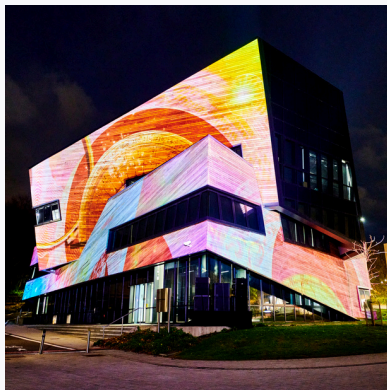
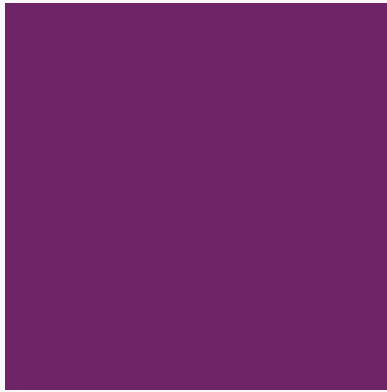
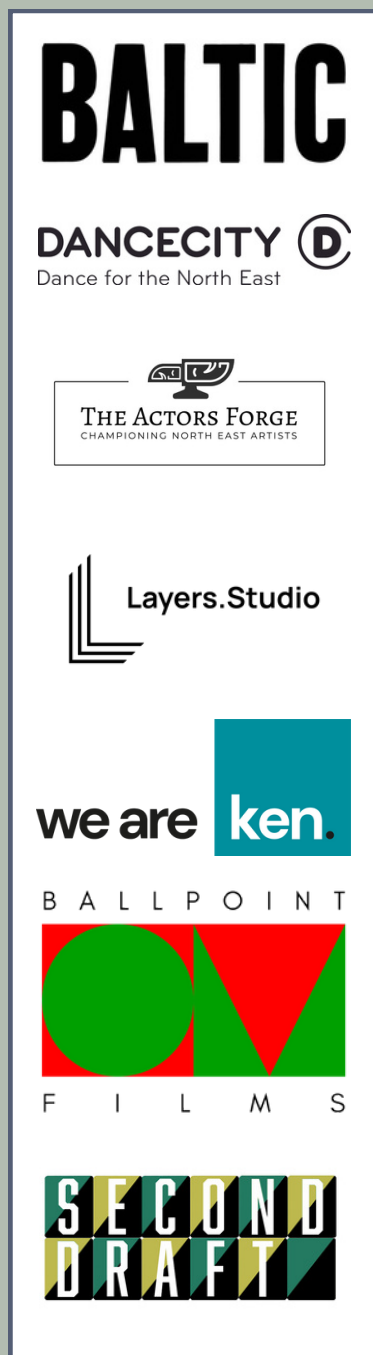


A Spotlight on the North East Creative Industry



Acknowledgements



With this report, we aim to shed light on the potential of North East Creative Industry. With its ingenuity, passion and community drive, this sector is ready for growth. We invite and encourage policymakers and funders to provide further support, as a thriving North East Creative Industry will benefit the entire region.

This report would not have been possible without the input and feedback of various representatives of the North East Creative Industry. These representatives have provided their input during workshops and afterwards on the report. The authors would like to thank all of them for their contribution.

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Table of Contents

- 1 The North East Creative Industry
- 2 A Challenge Mapping Event
- 3 Challenge 1 - The Value
Showcasing the potential of the creative industry
- 4 Challenge 2 - The Identity
Who is the North East Creative Industry?
- 5 Challenge 3 - The Job
Career pathways in the creative industry
- 6 The Future?
- 7 What is next?



A Spotlight on the North East Creative Industry

The North East of England consists of three major cities, where the newly formed combined authority covers County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland. With a regional economy worth more than £40 billion, the region supports 820,000 jobs across 5,500 businesses[1]. The creative industry, including the culture and digital sector, accounted for around 25% of the region's jobs in 2021[2]. A large part of the people working in this sector are self-employed. The pandemic hit the North East creative sector and saw the largest reduction in the workforce across the UK[2,3]. The absence of a thriving creative industry poses a risk to the whole region, as it will likely negatively affect innovation in the region[3]. On the other hand, with the irreversibility of working from home, there is a growing opportunity to pull more people to move 'up north', where the costs of living compared to the South are lower, and the pace of living is slower.

In December 2023, a new devolution deal for the North East was announced[4], followed by forming the combined authority and election of the first North East mayor in May 2024[1]. The devolution deal recognises

the importance of the sector and announces several plans for a growing creative sector that should contribute further to a sustainable and inclusive economy[4]. This is on top of several other funding initiatives that were announced in the past two years, such as the national funding to ‘turn the North East into a film and TV powerhouse’[5], the North of Tyne Culture and Creative Investment Programme, the North East Create Growth Programme[6], and the recent announcement to invest even more in the Crown Works project[7]. These new funding opportunities are highly welcomed, as a struggling creative sector further reduces jobs, leading to further economic decline and a disadvantaged region.



With the aftermath of the pandemic, the challenges of decreasing creative sector, a new devolution deal and renewed attention for the sector, it is a dynamic time. This current state brings new challenges that have the possibility to – if addressed well – be turned into effective solutions. The more technical challenges often have readily available technical solutions, and subsector-specific challenges need a targeted and tailored approach. However, we uncovered that many challenges exceed the individual subsectors and demand for innovative knowledge solutions.

To develop these solutions, researchers and practitioners need to join forces and leverage the generative power of researchers with the experience-based knowledge of practitioners in meaningful research-practice collaborations. Together, these collaborations can identify the core challenges and provide effective solutions that can support the North East Creative Industry in a sustainable future. The Durham Social Science Enterprise Lab took up this challenge and started with an innovative program to bring research and practice together.

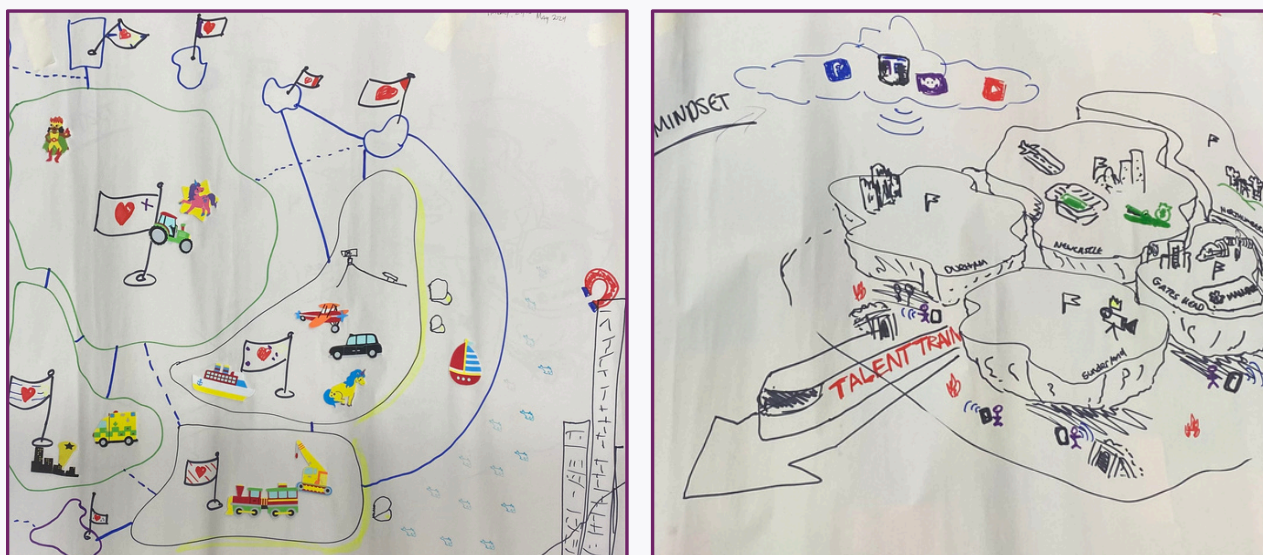
A Challenge Mapping Event

Before working towards solutions to make the North East Creative Industry future-proof, exploring what lies at the core of the industry's challenges is essential. To open the conversation, we invited representatives of various subsectors: acting, art, animation, branding, content, dance, design, digital, entertainment, film, museum, music, photo, publishing, television, theatre, video, and writing. On the 24th of May, the Social Science Enterprise Lab hosted a five-hour challenge mapping event with seven representatives of the North East Creative Industry. Listening to and including the creative industry's voice is crucial to identifying and prioritising the most pressing and core challenges now.

Table 1 Overview of representatives

Representative	Organisation	Sector
Catherine Johns	Dance City	Dance
Daniel Lemon	The Actors Forge	Acting and Artist Management
James Hanson	Layers Studio	Digital and Branding (web software)
Kate Gray	BALTIC Centre of Contemporary Art	Visual Art and Design
Len Collin	Ballpoint Films	Films and TV
Mark Stuart Bell	Second Draft	Video and Film
Ross G Palmer	We Are Ken	Branding, Digital and Graphic Design

During this event, the group worked together to identify, define, and prioritise the main challenges facing the creative industry in the region. After an introduction, the day began with brainstorming all possible industry challenges in two groups, leading to an overview of two visual representations of the challenges in the North East Creative Industry.



Next, participants discussed in pairs the underlying causes of these challenges. After identifying these underlying causes, we continued the session by clustering these challenges into themes. This was followed up by a discussion about why, where, when, and who these challenges affect. What followed was a synthesis of three main challenges strongly linked to each other, each consisting of several elements. Addressing the first challenge will benefit the second and supports the third.

Figure 1 Overview of the main challenges of the North East Creative Industry



Challenge 1 - The Value

Showcasing the potential of the creative industry

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Creativity is everywhere in the North East, and it is deeply embedded in communities, from newer forms such as makina and breaking to more traditional forms of crafting and brass bands. Plays and art are created in community halls and groups just as much, if not more so, than in formal venues. But sometimes, there is a disconnect between all this vibrancy and the formal support available; equality of access to opportunity is critical.

Catherine Johns, Dance City



The North East Creative Industry faces a challenge when individuals and organisations within the sector fail to clearly and effectively articulate their value to others. When this value remains unclear, investing in the industry creates uncertainty for various stakeholders, potentially impacting its promising future.

This challenge is influenced by the historical, cultural, and structural factors in the North East. Workshop participants mentioned that the North East has a tradition of humbleness where people are taught to be quiet and not speak up. People feel like the underdog of ‘The South’, which typically has a strong pull factor and receives most of the money and attention. On the other hand, people like to distinguish themselves from the rest of the country and feel deeply linked to the region.

The culturally embedded humbleness within individuals of the North East can turn into a lack of confidence and a negative self-image. They might feel they are not ‘good enough’ to work in the creative industry because all good people go to ‘The South’ or even overseas. This may stop people from taking risks and joining the industry or innovating within the industry. When the value of the North East Creative Industry remains unclear, individuals and organisations may continue to struggle with developing their confidence and building a strong, positive self-image.

It is difficult to define the value of the creative sector without a clear understanding of what success is and how to measure it. This is particularly difficult in the creative industries where objectifying and quantifying value is complex. The absence of a clear objective measure means it is challenging for individuals and organisations to prove and communicate their value to others who want to work with or for them, including new employees, businesses, consumers, policymakers, funders, and investors.

The difficulty articulating their value affects the relationship with these stakeholders.

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Over the past five years, we have seen how rapidly our sector has expanded in value and confidence with a strong and charismatic screen agency. Acting as a figurehead, they have rewritten the narrative for this place and are loudly, unapologetically creating a buzz here that everyone wants to experience.

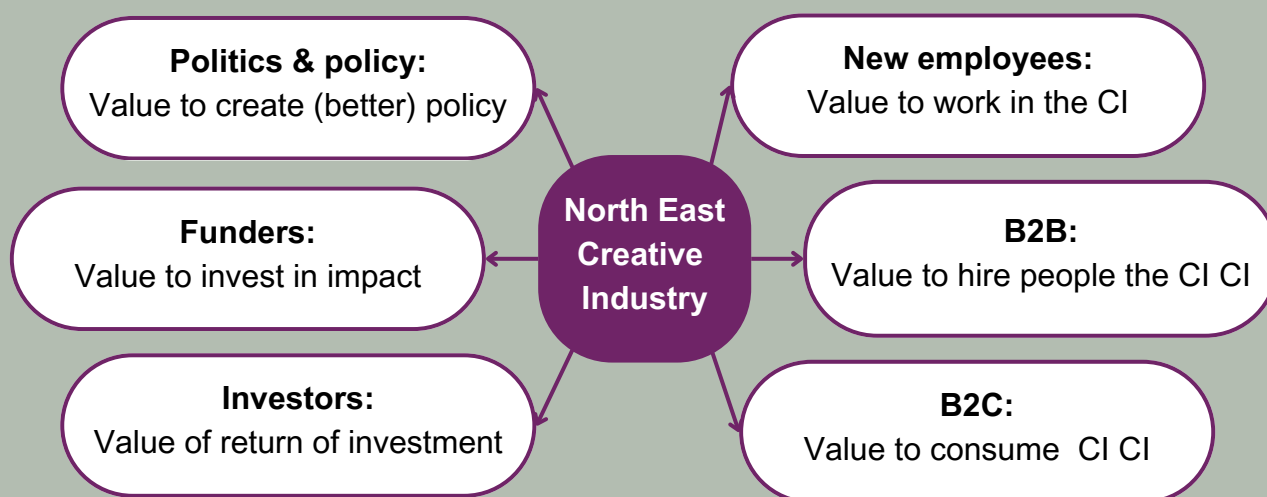
It's absurd that anyone could think creative professionals here are somehow less experienced, innovative or talented than those in other parts of the country. In fact, it's the exact opposite. Creativity itself is born from obstacles and limitations, from doing more with less. We need to broadcast this. But first, we need to believe it ourselves.

Mark Stuart Bell, Second Draft



The result of having no clear value to present means that individuals and organisations within the industry need to spend significant time and effort convincing others of their value. This is not only time-consuming but also mentally challenging if they constantly feel the need to ‘prove’ themselves. Furthermore, the industry often represents itself via its large variety of subsectors. There is little unified action that speaks on behalf of the whole sector, and individuals and organisations regularly need to compete for scarce funds rather than support and strengthen each other. This leads to a fragmented voice and inconsistent messaging.

Figure 2 How not having a clear value affects stakeholders of the North East Creative Industry.



It became clear that we lack pride around one united identity, to the point of diluting a core message so as to include as many different small areas as possible. One united identity that encompasses the North East as one creative region in a way that captures everything from hand-crafted to digital creative services is urgently needed.

James Hanson, Layers Studio

Challenge 2 - The Identity

Who is the North East Creative Industry?

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In the UK, the idea of the North is often used to denote Manchester or Liverpool. The North East has a very different history, makeup, and cultural value. There was discussion about how the particular challenges and opportunities in the North East vary from other areas, and therefore, we need to articulate these differences in a way that celebrates achievements, access, and the North East Diaspora. Baltic has a very different audience than visual arts organisations in other parts of the country, and that is to be celebrated.

Kate Gray, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art



The second challenge links closely to the first: the North East Creative Industry needs a clearer identity. The absence of a strong identity is associated with the absence of one voice, which limits advocacy opportunities for the industry. The ‘Creative Industry’, in general, does not have a distinct identity, and there is no such thing that distinguishes the North East Creative Industry from other parts of the country.

Without a clear identity, it is challenging for individuals and organisations in the industry to identify themselves with the industry and for others to have a clear idea about what the industry entails. It is suggested that when the identity and value of the industry are not clearly defined, research and development will be held back. This affects innovation across the sector and for the region as a whole.

Individuals and organisations in the creative industry often identify themselves as part of their specific subsector rather than seeing themselves as part of the wider creative sector. This lack of identification with the broader sector results in limited group identity and a sense of community, where competition prevails over collaboration. The absence of role models within the North East Creative Industry who can feature as sector ambassadors does not contribute to a stronger identity. Without role models, it is more difficult for individuals to identify themselves positively with others in the industry, and there is no external public representation of the North East Creative Industry.

Individuals and organisations in the creative industry are often undervalued and, consequently, underpaid for their work. External stakeholders may see the creative industry as not a 'real' industry, which leads to undervaluing, as they may not offer sufficient fees or compensation (see also Challenge 1). The industry traditionally depends on temporary contracts, funding, and investments, which causes job insecurity. Underpayment and job security do not contribute to a positive image for the industry as a secure, sustainable career. There is no supportive system, let alone a safety structure, that structurally supports individuals and organisations in the sector.



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From a personal perspective, this study and the collective outcomes discussed in the workshops have led me to re-evaluate my views on the region's creative sector. I believe it is crucial to have a unified and reflective creative voice supported by several high-profile leaders in the industry. This collaborative effort will help us showcase the significance of our work both within our region and beyond, highlighting the benefits and successes we achieve. By doing so, we can begin to reap the rewards and address the challenges related to value and career opportunities.

Ross G Palmer, We Are Ken

Challenge 3 - The Job

Career pathways in the creative industry

To remain vital and sustainable, each sector needs new individuals who choose a career in that sector. The North East Creative Industry has the challenge of competing with a strong pull factor from ‘The South’. Individuals who decide to join the sector are commonly attracted to the

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It’s often said that making a film is like going to war. Your supply lines are essential. Transport, logistics, catering, and accommodation may not be the glamorous side of a shoot, anyone who has used a honey wagon knows that, but without that support, there is no production, no stars and no red carpet.

Len Collin, Ballpoint Films



more visible and well-known businesses and organisations. This is despite the current developments of investments in parts of the industry in the North East. This pull from other areas comes on top of the unclarity of the value (Challenge 1) and the absence of a strong identity (Challenge 2). As a result, people are not aware of the career pathways in the industry, and a limited number of new people join, which leads to decreased creativity and innovation in the sector and region.

The variety of career pathways in the creative industry is much more diverse than most people realise. Many jobs, such as administration, finance, and ICT, are not in the direct spotlight but are invaluable for a thriving industry.

Think about a large film production that not only involves actors and camerapeople but also, for example, producers, editors, screenwriters, casting, costume, set and sound designers. Not only that, but the production also provides jobs in marketing, finance, legal, sales, and many other roles that are often invisible but crucial for success. The challenge for the industry is to make people aware that there are many possibilities within the industry.

For the more visible jobs in the sector, it is often unclear what that job involves. Many of these jobs require many more skills than they initially implied. For example, an actor needs to manage their booking agent, accountant, and social media, and a self-employed web designer needs to make sales pitches, billing, and organise their own technical support. Many of these skills are not expected and even more not taught in job-related training. Individuals who choose to work in this kind of job often underestimate the significance of doing all the other parts of the job well.

The workshop participants indicated a resilient mindset is needed to succeed in this sector. There is undervaluing, underestimating the job, an unsupportive environment, job insecurity and many other discouraging elements of a career in this sector.

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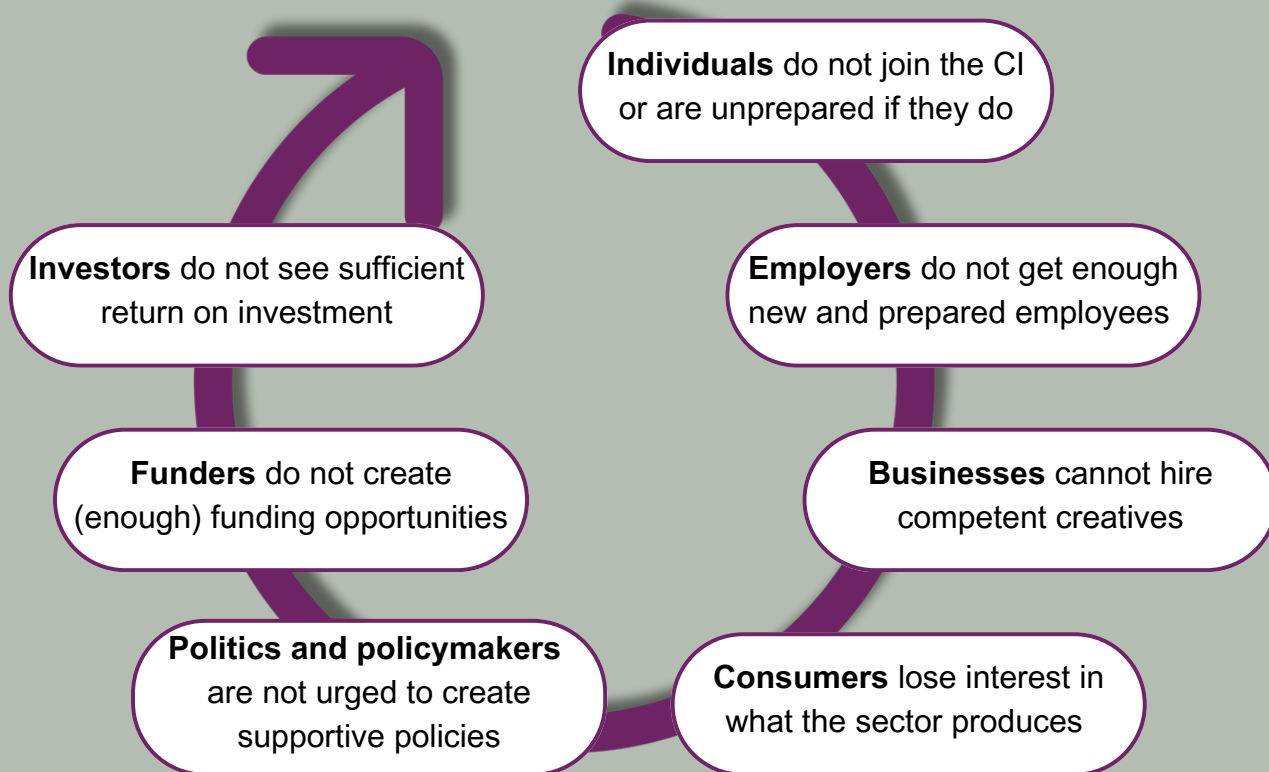
Being a professional actor is an incredibly challenging path, however, it has never been a better time to be an actor in the North East. With the vast opportunities set to launch on our doorstep, it is vital that we create infrastructure, pathways and development opportunities for homegrown artists. It is important that we work together in the region to spearhead the progress of the North East as a creative hub, filled with available talent.

Daniel Lemon, The Actors Forge



The workshop participants indicated a resilient mindset is needed to succeed in this sector. There is undervaluing, underestimating the job, an unsupportive environment, job insecurity and many other discouraging elements of a career in this sector.

Figure 3 Negative spiral of not having clear career pathways in the North East Creative Industry



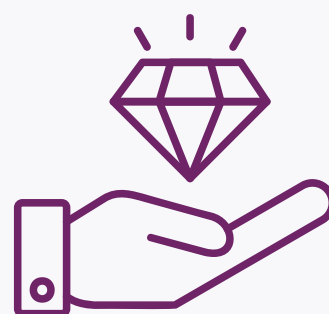
When not enough new individuals join the industry, the talent pipeline dries up, which may lead to decreased innovation. There is a strong need to address this challenge and create clear and transparent pathways for the industry. The absence of this affects diverse groups and – if not vigilant – creates a downward negative spiral, where new, passionate individuals who want to work in the industry don't join or are unprepared if they do. This may lead to employers who cannot hire prepared and well-trained employees and businesses that cannot engage with competent individuals and organisations in the industry. This leads to a lack of visibility and availability of the industry in the North East, leading consumers who no longer engage with the industry and may lose their interest. It will not encourage policymakers to create supportive policies that will enable organisations to support the industry, and consequently, there will be fewer funding opportunities, and investors will be less inclined to invest. This will result in fewer opportunities in the sector, with fewer new individuals joining the sector.

The Future?

How would the future look like if we were able to solve these three main challenges?

Challenge 1 | The Value

If the value of the North East Creative Industry, including its diverse subsectors, is identified and communicated, it would directly support the industry by attracting new employees, businesses, customers, policymakers, funders, and investors to engage with them now and in the future.



Challenge 2 | The Indentity



If the value of the North East Creative Industry, including its diverse subsectors, is identified and communicated, it would directly support the industry by attracting new employees, businesses, customers, policymakers, funders, and investors to engage with them now and in the future.

Challenge 3 | The Job

If career pathways in the creative industry are more precise and there is a supportive system for these pathways, new people may be more inclined and prepared to join and stay in the industry. If more new people join the industry, the North East Creative Industry can grow and flourish.



What is next?

This report outlines the main challenges identified by representatives of the creative industry in the North East. Although the industry may seem in a negative stage, the funding opportunities, favourable climate, and a willingness to adapt and change within the industry provide many opportunities to address these challenges and reshape and futureproof the North East Creative Industry. The industry itself is resilient, flexible, and, above all, creative, and this report can be used to start making these changes. The new North East Combined Authority and local and regional policymakers can use this report to begin addressing and turning these challenges into opportunities that will benefit the North East Creative Industry and provide value for the whole region. From the challenges outlined above, three questions need attention:

- 1 How can the North East Creative Industry better define, measure, and communicate the value it creates to a diverse range of stakeholders?
- 2 How can the North East Creative Industry work together towards developing a common identity as an innovative, leading sector in the UK?
- 3 How can the North East Creative Industry better structure and support career development across the sector?

What makes these questions particularly challenging is that there is no research immediately available to solve them. Facing these specific demands, both theoretical and technical knowledge available seems inadequate or insufficiently curated to derive meaningful solutions. This calls for new research. The Durham Social Science Enterprise Lab will continue collaborating with the creative industry and Durham-based researchers to address these challenges. We will collaborate in research-practice projects to find new, practical, and scalable solutions grounded in a solid theoretical background for the North East Creative Industry.

About this report

About the Social Science Enterprise Lab

In the Social Science Enterprise Lab at Durham University, we aim to scale up the impact of social science research through commercialisation. Unlike other science commercialisation activities, we bring research impact and business prospecting together and early into the research process. In the Lab, we leverage the generative power of social science knowledge and the motivation behind social enterprising. Combined, they can give the research efforts of social scientists the necessary intentionality and direction to produce scalable research impact, as it is embedded into the research process itself and the daily practices of social scientists.

We thank Jeni Smith and Rodrigo Frias for their contribution to the challenge mapping event.

Our website: www.durham.ac.uk/ssel

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