

PERFORMING AND VISUAL ARTS



**Creative Industries
Policy and Evidence Centre**

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Creative Industries Skills Audits

Creative Industries Skills Audits

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About Work Advance

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

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

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

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

The performing and visual arts sector is significant to the creative economy. Indeed, with employment exceeding 273,000 in 2024, it accounts for a sizeable share (11%) of the creative industries workforce. While there have been modest increases in employment since 2014, and periods of severe contraction at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is currently growing confidence in a longer-term recovery.

Just under a third (31%) of performing and visual arts employers who had hired staff (including freelancers) in the past two years reported recruitment difficulties. These were mostly caused by candidates lacking the skills or experience required for the role.

In the sector, skills shortages were most acute when employers were recruiting early-career candidates with two to five years' experience (47%). In turn, a fifth of recruiting employers were looking for new entrants. Employers struggle to recruit to specialist roles in artistic content and performance activities: theatre technicians; children's entertainers; art consultants; actors; broadcasting and entertainment producers; and arts officers, producers and directors. There are also challenges with business, finance, sales and marketing roles.

Technical skills shortages cover specialist production skills linked to operating lighting, sound and audio-visual (AV) systems. Increasingly this calls for advanced digital skills in technical domains. Business and commercial skills are also highlighted, as well as transversal skills.

2 Current skills gaps in the existing workforce

Alongside the challenge of skills shortages when recruiting, performing and visual arts employers also pointed to skills deficiencies among their workforce. In 2025, skills gaps affected 39% of employers in the sector.

Many of these are transitory in nature – that is, they exist because individuals are new to their role (cited by 42% of performing and visual arts employers with skills gaps) or have only partially completed the training required for their position (19%). In addition, skills gaps may be an indicator of the positive, ongoing business development and transformation of firms. Examples of this include evidence that employers are introducing new technology (26%) and working practices (20%). In a context of change, it is also of interest that 43% of employers said staff have not received appropriate training.

Most commonly, performing and visual arts employers reported skills deficiencies amongst workers who were relatively early (2 to 5 years) into their careers – cited by 44% of employers with skills gaps in the sub-sector compared to 32% across the creative industries.

The occupations where employers suggest skills gaps feature most heavily closely mirrors those hardest to recruit for, with the addition of studio and stage managers, and camera and photographic equipment technicians. Employers suggest the workforce needs stronger technical, business and transversal skills, while industry stakeholders also emphasise the importance of rehearsal time to maintain hands-on practice and show-craft skills.

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

Performing and visual arts employers are relatively positive about the future outlook, with 43% of employers in the sector expecting to grow staff numbers over the next three to five years. The vast majority of those that do, also anticipate a need to upgrade the skills of the workforce, often due to the introduction of new technologies, the development of new products and services and the introduction of new working practices.

Many of the production roles subject to skills shortages and gaps today are expected to be in growing demand in future: theatre technicians, actors, entertainers and presenters. There is also expected to be an ongoing call for business roles in sales and marketing, business development and finance. Education and community outreach support functions were also cited.

As for skills gaps, employers anticipate a need for workers to upgrade core technical skills and broader business capabilities in future. Yet lines are increasingly expected to blur between artistic disciplines, and technology and creative sub-sectors, calling for cross-disciplinary skills, especially driven by technology (e.g. technicians scripting customised solutions to manage theatre technology systems, immersive and virtual technologists designing digital scenography, and artists creating coding in art making and interactive installations) and by business development (e.g. accountants utilising new revenue streams via merchandising; and marketers exploiting audience insight via ticketing systems, social media intelligence and streaming metrics).

4 Taking action to address skills challenges for the industry

Skills challenges are having a significant impact on the sector. Nearly three quarters (73%) of performing and visual arts organisations that experience skills shortages or skills gaps report an impact, often increased the workload of other staff, increased operating costs, the loss of business or orders to competitors and decreased staff morale.

The majority of employers in the sector (90%) are taking action in response, and 88% had provided training over the past year. While reported rates compare favourably with wider surveys, only a minority provide off-the-job training (10%).

Performing and visual arts employers reported a range of factors influencing and/or inhibiting training patterns. The most common, which exceed the levels reported by the creative industries as a whole, are a lack of funds for more training (49% vs 36%) and external courses being too expensive (22% vs 18%). Time constraints also feature, with employers suggesting staff are too busy to give training (24% vs 19%) and undertake training (16% vs 14%) and managers lack time to organise training (13% vs 15%).

The sector called for more financial support and flexible training. There is interest in advancing collaboration between industry and education providers to improve the relevance of training, especially for freelancers (e.g. enhancing HE provision and widening and flexing apprenticeship and placement offers), improvements to careers information and campaigning, and the funding of modular training via the Growth and Skills Levy and 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 performing and visual arts.

The research utilises the DCMS definition of the creative industries, which includes the following Standard Industrial Classification codes for the performing and visual arts:

- 90.01 Performing arts
- 90.02 Support activities to performing arts
- 90.03 Artistic creation
- 90.04 Operation of arts facilities
- 85.52 Cultural education (50%)

The wider creative sub-sectors for the Skills Audits of the creative industries cover 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 music.

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 (Government Office for Science, 2016; 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).

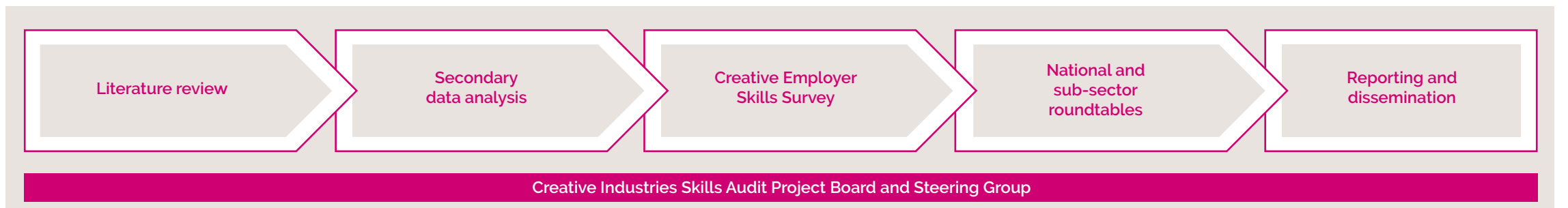
The research team deployed a rigorous, five-stage approach to developing the Skills Audits, including:

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

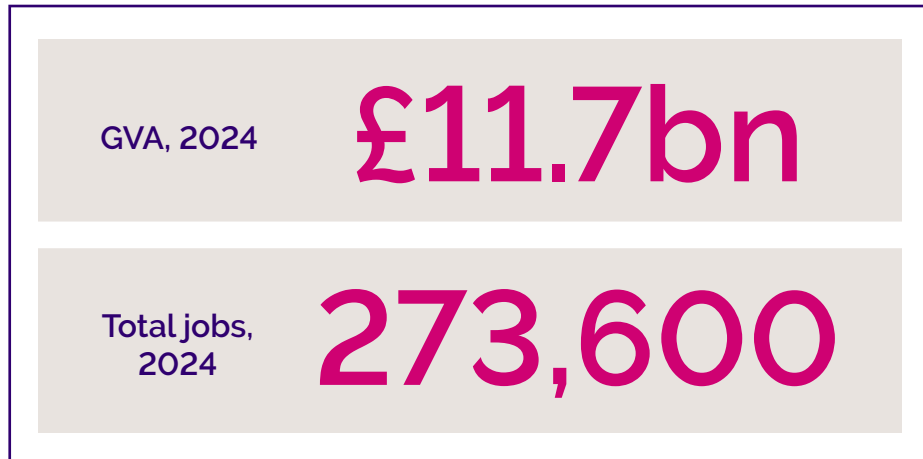
- **New primary research** – the Creative Employer Skills Survey (CESS) – including over 1,300 telephone interviews with employers across the creative industries to explore their perspectives on skills priorities, the talent pipeline, barriers and enablers to skills investment;
- **A series of roundtables**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

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

Figure 1: Developing the Creative Industries Skills Audits



2. Sector profile and performance



The performing and visual arts sector is a vibrant component of the creative industries. Indeed, with an annual contribution of £11.7bn in gross added value (GVA) and with employment exceeding 270,000 in 2024, it accounts for a sizeable share (11%) of the creative industries workforce.

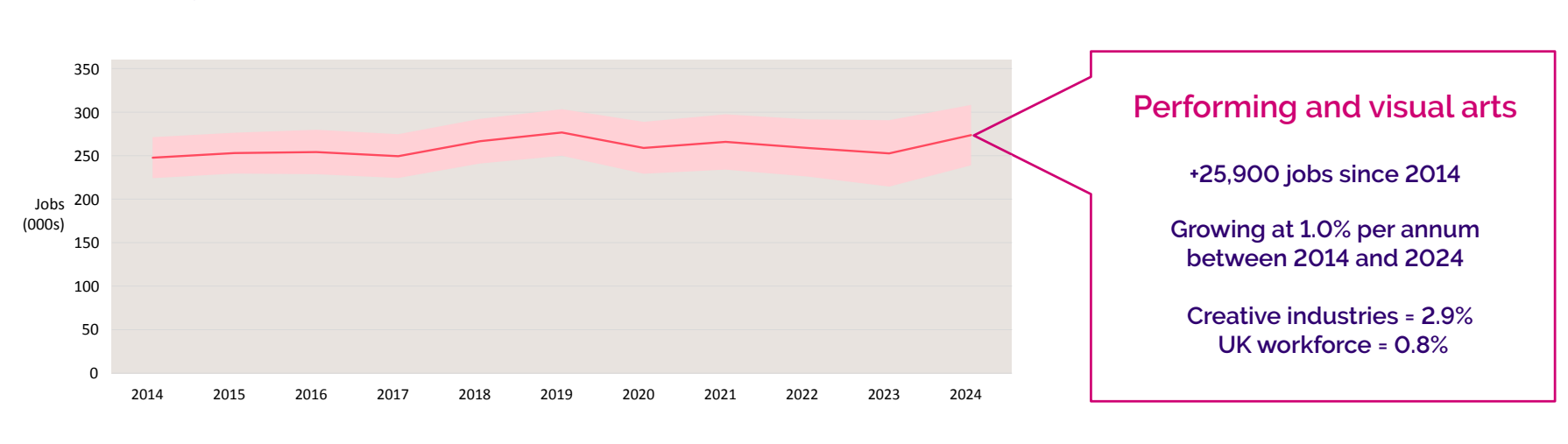
The sector encompasses artistic content, artwork and performance activities, including theatre, dance, opera and circus, and visual arts such as painting and sculpture. This is supported by a range of production, management and publicity activities, crucial to delivering and promoting productions, exhibitions and events.

The sector comprises a mix of social enterprise, not-for-profit and commercial organisations. These are funded through commercial activities, such as ticket sales and merchandise; public funding, for example from Arts Council England, local authorities and other public bodies; and contributed income, which includes sponsorship, trusts and donations. Parts of the sector are heavily subsidised by public funding (Arts Council England, 2020).

Recent trend analysis points to a 1.0% per annum growth in employment for the sector between 2014 and 2024. This equates to an increase of just under 26,000 jobs. This compares to an average rate of growth of 2.9% for the creative industries as a whole and is broadly in line with UK workforce average (0.8%). That said, while growth was severely depressed at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, rates are beginning to stabilise again and there is growing confidence in a longer-term recovery.

Geographically, opportunities are concentrated in cultural hubs and creative city clusters as production schedules (e.g. rehearsals, performances and installations) often take place sporadically and in intensive bursts, focused around shows, premieres or exhibitions. Regions like the South-East of England, North-West England and Scotland have significant creative employment in the sector, but artists will migrate towards major cities and away from rural areas and some devolved nations (e.g. Northern Ireland and Wales) where there are fewer opportunities.

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 number of 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 is often cyclical, commission-driven and project-based in the sector as a whole (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023), levels of self-employment are generally high overall and double the UK economy average (28% vs 14%). In common with such features, levels of self-employment are significantly higher within the performing and visual arts sector and account for 67% of the workforce. Research from Arts Council England suggests that a project- and freelance-heavy business model creates low job security, non-linear careers and a high incidence of portfolio careers among the workforce, often in jobs outside the sector (University of Essex, 2024).

In line with the creative industries workforce generally, which is highly skilled, the performing and visual arts sector is highly qualified. Indeed, 67% of workers in the sector have a degree or higher qualification. That said, the occupational profile is quite distinct, reflecting the different sub-sectoral skills demands and largely centred on the various core activities of the sector. Key roles include:

- Artistic content and performance activities in front-facing roles, which cover actors, dancers, choreographers, opera singers, circus artists, visual artists (painters, sculptors and illustrators), installation and performance artists, directors, playwrights and composers;
- Production and promotion activities involving lighting designers and technicians, sound engineers, stage managers, set designers and carpenters, costume designers and wardrobe technicians, wig and makeup artists, prop makers, stagehands, riggers and automation specialists;

- Background and management activities, including roles such as producers, directors, production managers, arts administrators, venue managers, marketing and audience development staff, and fundraising managers; and
- Education and community outreach activities, in roles such as drama instructors, dance teachers, community arts facilitators, education/outreach officers and creative workshop leaders.

Most roles within the performing and visual arts sector require a mix of technical and general skills (SOLT / UK Theatre, 2017; Mori, Gimlette and Dzro, 2024). While specific jobs have distinct, specialised capabilities, common skills themes emerge. Distinct, specialised technical, creative and artistic skills act as a crucial foundation. For example, performers need acting, singing or dance techniques; visual artists need artistic skills; directors and choreographers need creative vision and storytelling skills; and technicians need computer-controlled lighting, sound and automation skills. Transversal skills are common, such as teamwork, communication, motivational skills, planning and organisation, and problem-solving (creative and logistical). And, with fast-paced technological change, there are growing calls for digital skills, resilience, flexibility and continuous learning.

While partners across performing and visual arts are working to progress diversity within the sector, there is still more to do (Arts Council England, 2023). Recent data, such as from the returns from Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs), confirms official data, which shows an underrepresentation of people of colour and pronounced class-based disparities among those working within the performing and visual arts sector. While employment opportunities for women and disabled workers have improved, sector data (Arts Council England, 2023) highlights ongoing work is needed to advance workforce diversity.

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

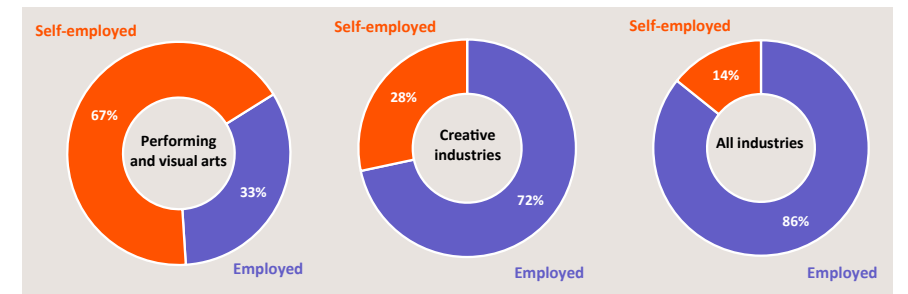


Figure 4: Workforce qualifications (% degree-qualified), 2022-2024

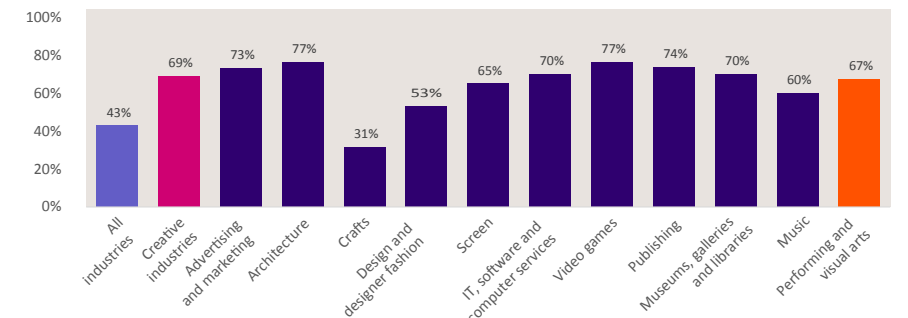
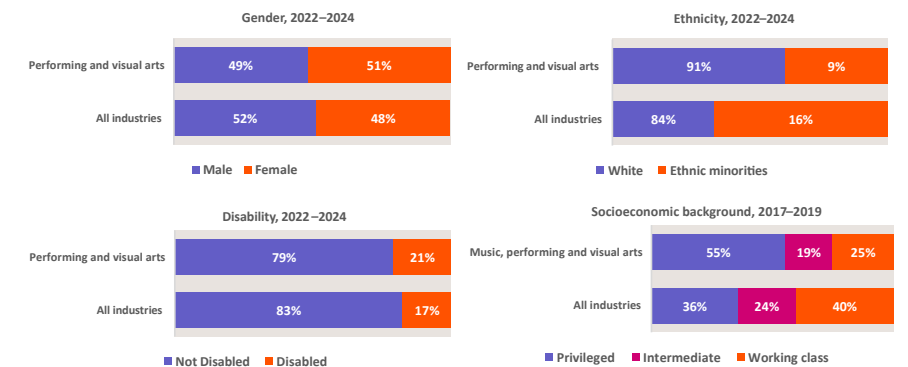


Figure 5: Workforce diversity



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

Notes: Data based on a three-year pooled sample from the ONS Annual Population Survey. Data for socioeconomic background is from the Creative PEC Good Work Review – see Carey, Giles and O'Brien (2023) for further information on the definitions used.

4. Recruitment difficulties

CESS 2025 examines skills mismatches. 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 found that, over the last two years, just over four fifths (81%) of employers in the performing and visual arts sector have been recruiting (including agency staff and freelancers). This far exceeds levels across the creative industries (65%).

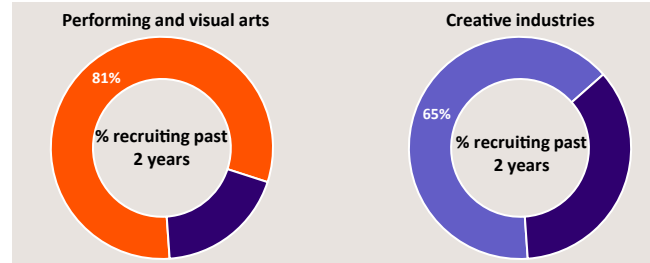
Furthermore, there are some parallels and some differences in the mechanisms for recruitment between performing and visual arts and the creative industries as a whole. For example, the most popular recruitment methods, exceeding levels in the creative industries, involve the use of online job platforms (62% vs 52%), professional networks (44% vs 35%) and company websites (41% vs 25%). Word of mouth is slightly less common (41% vs 46%).

Around a third of performing and visual arts employers (31%) had hard-to-fill vacancies – similar to all creative industries (32%). Recruitment difficulties in the sector were more likely to be due to lack of required skills (67%), work experience (54%) or required qualifications (28%), again, closely aligning with the creative industries.

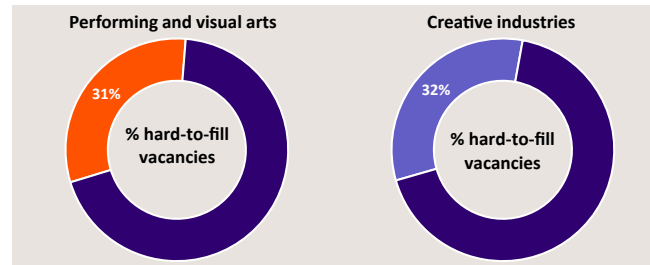
That said, slightly more employers in performing and visual arts reported that a lack of qualifications was an issue compared to the creative industries. In addition, higher levels of employers in the sector had problems with competition from other employers, poor terms and conditions or a remote location.

Figure 6: Hiring and recruitment difficulties, 2025

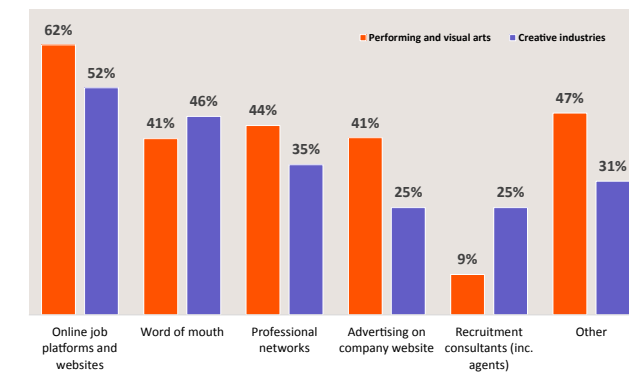
Q: Has this site recruited anyone, including any paid employees, agency staff, and self-employed or freelance workers, in the past two years?
Base = all establishments (n = 148)



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 = 127)



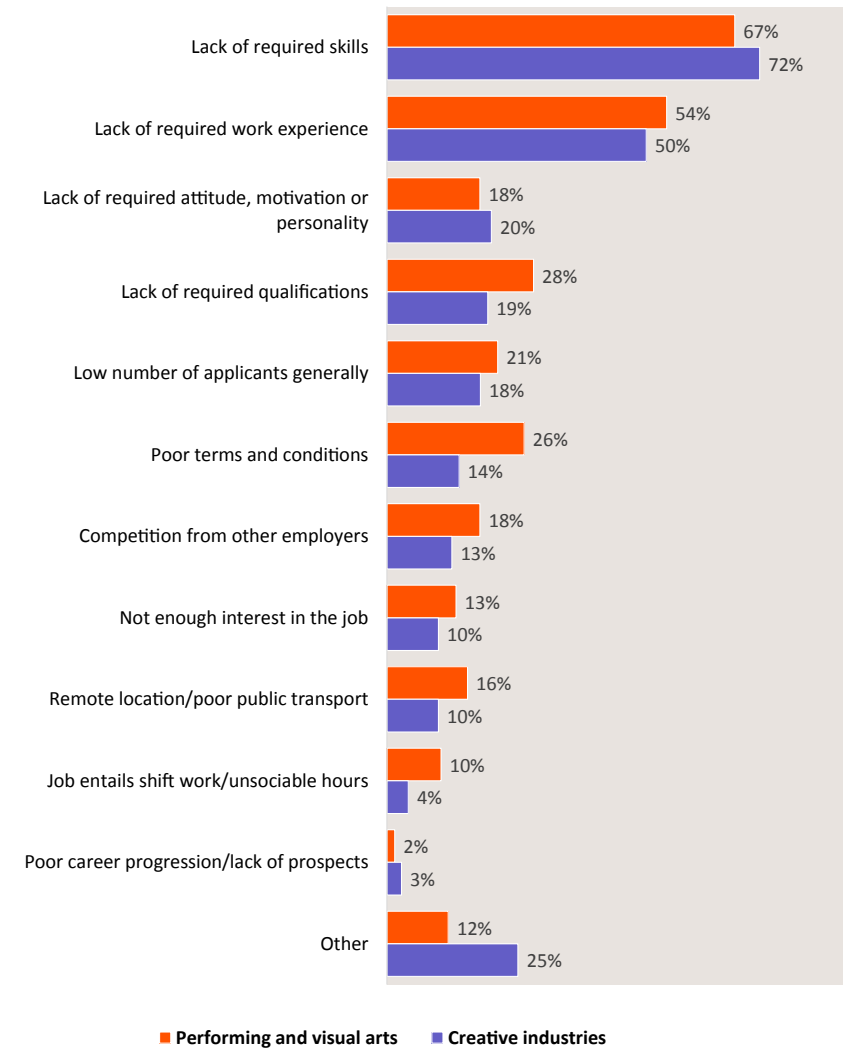
Q: What recruitment methods do you use to fill vacancies at this site?
Base = establishments that have recruited in the past two years (n = 127)



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 = 45)



Source: CESS, 2025

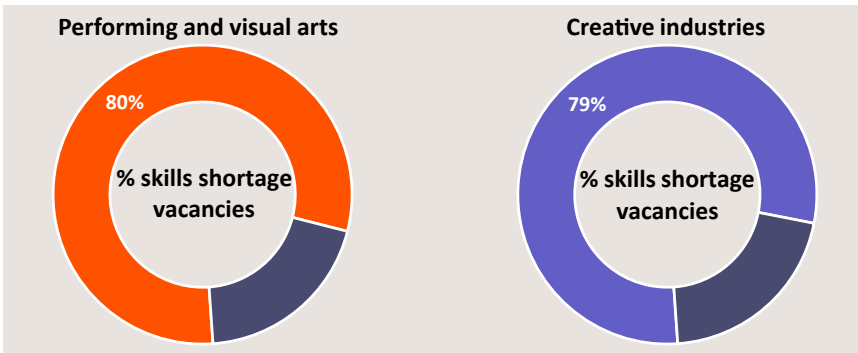
5. Skills shortages

Taking the skills responses together, CESS 2025 shows that skills shortages are the main cause of hard-to-fill vacancies. Indeed, 80% of employers in the performing and visual arts sector reported that their vacancies were hard to fill for skills reasons – broadly in line with levels for the creative industries as a whole (79%).

The highest share of employers with skills shortages in the performing and visual arts sector were recruiting for early-career candidates with two to five years' experience (47%) – this far exceeded levels for the creative industries as a whole (30%). Meanwhile, a fifth were looking for new entrants. In contrast, less than one quarter (23%) of employers experiencing skills shortages in the sector were recruiting experienced staff with five to ten years' experience, which was a lower level than for the creative industries as a whole (42%).

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 = 45)



Source: CESS, 2025

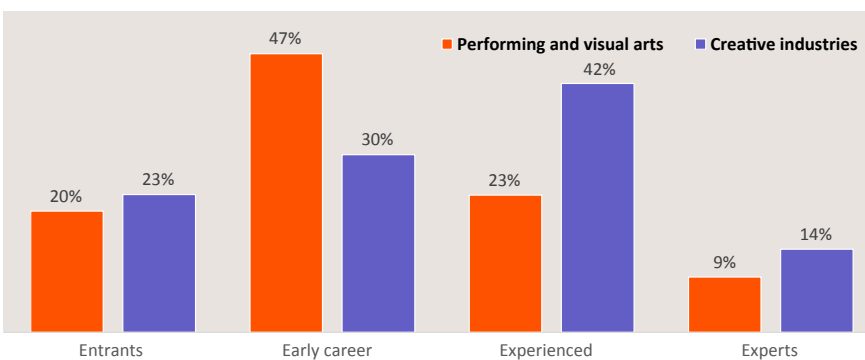
Employers in the performing and visual arts sector outlined a wide range of occupations that are proving hard to fill. These are broad-ranging and cover many parts of the sector.

The most common are specialist roles attached to artistic content and performance activities and production – particularly theatre technicians (24%). Yet it also covers children's entertainers; art consultants; actors; broadcasting and entertainment producers; and arts officers, producers and directors. Some of these are at a more senior or management level such as theatre managers and theatre production managers.

Other generic roles were identified in some of the background areas of business, finance and marketing, including advertising and marketing executives, charity administrators, accounting clerks and bookkeepers, finance administrative occupations, functional managers and directors, and fundraisers.

Figure 9: Seniority of roles with skills shortages, 2025

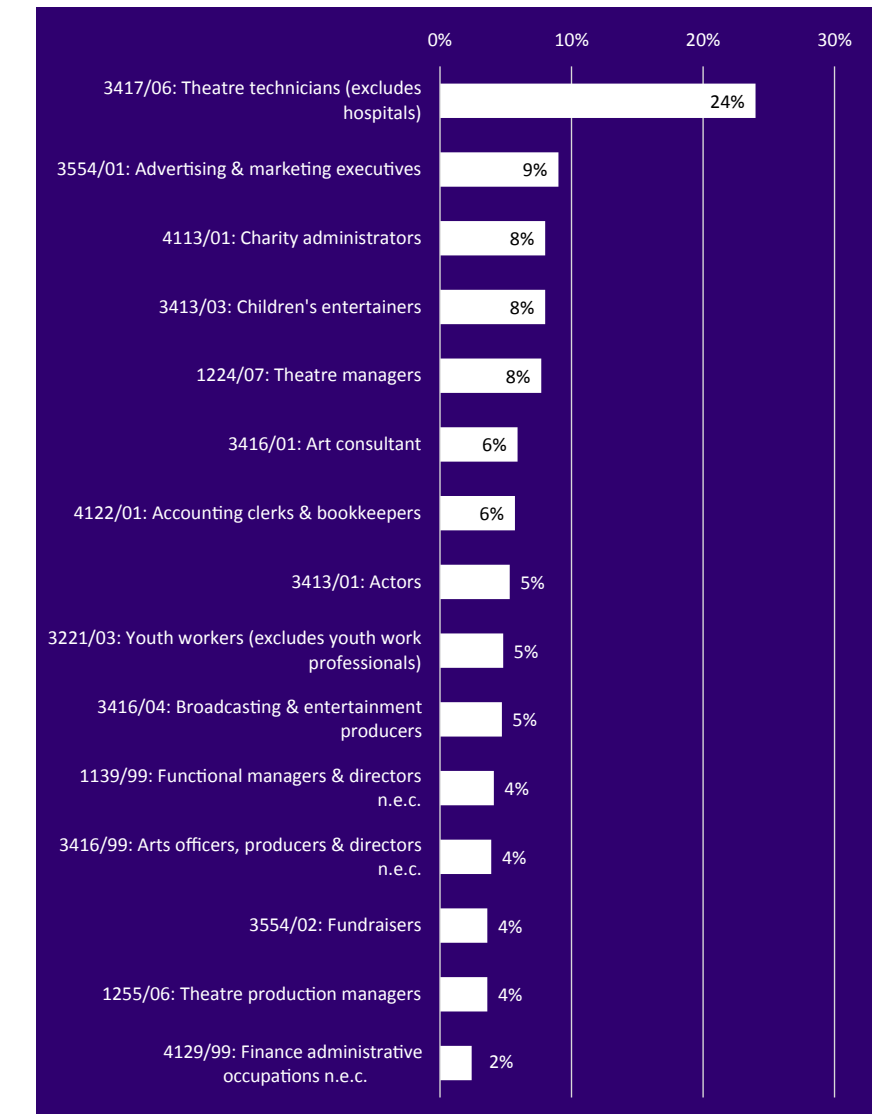
Q: How would you describe the level of experience or seniority of the candidates sought for [skills shortage occupation] vacancies?
Base = establishments with skills shortage vacancies (n = 37)



Source: CESS, 2025

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 = 45)



Source: CESS, 2025

5. Skills shortages (continued)

CESS 2025 results align with wider research (e.g. Mori, Gimlette and Dzro, 2024) and employer insights from the roundtable. These highlighted skills-shortage roles in many technical production areas like lighting technicians, sound engineers, stage carpenters and automation operators, stage managers and production managers, and costume and wardrobe technicians. While these were often linked to roles at a senior level, where employers are looking for particular creative expertise (e.g. experienced actors, choreographers and senior artistic directors), this was not universally the case – as the survey results also suggest.

CESS 2025 also identifies the main specialist skills that employers in the performing and visual arts sector find lacking among applicants. This highlights core, technical capability pertinent to the roles outlined earlier, such as specialist technical production skills linked to operating lighting, sound and AV systems. Increasingly, this calls for advanced digital skills in technical domains (e.g. technicians need to program complex lighting sequences, sound mixing for live musicals and computer-aided design (CAD) tools). Business and commercial skills are also highlighted in areas like marketing, finance and intellectual property. This is confirmed by wider evidence (Mori, Gimlette and Dzro, 2024) and the roundtable consultations.

CESS 2025 reviews the digital skills lacking in the sector. Overall, nearly three quarters (73%) of employers in the performing and visual arts sector stated they had found no digital skills difficult to obtain. This far exceeded the creative industries overall (55%). Where there were problems, the digital skills reported to be lacking were wide-ranging but were generally among small numbers of employers. The most common problems were in web development and Microsoft Office skills. This suggests that, for the sector overall, digital skills ambitions are yet to be fully realised.

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 = 37)

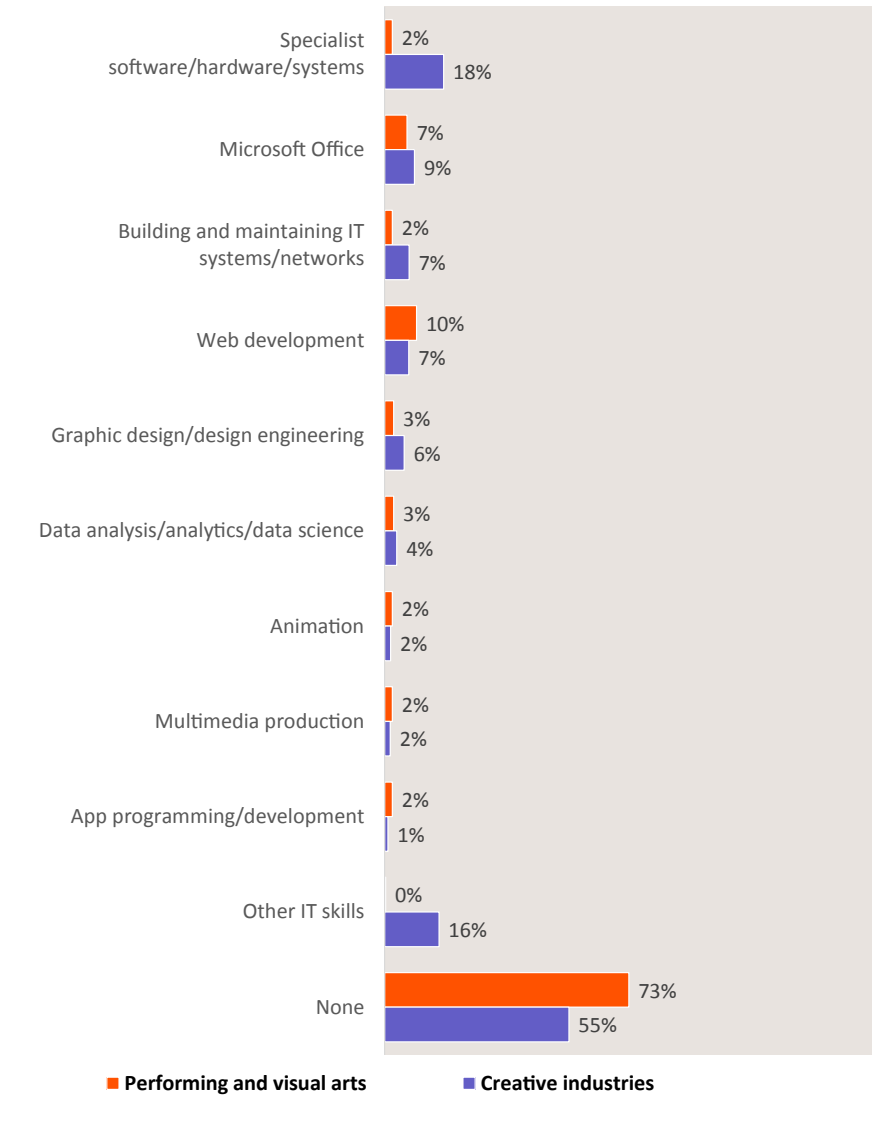


Source: CESS 2025

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 = 37)



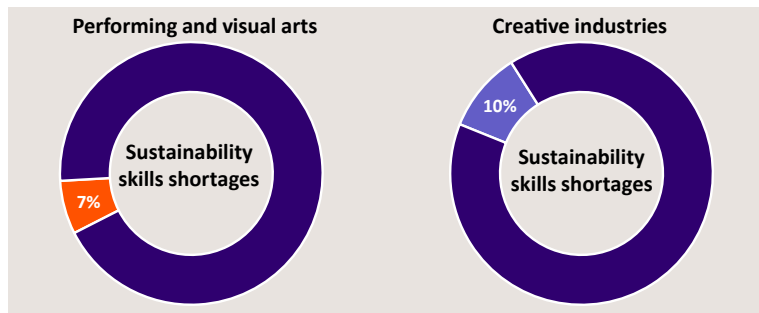
Source: CESS, 2025

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 = 37)



CESS 2025 also reviews the core or transversal skills that employers in the creative industries report as most difficult to find among applicants when recruiting. A core intention is to explore if creative sub-sectors align with other parts of the economy in calling for more generic skills and whether these needs are being met (Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025).

Generally, CESS 2025 suggests fewer performing and visual arts employers with skills shortages identify transversal skills as lacking amongst applicants for job roles.

However, wider research in the sector has suggested that there is a growing demand among employers in performing and visual arts for employees with stronger transversal skills. This has highlighted generic skills in a number of areas to complement a growth in technical and digital skills, including planning and organising, project management, teamwork and communication skills (SOLT / UK Theatre 2017, Mori, Gimlette and Dzro, 2024).

This is demonstrated in calls for a blend of generic and technical capabilities that bring real-world experience and show-craft, especially in areas of the performing arts. In short, employers are seeking among new recruits an ability to cope practically with the uncertainty of working in an environment of live productions and events. Such a context increasingly calls for having resilience, being flexible, trouble-shooting and working to tight deadlines, alongside having technical skills to deliver an excellent standard.

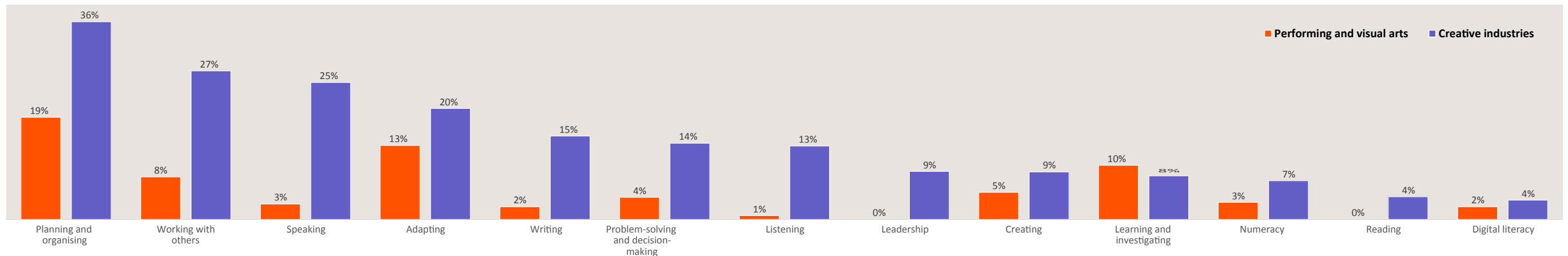
CESS 2025 also provides up-to-date information about the extent to which employers experience difficulties finding candidates for job roles that have the skills needed to achieve organisational sustainability goals. It appears that, in terms of current skills shortages, these were less of an issue, for either the performing and visual arts sector or the creative industries.

Indeed, only 7% of performing and visual arts employers with skills shortage vacancies reported applicants were lacking sustainability or green skills, 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 = 37)



6. Skills gaps

When considering skills deficiencies among their current workforce, just under two fifths of all employers (39%) within the performing and visual arts sector reported skills gaps. This is higher than the level for the creative industries overall (32%). While levels of skills gaps appear higher than those seen in the Employer Skills Survey 2022 (Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025), in part, this potentially reflects the broader assessment of the workforce. Indeed, CESS 2025 captures agency staff and 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 CESS 2025, the most common causes are transitory. That is, they exist because individuals are new to their role (cited by 42% of performing and visual arts employers with skills gaps) or have only partially completed the training required for their position (19%). These findings are in line with wider evidence (Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025).

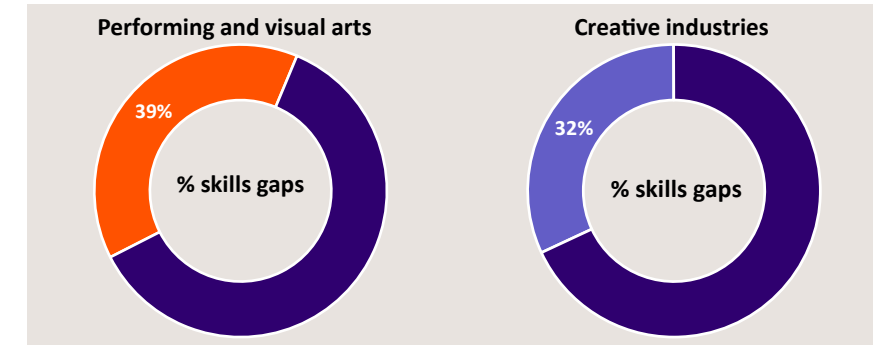
In addition, skills gaps may be an indicator of the positive, ongoing business development and transformation of firms. Examples of this include evidence that employers are introducing new technology (26%) and working practices (20%).

In a context of change, it is also of interest that a significant share of employers reported that staff have not received appropriate training (43%).

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 = 148)

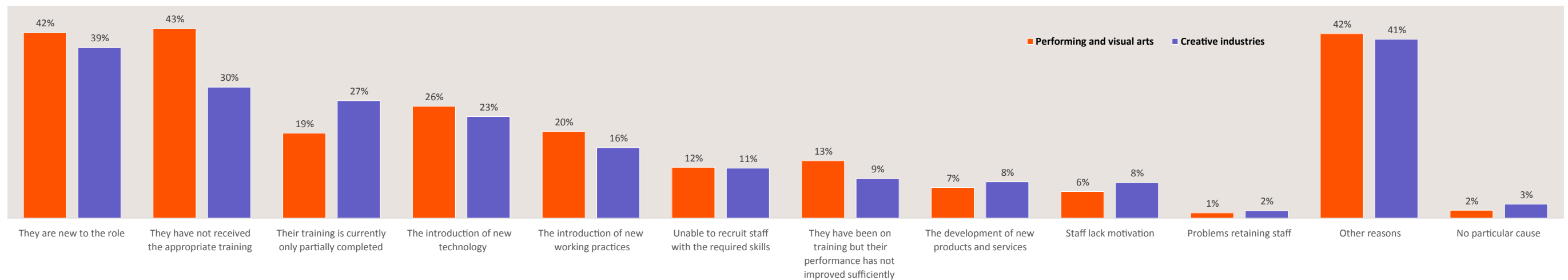


Source: CESS 2025

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 = 65)



Source: CESS, 2025.

6. Skills gaps (continued)

Most commonly, performing and visual arts employers reported skills deficiencies amongst workers who were relatively early (2 to 5 years) into their careers – cited by 44% of employers with skills gaps in the sub-sector compared to 32% across the creative industries. Over one in five (22%) pointed to skills gaps amongst new entrants with less than 2 years experience.

In contrast, employers in performing and visual arts were less likely than all creative industries employers to report skills gaps amongst experienced staff (25% vs 37%) or experts (10% vs 13%).

CESS 2025 also provides an indication of the nature of roles where there are skills gaps. These are broad-ranging and cover all parts of the sector.

The most common roles with skills gaps in the sector are specialist roles aligned to artistic content and performance activities and production. Again, as for skills shortages, the biggest area of concern in the performing and

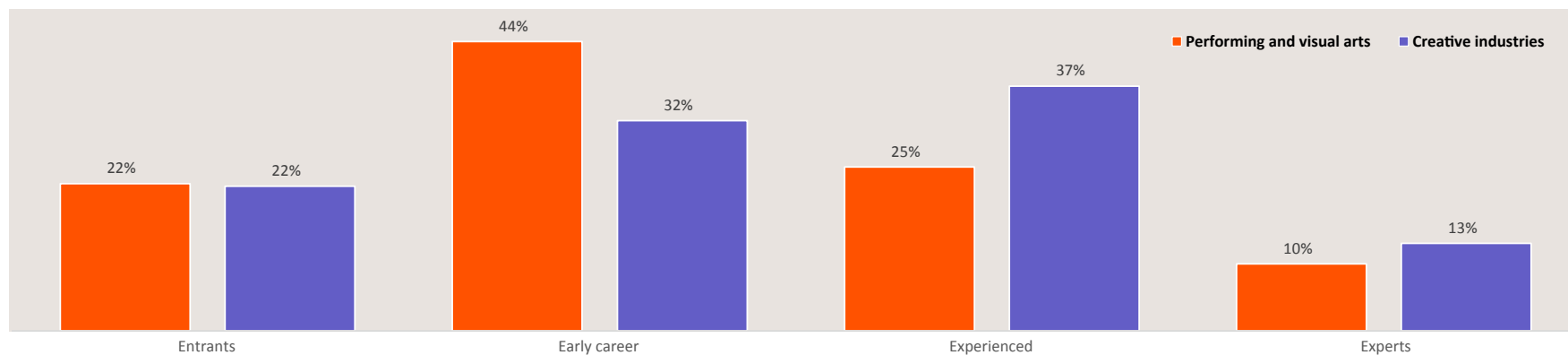
visual arts sector was for theatre technicians (11%). Other technical roles for concern include arts officers, producers and directors; art consultants; gallery and museum attendants; studio and stage managers; and camera and photographic equipment technicians.

Other generic roles were identified in background areas covering business functions, finance and marketing. These include fundraisers, advertising and marketing executives, sales-related occupations and other administrative occupations. There was also a focus on aspects of facilities management, often associated with live performances, such as commercial cleaners and bar staff. Some of these roles are clearly at more senior levels and include management responsibilities such as human resource (HR) managers and directors.

In addition, roles with skills gaps were also found in education and community outreach areas of the sector, covering dance and drama school principals and owners, and community workers.

Figure 17: Seniority of staff with skills deficiencies, 2025

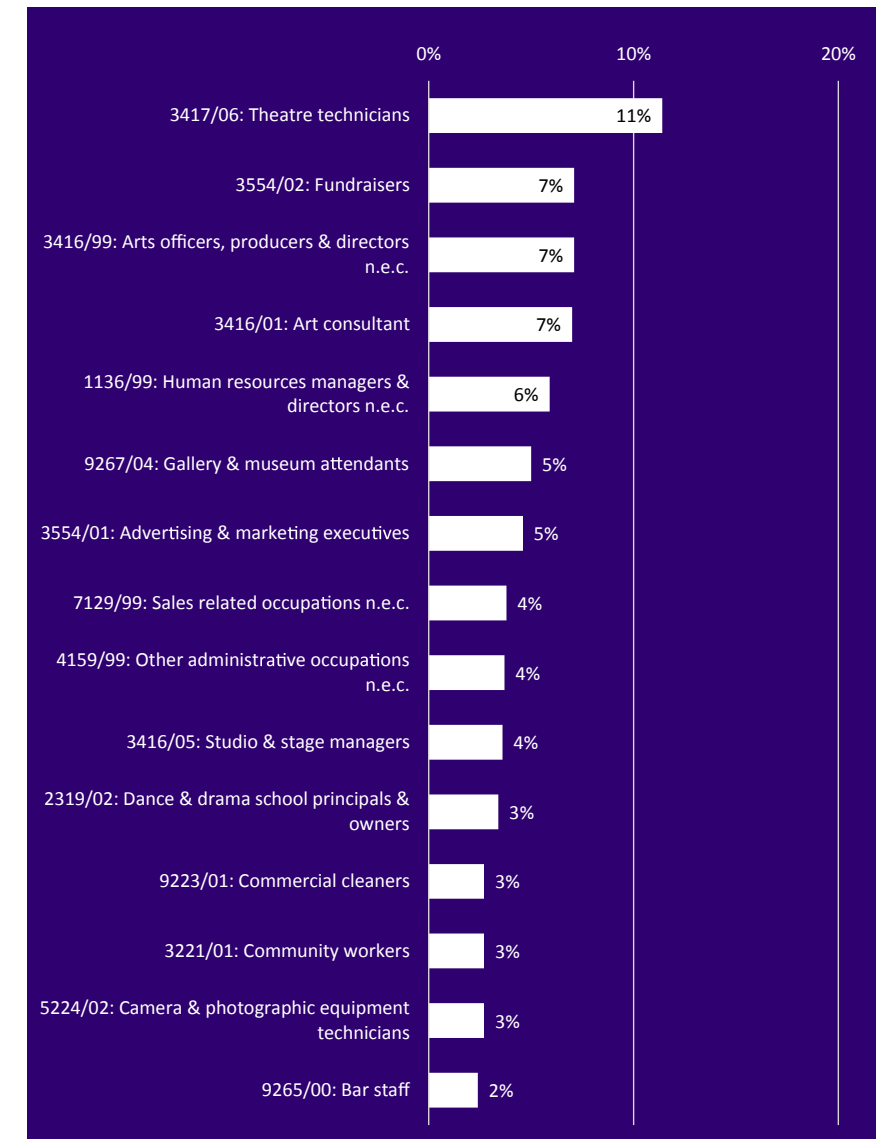
Q: How would you describe the level of experience or seniority of the staff working as (skills gap occupation)?
Base = establishments with skills gaps (n = 65)



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 = 65)



Source: CESS, 2025

6. Skills gaps (continued)

CESS 2025 identifies the main specialist skills lacking among the existing performing and visual arts workforce. In common with shortages, this points to a lack of proficiency, pertinent to the roles outlined earlier, in core technical skills such as specialist technical production skills. Business and commercial skills are also highlighted in areas like marketing, finance, communication and time management. In addition, there is reference to a lack of management skills such as strategic planning, budgeting and people management, especially in relation to promoting practices around equality, diversity and inclusion.

Wider evidence, and insights from the roundtable, confirm the prevalence of skills deficiencies mid career, and among senior staff, due to management shortfalls. Reference was also made to the challenges of the workforce maintaining skills, particularly given the fluctuating nature of work patterns and live productions. This places additional demands on artists and performers to maintain hands-on practice and rehearsal time to get back to peak and/or build their show-craft skills for live productions and exhibitions.

Furthermore, CESS 2025 explicitly explores demands for digital skills. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the traditional focus of the sector on specialist performance and artistic capabilities, 73% of employers reported that they do not currently have digital skills gaps. That said, with the wider impact of technology on parts of the sector, some digital skills gaps were reported, perhaps providing an indication of where future demand may grow. This included Microsoft Office skills, specialist software/hardware systems, web development, multimedia production, 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 = 65)

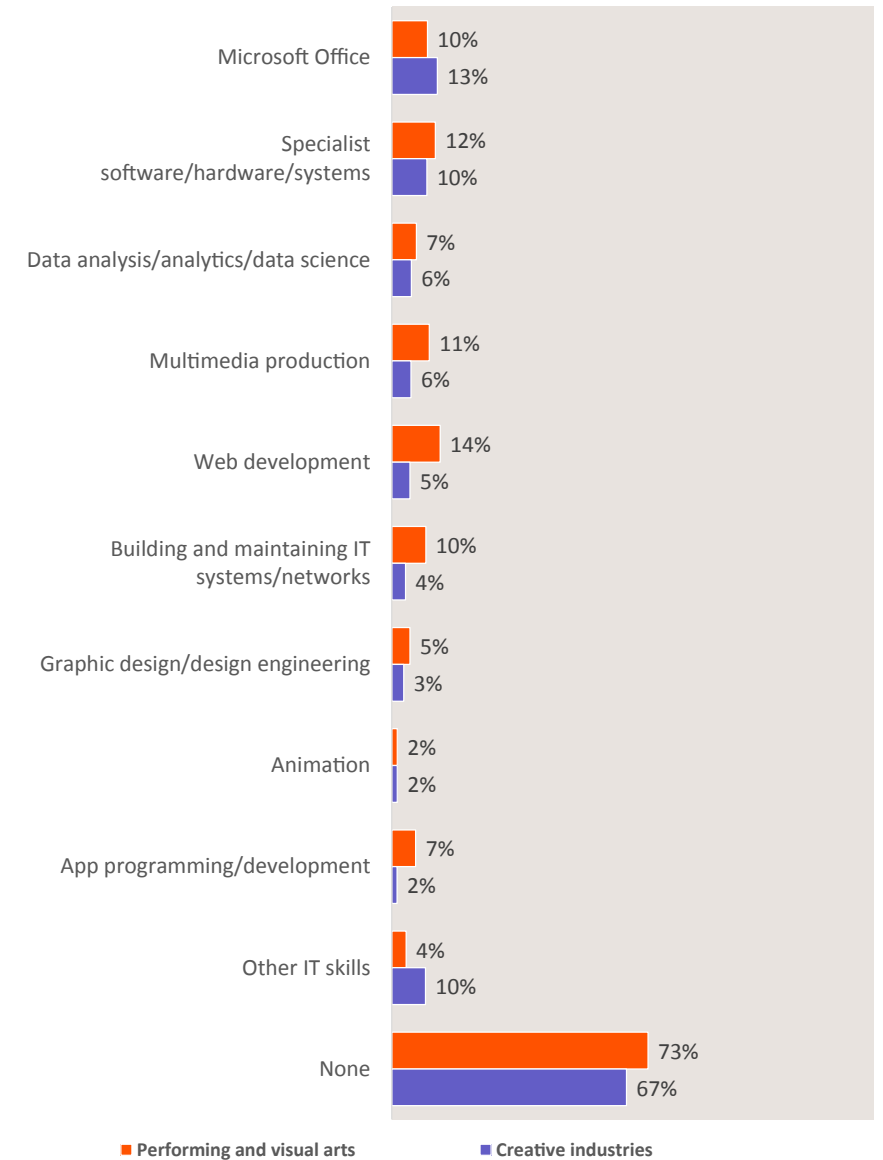


Source: CESS 2025

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 = 65)



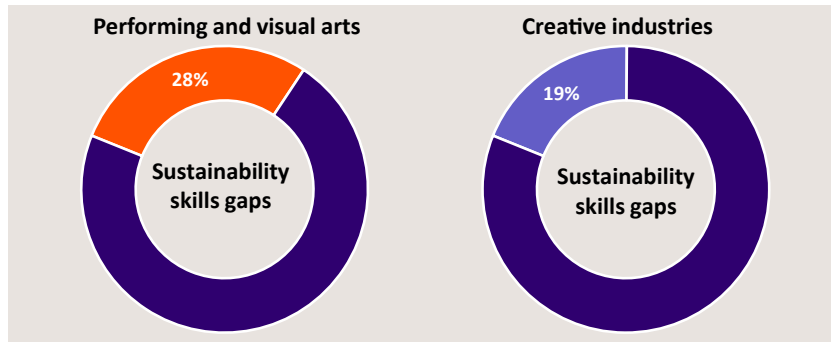
Source: CESS, 2025

6. Skills gaps (continued)

Figure 21: Sustainability skills gaps, 2025

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

Base = establishments with skills gaps (n = 65)



CESS 2025 was also deployed to review transferable skill deficiencies among the existing workforce. This revealed that a lack of core or transferable skills among the existing workforce is a much bigger challenge for performing and visual arts employers, than a lack of these skills amongst candidates applying for job vacancies.

Most commonly, the transferable skills that employers in the sector felt needed improving amongst their workforce were planning and organising skills (cited by 25% of performing and visual arts employers with skills gaps), working with others (15%), problem-solving and decision-making (14%), speaking (13%) and adapting (12%).

In addition, more employers in the sector reported gaps in leadership skills compared to the creative industries overall – cited by 14% of employers with skills gaps in performing and visual arts compared to 8% across the creative industries.

This aligns with wider research which points to growing issues with management skills, as well as concerns with real-world experience and show craft. (Mori, Gimlette and Dzro, 2024; Nordicity and Smith, 2017). This was especially where new recruits and those earlier in their careers had built up less practical experience for live productions and events to develop their confidence in both generic and technical skills.

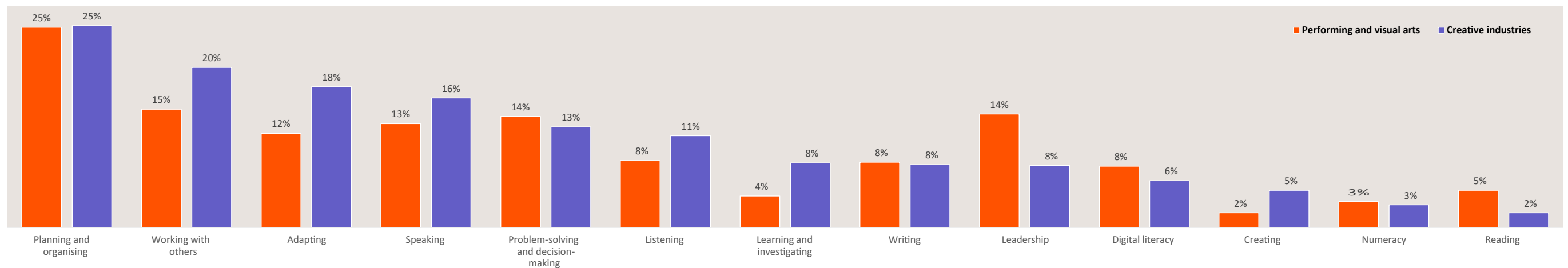
A review of sustainable or carbon-neutral skills gaps among the existing workforce also points to greater pressures compared to skills shortages among potential recruits.

More than one in four (28%) of performing and visual arts employers with skills gaps reported these related to a lack of skills needed to achieve organisational ambitions to become more sustainable or carbon neutral – a higher share relative to creative industries employers overall (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?

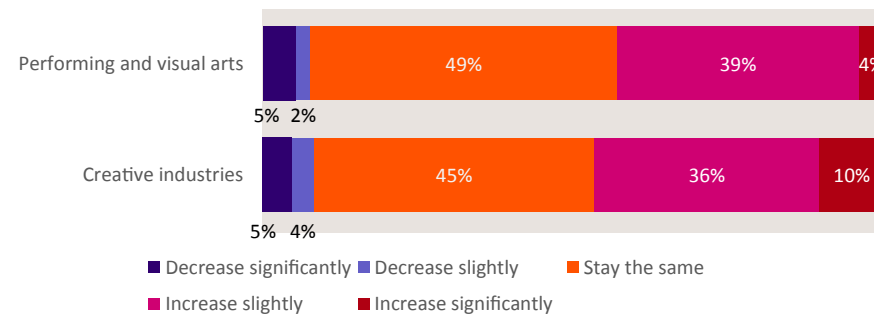
Base = establishments with skills gaps (n = 65)



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 = 148)



Source: CESS 2025

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 in the performing and visual arts sector, although less so than the creative industries overall.

Indeed, just under half of performing and visual arts employers expect to be increasing the number of staff they employ in future (i.e. 43% vs 46% of creative industries employers).

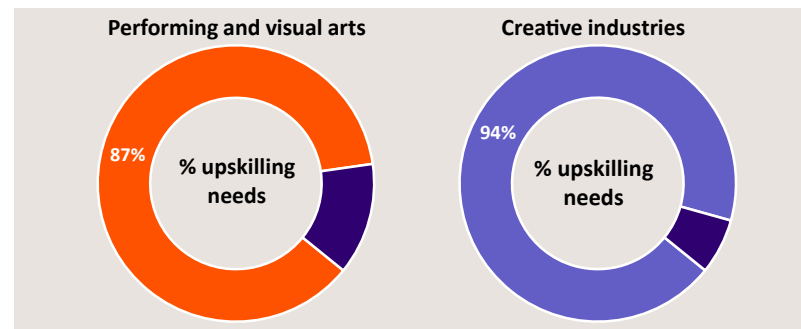
Further, the vast majority (87%) of performing and visual arts employers that expect to grow staff numbers also anticipate a need to upgrade the skills of their workforce over the next three to five years.

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

This is seen, for example, through the introduction of new technologies or equipment (cited by 81% of performing and visual arts employers with upskilling needs), the development of new products and services (70%) and the introduction of new working practices (72%). That said, new legislative requirements are also a fairly significant factor (67%) and at higher levels to the creative industries as a whole (63%).

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

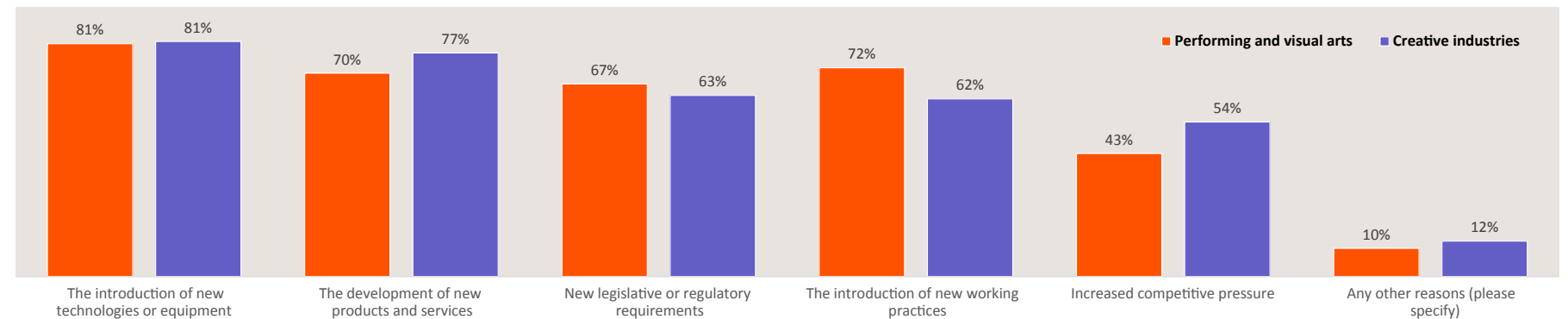
Q: Over the next three to five years, do you expect that any staff at this site will need to acquire new skills or knowledge? ≠ 'None'
Base = establishments expecting to increase staff numbers in future (n = 62)



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 expecting to increase staff numbers in future (n = 62)



Source: CESS 2025

7. Future jobs and skills needs (continued)

CESS 2025 also looks at the nature of new roles that employers expect to require in the next three to five years and future upskilling needs.

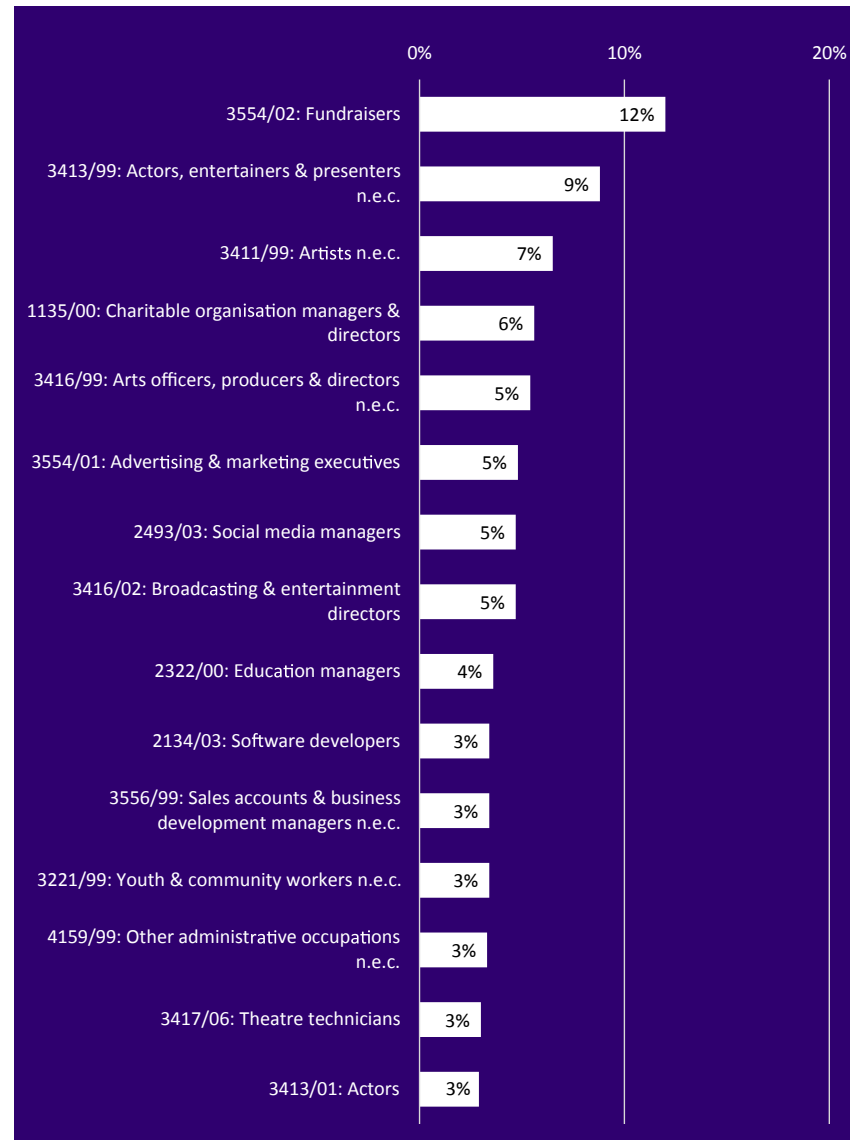
The top fifteen future roles in which growth is expected are broad-ranging and cover many parts of the sector. The most common specialist roles related to artistic content, performance activities and production, including actors, entertainers and presenters; theatre technicians; and artists. Roles were also identified in areas of business, finance and marketing, including fundraisers; advertising and marketing executives; sales accounts and business development managers; and social media managers; as well as digital roles, such as software developers. In addition, education and community outreach support functions featured, including education managers, and youth and community workers. Some of these roles were also at more senior levels, including charitable organisation managers and directors; arts officers, producers and directors; and broadcasting and entertainment directors.

Furthermore, CESS 2025 also reviews the roles in which employers expect workers will need to upgrade their skills in future. Again, this covers a mix of sector-specific roles, such as technicians; actors, entertainers and presenters; and artists, and wider business roles, include fundraisers, other administrative roles, office managers, public relations officers and software developers. More senior management roles are also expected to require stronger skills, including theatre managers; managers and directors in the creative industries; arts officers, producers and directors; and broadcasting and entertainment directors and producers.

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 = 62]

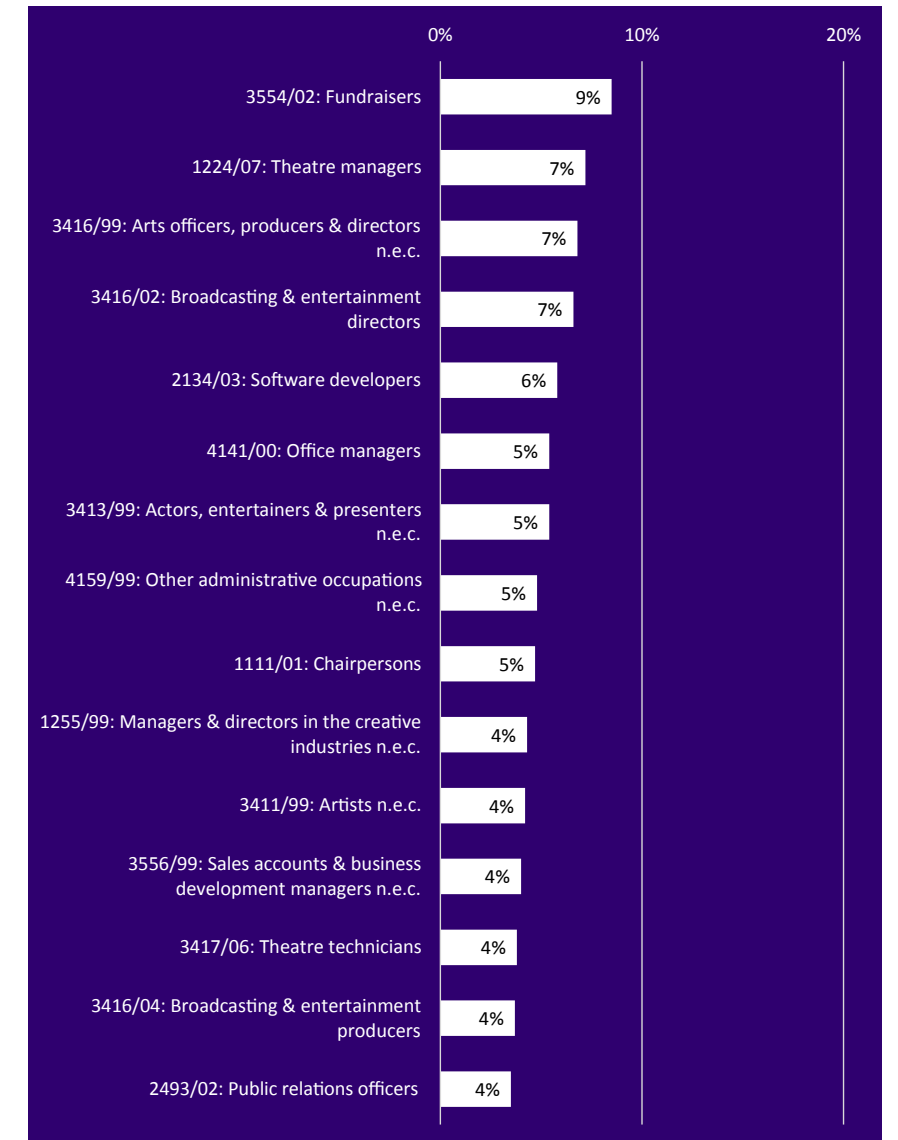


Source: CESS 2025

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 = 54]



Source: CESS 2025

7. Future jobs and skills needs (continued)

The Skills Audits have also sought to explore the types of skills that will become more important in future, including specialist, digital and transversal skills.

Evidence from the survey, combined with wider research and the employer insights from the roundtable, points to a growing need for a fusion of digital and creative skills, especially in those areas driven by technology. Examples included technicians scripting customised solutions to manage theatre technology systems; immersive and virtual technologists designing digital scenography; artists creating coding in art making and interactive installations; and audience insight specialists, interpreting and acting on data, via ticketing systems, social media intelligence and streaming metrics.

Lines are also expected to blur between creative sub-sectors, increasing demand for cross-disciplinary technical skills. For example, in live performances, multimedia designers integrating digital elements like video projection, multimedia sets and 3D effects with traditional activities like lighting, sound and costumes; theatre producers working with game designers; visual artists partnering with design engineers; and artists working in community health and well-being. Stakeholders engaged through the process also stressed the importance of commercial and entrepreneurial skills, including developing new revenue streams via merchandising, digital products, educational offerings and partnerships with brands and sponsors.

CESS 2025 further explores the likely future demand for digital skills in the sector. Overall, 64% of employers in the performing and visual arts sector expected to require new digital skills – this was similar to the creative industries overall. The digital skills identified covered several areas: Microsoft Office, web development, multimedia production, specialist software and hardware, data analysis and graphic 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 = 54)

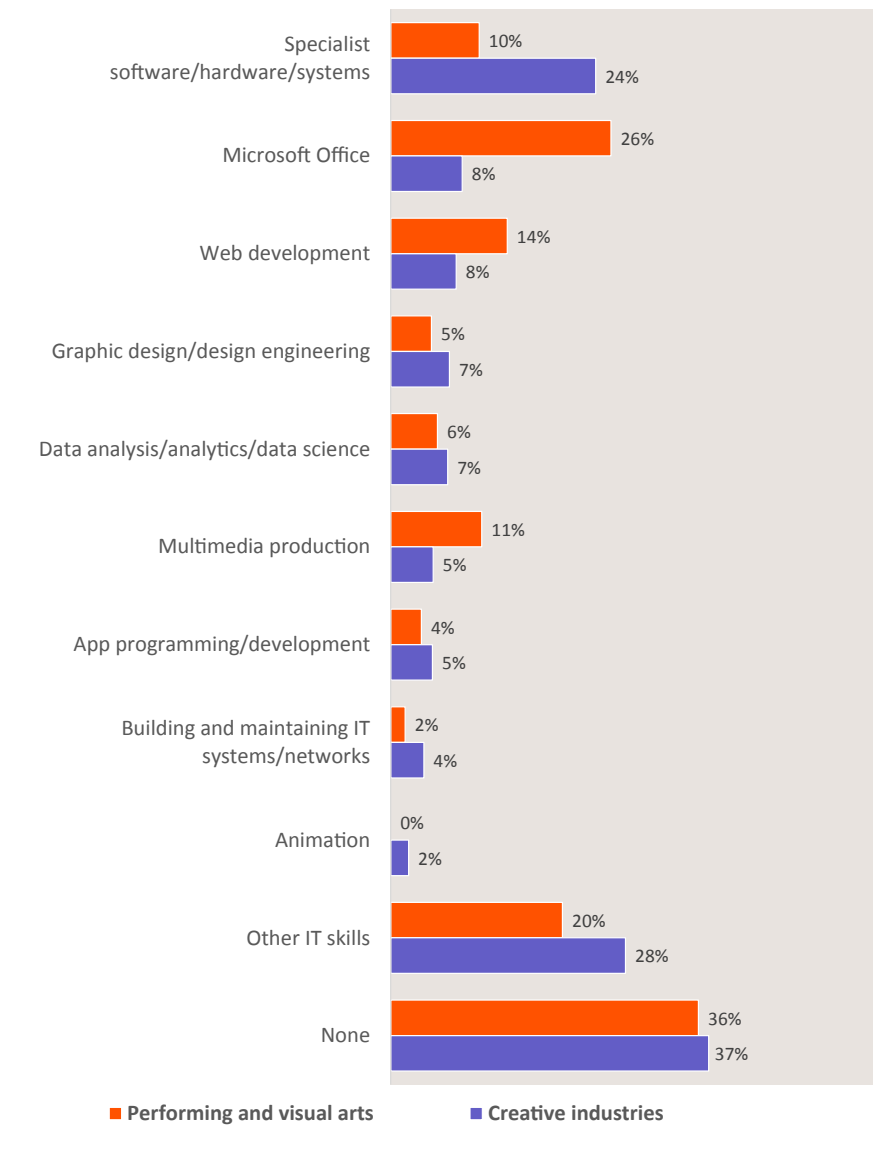


Source: CESS 2025

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 = 54)



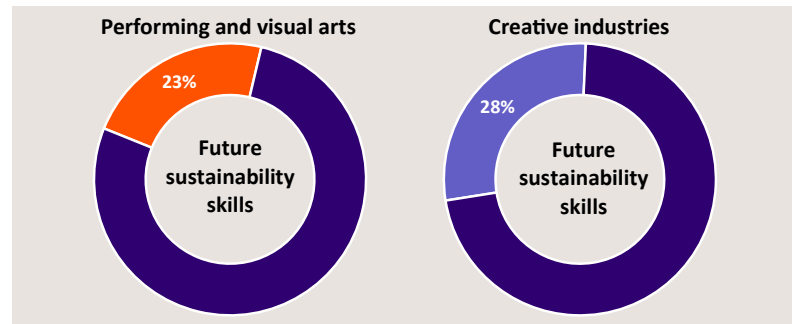
Source: CESS 2025

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 = 54)



CESS 2025 also explores the perspectives of employers in the performing and visual arts sector on what core, transferable skills will need improving in the next three to five years.

Most commonly, these involve planning and organising (cited by 23% of performing and visual arts employers with upskilling needs), working with others (22%), speaking (15%) and adapting (8%). While perspectives on future core skills mirrored the broad picture for the creative industries, future demand was reported at lower levels for the performing and visual arts sector than for the creative industries overall.

In line with CESS 2025, wider research has supported a growing requirement for the future workforce in the sector to develop more generic skills such as creativity, communication, problem-solving and teamwork

(World Economic Forum, 2025). But, in slight contrast to the survey results, creativity has been especially emphasised to enhance human-centred artistic experiences.

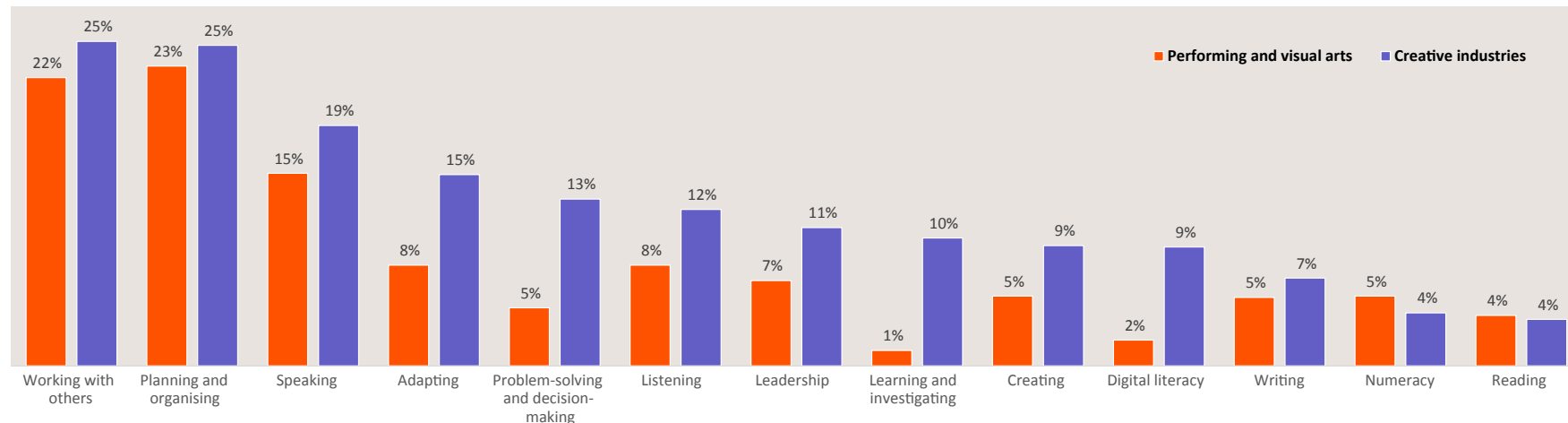
The call for a blend of generic skills was also confirmed by attendees at the roundtable, who emphasised a need for employees, particularly younger workers, to develop stronger core skills which help them to be more work-ready. Taken together, this places an onus on resilience and adaptability skills, as well as a willingness to continually learn.

Another area where employers anticipated a need for stronger workforce skills related to organisational ambitions to become more sustainable or carbon neutral in future. Nearly one in four (23%) of performing and visual arts employers with upskilling needs expected workers to require stronger sustainability or green skills. This was slightly lower than the average across the creative industries (28%) but higher than the share of employers identifying these as skills gaps today.

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 = 54)



Attendees at the roundtable expected future demand for environmental and sustainability skills to be higher. This was thought likely to reflect not only an increase in the importance of environmental concerns in future but also wider work across the sector to promote understanding and good practice. For example, Arts Council England has been running an Environmental Programme, impacting the performing and visual arts sector, since 2012. This has been providing a range of resources, tools and training to support cultural organisations to take climate action. Returns from its annual culture, climate and environmental responsibility review (Arts Council England, 2024a) suggest increasing numbers of organisations are taking steps to explore environmental themes and to meet the standards of sustainable practices through their exhibitions, shows, events and educational activities (e.g. how to calculate and offset carbon emissions, and deploy recycling green waste and other recycling policies).

8. Employer investment in skills

CESS 2025 enables an assessment of the impact of skills challenges on employers in the performing and visual arts sector, relative to the creative industries– 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 73% of performing and visual arts employers facing skills challenges reporting some kind of impact – just above the level for all creative industries employers (69%). This suggests, as does wider evidence, that skills deficiencies are an important business concern for the sector (Giles, Carey and O’Brien 2025). Indeed, a wide range of impacts were reported.

For example, a sizeable minority (44%) reported that such skills challenges are increasing the workload for other staff. Other common impacts reported include experiencing increased operating costs (26%), losing business or orders to competitors (25%), having difficulties meeting deadlines (22%) and a reduction in long-term growth or investment plans (21%). It is also noteworthy that performing and visual arts employers were more than twice as likely as all creative industries employers to suggest the skills shortages or gaps they face are negatively impacting staff morale or wellbeing (23% vs 11%).

The vast majority (90%) of employers across the sector were taking some action in response to skills challenges, more so than for employers across the creative industries overall (82%).

The most frequent response was to increase training for the existing workforce, something that was pursued by 58% of performing and visual arts employers facing skills challenges. Furthermore, this was at higher levels relative to the creative industries as a whole (47%). Other common actions included taking on and training less-well-qualified recruits (25% vs 20%), bringing in contractors (25% vs 17%) and expanding trainee and apprenticeship programmes (16% vs 15%). Interestingly, more employers in the performing and visual arts sector were also increasing advertising/recruitment spend (12% vs 6%).

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 = 81)

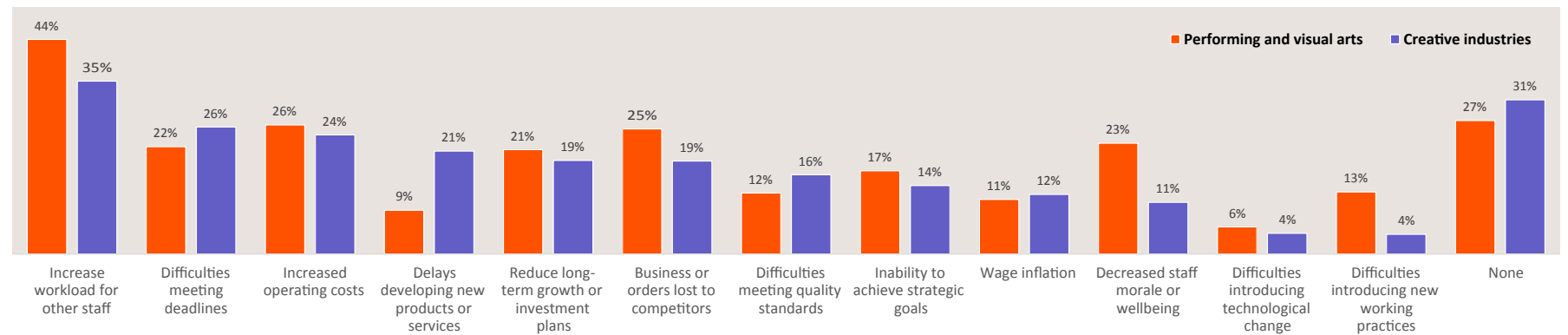
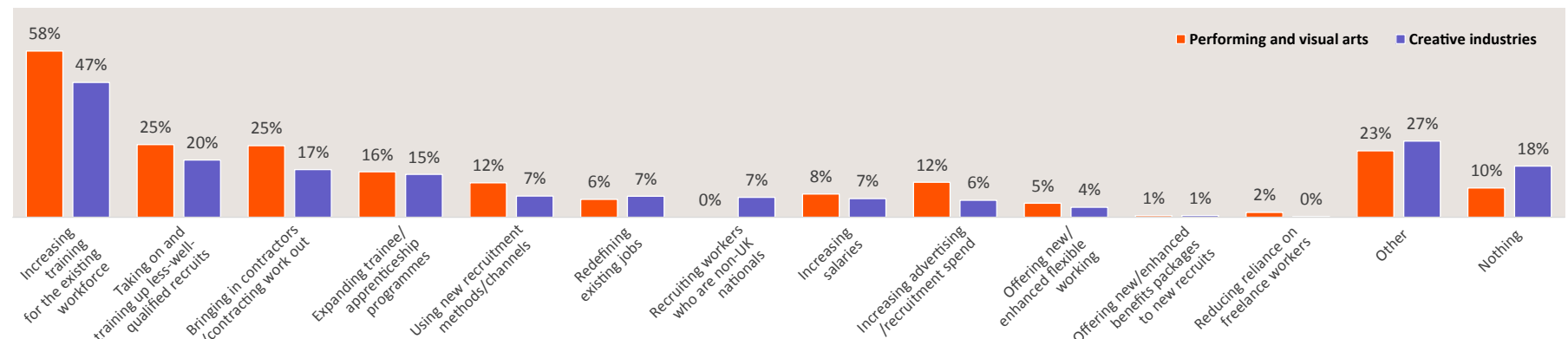


Figure 33: Response to skills challenges, 2025

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

Base = establishments with skills shortages or skills gaps (n = 81)



Source: CESS 2025

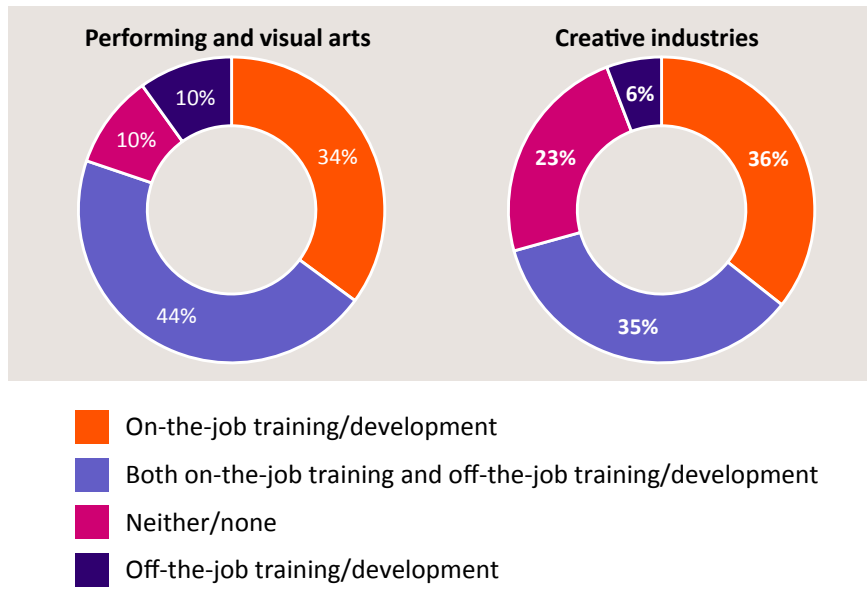
8. Employer investment in skills (continued)

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 performing and visual arts, are investing sufficiently in upskilling and reskilling their workforce.

As highlighted earlier, occupations relevant to the performing and visual arts sector rely heavily on HE pathways to provide the baseline, foundation education for early-career workers. That said, a number of roles also value technical pathways, supporting the take-up of arts education at school (e.g. art, drama and design/technology subjects), technical subjects through FE and apprenticeships, and ongoing training, alongside practical work experience (Mori, Gimlette and Dzro, 2024).

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 = 148)



Source: CESS 2025

CESS 2025 provides an indication of the extent of employer training provision arranged or funded by performing and visual arts employers relative to the creative industries, over the last twelve months, to keep the baseline of skills relevant. This includes training not only for employees but also that provided to agency staff and self-employed or freelance workers.

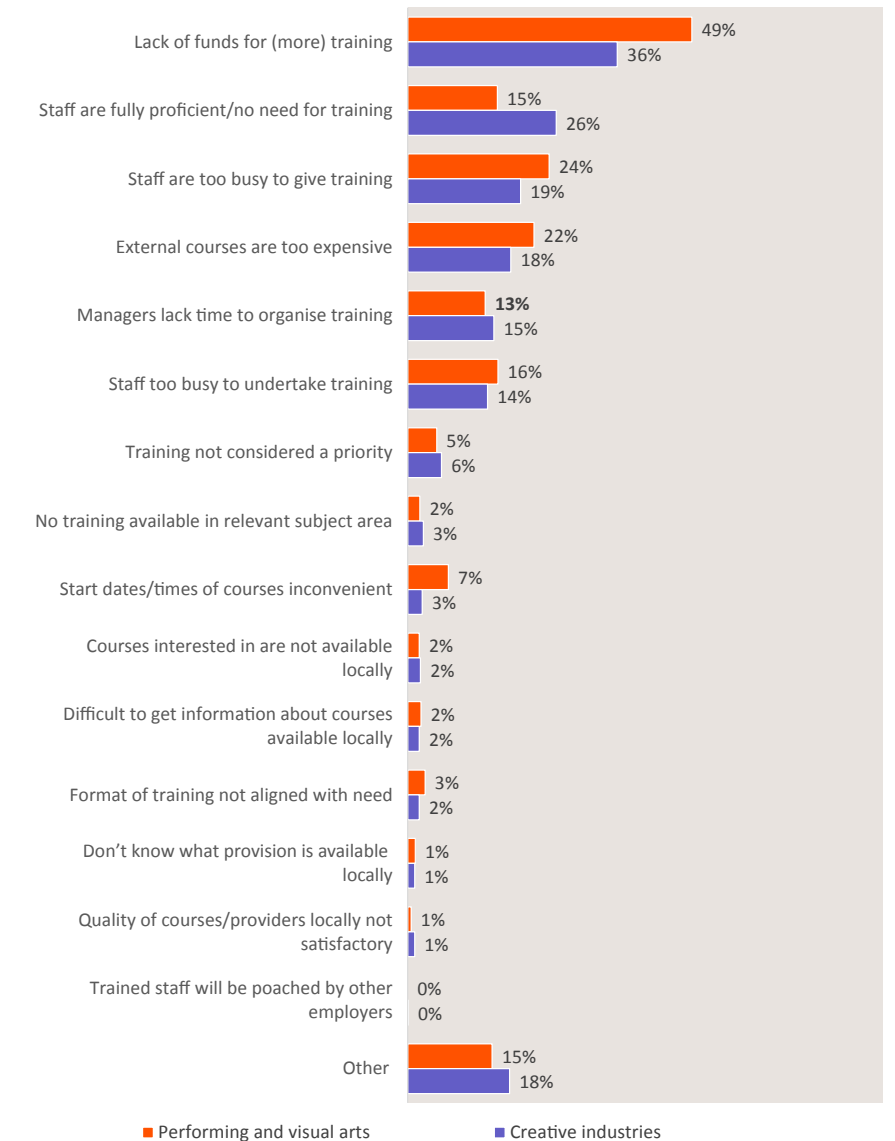
Positively, CESS 2025 data points to higher levels of training within this broader definition than indicated elsewhere (e.g. see the Employer Skills Survey 2022; Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025). Indeed, around three quarters of firms in the sector (88%) provide some kind of training compared to 76% in the creative industries. In contrast, this means only 10% have not provided any training.

In addition, most of the training provided is either a blend of off and on the job (44% vs 35%) or on the job only (34% 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, persistent skills deficiencies and growing skills challenges, there is clearly room for ongoing enhancements to development opportunities.

A closer examination of those employers who are not providing any training points to the obstacles inhibiting provision. The most common barriers for employers in the performing and visual arts sector are financial; they include a lack of funds for more training (49% vs 36%) and external courses being too expensive (22% vs 18%). In addition, timing is an issue, with other common responses suggesting staff are too busy to give training (24% vs 19%), staff are too busy to undertake training (16% vs 14%) and managers lack time to organise training (13% vs 15%). While employers also reported staff are fully proficient, this is at lower levels than the creative industries overall (15% vs 26%).

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 = 148)



Source: CESS 2025

8. Employer investment in skills (continued)

Although CESS 2025 points to relatively high levels of training, in the context of considerable future upskilling needs, it is important that employers within the performing and visual arts sector continue to invest in future in the skills of their workforce.

When considering the measures that would enable employers in the performing and visual arts sector to continue to invest in skills and training, a range of factors are identified as important. Given the high level of employers reporting financial pressures as a significant barrier to training, it is perhaps unsurprising that the majority of employers value financial measures. Indeed, the highest level of support was for financial measures such as subsidies towards the cost of training (78%) and tax relief on expenditure on staff training (59%).

In addition, with barriers also reported around timing, other common responses among employers in the performing and visual arts sector included more flexible forms of training (44%).

In addition, other common responses among employers in the performing and visual arts sector included opportunities to collaborate with providers to develop training aligned to business needs (42%), opportunities to collaborate with other businesses to develop training aligned to business needs (40%), and information and advice on identifying training needs (38%) and finding relevant training (37%). Many of these measures were reported at higher rates than for the creative industries overall.

CESS 2025 findings were supported by the employer consultations at the roundtable. In that light, positive reference was made to relevant policy developments in the different skills systems and the opportunities these present to performing and visual arts employers.

This includes steps to enhance collaboration between industry and education providers to improve the relevance of training for the sector, especially for freelancers (e.g. enhancing HE provision and widening and flexing apprenticeship and placement offers); improvements to careers information and campaigning; and the funding of modular training such as through the Growth and Skills Levy and Lifelong Learning Entitlement (HM Government, 2025).

Figure 36: Enablers of employer investment in training, 2025

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

Base = all establishments (n = 148)



Source: CESS 2025

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