Living the dream?

The reality of working in the creative industries in 2026

New Creative PEC report looks at pay, progression, job security, bullying and harassment across all creative sub-sectors

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Today sees the launch of new research from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC), providing a comprehensive overview of the realities of working in the creative industries in 2026. This comes as major UK creative funders, including Arts Council England, commit to a new shared statement on what 'Good and Fair Work' looks like in creative sectors.

Today's report **'Job quality in the creative industries, 2026'** provides an update to Creative PEC's 'Good Work Review' published in 2023. The report finds significant progress in terms of the appointment of two new Creative Industries Freelance Champions by the UK Government, the Employment Rights Act 2025, the Creative Industries Sector Plan (which made Good Work an explicit priority) and interventions across governments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Creative Industries Minister, Ian Murray, says:

"This report is clear: Britain's creative industries offer many people good careers, but too many workers face barriers to entry, insecure jobs and diversity needs serious improvement. That is not good enough for a sector with such talent and potential.

"We only have the best creative industries in the world because of the world class talent that's made them so. That means more action is needed, and the Good Work commitment is a strong place to start. We will play our part in driving up working practices by also committing to uphold these principles, both as an employer and a

funder. The Creative Industries Sector Plan made workforce improvements an explicit priority, and we are putting it into practice."

The report is based on 40 indicators used to determine whether work is 'good', such as pay, overtime, flexible working, employer pension, work-related illness, training provision and bullying. Findings are segmented for each creative sub-sector alongside suggestions for where action is most needed.

In many respects, work in the creative industries is found to be 'good'. Full-time employees earn more than one-third (35%) more than the economy-wide average, and job autonomy leads all other industrial strategy sectors. This positive picture sits alongside significant trade-offs in terms of job security, pay satisfaction, training and progression opportunities.

Key findings:

- **Autonomy** is far more common in the creative industries than all other priority sectors in the industrial strategy: workers report substantially more control over their job (50% vs 38%), the pace of work (56% vs 44%) and their working hours (48% vs 30%).

- **Pay:** full-time employees in the creative industries earn one-third (35%) more than the economy-wide average. However, a gender pay gap persists and people from working-class backgrounds experience lower pay and lower job security.

- **Job security** falls well short of the all-industry benchmark. It has fallen by 14% from 57% in 2014-16 to 43% in 2022-24 (compared with 51% in other industries).

- **Workforce diversity** remains a critical concern. Representation of people from working-class backgrounds has fallen since 2021 (from 25% to 21%), leaving the creative industries behind all other industrial strategy sectors.

- **Employer training** falls short of the all-industry average (55% vs 60%), and workforce training participation is the lowest of any industrial strategy sector.

- **Creative Freelancing** sees only 54% of practitioners satisfied with their household income (vs 71% of employees), with weekend working more than twice as common, and just 14% taking part in job-related training in the past

three months (vs 21% of employees).

- **Trade Union membership** is consistently weak (8% vs 20% for other sectors).

Heather Carey, Director of Work Advance and co-author, says:

"Three years on from the Good Work Review, there is much to celebrate. Creative workers enjoy more autonomy and flexibility than those in any other growth sector, and Good Work is now a priority for government and industry across all four nations. But the trade-offs we identified in 2023 persist: job security is low, worker voice is weak, working-class people remain under-represented and freelancers face particular challenges. Government and industry must now go further and faster: embedding Good Work standards, supporting firms to meet them, investing in skills and advancing a wide-ranging package of measures to improve job quality for creative freelancers."

Bernard Hay, Director of Policy, Creative PEC, says:

"The publication of Creative PEC's Good Work Review in 2023 marked the beginning of government and industry action on job quality, particularly via the Creative Industries Council's Good Work Review Action Plan. Now three years on, we welcome the policy measures being announced today and congratulate those organisations making this important step. Public bodies and funders play a critical role in setting standards and enabling good practice across the wider sector. The PEC will continue to work closely with partners to support a more inclusive creative sector, and help ensure it offers rewarding, fair and sustainable work for all."

Alongside today's report launch, several creative funders will commit to a shared statement on 'good and fair work' in response to the principles set out by Creative PEC. The Funders are: Arts Council England, Arts Council of Wales, BFI, Creative Wales, Creative Scotland, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Youth Music.

In a further move to bolster working conditions in the creative industries, the Intellectual Property Office will also today announce new guidelines for self-employed creatives.

Sara Whybrew, BFI's Director of Skills and Workforce Development, said:

"The BFI welcomes today's report, showing us that there has been some positive movement around this agenda, but that we've still got more work to do. Through the first phase good work review action plan, the sector's creative and cultural National Lottery and Grant in Aid funders have today published our first shared commitment statement together, focused on Good and Fair Work. We stand shoulder to shoulder on this subject and from this baseline position, we will continue to explore additional steps we might take together to aid adherence to these principles across our collective footprint and through our funding decisions.

We also thank the Intellectual Property Office for working closely with representatives from across the sector to create important new guidance for self-employed creators. This aims to lead to greater understanding and awareness of IP rights and better protection of the work created by this brilliant part of our workforce, and ultimately, we hope provides them with greater security.

The pillars of Good and Fair Work must sit at the forefront of our sector's narrative, and positive job quality is something that every type of worker is entitled to experience as standard."

'Job quality in the Creative Industries, 2026' is by Heather Carey (Work Advance), Ruoxi Wang (Work Advance) and Dave O'Brien (University of Manchester) and published by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC).

Download the report from 00.01 11 November 2026

https://pec.ac.uk/state_of_the_nation/**job-quality-in-the-creative-industries-2026**/

Notes to Editors:

1.Shared Commitment Statement on Good Work

The Creative and Cultural National Lottery and Grant in Aid funders* (The Funders) across the UK believe that all professionals working in the creative industries and culture sector deserve fair pay, safe working conditions and opportunities to develop and progress. We are therefore committed to upholding the principles of Good and Fair Work, both as employers and in our creative and cultural funding programmes.

Good (or Fair) Work in the creative sectors was defined in the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre's Good Work Review, and encompasses these core principles:

- Fair reward, terms and conditions,
- A balance of security and flexibility,
- Autonomy and personal fulfilment,
- Skill use, development and progression,
- Agency, voice and representation, and
- A healthy, respectful, safe and inclusive work environment.

[And for all funders] We will work closely with partners, funded organisations, and member representative bodies to support understanding and adoption of Good and Fair Work by organisations across the sector and will incorporate these principles in our funding conditions and agreements where relevant.

*The Funders: Arts Council England, Arts Council of Wales, BFI, Creative Wales, Creative Scotland, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Youth Music.

2. State of the Nations reports

The report is part of the Creative PEC's State of the Nations research series, which uses the latest data to inform policymakers on how best to support the creative sector across four thematic areas. Regular reports on each area will be published annually over the five years of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funding period.

3. 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, follow us on LinkedIn and Bluesky, or sign up to our newsletter.

4. About the Good Work Review Task and Finish Group

The Good Work Review Task and Finish Group was set up by the Creative Industries Council (CIC) and DCMS in response to the Good Work Review of Job Quality in the Creative Industries. Chaired by the BFI, the Task and Finish Group informed the creation of the first phase Good Work Review Action Plan, which has progressed select responses to recommendations in the Good Work Review. The BFI has continued to oversee the action plan and will support the development of a second phase action plan with creative industries partners in 2027. This is with a view to developing further responses to the recommendations set out in the Good Work Review.

5. 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.

6. **Job quality in the Creative Industries, 2026'** was designed by Mike Green at Green Doe Graphic Design.