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Tackling class inequality in the UK Screen Industries

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Executive summary

The Screen Industries are a vital and vibrant part of the economy. A key area of competitive advantage for the UK in a post-Brexit era, they contribute over £20bn in GVA and employ over 200,000 people. As part of the wider Digital and Creative Industries, they are acknowledged as central to the Government's new Plan for Growth.

But while the story of the UK Screen Industries is, in so many ways, hugely positive, the sector faces challenges too; and one of the greatest relates to diversity. Whether in terms of race, gender, disability, or social class, the Screen Industries are failing to include and support talented individuals from a range of backgrounds and demographic groups.

In August 2020, the PEC published the first paper from an ongoing series exploring class and social mobility in the UK Creative Industries. The work painted a concerning picture of widespread and persistent class imbalances across all sub-sectors (with the exception of Craft), which were particularly pronounced in key creative roles, including curators, authors, musicians, artists, actors and entertainers, and film-makers.

New analysis of the 2020 Labour Force Survey data only serves to heighten these concerns. In 2020, over half of those working in the Screen Industries were from privileged backgrounds (53 per cent), compared to 38 per cent of those working in any role. Class imbalances are particularly pronounced amongst 'Arts officers, producers and directors', where 61 per cent of those working in these key creative roles were from privileged backgrounds, making these amongst the most elite occupations in the Creative Industries, or indeed wider economy.

In contrast, those from working-class backgrounds are significantly under-represented in UK Screen. In 2020, only one in four of the UK Screen workforce came from lower socio-economic backgrounds, compared to 38 per cent of those across the economy – the lowest level since social mobility questions were introduced in the Labour Force Survey in 2014.

Figure 1: Class imbalances in UK Screen (percentage of workforce), 2020[1]
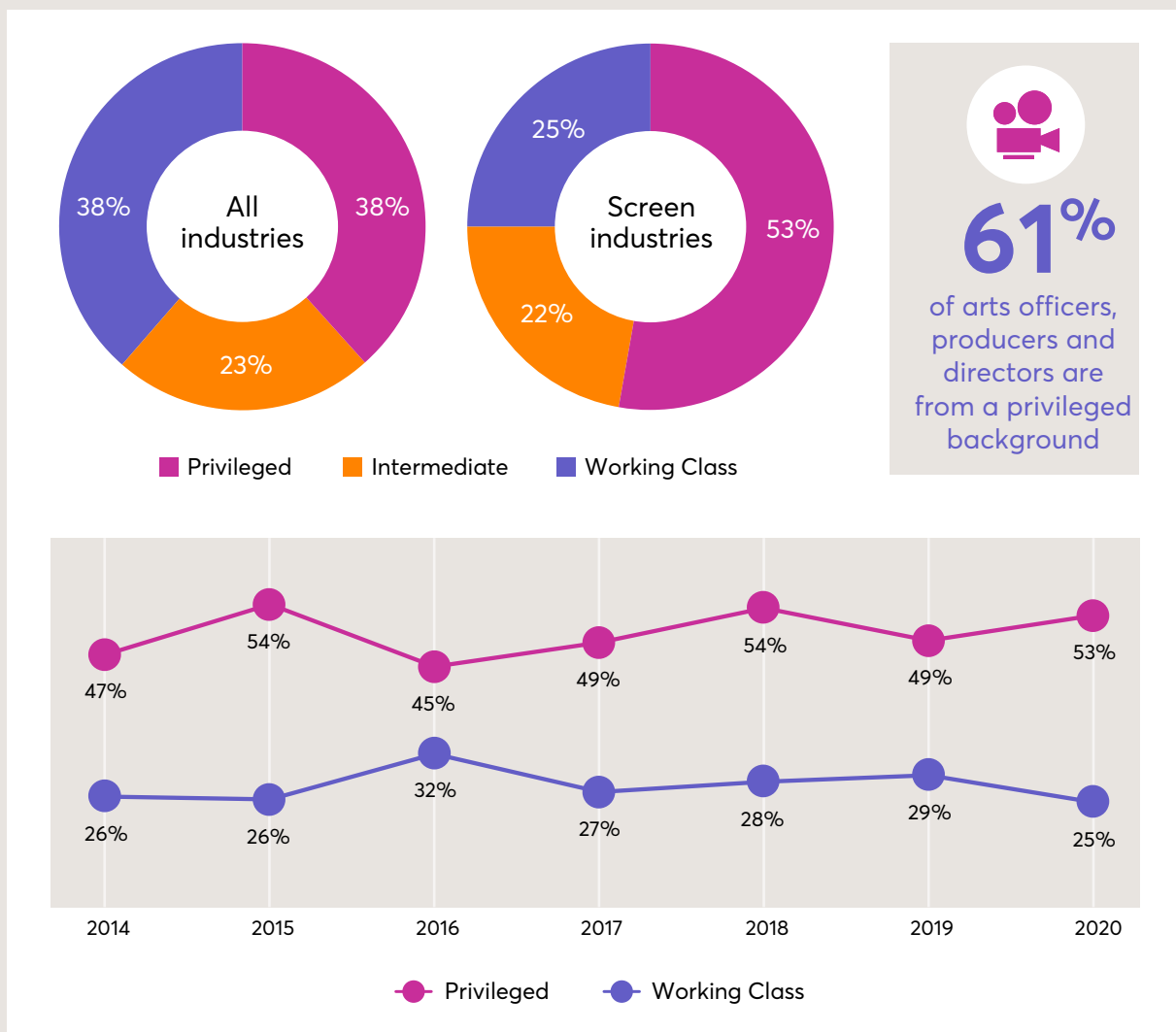
Source: Labour Force Survey

1. Figures may not sum to 100 per cent due to rounding. Class origins based on parental occupation aged 14 and coded to the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) where Privileged = NS-SEC 1 and 2; Intermediate = NS-SEC 3 and 4; and Working Class = NS-SEC 5, 6, 7 or 8. Please see Annex A for further information.

Given wider research suggesting COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting those already disadvantaged in the labour market, this raises important questions as to whether the pandemic could have potentially worsened the (already pronounced) class-based inequalities evident in the Screen Industries.

As part of the PEC's Class in the Creative Industries programme, this paper constitutes the first 'deep-dive' focussing on the UK Screen Industries, supported by ScreenSkills with National Lottery funds awarded by the BFI. It has sought to understand why UK Screen is the province of the privileged; what work is currently underway to address class-based exclusion; and how and where the industry can go further to shift the dial on socio-economic diversity in a significant and sustained way.

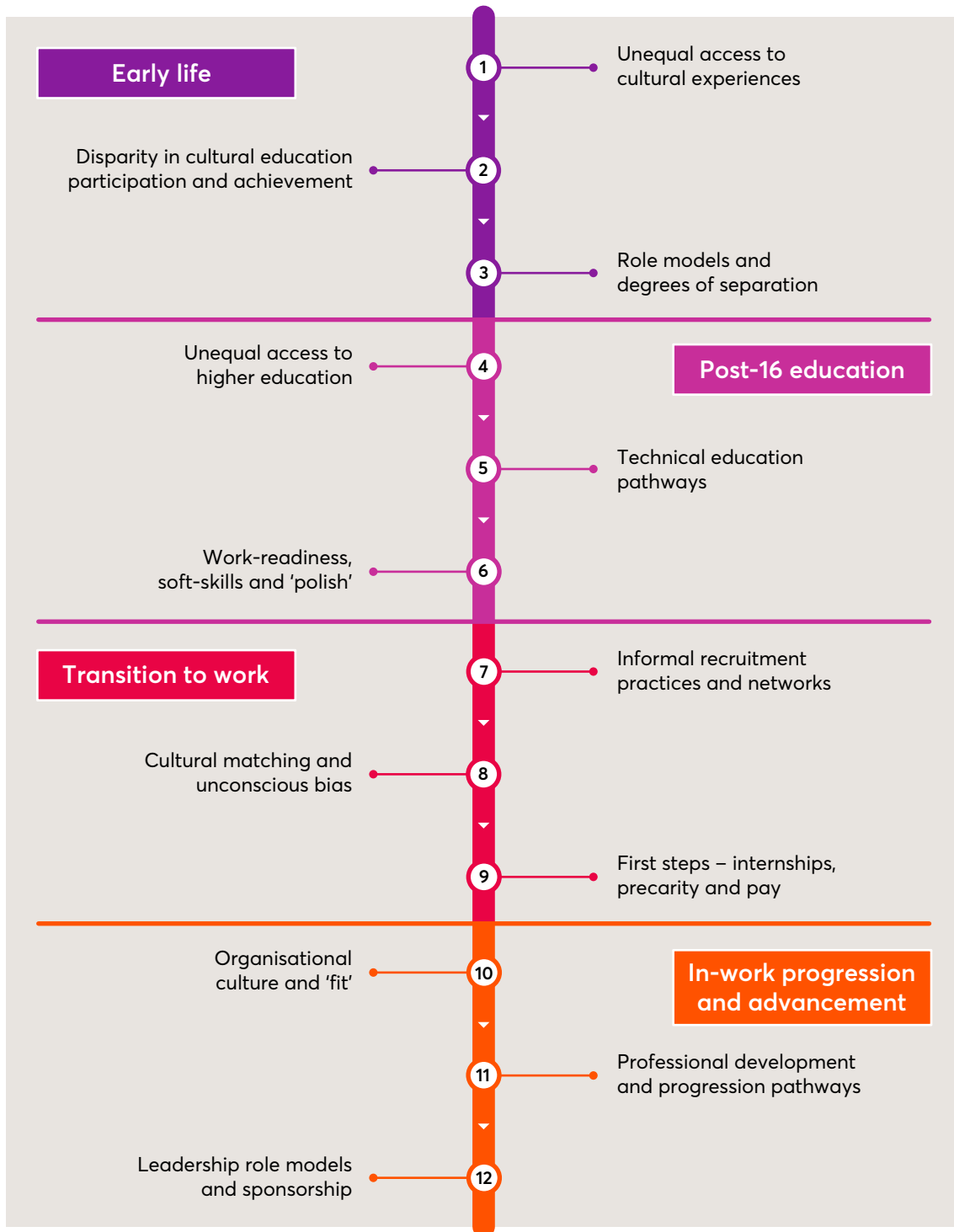## Examining class-related disadvantage in UK Screen

Our research has examined the points at which people experience class-related disadvantage throughout their life. While we have built on the substantial existing literature, our assessment has been led by interviews with those with lived experience of these issues, working in Screen roles today.

Our work finds **those from a lower socio-economic background are at a profound disadvantage when it comes to getting in and getting on in the Screen Industries**.

We identify **twelve primary points where class-based inequality or exclusions occur**.

Figure 2: Mapping the primary points the class-related disadvantages across life stages

Early life

1. Unequal access to cultural experiences

2. Disparity in cultural education participation and achievement

3. Role models and degrees of separation

Post-16 education

4. Unequal access to higher education

5. Technical education pathways

6. Work-readiness, soft-skills and 'polish'

Transition to work

7. Informal recruitment practices and networks

8. Cultural matching and unconscious bias

9. First steps – internships, precarity and pay

In-work progression and advancement

10. Organisational culture and 'fit'

11. Professional development and progression pathways

12. Leadership role models and sponsorship

We find exclusions start early in life. Unequal access to culture, disparities in participation and achievement in cultural education, and a lack of visible role models, mean the Screen Industry loses talented young people. This is in contrast to middle-class origin individuals who have already accumulated the 'cultural capital' that is the basis of a successful career.

Disadvantages continue in post-16 education. Routes into Screen are shaped by unequal access to higher education, flawed technical pathways, and the systemic failure to equip all learners with confidence and soft skills. These issues mean that education is, as yet, failing to address inequalities experienced early in life.

Those from working-class backgrounds face further obstacles as they enter work. Informal recruitment is commonplace in Screen. Those without the extensive 'social capital' of networks and industry connections face significant challenges to securing first, and subsequent, career opportunities. Pay and precarity are major issues for the industry. It is incredibly difficult for anyone without financial backing to sustain a career.

Class-based exclusions continue when in work. Our interviewees described how their background, accent and regional dialect marked them as 'different', unable to bring their whole self to work. Connections are crucial once in work, ranging from the importance of the school or university someone attended, through to the way that those from more privileged backgrounds benefit from the support of sponsors that 'fast-track' their path to success.

Many of the underlying causes of class imbalances in UK Screen lie in well-documented disparities in financial, social, and cultural capital. But capital is always context-specific, and **our research suggests there are a range of industry-specific factors that influence the chance of someone from a working-class background 'getting-in' and 'getting-on' in UK Screen**.

Key parts of the Screen Industries are concentrated in urban centres, particularly in London and the South East. This influences the geography of opportunity and a person's 'degrees of separation' from UK Screen. The demographics of the sector, along with industry practice does not support diversity. The way the industry finds and advances talent, and current workplace culture impacts access, retention and progression. In parts of the sector, pay is low, work is insecure, and upfront investment is required to develop a portfolio or back a new project. **For those from working-class backgrounds the Screen Industries can appear a high-risk game, where the stakes are high, pay-outs are rare, and the deck is stacked in favour of the privileged**. Consequently, many 'opt out' of pursuing opportunities because of a sense that these jobs are not 'for them' or in anticipation of the obstacles they may face in securing and progressing in work in UK Screen.

Reviewing business practice, policy and programmes

So what are the UK Screen Industries doing to stem this loss of talent; to address class-based inequality; and to build a truly inclusive sector where everyone can thrive, irrespective of their socio-economic background?

Our review of current business practice suggests that **work is underway**, particularly amongst the major broadcasters. Employers are increasingly prioritising diversity and inclusion within their own businesses; changing recruitment practices; investing in educating their leaders and workers; and promoting more inclusive workplaces. This activity is welcome and needed, particularly to address inequalities linked to gender, race and disability. Yet, **when it comes to socio-economic diversity, we are much earlier on the journey**.
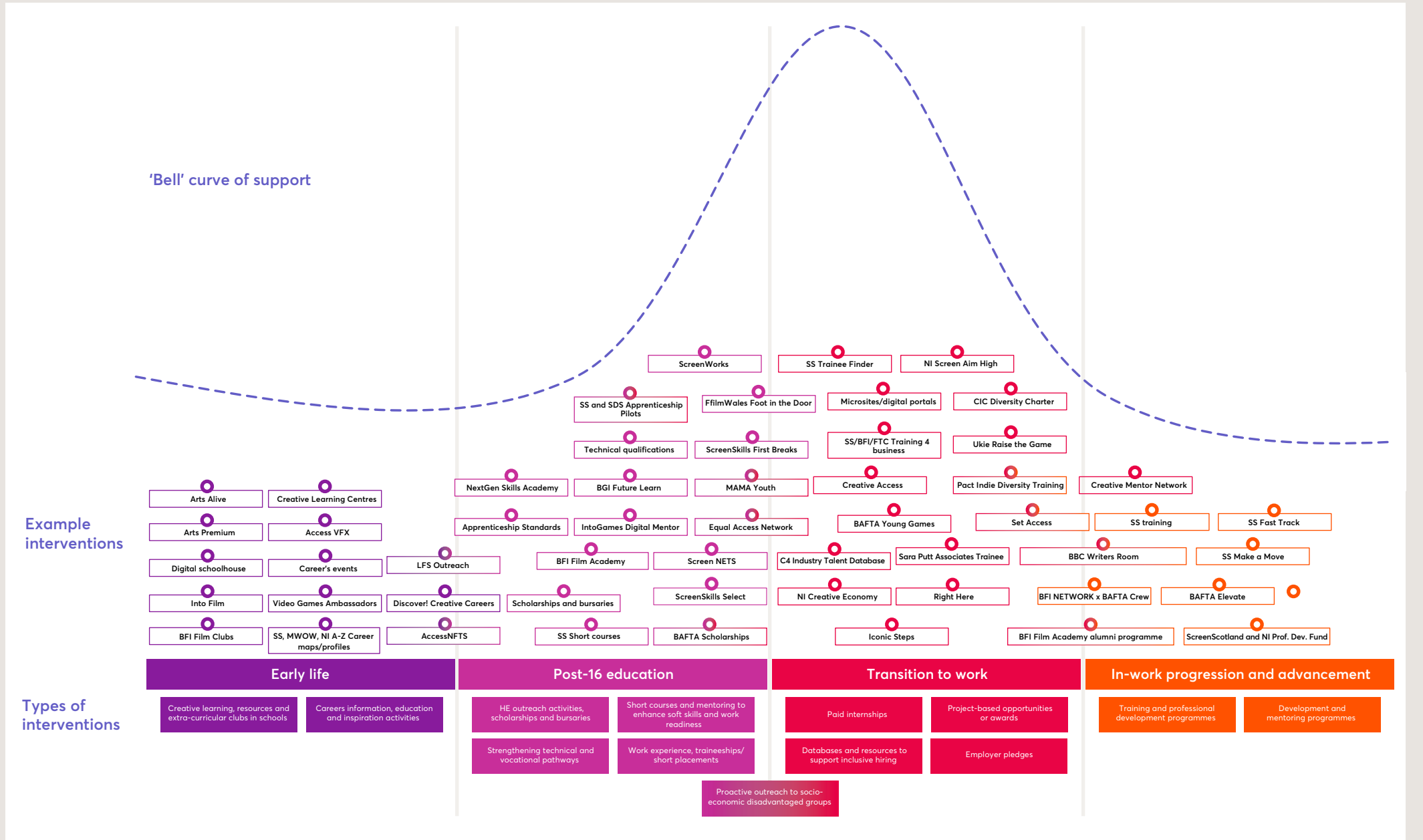
Difficulty in measuring a person's socio-economic background, or even understanding or talking about the concept of social class, acts as a significant hurdle that few businesses progress beyond. Many cite additional barriers, related to a shortfall of diverse talent, difficulty in getting the Apprenticeship model working, and challenges in navigating a fragmented landscape of support.

Our mapping of sector-specific policy and programmes suggests that other industry stakeholders are acting too: to improve the measurement of diversity, to establish new standards and conditions, and to advance interventions that support under-represented groups (including those from working-class backgrounds). This includes an array of interventions, such as: creative learning and resources for schools; careers information, education and inspiration activities; HE outreach activities, scholarships and bursaries; efforts to strengthen technical and vocational pathways; short courses to enhance soft skills; placements and internships; and training, professional development and mentoring programmes. While we have not sought to undertake a comprehensive review of place-based initiatives, our research suggests there is much **local innovation underway in creative clusters across the country**, that serves to extend, complement and nuance national programmes.

Yet, when we consider the distribution of interventions across life stages, we identify what appears to be a 'bell curve' of support. We find current activities tend to cluster around 'Post-16 education' and 'Transition to Work'. Our review of the policy landscape finds a relatively robust set of early-life interventions – which, though smaller in number, are greater in scale. In contrast, our analysis found far fewer programmes that seek to support the in-work advancement and progression of under-represented groups.

Further, **activity is often small-scale and short term** in nature. There are few programmes that support under-represented groups across multiple life stages, or that aid the transition from one scheme to the next to provide greater continuity of support. This creates a landscape where diverse talent can 'fall through the cracks'.

Figure 3: Mapping interventions across life-stages[2]

'Bell' curve of support

Example interventions

Early life	Post-16 education	Transition to work	In-work progression and advancement
	ScreenWorks	SS Trainee Finder / NI Screen Aim High	
	SS and SDS Apprenticeship Pilots / FfilmWales Foot in the Door	Microsites/digital portals / CIC Diversity Charter	
	Technical qualifications / ScreenSkills First Breaks	SS/BFI/FTC Training 4 business / Ukie Raise the Game	
Arts Alive / Creative Learning Centres	NextGen Skills Academy / BGI Future Learn / MAMA Youth	Creative Access / Pact Indie Diversity Training	Creative Mentor Network
Arts Premium / Access VFX	Apprenticeship Standards / IntoGames Digital Mentor / Equal Access Network	BAFTA Young Games / Set Access	SS training / SS Fast Track
Digital schoolhouse / Career's events / LFS Outreach	BFI Film Academy / Screen NETS	C4 Industry Talent Database / Sara Putt Associates Trainee	BBC Writers Room / SS Make a Move
Into Film / Video Games Ambassadors / Discover! Creative Careers	Scholarships and bursaries / ScreenSkills Select	NI Creative Economy / Right Here	BFI NETWORK x BAFTA Crew / BAFTA Elevate
BFI Film Clubs / SS, MWOW, NI A-Z Career maps/profiles / AccessNFTS	SS Short courses / BAFTA Scholarships	Iconic Steps	BFI Film Academy alumni programme / ScreenScotland and NI Prof. Dev. Fund

Types of interventions

Early life	Post-16 education	Transition to work	In-work progression and advancement
Creative learning, resources and extra-curricular clubs in schools	HE outreach activities, scholarships and bursaries	Paid internships	Training and professional development programmes
Careers information, education and inspiration activities	Short courses and mentoring to enhance soft skills and work readiness	Project-based opportunities or awards	Development and mentoring programmes
	Strengthening technical and vocational pathways	Databases and resources to support inclusive hiring	
	Work experience, traineeships/ short placements	Employer pledges	
	Proactive outreach to socio-economic disadvantaged groups		

2. National schemes only. Further information on the interventions shown can be found in the main report.

Shifting the dial on socio-economic diversity: policy priorities for the Screen Industries

Much work is underway to enhance diversity and inclusion in the UK Screen Industries. But the fact class-based exclusion is both pronounced and persistent raises important questions, not least: **Is there scope to enhance the current approach so to shift the dial on socio-economic diversity in a significant and sustained way?**

Phases 3 and 4 of the PEC's Class in the Creative Industries programme will seek to work collaboratively with industry to inform specific interventions, but our Phase 2 deep-dive points to six high-level strategic priorities for UK Screen:

1. **Take a holistic and intersectional view of diversity and inclusion**: Embedding socio-economic background within the industry's diversity 'conversation', particularly where gender, race, disability and class intersect, and tailor support to those that need it most.

2. **Put the fundamentals in place and create stronger incentives**: Agreeing an industry-wide approach to measuring socio-economic background; embedding this within existing industry diversity monitoring systems; establishing ambitious but attainable targets for socio-economic diversity; and enhancing the industry's approach to evaluating impact.

3. **Catalyse and enable industry leadership on social mobility**: We need more leaders of industry, both large and small businesses, including the broadcasters and major film and games businesses – to work proactively, and collaboratively, to advance social mobility in UK Screen: to shift how particular individuals and social groups are given value and assessed for key roles and opportunities. New targets must go hand in hand with additional information and resources to support businesses in rising to this challenge.

4. **Pump prime the diverse talent pipeline**: Stronger, proactive targeting of careers and inspiration activities towards social mobility 'cold spots'; embedding socio-economic diversity within the widening participation agenda of higher education institutions; and continuing efforts to strengthen technical pathways into the Screen Industries.

5. **Bring forward a new wave of diverse future leaders of industry**: Enhancing focus and investment in interventions that support progression and advancement, alongside new research exploring how to promote inclusive entrepreneurship and the scale-up of minority-led businesses in the Screen Industries.

6. **Explore place-based approaches to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusive growth**: Embedding diversity and inclusion within the creative cluster growth agenda; and working through local intermediaries to support career transition and connect those from disadvantaged backgrounds and located outside of urban clusters with opportunities.

These six distinct policy priorities – each individually important – **must be viewed as a coherent and complementary set of activities: the sum greater than the parts. Change will take time, so the industry needs to make a long-term commitment to enhancing socio-economic diversity. It is also important to recognise the need to act at different spatial, sectoral and strategic 'levels'**: looking at national policy interventions alongside placed-based approaches; advancing sub-sectoral programmes that complement activity across the Creative Industries; and treating both specific issues and underlying structural weakness.

Many of the causes of class imbalances in UK Screen speak to underlying systemic issues or concerns shared with other parts of the Creative Industries and the wider economy. Low levels of pay in parts of the Screen Industries – which acts as a significant obstacle for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds – speaks to the very economics of the sector, and how technology has driven changes in consumption that have, in turn, had a significant impact on the sustainability of commercial models. The flexible, freelance, project-based nature of work that characterises parts of the Screen Industries is in step with the rise of modern working practices across the economy and growing concerns about job quality and worker agency, raised in the Taylor Review. The need to spatially rebalance the Screen Industries and ensure that all people and places share the benefits of growth, speaks to the very heart of the Government's 'levelling up' agenda.

So, **while we seek to enhance and advance policies, programmes and businesses practices that promote socio-economic diversity in UK Screen, it will be important to ensure alignment with this wider policy agenda and to explore how the Screen Industries – in so many ways at the vanguard of some of these issues – can play an important role in enhancing social mobility and promoting shared prosperity across the UK.**

About the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre

The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) works to support the growth of the UK's Creative Industries through the production of independent and authoritative evidence and policy advice.

Led by Nesta and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of the UK Government's Industrial Strategy, the Centre comprises of a consortium of universities from across the UK (Birmingham; Cardiff; Edinburgh; Glasgow; Work Foundation at Lancaster University; LSE; Manchester; Newcastle; Sussex; Ulster). The PEC works with a diverse range of industry partners including the Creative Industries Federation. For more details visit **www.pec.ac.uk** and 🐦 **@CreativePEC**

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