



Department
for Education

Skills England: Sector skills needs assessments

Creative Industries

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Contents

Summary	3
Priority jobs and skills	4
Training routes into the sector	5
Securing the future workforce	6
Key gaps in provision	7

Summary

The creative industries are a cornerstone of the UK's economy and cultural identity. In 2023 they contributed over £124 billion to the economy, accounting for approximately 5.2% of the UK's Gross Value Added (GVA) and employed 2.4 million people (representing 7.1% of the national workforce).^{1,2} This is an increase of 23,000 people from 2022 and of 318,000 from pre-pandemic 2019 estimates. This sector encompasses a wide range of industries, including advertising, architecture, crafts, design, film, music, video games, performing and visual arts. Beyond their economic impact, the creative industries enhance societal wellbeing, foster cultural expression, and strengthen the UK's global influence.

The creative industries are one of the country's highest growth industries with their GVA growing at 1.6 times the national rate between 2010 and 2023 (35.4% vs 22.4%). Filled jobs in creative industries grew by 54.9% between 2011 and 2023, from 1.6 million to 2.4 million, 4.3 times the rate of the UK economy.^{5,7} Creative occupations and the creative industries are defined according to the criteria set out in the footnotes below.^{3,4}

While the sector's impact is felt nationwide, its distribution across the UK is notably uneven. London is the dominant hub, accounting for 29% of creative industries employment in 2023, 34% of businesses in 2024⁵, and 51% of GVA in 2022.⁶ The North of England, comprising the North East, North West, and Yorkshire and the Humber, presents a more modest profile, contributing 17% of employment, 14% of businesses, and 11% of economic output in the same periods. However, this concentration in London is not uniform across all creative industries, with video game development having 80% of their workforce based outside the capital.⁷

At the time of writing, definitions of the eight Industrial Strategy growth-driving sectors are still in development. Our analysis uses the best available definitions and evidence, setting out what we already know and where further work is needed to understand the skills landscape within these sectors. The forthcoming Industrial Strategy Sector Plans will set out analysis of the highest growth potential subsectors.

¹ [Economic Estimates GVA 2023 \(provisional\)](#), DCMS (2024)

² [Economic Estimates: Employment in the DCMS sectors](#), DCMS (2024)

³ Creative industry occupations are assessed and defined according to the following five criteria: 1) novel process, 2) mechanisation resistant, 3) non-repetitiveness or non-uniform function, 4) creative contribution to the value chain, 5) interpretation, not mere transformation.

⁴ Sector is statistically defined using the DCMS Sector Economic Estimates Methodology: [DCMS Sector Economic Estimates Methodology - GOV.UK](#)

⁵ [DCMS economic estimates: Business demographics 2024](#), gov.uk (December 2024)

⁶ [DCMS Sectors Economic Estimates: Regional GVA 2022](#), DCMS (2024)

⁷ [Studio numbers and employment rise in Uk video games industry](#), TIGA (2023)

Priority jobs and skills

The creative industries are experiencing significant skills shortages across multiple areas. Overall, 33% of all vacancies are attributed to skills shortages. Skill shortages are particularly high in professional and associate roles - 41% and 31% respectively in creative industries, compared to 14% and 10% skills-shortage vacancies in these roles across the broader economy.⁸ An industry review corroborated this, highlighting that skills shortages are more pronounced in higher skilled roles.⁹ However, this partly reflects the higher proportion of the workforce employed in higher level occupations. Analysis of the Employer Skills Survey by DCMS shows the UK creative industries face distinct skills challenges across three key groupings: soft/people skills gaps, technical and practical skills gaps, and IT specific skills gaps. In particular, creative industries businesses are more likely than the UK average to report skills gaps and shortages in areas such as “making speeches and presentations”, “specialist skills and knowledge needed to perform the role”, “solving complex problems”, and “creative and innovative thinking”. In addition, creative businesses report shortages in “advanced and specialist IT skills”, such as graphic design, app development skills, and multimedia production skills.¹⁰

During Skills England’s recent engagement ¹¹ employers emphasised that vacancy data may significantly underestimate sector wide skills demand. Not all roles are formally advertised, particularly where they are project-based and short-term so informal, or alternative recruitment methods are used. Additionally, the perception of skills shortages in creative industries, beyond what vacancy data captures, is a crucial element of the sector's perspective and suggests that skills policy should address coordination and mismatch issues rather than focusing solely on addressing skills shortages.

The creative industries are undergoing a transformative shift driven by technological convergence, leading to the rise of "fusion" or "createch" skills that blend technological competence with creative thinking. Workers across industries must now develop capabilities that integrate AI literacy, digital and data analytics, with skills like creativity and problem-solving. Over two-thirds (69%) of employers in the creative industries said that they expect that their employees will need to upgrade their skills (compared to 62% of all employers), with the introduction of new technologies or equipment and the development of new products and services most frequently the driver.¹²

⁸ [Skills gaps and shortages in the creative industries: Employer perceptions and actions, UK, 2022 - research report - GOV.UK](#) (DCMS, 2025); and [Employer skills survey: 2022 - GOV.UK](#)

⁹ [Creative Skills Monitor](#), Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre (2020)

¹⁰ [Skills gaps and shortages in the creative industries: Employer perceptions and actions, UK, 2022 - research report](#) (DCMS, 2025)

¹¹ During this engagement process and the drafting of this publication, Skills England was set up in shadow form within the Department for Education (DfE). [Skills England - GOV.UK](#)

¹² Giles, L., Carey, H. and O'Brien, D. (2025) 'Skills Mismatches in the UK's Creative Industries'. Creative PEC State of the Nations Research Series. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.14733687

Focus on creative industries

Wider engagement from the sector has suggested the **video games industry** continues to face significant skills shortages impacting sector growth, despite recent global redundancies. Recent research by TIGA (The Independent Games Developers' Association) who surveyed 26 games businesses employing 13% of the workforce indicates that specialist shortages persist, with 50% of UK games businesses reporting difficulties filling vacancies in 2024.¹³ Art roles remain the most affected at 41%, followed by programming at 30% and design at 11%, with these shortages leading to project delays in 54% of studios and increased workload pressures across 65% of teams. The industry's recruitment patterns show 78% of new hires coming from within the industry, 21% from recent graduates, and only 2% coming from apprentices.¹⁴

The film and television industry is navigating a period of transformation, marked by significant challenges and technological shifts. Following the initial post-Covid production boom, the industry experienced a significant retraction, with production spending now beginning to stabilise and gradually increase.

Despite this recovery, the industry faces substantial workforce challenges. Recruitment difficulties have emerged across multiple critical roles, creating significant pressure on production capabilities. Key areas experiencing shortages include production management, editing, creative crafts like hair and make-up artistry, and visual effects production. An emerging concern is the skills gap in specialised technical roles, particularly in virtual production. The industry is witnessing a growing need for real-time engine coders who can bridge traditional creative processes with proficiency in advanced digital technologies. This shortage highlights a critical evolution in production techniques, where technical proficiency is becoming as crucial as creative skills.¹⁵

Training routes into the sector

Our engagement with industry stakeholders found that young people face significant barriers to entering creative careers due to inadequate career guidance, stemming from a lack of awareness of the routes available into the sector, limited resources for advisors, and weak industry connections. This is particularly evidenced in the screen industries but was also raised across other industries in Skills England's wider engagement with the sector.¹⁶ In response to this, the Government has provided £3 million to expand the

¹³ [Thwarting growth, delaying new releases & more: The impact of game development skills shortages in the UK](#), TIGA (2023)

¹⁴ [Is there a skills crisis in games? TIGA's 2024 Skills Report answers the question](#), TIGA (2024)

¹⁵ [ScreenSkills Assessment 2021](#), ScreenSkills (2021)

¹⁶ [BFI and ERIC screen careers research](#), BFI (2022)

Creative Careers Programme, to give young people the opportunity to learn more about career pathways and directly engage with creative workplaces and employers.

There are significant barriers and challenges facing the creative industries when it comes to effective training and education pathways. The creative industries demonstrate low take-up of apprenticeship programs, with apprenticeships in the creative industries accounting for only 2.1%^{17,18} of all apprenticeship starts in the 2020/21 academic year, for a sector which represents over 7% of the total workforce. Our engagement found take up was hindered by the delivery costs for small firms, inflexible duration requirements when presented in the project-based, freelance nature of the sector, and a limited market of specialised training providers.¹⁹ The Department for Education has engaged with stakeholders within the industry to develop flexible and portable apprenticeship models and continues to work with the sector to make apprenticeships more accessible. Additionally, creative employers have also struggled with the implementation of T Levels, where the project-based, flexible nature of much creative work may create difficulties in scheduling and coordinating the required industry placements.

Training routes in the creative industries demonstrate a strong emphasis on higher education. An estimated 69% of the creative workforce hold a degree or equivalent qualification. The proportion of degree-holders varies across industries, for example advertising and marketing industries see 71% with degree-level or higher qualifications, compared with 49% in crafts. Compared to the broader UK economy, the creative industries showcase a more highly educated workforce²⁰ aligning with the high number of professional and associate roles in the sector.

Securing the future workforce

Building on the training landscape outlined above, industry stakeholders have identified several key factors that influence the success of workforce development initiatives. The training landscape in creative industries is increasingly recognised as multifaceted, emphasising both established craft skills and emerging digital technologies.

While addressing skills gaps and training needs is crucial, the creative industries face a broader set of interconnected challenges linked to job quality that impact talent attraction and retention. The most significant influences are financial instability, workplace conditions, systemic professional barriers (including those faced by freelancers which include limited access to social networks where jobs are found, effects of social and

¹⁷ [Apprenticeship starts and achievements in enterprise characteristics, Academic year 2020/21](#)

¹⁸ [Creative industries apprenticeship starts, Academic year 2020/21](#)

¹⁹ [Apprenticeships, Academic year 2024/25 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#), DfE (2024)

²⁰ [Economic Estimates: Employment and APS earnings in DCMS sectors, January 2023 to December 2023 - GOV.UK](#)

cultural stereotypes, and language/accent-related barriers²¹), a gender imbalance, with 62% of employees in the creative industries male (compared to 38% female)²², and low social mobility. Self-employed workers in the creative industries face financial uncertainties, low pay, insecure income, long hours, and lack of worker representation, making these careers seem unsustainable for new talent. More than a quarter (28%)²³ of freelancers stated that they would not be able to stay in the sector without the financial support of a spouse or partner with a steady income. The sector's low employer investment in training, with creative businesses among the least likely to develop staff training plans or identify talent, further exacerbates these challenges.²⁴

Key gaps in provision

Industry stakeholders have identified several priorities for improving the creative sector's training landscape. These include:

- Technical training programs, mid-career professional development, and upskilling in emerging areas like green technologies, digital skills, and AI.
- The importance of transferable skills that enable professionals to move between different roles and sectors. In creative industries, there is a sector-wide understanding that practical, hands-on skills and experience are equally valuable to transferable skills, particularly in fields like live events, film and theatre, where technical skills and expertise are paramount to delivering these roles.
- The current training system was felt to overemphasise entry-level positions, when the most acute skills gaps actually exist at mid-career and senior levels. There was a call for more flexible, lifelong learning models that support professionals as they advance in their careers, rather than treating training as a one-time, early-career intervention.
- Sector employers also called for more flexible, modular learning approaches that combine practical experience with theoretical knowledge. Their recommendations focus on strengthening partnerships between education providers and industry, while establishing clear professional development pathways. This industry-led approach aims to build a workforce equipped with both technical and soft skills needed for future challenges.
- Making training accessible for the high numbers of freelancers and SMEs working in the sector.

²¹ [Creative and Cultural Freelancers study | Arts Council England](#)

²² [Economic Estimates: Employment and APS earnings in DCMS sectors, January 2023 to December 2023 - GOV.UK](#)

²³ [Creative and Cultural Freelancers study](#), Arts Council England (2024)

²⁴ [Job quality in the Creative Industries](#), The Good Work Review (2023)



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