behind the scenes in the creative industries

Bectu's Big Survey
Executive Summary

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.

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.

This summary outlines key findings from the survey, highlighting the impact on workers and critical issues that need addressing across the sector.

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 research[1] 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%).

1. Bectu (July 2024) Half of UK screen industry workers remain out of work, Bectu research finds, 29 July. Available at: https://bectu.org.uk/news/half-of-uk-screen-industry-workers-remain-out-of-work-bectu-research-finds

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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.

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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 sectors.

- Around a third of freelancers (31%) told us that they have no savings, and fewer than half of freelancers have a pension (48%).

- Less 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.

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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 anti-social behaviour, violence, aggression or harassment from an audience member/s in the past 12 months.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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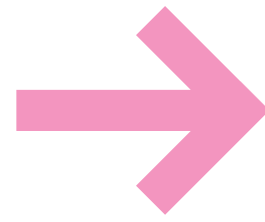
The findings make a clear case for urgent reforms to address these issues, including better support for freelancers, improved working conditions, and stronger diversity and inclusion initiatives. Ensuring the long-term sustainability of the UK's creative industries requires a coordinated effort from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

A full copy of this report
can be downloaded at
**bectu.org.uk/
bectu-big-survey-hub**