

# UK Film Exhibition Sector Workforce Survey

MAY 2026

## BOX OFFICE



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## Preface

Cinema continues to be one of the UK's most accessible and communal art forms, and the independent exhibition sector plays a vital role in ensuring that audiences everywhere can experience film in welcoming, meaningful ways. But the health of the sector depends on the people who power it. Understanding who they are, how they work, and what they need is essential if we are to build a resilient, equitable and future facing exhibition workforce.

In 2022, the Independent Cinema Office (ICO) published a landmark workforce survey - the most comprehensive ever undertaken of the UK cinema exhibition sector. Four years on, the sector continues to navigate a period of profound change. Although we have moved further from the COVID-19 pandemic, its long tail impacts remain visible in shifting audience behaviour, flat or reduced admissions, and weakened financial reserves that limit investment in capital projects and upgrades. The UK's cost of living crisis and high inflation have further constrained audiences' disposable income while increasing operating costs for exhibitors, reducing their ability to raise pay or create new roles. At the same time, rapid advances in digital technology and artificial intelligence (AI) are reshaping the skills required across the sector.

This 2026 edition, delivered in partnership with The Bridge Group, provides an updated picture of the workforce. We sought responses from people working across the exhibition sector, including employees, freelancers, volunteers and anyone involved in helping audiences access cinema in a public space. Our aim was to capture a fresh snapshot of who works in the sector today and to understand if the workforce has or has not changed over the past four years.

At a time when the exhibition sector is under sustained financial and operational pressure, robust workforce data is essential for making a clear and evidence led case to government and industry stakeholders about where investment is most urgently needed. Understanding the realities of who works in the sector, the conditions they face, and the barriers that limit progression enables policymakers, funders and support organisations to target resources effectively. By providing a detailed, up to date picture of the workforce, this survey strengthens the sector's ability to advocate for meaningful, long term investment that supports both the people who deliver cinema and the communities they serve.

We are immensely grateful to the **620 individuals** who took the time to share their experiences with us. This represents a remarkably robust sample for the film exhibition sector – capturing roughly 3% of the total workforce – providing us with a statistically significant foundation for this analysis. We hope the findings support the ICO and the wider sector in making evidence-informed decisions about where investment and structural change are most needed.

## About the 2026 Workforce Survey

The 2026 Workforce Survey sought to gather evidence on who works in UK film exhibition and the conditions shaping their working lives. It explored respondents' length of time in the sector, employment type, hours worked, management responsibilities, and the type of organisation they work or volunteer for, alongside a wide range of job roles. The survey also examined experiences of management support, influence in decision-making, and perceptions of fair pay, as well as the sustainability and motivations behind freelance work.

To understand workforce development and equity, the survey asked about training access, skills needs, and career progression, and collected detailed demographic information including age, gender, sexuality, socio-economic background, disability and ethnicity. Together, we hope this information provides a comprehensive picture of the sector's workforce, how people enter and sustain their roles, and where structural challenges or inequalities may exist.

The survey was promoted widely across the UK exhibition sector to maximise reach and representation. It was distributed to the ICO's mailing list of over 11,000 subscribers and shared across ICO social media channels, including Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn. We also contacted CEOs and senior leaders of 200 exhibition venues directly and asked them to disseminate the survey to all staff, ensuring that part time workers, frontline teams and volunteers, who may not be connected to sector mailing lists, had the opportunity to participate. In addition, key industry partners such as the Arts Marketing Association, British Film Institute (BFI), BFI Film Audience Network (BFI FAN), Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority (CIISA), Cinema For All, Film & TV Charity, Filmbankmedia, and ScreenSkills promoted the survey through their own networks.

The survey was anonymous, mobile friendly and designed to take around 15 minutes to complete, supporting accessibility and encouraging participation. This multi channel, cross sector approach is important context when interpreting the findings: the respondent profile reflects both the breadth of these networks and the parts of the sector most engaged with industry communications.

Data was shared with The Bridge Group from **620 respondents**, a marginal increase from 602 in the last survey. Based on 2021 ONS data from the inter-departmental business register, this compares with 20,681 employed in the film exhibition sector. The survey has therefore captured responses from around 3% of those employed in the sector. More data and higher response rates are always preferable, but responses were received from a range of individuals which has enabled us to interrogate the data and disaggregate responses by different demographics.

Not all respondents answered every question; some selected options such as "Prefer not to say" or "I don't know" for certain questions, and not all respondents provided free text to open questions. Those who responded "Prefer not to say" or "I don't know" are excluded from analysis unless the percentage is higher than 10%. This means that figures are not always based on the full number of respondents. Tables report the number of respondents from which percentages are calculated.

In a small number of cases where respondents provided a free text response which corresponded with an option or category, they were added to this group to ensure the maximum level of data inclusion.

While the data provided is anonymous it may still be possible to identify people from combinations of information. Where the number of respondents is less than five, this has been suppressed with an asterisk (\*) to avoid the identification of individuals.

Where comparisons are made with the 2022 Workforce Survey, readers should note that these are two separate samples. While many of the demographic characteristics are broadly similar, any differences should be interpreted cautiously and cannot be assumed to reflect a change at a population level. They are nonetheless offered as useful contextual reference points.

## Key findings

This report presents the findings from 620 respondents. It covers who is working in the sector, in what roles and on what terms, and considers what these patterns mean for equity, access and the long-term health of UK independent cinema.

The report provides a range of rich insights. Key highlights include:

### Demographics

- ▶ The ethnic profile of the sector is largely unchanged since 2022: 89% of respondents identified as white – the same figure as four years ago – compared to 79% of the wider UK working-age population. This gap is particularly stark given the sector's concentration in London, where the working-age population is more ethnically diverse.
- ▶ The sector appears to be ageing. The proportion of respondents aged 50 or over has increased from 31% in 2022 to 42% in 2026, while those aged under 30 have fallen from 25% to 18%. This may reflect attrition among younger workers or difficulties in attracting and retaining them – a challenge the sector will need to address.
- ▶ The UK film exhibition sector continues to attract and retain a highly diverse workforce in terms of sexual and romantic orientation, far exceeding national averages. One in four survey respondents (24%) identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) or self-describe in another way.
- ▶ Health conditions and disability are more prevalent in this sector than in the general working population. 34% of respondents identified as having a health condition, impairment or learning difference, compared to 24% of the wider working-age population. Mental health conditions remain the most reported. The sector should continue to look closely at how working conditions and support structures contribute to these rates.
- ▶ The sector continues to overrepresent individuals from privileged socio-economic backgrounds (SEB). 57% of respondents come from high SEB, compared to 37% of the general population and approximately 60% across the wider creative sector. This pattern is unchanged from 2022 and demands a structural response.

## Employment background

- ▶ Volunteers now make up a substantially higher share of the workforce. 31% of respondents identified as volunteers, compared to 15% in 2022. This is a striking structural shift with profound implications for pay, career progression, and who can afford to participate.
- ▶ Unpaid work experience remains common. 37% of respondents had undertaken unpaid work experience at some point in their career – a slight reduction from 40% in 2022, but still a significant barrier for those who cannot afford to work without remuneration.
- ▶ Further analysis shows that women and people from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds are more likely to have undertaken unpaid work experience.
- ▶ Freelance work is increasingly a constrained choice rather than a preference. One-third of self-employed respondents (33%) say they freelance because they cannot find suitable employment. At the same time, far fewer freelancers report being able to secure enough work (down from 36% in 2022 to 20% in 2026). Together, these shifts indicate that freelance conditions in the sector are deteriorating and that more people are freelancing out of necessity rather than choice.
- ▶ The geographic concentration of jobs in London and the South East persists. While London's share has slightly decreased, the combined London and South East region still accounts for nearly a third of respondents' workplaces. Scotland accounts for 18% of respondents, a notable increase from 14% in 2022. The large proportion of jobs located in Scotland, and the reported increase from four years ago, may indeed reflect a meaningful shift in the geographic distribution of the sector across the UK.

## Experience in the workplace

- ▶ Overwork seems to be common but compensation is limited. 80% of respondents work beyond their contracted hours, with more than half (51%) doing so "always" or "frequently". While 98% receive some form of "compensation", it is rarely financial. 40% of overtime is entirely unpaid, and the most frequent over-workers are the least likely to be paid for it.
- ▶ Only 43% of managers feel they actually have enough time in their week to manage and support their teams effectively.
- ▶ Men report having a "great deal" of input into decision-making at their organisation at a higher rate (51%) than women (41%), a disparity particularly visible in middle-management roles.
- ▶ Only 28% of the total workforce feels fairly paid. Women are notably more dissatisfied, with 43% feeling unfairly compensated compared to 36% of men.

## Training and career development in the sector

- ▶ In 2026, 72% of respondents report having received training in the four years prior to the survey, a substantial increase from 2022, when half of all respondents have never received professional training in 2022. Barriers to training remain consistent with 2022, with cost and workload cited most frequently. This represents a significant lost opportunity for the sector.
- ▶ A notable discrepancy exists between future development priorities and actual training uptake. AI serves as a primary example; while identified as a future priority by 15% of respondents, only 6% have undertaken training in this area to date.
- ▶ Barriers to training are widespread and structural. 79% of respondents report at least one barrier to accessing training, with lack of time and lack of employer funding cited by around two thirds of those affected. Geographic inequity is also stark – 58% of those working in Wales and the North cite a lack of nearby provision, compared to just 13% in London.
- ▶ Career progression remains limited. 71% report at least one barrier to progression, most commonly a shortage of roles at the right level (58%) and unclear progression routes (57%). Geographic concentration of opportunities continues to be a barrier to career progression.
- ▶ Retention is at risk, especially among early-career workers and the overworked. While 73% intend to continue in the sector, a quarter are undecided or likely to leave. Those with fewer than five years' experience (34%) and those working more than 49 hours a week (42%) show the highest rates of uncertainty.





The 2026 workforce survey asked a range of individual characteristics to understand who is working in the independent cinema sector. While this is not a census (where the whole workforce is surveyed), the results can offer an insight into how diverse communities are represented in the sector.

## Gender

55% of respondents identify as women, 40% as men, 3% as non-binary, and 1% self-describe using a different term.<sup>1</sup> These proportions mirror those recorded in 2022 (56% women, 41% men, 3% non-binary or self-describing). Due to the small number of respondents who identify as ‘non-binary’ or who self-describe in another way, when looking at patterns of differences between genders, these two groups have been excluded to preserve their anonymity.

## Ethnicity

89% of respondents identify as White and 11% as Black, Asian, or from ethnically diverse backgrounds. This composition reflects the broader creative industries, where White representation is reported at 90%.<sup>2</sup> However, White individuals remain overrepresented in this sample compared to the wider UK working-age population, which is 79% White.<sup>3</sup> This gap is particularly notable, given the high proportion of jobs located in London (see page 25 the Geography section), where the working-age population is more ethnically diverse (54% White).<sup>4</sup>

1. Gender and gender identity were recorded based on respondent self-identification, with options including ‘Woman’, ‘Man’, ‘Non-binary’, and an open-text self-description. Throughout this report, these categories are trans-inclusive, encompassing all individuals who identify with these terms, including those who identify as transgender or have a trans history.
2. This figure is from the State of the Nation UK Arts, Culture and Heritage Audiences + Workforce report [\[here\]](#) published by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC).
3. This figure is calculated by The Bridge Group using the Annual Population Survey (Jan – Dec 2025). This figure includes both those born in the UK and outside the UK.
4. This figure is from the Census 2021 [ONS].

Table 1. Respondents by ethnic group

Ethnicity	%
White (British, Irish, GRT*, Other)	89%
Asian / Asian British	3%
Black / Black British	2%
Mixed	5%
Other	2%

\*GRT refers to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller

Note: The percentages reported in Table 1 are rounded to the nearest whole number; totals may deviate slightly from 100% due to rounding effects. This means the rounded percentages for respondents from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds differ slightly from the combined figure reported in the text above [12% and 11% respectively]. The aggregation reported in text is useful for comparability with 2022. Significant nuance is lost in this process, as different groups experience different challenges in the sector. The full breakdown of ethnic group responses can be found in the Appendix.

## Age

The overall spread of respondents across age ranges is shown in the table below, with breakdowns by gender. Compared to the 2022 survey, the 2026 sample is notably older. The proportion aged 50 and above has risen from 31% to 42%, while the proportion of those aged under 30 has fallen from 25% to 18%. Similarly to what the data showed in 2022, women in the sector are younger than men. 15% of women are aged 25–30, compared to 10% of men, while men are overrepresented among the older age groups (60+: 39% of men versus 18% of women).

Table 2. Respondents by age and gender

Age range	Men	Women	Overall
20-24	5%	4%	4%
25-30	10%	15%	13%
31-34	5%	9%	7%
35-39	10%	15%	13%
40-49	17%	22%	20%
50-59	14%	17%	16%
60-69	23%	12%	17%
70+	16%	6%	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note: Respondents identifying as non-binary or self-describing in another way and those who chose 'prefer not to say' for age or gender are excluded from this table to protect anonymity.

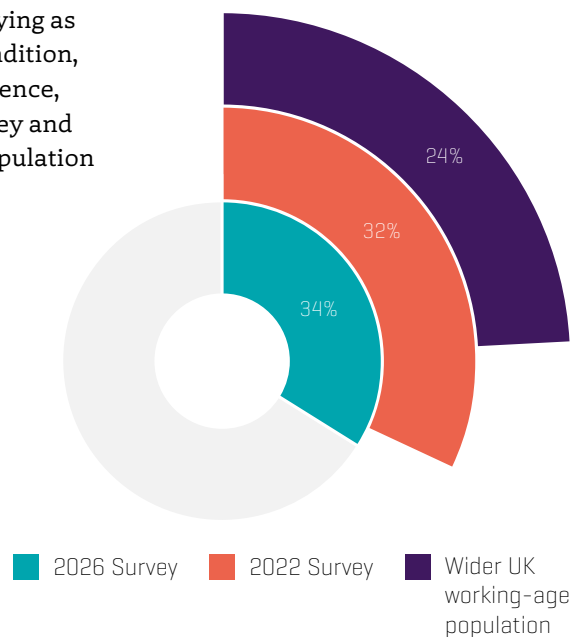
### Sexual orientation

64% of respondents identify as straight or heterosexual, 13% as bisexual, and 7% as gay or lesbian, with 4% self-describing in another way; 12% prefer not to say. This represents a higher proportion identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) or self-describing than in the general UK population (5%<sup>5</sup> compared to 24% in this survey), consistent with 2022 findings and with broader patterns across the creative industries.

### Health condition, impairment or learning difference

34% of respondents identify as having at least one health condition, impairment or learning difference. This is above the 24% reported for the wider UK working-age population<sup>6</sup> and slightly higher than the 32% recorded in the 2022 survey.

Figure 1. Respondents identifying as having at least one health condition, impairment or learning difference, compared with the 2022 survey and the wider UK working-age population



Mental health conditions are the most reported, selected by 38% of those reporting at least one condition. Long-standing illness or health conditions (32%) and specific learning differences (26%) are also common. Only a small number of respondents identify as having a physical impairment, or a serious hearing or visual impairment.

5. This figure is calculated by The Bridge Group using the Annual Population Survey (2024) reported by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

6. This figure is in the official statistics published by Department for Work and Pensions - [The employment of disabled people 2025](#).

Table 3. Types of health condition, impairment or learning difference of the respondents

Health condition, impairment or learning difference	%
A mental health condition (e.g. depression, anxiety disorder)	38%
A long-standing illness or health condition	32%
A specific learning difficulty (e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia, AD(H)D)	26%
Two or more conditions, impairments or learning differences	16%
A social/communication impairment (e.g. autistic spectrum disorder)	11%
Other health conditions (prefer not to specify)	9%
Free text description	6%
A physical impairment or mobility issues	5%
Deaf or serious hearing impairment	*

\* indicates fewer than five responses

Note: Respondents were asked to indicate all health conditions, impairments or learning differences they have, therefore percentages do not sum up to 100%. Percentages are based on the 149 respondents who selected at least one condition.

## Caring responsibilities

22% of respondents report having some caring responsibilities, similar to the 23% recorded in 2022. Of those with caring responsibilities, the majority (61%) are the primary carer of a child or children under 18; 24% are secondary carers.

Table 4. Caring responsibilities reported by respondents

Type of caring responsibility	%
Primary carer of a child/children (under 18)	61%
Secondary carer	24%
Primary carer of an older person	11%
Primary carer of a disabled person	5%
Other	8%

Note: Respondents were asked to select all types of caring responsibilities they have, thus percentages do not sum up to 100%. Percentages are based on the 97 respondents who selected at least one type of caring responsibility.

## Socio-economic background

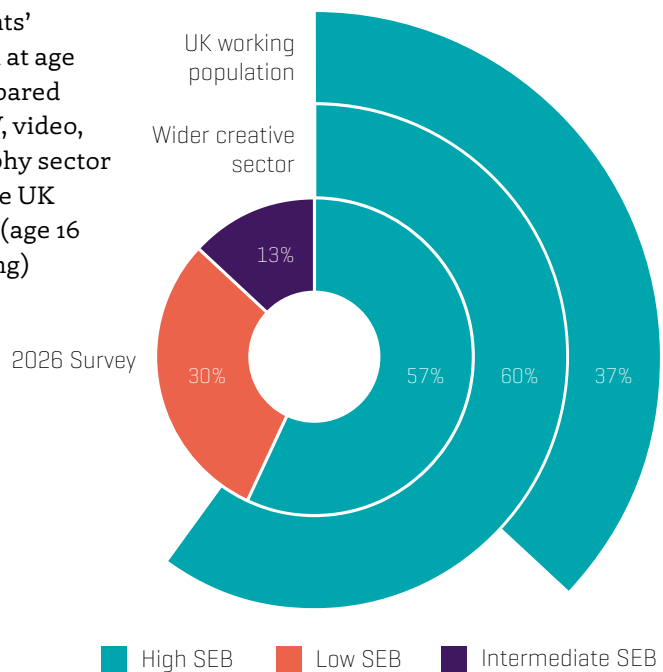
An individual’s socio-economic background (SEB) can be understood using multiple indicators. In the survey, we asked respondents’ parental occupation at age 14, type of school attended at age 11 to 16, free school meal eligibility, and highest parental qualification.<sup>7</sup>

### Parental occupation

Respondents indicate the occupation of the main household earner when they were aged 14. This is an established proxy measure for childhood SEB, given the well-documented links between parental occupation, household resources and life outcomes.

57% of respondents are from a high SEB, 13% from an intermediate SEB, and 30% from a low SEB. This is almost identical to the 2022 findings (56%, 13%, 30% respectively) and continues to reflect a sector that overrepresents people from more privileged backgrounds as with the wider film, TV, video, radio and photography sector (around 60% high SEB).<sup>8</sup>

Figure 2. Respondents’ parental occupation at age 14 (inner ring), compared to the wider film, TV, video, radio and photography sector (middle ring) and the UK working population (age 16 and over)<sup>9</sup> (outer ring)



7. Detailed information on each measurement can be found in the [employers’ Cross-Industry Toolkit](#), created by The Bridge Group in collaboration with the Social Mobility Commission.

8. This figure is from the [2024 State of the Nation UK Arts, Culture and Heritage Audiences + Workforce report](#), published by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC).

9. The full national benchmark for all socio-economic backgrounds is as follows: 37% for professional or ‘higher’ SEB, 24% for intermediate SEB, and 39% for working class or ‘lower’ SEB. These figures are from the [employers’ Cross-Industry Toolkit](#), created by The Bridge Group in collaboration with the Social Mobility Commission.

### School type

The type of school measure shows systemic economic and cultural advantages. Research shows that those who attended independent schools are overrepresented in Britain's creative sector, 32% among those working in film and TV (39% among those who attended school in the UK).<sup>10</sup>

Among those who attended school in the UK,<sup>11</sup> 12% of respondents attended an independent school, compared to 6.5% of the current UK school-age population and 15% of the ICO's 2022 sample. Notably, independent school attendance in the film exhibition sector continues to be significantly lower than the 39% observed across the wider British film and TV sector.

Of those who attended an independent school, 33% reported receiving a means-tested bursary covering 90% or more of costs, compared to 16% in 2022. It would be interesting to explore the reasons behind this change; however, the relatively small number of respondents who attended independent schools in this survey does not allow us to investigate this further here.

Table 5. Respondents' type of school attended between the ages 11 and 16

School type	%
State-run or state-funded non-selective school	59%
State-run or state-funded selective school [e.g. grammar school]	29%
Independent or fee-paying school	8%
Independent, means-tested bursary (90%+ of costs)	4%

Note: Percentages are based on the 381 respondents who attended a school in the UK. Excluded from the calculations of the reported percentages are those that did not attend school in the UK (N = 49), those that preferred not to answer the question (N = 11), and those that skipped the question (N = 179).

### Free school meals eligibility

Free school meals eligibility represents economic disadvantage. Of those respondents who can answer the question (i.e. excluding those who finished school before 1980, attended school overseas, or did not know), 33% indicate they had been eligible for free school meals. This is consistent with the 2022 finding and provides a further marker of the significant share of the workforce who come from lower-income backgrounds.

10. See the [Elitist Britain 2025: The Educational Backgrounds of Britain's Leading People \[2025\] published by the Sutton Trust](#). The creative industries cohort analysed in this report consists of UK-born or UK-based film and television actors who received at least one BAFTA nomination between the 2019 and 2025 award ceremonies. While the highly specialised nature of this high-profile talent sample requires caution when comparing it directly with the broader film exhibition workforce, it remains a vital benchmark illustrating systemic socio-economic inequalities and barriers to entry across the wider creative economy.

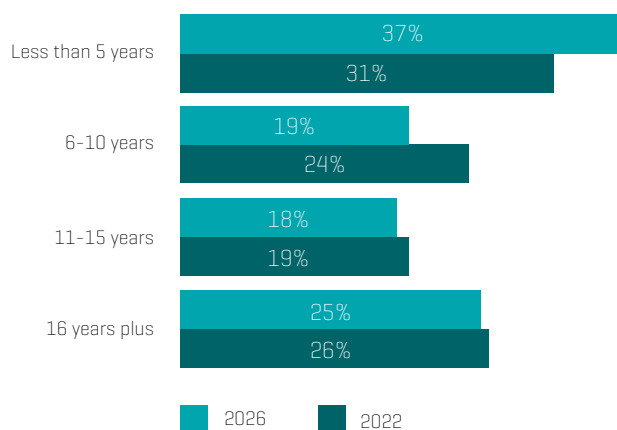
11. 11% of respondents attended school outside the UK.

# WORKFORCE PROFILE AND EMPLOYMENT LANDSCAPE

### Experience in the sector

37% of respondents have worked in the sector for fewer than five years, 19% for six to 10 years, 18% for 11 to 15 years, and 25% for 16 or more years. Compared to 2022, there are proportionally more newcomers (37% vs 31%) and fewer in the six-to-ten-year bracket (19% vs 24%).

Figure 3. Experience in the film exhibition sector (including paid and unpaid capacity)



In the 2026 survey, we have specifically asked about *paid* work in the sector. 34% of respondents report working in the sector in an unpaid capacity. Of those in paid roles, 37% have been working in paid roles for fewer than five years, and 24% have been working in paid roles longer than 16 years.

37% of respondents have undertaken *unpaid work experience* at some point in their career in film exhibition. This is a slight reduction from the 40% recorded in 2022. Of those who have done unpaid work, 19% have done so for more than six months. Further analysis shows that women and people from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds are more likely to have undertaken unpaid work experience.

Table 6. Respondents’ unpaid work experience

Duration of unpaid experience	%
Never undertaken unpaid experience	63%
1-2 weeks	6%
3-4 weeks	4%
2-3 months	4%
4-6 months	3%
More than 6 months	19%



## Employment status

42% of respondents are permanent employees, 14% are self-employed or freelance, and 4% are on fixed-term contracts. This year, 31% identify as volunteers, more than double the 15% recorded in 2022. Only 2% are on casual or zero-hours contracts, compared to 6% in 2022. This distribution is consistent with the wider film, TV, and photography sectors, where the percentage of people who are employed is close to 50%.<sup>12</sup>

Table 7. Respondents' employment status

Employment status	%
Permanent employee	42%
Fixed-term employee	4%
Casual or zero hours contract	2%
Self-employed / freelance	14%
Volunteer	31%
Unemployed / between roles	1%
Other	5%

Note: Direct comparison with 2022 is limited by changes in response categories. The 2022 survey did not separate full-time and part-time employees in terms of type of contract (e.g., permanent, fixed term, etc.) and did not include the 'fixed-term' or 'unemployed/between roles' categories.

We have also asked how many hours respondents work in their current role in a typical week. 40% of respondents typically work between 0 and 15 hours per week in their role, with 37% working 31 to 48 hours. The high proportion working fewer than 16 hours reflects the large share of volunteers and part-time workers in the survey sample.

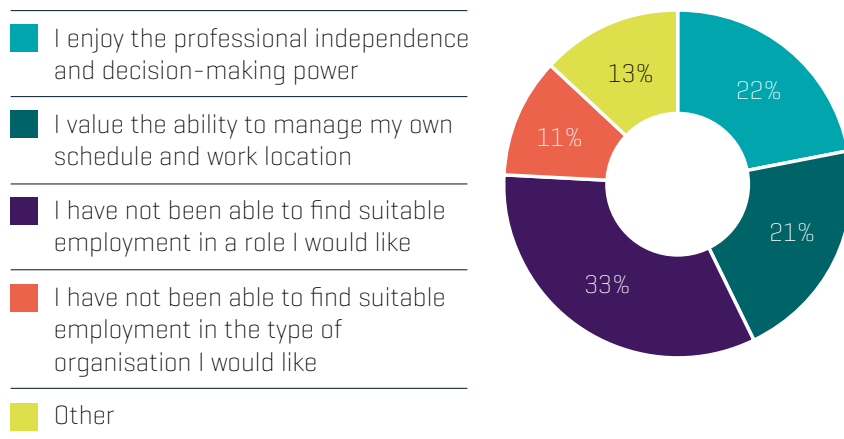
12. This figure is from the [2024 State of the Nation UK Arts, Culture and Heritage Audiences + Workforce report](#), published by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre [Creative PEC].

### Self-employed and freelance workers

Further questions are asked to the 83 respondents who identify as self-employed. When asked what motivates self-employed working, 33% of freelancers indicate they have not been able to find suitable employment in a role they would like, an increase of 9 percentage points since 2022. A further 11% cannot find employment in the type of organisation they would like, which has more than doubled from 2022.<sup>13 14</sup> While 22% value the flexibility of self-employment and 21% appreciate the autonomy it affords, the balance appears to have shifted since 2022. Freelance work now appears more frequently to be a constrained choice than a preference.

Figure 4. Respondents’ motivations of being self-employed/freelance

#### Motivation



Note: Respondents were asked to select a primary motivation for being self-employed or freelance. ‘Other’ responses reported a mix of more than one options.

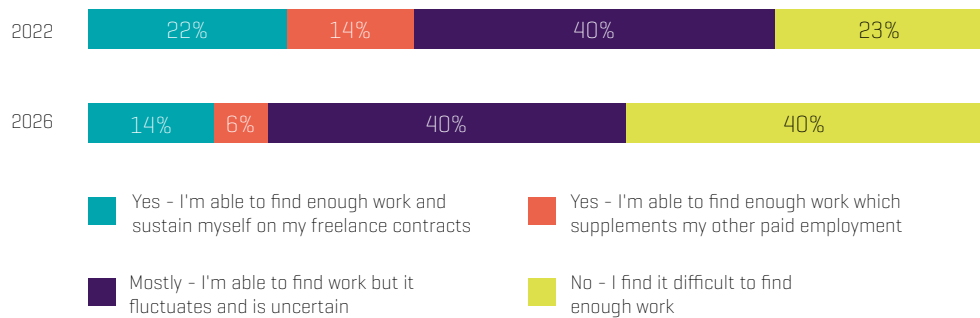
13. The proportion for ‘I have not been able to find suitable employment in the type of organisation I would like’ was not reported in 2022 due to the small number of responses.

14. Data from the ICO’s dedicated jobs board indicates a notable contraction in recruitment activity within the sector over the last few years. Following a peak in 2022, when vacancy postings reached 700, the number of advertised roles fell to 398 in 2025—representing a decline of over 43%. While jobs board metrics serve as a helpful proxy rather than an exhaustive measure of sector-wide employment, this sharp contraction strongly suggests a broader slowdown in hiring.

We also asked those individuals who are self-employed or freelance if they can find enough work. Compared to 2022, a considerably larger proportion of self-employed or freelance respondents report finding enough work difficult (40% versus 23%). At the same time, the percentage of self-employed or freelance respondents reporting finding enough work (either to sustain themselves or to supplement other paid employment) has fallen from 36% in 2022 to 20% in 2026. When viewed alongside the growing trend of individuals turning to freelance work out of necessity, the sharp increase in those struggling to find sufficient work suggests that conditions within the sector might be deteriorating.

Figure 5. Respondents' answers when asked if they can find sufficient work, 2022 and 2026

### Able to find sufficient work?



## Information on current (or last) role

### Area of work

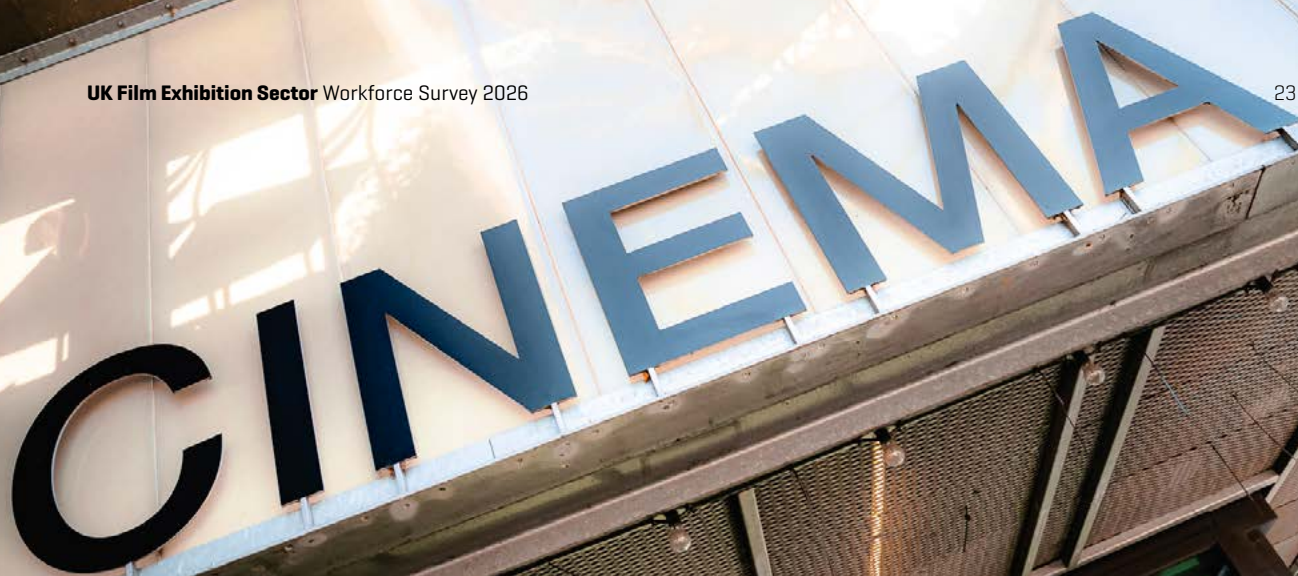
Among respondents in 2026, programme creation remains the most common area of work, accounting for 24% of respondents, followed by front of house (16%) and communications and marketing (10%).

Compared to 2022, the proportion in front of house roles in the sample has increased markedly (16% vs 9%). In contrast, representation in operations has fallen from 13% to 9% and programme creation has declined from 29% to 24%. The 'other' category has grown (19% vs 14%), largely comprising people whose work spans multiple areas or who hold governance or voluntary leadership roles.

Table 8. Respondents' area of work, 2022 and 2026

Area of work	2022 %	2026 %	Diff
Programme creation	29%	24%	▼ 5%
Front of house	9%	16%	▲ 7%
Communications and marketing	11%	10%	▼ 1%
Operations	13%	9%	▼ 4%
Projections/Technical	6%	6%	-
Strategy	3%	4%	▲ 1%
Learning and audience development	4%	4%	-
Fundraising and business development	2%	3%	▲ 1%
Finance and HR	2%	2%	-
Premises management	8%	1%	▼ 7%
Hospitality	1%	1%	-
Other	14%	19%	▲ 5%

Note: Finance and HR options were combined to be able to report in full.



### Type of organisation

25% of respondents work for a not-for-profit independent cinema, an increase from 17% in 2022. Film festivals (16%), film clubs and societies (14%), and for-profit independent cinemas (12%) are also well represented. The share working in a multiplex has fallen dramatically, from 15% in 2022 to just 2% in 2026.<sup>15</sup>

Table 9. Type of organisation respondents work for

Type of organisation	%
Independent Cinema (for profit)	12%
Independent Cinema (not-for-profit)	25%
Multiplex	2%
Independent Chain	3%
Mixed Arts Venue	11%
Film Festival	16%
Film Club/Society	14%
Collective/Pop-up	2%
Industry body	6%
I do not work for a specific organisation, e.g. I am self-employed	4%
Other	7%

15. While we cannot definitively isolate the drivers behind this sharp contraction in multiplex representation, we suggest two potential explanations for this shift. Methodologically, it is highly probable that the promotional and distribution channels for the 2026 survey were more heavily concentrated within independent cinema networks. This would naturally result in fewer responses from commercial multiplex staff. From a more sector-wide perspective, this drop may reflect real shifts in how multiplex cinemas operate. The rapid automation (e.g., self-service ticket kiosks and digital food-and-drink stations) over the last four years might have reduced the number of staff working on the ground. As a result, there are fewer multiplex workers in the sector to take the survey.

**Seniority level**

Compared to 2022, a smaller proportion of respondents currently work at manager level (down from 34% to 23%) and more at administrator level (up from 11% to 16%). 12% chose 'Other', most commonly to describe voluntary or governance roles. The proportion of respondents working in the most senior roles (Director/Executive) appears largely unchanged since 2022 at around 15%.

Table 10. Respondents' seniority level in their current role

Seniority level	2022 %	2026 %
Director/Executive	14%	15%
Senior Manager	15%	14%
Manager/Supervisor/Project Manager	34%	23%
Officer/Coordinator	17%	17%
Administrator/Assistant/Usher/Box office	11%	16%
Intern/Trainee/Apprenticeship	1%	3%
Other	8%	12%

When asked about their people managerial responsibilities, 55% of respondents report none, higher than the 47% recorded in 2022. 22% manage fewer than five people, 12% between five and 10, and 12% more than 10 people. The lower proportion with management responsibilities is consistent with the shift toward more junior and voluntary roles in the survey sample.



### Geography

Respondents are asked to provide the first part of their workplace postcode, which is converted into the appropriate UK regions.

London accounts for 21% of workplace postcodes, and the South East a further 11%. This is a combined total of 32%, down from 36% in 2022. Scotland accounts for 18% of respondents, up from 14% in 2022.<sup>16</sup>

Among those who have provided both work and home postcodes, most respondents (94%) live and work in the same region. Of the 21 respondents reporting working and living in different regions, seven split their time equally between working from home and from an office and six report working from home.

Figure 6. Distribution of workplaces across the UK

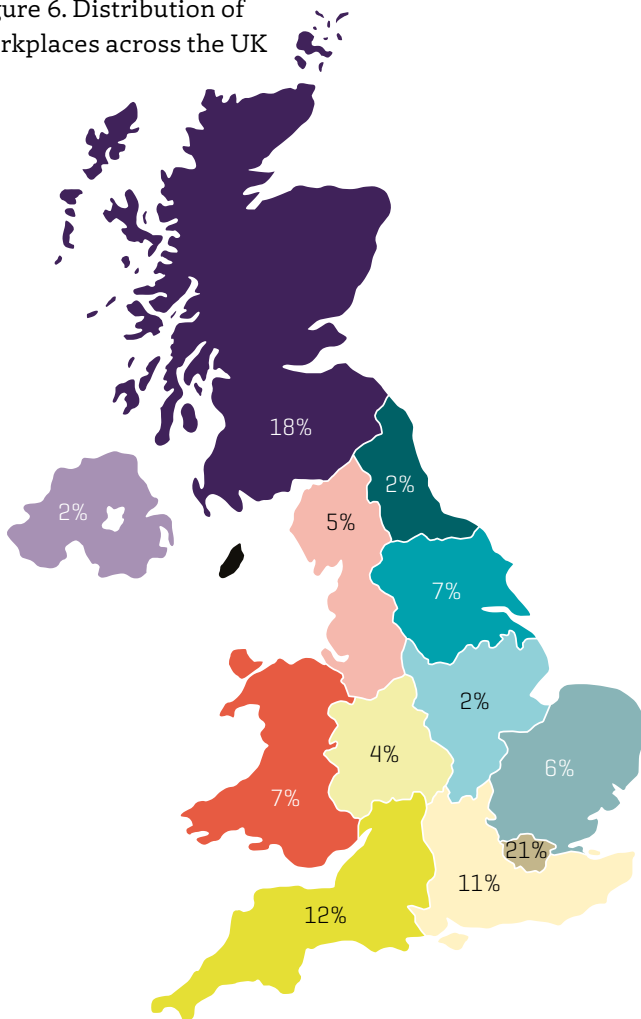


Table 11. Respondents' work and home postcodes by region

Employment region	Work %	Home %
North East	2%	2%
North West	5%	5%
Yorkshire and the Humber	7%	7%
East Midlands	2%	3%
West Midlands	4%	3%
East of England	6%	7%
London	21%	19%
South East	11%	13%
South West	12%	13%
Wales	7%	6%
Scotland	18%	19%
Northern Ireland	2%	2%
Outside the UK	1%	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

16. While the reasons for this job concentration in Scotland and its increase in share in the last four years are not clear from the data, one explanation lies in greater and more targeted investment in Scotland. Film exhibitors in Scotland receive funding from both the BFI (from the UK government and National Lottery) and Screen Scotland (Scottish Government and National Lottery). In contrast exhibitors in England, Wales and Northern Ireland only receive support from the BFI.



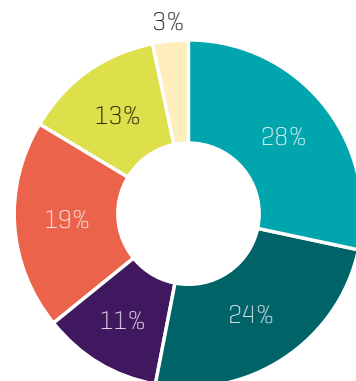
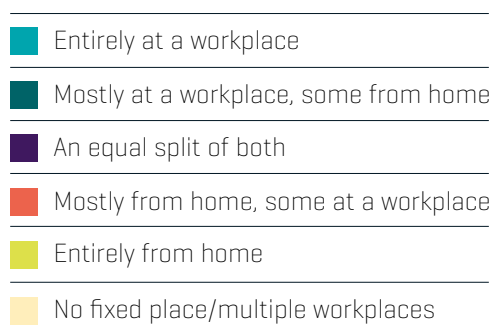
### Working arrangements

This year, we have introduced a working arrangement question in the survey. 28% of respondents work entirely at a workplace, with 24% mostly at a workplace but sometimes working from home. 19% worked mostly from home with some time at a workplace, and 13% worked entirely from home.

Over 50% of respondents are ‘hybrid’ workers (part travelling to work, and part at home), which is notably higher than the national figure at 28%.<sup>17</sup> 3% have no fixed place of work or work across multiple sites.

Figure 7. Respondents’ work arrangements

### Work arrangements



17. This figure is drawn from the [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) report \(2024\), Who are the hybrid workers?](#)

## Income

Respondents are asked to indicate their expected annual gross income for 2026 in the sector. The figures here reported should be interpreted with care, as income will vary substantially depending on whether respondents are full-time employees, part-time workers, volunteers, or self-employed. It should be noted that 40% of respondents work 15 hours or fewer per week.

19% of respondents report expected annual income of under £5,000, a category that was not available in the 2022 survey and captures more than half of the volunteer workforce. Indeed, of the 82 respondents reporting income under £5,000, 63% work in a volunteer capacity and a further 18% work as self-employed or a freelance worker. The two other most commonly reported expected income bands are £25,001–£30,000 (15%) and £31,001–£35,000 (13%). The proportion of individuals who expect to earn above £45,000 has remained at a similar level compared to 2022.

Further analysis shows that while expected annual income generally increase with the number of hours worked, a distinct trend emerges for those working 49 hours or more per week<sup>18</sup>. Despite the increased hours, the majority of this group remains within the £15,001–£40,000 bracket, suggesting a clear ceiling in compensation relative to time invested.

**Table 12. Respondents' expected annual income in the sector**

Income band	%
Under £5,000	19%
£5,001-£10,000	6%
£10,001-£15,000	8%
£15,001-£20,000	5%
£20,001-£25,000	8%
£25,001-£30,000	15%
£30,001-£35,000	13%
£35,001-£40,000	8%
£40,001-£45,000	7%
£45,001-£50,000	3%
£50,001-£55,000	2%
£55,001-£70,000	2%
£70,001-£80,000	2%
£80,000+	2%

18. According to ONS, those who are working 31 hours or more a week are considered working full-time. 43% of the respondents report they usually work 31 hours or more a week in their current role (including paid and unpaid overtime). 6% report they work 49 hours or more a week.




### Method of job discovery

An organisation's own advertisement is the primary gateway into current/last roles (17%), closely followed by personal networks (14%), and internal promotions (13%).

Notably, 11% of respondents have secured their positions through self-initiation, having created their own role or organisation. This category, newly introduced this year in response to its prevalence in the 2022 findings, underscores the high level of individual agency in the sector. Overall, the pattern remains consistent with 2022, with no single channel standing out.

Table 13. Respondents' method of job discovery

Channels for job	%
Word of mouth	8%
Friend/relative/colleague	14%
Organisation's advert [e.g. on their website or in the venue]	17%
Advert on job site	6%
ICO jobs board	6%
Social media channels	4%
Recruitment agency	0%
Approached by organisation	11%
Contacted the organisation	5%
Internal promotion	13%
Self-initiated [for example, I created my own role/organisation]	11%
Other	5%



# EMPLOYMENT AND DEMOGRAPHICS



This section examines the relationship between employment characteristics and key demographic variables. We look in turn at employment type, seniority, and income, each broken down by gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background (SEB), and health condition.

### Employment type by demographic group

#### Gender

Among respondents who selected Woman/Man, women comprise 58% of the sample but hold a higher prevalence in fixed-term (78%) and self-employed (71%) roles. Conversely, men represent 52% of the volunteer cohort, a share slightly higher than their overall workforce representation. The gender distribution among permanent employees (59% women, 41% men) aligns closely with the overall sample composition.

Table 14. Respondents' employment type by gender

Employment type	Women	Men
Permanent employee	59%	41%
Fixed-term employee	78%	22%
Self-employed/freelance	71%	29%
Volunteer	48%	52%
<b>Total</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>42%</b>

Note: Data for 'Casual/zero-hours contract' and 'Other' categories have been omitted due to the small sample size.

### Ethnicity

People from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds make up 11% of the sample, a proportion mirrored among respondents in permanent employment. They are, however, noticeably overrepresented among those in fixed-term employment (33%) and 'Other' arrangements (25%), and notably underrepresented among volunteers (6%).

Table 15. Respondents' employment type by ethnic group

Employment type	White	Black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds
Permanent employee	89%	11%
Fixed-term employee	67%	33%
Casual/zero hours contract	100%	0%
Self-employed/freelance	85%	15%
Volunteer	94%	6%
Other	75%	25%
<b>Total</b>	89%	11%

Note: Data for 'Casual/zero-hours contract' have been omitted due to the small sample size.

### Socio-economic background

The distribution of SEB across employment types is broadly consistent, with high SEB respondents comprising the majority in most employment types. Those from a low SEB account for 33% of permanent employees and 30% of self-employed workers, in line with their 30% share of the overall sample.

The relatively even distribution suggests that SEB does not strongly predict which type of employment arrangement people are in, though the data is limited by sample size in smaller categories.

### Health condition, impairment or learning difference

People with a health condition, impairment or learning difference account for 34% of the overall sample. They are notably overrepresented in fixed-term employment (56%) and in 'Other' arrangements (45%). They are proportionately represented among permanent employees (34%) and slightly underrepresented among volunteers (30%).

### Seniority level by demographic group

#### Gender

Women represent most of the workforce across all levels of seniority. The difference is most pronounced at the entry and operational levels, with women accounting for 67% of administrative and front-of-house roles and 63% of officer/coordinator positions. This gap narrows at more senior levels, where the workforce composition more closely resembles the sample at large, comprising 57% women at the director/executive level and 56% at the senior management level.

Table 16. Respondents' seniority level by gender

Seniority level	Women	Men
Director/Executive	57%	43%
Senior Manager	56%	44%
Manager/Supervisor/Project Manager	53%	47%
Officer/Coordinator	63%	36%
Administrator/Assistant/Usher/Box office	67%	33%
Intern/Trainee/Apprenticeship	50%	50%
<b>Total</b>	57%	43%



## Ethnicity

People from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds are represented across all levels of seniority but are notably absent from senior manager roles where they comprise only 8%, below their 11% share of the overall sample. They represent 13% of directors and executives, 12% of managers, and 16% of administrators and front-of-house staff.

The pattern in 2022 showed a starker gap at managerial level, with the 2026 data suggesting some narrowing, though the small sample sizes require caution in interpretation.

Table 17. Respondents' seniority level by ethnic group

Seniority level	White	Black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds
Director/Executive	87%	13%
Senior Manager	92%	8%
Manager/Supervisor/Project Manager	88%	12%
Officer/Coordinator	88%	12%
Administrator/Assistant/Usher/Box office	84%	16%
Intern/Trainee/Apprenticeship	92%	8%
<b>Total</b>	89%	11%

Further analysis reveals respondents from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds are more likely to work within organisations that are less established or easier to self-start, such as film festivals, film clubs, societies, collectives, pop-ups and community cinemas. Specifically, 65% of Black, Asian and ethnically diverse respondents report working in these types of organisations, compared to 44% of White respondents. While we are not able to publish granular data due to small sample sizes, this pattern is visible at the most senior level (Directors/Executives). This trend suggests that barriers may exist for diverse talent both accessing and advancing within traditional, established cinema institutions.

### **Socio-economic background**

Respondents from high socio-economic backgrounds (SEB) comprise the majority across all levels of seniority, representing between 53% and 61% of the workforce at any given seniority level. This distribution aligns with the overall high SEB share of 57%.

Individuals from low SEB are more prevalent at the senior manager level (39%) than at the director/executive level (31%). Conversely, they appear underrepresented in administrative, front-of-house, and officer roles. In these positions, those from intermediate SEB backgrounds are more prevalent, accounting for 16–17% of the cohort, higher than the 13% sample average. These observations, however, should be interpreted with caution due to the smaller sample sizes involved.

### **Health condition, impairment or learning difference**

People with a health condition, impairment or learning difference account for 34% of the overall sample. They are slightly less likely to be directors or executives (33%) or senior managers (28%) than their overall share would suggest, and more likely to be at officer/coordinator level (38%). This is consistent with the 2022 finding that those with health conditions were less likely to be in senior manager roles, and points to a pattern worth monitoring.

### **Income by demographic group**

The following analysis explores income distribution across various demographic groups. However, these findings should be interpreted with caution, as income levels are significantly influenced by other factors such as employment status and total hours worked.

#### **Gender**

Men are overrepresented at the very lowest income band (56% of those earning under £5,000, despite being 43% of the matched sample), which most likely reflects the fact that men are more likely than women to be working in voluntary roles. Women are more strongly represented in mid-range bands. At higher income bands (£40,000+), women and men converge to roughly proportionate shares.

## Ethnicity

Respondents from Black, Asian, and ethnically diverse backgrounds that answered both ethnicity and income questions represent 12% of the sample. While representation is broadly proportionate in the lower and mid-range income brackets, it substantially decreases in the highest earning category (£40,001+), where individuals from Black, Asian, and ethnically diverse backgrounds make up 8% of the group. Note that to protect respondent anonymity due to small sample sizes in high-income brackets, data for earnings above £40,000 has been aggregated.

Table 18. Respondents' expected annual income in the sector by ethnic group

Income band	White	Black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds
Under £15,000	86%	14%
£15,001-£30,000	90%	10%
£30,001-£40,000	84%	16%
£40,001 +	92%	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>12%</b>

Note: The ethnic representation in Table 18 differs from the overall sample statistics reported on page 9 (89% White; 11% Black, Asian, and ethnically diverse). This discrepancy arises because Table 18 is based on a subset of respondents – specifically those who provided answers to both the ethnicity and income questions.

## Socio-economic background

High SEB representation remains consistent regardless of income, peaking at 64% in the £30,001-£40,000 bracket and maintaining at least a 48% share even in the highest income band (£50,000+).

Respondents from low SEB backgrounds comprise 30% of the total sample. Their representation is most significant in the £5,000-£15,000 and £15,000-£30,000 bands (35% and 32%, respectively).

Notably, in the highest earnings category (£50,000+), the proportion of respondents from intermediate SEB backgrounds rises to 24%, nearly double their total sample average of 14%. Note, however, that due to the smaller sample sizes in the upper income bands, these figures have been aggregated to ensure data privacy and should be viewed as indicative of broader trends.

Table 19. Respondents expected annual income in the sector by SEB

Income band	High SEB	Intermediate SEB	Low SEB
Under £5,000	58%	15%	27%
£5,001-£15,000	46%	20%	35%
£15,001-£30,000	57%	12%	32%
£30,001-£40,000	64%	9%	27%
£40,001-£50,000	57%	11%	31%
£50,000 +	48%	24%	28%
<b>Total</b>	56%	14%	30%

### Health condition, impairment or learning difference

Those with a health condition, impairment or learning difference are overrepresented at the lower income bands and underrepresented at the higher bands. The income gap by health condition is consistent with 2022, which found that 59% of those with a health condition earned under £25,001, compared to 48% of those without.

Table 20. Respondents expected annual income in the sector by health condition

Income band	No health condition	At least one health condition
Under £5,000	61%	39%
£5,001-£15,000	55%	45%
£15,001-£30,000	64%	36%
£30,001-£40,000	66%	34%
£40,001-£50,000	68%	32%
£50,000 +	66%	34%
<b>Total</b>	63%	37%

Note: Due to the smaller sample sizes in the upper income bands, these figures have been aggregated to ensure data privacy.



# EXPERIENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

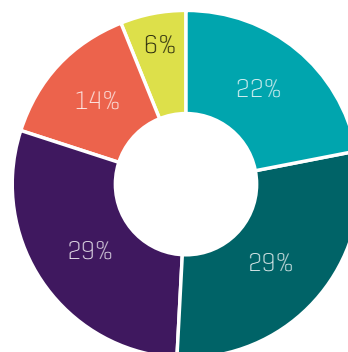
This section presents findings from a set of new questions introduced in the 2026 survey on respondents' day-to-day working experience. The questions cover overwork and compensation, management support, involvement in decision-making, and perceptions of fair pay. Although no historical comparisons are available, they provide an important baseline for future tracking.

### Overwork

Respondents who have fixed or contractual hours were asked how often they work beyond those hours. Of the 344 respondents to whom this question applied, 80% report working beyond their contracted hours at least occasionally, with over half (51%) doing so always or frequently. Only 6% report never working beyond their contracted hours.

Figure 8. Respondents' frequency of overwork

#### Frequency of overwork

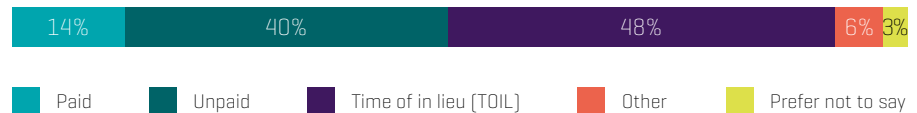


Note: 38% of the full sample [208 respondents] indicated they do not have fixed or contractual hours and are not included in the above. This group includes zero-hours contract workers, freelancers, and volunteers.

Of the respondents working beyond their contracted hours, 98% report receiving some form of compensation. The most common form of compensation is time off in lieu (TOIL), cited by 48% of this group. Only 14% report their additional working hours being usually paid. The reliance on TOIL and unpaid overtime rather than paid compensation is particularly stark given the high frequency with which overwork occurs.

Figure 9. Form of overwork compensation respondents received

### Form of compensation



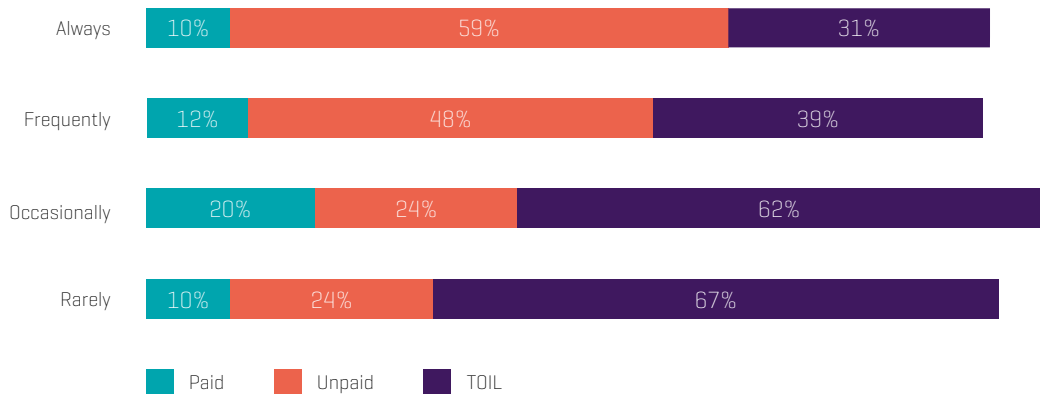
Note: Respondents could select more than one form of compensation. Therefore, percentages do not sum to 100%.

It is worth noting that, among those who always work beyond their contracted hours, 59% of this time was unpaid and 31% was compensated through TOIL, meaning those who overwork most frequently are also least likely to receive financial compensation.

TOIL becomes more prevalent as overwork becomes less frequent. 67% of those who rarely work beyond their hours receive TOIL, suggesting it functions more as an occasional remedy than a systematic response to routine extra work.

Figure 10. Form of overwork compensation by frequency group

### Overwork frequency



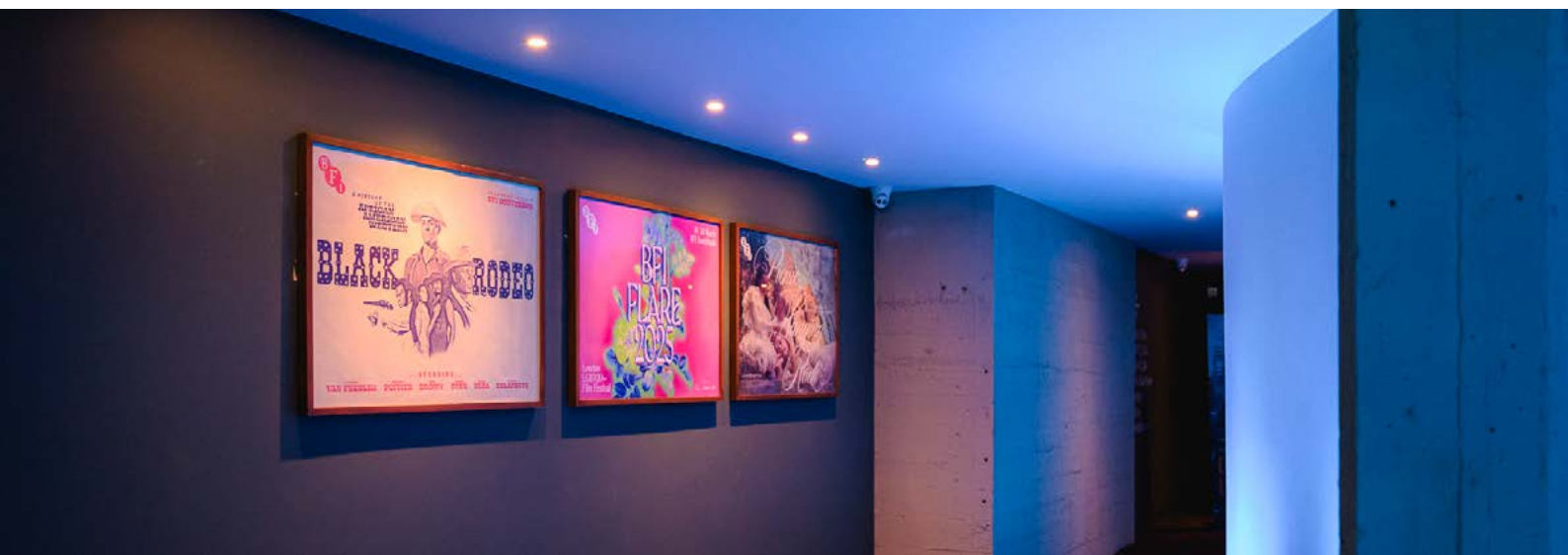
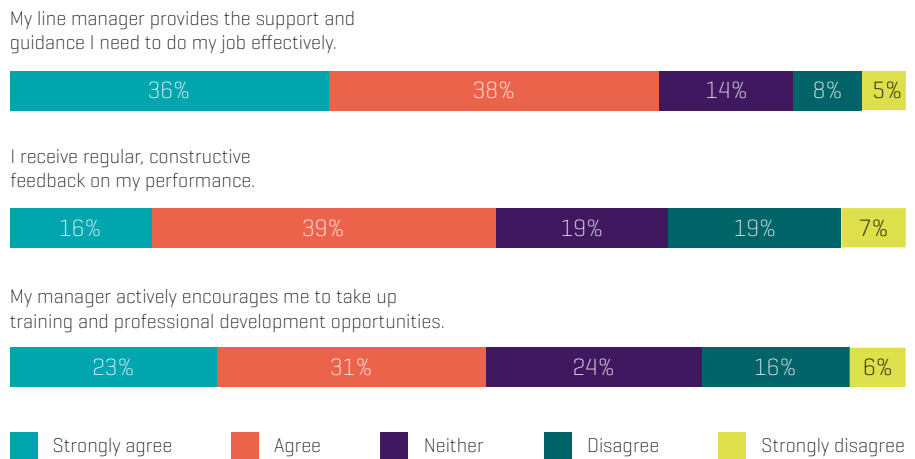
Note: Percentages within each row are not mutually exclusive as respondents could select more than one compensation type.

### Management support

Respondents were asked about their experience of management support, across three dimensions – practical support and guidance, feedback, and encouragement of professional development. Responses suggest that while many staff feel adequately supported in doing their job, they are less confident about the quality of feedback they receive and the extent to which managers actively encourage training and development.

74% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their line manager provides the support and guidance they need to do their job effectively. However, only 55% agreed they receive regular, constructive feedback on their performance, with 26% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Agreement falls further when respondents are asked whether managers actively encourage their professional development. Only 54% agreed with the statement, while 22% disagreed or strongly disagreed. A further 24% selected neither agree nor disagree.

Figure 11. Respondents’ perception of management support



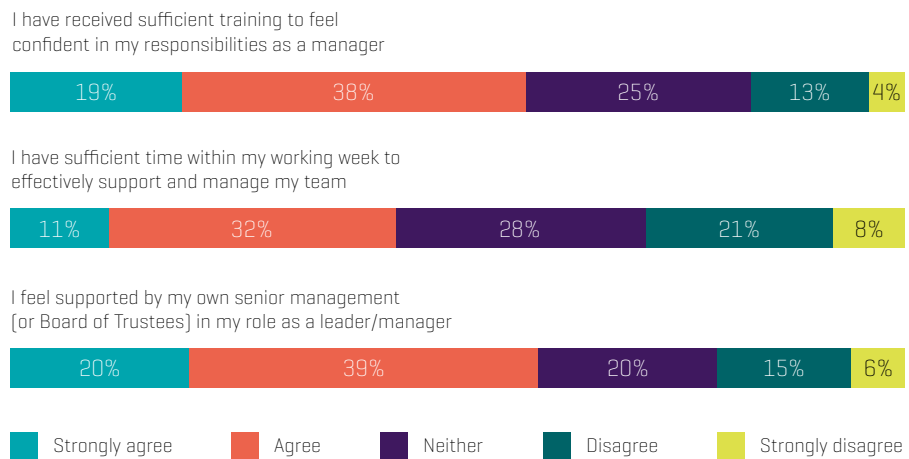
### Support for those in management roles

Those who hold management or leadership responsibilities were asked a parallel set of questions about the support they themselves receive. Responses reveal a mixed picture. While almost 60% of managers feel they have received sufficient training for their role (57% agreed or strongly agreed), 17% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

More notably, only 43% agreed they have sufficient time within their working week to effectively support and manage their team, while 29% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 28% felt neither way. This echoes the overrepresentation of respondents in senior roles (i.e., Director/Executive) among those who report always working beyond contracted hours (28% versus 22% in the overall sample).

Support from senior management is also a concern for a significant share. While 59% of managers reported feeling supported by their own senior management or board, 21% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 12. Perceptions of support among managers and leaders



### Involvement in decision-making

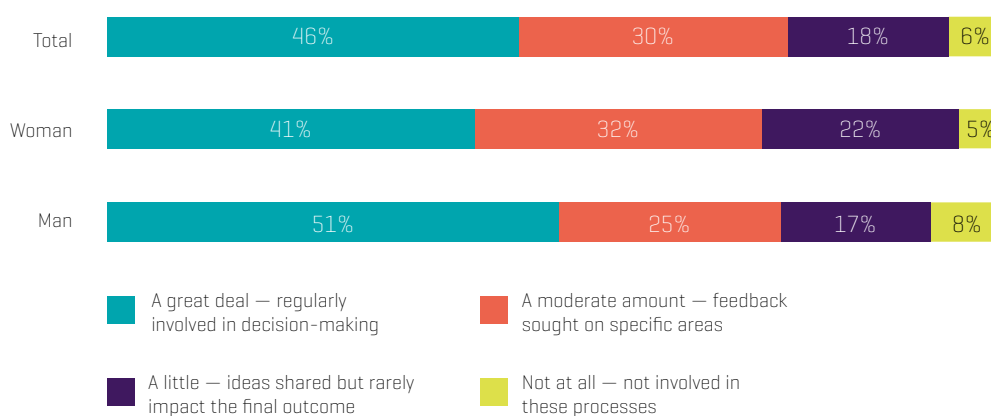
Respondents were asked to what extent they feel they have the opportunity to contribute their ideas and feedback toward their organisation's plans, programming, or working practices'. The results suggest a reasonably participatory culture in most of the sector.

46% of respondents report being involved in decision-making at their organisation to a great deal, meaning they are regularly involved in decisions about their area of work. A further 30% say their feedback is sought on specific areas. 18% say they can share ideas but that these rarely impact outcomes, and 6% report no involvement in decision-making at all.

As expected, respondents are more likely to report higher levels of decision making when they work in senior roles (e.g., 95% of those working as Director/Executives report having ‘a great deal’ of input into decision-making). Indeed, those in Director/Executives roles make up one third of the respondents reporting greater involvement in decision-making, with another third comprising those in Senior Manager or Manger roles.

Interestingly, men report having ‘a great deal’ of input into decision-making at a higher rate (51%) than women (41%). Women were more likely to say they had ‘a little’ involvement than men (22% and 17%, respectively). This difference is particularly visible among those employed in middle roles (Manager/Supervisor/Project Manager and Officer/Coordinator).

**Figure 13. Respondents’ perception of their involvement in decision-making**



Note: 26 respondents [5%] selected ‘not applicable’ (e.g. short-term freelancers) and are excluded from the above.

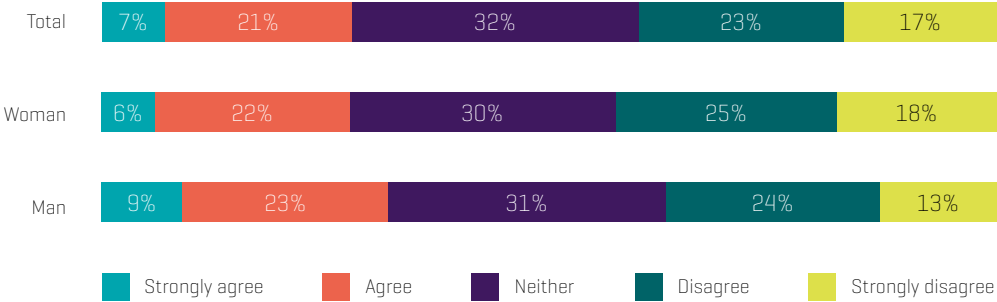
### Perceptions of fair pay

Respondents were asked whether they feel they are paid fairly for the responsibilities they have and the amount of work they do. Only 28% agreed or strongly agreed, while 40% disagreed or strongly disagreed. A further 32% selected neither agree nor disagree.

Taken alongside the income data reported in the previous section, where those working over 48 hours per week mostly remain in the low-to-mid income brackets, this dissatisfaction likely reflects genuine concerns about the adequacy of pay rates across the sector rather than simply high expectations.

Perceptions of pay fairness also vary by gender. Women are more likely to think they are not fairly paid: 43% of women disagreed or strongly disagreed compared to 36% of men.

Figure 14. Respondents' perceptions of fair pay



Note: 54 respondents [11%] chose 'Prefer not to say' and are excluded from the valid percentages above.



# TRAINING AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN THE SECTOR

This section examines training and professional development within the sector: both what has happened over the past four years and what respondents feel is needed. It covers the match between current skills and roles, training received and how it was funded, personal development priorities, sector-wide training needs, and barriers to both training and career progression.

### Match between skills and current role

Respondents evaluated the alignment between their current role and their professional skills, knowledge, and training on a scale of 1–10. The results indicate a generally strong alignment, with the data heavily skewed toward the higher end of the spectrum.

75% of respondents report a good-to-complete match. Notably, 58% selected between 7 and 9, and 17% express perfect alignment with a score of 10. This is followed by 17% of respondents reporting a moderate fit (rating 5 and 6). Only 8% of respondents indicate a mismatch, with 8% scoring between 1 and 4, thus highlighting a small but meaningful minority who perceive their skills as substantially misaligned with their current role.

When compared to the 2022 survey, which reported a 70% positive rate regarding skill-role fit (scoring 7 to 10), the current data suggests a modest improvement in perceived alignment. However, these figures should be interpreted with caution, as the two sample groups are not directly comparable.

**Table 21. Respondents' perception of match between their current role and their professional skills, knowledge, and training**

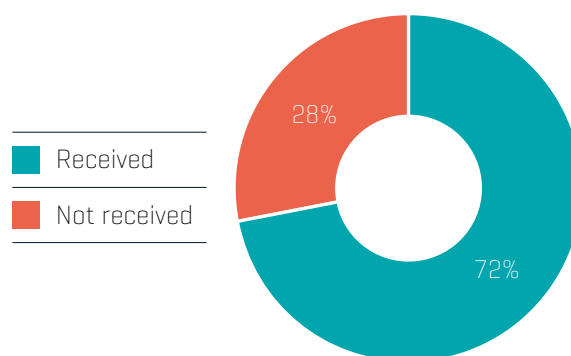
Score	%
1-4 [low match]	8%
5	11%
6	6%
7-9 [high match]	58%
10 [complete match]	17%

## Training received

72% of respondents report having received at least one form of professional or structured training in the four years prior to the survey. 28% received no training at all during this period. This is a meaningful improvement on the 2022 figure, which reported that 50% of respondents had never received any professional training across their career.

It is worth noting that direct comparison is limited, as the time frames differ. Note that as the 2026 question covered the last four years, while the 2022 survey asked about career to date, the questions are not directly comparable. However, given the shorter timeframe considered in the 2026 survey, the increase in the share of respondents reporting having received some structured training hints at a notably positive trend in recent times.

**Figure 15. Proportion of respondents reported having received at least one form of professional or structured training in the four years prior to the survey**



## Training subject area

Among those who have received training in the last four years, diversity and inclusion (including accessibility, disability awareness and sign language) is the most commonly selected area, with 53% of trained respondents having received it. First aid (31%) and health and safety (31%) were also among the most common, reflecting the operational requirements of exhibition venues. Audience development (35%) and programming creation (21%) are the most selected areas with direct professional development value for the sector's creative work.

The least frequently cited areas are Artificial Intelligence (AI), governance, hospitality, and general HR, each accounting for 6% of responses, followed by graphic design and premises management at 4% each. The low percentage of trained respondents reporting having received AI training might be an area of concern given the increasing relevance and prevalence of AI technology.

Table 22. Top five training subject areas undertaken in the last four years

Training area	% of those trained
Diversity and inclusion/accessibility/disability awareness/sign language	53%
Audience development	35%
First aid	31%
Health and safety	31%
Programming creation	21%

Note: Respondents could select multiple training areas. Percentages are of the 363 respondents who had received at least one form of training. The full list of training areas is provided in the Appendix.

### Funding for training

Of those who have received training, 65% report it as fully funded entirely by their employer, 11% as fully self-funded, and 24% as a mixture of both. This is broadly positive, suggesting that where training happens it is predominantly employer-supported.

Table 23. Source of training funding

Source of training funding	% of those trained
All funded by employer	65%
All self-funded	11%
A mix of funding sources	24%

Note: Percentages are of the 359 respondents who had received at least one form of training.

### Recency of training

Among those who have received training in their current role, 56% have done so within the last 12 months, and a further 20% within the last one to two years. 12% had last received training more than four years ago. Indeed, this finding supports the overall impression that the prevalence of training has been increasing in recent years. Indeed, the proportion of respondents who have trained within the last year (56%) is notably higher than the equivalent 2022 figure (41%).

## Training and development priorities

### Personal priorities

Respondents are asked to identify up to three areas in which they would personally like to develop over the next five years. Audience development is the top priority, selected by 38% of respondents, followed by programming creation (28%) and diversity and inclusion/accessibility (23%). The fact that these were also the most frequently undertaken training areas in recent years, on the one hand, suggests a sustained, long-term need for expertise in these fields. On the other hand, the continued high demand suggests that current training supply may not yet be fully meeting the sector's evolving requirements.

The data further reveals a significant gap in emerging skills. While AI features strongly as a future priority (15%), it remains underrepresented in the list of training actually undertaken (6%). This disparity highlights a clear mismatch between workforce demand for new technical expertise and the current supply of training opportunities.

**Table 24. Respondents' personal training and development priority areas**

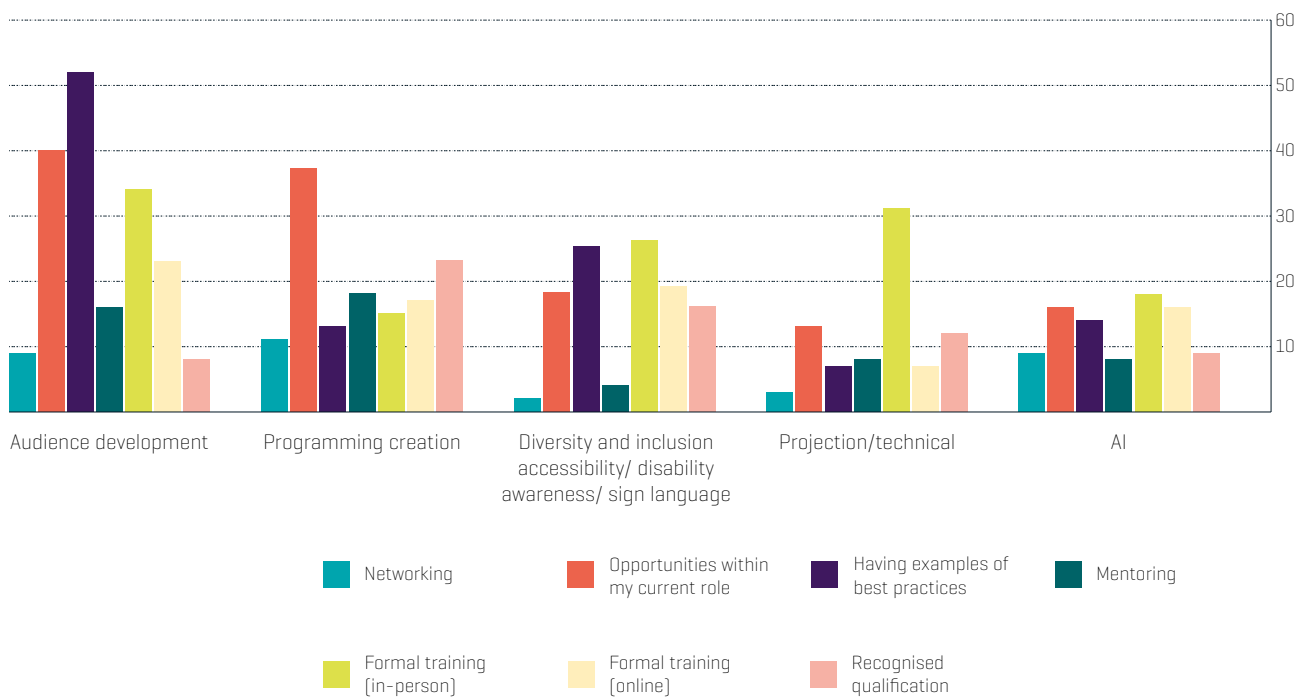
Training subject area	%
Audience development	38%
Programming creation	28%
Diversity and inclusion/accessibility/disability awareness	23%
Fundraising and sponsorship	19%
Projection/technical	17%
Data analysis	16%
Leadership	15%
AI	15%
Marketing and communications	15%
Environmental sustainability	12%
Project management	11%
Finance	10%

Note: Respondents were asked to select up to three priority training areas and their preferred delivery methods. Percentages are based on the 473 respondents who selected at least one area. The table displays only those training areas selected by 10% or more of respondents for development over the next five years. The full list is available in the Appendix.

Respondents also indicated their preferred mode of development for each area. While the survey assessed a wide range of topics, several notable trends emerged regarding how respondents prefer to learn:

- ▶ In terms of training for audience development, respondents most often choose having examples of best practice (52 respondents) and on-the-job opportunities within their current role (40).
- ▶ For programming creation, on-the-job opportunities are by far the most popular (37 respondents), followed by recognised qualification (23), mentoring (18), and formal in-person training (15).
- ▶ For diversity and inclusion, formal in-person training is the most sought-after mode (26 respondents), with best practice examples also highly valued (25).
- ▶ For projection/technical skills, formal in-person training is the most sought-after mode of development (31 respondents), reflecting the hands-on, equipment-dependent nature of the work.
- ▶ Meanwhile, for AI, best practice examples are the most commonly selected preferred mode of training (23 respondents).

Figure 16. Respondents' preferred mode of training for each area



Note: Respondents were asked to select up to three priority training areas and their preferred delivery methods. The full list is available in the Appendix.

### Sector-wide priorities

Respondents are also asked to identify the three areas they feel as most in need of development across the whole UK independent cinema sector. Audience development tops the list at 40%, followed by diversity and inclusion/accessibility (36%), and fundraising and sponsorship (25%).

The sector-level priorities are notably more outward-looking than the personal priorities. Environmental sustainability, for example, rises from 12% as a personal priority to 23% as a sector priority, and AI rises from 15% to 21%, suggesting respondents recognise these as challenges for the sector as a whole even when they do not align with their own current professional focus.

**Table 25. Respondents' opinion on sector-wide training and development priority areas**

Sector-wide training priority	%
Audience development	40%
Diversity and inclusion/accessibility/disability awareness	36%
Fundraising and sponsorship	25%
Environmental sustainability	23%
AI	21%
Marketing and communications	15%
Data analysis	13%
Programming creation	13%
Customer service	12%
Leadership	11%
People management	11%
Finance	10%
Projection/technical	10%

Note: Respondents were asked to select up to three training areas in need of development across the UK cinema sector and their preferred delivery methods. Percentages are based on the 455 respondents who selected at least one area. The table displays only those training areas selected by 10% or more of respondents. The full list is available in the Appendix.

When asked about preferred mode of training for each area, in the context with sector priorities, notable trends include:

- ▶ For audience development, formal training and best practice examples are equally popular (37–40 respondents).
- ▶ For diversity and inclusion, formal in-person training is by far the most selected delivery mode (56 respondents), followed by best practice examples (43).
- ▶ For fundraising and sponsorship, formal training (29 for in-person and 25 for online), networking (12) and best practice examples (16) are all commonly selected.
- ▶ For environmental sustainability and AI, best practice examples (31 and 34, respectively) and formal in-person training (29 and 20, respectively) are both highly valued.

Figure 17. Respondents' preferred mode of training for each sector-wide priority area

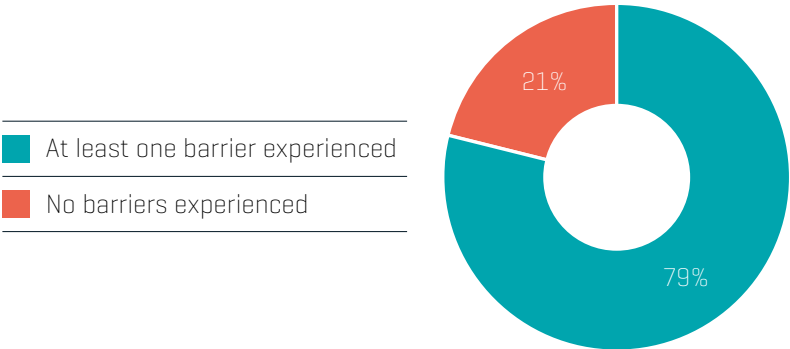


Note: Respondents were asked to select up to three training areas in need of developing across the UK cinema sector and their preferred delivery methods. The full list is available in the Appendix.

### Barriers to accessing training

79% of respondents who answered this question reported experiencing at least one barrier to accessing training and development opportunities.

Figure 18. Respondents' experience in accessing training opportunities



For respondents who identified development barriers, the two most commonly cited are lack of time or high workload (67%) and lack of budget or funding from their employer (64%). These two barriers are broadly equal in prevalence and are often cited together, suggesting a structural squeeze in which staff want to develop but have neither the time nor the financial support to do so.



A further 32% of respondents report no training available close to where they live, and an equal 32% say there are no available courses on the right topic, underlining the importance of the geographic and subject-matter coverage of training provision. Indeed, 58% of those working in Wales, 58% of those working in the North, and 48% of those working in the Midlands and the East of England mention no training available close to where they live compared to only 13% of those working in London.

Lack of employer support (22%) and accessibility (5%) are also commonly cited, the latter pointing to barriers that may be particularly acute for the 34% of respondents who identify as disabled.

Among 11% of respondents who self-describe their barriers, responses that stand out include:

- ▶ **Age-related exclusion:** several respondents feel they have “aged out” of opportunities that are framed for under-25s or early-career workers, despite being new to the sector later in life.
- ▶ **Access limits for volunteers:** many volunteers feel training is either “not for them”, unavailable outside paid employment, or not prioritised despite volunteers carrying major operational responsibility.
- ▶ **Systemic burnout and precarity:** training barriers are often described as symptoms of wider issues: low pay, understaffing, over-reliance on goodwill, and lack of organisational capacity to release people for development.

**Table 26. Respondents’ barriers to accessing training and development opportunities**

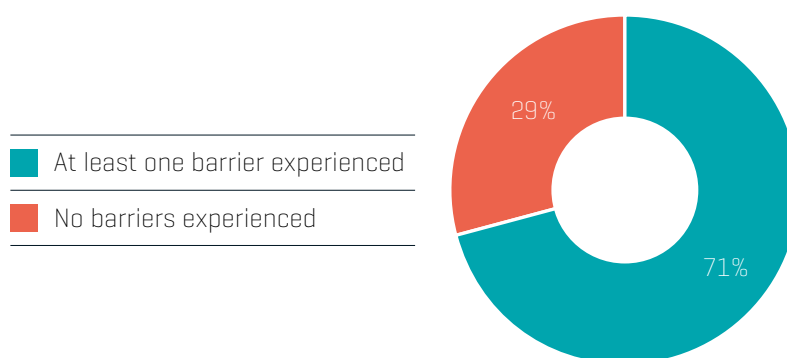
Barrier to training	% (of those with barriers)
Lack of time/high workload	67%
Lack of budget/funding from employer	64%
No training available close to where I live	32%
No available training courses on the right topic	32%
Lack of support from employer	22%
Accessibility	5%
Other	11%

Note: Respondents could select more than one barrier.

### Barriers to career progression

71% of those who responded to the question on barriers to career progression report experiencing at least one such barrier, a similarly high proportion to those encountering barriers to training.

Figure 19. Respondents' experience in career progression



The most commonly cited barriers are limited roles available in their specific field or specialism (58%) and lack of clear progression routes (57%). This indicates the sector may simply not have enough roles at the right level to absorb people seeking to progress.

Geographic barriers are also significant, with 46% citing a lack of opportunities in their location, which is particularly relevant given that most roles and paid positions are concentrated in London and the South East. Lack of access to senior-level vacancies (37%) and lack of mentorship or professional guidance (31%) are also common, pointing to the value of mentoring schemes and transparent recruitment practices in supporting progression. Financial barriers, such as the cost of further qualifications, are cited by 28%.

Table 27. Respondents' barriers to progression

Barriers to progression	% [of those with barriers]
Limited roles available in my specific field or specialism	58%
Lack of clear progression routes	57%
Lack of opportunities in my geographic location	46%
Lack of access to senior-level vacancies	37%
Lack of mentorship or professional guidance	31%
Financial barriers [e.g., cost of further qualification]	28%
Other	14%

Note: This question was introduced in 2026 and no comparable 2022 data is available. Respondents could select more than one barrier.

### Intentions to continue in the sector

When asked if ‘they see themselves continuing their career in the exhibition sector,’ 73% of respondents report they definitely or probably intend to continue working in the sector, with 38% opting for definitely and 35% probably. 21% were undecided, and 6% said they would probably or definitely not continue. While the headline figure is broadly positive, the 27% who are uncertain or likely to leave represents a significant share, especially given the issues highlighted in terms of unpaid work and barriers to training and progression.

Table 28. Respondents’ intention to continue working in the sector

Intention to continue in the sector	%
Yes, definitely	38%
Yes, probably	35%
Maybe. Undecided/I don't know	21%
Probably not	4%
Definitely not	2%





Those who indicate they might not continue (119 respondents) were asked to select their primary reason for considering leaving the sector. Lack of career progression is the most cited factor (18%), followed by higher salary available elsewhere (15%) and retirement (13%). Burnout or high stress levels are mentioned by 10%, a figure that should be read alongside the high rates of overwork and the mental health data discussed earlier in this report. Lack of stability or contract security is cited by 9%, reflecting the precariousness of freelance and fixed-term employment in the sector.

Table 29. Primary reasons for considering a career departure

Reason for potentially leaving	% [of those considering leaving]
Lack of career progression in the sector	18%
Higher salary/pay available elsewhere	15%
Retirement	13%
Burnout or high stress levels	10%
Lack of stability/contract security	9%
Workplace culture or environment	7%
Desire to move to another part of the film industry	6%
Better work-life balance in another industry	5%
Other personal reasons [e.g., care responsibilities]	4%
Desire to move to a different industry	4%
Lack of training or development opportunities	2%
Other	7%

Note: This question was introduced in 2026 and no comparable 2022 data is available. The question was shown only to those who selected 'Maybe', 'Probably not' or 'Definitely not' to the previous question.

To understand who are at risk of leaving the sector, we conducted further analysis, which reveals some interesting patterns.

**Table 30. Demographic and employment profile of respondents undecided about or intending to leave the sector**

Characteristics	Sub-Group	% Undecided or intend to leave
Gender	Women	29%
	Men	23%
Socio-economic background	High SEB	29%
	Intermediate SEB	34%
	Lower SEB	20%
Health condition, impairment or learning difference	At least one	31%
	None	26%
Experience in the sector	Fewer than five years	34%
	6-10 years	28%
	11-15 years	19%
	16+ years	24%
Hours worked in a typical week	0-15 hours	29%
	16-30 hours	25%
	31-48 hours	25%
	49+ hours	42%
Workplace location	London	22%
	South East	19%
	Scotland	20%
	Wales	42%
	Other UK regions	24-25%
Work/home location	Living and working in different regions (likely long-distance commuter)	33%
	Living and working in the same region	22%

Note: Due to small sample sizes, we are not able to report granular data on workplace locations in other UK regions.

Due to small sample sizes of sub-groups, we are not able to isolate or prove any reasons behind these patterns. However, when viewed alongside other findings, we can point to several likely reasonings at play:

- ▶ The high rate of indecision or intention to leave among those with fewer than five years of sector experience (34%) suggests that the precarious conditions of the sector – characterised by low pay and high rates of unpaid labour – are negatively affecting the confidence of early-career workers. This may lead to a critical leak in the sector's talent pipeline. The slight increase in the 16+ years cohort (24%) is expected due to natural retirement age.
- ▶ 42% of those working more than 49 hours a week are undecided about or considering an exit. This is highly likely to be linked to our earlier findings on overwork, where those working the most intensive schedules are also the least likely to be compensated with overtime pay or TOIL.
- ▶ The higher rate of indecision or intention to leave the sector among those working in Wales (42%) compared to the relative stability of Scotland (20%) or London (22%) warrants further investigation with regional partners.
- ▶ Similarly, the higher attrition risk among long-distance commuters (33%) points to the added financial and personal toll of regional job centralisation.



## Conclusion

The findings in this year's survey highlight an ageing workforce, persistent inequalities in socio economic background and ethnicity, and a sharp rise in volunteering that risks entrenching barriers to entry. Many respondents report overwork, limited management capacity, and dissatisfaction with pay, while barriers to training and career progression remain. At the same time, the sector continues to attract people who believe strongly in the cultural and social value of cinema and who want to build meaningful careers within it.

Addressing the disparities identified in this report requires coordinated action across the sector. Organisations need support to offer fairer pay, reduce reliance on unpaid labour, and create clearer, more accessible pathways into employment. Investment in management capacity and workforce wellbeing is essential if teams are to thrive. Training provision must be better funded and more closely aligned with emerging skills needs, including digital literacy and AI. And to widen participation, the sector must continue to challenge structural barriers – particularly those linked to socio economic background and ethnicity – that limit who can enter, progress and lead.

These challenges are not unique to the film exhibition sector but reflect wider pressures across the creative industries. The UK Government acknowledges this through its Creative Industries Sector Plan (2025), which sets out interventions to build a more resilient, skilled, and diverse workforce. This report adds to that evidence base, with clear implications for what targeted support will be needed in the film exhibition sector specifically.

The ICO will continue to work with partners across the UK to champion these priorities and to support exhibitors in building a more inclusive, sustainable and future ready workforce. We are grateful to everyone who contributed to this survey, and we hope the insights shared here help drive the change needed to ensure that independent cinema remains a place where people can work, grow and belong.

## Appendix

### Full ethnicity breakdown

Ethnic group	N
Asian / Asian British – Indian	0
Asian / Asian British – Chinese	*
Asian / Asian British – Pakistani	*
Asian / Asian British – Bangladeshi	0
Asian / Asian British – Other Asian	7
Black / African / Caribbean – African	4
Black / African / Caribbean – Caribbean	*
Black / African / Caribbean – Other Black	*
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	*
Mixed – White and Black African	*
Mixed – White and Asian	6
Mixed – Other Mixed or Multiple	11
White – English/Welsh/Scottish/N.Irish/British	314
White – Irish	17
White – Gypsy or Irish Traveller	*
White – Roma	0
White – Other White	48
Other – Arab	*
Prefer not to say	9
Self-described	7

### Full socio-economic background breakdown

Occupation group	%
Modern professional and traditional professional occupations (e.g. teacher, nurse, solicitor, engineer)	37%
Senior, middle or junior managers or administrators (e.g. finance manager, retail manager)	18%
Routine, semi-routine manual and service occupations (e.g. postal worker, catering assistant, bar staff)	16%
Technical and craft occupations (e.g. motor mechanic, electrician, plumber)	11%
Clerical and intermediate occupations (e.g. secretary, call centre agent, nursery nurse)	8%
Small business owners [<25 employees]	5%
Long-term unemployed (Jobseeker's Allowance for more than a year)	3%
Other (retired, question not applicable, don't know)	3%

### Nationality

89% of respondents identified with a British Isles nationality (British, English, Northern Irish, Scottish, Welsh or Cornish), with a further 2% holding a dual nationality that included a British Isles identity. 9% held another nationality. These figures point to a predominantly home-nation workforce, consistent with the geographic distribution of the sector.

### Marital status

42% of respondents were married or in a civil partnership – an increase from the 36% recorded in 2022. This is broadly consistent with the ageing of the sample, given that those who are married or in a civil partnership tend to be older.

### Full breakdown of training undertaken

Training subject area	N
No training	138
AI	20
Audience development	128
Customer service	57
Data analysis	51
Diversity and inclusion accessibility/disability awareness/sign language	191
Environmental sustainability	79
Finance	33
First aid	112
Fundraising and sponsorship	48
GDPR and data protection	72
Governance	20
Graphic design	15
Health and safety	112
Hospitality	22
IT	25
Leadership	48
Marketing and communications	72
More general HR	23
People management	47
Premises management	16
Programming creation	78
Project management	38
Projection/technical	51
Risk management	36
Safeguarding	69
Other [please describe]	18

### Full breakdown of personal training priority areas by preferred method of delivery

	Networking	Opportunities within my current role	Having examples of best practices	Mentoring	Formal training (in-person)	Formal training (online)	Recognised qualification
AI	5	7	23	2	13	15	6
Audience development	9	40	52	16	34	23	8
Customer service	2	6	12	4	4	2	3
Data analysis	1	18	6	5	19	17	9
Diversity and inclusion accessibility/ disability awareness/sign language	2	18	25	4	26	19	16
Environmental sustainability	1	11	17	4	12	6	7
Finance	0	5	9	3	14	11	7
First aid	0	2	1	0	12	6	1
Fundraising and sponsorship	9	16	14	8	18	16	9
GDPR and data protection	2	2	2	1	2	5	1
Governance	1	4	3	2	9	3	0
Graphic design	2	3	4	2	7	13	5
Health and safety	0	1	4	0	6	1	3
Hospitality	0	2	0	1	1	0	0
IT	0	2	4	1	4	4	3
Leadership	4	13	1	20	20	4	10
Marketing and communications	6	10	14	4	12	18	5
More general HR	0	2	0	0	3	5	4
People management	0	7	3	5	16	7	3
Premises management	0	6	1	0	8	1	3
Programming creation	11	37	13	18	15	17	23
Project management	0	9	7	7	13	4	12
Projection/technical	3	13	7	8	31	7	12
Risk management	0	2	3	0	4	2	1
Safeguarding	0	0	2	0	1	4	1

### Full breakdown of sector-wide training priority areas by preferred method of delivery

	Networking	Opportunities within my current role	Having examples of best practices	Mentoring	Formal training (in-person)	Formal training (online)	Recognised qualification
AI	6	7	34	3	20	22	5
Audience development	12	38	40	14	37	31	11
Customer service	7	5	11	4	19	6	3
Data analysis	4	8	7	3	18	15	6
Diversity and inclusion accessibility/ disability awareness/sign language	4	18	43	6	56	20	17
Environmental sustainability	4	6	31	2	29	21	12
Finance	2	11	10	5	10	6	3
First aid	0	1	0	0	3	3	0
Fundraising and sponsorship	12	10	16	13	29	25	7
GDPR and data protection	0	0	1	1	7	2	0
Governance	0	2	7	0	9	3	2
Graphic design	3	2	3	0	4	3	1
Health and safety	0	1	0	3	5	0	3
Hospitality	0	0	4	1	4	3	0
IT	4	0	2	0	4	2	0
Leadership	1	5	7	12	14	7	6
Marketing and communications	3	10	9	5	16	17	10
More general HR	0	2	3	0	9	2	5
People management	1	7	4	4	16	8	10
Premises management	0	0	4	0	1	3	1
Programming creation	6	11	6	6	13	11	4
Project management	1	7	3	4	7	6	3
Projection/technical	1	8	4	4	14	7	6
Risk management	1	3	2	2	3	4	1
Safeguarding	2	1	2	1	5	6	0

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