



behind the scenes in the creative industries

Bectu's Big Survey: The Results

bectu
BIG
SURVEY
25



Bectu is the union for creative ambition and a sector of Prospect trade union. We represent nearly 40,000 staff, contract and freelance workers in the UK's media and entertainment industries.

Our members work in non-performance roles in live events, broadcasting, film and cinema, digital media, independent production, leisure, fashion, theatre and the arts. We are one of the UK's largest unions for freelancers.

Published September 2025

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25-0086/SEP25/PDF

behind the scenes in the creative industries

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executive summary

Bectu's Big Survey offers an in-depth analysis of the current state of the UK's creative industries, focusing on the experiences of and challenges faced by creative workers.

Conducted between February and March 2025, the survey gathered responses from 5,597 individuals across various sectors, including film, broadcasting, TV drama, theatre, live events and fashion.

1

Employment and job security

The creative industries are characterised by high levels of job insecurity, with only 20% of workers feeling secure in their jobs. Freelancers, who make up a significant portion of the workforce, face even greater precarity, with many experiencing job cancellations and working without formal contracts.

- Just one in five creative industry workers (20%) report feeling secure in their job, and this drops to just 13% among freelancers.
- 30% of all creative industry workers are not currently working. And almost a third of all creative industry workers think they will have left the creative industries in five years' time. This figure is highest among freelancers (31% compared to 22% of full-time employees), and those who are from a working-class background (31% compared to 26% who are not).

2

The screen industries slowdown

The screen industries have experienced a marked slowdown over the past few years following a boom in 2022, particularly in film and high-end television production. This has been driven by a combination of factors, including the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising production costs, commissioning pauses, and broader economic uncertainty.

- There are still large numbers of screen industry workers out of work; 43% of all 3,453 screen industry workers surveyed by Bectu between February and March 2025 said they were not currently working.
- This is only a small reduction from July 2024, when Bectu research¹ found more than half (52%) of the UK's film and TV workforce were out of work, and February 2024 when 68% of respondents said they were not working, only a tiny decrease from September 2023 (74%).

3

Pay and affordability

Despite the economic contributions of the creative industries, many workers struggle with low pay. A significant portion of the workforce earns below the national median income, with freelancers particularly affected. Financial instability is widespread, leading to difficulties in meeting basic living costs.

- Two-thirds (66%) of all creative industry workers say they are currently struggling financially, with 22% finding things extremely difficult.
- One in ten overall (9%) have been unable to pay their rent or mortgage in the past year, while 14% have fallen behind on household bills.
- 24% of workers from a working-class background earn under £20,000 a year from their creative work compared to 19% of those not from a working-class background. They are also more likely to be out of work, earn less, and rely on debt to stay afloat.

4

Challenges for freelancers

Key issues such as unsustainable working hours, the 'feast or famine' nature of freelance employment, bullying and harassment, poor levels of diversity, and a lack of employment rights for freelancers continue to plague the creative industries.

- Around a third of freelancers (31%) told us that they have no savings, and fewer than half of freelancers have a pension (48%).
- Fewer than half of freelancers (48%) say that they are always paid on time for the work that they do and 37% say that late payments have impacted their cash flow or caused them to go into debt.

5

Working conditions

Long hours and poor working conditions are prevalent, contributing to high levels of stress and burnout. The survey reveals that many workers exceed the EU Working Time Directive, with some reporting working days of 12 hours or more.

- Over a quarter (27%) had breached the EU Working Time Directive by working more than 48 hours in the week they completed the survey.
- On average, creative industry workers reported a typical working day of more than 10 hours, with over one-third (34%) saying it was usual for them to work 12 hours or more.
- Seven in ten creative industry workers (70%) said that their work has had a negative impact on their personal relationships.

6

Diversity and inclusion

The report underscores the need for improved diversity and inclusion within the creative industries. Workers from marginalised backgrounds, including those from global majority ethnic groups and those with disabilities, face significant barriers to career progression and experience higher levels of discrimination and harassment.

- 42% of global majority respondents reported witnessing racial harassment and/or abuse at work, and over a third (35%) had direct experience of racial harassment or abuse in the workplace. Among Black respondents, a shocking 61% had personally experienced racial discrimination or abuse at work.
- 30% of disabled workers said that they feel discriminated against at work and almost half of disabled workers (45%) concealed information about a life commitment, situation, or diagnosis when applying for jobs.
- A mere 17% of all women workers said that there was gender pay equity in their workplace.

7

Bullying and harassment

Our research suggests an endemic culture of bullying and harassment rooted in informal workplace cultures, power imbalances, and lack of clear HR structures. Freelancers are especially vulnerable, with limited protection and fear of retaliation.

- More than seven in ten (71%) creative industry workers say that behaviours that would be considered toxic and inappropriate in public life are often tolerated in the creative industries.
- More than six in ten creative industry workers (61%) have personally witnessed or experienced bullying or harassment in the workplace.
- Around a third (31%) of theatre and live events workers had experienced antisocial behaviour, violence, aggression or harassment from an audience member/s in the past 12 months.

8

Health and safety

Health and safety concerns are prominent, with many workers reporting inadequate training, poor sanitation, and long working hours. The lack of structured support for emotional wellbeing is also a critical issue, particularly for those working on or with distressing content.

- More than one in ten (12%) of all creative industry workers have had a workplace accident in the past three years, while 19% have felt at risk of an accident. Theatre workers are most likely to have had a workplace accident (18%) or to have felt at risk of one (21%).
- Nearly six in ten creative industry workers (59%) said they have felt anxious or depressed in the past 12 months.

9

Exclusion and career progression

The report highlights significant barriers to career progression for workers from marginalised backgrounds. Many face discrimination and lack access to opportunities for advancement. This is particularly pronounced for workers from global majority ethnic groups and those with disabilities.

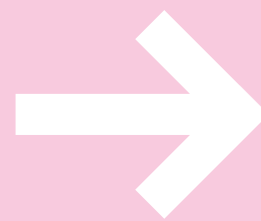
- Overall, when asked about all jobs that they had applied for in the past year and a half, three quarters of all creative industry workers (75%) said that they had gotten the job through a friend or contact.
- Only 7% of women reported gender equality in terms of career progression at their place of work.
- Among global majority respondents, 64% said that people who are from marginalised backgrounds are less likely to be promoted or hold more senior roles in their workplace – this compares to 44% of all respondents.

10

Impact of artificial intelligence

The rapid advancement of generative AI technology poses both opportunities and challenges for the creative industries. While AI can streamline processes and foster innovation, it also raises concerns about job displacement, copyright issues, and the erosion of creative value.

- Just 10% of creative industry workers predict AI will have a positive impact on the industry they work in over the next five years. Overall, 59% think the impact will be negative.
- Very few creative industry workers have used generative AI in their own work – 62% say they have not used AI and do not plan to.
- For those who have not used AI tools at all and do not plan to, 70% think the impact on their industry will be negative, compared with 40% who have used AI to generate text or images and 46% who have used AI to generate or edit video content.



Our findings make a clear case for urgent reforms to address these issues, including better support for freelancers, improved working conditions, and stronger diversity and inclusion initiatives. Ensuring the long-term sustainability of the UK's creative industries requires a coordinated effort from government, industry bodies, and employers to create a fairer and more inclusive environment for all workers.



foreword



Philippa Childs
Head of Bectu

this report marks a ground-breaking moment for Bectu. Bectu's Big Survey is the most comprehensive snapshot we've ever produced of the lived realities of workers across the creative industries.

With over 5,500 responses from workers in film, TV, theatre, live events, broadcasting, fashion and beyond, it offers a vital, honest, and at times stark reflection of what it means to build a career in the UK's creative sectors today. We're proud to publish this critical snapshot of the realities facing our workforce and we're committed to repeating this research every two years to ensure we continue to listen, learn, and fight for the changes our members need.

I want to sincerely thank everyone who took the time to share their stories with us, often painful or deeply personal. Your voices have power, and it's your willingness to speak candidly that makes this report possible. Your insights will directly shape how we campaign, lobby, and support you in the years ahead.

The findings highlight serious, systemic problems that continue to undermine the sustainability and fairness of work in the creative industries and confirm what many of us have known for some time. Insecurity, low pay, long hours, poor mental health and widespread reports of bullying and harassment are not isolated incidents. They are structural issues, and they demand urgent reform. Freelancers, who form the backbone of the sector, remain especially vulnerable, with many locked out of basic protections and forced to navigate unstable, exploitative conditions. At a time when the sharp

slowdown in the screen industries has left many out of work and struggling, the findings in this report reflect just how fragile the employment landscape is for creative industry workers.

The data also reveals the deep and persistent inequalities that too many industry workers still face. Workers from global majority backgrounds, disabled people, women and those from working-class origins face clear barriers to progression and experience disproportionately high levels of discrimination, exclusion and financial hardship. These aren't just equality issues, they're industry-wide risks that threaten the diversity, vitality and future of our creative sectors.

But amid these serious concerns, there are reasons for optimism. The creative industries are now a recognised pillar of the UK's Industrial Strategy. The commitment to appoint a Freelance Champion to advocate for freelancers from the heart of government is a hugely welcome step forward, and a clear signal that things can and must change. Government has acknowledged the need for reform to improve workers' lives and growing engagement with unions, including Bectu, signals that change is not only possible, it's underway.

Bectu will use the evidence from this report to redouble our efforts, working with members, industry bodies and policymakers to secure meaningful improvements to pay, rights, diversity, and working conditions. Our creative industries are a national asset, but they cannot thrive without valuing and protecting the workers who power them. With this evidence in hand, we are more determined than ever to drive lasting change.

Philippa Childs

bectu's big survey

While creative industry workers are critical to our economy and to our social and cultural fabric, they (especially freelancers) often fall through data gaps on employment statistics, and without formal employment structures, their voices are often not heard. Bectu's Big Survey looks to fill these gaps, and use the findings to push for change.

Between February and March 2025, Bectu surveyed 5,597 respondents across the creative industries in the UK's largest ever survey of behind-the-scenes creative workers (including supporting artists).

Respondents came from across the creative industries; 36% in film, 17% in broadcasting, 36% in TV drama, 23% in theatre, 16% in live events, 19% in unscripted and factual TV, 10%

in commercials, 3% in arts (galleries, arts centres, etc.), 2% in fashion, 1% in cinemas, 1% in gaming and 6% in other parts of the creative industries.²

Respondents came from a wide range of backgrounds, undertaking a diverse array of roles across the creative industries:

- 46% were women, 49% men, and 2% non-binary
- 7.3% of all respondents (413) identified as being from a global majority ethnic group – 72% were white British, 4% white Irish and 11% white other
- 25% of respondents considered themselves to have a disability
- 70% of all respondents said they are heterosexual, 20% identified themselves somewhere on the LGBT+ spectrum

- 49% were based in London, 9% in the South East, 8% in Scotland, 7% in the North West, 6% in the South West, and 5% in Wales
- 43% of respondents had worked in the creative industries for 16 years or more. 16% had worked in the industry for 11-15 years, 20% for 6-10 years, 16% for 2-5 years and 6% for two years or less
- 31% told us they were parents while 5% said they were carers
- 57% of all respondents said they came from a working-class background, 37% did not.

Bectu's Big Survey heard from:

- 121 sound engineers
- 14 heads of stage
- 535 producers
- 143 hair and makeup artists
- 55 riggers
- 47 costume cutters
- 13 intimacy coordinators
- 223 supporting artistes
- 141 editors
- 69 lighting technicians
- 25 scenic painters
- 127 camera operators
- 46 front of house
- 7 prop modellers
- 12 stage door keepers
- 71 directors of photography
- 55 location managers
- 7 textile artists
- 263 directors.

Survey methodology

An online survey was promoted through direct emails to Bectu members and wider circulation through industry bodies as well as social media advertisements. 5,597 responses were collected between 28 February and 21 March 2025.

The survey targeted creative industry workers in roles represented by Bectu, so respondents were screened using the question 'Do you work in the creative industries in a non-performing role or as a supporting artiste?' with only positive responses accepted. Participation was voluntary, though we offered an incentive of a prize draw for a retail voucher.

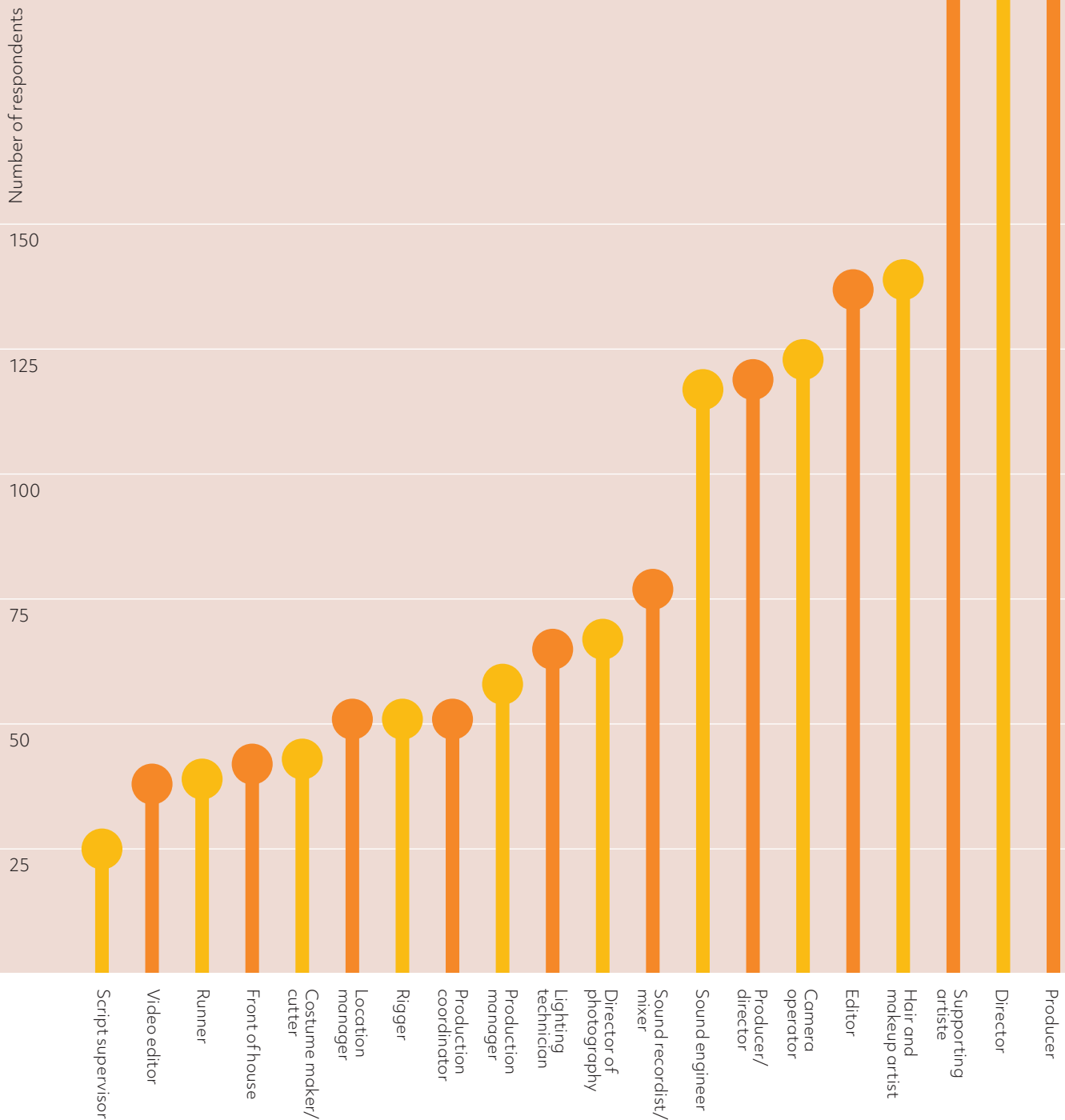
Data processing and analysis were conducted using R. All statistical tests were conducted at a 95% confidence level ($\alpha = 0.05$). Prior to analysis, the dataset was cleaned and prepared:

- Removing incomplete or inconsistent responses
- Recoding categorical variables for consistency
- Microsoft Copilot was used to standardise, categorise and code job titles.

Free-text responses were collected as part of the survey and sorted by generating themes and analysing patterns, with anonymous, representative quotes selected for illustration.

Figure 1

Respondents' top 20 job titles, by frequency





“

It is not seen as a 'proper' job, we have zero-hour contracts – but can often work 40+ hours a week, then we can be closed for three weeks with no work.

”



creative worker profiles

the UK's creative industries are a vital part of the economy; fast-growing, globally influential, and built on highly skilled labour. But behind the success story lies a more complex and fragile reality for many of the professionals who power it. For creatives in non-performing roles, including production, design, editing, and technical roles, work is characterised by irregular schedules, freelance contracts, and precarious conditions. While some thrive, others are pushed to the edge by long hours, inconsistent pay, and a lack of structural support.

This analysis draws on responses from over 4,500 creative industry workers in the survey sample to map the diversity of experiences within this behind-the-scenes workforce. We identified five distinct profiles, based

on how workers cluster across variables including income, weekly hours, experience, sector, financial security, mental wellbeing, and employment status. These profiles reveal not just economic differences, but lived differences in how work is structured, how careers unfold, and where the pressures lie. Our analysis highlights the impact of the screen industries slowdown on workers as well as the long hours culture and low pay in certain sectors. Though insecurity and stress are shared experiences, the feast or famine nature of much of the industries, as well as pay disparities, draw clear dividing lines in workers' experiences.

We find two groups of established, higher earners; one older, more stable and comfortably well off, while the other (largely screen industries workers) has faced a long

spell without work as a result of the commissioning slowdown, placing a strain on their finances and wellbeing. We then find a distinct group of precarious freelancers and part-time workers, with significant experience but unstable working conditions putting their earnings below average and making them feel very insecure.

Of the final two groups, one is most likely to leave the creative industries in the next few years. These are generally workers who have gained a few years of experience in the sector, with most operating as freelancers, but the stress of low hours and low income is resulting in high levels of burnout. The final group is also insecure, though for different reasons, as it is the long hours culture that is taking a toll on their wellbeing. Many are working in the theatre sector, and across the regions and nations, and working more than 50 hours/week but earning under £30k.

From experienced professionals holding senior roles in television and

theatre, to underemployed freelancers navigating career instability, these profiles paint a nuanced picture of a workforce under strain – and help to identify the industry responses needed to create more secure and sustainable creative careers. While the needs and circumstances of workers across the creative industries vary and require nuanced approaches, there are undeniably widespread challenges demanding urgent attention.

The feast-to-famine nature of employment, coupled with significant financial insecurity and pressing mental health concerns, reflects an ecosystem built on precarious and often informal working practices. These conditions leave many creative industry workers vulnerable, across all of these profiles, underlining the need for sector-wide reforms that address both the diversity of worker experiences and the fundamental issues undermining stability and wellbeing throughout the industry.

Profile methodology

Latent Class Analysis (LCA) was used to identify distinct profiles among creative industry workers in non-performing roles in the UK. LCA is a statistical technique used to uncover unobserved (latent) subgroups within a population based on patterns in categorical response data. For this analysis, we selected variables that captured key aspects of working life for creatives: income, weekly working hours, mental wellbeing, and financial security. These variables were recoded where necessary and input into the model in R. Model fit

was assessed using statistical tests (BIC and entropy) to determine the optimal number of classes. A five-class model was selected as it offered the best balance between interpretability and statistical fit.

Once class membership probabilities were assigned, the resulting profiles were analysed using cross-tabulations with additional survey data, including sector of work and demographic details. This interpretation offers a nuanced picture of different experiences across the creative industries.

Sector concentration

Seven icons show the main sectors of employment for each creative worker profile, with a percentage below indicating the sector concentration.

**Broadcasting • Commercials • Film • Live events
Theatre • TV drama • Unscripted/factual TV**



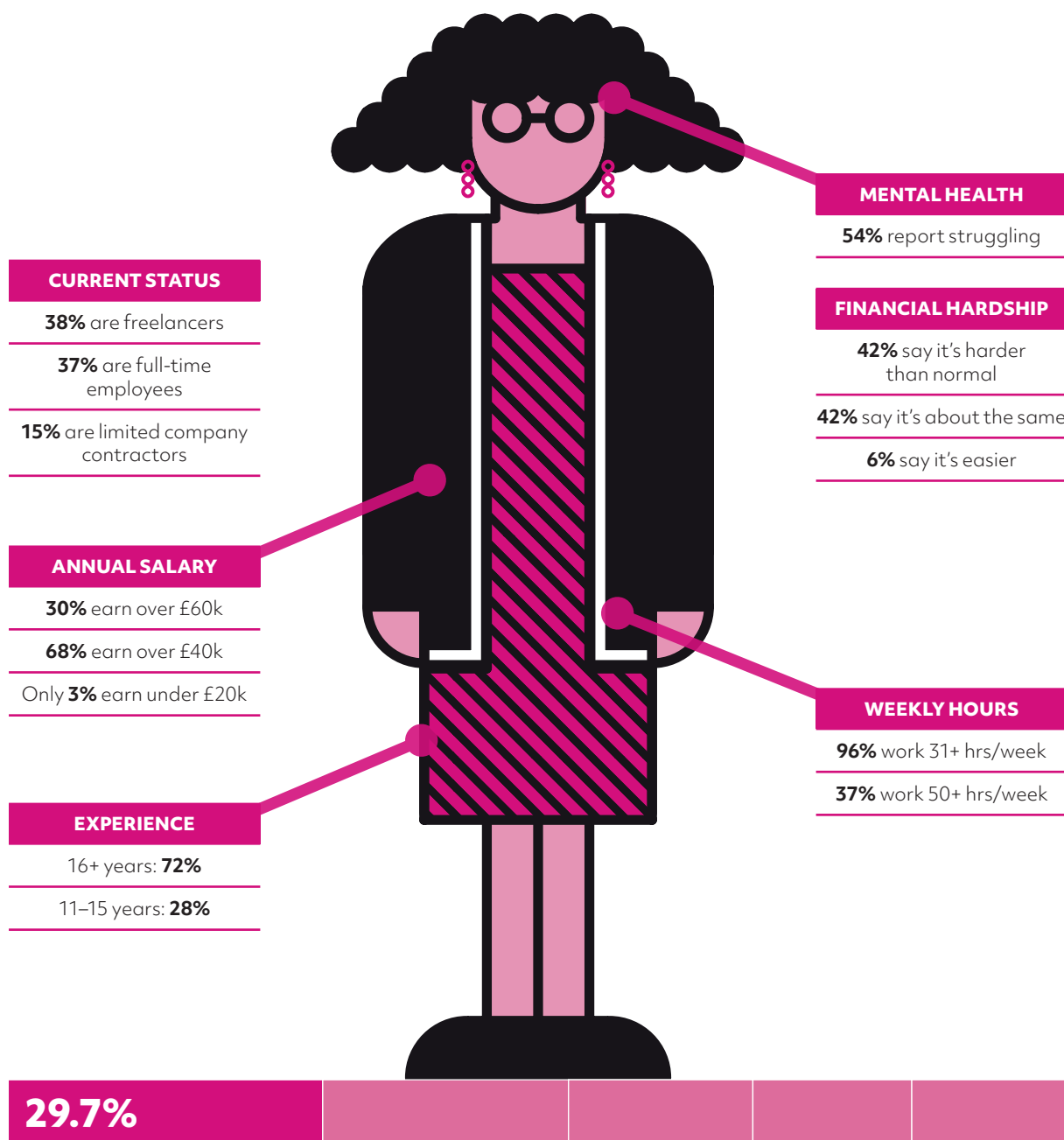
Figure 2

Distribution of creative worker profiles

TO NEAREST 0.1%

- A. Established Professionals, **29.7%**
- B. Overworked Insecure Creatives, **23.2%**
- C. Burnt-Out Mid-Career Creatives, **17.4%**
- D. Dry-Spell High Earners, **15%**
- E. Struggling Freelancers, **14.7%**





A. Established Professionals

Long-established creative industry professionals working behind the scenes in production, technical or design roles, mostly in London and the South East (67%). With large proportions of this group working in theatre, broadcasting, film and TV drama, and factual/unscripted, they are highly experienced and mostly earn a good wage for what they do, though long hours remain a significant issue. They are mostly freelancers or limited company contractors, and though many report common wellbeing pressures, this is well below the average.

This group likely includes heads of departments or senior creatives with long tenures in the industry. Their security stems from experience and high income, but ongoing work demands pose challenges. One in five (19%) of this group are aged over 65, though as many have spent their careers as freelancers or selfemployed workers, just 27% report having a pension.



21.6%



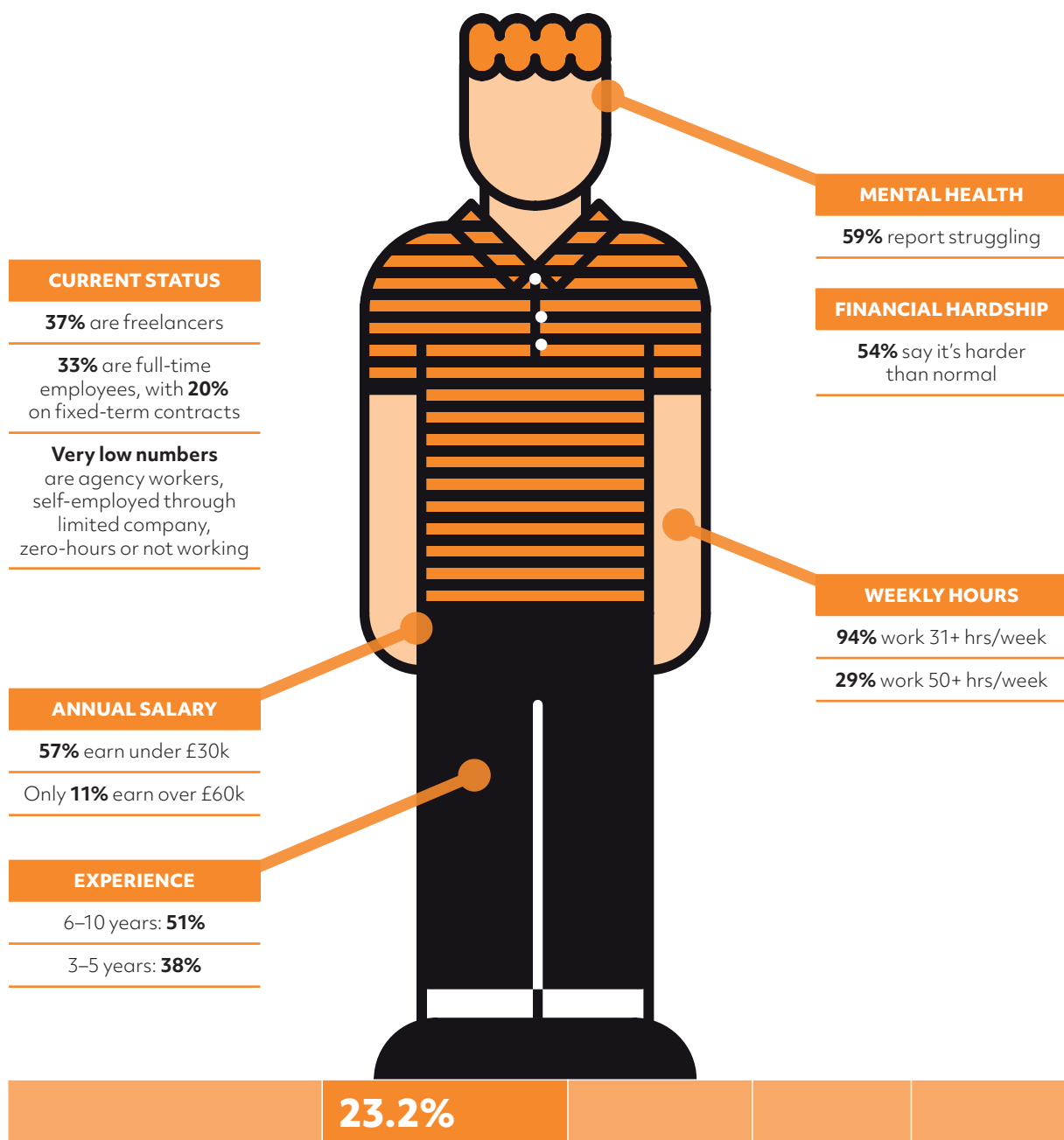
14.6%



14.6%



7.3%



B. Overworked Insecure Creatives

These workers are putting in long hours – especially in the screen industries – but face low income and precarious conditions. Most are based outside of London (61%) with 11% in Scotland, 10% in the North West and 7% in Wales. Many are freelancers or on fixed-term contracts, working more than 50 hours/week but earning under £30k. Despite this group containing many employees, they are least likely of all the groups to say they have a pension (just 16% say

they do), while reflecting their low earnings, only 24% say that they have savings.

These are seasoned creatives – often in high-responsibility roles – doing everything they can to stay afloat. But long hours and low pay are wearing thin, and the sustainability of their careers is in question. One in five (20%) see themselves leaving the creative industries in the next five years.



18.3%



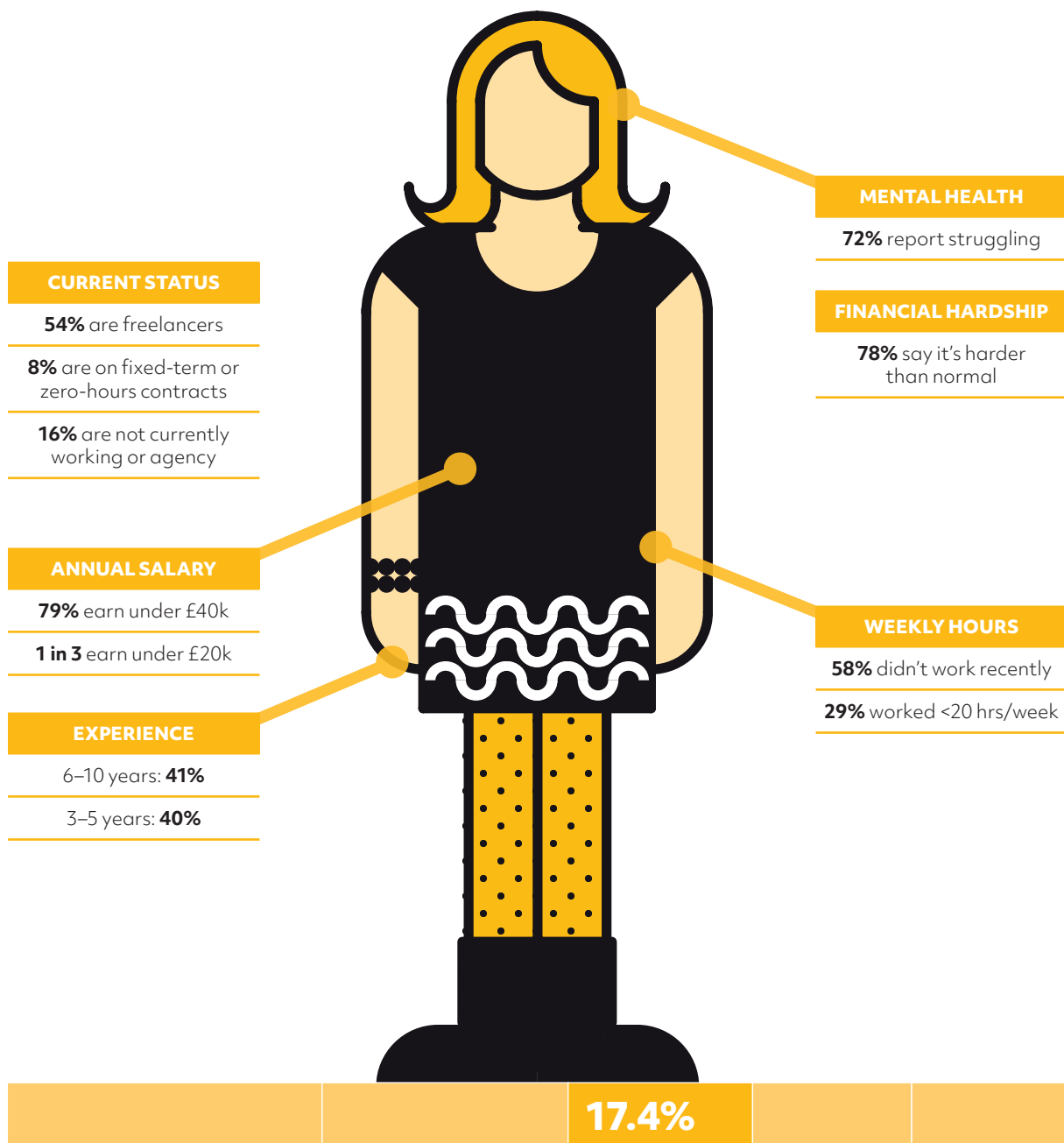
17.4%



9.2%



7.3%



C. Burnt-Out Mid-Career Creatives

This group is made up of mid-career creatives with 3–10 years' experience, working primarily in unscripted television, TV drama and film. This group also includes the highest proportion of fashion professionals, a sector known for high competition and unstable pay. They report low hours, low income, and high levels of burnout. Most are freelancers, with a notable share not working at all. This group are most likely to say that they think they will leave the creative industries in the next five years (48%) as the financial strain and mental health

struggles they face make a future in the creative sector seem untenable.

These are working creatives who may have climbed a few rungs of the ladder but have now stalled. Burnout, inconsistent jobs, and industry volatility all intersect here, affecting both income and wellbeing. This group is concentrated in London and the South East (63%), which reflects their struggles with high costs of living and housing, and has the highest proportion of parents (42%) of all the groups.



22.7%



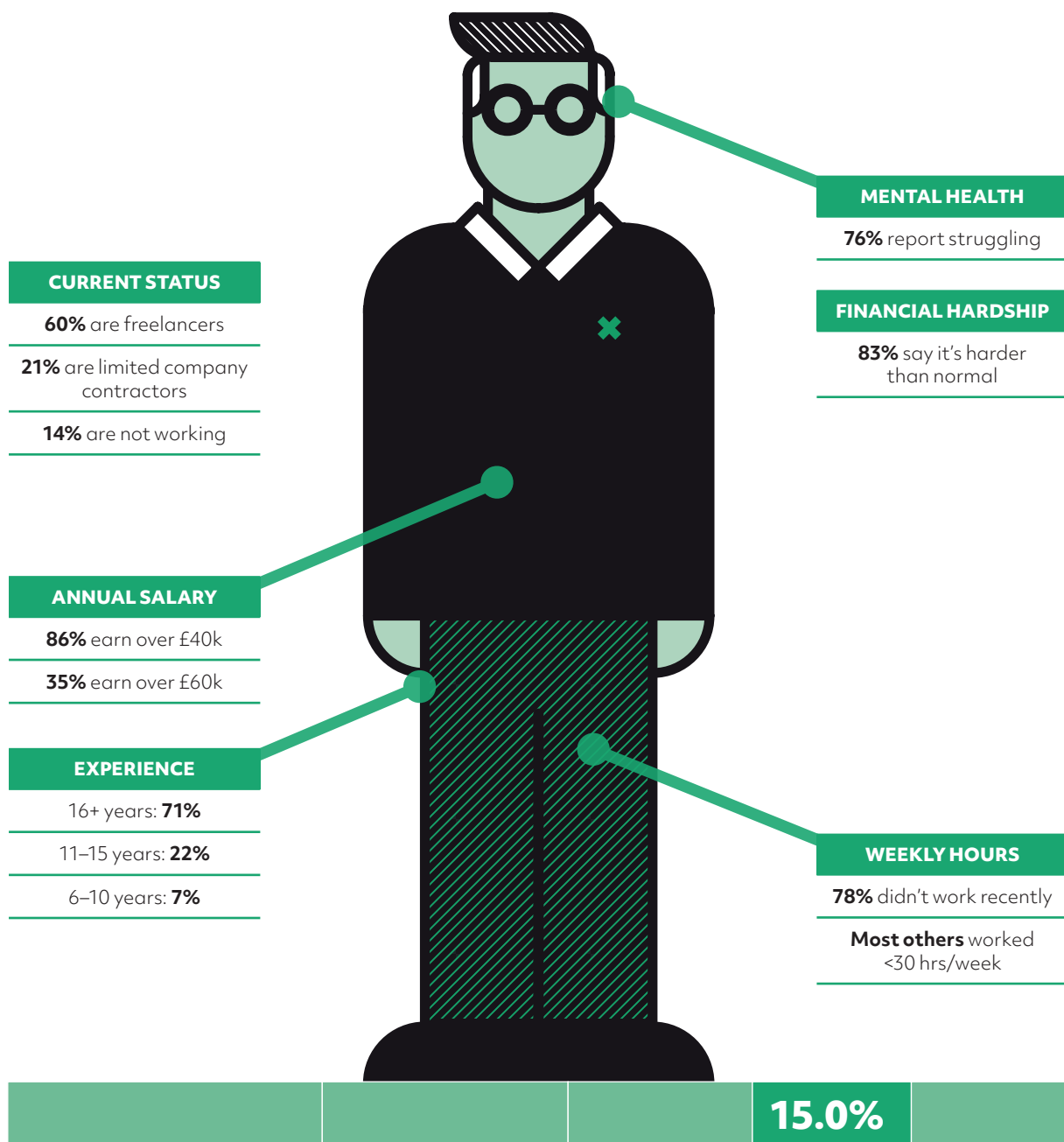
19.5%



15.8%



10.3%



D. Dry-Spell High Earners

Historically high-earning, experienced freelancers or limited company contractors, mostly working in the screen industries, who've recently been hit by long dry spells in work as a result of the crisis in commissioning slowdown. Concentrated in film, TV drama, unscripted, and commercials, they have ridden the feast and famine nature of the industry, but as the slowdown has dragged on are now really struggling, with limited work and high mental stress. More than three quarters (76%) report feeling insecure in their work.

Most likely to be men (57%) based in London and the South East (54%), the North West (8%) and Scotland (8%), reflecting their concentration in the screen industries. A higher proportion than most other groups (37%) are parents. Despite their

difficulties, most still want to remain in the creative industries over the next five years (76%).

This group may include line producers, senior editors, or creative leads who've weathered years in the industry, but recent gaps in work have revealed their vulnerability, despite historically high earnings. 62% do not report having savings – most have used any existing savings to support themselves through an unexpectedly long period without work – and as almost all of this group operate as self-employed or freelance, just 32% report having a pension.



23.2%



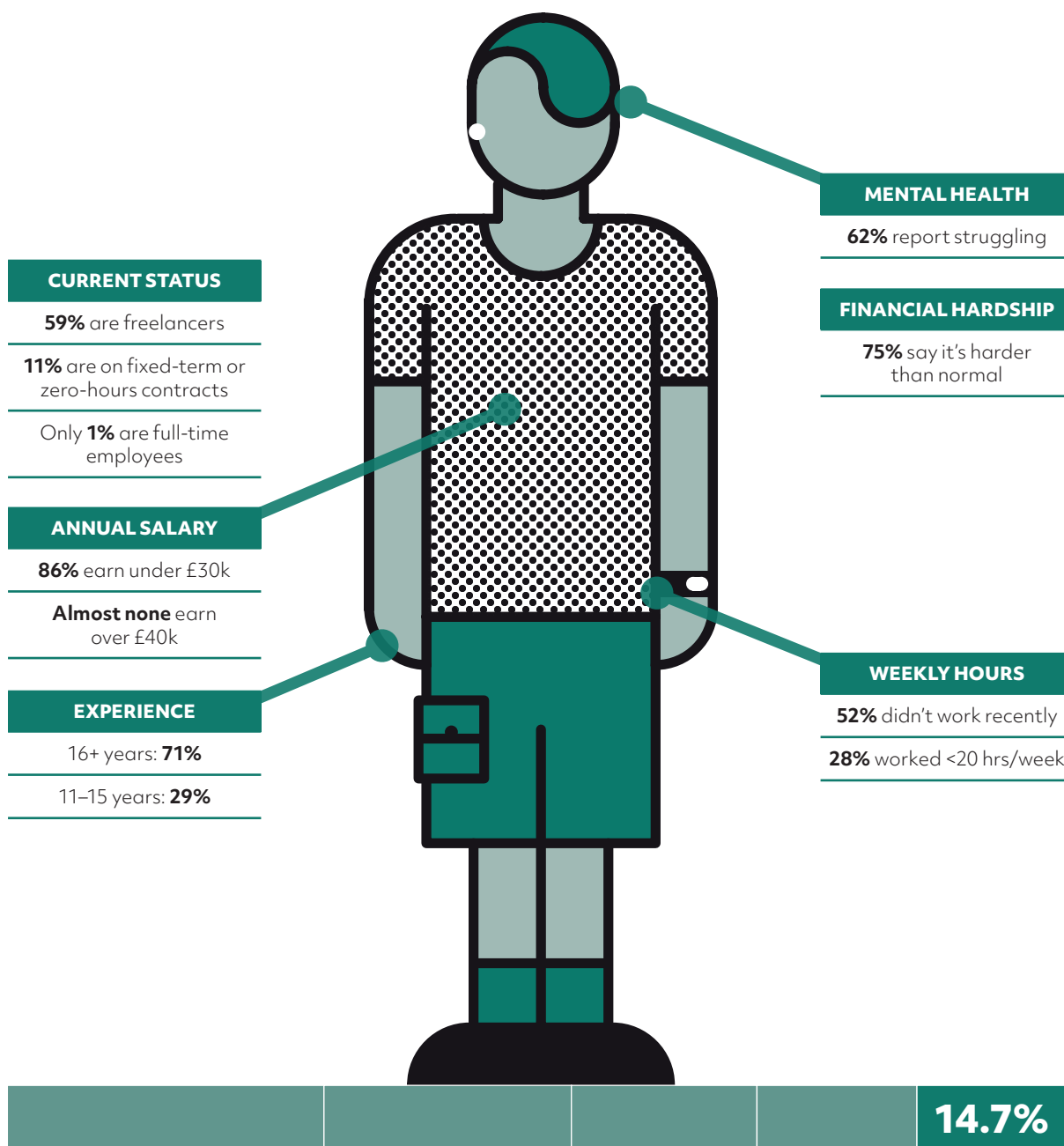
20.8%



8.0%



7.8%



E. Struggling Freelancers

These are some of the most economically vulnerable professionals in the sample, with 80% reporting that they do not feel secure in their work. Despite long experience, they often work very few hours and earn the least. They're primarily freelancers or fixed-term staff, and frequently not working at all. Just 18% have a pension and just under a third (31%) report having savings. The majority face both financial and mental health strains. Many have been hit by the slowdown in commissioning across the screen industries, but this group also contains a significant number of theatre and live events workers.

They are generally younger (46% are under 35) and are more likely to be women (49%) or non-binary (5%). This group are more likely to be spread across the UK than to be in London (42%) and may include freelance production assistants or administrative staff whose roles are heavily affected by job instability, cancellation or downtime – showing how experience doesn't always shield against precarity. Around a third of this group (30%) see themselves leaving the creative industries in the next five years.



21.6%



14.6%



14.5%



11.3%

working in the creative industries

Creative work in the UK remains a vital and dynamic force, underpinning industries that contribute not only to the economy but also to cultural life, community identity, and global influence.

The BFI's Research and Statistics Unit³ estimates that film and high-end TV production spend in the UK was £5.6 billion in 2024, a 31% increase on 2023 as parts of the sector regained momentum, generating billions to the UK economy. The UK theatre sector generated £4.44 billion in turnover in 2024, sustaining over 230,000 jobs nationally, with a staggering 17.1 million theatregoers attending West End productions.⁴

The UK has one of the most highly skilled and versatile workforces in the industry, creating some of the world's most popular programmes,

shows and events, often commissioned and streamed by our world-leading public service broadcasters, who act as large skills incubators within the ecosystem. It is the skill and dedication of the creative industries workforce that underpins the UK's success as a global player in film and television production, the arts and live performance.

As the creative sectors have navigated post-pandemic recovery, technological disruption, and shifts in funding and employment models, workers have faced growing uncertainty about their futures, yet have continued to demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and innovation. But poor working conditions, long hours and low pay, and a reliance on freelancers who hold few employment rights and are forced

to move from job to job with little security and no safety net, means the industry is built on precarity.

In our survey, 30% of all creative industry workers were not currently working. And almost a third of all creative industry workers plan to leave the creative sector in five years' time **(Figure 3)**. This figure is highest among freelancers (31% compared to 22% of full-time employees), and those from a working-class background (31% compared to 26% who are not).

The impact of the screen industries slowdown on the workforce is evident. A downturn in broadcasters' commissioning, due to financial constraints caused by a further squeeze on the BBC licence fee and a slump in advertising revenue coinciding with strikes in the US, has left thousands of screen industry workers without work for long periods.

In broadcasting, 34% see themselves leaving the creative industries over the next five years, while in unscripted and factual TV,

where in 2023, Bectu warned of a crisis in the workforce,⁵ around half of workers predict leaving the industry in the next five years.

Improving working conditions in the UK's creative sectors is not just a matter of fairness but is essential to the long-term health, diversity, and sustainability of the industry. Behind the UK's global cultural success lies a workforce that is too often underpaid, undervalued, and overextended. Persistent issues such as insecure contracts, long hours, lack of access to training, and poor mental health support drive talented individuals out of the sector, disproportionately affecting those from marginalised backgrounds.

Without meaningful reform, the creative industries risk becoming inaccessible to all but the most privileged. Ensuring decent working conditions is fundamental to nurturing creativity, retaining talent, and building an industry that reflects and serves the richness of UK society.

Insecurity

Job insecurity is a defining feature of employment in the UK's creative industries. Just one in five creative industry workers (20%) report feeling secure in their job, and this drops to just 13% among freelancers. The instability is not limited to future planning; it is a daily reality for many.

More than half (55%) of creative industry workers have experienced a job being cancelled at short notice in the past year, undermining their ability to earn a reliable income and plan ahead. A further 43% said they

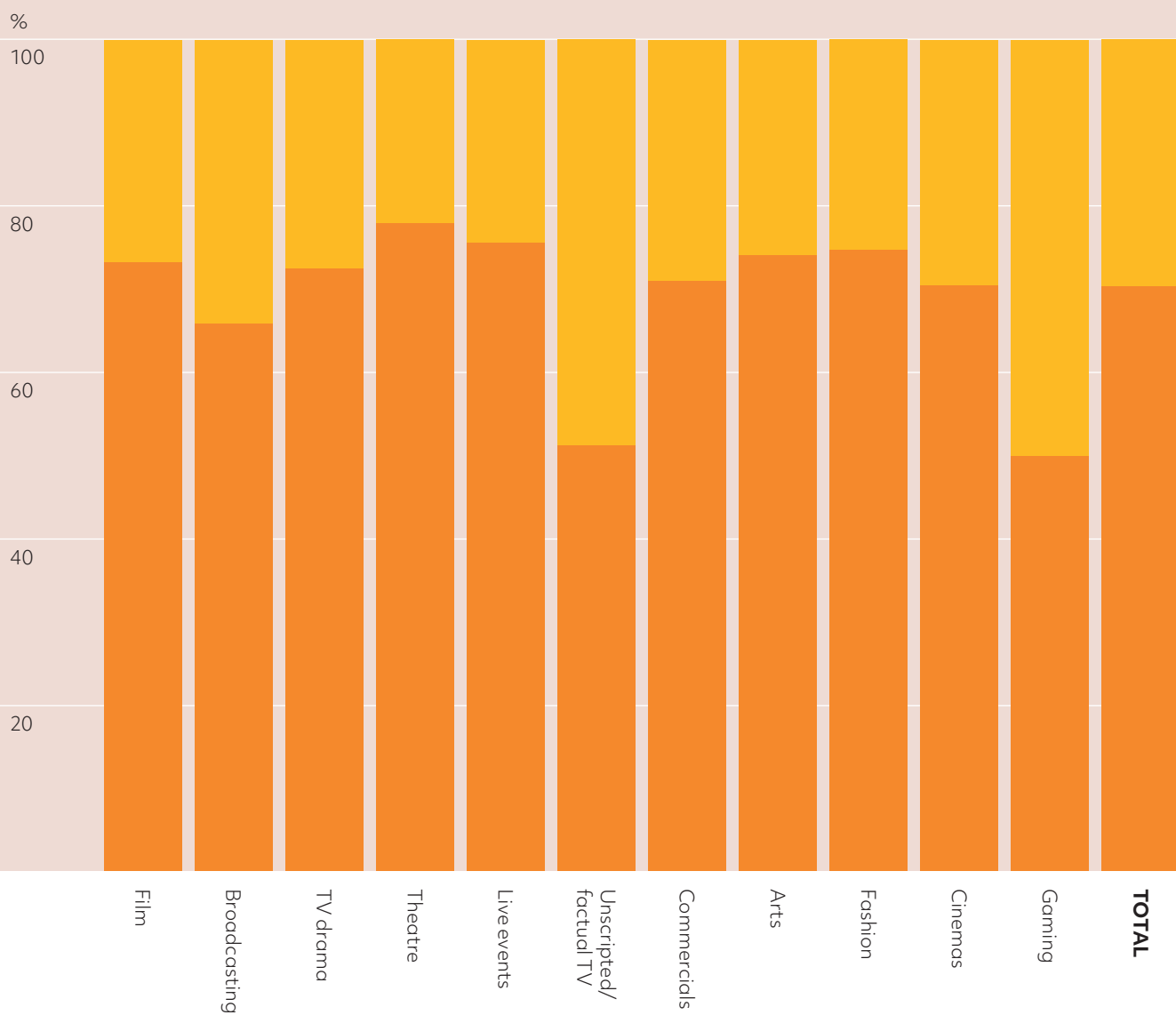
had started working without a formal booking confirmation, leaving them vulnerable to non-payment and last-minute changes.

This precarity is compounded by a lack of recognition. Over a third (37%) of creative industry workers say they do not feel valued by their employer or engager for the work they do. Together, these figures point to a systemic issue of undervaluation and instability that threatens the long-term sustainability of creative industry careers.

Figure 3

Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

- Still working in the creative industries
- Working in another industry



Pay and affordability

The 2023 Good Work Review found that a quarter of workers in the creative industries were looking for another job because they are unhappy with their pay (25% compared to 20% across all industries).

Indeed, despite the creative industries acting as an engine of growth for the economy as a whole, low pay is an issue for many workers in the sector. Bectu research from 2022 found that average earnings for freelancers in the theatre industry are 17.5% below the UK national average salary. The Film and TV Charity's 2023 Money Matters report highlights significant financial challenges faced by professionals in the UK film and television industry. According to the report, nearly half (45%) of respondents found it difficult to manage financially, with 42% having less than £1,000 in savings and 27% possessing no savings at all.

Our findings mirror these findings and reveal stark levels of low income among creative industry workers. Although there is a substantial group of high earners (29% earn over £50,000 a year from their creative work), many are on poverty wages. Over one in ten (11%) earn less than £10,000 per year before tax from their work in the creative industries, while a further 11% earn between £10,000 and £20,000. In total, 38% of all respondents earn less than £30,000 a year from creative work – well below the national median income. These figures underscore how deeply embedded low pay is across the creative industries.

Some sectors face especially acute issues of low pay (**Figure 4**). In film, despite higher proportions of higher earners than in many other sectors, 17% of workers earn under £10,000 annually from creative work; in fashion, the figure rises to 18%. More than half (55%) of theatre workers and 48% of those in live events earn under £30,000, despite the long hours and high skill levels these roles demand.

Low earnings are forcing creative industry workers – particularly freelancers and those in insecure work – to seek additional income outside

the sector. Two-thirds (66%) of all creative industry workers say they are currently struggling financially, with 22% finding things extremely difficult. Among those not currently in work, the picture is even more dire: 89% are experiencing financial difficulty, with 44% “really struggling”.

The correlation between income level and reliance on non-creative work is clear. Just 11% of those earning over £60,000 supplement their income with external work, compared to 34% of those earning £20,000–£30,000, 50% of those on £10,000–£20,000, and a striking 64% of those earning under £10,000. A third of all freelancers (33%) work outside the creative industries, rising to over half (53%) for those on zero-hours contracts.

For those starting out in the creative industries, the picture is bleak, as more than a third (34%) report earning under £10,000 a year from their creative work and 24% are earning £10,000–20,000 a year.

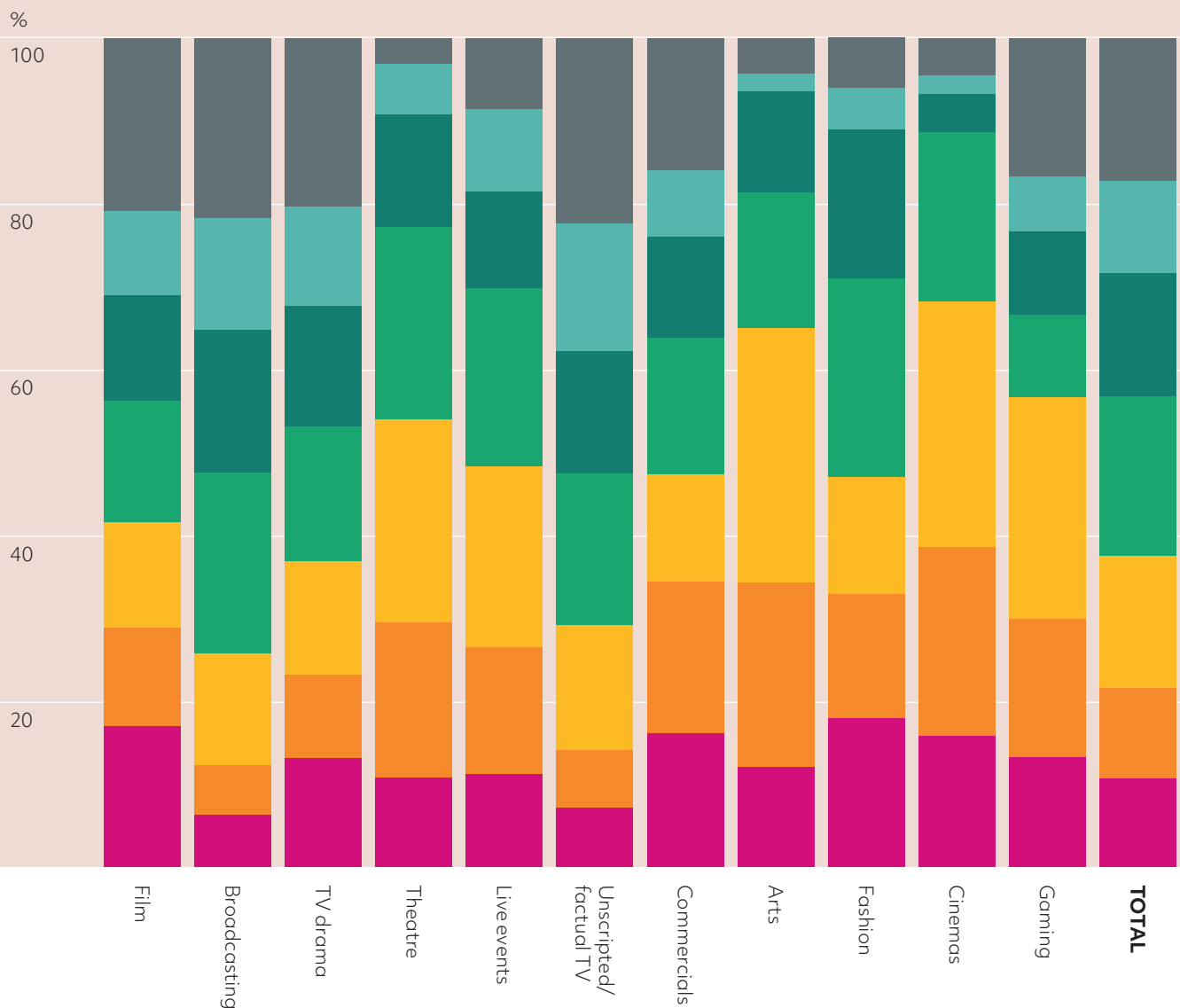
The impact of low and unstable income is visible in workers' ability to meet basic living costs. One in ten (9%) have been unable to pay their rent or mortgage in the past year, while 14% have fallen behind on household bills. Nearly one in ten have had to move back in with family due to the cost of living, and 4% have taken out unsecured loans to cover bills. Among those out of work, 22% have missed bill payments and 17% have struggled with housing costs.

In the past year alone, 9% of creative industry workers have applied for Universal Credit, 5% for Jobseeker's Allowance, and 4% have sought help from sector-specific hardship funds including the Film and TV Charity's benevolent fund and Bectu's benevolent fund. Alarming, 2% of all creative industry workers, and 3% of freelancers, have needed to use a foodbank.

With many struggling to make ends meet, a majority (85%) of low-income workers (those earning £10,000 or less a year from their creative work) feel their work is precarious, while only 14% feel confident about their future in the

Figure 4

Average annual income before tax



creative industries. 64% are already supplementing their income with work outside the creative industries.

Workers from working-class backgrounds face the sharpest consequences of these systemic challenges. 24% of workers from a working-class background earn under £20,000 a year from their creative work compared to 19% of those not from a working-class background. They are also more likely to be out of work, earn less, and rely on debt to stay afloat. Sixty-eight percent of working-class respondents say they are financially struggling, and 17% have taken out loans or unsecured debt to cover essential costs – compared with 11% of those not from working-class backgrounds. These disparities reveal the urgent need to address socioeconomic barriers that

prevent diverse voices from thriving in the creative industries.

Moreover, there is little pay transparency across the creative industries. This opacity particularly disadvantages freelancers and early-career professionals, who often lack access to reliable information about industry standards. Many told us that they were often booked for jobs without details of payment, and only 77% of contracts included details about payment terms.

While many in the creative industries are earning a comfortable living, there are too many creative industry workers without the financial security they need. Improving pay in the UK's creative industries requires a coordinated effort to address low wages, insecure contracts, and the undervaluing of creative labour.

Contracts

Contractual arrangements in the creative industries are highly varied, with a significant proportion of workers lacking formal or secure contracts.

Short-term contracts are the norm for many theatre workers; touring companies prefer to keep contracts less than two years to 'keep the show alive', while many theatre workers want flexibility, for example, those who are working to supplement their income from performing roles. Many roles, particularly in film, television, and live events, are contracted on a daily basis, commonly known as "dailies". These short-term contracts are typical for crew members such as camera operators, lighting technicians, production assistants, and stagehands, who are hired per day or per shoot rather than on longer-term agreements.

Others will have been employed in the same role on a seasonal basis, for example, those working in opera houses or at festivals, while others will operate as full-time employees for years under the same employer or for the length of a single production.

Among those with contracts, only 23% hold permanent contracts, while others have fixed-term

agreements of varying lengths: 19% with set hours over 12 weeks, 9% with contracts lasting four to twelve weeks, 4% with contracts of one to four weeks, and 7% with contracts of one week or less. 21% reported having contracts without any set hours. And the informal nature of work means that 17% of creative industry workers reported having no contract for their current or most recent job.

Breaking this down by sector, the variety in contracting arrangements is clear. While 40% of theatre workers are contracted on a permanent basis, just 7% in film say the same. And contracts of a week or less are common in film (12%), commercials (12%) or TV drama (10%), but are much rarer in theatre (3%), arts (3%), live events (5%) or unscripted and factual TV (5%).

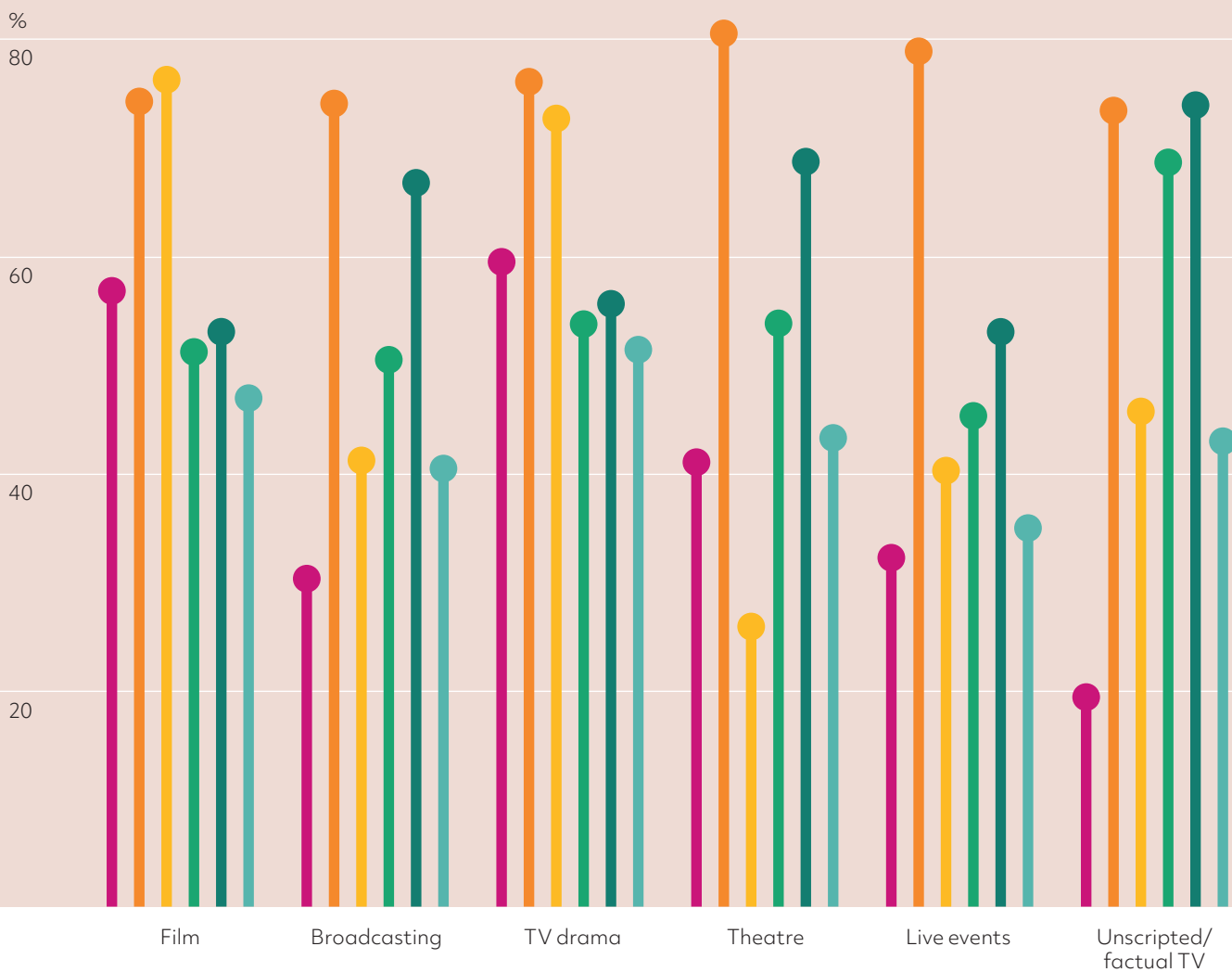
Freelancers face even greater precarity: 26% have no contract at all, and a similar proportion (26%) have contracts without set hours. Short-term contracts of one week or less affect 9% of freelancers, while others have contracts lasting between one and three months.

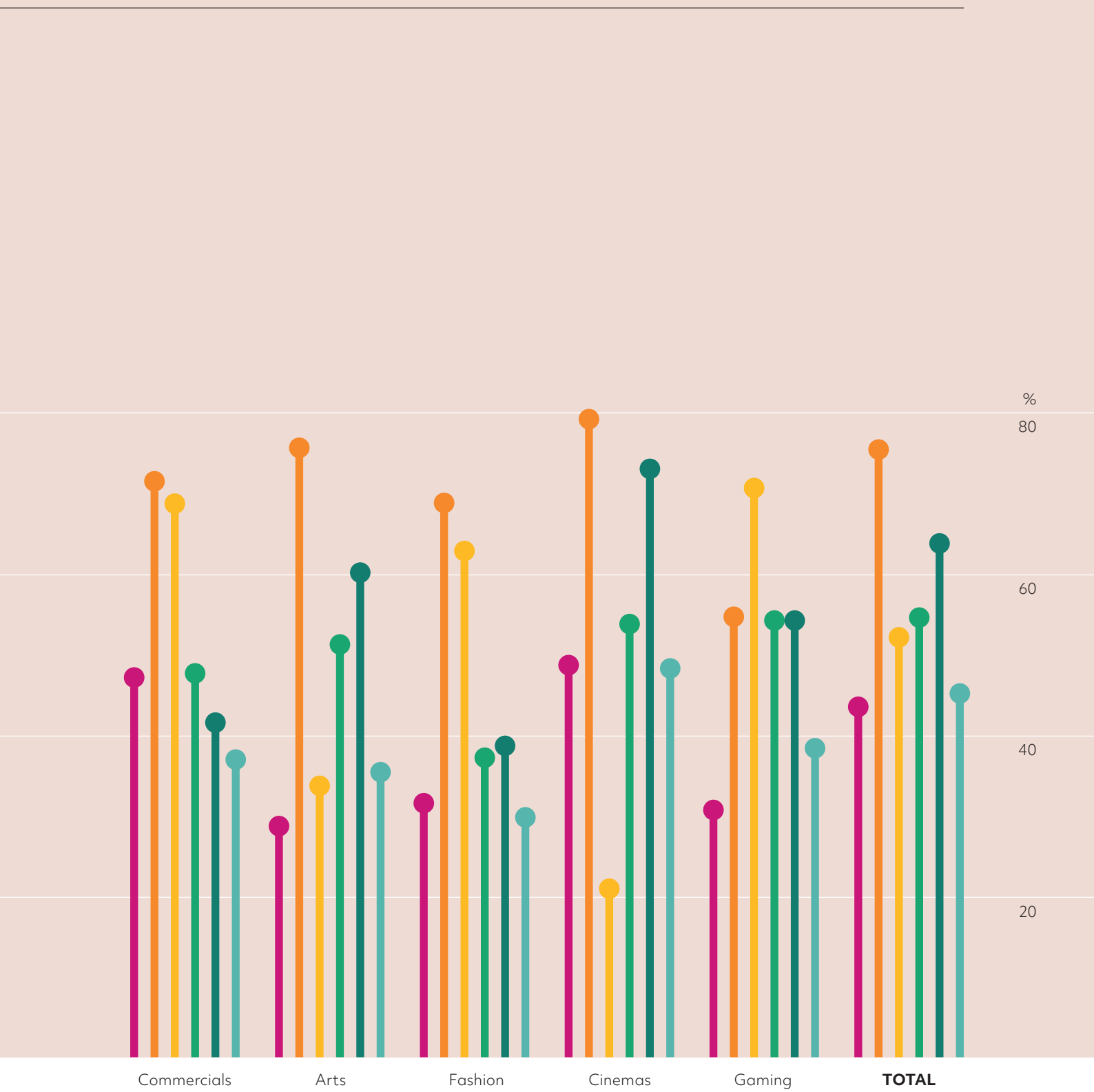
Even where they are in place, less than half of contracts adequately address important worker protections:

Figure 5 →

If you had a contract on your last job, did it contain any of the following?

- Non-disclosure agreement(s)
- Payment terms
- Details about overtime rights
- Indication of the process for reporting bullying and harassment
- Notice period
- Termination clause





only 45% include information about overtime rights. While there was little variation here between freelancers (43%) and full-time employees (47%), there were substantial differences between the sectors.

Notably, unscripted and factual TV workers were least likely to have overtime rights set out in their contracts (21%), three times less likely than those working in scripted TV drama (61%). Bectu is currently campaigning to establish an agreed set of terms to regulate working practices for unscripted freelancers in the same way that is currently in place for those working on TV dramas.

Furthermore, essential contract elements are often missing: 23% of contracts lack clear payment terms, 34% do not specify a notice period, and 44% omit a termination clause. These gaps in contractual clarity leave many creative industry workers vulnerable to unfair treatment and job insecurity.

We also find that the use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs)

is incredibly normalised; more than half of the creative industry workforce (53%) has signed an NDA as part of their contract. For employees, this applies to about a third (33%), while six in ten freelancers (59%) and more than eight in ten agency workers (83%) have signed NDAs.

While NDAs often serve a legitimate purpose, such as protecting sensitive content, intellectual property, or commercial confidentiality, they are increasingly seen as a barrier to transparency and accountability, particularly in employment relations. In some cases, NDAs have been used to discourage workers from speaking out about poor working conditions, bullying, harassment, or pay disputes. The widespread use of NDAs, reported in over half of creative industry workers' contracts, raises concerns about power imbalances, especially for freelancers and early-career workers who may feel unable to challenge unfair terms or practices for fear of breaching confidentiality clauses.

Long hours

The culture of long and irregular working hours is a longstanding and deeply embedded feature of the UK creative industries. Though this is often viewed as the price of passion, flexibility, or opportunity, it is also the result of a lack of employment rights possessed by freelancers and an informal culture that prohibits workers from challenging poor working practices.

While 30% of creative industry workers had not worked at all in the past seven days, reflecting the sector's volatile and freelance-driven employment model, those who did work often did so to excess.

Among all respondents, 17% reported working 41–50 hours in the past week, 12% worked 51–60 hours, and 7% exceeded 61 hours. Focusing only on those who had worked in the past week, over a quarter (27%) had breached the EU Working Time Directive by working more than 48 hours, an alarming figure that signals both a lack of regulation and an overreliance on individuals to self-manage extreme workloads.

The problem is even more stark when looking at the length of the working day. On average, creative industry workers reported a typical working day of more than 10 hours, with over one-third (34%) saying it was usual for them to work 12 hours or more. Roles in film and TV drama were particularly affected: 24% of those who had worked in the past week reported doing so for over 50 hours, while 14% said that on an average working day, they are not able to take a single break. Across the creative industries more broadly, 13% of workers said they typically received no breaks at all.

Less than a quarter of freelance workers reported a working day of nine hours or less, as 19% reported average days of 13 hours or more (**Figure 6**).

Research has consistently highlighted the risks associated with this “always-on” culture, both for individual wellbeing and the sustainability of the workforce. Long hours are associated with burnout, poor mental health, and increased

health and safety risks. Moreover, they can create significant barriers to entry and progression for anyone unable or unwilling to conform to an unsocial, high-pressure schedule, including those with disabilities and caring responsibilities.

The challenge that this places on creative industry workers to balance work with their personal life is clear. In our survey seven in ten creative industry workers (70%) said that their work has had a negative impact on their personal relationships. And for more than a third of creative industry workers (34%), their work has impacted their reproductive choices (e.g. choosing to have children).

Despite amplified conversations about inclusion, fairness and wellbeing, the normalisation of excessively long working hours remains a major structural problem across the creative industries. It is not simply a matter of poor time management or personal sacrifice, it is a systemic issue that demands sector-wide change, including stronger protections, more robust scheduling standards, and cultural shifts in what is considered acceptable and sustainable work.

In response to the widespread culture of long and unsocial working hours in film and scripted drama, Bectu Vision and Timewise conducted pioneering research in 2022 to assess whether a shorter working day could

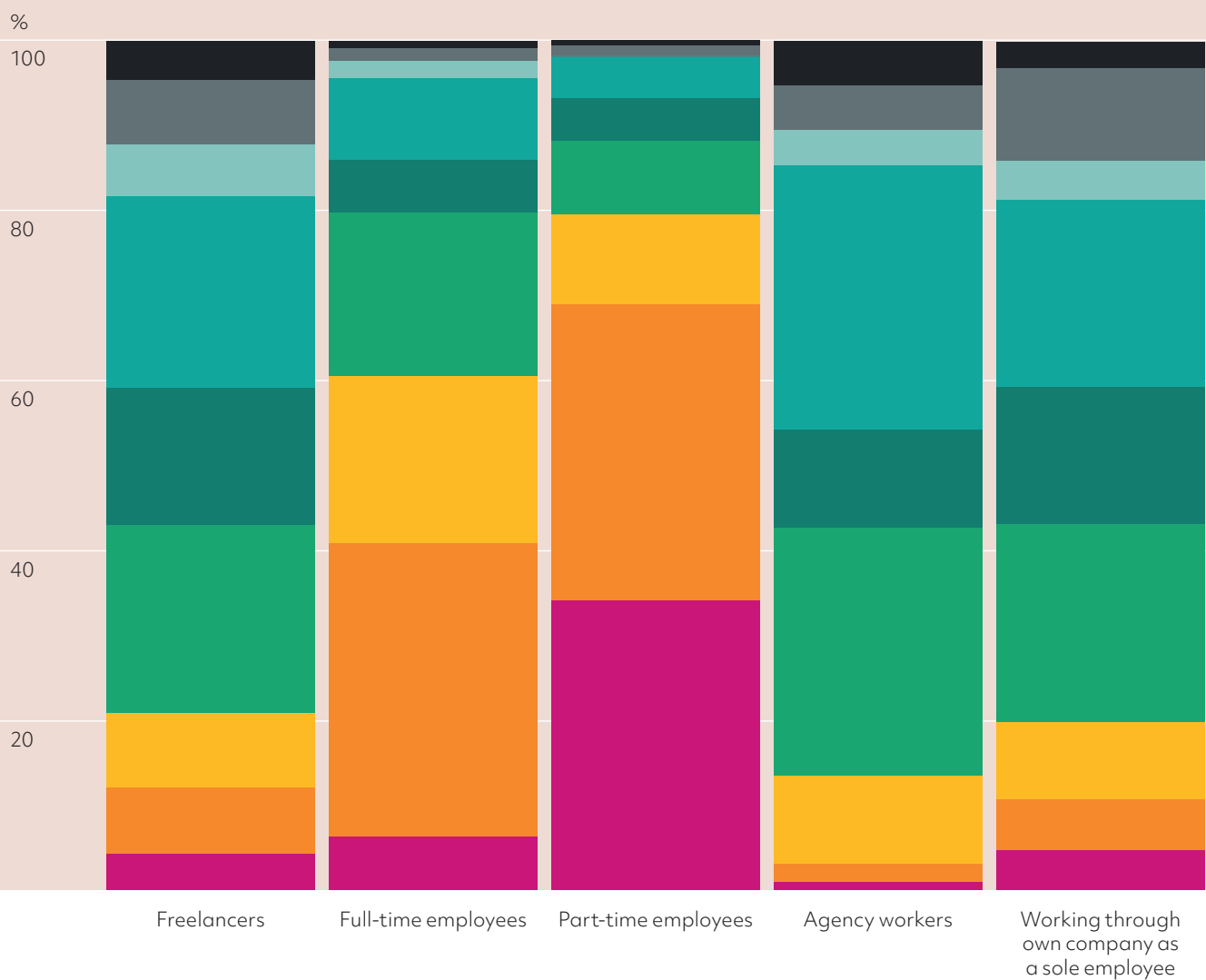
realistically be adopted in the UK. Building on input from a UK-wide survey of crew members and detailed action research with four active productions in Scotland, the study tested the viability of reducing the standard working pattern to 8-hour days over 5-day weeks, with overtime paid at time-and-a-half.⁶

The productions involved ranged from a continuous drama series to high-end television drama for a streaming platform, with crew sizes between 70 and 450. Across all case studies, the response from crew, cast, writers, directors, production teams, and commissioners was overwhelmingly positive, suggesting strong appetite for change across the board. The research team developed two alternative production schedule blueprints and created a detailed financial model for an 8-hour day. Their analysis found that adopting this approach would lead to a modest increase in production costs (around 4%) and extend shooting schedules by 12 to 19 days, depending on the scale and complexity of the project.

A shorter working day is feasible and desirable, but clearly there needs to be a greater culture shift across the industry. Nonetheless, reforming a culture of long hours, precarity and informality is critical to challenge the likely exodus of creative industry workers as set out in our research.

Figure 6

Hours in average working day



bectu recommends...



Right to a written contract for self-employed workers

Freelancers and self-employed creatives often enter working relationships without formal documentation, leaving them exposed to non-payment, last-minute cancellations, and unclear expectations. Mandating written contracts for all engagements, regardless of employment status, would bring baseline protections to this precarious workforce. This will only be viable if it can meet the needs of workers who across the creative industries are often engaged on irregular, short-term contracts. This is something the Government has pledged in its Plan to Make Work Pay, with changes expected from 2025 to 2027.

Reforming Universal Credit to allow for intermittent working

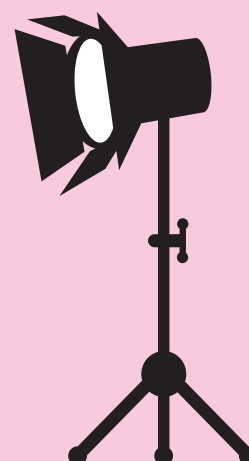
The creative industries rely on project-based work and variable incomes — a reality that Universal Credit (UC) fails to reflect. Current rules penalise short-term jobs or inconsistent earnings, making the system unworkable for many freelancers. Reforming UC to account for earnings averaged over longer periods, as well as removing the minimum income floor, would not resolve the wider issues that give way to this situation, but would enable precarious freelance workers to access the support they need, and should be able to access.

Shorter working days

Implementing shorter standard working days (such as a 10+1 structure) across TV and film production would support work-life balance and improve retention. This proposal builds on Bectu's long-standing campaign to curb excessive hours. While realising this demands a culture shift from broadcasters, commissioners and individual production companies, this could be delivered as part of wider reforms Labour could back through its proposed Fair Work Agency.

Ending last-minute job cancellations

Late cancellations are a growing issue in the freelance sector, leaving workers unpaid and unable to seek other work. Employers and engagers should be required to offer cancellation compensation and minimum notice periods. This would mirror protections offered to PAYE employees and should be a priority area for the Freelance Champion role announced by the Government in its sector plan for the creative industries.



spotlight

regional differences

Survey respondents came from across the UK, with the majority from London (49%) and the South East (9%), reflecting the London-centric nature of the creative industries (**Figure 7**).

There were many shared experiences from workers across the UK. However, there were some regional differences, especially regarding financial security.

In London and the North West respectively, 8% of workers earned under £10,000 a year from their creative work, while in the East Midlands (20%), South East (17%), South West (17%), Wales (17%) and Scotland (16%), the proportion was twice as high.

Meanwhile, in London (22%) and the South East (17%) there were far

more high earners (over £60,000 a year before tax) as in the other regions, including South West (13%), Wales (9%), Scotland (7%) and the West Midlands (9%).

Nonetheless, across the regions, there were significant numbers of workers struggling financially, and those in London (9%) and the South East (11%) were struggling most to pay their rent or mortgage, reflecting the high housing and living costs in and around the capital.

However, workers outside of London were generally more likely to be working a second job outside of the creative industries to support their income, especially in the East Midlands (48%), North East (43%) and South West (39%) (**Figure 8**).

Figure 7

Respondents by region

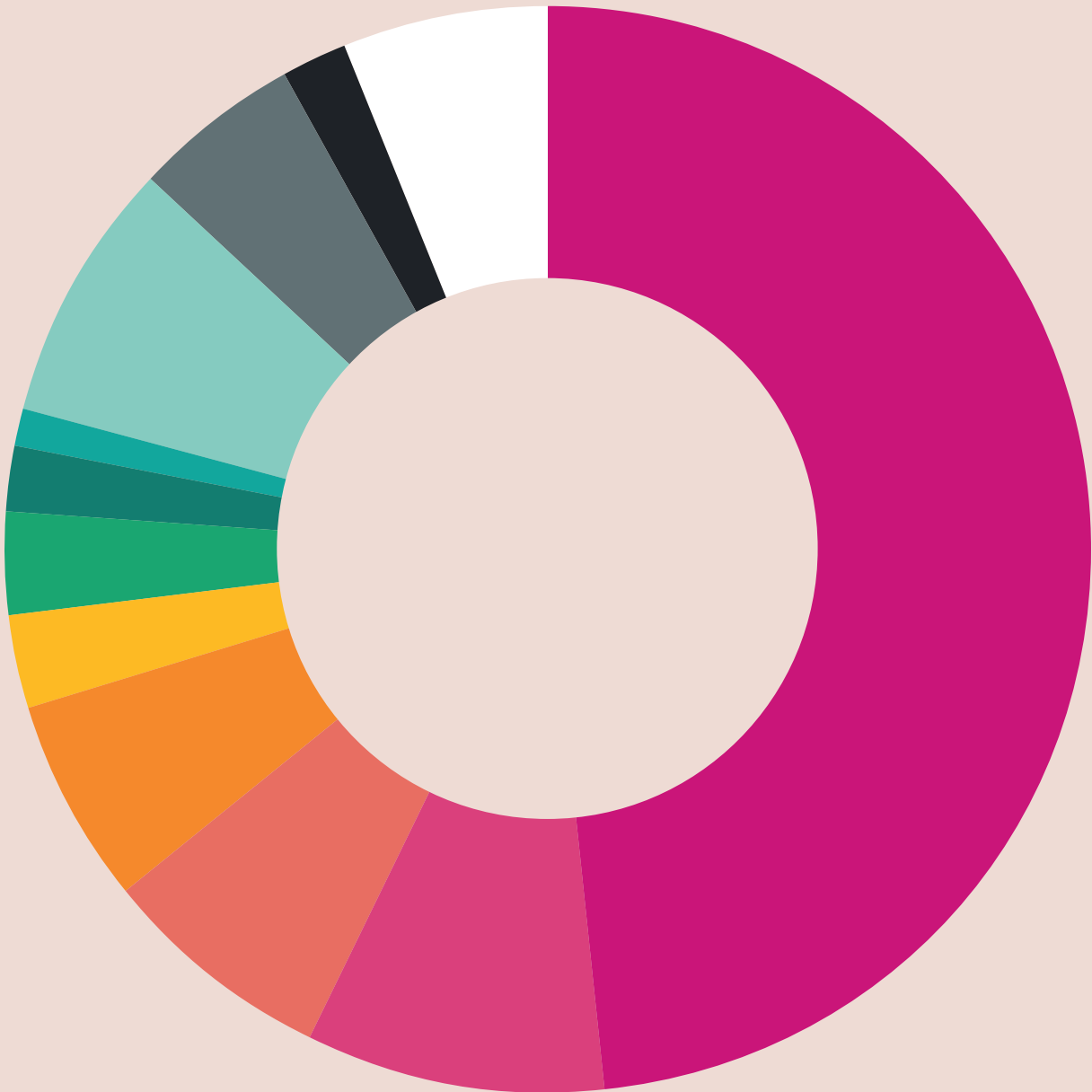
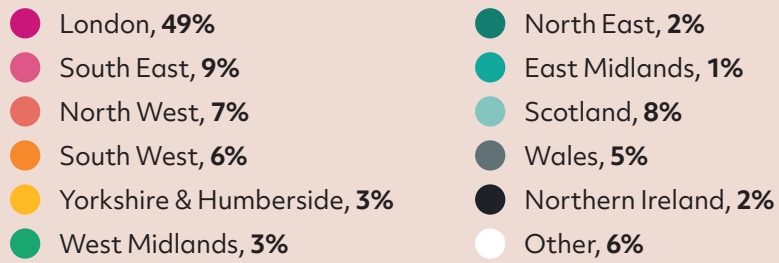
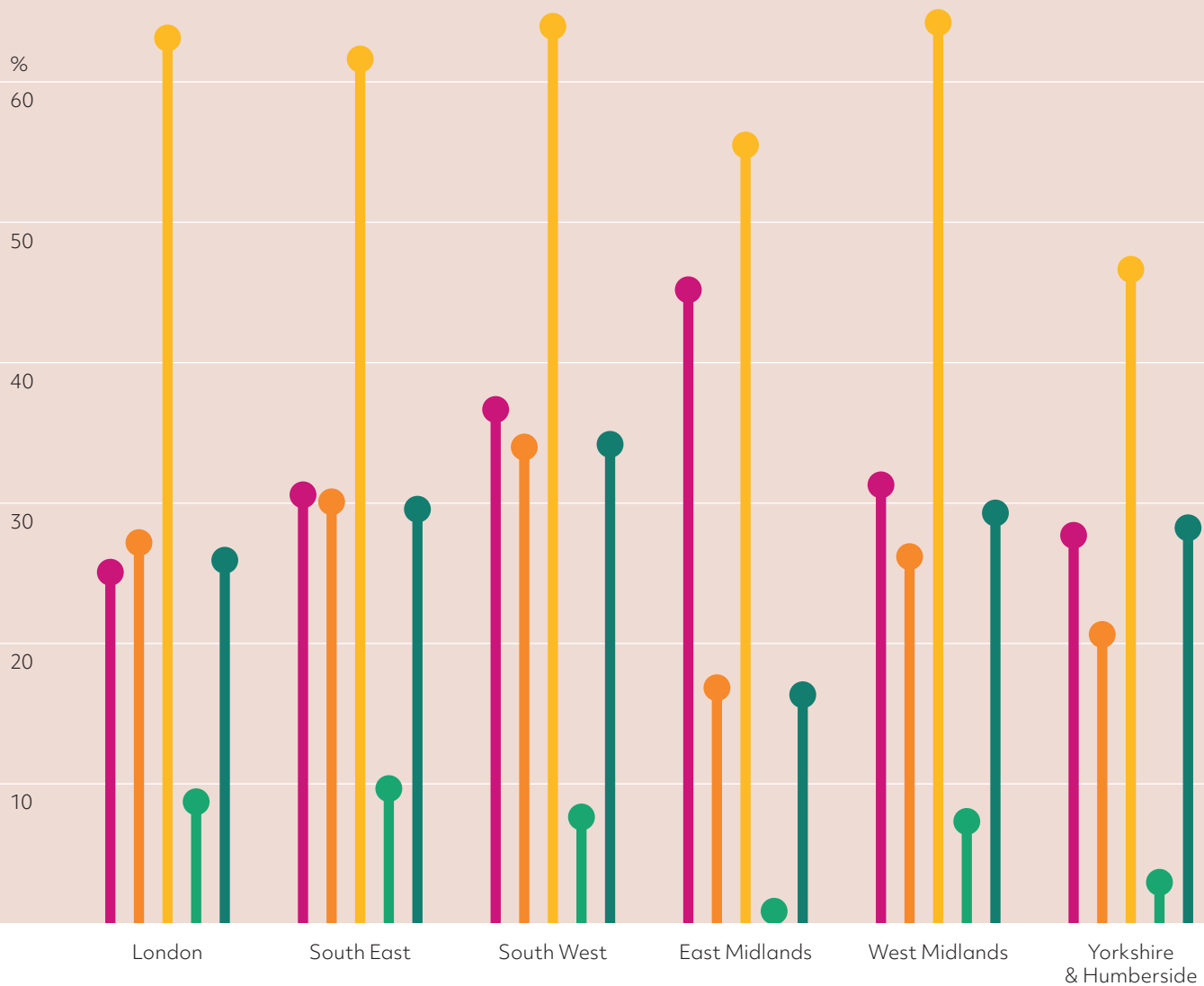
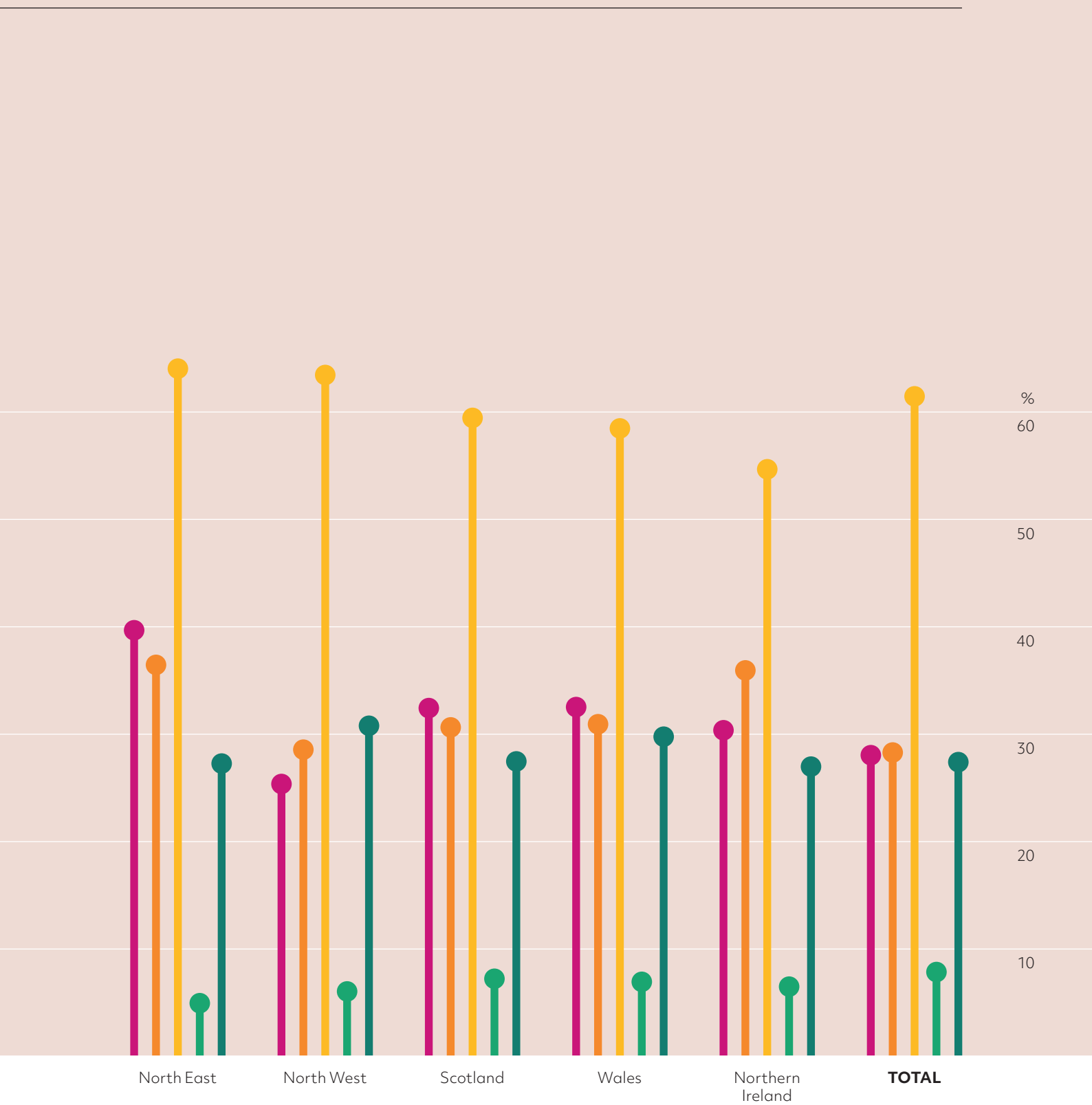


Figure 8 →

Financial pressures on creative industry workers, by region

- I supplement my income with a second job
- I am currently not working
- I am struggling financially at the moment
- I am unable to pay my rent or mortgage
- I see myself working in another industry in five years' time





the screen industries slowdown

the UK's screen industries, encompassing film, television, animation, and streaming, are a global success story, bringing billions to the economy and shaping culture at home and abroad. From independent cinema to high-end television drama, this sector showcases world-class creative talent and technical expertise. Yet for the many workers holding up the industry, the reality is instability, precarity, and intense pressure.

The screen industries have experienced a marked slowdown over the past few years following a boom in 2022, particularly in film and high-end television production. This has been driven by a combination of factors, including the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising production costs, commissioning pauses, and broader economic uncertainty.

In 2023, the situation was further compounded by the US writers' and actors' strikes, which disrupted global production schedules and led to delays and cancellations across the UK sector. Many major broadcasters and streaming platforms have since reined in their content pipelines, leading to fewer greenlit projects and longer gaps between commissions. This cooling of what had previously been an overheated production market has raised urgent questions about the sustainability of the industry's growth model and exposed the fragility of the ecosystem that supports it.

Our research has tracked the impact on the screen industry workforce over this time (**Figure 9**). There are still large numbers of screen industry workers out of work; 43% of all 3,453 screen industry workers surveyed

by Bectu between February and March 2025 said they were not currently working. This includes:

- 43% of those in film
- 45% of those in TV drama
- 46% of those in unscripted
- 45% of those working in commercials.

This is only a small reduction from July 2024, when Bectu research⁷ found more than half (52%) of the UK's film and TV workforce were out of work, and February 2024 when 68% of respondents said they were not working, only a small decrease from September 2023 (74%). 71% of those working in TV drama, 79% of those working in commercials and 78% of those working in film say that their employment was directly affected

by the 2023 US industrial disputes and industry slowdown.

Despite high proportions of people working in unscripted saying that they are out of work, only 43% of unscripted workers say that they were directly impacted by the 2023 US industrial disputes and industry slowdown, suggesting a bigger problem in commissioning.

Overall, only 16% of screen industry workers (film, TV drama, unscripted and commercials) have seen a full bounce back in their employment since the end of US industrial action in November 2023. Just 10% of those working in commercials, 11% of those working in unscripted, 17% of those working in film, and 17% of those working in film and TV drama say that they've seen a full recovery in their employment.

The impact on screen industry workers

The impact this is having on workers is profound (**Figure 10**). Seven in ten (70%) screen industry workers saying that they are struggling financially (27% are finding things extremely difficult and 43% more difficult than normal).

A third of screen industry workers (30%) told us that they have no savings which they might have been able to rely on. Indeed, just a quarter of screen industry workers (25%) said they would be able to maintain their current standard of living if they had no work for three months. With that now a reality for many, workers are struggling to stay afloat.

Almost one in five (16%) screen industry workers have been unable to pay their household bills in the past year. 12% have been unable to cover their housing costs, with one in ten (10%) moving back in with family as a result.

More than a third (35%) of screen industry workers earn under £30,000 a year, before tax, from their work in the creative industries. And 31% supplement their income with work outside of the creative industries.

11% of screen industry workers have applied for Universal Credit, while 17% report having taken out a loan or other unsecured debt to cover household costs.

The slowdown is also taking a toll on workers' wellbeing, with 65% reporting poor mental wellbeing and 61% reporting anxiety or depression over the past 12 months. One in five screen industry workers are really struggling with their mental wellbeing, while 46% are somewhat struggling. This crisis poses an existential threat to the highly skilled workforce who hold up the UK's £125 billion creative industries.

A third (33%) of screen industry workers now see themselves leaving the industry all together in the next five years. This is a marked increase in the number of people who are planning to leave the industry within the next five years – from 24% in September 2023, as the long-term impact of the slowdown has taken hold.

The ebb and flow in work is clearly unsustainable, with only 13% of screen industry workers saying that they feel secure in their job.

Figure 9

Screen industry workforce over 18 months

SCREEN INDUSTRY WORKERS, N=3,453

- In work
- Out of work

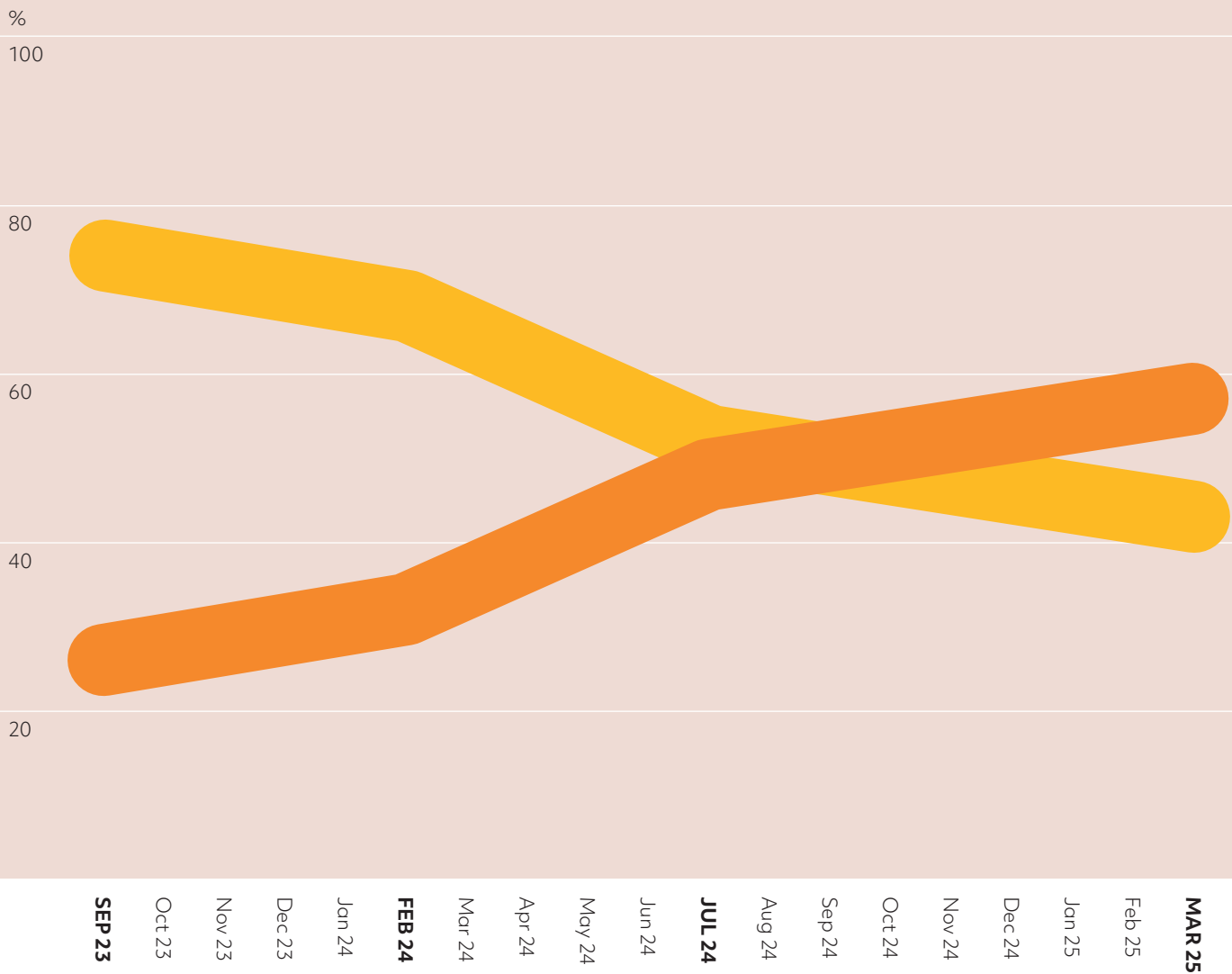


Figure 10

Based on your experiences over the past 12 months, which of the following apply to you?

SCREEN INDUSTRY WORKERS, N=3,453

- I've used a foodbank, **2.0%**
- I've applied for financial support (eg the union's Benevolent Fund or Film and TV Charity grant), **4.82%**
- I've applied for Jobseeker's Allowance, **6.39%**
- I've moved back in with parents or other family, **9.95%**
- I've applied for Universal Credit, **10.86%**
- I've been unable to pay my rent or mortgage, **11.98%**
- I've been unable to pay all my household bills, **16.17%**
- I've had to take out a loan or other unsecured debt to pay bills, **16.31%**
- I've felt anxious or depressed, **60.89%**

%

30

25

20

15

10

5



Poor working conditions worsening

In the context of the screen industries slowdown crisis, with more facing famine than feast, respondents told us that poor employment and engagement practices were becoming more widespread, while workers are feeling less able to speak up and challenge poor practice:

“It’s a bad time to be a freelance film/TV creative...it looks like an industry in crisis is now in a death spiral. Companies are in a race to the bottom as budgets are continuously squeezed and it’s those on the coalface – the freelancers – who deal with the result of that, yet are often exploited by employers.”

“It’s feast or famine. At the moment rates are sliding because of the lack of commissions.”

“I’m losing sleep a lot of the time as I wake up panicking about my future, especially since companies wait until the last second to either confirm or reject if you’ll be working with them. I’m incredibly stressed all of the time and there is often the vague threat that if I don’t just accept poor pay I won’t be able to work with them.”

“It’s been dire and companies and employers have exploited that in the last year, often letting you go when convenient to them without a head’s up and paying you when convenient to them. If you don’t come from a rich background, it’s extremely hard to survive in this industry.”

And this in turn is having an impact on industry diversity, with global majority respondents, those with disabilities, older workers and working-class respondents all faring worse than their white, middle-aged, able-bodied, male counterparts.

“As a seasoned professional of 20 years I’m now considering retraining in another sector due to the bleak

picture of creative industries here. I will add that as a woman and a mother my ability to take on the hours and inflexible work that the industry demands is much more limited. I notice many women in this industry are basically forced out once they have children. It’s a huge loss of skills and experience and it’s not getting better.”

“Especially in the film industry, it’s connections you have with people who are in positions to employ you... I still see discrimination.”

This is reflected in the number of screen industry workers currently out of work **(Figure 11)**:

- 45% of working-class respondents are currently out of work compared to 41% of respondents who do not consider themselves to be from a working-class background.
- 49% of disabled workers are currently out of work in the screen industries, compared to 42% of able-bodied workers.
- Global majority respondents are also less likely to be in work than their white counterparts; 58% of Asian/Asian British respondents said they were not working, compared with 44% of white British respondents.

And there is a significant gap between younger and older workers, with 65% of 25–34-year-olds currently in work compared with 48% of 55–64-year-olds. This would suggest older workers are being squeezed out of the job market as work has become more scarce.

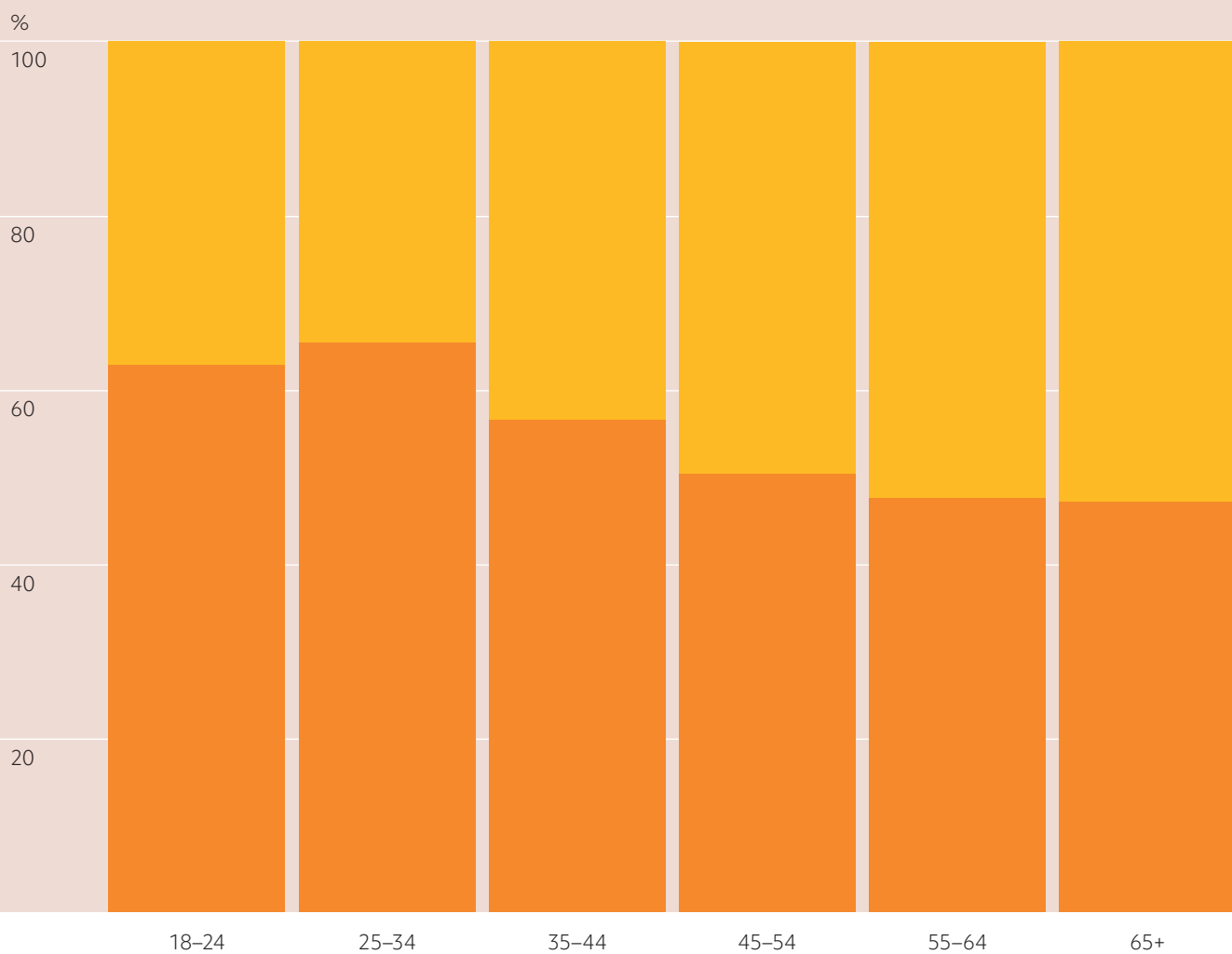
The ‘feast or famine’ nature of the industry – whereby there may be an overabundance of work one minute, and none the next – is not just an incredibly challenging environment to work in but is creating the conditions for exclusion. The screen industries must come together not just to address the current crisis, but to commit to long-term change.

Figure 11

Are you currently working?

SCREEN INDUSTRY WORKERS, N=3,453

- Yes
- No



bectu recommends...



Holding the Industrial Strategy to account

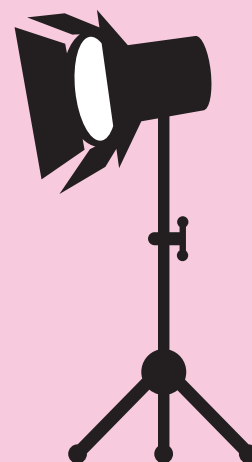
While the Government's Industrial Strategy pledges a boost to TV and film production, there must be accountability to ensure that this boost is benefiting the screen industries workforce who have had to face the tough realities of the commissioning slowdown. Broadcasters, commissioners, producers, unions and industry bodies must work together to hold government to account. Progress should be transparent, measurable, and assessed not only by output, but by the quality of work and conditions for those who power the industry.

Investing in skills and training

To ensure that valuable skills are not lost during downturns in commissioning, commissioners and broadcasters must make skills development a commissioning requirement, particularly for public service broadcasting and publicly funded projects. Additionally, they should invest in training schemes during downtimes to help crew and creatives upskill or retrain for emerging roles.

Develop a greater understanding of the impact of the slowdown on industry diversity, including on older workers

Recent slowdowns in TV and film commissioning have disproportionately impacted underrepresented freelancers, particularly older workers, disabled people, and people of colour. Broadcasters and commissioners must come together to collect and publish disaggregated data to identify where progress on inclusion is at risk, and to put protections in place.





“

I've worked in some very toxic organisations. There's a lot of pressure to brush over things that aren't safe, or work silly hours or always say yes, even if I'm really uncomfortable with what I'm being asked to do.

”



spotlight

disabled workers

N=1,068

the informal nature of hiring practices in the UK's creative industries presents particular challenges for workers who have a disability. As highlighted in our research, very few employers or engagers ask about access needs in the hiring process, while a lack of formal HR structures presents additional barriers to disclosing specific needs or requesting reasonable adjustments.

Almost half of disabled workers (45%) concealed information about a life commitment, situation, or diagnosis when applying for roles in the past 18 months.

Freelancers are especially at risk of not being able to voice their needs, with the precarity of freelance work meaning most do not feel comfortable raising additional needs so as to not face repercussions.

“I’m a disabled person, often I’m not hired for a role even though I have more experience and ability than the non-disabled person that is hired over me. As a disabled person in the camera crew, I’m often not the first choice of the DOP/Producer [who] will 90% of the time hire a non-disabled person over me. Production companies often say they want diversity until they find out they have to pay for it or it turns out to be too much of a problem for them.”

“I try not to use my wheelchair at work because it would be impossible to work costume in a wheelchair. I have been repeatedly told this was too much to ask and could not be accommodated. I was turned away and ghosted after interviews where I mentioned this disability so now I conceal it until I can’t anymore.”

“I am freelance and was asked by the Series Producer on a well-known show and well-known production company, to remove myself from the editing contract, on which I was booked for three months, when I discovered after the first week of employment a lump on my neck. During the medical investigations for potential neck cancer I was told by the Series Producer ‘I’m going to have to be ruthless and ask you to step off the show.’”

“People with disabilities are taken advantage of with unpaid ‘training initiatives’ that lead them down a rabbit hole which never results in being able to progress in the industry.”

We asked disabled workers (n=1,068) when they disclose their disability in the hiring process. Worryingly, 38% of all disabled respondents said that they would not disclose their disability to their employer or engager. 14% would disclose on applying, 11% at the interview stage, 13% only once they were given a job offer, and 24% at another point (**Figure 12**).

Reflecting an inability to disclose access and adjustment needs, just 36% of disabled workers said that they feel fully supported by their employer or engager. Worryingly, 30% of disabled workers said that they feel discriminated against at work.

There is clearly a long way to go to ensure that disabled workers are fully included by employers and engagers in the creative industries. Our research also suggests that existing schemes to support disabled workers at work have very low take up.

The Government’s Access to Work scheme is designed to support

disabled individuals and those with physical or mental health conditions in securing and maintaining employment. It provides financial assistance to cover additional work-related costs that go beyond an employer’s legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments. However, in our survey, 70% of disabled respondents were unaware of this scheme. 25% were aware but had not used the scheme – just 5% said that they had.

Access passports and access riders are tools used to support disabled and neurodivergent workers to communicate their access needs in the workplace or other professional settings. While they’re not official legal documents, they play an important role in promoting inclusive and supportive environments. But in our survey, 81% of disabled workers were unaware of access passports/access riders – just 3% said they had them.

There have been some really positive initiatives to improve the inclusion of disabled workers across the creative industries, notably the TV Access Project, which works with disabled people and the wider industry, working towards the full inclusion of disabled workers in the industry by 2030.⁸

However, without clear structures for disclosure and adjustment, disabled workers are too often left to navigate risk and exclusion alone. Addressing these issues requires more than awareness and demands proactive, structural change from employers, engagers, and policymakers alike. Until then, the creative sector cannot claim to be truly open or equitable.

Figure 12

At what point would you usually disclose your disability to your employer/engager?

DISABLED RESPONDENTS, N=1,068 • TO NEAREST 0.5%

- On applying, **14%**
- At interview stage, **11.5%**
- After job offer, **12.5%**
- At another point, **24%**
- I would not disclose, **38%**



bectu recommends...



Access to Work

Many eligible creatives, especially freelancers, don't know they can apply for Access to Work support. The Department for Work and Pensions should improve outreach and simplify applications, with sector-specific guidance for creative industry workers and better support for sole traders.

Ensuring small employers provide reasonable adjustments

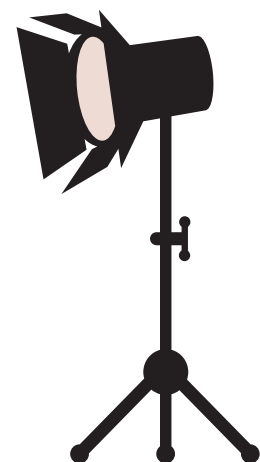
Guidance and training should be introduced to help small employers and production companies understand and meet their duties on reasonable adjustments.

Employers and engagers must ask about access needs – and provide adjustments

In pre-contract stages, all engagers, commissioners and producers should be required to ask workers, including freelancers, about their access needs, with adjustments funded via a shared industry pot if needed.

Addressing harassment and discrimination of disabled workers

Any anti-harassment strategies must be intersectional and include disability-specific reporting channels.



freelancing across the creative industries

the unique demands and working practices of the creative sector – the need for highly specialised skills, the short-term, project-based nature of work that is often reliant on inconsistent funding, and tight turnaround times have all led to a situation where freelancing in the creative industries is often the norm. This structure has long underpinned the sector's ability to innovate, adapt and thrive on the global stage. The highly skilled freelance workforce, from film crews and theatre technicians to post-production specialists and digital artists, has often benefitted from the flexibility and freedom, as well as earning potential, that comes with freelance work.

However, freelancers must shoulder risks, working without the security, rights, or recognition afforded

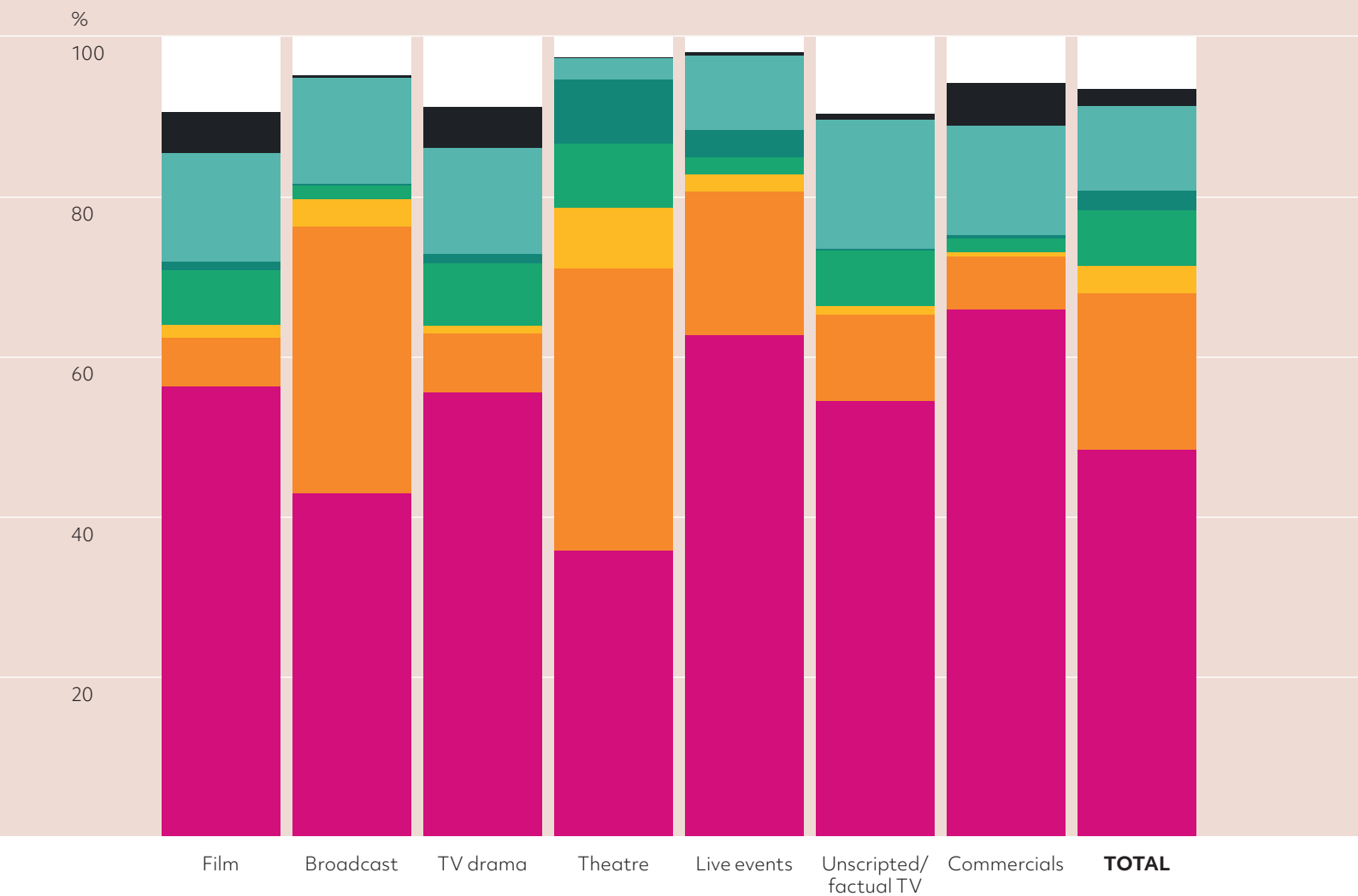
to employees. Key issues such as unsustainable working hours, the 'feast or famine' nature of freelance employment, bullying and harassment, poor levels of diversity, and a lack of employment rights for freelancers continue to plague the creative sectors.

Figures from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport suggest that across film, television, radio, computer gaming, publishing and the performing arts, 32%, or 989,000 jobs, were self-employed. This was more than double the rate of self-employment in the wider UK economy (14%). However, given the atypical nature of work in the creative industries as well as the difficulty in defining freelancers due to a complex mix of tax and employment status, we expect that the proportion of freelance workers in the creative industries is much higher.

Figure 13

Current employment status, by sector

- Freelancer
- Full-time employee
- Part-time employee
- Employee on a fixed-term contract
- Employee on a zero-hours contract
- Work through own limited company as a sole employee
- Work through an agency
- Not currently working



Freelancers Make Theatre Work⁹ estimates that there are 200,000+ self-employed and freelance workers from all areas of theatre, opera and live performance, who make up 70% of the UK theatre workforce. And Bectu research has found that 72% of fashion creatives are operating as freelancers.¹⁰

Around half of all survey respondents (48%) told us they are freelancers and 10% work through their own limited company as a sole

employee. One in five (20%) are full-time employees, 4% are part-time employees, and 7% employees on fixed-term contracts.

But across different sectors of the creative economy, this differs significantly, with workers in broadcasting (33%) and theatre (35%) both more likely to be full-time employees. In fashion (69%), live events (62%), and the screen industries (55%), those most likely to be freelancers are much higher.

What is a freelancer?

‘Freelancing’ is not the same as self-employment, but instead refers to people working through a mixture of engagements as self-employed or employed, usually on a series of short-term contracts. There is very little data available on this workforce because of irregular patterns of employment and engagement, but freelancing is a mainstream and growing subset of the working population, especially in the creative sectors.

Of those who called themselves ‘freelancers’ in our survey (not including those who said they were self-employed through their own limited company), 16% are PAYE. 68% operate as sole traders, 15% operate through their own limited company and very small numbers operate through umbrella companies – just 0.3% (**Figure 14**).

And the way freelancers are contracted varies widely. Overall, 26% of freelancers said that they did not have a contract and the same proportion (26%) said that their

contract did not set out any set hours. One in ten (9%) were contracted with set hours for a period of a week or less, 6% for a term of 1–4 weeks, 13% for 4–12 weeks and 18% for a period of 12 weeks or more.

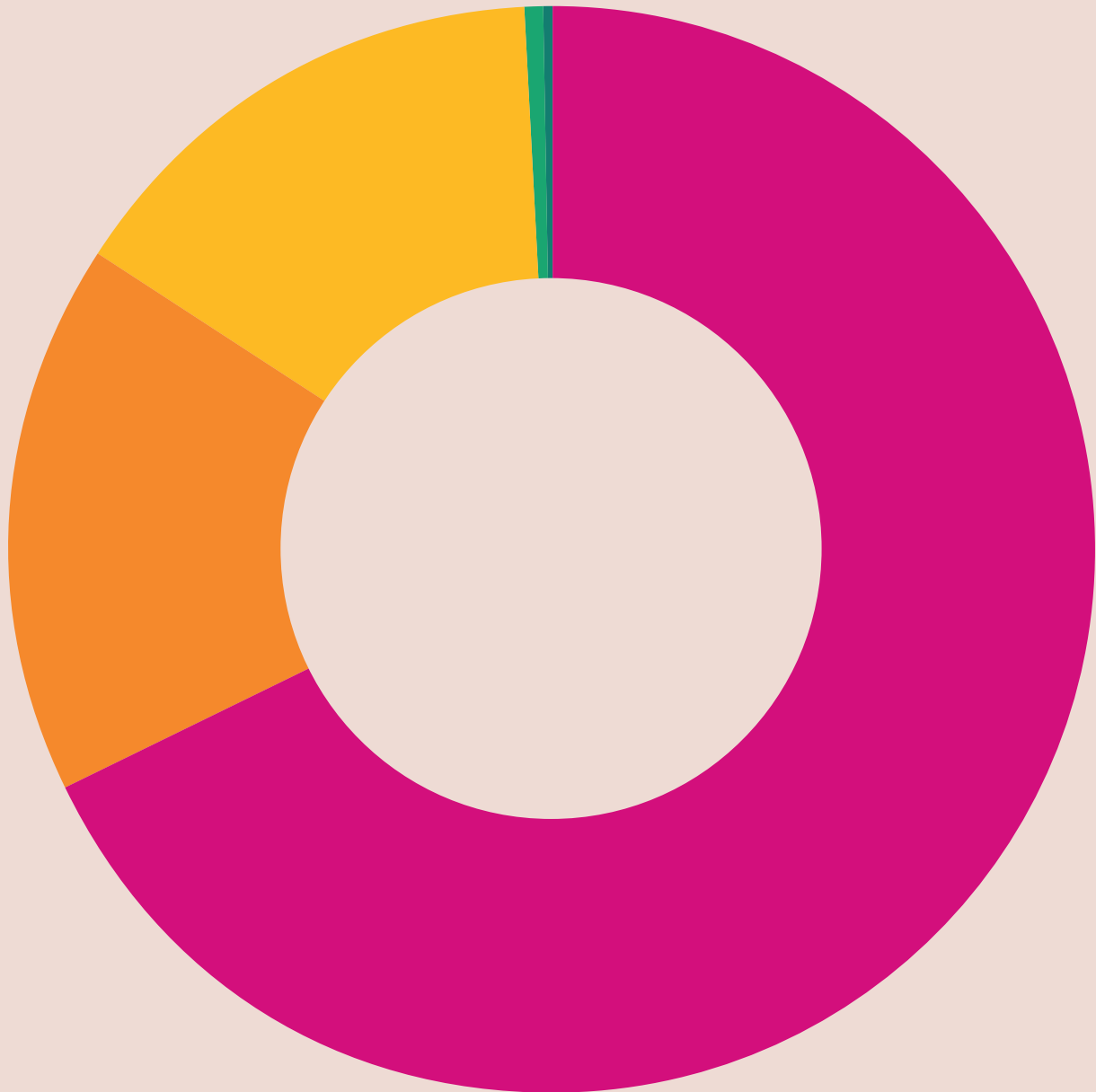
Freelancers are, therefore, not a simple category to understand. However, they are a critical part of the creative industries, making a significant contribution to the wider economy. But despite their essential role, the self-employed and freelancers get a raw deal. They’re more exposed to the ebbs and flows of the business cycle, and lack many of the protections enjoyed by employees, such as sick pay, flexible working hours and parental rights. The boom-and-bust nature of much of the sector leaves freelancers hugely exposed and vulnerable. Nowhere was this better illustrated than during the COVID-19 pandemic, when tens of thousands of freelancers fell through the gaps of government support.

Figure 14

Tax status of freelancers

FREELANCE WORKERS, N=2,751 • TO NEAREST 0.5%

- I pay tax myself as a sole trader, **68%**
- My employer pays tax on my behalf (PAYE), **16%**
- I pay tax myself through my own limited company, **15%**
- My tax is paid through an agency, **<0.5%**
- My tax is paid through an umbrella company, **<0.5%**



paye freelancers

N=370

Those working as freelancers, but paid as PAYE, sit in between a complex space of employment law and tax status. When the term 'freelancer' is applied to someone on a short, fixed term PAYE contract, they actually have many of the employment rights of someone in full-time employment. This may be as an employee or as a 'worker' through an employment status known as 'limb (b)' status. For example, freelancers in this scenario are entitled to holiday pay and Statutory Sick Pay. However, this is not always applied, and freelancers may not be aware of what they are entitled to access.

Based on ONS data in a 2020 Treasury Committee report,¹¹ it is estimated that approximately 780,000 people fall into this category of PAYE freelancers. However, there is very little available data on PAYE freelancers, as generally these workers get lost between HMRC data that focuses on tax status and ONS employment data that focuses on employment patterns. During the pandemic, this 'in-between-ness' of PAYE freelancers left them particularly exposed.

PAYE freelancers could not access Bounce Back loans as they were not viewed as self employed by banks but were also excluded from Government support schemes for employees due to the way their contracts fell, often working across multiple contracts or moving between short-term jobs.¹²

According to our survey data, PAYE freelancers are especially prevalent in the screen industries, where around one in five who said they were freelance are paid as PAYE (18% in film, 19% in TV drama and 13% in unscripted or factual TV). Around a third (34%) supplement their income with work outside of the creative industries, similar to the overall survey total (29%).¹³

But there is no single model that captures how they are working. PAYE freelancers in the creative industries could look like:

- Someone working a 'season' for a national opera house, employed on a 12-week contract that is renewed every year, or every 25 weeks.
- A runner working on a major motion picture production on a 12-month contract
- A hair and makeup artist working as a 'daily' on short notice for a feature film
- Someone working as casual staff, working in a front of house role on a minimum hours contract
- Someone employed by the producer of a large musical on an 18-month contract.

PAYE freelancers are more likely to be younger (64% are under 35), to be women or non-binary (59%), or to be disabled (27%).

Most are more junior in their creative careers in comparison to all survey respondents; 44% have worked in the creative sector for five years or less, compared to 21% overall. Perhaps reflecting this, PAYE freelancers also earn less than the average creative industries worker, with 46% earning £30,00 or less a year before tax from their creative work, compared to 42% of all freelancers and 37% of all respondents.

Despite PAYE freelancers supposedly being able to access more employment rights than self-employed workers, our survey data would suggest that this is often not the case. With an average workday reported by PAYE freelancers as 11 hours, 19% said they would generally receive no breaks over the working day, compared to 8% of full-time employees and 13% of freelancers.

Around half (48%) of PAYE freelancers say they have no pension, despite the fact that PAYE employees are subject to auto-enrolment into workplace pension schemes.

The vast majority (82%) say that they have never been offered any training or development opportunities, and only 13% say they have and would have the costs for this covered by their employer. For full-time employees, by contrast, 58% had been offered training or development, paid for by the employer.

PAYE freelancers are also less likely to report incidents of bullying or harassment

to their employer, suggesting less trust in their relationship with their employer – 48% who have experienced this did not report the incident compared to 36% of full-time employees. And they are more likely to feel there is a health and safety risk to them in the workplace – 34% of PAYE freelancers have had an accident at work, or felt at risk of this, compared to 24% of full-time employees.

More than half have had a job cancelled at short notice (52%), or have started working without a booking confirmation (52%). One in five have waited more than six weeks after a job to be paid (21%) with the same proportion (21%) saying that late payments had impacted their cash flow or caused them to go into debt.

No surprise, then, that just 17% say that they feel secure in their job and 82% say they feel their work is precarious. Just 23% feel confident about their future in the creative industries.

The difference in experiences of PAYE freelancers reflects the fact that they are neither employees, nor are they truly self-employed. In upcoming reforms to employment rights, it is clear that this group could, once again, fall through the cracks. While many changes, such as day one rights, will be positive, there remains questions about education and enforcement if this precarious group of workers are to truly benefit.

“It’s feast or famine”

Freelancers are less likely to be in work than those in other forms of employment and engagement, highlighting their vulnerability due to the feast or famine nature of much creative work.

Almost four in ten (39%) freelancers and 35% of those working through their own limited companies are currently out of work. Over the past six months, 6% had had no work at all, while 42% had worked between 1–3 months. Just a quarter had worked over the full six months.

Those in the screen industries are especially vulnerable, as evidenced during the current commissioning slowdown, a crisis that has seen huge numbers of screen industry workers out of work for long periods of time.

Half (47%) of screen industry freelancers are currently out of work, with only 13% saying that they have seen a full recovery in their employment since the end of the industrial action was called in late 2023. Respondents in the US described financial difficulties and the heavy toll on their mental wellbeing, compounding existing challenges for workers in the sector:

“I feel like I’m constantly gasping for air with no future in sight.”

“Being a freelancer in the film/TV industry feels like a constant struggle. It feels as if the industry has never fully recovered and it’s hard to know if my career is even sustainable anymore. I don’t feel like there’s any support and most jobs feel like they’re owned by a small pool of people who gatekeep. It affects my mental health as well as my living conditions. I’m just so sad – I’ve worked so hard for so many years and everything feels hopeless.”

“Later commission decisions are affecting freelancers massively as we only have a certain amount of funds as we need to keep money aside for tax, due to the tax payment structure at the HMRC in the UK. There is only a certain amount of time [until] I will need to think about a different profession which has more stability. In 2025 I have only had 2 weeks’ work, and it’s now mid-March.”

Indeed, 82% feel their work is precarious and less than a quarter feel confident about their future in the creative industries (24%).

But for those who are in work, a long hours culture is often the norm. For full-time employees across the creative industries, the majority work an 8-hour day (34.8%), while 20% work a 9-hour day and 19% work a 10-hour day. Part-time employees were most likely to work less than eight hours (34%) or an 8-hour day (35%).

However, for freelancers, just 8% work a standard 8-hour day and a mere 4% are working less than that. Around a quarter of freelancers report a 12-hour working day as standard (23%), with 38% working 10–11 hours, 14% working 13–14-hour days and 5% reporting that an average day can be 15 hours or more.

For those working for their own limited companies as sole employees, the hours are similar, as 80% report working 10 hours or more in an average day (22% work a 12-hour day as standard).

Freelancing is often seen to be a positive way of working due to the flexibility it grants workers; however, our data would suggest that this flexibility is often one-sided (**Figure 6**). Given these challenges, it is no surprise that almost a third (31%) of freelancers see themselves working in another industry in five years’ time.

To ensure the long-term sustainability of the UK’s world-leading creative industries, urgent action is needed to better support the freelance workforce at its core. Freelancers deserve fairer, more secure conditions, including access to sick pay, pensions, and parental leave, regardless of contract length. Government and industry must work together to create funding structures and commissioning models that recognise the realities of freelance work, while tackling late payments and ensuring freelancers are treated with the same respect and value as staff roles. Without meaningful reform and stronger protections, we risk losing the diverse talent and innovation that make the UK’s creative sector thrive.

Figure 15

Are you currently working? By employment status

- Yes
- No

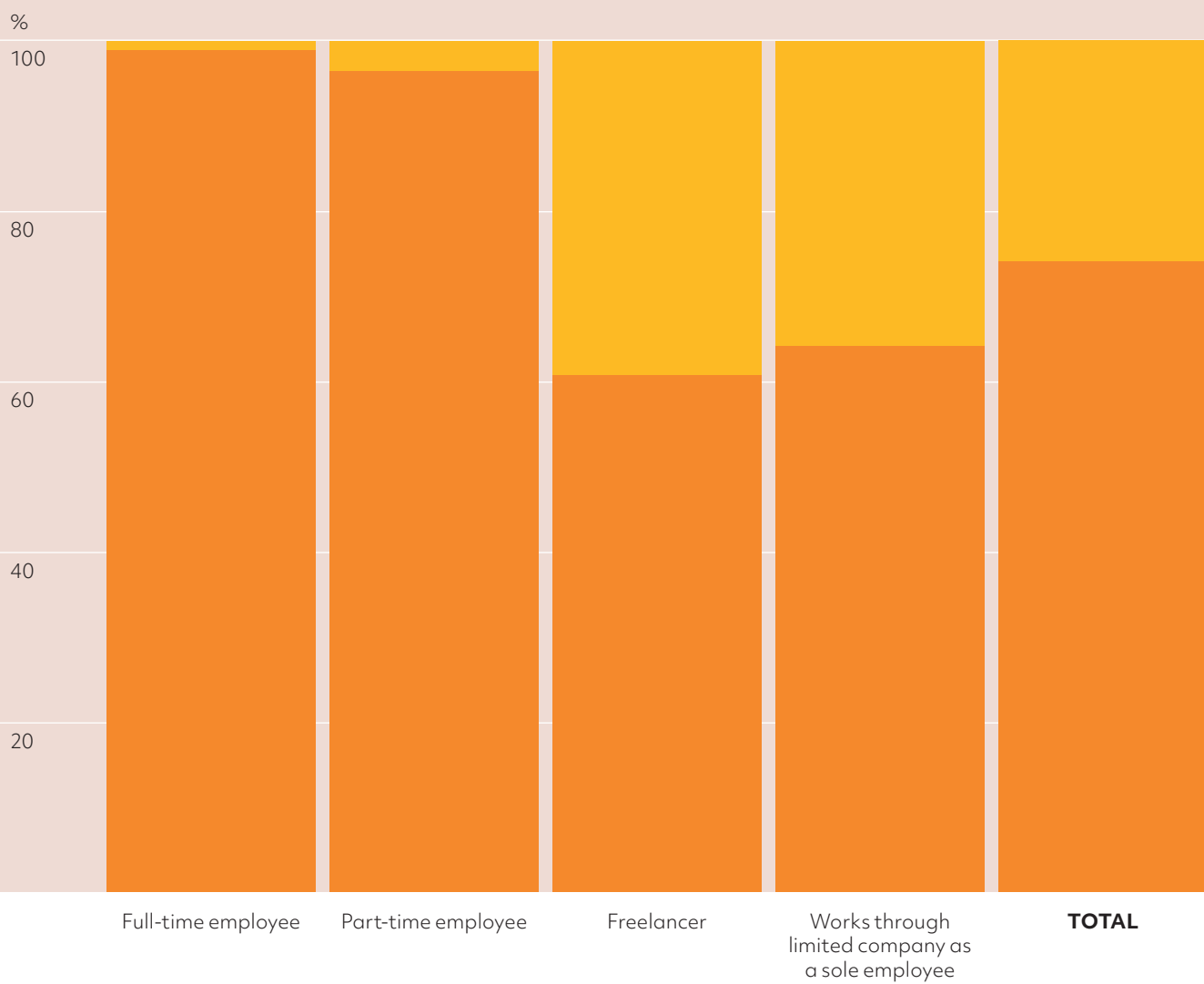
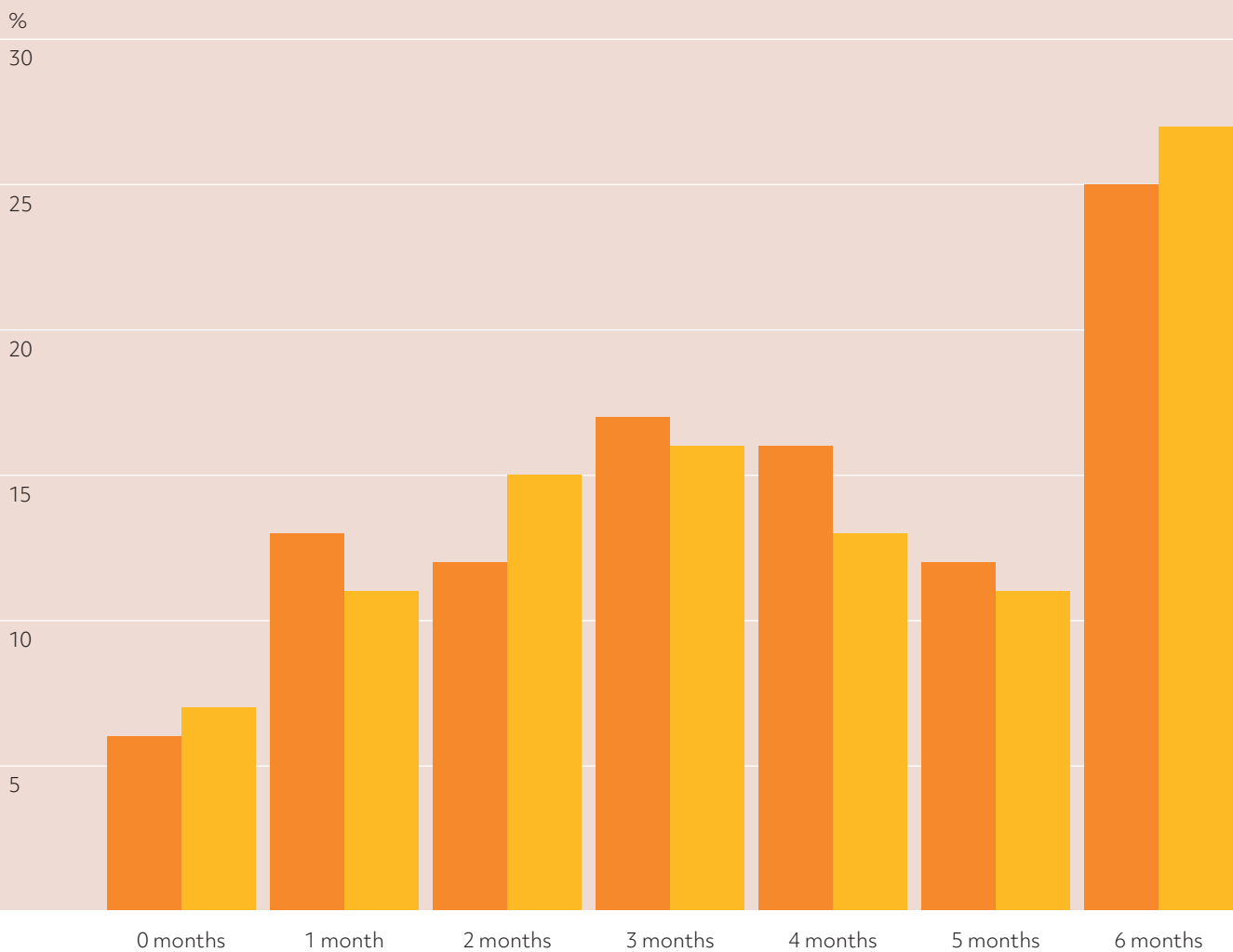


Figure 16

Number of months worked out of the past six months, by employment status

- Freelancer
- Self-employed through limited company



Creativity without a safety net

Freelancing in the creative industries is often framed as a lifestyle choice, which for some it is. But for many, it's the only route available in a sector dominated by short-term contracts and precarious work. Creative freelancers are routinely denied basic rights and protections, including access to sick pay, holiday pay, and redundancy support. For the majority, this is because they are classed as self-employed, however, our research has also highlighted the issues PAYE freelancers have in accessing rights and protections that they should be afforded.

Unlike employees, freelancers who are classified as self-employed have no guaranteed income if they fall ill, need to take time off, or lose work suddenly. Although benefits like Universal Credit are theoretically available, the system often fails to accommodate the irregular, fluctuating earnings typical of freelance work, leading to delays, reduced payments, or ineligibility. As a result, many creative industry freelancers fall through the cracks of the social safety net, exposed to financial insecurity in times of illness, economic downturn, or personal crisis.

We heard from many freelancers about how this impacted them in day-to-day life, with many highlighting that freelancing was not a choice, but something enforced by employers' business models:

“I realise now how much of a raw deal we have. Terrible hours, no pension, unsecured work, no benefits, no rewards for good work, workplace bullying that just doesn't exist in any other sector.”

“No work, no savings, no pension, no support. Massive anxiety about how to live and help to support my family. My partner is also a TV freelancer and in the same situation. I am doing all I can to find work elsewhere, but this is the most awful, stressful time of my life.”

“It's difficult to feel protected as a worker, and I would rather be employed than work freelance but

it is unrealistic for me to earn enough money without freelancing.”

And many highlighted the impact that a lack of employment rights, such as maternity leave and pay, or flexible working rights, was having on equality in the industry:

“As I'm getting older I'm looking to the future when I have children and feel hesitant about the industry with no maternity help and then the hours once returning to work. I don't want to leave the industry but being unable to plan out your year and working immense hours is something I'm beginning to struggle with.”

Our survey found that just 6% of freelance women in the creative industries have been offered paid leave or flexible working to allow attendance at fertility-related appointments, for example for fertility treatment, and just 22% have been able to access job shares and flexible working arrangements. And more than a third of all freelancers (34%) said that their work has impacted their reproductive choices (e.g. choosing to have children).

Indeed, the UK lags behind much of the world in terms of rights and protections afforded to workers in the creative industries, with many other jurisdictions offering tax and benefits systems tailored to support those working in the unique context of the creative industries.

Across Europe, there are a number of schemes to ensure creative freelancers benefit from systems that recognise the irregular nature of their work, such as the French intermittent artist scheme that provides access to unemployment benefits during gaps between contracts, or Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts pilot, that offers flat payments of €325 a week to 2,000 eligible artists and creative arts workers. South Korea has implemented housing initiatives to support creative freelancers and in Canada and Australia, there are targeted support funds and tax relief mechanisms designed specifically for cultural workers.

Meanwhile, in the UK, freelancers are left to navigate a benefits system that assumes permanent employment, and a tax regime that often penalises rather than protects. A recent study¹⁴ from the University of Glasgow examined policies in six other countries and indicates how similar schemes could transform the financial stability of UK freelancers, finding that applying these models to a UK context could increase UK freelancers' disposable income by 50% or more.

The need for better support is clear. Our survey results highlight how many creative industry freelancers are struggling to get by. Only a quarter (25%) say they would be able to maintain their current standard of living if they had no work for three months, something that has become a reality for thousands during the commissioning slowdown in the screen industries.

A quarter of all freelancers said that they are currently finding things extremely difficult financially, while 42% are finding things more difficult than normal. In the past year, 11% have struggled to pay their rent or mortgage, 16% have been unable to cover all of their household bills, 10% have moved back in with their parents or other family and 3% have had to use a foodbank.

Our survey finds that 11% of creative industry freelancers have applied for Universal Credit in the past 12 months, and 5% have applied for Jobseekers' Allowance, while 16% had to take out a loan or other unsecured debt to pay bills.

Ineligible for many forms of financial support or protection, including auto-enrolment to pension schemes, freelancers are generally expected to support themselves through periods of financial instability and for future planning.

When we asked creative industry freelancers what protections they have in place for themselves, around a third (31%) told us that they have no savings, and fewer than half of freelancers have a pension (48%). Working-class freelancers are even more precarious – those who say they are from a working-class background are 10% less likely to have savings (45% do not have any) or to have a pension (56% do not have a pension).

Many freelancers are also not adequately protected through insurance; from our survey, 55% have Public Liability Insurance, 14% portable equipment; 15% personal accident cover and 17% personal contents cover.

It is clear that more needs to be done to address the financial insecurity of freelancers, including the regulation of payments.

Late payments

One of the most persistent challenges for freelancers is late payments. Without the protection of standard employment contracts, freelancers often have little leverage when clients delay paying invoices, sometimes waiting months for money they are owed. This creates serious cash flow problems, making it harder for them to cover living expenses, invest in their businesses, or plan for the future.

Late payments are governed by the Late Payment of Commercial Debts Act 1998, which allows for interest and debt recovery costs to be claimed if another person or business is late paying for goods or a service. By law, payments are generally considered late when 30 days have

passed from when the invoice is received by the client or customer, or the goods and services have been delivered (if later than the invoice date).

The Small Business Commissioner (SBC) was established as an independent body following excessive reports of overdue payments owed by large businesses to small businesses in 2015, and was appointed under the 2016 Enterprise Act. Over the reporting period of 2022/23, interventions from the SBC led to the recovery of £283,458 from 387 cases.

But given the scale of the problem and the huge remit the SBC covers, this is just a drop in the ocean. Bectu's own monies owed service recovered £38,814.64 in 2024 from

Figure 17

Impact of background on the financial status of freelance workers

- All freelance respondents
- Freelancers from a working-class background

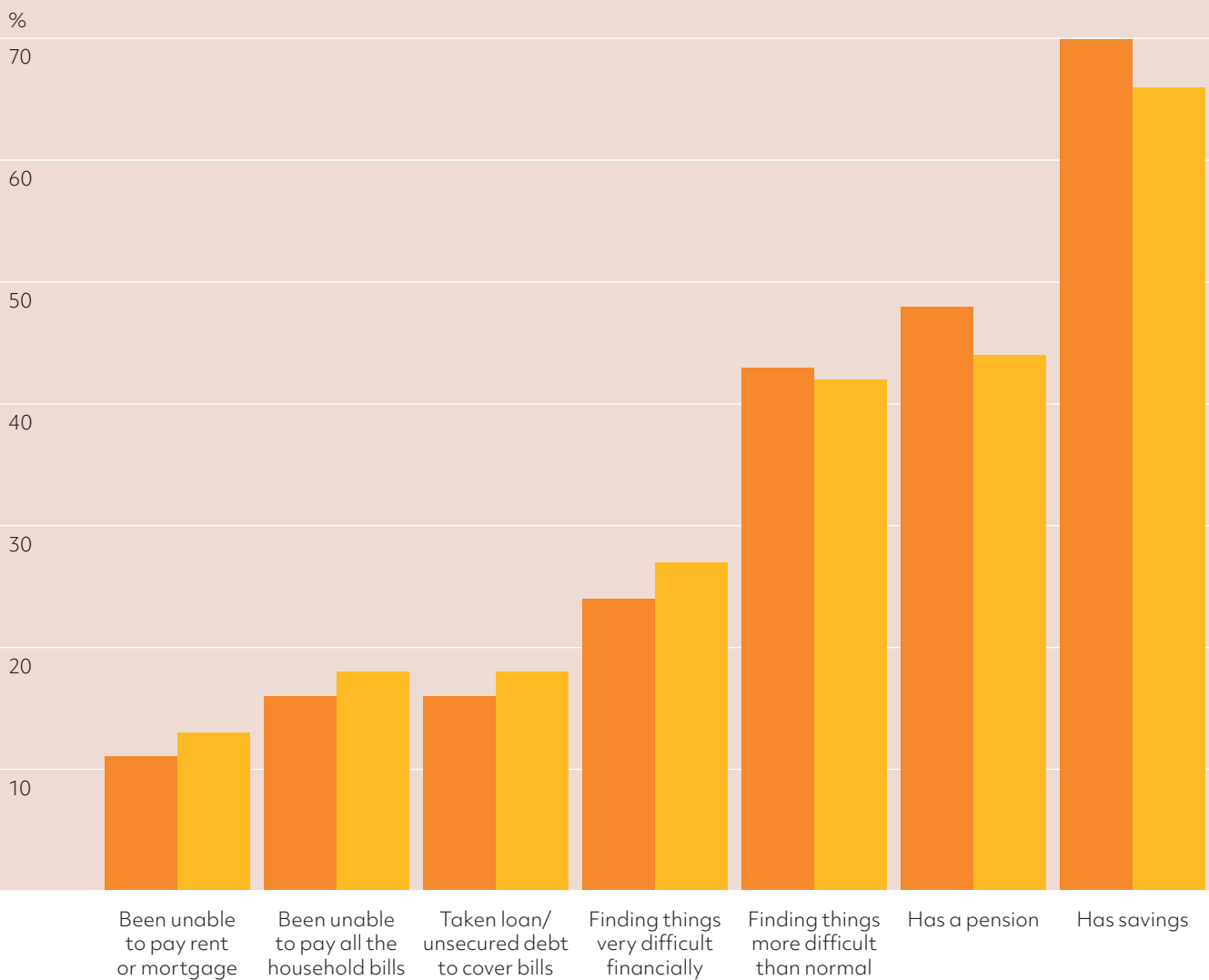


Figure 18

Prevalence of statements from freelance survey respondents

FREELANCE WORKERS, N=2,751

- I have not been paid for a job because the company I was working for became insolvent, **17%**
- In the past year, I have waited more than six weeks after a job to be paid, **37%**
- Late payments have impacted my cash flow or caused me to go into debt, **37%**
- I am always paid on time for the work I do, **48%**
- I have had a job cancelled at short notice, **64%**

%
70

60

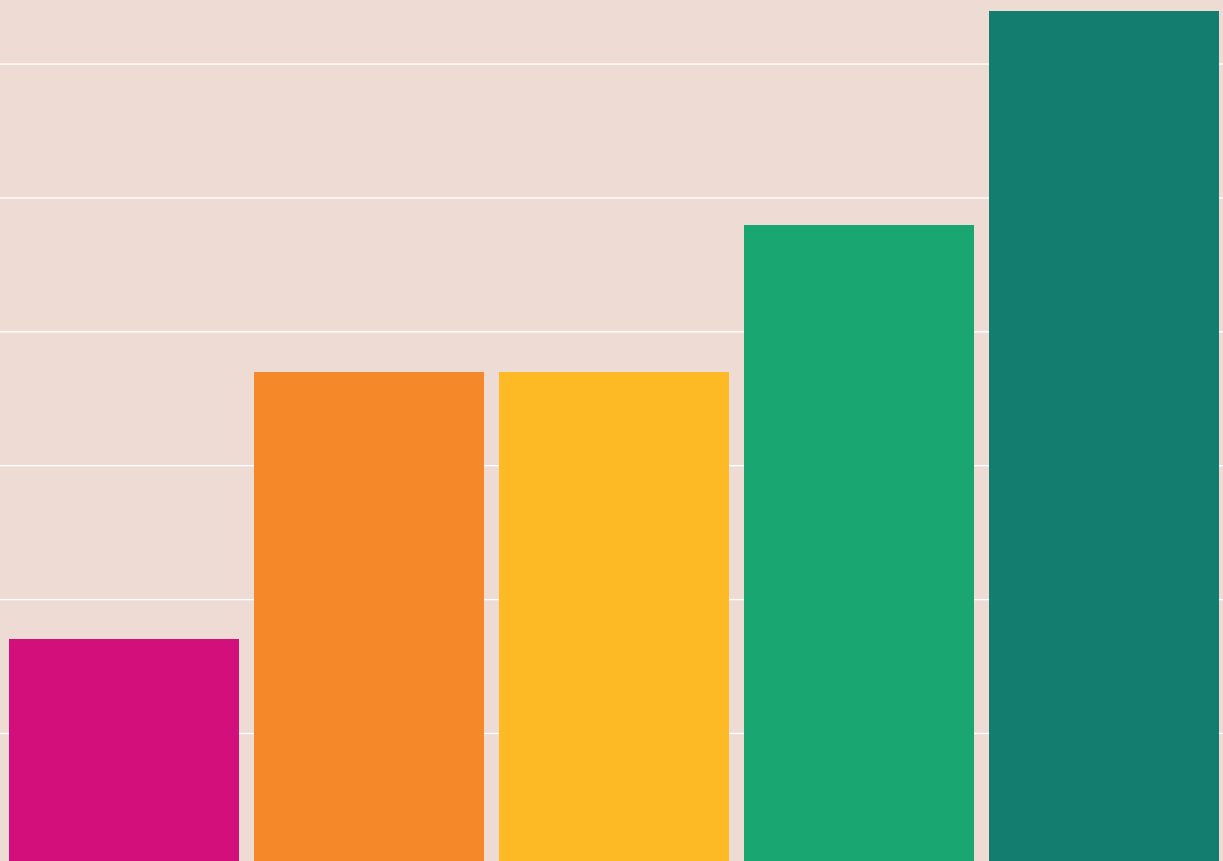
50

40

30

20

10



a total of 285 cases. This came solely from our membership of approximately 37,000 across the creative industries. The Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed (IPSE) research¹⁵ from 2022 found that the average amount owed to freelancers was £5,230 with one in five (20%) finding themselves without the money to cover basic living costs.

The new Fair Payment Code¹⁶ was introduced in February 2025 to replace the Prompt Payment Code, an initiative from the SBC to encourage on-time payments between businesses. The code offers a tiered awards system aimed at awarding best practice and driving improvements in payment performance. However, it remains a voluntary system, while one of the biggest problems for freelancers is within the mechanism of recovering late payments.

The Department of Business and Trade's own research into late payments¹⁷ found that micro businesses were very unlikely to pursue late payments formally (19%), while large businesses were more likely to do so (42%), suggesting a power imbalance across business relationships. The main reason cited (by 44% of micro businesses) was the fear that pursuing a late payment could prevent them receiving more work through their customers.

Given that freelancers are "only as good as their last job", and that

finding work in the creative industries is so heavily tied to personal connections, freelancers face significant issues in challenging late payments.

Our survey found that while the vast majority (79%) of creative industry freelancers had a contract containing payment terms on their current or most recent job, less than half (48%) said that they are always paid on time for the work that they do, while in the past year, 21% said they have often (and 26% said sometimes) waited more than 30 days for a payment.

More than a third of all creative industry freelancers (37%) have waited more than six weeks for a payment. A staggering 37% say that late payments have impacted their cash flow or caused them to go into debt. And almost one in five (17%) freelancers have not been paid for a job because the company they were working for became insolvent. This is a particular issue for workers in fashion (26%), commercials (25%), and live events (24%).

These figures show that despite new initiatives and legal protections, late payment remains a widespread and damaging issue for creative industry freelancers. Without stronger enforcement mechanisms and greater cultural change within the creative industries, too many freelancers will continue to bear the financial and emotional burden of unpaid work.

bectu recommends...

A role for the Freelance Champion

While the appointment of a Freelance Champion will be a huge step forward for asserting rights for freelancers in policy, the Government must ensure that this role is far more than ornamental. The role must be fully resourced and given adequate powers to influence meaningful change across governmental departments.

Enforcement of employment rights for PAYE freelancers

Our research highlights a clear gap in the enforcement of employment rights for freelancers on PAYE contracts, an overlooked group of workers who are not receiving adequate protections. A response should be coordinated between the new Freelance Champion and the Fair Work Agency.

The anomalous nature of freelance work must be accounted for in proposals to move to single worker status

Labour's plan to Make Work Pay made proposals whereby the current three-tiered system of employment status (employee, worker, and self-employed) would be replaced with a two-tiered system, effectively creating a single 'worker' status for most individuals, with a separate category for those genuinely self-employed. However, while many will benefit, there is a risk that this would push a significant number of individuals who currently benefit from limited rights as 'workers' out of these rights, into being 'self-employed'. We urge the Government to work with the new Freelance Champion and engage unions to ensure that nobody is inadvertently pushed out of employment rights.



Access to employment rights including sick pay, pensions, and parental leave

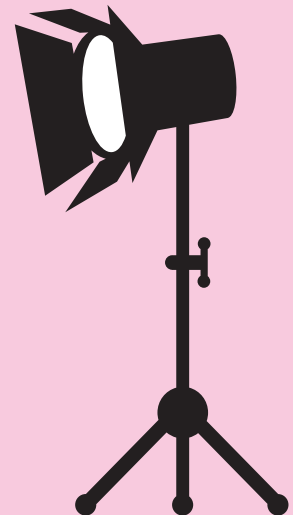
As part of Make Work Pay reforms, the Government must explore the potential of portable benefit schemes (e.g., cumulative pension, sick pay) that travel with freelancers across projects

Action on late payments

Late payments are one of the most widespread issues affecting freelance creatives, contributing directly to debt, stress, and financial instability. Enforcing a 30-day maximum payment period, with penalties for late payers, would offer real security. This should come under the remit of the Freelance Champion, working with the existing Small Business Commissioner, to ensure the existing late payment scheme is fit for purpose when it comes to freelance and self-employed workers, and ensure compliance.

Make freelancing pay

Freelancers straddle complex tax and employment statuses, often combining PAYE, self-employment, and limited company work, and current systems don't reflect this complexity. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) must work together with the new freelance champion to introduce mechanisms that smooth out income volatility, allow for cumulative benefit eligibility, and clarify tax liabilities. Building on the work of Make Freelancing Pay and Action for Freelancers, this could assess the potential for a dedicated earnings averaging tool for HMRC and DWP to assess income over longer periods, as a means of accounting for intermittent work and preventing penalties for temporary dips or spikes in earnings common to freelancers.



spotlight

global majority workers

N=413

global majority workers shared a range of perspectives on their experiences in the workplace, offering valuable insights into both the opportunities and challenges they face. We use the term 'global majority' to include respondents who are racially and ethnically non-white, acknowledging that collectively, they represent the global majority. This includes people identifying as Black, Asian, Arab, mixed heritage, and other non-white ethnicities, as per UK census categories, totalling 413 respondents. While due to sampling size, we use this term throughout the report, it's important to recognise that lived experiences vary and identity is complex and can be self-defined.

Overall, global majority respondents were more likely to be

struggling financially (74% compared to 65% overall), to be lower earners (30% earn £20,000 a year or less from their creative work compared to 21% overall) and are less likely to have a pension (39% compared to 50% overall). Global majority respondents were also significantly more likely to say that they had felt pressured to work for free (49% compared to 39% of all respondents).

Career progression was also reported as an issue. Among global majority respondents, 64% said that people who are from marginalised backgrounds are less likely to be promoted or hold more senior roles in their workplace – this compares to 44% of all respondents. This was a particular issue for Black respondents (43% of those from Black Caribbean and 54% of Black African backgrounds

strongly agreed, compared to 16% of all respondents).

In the screen industries, global majority respondents are also less likely to be in work than their white counterparts; 58% of Asian/Asian British respondents said they were not currently working, compared with 43% of all respondents.

Just 31% of global majority respondents said that the creative industries are an inclusive place to work, compared to 39% of all respondents. And 76% said that behaviours that would be considered toxic and inappropriate in public life are often tolerated in the creative industries, compared to 71% overall.

This is unsurprising when looking at the experiences of global majority respondents at work. In theatres and live events, 34% of global majority respondents had experienced antisocial behaviour, violence, aggression or harassment from an audience member/s.

Global majority (63%) workers were only slightly more likely to say that they had directly experienced or witnessed bullying and harassment in the past 12 months than all respondents (61%). However, it is clear that much of the bullying and harassment experienced by global majority workers is racialised. When we asked only global majority respondents about their experiences of racial harassment and/or abuse at work, 42% reported witnessing racial harassment and/or abuse at work, and more than a third (35%) had direct experience of racial harassment or abuse in the workplace.

Among Black respondents, a staggering 61% had experienced racial discrimination or abuse at work.

This mirrors findings from the recent 'Black in Focus' report, which highlights how these experiences are both a manifestation and an entrenchment of the systemic barriers faced by mid-career Black professionals in the creative industries.

And when asked on a scale of 1-10 how confident they were in their current workplace's ability to address incidents of racial abuse and discrimination appropriately, global majority respondents gave an average score of just five.

Across all creative industry workers, just 38% overall feel confident that as a sector or industry we are taking effective action to be actively inclusive for all – notably only 29% of global majority respondents said the same.

While progress has been made, there is still much to be done to improve racial equality for workers in the creative industries, particularly in addressing barriers to access, representation, and career progression. We asked global majority respondents about their preferences for initiatives to bring about better representation of ethnic minority professionals in the creative industries.

There was support across the board for these initiatives, but especially more support for career advancement for established ethnic minority professionals (68%), more support for entry-level roles for people from ethnic minority backgrounds (66%), better industry engagement and consultation with ethnic minority workers (66%), and for an independent reporting body set up to help support and sustain diversity within the creative industries (61%).

Figure 19

Global majority survey respondents by ethnic origin

GLOBAL MAJORITY RESPONDENTS, N=413

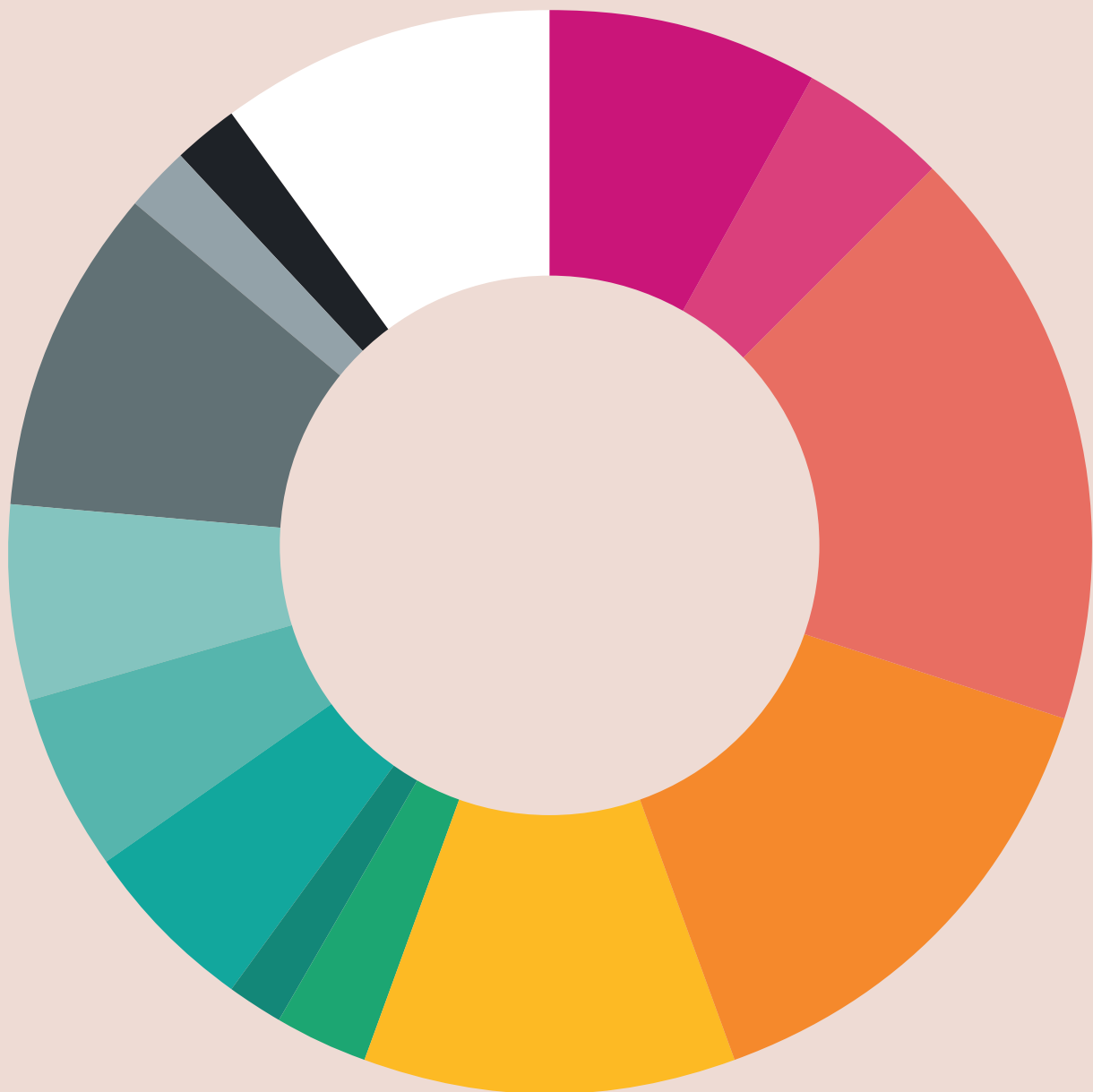
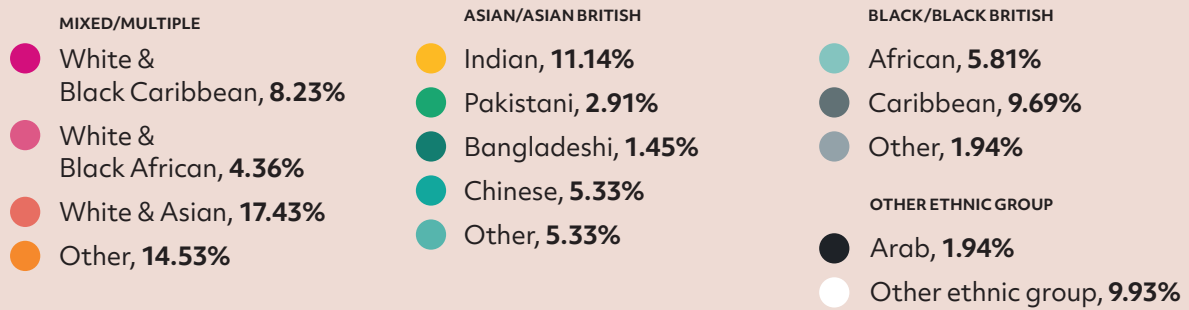
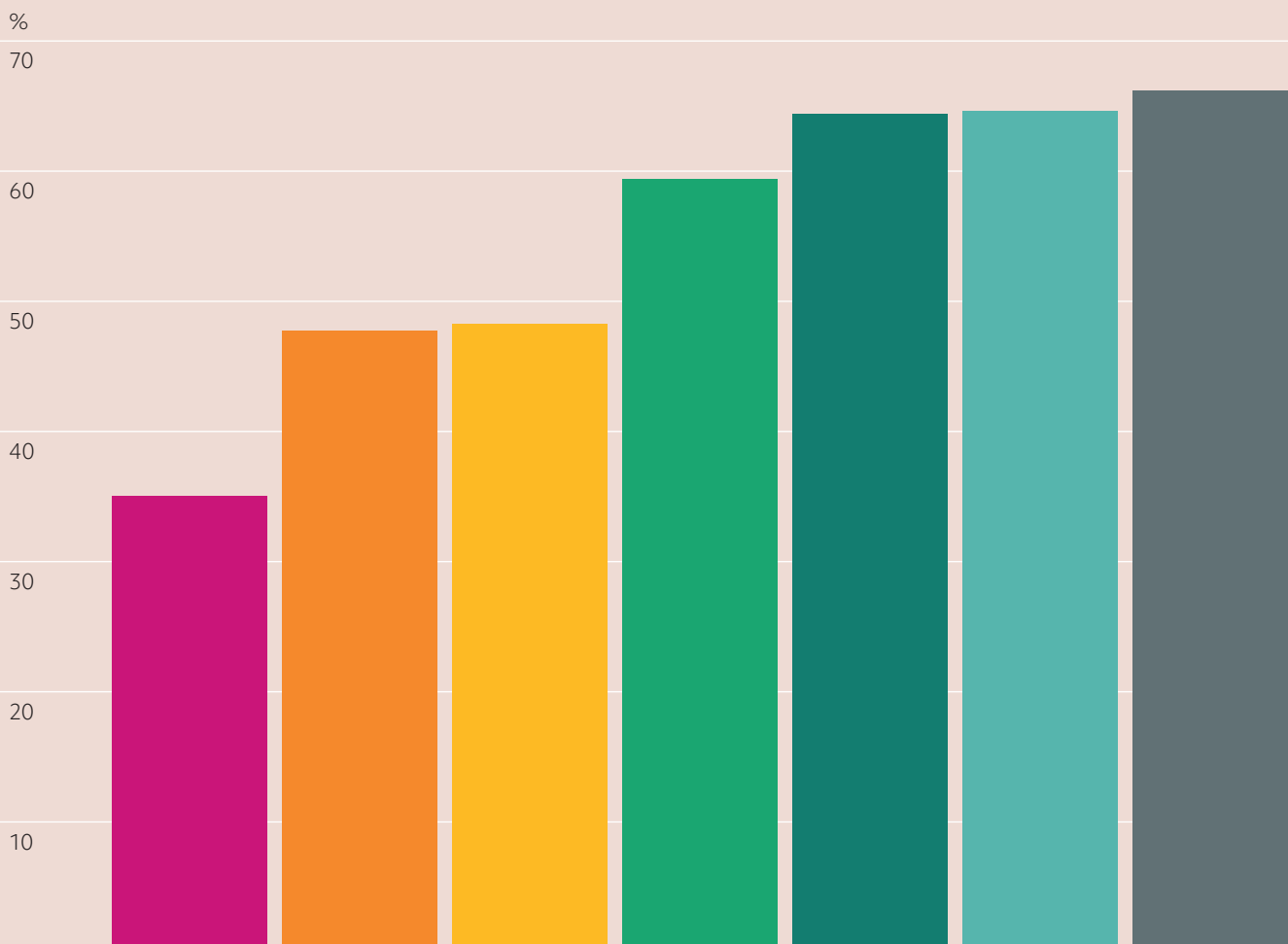


Figure 20

Which of the following actions could bring about better representation of ethnic minority professionals in the creative industries?

GLOBAL MAJORITY RESPONDENTS, N=413

- A race plan for the creative industries, **35%**
- Better data and progress tracking of diversity across the industry, **49%**
- A standardised, industry-wide complaints procedure adopted by production companies, **49.5%**
- An independent reporting body to help support and sustain diversity in the creative industries, **61%**
- Better industry engagement and consultation with ethnic minority workers, **66%**
- More support for entry-level roles for people from ethnic minority backgrounds, **66%**
- More support for career advancement for established ethnic minority professionals, **68%**



bectu recommends...



Career advancement initiatives for global majority workers

Freelancers from Black, Asian and other global majority backgrounds are significantly underrepresented in senior roles, often concentrated in less secure, lower-paid parts of the industry. Initiatives including mentorship, funding schemes, and inclusive commissioning, are essential to dismantling these structural barriers.

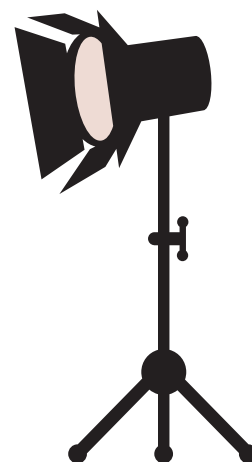
Broadcasters and commissioners to review ethnicity pay and seniority gaps

Broadcasters and platforms should publish detailed ethnicity and pay reporting at a programme level that includes self-employed contributors. This could include broadening Ofcom data collection requirements for broadcasters to ensure levels of seniority and pay are collected as part of diversity monitoring requirements. Transparent reporting would create accountability and support change.

Tackling racialised bullying and harassment at work

Global majority workers frequently report experiencing exclusion, microaggressions, and overt bullying, especially in freelance and short-term roles. The Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority (CIISA) and other enforcement bodies must be supported to investigate and resolve cases involving freelancers, ensuring safety and dignity in every workplace.

Employers and engagers should ensure that they have clear and transparent complaints procedures in which ethnic minority workers including freelancers can have confidence, in line with the Race Action Plans developed by Bectu for the commercials production sector and theatre industry. The TV drama sector should support Bectu's upcoming TV drama race action plan which is gathering support across the industry.





“

People are in fear of speaking out because of how it will affect their employment opportunities going forward. All film and TV work comes through people you know. You don't want to be seen as someone that 'causes trouble'.

”



spotlight

lgbt+ workers

N=816

from the 816 LGBT+ workers surveyed, responses indicated an overall positive sense of inclusion within the creative industries. A majority (63%) reported feeling able to bring their full selves to work, and 58% said they were 'out' in the workplace (**Figure 21**). However, these experiences varied significantly across different LGBT+ identities.

While high proportions of gay (84%) and lesbian (79%) respondents were out at work, only 41% of bisexual respondents reported the same. Perceptions of inclusivity also differed: 51% of gay respondents described the creative industries as inclusive, compared to just 39% of heterosexual respondents – yet this figure dropped to only 30% for lesbian and queer workers.

Mental health concerns were widespread among LGBT+ participants. In the past 12 months, 75% of lesbian, 60% of gay, 74% of bisexual, and 81% of queer respondents reported feeling anxious or depressed. This compares with 56% of heterosexual respondents, highlighting a stark disparity in emotional wellbeing.

Bullying and harassment were also more commonly reported by LGBT+ workers. While 58% of heterosexual respondents had either experienced or witnessed bullying or harassment at work, the numbers were notably higher for LGBT+ participants: 64% of gay men, 65% of lesbians, 68% of queer respondents, and 70% of bisexual individuals.

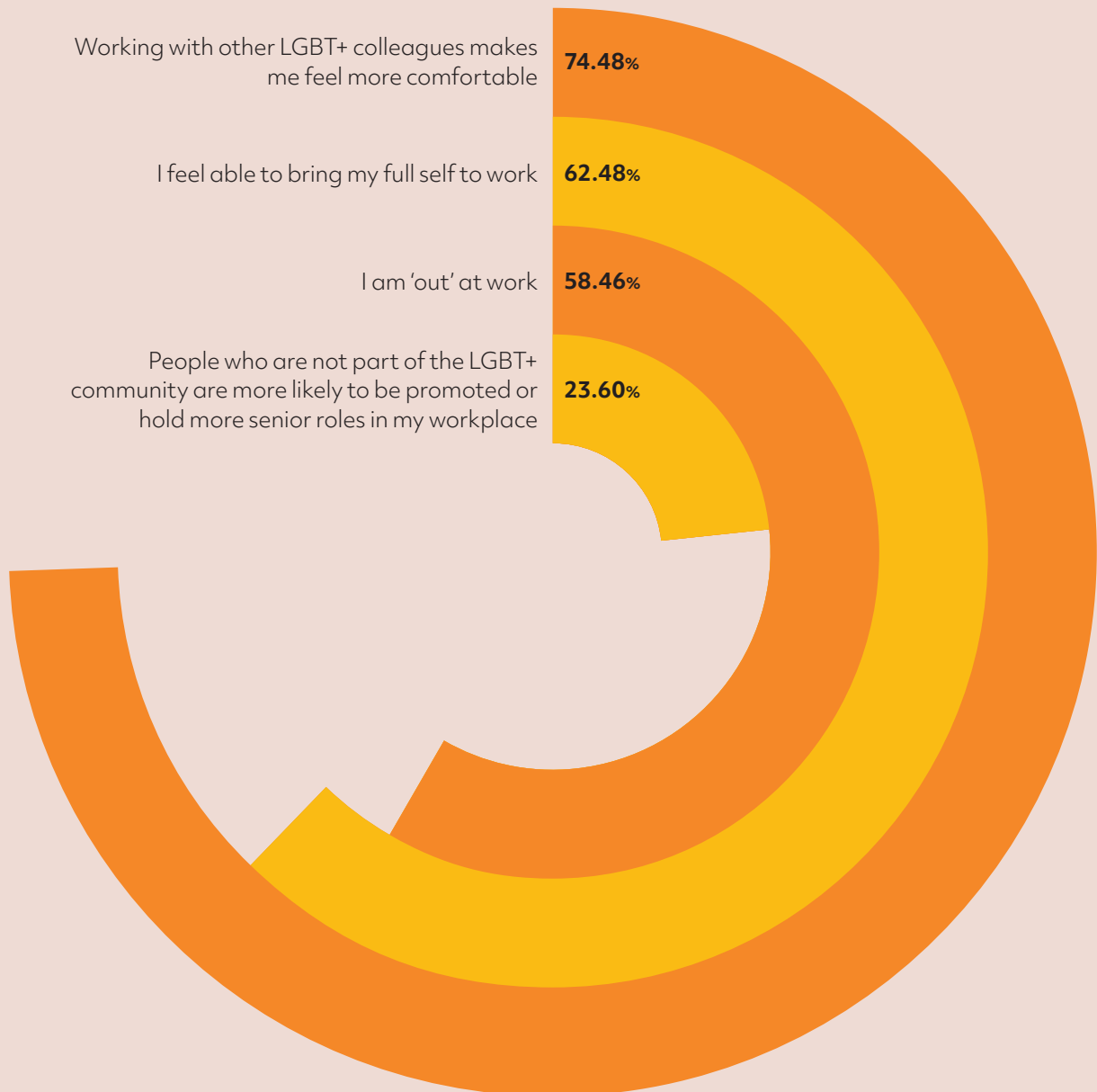
In theatre and live events, LGBT+ workers were disproportionately affected by external hostility. Reports of antisocial behaviour, violence, aggression, or harassment from audience members in the past year were higher among LGBT+ respondents, affecting 36% of bisexual people, 37% of gay men, 38% of lesbians, and 42% of queer individuals, compared to 28% of their heterosexual colleagues.

These findings highlight that while progress has been made toward greater inclusion, significant disparities remain. Addressing the specific challenges faced by different LGBT+ communities is essential to creating a truly equitable and supportive environment across the creative industries.

Figure 21

Prevalence of statements from LGBT+ survey respondents

LGBT+ RESPONDENTS, N=816



wellbeing in the workplace

Workers in the UK's creative industries face multiple intersecting challenges that continue to undermine their wellbeing. Long hours, precarious employment, low pay, and a lack of basic employment rights are entrenched features of the sector, disproportionately affecting freelancers and those in early- to mid-career roles. These systemic pressures take a measurable toll on mental health, as revealed by the Film and TV Charity's 2024 Looking Glass survey of screen industry workers, where 35% rated their mental health as "poor" or "very poor," up from 24%

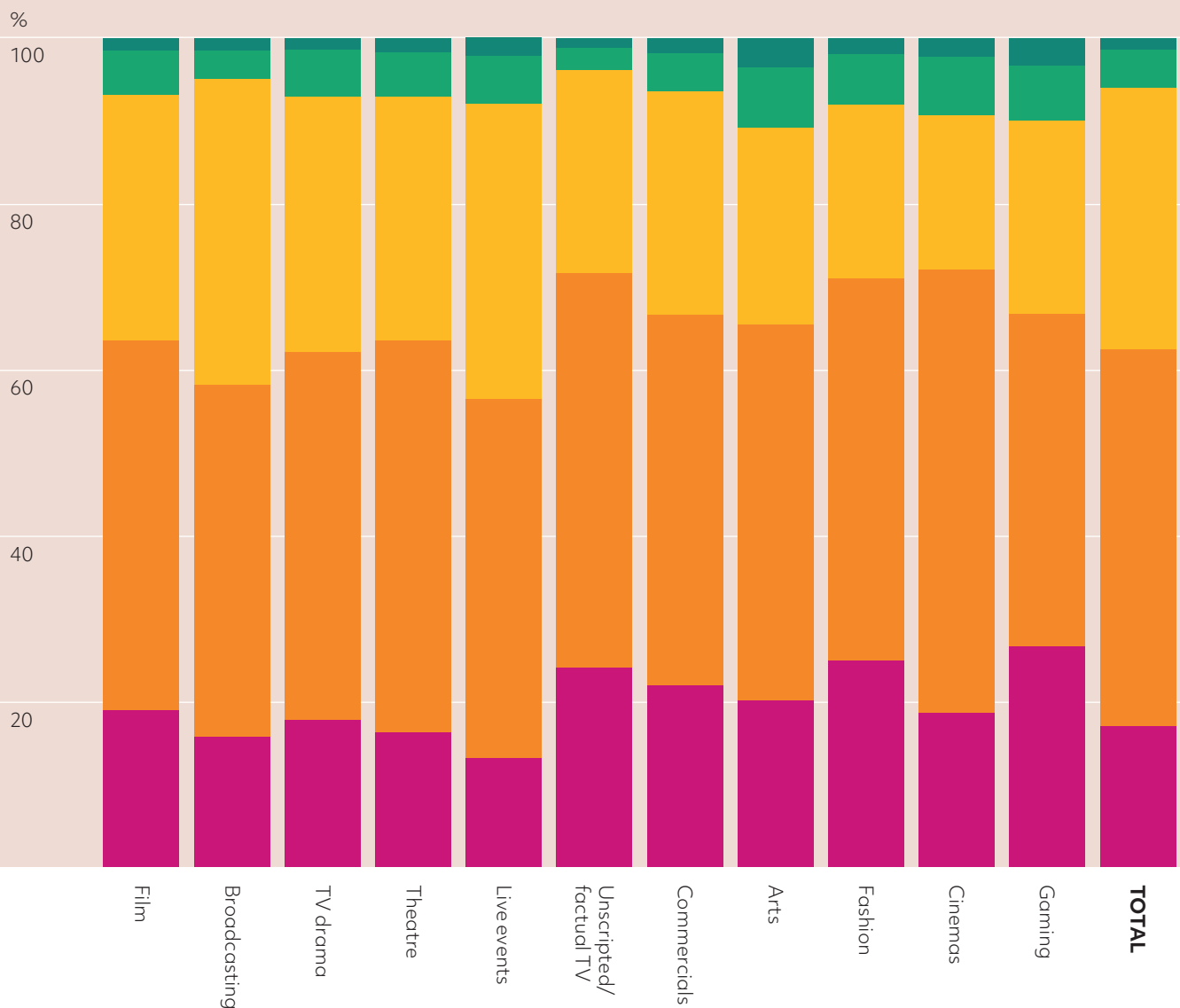
in 2022. And 64% said they had considered leaving the industry due to mental health concerns. The creative industries risk losing a generation of talent to burnout, disillusionment, and chronic instability.

Our survey finds a similar situation across all sectors of the creative industries. Overall, 63% of all respondents told us that they are struggling with their mental wellbeing, with 17% really struggling and 46% somewhat struggling (**Figure 22**). Nearly six in ten creative industry workers (59%) said they have felt anxious or depressed in the past 12 months.

Figure 22

Current mental wellbeing of respondents, by sector

- I am really struggling with my mental wellbeing
- I am somewhat struggling with my mental wellbeing
- My mental wellbeing is about the same as normal/I haven't experienced much impact
- My mental wellbeing is somewhat better than normal
- My mental wellbeing is much better than normal



A mental health crisis

Those impacted by the ongoing screen industries slowdown have faced particular pressures, as a work drought has induced financial pressures and uncertainty about the future. Three quarters (75%) of creative industry workers who are currently out of work are struggling with their mental wellbeing, and two thirds (66%) said they have felt anxious or depressed in the past year.

Workers in the unscripted TV sector were particularly likely to report poor mental wellbeing, mirroring findings in the Looking Glass research. Around a quarter of those working in unscripted TV said they are really struggling with their mental wellbeing and 68% said that they have felt anxious or depressed in the past year.

Unscripted roles often involve small budgets, tight turnarounds, and less formalised working structures. Coupled with the freelance nature of this work, unscripted workers often face intense workloads, unpredictable hours, and extended periods without rest or job security. The acute impact of the industry commissioning slowdown on unscripted TV workers has amplified their insecurity.

But on top of poor working conditions, a quarter (25%) of all unscripted workers also told us that they had worked on content that they had found harmful or distressing over the past 12 months. Researchers, producers, and editors often work on shows involving trauma, abuse, violence, or emotionally charged

real-life stories, yet rarely receive the psychological support that such material demands. Unlike many occupations where employers have a duty of care to protect workers who are exposed to traumatic content, these workers are not routinely offered debriefing, counselling, or training in trauma-informed practices, largely because of the freelance nature of work.

While unscripted workers are especially exposed, this is a wider issue across the creative industries. Almost one in five (17%) creative industry workers (and 20% of all global majority respondents) have worked on content that they have found distressing or harmful over the past 12 months. This includes one in five workers in theatre (20%) and broadcasting (21%).

The lack of structured support for emotional wellbeing remains a glaring gap across the creative industries, especially where a reliance on freelancers has left employers and engagers to overlook their duty of care.

This absence of structured support is symptomatic of a wider cultural problem in the creative industries, where the freelance model often allows poor practices to flourish unchecked. Without clear accountability, many workers find themselves isolated, with little recourse when facing mistreatment. In this environment, reports of bullying, harassment, and toxic workplace cultures have become alarmingly common, not as isolated incidents, but as systemic issues.

Workplace culture

Informal hierarchies, insecure employment, and a high-pressure working environment all feed a context where exploitation and abuse are widespread. Bullying, discrimination, and harassment are not always reported, or where they are, often go unaddressed due to a lack of formal HR structures and fear of professional retaliation – particularly among freelancers who rely on reputation and relationships for future work. Power

imbalances between senior creatives or ‘talent’ and junior or freelance staff can foster a culture where unacceptable behaviour is normalised or dismissed as “part of the job.”

Despite industry-wide awareness campaigns and numerous high-profile exposés, meaningful cultural change has been slow, leaving many workers to navigate harmful environments without adequate support or protection.

Figure 23

Have you personally experienced or witnessed bullying or harassment in the workplace?

'YES' RESPONSES

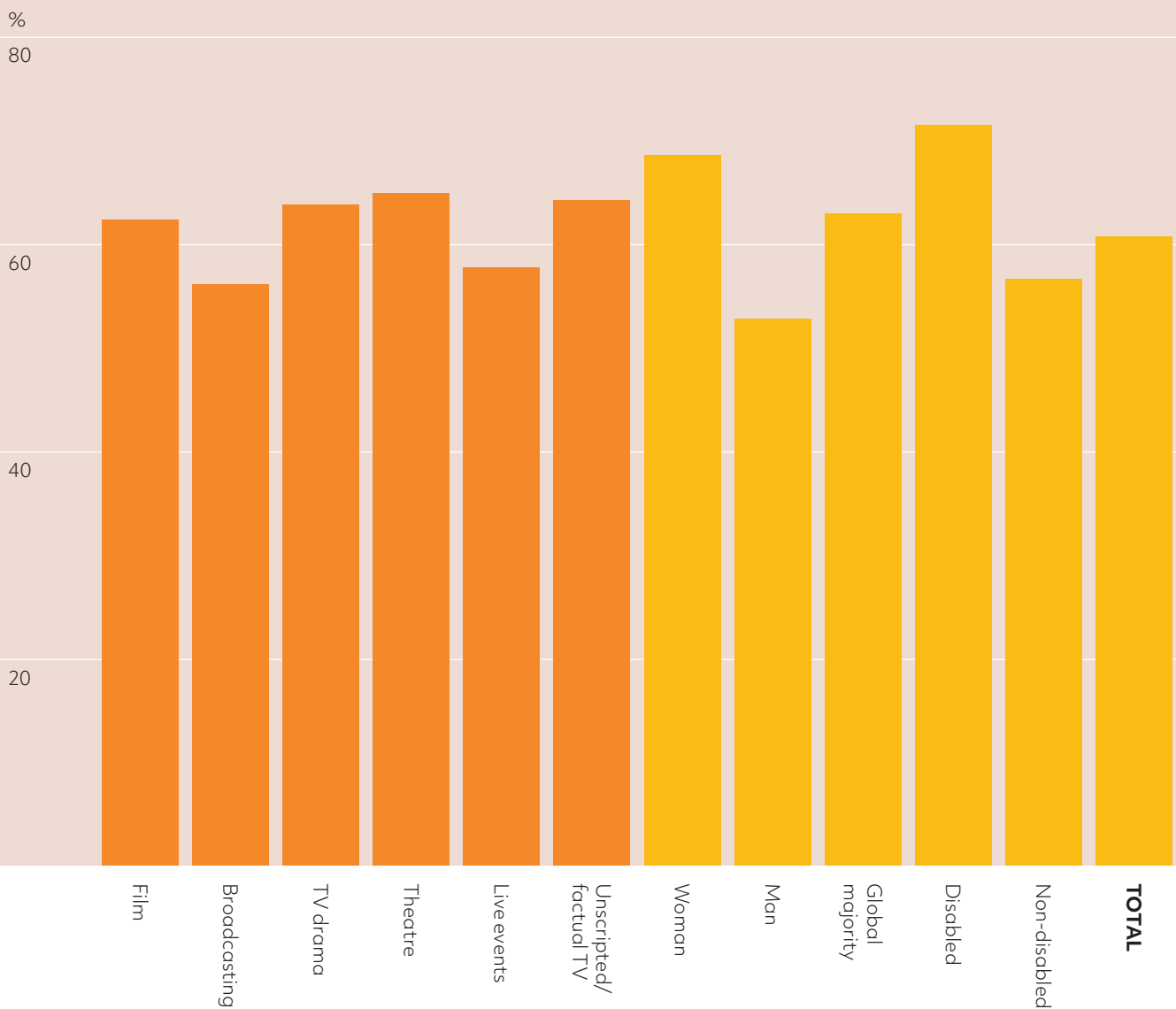
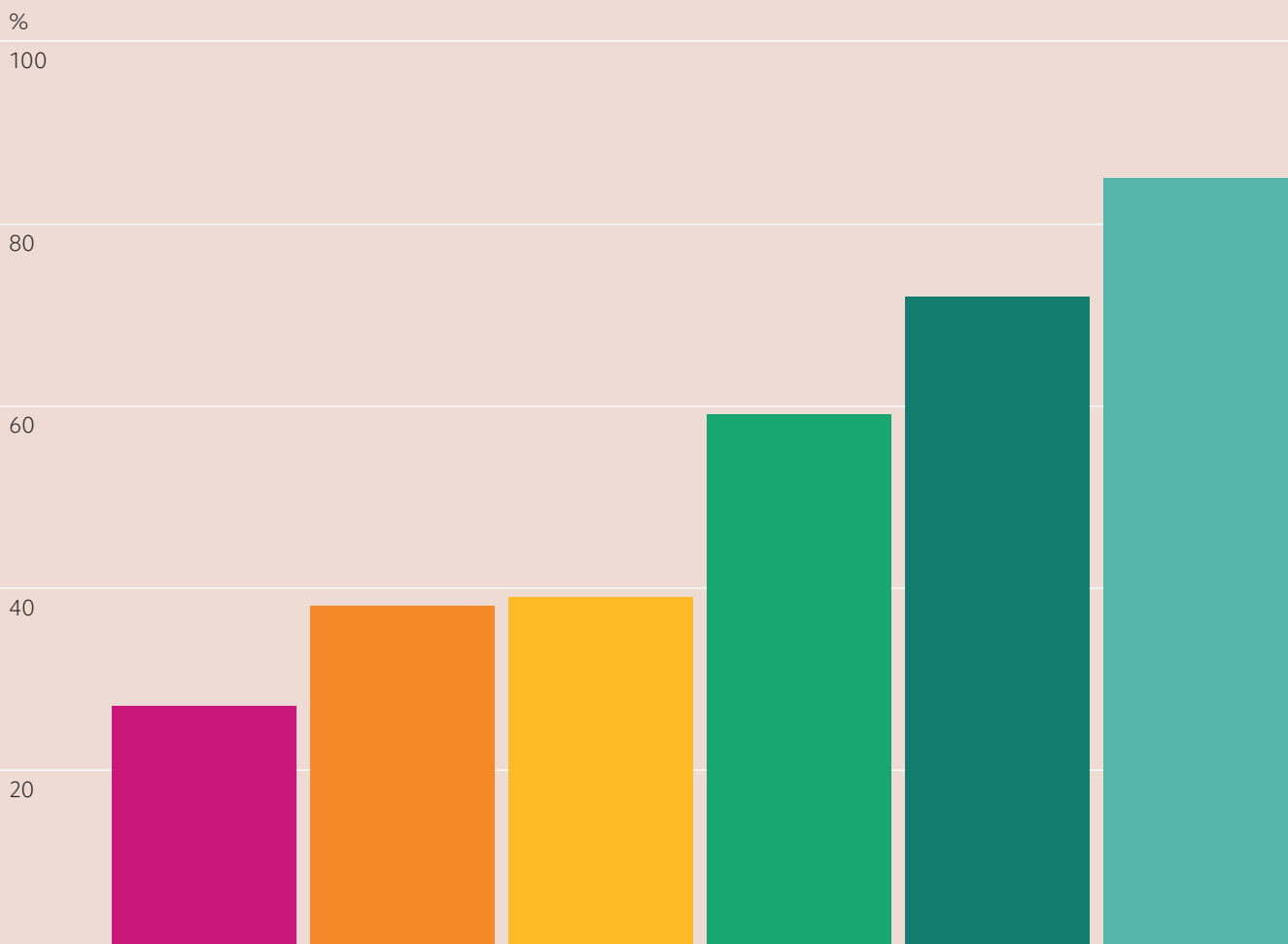


Figure 24

Prevalence of statements about workplace culture from survey respondents

- My employer or engager promotes a healthy work culture, **27%**
- The creative industries are an inclusive place to work, **38%**
- I feel fully supported by my employer or engager, **39%**
- I am treated with respect in the workplace, **59%**
- Behaviours that would be considered toxic and inappropriate in public life are often tolerated in the creative industries, **72%**
- I would support the launch of an independent body to report health and safety concerns, including bullying, harassment and sexual harassment, **85%**



More than seven in ten (72%) creative industry workers said that behaviours that would be considered toxic and inappropriate in public life are often tolerated in the creative industries – this increases to eight in ten workers in unscripted (79%) and 76% of global majority respondents.

And more than six in ten creative industry workers (61%) have personally witnessed or experienced bullying or harassment in the workplace **(Figure 23)**.

Women (69%) were far more likely than men (53%) to have experienced bullying and harassment at work, while disabled (72%) and global majority (63%) workers were all more likely to say that they had directly experienced or witnessed bullying or harassment in the past 12 months.

And by sector, more than six in ten of those working in TV drama and in film (63%) in unscripted or factual TV (64%), and in theatre (65%) told us that in the past year they had personally witnessed or experienced bullying or harassment in the workplace.

But only around half (55%) of those who have experienced bullying or harassment had reported the incident to their employer or engager. Just 12% who reported the incident were satisfied with the response – 42% said the response when they reported was insufficient.

This low level of reporting is in part due to experience of poor responses, and in part due to low levels of awareness of the reporting process. When asked whether their contract contained an indication of the process for reporting bullying and harassment, only around half (49%) of full-time employees and 46% of freelancers said that this was outlined in their contract.

However, low levels of reporting are linked to a mix of cultural, structural, and economic factors, especially for freelancers. Many fear

professional repercussions, such as being blacklisted or losing future work opportunities in industries where jobs are often secured through informal networks and reputation. The power imbalance between seniors, workers and talent can discourage speaking out. And a culture of silence, compounded by precarious employment and isolation, can make people feel reporting is futile or even risky to their livelihood. Indeed, 48% of freelancers did not report incidents, compared to 36% of full-time employees.

It is no surprise, then, that a minority of creative industry workers said they think the creative industries are an inclusive place to work (38%) and just 27% of all creative industry workers said that their employer(s) or engager(s) promote a healthy work culture **(Figure 24)**.

Less than four in ten (39%) creative industry workers said that they feel fully supported by their employer or engager and just 59% of all creative industry workers feel that they are treated with respect in the workplace.

Broadcasters, studios, streamers, production companies and other creative industry bodies and employers all must do better to turn the dial on toxic workplace cultures, including improving their reporting practices. There are, however, a number of positive building blocks being put in place, including the Film and TV Charity's work on mentally healthy productions¹⁸ and Bectu's own sexual harassment support service.¹⁹

The establishment of the Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority (CIISA) has been a hugely positive step, with 85% of all survey respondents saying that they would support the launch of an independent body to report health and safety concerns to, including bullying, harassment and sexual harassment.

Inclusion and exclusion

Inclusion and exclusion are persistent and defining dynamics within the UK's creative industries, shaping who gets to participate, who advances, and whose stories are told. Despite a public-facing image of diversity and innovation, the sector remains marked by significant inequalities related to race, class, gender, and disability. As our survey results highlight, women, people of colour and disabled workers are all more likely to have experienced or witnessed bullying and harassment at work **(Figure 25)**.

Indeed, when we asked only global majority respondents about their experiences of racial harassment and/or abuse at work, a staggering 42% reported witnessing racial harassment and/or abuse at work, and more than a third (35%) had direct experience of racial harassment or abuse in the workplace. And across all creative industry workers, just 38% overall feel confident that as a sector

or industry we are taking effective action to be actively inclusive for all – notably only 29% of global majority respondents said the same.

Almost one in five of all respondents, and almost a quarter (24%) of global majority respondents, feel discriminated against in the workplace. Those from working-class backgrounds are 1.5 times (21%) as likely as those who are not (14%) to say that they feel discriminated against in the workplace.

Despite increasing awareness and public commitments to diversity, many workers from racially minoritised or marginalised backgrounds report experiencing subtle microaggressions, overt hostility, or being subjected to stereotyping and tokenism. Such experiences are often normalised or dismissed, with victims frequently feeling unable to speak out due to fear of retaliation or being perceived as “difficult”, especially for freelancers.

Health and safety

Health and safety in the UK's creative industries has become an increasingly urgent issue, particularly in light of high-profile incidents and growing scrutiny of workplace practices. While often compared to sectors like construction or manufacturing, creative work environments, ranging from film sets and theatres to design studios and festivals, carry their own distinct risks. These include physical hazards (e.g., stunts, rigging, long hours), but also psychosocial risks like stress, burnout, and bullying.

Research from the Mark Milsome Foundation in 2021 found that over 80% of film and TV professionals reported that they felt unsafe at work at some point during their careers, and almost 60% felt that corners were being cut in the name of time or budget pressures.²⁰ And Bectu's research into festival workers found that half the respondents said they 'sometimes' or 'usually' felt unsafe while working at UK festivals in 2024.²¹

In our survey, just a quarter of

creative industry workers said that their employer or engager takes their health and safety very seriously – 51% said they take it quite seriously, one in five (20%) said not seriously and 4% said not at all. Among freelancers, a quarter did not feel their employer or engager takes their health and safety seriously and 4% said they don't look out for their health and safety at all.

More than one in ten (12%) of all creative industry workers have had a workplace accident in the past three years, while 19% have felt at risk of an accident. Theatre workers are most likely to have had a workplace accident (18%) or to have felt at risk of one (21%).

Creative industry workers are experiencing health and safety issues in high numbers – in the past year, 19% reported having experienced risks to their physical safety, 25% working without adequate health and safety training or briefings, 35% working with poor sanitation, and a staggering 79% reported long working hours.

Figure 25

Have you witnessed or experienced racial discrimination and/or abuse while at work?

GLOBAL MAJORITY RESPONDENTS, N=413

- I have witnessed this
- I have experienced this
- I have neither witnessed nor experienced this

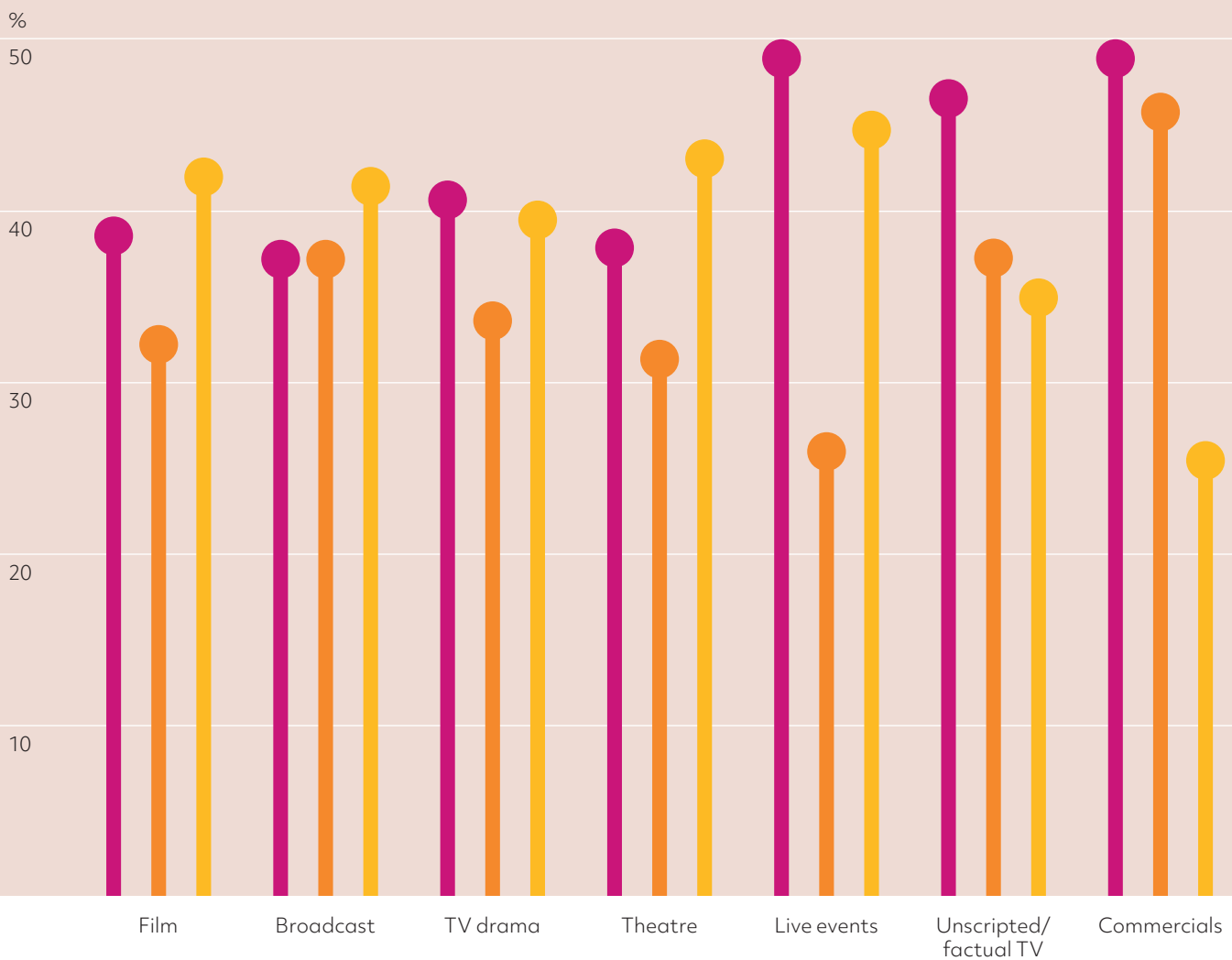
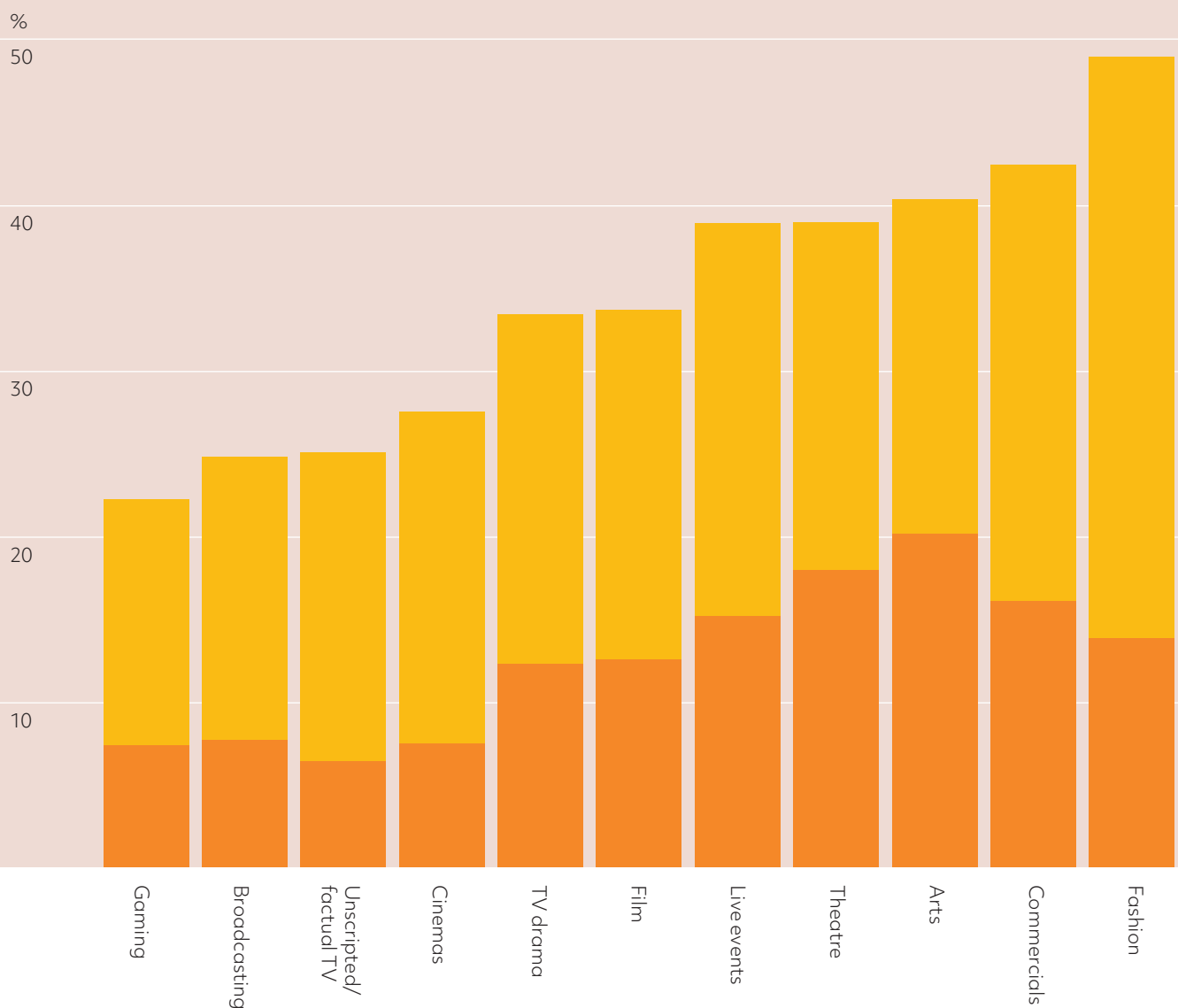


Figure 26

In the past three years, have you had an accident at work? By sector

- I have had an accident at work
- I have felt at risk of having an accident at work



And troublingly, less than half of all creative industry workers say there is always a risk assessment in place (44%), while a third (32%) said there usually is, 14% said sometimes, 6% rarely and 3% said never.

Improving health and safety practices across the UK's creative industries is critical. The sector thrives on innovation, collaboration, and human creativity, yet too often this comes at the cost of physical risk, mental strain, and unsafe working environments, especially for freelancers and those in less secure roles. High-profile tragedies like the

death of Mark Milsome have laid bare the consequences of inadequate safety protocols, while workers often report a widespread culture of silence, fear, and corner cutting. Meaningful change demands a proactive commitment to embedding safety, including psychological safety, into the foundations of creative work. This includes standardised training, clearer reporting channels, and a cultural shift that empowers all workers to speak up without fear. Only then can the industry truly honour the value of its workforce and build a safer, more sustainable future.

Health and safety issue	Experienced in the last 12 months	
	Total	Freelancers
Risk to physical safety e.g. working at height without proper equipment	19%	21%
Noise pollution/exposure to excessive noise without adequate PPE	23%	25%
Working in extreme heat or cold without adequate provisions	35%	36%
Inadequate training/safety briefing/risk assessment	25%	26%
Poor sanitation – e.g. substandard washing/toileting facilities	35%	38%
Issues with quality and availability of crew food and drink	42%	48%
Lack of adequate accommodation onsite/onset	22%	25%
Long working hours	79%	84%

Audience harassment

In response to a growing chorus of concern, amplified by media coverage of a perceived increase in unsafe behaviours in British theatrical venues, Bectu ran a week-long survey in late February 2023, receiving 1,508 responses. The survey found that 79.9% of respondents, a staggering 1,069 workers, had experienced “acts of bullying, violence, intimidation, harassment, or abuse of staff”.

A combination of staff shortages, alcohol sales and changes in drinks policies, the financial precarity of venues resulting in policy changes and more permissive management attitudes towards customers, and a change in staffing, had all created factors where workers were too often having to deal with abusive and antisocial behaviour and even violence.

- 917 respondents had experienced visitors to their theatre carrying out “acts of bullying, violence, intimidation, harassment or abuse of other members of the audience.”
- 788 had witnessed visitors “damaging the venue in acts of vandalism or as a result of intoxication (including urinating, being sick, etc).”
- 1,222 reported experience of or being witness to “general disorderly/loud/unsafe/intoxicated/lewd/antisocial behaviour” from audience members.

In our Big Survey, we revisited this research and asked those working in theatre and live events (n=1,051) whether they had personally

experienced antisocial behaviour, violence, aggression or harassment from an audience member/s in the past 12 months.

Overall, around a third (31%) of theatre and live events workers had experienced this – including 34% in live events and 29% in theatres. However, front of house staff are clearly bearing the brunt of bad audience behaviour – as more than three quarters of front of house staff (77%) say that they have experienced antisocial behaviour, violence, aggression or harassment from an audience member/s in the past year.

Across roles, there was a consensus that antisocial behaviour among audiences had become worse in the past five years, as a majority across front of house, technical, backstage and admin roles all said things had gotten worse. Theatre workers were more likely to say that things had gotten worse in the past five years (71%) while for those working in live events, around half (47%) thought things had improved, and half felt things had worsened (48%).

Bectu has previously called on the management of all theatrical venues in the UK to rethink their approach to audience behaviours in a range of different ways via its Safer Theatres Charter. We have also called on theatrical venues to revisit key policies around risk assessments as well as staffing policies, so that staff are better protected from abuse, harassment and risks to their safety. Our latest survey results suggest that there is still some way to go.

Figure 27

Have you personally experienced anti-social behaviour, violence, aggression or harassment from an audience member/s in the past 12 months?

LIVE EVENTS AND THEATRE WORKERS, N=1,101

- Yes
- No

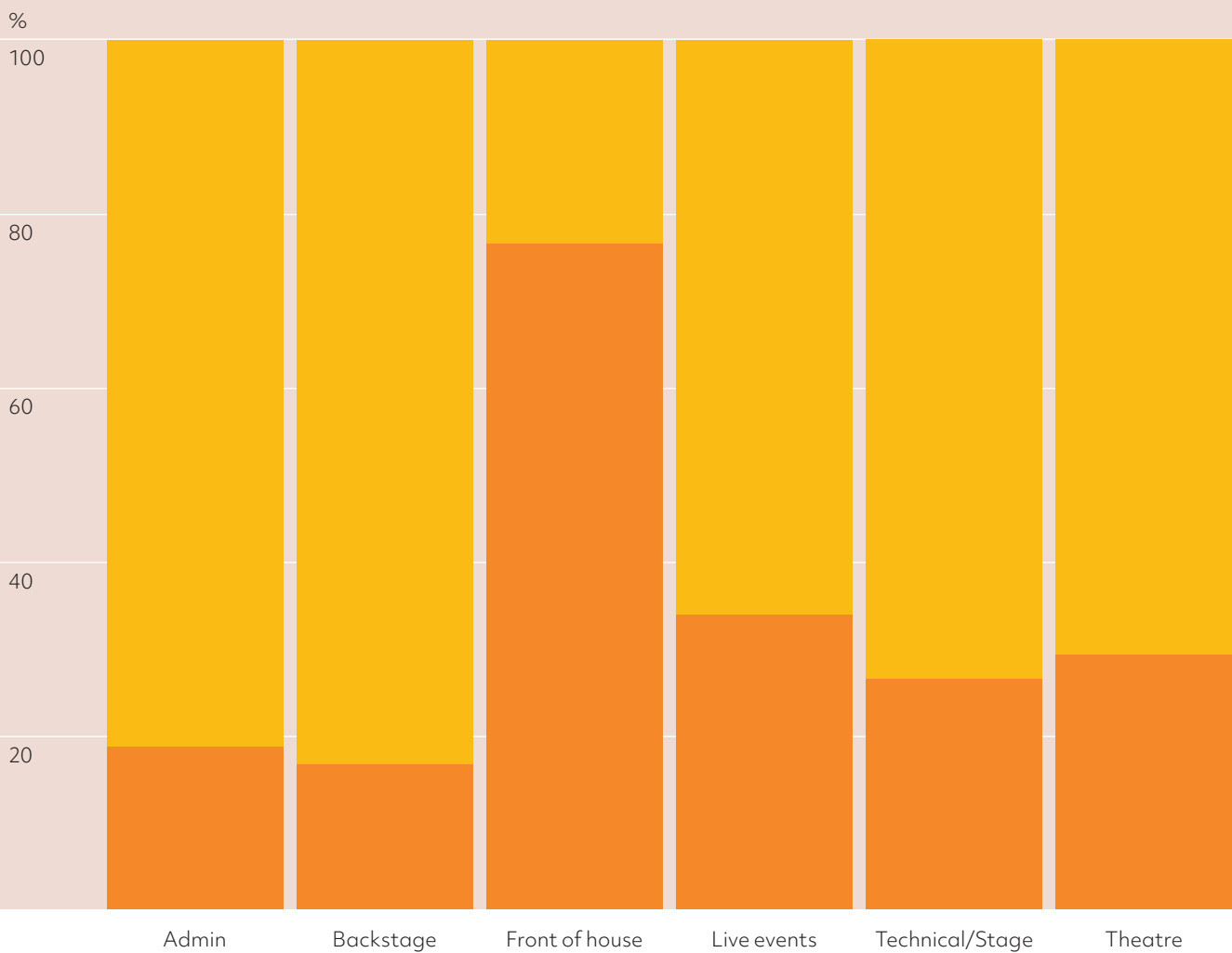
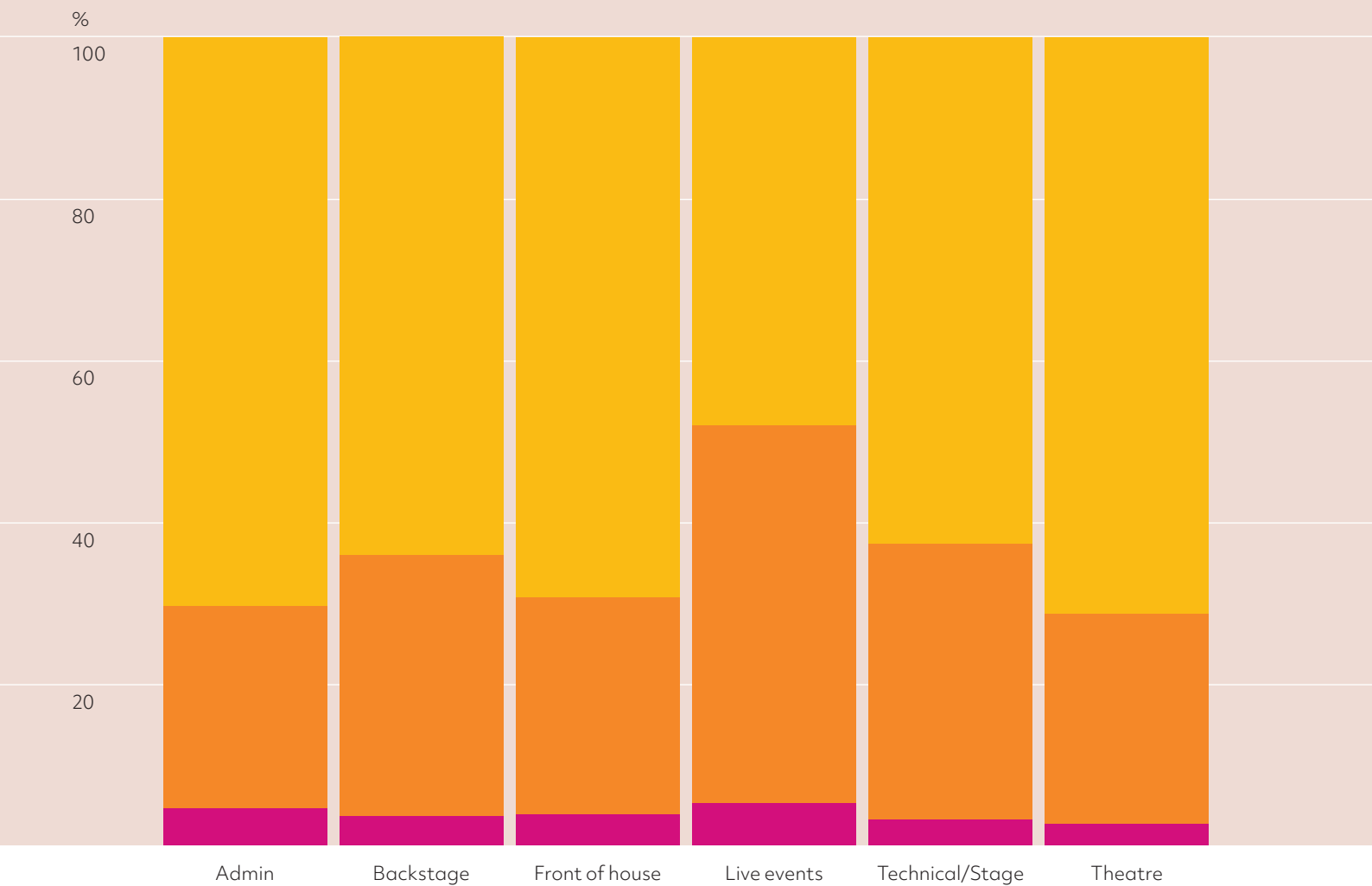


Figure 28

How do you think anti-social behaviour from audiences has changed over the past five years?

LIVE EVENTS AND THEATRE WORKERS, N=1,101

- It has got better
- It has stayed about the same
- It has got worse



bectu recommends...



Tackling bullying and harassment

Strong protections against bullying and harassment must apply across every contract type, including freelance and self-employed workers. Freelancers need real recourse, clear processes for complaints, independent investigation, and guaranteed non-retaliation. Industry-wide enforcement mechanisms like CIISA must be properly resourced with sure commitments from across industry and remain fully independent.

Ending fear of retaliation for freelancers

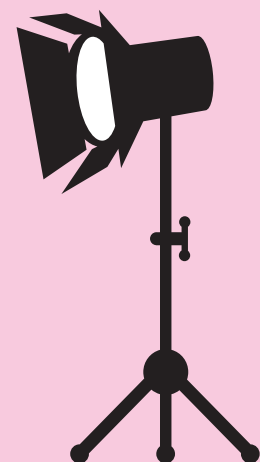
Freelance contracts should explicitly guarantee a safe, harassment-free environment, with consequences if that's breached, which must apply to any workers including short-term or fixed-day contracts. While the recent change to ban non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) to silence victims and to conceal unacceptable behaviour at work is welcome, action is needed to enforce this alongside broader fears of retaliation in practice. The Government's proposed Fair Work Agency should work with the new Freelance Champion to enforce these clauses across the sector.

Reporting processes for bullying and harassment

Independent reporting processes, established through CIISA, should be designed to ensure junior workers and those from marginalised backgrounds are able to come forward and report when needed. Data from these should be used to identify patterns and hold employers and engagers accountable.

Improving health and safety across the creative industries

Freelancers deserve the same protections as permanent staff when it comes to workplace health and safety. Productions should be required to ensure safe working hours, rest breaks, safe travel, and suitable insurance as well as ensuring freelance work has the appropriate risk assessments, including for mental health risks.²² Freelance involvement as health and safety representatives, in health and safety committees and reporting systems should be standardised.



spotlight

touring in the european union

many creative industry workers have relied on the ability to travel freely across Europe to work on short-term projects, attend events, or collaborate with international clients. However, following the UK's exit from the EU, creative industry workers touring in the EU face a range of logistical, financial, and bureaucratic challenges. Visa and work permit requirements now vary by country, creating a complex and costly patchwork of regulations.

A job that requires travelling through multiple EU countries, for example, for a camera operator working on a TV series, that would previously have been possible without visas, now requires multiple visas as

well as organising different carnets for different countries to travel across borders with their equipment. This is a very expensive and complex process and can mean jobs falling through altogether.

Touring theatre and live events professionals have been particularly hard hit by post-Brexit changes. An Independent Society of Musicians report from 2019 found that 85% of musicians they surveyed visit the EU27/EEA for work at least once a year, 22% visit the EU27/EEA more than 11 times per year and more than a third (35%) spend at least a month per year working in EU27/EEA countries.²³

But previously seamless cross-border movement has been replaced by a fragmented system

of visa rules, cabotage restrictions (limiting the number of stops UK-registered vehicles can make in the EU), and burdensome customs paperwork for sets, costumes, and technical equipment. These changes have made European touring more complex and expensive, especially for small- to mid-scale productions that lack the administrative capacity or budget to absorb additional costs. The unpredictability of planning EU tours now threatens the international reach of UK theatre and live events, undermining artistic exchange and income streams vital to the sector's sustainability.

We asked live events and theatre workers about their work in the EU

and how this had been impacted by Brexit. Overall, 38% of theatre and live events workers had never worked in the EU. Of those who had worked in the EU, half (50%) said that Brexit had made working in the EU more difficult whilst 14% had ceased to work in the EU altogether.

This would suggest an urgent need for clearer guidance, practical support, and targeted policy solutions to ensure that international touring remains viable for UK-based creative industry workers. This could take the form of a cultural accord between the UK and the EU to reduce the processes currently in place for creative industry workers, their equipment and goods.

bectu recommends...

An EU–UK agreement on working rights for creatives

As part of a wider UK–EU dialogue on youth mobility, science collaboration, and mutual recognition of standards, we urge the EU and UK to agree a cultural accord to reduce the processes currently in place for creative industry workers, their equipment and goods. This would ensure mutual agreement allowing artists, technicians, performers, and other creative industry workers to tour and work across borders for up to 90 days in any 180-day period, without needing work permits or country-by-country visa applications.

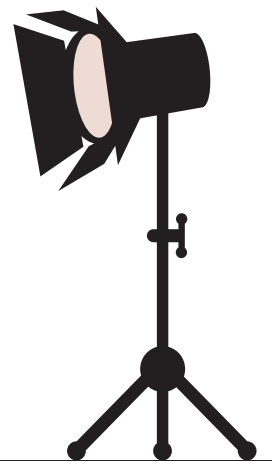
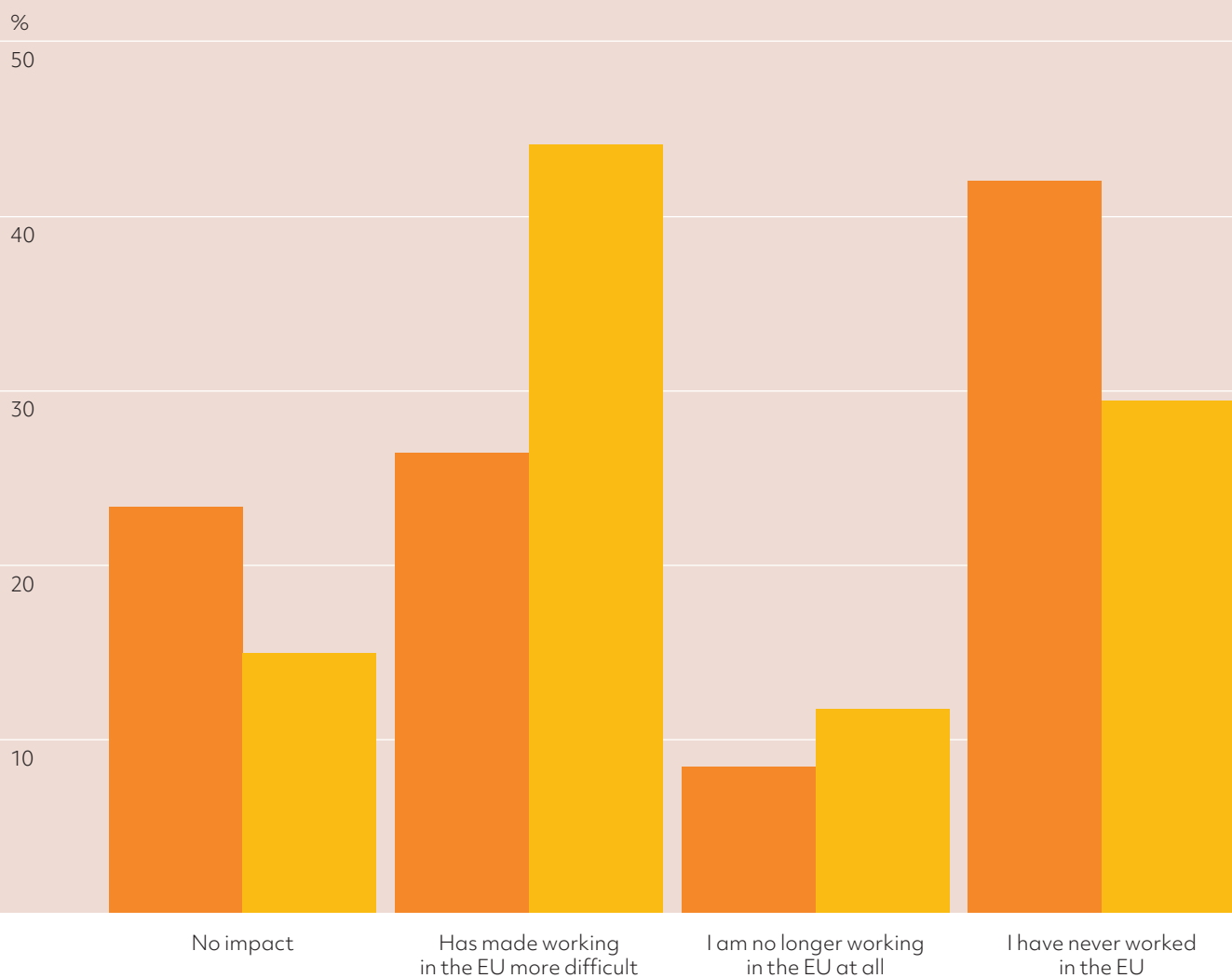


Figure 29

What impact, if any, has the UK's exit from the EU had on working in the EU?

- Theatre
- Live events





“

The film and TV industry
relies on word of mouth and
nepotism to hire people.
It stands to reason that there
is slow progress towards
diversity and gender equality.

”



hiring and progression

access and progression are key fault lines in the UK's creative industries, determining who is able to enter the field, who finds sustainable work, and who is supported to build a lasting career. Indeed, research has shown that the creative workforce is disproportionately white, middle-class, and London-centric, with barriers to entry and progression that are often informal and opaque.^{24 25}

These barriers include unpaid internships, reliance on personal networks, and cultural gatekeeping, which disadvantage those from working-class backgrounds and

underrepresented groups. Moreover, while some strides have been made to improve representation, deep structural issues, such as insecure employment and a lack of accountability, continue to reproduce exclusion in new forms, particularly for freelancers and those in project-based roles. Understanding these patterns is essential for building a more equitable and sustainable creative sector.

Just 36% of respondents told us that they feel the creative industries are an inclusive place to work. Looking at patterns of hiring and seeking work, this lack of inclusion is reflected in how people find work.

Figure 30

Do you agree that people from marginalised backgrounds are less likely to be promoted or hold more senior roles in your workplace?

TO NEAREST 0.5%

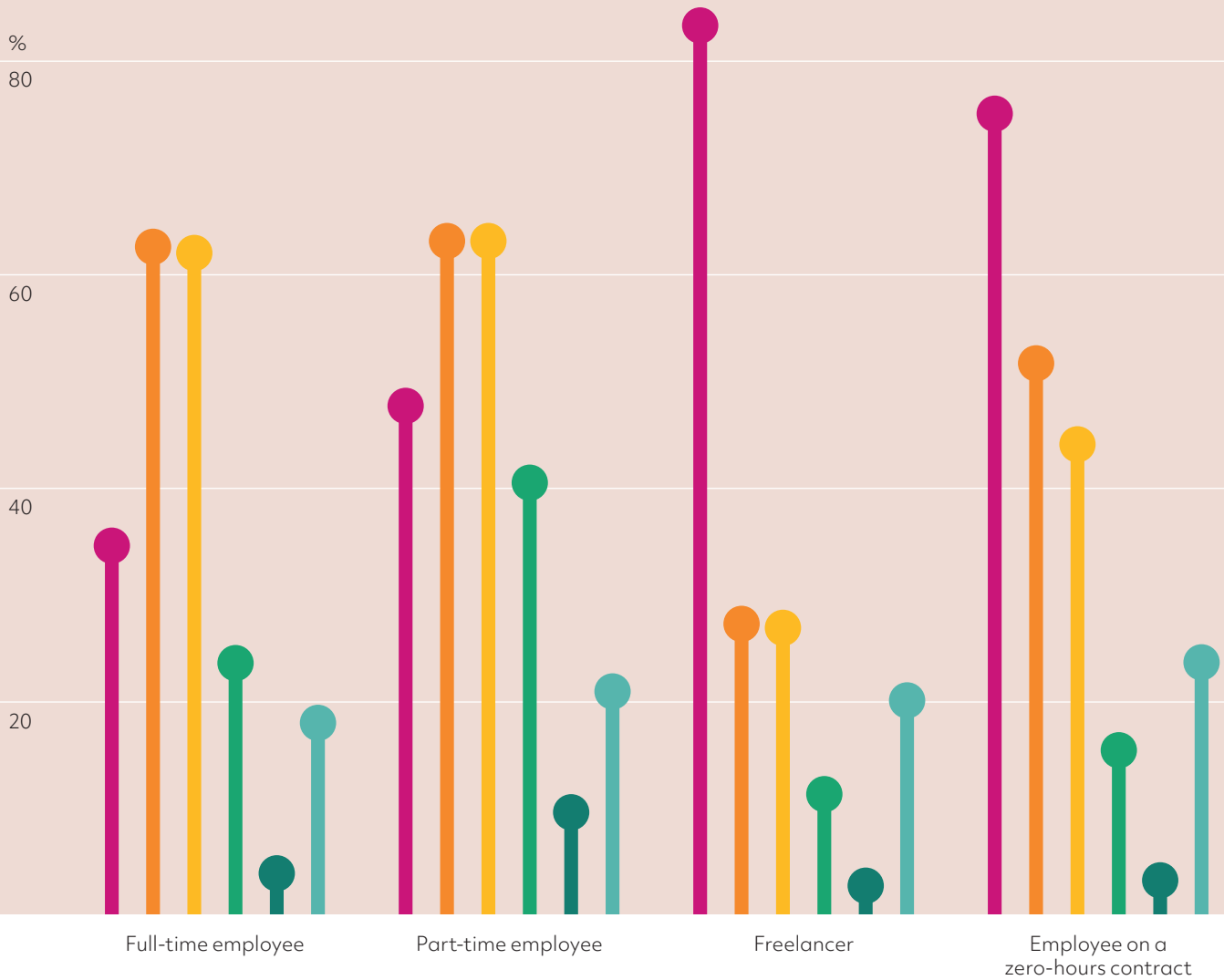
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

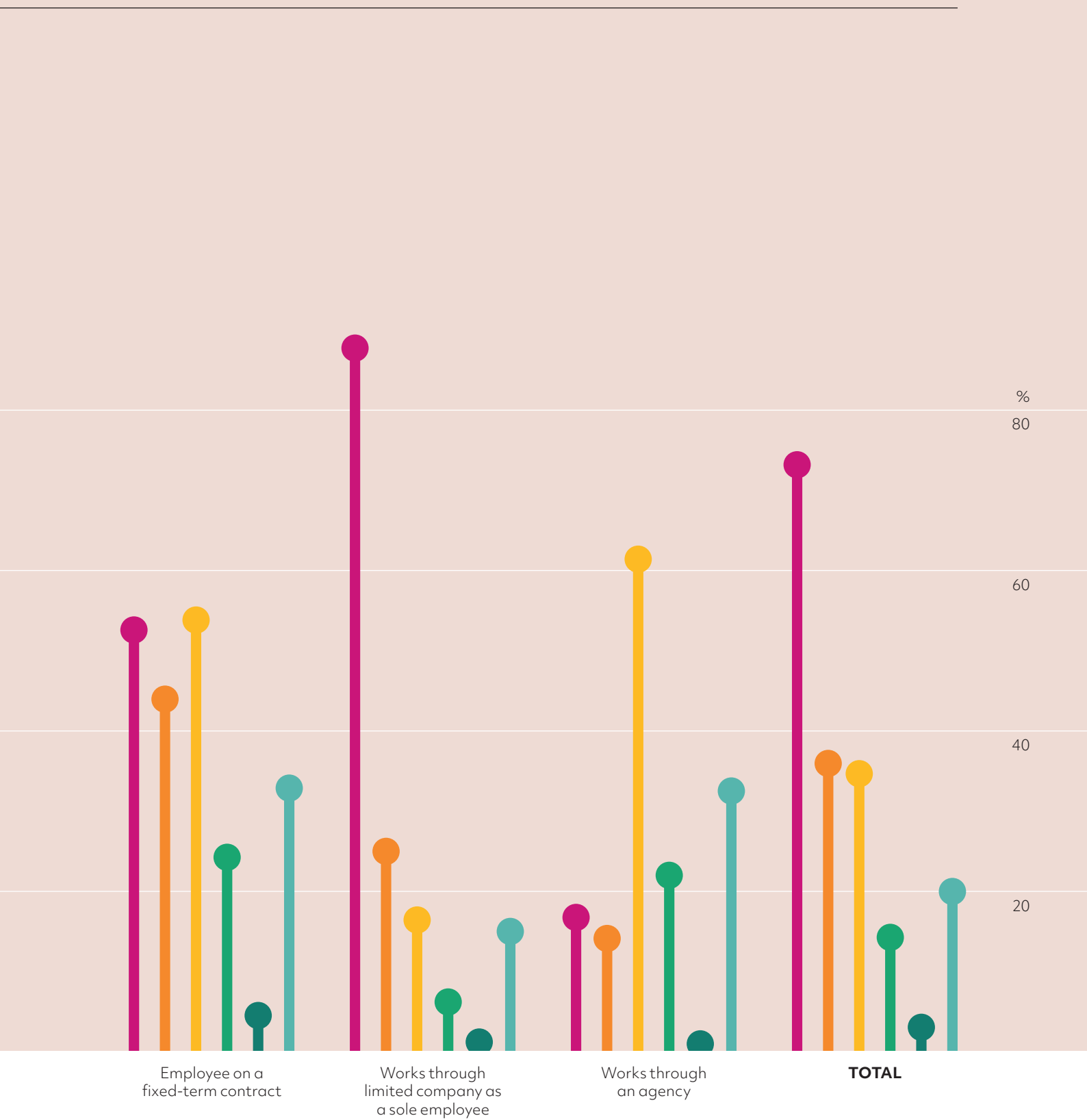


Figure 31 →

Prevalence of statements on creative industry job applications over the past 18 months, by employment status

- I got the job through a friend or contact
- I was invited to a formal interview
- The position was advertised publicly
- I was asked about my access needs
- I was asked about parenting or caring responsibilities
- I concealed information about a life commitment, situation or diagnosis when applying





Hiring practices

Hiring practices in the UK's creative industries are often shaped by informality, personal networks, and short-term contracts, rather than transparent or structured recruitment processes. While this flexibility can support innovation and rapid production, it also reinforces exclusion, making it difficult for those without industry connections or financial security to access and sustain creative careers.

Overall, when asked about all jobs that they had applied for in the past year and a half, three quarters of all creative industry workers (75%) said that they had gotten the job through a friend or contact. This increases to 82% of those working in film, TV drama and fashion, while for theatre, this was true for 64% of respondents.

Only 37% overall said that the position was advertised publicly, while the proportion for TV drama (25%), film (27%) and fashion (27%) was even lower. And just 37% of all respondents – including just 23% of fashion creatives, 30% of those working in film and 31% working in TV drama – said that they had been invited to a formal interview.

Working-class respondents were only slightly less likely to have gotten a job through a friend or contact (73%) than those not from a working-class background (76%), while for entry level workers (those in the first two years of working in the creative industries), this figure was 64%. Most entry level workers had found the job through a public advertisement (57%) and were far more likely to have a formal interview, though the figure was still less than half (49%).

While this highlights the barriers to entering the creative industries, it would suggest that progression remains even more closed off. This mimics research from Creative Access that found that 66% of employers admitted to focusing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts predominantly at entry level, with DEI efforts and practices at a more senior level often being neglected.²⁶

Very few workers overall said that they were asked about their access needs (16%), including just 23%

of disabled workers. And just 5% overall were asked about their parenting or caring responsibilities, including 8% of parents and 6% of carers.

Our research would suggest that the closed nature of hiring practices make it especially difficult for workers to be open about their personal and accessibility needs in the hiring process. Overall, 22% of creative industry workers said that they concealed information about a life commitment, situation, or diagnosis when applying. The figure was twice as high for disabled workers (45%), while for carers this figure was 37%.

“As a freelancer, recruiters want someone with 5 years' experience. How am I to progress, bouncing between contracts?”

“Favouritism and nepotism is still rife, toxic and bullying behaviour is hidden... Once you are in the industry, you are often left to figure things out, meaning people with contacts do well and are steered towards opportunities, while gatekeeping information from others.”

“I applied to a job via a vague but approachable Facebook post. I got the job without seeing a job description, which when I asked for it, was wildly different from what I applied for.”

“Far too much word of mouth hiring in my part of the industry. But this is a result of the job being so specific to very bespoke workflows, and the cost of mistakes being so high, that it puts huge pressure on those who hire to “hire safe” and use people you know or people who have done it before. This will only change if studios and production companies are made to understand this and put less pressure on their freelance workers to deliver in this way. More time in a schedule gives all departments more time to engage in CPD training within a job.”

“Most of the time work opportunities are via text message e.g. ‘Are you free on...’ Very little detail of what the job is or where it

is. I usually have to respond with 'Yes but what is it and where is it? And how much?' Sometimes I will just get text confirmation of work e.g. 'Great we'll book you on it.'"

“ Since having children, I feel judged when I mention this in interviews.”

“ Sometimes it is not always clear what role you will be taking before hiring. Often you do not know the project or what is expected of you before the job starts.”

Perhaps interestingly, those who were parents were less likely than the average creative industry worker to conceal information about a life commitment, situation, or diagnosis when applying for a job (20%). Though when looking only at mothers, this figure increases by almost half, to 28%, reflecting the gendered nature of balancing parental roles with work.

Our research paints a worrying picture of hiring practices in the creative industries, with many marginalised groups most exposed.

Internships and unpaid work

In our survey, more than a quarter of all creative industry workers (26%) said they interned to get into the creative industries. In the same survey, Bectu found that those from working-class backgrounds (23%) were less likely to come through this route than those who were not (30%), highlighting their prohibitive nature.

We also found that those in London were more likely to have interned to get into the industry (30%) than those from other regions and nations (19% in the West Midlands, 21% in Wales, 22% in the South West), with opportunities concentrated in the capital and high housing and living costs acting as a further barrier to those from outside the M25.

Despite many benefitting from internships, creative industry workers are clear that unpaid internships should not be continued. Overall, 94% agree that all interns should be paid at least minimum wage.

But unpaid work is a broader issue in the creative industries, with 39% of survey respondents saying that they have felt pressured to work for free. The view that creative work is

a 'labour of love', the freelance nature of much work, as well as the importance of contacts and connections in finding work can make it difficult for individuals to challenge expectations about unpaid work without risking reputational damage or missed opportunities.

Many workers, particularly those early in their careers, are made to feel that unpaid work is the only way to "get a foot in the door" or prove themselves, which would lead to future work. In our survey, half (49%) of those who have spent two years or less working in the creative industries said that they have felt pressured to work for free.

The persistence of unpaid work in the UK's creative industries highlights a deep-rooted imbalance between aspiration and access. While genuine work experience can be the best means of giving young people a feel for the industry, unpaid labour is exploitative and exclusive. If the sector is to thrive on true diversity, innovation, and merit, it must confront the ethical and economic realities of unpaid labour.

Figure 32

Unpaid work and internships, by years worked in the creative industries

- I interned to get into the creative industries
- I have felt pressured to work for free

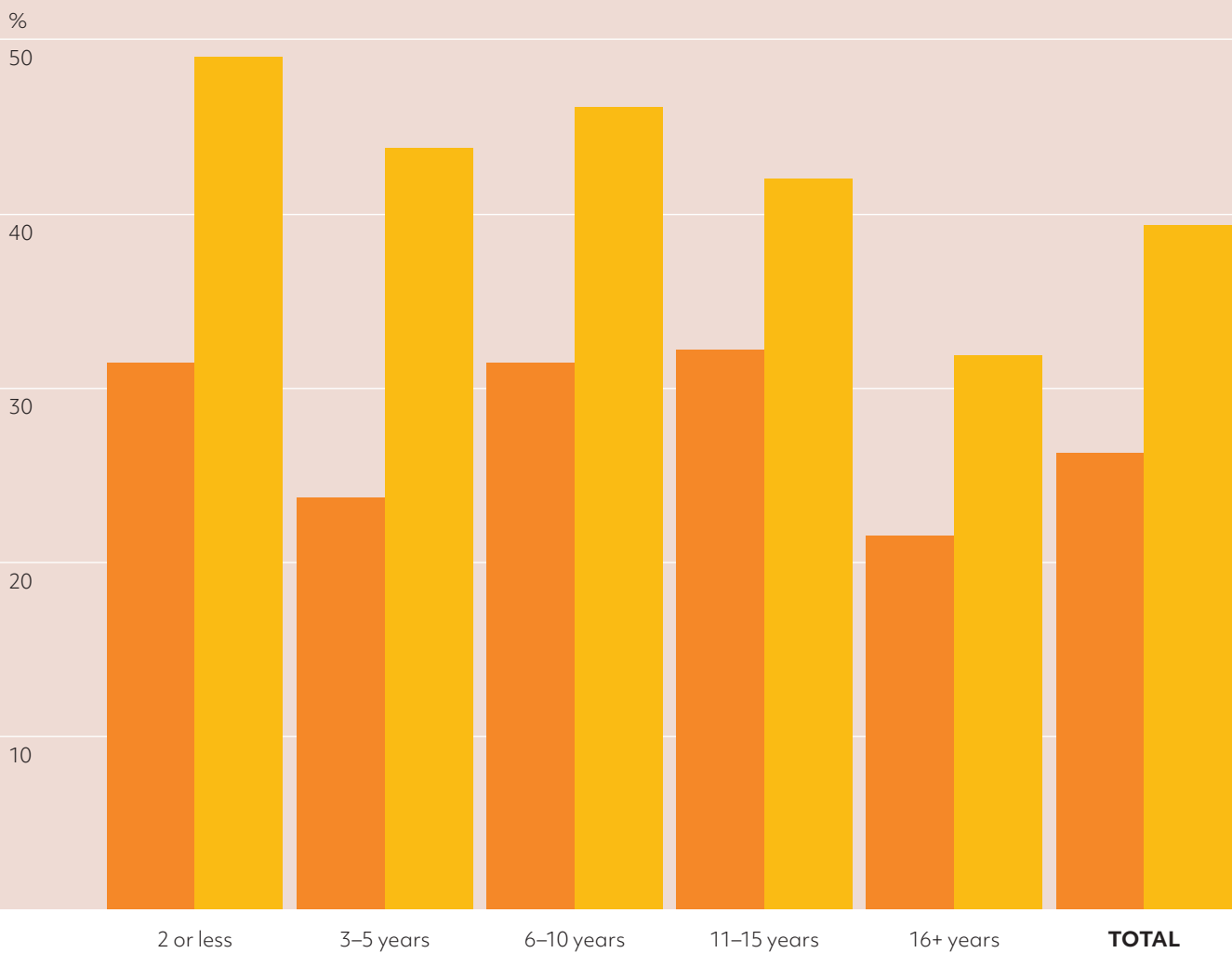
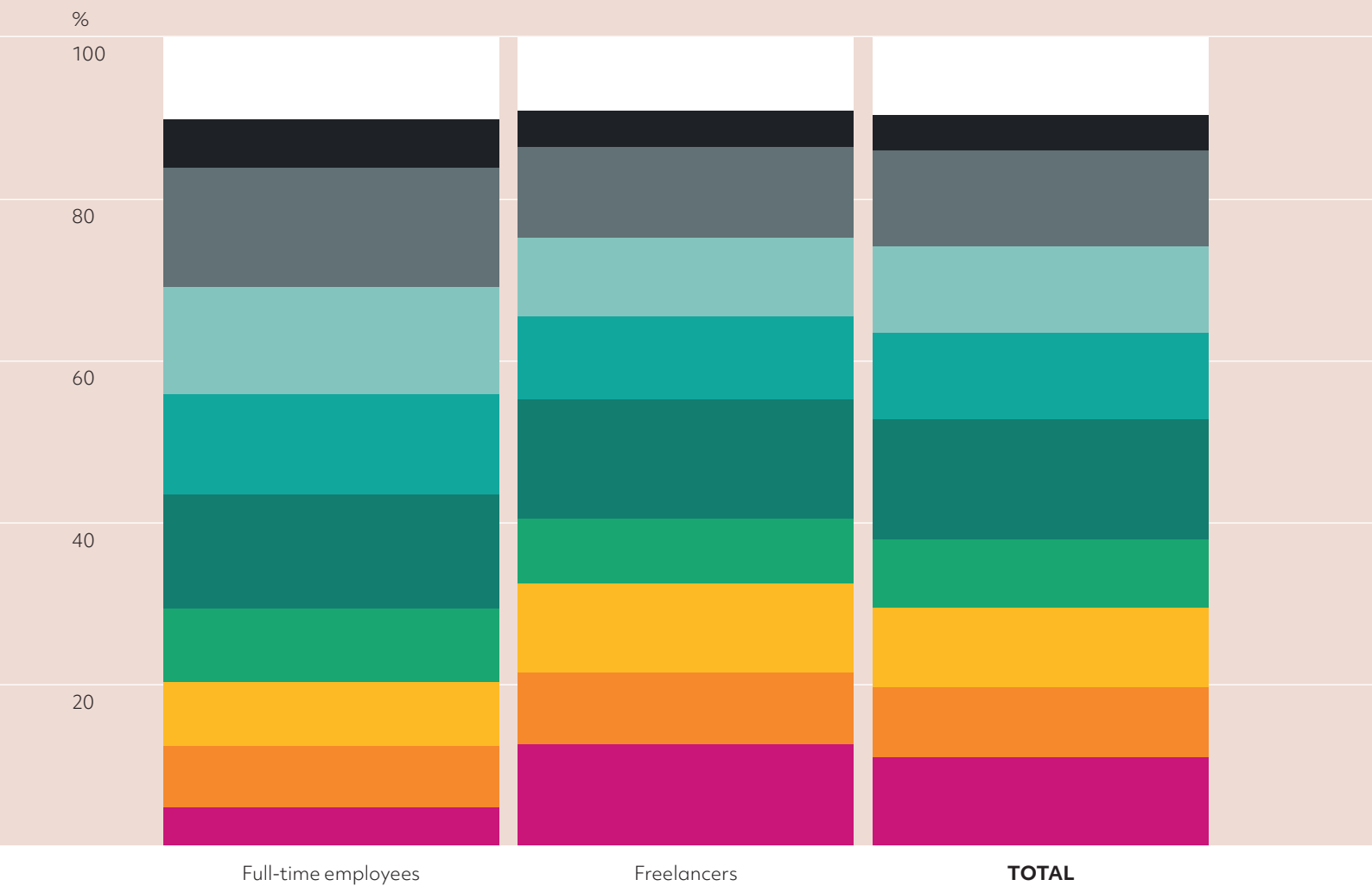


Figure 33

On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (very), how confident do you feel that you know what training you could do to support your development at work?



Career progression and development

The reliance on networks, opportunity, and visibility in obtaining work across the creative industries, as well as the job-to-job nature of freelance work, means that career progression and development is rarely linear. Access to development opportunities, mentorship, and recognition is uneven, raising important questions about who gets to build sustainable careers in the creative sector.

Seven in ten (71%) overall (and 83% of freelancers) have not been offered any training or development opportunities by their employer or engager – and just 25% overall said they had been offered opportunities where their employer or engager would cover the costs. For freelancers only 12% had been offered training or development opportunities paid for by their employer or engager, compared to 57% of full-time employees.

Moreover, awareness among workers over the development and training they need to advance their careers is relatively low. When asked on a scale of 1-10 how confident they feel that they know what training they could do to support their development at work, more than half gave a score of 5 or less, with around one in five giving a score of 1-2. For freelancers, even fewer workers were aware of the training they need to do to support their development at work **(Figure 33)**.

However, training is only part of the picture, as wider structural inequalities play out through a very unequal landscape for progression in the creative industries.

Among global majority respondents, 64% said that people who are from marginalised backgrounds are less likely to be promoted or hold more senior roles in their workplace – this compares to 44% of all respondents. And more global majority respondents

said they wanted to see support for career advancement for established ethnic minority professionals (68%) than more support for entry-level roles for people from ethnic minority backgrounds (66%).

Barriers to career progression are often strongly gendered. Half (50%) of all women agreed that those from marginalised backgrounds are less likely to be promoted or hold more senior roles compared with 37% of men **(Figure 30)**.

Similarly, 48% overall believe there is a pay gap in their workplace – but among global majority respondents, this increases to 56%. A majority (58%) of women felt there was a pay gap compared to 37% of men.

When asked how they felt their workplace was doing in terms of gender equality, only 7% of women reported full gender equality in terms of career progression, while 17% thought their workplace was doing well and 37% thought their workplace was doing ok **(Figure 34)**.

Just 7% of women reported having coaching or mentoring to support women workers, while 16% said there were no women in senior management positions in their workplace. A mere 17% of all women workers said that there was gender pay equity in their workplace.

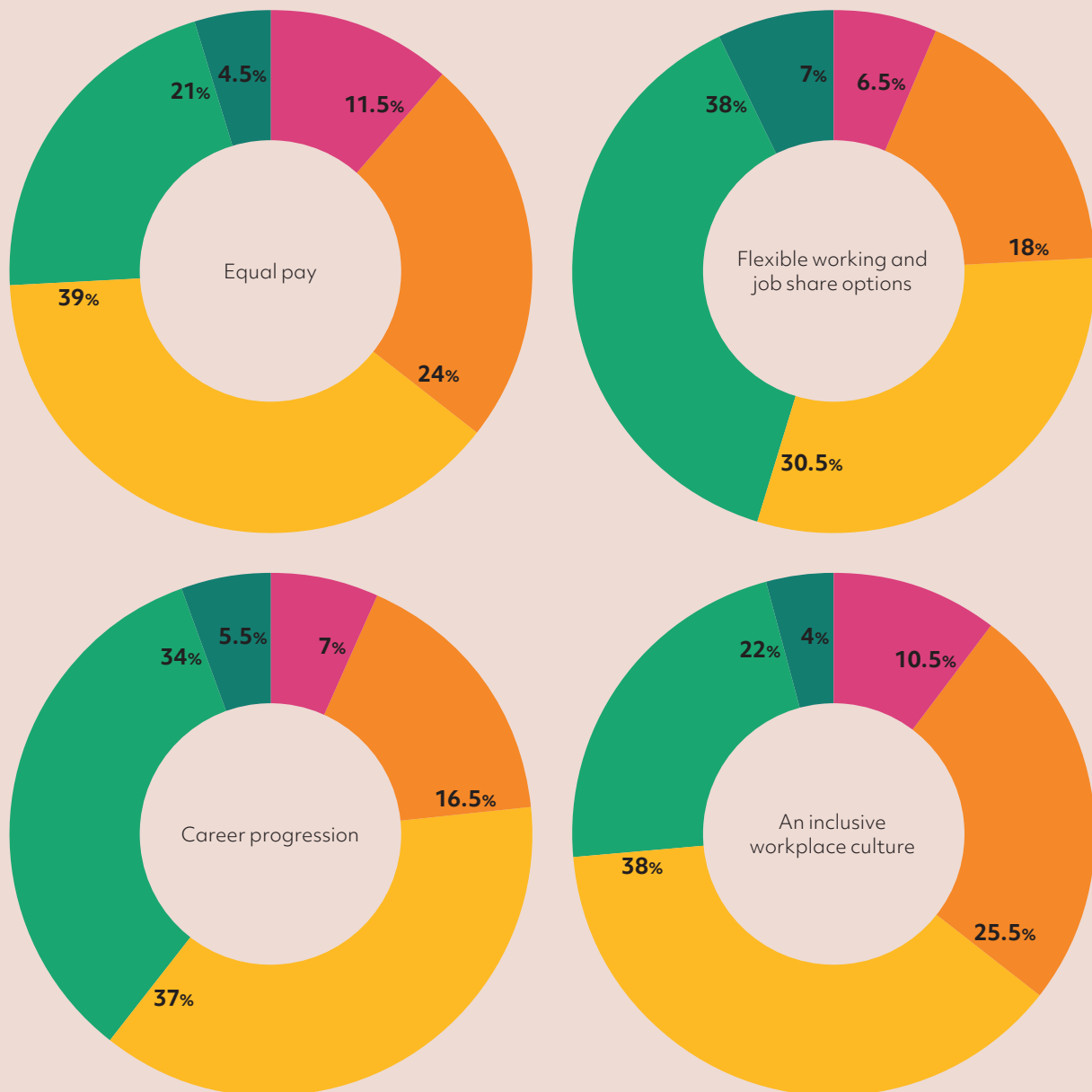
Structural inequalities, including gender and racial disparities, further exacerbate challenges arising from exclusionary hiring practices in the creative industries, with women and global majority workers facing additional obstacles in pay, promotion, and professional support. Our research highlights the urgent need for systemic change to ensure that all workers, regardless of background, have equitable access to the opportunities that are essential for long-term success in the creative sector.

Figure 34

How well is your current/last workplace doing in terms of gender equality in key areas?

WOMEN RESPONDENTS, N=1,991 • TO NEAREST 0.5%

- Full gender equality
- Doing well
- Doing ok
- Not doing well
- No gender equality



bectu recommends...

Improving access to career development

Broadcasters, commissioners and streamers should review commissioning practices that block career development for marginalised workers. Long-running productions and studios should offer contracts with training and advancement routes and be discouraged from repeat short-term hiring.

Fairer hiring practices

The normalisation of informal hiring practices across the creative industries means job applicants are often simply ignored or 'ghosted'. There are some basic, low cost and high impact measures, normalised in most industries, such as acknowledgement of application, rejection letters and feedback on job applications that production companies and other employers should put in place as standard. These would go a long way to improve applicants' experiences, which would have a positive impact on those from marginalised backgrounds who are less likely to be connected in the industry.

Improving career development across the creative industries

While there are a number of training and upskilling initiatives, notably ScreenSkills for the screen industries, our results show that many continue to miss out on skills development opportunities. Major players across the creative industries, including broadcasters and commissioners but also arms-length bodies such as Arts Council England and membership organisations including Society of London Theatre, UK Theatre, and the Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television (Pact), should come together to develop a portable professional development fund for freelancers to upskill, retrain, or take time for career transitions. This could sit alongside the Skills Passport in the Government's Creative Industries Sector Plan.

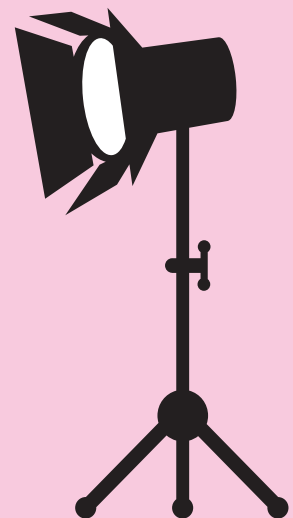


Better enforcement on unpaid work, including overtime rights

The Government must ensure stricter enforcement on unpaid work, including clearer rules to eliminate unpaid creative industry internships. The Fair Work Agency should first undertake proactive investigations, with a focus on freelance workers, where unpaid work, often falsely categorised as self-employment, negates minimum wage rules. Employers and engagers must ensure that they are enforcing agreements around overtime rights.

Mechanisms to stop nepotistic hiring

Too much work in the creative industries is dependent on “who you know”. Access must be broadened; this could be through expanding inclusive job platforms (like Creative Access, the Talent Manager, or BFI Crew List) or through creating a ‘fair hiring’ code of practice, led by industry bodies that could become an accreditation for production companies and other employers who comply with inclusive and fair recruitment standards.



spotlight

early career workers

those entering the creative industries, here measured by the 287 respondents in their first two years of employment in the creative industries, often face a unique set of challenges and opportunities. This period is marked by adaptation, as individuals seek to build networks, gain practical experience, and establish a foothold in a highly competitive and often precarious sector. Many navigate irregular work patterns, low or unpaid roles, and limited paid job security, which can make entry into the industry especially daunting, particularly for those without financial backing or industry connections.

While our survey suggests that there are similar numbers of early career workers operating as freelancers (45% compared to 48% overall), they are more likely to be contracted through PAYE (38%) than they are to be working as self-employed through a limited company (3% compared to 29% overall). Most said their current or last job was publicly advertised (57% compared to 37% for all respondents) while 64%

found it through a contact or friend (compared to 74% of all respondents).

They are generally lower earners – with 34% earning £10,000 or less, 24% earning £10-20,000 and 29% earning £20-30,000 a year before tax from their creative work. 45% have a second job to supplement their income compared to 30% of all creative industry workers.

Although they are more likely than other industry workers to have savings (74% compared with 69% overall), just 26% of early career workers have a pension.

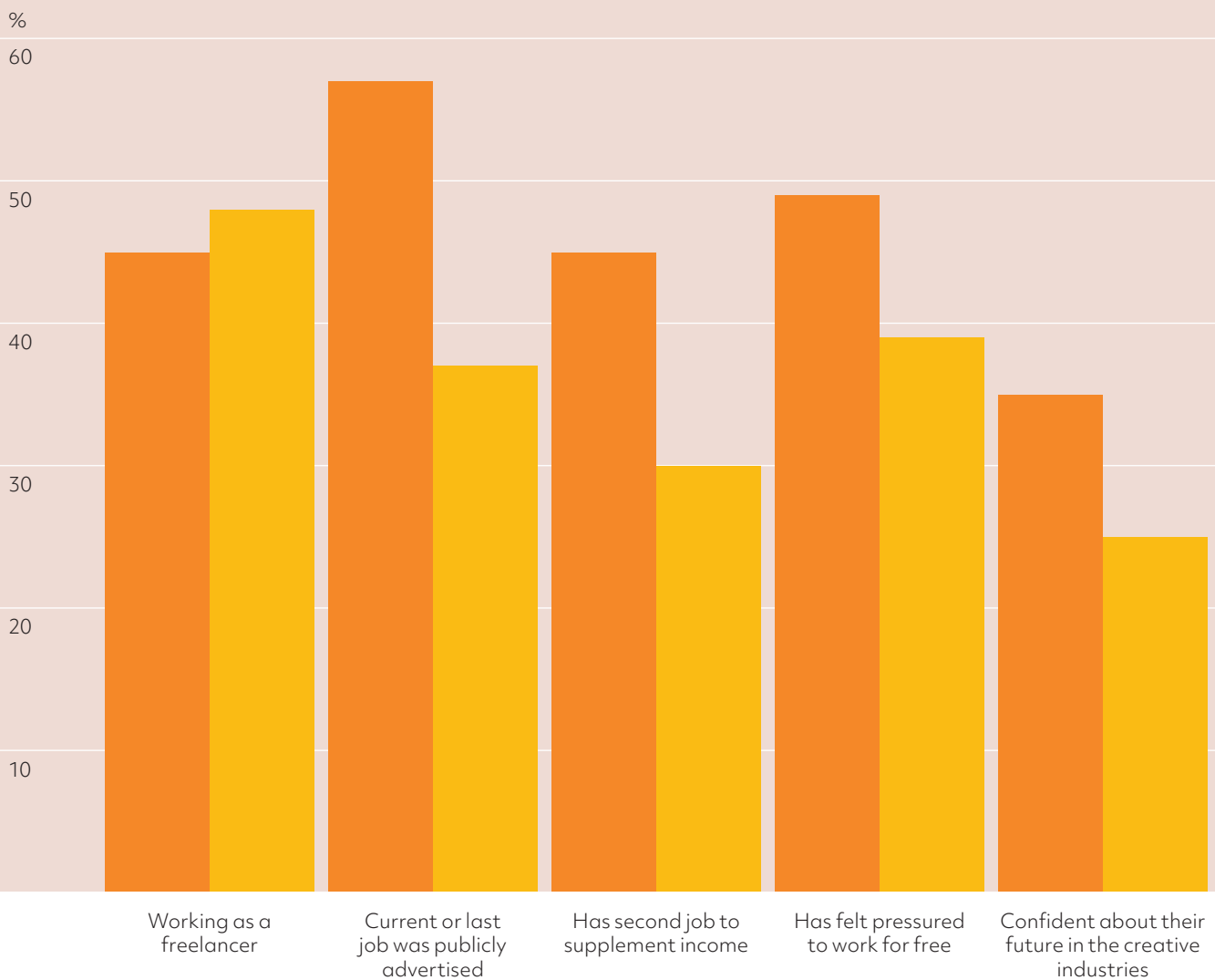
And they are generally confident about their future in the creative industries (35% compared to 25% overall) – while 20% say they see themselves working elsewhere in the next five years.

However, perhaps to get a foot in the door and build their reputation in the industry, many are being exposed to exploitative practices; half (49%) have felt pressured to work for free (compared to 39% overall), and 71% have experienced long working hours that could be considered a health and safety risk.

Figure 35

Circumstances of early career workers compared to the overall workforce

- Early career workers
- General workforce



artificial intelligence

the rapid advancement of generative AI technology presents an enormous technological advancement that is set to shake up the creative industries. There are many similarities with the introduction of other technologies, such as VFX, but the 'intelligence' ability of AI means that the impact across the industries Bectu represents is less predictable.

The pace of development of AI is unpredictable and fast-changing. With every release of a new generative system or update, there have understandably been shocks sent through the creative industry workforce. Text generators can not just answer questions, but write full screenplays, mimic specific writing styles, and incorporate complex ideas and themes into written pieces

that meet a string of requirements, all within seconds. Video generating programmes can produce lifelike footage from prompts, or edit down hours of raw footage to short films in a matter of seconds.

There is transformative potential within AI technologies, to minimise basic or repetitive tasks, to speed up laborious processes or to forge new innovative paths. But where the balance of costs to benefits weighs is an ongoing debate. There are clear concerns about copyright and intellectual property, job displacement, and creativity more broadly.

The potential for generative AI to undermine copyright and intellectual property protections afforded to creatives has been widely covered, as artists, writers, musicians, and other creators campaign to retain

control over how their content is used in AI development.

Bectu has opposed the proposals from the UK Government for a rights reservation model to address the impact of generative AI models on intellectual property rights. We believe that an 'opt-out' model would shift the onus of protecting rights to works onto their creators – meaning workers would bear the burden on which big tech would profit. We believe that this would make such a scheme unworkable, unfair and ultimately damaging to the creative industries. Those with less power in the industry, including freelancers and the self-employed, as well as backstage roles, would lose out most.

Indeed, AI is adding to existing precarity for the workforce. A recent H&M campaign²⁷ employed AI to generate 'twins' of 30 models for a series of social media posts and marketing material. H&M made clear that the models would retain their image rights and be compensated for use of their digital twins in a similar arrangement to their usual work, and paid for use of their images based on rates agreed by their agent. However, this clearly has a broader impact on other fashion creatives and industry workers, from makeup and hair, to rigging and lights.

At present, it is very difficult to know how much AI is being used in the creative sector, because the sector is largely propped up by a freelance workforce with few employment rights, moving between short-term jobs at short notice.

Research from Queen Mary University and the Alan Turing Institute²⁸ has shown that generative AI use is already undermining current rights and protections through data extraction, reinforcing existing power inequities and furthering exploitative contractual processes. The research highlights that the current lack of transparency in the use of generative AI is impacting less powerful creatives and those doing the 'backroom' work in the creative industries, with freelancers most exposed.

Bectu members are understandably concerned about how AI will impact the creative industries, though more feel that any negative

impact will be on the industry as a whole than on their personal job security. In our survey, just 10% predicted that AI will have a positive impact on the industry they work in over the next five years. Overall, 59% think the impact will be negative.

Across sectors, those in the screen industries are most concerned about the impact that AI will have on the industry they work in (63% predict a negative impact) as well as on their own job security (55% predict a negative impact).

However, reiterating findings from earlier research,²⁹ it is more junior workers who feel most exposed to negative impacts from the use of generative AI. 65% of those in the first two years of their creative career predict a negative impact on the industry they work in, compared to 56% of those who are more established (16+ years). And 29% of those in the first two years of creative work predict a very negative impact on their own job security, compared with 17% of those with 16 or more years' experience.

We also asked creative industry workers about their use of generative AI in their work. The results suggest that very few creative workers have used generative AI in their own work – 62% said they have not used AI and do not plan to. 17% have used AI tools to generate text, 8% have used AI to produce or edit images, and just 2% have used AI to produce or edit video content. 10% had used AI in another way, while 12% had not used AI yet, but planned to.

Our research suggests a significant gap between employment of generative AI tools, and their use among the wider workforce. Just 2% of screen industry workers have used AI to generate, produce or edit video content, while the Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television's research from 2024³⁰ found that 57% of producers have already used AI in their production process or had plans to.

It is essential that creative industry workers are given access to any opportunities that AI developments bring, and are not left behind, while tech giants profit. While not all roles in the creative industries will benefit from using

AI tools, our research would suggest that many could benefit from education and training about how AI tools can support them in their role.

This echoes findings from BFI and CoSTAR research, that industry-wide training and reskilling will be needed not only to meet industry demand, but to support workers to adapt as AI technologies become commonplace in production.³¹

For those who have used AI tools in their work, the perceived negative impact on the industry they work in, and on their own job security, is far lower than those who have not used AI tools in their work at all. For those who have not used AI tools at all and do not plan to, 70% think the impact on their industry will be negative, compared with 40% who have used AI to generate text or images and 46% who have used AI to generate or edit video content.

Moreover, in regulating AI, it is essential to understand the nature of 'value' in the creative industries, which cannot simply be looked at in monetary terms. The value of the

UK's creative industries is rooted in the production of unique, British, risk-taking content, which comes from small-scale, independent productions. Many in the creative sector take on jobs to pay the bills that allow them to self-fund or take on poorly paid creative projects. To avoid a monopolisation of content, whereby only big budget productions can survive, AI must be regulated to protect creative value, including through preserving copyright and intellectual property.

The creative industries rely on far more than technical ability alone. Machine learning relies on the creativity of the existing workforce to train it.

This creativity is at the heart of the UK's creative sector and must be reflected through regulation that accounts for backstage and technical roles alongside other creatives. We urgently need mechanisms for safe, fair, and responsible AI content production and distribution, including measures to trace where content originated and to credit origin content.

Figure 36

How do you feel about the impact of artificial intelligence on the industry you work in over the next five years? By sector

- Very positive
- Quite positive
- Neither positive nor negative
- Quite negative
- Very negative

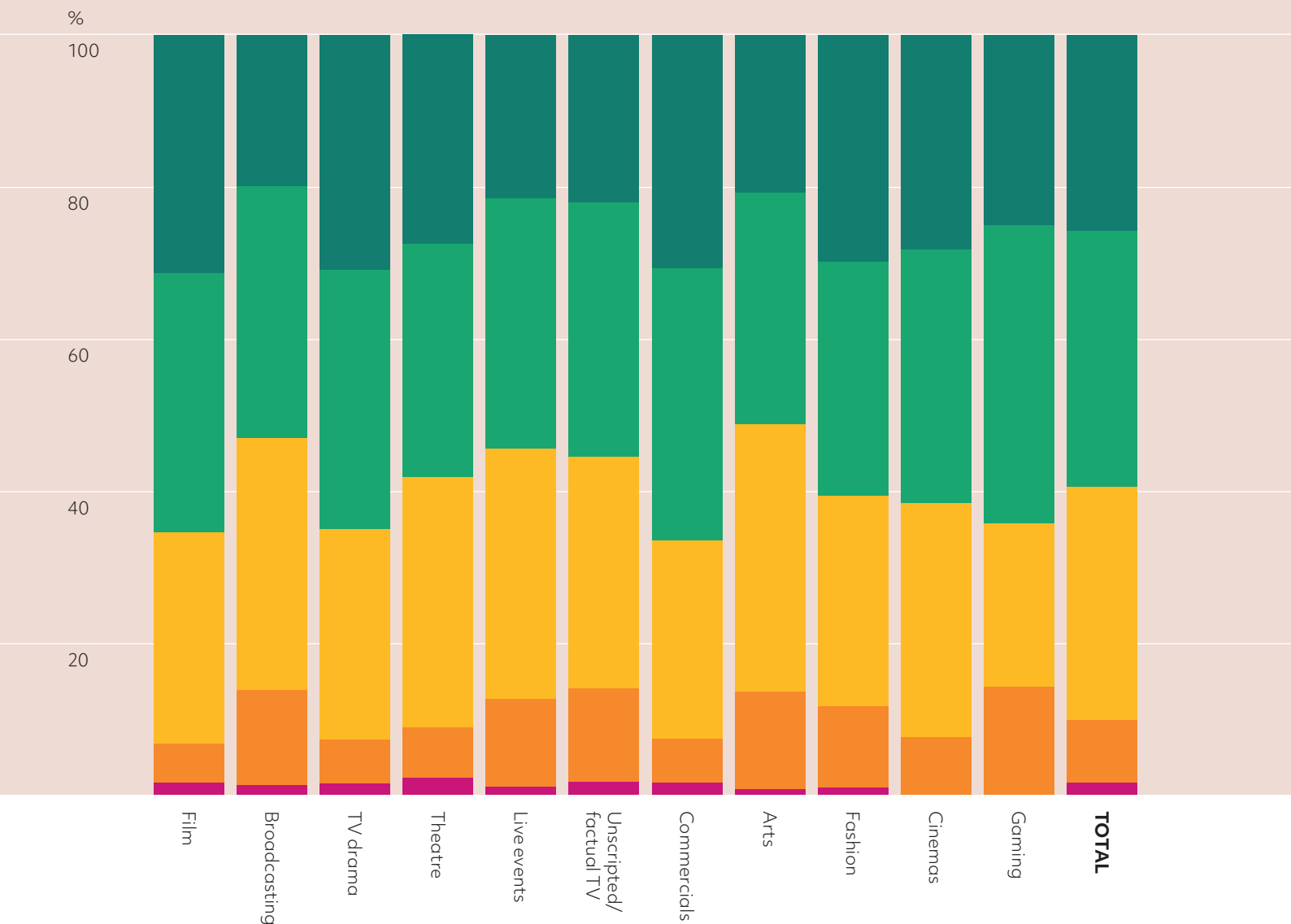
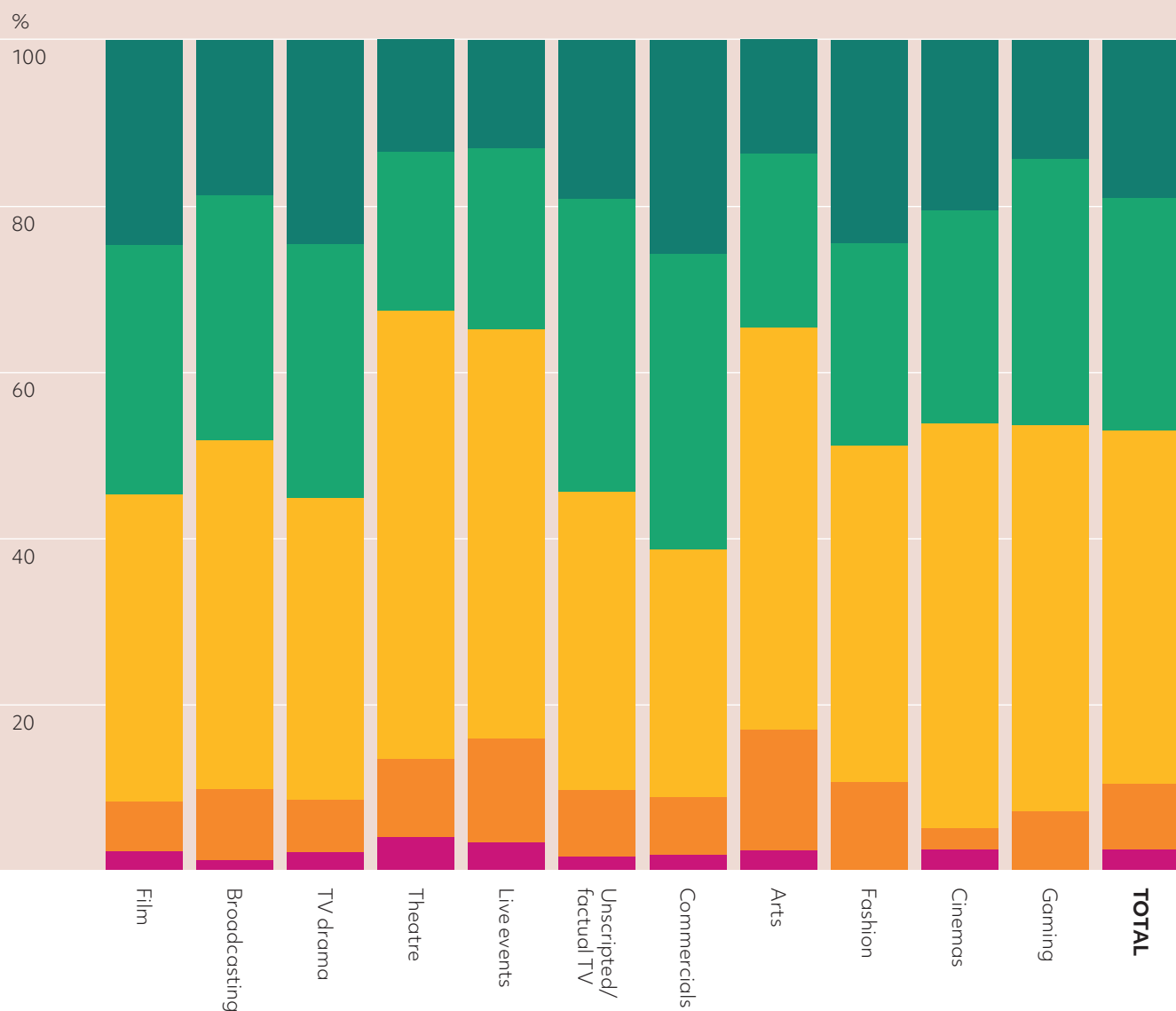


Figure 37

How do you feel about the impact of artificial intelligence on your own job security? By sector

- Very positive
- Quite positive
- Neither positive nor negative
- Quite negative
- Very negative



bectu recommends...



Better understanding the impact of AI on technical and production roles

There is a lot of fear among technical and backstage roles about the impact of AI on their job security, but very little research carried out so far. We believe more needs to be done to understand the impact of AI on job quality, working conditions, and income security for creative industry workers.

Training opportunities for workers on AI

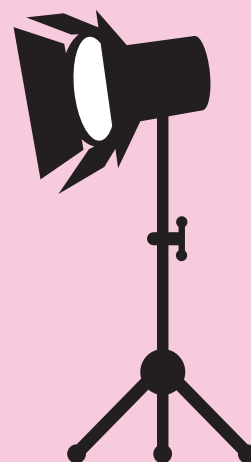
Workers need to be given better opportunities to employ new AI technologies, but also to assert their rights relevant to AI use. Training should be provided by further education institutions, professional associations, unions, and employers, to ensure that workers, including freelancers, can gain sector specific knowledge about how to apply AI in their work. In addition, workers should be upskilled on contract negotiation and strategies for asserting their rights when it comes to AI.

Transparency and disclosure over AI use

Technology developers need to be clear about how their technology operates, the content it is trained on and the impact it will have, in consultation with creative industry workers and trade unions. This includes logs of training data and clear labelling on AI outputs, which should apply wherever these technologies are applied.

Fair remuneration

There needs to be greater transparency and clearer guidelines used by employers and engagers so that creative industry workers can be fairly remunerated. This includes the remuneration of creative industry workers who have intellectual property and copyright as well as image rights, but must also include remuneration for the changing nature of technical and backstage roles as a result of AI technologies through impact assessments in the roll out of new AI technologies.





“

Late scripts, late casting, late decisions, the long hours, and many more 'normalised' issues... make it a difficult industry to work in, and many of them can be solved easily to make the industry a much healthier and more efficient place to work.

”



next steps

this is a pivotal moment for workers across the UK's creative industries. The sector's inclusion as a priority area for growth in the UK's Industrial Strategy signals a long-overdue recognition of its vital contribution to the nation's economy, innovation, and cultural identity.

With the Government now preparing to implement long-awaited reforms to employment rights, there is a clear window of opportunity to tackle the deep-rooted challenges. For the creative industries, this could signal a shift from precarity to sustainability, but these reforms must be shaped inclusively, enforced strongly, and expanded genuinely to freelance and self-employed workers.

The findings from Bectu's Big Survey present a stark but essential account of the current realities facing creative industry workers in the UK. They underscore the urgent need for reform across employment rights, workplace practices, and support structures. This is especially true for the freelance workforce, who remain excluded from many of the basic rights afforded to employees, including sick pay, holiday entitlement, parental leave, and protection from unfair dismissal. Without targeted policy reform that extends this support to all workers, we could see a two-tier system that leaves workers who hold up some of the UK's most prosperous industries with precarious incomes and little recourse when facing exploitation or poor treatment.

The appointment of the UK's first Freelance Champion marks a hugely positive step forward in recognising and representing the needs of freelance workers at the heart

of government. The champion's role must be meaningfully resourced and empowered to tackle systemic issues in a cross-government manner, including enforcement of rights, accounting for the 'feast or famine' nature of work in tax and benefits, and ensuring action on late payments. Their engagement with other government departments, unions, industry leaders, and freelancers themselves will be critical to ensure these challenges are understood and addressed effectively.

Equally, the Government must place workers and their representatives at the centre of any future changes to policy or legislation affecting the sector. Ongoing, structured consultation with trade unions, including Bectu, is essential to crafting reforms that are grounded in the lived realities of creative industry workers.

However, change cannot rest solely with government. Industry employers and bodies must take proactive responsibility to improve conditions in their workplaces. That means addressing toxic cultures, improving HR support, ensuring timely payments, and promoting diversity and inclusion at every level. It also means embedding sustainable practices that allow workers to build secure, long-term careers.

The creative industries are a vital part of the UK's cultural and economic landscape. But their future depends on valuing the people who power them. With this report as a catalyst, we call on all stakeholders, government, industry, and unions, to come together to deliver the structural change creative industry workers urgently need and deserve.

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