



Mind the Digital Skills Gap – Charles Freeman (Creative Network South)

The Creative Economy is the fastest growing Business Sector in the Solent Regionⁱ. Since 2010 nearly a third of job growth in Portsmouth can be attributed to the expansion of the Creative Sector. Almost all the new jobs are digital. These include roles in software development, web design, digital marketing, Games and Interactive Entertainment, Sound Design, and Film (in particular Editing, VFX Animation and Post Production).

The Creative Sector has a dirty secret. It lacks diversity. Women hold approximately 1/3rd of jobs in the industry and a significantly smaller proportion of top jobs. In London which still has the strongest creative economy in the UK, People from Black and Asian backgrounds are 40% underrepresented, and according to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport only 9% of creative jobs are held by people from the 1/3rd of the population with the least advantaged backgrounds. ⁱⁱ

The arts councils Making the Shift reportⁱⁱⁱ suggested only 3.4 % of the arts and cultural labour force identified as having a disability. (20% of the total workforce identify as having a disability.) Recent surveys in the interactive marketing, screen and games industries indicate that large numbers of neurodivergent people work in the sector. For example, autistic people are 10 times overrepresented in the interactive marketing and games sectors compared to other employment sectors. However, these opportunities are not equally available. ND people from the groups already underrepresented in the sector find it harder to access diagnosis and support prior to college or university, and frequently don't know how to get into the sector.

Some of the barriers making diversity harder to achieve include -

- 1) **Nearly 80% of people employed in the sector are Graduates^{iv}** . - From 1990- 2010 creative industry courses were at the forefront of the expansion of higher education. They attracted many first generation graduates well over 75% of whom ended up working in the sector^v.

Since 2010 university creative industry courses have fallen out of favour. Government has favoured STEM courses. Student Fees have increased and recently the government has announced graduates would need to pay back student loans at a lower salary starting point. This has made it riskier for person from a low-income family to take a creative industry related course.

Non-Graduate pathways to employment are facing challenges, BTECs are being phased out and replaced by T Levels which will require more academic entry requirements. A big attraction of the sector in the past was you could learn by doing and entry qualification requirements to get on courses were low. Apprentices are only starting to get a foothold in a sector employing 3M people only 6000 started on creative apprentices in 2018. In 2020 Netflix and Warner Brothers advertised 40 apprenticeships and received 1 500 applicants.

- 2) **1/3rd of Jobs in the sector are self employed**^{vi} - The Creative Sector Employs an unusually large numbers of freelancers. Many people are also employed on very short-term PAYE contracts. Insecure employment makes the sector a risky choice for many people who need a steady income meaning the option is only open to those who can afford to take the risk or have limited alternative choices. Parents from immigrant communities would frequently prefer their children to get a job in a safe secure profession rather than in the creative industries.
- 3) **The Average Creative Business in the Solent area employs fewer than 5 people.** The creative sector is made up of many Micro Businesses. Most do not have HR departments and can not afford to take risks when recruiting. Businesses are also dependent on project work and need a flexible workforce. It is difficult for businesses to commit to taking on a level 3 apprentice for 2-3 years or to offer a formal graduate staff development programmes of the type found in the engineering industry. Very often the best way to get jobs is through network connections or by completing a freelance assignment. Early-stage creatives will often have to change job to get promotion rather than follow a clear career path within one organisation. This can make it hard for people with good skills but limited network connections to break into the sector.

<https://makingwavesfilmfestival.com/>

<https://www.creativenetworksouth.co.uk/>

ⁱ https://www.creativenetworksouth.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/HANTSCC8605-Creative-industries-Brochure_v16-SINGLES-DIGITAL.pdf Sec 4.3

ⁱⁱ [https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/sites/default/files/2017-06/30183-CIF%20Access%20&%20Diversity%20Booklet_A4_Web%20\(1\)\(1\).pdf](https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/sites/default/files/2017-06/30183-CIF%20Access%20&%20Diversity%20Booklet_A4_Web%20(1)(1).pdf)

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ACE206%20MAKING%20A%20SHIFT%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>

^{iv} <https://www.thecreativeindustries.co.uk/facts-figures/uk-creative-overview-facts-and-figures-employment-figures>

^v <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/report-summaries/report-summary-creative-graduates-creative-futures>

^{vi} <https://www.pec.ac.uk/policy-briefings/freelancers-in-the-creative-industries>