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Creative Industries Skills Audits

Creative Industries Skills Audits

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About Work Advance

Work Advance undertakes research, analysis and evaluation to advance understanding of developments in the world of work. We drive practical improvements in policies, programmes and practices that support inclusive and sustainable growth; productive businesses and better management practices; a skilled, agile and healthy workforce; and stronger, more vibrant and cohesive local communities.

Through our networks, we provide research, policy and consultancy services to a range of partners, including businesses large and small, trade unions, professional bodies, policymakers and wider practitioners.

Work Advance adopts an approach that is client-centred. We aim to secure practical solutions through blended research and consultancy services, as well as strong stakeholder engagement and partnership, which brings value through evidence-based and expert insights into what works. We design and support the delivery of tailored programmes and initiatives to test and trial new innovations, including help with monitoring and evaluation to track results and impact.

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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 creative industries in the UK through the production of independent and authoritative evidence and policy advice.

Led by Newcastle University, with the Royal Society of Arts, and funded by the UKRI via 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.

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Executive summary

1 Skills shortages when recruiting: The picture today

The publishing sector is significant to the economy, accounting for a sizeable share of the creative industries workforce (7%). While there has been some turbulence in employment since 2014, there is growing confidence in a sustained recovery, as the publishing process continues to transform content creation and production in the sector to meet evolving consumer demands (from print to e-books, audiobooks, social media materials and podcasts).

Just over a third (34%) of publishing employers that had hired staff (including freelancers) in the past two years reported recruitment difficulties. These were mostly caused by candidates lacking the skills or experience required. In publishing, skills shortages are most acute among less experienced staff (with less than two years of experience). Employers struggle to recruit for key roles in books, newspapers, journals, translation services and distribution, such as: newspaper, periodical and broadcast editors; translators and interpreters; literary editors; and newspaper and periodical journalists and reporters. There are also challenges with business, finance, sales, marketing and certain digital roles.

Technical skills shortages point to a lack of literacy and language skills linked to writing, editing and copywriting (and foreign languages for translation); research and reporting skills needed to gather insights and news; stakeholder management; and practical industry-specific knowledge. Business skills are also highlighted in areas like marketing, sales and finance.

2 Current skills gaps in the existing workforce

Alongside the challenge of skills shortages when recruiting, publishing employers also point to skills deficiencies across their existing workforce. In 2025, skills gaps affected 27% of employers in the sector.

Many of these are transitory in nature – that is, they exist because an individual is new to their role or has only partially completed the training required for their position. In addition, skills gaps may be an indicator of firms' positive ongoing business development and transformation. Examples of this include employers introducing new technology (19%) or new products and services (19%). In a context of change, it is also of interest that a significant share of employers with skills gaps reported these were due to staff not having received appropriate training (45%).

The majority of publishing employers (60%) are seeing skills gaps among less experienced staff members (with less than two years of experience as early-career workers or new entrants).

The types of skills that need improving across the workforce closely mirror those lacking in candidates, capturing a blend of technical skills and business skills. Industry-specific technical skills include literacy, language and communication skills for content creation. That said, digital processing and multimedia skills are also increasingly vital yet lacking (e.g. using software and multimedia, developing interactive digital content).

3 Jobs and skills priorities over the next three to five years

Publishing employers remain cautious about the future outlook. Only 15% of employers in the sector expect to grow staff numbers over the next three to five years. These employers also expect future upskilling needs due to: the introduction of new technologies or equipment; the development of new products and services; and the introduction of new working practices.

Many of the roles subject to skills shortages and gaps today are expected to be in growing demand in future (e.g. newspaper and periodical journalists, reporters and editors, as well as translators). An ongoing call is also expected for business roles in sales and marketing, business development, and finance; education and community outreach support functions; and specific digital roles. The latter category includes software developers, IT managers, and graphic and multimedia designers.

While recognising the growing need for blended skillsets across specialist and generic business areas, there will be a continued focus on technology. Skills in particular demand include: data analysis in editing, e-commerce and marketing; multimedia content production and design for product development and user experience (UX) enhancement (e.g. e-books, social media posts, audio content/podcasts); industry-specific knowledge surrounding content protection and intellectual property (IP) rights; and ability to use AI to enhance efficiencies and support ethical and inclusive practices.

4 Taking action to address skills challenges for the industry

Skills challenges are having a significant impact on publishing firms, with 79% of employers with skills shortages or gaps reporting a business impact. This increases the workload of other staff, raises operating costs, leads to the loss of business or orders to competitors, and causes wage inflation.

The majority of employers with skills challenges are taking action in response (87%), with around half (51%) having provided training over the past year. While reported rates compare favourably with wider surveys, only a minority provide off-the-job training (8%).

Publishing employers reported a range of factors influencing and/or inhibiting training patterns. The most common reason cited by employers in the sector for not providing training is that staff are fully proficient (44%). In addition, employers are inhibited by a lack of funds and external courses being viewed as too expensive.

Employers in the publishing sector called for more financial support and flexible training. In addition, there was interest in wider measures such as: enhanced collaboration between industry and education providers to improve the range of technical training for the sector (e.g. widening the apprenticeship and placements offer); improvements to careers advice, information and campaigning; and increased funding of modular training (e.g. through the Growth and Skills Levy and the Lifelong Learning Entitlement).

1. Introduction to the Creative Industries Skills Audits

Throughout 2025, the Creative PEC and Work Advance embarked on a series of UK-wide Skills Audits for the creative industries and its sub-sectors. A commitment in the Creative Industries Sector Plan and funded jointly by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Creative Industries Council (CIC), the Skills Audits have sought 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 wider workforce issues.

The Skills Audits have been delivered in two phases:

Phase 1: Assessed the skills priorities across the creative industries as a whole;

Phase 2: Examined in greater depth the skills priorities of different creative sub-sectors.

This report is part of the suite of sub-sector skills audits produced during Phase 2, presenting the skills needs, challenges and priorities of the publishing sector. The research utilises the DCMS definition of the creative industries, which includes the following Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes for the sub sector:

- 58.11 Book publishing
- 58.12 Publishing of directories and mailing lists
- 58.13 Publishing of newspapers
- 58.14 Publishing of journals and periodicals
- 58.19 Other publishing activities
- 74.3 Translation and interpretation activities

The wider sub-sectors of the creative industries covered by the Skills Audits include: advertising and marketing; architecture; crafts; design and designer fashion; film, TV, video, radio and photography; IT, software and computer services; computer games; publishing; museums, galleries and libraries; music; and performing and visual arts.

The analysis for the audits is underpinned by an established labour market framework, covering issues of labour demand, occupational structure, current and future skills needs, and drivers of change (Foresight and Government Office for Science, 2016; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2019). The framework provides a structured way of thinking about the different dimensions of the labour market in terms of skills supply and demand and how they interact with one another (e.g. driving shortages and gaps).

The research team deployed a rigorous, 5-stage approach to developing the Audits, including:

- **A rapid evidence review**, examining evidence on skills issues across the creative industries, in different UK nations and sub-sectors, produced by government, industry stakeholders and the research community
- **Secondary data analysis** of official, government sources of labour market information (or 'top-down LMI) to provide a robust, consistent and comparable baseline.

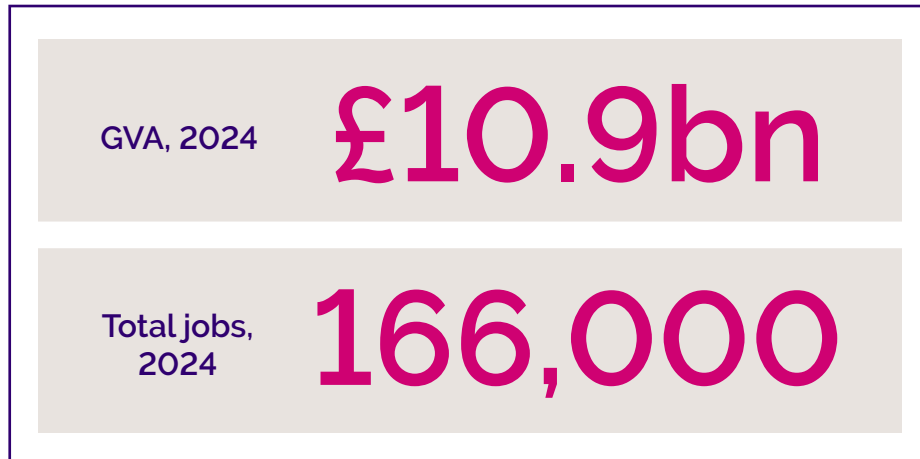
- **New primary research** – the Creative Employer Skills Survey – including over 1,300 telephone interviews with employers across the creative industries to explore their perspectives on skills priorities, the talent pipeline, barriers and enablers to skills investment.
- **A series of roundtables** bringing together Government, national and sub-national creative agencies, trade bodies, unions, creative businesses and major cultural organisations and education providers to promote shared consensus on skills priorities.
- **Reporting and dissemination**, including the production of the Creative Industries Skills Audit and a suite of 11 sub sector audits.

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 industries sub-sector.

Figure 1: Developing the Creative Industries Skills Audits



2. Sector profile and performance



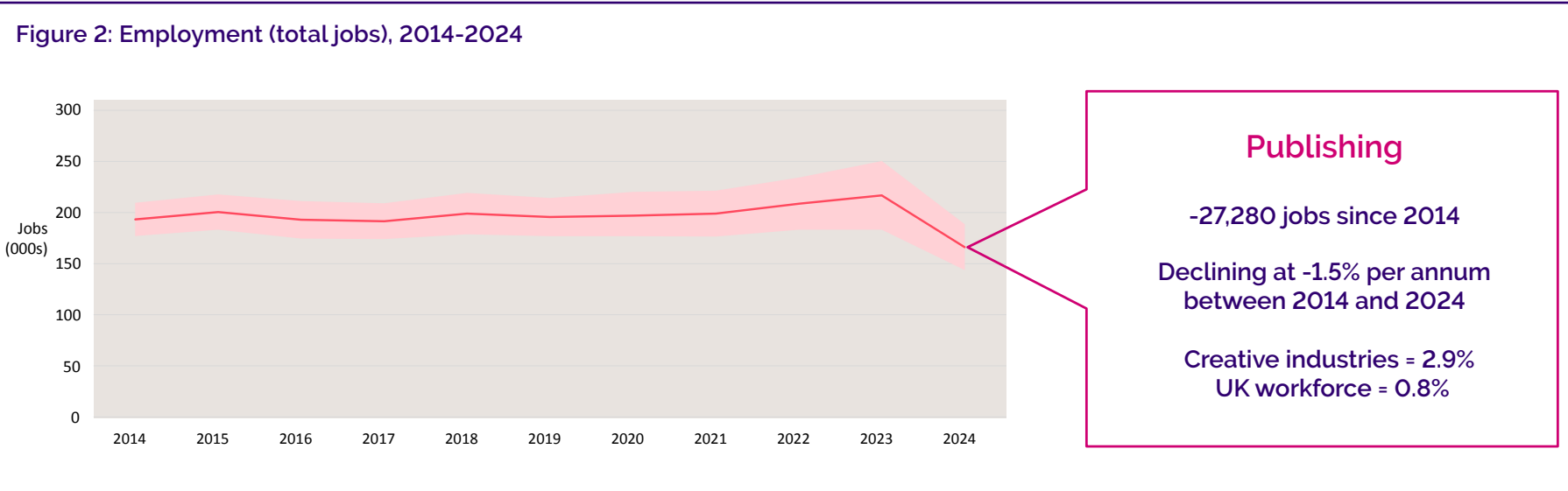
The publishing industry – as defined by DCMS – centres on the process of creating and disseminating published content. This encompasses a broad range of activities including: book publishing; the publishing of directories and mailing lists; newspaper publishing; journal and periodical publishing; other publishing activities; and translation and interpretation services.

Publishing is a key sector in the UK economy and the creative industries. Indeed, with an annual contribution of £10.9bn in gross value added (GVA) and around 166,000 jobs in 2024, it makes up around 7% of the creative industries' total GVA and 7% of the total creative industries' workforce.

The sector consists of a few large, global publishing houses, alongside many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro-businesses (over 95% of UK publishing firms have fewer than 50 employees, similar to creative industries broadly). Assessments of workforce size include those working as employees and self-employed individuals, and those in creative and non-creative roles in the sector.

With the last decade being marked by rapid technological change, as well as wider shocks from the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit, the sector has seen some turbulence. Recent trend analysis based on the official definition (DCMS, 2025) points to a slight overall decline (-1.5% per annum) in employment for the sector between 2014 and 2024. This equates to a decrease of just over 27,000 jobs since 2014, compared to an average rate of growth of 2.9% for the creative industries as a whole, which exceeds the UK workforce average (0.8%). That said, industry insights suggest the UK publishing sector is not uniformly declining, as different parts of the industry shift from print towards digital, audio and specialised roles (Publishers Association, 2024a). Publishing has a strong export orientation – over half of UK publishing sales are exports – and this will be a key driver of future revenue growth (Publishers Association, 2024a). Future increases in revenue, however, may not always translate into employment growth in the UK. Indeed, as the UK workforce is restructured, some new roles may be created but others may move abroad.

The publishing workforce has traditionally been clustered in London and the South-East of England. Over the last decade, however, the share of publishing employees based in London has fallen and a number of creative clusters have developed across the UK, such as in Oxford, Edinburgh and Cardiff (Publishers Association, 2024a). This has been aided by the shift towards digital and remote working.



Source: DCMS (2025b, 2025c)

Notes: GVA at current prices. GVA data for 2024 is provisional. 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. Growth rates are compound annual growth rate (CAGR).

3. Jobs and skills

There are some distinct and shared features of work in different parts of the creative industries. As much of the work is often cyclical, commission-driven and project-based in the sector as a whole (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023), levels of self-employment are generally high – in fact, they are more than double the UK economy average (34% vs 14%).

The publishing sector is highly skilled and qualified, mirroring the creative industries as a whole. That said, the publishing workforce has a higher share of workers educated to degree level or higher (74% vs 69%). As with other creative sub-sectors, the occupational profile of publishing is quite distinct. This reflects the need for candidates to meet industry job roles and tasks that are quite context-specific.

Publishing involves multiple stages, each of which requires distinct roles and skills. These include commissioning and content acquisition, editing, design/typesetting, production (print or digital), marketing, distribution, and sales. Specific roles include:

- **Commissioning, content and editing** (e.g. commissioning editors, editors and editorial assistants, proofreaders);
- **Design and production** (e.g. book designers and graphic designers, typesetters and digital compositors, production managers, print production schedulers, web content managers, digital producers);
- **Marketing, publicity and sales** (e.g. marketing managers, marketing assistants, publicists and publicity managers, sales representatives, advertising sales executives); and
- **Digital and audience development** (e.g. digital development editors, audience development managers, consumer insight data analysts or insight managers, translators).

Existing research highlights current skills needs, covering: literacy and content creation skills (i.e. excellent written and oral communication, creative and analytical thinking, and attention to detail and accuracy for editing, writing and proofreading); project management (i.e. strong organisational, prioritisation and time management skills and an ability to meet deadlines); collaboration and teamwork skills (i.e. ability to contribute to team effort involving editorial, design, marketing, sales, authors, printers and distributors); digital literacy and technical skills (including knowledge of advanced Microsoft Office functions, content management systems, design software, analytics tools, data analysis and numeracy); and stakeholder management, interpersonal and customer-facing skills (i.e. strong influencing, negotiation and persuasive skills, alongside marketing).

While the publishing industry is working to progress diversity across the sector by creating more opportunities for women, including in senior roles, there is still more to do (Publishers Association, 2024b). Findings from the most recent Publishing Workforce Report 2024 confirm official data, which reveals an underrepresentation of people of colour and persistent, pronounced class-based disparities. Indeed, the representation of people from ethnic minority groups remains below levels for other industries (13% vs 16%) and there is a much higher share of workers in the sector from privileged backgrounds compared to other industries (51% vs 36%). That said, representation of individuals with disabilities is on par with the economy-wide picture (16% vs 17%).

Figure 3: Employment status of the workforce, 2022-2024

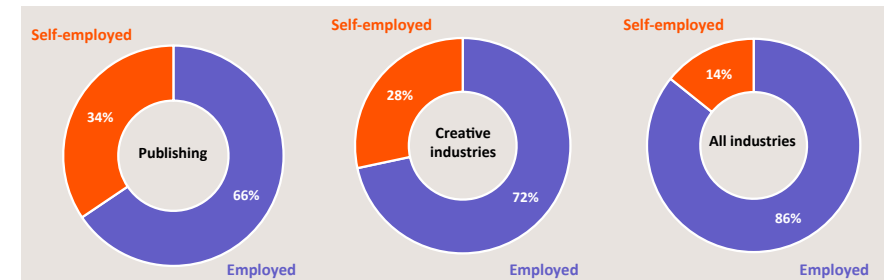


Figure 4: Workforce qualifications (% degree-qualified), 2022-2024

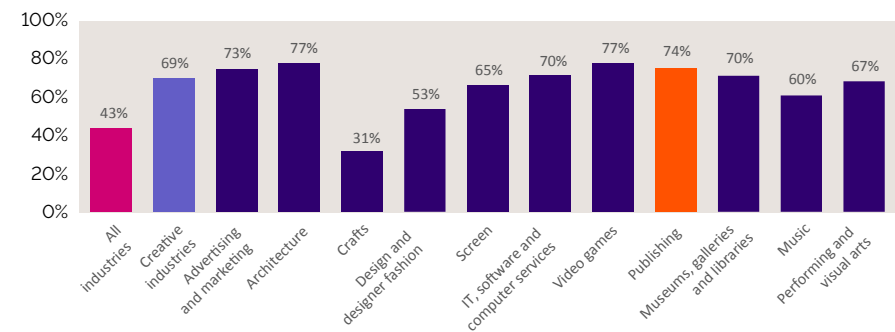
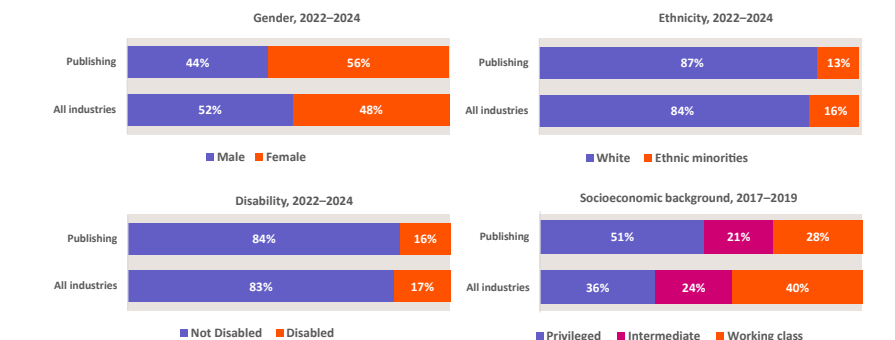


Figure 5: Workforce diversity



Source: DCMS (2025a) and Carey, Giles and O'Brien (2023)

Notes: Data based on a three-year pooled sample from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Annual Population Survey. 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.

4. Recruitment difficulties

The CESS 2025 examined skills mismatches, where employers' skills demands cannot be met. This starts with recruitment difficulties and skills shortages when employers are looking for talent in the external labour market, but cannot find candidates with the requisite skills. We found that, in light of long-term turbulence in the sector in the last decade, recent recruitment in the UK labour market has been more muted. Indeed, over the last two years, just over two fifths of employers within publishing (46%) have been recruiting, including for agency staff and freelancers. This is a lower level than seen across the creative industries (65%). Employers at the roundtable suggested this may also reflect a greater orientation to global markets and talent.

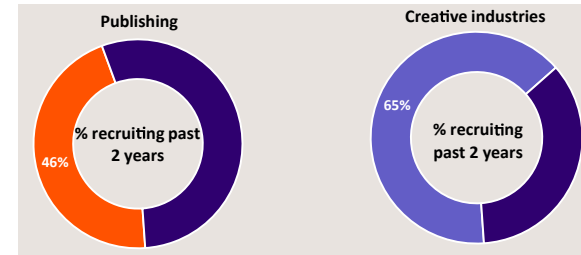
Further, the CESS 2025 identified parallels in recruitment mechanisms for publishing and the creative industries as a whole, with the most popular methods involving the use of online job platforms (56%) and word of mouth (34%). That said, more publishing employers deployed online platforms and fewer relied on word-of-mouth activities compared to the sector as a whole.

Around a third of recruiting publishing employers (34%) had hard-to-fill vacancies, similar to all creative industry employers (32%). Recruitment difficulties were more likely within publishing to be due to a lack of required skills (67%) and, to a lesser extent, required work experience (50%) and qualifications (33%). The lack of required qualifications was higher relative to the creative industries overall, while the lack of required skills was lower. Furthermore, a lack of required attitude or motivation was less of an issue for publishing employers. By contrast, slightly more employers in the sector highlighted issues with poor terms and conditions and not enough interest in the job relative to other creative employers.

Figure 6: Hiring and recruitment difficulties, 2025

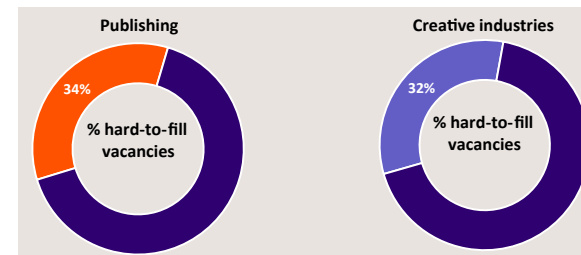
Q: Has this site recruited anyone, including any paid employees, agency staff, and self-employed or freelance workers, in the past two years?

Base = all establishments (n = 108)



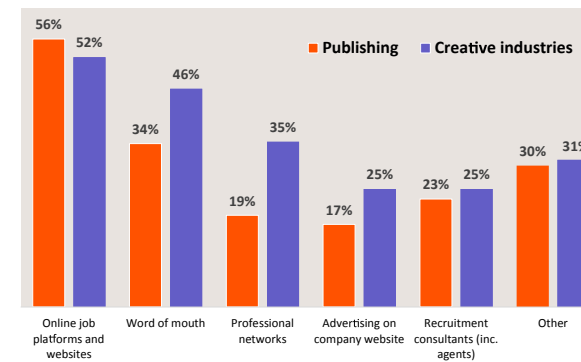
Q: Did any of the vacancies you had at this site in the past two years prove hard to fill?

Base = establishments that have recruited in the past two years (n = 64)



Q: What recruitment methods do you use to fill vacancies at this site?

Base = establishments that have recruited in the past two years (n = 64)

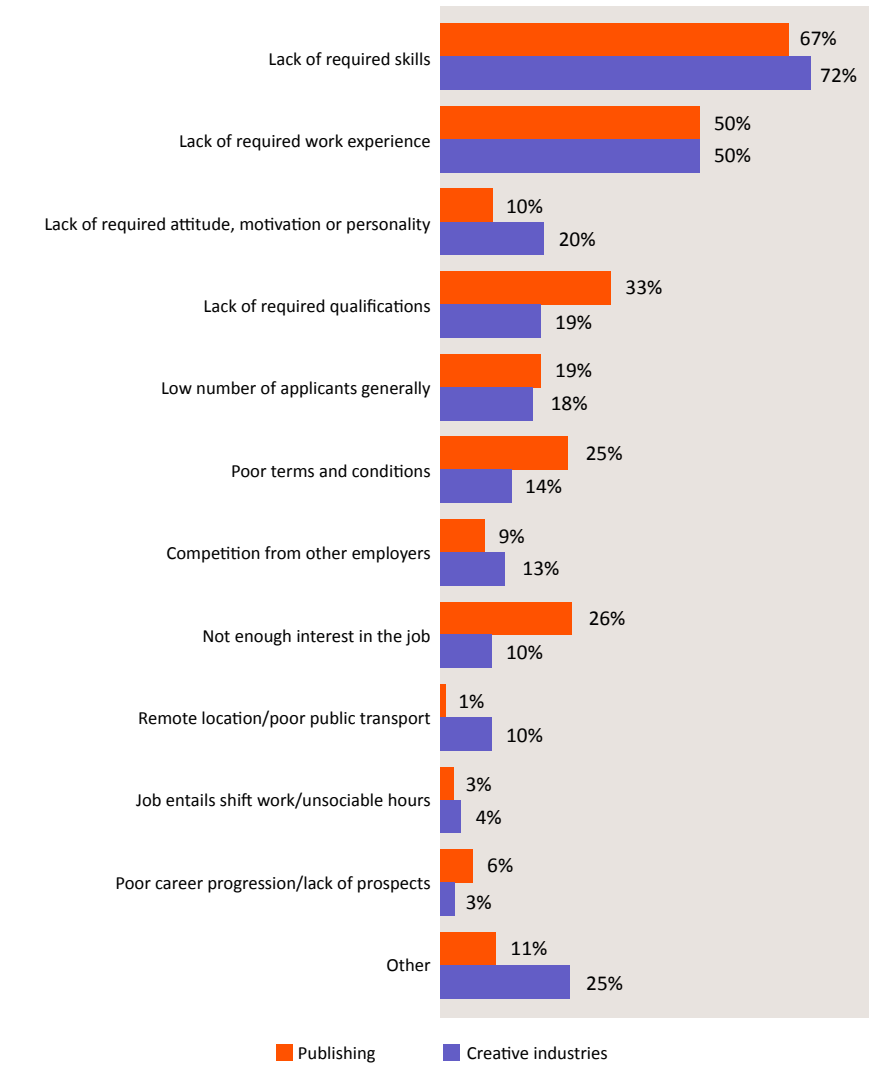


Source: CESS 2025

Figure 7: Main causes of recruitment difficulties, 2025

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

Base = establishments with hard-to-fill vacancies (n = 25)



Source: CESS 2025

Notes: Responses are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

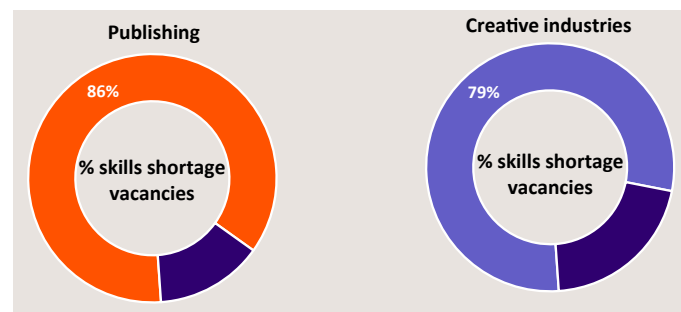
5. Skills shortages

Taking the skills responses together, the CESS 2025 showed that skills shortages were the main causes of hard-to-fill vacancies. Indeed, 86% of publishing employers reported that their vacancies were hard to fill for skills reasons. This was a higher level than for the creative industries overall (79%).

The survey also explores the level of experience being sought by employers with skills shortages. The highest share of recruiting employers within publishing who were experiencing skills shortages were seeking candidates with less experience (i.e. two years or less) – that is, they were looking for new entrants or those early in their careers. By contrast, fewer publishing employers were seeking experienced candidates with between five and ten years of experience. This differs from the creative industries as a whole, where fewer employers reported looking for less experienced candidates. Responses, however, are limited, so need to be viewed with caution.

Figure 8: Hard-to-fill vacancies caused by skills shortages, 2025

Q: What were the main causes of your vacancies for [occupation] being hard to fill? = Lack of applicants with required skills, qualifications or experience
Base = establishments with hard-to-fill vacancies (n = 25)



Source: CESS 2025

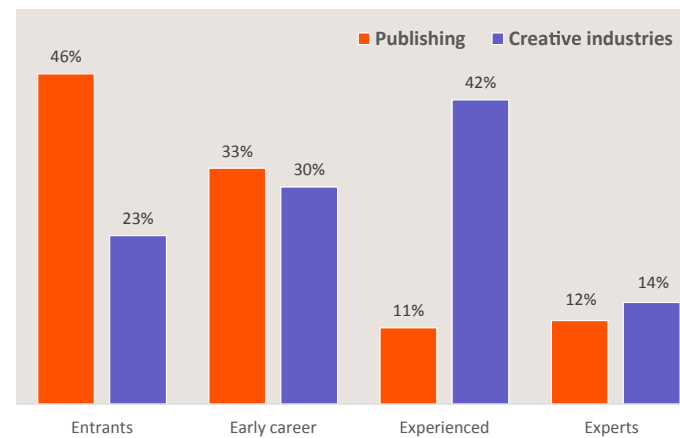
Notes: Responses are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

Publishing employers reported a wide range of occupations that were proving hard to fill. The most common were specialist roles in a range of the publishing sub-sectors – that is books, newspapers, journals, translation services and distribution. This was a particular issue for roles such as newspaper periodical and broadcast editors but also covered translators and interpreters, literary editors, and newspaper and periodical journalists and reporters.

That said, more generic hard-to-fill roles were identified including business and sales executives, business and financial project management professionals, advertising and marketing executives, marketing managers, and transport and distribution clerks. Digital roles were also specifically identified (although to a lesser degree), such as graphic and multimedia designers, IT user support technicians, and software developers.

Figure 9: Seniority of roles with skills shortages, 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 (n = 20)

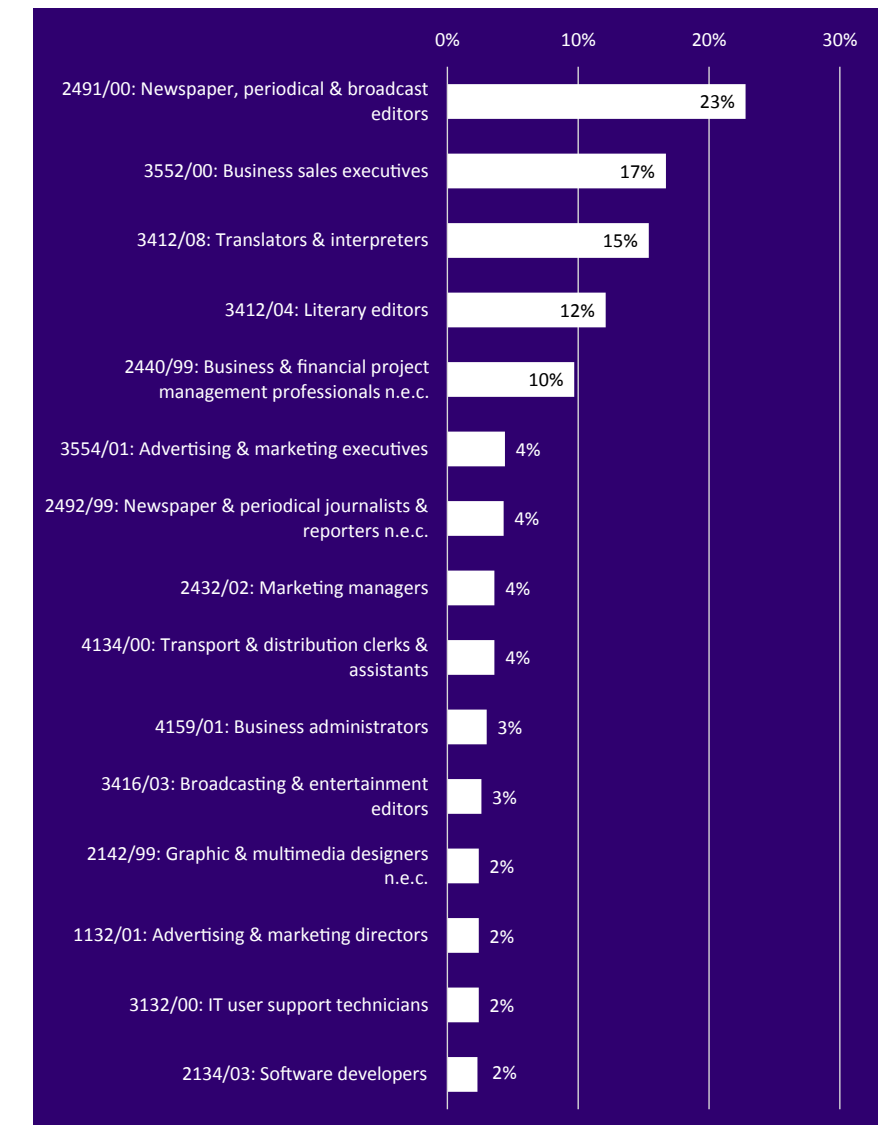


Source: CESS 2025

Notes: Responses are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

Figure 10: Hard-to-fill occupations (six-digit Standard Occupational Classification [SOC]), 2025

Q: For which specific occupations did vacancies at this site prove hard to fill?
Top fifteen occupations cited. Base = establishments with hard-to-fill vacancies (n = 25)



Source: CESS 2025

Notes: Responses are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

5. Skills shortages (continued)

There is strong alignment between the hard-to-fill roles identified in the CESS 2025 and wider research (Publishers Association, 2023b). For example, existing research has pointed to roles in publishing operations, sales, marketing and IT, highlighting technical roles focused on content creation, such as: editors in different publishing disciplines; bilingual/regional specialists (e.g. roles requiring bilingual skills in Wales and Scotland, including Welsh–English editors and Gaelic publishers); specialist sales and rights roles (e.g. educational publishing sales representatives, academic journal sales roles and rights/licensing managers); and core business support (e.g. finance managers and accountants and marketing professionals). Highlighted roles in specific digital areas include software developers, data analysts, scientists, IT specialists and web engineers for digital publishing platforms.

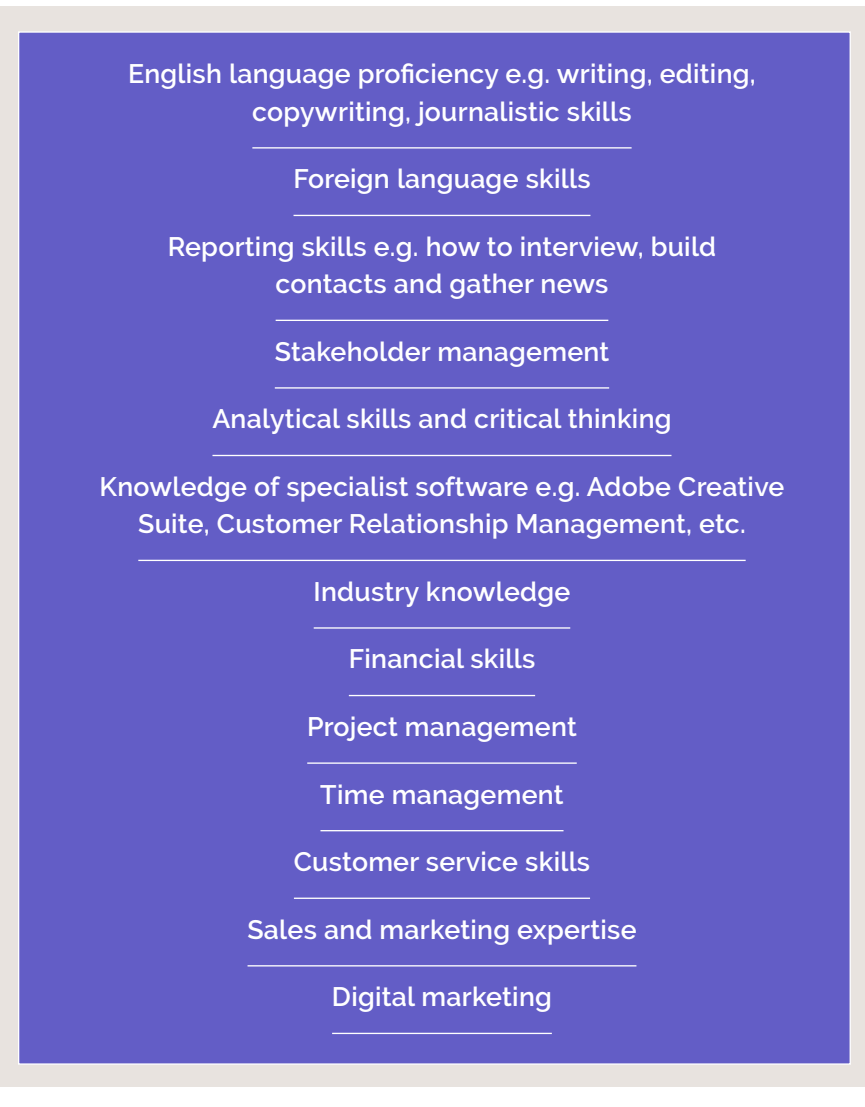
The CESS 2025 asked publishing employers with skills shortages to identify the main specialist skills lacking in applicants within the sector. Findings reveal core technical capabilities pertinent to the roles outlined earlier, such as: literacy and language skills linked to writing, editing and copywriting; research/reporting skills for gathering insights and news; stakeholder management; and practical industry-specific knowledge about how publishing works (e.g. experience of the products/books published). For those involved in translation, language proficiency extended to foreign languages. Business skills were also highlighted in areas like marketing and finance.

The CESS 2025 explicitly reviewed the current digital skills lacking, finding that 35% of publishing employers with skills shortages identified lack of digital skills. This means fewer employers in the sector have digital concerns relative to the creative industries as a whole. That said, a minority of publishing employers highlighted digital skills issues such as a lack of Microsoft Office skills and web development skills.

Figure 11: Specialist skills shortages, 2025

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

Base = establishments with skills shortage vacancies (n = 20)



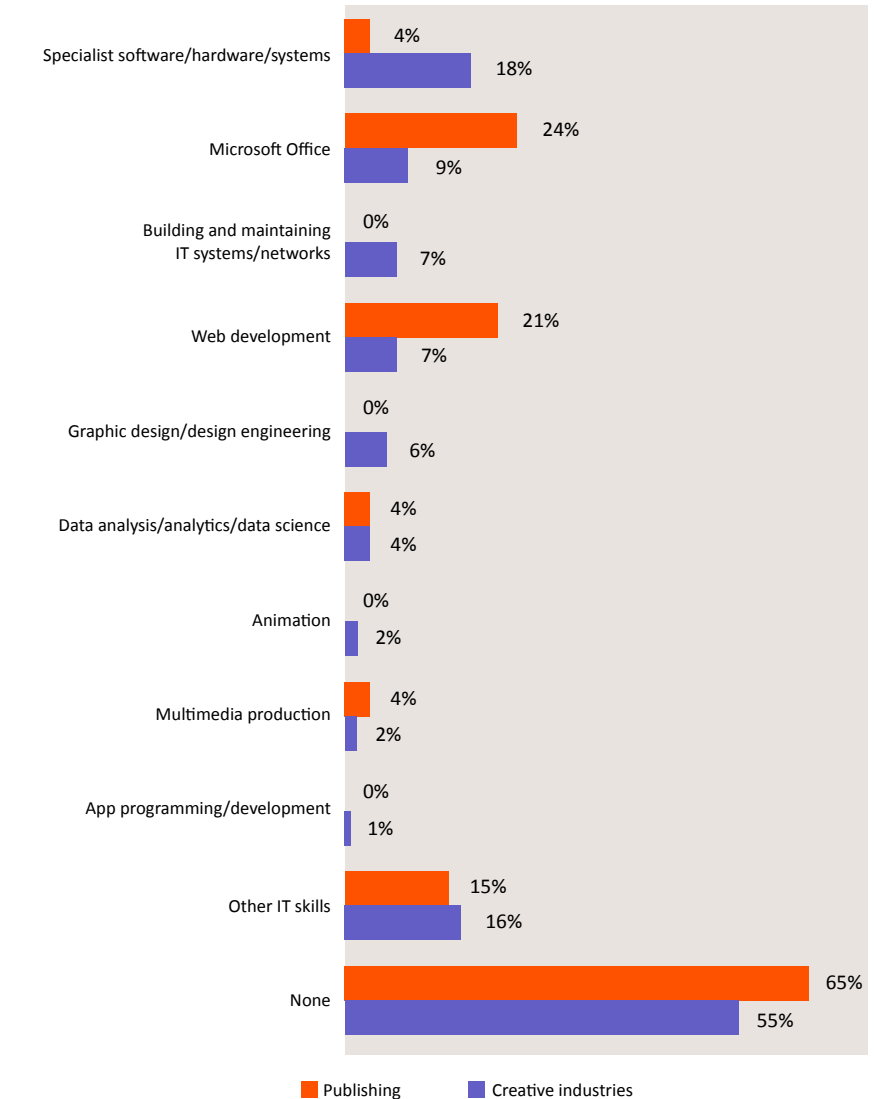
Source: CESS 2025

Notes: Responses are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

Figure 12: Digital skills shortages, 2025

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

Base = establishments with skills shortage vacancies (n = 20)



Source: CESS 2025

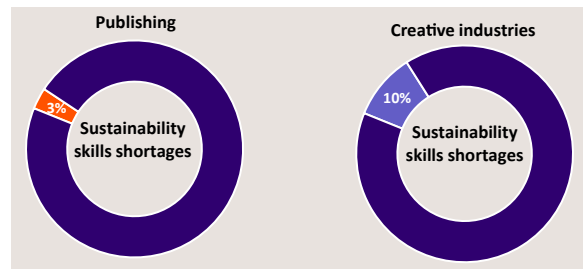
Notes: Responses are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

5. Skills shortages (continued)

Figure 13: Sustainability skills shortages, 2025

Q: Were any of the skills you found difficult to obtain from applicants for [skills shortage occupation] vacancies related to wanting to be more sustainable or carbon-neutral? If so, what specific sustainability or 'green' skills have been lacking?

Base = establishments with skills shortage vacancies (n = 20)



In an increasingly automated modern economy characterised by constant disruption, generic and transversal skills are also key. The CESS 2025 explored current perspectives of employers in the publishing sector as to where skills are lacking in terms of transversal core skills.

The results of the CESS 2025 suggest that, in line with previous research (Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025), the core skills most difficult to find by publishing employers are planning and organising skills, speaking skills, and problem-solving.

While this picture broadly mirrors the creative industries in terms of core skills, a much lower share of publishing employers pointed to difficulties with working with others and adapting. That said, a slightly higher share of employers in the sector reported looking for leadership skills.

Wider research echoes that some of these generic skills are hard to find (Publishers Association, 2023b), for example underlining the importance of communication, influencing and negotiation skills, project and time management skills, flexibility and adaptability, and continuous learning (Publishers Association, 2023b).

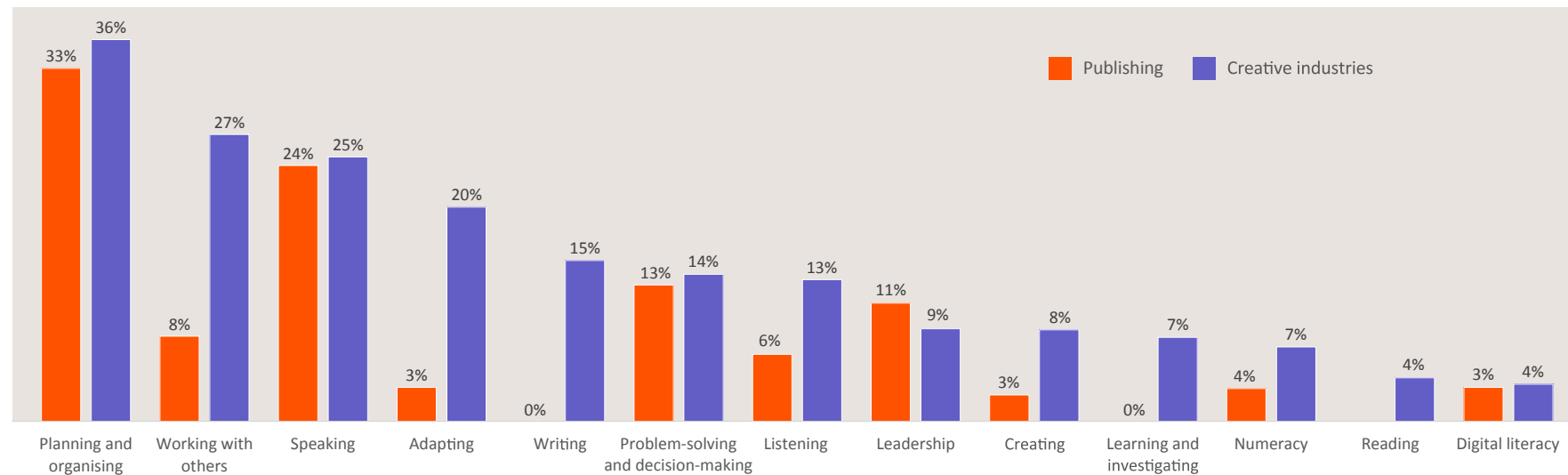
The demand for a blend of generic skills was also confirmed by attendees at the roundtable, particularly following the Covid-19 pandemic and among younger workers. Indeed, there was a concern that remote and home working had limited the degree to which candidates were work-ready. In addition, attendees emphasised a lack of skills among candidates in terms of flexibility and adaptability, resilience, critical thinking, interpersonal skills when working with other people and in an environment of constant change, and continuous learning. Furthermore, there was reference to the need for management capability, especially for those in mid-career.

In addition, the CESS 2025 generated up-to-date information about difficulties finding more sustainable or carbon-neutral skills. It appears that these are less of an issue overall for both the publishing industry and the creative industries overall. Indeed, only 3% of publishing employers with skills shortage vacancies reported a lack of specific sustainability or green skills, compared to 10% for creative industry employers overall.

Figure 14: Core skills shortages, 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 = 20)



Source: CESS 2025

Notes: Responses are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

6. Skills gaps

When considering skills deficiencies across their current workforce, just over a quarter of all employers (27%) within publishing reported skills gaps. This is slightly lower than in the creative industries overall.

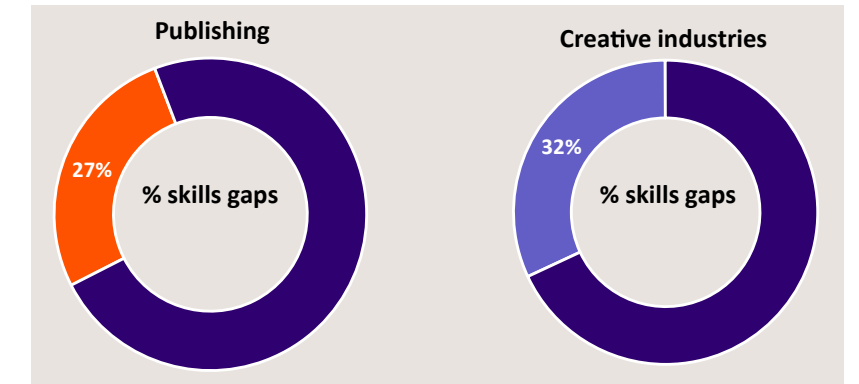
While levels of skills gaps appear higher than those seen in the Employer Skills Survey 2022 (reported as 11% of employers (Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025)) this will, in part, reflect a broader approach to assessing the workforce. Indeed, in reviewing the existence of skills gaps, the CESS captured agency staff, self-employed and freelance workers in addition to in-house employees. Its data tells us there are a variety of factors contributing to skills gaps.

According to the CESS 2025, the most common causes are transitory. That is, they exist because individuals are new to their role (cited by 28% of publishing employers with skills gaps) or have only partially completed the training required for their position (26%). These findings are in line with wider evidence (Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025).

In addition, skills gaps may be an indicator of positive ongoing business development. For example, there is evidence that employers experiencing skills gaps attribute these to the introduction of new technology (19%) and new products and services (19%). In a context of constant change, it is also of interest that a significant share of employers reported that skills gaps reflected the fact that staff have not received appropriate training (45%).

Figure 15: Skills gaps, 2025

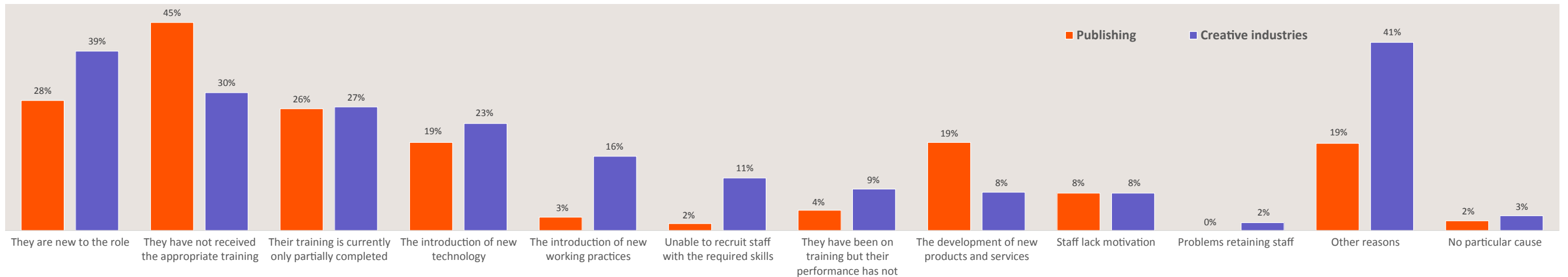
Q: Thinking about your current workforce (including employees, agency staff, self-employed or freelance workers), approximately what percentage would you regard as fully proficient at their job?
Base = all establishments (n = 108)



Source: CESS 2025

Figure 16: Main causes of skills gaps, 2025

Q: What are the main causes of staff in [skills gap occupation] not being fully proficient at their job?
Base = establishments with skills gaps (n = 34)



Source: CESS 2025

6. Skills gaps (continued)

The majority of publishing employers stated that existing workers with skills gaps were less experienced staff (with less than two years of experience, as early-career workers or new entrants).

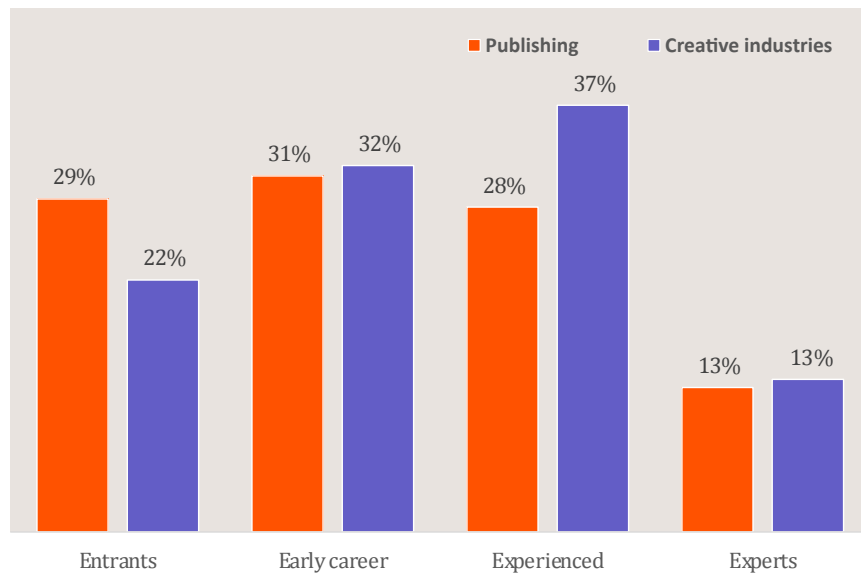
That said, a significant share (around two fifths) still reported gaps among experienced and expert staff with over five years of experience.

The CESS 2025 also provided an indication of the nature of roles where there are commonly skills gaps. Often roles with gaps are specialist roles that are distinct to the sector, such as newspaper, periodical and broadcast journalists, reporters and editors, and designers.

Figure 17: Seniority of staff with skills deficiencies, 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 (n = 34)



Source: CESS 2025

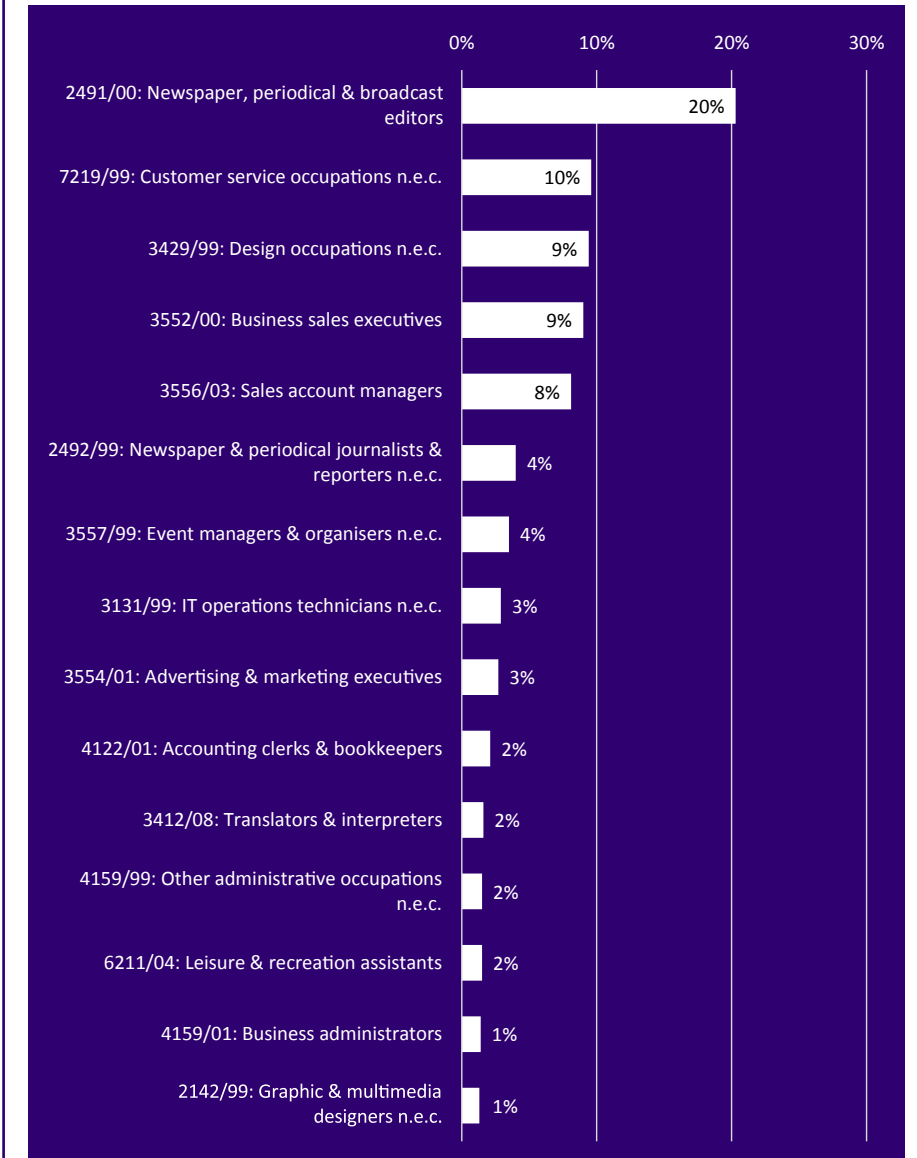
In addition, more generic roles can be identified in broader business areas such as finance, sales and marketing, and office management. These include: accounting clerks and bookkeepers; advertising and marketing executives; event managers and organisers; sales account managers; customer service occupations; business sales executives; business administrators; and other administrative occupations. Similarly, digital roles were identified as being hard to fill (although to a lesser degree) in areas such as IT operations and graphic and multimedia design.

The roles identified in CESS 2025 again align with wider research (Publishers Association, 2023b; World Economic Forum, 2023). For example, previous studies have highlighted skills challenges with reference to publishing operations, sales, marketing and IT. Technical roles focused on content creation have proved particularly hard to fill (including editors and content strategists in various publishing disciplines), alongside core business support (e.g. finance managers, accountants and marketing and sales professionals). Prior research also recognised the growing effects of technology, highlighting distinct digital roles (e.g. software developers, data analysts, scientists, IT specialists and web engineers for digital publishing platforms) as well as more generic roles with increasing digital capability (e.g. magazine and digital editors and content strategists in emerging fields/new content formats, such as audio/podcast editors or scientific editors with AI knowledge).

Figure 18: Skills gap occupations, 2025

Q: In which specific occupations are staff not fully proficient at their role?

Top fifteen occupations cited. Base = establishments with skills gaps (n = 34)



Source: CESS 2025

6. Skills gaps (continued)

The CESS 2025 identified the main skills lacking in the existing publishing workforce as skills gaps. Like with shortages, it pointed to core, technical capabilities pertinent to the roles outlined earlier, as well as a variety of business skills such as marketing and finance. As before, industry-specific technical skills include: literacy, language and communication skills for content creation (including foreign language skills for translation work), customer service, and project management. That said, respondents also made reference to a range of digital processing and multimedia skills affecting content creation and production in a variety of digital and published formats, including e-books, social media/blog posts, articles, audio content/podcasts, videos, infographics (e.g. using multimedia to develop, produce and edit interactive content) and marketing (e.g. developing publisher websites, enhancing UX, designing e-commerce storefronts, using customer data for marketing segmentation, etc.).

Furthermore, the CESS 2025 explored explicit demands for digital skills within the publishing sector. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the technological and digital transformation of the sector, a much higher share of employers with skills gaps (62%) reported a lack of digital skills in the existing workforce. This was a higher level than across the creative industries as a whole (33%). Indeed, a higher share of publishing employers reported skills gaps in: Microsoft Office (43% vs 13%); specialist software and hardware (26% vs 10%); data analysis (22% vs 6%); multimedia production (19% vs 6%); graphic design (20% vs 3%); building/maintaining IT systems and networks (19% vs 4%); and web development (22% vs 5%). There were also calls for advanced digital skills, such as data analysis and AI and machine learning capabilities to support content creation and production.

Figure 19: Specialist skills gaps, 2025

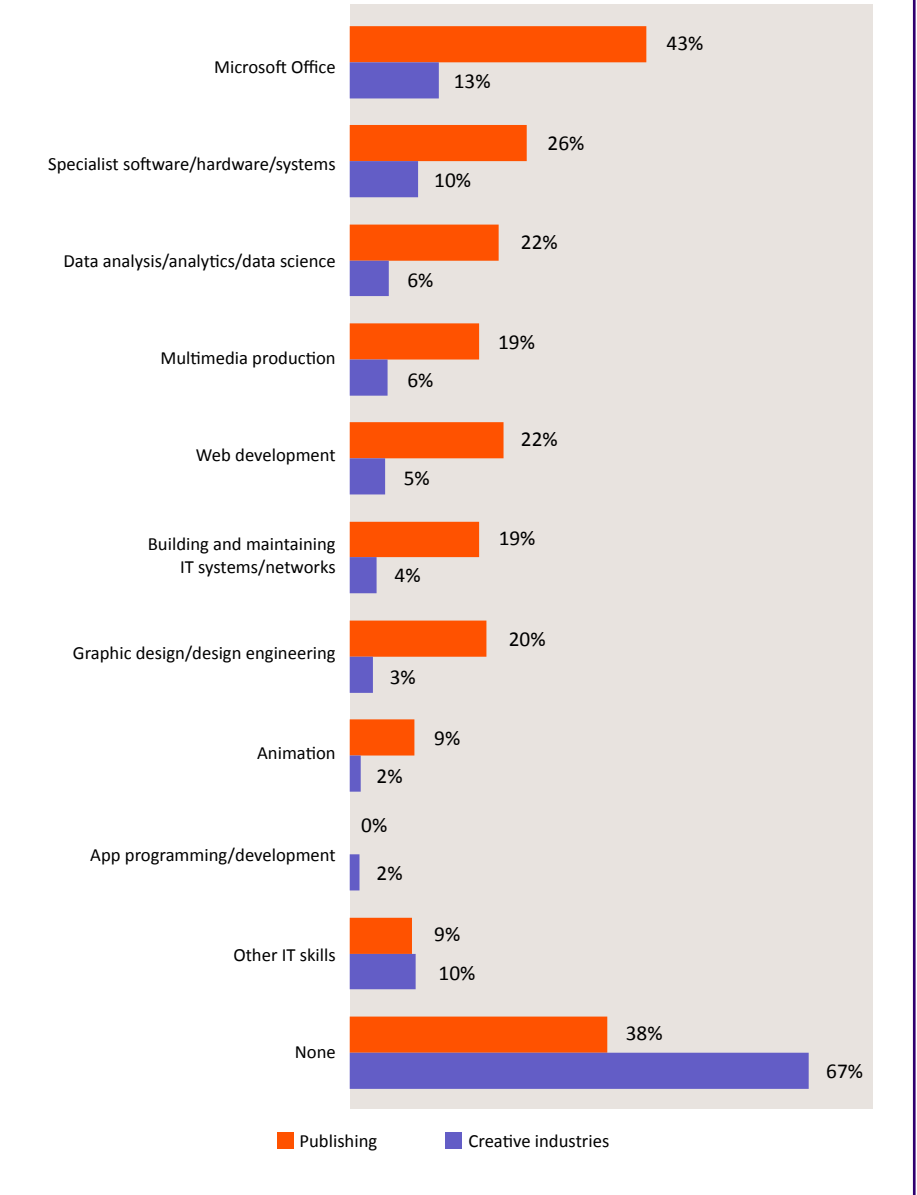
Q: Do any of your staff working as [skills gap occupation] lack full proficiency in terms of specialist skills or knowledge needed to perform the role? If so, what specific specialist skills or knowledge are they lacking full proficiency in?
 Base = establishments with skills gaps (n = 34)



Source: CESS 2025

Figure 20: Digital skills gaps, 2025

Q: Do any of your staff working as [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 = 34)



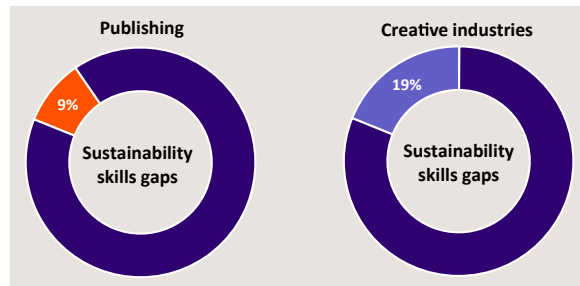
Source: CESS 2025

6. Skills gaps (continued)

Figure 21: Sustainability skills gaps, 2025

Q: Were any of the skills you mentioned needing improving among staff working as [skills gap occupation] related to wanting to be more sustainable or carbon-neutral? If so, what specific sustainability or 'green' skills are they lacking full proficiency in?

Base = establishments with skills gaps (n = 34)



The CESS 2025 also explored what wider, transferable or core skills are deficient among the publishing workforce.

Most commonly, responses focused on planning and organising (37%), working with others (21%), adapting (25%), speaking (22%), and problem-solving (18%). All of these skills gaps were reported at higher levels in publishing than for the creative industries overall.

In addition, a higher share of publishing employers, compared to the creative industries overall, reported skills gaps in terms of listening (30%), creating (20%) and to a lesser extent leadership (13%).

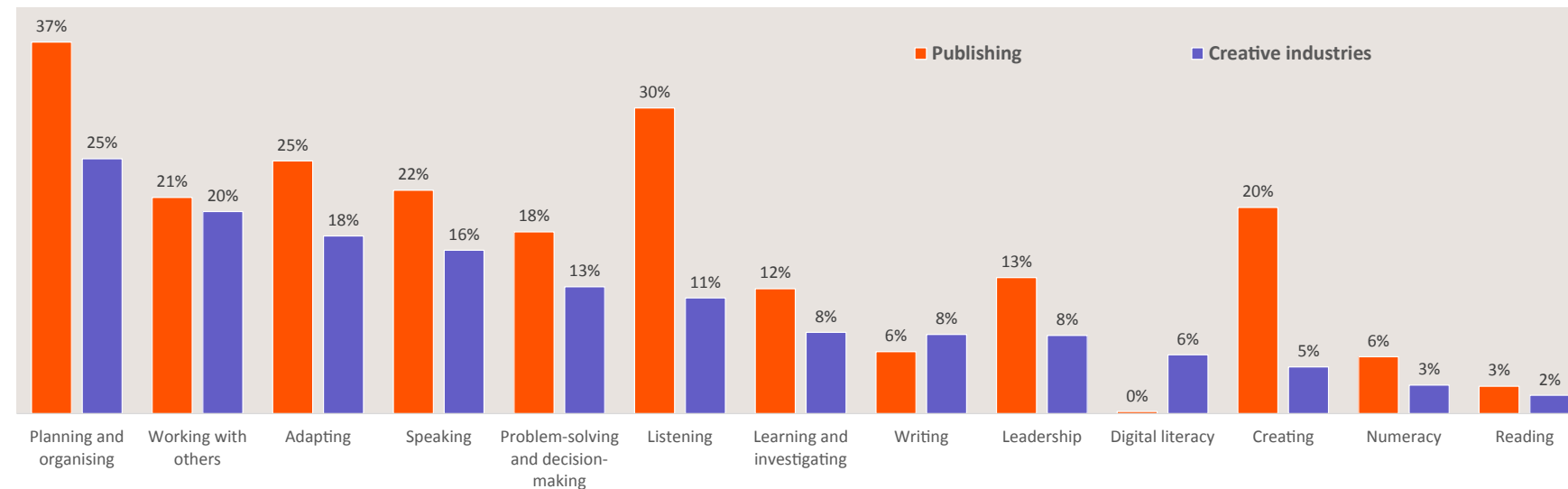
Existing research (Publishers Association, 2023b) has confirmed the priorities with reference to generic skills that need to be addressed in the sector. They include: a broad range of communication skills (written and verbal); organisational skills and an ability to manage time; influencing and persuading others; flexibility and adaptability; and continuous learning. For staff in mid-career roles, necessary skills also include management, such as general expertise in people management and diversity and inclusion, team management, project leadership, and strategic planning skills.

In addition, wider research has pointed to cross-functional skills, encouraging employers to broaden the skill sets of their staff beyond narrow job functions to increase organisational agility with a blend of technical and generic capabilities (e.g. training editors in basic marketing principles; training sales teams in product knowledge and content trends).

Figure 22: Core skills gaps, 2025

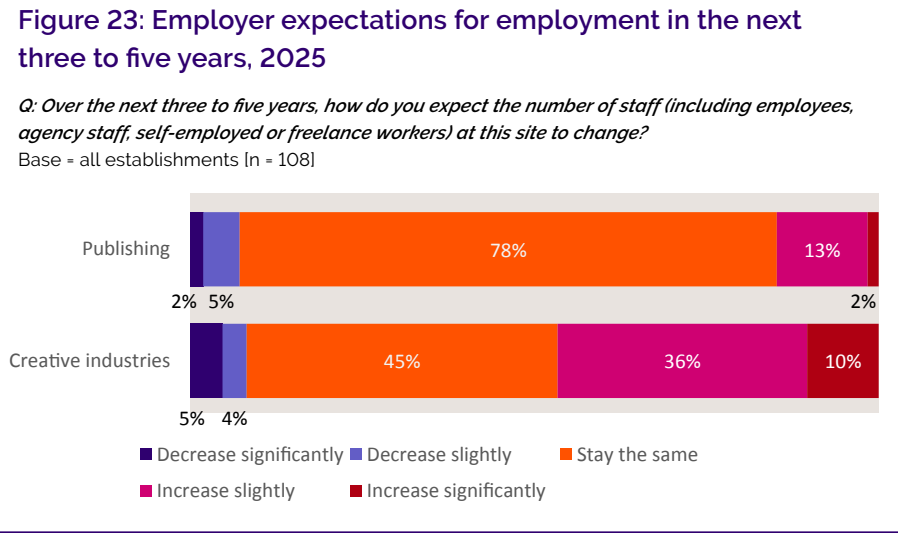
Q: Do any of your staff working as [skills gap occupation] lack full proficiency in terms of core or 'transversal' skills? If so, what specific core or transversal skills do you feel need improving?

Base = establishments with skills gaps (n = 34)



When reviewing the emphasis on sustainable or carbon-neutral skills in the existing workforce, the CESS 2025 revealed a higher level of demand compared to the share of publishing employers reporting skills shortages in these areas. Indeed, a higher share of publishing employers (9%) reported that specific sustainability and green skills were lacking in their existing workforce compared to those reported for shortages (3%), albeit at lower levels than creative industry employers overall (19%).

7. Future jobs and skills needs



Source: CESS 2025

The CESS 2025 provided an indication of employers' expectations for the future and whether they anticipate the need to increase levels of employment and/or upskill their workforce in the next three to five years. Overall, the data points to more modest business ambitions in publishing relative to the creative industries as a whole.

Indeed, the vast majority of publishing employers (78% of employers in the sector) stated they expect their number of staff to stay the same in the next three to five years.

As such, only 15% of employers within the publishing sector expect to increase the number of staff they employ over this period. This is lower than for creative industry employers overall (46%).

That said, where there is expected to be growth, all firms reported future upskilling needs (compared to 94% in the creative industries).

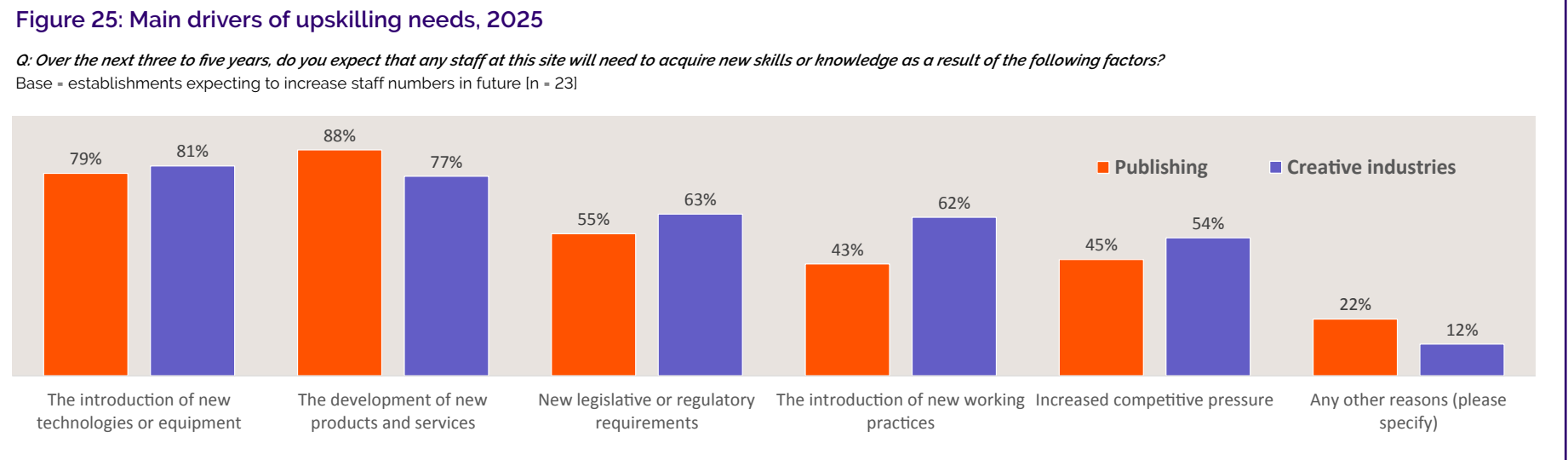
Closer examination of the reasons behind business needs to acquire new skills in the workforce sees a considerable share of employers reporting technological advancement and innovation as key drivers. This is particularly relevant for the development of new products and services, but it also extends to the introduction of new technologies or equipment.

In addition, given the importance of ongoing work to protect content and prevent copyright infringements, it is not surprising that new legislative requirements are also a fairly significant factor, albeit at lower levels compared to the creative industries as a whole.



Source: CESS 2025

Notes: Responses are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution



Source: CESS 2025

Notes: Responses are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution

7. Future jobs and skills needs (continued)

The CESS 2025 also enabled a more detailed look at the nature of the roles that employers expect to require in the next three to five years in the workforce, as well as future upskilling needs.

First, it identified the roles most likely grow in future. These mainly encompass technical and specialist digital roles, such as newspaper journalists and reporters, newspaper, periodical and broadcast editors, and designers. Nevertheless, this was not universally the case and wider, more generic roles were identified, including advertising and marketing executives, marketing managers, conference managers, press officers, and business sales executives. Unsurprisingly, given the ongoing influence of technology, several specialised digital roles were also identified, including software developers and IT managers.

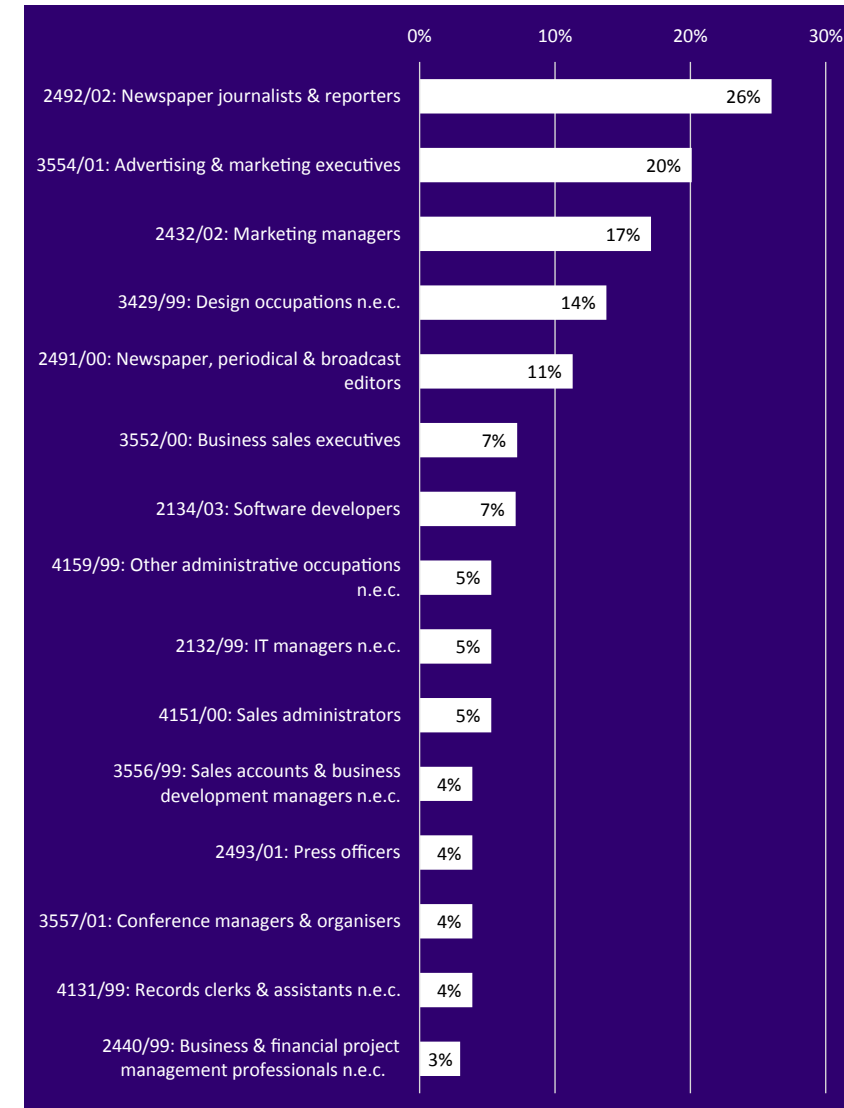
In addition, the CESS looked closely at the top roles that were expected to require new skills over the next few years. Again, it highlighted a mix of technical roles in the publishing sector alongside more generic roles. Starting with the specialist roles, the most common occupations requiring new skills include publishing managers and directors, newspaper journalists and reporters, translators, broadcasting and entertainment editors, and broadcasting and entertainment directors.

Moving to the more generic roles, the survey highlighted positions in wider business areas (e.g. sales, marketing and business management), such as administrative roles, advertising and marketing executives, sales account managers, business and financial project management professionals, and event managers. Furthermore, the digitally enabled roles it highlighted include graphic and multimedia designers, other design occupations, and camera operators and videographers.

Figure 26: Occupations in demand in future, 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 in future (n = 23)



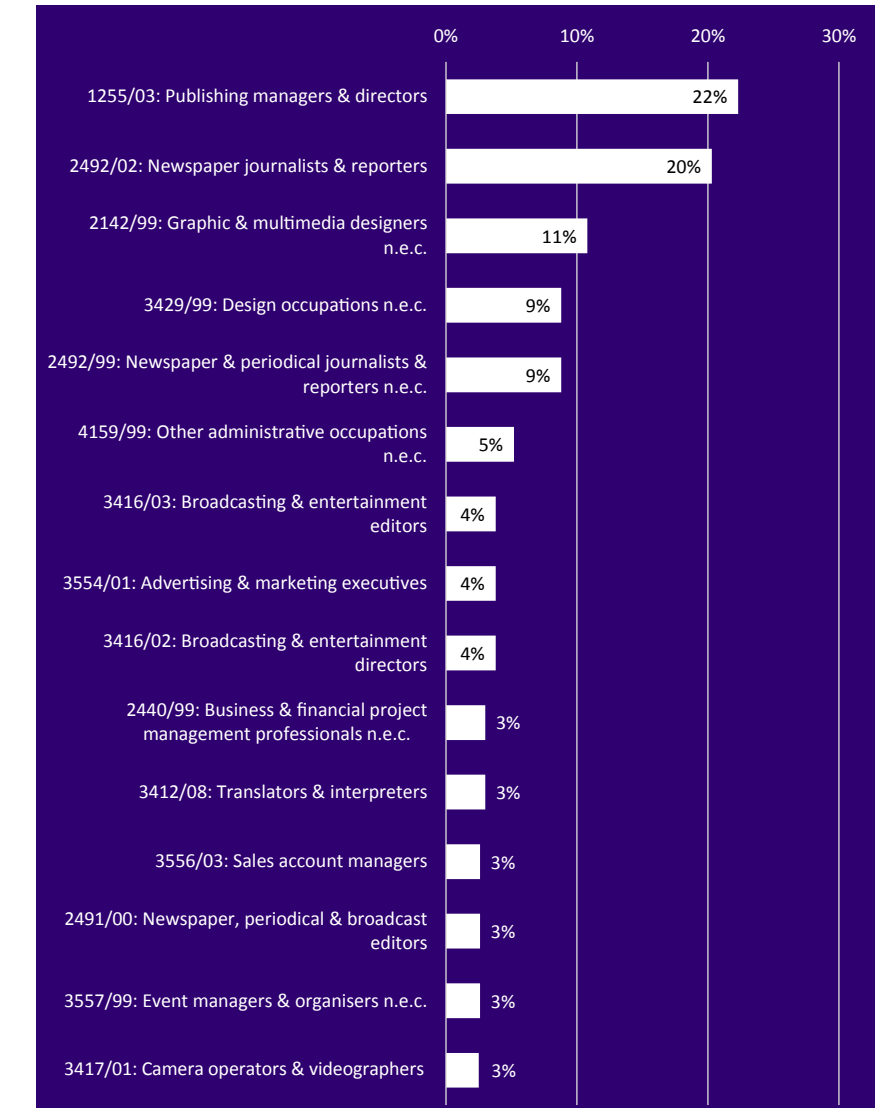
Source: CESS 2025

Notes: Responses are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

Figure 27: Occupations with upskilling needs, 2025

Q: In which specific occupations do you expect staff to have the greatest need to acquire new skills or knowledge over the next three to five years?

Top fifteen occupations cited. Base = establishments expecting to increase staff numbers in future (n = 23)



Source: CESS 2025

Notes: Responses are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

7. Future jobs and skills needs (continued)

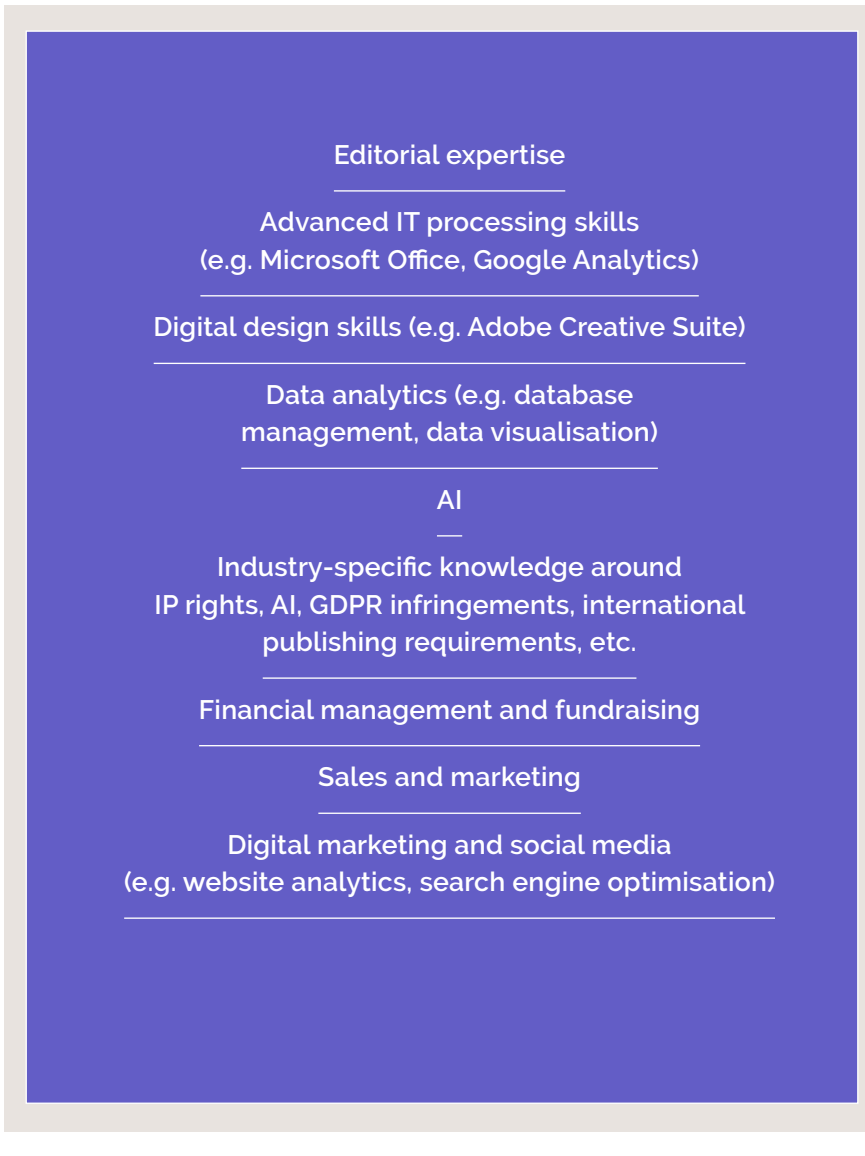
The CESS 2025 also identified the main technical skills publishing employers expect to be required in the future. While recognising the continued need for blended skillsets across specialist and generic business areas, it highlighted the growing effects of technology, which continues to transform content creation and production in the sector. Indeed, as the publishing process increasingly works with a variety of digital and published content formats and reader behaviour evolves from print to e-books and audiobooks, the skills required are also expected to evolve. For example, growing calls are anticipated for: data analysis skills in editing, e-commerce and marketing (e.g. using customer data for insight and marketing segmentation etc.); multimedia content production and digital design skills to develop products and enhance UX (e.g. e-books, social media/blog posts, articles, audio/podcasts, videos and infographics); and industry-specific knowledge around protecting content and IP rights, the increasing risks of copyright infringements, anti-piracy due to the use of AI, and ethical and inclusive practices. Furthermore, as readers move from buying products outright to subscribing to services and engaging in social media discussions (e.g. #BookTok), employers seek business and marketing skills.

The CESS 2025 further explored the likely future demand for digital skills in the sector. Overall, 56% of publishing employers that expect to expand staff numbers also expect a need for workers to acquire new digital skills over the next three to five years – similar to the creative industries overall. Growth is expected across several digital areas, from Microsoft Office to more specialist software and hardware systems, data analytics and multimedia production. Other IT skills were also referenced, including growing awareness and use of AI, particularly at advanced levels. In turn, there were calls for AI and automation specialists who can oversee AI integration and use (e.g. algorithm trainers, automation workflow production managers).

Figure 28: Specialist skills needs in next three to five years, 2025

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

Base = establishments with upskilling needs (n = 23)



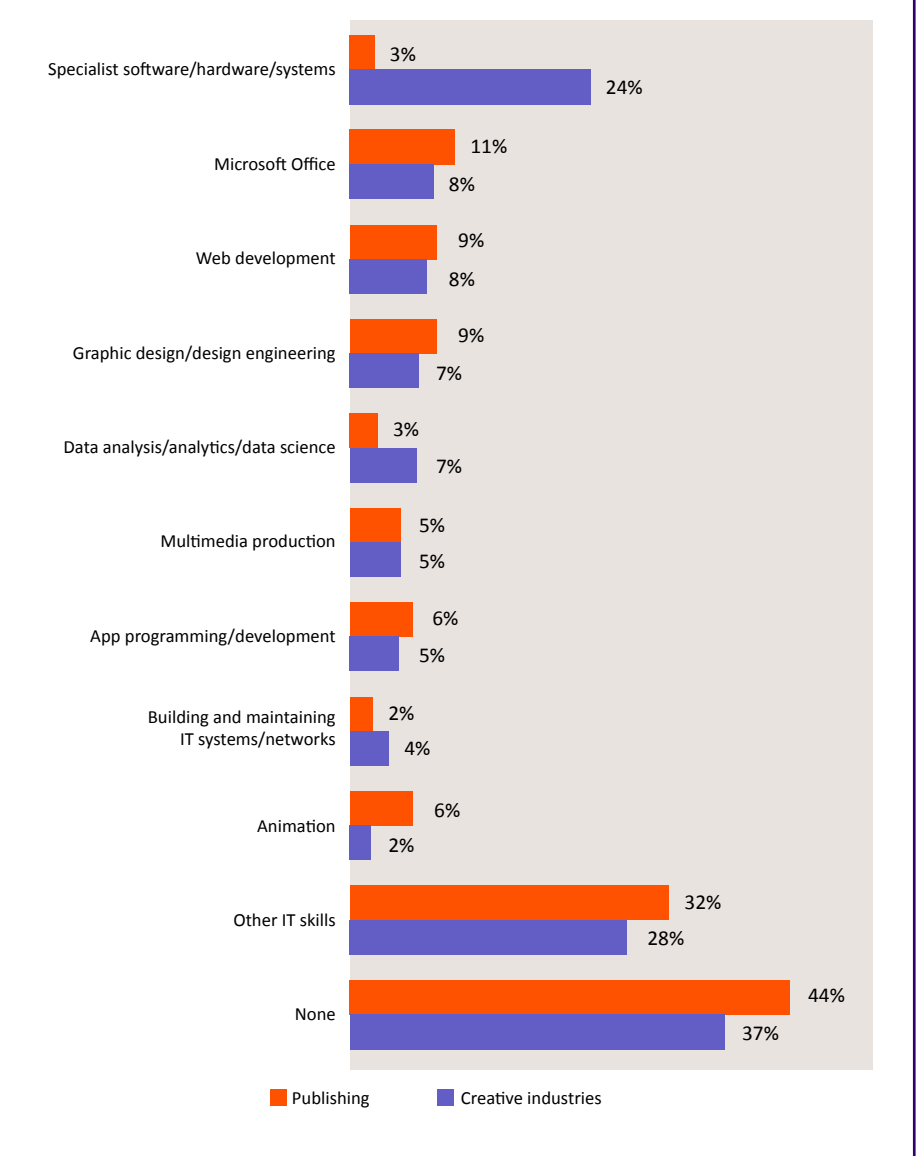
Source: CESS 2025

Notes: Responses are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

Figure 29: Digital skills needs in next three to five years, 2025

Q: Do you expect staff will 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 = establishments with upskilling needs (n = 23)



Source: CESS 2025

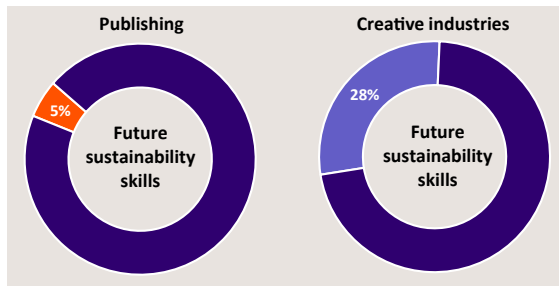
Notes: Responses are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

7. Future jobs and skills needs (continued)

Figure 30: Sustainability skills needs in next three to five years, 2025

Q: Are any of the skills you expect staff will need to acquire over the next three to five years related to wanting to be more sustainable or carbon-neutral? If so, what specific sustainability or 'green' skills will need improving?

Base = establishments with upskilling needs (n = 23)



The CESS 2025 also reviewed future transferable skills with reference to what would need improving in the next three to five years.

Most commonly these involved working with others, planning and organising, speaking, and adapting. With the exception of working with others, these future skills were reported by fewer publishing employers than by employers across the creative industries as a whole.

In addition, a higher share of publishing employers compared to the creative industries overall reported the need for leadership skills.

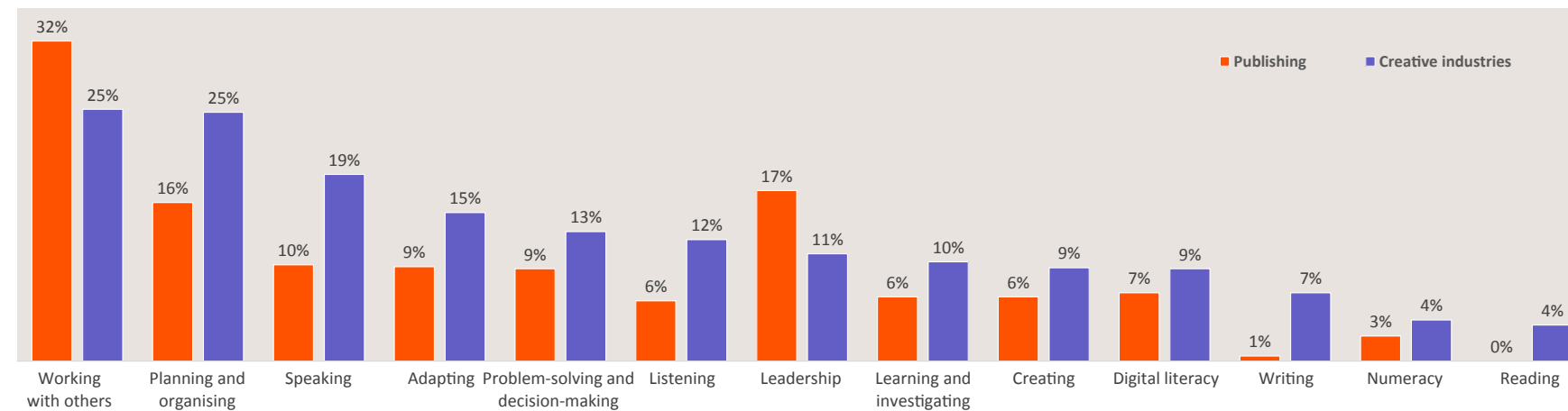
In line with the CESS 2025, wider research also reports a growing requirement for the future workforce in the sector to have core skills such as creativity, communication, problem-solving and teamwork (World Economic Forum, 2023). This places a continuous focus on the need for cross-functional skills (Publishers Association, 2023b), encouraging employers to broaden the skillset of their staff beyond the requirements of their immediate jobs, with a blend of technical and generic capabilities (e.g. training editors in basic marketing principles, training sales teams in product knowledge and content trends).

In this context, there is also an emphasis on the need for: an entrepreneurial mindset; inclusive leadership models supporting ethical, flexible working practices, including hybrid and remote working; ability to work effectively with different stakeholders and clients; and adaptability and learning agility to keep pace with continuing changes in working practices. The call for a blend of generic skills was also confirmed by attendees at the roundtable.

Figure 31: Core skills needs in next three to five years, 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 = establishments with upskilling needs (n = 23)



The Creative Employer Skills Survey also sought to explore the extent to which upskilling needs were associated with organisational goals to become more sustainable or carbon neutral in future.

In 2025, only a modest share (5%) of employers in the publishing industry that expect to grow, also anticipate a need to upgrade sustainability or 'green' skills amongst their workforce. This was below the creative industries average (28%), albeit caution must be exercised in interpreting these figures given the low sample base, and existing research has pointed to growing emphasis on environmental issues and the need to enhance sustainable working practices and skills across the sector (Publishers Association, 2023b).

Source: CESS 2025

Notes: Responses are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

8. Employer investment in skills

The CESS 2025 enabled an assessment of the impact of having skills challenges on employers in publishing relative to the creative industries overall – that is, it explored the effects of skills shortage vacancies and/or skills gaps on firm performance.

It appears that the effects are widespread, with 79% of publishing employers with skills challenges reporting some kind of impact: this is a higher level than for all creative industries employers (69%). This suggests, in line with wider evidence, that skills deficiencies are an important business concern for the sector.

Indeed, just over half (52%) of publishing employers with skills challenges suggest these are increasing the workload for other staff. Other common impacts reported include the loss of business or orders to competitors (39%), wage inflation (28%), and increased operating costs (25%).

A majority of employers with skills challenges across the sector (87%) said they were taking some action in response to skills challenges – more so than the creative industries as a whole (82%).

The most frequent response was to increase training for the existing workforce; this was pursued by 45% of publishing employers – a similar level to the creative industries as a whole (47%). Other common actions included taking on and training less qualified recruits (24% vs 20%) and bringing in contractors (24% vs 17%). Interestingly, more employers within publishing were also increasing salaries (13% vs 7%). On the other hand, fewer employers in publishing were expanding trainee and apprenticeship programmes compared to the creative industries overall (4% vs 15%).

Figure 32: Impact of skills challenges, 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 = 46)

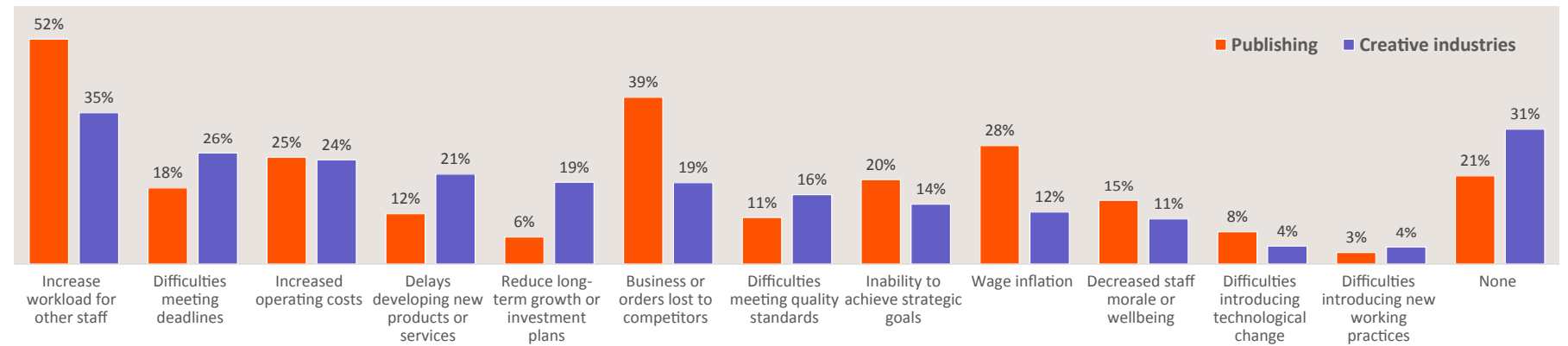
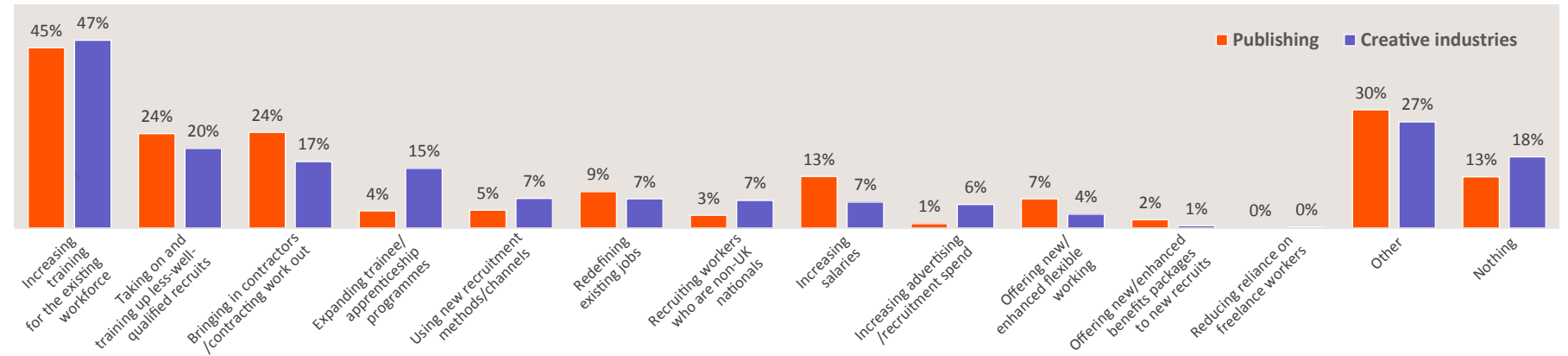


Figure 33: Response to skills challenges, 2025

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

Base = establishments with skills shortages or skills gaps (n = 46)



Source: CESS 2025

8. Employer investment in skills (continued)

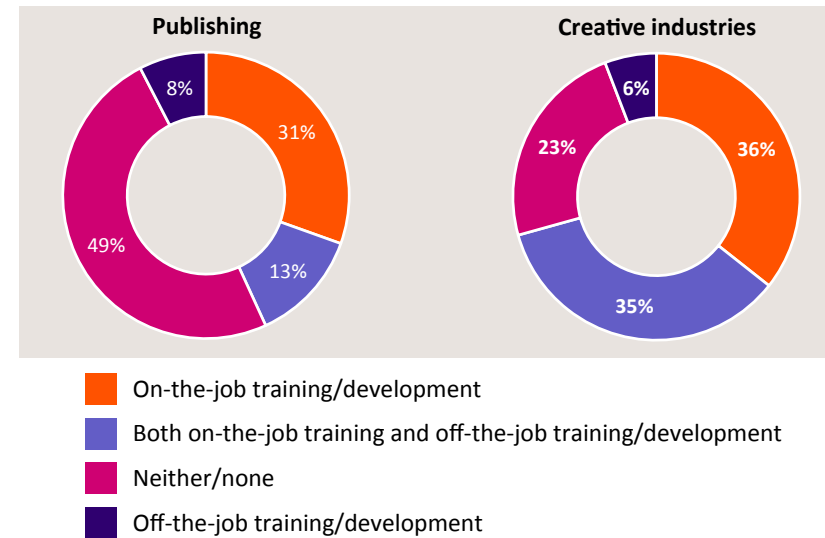
In reflecting on the skills challenges facing employers and the anticipated need to develop new skills in the years ahead, an important question arises on whether creative industries employers are investing sufficiently in up- and reskilling their workforce.

As highlighted earlier, occupations in the publishing sector rely heavily on higher education pathways to provide the baseline foundational education for early-career workers. There are then opportunities to top up skills through continuing professional development (Publishers Association, 2023b).

The CESS 2025 provided an indication of the provision of training arranged or funded by publishing employers relative to the creative industries

Figure 34: Employer training provision, 2025

Q: What, if any, training has your organisation arranged or funded over the past twelve months?
Base = all establishments (n = 108)



Source: CESS 2025

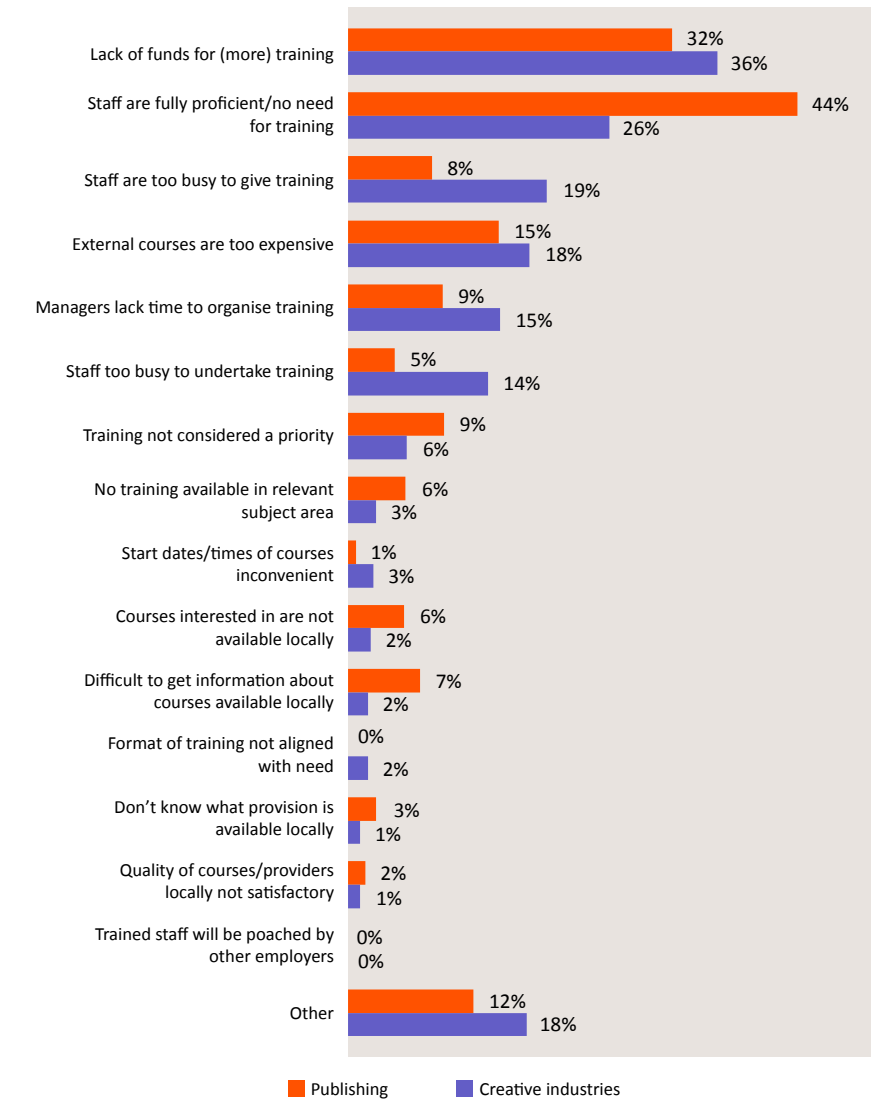
over the last twelve months. This includes training not just for in-house employees but also for agency staff and self-employed or freelance workers. Encouragingly, data from the CESS 2025 pointed to higher levels of training across the creative industries as a whole according to this broader definition than indicated elsewhere (see for example the Employer Skills Survey 2022; Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025). That said, this is less evident for publishing. Indeed, only around half of firms in the publishing sector (51%) reported providing some kind of development compared to 77% in the creative industries overall. Notably, this means nearly half of publishing employers do not provide any training.

In addition, most of the training seen in the publishing sector is provided on the job – and even then, at lower levels than for the creative industries as a whole (31% vs 36%). Consequently, blended learning and off-the-job training are also seen at comparatively lower levels. In the case of off-the-job training, it is known that this is less likely to lead to transferable, accredited skills attainment (OECD, 2019). While skills gaps are narrower in this sector, in a context of ongoing technological advances and growing skills challenges, there is clearly room for improvement.

A closer examination of publishing employers who are not providing any training, relative to all employers in the creative industries, reveals the factors influencing provision. In part, training patterns reflect the perception of publishing employers that their staff are fully proficient (44% vs 26%). That said, there are other barriers, such as a lack of funds (32% vs 36%) and the expense of external courses (15% vs 18%). While overall numbers are low, there is also slightly more of an indication than for the creative industries overall that training and/or courses are less relevant or easily accessible locally. Wider research aligns with the survey, recognising the challenges around lower levels of training (Publishers Association, 2023b). There is a high concentration of smaller firms across the sector, and smaller companies can struggle due to limited budgets and time, while flatter structures can limit progression opportunities and exacerbate staff retention issues.

Figure 35: Barriers to training provision, 2025

Q: What, if anything, prevents your organisation from offering (more) training for staff at this site?
Base = all establishments (n = 108)



Source: CESS 2025

8. Employer investment in skills (continued)

With the CESS 2025 pointing to lower levels of training within publishing, and in the context of considerable future upskilling needs, it is important that employers are supported to continuously invest in the skills of their workforce.

A range of factors must be considered when assessing the measures that would enable more publishing employers to invest in skills and training. Given the high level of employers reporting financial pressures as a significant barrier to training, it is perhaps unsurprising that a majority of publishing employers value financial measures. Indeed, most respondents expressed support for financial measures such as subsidies towards the cost of training (58%) and tax relief on expenditure on staff (50%). That said, these were highlighted by fewer employers compared to the creative industries as a whole.

Furthermore, with barriers reported around timing too, other common responses among employers in the publishing sector included support for time-saving through measures such as more flexible forms of training (41%).

In addition, there was interest in wider measures, such as opportunities to collaborate with providers to develop training aligned to business needs (33%) and information and advice on finding training relevant to their sector’s needs (39%).

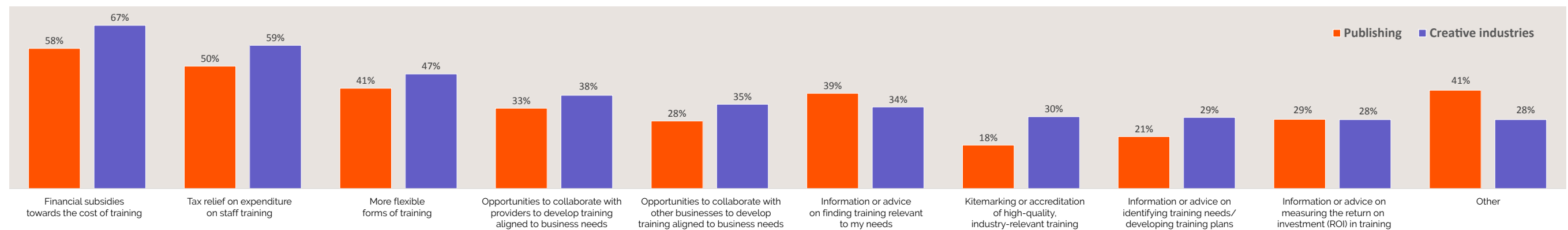
The CESS 2025 findings were supported by employer insights from the sector roundtable. During this meeting, positive reference was made to relevant policy developments in terms of different skills systems and the opportunities these presented to the publishing sector.

These encompassed: steps to enhance collaboration between industry and education providers to improve the range of technical training for the sector (e.g. widening the apprenticeship and placements offer); improvements to careers information and campaigning; and the funding of modular training through programmes such as the Growth and Skills Levy and the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (HM Government, 2025).

Figure 36: Enablers of employer investment in training, 2025

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

Base = all establishments (n = 108)



Source: CESS 2025

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