



One
Creative
North



One Creative North

Chair's scoping report
Jude Kelly CBE

May 2025



West
Yorkshire
Combined
Authority

Tracy
Brabin
Mayor of
West Yorkshire

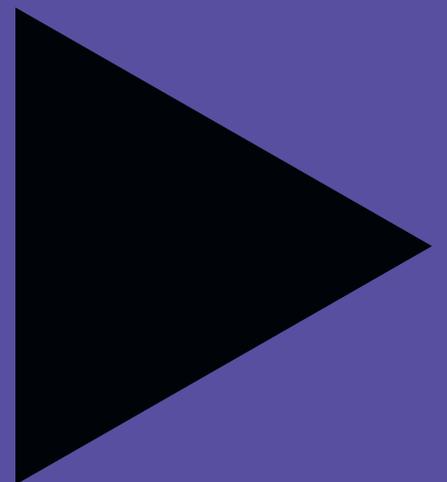


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One Creative North

Inspire
Nurture
Sustain
Retain
Champion



One Creative North is the Northern creative corridor¹ that

- Supports creative businesses in the North² to start up, scale up and succeed, creating jobs and opportunities across the region.
- Builds opportunities, skills, a sustainable career, and a proper income for a diverse workforce in the creative industries of the North.
- Orchestrates growth and prosperity for the creative industries in the North and contributes to community health and a fairer society.
- Changes the story of the North's creative industries to inspire ambition, loyalty and global admiration.

The Northern creative corridor A place of change



The Responder, 2021. Photo: BBC Pictures.

¹ A creative corridor is defined as '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'. This builds on previous research including *Geographies of Creativity: Creative PEC State of Nations Report (2023)* and *Northern England's Creative Industries Background Paper (2023)*.

² Throughout this report the North refers to the North of England.

Jude Kelly CBE / Biography

Jude Kelly CBE is an internationally acclaimed creative leader who has founded and steered some of the world's most prestigious cultural institutions, arts festivals, charities and outreach programmes.

A pioneer for social progress, Kelly is renowned for championing inclusion, gender equality and diversity. She is the former Artistic Director of the Southbank Centre and founder Artistic Director of the West Yorkshire Playhouse (now Leeds Playhouse).

Kelly is the current Head of Global Advisory and the Founder of WOW – Women of the World – which runs festivals and programmes in many parts of the UK including Bradford, Durham, Hull, Manchester and Rotherham, and internationally in 26 countries.

She has directed over 200 theatre and opera productions, led the Culture programme for the London Olympic and Paralympic 2012 bid and was a Cultural Leader in Residence for the World Economic Forum 2024. She is the eighth Master of St Catherine's College, University of Oxford, a Board member of Creative UK and cultural adviser to The Eden Project.

Kelly was commissioned as Chair of One Creative North in September 2024 and this document shares her findings.



Contents

Jude Kelly CBE / Biography	4
Preface Mayor Tracy Brabin	6
Introduction Jude Kelly CBE.....	8
Summary and recommendations	10
Pan-regional objectives and opportunities.....	12
One Creative North regions.....	13
Recommendations for stakeholders.....	14
Governance.....	16
Context	17
Creative industries background	18
Skills	20
Access to finance	24
Four key growth sectors	28
Pan-regional sector insights	29
Screen / Screen Alliance North.....	30
Screen / Public Service Broadcasting	32
Contemporary Music / Northern Music Network.....	35
Games / Game Republic Ltd.....	38
Writing and Publishing / A new pan-regional alliance.....	40
Narrative of the North	43
Next steps and recommendations	44
With gratitude	44
Appendix	46
Glossary	49

Preface

Growing up on a council estate in Batley on free school meals, I wanted to be an actor. Encouraged by access to music, art, drama and creative writing at school and a top-class youth drama club in Bradford (short lived after my dad lost the car that came with his job), my talent was nurtured and with it the opportunity to fulfil my potential.

Sadly, after years of underfunding of the arts, the erosion of creative subjects in schools along with stretched council budgets, the opportunities I had that enabled me to have a three-decade career in the creative industries, are now not a given.

This is true of all youngsters across the country, but for Northern kids, the gulf between talent and access to opportunity is shamefully wide. In London and the South East there is a natural and understandable agglomeration of the arts. National institutions and conservatoires cluster together, while schools have easy access to a pool of talented, creative visiting experts. And with 63% of investment in creative companies going to London and Southeast, this situation is set to continue. Talented Northerners will continue to think they have to leave to achieve, creating problems for not just the North but for an overheated South.

**But there is a solution.
Devolution and collaboration.**

If we want growth across the whole country, we must innovate and invest in new opportunities and at scale. Coming together across the North as One Creative North we'll not only change the dial for the people we represent but have national and global impact.

The economic value of taking a cluster and corridor approach to sectors is well evidenced. Creating a pan-regional collaboration that means the creative industries thrive from Liverpool to Hull, Sheffield to Newcastle, is ambitious. But the prize is phenomenal and unprecedented: **the promise of £10 billion into the economy and up to half a million more people with good jobs.**

Success depends on every single one of those people being inspired and encouraged to pursue a creative career, and being able to do that in the North.

In September 2024, Northern Leaders announced One Creative North as a way to innovate across our regions. Jude Kelly CBE was commissioned as Chair to scope how we'd turn the vision into reality, to research and articulate the radical interventions to create jobs and grow our economies.



It is a unique moment and opportunity to have such a coalition of the willing: all of The Great North Mayors and combined authorities, Arts Council England (ACE), Channel 4, BBC, ITV, Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC), The Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (The RSA), Universities, Creative UK and the highly valued original signatories to this enterprise.

I am profoundly grateful to everyone who is part of this journey, to the Mayors and their teams, Arts Council England for co-commissioning this piece of work and to Jude, who has undertaken this huge task with a deep personal commitment to creating a fairer world.

What Jude perceived, from the outset, is the humanity of this project. Behind the numbers are people, behind successful clusters are relationships. For six months, Jude with great sensitivity and understanding of context, criss-crossed the North, initiating hundreds of conversations, making connections. She has also been an exceptional ambassador, raising the profile of One Creative North nationally and internationally through conversation and participation in high-profile events.

In many ways this scoping document has already been superseded by activity and presence. The spark has been lit, One Creative North exists and it is already making a difference. Pan-regional alliances have come together to articulate their ambition and contribution, providing clear direction and calls to action, as well as investment readiness.

But it's a fledgling enterprise and, in this rare moment of opportunity, we need to maintain momentum and crowd in investment to realise the promise One Creative North offers.

It has been my privilege to represent all UK Mayors on the government's Creative Industry Sector Plan Taskforce and I am greatly encouraged that One Creative North has already been recognised and valued in this forum. Pan-regional, industry and sector collaborations are developing with, for example, a commitment to join up across skills, finding new ways to crowd investment into the sector. Additionally, One Creative North has put the creative industries front and centre of The Great North conversation.

In the North our superpower is our capacity to genuinely cooperate. This cooperative spirit is what can make us different.

One Creative North isn't just about what's in it for some of us, it's what's in it for all of us. If we are bold enough to embrace this initiative, it has the potential to not only change our places, bringing hope and jobs, but to strengthen our global position as the most creative country in the world.

It's time to do something different. It's time for One Creative North.

Tracy Brabin
Mayor of West Yorkshire

Introduction

I grew up in Liverpool. My grandmother left school at twelve and had fourteen children. Culture wasn't part of my background. My route through to the arts was via a local dance class, community organised talent competitions, a headmaster suggesting I use the assembly hall to form a youth theatre with my friends, and the backdrop of a city that loved creativity. Inclusive growth is powered by everyone being able to fulfil their potential, the creative and cultural industries in symbiosis.

Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse, Liverpool Philharmonic, the Mersey Poets, The Blackie, the night clubs and music venues, the Bluecoat, then later FACT, all fed my imagination alongside the Walker Art Gallery that I escaped to as a confused teenager looking for 'my tribe'.

In those days I never felt the need to travel further, Liverpool had everything. I'd heard Manchester was good too but they were my football rivals so it would have been treachery to praise them or even pay a visit!

Later in my career I spent twelve wonderful years as Artistic Director of The Leeds Playhouse (then called West Yorkshire Playhouse). As the city invested in new arts facilities and organisations and audiences grew in size and demographic, our shared ambition was boundless and mirrored other exciting cultural organisations scattered across the North.

Working recently in Manchester at Home and Factory International, in Bradford, in Hull, in Rotherham and in Durham I'm constantly inspired by Northern creatives whether they be teenagers or veterans like me. But too much talent goes unnoticed or undernourished, and economic background still plays too big a role in the ability to start or sustain a career. Important original initiatives often have stunted growth or wither from lack of investment. Terrific entrepreneurial and creative talent struggles to overcome negative perceptions about the North, investors play it safe in the South and large-scale organisations admit to feeling frustrated with a skill pool that has gaps and weaknesses.



London and the South East still act as a magnet, offering many more jobs, networking and media opportunities, industry specialists and companies. It's difficult to replicate the depth and scale of this in the North, hampered by poor transport, suffocated ambition and regional rivalry caused by competitive bidding for scarce resources. Instead it can build growth from its own stories and identities.

The purpose of One Creative North is to drive economic growth.

There's a unique window of opportunity supported by the upcoming Creative Industries Sector Plan and the Regional Growth Fund announced in January.

Growth in those lead sectors does depend on thriving cultural industries and the economic benefit of the publicly funded arts and culture sector has just been further evidenced in a recent report by the Centre for Economics and Business Research. Liverpool Biennial, for example, contributing £24.3 million in 2023.

Despite the obstacles it faces, the North has an astounding cultural history with artists and organisations of every persuasion. The voice of the North permeates UK culture in a distinctive and powerful way that brings humour and dramatic narratives to speak of resilience and social justice as well as the exuberance of living.

The North has many distinctive planets that all need to be recognised for their individual qualities. Together they form a unique galaxy with a distinctive voice. One Creative North has been formed to champion this voice.

Jude Kelly CBE

Summary and recommendations

One Creative North has been formed to promote rapid growth in the creative industries of the North, support business growth and job creation, and unlock the huge potential of talent and expertise.

There is no single policy or action that will generate rapid growth in the creative industries in the North.

Collaboration is key, despite its challenges.

Easy to say but hard to do.

Given the necessary governance, resource and momentum, One Creative North will help collaboration and provide a collective voice to lobby central government and the private sectors to unlock significant resources and major inward investment from the UK and overseas.

There will not always be consensus and not everyone will agree with what is in this document, that's to be expected. However there's enough common ground to reach agreements as part of vital next steps.

Photos: National Literacy Trust.



One Creative North will:

- Establish joined up approaches to training, skills and lifelong learning across government, private and public sector and education providers – recognising the critical role of universities in placemaking and growth.
- Convene conversations and share best policy and practice.
- Provide regional direction and be the strategic interface between the local and the national.
- Offer a brand identity that engenders a sense of belonging and an outward facing 'shop window' to attract domestic and inward investment.
- Inform and influence local, regional and national policy.
- Provide a best practice model for co-operative working across devolved government.
- Help to drive genuinely inclusive growth in the creative industries in the North and narrow the economic gap with London and the South East.

One Creative North will not:

- Dampen healthy competition.
- Displace place-based activities.
- Become a resource-draining entity that needs significant servicing.

Barriers to growth

All the Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs), stakeholders and sector consultation groups agreed on the following topics as priorities for action:

- Tackling a perceived negative Northern Narrative.
- Need for more pan-regional industry networks.
- More equitable access to finance.
- Growing and retaining skills at all levels within the sector.

Priority sectors

The lead priority sectors were chosen based on an intersection of already identified MSA priorities and work underway. The intention is for One Creative North interventions to benefit all, but in the first instance work should focus on:

- **Screen**
- **Contemporary Music and Audio**
- **Games and Digital Tech**
- **Writing and Publishing**

All the MSAs, stakeholders and sector consultation groups are concerned to ensure that growth benefits everyone within their region and builds strong healthy communities.

Pan-regional objectives and opportunities

The opportunities that devolution offers the North have been met with huge excitement and determination to think expansively. Areas are drawing up their local growth plans and related delivery through sector plans, aspects of which will be necessarily influenced by the Spending Review to be announced in June.

It's crucial to recognise the importance of local ownership of these plans in the context of One Creative North. Every region has a distinctive history and voice, and devolution offers the chance to strengthen that. It is essential that cooperation between regions is not seen as an attempt to amalgamate or undermine the autonomy of each authority. They are the experts regarding their own communities.

Whilst recognising the vigour and distinctiveness of each region, the scoping exercise has engaged Mayors, leaders, MSA culture leads, ACE, BBC, Channel 4, the Creative PEC, Creative UK, ITV, The RSA, signatories, stakeholders, sector leads and institutions to establish the areas of common interest that would benefit from a joined-up strategy and add value. Through this scoping exercise the priority sectors with pan-regional overlap have been identified as being: games, music and screen. Writing and publishing has also been identified, as an underpinning and essential sector. There are also exciting crossovers between those sectors, such as convergent tech and live immersive experience.



Aesthetica Short Film Festival 2023. Photo: Jim Poyner.

One Creative North region

As of 19 May 2025

Mayoral Combined Authority

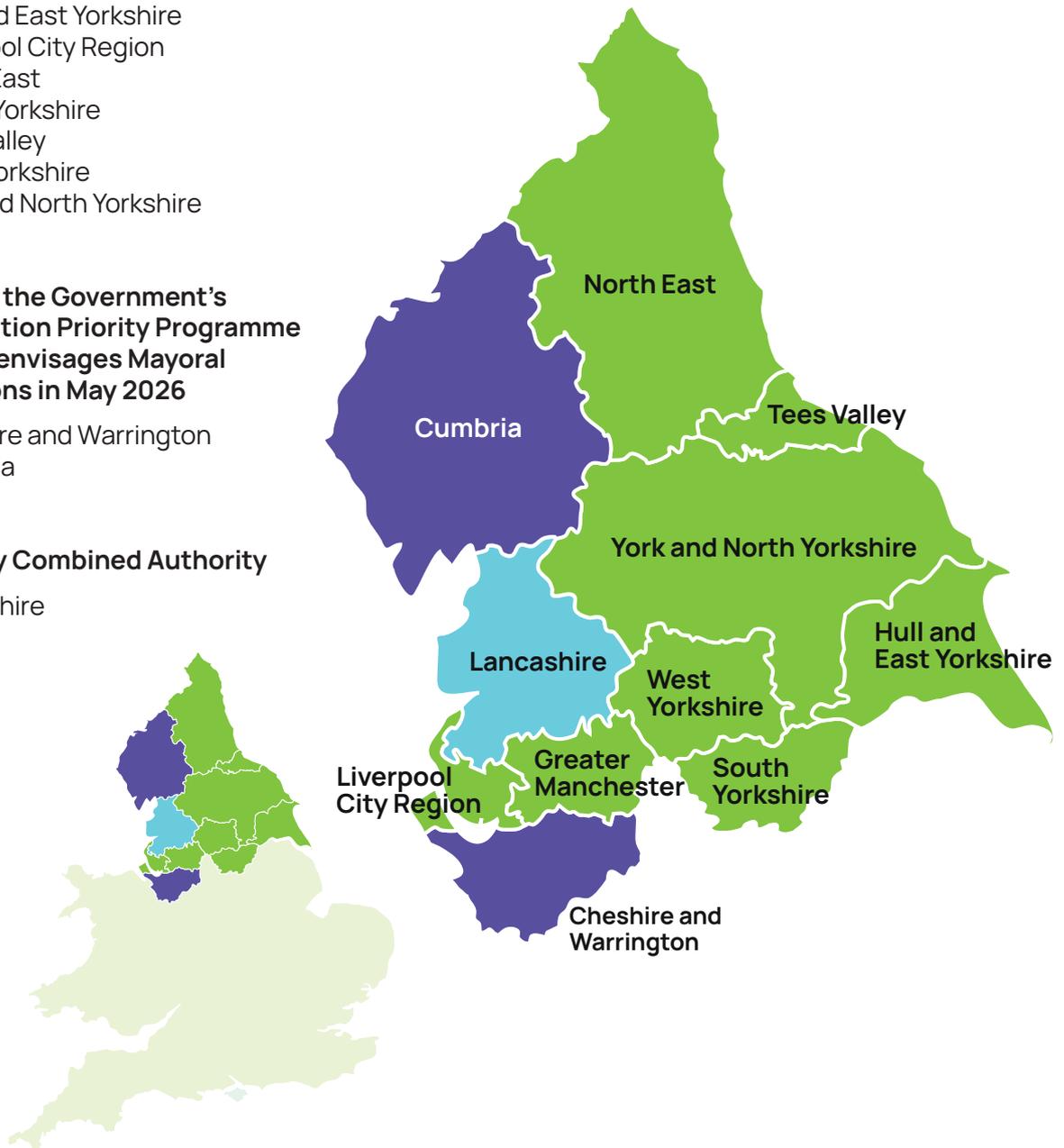
- Greater Manchester
- Hull and East Yorkshire
- Liverpool City Region
- North East
- South Yorkshire
- Tees Valley
- West Yorkshire
- York and North Yorkshire

Part of the Government's Devolution Priority Programme which envisages Mayoral elections in May 2026

- Cheshire and Warrington
- Cumbria

County Combined Authority

- Lancashire



Recommendations for stakeholders

to consider, discuss and agree a shared plan of action in relation to The Great North.

1. Investment and Access to finance for Northern creative industries

- Build the business case for a £30 million growth fund made up of investment from private sector, government, philanthropy and combined authorities.
- Secure investment for pan-regional alliances. Empower them to build capacity and representation, connectivity, new narratives, and investment-ready products to accelerate growth.
- British Business Bank to establish a regional 'front door', aligned with Creative UK plans, with creative industry sector specialists and bespoke sector products.
- Introduce interventions specifically aimed at greater inclusivity.
- Transparent, timely, data regarding return on investments in the creative industries including by geography.
- As proof of co-competition and positive partnership, ringfence a portion of the DCMS (Department for Culture, Media and Sport) priority MSA funding to build pan-regional capacity and/or invest in initiatives that will have benefit across MSA regional boundaries.

2. Provide better and more co-ordinated business support to creative industries

- Provide finance and digital literacy bootcamps for the sectors in partnership with Creative UK, ACE and others.
- Scale up and adapt DCMS's successful Create Growth Programme.
- Create a Northern masterclass series with broadcast and university partners, to share expertise and success stories, and champion representative sector role models.
- Host and record a series of events with key Northern entrepreneurs on business models and methods including finance and project management, building an accessible knowledge bank.

3. Create a skills pipeline opening up creative career opportunities to anyone in the North, anywhere in the North

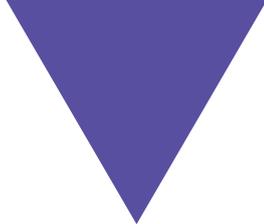
- Establish a Northern Skills Consortium in partnership with educators and industry, aligned with Skills England and other initiatives, to inspire, nurture, sustain, retain and attract talent to the North as well as filling skills gaps at all levels of the industries.
- Establish a working group of relevant MSA leads, such as culture and skills, to establish and enable delivery of the pan-regional agenda.
- Map existing creative industries networks and promote through one platform, so people can find them and connect. Identify gaps in provision and create networks where needed. One Creative North has already brought together sector alliances, with the intention of harnessing the power of a 'network of networks'. Consideration to be given to making the networks inclusive and accessible.
- Ensure that proceeds from the Growth and Skills Levy, such as in the screen sector, are distributed in the sector that generated it.

4. Rebalance creative industries' research and development (R&D) spend to benefit the North

- Pioneer a collaborative cluster R&D fund with private sector, UKRI and relevant MSAs building on January's Regional Growth Fund announcement. Leverage the opportunity to use One Creative North as a pilot for new approaches.
- Establish a series of solution-focused consortia to serve as networking and sounding boards on a range of topics. Like a public enquiry, these consortia would be for a defined period (12 months) and produce action plans increasing sector connectivity.

5. Maximise the benefits of the creative industries beyond their sectors

- It has been well evidenced that clusters and corridors of creative activity have significant benefits beyond their sectors, including regeneration, placemaking, visitor economy, identity and profile. Establish a new radical R&D thinktank bringing together the innovative spaces to inform public policy wider than the creative industries.
- **Launch Great North, Great Stories**, an opportunity to use the creative industries to reshape the narratives of the North with broadcast partners.
- Build examples of the North operating a shift of mindset to champion each other even while competing, such as plans already underway to establish a pan-regional music export office that complements regional ones. Amplify these positive stories and incentivise pan-regional partnerships.



Governance

One Creative North should be established within The Great North umbrella partnership, alongside other ongoing joint pieces of work.

One Creative North will ideally have a steering group and chair recruited through headhunters. They should have the profile and drive to be national, and international, champions. Mayor Brabin to continue as Mayoral lead. Sector intelligence should be mobilised through an advisory board of pan-regional alliances. It needs a structure that allows for streamlined and effective communication between stakeholders and ensures equal engagement with regions not yet under an MSA.

It needs to be sufficiently resourced to operate and take forward recommendations. A pitch has been made to DCMS for £500k for this purpose, additional to the Regional Growth Fund announced in January.

One Creative North should establish a data and evidence function, in partnership with the Creative PEC at Newcastle University, subject to external funding, as well as regional and academic representatives, ONS and DCMS. The purpose of this function will be to benchmark, coordinate and advise on measures of change and, where appropriate, commission research to support the ongoing development and evaluation of One Creative North.

One Creative North should kick off practically with a two-day workshop conference within an appropriate context, to turbocharge activity, networks, initiatives and source ideas from practitioners and creative businesses.

The main focus of One Creative North is economic growth and job creation. This does not happen in isolation and depends upon thriving cultural as well as creative sectors.

Underpinning these plans is a proper regard for the role the arts and culture play in the health and wellbeing of our communities. All the regions are deeply concerned with

ensuring that people, and particularly children and young people, have access to cultural expression as a human right. All recognise that community cohesion is dependent on a good quality of life, the sharing and respecting of different stories, equality of opportunity and a sense of social justice. The arts and culture are perceived to be critical to regional development both economically and socially.

Equitable connectivity is critical for success. Whilst out of the scope of this exercise, affordable, accessible and reliable public transport is vital to One Creative North. The recent commitment to improving rail in the North by the mid 2030s is essential. In the short term people hope for more trains with greater capacity. Similarly, fast Wi-Fi is also a necessity, particularly in more isolated regions and on public transport.

Also outside the scope of the original brief as not limited to the North, the AI/digital revolution cuts through every aspect of the creative industries. Every consideration should be given to ensuring the benefits of AI are maximised and its risks minimised. This is a live conversation and one that will inform the forthcoming Creative Industries Sector Plan, and through this influence related One Creative North policy and practice.

Context



On September 4th 2024, Northern Mayors and council leaders representing non-Mayoral areas announced a new partnership between their administrations, which will become known as The Great North. Devolution offers opportunities to leverage their respective powers by forging and strengthening pan-regional initiatives, identifying investment opportunities and building on their combined experience and expertise. The areas for joint working were defined as Trade and Investment; Net Zero; Innovation; People and Place, and Transport.

One Creative North was announced immediately as an example of partnership working in action, with a six-month scoping exercise to identify the potential for pan-regional growth in the creative industries. This builds on research and stakeholder engagement undertaken by a consortium including the Creative PEC, RSA, BBC and ACE.

The One Creative North scoping brief was to consider three key pillars that currently hamper success: one, access to finance; two, skills and three, connectivity. Through research, an additional pillar emerged – the 'Northern narrative' – the way that places and people are often misrepresented.

This scoping document has been greatly informed by individual meetings with each of the Mayors. Crucial input has been provided by sector leaders, practitioners and original signatories to One Creative North. The principal task was to draw on the significant knowledge and aspirations already in the sectors, join dots and identify needs. It is not the intention to reinvent the wheel or displace the good work that is already happening.

Conversations were captured and revisited, shaping branches of discussion, reflection and connections. This was supported through the generous facility of access to Creative PEC.

West Yorkshire Combined Authority established a working group of specialists in clusters, access to finance, data and evidence, skills and the creative industries. This group connected with peers across other Northern Mayoral combined authorities and with stakeholders. The BBC provided great support through administrative capacity as well as regular strategy and policy reflections.

This is emergent thinking and doing, and the scoping exercise was regularly re-aligned with the rapidly changing context such as government's industrial strategy green paper, **Invest 2035: The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy (2024)** and the Creative Industries Sector Plan Taskforce. This scoping document is not a conclusion, but a way marker on a complex journey. Its presentation forms part of the launch of The Great North and consideration needs to be given to how One Creative North synchronises with that initiative.

Creative industries background

The creative industries are recognised as an important and unique selling point of the UK. There have been evolutions of policy since the **Creative Industries Mapping Document** of 1998, when the sector was valued at £60 billion a year with a workforce of 1.4 million³.

An outstanding success story, the creative industries now contribute an estimated £124.6 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) and employ over 2.4 million people⁴, 15% (360,000) of those being in the North. However, this strong growth masks the regional disparities that underpin the figures. The lion's share of economic progress has been achieved in London and the South East in absolute terms, which together now account for almost 70% of the UK's creative industries GVA⁵.

June 2023

The Creative Industries Sector Vision is published by the previous government in tandem with the Creative Industry Council and aimed to add £50 billion to the economy by 2030. The vision referenced growth across the UK, and the benefits of clusters and corridors in driving regional economic growth across the country, but did not have a focus on place. Following a change of government in 2024 the conversation has moved quickly to address the imbalance.

An initial summit hosted at Newcastle University is held with a coalition of stakeholders to explore the potential of a Northern Creative Corridor, including the Mayor of West Yorkshire, ACE, RSA, BBC and the Creative PEC.

November 2023

A coalition of stakeholders commit to the idea of a Northern Creative Corridor, with 30 founding signatories including several Mayors and sector leaders such as ACE, Creative PEC, The RSA, Creative UK, North East Screen, the N8 universities and Ubisoft, plus the BBC, ITV and Channel 4⁶.

February 2024

Stakeholders commit to progress the Northern Creative Corridor under the name of One Creative North, building on initial research and stakeholder engagement workshops undertaken by Creative PEC, RSA, and ACE.

September 2024

One Creative North is initiated as a pan-regional collaboration to grow the Creative Industries, with Jude Kelly CBE as Chair for six months to undertake a scoping exercise.

³ Creative Industries Mapping Document 1998 - Creative Industries Mapping Documents 1998 - GOV.UK

⁴ www.gov.uk/government/statistics/economic-estimates-employment-october-2023-to-september-2024-for-dcms-sectors

⁵ Siepel, J., Ramirez-Guerra, A., and Rath, S. 2023. Geographies of Creativity. Creative PEC. Available at: pec.ac.uk/state_of_the_nation/geographies-of-creativity/

⁶ www.thersa.org/design-for-life-our-mission/prosperous-places/innovation-corridors/creative-corridors/



October 2024

Creative Corridors: Connecting Clusters to Unleash Potential is published by the RSA, Creative PEC and ACE. It outlines the need to take a geographically rebalancing approach to the Creative Industries, which joins up existing creative clusters and microclusters: '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'⁷.

The **Creative Corridors** report suggests creating a Northern Creative Corridor to turbocharge the growth potential of the combined regions of the North. Research from the Creative PEC estimated that if the North of England were able to grow the GVA share of its creative industries to even half that found in London and the South East, it could contribute around £10 billion in additional GVA to the region by 2030⁸.

November 2024

Central Government issues **Invest 2035: the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy** white paper naming the creative industries as one of eight priorities.

December 2024

First meeting of the Creative Industries Sector Plan Taskforce, convened to make recommendations to Government. It is jointly chaired by Sir Peter Bazalgette and Baroness Shriti Vadera with sector leads such as Caroline Norbury from Creative UK and Mayor Brabin as representative of UK Mayors.

January 2024

Creative Industries Growth Summit in Gateshead. The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Lisa Nandy, announces a £60 million package of support to drive growth. Six priority areas are announced who will benefit from additional funding, four in the North: Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, the North East and West Yorkshire.

Against the backdrop of accelerated commitment to place-based change, this scoping document examines the opportunities for the creative industries to work pan-regionally in the North, outlines the challenges to realising those ambitions and makes proposals for delivering significant change. The overarching objective is to create additionality and not to impose boundaries on the provenance of the regional authorities within the North.

⁷ Hay, B., Hopkins, E., Miles-Wilson, J., Sims, H., & Stratton, T. (2024) *Creative Corridors: Connecting Clusters to Unleash Potential*. Zenodo doi: 10.5281/zenodo.11243789

⁸ Easton, E., Bakhshi, H., Haldane, A., Carey, H., di Novo, S., Fazio, G., Gascogne, A., Kenyon, T., Sapsed, J & Siepel, J. (2024) *Northern England's Creative Industries*. Creative PEC and RSA. Available from: pec.ac.uk/discussion_paper_/northern-englands-creative-industries/



Skills

Related to a negative Northern narrative is the reality of a skills gap. Whilst the creative industries exemplifies a high-skilled workforce, it is experiencing significant skills challenges: 65% of hard-to-fill vacancies in the creative industries are attributable to skills shortages, compared with just 41% of hard-to-fill vacancies in all sectors⁹.

Every industry needs an available workforce with the necessary skills. Generative AI is driving a new Industrial Revolution. This is a double-edged sword for the creative industries as there is a real threat that certain skills will be overtaken but also significant opportunity for those who are already prepared for the rapidly changing environment. People will need to be supported to reskill to keep up and stay in the workforce. Creators of original material need policy and legislation that protects their rights and training to exercise those rights.

Every employer, large or small, engaged in the development of this scoping document spoke about the difficulties of finding and retaining a skilled local workforce. It was often given as a reason for not expanding a business or for considering relocating to the South. They were often forced to recruit from London and couldn't guarantee employment security in the region after short or medium term contracts. Freelancers who wanted to stay in, or move to, the North spoke of the financial jeopardy that resulted from operating in a patchy market with unreliable, inefficient and expensive transport. This forces people to seek work in the South, or overseas, and exacerbates the skills gaps. This is an acute challenge, as creative businesses in the North's microclusters are more likely than firms in all other parts of the country except London to rely on freelancers as important sources of new knowledge and skills¹⁰.

Anyone who has achieved success in the creative industries has navigated a unique journey, which depended on a sequence of opportunities. At some point they were inspired by a creative or cultural experience that prompted them to explore how it was made and by who. It is likely that this was encouraged by someone important to them – a carer, a teacher, a role model of another kind. Probably with help, they made particular decisions that allowed them to gain the necessary skills, experience and connections to turn that inspiration into a living either through regular employment or on a freelance basis, or combination of that. In rapidly evolving industries they are probably required to gain new skills.

These journeys can be lonely but are helped by drawing knowledge and support from being part of communities and networks. Often they will pay their experience and acquired access forwards, through teaching, mentoring or creating opportunities through careers advice, paid work placements and apprenticeships. Too often, opportunities between every stage of career are not available locally or regionally.

The landscapes in which those journeys are made are created by a multitude of providers, including the MSAs.

⁹ Giles, L., Carey, H. and O'Brien, D. (2025) 'Skills Mismatches in the UK's Creative Industries'. Creative PEC State of the Nations Research Series. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.14733687

¹⁰ Siepel, J., Ramirez-Guerra, A., and Rathi, S. 2023. Geographies of Creativity. Creative PEC. Available at: pec.ac.uk/state_of_the_nation_geographies-of-creativity/

Several Northern MSAs came together, and with sector representatives, to identify how the pan-regional landscape could better serve those working in the creative industries and those aspiring to.

Key findings

The team of Northern MSAs identified issues that were not only common across the North, but the whole country. A consistent challenge is a lack of robust and place-based data in the creative and cultural sectors to inform Labour Market Information (LMI) and so identify current and future skills gaps. With 28% of those working in the creative industries being self-employed, compared to 14% in the whole economy¹¹, there is the risk of having an incomplete picture of industry skills shortages and gaps when sources of LMI, such as the Employer Skills Survey, ask employers questions on these only with respect to employees¹².

Freelancers often depend on networks for employment, which exacerbates inequality of opportunity as it is more difficult for those without existing connections in the industries to find work.

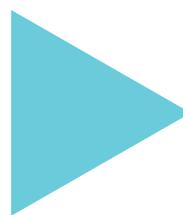
Regions in the North have independently developed their skills strategies for the creative industries in relation to their local growth plans. They have had to bid against each other for key skills funding – necessitating different and novel proposals. This has led to an inconsistency of offer across the North, with a myriad of different levels of recognition and potentially confusing landscape for those who want to gain work-ready skills that will give them the flexibility to work across MSA boundaries.

There was a consensus concern about the talent pipeline drying up. For example, nationally there is a 41% drop in GCSE arts subject take up between 2009/10 and 2022/23, and 29% at A Level – with a 73% drop in young people taking GCSE Design and Technology¹³.

There has been a 57% drop in creative subject enrolment at FE (Further Education) level in England from 2014/15 to 2022/23, from 391,240 to 169,590, compared to a 31% drop across all subjects¹⁴.

Reduction of creative access in formal education has a direct impact on young people from the most deprived backgrounds. For example, engagement with performing arts is largely the same in the state sector in formal education, irrespective of background. Outside of school, those from deprived backgrounds are only half as likely to engage in performing arts provision as their peers from non-deprived backgrounds¹⁵.

Only 0.2% of all apprenticeships in England are in crafts, creative arts and design¹⁶.



¹¹ DCMS. (2025). DCMS Economic Estimates: Employment October 2023 to September 2024 for DCMS Sectors. Available from: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/economic-estimates-employment-october-2023-to-september-2024-for-dcms-sectors

¹² Giles, L., Carey, H. and O'Brien, D. (2025) 'Skills Mismatches in the UK's Creative Industries'. Creative PEC State of the Nations Research Series. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.14733687

¹³ www.campaignforthearts.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/The-State-of-the-Arts.pdf

¹⁴ pec.ac.uk/state_of_the_nation/creative-further-education/

¹⁵ ¹⁶ Giles, L., Carey, H. and Hickman, B. (2024) 'Creative Further Education in the Four UK Nations', Creative PEC State of the Nations Research Series. United Kingdom: Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC). doi: 10.5281/zenodo.12532918

Proposal: Northern Skills Consortium

To establish a pan-regional consortium aligned with national and industry initiatives such as Skills England, those run by Public Service Broadcasters and ScreenSkills. To develop shared approaches to inspiring, nurturing and sustaining talent in the North. Key functions would be:

- Cultivation of creativity in the classroom and curricula, in part through paying creatives and institutions to deliver teacher professional development.
- Coordinated approach to inspiring future generations through representation, continued professional development for teachers, and role model / ambassadors in schools as well as 'career influencers' via an app or similar platform – enabling young people to not only see themselves in industry but have the pathways clearly articulated.
- Data sharing on a dynamic platform to help identify current and future skills needs in the North of England's creative industries, underpinned by a curriculum that's fit for purpose, careers advice, flexible/modular apprenticeships and Further/Higher Education courses that service that demand.

- Joined up approach to promoting the creative industry courses available in different regions.
- Joined up approach to incubation of talent across the North and between education and skills providers, government and industry.
- Consortia approach across Higher Education, industry and government to promote graduate opportunities.
- Subsidy for training, upskilling and reskilling for freelancers.
- Mobilise the brand identity of One Creative North to promote creative opportunities, platform talent and enable networking.
- Dedicated support for the self employed including funding that allows the time for retraining and upskilling.
- Digital bootcamps that deliver online training and also serve as networking and knowledge sharing opportunities.





Access to finance

For creative industries looking for finance, there is a potentially bewildering array of products available and access is not currently equally distributed.

Research by the Creative PEC shows that venture capital finance for creative industries firms is heavily concentrated in London and the South East – with 63% of all investments made in these two regions, compared for example with 11% in the North of England, 5% in the East of England, 6% in the South West, 5% in Scotland, and just 2% in Wales and Northern Ireland¹⁷.

Every good idea needs resource to be realised. Every successful business model needs investment to grow. Every self-employed creative needs to make a living. Access to finance is a complex area, especially in industries that are defined by the creation of something that didn't exist before.

It has been evidenced that there is limited knowledge on which products or financial blends may be available to creative industry businesses. There is similarly limited understanding from financial lenders or fund managers about the nature of the sectors. The report published in March 2025 by Creative UK and the Creative PEC highlights the many and serious barriers to finance in the creative industries, which are stymying growth¹⁸. Analysis from a survey undertaken by BVA BDRC in 2024 of 896 firms weighted by sub-sector, nation and region (to make the sample representative found that):

- Approximately 30% of respondents felt they lacked the financial knowledge to identify the best types of finance for their business. Smaller and female-led organisations were more likely to report not having sufficient knowledge about their financial options.
- Female and ethnic minority-led creative industries organisations are more likely to report needing capital (10% and 9% more likely, respectively), but they face a lack of guidance, access to information and other barriers in accessing funding.
- Creative industries businesses led by people from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to view access to finance as a barrier to growth and 17% more likely to have put their own capital into their business. This underscores the need for targeted equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives to address access to finance needs in the creative industries.
- 27% of respondents do not know where to go for information on finance.
- 41% of respondents say they do not have the financial and management skills to grow.

¹⁷ Siepel, J, Rathi, S and Cowling, M (2024) 'Growth finance for the creative industries', Creative PEC State of the Nations Research Series. United Kingdom: Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC). ISBN: 978-0-7017-0280-9 DOI:10.5281/Zenodo.13889750

¹⁸ Bakhshi, H., Siepel, J., Carmona, L., Tarr, A. Unleashing Creativity: Fixing the finance gap in the creative industries. Creative UK & Creative PEC. Available from: unleash.wearecreative.uk/

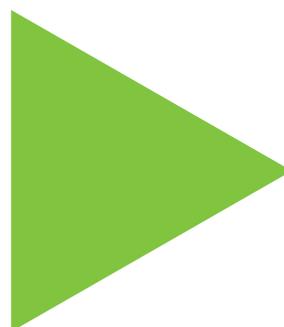
- 51% of organisations feel that financial institutions perceive them as too risky to invest in. Of the organisations in the sample that reported having applied for finance and been rejected, the perception of being too risky or the funder not understanding the business were the two most frequently cited reasons for rejection. These provide indicative evidence to suggest that information asymmetries exist between investors and creative businesses.
- 41% of respondents feel that current financial products do not meet their needs, indicating a mismatch between available finance options and sector requirements.
- Of those who had sought equity investment unsuccessfully, 44% felt the investor had not sufficiently understood their organisation.
- Creative organisations in micro-clusters outside major urban centres often view external finance as essential for growth but are nearly twice as likely as others to view finance as a barrier. These organisations face specific challenges, including fewer localised funding sources and limited financial advisory services; obstacles less common in established creative clusters.

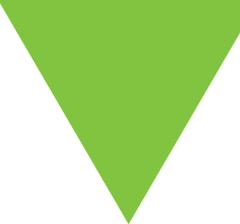
Access to finance has been rigorously considered by the Creative Industries Sector Plan Taskforce, with the benefit of a community of experts. One Creative North scoping has fed into those discussions and will be informed by its findings.

After publication of the Spending Review and Creative Industries Sector Plan, One Creative North should draw up a finance masterplan that includes R&D, skills, different sector needs, place and inclusion. Blended funding models should include public, private, philanthropic and subsidy as well as consideration of the role of tax incentives and levies to drive investment and growth. It is critical that this is

bespoke to the Northern context and aligns with the ambitions and individual activities of each region. To ensure equitable access to regional investment, each region should formally integrate the creative industries into their local growth plans.

There is an urgent need for greater literacy between the creative industries and fund managers. It is also important that investment strategies recognise the distinct needs of cultural and subsidised sectors within the creative industries. These sectors often operate under different business models with non-commercial funding streams playing a crucial role and it is important that these organisations have the opportunity and support to expand their income base. To achieve this, cultural sector leaders must be equipped with the resources, expertise and financial mechanisms necessary to develop market-based revenue streams. This will enable them to leverage their valuable cultural assets to generate sustainable commercial income, whilst maintaining their core mission, such as through the use of social impact finance.





The **Creative Corridors** report of October 2024 recommended the creation of an Investment Office, whose role is to transmit the campaign story, acting as a 'front-door' for domestic and inward investment¹⁹. Other conversations have proposed establishing a dedicated fund or creative bank²⁰. One Creative North finance approaches should not duplicate or displace local, regional or national successful models. In the short term, the British Business Bank is nominated by central government as the primary investment vehicle, helping to provide access to finance for small businesses, including in the creative industries. Their business model will adapt in response to the national industrial strategy and the vital needs for sector specialism. It must be proactive in ensuring equity of investment such as by geography, gender and ethnicity.

Success will depend on a regional 'front door' into the British Business Bank and bespoke support. It also needs creative industry specialists in the British Business Bank, as well as financial literacy upskilling in the sectors themselves – such as bootcamps – with dedicated support for those currently underrepresented.

Research and Development

The creative industries are pioneers and, as such, need specific approaches to R&D and the monetisation of Intellectual Property (IP). The creative industries need a dedicated and long-term approach to R&D funding, to develop and capitalise unique IP as well as to position the UK at the forefront of the rapidly changing interface between creativity and technology. UKRI/AHRC Creative Industries Clusters programmes have demonstrated a clear line of sight between long-term investment and positive impact, with spillover benefits.

From a national perspective, One Creative North is primed to lead on a mixed-fund approach to R&D cluster and corridor funding, including exploring how R&D collaborations could be enabled between the North's creative clusters.

Multiple regional stakeholders with vested interests in the creative industries should be involved to ensure that clusters benefit from local knowledge, resources and networks and support local economic growth, especially through strengthened collaboration between existing creative clusters and microclusters. This collaborative approach ensures that the journey from idea/IP creation through to a revenue-generating business is supported at every stage.

¹⁹ Hay, B., Hopkins, E., Miles-Wilson, J., Sims, H., & Stratton, T. (2024) Creative Corridors: Connecting Clusters to Unleash Potential. Zenodo. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.11243789

²⁰ Choudhry, I. & Hay, B. (2024). Insights from the Northern Creative Corridor Workshops Sprint. Creative PEC & RSA. Available from: pec.ac.uk/policy_briefing_entr/policy-brief-insights-from-the-northern-creative-corridor-workshops-sprint/

Create Growth

DCMS's successful Create Growth Programme (CGP) has provided a crucial foundation for supporting SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises), enhancing their investment readiness and attracting private investment. The current CGP framework should be scaled to support a greater number of high growth potential businesses in the North where investment gaps remain significant. By leveraging insights from the CGP, localised investment strategies can support emerging creative clusters and microclusters.

Data and evidence needs

Evidence of equitable investment needs benchmarking and agreed measures of success. Fund holders and managers should work closely with pan-regional sector networks to ensure that those with expertise inform what is greenlit.

All information regarding lending and growth needs to be measured geographically to ensure the North has oversight of progress and opportunities for further interventions.

Further research is needed to understand the finance needs of the different subsectors at different points in their cycle. It also needs to identify the market failures that only public finance can resolve.

Rivalry between the Northern regions can be both a healthy galvaniser or a deterrent to partnership. Competition builds an unhelpful impression of winners and losers and government should be encouraged to fund all the One Creative North MSAs as one priority area. However, the creation of priority places, and different rates of devolution in different regions does offer opportunity. The North of England is the birthplace of the Equitable Pioneers Society and the principle that 'co-operatives serve their members most effectively by working together through local, national, regional and international structures'. There is scope, within reason, to pool resource for the greater good, for initiatives established in One Creative North to have benefit across regional boundaries.

New Writing North Screenwriting Weekender © Rob Irish.



Four key growth sectors

The vitality of the whole cultural and creative ecosystem needs sustaining and championing. One Creative North aims eventually to give a voice to that ecosystem as a whole.

In the first instance, however, the aim is to maximise growth. Therefore, work should concentrate on the four sectors identified as priorities for most regions in the North, as well as the pioneering intersections between such as immersive live experience:

- ▶ 1. Screen
- ▶ 2. Games
- ▶ 3. Contemporary Music and Audio
- ▶ 4. Writing and Publishing

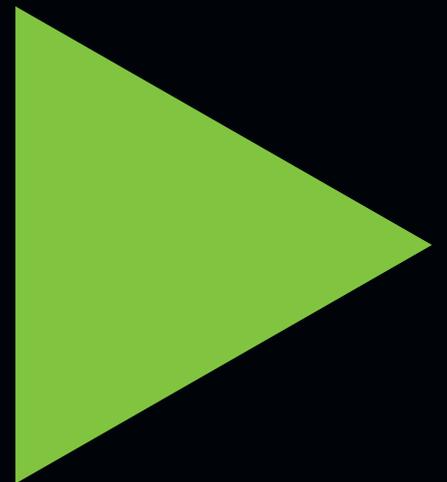
This is not to exclude other sectors, but to recognise the intersection of shared commitments and activity already underway, from which the clusters and Northern corridor might flourish.

Pan-regional alliances from the four sectors were consulted and their findings are shared here, as well as a joint statement by Public Service Broadcasters.

It's acknowledged that not everyone will feel represented at this stage, and it is a critical task of One Creative North to properly build and sustain the sector communities and ensure that their shared voices are heard.



Pan-regional sector insights



Screen / Screen Alliance North

Screen Alliance North is a powerful screen industries partnership that brings together four established production hubs and decades of experience from the country's most successful and dedicated regional screen agencies: Liverpool Film Office; North East Screen; Screen Manchester and Screen Yorkshire.

Simply put we believe the North is the answer to global growth for the UK screen sector and to the current skills challenges that might inhibit that growth. Working together collaboratively is already making a difference, but with the support of One Creative North we can do so much more. Our three top priorities have already been articulated at a local level and nationally to DCMS and to the Creative Industries Taskforce via our combined Mayoral representation. However, it is worth re-stating them here and providing additional documentation to support some of them in more detail.

Recommended interventions

- Devolution of High End TV Skills Levy – productions made in the North pay the levy in the North and the money is spent on training for Northern crew.
- English Region uplift to the Audio-Visual Tax Credit – regional and global competitiveness would be enhanced by creating an additional incentive for productions realised outside of the metro London area.
- Devolution of funding for production services across the English regions needs to reflect where and how that service is delivered and the economic and cultural value it generates, rather than be administered by a London based centralised third party. Existing funding for productions and skills support should be devolved to Regional Screen Agencies to become more sustainable and have the ability to deliver ambitious growth plans.

Investment opportunities

- Business support pilot in the North for film and TV production companies, specifically designed to maximise growth potential not least through unlocking new opportunities, creative strategies to attract investment and grow international trade.
- Low levels of subsidy and specialist support to develop and refine business propositions.
- Significant investments to be fully recoupable as a conditional loan over five years repayable not on a monthly basis, but as a percentage of fees earned on commissions, net profit shares or other income streams.



The Personal Life of David Copperfield, 2020. Courtesy: Screen Yorkshire.

Screen / Public Service Broadcasting

One Creative North statement²¹

The UK Public Services Broadcasters (PSBs) have a long history of informing and entertaining the nation and in growing the creative industries in the North of England.

The PSBs make more content in the UK than anyone else and have consistently exceeded their Out of London quotas. In an increasingly global media market, PSBs play a crucial role in telling stories about the UK to the people of the UK, showcasing diverse voices across a range of genres. They make these stories universally available and open up viewers to experiences and perspectives that are not shown elsewhere.

In 2023 collectively the PSBs produced over 250 titles in the North of England in a wide range of genres as well as coverage of a wide range of sporting events. Through this content and local news coverage the PSBs tell the stories of the North of England and reflect the diverse cultural identities that exist across the region.

Collectively the PSBs have an extensive network of creative bases across the North of England, including Salford, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and Hull. In many cases the PSBs have co-located their activities (e.g. Salford Media City, Leeds) catalysing the growth of creative clusters. As a result, thousands of creative workers are employed by the PSBs across the North of England.

The PSBs welcome the proposals from One Creative North to create a northern creative corridor with the ambition to deliver growth and open opportunity across the whole of the North of England. We welcome the focus on collaboration between all creative stakeholders and local leaders and the PSBs are collectively committed to working with One Creative North in this new framework of collaboration.

Across the North of England PSBs catalyse the growth of the creative industries by attracting inward investment, investing in infrastructure, skills and technological innovation. But the PSBs, face significant challenges. Ongoing tech disruption and fierce competition for audiences from global streamers and revenue from a wide variety of online competitors is intensifying the mounting pressure on the future sustainability of the PSB system.

The benefits of the PSB compact have eroded as PSBs now face the cost of running multiple distribution networks, whilst streamers only deliver content over the internet. The BBC has seen a 30% real terms reduction in its level of funding and funding PSBs through advertising revenues has become more challenging. Whilst the PSBs are all

²¹ PSB signatories to this statement are BBC, ITV and Channel 4.



Behind the Scenes *The Irregulars*, Liverpool 2021.
Photo: Liverpool Film Office.

working to transform and adapt their strategies in response to these challenges, there is now a broad consensus from organisations such as Ofcom²² and Pact²³ that the sustainability of the PSB system and PSB content investment is now increasingly serious, and that significant intervention is required to retain the benefits of PSB. International investment from streaming services is welcome and has been valuable to the growth of the sector, including in the North of England, but alone it is insufficient to drive the growth and outcomes that One Creative North identifies as our shared objective. **The evidence is clear on the importance of a thriving PSB ecosystem for the future growth of creative industries in the North.**

To secure the PSB ecosystem for the future, at a UK wide level we need:

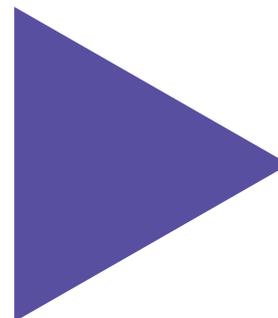
- **Political support for a muscular implementation of the Media Act 2024 and a new regime for prominence (and fair value) from YouTube. The Media Act regime should cover all major platforms that people watch TV on such as Xbox and Playstation.**
- **New Interventions to help to fund PSB and original UK content:**

The tax credit system could be reformed in a number of ways:

- Support for key genres – e.g. tax credits focused on children’s, regional news, comedy, continuing drama or UK HETV drama and scripted comedy.
- Incentivisation of public service objectives – encouraging production out of London, the preservation of IP within the UK, and co-production with PSBs.

Significant and sustainable public funding for the BBC is needed to sustain the mixed ecology of TV funding and the cost of providing public service broadcasting needs to be addressed – including a managed and clear transition from traditional broadcast to transmission of TV entirely over the internet with mechanisms to ensure PSB services are fairly and cost effectively distributed, particularly via online platforms.

- **Political support for UK PSBs and commercial players to collaborate and grow their scale to compete against global competitors.**
- **Skills: enhanced flexibility to maximise Growth and Skills Levy revenue spent on training, so it is retained within sectors, potentially with the greatest freedom in designated hubs such as the Leeds/Manchester corridor.**



²² www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-guidance/psb/2024/review-of-public-service-media-2019-2023.pdf?v=389567

²³ www.pact.co.uk/resource/pact-to-look-at-the-bigger-picture.html

Delivering these changes would have significant benefits to the North of England. Regional policy is also essential if we are to realise the full potential of the creative industries in the North, including:

- Production funds to secure high quality TV production in the region.
- Funded skills and opportunity schemes, including apprenticeship brokerage and early careers incentives such as free/discounted travel including Liverpool's **Apprentice Travelcard** or **GM's Our Pass**.

Beyond creative industries specific interventions, broader growth policies including investment in transport, housing and place-making are critical to the growth of the creative industries in the North and ensuring that everyone in the region can access the opportunities that growth provides.

The PSBs believe that One Creative North could play a central role in convening and mediating partnerships, supporting and facilitating pan-regional initiatives, for example skills passports, and reducing the bureaucracy

of multiple local initiatives where possible. One Creative North could support The Great North in providing a collective voice to central government and the private sectors to unlock significant resources and major inward investment from the UK and overseas. Rail connectivity, tax incentives, skills and higher education and approaches to trade and investment all working in tandem is critical for creative industries growth.

The PSBs are collectively committed to working together with One Creative North to help drive the creative economy in the north. They will identify ways to work collaboratively over the coming months to support business growth and job creation in the North.

Dad's Army, 2015, Flamborough Head. Courtesy: Screen Yorkshire.



Contemporary Music / Northern Music Network

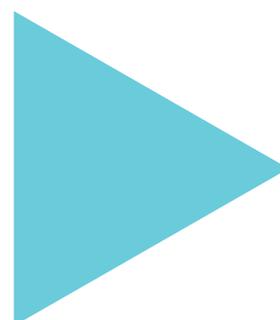
Northern Music Network is a collective whose key priorities are to showcase Northern talent, share best industry practices, present a united and inclusive voice and create opportunities to promote a sustainable music industry. It currently comprises Bradford Producing Hub, Brighter Sound, Come Play With Me, Culture Liverpool, Liverpool Sound City, Generator, Hull Music Net, Jazz North, Kycker, Music Local, Nothin But the Music and The Glasshouse International Centre for Music.

While all organisations benefit from partnerships and some funding from national trade organisations and major music companies, it would be refreshing for strategic investment and decision making around education, skills and workforce development to be made in locally based networks and support initiatives that collaborate pan regionally, feeding existing structures, leading to extensive growth.

Recommended interventions

Bridge the disconnect between education, workforce development and industry:

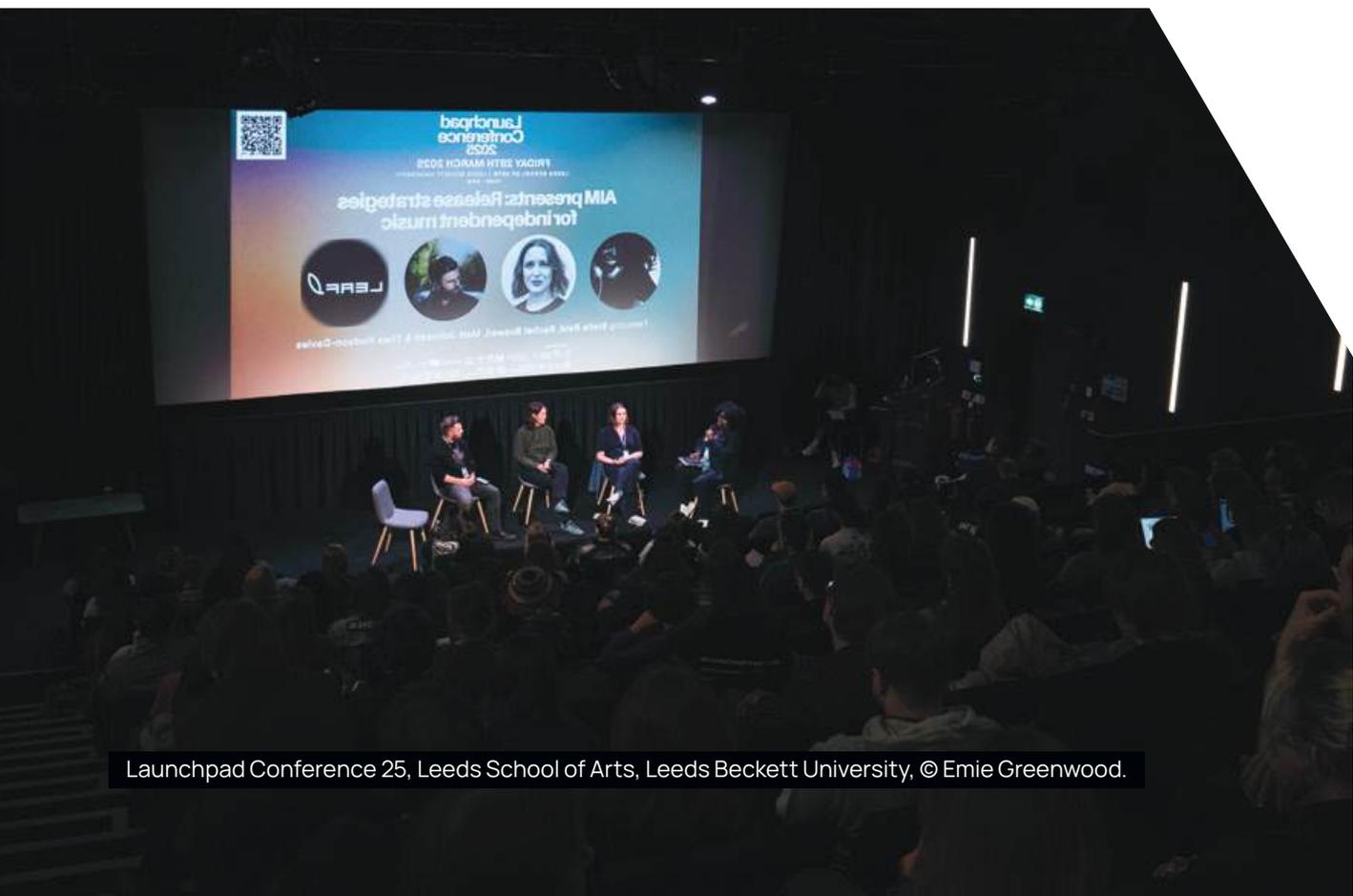
- Evolve music education curricula and offers including sector compatible apprenticeships, work-based learning and artist development.
- Additional resource to enable music hub partnerships to interface with industry, sector bodies and post 18 skills development.
- Cultivate/subsidise incubation opportunities for artist-adjacent and backstage roles.
- Better resource the pan-regional network to represent the regional sector across sub-sectors, and ensure cold spots are sufficiently represented, enabling partner organisations to:
 - Ensure knowledge building around IP management and royalty collection and support at least 100 young people to register their works with Performing Rights Organisations (PROs).
 - Support export and investment readiness including support to cement commercial investment.
 - Support future business models, including tech and AI.
 - Resource EDI awareness and progression support across industry and education.
 - Liaise with local government to support developmental issues and implement agent of change.
 - Build a directory of regional music businesses and opportunities.



- Support for grassroots music venues, recording studios and rehearsal rooms, including deployment of agent of change at local level and consideration of rates relief.
- Facilitating greater movement of Northern businesses to engage with partners across the UK and internationally such as support for travel, conferences, showcases, trade fairs – alongside developing export strategies.
- Skills and workforce development aligned with industry need, with support for freelancers to engage alongside job creation support.
- Embedding music in placemaking and visitor economy strategies and facilitating cross-sectoral thinking with adjacent policies such as health and transport.
- Establish a network of networks.
- Rapid development of sustainability awareness to satisfy industry led green initiatives.

Investment opportunities

- Regional rollout of industry-led funding initiatives such as PPL Momentum Accelerator, Power Up, MMF Accelerator and ACE Grassroots Music Fund.
- Flexible skills funding to allow sector led and sector appropriate initiatives across artist development, skills and workforce training.
- Match funding for new job creation from regional SMEs as internships, to expand workforce, develop skills and incubate freelance talent.
- Access to funding to allow rights holders to draw down IP royalties at point of registration, recouped through later distribution through Performing Rights Organisations.



Launchpad Conference 25, Leeds School of Arts, Leeds Beckett University, © Emie Greenwood.



Games / Game Republic Ltd

Game Republic Ltd runs the largest games industry networks in the North of England with over 1300 developers, composers, artists, programmers and educators.

The organisation was founded by developers in 2003 and was originally publicly funded but has been financially sustainable since 2011. It is pan-Northern and supports business development through advice, introductions, reviews and 12 events a year for its members, alongside collaborations with industry partners and events. It also runs trade missions and bootcamps with Government Departments and regional authorities.

The games industry is in a period of adjustment, which is impacting larger studios and reducing investment opportunities for indie game studios. This is exacerbated in the North where investment is disproportionately lower than in London and the South East. Success is often predicated on the creation of original games whose IP can be commercialised and, in some cases, whose unique play, code and mechanics can be patented. Retention of IP underpins greater long-term business success within the games industry and beyond thanks to spillover tech that can be exploited in other sectors too.

Recommended interventions

Establish a Northern Games office with investment fund that doesn't displace existing networks or initiatives:

- Upskilling offers in financial literacy, product to market and export including travel bursaries for studios. Game developers would then benefit from sector-specific education and insights as well as commercial and business knowledge.
- Pan-regional panel of expertise to share needs, skills and opportunities for public sector agencies, policy makers and funding bodies that doesn't displace existing networks.
- Bootcamps and short course credits for training for game studios and start-ups.
- Kickstart scheme to encourage recruitment of young people and graduates into industry and support SMEs to grow.
- Research into the size, scale, value and growth of the sector across The North with Northern educational institutions.

Investment opportunities

The UK Games Fund reports £5 return on every £1 of investment, but is only open to established companies operating PAYE income tax and employees. Games London has received a significant investment of a £10.7 million fund for creative industries from the London Mayor to make London the global games capital. The funding supports games festivals, trade missions, investor events and more. The level of investment in London and, in countries such as Germany, highlights how the sector is viewed as an engine of growth and is addressing market failure where private investors and venture capital funds are becoming more risk averse. The North has a strong track record in developing global games hits both in their own right and through work for hire. There is significant opportunity, with the right expertise, to take new and viable products to market, to increase IP in the region – which is evidenced to create economic growth – and to secure return on investment.

- Establish a fund of small to significant investment pots to be managed through a new Northern Games Fund with rapid mechanism for quick distribution and a recoupment model that reinvests an agreed percentage of profits back into the fund – suggested model for further development:
 - Public: 20% of revenues until recoup completed and 10% of any profits back into the fund.
 - Private: 20% of revenues until recoup and 10% of profits back into the fund.
 - Publisher/intermediary mitigating risks and ensuring best chances of success – paid out of investment initially and/or 5% of revenue depending on partner.

Photo top: Wakefield GaMaYo and the Game Republic Awards run by Game Republic 2024.
Credit: Corrupted Lens thecorruptedvisuals.com
Photo bottom: Liverpool Game Republic event, 2025.
Credit: Corrupted Lens thecorruptedvisuals.com



Writing and Publishing / A new pan-regional alliance

Whilst not possible to capture all the vital voices working in literature and related sectors across the North in this scoping exercise, here are some initial insights from people and organisations in the field. The scoping exercise has highlighted that there are rich ecologies and networks, with great potential for a pan-regional alliance.

Words are the carbon factor for success in the creative industries, without them no creative sector can succeed. There are numerous creative writing and publishing courses across universities in the North and a strong ecology of partnerships, festivals and initiatives such as BookTrust, which works to embed reading in young people's lives across the North. Capital projects include British Library North, New Writing North and National Poetry Centre.

Proposed interventions:

- Formalise a Northern network of networks for literature and related sectors – essentially connect the hubs with spokes.
- Establish a pan-regional writing and publishing skills hub, potentially scaling up what is already happening in the North East.
- Build commercial viability in the sector through a mixed income model that includes commercialisation of expertise in education and beyond.

Investment opportunities:

- Northern Writers' Awards that leverage co-investment to attract inward investment.
- Audio including podcasting.
- Publishers inward investment programme.
- Nationally focussed but North-anchored programming that celebrates and develops talent.
- One-off programme of writers' residencies across a diverse range of Northern institutions and communities in both arts and non-arts settings. To be of sufficient scale to draw national attention, whilst having local impact.
- Small pot subsidies for IP development and support to get to market, for example enabling people to write their first book whilst otherwise employed.
- Embedding literature in placemaking and visitor economy strategies.



Photo: Poetry with a Punch, Credit: Bradford Literature Festival.



Narrative of the North

Challenge

A common theme of many conversations has been frustration at the unsophisticated misrepresentation of the North that has been perpetuated for generations in England. This leads to a prejudiced perception of the place and its people, which then shapes the prospects of both.

Lazy caricatures of bleak industrial landscapes, depressed economic conditions, poor health, high crime rates and social unrest tell only partial stories. There is no one North tale to be told, there are shared themes and experiences but an incredibly rich diversity of lives and places. The investment principles of the Treasury's Green Book exacerbate inequality, the lack of reliable and affordable public transport being a prime example.

Possibly most damaging is the internalising of such a negative narrative amongst the communities themselves. Young people grow up feeling that their village, town or city is second or third class to other parts of the country and that ambitious dreams, success and world-class standards are for other people. This leads to a belief that you need to leave to achieve and a subsequent talent drain to London and the South East and overseas.

The creative industries are caught up in this negative narrative too.

Despite many local heroes, there is an idea that creative professions are for richer people or those in London. Young people are being discouraged from entering a career in the creative industries, which are perceived as risky and skewed toward prospects in the South.

The North needs a new narrative.

Whilst outside the original brief of this scoping exercise, this unique moment of The Great North partnership is an opportunity to mobilise the creative industries to tell the stories that genuinely give voice to the complex and multi-faceted places and people that we call the North.

Proposal

Launch the **Great North, Great Stories** creative industries campaign with broadcast partners to communicate shared narratives as well as the regions' diverse identities. Embed this with skills and career development, 'influencers' in schools and an ambassador programme.

Crafted by Northern writers and filmmakers the stories will include local heroes of all ages, from little known histories to famous Northerners. They will demonstrate the many versions of success.

The campaign will translate across multiple platforms including radio and podcast and be supported in print and brand collateral. The campaign to foster healthy competition to encourage, for example, each neighbourhood, school, business, factory, club, rural community, coastguard, university and fire service to create their own great stories.

This is to be a major project, similar to launching a City of Culture campaign, to prove to local people and the world that something special exists in our own backyard.

Next steps and recommendations

Establish governance over summer 2025 that folds into The Great North and is as simple as possible but allows for ground-up as well as top-down influence.

Workshop with stakeholders to plan next steps in response to this scoping document and in relation to the outcome of the June Spending Review.

Develop the data and evidence function that will undertake the necessary benchmarking to measure success.

With gratitude

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By its definition a collaboration depends on cooperation and the scoping exercise and document would not have been possible without the several hundred people who so generously shared their time, expertise and connections.



West
Yorkshire
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Tracy
Brabin
Mayor of
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Dame Helen Mirren and Jim Broadbent in *The Duke*. Credit: Path/Ingenious/Screen Yorkshire.

Appendix

Regional creative industries priorities

Cheshire and Warrington

Cheshire and Warrington have recently commissioned a strategic document that includes consideration of the Creative Industries in relation to growth and the government's Industrial Strategy.

Hull and East Yorkshire

Hull and East Yorkshire have digital and creative as one of six priority sectors in the Economic Strategy Framework with specific commitments to boost higher level skills, support investment and growth in research and innovation, develop a pipeline of employment sites for growth and business support.

Lancashire

Lancashire has a dedicated creative industries development service with a remit to cultivate the county's creative ecology by strengthening existing business, supporting new enterprises, and working to raise the competitiveness and profile of the sector across the sub-region. Creative Lancashire also connect to a growing community of creative practice centred around priority programmes including British Textile Biennial, National Festival of Making, Eden Project Morecombe, Harris Museum (Our Place), and advocates for the creative industries as a key economic driver to influence policy.

Cumbria

Cumbria is moving towards devolution, and renewed focus is being placed on the role of the creative industries in addressing the growth agenda, supporting the diversification of the region's economy, and providing much-needed opportunities for young people. Across the two unitary authorities, arts and culture are to be prioritised as central to civic life and community cohesion, with pioneering methods in citizen led decision making and a commitment to address the lack of creative subjects within the curriculum.

Liverpool City Region

Liverpool City Region is a global hub for creative industries which has been identified as one of three priority sectors for growth by the MCA. Priority sectors are screen, music and video games as one of the most important games development hubs in the country and flagship investment projects across all sectors including the transformation of Littlewoods into a world class screen studio and production facility. In partnership with Universal Music, Liverpool will be home to a world-first immersive music attraction. As England's only UNESCO City of Music the UKRI AHRC Music Futures Creative Cluster investment will spearhead a Music Lab facility to reimagine how music is made and consumed.

Greater Manchester

Greater Manchester has the creative industries as a key growth sector, with particular focus on music, screen and broadcasting, games and createch and performing arts. It is home to world-class organisations and venues such as Factory International and Co-op Live as well as grassroots creative hubs like Islington Mill and Grit Studios. Content created at MediaCityUK and Space Studios or filmed on location is beamed and streamed around the world. SODA, RNCM, the University of Salford and University of Manchester's Creative Manchester are at the heart of an integrated approach to growing a skilled workforce.

North East

North East includes the creative industries as a priority in the draft local growth plan and has achieved a 67% in job growth in the sectors since 2015. Areas of growth include screen, software, music and writing with significant investments such as the £450 million development of Crown Work Studios and the Centre for Writing.

South Yorkshire

South Yorkshire's creative and cultural industries are worth £2 billion to the regional economy and are growing fast. Strengths and opportunities include games and interactive entertainment; media and entertainment production including live events and audience tech; music and audio alongside practitioner strengths in early years and creative health models of working. The region also has strengths in advertising and marketing; design, printing and publishing services.

Tees Valley

Tees Valley's Strategic Economic Plan identified digital and creative, and culture and tourism, as two of seven priorities with an initial growth programme of £20.5 million – in delivery since 2020. Screen, music, festivals and visual arts were identified as key growth subsectors. Tees Valley's approach seeks to build resilience and support sector growth through investment in infrastructure, skills and business support. The region recently announced its £160m government funded Investment Zone, which will focus on digital and creative industries and the connections between the two.

York and North Yorkshire

York and North Yorkshire has creative industries as one of five priority sectors. York, the UK's only UNESCO City of Media Arts, is recognised for excellence in film, TV, games and immersive tech; with local companies creating VFX for global distribution and digital storytellers producing immersive heritage experiences for national institutions. The University of York is leading on R&D in live performance through CoSTAR (Convergent Screen Technologies And performance in Realtime) Live Lab and the region's distinctive mix of urban-rural-coastal is home to a year-round programme of World class art, literature and music festivals.

West Yorkshire

West Yorkshire has identified the creative industries as a priority in its local growth plan, with particular focus on music, screen, fashion and textiles, convergent tech and games. Bradford is the world's first UNESCO city of film with ambitions to build a thriving screen sector as a legacy of its year as UK City of Culture. Assets in the region include Production Park and Channel 4 and investment is driven through '*You Can Make it Here*', a suite of support for the self employed and small businesses.

Glossary

Arts Council England –

Arm's length non-departmental public body of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport that champions and invests in art and culture.

Arts Council England Grassroots music sector –

Encompasses a range of organisations including rehearsal and recording studios, venues, festivals, and promoters.

Audio-visual Tax Credit –

Tax relief that can be claimed on audio-visual expenditure by certain businesses

BookTrust –

BookTrust is the UK's largest children's reading charity with a history that stretches back over 100 years.

Bootcamps –

Training and skills development opportunities.

British Business Bank –

An operationally independent economic development bank owned by the Department for Business and Trade, dedicated to helping small businesses, with head office in Sheffield.

British Library North –

The British Library North project aims to deliver a new British Library presence in Leeds.

Community Health –

Broad approach to health and wellbeing of people, often outside of formal healthcare systems.

Create Growth Programme –

DCMS funded package of targeted support to high growth creative businesses.

Creative cluster –

Clusters of creative and cultural industries, considered to be key drivers of growth.

Creative Industry Sector Plan Taskforce –

A group of creative industries specialists tasked with developing the sector's plan aligned with the national industrial strategy.

Creative PEC – Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre –

Collaborative research centre for the creative industries, led by Newcastle University with the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), and funded by the UKRI via the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Creative UK –

Not-for-profit organisation that supports the creative industries in the UK.

GaMaYo –

Network for games developers in Yorkshire and the North.

Game Republic –

Support success in the games industry in Yorkshire and the North.

High End TV Skills Fund –

Supports the longevity and quality of crew and talent for the UK's high-end TV industry.

Information Asymmetry –

Where one party has more or better information than the other.

Intellectual Property –

Original creation such as story, invention or symbol.

Local Growth Plan –

Strategy developed within a specific region and aligned with national priorities to drive economic growth.

Mayoral Strategic Authorities –

Combined authorities led by a directly elected Mayor with increased power over transport, housing, skills, regeneration, public safety and health.

MMF Accelerator –

Music Managers Forum which supports independent artists, songwriters, DJs and producer managers to build greater commercial sustainability including offering 12-month grants of up to £12,000, alongside expert-led professional development training.

National Poetry Centre –

The vision for a new national home for poetry in Leeds spearheaded by the Poet Laureate Simon Armitage.

New Writing North –

Fosters opportunities for writers and supports talented people from all backgrounds to achieve their creative ambitions.

Northern Creative Corridor –

The Northern Creative Corridor is a partnership initiative aimed at connecting creative clusters across Northern England to drive regional growth in the creative industries.

Northern Music Network –

Collective with priorities to showcase Northern talent, share best industry practices, present a united and inclusive voice and create to opportunities to promote a sustainable music industry.

Northern narrative –

The way that places and people in the North of England may be misrepresented.

**Pan-regional Collaboration/
Partnership –**

Partnerships across different regions, such as the North of England.

Power-up –

An ambitious, long-term initiative that supports Black music creators and industry professionals and executives, as well as addressing anti-Black racism and racial disparities in the music sector.

PPL Momentum Accelerator –

Targeted scheme to support the development of outstanding artists and bands who are writing their own music, and future industry professionals, outside London.

The RSA – Royal Society for Arts –

The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce.

Screen Alliance North –

Partnership of four screen agencies with focus on skills development.

The Great Northern Games Discord –

Brings together collectives and events across Yorkshire and the North.

The Great North Partnership –

North of England Mayoral-Led partnership to drive economic growth.

The Green Book –

Guidance issued by HM Treasury on how to appraise policies, programmes and projects.

UKRI –

National funding agency investing in science and research in the UK sponsored by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.



