Recognising Excellence in the Creative Industries

2026 REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

The creative sector is powered by a unique blend of artistic vision and technical precision. Yet, for many skilled professionals, particularly those navigating freelance or project-based careers, a unified standard to validate this expertise has been missing. This report introduces a transformative solution: a professional registration framework developed in collaboration by the Institute of Science and Technology (IST) and Creative UK.

Designed to support individuals at every career stage, this framework provides a portable seal of quality for the workforce. By establishing clear benchmarks, from Registered Technician (RTCiT) and Registered Practitioner (RPCiT) to Advanced Practitioner (APCiT), we are ensuring that technical skills and creative problem-solving are accorded the professional status they deserve. This initiative empowers individuals to demonstrate their value, ensuring their competence is recognised and respected across the entire sector.

This framework directly supports the core pillars of the Technician Commitment by providing a formal structure for Visibility, Recognition, and Career Development. The framework ensures that technical expertise is given a clear, public identity across the creative technology sectors.

Area of Difference	RTCiT (Technician)	RPCiT (Practitioner)	APCiT (Advanced Practitioner)
Problem Solving and Innovation (Competency A & D)	• Addresses **well-defined problems** • Provides **practical** solutions • **Identifies** resources effectively	• Provides solutions that **consider multiple factors** (e.g. technical, creative, inclusivity, environmental) • **Proposes innovative** solutions	• Solves problems **strategically** often in the **absence of complete information** • uses refined knowledge to **optimise outcomes**
Supervision and Authority (Competency B)	• Works **under supervision** • Follows **established procedures**	• Works with **minimal supervision** • Has the authority to **instruct** others on suitable practices	• Exercises **significant personal responsibility and autonomy** • **Develops and promotes policies** rather than just following or instructing on them
Teamwork and Leadership (Competency C)	• Works **collaboratively within a team** to ensure information is accessible	• Works successfully with colleagues from a **variety of roles** (e.g., students, academic, designers, clients)	• Demonstrates **inclusive leadership** skills • **Fosters a collaborative culture** and guides and inspires others
Professional Standards and Development (Competency E)	• Focuses on **complying** with codes of conduct • Enhances competence	• Focuses on **best practice** (e.g. ethical) • Identifies areas for development that enhance the organisation and the **wider environment**	• **Actively contributes to the definition** of Codes of Conduct • **Champions** development for peers

Summary Table 1: This table outlines the progression of professional capability across the three registration levels, highlighting increasing complexity in problem-solving, responsibility, leadership, and professional impact.

Feature	RTCiT (Technician)	RPCiT (Practitioner)	APCiT (Advanced Practitioner)
Responsibility	**Follows** procedures	Follows and **instructs**	**Develops** policies
Supervision	Under **supervision**	**Minimal** supervision	Significant **autonomy**
Interaction	Within a **team**	**Variety** of roles	Inclusive **Leadership**
Improvement	**Seeks** opportunities	**Advises** and **proposes**	**Drives** and **leads**

Summary Table 2: This summary provides a simplified overview of how responsibility, supervision, interaction, and improvement evolve across each registration level.

WHY IT IS NEEDED

CHANGING WORKFORCE

The UK creative industries are a significant engine of economic growth, yet the workforce faces unique structural challenges that traditional employment models don't address. A primary driver for this framework is the high prevalence of freelance, short-term, and project-based roles. Unlike sectors with stable, long-term employment, creative practitioners often move between temporary contracts, making it difficult to demonstrate consistent career progression or validated competencies to new employers.

GROWING SKILLS GAP

Furthermore, the sector is experiencing a "skills mismatch." Recent data indicates that approximately 65% of hard-to-fill vacancies in the creative industries are attributable to skills shortages, significantly higher than the national average. As the sector rapidly adopts new technologies, including AI and "Createch" (the convergence of creativity, arts, and culture with emerging technologies like AI and VR) the gap between existing workforce skills and employer needs is widening.

THIS FRAMEWORK PROVIDES A STANDARDISED, PORTABLE MECHANISM FOR INDIVIDUALS TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR COMPETENCY. IT ALLOWS PROFESSIONALS TO VERIFY THEIR SKILLS, BOTH TECHNICAL AND CREATIVE, INDEPENDENTLY OF A SPECIFIC EMPLOYER, ENSURING THAT THEIR EXPERTISE IS RECOGNISED REGARDLESS OF THEIR CURRENT CONTRACT STATUS.

BENEFITS TO INDIVIDUALS

Professional registration offers a robust structure for career development in a volatile labour market. For individuals, the key benefits include:

1

Portable Recognition

It validates skills and experience in a way that travels with the individual, crucial for freelancers who may otherwise lack a consistent record of professional development.

2

Parity with STEM

It elevates technical and creative roles to a status comparable with professionally registered scientists and engineers (e.g., RSci, CSci), fostering greater professional respect and identity.

3

Career Mapping

The framework distinguishes between levels of practice (Technician, Practitioner, Advanced Practitioner), helping individuals identify their current standing and plan their route to senior roles.

4

Validation of ongoing CPD (skills advancement):

As roles increasingly blend creativity with advanced technology "Createch", this registration provides third-party validation of continuing CPD and skills advancement demonstrating an individual's current and future focus.

Challenges Facing the Sector

The backdrop to this initiative is a sector facing "profound and sustained upheaval". While the Government's Sector Plan aims for £31bn in annual investment by 2035, the workforce is under pressure. Career progression is challenging for many, with optimism at a four-year low in 2025. Freelancers, who make up a third of the workforce, face precarious conditions, with 39% reporting periods of unemployment and 82% describing their work as precarious.

This framework helps mitigate these risks by offering a stable professional anchor, a recognised status that remains constant even when employment does not.

THE PARTNERSHIP: IST AND CREATIVE UK

This framework is the result of a strategic partnership between two leading bodies:

The Institute of Science and Technology (IST):

The IST is a professional body known for running registration schemes for technical and specialist staff. They bring the rigour of the Science Council's registration standards, adapting their proven methodology for validating technical competence to the creative sector.

Creative UK:

As the national membership body for the creative industries, Creative UK provides the sector-specific context. They champion the value of the creative workforce and ensure the framework is relevant to the diverse needs of artists, technicians, and producers.

Together, we have created a registration framework that respects the unique culture of the creative arts while applying the robust assessment standards found in technical disciplines.

FRAMEWORK CREATION

The development of this framework followed a rigorous consultation process involving industry experts, employers, and technical specialists.

A Steering Group was convened to oversee the initial design. This group, comprising representatives from across the sector:

Tracy Harwood (Chair)
Professor of Digital Culture, Demontford University

Terry Croft
Chair and CEO, IST

Joan Ward
Deputy Chair and Finance Officer, IST

John Paul Ashton-Kinlin
Marketing & Development Officer, IST

Ian Tidmarsh
Head of Creative Frameworks and Administration, IST

Michelle Jackson
Registrar, IST and University of Manchester

Jan Brett
Secretary, IST and University of Liverpool

Simon Hooper
Head of Membership, Creative UK

Chris Slesser
Development and Partnerships Manager, Creative UK

Gary Anderson
Technical Manager, University of Lincoln

Keith Hill
Associate Director of Technical Services,
University of Reading

Natallie Kennerley
Technical Services Development Manager,
Manchester Metropolitan University

Graeme Shaw
Principal Technical Specialist (Arts)
Brunel University London

Following this, the framework was subjected to a wider consultation period. This iterative process ensured that the language reflected the reality of creative work:

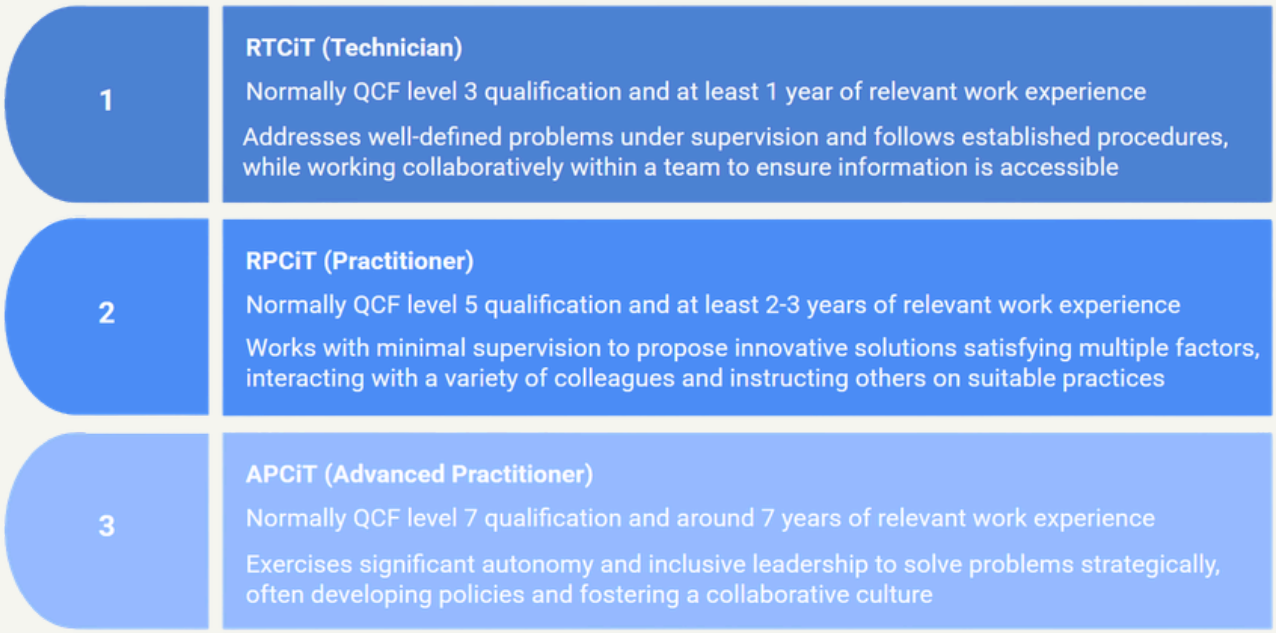
Sara Bacon
Centre Manager,
National Technician Development Centre

John Ayers
Head of Technical Support,
Glasgow School of Art

Kath Garaghty
Head of Technical Qualifications,
National Theatre

Martin O'Leary
Head of Pervasive Media Studio,
Watershed

THE FRAMEWORK



The framework defines three distinct levels of professional competence, designed to mirror career progression from early-stage technical support to a strategic decision making level.

- **RTCiT (Technician):** Collaboratively solves defined problems under supervision by following established procedures.
- **RPCiT (Practitioner):** Works largely independently to propose innovative solutions, guide colleagues, and collaborate.
- **APCiT (Advanced Practitioner):** Leads to solve strategic problems, develop policies, and build a collaborative culture.

HOW TO APPLY

1. Become an IST Member (MIScT, FIScT)
2. Identify a Supporter
3. Contact: registrations@istonline.org.uk
4. Complete Registration Application Form and pay fees
5. In your application don't forget:
    a. Complete the Competencies Form (Evidence Skills)
    b. Enclose your current Curriculum vitae (CV)
    c. Enclose a scan of your Qualification or complete Equivalency Report
    d. Complete a PPD Record (of the past year)
6. Look at guidance documents for help and ask IST for mentoring and feedback if necessary

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