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YORK & NORTH YORKSHIRE COMBINED AUTHORITY | DAVID SKAITH MAYOR

The Creative Industries in York and North Yorkshire:

The evidence supporting our city, region and rural creative powerhouse

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A foreword from Andy Kerr, Director of Economy, York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority

The Creative Industries in York and North Yorkshire are at the forefront of digital and creative innovation and represent a vibrant success-story for the region.

Identified as a key pillar of the UK Government's Modern Industrial Strategy, and one of six competitive advantage areas in York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan, the Creative Industries and the people who work within the sector, are at the heart of plans for regional and national growth.

The York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority is working with partners across the region to ensure that our Growth Plan translates into tangible delivery and meaningful impact.

Our partnership with XR Stories at the University of York ensures that plans for the Creative Industries in York and North Yorkshire are underpinned by research expertise and the XR Stories' unique position driving innovation and growth in the sector over the last seven years.

I'm delighted to present this report as a synthesis of the evidence emerging from our collaboration with XR Stories, alongside impact analysis, policy research and recommendations that will support plans to unlock growth in the York and North Yorkshire creative industries.

The York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority endorses the recommendations put forward in the report and is committed to progressing many of them as part of our 10-year delivery plan.

Executive summary

The York and North Yorkshire region stands at the threshold of a transformative decade. With the establishment of the combined authority, a £540 million devolution deal over 30 years, and the UK Government's 2025 Creative Industries Sector Plan[1] pledging to double national investment by 2035, the region has a unique opportunity to establish itself as a globally connected centre of creative innovation.

The York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan[2] (published in July 2025) identifies the Creative Industries as one of five sectors in the region identified as having competitive advantage. An associated delivery plan (in development at the time of publication) will support the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority to achieve its strategic goals.

This report outlines how York and North Yorkshire can evolve from a strong regional cluster to become a nationally recognised CreaTech hub (defined as the fusion of creative content and emerging technologies) and an international cultural gateway.

National positioning	Regional distinctiveness	International relevance
York is the UK's only UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts, home to the XR Stories programme and the University of York as lead for the CoSTAR Live Lab, anchoring a world-class ecosystem in immersive storytelling, digital heritage, and screen innovation. These assets align directly with national priorities for CreaTech research and development (R&D), intellectual property (IP) commercialisation, and corridor-based growth.	North Yorkshire offers a vibrant mix of rural microclusters, coastal cultural economies, and a year-round programme of world-class festivals, with creativity thereby embedded in its landscapes and communities. This makes the region a living testbed for how culture, technology, and place-based growth can converge.	From the Aesthetica Short Film Festival to Mediale, and with the support of over 30 museums and galleries, as well as a significant range of festivals, the region already attracts international audiences and collaborators. With targeted investment in exports, inward investment, and cultural diplomacy, York and North Yorkshire can project soft power on a global stage.

The vision is clear: York and North Yorkshire should not be seen merely as a creative "periphery", but as a national leader in CreaTech innovation and a globally recognised centre for cultural storytelling, heritage, and immersive technology, fostered through an inclusive approach to the region and its workforce.

[1] UK Government. Creative industries sector plan: the UK's modern industrial strategy [Internet]. UK Government. 2025. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/685943ddb328f1ba50f3cf15/industrial_strategy_creative_industries_sector_plan.pdf

[2] York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. York and North Yorkshire's Local Growth Plan [Internet]. York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. 2025. Available from: https://yorknorthyorks-ca.gov.uk/our-strategy/localgrowthplan/

To realise this vision, the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority, working with universities, cultural institutions, and industry partners, must seize five interlocking opportunities:

1.	Promote York as a creative-corridor-connecting node (a core location that links various creative industry clusters and microclusters across a geographic region) as part of the One Creative North Northern Creative Corridor,[3] and its role as a gateway to the wider York and North Yorkshire region.
2.	Expand creative technology facilities to enhance the region's unique selling point as an innovation expert, creating a rural–urban innovation testbed with national and export potential.
3.	Commercialise research and IP through a dedicated Creative IP Studio, unlocking investor-ready assets.
4.	Lead in skills innovation, scaling immersive continuing professional development (CPD), further education (FE)/ higher education (HE) pipelines, and leadership training that address national workforce shortages.
5.	Project regional creativity globally, embedding export-readiness through business support programmes and funding for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as well as using creative technology work with festivals and heritage assets as international showcases for the region and businesses.

By aligning local strengths with both national strategy and the York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan, the region can evolve from an area of potential into a globally recognised centre of creative innovation. The York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority's Local Growth Plan combines the vision, levers, evidence, and momentum to lead this transformation, ensuring that the next decade delivers inclusive regional growth, national leadership, and international acclaim for the region's Creative Industries.

In 2025, XR Stories partnered with the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority to run a Creative Economy Census.[4] The aim of the census was to gather insights from individuals and businesses who work in the York and North Yorkshire creative economy to inform the Local Growth Plan.

More than 200 creative economy practitioners and businesses responded to the census, providing a vivid picture of the region's creative economy in action. Respondents emphasised three priorities above all others:

Affordable creative space

Better support for freelancers and microbusinesses

Small and flexible funding

The evidence confirms that York and North Yorkshire's creative sector is dynamic and ambitious but constrained by issues of infrastructure, visibility, and access to finance. These lived experiences reinforce the quantitative findings set out in this report and highlight where local interventions could have the most significant impact.

Local economic and cultural planning

Combined authority investment and advocacy

Bids to national funds

(devolved funding from government, and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI))

Cross-regional collaboration

(e.g. One Creative North)

[3] Kelly J. One Creative North Chair's scoping report [Internet]. One Creative North. 2025 Apr. Available from: https://thegreatnorth.org.uk/downloads/95/one-creative-north-report-may-2025.pdf

[4] Harrison J, Brandom S, Neyra R, Murphy D, Brown E. York and North Yorkshire creative economy census 2025 technical report [Internet]. XR Stories, York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. 2025. Available from https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17708416

1. Introduction and vision

This opening chapter sets out the vision and policy context for creative industries growth in York and North Yorkshire,

Outlining the region's distinctive blend of heritage and innovation	**Introducing the emerging role of York and North Yorkshire within the wider creative technology ecosystem, both nationally and as part of the plans for the Northern Creative Corridor being developed under the banner of One Creative North**	**Examining the Creative Industries within the wider ambitions of the York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan (2025)**

1.1 Creative industries leadership from the historic North

York and North Yorkshire sits at the intersection of rich cultural and historical roots and forward-looking innovation. The region is establishing a strong reputation for creativity and digital storytelling, bringing together innovation, content creation, and heritage-driven creativity. The region's workforce and unique geography, and York's status as the UK's first and only UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts, are vital components of the York and North Yorkshire Creative Industries ecosystem.

York is home to the nationally recognised XR Stories programme and the University of York, the lead for the CoSTAR Live Lab. These initiatives support a place-based innovation economy driven by storytelling, performance, and immersive media. North Yorkshire brings creative traditions rooted in performance, crafts, and visitor experiences, offering a complementary rural edge to the region's digital growth. Initiatives such as the Great Place Lakes and Dales[5] and AMP Producers[6] promote creativity and skills development in North Yorkshire.

The York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan reinforces this analysis, positioning the region as a "trailblazing City Region Rural Powerhouse" and identifying the Creative Industries among its competitive advantage sectors.[7] This provides a policy anchor for the creative growth ambitions outlined in this report.

1.2 Regional geography

York and North Yorkshire forms a diverse and distinctive region, including urban centres, historic towns, rural communities, and two national parks. It consists of the City of York and the extensive North Yorkshire unitary authority, which covers seven former districts: Craven, Hambleton, Harrogate, Richmondshire, Ryedale, Scarborough, and Selby.

Geographically, North Yorkshire is England's largest ceremonial county by area, stretching from the North Sea coast at Scarborough and Whitby, across the North York Moors and the Yorkshire Dales, and down into agricultural lowlands. The region borders several other counties, including West Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cumbria, and the East Riding of Yorkshire.

With its outstanding natural landscapes, the region is a significant tourism destination and home to a mix of agricultural, heritage, creative, digital, and manufacturing industries. The economy is marked by strong microbusiness activity; a growing bioeconomy and opportunities in the clean energy sector; and internationally recognised food, farming, and visitor economy assets.

York and North Yorkshire has 40,000 registered enterprises across all industries,[8] the vast majority (89%) being microbusinesses (0–9 employees), and a total workforce of 426,125.[9]

[5] Innovate Educate Ltd. Great Place Lakes and Dales [Internet]. Innovate Educate Ltd [date unknown]. Available from: https://www.ieltd.co.uk/great-place-lakes-and-dales/

[6] AMP. AMP Producers + PODs [Internet]. AMP [date unknown]. Available from: https://amp-music.co.uk/youth-voice/youthledprojects/

[7] York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. York and North Yorkshire's Local Growth Plan [Internet]. York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. 2025. Available from: https://yorknorthyorks-ca.gov.uk/our-strategy/localgrowthplan/

[8] York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. York and North Yorkshire's Local Growth Plan [Internet]. York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. 2025. Available from: https://yorknorthyorks-ca.gov.uk/our-strategy/localgrowthplan/

[9] ONS Local: Estimated number of creative industries jobs, for combined authorities and specified local authorities, 2020 to 2024 [Internet]. Office for National Statistics. 2025. Available from: https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/adhocs/3036onslocalestimatednumberofcreativeindustriesjobsforcombinedauthoritiesandspecifiedlocalauthorities2020to2024

In governance terms, the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority was officially established in 2023 following a £540 million devolution deal with the UK Government. This combined authority unites City of York Council and North Yorkshire Council under a single strategic body, led by the directly elected Mayor of York and North Yorkshire, whose first term began in May 2024. The York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority is responsible for delivering regional priorities related to transport, housing, net zero, skills, and economic growth, thereby empowering local decision-making and long-term investment.

1.3 Regional context and strategic positioning

The York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan (2025) underlines the importance of coordinated regional planning in delivering national ambitions for inclusive, innovation-led growth. Devolved authorities such as the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority are now central to driving these outcomes, shaping investment, aligning skills and innovation priorities, and fostering sector clusters through local leadership.

The York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan identifies the Creative Industries as one of the region's five competitive advantage sectors, reinforcing York and North Yorkshire's strategic positioning as a centre for creative innovation and digital storytelling. Its principles underpin this report's recommendations for cluster development, investment-readiness, and cross-regional collaboration within the emerging Northern Creative Corridor, developed under the banner of One Creative North.[10]

By embedding the Creative Industries at the heart of this devolved growth framework, the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority has recognised its role as both an economic driver and a catalyst for placemaking, well-being, and identity. This alignment between local and national priorities provides the foundation for the strategy outlined in the subsequent chapters of this report.

1.4 Why here? Why now?

The UK Government's 2025 Creative Industries Sector Plan sets out a bold ambition: to double annual investment in the Creative Industries by 2035, increase innovation, and prioritise regional cluster development.

York and North Yorkshire aligns strongly with the four strategic ambitions outlined in the national plan: innovation, skills, finance, and trade. To unlock this potential, targeted investment in infrastructure, finance, and corridor development is necessary.

The region's unique position, spanning a high-growth city and surrounding rural districts, also makes it a testing ground for scalable, place-based growth. With new powers under the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority and the potential for early-stage investment through mayoral funds, the time is right to define and implement a shared regional strategy.

1.5 Prevailing policy headlines: National context for regional opportunity

The policy environment for the Creative Industries has never been more aligned with the strengths and ambitions of York and North Yorkshire. The UK Government's Creative Industries Sector Plan presents a series of interconnected national strategies, placing regional clusters, innovation-led growth, and creative exports at the centre of the UK's future economy.

[10] Kelly J. One Creative North Chair's scoping report [Internet]. One Creative North. 2025 Apr. Available from: https://thegreatnorth.org.uk/downloads/95/one-creative-north-report-may-2025.pdf

1.5.1 The Creative Industries Sector Plan

The UK Government's Creative Industries Sector Plan sets out a bold 10-year ambition

Almost double investment in the sector from **£17** billion to **£31** billion by 2035

Increase the number of high-growth creative businesses

Embed creative industries in regional innovation systems

Develop cross-sector strengths in CreaTech, screen industries, and digital storytelling[11]

Key investment lines include:

£270 million in support for public service broadcasters, the British Film Institute (BFI), and international co-productions

£100 million to develop new creative clusters and R&D labs

£25 million for the expansion of CoSTAR infrastructure and CreaTech testbeds

£150 million through the Creative Places rowth Fund

York and North Yorkshire's positioning – as a growing CreaTech hub and regional cluster rooted in cultural identity – makes it an ideal candidate for the next wave of sector funding. This position also supports deeper cluster-building around existing assets such as XR Stories, the Guildhall creative workspace, and the CoSTAR Live Lab, led by the University of York.

1.5.2 Corridors and cross-regional collaboration

York and North Yorkshire is situated within the emerging Northern Creative Corridor (developed by One Creative North).[12] The corridor aims to leverage the potential that comes with greater coordination across a geographical area to:

- Improve investment and access to finance for Northern creative industries
- Provide better and more coordinated business support to creative industries
- Create a skills pipeline, opening up creative career opportunities
- Rebalance creative industries' R&D spend to benefit the North
- Maximise the benefits of the Creative Industries beyond their sectors

The corridor runs from Chester and Liverpool, through Greater Manchester to Leeds and Sheffield, and on to Newcastle and Tyneside, Teeside, Gateshead, Durham, and Darlington. It connects innovation and production hubs in Leeds and Manchester with video game studios in Newcastle and Gateshead in the North East. It links arts, culture, and heritage institutions across the North to the North West, which is a hub for live music.

UKRI and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) will further support the development of CreaTech clusters through R&D funding connected to the original CoSTAR programme. This will help create connected new labs and testbeds, as well as new waves of place-based creative clusters and R&D and innovation programmes for key geographies and creative industries subsectors.[13]

[11] UK Government. Creative industries sector plan: the UK's modern industrial strategy [Internet]. UK Government. 2025. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/685943ddb328f1ba50f3cf15/industrial_strategy_creative_industries_sector_plan.pdf

[12] The RSA. Creative corridors: connecting clusters to unleash potential [Internet]. The RSA. 2025. Available from: https://www.thersa.org/reports/creative-corridors-connecting-clusters-to-unleash-potential-report/

[13] Siepel J, Bakhshi H, Bloom M, Velez Ospina J. Understanding Createch R&D [Internet]. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2022 Dec. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Understanding-Createch-RD-v4.pdf

1.5.3 Cross-government priorities

Creative policy is also shaped by wider Whitehall strategies, and policy alignment

The UK Innovation Strategy,[14] which positions creative industries within the UK's five "technology families", including immersive and digital tech	**Skills England priorities for 2025 to 2026,[15] which call for employer-led technical education and local skills plans tied to economic need**	**The International Trade Strategy,[16] which supports creative exports, IP trade, and soft power via cultural diplomacy**

The York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan (2025) sets out a 10-year vision for the region to become a trailblazing City Region Rural Powerhouse: a place where city, market-town, and rural economies work together to deliver inclusive, sustainable growth.

Core objectives			
Boost productivity and innovation across priority sectors: Creative Industries, Clean Energy, Bioeconomy, Food and Farming Innovation, and Rail Innovation and Security.	Deliver place-based growth that recognises the diversity of York and North Yorkshire, its urban centres, market towns, and rural and coastal areas.	Embed skills, infrastructure, and R&D as foundations for future competitiveness.	Align regional delivery with national policy priorities, linking to the UK Industrial Strategy and Creative Industries Sector Plan (2025).
Delivery focus			
The findings inform this report's regional evidence base, ensuring that policy and investment decisions drawing on this report will reflect the full diversity of York and North Yorkshire's creative economy.	Improved connectivity, housing, and green infrastructure to support sustainable development.	Cross-sector partnerships (public, private, academic) to unlock new investment.	Commitment to inclusive growth, ensuring that rural and coastal communities share the benefits of creative and economic renewal.

[14] Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. UK Innovation Strategy: leading the future by creating it [Internet]. UK Government. 2023. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-innovation-strategy-leading-the-future-by-creating-it

[15] Department for Work and Pensions. Skills England priorities for 2025 to 2026 [Internet]. UK Government. 2025. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skills-england-priorities-for-2025-to-2026

[16] Department for Business and Trade. UK trade strategy [Internet]. UK Government. 2025. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-trade-strategy

2: Sector shape and scale

This chapter examines the shape, scale, and composition of York and North Yorkshire's creative industries. It draws on a range of data sources on the region, including:

New evidence from the York and North Yorkshire Creative Industries: Analysis of Size and Concentration report[17] by Hatch (2025), commissioned by the University of York	**Findings from the York and North Yorkshire Creative Economy Census (2025)[18]**	**Office for National Statistics (ONS) datasets for UK business activity[19]**	**The BOP Consulting Economic Impact Analysis[20]**

It explains the mixed-methods approach used to capture a picture of the region's creative economy, and summarises key findings on business numbers, employment, and spatial clustering.

Together, this evidence provides a data-driven foundation for the strategy that will follow, demonstrating not only the region's strengths and specialisms but also the need for targeted investment and coordinated regional action.

The Creative Industries in York and North Yorkshire: Headline figures

£790
million per annum gross value added (GVA)

3%
of total regional GVA

2,600
creative companies

6%
of total companies in the region

20,904
creative jobs

[17] Hatch. York and North Yorkshire creative industries: analysis of size and concentration [Internet]. Hatch. 2025. Available from: https://xrstories.co.uk/publication/york-and-north-yorkshire-creative-industries-analysis-of-size-and-concentration

[18] Harrison J, Brandom S, Neyra R, Murphy D, Brown E. York and North Yorkshire creative economy census 2025 technical report [Internet]. XR Stories, York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. 2025. Available from https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17708416

[19] ONS Local: Estimated number of creative industries jobs, for combined authorities and specified local authorities, 2020 to 2024 [Internet]. Office for National Statistics. 2025. Available from: https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/adhocs/3036onslocalestimatednumberofcreativeindustriesjobsforcombinedauthoritiesandspecifiedlocalauthorities2020to2024

[20] BOP Consulting. XR Stories economic impact analysis report [Internet]. XR Stories. 2022. Available from: https://xrstories.co.uk/publication/xr-stories-economic-impact-analysis-report/

2.1 Overall context on the UK creative industries

The UK's Creative Industries are a recognised engine of growth and innovation. According to the DCMS Creative Industries economic estimates (2024), the sector contributed over £124.6 billion in GVA to the UK economy in 2022, equivalent to approximately 6% of national output. It supported around 2.3 million jobs – one in 14 UK workers.[21] Between 2010 and 2023, GVA generated by the Creative Industries grew by 35%, compared to 22% across the broader economy, underscoring their relative resilience and dynamism.[22]

DCMS defines the Creative Industries through nine subsectors, each with distinct economic contributions and occupational profiles:

- **Film, TV, video, radio, and photography**
- **Music, performing, and visual arts**[23]
- **Advertising and marketing**
- **Museums, galleries, and libraries**
- **Publishing**
- **Architecture**
- **Crafts**
- **Design and designer fashion**
- **IT, software, and computer services**

This classification provides the baseline for national policy, economic estimates, and sector monitoring.

2.2 Regional Creative Industries' economic contribution

Within this broader regional context, the Creative Industries in York and North Yorkshire contribute an estimated £790 million in GVA annually, accounting for approximately 3% of the total regional GVA.[24] York itself accounts for approximately half of this GVA, while rural North Yorkshire makes a significant contribution across various creative subsectors, including museums, live performance, architecture, and visual arts.

According to the BOP Consulting Economic Impact Report (2022), York experienced a 77% increase in the location quotient (LQ) for IT/software between 2015 and 2021, surpassing the UK average.[25] The R&D commercialisation pipeline at the University of York is one part of this growth, including the work of XR Stories and related creative technology partnerships that accelerated from 2018 onwards.

[21] Department for Culture, Media and Sport. DCMS sector economic estimates: employment, January 2024 to December 2024 [Internet]. UK Government. 2025. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/economic-estimates-employment-january-2024-to-december-2024-for-dcms-sectors/dcms-sector-economic-estimates-employment-january-2024-to-december-2024; Department for Culture, Media and Sport. DCMS economic estimates: monthly GVA (to September 2024) [Internet]. UK Government. 2024. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dcms-economic-estimates-monthly-gva-to-september-2024

[22] Department for Culture, Media and Sport. DCMS economic estimates: business demographics, 2024 [Internet]. UK Government. 2024. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dcms-economic-estimates-business-demographics-2024

[23] Department for Culture, Media and Sport. DCMS sectors economic estimates: labour force survey, July to September, 2016–2024 [Internet]. UK Government. 2024. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69121a54ece74c08fbaa6462/Updated_DCMS_Sectors_Economic_Estimates_Labour_Force_Survey__July_to_September_2016-2024.ods

[24] Hatch. York and North Yorkshire creative industries: analysis of size and concentration [Internet]. Hatch. 2025. Available from: https://xrstories.co.uk/publication/york-and-north-yorkshire-creative-industries-analysis-of-size-and-concentration

[25] BOP Consulting. XR Stories economic impact analysis report [Internet]. XR Stories. 2022. Available from: https://xrstories.co.uk/publication/xr-stories-economic-impact-analysis-report/

2.3 Business profile

The York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan[26] cites the numbers of creative businesses as 1,500, but figures cited in research commissioned by the University of York, and conducted by Hatch, suggest the figure is in fact 2,600 – 6% of the total number of companies. This discrepancy is explained by the various data extraction models and, in particular, Hatch's use of several different data sources to present a more representative picture of the number of creative businesses in the region.

As noted above, the sectoral mix includes advertising, architecture, crafts, design, film and television, IT/software, publishing, museums and galleries, and the performing arts. The strongest growth is currently observed in IT and software services, publishing, and the screen industries (film, TV, and video).[27]

The York and North Yorkshire Creative Economy Census (2025) provides an insight into the region's creative subsectors. Music, performing, and visual arts form the largest group (40%), followed by film, TV, video, and photography (12%), advertising and marketing (11%), crafts (10%), and design (9%). Notably, 41% of respondents said their creative activity overlapped with heritage-related work, demonstrating the interdependence between York and North Yorkshire's creative and cultural economies.

While the census offers valuable insights into the York and North Yorkshire creative economy, response rates from the different subsectors varied significantly. The census data therefore provide a sample evidence base, alongside larger data sources from Hatch, the ONS, and BOP Consulting.

Figure 1 shows the Creative Industries subsectors in which respondents to the York and North Yorkshire Creative Economy Census (2025) reported working. Participants provided information about both their primary and, where applicable, secondary roles in the creative economy. These are labelled as 'Primary' and 'Secondary' in the figure legend.

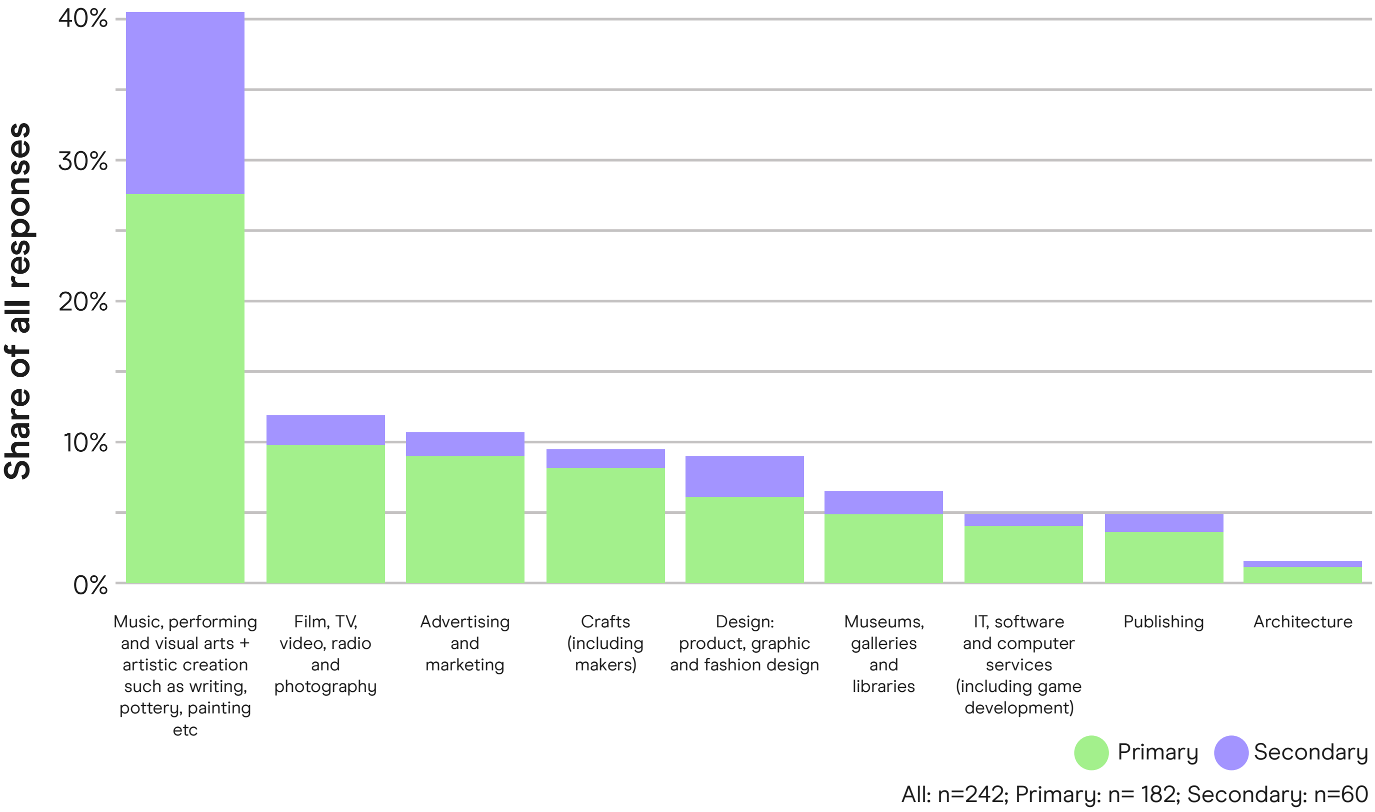


Figure 1: Creative subsector composition. Source: York and North Yorkshire Creative Economy Census (2025).

[26] York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. York and North Yorkshire's Local Growth Plan [Internet]. York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. 2025. Available from: https://yorknorthyorks-ca.gov.uk/our-strategy/localgrowthplan/

[27] Hatch. York and North Yorkshire creative industries: analysis of size and concentration [Internet]. Hatch. 2025. Available from: https://xrstories.co.uk/publication/york-and-north-yorkshire-creative-industries-analysis-of-size-and-concentration; and BOP Consulting. XR Stories economic impact analysis report [Internet]. XR Stories. 2022. Available from: https://xrstories.co.uk/publication/xr-stories-economic-impact-analysis-report/

2.4 Workforce and employment

New analysis of ONS estimates for Creative Industries jobs in the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority region provides further clarity on the region's position within the broader Northern creative economy.

The ONS Creative Industries jobs dataset (2020–2024)[28] estimates employment in the region's creative industries to be between 18,800 and 23,000 jobs, with the latest figure standing at 20,905 jobs in 2024.

When benchmarked against nearby comparators, York and North Yorkshire has smaller absolute creative industries employment numbers than Greater Manchester (125,995 creative jobs in 2024) and West Yorkshire (88,206). However, it is closer in comparison to the North East (50,957 creative jobs), positioning York and North Yorkshire as a mid-scale creative labour market within the Northern Creative Corridor.

Importantly, York and North Yorkshire's creative workforce is proportionally significant given the region's smaller overall population and business base. This reinforces the narrative that, while the region cannot compete on raw scale, its specialisation in CreaTech, immersive storytelling, and heritage-driven creativity means it "punches above its weight" in relative clustering strength.

The Hatch analysis identified that for York and North Yorkshire, the creative workforce is estimated at 11,400 (3% of total jobs). Employment is concentrated in York's urban centre (particularly digital and software subsectors), and North Yorkshire sustains over 6,700 creative roles, including in heritage, performance, and visual arts.[29]

While the workforce figure presented in the Hatch analysis is significantly lower than that of the data presented by ONS, this is best understood as a conservative baseline, capturing registered businesses and excluding much freelance and microbusiness activity captured in the ONS data.

The difference reflects methodological scope: the ONS dataset incorporates self-employment and a wider range of occupational activity, while Hatch and the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) focus more narrowly on company-based employment. The latest ONS data release also acknowledges that datasets on York's Creative Industries were previously suppressed.

Taken together, these two measures provide complementary perspectives:

BRES/Hatch:

A lower-bound measure of registered employment, useful for trend comparison

ONS (2024):

A fuller estimate of total workforce scale, aligning with observed patterns of freelancing and microbusiness activity in York and North Yorkshire

This dual evidence base confirms that York and North Yorkshire should be seen as a mid-sized regional creative labour market, smaller in scale than West Yorkshire or Greater Manchester, but significantly larger than previously assumed and marked by distinctive strengths in CreaTech and immersive storytelling.

[28] ONS Local: Estimated number of creative industries jobs, for combined authorities and specified local authorities, 2020 to 2024 [Internet]. Office for National Statistics. 2025. Available from: https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/adhocs/3036onslocalestimatednumberofcreativeindustriesjobsforcombinedauthoritiesandspecifiedlocalauthorities2020to2024

[29] Hatch. York and North Yorkshire creative industries: analysis of size and concentration [Internet]. Hatch. 2025. Available from: https://xrstories.co.uk/publication/york-and-north-yorkshire-creative-industries-analysis-of-size-and-concentration

2.5 Rural and coastal creative activity

The Creative Industries in York and North Yorkshire are characterised by a distinctive spatial pattern that blends urban innovation clusters with dispersed rural micro-hubs. While York anchors the region's creative identity through its higher concentration of digital, screen, and immersive media businesses, North Yorkshire contributes a rich ecosystem of place-based, heritage-driven, and crafts-based creative practices that are often statistically underrepresented in official datasets.

According to Hatch, and corroborated by a research report commissioned by XR Stories in 2022 – Creative Industries in the Rural Peripheries,[30] North Yorkshire exhibits a significant, albeit more diffuse, spatial distribution of creative activity:

Scarborough and Filey	Harrogate	Selby and Skipton	Whitby and Ryedale
Home to live performance venues such as the Stephen Joseph Theatre, a pioneer of theatre in the round; festivals (e.g. Scarborough's Books By the Beach Festival, and Big Ideas By the Sea); and visual arts activity	A hub for design, publishing, and heritage tourism with active local creative networks	Notable for crafts, maker culture, and architecture firms	Strong links to traditional crafts, galleries, and music

These areas are often driven by microbusinesses, freelancers, and seasonal or tourism-related creative work. These factors result in undercounting in datasets that rely on VAT registration or Standard Industry Classification (SIC) codes. Consequently, Hatch supplemented ONS data with LinkedIn, AI-enhanced web-scraping, and company website research to capture this "invisible" workforce.

Deeper spatial analysis shows distinct sectoral strengths across York and North Yorkshire:

York anchors digital and immersive media with LQs above 1.0 for IT/software and Creative Industries, indicating significant clustering, with IT/software recording an LQ of 1.3 in 2021.[31]

Dispersed rural microbusiness networks characterise North Yorkshire. Despite lower absolute concentrations, the county recorded LQ increases of 55% for screen industries and 43% for IT/software between 2015 and 2021.[32]

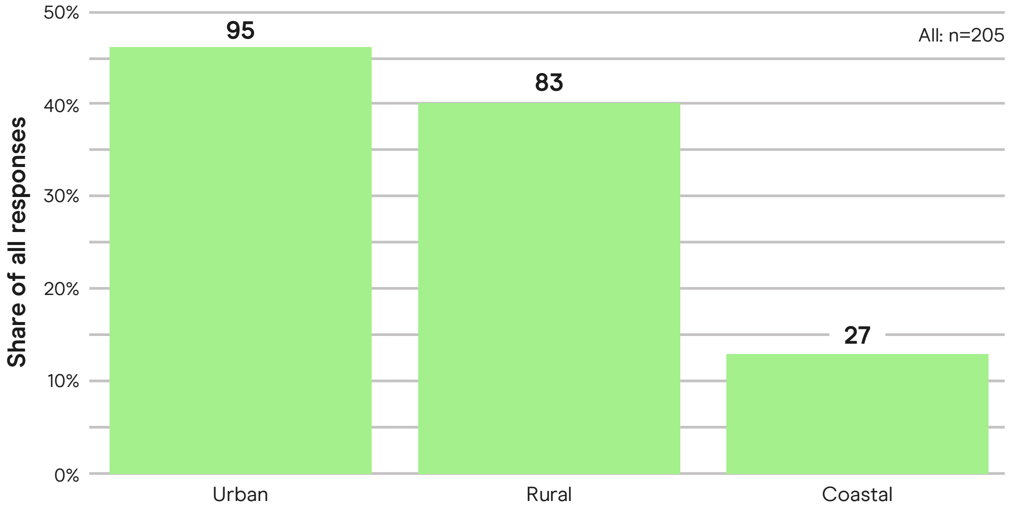


Figure 2: Urban–rural–coastal distribution. Source: York and North Yorkshire Creative Economy Census (2025).

[30] McNally D. Creative industries in the rural peripheries [Internet]. XR Stories. 2022. Available from: https://xrstories.co.uk/publication/creative-industries-in-the-rural-peripheries/

[31] BOP Consulting. XR Stories economic impact analysis report [Internet]. XR Stories. 2022. Available from: https://xrstories.co.uk/publication/xr-stories-economic-impact-analysis-report/

[32] BOP Consulting. XR Stories economic impact analysis report [Internet]. XR Stories. 2022. Available from: https://xrstories.co.uk/publication/xr-stories-economic-impact-analysis-report/

Of respondents to the Creative Economy Census (2025) 46% identified as urban-based, 40% as rural, and 14% as coastal (see Figure 2).. Rural and coastal respondents were most active in crafts, music, and performance, while urban participants predominated in digital design, advertising, and film-related work. These figures quantify the qualitative patterns of dispersed creativity identified elsewhere in the region.

In addition, the BOP Consulting[33] analysis highlights that:

Of the creative businesses in rural North Yorkshire, 45% operate without formal premises (e.g. home studios, shared spaces)	Many rural creative professionals pursue portfolio careers, combining multiple roles across arts, education, and tourism	There is a skills retention challenge, with younger creatives often moving to Leeds, Manchester, or London because local support structures are not sufficient for them to scale their work

Despite these challenges, rural areas benefit from strong community embeddedness, heritage assets, and landscape-inspired practices, which are all particularly relevant for crafts, performance, and immersive storytelling.

2.6 Heritage-driven creativity

Qualitative findings from the York and North Yorkshire Creative Economy Census (2025)[34] corroborate the identified pattern of distributed creativity. Of the respondents, 32% reported direct collaboration with heritage organisations such as York Museums Trust, English Heritage and the National Trust, or described using listed buildings and heritage sites as workplaces.

Rural and coastal creatives often draw on local heritage and landscape as inspiration – from maritime traditions in Scarborough to repurposed farm buildings in the North York Moors – demonstrating how York and North Yorkshire's historic environment underpins both creative practice and economic identity.

[33] BOP Consulting. XR Stories economic impact analysis report [Internet]. XR Stories. 2022. Available from: https://xrstories.co.uk/publication/xr-stories-economic-impact-analysis-report/

[34] Harrison J, Brandom S, Neyra R, Murphy D, Brown E. York and North Yorkshire creative economy census 2025 technical report [Internet]. XR Stories, York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. 2025. Available from https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17708416

2.7 Functional corridors and emerging links

Emerging creative corridors in York and North Yorkshire, particularly along the A59 (York–Harrogate–Skipton) and A64 (Selby–York–Malton–Scarborough), support knowledge exchange and mobility across urban–rural boundaries. These corridors align with the UK Government's Levelling Up missions and the North's emerging CreaTech clusters strategy.

Analysis of business postcodes from the Creative Economy Census highlights concentrations around HG1, YO1, and YO11 – defining a Harrogate–York–Scarborough axis. Secondary clusters appear in Whitby (YO21), Selby (YO8), and Thirsk (YO7). This mapping highlights the corridor-based development potential along the A59 and A64, connecting cultural and digital nodes (see Figure 3).[35]

Figure 3 maps responses to the York and North Yorkshire Creative Economy Census (2025) using postcode boundary data. Darker shades on the map indicate areas with a higher concentration of responses and lighter areas represent lower response counts.

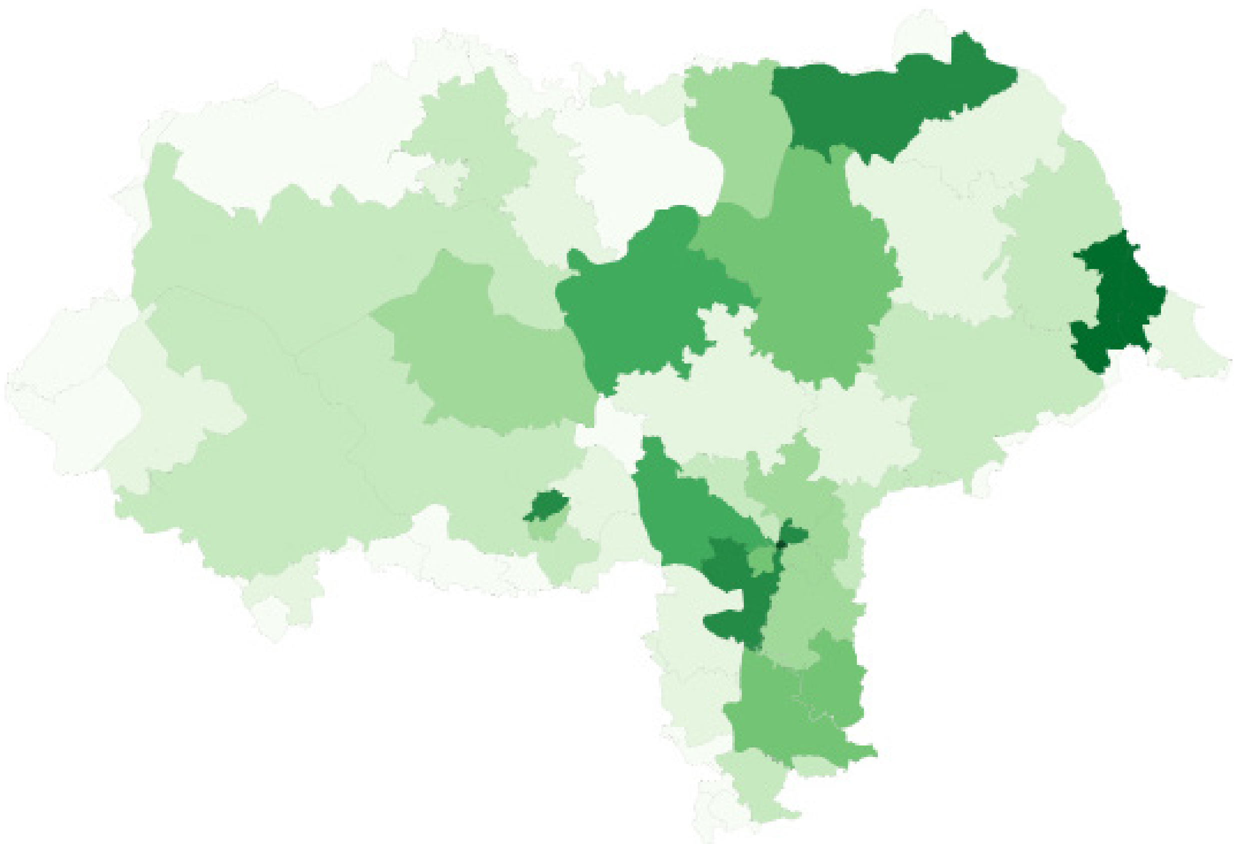


Figure 3: Creative business outward (postcode) density map. Source: York and North Yorkshire Creative Economy Census (2025).

[35] Harrison J, Brandom S, Neyra R, Murphy D, Brown E. York and North Yorkshire creative economy census 2025 technical report [Internet]. XR Stories, York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. 2025. Available from https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17708416

2.8 Summary

By combining official statistics with new digital mapping methods, this chapter establishes a robust baseline for understanding the location of creative industries and their contributions, and how York and North Yorkshire's unique mix of urban innovation and rural creativity can be leveraged for growth.

Methodology overview: How the evidence was built

The Hatch (2025) analysis adopted a mixed-methods, triangulated approach. This methodology was designed to overcome the limitations of traditional data sources, which are often affected by suppressed data, small sample sizes, and the underreporting of microbusinesses, which are particularly prevalent in rural and dispersed geographies such as North Yorkshire.

Core components			
Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes: Used to categorise businesses into Creative Industries subsectors	**LinkedIn Talent Pool Report: Insights on workforce movement, education, skills, and potential talent losses ("leaks") across sectors and locations**	**Brainnwave large language model (LLM): A web-scraping tool employed by Hatch for detailed analysis of the extended reality (XR) sector**	**Creative Economy Census: Qualitative and quantitative data providing insights from individuals and businesses who work in the York and North Yorkshire Creative Industries**

This enhanced mapping revealed a more complete and inclusive picture of creative activity, particularly in dispersed rural and digital-first subsectors, which are often invisible in traditional datasets.

Purpose
The findings inform this report's regional evidence base, ensuring that policy and investment decisions drawing on this report will reflect the full diversity of York and North Yorkshire's creative economy.

3: Innovation: York and North Yorkshire's strength in the Northern Creative Corridor

As innovation is central to the UK's Creative Industries Sector Plan, with R&D recognised as the foundation for new growth, productivity, and international competitiveness, this chapter explores how innovation and cluster development drive the growth of York and North Yorkshire's Creative Industries.

It examines the region's potential role as a national testbed for CreaTech, anchored by R&D assets such as XR Stories, as well as the University of York's key role in leading CoSTAR Live Lab.

Drawing on evidence from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC), Hatch, and One Creative North reports, the chapter outlines:

- **How creative clusters operate**
- **Where York and North Yorkshire sits within the wider Northern Creative Corridor**
- **Why connecting local innovation nodes into a pan-regional network matters for competitiveness and resilience**

The chapter highlights flagship examples of innovation in action, from XR Stories residencies to CreaTech enterprises, such as Viridian FX, AY-PE, and Pilot Theatre. It considers how these models can inform future policy and investment. In doing so, it positions York and North Yorkshire as a leading regional hub for creative R&D, bridging cultural heritage, digital technology, and commercial growth.

> **"We will unlock the potential of our Creative Industries across the UK's high-potential city regions and clusters, where there are significant opportunities to boost regional economic growth and create high-quality jobs. Creative clusters, particularly where sectors and creative disciplines combine, have been a proven success."**
>
> Creative Industries Sector Plan[36]

3.1 Unlocking the region's innovation potential

With distinctive strengths in innovation across the Creative Industries, York and North Yorkshire has a unique capacity to fuse cultural assets with emerging technologies. XR Stories, launched in 2018 as part of the first wave of the UKRI/Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Creative Industries Clusters Programme, has played a pivotal role in anchoring this innovation system. Its positioning at the University of York has brought together researchers, industry, and policymakers, enabling the development of new immersive storytelling formats and supporting over 100 collaborative projects with creative businesses.[37]

Evidence from Creative PEC confirms the wider benefits of clustering. The 2020 Creative Radar study mapped 709 creative "microclusters" across the UK, including many located outside recognised metropolitan clusters.[38] These microclusters were particularly growth-oriented and ambitious in regions beyond London and the South East, although they also faced more acute financial barriers. This evidence highlights the potential of York and North Yorkshire's dispersed but dynamic creative businesses, which benefit from proximity and knowledge exchange but require targeted interventions to scale.

[36] UK Government. Creative industries sector plan: the UK's modern industrial strategy [Internet]. UK Government. 2025. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/685943ddb328f1ba50f3cf15/industrial_strategy_creative_industries_sector_plan.pdf

[37] BOP Consulting. XR Stories economic impact analysis report [Internet]. XR Stories. 2022. Available from: https://xrstories.co.uk/publication/xr-stories-economic-impact-analysis-report/

[38] Siepel J, Camerani R, Masucci M, Velez Ospina J, Casadei P, Bloom M. Mapping the UK's creative clusters and microclusters [Internet]. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2020. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/PEC-Creative-Radar-report-November-2020.pdf

Regional anchors for CreaTech

As a former creative industries R&D cluster for Yorkshire and the Humber, XR Stories[39] has demonstrated best practice in aligning research excellence with commercial innovation. Its success provided a foundation for the University of York to secure a key role leading CoSTAR Live Lab,[40] reinforcing the region's role in shaping national CreaTech R&D infrastructure. Together, these initiatives have helped to establish York and North Yorkshire as a testbed for immersive storytelling, virtual production, and user-centred design technologies.

The wider Creative PEC Geographies of Creativity report underlines the fact that universities acting as "anchor institutions" are critical to the performance of regional creative clusters.[41] York exemplifies this model, combining its heritage as the UK's only UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts with forward-looking CreaTech R&D facilities. These assets create perfect conditions for York and North Yorkshire to connect more fully with the emerging Northern Creative Corridor, developed under the banner of One Creative North.[42]

3.2 Innovation in action

The innovation pipeline in the region demonstrates the practical value of collaboration. XR Stories has supported projects including experimental theatre productions that integrate mixed reality (MR), and new distribution models for immersive heritage experiences. These initiatives demonstrate how R&D investment can be translated into commercial outcomes, thereby strengthening the case for a Creative IP Studio to capture, scale, and finance research outputs across the region.

National survey data reinforce this opportunity. Analysis of the UK Innovation Survey reveals that, although the proportion of "innovation-active" creative firms has declined over the past decade, creative businesses remain significantly more engaged in design, IP protection, and software-related R&D than other service sectors. Furthermore, regional and national innovation support programmes are identified as significant drivers of activity.

York and North Yorkshire's innovation ecosystem goes beyond an idea: it actively creates award-winning content, market-ready products, and benefits for the community. Of the respondents to the York and North Yorkshire Creative Economy Census, 57% reported that their business had created a new product in the last 12 months. The region's creative R&D efforts enable businesses and institutions to experiment, grow, and commercialise new forms of storytelling, interaction, and learning.

A distinctive wave of immersive innovation increasingly shapes the creative and cultural sectors of York and North Yorkshire. Collaborations between HE programmes, small businesses, freelancers, and cultural organisations have enabled a number of pioneering projects that demonstrate how R&D in CreaTech can transform storytelling, heritage, education, and business growth, exemplifying regional innovation.

[39] XR Stories, an R&D initiative launched in 2018 and led by the University of York in partnership with Screen Yorkshire and the BFI. The programme was designed to support innovation in immersive and interactive storytelling and has since grown into one of the UK's most recognised regionally embedded CreaTech initiatives: https://xrstories.co.uk/

[40] The University of York also takes a leading role in the UK's CoSTAR programme—the £75 million national R&D infrastructure for screen and live performance, funded by UKRI. The University of York-led CoSTAR Live Lab, based at Production Park in Wakefield, features an LED virtual production stage, real-time audience testing environments, and high-end audio capabilities: https://www.costarnetwork.co.uk/labs/livelab

[41] Siepel J, Ramirez-Guerra A, Rathi S. Geographies of creativity [Internet]. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2023. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Creative-PEC-Geographies-of-Creativity-State-of-the-Nations-December-2023.pdf

[42] Kelly J. One Creative North Chair's scoping report [Internet]. One Creative North. 2025 Apr. Available from: https://thegreatnorth.org.uk/downloads/95/one-creative-north-report-may-2025.pdf

3.3 Regional examples of innovation

The following are four businesses from York and North Yorkshire that illustrate the breadth of innovation in action across the region.

Viridian FX: Visual innovation in York	Founded in York, Viridian FX is a pioneering visual effects (VFX) studio recognised for its work on international film and television projects. Combining artistry with cutting-edge VFX technology, the studio exemplifies regional excellence in digital innovation. The York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan identifies Viridian FX as part of a growing digital content cluster, demonstrating that high-end post-production can thrive outside major metropolitan centres. Their work enhances the region's global competitiveness in creative exports and supports the development of local talent.
Peel X: Digital storytelling in Skipton	Peek X is an award-winning XR studio based in Skipton, North Yorkshire, that delivers immersive user experiences across tourism, retail, education, culture, and the arts. Peel X's diverse portfolio of work has achieved such accolades as Visit England's Best Told Story Award. Its recent award-winning app Uist Unearthed – the first augmented reality (AR) trail app to deliver archaeological storytelling – was recently featured in the British Museum.
Trimble: Innovative creative technology in Richmond	Trimble is a communications company that helps animal health professionals create engaging creative content to excel at what they do. With a national and international client base, Trimble's team of videographers, content creators, scriptwriters, designers, and veterinary specialists provide high-end videos, photography, medical illustrations, and graphic design to support companies in the veterinary sector to creatively explain the benefits of products and services.

3.4 Comparative strengths and CreaTech research and development

As referenced in Chapter 2, the concept of CreaTech is now widely recognised as a growth driver. CreaTech is defined as creative businesses where the development or novel adaptation of technology forms a core part of their activity. Research shows that CreaTech firms differ from conventional technology companies in how they organise their R&D: they rely more on staff time and freelancers than on capital equipment, and often lack formal R&D budgets. This creates challenges in accessing R&D tax relief and highlights the need for HMRC and policymakers to adapt frameworks to recognise R&D driven by the arts, humanities, and social sciences.[43]

York and North Yorkshire's CreaTech profile, particularly in immersive storytelling, virtual production, and applied AI, aligns closely with these findings. Further, specific heritage and CreaTech opportunities are highlighted in the Creative Economy Census: over 40% of respondents reported that their creative economy activity intersects with the heritage sector. This underlines a major opportunity for CreaTech innovation, combining immersive storytelling, interactive interpretation, and digital preservation technologies with York and North Yorkshire's cultural assets.

[43] Siepel J, Bakhshi H, Bloom M, Velez Ospina J. Understanding Createch R&D [Internet]. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2022 Dec. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Understanding-Createch-RD-v4.pdf

3.5 A corridor-based innovation strategy

York in particular has strengths in CreaTech, and should be used as a focal point and lever for the wider region's ambitions as a creative technology innovation hub. The innovation of both York and the wider York and North Yorkshire region does not stand alone; it is increasingly integrated into a broader Northern strategy.

This pan-regional initiative links clusters across Leeds–Bradford (screen and post-production), Manchester (broadcast and IP), Hull (digital culture), and the North East (games, VFX), fostering a cohesive, innovation-driven ecosystem.

In turn, this corridor-based approach boosts regional competitiveness, similar to global examples like the Toronto–Waterloo tech corridor in Canada. It positions York not just as a creative city but as a connected, distributed network of innovation.

A key role for York in the One Creative North corridor would provide a strong framework for future growth. Evidence from the Creative PEC shows that creative microclusters outside London have the greatest potential to scale when connected to wider corridors of innovation. Connecting York's immersive R&D strengths with production capacity in Leeds and Manchester, as well as with coastal and rural clusters in Scarborough, Harrogate, and beyond, could help realise the "supercluster" effects seen in Canada's Waterloo–Toronto innovation corridor.

Evidence from the Creative Economy Census indicates[44] that innovation and export activity are already thriving at the micro level. Respondents reported national and international recognition, from BAFTA and the UK Theatre Awards to broadcast collaborations with BBC Radio 3, and exported work reaching Europe, the USA, and Asia. Many of these achievements originate from small or home-based studios, reinforcing the importance of targeted R&D and investment support to help such enterprises scale their impact.

3.6 A regional powerhouse

York and North Yorkshire has numerous networks, organisations, and infrastructural elements that bolster creativity. Buildings with office, events, and networking space focusing on the Creative Industries include Patch (York), The Station (Richmond), Craven Arts House (Skipton), Woodend Gallery (Scarborough), and The Barn (Tadcaster). While these venues are often run on a commercial basis, some are community interest companies (CICs) and some are owned and run by local authorities. Support and networking organisations such as Creative Harrogate, York Creatives, AHH Studio Collective (Malton), and the Scarborough Creative Cluster offer events, networking, and opportunities for peer-to-peer support. Companies including Mediale (Selby) and ARCADE (Scarborough) focus specifically on engagement with the creative community, while The Artery (Craven) and Creative Business Skills (York) provide business-specific support for creative practitioners.

Whether physical buildings or centres of activity, the aforementioned hubs are often restricted by geographical boundaries. Formal boundaries may exist due to funding restrictions based on local authority or town council geographies, restricting who can be supported. Informal limitations might also be in place, to provide a sensible focus on supporting creatives in a localised and defined area. As a result, best practice is not always shared, and opportunities available in one part of York and North Yorkshire are not necessarily available across the whole region.

In other parts of the UK, combined authorities have leveraged these microclusters of support into cohesive, pan-regional support offers. Creative Cardiff,[45] for example, supports the Cardiff Capital Region (10 local authorities and approximately half the population of Wales). Introducing a pan-regional resource hub similar to Creative Cardiff, with job boards, events, space directories, and skills and training summaries, would provide a coalescing mechanism to support the branding of York and North Yorkshire as a creative cluster. It would also support creative practitioners and companies to access new opportunities, connect with others working in the sector, and, ultimately, develop the skills and networks required to grow their businesses.

3.7 Summary

York and North Yorkshire can consolidate its reputation as a CreaTech hub by building on its status as a first-wave cluster and positioning this cluster as an R&D node within a corridor strategy. This will enable the region to play a nationally significant role in advancing innovation across the UK's creative industries. A range of initiatives are emerging from York and North Yorkshire's CreaTech R&D scene that deserve dedicated policy and investment focus.

[44] Harrison J, Brandom S, Neyra R, Murphy D, Brown E. York and North Yorkshire creative economy census 2025 technical report [Internet]. XR Stories, York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. 2025. Available from https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17708416

[45] Creative Cardiff: https://creativecardiff.org.uk/

4: Skills and talent

This chapter examines the skills base and labour market for York and North Yorkshire's Creative Industries,

Summarising workforce scale and trends	**Identifying gaps and shortages (technical, fusion, and leadership skills)**	**Assessing barriers to access for freelancers, rural and coastal learners, and underrepresented groups**

It also maps FE/HE pathways and programmes, and outlines where devolved and corridor-wide interventions can most effectively improve progression, retention, and upskilling.

4.1 Meeting the creative skills challenge

The growth of York and North Yorkshire's Creative Industries depends not only on infrastructure and finance but also on the strength of its workforce. Nationally, the Creative Industries Sector Plan (2025) places skills at the centre of future growth, with a focus on employer-led training, technical qualifications, freelance support, and careers guidance.

For York and North Yorkshire, where microbusinesses and freelancers dominate, the challenge is twofold: to nurture the next generation of creative talent and to retain and upskill the current workforce in ways that are flexible, inclusive, and relevant to industry demand.

The ONS Creative Industries jobs dataset (2024) highlights the volatility and resilience of York and North Yorkshire's workforce, reflecting the impact of pandemic-era shocks and restructuring. However, as noted in Chapter 2, by 2024 employment had stabilised at 20,905.[46]

This pattern mirrors the broader sector's cyclical challenges but also underlines York and North Yorkshire's adaptability, with workforce levels recovering more quickly than in some neighbouring regions. By contrast, West Yorkshire saw a sharper dip in 2021 (down to 59,211 jobs) before figures returned to pre-pandemic levels, while in Greater Manchester the workforce continued to expand, reaching over 106,000 creative jobs in 2024.

For skills planning, this suggests two implications:

Volatility demands flexibility – the predominance of freelancers and microbusinesses in York and North Yorkshire means that job numbers fluctuate significantly. Skills interventions must therefore be modular, responsive, and capable of supporting workers through transitions.

Scale versus specialisation – while York and North Yorkshire cannot match the sheer volume of jobs in Leeds/Manchester, it can build on its distinctive strengths in immersive and CreaTech R&D to attract and retain talent. This requires targeted investment in graduate retention, technical and leadership training, and region-wide support for access to training to address the challenges of a rural

[46] ONS Local: Estimated number of creative industries jobs, for combined authorities and specified local authorities, 2020 to 2024 [Internet]. Office for National Statistics. 2025. Available from: https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/adhocs/3036onslocalestimatednumberofcreativeindustriesjobsforcombinedauthoritiesandspecifiedlocalauthorities2020to2024

4.2 Nature of employment and structural challenges

Project-based work, short-term contracts, and self-employment define creative employment. The Creative PEC's Good Work Review (2024) found that creative workers are twice as likely to be self-employed as the UK average, and that 70% of non-permanent staff were on fixed-term contracts compared with 47% across all industries.[47] Informal recruitment practices and reliance on networks disadvantage those without access to industry contacts, reinforcing barriers to inclusion.

Freelancers face additional vulnerabilities, including low and unstable incomes, long hours, and limited access to training and representation. Nationally, 45% of creative industries employers had not provided any training in the previous year, compared with 40% across all industries.[48] Apprenticeships remain underutilised, with the Creative Industries accounting for just 2.1% of all apprenticeship starts, despite representing more than 7% of the UK workforce.[49]

The findings of the York and North Yorkshire Creative Economy Census[50] echo these structural issues. Businesses consistently cited difficulties in recruiting suitably skilled employees; this was particularly due to the limited local talent pool, difficulties in funding training, insufficient time to organise and deliver training, and limited local training provision. Some organisations provide in-house training to compensate for a lack of formal opportunities, while one respondent reported that they have offshored elements of their work to maintain affordability. Respondents called for accessible, high-quality training in both technical and business skills, alongside mentorship programmes that understand freelance and microbusiness models.

The census also highlighted heavy reliance on unpaid and voluntary labour across the sector, including in trusteeships, festival organisation, and mentoring, which allows many activities to be sustained but raises concerns about long-term fairness and workforce sustainability.

While 30% of Creative Economy Census respondents work more than 37.5 hours per week, 52% reported fewer than 30 hours. This dual pattern of overwork and underemployment illustrates the volatility and time-fragmentation that characterise freelance creative careers, particularly in project-based sectors.

4.3 Diversity and inclusion

Despite progress, entrenched inequalities continue to shape the UK's Creative and Screen Industries. Research shows that women remain overrepresented at entry level but significantly underrepresented in senior creative and decision-making roles.[51] Class-based inequalities also remain a persistent barrier to progression: workers from professional and managerial households continue to dominate the sector, accounting for around 61% of the workforce. In comparison, those from working-class origins make up just 31%.[52] In senior roles, gender disparities are particularly stark. Recent evidence finds that men hold around 62% of senior positions across the screen industries, underscoring the structural nature of exclusion.[53]

The York and North Yorkshire Creative Economy Census data reveal a workforce that is both varied in age and relatively gender-diverse, with 60% of respondents aged 25–54 and 60% identifying as female. Also, 35% of respondents reported holding more than one creative economy role, reflecting a highly flexible, portfolio-based labour market typical of creative clusters with significant freelance participation.

[47] Carey H. The good work review [Internet]. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2025. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/research_report_entr/good-work-review/

[48] Giles L, Carey H, O'Brien D, Gorman S, Green M. Skills mismatches in the UK's creative industries [Internet]. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2025 Feb. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Creative-PEC-Skills-mismatches-in-the-UKs-Creative-Industries-12-Feb-2025.pdf – esp. Executive Summary and section 5.2.

[49] Skills England. Skills England: Sector skills needs assessments – creative industries [Internet]. Skills England. 2025 Jun. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6863f1e5b466cce1bb121aed/Skills_England_-_sector_skills_needs_assessments_-_creative_industries.pdf

[50] Harrison J, Brandom S, Neyra R, Murphy D, Brown E. York and North Yorkshire creative economy census 2025 technical report [Internet]. XR Stories, York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. 2025. Available from https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17708416

[51] Wing-Fai L, Gill R, Randle K. Getting in, getting on, getting out? Women as career scramblers in the UK film and television industries. The Sociological Review [Internet]. 2015 May 1;63(1_suppl):50–65. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954x.12240; Cannizzo F, Strong C. "Put some balls on that woman": gendered repertoires of inequality in screen composers' careers [Internet]. Gender Work and Organization. 2020 Jun 25;27(6):1346–60. Available from: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.12496; and Sissons P, Godwin ES. Diversity and inclusion in the screen industries – a rapid evidence assessment [Internet]. University of Wolverhampton. 2024. Available from: https://wlv.openrepository.com/server/api/core/bitstreams/5ca2db73-f87f-4baf-b1fc-656c056d3f56/content.

[52] Carey H, O'Brien D, Gable O. Screened out: class-based disadvantage in the UK screen industries [Internet]. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2021. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/PEC-and-ScreenSkills-report-Screened-Out-FINAL-April-2021.pdf

[53] Sissons P, Godwin ES. Diversity and inclusion in the screen industries – a rapid evidence assessment [Internet]. University of Wolverhampton. 2024. Available from: https://wlv.openrepository.com/server/api/core/bitstreams/5ca2db73-f87f-4baf-b1fc-656c056d3f56/content

Yorkshire has been a testbed for major inclusive programmes such as Beyond Brontës, Connected Campus, and the Centre of Screen Excellence: Yorkshire (CoSE:Y), which together have supported thousands of new entrants into the screen industries. However, recent evidence shows that while these schemes successfully improve access, many participants remain concentrated in junior or early-career roles, highlighting the need for targeted "step-up" interventions to support mid-career progression and leadership development.[54]

4.4 Skills gaps and shortages

Research from the Creative PEC on skills mismatches (2023) identifies creative businesses as among those most affected by skills shortages. Employers report persistent gaps in technical fields, VFX, animation, virtual production, and advanced "fusion skills" that blend creativity with AI, coding, and data.[55] Transferable skills are also in deficit: skills levels in project management, communication, and teamwork are repeatedly cited as weaknesses. Leadership and business skills are often underdeveloped: many creative leads are promoted into management roles without adequate training, which reduces productivity and innovation capacity.[56]

4.5 Skills gaps and shortages

In York and North Yorkshire, 35% of respondents reported having never undertaken any skills-based training in their creative economy roles. Also, 33% cited a lack of funding as a barrier to their business/organisation providing skills-based training. This demonstrates the need for subsidised modular training and locally delivered CPD aligned with corridor-wide skills planning.

Figure 4 shows the difficulties that businesses and organisations, represented in the York and North Yorkshire Creative Economy Census (2025), encountered when providing skills-based training for their employees.

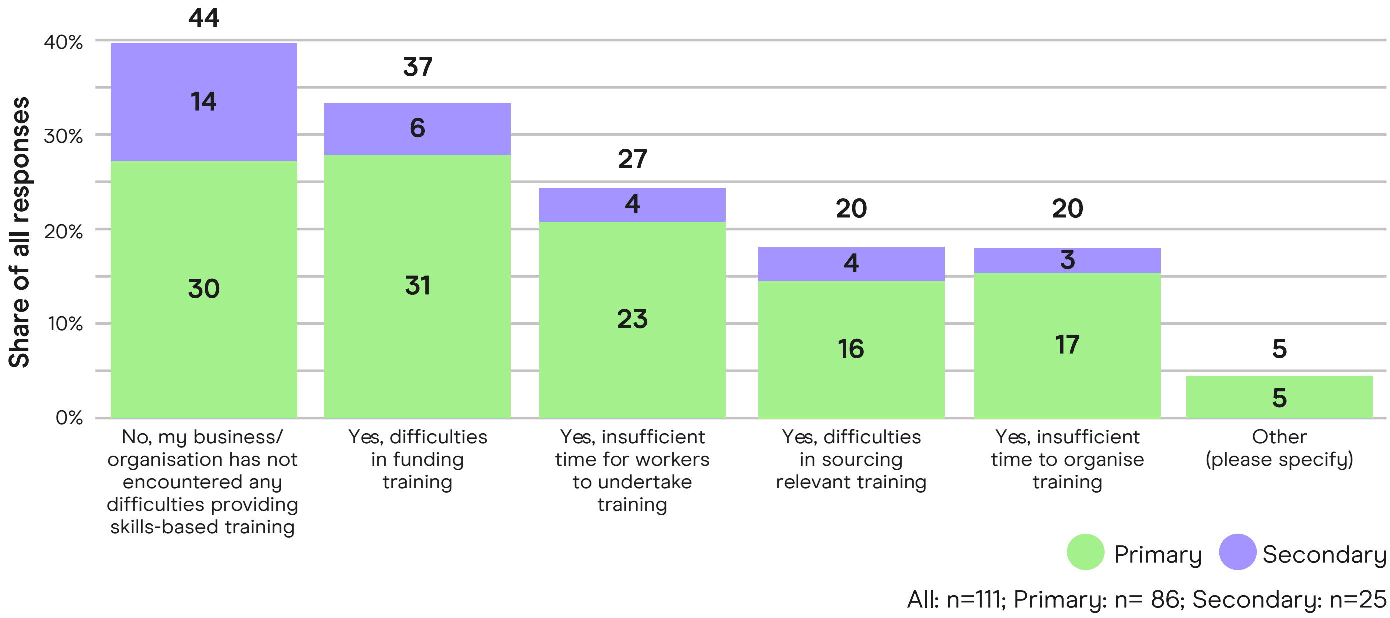


Figure 4: Difficulties in providing skills-based training. Source: York and North Yorkshire Creative Economy Census (2025).

Participants provided information about both their primary and, where applicable, secondary roles in the creative economy. These are labelled as 'Primary' and 'Secondary' in the figure legend.

[54] Thomas B, Einarsdóttir A. Assessing the impact of diversity schemes on career trajectories [Internet]. Screen Industries Growth Network (SIGN). 2023. Available from: https://screen-network.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Assessing-the-impact-of-diversity-schemes-on-career-trajectories.pdf

[55] Giles L, Carey H, O'Brien D, Gorman S, Green M. Skills mismatches in the UK's creative industries [Internet]. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2025 Feb. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Creative-PEC-Skills-mismatches-in-the-UKs-Creative-Industries-12-Feb-2025.pdf

[56] Giles L, Carey H, O'Brien D, Gorman S, Green M. Skills mismatches in the UK's creative industries [Internet]. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2025 Feb. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Creative-PEC-Skills-mismatches-in-the-UKs-Creative-Industries-12-Feb-2025.pdf

4.6 Further and higher education

York and North Yorkshire's HE and FE network provides a powerful foundation for skills, innovation, and inward investment, directly linking talent pipelines to regional growth sectors, including the Creative Industries, the bioeconomy, and digital innovation. The region hosts three universities: the **University of York** (a world-top-150 research-intensive university), **York St John University** (with recognised strengths in creative practice, media production, and social enterprise), and the **Coventry University** campus at **Scarborough**.

Complementing these are six FE colleges delivering technical and vocational pathways aligned with local skills needs: **York College, Scarborough TEC, Selby College, Craven College, Harrogate College,** and **Askham Bryan College** (specialising in land-based and environmental disciplines). Together, these institutions form a region-wide ecosystem supporting both higher-level innovation and inclusive access to creative and technical skills.

4.7 Creative and digital learning: Pathways and scale

The region offers a comprehensive pipeline of creative and digital learning, ranging from T Levels and apprenticeships to vocational diplomas, higher technical qualifications, undergraduate degrees, and postgraduate research. Across the three universities and six FE colleges, provision spans subjects such as film, television, games, design, music technology, computing, animation, media production, and immersive technologies.

In total, an estimated 130–190 courses engage around 3,500–5,500 students annually across FE and HE. This ecosystem underpins the region's innovation capacity, creative workforce, and export potential, ensuring opportunities for learners at every level, from school-leavers to those undertaking advanced study.

With its six colleges across the region, FE provision plays a vital role in the regional skills system, and yet gaps remain. Across Yorkshire and the Humber, creative subjects accounted for 8.9% of FE enrolments in 2022–2023, the highest rate in the North. However, only 15% of these were in arts, media, and publishing, the lowest rate across Northern regions and the second lowest nationally.[58] This suggests both strength in overall uptake and weakness in subject balance. Large parts of the region lack access to FE and the creative apprenticeship offer outside of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is narrow and limits progression routes.

While HE institutions in York have strong links with industry, graduate outcomes for arts and culture-related disciplines still raise concerns about underemployment and job quality. National graduate outcomes data for the 2022/2023 cohort show that 15 months after graduation, 88% were in some form of work or further study and 59% were in full-time employment. Many creative arts graduates instead report portfolio-style, freelance, or part-time activity.[59] These patterns can reflect insecure contracts, limited progression pathways, and decisions by graduates to take up roles outside those occupations classified as arts, design, and media.[60] The strengthening of pathways from HE to industry requires more structured placements, paid internships, and employer investment; however, there are several initiatives and exemplars, some of which are covered in section 4.8.

[57] McNally D. Creative industries in the rural peripheries [Internet]. XR Stories. 2022. Available from: https://xrstories.co.uk/publication/creative-industries-in-the-rural-peripheries/

[58] Giles L, Carey H, Hickman, B. Creative further education in the four UK nations [Internet]. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2024. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Creative-Further-Education-in-the-Four-Nations-Creative-PEC-State-of-the-Nations-report-1.pdf

[59] HESA. Graduate outcomes 2022/23: summary statistics (SB272), figure 1 – graduate activities [Internet]. HESA. 2025 Jul. Available from: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/17-07-2025/sb272-higher-education-graduate-outcomes-statistics/activities

[60] Wicklow K, Gamble D. The value of creative graduates – research report 2024 [Internet]. GuildHE, UKADIA. 2024. Available from: https://guildhe.ac.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/The-Value-of-Creative-Graduates-Report-2024-GuildHE-and-UKADIA_compressed-1%20%281%29.pdf

Private organisations, including Innovate Educate[61] and Screen Yorkshire,[62] also support learning and development, providing skills bootcamps, toolkits and online resources for individuals looking to enter or progress within the region's creative industries.

Private providers are often funded by the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority, or by other public sector funds. Example programmes include a creative business skills bootcamp[63] delivered by York St John University in partnership with Aesthetica, and a technical production skills bootcamp[64] delivered by Production Park, both funded by the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority using devolved funding from the Department for Education.

In 2025, the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority launched the Mayor's Skills Innovation Fund,[65] a £2.3 million grant fund to support further skills development in the region. As one of three recipients of the funding, XR Stories will deliver immersive technology skills training to strengthen the region's creative sector via the Extending XR programme.[66] The Mayor's Skills Innovation Fund is focused on increasing the number of new tutors, learners, and courses using innovative approaches to support skills development across the whole region.

4.8 Regional initiatives and exemplars

York and North Yorkshire has already pioneered several innovative approaches to bridging these gaps. Screen Yorkshire's Trainee Hub, Beyond Brontës, and Connected Campus programmes provide inclusive pathways into the screen industry.[67] XR Stories has piloted immersive technologies CPD for SMEs, demonstrating how R&D-led training can be integrated into business development. The York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority has also begun investing in mayoral skills pilots, such as the Extended XR programme, which will be delivered across the region.

Screen Alliance North is one of the BFI Skills Clusters established under the National Lottery-funded BFI Skills Clusters programme to address skills gaps and support workforce development across the UK's screen industries. Led collaboratively by Screen Yorkshire, Liverpool Film Office, and North East Screen, the Alliance covers the majority of the North of England, including York and North Yorkshire, by creating seamless pathways between education, training, and employment. It works with universities, colleges, and industry partners to coordinate regional provision in film, TV, animation, games, and VFX, ensuring that local talent can access high-quality opportunities without leaving the region. The initiative plays a key role in aligning the skills agenda with inward investment and production growth.[68]

4.9 Overarching challenges

1.	Underinvestment in training and apprenticeships: Creative SMEs under-train compared to the rest of the economy, and apprenticeship take-up is weak. Expanding modular CPD and apprenticeship incentives is essential.
2.	Mismatch between HE and industry: York is home to two strong HE institutions with creative specialisms – the University of York, with immersive tech, film, games, and storytelling; and York St John University, with performance, media production, and business. However, there is a mismatch between HE and industry: arts and culture graduates are highly motivated and utilise their skills but face low pay and limited early-career opportunities. Stronger pathways from HE to paid placements are needed.
3.	FE provision and apprenticeships in creative fields remain limited: This is especially the case outside Information and Communications Technology (ICT) disciplines.
4.	Barriers for rural and coastal learners: They face significant barriers in accessing industry-relevant training.
5.	Net talent loss from York and North Yorkshire to Manchester, Leeds, and London: This is particularly the case for mid-career creatives.
6.	Diversity without progression: Entry-level diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI) programmes are working, but barriers remain at mid-career and in leadership. Clearer regional DEI data and step-up schemes are required.
7.	Leadership and business skills gap: Technical skills dominate the debate, but poor management capacity undermines team performance and business growth. Leadership training must be embedded alongside craft training.
8.	Regional retention and “talent leakage”: With no major broadcasters or film commissioners in York and North Yorkshire, retaining graduates and experienced professionals requires a stronger studio ecosystem, employer investment, and visible career ladders.
9.	Data and evidence gaps: Inconsistent freelancer data, weak regional DEI stats, and a lack of longitudinal tracking make it hard to assess interventions. Regional partnerships with the Creative PEC and Skills England could fill this gap.

4.10 Summary

The evidence suggests a flexible, freelance-heavy workforce with distinct strengths and notable pressure points. Aligning mayoral skills pilots, FE/HE partnerships, and employer-led CPD with corridor-wide mobility will be critical. In line with the York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan (2025), devolved delivery should prioritise modular training, leadership pathways, and rural access, ensuring talent can start, stay, and step up across the region.

5: Finance, IP, and business growth

This chapter outlines:

The financial barriers facing creative SMEs and freelancers	The case for IP-backed investment	The business support required to turn prototypes into scalable firms

It reviews investment gaps, diversity, and inclusion in access to capital, and proposes investor-readiness, revolving micro-funds, and IP lending pilots aligned with national schemes and corridor collaboration.

5.1 Access to finance: Persistent barriers

York and North Yorkshire faces the same structural finance barriers seen across the creative economy, amplified by geography and firm size. However, it also has unique strengths, including IP-rich clusters, world-leading R&D facilities, and a growing role in corridor strategies. By piloting IP-backed finance, embedding investor-readiness, and linking to national initiatives, the region can harness its creative potential to drive sustainable business growth and establish a model for other parts of the UK.

Access to finance remains a significant barrier for creative businesses throughout the UK, and York and North Yorkshire is no exception. The region's creative sector is primarily composed of microenterprises, sole traders, and early-stage firms. While this structure fosters agility and innovation, it also exposes vulnerabilities: many businesses lack collateral, rely on project-based income, and struggle to demonstrate the predictable revenue streams that traditional lenders typically seek.

Qualitative evidence reinforces these findings. Of the York and North Yorkshire Creative Economy Census respondents, 54% identified access to funding as a barrier to growth. Access to finance was also the most common business support initiative requested by respondents, with 45% saying that it would really help their business or organisation. Within this, respondents requested small, low-administration grants and micro-commissions tailored to freelancers and sole traders, alongside match-funded schemes to leverage external investment. Respondents stressed that most available support is too generic and does not reflect the realities of their creative work. These insights highlight a need for simpler, locally delivered funding mechanisms and creative-specific business advice.

The York and North Yorkshire Creative Economy Census confirms the predominance of micro and freelance enterprise models, with 36% of respondents identifying as freelancers, 17% as sole proprietors, and 17% as private company owners. This business ecology emphasises the importance of micro-grants, revolving funds, and flexible finance mechanisms over conventional SME loans or equity instruments.[69]

As presented in Figure 5, when ranked quantitatively, the leading barriers to growth were access to finance (54%), reduced consumer demand linked to the cost of living (49%), increased competition (37%), York/North Yorkshire location (32%), and a limited customer base (30%). These metrics align closely with national Creative PEC research, with additional concerns pointing to the geographically dispersed nature of York and North Yorkshire. These barriers highlight immediate priorities for combined-authority-level intervention.

The national context reinforces this challenge. the Creative PEC and Creative UK's Unleashing Creativity: Fixing the Finance Gap (2023) survey found that creative businesses are less likely to secure bank loans or venture capital than comparable SMEs, partly because investors often misunderstand IP-led business models.[70] In York and North Yorkshire, the geography of dispersed microbusinesses amplifies this challenge, with rural connectivity and coastal deprivation making it more difficult for firms to attract outside investment.

[69] Harrison J, Brandom S, Neyra R, Murphy D, Brown E. York and North Yorkshire creative economy census 2025 technical report [Internet]. XR Stories, York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. 2025. Available from https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17708416

[70] Bakhshi H, Siepel J, Carmona L, Tarr A. Unleashing creativity: fixing the finance gap in the Creative Industries. Creative UK / Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2025. Available from: https://unleash.wearecreative.uk/

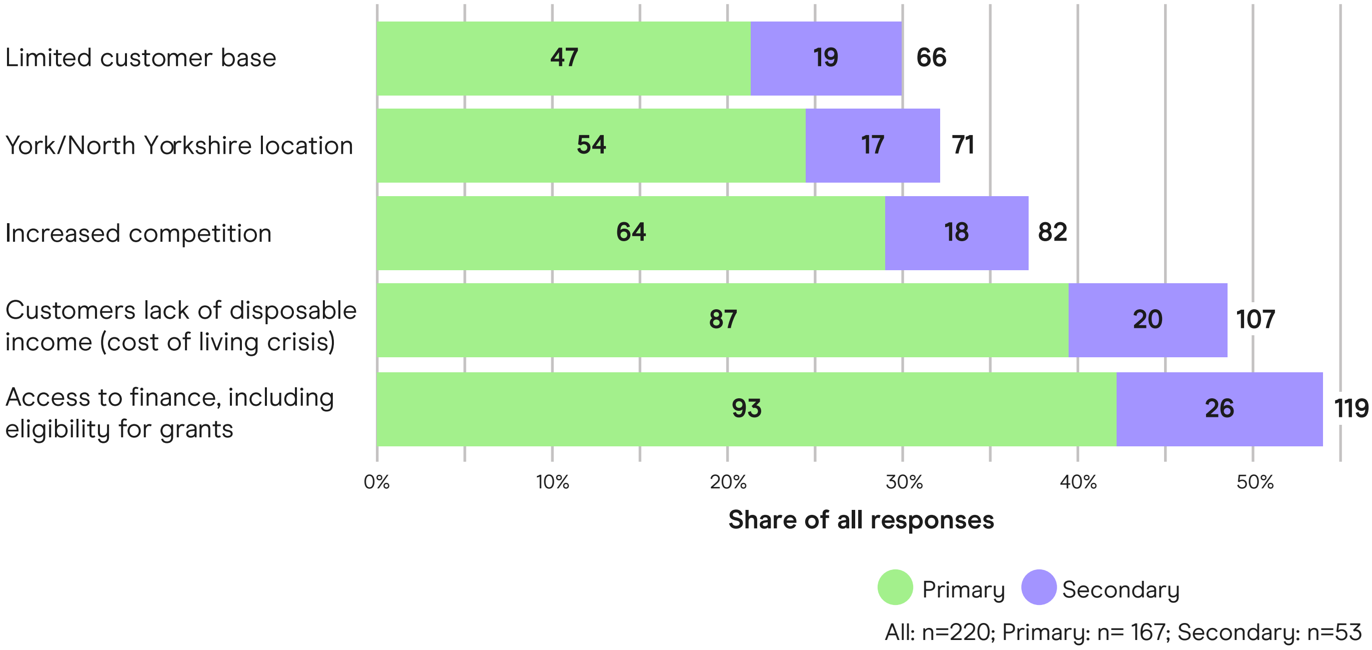


Figure 5: Top five barriers to growth. Source: York and North Yorkshire Creative Economy Census (2025)

Participants provided information about both their primary and, where applicable, secondary roles in the creative economy. These are labelled as 'Primary' and 'Secondary' in the figure legend.

5.2 Investment gaps and regional disparities

Despite strong assets, Yorkshire and the Humber receives a disproportionately low share of investment. Only 3% of UK equity investment in the Creative Industries flows into the region, compared with 64% for London and the South East. Creative firms here also report lower levels of investment-readiness. It appears that local appetite for capital is not translating into access: too many firms are deterred from seeking finance by a fear of rejection or a lack of understanding from funders.[71]

Precarity is also a fundamental element of the creative economy. Freelance-dominated workforces, short-term contracts, and reliance on commissions rather than guaranteed income reduce financial resilience. The evidence from the Creative PEC/Creative UK survey (2024) shows that in York and North Yorkshire this leads to a need for investment-readiness support at both start-up and scale-up stages.

Clusters can help to reduce these barriers. For example, firms situated in DCMS-recognised clusters are 15% more inclined to apply for finance and 14% less likely to report a lack of financial knowledge.[72] For York and North Yorkshire, this highlights the importance of formalising cluster status and integrating finance-readiness support within corridor-wide initiatives.

5.3 Diversity and inclusion in access to finance

Inequalities are also visible in financial access. National research indicates that female CEOs in the Creative Industries are 8% more likely to desire business growth and 10% more likely to anticipate needing funding. CEOs from mixed heritage or minority ethnic backgrounds are 9% more likely to seek growth, yet 21% more likely to inject personal funds due to a lack of external finance.[73] Supporting underrepresented founders in York and North Yorkshire will therefore be crucial to unlocking growth across the entire sector.

[71] Siepel J, Rathi S, Cowling M. Growth finance for the Creative Industries [Internet]. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2024. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/PEC-Growth-Finance-for-Creative-Industries.pdf

[72] Siepel J, Rathi S, Cowling M. Growth finance for the Creative Industries [Internet]. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2024. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/PEC-Growth-Finance-for-Creative-Industries.pdf

[73] Bakhshi H, Siepel J, Carmona L, Tarr A. Unleashing creativity: fixing the finance gap in the Creative Industries. Creative UK / Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2025. Available from: https://unleash.wearecreative.uk/

5.4 From innovation to investment

Creative firms in the region are rich in IP, spanning publishing, games, immersive content, and museums. Yet too often, IP value leaks out through early sales of rights or the inability to scale. XR Stories offers an instructive example of how public R&D investment can de-risk experimentation and produce investable IP: 85% of its supported businesses reported that their partnerships created revenue-generating assets that would not otherwise have existed.[74] The challenge is ensuring that such IP progresses through the pipeline into investment, licensing, and global markets.

The Creative Industries Sector Plan (2025) explicitly calls for pipeline interventions to help firms transition from prototype to investment. For York and North Yorkshire, this means leveraging assets like XR Stories and CoSTAR as innovation engines, while building corridor-level investor-readiness programmes to translate prototypes into scalable businesses.

5.5 The case for IP-backed finance

Traditional finance undervalues intangible assets, yet creative IP remains one of the UK's most valuable economic resources. Creative UK's Provocation Paper on Creative Economy Capital (2023) makes the case for new financial instruments that recognise the long-tail revenues and global potential of creative IP.[75] The UK has argued for the British Business Bank to develop dedicated instruments that recognise the long-tail revenue models and intangible assets of creative businesses. Creative UK proposals include a Creative Economy Capital framework and a "fund-of-funds" model that would blend commercial, social impact, and philanthropic investment. These would provide a single front door to investment, align risk-sharing mechanisms, and ensure that creative companies – whether commercial or cultural – can access the right kind of capital at the right time.

York and North Yorkshire is well placed to pilot such approaches. Its profile of microbusinesses, combined with strong IP generation through clusters and universities, provides a testbed for developing IP-backed finance models with national applicability.

5.6 Spillover benefits and the case for public investment

Investing in creative firms delivers benefits that extend well beyond the sector itself. Frontier Economics (2023) found that firms more connected to the Creative Industries were up to 18% more likely to introduce new-to-market products.[76] These spillovers are not captured in private investment models, resulting in the underproduction of creative innovation relative to its broader value. For York and North Yorkshire, this strengthens the argument for public and blended finance, as support for creative firms not only drives sector growth but also enhances tourism, manufacturing, education, and digital innovation.

5.7 Attracting domestic and foreign investment

The UK ranks as the second-largest global hub for inward foreign direct investment (FDI) in the Creative Industries, with FDI accounting for 10% of investment in UK creative industry projects. However, these opportunities remain heavily concentrated in London. Developing investment proposals that emphasise York's CreaTech strengths, UNESCO City of Media Arts designation, and corridor connectivity could assist York and North Yorkshire in attracting more FDI and domestic investment. Aligning inward investment promotion with the Northern Creative Corridor brand would enhance visibility and credibility.

5.8 Summary

Unlocking growth requires tools that value intangible assets and align with the cash-flow patterns of project-based work. Devolved tools under the York and North Yorkshire Growth Plan can pilot IP-sensitive finance, build investor-readiness, and attract private capital, while corridor branding broadens market access. Done effectively, this will turn regional R&D and content pipelines into sustainable business growth.

[74] BOP Consulting. XR Stories economic impact analysis report [Internet]. XR Stories. 2022. Available from: https://xrstories.co.uk/publication/xr-stories-economic-impact-analysis-report/

[75] Norbury C, Tarr A. Provocation paper creative economy capital – a framework for creative investment [Internet]. Creative UK. 2025. Available from: https://freelance.wearecreative.uk/hubfs/Provocation%20Paper-%20%20Creative%20Economy%20Capital%20-%20A%20Framework%20for%20Creative%20Investment-FOR%20PUBLIC.pdf

[76] Popov D, Baker J, Crawford R. Creative spillovers: do the Creative Industries benefit firms in the wider economy? [Internet]. Frontier Economics. 2023 Jun. Available from: https://www.frontier-economics.com/uk/en/news-and-insights/news/news-article-i10374-creative-spillovers-do-the-creative-industries-benefit-firms-in-the-wider-economy

6: Trade, exports, and clusters

This chapter analyses:

Export capacity and opportunity in York and North Yorkshire's Creative Industries	The link between innovation and exporting	The role of festivals, UNESCO status, and cluster brands in market access

It identifies barriers for micro-firms and proposes targeted interventions to enhance export-readiness, brokerage, trade missions, and cultural diplomacy, connected to corridor partners and Department for Business and Trade (DBT) programmes.

6.1 From local strength to global reach

York and North Yorkshire's Creative Industries, though smaller in scale than those of major metropolitan centres, possess internationally recognised assets that provide strong export potential. York's designation as the UK's only UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts signals global cultural status. At the same time, flagship festivals such as the Aesthetica Short Film Festival, Harrogate International Festival, and Ryedale Festival showcase original IP and attract international delegates. These platforms reinforce the city's position in the global cultural landscape and provide access to international markets.

The York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority recognises that trade and exports are essential for growth. Exporting creative firms are typically more innovative, more productive, and more resilient than non-exporting ones. Creative PEC's evidence shows a positive link between exporting and innovation: firms with higher investment in R&D and IP are also more likely to export successfully.[77]

6.2 Trade data and export capacity

The UK is a leading exporter of creative services, ranked fifth in the world, with £45.6 billion exported in 2021, compared with £9.1 billion in creative goods.[78] Services exports are dominated by IT/software, film and TV, and advertising. Exports of goods remain strong in the crafts, publishing, and music sectors. Between 2010 and 2021, UK creative services exports grew by 150% in real terms, while creative goods exports stagnated, reflecting the UK's comparative advantage in services.

For York and North Yorkshire, this trend is significant. The region's strengths in digital storytelling, publishing, and immersive content align directly with high-growth services export categories. However, export intensity in North Yorkshire lags behind that of London and the South East. The Creative PEC analysis reveals that the region's export share declined from 4.3% in 2013 to 0.54% in 2022.[79] Closing this gap requires targeted export support, investment-readiness, and better promotion of regional creative assets in global markets.

[77] Tether BS, Yu X, Alliance Manchester Business School, University of Manchester. What distinguishes creative industry exporters? And does engaging in innovation, R&D and design matter? [Internet]. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2022 Jul. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Creative-Industry-Exporters-PEC-Discussion-Paper-July-2022.pdf

[78] Fazio G, Jones J, Maioli S, Simandjuntak D. UK trade in a global creative economy [Internet]. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2024. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/UK-Trade-in-a-Global-Creative-Economy-Creative-PEC-State-of-the-Nations-March-2024.pdf

[79] Fazio G, Jones J, Maioli S, Simandjuntak D. UK trade in a global creative economy [Internet]. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2024. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/UK-Trade-in-a-Global-Creative-Economy-Creative-PEC-State-of-the-Nations-March-2024.pdf

6.3 Challenges to scaling internationally

Export barriers are well documented. The Creative PEC's State of the Nations trade report[80] highlights Brexit-related uncertainty, new visa requirements, customs duties, and logistical issues as major challenges for creative exporters. SMEs and microbusinesses are especially vulnerable, often lacking the capacity to manage complex regulatory environments. Regional firms also face difficulties in protecting IP in overseas markets, emphasising the need for both national and local advisory services.

Many creative firms in York and North Yorkshire are microbusinesses with freelance workforces, which are less likely to have formal export strategies.[81] To succeed, support must be tailored: modular training, brokerage for international partnerships, and shared platforms to promote regional creative IP abroad. The Preston Model[82] highlights the potential of community wealth-building for creative industries: by embedding procurement locally and retaining spend, cultural and creative organisations can anchor economic regeneration. Applied to York and North Yorkshire, this suggests that universities, councils and anchor institutions should direct commissioning spend towards local creative SMEs, strengthening the base for export capacity.

Qualitative feedback demonstrates strong latent export potential across the region. York and North Yorkshire Creative Economy Census respondents reported exporting work to the USA, Singapore, Spain, and Germany. These self-initiated international links illustrate that York and North Yorkshire's creative microbusinesses already operate globally despite

6.4 Soft power and cultural diplomacy

Beyond economic metrics, the Creative Industries contribute significantly to the UK's global influence and soft power. York's UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts status exemplifies how cultural capital enhances international reputation and attracts investment. Cultural exports also shape perceptions: British film, television, design, and publishing help project the values of creativity, diversity, and innovation worldwide.

International comparisons reinforce this point. South Korea's government-backed promotion of K-content demonstrates how strategic investment in cultural exports can drive both economic and diplomatic outcomes.[83] Similarly, France's policy requiring streamers to invest in local content ensures the global visibility of French culture. For York and North Yorkshire, framing creative exports as both economic assets and instruments of soft power can strengthen the case for public support.

Cultural diplomacy also opens doors to wider trade relationships. York's historic links and international partnerships, from sister-city programmes to cultural exchanges, provide ready-made platforms for creative businesses to showcase their work. Integrating creative exports into wider tourism and trade strategies can amplify impact.

York and North Yorkshire's museums and galleries are vital anchors of regional identity and soft power, projecting the area's heritage and creativity to national and international audiences. Together, they attract millions of visitors annually and underpin the visitor economy that supports the region's cultural and tourism export potential. Their nationally significant mix spans the **National Railway Museum, York Art Gallery, Yorkshire Museum, Castle Museum, JORVIK Viking Centre, Fairfax House** (York); plus **Mercer Art Gallery** (Harrogate), **Ripon Museums** (Workhouse, Prison & Police, Courthouse), **Ryedale Folk Museum** (Hutton-le-Hole), **Scarborough Art Gallery** & **Rotunda Museum, Whitby Museum** & **Pannett Art Gallery, Captain Cook Memorial Museum** (Whitby), **Craven Museum** (Skipton), **Green Howards Museum** & **Richmondshire Museum** (Richmond), and independent spaces such as **Zillah Bell Gallery** (Thirsk).

80 Du J, Shepotylo O, Beyza Satoglu, E. Brexit uncertainty and trade in Services: evidence from the UK Creative Industries 2014–2019 [Internet]. 2023. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Brexit-Uncertainty-and-Trade-in-Services-PEC-Discussion-Paper-March-2023.pdf

81 Fazio G, Jones J, Maioli S, Simandjuntak D. UK trade in a global creative economy [Internet]. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2024. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/UK-Trade-in-a-Global-Creative-Economy-Creative-PEC-State-of-the-Nations-March-2024.pdf

82 Whyman PB, Wright A, Lawler M, Petrescu A. Supporting the Creative Industries: the impact of the "Preston Model" in Lancashire [Internet]. Creative Lancashire. 2022. Available from: https://www.creativelancashire.org/files/library/Supporting-the-Creative-Industries-The-Impact-of-the-Preston-Model-in-Lancashire_19042022-1.pdf

83 Fazio G, Jones J, Maioli S, Simandjuntak D. UK trade in a global creative economy [Internet]. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2024. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/UK-Trade-in-a-Global-Creative-Economy-Creative-PEC-State-of-the-Nations-March-2024.pdf – see South Korea case study (Chapter 5).

The region's festivals are powerful instruments of soft power, talent attraction, and place branding, connecting local culture to global audiences and supporting creative exports across film, music, literature, and live performance. Signature events include **Aesthetica Film Festival** (BAFTA-qualifying, York), **York Early Music Festival**, **York Festival of Ideas**, **JORVIK Viking Festival**, and **York Literature Festival**; and region-wide events such as **Harrogate International Festivals**, **Ryedale Festival**, **Deer Shed Festival** (Thirsk), **Swaledale Festival**, **Whitby Goth Weekend**, **Whitby Folk Week**, **Malton Food Lovers Festival**, **Skipton International Puppet Festival**, **Richmond Walking & Book Festival**, and the **Staithes Festival of Arts & Heritage**.

6.5 Summary

To shift from latent to systematic export growth, York and North Yorkshire should integrate creative services exports into devolved trade support, link SMEs to corridor trade missions, and leverage UNESCO and festival platforms for soft power. This directly aligns with the Local Growth Plan's ambition to increase R&D, exports, and visibility, making creativity a global calling card for the region.

7: Place-based creative growth

This chapter connects creative growth to spatial strategy, exploring coastal renewal, rural microclusters, and York's urban hub. It maps:

Infrastructure and workspace needs	Community-led activity	The role of connectivity and hubs in enabling dispersed creators to participate

It positions creativity within transport, digital, housing, and net zero planning, so that place and sector strategies reinforce each other, an approach whose benefits are evidenced in the York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan.

7.1 Mapping place to strategy

Creative growth in York and North Yorkshire cannot be considered in isolation: it must be aligned with both the regional priorities set by the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority and national strategies such as the UK Creative Industries Sector Plan (2025). This chapter emphasises the importance of aligning place-based assets – coastal towns, rural market centres, and dispersed microclusters – with the transport, infrastructure, and innovation investments that underpin regional economic development.

The York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority's Local Growth Plan emphasises the need to deliver growth, remove barriers to opportunity, and achieve net zero through integrated spatial planning.[84] Similarly, the Sector Plan calls for doubling of creative investment, embedding of innovation in regional systems, and expansion of clusters. Bridging these two agendas ensures that York and North Yorkshire's creative geography contributes not only to cultural vibrancy but also to wider economic renewal.

The York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan identifies culture and creativity as vital to the attractiveness of York and North Yorkshire's market towns and coastal areas, stating that "our towns are attractive places to live, learn and work, often underpinned by culture and creative opportunities". The following sections reference York Central's regeneration as a major mixed-use cultural and digital hub, alongside emerging creative clusters in Scarborough and Selby. These align with Local Growth Plan priorities around community wealth-building and inclusive local investment, supporting creative employment opportunities across both rural and coastal communities.

7.2 Coastal creativity and regional renewal

The region's coastline, which includes Scarborough and Whitby, embodies the challenge of aligning cultural identity with regeneration strategy. The Creative PEC's evidence shows that seaside towns can act as innovation sites when cultural investment is linked to the visitor economy and local infrastructure.[85] At the same time, On the Waterfront[86], which advocates for a dedicated coastal strand to the Creative Places Growth Fund,[87] highlights how coastal communities face health, housing, and climate vulnerabilities that demand integrated solutions.[88] Scarborough and Filey are coastal towns with longstanding artistic traditions and growing creative microbusiness communities. They combine robust visitor economies with underutilised creative potential.

For the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority, investing in coastal creative economies is not a cultural "add-on" but a pathway to achieving regional growth, delivering spatial equity, and supporting net-zero-ready regeneration. A strategy that links festivals, cultural quarters, and digital storytelling to transport improvements and visitor infrastructure makes creativity central to coastal renewal, as outlined in On the Waterfront.

[84] York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. York and North Yorkshire launches 10-year Growth Plan [Internet]. York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. 2025. Available from: https://yorknorthyorks-ca.gov.uk/york-and-north-yorkshire-launches-10-year-growth-plan/

[85] McFadzean L, Giannachi G, Evans J. Creative industries innovation in seaside resorts and country towns [Internet]. University of Exeter. 2022. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/policy_briefing_entr/seaside-resorts-and-country-towns/

[86] de Graaf K, McKenzie K, Asthana S, Agarwal S, Smith R. On the waterfront: why our ports and coastal communities hold the key to a more connected and prosperous Britain. Key Cities. 2025. Available from: https://keycities.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Key-Cities-On-thewaterfront-March-2025.pdf

[87] Gov.UK. Six regions receive 25 million to bolster creative industries [Internet]. Gov.UK. 2025. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/six-regions-receive-25-million-to-bolster-creative-industries

[88] Harrison J, Brandom S, Neyra R, Murphy D, Brown E. York and North Yorkshire creative economy census 2025 technical report [Internet]. XR Stories, York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. 2025. Available from https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17708416

7.3 Rural microclusters and market towns

Mapping rural creative activity into a regional growth strategy requires close attention to microclusters. The National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise's (NICRE's) work identifies concentrations of creative firms in rural towns, which thrive on cultural amenities and tourism flows but often lack finance, connectivity, and leadership capacity.[89]

For North Yorkshire, towns such as Harrogate, and areas such as Richmondshire and Ryedale, serve as key nodes that must be connected – both physically and digitally – to York and the wider Northern Creative Corridor. This involves aligning creative support services (like workspace, business development, and networks) with transport strategies, broadband expansion, and business support programmes from the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority, ensuring that microclusters contribute fully to regional productivity.

The Creative Economy Census demonstrates how space and connectivity impact the region's creative capacity. Over half of respondents described creative workspaces as "vital" or "the lifeblood" of their practice, yet many found York to be one of the most difficult places to secure affordable studio space. Rural and coastal creatives called for pop-up shops and shared co-working hubs to help reduce isolation. Networks were viewed as essential for finding work and peer support but were also described as exclusive and as "talking shops" that need to become more action focused. Of the rural respondents, 34% said that they were not aware of any networks near them. These findings emphasise the need for coordinated investment in spatial equity, creative hubs, and corridor-wide connectivity.[90]

7.4 Infrastructure and spatial equity

Infrastructure provision is a decisive factor in mapping creative potential to growth strategy. Gaps in transport and broadband provision limit the ability of creative workers to scale their businesses and collaborate across the region. The York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority has identified these barriers in its transport and net zero plans, recognising that investment in full-fibre, public transport, and low-carbon mobility will deliver not just economic benefits but also carbon reduction. Creative workers are disproportionately affected by poor infrastructure, making spatial equity an essential condition for cluster development.

Embedding cultural infrastructure into wider planning, whether through coastal regeneration frameworks, market-town renewal, or York's role as a UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts, ensures creativity is not marginal but central to the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority's regional growth strategy.

7.5 Community-led growth and opportunity: A different creative geography

Creative growth in York and North Yorkshire does not follow the pattern of urban clustering. It is dispersed, intermittent, and rooted in locations characterised more by cultural identity and tourism than by technology or screen infrastructure. Yet, this very nature makes it the kind of geography that national policy now aims to support.

The 2025 Creative Industries Sector Plan explicitly advocates for investment in non-metropolitan creative areas, backed by the £150 million Creative Places Growth Fund and a broader commitment to ensuring that all parts of the UK benefit from growth in the creative sector. North Yorkshire, as part of the UK's largest combined authority region, is well placed for this type of place-based creative development.

The Local Growth Plan clearly recognises the importance of communities in fostering cultural growth. Festivals in Whitby, grassroots venues in Selby, and craft networks in the Dales are all examples of local identity driving economic activity. Research by the Creative PEC confirms that these forms of community-led growth establish anchor points for placebased creativity.[91]

7.6 Summary

Creativity thrives where infrastructure, identity, and opportunity meet. Embedding cultural infrastructure and affordable space in devolved spatial planning, and linking market towns and coastal communities to corridor networks, delivers inclusive growth consistent with the York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan. This is how cultural vitality becomes a regional development engine, not a bolt-on.

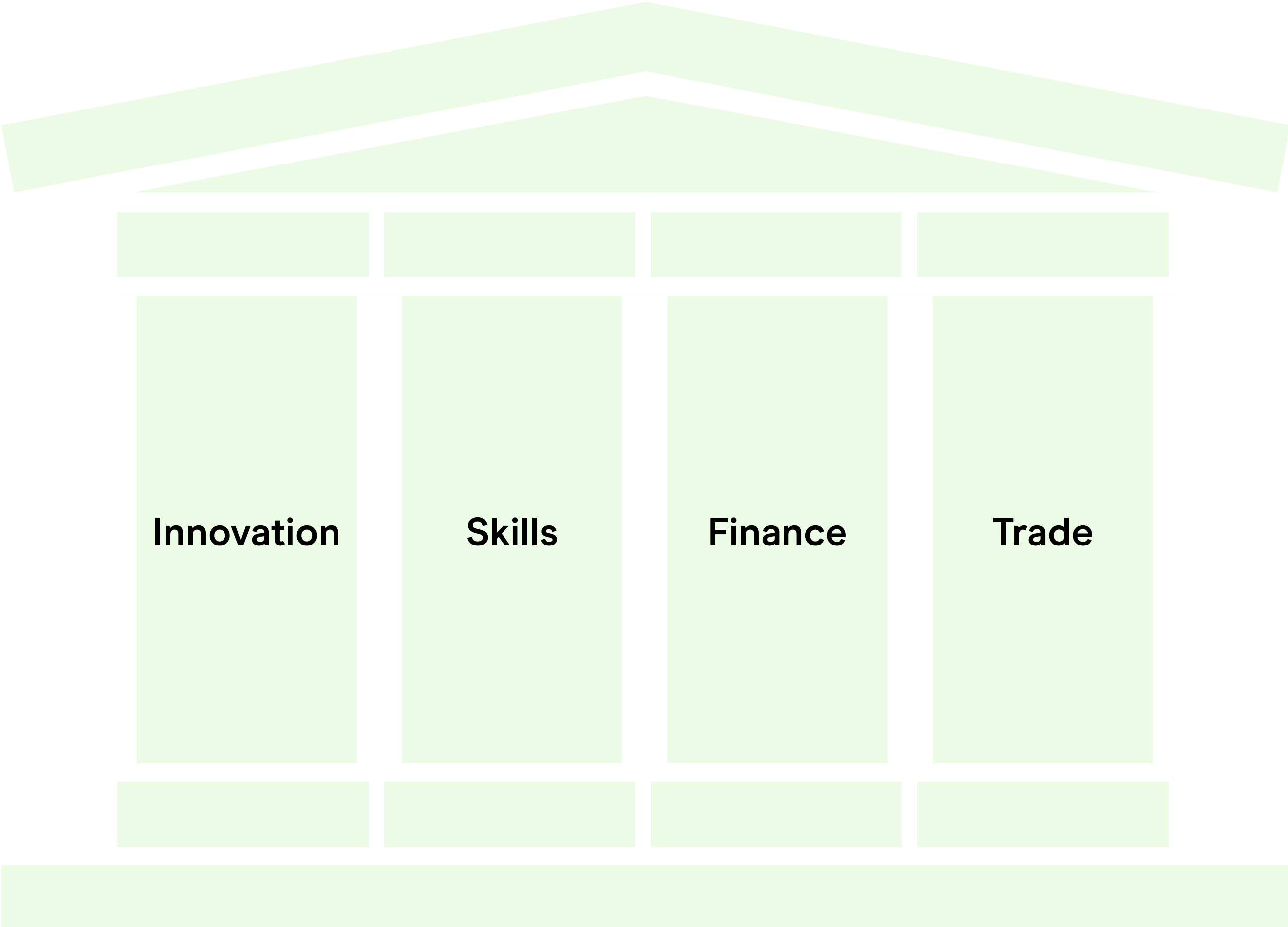
89 Siepel J, Camerani R, Masucci M, Velez Ospina J, Casadei P, Bloom M. Mapping the UK's creative clusters and microclusters [Internet]. Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. 2020. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/PEC-Creative-Radar-report-November-2020.pdf

90 Harrison J, Brandom S, Neyra R, Murphy D, Brown E. York and North Yorkshire creative economy census 2025 technical report [Internet]. XR Stories, York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. 2025. Available from https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17708416

91 McFadzean L, Giannachi G, Evans J. Creative industries innovation in seaside resorts and country towns [Internet]. University of Exeter. 2022. Available from: https://pec.ac.uk/policy_briefing_entr/seaside-resorts-and-country-towns/

8: Strategic opportunities

This chapter synthesises the evidence into a concise framework of strategic opportunities that position York and North Yorkshire at the centre of the UK's Creative Industries growth agenda. These opportunities align directly with the four national pillars of the 2025 Creative Industries Sector Plan:



York and North Yorkshire is uniquely positioned to transform its creative assets into opportunities for regional growth and innovation that brings national visibility.

The York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan (2025) explicitly references national frameworks such as the Industrial Strategy, which recognises the Creative Industries as a sector with competitive advantage. The Local Growth Plan calls for increased R&D, innovation, and export growth through partnerships and initiatives including One Creative North, CoSTAR, and XR Stories, aligning with the growth drivers and competitive sectors outlined in the Industrial Strategy.

Collectively, these documents demonstrate how creativity can drive inclusive, sustainable growth for a pioneering city region and rural powerhouse. The Local Growth Plan and Industrial Strategy are underpinned by numerous regional and national policy research reports that provide evidence and insights on the barriers and opportunities facing the sector.[92]

[92] O'Connor K, Brown, E, Murphy D. Our Creative Potential: Policy Opportunities for York and North Yorkshire [Internet]. XR Stories. 2025. Available from https://xrstories.co.uk/publication/our-creative-potential-policy-opportunities-for-york-and-north-yorkshire/

8.1 Innovation: York and North Yorkshire's strength in the Northern Creative Corridor

Strategic goal: York and North Yorkshire is the UK's leading rural–urban CreaTech testbed, linking cultural assets and advanced technologies to deliver national innovation outcomes.

The national Creative Industries Sector Plan commits to "accelerating innovation-led growth" through increased R&D investment and CoSTAR expansion.

Recommendations for the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority:	
1.	Establish York and North Yorkshire as the lead region in the One Creative North Northern Corridor for innovation and R&D.
2.	Expand immersive R&D facilities through CoSTAR infrastructure and the existing XR Stories immersive technology R&D studio in York city centre. Focus on immersive heritage, sustainable tourism, and cultural AI applications.
3.	Enhance the CreaTech ecosystem connecting the University of York's XR Stories, CoSTAR Live Lab, and regional SMEs into a shared testbed for cross-sector innovation.
4.	Establish the Creative Content Exchange: a regionally led platform to support microbusinesses in engaging with the UK's upcoming IP licensing infrastructure.
5.	Foreground creative industries innovation in the Innovation Hub at York Central.
6.	Develop a programme of regional access to equipment and skills via a region-wide resource hub (see section 3.6).

8.2 Skills: Growing and retaining creative talent

Strategic goal: York and North Yorkshire is seen as an exemplar of best practice for connecting, promoting, and realising an urban, rural, and coastal city region and rural powerhouse.

The Skills and Workforce strand of the Creative Industries Sector Plan emphasises flexible CPD, employer-led training, and support for freelancers. This reflects the needs of York and North Yorkshire in relation to skills and talent.

Recommendations for the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority:	
1.	Develop modular CPD in leadership, business, and digital production, led by XR Stories and FE/HE partners.
2.	Embed inclusive skills pathways for rural, coastal, and underrepresented learners to access high-value creative roles.
3.	Embed leadership and business training into regional programmes in recognition of its importance alongside technical skills development.
4.	Integrate York and North Yorkshire's creative skills priorities into the Northern Creative Corridor's plans for a Northern Skills Consortium, working with West Yorkshire and Screen Yorkshire.
5.	Develop a workforce development portal, advertising skills progression and training opportunities. Leverage a skills provider forum to work with FE and HE providers as well as private providers to prevent duplication, cover gaps, and provide a coherent and cohesive pan-regional set of CPD and other skills.
6.	Develop a regional accreditation system to pull together disparate training schemes into one programme. Scale the disparate training schemes across the whole region.
7.	Develop and deliver an inclusive rural/coastal and urban creative workforce development plan that incorporates apprenticeships, internships, supported mentoring schemes, and work experience placements (feeding the talent pipeline) that includes technical, practical, business, and leadership skills.

8.3 Finance: Unlocking IP and place-based investment

Strategic goal: York is a regional capital for creative IP commercialisation, bridging research and enterprise. York and North Yorkshire is recognised as the place to start, grow, and scale a creative business.

Access to finance remains a critical barrier nationally. The Sector Plan introduces IP-backed lending pilots and a new Creative Content Exchange, while the York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan prioritises investment-readiness and inclusive finance.

Recommendations for the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority:	
1.	Establish an investor-readiness programme: training, mentoring, and brokerage tailored to microbusinesses and freelancers, embedded in the Northern Corridor.
2.	Establish a Creative IP Studio in York to commercialise UKRI-funded research and support SMEs in IP valuation.
3.	Pilot IP-backed finance in collaboration with the British Business Bank and Creative UK, and test models such as the Creative Content Exchange.
4.	Lobby for inclusion in the Creative Places Growth Fund (currently limited to six mayoral authorities, but subject to review in 2026).
5.	Collaborate with West Yorkshire on a joint “Screen Cluster East–West” proposition to strengthen scale and eligibility for national funds.
6.	Target inclusive growth: design finance interventions to specifically support women, minority ethnic and rural founders.
7.	Establish a Creative Investor network.
8.	Establish an evergreen regional content creation investment fund.

8.4 Trade and exports: Expanding global reach

Strategic goal: York and North Yorkshire is a gateway for rural–urban creative exports, aligning local soft power with the UK’s global CreaTech agenda.

Recommendations for the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority:	
1.	Create a York and North Yorkshire Creative Export Programme with DBT and Creative UK: focusing on screen, providing tailored support to microbusiness, and using data on innovation spillovers to justify public investment in creative finance.
2.	Embed export-readiness and brokerage support for SMEs in the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority’s Growth Hub, aligned with creative IP protection services.
3.	Harness cultural diplomacy: integrate York’s UNESCO status, heritage assets, and festivals into soft power strategies that promote regional IP globally.
4.	Expand participation in trade missions: link regional firms to DBT-supported delegations and corridor-wide programmes.
5.	Leverage corridor branding to attract FDI and promote York and North Yorkshire creative IP globally.

8.5 Place-based growth

Strategic goal: York and North Yorkshire is a national exemplar of inclusive creative growth, where every community, from coastal towns to rural villages and urban centres, contributes to and benefits from cultural regeneration, digital innovation, and creative enterprise.

Creativity supports every pillar of the York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan: growth, inclusion, and net zero.

Recommendations for the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority:	
1.	Coalesce regional partners and stakeholders around a shared vision that promotes York and North Yorkshire as the innovation region fostering creative potential and inclusive growth.
2.	Create testbeds in key market and coastal towns across the region, linking culture, regeneration, and tourism.
3.	Develop a "network of networks", linking creative support hubs to share best practice, enable cross-referral beyond their immediate focus, and showcase the region in its entirety.
4.	Develop an online hub with access to resources, networks, training, skills, and support, with entry points for all, to build digital connectivity and infrastructure in rural and coastal areas.
5.	Support community-led growth through micro-grants and grassroots creative enterprise.
6.	Integrate with transport and housing planning to embed creative placemaking.

8.6 Summary

These opportunities align national ambition with local capacity, connecting innovation with inclusion, finance with fairness, and trade with identity. By leveraging the 2025 Sector Plan and York and North Yorkshire's devolved powers, the region can turn creative potential into measurable impact, building an economy that truly feeds, powers, connects, inspires, and protects the UK.

9: Roadmap to delivery

Delivery of these recommendations is not the responsibility of any one institution or stakeholder. Long-term strategic collaborations and clear delivery partnerships, working to a combined vision under a transparent governance structure, will enable far-reaching programmes of activity.

This chapter proposes a set of projects with immediate and mid-term aims, structured around a series of strategic goals and objectives. It identifies short-term goals that can be delivered with minimal or no funding, alongside longer-term outputs where investment will be required. It outlines how York and North Yorkshire can operationalise the Creative Industries Sector Plan's four pillars (innovation, skills, finance, and trade) through pilot actions, funding streams, and delivery partnerships. It identifies routes for investment, capacity building, and long-term collaboration.

9.1 Project proposals

Creative technology IP studio	
Strategic goal	• York and North Yorkshire is the UK's leading rural–urban CreaTech testbed, linking cultural assets and advanced technologies to deliver national innovation outcomes.
Objectives	• Expand facilities. • Ensure a level of region-wide access to technologies.
Short-term actions (minimal/no funding)	• Develop a region-wide innovation strategy, focusing on inclusive growth. • Engage a regional advisory board of leading businesses, anchor cultural institutions and regional stakeholders. • Develop a proposal for funding, including potential funding sources.
Planned outputs	• Creative IP Studio focusing on R&D, expanding the CreaTech facilities in the Guildhall in York. • Pan-regional access to technology via engagement with regional hubs. • Prototyping, product development, and investor-readiness grants available. • Creative Content Exchange – a regionally led platform to support microbusinesses in engaging with the UK's upcoming IP licensing infrastructure.
Partners and stakeholders	• York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. • University of York. • Innovative SMEs.
Possible funding sources	• UKRI, York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority, IUK, DCMS, Create Growth.

Pan-regional skills and talent offer	
Strategic goal	• York and North Yorkshire is seen as an exemplar of best practice for connecting, promoting, and realising an urban, rural, and coastal city region and rural powerhouse. • Careers in creative technology are seen to be possible in the region, minimising talent leakage.
Objectives	• Clear pathways into creative careers closer to home from school age upwards. • Clarity across the region on training and skills development opportunities, at all levels, covering technical and leadership.
Short-term actions (minimal/no funding)	• Develop an inclusive rural/coastal and urban creative workforce development plan, incorporating apprenticeships, internships, supported mentoring schemes, work experience placements (feeding the talent pipeline), and including technical, practical, business, and leadership skills. • Develop a web-based portal with all skills opportunities advertised and available, and work with FE and HE as well as private providers to prevent duplication, cover gaps, and provide a coherent and cohesive pan-regional set of CPD and other skills development.
Planned outputs	• Regional accreditation established, e.g. creative baccalaureate. • Clear access to modular CPD programmes, including technical and leadership. • Creative Entrepreneurship programme established.
Partners and stakeholders	• Head of Skills (York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority). • HE and FE providers. • Private providers. • Managers of spaces where training could take place.

Inward investment support package	
Strategic goal	• York is a regional capital for creative IP commercialisation, bridging research and enterprise. York and North Yorkshire is recognised as the place to start, grow, and scale a creative business.
Objectives	• Strengthen access to capital and IP commercialisation.
Short-term actions (minimal/no funding)	• Work with leading investment companies, public funding routes, relevant government departments, and public sector bodies to develop an inclusive investor-readiness programme, with tailored training, mentoring, and brokerage. • Establish a Creative Investor network.
Planned outputs	• Funding acquired to provide grants aimed at supporting investment and scale-up. • A region-wide programme specialising in creative industries. • York and North Yorkshire is included in the Creative Places Growth Fund (currently limited to six mayoral combined authorities but subject to review in 2026).
Partners and stakeholders	• British Business Bank, Creative UK, investment companies.
Possible funding sources	• Create Growth Programme. • Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund.

Trade and export leverage package	
Strategic goal	• York and North Yorkshire is a gateway for rural–urban creative exports, aligning local soft power with the UK's global CreaTech agenda.
Objectives	• Increase the number of creative industry companies in the region trading globally. • Raise the profile of York and North Yorkshire as an innovative creative technology region.
Short-term actions (minimal/no funding)	• Understand requirements and opportunities for a York and North Yorkshire Creative Export Programme, in partnership with DBT and Creative UK, providing tailored support for microbusinesses. • Build York's presence in the UNESCO Media Arts and Creative Cities Network; build awareness within the wider region of the value and importance of the status, i.e. Reignite. • Leverage corridor branding: position York as the cultural and CreaTech hub within the Northern Creative Corridor to attract global attention; collaborate across the Northern Creative Corridor to attract FDI and promote export-ready IP catalogues internationally. • Develop a proposal for expanding participation in trade missions, linking regional firms into DBT-supported delegations and corridor-wide programmes.
Planned outputs	• A recognised and repeatable support programme for regional creative industries.
Partners and stakeholders	• British Business Bank, UK Export Academy, DBT Tradeshow Access Programme, GREAT Campaign, UNESCO governance in York.
Possible funding sources	• York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority funds.

Clusters and place-based growth development	
Strategic goal	• York and North Yorkshire is a national exemplar of inclusive creative growth, where every community, from coastal towns to rural villages and urban centres, contributes to and benefits from cultural regeneration, digital innovation, and creative enterprise.
Objectives	• Develop a strong York and North Yorkshire CreaTech identity that underpins and unites diverse individuals and organisations as part of a coherent and ambitious regional identity.
Short-term actions (minimal/no funding)	• Coalesce regional partners and stakeholders around a pledge/commitment. • Fully mapped, accessible, inclusive, and connected online hub/portal with access to resources, networks, training, skills, and support, with entry points for all. • A Creative Industries Support Forum – a network of networks, to share best practice and connect across the geography.
Planned outputs	• A web resource connecting and enabling both creative industries practitioners / companies and support organisations, providers, and spaces.
Partners and stakeholders	• Providers and practitioners across the region.
Possible funding sources	• UKRI. • Creative Places Growth Fund.

9.2 Governance and evaluation

Creation of a delivery plan for the Creative Industries, aligned with the York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan, will ensure clarity and transparency. National policy and sector metrics (GVA, jobs, exports, innovation activity) could be combined with protocols for assessing the impact of the creative economy in the region, with numerous frameworks for evaluating creative and cultural value available for assessment and implementation. A Creative Growth Board should oversee delivery, and regular evaluation should track impact, reviewed annually in a publicly available report.

9.3 Summary

The roadmap provides a pragmatic pathway to realising the region's creative potential. By aligning local powers with national policy, investing in R&D and talent, and piloting models that can scale across the North, York and North Yorkshire can cement its role as a creative innovation powerhouse. In this region, ideas are not only born, but built, scaled, and shared with the world.

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