

Acknowledgements

The creative corridors policy landscape is incomplete and ever evolving. This report is the result of a joint venture between the RSA and Creative Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC) and we wish to extend our heartfelt thanks to all who have joined us on this journey so far and generously contributed their time and expertise to explore unlocking the UK's creative industries' full potential.

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Report authors: Bernard Hay,
Emily Hopkins, Jolyon Miles-Wilson,
Hayley Sims and Tom Stratton

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About us

We are the RSA. The royal society for arts, manufactures and commerce. Where world-leading ideas are turned into world-changing actions. We're committed to a world where everyone can fulfil their potential and contribute to more resilient, rebalanced and regenerative futures.

The RSA has been at the forefront of significant social impact for over 260 years. Our research and innovation work has changed the hearts and minds of generations of people. Central to all our work are our mission-aligned

Fellows; a global network of innovators and changemakers who work collectively to enable people, places and the planet to flourish in harmony.

We invite you to be part of this change. Join our community. Together, we'll unite people and ideas in collective action to unlock opportunities to regenerate our world.

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We define our ambitions as:

Our mission

To enable people, places and the planet to flourish in harmony.

Our vision

A world where everyone can fulfil their potential and contribute to more resilient, rebalanced and regenerative futures.

How we deliver our work

We do this by uniting people and ideas in collective action to unlock opportunities to regenerate our world.

About our partners

Arts Council England

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. We have set out our strategic vision in Let's Create that by 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. We invest public money from Government and The National Lottery to help support the sector and to deliver this vision.

www.artscouncil.org.uk.

Creative PEC

The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative 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 Newcastle University, with the Royal Society of Arts and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Creative PEC comprises a core consortium of Newcastle University, Work Advance, the University of Sussex and the University of Sheffield.

For more details visit www.pec.ac.uk and @CreativePEC

Foreword

The UK is a creative superpower, with pockets of creative genius across the four nations and regions as well as a strong international profile – from world class cultural events to world renowned architecture, from advertising to TV and film production, from podcasting to gaming. These sectors generate jobs, innovation and growth, which has led to the identification of the creative industries as one of the eight growth-driving sectors in the UK Government's forthcoming Industrial Strategy. The strength of the creative sector is also felt locally, promoting opportunities for wellbeing, inclusion, and enjoyment for individuals and communities. This is only going to grow – we know that against a challenging national economic picture, the creative industries are bucking the trend, having grown faster than other industries since 2011.

That growth, however, is not equally distributed across the country. London and the M25 still dominate the UK's creative economy compared to other regions. It is a beating heart of interconnected supply chains, labour markets, arts institutions, and investment opportunities, which is rightly globally recognised and contributes to the strength of the creative industries across the whole of the UK. However, there are clusters of creative activity spread across the four nations that do not always get the levels of investment and support they require to fulfil their potential.

This is a moment of huge opportunity: to think radically differently about the creative industries from a geographical perspective, and - against the backdrop of greater devolution, as well as the UK Government's Growth Mission and a renewed commitment to industrial strategy with the creative industries at its heart - take action at the local and regional level to help drive growth and widen opportunity. Our question, therefore, is: what practical steps can be taken to support the creative industries within regional contexts?

Drawing on inspiration from London and from international innovation corridors, how might we connect existing creative microclusters and clusters in places across the UK to become more than the sum of their parts: to become creative corridors? The goal is not to compete with or replicate London, but to achieve economies of scope and scale across places to realise some of the economic and social benefits that would come from the resulting investment, job opportunities, skills provision, and cultural access across the whole of the UK.

Corridors are an exciting new frontier where the evidence base is still emerging, but the potential gains are significant. For this reason, this report argues that local leaders should be supported to start exploring creative corridor development now. This report aims to open up the conversation and provide some practical recommendations to support others to begin joining up clusters across regions to bring greater prosperity across the four nations.

Over the last few months, the RSA, Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC), and Arts Council England have been working in partnership and speaking to creative practitioners, organisations, and policymakers up and down the country to understand the conditions required to nurture creative corridors. One refrain that has been repeated throughout these discussions is around the inherent dynamism of the creative industries - from the freelancers flexing from job to job, to the practitioners working at the forefront of innovative areas such as CreaTech, to the actors and musicians performing live every night. Courage, an

appetite for thinking differently, and collaboration are the lifeblood of the creative industries; how can we harness this dynamism to join up creative hotspots and unleash potential in places?

Ultimately, our vision is for a UK where the next generation of creative talent, as well as existing creative practitioners, microbusinesses, arts and cultural institutions, can thrive in their communities and access world-class opportunities and investment on their doorstep. We hope this report serves as a useful conversation-starter for colleagues across the creative industries and beyond, helping us all to consider how we might work together to make this vision a reality.

Andy Haldane, Chief Executive, The RSA

Professor Hasan Bakhshi, Director, Creative PEC

Sir Nick Serota, Chair, Arts Council England

Dr Darren Henley, Chief Executive,
Arts Council England

Executive summary

The opportunity

Despite a challenging national economic backdrop, the creative industries have bucked the trend with consistent growth over the last decade, albeit, this growth is not experienced equally across the UK. In recent years, policymakers and industry leaders across the UK have sought to exploit the tendency for creative firms to cluster to drive regional growth of the creative industries. The UK is home to what has now been referred to as a creative supercluster: London and the M25. This region accounted for 68% of UK creative industries GVA (£71 billion) in 2019. Despite historic dominance of this supercluster - and indeed of London in the UK's economy as a whole - the creative industries are uniquely placed to unleash prosperity in places

across the four nations, owing to their unique economic dynamism and social impacts.

This report sets out one potential mechanism for harnessing this growth: creative corridors. Corridors are a large geographic area of multiple creative clusters and microclusters which are joined through supply-chains, labour markets, networks, and coordinated policy under a common goal. Therefore, there are two central questions explored in this report. First, how might we draw on the success of the London supercluster, as well as examples of emerging corridors both nationally and internationally? Second, what are the current barriers and opportunities to stimulating connectivity between existing creative clusters to develop creative corridors across the UK? These questions framed a policy review, which included a rapid desk-based review of literature and workshops with stakeholders from across creative industries, government, and civil society between November 2023 and March 2024.

Why corridors?

While the evidence base for creative corridors is developing, learning can be drawn from international examples of innovation corridors which demonstrate the connective potential for other sectors. The report also uses the latest emerging evidence on potential corridor growth and cites pioneering corridor initiatives in the UK, which can be seen in places ranging from Wales and the West of England to the Thames Estuary in the South East.

Within the current context of increasing devolution across the UK, as well as the UK Government's forthcoming Industrial Strategy's focus on the creative industries, place and industrial clusters, this is an advantageous moment to consider the opportunities that increased regional powers and resources may provide to support and harness the growth of creative industries at the

local level. The connective tissue required to join up clusters into creative corridors may take a variety of forms; indeed, as corridors are an emerging area, there is flexibility with the model and how it might be applied to the nuances of specific places. However, the key benefit of working at a corridor level is the potential that comes with greater coordination across a larger geographic scale.

Insights from stakeholder workshops

Stakeholder workshops took place to hear diverse perspectives on the opportunities and challenges for creative corridors in the UK context. These discussions took place in early 2024, before the announcement of the UK general election in July. The context of the new policy landscape has been reflected throughout this report, but it is worth noting that insights from the stakeholder workshops were gathered in a different context.

The four topics were:

1. Supporting innovation

The creative industries face distinct Research and Development (R&D) challenges such as limited tax relief applicability and fewer opportunities available for freelancers and small and medium size enterprises (SMEs). Since R&D is a driver of innovation and productivity, these challenges impact the innovation potential of creative firms. Corridors may hold the key to forging, on a larger scale, collaborations between creative and non-creative businesses, increasing the transferability of creative knowledge and creating opportunities for cross-pollination across sectors.

2. Nurturing arts and culture

Arts and culture venues and organisations play an integral role in the local creative and tourist economies. Engagement with the arts, culture and heritage sectors also generate positive social impacts including increased wellbeing and pride in place. Reductions in public funding in the arts may undermine the place-making capacity of these anchor institutions. Since creative firms tend to cluster around them, arts and cultural institutions

could benefit from being part of a corridor, at the same time acting as ‘nodes’ along corridors, drawing in tourism, inward investment, and job and showcasing opportunities for creative workers.

3. Building skills pathways

Skills shortages are widespread in the creative industries and impede cluster formation. Corridors may help address this through developing place-based career pathways with links to regional opportunities and industries. Notably, while offering flexibility as a career path, evidence shows that the freelancer community faces barriers which include accessing skills development opportunities. This could be facilitated by ‘skills coordinators’ whose role would involve joining up thinking across stakeholders, including employers, education institutions, skills bodies and local government.

4. Accessing finance

There are disparities in access to private finance for creative firms between London and the rest of the country. Collaboration across a corridor may provide a way of addressing disparities in access to private finance experienced by creative firms outside of London by bundling opportunities to increase potential returns and by building tailored business and investor support to ‘match’ the right investment to creative firms across a larger geography. Creative corridors provide a model to scale-up existing funding initiatives that have already supported place-based creative development, creating jobs and boosting local economies.

Policy framework for action

The development of our proposed policy tools was guided by a set of four design principles, which could be used in future for diverse partners to consider when designing creative corridor policy:

- What is the sector growth challenge or opportunity that this policy responds to?
- How does the corridor specifically add value to this policy?

- Does the policy sufficiently scale-up existing good practice?
- Can we articulate why this policy will have high impact (e.g. alignment with UK Government missions and forthcoming Industrial Strategy)?

The resulting framework is intended as a starting point from which bespoke corridor interventions can be developed and tested. Given the novelty of creative corridors as a model, there is incomplete evidence highlighting ‘what works’ at this specific scale for the creative industries. As the evidence base continues to grow, our attention has been on developing tangible steps that local leaders can undertake now to seed a creative corridor, as well as on outlining how national policymakers and funders could support them in this endeavour. The suggested steps for local leaders are set out below and the full recommendations table is in Section 3 of the report.

Foster collaboration

Step 1

Develop a Creative Corridor Coalition. This will be a formal group responsible for developing a corridor’s programme strategy, monitoring its delivery, facilitating coordination between relevant stakeholders, and aligning investment activities.

Governance arrangements should be responsive to local structures and associated challenges and opportunities. Those developing corridor initiatives should aim to ensure:

- A range of powers are represented, including convening power, policy levers, creative industry expertise, and community power.
- Strong and outward facing local leadership is involved. This will help build local ownership whilst cultivating collaborative enterprises.
- Coordination and analytical capacity baked into resourcing, so that there is a dedicated group of officers who can support board members and provide energy and dynamism.

Step 2

Establish a Creative Corridor Data Function tasked with gathering, analysing, and sharing data to drive evidence-based policy and monitor performance in the corridor. This function should hold an ethos of ‘working in the open’ to ensure robustness and efficiency.

Elevate creative research and development and innovation opportunities

Step 3

Establish a creative corridor applied R&D fund, working with HEIs, ALBs, local government and the UKRI to fund creative corridor R&D collaborations which are cross-sector and connect creative clusters. These should be specifically tailored to the unique contributions of creative R&D and the research strengths identified across the Corridor.

Consider co-designing the fund structure with a diverse range of creative practitioners, including representatives from cultural organisations, to ensure equitable and inclusive access to the fund and build in mechanisms to incentivise cross-sectoral and cross-corridor knowledge exchange.

Step 4

Underpinning the R&D fund, deliver grants and incentives to support small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) and micro-businesses at corridor level to access finance and similarly benefit from cross-corridor knowledge exchange. Support hybrid working across creative and non-creative firms to develop innovative products, services, and business models. This could include innovation vouchers, micro-grants, or shared access to R&D expertise/infrastructure across the corridor (e.g. universities, workspaces, tools, and resources).

Streamline skills pathways and work opportunities

Step 5

Develop lifelong creative skills strategies for the corridor, which may include a corridor-led skills improvement plan and a post-16 creative skills strategy. This will require working with education providers, Skills England, industry, and local government, and should be tailored to the local wider industrial landscape to enhance matching between local workers and job opportunities.

Ensure alignment between local, regional, and national strategies and use this as an opportunity to connect workers from diverse sectors and backgrounds to tailored skills opportunities so that everyone can enjoy the benefits of the corridor.

Step 6

Work with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and technical education institutes to develop flexible, modular, and digital micro-credentials and learning grants for continuing professional development which better fit the needs of creative industries professionals and builds common accreditation.

Develop corridor-wide opportunities for training and upskilling diverse creative talent throughout the lifecycle. This could involve leadership training, skills programmes, and professional networks designed with underserved communities in mind, so that the corridor's workforce is representative of its resident population.

Establish a creative freelancer coordination role that reports to a corridor's coalition (see Action Area 1). This would prioritise the involvement and development of the creative freelance community across a corridor to encourage connected working and grow local supply chains. This could be delivered alongside a freelance-specific business support and training fund, enabling freelancers to access opportunities across the corridor.

Boost profile and attract finance

Step 7

Develop a single corridor promotion campaign led in close collaboration with the coalition that recounts a singular story about place, showcasing creative industries strengths and firms across the corridor.

Step 8

Establish a Creative Corridor Investment Office whose role is to transmit the campaign story, acting as a 'front-door' for inward investment.

Call to action

Locally-led creative corridors are an opportunity to supercharge cultural and creative industries growth across the four corners of the UK and retain our collective competitiveness in the future. Using corridors as a test bed and harnessing both the power of the creative industries and devolved powers at the regional level to scale up potential across regions - connecting businesses, developing skills, building understanding of and growing creative R&D to foster innovation - we can take bold steps to realising prosperous futures.

This is just the beginning and the RSA, Creative PEC and Arts Council England are committed to continuing to explore and experiment with this concept in regional contexts. By following and iterating on these steps, we hope to continue to build out the evidence base to bring others along with us on this journey. If you are interested in any of the ideas in this report, please get in touch by emailing creative.corridor@rsa.org.uk.

Although there are many unknowns in this area, we believe that with some ambition, collaborative working and the dynamism of the creative industries we could make a significant contribution to unlocking growth and breaking down barriers to opportunity across the four nations of the UK.

The opportunity

The UK is a creative superpower, with a long, proud, and rich history of producing great talent, goods, and services across these varied industries. Further, despite a challenging national economic backdrop, the creative industries have bucked the trend with consistent growth over the last decade. They are a key employer, representing around 7% of the UK's total jobs, which equates to 2.4 million filled jobs as of 2022 - an increase of 14% since 2019.¹ They are also a significant UK export, with creative services accounting for 14% of all UK service exports in 2021 and growing three times the rate of service exports as a whole since 2010, despite the effects of COVID-19 and Brexit.²

This is a pivotal moment for the creative industries in the UK. Their relative strength and resilience masks stark spatial differences in infrastructure, support and funding, and therefore untapped potential. Across the UK's creative industries, employment continues to concentrate around London and 'cold spots' persist within other regions and nations.³

¹ Economic Estimates: Employment in the DCMS Sectors, January 2022 to December 2022', accessed 28 March 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/economic-estimates-employment-in-dcms-sectors-and-digital-sector-january-2022-to-december-2022>

² Giorgio Fazio et al., 'UK Trade in a Global Creative Economy', State of the Nations Research Series (Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre, 2024).

³ On regional inequalities within the UK creative industries, see: Josh Siepel, Alejandro Ramirez-Guerra, and Sawan Rathi, 'Geographies Of Creativity', State of the Nations Research Series (Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre, 6 December 2023), <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.10245530>; for an example of inequalities within a region, see the following report looking at the case study of Manchester: Bruce Tether, 'Creative Clusters and Sparse Spaces:

This is the heart of the challenge that is explored in this report – how might the growth and dynamism of the creative industries be harnessed to unleash prosperity in places? The work takes place in the context of persistent national headwinds – for example, exports of goods produced by the creative industries have declined since the Brexit referendum in 2016⁴, and the cost-of-living crisis is threatening the survival of arts and cultural institutions domestically. However, evidence shows that investing in creative industries remains worthwhile, offering benefits for the places in which they are located that extend beyond just economic returns.

For instance, research shows that supporting local creative economies brings wider benefits for other local industries. It has been estimated that for every job generated by the arts and culture subsectors, 1.4 full-time equivalent jobs are supported more widely.⁵ For the broader range of occupations falling under the creative industries, an estimate drawing on employment data from UK cities between 1998 and 2018 suggests that for every one job in the creative industries, 1.9 further non-tradable jobs are generated in the same city.⁶

Furthermore, growth in the creative industries contributes to place making, building areas into more attractive destinations for visitors, workers, and business. Investment in arts, culture and heritage institutions can inject new life into places, increasing footfall and building healthy local economies.

Manchester’s Creative Industries and the Geographies of Deprivation and Prosperity’ (Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre, 2022), https://pec.ac.uk/discussion_paper /creative-clusters-and-sparse-spaces/

⁴ Maioli et al., ‘UK Trade in a Global Creative Economy’.

⁵ Cebr, ‘Contribution of the Arts and Culture Industry to the UK Economy: A Cebr Report for Arts Council England’ (London: Cebr, 2020).

⁶ Diana Gutierrez-Posada et al., ‘Creative Clusters and Creative Multipliers: Evidence from UK Cities’, *Economic Geography* 99, no. 1 (1 January 2023): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00130095.2022.2094237>

Notable examples of where we have seen this happen in recent times are with the Southbank Centre in London and the Hepworth Gallery in Wakefield.⁷

Access to arts, culture and creativity play a central role in many of our lives and offer an outlet for improving wellbeing on an individual level and promoting social cohesion on a community level.⁸

These multifaceted benefits offer an enticing opportunity for the new UK Government. It also aligns with the recognition of the creative industries as one of the eight growth-driving sectors within the forthcoming Industrial Strategy, chosen for the critical role these sectors will play in helping the Government achieve its wider growth mission. The creative industries are uniquely placed to contribute to the central mission of economic growth, while also cutting across others such as breaking down barriers to opportunity and contributing to creating a healthier UK where everyone lives well for longer. It should be our shared priority to understand exactly how this potential can be harnessed for greater gains across all of the regions and nations of the UK.

⁷ Economic and Social Impact Assessment of The Southbank Centre' (Hatch Regeneris, 2020).

New Report Evidences the Positive Impact of 10 Years of The Hepworth Wakefield', The Hepworth Wakefield, accessed 14 May 2024, <https://hepworthwakefield.org/news/new-report-evidences-the-positive-impact-of-10-years-of-the-hepworth-wakefield/>.

⁸ Louise Mansfield et al., 'Creativity and Pathways to Wellbeing: A Rapid Scoping Review for The What Works Centre for Wellbeing', 2024, <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/projects/creativity-and-wellbeing/>.

Julie Van de Vyver and Dominic Abrams, 'The Arts as a Catalyst for Human Prosociality and Cooperation', *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 9, no. 6 (1 August 2018): 664-74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617720275>.

Why corridors?

In recent years, policymakers and industry leaders across the UK have sought to exploit a prominent feature of the creative industries to drive regional growth: the fact that creative firms tend to cluster. That is, creative firms tend to locate in physical proximity to other similar firms and to collaborate and compete, due to a combination of factors such as the importance of knowledge exchange and the need for physical spaces such as film studios and cultural infrastructure (within certain subsectors). Once a critical mass of creative firms is achieved, they go on to attract more skilled workers, specialist suppliers and investors, fostering a wider environment of collaboration and competition.

This phenomenon has been shown to drive innovation, productivity, and economic growth, and to produce a range of indirect benefits for the places in which they are located.⁹ At a UK-level, the value of creative clusters can be seen by their prevalence in significant policy positions such as the previous UK government's Creative Industries Sector Vision, and the central role of the creative industries in the recent Industrial Strategy Green Paper, as well as through national programmes like the AHRC's Creative Industries Cluster programme¹⁰ and devolved and regional strategies for the creative

⁹ For a systematic literature review of creative cluster research, see: Martha Bloom et al., 'Evolution and Trends of Creative Cluster Research' (Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre, 9 September 2020), https://pec.ac.uk/discussion_paper/evolution-and-trends-of-creative-cluster-research/; see also more recent data on the performance of UK creative clusters in: Siepel, Ramirez-Guerra, and Rathi, 'Geographies Of Creativity'.

¹⁰ 'Creative Industries Clusters Programme', accessed 26 April 2024, www.ukri.org/what-we-do/browse-our-areas-of-investment-and-support/creative-industries-clusters-programme/

industries such as the 10x Economy Vision for Northern Ireland¹¹, Arts Council England's place-based Cultural Development Fund¹², and the new Creative Industries Tees Valley Investment Zone.¹³

We can already see the strength of creative clusters across the UK, in places from Edinburgh and Belfast to Manchester and Cardiff, but the UK is also home to what has now been referred to as a creative supercluster: London and the M25. This supercluster alone accounted for 68% of UK creative industries GVA (£71 billion) in 2019.¹⁴ What might it take to achieve similar benefits of scale across other places of the UK? How might we build on the existing collaboration, competition, and networks that comprise a creative cluster across a larger geographic area? To what extent might these drive regional creative industries growth across the whole country? **A potential answer to these questions is 'creative corridors': large geographic areas of multiple creative clusters and microclusters which are joined through supply-chains, labour markets, networks, and coordinated policy under a common goal.**

¹¹ '10x Economy - an Economic Vision | Department for the Economy', Economy, 10 May 2021, <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/10x-economy-economic-vision>

¹² 'Cultural Development Fund: Round Four', Arts Council England, accessed 26 April 2024, <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-open-funds/cultural-investment-fund/cultural-development-fund-round-four>

¹³ 'Investment Zones', GOV.UK, accessed 26 April 2024, www.gov.uk/government/publications/investment-zones-update/investment-zones

¹⁴ Siepel, Ramirez-Guerra, and Rathi, 'Geographies Of Creativity'.

This report

The purpose of this report is to shape policy to foster the development of creative corridors that can help drive growth in the creative industries across the UK. It points to actions that national government and agencies can take to nurture potential corridors, and sets out some tangible, initial steps that local and regional actors can take to set a creative corridor intervention in motion. Rather than thinking about enhancing the existing growth of the creative industries, this is about exploring how that growth can be harnessed and mobilised on a different geographic footprint, to enable prosperity that is rooted in place and speaks to unique local characteristics.

This report draws on the early evidence base on corridors and insights from stakeholder workshops to consider the potential for creative corridors to unleash local and regional prosperity. **Section One** draws together the case for pursuing a corridors model. Whilst the evidence base for creative corridors is still developing, there is learning emerging from international examples of ‘innovation corridors’ which demonstrate their potential for other sectors. It also shares examples of pioneering creative corridor initiatives in the UK developing in places ranging from Wales, the West Midlands and the West of England, to the North of England and the South East in the Thames Estuary.

Using this emerging evidence base as our starting point, **Section Two** sets out insights that have been gathered from the stakeholder workshops and additional desk-based research to add colour to our understanding of the key themes. Within the current context of increasing devolution across the UK, it is an opportune moment to be thinking about the role of the creative industries at different geographic scales, and the opportunities that increased regional powers and resources may provide to support creative industries locally. In particular, examining how the devolved administrations, the Mayoral Combined Authorities in England, and local authorities might work with partners from the public, private, and voluntary sectors to achieve supercluster style benefits for their creative industries through a coordinated approach.

Section Three builds on these insights to offer some practical recommendations for local leaders in this context to take first steps to bring this potential to life. As the evidence base continues to grow, our attention has been on developing tangible steps that local leaders can grasp now to set out on a corridors intervention, as well as on outlining the roles for national policymakers and funders that would unlock opportunities further.

“Our creative industries are world-leading, an engine of our economic growth and at the heart of our increasingly digital world. From 2010 to 2019 they grew more than one and a half times faster than the wider economy and in 2021 they generated £108 billion in economic value. In 2021, they employed 2.3 million people, a 49% increase since 2011.”

- *DCMS Creative Industries Sector Vision 2023*

“We will put rocket boosters under tourism, film, gaming – growing creative industries in Sunderland, Blackpool, Birmingham and Dundee, alongside our amazing Mayors and Councils so, people in every part of our country have not just good jobs in their own community, but the chance to write the next chapter of our national story”

- *Lisa Nandy MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, speech at Labour Party Conference 2024*

The creative industries

In this report, we refer to the DCMS definition of the creative industries, which includes:



Advertising and marketing



Architecture



Crafts



Design and designer fashion



Film, TV, radio and photography



IT, software and computer services



Museums, galleries and libraries

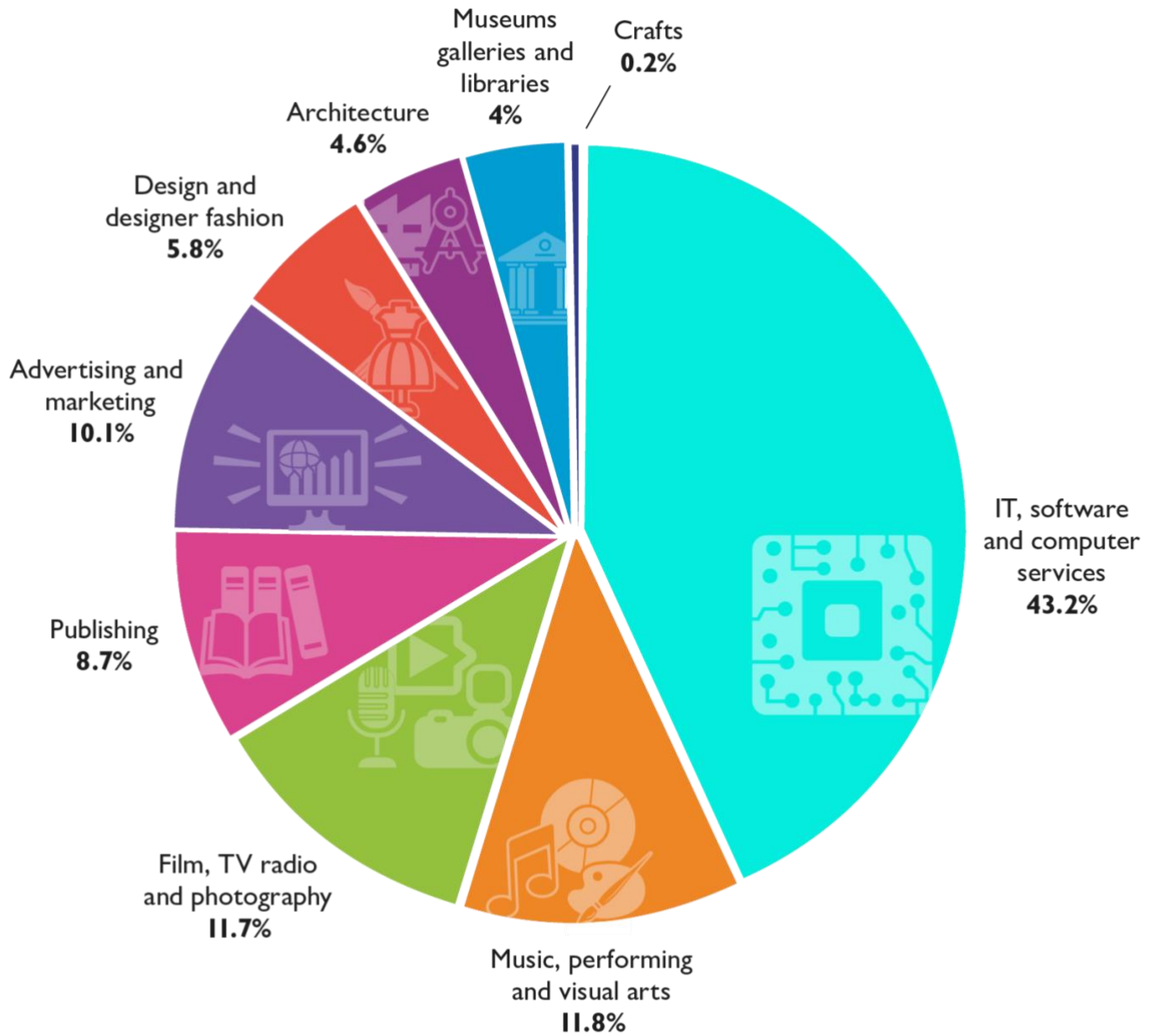


Music, performing and visual arts



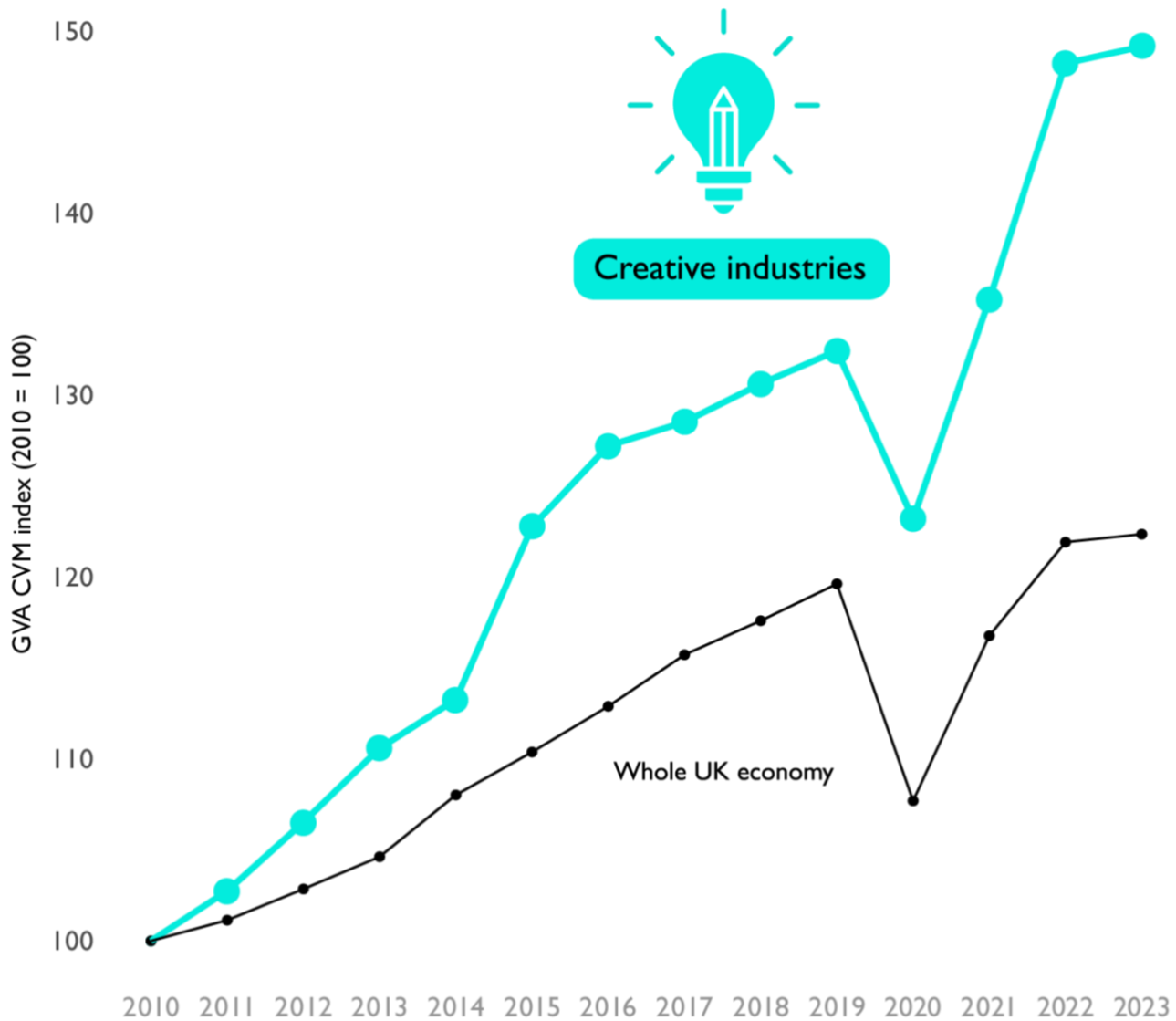
Publishing

Figure A: Breakdown of employment in the subsectors in the creative industries



Source: DCMS Economic Estimates

Figure B: Creative industries were growing one and a half times faster than the UK economy pre-pandemic, and have recovered more quickly post-pandemic

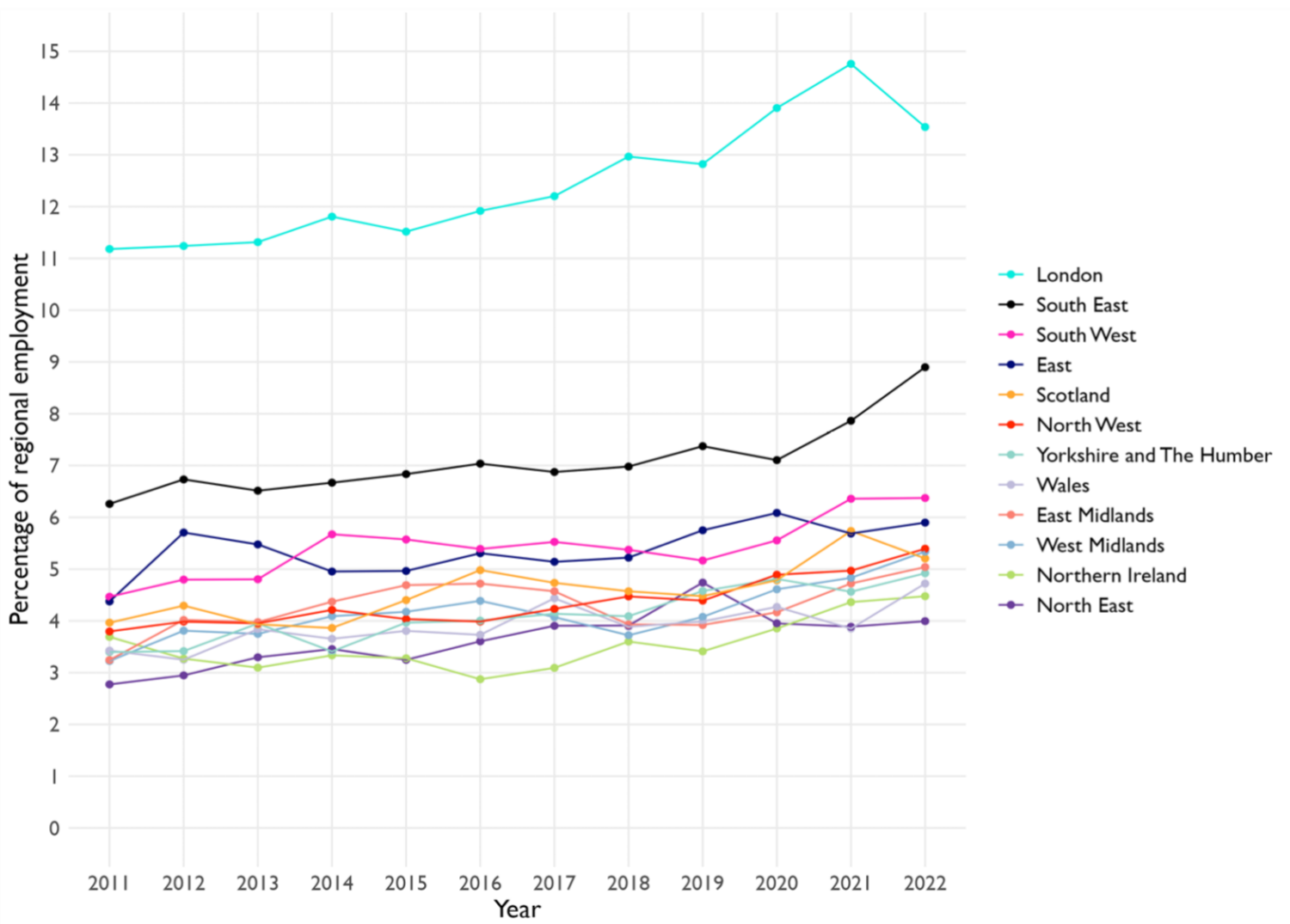


Source: DCMS Economic Estimates 2024

Note: GVA index expressed as chained volume measures:

Period 2010-2019 based on 2019 prices; Period 2020-2023 based on 2022 prices

Figure C: Employment in the creative industries as a proportion of total regional employment by year



Source: DCMS Sectors Economic Estimates ¹⁶

The case for creative corridors

Definitions of key concepts

Culture and creative industries:

In this report, we use the UK Government Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) definition of the creative industries (see figure A), which is a broad umbrella definition and includes diverse subsectors which range from performing arts, to marketing, to IT and software services. In an increasingly digital world, the relationships between the more traditional “arts” and other creative sectors is increasingly intertwined - for example, the gaming industry is of huge importance to a number of UK regions. Indeed, an emerging hybrid sector that is showing huge growth potential is “CreaTech” - meaning creative businesses where the development of new technologies or the adaptation of existing technologies in a novel way is a significant part of their business, rather than creative businesses that work exclusively in IT/software subsectors.¹⁵ For the purposes of this report, we will use the creative industries to refer to the whole and will specify when talking only about the opportunities and barriers for the arts and cultural subsectors.

Creative cluster:¹⁶

A geographic area where there is a concentration of creative workers and firms which compete and collaborate with each other. The cluster

¹⁵ [Siepel et al. ‘Understanding Createch R&D’. \(Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, 2022\)](#)

¹⁶ Caroline Chapain et al., ‘Creative Clusters and Innovation’, 2010

¹⁷ Josh Siepel et al., ‘Creative Radar 2021: The Impact of COVID-19 on the UK’s Creative Industries’ (Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre, 2021)

¹⁸ Siepel, Ramirez-Guerra, and Rathi, ‘Geographies Of Creativity’.

environment enables the sharing of ideas and resources so that relationships emerge, innovation can occur and economic output increases.

Clusters can be identified through different spatial lenses. DCMS has identified 55 creative clusters in the UK that are 'Travel To Work Areas' (TTWA), defined where at least 75% of the resident population works in that area and where at least 75% of the workforce in that area are residents. The boundaries of creative clusters are flexible and porous and so it is worth noting this is just one means of analysis and the edges of clusters do not necessarily align exactly to the TTWA area. Clusters have been the focus of policy intervention in recent years as they tend to perform more highly on a range of economic metrics than non-cluster areas.

Creative microcluster:¹⁷

With similar characteristics to creative clusters, microclusters are identified at a smaller spatial scale, at the level of streets, neighbourhoods, and towns. Some microclusters are located within larger cluster areas, but many stand alone in areas beyond the catchment of creative clusters.

Critically, microclusters can also be found outside of main urban areas - which have tended to be the focus of policy interventions - and so they provide an opportunity to grow creative economies outside of urban areas. This could help to address regional inequalities by increasing opportunities for funding, innovation collaboration, or skills development.

Creative supercluster:¹⁸

Typically a very large city, which attracts creative workers, businesses, and investment on a globally competitive scale. In the UK context, London and the M25 can be considered a creative supercluster, insofar that the region is a global hub for arts, media, culture, and creative business and plays a disproportionate role in the UK's creative economy.

Creative corridor:

A large geographic area of multiple creative clusters and microclusters which are joined through supply-chains, labour markets, networks, and coordinated policy. Corridors are an emerging policy area and so the understanding of scale or shape may evolve over time, but for the purposes of this report, we understand creative corridors to span large geographic areas, often across multiple administrative units (for example, local or combined authority areas).

Drawing inspiration from “innovation corridors”¹⁹ which have been piloted in Canada and the United States, the basis for a corridor - and therefore what differentiates it from a supercluster - is that it is a means to join up relatively dispersed, discrete areas that together replicate some of the innovation properties of a supercluster. Corridors may be useful in key areas such as access to finance or labour, where adjacent creative clusters and microclusters are competing for similar resources, as well as in areas such as skills pathways, where clusters could benefit from greater collaboration.

As an example, developing shared strategies to strengthen skills pathways across a corridor could ensure that employers have access to a deeper pool of skilled labour and workers have more career choices, which means better job matching and more fluid movement of people and ideas across the geographic area. Critically, the fluidity and cross-fertilisation of ideas leads to greater innovation and profile, attracting more finance to the area leading to higher productivity in a way that one cluster may not be able to achieve on its own.

With this rationale, large geographic areas in different regions could realise some of the economic returns akin to a supercluster, without the urban

¹⁹ Sara Lawrence et al., ‘A Blueprint for Building an Innovation Corridor’ (RTI International, 1 May 2020), www.rti.org/publication/blueprint-building-innovation-corridor

density of a large city, perhaps even including coastal and rural creative economies. It is important to note that the evidence base is emerging alongside policy interventions, but this is our basis for the purposes of this report.

Place-based approaches in the creative industries

There is an established body of academic literature, policy support, and industry-led practice that recognises the importance of the creative industries' tendency to cluster in driving innovation and economic growth. Research over the last two decades has identified creative clusters at different geographic scales, spanning across the UK regions and nations.²⁰ In 2016, Nesta and Creative England mapped 47 creative clusters - agglomerations of creative businesses and workers that collaborate and compete.²¹ This work mapped where creative businesses and organisations were concentrating across a Travel-to-Work-Area scale (TTWA, also known as commuter zones) around the UK, looking for geographic hotspots of creative industry activity that was measured by its relative importance in the local economy. Whilst many of these encompassed creative cities, such as Manchester, Brighton, and Bristol, the report also highlighted creative clusters outside of these in places like Guildford and Slough, which it referred to as 'creative conurbations'. In 2022, DCMS updated this mapping to formally recognise 55 creative clusters at a TTWA scale in the UK, as well as developing a five-point framework noting the essential factors for cluster growth: access to finance; access to talent; innovation; broad environment

²⁰ See for instance the discussion of the North of England in: Siepel, Ramirez-Guerra, and Rathi, 'Geographies Of Creativity'.

²¹ Juan Mateos-Garcia and Hasan Bakhshi, 'The Geography of Creativity in the UK' (Nesta, 2016), https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/the_geography_of_creativity_in_the_uk.pdf

(e.g. infrastructure); and exporting.²² This highlighted the expansion of creative clusters across the four nations, as well as noting the enabling factors that had allowed such growth to take place in these locations.

In addition to creative clusters, the Creative PEC has defined another geographical layer in creative microclusters. Using data at a Middle Layer Super Output Area (MSOA) level, 709 creative microclusters were identified at a street, neighbourhood, and town level. Importantly, these microclusters can operate within a larger creative cluster – for example, 22 microclusters were identified within Greater Manchester and over 200 creative microclusters were located in London alone. This evidence supported the identification of creative agglomeration that was taking place in rural and coastal areas away from large urban areas. However, it also showed that companies in creative microclusters outside of London were more likely to perceive access to external finance as a barrier to growth, even if they were based in a larger cluster. This finer geographical detail is critical for seeing the connections between clusters at different scales across the UK, as well as supporting interventions that speak to the barriers they face.²³

It is worth noting that whilst a lot of focus has been placed on the role of clusters in supporting more ‘commercial’ parts of the creative industries, like film and television or video games, there are also important complementarities between these commercial aspects and the not-for-profit or subsidised parts of the arts and culture subsectors. Academic research highlights the important role that social networks around arts and

²² Frontier economics, ‘Understanding the Growth Potential of Creative Clusters’, 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-the-growth-potential-of-creative-clusters>

²³ Josh Siepel et al., ‘Creative Industries Radar: Mapping the UK’s Creative Clusters and Microclusters’ (Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre, 2020), https://pec.ac.uk/research_report_entr/creative-radar-2021-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-the-uks-creative-industries/

culture activities play in the success of creative hubs, with evidence that the presence of arts and culture infrastructure like galleries and museums can boost productivity.²⁴ Indeed, we find that creative microclusters are more likely to emerge where this supporting infrastructure is found.²⁵ These networks are also key for developing the specific identities of places known for their creative opportunities.

A new frontier: creative corridors

Amongst the benefits previously outlined, creative industries clustering across the UK helps to enable the highly networked nature of their activities within these places.²⁶ Creative work, whether it be the production of a new film or the creation of a new fashion line, often relies on assembling a temporary crew of specialist freelancers and employees, coordinating complex supply chains, and raising finance, often on a project-by-project basis. Access to personal networks plays a central role in accessing the right information to establish and deliver these projects.²⁷

²⁴ See for example: Hasan Bakhshi, Ian Hargreaves, and Juan Mateos-Garcia, 'A Manifesto for the Creative Economy' (Nesta, 2013), www.nesta.org.uk/report/a-manifesto-for-the-creative-economy/

²⁵ Siepel et al., 'Creative Industries Radar: Mapping the UK's Creative Clusters and Microclusters'.

²⁶ For a discussion of some of the implications of what this means for public policy, see: Hasan Bakhshi, Stuart Cunningham, and Juan Mateos-Garcia, 'Public Policy for the Creative Industries', in *The Oxford Handbook of Creative Industries*, ed. Candace Jones, Mark Lorenzen, and Jonathan Sapsed (Oxford University Press, 2015), 465–85, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199603510.013.027>

²⁷ Jonathan Sapsed, Andrew Grantham, and Robert DeFillippi, 'A Bridge over Troubled Waters: Bridging Organisations and Entrepreneurial Opportunities in Emerging Sectors', *Research Policy* 36, no. 9 (1 November

Whilst such benefits can be generated locally or regionally, it is however important to recognise that clusters also act as nodes in larger domestic and international networks which support and enable the production activities of creative industries.²⁸ A Manchester based freelancer may deliver a project with a Leeds-based firm. A production studio in Cardiff may hire filming equipment from a business in Bristol. The detailed insights generated through creative clusters mapping and definition have led to further thinking around how to grow and connect these agglomerations into what we are referring to as ‘creative corridors.’²⁹

Our understanding of these larger relationships and dependencies between creative clusters is still in its infancy. However, there is a growing body of research exploring this issue. For example, research by Nesta in 2016 used data from the online events platform ‘Meet-up’ to explore networks across clusters. It found inter-regional creative networks spanning between cities in the North of England, as well as Edinburgh and Glasgow, and Cardiff, Bristol, and Bath, amongst other places.³⁰ The Creative PEC has also found evidence of positive spillovers between adjacent microclusters.³¹ A recent report by Cambridge Econometrics on Innovation Clusters, commissioned by the Department for Science, Innovation, and Technology, has used network analysis to show that research partnerships can span large geographic distances between clusters.³² Forthcoming research for the

2007): 1314-34, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2007.05.003>; Bakhshi, Hargreaves, and Mateos-Garcia, ‘A Manifesto for the Creative Economy’.

²⁸ Mateos-Garcia and Bakhshi, ‘The Geography of Creativity in the UK’.

²⁹ Chapain et al., ‘Creative Clusters and Innovation’.

³⁰ Mateos-Garcia and Bakhshi, ‘The Geography of Creativity in the UK’.

³¹ See Siepel, Ramirez-Guerra, and Rathi, ‘Geographies Of Creativity’.

³² ‘Identifying and Describing UK Innovation Clusters’ (Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, 2024),

Creative PEC demonstrates that the same is true for creative industries R&D collaborations through a study of UKRI Gateway to Research data.

At this inter-regional scale, however, there is also an increased risk of what previous research has referred to as ‘systems failures,’³³ where gaps or holes may emerge in the networked activities that sustain creative activity. For clarity, in this context, we refer to these as coordination failures in this report’ and suggest there are four areas where such failures may emerge, which a creative corridor intervention may help to mitigate:

- 1. Skills development:** rather than collaborate, employers and training providers in any one cluster may underinvest in the skills of their local talent if they anticipate that employers in neighbouring clusters (and beyond) will also benefit from that investment.
- 2. Access to finance:** firms in one cluster may compete with those in another cluster for limited national and overseas investment. By joining up, they could increase liquidity in the market for investors and possibly offer a wider pool of resources, thereby lowering the risk premium for investors and increasing attraction with a more diverse portfolio.
- 3. Innovation:** the benefits of positive knowledge spillovers from business investment in R&D on firms in neighbouring clusters may not be realised without coordination.
- 4. Arts, culture and heritage:** public funders in arts, culture, and heritage may not recognise the positive spillover benefits on the sector in neighbouring clusters (e.g. tourism).

In the context of greater devolution of powers, there is also increasingly a risk of disjointed governance. For example, skills strategies covering a single area may be developed concurrently by a local or combined authority,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/identifying-and-describing-uk-innovation-clusters>

³³ Bakhshi, Cunningham, and Mateos-Garcia, ‘Public Policy for the Creative Industries’.

through a cultural compact or similar body, and at national government level without collaboration (although the creation of Skills England will provide an opportunity to address this in some way).

Applying a creative corridor model to an area by sharing assets and unifying strategies is intended to enable greater economies of scope and scale. In doing so, this addresses coordination failures and allows places across a larger geographic area to reap the benefits. By stimulating greater connections between clusters, for instance through increasing supply-chain linkages, R&D collaborations, and labour mobility through a coordinated approach, a creative corridor may be able to bring additional agglomeration advantages and efficiencies above and beyond those found within individual clusters. Indeed, previous research by Nesta suggests that regional ‘rivals’ are more successful when they work together to grow their creative industries,³⁴ a movement which is increasingly being seen through policy interventions with a cross-regional focus.³⁵

Origins of the concept

The creative corridors concept is derived from domestic and international examples of innovation corridors, which have their origins in the science and technology sectors. Globally, models include the likes of Silicon Valley in California, but also the Toronto-Waterloo corridor in Canada, which has a tech-based focus. In the UK, there has been some progress in the London to Cambridge innovation corridor, which focuses on sci-tech developments.³⁶

³⁴ Juan Mateos-Garcia, Joel Klinger, and Konstantinos Stathoulopoulos, ‘Creative Nation’ (Nesta, 2018), www.nesta.org.uk/report/creative-nation/

³⁵ See, for example: ‘Creative Estuary’, Creative Estuary, www.creativeestuary.com/

³⁶ ‘The UK Innovation Corridor’, UK Innovation Corridor, <https://innovationcorridor.uk/>

The Canadian examples are particularly instructive as they have received support from federal government, including Canada's Global Innovation Clusters initiative, to nurture five clusters across Canada ranging from aquaculture to plant-based protein alternatives to artificial intelligence. As of 2023, the initiative has provided more than \$2 billion of co-investment with industry, supported more than 500 projects, and generated more than 850 new intellectual property (IP) rights.³⁷

Analysis of the Ontario corridor, for instance, has surfaced a helpful set of factors that have contributed to its success:³⁸

- **Strategic location** in proximity to economic centres including Montreal, Toronto, and Ottawa, as well as access to the USA. Its geography also means that urban-rural connectivity is an opportunity on which to capitalise.
- **Local educational institutions are assets.** Proximity to a collection of educational institutions yields benefits such as access to talent and skills. Linkages between industry and education support a healthy knowledge base.
- **The existing workforce is already highly educated and innovative.**
- **The area is attractive as a place to live and work,** with quality of place and quality of life indicators rating highly.
- **Telecoms infrastructure** - such as high-speed broadband - for the region is generally good.

It is important to note that the Canadian examples are not considered to be an unequivocal success story. Critics point to a lack of strategic planning -

³⁷ Innovation Government of Canada, 'Innovation Superclusters Initiative - Home', 23 January 2024. www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/093.nsf/eng/home

³⁸ 'Canada's Creative Corridor: Connecting Creative Urban and Rural Economies within Eastern Ontario and the Mega Region' (The Eastern Ontario CFDC Network Inc, FedNor and The Government of Canada), https://tweed.ca/photos/custom/Canadas_Creative_Corridor.pdf

including the absence of clear evaluative processes and metrics for success - contributing to under-delivery in terms of economic impact and poor budget management.³⁹ Furthermore, some suggest that the underwhelming results of the Canadian initiative are attributable to a focus on funding at the expense of an understanding of how clusters work.⁴⁰ As we continue to experiment, these points provide learnings on what is and isn't effective for encouraging the formation and growth of creative corridors and when this might be the most appropriate intervention. There are other examples from North America to draw on too - such as the North Carolina innovation corridor.⁴¹

Potential effects of creative corridors in the UK

While this policy context provides a solid foundation to work from, the evidence base is still emerging, and so robust analysis outlining the impact of such interventions is scarce. Nevertheless, drawing on a wider range of literature, there are benefits that we could expect to see from creative corridor interventions. Importantly, these would focus on harnessing the unique differences of diverse local creative strengths and cultural identity through coordinated strategies and interventions, rather than replacing them.⁴² These include:

³⁹ 'We Can No Longer Justify Canada's Ill-Conceived Superclusters', University Affairs. <https://universityaffairs.ca/opinion/policy-and-practice/we-can-no-longer-justify-canadas-ill-conceived-superclusters/>

⁴⁰ 'What's Happening with Canada's Superclusters?', University Affairs. <https://universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/whats-happening-with-canadas-superclusters/>

⁴¹ Lawrence et al., 'A Blueprint for Building an Innovation Corridor'.

⁴² Creative PEC research has shown that collaboration across administrative boundaries at a local authority level is not a zero-sum game;

- **Greater matching in the labour market:** corridor development can actively encourage collaboration between skills strategies and development of pathways across regions and administrative boundaries. This means that local people can **access the skills provision that is relevant to the local industrial landscape** and therefore access jobs more effectively that speak to local need.
- **Increased levels of innovation:** Evidence shows that knowledge transcends geographical boundaries through spillovers, which occur between clusters and therefore expand knowledge flows and innovation.⁴³ Corridor initiatives could **harness these spillovers and actively encourage coordination** across the relevant area that furthers such effects, encouraging clusters to cooperate on innovation activity. The role of universities as anchor institutions is critical to enhance this. Recent evidence suggests that knowledge spillovers are generated by job mobility, which is generally higher in creative clusters.⁴⁴
- **Economic growth at a local and regional scale:** Rather than nearby clusters competing for the same constrained resources, linkages stimulate agglomeration. Economic growth is likely to be fuelled by **increased public and inward investment towards an area with a greater scale and profile.** This could help to redistribute growth more equally across the UK - including rural and coastal creative communities working outside of major cities. The greater scale could

collaboration can benefit adjacent economies. See: Mateos-Garcia, Klinger, and Stathoulopoulos, 'Creative Nation'.

⁴³ 'Creative Spillovers: Do the Creative Industries Benefit Firms in the Wider Economy?' (Frontier Economics, 2023), <https://www.frontier-economics.com/media/z5bpkoxk/creative-spillovers-do-the-creative-industries-benefit-firms-in-the-wider-economy.pdf>

⁴⁴ <https://www.escoe.ac.uk/publications/job-mobility-in-and-around-the-creative-economy/>

provide opportunities to improve infrastructure needs - such as transport and digital connectivity. The knock-on impact of this growth may generate higher rates of employment and productivity across various creative subsectors.

- Building on these economic benefits, creative corridors have the potential to deliver significant social benefits by amplifying effects commonly attributed to the creative industries. By investing in culture and creativity at a significantly larger geographic scale, it is likely that pride in place, social connectedness and wellbeing benefits would also be amplified. Particularly in relation to increased knowledge flows and intensity of collaboration, the level of shared regional identity is likely to be strengthened.

The connective tissue required to join up clusters into creative corridors may take a variety of forms; indeed, as corridors are an emerging area, there is flexibility with the model and how it might be applied to the nuances of specific places. **However, the key benefit of working at a corridor level is the potential that comes with greater coordination across a larger geographic scale.**

There are defining features of the creative industries that may offer particular opportunities for greater connection and scale. For example, the high proportion of freelance creatives and small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) in the sector is an important dimension and means the creative industries labour market is relatively fluid in terms of job mobility. In practical terms, collaboration between creatives within clusters and microclusters is commonplace, and therefore our hypothesis is that further connection and coordination across clusters and microclusters may provide additional economies of scale to the places within that larger network.

Scale may not be useful for all aspects of creative clusters in every regional context. The sub-sector networks that exist in microclusters may already be highly productive in certain places, and it is still very useful for local leaders to continue to enable the growth of creative clusters for local economic development. However, this report articulates some of the areas where

collaboration at scale is useful to unlock further potential across city-regions. Furthermore, given what we know about the huge potential of the creative industries and the need for economic growth that can be enjoyed across the UK on a mass scale, exploring the potential of corridors is an opportunity to complement clusters. We hope that addressing some of the coordination failures between clusters to realise corridors will ensure a wider range of people and places across the UK can enjoy the economic benefits.

The development of creative corridors all across the UK provides an approach through which these challenges may be addressed and could see the network effects of agglomeration economies achieved at a larger geographic scale. In the next section, we ask where the development of creative corridors in the UK might be prioritised.

The potential for corridors in the UK

Exploring the concept further

While place-based creative policymaking to support the creative industries continues to gain traction in the UK, exploring the potential of corridors is timely. At a national level, the new UK government have shown strong support for the creative industries playing a critical role in the central national growth mission⁴⁵.

Within the Industrial Strategy Green Paper, there has also been a focus on high-potential, growth-driving clusters that may build on place-based opportunities - with creative clusters and corridors specifically cited as possible routes to achieving such goals.

There is great work happening across devolved administrations to develop culture strategies for place, and the development of culture strategies in recently formed Mayoral Combined Authorities and local government

⁴⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/culture-secretary-declares-culture-media-and-sport-sectors-crucial-to-national-growth-mission>

demonstrate growing collaboration between national, local, and regional stakeholders. Taking this one step further and considering what it might take to realise a creative corridor for greater gains is therefore a compelling challenge. In fact, in some areas, various bodies are starting to experiment in this way, as seen in the work in the Thames Estuary and Cardiff-Bristol areas.

From November 2023 to March 2024, the RSA and Creative PEC, funded by Arts Council England, convened a broad range of stakeholders to consider evidence on existing and emerging creative corridors, as well as the unique contributions and challenges of the creative industries, to draw out some early insights on the potential for creative corridors in the UK. Drawing on these stakeholder workshops, as well as desk-based research and statistical analysis from the Creative PEC's wider work, this report sets out recommendations for a range of policy measures that we hope will serve as a launchpad for action.

How might we draw on the success of the London and the M25 supercluster - as well as examples of emerging corridors both nationally and internationally - and what are the current barriers and opportunities to stimulating connectivity between existing creative clusters to develop creative corridors across the UK? These questions framed an evidence review which included a rapid desk-based review of literature and workshops with stakeholders from across creative industries, government, and regions between November 2023 and February 2024 (for the full detail of the review process, please see Appendix A). These discussions took place in early 2024, before the announcement of the UK general election in July. The context of the new policy landscape has been reflected throughout this report, but it is worth noting that insights from the stakeholder workshops were gathered in a different context. This section sets out the starting insight and themes that formed the base for workshop discussions.

The Creative PEC's recent research suggests that creative corridors should begin through the identification of areas where clusters or microclusters of creative workers and businesses currently exist, but where linkages could be

made to further strengthen their competitive successes and guard against coordination failures.

UK opportunities for creative corridors

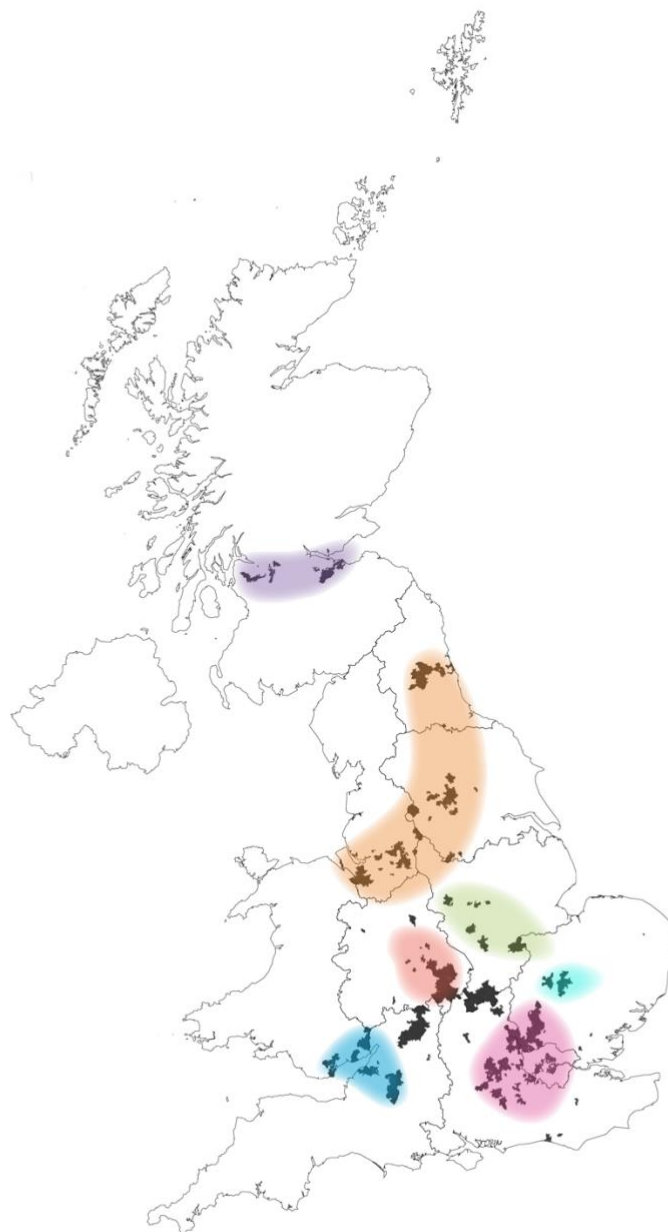
In their background briefing paper on In their background briefing paper on the Northern creative corridor, the RSA and Creative PEC suggested several key conditions for growth that would mitigate the potential for coordination failures and could be supported through creative corridors.⁴⁶ The Creative PEC's 2023 report, 'The Geographies of Creativity', points to areas that might be suitable candidates for creative corridor interventions. It does so by identifying where sites of creative activity in one area are statistically shown to be significantly spatially correlated with neighbouring areas, as such indicating where creative clustering activity could be harnessed and scaled up to yield similar high growth benefits to creative superclusters like London and the M25.⁴⁷ The map on the right (Figure D) shows the clusters with this potential highlighted in dark grey.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Eliza Easton et al., 'Northern England's Creative Industries: Background Paper' (Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre, led by Newcastle University with the RSA, 2023).

⁴⁷ Siepel, Ramirez-Guerra, and Rathi, 'Geographies Of Creativity'.

⁴⁸ Special thanks to Creative PEC colleagues, who provided the data to produce the clusters map, and advised on its interpretation. Siepel and colleagues used spatial econometric methods to identify creative clusters where there was a high concentration of creative businesses that were in close proximity to other clusters with a high concentration of creative businesses. Note that the creative corridors identified here are hypothetical and approximate and should not be considered definitive in any way. More research is required to identify the relationships between clusters in these potential corridors.

Figure D: Map of creative clusters and potential corridors in the UK



Sources: Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre⁴⁹, ONS Open Geography Portal⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Siepel, Ramirez-Guerra, and Rathi, 'Geographies Of Creativity'.

⁵⁰ 'Open Geography Portal', <https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk>

Figure D gives an indication of some of the potential creative corridors across the UK:

Northern corridor(s): Running from Chester and Liverpool, through Greater Manchester and over to Leeds and Sheffield. Then, from Leeds to Newcastle and Tyneside, Teeside, Gateshead, Durham, and Darlington.

Edinburgh-Glasgow-Dundee Corridor.

Cardiff-Newport-Bristol-Bath-Gloucester/Cheltenham corridor: roughly along the M4 motorway.

West Midlands corridor: hotspots in Birmingham and Coventry, but extending to Gloucester, Cheltenham, and Northampton.

East Midlands and Sheffield corridor: hotspots include Leicester, Derby, Nottingham, and Sheffield.

Cambridge corridor: hotspots around Cambridge, Bedford, and Huntingdon.

London and the M25: hotspots running across London, Surrey, Kent, and Sussex.

Spotlight on emerging corridor initiatives

Cardiff-Newport-Bristol-Bath corridor

The main cities within this corridor are already well established creative tech clusters with their own unique strengths (screen industries in Cardiff and Bristol, publishing in Bath). Further creative investment and collaboration has helped to connect these clusters together, including through the Creative Industries Clusters Programme (Clwstwr in Cardiff and Bristol + Bath Creative R&D), the Creative Industries Cluster Hubs project in Newport, and the Strength in Places fund (MyWorld and Media Cymru).⁵¹ A

⁵¹ <https://arts.wales/news-jobs-opportunities/newport-creative-industries-cluster-hub>
<https://clwstwr.org.uk/>

corridor in this region is evidenced through proactive collaboration across a large-scale commercial creative ecosystem, supported by a high density of universities in the area, effective rail links and a skilled workforce.⁵² A more joined up “Western Supercluster” is currently being explored in partnership between Western Gateway, the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) and Cardiff Capital, with a focus specifically on creative technologies.

Thames Estuary and the South East

While London and the M25 is an established supercluster with existing agglomeration effects, its fortunes are inextricably linked to the Thames Estuary where there is potential to capitalise on corridor interventions to ensure that the benefits of regeneration are expanded into the South East.

The Thames Estuary Production Corridor (TEPC), an ambitious vision to build on the region’s industrial heritage for long-term culture-led growth in East London, Kent, and Essex over the next 30 years, is supported by:

Recently improved transport infrastructure (DLR, HS1, Elizabeth line) and the existing Southeastern and C2C coastal mainline services into Kent and Essex.

Growth in affordable housing (290,000 new homes to be built along the Thames Estuary by 2050).

Excellent education and skills provision (National College Creative Industries at the Backstage Centre High House Production Park, South East Talent Accelerator and Higher Education Institutes such as the Universities of Kent and Essex) .

<https://bristolbathcreative.org/>

<https://www.discover.ukri.org/strength-in-places-fund/>

⁵² Siepel, Ramirez-Guerra, and Rathi, ‘Geographies Of Creativity’.

A thriving knowledge economy that fosters local talent and skills pipelines.

Investment in centres for creative production and innovation (Chatham Historic Dockyard, High House Production Park, Basildon, and Gravesham).

The Thames Estuary Production Corridor (TEPC) launched in 2017 by the Mayor of London in partnership with the London Economic Action Partnership, the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) and the South East Creative Economy Network (SECEN). Strategic delivery of the TEPC vision and evidence base, began in 2019 with the launch of Creative Estuary with investment of £4.3m from DCMS and Arts Council England's Cultural Development Fund. Creative Estuary is led by the University of Kent on behalf of a consortium of public sector and cultural organisations, working together to support the TEPC. They included SELEP, Kent and Essex County Councils, the Greater London Authority, 11 local authority areas represented by Thames Gateway Kent Partnership and Opportunity South Essex, SECEN, University of Kent, University of Essex, Locate in Kent, and cultural organisations Metal and Cement Fields.

In 2023, further investment of £1.15m was made by Arts Council England as part of their Place Partnership Project Fund.

There has also been an important dimension of driving growth through skills investment in the Thames Estuary Production Corridor, as evidenced by the Creative PEC.⁵³

Northern Creative Corridor

Creative corridors are an emerging area and so concurrently to this national policy report the RSA and Creative PEC have been exploring how a Northern Creative Corridor (NCC) might be nurtured from Hull to Liverpool, Bolton to Berwick, Leeds to Carlisle and everywhere in between.

⁵³ [Giles et al. 'Growth through skills: Lessons from the Thames Estuary Production Corridor'. \(Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, 2021\).](#)

In collaboration with the NCC signatories - a coalition of local and regional policymakers, CEOs and Directors from across Northern creative industry subsectors, funding bodies, creative industry advocacy bodies, and universities and skills providers - a set of policy propositions have been developed and were published in the Manifesto of the North in September 2024⁵⁴. These propositions - which include a commitment to a £50m investment fund for R&D focused on creative technologies - have been brought together under the umbrella “One Creative North” which is now being spearheaded as an initiative by Mayor of West Yorkshire, Tracy Brabin⁵⁵.

There are a variety of regional sub-sector strengths in the North. The Northern screen industry is growing, with Northern film and TV crews working across the region. The North West is a hub for live music, with Liverpool hosting the Eurovision Song Contest in 2023 and Manchester attracting world-class talent for Manchester International Festival. In Yorkshire, AHRC’s Creative Industries Clusters Programme has also boosted the historical textiles and fashion expertise in the region. The concentration of video game studios in Newcastle and Gateshead in the North East and emerging CreaTech companies have made it an attractive home for skilled tech workers. The North of England is also home to invaluable arts, culture and heritage institutions, providing excellent experiences for communities across the region. Large-scale and multi-purpose venues include the newly opened Aviva Studios, led by the team behind Manchester International Festival, and Gateshead’s BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Arts, which is an example of investment in cultural infrastructure supporting local regeneration for more than 20 years. Looking forwards, Bradford is set to be

⁵⁴ NP11. ‘Convention of the North’. 17 October 2024.

<https://www.conventionofthenorth.org.uk/>

⁵⁵ BBC. ‘Creative bank’ worth £50m planned for the North’. 4 September 2024. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c9qg2v4rdw1o>

the UK's City of Culture for 2025, while the North is also home to a network of rural and urban museum sites preserving its unique Roman history.

Workshop lines of enquiry

Stakeholders from across the prospective corridor areas were convened to explore how the four coordination failures identified by the Creative PEC⁵⁶ manifested in different places and start to seed some policy options as a response. These four areas were reframed as our guiding themes for workshops and analysis:

- Supporting innovation
- Nurturing arts and culture
- Building skills pathways
- Access to finance

During the first phase of this process, the aim was to deepen understanding of the case and conditions for creative corridors for the different UK regional contexts. The second phase included seven policy workshops, with four held online via Zoom and three in person in different locations in the North of England. These workshops engaged a total of 112 stakeholders from across local and regional government and the creative industries and a range of different UK regions (where possible correlating with the potential areas for corridors set out above). Representatives were invited from combined and local authorities, cultural organisations, creative businesses, and universities to name but a few. However, we note that there was an underrepresentation of other key stakeholders in the creative industries, such as freelancers.

⁵⁶ Siepel et al. 'Geographies of Creativity'. (Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, 2023). https://pec.ac.uk/state_of_the_nation/geographies-of-creativity/

Table 1: Creative corridors challenge questions – “how might we...?”

Theme	Challenges
Arts and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect arts, culture, and heritage hubs to form inter-connected corridors? • Create better conditions for creative freelancers?
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable flexible, modular apprenticeship schemes across local clusters connecting multiple small/micro businesses? • Develop place-based careers pathways linked to regional opportunities? • Ensure that opportunities in the creative industries are open to diverse individuals and communities?
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support other industries to benefit from (local or national) creative talent? • Stimulate the adoption of emerging technologies to drive productivity and innovation? • Better measure and value creative research and development (R&D)?

*Note that the ‘access to finance’ theme was explored through a roundtable format rather than workshop and the resulting outputs were therefore slightly different.

Each workshop focused on a specific coordination failure. The aim was to surface barriers and opportunities in the potential corridor areas, and consider policy interventions to address them. Initially, stakeholders were asked to develop a set of questions that articulate the key challenges, summarised in Table 1.

The policy workshops surfaced a deep set of insights into the opportunities and barriers in reference to each of the themes. In some workshops, stakeholders built on these with suggestions of specific policy interventions

at the local, regional and/or national level that would help address the problem. The rest of this Section is dedicated to distilling these insights, and key policy options are curated in Section 3.

Insights on the four themes

The first part of this section summarises the key themes that emerged from the four themes, while the second part outlines some common themes that were surfaced throughout.

Supporting Innovation

The challenge

Research and development (R&D) more broadly is a driver of innovation and productivity, which creative work naturally lends itself towards due to the focus on creative testbeds which help to develop solutions or resolve a specific question or uncertainty. R&D can result in innovation, whereby new products, services or processes are developed that may be of benefit to the wider economy.

National policies have been designed to stimulate R&D at a regional level - such as the UKRI Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund and wider Innovation Accelerators. These have been recognised as useful to drive regional growth outside London and the M25, and recent evidence shows how R&D collaborations tend to span larger geographic distances (up to 150km) and act as key threads across regions.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ 'Identifying and Describing UK Innovation Clusters'.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/identifying-and-describing-uk-innovation-clusters>

Barriers

However, the creative industries face distinct R&D challenges, with issues including: a limited applicability for tax relief compared to the wider economy; the short-term nature of project-based work limiting opportunities to develop R&D projects; and opportunities not being as open to the highly freelance creative workforce compared to larger businesses and organisations often involved with innovation activity. These are but a few issues that lead to barriers to accessing R&D for many across the creative industries.

Creative R&D also misses out on additional tax credits that other sectors (e.g. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Medicine) qualify for. The prevalence of SMEs and micro-businesses in the creative industries also makes it more difficult for the creative workforce to access R&D support, due to the typical lack of in-house expertise and capacity to engage. However, there is untapped potential here, with evidence from the Creative PEC showing that over two thirds of creative businesses report engaging in R&D, despite only 6% receiving tax credits.⁵⁸ Stakeholders identified reasons for this being primarily around the absence of a clear definition of creative R&D, as well as disproportionate focus on digital creativity which means other subsectors and regional strengths are potentially under-supported in R&D terms, particularly neglecting the arts and culture sector. Some participants called for better recognition of the value of creative R&D, with opportunities for regional leaders to jointly advocate to UK government stakeholders for a broader definition of R&D to open up eligibility for tax reliefs.

⁵⁸ Siepel et al. 'Creative Radar 2021: The Impact of COVID-19 on the UK's Creative Industries'. (Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, 2021). <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Creative-Radar-2021-The-Impact-of-Covid-19-on-the-Creative-Industries-PEC-July-2021.pdf>

Opportunities

Stakeholders cited examples of collaborations between creative and non-creative organisations that have led to the transferability of creative knowledge that, in turn, enhances other work. Participants were interested in developing ways to promote regional cross-pollination between sectors, particularly through funding mechanisms that could support new kinds of knowledge transfer partnerships. This might include cross-sector ‘in-residence’ placements for artists, manufacturers, and developers at a corridor level. There could be a clear opportunity for a corridor intervention to encourage hybrid sector working and connect local creative industries with wider partners, to build on existing collective strengths and possibly generate new products or knowledge as a result.

For the arts and culture subsectors in particular, festivals such as Sheffield⁵⁹ DocFest, Manchester International Festival, and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival were referred to as organic ‘hotbeds’ for creative R&D, bringing together performers, audiences, and industry with networking and commercial opportunities - for example, Phoebe Waller-Bridge’s one woman show “Fleabag” is a notable success story.⁵⁹ Stakeholders highlighted further opportunities, including: driving growth in hybrid sectors to connect industrial strengths across a corridor (e.g. creative health or creative manufacturing); harnessing growth opportunities of emerging technologies (e.g. immersive technology) where significant upfront investment by firms and universities is needed to capitalise on opportunities; and increasing the role that the cultural sector plays to find creative solutions to challenges in other sectors (for example, meeting net zero targets).

⁵⁹ ‘Phoebe Waller-Bridge and Fleabag at the Fringe: 10 Years On’, Edinburgh Festival Fringe, accessed 22 April 2024, www.edfringe.com/learn/news-and-events/phoebe-waller-bridge-and-fleabag-at-the-fringe-10-years-on

Policy idea highlights from workshops

- **Development of corridor-focused innovation funds for creative businesses with a clear applied/thematic/geographic focus**, which would act as a route to encouraging R&D within and beyond the creative sector. Creative UK/UKRI's Creative Catalyst Challenge Fund was cited as an example which offers up to £250,000 of grant funding for R&D and has a clear thematic focus of addressing environmental impacts in the creative industries.⁶⁰
- **Corridor-focused innovation funds to include opportunities for the subsidised creative subsectors at a micro-grant scale** to ensure that cultural organisations, freelancers, and micro/SMEs are included in the process.
- **UK government to broaden the definition of R&D for tax credits eligibility** - for example, adopting the full Frascati definition used by many other OECD countries, which includes reference to “creative and systematic work to increase knowledge”.⁶¹

Access to Finance

The challenge

Attracting large-scale investment into the creative industries will be a key challenge for corridor interventions. This is made more difficult because access to funding and investment within the creative sector itself is not evenly distributed at a geographical or subsector level - we know that private finance is more likely to be secured by commercial and for-profit creative industries in comparison to the subsidised cultural sector, which relies more on local authority and grant finance.

Evidence from a Creative Industries Council finance survey showed that nearly two-thirds of the creative businesses surveyed had agreed that they were happy to use external finance to help grow their business, but two-thirds of those believed that lenders find their sector hard to understand and

therefore their sector struggles more than others to get funding.⁶² Whilst tax reliefs do exist for specific creative activity such as theatre, orchestras, museums and galleries, video games and TV, other creative subsectors receive no relief, and focus more on securing public grants or private investment.

Barriers

Workshop stakeholders emphasised the disparity in access to private finance for creative firms between London and the rest of the country. Creative PEC research has shown that creative businesses in the North of England, for example, are more likely to see access to finance as a key barrier to growth.⁶³ As one workshop participant put it: “more investment is needed in the North, across the board, on a national and local level, from both public and private sectors”. Wider evidence from the Creative PEC also shows that Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is largely directed to London and the M25, providing an additional layer of complexity to the creative financial landscape.⁶⁴ Whilst there are positive signs of investment being made more evenly across the four UK nations, there are also challenges with how to distribute funding beyond major cities and into towns, rural, and coastal areas where creative microclusters are located.⁶⁵

⁶² BDRC, ‘Access to Finance’ (Creative Industries Council), <https://cic-media.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/media/471225/cic-access-to-finance-research-report-june-2018.pdf>

⁶⁴ Jones, J. and Fazio, G, ‘The Nature of Foreign Direct Investment in the Creative Industries’ (Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre, 2022), https://pec.ac.uk/discussion_paper/the-nature-of-foreign-direct-investment-in-the-creative-industries/

⁶⁵ Siepel J, ‘Small Engines of Growth: Understanding Creative Microclusters’, Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (blog), 19 November 2020, https://pec.ac.uk/blog_entries/small-engines-of-growth-understanding-creative-microclusters/

The disconnected nature of the funding ecosystem was also raised, with investors often not coordinating with each other, leading to no single authority for financial provision or advice. Northern stakeholders also underlined the desire for a “single front door” for investment in the North to connect and strengthen investment opportunities as well as increase the regions’ ability to attract investment from private sector sources, such as angel investors and venture capital funds. Participants were particularly interested in the opportunities presented by devolution to distribute finance more equitably around the UK and in a manner that can be tailored to local needs.

Opportunities

Collaboration across a corridor may provide a way of bundling opportunities to increase access to regional finance and build tailored business and investor support to ‘match’ the right investment to creative firms across a larger geography. In this way, corridors can play a complementary role to existing national and local initiatives. Creative corridors provide a model to scale-up existing funding initiatives that have supported place-based creative development, created jobs, and led to economic gain. Such initiatives have established ways of directing investment into place-based interventions, like the DCMS/Innovate UK Create Growth programme⁶⁶, the UKRI Strength in Places Fund⁶⁷, the Arts Council England-delivered Cultural Development Fund⁶⁸ and Place Partnerships Programme⁶⁹, and the Creative

⁶⁶ ‘Create Growth Programme - Innovate UK Business Connect’, iuk.ktn-uk.org/programme/create-growth/

⁶⁷ ‘Strength in Places Fund’, <https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/browse-our-areas-of-investment-and-support/strength-in-places-fund/>

⁶⁸ ‘£15 Million Boost for Cultural Venues to Level up Access to the Arts across England’, GOV.UK, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/15-million-boost-for-cultural-venues-to-level-up-access-to-the-arts-across-england>

⁶⁹ ‘Arts Council National Lottery Project Grants’, Arts Council England, www.artscouncil.org.uk/ProjectGrants

UK and North of Tyne Combined Authority Culture and Creative Investment Programme.⁷⁰ While these programmes may have diversified financial support for specific places, they may also provide opportunities to borrow from existing cluster development blueprints and scale up to a corridor level.

Stakeholders described perceived disparities in securing funding across the different creative subsectors, highlighting an “ever increasing disparity between the business models able to raise capital”. Nevertheless, CreaTech businesses were discussed as those that seemed well placed in the creative industries to attract private investment when compared to other subsectors.

Policy idea highlights from workshops

- **Further devolve financial powers at a regional level** to enable place- and sector-focused funds to be distributed by key players. For example, the British Business Bank’s Regional Funds could be expanded to see public and private investment addressing funding gaps whilst offering corridor-wide support.
- **Central government support for new investment approaches which connect Mayoral Combined Authorities**, focusing on providing financial support for creative individuals/businesses/organisations across a whole corridor with one point of access. This could involve scaled up models of the Greater Manchester Culture Fund (which includes a mix of financial approaches)⁷¹ or the North of Tyne Culture and Creative Investment Programme (which includes grant funding, debt and equity finance, and business support).

⁷⁰ ‘North of Tyne Culture and Creative Investment Programme’, Creative UK (blog), <https://www.wearecreative.uk/northoftyne/>

- **Undertake new research on the connections between publicly funded creative organisations and the commercial/for-profit creative sectors** to understand historic and emerging financial issues, with the findings informing effective corridor strategies that can offer better support.
- **Develop promotional campaigns and events to showcase individual creative corridors** whilst also platforming the benefits of creative sector investment.

Skills pathways

The challenge

There are several challenges for the skills landscape within the context of the creative industries. Siloed sub sectors, fragmented skills pathways, and the disproportionate number of freelancers and SMEs without institutional access to skills development were all highlighted by stakeholders as pressing challenges to growth for the sector. It is a complex landscape, but with skills budgets devolved to mayoral combined authorities and the opportunity to join up skills strategies across regions, creative corridors can play a role in facilitating greater alignment for greater gains.

Barriers

Skills shortages are widespread in the creative industries, with 42% of creative employers reporting they struggled to recruit people with the right skills or employed people with insufficient skills in 2018.⁷²

⁷² Giles L, Spilsbury M, and Carey H, 'A Skills Monitor for the Creative Industries' (Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre, 27 July 2020), https://pec.ac.uk/discussion_paper/a-skills-monitor-for-the-creative-industries/

There are important geographical dimensions to this challenge, with skills training being more readily available in larger cities, which may then require travel from people not living in those urban centres. Research suggests that firms that reported 'access to skills' as a hindrance and selected that they had vacancies that are hard to fill are more likely to be located in creative clusters - these might include many micro-businesses and stable firms from a wide range of creative subsectors, but feature a smaller share of high-growth businesses.⁷³

Another major challenge is apprenticeships, where many larger creative businesses pay the UK Apprenticeship Levy but sometimes receive little benefit in return. Apprenticeships, at present, are widely perceived as unsuitable for most creative businesses due to the traditional apprentice model infrequently aligning with short-term, project-based creative work. According to Creative PEC research, only 17% of creative employers supported apprenticeship training for over two years, compared to 40% of employers across all industries. Small businesses face the greatest barrier here, with only 6% engaging compared with 23% of larger employers.⁷⁴

Opportunities

Workshop participants saw potential in corridors for developing place-based career pathways with strong links to regional opportunities and industries. There was also discussion around how to enable more flexible creative apprenticeship schemes in local clusters, and how to better connect creative businesses and organisations with apprentices in order to strengthen the career pipeline. In addition to skills pathways into creative careers themselves, some participants raised the value of engagement in

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Giles, L. and Spilsbury, M. 'A skills monitor for the Creative Industries'. (Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, 2020).

https://pec.ac.uk/discussion_paper/a-skills-monitor-for-the-creative-industries/

culture and creativity in skills development more broadly, and in encouraging education practitioners to see the value of creative skills for the future. We know for example that engagement in the arts appears to encourage prosocial behaviours such as volunteering and charitable giving and that reading provides benefits to social interaction. This is another distinctive benefit that can be harnessed.⁷⁵

Workshop participants from the West Midlands specifically shared how the region has experienced ‘brain drain’, with talented creative graduates typically leaving for the likes of London, Manchester, or Bristol. Conversely, London-based employers highlighted the need to ensure that a diverse breadth of individuals and local communities have access to local opportunities in the creative industries, given the context of long-term inequality in the UK’s creative workforce.⁷⁶ For example, participants highlighted how the film industry is an important part of the economy in

⁷⁵ Julie Van de Vyver and Dominic Abrams, ‘The Arts as a Catalyst for Human Prosociality and Cooperation’, *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 9, no. 6 (1 August 2018): 664–74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617720275>

David Dodell-Feder and Diana I. Tamir, ‘Fiction Reading Has a Small Positive Impact on Social Cognition: A Meta-Analysis’, *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 147, no. 11 (2018): 1713–27, <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000395>;

Paul Montgomery and Kathryn Maunder, ‘The Effectiveness of Creative Bibliotherapy for Internalizing, Externalizing, and Prosocial Behaviors in Children: A Systematic Review’, *Children and Youth Services Review* 55 (1 August 2015): 37–47, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2015.05.010>

⁷⁶ Natalie Wreyford, Dave O’Brien, and Tamsyn Dent, ‘Creative Majority: An APPG for Creative Diversity Report on “What Works” to Support, Encourage and Improve Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Creative Sector. A Report for the All Party Parliamentary Group for Creative Diversity.’, 2021, www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/projects/creative-majority

Hounslow, but most people working in the film industry are not from the local area. The lack of capacity within small and medium-sized businesses was also widely cited as a particular challenge for hosting apprentices and accessing training, with the project-based nature of working in the creative industries being another. As one employer in TV put it: “production schedules are difficult. The apprenticeship model can be quite restrictive and it’s a big commitment...we are paying into a levy but not making use of it.”

Participants also suggested that the skills system is currently too fragmented and there could be a role for a “skills coordinator” or “regional skills agency” to provide a single point of contact and to join up thinking. Currently sector skills bodies, Local Cultural Educational Partnerships (LCEPs) and Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) all shape the skills landscape but need to be better connected across combined authorities and regional boundaries. This initiative would be supported by digital platforms and aim to understand and anticipate local skills demands, help shape learning provision, and support workers (including freelancers) and learners to identify and participate in appropriate skills development opportunities.

There was reference to existing models of good practice from Mayoral Combined Authorities, including the West Yorkshire Combined Authority’s Skills Bootcamp, which was designed to enhance creative career opportunities across the region.⁷⁷ An example of successful corridor interventions includes the Thames Estuary Production Corridor, supported by regional and local government alongside industry and education providers to facilitate creative production chains across 30 creative sites

⁷⁷ ‘New Skills Bootcamp to Boost Gigs and Live Events in West Yorkshire’, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/all-news-and-blogs/new-skills-bootcamp-to-boost-gigs-and-live-events-in-west-yorkshire/

and 18 neighbouring local authorities.⁷⁸ One aspect of this corridor specifically focused on improving creative skills alongside universities, schools, colleges, and private providers, with strategic governance from a multi-partner Skills and Productivity Board. The overall skills plan aimed to improve access and diversity in the sector, support lifelong learning, and break down barriers into creative careers across larger geographic area.⁷⁹

Policy idea highlights from workshops

- **Combined authorities should invest in a corridor-wide skills agency and skills coordinator role(s)** that are strategically designed with local needs and organisations in mind, drawing from expertise across government, industry and research.
- Advocate to UK Government for apprenticeships that have more flexibility and allow for more modular, lifelong, and self-employed training possibilities. **Modular apprenticeship models could be piloted and evaluated across a corridor** - adapting similar work being undertaken by the British Film Institute (BFI) to design a modular apprenticeship model to overcome the structural and systemic challenges the sector faces.

Nurturing Arts and Culture

The challenge

Arts and cultural venues act as anchor institutions, playing an integral role in the local creative and tourist economy, serving communities, and

⁷⁸ 'The Thames Estuary Production Corridor'.

⁷⁹ Lesley Giles and Heather Carey, 'Growth through Skills: Lessons from the Thames Estuary Production Corridor' (Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre, 2021). <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/arts-and-culture/current-culture-projects/thames-estuary-production-corridor>

contributing to wider social outcomes such as pride in place and wellbeing.⁸⁰ High profile artists and cultural institutions make areas attractive to workers, enterprises and visitors, thus making a strong contribution to place marketing.⁸¹ This is well evidenced, with a notable example being the Southbank Centre, which helped regenerate the South Bank area in London by attracting visitors across a range of interventions, including events programmes, commercial partnerships, and youth engagement.⁸²

Though London clearly benefits from an advantageous start point, this boon to place-making induced by cultural investment is not limited to the capital and is found in places across the country. The Hepworth Gallery is a strong example of place regeneration. Having grown its footfall substantially between 2011 and 2019 to attract hundreds of thousands of visitors annually, this cultural hub now spends millions of pounds in the local community each year, and was the catalyst for the development of Tileyard North, a new 135,000 square foot creative industries hub for West Yorkshire.⁸³ The challenge for any creative corridor intervention in this regard

⁸⁰ Metro Dynamics 'The Impact of Arts & Culture on the wider Creative Economy'. (Arts Council England, 2020).

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/impact-arts-and-culture-wider-creative-economy>

⁸¹ Cebr, 'Contribution of the Arts and Culture Industry to the UK Economy: A Cebr Report for Arts Council England'; Andy Parkinson, Jamie Buttrick, and Eddie Knight, 'Arts and Place Shaping: Evidence Review' (Wavehill: social and economic Research, 2020),

www.artscouncil.org.uk/arts-and-placeshaping-evidence-review

⁸² Hatch Regeneris, Economic and Social Impact Assessment of The Southbank Centre' 2020.

⁸³ New Report Evidences the Positive Impact of 10 Years of The Hepworth Wakefield', The Hepworth Wakefield, accessed 14 May 2024,

will be to secure sufficient investment against a challenging funding landscape context.

Barriers

The cultural subsectors in particular are home to diverse array of organisations and business types - these include charities, not-for-profits, social enterprises, and community interest companies (CICs). This makes for a diverse and complicated funding landscape, with different levels of reliance on social impact finance, public grants and subsidies, and philanthropic funding. Therefore, the cultural subsectors can be seen to face more challenges when generating incomes and attracting investment when compared with other creative industries that rely on commercial and private finance.

This is an issue which is further compounded by the key role of local authorities in providing cultural funding for an area. Investment into arts and culture through local authorities in England has fallen by more than 30% in real terms between 2009/10 and 2019/20, following trends of overall decline in local government budgets in the same period.⁸⁴ This is an issue that has the potential to increase strain on the creative and cultural industries in the context of post-pandemic inflation. It also highlights challenges around balancing the key role of local and regional authorities in creative corridors and directing public investment from within authorities into creative industry development.

Opportunities

<https://hepworthwakefield.org/news/new-report-evidences-the-positive-impact-of-10-years-of-the-hepworth-wakefield/>

⁸⁴ 'A New Deal for Arts Funding in England?', Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (blog), 12 January 2023, https://pec.ac.uk/blog_entries/a-new-deal-for-arts-funding-in-england/

There is increasing demand for capital investment into cultural infrastructure, as well as developing methods on how to measure the economic value of such assets through the DCMS Culture and Heritage Capital programme.⁸⁵ Some central government funds have been designed to support place-based investment into cultural infrastructure, which could be taken further through an expanded model of the ACE Cultural Development Fund⁸⁶ or the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Levelling Up Fund, which explicitly invested in culture projects in its latest rounds.⁸⁷

This could be key in effective corridor development as the latest research has shown that creative microclusters in particular are likely to emerge near existing cultural institutions.⁸⁸ Cultural institutions are also acting as ‘R&D labs’ for the creative industries - an analogy can be drawn here with the role of science parks - through their role in building talent pipelines, nurturing collaboration, encouraging experimentation, and driving innovation and

⁸⁵ ‘Culture and Heritage Capital Portal’, GOV.UK, 21 March 2024, www.gov.uk/guidance/culture-and-heritage-capital-portal

⁸⁶ ACE ‘Cultural Development Fund: Round Four’. <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-open-funds/cultural-investment-fund/cultural-development-fund-round-four>

⁸⁷ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2024) ‘Levelling Up culture projects: methodology note’. [https://www.gov.uk/guidance/levelling-up-culture-projects-methodology-note#:~:text=This%20note%20sets%20out%20the,Levelling%20Up%20Fund%20\(LUF\).](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/levelling-up-culture-projects-methodology-note#:~:text=This%20note%20sets%20out%20the,Levelling%20Up%20Fund%20(LUF).)

⁸⁸ Jorge A. Velez-Ospina et al., ‘Determinants of Rural Creative Microclustering: Evidence from Web-Scraped Data for England’, *Papers in Regional Science* 102, no. 5 (2023): 903-43, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pirs.12754>

commercial activity.⁸⁹ Stakeholders also discussed the potential for arts and culture institutions to act as ‘nodes’ along creative corridors which draw in tourism, inward investment and jobs, and showcase opportunities to creative workers.

Finally, stakeholders emphasised the unique social value that engagement in arts, culture and creativity brings and suggested using this as a ‘hook’ for attracting investment. Participation in a range of creative activities is beneficial to wellbeing across multiple metrics, including reduced anxiety, stress, depression, and increased self-esteem, self-efficacy and quality of life.⁹⁰ For example, listening to or producing music (including singing) can help reduce both physiological and psychological symptoms of stress.⁹¹

Receptive engagement - that is, engagement that is not necessarily participating in creative activities - has beneficial effects on wellbeing, too. For example, attending arts events and venues correlates with greater happiness and mood, And visiting cultural venues can lead to reduced risk

⁸⁹ Metro Dynamics ‘The Impact of Arts & Culture on the wider Creative Economy’. (Arts Council England, 2020).

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/impact-arts-and-culture-wider-creative-economy>

⁹⁰ Louise Mansfield et al., ‘Creativity and Pathways to Wellbeing: A Rapid Scoping Review for The What Works Centre for Wellbeing’, 2024,

<https://whatworkswellbeing.org/projects/creativity-and-wellbeing/>

⁹¹ Martina de Witte et al., ‘Effects of Music Interventions on Stress-Related Outcomes: A Systematic Review and Two Meta-Analyses’, *Health Psychology Review* 14, no. 2 (2 April 2020): 294-324,

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17437199.2019.1627897>.

of developing depression.⁹²⁹³ This further strengthens the argument of the unique positioning of the creative industries to break down barriers to opportunity across places. At a corridor scale, investing in arts and culture could bring a compelling mix of both regional economic value through place-making and significant benefits for local populations.

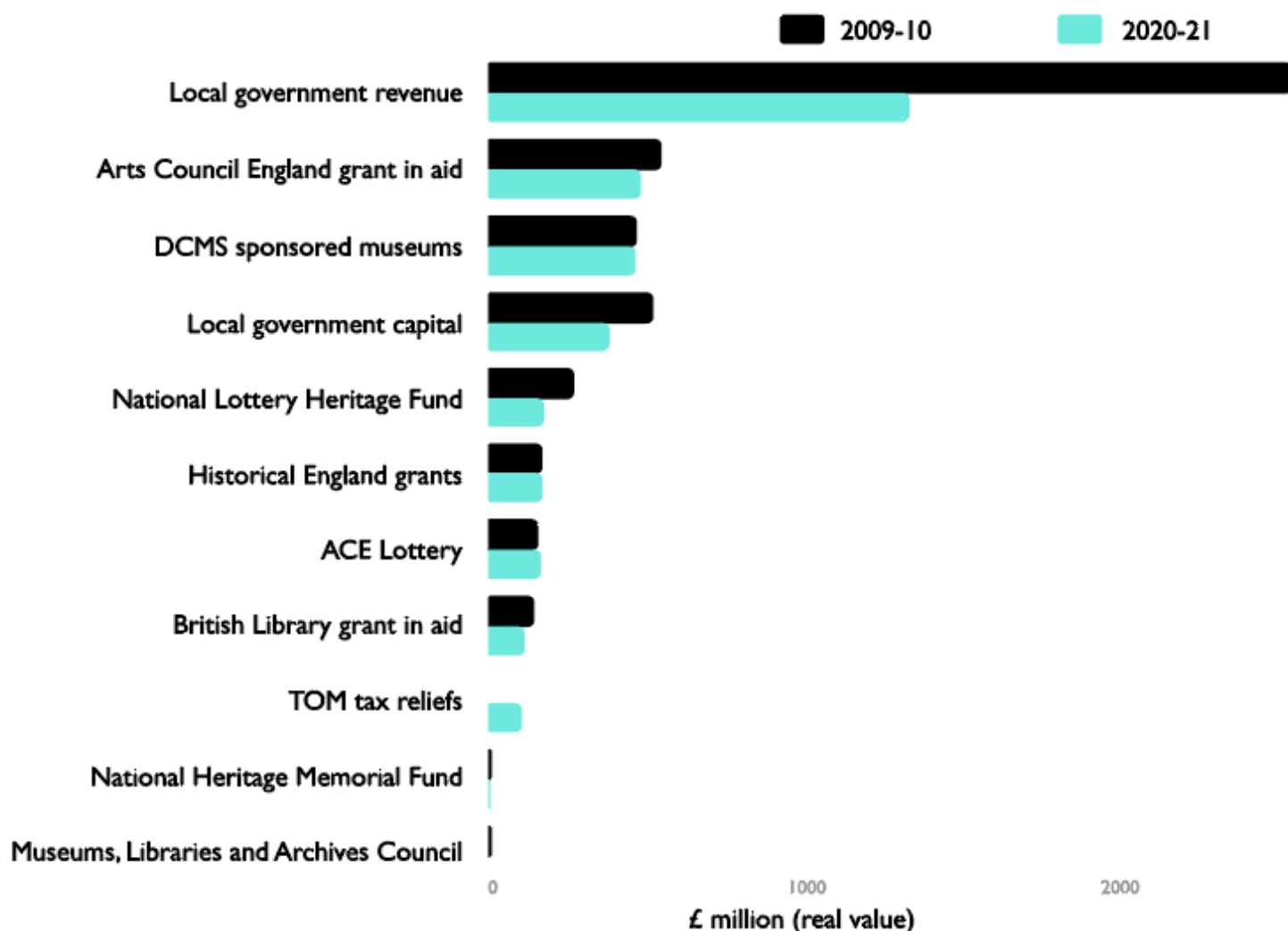
Policy idea highlights from workshops

- Work with venues across the corridor which **have performance or showcasing spaces to package and market to a wider audience** looking for opportunities to display work. Consider wrapping a festival or other marketing banner around this to build profile and draw in tourism and potential investment.
- Work with arts and culture institutions to inspire the next generation of artists and creatives in local schools by developing schemes across a corridor to bring in high-profile and home-grown talent and expose young people to more examples of the possibilities than in their immediate locality, **developing the talent pipeline of the future.**

⁹² Jessica Bone and Daisy Fancourt, 'Arts, Culture and the Brain: A Literature Review and New Epidemiological Analyses' (London: Arts Council England, 2022), <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/arts-culture-brain>.

⁹³ Daisy Fancourt et al., 'The Impact of Arts and Cultural Engagement on Population Health: Findings from Major Cohort Studies in the UK and USA 2017-2022' (London: UCL, 2023), <https://www.artsandhealth.ie/research-evaluation/the-impact-of-arts-and-cultural-engagement-on-population-health/>

Figure F: Sources of public arts funding in 2009-10 and 2020-21



Source: Creative PEC⁹⁴

DCMS = Department for Culture, Media and Sport

TOM = Theatre, Orchestras and Museums

Cross-cutting insights

Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

⁹⁴ Di Novo, S. and Easton, E. 'A new deal for arts funding in England?' (Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, 2023).

https://pec.ac.uk/blog_entries/a-new-deal-for-arts-funding-in-england/

The challenge

Creative PEC research has shown that people from higher socio-economic backgrounds are twice as likely to be employed in the Creative Industries as those from working class backgrounds.⁹⁵ Workers from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds are also underrepresented. According to research from Creative UK, around 11% of jobs are filled by workers who identify as Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic, which is similar to the UK economy as a whole. However, their analysis suggests that this should be higher at around 18%, given the share of creative jobs in London, where more significant levels of the population are from a wide diversity of backgrounds.⁹⁶

Barriers

Developing an equitable, diverse, and inclusive creative workforce came through strongly as a key condition for corridor development. The lack of representation of all demographic groups within the UK population is a long-standing issue in the creative industries, and commitments to improving access to the creative sectors should be firmly weaved across all the suggested policy actions. Across several workshops, EDI was highlighted as an important thematic challenge to address across all other themes and should be weaved across all policy positions. Participants suggested that

⁹⁵ Heather Carey, Dave O'Brien, and Olivia Gable, 'Social Mobility in the Creative Economy: Rebuilding and Levelling Up?' (Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre, 2021), https://pec.ac.uk/research_report_entr/social-mobility-in-the-creative-economy-rebuilding-and-levelling-up/

⁹⁶ Creative Industries Federation and Mobo (2017) 'Creative Diversity. The state of diversity in the UK's creative industries and what we can do about it'. [https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/sites/default/files/2017-06/30183-CIF%20Access%20&%20Diversity%20Booklet_A4_Web%20\(1\)\(1\).pdf](https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/sites/default/files/2017-06/30183-CIF%20Access%20&%20Diversity%20Booklet_A4_Web%20(1)(1).pdf)

the industry is getting better at increasing diversity in entry-level positions, with low/no pay internships less common than in the past. However, increasing representation “at mid-level” and “higher up” was seen as a particular challenge. Indeed, there is evidence of the longstanding inequalities in the cultural workforce set out in recently published Creative PEC research.⁹⁷

On a local level, consideration must also be given to the possible negative impacts that can result from changes to the characteristics of neighbourhoods. Gentrification is the process by which higher-income workers move into an area and displace the original, lower-income residents by altering local amenity provision and driving up the cost of living and property.⁹⁸ As a part of the post-industrial labour market, the creative industries have typically been considered to be involved in this process. Research from the Creative PEC aiming to quantify the relationship between creative presence in an area and subsequent gentrification has indeed found (small) significant relationships between the movement of creative businesses and workers into an area and that area’s subsequent gentrification.⁹⁹ Their findings indicate that the extent of the relationship is stronger for creative workers than creative businesses, and that the effects

⁹⁷ Siobhan McAndrew, Dave O’Brien, Mark Taylor, Ruoxi Wang. ‘Audiences and workforces in arts, culture and heritage’. Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre, 2024. [doi: 10.5281/zenodo.11150622](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11150622).

⁹⁸ Ruth Glass, ‘Introduction to London: Aspects of Change’, London: Aspects of Change, 1964; Chris Hamnett, ‘Gentrification and the Middle-Class Remaking of Inner London, 1961–2001’, *Urban Studies* 40, no. 12 (2003): 2401–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0042098032000136138>

⁹⁹ Tasos Kitsos, Max Nathan, and Diana Gutierrez-Posada, ‘Creative Destruction? Creative Firms, Workers and Residential Gentrification’ (Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre, 2023), https://pec.ac.uk/discussion_paper/creative-destruction/

vary between areas, with stronger effects found when looking at just London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Bristol, and Cardiff. Importantly, they also found evidence to indicate that a specific subset of creative workers - artists (as opposed to creative services workers) - may spearhead the gentrification process, consistent with previous accounts theorising the same.¹⁰⁰ Overall, the findings of this work highlight the need for policymakers and local government to carefully consider and mitigate the nuanced ways that increases in creative industries activity in an area may impact that area negatively. In the context of creative corridors, strategies should at least involve risk assessments of how changes in areas might influence the local cost of living and property prices and ensure that equality impact assessments are in place from the start.

Opportunities

As with ensuring that people from all areas of local communities can access local opportunities, some participants suggested that best practice can be seen across larger screen sector employers in the sectors, including the BBC, BFI, ITV, and Sky. There is an opportunity for industry to work together to mainstream this across the creative industries, particularly within the context of creative corridors, where participants suggested there was also an opportunity to pool efforts across a region when searching, advertising, and recruiting for more diverse governance roles.

¹⁰⁰ 'Gentrification, Displacement and the Arts: Untangling the Relationship between Arts Industries and Place Change - Carl Grodach, Nicole Foster, James Murdoch, 2018', <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0042098016680169>

Policy idea highlights from workshops

- Consider schemes such as EDI learning networks and **specific EDI tailored skills support** which draw inspiration from initiatives such as the Innovate UK Inclusive Innovation Award
- **Restructure the apprenticeship levy** model with those who are furthest from the labour market front and centre of its design to ensure equitable access.

Supporting freelance creatives

The challenge

Freelancers are an integral part of the UK's creative workforce, with evidence showing that 28% of workers in the UK's creative industries are self-employed, compared to 14% across all industries. In some creative subsectors related to arts, museums and libraries, this figure is as high as 70%.¹⁰¹ Beyond making up a large amount of the creative workforce, freelancers also bring wider value through their in-depth expertise, wide-spanning professional networks, and role in generating knowledge spillovers, just to name a few. Such elements of freelance work highlight the unique ways in which developing a supported and sustainable freelance community will help expand creative clusters further than their current boundaries. Consequently, the prospects for a thriving creative corridor are closely tied to freelancers, who face challenges around their financial security and access to upskilling opportunities.

¹⁰¹ DCMS (2023) 'Economic Estimates: Employment in the DCMS sectors, January 2022 to December 2022',

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/economic-estimates-employment-in-dcms-sectors-and-digital-sector-january-2022-to-december-2022/economic-estimates-employment-in-the-dcms-sectors-january-2022-to-december-2022>

Barriers

Throughout the workshops, stakeholders emphasised the importance of creative corridors focusing on the needs of freelancers. Participants discussed how we might create better conditions for creative freelancers through larger scale interventions. One factor contributing to this challenge was the perception of the value of freelancers; with policy often focused on scaling up, business support programmes can exclude freelancers who are often working in highly networked, collaborative, and entrepreneurial ways. This is further complicated when support programmes are designed for businesses, ruling out individual-level support and any freelancers who don't identify their work as a business, creating more barriers to growth and indicating the need for freelancer specific support.

In relation to cultural work, scaling up is not always relevant or useful for the work in question - alternatively, ensuring more stable and frequent opportunities for freelance work is a good route for growth. The quality of working conditions for creative freelancers was also cited as a major challenge, with such workers facing precarious project-based contracts, late payments of invoices, and limited capacity and resource to join things like skills and training programmes.

Opportunities

Whilst many of the conditions for freelancers are largely determined at the national policy level, stakeholders emphasised the potential that region-led strategies have to pilot good practice in supporting creative freelancers, building on existing local initiatives (e.g. the Creative UK Manchester Programme). The areas highlighted for policy action were:

- Raising awareness of the value of creative freelancers.
- Fostering 'good work' conditions for freelancers.
- Developing richer data on freelancers to inform policy-making.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Arts Council England have commissioned a study on the voice of freelancers, due to be published in 2024. See 'Finding the Voice of

- Improving business support and continual professional development.

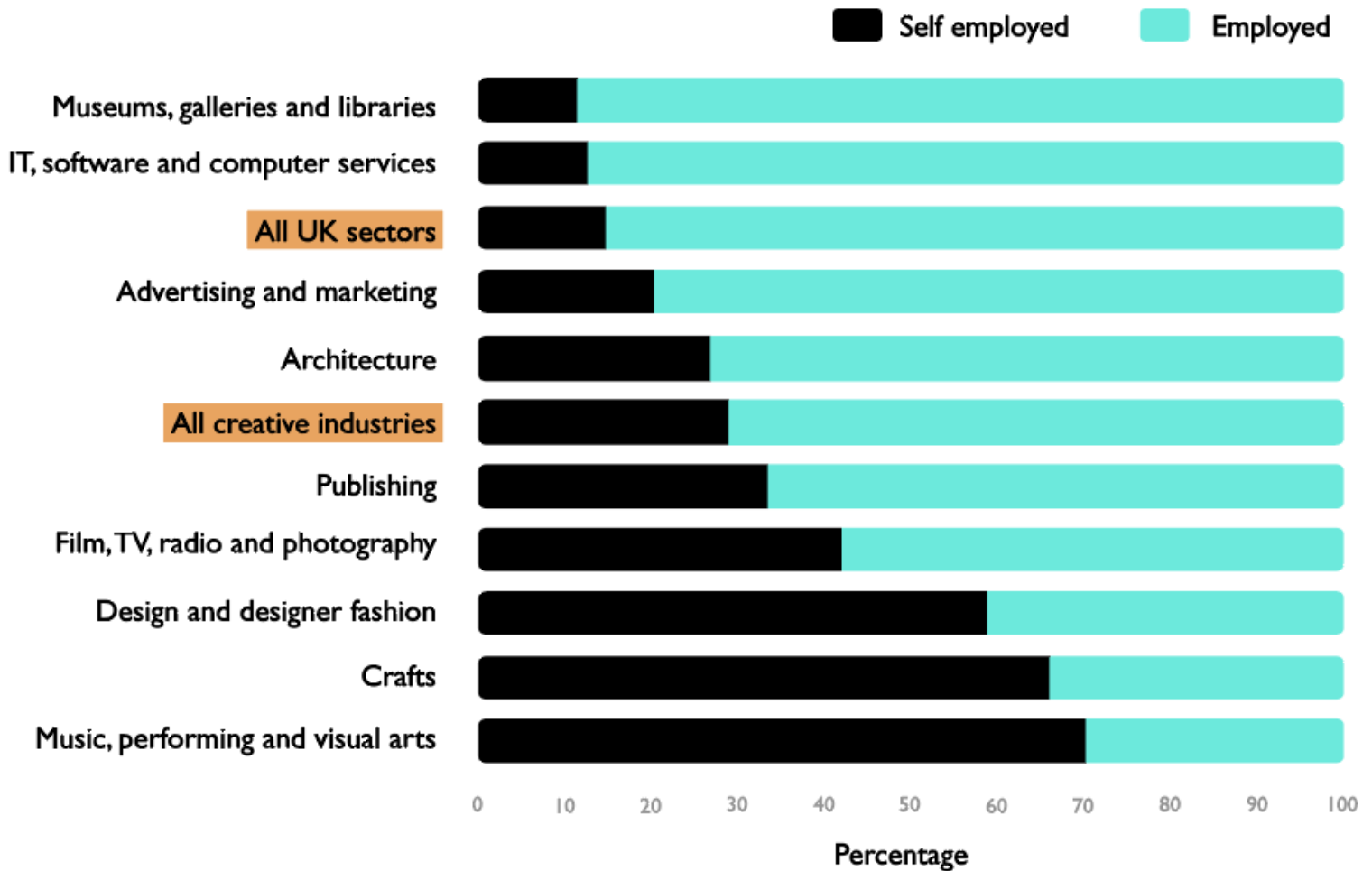
At a regional scale, investment has been made to directly support creative freelancers through protected funding pots. The Greater Manchester Combined Authority's Inspire Fund supports freelance artists and organisations across the region to have wider opportunities to access finance.¹⁰³ Such models may be scaled up to support a wider creative freelance community. While offering flexibility as a career path, stakeholders highlighted how the freelancer community faces barriers such as financial precarity, difficulty securing sufficient work, and challenges around accessing skills development opportunities.

Corridors could serve as an effective geographical scale at which freelance support may be trialled and developed. This will require cross-sector coordination and commitment to a part of the creative workforce that is frequently overlooked in data and policy development. However, a thriving freelance community would allow corridors to effectively match business needs and skills at a larger geographic scale, meaning more creative firms gaining access to freelance workers with specific skills and expertise. Ensuring high standards and working conditions for a creative freelance community could also attract workers - and thus employers - to an area, strengthening a region's reputation.

Freelancers | University of Essex',
www.essex.ac.uk/news/2023/10/06/finding-the-voice-of-freelancers

¹⁰³ 'GMCA Inspire Fund', Greater Manchester Combined Authority.
<https://www.10gm.org.uk/Inspire-Fund.html>

Figure G: Share of self-employed workers across creative industries sub-sectors



Source DCMS Sectors Economic Estimates: Employment in DCMS Sectors and Digital Sector, July 2022 to June 2023', GOV.UK, 5 March 2024

Policy idea highlights from workshops

- **Develop corridor-wide business support schemes that are designed for freelancers**, scaling up models such as the Greater Manchester Combined Authority Inspire Fund which delivers grants up to £2,000 for freelancers and micro-businesses across the region to support equipment, space, and event delivery. Doing so at a corridor level would build supply chains whilst ensuring opportunities for freelance work arise across the different places involved.
- **Strengthen professional networks for freelancers** at a corridor scale to generate more local connections - like the freelance cooperative in Belgium, which provides support services and a salary guarantee fund

to over 100,000 members; or possibly building on existing UK networks like North East Cultural Freelancers.

- **Co-design competency frameworks for artists** with local freelancers and creative businesses to set consistent standards and empower workers to build competencies that better match with vacancies and widen employability opportunities.

The challenge

A predominant discussion in the workshops was the importance of developing a multi-stakeholder and collaborative approach to corridor initiatives. Understanding which key cross-sector actors may be involved in creative corridor development is essential for designing policy interventions at a local, regional, and national scale. Stakeholders particularly highlighted that:

- Corridors are highly likely to span administrative boundaries, so will require a coordinated approach - for example, the proposed Northern Creative Corridor spans several local authority and Mayoral Combined Authority boundaries, and any corridor spanning the Cardiff-Bristol area would connect clusters across England and Wales.
- Corridors bring together a diversity of places with distinctive communities, identities, and needs, to a higher degree than smaller clusters/microclusters.
- Some existing funding and policy levers at a national level can promote competition over collaboration, which may disincentivise cluster development.

Two prevailing considerations emerged - firstly, the issue of governance structures for creative corridors and, secondly, ways of prioritising collaboration over existing competitive structures.

Governance opportunities

Policymakers at the national level, across the devolved administrations, in Mayoral Combined Authorities, and in local authorities will play significant roles in the effective implementation of creative corridor initiatives and hold the key to a wealth of knowledge required to connect creative clusters and microclusters across the UK. Research from the Connected Places Catapult¹⁰⁴ suggests that innovation corridors typically possess lean formal management that deliver on several fronts and rely on the support and commitment of a wider steering board or committee. Given the broad span of stakeholders involved with the creative industries, this may be expanded to allow for wider representation on creative corridor governance structures. However, strong leadership is also a critical enabling factor: committed, charismatic leaders can unlock a high level of collaborative capacity and amplify the impacts of shared approaches.

When asked for examples of good leadership practice, some workshop participants discussed specific political figures seen as key champions of creative industries growth and support. For example, Tracy Brabin, the Mayor for West Yorkshire, was cited for her role in spearheading several creative skills and development initiatives in the region. Other leaders - like Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London), Andy Street (former Mayor of West Midlands), and Andy Burnham (Mayor of Greater Manchester) were also mentioned. Beyond political leaders, there have been examples of successful initiatives that have benefited from high profile industry talent “sponsoring” work and shining a light on opportunities - for example, Russell T Davies in the Cardiff

¹⁰⁴ [Catapult \(2021\) ‘Hubs of Innovation: The role of Districts, Corridors and Quarters as hubs of the Covid-adjusted innovation economy’](https://cp-catapult.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2021/03/Hubs-of-Innovation-Report-final-PDF.pdf). <https://cp-catapult.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2021/03/Hubs-of-Innovation-Report-final-PDF.pdf>

TV industry and Steven Knight in Birmingham, both working in partnership with a wider steering board of stakeholders.¹⁰⁵

Stakeholders particularly highlighted the importance of balancing ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ approaches. Devolved powers at the Mayoral Combined Authority and Unitary Authority level were identified as critical in developing corridors as they receive significant funding in relevant areas (e.g. skills and transport), have control over relevant policy levers, and have strong convening power rooted in local relationships and insight. Crucial relationships also sit with local authorities across a region: this embedded level of government provides expertise in local urban planning and business support and acts as the largest public sector funder of arts and culture in the UK.¹⁰⁶

Central government support is equally necessary as part of this collaborative model. For example, following the success of the Toronto-Waterloo corridor in Canada, the federal government supported innovation corridor programmes more widely to scale up and replicate the high rates of growth.¹⁰⁷ In the UK, central departments such as DCMS will similarly be critical policy actors in delivery, with the ability to create conditions for cooperation at a local and regional level. Central government has the

¹⁰⁵ BBC (2023) ‘Doctor Who: Economic Impact’, www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/documents/doctor-who-economic-impact-report-fin.pdf

¹⁰⁶ Di Novo, S. and Easton, E. ‘A new deal for arts funding in England?’ (Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, 2023). https://pec.ac.uk/blog_entries/a-new-deal-for-arts-funding-in-england/

¹⁰⁷ Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, ‘FedDev Ontario Boosts Global Investment Opportunities in Waterloo Region’, news releases, 27 June 2019, <https://www.canada.ca/en/economic-development-southern-ontario/news/2019/06/feddev-ontario-boosts-global-investment-opportunities-in-waterloo-region.html>

convening power to encourage regional investment and can incentivise interventions focused on creative skills, innovation, and place-based growth. This is key, given the potential role of creative corridors in helping central government departments achieve their wider ambitions of national economic growth - with jobs and productivity growth in every part of the country - as well as addressing specific commitments to skills development in the national growth mission.

Centrally located policy stakeholders also include national funders and arms-length bodies including AHRC, Arts Council England and UKRI, who have increasingly worked in place-based and devolved partnerships that help to support interventions in collaboration with local actors.

Stakeholders cited these bodies as highly important to corridor governance given their role in delivering funding and designing interventions for the cultural and creative sectors - supporting everything from cultural infrastructure to enabling creative R&D. This experience makes national funders and bodies well placed to lead on advisory functions to understand 'what works' in creative corridor development.

Such national bodies also provide support and advice to local partners. ALBs such as Arts Council England, Historic England, and the Heritage Fund regularly work with local and combined authorities, enabling them to access sector expertise which is difficult to maintain at a local level. This enables local partners to maximise funding they are investing into creative sector growth; for instance, the role of DCMS ALBs in England supporting local government to maximise investment opportunities from the Levelling Up Fund and UK Shared Prosperity Fund through accessing the Levelling Up Places Service.

Governance models will need to be formed at a corridor level to align large-scale creative industries support across administrative boundaries. This will mean entering new governance terrain, not only in terms of the emerging supercluster evidence base, but also the new cross-government working practices that will need to be piloted in delivering such interventions.

Collaboration opportunities

As well as effective interrelations between different governmental and industry bodies, stakeholders pointed to the importance of a joined up ‘ecosystem’ approach to corridor development. A range of actors were discussed as key collaborators for corridors, including universities, industry, and other anchor institutions, to encourage more fluid working practices across diverse sectors.

Recognising the critical role that higher education institutions can play as connectors and conveners, participants also suggested that creative superclusters could build on and scale up existing knowledge exchange models that are often established to connect universities with wider industry and policy. Stakeholders cited learning from collaborative structures in previous initiatives like the AHRC Creative Industries Cluster Programme and the Arts Council England Creative People and Places programme.

Many respondents also suggested that the regional creative industries landscape is currently defined by a tension between competition and collaboration. For example, current bid-led funding models were described as “still competitive, even when we’re told to work together” and tending to “create winners and losers” across the sector and the country. These processes were seen to be exacerbated by austerity, with a shrinking pool of public funding for creative and cultural activity leading to a shift in local government priorities.

Overall, discussions pointed towards a need for policies that address the “hyperlocal” and “real time” needs of an area to ensure a sophisticated understanding of regional strengths and weaknesses and to support collaborations to attract investment and drive agglomeration. The allocation mechanisms of national and regional funding will need to be considered in creative corridor strategies to avoid the negative impacts of highly competitive and time-intensive funding bids that have come to dominate the place-based policy landscape. With corridors being emphasised as wholly collaborative interventions, it will be a challenge to retain healthy

competition whilst also encouraging joined-up working. However, the starting point would be to identify where the benefits of collaboration outweigh those of competition.

Policy idea highlights from workshops

- **Coordination both within and across regional boundaries will be critical to govern the developing interventions** and streamline networks for better communication and action - there were suggestions for a governance structure that connects across different Mayoral Combined Authorities, the creation of corridor-specific development corporations, and the elevation of key anchor institutions like universities within a corridor governing body.
- Political buy-in will need to be generated across all scales - from central government to Metro Mayors to local councillors. **Strong local leadership was cited as essential to develop top-down and bottom-up support** of creative corridor interventions.

A policy framework for action

Purpose of this framework

Based on the evidence and analysis so far, this section outlines a policy framework for action that can be used by those who want to begin implementing creative corridors in their places. The framework is intended as a starting point from which bespoke corridor interventions can be developed and tested.

Given the novelty of creative corridors as a model, evidence highlighting what works at this specific scale is limited. Our policy framework is not prescriptive and should instead be taken as a starting point which can go on to be adapted to the specificities of place. We also note other limitations,

such as the underrepresentation of key stakeholder groups in the workshops, including freelancers and young people.

Nevertheless, the framework set out in this section is intended to help interested stakeholders achieve a base from which to develop their own interventions, leaving room for the place-specific nuance that will be required from local decision makers and communities. Where possible, we have drawn inspiration from existing initiatives that might be scaled or adapted. **We have also drawn threads from the recommendations of the RSA's UK Urban Futures Commission which sets out a framework for developing local prosperity more broadly.**¹⁰⁸

Importantly, these recommended actions should not be standalone interventions. There will naturally be interrelations between the different actors, sectors, creative subsectors, and geographic scales of a creative corridor. Furthermore, given the aim for supercluster levels of agglomeration, the very nature of creative corridor development requires interconnection between different focus areas. This also may help to avoid siloed working patterns that hinder strategic collaboration models.

Turning words into action

This is a new frontier for creative industries policymaking, building on years of good work around creative clusters and the wider geographies of creativity in the UK. For local leaders, making the political decision to invest in corridor development and implementing these recommendations will take a degree of bravery.

However, we believe that supporting more effective coordination and connection between clusters to become creative corridors that achieve supercluster style benefits could have significant social and economic impact for the UK's regions across the four nations. We also believe that the

¹⁰⁸ [‘Unleashing the Potential of the UK's Cities: Report of the UK Urban Futures Commission’. The Royal Society of Arts, 28 September 2023. https://www.thersa.org/reports/uk-cities-unleashing-potential.](https://www.thersa.org/reports/uk-cities-unleashing-potential)

unique characteristics of a place will be central in shaping the development of individual corridor frameworks.

For example, alongside this national review, the RSA and Creative PEC have been working at pace to develop broad policy propositions through which to develop a ‘Northern Creative Corridor’, specifically in the North of England.¹⁰⁹ A background briefing paper on the region’s creative industries suggests that a Northern Creative Corridor might help generate an additional £10bn in annual GVA by 2030.¹¹⁰ We know from this initial research and stakeholder consultation that this area is particularly ripe for intervention, and so in keeping with the RSA’s belief in not just generating ideas, but acting on them, we are developing this report while simultaneously testing approaches ‘on the ground.’¹¹¹

There will be many regional specific actions that need to be in place to support corridor development, but **the purpose of this framework is to outline key actions that we believe could support the development of creative corridors and support national and local leaders to take first steps to develop a creative corridor.**

¹⁰⁹ Eliza Easton et al., ‘Northern England’s Creative Industries: Background Paper’ (Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre, led by Newcastle University with the RSA, 2023).

¹¹⁰ Eliza Easton, Hasan Bakhshi, Andy Haldane, Heather Carey, Salvatore di Novo, Giorgio Fazio, Annie Gascoyne, Tom Kenyon, Jonathon Sapsed, and Josh Siepel. ‘Northern England’s Creative Industries: Background Paper’. Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre, led by Newcastle University with the RSA, 2023, <https://www.thersa.org/reports/northern-englands-creative-industries-background-paper>

¹¹¹ To find out more about Northern specific activity, please contact Creative.Corridor@rsa.org.uk

The development of the policy framework was guided by **a set of four design principles**, which could be used in future for diverse partners to consider when designing creative corridor policy:

1. What is the sector growth challenge or opportunity that this policy responds to?
2. How does the corridor scale specifically add value to this policy?
3. Does the policy sufficiently scale-up existing good practice?
4. Can we articulate why this policy will have high impact (e.g. alignment with UK Government missions)?

The resulting policy recommendations are set out in the table below, aligned to four key action areas which encapsulate the crux of the challenges across the four themes identified through the workshop insights. Within these areas, there are eight practical steps which we offer to local and regional leaders as a starting point for developing creative corridor interventions. Different regions will have different existing strengths and so any exercise should first start with a mapping activity, in addition to establishing a clear monitoring and evaluation framework to support a test and learn approach in implementation.

Wider enabling conditions

Creative corridors will flourish when the right conditions are provided and none of the suggested policy actions will exist in a vacuum - there is critical infrastructure at national and local scales that would enable greater connectivity and productivity for creative corridors.

A theme that was consistently raised in stakeholder workshops - particularly those in the North of England - was the lack of **transport connectivity**, with many raising the discrepancy between journey times from London-Liverpool and Liverpool-Newcastle. Generating such large-scale transport investment is beyond the scope of this work and would

require significant national investment, hence has not been included in our recommendations. However, with new devolution deals in England coming into place, including powers over local transport, there may be some opportunities to consider how transport infrastructure could be improved to foster greater physical connectivity between clusters - such as the expansion of the Metro in the wider Newcastle city region.

Furthermore, as we've explored in previous chapters, the existence of vibrant **cultural infrastructure** - such as museums, public galleries, libraries, archives, and heritage sites - is increasingly seen as necessary for creative cluster and corridor growth. The presence of unique cultural infrastructure can make a corridor appealing, and developing infrastructure that supports creative work and innovation may attract workers to an area. In fact, recent evidence shows that creative microclusters in both urban and rural areas are likely to emerge near cultural and heritage assets.¹¹² Central government has committed to place-based capital investments into cultural infrastructure, like the DCMS-Arts Council England Cultural Investment Fund,¹¹³ based on the understanding that supporting cultural assets can unlock wider growth, productivity and regeneration. Given the success of such capital investments, this should be emulated at a corridor level.

At a regional level, organisations like the Creative Land Trust¹¹⁴ are pioneering new business models that allow the development of underutilised buildings into affordable creative workspaces to generate **sustainable access to infrastructure**. Such models have shown the value of such interventions and offer opportunities for wider replication alongside partners like local authorities - as seen with the Greater London Authority's involvement with the Creative Land Trust. If similar models were designed to

¹¹² Velez-Ospina et al., 'Determinants of Rural Creative Microclustering'.

¹¹³ 'Cultural Investment Fund', Arts Council England, www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-open-funds/cultural-investment-fund

¹¹⁴ 'Creative Land Trust', Creative Land Trust, <https://creativelandtrust.org/about-us/>

operate at a corridor scale, they could generate successful regeneration and develop further infrastructure to support a thriving corridor.¹¹⁵

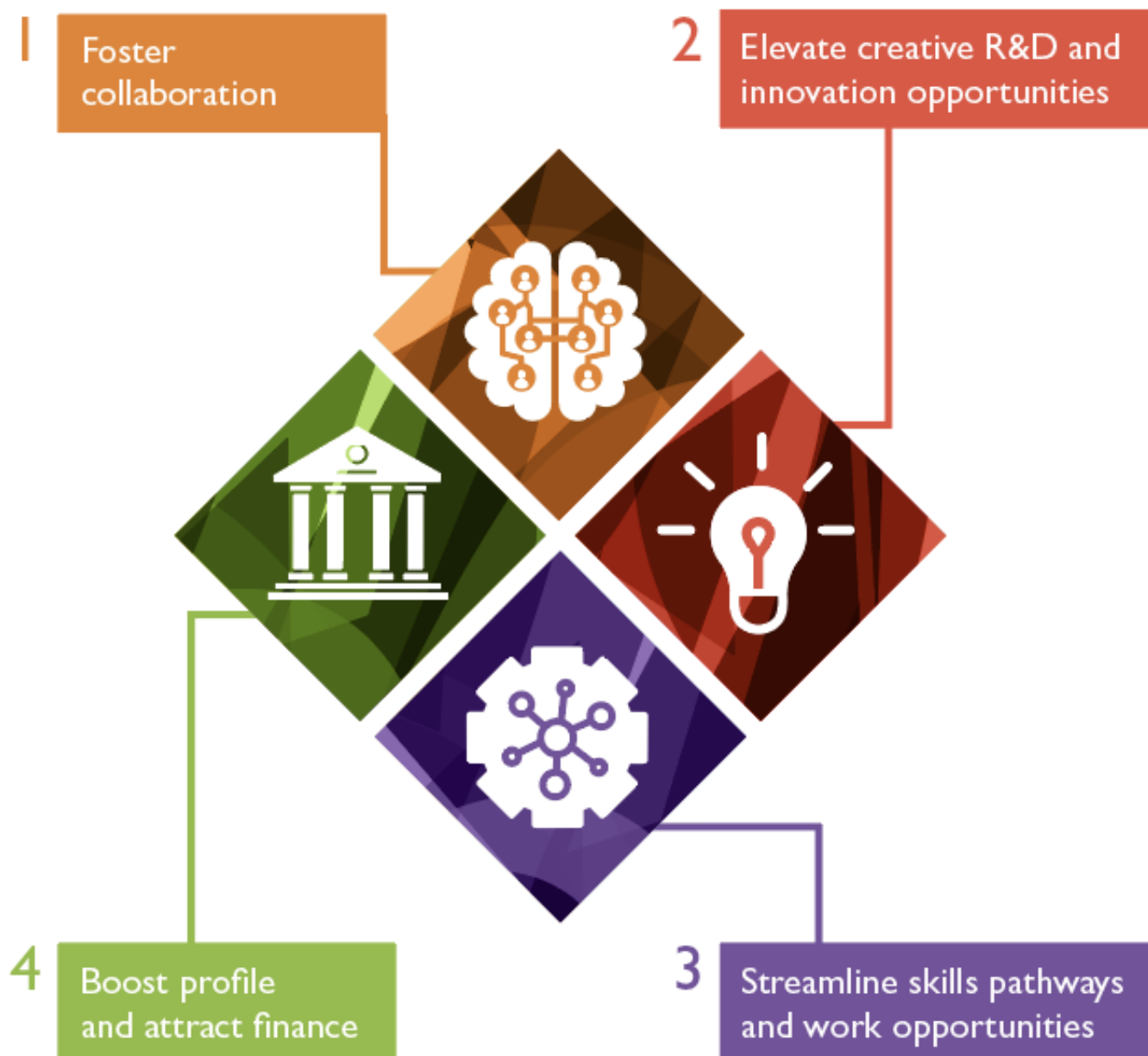
Finally, **digital infrastructure** is a key component of a successful creative corridor, allowing for virtual connections and innovation across administrative boundaries. Major investments have been made across the four nations to improve the quality of digital infrastructure in rural and urban areas, including the improvement of high-speed internet connections. However, in a post-pandemic context with increasing virtual working, digital sharing, and cloud-based storage use, it is critical that cold spots in digital provisions are addressed to allow for seamless online communication and collaboration. This is especially critical in creative corridor development as creative networking, business transactions, and skills training now often rely on some degree of virtual organisation and facilitation. The creative industries are an increasingly digital set of subsectors and are quick to adopt the latest technologies, emphasising the need for supportive digital policy and regulation development to support corridor growth.

Recommendations for action

The following table outlines a series of steps that we recommend any interested parties to consider as initial actions to take towards developing a creative corridor intervention. These are arranged across four ‘action areas’ which represent the key challenges faced that were explored in Section Two and incorporate the other key themes that were identified as important in stakeholder discussions, such as the importance of freelancers, the role of arts and culture and equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). These eight practical steps should be considered as a starting point to be tailored to

¹¹⁵ Velez Ospina, J. (2022) ‘Mapping and examining the determinants of England’s rural creative microclusters’, Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. https://pec.ac.uk/research_report_entr/rural-creative-microclusters/

place and we also set out suggestions to national bodies that would unlock opportunities further.





Action area 1: Foster collaboration

Actors	Initial steps	Existing practice
<p>Regional: MCAs, LAs, Cultural Institutions, Cultural Compacts, Regional ALB reps, Anchor Institutions, Private Sector</p>	<p>Step 1</p> <p>Develop a Creative Corridor Coalition: a formal but flexible group responsible for developing a programme strategy, monitoring delivery, facilitating coordination, and aligning investment activities across the corridor area.</p> <p>Governance arrangements should be responsive to local structures and associated challenges and opportunities. However, when establishing a governance mechanism, the following dimensions should be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a range of powers are represented to effectively rally stakeholders: convening power (e.g. metro mayors), appropriate policy levers (such as devolved skills budgets), creative industry credibility (e.g. high profile, home grown talent), and community power (e.g. freelance network reps) • Outward facing, strong, and local leadership: this could be a mayor or a higher education institute. Importantly, this will build local ownership for the initiative, but also be positioned to collaborate with other regions and avoid the trap of a zero-sum game mindset. • Ensure there is coordination and analytical capacity baked into resourcing so that it is not “just another board” with long papers and minute taking; embed a dedicated group of officers who can support board members and provide energy and dynamism. <p>Step 2</p> <p>Underpin this with a Creative Corridor Data Function to transparently gather, share, and analyse data to inform evidence-based policy and evaluate performance across the corridor area that speaks to the unique characteristics of the local creative industries (e.g. micro-businesses, urban/rural picture).</p>	<p>Creative UK Regional Growth Programmes</p> <p>Civic University Agreement with Greater Manchester Combined Authority</p> <p>Canada’s Creative Corridor: Connecting Creative Urban & Rural Economies within Eastern Ontario & the Mega Region</p> <p>Thames Estuary Cultural Planning Toolkits</p>
<p>National: UK government, National ALBs and agencies</p>	<p>Office for National Statistics to publish creative industries cuts of existing data and statistical releases to allow greater evidence sharing and granularity at a sub-regional level. Work hand in glove with Corridor Data Function and regional data agencies to be responsive to local need. Alongside this, build on methods being developed in the DCMS Culture and Heritage Capital programme.</p> <p>Maximise opportunities with the new statutory Local Growth Plans required of every region, explicitly encouraging a central role of a strong cultural and creative ecosystem to achieve local growth. Ensure alignment with direction of travel of national industrial strategy to optimise impact.</p>	<p>DCMS Culture and Heritage Capital Portal</p> <p>Local Government Association LG Inform</p>



Action area 2: Elevate creative R&D and innovation opportunities

Actors	Initial steps	Existing practice
<p>Regional: MCAs, LAs, Cultural Institutions, Cultural Compacts, Regional ALB reps, Anchor Institutions, private sector</p>	<p>Step 3 Establish a Creative Corridor applied R&D fund, working with HEIs, ALBs, Local Government, and UKRI to fund creative corridor R&D collaborations across HEIs, cultural organisations, and wider industry. These could have a cross-sector focus and be specifically tailored to the unique contributions of creative R&D and the research strengths identified across the Corridor.</p> <p>Consider co-designing the fund structure with a diverse range of creative practitioners, including representatives from cultural organisations, to ensure equitable and inclusive access to the fund and build in mechanisms to incentivise cross-sectoral and cross-corridor knowledge exchange.</p> <p>Step 4 Underpinning the R&D fund, deliver grants and incentives to support small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) and micro-businesses at corridor level to access finance and similarly benefit from cross-corridor knowledge exchange. Support hybrid working across creative and non-creative firms to develop innovative products, services, and business models. This could include innovation vouchers, micro-grants, or shared access to R&D expertise/infrastructure across the corridor (e.g. universities, workspaces, tools, and resources).</p>	<p>UKRI Strength in Places Fund</p> <p>AHRC Creative Industries Clusters Programme (including Clwstwr: A Model for Research, Development and Innovation in the Creative Industries)</p> <p>AHRC Convergent screen technologies and performance in realtime (CoSTAR)</p> <p>Creative UK - Innovate UK Creative Catalyst challenge fund</p> <p>Invest Northern Ireland Innovation Vouchers</p> <p>Creative FUSE North East's Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange (CAKE) events</p> <p>STEAMhouse Birmingham, Birmingham City University</p>
<p>National: UK government, National ALBs and agencies</p>	<p>Relevant government departments to work with emerging creative corridors to leverage UK Government regional investment with corridor strengths and opportunities. This includes broadening central definitions of Creative R&D and expanding tax reliefs for creative businesses/organisations.</p>	<p>DCMS-Innovate UK Create Growth Programme</p> <p>DSIT 'Meaning of research and development for tax purposes'</p> <p>HM Revenue and Customs Corporation Tax relief for Research & Development</p>



Action area 3: Streamline skills pathways and work opportunities

Actors	Initial steps	Existing practice
<p>Regional:</p> <p>MCAAs, LAs, Cultural Institutions, Cultural Compacts, Regional ALB reps, Anchor Institutions, private sector</p>	<p>Step 5</p> <p>Develop lifelong creative skills strategies for the corridor as a whole, which may include a corridor-led skills improvement plan and a post-16 creative skills strategy. This will require working with education providers, Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IFATE), industry, and local government, and should be tailored to the local wider industrial landscape to enhance matching between local workers and job opportunities.</p> <p>Ensure alignment between local, regional, and national education strategies and use this as an opportunity to focus on bringing those furthest from the labour market towards skills opportunities so that everyone can enjoy the benefits of the corridor.</p> <p>Step 6</p> <p>Work with Higher Education Institutions and technical education institutes to develop flexible, modular, and digital micro-credentials and learning grants for continuing professional development which better fit the needs of creative industries professionals and builds common accreditation.</p> <p>Develop corridor-wide opportunities for training and upskilling diverse creative talent throughout the lifecycle. This could involve leadership training, skills programmes, and professional networks designed with underserved communities in mind, so that the corridor's workforce is representative of its resident population.</p> <p>Establish a creative freelancer coordination role that reports to the corridor coalition (see Action Area 1). This would prioritise the involvement and development of the creative freelance community across a corridor to encourage connected working and grow local supply chains. This could be delivered alongside a freelance-specific business support and training fund to enable freelancers to access opportunities across the corridor.</p>	<p>RSA Cities of Learning</p> <p>West Yorkshire Combined Authority Skills Bootcamp</p> <p>Greater Manchester Combined Authority Inspire Fund</p> <p>The West Midlands Creative Freelancer Support directory</p>
<p>National:</p> <p>UK government, National ALBs and agencies</p>	<p>Redesign apprenticeship schemes to enable flexible, modular models which work for the creative industries, and allow greater mobility for learners to gain experience across creative corridors. Leverage relevant opportunities through the establishment of Skills England to do this.</p> <p>Establish a cross-government Freelance Commissioner role to give greater visibility and support to the needs of self-employed workers at a national level. Similar roles could be established at a corridor and/or devolved administration level to form a network.</p>	<p>Department for Education Flexi-Job Apprenticeships</p> <p>Newcastle College University Centre Creative and Digital Degree Apprenticeship</p>



Action area 4: Boost profile and attract finance

Actors	Initial steps	Existing practice
<p>Regional: MCAs, LAs, Cultural Institutions, Cultural Compacts, Regional ALB reps, Anchor Institutions, private sector</p>	<p>Step 7 Develop a single corridor promotion campaign that is led in close collaboration with the corridor coalition to tell one singular story about place and showcase creative industries strengths and firms across a corridor area, working closely with DBT, CITIB, and British Council on international showcase opportunities.</p> <p>Step 8 Each corridor to establish a Creative Corridor Investment Office that transmits the campaign story and acts as a 'front-door' for inward investment. This could also support cultural institutions and creative businesses to identify respective opportunities across the public and private sector and provides training and support to firms and investors to get 'investment ready'.</p>	<p>GREAT Campaign Sheffield Doc Fest Manchester International Festival CITIB International Strategy North of Tyne Combined Authority Culture and Creative Investment Programme</p>
<p>National: UK government, National ALBs and agencies</p>	<p>Relevant government departments to support promotion of Creative Corridor delegations by involving them in, and providing training support to leverage International Trade Missions and to support visits to corridor for international delegates and foreign investors.</p>	<p>SXSW Conference</p>

What's next?

Creative corridors are an opportunity to supercharge cultural and creative industry growth across the corners of the UK and retain our collective competitiveness in the future. By scaling up potential across regions - connecting businesses, developing skills, building understanding of and growing creative R&D to foster innovation - we can take bold steps to realising prosperous futures.

Within an emerging national Industrial Strategy, the UK's creative industries are not only seen as one of the leading growth-driving sectors, but also recognised for the success that has been achieved through creative clusters. Creative corridors are the next opportunity to scale up this place-driven growth.

Moreover, in an era of growing devolution of powers from Whitehall, creative corridors are a tool that metro mayors, local government and creative sector leaders can grasp and lead the way in bringing prosperity and creativity to places.

We hope that these recommendations provide a basis for local, regional and national actors to start experimenting in place and venture towards growing creative corridors. This is an emerging area, but the potential size of the prize - economic and social - is considerable. This means to pooling together labour markets, drive innovation and productivity across the four nations of the UK, and bringing significant social cohesion and pride in place to communities to transform regions. In the case of the Northern Creative Corridor, we estimate an additional £10bn of additional GVA for the region, as an example.

The fundamental piece of the puzzle will be turning this theory into action. There are already green shoots emerging in places across the UK, such as in Cardiff-Bristol and the Thames Estuary area, that interested parties should look to contribute to and connect with. Work is also starting with a range of stakeholders across the nascent Northern Creative Corridor - dubbed "One Creative north" to seed tangible propositions into a reality which includes

proposals to set up a corridor investment fund that deliberately constitutes collaboration across the region and sectors.

This just the beginning and the RSA, Creative PEC and Arts Council England are committed to continuing to explore and experiment with this concept in regional contexts. By following and iterating on these steps, we hope to continue to build out the evidence base to bring others along with us on this journey. As the national development agency for museums, arts and libraries, the Arts Council has a vital role to play in helping places make the most of their cultural and creative potential. The partnership with the RSA and Creative PEC has brought a compelling mix of convening power, a critical eye and cutting-edge insights to the journey already and we would collectively welcome any conversations or constructive challenge from interested parties. If you are interested in any of the ideas in this report, please get in touch by emailing creative.corridor@rsa.org.uk

Although there are some unknowns in this area, we believe that with some ambition, collaborative working and the dynamism of the creative industries, we could make a real difference to the fortunes and wellbeing of our country. The ideas and energy emerging from creative corridors represent an investment in new industries, boosting productivity and good jobs, and restoring pride in place. Corridors can leverage the potential of our world leading cultural and creative sectors, for the benefit of the whole country, and we very much hope you will join us on the next stage of this venture.

Appendix B: Workshops and insight gathering

Between November 2023 and March 2024, the RSA and Creative PEC convened over 100 stakeholders from the cultural and creative industries from a range of UK regions. This included representatives from local and combined authorities, arts and cultural organisations, policy and advocacy groups, and higher education institutions.

Creative PEC's "Geographies of Creativity" paper formed the basis of the evidence review, combined with a rapid review of grey literature that

included international case studies and commentary on current barriers to growth for the creative industries.

Overall, six workshops took place over December-February (3 hosted online via the Zoom platform, 3 hosted in person in different Northern cities). There was also a roundtable hosted on Zoom and co-hosted with Creative UK to specifically discuss the access to finance theme.

During March and April 2024, insights from this process were synthesized by RSA and Creative PEC colleagues to inform internal recommendations development.

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