

An Industry In Flux:

Creative Access Thrive Report

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Introduction

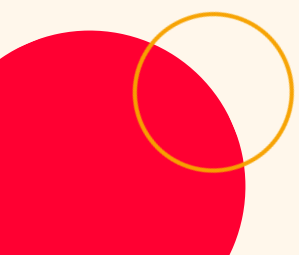
The past year has been a pivotal time for individuals and companies working in the creative economy, as we navigated a fast-changing landscape and shifts in global politics, funding streams and uptake of smart technologies. The concerns and disruption that these existential factors bring are certainly evident in the responses to our Thrive survey this year.

For company heads, it's been harder to plan, invest in, and nurture their teams amid both financial and structural uncertainty.

For creative professionals, there have been long periods without work; it appears harder than ever to grow and progress a creative career; and optimism is at a four-year low. Talented individuals that we have trained and nurtured over the last decade are facing tough decisions, mental health challenges, and serious obstacles to continuing their chosen careers. Many are deciding to leave the creative industries.

In short, we're at a critical juncture. Urgent action is needed in order to secure the future prosperity of our creativity and the communities we serve.

Amid the disruption, there is also some good news coming from our research, and from the conversations we've had with countless employers across the creative economy; and that's the power and value of DE&I interventions to amplify our creative output and retain talent. The feedback shows that talent-nurturing activities and career support are delivering both short and long-term impact.



That's why I'd urge you to spend time looking at the Impact and Recommendations sections of this report. While there is some difficult data to digest this year, the findings also demonstrate what's working, and indicate what should be prioritised in the coming year.

The UK Government has just announced a £380 million investment into the creative industries. Core to this investment, they state, is building a 'resilient, skilled and diverse workforce'. Despite the challenges that the creative industries is facing, we have an opportunity to build back better – taking advantage of the Government investment and all the learnings from the past decade, in terms of how to foster inclusive and healthy work cultures.

In the Recommendations section of this report, you'll find practical steps and strategies that creative companies of all shapes and sizes can deploy to *not* lose momentum on the DE&I gains made, and to place talent and equal opportunity at the heart of your operations.

The team at Creative Access are here to support you, to help you understand what's happening on the ground, and to equip you with the tangible steps and support you need to facilitate building a better sector together, where everyone thrives.

Mel Rodrigues
CEO, Creative Access
July 2025



Methodology

This is our fourth annual Thrive report, the first being in March 2022. The Thrive report by Creative Access gathers insights on business sentiment around DE&I with employers as well as career sentiments amongst individuals from our community via an annual Thrive survey.

The study was conducted over a 4-week period in March and April 2025. Separate surveys were initially sent out to two groups:

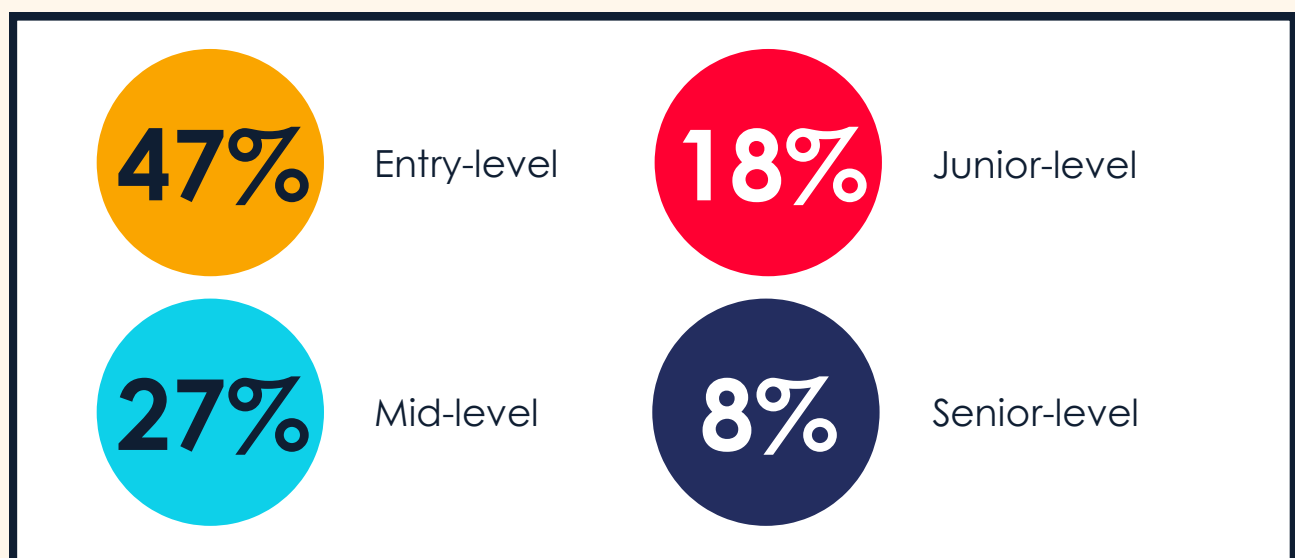
- **Individuals:** both to those in receipt of support from CA (interns, alumni, mentees, Kickstart placements), as well individuals signed up to our opportunities board and the wider creative community not in receipt of our services
- **Employers:** both to those who had purchased services from CA and those who had not

We received 200 responses to the individual survey and 100 to the employer survey.

Individual responses and demographics

There were 200 responses to the individual survey which are broken down by eligibility category and job level as follows:

58% Black, Asian or ethnically diverse backgrounds **44%** Lower socioeconomic backgrounds **29%** Disabled



	Overall %	BAED %	Disabled %	Lower SES %
In receipt of services from CA	69	41	20	29
Not in receipt of services from CA	31	17	9	15
Total %	100	58	29	44

Employer responses and breakdown by size and sector

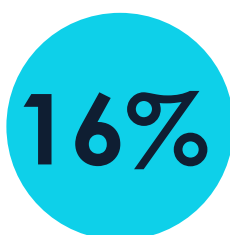
100 respondents across the creative industries completed the employer survey. Here were the sectors with the highest response rate:

Industry	Representation
Books, publishing & journalism	16%
Film, TV & radio	19%
Music, theatre, dance & visual arts	27%
PR, marketing & advertising	15%

Breaking down responses by organisation size we can see that:



from organisations with
49 or fewer FTE



from organisations
with 250 or more FTE



from organisations
with 50-249 FTE

Executive summary

'An Industry in Flux' is the title of this year's Thrive report. The common thread throughout our research is the huge amount of change, challenge and disruption being experienced by staff, freelancers and employers in the creative economy.

Key trends this year include:

Job uncertainty impacting creatives from under-represented groups

We've seen a sharp drop in career optimism (**66%** down to **31%** between 2022 and 2025), with disabled creatives experiencing the lowest optimism of all groups. When it comes to those in receipt and not in receipt of Creative Access services, the biggest optimism gap is seen amongst those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The film, TV and radio sector is lowest for optimism at **30%**, but publishing saw the largest drop from **54%** in 2024 to **43%** in 2025. No doubt impacting these sentiments is the availability of work, as **46%** of freelancers said their volume of work had decreased.

It is harder than ever to grow and progress creative careers

Career progression appears to be gridlocked. Less than half of our respondents report progress compared with two thirds of respondents in 2022. **87%** have not been promoted in the past 12 months and **83%** haven't received a pay rise. This points to the financial challenges faced by creative companies over the last year, resulting in less capacity to nurture and reward staff.

Wellbeing and mental health is being negatively impacted

Respondents in all categories told us that work was more likely to have a negative impact on their mental health. This was most striking amongst disabled people. Working hours and poor line management were the most commonly cited reasons, followed by team dynamics and a lack of focus on wellbeing. But it's not all negative: a significant amount of people (**32%**) feel that their work had at least some positive impact on their mental health.



Career support is driving progress for under-represented talent

92% of individuals who have received Creative Access services said CA made a significant or very significant impact on their career progress, and individuals we have supported in the last year are more likely to report having made progress than those who haven't received our support.

Access to networks is a long-standing barrier and is markedly improved for those we support: **51%** reported access to the necessary contacts and networks, compared to **31%** of those not in receipt of our services. Similarly, **80%** report having the knowledge and skills needed to progress their careers, compared to **67%** of those without support.

DE&I is paying the price of financial and structural blocks

5% of organisations overall - and **14%** of larger organisations - told us they had decreased spend on DE&I this year. This reduction in spend may also explain the downward trend in workforce demographics: less than half of employers (**47%**) reported an increase in the overall representativeness of their workforce. This number has been falling over the last 4 years and is the most striking in larger organisations. The majority of employers (**42%**) also stated that equity of progression and reward had not changed over the last 12 months.

Encouragingly, **44%** of respondents confirmed that their organisation had increased spend on DE&I in the last 12 months, an increase on last year's **35%**. In addition, **82%** of employers attributed their organisation's progress in DE&I to working with Creative Access.

And there are some indicators that this commitment is paying off - employers in PR, marketing and advertising are reporting a significant improvement in representativeness of their workforce in the past year.

AI adoption is changing the creative jobs and skills landscape

53% of organisations are now using AI in their workflows, compared to just **3%** in 2024 and less than **1%** in 2023. This rise demonstrates an exponential shift - just last year **82%** of organisations told us that they had 'no intention' to introduce AI technologies.

From a talent perspective, only **18%** of individuals have received Generative AI training in the workplace, and **82%** of all respondents have concerns about the ethical and inclusion implications of using AI.





Individual snapshot: the optimism dip

The current challenges in the creative sector are acutely and disproportionately impacting talent from under-represented backgrounds. Against a backdrop of a continued cost-of-living crisis, mass redundancies and an increasingly divisive political climate, it is no surprise that optimism has dropped to **31%** this year, representing a continuous fall since 2022 (**66%**).

There is a way to address this however - we know that career support and inclusive practices work. Individuals who receive our services repeatedly report higher levels of knowledge and skills, confidence, optimism and contacts and networks compared to those who have not received services.

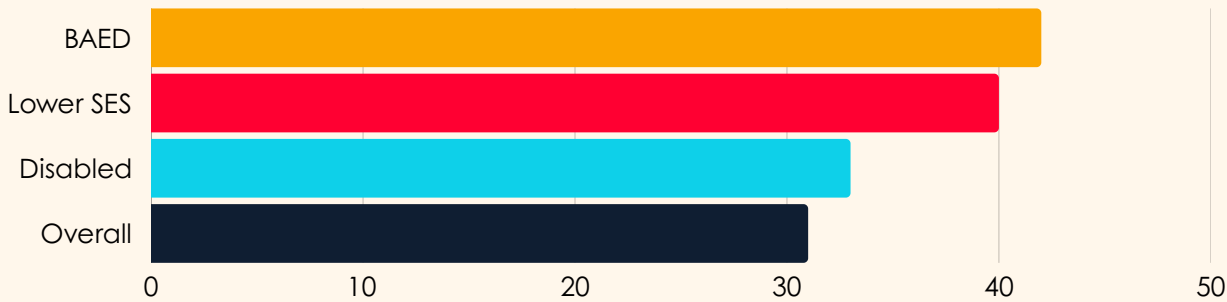
% of individuals optimistic about career progression:

Eligibility category	2022 %	2023 %	2024 % received services	2024 % no services	2025 % received services	2025 % no services
All respondents	66	61	49	40	42	31
BAED	71	60	55	40	44	36
Disabled	64	48	36	23	31	39
Lower SES	69	60	56	34	46	26

In general, people who received our support had higher levels of career optimism than those who didn't. There is an anomaly amongst disabled talent, who this year reported feeling more optimistic without our support. This may be explained in part by the higher commitment to improving disabled access and representation that has been delivered recently, including large sector collaborations like the [TV Access Project](#), but also perhaps by the lower survey response levels in this group. Disabled people were the least likely to feel optimistic about their careers overall.

Interventions are working, but optimism across the board has fallen. Despite a recent surge in recognition of class barriers, our data shows that the biggest optimism gap between those in receipt and those not in receipt of our services, is amongst those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Similarly, whilst confidence has remained relatively steady for most groups this year, it has dropped for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to **51%**.

% agree or strongly agree that they feel optimistic about their careers



Optimism across the sectors

When analysing the data by sector, we see a clear difference in film, TV and radio compared to the other sectors, with only **30%** agreeing or strongly agreeing that they feel optimistic about their career prospects. The second least optimistic sector was publishing at **43%**, which also had the largest drop from last year (**54%** in 2024).

In contrast, optimism amongst music, theatre, dance and visual arts, and PR, marketing and advertising is notably higher than last year.

Current sector	2024 %	2025 %
Film, TV & radio	32	30
Books, publishing & journalism	54	43
Music, theatre, dance & visual arts	59	65
PR, marketing & advertising	53	63

More individuals say their culture is inclusive compared to 2024, and those who've received Creative Access services are more likely to report that their organisation is inclusive. However, research shows that inclusive culture is clearly not the only swaying factor when it comes to career optimism and vice versa.

Interestingly, while music, theatre, dance and visual arts respondents felt more optimistic about career progression, they were less likely to feel like they worked in an inclusive environment. This is perhaps because of the high volumes of freelancers in this sector. And despite being the second least optimistic about their career progression, individuals working in publishing were most likely to agree that their organisation had a supportive culture, reflecting a rising trend seen last year.



% report working in a supportive and inclusive culture

Current sector	2024 %	2025 %
Film, TV & radio	61	72
Books, publishing & journalism	69	85
Music, theatre, dance & visual arts	71	59
PR, marketing & advertising	59	75

“ Lots of **people are still trying to be positive** about the [TV] industry, but also the reality is that a lot of people who've been working in the industry for a long time have been out of work. **There's a bit of a worrying energy** in the industry... **Equally, I've been really lucky with a production that actually cares about inclusivity.** ”

TV runner on a Creative Access mentoring scheme

The freelance perspective

Of all the respondents freelancing, **46%** said their volume of work had decreased, whilst **29%** increased and **25%** said the volume was the same.

Film, TV & radio freelancers in focus

When we analysed the split by sector, we saw that, as with last year, film, TV and radio accounted for a significant amount of the decline in available freelance work.

Current sector	2024 % increase	2024 % decrease	2024 % the same	2025 % increase	2025 % decrease	2025 % the same
All	16	48	36	29	46	25
Film, TV & radio	13	61	26	27	64	9

Employer snapshot: a changing DE&I landscape

DE&I under pressure

The current 'anti-woke' agenda being pursued in US politics; market shifts; sustained financial squeezes; and the exponential rise of AI are all existential challenges that have impacted company leaders this year.

But in tandem, we have seen some positive moves and doubling down on DE&I in the past months. Notably the UK television industry affirmed its commitment to investing in long-term, sustainable inclusion strategies that 'go beyond talk and deliver real impact'¹. In addition, the new [UK Government industrial strategy](#) also places diversity firmly at the heart of creative economy growth.

The reality on the ground, however, shows that employers are feeling the pinch and are finding this work harder to do both financially and strategically.

DE&I spend and impact of cuts

5% of organisations overall, and **14%** of larger organisations, told us they had decreased spend on DE&I, continuing a trend first observed last year.

This was mainly due to economic uncertainty (**60%**), but interestingly **40%** reported changing priorities within the organisation.

2025 responses	Overall %	Up to 49 %	50-249 %	250+ %
Increased DE&I spend	44	40	46	57
Decreased DE&I spend	5	6	0	14
DE&I spend stayed the same	51	55	54	29

1. [Creative Diversity Network diversity statement, June 2025](#)

The impact of reduced spend and changing priorities is most evident in inclusive recruitment practices.

For the first time since we began running the Thrive survey, the overall number of employers using inclusive recruitment practices is no longer rising. Although it is important to note that the comments and sentiments provided by employers express a desire to do better at DE&I despite these changes and challenges.

“

I've pushed to encourage more diverse hiring practices and for the company to engage with recruiters that specialise in getting employment for under-represented groups. Although it's early days, I think the company has a long way to go in training staff and **making the workplace genuinely more inclusive.**

Producer at an animation studio

”

Fall in representation - cause and effect of budget cuts?

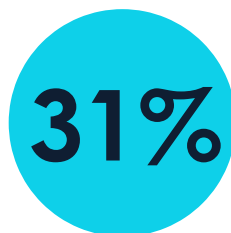
As in previous years, there is a difference in the overall representativeness of the workforce and the equitable distribution of progression and rewards. Less than half of employers **(47%) cited an increase in the overall representativeness of their workforce** – this number has been falling over the last 4 years and is most striking in larger organisations.

This year, we also saw **a further fall in the number of organisations reporting that their organisation has become more equitable in the last 12 months.** In addition, the majority of employers felt that the equity of progression and reward had not changed over the last 12 months **(42%)**, whilst **2%** felt that this had in fact become less equitable, indicating that some organisations may be responding to financial and political uncertainty by deprioritising equity work.





do not provide
DE&I training



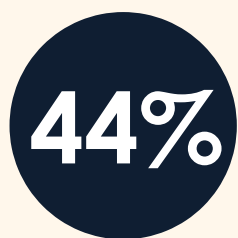
do not have a
DE&I strategy



had a **DE&I lead or team**, down from **70%**
last year & **74%** in 2023

- **DE&I effort is still overwhelmingly focused on entry-level** positions – despite an intention last year to shift this focus to retain and progress mid-senior level employees
- **Less than half** of organisations state **having the robust data** required to measure their DE&I goals, **a fall from last year**

Reasons to remain hopeful



of organisations said they had actually **increased their DE&I spend** – an **uplift on last year's 35%** - showing there is still a level of commitment to inclusive hiring and progression

In a possibly connected trend, three major sectors - film, TV and radio; music, theatre, dance and visual arts; and PR, marketing and advertising - report an increase in representativeness of their workforce compared to 2024 (see table on the next page).



Sector breakdown

Representation is still however a mixed picture. Publishing has reported a sharp decrease in representativeness of its workforce from **55%** to **33%**, whilst the number of respondents reporting that their organisation has become more equitable since last year has starkly dropped for TV and film from **27%** to **6%**. In contrast, PR, marketing and advertising has seen an increase of representation in the workforce (**43%** to **64%**).

% reporting an increase in representativeness of workforce

Sector	2022 %	2023 %	2024 %	2025 %
Books, publishing & journalism	68	78	55	33
Film, TV & radio	74	68	53	56
Music, theatre, dance & visual arts	66	72	48	50
PR, marketing & advertising	68	61	43	64

% reporting increased equity in progression and rewards

Sector	2022 %	2023 %	2024 %	2025 %
Books, publishing & journalism	50	56	33	13
Film, TV & radio	43	23	27	6
Music, theatre, dance & visual arts	26	24	15	27
PR, marketing & advertising	47	48	29	29

Overall, employers claiming 'greater authenticity and diversity of creative output' remained stable at **41%**, but there were stark variations within different sectors. PR remains steady, music, theatre, dance and visual arts and film, TV and radio are climbing back up to their former figures. The publishing sector sees a dramatic year-on-year decrease to its diverse output by **44%** from 2022 to 2025.

% reporting greater authenticity & diversity of creative output

Sector	2022 %	2023 %	2024 %	2025 %
Books, publishing & journalism	64	61	45	20
Film, TV & radio	71	50	37	44
Music, theatre, dance & visual arts	53	64	41	69
PR, marketing & advertising	46	57	36	43

“

We always seek a diverse cross section of our team to input in the creative process.

”

Director of an events agency



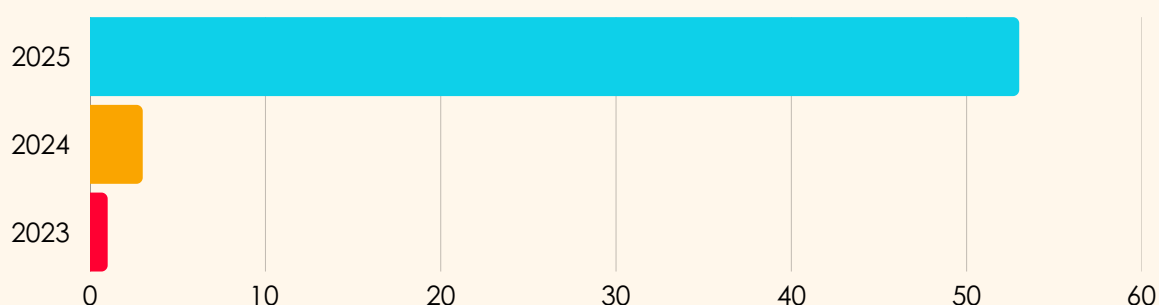
Disruptive technologies: AI & creative workflows

Alongside understanding the impact of a turbulent political and financial year, our Thrive report documents the uptake and impact of AI on creative talent.

Acceleration of AI: 2024 vs. 2025

There has been a dramatic spike in the number of organisations using AI with **53%** stating they are already using it, compared to **3%** in 2024, and less than **1%** in 2023. This rise appears to have surprised the creative economy, with **82%** of organisations stating in 2024 that they had no intention to introduce this technology.

% of organisations using AI



We found that larger organisations are more likely to be using AI already (**79%** vs. **49%**) or are more likely to be considering introducing AI in the next 12 months (**21%**). However, the rapid uptake of AI even amongst smaller organisations is significant and likely to reflect the low entry costs to accessing these technologies.



What are we using it for?

41% of employers report using AI for general administration, **19%** for talent acquisition and **33%** for creative processes. Despite this, only **18%** of individuals have received any generative AI training in the workplace, although a further **10%** say this is planned, and **82%** of respondents have concerns about the ethical and inclusion implications of using AI.

AI in the recruitment process

In 2024, 7 in 10 companies said they planned to use AI in the hiring process, despite most acknowledging its bias.²

Our latest Thrive survey tells us that **1 in 5** organisations are currently using AI for talent acquisition and development such as job ads, recruitment, and HR. The risk of biases and propensity for hallucinations in AI tools are well documented, and its use in recruitment could pose risks to diversity. With figures like this bound to grow, it's vital that employers manage these biases, or risk further marginalising high potential talent from under-represented groups.

“My concerns are that there can be **bias** (invoking further prejudice), **lack of transparency, data privacy**, and mainly its resources are **detrimental to climate change**.”

Mid-level publishing employee on the Creative Access Thrive programme

In response to the growing concerns of employers and creatives around the biases and ethical challenges of using generative AI, Creative Access has developed a new training session: [Inclusive AI for Creative Workplaces](#).

Designed to equip creative workers, leaders, hiring and team managers with essential knowledge and expertise to understand the inherent biases, and guarding against incorrect information and 'default settings' present in mainstream Gen AI tools.

Retention & progression

The creative industries are facing a dilemma: skilled talent from under-represented backgrounds are leaving the industry because of barriers to progression – but employers are struggling to deliver career progression or upskilling in the current economic climate.



87%

haven't received a **promotion** in the past 12 months



83%

haven't received a **pay rise** in the past 12 months



73%

haven't received **training** in the past 12 months

“

When the market is like this, **it is very hard to ensure your workforce becomes more representative** as there are **less jobs**.

Head of talent at a TV production company

”

This year, the most significant barriers to progression were:

- **Lack of space within the organisation** to progress **(24%)**
- **Financial barriers**, such as lack of funds for new equipment or training **(20%)**
- **Location** **(15%)**



The issue of lack of space to progress is echoed in the findings of the employer survey, where organisations report a lack of progress on DE&I goals due to financial uncertainty and hiring freezes.

Likewise, the impact of financial barriers is something we've seen in our own initiatives at Creative Access. Our Career Development Bursary, supported by WME and McLaren Racing, saw over 1,000 applications received this year – a record number since we began running the Bursary in 2021. The majority of the bursary grants went to those at mid-level in their careers.

“ Although I've got the **experience, skills, and knowledge to move forward** in my career, **things haven't progressed** over the last 18 months. ”

Freelancer in publishing

“ It feels like **the industry I was part of is eating itself alive and not economically fruitful to pursue** anymore. It's made me massively **rethink my career** and what I even want to do as I could barely afford to live from the income from my last two jobs. ”

Junior theatre industry worker





Are under-represented talent leaving the industry?

% still working the creative economy 2 years or more after completing a CA programme

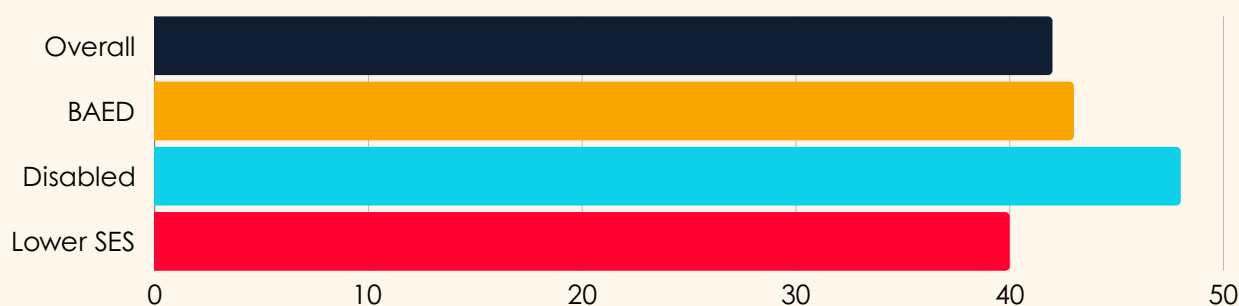


These figures show that the majority of individuals from our community who have taken part in a Creative Access programme since 2022 remain in the creative industries (**84%** in 2024, **96%** in 2023, and **92%** in 2022).

There has been an overall decline in the number of respondents reporting career progress this year, with **less than half** saying they've advanced, compared to **two-thirds** in 2022. This trend is particularly significant for individuals from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who seem to be disproportionately affected by the wider challenges facing the sector, as outlined below.

However, individuals who have received our support are consistently more likely to report positive outcomes. This includes feeling more optimistic about their careers and being more likely to stay in the industry than those who haven't accessed our services.

% reporting that their careers have progressed in the past 12 months



There is still a worrying trend at large that people are leaving the industry and struggling with progression - even when they've taken part in a career support programme - highlighting the urgent demand for more wide-scale, holistic interventions.

Employers need to support individuals from under-represented backgrounds consistently, throughout their careers. Short-term quick-fix interventions are not enough.

“

I am optimistic that now I am in the industry it will be much easier to progress, however, it seems to only be getting **more competitive** to get that role or promotion.

Progression feels up to chance and circumstance rather than because I know how to advocate for myself and increase my skillset in my workplace.

”

Mid-level Creative Access alumni
working in charity sector



“ Being on the Thrive programme and having mentorship **opened my eyes to the type of progression that I would like** to see in my career, not necessarily in my role at the company that I am at currently.

I saw that within my company (after using techniques learnt on the Thrive programme) that progression isn't possible.

That wouldn't have happened if I didn't have the mentorship and 'self-belief' training and networking sessions, which **allowed me to see different ways of progression**, what other careers could look like, and how following your passions can support the next stage for wherever it is that I might go. **So, I do feel optimistic** because of this. ”

Mid-level publishing professional on Creative Access
Thrive development programme

Wellbeing

Respondents in all categories told us that work was **more likely to have a negative impact** on their mental health than a positive impact. This was most striking amongst disabled people.

Impact of work on mental health	Significant positive impact	Some positive impact	No impact	Some negative impact	Significant negative impact
All respondents %	7	25	24	31	14
BAED %	7	23	26	27	17
Disabled %	9	28	14	31	19
Lower SES %	8	28	23	31	10

“As a neurodiverse, single woman with a low income and a legal responsibility for a disabled sibling, I find that the entire system is rigged against me. The government try to force people like me into work, but many employers actively make it harder for disabled/neurodiverse people to access work and the writing industry is also actively rigged against me.

Content writer in publishing

Despite this, **32%** of respondents felt that their work had at least some positive impact on their mental health. In addition to this, only **3%** of respondents told us that their employer provides no support for wellbeing at work, a big drop from last year (**26%**).

However, such data begs the question, why is there still a disconnect between work having a negative impact on mental health, even though support for wellbeing has improved? And how can employers act to ensure their employees can benefit from the support on offer?

The most common reasons cited for having an impact on mental health were:

- **Working hours (22%)**
- **Poor line management (22%)**
- **Team dynamics (15%)**
- **A lack of focus on wellbeing (15%)**

Undertaking training around navigating neurodiversity, inclusive line management and inclusive recruitment is clearly vital. Employers have spoken to the importance of our interventions for managers in particular:

“

Creative Access has really supported us with training, particularly for managers. We had some very successful training around hiring inclusively. These sessions really changed our focus and supported our goals.

Head of talent at a production company

”

Mid-senior level support is *still* lacking

As in previous years, individuals felt that DE&I interventions were overwhelmingly focused on entry-level positions, despite believing that it should be focused on all levels in the organisation.

This reflects responses from employers who also recognised that their own DE&I efforts remained overwhelmingly focused on entry-level positions – despite an intention last year to shift this focus.

Where are employers currently focusing?

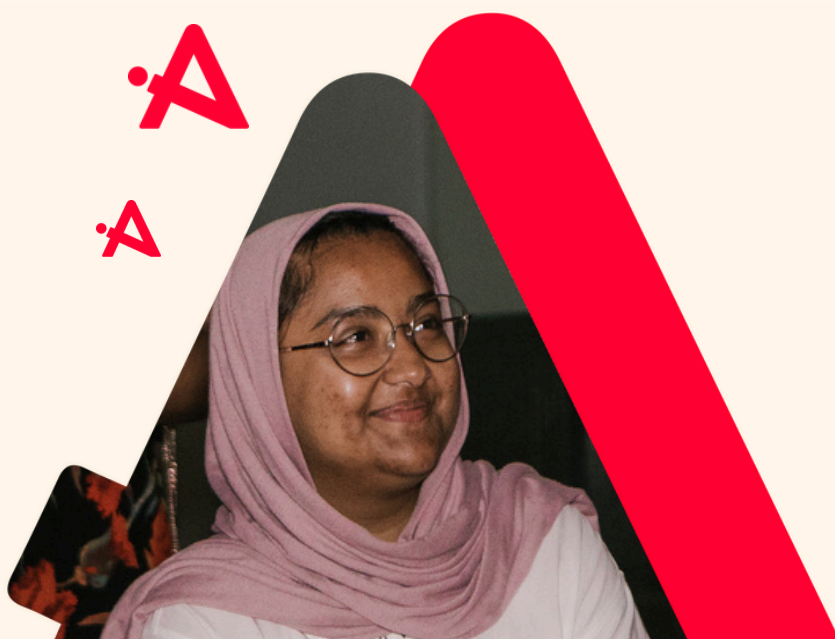
Level within organisation	Identified as current DE&I focus 2023 %	Identified as current DE&I focus 2024 %	Identified as current DE&I focus 2025 %
Entry	46	52	50
Mid	22	15	19
Senior	5	5	3
Exec/leadership	3	2	3
Trustees/non-exec directors	4	6	5
All of the above	20	20	20



Where do individuals think employers need to focus?

Level within organisation	Identified as DE&I focus needed 2023 %	Identified as DE&I focus needed 2024 %	Identified as DE&I focus needed 2025 %
Entry	23	19	20
Mid	7	9	10
Senior	10	12	11
Exec/leadership	16	12	10
Trustees/non-exec directors	2	2	0
All of the above	41	46	49

These findings bolster the desire from employers to support people throughout their entire career – and it is reflected in the needs and wants of workers from under-represented backgrounds in the sector. However, it highlights the pressing need for organisations to act upon these aims to retain mid-senior level talent.



Our impact

Impact is at the heart of everything we do at Creative Access. Meaningful change and progress can only be achieved if we are measuring what works and why. Therefore, we are very pleased that the findings of this year's Thrive survey once again highlight that individuals who have received our services in general report higher levels of knowledge and skills, confidence, optimism and contacts and networks than individuals who have not.

“Creative Access not only provided me with my first paying opportunity, but **supported me throughout my career beyond an entry-level role**. They have given me endless access to **training, new skills and mentoring**.”

Freelance journalist on the Thrive programme

Holistic approach

At a time when optimism and confidence levels are declining and access to networks is narrowing, our holistic approach - supporting both individuals and employers through tailored programmes, training and events - is more vital than ever. The Thrive survey allows us to constantly refine our services and proactively respond to the sector's emerging challenge, whether that's growing our mentoring partnerships connecting under-represented creatives with industry professionals, or developing new training workshops around AI to meet employers' evolving needs.

We surveyed individuals who have taken part in at least one Creative Access programme and compared their outcomes with those who have not received our services.

The results speak volumes.



Our impact: individuals

92%

said Creative Access made a **significant or very significant impact on their career progress.**

51%

report having **access to the necessary contacts and networks**, compared to only **31%** of those without support.

80%

report having the **knowledge and skills needed to progress** their careers, compared to **67%** of those without support.

46%

made career progress, compared to just **32%** of those without support.



“

**Creative Access
is the best thing
I ever did in
my career.**

Freelance journalist &
Creative Access alumni

”

Our impact: employers



82%

attributed their organisation's **progress on DE&I goals** at least in part to their work with Creative Access (consistent with 2024, 2023 & 2022).



73%

say Creative Access services **helped them progress**

“

When we used other companies for recruitment, we always asked them to look for candidates from under-represented groups and make sure that our ads were inclusive but **advertising via Creative Access was the first time this really worked.**

Director at a talent management company

”

“

Creative Access' expertise and network have supported us in **reaching a wider and more diverse pool of talent**, particularly in areas where access to the arts and cultural sectors has historically been limited.

[It's] helped us **embed more inclusive practices into our recruitment** and support structures.

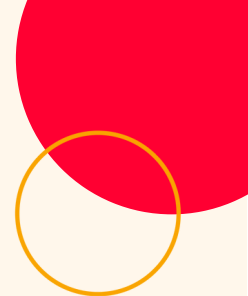
It has also offered **valuable opportunities for reflection and learning, strengthening our broader DE&I strategy** and deepening our impact both within our organisation and the industry at large.

”

Associate people director at artist management group



Conclusion



We called this report 'An Industry in Flux' because the breadth of challenges being faced by the creative workforce, employers and company heads in 2025 are deep-seated, interconnected and fast evolving.

Career optimism, progression and wellbeing have all been negatively impacted by financial uncertainty and structural shifts. Employers are committed to delivering diverse and inclusive cultures. They understand that diversity of thought and experience is critical to their output and future prosperity, but they are finding this work increasingly difficult to do.

We are at a pivotal point. This is the moment to take stock of the direction we are heading in, ask ourselves serious questions about whether it is the course we want to follow, and take action to carve a different path.

If we continue on this course - where we are losing talent from the sector, and winding back career support for creatives from under-represented groups - our cultures, content and collective output will be poorer for it.

But we have a choice. Even on more limited budgets, and in a more disrupted commercial and political climate, we can double down on the values that underpin our work, collaborate with each other, and do what we can, when we can, to retain and nurture talent from *all* backgrounds.

It might seem like a herculean task to unpick and act on the myriad of challenges detailed in this report, but there are some clear patterns, insights and related actions that can be gleaned from the data. In the recommendations section that follows, we have detailed some SMART tasks (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound) that employers and talent can reflect on, pick up and adopt as part of their onward activities.

Thank you for reading this report and for your commitment to creating a truly inclusive creative sector.

Employer recommendations

1 Tackling the progression problem

This year's report highlights the career blocks affecting experienced, skilled talent. There are a number of actions that individuals and companies of all shapes and sizes can take to drive career progression in their organisation.

The first three points listed below are vital actions that all hiring managers and line managers can implement straight away requiring no or little budget.

Mentoring

Become a mentor for a mid-level professional from an under-represented group.

Hiring

Complete [inclusive recruitment](#) training.

Network

Attend an industry mixer to meet untapped talent every 2 months.

If you are a medium to large size company – and can commit funds to a more sustained talent, training and inclusion strategy – this is what we know will make a difference from our work over the past 13 years with both talent and employers:

Mentoring programmes

Running a company [mentoring programme](#) to engage staff with external talent is one of the most effective ways to keep the pipeline moving, and help mid-level talent connect with opportunities and hiring managers/company heads.

[Read about our work with Ogilvy.](#)

Recruitment strategies

Commit to an [inclusive recruitment strategy](#), with budget and processes to widen engagement, ensuring that any new vacancies are reaching candidates who may not already have contact with your organisation.

Facilitate network-building

Host masterclasses and industry mixers to meet untapped talent. [Find out about partnering with us on an event.](#)

Empower your future leaders

Enrol high potential talent on your team from under-represented groups onto our [Thrive programme](#) and help them gain the skills and confidence they need to apply for and successfully step into senior roles.

2

Be proactive about retention

Alongside the progression challenge, we know that experienced talent are also either considering leaving the creative sector or have already left. While it is hard to pin-point one single factor, job insecurity and financial challenges are commonly cited reasons that professionals are seeking more 'stable' industries and work. Offering salary transparency and equitable pay is one way we can buck this trend.

Show the salary

One small but significant way you can act on financial barriers for mid-senior talent is by offering role and salary transparency. At Creative Access we ask all employer partners listing roles on our jobs board to provide at least the salary band and to keep ads up for at least 3 weeks where possible. It helps people from all groups - but especially those who are, for example, under financial strain or have caring responsibilities - to make informed decisions, plan and prepare.

Examine pay gaps

Build on this by looking at gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps. This can help you see when, where and why talent from under-represented groups are leaving.

Plan for retention across projects

The trend across the creative economy has been to hire freelancers for specific projects - for the minimum time needed - to maximise budget. While project-based work creates momentum and flexibility that suits many freelancers, people from under-represented groups tend to be disproportionately disadvantaged. Examples include disabled talent who don't have a long enough contract to justify costs of carers and can't get access to work payments in time; primary carers who can't make arrangements at a moment's notice; or people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who don't have a 'buffer' to pay for bills between projects.

By looking across your projects and work schedules, and planning how talent might be retained and developed across a longer period, you give people the best chance of getting in and staying in.

[Read more of our advice on how to best support freelancers.](#)

3

Deliver effective wellbeing practices in the workplace

This year's report also highlighted the mental health challenges and negative impact of work insecurity and some unhealthy cultures. Providing a meaningfully inclusive, supportive and psychologically safe work environment is critical to retaining all staff - but even more so in the case of talent who have already overcome significant hurdles to enter the workplace.

Here are some measures that you can take now to understand how your culture is perceived by your team and which wellbeing activities to prioritise:

Temperature check

A culture survey helps understand where people are at and how inclusive the current work culture is. The key to a good survey is forming an action plan from the findings, sharing with the team the results and actions, and making sure these are followed up on.

Training

Teams often point to knowledge gaps and inconsistent behaviour from managers as key reasons why inclusivity breaks down. Inclusive line management training for anyone with management or leadership responsibilities is a positive way to ensure consistency and understanding.

Wellness Action Plans

Everyone is different and will need varying things in place to do their best work. Creating a simple Wellness Action Plan (Mind) with each individual sends the signal that you have thought about their wellbeing and have clear frameworks of support in place for them.

Support

We all need different types of support at different stages of our career. Some companies are able to provide external assistance programmes. If this is cost-prohibitive, there are a number of charities and organisations that you can sign-post team members to for free mental health and/or financial support, including the Film & TV Charity, Acting for Others, Help Musicians, The Spare Room Project and The Printing Charity.

4 Adopt AI inclusively

This year we saw an exponential rise in the adoption of generative AI into creative workflows. But what does this mean for skills and jobs? We may need to move fast to make sure that talent from all groups can access quality training and up-skilling in these rapidly evolving, data-driven and prompt-based workflows. In response to this, Creative Access has recently launched its [inclusive AI workshop](#).

We are also [supporting talent](#) through our monthly programme of masterclasses and interventions such as our Career Development Bursary to improve access to the digital skills and software they need to keep pace.

Equipping yourself and your teams with some basic training is the first step to harnessing this technological opportunity, rather than feeling overwhelmed by it.

5 Deliver allyship in difficult times

It is undeniably hard to be a person from a minoritised background right now. Despite the wave of positive change in recent years regarding disability inclusion, anti-racist practice and levelling the playing field for working class talent, the creative sector is feeling the financial pinch and there is a danger that this progress will be lost. Combined with the rise of far-right rhetoric, it is no wonder that professionals from communities under attack are feeling vulnerable, isolated and less optimistic about their careers.

But the UK's creative sector has the power and agency to make different choices. If your business is built on the values of equity, mutual respect and championing potential then you must live this out in your decisions and strategic actions. We have an opportunity not only to be world-leading in our output and innovation, but in how we treat and nurture our workforce.

It starts with being an open ally for under-represented groups in your team and the wider workforce. Being an ally doesn't mean you have to understand and know everything about every intersectional challenge, but equipping yourself with key information and some useful resources is a vital first step.

- **Read:** check out our [resources](#) on everything from mental health in the workplace to supporting the trans community
- **Training:** complete [training](#) around neurodiversity, unconscious bias and allyship in the workplace
- **Leadership:** sponsor talent from under-represented groups on our [Thrive programme](#) and use our services to [recruit](#) senior level talent and NEDs

6

Future-proof your pipeline now

We have seen a worrying reversal in representation - with employers describing their workplaces as less equitable than the previous four years. This can seem like a very difficult trend to unpick - where do you start?

Know your data

A team survey helps understand demographics, especially non-visible ones (e.g. class and disability) and helps you choose which areas to prioritise in the coming year.

Training

Once you know which areas to prioritise, you can tailor your training to support this work – such as understanding micro-aggressions; accessibility at work; or the class ceiling.

Leadership

Sponsor talent from under-represented groups on our Thrive programme and use our services to recruit senior-level talent and NEDs to keep the pipeline moving, and talent from under-represented groups getting access to the senior, decision making roles, where there may be a current lack of visible, meaningful role models.

“We initially began working with Creative Access in 2021 to recruit entry-level roles. Since then, **we’ve also undertaken regular training and hired a NED via Creative Access**, the latter of whom has supported our in-house talent manager with **developing a robust DE&I strategy including clear KPIs, holding our leadership team to account.**”

Managing director at a marketing agency

Individual recommendations

How do you get your organisation to better support your professional development?

Ask your employer to support you via one of our career development programmes whether you're just starting out in your career, or you've progressed to mid or senior level status. [Read our advice](#), or get in touch with us at info@creativeaccess.org.uk to request a template for making your case.

How can you access our opportunities?

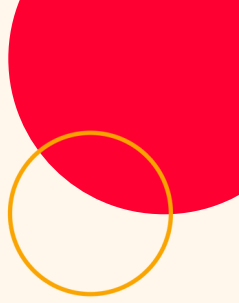
Sign up to our [jobs and opportunities board](#) for entry to mid and senior-level roles. You'll be the first to hear about the best new live roles and opportunities in the creative industries, plus bursary application launch timings, free masterclasses & networking events.

Useful organisations for career advice, development and networks:

- [BECTU](#)
- [JournoResources](#)
- [Creative Lives In Progress](#)
- [I Like Networking](#)
- [Common People](#)
- [People Like Us](#)
- [UK Black Comms Network](#)
- [We Are Black Journo](#)
- [Creative UK](#)
- [ScreenSkills](#)
- [UK Music](#)
- [Help Musicians](#)
- [Creative Diversity Network](#)
- [WorkWise for Screen](#)
- [CIPR](#)
- [Equity](#)
- [The Publishers Association](#)



Glossary



CA: Creative Access

CA services: Creative Access development programmes e.g. recruited into an internship or role, Springboard entry-level programme, Thrive mid-level programme, Creative Access mentoring programmes

DE&I: diversity, equity and inclusion

BAED: Black, Asian and ethnically diverse

Lower SES: Lower socioeconomic background

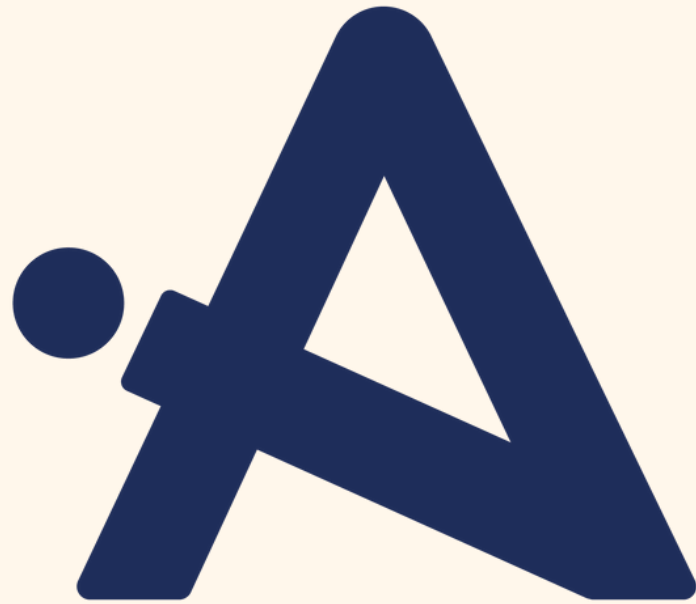
AI: Artificial Intelligence

GenAI: Generative AI - a category of AI models that can create new content, including text, images, audio, video, and code, based on learned patterns from existing data, such as Chat GPT.

What do we mean by 'under-represented groups'?

There is an urgent need to improve representation of those who identify as Black, Asian, or from other ethnically diverse backgrounds, or people of any ethnicity who belong to the following under-represented groups: disabled people, people with the characteristic of gender reassignment, individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, carers and asylum seekers. And so, we primarily focus on these groups.

[Read more about Creative Access' criteria for eligibility.](#)



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