



DELIVERING FOR **FREELANCERS:** Creative UK proposals for a new Freelance Champion role

COMPILED BY AMY TARR AND HARRY GAULT
CREATIVE UK POLICY & RESEARCH TEAM



Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
THE OPPORTUNITY AND THE GAP	4
THE STRATEGIC CASE	5
PRECEDENTS AND MODELS	6
EVIDENCE GENERATION THROUGH INQUIRIES	8
CONCLUSIONS	10

wearecreative.uk 

[@wearecreativeuk](https://www.instagram.com/wearecreativeuk) 

[Creative UK](https://www.linkedin.com/company/creativeuk) 

[@creativeuk.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/creativeuk.bsky.social) 

INTRODUCTION

Freelancers are critical to the UK's most dynamic and high-growth sectors – from the creative industries to digital technology and green innovation - yet they remain structurally unsupported within government policymaking. Despite making up a significant proportion of the workforce and contributing billions to the economy, freelancers face persistent barriers and their complex status makes it difficult for them to access support. Nowhere is this more evident than in the creative industries, where freelancers account for over 70% of some subsector workforces.¹ Despite this, freelancers were some of the worst served by pandemic support schemes. Without focused leadership, they will continue to be overlooked in economic reforms, under-represented in workforce planning and left financially exposed.

It is important to recognise that freelancing is distinct from self-employment. Many freelancers operate through a mix of short-term PAYE contracts and self-employment, often across multiple employers and engagements and often fall through the gap of policy making. By establishing dedicated infrastructure that spotlights the challenges freelancers face and helps them to remain in the sectors that depend on their skills and ways of working, the Government would be strengthening the very market it relies on to deliver its growth ambitions.

This paper was developed prior to the publication of the Government's Creative Industries Sector Plan, which included the welcome announcement of a Freelance Champion. Along with many of our members, Creative UK has consistently called for the appointment of a Freelancers' Commissioner, independently appointed and hosted by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) – to provide this infrastructure, starting

with a focus on the creative industries, where freelancing rates are highest.

We are delighted that the UK Government has heard these calls and has committed to the appointment of a new Freelance Champion. If designed and remunerated appropriately, this role has the potential to deliver on many of the key asks that we, and others, have called for.

The role outlined in this paper is, in the first instance, non-statutory and advisory in nature. Whilst we have drawn on comparisons with existing 'commissioner' roles, these examples are intended to demonstrate the potential impact of targeted leadership roles, rather than suggesting that statutory powers are required from the outset. The paper aims to set out ways in which the Freelance Champion could draw upon the examples to deliver a crucial internal advocacy role – championing the needs of freelancers across government departments and ensuring their perspectives are consistently embedded within policy decision making.

The proposals in the paper aim to align with direction of travel that has been set by the Good Work Review and taken forward by its Self-Employment Working Group. The Freelance Champion's work should build upon these efforts, whilst also working closely with the Small Business Commissioner and the Creative Industries Council (CIC).

We are grateful to the many Creative UK members who supported the development of this paper, both through their insights and by reviewing early drafts. In particular, we would like to thank Bectu, DACS and Directors UK for their expertise and engagement.

1 Freelancers Make Theatre Work, 2024

THE OPPORTUNITY AND THE GAP

Freelancers and the self-employed – individuals who operate outside traditional employment structures – represent a growing share of the workforce.² We recognise that the term ‘freelancer’ is used flexibly and includes individuals working via limited companies, commissions, umbrella arrangements, or in hybrid PAYE/self-employed models. Their contributions underpin some of the UK’s most vital and high-growth sectors, including the cultural and creative industries. Today, the sector employ an estimated 2.4 million people, of whom approximately 28% are self-employed – double the economy-wide average;³ according to The Film and TV charity, this rises to approximately 50% for the film and TV industry.⁴

In short, freelancers are not a marginal group; rather they are essential to UK competitiveness, sectoral innovation and regional growth - but despite their critical economic role, freelancers are often structurally unsupported by policymaking (Creative UK, 2025).⁵ Key government strategies – including the Industrial Strategy – have proposed strategic approaches that are overwhelmingly designed around traditional employers and exclusively PAYE workers, leaving freelancers with:⁶

- Poor access to finance and credit, due to irregular income and lack of conventional employment records;
- Vulnerability to late payment and inequitable contract terms, with few practical avenues for redress;
- Limited social protection including barriers to pensions, parental leave, and sick pay;

- Reduced access to skills and workforce development programmes, many of which target salaried employees or larger businesses;
- Fragmented representation, with no single government body advocating for or coordinating freelance-related policy.

These issues are not new. Successive reports and reviews have recognised the problems, but comprehensive solutions have failed to materialise – and recent shocks, notably the Covid-19 pandemic, have further exposed these systemic weaknesses (Creative UK, 2025). While furlough schemes protected salaried workers, many freelancers and self-employed people were left to navigate inconsistent support (e.g. the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme) or fell through gaps altogether.

The absence of a dedicated leadership function for freelancers within government has led to piecemeal initiatives and missed opportunities. In areas where freelancers are concentrated, the lack of strategic coordination risks undermining sector growth, competitiveness and international standing – and without targeted leadership, the UK risks:

- Wasting the potential of high-growth sectors dependent on flexible talent;
- Losing global competitiveness as other economies adapt more rapidly;
- Deepening inequality between traditionally employed workers and freelancers.

² [The Self-Employed Landscape | IPSE](#)

³ [DCMS Sector Economic Estimates: Employment - GOV.UK](#)

⁴ [Film & TV Charity Research Finds Half Freelancers Struggling](#)

⁵ [Forging Freelancer Futures | Creative UK](#)

⁶ Ibid

THE STRATEGIC CASE

The need for a Freelance Champion is not simply a response to gaps in workforce support. It is a strategic economic intervention that aligns with the UK's stated policy priorities and growth ambitions, which emphasise the importance of innovation, high-skilled employment and flexible work models to drive national prosperity (Invest 2035, DBT 2024; Make Work Pay, DBT 2024). Achieving these goals will be impossible without fully integrating the freelance workforce into strategic economic planning.

FREELANCERS: A CORE COMPONENT OF GROWTH

The UK's Industrial Strategy proposals, outlined in *Invest 2035*, identified several high-growth sectors critical to future economic success, including the creative industries.⁷ Within the creative workforce, freelancers are not peripheral participants – they are essential enablers (Arts Council England, 2024; Creative UK 2025).

For example:

- Of the 5,600 creative industry workers who responded to a 2024 survey, nearly half (48%) identified as freelancers, but their employment arrangements were highly fragmented: 16% were PAYE, 68% were sole traders and 15% operated through their own limited companies.
- Directors UK's 2025 member survey further underscores the complexity: 100% of their members are freelance or self-employed in practice; yet with that group, 54.9% operate as sole traders, 40.8% through limited companies and just 8.7% via PAYE

engagements. This reinforces the fact that traditional employment classifications underrepresent the scale of freelance work in practice – particularly in film and TV, where non-linear, project-based work remains the norm.⁸

- Freelancers make up more than half of the UK film and TV workforce, but more than a third of those have said they will look elsewhere for jobs in the next five years (University of Reading, 2025).⁹
- The gaming industry, worth over £4.5 billion to the UK economy, relies heavily on freelance developers, artists and designers – with 12.7% of the workforce operating on a freelance basis (TIGA, 2024¹⁰) versus 6% of the total workforce (IPSE, 2024¹¹).
- 69% of cultural freelancers are engaged exclusively or primarily as freelancers, whilst 29% combine freelancing with combined positions (Arts Council England, 2024).¹²

Without a clear, coherent strategy to support freelancers, the cultural and creative industries face structural workforce constraints that will inhibit its ability to deliver on the goals of Invest 2025- and these challenges will be compounded amongst underrepresented demographics –discouraging entrepreneurship and limiting social mobility (Bectu, 2024¹³, Creative UK 2025). Embedding inclusion and addressing structural inequities must also be central to the Champion's role to help surface these gaps and ensure that policies and practices ensure that issues of fair treatment, financial inclusion and equitable

⁷ [Invest 2035 - GOV.UK](#)

⁸ [Directors UK - Full Report](#)

⁹ [Report_Freelancers_SIV_FINAL.pdf](#)

¹⁰ [WEATHERING THE STORM: TIGA research reveals UK games dev sector continues to grow, despite global sector downturn - TIGA](#)

¹¹ [The Self-Employed Landscape | IPSE](#)

¹² [Cultural Freelancers Study 2024: Our largest piece of research into the freelance sector | Arts Council England](#)

¹³ [Half of UK screen industry workers remain out of work, Bectu research finds | Bectu](#)

opportunity for freelancers, particularly those from underrepresented groups, are addressed systematically, rather than reactively.

Crucially, appointing a Freelance Champion aligns with the UK Government's commitments on employment reform. The landmark Employment Rights Bill (introduced in October

2024, and at Committee Stage in the House of Lords at the time of writing) would represent a missed opportunity if it fails to embed the role of a Freelance Champion into the post-Bill landscape, where the office would act as a conduit between the UK Government and the freelance economy.

PRECEDENTS AND MODELS

Across the UK and internationally, governments have successfully established independent offices and roles to address under-served or vulnerable groups, influence cross-departmental policy and deliver measurable impact – without excessive bureaucracy or cost. These examples demonstrate that, where governments identify a structural gap affecting major parts of the economy or society, a targeted commissioner or champion model provides an effective and politically feasible solution, that enables authoritative evidence gathering and swift action.

The Small Business Commissioner (UK)

The Small Business Commissioner (SBC), established under the *Enterprise Act 2016*, provides a direct UK precedent. The SBC was created to tackle late payment and unfair practices affecting small businesses – an issue that, much like freelance work today, cut across sectors and constrained economic growth.

Key features of the SBC model:

- Hosted independently but supported by a sponsoring department (currently the Department for Business and Trade).

- Modest operational budget (c. grant in aid funded at around £1.1m per year¹⁴).
- Inquiry and advisory powers, but no direct enforcement or regulatory role.
- Capacity to gather casework evidence, name poor practices publicly, and advise government on structural reforms.

The SBC model has proven that a commissioner can operate at low cost, influence policy debates and directly improve outcomes for vulnerable economic actors.

However, its narrow focus (late payment only) limits wider impact – a Freelance Champion could avoid this by starting with a broader inquiry mandate across payment, finance, skills and protections.

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales

The Older People's *Commissioner for Wales*, established under the *Commissioner for Older People (Wales) Act 2006*, offers a model of stronger investigatory powers combined with sector-wide advocacy.

14 Question for Department for Business and Trade, UIN 18416, tabled on 6 December 2024 (Andrew Griffith, MP)

The Commissioner can:

- Conduct formal reviews of services affecting older people;
- Issue public reports and recommendations that government bodies must formally respond to;
- Provide leadership across government and society on systemic reforms.

Funded at around £1.7 million annually¹⁵, this model shows that an independent commissioner, even with limited statutory powers, can transform visibility and prioritisation of a critical group.

A Freelancer Champion could adopt similar principles: independently investigating freelance workforce issues, making recommendations and compelling cross-departmental attention.

The Veterans Commissioner (Scotland)

Scotland's Veterans Commissioner was established in 2014 to advocate for the needs of former armed forces personnel.

Though initially set up without legislative powers, the role has:

- Gathered evidence through formal inquiries;
- Published authoritative reports leading to direct policy changes;
- Provided a single point of leadership within Government on a cross-cutting issues.

This model is especially instructive for the Freelance Champion, as it started with an inquiry and advocacy remit, without formal

powers – relying on evidence and persuasion and only later expanded influence based on results. This demonstrates that embedding the role within the right department (but maintaining independence) ensures impact without duplication. The Veterans' Commissioner has historically operated with only a handful of staff and a budget of approximately £300k per year.¹⁶ Despite its limited resources, by acting as a single focal point within government on a cross-cutting issue, the Commissioner has elevated veteran's issues onto the policy agenda and secured tangible improvements.¹⁷

New York City's Freelance Isn't Free Act (United States)

Internationally, New York City's Freelance Isn't Free Act (2017) is a pioneering model for protecting freelance workers. This law – the first of its kind – created groundbreaking protections for freelance workers in NYC. A five-year review of the Act, found the legislation to 'be effective and working as intended.'¹⁸

It introduced:

- Mandatory written contracts for freelance work;
- Penalties for late or non-payment;
- An enforcement unit embedded in the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection. As of 2023, freelancers had recovered more than \$1.5million in owed compensation.¹⁹

15 Older People's Commissioner for Wales, Estimate 2025-26 [gen-ld16858-e.pdf](#)
16 [Written question and answer: S6W-07325 | Scottish Parliament Website](#)
17 [Progress reports | Scottish Veterans Commissioner](#)
18 [5-Year Report on NYC's Freelance Isn't Free Act | November 1, 2023](#)
19 [5-Year Report on NYC's Freelance Isn't Free Act | November 1, 2023](#)

Freelance Champion: scope and responsibilities

The Freelance Champion would be a dedicated, independent advocate for freelancers across the creative economy, tasked with delivering measurable improvements in the conditions under which freelance work is undertaken. In order to fill the recognised structural gap, we believe the Freelance Champion should focus on three priority functions:

- Evidence generation
- Policy leadership

- Sector engagement

To ensure clarity of purpose and consistency of approach, the Freelance Champion should be guided by a single overarching objective. Creative UK has drawn upon the outputs of recent research and propose the following as a mission statement that aims to capture the overall objectives of the role:

To champion the interests of freelancers working across the cultural and creative industries by strengthening their voice in government, ensuring that the conditions for sustainable, inclusive freelance careers are embedded in evidence-led policy making, industry practice and public investment.

EVIDENCE GENERATION THROUGH INQUIRIES

The Freelance Champion could launch formal, structured inquiries into the major systemic barriers freelancers face.

This first inquiry could include closed evidence sessions, commissioned data analysis, and direct engagement with freelancers and cultural and creative businesses, culminating in a formal report with targeted policy recommendations for the Government to respond to.

Establishing a systematic, independent - but government-backed – evidence base on freelancing would replace today's fragmented and inconsistent data with authoritative insights that can shape future policy in a way that includes freelancers from the outset. Building on its evidence base, the Freelance Champion could publish regular reports and recommendations, to government and industry with a roadmap for improving freelance work sustainability.

Initial areas of policy focus, informed by inquiry findings, could include:

- Internal government advocacy, embedding freelance considerations within departmental policy making and acting as a conduit for cross-Government coordination on freelance workforce issues.
- Championing data reform by working with the Office of National Statistics to modernise SOC and SIC codes and develop new data models that accurately capture the realities of hybrid freelance employment patterns.
- Advising on adaptations to skills and retraining funding eligibility to ensure freelance workers can access skills programmes without requiring employer sponsorship;

- Proposing modifications to financial services regulation, ensuring freelancers are fairly assessed for mortgages, business loans and credit; based on income patterns, rather than employment status;
- Exploring policy incentives for retirement savings amongst freelancers to boost long-term financial resilience for freelancer workers.

It is essential that the Freelance Champion works in partnership with the newly established *UK Pensions Commission*, announced in July 2025, to help shape retirement savings solutions that are genuinely fit for freelance work. Traditional auto-enrolment mechanisms are not well suited to the realities of freelance income, which is often irregular, multi-sourced and low-contribution. As outlined in *Forging Freelance Futures* (Creative UK, 2025), 68% of freelancers in the cultural and creative industries are not currently saving for retirement, a stark indicator of the structural barriers that persist within the current pension landscape. This lack of provision is not just a challenge for individual financial resilience but poses a long-term policy risk for government. By working with the Commission and sector stakeholders, the Freelance Champion can help develop models that encourage contribution, remove access barriers and address the longer-term consequences of persistent exclusion from mainstream retirement provision.

The Freelance Champion's reports could form the basis for concrete government action (voluntary or legislative) to reduce freelancer precarity, enhance their contribution to growth sectors and ensure that the UK's flexible workforce model remains competitive internationally.

Sector engagement and industry collaboration

The Freelance Champion could also act as a convenor and catalyst within the freelance economy, bringing together freelancers, trade associations, unions and major employers to drive best practice adoption.

By aggregating otherwise atomised freelance voices and aligning sector leaders around reform goals, the Freelance Champion has the potential to drive practical improvements that voluntary initiatives alone have so far failed to achieve.

Measurable outcomes

Within 12-18 months, we propose the publication of an authoritative *Freelance Creative Industries Workforce Inquiry Report*, complete with data and recommendations. Such a report would be, in itself, a milestone – the first comprehensive assessment of creative freelancing endorsed by government.

Following the report, the Freelance Champion could work with sector stakeholders to implement voluntary improvements. For example:

- Work with skills providers and freelance engagers to explore and promote inclusive eligibility criteria and equitable access to skills and training initiatives;
- Engage a representative sample of freelancers across regions and subsectors through evidence sessions, surveys and consultations to ensure diverse voices inform the Freelance Champion's priorities and recommendations.

CONCLUSION

Government support for a Freelance Champion represents a strategic, affordable and politically resonant intervention to modernise the UK labour market and support national growth. Freelancers are critical to the UK's economic success, particularly in the creative industries, yet freelancers remain structurally unsupported, underserved in policy and under-protected against systemic risks like late payment, financial exclusion and skills gaps. Establishing an independent Freelance Champion could fill this gap, by providing:

- An authoritative voice for freelancers across government policymaking;
- A robust, independent evidence base on freelance workforce conditions;
- Practical, targeted policy reforms to strengthen freelance sustainability and growth;
- A scalable model for future workforce innovation across sectors.

The proposal is rooted in strong precedent. Similar roles have delivered clear benefits in areas ranging from small business protection to older people's rights. With modest investment, clear governance and a focused mandate, the Freelance Champion should play a critical role in helping to ensure that flexible, innovative work is not only protected but enabled to thrive – securing the freelance economy as a core pillar of the UK's future prosperity and the UK Government's Growth Mission.



wearecreative.uk



[@wearecreativeuk](https://www.instagram.com/wearecreativeuk)



[Creative UK](https://www.linkedin.com/company/creativeuk)



[@creativeuk.bsky.social](https://twitter.com/creativeuk.bsky.social)

TOMORROW BUILDING, 130 BROADWAY
SUITE 7, 2ND FLOOR, MEDIACITYUK,
SALFORD, ENGLAND, M50 2AB
INFO@WEARECREATIVE.UK
03330235240