Creative Higher Education Strategic Framework

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Contents

Foreword	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction	7
The Mission	13
Vision Statements	14
Recommendations	16
Conclusion	20
Annex A	21
Annex B	36
Annex C	38

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Foreword

This document emanates from a series of collective conversations held over the past several years about the connection between our world-leading creative industries and the higher education pipeline that fuels them. Together, they form a creative ecosystem within which cultural offers and creative businesses grow and innovate, supported by a wide-reaching and diverse educational offer aimed at developing new creative professionals and providing ongoing development to those already working or otherwise involved in cultural activities throughout our country. That ecosystem, however, is under threat.

Years of sustained financial pressure and persistent budget reductions across higher education and the cultural sectors are threatening the infrastructure underpinning this system. A growing number of HE providers are closing creative courses and relevant spaces due to dwindling public funding. Cutting courses and closing spaces does more than reduce graduate numbers or creative output. It directly threatens our economy and society by stripping away vital community hubs and cultural spaces. Such losses weaken businesses both within and beyond the creative sector by eroding essential cultural infrastructure that supports community cohesion and generates innovation through shared problem-solving; something we desperately need to tackle 21st-century challenges like climate change, mis-and disinformation, and caring for an ageing population. Left unchecked, this decline threatens the vitality and wellbeing of local communities—starving local regeneration and prosperity efforts of the creative energy required for success and hollowing out public entertainment and grassroots groups like choirs, orchestras, and art classes.

Existing and fragmented approaches to policy and funding across the educational and cultural sectors exacerbate these threats by failing to acknowledge the deep inter-connectedness between creative education, social wellbeing and our economic lives. This project has, therefore, been concerned with articulating that wide-ranging impact and value of creative higher education as a starting point for drafting a strategic framework for securing that ecosystem into the future.

This framework sets out a decisive, long-term vision for creative higher education and a blueprint for sustaining its vital contributions to both our economy and society. Our blueprint outlines cross-cutting enablers to signal clearly the systemic shifts needed from policymakers, institutions, and industry partners alike. By aligning our collective efforts behind these priorities, we can build a resilient sector, unlock the transformative impact of creative education and deliver lasting transformation to the economy and our society.



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Executive Summary

1. This strategic framework, commissioned by GuildHE Creative on behalf of the whole higher education (HE) sector, provides a blueprint to recognise creative HE as inherent and vital to our national infrastructure. While the creative industries comprise a major economic growth sector, the higher education institutions fueling them face systemic financial strain and uncoordinated, siloed policies that undermine their long-term sustainability.

2. The framework provided here establishes a strategic mission and vision for creative higher education. It outlines a collaborative approach between educational institutions, policymakers, and industry partners to strengthen the ecosystem, advancing institutional capacity, creative sectors, local communities, and global standing. Unlike other disciplines that often isolate education, research, and civic activities into separate streams, creative HE seamlessly integrates these three areas into a unified, high-impact ecosystem.

3. Creative higher education forms part of our national strategic infrastructure, driving economic, social, and cultural prosperity through integrated research, education, and civic partnerships. Transcending conventional classroom models, the sector functions as an industry-embedded talent engine: **students learn as active practitioners from day one** through live enterprise, technical experimentation, and direct industry collaboration. This real-world alignment is sustained by dual-professional academic and institutional leaders who bring active creative practice directly into governance, research, and teaching.

4. As an essential driver of the UK's economic dynamism and cultural life, creative higher education supplies 75% of the workforce for a **£145bn growth sector** while anchoring communities through shared facilities, civic engagement, and applied research. The public-facing galleries, theatres, rehearsal spaces, and specialised equipment of creative higher education institutions support local practitioners while continuously generating cultural work that enriches their surrounding areas. Data from the Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Survey showed that, in the 2024/25 academic year, there were more **than 4.2 million public visitors** to HE performance, gallery and museum spaces. This shows how significantly creative education providers serve as regional hubs that sustain the cultural economy and improve lives beyond those directly involved with the universities and colleges themselves.

5. Additionally, creative HE drives economic growth, social mobility, and community wellbeing by equipping students with essential technical and transversal skills that global businesses desire and which prove resilient (and increasingly vital) in the face of ongoing technological and labour market changes. Through its applied pedagogy, creative HE widens access to education for underrepresented and neurodiverse learners while fostering cross-industry innovation. Ultimately, sustaining creative practice is vital for confronting modern societal challenges such as climate change, improving health, and tackling misinformation, spurring business development, and enriching cultural and civic life.

6. Creative higher education delivers exceptional returns across **skills**, **research**, and **cultural placemaking**, but it does so in the face of systemic friction. Outdated funding regimes, misaligned performance metrics, and fragmented policy frameworks continually fail to reflect the holistic value of creative graduates and institutional activities. Furthermore, destabilising creative higher education undermines Government priorities for social mobility and regional equity. Any contraction risks creating an elitist ecosystem:

arts education becomes the preserve of private schools and affluent students, while creative industries retreat to major cities, restricting access to a privileged few. We must work towards better defining the full value of creative education and the ways it actively supports regional prosperity and social mobility in order to secure the widest opportunity for all to participate within and benefit from it.

7. The strength of our creative education ecosystem rests in the dynamic synergy between different types of institutions, from specialist creative HE and FE institutions to large-scale, multi-faculty universities. Operating across urban, coastal, and rural communities, specialist creative providers function as vibrant cultural hubs. By pairing industry-informed curriculum with creative innovation, they fuel regional enterprise, expand access to creative education, and foster thriving communities. Without targeted strategic support for specialist institutions, key regional talent pipelines and business incubation opportunities in strategic growth sectors will dwindle. Concurrently, multi-faculty institutions delivering creative disciplines fulfil an indispensable civic role, invigorating regional culture and driving cross-disciplinary innovation. Preserving both higher education models ensures a robust, interconnected creative ecosystem spanning the entire country.

8. Because the creative ecosystem is deeply interdependent, sustaining and enhancing its impact demands joined-up policy that recognises how skills, place, research and innovation actively reinforce one another. The UK's creative industries consistently outpace the wider economy, but stalled talent pipelines threaten national competitiveness, local prosperity, and social mobility. Failing to address a weakening creative HE ecosystem undermines Britain's own industrial strategy and ambitions for prosperity in every postcode.

9. What follows in this document is a strategic framework and blueprint for addressing these issues in a way that will build a strong foundation for the future prosperity of creativity in all its forms. We have provided examples throughout this document and on the **GuildHE website** of the value which informs this framework, along with insights gathered from higher education providers, industry leaders, sector bodies, and policymakers.

10. To oversee and inform the analysis of that evidence and the drafting of this framework, GuildHE Creative formed a taskforce comprised of 22 senior representatives from the creative, education, and policy sectors, including Arts Council England (ACE), Creative UK, Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade (DBIST), Department for Education (DfE), Research England, Skills England, the British Academy, Conservatoires UK, and The Council for Higher Education in Art & Design (CHEAD). This work was crafted in tandem with the **Creative Education Coalition** (CEC), building on its **updated manifesto** by translating a vision of a strong creative higher education sector into practical interventions across funding, regulation and policy to secure it.

11. Understanding the deeply interconnected nature of these deliverables, this strategic framework establishes a unified, actionable blueprint built upon cross-cutting enablers. It identifies and proposes targeted initiatives to be undertaken by key stakeholders including Government, regulators, funders, industry, regional bodies, and creative higher education providers themselves. Rather than calling for substantial new financial investment, the framework focuses on strategic alignment to fully realise our existing capacity.

12. The framework's mission is to unleash the full potential of creative higher education by securing policies, funding, and regulatory frameworks that enable it to power sustainable economic growth and cultural prosperity into the future. To advance this core mission, we've outlined three strategic visions for the future of creative higher education broadly:

    a. Creative higher education is recognised as critical civic infrastructure that powers place-based development and growth,

including civic participation, regional prosperity and local pride;

b. A pioneering creative-practice research and innovation ecosystem is sustained and its unique value as an indispensable driver of the UK's cultural leadership, economic growth and ability to solve 21st century challenges is recognised through targeted investment and regulatory parity;
c. An agile creative education system is integrated with industry and community to power growth, social mobility, and societal wellbeing.

These visions capture our ambitions for the future and will be the basis of determining the success of this effort as we move into the next stage of this work with stakeholders.

13. Key recommendations for securing those visions include strengthening regional creative infrastructure collaborations and national industry-HE partnerships; improving the alignment between Government departments, regulators and funding approaches; innovating the means of measuring the comprehensive impact of creative HE, and establishing a creative industries pact for skills.

14. Additional background on the development of this framework and its supporting rationale can be found in the supplementary materials. Annex A details the evidence base and rationale behind our strategic visions and cross-cutting enablers. Annex B describes the project's governance structure and how evidence was gathered to inform this work.





Introduction

The Opportunity

15. The UK's creative sector represents a major economic and cultural success story, **expanding at double the pace of the national economy** and designated by Skills England as the **premier high-growth employment sector** for 2025, with strong growth projected through 2030. Higher education is central to this performance, with **graduates comprising approximately 75% of the creative workforce**; significantly above the 51% national average across all sectors. Globally, creative skills are increasingly recognised as vital to economic resilience and innovation.

16. Recognising that the creative industries generate **£145bn** annually and are growing at more than four times the national rate, the Government has affirmed the need to support and celebrate this key economic driver. This strategic framework establishes how to sustain and strengthen the higher education sector that underpins these industries, redefining the purpose of creative HE, championing its essential value, and creating the structural conditions required for long-term success.

17. Creative higher education is deeply rooted in the places in which it operates. Students, staff, graduates, studios, workshops, theatres, galleries, research, public programmes, and partnerships form part of the cultural, social, and economic fabric of towns, cities, and regions. Data from the Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Survey showed that in the 2024/25 academic year this brought in **over 4.2 million public visitors** to HE performance, gallery and museum spaces alone. Creative education providers thereforeserve as regional hubs that accelerate the cultural economy.

18. Creative HE providers act as cultural and civic anchors, bringing together education, creative practice, research, enterprise, industry, and communities. This matters because prosperous places are not created by economic growth alone. They depend on cultural confidence, social connection, participation, identity and the ability of people to imagine and shape their futures. Creative higher education contributes to these foundations while also developing the people, ideas, businesses and networks that drive regional economies. Its distinctive contribution is therefore both cultural and economic, individual and collective, immediate and long-term.

19. The strongest examples within creative HE seamlessly integrate cultural activity, community engagement, education, enterprise, and regional development, providing a connected contribution to place and society. For example Norwich University of the Arts, embedded in the cultural infrastructure of the East of England, provides specialist technical and enterprise education in visual arts, gaming, architecture, film, performing arts and design, co-created with local businesses and regional partners. In Games Design alone, there is very strong community infrastructure with networks such as Norfolk Game Developers to the Norwich Games Festival as well as a local labour force that is growing year on year.

20. Creative higher education pedagogy yields broad economic and social benefits, sustaining a resilient, future-ready workforce both within and beyond the creative sector. Creative thinking is now a **top 5 critical skill for businesses globally**. By combining technical mastery, entrepreneurial adaptability, freelance capability, and lifelong professional development, creative HE prepares practitioners to navigate shifting labor markets and maintain long-term career

stability.

21. Academic staff, technicians, and leaders maintain dual roles as industry leaders, artistic directors, and board members, creating a mutually beneficial link between higher education and cultural organisations. Through accessible and engaging creative learning environments, our educational pedagogy also nurtures hidden talent and advances social mobility by converting individual potential into real success and transforms diverse ways of thinking into strategic problem-solving capabilities. This reinforces our core view that creative higher education is vital for access and participation, as well as for advancing 21st-century teaching methods that cater to varied learner traits and abilities, including neurodivergence and students with other additional learning needs.

22. Creative practice also plays an increasingly vital role in addressing key societal challenges. It contributes to environmental efforts, combats misinformation, fosters community cohesion, and enhances healthcare through arts therapy and social prescribing. This is because art enables society to explore what it is to be human and to deepen our empathy and appreciation for others' experiences. As demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, entertainment and creative expression **support individual and collective wellbeing**. For example research conducted by **UCL** highlights how individuals frequently turned to the arts to cope with pandemic-related challenges. During this period 1 in 5 people increased their engagement with arts activity and 1 in 8 watched a higher volume of online arts performances. Furthermore, creative practice serves as a fundamental driver for confronting societal injustices and challenging established norms. Because creativity is indispensable to a thriving society, educating citizens to sustain and advance creative practice is essential.

23. By embedding design thinking, practical problem-solving, and advanced research and development (R&D) expertise into the graduate talent pipeline, creative higher education institutions convert practitioner inquiries into dynamic regional enterprises. **Serving as an R&D force multiplier** across the UK economy, creative research and innovation fuels intellectual property generation, creative technology advancements, and commercial applications across digital media, advanced manufacturing, and the service industry. For example the Global Smart Lab at Winchester School of Art brings together expertise in creative computing, AR/VR, AI technologies, inclusive design, smart service design, smart textiles, and data visualisation. In its collaboration with the University of Southampton, the Lab connects with leading centres in computing, engineering, life sciences, health, marine sciences and beyond, including collaborations with the Web Science Institute, the National Oceanography Centre, the Research Centre on Ageing, and the Alan Turing Institute.

24. While creative higher education provides these essential social, cultural, and economic foundations, the sector's full potential remains constrained by systemic challenges that hamper its growth and sustainability. Unlocking its true capacity requires directly addressing the policy, regulatory, and financial barriers that currently limit its scope and impact.

25. Because the Government departments addressing these respective areas operate without sufficient alignment, policymakers rarely recognise these constraints. There has therefore been a sustained pattern of funding cuts and policy decisions which undermine creative provision. Examples of this include: the complete removal of the high-cost funding subsidy in the OfS Strategic Priorities Grant; creative subjects omitted from the list of prescribed LLE courses; the redesign of the AHRC Doctoral Training Partnerships programme to limit applications from smaller-scale institutions by half; and the restructuring of the UKRI budgets and discontinuation of Quality Related funds relating to research culture, policy support and participatory research.

26. While acknowledging the broader network of systems supporting the creative industries and cultural conveners, activities within this strategy framework are strictly confined to

Government, regulators, funders, industry, and creative HE providers, for which the HE sector has most influence over.

Growth and impact challenges

27. While the Government highlights the creative industries as a key sector for growth, creative higher education remains constrained by fragmented systems across post-16 skills, research and innovation, regional policy, and civic engagement. In reality, creative HE operates as an interconnected ecosystem where teaching, research, innovation, and community partnerships mutually reinforce one another.

28. Crucial to the Government's ambitions to generate prosperity in every postcode are creative higher education institutions, which act as catalysts for place-based regeneration. A clear example is Arts University Plymouth, which functions as a regional anchor in the South West. Through its **public gallery**, **MIRROR**, and open-access initiatives like **Fab Lab South West**, the university embeds local community engagement directly into student pedagogy, providing free public cultural programming while equipping regional citizens and enterprises with digital design capabilities.

29. Because teaching, research and place are distinctive policy areas for policy makers and funders, this strategic framework has needed to accommodate this through the development of 3 distinctive vision statements. However, current regulatory systems artificially separate research, innovation, and core teaching, leading to disjointed decisions which compound negative effects felt uniquely by creative higher education institutions and the creative industries. This is because there is a mutually-reinforcing enrichment within creative disciplines that requires input from research, teaching, knowledge exchange and innovation activities simultaneously. These cannot be teased out and treated as separate within creative disciplines, which is what makes them unique amongst other types of academic areas of knowledge and practice.

30. Furthermore, UK research funding, assessment, and regulatory structures can struggle to include and evaluate creative research, despite its effectiveness in addressing critical social issues like social cohesion and human rights. Outputs from creative research are diverse and typically not traditional journal articles or monographs and are therefore largely omitted from citation metrics, metascience studies, and AI processes, all being used to articulate the value of research and leverage the support of Government. The rapid development and adoption of these areas is a concern, as we risk losing sight of a rich, distinct, and valuable part of the UK research capability.

31. Due to the multiplicity of the creative disciplines and industries, there is a challenge in representation and coordination too. According to the **DCMS definitions established in 2001**, the creative industries span advertising and marketing; architecture; crafts and visual arts; design and fashion; film, TV and radio; IT and computer games; music and performing arts; publishing and literature; and museums, galleries and libraries. Even within each defined industry here, there are multiple sub sectors that behave, adapt and create differently, they have varying degrees of scale, funding and investment as well as different social contexts, cultural capitals and attractiveness to varying audiences and demographics. This presents a unique challenge for Government and funders when attempting to recognise, reward and measure effectiveness and current structures do not disaggregate subsectors effectively.

32. Another fundamental disconnect persists within the current skills policy landscape too. Although creative HE equips graduates with vital technical, digital, and transversal skills increasingly in demand across the globe, existing frameworks present significant barriers to delivering those graduates into the

workforce in a sustainable way. They tend to underestimate creative expertise demand and reactively target immediate short-term shortages rather than addressing structural coordination needs and workforce planning challenges – issues further complicated by high levels of self-employment and the dominance of SMEs in our national economy.

33. The core challenge is therefore not simply increasing funding for creative higher education to increase its impact, but instead identifying how we might bring together the segmented policy systems for teaching, research and civic engagement to better report, reflect, and support this unique and collaborative model. For example, the economic contribution of a graduate may not appear in conventional employment data; the value of a public programme may not be captured through existing institutional economic impact measures; and the long-term contribution of a specialist facility to a region is rarely visible within short-term funding frameworks. This is particularly problematic for specialist creative institutions whose value often extends well beyond the number of students educated to providing cultural infrastructure, specialist facilities, public engagement, professional networks, talent pipelines and civic activity that would otherwise be unavailable in their region.

34. Re-designing and building new interconnected frameworks to empower the creative sector's future demands a unified, cross-sector collaborative effort to articulate a blueprint for doing so. This strategic framework sets forth the approach to guide that collective commitment.

What is at risk: the impact of inaction

35. While creative higher education is capable of accelerating nationwide growth, opportunity, and living standards, it cannot continue to deliver impact amidst declining resources and fragmented policy decisions. Continued reductions in creative higher education provision, risk limiting access for diverse talent and deepening socioeconomic inequalities. Reduction in creative skills, research and innovation threaten to weaken the nation's economic and cultural vitality precisely when national industrial strategy aims for sectoral expansion and place-based regional growth.

National infrastructure

36. The UK's global reputation in creative education is supported by strong international investment and student mobility. Rooted in a long history, specialist creative providers were intentionally founded during the Industrial Revolution to fuse artistic craft and design with industrial innovation, embedding creative education directly into the nation's economic framework. For example, the Royal College of Art was established in 1837 as the Government School of Design to support national economic growth through industrial design. Beyond London, regional institutions like the Norwich School of Design were established in 1845 with a similar purpose. Today, this specialised ecosystem provides a unique competitive edge globally. Furthermore, international models, ranging from European Union frameworks to planned economies, demonstrate that creative higher education is a prized asset that enhances global competitiveness and strategic soft power. This is why **DCMS see the creative industries** as "a crucial part of the UK's global influence and economic growth by building soft power through affinity, legitimacy and trust.

37. Deeply rooted in the physical and social fabric of their local communities, creative higher education institutions serve as hubs of creative engagement. They function as dynamic spaces where technical expertise, academic research, experimentation, cultural expression, and civic participation intersect. For example, Arts University Bournemouth's Plastic Research and Innovation Centre collaborated with a local Dorset circular recycling company to hold workshops with

local children to encourage them, and their parents, to think more critically about plastics and their role in everyday life through a form of visual play. Using plastic litter from Bournemouth Beach, visitors built sculptures to represent their views and understanding of the lifecycle of plastic. In Hartlepool, The Northern School of Art launched Rockpools in 2026, a creative and cultural programme partnered with local businesses to co-deliver community creative activity for everyone in the city. Drawing inspiration from local artists, the region's maritime history and the new film and TV studio space, this programme utilised the region's identity and physicality to improve the lives of local people. Operating across rural, coastal, and urban areas, specialist creative providers in HE and FE combine highly specialised, industry-informed training with innovation which stimulates local economic development, broadens educational access, bolsters national competitiveness, and cultivates vibrant local ecosystems. Without strategic support for specialist creative providers, key regional talent pipelines and business incubation in strategic growth sectors will be compromised.

38. Many multi-faculty universities also offer creative programmes, with several evolving directly from historic creative arts institutions that expanded over time, such as Heriot Watt University which was founded in 1821 as the School of Arts of Edinburgh, Kingston University began as Kingston School of Science and Art founded in 1899 and Anglia Ruskin University founded as the Cambridge school of Art in 1858. Many multi-faculty universities also maintain distinctive arts offerings such as East 15 Acting School of the University of Essex and Winchester School of Art as part of the University of Southampton. These universities similarly serve as vital anchors for civic partnership and responsibility, enriching local culture and advancing the connections between creative discipline, interdisciplinary collaboration, and economic and societal prosperity, but often do so using more traditional models of teaching. They still, however, offer a great deal of creative infrastructure such as galleries and performance spaces that are accessible to the public and fund community assets, for example the University of Derby rescuing the Derby Playhouse in 2008 and St Andrews University acquiring The Byre Theatre.

39. The fundamental strength of creative HE lies in the synthesis and coexistence of both specialist and multi-faculty educational models.

Skills and employment

40. As the global economy faces unprecedented structural shifts and AI rapidly reshapes traditional skill sets and labour market demand, non-creative disciplines are increasingly adopting the studio-based, project-led pedagogy pioneered by creative faculties **such as at Norwich University of the Arts**. These new pedagogical approaches emphasise adaptability, iterative problem-solving, and non-linear inquiry. Weakening creative HE risks undermining the very source of these adaptable learning approaches which are proving increasingly indispensable to most disciplines.

41. Furthermore, as AI and real-time computing disrupt creative production, practitioners require continuous upskilling. Without a strong higher education CPD ecosystem, the domestic workforce will fall behind overseas competitors, forcing UK studios to offshore technical roles.

42. Creative careers are predominantly project-based and freelance. Without university training in enterprise, financial agility, and self-employment resilience, graduates will enter the sector without the operational tools needed for career longevity, leading to severe mid-career churn and loss of mature talent which will hamper industry growth and reputation.

Social mobility

43. Creative higher education is a **vital engine of social mobility**. Through tactile, applied pedagogy and inclusive studio cultures, creative providers offer a **transformative entry point** where neurodiverse students, non-linear thinkers, and underrepresented

communities find **alternative ways to communicate, participate and express themselves** in order to thrive. Beyond the classroom, this commitment enriches local places through civic initiatives and public culture, for example **Havering London**, a newly established culture and placemaking organisation created to deliver Havering's Cultural Strategy, 'A Good Life'. Supported by the Arts Council alongside staff, students, and resources from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, the initiative includes evaluating how building creative digital skills can drive local economic growth, reinforce cultural identity, and advance an inclusive, sustainable digital economy.

44. Whilst the creative industries themselves have a long way to go in improving hiring practices, access to the qualifications needed to be successful must be retained. Diminishing or cutting off these pathways risks shutting this talent out of higher education and skilled employment altogether, reinforcing systemic inequalities, deepening structural unemployment and increasing welfare dependencies. Without social mobility support from the primary talent pipeline, creative industries will become accessible only to those with family wealth and London networks, completely reversing decades of social mobility gains across the UK's regions.

Economic growth: local to national and international

45. Creative HE institutions serve as regional incubators. Without them, early-stage, practitioner-led prototypes and startups stall before reaching market viability, diminishing national intellectual property generation and venture creation. Examples of these activities include **Workroom Grow** by Arts University Plymouth, **InnovationRCA** by Royal College of Art and the **SPARK Business Incubation Centre** at the University of Wolverhampton. Without a steady pipeline of graduates equipped with applied, practitioner-led skills across the country, high-growth sectors will either centralise entirely around London or offshore digital and design capabilities abroad.

46. Britain holds a **leading global position** across **immersive media**, **video games**, virtual production, and generative design. Should higher education scale back practice-led research, our country risks forfeiting the foundational R&D that enhances industry. Cutting-edge technological innovations from AI and robotics to medical devices and aerospace struggle to achieve real-world adoption when stripped of human-centred design, ethical considerations, ergonomics, and intuitive usability. Eroding creative research and innovation severs the vital link converting pioneering scientific breakthroughs into viable, user-focused market applications.

47. A lack of Government investment in this capability risks diminishing the reach and effectiveness of the UK's wider industrial and innovation plans. Prioritising pure science, mathematics, and engineering at the expense of creative practice starves the core translation mechanism of practitioner inquiry and creative design that ensures such technical investments achieve widespread adoption, practical functionality, and commercial success. This underscores the growing imperative for interdisciplinary practices across higher education and research. As highlighted by leaders such as Professor Sir Ian Chapman, embedding interdisciplinary approaches is essential to bridging technical innovation with creative execution and solving complex societal challenges. For example, the **Centre for Performance Science** is a joint initiative between the Royal College of Music and Imperial College London, combining expertise in music, science, medicine, and business to investigate performance across disciplines. **GSA Rural Lab** is an interdisciplinary research centre at the Glasgow School of Art's Highlands & Islands campus near Forres, Moray, driving sustainable economic growth and cultural transformation in rural spaces.

48. With the HE sector under acute financial strain and recent policy shifts diminishing arts funding, failure to act puts the future of the UK's creative practice at serious risk.

The Mission

To unleash the full potential of creative higher education by securing policies, funding, and frameworks to enable it to power sustainable economic growth and secure the UK's cultural prosperity into the future.



Photo credit
Rocia Chacon / The Place, London Contemporary Dance School

Vision Statements

49. To deliver this mission, we have articulated visions for the future creative higher education ecosystem. These vision statements include the existing impacts delivered by creative institutions to education, the economy and society, but also signal what is required in order to secure the UK's economic resilience, civic vitality, and soft power, all of which rely on a strong creative higher education ecosystem.

Creative higher education is recognised as critical civic infrastructure that powers place-based development and growth, including civic participation, regional prosperity and local pride.

Creative higher education builds the social, cultural, and civic foundations necessary for sustainable growth across the UK. To realise its full impact, policy solutions will formally recognise and fund the delivery of public cultural infrastructure to enhance HE institutional practices.

The benefits of creative civic infrastructure will continue to ripple across the entire country: energising local businesses with creative talent, strengthening community cohesion for families and residents, and providing public services with dynamic partners for social and economic innovation.

Creative higher education will be funded and supported to continue to transform towns and cities - creative HE providers will provide the mechanisms in communities and regional economies to boost locally specific needs vocationally. It will also stimulate higher living standards and vibrant towns and cities through continuing to build cultural significance over time.

Photo credit
Arts University Plymouth



A pioneering creative-practice research and innovation ecosystem is sustained and its unique value as an indispensable driver of the UK's cultural leadership, economic growth and ability to solve 21st century challenges is recognised through targeted investment and regulatory parity.

Excellent creative education depends on vibrant and practice-led research and innovation, including the skills to interrogate, evaluate, ideate and innovate which boosts enterprise, research impact and ultimately innovates the future of teaching and learning.

Creativity drives growth and place-based prosperity through entrepreneurship - creative disciplines will continue to generate solutions across all sectors and stimulate enterprise and innovation in the UK.

Creative research practice collaborates with other disciplines to tackle major societal challenges, including healthcare, environmental sustainability, and social cohesion, adding value through the specialised expertise in communicating complex ideas, engaging minds, and challenging perceptions.

An agile creative education system is integrated with industry and community to power growth, social mobility, and societal wellbeing.

Creative skills are recognised as vital drivers of cross-sector growth, fuelling business innovation across the entire economy while enriching civic life. Creative pedagogies build personal resilience and provide inclusive, empowering learning environments.

Through public exhibitions and shared practice, creative higher education sparks curiosity, deepens community engagement, and enhances societal wellbeing - deepening the resilience of our local communities which then power our modern economy.

Through deep industry integration, essential training for freelance careers, and continuous professional development, higher education specialists cultivate the technical mastery and entrepreneurial agility required for professional practice in order to sustain a globally-leading creative workforce equipped to thrive in a rapidly transitioning global landscape.

50. While our visions are structured around three recognised HE policy pillars, our evidence shows that creative education, research, and placemaking are inherently interconnected. To reflect this reality, our recommendations therefore are framed not as isolated initiatives, but as cross-cutting enablers designed to drive all three priorities through coordinated, collective action.

Recommendations

51. To achieve the stated mission and visions for creative HE, the following interventions should be implemented:

A: Forging Strategic Industry-HE Partnerships	By who
A1. Enhance national industry-HE links: Better align HEIs with national trade bodies to ensure skills, research and innovation provision matches regional and national long-term industry needs.	• HE providers • Industry
A2. Enhance cross-sector collaboration: Foster deeper Government, education, and industry collaboration, and evaluate national creative skills governance to ensure parity between higher and further education and across industry subsectors and enable better coordination.	• Central Government • HE providers • Industry • Local Government

B: Demonstrating the Comprehensive Impact of Creative HE	By who
B1. Coordinated Government policy-making: Formal and structured alignment between DBIST, DCMS, DfE and DHSC to maximise the potential of creative higher education, in particular its contribution to society, the economy, science and the goals of the Industrial Strategy.	• Central Government • HE providers • Industry • Local Government • Regulators
B2. Establish a cross-departmental metrics taskforce: DCMS, DfE, DBIST and DWP should establish a joint task force to overhaul the underlying data infrastructure used to measure the creative economy. The taskforce should focus on fixing foundational data gaps - specifically updating outdated SOC/SIC occupational classifications and resolving blind spots in Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) tracking - so that national datasets accurately capture freelance, self-employed, highly skilled and portfolio working patterns.	• Central Government • HE providers • Industry • Regulators
B3. Reform research, regulation and evaluation frameworks: Using the improved data classifications developed in B2, regulatory and funding bodies (such as UKRI, Research England, and the OfS) must overhaul how they evaluate creative higher education and allocate funding. Evaluation data must move beyond narrow	• Central Government • HE providers • Industry • Regulators • Funders

economic proxies like graduate starting salaries, traditional journal citations, and direct commercial income to reward wider socio-cultural and civic value.	
B4. Introduce longitudinal graduate impact tracking: Undertake large-scale, longitudinal tracking of creative higher education outcomes to establish international benchmarks and measure long-term socio-cultural contributions. Higher education providers must complement this data by leveraging alumni narratives to demonstrate the tangible economic and societal impact of creative education.	• Central Government • HE providers • Regulators

C: Access to Sustainable Funding	By who
C1. Reinstate Strategic Priority Grant funding for creative subjects and protect specialist provider funding lines in teaching and research to offset intensive contact hours and specialist facility costs.	• Central Government • Funders • Regulators
C2. Safeguard endangered subjects: Launch an independent review into vulnerable creative disciplines to establish a national subject-level resilience strategy and introduce targeted funding to protect high-cost, endangered subjects that deliver civic and practical value.	• Central Government • Funders • Regulators
C3. Ensure regulatory and funding processes actively champion specialist and creative provision rather than treating it as an outlier, embedding this support directly into the evaluation and success criteria for project and research bids; for example, mandate the inclusion of specialist institutions in consortium bids to fully leverage their unique expertise, acknowledging that many lack the internal capacity or scale to secure funding independently.	• Central Government • HE providers
C4. Enable HEIs to deliver adaptable, modular learning pathways funded by the LLE to better serve creative freelance practitioners and non-traditional students.	• Central Government • HE providers
C5. Explore other income sources: Investigate sector skills levies, business tax incentives, and the redistribution of unused apprenticeship levies to SMEs to **better serve the creative sector skills needs**.	• Central Government • Funders

D: Empowering Regional Ecosystems and Civic Infrastructure	By who
D1. Strengthen regional creative and cultural collaboration: All regions should establish partnerships which bring together creative HE, cultural organisations, industry, schools and FE, public services and communities to identify regional assets and gaps, establish	• Central Government • Local Government • Local industry partners

shared priorities and coordinate investment. This should work alongside, or strengthen, already developed cultural compacts such as Civic Agreements.	• HE providers • Charity sector
D2. Incentivise and introduce shared creative infrastructure: Government and regional authorities should support the wider use of creative HE facilities to stimulate place-based growth including studios, workshops, theatres, galleries, laboratories and production spaces by practitioners, graduates, businesses, cultural organisations and communities. This requires both capital investment and sustainable revenue funding.	• Central Government • Local Government • HE providers
D3. Build a Shared Regional Evidence Base: Regional bodies and HEIs should collaboratively map regional creative ecosystems, tracking graduate retention, cultural participation, and community impact to guide strategic investment.	• Skills England • Local Government • HE providers

E: Securing the Talent Pipeline and Widening Access	By who
E1. Rebuild Creative Pathways across education: Restore creative subjects in primary and secondary schools as a matter of urgency, supported by strengthened career advice to break down socio-economic barriers early. Reevaluate the post-16 curriculum reform to ensure that new T and V Levels do not compromise the agility required to reflect a rapidly changing industry.	• Central Government
E2. Coordinated regional outreach and access: Pair regional access partnerships with a national HE outreach strategy for creative education to expose young people to specialist creative pathways.	• Central Government • HE providers • Regulators
E3. Incentivise inclusive recruitment practices in creative industries to ensure that there are no barriers to participating in a creative career by building on the Social Mobility Commission, Creative UK and trade body advice.	• Central Government • Industry
E4. Establish a joint commitment from Government, higher education, and industry to counter damaging, low-value narratives of the value of creative degrees and decisively demonstrate the rigorous skills, productivity, and essential economic contribution of creative graduates.	• Central Government • HE providers • Industry • Local Government
E5. National transversal skills coordination: HE sector leaders should establish a coordinated framework that champions transversal creative skills across higher education curricula, supported by industry and Government advocacy for these competencies to improve public understanding of the value of creative degrees to national prosperity and enhance our value proposition.	• HE providers • National Government

E6. Enhance HE internal quality processes to enable more agile curriculum development based on research, innovation, and industry needs.	• HE providers • Industry

F: Driving Creative Innovation, Enterprise and Sustainable Work	By who
F1. Embed commercial and entrepreneurial expertise in curriculum: Mirror the Creative PEC Entrepreneurship Framework within HE curriculum to ensure graduates gain foundational knowledge in IP, marketing, sales, and freelance business management.	• HE providers • Industry
F2. Transform knowledge exchange metrics to recognise, reward and fund innovation of all scales and disciplines: broaden the HEIF funding mechanism from income generation to include financial, cultural and social impacts to the partner.	• Central Government • Funders
F3. Establish a creative industries pact for skills: Create a structured, co-funded programme between DCMS, industry and HEIs for work placements, apprenticeships, and mentoring to reduce the administrative burdens on HE while expanding access for underrepresented groups. A skills passport for freelancers, SMEs and the broader creative workforce would also support better coordination in CPD and drive rapid upskilling and cross-disciplinary research. Crucially, it positions creative practitioners as active co-designers in the development and responsible adoption of AI and emerging technologies, rather than passive workers adapting to technological change.	• Central Government • HE providers • Industry • Local Government

G: Pioneering CreaTech and Technological Integration	By who
G1. DBIST and DCMS should fund Technical Excellence Networks that pair specialist creative higher education providers with Technical Excellence Colleges, other FE colleges and designated industry partners to pioneer new pathways in CreaTech and AI. This initiative will deliver measurable outcomes, including co-designed CreaTech and AI modules approved for delivery under Growth and Skills Levy apprenticeship frameworks. This would also support the Post-16 White Paper aspirations for better collaboration between HE and FE providers.	• Skills England • DCMS • FE providers • HE providers
G2. Ensuring creative HE providers have access to innovation and technology funding that enables investment in the specialist equipment, facilities and expertise required to teach and experiment with emerging technologies.	• Central Government • Funders

Conclusion

52. Throughout the consultation and development of this strategic framework, numerous inspiring examples surfaced demonstrating the transformative impact of creative higher education. It plays a crucial role in building a thriving economy and supporting a vibrant society. A wealth of case studies showcasing these contributions is available on the **GuildHE website** and in the supplementary Annex to complement this framework. However, these successes often occur despite existing regulatory and funding frameworks, rather than because of them. Creative research, practice, and non-linear employment patterns remain poorly understood and are not well captured in traditional academic and employment metrics.

53. To fulfil Government and industry ambitions for a dynamic creative ecosystem that empowers local communities and drives economic growth, further action is essential to secure creative higher education provision, the skills pipeline into the creative industries, and the opportunity for all to access creative and cultural activities within their communities and localities.

54. The recommendations are the culmination of 18 months of intense work by colleagues from higher and further education, the creative industries, and Government. What results is a blueprint for a stronger, more coordinated and purposeful collaborative way of working to secure the future of creative higher education. It is not exhaustive, nor does it present an argument fully formed. It is intended to set out a starting point, from which we can begin to work together to outline steps towards the visions outlined within. Sector representative bodies, Government departments, and regulatory agencies all have roles to play in delivering these recommendations; there may be other organisations who also wish to get involved, which we welcome. GuildHE will provide a coordinating function, working with all stakeholders to determine how the suggestions here within can be implemented in practice. We will monitor progress against the recommendations and visions as a means of assessing the effectiveness of this framework, alongside monitoring the associated risks over time.

55. **If you would like to get involved to hear more or to support the implementation of this work, please email creativeHE@guildhe.ac.uk.**



Photo credit
London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art

Annex A: Rationale



Introduction

56. Designed to contextualise this strategy and its cross-cutting enablers, this Annex draws on findings from our call for evidence to set out the policy backdrop, sector challenges, and the rationale for proposed actions. It also highlights exemplary practices ready to scale across the sector, supported by targeted funding, regulation, and partnerships. We hope this will bring the visions and enablers to life. Further details on specific actions we believe would support the ambitions of the strategy by key stakeholders in creative HE (HE providers, local and national Government, employers, and cultural institutions) can be found in Annex B.

57. This Annex reflects on creative HE's core purpose and missions, and is framed around the three guiding areas of practice administered by different parts of Government and regulation:

    a. Regions, Engaged Citizenship and Civic Responsibility
    b. Research and Innovation
    c. Curriculum, Skills and Student Experience

Regions, Engaged Citizenship and Civic Responsibility

Creative higher education is recognised as critical civic infrastructure that powers place-based development and growth, including civic participation, regional prosperity and local pride.

Photo credit
Jonny Walton / Leeds Arts University

The Opportunity

58. Creative higher education institutions are deeply embedded in the social and physical fabric of their localities. They serve as civic anchor institutions and regional convenors where research, technical mastery, experimentation, ideation, culture, and public engagement occur simultaneously. We want every region of the UK to be able to draw on the distinctive contribution of creative higher education.

59. Without creative higher education, regional devolution policies related to place improvement will fail to deliver inclusive growth because cultural confidence, social cohesion, and creative agency are not optional by-products of economic success; they are the prerequisite foundations on which regional economic resilience depends.

60. Creative higher education transforms towns and cities by building the social and cultural foundations of communities, where participation in culture and local creative projects improves health, wellbeing, social mobility, and democratic dialogue. Furthermore, through entrepreneurship, education, research, and partnership, creative HE institutions build more inclusive places and expand who has the agency to shape the future.

61. The strongest examples demonstrate this integrated model. An in-curriculum project partnering with a local community, business or charity can simultaneously give students professional experience, help a community address a local challenge, strengthen relationships between an institution and its region, and generate new ideas or opportunities for local organisations. A workshop, theatre, gallery or digital laboratory can support teaching and research while also providing space for practitioners, graduates, businesses and communities. Retention of graduate enterprises in a place can contribute to local economic growth while strengthening the region's cultural life.

    a. According to **evidence** gathered by the Creative Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC), ONS Business Register Employment Survey (BRES) data suggests that creative industries employment made up 4.2% of all business employment in the UK in 2015, rising to 4.5% in 2019 and staying at that level in 2021. **Other research** by PEC suggests that the prevalence of high levels of university-industry interactions in places such as London, Cambridge and Oxford points to the benefits that can come from the development of strong university level mechanisms. Technology transfer partnerships can incentivise commercialisation and provide expertise to allow university-derived knowledge to be scaled up.
    b. According to the Mayor of London and the London Assembly, London's creative industries **generate** £42 billion a year and support one in six London jobs, while four out of five tourists say culture is the reason they choose to visit the capital.
    c. Norwich University of the Arts (NUA) provides specialist technical and enterprise education in visual arts, gaming, architecture, film, performing arts and design, co-created with local businesses and regional partners. In the last 10 years of regional engagement, **it has regenerated** the Creative Quarter of Norwich. In Games Design alone, there is very strong community infrastructure demonstrated through networks such as Norfolk Game Developers and the Norwich Games Festival, and a growing local labour force. An NUA-led **report** values the UK games industry at £7.82 billion, £6 billion GVA and employs 28,500 people. Norfolk and Suffolk hold 5.9% of this workforce, driven by NUA, the University of Suffolk and University of East Anglia's graduates and specialist facilities.
    d. Falmouth University's **BE Good**, an academic-led and student-run agency within the School of Communication, applies behavioural economics to influence consumer choices and create

positive social impact through live briefs, including initiatives targeting violence against women.

e. Established in 2024, the **RCA x Design for Good Academy** leverages RCA expertise and an alliance of global companies, including Airbus Commercial, BP, DBS Bank, General Mills, LIXIL, Logitech, Lloyds Banking Group, Nedbank, Nestlé, McKinsey & Company, Microsoft, PepsiCo, and Philips. It delivers an annual online short course for RCA students and alliance members, offering end-to-end training from project scoping and human-centred design to prototyping and implementation.
f. The **MusicFutures Creative Cluster** in Liverpool is a five-year, £6.75 million programme funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, designed to celebrate the Liverpool City Region as a global leader in music innovation, sustainability, and research. Led by the University of Liverpool in partnership with Liverpool John Moores University, and with more than twenty regional stakeholders, including the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, the initiative brings together higher education, industry, local Government, and the creative sector to strengthen the city's cultural and economic future.
g. Arts University Bournemouth works with Health Sciences University to **provide intergenerational arts activities to promote healthy ageing and address loneliness and social isolation**; Bournemouth Area Hospitality Association and the Business Improvement District will collaborate to develop a programme to utilise the theatre for the destination economy.

62. This does not imply that creative higher education ought to lead local growth single-handedly. Instead, it underscores how the sector already stimulates place-based regeneration, yet its sustained impact on regional growth stays largely unrecognised. We must therefore move beyond viewing initiatives as a disparate collection of isolated activities and instead fund and nurture creative HE as essential regional infrastructure.

63. Illustrative practices across the provider ecosystem highlight how higher education directly fosters local civic vitality and cultural enrichment. To scale, resource, and systematically embed these proven approaches nationwide, the primary challenge is to establish robust structural conditions and unify them under shared frameworks.

The Challenge

64. The evidence gathered for the development of this strategy shows that creative providers are already engaged in co-creation, widening cultural participation and engagement with practitioners, businesses and communities. But it also shows that this activity is frequently underfunded, difficult to measure and insufficiently recognised by regulatory and knowledge-exchange frameworks.

65. **Creative HE's contribution to regions is poorly recognised** because place-based policy continues to understand universities predominantly through their economic, skills, or research functions, while cultural policy focuses on cultural organisations and the creative industries. However, creative HE sits across these boundaries, making its contribution difficult to see within conventional measures and short-term funding frameworks. This is particularly problematic for specialist creative institutions whose value extends well beyond student headcount to providing regional cultural infrastructure, facilities, and networks. Examples of cultural contributions from higher education are public exhibitions, galleries, and degree shows which **generate immediate footfall and cultural capital** in all areas of the UK including crucially non-metropolitan town centres. Withdrawing this presence degrades the social fabric and accelerates the decline of post-industrial high streets. **The core issue is not an absence of regional**

engagement, but rather a policy framework that fails to recognise this work as a cohesive contribution to place.

66. **Regional policy also remains fragmented** across skills, economic development, culture, health, and community development. While devolution offers opportunities to change this approach, creative HE is not consistently embedded within these structures, risking transactional rather than strategic partnerships. Businesses and skilled workers relocate to areas that offer rich cultural and social amenities. Weakening the local creative skills ecosystem diminishes place attractiveness, making it harder for regional authorities to attract broader commercial investment. **The challenge is therefore to move from narrow disparate partnerships to strategic regional ecosystems that put creative practice at the centre of growth**.

67. **Short-term funding undermines long-term place-based work**. The creative infrastructure offered by HE providers such as studios, workshops, theatres, galleries, and digital labs is expensive to maintain. Mounting financial strain on HEIs makes maintaining this shared civic infrastructure increasingly precarious. This is further exacerbated by short-term competitive funding, which undermines long-term place-based work, making sustained trust and relationship-building difficult. Shared spaces and cultural public events also serve as preventive community infrastructure, supporting mental health, tackling loneliness, and building civic pride. When creative institutions scale back community outreach, local councils and public services lose critical partners in preventative public health and social care delivery. **Civic contribution must be recognised and funded as a core strategic priority rather than a marginal activity**.

68. Lastly, **devolution must not leave creative HE behind**. Creative opportunity risks becoming increasingly concentrated within primary metropolitan hubs, despite the nationwide presence of talent. The UK possesses a significant strategic asset in its specialist institutions located throughout coastal and rural areas, which actively disperse artistic insight and capability to stimulate local economic vitality. Similarly, multi-faculty institutions situated beyond major urban centres extend the reach of creative higher education into varied communities. Yet, without overarching system leadership to safeguard sectoral health, prevailing funding models threaten to undermine this crucial provision, creating a tangible danger of course closures and institutional loss that could lead to widespread creative cold spots across the nation. This also requires local Government to see creative HE not simply as a delivery partner, but as a strategic asset and source of regional intelligence. **The ambition should therefore be to build and sustain creative capacity across the UK**.

Conclusion

69. To unlock the sector's regional impact, creative higher education must be integrated as vital public infrastructure rather than standalone provision in a volatile free market. Delivering this transformation demands three shared commitments: dedicated regional cultural collaboration mechanisms to align priorities, co-investment in shared creative facilities with sustainable capital and revenue, and building an outcomes-focused evidence base that tracks genuine regional value over time.

Research and Innovation

A pioneering creative-practice research and innovation ecosystem is sustained, and its unique value as an indispensable driver of the UK's cultural leadership, economic growth and ability to solve 21st century challenges is recognised through targeted investment and regulatory parity.

The Opportunity

70. In creative disciplines, research, teaching and knowledge exchange operate as a continuous feedback loop. Academic research directly shapes public practice, driving breakthroughs in artistic methodologies and creative innovations that keep the UK at the global cutting edge. In turn, this practitioner-led inquiry translates into high-impact enterprise, equipping graduates with the applied problem-solving, design thinking, and advanced R&D skills essential to the creative workforce.

71. It is typical, especially in specialist institutions, that academics, technicians, and even institutional leadership are closely involved in the creative industries professions. They are directors at national and internationally leading theatres; they are dancers and choreographers of award-winning performances, and they often take leadership roles in the governance of our cultural institutions. The institutions themselves **lead** and/or collaborate with Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations. There is a mutual benefit that has developed over decades.

72. Creative higher education provides the time, space, and access to resources for practitioners to test, try, and experiment within robust frameworks of research and innovation principles, whilst supporting portfolio careers that make long-term involvement in the creative industries more possible. Students in higher education have an enriched curriculum that draws on an enviable currency in the 'real world'. These are real and tangible benefits which current regulatory structures and research and innovation reward and assessment do not support well, and that needs to change.

73. There is an opportunity here to radically rethink the contribution to research and innovation that creative higher education can make, and how its fluid, flexible, and interwoven relationship with teaching and learning, placemaking, and its industrial sector could be transferred to other disciplines.

74. Creative subjects are at the leading edge of research diversification, pioneering practice-led and practice-based inquiry that yields diverse 'Non-Traditional Outputs' (NTOs) such as performances, exhibitions, designs, compositions, and digital artefacts. In REF 2021, for example, 40% of outputs in music were classified as NTOs, whereas across the whole exercise, NTOs made up just 2% of submitted

research. These collaborative, team-based outputs also feed directly into the creative industries. Creative research offers models that challenge traditional academic norms of knowledge dissemination across the wider research ecosystem, which are, as identified by the **Hidden REF** initiative, overly dominant.

75. Creative R&D acts as an economic force multiplier, advancing IP, technology, and commercial applications across advanced manufacturing, digital media, and services. Research from the **Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre** shows that nearly two-thirds of creative micro-enterprises engaged in R&D over the past three years - outpacing all other priority sectors. Despite prioritising R&D for growth, these firms face significant operational and financial barriers, with most maintaining modest budgets: 47% estimate R&D expenditure under £50,000 and 34% under £25,000.

76. Specialist creative higher education serves as a driver of enterprise, generating 19% (883) of the UK's student start-ups and spin-out ventures according to HESA data. Unfortunately, we are not able to accurately determine the number of creative student start-ups from multi-faculty institutions, so it is highly likely the number will indeed be higher nationally. For example, **the highest number of student start-ups in the UK** from one institution originate from University of the Arts London (UAL). **The Creative Advantage: R&D Case Studies from the UAL Eco-system** provides examples of nine graduate-led enterprises across industries ranging from material science and sustainable fashion to architecture demonstrating the powerful impact of creative R&D.

77. At the same time, the creative sector is pioneering the adoption, application, and growth of CreaTech. **Fully realising** this impact demands cross-Governmental alignment and the strategic use of public convening power to encourage industry partnerships, with **higher education institutions serving as critical partners** in driving these advancements. Numerous initiatives across creative disciplines showcase digital and technological innovation and consider the broader implications of the growth and adoption of such technologies. Funded as part of Research England's Expanding Excellence in England portfolio, the **Centre for Performance, Technology, and Equity (PTEQ)** at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama is dedicated to innovating ground-breaking approaches to immersive and digital technologies from a performance-led perspective, in tandem with promoting social equity. The Centre has partnered with the Royal Shakespeare Company, CAMERA at University of Bath, The British Red Cross, and the German National Library, demonstrating a reach and impact that puts CreaTech in diverse domains including social dialogue, community engagement, performance, and international development.

78. Furthermore, creative research methodologies offer innovative solutions to complex societal issues. By leveraging human-centred design, immersive storytelling, and behaviour-change insights, these approaches transform healthcare delivery, promote net-zero initiatives, and foster civic cohesion. For example:

    a. Based within the **Centre for Cultural and Creative Industries** at Bath Spa University, the **Narrative and Emerging Technologies Lab** investigates how advanced technologies reshape experiential storytelling and audience engagement. The lab acts as a key academic anchor within the South West's creative ecosystem, playing a pivotal role in flagship R&D initiatives, including the £46 million **MyWorld** programme and the £6.8 million **Bristol+Bath Creative R+D** partnership.
    b. Sheffield Hallam University's **Lab4Living** brings together design, healthcare, and creative researchers to address real-world health and wellbeing issues. Projects include using design to challenge ageing preconceptions and developing solutions for safer breast radiotherapy.
    c. Anglia Ruskin University working with the National Institute for Health and Care Research on the **role of music therapy** in NHS inpatient mental health dementia wards.
    d. **UAL Creative Computing Institute Research Projects** explore areas such as:
        i. Creativity, Machine Learning, and AI: Explores how Machine Learning and AI can transform the creative arts in collaboration with universities of Durham, Sussex,

Goldsmiths and corporate partners including Google Magenta.

ii. Human-Computer Interaction: Examines human-technology relationships to support agency user concerns, involving SEN schools, UCL Hospital stroke patients, and video game developers like Sony.

iii. Platforms, Big Data, and Digital Citizenship: Research focused on building distributed digital media platforms that utilise big-data analysis to understand public perceptions of learning disabilities and autism.

The Challenges

79. The evidence gathered for the development of this strategy shows that while creative research provides the dynamic, practice-led innovation powering the UK's economy, it is constrained by an ecosystem designed for other more traditional research disciplines. The creative HE sector faces a number of interconnected challenges including in the operationalisation of funding streams and block grants, rigid REF architectures, panel underrepresentation, and metascience citation blind spots. Innovation is challenged by scale-biased HEIF allocations and risk-averse private capital. **Rebuilding the resilience across the UK creative research landscape requires dismantling these artificial divisions, ensuring national evaluation, policy, and funding instruments properly capture and reward the agile, high-impact reality of creative inquiry**.

80. **Creative research faces fragmented regulation and funding systems**. Current structures delineate strictly between research, innovation, and teaching, creating disjointed decisions and a "perfect storm" of funding pressures - including cuts to Strategic Priorities Grant teaching support, HEIF restructuring, and the removal of UKRI block grants for research culture, policy support, and participatory research from 2027/28 (representing between 8.5% to 50% loss of block grant funding for world leading creative specialists).

81. **Creative research is undermined by rigidity in research assessment**. As a research discipline, creative subjects are relatively young but are cutting-edge, and marked by rigour, innovation, and diversity in modes of dissemination. Creative research delivers practice-based, collaborative inquiry capable of tackling complex societal challenges and powering one of the UK's most successful economic sectors. Yet UK evaluation systems remain too rigid, prioritising traditional single-authored monographs over dynamic, team-led outputs like performances, exhibitions, and catalogues. As shown by Research England's Embedding Trust in Evaluation (E-TIE) project, properly valuing Non-Traditional Outputs (NTOs) offers a truer, more inclusive measure of public investment. Rather than sidelining this work, **national frameworks must integrate creative specialists into assessment design, using their expertise in novel dissemination to modernise how the wider research landscape evaluates impact and knowledge creation**.

82. **Fair assessment remains a significant hurdle.** The UK research ecosystem thrives on the complementary strengths of large multi-faculty universities and focused specialist institutions, yet the REF's structural architecture presents distinct hurdles for smaller providers. Broad Units of Assessment can inadvertently compress distinct disciplines like music, dance, and screen studies, while the logistical investment required to serve on assessment panels means specialist providers are severely underrepresented in REF panel decision-making. Multi-faculty universities offer critical scale and infrastructure, but evaluation frameworks must equally validate the agile, high-impact environments characteristic of specialist providers. **Addressing these disparities alongside practices that omit**

single-subject submissions from league tables ensures both institutional models are championed and evaluated equitably.

83. **Creative research suffers from metascience's blind spot.** Metascience has gained substantial influence, supported by the dedicated, £10m Metascience Unit within the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade to interrogate research culture and metrics. While this scrutiny is valuable, it has a significant blind spot: creative research. Because non-traditional outputs and publication routes do not map easily onto standard aggregation tools like Web of Science or Altmetric, creative inquiry is largely omitted from the citation and text-mining datasets that currently inform national funding and value assessments. Even tools and dashboards developed to support understanding of the HE sector like the **OfS Market Monitoring Tool** entirely omit creative disciplines. This doesn't enable 'research on research' to optimally map the contributions creative research makes to knowledge generation, improving lives and generating economic growth.

84. **Innovation culture rewards scale, not impact**. Due to scale-based criteria in HEIF and HE-BCI funding formulas, many creative HEIs are excluded from flexible innovation funding. This barrier reflects institutional size rather than impact, as **smaller creative providers would qualify** for larger allocations when adjusted for scale. Heavy reliance on income as a metric fails to measure the external, social, cultural, and regional value generated by creative innovation.

85. **Lack of risk taking by investors perpetuates marginalisation of creative innovation**. Outlined by the **recent Tony Hickson UKRI review**, creative disciplines are not largely understood by investors and stimulates higher levels of risk aversion for venture capitalists due to fewer examples than STEM-related enterprises. This has a perpetuating factor on future investment.

Conclusion

86. We have an opportunity to radically rethink and better recognise the contribution that creative higher education can make to research and innovation. As the relative 'new kid on the block' of research, and as a result of its very nature of challenging the status quo through creativity, it is time to make better use of its methods, expertise, and merits. Its fluid, flexible, and interwoven relationship with teaching and learning, placemaking, and its industrial sector could be transferred effectively to other disciplines. As demonstrated in the REF, these disciplines already lead the way in capturing and communicating the value of diverse types of research output and arriving at a fair assessment of them; by applying that expertise to other areas of research, the UK could have a far more holistic picture of the contribution of all researchers and research types, from software and methods to technical infrastructure, and be better able to leverage that value for society and the economy.

87. Creative research also contributes beyond advancing knowledge; the methods and outputs play a significant role in improving lives through their contribution to cultural life and social connection, and driving the growth that is needed in the UK economy such as through their early adoption and adaptation of new technologies. In recent years significant investments in creative institutions as sites of emerging excellence in England have supported innovations across materials, createch, and social equity, and they have demonstrated that, despite being of a smaller scale, they are able to drive impact and engagement that outstrips expectations. Building upon these by addressing the inequalities in the funding, regulation, and evaluation systems is essential. **This will make the most of public investment to date, and unleash the potential of one of the UK's most distinctive assets - a practice-led, research-informed creative sector which can push boundaries and lead innovation at a global scale.**

Curriculum, Skills and Student Experience

An agile creative education system is integrated with industry and community to power growth, social mobility, and societal wellbeing.

The Opportunity

88. Creative skills are recognised as essential drivers for both industrial innovation and broader societal prosperity, securing a future where creative education powers a modern economy and enriches communities nationwide. Creative pedagogies cultivate technical mastery, digital capability, and vital transversal skills such as human-centred design, iterative problem-solving, agility, and critical thinking, which the **World Economic Forum** identifies amongst the most essential for the future global workforce across all sectors, with significant demand in finance, education, health, advanced manufacturing, and information and technology services. It is therefore vital that we defend and extend access to creative HE curriculum and pedagogies to secure the right skills needed for our whole economy and society.

89. Through studio-based learning, live industry briefs, and civic projects, creative HE equips graduates with the adaptive agency required for modern careers. A society with creative competency also fosters cultural engagement, sparks inquisitiveness, and enhances overall societal wellbeing. The creative and academic work of students and staff is consistently shared through public displays, which helps bring local culture to life and connects the community more closely with higher education. Student coursework also helps to solve real-world problems. For example:

    a. **Arts University Plymouth × Finisterre**: BA (Hons) Textile Design graduate Ayesha King collaborated with Finisterre's Seasuit Project to develop a modest wetsuit for Muslim women, allowing them to engage in water sports while honouring cultural dress requirements - a product now sold nationwide.
    b. **Norwich University of the Arts × Safe In Our World**: Games Art, Design, and Development students partnered with the video games mental health charity Safe In Our World. The brief challenged students to create either concept art or a short game exploring the link between nature and mental wellbeing.
    c. **Leeds Arts University × Ezili:** Fashion Photography students executed a live commercial brief for swimwear brand Ezili, resulting in the winning photograph being featured on a Times Square billboard in New York.

d. **Abertay's Dare Academy:** an annual game design competition for students teams to pitch concepts, with selected groups building playable prototypes guided by UK games industry mentors.

90. Specialist creative institutions are at the cutting edge of industry innovation, bringing together students, practitioners and academics to supercharge the creative sector. Their focused curriculum delivers the technical mastery and entrepreneurial agility required for sustainable professional practice. Through deep industry integration, providing essential business skills for freelance careers, and offering continuous professional development, they ensure practitioners are equipped to thrive within a rapidly transitioning global landscape. This talent pipeline is why the UK is seen as a global leader in creative practice. For example, 94% of the UK's highest-budget high-end TV productions feature graduates from the National Film and Television School. Their alumni also contributed to over 70% of top 20 UK box office hits since 2020.

91. Creative higher education is also a powerful engine for social mobility, equity, and inclusion. Its distinctive learning environments particularly empower neurodivergent learners, who make up a disproportionate share of creative enrolments. According to **Brunswick et al. (2024)**, research covering almost 5.7 million UK first-year students over 12 academic years found students declaring learning or attention difficulties were significantly more likely to study creative arts and design and attend specialist institutions.

92. Specialist higher education institutions also often deliver education that extends well beyond degree-level provision. This includes a deep, strategic commitment to the talent pipeline through active engagement with the school curriculum and supporting wider social mobility projects. Across creative HE there are many initiatives that illustrate the transformative impact of engaging in creative practice.

    a. The **AUB Being a Boy** project offers young men a dedicated environment to explore the intersection of masculinity and their daily lived experiences. By championing their unique voices and celebrating their artistic achievements, the project fosters a deeper understanding of modern boyhood. These workshops provide an innovative outlet for participants to reflect on their own lives, serving as a critical intervention to improve future health, wellbeing, and educational attainment for young men.
    b. Established in 1988, Arts University Plymouth's **Young Arts programme** supports gaps in school arts provision. The inclusive, safe clubs support students with social, behavioural, and anxiety challenges. Tactile, project-based experimentation validates non-linear strengths, building confidence and portfolios to access higher education and the creative workforce.
    c. The **AUB Access 500 programme** is specifically engineered to dismantle systemic barriers and cultivate diverse talent across the region. By partnering with local schools, colleges, and community organisations, this initiative targets individuals facing significant financial or social obstacles. It provides 500 free learning opportunities over a five-year horizon, specifically supporting underrepresented groups and those with NEET status to transition into higher education.

93. The rapid development of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies is reshaping both how creative work is produced and the skills required across the creative industries. CreaTech increasingly sits at the intersection of creative practice, technology, research and enterprise, requiring people who can combine technical capability with distinctly creative skills such as design, storytelling, critical thinking and problem-solving. Higher education has an important role in developing this combination of skills, particularly where specialist creative expertise can be brought together with emerging technologies. For example:

    a. BIMM University has established **AI_Labs** with nearly £1 million in support from Innovate UK's BridgeAI initiative. Partnering with five pioneering AI organisations, the initiative evaluates how

artificial intelligence influences creative sectors, unlocking new avenues for innovation, creative expression, and career opportunities. Additionally, it aims to implement an ethical, transparent framework to ensure regulatory compliance for AI-created musical compositions and evaluate the wider ethical implications and disruption to the creative industries.

b. At Norwich University of the Arts (NUA), the institution's high-end **Virtual Production Studio** demonstrates how specialist providers anchor the rapid convergence of games engines, VFX, and film. By embedding real-time LED volume production and motion-capture technology directly into undergraduate and postgraduate curricula from day one, NUA trains a new hybrid cohort capable of operating advanced spatial computing systems while mastering visual storytelling and cinematic design.

94. Through the alchemy of technical, digital, and transversal skills, and a commitment to inclusive pipelines that dismantle barriers to entry, creative HE empowers a diverse, agile workforce. We must therefore ensure that specialist creative skills are accessible across every region, securing a future where creative education is the vital engine for social mobility and the cornerstone of a modern, innovation-led economy.

The Challenge

95. **Flawed evaluation metrics in the regulatory and policy environment misrepresent the value of creative HE**. Existing higher education policy and regulatory frameworks disadvantage creative graduates by using evaluation models designed for traditional, salaried employment. Relying on standardised employment and salary metrics makes creative sector graduate outcomes appear deceptively weak, placing an unfair reputational risk and regulatory burden on creative HE. Our call for evidence shows widespread sector concern over metrics like the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data, which fail to reflect non-linear pathways, freelancing, and micro-enterprises. Collaborative initiatives with partners like ScreenSkills, the BBC, and the National Film and Television School demonstrate that the creative industries rely on **flexible, multi-skilled pathways** and portfolio work rather than permanent static roles. Despite a sector-wide commitment within HE to enhance student employability with positive results the policy environment creates a damaging negative outcomes narrative that fails to capture the nuanced realities of creative professional life.

96. The misunderstanding of creative careers in policy and regulation stems from three primary structural challenges:

    a. **Prevalence of self employment/portfolio careers:** Research from **NESTA and the Creative Policy and Evidence Centre** (PEC) indicates that self-employment represented 28% of the creative workforce between April 2024 and March 2025 - twice the national average - and reached 59% specifically in the **arts and heritage subsectors**. Because of this, many recent graduates have multiple jobs, or part-time roles not directly related to their degree straight out of university. This often skews Graduate Outcomes data when asked about 'primary employment' and 'full-time' or 'part-time' work. Some graduates say their creative role, and others their other or part-time job which supports their freelance creative career. The Graduate Outcomes data also shows creative graduates are also more likely to report they are working 'part time' but as many do this alongside self-employment, they are often likely to be working full-time hours.

    b. **SOC code distortion:** Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) structures systematically

downgrade advanced creative professions into non-graduate bands (SOC 5–7). Highly skilled specialists - such as costume designers, prop makers, prosthetic makeup artists, visual merchandisers, and textile artisans - **are regularly misclassified** as generic sales, customer service, or beauty workers, skewing national workforce data and artificially deflating institutional outcome scores. High-level occupations **requiring advanced qualifications comprise 83% of creative positions**, challenging the notion that creative careers indicate graduate underemployment.

c. **Sector wage conventions:** As the Skills England assessment highlights, **entry-level creative earnings are routinely depressed** by an industry-wide "vocational discount". Lower starting pay reflects sector-specific wage conventions, and industry pay-rates rather than educational underperformance, yet standard metrics treat it as a proxy for low value, disincentivising the delivery of creative HE. Furthermore, **new evidence from the PEC** shows that job security within the creative industries is the lowest of the industrial strategy areas and involuntary part-time work and underemployment are both the highest.

97. Evaluating creative higher education solely on immediate post-graduation salaries ignores the enduring economic, adaptive, and strategic value creative graduates deliver to the economy and wider society. As automation reshapes entry-level roles, metrics tied to short-term employment outcomes become increasingly obsolete. **National policy must therefore align with the modern creative employment realities and shift the focus toward the enduring economic, adaptive, and strategic value of creative HE**.

98. **Industry partnership with HE needs investment and coordination**. Our call for evidence reveals that university-industry collaboration remains fragmented. Partnerships rely heavily on informal networks, placing an unsustainable burden on specialist providers and practicing staff rather than operating through a cohesive national framework. Government-preferred mechanisms such as degree apprenticeships and occupational standards fail to gain widespread traction because they cannot accommodate the freelance, project-based realities of a sector dominated by SMEs. There is also a potential over-reliance on the assumption that individual local employers possess a comprehensive understanding of aggregate national labour market trends. While higher education institutions are already at the forefront of delivering advanced technical training and incorporating employer input, Skills England's recent creative skills assessment emphasised that **policy must focus on resolving structural coordination and skills mismatches**, instead of simply responding to immediate workforce gaps.

99. An unsustainable narrative across all skills policy is the expectation that higher education alone must fund, facilitate, and guarantee graduate work-readiness. While **Creative PEC data** indicates that 21% of new hires are perceived to lack professional readiness, employer appetite to co-invest in early-career pipelines has failed to materialise at scale. Without formal incentives or financial support, limited industry involvement in paid placements and outreach entrenches unpaid internship cultures, directly undermining social mobility and the **Milburn Review**'s access ambitions. Although both the Industrial Strategy and the Post-16 White Paper mandate closer education-to-business links, **these policies will falter without dedicated funding mechanisms that actively incentivise industry co-investment in the talent pipeline that sustains its commercial success**.

100. **Strengthening the agility of the HE curriculum development is necessary**. Higher education institutions remain responsive to current and future skills needs by leveraging industry advisory boards, aligning with Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs), and embedding entrepreneurship frameworks. However, a fundamental tension exists between the rapid pace of the creative economy and the timelines required in institutional course approvals, creating structural barriers. To overcome these structural barriers **the sector must establish robust, sector-led coordination mechanisms to align skills investment with industry needs while critically evaluating internal barriers to agile curriculum development, approval, and delivery**.

101. **Establishing sustainable funding for creative CPD and lifelong learning is needed**. Resolving **persistent mid-career skills gaps** across the creative economy requires expanding flexible CPD and micro-credential pathways, particularly for SMEs and freelance professionals. However, HE providers encounter substantial financial and structural barriers, exacerbated by the omission of creative disciplines from the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) alongside broader creative funding cuts. Consequently, **LLE eligibility requires urgent review to encompass creative subjects, while the DfE should partner with Skills England and DCMS to establish a national creative CPD initiative featuring recognised accreditation and digital skills passports**.

102. **Safeguarding vulnerable disciplines and specialist funding need attention**. Growing financial constraints are compelling universities to implement cost reductions, frequently leading to the loss of essential civic programs and **creative course closures**. **CHEAD has highlighted** the rising prevalence of craft course closures and its detrimental impact on fulfilling national industrial strategy goals and preserving heritage skill sets. Specialist creative institutions also remain particularly exposed and vulnerable to funding cuts which affect creative courses. Therefore **protecting specialist provider funding and introducing a dedicated financial framework for creative HE is critical to preserve these strategic national assets and secure a resilient, adaptable talent pipeline**.

103. **Transversal creative skills offer complex problem solving and long-term resilience but are undervalued**. Through human-centred design, iterative development, and critical reflection, creative degrees equip graduates with transversal capabilities that drive innovation across all industries. While institutions already evidence these traits through initiatives like the UAL **Creative Attributes Framework**, communication remains fragmented. **Establishing a unified framework across secondary and higher education will provide a shared language for industry leaders and policymakers, clearly demonstrating the multi-sector economic value of creative graduates**. This would also help to reassure creative students that applying their skills across the wider economy does not compromise their creative identity.

104. **Recognition of the power of creative subjects to inclusivity and opportunity is needed**. The **erosion of creative education within the primary and secondary curriculum** has led to a significant depletion of cultural literacy among young people. This has culminated in a 41.7% decrease in the total of expressive Arts entries at GCSE between 2009/10 and 2024/25, and a 25% decline in Arts A Levels between 2011/12 and 2024/25. This decline creates substantial barriers in the ability to access and succeed within **creative higher education pathways** as the steepest drops occur in schools within the most deprived fifth of local authorities. Additionally, regions with the highest eligibility for free school meals - the West Midlands and North East - record the lowest proportion of Arts GCSE entries. A significant portion of widening participation initiatives within HE therefore focuses on compensatory measures, rather than strategically deploying resources to elevate aspirations or communicate the profound economic and societal contributions of creative competencies. Specialist institutions, in particular, dedicate substantial effort to addressing these systemic gaps through their access and participation plans.

105. Whilst we welcome progress on school curriculum, higher education must also treat the **risks of post-16 qualification reform** (V Levels and T Levels) with the same urgency as the deterioration of arts in schools. Rigid assessment modes, industry integration and the complexity of multiple small qualifications threaten to destabilise access to post-16 creative qualifications and exclude those such as neurodivergent learners who rely on large, flexible creative qualifications (such as BTECS and the **UAL Foundation Diploma**) to thrive. **We must safeguard these flexible pathways and advocate for inclusive post-16 routes that prepare all students effectively for higher education, the creative sector and beyond**.

106. **Careers advice and alumni tracking needs reform**. Breaking into the creative industries is notoriously difficult, prompting HE providers to embed professional practice, co-design curricula, and integrate work experience to lower barriers. While some providers focus directly on creative careers, others prepare

graduates to apply adaptable skills across sectors like technology, health or public policy. Nevertheless, as already established, tracking long-term graduate outcomes is an ongoing challenge that institutions themselves must take greater accountability for resolving as well as using public data. This will ensure that the curriculum is doing the things it is expected to do. For example, GuildHE is currently supporting Norwich University of the Arts on a project examining how best to assist creative graduates entering the sector. Through staff and alumni workshops and evidence gathering, NUA analysed employability practices and graduate needs across different HEIs and is currently producing a policy report co-developed with the Chair of the Graduate Futures Institute Creative Industries Task Group.

107. Limited public understanding of creative careers also hinders the recognition of creative skills and restricts aspirations. DCMS funds the updated **Discover Creative Careers programme** to improve awareness of cultural and creative careers among 11- to 14-year-olds, focusing on under-represented groups and underserved regions. It is hoped that this renewed energy will make an impact, and needs engagement by schools, colleges, FE, HE and businesses to make it a success. **Only through collaboration will we be able to understand the impact of creative graduates, better communicate the value of creative careers and support our alumni into the right jobs for them**.

108. **CreaTech and AI require a joined-up skills and innovation ecosystem**. The speed of technological change creates challenges for traditional approaches to skills development. Universities cannot simply respond by creating new degree programmes every time a technology or platform emerges. Institutions need the capacity to continually adapt curricula, provide access to emerging technologies and specialist facilities, and offer flexible opportunities for graduates and existing workers to update their skills throughout their careers. This makes stronger connections between teaching, research, innovation and continuing professional development particularly important. Crucially, creative HE must address how AI transforms creative practice while supporting the broader workforce as AI destabilises traditional work. In response institutions such as **Arts University Plymouth** encourages students to take a proactive approach to understanding generative AI and how it could augment or disrupt their own creative processes.

109. Creative HE's signature pedagogies prioritising human judgment, iteration, and non-linear problem-solving offer a resilient model for human-centred innovation and technology adoption. As AI **transforms** the creative sector, entry-level positions face pressure while professional roles transition toward steering AI outputs. The Institute for Work has recently published **policy recommendations** to support the creative industries during the AI transition.

110. CreaTech also demonstrates why skills and innovation policy cannot be developed separately. Universities are not just supplying graduates to an established labour market; they are helping businesses experiment with, understand and adopt new technologies through research, knowledge exchange, industry partnerships and creative practice. **Stronger connections between HE and industry can support both the development of future talent and the diffusion of innovation through the creative economy, particularly among SMEs and freelancers, which may lack the resources to invest independently in research, training or new technologies**.

Conclusion

111. Lasting progress to unlock the full value of creative skills to the economy and society demands a structured, staged reform programme rather than piecemeal initiatives. The initial priority must focus on

reforming graduate outcome metrics to capture the true socioeconomic value of creative skills, alongside school and creative qualification reform and embedding creative pathways within the Lifelong Learning Entitlement. Crucially, the Government and industry must establish a Creative Industries Pact for Skills, protect high-cost and specialist provider funding, and invest in Technical Excellence Networks that pair HE with FE and industry for CreaTech and AI upskilling. Our recommendations also strongly align with findings from Skills England and the Creative PEC, and calls for stronger connectivity between industry and higher education to secure an agile, inclusive creative workforce for the future. Building this policy and funding foundation will ensure sustainable talent pipelines, widen access, and secure the UK's creative leadership.

112. Without immediate recognition of these realities, we risk irreparably dismantling two centuries of institutional capacity and regional infrastructure, undermining the UK’s economic resilience and global competitiveness long before the true cost is realised.

Annex B: Project Governance

113. The project was commissioned by GuildHE Creative in March 2025, with Professor Roni Brown, Emeritus Professor at University of the Arts London, acting as the External Chair. Throughout the commission, GuildHE Creative also served as a focused forum for discussion in tandem with our theme leads and external taskforce.

114. Three theme leads were appointed to support the development of the call for evidence and the drafting of this document. They were:

    a. Professor Maria Delgado, Vice Principal Research and Knowledge Exchange, Royal Central School Of Speech and Drama
    b. Professor Stephen Felmingham, Provost, Arts University Plymouth
    c. Professor Ben Stopher, Vice-Chancellor, Norwich University of the Arts
    d. We are also grateful for the additional support and leadership provided by David Rowe, Pro Vice-Chancellor at BIMM University, Dr Robin Kirby, Registrar and Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Arts University Plymouth, and Professor Jonathan Whiskerd, UK Executive Dean at the Institute of Contemporary Music Performance.

115. We introduced an external Taskforce to support the development of the strategy. It comprised 22 senior representatives from the creative, education, and policy sectors, including Arts Council England (ACE), Creative UK, Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade (DBIST), Department for Education (DfE), Research England, Skills England, the British Academy, Conservatoires UK, and The Council for Higher Education in Art & Design (CHEAD).

116. To enable structured data collection and build a comprehensive picture of creative HE health, key themes and sub-themes were established. They were:

    a. Curriculum, Skills and Student Experience
    b. Research and Innovation
    c. Regions, Engaged Citizenship and Civic Responsibility
    d. Subthemes:
        i. Place: local vs national priorities and impacts of devolution
        ii. Artificial intelligence (AI) and technology
        iii. Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)
        iv. Size, scale and resources of HE providers
        v. Global reputation of creative higher education

117. To establish a robust evidence base for this strategy, we launched a sector-wide call for evidence to

gather good practice and relevant research from across the higher education and creative sectors in spring 2026. This process was informed by an initial review of key policy documents and research reports published by Government bodies, regulators, and industry agencies.

118. Alongside the call for evidence, we conducted a series of exploratory workshops with higher education providers to examine key barriers to impact across each strategic theme. We also engaged in detailed discussions with cultural organisations, the creative industries and representative bodies spanning both higher education and the creative sector.

119. To maintain rigour, an independent analysis of the call for evidence responses and core policy literature was undertaken by Counterculture. This independent synthesis ensured an impartial evaluation of the evidence and its alignment to national policy priorities.

120. In total, over 150 higher education representatives, industry partners, and sector organisations have so far directly contributed to shaping this strategy.

Annex C: Consultation Questions

Vision and Mission

1. We have proposed positioning Creative HE as a vital national infrastructure. Do you agree with this and the wording of the overarching mission and visions?
    a. Yes fully | Partially | No
    b. Please explain your answer, including any changes you think we should make.

Recommendations

2. Do you have any feedback on our recommendations within Cross-Cutting Enabler A: Forging Strategic Industry-HE Partnerships?
3. Do you have any feedback on our recommendations within Cross-Cutting Enabler B: Demonstrating the Comprehensive Impact of Creative HE?
4. Do you have any feedback on our recommendations within Cross-Cutting Enabler C: Access to Sustainable Funding?
5. Do you have any feedback on our recommendations within Cross-Cutting Enabler D: Empowering Regional Ecosystems and Civic Infrastructure?
6. Do you have any feedback on our recommendations within Cross-Cutting Enabler E: Securing the Talent Pipeline and Widening Access?
7. Do you have any feedback on our recommendations within Cross-Cutting Enabler F: Driving Creative Innovation, Enterprise and Sustainable Work?
8. Do you have any feedback on our recommendations within Cross-Cutting Enabler G: Pioneering CreaTech and Technological Integration?

9. What do you view as the highest priority for immediate, coordinated action and why?

Further Evidence and Case Studies

10. Can you share a case study or example where your institution or organisation has successfully utilised shared creative infrastructure (e.g. studios, labs, galleries) to drive local or regional economic impact?
11. Do you have examples of existing CreaTech or AI integration projects within your curriculum or business that could serve as a model for our proposed Technical Excellence Networks?
12. What specific evidence or longitudinal data points do you believe are currently missing from the sector that would most effectively persuade policymakers to increase investment?
13. Do you have any further comments or areas which you feel we have not addressed?

Respond to the consultation

We are delighted to receive feedback on this draft framework from across higher education providers, cultural organisations, industry partners, and the wider public. Please submit your consultation responses **via this link by 12 January 2027**.

The final document will then be launched in spring 2027.

We are also hosting an online webinar for stakeholders to discuss the document in person. This will take place on **12 January 2027** (12:00-13:00) on MS Teams. **Please RSVP to attend here**.

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