



# FASHIONUK

THE STATE OF THE SECTOR

## BECTU

Bectu, a sector of Prospect union, represents nearly 40,000 staff, contract and freelance workers in the media and entertainment industries.

## FASHION UK

Fashion UK, a branch of Bectu, is the first-ever union branch solely for UK-based non-performing fashion creatives.



# FASHION UK

THE STATE OF THE SECTOR

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Published by Bectu  
100 Rochester Row, London SW1P 1JP

25-0008/FEB25/CHP-150



A person's hand is visible at the top left, holding a black suitcase. The background is a solid, vibrant red. The text is positioned to the right of the suitcase.

**T**

he UK fashion and textile industry contributes an estimated £62bn to the UK economy.<sup>1</sup> Research from the British Fashion Council showed that in 2021 the UK fashion industry directly generated tax revenues worth £21 billion and was directly responsible for more than 800,000 jobs.<sup>2</sup> And the industry is set to grow profits by 5% over the next year.<sup>3</sup> However, for those working in the fashion industry, it is often a story of insecurity, long hours, low – or no – pay, bullying, harassment and nepotism.

# 31% OF FASHION CREATIVES SEE THEMSELVES WORKING IN ANOTHER INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS' TIME

The working conditions of creatives in roles such as Fashion and Accessories Designers, Hair Stylists, Makeup Artists and Nail Technicians, Photographers, Fashion Stylists, Tailors, and their Assistants have rarely been captured, especially for the many freelancers supporting the industry.<sup>4</sup> But stories of exploitation, harassment, bullying, abuse and insecurity are rife.

Bectu, the UK's union for the creative industries, surveyed over 500 UK fashion creatives to better understand the challenges they face. We found:

- Just one in 10 fashion creatives say they feel secure in their job.
- Only 14% are paid on time for their work.
- More than seven in 10 have struggled financially (72%) in the past year.

- Half (51%) of fashion creatives are earning under £30,000 a year before tax from their work in the industry.
- Eight in 10 (79%) have felt pressured to work for free.
- And 83% say that behaviours that would be considered toxic and inappropriate in public life are often tolerated in the fashion industry.

The responses also paint a bleak picture of poor work/life balance, with more than seven in 10 reporting mental health struggles in the past year, and most (59%) saying their work has negatively impacted their personal relationships.

The freelance nature of much of the workforce means fashion creatives are often in precarious work, moving between short term jobs with little security and few employment

rights or access to social security. Power imbalances within the creative industries can create opportunities for bullying and harassment. As with many other creative sectors, financial uncertainty through fluctuations in work leaves them exposed, while toxic behaviour often goes unchallenged with the absence of formal HR structures and an unwillingness to rock the boat when you are considered 'only as good as your last job'.

The impact of these conditions on fashion creatives is clear, as our survey shows that a third of fashion creatives (31%) see themselves working in another industry in five years' time.

Our research makes a clear call for action, to improve the working lives of fashion creatives. The industry must listen, or risk an exodus of the many highly skilled workers who are the backbone of the UK's world-leading fashion sector.



## *Methodology*

Between 9 September and 8 November 2024, Bectu carried out an online survey of 525 non-performing creatives working in fashion. Participants were recruited online, through social media, web media promotion and through word of mouth.

## *Respondents*

- Of the 525 respondents, the majority (78%) were women, while 19% were men and 2% non-binary.
- The majority of respondents were aged 25-34 (49%). 30% were in the 35-44 group, just 14% were over 45, and 8% were 18-24.
- Two thirds (66%) identified as heterosexual, while almost a third (27%) identified as being LGBT+.
- 62% identified as coming from a working-class background.
- Around half of those who took the survey identified as white British (48%), 24% from another white background, and 18% identifying as Black or from a minoritised ethnic background.
- 10% identified as having a disability, below the national average of 18%.
- Most respondents were working as freelancers (72%), with 10% working through their own limited company, and just 14% full time employees.
- 88% were London based, reflecting the London-centric nature of the industry.
- Respondents came from across the fashion industry. A quarter were working as Fashion Stylists or Fashion Editors (25%), a quarter as Hair Stylists, Makeup Artists and Nail Technicians, and 17% as Assistants, 7% as Designers, and 8% as Photographers.
- A small group of respondents were Tailors, Sewists or other makers, while 15% worked in creative roles outside of these categories.

A woman is walking on a white runway, wearing a vibrant red, pleated dress and black high-heeled shoes. The camera angle is low, focusing on her legs and feet. The background is a dark, out-of-focus area, likely a stage or event space. The text is overlaid on the lower left portion of the image.

**UNDervalUED,**  
*UNDERPAID*  
**& UNCERTAIN**





*“The industry centres itself around London but the pay in the city does not provide anywhere near enough to survive. The salaries in the industry need to raise to reflect London’s insane living costs. Lots of talented people in the industry are giving up and leaving London for a simpler life path outside of fashion.”*

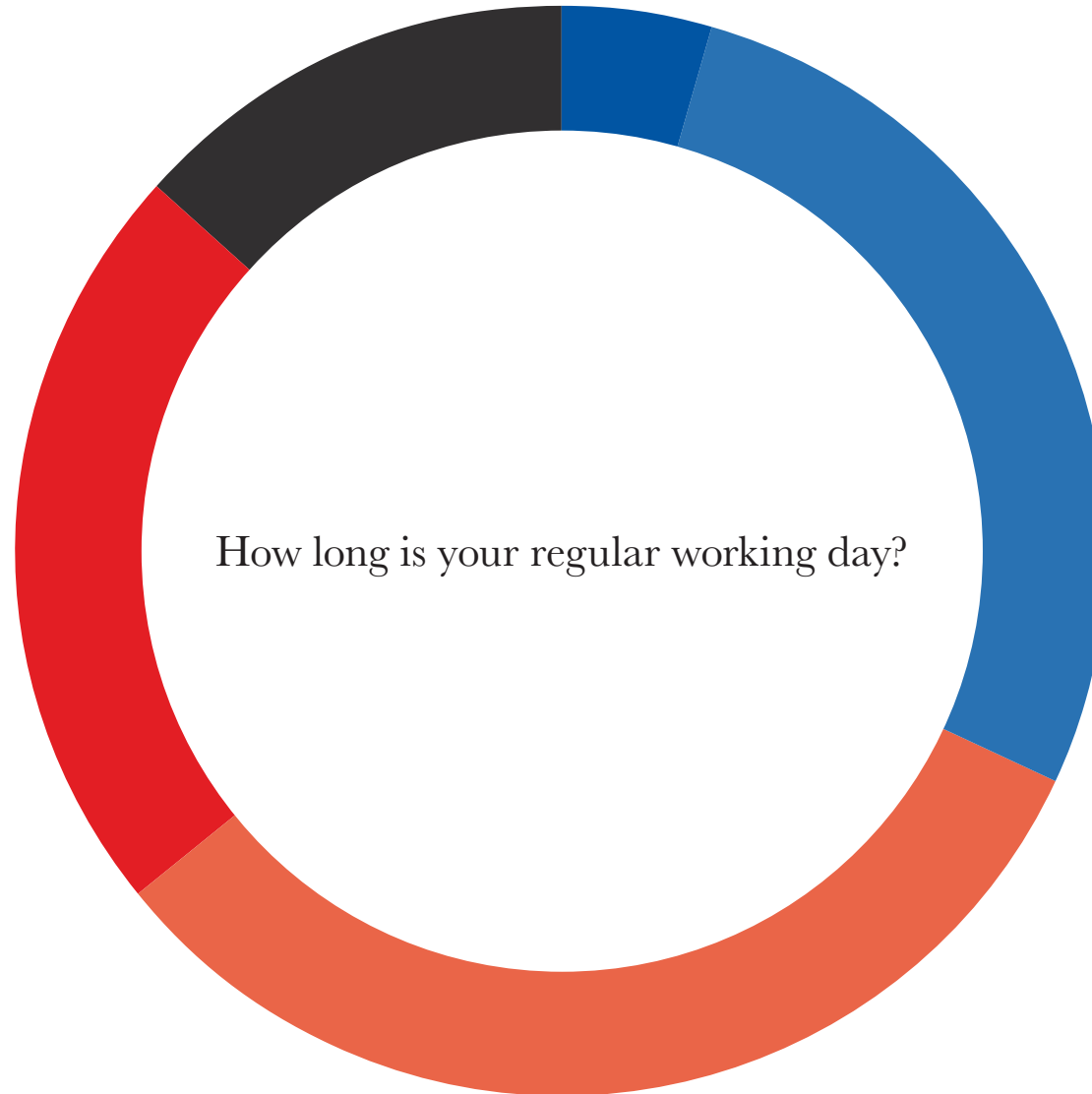
**FASHION BRAND OWNER**

*“I cannot decide what’s worse – working freelance and getting orders cancelled last minute with no reimbursement for materials, or working for a brand under a consultant/assistant role, which actually includes work of three different roles with a salary below London’s living wage.”*

**DESIGN CONSULTANT**

*“There is often no fee for editorial shoots and now not even travel expenses covered... also no overtime or limit on how long they shoot. I have done a 12-hour day for free previously.”*

**NAIL TECHNICIAN**



● Less than 8 hours, 4.77%   ● 8 hours, with 1 hour for lunch, 23.85%   ● 10 hours, with 1 hour for lunch, 33.78%   ● 11+ hours, 23.66%   ● Other, 13.93%

*“Underpaid, under-respected and have no-one to tell this to because HR is in the pocket of the CEO, who is our boss.”*

## SENIOR CREATIVE ASSISTANT

O

ur research highlighted the many challenges fashion creatives face, with long hours and low pay leaving them feeling undervalued. Respondents frequently spoke of the damaging impact their work was having on their lives, unable to plan ahead or to support their families, with many struggling financially or with their mental health and wellbeing.

While hours can fluctuate, depending on the nature of a job, a quarter (24%) of our survey respondents said that they work 11+ hours as a regular working day, with a third (34%) working 10+1 as standard. Assistants were most likely to report long hours, with a third (31%) working 11+ hour days as standard. Among freelancers, 62% worked at least 10 hours as a regular working day.

Respondents spoke about the pressure to accept these long hours, often without pay, as workers are often not asked to stay late or to have their hours calculated, but it is an expectation that workers stay until the work is finished. Despite these long hours, almost seven in 10 (69%) say they are not paid for

working overtime. This increased to 89% of full-time employees. The lowest paid were also least likely to receive any overtime pay – just 17% of workers with an income of £10,000 or less a year from fashion work were paid overtime – compared to 42% of all those earning above £50,000 a year.

The negative physical and mental health implications of working long hours, especially in many of the physical roles undertaken by fashion creatives, are well documented, associated with occupational stress, anxiety and depression as well as increased substance misuse, poor sleep and even risks of cardiovascular diseases. However, for many this has become the norm.

A person wearing a black mesh long-sleeved top and a white skirt is working on a garment on a mannequin. The person's hands are visible, adjusting the fabric. The background is blurred, showing other people and what appears to be a workshop or studio setting.

# WORKING *FOR* FREE

*“There’s an insane problem  
with young people being  
taken advantage of.”*

BESPOKE COATMAKER

## 79% OF FASHION RESPONDENTS SAY THAT THEY HAVE FELT PRESSURED TO WORK FOR FREE

# M

oreover, a lack of overtime pay is the tip of the iceberg when looking at fashion's culture of free work. Our survey found that nearly eight in 10 fashion creatives have felt under pressure to work for free.

Respondents spoke about the expectation of working overtime, prep and wrap hours and development time being unpaid. Some also spoke about how they were being expected to work for credits or gifts, which has become standardised in much fashion work, especially among Fashion Stylists.

The issue of unpaid internships has been widely reported, with 2019 research from the Sutton Trust<sup>5</sup> showing that 48% of the employers who offer internships admit to offering them unpaid. In London, where the majority of fashion creative work is concentrated, the research



*“It’s extremely hard to get into, especially as a freelancer, and unless you were quite well-known, starting out is very unsteady financially. It has been something I’ve always loved doing, but never something I could quit my full-time job for. I’ve been trying to crack the industry for over five years. Now I feel like I’ve given up.”*

### PERSONAL STYLIST

calculated that unpaid internships cost more than £1,000 per month to the interns, a figure which is likely much higher six years on from this report.

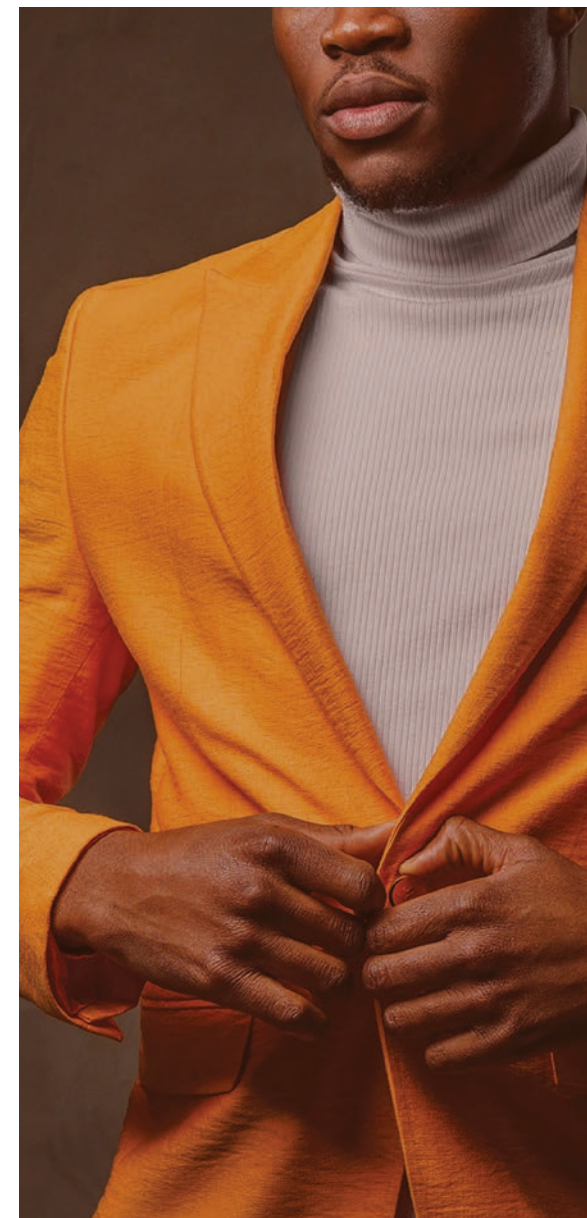
In our research, more than half (52%) of fashion creatives said that they had interned to get into the fashion industry. And three quarters (77%) think there is a place for internships within the industry – but it is clear from responses that these need structure and further regulation.

Respondents also spoke about the difficulties they faced in having to provide equipment, clothing and accessories, or having to front expenses, including travel,

without any clarity on if or when they would be reimbursed. We also heard responses about the common practice of clients asking for all-in fees, which means the creative does not know their final take-home fee after expenses. Respondents spoke of the exclusionary nature of unpaid work, including internships, for those from working-class backgrounds. With unpaid work often seen as a route to paid opportunities, free work is understandably exclusionary.

In our survey, working-class respondents were less likely to have interned to get into the industry (50%) than those who were not

from working class backgrounds (58%), but were more likely to have felt pressured to work for free (81% compared to 77%). And our research would suggest that starting in the industry from a working-class background has implications on earnings down the line, as 55% of working-class respondents said that they are currently earning under £30,000 a year from their fashion work, compared to 42% of those from middle- or upper-class backgrounds. Working-class respondents were twice as likely to be in the lowest earning cohort (21% earned under £10,000) as middle- or upper-class respondents (11% earned under £10,000).





*“So many talented people who are interested in pursuing styling but who cannot afford to work for free are being cut out of the picture. It’s becoming an industry that’s more and more inaccessible to working-class people who have to pay rent and only have themselves to rely on financially.”*

**STYLING ASSISTANT**

*“As a photographer working in fashion, you are expected to spend a lot of money every season on unpaid editorial work that often doesn’t bring new commercial work. It’s like a Ponzi scheme, bankrolling and supporting these powerful magazines.”*

**PHOTOGRAPHER/DIRECTOR**

*“So much unpaid work despite years of experience. I only take on these opportunities... in the hope that it will lead to paid work or a valuable network.”*

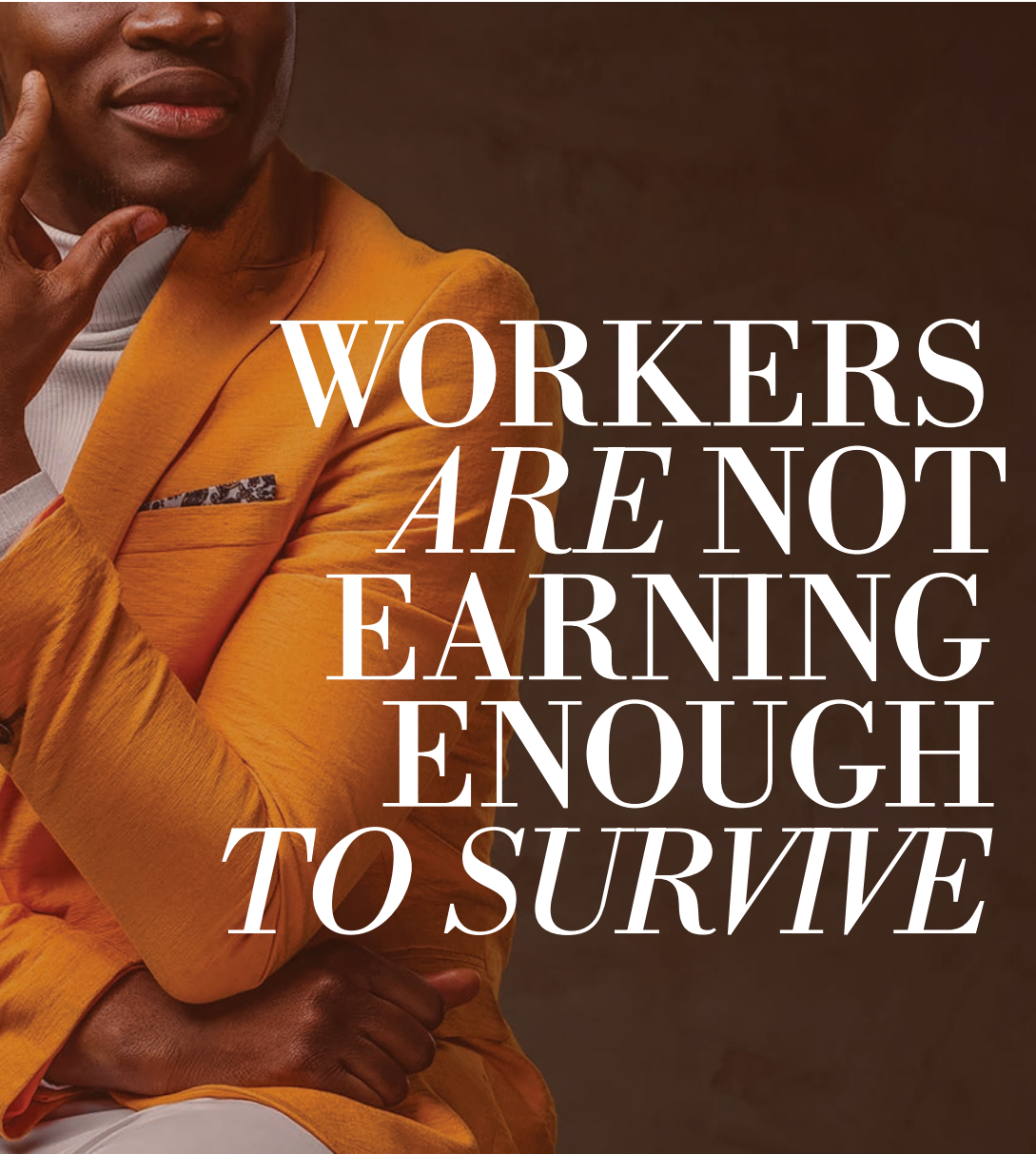
**STYLIST**

*“A huge part of the problem is stylists asking assistants to work for them for credit or expenses. It’s illegal and so unhelpful.”*

**FASHION STYLIST**

*“The ‘keep what’s left over’ after a tiny wardrobe budget is a disgraceful way to pay stylists.”*

**FASHION STYLIST**



# WORKERS ARE NOT EARNING ENOUGH TO SURVIVE

# W

hile unpaid work plagues the industry, creative fashion work that is paid is frequently not paid enough. Just 14% of fashion creatives said they feel that they receive a fair rate for their work.

More than a third (36%) are supplementing their income with non-fashion work. Those in the early stages of their fashion career were most likely to be supplementing their income with non-fashion work, a reflection of the unpaid work that respondents said was 'expected' to get into the industry as well as a drop off of workers in the industry over time.

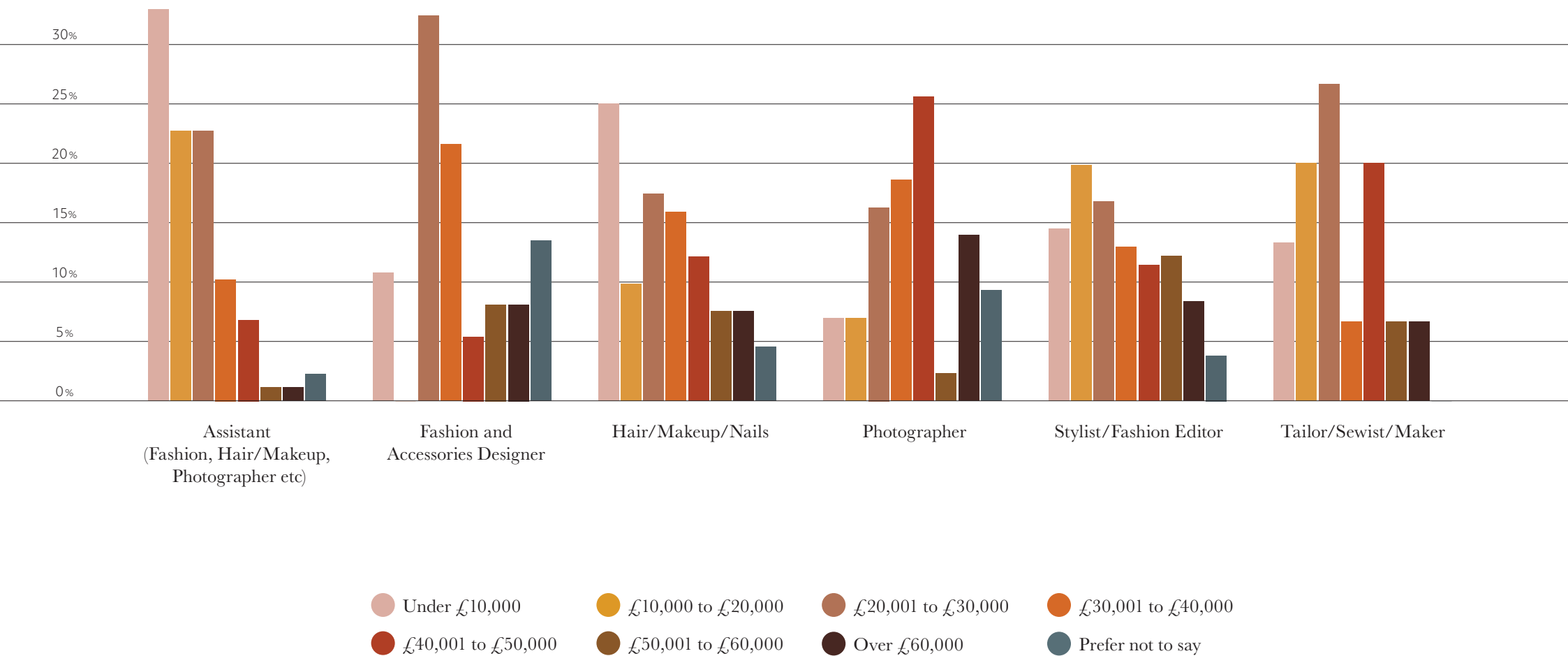
Overall, one in five (18%) are earning less than £10,000 a year before tax for their work in fashion; half (51%) of fashion workers are earning under £30,000 a year before tax from their work in the industry. Assistants were among

the lowest paid, with a third (33%) earning less than £10,000 a year and 23% under £20,000 a year. A quarter of Hair Stylists, Makeup Artists and Nail Technicians were earning less than £10,000 a year.

With so many struggling with low wages, almost three quarters of our survey respondents say they have struggled financially (72%) over the past year. Of those in the first two years of working in fashion, 84% are struggling, while 89% of assistants said they had struggled financially. Women (74%) and non-binary respondents (83%) were more likely to be struggling financially than men (65%).



## What is your average annual income, before tax, from fashion-related work?



INSECURITY  
& *LATE*  
*PAYMENTS*



*“I’ve had shoes thrown at me, been told certain expenses will be covered and then had the client refuse to pay them. I had clients claim to follow APA<sup>6</sup> but refuse to cover travel expenses for an 11+ hour day of work. Clients stop booking me if I start to charge interest on late payments. 16-hour days during London Fashion Week for as little as £100.”*

PHOTO ASSISTANT

*“Being released from options for shows in different countries last minute – ie the morning of or the night before. People need to be protected as the expenses are paid for by the freelancer so getting released is a huge financial loss.”*

MAKEUP ARTIST

*“Late payments and payment terms are horrendous and a regular ‘normal’ thing. Hair and Makeup regularly don’t get included with travel covered, even though kit can weigh upwards of 30kg each suitcase... Late cancellations and change of options are also difficult to manage and often mean the artist misses out on work.”*

HAIR AND MAKEUP ARTIST

*“Feels like there’s no job security; clients will book and cancel days before. Trying to ask for better pay doesn’t work and often results in not getting booked again. Seems like there is always someone willing to work for next to nothing.”*

HAIR AND MAKEUP ARTIST

# W

ith creative fashion roles being largely freelance, late payments and insecurity are significant issues for workers. Just one in ten (10%) said that they feel secure in their job.

The length of time people had been in the industry seemed to have very little impact on their sense of security, as only 11% of those who had worked in the industry for 15 years or more and 7% of those who had worked in the industry for 10-15 years said they felt secure in their job.

Just 5% of freelancers said that they felt secure in their job, while only 31% of full time employees said that their employment felt secure.

Job cancellations and late payments add to insecurity, as a staggering 71% of survey respondents – and 84% of freelancers – said that they have had a job cancelled at short notice

in the last 12 months, while 44% of survey respondents – and 52% of freelancers – had started a job without confirmation due to the last-minute nature of bookings.

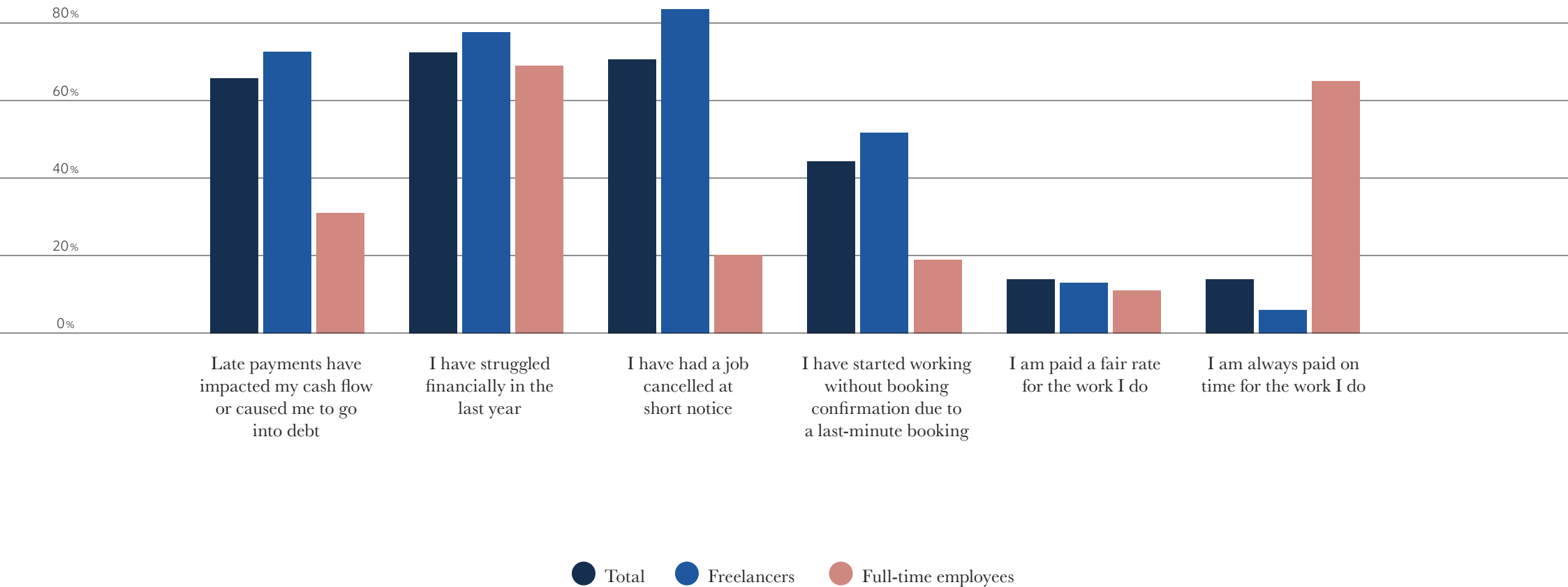
Only 14% of fashion creatives (and just 6% of freelancers) say they are paid on time for the work they do. In the past year, more than seven in 10 (71%) (and 81% of freelancers) have had to wait more than six weeks after a job to be paid. Shockingly, two-thirds (66%) say that late payment has impacted their cash flow or caused them to go into debt, with this figure increasing to 72% for freelancers.

*“I went horribly into debt as a fashion stylist. I was constantly waiting for and chasing payment.”*

HEAD BOOKER

*“Working on Fashion Week is absolutely ridiculous. You pay to go to places and agencies can cancel you hours before the show without any repercussion. A lot of artists get pencilled-in for the same show and released last minute. We invest time and money to be able to be in different cities.”*

### MAKEUP ARTIST/ASSISTANT





# *THE IMPACT OF POOR-QUALITY WORK*

*“I am strongly considering leaving the industry... The instability and unpredictability is heavily impacting my mental health and personal life.”*

MAKEUP ARTIST

## 72% OF FASHION RESPONDENTS SAY THAT THEY HAVE STRUGGLED WITH THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

# T

he long hours, low pay and insecurity uncovered in our research make it unsurprising that many fashion creatives are unable to maintain a decent work/life balance. A majority (59%) of respondents said that their work has had a negative impact on their personal relationships – increasing to 63% of those with parenting or caring responsibilities.

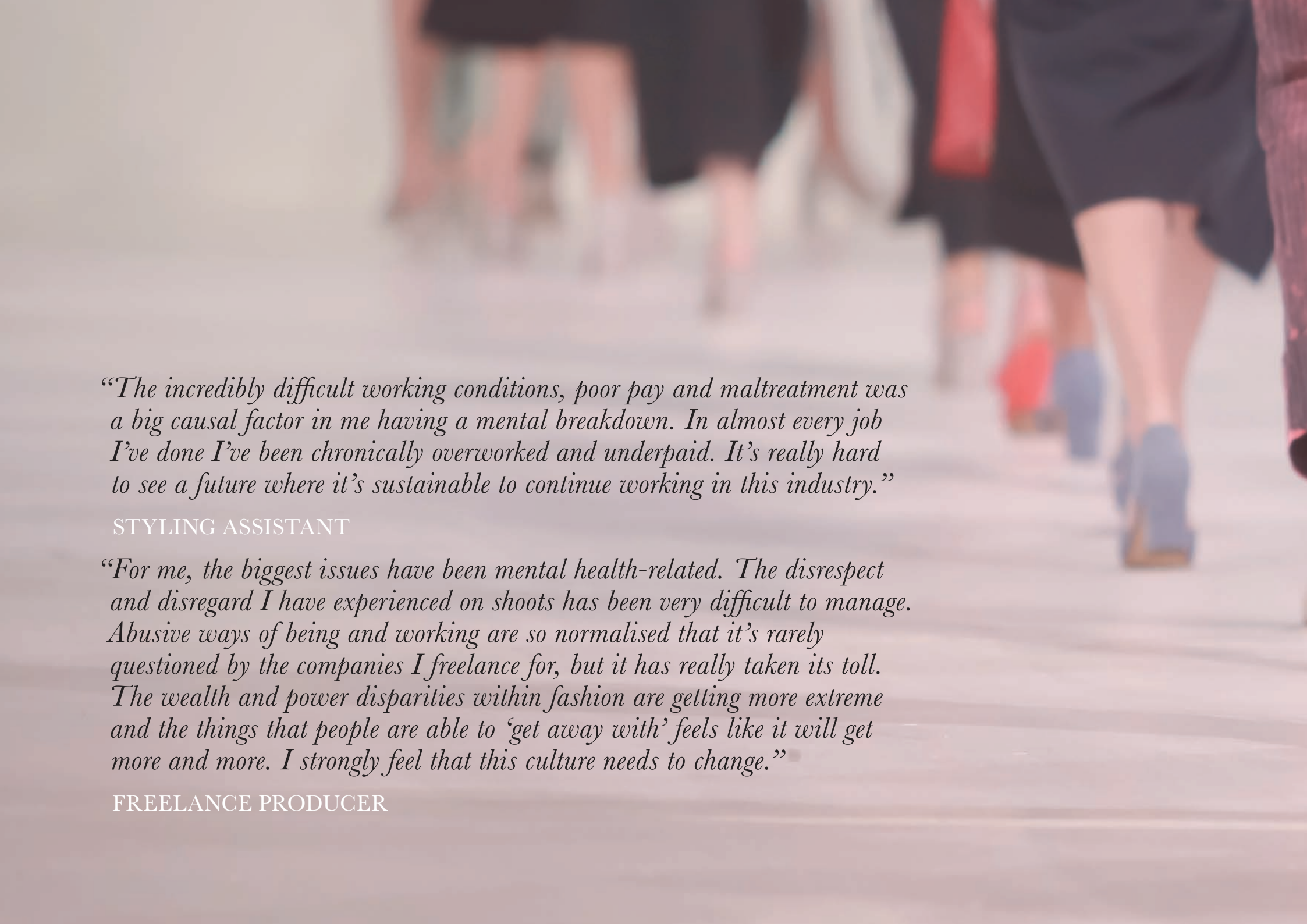
Creatives repeatedly mentioned their experiences of an industry that is exploiting creatives and failing to respect the talent on which it relies. Just over a quarter (26%) feel valued by their employer or engager for the work they do, and only 17% have felt fully supported by their employer or engager over the past year.

A lack of good quality work across the fashion industry is having a direct impact on the mental health and wellbeing of fashion creatives, as almost three-quarters have struggled with their mental health (73%) in the past year. Some respondents spoke of harassment driving them to feeling suicidal, while many others said

they had to take unpaid time off work to recover from physical and mental exhaustion.

And the mental health and wellbeing impact was a reason many said they were planning to leave the industry altogether. Respondents spoke of not being re-booked after disclosing mental health struggles to their employer or engager, of bullying and harassment as well as high level stress, financial concerns and long hours all driving them to sickness.

69% of respondents said that they could see themselves working in fashion in five years' time; but almost a third (31%) say they think that by 2029 they will be working in another industry.



*“The incredibly difficult working conditions, poor pay and maltreatment was a big causal factor in me having a mental breakdown. In almost every job I’ve done I’ve been chronically overworked and underpaid. It’s really hard to see a future where it’s sustainable to continue working in this industry.”*

STYLING ASSISTANT

*“For me, the biggest issues have been mental health-related. The disrespect and disregard I have experienced on shoots has been very difficult to manage. Abusive ways of being and working are so normalised that it’s rarely questioned by the companies I freelance for, but it has really taken its toll. The wealth and power disparities within fashion are getting more extreme and the things that people are able to ‘get away with’ feels like it will get more and more. I strongly feel that this culture needs to change.”*

FREELANCE PRODUCER







# GLOBAL MAJORITY FASHION CREATIVES

*“I worked for eight years,  
underpaid, for a small  
brand where the co-founder  
would openly make sexist  
and racist remarks.”*

PRODUCT CONSULTANT

## 40% OF GLOBAL MAJORITY FASHION CREATIVES SAY THAT THEY HAVE FELT DISCRIMINATED AGAINST AT WORK

# T

he inaugural UK Fashion DEI Report, published in 2024, highlighted the prevalence of inequities in the industry.<sup>7</sup> The research found that just 11% of executive team and board “Power Roles” (CEO, CFO, Chair and Creative Director) are held by people of colour, and 24% by women. While 86% of white men in the industry believed the industry is diverse, 46% of women of colour said the same.

Our research mimicked these findings, with fashion creatives from Black and minoritised ethnic backgrounds more likely to be in low-paid work and to have experienced workplace discrimination than their white counterparts.

Taking a sample of our survey of those from mixed heritage, Black, Asian or other global majority backgrounds (n=96), we found:

- 40% have felt discriminated against at work.

- 35% were earning under £10,000 a year from their fashion-related work.
- Only 7% said that their employer or engager promotes a healthy work culture.
- 85% agree that behaviours that would be considered toxic and inappropriate in public life are tolerated in the fashion industry.
- 28% say they see themselves leaving the fashion industry in the next five years.

*“As a POC in the fashion industry for 20+ years, I feel we are still very outnumbered by our white colleagues and all initiatives are geared at bringing in POCs from outside the industry at a junior level rather than (as with initiatives around white women in other industries, and even in fashion) promoting and growing from within the industry.”*

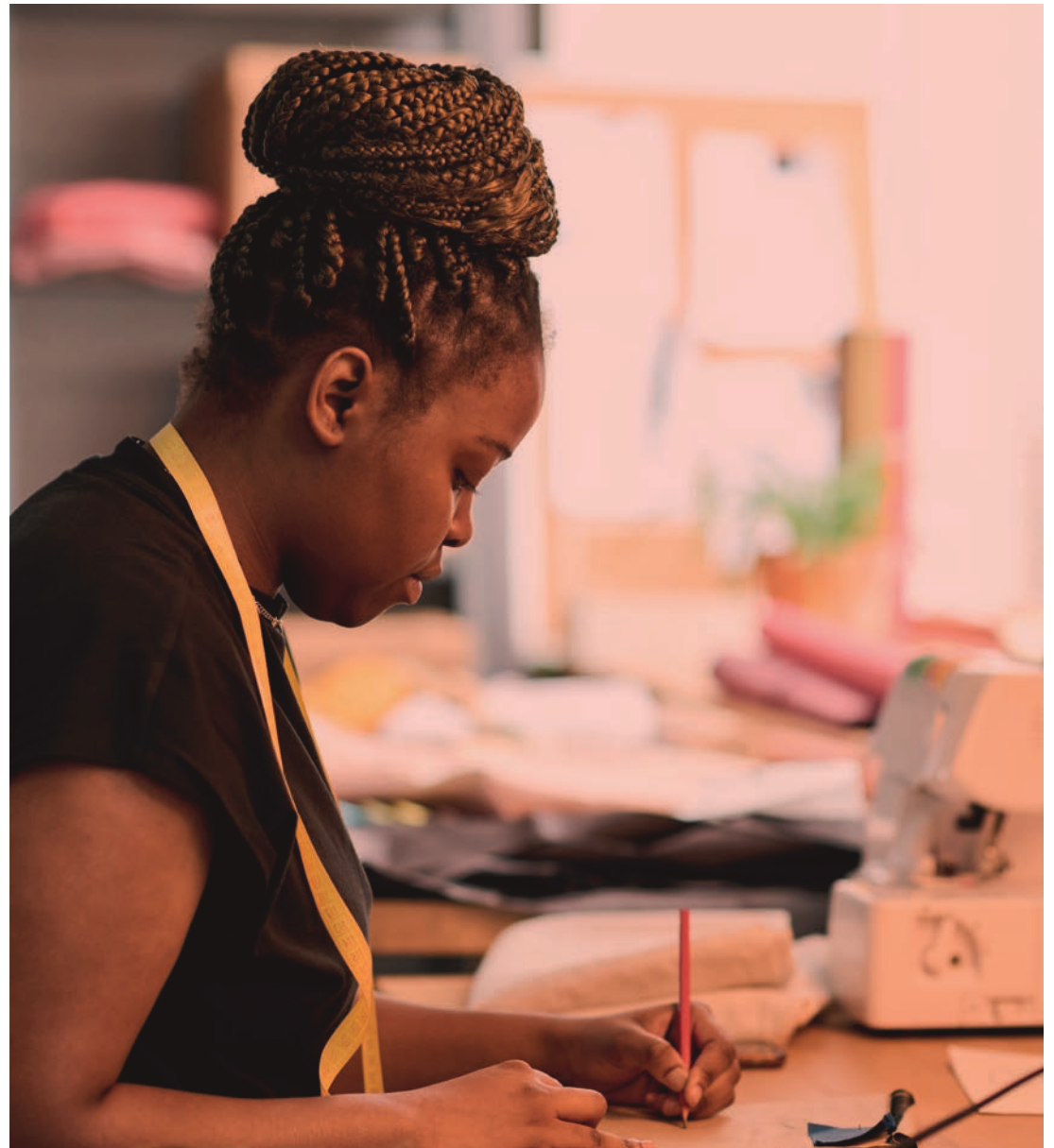
**HEAD OF BRAND PARTNERSHIPS**

*“Obvious racism is often not the biggest issue we face, but rather the microaggressions people make day to day that creep in. It’s these nuances that sail through the industry as it’s classed as ‘not racist’ but this is hugely detrimental to the industry and its minorities within.”*

**CASTING DIRECTOR**

*“Women get treated much more unfairly than men. Black women are put in a box in what they get to do even though they can do so much more.”*

**HAIRSTYLIST**





# TOXICITY & EXCLUSION

# T

hroughout our survey, accounts of bullying and harassment were shocking. Multiple respondents spoke about sexual harassment, having objects thrown at them, and being verbally abused by senior colleagues, managers or talent. It is very clear that fashion has a culture problem.

In many responses, where people had reported incidents, they were told that ‘nothing could be done’ or in many cases were let go from jobs or not re-booked. Only 15% say that their employer or engager promotes a healthy work culture.

Just 20% of survey respondents said that they considered the fashion industry to be an inclusive place to work, while a staggering 83% said that behaviours that would be considered toxic and

inappropriate in public life are often tolerated in the fashion industry.

One in three (30%) said they have felt discriminated against at work and a quarter (24%) have experienced harassment, bullying or discrimination at work during the past year. And with no formal reporting mechanisms or HR support, especially with so many freelancers active in the industry, respondents spoke about

## 83% OF FASHION CREATIVES SAY THAT BEHAVIOURS THAT WOULD BE CONSIDERED TOXIC AND INAPPROPRIATE IN PUBLIC LIFE ARE OFTEN TOLERATED IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

word-of-mouth discussions on certain figures through informal WhatsApp groups as the only means of protection they had against perpetrators. There was a high level of support from respondents for a more formal reporting scheme, as 96% of survey respondents said that they would back an independent body to which they could report health and safety concerns (including bullying, harassment and sexual harassment).

The launch of the Creative Industries Independent Standards

Authority<sup>8</sup> (CIISA) has been a positive step to uphold and improve standards of behaviour across the creative industries and to prevent and tackle all forms of bullying and harassment, including bullying and harassment of a discriminatory nature. At present, CIISA covers the film, TV, theatre and music industries. It is clear that the fashion industry would benefit from engagement with CIISA to end harassment and discriminatory practice, and our survey suggests there is clear support from workers for such engagement.





*“Sexual harassment from older male photographers. Being grabbed and told ‘If you didn’t have a boyfriend, you could be my assistant.’”*

**PHOTOGRAPHER  
& CREATIVE DIRECTOR**

*“There are people who will constantly exploit others to get ahead in the industry.”*

**HAIR AND MAKEUP ARTIST**

*“This is a wonderful industry but we have no protection. Sexism has gotten worse and worse... Payments are late. People create toxic environments, have seen open bullying. People hire the same people – there is no room to bring in new people.”*

**PRODUCTION DESIGNER**

*“I’m still amazed by the levels of toxicity in this industry.”*

**SENIOR FASHION DESIGNER**



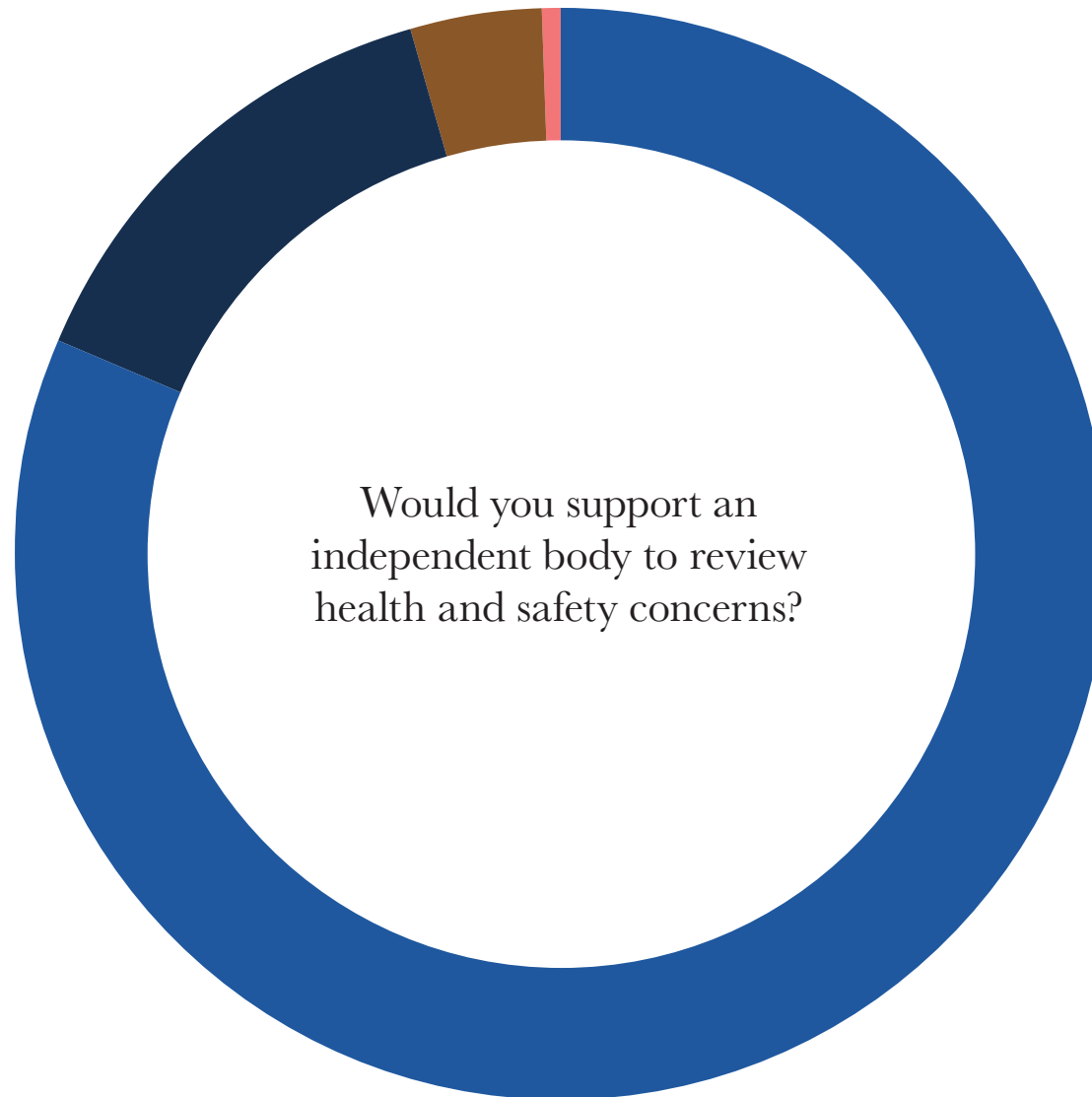
*“When I was an assistant, my boss left me locked in an apartment in Paris for two days because the celebrity we had been shooting for an ad campaign talked to me more than they did him.”*

*“They would regularly psychologically abuse me, doing things like stealing accessories from a table during a shoot, insinuating they’d gone missing and making me feel like I was going to have to pay for them before producing them from their pocket in the taxi on the way home saying ‘You should have been paying more attention’ – all while being paid £50 for a shoot.”*

*“Other things they would do include throwing shoes at me or keeping me past 11pm at their house with nothing to do whilst they scrolled their laptop, just to exercise power over me. I didn’t know any better and felt like I had to go through this to make it.”*

**CELEBRITY STYLIST**





● Strongly support, 81.57% ● Support, 14.01% ● Neither support nor oppose, 4.03% ● Oppose, 0% ● Strongly oppose, 0.38%

A person with their back to the camera, wearing a long white robe with a thin belt, walking away on a white runway. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

# RIGHTS, SUPPORT & COVER

# B

ecause so many freelancers are self employed, they are not eligible for statutory employment rights, such as sick pay, parental leave or redundancy pay. Freelancers on short-term PAYE contracts may qualify for statutory employment rights, but the transient nature of this work means these rights may not be enforced or upheld. The impact of low pay and insecure work on the freelance fashion workforce is seeing many even more exposed, without insurance, savings or a pension.

*“I have no pension, no assets, very little savings. No job security for years and the stress of that, and now I have a physical issue that means I can’t do it anymore. I’ve worked so hard, gone above and beyond, and for what?”*

### SET DESIGN ASSISTANT

Our survey results found that:

- Only a third (34%) of fashion workers, including just 23% of freelancers, say they have a pension.
- 42% of fashion workers have no savings.
- 46% have public liability insurance, 16% have portable equipment insurance, 18% have personal accident insurance and 20% have personal possessions contents insurance.

Fashion creatives often work with, or are in possession or control of, extremely valuable possessions, including luxury fashion, jewellery, and watches, plus photography and computing equipment. Working on set where injuries may be common and


working with others, such as models, where creatives may be liable means fashion creatives should have suitable insurance cover, but our survey would suggest that for many this is not something they have considered, or they have too many competing financial constraints to put it in place. For many employees, their employer will cover them, but freelancers may be at risk if they are not adequately insured.

It is worrying that, given the prevalence of workplace bullying and harassment uncovered in our survey, just one in 10 (10%) have an HR department or a designated person or team to go to with employment issues. Among freelancers, just 6% have access to this, while the figure rises to 30% for full-time employees.

When asked which support measures are working well, there were very few positive responses. However, a number of survey respondents spoke of peer support networks through WhatsApp, including Fashion UK’s group, and through Bectu, as well as anonymous forums to share bad practices or employers, while informally setting recommended minimum rates or T&Cs.

When asked about further support initiatives, there was unanimous support for more formal practices: 94% would support a rate card issued by the union stating the suggested minimum rate for each type of freelance job, and 92% would support a standardised booking confirmation document for freelance fashion creatives to give to employers.





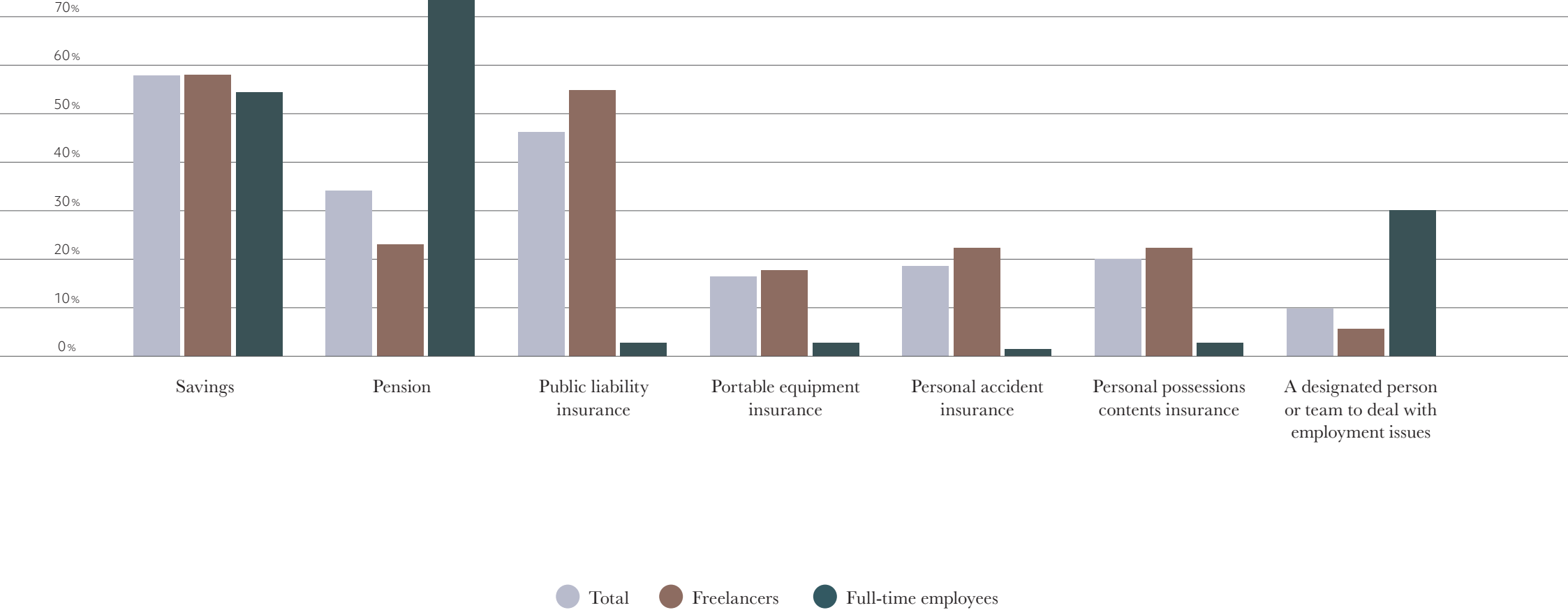
*“Junior members of team being made redundant, then role getting filled with new junior member of staff in less than a week.*

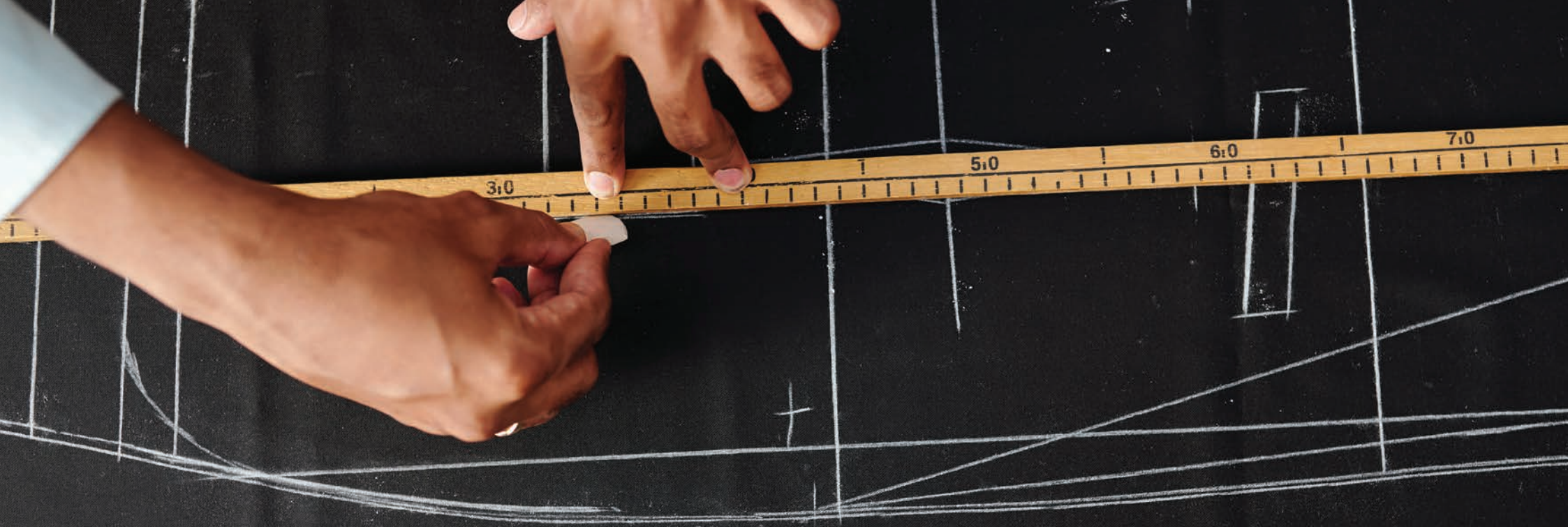
*“CEO bullying staff. Lack of clean premises. No work/life balance. No formal HR – CEO’s husband is HR – conflict of interest. No sick pay, no maternity pay, no working from home, no flexi-time.*

*“Being asked to use holidays for GP appointments and provide proof (GDPR breach) even though appointments are allowed in contract; same rule not applying for managers. CEO and managers commenting on staff and models’ weight and appearance.”*

**SENIOR DESIGNER**

# Do you currently have any of the following, with regard to your work in fashion?





# THE FUTURE *OF FASHION*

**T**

he rapid advancement of AI technologies presents new challenges to the fashion industry and to fashion creatives. There is positive potential with AI technologies to minimise basic or repetitive tasks, to speed up laborious processes or to forge new innovative paths. But where the balance of costs to benefits weighs is an ongoing debate. Concerns about copyright and intellectual property, job displacement, and creativity more broadly are increasingly emerging among fashion creatives, alongside broader environmental and ethical concerns.

*“People might start to underestimate others’ creativity and ideas or think AI can do the job faster, while we are already in a fast-paced working environment.”*

### SOCIAL CONTENT CREATOR

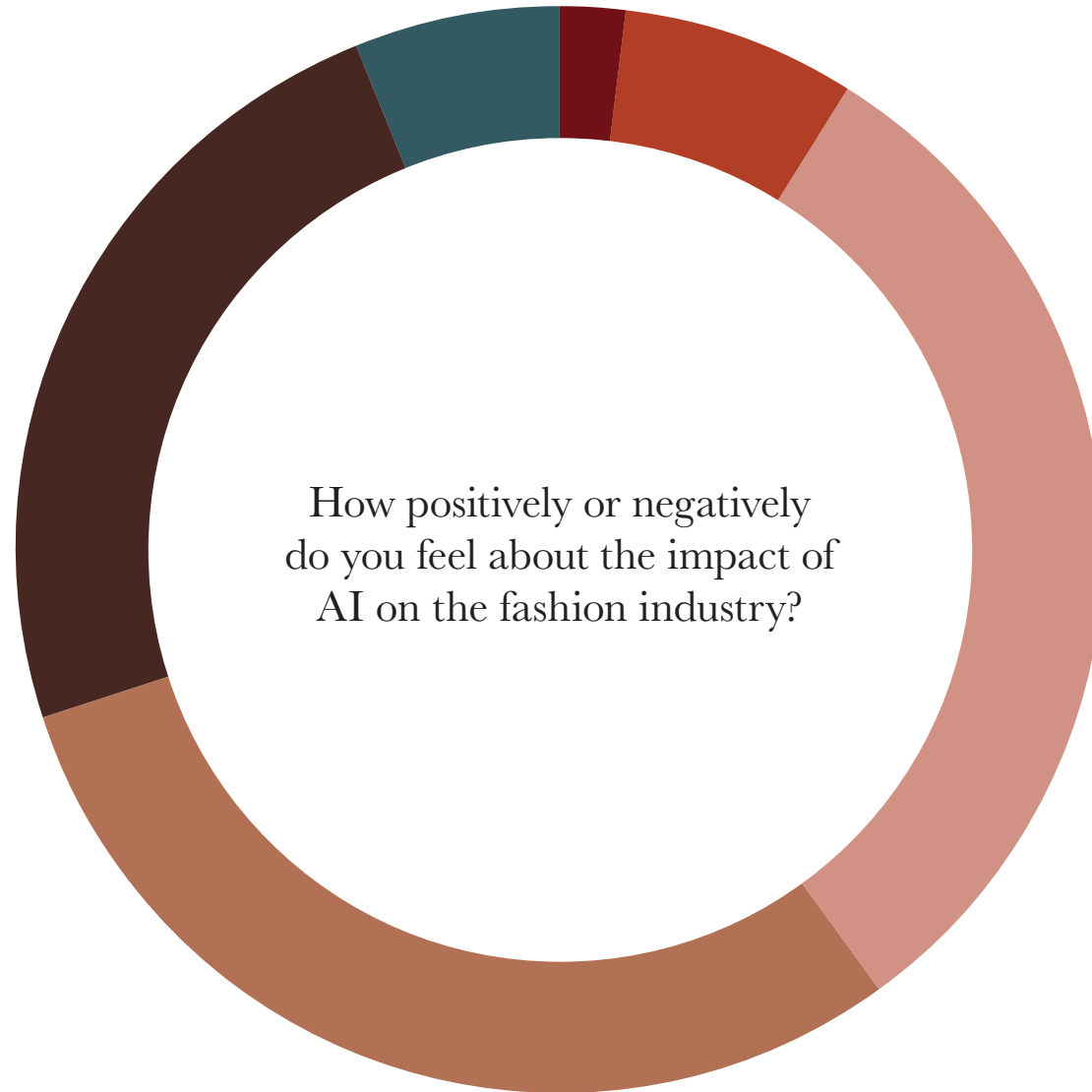
Our survey revealed that fashion creatives are less likely to be enthusiastic about the growth of generative AI and its impact on the fashion sector. Overall, just 9% predict that artificial intelligence will have a positive impact on the fashion industry (54% are predicting a negative impact). And even fewer feel that artificial intelligence will have a positive impact on their own job security (8% positive, 52% say negative).

*“I’m hopeful that it becomes a tool that can be helpful and employed in a positive way instead of a way to take jobs from human creators.”*

### FREELANCE FASHION STYLIST

In survey responses, many respondents stressed their fears of automation from AI leading to job losses, especially in e-commerce, among Hair Stylists and Makeup Artists and in reducing shooting on location. However, others said that they had used AI to support them with accessibility needs such as dyslexia or to increase efficiency in their work, including touching up pictures or helping them to draft pitches.

For generative AI to benefit fashion creatives, they need more support to harness the new technologies in a way that improves their work, including through access to training. And the use of AI must ensure that human creativity is amplified rather than replaced, with ethical use including transparency and control over large language models and data mining, so that human creatives are adequately compensated.



● Strongly positive, 2% ● Positive, 7% ● Neither positive nor negative, 31% ● Negative, 30% ● Strongly negative, 24% ● Don't know, 6%



A close-up photograph of a woman with long, wavy brown hair applying bright red lipstick to her lips. She is holding a black lipstick tube. The background is a soft, out-of-focus portrait of another woman's face, also with long brown hair. The overall color palette is warm, dominated by reds, oranges, and browns.

# A CALL FOR CHANGE

*“I would like to see a more inclusive industry that addresses key issues with actionable plans, fairer wages and respect for more junior staff.”*

DESIGNER INITIATIVES EXECUTIVE

*“I would like to see a fairer way of receiving jobs... Nepotism helps in London.”*

PRODUCER

**O**ver 500 fashion creatives told us of their experiences, painting a bleak picture of an industry that must address its culture of toxicity, late payments and poor working conditions. With almost a third of fashion creatives prepared to leave the industry altogether, the current state of the fashion industry is unsustainable for workers. Our research makes a clear call for change.

When we asked respondents the changes they wanted to see, there were some clear themes:

**1**  
**STANDARDISED AND  
TRANSPARENT T&CS**

To end a culture of long working hours, often with unpaid hours and no breaks, many asked for a standardisation of workplace terms and conditions, including rights such as holiday pay and break times.

**2**  
**STANDARDISED  
RATES OF PAY**

Respondents made clear calls for standardised and transparent rates of pay, including overtime allowances for variables such as travel or working unsocial hours.

**3**  
**AN END TO LATE  
PAYMENTS**

Creatives were adamant that payments must be made within 30 days, and that there must be accountability and enforcement for late or withheld payments.



*“I would love to see a strong union put together in the way there is for workers in film.”*

## PHOTOGRAPHER/DIRECTOR

### 4

#### A MORE INCLUSIVE CULTURE

We heard loud calls for a culture shift in the industry to promote more inclusive practices such as ensuring workers’ development so that women and global majority workers are represented in positions of power, better parental rights and respect for flexible working arrangements, improved sick pay and flexibility for disabled workers, and better treatment for workers struggling with their mental health.

### 5

#### IMPROVED WORK/LIFE BALANCE

There were numerous calls for working practices to improve overall work/life balance, not just in terms of hours and pay, but also flexible working and especially support for parents and carers.

### 6

#### AN END TO TOXIC WORK PRACTICES

The experiences of bullying and harassment revealed in our survey were shocking. Respondents demanded that toxic work practices must end, and that there needs to be a reporting mechanism for those who experience or witness bullying and harassment, while perpetrators need to be held accountable.

### 7

#### OPENING ACCESS TO THE INDUSTRY

Nepotistic hiring practices, racist and sexist behaviours, and an expectation of unpaid work – and especially unpaid internships – are all common across the fashion industry, but must be brought to an end in order to open up access.



*“I would like to see the industry more regulated, with mutual respect and understanding between all parties. It’s important to recognise that a Stylist’s role is different from that of Hair and Makeup professionals. Our working days, responsibilities and financial risks are unique and should be acknowledged accordingly.”*

#### **FASHION STYLIST**

*“I would like to see things more regulated and standardised. Nothing is written down and clearly explained... many workers get trapped in a corner because of this. There are things like contracts, terms or invoices that many freelancers do not know how to do, and if we had something that explains how it works, that would be incredibly helpful.”*

#### **CELEBRITY STYLIST**

*“I would like to see fair pay and treatment of assistants that allow actual career progression and learning. I would like to see top stylists and industry people held accountable for their poor actions and abuse of power. I would like to see opportunities given to people trying to enter the industry who aren’t from affluent backgrounds who can afford to work for free and get in based off who their family knows.”*

#### **FASHION ASSISTANT/STYLIST**



*“Nobody should work for free, ever.”*

HAIRSTYLIST

# ENDNOTES

- 1 <https://ukft.org/industry-reports-and-stats/#:~:text=The%20UK%20fashion%20and%20textile,from%20UKFT%20and%20Oxford%20Economics>
- 2 <https://www.britishfashioncouncil.co.uk/uploads/files/1/Oxford%20Economics%20report.pdf>
- 3 <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/state-of-fashion#/>
- 4 This report focuses on fashion creatives, and acknowledges that the exploitation of garment workers across the UK has been well documented. Investigations into factories in Leicester supplying fast fashion chains such as Boohoo found many workers paid as little as £3 an hour in appalling conditions. In luxury goods, ethical production campaign Good On You has found that 63% of large luxury brands do not pay a living wage at any stage in the supply chain.
- 5 <https://www.suttontrust.com/news-opinion/all-news-opinion/london-living-cost-unfair-unpaid-internships/>
- 6 <https://www.a-p-a.net/2024/07/front-page/apa-rate-card-2024/>
- 7 <https://www.britishfashioncouncil.co.uk/uploads/files/1/The%20UK%20Fashion%20DEI%20Report%20-%202022.01.24.pdf>
- 8 <https://ciisa.org.uk/about-us/>





This survey has laid bare the poor practices that plague the UK's fashion industry and made a clear call for change. Bectu's Fashion UK branch believes that by coming together, fashion creatives have the power to challenge the toxic status quo.

Fashion UK, a branch of Bectu, is the first ever union branch solely for UK-based non-performing fashion creatives. By bringing together fashion creatives across the industry, we can start to change the way the industry currently operates and make things better for all fashion workers, now and in the future.



*“There’s no other industry where you provide a service  
and all terms are blatantly ignored with no consequences.”*

FREELANCE FASHION ASSISTANT

