

## ‘Watershed moment for the Creative industries’

Major new study finds creative employers are ambitious for growth  
but hampered by an outdated skills system

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A new study published today by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC) and Work Advance is being called a ‘watershed moment’ for the creative industries. It reveals creative economy employers are ambitious for growth, with nearly 50% looking to expand their workforce. It points to skills in short supply today, and likely to be in high demand in the future including: app design, 3D modelling, UX design, drawing for construction, data analysis, editing, filming, urban design, cyber security, web dev, foreign language skills (publishing) and Computer Aided Design (CAD).

This good news for the sector is balanced by the more cautious suggestion that the UK skills system needs to modernise and become more agile to meet the needs of the creative industries, as training is failing to keep pace with innovation and technological advancement. 70% of the 1,300 employers interviewed as a part of the research, who are experiencing skills shortages or gaps, say it’s hindering growth potential.

The Skills Audits for the Creative Industries were funded by the DCMS and the Creative Industries Council (CIC) to better understand the current and future skills needs of the creative industries which represent £145bn in GVA and over 2.4 million jobs in the UK, and is one of the Government’s eight priority sectors for growth. Conducting the major skills industries review was a key commitment in the Creative Industries Sector Plan and today also sees the publication of eleven separate audits showing granular data for each sub-sector.

**The Rt Hon Ian Murray MP, Minister for Creative Industries, Media and Arts, said:**

*“The Creative Industries Skills Audit gives us the clearest picture yet of the skills our creative businesses need to grow and the training the workforce needs to get there. At a time of industry shifts and rapid technological change, that evidence has never been more important.*

*“Britain's creative industries are world-leading - it's our music, film and breadth of creative talent that really puts us on the map. This Government is determined to keep it that way and we know that it all starts with a highly skilled workforce.”*

**Baroness Shriti Vadera and Sir Peter Bazalgette, industry co-Chairs of the Creative Industries Council said:**

*“This is a trailblazing report: vital evidence from our 11 creative sub-sectors of the current and future skills needs of our innovative, digitally-driven sector. The Skills Audits are an essential platform for us to come together, and work with a Government that seeks to redraw the skills map. If the findings are acted upon the creative industries will deliver significantly greater cultural value and economic growth.”*

**Key findings:**

- 70% of creative employers who report skills challenges say it is hindering business operations and growth potential.
- 43% of employers in the creative industries report skills shortages or gaps. 21% of employers with skills challenges say it's hindering innovation and 19% said they are having to scale back growth or investment plans.
- Nearly 40% of creative employers say they can't afford staff training.
- Specific creative industries skills shortages are reported for app design, 3D modelling, UX design, drawing for construction, data analysis, editing, filming, urban design, cyber security, web dev, foreign language skills (publishing) and Computer Aided Design (CAD).
- Creative employers also report a lack of vital 'transversal' or critical business skills, like fundraising, finance or people management: 56% of employers with skills shortages suggest recruitment difficulties are a result of applicants lacking these core skills, and

47% of employers with skills gaps suggest these skills require improvement amongst their workforce.

- Skills challenges are most acute at the mid-career level, with technological change and rapid career advancement both contributing. 43% of employers with skills shortages and 37% with gaps report problems with more experienced staff.
- Many of the roles currently subject to skills shortages are expected to face growing demand in the future, particularly for software developers; graphic and multi-media designers; and advertising and marketing executives.
- 63% of creative employers that expect to grow and upskill their workforce said demand for digital skills will grow - driven largely by hardware and software upgrades and Artificial Intelligence.
- 20% of creative employers with a skills gaps say the 'sustainability/green' skills of their workforce need improving.

In tackling the mismatch between the needs of a growing sector and the current skills system the report authors call for:

**Key recommendations:**

- Local, regional and national governments should undertake place-based creative industries skills assessments.
- Government, industry and educators should forge a new 'Pact for Skills' as part of a new chapter of genuine partnership.
- National governments should prioritise initiatives to develop 'transversal skills' (core skills that cut across sectors such as planning and communication skills). Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) providers should embed transversal skills into courses as standard practice, building on curriculum reforms in England.
- There is an urgent need to address concerns about the deteriorating finance of HE providers, with three-quarters of the creative workforce holding a degree or other HE qualification.
- UK Government should fund new 'Technical Excellence Networks' to address advanced technical skill areas such as createch, green design and AI.
- The CIC should assess how current developments in the English skills system can be best leveraged for the sector, such as through developing new short courses

(Apprenticeship Units) addressing the sub-sector-specific applications of AI and sustainability skills.

- Creative industries employers should widen the talent pool from which they recruit, including young people, those disadvantaged in the labour market and underrepresented talent.
- Sector bodies should curate a package of measures for creative industries freelancers, to enable them to upgrade their skills and advance their careers, working with the new Freelance Champion.

**Heather Carey, Co-Director, Work Advance and Co-Report Author says:**

*“Today’s report marks a step-change in the evidence base on skills across the creative industries. Drawing on robust data and deep industry engagement, it shows clearly that skills challenges are not marginal - they are central to future growth. From fast-changing technologies to gaps at mid-career level, the evidence is unequivocal: we need a more responsive, joined-up skills system and this must be matched by greater investment by employers and workers to ensure skills remain relevant, now and in the future. This is a call to action for government, education and industry to work together to unlock the sector’s full potential.”*

**Bernard Hay, Director of Policy, Creative PEC and Co-Report author says:**

*“Over the last year we have engaged creative employers and sector leaders from across the UK to develop the most granular picture of skills needs across the creative industries to date. Across creative subsectors, what we see is an industry that requires talent with a blend of skills. These often include a mix of specialist and advanced technical skills, coupled with core skills like communication and business planning. The high levels of innovation activity and use of new digital technologies in the sector also mean that creative employer skills need to evolve rapidly.*

*“This rapid pace of change, coupled with the dominance of micro businesses and freelancing in the creative industries, require a skills system that is responsive, flexible and adaptive to the distinctive working practices we see in the sector.*

*“The identification of the creative industries as a priority growth sector in the UK’s Industrial Strategy, coupled with ongoing skills policy reform, mean this is a watershed moment and a unique time of opportunity to future-proof the skills system. This requires a system that is responsive to evolving need, flexible in delivery, and adaptive to the distinct working practices of the sector.”*

The report and eleven individual sub-sector reports were launched at a sold-out event at RSA House, London where Creative Industries Council (CIC) Co-Chairs Sir Peter Bazalgette and Baroness Shriti Vadera welcomed the findings, before a policy panel with industry representatives including Laura Mansfield, ScreenSkills, Sinéad Rocks, Channel 4, and Rebecca Swarray, Greater Manchester Combined Authority; freelance DJ and Curator.

/ENDS

**Download the report: ‘Creative Industries Skills Audits’ by Heather Carey and Bernard Hay**  
**[www.pec.ac.uk](http://www.pec.ac.uk) (live from 14.00 UK time Tuesday 12 May 2026)**

**The research team and spokespeople for the Creative PEC are available for comment and interview.**

Press contacts

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**Notes to editors**

## **1. About the Creative Industries Skills Audits**

The Skills Audits for the Creative Industries were funded by the DCMS and the Creative Industries Council (CIC) to better understand the current and future skills needs of the creative industries which represent £145bn in GVA and over 2.4 million jobs in the UK, and is one of the Government’s eight priority sectors for growth. Conducting the major skills industries review was a key commitment in the Creative Industries Sector Plan and today also sees the publication of eleven separate audits showing granular data for each sub-sector.

## **2. About the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC)**

Creative PEC works to support growth of the UK's Creative Industries through the production of independent and authoritative evidence and policy advice. Led by Newcastle University with the Royal Society of Arts and funded by the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Centre comprises a core consortium of; Newcastle University, Work Advance, Sussex University and the University of Sheffield. The PEC works with a diverse range of industry partners.

For more details visit [www.pec.ac.uk](http://www.pec.ac.uk), follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and [Bluesky](#), or [sign up to our newsletter](#).

## **3. About The UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council**

The UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), part of UK Research and Innovation, funds internationally outstanding independent researchers across the whole range of the arts and humanities: history, archaeology, digital content, philosophy, languages and literature, design, heritage, area studies, the creative and performing arts, and much more. The quality and range of research supported by AHRC works for the good of UK society and culture and contributes both to UK economic success and to the culture and welfare of societies across the globe.

4. 'Creative Industries Skills Audits is by Heather Carey and Bernard Hay' and designed by Mike Green at Green Doe Graphic Design