

**Freedom or working
for free?**

**Freelancers in the
creative economy.**

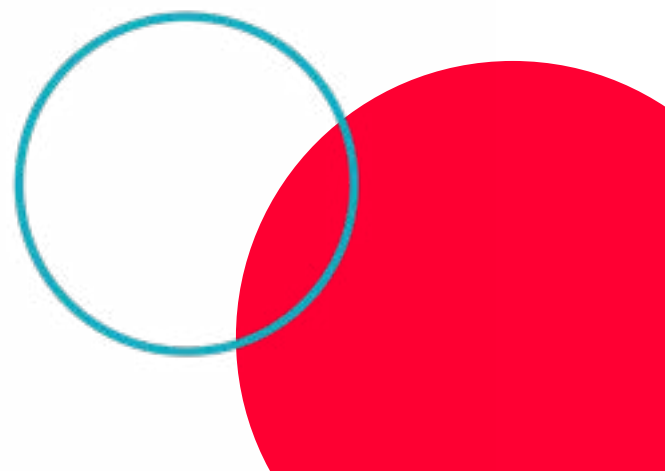
2023



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Introduction.



Freelancers are all too often the lifeblood and the lifesavers of a creative organisation. They're the flexible extra resource we bring in when the workload suddenly increases and there's no time (or budget) to hire; they're individuals with incredible specialist skills who can change your organisation but you could never afford to hire permanently; they're the crew on a theatre or TV production who make mind-blowing, award-winning work or in the case of many sectors in the creative industries, like film and TV, they are quite literally your entire workforce.

And yet, as our survey shows, many employers are not treating their freelancers in this way. They are treating them as 'other' to their permanent employees; investing in training or wellbeing for everyone except their freelancers or worse, claiming to create a culture of 'belonging' that includes everyone except the large proportion of individuals not on permanent contracts.

Creative Access has been at the forefront of supporting diverse talent for over a decade, it's all part of our mission to make the creative industries reflect UK society. We know how important it is to offer career-long support – particularly when talent is self-employed and lies outside the safety net of an organisation.

At Creative Access, we know how difficult it is to find solutions from within your organisation, regardless of whether the business is big or small. Within this report we examine the challenges, especially for under-represented individuals and provide recommendations on how organisations can make freelance talent thrive.

Bibi Hilton
CEO,
Creative Access



Methodology.



Creative Access undertook a survey to better understand the needs of freelancers working within the creative industries.

We asked about their work, wellbeing and financial situation across several sectors.

The 171 survey respondents comprised of individuals who self-identify as:

53%

Lower socio-economic background

46%

Black, Asian or ethnically diverse

27%

Disabled, of which:

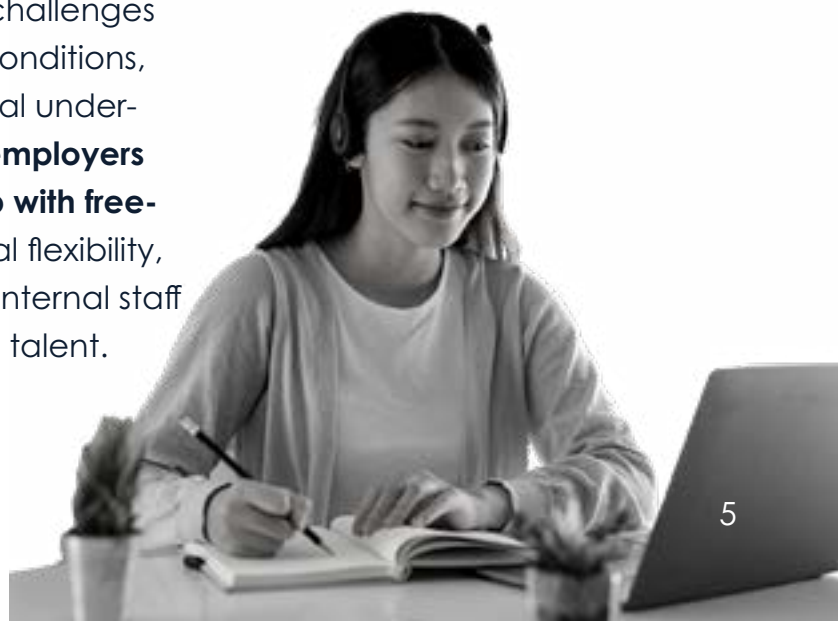
- **22% have long-term health conditions**
- **20% are neurodivergent**
- **9% report mental illness**

Key findings.

- Overall freelancers feel positively about working in this way; **most value control over their own time and the kind of work they do**
- However, while most freelancers feel positively about their role, **50% feel insufficiently supported by the employers they work with**
- Almost half (**48%**) of freelancers feel **employers need training on how to work with and get the best from freelancers**
- **1 in 5 individuals (22%) chose to become a freelancer due to negative experiences** (such as redundancy or a toxic working environment) in a permanent employed role
- **Freelancers from under-represented groups face even greater challenges:** if individuals are disabled, they're even more likely to have chosen to go freelance due to a negative experience in a permanent role, **1 in 3 (30%)**
- Perception is an issue, **most freelancers say they need help to market themselves to employers (69%),** this rises if an individual is disabled (**80%**)

Improving the freelance experience

The results show that there are significant challenges faced by freelancers in terms of working conditions, payment schedules and overall operational understanding. There are also **opportunities for employers to improve the overall working relationship with freelancers** such as providing more operational flexibility, connecting freelancers with mentors and internal staff training on how to best optimise freelance talent.



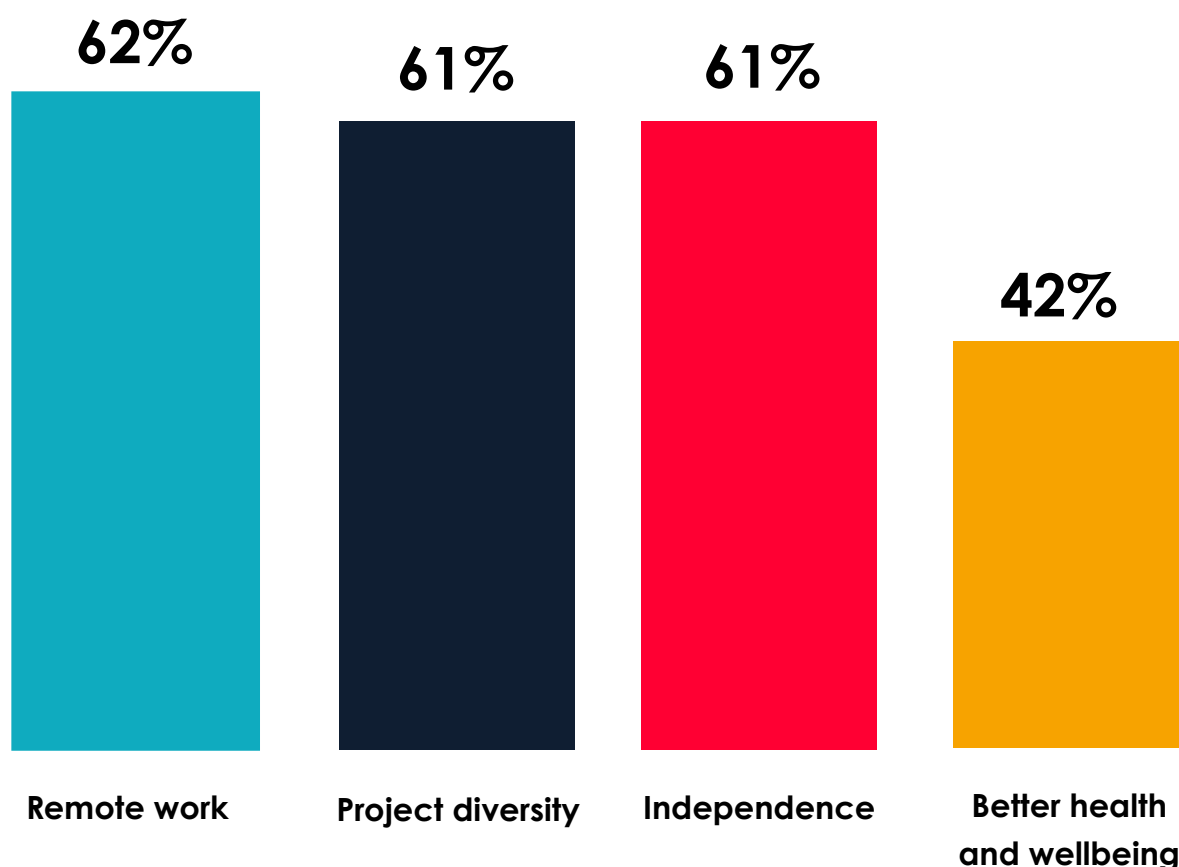
The freelance opportunity.



According to the Department for Digital Culture Media Sport (DCMS) the creative industries relies heavily on its freelance workforce which represents a third of its resource, versus around a tenth of the workforce at large ([DCMS 2021](#)). And the freelance workforce shows no signs of shrinking, however overall satisfaction is waning among freelancers, as findings from Creative Access suggest poor industry standards from employers.

Benefits of freelancing

Encouragingly, most freelancers feel positively about their career decision. When Creative Access asked freelancers what they think makes them successful and what they value most after having made the switch, the top five benefits of freelancing include:



The freelance opportunity.



How to succeed

When asked about critical success factors for a thriving career as a freelancer, respondents centred support, network and experience. More specifically freelancers called out:



Network (88%)



Expertise (77%)



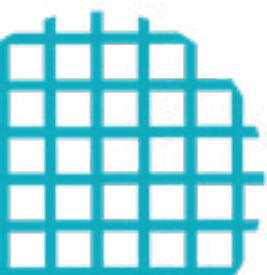
Work experience (68%)



References (40%)



Further education (12%)



Freelance challenges.



Despite the majority of freelancers Creative Access spoke to feeling good about their career decision there's a disconnect with employers. Half of respondents still don't feel supported by the employers they work with. This lack of support is especially true for freelancers who are disabled or have been made redundant, with 1 in 3 respondents choosing to go freelance due to negative experiences in a permanent employed role.

Several factors also make freelance life more challenging, in addition to the fact that as a self-employed individual holiday is unpaid (**60%**), freelancers feel stagnant at the lack of opportunities for growth, professional development and progression (**50%**) afforded to them by employers.

Half of freelancers experience regular late payment, and 35% say that the process of finding and then winning projects could be improved. This suggests that both employers and third-party bodies could do much more to improve the visibility and accessibility of project work.

Workplace 'belonging' is excluding freelancers

When asked '**Do you feel employers or clients do enough to support freelancers and make them feel included in their teams and organisations?**' only **15% stated yes**. It's also no coincidence that respondents highlight that training for employers on how to best support freelancers is one of the most important resolutions to the freelance, employer disconnect.



Freelance challenges.



The freelance experience across the sectors

- Freelancers working in book, newspaper and magazine publishing tend to have longer projects and contracts lasting one to six months (**42%**) in comparison to other sectors (on average **35%**)
- While there were some variances regarding the disadvantages of freelancing, on average **unpaid holiday (60%), lack of opportunities for training/professional development (50%), and harder to progress/secure promotions (50%)** came up as the **biggest disadvantages for most industries**
- Whilst 1 in 5 individuals chose to become a freelancer due to negative experiences in a permanent employed roles - **this doubles for PR, marketing and advertising (39%)**
- **39% felt positive about the impact freelancing has had on their health and wellbeing**
- This jumps to **50% for the PR, marketing and advertising and the book, newspaper and magazine publishing sectors**, and to **43% for musical, theatre, dance and visual arts**
- When asking what specific training they'd like to see for freelancers, **75% of those freelancing in TV, film, audio and radio chose general advice on navigating a freelance career**, compared to **62%** of other respondents
- In regards to financial support, **78% of freelancers said they would like funding specifically for freelancers to access professional development opportunities**
- This increases to **83% of freelancers in PR, marketing, advertising** and **91% of freelancers in music theatre, dance, visual arts**

How to thrive.

What do under-represented freelance talent need to thrive?

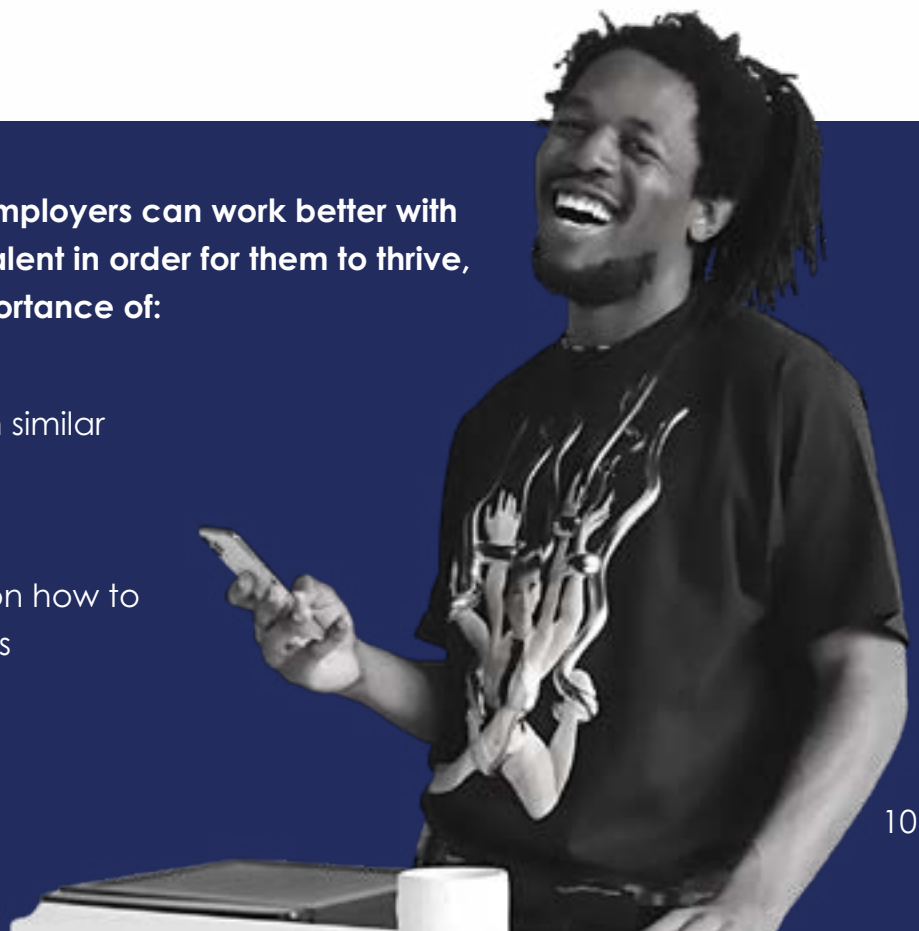
The UK has launched numerous schemes to support freelance talent, however, self-employed workers have highlighted specific benefits that will help them progress in their career. From third party organisations such as Creative Access, freelancers are asking for:

- **Networking events to build client network and amongst other peers in equal measure (67%)**
- **Training on personal brand building and publicity (69%)**
- **Freelance career advice (62%)**
- **Funding for professional training (78%)**
- **And funding for equipment or tech (70%) – this final point is especially important for disabled candidates (91%)**

When asked specifically how employers can work better with under-represented freelancer talent in order for them to thrive, respondents pointed to the importance of:

63% Access to a mentor with similar lived experience

48% Training for employers on how to best support freelancers



How to thrive.

Freelance respondents who identified as disabled were vocal about ways to empower and level the playing field for them to thrive. Employers need to ensure they're adhering to the law as a bare minimum, but they should also take heed of best practice for smooth working relationships...

Equitable working relationships with disabled freelance talent

Whether employers are working with freelancers for projects spanning a few days, or a few months, it's vital that influential stakeholders such as line managers, hiring managers working directly with freelance talent who identify as disabled are educated on the UK equalities act 2010.

And more importantly, that employers at large have a solid understanding of what reasonable adjustments look like, Creative Access defines its own accessibility guidelines [here](#). This is integral to ensure working relationships and projects are set up for success by following accessibility best practice.



If you have a creative organisation, at some point you will need freelancers. And here is our best practice for how to attract, retain and support the best freelancers in the business:

1 Think about their mental health and wellbeing

- Being a freelancer can be especially hard on your mental health
- Employers can play an important role in supporting freelancers with their mental health and wellbeing by opening up access to training and employee assistance programmes to freelancers

2 Give free access to your employee training

- 78% of freelancers in our survey said professional training was one of the most important areas employers and industry bodies can support them
- Ensure your freelancers can access all of your internal training
- Really progressive employers are now offering freelancers a stipend for further professional training – it's definitely one way to ensure the best freelance talent will remain loyal to you over your competitors
- Or there may be professional training that your team could provide freelancers such as personal brand building, legal or financial management training

3 Provide a line manager and a mentor

- For any freelancer working with you for more than a few weeks, they should be allocated a line manager, who should check-in with them regularly and provide performance reviews as they would with a permanent employee
- You could also consider offering your freelancers a mentor through Creative Access

4 A culture of inclusion means everyone

- If you are truly building an inclusive culture you can't segregate employees based on their employment contract
- Freelancers should be included in all social events, if you "do" birthdays in your organisation make sure theirs is marked too
- Make it clear you will make reasonable adjustments for disabled freelancers – 91% of disabled freelancers in our survey highlighted this was an issue with employers

5 Help them build their network

- Having a strong and growing network is critical for freelancers to find new projects and earn money
- Look at where you could help by writing testimonials for them on Linked-In or for their website or introduce them to people in your own network
- Showcase the work they've done for you on your organisation's channels and name check them





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