

# ARTWORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!

Workers in the design and cultural sectors are coming together to organise for our collective rights

## ABOUT DCW

The Designers and Cultural Workers Union evolved out of research undertaken by Evening Class ([evening-class.org](http://evening-class.org)), which was presented at a series of three events over three years as part of Antiuniversity Now! Festival ([antiuniversity.org](http://antiuniversity.org)).

This research explored problems within the graphic design industry, such as low wages, widespread overwork, unhealthy working environments and employment practices, and the ingrained depoliticisation of workers across the 'creative industries' as a whole.

In the UK, many employers in art, design, fashion, museums and theatre do not pay sick or holiday pay, or pay overtime. Illegally, 90% of internships are still offered unpaid. Fee payments are routinely late, workers have an unmanageable workload, and no job security and no pension, despite their high level of specialist skills and education.

The majority of enterprises in the cultural sector are micro businesses (95%) – businesses that employ fewer than ten people. In these small-scale working environments, managers and directors are often also designers themselves, and normally do not know their employees' rights at work. Such arrangements also complicate the right to raise complaints or grievances, as administrative procedures more often become informal interpersonal arrangements.

We object to the idea that those of us who work in the cultural sector deserve no protections or advocacy. Design and cultural work is largely sedentary office work. The misconception that creative ideation and production happen somehow without actual labour has allowed unfair wages to proliferate, overwork, stress and burnout to become chronic within the sector, and bad practice in employment to go unchallenged, even celebrated, for too long.

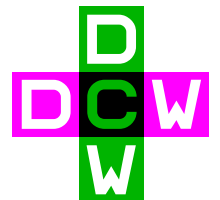
By setting up as an official union branch through United Voices of the World, rather than starting entirely from scratch, we benefit from the knowledge and skills of this successful and agile new union, and from our sister branches within it (Legal, Sex Work, Architecture, Gender-Based Violence sectors). UVW's framework is more responsive and adaptable to modern working arrangements, such as working for multiple employers, freelance and temp work.

Our branch has an intentionally broad, cross-sector membership, which includes: graphic, fashion and product designers, curators, film-makers, illustrators, writers, artworkers, educators. Any other type of creative worker is welcome to join. As UVW-DCW, we educate members about our rights at work, secure legal representation for workers, and organise campaigns to transform our industry in the interest of its workforce.

## STAY UPDATED

We maintain a regularly updated Are.na channel with many links, articles, books and resources. [are.na/uvw-designers-cultural-workers](https://are.na/uvw-designers-cultural-workers)

*Join our fight to build a more equitable culture from below!*



## FAQ

### Creative work is fun, why do I need a union?

- + Unions aren't only for when there's a problem. They are a place for social exchange and worker education as well as direct activism and casework.
- + Workers' pay in our sector is at odds with the value our industry contributes to the UK. The Creative Industries are growing at more than 5x the rate of the economy as a whole. It's clear from recent figures and forecasts that wealth generated in our sector is unevenly distributed, with gross levels of income inequality.
- + There is no sense of good practice in our sectors, in terms of fees, contracts, workplace environment, freelancing and so on. We want to undertake the research work to produce these for our members.

### I work freelance, or I'm self-employed – I thought I couldn't join a union?

- + 1 in 4 creative workers in the UK are freelance.
- + Traditional unions are changing. Most UVW members are not employed by one employer and they support each other in their struggles.
- + Even if you work for yourself, having access to resources and training to help you understand your rights as

a freelancer working for others is important.

- + Our aim as a union is to tackle the individualisation of work-related issues: it doesn't matter whether problems are experienced in a workplace or while working freelance.
- + Unions offer a space for solidarity with other creative workers in similar situations, and union members struggles in other sectors across the union.
- + We must recognise that our problems are shared, make connections between atomised workers, educate and support each other.

### I don't have any problems at work at the moment

- + DCW aims to foster an environment of mutual support that goes beyond specific crisis responses.
- + While dealing with individual problems and casework will of course be a vital part of the union's activity, we want to build a supportive network that goes to the heart of problems prevalent in the current creative work sector (overwork, underpay, burnout, etc) and rebuild a more just work culture, from the ground up.

### How is it organised? Do I need to be in London

- + We're a non-hierarchical member-led organisation. Anyone who joins can help

with organising, join a working group, organise a campaign or attend training. In London, there is an all member meeting every month and an organiser meeting every two weeks.

- + We mainly discuss things in between meetings on Discord, to avoid endless emails or WhatsApp group notifications.
- + We are looking to start other UK branches outside London, or around the world. Get in touch with us via email if you would like to be involved and have an area in mind.

### Aren't unions just for blue collar workers?

- + The changing landscape of work has problematised conventional class distinctions, meaning that many people don't fit neatly into prescribed socio-economic categories anymore. With this in mind, unions are for anyone interested in just and lawful employment, and those actively seeking to improve workplace conditions for themselves and others.
- + DCW aims to work across class boundaries to foster a new consciousness that responds to current and arising labour conditions and build solidarity amongst its members.

Extracts from collectively written demands, formulated at the first DCW public meeting on 02/10/19

- + We demand to be paid on time.
- + We demand paid overtime.
- + We demand to leave work on time and not to be expected to work outside work hours.
- + We demand that our employers are held accountable for our health, safety and wellbeing.
- + We demand an end to unpaid internships, unpaid pitching, unpaid 'opportunities' and unadvertised jobs.
- + We demand fair pay and pensions.
- + We demand union recognition!