Creative UK

POLICY INSIGHTS REPORT

Perception & Potential:

Public Attitudes Towards Creativity in the UK

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ABOUT

Creative UK is the national membership body for the Cultural and Creative Industries. We exist to champion creativity in its widest form - representing world-leading organisations from sectors as diverse as advertising, animation, architecture, broadcasting, crafts, design, digital, education, fashion, games, heritage, museums, music, performing arts, photography, publishing, theatre, TV, visual art and more.

We are an independent not-for-profit, which uses the insight and experience of our members, partners and the businesses we work with to help shape relevant government policy and advocate for meaningful social and economic change right across the UK.

Our vision is a world where creativity is valued and recognised as the driving force for our future. We're so passionate about this that we put our money where our mouth is: through own landmark investment funds, we've directly invested millions of pounds into creative businesses over the last decade.

Our team is based across the UK, and we work closely with Local and Combined Authorities to support creative talent, whilst delivering hands-on support – spanning business diagnostics, mentoring and investment readiness.

Our Filming in England service is a dedicated and bespoke production service to feature film and high-end TV productions looking to film in England, outside of London.

wearecreative.uk

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project was initiated by Creative UK and undertaken with support from Portland Communications, a member of the British Polling Council.

Significant thanks are owed to Gabriel Milland, Jude Ryan-Gray and Leon Davies at Portland Communications for undertaking the initial baseline poll, which formed the backbone of this paper.

METHODOLOGY

For this research, Portland Communications conducted the polling on behalf of Creative UK which, as per British Polling Council convention, included selections for participants to opt not to supply an opinion (in the form of "don't know" and "n/a" options). In the analysis of this data, Creative UK have taken the decision to omit these respondents and reweight the data to reflect this. The reasoning behind this decision was two-fold. Firstly, and most importantly, in omitting these participants the overarching patterns emerging from the data do not change, however, by doing so we have been able to build a more concise picture of public opinion toward creativity across the economy and society in the UK. Secondly, in removing this data we have been able to improve the clarity of the insights and results presented in this report, ensuring it is accessible for all audiences, without compromising robustness. Therefore, this reweighted data forms the basis of the analysis and figures presented below.

Foreword

Creativity is one of the UK's greatest strengths. It brings communities together, fuels innovation and generates more than £125 billion for our economy every year. It is a powerful force for both social and economic good – and the people who work in our sector do so with vision, skill and resilience.

Yet this policy insights report, based on a poll of over a thousand people, reveals that many – especially younger adults and those from less advantaged backgrounds – still don't see creativity as a viable career. Just 54% of 18–24-year-olds recognise the creative industries' contribution to the UK economy – and support for creative education is lower among those who question the sector's economic value.

The findings also show that where people live, how much they earn and how they vote all influence how they perceive creativity. Whilst support for creative education is strong overall, belief in the sector's role as a driver of growth and innovation remains uneven. That matters – because perception shapes policy, and policy shapes opportunity.

But there is good news too. A clear majority of the public value creativity for the role it plays in building healthy communities, driving social change and improving wellbeing. And young people in particular, see its potential to tackle the challenges of our time.

This gives us a platform to build on. With the right interventions – from stronger careers advice and access to creative apprenticeships, to greater investment in teachers and schools – we can ensure that every young person sees creativity not as a risk, but as a real, rewarding path.

This report comes at a defining moment for our sector. The Government's Creative Industries Sector Plan sets an ambitious course to increase investment and secure global leadership by 2035. Perception shapes participation and we need public confidence to match policy ambition. This is our opportunity to open up the creative industries. To make the case more clearly, reach more people and support the next generation to thrive.

CAROLINE NORBURY OBE,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, CREATIVE UK

Context

The cultural and creative industries (CCIs) GVA contribution is around £125bn annually. That's around 6% of the economy – more than life sciences, automotive manufacturing, aerospace and the oil and gas sectors combined.

The sector employs more than two million people, 28% of which are self-employed - compared to 14% of all workers in the UK - and enriches public life through cultural, educational and economic contributions.[1] Despite the sector's clear economic and social significance, public perceptions of creativity, creative careers and education suggest negative views about their value, viability and accessibility persist.

Recent research by Netflix and the National Youth Theatre found that 89% of working-class parents, guardians and carers preferred their children to pursue 'traditional' professions in law, finance or medicine, due to perceptions that they offered good career progression (60%), good pay (58%) and a stable career path (56%).[2] The same study found that nearly three-quarters (73%) of young creatives reported that their parents viewed their career choices as a waste of their education.[3]

Research from the Sutton Trust has also underscored stark socioeconomic barriers to accessing creative careers. Among adults under the age of 35, those from middle-class backgrounds are four times more likely to work in a creative occupation than those from working-class backgrounds.[4]

Much work has already been undertaken to improve collaboration between educational institutions and creative industries employers. In particular, the UK Government's Department for Culture, Media & Sport's (DCMS) Discover! Creative Careers programme, established in 2019, helps to bridge this gap by providing students with insights into creative careers and the skills needed to pursue those roles. Despite the clear success of these initiatives, negative public perceptions – or a limited understanding – of creative careers persist.[5]

To meet the ambitions set out in the Government's Creative Industries Sector Plan, including growing the sector's economic contribution to £31 billion GVA by 2035 and doubling the number of creative businesses that grow through private investment, these perceptions must be addressed head-on. Without public understanding of the creative industries' value, potential and pathways, efforts to scale the sector risk being undermined by low participation, constrained talent supply and limited investor confidence.[6]

In January 2025, Creative UK commissioned a national polling survey, with 1,025 respondents from across the nations and regions, to collect insights into public attitudes towards creativity, creative careers and education. The objective was to build an evidence base to help understand why these perceptions remain entrenched, and in doing so, inform future policy to remove barriers to entry in the UK's thriving creative industries.[7]

1 February 2025. *DCMS Economic Estimates: Monthly GVA (to December 2024)* [Online] Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dcms-economic-estimates-monthly-gva-to-december-2024; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/economic-estimates-employment-in-dcms-sectors-july-2023-to-june-2024. [Accessed 3 April 2025].
2 September 2024. *Netflix & NYT Research finds majority of working-class parents don't want their child to pursue a creative career* [Online]. Available at: https://www.nyt.org.uk/news/netflix-and-nyt-research-finds-majority-of-working-class-parents-dont-want-their-child-to-pursue-a-creative-career?url=%2Fnews%2Fnetflix-and-nyt-research-finds-majority-of-working-class-parents-dont-want-their-child-to-pursue-a-creative-career%2F. [Accessed 3 April 2025].
3 Ibid
4 November 2024. A Class Act [Online]. Available from: https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/A-Class-Act-1.pdf. [Accessed 3 April 2025].
5 Discover! Creative Careers Week 2025, 17th - 21st November [Online]. Available from: https://discovercreative.careers/ [Accessed 3 April 2025].
6 HM Government (2025) Creative Industries Sector Plan Industrial Strategy: Creative Industries Sector Plan
7 Portland Communications conducted a survey of 1,025 adults online between 2nd and 3rd January 2025. Data was weighted to be nationally representative.

This insights report provides an evidence-based overview of the survey's key findings, exploring respondents' views on the economic and social value of the creative industries, alongside their perceptions of creative careers and education. Recommendations for significant future work informed by the survey are included at the end of this report.

Key Findings

The headline findings of this research are:

- **A generational and class-based divide in perceptions of creativity.** There are significant perception gaps across demographic groups. Younger adults aged between 18-24 (54%) and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds (57%) are less likely to recognise the creative sector's economic contributions or view creative careers as viable, compared to individuals aged over 55 (63%) and higher socio-economic groups (72%). This suggests that unequal exposure to creative opportunities and education may be deepening these perception divides.

- **Where you live shapes what you believe.** Proximity to creative hubs influences optimism about creative careers. People living in major cities – especially London – have a significantly more positive view (66%) of creative career prospects than those in smaller towns or rural areas (59%). This regional disparity underscores how concentrated creative industries clusters can skew opportunities and awareness, with those farther from such hubs feeling creative careers are less accessible or secure.

- **The public values creativity – but not always economically.** Public support for the creative sector is moderate and uneven. A majority of people acknowledge the creative industries' economic importance (64%), but few express strong conviction (19%) and a notable minority remain unconvinced (10%). Moreover, respondents are more likely to value creativity and creative skills for their social benefits (61%), such as community building and health, than for their role in driving economic success and innovation (36%). This indicates a disconnect in understanding creativity's full value across society and the economy.

- **Belief in economic value drives support for education.** Beliefs about the creative sector's economic value shape support for creative education. Respondents who are sceptical about the creative industries' economic significance are less inclined to support expanding creative education in schools – a trend observed particularly among Conservative-leaning (59%) individuals. This correlation implies that making a stronger case for the creative industries' economic impact could broaden public backing for creative education.

01 The creative industries: an economic powerhouse and a social good

PERCEPTIONS OF THE VALUE OF CREATIVITY ACROSS THE UK

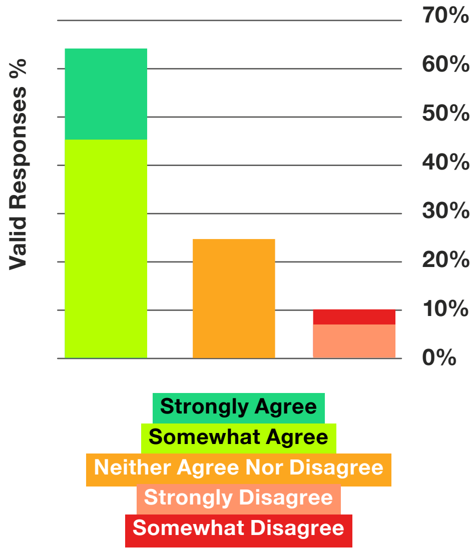
The creative industries are a cornerstone of the UK economy. However, public perceptions of the sector's economic contribution are uneven, with disparities influenced by generational differences, voting preferences and socioeconomic background.

Whilst 64% of survey respondents agree that the creative industries contribute significantly to the economy, within that group only 19% strongly agree, suggesting tacit agreement rather than an overarching consensus on the sector's economic value. 25% of respondents had no clear view, whilst 10% disagreed outright that the creative industries significantly contribute to the UK's growth and innovation.

There is general recognition that the sector's contributions extend beyond the economy, including its role in addressing societal challenges and fostering community cohesion, shown by the 61% of respondents who agreed that creativity plays a vital role in tackling issues such as community building, public health and climate change.

FIG 1

The Creative Industries significantly contribute to the UK's economic growth and innovation



There is, however, divergence between public perceptions of the sector's social impact and its role in driving success and innovation across the wider economy. When asked about the latter, only 36% of respondents rated creativity and creative skills as being extremely or very important across the wider economy, whilst 37% said they were only somewhat – or not at all – important in this context. This reveals a disconnect between public perceptions of creativity's value, and perceptions of its role in driving success across the wider economy.

Age and the Value of Creativity

Whilst respondents of all ages broadly recognise the economic contribution of the UK's creative industries, there is a concerning gap amongst younger adults. Only 54% of 18-24 year olds agreed that the sector contributes to the UK's economic growth and innovation, the lowest of any demographic group. This signals a serious risk to the future creative workforce and talent pipeline, highlighting the urgent need to better connect people with the economic and career opportunities that the sector has to offer.

It is notable that within the same demographic group – individuals aged 18–24 – 62% recognise creativity as a significant factor in addressing societal challenges, compared to 51% of those aged 55–64. This suggests that younger respondents are more likely to value creativity for its social benefits than for its role in driving economic innovation.

FIG 1.2

Creativity plays a vital role in addressing societal challenges, such as community building, public health and climate change

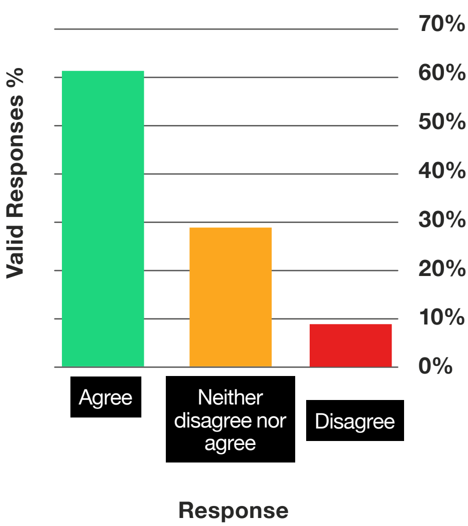


FIG 1.3

How important do you think creativity and creative skills are in driving success and innovation across sectors?

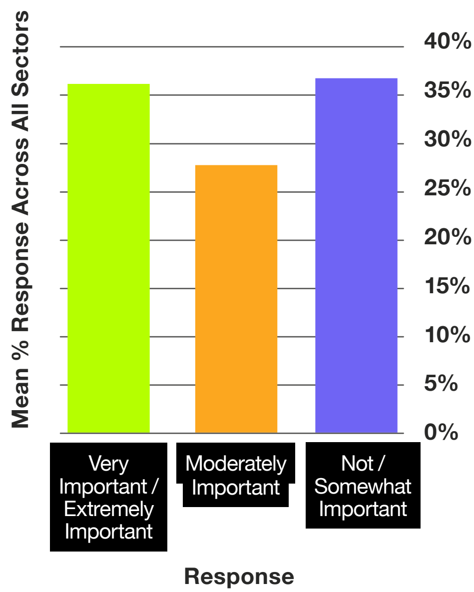


FIG 1.4

The creative industries significantly contribute to the UK's economic growth and innovation

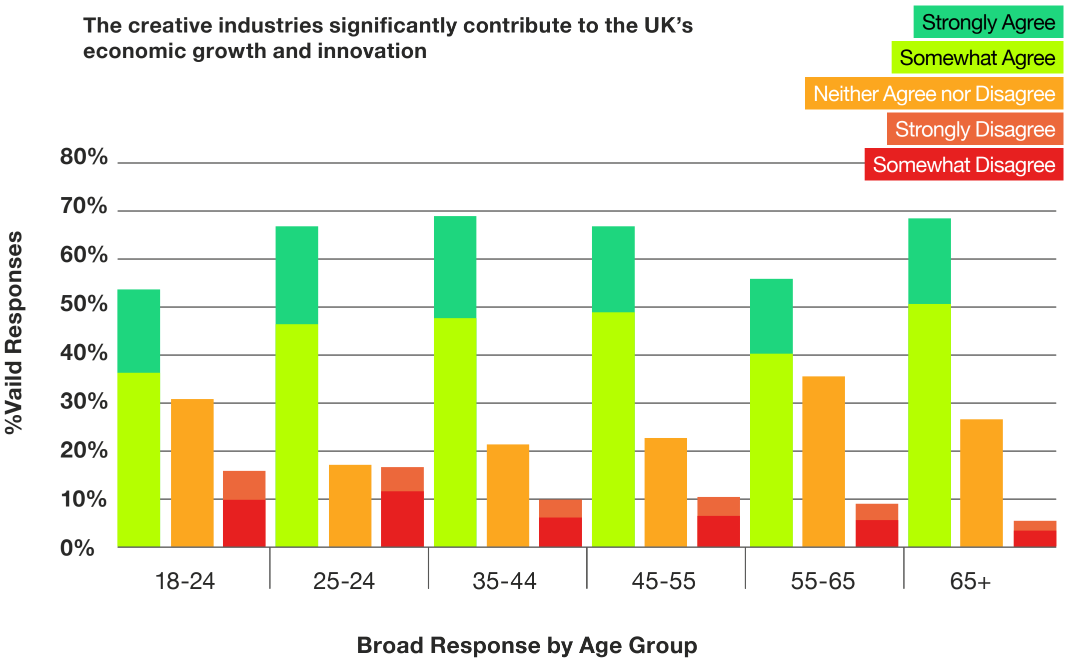
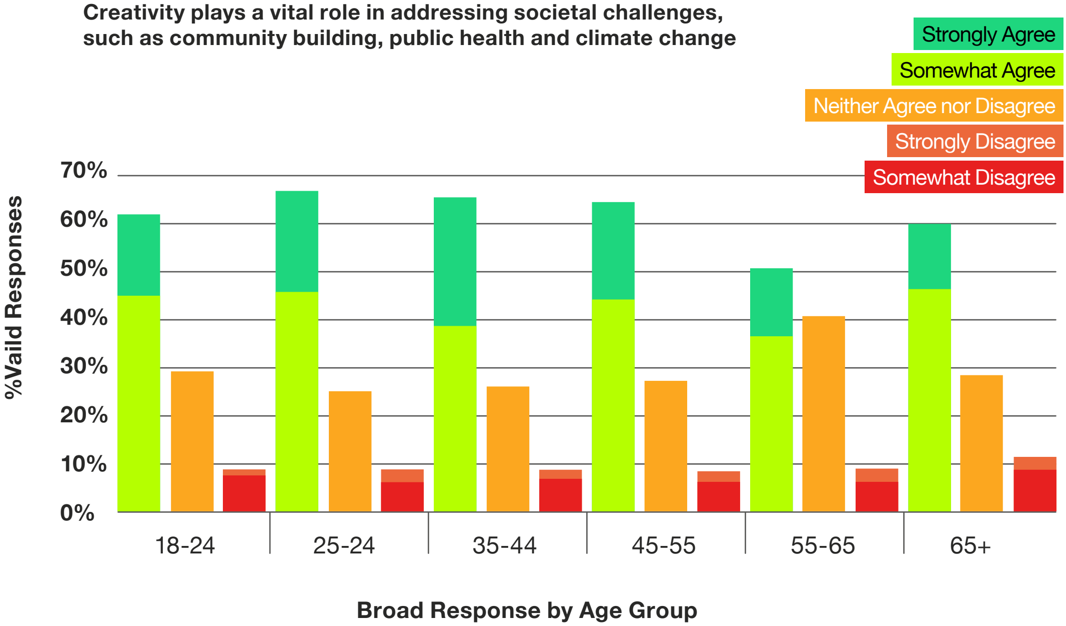


FIG 1.5

Creativity plays a vital role in addressing societal challenges, such as community building, public health and climate change



03

The Economics of Creativity: perceptions and socio-Economic background

Respondents from higher socio-economic grades (AB) report stronger recognition of the creative industries' economic contribution, with 72% agreeing that the sector's economic contribution is significant, compared to 57% in lower socioeconomic groups (DE). The greater engagement with, and access to, cultural consumption and creative roles among higher socio-economic groups is likely a key driver of this notable divide.[8] Research by the Sutton Trust (2024), shows that individuals from middle-class backgrounds under 35 are four times more likely to work in a creative occupation than their working-class peers.[9] Alongside the findings of our survey, this suggests further research is needed to establish the nature and extent of the relationship between socioeconomic status and pathways into creative careers.

SEE FIG 1.6 OVERLEAF.

The Political Divide on Creativity's Value

More than half of respondents agreed that the creative industries are a significant contributor to the UK's growth and innovation. However, perceptions of the sector's contribution vary by political affiliation. Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green voters tend to have a more positive view. Among Labour voters, 74% agree that the creative industries contribute significantly to the economy, whereas Conservative and Reform UK voters are more sceptical, with agreement falling to 60% and 57% respectively.

SEE FIG 1.7 OVERLEAF

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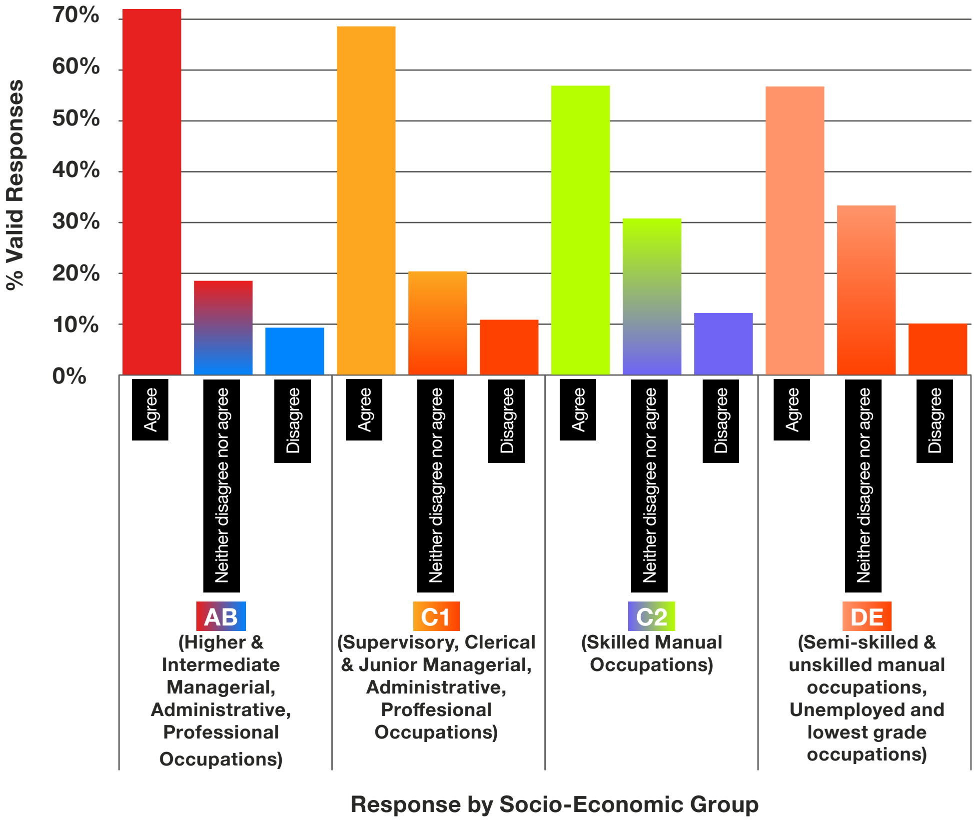
8 Socio-economic grades match the following definitions: AB (Higher & intermediate managerial, administrative, professional occupations), C1 (Supervisory, clerical & junior managerial, administrative, professional occupations, C2 (Skilled manual occupations), DE (Semi-skilled & unskilled manual occupations, Unemployed and lowest grade occupations); https://ukgeographics.co.uk/blog/social-grade-a-b-c1-c2-d-e

9 November 2024. A Class Act [Online]. Available from: https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/A-Class-Act-1.pdf. [Accessed 3 April 2025].

FIG 1.6
‘The creative industries significantly contribute to the UK’s economic growth and innovation’



Whilst Conservative voters are less likely to perceive the creative industries as a significant economic contributor, there is greater cross-party alignment on creativity’s broader social value – 56% of Conservative voters recognise creativity’s role in addressing societal challenges, compared to Labour (70%), Liberal Democrat (71%) and Green (63%) voters. This presents an opportunity to strengthen public understanding of creativity’s full impact; bridging the gap between economic and social perceptions could help build a more comprehensive narrative around the value of creativity.

SEE FIG 1.8 OVERLEAF

FIG 1.7

'The creative industries significantly contribute to the UK's economic growth and innovation'

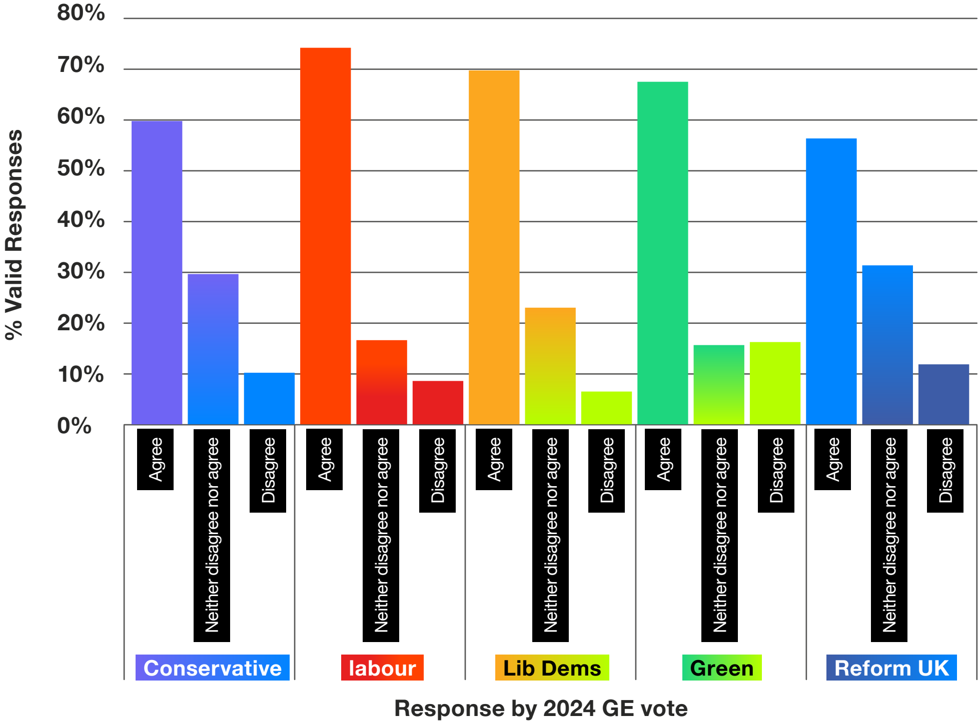
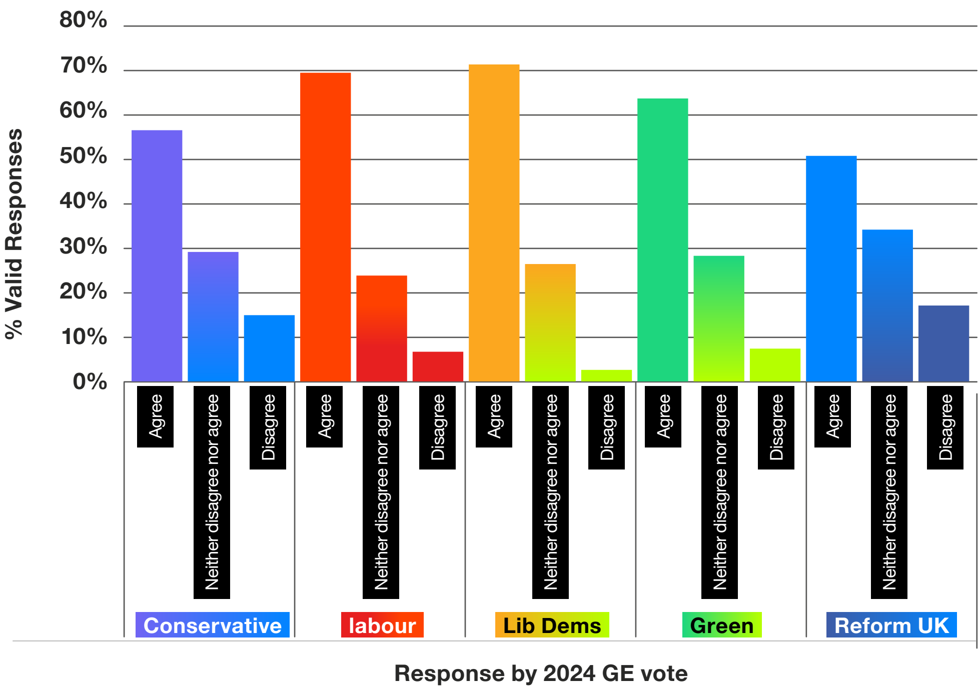
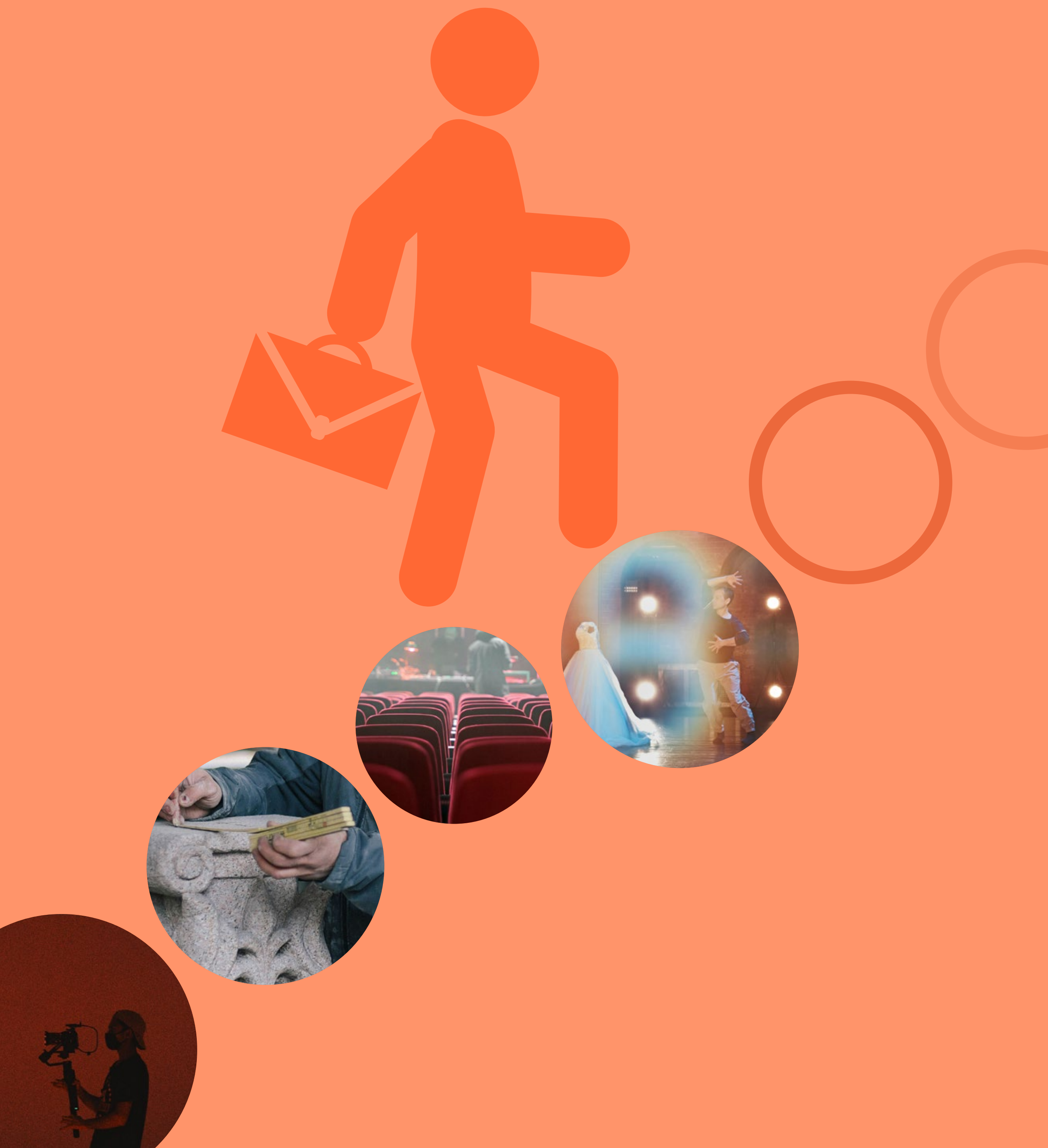


FIG 1.8

'Creativity plays a vital role in addressing societal challenges, such as community building, public health and climate change'





04

Balancing Passion and Pragmatism: creative careers and job security

Survey findings indicate marked variation in perceptions of creative careers. Overall, 62% of respondents agreed that careers in the creative sector offer job satisfaction, stability, and earning potential; however, only 16% expressed strong agreement. Conversely, 26% of respondents remained neutral, whilst 13% disagreed entirely, suggesting that concerns about the financial viability and stability of creative professions persist among certain groups.

The survey findings reveal notable differences in perceptions of the viability of careers in the creative industries across different age groups. The trend is similar to that found in respondents' perceptions of the sector's economic contribution. Younger respondents – particularly those aged 18-24 – report 58% agreement, which is a relatively low figure compared to most other groups. Equally, 19% disagree – the highest of any age group. This stands in stark contrast to older age groups, where rates of agreement steadily increase. For respondents aged 35-44, 68% agree that careers in the creative industries can be rewarding, in terms of job satisfaction, stability and earning potential.

FIG 2.1

'A career in the creative industries is a good option in terms of job satisfaction, stability and earning potential'

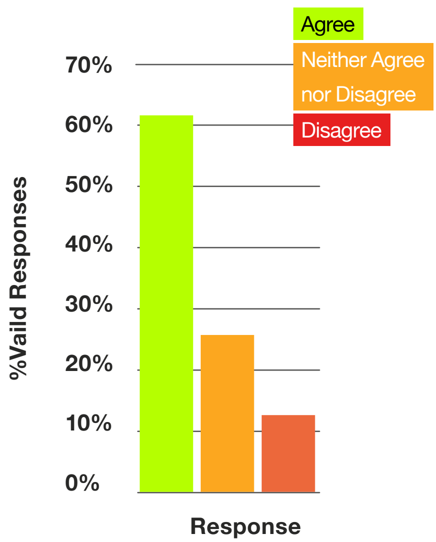
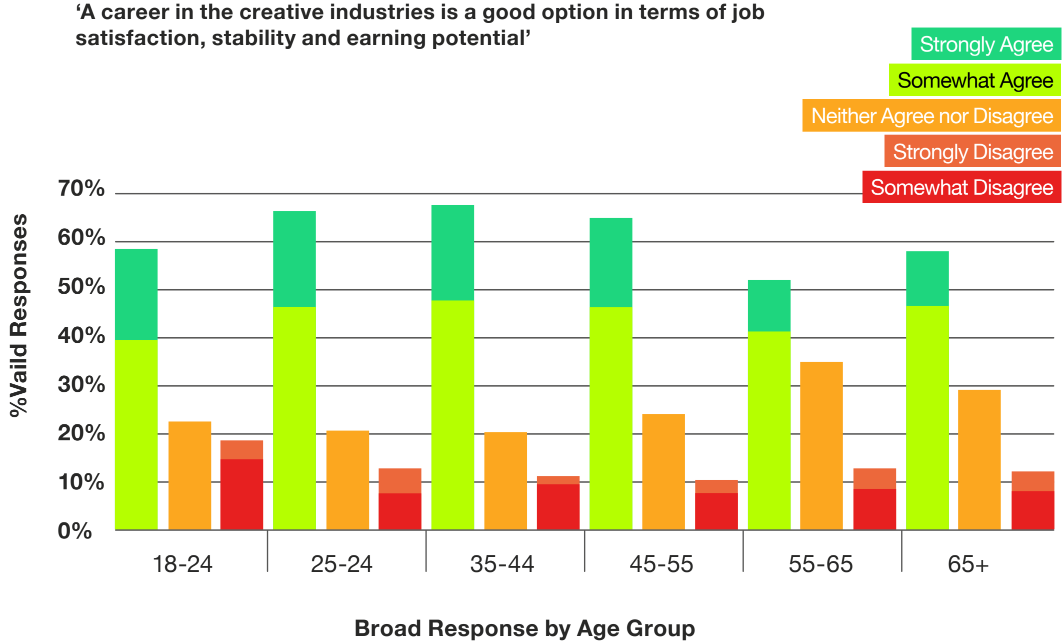


FIG 2.2

'A career in the creative industries is a good option in terms of job satisfaction, stability and earning potential'



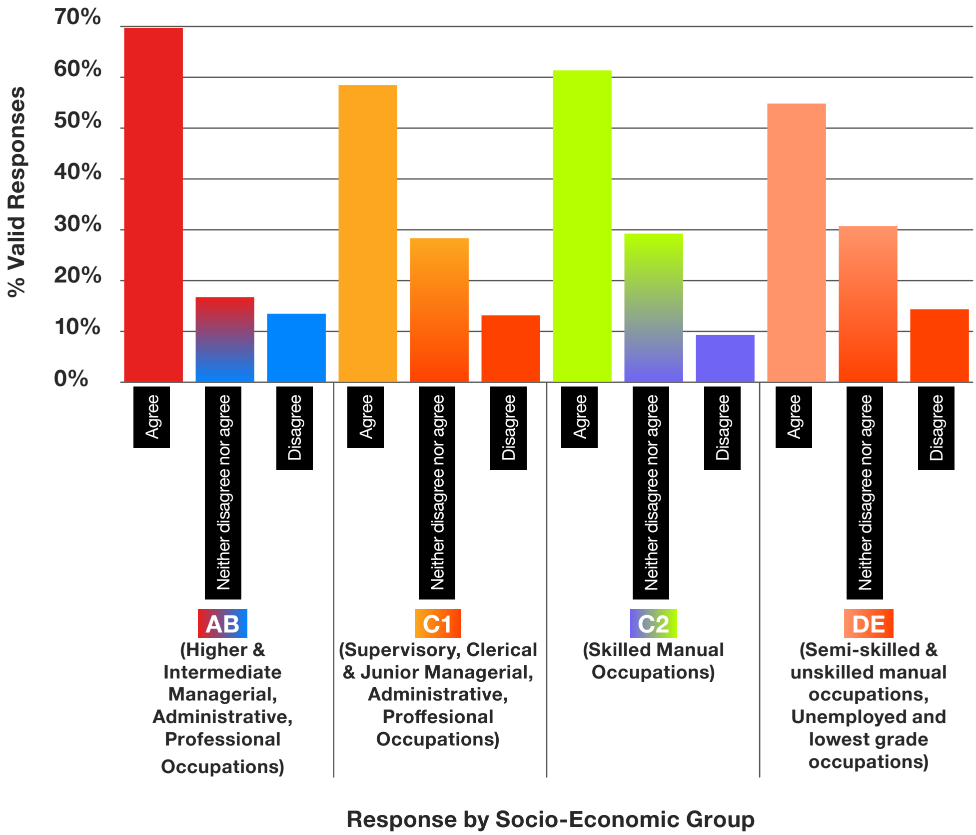
Findings also indicate a clear correlation between income levels and perceptions of job security in the creative industries. Among respondents in the D and E socio-economic groups, net agreement stands at just 55%. This figure jumps to 70% among A and B socio-economic groups, demonstrating how financial stability determines whether creative career paths are considered viable.

SEE FIG 2.3 OVERLEAF

Proximity to a major city, where creative clusters are more likely to exist, appears to be a significant factor in shaping perceptions of creative careers. Among respondents residing in a major city, 66% reported a positive and holistic view of creative careers. This figure drops to 59% for those living within a 45-minute radius of a major city and rises only slightly for respondents located more than 45 minutes away (61%). The marginal decline in the perceived viability of creative careers among those living at greater distances from major urban centres is likely driven, in-part, by the disproportionate concentration of access, opportunities, and targeted support within major cities. This uneven distribution is influenced by the presence of well-established and expanding creative networks and infrastructure in urban areas.

FIG 2.3

'A career in the creative industries is a good option in terms of job satisfaction, stability and earning potential'



SEE FIG 2.4 OVERLEAF

Whilst proximity to a major city influences perceptions of the value of creative careers, this effect is particularly pronounced for those living in and around the capital. 69% of respondents residing in Greater London agree that creative careers offer job satisfaction, stability, and earning potential, compared to 62% of respondents living outside Greater London.

A recent House of Commons report (2025) found that over half (51%) of the UK's creative industries' economic output was generated in London, despite the city accounting for just under a quarter (24%) of total UK economic output.[10] This highlights London's dominant role as a global hub for culture and creativity, supported by a highly concentrated ecosystem of arts, entertainment, and creative industries. As a result, perceptions of the viability of creative careers may be disproportionately shaped by the sector's strength in the capital, potentially reinforcing the view that such careers are less attainable for individuals living in other parts of the country.

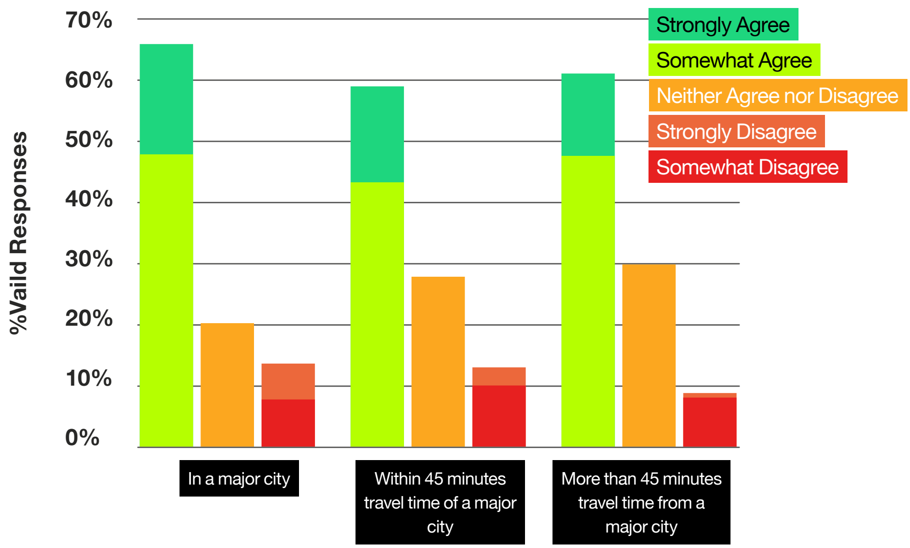
National solutions will be needed to counter regional disparities; not just in opportunity but in perception. A welcome commitment in the Creative Industries Sector Plan is the introduction of a Freelance Champion. With around thirty per cent of the creative workforce operating freelance, improving their conditions is essential to changing public perceptions of creative careers. A visible policy focus on tackling late payment, career precarity and access to training could help reshape assumptions about creative work.

SEE FIG 2.5 OVERLEAF

10 January 2025. Creative industries [Online]. Available from: https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2025-0017/CDP-2025-0017.pdf. [Accessed 3 April 2025].

FIG 2.4

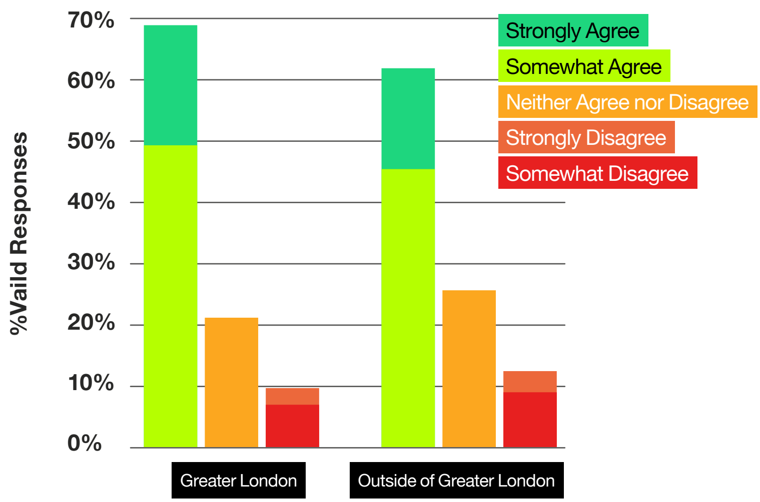
'A career in the creative industries is a good option in terms of job satisfaction, stability and earning potential'



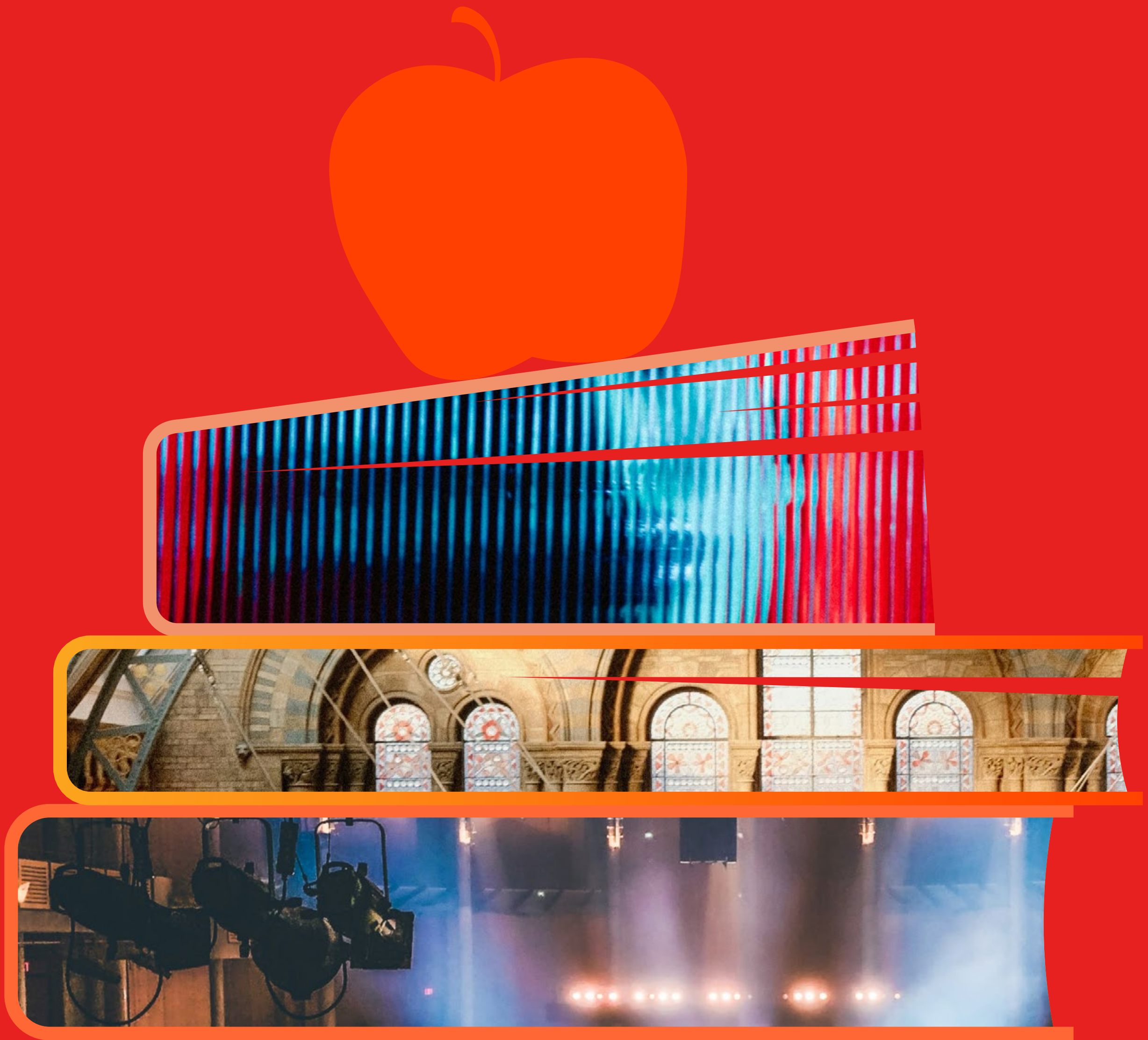
Broad Response by Proximity to a Major City

FIG 2.5

'A career in the creative industries is a good option in terms of job satisfaction, stability and earning potential'



Broad Response by Greater London Residency status



05
Creative education

Survey findings show strong support overall for schools placing a greater emphasis on creative subjects within the curriculum, with 63% of all respondents agreeing.

FIG 3.1

However, these perspectives become more nuanced when analysed through the lens of respondents' voting preferences. Support for a greater emphasis on creative subjects in the curriculum is higher among Labour (68%) and Liberal Democrat (64%) voters, whereas Green (59%), Conservative (59%) and Reform (62%) voters exhibit comparatively lower levels of support. This pattern aligns with broader trends observed in perceptions of the creative industries' economic contribution, suggesting a correlation between positive attitudes toward creative education and the belief that the creative industries constitute a significant economic sector.

SEE FIG 3.2 OVERLEAF

FIG 3.1

'Schools should place greater emphasis on creative subjects alongside traditional academic subjects'

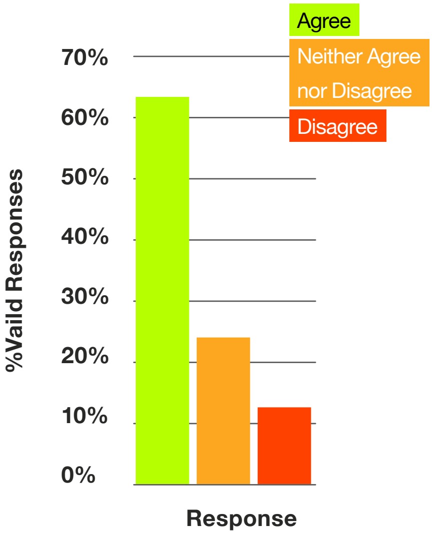
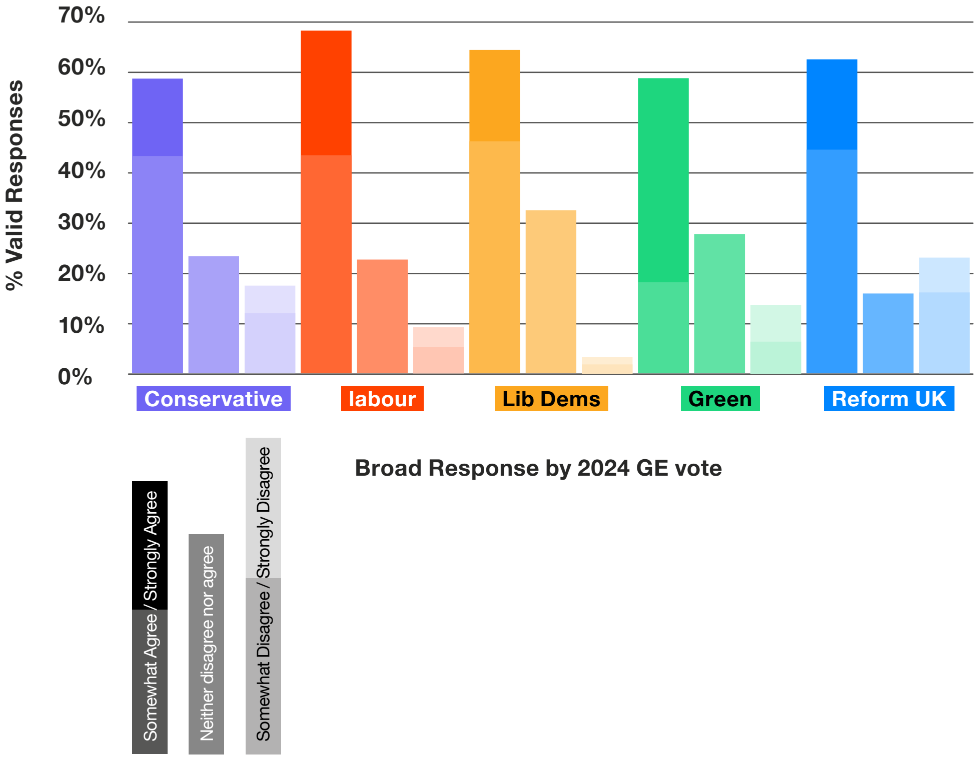


FIG 3.2

'Schools should place greater emphasis on creative subjects alongside traditional academic subjects'



06

Recommendations

This survey, together with broader evidence, highlights a dual challenge: persistent gaps in public understanding of the creative industries' economic and social value and existing strengths – including the public's belief in creativity's role in wellbeing and community building – that can be better harnessed. Addressing entrenched biases and amplifying positive perceptions will require coordinated action across education, policy and industry. A more strategic, visible and confident narrative about creativity's value is essential if the UK is to fully realise the benefits of its creative strengths.

In an era marked by rapid change and uncertainty, reinforcing the value of creativity becomes not just beneficial, but essential. The Government's Creative Industries Sector Plan offers a timely platform to do just that, setting out a bold commitment to backing the sector's full economic, cultural and social value across all parts of the UK. To help deliver on this ambition, we recommend the following strategic actions:

REFRAMING CREATIVITY'S SOCIAL VALUE AS A STRATEGIC ECONOMIC ASSET IS ESSENTIAL. Public recognition of creativity's role in placemaking is strong, but policy has often failed to treat it as core economic infrastructure. Devolved governments already align cultural policy with inclusive growth and wellbeing agendas; with the English Devolution White Paper and the Creative Industries Sector Plan there is now a clear route to embed creative and cultural platforms within mainstream growth policy – particularly in areas focused on AI integration, care innovation and net zero transition.

POSITION CREATIVITY AT THE HEART OF INNOVATION by replacing outdated STEM-only models with STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) frameworks to ensure creative and technical skill integration, addressing survey findings that creativity's role in innovation is undervalued, and preparing students for new and varied career paths, such as those emerging at the intersection of creativity and technology.

EQUIP TEACHERS AND CAREERS ADVISORS TO CHAMPION CREATIVE FUTURE through the provision of continuing professional development (CPD). Teachers and careers advisors shape perceptions at critical moments. Investing in their understanding of the breadth and viability of careers in the creative industries is essential to ensuring young people see creative careers as viable, rewarding and central to the UK's future success.

BREAK OPEN THE CREATIVE PIPELINE BY STRENGTHENING CREATIVE APPRENTICESHIPS AND VOCATIONAL PATHWAYS to provide parity with traditional academic pathways. The survey findings highlight ongoing concerns about the stability of creative careers. Expanding the number and visibility of creative apprenticeships, T-Levels and other vocational routes would create more accessible pathways to creative careers. These should account for non-traditional, portfolio careers, where individuals may combine training, freelancing and short-term contracts.

EQUIP THE GATEKEEPERS BY EXPANDING EMPLOYER-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS AND INCREASING CREATIVE INDUSTRY WORK EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS ALL REGIONS so students can see how diverse the sector is and understand the reality of career paths within it. Strengthening careers education – particularly through strategic initiatives like Discover! Creative Career programme – is essential to ensuring that creativity is recognised as a valuable and attainable career.

EMPOWER YOUNG PEOPLE BY HARNESSING THEIR PASSION FOR CREATIVITY AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL CHANGE. Young people increasingly recognise creativity as a powerful force for social change and community building – but more could be done to connect creative skills to sectors where they deliver public value. Education providers and industry must work together to reframe young people's understanding of creative employment opportunities and highlight its value in a broad range of sectors – from public health to sustainability and climate story telling.

INTEGRATE FINANCIAL LITERACY TRAINING INTO CREATIVE EDUCATION so young people interested in working in the sector understand the nature of freelance work, contracts and business management before considering a career early on. By demystifying the nature of prokect based work, it will become easier to address concerns around job security and earning potential.

REBUILD THE CREATIVE TEACHING WORKFORCE by providing incentives for graduates to pursue teaching careers in these fields. Given the strong public support for greater creative education in schools (over 60% agreement in the survey), it is critical that there are enough qualified teachers to meet this demand.

EXPAND OUTREACH AND ACCESS INITIATIVES to engage young people from underrepresented groups and lower socio-economic backgrounds. Investment should focus on embedding creative opportunities directly within communities –building on local partnerships between schools, employers and cultural organisations – particularly outside of major cities and creative hubs. Programmes should be designed to develop early skills and confidence – and crucially to provide tangible progression routes into education, training and employment.

STRENGTHENING THE EVIDENCE BASE on barriers and drivers through targeted longitudinal research should be a core priority for the UK Government. Whilst this survey establishes key baseline insights into public attitudes towards creativity, its findings raise further questions that require deeper investigation. To inform effective policy and investment, there is an urgent need for in depth research that examines how attitudes to creativity are shaped over time, particularly among young people, parents, and employers. Without robust data on these dynamics, interventions will remain partial and the full potential of the cultural and creative industries as a driver of inclusive growth will not be realised.