

Industry insight – Creative arts and culture

In a nutshell

The creative arts industry covers careers in advertising, craft, cultural heritage, design, literature, music, performing and visual arts (Creative and Cultural Skills).

The design industry employs the largest number of workers (33%), followed by performing arts (18%) and music (16%) (Creative and Cultural Skills, 2011).

There is a government led shift to encourage private investment in the arts and philanthropic donations, under the Big Society agenda. Many organisations that previously relied on public funding will need to raise their own funds towards projects.

What kind of work can I do?

The industry covers many areas and activities including:

- craft/3D design - contemporary and historical, designing, making, selling, teaching, curating, see [ceramics designer](#); [furniture designer](#); [glass blower/designer](#); [jewellery designer](#);
- cultural heritage - museums, galleries, arts centres, historical heritage, archaeology, see [archaeologist](#); [heritage manager](#); [museum education officer](#); [museum/gallery curator](#); [museum/gallery exhibitions officer](#);
- design - graphic, industrial, product, digital and multimedia, interior, exhibition, fashion, textiles, see [exhibition designer](#); [fashion designer](#); [graphic designer](#); [industrial/product designer](#); [interior and spatial designer](#); [multimedia specialist](#); [textile designer](#);
- literature - creative writing, literature development work, see [writer](#);
- music - producing and recording, selling, promotion, live events, education/training, see [musician](#);
- performance - theatre, music, dance; including performers, managers, administration, education, promoters and backstage technical staff, see [actor](#); [dancer](#); [theatre manager](#);
- visual art - artists, public and participatory art, gallery staff, arts administration, arts educators, curators, see [arts administrator](#); [commercial art gallery manager](#); [community arts worker](#); [fine artist](#); [illustrator](#); [photographer](#).

Find out more about each area of work at [Creative Choices](#).

What's it like working in this industry?

- Self-employment and part-time work are extremely common in the creative and cultural industries. 44% of people are self-employed compared to 13% in the UK as a whole, although this does vary depending on the actual sector worked in.
- Nearly half of the workforce is under 40 years old, making the industry predominantly young. Evidence suggests that people tend to leave the industry once they reach their thirties or forties.

- The industry is dominated by men, as fewer women work in the sector and are likely to earn less than their male counterparts. Women are well-represented however in cultural heritage and visual and performing arts, although they are still less likely to progress to director-level positions.
- The industry does not tend to be ethnically diverse, with only 7% of the sector being from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. There are many organisations however that are dedicated to promoting the arts of minority groups.
- Wages in the creative and cultural industries are lower than the national average. Those who have a first degree earn on average £453 per week, compared to £609 for the UK average as a whole. Some performers and artists however will command higher fees.
- Seasonal work is important in the performing arts, with peaks in summer and Christmas seasons. Short-term contracts are common.
- Health issues may prevent continuation in a career, particularly for dancers, performance artists and musicians, mainly through repetitive strain injury or accident. This may require people to stop performing and move into management or enter other careers. (All stats: Creative and Cultural Skills, Sector Skill Assessment for the Creative and Cultural Industries, 2010.)
- The UK has the largest cultural economy in the world relative to GDP. The creative arts and cultural industry employs over 794,000 people and contributes just over £28 billion GVA to the UK economy each year.
- The industry is mainly made up of small businesses. There are approximately 65,000 businesses and 94% of them employ fewer than ten people.
- Large organisations in this sector do exist and are mainly in publishing, theatres, museums and local authorities.
- Employment levels in the creative and cultural industries have increased while all other UK industries have remained static. (All stats: Creative and Cultural Skills, Sector Skill Assessment for the Creative and Cultural Industries, 2010.)
- In the UK, England employs the highest concentration of people in the creative and cultural industries with over 690,000 workers (88%). Scotland employs 7%, Wales 4% and Northern Ireland 2%.
- Within England, London employs 25% of the creative and cultural workforce, followed by the South East at 16% and South West at 9%. (All stats: Creative and Cultural Skills, Sector Skill Assessment for the Creative and Cultural Industries, 2010.)
- Many in the industry, e.g. writers, photographers, designer-makers and musicians work from a home-based studio or office.
- Digital communications have encouraged many creative forums to develop remotely, creating an international dimension that is accessible and dynamic.

Entry and progression

How do I find a job?

- Word of mouth is a common method of finding work in this sector and networking is essential.
- Social media can be an affective tool for finding opportunities as well as a good way to promote yourself. Ensure your account or profile is professional. A global communication platform for creatives is provided by the [Creative Services Guide](#).
- Connecting with local creative/cultural communities will help and get involved with festivals, events, networking evenings and gallery openings.

- Attend careers fairs, trade shows and exhibitions, and join professional bodies and support agencies and attend their seminars.
- Search on sector-specific job sites such as [Artjobster](#), [artsjobsonline](#) and [View Creatives](#).
- Many vacancies are not advertised, so consider producing a speculative application. If you have a particular specialism, such as science writing, concentrate on those niche publishers.
- Look out for opportunities on websites of main professional organisations and trade associations.
- Try the arts councils - [Arts Council of Northern Ireland](#); [Arts Council of Wales](#); [Creative Scotland](#) and [Arts Council England](#).
- Many people find success in this industry after a period of voluntary work, so be prepared to work for nothing or very little until you find your feet.
- Be prepared to take short term contracts/projects or a temporary job as a way in.
- Join vacancy bulletin mailing lists. Try professional bodies and careers sites such as [Creative Choices](#) and [ArtsHub](#).
- Study related journals and magazines, e.g. [The Stage](#), [a-n: The Artists Information Company](#), [British Journal of Photography](#) for job advertisements and articles.
- For some careers it is essential to have a portfolio. Produce a traditional one along with a digital version, or feature your work on a website.
- Attend portfolio and CV advice sessions or audition skills workshops, which are usually available through your university careers service. Detailed advice on writing an effective creative CV and real-life CVs are available in the published [Creative CV Guide](#).
- Many people in the creative and cultural industries are self-employed. See the Self-employment section for more information.

What skills do I need?

It is likely you will require some, or all, of the following:

- business skills;
- ability to network;
- determined attitude and commitment to your work;
- self-belief and confidence;
- ability to generate and develop ideas;
- good communication skills (written, verbal and visual);
- technical ability;
- time management and organisational skills;
- research skills;
- ability to work independently and with others;
- willingness to work long hours without financial reward.

Where can I find work experience?

- Work experience is essential in this industry to improve your job prospects, build credibility and gain valuable contacts.
- Most people find work experience through word of mouth, so it is important to network. Social media is also a good tool for finding opportunities.
- It is normal to apply speculatively for work experience. Locate organisations in trade, professional body and support agencies directories.
- Placements and internships are advertised on the websites of professional bodies, creative support agencies and individual companies.

Is postgraduate study useful?

- While the majority of those working in this industry do have degrees or higher-level qualifications it is possible to have a successful career based upon the strength of your ability alone.
- In some areas, such as glass blowing/designing, proven craft skills are regarded as more important than a postgraduate qualification.
- In other areas such as art therapy, higher education lecturing and some cultural heritage careers a postgraduate qualification is considered essential.
- Postgraduate courses can develop performance skills, networking abilities or design specialisms, and can be invaluable and sometimes essential in furthering your career.
- If you are considering postgraduate study, check that it will enhance your career prospects and whether there are any funding opportunities available.

See [types of jobs](#) for entry details relating to specific creative arts jobs.

How can my career develop?

- Initially, rates of pay will be basic, but should improve as you develop your professional reputation and portfolio. You may want to consider specialising and promoting your skills to a targeted market to improve your prospects.
- As a fine crafts designer-maker, you should work on developing your original work to a good standard and promoting it through exhibitions and seeking commissions.
- Published writers are at an advantage when approaching publishing houses. When submitting your work, always ask for feedback on your writing style and content.
- Photographers, designers and artists must stay in touch with key facilities and contacts, so networking is essential, supported by a good portfolio of work. Consider sharing studio costs, and stay up to date with technological advances. Enter national photographic competitions to build your reputation.
- In some larger companies and organisations, it can be possible to work your way up from entry level, through to senior position and then management. However, in smaller companies, you may need to frequently move employers in order to advance professionally.
- Many people continue to portfolio work and may develop a second career alongside. Teaching is common.
- Depending on the size of your company there may be little support for training and you may have to find, fund and complete the training in your own time.

Typical employers

Big players

- Graduates can work in the creative teams of large companies and agencies, across a range of sectors. This is more typical for designers and those working in the advertising field.
- The BBC has established graduate schemes, as do the larger publishing companies and advertising groups. Generally there are few major graduate recruiters in this sector who offer training programmes and a settled career development pathway.

- The Arts Council England is a big player in terms of funding and it provides significant investment in arts grants, reading programmes, festivals, awards, advisory bodies and more.

Small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

SMEs are organisations with fewer than 250 employees and an annual turnover of no more than £44million. Working for a smaller company can be rewarding because you are more likely to forge a path for yourself within the company, although opportunities to try other departments may be limited.

- The largest companies in this industry are major orchestras and museums as well as theatre, opera and ballet companies. Most will have fewer than 250 employees and you are more likely to find large numbers of graduates working together.
- There are a number of small theatre companies, musical ensembles/groups or other performing artists who work together as part of a company. In many cases the same people will be members of several different groups, each company existing for the duration of a project or performance. Technical, marketing, financial and management staff are also employed in these areas.
- Local authorities employ graduates in community arts outreach work but only in small numbers and usually on a session by session basis. These are mainly supported by specific project funding and do not offer structured career progression. One project may lead to others, which develops your professional profile and portfolio of work.
- Graduates may work for local authorities, either within a specific school or as part of a peripatetic service. This way of working occurs commonly in music and may occur in other areas of the performing arts, although such posts are then more likely to be funded through specific project money. Additionally, most local authorities employ one or two graduates as full-time arts development workers.

Careers services should have listings of jobs with small firms; see also the [Department for Business, Innovation and Skills \(BIS\)](#).

Self-employment

- Self-employment is the main way of working within this sector. In the initial stages many people combine self-employment with other paid work for financial security. It is also common for in-house employees to move into self-employment as a form of career development.
- Designer-makers sell their work (e.g. ceramics, jewellery, glass, textile pieces) directly to the public from their studios, stands at festivals or take commissions.
- Musicians play in a band, work as soloists, singer or copyist on a freelance basis.
- The majority of writers and photographers are self-employed, working for a range of clients from mainstream and specialist media, in-house departments, public and private sector or for advertising, design, public relations, marketing companies or publishers.
- Actors, dancers or performers may work on long projects or with theatre companies for short periods of time but will also be predominantly self-employed.
- For designers and craftspeople who need fully operational studios, sharing premises and running costs can be an ideal arrangement.

Opportunities abroad

- Performers, musicians, dancers, singers, stage technicians, writers and photographers all have transferable skills and are well placed to work abroad. International jobs range from working on cruise ships that employ versatile performers in a range of roles, to showing your jewellery or ceramics in an international crafts venue.
- Within the acting profession, shows can transfer from London to Broadway and take the original cast.
- Circus, mime and all forms of dance need no linguistic understanding and so overcome the usual barriers to working abroad.
- Music is an international discipline with its own language, and performers are familiar with scores in different languages.
- Orchestras, choirs, opera companies, soloist singers and bands tour frequently and also host visiting performers from other countries to the UK.
- The internet has also provided a platform for all those working in the creative sector to publicise and sell their work to a global audience.
- Visual artists can apply for an artist in residence position overseas. The artist creates their own work in return for sharing skills and passing on knowledge. They usually receive remuneration of some kind. Details of available residencies can be found at [Wooloo](#).
- New Zealand has a diverse publishing industry which covers a variety of markets. Employers are looking to up-skill workers to take advantage of digital publishing. Film, television, music and digital media are all strong areas within New Zealand and the creative industries get support from the government through Creative New Zealand, the country's Arts Council.
- India has an advancing creative and media industry due to a growth in the purchasing of entertainment products and the demands for creativity in business. India welcomes overseas expertise and technologies, especially those that add value to their products and increases their production efficiency.
- The creative industries are emerging in Hong Kong and the government has announced that the sector will become one of the six new pillars to help the country's economy. Film, television, music, design, animation and digital entertainment have progressed well in Hong Kong and together they contribute around 4% of the country's GDP. (UK Trade and Investment, 2011).
- Opportunities in China, Japan, France, Germany and America remain strong.

Will my qualifications be recognised?

- Experience is easily transferable and can be proven with a robust portfolio.
 - If you do have a qualification for one of the more specialised careers (e.g. art therapy) and you are wanting to work elsewhere in Europe, you can obtain advice on how your qualification equates to those in your chosen country via the [UK National Recognition Information Centre \(NARIC\)](#).
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Future trends

New technology

- Publication of books, music, photographs, film and other forms of visual art are widely available on the internet. The changes have blurred the edges between different creative disciplines and have contributed to a new generation of cultural consumers. In order to stay ahead, those in the industry will need to develop their skills continually.
- Creative practitioners will need a wider skill set to make the most of digital media and to make the most of the web as a marketing and publicity tool. Digital business models are seen as the way forward for both production and revenue. Small, creative businesses or freelance artists, photographers and performers can now publicise their products or services as effectively as larger organisations and need to push forward with this.
- Developments in software have revolutionised all areas of the creative sector. There are programmes for music notation, design, photography, creation and web presentation. Graduates will need to find the most relevant mix of programmes for their practice or professional needs, including those designed to support running a business.
- There is a particular concern about increased infringement of intellectual property in the digital age and creatives need to learn how to protect contracts and rights.

Skills gaps and demographics

- A balance of the required skills in the industry needs to be maintained if the UK is going to continue to remain strong against its international competitors. The UKCES has identified various skills which are particularly important. These include: management and leadership skills, professional ICT skills, technician skills and customer service and employability skills.
- The balance in the demographics of the workforce also needs to be addressed. It is usual for people entering the creative and cultural industries to undertake unpaid work experience, however this typically requires financial backing from elsewhere which not everyone has access to. The industry also has a below average proportion of black and minority ethnic employees and few women in the industry are employed in high-level jobs.
- Diversity and mobility is now being promoted by the creative and cultural industries through agencies such as the Cultural Leadership Programme, which aims to help social minority groups to expand their leadership skills.

Culture Privatisation

- The creative and cultural industries are traditionally funded by a number of public funding bodies, with Arts Council England being a major contributor. However, cuts in government investment have meant that less funding is available and in 2011 Arts Council England could only fund 696 organisations out of the 1,300 that applied.
 - There is therefore, pressure to encourage funding from private funds, through patron schemes, tax incentives for private funders and to encourage philanthropy to the arts. The aim from this is to create long term financial resilience and to sustain cultural excellence.
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Jargon buster

- **Blog** - website that is an online diary created to reflect personal comments. It can be updated, have links to other sites and be accessible to others. You can create your own blog.
- **Commission** - being asked to produce a piece of music, artwork or written article, etc. for an agreed fee.
- **Copy** - the words in publications, magazines, advertisements or websites.
- **Diagonal thinking** - a concept to aid recruitment in the creative industries. The ability to think creatively and logically. To be innovative and practical.
- **Digitalisation** - the conversion of analogue information into digital format.
- **DPI** - 'dots per inch' (more dots, sharper picture).
- **Freelance** - another phrase for being self-employed but means that you have specific contracts to do certain work rather than doing work and then trying to sell it.
- **In-house** - being employed by a company or organisation, rather than being self-employed.
- **Match funding** - when an organisation receives part of the money needed for a project from an external source, and makes up the rest from its own funds.
- **Micro-business** - an organisation that employs fewer than ten people.
- **Outreach** - going out from a regular base to work within the community.
- **Out-sourcing** - the contracting out of a business function to an external body. Could be to a self-employed person(s) or a private company.
- **Portfolio working** - combining a range of work, self-employment and sometimes study activities, rather than spending time on just one activity.
- **Social commerce websites** - using social media tools to buy and sell online.
- **Social enterprise** - a competitive business that is driven by a social or environmental cause. Any surplus money made from the business is reinvested in the social/environmental cause.
- **Social media** - online technology where people can share content in text format, visual and audio. Can be accessed via a PC and remote devices, such as mobile phones.

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