

The UK Freelance Workforce: the Known Facts

Protecting and promoting the interests of consultants, contractors and freelancers

There are an estimated 1.4 million freelance workers in the UK. Freelancing has grown in importance to the UK economy: in 1998 there were only an estimated 1.25 million freelance workers in the UK. Freelancer numbers have increased by 14 per cent in a decade.

What is a freelancer?

Freelancers can be said to:

- Be neither employers nor employees
- Be skilled professional workers
- Supply services to a range or succession of clients
- Have commercial (“self-employed”) relationships with their clients
- Work for a fee

There is no such thing as “a typical freelancer”. While they share the key characteristics that make them freelance, beyond this freelancers are an extremely diverse group:

- many different terms are used to describe them in many different sectors, including “freelancer”, “contractor”, “portfolio worker”, “consultant”, “own account worker” and many more
- they use a range of legal forms, including limited companies, sole traderships, partnerships, umbrella companies and others.

Who are they?

The UK contains approximately 1.4 million freelance workers. Of these, 62% are male, 38% female.

- this distribution appears to be uneven across different occupations
- men appear prevalent in management, IT, engineering and broadcasting
- women appear prevalent in translation services, as proof-readers and editors in book publishing

This figure includes:

- self-employed workers and directors of limited companies without employees, workers who use PAYE umbrella companies
- workers in Standard Occupational Classification major groups 1-3 ONLY
- workers with both organisational and personal clients
- workers with multiple and single clients

- workers with contracts of varying length
- workers who are freelance in either their primary or secondary paid work role, on either a full-time or part-time basis

An occupational breakdown of freelancers using SOC1-3 categories shows occupations with more than 50,000 freelancers to be:

Artistic and literary occupations	145,000
Managers in other service industries	140,000
Teaching professionals	111,000
Media associate professionals	75,000
Business and finance associate professionals	68,000
Design associate professionals	68,000
Information and communications technology	67,000
Functional managers	66,000
Business and statistical professionals	61,000
Therapists	57,000
Engineering professionals	54,000
Sales & related associate professionals	53,000
Public service & associate professionals	53,000

Notes on the figures

Statistics in this flyer are drawn from the report ‘Defining and Estimating the Size of the UK Freelance Workforce’ produced for PCG by John Kitching and David Smallbone of the Small Business Research Centre, Kingston University. Opinions and preferences expressed here are PCG’s and not necessarily those of SBRC.

These figures are drawn from BERR SME Statistics and both published and unpublished Labour Force Survey data. These two sources can be used to take different approaches to estimating the size of the freelance workforce, and can be triangulated to move towards a robust estimate, though it should be noted that they were not created for this purpose and are known to be subject to error.

For further information

www.pcg.org.uk

