



Trailblazing Programme

Report and Evaluation
July 2026

Contents

1. Summary	1
2. Introduction	4
3. Methodology	7
4. Programme Findings	11
5. Conclusions and next steps	25
6. Final words	28

Foreword



This is a proud moment for CIISA as we celebrate the work that has been done with our 12 Trailblazing partners and share insights and learnings that have emerged from the programme.

We partnered a range of different organisations, from orchestras to broadcasters, postproduction houses to iconic public venues, to ensure that CIISA's work is scalable and valuable across the rich and complex ecology of the creative industries.

I want to extend our gratitude to colleagues in each of these organisations for their help and support in developing this important element of CIISA's work. Our Trailblazers have been open and accessible in their approach, committed and collaborative in their partnership, and hugely generous with their time and expertise. It is their practical application of the CIISA Standards across the breadth

of their work that has allowed us to test the Standards 'on the ground'. From this work we have been able to create materials that will benefit organisations large and small across the creative sector.

I also want to acknowledge the work of my colleague, Amelia Knott who led this programme for CIISA and authored this important report, and Niyi Akeju who worked with Amelia and provided valuable support.

A key part of CIISA's role is to be a generous giver of knowledge, adding value to the creative sector we love. The Trailblazing programme has provided an important basis for our work to embed consistent standards of practice and behaviour across the creative industries, and we look forward to forging more fruitful partnerships as we progress in this aim.

Jen Smith, CEO of CIISA

1.Summary

The Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority (CIISA) has been established to drive lasting cultural change across the UK's creative industries and help prevent and tackle bullying and harassment, including discriminatory behaviour. Co-developed by those working in the industry, the CIISA Standards provide a shared framework for safer, more inclusive and more accountable working environments across the creative sector. Published in February 2025, the CIISA Standards set out clear expectations across four core areas:

- Safe working environments
- Inclusive working environments
- Open and accountable reporting mechanisms
- Responsive learning culture

To ensure the Standards could be translated effectively into practice, CIISA launched a Trailblazing programme to test implementation in real-world creative industry settings. Between June 2025 and April 2026, CIISA partnered with 12 organisations spanning different sectors, scales and ways of working across the creative industries.

The programme was built on openness, collaboration and shared learning. CIISA is hugely grateful to its Trailblazing partners, who engaged with honesty and commitment throughout the process. Their willingness to reflect openly on both strengths and challenges has helped shape the next phase of CIISA's work and generated valuable insight for the wider sector.

This report captures the headline findings from the Trailblazing programme: what worked, where challenges emerged and what the creative industries need next to embed lasting cultural change. These headlines only begin to reflect the depth of insight and experience generated through the programme, but the overarching conclusion is clear: the CIISA Standards work and can make a meaningful difference to workplace culture across the creative industries.

The Trailblazing programme demonstrated that the CIISA Standards are practical and achievable across a wide range of creative industry environments. Organisations at different stages of maturity used the Standards to strengthen culture, improve accountability and identify practical steps towards safer and more inclusive working environments.

The programme also demonstrated the value of CIISA's approach. Participants consistently described the process as supportive and solutions focused. CIISA created a trusted space in which organisations could speak honestly about challenges, test ideas openly and build confidence in addressing complex cultural issues. In doing so, CIISA demonstrated its value as a trusted partner, working alongside organisations to navigate difficult conversations and translate their objectives into meaningful action.

For many organisations, the programme created opportunities for reflection and candour within fast-paced creative environments. It enabled participants to move beyond policy, embedding conversations about their organisational culture more deeply into everyday practice.

“The CIISA Standards provided a framework to start conversations and enabled people to question behaviours that have become tolerated over time.”

Key findings from the Programme

Through our evaluation of the programme, feedback from Trailblazing partners highlighted that:

- The CIISA Standards provide a **credible and workable framework for organisations of all sizes** and sectors.
- **Practical, tailored support helps organisations translate the Standards** into meaningful day-to-day action.
- **Flexible and bespoke approaches deliver the strongest outcomes** but require sustained investment of time and resource.
- Organisations need **additional support to navigate behavioural “grey areas”** where expectations and boundaries can be unclear.
- Some organisations would benefit from **stronger systems for monitoring progress**, ensuring accountability and embedding responsive learning cultures.
- **Peer learning is a powerful driver of progress**, enabling organisations to share challenges, insight and good practice across sectors.
- The programme reinforced **the significant value of CIISA as an independent, trusted body** providing leadership, consistency and practical support for industry-wide change.

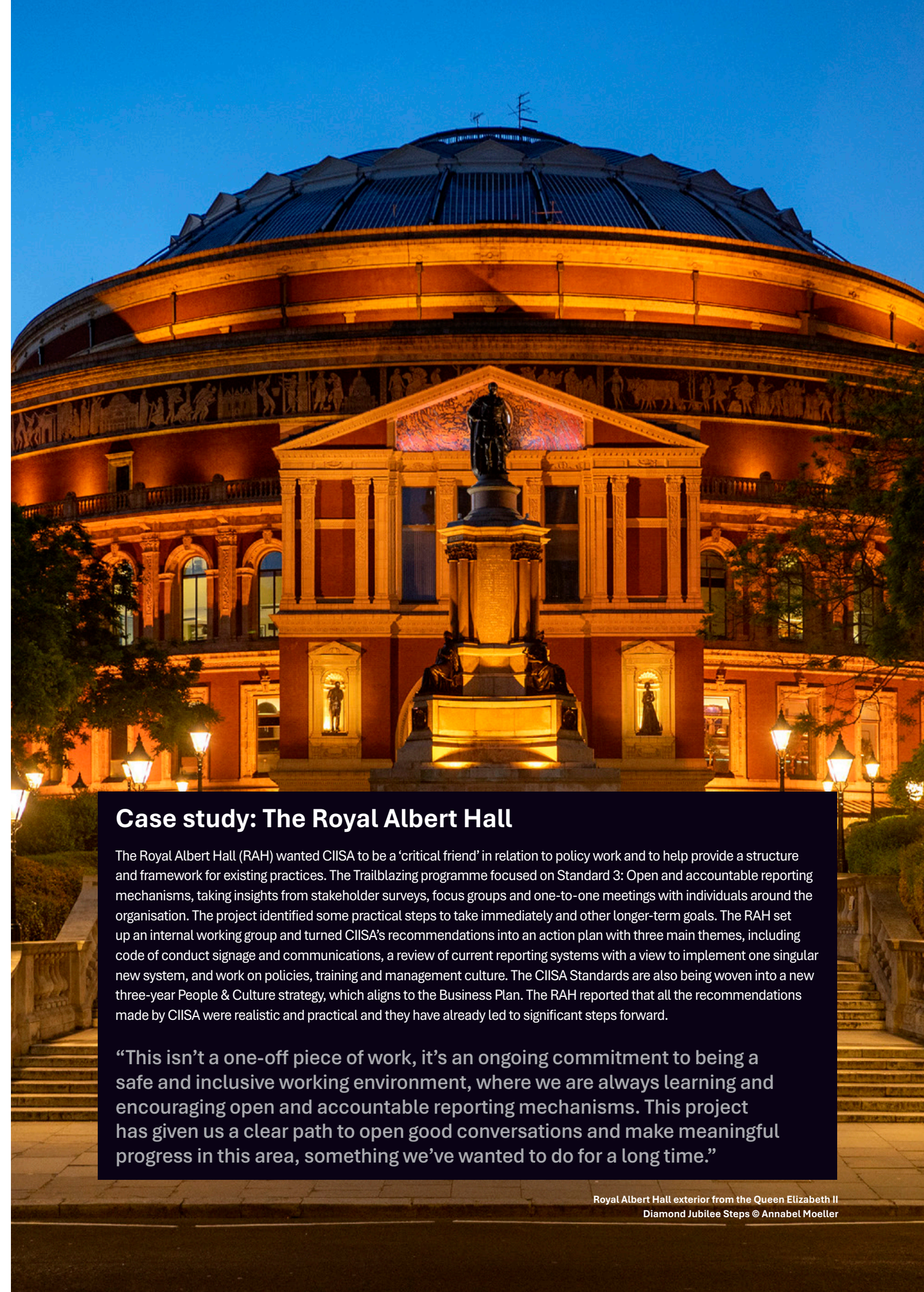
The Trailblazing programme reinforced that lasting cultural change cannot be achieved through policies and codes of conduct alone. It is built through practical action, openness, trust, shared learning and a willingness to challenge established norms and behaviours.

What happens next

Building on the insights from Trailblazing, we are now publishing sector-specific guidance, practical templates and implementation tools, alongside establishing peer learning networks and opportunities for engagement within and across sectors, with further resources to be developed as we grow.

Trailblazers also provided us with their thoughts on what further guidance and support they would like to see from CIISA as we embed our Professional Standards service, which will form the basis of our guidance and future training programme.

Together, these next steps provide CIISA with the clearest path on how best to support organisations across the creative industries to continue embedding the Standards from an industry expectation into everyday practice.



Case study: The Royal Albert Hall

The Royal Albert Hall (RAH) wanted CIISA to be a ‘critical friend’ in relation to policy work and to help provide a structure and framework for existing practices. The Trailblazing programme focused on Standard 3: Open and accountable reporting mechanisms, taking insights from stakeholder surveys, focus groups and one-to-one meetings with individuals around the organisation. The project identified some practical steps to take immediately and other longer-term goals. The RAH set up an internal working group and turned CIISA’s recommendations into an action plan with three main themes, including code of conduct signage and communications, a review of current reporting systems with a view to implement one singular new system, and work on policies, training and management culture. The CIISA Standards are also being woven into a new three-year People & Culture strategy, which aligns to the Business Plan. The RAH reported that all the recommendations made by CIISA were realistic and practical and they have already led to significant steps forward.

“This isn’t a one-off piece of work, it’s an ongoing commitment to being a safe and inclusive working environment, where we are always learning and encouraging open and accountable reporting mechanisms. This project has given us a clear path to open good conversations and make meaningful progress in this area, something we’ve wanted to do for a long time.”

Royal Albert Hall exterior from the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Steps © Annabel Moeller

2. Introduction to the Programme

Following publication of the CIISA Standards in February 2025, we launched our Trailblazing programme to understand how the Standards could be implemented effectively across real-world creative industry settings, and what organisations need to embed lasting cultural change in practice.

The programme brought together organisations of different sizes from across a wide range of sectors to test implementation of the Standards and inform the development of future guidance, tools and support. It was underpinned by three core objectives:

- To gauge **what resources will best assist organisations** to assess whether they meet the CIISA Standards, and what practical actions are needed for continuous improvement
- To understand **what type of support enables organisations to embed the Standards** effectively within the realities of creative industry working environments
- To identify **what difference the CIISA Standards can make to workplace culture**, behaviour and accountability when they are put into practice

Over a nine-month period, the project team delivered **14 projects with 12 organisations**¹ across the

creative industries. Together, these projects explored how the Standards could become more than “words on a page” and instead be embedded meaningfully within organisations, productions, projects and events to help create safer, more inclusive and more accountable working environments.

The programme was intentionally collaborative and adaptive. CIISA worked alongside organisations to understand their individual contexts, challenges and priorities, creating space for open discussion, honest reflection and practical problem-solving. This approach enabled organisations to test ideas, challenge assumptions and identify achievable actions for change.

While the programme could not capture every type of organisation or working environment across the creative industries, CIISA sought to ensure the Trailblazing cohort reflected as broad a cross-section as possible. This included representation across film, TV, music and theatre/live performance; different organisational sizes and levels of maturity - and national and regional representation across the UK.

The programme generated substantial insight into both the opportunities and challenges of embedding the CIISA Standards in practice. Most importantly, it demonstrated that organisations

across the creative industries are willing to engage openly with these issues and that, with the right support, meaningful cultural change is both possible and achievable.

The table below lists the individual projects involved in the Trailblazing programme. We remain deeply grateful to all the organisations, leaders, employees and freelancers who invested their time, insight and experience so generously.

“CIISA has become a shorthand for discussions on culture”

Our Trailblazing Partners

	Sector	Type	Location
BBC / BBC Studios (Three projects)	TV, Music	TV and radio broadcaster, unscripted production, outside broadcast, live broadcast	Salford, London; Italy
Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society	Theatre	Comedy, theatre, street performance, festival, many venues	Edinburgh, Scotland
Hallé Concerts Society	Music	Orchestra, volunteer ensembles	Manchester
Home Post Production	Film, TV	Post-production facility	Manchester
MultiStory Media (Part of ITV Studios)	TV	Broadcaster, unscripted production, live broadcast	London
Metropolis Studios	Music	Recording studio	London
Royal Albert Hall	Theatre, Music	Theatre, live performance and live music venue	London
Royal Shakespeare Company	Theatre	Venue(s), touring theatre, permanent staff and freelancers	Stratford
Sadler’s Wells	Theatre	Dance and theatre, four venues, education and workshops	London
Sky Studios	TV	Broadcaster, scripted and unscripted production slate	London
Two Cities Television	TV	Production company, end-to-end on scripted production	Belfast, Northern Ireland
Wales Millennium Centre	Theatre, Music	Theatre, live performance and live music venue	Cardiff, Wales

¹ We worked with the BBC across three different projects within the organisation

Case Study: The Royal Shakespeare Company

The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) started from a place of relative maturity in its approach and wanted to work with CIISA to hone language and practice, do a sense-check across the organisation and open up conversations with different stakeholders, particularly in terms of understanding what artists need in terms of support. CIISA supported the RSC to work through the assessment toolkits, survey the experience of freelancers and engage a range of permanent and freelance colleagues through focus groups. The approach led to a detailed action plan and roadmap that integrated CIISA recommendations into wider organisational initiatives to ensure alignment with the organisation's long-term culture and people strategy. The RSC team reported that the Trailblazing programme confirmed many things they already knew but gave them the push needed to sharpen focus and fast track work in key areas. This included immediate actions to improve the experience of freelancers via induction, onboarding and contracting.

“CIISA has helped us sharpen our priorities and accelerate action.”

3. Methodology

The Trailblazing programme followed six key stages designed to help organisations assess, test and embed the CIISA Standards in practice:

- **Kick-off discussions** to understand organisational priorities, challenges and objectives
- **Assessment** of the organisation's current position against the Standards
- **Action planning** to identify practical and achievable next steps
- **Implementation** of tailored support, including workshops, guidance and practical tools
- **Monitoring and review** of what worked in practice and where further support was needed
- **Reporting and learning** to capture insight and inform future CIISA guidance and resources

“CIISA's ongoing support helped to frame issues and make change feel possible”

Additional engagement during the Programme

Alongside the core programme, Trailblazing organisations participated in peer learning sessions to share experiences, approaches and challenges. These sessions reinforced the value of cross-sector collaboration and shared learning in driving cultural change across the creative industries.

These confidential online sessions operated as small communities of practice, bringing together participants from different organisations to exchange insight, problem-solve collectively and access specialist expertise where needed. Each session lasted a maximum of 90 minutes, allowing flexibility to build around busy schedules.

Sessions were kept intentionally small (maximum of five participants) to encourage open discussion, reflection and meaningful peer support.

The peer-learning networks were designed to build both confidence and capability, helping participants deepen their understanding of how to embed the CIISA Standards in practice while strengthening cross-sector relationships.

We also responded flexibly to emerging needs during the programme, including arranging specialist sessions - such as expert input on data protection issues relevant to reporting and workplace culture.

Key resources created

Every Trailblazing project was unique. Organisations came to the programme with differing levels of priorities and different challenges, requiring tailored understanding and support at each stage of the process. Using this wide-ranging insight and engagement, we developed and tested a range of assessment tools and resources with Trailblazing partners, including:

- Policy and practice gap assessments
- Stakeholder and role mapping tools
- Focused Assessments on:
 - Safe and inclusive working environments
 - Open and accountable reporting mechanisms
 - Responsive learning culture
- Reporting mechanism reviews and mapping tools
- Stakeholder surveys and feedback tools

Trailblazing organisations could then choose the tools and support they felt were most relevant to their needs, enabling a flexible and bespoke approach. Depending on capacity and preference, organisations completed work independently, collaboratively with us as a ‘critical friend’, or with more direct one-to-one support from the CIISA team.

Alongside the assessment tools, we also delivered workshops, focus groups, interviews and tailored practical sessions.

Othello press night, Stratford Upon Avon 2024.
Photo by Nicola Young (courtesy of RSC)

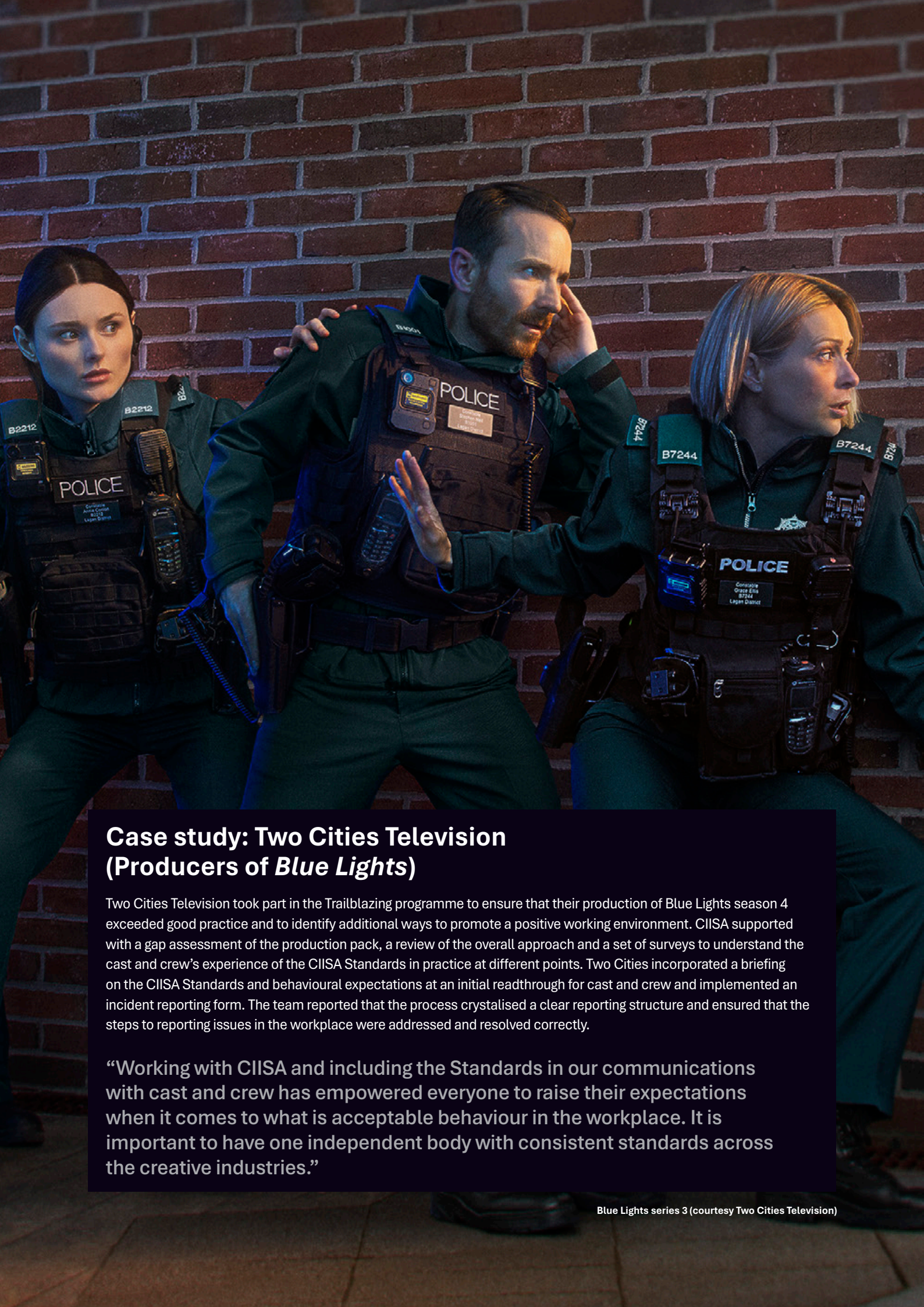
Choice of approach/resource	Number delivered	Number of Trailblazers
Policy gap assessments	12	12
Stakeholder mapping	13	12
Checklists and assessments of practice	8	7
Maturity survey for different stakeholder groups	13	6
Workshops	3	3
Focus groups	11	3
Talks or briefings	2	2

“You were so flexible and specific with us – adapting to what we needed and really listening and considering how to help. It was hugely appreciated, and a really important step in this process for us.”

Trailblazing organisations engaged with CIISA in different ways depending on their priorities, level of maturity and organisational context. For some, the programme helped identify gaps, risks and areas requiring further attention. Others used the process to validate existing good practice, strengthen ongoing work or explore how the CIISA Standards could be embedded within wider organisational strategies and projects.

Across the programme, many organisations also used the opportunity to shift conversations beyond compliance and towards building healthier, more accountable workplace cultures and working environments.

This flexibility was one of the programme’s key strengths. It enabled organisations to engage in ways that felt practical, relevant and achievable within their own environments, while also creating space for honest reflection, constructive challenge and meaningful progress. The process helped organisations move from broad ambition to clearer action, building confidence and momentum for longer-term embedding of the CIISA Standards.



Case study: Two Cities Television (Producers of *Blue Lights*)

Two Cities Television took part in the Trailblazing programme to ensure that their production of *Blue Lights* season 4 exceeded good practice and to identify additional ways to promote a positive working environment. CIISA supported with a gap assessment of the production pack, a review of the overall approach and a set of surveys to understand the cast and crew’s experience of the CIISA Standards in practice at different points. Two Cities incorporated a briefing on the CIISA Standards and behavioural expectations at an initial readthrough for cast and crew and implemented an incident reporting form. The team reported that the process crystalised a clear reporting structure and ensured that the steps to reporting issues in the workplace were addressed and resolved correctly.

“Working with CIISA and including the Standards in our communications with cast and crew has empowered everyone to raise their expectations when it comes to what is acceptable behaviour in the workplace. It is important to have one independent body with consistent standards across the creative industries.”

Blue Lights series 3 (courtesy Two Cities Television)

4. Programme Findings

The Trailblazing programme was designed not only to test the CIISA Standards in practice, but to generate structured learning about what CIISA needs to do to support organisations in achieving that.

We designed a programme Evaluation Framework to capture evidence, feedback and insight at every stage of the process.

Our Evaluation Framework focused on three core questions linked directly to the Programme’s objectives:

- Was this approach the best way to support organisations in understanding what meeting the CIISA Standards looks like in practice?
- What types of support have the best chance of supporting organisations to embed the CIISA Standards and make meaningful progress: both immediately and over time?
- How can CIISA best demonstrate impact while remaining responsive, collaborative and open to feedback?

To answer these questions, we actively sought open and meaningful feedback from Trailblazing partners about what worked well, where challenges emerged and what improvements we could make. This openness was essential. If the CIISA Standards are to drive real and lasting change across the creative industries, they must work in practice within the realities, pressures and complexities of creative working environments.

The Trailblazing programme created an important opportunity to test how CIISA can best support organisations to turn ambition into meaningful action.

1: Understanding and applying the CIISA Standards in practice

To answer this question, we asked for Trailblazers’ feedback on:

- A. whether the programme met their expectations
- B. how useful were CIISA’s tools, resources and support in helping them apply the Standards in practice
- C. the value of the peer-learning network in supporting reflection, confidence and shared learning

Case study: Hallé Concerts Society

The Hallé Concerts Society, which includes the Hallé orchestra and ensembles, took part in the Trailblazing programme to support ongoing work to improve policies, structures and processes. CIISA facilitated an internal workshop, reviewed existing policies and supported a stakeholder survey across the orchestra, administration and volunteers. The project identified a desire to build better connections between orchestra and management across different departments, with a particular focus needed on internal communications and reporting processes. The Hallé team reported that CIISA’s work supported challenging conversations internally and helped to frame issues in a way that made change feel possible. The approach has led to the Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB) committee being extended to include people and culture, and laid the foundations for further culture work in the organisation.

“The Trailblazing has encouraged everyone at the Hallé to speak up about the kind of workplace we want to be.”

The Hallé (courtesy Hallé Concerts Society)

1A: Meeting expectations

At Kick Off stage, each Trailblazing organisation was asked about their objectives from participating: what did they want to see from CIISA through the programme? We also asked what concerns they had about how to embed the CIISA Standards.

These conversations helped CIISA understand organisational priorities, shape support around real-world needs and evaluate whether the programme delivered meaningful value in practice.

Through this, Trailblazing organisations identified a total of 73 objectives between them. While priorities varied, several core themes emerged around what organisations were looking for from CIISA’s support.

What Trailblazers wanted from CIISA	Common asks
Practical implementation support	Understanding how to embed the CIISA Standards realistically within existing working practices
Assessment and benchmarking	Reviewing current approaches, measuring progress and understanding what “good” looks like in practice
External challenge and accountability	Using CIISA as a constructive “critical friend” to provide independent perspective and momentum
Culture change and engagement	Better understanding of how to engage with staff/worker experiences, communicate effectively with different roles and achieve cultural change
Flexible support aligned to existing work	Integrating the Standards into wider organisational priorities, leadership changes or ongoing programmes

Trailblazing organisations repeatedly highlighted the importance of practical, proportionate and flexible support. Many were not looking for entirely new systems or policies, but for help turning existing ambitions into meaningful action.

Alongside their objectives, Trailblazing partners identified their concerns or anticipated challenges when thinking about embedding the CIISA Standards. Thematically, these concerns reflected both organisational pressures and wider structural issues across the creative industries.

Common concerns raised by Trailblazers	Examples
Time and capacity pressures	Will participation create additional pressure for already stretched teams?
Internal engagement challenges	Will it be difficult to bring colleagues, managers or senior leaders with us through the process?
Practical relevance	Will this feel over-engineered or not sufficiently tailored to what we do/how we work?
Sector-wide cultural barriers	Do we have a challenge in getting people to speak up? Will people feel confident to say what they feel? Do we have the right culture to do this?

Feedback from Trailblazers

Feedback from Trailblazing partners demonstrated that the programme delivered meaningful progress against the objectives organisations had set at the outset. At the time of reporting, 59 of the 73 objectives identified across the programme had been fully or partly achieved, with 11 reported as not met.

Status	Examples/Narrative
Achieved (42)	CIISA and the Trailblazer agreed that the objective or expectation was met.
Partly Achieved (17)	The Trailblazer made good progress towards the objective but still had more to do, often due to the nature of the original ambition.
Not met (11)	No or very limited progress made towards the objective in the timeframe. In most cases this was due to circumstances outside CIISA’s control. One Trailblazer paused their programme before completion due to capacity constraints.
Unclear (3)	Feedback not provided by Trailblazers.

What worked well

Trailblazers consistently fed back during the programme that CIISA’s approach was viewed as **practical, constructive and responsive to the realities of creative industry working environments**. As a result, many concerns raised at the beginning of the programme reduced significantly as the work progressed.

Trailblazers also fed back that they **valued the flexibility of the support provided and the opportunity to engage openly with challenges in a non-judgemental and solutions-focused way**. Importantly, Trailblazers did not report any negative outcomes resulting from participation in the programme.

Feedback also highlighted that some challenges extend far beyond individual organisations and reflect wider structural and cultural issues across the creative industries. For example, the wider **precarity of freelancer work and resulting power imbalances**, linked into confidence in speaking up, inconsistent reporting cultures and uncertainty around accountability in complex working environments.

Clearly these systemic concerns would not be resolved fully within the scope of this Trailblazing programme. However, through stakeholder engagement and a reframing of issues, CIISA was able to help organisations surface these issues more clearly and identify steps forward to help address the challenges.

Most significantly, Trailblazers fed back **that CIISA has an important ongoing role to play in tackling these systemic issues** – and supporting organisations to navigate these more complex challenges. In particular, Trailblazers fed back the need for further practical guidance, shared learning and sector-wide support focused on reporting cultures, accountability and creating environments where people feel safe and confident to raise concerns.

“CIISA should find ways to build connections for those working across the creative industries to help them feel supported, understand what’s working and signpost useful interventions”

1B: CIISA’s tools, resources and support

A key element of Trailblazing was to test a range of practical tools and approaches to understand how useful and scalable they would be across organisations with different structures, capacities and resources. Trailblazers were asked to provide feedback on both the usefulness of the tools and how practical they were to apply in real-world settings.

What worked well

Feedback on CIISA’s **policy gap assessments** was consistently positive. Trailblazers found these reviews particularly valuable in helping them understand how existing policies aligned with the CIISA Standards and where further development was needed. Trailblazers highlighted the clarity and practicality of the resulting recommendations. Almost all Trailblazers chose for CIISA to complete these assessments on their behalf, reinforcing the value of external expertise and independent review.

Following this positive feedback, we will ensure this support becomes part of our offer to CIISA Registrants.

Trailblazers that opted to use CIISA’s **stakeholder surveys** also reported strong benefits. The surveys provided Trailblazers with concrete evidence and insight into workplace experiences, helping them identify gaps between policy and lived experience.

Several Trailblazers adapted survey questions to reflect their own organisational contexts or align with existing engagement activity. CIISA supported organisations by analysing findings and providing tailored recommendations linked directly to the Standards.

Many Trailblazers reacted positively to CIISA’s **stakeholder mapping tools**, particularly in helping organisations think more broadly about the different groups affected by workplace culture, behaviour and reporting processes. This proved valuable across organisations of different sizes and structures, helping ensure that approaches to implementation were inclusive and appropriately targeted.

Areas for improvement

Feedback on the larger toolkit was more mixed. Many Trailblazers valued having information and evidence gathered in one place and reported that the process created opportunities for deeper engagement with colleagues, prompting productive conversations that might not otherwise have taken place. However, some Trailblazers found the toolkit too lengthy and difficult to navigate, particularly when trying to involve colleagues across different parts of the organisation.

Because the toolkit was structured directly against the CIISA Standards, some respondents felt it was repeating similar information in multiple sections. Trailblazers also highlighted the limitations of a checklist-style approach when addressing workplace culture, which is often complex, nuanced and difficult to capture through structured templates alone.

This feedback is invaluable. As a result, we will look to increase our capacity to provide guided assessments to organisations so that they are not left to navigate the toolkits unassisted. We will also develop simpler and more accessible tools as we build a bank of resources for the sector.

For smaller organisations, CIISA tested a shorter checklist-style tool designed to provide a more proportionate and accessible approach. Trailblazers generally found this easier to use and more manageable with limited capacity and resources. However, the shorter format did not provide the same level of depth or comprehensive coverage against the full CIISA Standards.

Feedback on the reporting mechanisms mapping tool varied depending on organisational size and complexity. Larger Trailblazers found it useful in helping document and review multiple reporting routes and processes across their

organisations. However, for smaller Trailblazers with only one or two reporting mechanisms in place, the tool felt over-engineered and less relevant to their needs.

The role mapping tool was the least used and least positively received of the tools tested during the programme, suggesting that its purpose and practical value were less clear to Trailblazers. This has now been removed from the toolkit.

1C: The value of CIISA’s peer learning networks

Alongside the core Trailblazing activity, CIISA ran peer-learning networks for Trailblazers and gathered feedback on the value of these sessions.

We received significant feedback that **these networks became an important source of support, reflection and shared problem-solving** for many - particularly for individuals leading culture change work within complex and fast-paced environments.

Those who attended these networks consistently fed back specific benefits, including:

- Understanding the systems and approaches used by other organisations
- Learning from shared experiences and challenges
- Building confidence and consistency in decision-making
- Generating new ideas and practical solutions
- Creating dedicated time and space for reflection
- Developing supportive professional networks
- Validating approaches and sense-checking thinking with others facing similar issues

Several Trailblazers also told us about the emotional value of the sessions, describing them as reassuring and supportive spaces that helped reduce feelings of isolation often associated with leading culture and behaviour change work.

For one Trailblazer, the fact that the calls involved people who are industry adjacent but not too similar made the space feel safer than if it had been a network of close peers – and highlighted the convening power of CIISA to bring different sectors together. However, another participant reflected that they would have preferred more engagement with peers from within their own sector, rather than organisations that were industry-adjacent – highlighting the need for CIISA to ensure such a network can be responsive to individual needs.

Areas for improvement

Participants discussed the potential for a central hub where those in their cohort could share and access recommendations and suggestions of providers with each other, avoiding the need for individual follow ups. CIISA will consider the feasibility of this approach as part of peer networking.

The main challenge for the peer-learning networks was finding meeting times that worked consistently for busy participants across different organisations and sectors. As a result, not all Trailblazers were able to engage with the sessions equally. In light of the feedback, CIISA will explore different and additional styles of peer learning exchange, from sector-specific roundtables, to cross-sector groups, in order to meet different requirements.

“The peer-learning and exchange opportunities have given us new connections, ideas and a great support network.”



2. Can CIISA practically support organisations to embed the Standards?

To answer this question, we explored three elements with the Trailblazers:

- A. The usefulness of CIISA's recommendations
- B. The need for additional products and services from CIISA
- C. What progress looks like and how it can be sustained

2A: CIISA's recommendations

Trailblazers consistently reported that the most valuable support came where **CIISA provided practical, tailored recommendations grounded in a clear understanding of the organisation's context, challenges and priorities**. The projects that worked best were those where recommendations felt realistic, proportionate and capable of being implemented within existing organisational structures and resources.

Common themes within CIISA's recommendations included:

- Improving communication and feedback loops with creative industry workforces
- Introducing or strengthening anonymous reporting options
- Creating opportunities to encourage reporting and challenge unhelpful workplace norms
- Developing clearer systems for triaging and responding to concerns raised

“It was so useful – I can't even tell you what a gift it was to have a list of things to go off and do.”

CIISA also **supported several Trailblazers to translate recommendations into practical action plans**, helping organisations prioritise immediate, medium-term and longer-term actions. For some organisations, this meant revisiting foundational policies and processes; for others, it involved identifying quick wins, strengthening trust with stakeholders or building on existing good practice to drive further cultural change.

Areas for improvement

The programme highlighted that meaningful cultural change is rarely straightforward or quick to achieve. In some cases, the gaps identified through Trailblazing required significant strategic decisions about organisational priorities, investment and leadership focus, rather than simple operational fixes.

As a result, Trailblazers consistently highlighted the importance of strong leadership buy-in, internal capacity and sustained commitment if recommendations are to translate into lasting change. Without this commitment (and, in some cases, continued external support) many felt there was a risk that momentum can stall once initial recommendations have been made.

Several Trailblazers also reflected that longer-term engagement would be needed to achieve deeper and more sustainable impact.

The programme also demonstrated that organisations often require more than recommendations alone to implement change effectively. In several cases, Trailblazers requested practical templates, specialist suppliers, additional internal resource or access to expert advice to take work forward.

Case study: Home Post Production

Home Post Production (formerly known as Picture Shop) was acquired and launched as a new company during the Trailblazing programme. The leadership team saw the change in ownership as an opportunity to reset the culture and to get a clear idea of how the CIISA Standards can be put into practice in the post production context. CIISA supported Home with a gap assessment of the staff handbook and policies, development of a staff survey and a stakeholder mapping. They found involvement in the peer learning network particularly valuable as peers generously shared policies, ideas and approaches. Home's leadership team worked to develop a set of values that reflect and align with the CIISA Standards, engaging staff in the process. They reported that there is greater awareness of the importance of workplace culture among colleagues and that the support provided by CIISA has helped to lay the foundations of the new company.

“CIISA has become a common language at Home.”

Home Post Production

While CIISA was sometimes able to provide direct support or signposting, the programme highlighted wider gaps in infrastructure, specialist expertise and trusted professional pathways across the creative industries.

For example, one Trailblazer sought advice on sourcing appropriately qualified professionals for “duty of care” roles. This is an area where participants consistently highlighted the importance of having a standardised approach to sourcing qualified staff. As CIISA develops its Professional Standards function, it will explore the potential for accreditation pathways and clearer sector guidance for roles of this nature in the future.

2B: Additional products and services from CIISA

Through close working with Trailblazers, the programme provided valuable insight into the additional products, services and support organisations need to embed the Standards effectively and sustain long-term cultural change. The following picks out a number of the core requirements asked from CIISA:

- Help to clarify burdens of proof and thresholds of when something is unacceptable and when it isn’t
- How to document informal reports, rumours, complaints and allegations
- Understanding how to prevent future harm without breaking laws on data privacy or risking defamation claims
- How to deal well with anonymous concerns raised
- How to build adequate feedback loops into reporting mechanisms that still respect due process, data protection and privacy concerns
- How to manage interactions with third parties not directly contracted to the organisation (e.g. agency workers)
- How to communicate behavioural expectations effectively to workers on very short-term contracts
- How to communicate behavioural expectations to people with power in organisational relationships, including artists, senior creatives, clients, partners, donors, trustees.

To meet some of these requirements, CIISA developed specific tools, which included:

- A decision-making matrix for triaging reports of poor behaviour
- An example reporting form
- An example feedback loop to support reporting mechanisms
- A front of house risk assessment template

“The support provided was about the right amount, but the timeframe was too short for meaningful, embedded work”

Trailblazers responded well to these additional resources, highlighting their usefulness in helping organisations move quickly from discussion into action. Several organisations adapted and began using the tools within their own working environments during the programme itself, demonstrating the value of practical, accessible resources grounded in the realities of creative industry workplaces.

Alongside this, CIISA gathered examples of emerging good practice from across the programme, which are now informing the development of sector-specific guides.

Trailblazers also identified strong demand for further templates, examples and implementation resources. This reinforces both the need for practical support in this area and the important role CIISA can play in providing trusted, industry-informed tools to support long-term cultural change and signposting appropriately.

Areas for improvement

The programme highlighted both the growing demand for practical support and the current limits of CIISA’s capacity. While CIISA was able to provide tailored guidance and resources, there was limited capacity to deliver wider training or signpost specialist support such as legal or human resources advice. Trailblazing reinforced the importance of continuing to grow CIISA’s capability and support offer over time.

Trailblazing also demonstrated that organisations engage with the Standards from very different starting points. Larger organisations tended to value support to refine existing approaches and tackle very specific grey areas, while smaller or project-based organisations wanted more proportionate and practical solutions. This reinforced the importance of CIISA providing flexible support tailored to different organisational contexts.

2C: Measuring progress

Measuring progress on culture and behaviour is not straightforward. Unlike policies or processes, cultural change is difficult to see, track and evidence over time. Trailblazers asked CIISA, how do we know that what we’re doing is working?

To examine this question, CIISA developed a short anonymous survey to help organisations understand how their working culture is experienced by different groups of people across their workforce.

The survey asked participants to respond to a series of statements, such as “I feel safe in my working environment”. Such surveys can help organisations identify where experiences differ between stakeholder groups, for example between freelancers and permanent employees.

Several Trailblazers used the survey during the programme, in some cases adapting questions to align with existing staff or production surveys. For some, **the survey provided an important baseline against which future progress could be measured.** Others explored using the questions at different stages of productions or projects to better understand how workplace experiences change over time.

Trailblazers also highlighted that progress on workplace culture is rarely linear. In some cases, organisations may initially appear to be “going backwards” as trust in reporting systems increases and more concerns are raised. However, this can in fact be a sign of progress: demonstrating growing confidence in speaking up and greater trust that issues will be taken seriously.

Areas for improvement

Trailblazers highlighted some of the practical challenges involved in measuring workplace culture through surveys. In particular, several experienced low response rates from some stakeholder groups, making it harder to draw reliable conclusions about workplace experiences. Some also noted the risk of “survey fatigue”, particularly where people are regularly asked for feedback but do not see visible change as a result.

The timeframe of the Trailblazing programme also limited the ability to measure longer-term impact. In most cases, there was not enough time to gather baseline feedback, implement changes and then repeat surveys to assess whether workplace experiences had improved over time.

Trailblazers further reflected that anonymous surveys can sometimes identify concerns without explaining the reasons behind them. While this anonymity is important for building trust and encouraging honest feedback, it can also limit opportunities for deeper follow-up.

This feedback is really helpful – highlighting that CIISA’s survey worked best as a measurement tool to help organisations understand how workplace culture is being experienced, rather than as a standalone mechanism for identifying the root causes of problems.

3. How can CIISA demonstrate impact and responsive learning?

To understand the impact of the Trailblazing programme, we explored three key questions with Trailblazers:

- A. Whether organisations, productions and projects changed their approach or made tangible progress as a result of Trailblazing
- B. Whether workers experienced the CIISA Standards more clearly in practice by the end of the programme
- C. Whether CIISA itself learned from the programme and adapted its approach in response to feedback and insight

3A: Progress as a result of Trailblazing

Trailblazers entered the programme at very different stages of maturity and experience. Some had been engaged with CIISA since its early development and were already embedding aspects of the Standards within their organisations. Others encountered CIISA and the Standards for the first time through the Trailblazing programme itself.

Despite these different starting points, **all Trailblazers identified changes they had made as a direct result of participating in the programme.** Examples of progress included:

- Updating (and in some cases fully overhauling) policies and procedures
- Strengthening reporting processes and feedback mechanisms
- Sharpening organisational focus on priority areas
- Increased engagement and buy-in from senior leadership
- Embedding the CIISA Standards into wider organisational strategies
- Introducing behavioural expectations into contracts and agreements
- Improving communications with stakeholders about expected behaviours
- Adopting more person-centred language and approaches

For many Trailblazers, the programme helped **accelerate work already underway by providing structure, external challenge and momentum.** While some organisations implemented immediate “quick wins”, others used Trailblazing to lay the foundations for longer-term cultural change, helping prioritise future action and build greater organisational confidence and accountability.

Where Trailblazing involved individual productions or shorter-term projects, organisations also demonstrated how learning and good practice were being shared more widely across other productions and teams.

Trailblazers reported anticipating several long-term impacts, such as helping to create a more reliable picture of working culture.

Areas for improvement

Progress was more difficult where those participating in the programme had limited influence over the systems or decisions needed to drive change.

In some cases, responsibility for key issues sat with teams or stakeholders outside the scope of the Trailblazing work, making it harder for organisations to implement meaningful changes or demonstrate clear progress within the timeframe of the programme.

Case study: Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society wanted to understand how to use the CIISA Standards to achieve greater consistency in dealing with issues raised. The Society issues tickets and manages support services but does not run venues or programme the Fringe and so has limited actions available to take when individuals raise concerns. The Trailblazing programme included a facilitated workshop and support to develop a new policy suite that clarified unacceptable behaviours, how the Society would categorise and assess complaints, what actions the Society could take in response and where it could not take action. The EFFS team reported that the development of the whole policy suite would not have happened otherwise and the decision-making framework in particular felt like a lightbulb moment.

“Working with CIISA has been a real game-changer for us; the team have provided real insight and specific expert advice in helping us review and re-draft complex policies and resources. They’ve been reassuring, challenged us in the right ways, and really understood our needs and our unique role in the Fringe environment.”

Edinburgh Festival Fringe

Some sectors and production environments also faced particular operational pressures. For example, some types of productions work within extremely short preparation periods, lean staffing structures and limited capacity. In these contexts, introducing or testing new approaches could feel challenging, and some Trailblazers were only able to implement more limited changes during the programme period.

As a result of this feedback, CIISA will explore tailored practical guidance that meets specific needs in different sectors and is responsive to different operational environments.

3B: Experience of workers

During the programme, CIISA engaged directly with employees, freelancers and subcontracted workers through meetings, discussions and focus groups. These conversations provided valuable insight into workplace experiences across different roles, seniority levels and employment arrangements. Trailblazers also used their own formal and informal feedback mechanisms to gather wider stakeholder perspectives.

The original ambition for Trailblazing was to measure changes in worker experience over time through baseline and follow-up engagement. In practice, the programme timeframe meant this was not possible in most cases. However, where feedback and evidence were available, Trailblazers reported encouraging early signs of impact.

Examples included:

- Workers approaching organisations to discuss CIISA-related issues following briefings on the Standards
- Increased willingness to challenge behaviours that had previously become normalised or tolerated
- Reassurance among workers that organisations were taking action to improve workplace culture
- Improved staff survey responses relating to leadership behaviours and role-modelling
- Greater awareness and discussion of good practice across teams and productions

While many of these changes were early or incremental, they demonstrated the potential for the CIISA Standards to influence everyday behaviours, conversations and expectations within creative industry workplaces.

Areas for improvement

Given the relatively short timeframe, in most cases it was too early to assess whether workers felt the CIISA Standards were fully embedded in practice. Several Trailblazers reflected that meaningful cultural change takes time, particularly in organisations where morale, trust or confidence in reporting processes may already face challenges.

The programme also highlighted the importance of clarity around the role CIISA can play directly for workers, including freelancers. At the time of Trailblazing, this offer was still evolving, which sometimes made it more difficult for organisations to explain CIISA’s role and support available to their wider workforce.

“The Trailblazing project was well received by staff and, in conversations, people have referred to their engagement with CIISA and how good it is that we have committed to implement the Standards.”

3C: Lessons learned for CIISA

Trailblazing has been invaluable to us. It has generated significant learning about where organisations need the most support, what enables progress in practice and how CIISA’s future guides, tools and training should evolve.

It is impossible to list all the learning we have taken from this programme. The following table summarises the key findings and what action we will take on them.

Key findings and how we will respond

What we learned	What we will do
The biggest gaps in Trailblazer knowledge (and how CIISA can support them) were in reporting mechanisms and having a responsive learning culture (Standards 3 and 4).	Focus future guides, training and resources on reporting, accountability and learning culture.
Many challenges were industry-wide, particularly around freelancer trust, speaking up and behavioural expectations.	Develop sector-specific guides while encouraging more consistent industry-wide approaches.
Strong leadership buy-in was essential to progress.	Build leadership engagement more firmly into CIISA’s support model. Set out clear practical guides for senior leadership across different types of organisations.
Clear, values-led communication helped build trust and confidence.	Develop practical guides on how organisations can best communicate and engage on workplace issues relevant to the CIISA Standards, focusing on repetition and variety.
Many lacked ways to address lower-level concerns early.	Support organisations to identify and respond to issues earlier and more consistently.
Different organisations needed different approaches.	Develop flexible and scalable resources for different organisational contexts.
Culture change works best when focused on behaviours and values, not compliance alone.	Focus guides on practical outcomes and behaviour change rather than rigid processes.

5. Conclusions and next steps

Our Trailblazing programme gave us a unique opportunity to work closely with organisations across creative industries and test whether the CIISA Standards can drive meaningful change in practice.

What we found was encouraging, challenging and, at times, deeply revealing. Trailblazers engaged with openness and honesty, giving us invaluable insight into the realities of embedding cultural change within complex and fast-moving creative environments.

The programme has strengthened our understanding not only of what organisations need, but also of the important role CIISA can play in helping the sector build safer, more inclusive and more accountable workplaces.

We learnt a lot about what is needed: from creative industry organisations and CIISA, with the following key themes standing above others.

The Standards work in practice

Trailblazing demonstrated that the CIISA Standards are relevant and applicable across different sectors, organisational size and diverse working environments. Organisations at very different stages of maturity were able to use the Standards to strengthen workplace culture, improve accountability and identify practical next steps.

At the same time, the programme reinforced that embedding the Standards benefits from:

- Practical and expert support to translate the Standards into meaningful action
- Tailored engagement which reflects organisational size, complexity and capacity
- Strong leadership buy-in and sufficient authority to implement change

Practical support matters

One of the clearest findings from Trailblazing was that organisations value practical, flexible and bespoke support. While the tools and templates provided useful frameworks, the greatest impact came from working collaboratively with organisations to understand their specific contexts and pressures.

We also learned that organisations need different types of support at different stages, from practical templates and guided assessments to facilitated discussions, reflective questions and tools that help measure whether change is genuinely being embedded.

We will continue refining our tools and resources for different organisational contexts and prioritise guided support where capacity allows.

Organisations need help to navigate “grey areas”

Trailblazers consistently highlighted that the most difficult issues are often those that are not clear cut. Informal working practices, freelance relationships, short-term projects and complex power dynamics can make it difficult to determine responsibility, accountability and what makes the right response.

“CIISA has helped to shift some mindsets and got more people thinking about good practices.”

Case study: Sky

Sky wanted to ensure good practice was embedded across its scripted and unscripted commissioned productions, and to explore ideas for improvement. CIISA reviewed Sky’s policies, created mid-point and exit surveys for cast and crew and engaged two completed productions to gather in-depth feedback. The team reported that CIISA’s work largely validated existing Sky practices or proposed changes that were already in discussion and helped to highlight areas where clarity can be improved. Sky now has a clearer understanding of where communication needs to be streamlined and how to make expectations clearer for productions. Longer-term, the team expects the work to lead to a more reliable picture of working culture on productions and to help build greater trust with productions. The focus on behavioural standards, expectations, and accountability at all levels has helped reinforce the cultural direction Sky wants to drive.

“Our work with CIISA has helped us strengthen our processes and create clearer, more transparent guidance for our teams. Their expertise and industry-wide perspective have supported us in improving how we define responsibilities, set expectations, and handle reporting.”

Flavia (courtesy of Sky)

The programme also reinforced how industry norms regarding staying silent for fear of retribution - or prioritising the production or product above all else - can unintentionally discourage people from speaking up.

These insights directly shape our sector-specific guides, future training and areas for further expert support. Trailblazing also reinforced the importance of creating more joined-up approaches across the creative industries, rather than isolated organisational responses.

Peer learning is an essential component of CIISA's offer

Our peer-learning networks became one of the most valued parts of the programme, particularly for individuals leading culture change work without large teams or internal support networks.

Trailblazers consistently described the sessions as reassuring, practical and collaborative spaces that helped them test ideas, share challenges and feel less isolated in their work.

We also learned that different organisations want different types of peer exchange. As a result, we will explore a wider range of formats in future, including sector-specific discussions, cross-sector networks and specialist expert sessions.

Organisations need more support to measure progress

Trailblazing reinforced that measuring cultural change is complex. Organisations need practical ways to understand whether interventions are improving trust, confidence and workplace experience over time.

The programme highlighted the importance of not only gathering feedback, but also visibly responding to it. Demonstrating what has been learned (and what action will be taken) is essential to building trust and embedding a responsive learning culture.

We also found that organisations need support to identify meaningful indicators of progress beyond surveys alone. In response, we will continue developing practical guides and performance measures linked to each of the CIISA Standards.

There is significant value in CIISA as an independent industry body

Trailblazing reinforced the value of having an independent organisation like CIISA, which can convene conversations (particularly across different sectors that do not normally connect), provide external accountability and support organisations through complex cultural issues.

For many Trailblazers, CIISA's involvement helped raise the profile and priority of behaviour and culture within leadership discussions. The Standards also provided an important external reference point for those already leading this work internally.

The programme further demonstrated the importance of sustained industry-wide support, shared learning and trusted guides. We will continue building networks, resources and practical support for organisations and individuals across the creative industries, including clarifying how freelancers and individual workers can engage with and benefit from CIISA's work.



Case study: BBC Winter Olympics

The BBC Winter Olympics team worked with CIISA to clarify what the CIISA Standards mean in practice for different roles and to use the 2026 Winter Olympics as an opportunity to bring back learnings to business-as-usual practices. The Trailblazing support from CIISA included stakeholder mapping, a gap assessment of materials used for previous events and a toolkit to identify what was in place and any gaps to consider. The team updated their crew handbook to highlight the CIISA Standards and delivered a VT at the main crew briefing, explaining the CIISA Standards, why the BBC supports them and how to report any issues. They also delivered a dedicated session for on-air broadcasters. The team reported that the approach encouraged more people to think about good practice and colleagues initiated conversations prompted by the briefings. The team managed to try new things and make changes and improvements in a very tight timeline and the work done has led to a proposal for a kit for other productions with a checklist of additional wellbeing aspects to consider.

6. Final words

We are incredibly grateful to all the organisations, leaders, employees and freelancers who participated in the Trailblazing programme. Their openness and willingness to engage constructively with difficult issues made this work possible. The collaboration shown throughout the programme has been invaluable to CIISA as we continue establishing our role within the creative industries.

Trailblazing demonstrated that meaningful cultural change is both possible and necessary. Across very different sectors, organisations and working environments, we saw a shared determination to foster workplaces where people feel safe, respected, included and able to speak up without fear. We also saw the realities and complexities involved in achieving that change, particularly within sectors shaped by freelance working, short-term projects, intense pressure and longstanding cultural norms.

What emerged clearly from the programme is that the CIISA Standards are not simply aspirational or ‘nice to have’. They provide a practical framework that organisations can use to drive reflection, accountability and action. But Trailblazing also reinforces our belief that lasting change cannot be achieved through policies, compliance processes or isolated interventions alone. It requires leadership, trust, openness, continuous learning and a willingness to challenge behaviours and assumptions that may previously have gone unquestioned.

Every Trailblazer demonstrated leadership through their participation in this programme. By choosing to engage openly with the Standards, test new approaches and reflect on challenges as well as successes, these organisations have not only helped to progress individually, but have helped the wider creative industries move forward in this space.

The learning from Trailblazing will directly shape the next phase of CIISA’s work, from sector-specific guidance and practical tools to training, peer learning and future support for organisations and individuals across the creative industries. We will use this learning – of what worked well and areas for improvement – to continuously refine and improve as we develop our Professional Standards service.

This programme was only a beginning. But it has shown that when organisations are given the space, support and confidence to engage with these issues openly, meaningful progress can happen. Together, we have taken important first steps towards building creative industries where safe, inclusive and accountable working environments are not the exception, but the expectation.

Case study: Wales Millennium Centre

The Wales Millennium Centre (WMC) took part in the Trailblazing programme to benchmark their approach, understand how to target actions for different stakeholders appropriately and to check that their practices are effective. The WMC team worked through CIISA’s assessment tools and found that this helped to drive conversations around the organisation. Actions taken included a relaunch of the Code of Conduct and Mutual Respect Policy, supported by training, communications and a clear implementation plan. WMC reported that the Standards make it easier to articulate what the organisation stands for, sharpen thinking and engage those who are not yet involved in these conversations every day. Being a Trailblazer helped to accelerate some work and shine a spotlight on key areas, including thinking through whether actions are working in practice. Colleagues fed back that they were pleased WMC took part in the Trailblazing and there were improved results in relation to leaders and managers being seen to model good behaviours.

“CIISA provides a north star that helped us think about culture in relation to our work on EDI.”



Wales Millennium Centre



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