Creative Industries
Policy and Evidence Centre

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Policy Brief

Policy Brief:
Creative Freelancers

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About the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre

The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC) works to support the growth of the 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 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

The appointment of the Freelance Champion represents an important moment for the creative industries. Freelancers are central to the functioning and success of the sector, and Creative PEC has long called for this unique part of the creative workforce to be better represented in Government. To coincide with the appointment, we have put together this briefing, which synthesises the best evidence from our extensive research into freelancers from the past decade. It is intended to act as a point of reference for the Freelance Champion and others working in this policy space.

The briefing details how freelancers are represented across the creative economy, drawing on analysis of DCMS and Census 2021 data. Freelancers account for around 28% of the overall creative industries workforce, with particularly high concentrations in Music, Performing and Visual Arts (65%), Design and Designer Fashion (63%), and Crafts (45%). At the occupational level, there are particularly high levels of self-employment among Artists (86%), Actors (84%) and Musicians (83%), with concentrations of creative freelancers in London and the South of England. Our research has shown that three quarters of creative businesses work with freelancers, with 40% reporting that they hire as many or more freelancers than full-time employees. Freelancers also play a critical role in creative industries R&D and innovation, especially in the burgeoning createch sector.

Our recommendations are that the Freelance Champion should:

- **Strategically engage with freelancers, organisations and representative bodies in those parts of the creative industries where self-employed work is a structural feature.** Creative PEC research shows that self-employed workers constitute majorities in occupations such as Artists (86%), Actors (84%), Musicians (83%), Photographers, and Audio-visual and Broadcast Equipment Operators (64%). It will therefore be important to understand the dynamics affecting these roles and their related subsectors, though it should be noted that there are high numbers (if lower proportions) of self-employed workers in other creative occupations.
- **Gather evidence on the infrastructures that are developing among regional and sector-specific freelance networks.** There is extensive grassroots work being done to support freelancers, and tapping into 'what works' should involve engagement with practitioners already at the forefront of this effort. The Freelance Champion can act as an intermediary and identify opportunities for support, thus avoiding duplicating what is already established.
- **Highlight career pathways and upskilling opportunities in createch for freelancers.** Our data shows that freelancers are integral to createch firms, with 49% of these employers working with freelancers. Given the focus on supporting 'createch' in the UK Government's Creative

Industries Sector Plan, the Freelance Champion should ensure that freelancers are better represented in conversations around creative technology, as well as working with DCMS to highlight pathways into creative technology roles. This follows the recommendations we made in our 'Future avenues for createch' report that we co-authored with CoSTAR Foresight Lab.

- **Take an active role in ongoing developments in skills policy.** Our research demonstrates that upskilling remains an area of challenge for freelancers, with 10% reporting no training in the past three months, compared to 21% of employed creative workers. As a result, there is a real need to ensure that interventions currently in development meet their needs. The Growth and Skills Levy, Skills Passports, and Lifelong Learning Entitlement need careful, continual design and should be informed by consultation directly with the freelance workforce.
- **Work to implement tailored good/fair work standards for the creative freelance workforce.** Self-employed creative workers are more likely to report dissatisfaction with pay compared to their employed counterparts (35% and 28% respectively), as well as ongoing issues around access to social protections. The implementation of good/fair work risks fragmentation and having a clear, centralised set of standards specific to freelancers is crucial. To this end, the Freelance Champion should use the coordinating power of the Creative Industries Council to convene trade bodies, CIISA, trade unions and other relevant organisations to develop these standards.
- **Embed the perspectives of creative freelance workers from marginalised backgrounds in policy development.** The creative industries remain unrepresentative across a variety of different metrics, including class, gender and ethnic diversity. The Freelance Champion should work to ensure that diverse voices inform policy development relating to freelancing, with Recommendation 13 of the DCMS and Creative Industries Council-funded Good Work Review, which argues for the appointment of sector ambassadors, being a possible model.
- **Work with the ONS, DCMS, Creative PEC and industry partners to identify how data collection and analysis should be improved in order to track trends in the freelance workforce.** There are longstanding challenges around capturing the freelance workforce in data, which is due to a combination of fragmented data collection and difficulty in accurately recording who is or isn't freelance. The Freelance Champion can hold an important convening role for coordinating better collection and analysis.

While the briefing is rooted in Creative PEC's research into freelancers, we have also supplemented these findings with insights from our Industry Champions network of creative professionals. We held a workshop at the end of 2025 in which we explored priorities for the Freelance Champion's first 100 days.

1. Introduction

Freelancers are an integral part of the creative industries. Government economic estimates show that the self-employed make up around 28% of the creative workforce, which is twice the share for the wider economy.[1] It's for this reason that support for freelancers has been a core policy concern for the sector in recent years, with Creative PEC contributing extensively to the evidence base alongside a number of sector organisations including Creative UK, Equity, Bectu, Arts Council England and others.

In our last policy brief on freelancers, we supported the Creative Industries Federation in recommending that the government appoint a Freelance Commissioner 'to improve national data collection on types and structures of self-employment.'[2] In 2025, the Government's Creative Industries Sector Plan realised this ambition by committing to the creation of a Freelance Champion who would advocate for freelancers within UK Government and as a member of the Creative Industries Council.[3] In addition to their role representing freelancers in the sector, the Freelance Champion is also mentioned in parallel with the intention to continue fulfil the Good Work Review action plan.

In both policy and research, self-employment is often used as a proxy for capturing freelancers, even though not all freelancers will necessarily be self-employed and not all self-employed will be freelancers (even if they face similar challenges). Together, however, freelance and self-employed creative workers might be considered 'independent' workers.[4] Given this situation, this brief uses self-employment in the creative industries as a proxy for freelancers, and in Section 8 we discuss the definitional challenges in more detail.

This brief aims to identify opportunities and challenges for supporting freelancers in the UK by synthesising the most up-to-date evidence available from Creative PEC and elsewhere. In doing so, we also gesture to where more evidence is needed in order to make good on the ambition to support freelancers and the implementation of the Good Work Review, as well as the wider ambitions of the UK Government's plan to build a resilient workforce for the sector. Throughout, the brief is supplemented with qualitative insight from a session we held with our Industry Champions network of creative professionals in December 2025. Together, our Industry Champions mapped the challenges

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[1] Economic Estimates: Employment in DCMS sectors, April 2024 – March 2025. DCMS. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/economic-estimates-employment-in-dcms-sectors-april-2024-to-march-2025.
[2] E. Easton and B. Beckett (2021). Insights for policymakers: Freelancers in the creative industries. Creative PEC. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Freelancer-policy-briefing.pdf.
[3] UK Government (2025). Creative Industries Sector Plan. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/685943ddb328f1ba50f3cf15/industrial_strategy_creative_industries_sector_plan.pdf.
[4] Z. Wang (2026). Coworking spaces as informal skill ecosystems for the creative workforce. Creative PEC blog. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/blog_entries/coworking-spaces-as-informal-skill-ecosystems-for-the-creative-workforce/.

facing freelancers and developed priorities for the Freelance Champion's first 100 days in post.

2. The context

Creative industries employers are reliant on freelancers for their operations. This is especially true of sectors like film and TV, where project-based work is standard. The most recent data we have from our 2020 Creative Radar Survey shows that over three quarters of creative businesses reported working with freelancers, with 40% using as many or more freelancers than full-time employees.[5]

Despite their centrality to the creative economy, creative freelancers face numerous challenges in building a sustainable career. Irregular work, late payments, and a lack of social protections mean that freelancers are exposed to economic instability.[6] There is evidence that freelancers also undertake significant unpaid labour, a "hidden workload" that encompasses pitching, networking, marketing and extensive administration. As mentioned above, one further challenge is the fact that freelancers do not have a coherent definition in the UK compared to other countries like Norway, occupying something of a 'grey area' between employment and self-employment.[7] Although self-employment is often used as a proxy for capturing freelancers, this can flatten the complexity of freelance careers (see Section 7).

In our consultation with our Industry Champions network, there was a desire to highlight some of the positives associated with freelancing, which wider evidence also illustrates. Responses to our call for evidence for the Good Work Review underlined personal autonomy as a positive aspect of a creative career, not to mention artistic and creative freedom.[8] Research commissioned by Arts Council England finds that freelancers specifically value the freedom and flexibility afforded by their careers, allowing them to adapt to job opportunities as they arise.[9] However, this study was relatively narrow in that it focused on freelancers within ACE's designated disciplines, which is narrower than the creative industries as a whole.

[5] E. Easton and B. Beckett (2021). Insights for policymakers: Freelancers in the creative industries. Creative PEC. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Freelancer-policy-briefing.pdf.
[6] See especially the discussion on the impact of Universal Credit and the Minimum Income Floor in: H. Ashton (2023). 'Not here to help': Equity members' experiences of Universal Credit and the Minimum Income Floor. Equity. Available at: https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/scapvc/ccmps/staff/heidi_ashton/equity_universal_credit_report.pdf.
[7] B. Kleppe, J. Primorac, and H. Ashton (2026). Measuring matters: Mapping cultural and creative work in Europe. In: *Creative and Cultural Work in Europe*, edited by Kleppe et al. London: Routledge. Available at: https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.4324/9781003595625/creative-cultural-work-europe-miikka-pyykk%C3%B6nen-jaka-primorac-b%C3%A5rd-kleppe-david-wright
[8] H. Carey, L. Giles, and D. O'Brien (2023) *Call for Evidence: key messages. Working paper 2 from the Creative PEC's Good Work Review*. Creative PEC. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/PEC-GWR-Call-for-Evidence-key-messages-v4.pdf.
[9] M. Tyler, P. Hancock, R. Klich, H. Maples, and C. Unger (2024). Cultural Freelancers Study 2024. University of Essex and Arts Council England. Available at: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/developing-creativity-and-culture/supporting-individual-creative-and-cultural-practitioners/creative-and-cultural-freelancers-study .

The Industry Champions also suggested that freelancers often work across different subsectors of the creative industries, and are vital for knowledge exchange across the wider creative economy. Indeed, there is some evidence that labour mobility might be a driver of spillovers that support firm innovation.[10] OECD figures show around 30% of cultural and creative jobs are 'embedded' across the economy in sectors outside the creative industries.[11] They are part of a highly skilled creative workforce where 69% are graduates and 74% hold a Level 4 qualification or higher.[12]

3. Understanding the creative freelance workforce

3.1 Employment estimates

The subsectors that make up the creative industries are diverse, with multiple different business models, operational needs and labour dynamics. As a result, while it is true that the sector as a whole relies extensively on freelancers as a core part of its workforce, this can look quite different according to both subsector, occupation, geography and seniority. In this section, we break down some of the key statistics on creative freelancers and suggest ways in which data collection and analysis might be improved to give a fuller picture of how they work within the sector.

The most recent figures from DCMS's Employment Estimates show that the self-employed make up nearly 30% of the creative industries workforce, compared to a little under 15% of the workforce across the whole economy.[13]

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[10] Frontier Economics (2023). Creative spillovers: do the creative industries benefit firms in the wider economy? co-commissioned by DCMS and Creative PEC.. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-spillovers-do-the-creative-industries-benefit-firms-in-the-wider-economy/creative-spillovers-do-the-creative-industries-benefit-firms-in-the-wider-economy#sec3.

[11] OECD (2022). The Culture Fix: Creative People, Places and Industries, Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED). Available at: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2022/06/the-culture-fix_fda3a600/991bb520-en.pdf.

[12] DCMS (2024). Economic Estimates: Employment and APS earnings in DCMS sectors, January 2023 to December 2023. UK Government. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/economic-estimates-employment-and-aps-earnings-in-dcms-sectors-january-2023-to-december-2023

[13] DCMS (2025). Economic Estimates: Employment in DCMS sectors, January 2025 to December 2025. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/economic-estimates-employment-january-2025-to-december-2025-for-dcms-sectors. Note that DCMS treats these figures as 'official statistics in development' due to ongoing quality concerns about the sampling of the Annual Population Survey. The figures should thus be taken as indicative.

Table 1: DCMS Employment Estimates for the creative industries, January 2025 to December 2025

	All filled jobs	Self-employed	Proportion of self-employed
Whole economy	34,457	5,099	14%
Creative Industries	2,464	703	28%

Source: DCMS Employment Estimates for the creative industries, January 2025 to December 2025 (2025). All figures are estimates in thousands. See footnote 10.

We find that there is a degree of variability in the self-employed workforce according to creative subsector (Table 2). The Music, Performing and Visual Arts workforce contains the largest relative concentration of self-employed workers, with 65% of roles in the sector being self-employed. Film, TV, Radio & Photography (43%) and Publishing (36%) each have proportionally more self-employed workers than the creative industries as a whole. Advertising and Marketing (24%) and Architecture (24%) also contains a significant number of self-employed workers.

IT, Software and Computer Services (11%) and Museums, Galleries and Libraries (6%) have lower proportions of their workforce being self-employed compared to both the creative industries and economy-wide figure. These figures suggest that interventions aimed at freelancers are likely to have less of an impact in these sectors, though conversely both may benefit from policies designed with employees in mind.

The relationship between all filled jobs and the number of self-employed for each sector is also worth highlighting: IT, Software and Computer Services has the largest number of filled jobs, but a very low proportion of self-employed workers. For Music, Performing and Visual Arts, which has the second-highest number of filled jobs overall, the proportion is much higher. This points to how different sectors operate, and thus how interventions to support freelancers need to be closely tailored to sector-specific conditions.[14]

[14] S. McAndrew, D. O'Brien, M. Taylor, and R. Wang (2024). UK Arts, Culture and Heritage: Audiences + Workforce. Creative PEC. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Arts-Culture-and-Heritage-Audiences-and-Workforce-Creative-PEC-State-of-the-Nation-report-May-2024.pdf.

Table 2: DCMS Employment Estimates for creative industries subsectors, January 2025 to December 2025

Creative Industries Sub-sector	All filled jobs	Self-employed[15]	Proportion of self-employed
Advertising & Marketing	264	65	24%
Architecture	107	26	24%
Crafts	10	**	**
Design & Designer Fashion	132	**	**
Film, TV, Radio & Photography	272	119	43%
IT, Software and Computer Services	1,046	116	11%
Publishing	183	67	36%
Museums, Galleries & Libraries	118	8	6%
Music, Performing & Visual Arts	330	214	64%

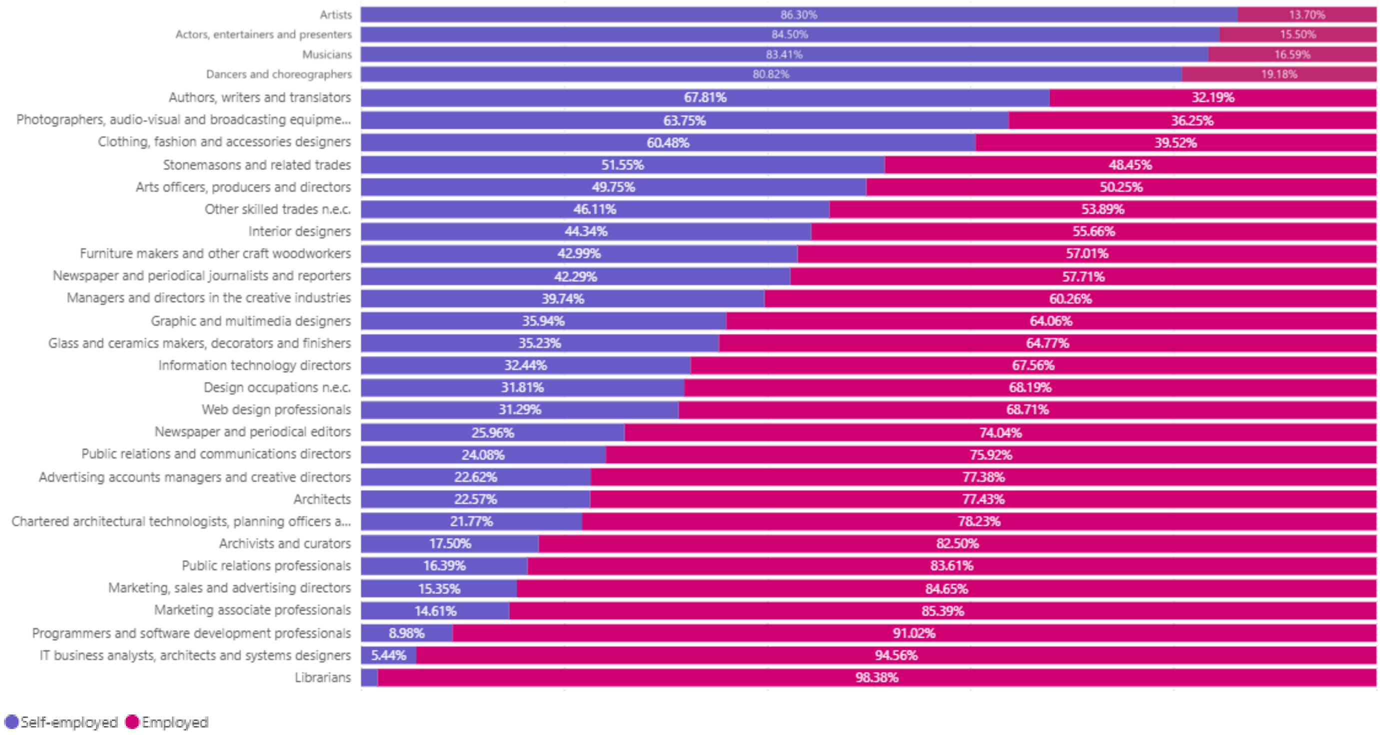
Source: DCMS Employment Estimates for the creative industries, January 2025 to December 2025 (2025). All figures are estimates in thousands. See footnote 10.

3.2 Occupational breakdown

In 2025, Creative PEC carried out analysis of the Census 2021 data with a view to understand what self-employment in the creative industries looked like.[16] This snapshot will have captured some of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent economic fallout for the sector, though it only captures data for England and Wales. The Census 2021 data also brings a useful additional lens because it allows us to dig into the extent that different creative occupations are primarily constituted of employees or self-employed workers at a greater scale than LFS, which also allows greater geographical insight.

[15] Note that DCMS have suppressed figures for both Crafts and Design & Designer Fashion to prevent disclosure of respondent information.
[16] R. Wang and B. Hay (2025). Creative self-employed workforce in England and Wales. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/blog_entries/creative-self-employed-workforce-in-england-and-wales/.

Figure 1: Self-employment in creative occupations, Census 2021



Source: Creative PEC analysis of Census 2021 data (Wang & Hay, 2025)

Figure 1 shows the top three creative occupations by the proportion of self-employment: Artists (86.3%), Actors, Entertainers and Presenters (84.5%), Musicians (83.41%) and Dancers and Choreographers (80.82%). Other occupations with more than 50% of the workforce self-employed include: Authors, Writers and Translators (67.81%), Photographers, Audio-Visual and Broadcasting Equipment Operators (63.75%), Clothing, Fashion and Accessories Designers (60.48%) and Stonemasons and Related Trades (51.55%).

The occupations where the proportion of self-employed individuals is lowest include: Librarians (1.62%), IT business analysts, architects and systems designers (5.44%), Programmers and Software and Development Professionals (8.98%), Marketing Associate Professionals (14.61%) and Marketing, Sales and Advertising Professionals (15.35%), followed by Public Relations Professionals (16.39%), Archivists and Curators (17.5%) and Chartered Architectural Technologists (21.77%). The raw numbers underneath reveal that, while the proportion of (for example) Marketing, sales and advertising executives who are self-employed is low, this still accounts for 26,304 workers, or the just shy of the number of Musicians who are self-employed. However, while the numbers of self-employed Marketing, sales and advertising executives or Programmers and software development professionals (23,726) are high, they will undoubtedly be subject to different labour market conditions and rates of pay compared to occupations such as Artists or Musicians. For example, there is evidence that, as well as being low paid, artists also have to undertake significant unpaid labour.[17] The challenge of unpaid labour was also highlighted in the Good Work Review, and it would be worthwhile trying to better understand which occupations are especially vulnerable to undertaking such work. Fundamentally, it is important to recognise that self-employment is a structural feature of certain occupations within the creative industries, and this will need to shape engagement and policy development for the sector.

In light of this analysis, it will be important for the Freelance Champion to focus their efforts strategically. **We recommend that the Freelance Champion prioritise engagement with freelancers, organisations and representative bodies in those parts of the creative industries that are most reliant on self-employed workers or where self-employment is a structural feature of individual occupations.** The Freelance Champion should continue to build awareness of where freelance workers face distinct challenges—wages, job quality, skills or some other issue—specific to the particular occupation or subsector they are in.

4. Geography of the creative freelance workforce

Census 2021 has also allowed Creative PEC researchers to explore the geographical dynamics of the freelance workforce due to its greater sample size compared to LFS data. Compared to DCMS economic estimates, Census 2021 allows us to look at the breakdown by occupation within distinct regions, as well as the make-up of the self-employed within combined authorities. Our dashboard allows users to explore location according to local authority and combined authority level in England and Wales, and shows that, in 2021, there were around 569,000 self-employed creative workers in total.[18] The results show that the highest concentrations of self-employed creative workers as a share of the total regional workforce are in Greater London (3.6%) and the West of England Combined Authority (2.58%). The remaining combined authorities each contain between 1% and 2%, except for Tees Valley which contains a little under 1%.

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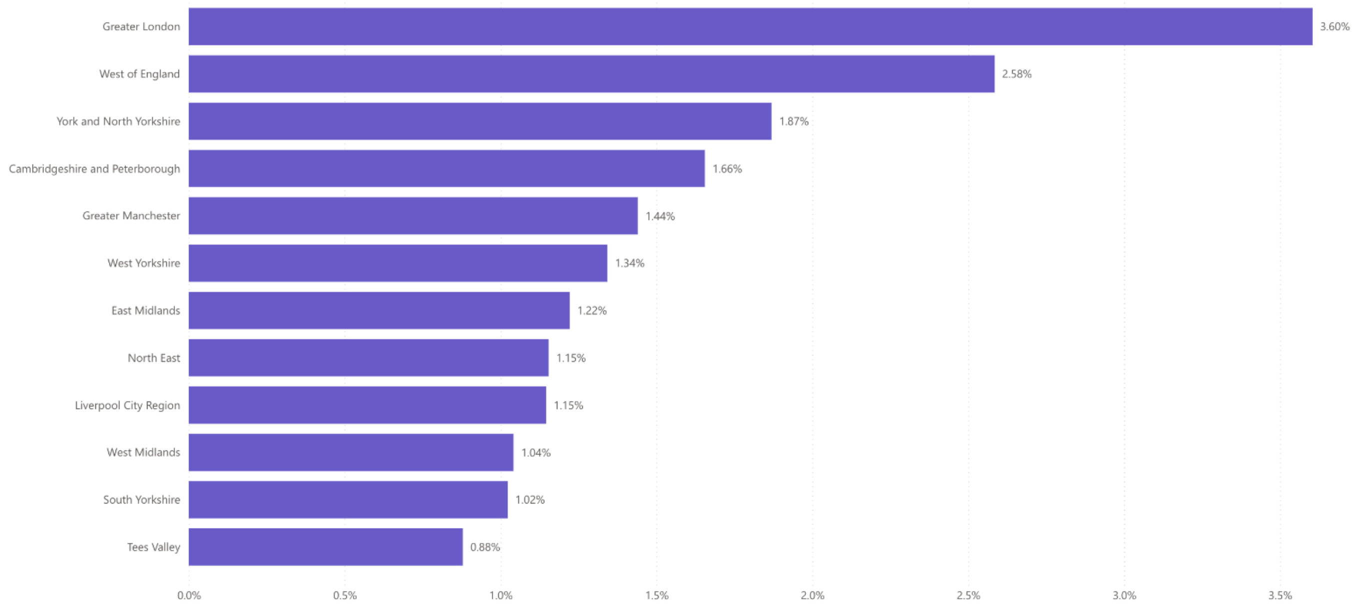
[17] A-N and Industria (2023). Structurally F-cked: a report into the bleak reality of artists pay. Available at: https://www.artistsnow.com/resource/structurally-f-cked-a-report-into-the-bleak-reality-of-artists-pay.html.
[18] This is lower than the DCMS estimates provided above, though note that Census 2021 data excludes Scotland. The ONS's Annual Population Survey (on which DCMS data is based) is also less comprehensive than the Census.

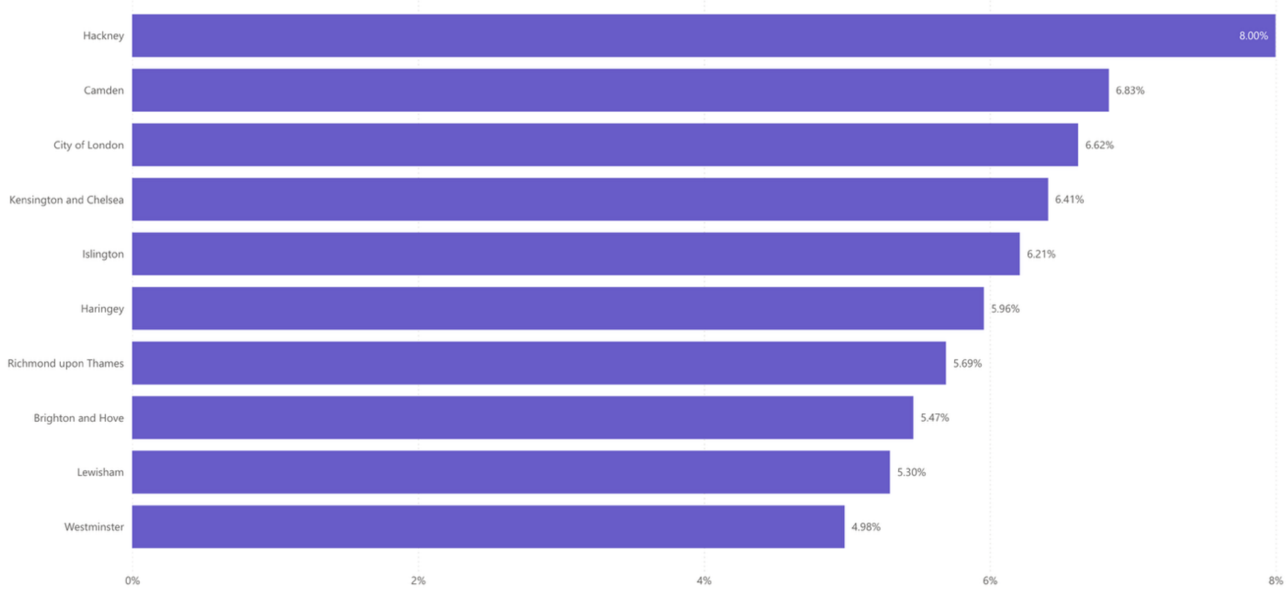
Figure 2: Proportion of self-employed creative workers in Combined Authorities in England



Source: Creative PEC analysis of Census 2021 data (Wang & Hay, 2025)

When we turn to local government figures, we find that nine of the top ten administrative areas for proportion of self-employed creative workers are local authorities in London, with the only exception being the unitary authority of Brighton and Hove. Other areas with high proportions of creative self-employed workers are largely concentrated in the south and south-west of England and include Lewes (3.81%), Waverley (3.65%), Mendip (3.51%), South Hams (3.47%), Tunbridge Wells (3.41%), and Bath and North-East Somerset (3.25%).

Figure 3: Top ten Local Authorities in England and Wales by proportion of self-employed creative workers



Source: Creative PEC analysis of Census 2021 data (Wang & Hay, 2025)

Creative self-employed workers are spread relatively unevenly across the whole of England and Wales, with concentrations in urban and a few semi-rural areas. The dispersed nature of this workforce means that interventions that can help to connect individuals are likely to be welcomed by freelancers. In our consultation with Industry Champions, they emphasised connection and mutual support as areas that the Freelance Champion might want to explore. For example, some pointed to the success of the North East Cultural Freelancers (NECF) network as a model of good practice for the sector that might be replicated and scaled in other parts of the UK, and Heidi Ashton has provided a comprehensive analysis of where infrastructure exists on a local level.[14] NECF emphasises coworking, networking and practical workshops to help members feel part of a wider community. The Industry Champions also suggested that more effective coordination between freelancers may also help to foster fruitful collaboration[19]. **We recommend that the Freelance Champion gather evidence on the grassroots infrastructures that are developing among regional freelance and cultural networks.** This would be with a view to help to developing low-cost, guided advice to freelancers on how best to pool knowledge, resources and network connections on a local or regional basis.

5. Freelancers and R&D and innovation

Creative PEC work has shown that freelancers are an integral part of the creative industries' R&D ecosystem. Creative businesses in micro-clusters located in London and the North of England report seeing freelancers as vital contributors to the development of new knowledge and skills.[20] The flip side of this is that creative firms may face challenges with sustainable growth, given their dependence on more mobile, precarious workers.[21]

Freelancers are also integral to the success of the UK's createch firms, which fuse creativity with technological innovation. As part of our *Understanding Createch R&D* report from 2022, we surveyed over 350 firms across the createch and wider tech sectors, finding that 49% of the former made use of freelancers in their R&D work.[22] Overall, 40% of R&D workers in createch are freelancers. The report

[19] There is some evidence that 'solo' self-employed individuals prefer to realise their ambitions through coordination with other self-employed workers or by subcontracting work, see: J. Cieślik, O. Dvouletý, and A. van Stel (2025) Expansion and job creation strategies in different solo self-employed segments. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal* 21. Available at: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11365-025-01129-x.
[20] J. Siepel, A. Ramirez-Guerra, and S. Rathi (2023). Geographies of Creativity. Creative PEC. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Creative-PEC-Geographies-of-Creativity-State-of-the-Nations-December-2023.pdf. Research suggests that firm openness to 'external linkages' can be a vital route to boosting knowledge and fostering complementarities, and thus lay the foundations for innovation; for an exploration of this in other sectors, see: Vahter et al (2013) Openness and innovation: are small firms different? Enterprise Research Centre. Available at: https://enterpriseresearch.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/ERC-RP12-ERC-Vahter-et-al-Open-Innovation.pdf.
[21] J. Siepel, S. Rathi and M. Cowling (2024). Growth Finance for the Creative Industries. Creative PEC. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/PEC-Growth-Finance-for-Creative-Industries.pdf.
[22] J. Siepel, H. Bakhshi, M. Bloom, and J.V. Ospina (2022). Understanding Createch R&D. Creative PEC. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Understanding-Createch-RD-v4.pdf.

also noted that the use of freelancers to this extent was surprising due to the potential for 'unwelcome spillovers', with valuable knowledge potentially being transferred out of firms, though the researchers also found that companies using freelancers were more likely to use non-disclosure agreements. On the other hand, participants in our Industry Champions workshop suggested that freelancers might be important for more welcome knowledge exchange, and there is evidence that labour mobility does lead to positive spillovers.[23] Given that OECD research shows that around 30% of cultural and creative jobs are embedded across the whole economy, there is plenty of potential for freelancers to be imparting knowledge capabilities and skills in different contexts. Understanding the extent and nature of this exchange could be important for better measuring the impact of freelancers on the economy.

Our recent *Future Avenues for Createch* report, co-authored with CoSTAR Foresight Lab, provided a number of recommendations to help freelancers maximise their expertise and impact on the burgeoning sector.[24] One key recommendation advocated for the formation of university-based training labs for freelancers, helping them to gain the specialist training they need to be able to contribute to the growth ambitions of the createch sector. **It also suggested that the Freelance Champion should play a key role in highlighting career pathways and upskilling opportunities in createch.** *Future Avenues for Createch* suggests that fostering the development of 'createch adjacent apprenticeship routes' could help in this regard.[25] In addition to these policy recommendations, it is also worth emphasising that the data underpinning our 2022 survey of createch firms requires updating; with createch becoming a major area of focus for the government, ensuring that freelancers are integrated into policy conversations through use of the good, recent data, should be a key aim for the Freelance Champion. Our own upcoming Creative Business Panel will be able to shed some light on the role of freelancers in R&D in particular.

6. Freelancers and skills

The Government's Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper set out to reform the post-16 provision in England, with the aim of developing a system that meets the needs of employers and the Industrial Strategy.[26] This is in the context of a creative sector which faces numerous challenges around skills

[23] Frontier Economics (2023). Creative spillovers: do the creative industries benefit firms in the wider economy? co-commissioned by DCMS and Creative PEC. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-spillovers-do-the-creative-industries-benefit-firms-in-the-wider-economy/creative-spillovers-do-the-creative-industries-benefit-firms-in-the-wider-economy#sec3.
[24] E. Hopkins, V. Williams and B. Hay (2026). Future avenues for createch: Insights and recommendations from rapid evidence review and industry engagement. AHRC, CoSTAR and Creative PEC. Available at: https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/UKRI-190126-FutureAvenuesForCreatech.pdf.
[25] Ibid.
[26] UK Government (2025). Post-16 education and skills white paper. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-education-and-skills-white-paper/post-16-education-and-skills-white-paper.

and training. Findings from our Skills Audit of the creative industries reveal that 32% of creative firms report skills deficiencies, with 72% indicating that their hard-to-fill vacancies are caused by a lack of skilled applicants.[27]

Freelancers face particular challenges when it comes to accessing skills development, with the Good Work Review finding that only 10% reported having had job training over a three month period, compared to 21% of employed creative workers and 24% of all workers.[28] Given this, it is vital that freelancers are supported to be able to access appropriate training for their professional development. The Post-16 White Paper promises to introduce more flexible options for training, including via the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) and Growth and Skills Levy (GSL), though the extent to which these interventions will serve the needs of freelancers remains uncertain. The LLE as mooted still has loans underpinning its funding model, which may be financially risky for freelancers, especially those who are in a financially precarious position. Where freelancers might need to develop foundational skills in entrepreneurship, finance or marketing, it is not clear that the LLE will be well-placed to serve their needs. The GSL, by contrast, is an employer-focused intervention with the initial rollout of Apprenticeship Units being focused on a quite narrow range of skills areas.[29] Skills Bootcamps may be a promising route to flexible training at 'intermediate' qualification levels, though since these interventions are also framed as a tool for addressing "economic inactivity" striking the right balance in terms of provision will necessarily require careful design. Given that bootcamps will be devolved to combined authorities in England, a key challenge will be to ensure that local governments are able to develop courses that are appropriate to their creative freelance workforces.

The Good Work Review showed that creative freelancers are more likely than others to work very long hours (up to 50 or 60 a week) and show higher dissatisfaction with their pay compared with their salaried counterparts (35% versus 28%), both of which may impact on their ability to take up training. As our Industry Champions noted, this is compounded by the range of skills freelancers are required to take on in addition to their creative practice: administrative, financial, and marketing skills are all necessary to make a career viable. ACE has reported on this 'functional flexibility' that is inherent to a freelance career, not to mention the problem of unpaid labour.[30]

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[27] H. Carey, L. Giles, and B. Hay (2026). Creative Industries Skills Audits: Creative Industries Summary Report. Creative PEC. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Creative-Industries-Skills-Audits-Summary-Report.pdf.
[28] H. Carey, L. Giles, and D. O'Brien (2023). Job quality in the creative industries: The final report from the Creative PEC's Good Work Review. Creative PEC. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/PEC-GWR-Job-quality-in-the-Creative-Industries-v7.pdf.
[29] Department for Education. The Growth and Skills Levy. Available at: https://find-employer-schemes.education.gov.uk/interim/growth-and-skills-levy.
[30] Tyler et al (2024). *Cultural Freelancers Study*. Arts Council England.

Getting the implementation of the LLE working for freelancers is therefore going to be imperative. In our consultation with Industry Champions, there was some concern that the LLE, as currently proposed, was limited in the breadth of subjects that it covers within its modular offer. While the most recent list of Level 5 and 6 approved Higher Technical Qualifications does involve a number of creative subjects areas, the current guidance on modular provision indicates that courses which form part of a larger qualification (such as a module of a larger undergraduate or postgraduate degree) do not count.[31] Given that freelancers may also need to update skills in their creative practice or to access training beyond their immediate expertise (e.g. marketing, financial management), reconsidering which modules or short courses are eligible for LLE funding is vital. **The Freelance Champion should therefore work with colleagues in DfE, Skills England and freelancers themselves to ensure that the LLE develops in a way that will fully benefit the creative freelance workforce.** This should involve gathering evidence from freelance workers themselves as well as engaging with relevant forums such as GuildHE's Creative Higher Education Taskforce, Creative Sector Skills Forum and relevant CIC working groups (among others).

Skills passports are another area that the Government has committed to supporting as part of the Sector Plan, following successful piloting by ScreenSkills in TV production.[32] This parallels recommendations in the Good Work Review that advocated for greater attention to digital badging and micro-credentials to meet the fast-changing skills needs of the creative industries, as well as the Creative Industries Skills Audits' call for 'digital infrastructure' to recognise learning.[33] For freelancers, a skills passport can be invaluable in demonstrating industry-approved training across different projects, and the ScreenSkills pilot benefitted from credibility derived from the involvement of multiple broadcasters and production companies. Skills passports were received with a degree of caution when we consulted our Industry Champions, however, with some suggesting they would need careful implementation to work well for freelancers. **The Freelance Champion should work closely with industry and Government to ensure that the development of skills passports are based on the best available evidence and in full consultation with freelance workers.** As leaders in this space, the experience of ScreenSkills in implementing skills passports within the screen sector makes them invaluable in understanding what works.

[31] Skills England (2026). Approved higher technical qualifications. UK Government. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/approved-higher-technical-qualifications.
[32] ScreenSkills. What is the ScreenSkills Training Passport? Available at: https://www.screenskills.com/training/screenskills-training-passport/what-is-the-screenskills-training-passport/.
[33] H. Carey et al (2026). Creative Industries Skills Audits, Creative Industries Summary Report. Creative PEC.

The Freelance Champion should also look to where the intervention has had success in other sectors, such as the Energy Skills Passport or Construction Skills Certification Scheme. It is important to be mindful that skills development also happens among creative freelancers in less formal contexts. Coworking spaces, including public spaces such as libraries, may be especially fruitful areas for the development of business, transversal, and digital skills.[34] Exploring and mapping how coworking spaces facilitate knowledge exchange—and potentially business opportunities—between freelancers could be helpful to devolved and local governments as they seek to implement growth and skills plans.

Creative PEC research has furthermore shown how the creative industries experience deficiencies in skills associated with management and leadership, which can be important components in driving productivity.[35] From our analysis of the Employer Skills Survey 2022, we found that 32% of employers report gaps around people management, in line with what was reported across all industries, and 28% report gaps in people/resource management, which is higher than all industries at 22%. More recently, the Creative Industries Skills Audit highlights that shown that 43% of employers report skills shortages to be found among mid-career and more experienced staff.[36] Given that these management skills are important for an effective and fluid freelance workforce, the defunding of many higher-level apprenticeships may weaken management training at a time when it is most necessary.

In light of the skills gaps and shortages that our work has highlighted, the importance of immigration in supplying diverse talent for the sector should also be considered, with around 16% of the creative workforce being non-UK nationals (compared to 14% of the workforce as a whole).[37] While identifying freelancers in the data is difficult, our researchers are able to partly track the self-employed creative workforce, showing that non-UK creative workers are more likely to be self-employed than their non-creative counterparts. There has been a significant decline in the percentage of non-UK creative self-employed workers from 2014 to 2024, dropping from 31% of the workforce to 18%. It will be crucial to understand how this drop intersects with the post-Brexit visa system, as well as the significant skills shortages faced by the sector.

[34] Z. Wang (2026). Coworking spaces as informal skill ecosystems for the creative workforce. Creative PEC blog. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/blog_entries/coworking-spaces-as-informal-skill-ecosystems-for-the-creative-workforce/.
[35] L. Giles, H. Carey, and D. O'Brien (2025). Skills Mismatches in the UK's Creative Industries. Creative PEC. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Creative-PEC-Skills-mismatches-in-the-UKs-Creative-Industries-12-Feb-2025.pdf.
[36] H. Carey et al (2026). Creative Industries Skills Audits, Creative Industries Summary Report. Creative PEC.
[37] S. Maioli, D. Simandjuntak, J. Jones, and G. Fazio (2025). Migration in UK Creative Occupations and Industries. Creative PEC State of the Nations report. Available at: http://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Creative-PEC-Migration-in-UK-Creative-Occupations-and-Industries-FINAL-9-6-2025.pdf.

7. Freelancers and good/fair work

The Good Work Review identified numerous challenges that the freelance workforce faces. As we noted in Section 6, self-employed creative workers are more likely than their employed counterparts to report dissatisfaction with pay (35% and 28% respectively), and consequently also face challenges with hidden labour costs such as administration and travel. This is accompanied by persistent issues reported around accessing the benefits and statutory protections enjoyed by employees, such as sick pay, holiday pay and pension contributions.[38] The Government's response to the late payment consultation indicates new guarantees around safeguarding income, though freelancers who operate as sole traders or on very small scale as a microbusiness might face challenges around enforcing claims.[39]

In addition to the issue of late payments, there is evidence that rates of pay have stagnated in several types of creative role in recent years.[40] Further research is needed to understand what existing rates of pay look like for freelancers across different sub-sectors and how this might have changed over time.[41] International comparisons would also be useful here, as research published by Creative PEC has previously suggested that there could be significant disparities between the UK and elsewhere, at least in more arts and culture-oriented roles.[42] Related to the issue of pay is also the question of whether creative freelancers are able to find enough hours, especially when they may be working multiple jobs (including non-creative roles). Indeed, there is evidence that a significant portion of creative workers hold more than one job, with the evidence suggesting, for example, that those working outside London are twice as likely to hold a second non-creative role.[43] The dynamics of second- or multiple job holding within the freelance workforce is another area where more

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[38] New data from the Pensions Commission's interim report suggests that only 4% of all self-employed workers have a pension, rising to just 17% of those who are self-employed but derive income from elsewhere. Department for Work and Pensions (2026). Pensions 2050: Evidence and Future Priorities. UK Government. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a073f6cf7c2e79c33db903d/Second_Pensions_Commission_Report_standard.pdf.

[39] Department for Business and Trade (2026). Late payment consultation: time to pay up – government response. UK Government. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/late-payments-tackling-poor-payment-practices/outcome/late-payment-consultation-time-to-pay-up-government-response-web-version.

[40] D. O'Brien, M. Taylor, R. Wang, P. Campbell, and K. Shorvon. (2025). Who Stays and Who Leaves? Mapping Arts, Culture and Heritage Careers. Creative PEC. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Who-Stays-and-Who-Leaves-report.pdf.

[41] Recent Creative PEC analysis showed relative stability in the freelance workforce across arts, culture and heritage sectors, though this was limited to 2022/23 and 2023/24. D. O'Brien et al (2025). Arts, Culture and Heritage: Recent Trends in UK Workforce and Engagement in England. Creative PEC. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Creative-PEC-Arts-culture-and-heritage-Recent-trends-in-UK-workforce-and-engagement-in-England-06-05-2025-2.pdf.

[42] H. Ashton (2021). Pay and conditions: the London West End vs NYC's Broadway. Creative PEC. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Heidi-Ashton-DP-Comparative-analysis-of-pay-and-conditions-West-End-and-Broadway-FINAL-April-2021.pdf.

[43] O. Brook, G. Giuliani, D. O'Brien and M. Taylor (2025). Precarity and second job-holding in the creative economy. Cultural Trends. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09548963.2025.2540966#abstract.

understanding is needed.

There have been a number of different pieces of work subsequent to the Good Work Review that have grappled with how social support for creative freelancers might work in practice, from innovative pension products that are more appropriate to the sector, to reforms to National Insurance and Universal Credit.[44] 'Make Freelancing Pay', a report by Design Otherwise commissioned by a consortium of partners led by the British Screen Forum including Creative PEC, took a comparative, international approach to identifying relevant tax and social support for screen sector freelancers. Fundamental to this report was the point that any adjustment to tax or benefits needs to be appropriate to a UK context, with calls to 'be more Sweden' or 'go South Korean' being too reductive. Further work should be directed to mapping how possible interventions might apply to other parts of the creative industries.[45] The report emphasised that the Government's Plan to Make Work Pay was the clearest route to reform for freelancers, but noted the focus was on employees and thus would not include self-employed workers. While the Government's response to its 'Making Work Pay: Strengthening Statutory Sick Pay' consultation acknowledged that some submissions had advocated extending measures to all workers, including the self-employed, the Employment Rights Act 2025 did not.[46] Regardless, there is a case to be made that welfare policy should give greater consideration to the support of creative and cultural freelance workers, and the Freelance Champion should seek to engage with the Department for Work and Pensions in the future.[47]

Alongside exploring possible reforms to social support, there is further work to be done to embed the good work agenda for freelancers across the creative economy. The Creative Industries Sector Plan committed to helping the sector enact the recommendations from the Good Work Review as part of developing a resilient workforce. Recommendation 5 of the plan urged co-design of good/fair work standards for the sector, while acknowledging that the diversity of existing sectoral and 'place-based' standards would require concerted effort to align. We also noted how much work had been done by trade unions such as Bectu and Equity in driving for collective agreements and codes of practice. The establishment of the Fair Work Agency (FWA) as part of the Department of Business and Trade offers further opportunity to work with creative industries employers and employees to understand how best

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[44] A. Tarr (2025). *Forging Freelance Futures*. Creative UK. Available at: https://freelance.wearecreative.uk/.
[45] D. R. Eikhof and H. Randolph (2025). *Make Freelancing Pay: Can we use taxes and benefits to boost competitiveness, and improve workforce diversity and retention in the UK screen sector?* Design Otherwise. Available at: https://britishscreenforum.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Make-Freelancing-Pay-Final.pdf.
[46] Department for Work and Pensions (2025). Government response: Making Work Pay: Strengthening Statutory Sick Pay. UK Government. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/making-work-pay-strengthening-statutory-sick-pay/outcome/government-response-making-work-pay-strengthening-statutory-sick-pay.
[47] H. Ashton, C. Bilton, and D. Wright (2026). Welfare policy as cultural policy in the UK. In: Kleppe et al, *Creative and Cultural Work in Europe*. London Routledge. Available at: https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.4324/9781003595625/creative-cultural-work-europe-miikka-pyykk%C3%B6nen-jaka-primorac-b%C3%A5rd-kleppe-david-wright.

to enforce their rights fairly.[48] Exploring accreditation or kitemarking systems for employers who achieve good/fair work standards was a key recommendation in the Good Work Review, and the FWA may offer a route to cohering standards across the sector. **The Freelance Champion should work to coordinate CIC, DCMS and other partners to develop a coherent set of good/fair work standards for creative freelancers**. This will require thorough review of the multiple good/fair work standards that have grown in different devolved and sub-sectoral contexts, including the Scottish Government's work on recommendations for a Culture Fair Work Charter, [49] and will be supported by upcoming Creative PEC research that aims to update the quantitative baseline on job quality that was the foundation for the original Good Work Review.[50] During our roundtable, the Industry Champions also raised challenges around accessing maternity and paternity leave, sick leave and compassionate leave. With the Employment Rights Act 2025 having already passed, there will be work to do to monitor the effects of its impacts on freelancers and to identify where new provisions do or do not meet their needs.

Despite the difficulties that many freelancers face, there are also some positives, a point that our Industry Champions were keen to highlight. Responses to our call for evidence for the Good Work Review underlined personal autonomy as a positive aspect of a creative career, not to mention artistic and creative freedom.[51] Brighton Fuse 2's investigation into digital freelancers from 2015 also found that 87% of respondents underlined the importance of flexibility for their careers, with the same percentage also saying that being able to realise their own business ideas was important.[52] Only 27% said that they had turned to freelancing because they could not find work as an employee. However, it should be emphasised that the situation is different for many careers in the arts where full-time employment simply isn't an option (as in acting, for example).

More recently, our research on who leaves arts, culture and heritage jobs shows that self-employed individuals are much less likely to leave their careers compared to their employed counterparts.[53] However, while this may appear to be positive, the researchers are clear that there may be a variety of reasons for why self-employed people are less likely to leave, including the difficulties inherent in

[48] DBT (2025). Factsheet: The Fair Work Agency. UK Government. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/696126a5d6532b76df7dcd75/fair-work-agency-factsheet.pdf.
[49] Scottish Government (2025). Independent Culture Fair Work Task Force: Report and Recommendations. Available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/independent-culture-fair-work-task-force-report-recommendations/documents/.
[50] H. Carey, R. Wang and D. O'Brien (2026, forthcoming) Job quality in the Creative Industries, 2026. Creative PEC State of the Nations report.
[51] H. Carey et al. (2023). *Call for Evidence: key messages. Working paper 2 from the Creative PEC's Good Work Review*. Creative PEC.
[52] J. Sapsed. R. Camerani, M. Masucci, M. Peterman, and M. Rajguru (2015) Brighton Fuse 2: Freelancers in the creative digital economy. University of Sussex. Available at: https://sussex.figshare.com/articles/report/The_Brighton_Fuse_2_Freelancers_in_the_creative_digital_IT_economy/23434313?file=41147264.
[53] D. O'Brien et al (2025). Who stays and who leaves? Mapping arts, culture and heritage careers. Creative PEC.

switching career.

8. Diversifying the freelance workforce

The creative industries workforce remains unrepresentative of the wider population. The Good Work Review demonstrated that creative workers from minority ethnic backgrounds are underrepresented in all creative sub-sectors other than IT, Software and Computer Services. Our analysis also found that representation of working class people was some of the lowest in the economy in several creative subsectors, while representation of women was especially low in Architecture and IT, Software and Computer Services. The picture for disability was more mixed, with Crafts, Music, Performing and Visual Arts, and Museums, Galleries and Libraries performing better than the wider economy. This matches some evidence we have on arts, culture and heritage occupations that suggests workers in this part of the creative industries are more likely to report a disability compared to the workforce as a whole (21% vs 18%).[54]

Other work has been able to illustrate how these dynamics play out among creative freelance workers specifically, with Arts Council England's survey finding that those from minority ethnic backgrounds were far less likely to see the sector as inclusive compared to the general freelance population (66% vs 47% respectively).[55] This also encompasses real inequalities in median pay between those from white backgrounds and workers from minority ethnic backgrounds.[56] Given that the Good Work Review also found that minority ethnic creative workers and self-employed workers suffer the highest rates of under-employment, there is reason to think that this problem is compounded for workers who occupy both of these categories.

Evidence has consistently shown that there are large structural barriers to getting into the creative industries, including the proliferation of unpaid work, informal hiring practices and cultural conformity.[57] Alongside the large volume of degree holders who dominate the sector, this presents a daunting challenge for those from marginalised backgrounds looking to break into creative work, and

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[54] S. McAndrew, D. O'Brien, M. Taylor, and R. Wang (2024). UK Arts, Culture and Heritage: Audiences + Workforce. Creative PEC State of the Nations report. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Arts-Culture-and-Heritage-Audiences-and-Workforce-Creative-PEC-State-of-the-Nation-report-May-2024.pdf.
[55] ACE (2024) Cultural Freelancers Study.
[56] A. Tarr (2025) Forging Freelance Futures.
[57] H. Carey, D. O'Brien, and O. Gable (2021). Social mobility in the Creative Economy: Rebuilding and levelling up? Creative PEC. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/PEC-report-Social-mobility-in-the-Creative-Economy-Sept-2021.pdf; O. Brook, D. O'Brien M. Taylor (2020) "There's No Way That You Get Paid to Do the Arts": Unpaid Labour Across the Cultural and Creative Life Course. Sociological Research Online 25(4). Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1360780419895291; O. Brook, D. O'Brien and M. Taylor (2020). Culture Is Bad For You: Inequality in the cultural and creative industries. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

doubly so for those who might look to strike out as a freelance worker.[58] **We therefore recommend that the Freelance Champion seeks to ensure that policymaking takes into account the particular perspectives of marginalised creative freelance workers.** There are various models that might be available to embed this: Recommendation 13 of the Good Work Review, for example, argued for strengthening the voice of freelance and marginalised groups by the appointment of a variety of representative 'ambassadors'. Regardless of the precise model, DCMS should work to support the Freelance Champion to engage relevant advisory bodies with support from a dedicated secretariat.

9. Data and definitions

In UK policy, freelancers are frequently talked about in the same breath as the self-employed. While there is certainly crossover, this is an imperfect proxy. This contrasts with other countries like Norway, which have a statutory definition for their freelance workforce.[59] A clear definition of what constitutes freelancing would be an important first step in collecting better data on the nature and scale of the workforce, and thus in devising more effective policy interventions.

Bectu has noted that the term 'freelance' is often used to cover several different types of work, encompassing short-term PAYE contracts, sole traders or limited company contractors, each of which require quite different levels of employment protection.[60] Researchers have highlighted how official statistics may fail to capture freelancers for a variety of reasons, including patchy sampling issues, self-classification errors and trouble in capturing portfolio careers that may include a mix of working patterns.[61]

Given the potential diversity inherent in the freelance workforce, understanding the distribution of different contracts and working patterns would be especially helpful for ensuring that policy developments speak to specific contexts. It would be helpful, for example, to understand the mix of sole traders, workers taking on a series of PAYE contracts, and those running limited companies (or some mix of the above), across the creative economy as well as between different creative subsectors. Similarly, as we noted in Section 6, many freelancers hold multiple jobs, often across

[58] R. Comunian, T. Dent, D. O'Brien, T. Read and N. Wreyford (2023). Making the Creative Majority. APPG for Creative Diversity. Available at: https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/resources/reports/2023/full-report-2023-making-the-creative-majority.pdf.
[59] H. Ashton (2025). The squeeze: Freelancers in a polycrisis economy. Arts Professional. Available at: https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/feature/the-squeeze-freelancers-in-a-polycrisis-economy. In Norway, freelancers pay tax like employees and are not required to keep accounts or register in the VAT register, see: Altinn (2026) Freelancers. Available at: https://info.altinn.no/en/start-and-run-business/planning-starting/before-start-up/freelancers/.
[60] Bectu (2023). What is a freelancer? Available at: https://bectu.org.uk/article/freelancers-employment-rights/.
[61] I. Panneels, M. Terras, M., C. Jones, I. Helgason, and M. Komorwski (2021). Plugging the Data Gap: Freelance Workers in the Creative Industries. Creative PEC. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/blog_entries/plugging-the-data-gap-freelance-and-self-employed-workers-in-the-creative-industries/.

different sectors, and being able to map where these intersections occur, and whether the dynamics are different depending on the type of creative role, would help to better understand knowledge and skills spillovers between key industries. Indeed, research highlights how the diverse nature of the creative industries means labour conditions span a significant range of different conditions and career pathways depending on the sub-sector.[62]

Even as the Employment Rights Act 2025 sought to create clearer definitions around employment status, the place of freelancers was not addressed despite attempts to establish a cross-economy Freelance Commissioner.[63] We have argued that any Freelance Champion appointed by the Government needs to be the driving force behind improving data collection on freelance employment. It is important that official statistics start to capture freelance work with a view to identifying future policy opportunities. **The Freelance Champion should therefore work with the ONS, DCMS, DWP, Creative PEC, and industry partners to identify how data collection and analysis should be improved in order to track trends in the freelance workforce.** This also extends to better understanding the dynamics of the immigrant freelance workforce given the UK creative industries' international outlook. Our research has highlighted that some of the visa routes that freelancers might use, such as the High Potential Individual or Global Talent visas, lack the requisite occupational data.[64] In the case of self-employed freelancers, a job is also not necessarily needed to access these visas, so understanding how individuals using these routes impact on the creative economy is hard to assess.

10. Looking ahead

This brief has aimed to show the breadth of existing evidence on the creative freelance workforce, and point to the gaps and future avenues for research. We've highlighted the main areas where we think the Freelance Champion might be best-placed to advocate on behalf of freelancers. Rather than being the last word on the matter, this brief should act as a foundation for future evidence gathering and policy development: on Good Work and skills, on building a diverse workforce, and on understanding what best practice looks like from those who know best—creative freelance workers themselves.

[62] B. Kleppe et al (2026) Measuring matters: Mapping cultural and creative work in Europe.
[63] The Earl of Clancarty's amendment, After Clause 150 to the Employment Rights Act. Available at: https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3737/stages/19806/amendments/10020958.
[64] S. Maioli et al (2025) Migration in UK Creative Occupations and Industries. Creative PEC. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Creative-PEC-Migration-in-UK-Creative-Occupations-and-Industries-FINAL-9-6-2025.pdf