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Creative Industries
Policy and Evidence Centre

Led by Newcastle University | Business School with RSA

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.

For further information please visit: www.workadvance.co.uk

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.

For more details visit www.pec.ac.uk

Supported by: HM Government | Creative Industries Council

Executive summary

1 Skills shortages when recruiting: The picture today

The crafts sector is a diverse and multifaceted component of the creative industries. Roles range from traditional makers (e.g. in woodworking, ceramics, textiles and glass) and heritage crafts roles (conservation and restoration) to precision production positions (e.g. pattern cutters, studio assistants and set creators). While the last decade has seen some contraction overall, there have been growth opportunities in a technologically enabled and sustainable future world of work.

In 2025, two fifths (40%) of crafts employers that had hired staff (including freelancers) in the past two years reported recruitment difficulties. These were caused mostly by candidates lacking the skills or experience required for the role.

In crafts, skills shortages are most acute among experienced staff and especially experts (ten or more years of experience). This reflects the need for high levels of technical mastery. Employers struggle to recruit key creative roles: goldsmiths, silversmiths, jewellers and precious stone workers; building information modelling (BIM) and computer-aided design (CAD) technicians; calibration and precision instrument technicians; and other skilled trades. Skills shortages cover various technical skills unique to the crafts in shortage, such as fine hand skills, casting, fine metalworking, polishing, finishing, stone-setting and weaving. Wider business skills feature too, including business development, sales, marketing and logistics. Transversal and technology skills are also lacking.

2 Current skills gaps in the existing workforce

Alongside the challenge of skills shortages when recruiting, crafts employers also point to skills deficiencies among their workforce. In 2025, skills gaps affected over two fifths (43%) of employers in the crafts sector.

Many of these are transitory in nature and exist because individuals are new to their role or have only partially completed the training required for their position. In addition, skills gaps may be an indicator of the ongoing transformation of a business. Examples of this include employers introducing new technology and new products. In a context of change, it is also of interest that 31% of employers said their staff have not received appropriate training.

With industry trends placing increasing demands on experienced crafts workers, almost three in ten (29%) crafts employers with skills gaps reported skills deficiencies were among experienced workers (with between five and ten years' experience) and nearly one in five (19%) suggested they affected expert-level staff.

The types of skills that crafts employers said need improving among their workforce closely mirror those lacking in candidates. This captures a blend of crafts skills and business and transversal skills. Further, there are increasing calls for craft-hybrid roles and cross-disciplinary knowledge. This applies to integrating traditional handcraft skills with different technologies to grow sustainable and digitally enabled craft and production roles. It also relates to integrating business development and marketing activities into crafts roles.

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

While a high share of crafts employers expect future upskilling needs due to advances in new technologies and innovations in products and services, the sector remains cautious about the outlook overall. Only two fifths of crafts employers (42%) expected to grow staff numbers over the next three to five years.

Many of the roles subject to deficiencies today are expected to be grow in the future, such as jewellery designers, BIM and CAD technicians and leather workers. There is also expected to be an ongoing call for business roles in sales and marketing, business development and distribution. But, in addition, distinct technical digital roles – like software developers, IT managers, and graphic and multimedia designers – are emphasised for the future.

While the skills anticipated to be in demand in the future are expected to call for a blend of specialist crafts and generic business and transversal skills, as identified for shortages and gaps, distinct requirements will need to evolve with future innovations in working practices.

Again, a focus on cross-disciplinary knowledge and a call for hybrid roles combining sustainable and digitally enabled crafts and production activities with business development, finance and marketing roles is expected. At the same time, it is expected that there will continue to be an emphasis on specific specialist craft techniques, including in areas of traditional crafts and heritage preservation and conservation.

4 Taking action to address skills challenges for the industry

Skills challenges, though still a significant constraint, tend to impact craft employers to a lesser degree than other creative industries employers. Four in ten (40%) employers in the sub-sector with skills shortages or gaps report a business impact compared to 69% of employers across the creative industries. The most common impact includes an increase in the workload of other staff and an increase in operating costs.

The majority of crafts employers (63%) took action in response, and around three fifths had provided training over the past year. While reported rates compare favourably with wider surveys, levels of training are low in the crafts sector, and only a minority (10%) provided off-the-job training.

Crafts employers report a range of factors influencing and/or inhibiting training patterns. The most common reason employers in the crafts sector give for not providing training is that staff are fully proficient. In addition, employers are inhibited by a lack of funds for training and staff being too busy to give training.

Crafts employers call for more financial support, flexible training, information/advice on finding training relevant to needs, and better kitemarking or accreditation of industry-relevant training. There is interest in exploring: steps to enhance collaboration between industry and education providers, drawing on past lessons, such as from Group Training models; funding for modular training, such as through the Growth and Skills Levy and the Lifelong Learning Entitlement; and trials of bespoke skills passports for the sector.

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 of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Creative Industries Council, 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 Two, presenting the skills needs, challenges and priorities of the craft sector.

The sub-sectors for the Skills Audits of the creative industries are: 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 the performing and visual arts.

The research primarily uses the DCMS definition of the creative industries, which includes the following Standard Industrial Classification code for the sub-sector:

32.12 Manufacture of jewellery and related articles.

That said, as DCMS acknowledges, this only captures part of the sector. Wider research is also used to consider the related experiences of micro-businesses and crafts workers more broadly, including those outside the creative industries (DCMS, 2016).

The analysis for the Skills 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 (OECD, 2019). The framework provides a structured way of thinking about the different dimensions of the labour market around skills supply and demand and the way in which they interact with one another (e.g. driving shortages and gaps).

The Skills Audits have adopted a five-stage approach:

- **A rapid evidence review** covering evidence on skills issues across the creative industries and synthesising skills research in the different UK nations, including research with industry stakeholders;
- **Secondary data analysis** of official, national sources of labour market information (or 'top-down' LMI) to provide a robust, consistent and comparable baseline;
- **New primary research** involving the Creative Employer Skills Survey (CESS) in establishments with two or more employees, to supplement the baseline analysis of employer perspectives on skills priorities and the skills system and talent pipeline to the industry;
- **A series of stakeholder roundtables** involving representatives from government, national and subnational creative agencies, trade bodies, unions, creative businesses and major cultural organisations and training/education providers, to contextualise the findings and to identify and promote shared consensus on skills priorities; and
- **Reporting and dissemination** to draw the findings together and use them to enhance policy developments.

The Skills Audits have been overseen by a Project Board comprised of the project funders and members of the research consortium. Day-to-day delivery has been shaped by a Steering Group including representatives from the governments across the UK, industry and training providers.

Figure 1: Developing the Creative Industries Skills Audits

2. Sector profile and performance

GVA, 2024	£0.5bn
Total jobs, 2024	11,900

The crafts sector is a diverse and multifaceted component of the creative industries and the UK economy. Although DCMS economic statistics place crafts as the smallest sector, with employment at 11,900 and gross value added (GVA) at £0.5bn in 2024, official assessments are believed to represent a significant underestimate of the sector's scale and contribution overall (TBR, 2014; Crafts Council, 2023).

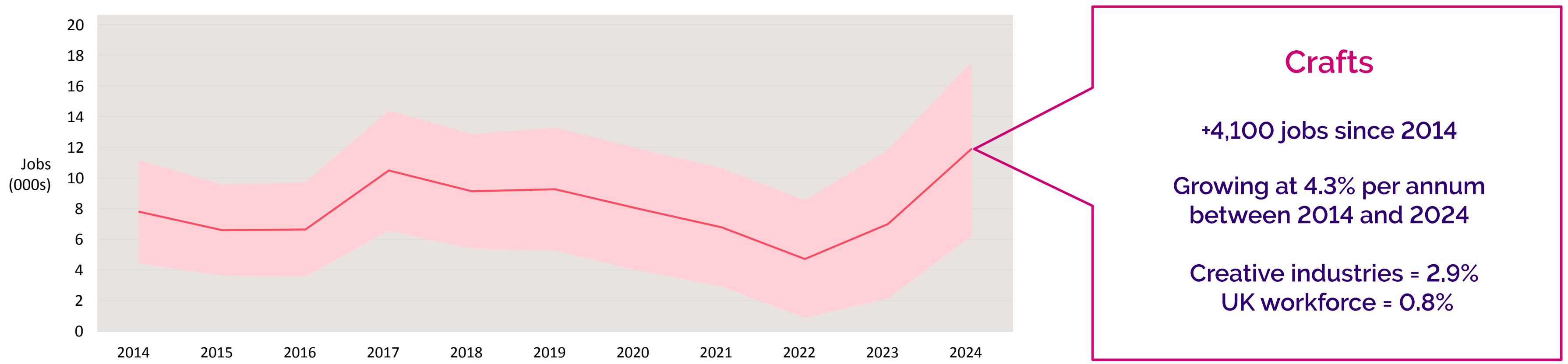
That said, trend analysis, also drawing on official statistics, in line with wider research (Crafts Council, 2020), points to growing opportunities through technological advances and an increasingly green and circular economy. Indeed, between 2014 and 2024, the sector saw employment growth of 4.3% per annum. This equates to an increase of just over 4,000 jobs over the period and exceeds the average rate of growth for both the creative industries (2.9%) and the UK workforce (0.8%).

More broadly, sector research emphasises the full range of craft activities – not only activities in the crafts sector but also those in creative and non-creative industries outside the sector. This includes traditional crafts and makers (in woodworking, ceramics, textiles, glass), heritage crafts (conservation, restoration, endangered skills) and, in a future world of work, technologically enabled creative production craft roles (innovative, design-led, often digitally integrated practices with craft applications). This includes precision production roles (e.g. pattern cutters, studio assistants and set creators). In addition, craft support roles extend to education and outreach (e.g. craft tutors, workshop leaders and museum educators) and technical business support and management (e.g. studio managers, gallery owners and marketing specialists).

'Craft work can be defined as a creative, skilled process of making, often involving manual and technical skill, deep material understanding, and the ability to design and manufacture, encompassing traditional practices like ceramics and jewellery to contemporary uses of digital-making' (Crafts Council, 2023).

With this wider definition, DCMS statistics suggest that around 9,630 additional people are employed in craft occupations in 'other' creative industries beyond the crafts sector and an extra 96,360 individuals are employed in craft occupations in non-creative industries (House of Lords, 2025).

Figure 2: Employment (total jobs), 2014-2024



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 common features of work in different parts of the creative industries. As much of the work across the sector as a whole is often cyclical, commission-driven and project-based (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023), levels of self-employment are generally high – double the UK economy average (28% vs 14%). In common with such features, the level of self-employment was significantly higher in the crafts sector compared to the creative industries and all industries, and accounted for just under two fifths (37%) of the workforce. Research from the Crafts Council suggests a high incidence too of portfolio careers, where craft workers do not work full-time and need to secure income from extra sources outside their crafts – for example, it has been found that 42% of workers have additional income (Crafts Council, 2025a).

While sector-specific research suggests the crafts sector is well qualified, in line with the creative industries workforce generally (e.g. Crafts Council, 2025a), this extends across a broader range of formal qualifications (from Level 2 qualifications to degree level and above and including craft-specific qualifications). As a result, official statistics suggest that a lower share of the workforce is degree-qualified (31%) and at lower levels than for the creative industries overall (69%). In turn, the spread of roles across the crafts workforce is more distinct and context specific. For example, 69% of the crafts workforce is employed in skilled trade occupations, while 86% of the creative industries workforce work in managerial, professional or associate professional jobs (Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025). As such, the occupational profile in the crafts sector provides a broad spectrum of roles, ranging from distinct specialist crafts to broader education and outreach roles, management and wider business support. Specialist roles, such as makers and designers, heritage specialists and production roles, cover several disciplines – for example, ceramics, glass, wood, jewellery, textiles and metals.

Crafts workers require highly specialised skillsets and deep knowledge, developed over many years. The Crafts Council distinguishes between the Master Craftsperson (five plus years of experience) and emerging makers (less than one year of experience). Technical mastery includes traditional design, heritage and/or precision skills in specific craft disciplines (Crafts Council, 2020). In turn, there are new demands for: digital, innovation and design thinking to modernise production, covering digital fabrication and sustainability practices for the circular economy; and business management and marketing skills, including digital marketing and e-commerce. This is especially the case among micro-businesses and freelancers managing portfolio careers which demand a blend of business skills beyond the core craft capabilities (Crafts Council, 2025c; Heritage Crafts, 2025).

The crafts sector is still characterised by geographic clustering in craft-rich regions and urban creative hubs. For example, there is a concentration in London and the South-East of England for high-value, design-led crafts. In addition, crafts hubs include: textiles, ceramics and metalwork in Wales; glassmaking, leatherwork and linen-based crafts in Northern Ireland; and craft and heritage clusters in Scotland (BOP Consulting 2012).

Although the historical demographic profile has changed over time from predominantly male craft workers to a more even gender balance, there is still a need to advance workforce diversity. For example, women in crafts, while growing in numbers, often still work precariously and for lower pay than male craft workers (Patel, 2021). Further, in the crafts sector, under-representation in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic background remains (Crafts Council, 2020, 2023, 2025; Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023). Many craft workers are older (over 50), creating concerns about succession planning.

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

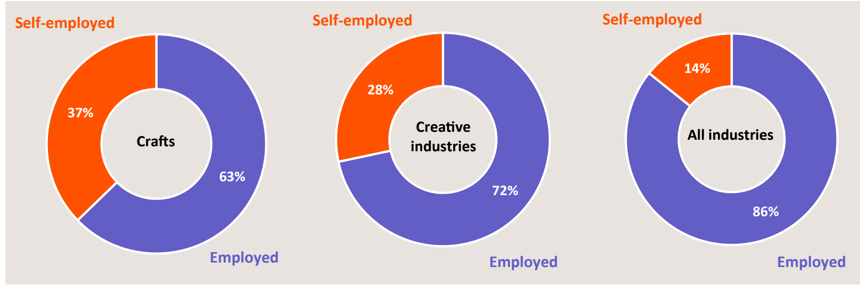


Figure 4: Workforce qualifications (% degree-qualified), 2022–2024

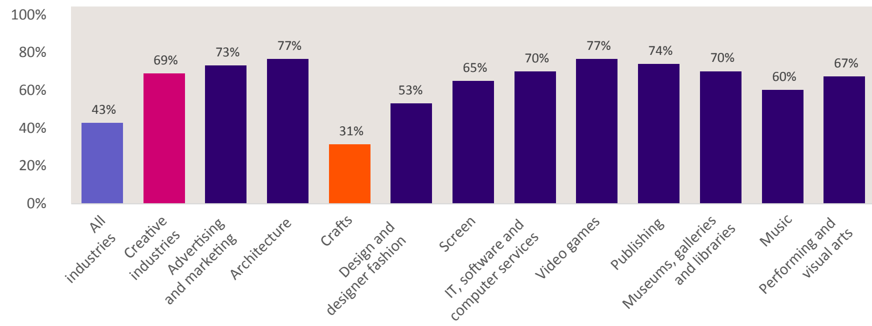
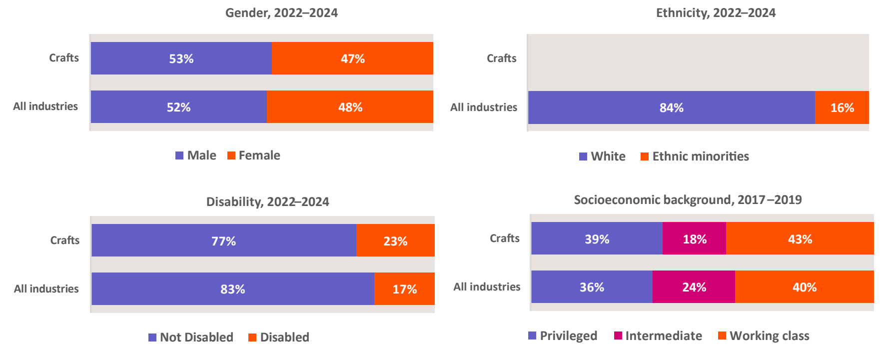


Figure 5: Workforce diversity



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

Notes: Data is based on a three-year pooled sample from the Office for National Statistics 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 enables the examination of 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 their needs cannot be met. We find that around half of employers in the crafts sector (49%) had been recruiting in the past two years. This included recruitment of agency staff and freelancers. This was lower than the percentage across the creative industries (65%).

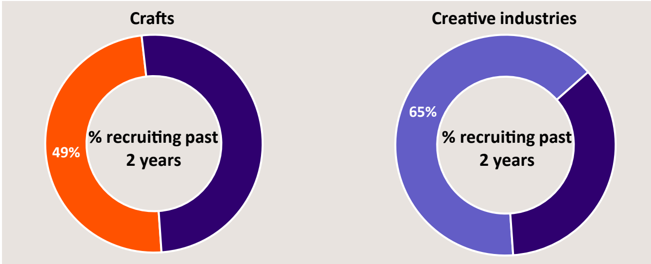
We find parallels in the mechanisms for recruitment in the crafts sector and the creative industries overall, with the most popular methods involving use of online job platforms and word of mouth. That said, there was a much higher use of word of mouth mechanisms within the crafts sector (67%) compared to the creative industries as a whole (46%). The reliance on informal and narrow networks was also acknowledged by employers consulted in the study.

Two fifths (40%) of recruiting crafts employers had hard-to-fill vacancies, which was higher than for the creative industries (32%). In the crafts sector, recruitment difficulties were most likely to be due to a lack of required skills (68%) and work experience (46%). This was broadly similar to the picture for the creative industries. Although employers consulted in the study felt there were challenges maintaining competitive rates of pay in the sector, they did not prioritise the effects of poor terms and conditions as much as skills issues. Interestingly, the employer survey and consultations both highlighted an issue with low numbers of applicants generally, especially among young people and in remote locations, reflecting a limited visibility of crafts careers.

Figure 6: Hiring and recruitment difficulties, 2025

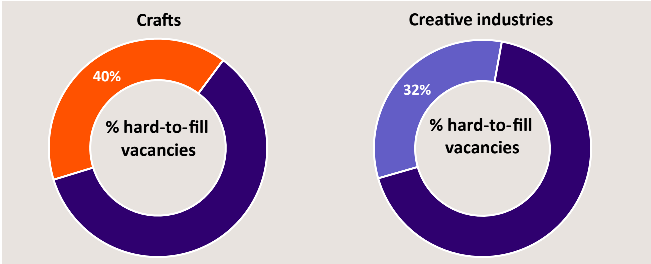
Q: Has this site recruited anyone, including any paid employees, agency staff, and self-employed or freelance workers, in the past two years?

Base = all establishments [n = 67]



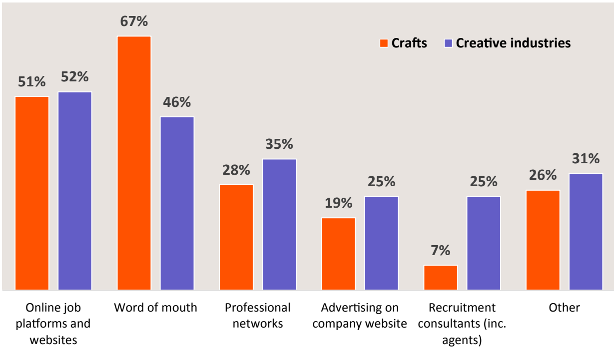
Q: Did any of the vacancies you had at this site in the past two years prove hard to fill?

Base = establishments that have recruited in the past two years [n = 36]



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

Base = establishments that have recruited in the past two years [n = 36]

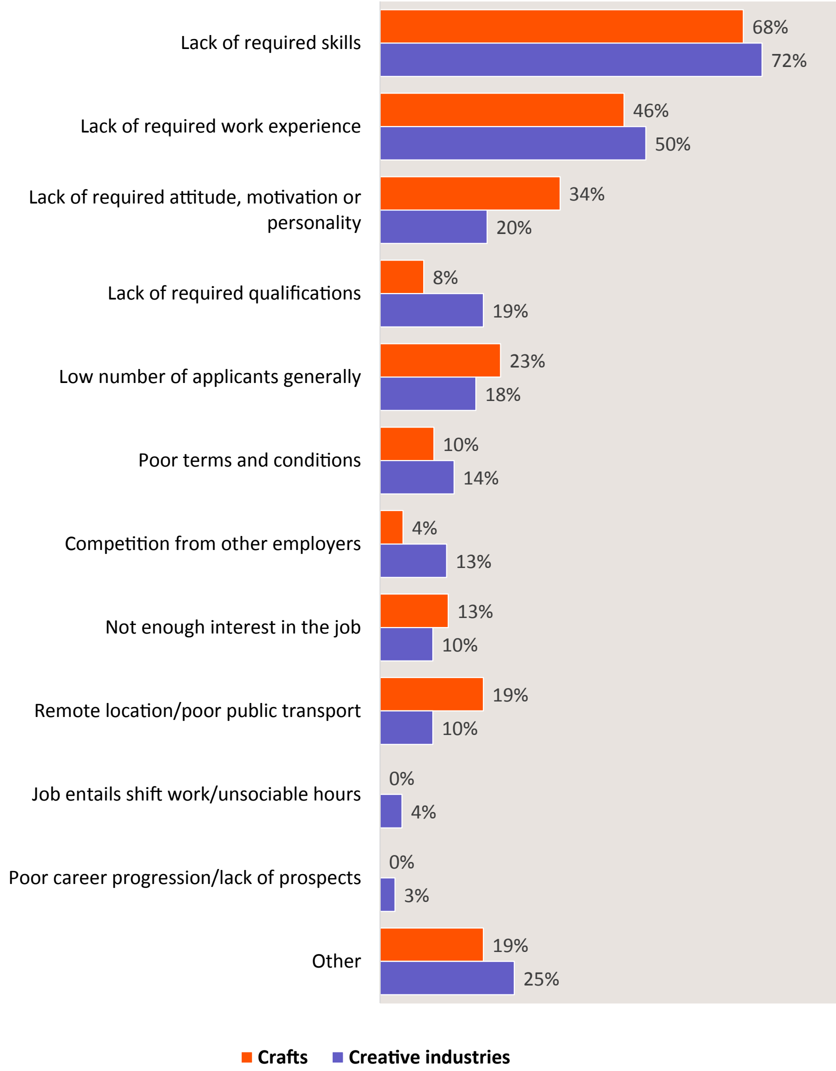


Source: CESS 2025

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 = 17]



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 shows that skills shortages were the main causes of hard-to-fill vacancies. Indeed, 73% of crafts employers reported that their vacancies were hard to fill for skills reasons. This was slightly lower than the percentage for the creative industries (79%).

The study explored the level of experience sought by employers with skills shortages – although responses are low and need to be viewed with caution. The highest share of recruiting employers in the crafts sector who were exhibiting skills shortages were seeking expert-level workers (with ten or more years of experience). This was much higher than for the creative industries as a whole, perhaps reflecting the need for high levels of technical mastery in many crafts areas. This perspective is confirmed by roundtable discussions and wider evidence (Crafts Council, 2020, 2025; Heritage Crafts, 2025).

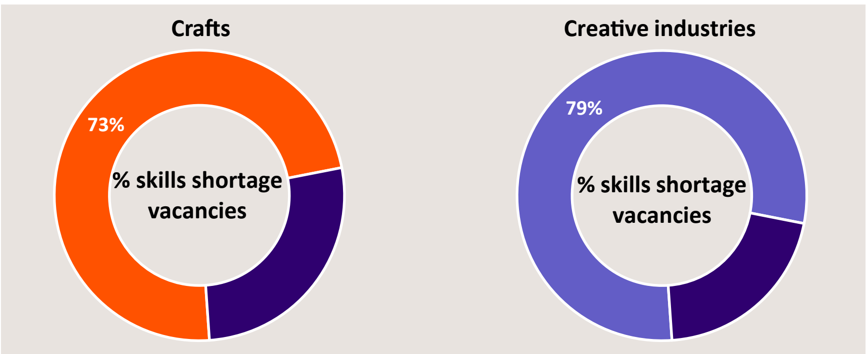
That said, some crafts employers, although in the minority, were still looking to recruit new entrants. Wider evidence here reveals significant skills shortfalls, especially among younger entrants given changes in creative education at school and a need for significant training to fill the gap.

A wide range of occupations proved hard to fill, most commonly technical and specialist roles: goldsmiths, silversmiths, jewellers and precious stone workers; BIM and CAD technicians; calibration and precision instrument technicians; and other skilled trades. That said, more generic roles in support functions were also identified, including: managers and directors in retail and wholesale; sales and retail assistants; and business sales executives. There is strong alignment between the hard-to-fill roles indicated in the CESS 2025, the consultations and wider research (Crafts Council, 2020, 2025; Heritage Crafts, 2025).

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 = 17]



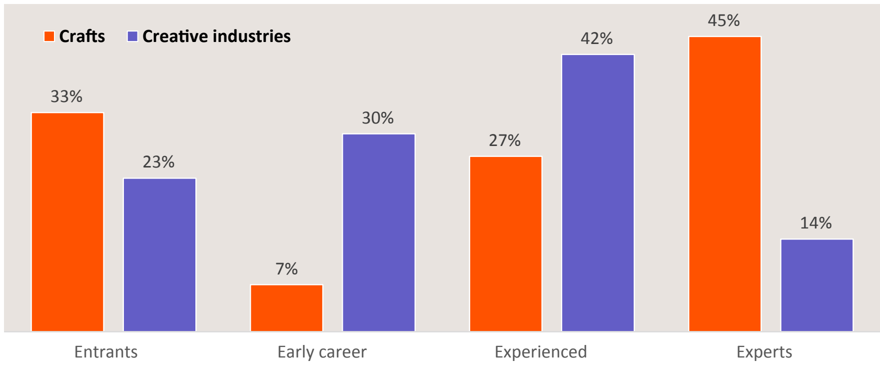
Source: CESS, 2025

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

Figure 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 = 14]



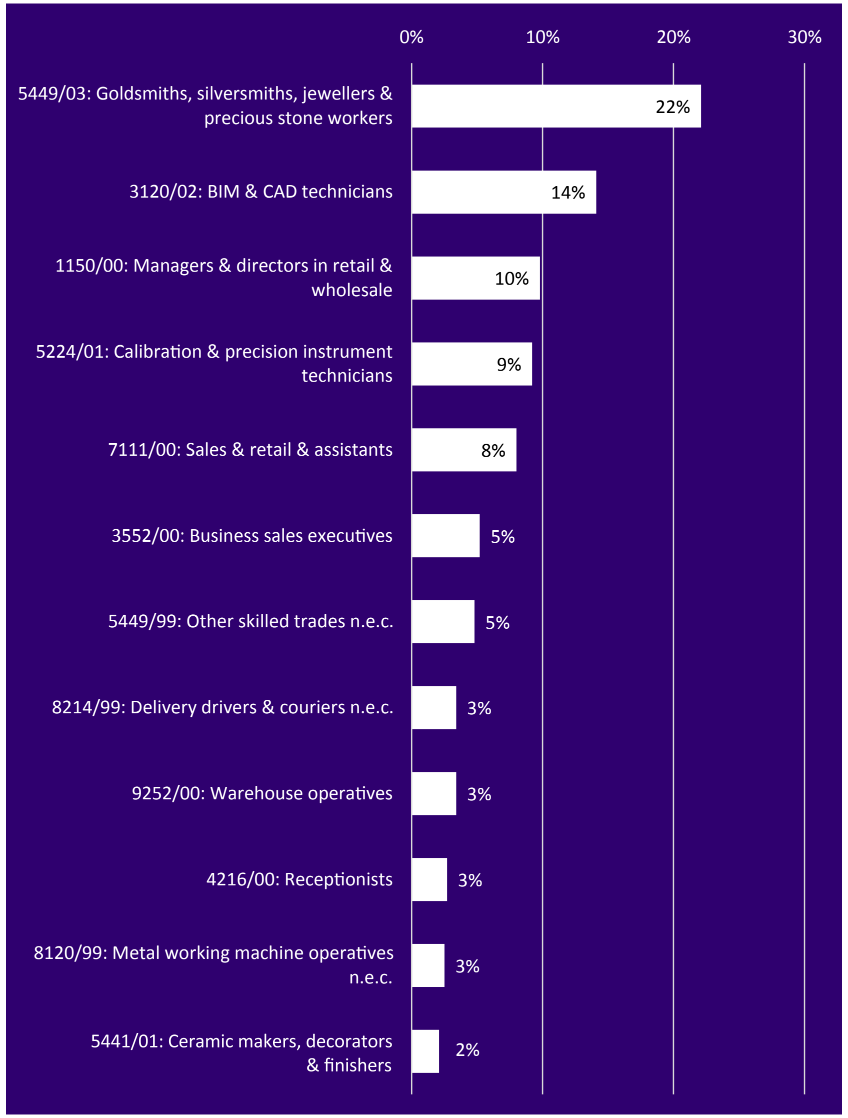
Source: CESS, 2025

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 = 17]



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)

The evidence taken together points to the risk of growing skills shortages in traditional and heritage craft roles and skilled trades, including for production craftspeople in small-batch manufacturing (e.g. metalworkers, weavers and pattern cutters), heritage crafts roles (e.g. in forms of jewellery making, glass working, furniture making, carpentry and rigging in boat building), and heritage restoration experts (e.g. stonemasons, flint, slate and brick workers, and thatchers), especially in remote areas. With technology modernising business practices and extending e-commerce, wider areas, especially for micro-businesses and freelancers, include business and marketing roles (e.g. studio managers and marketing specialists).

The CESS 2025 also identifies specialist skills that employers with skills shortage vacancies in the crafts sector suggest are lacking amongst candidates. These included various distinct craft skills unique to the various crafts in shortage as well as associated industry knowledge to preserve the individuality of the crafts process. This covered specific techniques such as fine hand skills, casting, fine metalworking and welding, polishing and finishing, stone-setting and weaving. Skills attached to different technologies also featured heavily, as did wider business skills, including business development, sales, marketing, and logistics and distribution.

The CESS 2025 also reviews the digital skills that are lacking. Overall, 70% of employers in the crafts sector with skills shortage vacancies stated they currently find no digital skills difficult to obtain – higher than in the creative industries overall. That said, a minority of crafts employers reported some digital skills shortages. These included skills in Microsoft Office and software and hardware development. Other reported IT skills challenges were related to various IT applications supporting the use of better business intelligence and stronger IT systems, networks and infrastructure.

Figure 11: Specialist skills shortages, 2025

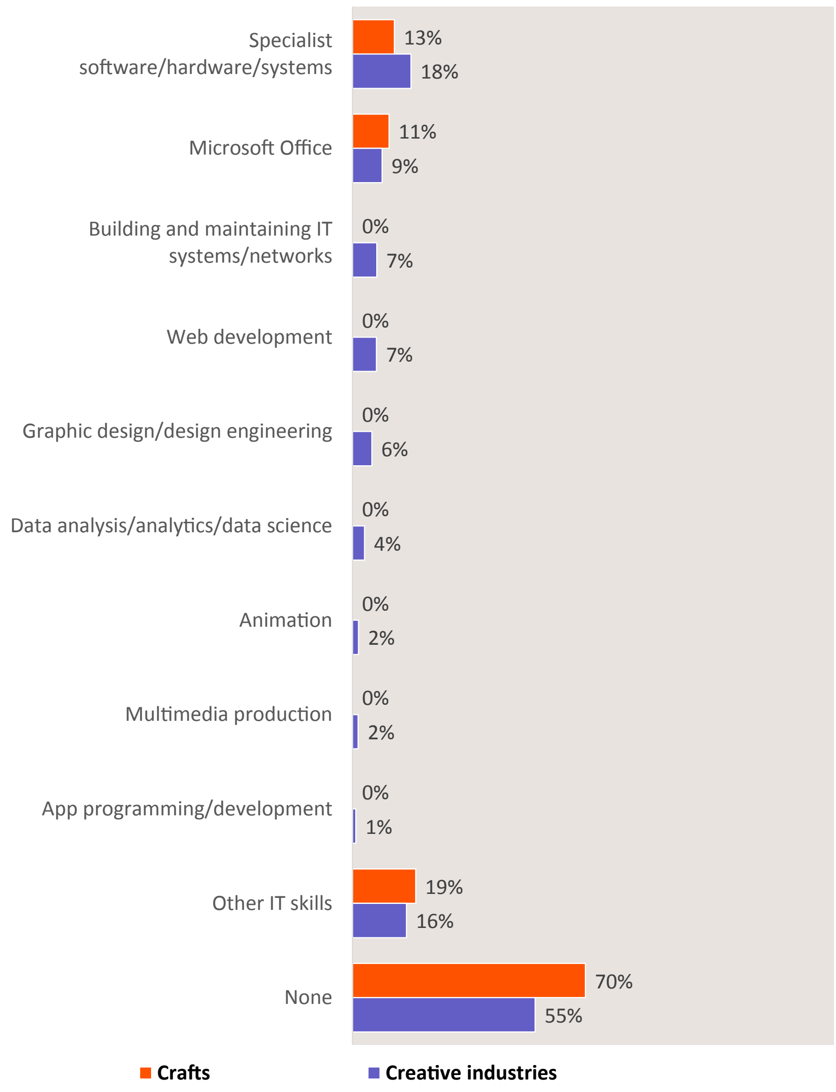
Q: Have you found any specialist skills or knowledge needed to perform the role difficult to obtain from applicants for [skills shortage occupation] vacancies? If so, what specific specialist skills or knowledge have been lacking?
Base = establishments with skills shortage vacancies [n = 14]

- Various distinct crafts skills
- Precision production skills, using computer-controlled machines (e.g. computer numerical controls/CAD)
- 3D printing and casting
- Industry knowledge (e.g. to preserve the distinct creativity of the crafts process and understand customer demands and routes to market)
- Business development, analysis and management
- Communication
- Customer service
- Sales and marketing
- Digital marketing
- Social media
- Logistics and distribution

Source: CESS 2025

Figure 12: Digital skills shortages, 2025

Q: Have you found any basic or advanced IT skills difficult to obtain from applicants for [SS Occupation] vacancies. If so, what specific IT skills have been lacking?
Base = establishments with skills shortage vacancies [n = 14]



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 have found difficult to obtain from applicants for [SS 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 = 14]

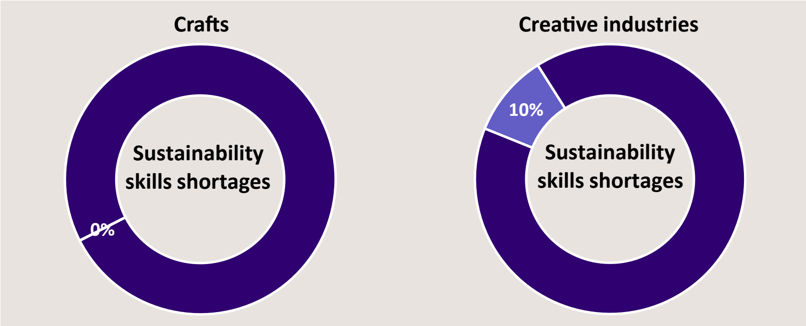
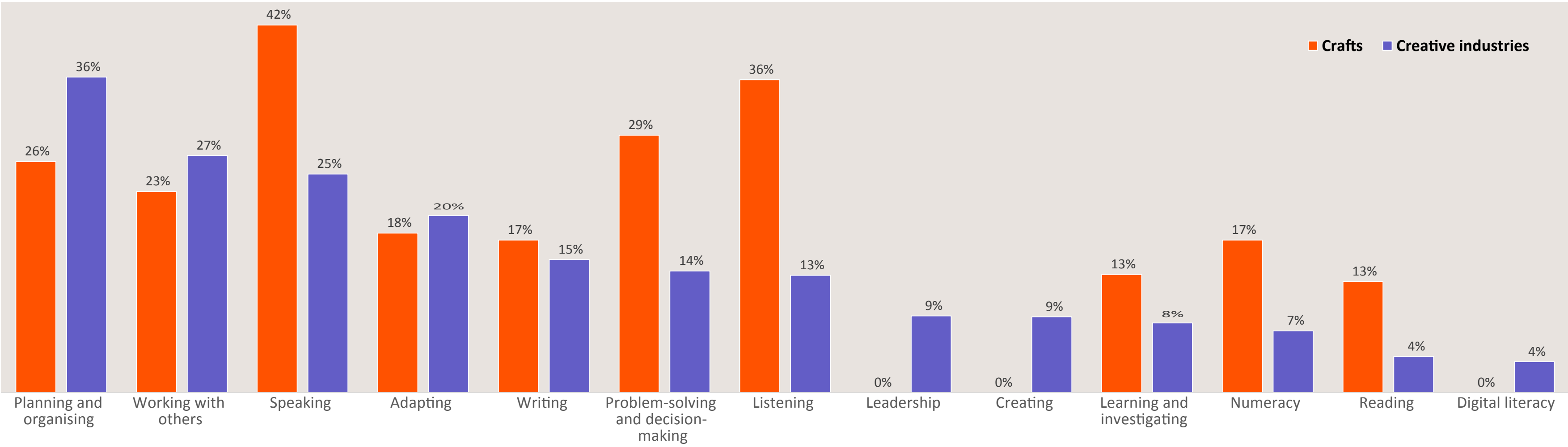


Figure 14: Core skills shortages, 2025

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 = 14]



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.

In an increasingly automated modern economy characterised by constant disruption, transversal skills are also key, driven by technology advances and climate change. Indeed, craft-focused research (e.g. Crafts Council, 2025; England, 2022; Luckman and Andrew, 2020) references a range of generic skills required by crafts workers alongside practical, technical skills (e.g. material knowledge and making skills). With many crafts workers operating as sole traders or micro-enterprises, transferable skills are seen as increasingly crucial to a broad entrepreneurial skillset to facilitate portfolio working and the building and maintaining of a professional reputation and market presence.

The CESS 2025, in line with previous research (Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025), suggests that for crafts employers, the core skills that are most difficult to find are communication skills (e.g. verbal and listening), planning and organising skills, problem-solving and decision-making, working with others and adapting. That said, a lower share of crafts employers compared to those in the creative industries overall seek these skills, with the exception of communication skills and problem-solving, which appear to be more of a problem for crafts employers.

The wider evidence, and insights from the roundtable, acknowledge that although a blend of generic as well as technical skills are needed, there is a risk that education and broader development opportunities still tend to prioritise creative aspects of professional craft practices (England, 2022) – albeit perhaps to a lesser extent in craft disciplines than in the past. In turn, where the pursuit of wider skills, in areas such as interpersonal skills, confidence, communication and presentation, time management and resilience, is threatened, this can inhibit steps to build a professional reputation and creative identity necessary to ensure commercial success (England, 2022).

The CESS 2025 also provides up-to-date information about difficulties finding more sustainable or 'green' skills. While wider research (e.g. Crafts Council, 2020) points to an increasing need for sustainability practices due to the effects of climate change, it appears that this is not yet translating into concrete sustainability skills shortages for either the crafts sector or the creative industries. Indeed, no crafts employers with skills shortage vacancies suggested difficulties were associated with finding candidates with the skills needed to deliver organisational sustainability goals. Indeed, skills shortages of these kinds were low overall – cited by just 10% of creative industries employers with skills shortages.

6. Skills gaps

When considering skills deficiencies among their current workforce, just over two fifths of employers (43%) in the crafts sector reported skills gaps. This was higher than the percentage for the creative industries overall (32%).

While skills gaps appear more prevalent than reported by the Employer Skills Survey 2022 (Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025) this will, in part, potentially reflect the broader assessment of the workforce. Indeed, in reviewing the existence of skills gaps, the CESS 2025 captures agency staff, the self-employed and freelance workers in addition to employees.

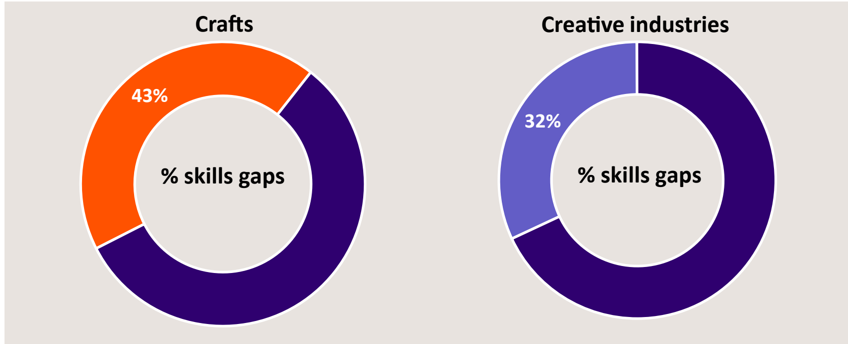
A variety of factors contribute to skills gaps. According to the CESS 2025, the most common causes were transitory – that is, they existed because individuals are new to their role (cited by 15% of crafts employers with skills gaps) or have only partially completed the training required for their position (28%).

In addition, skills gaps may be an indicator of positive ongoing business development. Examples of this include employers introducing new technology and new products. In a context of change, it is also of interest that a significant share of employers with skills gaps reported that staff have not received appropriate levels of training (31%).

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? = <100%.

Base = all establishments [n = 67]

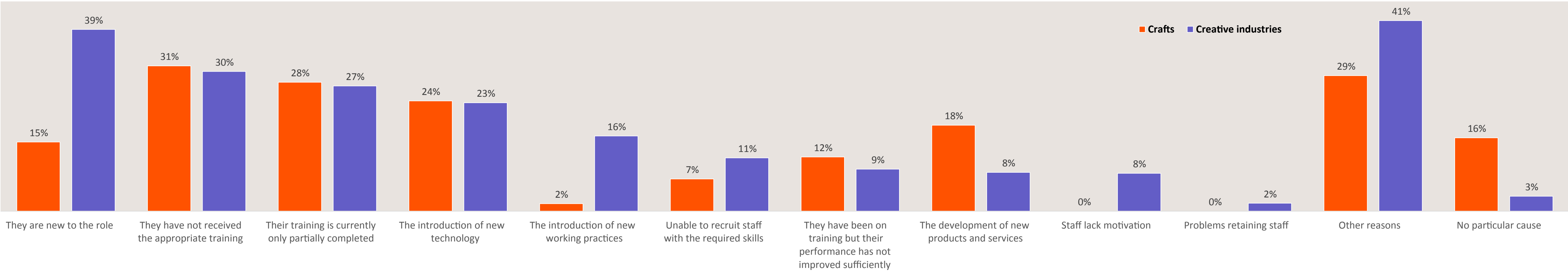


Source: CESS 2025

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 = 28]



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 (continued)

While most employers in the crafts sector and the creative industries reported reasons for skills gaps that were transitory in nature, this contrasted with the level of seniority of the staff working in these roles.

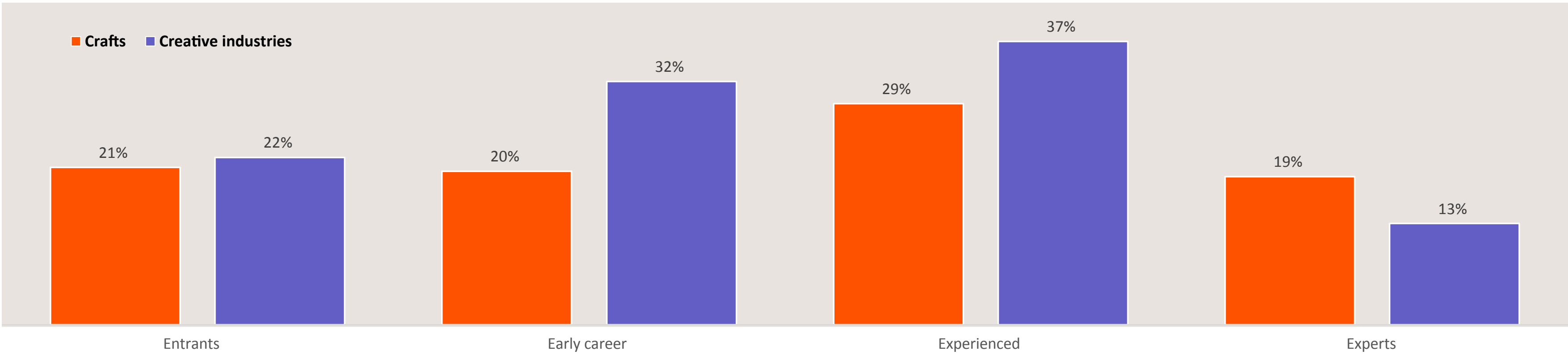
Indeed, almost three in ten (29%) crafts employers with skills gaps reported skills deficiencies were among experienced workers (with between five and ten years' experience) and nearly one in five (19%) suggested they affected expert-level staff (the latter above the average across the creative industries, 13%). That said, a significant share suggested skills gaps amongst entrants (21% in the crafts sector) and in the early stages of their career (20%).

The CESS 2025 also provides an indication of the nature of roles where there are skills gaps. The most common roles with gaps were specialist crafts roles, such as: goldsmiths, silversmiths, jewellers and precious stone workers; jewellery designers; metalworking machine operatives; footwear and leather working trades; and BIM and CAD technicians. Smaller numbers of the very specialist roles – such as glass makers, leather workers and ceramic makers – were also identified. In addition, there were gaps in more generic roles, including sales and retail assistants, managers and directors in the creative industries and social media managers.

There is a close alignment between the occupations identified by crafts employers and the areas of skills gaps identified in wider research (Crafts Council, 2020, 2025; Heritage Crafts, 2025). Indeed, this points to challenges in the existing workforce as working practices evolve and there are increasing calls for craft-technology hybrid roles, sustainable and digitally enabled production roles, heritage preservation specialist roles and business support and marketing roles. In addition, this highlights the risk of emerging skills being in short supply. This includes cross-disciplinary knowledge (e.g. integrating traditional handcraft skills with different digital and technology skills, such as CAD, and business skills, including marketing and sustainability knowledge), heritage preservation and conservation skills, sustainable production capability and marketing expertise.

Figure 17: Seniority of staff with skills deficiencies, 2025

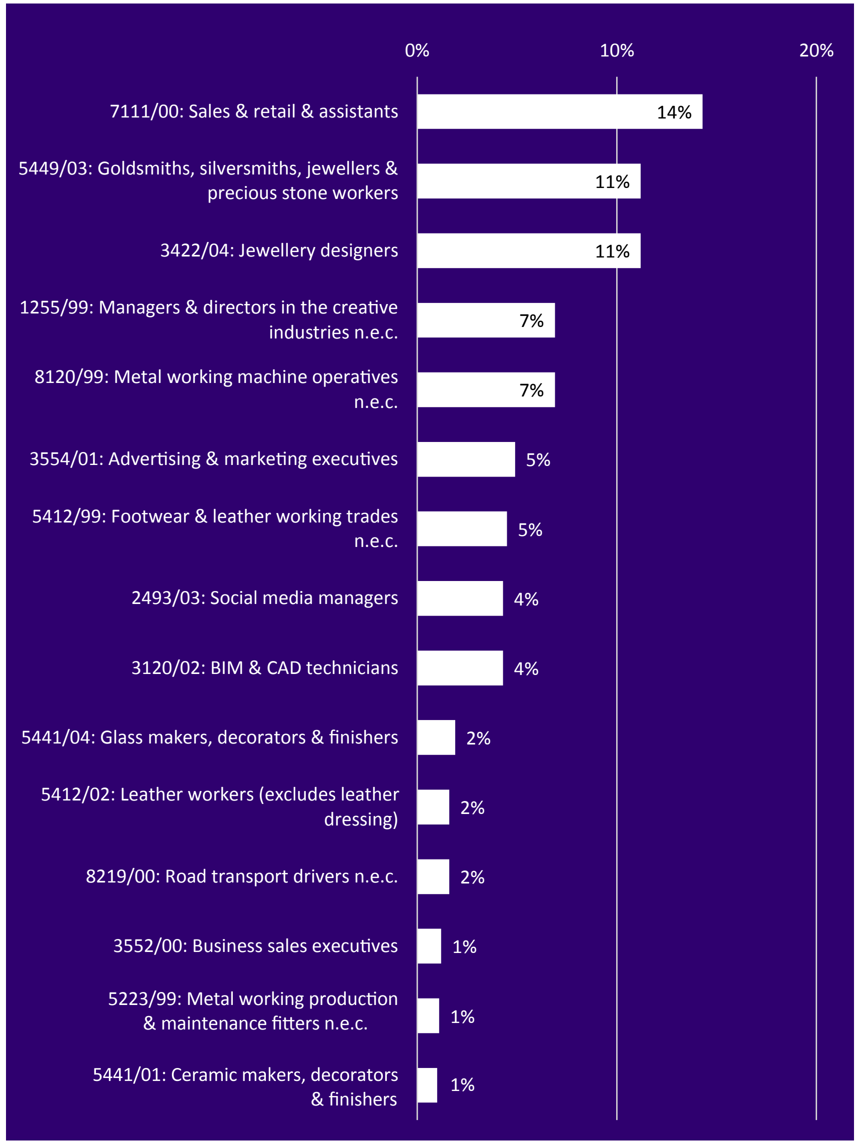
Q: How would you describe the level of experience or seniority of the staff working as [skills gap occupation]?
Base = establishments with skills gaps [n = 28]



Source: CESS 2025

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 = 28]



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 (continued)

The CESS 2025 identifies the main skills lacking in the existing workforce in the crafts sector. First of all, this highlighted the main specialist skills or knowledge to perform the role that employers identified as a skills gap. Again, this pointed to various distinct craft skills and industry knowledge required to preserve the individuality of the craft process, which are unique to the specific craft roles with skills gaps. This covered specific techniques, which have varying emphasis depending on the experience of the worker. These once more included areas such as fine hand skills and dexterity, casting, fine metalworking and welding, polishing and finishing, stone-setting and weaving. Again, skills attached to different technology also featured, as well as wider business skills, including business development, sales, marketing, and logistics and distribution. In addition, there was a specific focus on finance.

Furthermore, the CESS 2025 explores demands for digital skills for crafts. As for skills shortages, and perhaps unsurprisingly given the traditional focus of the crafts sector on specialist craft, making skills and handcrafts, most employers reported that they do not currently have digital skills gaps (68% of crafts employers – similar to the creative industries). That said, a range of IT skills were identified by around a third of employers, covering Microsoft Office, multimedia production, and graphic design and design engineering skills.

Figure 19: Specialist skills gaps, 2025

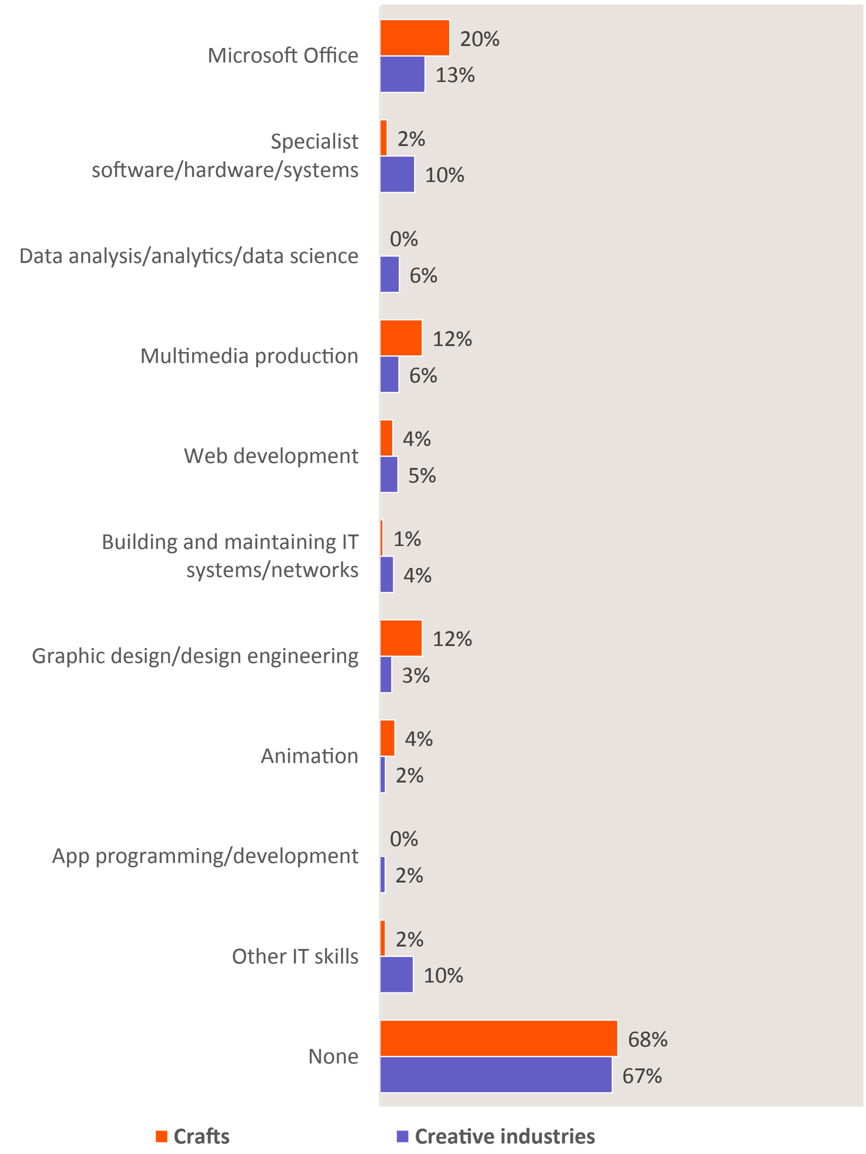
Q: Do any of your staff working as [skills gap occupation] lack full proficiency in terms of specialist skills or knowledge needed to perform the role? If so, what specific specialist skills or knowledge are they lacking full proficiency in?
Base = establishments with skills gaps [n = 28]

- Various distinct crafts skills
- Precision production skills, using computer-controlled machines (e.g. computer numerical controls/CAD)
- 3D printing and casting
- Industry knowledge (e.g. to preserve the distinct creativity of the crafts process and understand customer demands and routes to market)
- Business development analysis and management
- Income generation
- Project management
- Sales and marketing
- Digital marketing
- Logistics and distribution

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 = 28]



Source: CESS, 2025

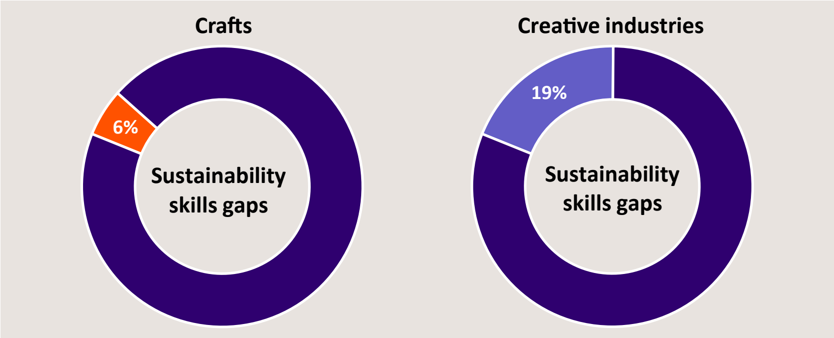
Notes: Responses are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

6. Skills gaps (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 = 28]



Given the known importance of crafts workers holding a blend of generic and technical skills (Crafts Council, 2025a; England, 2022), the CESS 2025 also provides an opportunity to explore the existence of current skills gaps within transferable skills among existing workers in the crafts sector.

Transferable skills were also found to be deficient among the workforce by some crafts employers. That said, the picture for the crafts sector varied compared to the creative industries as a whole. Indeed, the most common skills gaps for the crafts sector were speaking and listening. These were followed by digital literacy, aligning with earlier reported digital gaps.

A small share of crafts employers with skills gaps also suggested workers needed stronger adapting, problem solving and decision-making skills, albeit reported problems compared to the creative industries in planning and organising skills, adapting, reported less frequently compared to the creative industries as a whole.

The distinctiveness of skills gaps within the crafts workforce perhaps reflects the higher incidence of freelancers in the crafts workforce as well as micro-businesses and portfolio working (Crafts Council, 2020). Wider research has underlined the importance of generic skills such as interpersonal skills, communication and presentation skills, time management and resilience in developing an entrepreneurial skillset that enables the success of smaller crafts businesses (England, 2022).

When reviewing the emphasis on sustainable or carbon-neutral skills among the existing workforce, the level of demand continued to be more constrained.

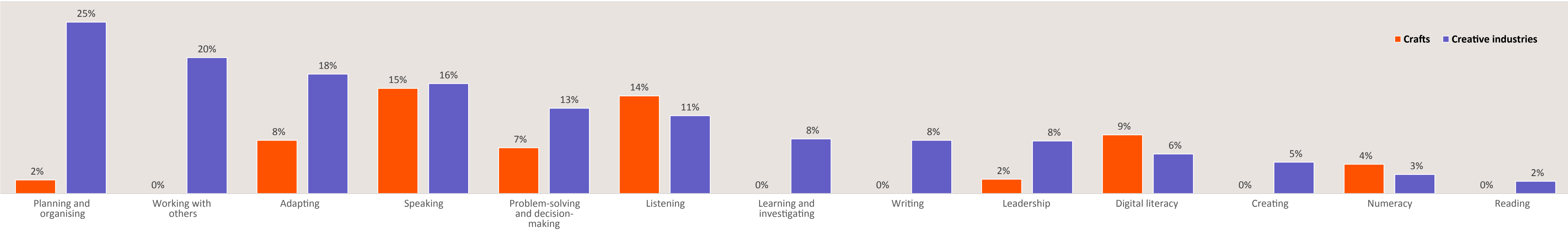
Indeed, a small percentage of crafts employers with skills gaps 6%) reported that specific sustainability and green skills were lacking among their existing workforce, much lower than for creative industries employers overall (19%).

Again, this does not appear to reflect the evidence from the employer consultations and the wider literature, which reports a growing business emphasis on the sustainability agenda and the need for moves towards more sustainable and greener practices (House of Lords, 2025; Whittaker and Macpherson, 2023).

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 = 28]



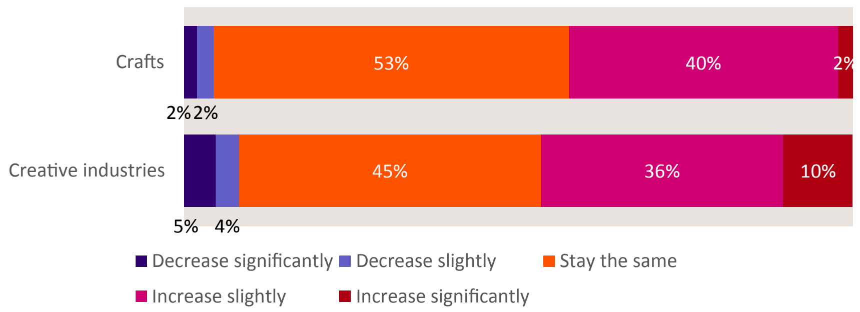
Source: CESS, 2025

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

Figure 23: Employer expectations for employment in the next three to five years, 2025

Q: Over the next three to five 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 = 67]



Source: CESS 2025

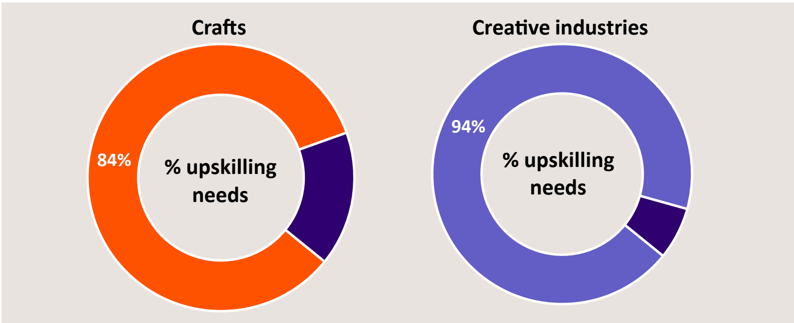
The CESS 2025 provides an indication of employers' expectations for the future and whether they anticipate the need to increase levels of employment and/or upskill their workforce in the next three to five years. Results point to a fairly high degree of ambition in both the crafts sector and the creative industries more broadly.

Indeed, around two fifths of crafts employers expected to be increasing the number of staff they employ over this period (42% vs 46% of creative industries employers). Further, the vast majority (84%) of craft employers that expect to grow staff numbers also anticipate a need to upgrade the skills of their workforce over the next three to five years albeit lower than across the creative industries (94%).

A closer examination of the reasons behind businesses needing to upskill their workforce shows that technological advancement and innovation were key drivers. This is seen in the high shares of crafts employers with upskilling needs reporting the introduction of new technologies or equipment (70%), the development of new products and services (64%) and the introduction of new working practices (44%) as drivers. That said, new legislative requirements was also a fairly significant factor (53%).

Figure 24: Employer expectations for upskilling in next three to five years, 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? ≠ 'None'
Base = establishments expecting to increase staff numbers in future [n = 26]

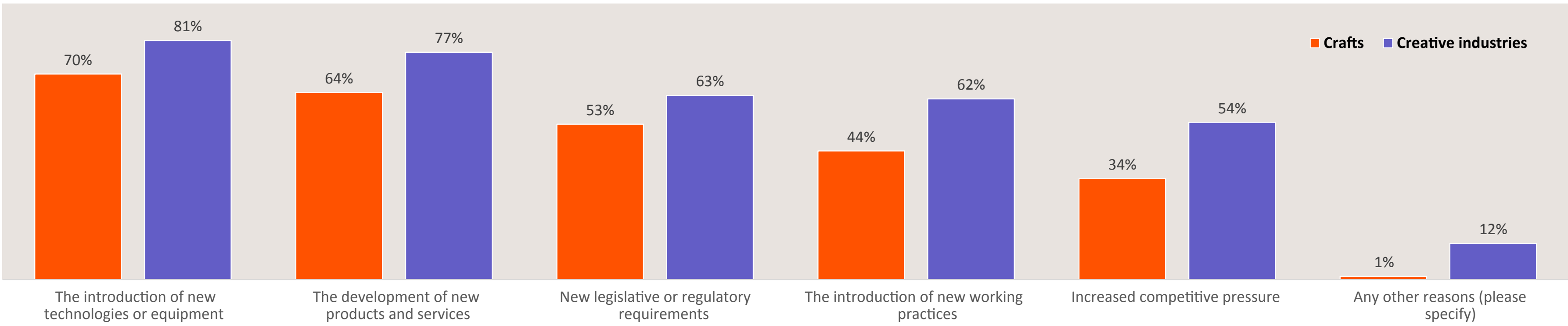


Source: CESS 2025

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

Figure 25: Main drivers of upskilling needs, 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 factors?
Base = establishments expecting to increase staff numbers in future [n = 26]



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 enables a detailed look at the nature of new roles that employers expect to require and future upskilling needs in the next three to five years.

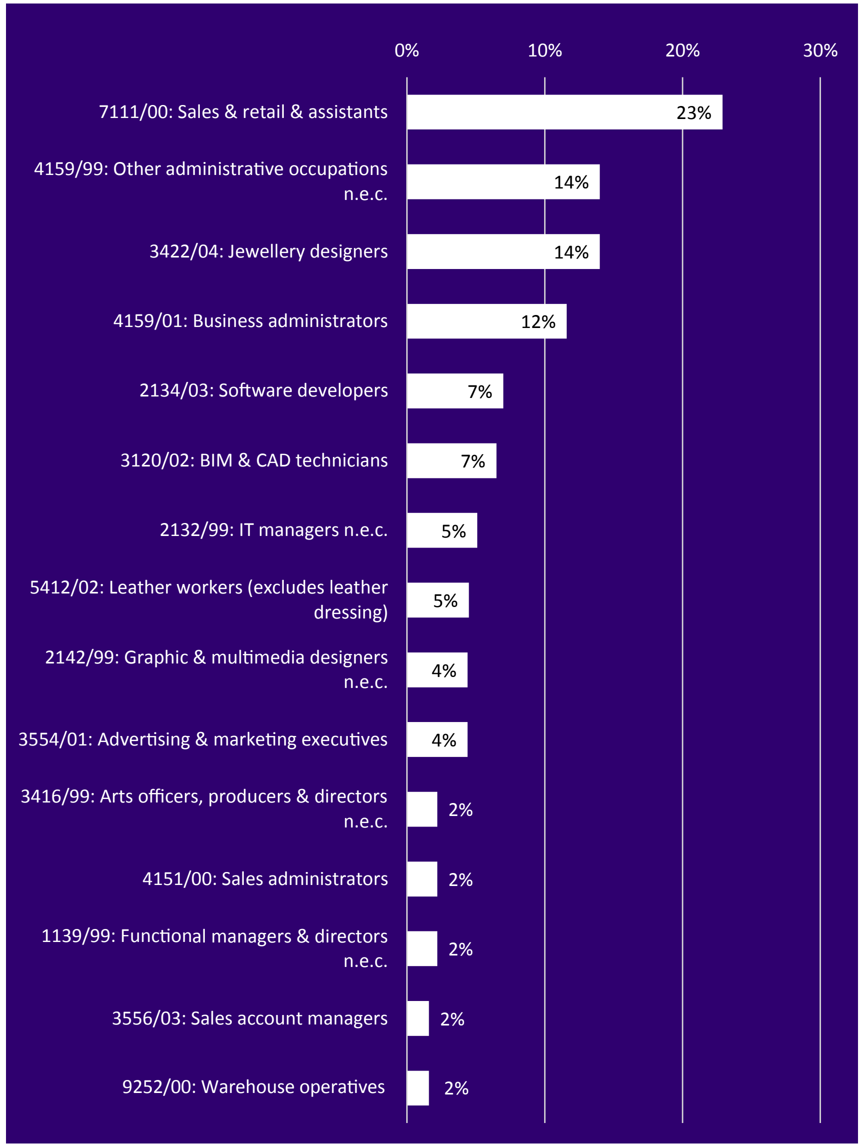
First, the roles likely to grow in the future were considered. The most common technical roles identified were jewellery designers, BIM and CAD technicians and leather workers. In addition, more generic roles were reported, including sales and retail assistants, other administrative occupations, business administrators and advertising and marketing executives. Interestingly, too, distinct digital technical roles featured: software developers, IT managers and graphic and multimedia designers.

In addition, the CESS 2025 examines the top roles expected to require new skills in the future. Again, this included a mix of technical crafts roles and broader roles. Starting with specialist crafts roles, the most commonly reported occupations were goldsmiths, silversmiths, jewellers and precious stone workers; retail jewellers; leather workers; CAD, drawing and architectural technicians; and BIM and CAD technicians. More generic roles identified included other administrative occupations, business sales executives, sales and retail assistants, and business and financial project management professionals. Various sales staff were also identified, albeit at lower levels. Again, software developers were identified by a relatively high share of employers.

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 = 26]



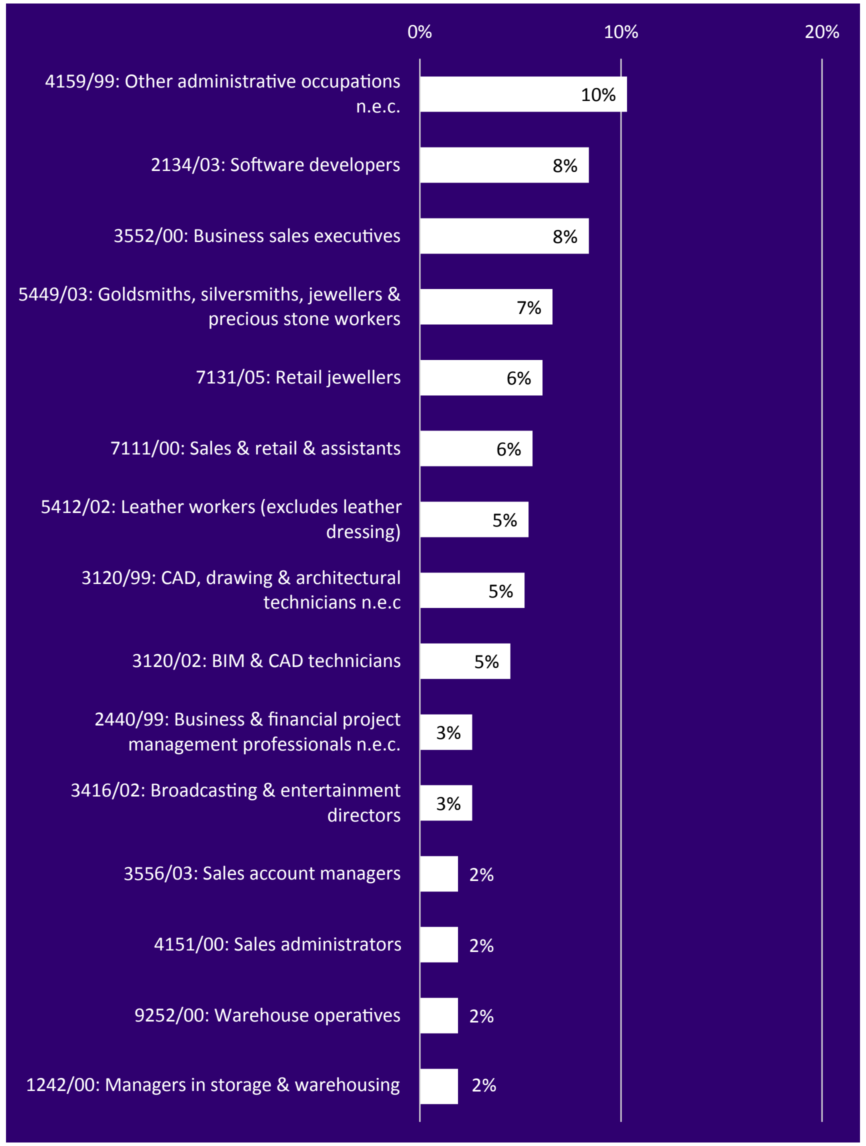
Source: CESS 2025

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 with upskilling needs [n = 22]



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)

There is strong alignment between the CESS 2025 and wider research (Crafts Council, 2020, 2025; Heritage Crafts, 2025) in terms of the critical roles and skills that are expected to grow. For example, as working practices evolve with technology and climate change, this is expected to increase future demand for craft-technology hybrid roles, sustainable and digitally enabled production roles, heritage preservation specialist roles and business support and marketing roles. Relatedly, there is a growing call for cross-disciplinary knowledge, sustainable production capability, heritage preservation and conservation skills and marketing expertise in the future (England, 2022; Luckman and Andrew, 2020).

The CESS 2025 also identifies the main technical skills expected to be required by crafts employers in the future. This highlights many of the specialist craft and generic business skills identified earlier as shortages and gaps. So, there was a similar array of distinct crafts skills and broader business skills.

That said, the CESS 2025 also identified a focus in the future on a wide range of digital skills in the crafts sector. Indeed, the survey found that 48% of employers with upskilling needs in the crafts sector expected to require new digital skills in the years ahead – this was significantly higher than the levels of skills shortages and gaps crafts employers reported (as seen earlier). Again, specific digital skills cited included web development skills and Microsoft Office skills. Other IT skills included the need for strong IT systems with effective use of cybersecurity, cloud computing and digital applications that support data analysis and effective customer engagement and sales. Reference was also made to the need to make better use of AI while also protecting the intellectual property of crafts workers.

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 = 22]

- Various distinct crafts skills
- Precision production skills, using computer-controlled machines (e.g. computer numerical controls/CAD)
- Industry knowledge (e.g. to preserve the distinct creativity of the crafts process and understand customer demands and routes to market)
- Data analytics (e.g. database management, data visualisation)
- Software development
- AI
- Network infrastructure, cloud computing, cybersecurity
- Business management
- Accounting
- Project management (i.e. tools)
- Digital marketing

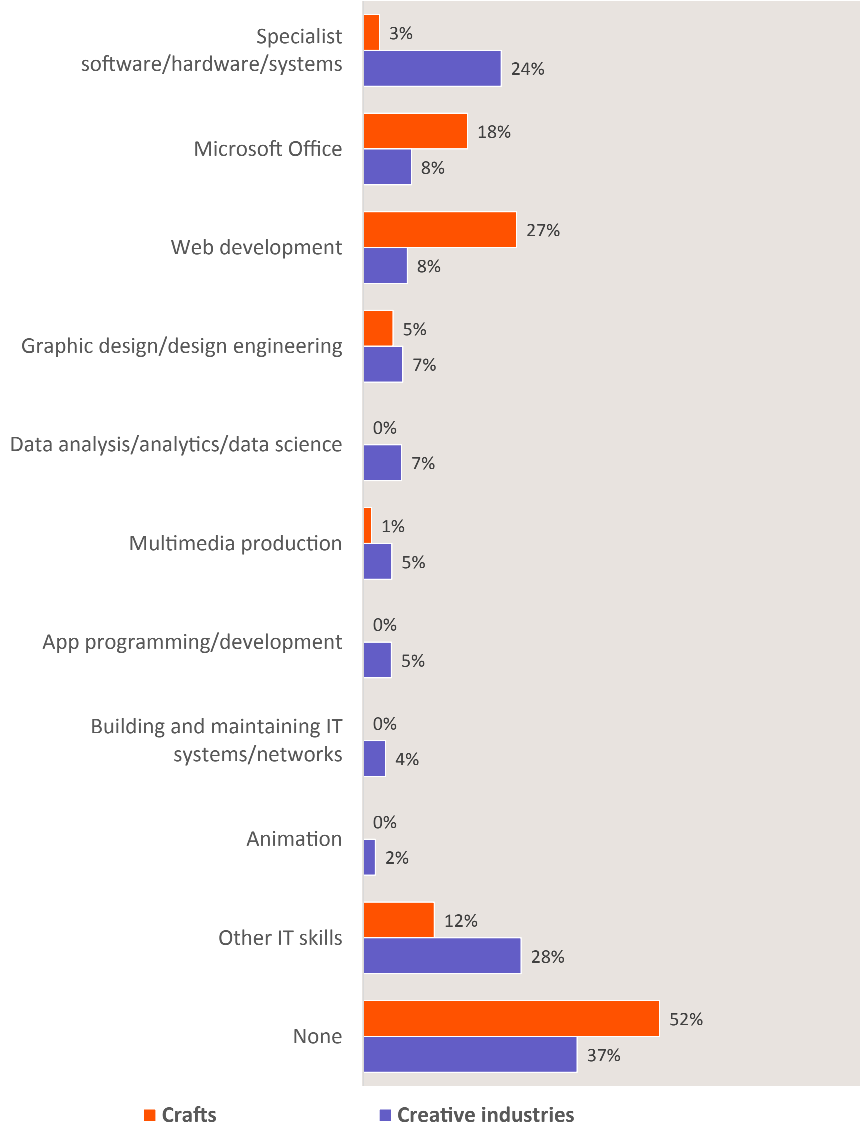
Source: CESS 2025

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 = 22]



Source: CESS 2025

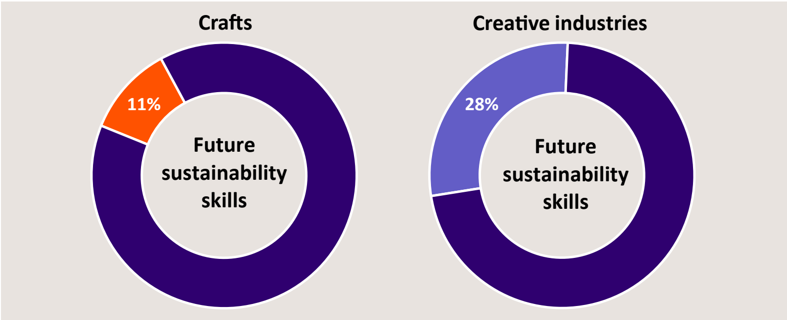
Notes: Responses are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

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 = 22]



Wider research, and insights from the roundtable, also suggest that the human element of craft work will continue to be important and that there will be an ongoing need for technical crafts and core transferable skills. Indeed, growth in technology will complement existing techniques and practices (The Creative Dimension Trust, 2025).

The CESS 2025 identifies perspectives of employers in the crafts sector around what core, transferable skills will need improving in the next three to five years. This specifically highlighted areas that might need improving in the future. Most commonly for the crafts sector, these were planning and organising, learning and investigating, adapting, and creating. Fewer employers compared to the creative industries raised skills such as working with others.

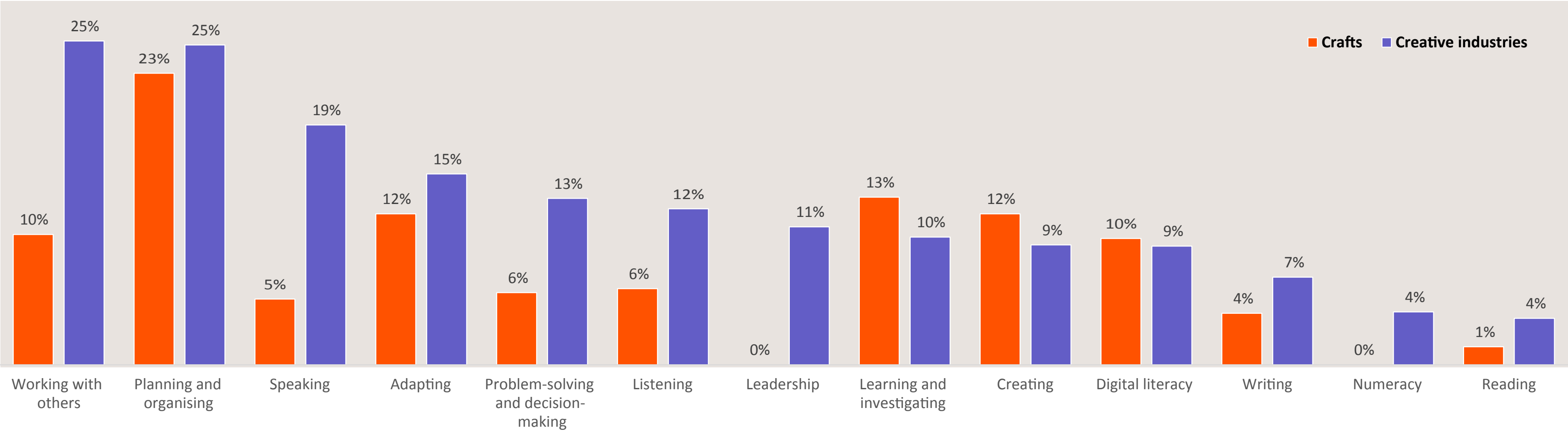
When reviewing requirements in the next three to five years for sustainable or carbon-neutral skills in the crafts sector, fewer crafts employers with upskilling needs highlighted an expected growth in these skills (only 11% in the crafts sector vs 28% in creative industries overall). It is of interest to view the employer perspectives on future skills needs alongside wider research to get a sense of current developments in the sector and the future potential to drive growth. While this research aligns closely with the survey results, it points to the likely ongoing drivers for change, shaping the future outlook for the crafts sector and, in turn, areas for future development:

- **Technological advancement and digital transformation** have the potential to accelerate digital fabrication, modernise practices and support the adoption of new digital tools and production processes for craft applications – such as CAD, 3D printing and enhancements to the visitor experience to meet consumer demand.
- **A growing sustainability agenda and climate change** fuelled by consumer preferences for bespoke and sustainable goods is likely to drive innovation towards sustainable and green practices (e.g. via the circular economy and seeking to repair, reuse, reduce waste and deploy sustainable materials). Climate change will require sustainable refurbishment and preservation.
- **Ongoing globalisation** is expected to increase the commercial focus on exploiting global markets for crafts, to promote heritage assets and to grow cultural tourism. A growth in international trade will encourage more business, commercial and cross-cultural design skills, including marketing, customer services and financial services.
- **An increasing policy agenda** is likely to push innovation in key areas, such as sustainable and green practices, wider access to crafts and heritage activities, and cultural tourism.

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 = 22]



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 enables assessment of the impact of skills challenges for crafts employers relative to the impact for those in the creative industries – that is, it explores the effects of skills shortage vacancies and/or skills gaps on firm performance. The results suggest that skills deficiencies have less effect on the crafts sector than other parts of the creative industries. Indeed, a sizeable majority of crafts employers (60%) reported no impact of skill challenges, compared to just under one third (31%) of employers in the creative industries overall.

Of those employers experiencing business impacts, smaller percentages of employers in the crafts sector compared to employers in the creative industries reported different business effects, such as increasing the workload for other staff (19% vs 35%) and experiencing increased operating costs (19% vs 24%). In addition, having difficulties meeting deadlines, delays in developing new products or services and a loss of business to competitors were also reported less frequently by crafts employers. Wider evidence suggests crafts businesses manage through retention of older, experienced craft workers, but that this may be harder to sustain without a strong talent pipeline and succession planning.

The majority of crafts employers (63%) were taking some action in response to skills challenges. However, 37% of crafts employers were still doing nothing, compared to only 18% of creative industries employers. The most frequent response was to increase training for the existing workforce – something pursued by 32% of crafts employers, albeit at a lower level than in the creative industries as a whole (47%). Crafts employers were also less frequently involved in expanding trainee and apprenticeship programmes and bringing in contractors or contracting work out. In contrast, steps to redefine existing roles and increase salaries were more common in the crafts sector. The employer consultations emphasised the challenges of finding contractors with the distinct crafts skills required or taking on inexperienced workers, often with substantial training needs.

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 = 35]

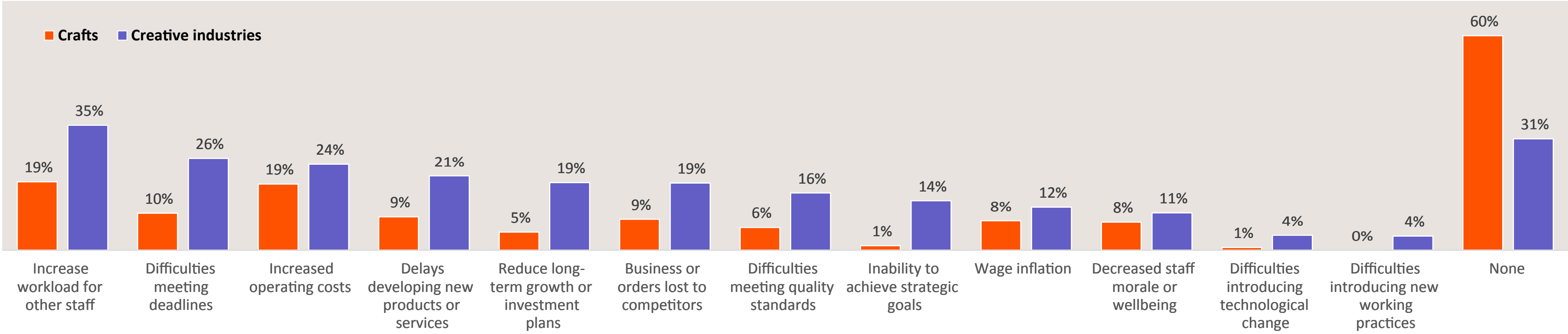
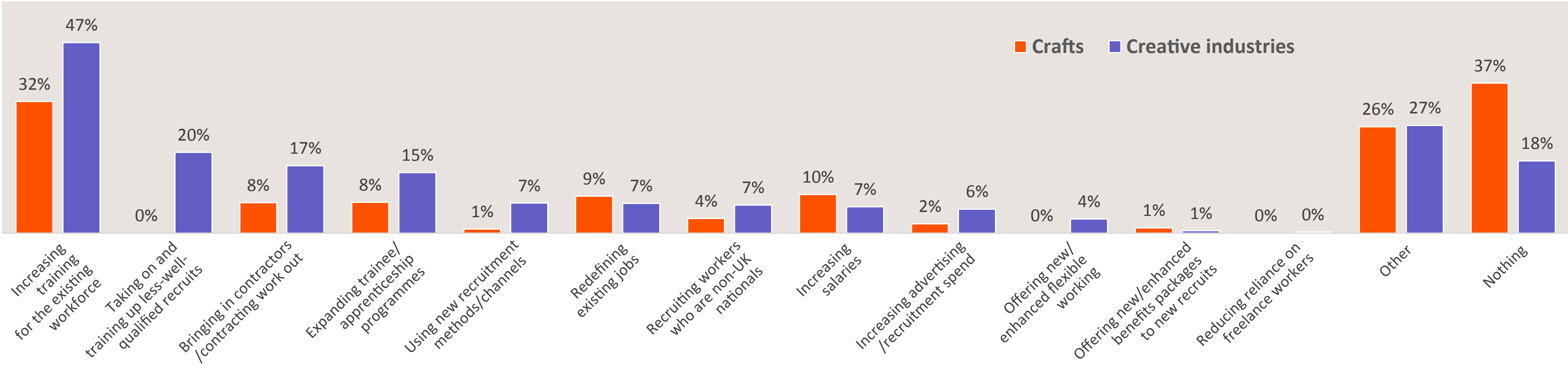


Figure 33: Response to skills challenges, 2025

Q: What, if anything, is your site doing to overcome these skills challenges?
Base = establishments with skills shortages or skills gaps [n = 35]



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 (continued)

In reflecting on the skills challenges employers are facing and the anticipated need to develop new skills in the years ahead, an important question concerns whether crafts employers are already investing sufficiently in upskilling and reskilling their workforce.

In common with wider parts of the creative industries, the crafts sector currently relies heavily on higher education pathways to provide the baseline, foundation education for early-career workers (House of Lords, 2025). Such routes enable individuals to grow their creativity, manual dexterity and distinct craft skills, and thus they have been important in filling the gaps left by the decline in arts and the creative curriculum in schools (Cultural Learning Alliance, 2024). That said, evidence points to ongoing steps to preserve and grow crafts skills through a combination of wider routes, including formal, often technical, education (such as apprenticeships and vocational qualifications where they exist and are still publicly funded), community initiatives and digital online learning resources. A core aim is to access a wider, more diverse talent pool.

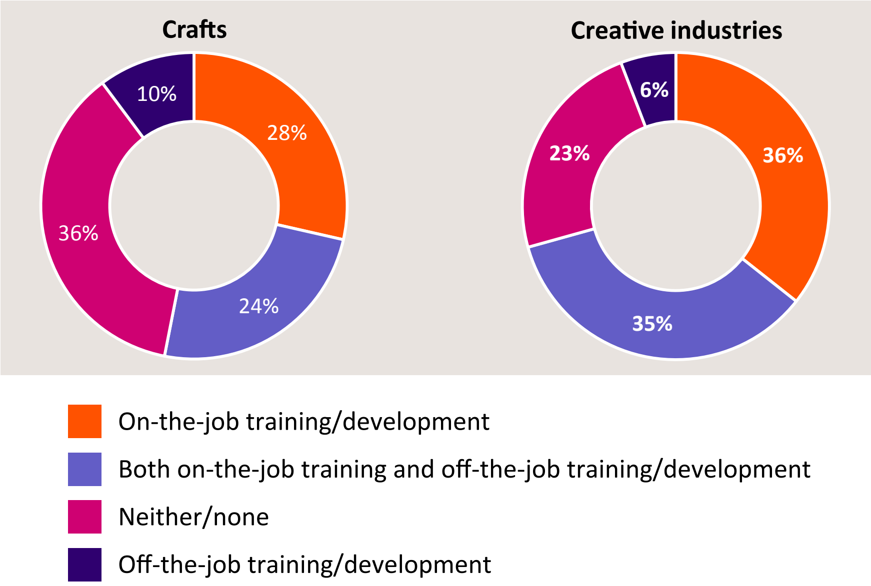
The CESS 2025 provides an indication of the extent of employer training provision arranged by crafts employers relative to creative industries employers over the past twelve months. This includes training for employees, but also training provided to agency staff, the self-employed or freelance workers. Although the CESS 2025, with this broader definition, points to higher levels of training across the creative industries overall than is indicated elsewhere (e.g. see the Employer Skills Survey 2022; Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025), training is provided less frequently within crafts. Indeed, some 61% of firms in the crafts sector provided some kind of development compared to 76% in the creative industries overall. This means that just over a third of crafts employers did not provide any training (36% vs 23%).

Further, most of the training provided was either a blend of off- and on-the-job training (24% vs 35%) or on-the-job training only (28% vs 36%). In the case of the latter, it is known that this is less likely to lead to transferable, accredited skills attainment (OECD, 2019). Challenges with supporting ongoing professional development were also found in wider research (Crafts Council, 2025), especially where crafts workers are less established and have more occasional work. This training position highlights a potential need for improvement in development opportunities, particularly given the current and future skills challenges identified.

A closer examination of the reasons crafts employers are inhibited in providing any training points to the obstacles that need to be overcome to enhance training levels in future. The most common barriers for employers in the crafts sector includes staff being fully proficient so training is not needed (37% vs 26%), lack of funds for more training (28% vs 36%) and staff being too busy to give training (14% vs 19%).

Figure 34: Employer training provision, 2025

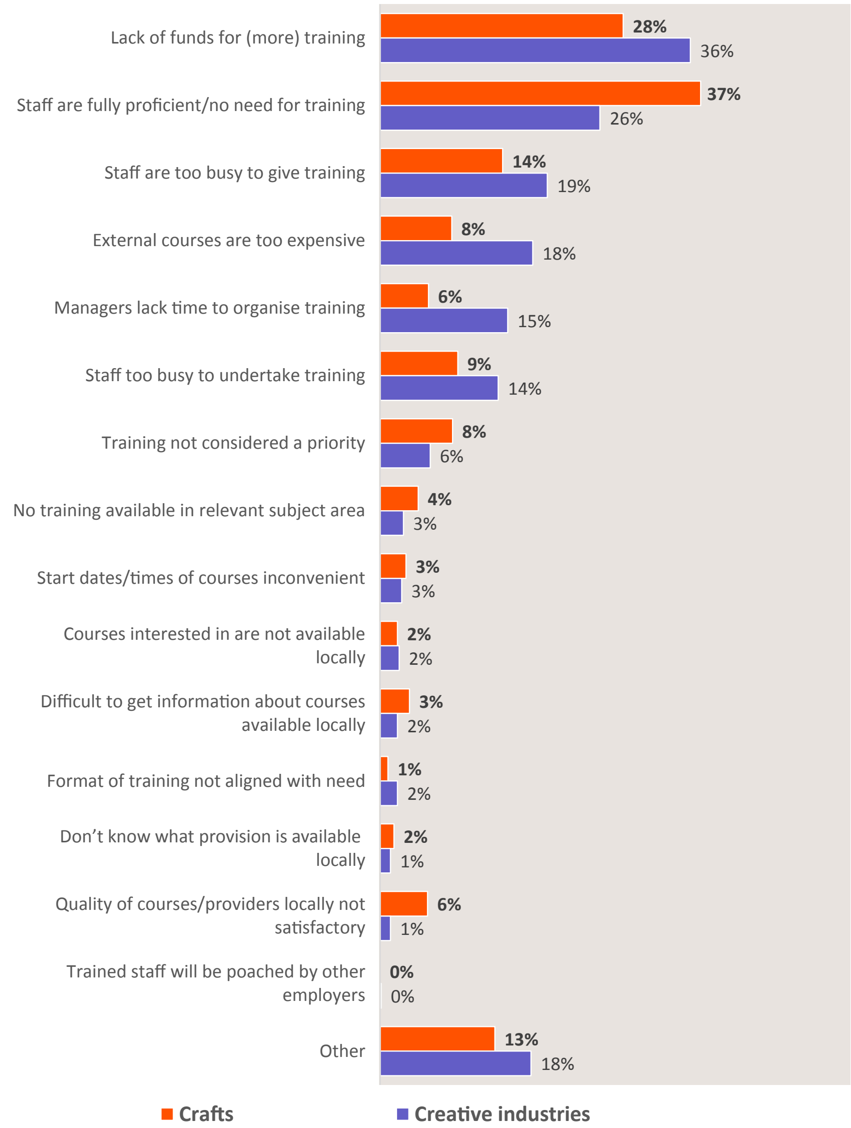
Q: What, if any, training has your organisation arranged or funded over the past twelve months?
Base = all establishments [n = 67]



Source: CESS 2025

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 = 67]



Source: CESS 2025

8. Employer investment in skills (continued)

With the CESS 2025 and wider research highlighting challenges for the crafts sector in pursuing training, and in the context of considerable future upskilling needs, it is important that employers are supported to continue to invest in the skills of their workforce. In the light of many of the skills drivers reported earlier, this will be important to support crafts workers to keep their skills relevant.

The CESS 2025 asks employers in the crafts sector to consider the value of several measures that might offer greater support to enable them to invest in the skills and training of their workforce. While responses were quite wide-ranging – perhaps unsurprisingly given the barriers to training – the majority of employers supported two measures to alleviate funding pressures.

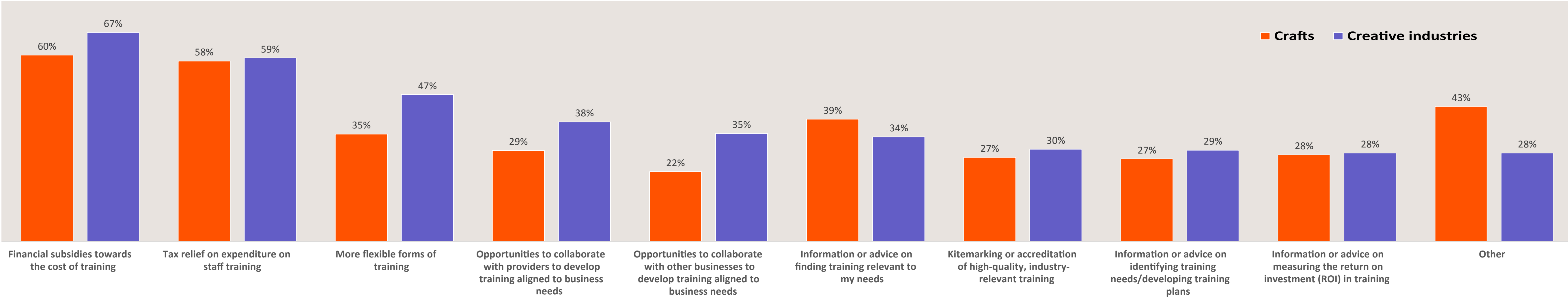
Indeed, the most common responses were financial subsidies towards the cost of training (60%) and tax relief on expenditure on staff training (58%). Furthermore, with a number of crafts employers stating that time pressures for crafts workers as well as wider staff and managers were inhibitors to providing training, there was also support for the skills system offering more flexible forms of training in the future (35%). This is backed by wider research, and there have been calls for blended learning options, involving training of shorter duration and delivered in various ways, online as well as on and off the job (Crafts Council, 2025a). Attendees at the roundtables also highlighted the complexity of training programmes funded and designed by the state (e.g. apprenticeships), which limited further education provision. They reported the need for private funding to facilitate access.

In addition, other common responses among crafts employers included information/advice on finding training relevant to needs (39%) and better kitemarking or accreditation of high-quality industry-relevant training (27%). The CESS findings were supported by the employer consultations in the sector. In that light, positive reference was made to relevant policy developments in the different skills systems and the opportunities these presented to crafts employers. These included: steps to enhance collaboration between industry and education providers, drawing on past lessons, such as those from group training models; funding of modular training, such as through the Growth and Skills Levy and the Lifelong Learning Entitlement; and trialling of bespoke skills passports for the crafts sector (e.g. 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 = 67]



Source: CESS 2025

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