Literature Review on current **recruitment challenges** and **skills needs** for the creative and cultural sectors

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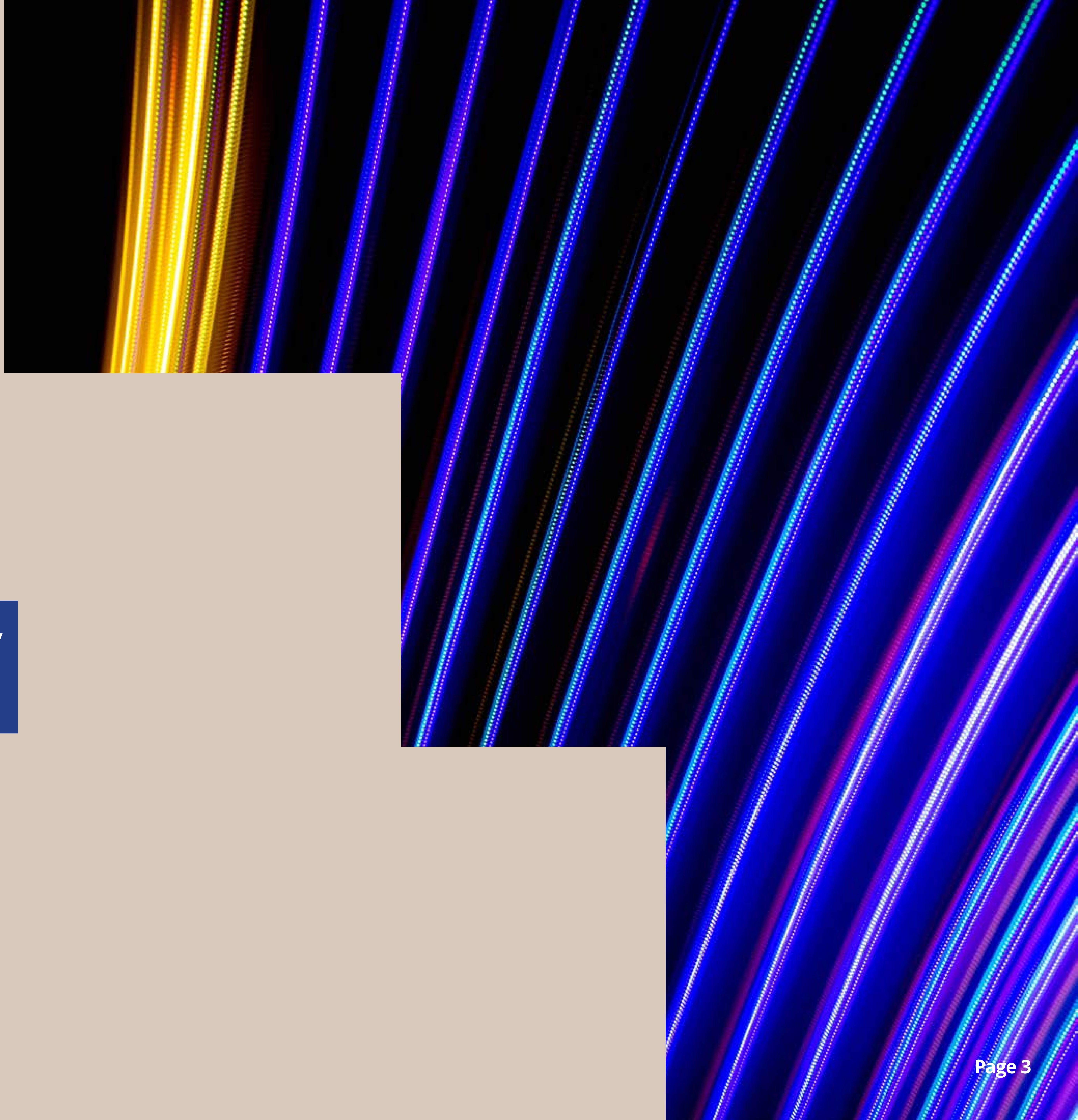
Executive **Summary**



This paper reviews the current literature that addresses the following two research questions:

1. How have recruitment challenges for employers changed since 2018?

2. How have the skills needs of cultural and creative workers and employers changed since 2018?

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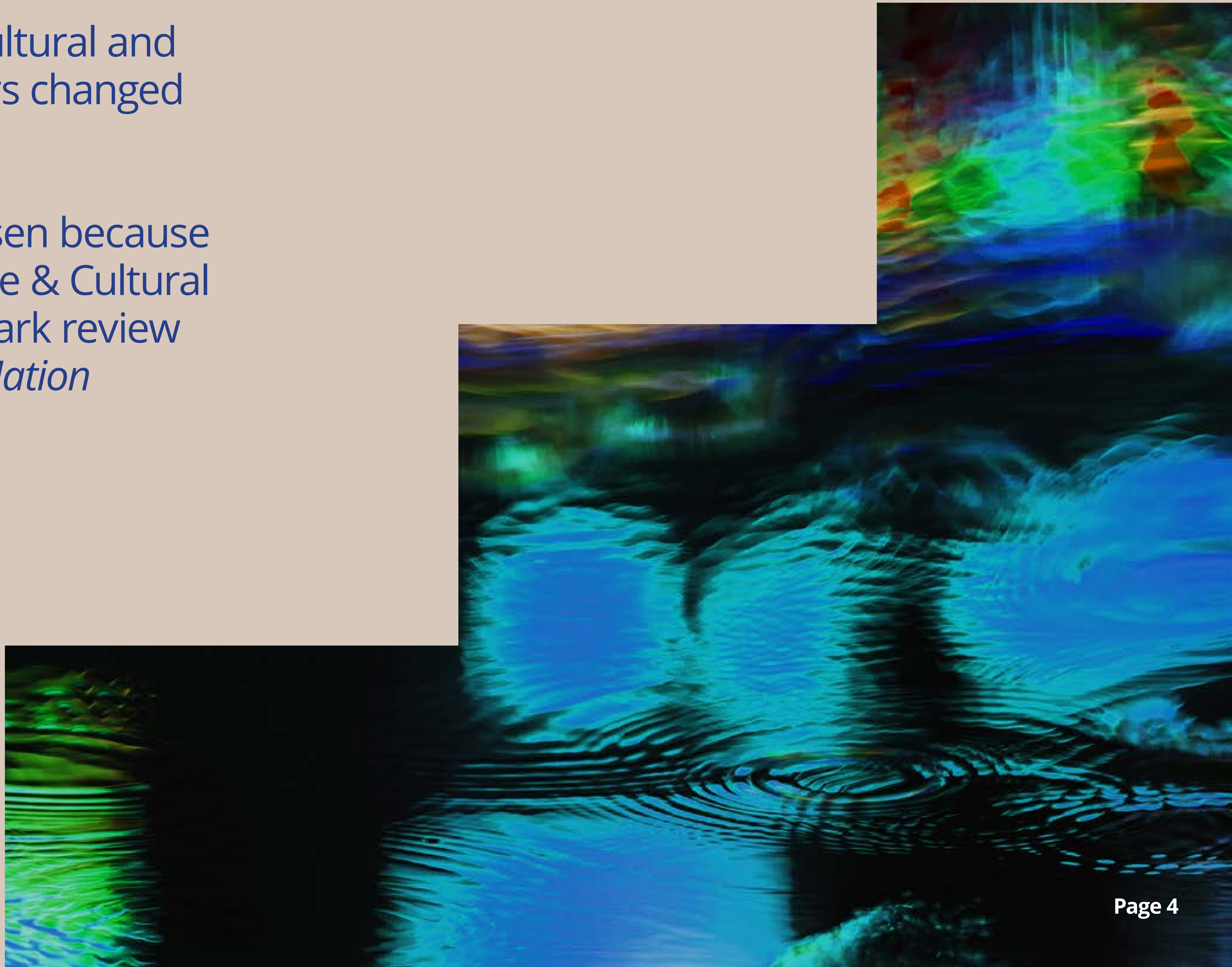

Creative & Cultural Skills is once again embarking on a renewed strategic commitment to research, to inform its sector-support offer and boost the level of knowledge and insight available to decision makers in the sector.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the social upheavals that it prompted and coincided with prompt a fresh look at the research that has been produced since 2018. In recent years the work of the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) has been instrumental in monitoring the sector labour market, describing its contours and dynamics, and providing deep analysis and explanations for the patterns visible in the data. The paper draws heavily on this.

Overall, not a great deal has changed in terms of recruitment challenges and skills needs – the old problems remain, despite attempts by governments, arts funders and sector development agencies to improve the situation identified in *Building a Creative Nation* (CCSkills, 2018). Generic or 'transversal' skills in management and finance, teamworking and leadership remain in short supply and employers are having to turn to consultancies and training to fill the gap. Recruitment from EU countries and the mobility of British workers in and out of the EU has been a concern in the sector since implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic and the ascendant campaigns for social and climate justice have brought the issues of poor working conditions into shaper relief – highlighting how structural inequities are born by different groups of workers and employers across the footprint of CCSkills. The growing numbers of freelancers in the sector (upon whom the sector is increasingly reliant) are especially in need of skills development, protection and investment more broadly.

There is an even more acute sense that the sector workforce does not reflect the full diversity of the UK population, and this is true across class, race, gender and disability. There is a growing understanding of why that is and what might work to change it. Expecting individuals – particularly those experiencing structural disadvantage – to change the sector is not a sustainable solution. Instead, there needs to be a focus on good working practices. These are the 'upstream' conditions that create good and fair work. This will be to the benefit of everyone, but especially those at risk of exploitation and discrimination.

The cultural sector exhibits a complicated and controversial picture of labour supply and demand across and within the different parts of the sector – diverging along lines of art forms, job roles and location. An oversupply of highly skilled labour means that many parts of the cultural sector suffer from under "employment". Meanwhile, those with in-demand skills are migrating to better pay and conditions in the commercial screen industries or outside the creative industries altogether.

Digital skills are even more important and in even-shorter supply in 2023 than in 2018, not merely because of advancing technology but also changing ways of working hastened by the pandemic. Working remotely and asynchronously with colleagues and clients has meant that new skills and habits need to be cultivated. This is as much about how to run a Zoom meeting as it is how to programme a sophisticated piece of backstage equipment.

The skills needs in the CCSkills footprint mirrors the skills needs of the wider economy: leadership, management, finance, digital… these are all persistent and widespread skills gaps in the UK labour market. If anything, the data from the PEC shows that the nd yet those skills do not always match the requirements of the economy. Rather than reskill, the data suggests that people took the opportunities afforded by the pandemic to upskill. There are not sufficient incentives for employers, freelancers or workers themselves to invest in their own professional development. A never-ending supply of passionate applicants, ingrained recruitment practices which favour academic grades over vocational qualifications, and a general sense that muddling through is good enough have led to the sector reaching what some people consider breaking point. All the while the number of workers and the output of the sector continues to grow.

All this research leads CCSkills to a more considered and informed approach to developing a sector support offer. It highlights where there are effective interventions that can be made 'upstream', that will foster sustained and systemic change.

It shows where there is the greatest need for attention and investment: by sub-sector, demographic group, as well as geography. It highlights the enduring knowledge gaps which hold back effective policymaking. It is not just a statistical portrait of the sector's workforce needs and challenges.

Crucially it gives an indication of the style and feel of how people make sense and derive meaning out of their working practices and their relationship to their peers. In the end this means that CCSkills has a better prospect of creating the conditions for good and fair work that is alert to the changing demands of artistic practice and technological evolution.

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The **context** of this literature review

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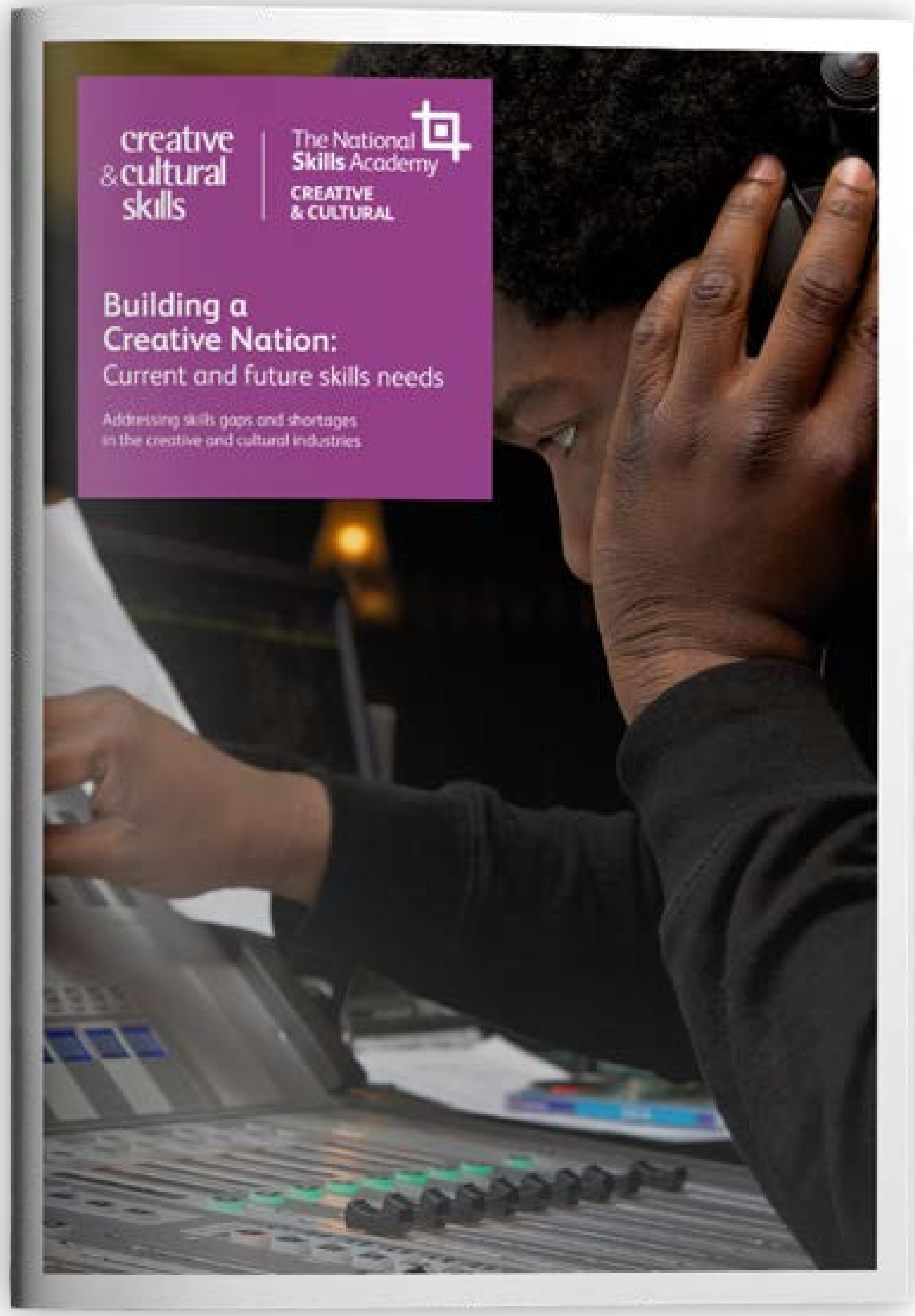
The cut-off date of 2018 was chosen because it marks the last time that CCSkills produced a landmark review of the sector: *Building a Creative Nation* (CCSkills 2018). CCSkills is once again embarking on a renewed strategic commitment to research, to inform its sector-support offer and boost the level of knowledge and insight available to decisionmakers in the sector. The COVID-19 pandemic and the social upheavals that it prompted and coincided with prompt a fresh look at the research that has been produced since 2018.

Building a Creative Nation: Current and future skills needs



The main findings from *Building a Creative Nation* were that:

- A third of creative and cultural businesses report current skills gaps; a similar proportion report current skills shortages. These are most prevalent in medium to large businesses.
- Generic, transferable business skills gaps and shortages are more common than gaps and shortages in specialist creative skills, in particular, marketing and communication, digital skills and financial skills such as fundraising. There is, however, concern over the future sustainability of 'master crafts' as experienced workers age and leave the sector.
- Skills gaps and shortages impact existing staff and businesses by increasing their workloads. They limit a businesses' ability to create new outputs, products and services and, in the most extreme examples, result in production ceasing.
- Businesses are attempting to address skills needs through training and recruitment. However, some businesses find it difficult to attract applicants with the required skills, attitude, and motivation. In a competitive labour market, creative and cultural businesses are often not able to match the salaries, terms and conditions offered in other sectors; many are not able to resource training and continuous professional development for existing staff. These are particularly tricky issues to overcome, which are exacerbated by reductions in public funding.
- 'Leadership' represent a significant skills gap in the sector. Recruiting senior staff with both a creative background and leadership skills presents a particular challenge and is acting as a barrier to addressing skills gaps and shortages at the senior level.
- Leaders recognise that 'technological change' will be important for the future viability of their business, yet over a third of leaders lack confidence in their ability to lead this change.
- There is lack of succession planning in many organisations to mitigate the impact of existing leaders leaving. If this continues, this presents a key risk and could potentially exacerbate existing skills gaps and shortages at the senior level.
- Effective ways to address skills issues in a competitive labour market include outsourcing work that cannot be done in-house, the development of strategic partnerships and working in collaboration with other organisations and businesses.

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Topical reasons for looking afresh at the evidence

A lot has changed since 2018. The COVID-19 pandemic had widespread impacts on the health, wellbeing and livelihoods of the sector (many of which endure deep into 2023).

The pandemic also accelerated a number of mega-trends that have continued to influence the way in which people in the UK relate to work, education, location and their life courses. **The pandemic 'lifted the lid' on a lot of weakened and degraded public services** and structural disadvantage that determine what sorts of people get to engage with and work in the cultural and creative sectors. The first years of the 2020s have also prompted a widespread and major conceptual and behavioural shift in relation to gender equality, racial equity and climate justice. 2020 also market the final departure of the UK from the European Union, which locked in changes to migration and labour laws as part of the Brexit Withdrawal Agreement.

The handling of the pandemic and the lockdowns was a devolved matter and the recovery out of the pandemic was also handled very differently in different parts of the UK. This is likely to have indelibly marked the devolved nations and their place in the 'recovery curve' and hence the skills and recruitment needs (in addition to intrinsic differences borne from scale and geography). In a comprehensive review of freelancer experiences of the pandemic Holly Maples and her team repeatedly highlight how freelancers were left to fend for themselves and as a result formed networks of mutual aid and support. But even the coverage and activities of these networks was patchy: a "Freelance Task Force developed specific informal networks in Wales and Scotland that sought to influence policy at devolved level, by contrast, it had little to no presence in or from Northern Ireland." (Maples et al 2022, p102)

Despite these momentous changes, there is nothing to suggest that the findings of *Building a Creative Nation* are out of date. The importance of generic skills across the sector has remained important and continues to come through in more recent survey data. Understandably, given how they fared in the pandemic, the fate of freelancers is a greater concern in 2023 than it was in 2018, as is a more determined effort to address systemic forces which disadvantage disabled people, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, women, and people of colour.

The advance of technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality have made the 'digital skills gap' even more acute – as has the pivot to creating and distributing cultural work online. Working remotely and asynchronously with colleagues and clients has meant that new skills and habits need to be cultivated. A shift in working habits which demands greater use of videoconferencing and digital collaboration tools has also brought the need for digital competencies into greater focus. This is as much about how to run a Zoom meeting as it is how to programme a sophisticated piece of backstage equipment.

While COVID-19 produced a lot of shock and pain and damage, it also prompted many people to reassess their relationships with work. Some found their voice and others went further and began to organise new networks to their leverage collective power. An article that tracked the collective responses to the pandemic by an international team of academics reflected that in the pandemic cultural sector practitioners asserted as never before that cultural products were the product of work, and that they could online arise from certain economic conditions (de Peuter et al 2023). Plays and concerts and paintings did not just emerge by making. Someone had to make them, and that person had to have a way to pay the bills to make the work. The pandemic prompted a large number of examples of freelancers turning to mutual aid and sharing resources, skills, time and contact.

This overturned some of the norm of competition that had existed before and reflected that support systems across the globe mostly neglected the self-employed and those whose earned income levels were very low. There was a spirit of DIY support by necessity.

The size and character of the research consulted

The overall scarcity of good data on cultural sector skills and workforce is well understood in the research community.

"Skills shortages present a major challenge to the creative industries. But detailed data on these shortages are limited and fragmented. This makes it difficult to forecast future requirements and develop evidence-based policy interventions that target priority areas. We welcome the launch of the Unit for Future Skills, but there is an urgent need for progress in its work. The Government should set out its plans for improving the collection and use of skills data (including on freelancers) in the creative industries to inform and drive change in skills policy."

(At Risk Report. House of Lords 2023, s116)

Despite an acknowledgement by many that the details of the cultural sector labour market are poorly understood there was still a lot of material that fed this literature review. At one point early in the process this review had a list of approximately 150 papers lined up for review. By the time it came to writing the report there was a total of about 100 that were especially relevant. Each had something to say about current and future recruitment challenges and skills needs.

Overall, the research which was consulted for this review falls into one or more of the following categories:

- Systematic attempts to use national research and data and takes a slice that draws out the aspects which are relevant to the cultural and creative industries.
- Investigations or evaluations into the effectiveness of particular interventions in the labour market (such as diversity initiatives or training schemes)
- Surveys and other data which capture the experiences and opinions of particular populations within the cultural sector workforce.
- Attempts to map of the size and composition of certain parts of the cultural sector and its workforce.
- Reviews of wider trends in employment and training which anticipate the current and future skills needs of the cultural and creative sectors.
- Papers which seek to explain why the sector workforce looks the way it does and has the strengths and weaknesses it does.

The format of this research varies across:

- Academic papers in peer review journals.
- Landmark studies commissioned by (or undertaken) by sector policymaking organisations.
- Blogs or updates to support sector conversations during and after the pandemic.
- Positional and advocacy documents which seek to give voice to elements of the sector.

Sometimes the research was an objective assembly of facts and indicators. Sometimes the research was an account of the current situation or recent past. Sometimes it was a synthesis of feelings, complaints and experiences. Sometimes it was an aggregation of desires and aspirations.

It is worth reflecting that this is a fast-changing sector – at the cutting edge of creative and technological innovation. There will always be a lag between events, issues, activities and the research that documents and interprets those phenomena. A better resourced research infrastructure would go some way to overcoming that lag. This is what the PEC has begun to do with its timely policy briefings. Nonetheless, **for those at the vanguard of the sector, for whom the greatest growth opportunities are often thwarted by slow-moving bureaucracies and a lack of shared understanding of the situation** in which they are operating. For example, StoryFutures Academy have found that the immersive economy lacks good and timely research into the skills needs in that part of the sector. "This knowledge gap is exacerbated by both the nascent and fast-growing nature of the sector. But it is a picture that is also replicated inside the industry: interviewees paint a picture of a young industry that hasn't yet quite worked out its key roles or skills requirements." (Bennet & Murphy 2020, p14)

The literature was assembled through a series of online string searches designed to identify meaningful studies published after 2018 within the footprint of CCSkills and within all four devolved nations of the UK.
A bibliography of the work cited in this report is found in Appendix 1. There is a separate fuller bibliography of all the literature consulted which is in the form of an Excel spreadsheet and is available upon request.

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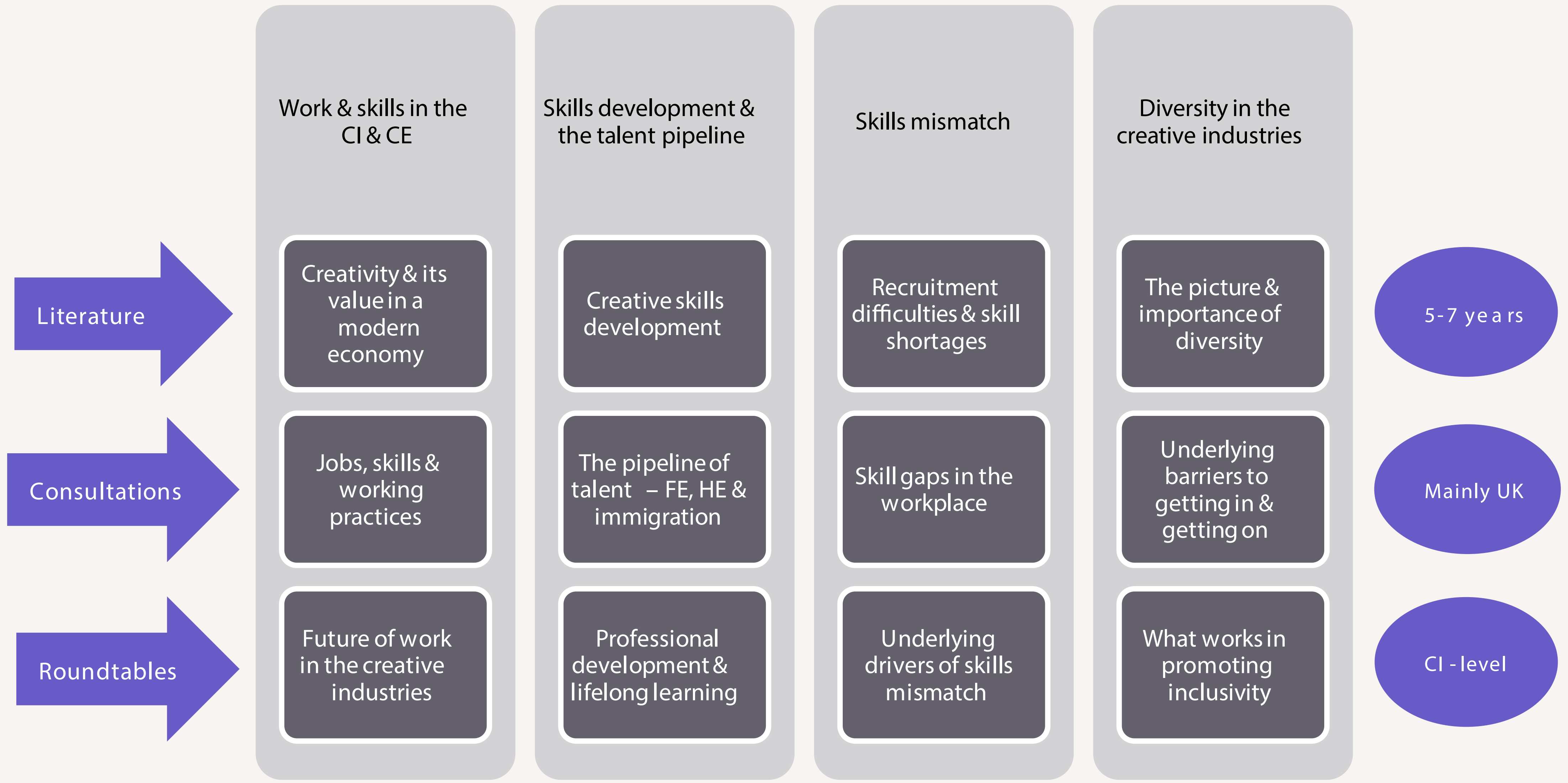
The important work of the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre

At the core of the review is the work of the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. The fundamental relevance of its Workstrand 2 is outlined in the table below.

About Workstrand 2: Skills, Talent and Diversity
The Work Foundation leads the PEC's area of work on Skills, Talent and Diversity, in partnership with other researchers from across the PEC consortium forming Workstrand 2. In particular, it is progressing work with Newcastle University, which leads the research strand on International Competitiveness, including immigration.

Together we are pursuing a dynamic and diverse research agenda., This seeks to: provide an authoritative overview of the current strategic skills demands for creative workers; understand the distribution of opportunities and barriers to labor market and career success for a range of underrepresented demographic and socio-economic groups; and, ultimately, develop policy tools to incentivise innovation in business practices and support stronger investment to grow the creative skills base and meet the needs of the UK's creative economy.

Figure 1.1:Framework for the evidence synthesis



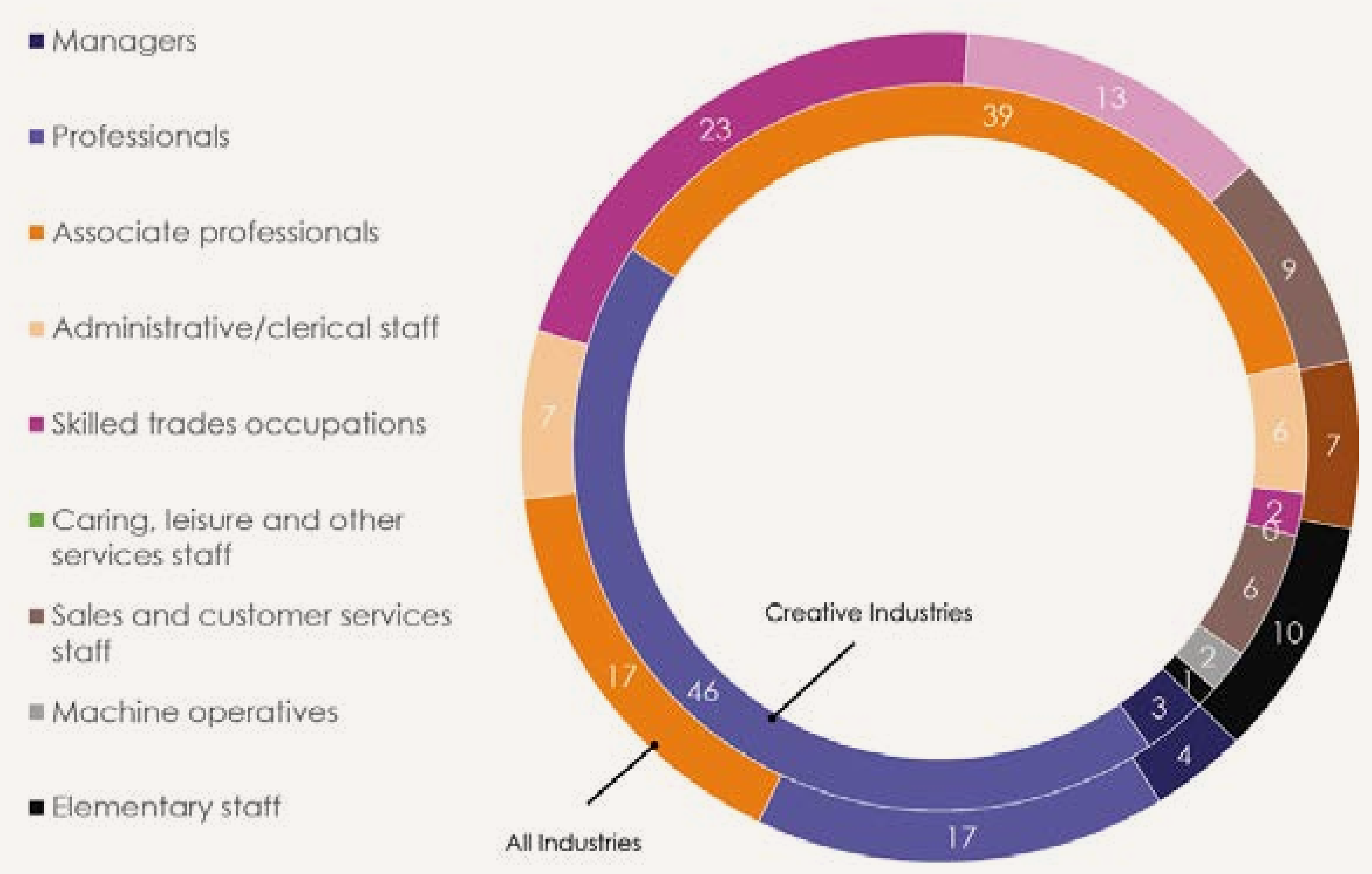
The PEC has also done some work to identify areas of knowledge and ignorance about the workforce in the sector. Their report 'Skills, Talent and Diversity in the Creative Industries: critical issues and evidence gaps' (Carey et al 2019) identified the following as important areas of attention in the future – where there is not a lot of research but a strong interest in the policy and practitioner community:

- Job quality: While we now benefit from growing data on the number of jobs in this part of the economy; we lack real insight or transparency around the quality of work and its impact on the health and wellbeing of the creative workforce.
- Strategic skill needs: We lack an accurate, coherent and up to date view of which careers and skills will be in greatest demand in the future; and what development / investment is required to up/re-skill.
- The value of creative education: Amidst concerns about the deprioritisation of creative education, there is an urgent need to find ways to better capture the value of creative education end-to-end through the education system and life-course.
- Pipeline of talent: We lack a regular, coherent source of intelligence on the pipeline of talent to the sector and the extent to which this is aligned with industry needs. There is also a dearth of evidence on either career progression or learning pathways.
- Creative professional development: We need better understanding of opportunities for professional development; the effectiveness of industry levies in promoting learning; and what new levers or forms of learning could promote greater workforce development, up / reskilling; particularly amongst the freelance workforce.
- Productivity and management practices: Against a backdrop of growing interest in the underlying causes of the UK's productivity problem, there is a dearth of evidence exploring these issues in the context of the creative industries. This is particularly significant given concerns around management and leadership capability in the sector.
- Tackling the diversity challenge: There is a lack of regular and robust evidence assessing the representation of all minority groups in the sector; insight which looks beyond participation to explore the quality of work and progression of those from disadvantaged backgrounds; the underlying barriers and what works in overcoming these.
- Local talent pools: There is a dearth of robust evidence on local talent pools and skills pipelines; the extent to which these are sufficient to meet the needs of local businesses; and how to connect sector-initiatives with wider, placed-based programmes to support skills development and adult learning.

A Skills Monitor for the Creative Industries (Giles et al 2020) is the best collection of data about current skills shortages and their impact on (and reaction from) employers and commissioners who would be looking to recruit into hard-to-fill roles. It shows that skills shortages across the creative industries are in the most skilled positions. It also shows that employers who face recruitment challenges are looking harder to find viable candidates but are not turning to training or salary increases to solve the problem.

According to PEC's research very few employers in the Creative Industries (6%) look to increase salaries in order to attract better skilled candidates – a lower percentage than evident across the economy, potentially reflecting tight margins linked to low-levels of productivity in the sector.

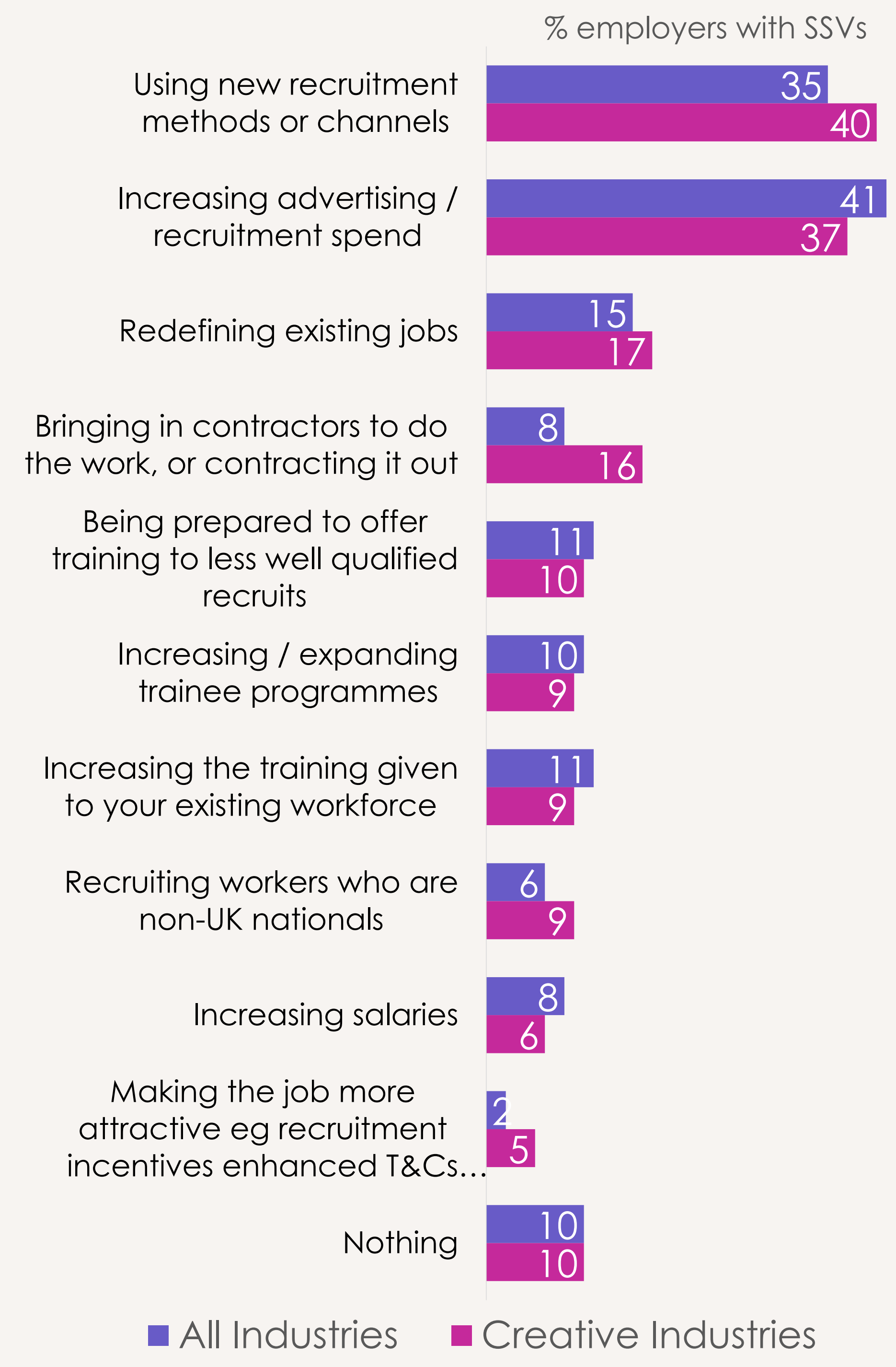
Figure 3.4: Skill shortage vacancies by occupation



Employer Skills Survey 2017

(Giles et al 2020, p20)

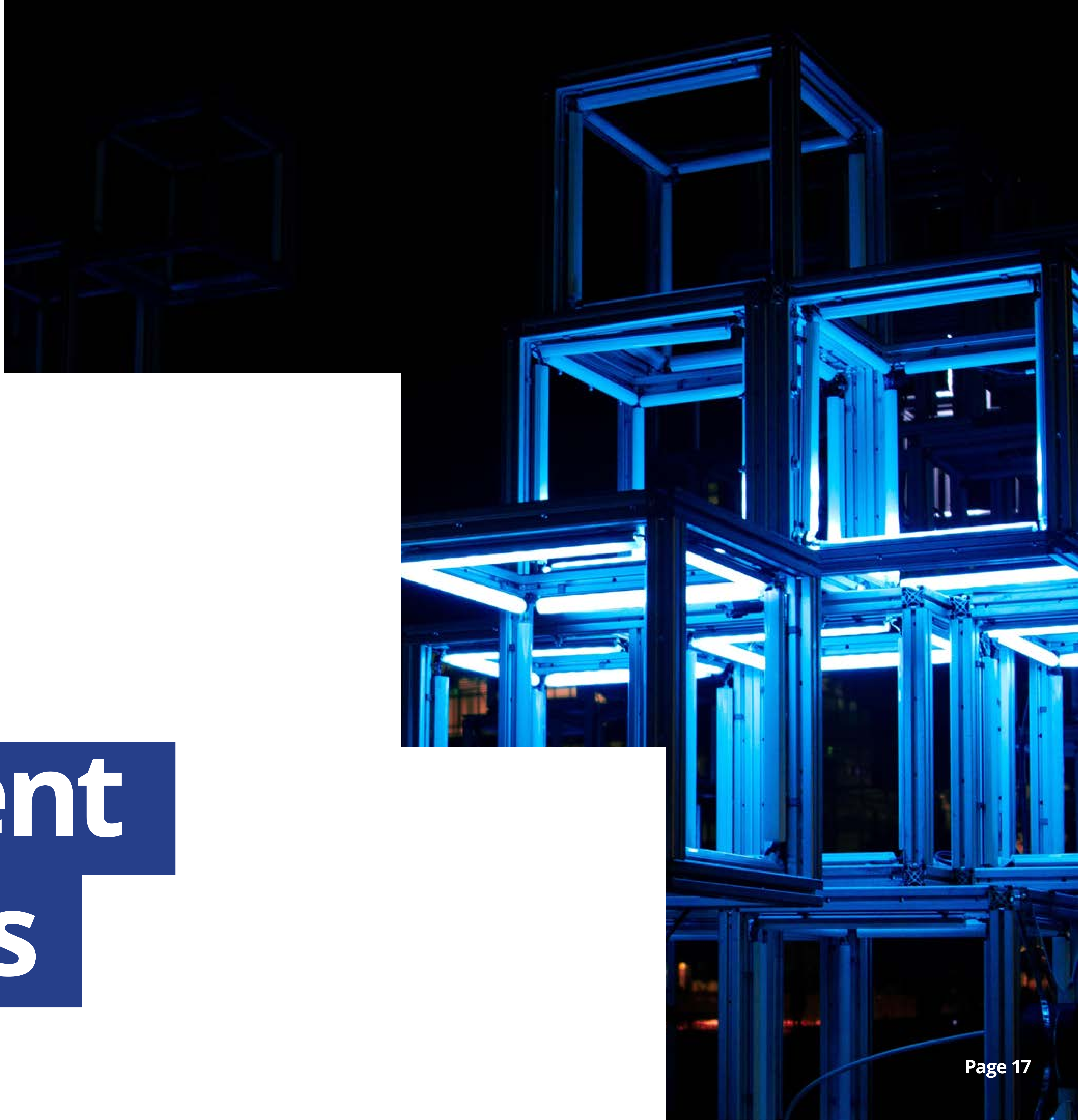
Figure 3.7: Response to skills shortage vacancies



Employer Skills Survey 2017

(Giles et al 2020, p22)

Findings in relation to **recruitment challenges**



The big story here is that **the recruitment challenges that dogged the sector in 2018 are still present.** A list of such challenges might include: finding the right people with the right skills and experience in specific job roles in specific parts of the sector; but otherwise dealing with the dynamic of over-supply of labour; struggling to recruit and retain a workforce that is reflective of the wider population; finding people with generic skills around finance and digital, and coping with the fact that the sector exists within a wider web of sectors and workforces which interact with the cultural sector in ways that are beyond anyone's ability to control.

Competition for talent within and between sectors

A CBI Skills Survey 2022 found (among other things) that in general there was "employer demand for people with skills at all levels, with businesses expecting to increase their need for people" whether they had entry-level skills, intermediate level skills, or higher-level skills over the next five years. **"Businesses are not confident in their ability to recruit workers to meet their skills needs over the next 3-5 years at all levels except for at entry level"** and that employers were expecting to struggle particularly in areas of industry-specific technical knowledge, leadership and management and advanced digital skills. This all indicates that the general skills shortages within the cultural and creative industries reflect the generic skills shortages across the whole workforce. (CBI 2022, p6)

What this means is the those with the in-demand skills can hop between sectors and optimise for whatever their career and life goals might be: whether that is income, work-life balance or anything else. People with in-demand skills in the cultural sector would frequently move to adjacent sectors like film and TV – especially during the pandemic. Workforce data analysed by the Centre for Cultural Value showed how "the film, TV and screen industries were booming in 2020, in spite of the pandemic, and attracting production and technical staff out of the performing arts." (Walmsley & Feder 2021, np)

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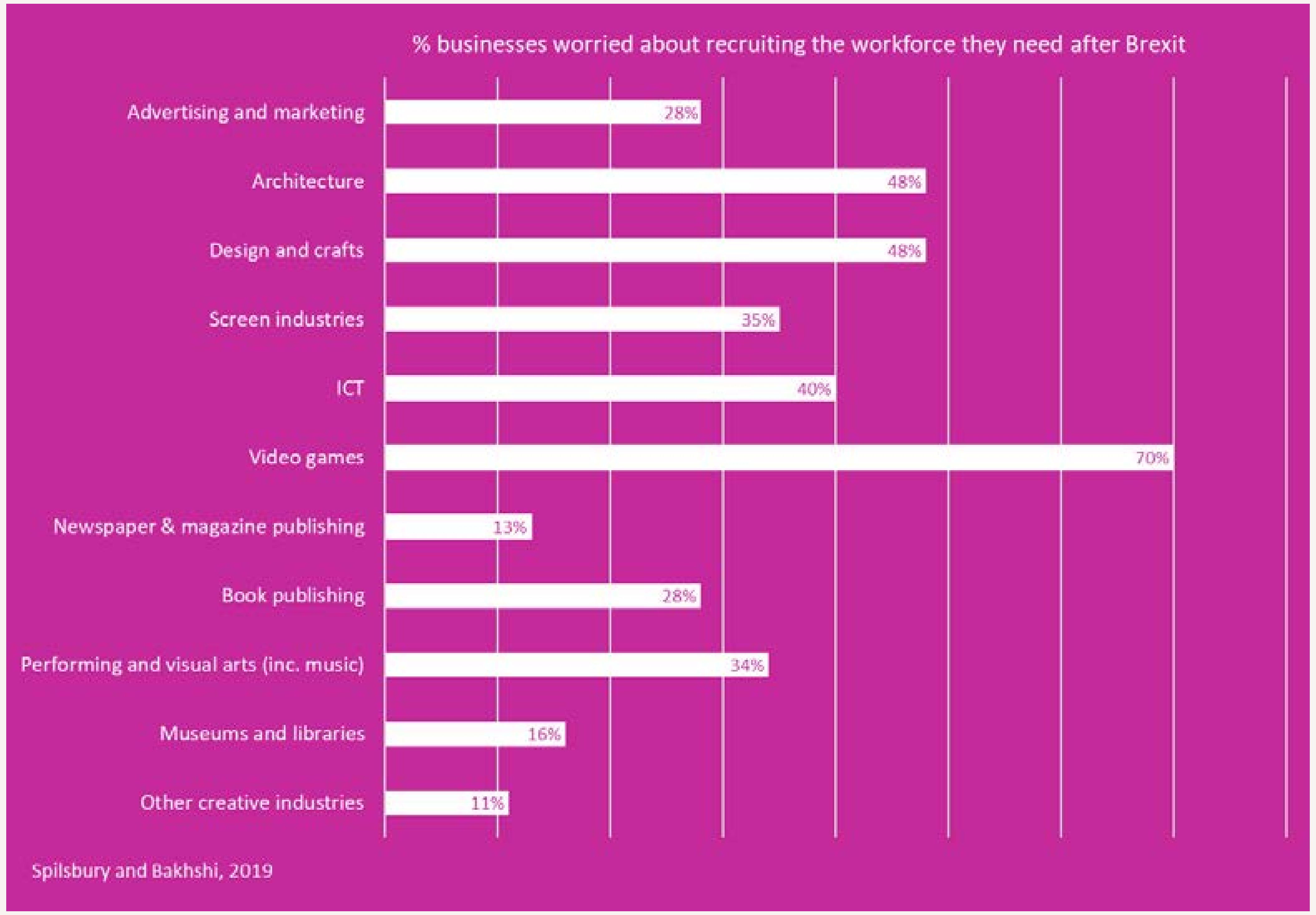
Brexit

When examining the migrant and skills needs of creative businesses in the UK in advance of the formal Withdrawal Agreement the PEC found that "a significant minority of creative businesses might have difficulty replacing EU migrant workers with UK nationals should the need arise." (Bakhshi & Spilsbury, p7) Because the sorts of jobs that would need to be filled were highly skilled and already under-subscribed by candidates. **"Jobs affected by skills issues in the creative industries tend to be in professional occupations contrasts with what we see in the wider economy"** (Bakhshi & Spilsbury, p6) and it is areas like manual labour and catering and leisure which have faced recruitment problems post-Brexit.

Other PEC research touched on Brexit (also in its pre-Withdrawal Agreement phase) and the way in which it was causing concern across a few subsectors in the way in which it might restrict access to talent and make hiring more complicated and expensive:



Music expected to be further affected by the end of free movement of labour (WF/ScreenSkills 2019a; Incorporated Society of Musicians, 2018).

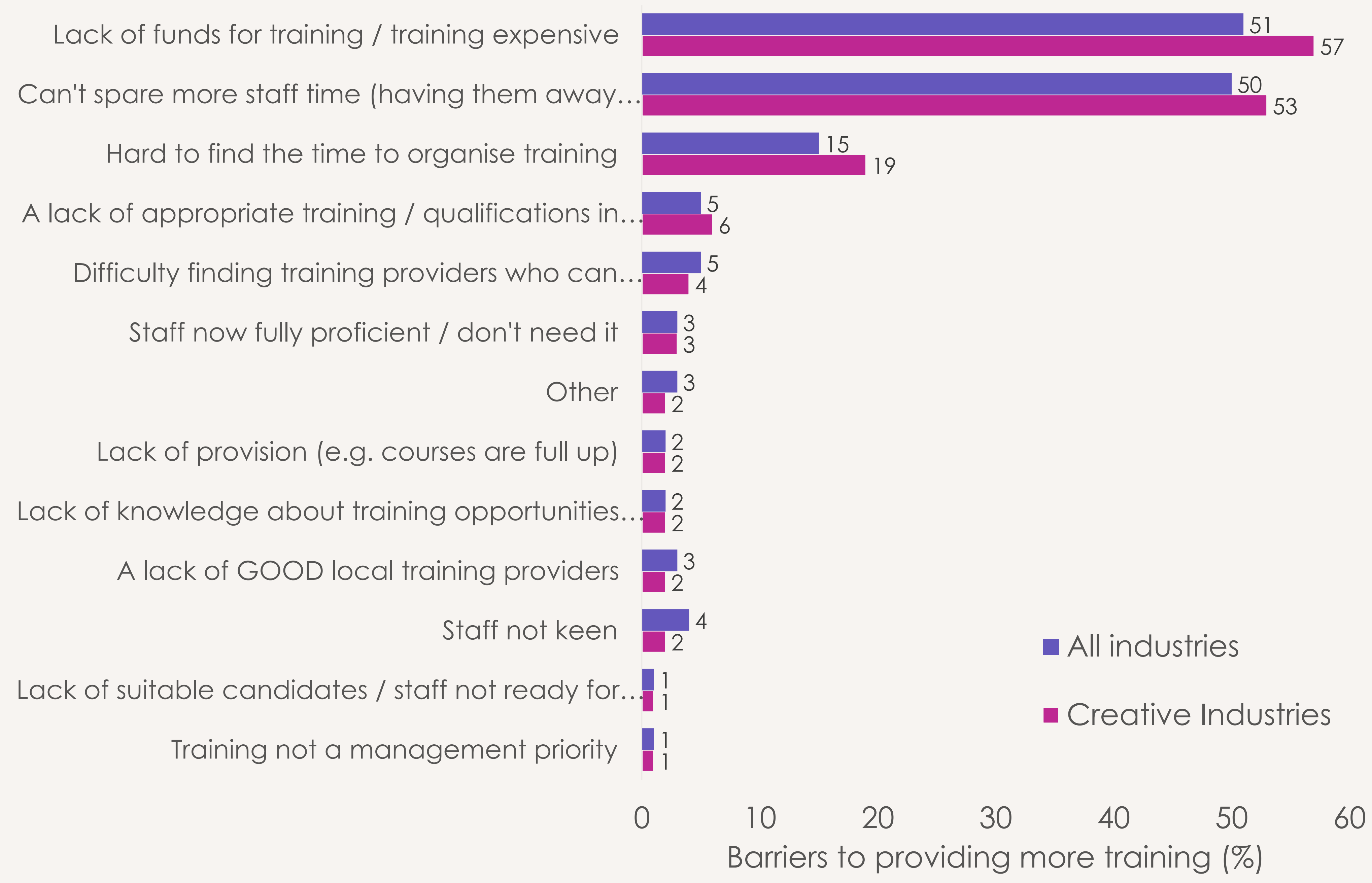
(Carey et al 2019, p32)

Under-investment in training and development

PEC research suggests that the sector is ambivalent about using training for workforce development and to ease the challenges associated with recruitment and retention.

Those that do want to provide more training see it as expensive and time consuming. (It is worth bearing in mind that survey responses of this kind are often proxies for 'I do not want to' or more specifically 'I do not want to… enough')

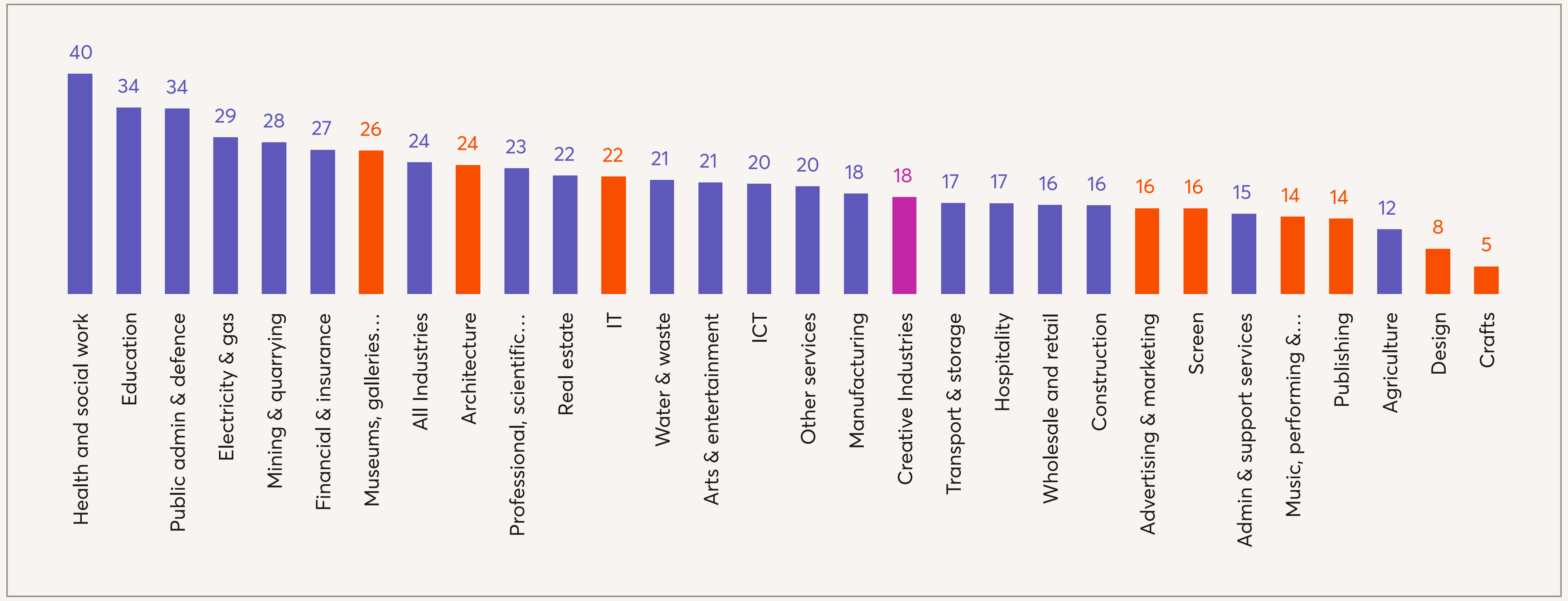
Figure 4.14: Barriers to providing more training for staff



Employer Skills Survey 2017

(Giles et al 2020, p35)

Figure 3.7. Participation in job-related training over the past 3 months (% of workers), 2017-2019



Source: Annual Population Survey 2017-2019

(Carey et al 2023, p27)

The Review of Fair Work in Scotland by Culture Radar found that that investment in workforce skills was an agreed priority, with managers placing greater emphasis on mental health and wellbeing. But many recognised that delivery was not matching ambition. Some of the main messages from the research were that skills investment, development and recruitment challenges were clearly articulated. As was "the need to improve the "career funnel" into the sector from Higher and Further Education, provide additional resources to upskill and attract new and replace lost skills, and to resource and increase access to development opportunities for freelancers were critical issues." (Scott 2022, p51)

A lack of training is a recurring theme in the PEC Good Work Review:

"There is overwhelming evidence that investment in skills and opportunities for professional development in the creative sector falls considerably short. Employers in the creative industries are significantly less likely to have a training plan for staff, a process in place for identifying 'high potential' or talented individuals within their organisations, or to have provided on or off the job training for their employees, with rates not just below the UK average but amongst the lower rates in the economy."

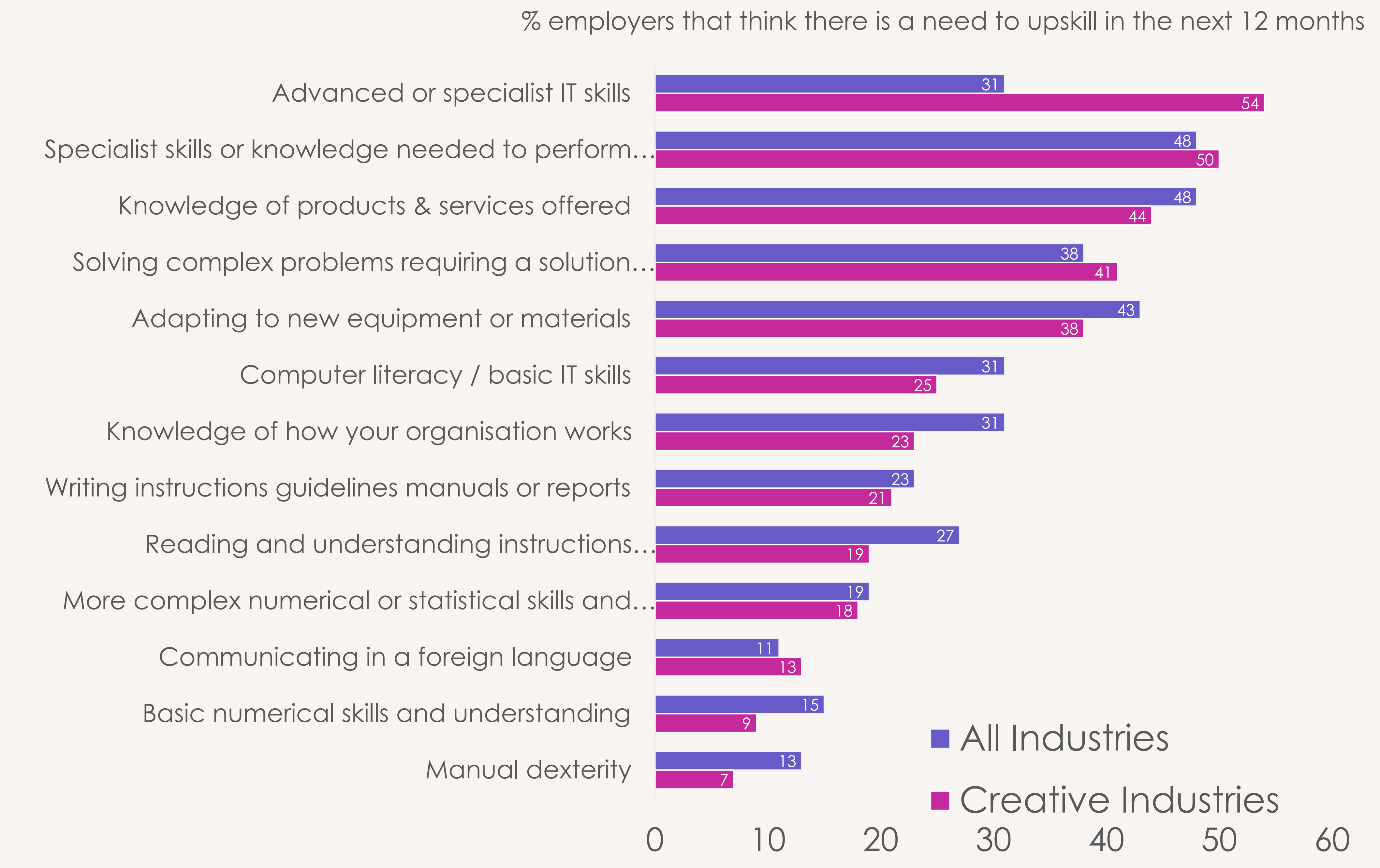
(Carey et al 2023, p27)

Creative businesses that do not provide training are also less likely to offer other opportunities for professional development. Staff are often expected to step into roles that they have not been adequately trained for – this inevitably leads to stress, burnout and departure. The data shows that "rates of training in sectors like Craft, Design, Publishing, Music, performing and visual arts, Screen, and Advertising and marketing amongst the lowest in the UK economy."

Where training did occur during the pandemic it was predominantly for upskilling rather than reskilling: "The educational activity of those core creative workers most impacted by the pandemic has not been reskilling for alternative professions but rather upskilling to reap the possible benefits of more education within creative occupations." (Feder et al 2021, np) This was true for freelancers, particularly those in the most creative roles: "Amongst directors, 92% claimed to have developed new skills during the lockdowns, compared to 79% of writers, 76% of actors, 53% of stage managers and 52% of lighting specialists. Those with portfolio careers were also more likely to have upskilled than those with just one (77% to 56%)." (Maples et al 2022, p11)

All this upskilling took place despite the fact that PEC research shows employers themselves identify many skills gaps that need addressing through training:

Figure 5.3: Skills that will need developing among the Creative workforce



Employer Skills Survey, 2017, Base: All establishments who anticipate a need for new skills in next 12 months

(Giles et al 2020, p37)

Figure 3.8: Skills gaps by Creative sub-sector

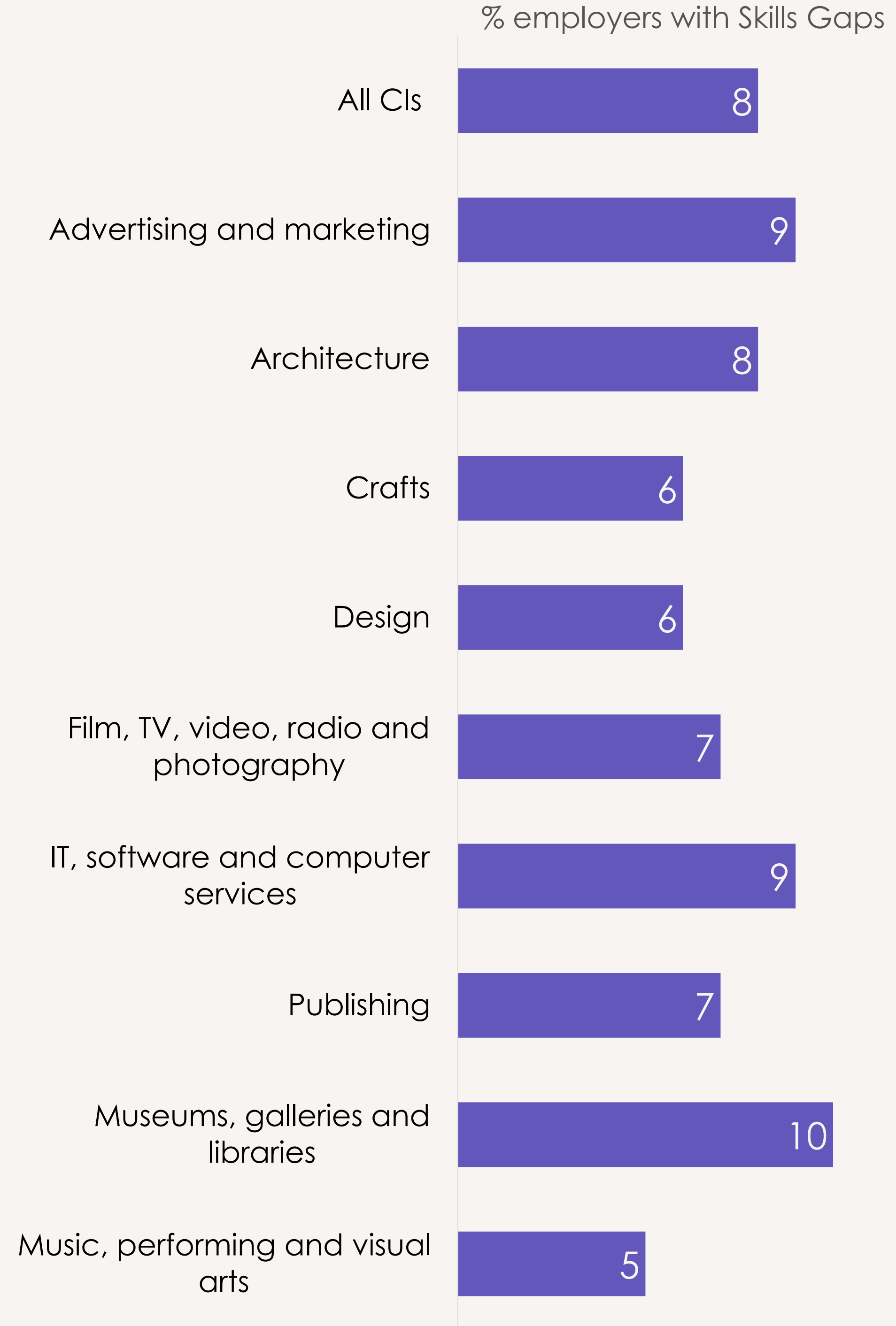


Figure 3.9: Skills gaps by occupation

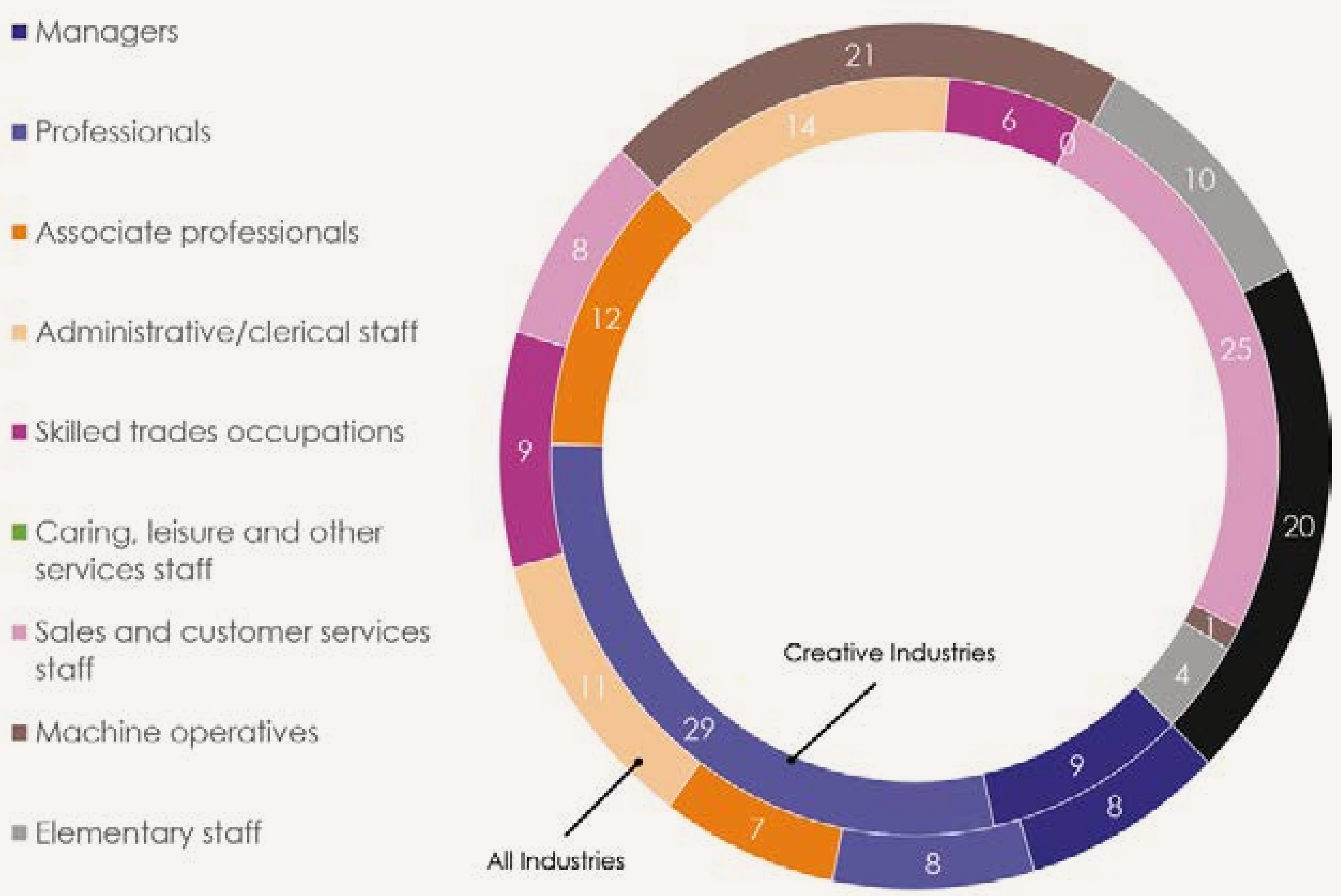


Figure 3.10: Reasons for skills gaps

(Giles et al 2020, p24)

Motivating forces in the labour market

There is a lot of research that examines and explains the motivating forces in the labour market in the cultural and creative industries. A big topic in the behaviour of employees, freelancers and all workers is pay.

The research is full of examples of highly skilled and well-educated people working in the sector without the level of compensation that their peers find in other sectors. PEC data suggests that those without creative degrees earn slightly more inside the creative sector than those who studies creative subjects at university. “This implies that high-level creative skills are in demand and are of significant worth, but that pay cannot be seen as an accurate indicator of value when creative graduates are not using pay as the primary basis on which to make their career choices.” (Bloom 2020, p3)

There is a strong sense that although the workers and entrants to the sector know that it is a tough sector to work in, they remain undeterred. Perhaps this is a tragedy or perhaps they are going in open-eyed and savvily getting what they want (creativity, autonomy, risk) while paying the penalty of things they can afford or are prepared to sacrifice (salary and stability). Recent academic research in Islington, Stoke-on-Trent and Hay-on-Wye interviewed young people from different backgrounds about their aspirations and attitudes to work:

> “The appeal of creative work, the exhortation to ‘be creative’ is common across all of them, as is the recognition that this may carry with it risk, insecurity and the need to ‘hustle’. Clearly the ability of young people to undertake this sort of work – the degree of economic capital behind them, the right sort of networks and connections, even an understanding of what these industries are and how they work – is very uneven.”
>
> (Killick & Oakley 2020, p135)

This approach to work and career is also there in a recent study of writers and musicians. Studies like this seek to explain what mechanisms are likely to create structural change and ‘stick’ rather than work against inherent and societal forces which drive people’s desires and choices when it comes to entering and exiting the cultural and creative industries:

> “There are of course important structural dimensions to the exploitation and self-exploitation of creative workers, to the inequality of opportunity in the creative workforce and to the creative industries’ chronic lack of diversity in terms gender, ethnicity and social class. However, there is also an important subjective dimension here in the motivations to either enter or pursue creative careers, and variations between different types of work, projects and career stages. In attempting to incentivise and support creative workers, policymakers and managers alike will need to address the complexity of individual motivations: the need to balance intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, applying ‘the right amount of fire’ to the creative

process, the extent to which external constraints are 'introjected' by creative workers, the mix of pleasurable and painful experiences of creative work, the role of social relationships and role models in legitimising individual motivation, the need for unproductive 'fallow' periods in a creative career. Such considerations may be applied not only to policies around creative work but also to policies around education, micro-organisation (project management, office design, HR) and macro-organisation (e.g. creative clusters) as part of a subjective turn in cultural policy studies."

(Bilton et al 2021, p750)

A wider theme in much of the research produced about (and after) the pandemic is about capturing and advocating for the sentimental and identity aspects of people's commitment to work, and how their (mis) treatment by employers, funders and politicians can hasten an exit from a sector they love despite the harms it might do to them. The 'love signals' are clear enough in the following excerpt, as are the warning signs that it's not an unconditional commitment:

"Our skills are hard won: our early careers in which we hone our craft in near poverty, subsidising ourselves with temp jobs and unpaid 'work experience' is the investment we make in our mid and late careers. And as our skills develop and we are able to command higher fees, we pay our younger selves back. This trajectory has fed and fuelled the success of the sector for over 70 years. It's what binds together the recent graduate and the Tony winner, it's the pipeline which keeps the commercial organisations, NPOs, independents, small scale touring circuits and village halls supplied with the world leading art and entertainment of which we are all rightly proud. The ultra-specialism of our diverse skill sets is central to our value, it is what makes our writers, actors, directors and designers the envy of the world. But many in a workforce this specialised will struggle to transfer those hard-won skills to other sectors such as film and TV.' […] 'If project grants become the only means by which a freelancer is able to access funding for basic subsistence, the result is likely to be a raft of 'bad faith' projects. It is questionable whether projects created in this spirit would have much legacy value, moreover their sheer number could threaten to overwhelm potential project partners, damaging relationships which have been carefully nurtured over the course of whole careers."

(Freelancers Make theatre Work 2020, pp2–7)

The 1,243 Voices report commissioned by Jerwood Arts during the pandemic is laced with concerns about precarity, burnout, competition, overwork, degrading of health and wellbeing. The author observes that "calls for better pay and working conditions are ultimately just one facet of a wider hope that the sector will take a more humane approach to work as it bounces back from the pandemic." (Wong 2021, p14) The spiritual, sentimental and subjective experiences of working in the sector matter a great deal to the artists that fed the study. The humanistic values and behaviours that seemed to be prompted by the pandemic were very welcome:

"What many artists seemed to appreciate most about the changed culture of the sector since the start of the pandemic wasn't any specific actions or initiatives but the greater sense of kindness and humanity in the way that people from all parts of the sector have treated each other more generally. For these artists, it has meant that they are no longer seen just as workers but as fully fleshed out people whose capacity for creative work is shaped by their wider lives and circumstances, and that collaborators, commissioners, and funders have recognised the need to accommodate different types of circumstances."
(Wong 2021, p19)

The sentimental aspects of work really come through the Freelancers in the Dark study, where "many felt that theatre work was the emotional heart of what they did. It was a 'calling' and at the core of their sense of themselves as artists and professionals." (Maples et al 2022 p66) and that, in the absence of official or corporate assistance, freelancers developed their own networks of support: "freelancers developed networks of mutual support to build back a sense of camaraderie. These social bonds with peers were remarkably important. In our survey, the most commonly cited source of non-financial support was 'other theatre freelancers'." (Maples et al 2022 p70)

Fundamental to finding work in the sector is knowing about (and recognising) that a job role even exists, and better still to find an individual whose path to success might be replicated. 'You can't be it if you can't see it' – as the slogan says. Research into the craft workforce found that much of the careers planning that young people do in the UK relies on them seeing and believing before making the real-world connections to potential employers and clients which "creates a challenge when graduates leave university and may struggle to access their identified markets or career due to competition, financial or structural barriers."
(England 2018, p30)

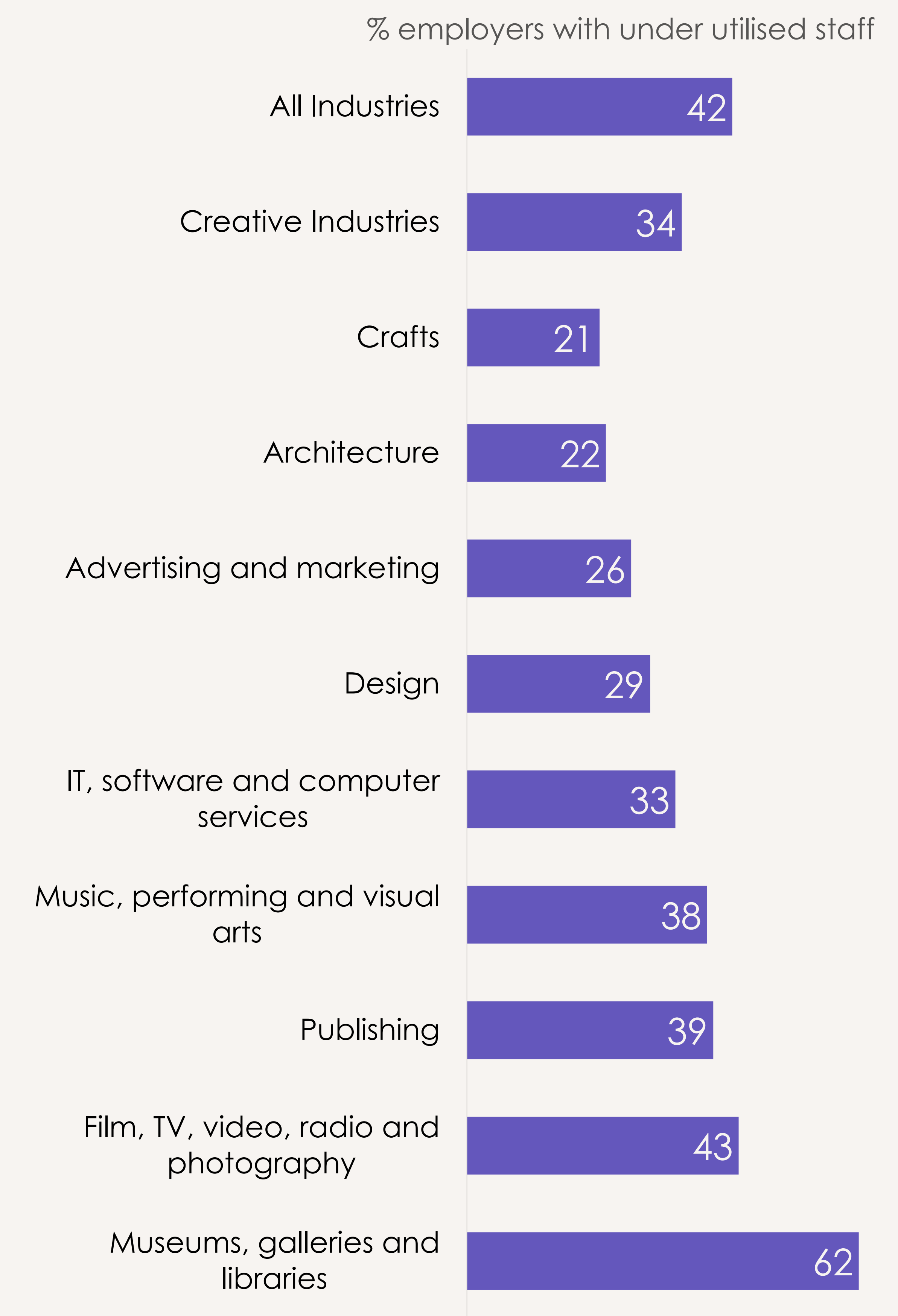
Workers, freelancers, employees all have their motivations and circumstances. But employers also play a role. There is less research into the motivations and values of employers, but one topic of interest is why they keep recruiting graduates when they complain that the candidates aren't fit for work straight out of university. PEC data in the sections above also shows they do not invest in training, especially vocational or on-the-job training. Ultimately, sector experts keep saying that "employers need to be more ambitious in who they recruit – and how. With many employers dissatisfied with the skills of university graduates, it is time for employers to broaden their outreach in regard to employment." (Casey 2019, p5) Possible ways to make this happen are introduced at the conclusion of this review.

Sub-sector dynamics and regional issues

The PEC workforce reviews demonstrate that while elements of the creative industries (such as IT, film, gaming, etc.) are experiencing widespread recruitment challenges and skills shortages, the data for heritage, museums, libraries, performing arts, etc. suggests something more like an over-supply of labour and chronic under-employment (where qualifications exceed the requirements for the work – like Museum Studies MAs restocking the shelves of the gift shop)

This is what is described in the PEC literature as 'underutilisation', and its true for about a third of employers whose staff's skills exceed their roles (although the economy-wide average is more like 40%). The numbers within the sector break down as follows:

Figure 3.14: Skills under-utilisation in the Creative Industries



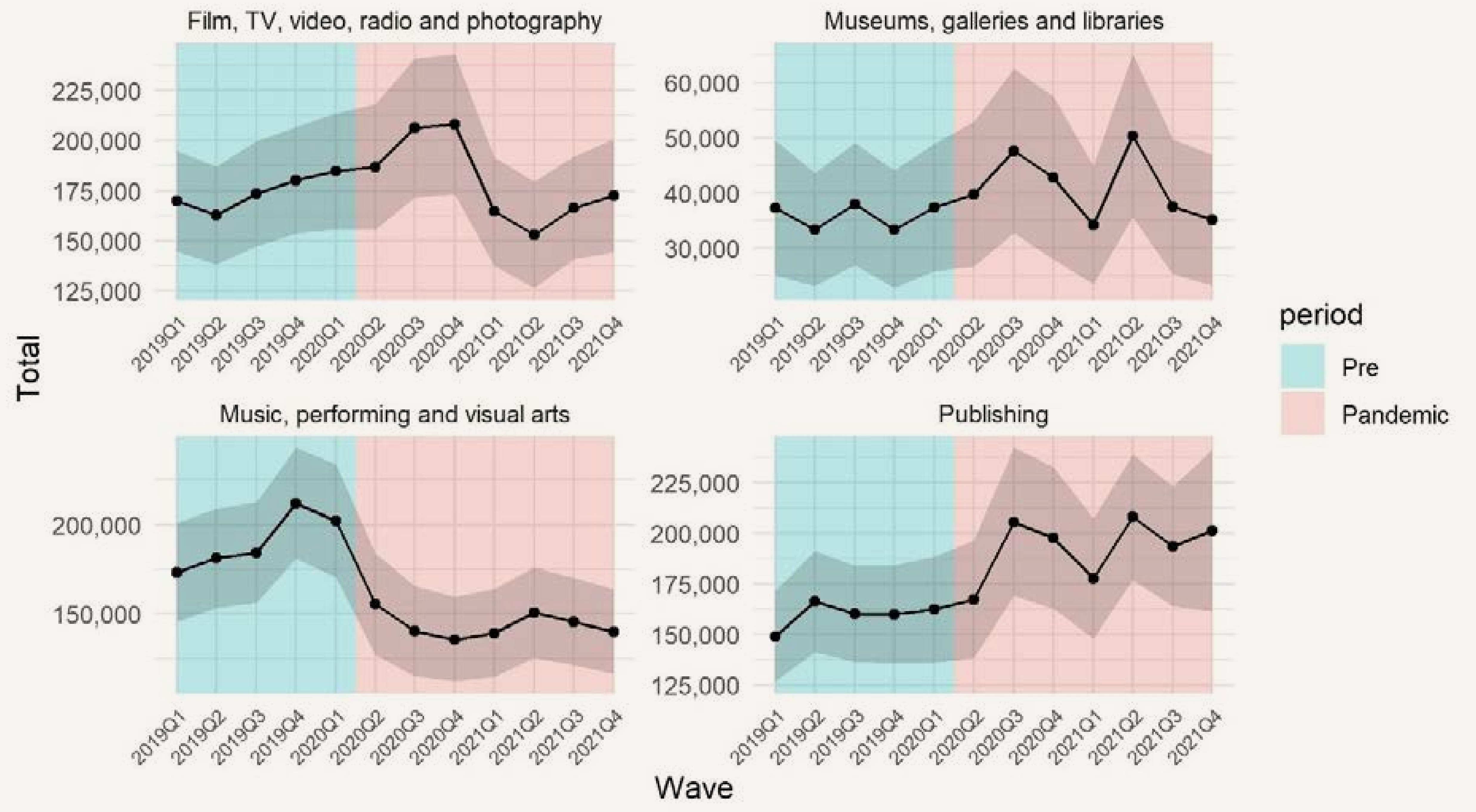
Employer Skills Survey 2017

(Giles et al 2020, p25)

Other PEC research has shown how the under-supply/over-supply of labour often splits along the lines which divide the CCSkills footprint from that of ScreenSkills: "Skills shortages [are] widespread in sectors like creative 'ICT and Games'; 'Film and TV' (including 'VFX and Animation'). At the same time, in other sectors such as publishing, museums and music, performing and visual arts there is anecdotal evidence of competition between workers for too few opportunities (oversupply)." (Carey et al 2019, p34)

A chart from a workforce study by the Centre for Cultural Value illustrates the three main trends in the sector operating together: mixed fortunes across the sector, a staff shortage that causes compound challenges (neglect, burnout, departure, etc.) and the way that screen industries were booming thanks to changes in production methods and consumption habits during the pandemic.

Figure 1: Number of workers in different creative sectors (2019–2021)



(Walmsley & Feder 2022, np)

The researchers "spoke to technical directors and production managers who were doing three people's jobs after up to twelve months without a break" which was causing some of them to consider "moving out of the sector to enjoy better pay and working conditions and to enjoy more quality time with their families." There were sub-sectoral and regional variations which might be lost in data which described national averages:

"We heard tales of how traditional stagecraft skills had been lost, perhaps forever, as older generations were made redundant. We heard about a very real recruitment crisis, especially in Northern Ireland, as performing arts organisations struggled to replace staff in many technical, administration and managerial roles."
(Walmsley & Feder 2022, np)

Going sector-by sector (where the research exists) shows that the common thread is low pay and poor conditions creating a challenge to recruit and retain a skilled and diverse staff... but also that the system carries along just the same.

Research by the Museums Association found that a significant proportion of respondents were experiencing issues with recruitment of staff (52% were having difficulties recruiting staff and 43% said recruitment pressures have worsened over the past year). The explanation for why is pay:

"This is largely because of the impact of external forces such as Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic, but our data showed that low pay is a considerable factor, with a number of respondents advising that their inability to offer competitive salaries has hampered recruitment."
(Incomes Data Research 2022, p34)

A roundup of survey data on skills shortages in theatre by Bectu showed that **the biggest factors for leaving the industry were "the combination of a poor work-life balance (84.8%) and unsocial hours (74.5%), alongside the low pay that the sector offers in comparison to other industries (77.2%).** Well over half of the respondents said that the work-life balance issue had actually got worse since the pandemic, and nearly half said that the question of anti-social hours had also deteriorated (over 20% said that it had got 'much worse' in both cases). On the issue of pay, the industry has always offered uncompetitive pay in relation to other sectors and the survey said that 80% believed that this factor had got worse (with 45% saying 'much worse') since the pandemic." (Bectu 2022, p1)

Low levels of confidence in employers' abilities to support staff and offer routes of progression in the performing arts: the same research found that 60% of respondents said that the issue of skills shortages had got 'much worse' since 2019. The shortages are widely thought to create a vicious cycle – that "... short- staffing = more stress at work = people leave the industry = short staffing." (Bectu 2022, p2) Shortages also meant that the skilled people were often overstretched and didn't have the capacity to step away from delivery and upskill others.

The Creative Industries Sector Skills Assessments for 2021 (Oxford Economics 2022) sums up the situation in Scotland where there is expected to be an above average growth in employment in the creative industries sector (2.2% v 1.2%). The largest part of that growth inside the creative industries is among highly skilled workers in ICT. There is a regional dimension: the top employing regions in the sector are forecast still to be Glasgow College Region and Edinburgh, East and Midlothian.

Implications for inclusion since COVID-19

The main different drivers which work together against diversity in the sector are described by Doris Eikhof who has studied the demographics of the sector prior to, during and after COVID-19: "the first is a Eurocentric, white, middle class, non-disabled and male idea of talent, which influences decision-making in recruitment, casting, awarding finance or access to training and education to the detriment of individuals who deviate from this idea; the second is the persistence of misogynist and discriminatory working cultures in large shares of the cultural economy, which makes them a less welcoming environment for individuals from under-represented groups to establish and maintain a career in; finally, there is the cultural economy's typical business models and their resultant exclusionary work and employment practices." (Eikhof 2020, p236)

The confluence of class disadvantage is really spelled out by this PEC paper which synthesises much of the known findings in the topic:

"Those from privileged backgrounds are more than twice as likely to land a job in a creative occupation. They dominate key creative roles in the sector, shaping what goes on stage, page and screen. They are also more likely to experience greater autonomy and control over their work, to have supervisory responsibility and to progress into managerial positions. We also find that class interacts with other factors – such as gender, ethnicity, disability and skill levels – to create 'double disadvantage'. The intersection of class and skills has a particularly pronounced impact on the likelihood of landing a creative job, where those from a privileged background who are qualified to degree-level or above are 5.5 times as likely to secure a creative role than those of working-class background who are only skilled to GCSE-level. Despite growing awareness of the issue and action by business, Government and industry stakeholders to promote greater inclusion, the likelihood of someone from a working-class background finding work in a creative occupation has remained largely unchanged since 2014 – the first point at which we are able to measure class origin using a robust and comparable method."

(Carey et al 2020, p2)

The PEC Good Work Review showed that differential access to training and clear pathways into and through the profession was also something that was determined by privilege and disadvantage rather than merit:

"Professional development is also more limited amongst those that are less well qualified, and Creative workers from a working-class background. While overall Creative employees rate their progression opportunities highly, there is substantial variation between Creative sub-sectors."

(Carey et al 2023, p28)

There are a range of problems which work against diversifying the cultural sector. A major part of it is the cultural baggage that is associated with artists, makers and other in the sector in the UK and the (lack of) social value applied to cultural professionals in the contemporary economy. There is a recurring sense of not feeling valued, welcomed or belonging in the sector:

> "Research on craft careers has acknowledged that within families, parents will often want their children to go to university and work towards a seemingly more financially secure, stable career, rather than pursue craft. This was a major theme in the preceding project to this one and the subject repeatedly came up in the interviews for this project. For those who did make it to college and university to study craft, they encountered various challenges which made it difficult for them to thrive on their course."
> (Patel 2021, p47)

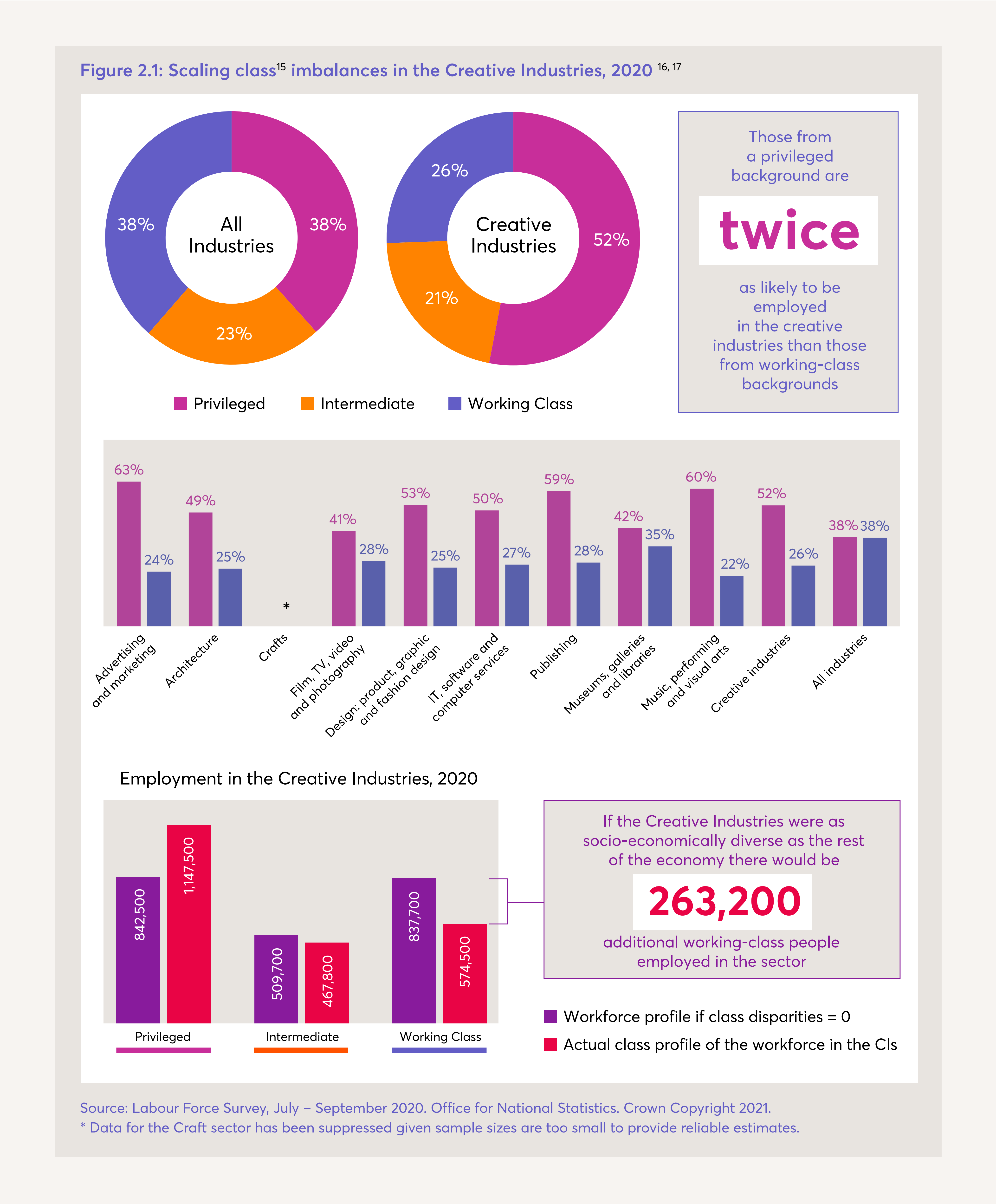
The entrants to the profession have to live a tension between their circumstances and their ambitions. This can mean that any hostility exhibited by the profession (whether that be low pay or precarity) is pushing on pre-existing forces which incentivise not joining the cultural sector workforce in the first place, as research into female makers of colour has suggested:

> "For the women in this research, their progression into a craft career is characterised by the tension between cultural expectation and norms, and the desire to start their own craft business to do what they love. The cultural perceptions of craft as a less secure career could be contributing to the relatively homogenous craft sector, both online and offline. As a result of this, makers try to establish a career later in life."
> (Patel 2019, p13)

The impact of the pandemic has been to exacerbate and highlight structural problems in the sector (and wider economy and labour market). The parts of the sector that were especially affected by the pandemic and its associated policies were those working in offline and analogue settings (theatres, museums, music, heritage, etc), those who work as freelancers, and those who face systemic disadvantage as a result of their demography or circumstances.

Research funded by the Clore Leadership Programme reported that a lack of structured and properly resourced professional development across the sector worsened since the pandemic, and that while diversity, equality and environmental sustainability remain high priorities for leadership training the "narrative feedback from non-white respondents is clear in identifying lack of progression routes for diverse leaders as a critical issue alongside the need for developing confidence. This was mirrored in responses from people who identified as having a disability where the lack of sufficient financial resources available for training and making suitable adaptions was also highlighted."
(Mayes 2020, p7)

PEC research demonstrates that the proportion of working-class people in the sector has shrunk as a result of the pandemic (Carey et al 2021). In Film and TV one in four people were from lower socio-economic backgrounds – the lowest share since 2014 when this began to be measured. The share also declined slightly in Design, Museums and Galleries and Music and performing arts. (Although the authors urge caution in drawing too many conclusions from data that is based on small samples in a very turbulent window of fieldwork.)



(Carey et al 2021, p9)

One of the things that might explain a difficulty in holding up a job as a freelancer in the cultural sector during COVID is that so much work is achieved thanks to networks, contacts and face-to-face encounters. With one respondent to a study into the fate of freelancers commenting on the most affected of their peers when the disruptions and privations of the pandemic began to bite: "They're all starting out, they're all more working class and they haven't got networks." (Easton & Beckett 2021, p4)

Work by Amanda Parker and other has demonstrated the various impacts of the pandemic on Black, Asian and ethnically diverse workforce, recognising the disadvantage that has come through disrupted education and a lack of in-person contact that lubricates the career pathways of many young people in the sector (Parker 2020a). The shock and disruption of COVID-19 has only exacerbated existing structural disadvantage that many arts workers of colour would have faced given the dynamics of work in the sector:

"Many young people from more diverse backgrounds are not attracted to arts management because they do not feel their voice is heard in the arts, or that the arts are relevant to them. They also suspect that young people are unaware of the range of career opportunities in arts management – and conversely that some may be put off by being aware of the lack of employment security. [...] The factors that lead people to take PAYE jobs are mainly related to the need for financial security and stability. Whilst the factors that lead people to take freelance roles are associated with valuing flexibility, and creative autonomy. The open responses highlight the fact that pursuit of contract type is rarely solely about the work itself, but also about how people understand their work fitting into the rest of their lives in terms of finance, security, and flexibility."
(Parker 2020b, pp3-11)

The pandemic has also been disruptive to disabled people working in or aspiring to work in the cultural and creative industries. Despite the obvious dangers and disruptions of the pandemic, it also presented some opportunities in terms of flexible remote working, interview practices and digital engagement for audiences. However, the pandemic has come on top of existing barriers. For example the Curating for Change project has conducted a survey which found that "The most cited reasons for D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people not making progress in terms of pursuing a career in museums were: inaccessible recruitment practices; lack of flexibility as to working patterns; and unnecessary requirements (e.g. driving licence, ability to lift objects), that could be met through other provision such as Access to Work." (Fox & Sparkes 2021, p5)

Partner Museums in Curating for Change wanted to increase their skills and expertise. More specifically, they sought to increase understanding of how to recruit D/deaf and/or disabled staff; gain new skills regarding how to create fully accessible exhibitions and experiences; and understand how to engage more D/deaf and/or disabled audience members:

"The current lack of knowledge in the sector as to how best to support and nurture D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people in the workforce is compounding under-representation and a lack of opportunities to progress and develop leadership skills. Without better understanding of the barriers disabled people face – and how to address those barriers – the sector will find it extremely difficult to tackle issues such as inaccessible recruitment processes or creating supportive and accessible working environments. It is also important to acknowledge that if the sector is fearful due to lack of knowledge, it is unlikely to feel confident to proactively open up opportunities for disabled people to join their workforces."
(Fox & Sparkes 2021, p13)

UK Disability Arts Alliance research revealed that disabled people operate in a highly fragile environment within arts and culture – their circumstances during COVID-19 compounding an already precarious sector employment situation. **About half of the people in the research experienced a decline or complete disappearance of work during the pandemic.** Again, about a half received no government or Arts Council financial support. The vast majority of the respondents were freelance, "with only 7% reporting full time salaried work and half of them express worries about their long-term job security." (Gentry 2021, p4)

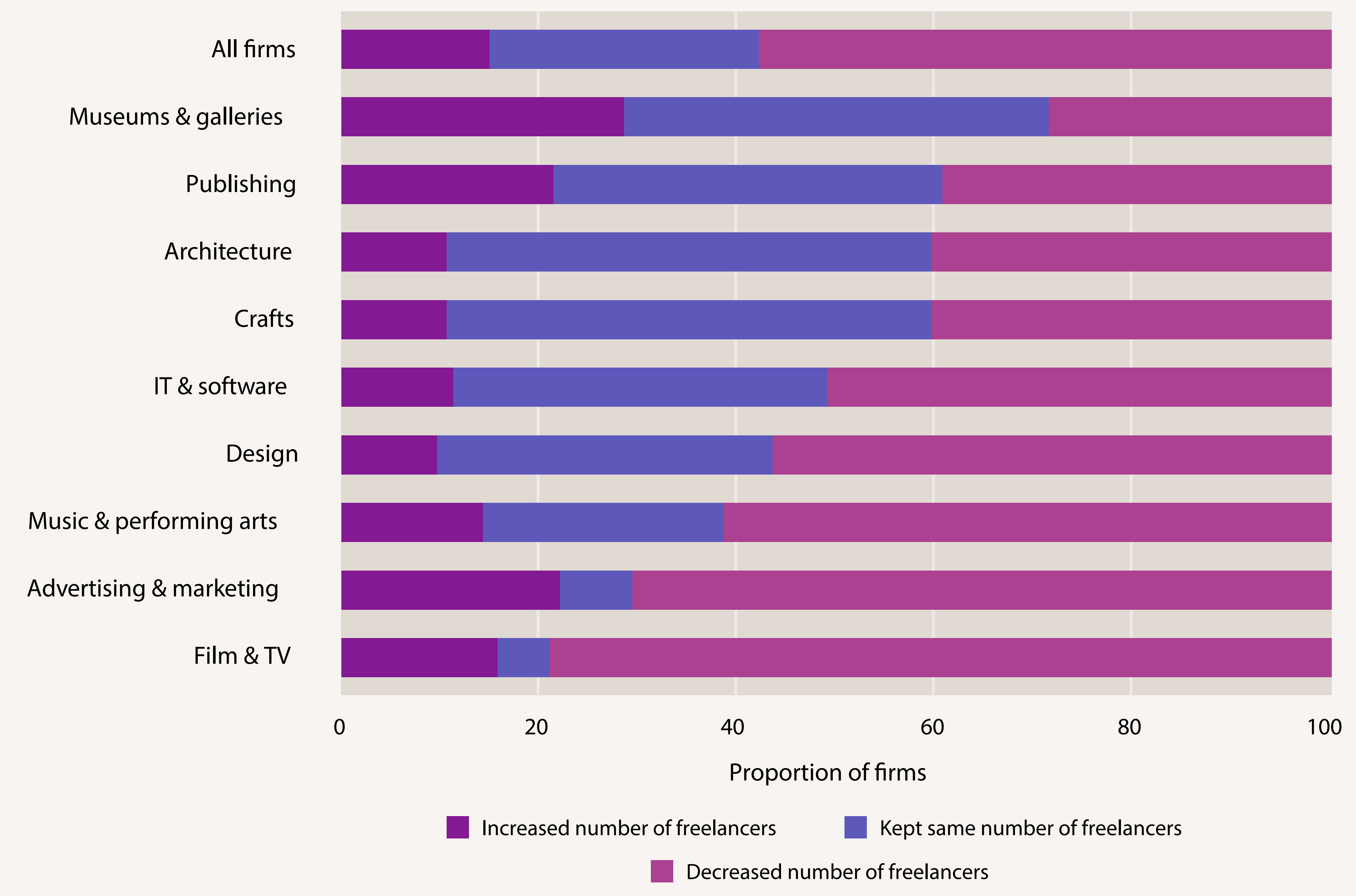
The recruitment and retention of parents and carers in the pandemic has been a problem in the performing arts sector, as evidenced by the work of PiPA (Parents and Carers in Performing Arts) who surveyed people working in backstage theatre roles – an area known to be suffering from a staff shortage:

"High job demands and a lack of job resources in backstage roles risk creating an 'effort-reward' imbalance, affecting worker engagement and increasing the risk of attrition. Participants reported a strong desire for increased flexibility and more manageable schedules than those currently available. Flexibility and autonomy are deployed in other industries to buffer the damaging effects of high job demands. The aim is to make work demands more manageable, but our survey found that such strategies in backstage work are limited. [...] Lack of control and autonomy over working hours and role was a significant push factor for people leaving the sector. Therefore, an urgent review of job demands and new strategies to increase job resources is called for."
(PiPA 2020, p5)

Freelancers in the creative industries since COVID-19

The fate of freelancers is the subject of a number of studies, both those which assess freelancer sentiment and experiences, and those that look at the economic fate of freelancers in various datasets across the sector. The precarity and hostility that some freelancers felt working in the sector was brought into sharp focus as a result of their experiences of the pandemic. **Without the opportunities to manifest the love of working in the arts sector then there are some reports which PEC research into the impact of COVID-19 on the UK's creative industries found that far from becoming redundant, freelancers become even more vital to businesses that had been making greater use of them prior to the pandemic.** Freelancers were important for those businesses that introduced new products as a result of the pandemic, as illustrated by this chart:

Figure 2.3: Percentage of companies increasing, maintaining, or decreasing freelancers



(Siepel et al 2021, p10)

The Freelancers in the Dark study found that narratives of widespread freelancer departure from the sector were not correct. The causes for leaving the sector were more "fundamental concerns within the industry as a whole, including precarious and devalued work, rather than being an outcome of the pandemic alone." (Maples et al 2022, p212) Others had taken on different work during the pandemic planned to return when able.

The Big Freelancer Survey 2 makes a number of related points about the fundamental dysfunction and unpleasantness of the sector. Particularly a lack of commitment to professional development, skills shortages and the enduring recruitment crisis that results. **There are concerns expressed about the future health and viability of the sector if there isn't an improvement in working conditions and investment in better recruitment, access and mentoring opportunities.** There was a sense that "people without enough experience and training are crushed by increased workloads and stress" and there will be more workplace accidents as a result. All of this had been made worse by the pandemic, which hadn't only stretched business models but also derailed many of the freelance careers in the sector (Freelancers Make Theatre Work 2022, pp20-21).

Deliberations of freelancers as to whether (and to what extent) they will continue working in the cultural sector after COVID-19 is the subject of many studies. The sector relies heavily on freelance workers and their departure from the sector has exacerbated particular areas of worker shortages. One of the recurring problems faced by freelancers was the fact that they were shut out of institutional support from Arts Council and others which was directed at organisations rather than individuals:

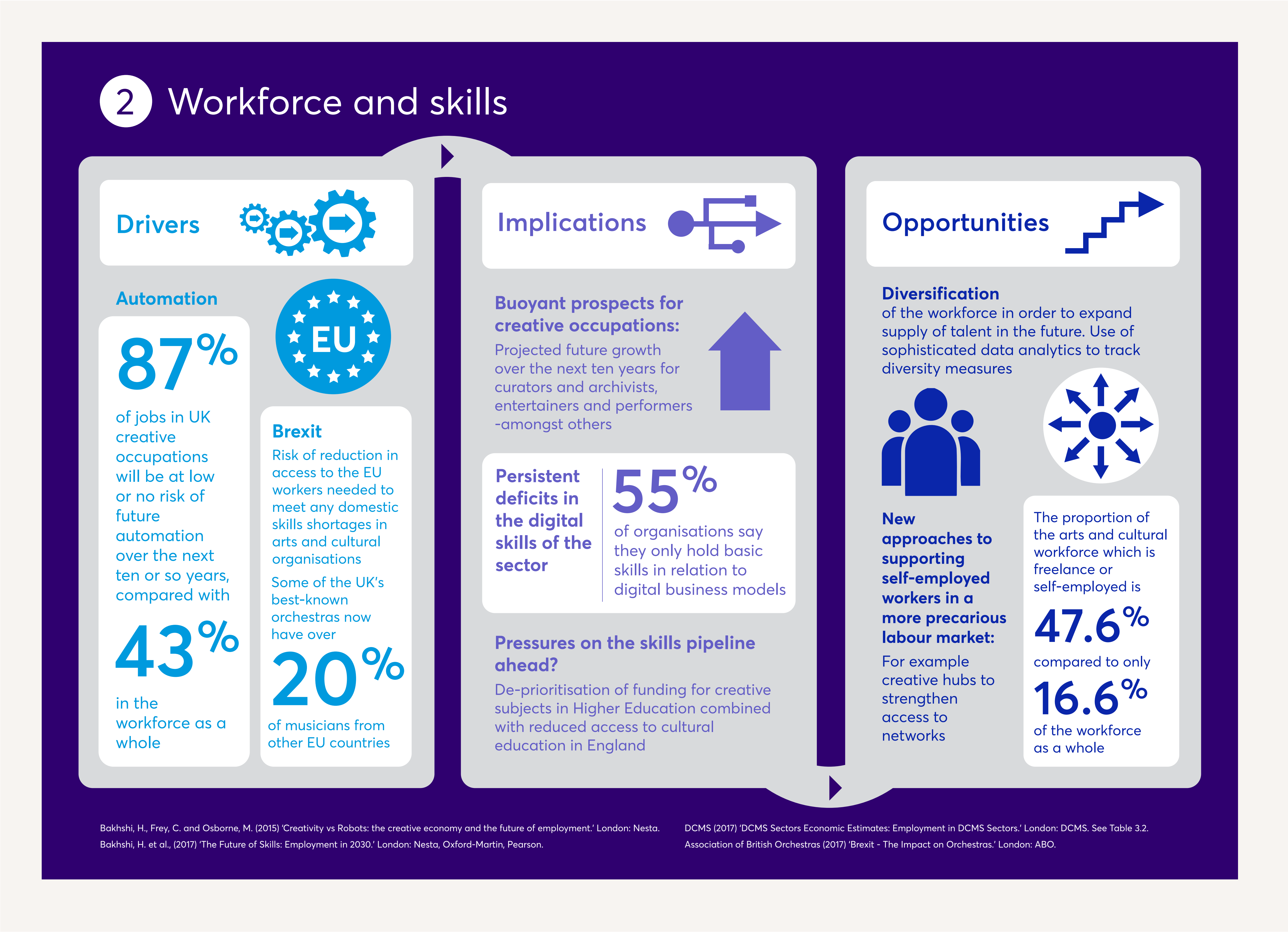
> **"Arts employees commonly benefit from workforce development opportunity within arts organizations' commitment to cultural workforce diversity and equality. Neither ACE nor NPOs make a parallel commitment to resourcing the continuous professional development (CPD) for freelancers similarly vital to achieving this. Features to be addressed by future arts policies include "lack of investment in workforce skills", "normalisation of non-standard recruitment practices" and aligning organizational budgets and support structures for freelance contributors with their overall contribution to arts organizations' resilience."**
>
> (Jones 2022, p11)

Data from the Welsh study of cultural freelancers from the middle of the 2021 waves of the pandemic showed that freelancers with protected characteristics and/or who had caring responsibilities in 2021 face additional barriers to support and are at greater risk of leaving the industry. The majority had been negatively impacted by COVID-19 with "with half losing 80% of their work in 2021." Sometimes this was due to cancellations or simply less work being around than before. This has resulted in a cutback by freelancers on investing in their themselves and their business with "almost a quarter of freelancers are still uncertain about whether they will stay in or leave the industry." (Donnelly & Komorowski 2022, p2)

There are still pragmatic and business reasons why people might choose to work in a freelance capacity even though it may disadvantage them in some other way (such as stable income or access to state support systems). A sector that does not fulfil a promise for autonomous and creative work will likely induce many people to depart it in search of better terms elsewhere. The following reference illustrates that stated motives do not always match-up with the material reality. Freelancers very often talk about the importance of creative practice and values and a desire for flexibility in the times and ways work is undertaken. But then the reality is often one of grafting and chasing scarce opportunities with small fees for most work. Freelancer experiences often exhibit "structured or constrained autonomy, being strongly shaped by wider structural factors in the labour market. For example, the dominant ways of working and contracting in the creative sector and sub-sectors, and their roles within the production system." (Henry et al 2021, p3)

Findings in relation to **skills needs**

creative & cultural skills



(Nesta 2018, p20)

In many ways the skills needs of the cultural sector haven't changed since the time of *Building a Creative Nation*. Therefore it is worth starting this section with a report from Nesta that was commissioned by Arts Council England to support the development of what would become their Let's Create Strategy. It was published in the same year as *Building a Creative Nation.*

"There is growing evidence that employers in some parts of the UK's creative industries – such as animation, visual effects and video games – are facing skills shortages. Likewise, there is evidence that museums and galleries struggle to recruit talent with specialist skills in preservation and handling, and that theatres lack applicants for a number of essential backstage roles. There is also evidence that arts and cultural organisations face skills deficits in relation to digital technologies in particular."

(Nesta 2018, p23)

Digital skills

Nesta's 2018 report goes on to say that many of those shortages are not new. In fact, the large deficits in digital skills go back many years. Literature consulted for this review – focussing on post-2018 research – indicates that this skills deficit has worsened. When looking into the future, which is only every going to be more reliant on digital tools and technology, the urgency in addressing the sector's digital skills becomes even more apparent.

Digital skills are a recurring topic in many studies of the sector during and after COVID. Sometimes the skills ambitions can be quite modest. For example, the skills needs of the heritage sector can be summarised as:

> **"Individuals want to know how to better use social media, create digital content and manage data. They continue to report a lack of time and insufficient face-to-face support as blockers to doing so. Organisations want to get better at creating new online and hybrid experiences, improve engagement and outreach in digital spaces, upgrade IT systems and work processes in order to improve efficiencies, and better understand their audience in order to improve digital marketing activities."**
>
> (Newman et al 2022, p6)

A review of the digital skills and literacies of the UK museum workforce (or 'museum people' as the report describes them) found that the museum sector's approaches to understanding and building digital skills and literacies need to be person-centred, led by individuals' needs rather than technologies or other external drivers; purposeful and values-led, clearly related to organisational missions; and nuanced and contextualised – helping people understand and relate skills to their own practice and setting. The report also found that **museum people needed to grasp some clear, consistent and widely recognised terms and definitions around digital skills and literacies, but not a single, set list.** They wanted responses that are both strategic and practical – helping them to set priorities and plan and track progress and proficiency. They needed support in recognising and then creating and enabling the conditions needed for organisational change to happen and thrive; and ultimately new guidance, tools and resources to support them in building their digital skills and literacy effectively (Malde et al 2018, pii).

The pivot to digital in the performing arts during COVID-19 didn't just relate to capture and broadcast of live performance. It also encompassed meeting, pitching, auditions, marketing and promotion. **Digital skills were in high demand and theatre makers were eager to embrace them when possible.** There is a set of techniques as well as tools which need to be learned in order to do things with expertise and professionalism:

> "Freelancers saw the transition to online performance and the opportunity to experiment with alternate media as a means of reconceptualising their practice and enhancing their portfolio. A London-based theatre director reflected on her move to digital performance platforms as a space to both remain creative and advance a new set of skills."
> (Maples et al 2022, p138)

This blend of tools and techniques is mirrored in an academic paper that seeks to systematise the digital skills needed for performance in the post-pandemic cultural sector. The study interestingly lands on 'digital aesthetic' as a new sort of competency in which an artist must build a digital construction of themselves, their artistic vision and wider character and style:

> "Performance makers must know what tools are available to them and how to use them. They must develop their specific style within the boundaries of technology-driven possibilities. At the same time, they need to swiftly grasp the organisational layer of theatrical production that is typically collaborative in nature. They need to know how to utilise technologies commonly used across workplaces to communicate, collaborate and manage work projects. In the context of performance training and education, specific technical, as well as baseline, digital skills and the digital aesthetic identity all need to be given consideration."
> (Webb & Layton 2023, p9)

Cross-modal and novel skills

New types of culture and creativity have created a demand for new skillsets which cannot be fabricated overnight. The recurring theme coming from work on the UKRI Creative Clusters is that because the immersive and virtual/augmented sectors are so new there aren't many experts around, there are very few experienced people who can be managers, and policymakers are way behind – somewhat due to the fact that government skills agencies have been emasculated and caught short. As a result, most team members in the immersive sector (even its vanguard of celebrated innovators and entrepreneurs) are largely self-taught.

"Insiders joke about the search for 'unicorns' who have the prized skills of interaction design, UX design or are adept at the use of Real Time Game Engines and are creatively excellent: the ability to be artistically creative and be proficient in a range of coding languages is a much sought-after skillset."

(Bennet & Murphy 2020, p46)

There are many accounts of the need for particular cocktails of skills. One account given in the PEC research which feels particularly insightful goes as follows: "Employment in this space requires 'fusion skills': a combination of creative and commercial and business skills. The sector requires ever more expertise around licensing and copyright, and generally adapting sales, marketing and business for a digital landscape, and particularly, for individuals to combine those skills in their own person, or to know how and where to outsource certain functions." (Carey et al p22)

Elsewhere in the literature such a fusion is described as being 'T-shaped'. There is a high demand for "workers who have a specific area of expertise but can understand and communicate with a broader range of disciplines and will help provide a strategic plan for the sustainable growth of their businesses and the wider industry. These skills are particularly important as many creative workers are self-employed, requiring entrepreneurial ability and strategic vision in addition to inherent creativity" (Casey 2019, p32). This matches more sector-specific 'futurology' work from a couple of years ago that placed a premium on various 'CreaTech' skills and competences – 'CreaTech' being a portmanteau of 'creative' and 'technology'. (Charter & Davis 2020)

The Work Advance/PEC oral evidence to House of Lords Creative Futures inquiry in 2022 by Lesley Giles neatly articulates the importance of 'CreaTech' skills and how they have grown and will continue to grow in the UK:

> "There is an incredible growth in digital content, design and internet applications, which all require creative skills in conjunction with digital or other technical abilities, enhancing audience engagement and experiences with user generated content. For example, this includes optimising advances in: digital technologies and machine learning, smart mobile devices, sensors and the internet of things, creative robotics, immersive technologies, augmented reality and virtual reality. This is in line with wider research suggesting a growing need amongst employers across the economy for workers that offer 'STEAM' skills: that is science, technology, engineering and mathematics alongside 'arts', and particularly creativity and design skills."
> (Giles 2022, np)

This novel blend of new ways of thinking, new ways of working, new hybrid skill sets and fresh approaches to tasks while deploying the latest technology is further explored by one of the Creative Clusters (StoryFutures at Royal Holloway University of London). Their Skills for Immersive Experience Creation report sets out the scale of the problem and the importance of it being solved:

1. The Skills Gap is Critical: 65% of companies identify a lack of skills as a significant barrier to their individual growth as a business.
2. It as Technical and Creative: Whilst 80% of those who identified skills as a barrier to growth highlighted a lack of technical roles within their own company and the wider talent pool as a barrier to growth, over half (51%) highlighted creative and managerial roles as a similar barrier.
3. A Lack of Experience: 73% of those working in immersive have worked on fewer than five projects. The pace of change and emergent nature of business models, which places a reliance on freelancers, makes it difficult to predict, scope and build up experience: a lack of experience is particularly acute in senior leadership roles.
4. It's Confusing: New entrants face a bewildering array of technologies, workflows and terminology that need de-mystifying rapidly in order to develop the talent base.
5. It's Interdisciplinary: Companies rely on building teams that can work across a range of technical and creative disciplines. Creativity and great communication skills are therefore crucial to success.
6. The New Hybrids: Interdisciplinary teams combined with relatively tight budgets and talent shortages lead to the emergence of 'slash' roles, such as producer/designer which require workers to master a diverse array of skills and enable companies to respond flexibly to new demands.
7. Skilled Use of Real Time Game Engines is a Sector-Wide Gap: Understanding the content creation and workflow processes of Real Time Game Engines is widely considered to be the single-most important skill for successful production. However, it is also in short supply: 52% of respondents identify proficiency with Unity (28%) or Unreal (24%) as a gap in their teams.
8. The Fight for Specialist Talent: The games sector has not only become a leader in immersive content production, but also a 'hunting ground' for recruiting talent, thanks to their transferable expertise in areas such as Real Time Game Engines, and interaction design.
9. A Broken Skills Pipeline: 44% of respondents were worried about the lack of graduates with relevant skills to keep up with demand. Competition for

graduates is fierce amongst not only immersive experience producers but also more traditional engineering disciplines like automotive.

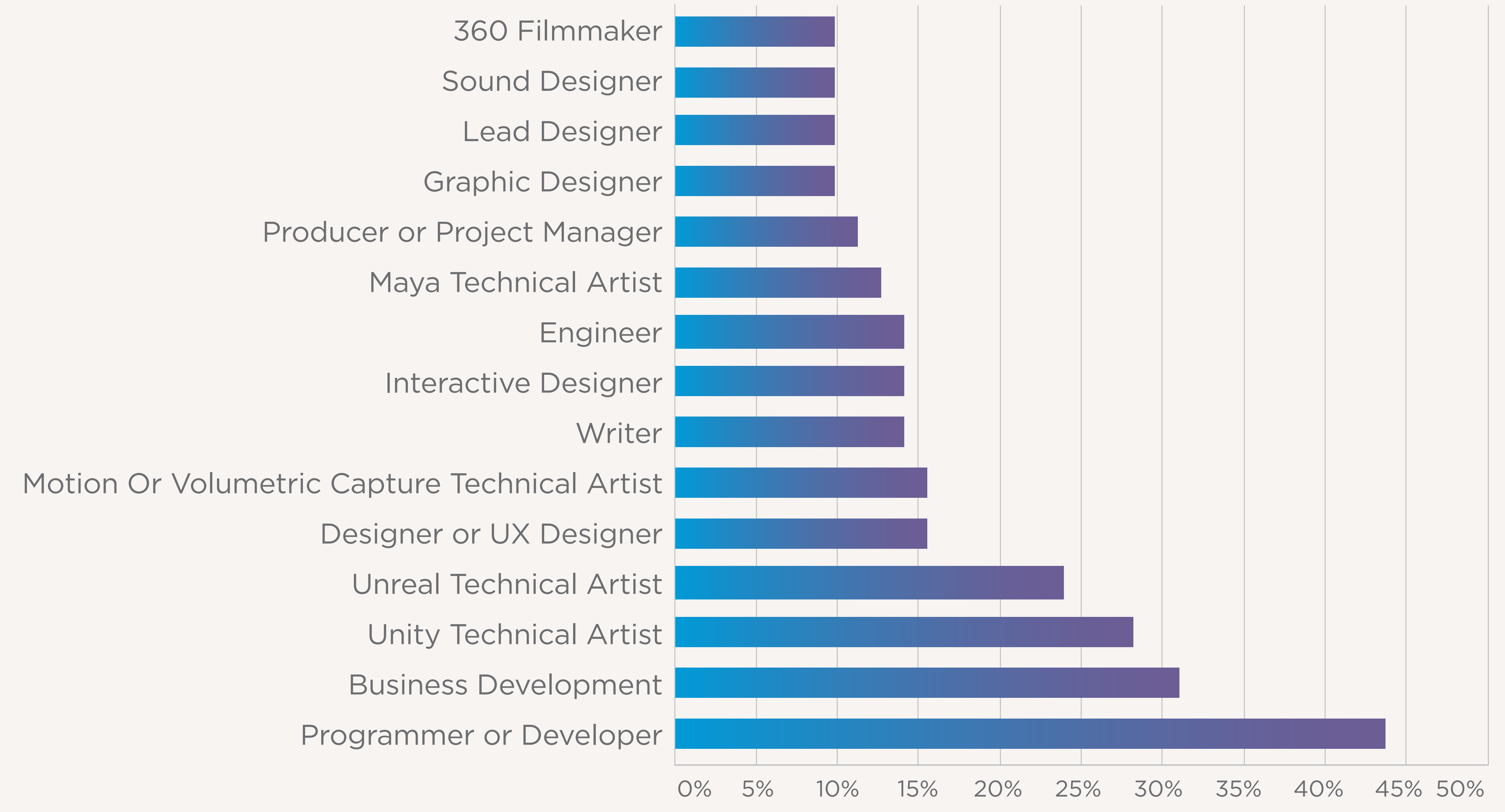
10. Lack Of Professional Training: With training not in the culture of most creative sector companies and resources tight, funding and infrastructure for training is critical (Bennett & Murphy 2020, p9).

The main skills gaps are relating to digital and technology, but they aren't exclusively the remit of technicians and programmers. Writers and technical artists are also in high demand.

The kinds of design skills and mindsets that recur in the StoryFutures report are reflected in a report from the Design Council which sets out the importance of design skills in the cultural and industrial future we will inhabit in the face of profound societal and planetary challenges:

> "Design skills are a skillset and a mindset – a particular way of thinking about a problem, putting materials together to achieve a function, creating meaning that leads to new ideas. They use our head, heart and hand. The head enables us to frame the right questions, explore diverse types of knowledge and make a creative and daring leap to an answer; the heart tells us to empathise with the people who are affected, understanding what works for them while thinking about the collective impact on others and our planet, as well as building relationships with organisations and individuals that might be involved in future solutions; the hand puts our creativity into use, working with materials to bring ideas to life and manipulate them into prototypes and real life objects and digital products and systems."
> (Design Council 2020, p12)

Figure 1.5: Key Skills Gaps in immersive experience production



(Bennett & Murphy 2020, p15)

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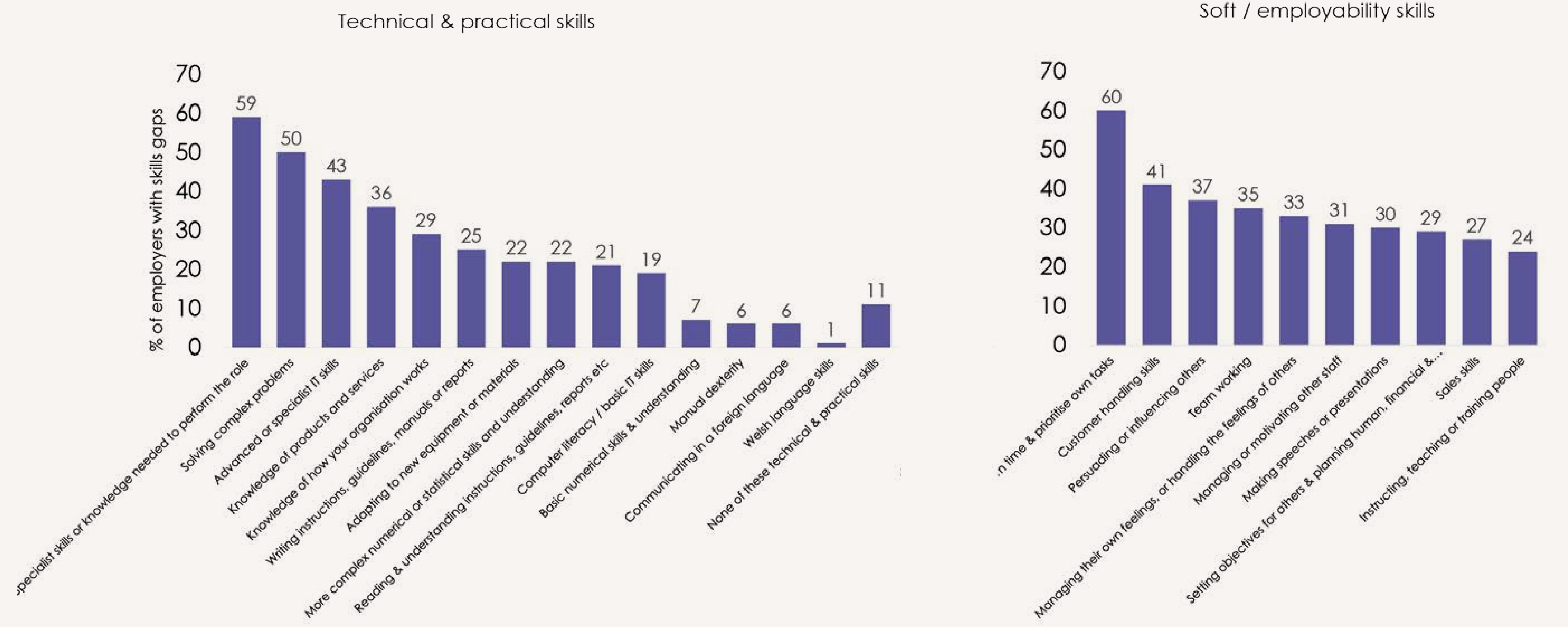
Generic skills

Generic or transversal skills which were highlighted as in short supply in 2018 are still recurring themes in the newer literature. For example, leadership and management as well as finance and project management are seen to be essential components in a post-pandemic recovery skillset.

The Crafting Professionals report found that more experienced professionals in the craft sector prioritised "finance skills (taxes, bookkeeping etc), sales skills, finance resources (start-up funds) and business support."

Figure 3.11: Skills deficiency amongst the existing workforce, Creative Industries



(Giles et al 2020, p24)

The full list of skills perceived as important by makers (in order of importance) are:

1. Making skills
2. Motivation
3. Confidence
4. Communication and presentation
5. Creative Identity
6. Interpersonal skills
7. Marketing and promotion
8. Costing and pricing
9. Vision
10. Market context
11. Time management
12. Resilience
13. Finances, taxes and accounting
14. Sales
15. Business planning
16. IP and legal

(England 2018, pp26-27)

More generally, the commercial skills needed in the visual arts sector was the subject of 2021 research by Creative Scotland. Overall it found that artists, makers and designers would like more professional development opportunities, training and advice. Skills needed across the visual artist sector in Scotland included training in digital marketing and sales, platforms and pricing, accessing international markets, more and varied professional development opportunities for visual artists (graduates, emerging and established) along the lines of Craft Scotland and Craft Council's CPD programmes (Creative Scotland 2021, p25).

Lesley Giles has argued that general (transversal/interpersonal/workplace) skills will be needed for people to work more effectively alongside machines:

"Many of these include higher cognitive creativity and critical thinking, as well as digital skills, communication, problem solving and analytical skills, a capability to unlearn and relearn, and resilience. McKinsey forecast that in the next 10 years (by 2030) 30m people will need to upgrade their transversal skills and half of them will be in critical thinking and information processing – which includes creativity. (IS suggests 3m with upskilling needs in creativity alone). Research at Nesta suggests greater creativity will enhance the resilience of people to automation (e.g. they forecast that nearly 9/10 roles will technology resilient)."

(Giles 2022, np)

Going beyond the cultural and creative sector and looking to wider skills research across the whole economy, a NFER forecasting study suggests where the main employment opportunities in the UK and internationally are likely to lie around 2035. Health, social and personal care roles are the most frequently mentioned in the literature as areas of future employment growth, and that “creative, digital and design” are also widely predicted to grow. The fact that both tech roles and care roles are likely to grown means that **growth is being driven by demand for both digital and human attributes.** The NFER study identified a “consensus on the essential employment skills expected to be most in demand in the future labour market. In addition to literacy and numeracy, and technical and digital skills, commentators identify a range of transferable skills, which will become ever more important in the face of technology.” (Taylor et al 2022, p8)

Arguably, creativity is a skill in its own right. Easton and Djumalieva (2018) looked directly at the topic of creativity and the future of skills by reviewing job adverts and set about to identify the sorts of skills that would be needed across the whole economy in 2030. Of the 39 transferable skills they considered, ‘creativity’ was “consistently the most significant predictor for an occupation’s chance of growing, as a percentage of the workforce by the year 2030” (Easton and Djumalieva 2018, p2). Creative Occupations in the DCMS’s list (used for generating their Economic Estimates) make disproportionate use of both creativity and organisational skills.

These occupations are also predicted to grow in number in the future. DCMS sectors don’t have a monopoly on creative skills. “Jobs for which employers request creativity at a similar rate as those in the DCMS list include: bakers and flour confectioners, chefs, florists, hairdressers and barbers, print finishing and binding workers” (Easton and Djumalieva 2018, p8.) **Creativity by itself is not sufficient for future-proofing the skills needs of future workers in the cultural and creative industries.** The research concludes that “project management and organisational skills (and research skills) are important complements to creativity, leaving creative jobs with even better prospects.” (Easton and Djumalieva 2018, p4)

Fair access skills

Diversity, equity and inclusion is a long-standing preoccupation in the cultural and creative sectors. Rhetorical and positional statements from policymakers, sector bodies and individual organisations have not been followed by effective action. This has prompted many to reflect on the failure of past interventions to generate systemic change around workforce and audience demographics. A fresher focus on fair work and fair access for all is likely to create a more conducive sector working environment which in turn will support efforts to diversify.

A recent landmark report from the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Creative Diversity states conclusively that, “diversity training alone will not solve the problems facing cultural and creative industries” and goes on to explain the way in which the commonplace forms of diversity training may actually work against the goals of equity and justice (Wreyford et al 2021, p72). In general, the conditions within an organisation cannot be overcome through interventions which are geared to change the opinions and behaviours of individuals.

Instead, the report identifies Tools for reducing bias in the workplace:

- Increase intergroup contact.
- Counter stereotypes.
- Perspective-taking.
- Try reverse mentoring: giving a voice to underrepresented groups through pairing them with executives.
- Create diversity task forces, bringing together people from different specialisms and at different levels.

There are still good reasons to equip managers with the skills and competencies required to manage individuals and teams that come from different backgrounds, or which have characteristics that are not the assumed norm of middle-class white able bodied etc.

Leadership attributes and the composition of leaders in the sector is an important part of the route to fair access across all pay grades in the sector. The Changing Cultures report outlines how:

"The changing nature of work has prompted a radical shift in the attributes, competencies, skills and behaviours required of leaders. Developing leaders is no longer a question of focusing on the person at the top of an organisation, but of creating opportunities for individuals to lead at all levels, be it as employees or freelancers. Yet distributed leadership is still far from the norm. For more collaborative models of leadership to become a reality, leaders will need softer skills, including the ability to build consensus, particularly when tough decisions need to be made.
The qualities and skills needed today are similar to those in other sectors: future-facing leaders need to adapt to a changing context while being centred on a core set of values that are reflected in their behaviour and in organisational culture."
(Hoyle et al 2018, p5)

Figure 1: Leadership competencies and behaviours

(Hoyle et al 2018, p19)

Getting beyond skills and into things which might be 'skill-adjacent' but still important (like mindsets or networks) it becomes clear in literature like the Creative Access Thrive report that there is a privilege/disadvantage dimension to how these are acquired and recognised. Candidates are more confident they have the skills and knowledge to do their jobs, but feel disadvantaged when it comes to having the contacts, confidence and networking abilities that are also key for progression:

"The lack of a network is a key barrier to entry for people from groups under-represented in the creative industries. It seems this barrier can persist throughout their career with less than two-thirds (62%) reporting they have access to the contacts they need to progress. The pandemic has also prevented candidates from being able to build their networks as effectively. This shows the need for and value of mentoring and other networking activities to support career progression for people from these groups."
(Creative Access 2022, p10)

A thorough Review of Fair Work by Culture Radar commissioned by Creative Scotland explains exactly what is needed to bring about Fair Work in Scotland (and by extension across the entire UK):

Many of the organisations contacted for the research said they were already adopting Fair Work Principles, but that they had little support to do so, and that they would do more if conditions allowed. In general every part of the sector in Scotland wants to support 'Fair Work' but nobody seemed prepared to take full responsibility for sector change or leadership. The research highlights how "low pay and precarious work" manifest as "a huge, difficult and long-term issue, and which has been a significant contributing factor to skills loss during COVID-19." (Scott 2022, p7)

Leadership
- Collective leadership
- Capacity to influence and take action
- Guiding principles
- Implementation schedule
- Monitoring and benchmarking

Sector standards and conditions
- Employer responsibility (Fair Work First)
- Clear sector standards (Fair Work Charter)
- Best practice guidance and policies
- Increased union and employer engagement

Funding & investment conditions
- Clear monitoring & evaluation criteria
- Realistic timeframes and proportionate measures
- Regular funding and additional resource

Sector Support
- Fair Work Resource Hub
- New resources and guidance
- Board and leadership development
- Sector-wide initiatives and pilots
- Skills, training and career pathways

4. Sector skills, training and career pathway action plan
- Clear Fair Work pathways that link HE/FE graduates with sector employers and unions
- Fair Work integrated into HE/FE professional practice modules
- Increase potential for apprenticeship programmes
- Supported, flexible professional development for employees and freelancers at all career stages

Figure 3: Key solutions for Fair Work implementation in the creative and cultural sectors, 2022

(Scott 2022, pp11-13)

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Strong variations within and between subsectors

The PEC skills monitor for the Creative Industries (Giles et al 2020) contains some of the data that fed the submission to the 2022 House of Lords Enquiry into the future of the creative industries. It shows a real difference in skills shortage and skills gaps among different sub-sectors within the creative industries.

The report makes some distinction between skills shortages and skills gaps (shortages are where skilled people cannot be found and gaps are where people do not have the necessary skills). Skills shortages are particularly problematic for those in crafts, IT, software and computer services, and architecture. **Skills gaps are a problem for museums, galleries and libraries, and businesses in IT, and advertising and marketing.** Skills gaps are most pronounced for higher-skilled roles. In particular, the most common skill deficiencies (both in the labour market, and amongst the existing creative industries workforce) relate to specialist skills or knowledge required for the role and advanced or specialist IT skills. (There is also a lack of transferable skills, particularly relating to time management, customer service, and people management capabilities)

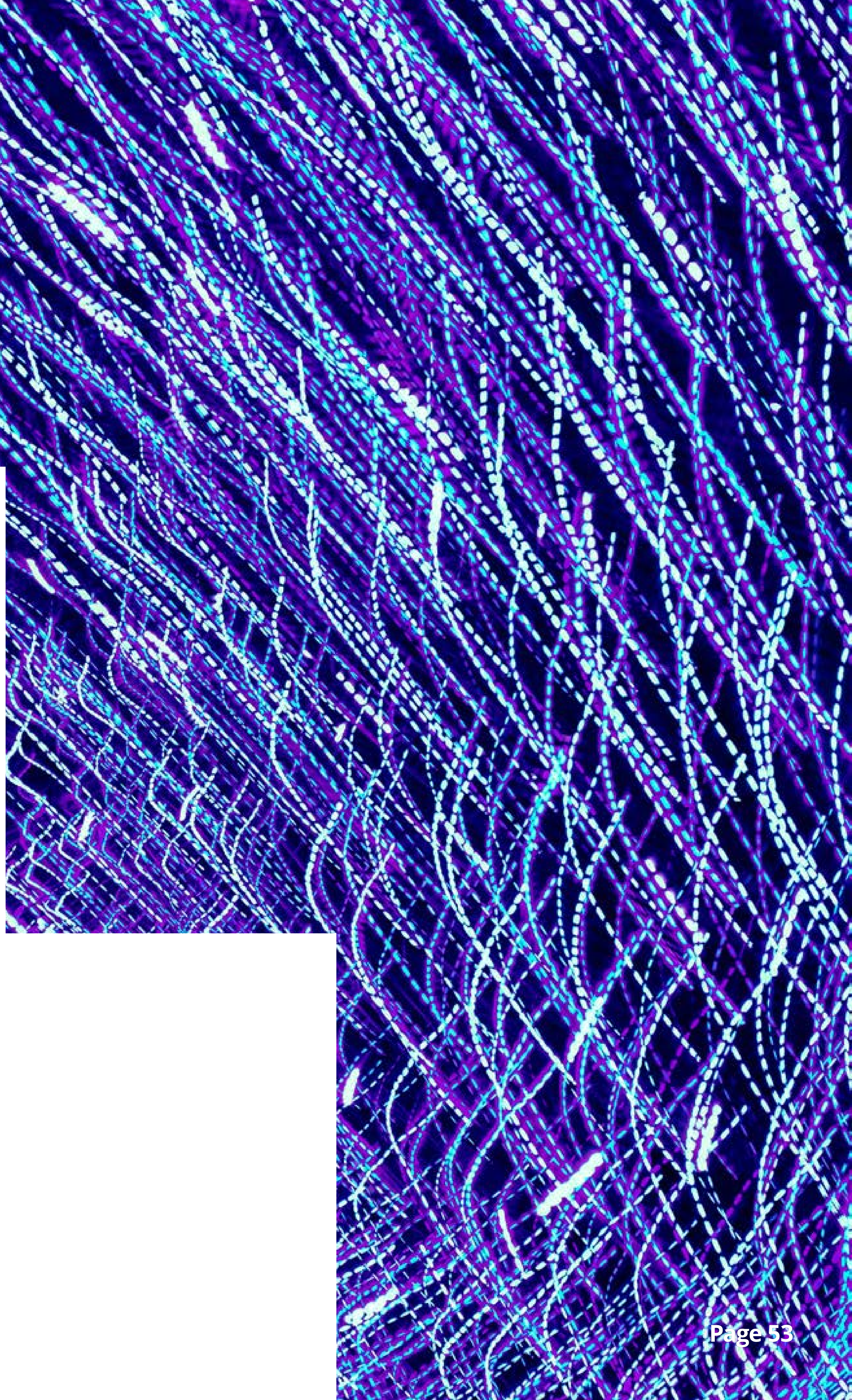
In her evidence supplied to the House of Lords inquiry itself Lesley Giles offers some more detail from the latest figures from the employer surveys and emphasising "their substantial heterogeneity."

The evidence goes on to explain that "skills shortages are much stronger in the ICT and digital sector (28.7%); architecture (33.2%); design (36.8%); games, film and TV (including 'visual effects – VFX – and animation'); and parts of the performing and visual arts. They also match the distribution of jobs, occurring in higher skilled roles." The skills shortages aren't uniform within individual sectors but are "affecting certain key roles such as: designers, (games designers; UX user (experience) and VFX (visual effects) designers; artists (3D artists, animators, VFX artists, storyboarders; and a whole host of other roles included within the artists code (3411); and dancers and musicians." (Giles 2022, np)

Figure 3.3: Skill shortage vacancies by Creative sub-sector

(Giles et al 2020, p20)

Concluding observations



This report, which examined the recruitment challenges and skills needs in the creative and cultural sectors since 2018 has generally concluded that the findings of *Building a Creative Nation* are still very relevant – that the specific technical as well as the generic skills identified in that research are still in demand and in short supply. The impact of COVID-19, and assertive and essential social justice movements like BlackLivesMatter have brought the inequities and precarity of working in the sector into sharper relief, as has the recent cost of living crisis.

Taking stock and looking back over the all the literature consulted there are a few points which feel important but remain unresolved. These invite reflection when formulating a sector support offer that is informed by the evidence assembled in this report.

What is a skill?

A skill is different from a behaviour which is different from a temperament. Each is a kind of personal attribute which may be necessary to activate for personal change at the individual level and wider structural change at the organisational or sectoral level. There is a distinction and differing viewpoints betrayed by some of the language and framing in the research consulted for this report between what are skills (which can be taught and/or acquired) and personal character traits or attributes (which can be nurtured/experienced).

Approaching the sector as it truly behaves rather than how it aspires to be

There is nothing new about the identification of skills shortages and a determination by government and the sector to address them. It is not uncommon for a report to conclude with a commitment for greater consideration of the evidence, investment and attention directed at the key challenge, but then ultimately nothing really changes. The sector has a habit of introspection (as betrayed by the tone and focus of many of the reports) but does not do a good job of coordinating to achieve systemic change. It is not an easy of simple task – nor is it especially technical. Individual projects and programmes will not overturn a system and a culture that has embedded inequity, that rewards privilege rather than talent, and permits an enduring precarity. The true motives of individuals and organisation are betrayed by their actions. Much of the research in this report interacts on inside a rhetorical or theoretical register: many rely on the subjective accounts of survey respondents or the extrapolation from generic data sets. Quantifying and appropriately describing the tangible effects of skills shortages and recruitment challenges is evidently a challenge for the sector.

The perils of forecasting

Lesley Giles's evidence to the House of Lords is a concise digest of the current skills research and forecasting situation and worth quoting. She states that:

> **"Most future employment and skills requirements will have solid foundations in the here and now and will have formed from strong roots in the past. With this perspective in mind, it is likely that part of the answer is that as the creatives industries grow, some future skills in the creative industries will simply involve an increase in demand for existing jobs and skills."**
>
> (Giles 2022, np)

She goes on to say that there are evidently trends in the sort of culture that is being produced and consumed, changes to working behaviours and norms, and emerging political and social preoccupations that will become even more important as the years pass. There will be new skills, new jobs, new industries. It is hard to predict where these might emerge from and what impact they will have on the economy and workforce of 2023.

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Thoughts for a new sector support and research offer

The 'Skills, Talent and Diversity in the Creative Industries: critical issues and evidence gaps' (Carey et al 2019) report outlines a number of hot topics for further research:

- Job quality
- Strategic skill needs
- The value of creative education
- Pipeline of talent
- Creative professional development
- Productivity and management practices
- Tackling the diversity challenge
- Local talent pools

There is a need to think carefully about the dynamics of supply and demand

Not just for labour, but also for training and employment opportunities. Vocational training is still seen as an inferior option to more traditional and academic routes into and up through the sector. There are lots of apprenticeship schemes in construction, transport, healthcare – with strong supply, strong demand, and good outcomes for those who complete. But arts and culture will have small numbers of apprentices even when such schemes are on offer. At the same time there are distinct sub-sector vocational pathways such as chartership or accreditation, and the professional institutes in areas like librarianship or conservation play an important role in workforce development.

"Ongoing skills shortages and skills gaps in the Creative Industries suggest that the supply of appropriately skilled workers coming through the skills system and active in the labour market is failing to keep pace or align with employer demand. The evidence suggests a range of underlying causes – linked to both the supply (skills provision) and demand side (take-up of training)."
(Carey et al 2023, p56)

"At the heart of this there is a supply and demand issue with the overall volume of creative graduates, but also problems with creative industries employment structures including unpaid internships and low-paid employment that may deter or prevent graduates from pursuing a creative career."
Crafting Professionals Report.
(Lauren England, 2020)

Despite the demonstrable precarity and low chances of success in many aspects of the sector, there is an unending stream of graduates and post-graduates who seek to make a career in the sector. This reveals a very high demand among entrants of to the labour market. An expansion of universities and courses as well as the self-subsidy that many are prepared to undertake is a striking phenomenon in areas like the visual and performing arts. Unfortunately this does not seem to be matched by an equal growth of employment opportunities and resultant demand for their labour.

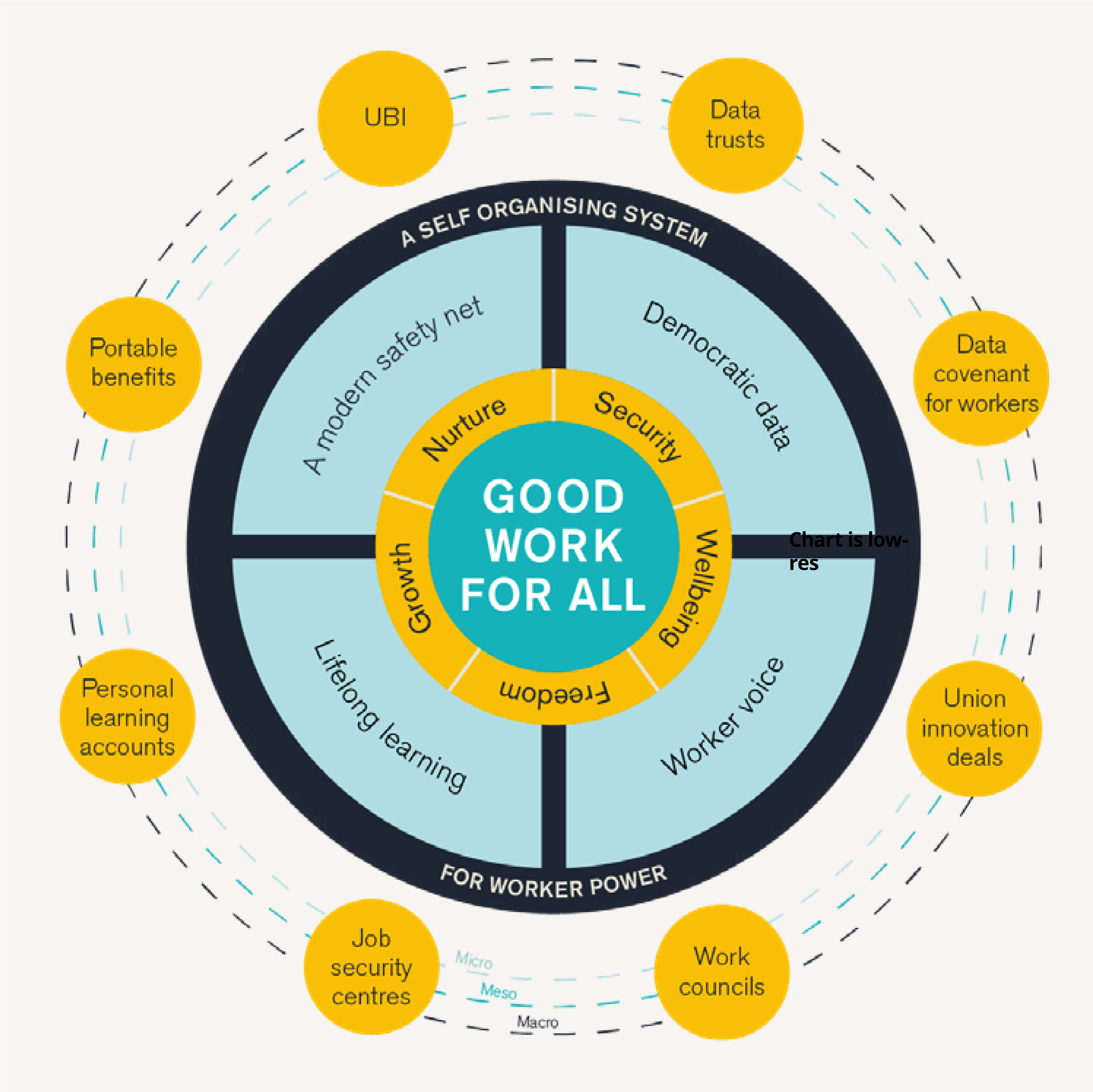
When it comes to putting together programmes which actually work, which excite local political and policy stakeholders, it's important to realise that not everyone is completely on board with the rhetorical norms and signals that the sector exhibits. An academic study of the Towns Fund (set up post-Brexit to address social and economic challenges of Britain's towns – rather than cities or rural areas) found a skills mismatch between the types of skills and training on offer, and competing strategies for attracting and retaining skilled workers or particular demographics. This is particularly true of creative skills, which are prized by employers across sectors and industries, and a priority in the government's plan for growth and sector deals, but afforded less provision in regional initiatives such as the Towns Fund. They also report that "many councillors did not see how to fund skills successfully, other than 'pottering about with work placements'. The inability to find 'shovel-ready' skills projects for the majority of respondents suggests that more work is needed linking cultural participation to skills development." (Marsh et al 2022, pp35-38)

Concentrate on better work, not more work

Ultimately the research into the workforce doesn't just identify where there are challenges in finding work and workers. It is also about the welfare of workers and the quality of their work. This emphasis is a profound post-pandemic reorientation away from 'more work' and towards 'good work' that isn't unique to our sector.

> **"It would be reasonable to conclude that what we need is better access to the creative industries: more apprenticeships, more 'diversity' schemes, online learning, shorter degree courses and so on. Some of this is undoubtedly desirable, but what is also apparent is the need to combine this with re-thinking the nature of work itself, not just work in the creative industries."**
> (Killick & Oakley 2020, p135)

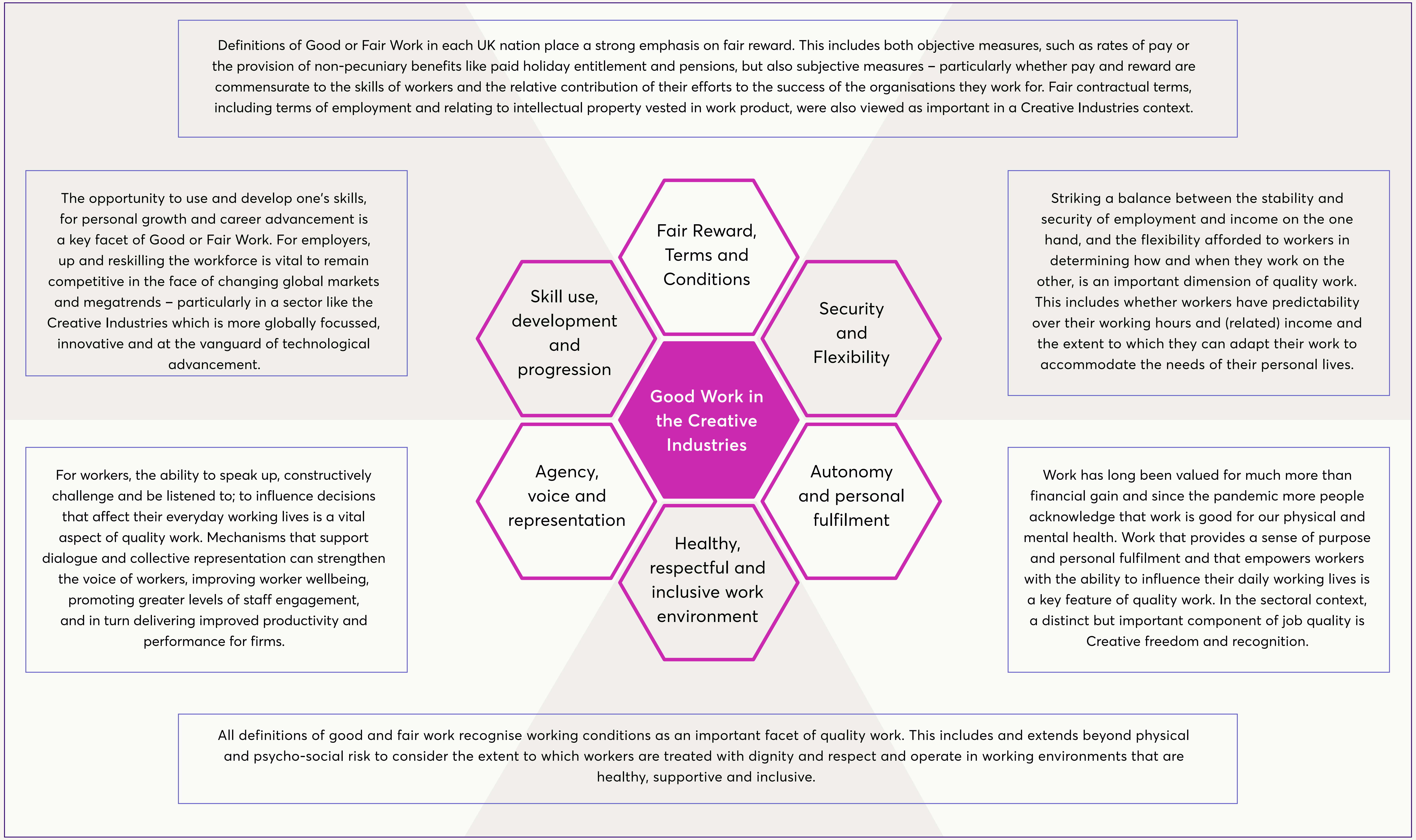
Luckily, there has been an explosion of people doing just that: rethinking what work is and what it could and should be in the cultural and creative sectors. The RSA's New Blueprint for Good Work is all about the ways in which our conventional policies (and paradigms) about work are increasingly broken and untethered form the lived reality of people in the C21st. It's arguable that the cultural and creative industries are at the vanguard of that untethering. This diagram sets out some practical (if ambitious) policy and governance measures that would truly begin to bring about 'Good Work':



(Lockey & Wallace-Stephens 2020, p7)

The PEC's 2023 Good Work Review shows how this can be made real in the cultural and creative industries:

Figure 2.3. Defining Good Work in the Creative Industries: the PEC's six domains of Job Quality



(Carey et al 2023, p13)

There are obvious pre-existing workforce investment schemes that the sector neglects to participate in such as Investors in People or other commitments and benchmarking exercises:

All of this suggests there is real need to bring about some of the conditions one would expect will (eventually) foster a more diverse, inclusive and equitable sector to work in.

Figure 3.8. Characterising job quality in Creative Sub-sectors

Theme	Indicator	Advertising & marketing	Architecture	Crafts	Design	Screen	IT & software	Publishing	Museums, galleries & libraries	Music, performing & visual arts	Creative Industries	All industries
Skills use, development and progression	Training Plan	38%	38%	*	21%	30%	32%	25%	62%	35%	33%	**48%**
	Employer Training	58%	60%	*	41%	48%	54%	41%	81%	54%	53%	**61%**
	Investors in People	6%	8%	*	3%	7%	5%	3%	37%	8%	7%	**15%**
	Processes to identify high potential talent	11%	6%	*	8%	8%	10%	6%	17%	10%	9%	**15%**
	Participation in Training	16%	24%	5%	8%	16%	22%	14%	26%	14%	18%	**24%**
	Perception of progression opportunities	59%	70%	*	60%	52%	68%	56%	39%	49%	62%	**54%**

(Carey et al 2023, p29)

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