State of the Nations research series

JOB QUALITY IN THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES 2026

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About the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre

The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC) supports 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 UKRI's 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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About the State of the Nations research series

Creative PEC's State of the Nations research series analyses the latest data across four thematic areas to inform the development of policies relating to the creative industries. Its scope is the whole of the United Kingdom, and wherever possible data is presented for all the nations and regions. Regular reports on each area will be published annually over the five years of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funding. The themes and corresponding Research Partners are:

- R&D, Innovation and Clusters (University of Sussex)
- Internationalisation (Newcastle University)
- Arts, Culture and Heritage Sectors (University of Sheffield)
- Education, Skills and Talent (Work Advance)

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State of the Nations research series

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Foreword

In UK policymaking, it can sometimes feel as though years, if not decades, pass before research and evidence help to shape actual policy decisions. But job quality appears to be an encouraging exception to this rule, with a flurry of policy activity in the creative industries since the publication of Creative PEC's landmark Good Work Review in 2023. We have seen the appointment of Creative Freelance Champions, responding to the Review's call for a stronger freelance voice in policymaking; the publication of the Good Work Review First Phase Action Plan, developed jointly by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Creative Industries Council; and the British Film Institute-funded Good Work Industry Support Programme pilot in screen, with further commitments from arts funders across the UK's four nations coinciding with the publication of today's State of the Nations.

This momentum has been reinforced by wider policy developments, notably the Employment Rights Act 2025, which represents the most substantial legislative intervention in this area since the late 1990s. The Act strengthens protections for workers in areas including job security, sick pay, family leave and protection from harassment, while strengthening the enforcement of employment rights. But the growing focus on Good Work also reflects a recognition among growing numbers of creative industries leaders that if creative talent is the foundation of the UK's strength in these industries, it is unacceptable that many people working in them continue to experience poor working conditions.

Over three years after the publication of the Good Work Review, we therefore believe it is timely to revisit the evidence: to assess where there are good practices, where progress is being made and where the greatest challenges remain. As with all our latest State of the Nations reports, wherever the data permits, we benchmark the creative industries against other sectors identified as priorities for economic growth in the UK's 2025 Industrial Strategy.

The report contains a wealth of interesting data and insights, and I encourage you to dive in. As always, we would welcome your feedback on our findings.

Professor Hasan Bakhshi,
Director, Creative PEC

Executive summary

In February 2023, the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC) published the Good Work Review (GWR), the first comprehensive examination of job quality across the UK's creative industries (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023a). The GWR was the product of a year-long, large-scale enquiry that brought together quantitative evidence, a rapid evidence assessment and an extensive programme of engagement – including a call for evidence, bilateral interviews and national policy roundtables – that collectively explored the views of over 120 stakeholders from across all creative sub-sectors and the four UK nations. It set out a robust, evidence-backed case for action and a policy framework organised around four strategic priorities and sixteen detailed recommendations that were informed by international best practice and co-developed with government, industry and wider stakeholders.

This report aims to update the quantitative baseline on job quality in the creative industries that underpinned the original GWR (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023b). The intervening period has seen considerable policy developments, including the Employment Rights Act 2025, the Creative Industries Sector Plan, the appointment of Creative Freelance Champions and continued work by government in each of the four nations and by industry to translate the GWR's four strategic priorities and sixteen recommendations into practice.

It provides policymakers, industry leaders and creative workers with the most current picture of where the sector stands on job quality – three years on from the original Review.

This report has three principal aims: to update the quantitative baseline of job quality established by the GWR, drawing on the latest available data across the same six domains and nearly 40 indicators; to benchmark the creative industries not only against the UK economy as a whole but, for the first time, against other priority sectors identified in the government's Modern Industrial Strategy (IS-8); and to examine how job quality varies within the creative industries, across sub-sectors and by employment status and personal characteristics.

The analysis draws on three major national data sources – the Annual Population Survey and Labour Force Survey, Understanding Society, and the Employer Skills Survey – applying the same definition of Good Work and a measurement framework consistent with the original Review.

The analysis offers five high-level findings.

Summary of findings

1. **In many respects, as concluded by the original GWR, we find work in the creative industries is 'good'**. Full-time employees in the creative industries earn more than one third (35%) more than the economy-wide average. Job satisfaction (83% vs 81%), skills-role match (51% vs 48%) and progression opportunities (61% vs 56%) are also slightly above the all-industry benchmark. And the sector leads every IS-8 comparator on autonomy: workers (including employees and the self-employed) report substantially more control over job tasks (50% vs 38%), work pace (56% vs 44%) and working hours (48% vs 30%) than the workforce as a whole.

2. **This positive picture sits alongside significant trade-offs**. Job security, at 43% (vs 51% across all industries), is the lowest of any IS-8 sector, and involuntary part-time work and underemployment are both the highest. As in the original Review, pay dissatisfaction (32% vs 25%) and unpaid overtime (4.3 vs 3.5 hours a week) in the creative industries also compares unfavourably. Collective representation is consistently weak – trade union membership sits at 8% (vs 20%).

   Perhaps most striking for a sector whose competitive advantage rests on talent is a pronounced, persistent underinvestment in skills. Employer training provision falls statistically significantly short of the all-industry average (55% vs 60%), and workforce training participation is the lowest of any IS-8 sector. Workforce diversity also remains a critical concern, most starkly for socioeconomic background: representation of workers from working-class backgrounds has fallen since 2021 (from 25% to 21%), leaving the creative industries behind every other IS-8 sector on this measure.

3. **The picture is often highly nuanced at sub-sector level**. In advertising and marketing and in IT, software and computer services, earnings are high but so are pay dissatisfaction and unpaid overtime, and a higher share of workers want to work fewer hours and report work-related illness caused by stress, anxiety or depression.

   In screen; design and designer fashion; and music, performing and visual arts, autonomy is high but so is job insecurity. The museums, galleries and libraries sub-sector has higher rates of training, trade union presence and collective bargaining but lower pay, job satisfaction and progression opportunities and higher rates of involuntary non-permanent work, underemployment, bullying and harassment. The picture of underrepresentation also varies by sub-sector. The report provides summary scorecards for each sub-sector which demonstrate that no sub-sector performs well across all measures of job quality and all creative sub-sectors have work to do to foster Good Work. However, the priorities will vary, underscoring the need for policy measures that address the distinct challenges of each sub-sector, rather than a single, sector-wide prescription.

4. As reported in the original GWR, **job quality for creative freelancers remains a particular concern**. In the creative industries, self-employed workers report substantially greater autonomy than employees on every measure – over job tasks (76% vs 42%), work pace (72% vs 51%) and working hours (69% vs 42%) – and slightly higher job satisfaction (85% vs 82%). But this comes at a cost: only 54% are satisfied with their household income (vs 71% of employees), weekend working is more than twice as common (74% vs 35%) and just 14% took part in job-related training in the past three months (vs 21%).

5. **Job quality continues to vary by personal characteristics**. A gender pay gap persists (£965 vs £808 median weekly earnings), and women are more likely than men to face involuntary non-permanent work and workplace bullying. People from ethnic minorities report lower autonomy over working hours (37% vs 50%) despite better progression. Disabled workers report substantially higher rates of work-related illness (15% vs 3%), lower job satisfaction (77% vs 84%) and lower pay (£847 vs £917). Workers from working-class backgrounds also report lower pay (£892 compared with £951 median weekly earnings for those from privileged backgrounds) and lower job security (40% compared with 48%).

Research insights and policy considerations

The original GWR established a robust, evidence-based policy framework organised around four strategic priorities and sixteen recommendations and these remain vital in mitigating the distinct challenges associated with work in the creative industries.

Since 2023, the policy landscape has changed substantially. The Employment Rights Act 2025 represents the most significant reform of UK employment law in a generation. There are substantial reforms underway to the four national skills systems that have the scope to build greater agility and responsiveness to the needs of industry, including the devolution of 16–19 technical education to Mayoral Strategic Authorities in England. The position that job quality now has in industry discourse has also changed. Promoting Good Work for all creative workers is now an explicit priority. The Good Work Review First Phase Action Plan – a joint initiative of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Creative Industries Council (CIC) – is being implemented, and the forthcoming Creative Industries Jobs Plan will examine what further action is needed to drive up job quality across the sector. Altogether, policy development in this area has been significant across all four UK nations, as summarised in Figure 6.2 (see Section 6).

Indeed, responsibility for the levers that can drive up job quality are shared between the UK government, devolved governments and industry. Employment law is reserved to the UK government for England, Scotland and Wales – so the Employment Rights Act 2025 and the new Fair Work Agency apply in Great Britain – but devolved in Northern Ireland, where a Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill has been proposed. Culture, the arts and skills are devolved, and the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive have each used their own levers to shape job quality in the creative and cultural sectors.

For instance, in Scotland, an Independent Culture Fair Work Task Force has recommended a sector Fair Work Charter and the extension of Fair Work First conditions to freelancers, and the Programme for Government 2026 to 2031 commits to piloting a Scottish Artists Minimum Income. In Wales, fair pay conditions are attached to Arts Council of Wales and Creative Wales funding, the Welsh Government has committed to tackling bullying and discrimination in screen, and a new Creative and Culture Forum will identify actions on fair pay and working conditions. In Northern Ireland, the Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme is developing new arts and heritage policies, including a sector skills strategy. Adding further to a substantially changed landscape across the UK are newly appointed Creative Freelance Champions; standards of behaviour published by the Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority (CIISA); and the Good Work Industry Support Programme in Screen funded by the British Film Institute (BFI).

Yet it remains important that government and industry stakeholders continue to work together to drive action across the full breadth of the policy framework developed in the original GWR. Reflecting on policy developments to date, the high-level findings of this update and wider shifts in the machinery of government across the four UK nations, we identify five areas where there is both an opportunity and a need to extend progress towards the Good Work agenda.

1. First, with the research highlighting ongoing concerns around the precarity of work, unpaid overtime and relatively weak collective representation, there is a need to **drive adoption of Good or Fair Work standards across the creative industries**. Progress to date has largely consisted of national or sub-sector pilots rather than the UK-wide framework of standards, accreditation and funding conditionality that the GWR envisaged. There remains a need to strengthen incentives for employers to adopt them, including by delivering the planned Creative Industries Accreditation Scheme. Following the launch of a shared commitment statement, there is a need to finalise shared Good Work funding conditions for National Lottery and Grant-in-Aid distributors, before extending conditionality to wider public sector grants and commissioning. Scotland and Wales offer instructive models – including the proposed Culture Fair Work Charter and the fair pay conditions attached to Arts Council of Wales and Creative Wales funding – and there is scope for the four governments to share learning and promote alignment. The remit of the new Fair Work Agency should also be expanded to address important concerns for the creative industries around illegitimate self-employment and fair contracting practice. In Northern Ireland, where employment law is devolved, the proposed Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill would provide an important foundation for comparable progress.
2. Second, **further resources and support are needed to build the capacity of creative firms, particularly SMEs, to meet these standards and improve workplace practices** in response to a persistent lack of workforce diversity, concerns around contracting, elevated rates of stress, anxiety and depression, and pockets of bullying and harassment. The pilot of the BFI-funded Good Work Industry Support Programme in Screen, now entering its second phase, offers a model that could be extended to other sub-sectors, tailored to their distinct challenges and delivered in partnership with trade bodies, skills bodies and employers. This should build on CIISA's newly published standards of behaviour and, in Wales, the Welsh Government's commitment to tackling bullying and discrimination in screen.

3. Third, with rates of training falling short of any other IS-8 sector, there is a pressing need to **harness ongoing skills reforms to deliver a step change in skills investment**. The Creative Industries Skills Audits recently published by the Creative PEC and Work Advance set out a wide-scale programme of work to achieve this and should be read alongside this report. This includes developing new short courses aligned to industry skills needs and modular higher education in creative subject areas, which, in England, could be funded through the Growth and Skills Levy and Lifelong Learning Entitlement. The Audits also point to a need to improve signposting of industry-recognised training; strengthen careers guidance; and deliver the industry-led Creative Industries Skills Passport announced in the Sector Plan to record training participation and support labour mobility that could help to mitigate the precarity of work and fluctuating patterns of demand in the sector. As skills policy is devolved, there are equivalent opportunities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the Skills Passport should be recognised across all four nations given the mobility of the creative workforce.

4. Fourth, there is scope **for the newly appointed Creative Freelance Champions to progress a wide-ranging programme of work to improve job quality for creative freelancers**, which this research has shown remains a pressing concern. This should include reviewing the adequacy of social protections for the self-employed; assessing new flexible financial products, including pensions; building awareness of fair contracting and employment rights, and helping to tackle illegitimate self-employment; and strengthening careers guidance and skills investment. This is a considerable agenda, requiring substantive resources and specialist expertise alongside the research support offered by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and DCMS through their recently announced Policy Fellowship and academic secondment. Given that culture and skills are devolved, the Champions will also need to work closely with the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive.

5. Finally, given our finding that job quality priorities vary considerably by sub-sector and that the sectoral mix of the creative industries varies from place to place, locally tailored approaches have particular value. With devolution continuing to advance in England – including through the transfer of responsibility for 16–19 technical education to Mayoral Strategic Authorities – and with distinct Fair Work approaches being taken by the devolved governments there is **growing opportunity to drive improvements in job quality through place-based partnership**. This could include customising place-based Good or Fair Work standards to reflect distinct sub-sector issues; making these principles a condition of local government funding; engaging creative employers and freelancers in forums to direct skills funding and develop place-based skills programmes; and convening networks of local employers as visible advocates and communities of practice embedding Good or Fair Work principles and practices within creative firms. In the devolved nations, Wales's new Creative and Culture Forum and the Fair Work Delivery Group proposed in Scotland offer natural vehicles for this work.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and context

In February 2023, the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC) published the Good Work Review (GWR), a landmark study and the first comprehensive examination of job quality across the UK's creative industries (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023a). The GWR was the product of a year-long, large-scale enquiry that brought together quantitative evidence, a rapid evidence assessment and an extensive programme of engagement, including a call for evidence, bilateral interviews and national policy roundtables, that collectively explored the views of over 120 stakeholders from across all creative sub-sectors and the four UK nations. Its purpose was to answer a deceptively straightforward question: how good are jobs in the creative industries, really?

The findings presented a nuanced picture. There was much to celebrate: creative workers reported higher-than-average levels of job satisfaction, greater autonomy over how, when and at what pace they work, and wages for full-time employees that – at the sector level – exceeded the national average. But there was also cause for concern. Pay was found to be low and pay dissatisfaction high in several sub-sectors. Unpaid overtime was higher in the creative industries than in other industry sectors. Job security was below average, underemployment a challenge and rates of training among the lowest in the economy.

Crucially, the GWR also evidenced substantial disparities in the picture of job quality based on the employment status and personal characteristics of workers.

Shortly after the publication of the GWR, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Creative Industries Council (CIC) published the Creative Industries Sector Vision (DCMS and CIC, 2023), which confirmed Good Work as a joint government–industry priority and marked the start of work to develop the first phase of a Good Work Action Plan. Across the sector, industry bodies, trade unions and skills organisations have worked to translate the GWR's four strategic priorities and sixteen recommendations into practical action. These include the Good Work Industry Support Programme, through which WorkWise has been piloted in the Screen sector; the development of shared Good Work funding conditions by major grant-awarding bodies; and ongoing efforts to strengthen protections and improve conditions for freelancers and workers across sub-sectors including screen; music, performing and visual arts; design and designer fashion; architecture; and publishing. In the devolved nations, the Scottish Government's Fair Work agenda and the Welsh Government's Social Partnership and Public Procurement Act 2023 have continued to frame efforts to improve job quality.

Improving job quality continues to be an important policy ambition – in the creative industries and across the economy more widely. The UK government has progressed a series of significant cross-cutting reforms. The Employment Rights Act 2025 introduced the most substantial changes to UK employment law in a generation, strengthening worker protections and establishing a new Fair Work Agency. The 'Get Britain working white paper' (Department for Work and Pensions, 2024) and the Keep Britain Working review (Mayfield, 2025) have placed employment quality at the heart of the government's economic strategy. For the creative industries specifically, the Creative Industries Sector Plan (Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade (BIST), DCMS and Department for Business and Trade (DBT), 2025) reaffirms the joint government–industry commitment to Good Work, confirming new interventions including the appointment of new Creative Freelance Champions to advocate for the sector's self-employed workers across government. And the forthcoming Creative Industries Jobs Plan will examine what further targeted action is needed to drive up job quality across the sector, with the Good Work Review Action Plan providing the platform on which future phases of policy can build.

It is important that these policy commitments are grounded in a robust and up-to-date evidence base. With this in mind, this fifth report in the 'Creative Education, Skills and Talent' strand of the State of the Nations series aims to update the quantitative baseline of job quality in the creative industries that underpinned the original GWR (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023b). It provides policymakers, industry leaders and creative workers with the most current picture of where the sector stands on job quality – three years on from the original Review.

1.2 Research aims and approach

This report has three principal aims:

1. **To update the quantitative baseline of job quality in the creative industries**, first established through the GWR, drawing on the most recently available national data sources to provide an up-to-date picture of performance across the approximately 40 indicators that make up the GWR's measurement framework;
2. **To benchmark the creative industries against comparator sectors**, examining how the sector performs relative to all industries and to the eight priority sectors identified in the government's Modern Industrial Strategy (IS-8),[1] enabling policymakers and industry to assess the creative industries' relative strengths and areas for improvement; and
3. **To examine variation within the creative industries**, exploring how the picture of job quality differs across creative sub-sectors and between different groups of workers, including by employment status,[2] gender, ethnicity, disability and socioeconomic background.

The analysis is structured around the six domains of job quality and the associated measurement framework developed for the original GWR, which has been retained, wherever possible, to promote comparability with the 2023 baseline. The framework draws on both objective and subjective measures of job quality and is built from three major national datasets: the Annual Population Survey and Labour Force Survey; Understanding Society; and the Employer Skills Survey. A small number of changes have been made to the indicator framework since the original GWR, reflecting changes in data availability and the introduction of new variables to national surveys since 2022; these are described in detail in Section 2.

It is important to note that this report is an update to the quantitative evidence base – it is not a full rerun of the GWR. The original GWR combined quantitative baselining with extensive qualitative engagement, generating rich insight from stakeholders, workers and employers. That qualitative evidence remains essential context for understanding the data presented here, and readers are encouraged to consult both the main GWR report and the quantitative baseline working paper alongside this report (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023a, 2023b).

1. The Modern Industrial Strategy (DBT and BIST, 2025) is a UK government strategy, but much economic development policy is devolved, and each of the devolved nations has its own economic strategy and priorities. In Scotland, reforms are being directed by the ten-year National Strategy for Economic Transformation (Scottish Government, 2022). In Wales, priorities were set out in 'Economic mission: priorities for a stronger economy' (Welsh Government, 2023), and the new Welsh Government's (2026a) Programme for Government commits to creating better-paid jobs. In Northern Ireland, the Department for the Economy's (2024) Economic Vision is built around four objectives – creating good jobs, promoting regional balance, raising productivity and reducing carbon emissions – supported by sectoral action plans, including one for the screen industries. In this report, the IS-8 sectors are used as UK-wide comparators to benchmark the creative industries, using UK-level data. This does not imply that they are the priority sectors in each nation.
2. Throughout this report, we use self-employment as a proxy for freelance work, but it is an imperfect one. Employment law distinguishes between employees, workers and the self-employed, and freelancers may fall into any of these: some work on fixed-term PAYE contracts (Gunn, 2026; WorkWise for Screen/BFI, 2026). Status is also often hard to establish, and some freelancers engaged as self-employed may legally be 'limb (b)' workers: people contracted to do the work personally for an organisation that is not their client or customer (Employment Rights Act, 1996). A shared definition and robust data are needed for a fuller assessment.

1.3 Report structure

The report is structured as follows. **Section 2** introduces Creative PEC's definition of 'Good Work', the six domains of job quality and the measurement framework developed for assessing job quality at a sectoral level. It also sets out any changes in indicator availability since the original GWR. **Section 3** examines job quality in the creative industries across the six domains and approximately 40 metrics, benchmarked against all industries and the IS-8 priority sectors. **Section 4** provides summary scorecard profiles of job quality for each creative sub-sector, drawing out relative strengths and areas for concern. **Section 5** explores how job quality varies according to employment status and personal characteristics, including gender, ethnicity, disability and socioeconomic background. **Section 6** concludes by summarising key findings, reviewing progress against the four strategic priorities and sixteen recommendations of the original GWR, considering relevant policy developments since 2023 and identifying where further action is needed to advance the Good Work agenda in the creative industries.

2 Creative PEC's job quality measurement framework

2.1 Introduction

This section sets out the conceptual and measurement framework that underpins the analysis in the rest of this report. It draws directly on the framework developed for the original GWR, which in turn was grounded in a detailed examination of leading international and UK approaches to defining and measuring job quality. Retaining this framework for the purposes of this update promotes comparability with the original baseline and meaningful tracking of trends over time.

2.2 Defining 'Good Work': Creative PEC's six domains of job quality

Job quality refers to a family of interrelated concepts concerned with whether work is decent, fair, fulfilling and meaningful, and whether it supports the wellbeing of workers. It is widely accepted as a complex, multidimensional concept, but there is no settled consensus on the dimensions it comprises or how best to measure them.

In Scotland and Wales, governments and their advisory bodies – including the Fair Work Convention and the Fair Work Commission – use the term 'Fair Work', while Northern Ireland's Executive refers to 'Good Jobs'. Following the original GWR, we adopt 'Good Work' as an umbrella term for work that is not only 'good' but 'fair', 'decent' and of 'quality', and we use 'Good Work' and 'Fair Work' interchangeably throughout (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023a).

Different frameworks emphasise different facets of work, reflecting the disciplinary traditions, policy contexts and institutional purposes from which they emerged (Eurofound, 2012; OECD, 2015; ILO, 2008).

To develop a definition of Good Work appropriate to the creative industries context, the GWR research team undertook a detailed review of the major frameworks in this space, drawing on:

- **Academic and research literature**, including outputs from the European Commission Horizon 2020-funded Quality of Jobs and Innovation Generated Employment Outcomes (QuInnE) project, and work by leading UK institutions and think tanks;
- **UK policy frameworks**, including the Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices (Taylor et al., 2017); the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Good Work Plan (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2018); the Measuring Job Quality Working Group (Carnegie UK Trust, 2018); Office for National Statistics (ONS) measures of job quality; and the definitions and measurement frameworks used by the Fair Work Convention in Scotland and the Fair Work Commission in Wales; and.
- **International literature**, including Eurofound's European Working Conditions Surveys; the International Labour Organization (ILO) Decent Work programme; the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Handbook on Measuring the Quality of Employment; and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Job Quality Database.

This review was also informed by bilateral discussions with economists, labour market analysts and officials involved in developing Fair Work frameworks in the devolved nations, as well as with analysts at DCMS and the former Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

The resulting framework is structured around six domains of job quality, each of which reflects a distinct but related dimension of what it means for work to be 'Good'. The domains are grounded in the principle – emphasised across national and international frameworks – that job quality is irreducibly multidimensional: no single measure or composite score can capture it adequately. The framework does not therefore generate domain scores or composite indices. Instead, it presents the evidence transparently across a range of indicators, allowing the relative importance of different dimensions to be assessed in context.

Figure 2.1: Defining Good Work in the creative industries: Creative PEC's six domains of job quality

Fair reward, terms and conditions	**Definitions of Good and Fair Work in each UK nation place a strong emphasis on fair reward**. This includes both objective measures – such as rates of pay, paid holiday entitlement and pension provision – and subjective measures – particularly whether pay and reward are commensurate with the skills of workers and their relative contribution to organisational success.
Security and flexibility	**Striking a balance between the stability and security of employment and income on the one hand, and the flexibility afforded to workers in determining how and when they work on the other**, is an important dimension of quality work. This includes whether workers have predictability over their working hours and income, and the extent to which they can adapt their work to accommodate their personal lives.
Autonomy and personal fulfilment	**Work has long been valued for more than financial reward**. A key feature of quality work is that it provides a sense of purpose and personal fulfilment and empowers workers to influence their daily working lives. This encompasses autonomy over job tasks, work pace, manner and order, as well as broader measures of job satisfaction and work intensity.
Healthy, respectful and inclusive environment	**All definitions of Good and Fair Work recognise working conditions as an important facet**. This extends beyond physical risk to consider psychosocial factors, the extent to which workers are treated with dignity and respect, and whether working environments are healthy, supportive and inclusive – including for workers from underrepresented groups.
Agency, voice and representation	**The ability to speak up, constructively challenge management and be listened to – and to influence decisions that affect everyday working life** – is a vital aspect of Good Work. Mechanisms that support dialogue and collective representation can strengthen worker voice, improve wellbeing and deliver improved productivity and performance for firms.
Skills use, development and progression	**The opportunity to use and develop skills, for both personal growth and career advancement**, is a key facet of Good Work. For employers, investing in upskilling and reskilling is vital to remain competitive. In a sector as innovative and globally focused as the creative industries, this is particularly important.

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

The six domains are not treated as equally weighted, nor are they independent of one another. In practice, the different facets of work are interconnected: pay levels affect financial security; autonomy relates to wellbeing; representation and voice support progression. The framework acknowledges these connections while maintaining analytical clarity by examining each domain in turn.

It is also important to note that the relevance of different domains may vary across the creative industries. The sector is highly heterogeneous: it spans sub-sectors as different as IT, software and computer services; architecture; music, performing and visual arts; crafts; publishing; and museums, galleries and libraries. The workforce is likewise diverse, including employees, freelancers, portfolio workers, micro-business owners and those combining creative work with employment in other sectors.

One of the key contributions of the GWR framework is that it was designed from the outset to capture this heterogeneity, generating evidence at sub-sectoral level and for different types of worker wherever the data allows.

Throughout the GWR and this update, particular attention is paid to the position of self-employed and freelance workers. Self-employment accounts for around 28% of employment in the creative industries, compared with approximately 14% across the UK workforce as a whole (Carey, Giles and Hay, 2026). In sub-sectors such as crafts and music, performing and visual arts, the majority of workers are self-employed. The distinct challenges and opportunities that non-standard work creates for job quality – in terms of income security, access to benefits, training and development, and collective voice – run as a thread throughout the analysis.

2.3 Measuring job quality at a sectoral level

Measuring job quality at a sectoral level presents particular challenges. While there is a growing body of research on job quality at the economy-wide level – drawing on large-scale social surveys and administrative data – much less work has been undertaken at the level of individual industries. This reflects both conceptual and data challenges: the multidimensional nature of job quality requires multiple data sources and many of the richest sources of job quality data are not routinely available at the level of granularity required for credible sub-sector analysis.

A further challenge specific to the creative industries is the way in which the sector is statistically defined. The creative industries are classified using a selection of four-digit Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes, derived from the 'dynamic mapping' methodology developed by Bakhshi, Freeman and Higgs (2013). Official datasets are not often published at this more granular level, meaning it is often necessary to commission customised tables or seek secure access to raw datasets in order to construct data for the creative industries.

The indicator framework

The Creative PEC framework for measuring job quality at a sectoral level was developed for the original GWR and is retained for this update. Within the six domains described in Section 2.2, the framework comprises nearly 40 indicators. These are drawn from data sources that are statistically robust at the sectoral level and that allow for consistent analysis across industry sectors as well as (where possible) creative sub-sectors, employment status and worker characteristics.

The framework incorporates both objective measures (such as earnings levels, rates of paid holiday entitlement and incidence of work-related illness) and subjective measures (such as job satisfaction and perceived job security). This dual approach reflects the established principle that how people experience their work – their perceptions and subjective assessments – matters alongside the objective conditions in which they work (Eurofound, 2012; OECD, 2015).

Figure 2.2 illustrates the indicators within each domain and Annex A provides the full indicator list, including data sources, coverage and analysis dimensions. This is particularly important in understanding which indicators present data for all workers and which for employees only.

The indicator framework has been largely retained from the original GWR to allow direct comparison with the 2023 baseline. However, a small number of changes have been made, driven by three factors: changes in the availability or design of variables in the underlying data sources; the introduction of new variables to national surveys since 2022 that were not available at the time of the original Review; and the need to avoid the number of indicators from becoming overly expansive. In total, the updated framework comprises thirty-nine indicators, as summarised in Figure 2.2 overleaf.

Figure 2.2: Creative PEC framework for measuring job quality at a sectoral level



Source: Authors' elaboration. See Table 1 in Annex A for full indicator specifications.

Data sources

The analysis draws on three major national datasets:

Annual Population Survey (APS) and Labour Force Survey (LFS). The APS is a continuous household survey run by ONS, providing data on the labour market characteristics of people resident in the UK. ONS was commissioned to produce customised tables to a specification developed by the research team. Data covers the period 2021 to 2025, with a three-year pooled dataset (2023–25) used when examining job quality in IS-8 sectors and creative sub-sectors and for worker characteristics.

Understanding Society. The UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) is the largest longitudinal household survey in the UK, following around 40,000 households across a broad range of domains. Creative industries data is accessed via Special Licence from the UK Data Service, providing four-digit SIC-coded data not available in the standard release. Data is drawn from Waves 6, 8, 10, 12 and 14, covering 2014–2016, 2016–2018, 2018–2020, 2020–2022 and 2022–2024 respectively, enabling both cross-sectional and trend analysis.

Employer Skills Survey (ESS). The ESS is a national establishment-based survey commissioned by the Department for Education (and its equivalents in the devolved nations). For the employer-level indicators in this report, the ESS22 is used (72,918 establishments; 3,231 creative industries establishments). Given sample size constraints in ESS24, the ESS22 provides more reliable sub-sector estimates and is the preferred source for this update.

Analytical approach

Wherever possible, the analysis presents data both for the creative industries as a whole and for individual creative sub-sectors. The sub-sectors used in this report are those defined by DCMS for the purposes of the Creative Industries Economic Estimates.[3]

The creative industries are benchmarked against all-industries averages and, where the data allows, against seven other IS-8 priority sectors – with the exception of Clean Energy Industries, which cannot be defined using SIC codes (DBT and Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), 2026). Performance is also analysed by employment status (employees vs self-employed) and, where possible, by personal characteristics including gender, age, ethnicity, disability status and socioeconomic background.

Estimates based on small samples are flagged throughout the report and should be interpreted with caution. Data from Understanding Society and the ESS has been subject to statistical significance testing, but ONS were not able to conduct equivalent testing for the APS and LFS data.

The report does not present composite domain scores: the relative weight that should be attached to different dimensions of job quality varies between individuals and across the life course, and no single aggregation rule can reflect that variation adequately.

3. While this report is based on the DCMS definition of the creative industries and its sub-sectors, it is important to note that the creative industries are defined differently in Scotland and in Wales. We use the DCMS definition to ensure consistency with the original GWR and comparability across the UK, so figures in this report may differ from those published by the Scottish and Welsh Governments.

3 Job quality: How do the creative industries measure up?

3.1 Introduction

Since the GWR established a definition and quantitative framework for job quality in the creative industries in 2023, considerable policy and industry attention has turned to what Good Work looks like in a sector that is fast-moving, freelance-heavy and at the forefront of technological change. This chapter revisits that framework, examining how the creative industries measure up against around forty indicators spanning six domains of job quality.

For each domain, performance is benchmarked in three ways: against the all-industry average, to gauge how creative work compares with the wider UK labour market; against the Review's original baseline and the years since, to track how the picture has changed; and against other sectors prioritised under the IS-8, to understand how the creative industries compare with the other parts of the economy the government has identified for growth.

3.2 Fair reward, terms and conditions

Definitions of Good or Fair Work across the UK nations place a strong emphasis on fair reward. This encompasses objective measures, such as pay and non-pecuniary benefits like paid holiday entitlement and pensions, but also subjective measures – notably whether reward is felt to be commensurate with workers' skills and contribution.

At surface level, the creative industries reward full-time employees well (Figure 3.1 overleaf). Median full-time weekly earnings (excluding overtime) stood at £962 in 2025, some 35% above the all-industry median of £715, and employer pension provision is now marginally (but not statistically significantly) ahead of the all-industry benchmark too (91% vs 89%). But pay dissatisfaction is higher than average (32% vs 25%), employees work more unpaid overtime (4.3 hours a week vs 3.5) and they tend to have slightly less paid holiday entitlement (25.0 days vs 25.7) – a reminder that fair reward is about more than headline pay. This echoes the original GWR, which found full-time wages above the national average but pay dissatisfaction high in several sub-sectors and unpaid overtime higher than in other industries (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023a).

There has been some shift in labour market indicators since the Review's original 2021 baseline. Median earnings have increased by around one fifth (19%), albeit showing a slightly slower proportional rise than the 24% growth recorded across all industries. Unpaid overtime has eased slightly over the period, while pay dissatisfaction peaked in 2023, likely reflecting cyclical conditions, which have varied across creative sub-sectors and are examined further in later sections of this report. The most pronounced improvement over the period is in pension provision, which has increased from 71% in 2014-2016 to 91% following the phased implementation of automatic enrolment (Mirza-Davies and Cunningham, 2026), bringing the creative industries in line with the rest of the economy.

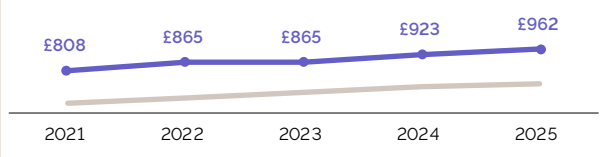
Benchmarked against other IS-8 sectors – treating estimates for the smaller sectors with some caution given sample sizes – the creative industries occupy a mid-table position on earnings. They are ahead of advanced manufacturing, as well as professional and business services and life sciences, on a par with financial services, but behind digital and technologies and defence. On the remaining indicators its position is weaker: pay dissatisfaction is among the highest of the IS-8 sectors; paid holiday entitlement is among the lowest; and pension coverage, though much improved, still lags most other IS-8 sectors.

Figure 3.1: Fair reward, terms and conditions

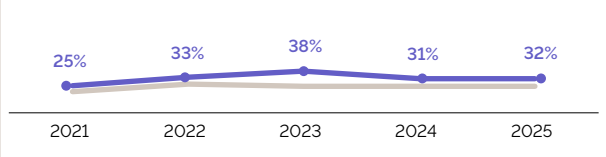
Key indicators	Creative industries	All industries
Median weekly earnings (FT Employees)	£962	£715
Pay dissatisfaction (% workers*)	32%	25%
Unpaid overtime (mean usual hours)	4.3	3.5
Paid holiday entitlement (mean no. of days)	25.0	25.7
Pension (% employees whose employer offers a scheme)	91%	89%

Trends over time

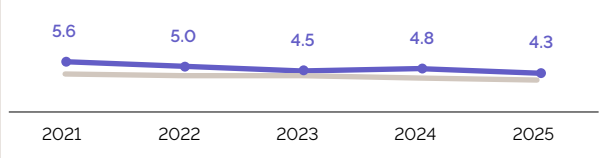
Median weekly earnings



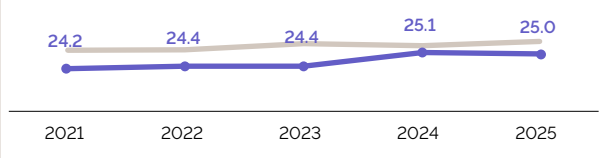
Pay dissatisfaction



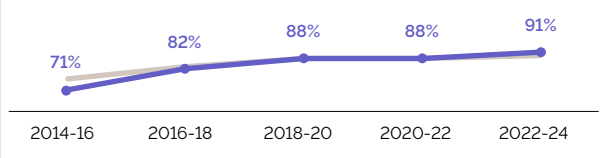
Unpaid overtime (hours)

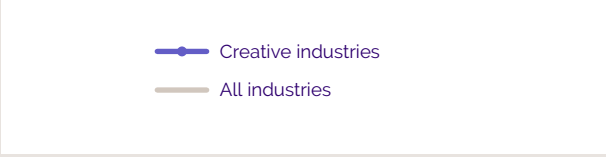


Paid holiday entitlement (days)



Employer pension



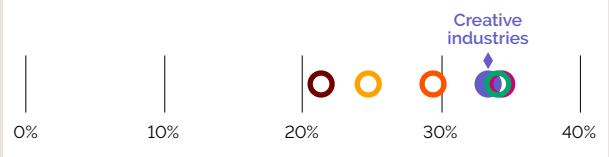


Performance vs other IS-8 sectors

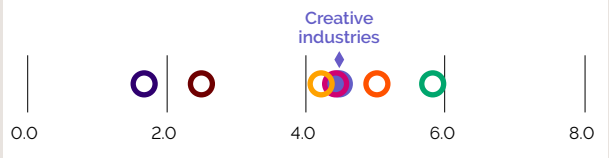
Median weekly earnings



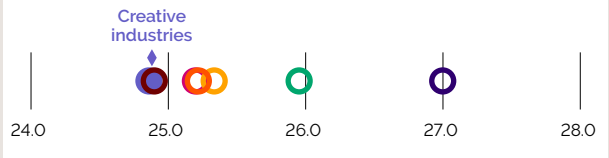
Pay dissatisfaction



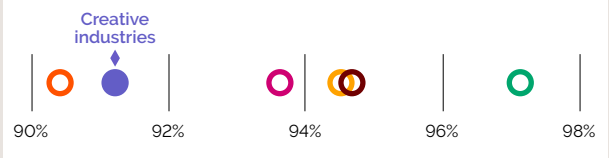
Unpaid overtime (hours)



Paid holiday entitlement (days)



Employer pension





Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS/LFS and Understanding Society

Notes: Full-time earnings for employees only, excluding overtime. Pay dissatisfaction is defined as looking for another job because pay is unsatisfactory in present job. Base = workers looking for a new job to replace present (main) job.

3.3 Security and flexibility

Good or Fair Work frameworks across the UK nations also emphasise security and flexibility – broadly, whether work is stable and predictable, and whether workers have genuine choice over how, when and how much they work, rather than facing precariousness or underemployment. Figure 3.2 benchmarks the creative industries against all industries and the other IS-8 sectors across indicators covering involuntary non-permanent work, self-employment and part-time work, underemployment, job security, flexible working arrangements and flexibility over work hours.

The picture here is one of contrasts. Workers in the creative industries (including employees and the self-employed) report greater flexibility over their working hours than the workforce as a whole, with differences not only statistically significant but substantial (48% vs 30%). However, job security is markedly lower (43% vs 51%) and involuntary part-time work is more common (13% vs 10%).

Job security has also fallen over time – from 57% in 2014–2016 to a low of 33% in 2020–2022, during the Covid-19 pandemic, before recovering somewhat to 43% – a larger and more sustained shift than on other indicators in this domain and one that leaves the sector well short of the all-industry benchmark. Flexibility over work hours has been comparatively stable and consistently high across the period. The remaining indicators show more cyclical volatility year to year, with involuntary part-time and non-permanent work both dipping around 2023 before rising again.

When benchmarked against the other IS-8 sectors, the creative industries have the lowest job security of the sectors shown and the highest rate of both involuntary part-time work and underemployment. It fares better on involuntary self-employment, where it is among the lowest of the IS-8 sectors, and on involuntary non-permanent work, where it sits around the middle of the range. It stands out most clearly on flexibility over work hours: indeed, workers in the creative industries benefit from greater flexibility than those in any other IS-8 sector.

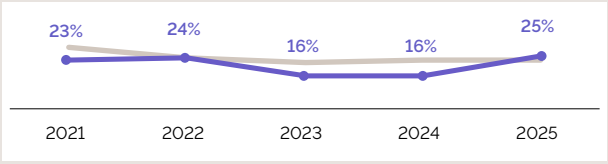
Taken together, the Security and flexibility domain points to a genuine trade-off: creative industries workers enjoy more flexibility over when and how much they work, but this comes alongside greater job insecurity and a higher incidence of involuntary part-time work and underemployment – patterns that likely reflect the sector's freelance-heavy, project-based structure. The same trade-off was central to the original GWR, which found job security below average and underemployment a challenge for the sector (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023a).

Figure 3.2: Security and flexibility

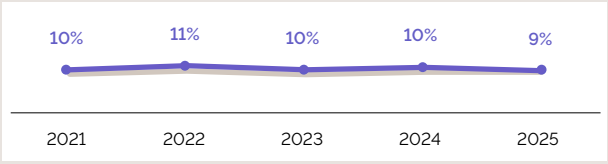
Key indicators	Creative industries	All industries
Involuntary non-permanent work (% of employees)	25%	24%
Involuntary self-employed (% of self-employed)	9%	9%
Involuntary part-time work (% of part-time)	13%	10%
Underemployment (hours insufficiency)	7%	8%
Job security	43%	51%
Flexible working arrangements	22%	23%
Flexibility over work hours	48%	30%

Trends over time

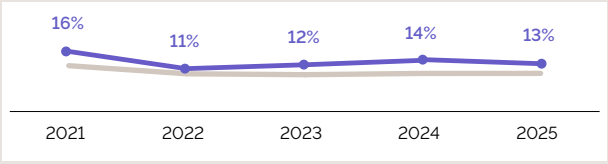
Involuntary non-permanent job



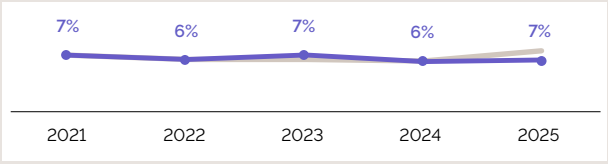
Involuntary self-employed

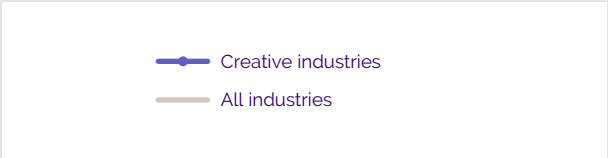


Involuntary part-time work



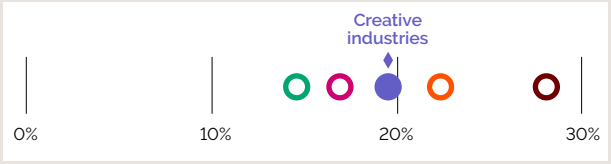
Underemployment (hours insufficiency)



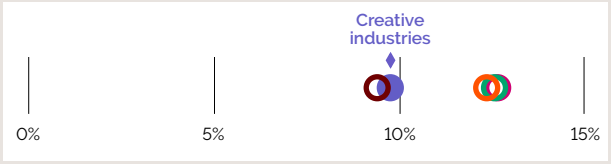


Performance vs other IS-8 sectors

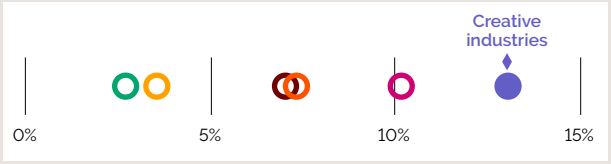
Involuntary non-permanent job



Involuntary self-employed



Involuntary part-time work



Underemployment (hours insufficiency)

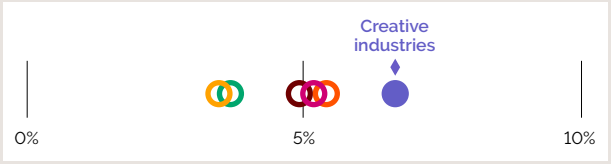
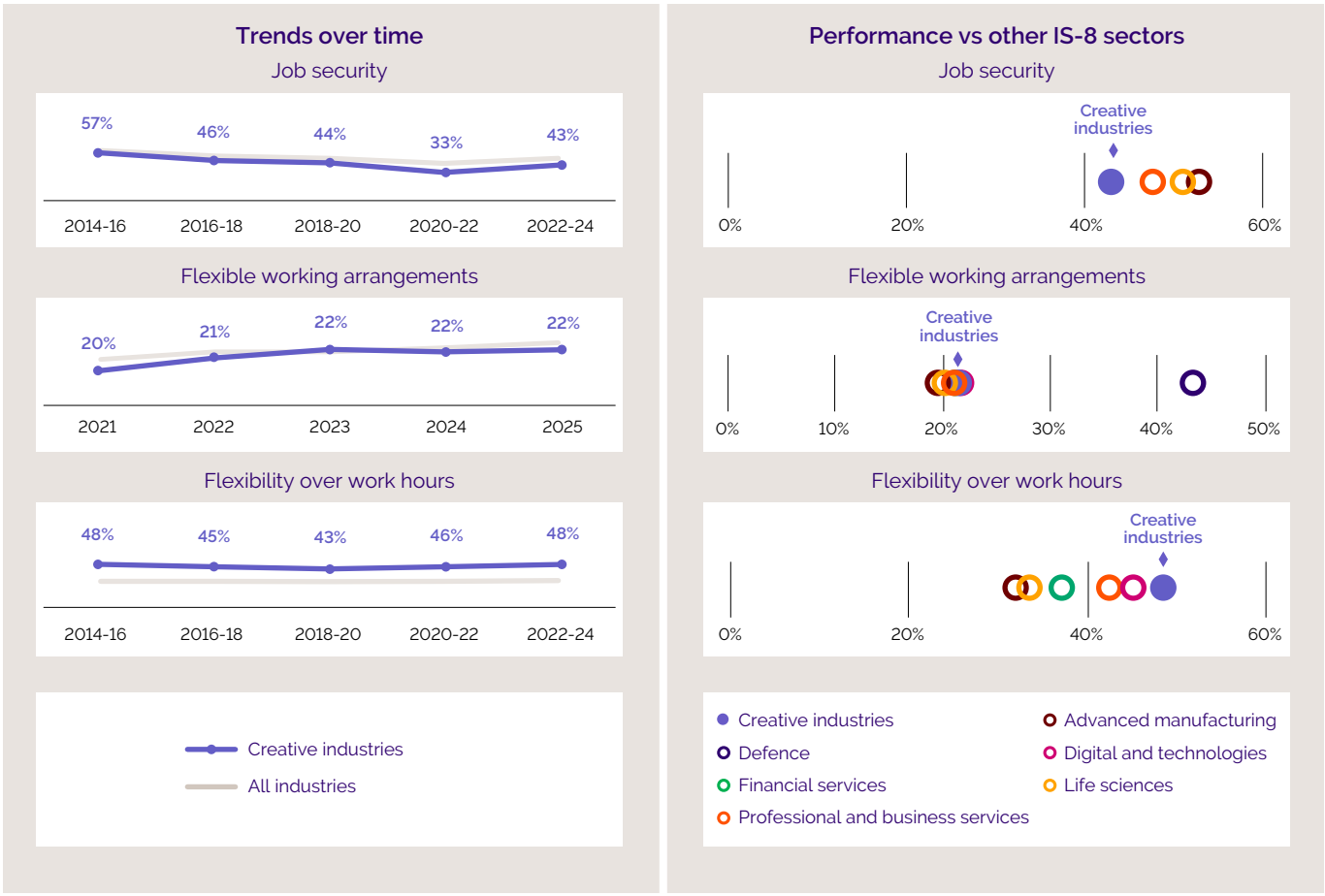




Figure 3.2: Security and flexibility (continued)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS/LFS and Understanding Society

3.4 Autonomy and personal fulfilment

Work has long been valued for much more than financial gain and, since the pandemic more people have come to recognise that work is good for physical and mental health. A key feature of quality work is that it provides a sense of purpose and personal fulfilment, empowering workers to influence their daily working lives, and creative freedom and recognition are distinct and important components of this in a sectoral context. Figure 3.3 benchmarks the creative industries against all industries and the other IS-8 sectors across indicators covering autonomy over job tasks, work pace, work manner and task order, job satisfaction, and work intensity.

Job satisfaction in the creative industries is slightly above the all-industry average (83% vs 81%), although the difference is not statistically significant. Autonomy, however, is where the creative industries differ markedly from other parts of the economy. Compared to the workforce as a whole, creative industries workers (employees and self-employed) report substantially more control over the tasks they do (50% vs 38%), the pace they set (56% vs 44%), and both how (67% vs 53%) and in what order (67% vs 55%) they carry out their work. This is a defining, not incidental, feature of creative work: on every one of these four measures, the creative industries have the highest score of any IS-8 sector, reaffirming the original Review's finding that creative workers enjoy greater autonomy over how, when and at what pace they work (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023a).

Work intensity is, however, potentially a greater area for concern. While one in five (20%) of creative workers work 50 or more hours a week – in line with the UK average (21%) – self-employed creative workers, who report the greatest autonomy of all, are also almost twice as likely as employees to work extremely long hours (32% vs 18%) (see Section 5).

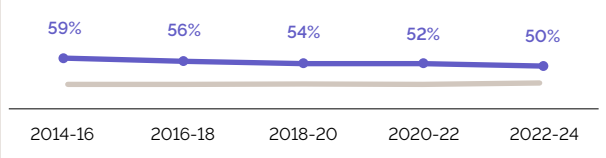
Wider research on the 'flexibility paradox' suggests that the same freedoms that make creative work attractive – control over tasks, pace and hours – can, particularly for the self-employed, tip into a form of self-exploitation, where autonomy is used to work harder and longer rather than more sustainably (Chung, 2022; Morgan, Wood and Nelligan, 2013). Indeed, the proportion of creative workers who say they would like to work shorter hours has risen from 33% in 2021 to 39% in 2025, even as the headline share working 50 or more hours has fallen – a possible sign that this tension is, if anything, intensifying.

Figure 3.3: Autonomy and personal fulfilment

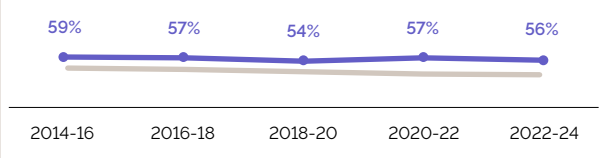
Key indicators	Creative industries	All industries
Autonomy over job tasks	50%	38%
Autonomy over work pace	56%	44%
Autonomy over work manner	67%	53%
Autonomy over task order	67%	55%
Job satisfaction (subjective rating)	83%	81%
Work intensity (working 50+ hours)	20%	21%
Work intensity (would like shorter hours)	39%	35%

Trends over time

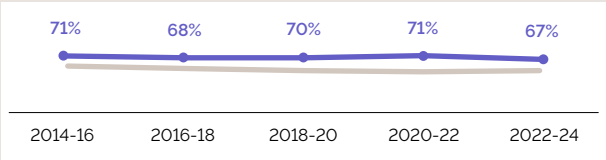
Autonomy over job tasks



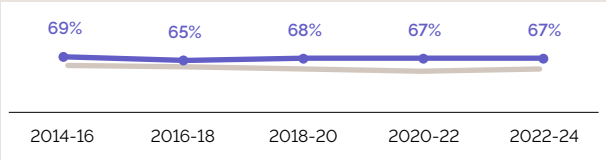
Autonomy over work pace

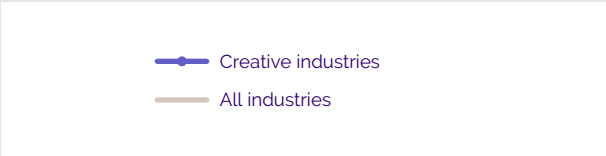


Autonomy over work manner



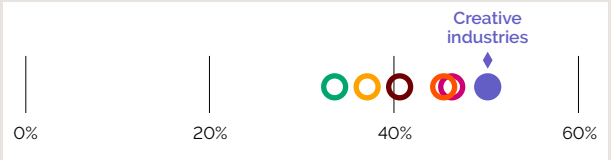
Autonomy over task order



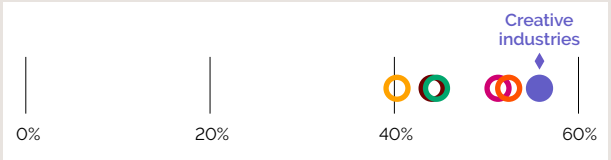


Performance vs other IS-8 sectors

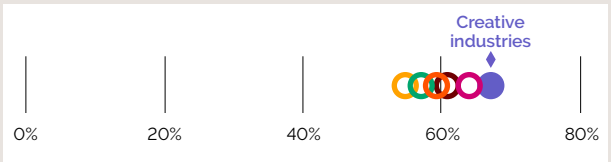
Autonomy over job tasks



Autonomy over work pace



Autonomy over work manner



Autonomy over task order

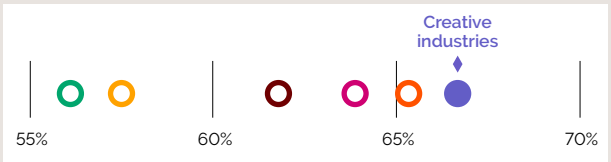
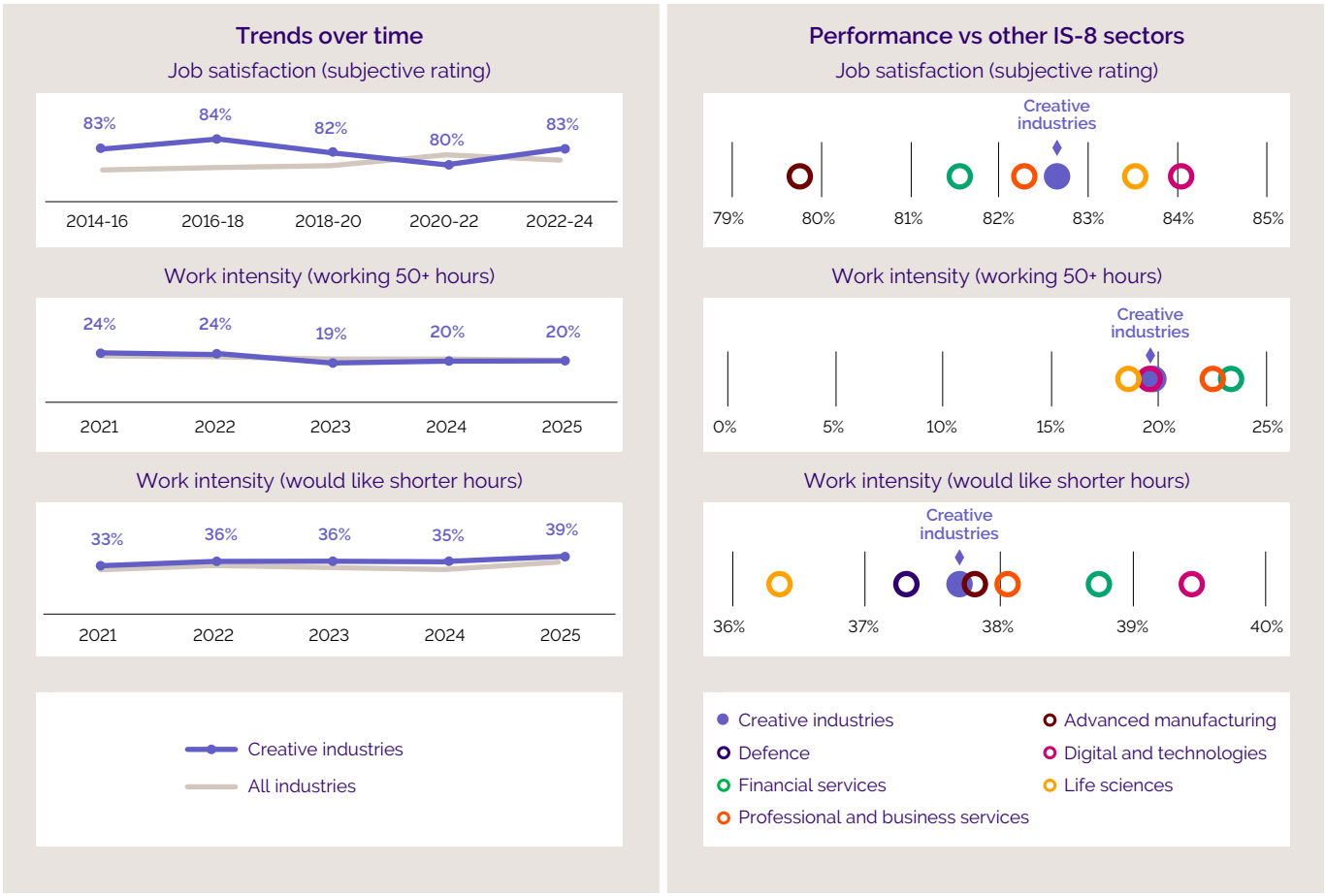




Figure 3.3: Autonomy and personal fulfilment (continued)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS/LFS and Understanding Society

3.5 Healthy, respectful and inclusive work environment

All definitions of Good and Fair Work recognise working conditions as a core facet – extending beyond physical and psychosocial risk to whether workers are treated with dignity and respect in environments that are healthy, supportive and inclusive. Figure 3.4 benchmarks the creative industries against all industries and the other IS-8 sectors across measures of ill health, wellbeing, bullying and harassment, and workforce representation.

On some health measures, the creative industries sit close to the UK norm. Self-reported happiness is in line with the all-industry average (7.4 vs 7.5). Work-related illness has fluctuated over the past five years, rising to 5.6% in 2025 and now slightly above the whole economy average. However, work-related illness caused by stress, anxiety or depression is a greater concern, being more frequently cited by workers in the creative industries (59% of those with work-related illness) than the UK workforce (51%). Creative workers also report higher anxiety on the standard wellbeing measure (3.4 vs 3.1) – a small but persistent gap and one that leaves the creative industries with the highest anxiety score of any IS-8 sector. The original baseline similarly found that creative workers reported greater levels of anxiety than average (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023b).

The more pressing story in this domain is the well-documented, persistent underrepresentation of diverse talent in the creative industries.

Women remain significantly underrepresented, at 37% – unchanged from the level recorded in the original Review, against an all-industry average that has itself moved only marginally (48%). Disability representation has inched up since the original baseline (from 13% to 14%) but has been outpaced by a faster rise in the all-industry rate (16% to 18%), leaving the gap slightly wider than before. Further, while the share of the workforce from ethnic minorities has risen steadily and is consistently above the all-industry average, questions remain as to whether the industry is representative of the ethnically diverse urban centres within which the creative industries are heavily concentrated.

Most concerning is the persistent underrepresentation of those from working-class backgrounds – something evidenced through the original GWR and work since (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023b; O'Brien, Taylor and Wang, 2025; McAndrew et al., 2024).[4] Indeed, the share of the creative industries workforce from low socioeconomic backgrounds has fallen since 2021, from 25% to 21%. This means the sector fares worse on socioeconomic diversity than any other IS-8 sector.

Bullying and harassment offers one potentially bright spot, with the share of workers reporting incidents falling below the UK average (9% and 15%, respectively). However, as we explore in Section 4, the creative industries average masks some pockets of concern within the sector, particularly in sub-sectors like museums, galleries and libraries; music, visual and performing arts; and screen, and the question is only asked of employees, excluding creative freelancers.

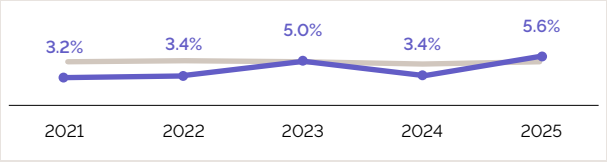
4. As for the original GWR, figures for workforce diversity presented in this report include those working in creative and non-creative roles in the UK creative industries. These will, therefore, differ from past Creative PEC research examining representation in specific arts, culture and heritage occupations (O'Brien, Taylor and Wang, 2025; McAndrew et al., 2024).

Figure 3.4: Healthy, respectful and inclusive work environment

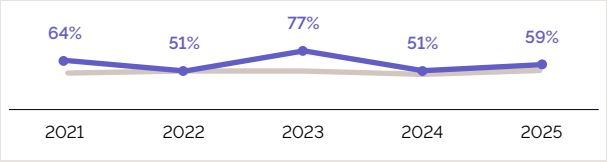
Key indicators	Creative industries	All industries
Work-related illness	5.6%	5.0%
Stress, anxiety and depression (% of those with work-related illness)	59%	51%
Wellbeing (happiness)	7.4	7.5
Wellbeing (anxiety)	3.4	3.1
Bullying and harassment	9%	15%
% workforce that are female	37%	48%
% workforce from ethnic minorities	19%	17%
% workforce that are disabled	14%	18%
% workforce from low socioeconomic backgrounds	21%	32%

Trends over time

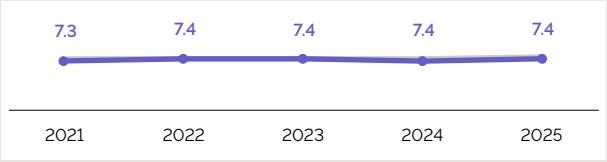
Work-related illness



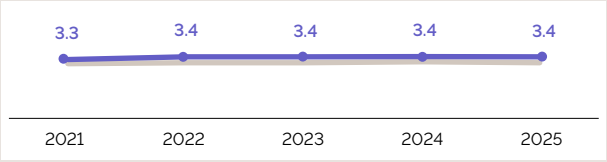
Stress, anxiety and depression (% of those with work-related illness)

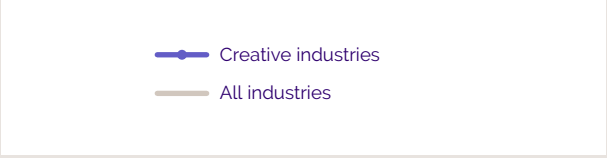


Wellbeing (happiness)



Wellbeing (anxiety)



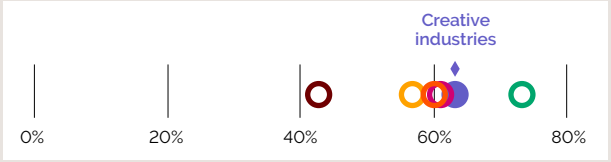


Performance vs other IS-8 sectors

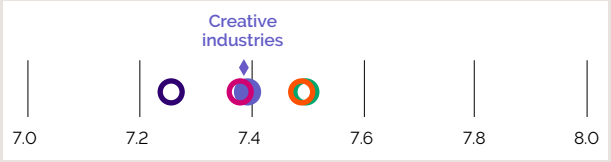
Work-related illness



Stress, anxiety and depression (% of those with work-related illness)



Wellbeing (happiness)



Wellbeing (anxiety)

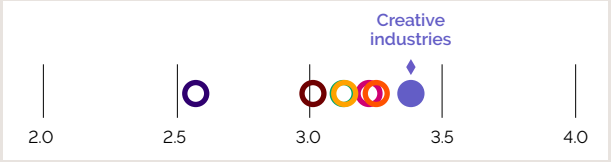
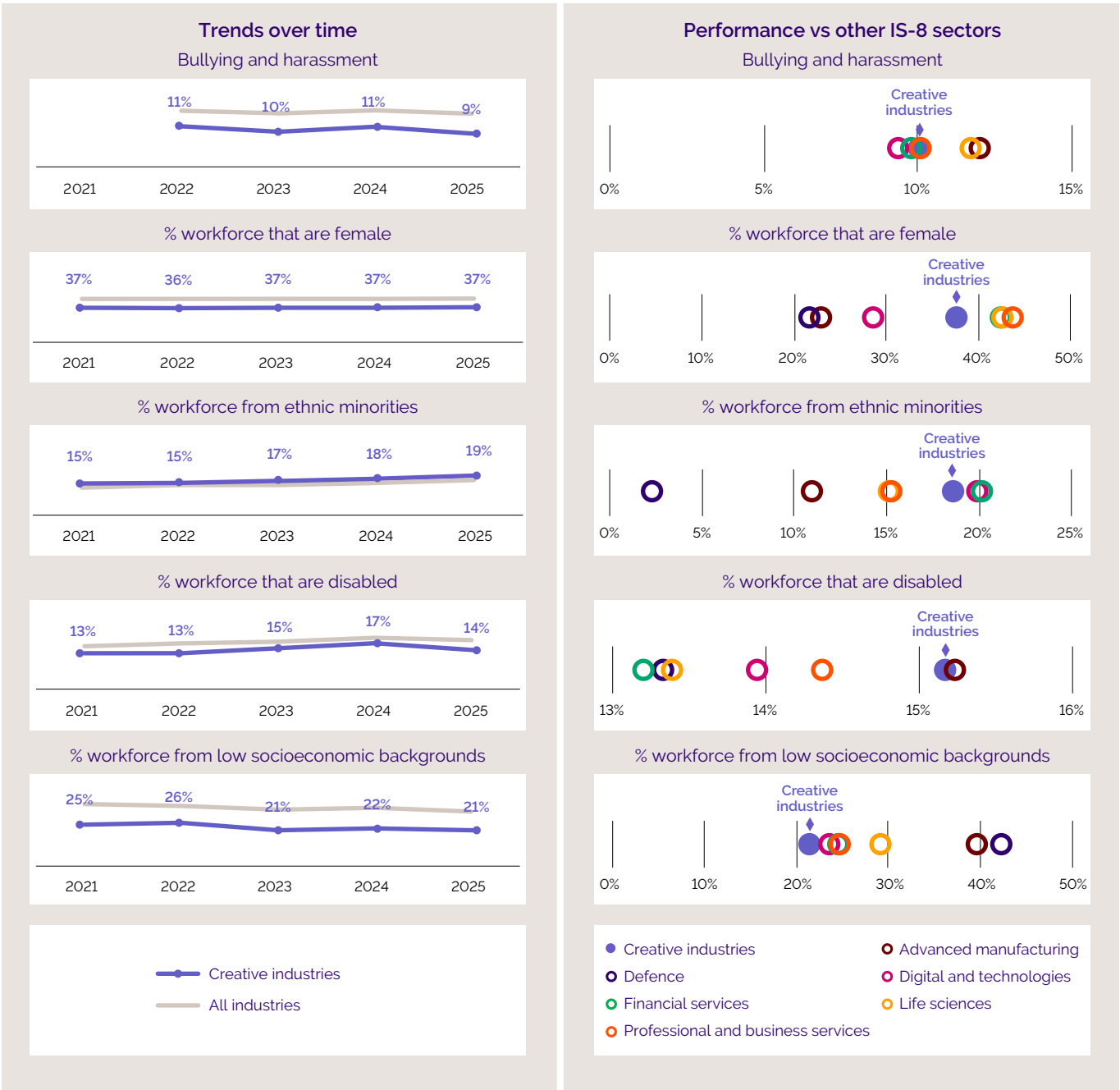




Figure 3.4: Healthy, respectful and inclusive work environment (continued)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS/LFS and Understanding Society

3.6 Agency, voice and representation

The ability of workers to speak up, constructively challenge and influence decisions that affect their everyday working lives is a vital aspect of Good Work. Figure 3.5 benchmarks the creative industries against all industries and the other IS-8 sectors across measures of collective representation and employee voice.

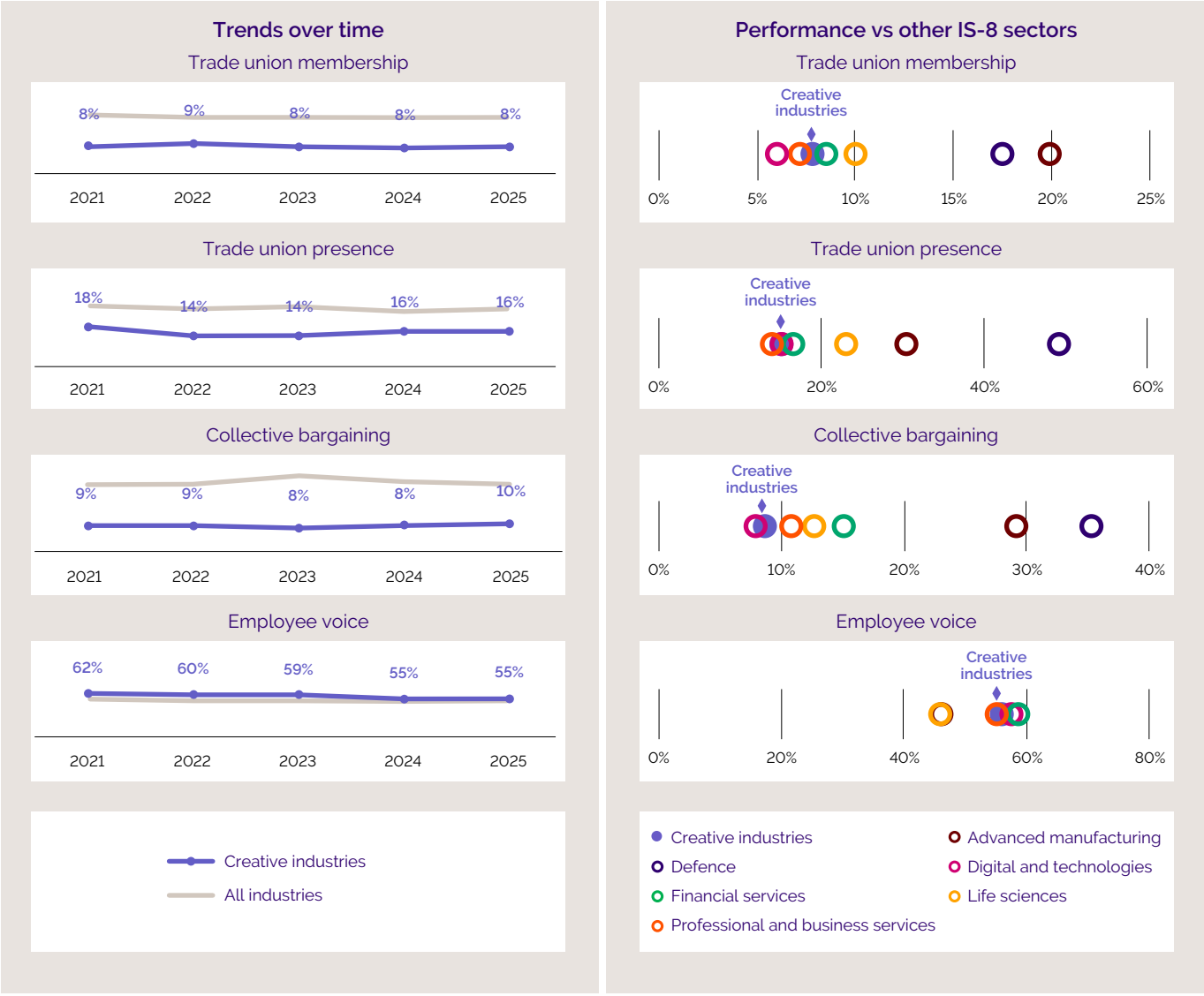
Around one third (34%) of creative industry employers have formal procedures in place for employee consultation – not statistically different from the average across the economy (36%), although the underlying data covers only Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

On collective representation, the creative industries lag the rest of the economy and have done so consistently. Trade union membership (8% vs 20%), trade union presence (16% vs 27%) and collective bargaining coverage (10% vs 26%) are all markedly lower than the all-industry average, with gaps of 11 to 16 percentage points that have barely moved since the original Review's baseline (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023b). Benchmarked against the other IS-8 sectors, the creative industries sit at or near the bottom on all three measures, well behind Defence in particular, where union presence and collective bargaining are both roughly three times higher.

Yet creative employees do not report feeling unheard. Employee voice – a subjective rating of how well managers involve staff in decision-making – is rated as good by 55% of creative employees and sits at four points above the all-industry average (51%), even as formal collective structures are largely absent. The original Review found much the same pattern, suggesting that in parts of the creative industries, voice can operate through direct and informal channels rather than collective ones. That advantage has narrowed since the original baseline, however – from 62% to 55% for the creative industries against a comparatively stable all-industry figure.

Figure 3.5: Agency, voice and representation

Key indicators	Creative industries	All industries
Trade union membership (% workers)	8%	20%
Trade union presence (% workers)	16%	27%
Collective bargaining (% workers)	10%	26%
Employee consultation (% employers)	34%	36%
Employee voice (rated as good, % employees)	55%	51%



Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS/LFS and ESS

Notes: Data on Employee consultation is for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland only. Further changes in the survey design undermines comparability over time and data for other IS-8 sectors is unavailable.

3.7 Skills use, development and progression

The opportunity to use and develop one's skills, for both personal growth and career advancement, is a key facet of Good Work. For employers, upskilling and reskilling the workforce is vital to remaining competitive – particularly in a sector like the creative industries, which sit at the vanguard of technological change. Figure 3.6 benchmarks the creative industries against all industries and the other IS-8 sectors across measures of skills use, employer investment in training and progression.

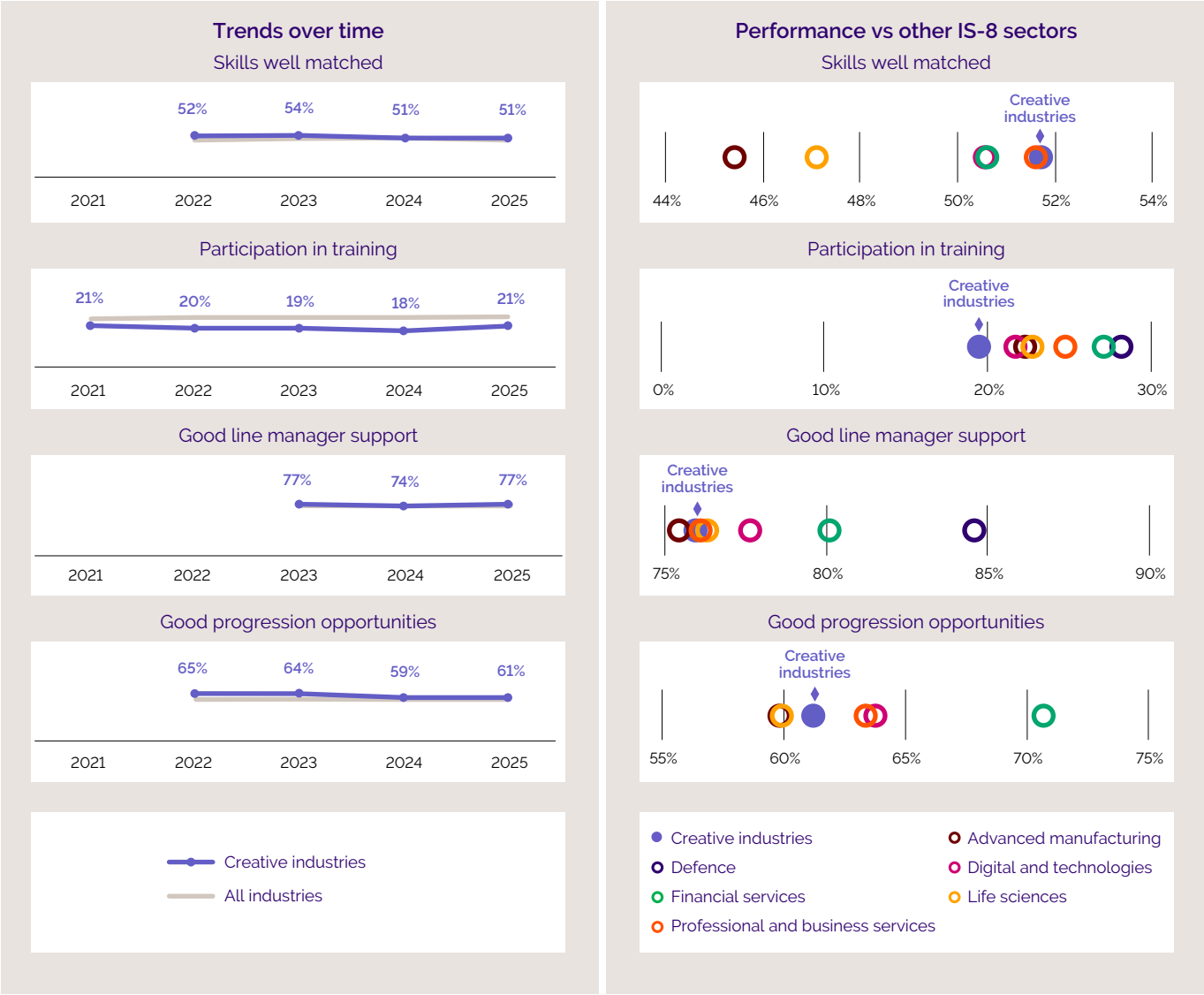
At surface level, creative employees report a genuinely good experience in terms of skills and progression, and a slightly higher share say their skills are well matched to their role than the all-industry average (51% vs 48%). Indeed, this is one of the highest rates of any IS-8 sector – even if it is noteworthy that nearly half of employees, in the creative industries and across the economy, do not feel their skills are well aligned to the demands of their job. Creative employees are also slightly more likely to report good line manager support (77% vs 75%) and good progression opportunities (61% vs 56%).

But this more positive employee experience sits on top of comparatively weak employer investment. Slightly fewer creative employers report having assessed their employees' training needs (46% vs 49%). A little over half (55%) of creative employers had provided training in the past year – statistically, significantly lower than the average rate of training across the economy (60%). And participation in training among the workforce (including self-employed workers) is not just below the all-industry average (21% vs 26%) but the lowest of any IS-8 sector.

This is not a new pattern. The original GWR found rates of training in the creative industries to be among the lowest in the economy (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023a). Further, Creative PEC's State of the Nations report 'Skills mismatches in the UK's creative industries' found that the share of creative employers providing training has fallen steadily, from 62% in 2017 to 55% today, and that training towards a formally recognised qualification has fallen even further, from 28% to 16% over a similar period (Giles, Carey and O'Brien, 2025). The recently published Creative Industries Skills Audits suggest employers face a range of practical barriers to training – more than a third cite a lack of funds, and others cite time pressures on managers and staff – that are closely tied to the sector's structure and fast-paced, project-based working patterns and that make it hard to carve out time or budget for formal development (Carey, Giles and Hay, 2026).

Figure 3.6: Skills use, development and progression

Key indicators	Creative industries	All industries
Skills well matched (% employees)	51%	48%
Training needs assessment (% employers)	46%	49%
Employer-provided training (% employers)	55%	60%
Participation in training (% workers)	21%	26%
Good line manager support (% employees)	77%	75%
Good progression opportunities (% employees)	61%	56%



Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS/LFS and ESS

Notes: Data on employers conducting training needs assessments is for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland only. Further changes in the survey design undermines comparability of ESS data over time and data for other IS-8 sectors is unavailable.

4 Job quality in creative sub-sectors

4.1 Introduction

Sections 2 and 3 set out Creative PEC's job quality framework and applied it to the creative industries as a whole, benchmarking the sector against the wider UK economy and against comparator IS-8 sectors. But the creative industries are heterogeneous, comprising distinct sub-sectors, each with its own history, workforce composition, business model and employment practices.

This chapter examines how the picture of job quality varies within the creative industries. It presents a summary scorecard profile for each creative sub-sector in turn, applying the same six-domain framework and set of indicators that were used throughout Section 3, so that sub-sector performance can be read alongside, and benchmarked consistently against, both the creative industries and all-industry averages.

Taken together, the profiles that follow show that strong performance on one facet of job quality is rarely matched everywhere else. This variation, and what lies behind it, is examined sub-sector by sub-sector in the sections that follow.

4.2 Sub-sector summaries

Each profile below follows a common structure, with a short narrative summary drawing out some of the defining features of job quality in that sub-sector, alongside a fuller scorecard presenting performance across the six domains, benchmarked against both the creative industries and all-industry averages. As elsewhere in this report, individual data points should be read alongside their statistical context, since estimates for smaller sub-sectors carry wider margins of error.

The sub-sectors follow the DCMS definitions used throughout this report (see Section 2.3) and profiles are presented for eight of these. Crafts, which is the smallest sub-sector and is ill-defined by SIC codes, has been excluded because underlying sample sizes are too small to support robust sub-sector analysis.

Some patterns recur across several sub-sectors. Higher pay does not translate into strong performance across all indicators – indeed, there is often clear trade-offs. For instance, job security in advertising and marketing and in architecture sits well below that of the creative Industries and all-industry benchmarks, while those working in IT, software and computer services – the creative sub-sector with the highest rates of pay – report more unpaid overtime and higher pay dissatisfaction than the all-industry average.

Museums, galleries and libraries and music, performing and visual arts record the strongest collective voice of any creative sub-sector, yet this is combined with comparatively low pay and weak progression opportunities.

Investment in training, however, lags the all-industry average in most sub-sectors (architecture and museums, galleries and libraries being the exceptions). A lack of workforce diversity is also a consistent theme: women are underrepresented in architecture and in IT, software and computer services; there is a lack of ethnic diversity in design and designer fashion and in publishing; and, in almost every sub-sector, representation from people form working-class backgrounds remains a substantial, systemic concern.

Advertising and marketing

In advertising and marketing, pay sits well above the UK average, employer pension provision is among the highest of any creative sub-sector and workers report more autonomy and better progression opportunities than the creative industries average. Yet workers contribute more unpaid overtime, are more likely to say they want to work shorter hours and report higher levels of anxiety and work-related illness caused by stress, anxiety or depression.

While the sector has expanded strongly over the past decade, recent years have been marked by challenging trading conditions and industry restructuring (Carey, Giles and Hay, 2026; IPA, 2025). That volatility shows up in job security, which is markedly below both the creative industries and all-industry benchmark, and in involuntary self-employment, which, at 17%, is the highest of any creative sub-sector.

Workforce diversity is a further concern. Disability representation is the lowest of any creative sub-sector (12%), and representation of workers from low socioeconomic backgrounds also lags well behind the all-industry benchmark – echoing findings from the All In Census (Advertising Association, IPA and ISBA, 2025).

Training investment tells a similar story to elsewhere in the creative industries, with both employer-provided training and workforce participation lagging the all-industry average.

Set against this, employees report a strong, positive experience of everyday voice (59%), rating line manager support as good. This is broadly in line with the creative industries and UK averages, even though formal union presence and collective bargaining remain limited.

Fair reward, terms and conditions

	Advertising and marketing	Creative industries	All industries
Weekly earnings	£823	£917	£687
Pay dissatisfaction	33%	34%	25%
Unpaid overtime (hrs)	5.2	4.6	3.7
Holiday entitlement (days)	25.3	24.8	25.6
Employer pension	96%	91%	89%

Safe, healthy and inclusive environment

	Advertising and marketing	Creative industries	All industries
Work-related illness	6%	5%	5%
Illness caused by stress, anxiety or depression	*69%*	63%	49%
Wellbeing (happiness)	7.5	7.4	7.5
Wellbeing (anxiety)	3.5	3.4	3.1
Bullying and harassment	n/a	10%	15%
Representation: Gender	51%	37%	48%
Representation: Ethnicity	16%	18%	16%
Representation: Disability	12%	15%	18%
Representation: Class	19%	21%	32%

Security and flexibility

	Advertising and marketing	Creative industries	All industries
Involuntary non-permanent	*29%*	20%	23%
Involuntary self-employment	17%	10%	9%
Involuntary part-time work	11%	13%	10%
Underemployment	7%	7%	7%
Job security	30%	43%	51%
Flexible working arrangements	22%	22%	23%
Flexibility over hours	38%	48%	30%

Agency, voice and representation

	Advertising and marketing	Creative industries	All industries
Trade union membership	5%	8%	20%
Trade union presence	10%	15%	27%
Collective bargaining	6%	9%	28%
Employee consultation	n/a	34%	36%
Employee voice	59%	56%	52%

Autonomy and personal fulfilment

	Advertising and marketing	Creative industries	All industries
Autonomy over job tasks	40%	50%	38%
Autonomy over work pace	57%	56%	44%
Autonomy over work manner	68%	67%	53%
Autonomy over task order	71%	67%	55%
Job satisfaction	76%	83%	81%
Work intensity (50+ hrs)	20%	20%	21%
Would like shorter 'hours'	39%	37%	33%

Professional development and progression

	Advertising and marketing	Creative industries	All industries
Skills match	49%	52%	49%
Training needs assessment	n/a	46%	49%
Employer training	52%	55%	60%
Participation in training	17%	19%	25%
Line manager support	76%	76%	75%
Progression opportunities	60%	61%	57%

Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS/LFS 2023–2025, Understanding Society 2022–2024 and ESS 2022. Italicised figures are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

Architecture

Architecture stands out for how much it invests in its workforce: employer-provided training, workforce participation in training and skills matching to role are all the strongest of any creative sub-sector, and work-related illness is the lowest recorded anywhere in the creative industries. Pay sits well above the UK average, and employer pension provision – at 98% – is higher than in any other creative sub-sector.

Yet this investment sits alongside the lowest job satisfaction of any creative sub-sector and the strongest desire among its workforce to work shorter hours. This is a familiar tension in the sector's own research: RIBA's Workplace Conditions and Wellbeing Report 2025 has continued to highlight long working hours as a defining pressure in practice life, and RIBA's Business Benchmarking data shows only modest salary growth even as staff costs and workloads have risen, with early-career Part 1 assistants particularly exposed (RIBA, 2025a, 2025b).

Job security is also markedly below both the creative industries and all-industry benchmark, and involuntary self-employment is more common than elsewhere. Representation gaps are wide across several dimensions: only a third of the workforce is female, well below the all-industry average, and RIBA's own benchmarking data continues to record a double-digit gender pay gap alongside a persistent ethnicity pay gap, improving only slowly year on year (RIBA, 2025b). Wider research suggests social inequalities in the sector often begin before people even enter the profession, given the socioeconomic skew of those studying architecture at undergraduate level (Holt-White et al., 2024).

Set against this, autonomy over job tasks and task order both exceed the creative industries average, and employees rate managerial involvement more positively than the creative industries and UK averages, suggesting that, for many, day-to-day working relationships remain a genuine strength even where hours and reward fall short.

Fair reward, terms and conditions

	Architecture	Creative industries	All industries
Weekly earnings	£806	£917	£687
Pay dissatisfaction	*23%*	34%	25%
Unpaid overtime (hrs)	4.8	4.6	3.7
Holiday entitlement (days)	24.4	24.8	25.6
Employer pension	*98%*	91%	89%

Safe, healthy and inclusive environment

	Architecture	Creative industries	All industries
Work-related illness	1%	5%	5%
Illness caused by stress, anxiety or depression	n/a	63%	49%
Wellbeing (happiness)	7.3	7.4	7.5
Wellbeing (anxiety)	3.7	3.4	3.1
Bullying and harassment	n/a	10%	15%
Representation: Gender	33%	37%	48%
Representation: Ethnicity	16%	18%	16%
Representation: Disability	13%	15%	18%
Representation: Class	22%	21%	32%

Security and flexibility

	Architecture	Creative industries	All industries
Involuntary non-permanent	n/a	20%	23%
Involuntary self-employment	13%	10%	9%
Involuntary part-time work	n/a	13%	10%
Underemployment	6%	7%	7%
Job security	*31%*	43%	51%
Flexible working arrangements	26%	22%	23%
Flexibility over hours	46%	48%	30%

Agency, voice and representation

	Architecture	Creative industries	All industries
Trade union membership	11%	8%	20%
Trade union presence	9%	15%	27%
Collective bargaining	15%	9%	28%
Employee consultation	n/a	34%	36%
Employee voice	58%	56%	52%

Autonomy and personal fulfilment

	Architecture	Creative industries	All industries
Autonomy over job tasks	47%	50%	38%
Autonomy over work pace	42%	56%	44%
Autonomy over work manner	51%	67%	53%
Autonomy over task order	62%	67%	55%
Job satisfaction	71%	83%	81%
Work intensity (50+ hrs)	24%	20%	21%
Would like shorter 'hours'	46%	37%	33%

Professional development and progression

	Architecture	Creative industries	All industries
Skills match	65%	52%	49%
Training needs assessment	n/a	46%	49%
Employer training	63%	55%	60%
Participation in training	28%	19%	25%
Line manager support	72%	76%	75%
Progression opportunities	60%	61%	57%

Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS/LFS 2023–2025, Understanding Society 2022–2024 and ESS 2022. Italicised figures are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

Design and designer fashion

The picture of job quality in design and designer fashion is one of contrasts. Job satisfaction, employee voice and flexibility over working hours are all the highest recorded in any creative sub-sector, and the workforce reports strong autonomy and comparatively modest rates of very long hours.

This partly reflects how work in the sector is organised. Self-employment is the dominant form of work in design and designer fashion, at 62% of the workforce – more than double the creative industries average and over four times the UK-wide rate (Hay et al., 2026a). That structure brings real autonomy but also means paid holiday entitlement is the lowest of any creative sub-sector, and both trade union presence and collective bargaining coverage are the lowest recorded anywhere in the creative industries.

Investment in training is very low: both employer-provided training and workforce participation are the lowest of any creative sub-sector, consistent with sector research showing employers face acute financial barriers and time constraints to training and rates of training among self-employed workers are very low.

Representation of ethnic minority workers, at 8%, is also the lowest of any creative sub-sector. On the fashion side specifically, this echoes a wider industry picture: a 2023 report by the British Fashion Council and MBS Group found people of colour held only around one in ten executive and board roles in UK fashion, and a follow-up industry-wide census in 2024 found little improvement, with only a minority of companies setting measurable diversity targets (British Fashion Council, 2024). As for other creative industries sub-sectors, the representation of people from working-class backgrounds in design and designer fashion falls considerable short of the all-industry average.

Fair reward, terms and conditions

	Design and designer fashion	Creative industries	All industries
Weekly earnings	£655	£917	£687
Pay dissatisfaction	*28%*	34%	25%
Unpaid overtime (hrs)	3.8	4.6	3.7
Holiday entitlement (days)	22.5	24.8	25.6
Employer pension	n/a	91%	89%

Safe, healthy and inclusive environment

	Design and designer fashion	Creative industries	All industries
Work-related illness	6%	5%	5%
Illness caused by stress, anxiety or depression	*48%*	63%	49%
Wellbeing (happiness)	7.4	7.4	7.5
Wellbeing (anxiety)	3.5	3.4	3.1
Bullying and harassment	10%	10%	15%
Representation: Gender	49%	37%	48%
Representation: Ethnicity	8%	18%	16%
Representation: Disability	19%	15%	18%
Representation: Class	23%	21%	32%

Security and flexibility

	Design and designer fashion	Creative industries	All industries
Involuntary non-permanent	n/a	20%	23%
Involuntary self-employment	13%	10%	9%
Involuntary part-time work	11%	13%	10%
Underemployment	8%	7%	7%
Job security	n/a	43%	51%
Flexible working arrangements	19%	22%	23%
Flexibility over hours	*60%*	48%	30%

Agency, voice and representation

	Design and designer fashion	Creative industries	All industries
Trade union membership	n/a	8%	20%
Trade union presence	2%	15%	27%
Collective bargaining	2%	9%	28%
Employee consultation	n/a	34%	36%
Employee voice	62%	56%	52%

Autonomy and personal fulfilment

	Design and designer fashion	Creative industries	All industries
Autonomy over job tasks	*57%*	50%	38%
Autonomy over work pace	*64%*	56%	44%
Autonomy over work manner	*65%*	67%	53%
Autonomy over task order	*56%*	67%	55%
Job satisfaction	89%	83%	81%
Work intensity (50+ hrs)	17%	20%	21%
Would like shorter 'hours'	34%	37%	33%

Professional development and progression

	Design and designer fashion	Creative industries	All industries
Skills match	60%	52%	49%
Training needs assessment	n/a	46%	49%
Employer training	41%	55%	60%
Participation in training	10%	19%	25%
Line manager support	n/a	76%	75%
Progression opportunities	54%	61%	57%

Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS/LFS 2023–2025, Understanding Society 2022–2024 and ESS 2022. Italicised figures are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

IT, software and computer services

IT, software and computer services (or the 'tech' sector) is the creative industries' largest sub-sector and on many measures of job quality, its strongest performer. Median weekly earnings are the highest of any creative sub-sector; job satisfaction, autonomy, line manager support and progression opportunities are among the strongest recorded anywhere in the creative industries; and involuntary part-time work and reported bullying are among the lowest. Despite limited trade union membership (just 3% of the workforce), employees in the tech sector tend to rate their job representation more positively than those across the creative industries or wider economy.

Workforce diversity is the clear exception. Those from low socioeconomic backgrounds are significantly underrepresented in the tech sector, with a difference of ten percentage points compared to the wider economy (22% vs 33%). Representation of women, at 23%, is the lowest of any creative sub-sector and wider industry research suggests women hold only around a fifth of specialist IT roles, with the gap widest in senior positions (BCS, 2025).

Pay dissatisfaction is also higher than the all-industry average, perhaps reflecting the high pay expectations that typically accompany high earnings, and unpaid overtime and reported mental ill health both run above the all-industry benchmark too. Training investment lags despite the sector's strength elsewhere: both employer-provided training and workforce participation fall short of the all-industry average, even though self-employment here is far less common than in most of the creative industries.

Fair reward, terms and conditions

	IT, software and computer services	Creative industries	All industries
Weekly earnings	£1,019	£917	£687
Pay dissatisfaction	36%	34%	25%
Unpaid overtime (hrs)	4.8	4.6	3.7
Holiday entitlement (days)	25.4	24.8	25.6
Employer pension	92%	91%	89%

Safe, healthy and inclusive environment

	IT, software and computer services	Creative industries	All industries
Work-related illness	5%	5%	5%
Illness caused by stress, anxiety or depression	68%	63%	49%
Wellbeing (happiness)	7.4	7.4	7.5
Wellbeing (anxiety)	3.2	3.4	3.1
Bullying and harassment	9%	10%	15%
Representation: Gender	23%	37%	48%
Representation: Ethnicity	24%	18%	16%
Representation: Disability	13%	15%	18%
Representation: Class	22%	21%	32%

Security and flexibility

	IT, software and computer services	Creative industries	All industries
Involuntary non-permanent	n/a	20%	23%
Involuntary self-employment	12%	10%	9%
Involuntary part-time work	6%	13%	10%
Underemployment	5%	7%	7%
Job security	51%	43%	51%
Flexible working arrangements	26%	22%	23%
Flexibility over hours	54%	48%	30%

Agency, voice and representation

	IT, software and computer services	Creative industries	All industries
Trade union membership	3%	8%	20%
Trade union presence	7%	15%	27%
Collective bargaining	3%	9%	28%
Employee consultation	n/a	34%	36%
Employee voice	59%	56%	52%

Autonomy and personal fulfilment

	IT, software and computer services	Creative industries	All industries
Autonomy over job tasks	52%	50%	38%
Autonomy over work pace	57%	56%	44%
Autonomy over work manner	73%	67%	53%
Autonomy over task order	68%	67%	55%
Job satisfaction	86%	83%	81%
Work intensity (50+ hrs)	n/a	20%	21%
Would like shorter 'hours'	40%	37%	33%

Professional development and progression

	IT, software and computer services	Creative industries	All industries
Skills match	53%	52%	49%
Training needs assessment	n/a	46%	49%
Employer training	56%	55%	60%
Participation in training	22%	19%	25%
Line manager support	78%	76%	75%
Progression opportunities	66%	61%	57%

Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS/LFS 2023–2025, Understanding Society 2022–2024 and ESS 2022.

Museums, galleries and libraries

Museums, galleries and libraries (MGL) has the most conventionally organised workforce of any creative sub-sector: flexible working arrangements, trade union presence, collective bargaining coverage and employer-provided training are all the strongest recorded anywhere in the creative industries. Only 5% of the workforce is self-employed, far below the creative industries average of 28%, meaning employment here looks much more like the wider UK economy (Hay et al., 2026b).

Yet this institutional strength sits alongside some of the sector's most persistent quality-of-work challenges. Involuntary non-permanent work and underemployment are the highest of any creative sub-sector, progression opportunities are the weakest, and rates of anxiety and of bullying and harassment are higher here than anywhere else in the creative industries.

Pay itself remains a longstanding, well-documented concern. The Museums Association's own salary research has repeatedly found museum pay running below the wider market rate, with median salaries failing to keep pace with inflation, and has warned this is squeezing both workforce wellbeing and diversity, since low pay and insecure contracts make the sector harder to access for people without independent financial means (Museums Association, 2024). Indeed, representation of workers from low socioeconomic backgrounds also lags the all-industry benchmark, consistent with the sector's continued reliance on unpaid entry routes and volunteer labour.

Set against this, gender representation is comparatively strong, and employees report solid autonomy over the pace and content of their work – a foundation that, combined with the sector's unusually strong institutional structures, suggests real potential to improve job quality further if pay and progression can be addressed.

Fair reward, terms and conditions

	Museums, galleries and libraries	Creative industries	All industries
Weekly earnings	£654	£917	£687
Pay dissatisfaction	36%	34%	25%
Unpaid overtime (hrs)	3.7	4.6	3.7
Holiday entitlement (days)	24.0	24.8	25.6
Employer pension	*90%*	91%	89%

Safe, healthy and inclusive environment

	Museums, galleries and libraries	Creative industries	All industries
Work-related illness	4%	5%	5%
Illness caused by stress, anxiety or depression	*57%*	63%	49%
Wellbeing (happiness)	7.3	7.4	7.5
Wellbeing (anxiety)	3.8	3.4	3.1
Bullying and harassment	18%	10%	15%
Representation: Gender	56%	37%	48%
Representation: Ethnicity	15%	18%	16%
Representation: Disability	22%	15%	18%
Representation: Class	21%	21%	32%

Security and flexibility

	Museums, galleries and libraries	Creative industries	All industries
Involuntary non-permanent	42%	20%	23%
Involuntary self-employment	n/a	10%	9%
Involuntary part-time work	18%	13%	10%
Underemployment	12%	7%	7%
Job security	*41%*	43%	51%
Flexible working arrangements	30%	22%	23%
Flexibility over hours	*27%*	48%	30%

Agency, voice and representation

	Museums, galleries and libraries	Creative industries	All industries
Trade union membership	23%	8%	20%
Trade union presence	35%	15%	27%
Collective bargaining	34%	9%	28%
Employee consultation	n/a	34%	36%
Employee voice	43%	56%	52%

Autonomy and personal fulfilment

	Museums, galleries and libraries	Creative industries	All industries
Autonomy over job tasks	*43%*	50%	38%
Autonomy over work pace	*49%*	56%	44%
Autonomy over work manner	*49%*	67%	53%
Autonomy over task order	*53%*	67%	55%
Job satisfaction	73%	83%	81%
Work intensity (50+ hrs)	19%	20%	21%
Would like shorter 'hours'	34%	37%	33%

Professional development and progression

	Museums, galleries and libraries	Creative industries	All industries
Skills match	45%	52%	49%
Training needs assessment	n/a	46%	49%
Employer training	79%	55%	60%
Participation in training	28%	19%	25%
Line manager support	73%	76%	75%
Progression opportunities	45%	61%	57%

Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS/LFS 2023–2025, Understanding Society 2022–2024 and ESS 2022. Italicised figures are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

Music, performing and visual arts

The music, performing and visual arts sub-sector combines some of the strongest subjective outcomes in the creative industries with areas of greater concern. Autonomy over job tasks, work pace and task order as well as flexibility over work hours are among the highest recorded in any creative sub-sector. Trade union membership and presence are also both the strongest of any creative sub-sector – a notable exception to the pattern seen elsewhere in the creative industries, although this is not reflected in self-reported measures of employee voice.

Job security is the lowest of any creative sub-sector and involuntary part-time work and underemployment exceed the creative industries and all-industry average. This is a likely reflection of how work is organised: two thirds of the workforce are self-employed, one of the highest rates in the creative industries, and involuntary self-employment is nonetheless the lowest of any sub-sector. This suggests that, for many, self-employment is a choice rather than a fallback, even as it brings less job security and fewer formal management relationships with it.

Rates of reported bullying and harassment are higher than in most other creative sub-sectors. People of colour and those from a low socioeconomic background are underrepresented in music, performing and visual arts, and wider research points to greater disparities at senior levels (UK Music, 2024).

Further, training participation among the workforce and progression opportunities both lag the creative industries average, consistent with a workforce disproportionately responsible for financing and arranging its own professional development, and line manager support is also the weakest recorded anywhere in the creative industries.

Fair reward, terms and conditions

	Music, performing and visual arts	Creative industries	All industries
Weekly earnings	£731	£917	£687
Pay dissatisfaction	19%	34%	25%
Unpaid overtime (hrs)	4.1	4.6	3.7
Holiday entitlement (days)	23.2	24.8	25.6
Employer pension	n/a	91%	89%

Safe, healthy and inclusive environment

	Music, performing and visual arts	Creative industries	All industries
Work-related illness	5%	5%	5%
Illness caused by stress, anxiety or depression	n/a	63%	49%
Wellbeing (happiness)	7.5	7.4	7.5
Wellbeing (anxiety)	3.6	3.4	3.1
Bullying and harassment	17%	10%	15%
Representation: Gender	50%	37%	48%
Representation: Ethnicity	13%	18%	16%
Representation: Disability	21%	15%	18%
Representation: Class	24%	21%	32%

Security and flexibility

	Music, performing and visual arts	Creative industries	All industries
Involuntary non-permanent	n/a	20%	23%
Involuntary self-employment	4%	10%	9%
Involuntary part-time work	15%	13%	10%
Underemployment	10%	7%	7%
Job security	*23%*	43%	51%
Flexible working arrangements	18%	22%	23%
Flexibility over hours	57%	48%	30%

Agency, voice and representation

	Music, performing and visual arts	Creative industries	All industries
Trade union membership	23%	8%	20%
Trade union presence	34%	15%	27%
Collective bargaining	26%	9%	28%
Employee consultation	n/a	34%	36%
Employee voice	48%	56%	52%

Autonomy and personal fulfilment

	Music, performing and visual arts	Creative industries	All industries
Autonomy over job tasks	65%	50%	38%
Autonomy over work pace	67%	56%	44%
Autonomy over work manner	71%	67%	53%
Autonomy over task order	77%	67%	55%
Job satisfaction	84%	83%	81%
Work intensity (50+ hrs)	18%	20%	21%
Would like shorter 'hours'	26%	37%	33%

Professional development and progression

	Music, performing and visual arts	Creative industries	All industries
Skills match	51%	52%	49%
Training needs assessment	n/a	46%	49%
Employer training	61%	55%	60%
Participation in training	16%	19%	25%
Line manager support	69%	76%	75%
Progression opportunities	45%	61%	57%

Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS/LFS 2023–2025, Understanding Society 2022–2024 and ESS 2022. Italicised figures are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

Publishing

The publishing industry presents a complex picture of job quality. Median weekly earnings sit well above the UK average, job satisfaction is high and, compared to the creative industries average, employees report more autonomy over their work, greater flexibility over their work hours and lower rates of very long hours.

Yet half of publishing workers report being unhappy with their pay – the highest share found anywhere in the creative industries. Job security lags the creative industries and all-industry benchmarks, and employee voice is notably weaker than the creative industries average, despite comparatively higher trade union representation and collective bargaining. Work-related illness caused by stress, anxiety or depression is also the highest of any creative sub-sector.

The representation of women, at 58%, is high and, according to the Publishers Associations' workforce survey, is on the rise (Publishers Association, 2024). However, ethnic minority representation falls short of the creative industries and all-industry average and a lack of socioeconomic diversity continues to be a key concern.

Some of the most striking figures relate, however, to professional development and progression. Rates of workforce participation in training and employer training provision are among the lowest of any creative sub-sector, with a statistically significant difference of almost twenty percentage points in the latter, compared to the all-industry average. Further, only around half of workers in the publishing industry feel there are good opportunities for progression – below both the creative industries and all-industry averages (61% and 57%, respectively).

Fair reward, terms and conditions

	Publishing	Creative industries	All industries
Weekly earnings	£836	£917	£687
Pay dissatisfaction	50%	34%	25%
Unpaid overtime (hrs)	4.3	4.6	3.7
Holiday entitlement (days)	24.7	24.8	25.6
Employer pension	*92%*	91%	89%

Safe, healthy and inclusive environment

	Publishing	Creative industries	All industries
Work-related illness	3%	5%	5%
Illness caused by stress, anxiety or depression	*70%*	63%	49%
Wellbeing (happiness)	7.4	7.4	7.5
Wellbeing (anxiety)	3.6	3.4	3.1
Bullying and harassment	n/a	10%	15%
Representation: Gender	58%	37%	48%
Representation: Ethnicity	14%	18%	16%
Representation: Disability	16%	15%	18%
Representation: Class	21%	21%	32%

Security and flexibility

	Publishing	Creative industries	All industries
Involuntary non-permanent	*23%*	20%	23%
Involuntary self-employment	12%	10%	9%
Involuntary part-time work	15%	13%	10%
Underemployment	9%	7%	7%
Job security	*41%*	43%	51%
Flexible working arrangements	19%	22%	23%
Flexibility over hours	56%	48%	30%

Agency, voice and representation

	Publishing	Creative industries	All industries
Trade union membership	11%	8%	20%
Trade union presence	25%	15%	27%
Collective bargaining	15%	9%	28%
Employee consultation	n/a	34%	36%
Employee voice	47%	56%	52%

Autonomy and personal fulfilment

	Publishing	Creative industries	All industries
Autonomy over job tasks	46%	50%	38%
Autonomy over work pace	56%	56%	44%
Autonomy over work manner	69%	67%	53%
Autonomy over task order	69%	67%	55%
Job satisfaction	86%	83%	81%
Work intensity (50+ hrs)	15%	20%	21%
Would like shorter 'hours'	40%	37%	33%

Professional development and progression

	Publishing	Creative industries	All industries
Skills match	51%	52%	49%
Training needs assessment	n/a	46%	49%
Employer training	41%	55%	60%
Participation in training	15%	19%	25%
Line manager support	74%	76%	75%
Progression opportunities	51%	61%	57%

Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS/LFS 2023–2025, Understanding Society 2022–2024 and ESS 2022. Italicised figures are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

Screen

The screen industries sector combines clear strengths in pay, job satisfaction, union representation and collective bargaining with a set of pressures that reflect a volatile few years for the industry.

A post-pandemic production boom gave way to a downturn from 2023, as US industrial action and cutbacks in streamer commissioning left many out of work and drove down wages (Bectu, 2024). Job security sits below both the creative industries and all-industry benchmark, and anxiety is higher here than across the creative industries as a whole, echoing the findings of industry research (Film and TV Charity, 2025). Involuntary part-time work, at 21%, is the highest of any creative sub-sector, and reported bullying and harassment also sits above the creative industries average. In Wales, for example, 68% of screen workers surveyed in 2026 were considering leaving the sector, with job insecurity the main reason (Davies and Hurford, 2026).

Screen workers also do not share fully in key strengths of the wider creative industries: autonomy and flexibility over working hours are both closer to the all-industry norm than the creative industries average, and long hours remain more common here than elsewhere in the sector, as evidenced through wider work (Swords et al., 2022).

Professional development and progression is another area requiring keen focus. Screen has a lower rate of skills matching to role than any other creative sub-sector, and both employer-provided training and workforce participation in training lag the creative industries and UK averages – a gap ScreenSkills and the BFI's own skills reviews have also identified (Branzanti et al., 2021; BFI, 2022). Representation of workers from low socioeconomic backgrounds remains one of the widest gaps against the all-industry benchmark found anywhere in the UK economy, a long-documented and persistent feature of the sector's talent pipeline (Carey et al., 2021).

Fair reward, terms and conditions

	Screen	Creative industries	All industries
Weekly earnings	£859	£917	£687
Pay dissatisfaction	30%	34%	25%
Unpaid overtime (hrs)	3.7	4.6	3.7
Holiday entitlement (days)	23.2	24.8	25.6
Employer pension	83%	91%	89%

Safe, healthy and inclusive environment

	Screen	Creative industries	All industries
Work-related illness	6%	5%	5%
Illness caused by stress, anxiety or depression	*59%*	63%	49%
Wellbeing (happiness)	7.3	7.4	7.5
Wellbeing (anxiety)	3.8	3.4	3.1
Bullying and harassment	15%	10%	15%
Representation: Gender	40%	37%	48%
Representation: Ethnicity	12%	18%	16%
Representation: Disability	16%	15%	18%
Representation: Class	19%	21%	32%

Security and flexibility

	Screen	Creative industries	All industries
Involuntary non-permanent	*5%*	20%	23%
Involuntary self-employment	9%	10%	9%
Involuntary part-time work	21%	13%	10%
Underemployment	8%	7%	7%
Job security	37%	43%	51%
Flexible working arrangements	15%	22%	23%
Flexibility over hours	30%	48%	30%

Agency, voice and representation

	Screen	Creative industries	All industries
Trade union membership	10%	8%	20%
Trade union presence	22%	15%	27%
Collective bargaining	15%	9%	28%
Employee consultation	n/a	34%	36%
Employee voice	50%	56%	52%

Autonomy and personal fulfilment

	Screen	Creative industries	All industries
Autonomy over job tasks	42%	50%	38%
Autonomy over work pace	41%	56%	44%
Autonomy over work manner	55%	67%	53%
Autonomy over task order	51%	67%	55%
Job satisfaction	83%	83%	81%
Work intensity (50+ hrs)	27%	20%	21%
Would like shorter 'hours'	35%	37%	33%

Professional development and progression

	Screen	Creative industries	All industries
Skills match	44%	52%	49%
Training needs assessment	n/a	46%	49%
Employer training	51%	55%	60%
Participation in training	15%	19%	25%
Line manager support	73%	76%	75%
Progression opportunities	57%	61%	57%

Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS/LFS 2023–2025, Understanding Society 2022–2024 and ESS 2022. Italicised figures are based on a small sample size. This may result in less precise estimates, which should be used with caution.

5 Good Work for all creative workers?

5.1 Introduction

Having explored variations among creative workers across sub-sectors, we continue to expand the picture and ask whether job quality is the same for all creative workers. In doing so, we provide evidence on how job quality varies by employment status and worker characteristics. This builds on the original GWR, which evidenced substantial disparities in job quality based on the employment status and personal characteristics of workers (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023a).

With self-employment running at double the rate of the wider economy and constituting the dominant form of work in some sub-sectors (Carey, Giles and Hay, 2026; Wang and Hay, 2025), understanding job quality for creative self-employed workers is especially important for evaluating job quality in the creative industries.

Further, we expand the discussion of job quality across individual characteristics, including gender, ethnicity, disability and socioeconomic background, to capture variations in job quality.

5.2 Job quality for creative industries freelancers

For statistical purposes, we use self-employment as a proxy for freelance work, but it is important to acknowledge that it is an imperfect one. 'Freelancer' is not a defined employment status and includes a range of ways of working, including people running their own limited company, people contracted to deliver a service on a time-limited basis (potentially even on PAYE contracts), creative practitioners producing commissioned or openly sold work, and any combination of these (DCMS, 2026a; Gunn, 2026). There are growing concerns – in the sector and more widely across the economy – surrounding illegitimate (or 'bogus') self-employment (Hansard, 2026), with plans to address this as part of government efforts to Make Work Pay (DBT and DSIT, 2024). Further, the survey data presented here is based on self-reported employment status, with respondents asked to choose between 'employee' and 'self-employed'. This does not distinguish 'workers', a defined status in the UK's current three-tier system, so anyone with that status, including those wrongly engaged as self-employed, cannot be identified.

With that said, the findings from this study echo concerns raised in the original GWR (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023a) about job quality for creative freelancers.

Figure 5.1 highlights some of the most pronounced disparities in job quality between self-employed workers and employees in the creative industries. As might be expected, self-employed workers report significantly higher flexibility (autonomy over work hours): 69% report that they have a lot of influence over their working hours, compared with 42% of employees. The significant difference holds across other measures of control in terms of autonomy. Three quarters (76%) of the self-employed report a lot of autonomy over job tasks, compared with 42% of employees, a gap of thirty-three percentage points. Similarly, creative self-employed workers also report more autonomy over work pace (72% and 51%, respectively), work manner (77% and 64%, respectively) and task order (78% and 63%, respectively). All of these differences are statistically significant. These findings highlight one of the positive features of creative self-employment, mirroring the original Review, which found that self-employed creative workers report considerable autonomy and control over their working hours (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023a). Job satisfaction is similarly high in both groups, at 85% for the self-employed and 82% for employees.

However, this greater autonomy comes alongside some important disadvantages. Just over half of self-employed creative workers (54%) are satisfied with their household income, compared with 71% of employees, and weekend working is far more common among them (74% vs 35%). Both differences are statistically significant. Among creative workers with recorded usual working hours, 32% of self-employed workers report working 50 hours or more a week, compared with 18% of employees. These disadvantages echo the original Review's finding that for creative freelancers, hours can be extremely long and pay dissatisfaction high (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023a).

The gap extends to skills. Only 14% of self-employed creative workers had taken part in job-related training or education in the last three months, compared with 21% of employees. This finding is in line with evidence from the GWR, which found that freelancers have little time or money to invest in their own development (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023a). In a sector that depends on the skills of a largely freelance workforce, and where technological change is rapid, this remains a serious concern.

Among creative workers, 11% of the self-employed belong to a trade union or staff association, compared with 7% of employees. That ordering runs opposite to the economy as a whole, where membership is far more common among employees than among the self-employed, at 22% compared with 6%.

Figure 5.1: The pros and cons of self-employment in the creative industries



Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS (2023–2025); LFS (2023 – 2025); and Understanding Society, Wave 14 (2022–24).

5.3 Job quality for underrepresented groups

We now move on to how the job quality picture varies across different groups. We compare job quality in the creative industries by worker characteristics covering gender, ethnicity, disability and socioeconomic background. The original Review found that disabled workers, workers from minoritised ethnic groups, those from working-class backgrounds and mid-career workers fared worse on a range of measures of job quality (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023a).

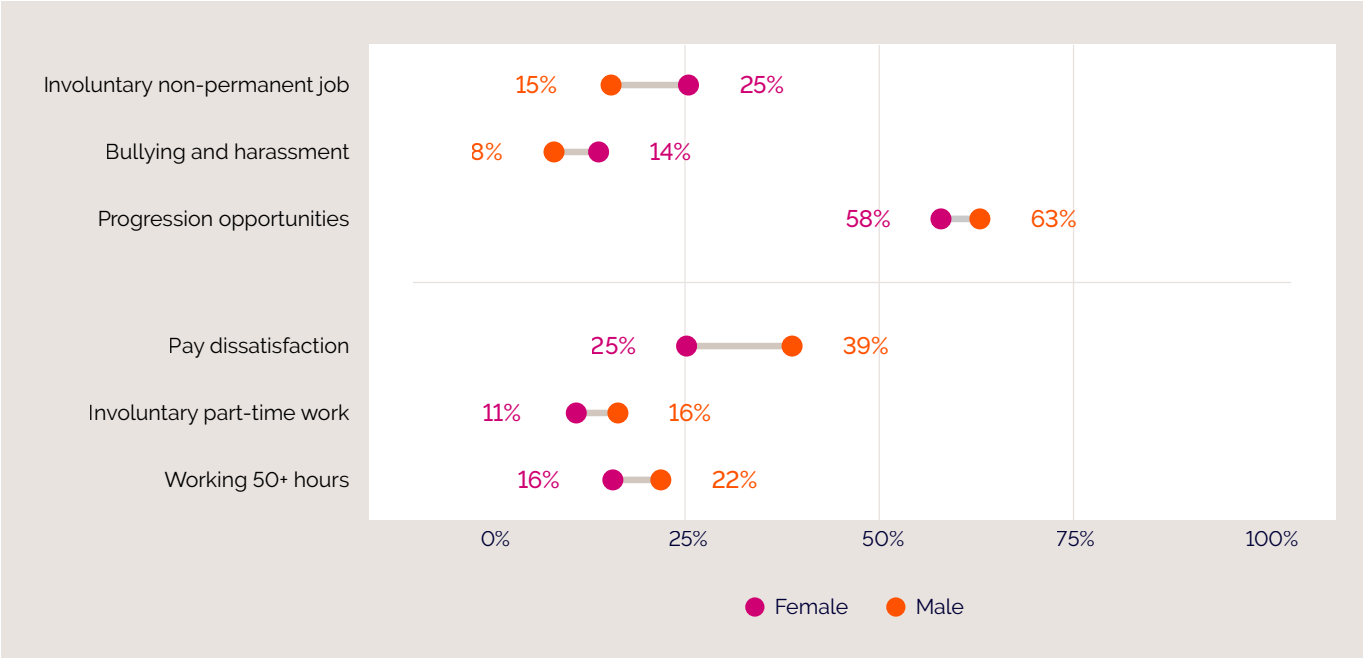
Gender

Figure 5.2 shows how job quality differs between male and female creative workers. Female and male show close patterns on autonomy, job security and job satisfaction, and there are no statistical differences between the two groups on the relevant measures.

Large differences between male and female are visible in earnings. Full-time male creative employees earn a median of £965 per week, compared with £808 for female employees. The gender pay gap is a persistent concern, in line with Carey, Giles and O'Brien (2023a). Female creative workers are also more likely than male workers to be involuntarily employed in non-permanent jobs: among creative workers in non-permanent jobs, 25% of women report that this is because they could not find a permanent job, compared with 15% of men. Notably, females are almost twice as likely as males to report being bullied or harassed at work in the past year, at 14% compared with 8%. They are also slightly less likely to say they have good progression opportunities.

However, among those seeking another job, male workers report higher pay dissatisfaction (39%) than females (25%). Males are also more likely to work 50 hours or more a week, at 22% compared with 16%, and are more often in part-time work involuntarily.

Figure 5.2: Job quality by gender (selected indicators)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS (2023–2025); LFS (2023–2025); and Understanding Society, Wave 14 (2022–24).

Ethnicity

We next look at ethnicity in Figure 5.3. Ethnic minority groups report slightly higher median weekly earnings (£949) than White workers (£900). However, among those who are seeking another job, they are more likely to report dissatisfaction with pay, at 43% compared with 31% for White workers. They also report a higher rate of involuntary part-time work, at 21% compared with 12%.

We also find differences in autonomy. Ethnic minority creative workers are statistically significantly less likely to report flexibility (autonomy over working hours) (37%) than White creative workers (50%). The point estimates are also lower for autonomy over work pace (48% compared with 57%) and task order (59% compared with 68%). However, they report better job and career progression opportunities, at 68% compared with 60%, while agency, voice and representation in terms of trade union membership, presence and collective bargaining coverage are somewhat lower than among White workers.

Figure 5.3: Job quality by ethnicity (selected indicators)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS (2023–2025); LFS (2023–2025); and Understanding Society, Wave 14 (2022–24).

Disability

Figure 5.4 shows differences in job quality between disabled people and people who are not disabled. The disability penalty in the creative industries is concentrated in health, treatment and progression.

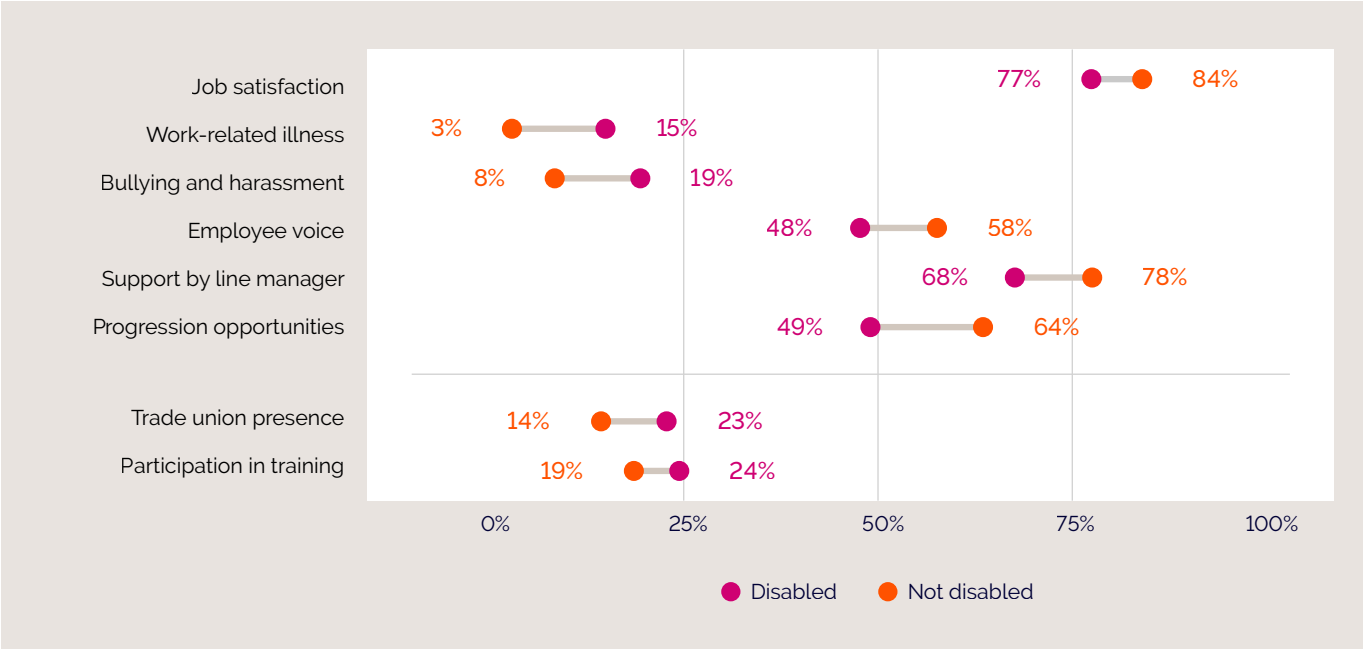
Full-time disabled creative employees reported median weekly earnings of £847, compared with £917 for non-disabled creative workers. The largest differences are in health and wellbeing: 15% of disabled creative workers report work-related illness, compared with 3% of those who are not disabled.

Their experience of the workplace differs too. Nearly one in five (19%) disabled creative workers report being bullied or harassed at work in the past year, compared with 8% of non-disabled creative workers. They are less likely to say they are well supported by their line manager, and less likely to rate employee voice in their workplace as good, at 48% compared with 58%.

Differences are also visible in job satisfaction and progression. Job satisfaction is estimated at 77% among disabled workers compared with 84% among those without a condition, while 49% report good job and career progression opportunities compared with 64% for non-disabled creative workers.

However, some indicators show the opposite direction. Disabled workers show greater workplace union presence (23%) compared with those who are not disabled (14%). Similarly, they also show higher participation in training (24% compared with 19%).

Figure 5.4: Job quality by disability (selected indicators)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS (2023–2025); LFS (2023–2025); and Understanding Society, Wave 14 (2022–24).

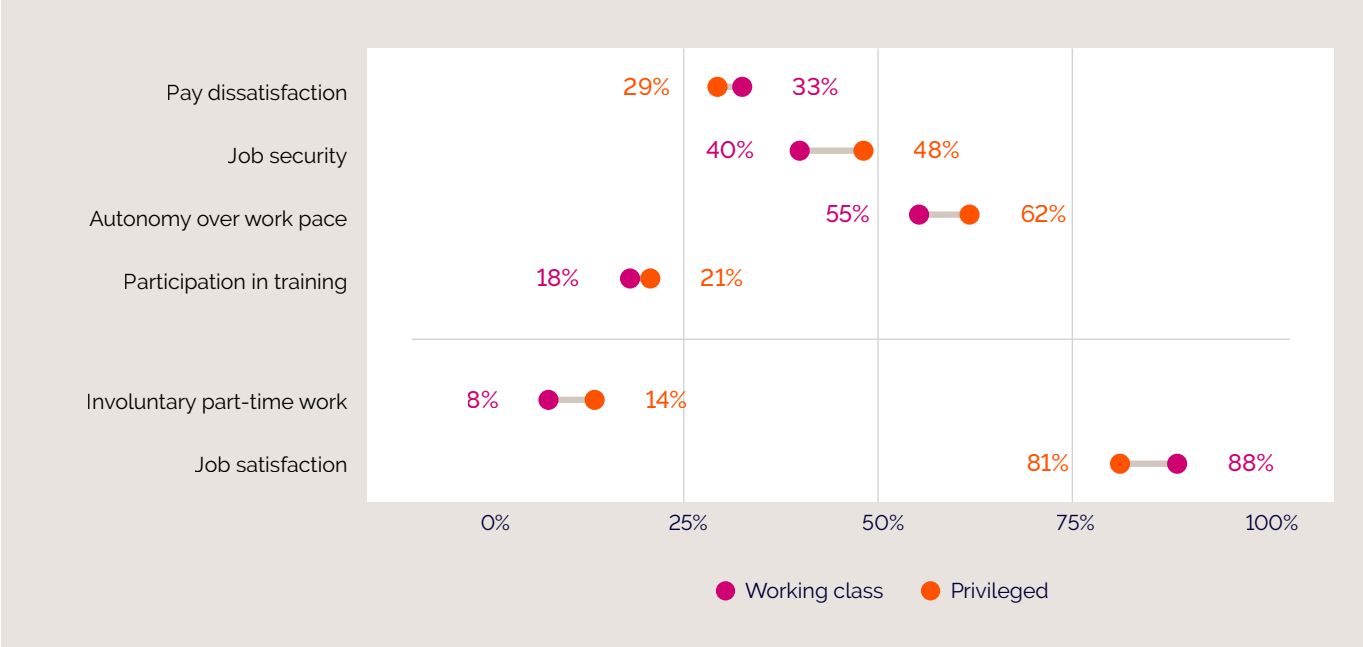
Socioeconomic background

Socioeconomic background in this section is measured by parental occupation, based on three categories of the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification. It captures creative workers' socioeconomic origins. Figure 5.5 compares the two ends of the classification: workers from working-class and privileged origins.

There is a modest descriptive gradient in pay. Full-time creative employees from privileged backgrounds report median weekly earnings of £951, compared with £903 for those from intermediate backgrounds and £892 for those from working-class backgrounds. Job security follows the same pattern: 48% of workers from privileged backgrounds report being very unlikely to lose their job, compared with 40% of those from working-class backgrounds.

Across other dimensions, the gaps are small and the patterns are mixed. Workers from privileged backgrounds report more control over their work pace (at 62% compared with 55%), while job satisfaction is the highest among those from working-class backgrounds (at 88% compared with 81%). Involuntary part-time work is also less common among creative workers from working-class backgrounds (8% compared with 14%). The remaining measures sit within a few points of each other in terms of pay dissatisfaction, participation in training and autonomy over work manner. We find no statistically significant differences on these measures based on Understanding Society.

Figure 5.5: Job quality by socioeconomic background (selected indicators)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the APS (2023–2025); LFS (2023–2025); and Understanding Society, Wave 14 (2022–24).

6 Conclusions

6.1 Summary

Three years on from the Good Work Review, which in 2023 established the first comprehensive, evidence-based picture of job quality across the UK's creative industries (Carey, Giles and O'Brien, 2023a), this fifth State of the Nations report from the Education, Skills and Talent theme has revisited that baseline. The intervening period has seen considerable policy developments, including the Employment Rights Act 2025, the Creative Industries Sector Plan, the appointment of new Creative Freelance Champions and continued work by government and industry to translate the GWR's four strategic priorities and sixteen recommendations into practice. Against this backdrop, it is important that this activity continues to be grounded in a robust and up-to-date evidence base.

This report has three principal aims: to update the quantitative baseline of job quality established by the GWR, drawing on the latest available data across the same six domains and around 40 indicators; to benchmark the creative industries not only against the UK economy as a whole but, for the first time, against other priority sectors identified in the government's Modern Industrial Strategy (IS-8); and to examine how job quality varies within the creative industries, across sub-sectors and by employment status and personal characteristics. The analysis draws on three major national data sources – the APS and LFS, Understanding Society, and the ESS – applying the same definition of Good Work and a measurement framework consistent with the original Review.

The analysis offers five high-level findings.

First, we find that in many respects, as concluded by the original GWR, work in the creative industries is 'good' and, in some cases, the sector performs not only above the all-industry benchmark but ahead of most or all comparator IS-8 sectors. Full-time employees in the creative industries earn 35% more than their counterparts across the economy. They are also slightly above the all-industry benchmark for job satisfaction (83% vs 81%), the match between skills and role (51% vs 48%), line manager support (77% vs 75%) and progression opportunities (61% vs 56%).

However, the standout finding concerns the autonomy that workers (including employees and the self-employed) in the creative industries enjoy: substantially more control over job tasks (50% vs 38%), work pace (56% vs 44%), and both how (67% vs 53%) and in what order (67% vs 55%) they carry out their work than the workforce as a whole – in fact, the highest score of any IS-8 sector on all four measures. Flexibility over working hours (48% vs 30%) is similarly the highest of any IS-8 sector.

Second, this positive picture sits alongside significant trade-offs and areas of concern, where the creative industries not only lag the all-industry average but rank behind, or at the bottom of, the IS-8 sectors. Job security, at 43% (vs 51% across all industries), is the lowest of any IS-8 sector, having fallen from 57% in 2014–16 to a low of 33% during the pandemic and only partially recovered since. Involuntary part-time work (13% vs 10%) and underemployment are both the highest of any IS-8 sector, suggesting that those working in the creative industries can often struggle to find sufficient work. As in the original GWR, pay dissatisfaction (32% vs 25%), unpaid overtime (4.3 vs 3.5 hours a week) and paid holiday entitlement (25.0 vs 25.7 days) also compare unfavourably with the all-industry average, while elevated rates of stress, anxiety and depression give cause for concern. Collective representation is consistently weak too – trade union membership (8% vs 20%), workplace presence (16% vs 27%) and collective bargaining (10% vs 26%) all sit at or near the bottom of the IS-8 sectors.

Perhaps most striking for a sector whose competitive advantage is predicated on talent is a pronounced and persistent underinvestment in skills – something evidenced in the original GWR and other Creative PEC State of the Nations reports exploring skills mismatches and management practices. Employer training provision falls statistically significantly short of the all-industry average (55% vs 60%) and workforce training participation is the lowest of any IS-8 sector. A lack of workforce diversity remains a critical concern, most starkly for socioeconomic background, where representation of workers from working-class backgrounds has fallen since 2021 (from 25% to 21%), leaving the creative industries behind every other IS-8 sector on this measure.

Third, while some challenges are shared across the creative industries – training investment lags the all-industry average in most sub-sectors, and the underrepresentation of working-class talent is close to universal – the picture is often highly nuanced at sub-sector level. In advertising and marketing and in IT, software and computer services, for example, average earnings are high, but so too are pay dissatisfaction and unpaid overtime, and a higher share of workers want to work fewer hours and report work-related illness caused by stress, anxiety or depression. In sub-sectors where self-employment is common – like screen; design and designer fashion; and music, performing and visual arts – autonomy and flexibility are high but so too are job insecurity and underemployment. In contrast, the museums, galleries and libraries sub-sector has many of the features of more conventionally organised work – formalised flexible working arrangements, trade union presence, collective bargaining coverage and higher rates of employer-provided training – but pay falls short of the all-industry average, job satisfaction is low, progression opportunities are limited and we find higher rates of involuntary non-permanent work, underemployment, and bullying and harassment. Patterns of underrepresentation also vary by sub-sector: a lack of gender diversity in architecture and in IT, software and computer services; a lack of ethnic diversity in design and designer fashion and in publishing. In extending the analysis in the original GWR, this report provides summary scorecards for each sub-sector. These show that no sub-sector performs well across all metrics and each must work to improve job quality. However, the priorities will vary, underscoring the need for policy measures that address the distinct challenges of each sub-sector, rather than pursuing a single, sector-wide prescription.

Fourth, as in the original GWR, job quality for creative freelancers remains a particular concern, characterised by acute trade-offs between different dimensions of Good Work. In the creative industries, self-employed workers report substantially greater autonomy than employees on every measure – over job tasks (76% vs 42%), work pace (72% vs 51%), work manner (77% vs 64%), task order (78% vs 63%) and working hours (69% vs 42%). They also enjoy slightly higher job satisfaction (85% vs 82%). But this autonomy comes at a cost: only 54% of the self-employed are satisfied with their household income, compared with 71% of employees; weekend working is more than twice as common (74% vs 35%); nearly a third (32%) work 50 or more hours a week, compared with 18% of employees; and just 14% took part in job-related training in the past three months, compared with 21% of employees – a continuing concern for a largely freelance workforce navigating rapid technological change.

Finally, echoing the original GWR, job quality continues to vary by personal characteristics. A gender pay gap persists (£965 median weekly earnings for full-time male employees, compared with £808 for female employees), and women are more likely than men to be in involuntary non-permanent work (25% compared with 15%) and experience workplace bullying and harassment (14% vs 8%). People from ethnic minorities working in the creative industries report lower autonomy over working hours (37% compared with 50% for White workers) and more involuntary part-time work (21% compared with 12%), despite reporting better progression opportunities (68% compared with 60%) and slightly higher median earnings. The starkest disparities are for disabled workers, who report substantially higher rates of work-related illness (15% compared with 3%) and work-related mental ill health (10% compared with 2%), lower job satisfaction (77% compared with 84%), weaker progression (49% compared with 64%) and lower pay (£847 compared with £917 median weekly earnings). Workers from working-class backgrounds also report somewhat lower pay (£892 compared with £951 median weekly earnings) and job security (40% compared with 48%) than those from privileged backgrounds, though the picture across other dimensions of job quality is more mixed.

6.2 Policy considerations

The original GWR established a robust, evidence-backed case for action and policy framework organised around four strategic priorities and sixteen detailed recommendations informed by international best practice and co-developed with government, industry and wider stakeholders. These are summarised in Figure 6.1 and remain vital in mitigating the distinct challenges associated with work in the creative industries.

Figure 6.1: The GWR's four strategic priorities and sixteen policy recommendations

Priority 1: Strengthen the baseline platform of protection and support for creative workers

1. **Preserve and strengthen the legislative platform**
   Protect employment and IP rights; extend mandatory reporting of workforce disparities
2. **Build awareness of rights and responsibilities**
   Tailor pan-economy guidance; run targeted rights awareness campaigns for the sector
3. **Promote compliance and strengthen enforcement**
   Work with pan-economy enforcement bodies; pilot industry-led solutions (for example, CIISA)
4. **Review adequacy of social protections for freelancers**
   Review freelancer safety net adequacy; pilot portable benefits and specialist support

Priority 2: Drive improvements in management and workplace practices

5. **Co-design Good/Fair Work Standards**
   Define Good/Fair Work for the sector; customise devolved standards by sub-sector
6. **Develop accreditation, kite-marking and awards**
   Launch a tiered accreditation scheme, employer awards and advocate network
7. **Extend conditionality in funding, events and awards**
   Make funding and major events conditional on Good/Fair Work sign-up
8. **Extend resources and support for businesses**
   Expand management training, advice and financial support for employers

Priority 3: Enhance professional development and progression

9. **Enhance relevance of the skills system**
   Build a common LMI framework; fund flexible, modular, technical pathways
10. **Advance industry-led skills innovation**
    Grow sector centres of excellence, micro-credentials and digital badging
11. **Unlock funding for skills co-investment**
    Increase levy flexibility; strengthen sector skills and training funds
12. **Empower workers to invest in development**
    Provide personalised support and flexible funds for freelancers and diverse talent

Priority 4: Improve worker representation and voice

13. **Strengthen the voice of freelancers and marginalised groups**
    Appoint sector Ambassadors; apply a 'Freelancer Test' to new policy/legislation
14. **Review industry governance structures**
    Widen creative worker representation on governance bodies and advisory forums
15. **Strengthen worker voice in business decision-making**
    Improve board/senior team representation; extend engagement and reporting
16. **Extend support for worker networks and communities**
    Modernise collective representation; fund informal and digital worker networks

Source: Authors' elaboration, condensed from Carey, Giles and O'Brien (2023a)

Yet, since the original GWR, much has changed: not in the issues – as many of these are structural and it will take time to observe the efficacy of interventions – but in the policy context.

In reviewing these developments, it is important to recognise how responsibility is divided across the UK. Employment law is reserved to the UK government for England, Scotland and Wales, so measures such as the Employment Rights Act 2025 and the Fair Work Agency apply in Great Britain; in Northern Ireland, employment law is devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly. By contrast, culture, the arts and skills are devolved to the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, each of which uses its own levers – including funding conditions, procurement and Fair Work frameworks – to shape job quality in the creative and cultural sectors. Progress on the Good Work agenda therefore needs to be read nation by nation, as set out in Figure 6.2.

The Employment Rights Act 2025 represents the most significant reform of UK employment law in a generation. Some provisions, such as the day-one statutory sick pay and a new Fair Work Agency, have already been delivered. Others will take effect from 2027, including those most relevant to the insecure, project-based work that characterises much of the creative industries, such as the right to guaranteed hours and the 'triple lock' of protections against fire-and-rehire. The government has also committed to mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting for large employers. These provisions apply in Great Britain. The Fair Work Agency became operational in April 2026, although its initial remit is limited to employment agency standards, gangmasters licensing and modern slavery, with responsibility for minimum wage enforcement, holiday pay and statutory sick pay to follow.

The position that job quality now has in industry discourse has also changed. Promoting Good Work for all creative workers is now an explicit priority, originally set out in the Creative Industries Sector Vision (DCMS and CIC, 2023) and more recently in the Creative Industries Sector Plan (BIST, DCMS and DBT, 2025).

Following the publication of the GWR, DCMS and the CIC co-developed a Good Work Review First Phase Action Plan, featuring four priorities: piloting a Good Work Industry Support Programme to strengthen management practices; exploring scope for a Good Work Accreditation for the creative industries; developing a shared Good Work Commitment Statement and Funding Conditions to be used by the sector's Grant-in-Aid and National Lottery distributors; and a behaviour change campaign to build awareness of rights, address unpaid work and improve contracting practices. Several of these priorities have since been implemented. For example the BFI-funded UK-wide pilot of the Good Work Industry Support Programme in the screen sub-sector ('WorkWise for Screen') has concluded, with a second phase due to be commissioned in 2027. The CIC's self-employed creators' group has launched creative industries-specific guidance on 'Understanding IP', developed in partnership with the Intellectual Property Office, and is working with Skills England on a new module on 'Understanding self-employment'. Separately, CIISA has published standards setting out minimum standards of behaviour for safe and inclusive work environments across the sector.

We have also seen substantial changes in the English skills system since the Labour government took office in July 2024, with reforms moving towards the more agile and responsive system envisaged by the Good Work Review. Skills England has been established and published its first Sector Skills Needs Assessment for the creative industries in June

2026. This built on the more granular Creative Industries Skills Audits, delivered by Creative PEC and Work Advance and co-funded by DCMS and the CIC (Carey, Giles and Hay, 2026).

The 'Post-16 education and skills white paper' confirmed additional flexibilities in the use of the Growth and Skills Levy to support apprenticeship units and the Lifelong Learning Entitlement to fund shorter higher education modules (Department for Education, 2025). The Creative Industries Sector Plan also announced a new industry-led creative industries Skills Passport that will provide a mechanism for workers to record industry-recognised training (BIST, DCMS and DBT, 2025).

There have also been significant developments in the devolved nations. In Scotland, the Independent Culture Fair Work Task Force has recommended a Culture Fair Work Charter, a Fair Work Delivery Group and a Fair Work Fund for the culture and creative sectors. It has also proposed the extension of Fair Work First, which requires organisations receiving public sector grants to pay at least the real Living Wage and provide effective channels for employee voice to freelancers (Scottish Government, 2024; Independent Culture Fair Work Task Force, 2026). The Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2026 to 2031 also commits to piloting a Scottish Artists Minimum Income, similar to the Republic of Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts scheme (Scottish Government, 2026). In addition, Scotland is reforming its post-school skills system following the Withers Review (Withers, 2023): the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Act 2026 will transfer responsibility for apprenticeships from Skills Development Scotland to the Scottish Funding Council from April 2027 (Scottish Funding Council, 2026). For now, this is largely an institutional reform. It creates the potential for more integrated skills pathways but has yet to change provision for the creative industries in practice.

In Wales, the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 continues to embed socially responsible procurement duties, and public funding for the sector is increasingly tied to Fair Work: Arts Council of Wales funding requires fair pay, at least in line with union rates where relevant, while Creative Wales production funding is tied to the Economic Contract and requires paid trainee placements (Welsh Government, 2024). Following the Senedd Culture Committee's Behind the Scenes inquiry (Senedd Cymru Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee, 2023), the Welsh Government committed to tackling bullying and discrimination in screen and to reviewing Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts pilot (Welsh Government, 2024). A new Creative and Culture Forum will now gather evidence and identify actions on fair pay and working conditions across the arts, culture and creative sectors (Welsh Government, 2026b), and the Future Generations Commissioner has published guidance for public bodies on fair pay and contracting when working with cultural freelancers (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2026). On skills, the Creative Wales Skills Fund continues to support sector-specific training (Welsh Government, 2026c), while Medr – the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research – is redesigning the apprenticeship programme to be more flexible and responsive from August 2027, retaining a dedicated creative, design and media framework (Medr, 2026).

In Northern Ireland, where employment law is devolved, the proposed Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill would extend the right to a written statement of terms to all workers from day one, curb exploitative zero-hours contracts and widen trade union access to workplaces (Department for the Economy, 2025), although its passage before the end of the current Assembly mandate in 2027 remains

uncertain. The Department for Communities' Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme Framework also sets out plans for new arts and heritage policies, including a sector skills strategy (Department for Communities, 2025).

There have also been efforts to improve worker representation within industry governance structures, with the Creators' Rights Alliance joining the refreshed CIC membership. Further, new Creative Freelance Champions, announced as a flagship commitment of the Creative Industries Sector Plan, have been appointed to advocate for the sector's creative freelancers within government and will also become members of the CIC (BIST, DCMS and DBT, 2025).

Altogether, policy development in this area has been significant across all four nations – as illustrated by Figure 6.2 – and it is important that government and industry stakeholders continue to work together to drive action across the full breadth of the policy framework developed in the original GWR.

Figure 6.2: Key policy developments since the GWR, by nation

Good Work Review priority

1 Baseline platform of protection and support
2 Management and workplace practices
3 Professional development and progression
4 Worker representation and voice



UK Government and UK-wide

1 Employment Rights Act 2025,[5] including Fair Work Agency, day-one statutory sick pay, right to guaranteed hours and 'triple lock' of protections against fire-and-rehire (among others).

1 Fair Work Agency operational, but initial scope limited to agency standards, gangmasters licensing and modern slavery, with minimum wage, holiday pay and statutory sick pay to follow.

1 UK government commitment to mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting for large employers.

1 Creative industries-specific guidance on 'Understanding IP' launched and work underway to develop an 'Understanding self-employment' module (part of the DCMS/CIC Good Work Action Plan).

1 CIISA standards published setting out minimum standards of behaviour for safe and inclusive work environments.

2 Shared Good Work Commitments launched and shared Funding Conditions being agreed by the sector's Grant-in-Aid and National Lottery distributors (part of the DCMS/CIC Good Work Action Plan).

2 Good Work Industry Support Programme being piloted in the screen industries (WorkWise for Screen, funded by the BFI) (part of the DCMS/CIC Good Work Action Plan).

2 CIC scoping a Good Work Accreditation Scheme for the creative industries (part of the DCMS/CIC Good Work Action Plan).

3 Skills Passport announced in the Creative Industries Sector Plan, providing a mechanism for recording industry-recognised training.

4 New trade union access rights and electronic balloting provisions under the Employment Rights Act.

4 Refreshed CIC membership includes the Creators' Rights Alliance.

4 Freelance Champions appointed to advocate for the sector's creative freelancers within government and be members of the CIC.

5. Employment Rights Act 2025 measures apply in Great Britain; employment law is devolved in Northern Ireland.

Figure 6.2: Key policy developments since the GWR, by nation (continued)

Good Work Review priority

1 Baseline platform of protection and support
2 Management and workplace practices
3 Professional development and progression
4 Worker representation and voice



England

3 Skills England established, publishing its first Sector Skills Needs Assessment for the creative industries. DCMS/CIC-funded Creative Industries Skills Audits also published.

3 Growth and Skills Levy reforms ongoing, including the funding of apprenticeship units.

3 Expansion of Higher Technical Qualifications and funding of shorter higher education modules, fundable through the Lifelong Learning Entitlement.



Scotland

1 Scotland's Programme for Government 2026 to 2031 includes a commitment to piloting a Scottish Artists Minimum Income.

2 Scotland's Independent Culture Fair Work Task Force has recommended a sector Fair Work Charter, a Delivery Group and a Fair Work Fund, and extending Fair Work First to freelancers.

2 Fair Work First policy in Scotland now mandates that all organisations receiving public sector grants must pay at least the real Living Wage and provide effective channels for employee voice.

3 Following the Withers Review, the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Act 2026 transfers responsibility for apprenticeships to the Scottish Funding Council from April 2027.

Figure 6.2: Key policy developments since the GWR, by nation (continued)

Good Work Review priority

1 Baseline platform of protection and support
2 Management and workplace practices
3 Professional development and progression
4 Worker representation and voice



Wales

1 The Senedd Culture Committee's Behind the Scenes inquiry examining Fair Work and freelancers in the creative workforce has concluded. The Welsh Government has committed to tackling bullying and discrimination in screen and to reviewing Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts pilot.

1 Wales's new Creative and Culture Forum will gather evidence and identify actions on fair pay and working conditions across the arts, culture and creative sectors.

2 Arts Council of Wales funding requires fair pay, at least in line with union rates where relevant. Creative Wales production funding is tied to the Economic Contract and requires paid trainee placements, with diversity criteria being strengthened.

2 The Future Generations Commissioner's Working Together for Culture guides public bodies on fair pay and contracts for cultural freelancers.

3 The Creative Wales Skills Action Plan provides a Creative Skills Fund of around £1m a year, with its first round supporting more than 27,000 people and 300 companies.

3 Medr is redesigning the Welsh apprenticeship programme to be more flexible and responsive from August 2027, retaining a creative, design and media framework.



Northern Ireland

1 4 Northern Ireland's Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill proposes written terms for all workers from day one, curbs on exploitative zero-hours contracts and wider trade union access to workplaces, including digital access.

3 The Department for Communities' Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme Framework sets out plans for new arts and heritage policies, including a sector skills strategy.

Source: Authors' elaboration, non-exhaustive list

Yet it remains important that government and industry stakeholders continue to work together to drive action across the full breadth of the policy framework developed in the original GWR. Reflecting on policy developments to date, the high-level findings of this update and wider shifts in the machinery of government across the four UK nations, we identify five areas where there is both an opportunity and a need to extend progress towards the Good Work agenda.

Firstly, there is a need to drive adoption of Good or Fair Work standards across the creative industries. This research has highlighted that there is still work to do to strengthen job quality in a range of areas, not least to address precarity, unpaid overtime and relatively weak collective representation. Job security is the lowest of any IS-8 sector (43% vs 51%), and trade union membership (8% vs 20%) and collective bargaining coverage (10% vs 26%) sit at or near the bottom of the IS-8 sectors. Standards developed to date have largely constituted national or sub-sector-specific pilots rather than the UK-wide framework of standards, accreditation and funding conditionality the GWR envisaged. There remains a need to promote alignment between existing standards and to strengthen incentives for employers to adopt these practices, including by delivering the Creative Industries Accreditation Scheme – part of the joint DCMS/CIC Good Work Action Plan – and developing associated kitemarking. Following the launch of a shared commitment statement, there is a need to finalise the shared Good Work funding conditions for use by National Lottery and Grant-in-Aid distributors and subsequently to explore opportunities to further extend conditionality to wider public sector grants, industry funding and commissioning. Developments in the devolved nations – including the Culture Fair Work Charter proposed in Scotland and the fair pay conditions attached to Arts Council of Wales and Creative Wales funding – offer valuable models, and there is an opportunity for the four governments to share learning, so that creative businesses and freelancers working across the UK face a coherent set of expectations. There is also scope for the new Fair Work Agency to expand its remit – currently limited to employment agency standards, gangmasters licensing and modern slavery – to include important concerns for the creative industries, particularly illegitimate self-employment and fair contracting practice. In Northern Ireland, where employment law is devolved, timely passage of the Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill would provide an important foundation for equivalent progress.

Secondly, there is a need for further resources and support to build capacity among creative firms to meet industry standards and drive improvements in workplace practices. This is particularly important given the persistent lack of workforce diversity, elevated rates of stress, anxiety and depression (cited by 59% of creative workers reporting a work-related illness, vs 51% across all industries) and pockets of concern around bullying and harassment in sub-sectors including museums, galleries and libraries; music, performing and visual arts; and screen. The BFI-funded pilot of the Good Work Industry Support Programme – through its first and second phase – has begun to develop resources and strengthen support to enable SMEs and individuals to adopt Good Work principles and practices in the screen industries. This offers a model that should be extended to other creative sub-sectors, and this research has highlighted the importance of working in partnership with trade bodies, skills bodies and employers to customise the programme to the distinct challenges and existing landscape of support evident in each sub-sector. This should build on CIISA's newly published standards of behaviour and, in Wales, the Welsh Government's commitment to tackling bullying and discrimination in screen, while the Fair Work Fund proposed by Scotland's Culture Fair Work Task Force could offer a complementary route to support creative employers to adopt Fair Work practices.

Thirdly, with rates of training falling short of any other IS-8 sector and employer training provision lagging the all-industry average (55% vs 60%), there is a pressing need to harness ongoing reforms to the skills system to deliver a step change in skills investment in the creative industries. The Creative Industries Skills Audits recently published by Creative PEC and Work Advance set out a wide-scale programme of work to achieve this and should be read alongside this report. This includes developing new short courses in critical areas like AI and sustainable design. In England, these should be funded through the Growth and Skills Levy and there is also scope for new Higher Technical Qualifications and higher education modules in creative subject areas that could be funded by the Lifelong Learning Entitlement. Generally, the Audits pointed to a need to improve signposting and kitemarking of industry-recognised training; develop clearer competency frameworks; provide stronger careers guidance; and enable the planned industry-led Skills Passports to record participation and promote portability and labour mobility, thereby helping to mitigate the precarity of work and fluctuating patterns of demand in the sector. As skills policy is devolved, equivalent opportunities exist in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – including through Creative Wales's Creative Skills Fund and the sector skills strategy proposed under Northern Ireland's Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme – and, given the mobility of the creative workforce, the Skills Passport should be designed to be recognised across all four nations.

Fourthly, there is scope for the new Freelance Champions to progress a wide-ranging programme of work to improve job quality for creative freelancers, which this research has shown remains a pressing concern: only 54% of self-employed creative workers are satisfied with their household income, compared with 71% of employees; nearly a third (32%) work 50 or more hours a week; and just 14% took part in job-related training in the past three months. This should include reviewing the adequacy of social protections for creative freelancers, drawing on evidence from Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts scheme and the forthcoming Scottish Artists Minimum Income pilot; assessing the feasibility of new flexible financial products, including pensions; developing new resources to build awareness of fair contracting, employment rights and IP protection, and to help tackle illegitimate self-employment; and curating a package of measures to strengthen careers guidance and skills investment among creative freelancers. This is a considerable agenda and the Freelance Champions will require substantive resources and specialist expertise, alongside the research support offered by the recently announced UKRI/DCMS Policy Fellowship and academic secondment (UKRI and DCMS, 2026; DCMS, 2026b). Given that culture and skills are devolved, the Champions will also need to work closely with the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive, and with initiatives such as Wales's new Creative and Culture Forum, to ensure their work benefits freelancers across the UK.

Finally, given we find job quality priorities vary considerably by sub-sector, and the sectoral mix of the creative industries varies from place to place, locally tailored approaches have particular value. With devolution continuing to advance in England – including through the transfer of responsibility for 16–19 technical education to Mayoral Strategic Authorities – and with culture and skills already devolved to the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive, there is substantial scope to **drive improvements in job quality in the creative industries through place-based partnership**. This could include developing or customising place-based Good or Fair Work standards to reflect the distinct job quality issues in creative sub-sectors; making Good or Fair Work principles a condition of local government funding or major events; engaging creative employers and freelancers in forums to direct skills funding and develop place-based skills programmes; and convening networks of local employers to act as visible and vocal advocates and communities of practice providing peer learning in embedding Good or Fair Work principles within creative firms. In the devolved nations, Wales's new Creative and Culture Forum and the Fair Work Delivery Group proposed in Scotland offer natural vehicles for this work, and better nation-level data on job quality in the creative industries (see Section 6.3) would help to assess the relative efficacy of these different approaches.

6.3 Research gaps

Despite the improvements to the GWR's evidence base achieved through this update – which draws on a wider range of comparator sectors and provides more granular sub-sector analysis – a number of the evidence gaps identified in the original Review remain, and new challenges have emerged in the underlying survey infrastructure that underpins this work. Closing these gaps will be essential to tracking progress on the Good Work agenda robustly over time.

First, important dimensions of job quality remain poorly measured. Since the GWR, welcome new questions on job quality have been added to the LFS and APS, covering skills match, bullying and harassment, and line manager support. However, we still lack a direct measure of whether workers find their work meaningful – a gap the GWR itself identified and which persists. The capacity of government surveys to support robust, disaggregated analysis has, if anything, become more constrained. High-Performance Workplace Practices questions in the ESS continue to be asked only in the devolved nations. Meanwhile, the Department for Education's move to alternating between larger and smaller survey waves has reduced the achieved sample to the point that this report, like Creative PEC's parallel research on management practices, has needed to rely on the 2022 wave of the ESS rather than the smaller 2024 update to sustain robust analysis for the creative industries.

Second, and as in the original GWR, job quality for creative freelancers remains the most significant evidence gap. Around one third of the indicators in Creative PEC's Measurement Framework cover employees only, meaning we still lack robust data on job quality for the self-employed in areas including pensions, skills alignment, progression, bullying and harassment, and employee voice. The Creative Industries Skills Audits have called for government surveys, including the ESS, to be extended to capture the skills needs and priorities of the freelance workforce; the same case applies to the wider measurement of job quality.

Third, we continue to lack robust data on job quality for underrepresented groups, including young people, people from ethnic minorities, disabled people, those from working-class backgrounds and other workers that might have a different experience of work given their personal circumstances, such as individuals with caregiving responsibilities. This is often because survey samples are rarely large enough to support this level of disaggregation – a limitation that becomes still more acute at sub-sector level, where some Creative PEC research has needed to exclude smaller sub-sectors, such as Crafts, from certain analyses on sample-size grounds.

Finally, better national, regional and local data is needed to explore the impact of alternative policy approaches and to direct place-based policy towards the areas and issues of greatest need. There could be much to learn from examining the picture of job quality in the creative industries in each UK nation, and the efficacy of national approaches to advancing Good or Fair Work. Further, there is an important place-based dimension, with the picture of job quality likely to vary considerably between urban and rural areas and between different cities and regions (not least reflecting the sectoral mix). Data sources at regional and national level are particularly valuable where they are large or targeted enough to identify sub-sector nuances that UK-wide surveys cannot capture. The Wales Screen Workforce Survey, for example, has tracked a shift towards freelance working (from 40% to 46% of respondents) and a rise in the share considering leaving the sector (from 52% to 68%) among screen workers in Wales since 2022 (Davies and Hurford, 2026) – insights not readily identifiable in UK-level data. Sustaining such sources, and improving their comparability across nations and regions, would strengthen the evidence base for place-based approaches to Good Work. The Creative Industries Skills Audits have taken a first step in this direction, recommending place-based assessments of creative industries skills needs in UK cities and regions; a similar job-quality-focused equivalent is still lacking. As responsibility for skills and growth continues to devolve to Mayoral Strategic Authorities and other sub-national bodies, closing this gap, including through the Local Skills Improvement Plans in England and equivalent regional skills assessments conducted in the devolved nations, will become increasingly important in ensuring that place-based Good Work interventions are evidence-led.

Annex: Good Work Measurement Framework

Indicator	Source	Coverage	Time series	IS-8 sectors	Sub sectors	Employment status	Personal characteristics
Median weekly earnings (exc. overtime)	Annual Population Survey	Full-time Employees	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Pay dissatisafaction	Annual Population Survey	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Unpaid overtime	Annual Population Survey	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Paid holiday entitlement	Labour Force Survey (OD quarters)	Employees only	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Employer pension	Understanding Society	Employees only	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Involuntary non-permanent job	Annual Population Survey	Employees only	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Involuntary self-employment	Labour Force Survey (OD quarters)	Self-employed workers	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Involuntary part-time work	Annual Population Survey	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Underemployment (hours insufficiency)	Annual Population Survey	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Job security	Understanding Society	Employees only	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Flexible working arrangements	Labour Force Survey (OD quarters)	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Flexibility (autonomy over work hours)	Understanding Society	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Autonomy over job tasks	Understanding Society	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Autonomy over work pace	Understanding Society	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Autonomy over work manner	Understanding Society	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Autonomy over task order	Understanding Society	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Job Satisfaction (subjective rating)	Understanding Society	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Work intensity (working 50+ hours)	Annual Population Survey	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Work intensity (would like to work shorter hours)	Annual Population Survey	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Annex: Good Work Measurement Framework (continued)

Indicator	Source	Coverage	Time series	IS-8 sectors	Sub sectors	Employment status	Personal characteristics
Work-related illness	Labour Force Survey (JM quarters)	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Work-related mental illness	Labour Force Survey (JM quarters)	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Wellbeing (happiness)	Annual Population Survey	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Wellbeing (Anxiety)	Annual Population Survey	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Bullying and harassment	Labour Force Survey (JM quarters)	Employees only	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Representation: Gender	Annual Population Survey	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	N/A
Representation: Ethnicity	Annual Population Survey	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	N/A
Representation: Disability	Annual Population Survey	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	N/A
Representation: Social class	Annual Population Survey (JS quarters)	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	N/A
Trade union membership	Labour Force Survey (OD quarters)	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Trade union presence	Labour Force Survey (OD quarters)	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Collective bargaining	Labour Force Survey (OD quarters)	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Employee consultation	Employer Skills Survey	Employers	N	N	N	N	N
Employee voice	Annual Population Survey	Employees only	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Skills match	Labour Force Survey (JM quarters)	Employees only	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Training needs assessment	Employer Skills Survey	Employers	N	N	N	Y	N
Employer-provided training	Employer Skills Survey	Employers	Y	N	Y	Y	N
Participation in training	Annual Population Survey	All Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Line manager support	Labour Force Survey (JM quarters)	Employees only	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Progression opportunities	Annual Population Survey	Employees only	Y	Y	Y	N	Y

List of acronyms and abbreviations

AHRC: Arts and Humanities Research Council

AI: artificial intelligence

APS: Annual Population Survey

BCS: BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT

BFI: British Film Institute

BIST: Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade

CIC: Creative Industries Council

CIISA: Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority

Creative PEC: Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre

DBT: Department for Business and Trade

DCMS: Department for Culture, Media and Sport

DSIT: Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

ESS: Employer Skills Survey (ESS22 and ESS24 refer to the 2022 and 2024 waves)

FT: full-time

GWR: Good Work Review

ILO: International Labour Organization

IP: intellectual property

IPA: Institute of Practitioners in Advertising

IS-8: the eight priority growth sectors identified in the Modern Industrial Strategy

ISBA: Incorporated Society of British Advertisers

IT: information technology

LFS: Labour Force Survey

LMI: labour market information

MGL: museums, galleries and libraries

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

ONS: Office for National Statistics

PAYE: Pay As You Earn

QuInnE: Quality of Jobs and Innovation Generated Employment Outcomes

R&D: research and development

RIBA: Royal Institute of British Architects

SIC: Standard Industrial Classification

SME: small and medium-sized enterprise

SoTN: State of the Nations

UKHLS: UK Household Longitudinal Study (Understanding Society)

UKRI: UK Research and Innovation

Glossary

All-industry average: The figure for the UK economy as a whole, used throughout the report as the main benchmark against which job quality in the creative industries is compared.

Annual Population Survey (APS) and Labour Force Survey (LFS): Continuous household surveys run by the Office for National Statistics, providing data on the labour market characteristics of people resident in the UK. Customised tables were commissioned for this report.

Autonomy: The extent to which workers can influence their daily working lives. The framework measures autonomy over job tasks, work pace, work manner and task order, recording the share of workers who report having a lot of influence over each.

Bullying and harassment: The share of employees reporting that they have been bullied or harassed at work in the past year. The question is asked of employees only, so excludes creative freelancers.

Collective bargaining: The share of workers whose pay and conditions are affected by agreements negotiated between their employer and a trade union.

Creative Freelance Champions: Champions appointed by the UK Government to advocate for the interests of self-employed creative workers across government.

Creative industries: Industries defined by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as those which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.

Creative sub-sectors: The groupings of sectors within the creative industries used by DCMS for its Creative Industries Economic Estimates: advertising and marketing; architecture; crafts; design and designer fashion; IT, software and computer services; museums, galleries and libraries; music, performing and visual arts; publishing; and screen (film, TV, video, radio and photography).

Domains of job quality: The six interrelated dimensions of Good Work that structure Creative PEC's measurement framework: fair reward, terms and conditions; security and flexibility; autonomy and personal fulfilment; healthy, respectful and inclusive work environment; agency, voice and representation; and skills use, development and progression.

Employee consultation: The share of employers with formal procedures in place for consulting employees. Data is drawn from the Employer Skills Survey and covers Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland only.

Employee voice: A subjective rating of how well managers involve staff in decision-making, measured as the share of employees rating this as good.

Employer Skills Survey (ESS): A national establishment-based survey commissioned by the Department for Education and its equivalents in the devolved nations, covering recruitment, skills challenges and training. This report uses the 2022 wave.

Employer-provided training: The share of employers that have funded or arranged training for their staff in the past 12 months.

Employment Rights Act 2025: UK legislation representing the most substantial reform of employment law in a generation, strengthening protections in areas including job security, sick pay, family leave and harassment, and establishing the Fair Work Agency. It applies in Great Britain.

Employment status: The legal category determining a person's employment rights. UK employment law distinguishes between employees, workers and the self-employed. Survey respondents in this report self-identify as either 'employee' or 'self-employed'.

Fair Work: The term used by governments and advisory bodies in Scotland and Wales, including the Fair Work Convention and the Fair Work Commission, for good quality work. It is used interchangeably with Good Work in this report.

Fair Work Agency: A single enforcement body for employment rights established under the Employment Rights Act 2025, which became operational in April 2026 and applies in Great Britain.

Fair Work First: The Scottish Government's policy of attaching Fair Work criteria, including payment of at least the real Living Wage and effective channels for employee voice, to public sector grants and contracts.

Flexibility (autonomy over work hours): The share of workers reporting a lot of influence over their working hours.

Flexible working arrangements: The share of employees with a formal flexible working arrangement, such as flexitime, annualised hours, term-time working or job sharing.

Freelancers: Individuals working independently rather than as employees. 'Freelancer' is not a defined employment status, so this report uses self-employment as an imperfect statistical proxy for freelance work.

Good Work: An umbrella term for work that is not only 'good' but also 'fair', 'decent' and of 'quality', encompassing the six domains of job quality defined by Creative PEC.

Illegitimate ('bogus') self-employment: Arrangements in which people are engaged as self-employed when, in law, their working relationship gives them worker or employee status.

Involuntary non-permanent work: The share of employees in temporary or fixed-term jobs who are in such work because they could not find a permanent job.

Involuntary part-time work: The share of part-time workers who work part time because they could not find a full-time job.

Involuntary self-employment: The share of self-employed workers who are self-employed because they could not find work as an employee.

IS-8 sectors: The eight sectors prioritised for growth in the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy: advanced manufacturing; clean energy industries; creative industries; defence; digital and technologies; financial services; life sciences; and professional and business services. Clean energy industries cannot be defined using SIC codes and are excluded from the comparisons in this report.

Job quality: A family of interrelated concepts concerned with whether work is decent, fair, fulfilling and meaningful, and whether it supports the wellbeing of workers.

Job satisfaction: The share of workers reporting that they are satisfied with their job.

Job security: The share of workers who consider it unlikely that they will lose their job.

Limb (b) worker: A person contracted to perform work personally for an organisation that is not their client or customer. Workers have some, but not all, of the employment rights of employees.

Median weekly earnings: The midpoint of gross weekly earnings for full-time employees, excluding overtime.

Modern Industrial Strategy: The UK Government's 2025 industrial strategy, which identifies eight priority growth sectors (the IS-8).

Paid holiday entitlement: The mean number of days of paid holiday to which employees are entitled each year.

Participation in training: The share of workers, including the self-employed, who have taken part in job-related education or training in the last three months.

Pay dissatisfaction: The share of workers looking for another job who are doing so because pay in their present job is unsatisfactory.

Pooled data: Survey data combined across several years (for example, 2023–2025) to increase sample sizes and support more robust analysis of smaller groups, such as creative sub-sectors.

Progression opportunities: The share of employees who report good job and career progression opportunities.

Representation: The share of the workforce from groups that are underrepresented in the creative industries, measured by gender, ethnicity, disability and socioeconomic background. Figures include those in both creative and non-creative roles in the creative industries.

Skills match: The share of employees who report that their skills are well matched to the requirements of their job.

Socioeconomic background: Workers' socioeconomic origins, measured by parental occupation using three categories of the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification: privileged (managerial and professional), intermediate and working-class backgrounds.

Standard Industrial Classification (SIC): The system used to classify businesses by their main economic activity. The creative industries are defined using a selection of four-digit SIC codes.

Statistical significance: An indication that a difference between two estimates is unlikely to have arisen by chance. Significance testing was applied to Understanding Society and Employer Skills Survey data but was not available for APS and LFS data.

Trade union membership: The share of workers who are members of a trade union or staff association.

Trade union presence: The share of workers with a trade union or staff association present at their workplace.

Training needs assessment: The share of employers that have assessed their employees' training needs.

Underemployment: A measure of hours insufficiency, capturing workers who would like to work more hours than they currently do.

Understanding Society: The UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS), the largest longitudinal household survey in the UK, following around 40,000 households. Creative industries data is accessed via Special Licence from the UK Data Service.

Unpaid overtime: The mean number of unpaid overtime hours that employees usually work each week.

Wellbeing (happiness and anxiety): Measures of personal wellbeing in which respondents rate how happy, and how anxious, they felt yesterday on a scale of 0 to 10. A higher anxiety score indicates poorer wellbeing.

Work intensity: Measured as the share of workers usually working 50 or more hours a week, and the share who would like to work shorter hours.

Work-related illness: The share of workers reporting an illness caused or made worse by their work. Work-related mental illness refers to those whose work-related illness is stress, anxiety or depression.

Data statement

Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex

Understanding Society, Waves 6, 8, 10, 12 and 14. The detailed sectoral data presented in this report is not publicly available. Data can be accessed from the UK Data Service here.

Office for National Statistics Annual Population Survey and Labour Force Survey 2021–2025

The detailed sectoral data presented in this report is not publicly available. Wider labour market indicators for the creative industries are available from the DCMS Sectors Economic Estimates Series here.

Department for Education Employer Skills Survey 2022

Much of the Employer Skills Survey 2022 data for the creative industries presented in this report is not publicly available. A selection of indicators has been published by DCMS, available here.

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