS 2025

*Q: What, if anything, prevents your organisation from offering (more) training for staff at this site?*

Base = all establishments. [n = 1,302]

Employers in publicly-funded parts of the sector like museums, galleries and libraries; music; and performing and visual arts were more likely to point to cost constraints – a potential reflection of cuts to arts funding over the past decade (Ashton et al., 2024). A lack of funds for training and/or the cost of external courses was also a particular concern for employers in design and designer fashion, and screen, while stakeholders in advertising and marketing suggested that challenging trading conditions and industry restructuring was affecting the take-up of training.

Time for training appears to be a particular issue in the advertising and marketing, music, screen and video games industries. In advertising and marketing, for example, roundtable participants suggested the pace the industry worked at often made it challenging for workers, particularly mid-career talent, to take time out for development. In screen, the project-based nature of work in film and TV production was seen as a challenge, where during acutely busy periods in the production cycle it was difficult to offer or participate in training.

Overall, few employers that responded to the survey pointed to a lack of relevant training or raised concerns about the format, quality or local availability of skills provision. However, there was some variation by sub-sector and challenge to this by stakeholders consulted through the audit process.

In design and designer fashion, employers were more likely than other creative industry employers to suggest that start dates, the times of courses or the format of training was not well-aligned with the needs of the industry, echoing wider sector research (UK Fashion and Textile Association and Oxford Economics, 2023).

In advertising and marketing, roundtable participants suggested courses could be overly generic, poor quality and not at the right level to address the skills constraints the sector faces. Additionally, they highlighted the difficulty faced in utilising Apprenticeship Levy funds as a key indication that skills provision was not well aligned to the needs of the sector (Advertising Association, 2025).

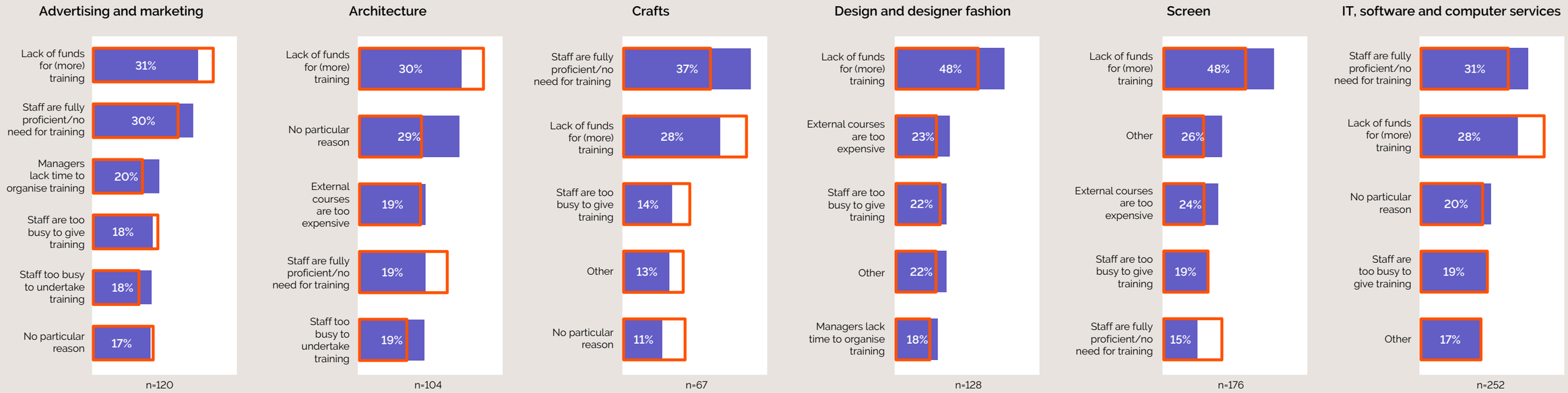
In the screen industries, wider research has demonstrated the challenge posed by the structural features of some skills products, including apprenticeships (BFI, 2022; Screen Sector Skills Taskforce, 2023). Further, analysis of employers reporting 'other' barriers to training suggests screen employers often require highly specialised skills and training, which they struggle to find externally and hence offer in-house.

This was also echoed by attendees at the video games roundtable, who suggested skills provision was not always well-aligned to sector needs and was insufficiently flexible to accommodate the working patterns of the industry.

More generally, participants in the tech sector roundtable highlighted how continual skills policy shifts created confusion and reduced the likelihood of employer engagement.

## Figure 6.7: Barriers to training in different creative sub-sectors, 2025

% of employers citing these constraints




Source: CESS 2025

***Q: What, if anything, prevents your organisation from offering (more) training for staff at this site?***

Base = all establishments. [n = 1,302]. Red outline represents the creative industries average.

In the face of such barriers to training, a critical question then becomes what factors would enable greater skills investment in future?

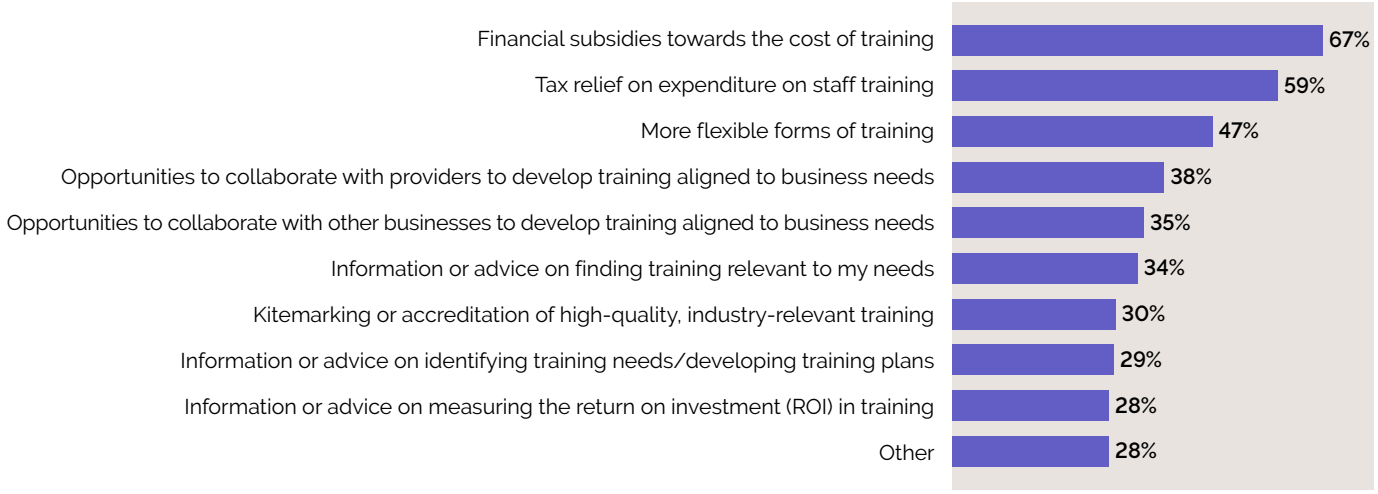
Unsurprisingly given the primary constraints, employers across all creative sub-sectors frequently point to the need for financial support, including financial subsidies towards the cost of training, cited by two thirds (67%) of creative industry employers and tax relief on expenditure on staff training (cited by 59%) (Figure 6.8).

In this context, stakeholders consulted through the Skills Audit process welcomed additional flexibility in the English skills system, including in the use of funds raised through the Growth and Skills Levy (GSL) and with the forthcoming LLE. Those engaged in the national roundtables also pointed to scope for the creative industries to better utilise equivalent funding in the devolved nations, such as Personal Learning Accounts in Wales and the 'Skill Up' Flexible Skills Fund in Northern Ireland, as important means for unlocking more funds for training. In contrast, stakeholders in Scotland raised concerns that the discontinuation of the Flexible Workforce Development Fund could have a negative impact on rates of training in the sector, while those consulted in a range of sectors raised concerns that the defunding of Level 7 apprenticeships could remove vital, technical pathways into the sector.

The ongoing funding of skills bootcamps in England, greater funding of modular training and short courses generally, and skills passports to enable workers to record learning and development was seen as particularly important. Indeed, nearly half (47%) of creative industry employers suggested more flexible forms of training would enable them to offer more training in future.

**Figure 6.8: Enablers of skills investment, 2025**

% of employers suggesting these measures would enable them to offer more training




Source: CESS 2025

***Q: What measures would enable your organisation to offer (more) training in future?***

Base = all establishments. [n = 1,302]

In several creative sub-sectors, ranging from tech and video games to screen, and advertising and marketing, stakeholders suggested the funding of digital and AI short courses through the GSL was an immediate opportunity for the creative industries to harness, if the courses available were high quality and tailored to the specific applications of these technologies in the sector. Such courses should also be tailored to support the development of blended 'creative technology' skills and the needs of 'createch' businesses working across sub-sectors (Hopkins, Willliams and Hay, 2026; Royal Anniversary Trust, 2025).

CESS 2025 also found a strong appetite for collaboration. More than one third of employers sought opportunities to collaborate with other businesses (35%) and with providers (38%) to develop training aligned to industry needs. This was particularly the case among employers in design and designer fashion, screen, video games, and performing and visual arts, while in architecture, employers sought strong collaboration with providers, and employers in museums, galleries and libraries were keen to collaborate with other organisations to help develop relevant training options (see Figure 6.9 overleaf).

Stakeholders across all creative sub-sectors emphasised the importance of industry employers and education providers working together. This was seen as vital to improve the relevance of provision across the skills system, from enhancing HE provision, to extending the offer and quality of technical and vocational pathways, including apprenticeships, strengthening careers guidance, securing more industry placements for learners, and improving the knowledge transfer between industry and educators. In video games, stakeholders saw this as key, to ensure provision kept pace with rapidly evolving skill needs. In screen, roundtable participants emphasised the long-history of collaboration on skills development, in part enabled by industry skills funds, supporting sectoral and place-based initiatives. In design, stakeholders highlighted initiatives such as 'Design for Planet' and the Institute of Positive Fashion as examples of how strengthened collaboration can better align skills provision to the needs of the economy. In museums, galleries and libraries, employers and stakeholders pointed to the value of peer-run support networks for skills development and partnerships with universities given the reliance on HE graduates.

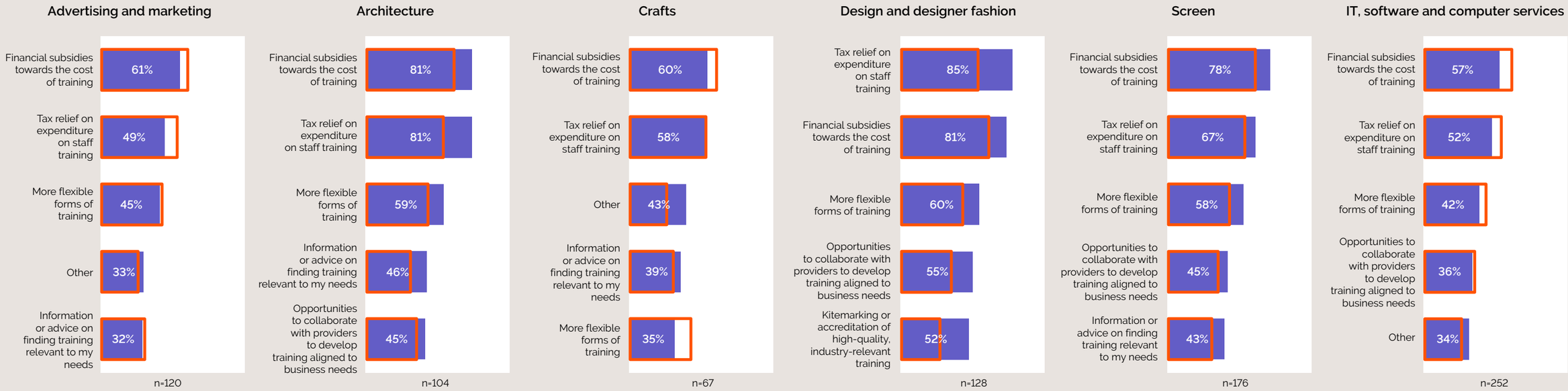
Stakeholders also emphasised the importance of the industry working in close partnership with government to maintain vital immigration routes and ease friction for international talent needed for highly specialised roles in various parts of the creative industries, for instance, expert-level video games programmers, and curators and collections management in museums, galleries and libraries.

Finally, the Skills Audit process suggests an important role for targeted support for employers in the creative industries. Around three in ten creative industry employers suggested more information and advice would better enable them to offer training for workers, including help identifying training needs or developing training plans (cited by 29% of employers), finding relevant training (34%), and kitemarking or accreditation of high-quality, industry-relevant training (30%).

Indeed, stakeholders consulted through the Skills Audit process also suggested businesses would benefit from support of this nature, with an emphasis on 'making it easy' for employers to identify relevant training and minimising the administrative burden of accessing mainstream skills programmes. Some emphasised the need for clearer competency frameworks, linked to training options, to better enable both employers and workers (including freelancers) to identify upskilling needs, access relevant training or wider development opportunities (e.g. informal learning, mentoring). Others stressed the importance of management development programmes customised to the needs of the sector, which were seen as vital in extending the capacity of business leaders in the creative industries to review the skills of their workforce as a key business asset, put these skills to effective use to drive firm performance, identify targeted upskilling needs, and anticipate the talent and skills needed to achieve their organisational objectives for the future.

## Figure 6.9: Enablers of skills investment in different creative sub-sectors, 2025

% of employers suggesting these measures would enable them to offer more training




Source: CESS 2025

***Q: What measures would enable your organisation to offer (more) training in future?***

Base = all establishments. [n = 1,302] Red outline represents the creative industries average.

# 7 Conclusions and policy recommendations

## Introduction

**A key objective of the Creative Industries Skills Audits has been to provide granular and detailed insights on the critical jobs and skills needed in different creative sub-sectors. And we do this through the detailed tables and charts in this report; and through the sub-sector Skills Audits which seek to capture the distinct and often highly nuanced issues in different parts of the creative sector.**

But another core purpose of the Skills Audits has been to help build consensus among leading industry experts and employers around common themes; to identify distinct differences where they exist; and to provide the evidence needed to enable the creative industries to 'speak with a united voice' on both the common skills challenges they face, and what needs to shift – in the skills system and in industry practice – in order to address them. So, when we look across all the sub-sector Skills Audits and all the sections of this report, and we reflect on all that we have heard from those who have contributed to the Skills Audits process, what common issues and areas for action emerge?

This final chapter seeks to draw conclusions, about the scale and nature of skills challenges across the creative industries, but also the skills priorities for the future. We identify five key insights and five key priorities for ensuring the creative industries have the skills needed for growth.

## 7.1 Five key takeaways from the Skills Audits

### 1 Skills matter most

**72% of employers with hard-to-fill vacancies (HTFVs) suggest the main cause was candidates lacking the skills required for the role. Less than one in five (19%) point to a lack of qualifications.**

One third (32%) of creative industries employers that had recruited over the past two years reported difficulties filling vacancies and most commonly this was due to candidates lacking skills (cited by 72% of employers with recruitment difficulties) and less so that they lacked specific qualifications (cited by 19%). Across all creative sub-sectors, candidates lacking the required skills was the most common cause of hard-to-fill vacancies.

Sometimes the skills hardest to find are highly specialised technical skills or advanced digital skills. However, innovation and technological advancement are also transforming working practices and driving a broadening of skills sets and a fusion of skills within and between roles. Indeed, the Skills Audits find that often the problem is a lack of vital transversal skills (planning and organising, teamworking, communication, adaptability) and critical business skills, particularly commercial skills (sales, business development, fundraising), marketing, finance and people management. It is an alchemy of technical, digital, transversal and business-critical skills that employers look for and that workers need to build successful careers in the creative industries.

### 2 The skills half-life is short

**One third (32%) of creative firms report skills deficiencies among their workforce and nearly one quarter (23%) of those that do suggest skills gaps are driven by new technology.**

The pace of change, and particularly technological advancement and high levels of innovation activity across the sector, means the skills needs of the creative industries evolve rapidly. Nearly one third (32%) of creative firms report skills deficiencies among their workforce and nearly one quarter (23%) of those that do suggest skills gaps are driven by new technology. More than eight in ten (81%) employers expecting to grow their workforce in the years ahead also anticipate a need to upgrade workforce skills in response to the introduction of new technology or equipment, and more than three quarters (77%) because of the development of new products or services.

In parts of the creative industries – in tech, screen, and video games – the need to upgrade skills in response to hardware or software updates is near constant. There are increasingly blurred boundaries between artistic disciplines and technology, creating growing demand for a 'fusion' of creative and digital – or 'createch' – skills (Bakhshi, Djumalieva and Easton, 2019; Hopkins, Williams and Hay, 2026). More generally, the Skills Audits point to a 'watershed' moment for AI adoption, with employers across the creative industries anticipating a need to upskill their workforce to realise the benefits of these new technologies. Creative industries employers also increasingly recognise the need to upgrade workforce skills to achieve their organisation's sustainability goals with 28% of creative employers that expect to expand their workforce also anticipating the need to upskill their workforce in skills related to environmental sustainability in the next three to five years.

## 3 Skills challenges are most acute at mid-career level

**42% of employers with skills shortages and 37% of those with skills gaps suggest the skills challenges they face are associated with experienced staff. Just one in five (23% and 22% respectively) point to challenges with entry-level talent.**

Despite an ongoing focus in the policy discourse on entry pathways within the different skills systems, the Skills Audits suggest that in many creative sub-sectors, skills shortages and gaps are most acute among mid-career talent.

Across the creative industries, 42% of employers with skills shortages and 37% of those with skills gaps suggest the skills challenges they face are associated with experienced staff (five to ten years into their career). Just one in five (23% and 22% respectively) point to challenges with entry-level talent.

This mid-level talent problem appears most pronounced in advertising and marketing, screen, video games, design and designer fashion, and the tech sector. This resonated strongly with industry stakeholders and employers engaged through the roundtables. Some suggested technology, including AI, was reducing demand for more junior-level talent while driving increased competition for mid-level and senior positions. Others pointed to the rapid pace of careers advancement in these sub-sectors, often without training necessary to develop the skills required in more senior roles and to issues related to talent retention in some parts of the creative industries.

## 4 Skills challenges threaten to undermine growth potential

**Seven in ten (69%) creative industries employers with skills challenges suggest these are having a business impact. One in five suggest the skills challenges they face are hindering innovation (21%) and undermining long-term growth or investment plans (19%).**

In 2025, more than four in ten (43%) creative industries employers reported either skills shortages when recruiting or skills gaps among their workforce. Among those that did, 69% suggested these skills challenges were having an impact on their business in a range of ways. Skills challenges most commonly result in an increased workload for other staff and hinder the delivery capability of creative firms.

In the context of the UK government's Industrial Strategy, it is particularly concerning that skills challenges are hampering innovation and growth in the creative industries: around one in five creative firms with skills shortages or gaps suggest these challenges were delaying them developing new products or services (21%) or causing them to scale back their long-term growth or investment plans (19%).

Creative firms expecting to grow staff numbers in the years ahead also anticipate a need to upgrade the skills of their existing workforce. Future skill needs are wide-ranging, including technical, advanced digital, transversal and critical business skills. Sustainability or 'green' skills were also seen as particularly important in future both due to evolving regulation, industry standards and market demand in some sub-sectors, as well as an area of innovation and growth in others (BOP Consulting and Julie's Bicycle, 2023; Schneider, 2023). Employers across all creative sub-sectors also emphasised the importance of strengthening their workforce's ability to work with AI as a driver of innovation and productivity.

### 5 The structural features of the sector hinder skills investment and collaboration

**36% of creative industries employers suggest they lack funds for training and one in seven suggest that managers are too busy to organise training (15%) and staff are too busy to participate (14%).**

In the context of current skills challenges and future upskilling needs, strengthening and securing a continual investment in skills will be vital to the future success of the creative industries. The Skills Audits suggest many creative industries employers already provide training and wider informal learning opportunities for their workforce. Yet rates of formal training are low, and other research suggests the intensity of training falls short of other industries. For instance, creative industries employers offer fewer days of training per trainee than all employers, and are less likely to provide accredited training (Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025).

Strengthening the incidence and intensity of workforce development, and ensuring this is well targeted, addressing critical skills gaps and developing the skills needed for the future, will be vital in realising productivity gains and ultimately powering the growth of the sector. However, creative industries employers highlight a range of factors that act as a barrier to them providing more, or indeed any, training for workers.

Principal among them are financial and time constraints. More than one third (36%) of creative industries employers reported that they lacked the funds to invest in training. The fast pace of the sector, its project-based working patterns, and the dominance of micro-businesses also make it difficult to carve out time for development. Around one in five employers suggest staff were simply too busy to give training (19%), while others said managers were too busy to organise it (15%) or employees lack the time to participate (14%). Stakeholders engaged through the Skills Audits process raised concerns that the skills provision is not always well-aligned to the needs of the creative industries in format, duration and content. In exploring enablers of skills investment, many employers call for more flexible forms of training.

Further, the Skills Audits suggest a strong appetite among creative firms to collaborate with other businesses (cited by 35% employers) and with providers (38%) to shape relevant provision. Yet past research has found that just than one in ten creative industries employers achieve this in practice (Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025). Addressing this gap between intent and action will be central to driving up employer engagement and investment in skills.

## 7.2 Five skills priorities for the future

**Together, these findings place considerable onus on the skills system to meet rapidly evolving needs of the creative industries. It also requires employers and workers to invest continually in ongoing skills development and training to ensure workforce skills remain relevant now and in the future. The Skills Audits process points to five skills priorities for the future.**

## Five skills priorities for the UK creative industries

### 1 Forward-looking, three-dimensional skills intelligence

1A: Ensure national LMI provides regular, robust data and forecasts for the creative industries, alongside other priority sectors, as standard.

1B: Develop a rolling programme of 'bottom-up' LMI, founded on sub-sector research, the Creative PEC's CBP and three-yearly Creative Industries Skills Audits.

1C: Undertake place-based assessments of creative industries skills needs in UK cities and regions to inform local skills planning.

### 2 Embed transversal, digital and sustainability skills across education and skills provision to develop the 'alchemy' of skills needed by the sector

2A: Strengthen transversal, digital and sustainability skills in schools through new resources and assessment guidelines for creative subject provision and enrichment opportunities.

2B: Ensure transversal, AI and sustainability skills are more consistently embedded in creative further and higher education provision.

2C: Integrate critical business skills such as sales, marketing and IP into education at every level, including through a new "Entrepreneurship Framework".

### 3 Strengthen and diversify talent pathways into key creative industries jobs

3A: Safeguard and strengthen higher education (HE) for the creative industries, including more flexible, modular, industry-relevant provision

3B: Maximise the potential for technical education reforms to diversify pathways and unlock more funding and investment in skills.

3C: Widen the talent pool from which creative industries employers' recruit, including young people, those disadvantaged in the labour market and diverse talent.

3D: Preserve immigration routes that enable employers to respond to temporary shortages and access the brightest international talent.

### 4 Precision upskilling that drives innovation and growth

4A: Improve signposting and kitemarking of high-quality, industry-recognised training that offers maximum return on skills investment.

4B: Foster a stronger, more strategic focus on talent management, skills activation and developing a learning culture within creative firms.

4C: Empower creative workforce upskilling through clearer competency frameworks, stronger careers guidance, and new Skills Passports.

### 5 A stronger partnership between government, education and industry

5A: Commission an independent review of skills governance arrangements for the creative industries.

5B: Give the new Freelance Champion a clear mandate for skills.

5C: Develop a new Creative Industries Pact for Skills to galvanise employer investment

5D: Develop new Technical Excellence Networks to address advanced technical skills

1

# Forward-looking, three-dimensional skills intelligence

## Why?

While the Creative Industries Skills Audits have sought to provide a detailed picture of the most pressing skills issues, the pace of change in the creative industries means data and insight needs to be updated on a regular basis. This is vital to ensure that skills provision can anticipate and respond to employer needs and to steer individuals towards high quality jobs in creative sub-sectors (Barnes et al., 2023).

This LMI needs to cover both the demand side (i.e. jobs and skills needs) and the supply-side (skills provision, workforce development) and examine areas of skills mismatch (skills shortages and gaps), incrementally developing the evidence base across a robust, shared Labour Market Framework. It also needs to be three-dimensional, seamlessly integrating national LMI with more granular sector and place-based skills assessments.

## What?

**1A: Ensure national LMI provides regular, robust data and forecasts for the creative industries, alongside other priority sectors, as standard.**

An important first step to strengthening national LMI for the creative industries is ensuring that the official classifications that underpin national datasets are well-aligned with activities, jobs and skills in creative sub-sectors. DCMS, working with members of its Technical Working Group (including the Creative PEC), should continue to inform reviews of the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC), SOC and new Standard Skills Classification (SSC), particularly to ensure emerging areas such as createch or sustainable and regenerative design are well-captured.

While the ONS's SIC 2026 framework and review of SOC codes will provide more granular categories for creative industries and occupations, it is equally important that data owners, including ONS, DfE, Skills England and LMI partners in the devolved nations, ensure government surveys collect sufficiently large samples, are coded to the most detailed level of SIC and SOC granularity, and publish disaggregated data for the creative industries (alongside other priority sectors) and creative sub-sectors (where possible), as standard (Bakhshi 2023). This includes data from the Labour Force Survey and Employer Skills Survey, national industry surveys (such as the Creative Wales Industry Survey) and long-term labour market projections (such as Skills Imperative or Northern Ireland's Skills Barometer). This is especially important for the sector, given alternative data sources such as job postings provide an incomplete picture of skills needs due to the prevalence of informal recruitment practices in parts of the creative industries. There is also a need to extend the questions included in government surveys so that they provide data on the skills needs and priorities of the freelance workforce, for example including questions in the Employer Skills Survey.

National LMI partners should utilise these data assets to produce regular, robust sector skills assessments for the creative industries, extending the programme being developed by Skills England and Skills Development Scotland across the four nations. The new Labour Market Evidence Group (LMEG) can also play an important role in promoting a shared, UK-wide evidence base and alignment between skills, labour, industrial and immigration policy.

**1B: Develop a rolling programme of 'bottom-up' LMI, founded on sub-sector research, the Creative PEC's CBP and three-yearly Creative Industries Skills Audits.**

The 2025 Creative Industries Skills Audits process has demonstrated the value of a robust, bottom-up, industry-wide assessment of the skills needs and priorities of the creative industries. But it has also served to highlight the pace of the change in the sector.

It is recommended that the CIC facilitate a robust and collaborative skills audits process for the creative industries on a three-yearly cycle. The CIC should work in close partnership with DCMS, national LMI partners and creative bodies (e.g. Creative Wales), and sub-sector trade bodies and skills bodies. It should seek to build on and elevate national and sub-sectoral data, evidence and research. Wherever possible, the methodology and questionnaire for the CESS should remain consistent, in order to promote comparability of the data over time.

In addition to these detailed three-yearly skills assessments, the Creative PEC will track a headline indicator of skills mismatches on an annual basis through the CBP. As a longitudinal survey, CBP will provide new causal evidence on the link between employer training, management practices and firm performance, strengthening the case for targeted skills investment and stronger, more people-orientated workplace practices.

## SPOTLIGHT

**1C: Undertake place-based assessments of creative industries skills needs in UK cities and regions to inform local skills planning.**

Place-based LMI is also important and there is a need for further research examining the skills needs of the creative industries in different cities and regions.

Firstly, there is scope to more routinely capture the needs of the creative industries in economy-wide regional or local skills assessments. In England, Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs) should ensure the creative industries are well-represented on Employer Representative Bodies (ERBs) and feature in the assessment and monitoring of sector skills priorities underpinning Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs). In the devolved nations, skills assessments conducted by Labour Market Partnerships in Northern Ireland; Regional Economic Partnerships in Scotland; and Regional Skills Partnerships in Wales should consider the needs of the creative industries, particularly in cities and regions that are home to nascent or well-established creative clusters.

Additionally, local and regional partners and sector bodies should work in partnership to produce focused place-based assessments of the skills needs of the creative industries or specific creative sub-sectors which are particularly important to local economies. For instance, in Liverpool, UK Music and MusicFutures (an AHRC-funded cluster) are collaborating on a skills assessment for the music industry in the city region, adapting the methodology used for the Creative Industries Skills Audits.

While these assessments should be place-led, there is merit in promoting consistency in the approach, wherever possible, to promote both comparability and efficiency. To this end, the Creative PEC will develop a new toolkit to support local Creative Industries Skills Audits. This will build on the approach advanced through the UK Creative Industries Skills Audits, providing guidance on key data sources, survey methodologies and engagement mechanisms and featuring a new 'policy toolkit' setting out potential interventions local and regional actors can utilise to address skills pinch points and deliver skills priorities in cities and regions.

2

# Embed transversal, digital and sustainability skills across education and skills provision to develop the 'alchemy' of skills needed by the sector

## Why?

The creative industries require a striking mix of skills, yet the Creative Industries Skills Audits suggest that, too often, employers find candidates for job vacancies and those in their current workforce are insufficiently equipped with all the skills they need to operate effectively in these roles. Alongside technical skills shortages, more than half (56%) of creative industries employers with skills shortages suggest applicants lacked vital core skills, such as planning and organising, agility, oracy or the ability to work effectively in a team. Critical business skills, such as financial planning, fundraising, sales and marketing were also regularly cited as an area where both candidates and the existing creative workforce need stronger skills.

Stakeholders engaged through the Skills Audits process called for further measures across the talent pipeline to ensure that national skills systems better develop the diverse skillsets needed in the creative industries, including technical, digital, transversal, and key business skills.

**56%** of employers with skills shortages suggest recruitment difficulties are a result of applicants lacking core skills, and **47%** of employers with skills gaps suggest these skills require improvement amongst their workforce.

Source: CESS 2025,

## What?

**2A: Strengthen transversal, digital and sustainability skills in schools through new resources and assessment guidelines for creative subject provision and enrichment opportunities.**

With skills deficiencies in areas like verbal communication, complex problem solving, creative and innovative thinking on the rise across the economy (IFF Research, 2025), there is need for sharper focus on actively developing core, transversal skills in the classroom and through wider enrichment activities, including in creative provision. This should go hand-in-hand with stronger assessment and accountability, to ensure that young people leave education equipped with the diverse set of skills they need to build successful careers in the modern world of work.

In England, significant reforms are underway following the Curriculum and Assessment Review. The recently published Schools White Paper includes a range of commitments with the overall aim of promoting a broader educational experience, including a new oracy framework providing guidance for teachers on how to support and formatively assess speaking skills, and a new national Enrichment Framework that will ensure all pupils benefit from access to a broad set of experiences beyond the academic curriculum (Department for Education, 2026).

However, in some UK nations facing the same skills deficiencies, transversal skills have been well-embedded in the curriculum for some time, suggesting that curriculum reforms alone will not be enough.[8] There is a need for new resources for creative subject teachers, clearer guidelines for assessing the core skills of learners and more enrichment opportunities that support the development of transversal skills vital in the labour market. In England, the forthcoming National Centre for Arts and Music Education should prioritise developing these resources to support the development of transversal skills in formal creative education and in enrichment opportunities.

Skills Development Scotland, for example, has developed the Meta-skills Progression Framework – a resource designed to support practitioners to understand and develop important transversal skills at every level, from early years through to the senior phase.[9] In England, the Schools White Paper also suggests new benchmarks will be included in Ofsted inspection toolkits, and new resources will be developed for schools, including case studies and self-assessment tools.

The creative industries have much to gain from supporting these initiatives, particularly in co-designing enrichment activities centred around arts, culture and creativity and in supporting their delivery, including through increasing opportunities for young people to undertake work experience in the sector.

### 2B: Ensure transversal, AI and sustainability skills are more consistently embedded in creative further and higher education provision.

Developing the alchemy of technical, digital, transversal and critical business skills required to build successful careers in the creative industries also presents a challenge for providers of further and higher education. This places onus on widening what is taught in study programmes to include an understanding of the key functions and forms of the industry and the development of critical transversal skills often cited as deficient amongst applicants for job roles; skills like teamwork, project planning or business skills required for freelance careers. The Skills Audits also emphasise the need to develop the skills to work with new technologies and sustainability skills that creative firms need to achieve their organisation's environmental goals.

Examples of providers working to embed transversal skills development, alongside technical competency, in study programmes, so that learners are more 'work-ready' can be found across all UK nations. Often this is not limited to what is taught, but how. For example, in Scotland, West College Scotland, has developed an innovative, holistic, project-based delivery model which brings together students from multiple disciplines to form teams tasked with specific briefs, mirroring the different departments and phases in Film and TV

8. In Wales, for example, 'integral skills' such as creativity and innovation, critical thinking, problem solving, planning and organising are seen as vital to achieving the 'four purposes' of the curriculum. Similarly, Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence focusses on ensuring young people have opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to adapt, think critically and flourish in today's world.

9. The senior phase is the final stage of compulsory education in Scotland, typically taken between ages 15 and 18.

production (Carey, Giles, Wilks, & Hickman, 2024). Similarly, Middlesex University has developed MDX Studios, a working studio environment supporting Level 7 creative technology programmes, with embedded credit-bearing work placements and modules on Creative practice and AI and Business Skills for Creative practice. University of the Arts London has developed a Climate Action Plan that embeds carbon literacy training, bespoke staff development and provides frameworks for educators to embed climate and social justice principles into all courses, and industry partnerships that provide access to real-world project briefs and work experience opportunities.

As in schools, facilitating knowledge exchange and developing resources, as well as providing opportunities for educators to gain industry experience through their training and CPD at FE and HE-level would help to strengthen transversal skills development in FE and HE.

Similarly, work experience placements are an invaluable opportunity for learners to develop transversal skills. Whilst previous research from the Creative PEC has highlighted that a higher share of creative employers offer work experience placements focused on employability to UK employers overall (Giles and Carey 2025), these remain a minority. Employers should work with local FE and HE providers to develop and increase work experience placements.

## SPOTLIGHT

**2C: Integrate critical business skills such as sales, marketing and IP into education at every level, including through a new "Entrepreneurship Framework".**

One of the most consistent messages from the Skills Audits in each creative sub-sector is the need for stronger business skills, particularly sales or fundraising (depending on the financial model), marketing (particularly via social media), IP and copyright, and financial planning and management. Better developing these skills in the education system, as an embedded part of the curriculum and particularly in creative disciplines, was seen as key. So too was this seen as a key area for CPD, especially with creative microbusinesses and self-employed workers, including through Skills Bootcamps that can provide appropriate business skills for creators.

As noted earlier, some FE and HE courses already integrate modules to develop critical business skills. There have also been ongoing efforts over a number of years to build awareness of IP rights, amongst workers, businesses and educators, led by the Intellectual Property Office (IPO).

The IP Education Framework provides an example of how such skills might be embedded across creative subjects. It aims to embed IP knowledge at all levels of education, from primary to HE, and is accompanied by resources to support the teaching of the framework. Further, the IP Tutor Plus online learning tool offers resources to support teachers and university lecturers to deliver their own IP training (Carey, Giles & O'Brien, 2023).

Not only will IP education continue to be vital in future, particularly in the context of AI, but such initiatives provide a useful model in how to effectively integrate wider business critical skills into education, at every level. A new 'Entrepreneurship Framework', modelled on the IP Education Framework but with a focus on embedding critical business skills across education stages, would provide valuable guidance and support in embedding such skills into creative subjects.

3

# Strengthen and diversify talent pathways into key creative industries jobs

## Why?

The Creative Industries Skills Audits have identified a range of occupations that will be critical for future growth. Occupations like Architects, Graphic Designers, Software developers, Advertising execs and Animators. Many of these occupations are subject to skills shortages today and will also be in demand in other sectors of the UK economy. Bolstering education pathways into critical jobs will therefore be vital in future. .

**47%** of creative industries employers suggest more flexible forms of training would enable them to offer training or more training in future.

Source: CESS 2025,

## What?

### 3A: Safeguard and strengthen higher education (HE) for the creative industries, including more flexible, modular, industry-relevant provision

With three-quarters of the creative workforce holding a degree or other HE qualification (DCMS, 2026), higher education is a vital route into careers into the creative industries. Yet stakeholders engaged through the Skills Audits process raised concerns that deteriorating finances of HE providers (Office for Students, 2025) and cuts to creative courses announced by various HE institutions could choke off the talent pipeline to the creative industries.

In England, the commitment in the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper to reform the Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG) to ensure alignment of funding with priority sectors is to be welcomed (UK Government, 2025). This reform paves the way for a more refined, data-led approach to directing SPG funding towards high quality, high priority courses that address the needs of priority sectors, including the creative industries. As a part of these reforms, the Department for Education should reverse the deprioritisation of creative disciplines in past guidance issued to the Office for Students on courses eligible for support through the SPG[10] (Department for Education, 2021; Department for Education, 2025; UK Government, 2025).

Across all UK nations, there is a need to ensure HE provision is sufficiently flexible and agile to respond to rapidly changing skills needs in creative sub-sectors. This can seem somewhat of a paradox: on the one hand the time taken to reach the high-level of competence required in many creative roles; and on the other, the short skills-half life in the sector meaning industry skills needs change rapidly. More flexible, modular provision, including the use of

10. In 2021, Department for Education (DfE) Guidance to the Office for Students (OfS) on the allocation of the HE Teaching Grant for the 2021/22 financial year reduced high-cost funding allocation for 'non-strategic' courses including: Art and Design, Music, dance, drama and performing arts, Media studies and Archaeology. In 2025, DfE Guidance instructed the Office for Students to reprioritise high-cost subject funding away from media studies, journalism, publishing and information services courses.

break points in degree programmes and more blended learning options, incorporating industry placements, could help to better achieve this balance, keeping provision current with industry needs and providing opportunities for learners to customise their education to more effectively aid upskilling and career progression.

In England, the new Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) will provide a new mechanism of loan funding to enable learners and workers to enrol in shorter HE modules and Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) relevant to the needs of the industry (UK Government, 2025). A fuller range of creative subject groups should be included in those eligible for modular funding.[11]

## SPOTLIGHT

**3B: Maximise the potential for technical education reforms to diversify pathways and unlock more funding and investment in skills.**

We are seeing considerable shift in technical education in all UK nations. While the policy measures vary between the nations, there is a shared intent to develop clearer, streamlined, high-quality pathways into priority sectors, like the creative industries.

In England, the roll-out of T-Levels and the introduction of V-Levels (creative subjects from around 2030) and Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) offers the potential to create strong technical pathways from levels 3 to 5 (UK Government, 2025). Shorter duration and accelerated Apprenticeships and new flexibilities in the use of the Growth and Skills Levy (GSL), including to fund short courses ("Apprenticeship Units") (UK Government, 2025; DWP, 2026), offer the potential to strengthen relevance, address implementation challenges and enable the sector to realise greater returns from employers' contributions to the GSL.

There is a need for the Creative Industries Council (CIC) and industry stakeholders to assess how developments in the English skills system can be effectively leveraged for the sector, identifying which mainstream skills products are best suited to addressing identified skills pinch points and future skills needs. The Skills Audits point to a range of opportunities, including scope for promoting and extending Apprenticeships in a broader range of sub-sectors such as Crafts, Music and the Performing and Visual Arts and for short courses addressing sub-sector-specific applications of AI and sustainability skills.

There is also a need for the UK Government to engage industry in order to mitigate potential risks associated with reforms, including: 'switching-off' valued routes into the creative industries offered by Applied General Qualifications (AGQs) before alternative pathways like T-Levels and new V-Levels are well-established; the impact of streamlining existing Apprenticeships, including in areas such as Crafts, Music and Performing and Visual Arts; the defunding of Level 7 Apprenticeships highly valued in sectors like Tech, Architecture, and Advertising and Marketing; and the potential defunding of Management Apprenticeships which, if funded, could prove useful in addressing identified management deficits in the sector (Giles and Carey 2026).

11. At the time of writing, architecture and computing are included in the list of subject groups eligible for modular funding.

Efforts to develop more agile, modular, responsive, industry-facing learning options in each UK nation also hold great potential. In England, Skills Bootcamps have been increasingly used in areas such as digital marketing, video editing, immersive technologies and in providing core business skills for creative freelancers. It is important these flexible short courses continue to be used to address industry needs as funding is devolved to Mayoral Strategic Authorities and provided for places which are not within an MSA. The Scottish Funding Council, Quality Assurance Agency in Wales and Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland are all working to develop shorter flexible courses, accredited through digital badges or micro-credential certificates. These modular training options are well-suited to the project-based and fluctuating working patterns evident in parts of the creative industries and can be responsive to the rapid pace of changing labour market needs in the sector.

**3C: Widen the talent pool from which creative industries employers' recruit, including young people, those disadvantaged in the labour market and diverse talent.**

Strengthening technical education is an important precursor to diversifying pathways into the creative industries. However, real change will only happen if employers give equal parity of esteem to these routes and adopt more open and inclusive recruitment practices, hiring for skill and potential, rather than requiring an undergraduate degree as a proxy.

The Skills Audits have been conducted at a time of growing numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and growing concerns about the impact of AI on entry-level opportunities in the labour market. Indeed, as highlighted earlier, few of the roles that creative industries employers expect to recruit for in the years ahead are junior-level positions and stakeholders engaged through the process emphasised how this might choke off the talent pipeline and compound the mid-level talent problem in years to come.

As a priority sector, the creative industries have an important role to play in providing opportunities for young people from all backgrounds and for adults disadvantaged in the labour market. This includes creative employers supporting the new Youth Guarantee and place-based trailblazers in England and Wales – particularly given several of these trailblazers are located in key creative clusters, including in London, Liverpool, the West Midlands and West of England – by providing work tasters and paid placement opportunities (HM Government, 2024; DWP, 2025). Creative firms should also engage with similar schemes in the devolved nations, for example the Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) in Wales and Scotland, and Northern Ireland's JobStart Scheme. New financial subsidies for firms taking on young people on Universal Credit and a new Apprenticeship Incentive recently announced by UK Government are an important step towards supporting creative industries employers to engage in these schemes (DWP, 2026).

Further, plans for additional Sector-based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs) across Film & TV and Music in three areas of England highlight the potential to increase creative industries engagement in national and place-based employment support programmes that blend pre-employment training with supported and / or subsidised jobs in order to support transitions into sustainable careers in growth sectors (Discover! Creative Careers, 2026; Giles, Sissons, Carey, Subosa, & Newton, 2022). The CIC and industry stakeholders should assess whether there is potential for such initiatives to be extended to other creative subsectors and places.

Finally, as we set out in Section 2, the socio-demographic profile of the creative industries workforce does not reflect the diversity of the UK population, and women, people of colour, disabled people, and those from working-class backgrounds remain significantly underrepresented in creative sub-sectors. Creative industries employers must recognise this as intrinsically linked to the picture of skills shortages across the creative sub-sectors and redouble efforts to address systemic underrepresentation of diverse talent, including through more open and inclusive hiring and workplace practices (Carey, Giles & O'Brien, 2023). This should include adherence to the Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority (CIISA) standards (CIISA, 2025) and engagement in the Good Work Industry Support programme as part of the government-industry response to the Creative PEC Good Work Review (BFI, 2024; DCMS and CIC, 2023).

**3D: Preserve immigration routes that enable employers to respond to temporary shortages and access the brightest international talent.**

Alongside commitments to develop the domestic talent pipeline into the creative industries, there remains a need to preserve immigration routes that enable employers to address temporary shortages and access world-leading talent.

While generally the demands of the creative industries are for high-skilled talent, the Creative Industries Skills Audits identified a small number of hard-to-fill occupations or occupations in future demand that also featured in the Migration Advisory Committee's Review of the Temporary Shortage List (TSL) of RQF 3-5 (A-Level and equivalent) Occupations – occupations like Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators and Marketing Associate Professionals (Migration Advisory Committee, 2025). Data from these Creative Industries Skills Audits and subsequent iterations should continue to play an important role in providing evidence to inform decisions on the inclusion of occupations on the TSL.

However, as noted earlier, most roles in the creative industries require highly skilled workers. Stakeholders engaged through the Skills Audits process emphasised the importance of maintaining important routes for global talent, including the Innovation Founder, Global Talent Visa and Skilled Worker Visa for highly skilled, degree-qualified international talent, echoing past Creative PEC research suggesting that half of workers entering the UK for creative occupations have used these routes (Maioli, Simandjuntak, Jones, & Fazio, 2025).

4

# Precision upskilling that drives innovation and growth

## Why?

While efforts to strengthen education pathways into the creative industries are important, the Creative Industries Skills Audits suggest a need to reorientate focus towards promoting retention, progression and upskilling of the existing workforce.

Research by The Productivity Institute suggests highly targeted, intensive training, directed towards professional and technical staff, alongside training for managers, yields the highest returns (Schwarz et al., 2026). A large share of the creative workforce work in professional and technical occupations. There is also growing evidence of a considerable management deficit (Giles and Carey, 2026). Further, the Skills Audits suggest that skills pinch points are often highly specific.

Taken together, this suggests that the productivity dividend associated with precision upskilling of the creative workforce – highly-targeted training, coupled with management development that can ensure these skills are put to good use in the workplace – could therefore be substantial.

## What?

**4A: Improve signposting and kitemarking of high-quality, industry-recognised training that offers maximum return on skills investment.**

The development of more relevant and flexible learning options (discussed earlier) will be an important feature of a more responsive skills system. However, there is a need to consider how this new offer will sit alongside industry-led training available and valued across all creative sub-sectors. Adding further complexity to the existing landscape of provision risks exacerbating the challenge creative industries employers and workers face in identifying high-quality training, well-aligned to their needs.

There will be a growing need for clear signposting and kitemarking of industry-recognised or certified training, building on examples that already exist in various parts of the creative industries. TechSkills Tech Industry Gold, for example, is an industry-certified digital badging scheme for quality training relevant for digital and tech careers. The NCTJ has established professional standards for Journalists, with associated kitemarking and CPD training programmes offered through the NCTJ Journalism Skills Academy.[12] Other examples include the Advertising Association's Training Hub, NI Screen's framework, RIBA's CPD Providers Network or ScreenSkills' Production Safety Accredited scheme.

**34%** of creative industries employers would welcome more help in finding relevant training and **30%** suggest accreditation and kitemarking of high-quality, industry-relevant provision would enable them to offer more training in future.

Source: CESS 2025,

12. For a discussion of this, see Spilsbury (2025).

The Creative Industries Council should work with industry trade bodies and sector skills bodies to further expand and promote alignment between existing industry certification and kitemarking of quality-assured CPD. Rather than duplicating existing schemes, this should focus on promoting shared standards, branding and resources, including a single 'shop window' for accessing industry-endorsed training. This will be particularly important where there are shared skills needs between creative sub-sectors, for example, design, digital technologies (including games engines, animation software, AI and cybersecurity), critical business skills and sustainability skills.

### 4B: Foster a stronger, more strategic focus on talent management, skills activation and developing a learning culture within creative firms.

The Creative Industries Skills Audits suggest many creative firms are already taking important steps to develop their workforce but there is scope for this practice to become more widespread and for a more strategic and impactful approach to upskilling the workforce.

Stakeholders engaged through the Skills Audits process suggest many creative firms need a stronger focus on talent planning, workforce development and skills use and creative employers call for help in identifying training needs (cited by 29% creative firms). Further, there is growing focus across OECD nations on the benefits of informal learning as a mechanism to more rapidly respond to evolving skill demands. This is particularly the case in the face of technological change, where the design and accreditation of formal and non-formal training programmes often entail delays, limiting their immediate relevance for upskilling and reskilling (OECD, 2026b).

Government and industry stakeholders should respond to the call from creative industries employers for additional support.

Trade bodies and sector skills bodies should develop new **Skills Toolkits**, comprised of diagnostic tools, guides and case studies to enable creative firms to evaluate the skills of their workforce, identify upskilling needs, explore training options, and estimate the potential return on skills investment. These could emulate Skills Toolkits developed in other sectors and nations, for example the Tourism Sector Skills Toolkit developed by the Pact for Next Tourism Generation Skills.

With growing evidence that few creative industries employers engage with mainstream business support (Giles and Carey 2026), DCMS should work in partnership with the CIC and place-based partners in key creative clusters to co-design a new, subsidised **"Skills 4 Growth" management programme**. This could sit alongside existing industry schemes that focus on attracting investment or driving innovation, by offering a specific focus on future talent management, skills activation and building a learning culture within creative firms. Such a programme could help to mitigate the impact of defunding Management Apprenticeships and connect with the Good Work Industry Support Programme currently being piloted in the screen industries ("Work Wise") as part of a joint government-industry response to the Creative PEC Good Work Review (BFI, 2024; DCMS and CIC, 2023).

## SPOTLIGHT

### 4C: Empower creative workforce upskilling through clearer competency frameworks, stronger careers guidance, and new Skills Passports.

Despite the high incidence of training reported in CESS, earlier research has found that rates of training among creative workers in some sub-sectors are among the lowest in the economy (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023). Evidence points to a range of causes: unclear progression pathways which makes it hard to identify skills gaps and training needs; a lack of time linked to work intensity and project-based work in parts of the sector; low pay and fluctuating incomes that limit funds for training; a mismatch between the training offer and learner needs in terms of content, timing and delivery models; and information failures which make it challenging for workers to find training that will really deliver a return on their investment.

Given the breadth of the issues, industry trade bodies and sector skills bodies should curate a package of support to empower the creative industries workforce – employees and freelancers – to invest in their skills throughout their careers, including:

**Clearer competency frameworks** – that set out the knowledge and skills required in different roles, building on National Occupational Standards, the new Standard Skills Classification and industry schemes, such as ScreenSkills Skills Checklists.

**Stronger careers guidance** – to help creative workers to understand progression pathways, self-assess their training needs and identify high-quality, industry-endorsed courses and wider learning and development opportunities. This should include exploring how to maximise the benefits of the new Jobs and Careers Service (UK Government, 2024) and considering how this might work alongside the refreshed creative careers service (UK Government, 2025c). Stakeholders consulted through the research also emphasised the important role of trade unions in providing and sign-posting skills programmes, careers guidance and mentoring opportunities. For instance, CULT Cymru – a learning project led by Bectu in partnership with Equity, the Musicians' Union and the Writers' Guild – provides learning activities and networking opportunities for workers, employers and other organisations across the creative industries in Wales.

**New Skills Passports** – to enable workers to recognise and record learning. The development of industry-led Skills Passports, as set out in the Creative Industries Sector Plan, could provide a vital mechanism to do this, complementing the new digital Education Record by providing a mechanism for capturing industry-recognised training. An initial pilot focusing on common areas of mandatory training has been proposed to offer value for production environments in screen, and performing arts and music, building on the success of the existing ScreenSkills Training Passport. Subsequent phases should look to extend the Skills Passports to record wider industry-certified training, including technical and digital skills, as well as training to strengthen critical business, management and sustainability skills. In addition to strengthening the incentives for learning, these Skills Passports would promote labour mobility, better enabling workers to exploit opportunities in multiple creative sub-sectors (and potentially other industry sectors) to manage the precarity of work created by fluctuating patterns of demand.

5

# A stronger partnership between government, education and industry

## Why?

Strengthening employer engagement in the skills system is not a new endeavour, but it has proved difficult to achieve in practice. The heterogeneity of creative sub-sectors and the structural features of the industry, with the predominance of micro-sized firms and propensity for freelance work, makes this particularly challenging.

The potential benefits of unlocking the appetite for collaboration evident amongst creative industries employers are considerable but will require substantive shift in the institutional landscape and a new chapter of genuine partnership between government, education and industry.

**35%** of creative industries employers are keen to collaborate with others to develop relevant training provision. Just **11%** achieve this in practice.

Source: CESS 2025, ESS22

## What?

**5A: Commission an independent review of skills governance arrangements for the creative industries.**

While industry engagement can (and does) happen at the level of individual firms, intermediaries are vital mechanisms for brokering partnerships at scale. Sector bodies can give a vital voice to employers in shaping national and regional skills planning, act as a convening force for industry-led skills innovations, promote collaboration between employers, and partnership between industry and educators (UKCES, 2009).

The closure of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) in 2017 and removal of government funding for its network of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) through the 2010s has left a fragmented landscape of skills governance in the creative industries. In some sub-sectors, there remains a dedicated industry-funded skills body, such as in the screen industries (ScreenSkills) and tech sector (TechSkills). In others, industry trade bodies lead the skills agenda, with varying capacity.

For sector bodies to fulfil their vital role in promoting effective governance of the UK skills system – underpinned by strong tripartite working between national, sector and place-based institutions – there is a need to look at sustainable funding, support existing or rebuild institutional infrastructure for labour market analysis and workforce planning in creative sub-sectors.

To this end, the CIC and DCMS should commission an independent review of skills governance arrangements for the creative industries. This should examine the existing landscape of sector bodies and alternative options for strengthening the institutional infrastructure, with due consideration of alternative funding models that would safeguard the financial sustainability of existing and any new organisations, including the potential expansion of sector skills levies.

National creative agencies (e.g. Creative Wales), the CIC and the new Creative Sector Skills Forum will also play a vital strategic, coordinating role, acting as a single voice for the creative industries on shared issues at a national and UK-wide level, including through the forthcoming sector Jobs Plan.

### 5B: Give the new Freelance Champion a clear mandate for skills.

With self-employed or freelancer workers comprising up to two-thirds of the workforce in some creative sub-sectors, building a skills system that incentivises and enables up and reskilling amongst creative freelancers is a critical concern. The appointment of the new Freelance Champion provides a vital opportunity to give creative freelancers a clearer voice in shaping a skills system that better meets their needs.

To achieve this in practice, the Terms of Reference for the Freelance Champion must include a clear mandate for skills – to work with UK and devolved government and sector bodies to shape skills policy and to represent freelancer interests through industry forums, such as the Creative Sector Skills Forum and Creative Industries Council.

The Freelance Champion should work with Sector Bodies to curate a coherent package of interventions needed to support a step-change in skills investment, including measures that promote access to mainstream skills programmes, coupled with targeted interventions that address the distinct challenges creative freelancers face to training. There is a pressing need to review how to unlock the value of the Growth and Skills Levy (GSL) and Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE) in England and wider workforce development funds and careers guidance in each UK nation.

Many of the priorities identified through the skills audit process will be important in building a skills system that works better for creative freelancers. This includes strengthening data and information on the skills needs and challenges of creative freelancers (Recommendations 1A and 1B); ensuring creative freelancers directly inform the Entrepreneurship Framework (2C); giving them a voice in determining which short courses and skills bootcamps would be most valuable for their creative practice (3A and 3B); steering them towards high-quality, industry-endorsed training (4A); developing new Skills Passports to enhance the portability of their learning and improving access to guidance and mentoring throughout their career (4C).

## SPOTLIGHT

### 5C: Develop a new Creative Industries Pact for Skills to galvanise employer investment.

Alongside more consistent governance arrangements, there is also a need for new measures that will galvanise the industry to work more actively and collaboratively to deliver skills for future growth. We recommend that the Creative Industries Council initiate a new **Pact for Skills** with the dual aim of enabling the creative industries to coordinate efforts in relation to skills while also demonstrating their commitment and contribution to the Government's growth and opportunities missions.

This could emulate key features of the European Commission's Pact for Skills, which has proved successful in enabling industries to articulate their commitment to the skills agenda; to pool resources and align upskilling efforts; foster communities of practice where employers can share learnings and identify collaboration opportunities; and track and demonstrate the impact of their efforts and the contribution this has made to wider policy objectives.

While the CIC would be a key convenor, at the centre of the Pact for Skills would sit a partnership between government, employers, sector skills bodies, trade bodies, social partners, education and training providers and research organisations. Partners would sign a Partnership agreement, setting out:

- **Strategic aims**: the most pressing, shared, skills challenges for the creative industries and a small number of high-level strategic priorities that the Pact for Skills will collaboratively seek to address. These might align with the skills-related priorities identified in the Creative Industries Sector Plan, strategies in the devolved nations and in different creative sub-sectors.
- **Partnership objectives and KPIs**: specific objectives for the Partnership's activities. This might include (for example) anticipating industry skills needs; building awareness of creative careers; improving the relevance of, and increasing enrolments on, technical education courses; promoting a more diverse and inclusive workforce; improving job quality; intensifying upskilling efforts, including amongst freelancers; and strengthening management capability. This should include specific KPIs and (where possible) quantitative targets.
- **Member commitments**: signatories to the Pact would then be asked to commit to concrete activities that would support the Partnership's strategic aims and objectives, such as:

### Examples of impact commitments

- careers inspiration activities (e.g. materials, talks, school visits)
- work placements to support T-levels and the Youth Guarantee
- apprenticeships
- targeted employment and training opportunities for under-represented groups
- training hours / days for staff
- mentoring opportunities for workers from underrepresented groups

### Examples of capacity commitments

- complete industry surveys
- host roundtables to support skills audits or research
- participate in employer networks, panels or forums
- share HR tools or practices
- enable access to training facilities for freelancers or SMEs
- provide in-kind resources to support partnership activities

Once established, there is additional scope to consider whether commitments to the Pact for Skills might form a condition for those in receipt of industry funds, building on the Shared Good Work Funding Conditions being developed by the sector's National Lottery and Grant in Aid distributors.

## SPOTLIGHT

### 5D: Develop new Technical Excellence Networks to address advanced technical skills.

Partnerships between industry employers and education providers in specific places can help to create more agile, responsive skills systems – aligning training with the specific skills needs of the regional economy and strengthening pathways from education into work (OECD, 2021).

There are already a range of examples of networks of creative industries employers and providers working together in nations and city-regions across the UK. Some of these have been initiated and funded by a combination of industry organisations and government/national lottery funding/ funded bodies, for instance the BFI's Skills Clusters. Others have been convened by national or local actors, such as the Creative Skills Advisory Panel in Wales, the Mayor of London's Employer Hubs and Skills Academy Programme and the Create Talent programme, recently launched by the North East Combined Authority. In Scotland, the Regional Tertiary Pathfinders programmes has sought to promote collaboration between tertiary institutions, employers, and stakeholders (Scottish Funding Council, 2025) and in Northern Ireland, Studio Ulster is developing a pipeline of talent and cutting edge skills needed in virtual production (Carey, Giles, Wilks, & Hickman, 2024).

National governments should develop and fund a new suite of place-based Technical Excellence Networks addressing some of the advanced technical skills areas subject to rapid technological advancement and innovation in the creative industries. The Creative Industries Skills Audits point to a range of possible areas: createch, green design, sustainable fashion, technical production, screen heritage, AI programming. There may also be scope to align the Technical Excellence Networks, with CoSTAR, the Future Observatory and the next waves of the UKRI creative industries clusters programme.

These Technical Excellence Networks could play a vital role in the skills ecosystem, forging deep and sustained partnerships between employers, providers, industry bodies, cities and regions. In England, they could feature new Technical Excellence Colleges but connected with higher education institutions (and potentially also specialist private training providers) to reflect the higher-level skills needs of the creative sector. Technical Excellence Networks could undertake horizon scanning and foresighting to identify emerging skills needs; pioneer new technical pathways from Levels 3 to 7; develop targeted short courses to support precision upskilling of the creative industries workforce; and support the sharing good practice and offer CPD for teaching professionals from a wide range for FE and HE institutions.

There is also scope to utilise these new networks to facilitate place-based teacher-industry exchange schemes, to promote knowledge exchange, address shortages of specialist teachers and provide an opportunity for creative industry freelancers to supplement their incomes. These could seek to emulate similar schemes operating in the construction industry, where industry experts offer masterclasses and teach study modules, while teaching staff in FE and HE develop up-to-date, practical skills through placements in industry. In addition to promoting relevance and enhancing the quality of provision, these could help ease specialist teacher shortages in areas like Music, Design and Technology and Drama (NFER, 2025), while also providing an opportunity for creative freelancers to supplement their incomes and mitigate the financial insecurity posed by fluctuating work patterns.

# Annexes

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# Acronyms and abbreviations

**AI** – Artificial Intelligence

**AR** – Augmented Reality

**AV** – Audio Visual

**BIM** – Building Information Modelling

**CAD** – Computer Aided Design

**CBP** – Creative Business Panel

**CESS** – Creative Employer Skills Survey

**CIC** – Creative Industries Council

**CIISA** – Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority

**CoSTAR** – Convergent Screen Technologies and performance in Realtime

**CPD** – Continuing Professional Development

**CRM** – Customer Relationship Management

**DCMS** – Department for Culture, Media and Sport

**DfE** – Department for Education

**FE** – Further Education

**GSL** – Growth and Skills Levy

**HE** – Higher Education

**HR** – Human Resources

**HTFVs** – Hard-to-fill Vacancies

**ERP** – Enterprise Resource Planning

**IP** – Intellectual Property

**IT** – Information Technology

**LLE** – Lifelong Learning Entitlement

**LMEG** – Labour Market Evidence Group

**LMI** – Labour Market Information

**LSIP** – Local Skills Improvement Plan

**N.E.C.** – Not Elsewhere Classified

**OJA** – Online Job Advert

**OECD** – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

**ONS** – Office for National Statistics

**RT** – Real-time

**SEO** – Search Engine Optimisation

**SIC** – Standard Industrial Classification

**SME** – Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

**SOC** – Standard Occupational Classification

**SPG** – Strategic Priorities Grant

**SSC** – Standard Skills Classification

**UI/UX** – User Interface / User Experience

**VFX** – Visual Effects

**VR** – Virtual Reality

# Glossary of terms

**Applied General Qualifications**
Level 3 qualifications in England (e.g. BTECs) that provide broad, practical learning and are often used as pathways into higher education or employment, including in the creative industries.

**Basic or 'Core' skills**
Foundational skills necessary to function in life and at work, usually referring to numeracy, literacy and digital skills.

**Continuing Professional Development (CPD)**
The process by which individuals maintain and enhance their skills and knowledge throughout their working lives.

**Creative Business Panel (CBP)**
A longitudinal survey and data resource developed by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre to track business conditions, including skills needs and challenges, across the creative industries.

**Creative Employer Skills Survey (CESS)**
A bespoke employer survey conducted as part of the Creative Industries Skills Audits to gather evidence on recruitment, skills shortages, skills gaps and future skills needs across the sector.

**Creative industries**
Industries defined by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as those based on creativity, skill and talent, with the potential to generate economic value through the exploitation of intellectual property.

**Creative Industries Sector Plan**
The UK Government's strategic plan for supporting the growth of the creative industries, including measures to strengthen skills, innovation, workforce development and sector productivity.

**Creative sub-sectors**
Distinct industries within the creative industries (e.g. design, music, screen, architecture).

**Curriculum and Assessment Review**
A review of the school curriculum and assessment system in England, considering how education can better support skills development, including creative, digital and transversal skills.

**Demand side**
The employer-led dimension of the labour market, referring to the demand for jobs and associated skills across sectors, occupations and geographies.

**Drivers of change**
The structural forces shaping employment and skills needs, including societal, technological, economic, environmental and political factors. Long-term trends are often referred to as megatrends.

**Education and skills provision**
The range of formal and informal learning opportunities delivered through schools, further education, higher education, independent training providers, and employers.

**Employer training provision**
Training funded and/or delivered by employers, including on-the-job and off-the-job learning, which may be formal or informal.

**Employment demand**
The demand for jobs and associated skills within sectors, occupations or geographies, shaped by economic conditions, technology and business activity.

**Freelancers / self-employed workers**
Individuals working independently rather than as employees, forming a significant component of the creative industries workforce.

**Global Talent Visa**
A UK visa route enabling highly skilled individuals in sectors including the creative industries to live and work in the UK without a job offer, subject to endorsement.

**Hard-to-fill vacancies**
A measure of recruitment difficulty, capturing the extent to which employers experience challenges filling vacancies, often due to a lack of suitably skilled candidates.

**High-performance workplace practices**
A combination of organisational and management practices that enhance employee engagement, skills development and productivity.

**Innovation Founder Visa**
A UK visa route designed to enable entrepreneurs with innovative business ideas to establish and grow businesses in the UK.

**Labour Market Framework**
A structured analytical framework used to assess employment and skills requirements, ensuring consistent consideration of demand, supply and mismatches.

**Labour Market Information (LMI)**
Data and analysis relating to employment, skills demand, workforce supply and labour market trends, used to inform policy and decision-making.

**Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE)**
A UK Government funding system that provides individuals with access to loan funding for education and training across their lifetime.

**Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs)**
Employer-led plans in England that identify local skills priorities and inform post-16 technical education and training provision.

**Migration Advisory Committee (MAC)**
An independent body that advises the UK Government on migration policy, including the identification of skills shortages.

**National Centre for Music and Arts Education**
A national body supporting the development of music and arts education, including resources, training and guidance for educators.

**Oversupply and underutilisation**
A form of skills mismatch where individuals possess skills or qualifications above those required for their current role.

**Profile of the workforce**
The demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the workforce, including gender, age, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic background and qualifications.

**Professional workforce development**
The ongoing development of individuals' skills throughout their careers, supported by services such as careers advice, training, mentoring and professional accreditation.

**Project-based work**
Work organised around discrete, time-limited projects rather than continuous employment relationships.

**Seniority**
The level of experience associated with a role. The Skills Audits define this based on years of work experience since leaving full-time education, using four categories: Entrants (less than 2 years post full-time education); Early career (2–5 years post full-time education); Experienced (5–10 years post full-time education); Experts (more than 10 years post full-time education).

**Shortage Occupation List / Temporary Shortage List**
Lists developed by the Migration Advisory Committee to identify occupations in shortage in the UK, informing eligibility for work visas and migration policy.

**Skills**
The ability and capacity to carry out tasks using knowledge, experience and competencies, mobilising knowledge, attitudes and values to meet complex demands.

**Skills Audit**
A programme of labour market assessments examining current and future skills needs across creative sub-sectors to inform policy and industry action.

**Skills challenges**
A broad term encompassing skills shortages, skills gaps and other workforce-related constraints that affect employers' ability to recruit, retain and develop talent.

**Skills gaps**
A measure of internal skills mismatch where members of the existing workforce are not fully proficient in their roles.

**Skills mismatches**
A misalignment between skills supply and employer demand, including both shortages and underutilisation.

**Skills shortages**
A measure of external skills mismatch where employers are unable to recruit individuals with the required skills, qualifications or experience.

**Skills supply**
The skills available within the workforce or wider population, developed through education, training and work-based learning across the life course.

**Skills system**
The combined set of institutions, policies and stakeholders responsible for skills development.

**Skilled Worker Visa**
The main UK work visa route enabling employers to recruit international workers into eligible skilled roles.

**Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG)**
Funding allocated by the UK Government to higher education providers in England to support priority subjects and activities, including creative disciplines.

**Structure of employment**
The characteristics of work within a sector, including contract types, working patterns, earnings, occupations and geographic distribution.

**Supply side**
The education and training system and wider mechanisms that generate the supply of skills in the labour market.

**Technical / vocational skills**
Specialist skills, knowledge and expertise required to perform tasks and function within a particular job.

**Transversal skills**
Skills that cut across different tasks and job roles and can be used in a wide variety of situations in life and work, including creative, critical thinking and socio-emotional skills.

**Types of skills (technical, digital, transversal, business-critical, sustainability)**
A broad categorisation of skills required in the creative industries:

- Technical: occupation-specific expertise
- Digital: ability to use and develop digital technologies
- Transversal: transferable skills applicable across roles
- Business-critical: commercial and operational skills (e.g. management, marketing)
- Sustainability: skills related to environmental performance and sustainable practices

**Upskilling**
The process of developing additional or enhanced skills among the existing workforce to improve performance and adapt to changing job requirements.

# Technical annex

## Sector definitions

The Creative Industries Skills Audits used an adapted version of the DCMS definition of the creative industries. This presented data for video games separately from IT, software and computer services, and disaggregated music and performing and visual arts.

For statistical purposes, for example when classifying the main activity of businesses responding to the Creative Employer Skills Survey or analysing secondary data sources, sectors were defined based on Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes, as follows.

| Description | Standard Industrial Classification |
|---|---|
| **Advertising and marketing** | **70.21** Public relations and communication activities<br>**73.11** Advertising agencies<br>**73.12** Media representation |
| **Architecture** | **71.11** Architectural activities |
| **Crafts** | **32.12** Manufacture of jewellery and related articles |
| **Design and designer fashion** | **74.1** Specialised design activities |
| **Screen industries** | **59.11** Motion picture, video and television programme production activities<br>**59.12** Motion picture, video and television programme postproduction<br>**59.13** Motion picture, video and television programme distribution<br>**59.14** Motion picture projection activities<br>**60.1** Radio broadcasting<br>**60.2** Television programming and broadcasting activities<br>**74.2** Photographic activities |
| **Video games** | **58.21** Publishing of video games<br>**62.01/1** Ready-made interactive leisure and entertainment software development |
| **Publishing** | **58.11** Book publishing<br>**58.12** Publishing of directories and mailing lists<br>**58.13** Publishing of newspapers<br>**58.14** Publishing of journals and periodicals<br>**58.19** Other publishing activities<br>**74.3** Translation and interpretation activities |
| **Museums, galleries and libraries** | **91.01** Library and archive activities<br>**91.02** Museum activities |
| **Music** | **59.2** Sound recording and music publishing activities<br>**85.52** Cultural education (50%) |
| **Performing and visual arts** | **90.01** Performing arts<br>**90.02** Support activities to performing arts<br>**90.03** Artistic creation<br>**90.04** Operation of arts facilities<br>**85.52** Cultural education (50%) |

# Creative Employer Skills Survey

## Creative Employer Skills Survey 2025 (CESS25)

### Overview

The Creative Employer Skills Survey 2025 was an establishment-based, telephone survey of creative industries firms conducted as part of the Creative Industries Skills Audits. It included commercial businesses and not-for-profit organisations, with 2+ employees, in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Following a competitive tendering process, MMarket Solutions was commissioned to deliver the survey. Fieldwork was conducted between March and May 2025, with a total achieved sample of 1,302 interviews.

### Questionnaire

The survey was directed towards hiring or training managers in creative industries firms. Questions were structured around five sections:

1. Firm characteristics;
2. Recruitment and recruitment difficulties;
3. Skills deficiencies amongst the workforce;
4. Future jobs and skills needs; and
5. Impact and response to skills challenges

The survey included mostly closed questions, but with some "Other: please specify" categories and open-ended questions, particularly when examining the specific job roles or skills where shortages, gaps or future needs are most acute. Wherever possible, questions were aligned to DfE's Employer Skills Survey. Job roles were coded to 6-digit Standard Occupational Classification using the Computer Assisted Structured Coding Tool (CASCOT) developed by Warwick Institute of Employment Research.

### Sampling

An initial sample list was procured from Experian. This was subsequently validated and augmented in consultation with the project Steering Group. Creative industries employers were also invited to express interest in participating via a web-landing page; the survey was promoted by the Creative PEC project Steering Group via newsletters, websites and social platforms; and screening questions were used to confirm eligibility.

### Quotas

Quotas were set for sub-sector; firm size; and nation/region. The sample stratification disproportionately targeted larger businesses, smaller sub-sectors and nations to ensure minimum sample bases.

### Grossing and Weighting

Data was weighted based on sub-sector; firm size; and nation/region, and grossed to be representative of the creative business population using data from the Inter Departmental Business Register (establishments, 2+ employees).

### Achieved sample

| Total | 1,302 |
|---|---|
| **Sub-sector** | |
| Advertising and marketing | 120 |
| Architecture | 104 |
| Crafts | 67 |
| Design and designer fashion | 128 |
| Screen industries | 176 |
| IT, software and computer services | 252 |
| Video games | 50 |
| Publishing | 108 |
| Museums, galleries and libraries | 79 |
| Music | 70 |
| Performing and visual arts | 148 |
| **Firm size** | |
| 2 to 9 employees | 694 |
| 10 to 49 employees | 473 |
| 50 to 99 employees | 74 |
| 100+ employees | 61 |
| **Nation and region** | |
| North East | 19 |
| North West | 81 |
| Yorkshire and Humber | 67 |
| East Midlands | 61 |
| West Midlands | 75 |
| East of England | 106 |
| Greater London | 321 |
| South East | 154 |
| South West | 97 |
| Scotland | 123 |
| Wales | 100 |
| Northern Ireland | 98 |

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