

Finding out about visual arts

The visual arts industry is part of the creative and cultural industries, represented by the Creative and Cultural Skills Sector Skills Council, which also includes: craft; cultural heritage; literature; design; music; and performing arts. The creative and cultural industries currently employ 678,480, people, of which 24% are based in London. There are 74,640 businesses in the creative and cultural industries, of which 87% employ less than 10 people.

The UK visual arts industry employs a range of people in an array of different jobs and practices. The workforce is dominated by individuals and sole traders – artists, freelancers, consultants, interns and volunteers. Many also contribute to education programmes and community work. Employers are museums, galleries, studios, arts centres, public sector agencies, public art agencies, educational bodies, studio organisations, festivals and art fairs. The industry is supported by technicians, curators, managers, publicists, academics, educators, project managers, art theorists, critics and more.

The visual arts industry is linked to other industries, such as advertising, interactive media, games, publishing and design. Many of visual arts skills are transferable to other creative professions.

Key facts:

- There are 37,480 people working in the visual arts, of which 76% are artists and 24% are in art retail.
- There was a 17% increase in workforce numbers between 2004 and 2006.
- There are 4,580 businesses, of which 82% employ less than 50 people.
- Visual arts contribute £1.9 billion to the UK economy.
- 70% of those in the visual arts are self-employed.
- 14% of the workforce is part-time.
- Men (66%) are more likely to have a level 4 qualification than women (58%).
- 57% of those working in visual arts have at least a level 4 qualification.
- Women are likely to earn less money than men (71% of women earn less than £10,000 per year, compared to 40% of men).
- Many visual artists have portfolio careers combining a variety of different jobs.

Jobs in the industry include: animator, art editor, art exhibition organiser, art handler, art valuer, arts administrator, attendant/gallery staff, development arts – staff, illustrator, manager - arts centre, sculptor, technical illustrator

Entry and progression

In the visual arts industry, gaining experience and learning through action is a fundamental principle. The industry values work-based learning and often entrants do not enter occupations with a complete range of skills. Continuing professional development and the provision of courses are common. Occupational pathways in the industry are non-existent, unclear or overly complicated.

There is a range of educational opportunities, industry endorsed courses (at foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate level), work-based learning, vocational qualifications, apprenticeships and training schemes available.

For job specific entry requirements, job profiles should be consulted.

Workforce statistics

Number of UK employees: 37,480

Number of UK employers: 4,580

Gender: 50% male, 50% female

Ethnicity: 95% of the workforce is white

Age: 42% of the workforce is under the age of 40 years

15% of the workforce is aged between 40-44 years

[N.B. Data from Creative and Cultural Skills Workforce Survey, 2009.]

Employment trends and future prospects

Due to government policy and social regeneration, there has been a widening perception of public art. Public art is increasingly seen as a quality marker for the built environment which has led to changes in the traditional perceptions of the industry. Visual art are been displayed in a variety of public locations, such as public transport and shopping precincts.

Skill requirements and shortages

There is only anecdotal evidence that artists are lacking production and IT skills. For artists, the specific skills lacking are artistic, craft, finance/accounting, IT and technical. In the creative role, business development, design, production and technical skills are lacking.

Future skills for the industry include: marketing skills (awareness of new markets and the creation of 'cultural products')

- Entrepreneurial skills (taking 'cultural products' to new markets)
- Digital/IT skills
- Freelancing skills (professional skills and contract, budget, use of accounting, co-operation skills)
- Fundraising skills (awareness and some specialisation)

- Education skills (entry level, facilitation and general practise)
- Management/leadership
- Transition skills (expressed elsewhere as a proxy for experience)

Occupational trends

Across the creative and cultural industries, employment in professional, associated and technical roles will increase by 26% over the next few years, compared with 15% across the UK. 39% of creative and cultural employers state that all occupations will maintain their current importance.

National and regional data

Northern Ireland – There are 11,640 people working in the Northern Ireland creative and cultural sector. 1% of the UK visual arts workforce is located in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, the visual arts industry contributes £16 million to the UK economy. More than 99% of the visual arts workforce is white. 22% of the workforce is male. 51% of the visual arts workforce in Northern Ireland is self-employed.

Scotland – There are 45,420 people working in the Scottish creative and cultural sector. 7% of the UK visual arts workforce is located in Scotland. The visual arts industry in Scotland contributes £47 million to the UK economy. 85% of the visual arts workforce is white. 33% of the workforce is male. 68% of the visual arts workforce in Scotland is self-employed.

Wales – There are 24,060 people working in the Welsh creative and cultural sector. 7% of the UK visual arts workforce is located in Wales. In Wales, it contributes £36 million to the UK economy. 96% of the workforce is white. 55% of the workforce is male. 81% of the Welsh visual arts workforce is self-employed.

[N.B. The data for the following regions are for the creative and cultural sector as a whole.]

East Midlands – There are 44,380 people in the sector workforce in the region, representing 7% of the UK sector workforce. There are 3,950 creative businesses in the region, of which 92% employ less than 50 people. 35% of the workforce is self employed. 63% of the workforce is male. 95% of the sector workforce is white and 54% are under 40 years.

East of England – There are 63,700 people in the sector workforce in the region, representing 9% of the UK sector workforce. There are 6,710 creative businesses in the region, of which 93% employ less than 50 people. 37% of the workforce is self employed. 66% of the workforce is male. 95% of the sector workforce is white and 46% are under 40 years.

London – There are 164,690 people in the sector workforce in London, representing 24% of the UK sector workforce. There are 21,600 creative businesses, of which 93% employ less than 50 people. 51% of the workforce is self employed. 58% of the workforce is male. 84% of the sector workforce is white and 56% are under 40 years.

North East – There are 19,680 people in the sector workforce in the region, representing 3% of the UK sector workforce. There are 1,330 creative businesses in the region, of which 90% employ less than 50 people. 38% of the workforce is self employed. 63% of the workforce is male. 96% of the sector workforce is white and 53% are under 40 years.

North West – There are 59,580 people in the sector workforce in the region, representing 9% of the UK sector workforce. There are 5,660 creative businesses in the region, of which 91% employ less than 50 people. 34% of the workforce is self employed; the majority of who are in arts and music. 62% of the workforce is male. 95% of the sector workforce is white and 55% are under 40 years.

South East – There are 98,170 people in the sector workforce in the region, representing 14% of the UK sector workforce. There are 12,300 creative businesses in the region, of which 93% employ less than 50 people. 43% of the workforce is self employed. 59% of the workforce is male. 97% of the sector workforce is white and 47% are under 40 years.

South West – There are 60,690 people in the sector workforce in the region, representing 9% of the UK sector workforce. There are approximately 5,000 creative businesses in the region, of which 93% employ less than 50 people. 47% of the workforce is self employed in arts, design and music. 59% of the workforce is male. 98% of the sector workforce is white and 46% are under 40 years.

West Midlands – There are 40,300 people in the sector workforce in the region, representing 6% of the UK sector workforce. There are approximately 5,000 creative businesses in the region, of which 91% employ less than 50 people. 31% of the workforce is self employed, which is the lowest regional figure. 58% of the workforce is male. 91% of the sector workforce is white and 49% are under 40 years.

Yorkshire and the Humber – There are 45,900 people in the sector workforce in the region, representing 7% of the UK sector workforce. There are just under 4,000 creative businesses in the region, of which 90% employ less than 50 people. 40% of the workforce is self employed. 60% of the workforce is male. 97% of the sector workforce is white and 53% are under 40 years.

Salary levels

Pay scales in this industry are variable, so the following only provides an indication of the wage structure of the current workforce:

- 3% earn more than £41,000 per year
- 2% earn between £29,000 - £41,000
- 5% earn between £20,000 - £29,000
- 31% earn between £10,000 - £20,000
- 59% earn less than £10,000 per year

Career paths

Job profiles from [Next Step](#) and [Creative Choices](#)

Further sources

[Creative and Cultural Skills](#)

[Creative Choices](#)

[Arts Council England](#)

[Arts Council of Wales](#)

[Scottish Arts Council](#) (SAC)

[The UK Film Council](#)

[Voluntary Arts](#)

[Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing](#)

[National Museum of Photography, Film and Television](#)

[Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators](#) (ISTC)

[Literature training](#)

[Association of Art Historians](#)

[British Cartoon Archive](#)

[British Film Institute](#) (BFI)

[Cartoonists' Club of Great Britain](#)

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