Creative Industries
Policy and
Evidence Centre

Led by Newcastle University Business School with RSA

Policy Brief: Migration in UK Creative Occupations and Industries

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Overview

The UK's creative industries are internationally oriented, a fact that's reflected in its export success,[1] volume of foreign direct investment,[2] and reliance on global talent. They are a key component of the UK Government's forthcoming Industrial Strategy, recognised as a priority sector for driving economic growth, innovation and soft power. Following the publication of the UK Government's *Restoring Control over the Immigration System* White Paper in May 2025, this briefing sets out the latest findings on migration in the creative industries and policy considerations to safeguard the sector's future competitiveness.

We highlight key findings from Creative PEC's latest State of the Nations report, *Migration in UK Creative Occupations and Industries*[3]. This represents one of the most in-depth pieces of research on migration and the UK's creative sector in the post-Brexit period. The report draws on the UK Government's quarterly migration statistics from 2021Q1 to 2024Q1 which allows occupation-level analysis and covers the period following the introduction of the new post-Brexit points-based immigration system, as well as longer-term data from the Labour Force Survey from 2014 to 2024 with additional Census 2021 data.

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[1] Maioli, S., Fazio, G., Jones, J. and Simandjuntak, D. (2024) 'UK Trade in a Global Creative Economy'. Zenodo. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.10809397. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/state_of_the_nation/uk-trade-in-a-global-creative-economy/

[2] Jones, J., Simandjuntak, D., Maioli, S. and Fazio, G. (2024) 'Foreign Direct Investment and the UK's Creative Industries'. DOI: 10.5281/ zenodo.14045803. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Foreign-Direct-Investment-in-the-Creative-Industries-FINAL.pdf

[3] Maioli, S. (2025) Migration in UK Creative Occupations and Industries. Zenodo. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.15475282. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Creative-PEC-Migration-in-UK-Creative-Occupations-and-Industries-FINAL-9-6-2025.pdf

The findings show that the UK is an attractive destination for skilled creative workers from abroad. A larger proportion of non-UK workers is employed in the creative industries compared to other parts of the economy, and, since 2021, there has been an increase in creative workers coming to the UK for temporary periods. We outline four key considerations for migration policy to ensure that the UK's creative industries remain a key destination for international talent.

Key Findings

Work routes into the UK for foreign creative workers

- **Since 2021, the most common visas for non-UK creative workers entering the creative industries** are the Skilled Worker visa (50%), the temporary (maximum 12 months) Creative Worker visa (20%) and the Expansion Worker/Global Business Mobility visa (15%). We lack granular data for other visas relevant to the creative industries, including the Global Talent Visa, Innovator Founder Visa, and High Potential Individual Visa because they are not reliant on having a job offer and thus do not feature in the totals.[4]

- **There are sub-sectoral differences between where different visa types are being granted.** Nearly two thirds of visas in creative occupations covered by the data were granted for roles falling under the IT, Software and Computer Services subsector. By comparison, those occupations more associated with arts and culture tended to come via temporary routes on Creative Worker visas, with the most common being Actors, Entertainers and Presenters (7.5% of visas granted for creative occupations), Musicians (5.5%), Marketing Associate Professionals (4.6%), and Arts Officers, Producers and Directors (3.9%).

Migration trends in the creative economy

- **There have been increases in visas for creative workers since the implementation of the UK's points based post-Brexit immigration system.** Since 2021, there has been a 70% increase in temporary visas for creative occupations, compared to 13.5% for non-creative ones.[5] For longer-term visas, including the Skilled Worker visa, there was only an 8% increase, compared to 233% across the wider economy (or 106% if excluding Health and Social Care visas).

- **The period from 2021 to 2024 saw a change in the composition of long- and short-term visas for all occupations.** The share of worker visas granted for creative occupations shrank from 21.5% in 2021 to 8.2% in 2023. The overall increase in temporary visas in creative occupations may reflect EU workers appearing in post-Brexit migration statistics for the first time, as well as employer difficulty in recruiting skilled workers in the aftermath of the pandemic.

[4] While these remain important visas and should be considered for future research, in aggregate they are a small number of overall visa applications.
[5] Temporary worker visas encompass the Creative Worker visa and the temporary visa routes of the Global Business Mobility visa

- **The UK's creative industries draw extensively on international talent as part of their success**. For 2024, 16% of the creative workforce were migrants, a little higher than 14% of the rest of the economy. IT, Software and Computer Services (19%) and Publishing (17%) have the highest average proportion of non-UK workers over the 2014 to 2024 period. Non-UK workers specialise in a small number of professions within each creative subsector, such as architects (within Architecture) and programmers and software development professionals (within IT, Software and Computer Services).

- **Creative workers are primarily coming from Asian countries, reflecting the success of previous bilateral agreements and opportunities for strengthened cooperation.** Of new visas granted between 2021Q1 and 2024Q1, 62.6% were from Asia, followed by the rest of Europe (16.8%), the Americas (9.1%) and Africa (9.1%). South Asia is the largest Asian region of origin for non-UK workers in multiple creative occupations including 'Web design and development professionals', 'Actors, entertainers and presenters' and 'Arts officers, producers and directors'. 53% of creative visas were from India over the period.

- **Non-UK workers are more likely to be working in certain creative occupations compared to UK workers, reflecting the attractiveness of the sector to overseas workers and its reliance on them.** Our researchers used a Migration Quotient[6] which accounts for the overall size of both the UK and non-UK workforce in the country to show that non-UK workers show a greater likelihood to be in thirteen creative occupations than UK workers, encompassing programmers and software development professionals; authors, writers and translators; and architects.

- **The growth of the non-UK workforce has occurred across UK nations and regions.** While London attracts the largest share of the non-UK creative workforce, other nations and regions have experienced higher growth rates in the over the 2014-2024 period, highlighting both the ability of UK nations and regions to attract global talent and the importance of international workers to local creative economies across the UK.

UK restrictiveness to inward movement

- **The UK is average in terms of mobility and openness to trade in talent**. Worker mobility is a key factor in giving countries the edge in services trade. Our researchers used Service Trade Restrictions Index (STRI) produced by the OECD to measure relative openness across five broad creative sectors. The UK is found to be average in terms of its openness to creative talent mobility compared to peer nations.

[6] The Migration Quotient is calculated as: $\frac{\text{Non-UK nationals in specific occupation / Non-UK nationals in all occupations}}{\text{UK nationals in specific occupation / UK nationals in all occupations}}$ See the report for more detail on the methodology.

Policy considerations

1) **The UK's creative industries are internationally oriented and maintaining attractiveness to global talent should be a priority.** The UK's creative industries rely on non-UK workers to a higher degree than the economy overall, with even higher rates in high-tech areas like IT, Software and Computer Services. In order to take advantage of global creative talent, the UK Government should continue to monitor and review how proposed visa reforms might affect the sector. For example, in its Immigration white paper, the Government committed to double the number of eligible higher education institutions for the High Potential Individual Visa (HPI). Special consideration should be given to expanding the number of specialist creative institutions on the list, including those that may not otherwise feature highly in more generic overall global rankings, such as Aalto University, RMIT and Rhode Island School of Design.[7]

2) **Easing visa-related administrative and financial burdens on creative businesses and workers.** The Government's Immigration white paper proposes raising the Immigration Skills Charge (ISC) with inflation for the first time since 2017. This may burden micro and small creative businesses with a need for highly skilled workers but smaller operating margins. The Government should assess the ISC's impact on domestic upskilling and clarify how new funds will support UK training. Planned increases to salary and qualification thresholds may also limit access to overseas talent given that wages for many skilled creative occupations may fall below this line, so engagement with the sector via LMEG is essential to avoid unintended barriers.[8] Finally, to ease financial strain on non-UK talent (and especially freelance talent), visa-related costs such as the Health Surcharge could be spread over time, and requirements adjusted for short-term projects or hard-to-fill vacancies.

3) **Improving visa data quality to inform policy.** Publicly available visa data is limited, especially for freelancers and those on less conventional visa routes, hindering effective research and policymaking. Stronger data is essential to understanding the contribution that non-UK workers make to the economy, as well as improving Labour Market Information as a whole. While the UK Government's forthcoming Labour Market Evidence Group provides one mechanism to address this, further improvements are needed. More detailed data is needed for routes that don't require a job offer, such as the High Potential

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[7] Kulka, B. and Easton, E. (2022). 'Three ways to support growth in the creative industries'. Creative PEC. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Introduction-to-the-CI-for-an-incoming-Prime-Minister-1.pdf ; reiterated in a recent report published by the University of the Arts London: Easton, E. (2024). 'Keeping the UK's creative industries globally competitive. University of the Arts London. Available from: https://www.arts.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0024/436047/UAL_EA_Fullreport.pdf.

[8] Creative PEC research has previously suggested that the threshold risked affecting more junior creative workers. Haddoud, M et al. 'Post-Brexit migration and accessing foreign talent in the Creative Industries': https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/PEC-Post-Brexit-migration-and-accessing-foreign-talent-in-the-Creative-Industries.pdf

Individual and Innovator Founder visas, to better understand whether individuals coming on this route end up in the creative economy.

4) **Prioritise creative worker mobility in future bilateral agreements to strengthen UK creative exports.** The UK should continue to embed creative worker mobility into future bilateral agreements, including provisions for short-term visas, touring permits, and equipment movement to reflect the sector's unique working patterns. Agreements must be reciprocal, reduce red tape, and support the UK's cultural and economic influence, especially in the EU[9], which remains our largest export destination for both creative goods and services.[10] Recent UK-EU talks have acknowledged the value of cultural exchange, with plans to explore a youth mobility scheme. Any such initiative should account for the specific needs of creatives and address the difficulties of touring in Europe, such as transporting equipment and managing cross-border admin. We would also highlight the close connections between the UK and priority markets in Asia, with our research showing the importance of workers from Asia to the UK's creative industries. This should be seen in the context of ongoing efforts to build closer economic and cultural partnerships with Asian markets, most recently through the UK-India Trade Agreement and the Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and India on cultural cooperation.

[9] See, for example: https://musiciansunion.org.uk/news/touring-in-the-eu-post-brexit-key-findings-and-next-steps-from-the-mu-s-recent-survey

[10] Maioli, S., Fazio, G., Jones, J. and Simandjuntak, D. (2024) 'UK Trade in a Global Creative Economy'. Zenodo. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.10809397. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/state_of_the_nation/uk-trade-in-a-global-creative-economy/

Citation and further resources

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To access the full report, please follow this link: Migration in UK Creative Occupations and Industries.

About the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre

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

Led by Newcastle University, with the Royal Society of Arts, and funded by the UKRI via the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Creative PEC comprises a core consortium of Newcastle University, Work Advance, the University of Sussex and the University of Sheffield.

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