Brexit & the Creative Industries

Providing access to international talent

The creative industries are the UK's fastest growing sector, with one in 11 jobs in the creative economy. We are world leaders in the field, with creative exports from Stormzy, to Shakespeare to the Great British Bake Off defining us around the globe.

International talent is absolutely central to the success of our creative industries. Access to international talent promotes growth, leading to the creation of more jobs in the economy as well as the development of the domestic workforce by bringing them into contact with the best and brightest in the world. It is vital that any future immigration system allows our sector to bring in the brightest and best from the EU and beyond.

About the creative industries:

- Worth £101.5bn GVA to the UK economy, more than oil and gas, automotive, aerospace and life sciences combined.
- Growing at twice the rate of the wider economy
- Creating jobs four times as quickly as the wider economy
- Responsible for almost 10% of all UK service exports
- A priority sector in Government's industrial strategy
- Growing faster in nations and regions including Scotland, the West Midlands and North West than in London

How much does the sector rely on international workers?

- Official statistics report that 6.7% of workers in the sector are from the EU, while 6% are from outside the EU.
- But work by industry suggests this percentage is far higher in some of the most productive parts of the sector:
  - 25% of architects are non-UK EU [Royal Institute of British Architects survey]
  - 30% of visual effects workers are non-UK EU [UK Screen Alliance members' survey]
  - 20-30% of video games employees are non-UK EU [Ukie members' survey]

Why do the creative industries need international workers?

- **To attract the brightest and best:** Companies from the Royal Opera House to publishing giant Penguin Random House need to employ world-class workers if we are to retain our reputation as global leaders.

- **To broaden their skill sets and access global markets:** Drawing staff from a wider range of backgrounds helps companies understand and sell into a greater number of markets. It helps advertisers to land accounts internationally and broadcasters to develop audiences worldwide, for example.

- **To fill domestic skills gaps:** The creative industries have major skills gaps - particularly in jobs that need a mix of creative and technical skills, such as graphic design and sfx/vfx. The Migration Tier 2 Shortage Occupation List, which lists jobs where the government will permit sponsorship of migrants in recognition of severe skills shortages, includes 22 creative industries occupations. We depend on international workers to fill these roles.

- **Because they are highly specialised:** The creative industries work with cutting-edge technologies from virtual reality to artificial intelligence. They also employ extremely specialised craftspeople, from leatherworkers in fashion to heritage construction specialists in architecture. There are only a handful of people around the world who can do these jobs and the UK competes in a global marketplace for their skills.

The challenge posed by Brexit

- An end to freedom of movement will significantly limit our access to EU talent and increase the pressure on our non-EU immigration system, which already struggles to meet the sector's needs.
- It will also limit the ability of creative workers to travel around Europe. This is crucial for practitioners like touring performers and film production companies that need to shoot on location.
- UK immigration systems must be majorly rethought if the creative industries are to continue to thrive and grow.

Recommendations

1. **Maintain Britain's reputation as an open and welcoming cultural hub.**

2. **Provide UK workers with the skills to work in the creative industries.** Government should comprehensively review the ways in which creative and technical skills are taught in the UK, from secondary education to CPD training.

3. **Ensure any future EU-UK agreement allows the best possible access to talent.** This must include measures such as visa-free travel between the EU and UK, reciprocal rights for UK workers to move and work freely for short-term projects such as performances and shoots, and same-day access to talent for businesses that need workers with immediate notice.

4. **Ensure the tier 2 salary threshold is flexible to meet the needs of creative enterprises:** If the government does not intend to exempt EEA or creative workers, the salary threshold for all international hires should be lowered, taking into account regional differences. Alternatively, the language in the immigration rules could be changed from £30,000 per year (£35,000 for indefinite leave to remain and £20,800 for new entrants) or the appropriate rate "whichever is higher", to £30,000 per year or the appropriate rate, "whichever is lower".

5. **Introduce a 'creative freelancer' visa.** A third of all workers in the UK's creative industries are self-employed. Aside from around 200 'exceptional talent' visas reserved for those working at the very top of their field, workers coming into the UK on both a long and short-term basis require an employer to sponsor them. A 'creative freelancer' visa should be introduced and awarded to those who are able to demonstrate a history of work in the sector as well as a viable plan for acquiring work in the UK.

6. **Scrap the immigration skills charge.** This charge is designed to discourage international recruitment and is imposed on those bringing in workers from abroad. Businesses may be charged up to £5,000 and government has announced plans to double this. The creative industries are unfairly penalised by this charge as skills gaps mean international recruitment is often necessary. Government has also failed to demonstrate that this money is being contributed to domestic skills training as it claimed it would be.

7. **Expand and regularly review the shortage occupation list.** It is essential that the list keeps pace with UK skills shortages and reflects the sector's needs. It should give employers as much flexibility as possible over recruitment.

8. **Update and regularly review the standard occupational codes and appropriate rates:** Improve the UK's ability to track the working needs of the creative industries.

9. **Improve the visa processing system.** Digital technologies would allow UK Visas and Immigration to process visas without the need to retain passports, which often causes issues for internationally-touring acts. The visa system should also place greater faith in the decisions made by major cultural institutions about the legitimacy of acts they bring in to the country.