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**Creative Industries
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Creative Industries Skills Audits

Creative Industries Skills Audits

MUSIC

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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.

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Executive summary

1 Skills shortages when recruiting: The picture today

Despite ongoing challenges in a modern and uncertain global economy, the music industry continues to display a picture of resilience and ambition for growth. Commercial models in the sector have had to change to survive as the explosion of digital platforms and formats have transformed markets and the way in which consumers access, buy and exchange music. The effects have been far-reaching, whether in recording, artist management, promotion, licensing, royalty collections and/or publishing.

Just under one third (31%) of music employers having hired staff (including freelancers) in the past two years, report recruitment difficulties. These are mostly caused by candidates lacking the skills or experience required for the role.

In music, skills shortages are most acute among experienced staff (with between two and ten years' experience). Employers struggle to recruit key creative roles, such as in recording and live events (sound engineers, theatre technicians, facilities), management (broadcasting and entertainment producers, arts officers, producers and directors) and education (music teachers). Wider business roles with skills shortages include finance, sales and marketing.

Skills shortages cover technical production skills, digital literacy skills, business skills (e.g. budgeting, marketing, contract knowledge) and management. Employers also highlight transversal skills, such as planning and organising, working with others and communication.

2 Current skills gaps in the existing workforce

Alongside the challenge of skills shortages when recruiting, music employers also point to skills deficiencies among their existing workforce. In 2025, skills gaps affected three in ten (31%) employers in the music industry. Many of these are transitory in nature – that is, they exist because individuals are new to their role (44% of music employers) or have only partially completed the training required for their position (36%). In addition, skills gaps may be an indicator of the positive ongoing business development and transformation of firms. Examples of this include employers introducing new working practices.

In common with most employers in the music industry reporting transient skills gaps, this aligns with the level of seniority of the staff working in these roles. The majority of employers in the music industry state that existing workers with gaps are less experienced (with five years' experience or less), as new entrants or at early stages in their career.

The skills that employers say need improving among their workforce closely mirror those lacking in candidates. This includes a specific focus on maintaining technical skills in production and live events, involving roles like sound engineers and broadcasting and entertainment producers. Wider education and business roles are also mentioned, alongside core skills. Specific industry knowledge focuses on licensing and royalties and 'show craft'.

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

The music industry is ambitious about the future, with 57% of employers expecting to increase staff numbers over the next three to five years. Further, almost all music 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. The biggest drivers are expected to be the introduction of new technologies or equipment (79%), the development of new products and services (78%) and the introduction of new working practices (65%).

Many of the roles subject to skills shortages and gaps today are expected to be in growing demand in future. These include sound engineers and broadcasting and entertainment producers (e.g. studio managers, live performance producers) as well as wider business roles in finance and marketing. In addition, specific digital roles are mentioned, including software developers and IT system architects.

The future is expected to demand more hybrid roles, blending digital and creative skills and enhancing audiences' interactive experiences through immersive media. For example, in studios and live production, AI music programmers and audio engineers will work with AI tools to compose and enhance music, and immersive experience designers, event technologists and extended reality (XR) producers may enhance virtual music experiences with augmented and mixed realities. The effects are anticipated to be cross-cutting, not only in music but in other parts of the creative industries, as music integrates with screen and games design.

4 Taking action to address skills challenges for the industry

Skills challenges are having a significant impact on the music industry, increasing the workload of other staff, increasing operating costs and affecting long-term growth or investment plans.

Almost all employers facing skills challenges in the sector are taking action in response, and around three quarters provided training over the past year. While reported rates compare favourably with wider surveys, a minority provide off-the-job training (9%).

Music employers report a range of factors influencing and/or inhibiting training patterns. By far the most common barrier reported by employers in the music industry is a lack of funds for more training, which exceeds the rate for the creative industries as a whole (51% vs 36%). Other barriers include constraints on time, such as staff being too busy to give training (34%), managers lacking time (31%) and staff being too busy to undertake training (28%).

Music employers call for more financial support and flexible training. This includes 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 such as 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 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 music industry.

The research utilises an adapted version of the DCMS definition of the creative industries, including the following Standard Industrial Classification codes for the music industry:

59.2 Sound recording and music publishing activities

85.52 Cultural education (50%)

That said, as it is acknowledged, this only captures part of the sector, and wider research is also used to consider the related experiences of micro-businesses and musicians more widely (UK Music, 2021a).

The wider creative sub-sectors for the 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; 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 (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** involving a review of evidence on skills issues across the creative industries and synthesising skills research in the different UK nations, including 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) of establishments with more than two employees, to supplement

the baseline analysis with employer perspectives on skills priorities and the skills system and talent pipeline to the industry;

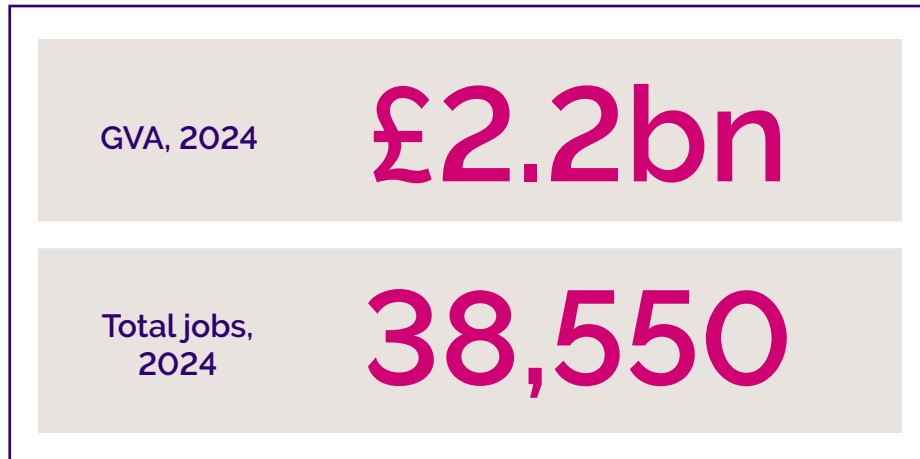
- **A series of stakeholder roundtables** to contextualise the findings and to identify and promote shared consensus on skills priorities. These involve representatives from government, national and subnational creative agencies, trade bodies, unions, creative businesses and major cultural organisations and training/education providers; and
- **Reporting and dissemination** to draw the findings together and use them to enhance policy developments.

The 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

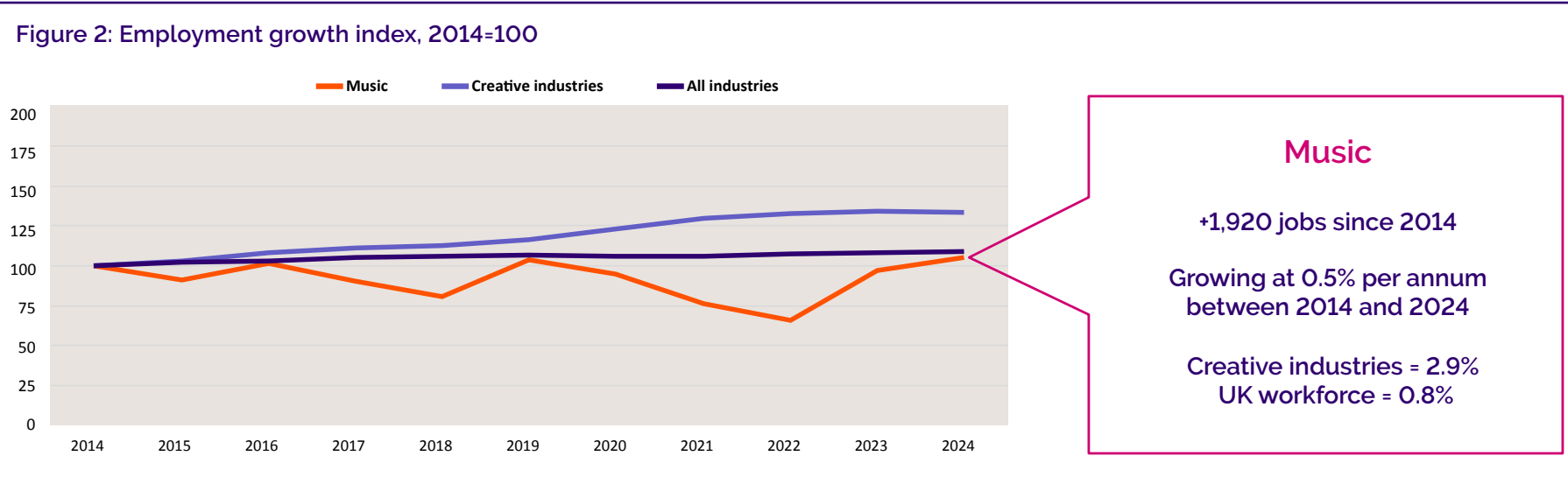


The music industry encompasses the creation, production, distribution and performance of music in all its forms. DCMS economic statistics suggest employment is nearly 40,000 and put gross value added (GVA) at £2.2bn in 2024. Yet these official assessments are believed to represent a significant underestimate in its wider scale and contribution overall (UK Music, 2021a). This wider definition puts employment at around 220,000 in 2024 and GVA at £8bn (UK Music, 2025).

The UK music industry identifies core music activities covering music creation, recording, live performances, music publishing, music merchandise; and retail and artist branding. The sector comprises a mix of commercial companies and not-for-profit organisations, funded through a range of commercial activities, public funding and contributed income, which includes sponsorship, trusts and donations.

Recent trend analysis based on the official albeit narrower definition (DCMS, 2025a) points to an overall increase (0.5% per annum) in employment for the sector between 2014 and 2024. This equates to a growth of just under 2,000 jobs over the period. This compares to an average rate of growth of 2.9% for the creative industries as a whole and is similar to the UK workforce average (0.8%). This means the music industry, while seeing some turbulence, has more than recovered from any falls in employment seen during this time, such as in the Covid-19 pandemic.

Insights from UK Music underline ongoing growth across the sector more broadly and, therefore, provide further evidence of sustained confidence. Indeed, while the sector faces significant challenges in a disrupted economy, it continues to grapple effectively with ongoing change (UK Music, 2025). The explosion of digital platforms and formats has transformed markets and the way in which consumers access, buy and exchange music. With a global downturn in economic activity, there are wider pressures on income streams and cuts to public funding. With moves to online streaming, retail outlets have declined, and commercial models in the sector have had to change to survive. While this is particularly affecting those dealing in recording, artist management, promotion, licensing, royalty collections and publishing (UK Music, 2025), the long-term trajectory is still supporting growth.



Source: DCMS (2025a, 2025b)

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. Growth rates are compound annual growth rate (CAGR). Chart shows index of employment (2014=100). This differs from other sub-sector audits, given data limitations that affect the Music sector only.*

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 is often cyclical, commission-driven and project-based (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023), levels of self-employment are generally high overall and double the UK economy average (28% vs 14%). In common with such features, levels of self-employment are significantly higher within the music industry and account for 62% of the workforce. Sector research suggests a project- and gig-driven business model creates low incomes and job security, non-linear careers and a high incidence of portfolio careers among the workforce, often in jobs outside the sector (UK Music, 2025; Musicians' Union, 2023).

In line with the creative industries workforce generally, which is highly skilled, the music industry is highly qualified: 60% of workers have a degree or higher qualification in music, performing and the visual arts. Sector-specific research suggests 70% of musicians hold a degree or higher (Musicians' Union, 2023). That said, the occupational profile is quite distinct, reflecting the different sub-sectoral skills demands, which are largely centred on the various core commercial activities of the sector, as follows (UK Music, 2021a):

- Music creation and composition roles, like musicians, composers, lyricists, songwriters, vocalists and DJs;
- Live performance producers, sound engineers, lighting technicians and stage crew, venue staff such as venue and stage managers, in-house promoters, stage front-of-house staff;

- Music publishing and recording, such as studio engineers, producers, artists and repertoire managers, talent scouting, record label executives and product managers overseeing recordings and releases, music publishers handling song copyrights and licensing;
- Distribution and marketing professionals, such as streaming platform editors, playlist curators, data analysts and social media managers; and
- Artist branding and image roles, like artist managers, promoters, booking agents and generalists such as accountants.

Music industry roles require a core of highly specialised technical, musical and creative skills. Most roles demand musical talent (e.g. performers). Yet creativity is also crucial for music creators, performers and producers crafting a signature sound, or marketers devising a compelling campaign. In addition, many roles call for proficiency with technology, such as sound engineers and music producers mastering audio hardware and software, and stage technicians operating lighting, sound and AV systems. With growing technology, a green agenda, moves to digital music and changing consumer behaviours, there is an increased focus on digital literacy and business and commercial skills. Indeed, there is a growing need to understand intellectual property rights, health and safety standards, compliance with licensing and regulations, marketing and promotion, and advancing eco-friendly practices, productions and events, reducing carbon footprints (UK Music, 2025).

While the music industry is working to progress diversity across the sector, there is still more to do (UK Music Diversity Taskforce, 2020; UK Music, 2024; Arts Council England, 2023). Data from the most recent Music Diversity Survey confirms official data which shows a slight under-representation of people of colour and women, especially in senior roles, and pronounced class-based disparities. That said, there is a slightly higher share of disabled workers compared to other sectors (UK Music, 2024).

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

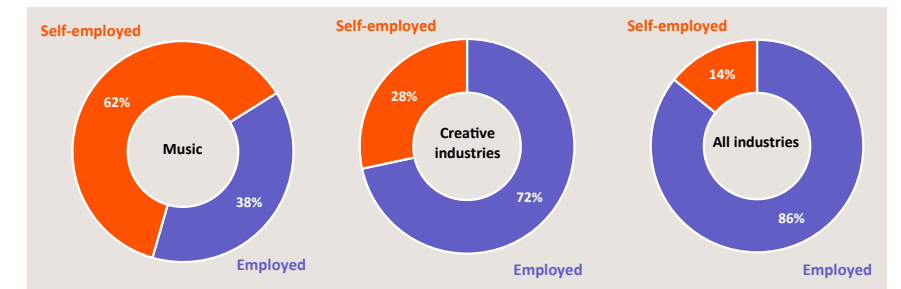


Figure 4: Workforce qualifications (% degree-qualified), 2022-2024

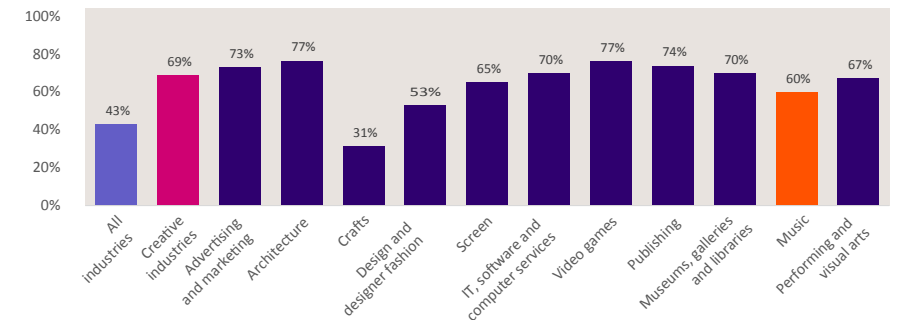
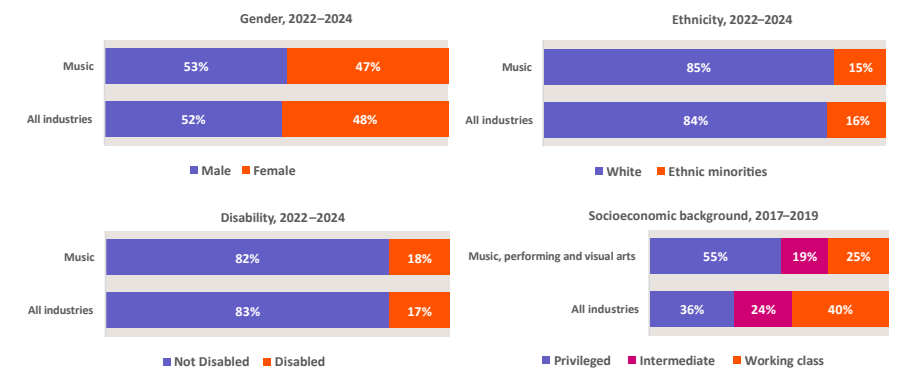


Figure 5: Workforce diversity



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

Notes: Data 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

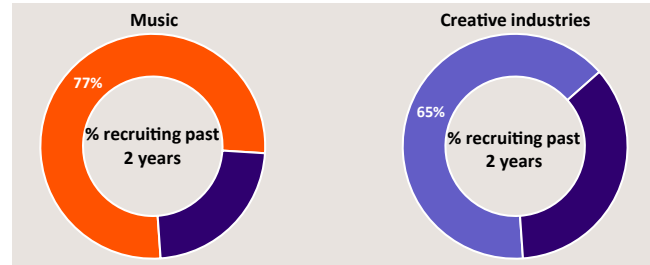
The CESS 2025 enables the examination of skills mismatches, where employers' skills demands cannot be met. This starts with recruitment difficulties and skills shortages when employers are looking for talent in the external labour market, but their needs cannot be met. As the sector continues to focus on growth, we find that over the last two years just over three quarters of employers in the music industry (77%) have been recruiting. This includes for agency staff and freelancers. This is at higher levels than across the creative industries (65%), reflecting a more buoyant sector and growth.

There are differences between the music sector and the creative industries as a whole in the recruitment methods used. Indeed, employers in the music industry place a greater focus on the use of word of mouth than online job platforms and/or professional networks. This is perhaps a little more concerning in the context of limits to diversity among the music workforce and the high degree of workers coming from more privileged backgrounds, for example (UK Music, 2024).

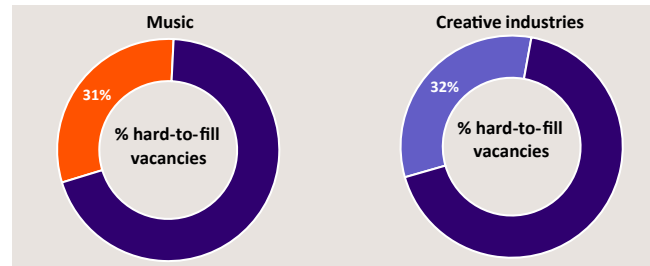
Just under one third of recruiting music employers (31%) had needed to fill vacancies, which is similar to the creative industries as a whole (32%). Recruitment difficulties in the music industry were more likely to be due to a lack of required skills (67%), work experience (66%) and required qualifications (36%). This was broadly similar to the picture for the creative industries. That said, a slightly higher percentage of music employers reported that work experience was an issue compared to the creative industries overall. Furthermore, a lack of required attitude or motivation was also more of an issue for music employers, as were poor terms and conditions and a remote location. Nonetheless, numbers are low and should be viewed with caution.

Figure 6: Hiring and recruitment difficulties, 2025

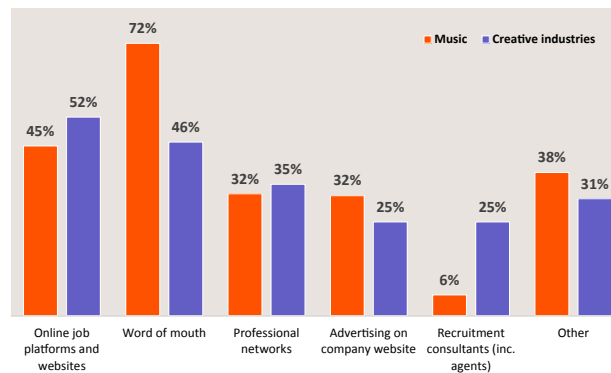
Q: Has this site recruited anyone, including any paid employees, agency staff, and self-employed or freelance workers, in the past two years?
Base = all establishments (n = 70)



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 = 56)



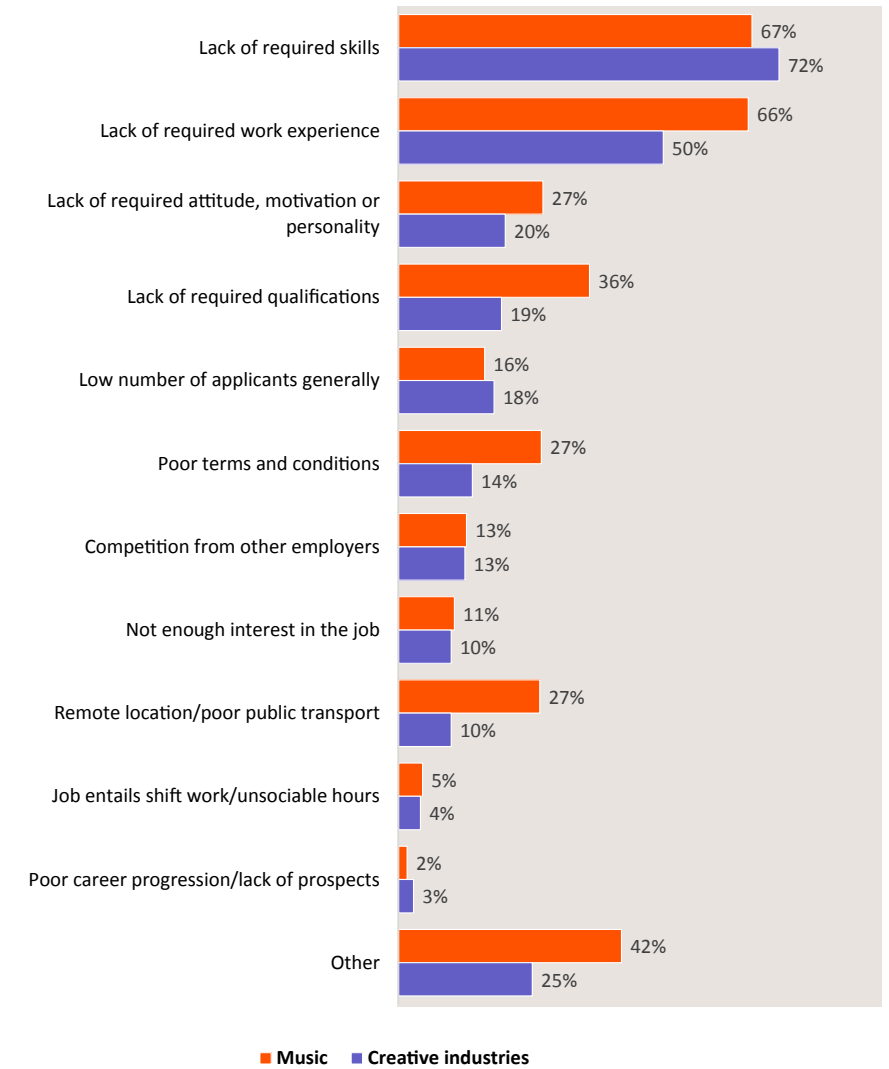
Q: What recruitment methods do you use to fill vacancies at this site?
Base = establishments that have recruited in the past two years (n = 56)



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 = 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

Taking the skills responses together, the CESS 2025 therefore shows that skills shortages were the main causes of hard-to-fill vacancies. Indeed, 84% of music employers reported that their vacancies were hard to fill for skills reasons. This was higher than levels for the creative industries (79%).

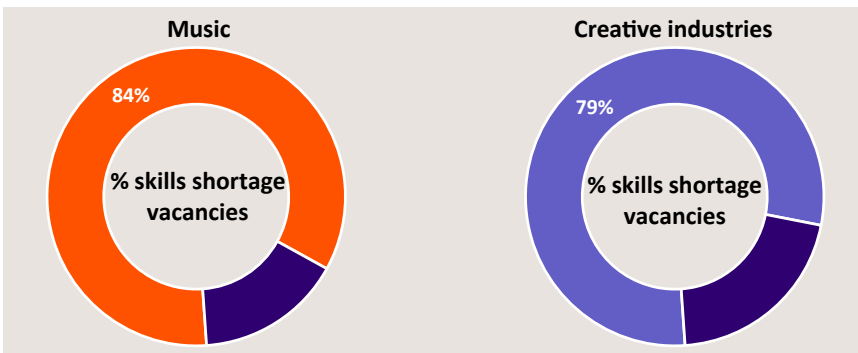
The study has tested the level of experience being sought by employers, where skills shortages are encountered – although responses are low, so need to be viewed with caution. The highest share of recruiting employers in the music industry who were exhibiting skills shortages were seeking candidates with more experience (i.e. with five to ten years of experience) – slightly higher than the creative industries as a whole. That said, many music employers were also looking for new entrants and those early in their

careers. In contrast, very few employers reported seeking experts (with more than ten years of experience).

Music employers outlined a wide range of occupations that were proving hard to fill. Some of the most common were specialists in the sector, such as broadcasting and entertainment producers; sound engineers; arts officers, producers and directors; theatre technicians; facilities co-ordinators; managers and directors in the creative industries. This confirmed many at senior, mid-career roles. Other generic roles were identified too, including marketing associate professionals; business development managers; business administrators; business and financial project management professionals; financial managers and directors; and fundraisers. Music employers also highlighted skills shortages affecting teachers of music. Broadly, these results align with existing research (UK Music, 2025) and the employer consultations, pointing to challenges supplying skills in technical off-stage, production and live events, such as experienced sound engineers, live event production managers and acoustics/AV technicians.

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 = 20)

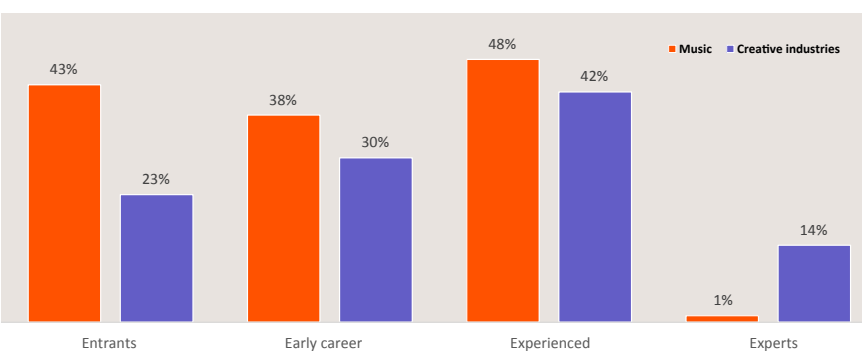


Source: CESS, 2025

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

Figure 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 = 18)

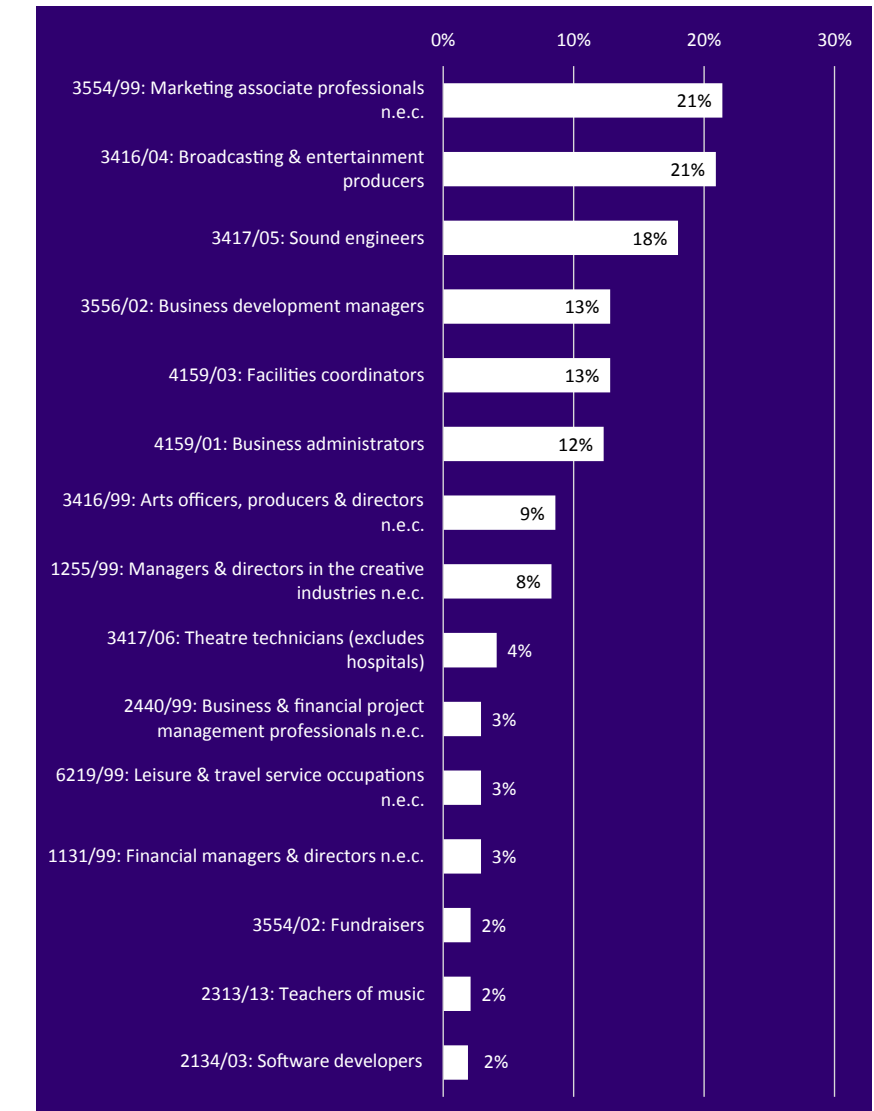


Source: CESS, 2025

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 = 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)

Taken together the evidence also highlights shortages in management, education and business, such as music producers, creative directors, senior label executives, venue/general managers and music teachers.

The CESS 2025 identified the main specialist skills lacking in applicants within the music industry for employers with skills shortages. This cited distinct musical creativity skills, often associated with demands for a particular music genre or type of artist, and specific technical production expertise to operate lighting, sound and AV systems. A wide range of unique industry knowledge was also cited to understand the practical workings of music sub-sectors, whether live events or recording and publishing, with reference to technical areas like licensing and royalties. Skills attached to different technology also featured heavily, as well as wider business skills, including business development, sales and marketing. This mirrors wider research and insights from the roundtable, highlighting challenges finding digital literacy skills, business skills (e.g. budgeting, marketing, contract knowledge) and management skills (e.g. people management or project management). This included a focus on digital experts supporting business roles like digital marketing.

The CESS 2025 reviews the digital skills lacking. Overall, 64% of employers in the music industry stated they had found no digital skills difficult to obtain – higher than for the creative industries overall. That said, for a minority of music employers, some digital skills shortages were highlighted. These included skills in web development, Microsoft Office, and software and hardware development. Other IT skills challenges reported pointed to specific IT applications, tools and operating systems being sought.

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 = 18)



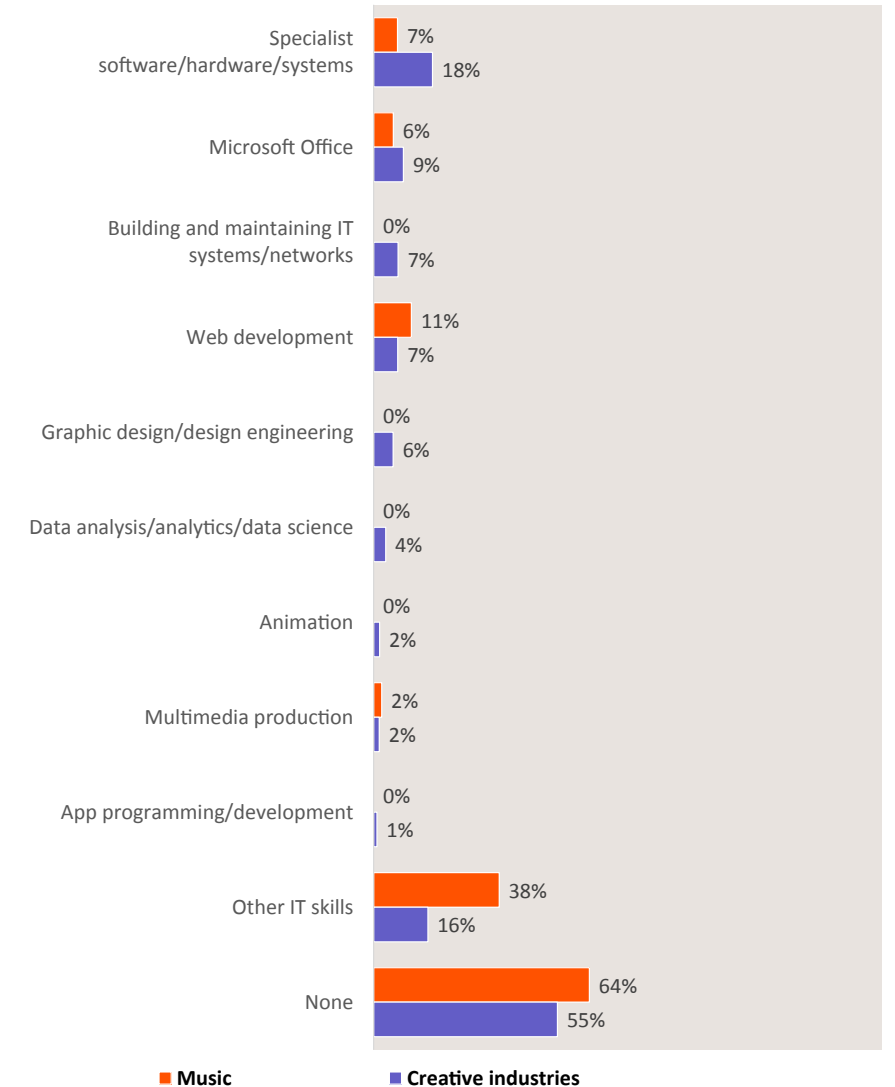
Source: CESS 2025

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 [SS Occupation] vacancies. If so, what specific IT skills have been lacking?

Base = establishments with skills shortage vacancies (n = 18)



Source: CESS, 2025

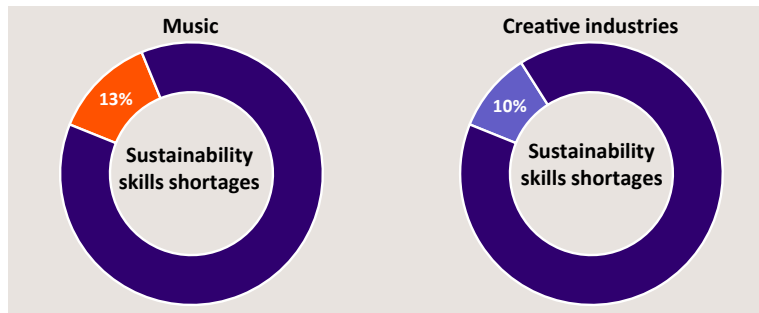
Notes: Responses are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

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 ISS 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 = 18)



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, core and transversal skills are also key.

The CESS 2025 suggests that in line with previous research (Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025), the core skills most difficult to find by music employers are skills such as planning and organising; working with others; verbal communication and speaking; and adapting. While this picture broadly mirrors the creative industries, a much higher share of employers in the music industry raised these skills issues. There is some alignment here with earlier research (Cultural and Creative Skills, 2011) around communication, teamwork and networking skills.

Other areas in the CESS 2025 that are a problem for a significant minority of music employers are writing; problem-solving and decision-making; and listening. That said, the number of respondents is low.

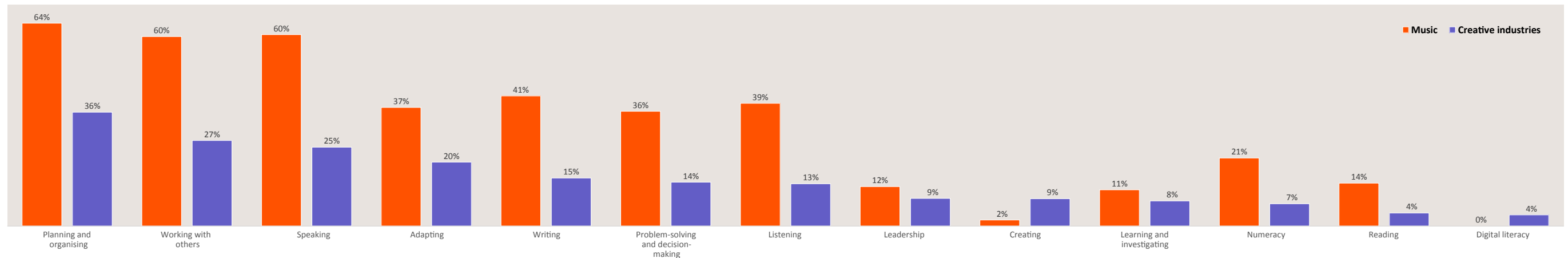
The employer consultations conducted for this study, taken alongside wider research, reinforce the need to combine technical and transversal skills highlighted by the CESS 2025. In particular, this underlines calls for industry-specific experience, where new recruits have a practical perspective and combine technical know-how with wider generic capabilities. This is especially important for live productions and events, with an ability to deliver to excellent standards while coping with uncertainty; being flexible; having resilience; trouble-shooting; and working to tight deadlines (Youth Music, 2024).

The CESS 2025 also provides up-to-date information about difficulties finding more sustainable or carbon-neutral skills. It appears that these were less of an issue overall for both the music industry and the creative industries. Indeed, only 13% of the music employers with skills shortages reported specific sustainability or green skills were lacking, compared to 10% for creative industries 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 = 18)



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 among their current workforce, just under one third of all employers (31%) within the music industry reported skills gaps. This is similar to the picture for the creative industries overall (32%). While levels of skills gaps appear higher than those seen in the Employer Skills Survey 2022 – at 11% of employers (Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025) – in part this potentially reflects the broader assessment of the workforce. Indeed, the CESS captures agency staff, the self-employed and freelance workers, in addition to employees, in reviewing the existence of skills gaps.

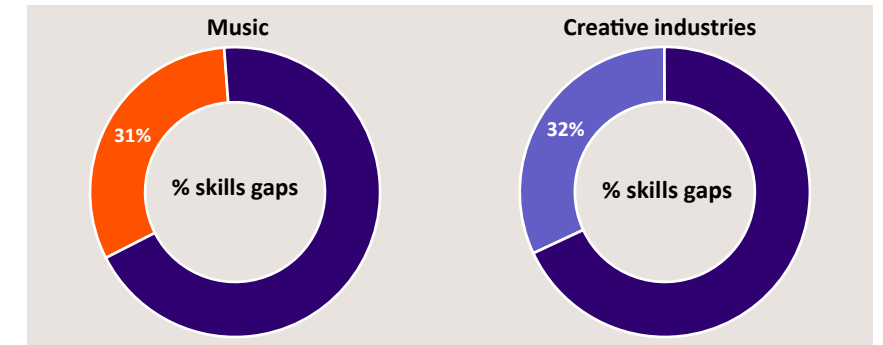
There are a variety of factors contributing to skills gaps. According to the CESS 2025, the most common causes are transitory – that is, they exist because individuals are new to their role (44% of music employers) or have only partially completed the training required for their position (36%). These findings are in line with wider evidence (Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025).

In addition, skills gaps may be an indicator of the positive ongoing business development and transformations. Examples of this exist where employers are introducing new working practices (32%). Furthermore, to a lesser extent music employers are introducing new technology and/or developing new products and services (but numbers here are low and should be viewed with caution).

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 = 70)

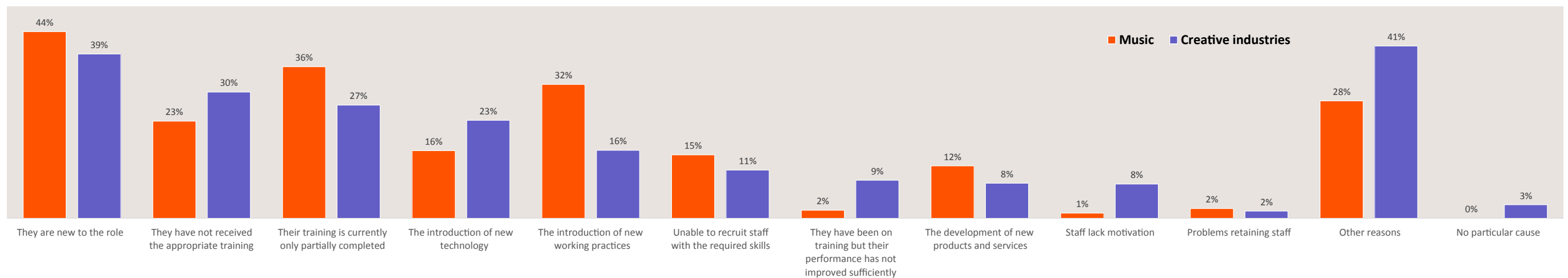


Source: CESS 2025

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 = 24)



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)

In common with most employers in the music industry reporting reasons for skills gaps that were transitory in nature, this aligned with the level of seniority of the staff working in these roles. Indeed, the majority of employers in the music industry stated that existing workers with gaps were less experienced (less than five years' experience), as new entrants or at early stages in their career. That said, a significant share of employers reported that experienced staff and experts also had skills gaps.

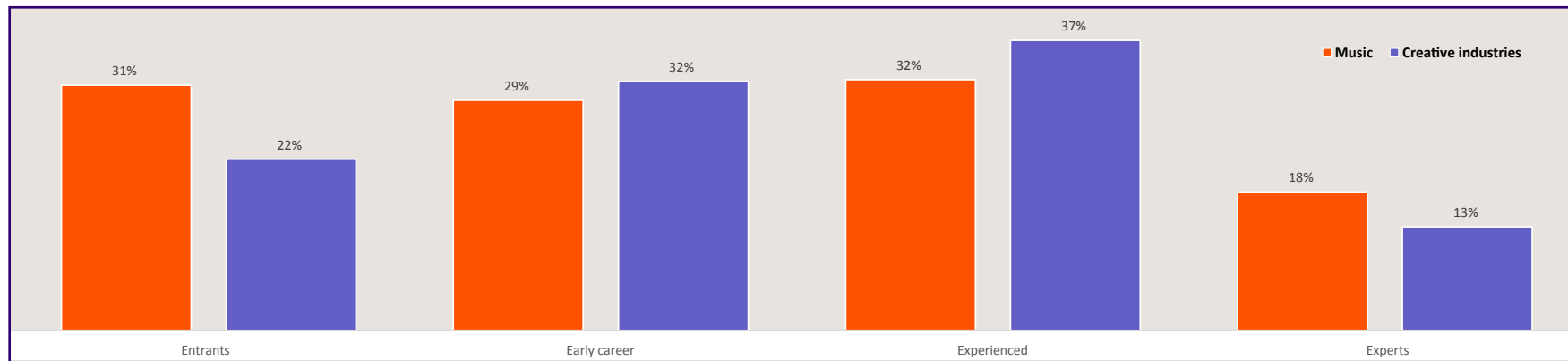
The CESS 2025 also provides an indication of the nature of roles where there were skills gaps. The most common roles with gaps were specialist roles to the sector. Again, as with skills shortages, the biggest area of concern was for broadcasting and entertainment producers, and sound engineers. Again, this aligns with existing research (UK Music, 2024), pointing to problems maintaining technical skills areas, especially with ongoing developments in technology such as technical off-stage, production and live events involving roles like experienced sound engineers (UK Music, 2024).

However, technical roles were not the only ones with skills issues, and wider, more generic roles were identified in areas of business, finance and marketing, including business and financial project management professionals, office managers, other administrative occupations, event managers and organisers, marketing managers, advertising and marketing executives, and sales-related occupations. There were also management roles, such as company managers and finance managers and directors as well as charitable organisation managers and directors. Skills gaps, as with skills shortages, also include skills issues with reference to music education and concerns with vocational and industrial trainers.

Wider research and employer insights from the roundtables confirmed some of the of roles exhibiting skills gaps. In particular, in line with changing technology and commercial models and moves to digital music and streaming, this increased the focus on business, financial and commercial roles (e.g. strategic planning, revenue diversification, digital marketing, compliance, licensing and IP knowledge) and management roles.

Figure 17: Seniority of staff with skills deficiencies, 2025

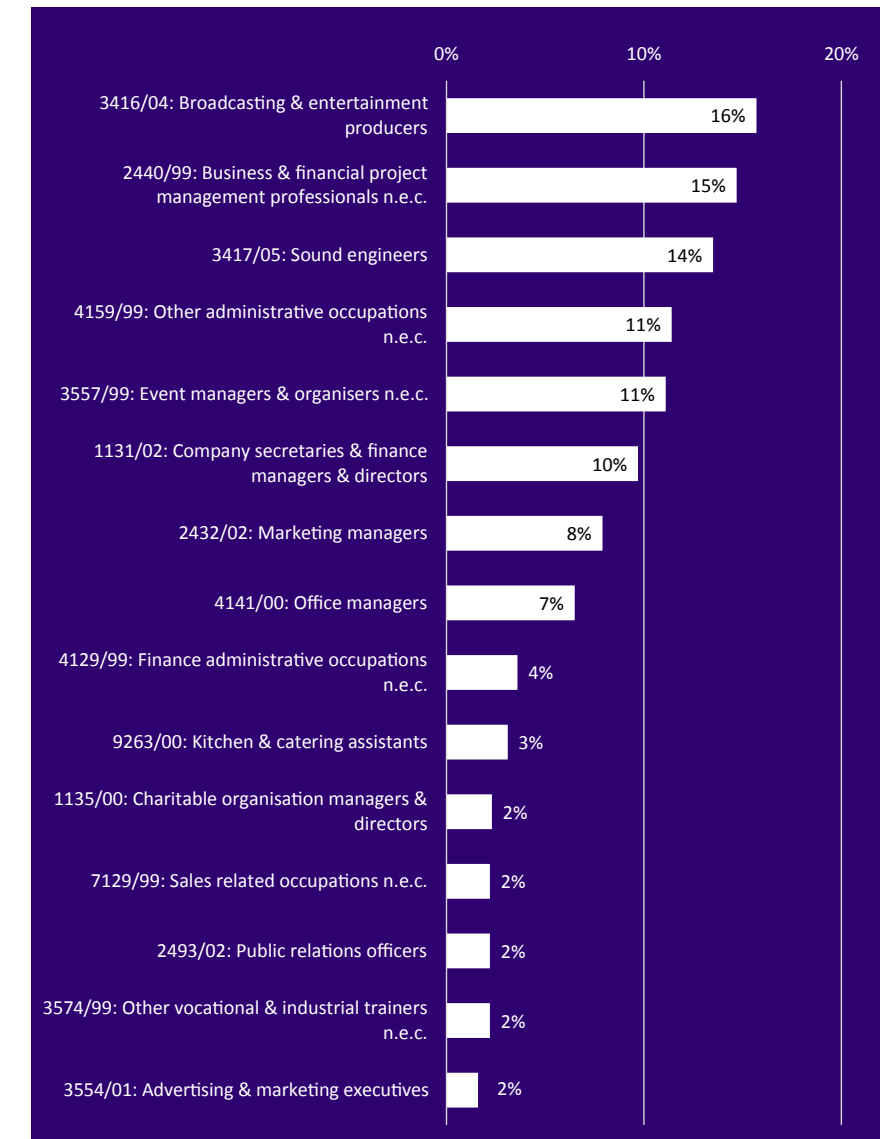
Q: How would you describe the level of experience or seniority of the staff working as (skills gap occupation)?
Base = establishments with skills gaps (n = 24)



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 = 24)



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 identified the main skills lacking in the existing music industry workforce as skills gaps. In common with shortages, this points to distinct musical creativity skills often associated with demands for a particular music genre or type of artist, such as for certain productions. Again, a wide range of unique industry knowledge was also cited to understand the practical and technical workings of music sub-sectors, with specific reference to technical areas like licensing and royalties. Skills attached to different technology also featured heavily in areas of technical productions and recording as well as wider business skills, including business development, sales and marketing. Wider research and employer insights from the roundtables referenced the challenges, especially for less experienced musicians, in developing their craft due to changes in the music ecosystem and the loss of grassroots venues (UK Music, 2024).

Furthermore, the CESS 2025 explores demands for digital skills in the music industry. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the traditional focus of the sector on specialist and musical capabilities, nearly half of employers reported that they do not currently have digital skills gaps (48% of music employers vs 67% in the creative industries). That said, with the wider impact of technology on the sector, some digital skills gaps were still reported, despite low numbers. This perhaps provides a signal as to where future demands may grow. For example, this includes Microsoft Office, specialist software/hardware/systems, multimedia production skills, web development, and building and maintaining IT systems/networks.

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 = 24)



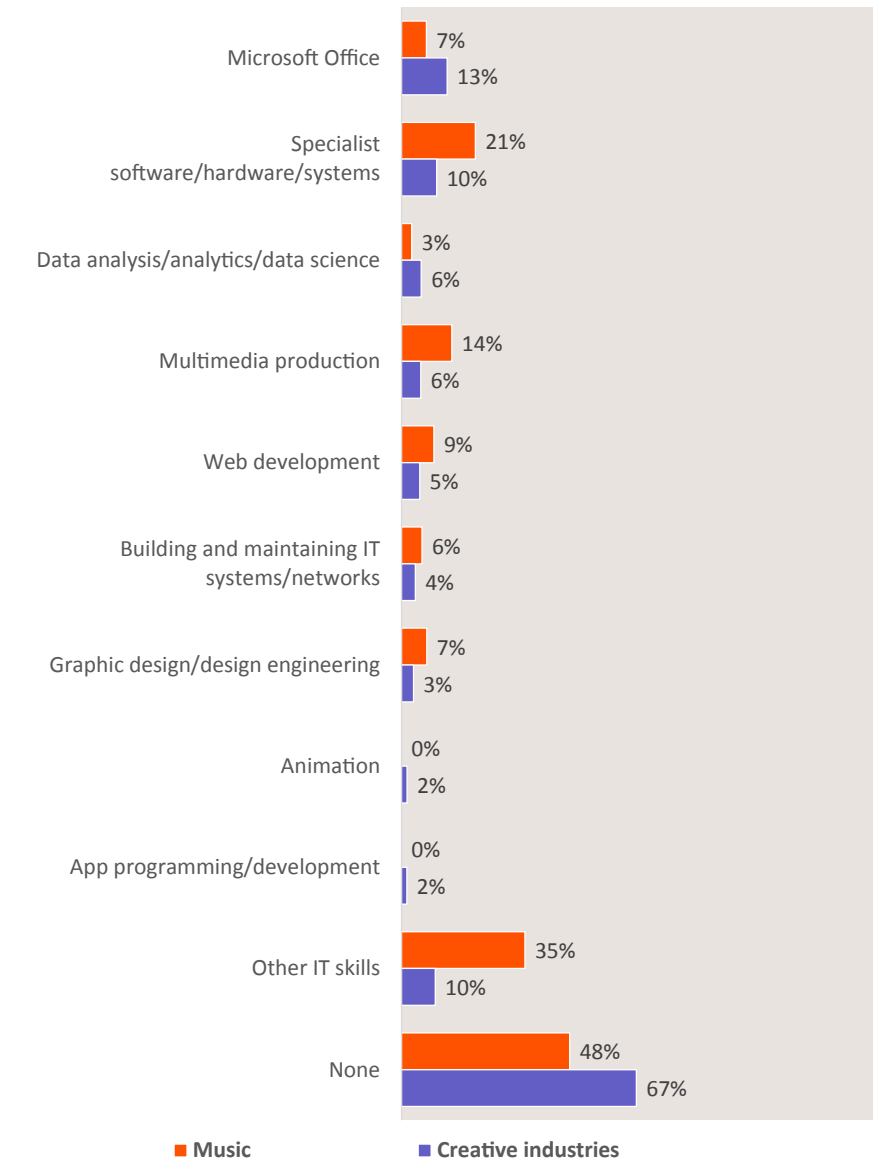
Source: CESS 2025

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

Figure 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 = 24)



Source: CESS, 2025

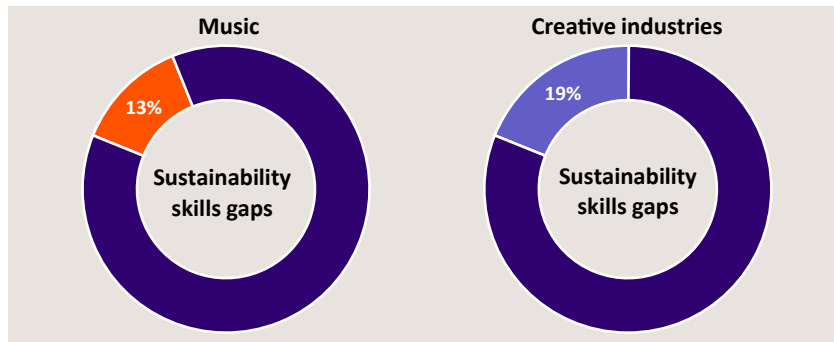
Notes: Responses are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

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 = 24)



Transferable skills were also found to be deficient among the workforce by some employers in the music industry.

Most commonly these involved planning and organising, and working with others. Other areas identified, although to a lesser degree, included speaking, listening, writing, problem-solving and decision-making, leadership and creating. Unlike the creative industries more generally, there was less emphasis on adapting, and learning and investigating.

Given the low numbers, the results have been validated with existing research and the employer roundtable.

In common with skills shortages, wider evidence points to challenges building the right mix of generic skills among the existing workforce, alongside growing digital capabilities (UK Music, 2024; Taggart, n.d.; Cultural and Creative Skills, 2011). One key skill in this regard is seen to be management capability.

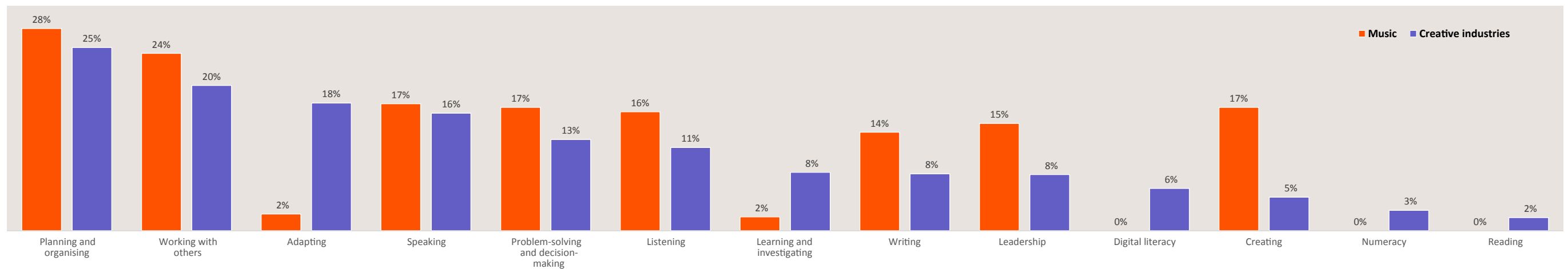
In addition, attention is drawn to concerns with 'real-world experience' and 'show craft'. This was especially where new recruits and those early in their careers had built up less practical experience for live productions and events. With pressures on grassroots venues and a decline in the schedule of live events, this has raised concern about there being sufficient opportunity and experience to learn how to deliver to excellent standards while coping with uncertainty, being flexible, having resilience, trouble-shooting and working to tight deadlines (House of Commons, 2024).

Despite general expectations that demands for green skills will increase, when reviewing the emphasis on sustainable or carbon-neutral skills among the existing workforce, this points to similar levels of concern relative to skills shortages. That said, this was at lower levels overall (only 13% of employers with skills gaps in the music industry) and when compared to the creative industries employers as a whole (19%).

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 = 24)



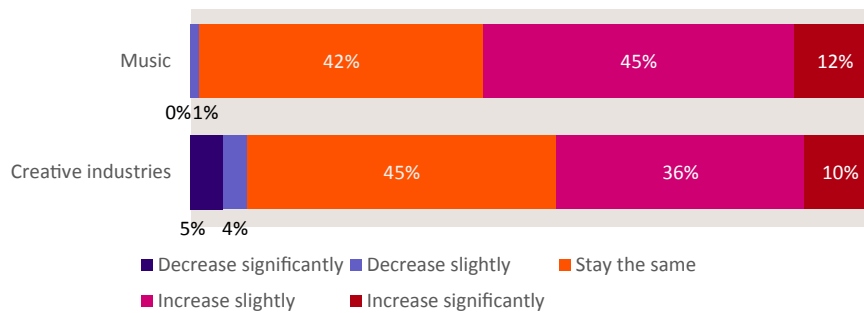
Source: CESS, 2025

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 = 70)



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. This points to a fairly high degree of ambition, especially in the music industry.

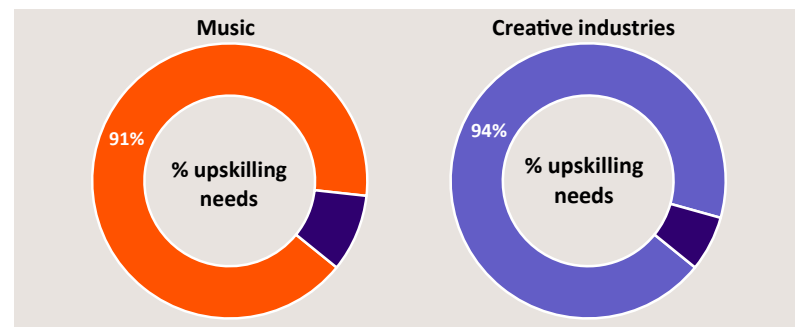
Indeed, over half of employers in the sector expect to be increasing the number of staff they employ over this period (57% of music employers vs 46% of creative industries employers). Further, almost all (91%) music employers that expect to grow staff numbers also anticipate a need to upgrade the skills of their workforce over the next three to five years.

A closer examination of the reasons behind business requirements to acquire new skills among the workforce shows that a high share of employers report technological advancement and innovation as key drivers.

This is seen, for example, through the introduction of new technologies or equipment (79%), the development of new products and services (78%) and the introduction of new working practices (65%). That said, new legislative requirements are also a fairly significant factor (64%). All these results are broadly in line with the creative industries as a whole.

Figure 24: Employer expectations for upskilling in next three to five years, 2025

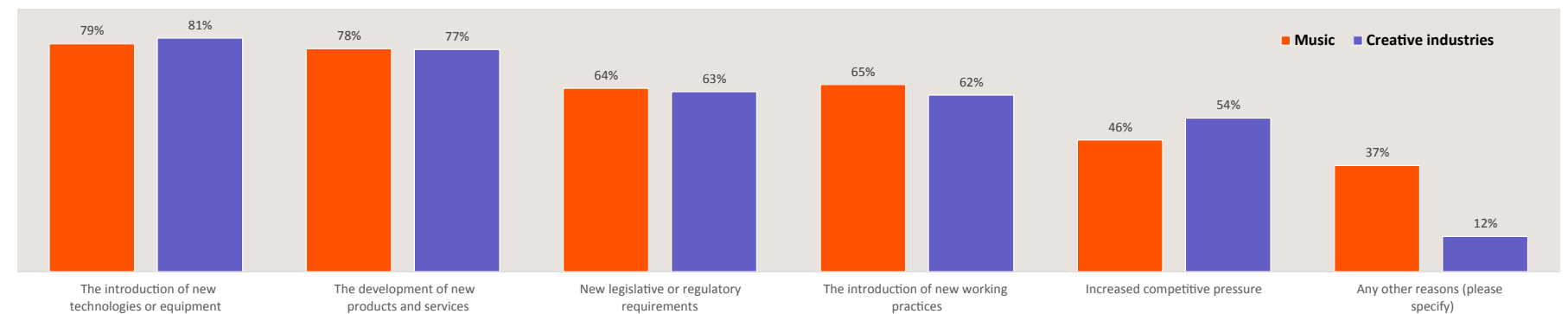
Q: Over the next three to five years, do you expect that any staff at this site will need to acquire new skills or knowledge? ≠ 'None'
Base = establishments expecting to increase staff numbers in future (n = 38)



Source: CESS 2025

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 with upskilling needs (n = 38)



Source: CESS 2025

7. Future jobs and skills needs (continued)

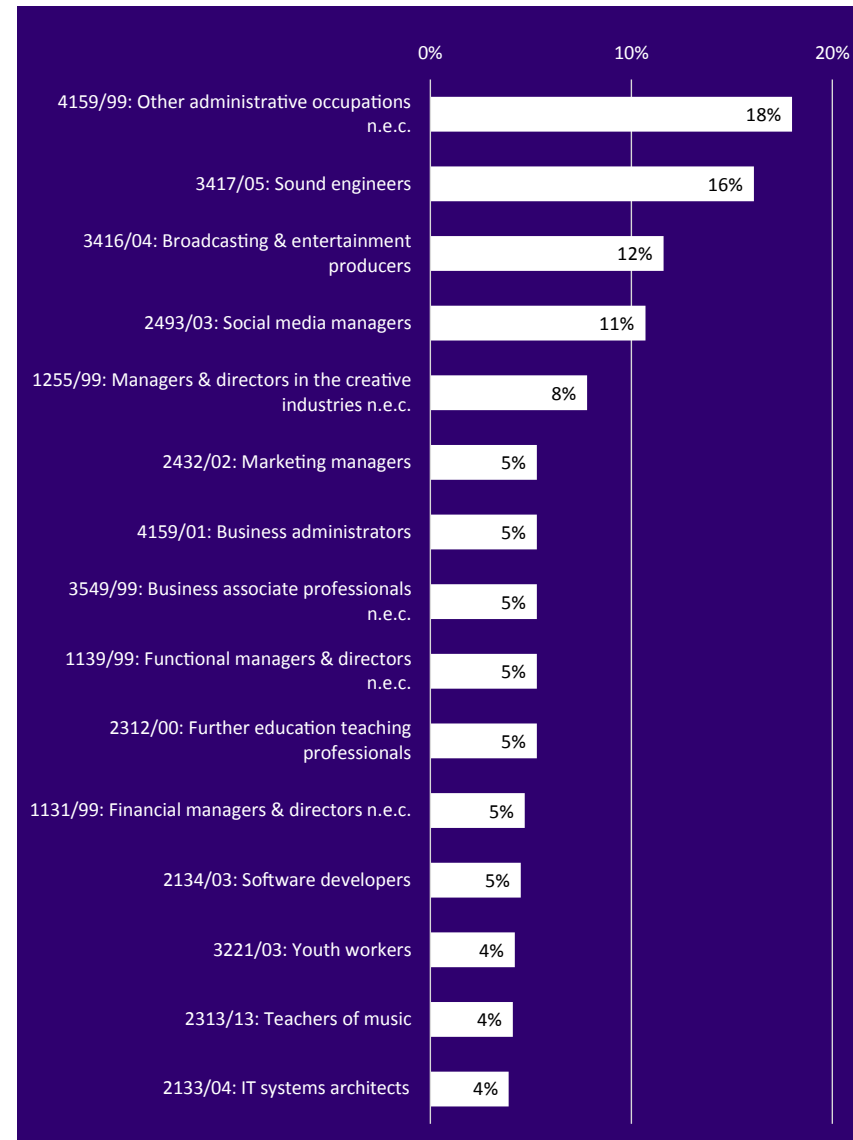
The CESS 2025 also takes a detailed look at the nature of new roles that employers expect to require in the next three to five years among the workforce and future upskilling needs. First those roles expected to grow in the future were considered. The most common specialist roles were sounds engineers, and broadcasting and entertainment producers (e.g. studio managers, live performance producers). Furthermore, wider, more generic roles were identified in areas of business, finance and marketing, including marketing managers, social media managers, business administrators, other administrative occupations and business associate professionals. In contrast to current skills challenges with reference to future roles, specific technical digital roles were also mentioned, such as software developers and IT system architects. There were also key management roles identified, such as managers and directors in the creative industries, functional managers and directors, and financial managers and directors.

In addition, the CESS 2025 reviews the top roles that are expected to require new skills in future. Again, this covers a mix of specialist and broader areas. Starting with the technical roles in the sector, we find the most common ones include sound engineers, broadcasting and entertainment producers, and theatre managers. In addition, wider, generic roles include a particular focus on future business and financial development, such as business development managers, financial advisers and planners, financial accounts managers, and dispatch distribution managers. Once again, roles expected to have future upskilling needs include specific digital roles, such as software developers, network and systems administrators, and social media managers.

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 that expect staff numbers to increase (n = 37)

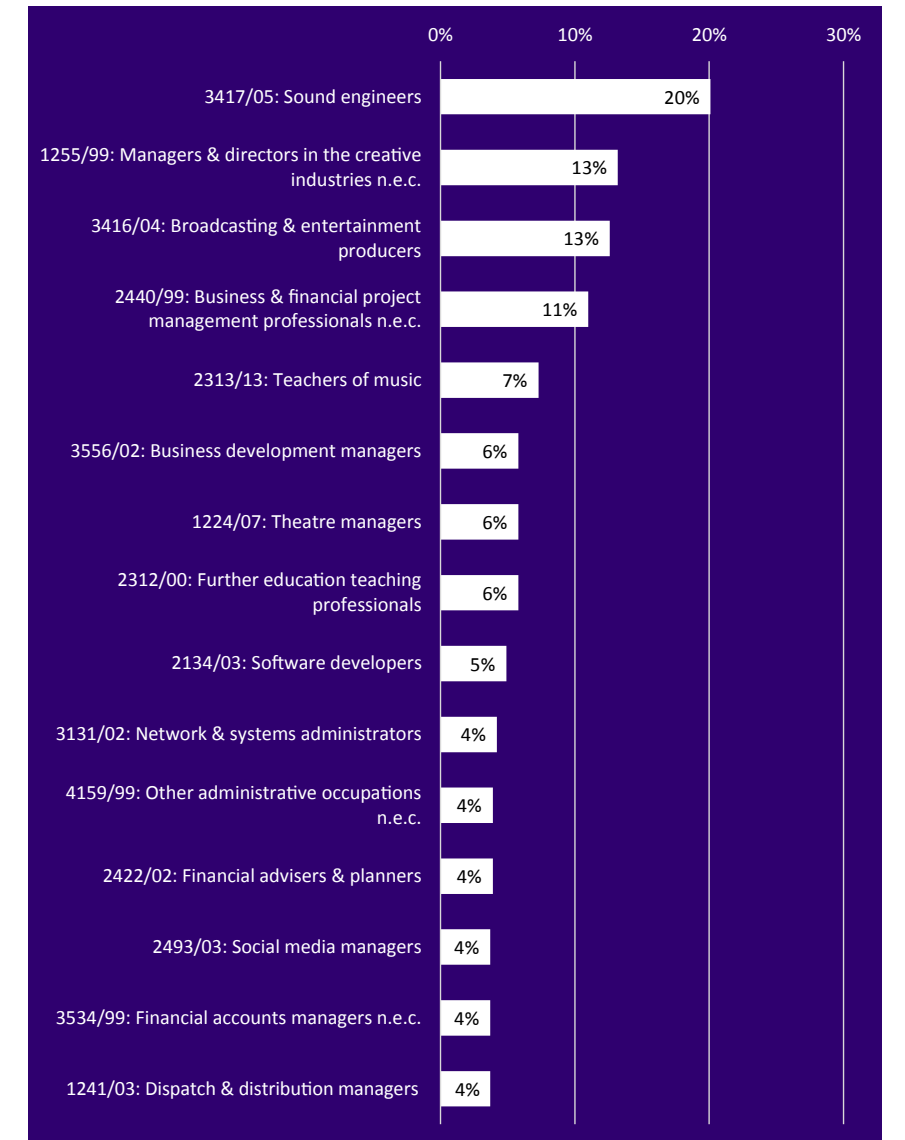


Source: CESS 2025

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 = 35)



Source: CESS 2025

7. Future jobs and skills needs (continued)

The CESS 2025 also identified the main technical skills expected to be required by music employers in the future. This highlighted many specialist technical production skills and generic business skills similar to those identified for shortages and gaps and reported earlier. That said, there was a greater focus on developing financial expertise to maintain financial viability, and sales and marketing skills to keep up with the effects of technological changes and evolving avenues to access music and optimise customer engagement. In this context, a range of specific digital skills were also emphasised.

The CESS 2025 further explored the likely future demand for digital skills in the sector. Overall, 65% of employers in the music industry with upskilling needs expected to require new digital skills over the next three to five years – this was similar to the creative industries overall. Several digital skills were expected to grow, such as skills in data analysis, specialist software and hardware, Microsoft Office, web development, app programming/development, multimedia production and graphic design/design engineering. Unsurprisingly, references were also made to extending the use of AI.

Wider research and roundtable discussions suggest technology will create more hybrid roles, blending digital and creative skills and enhancing audiences' interactive experiences through immersive media (WEF, 2025). For example, in studios and live production, AI music programmers and audio engineers will work with AI tools to compose and enhance music, and immersive experience designers, event technologists and XR producers may enhance virtual music experiences with augmented and mixed realities. The effects are anticipated to be cross-cutting, not only in music but in other parts of the creative industries, as music integrates with screen and games design.

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 = 35)

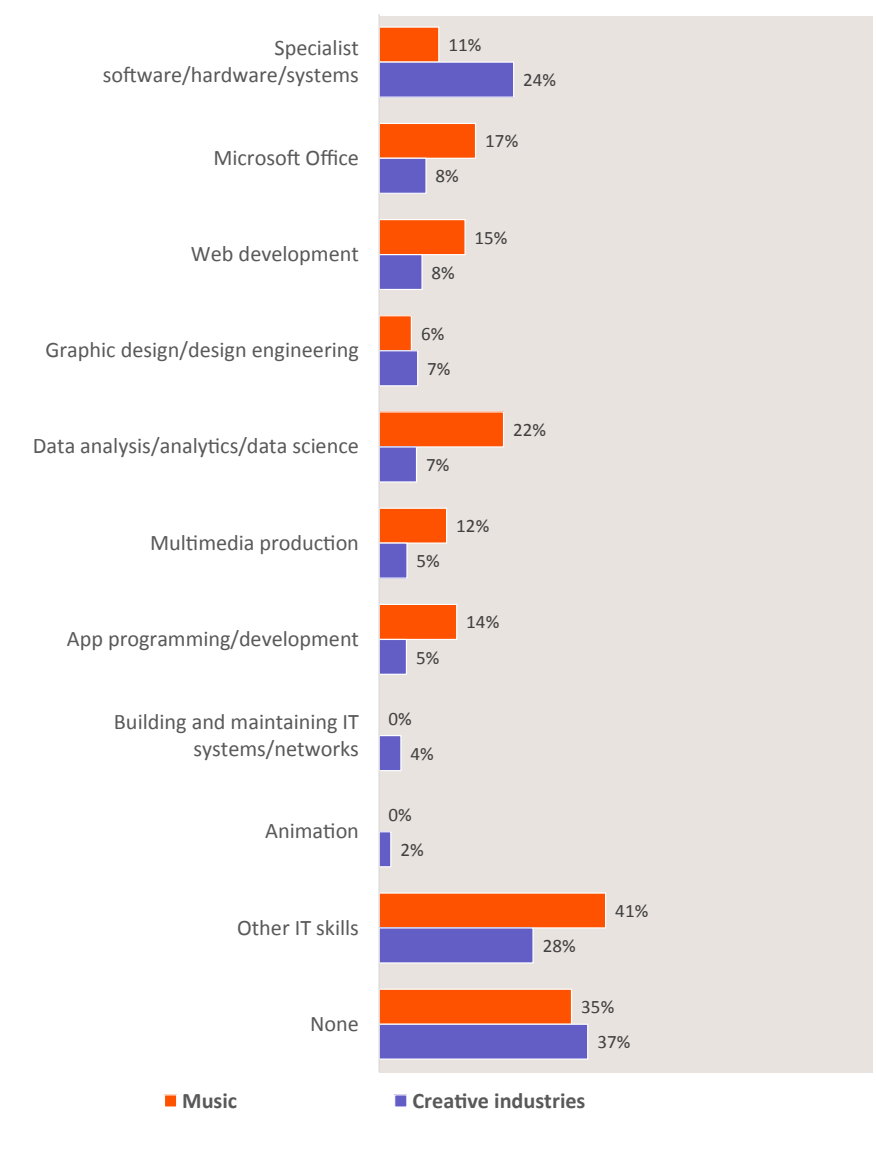


Source: CESS 2025

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 = 35)



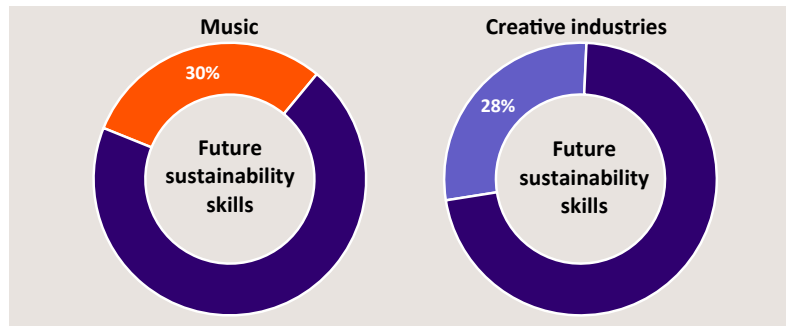
Source: CESS 2025

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 = 35)



Wider research and employer insights from the roundtables also suggest that a growth in technology is expected to enhance the value of human musical creativity. In future, calls for musical originality are expected to heighten to preserve the human contribution and to keep ahead of AI-generated musical content and products. This is anticipated to place an emphasis on composers and musicians crafting compelling content and compositions with fresh ideas and originality that will emotionally resonate with audiences. But with hybrid roles will come a fusion of wider skills. Advances in technology will not only increase digital skills and data literacy but core skills.

The CESS 2025 identifies current perspectives of employers in the music industry around what core, transferable skills will need improving in the next three to five years.

Most commonly, these involved planning and organising, working with others, and adapting. In addition, a higher percentage of music employers than creative industries employers highlighted a need for problem-solving and decision-making, learning and investigating, and creating.

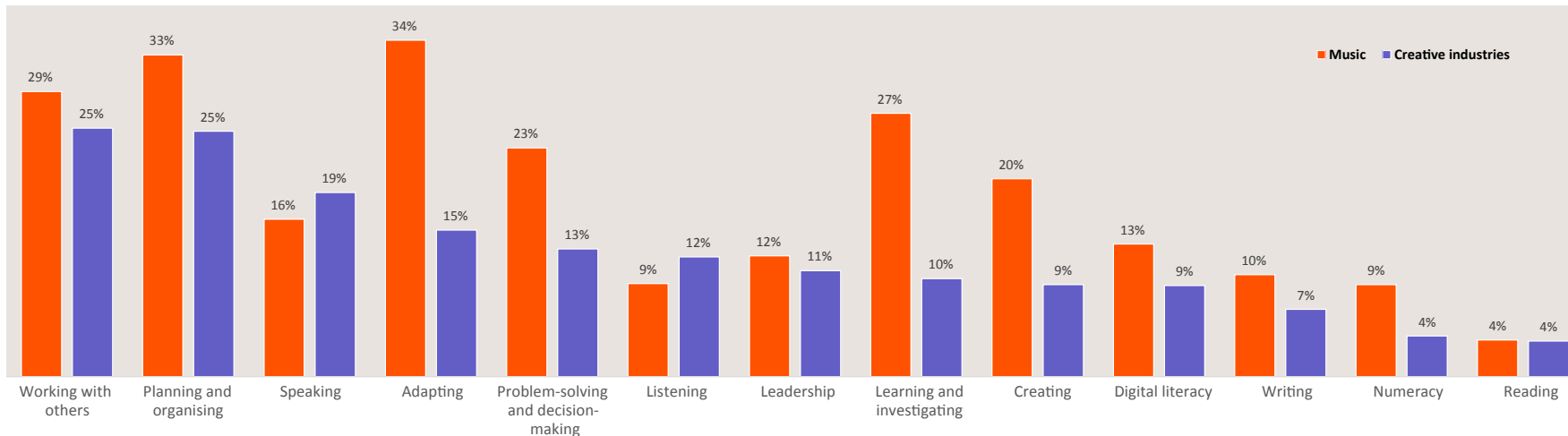
In line with the CESS 2025, wider research supports a growing requirement for the future music workforce to have more generic skills such as creativity, communication, problem-solving and teamwork (WEF, 2025). Further to this, in volatile, project-based industries like music, with fluctuating work patterns and high volumes of freelance work, there is also expected to be a need for adaptability, resilience and ability to continuously learn. Furthermore, with a more global economy there is expected to be a greater push for inclusion, cultural awareness, diversity and ethical practices to enhance the reach to global audiences.

When reviewing requirements in the next three to five years for sustainable or carbon-neutral skills among the music industry, this points to a potential growth in future demand. For example, a higher level of employers in the sector with upskilling needs reported that they expect to require specific sustainability and green skills in future (30%). Interestingly, this also exceeds levels for creative industries employers overall (28%). This likely future growth is also confirmed by wider research (WEF, 2025). Indeed, it is thought to reflect an increase not only in the importance of environmental concerns in future, but wider work across the sector to promote understanding and good practice. For example, Arts Council England has been running an environmental programme since 2012. This has been providing a range of resources, tools and training to support creative and cultural organisations to take climate action. Returns from its annual review (Arts Council England, 2024) suggest increasing take-up.

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 = 35)



8. Employer investment in skills

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

It appears that the effects are widespread, with 71% of music employers reporting some kind of impact – similar to all creative industries employers (69%). This suggests, as in wider evidence, that skills deficiencies are an important business concern for the sector. Indeed, a sizeable minority (35%) reported that such skills challenges are increasing the workload for other staff. Other common impacts reported include experiencing increased operating costs and a reduction in long-term growth or investment plans. In addition, in contrast to the creative industries as a whole, fewer employers in the music industry reported having difficulties meeting deadlines and delays in developing new products or services.

Almost all (99%) of employers across the sector were taking some action in response to skills challenges and more so than in the creative industries as a whole (82%). The most frequent response was to increase training for the existing workforce, something that was pursued by nearly three fifths of music employers (57%), exceeding levels for the creative industries as a whole (47%). Other common actions included taking on and training less well-qualified recruits, expanding trainee and apprenticeship programmes and redefining existing jobs.

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 = 30)

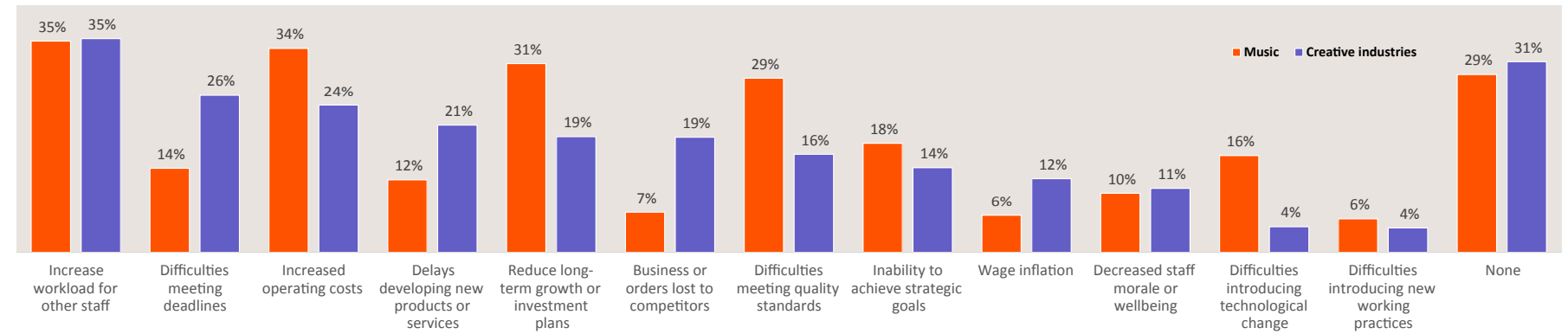
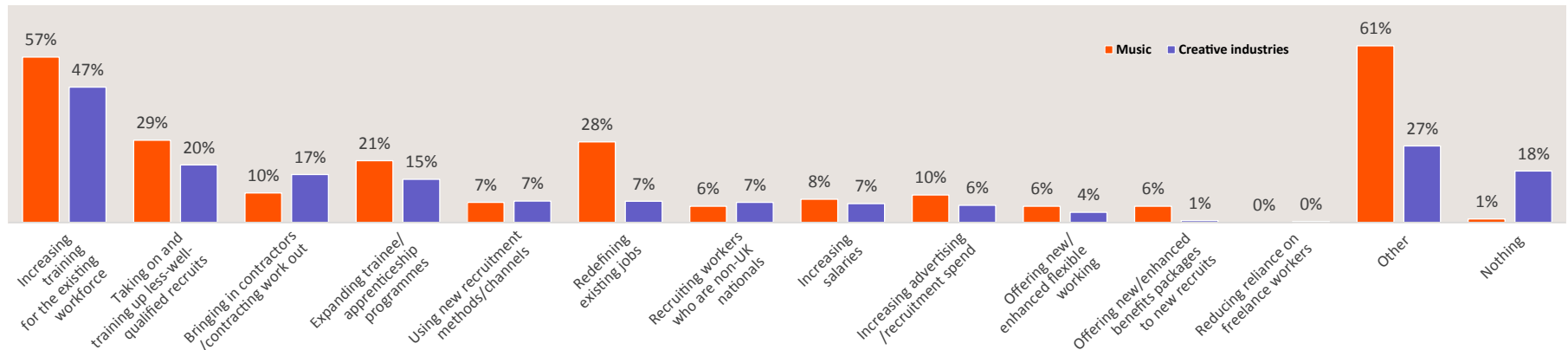


Figure 33: Response to skills challenges, 2025

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

Base = establishments with skills shortages or skills gaps (n = 30)



Source: CESS 2025

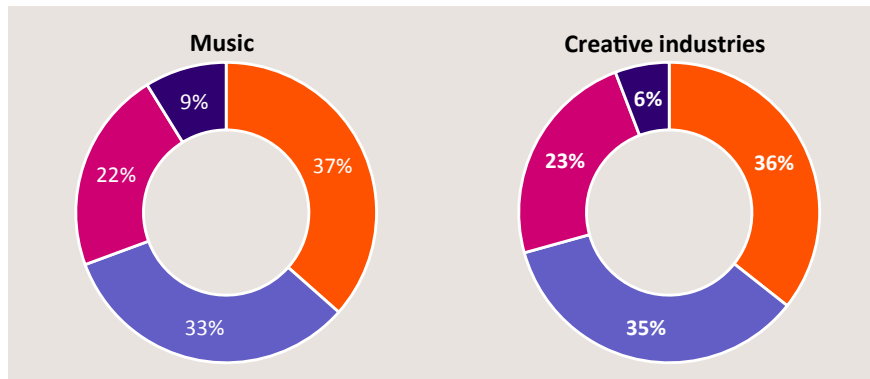
8. Employer investment in skills (continued)

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 employers in the creative industries' sub-sectors, such as the music sector, are investing sufficiently in upskilling and reskilling their workforce.

As highlighted earlier, various occupations relevant to the music industry rely heavily on higher education pathways to provide the baseline, foundation education for early-career workers. In particular, there is a focus on specialist subjects, including music production, music technology and music publishing. That said, a number of roles also value technical pathways,

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 = 70)



- On-the-job training/development
- Both on-the-job training and off-the-job training/development
- Neither/none
- Off-the-job training/development

Source: CESS 2025

supporting the take-up of arts education at school (e.g. music, drama and arts subjects), technical subjects through FE and apprenticeships (where they exist), and ongoing training, alongside practical work experience.

The CESS 2025 provides an indication of the extent of employer training provision arranged or funded by employers in the music industry over the past twelve months to keep the baseline of skills relevant. This includes not only training for employees, but that provided to agency staff, the self-employed or freelance workers.

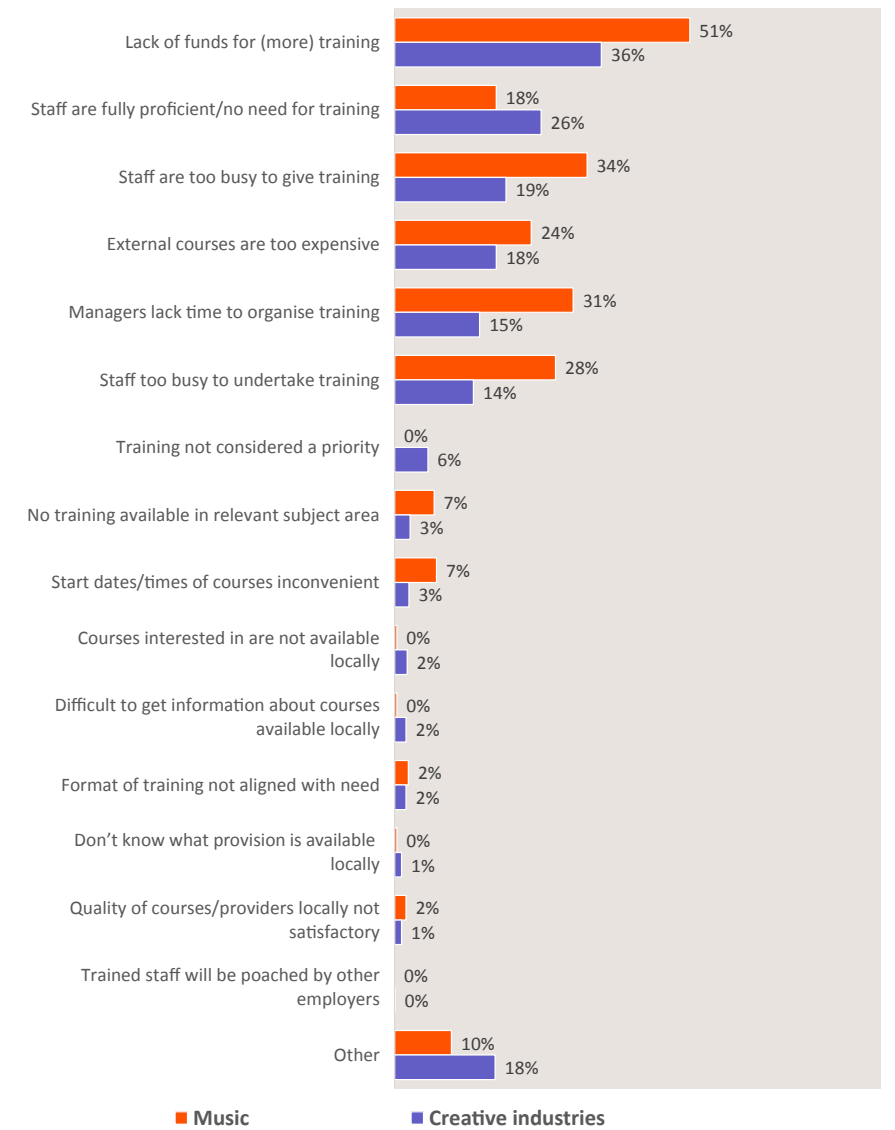
Positively, the CESS 2025 data points to higher levels of training with this broader definition than indicated elsewhere (e.g. see the Employer Skills Survey, 2022; Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025). Indeed, just over three quarters of firms in the music industry (78%) provided some kind of development, compared to 77% in the creative industries. In contrast, this means around one quarter did not provide any training.

Further, most of the training provided was either as a blend of off- and on-the-job training (33% vs 35%) or on-the-job training only (37% 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). In a context of ongoing technological advances in working practices, and growing skills challenges, there is clearly room for improvement.

A closer examination of the reasons music employers are inhibited in providing any training points to the obstacles that need to be overcome to enhance training levels in future. By far, the most common barrier reported by employers in the music industry is a lack of funds for more training (51% vs 36%), which exceeds the rate for the creative industries as a whole. Other barriers include constraints on timing, such as staff being too busy to give training (34%), managers lacking time (31%) and staff being too busy to undertake training (28%).

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 = 70)



Source: CESS 2025

8. Employer investment in skills (continued)

Although the CESS 2025 points to higher levels of training in the context of considerable future upskilling needs, it is important that employers within the music industry are supported to continue to invest in the skills of their workforce.

When considering the measures that would enable music employers to continue to invest in skills and training, a range of factors are considered important. Indeed, the majority of employers in the sector would value financial subsidies towards the cost of training (78%) and tax relief on

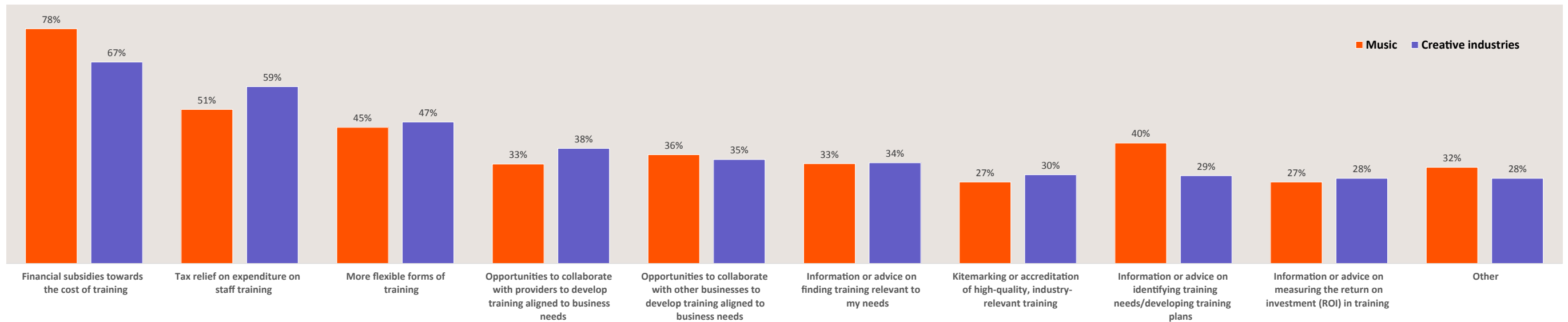
expenditure on staff training (51%). This is perhaps less surprising given the high level of employers reporting financial pressures as a significant barrier to training.

Furthermore, with widespread concerns about constraints on time as a further barrier, there is also stronger support for measures such as more flexible forms of training (45%). In addition, other common responses among employers in the music industry included accessing information or advice on identifying training needs (40%), opportunities to collaborate with other businesses to provide training (36%) and better kitemarking or accreditation of high-quality industry-relevant training (27%).

The CESS 2025 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 present to music employers. This included 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 funding of modular training such as through the Growth and Skills Levy and the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (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 = 70)



Source: CESS 2025

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