

# Social mobility in the Creative Economy

## Rebuilding and levelling up?

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## Executive summary

The Creative Industries are undoubtedly one of the most successful parts of the UK economy. Their contribution to UK Gross Value Added (GVA) (£116 billion in 2019), our trade balance (£37.9 billion in service exports), the labour market (2.2 million jobs) and our soft power, is widely acknowledged. Most recently, the Government's new 'Plan for Growth' marked them as *"a major success story for the UK, and a critical driver of innovation and growth."*

In order to rebuild, following the Coronavirus pandemic, we can look to the opportunities created in high-growth, high-skill parts of the UK economy. Sectors like the Creative Industries. However, the Creative Industries are highly unequal. Whether we look at gender, race, disability or class, there are deep divides and entrenched inequality within the Creative sector.

We need to understand and act upon inequalities in Creative Industries. This is to make sure their contribution to rebuilding benefits more people and places across the UK. This is a core aim of the Government's 'Levelling Up' agenda, a core demand from many voices within our creative sector, and should feature strongly in any 'Sector Vision' for the Creative Industries.

This paper concludes phase 2 of our ongoing programme of work, supported by funding from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). During this nine-month inquiry, we have reviewed a vast body of literature, further interrogated secondary data sources, and undertaken over 150 interviews with stakeholders, businesses and workers, to understand industry perspectives and explore lived experience of class-based disadvantage in the Creative sector.

The report provides **definitive evidence** on the causes of class imbalances and sets out an **ambitious and wide-ranging programme of change** to enhance social mobility into Creative roles.

We outline *why* the sector needs to sharpen its focus on socio-economic diversity; *what* to prioritise in order to tackle class-based disadvantage across the life-course; and *how* – through significant, systemic and sustained action – Government, industry and educators can work together to build a more socially inclusive Creative Economy. This report should be viewed alongside the report from the APPG for Creative Diversity, which considers effective practice for businesses and policy makers, and the practical

guidance offered by the forthcoming Social Mobility Commission Employer's Toolkit for the Creative Industries.

Together, these offer strong foundations on which to build a movement for change. This represents **an opportunity for the Creative Industries to seize this moment, as we emerge from an unprecedented crisis, to address the long-standing inequalities in the sector**; to grasp the potential offered by the diverse talent that exists in the UK; to cement our creative excellence and competitive advantage, globally; and to demonstrate the vital role that growth sectors, like the Creative Industries, can play in rebuilding a more inclusive economy.

## Five reasons why we need to sharpen focus on socio-economic diversity in the Creative Economy

### 1. The class crisis in Creative Industries is worse than in other sectors and professional roles:

Class-based exclusion is more pronounced in the Creative Industries than in any other industrial sector. The class origin demographics of creative occupations such as Architects, Journalists and Editors, Musicians, Artists, and Producers and Directors, are amongst the most elite in the economy, even more so than Management Consultants or Stockbrokers.

2. **The scale of this class crisis is significant:** If the Creative Industries were as socio-economically diverse as the rest of the economy, there would be more than 250,000 more working-class people employed in the sector. This deficit is equivalent to the size of the creative workforce in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland combined.

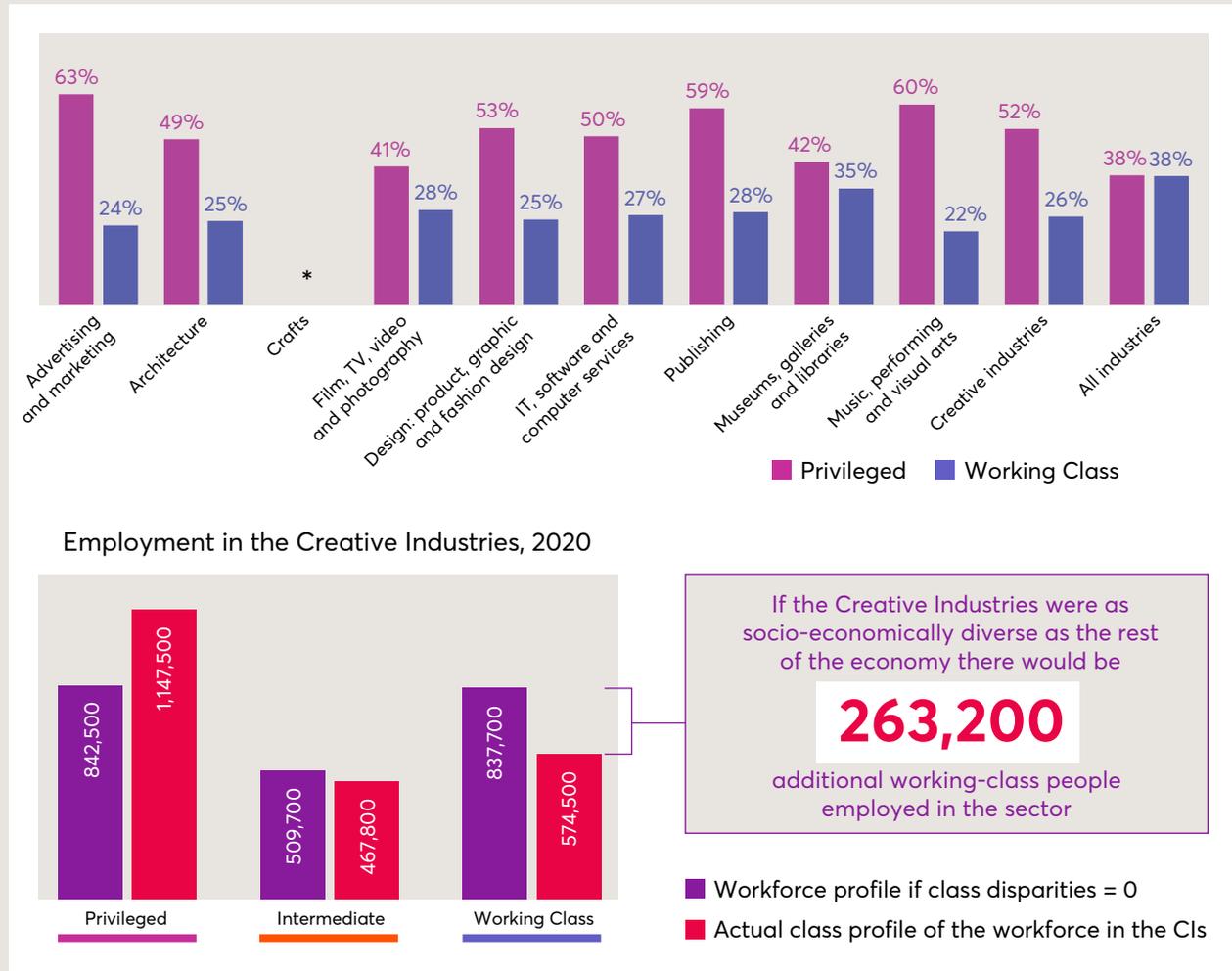
3. **Growth of the Creative Industries is mostly benefitting the privileged:** Two thirds of the increase in employment in the sector over the past five years was taken by those from

privileged backgrounds. In contrast, the relative likelihood of someone from a working-class background ending up in the Creative Industries remains largely unchanged since 2014.

4. **Class intersects with gender, race, disability, skills and place:** For individuals this creates double disadvantage. For policy-makers this calls for an intersectional approach, recognising that promoting social mobility is integral to wider efforts to address inequality and exclusion, and to 'level up' the Creative Economy.

5. **The COVID-19 pandemic may make this worse:** The latest labour market data – which only captures the very early stages of the pandemic – coupled with lessons from the 2008 financial crisis offer cause for concern. Those with access to financial reserves and networks will have been better placed to withstand the heightened insecurity, risk and competition for roles created by the pandemic.

Figure 1: Scaling class imbalances in the Creative Industries, 2020



The report outlines a ten-point, ten-year, plan to enhance socio-economic diversity in the Creative Economy.

This plan is substantial and ambitious in its intent. It represents a departure from the current, piecemeal approach. It recognises that significant, systemic and sustained action will be required to address class-related disadvantages in the Creative sector.

Shared commitment, accountability and good governance will be key. We recommend establishing a Social Mobility Council, jointly chaired by the Minister of State for Digital and Culture, the Chair of the Creative Industries Council, and the incoming Chair of the Social

Mobility Commission and with senior-level representation from education, government and all corners of the Creative Industries. This Council must set explicit targets, track progress at six-monthly intervals, and appoint a socio-economically diverse Advisory Panel to provide independent guidance and scrutiny.

What we need to see now is action, by Government, educators and businesses. These stakeholders must make a long-term commitment to transforming our Creative Industries. The next chapter in the Creative Industries' success story should tell of the vital role that diverse talent has played, and the opportunities this vibrant part of the economy has created, for people from every social background.

## Shaping an agenda for change: A ten-point plan to advance social mobility into the Creative Economy

Our research sought to understand the underlying causes of class imbalances in the Creative Industries. We looked in detail at key creative roles in four sectors: Advertising, Fashion, Publishing, and Screen. We found striking consistency in the story of class-based disadvantage across these Creative Industries.

It is clear that small scale investment in short-lived 'diversity initiatives' will not address the scale of the problem. What is needed is systemic change.

To do so, we identify four priorities, with ten recommendations, for building a more socially inclusive Creative Economy:

### 1. Early life experiences must establish fair foundations for success

Future success in the Creative sector is heavily influenced by childhood experiences. Class-based disparities in cultural engagement, cultural education participation and achievement, and extra-curricular activities profoundly impact the chances of individuals getting into creative occupations. Those from working-class backgrounds lack personal connections to those with

knowledge of creative careers, and they are often discouraged from pursuing creative educational and occupational routes.

Access to culture and cultural education must be made fair and equal. Creative Industries must build a sense that there is a career for everyone, regardless of class background, and create better awareness of the breadth of roles available.

#### Recommendation 1

Offer a new, long-term financial settlement for cultural education, with enhanced funding and resources for arts and culture in schools, alongside investment in the local institutional infrastructure and an extended network of Creative Learning Centres to widen access to culture outside of urban conurbations and within social mobility cold spots.

#### Recommendation 2

Extend investment in the Creative Careers Programme for the next fiscal cycle; expand its reach to Scotland and Northern Ireland; extend activities, widen support and more actively target social mobility cold spots; and embed the programme within local skills systems, exploiting the vital brokerage role it can play between industry and educators.

### 2. Unlocking the potential of education as the great leveller

A university degree from a prestigious institution remains the primary route into many Creative Industries. The cost of higher education, along with the need to relocate to

attend specialist creative institutions acts as a considerable obstacle for those from low socio-economic backgrounds. While technical education could offer a valuable alternative,

fractured and flawed pathways, industry-specific implementation challenges and low levels of awareness and perceptions of vocational education, undermine this potential in parts of the Creative Industries.

We need to widen access to higher education, open up technical routes into the industry, and deliver a valuable and enriching educational experience that prepares all students for the future world of work in the Creative sector.

### Recommendation 3

Universities, and particularly specialist creative institutions, should redouble their efforts and play a leading role in driving social mobility into the Creative Industries, including stretching targets for socio-economic diversity in their Access and Participation Plans; strengthening focus on the student lifecycle, coupling financial support with pastoral care; and extending their offer of online, blended, and flexible learning options.

### Recommendation 4

Harness ongoing developments in skills policy, particularly in England, to rapidly open-up technical pathways into the Creative Industries. Advance flexible Apprenticeship models, modular learning options and locally-led skills solutions; enabled through strong, collaborative networks for creative skills development in local places; and by promoting engagement with technical education amongst employers and learners.

## 3. Improving job quality and business practices in the Creative Industries

Low pay, job insecurity, and workplace practices such as unpaid internships and informal hiring, act as a considerable barrier to those without reserves of financial and social capital.

Even when they overcome barriers to entry, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds face further disadvantage when in work. Class-based exclusion can be subtle – judgements based on accents or ‘banter’ about cultural knowledge – but it

fosters a sense of ‘otherness’ amongst those from working-class backgrounds. Working class origin creatives face the stark choice of changing themselves and hiding their background or limiting their chances of success.

To address these issues, the Creative Industries need to advance policies and business practices that promote socio-economic diversity while ensuring all Creative Work must become Good Work.

### Recommendation 5

Government and industry should unite in driving a movement for change to advance social mobility in the Creative Industries, by embedding socio-economic diversity within the CIC Diversity Charter, adopting the new SMC Social Mobility Toolkit, and commissioning a business-led Social Mobility Taskforce to drive the implementation of the Toolkit across Creative sub-sectors.

### Recommendation 6

To address some of the most fundamental causes of class imbalances, we need a Good Work Strategy for the Creative Industries, that seeks to quickly stamp out bad practice, such as unpaid internships, while advancing a long-term plan to ensure the Creative sector offers Good Work to those from all backgrounds, building on the principles and recommendations of the Taylor Review.

## 4. Accelerating progression of diverse talent and promoting inclusive leadership of the Creative Industries

Those from working-class backgrounds face significant obstacles in their path to leadership positions. These include: a lack of formal job structures, career pathways or professional development; the power of nepotism and networks in affording access to opportunities that accelerate progression; sponsors that provide mentorship, advocacy and advice to enable success; and more subtle issues grounded in the possession of the confidence to speak up and be heard.

Creative entrepreneurship, in particular, is best described as a risky game. The stakes are high, pay-outs are rare, and the

deck is stacked in favour of the privileged. The challenges faced by most business start-ups (protecting IP, access to funding, commercial and leadership skills) are heightened amongst those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

It is right that there has been a great deal of focus on new entrants into the Creative Industries. In addition, interventions that support progression and advancement of working-class talent into leadership positions are needed. Creative Industries must ensure the next wave of creative leaders are much more diverse than those that went before them.

### Recommendation 7

Bring forward a new wave of diverse future leaders of industry, through a Creative Industries challenge fund that provides flexible grants to scale existing, and advance new, professional development and leadership programmes to support and accelerate the advancement of those from lower socio-economic backgrounds

### Recommendation 8

Unlock the potential of creative entrepreneurs from (socio-economically) diverse backgrounds, through further research to explore distinct barriers to starting and scaling creative ventures, including those pioneering new creative technologies, and by better targeting and extending funding and support for diverse entrepreneurs and minority-led enterprises in the Creative Industries.

## Levelling up the Creative Economy

It is clear from recent policy statements that the Government's 'levelling up' agenda has a much broader vision that extends beyond place-based interventions. At the same time, the story of unequal social mobility into Creative Industries is also a spatial story of unequal places.

The spatial concentration of the Creative Industries in urban centres across the UK, and in London and the South East in particular, plays an important part in making Creative Industries unequal. It impacts early-life access to culture and to specialist education, an individual's 'degrees of separation' from vital creative networks, and the geography of opportunity, particularly of higher-status jobs, projects or commissions.

Efforts to 'level up' the Creative Economy and support the development of thriving creative

clusters throughout the UK, have an important role in tackling the sector's social mobility problem. For 'levelling up', we need to look beyond the obvious candidates, and nurture the development of nascent clusters and 'micro-clusters' that provide creative opportunities for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. We also need to consider the quality of creative work, and who benefits from these opportunities.

With the promise of further devolution of powers and funding to cities and counties in the forthcoming Levelling Up White Paper, and with more funding coming through in the form of the Levelling Up, UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and National Skills Funds, there is an opportunity to advance new place-sensitive policies to promote equality, diversity and inclusive growth.

### Recommendation 9

Expand funding and support to enable the inclusive growth of creative clusters and micro-clusters across the UK, deploying diversity monitoring and targets to more closely couple economic and social outcomes. Advance industry-led and place-based approaches, founded on local insight and enabled through strong institutional infrastructure, that connect those from (socio-economically) disadvantaged backgrounds with good quality jobs in the Creative Economy.

Many of our recommendations concern better targeting of interventions towards those from low socio-economic backgrounds. In order to target, we first need to measure. With the Social Mobility Commission's [new guidance and simplified approach](#) there is an opportunity to establish a robust and consistent approach to measuring

socio-economic background across the Creative Industries. This creates strong foundations to establish explicit, ambitious, and attainable targets for enhancing socio-economic diversity. It will also allow us to assess the impact of different interventions.

### Recommendation 10

Put the fundamentals in place and create stronger incentives, by adopting the Social Mobility Commission's approach to measuring socio-economic background; establishing explicit targets for socio-economic diversity in the Creative Industries; and ring-fencing funding for evaluation and knowledge exchange.

**The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) works to support the growth of the UK's Creative Industries through the production of independent and authoritative evidence and policy advice.**

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