

CIISA

Unlocking Growth Through Accountability

June 2025



CIISA

The Creative Industries
Independent Standards Authority
Independent. Without fear or favour.

Contents

Foreword	4
Introduction	5
Context	6
A perfect storm of invisibility	6
The growth gap: what is on the table economically	7
The role of CIISA: infrastructure for positive change	8
Approach	9
Methodology	9
Key findings	11
Cost of workplace conflict in the creative industries	11
The consequences of these costs to UK economic growth	12
Next steps	13

Unlocking Growth Through Accountability

**Tackling the Cost of Workplace Conflict
in the UK's Creative Industries**



Foreword

We commissioned this landmark report looking into the cost of workplace conflict within the UK's creative industries because, quite simply, before now this insight did not exist. Empowering and safeguarding the workforce is the bedrock of any credible growth strategy and this is a pivotal moment in which to take stock of every opportunity which can help drive this. Positive workplace culture is economic infrastructure that supports growth.

Despite being one of the most celebrated aspects of British socio-economic power, our creative industries are plagued by underreported workplace conflict, especially among freelancers and self-employed workers. Hidden within this are countless harrowing personal experiences of incredible people in our creative industries who strive to bring unique talent, foster the development of intellectual property and drive innovation. Alongside this, what has also been invisible thus far is the significant collective economic impact of unsafe working environments – and the potential for further growth which could be realised through cultural reform and accountability.

This report sets out key findings of new independent economic modelling and analysis, drawing on insights from former UK Government specialists as well as expertise from across the UK's cultural and creative industries. It finds that there is clear opportunity, with the potential for up to 1.4% additional output from the UK's creative industries annually yet to be realised. Without proactive intervention in workplace conflict, the current annual cost of £1.8bn of lost value will continue to result in a 5% average reduction in productivity for each of the 700,000 creative industry professionals who are affected by workplace conflict.

There is irreversible public concern regarding the prevalence of harm within the UK's creative industries – and we are rising to this leadership challenge of collectively making positive change. Although many organisations are making improvements to working practices, the Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority (CIISA) was established specifically to accelerate and strengthen effective interventions as well as address significant gaps in preventing and proactively tackling these important issues. Our role in setting and embedding standards and providing a safe confidential independent place to seek advice and report behaviours of concern, as well as provide mediation, dispute resolution and arbitration, are essential enabling infrastructure to ensure that our talented workforce are safe.

Working together, we can unlock the full potential of our deeply cherished and internationally admired creative industries – key to this is safe, positive working environments where creativity can do what it does best – innovate, transform lives, be an economic powerhouse and continuously redefine our place in the world.

Baroness Helena Kennedy KC
Chair, CIISA

Jen Smith
CEO, CIISA



Introduction

The UK's creative industries are a vital part of the national economy, and our international impact, yet their full potential remains unrealised in part due to the systemic and under-addressed issue of workplace conflict¹. There are clear indications that bullying and harassment, including behaviour of a discriminatory nature in the creative industries continue to affect many who work in the sector² — particularly the self-employed, including freelancers³, who make up a significant proportion of the UK's creative industries workforce.

Yet until now the economic cost has been obscured by a profound lack of comprehensive data. CIISA commissioned this report as a critical milestone from which to accelerate the scale of commitment and action needed to tackle these issues in the UK's creative industries. This report introduces new independent economic modelling and analysis that estimates the cost of workplace conflict in the UK's creative industries, and quantifies the “growth gap”: Gross Value Added (GVA) output that could be unlocked through effective interventions and cultural reform when it comes to workplace conflict. These figures, whilst indicative and conservative, point to a significant and previously hidden economic opportunity — which to realise, is contingent on coordinated action.

1 In this report, workplace conflict is defined as being humiliated or undermined at work; heated arguments, being shouted at or verbally abused; discrimination by reasons of sex, race, disability, age; intimidation; sexual harassment or assault; physical threat or assault. This is the CIPD survey definition which informed the ACAS (2021) study: see the methodology section of this report.

2 Surveys in various parts of the UK's creative industries clearly indicate there are issues with bullying and harassment, including behaviour of a discriminatory nature. For example, the [Film & TV Charity's 2024 Looking Glass survey](#) found 41% of respondents working across screen in the UK had experienced or witnesses bullying or harassment at work.

3 From here on, self-employed is used and includes freelancers.



Context

A Perfect Storm of Invisibility

The absence of comprehensive data on workplace conflict across the whole of the workforce in the UK's creative industries can be understood as the result of interlocking structural and cultural barriers, including:

- **A dynamic and complex creative ecosystem based on workforce structures** which, in comparison to other industries, are dominated by micro-businesses and self-employed workers who are generally excluded from most standard labour market surveys as well as human resources (HR) processes in many organisations;
- **Informal and opaque work cultures**, where among other things, reputation-based recruitment can discourage reporting of misconduct for fear of reputational damage and career harm e.g., being frozen out of future work opportunities;
- **Use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs)** and confidential settlements which can hide the true extent of workplace conflict, contribute to the existing lack of reliable data about the breadth of harmful behaviour and inhibit institutional learning;
- **Inconsistent oversight mechanisms** and the absence of centralised governance, contributing to siloed approaches within a diverse creative ecosystem;
- **Ethical considerations in research**, particularly around involving individuals in vulnerable and/or precarious positions who experience conflict in the workplace; and
- **Institutional underinvestment**, regarding comprehensive centralised labour market data, including on wellbeing and workplace culture for self-employed people; and
- **Cultural practices in some areas which normalise harm**, particularly in high-pressure and/or hierarchical creative environments.

Together, these dynamics are contributing to underreporting, under-analysis, and insufficient interventions on workplace conflict. The impacts ripple across the sector: from talent loss and presenteeism, to compromised productivity and loss of experience within the workforce, to declining mental health and missed opportunities for innovation. Yet much of these costs have remained largely unmeasured until now.



The Growth Gap: What Is On the Table Economically

Workplace conflict erodes individual wellbeing and increases personal financial risk - it also undermines productivity, innovation and long-term sustainability of the UK's creative industries. Economic impacts include:

- **Attrition of skilled people**, with many choosing to take extended breaks or leave the creative industries completely, leading to costly turnover and lost experience and institutional knowledge;
- **Compromised productivity**, including through presenteeism and reduced performance, where individuals remain in roles but underperform due to distraction, stress, burnout, or unresolved interpersonal conflict;
- **Exclusion of marginalised voices**, weakening diversity, equity, inclusion, and the breadth of who works within the sector and what is created; and
- **Barriers to collaboration and trust**, impeding innovation and creative risk-taking.

Positive workplace culture is not only a moral and cultural imperative. The economic modelling presented here begins to translate some of the impacts of workplace conflict into financial terms, and when considered at scale across the creative industries, findings underscore that addressing these issues is a material opportunity for even greater economic contribution. A more accountable, psychologically safe creative sector in the UK would not only help prevent harm; it would enable greater productivity, support suppressed talent, and facilitate more sustainable growth.



The role of CIISA: infrastructure for positive change

Unlike other sectors, the UK's creative industries lacked a sector-wide oversight body for professional standards and dispute resolution until the establishment of the CIISA, which came into operation in 2024, marking a pivotal step toward enabling long-term reform in support of the UK's creative industries, and their impact both domestically and abroad.

CIISA is an independent body which, while still being built, will ultimately be equipped to:

- **Provide advice and respond to reports of behaviours of concern**, as a safe confidential independent body, building trust;
- **Establish industry-wide data systems**, enabling the first consistent collection and analysis of workplace conflict data across the creative ecosystem;
- **Generate new insight**, through the production and sharing of regular reports on what is happening within workplace conflict in the creative sector;
- Include a **focus on the self-employed** ensuring their experiences are prioritised and not overlooked;
- **Challenge culture of silence** where it exists through commitment to pattern recognition even in confidential cases;
- **Provide education and standard setting**, shifting focus to prevention; and
- **Foster sector-wide accountability**, facilitating collaboration and learning across historically fragmented domains.

CIISA is uniquely positioned to serve as both a safety net and a catalyst for improvement: surfacing hidden harms while shaping better conditions for industry-wide cultural change. Its potential, however, hinges on meaningful implementation, adequate funding, and strong leadership from the UK's creative industries alongside the support of the UK Government.

Now in its second year, CIISA is building on the strong design foundations created in 2024 to mark a transition from vision to reality. Following the successful launch of CIISA's first ever set of cross-industry Standards in early 2025, CIISA began work with trailblazer organisations across screen, music, and theatre to co-develop practical, sector-specific resources to help embed Standards into everyday practice. CIISA intends to finalise and launch a first suite of services by the end of 2025-26, beginning with a flagship Reporting Service before phasing in other vital services, such as dispute resolutions and investigations, over the next two years. Designed in close consultation with future users and key stakeholders, this initial service will provide a trusted, independent route for raising concerns, marking a major milestone in CIISA's mission to create safer workplaces. This will ensure CIISA is equipped to serve every corner of the UK's creative industries—now and into the future.



Approach

The creative industries, as defined by the UK Government's Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), generated £124 billion⁴ in GVA and supported over 2.4 million⁵ jobs (including employees and self-employed) in 2023, accounting for 5% of the UK's GVA and 7% of total employment. Self-employed people account for 28% of all jobs in the UK's creative industries.

These figures include the IT, software, and computer services sector (referred to as 'IT' hereafter), which accounts for 43% of employment in DCMS-defined creative industries, with 11% of people self-employed. It is worth noting that aspects of the creative industries include varied elements with considerable differences, particularly regarding IT. IT is the highest paying aspect of the UK's creative industries, with a median annual gross pay of £49,500 in 2024 – well above the whole-economy average.

By contrast, for example, music, performing and visual arts, the second largest element of the creative industries by employment (13% of the total), has the highest proportion of self-employed people at 66% of the UK's creative industries on the whole. This element of the creative sector is also the lowest paying aspect of the UK's creative industries on average, with a median annual gross pay of £27,409 in 2024. In light of these differences, this report provides both industry-wide estimates and adjusted estimates that exclude the IT element.

Without IT, the UK's creative industries generated approximately £75 billion of GVA and nearly 1.4 million jobs in 2023, accounting for 3% of the UK's GVA and 4% of total employment. 41% of the people in these jobs are self-employed, more than 2.5 times higher than the share of self-employed people in the workforce across the whole economy. This shows the crucial role of the self-employed in the UK's creative industries.

Methodology

This report contains brand new research, tailoring methodology previously developed by Advisory, Conciliation, and Arbitration Service (ACAS) in 2021.⁶ The report also draws from new modelling exploring what is happening within the UK's creative industries. New findings were identified through expansion of the ACAS approach so that it includes the self-employed, who make up a significant portion of the UK's creative industries. Analysis also incorporated expert judgement, a standard approach in UK Government research where there is an absence of relevant data and/or coverage is limited, as is particularly the case in respect of the self-employed in the UK's creative industries. The diversity and breadth of the creative ecosystem reinforces the importance of expert judgement in appropriately tailoring the approach and results of this study into the costs of workplace conflict across the creative industries. In this new work, a relatively conservative

4 DCMS (2025), [DCMS Economic Estimates: Annual GVA 2023 \(provisional\) - data tables](#)

5 DCMS (2025), [Economic Estimates: Employment October 2023 to September 2024 for DCMS Sectors](#)

6 ACAS (May 2021), [Estimating the costs of workplace conflict](#)



approach to modelling has been adopted. Findings include a range of costs based on a sensitivity analysis⁷ where official data is not available and expert judgement has been used, with a central estimate identified.

The previous ACAS study estimated the costs of workplace conflict to UK organisations based on:

- the average cost of each channel by which costs are felt, per person affected. These costs were calibrated to reflect the specific circumstances of employees and self-employed people; and
- the number of employees and self-employed affected.

In the new modelling informing this report, it has been assumed that 25% of all employees in the creative industries experience conflict at work (based on the latest Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) survey that underpinned the ACAS study), and 38% of self-employed people experience conflict at work (based on the same CIPD survey for individuals on atypical contracts)⁸.

In the UK's creative industries, the share of self-employed workers is 14 percentage points higher than the economy-wide average, accounting for 28% of the employed population; when excluding the IT aspect, the share of self-employed workers is 26 percentage points higher at 41% of people in work⁹. Building on the ACAS study, the methodology for this new modelling has been adjusted specifically to reflect the distinct characteristics of self-employed workers.

In this new work leading to the findings of this report, ACAS-consistent categories have been used to estimate costs associated with the self-employed, although the mechanisms by which costs are felt in respect of this group differ considerably when it comes to, for example, costs from resignation, dismissal and formal procedures for employees which are likely to manifest themselves in the self-employed leaving, forgoing work entirely or through informal management of workplace conflict. Estimates within these new findings therefore focus on providing a reasonable overall estimate of the costs with respect to the self-employed rather than their allocation across ACAS categories.

A critical missing aspect of this analysis is the ability to drill down into race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, and other factors. The data available to carry out this initial estimate of the cost of workplace conflict in the creative industries was not sufficiently granular to explore these issues. It is considered to be critically important to resolve this data gap within the UK's creative industries, to granularity, for an important future extension of this analysis. Notably, in 2025 69% of UK workers from ethnic minorities report experiencing discrimination in the workplace or during the hiring process, while roughly twice as many female workers report experiencing sexism at work compared to male workers.¹⁰

7 The sensitivity analysis assumes that costs per individual affected can be 20% higher or lower than the central estimate.

8 CIPD (2024), Good Work Index 2024: Survey report provided the basis for these figures and is consistent with expert views used in this research that the self-employed are more likely to experience conflict at work because of potentially more precarious work conditions, the temporary nature of contracts, etc.

9 DCMS (Apr 2025), [Employment in the DCMS sectors: October 2023 to September 2024](#)

10 CIPHR (2025), [Workplace discrimination statistics in 2025 - Discrimination at work](#)



Key findings

Cost of workplace conflict in the creative industries

This new analysis indicates that of people working in areas defined through the UK Government's Department of Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) creative industries, 700,000 (30%) of individuals experience conflict at work. Of those in the UK's creative industries who experience workplace conflict, 60% are employees and 40% are self-employed.

Overall, this new modelling identifies that this workplace conflict comes at a cost of between £1.4 and £2.2 billion a year, with a central estimate of £1.8 billion a year. Of this, £1.2 billion (two thirds) of this cost is attributed to employees and £0.6 billion (one third) of this cost to those who are self-employed.

When considering the UK's creative industries without IT, estimates indicate that 400,000 individuals at work are affected by workplace conflict each year, of which over half of these individuals are self-employed. The cost of workplace conflict remains significant at between £0.8 to £1.2 billion a year, with a central estimate of £1.0 billion a year, with half of this cost each attributed to employees and the self-employed.

Within this overall cost figure, the largest driver of the cost of workplace conflict in the creative industries relates to people leaving work earlier or being away from work for longer periods of time. For employees, this is due to resignations and disciplinary dismissals. Self-employed workers, by comparison, are unlikely to resign or face disciplinary dismissal in the same way employees do, particularly where short-term contracts are typical. Instead, people may choose to end their contracts early, or see out the duration of a contract but take longer periods away from work before seeking the next contract, or may exit the creative industries entirely. Individuals may also experience the risk of sometimes not getting future work from certain employers as a result of efforts to address workplace conflict.

Estimates indicate that across the UK's creative industries the cost of people leaving or forgoing work due to workplace conflict are between £1.1 billion and £1.7 billion; when considering without IT, this cost remains significant at between £0.6 to £0.9 billion.

Other relevant costs amount to between £0.3 billion and £0.5 billion (£0.2 to £0.3 billion excluding IT), and include:

- The cost of disciplinary cases, which primarily affects employees. Expert judgement in this research identified that self-employed workers are less likely to be subject to formal disciplinary procedures due to the lower prevalence of HR capacity for self-employed workers, also reflecting the fact that, within the UK's creative industries, the majority of organisations have less than 10 employees, and there are fewer large employers within the sector (for example, less than 7% of creative industry businesses – and less than 5% cultural businesses – have more than 10



employees, relative to 11% respectively economy-wide)¹¹. In the new research informing this report, the cost equivalent of disciplinary cases for the self-employed is captured in the costs of informal resolution.

- The cost of sickness absence is captured where it affects employees. Expert judgement in this research identified that the self-employed are less likely to take leave of sickness absence due to conflict and, instead, are more likely to endure workplace conflict through to the end of a contract, and when having done this, are likely to take longer periods away from work, between contracts to recover. This cost for self-employed people is captured in the cost of leaving work.
- The cost of litigation can affect both self-employed people and employees but is likely to be materially higher for the self-employed, partly because there are fewer large employers where costs are spread more thinly and partly due to the nature of workplace conflict proceeding to litigation.
- The costs of employee grievances have also been considered, which are likely more prevalent for employees, and the cost of presenteeism, which cuts across both employees and the self-employed.

The consequences of these costs to UK economic growth

For the whole of the UK's creative industries, the average productivity cost of workplace conflict is £2,100 to £3,300 per individual affected, which presents as an average output loss of 5% per individual affected. This cost is marginally smaller when excluding IT, with average £2,000 to £3,000 per employee per year and still with an average output loss of 5% per individual affected.

In aggregate, the central estimate of the £1.8 billion cost of workplace conflict in the UK's creative industries is 1.4% of output in the sector and 0.07% of output across the whole UK economy. When considering the creative industries without IT, the £1 billion cost of workplace conflict in the creative industries is 1.3% of output in the sector and 0.04% of output across the whole UK economy.

To consider these figures in context, the UK Government expects reforms to planning rules to boost housebuilding to add 0.2% to GDP in five years' time¹².

The existing 1.4% growth gap in the UK's creative industries is not small. While it is not possible to fully eradicate workplace conflict, successfully addressing the issue of workplace conflict in the UK's creative industries could make significant gains in closing this gap.

¹¹ DCMS (2024), [DCMS economic estimates: Business demographics, 2024](#)

¹² OBR (March 2025), Economic and fiscal outlook



Next Steps

When fully built, CIISA will provide an independent safe space where individuals can report experiences of harmful behaviours without fear of repercussion, knowing that their concerns will be taken seriously. CIISA represents the agreed steps that leaders, individuals, and organisations from across the creative industries have asked for – and committed to taking – to ensure the collectively upholding and improving of standards of behaviour through independent accountability and learning.

By setting Standards and by supporting organisations to embed them, CIISA is positively striding forward in underpinning healthy working environments for the UK's creative industries, in aid of the creative sector's growth and resilience. It is essential for everyone across the UK's creative industries – who have come together to agree on the expectations set out in the Standards – to embed and live out the Standards day in, day out to secure safer, more productive working environments for the UK's talented workforce.

CIISA is supported by responsible organisations who are committed to CIISA for the long term, but this support is not yet universal. Despite seeing public displays of goodwill, words must be translated into long-term commitments to funding CIISA. The UK has the opportunity to lead the way in embedding cultural change and better workplaces for the UK's creative industries workforce that will continue to drive growth, but real action needs to be taken. CIISA offers the practical solution that leaders, individuals and organisations across the sector have asked for, and now is the time for that to be backed with real, long-term financial commitments.

UK Parliament's Culture, Media & Sport Committee has made clear recommendations in this respect, including that all parts of the UK's creative industries under CIISA's remit should commit to unconditional, long-term funding within six months; that for CIISA to operate effectively, the UK's creative industries must support CIISA financially and ideologically to be a fundamental part of operating in the UK; and that the UK Government must send a strong message that it is prepared to use all means at its disposal to compel the UK's creative industries to tackle workplace conflict more effectively¹³. UK Parliament's Women and Equalities Committee has also backed the establishment and future of CIISA, noting that future success depends on sustainable funding and a supportive legal framework, calling on the UK Government to provide support.¹⁴

Following the completion of this new research, presenting estimates specific to the UK's creative industries for the first time, CIISA will convene sector leaders on these next steps, including seeking to continue to expand this important economic research so that there are clear, meaningful data and insight through which to assess progress within the UK's creative industries on closing the existing economic gap for a more sustainable future.

It is in the best interests of the people working in the UK's creative industries, and the wider economy, to tackle bullying and harassment, including behaviour of a discriminatory nature through building positive workplace culture as economic infrastructure.

¹³ UK Parliament Culture, Media & Sport Committee (2025), [British film and high-end television report](#)

¹⁴ UK Parliament Women & Equalities Committee (2025), [Misogyny in Music On Repeat](#)



CONTACT DETAILS

info@ciisa.org.uk

Registered address:

22 Wycombe End, Beaconsfield,
Buckinghamshire,
HP9 1NB, United Kingdom



CIISA

The Creative Industries
Independent Standards Authority
Independent. Without fear or favour.