
 **Create Growth
Programme**

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Department
for Culture,
Media & Sport

 **Innovate
UK**

Introduction

Following the success of the Creative Scale Up (CSU) pilot, the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) has launched the Create Growth Programme. The programme has been designed to support the development of creative industries with high-growth potential across England.

The Create Growth Programme – set to be completed in March 2025 – was set up by DCMS with £17.5 million investment in the six original regions, with up to £7 million provided by Innovate UK. In July 2023, the government published its [Sector vision](#), in which it announced an additional £10.9 million to support a further six regions. Innovate UK provided another £6.92 million for the grant funding competition.

Eligible businesses in Create Growth regions are able to apply to Innovate UK for grants and investor partnerships. The programme aims to drive innovation and investment in the sector, helping creative businesses to explore new innovative projects that will stimulate growth and attract private investment. It also aims to prime and build investor networks, connecting businesses across regions, building new supply chains and creating pathways for future founders.

The challenge

Historically, the Creative Industries (CI) have struggled to obtain the necessary level of investment to grow and scale, in part due to investors' limited understanding of the opportunities for investing in CI. Investors generally look for scalability and defensible intellectual property (IP) which can be a challenge for CI businesses.

In addition, founders in CI businesses tend to be specialists in their discipline rather than in business, which leads to a broad lack of business skill and understanding. Finally, many smaller businesses aren't static in terms of size and can have multiple or varied project and IP funding models, such as crowdfunding.

Delivery

The competition is split into two phases: Grant Funding and Investor Partnerships.

Grant Funding offering £10,000-£30,000 for eligible project costs has been available to creative businesses in the assigned regions. To date, 108 businesses have received grant funding from the programme.

The Investor Partnerships phase was recently completed. The aim of this element of the programme was to address the 'equity investment gap' by encouraging highly innovative micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to attract investment that is aligned to early-stage research and development grant support. This will enable them to attract the necessary level of follow-on investment as they scale and grow.

Working with each region's combined authorities and LEPs, the programme offers targeted support to eligible

businesses to help unlock their growth potential. Each region will deliver bespoke support that responds to the specific needs of their local creative businesses.

Innovate UK Business Connect are delivering investor focused activities, including networking and pitching events, mapping of current and potential investment in the sector, and resources to support the understanding of investment opportunities. They will also be working with investors at a national and local level to better understand the investment opportunities in the creative industries.

Impact

The Create Growth Programme will deliver a number of direct outcomes and a lasting impact across the creative sector in England.

The collaboration between Investor Networks and Innovate UK will help to leverage investor partnerships with CI businesses, whilst increased investor understanding of regional CI opportunities will sow the seeds for future investment beyond the programme.

In addition, the programme will see increased regional capital for CI businesses, holding briefing events and expanding the understanding of the sector to facilitate Innovate UK's funding of the wider CI ecosystem.

By tailoring the support programme to meet the needs of the businesses, the programme will also create a stronger, growing and better-equipped creative sector. It will help to build meaningful relationships between founders and investors, driving increased regional investment to boost growth outside of London, and improve regional understanding of the broader CI network.

A regional approach

Creative Industries businesses outside of London often find it difficult to access startup or scale-up finance. Regional support tends to be sporadic and investor networks outside of London are limited in this sector.

To help tackle this, six regions outside of London have been selected to take part in the Create Growth Programme and deliver bespoke support to creative businesses with high-growth potential. Regions were selected via an open competition run by the DCMS between July and September 2022.

Each region is led by the local council, partnership or combined authority, and comprises several areas, towns and cities. The six chosen regions are:

1. Greater Manchester
2. East Anglia
3. North East England
4. South West¹
5. South East
6. East Midlands

Following additional funding in 2023, six new regions were added. These are:

1. Nottingham & Nottinghamshire
2. Devon
3. Hull & East Yorkshire
4. West Midlands
5. West Yorkshire
6. Hertfordshire

Delivered by teams in each of the regions, creative businesses with high-growth potential will be able to apply for support to help them prepare for investment and grow their business. Each region has its own distinct approach and bespoke programme, tailored to the businesses in its cohorts. Some regions specialise in certain sub sectors, whereas others pride themselves on a broad range of talent.

Whilst all regions are supporting the main objectives of the Create Growth Programme, it also provides the opportunity to celebrate what their cohorts have to offer. They can cater to each business' individual needs and showcase their region as a key player in the future development of the UK's creative industry.

¹ The South West region is divided into three: The West of England, Devon, and Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly



The UK's creative industries are world-class and represent a critical pillar of our economic success, both now and for the future. At Innovate UK, we seek to support businesses across all sectors through our innovation ecosystem. We are delighted to partner with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport on the Create Growth Programme. This programme accelerates the ambitions of creative businesses across the regions, enabling them to unlock their high-growth potential."



Esra Kasapoglu, Director of Artificial Intelligence and Data Economy

Regional team overviews

1 Greater Manchester

Led by the team at Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), the Greater Manchester Area encompasses: Wigan, Bolton, Bury, Rochdale, Salford, Oldham, Trafford, Manchester, Tameside, Stockport

2 East Anglia

The East Anglia region is being led by New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership and encompasses: Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

3 North East England

Led by the North of Tyne Combined Authority, this area encompasses: North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Gateshead, Sunderland, Durham, Northumberland, Newcastle

4 South West

The South West region is divided in: a) Bristol, Bath, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire, b) Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, and c) the county of Devon.

5 South East

Led by Kent County Council on behalf of the South East Creative Economy Network, the South East area encompasses: Essex, East Sussex, West Sussex, Kent, Medway, Brighton and Hove, Southend on Sea, Thurrock

6 East Midlands

Led by Leicester City Council, the East Midlands area encompasses: Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Rutland

7 Nottingham & Nottinghamshire

The Nottingham region is being led by Nottingham City Council and encompasses Nottingham and Nottinghamshire

8 Hull & East Yorkshire

The Hull & East Yorkshire region is being led by the HEY Business, Growth and Skills Hub. The region encompasses Hull and East Riding of Yorkshire

9 West Midlands

The West Midlands region is being delivered by Creative UK in partnership with West Midlands Combined Authority and Create Central and encompasses Birmingham, Solihull, Sandwell, Dudley, Coventry, Walsall, Wolverhampton

10 West Yorkshire

The West Yorkshire region is being led by the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and Creative UK and encompasses Leeds, Kirklees, Wakefield, Bradford, Calderdale

11 Hertfordshire

The Hertfordshire region is being led by Hertfordshire LEP and Hertfordshire Growth Hub and encompasses the ceremonial county of Hertfordshire



Greater Manchester

The Greater Manchester region is being led by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and encompasses:

- Wigan
- Bolton
- Bury
- Rochdale
- Salford
- Oldham
- Trafford
- Manchester
- Tameside
- Stockport

The home of Media City, a thriving music scene, and the newest city of culture, Stockport, Greater Manchester is a diverse hub of creativity. With four universities and numerous colleges focusing on creative and digital arts, the region's rich creative and cultural history provide the ideal hub for innovation.

The region's creative diversity is reflected in the Create Growth Programme cohort, which has a little bit of everything – from sustainable fashion, graphic design and modelling, to performing arts, magazine editing and music production.

With more than six years' experience running support programmes, including the Creative Scale Up (CSU) pilot, the team are continuing their legacy and applying learnings. This includes the fact that subsectors such as gaming provide a bridge to the creative sector, starting conversations with investors and opening doors to other areas.

Now, the team are excited to deliver the Create Growth Programme and showcase everything the region has to offer, providing more opportunities to creative businesses and creating a legacy that stretches beyond the programme and first cohort.

“ We do things differently. We are super diverse, we're super quirky and we want to truly embrace that and make that our strength going forward.”



Sarah Novotny, Digital, Creative and Tech Sector Lead, GC Business Growth Hub

Objectives and delivery

The team are excited to give the creative sector more focus, strengthening it to make Greater Manchester the “Hollywood of the UK”, developing an international brand that aligns the region with certain attributes.

Their heritage of doing things differently also provides an opportunity. Sarah Novotny, Digital, Creative & Tech Sector Lead at GC Business Growth Hub says, “We don't want to be known for one thing. We want to be known as a diverse community that thinks outside the box.”

The GMCA are offering coaching, masterclasses and leadership events, designed to help businesses find contacts, showcase innovation, and support their journey to investment readiness.

They're also shifting mindsets and helping founders understand their value. Becki Coen, Programme Manager for Digital, Creative & Tech at GC Business Growth Hub explains:

“A lot of them have started as a hobby or passion project, so getting them to be a bit more commercially minded is a big part of the programme.”

Impact and response

Drawing on their learnings from previous support programmes, the GMCA have a finely-tuned but diverse first cohort of 20 businesses. This curated approach allows them to foster a truly collaborative environment, led by peer-to-peer support and underpinned by advisor relationships.

The team has excellent links to investor networks as well as the university ecosystem, providing multiple channels for businesses to access funding, and supporting the community element that underpins much of their work.

So far, the response has been very positive from both the businesses and investors. The broad range of support means Greater Manchester doesn't have to turn anyone away – no matter what stage the businesses are at, no one has to go it alone.

The team are proud of the collaborative approach that the programme offers, and are excited by the regional networking and knowledge sharing opportunities.

[Connect with the Greater Manchester programme](#)

NEWANGLIA

Local Enterprise Partnership
for Norfolk and Suffolk

2

East Anglia

The East Anglia region is being led by New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership and encompasses:

- Cambridgeshire
- Peterborough
- Norfolk
- Suffolk

They're working with several consortium partners who are helping to deliver the Create Growth Programme, branded a Creative East. These include: the University of East Anglia (UAE); Norwich University of the Arts; Anglia Ruskin University, University of Suffolk; Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, and Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils.

Having worked with startups and SMEs in the past, running similar programmes in other sectors, the team in East Anglia know the value of providing bespoke support for businesses, particularly in the Creative Industries. Generic support simply isn't suitable and in some cases, creative

businesses have been put off altogether – thinking that private investment or investment readiness support isn't for them.

The introduction of the Create Growth Programme has been welcomed by the East Anglia team, along with regional investors and creative businesses looking for support. The team are excited to deliver a programme that's been designed specifically to champion creative businesses and respond to their needs, deeming it a unique opportunity for the four participating cohorts and the creative industries as a whole.

The East Anglia cohorts present a broad mix of creative businesses, from production companies working across film and television, to computer games, podcasting and app development. Some are fairly advanced and have grown organically, whilst others are more early stage.

Most are at a bit of a crossroads, looking for the support to expand their business and move into other markets. Being part of the programme gives them access to expertise and networks they wouldn't otherwise, helping them to shape how their business moves forward.

Objectives and delivery

The team is delivering tailored support from sector specialists, alongside academic partners, private investors and public sector funding. They offer one-to-one advice from industry experts, plus masterclasses and cohort-specific seminars.

They also provide carefully-matched mentors to ensure businesses receive the most relevant support. Saffron Myhill, Innovation Funding Manager at Creative East says:

"These mentors are working in the industry and can share firsthand experience. The participants would never get access to them otherwise, so it's a unique opportunity."

The programme is highly collaborative, with businesses supporting each other and meeting local investors like the Anglia Capital Group. Businesses can also develop and practise their pitch, receiving feedback from mentors, peers and real-life investors.

Having worked on the Low Carbon Investment Fund, East Anglia is also prioritising sustainability. By encouraging businesses to do the same, they hope to add value and attract sustainably-minded investors.



This is a golden opportunity to strengthen links with the creative industry sector in the region, which is really exciting."



James Allen, Innovation and Sectors Manager at New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership

Impact and response

With positive feedback so far, the team hope the programme will create a hub of opportunity for local investors and encourage the development of a co-investment fund.

The in-person elements of the programme have also been successful, with conversation and collaboration a top priority. Sam Burton, Senior Investment Advisor at Creative East says, "When you're in a room with people, that's how you form relationships. That's been so valuable, particularly as they're all like-minded creative people but with different areas of expertise. They're all so generous with their thoughts and opinions."

The programme provides a friendly yet professional environment for companies to feel more confident and empowered, and helps to broaden their horizons. Penny Wright, Programme Communications Co-ordinator at Creative East, says, "It's a chance for companies to reflect and think differently about their opportunities, where they might previously have thought that private investment wasn't for them."

[Connect with the East Anglia programme](#)

North East England

The North East England region is being led by the North of Tyne Combined Authority and delivered in partnership with Creative UK. It encompasses:

- North Tyneside
- Durham
- South Tyneside
- Northumberland
- Gateshead
- Newcastle
- Sunderland

Prior to the launch of the Create Growth Programme, research showed that creative awareness and investment was low in the north of England. However, it also indicated potential growth sectors due to strategic interventions – in particular, design, fashion, film and television computer software, gaming and publishing.

The team has invested heavily in the culture, creative and tourism sectors, running multiple programmes across different areas. Now in the diagnostic phase of the programme, they're already seeing a fantastic cross-section of sectors, businesses and growth stages. There is a slight skew towards tech and software, but also representation across the industries, from film to publishing.

The programme's key focus on investment readiness is a real opportunity to use the strengths of existing regional partnerships, as the team explain:

"In the North of Tyne, there's infrastructure to help [businesses] prepare for investment but there's also the funds there to help them secure it. So it's a real opportunity to change the landscape for creatives at this time."

The North of Tyne team see this as a real opportunity to play to the strengths of existing regional partnerships and infrastructure to better support creative businesses in the region. The creative sector is relatively small in the North East, so the team are excited to see how each sub sector grows with the support of the programme.

“There are strategic opportunities in relation to the investor network, helping them to see the value of investing in the creative sector.”



Carol Bell, Associate Regional Director at Creative UK

Objectives and delivery

Better support for the creative sector will cover a bigger area and provide a more clear and joined-up offer. “It's got huge potential in relation to a springboard for further coherent work which ties in with other activities,” says Carol Bell, Associate Regional Director at Creative UK.

Long term, the team hopes to add more value with many sector-specific cohorts. For now, 100 businesses go through intensive development and a further 100 will move through an open-access model, providing ‘light-touch’ support.

With such a mix of businesses, it's important to the team that delivery is bespoke. They're taking the time to understand each business, their market and how they operate, to provide the right support and help them navigate towards investment.

Support is tailored to business needs, designing individual pathways and interventions to help them test their commercial model and identify growth opportunities. It includes group sessions and peer-to-peer support, with businesses encouraged to engage in self-reflection and analysis, as well as cross-regional collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Impact and response

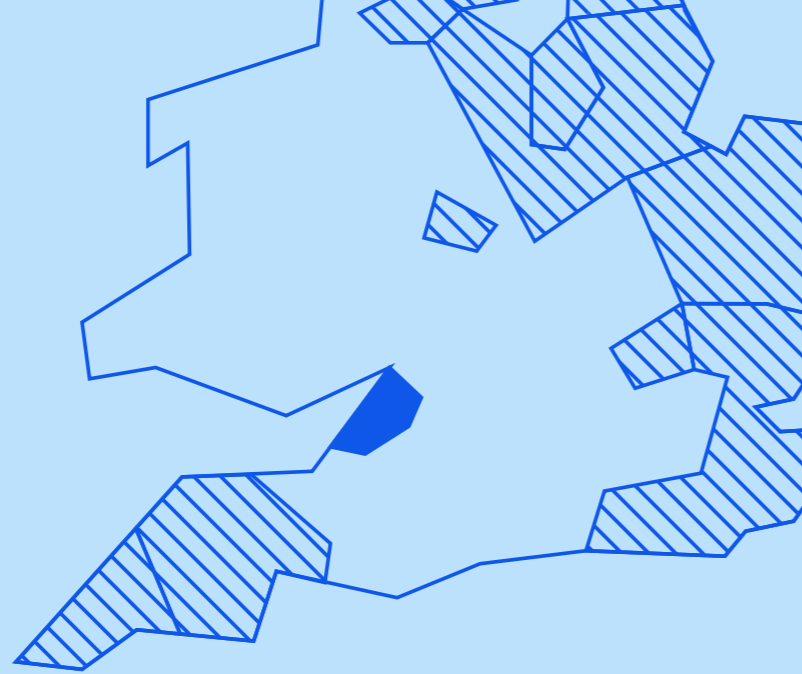
The North of Tyne region is already seeing a positive response and early impact. Three businesses have already been approached by investors, highlighting the programme's projected success and the support offered by the region's complementary existing “wraparound workshops”.

The programme allows the team to identify those businesses with growth potential. But those who aren't ready for investment can be referred back to the Creative UK CCIC for alternative support. This ensures businesses receive the support they need, and remain invested in the programme to drive longevity for the next cohort.

The team are also seeing the impact on businesses who are traditionally grant reliant or wouldn't previously have considered private investment. Carol says, “They're starting to think about commercialisation of aspects of their activity and can see the value in it.”

The team sees this programme as a great opportunity for the North East.. “It's already a massive achievement that the region has been able to bring that collaboration together, especially for the creative sector,” they said.

[Connect with the North East Programme](#)



4 **a**

South West – West of England

Part of the South West region, the West of England is being led by the West of England Combined Authority. It encompasses:

- Bristol
- Bath
- North Somerset
- South Gloucestershire

Part of the South West region, the West of England is led by the West of England Combined Authority and comprises four areas: Bristol, Bath, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire.

The team are looking for creative businesses who are exploring growth opportunities, such as reaching new customers, developing or taking a product or service to market, and expanding to new markets.

Having taken part in the Creative Scale-Up Pilot, the team received lots of great feedback and are applying their learnings to the new cohort. One priority is to make the programme less Bristol-centric – which is a well-networked city – and encourage more applications from other areas.

Diversity is another priority for the West of England, aiming for a ratio of 40% diversity-led businesses. This requires at least 50% of a company’s founders or directors to be female, disabled or from minority ethnic backgrounds.

With no particular subsectors, the team have purposely selected a wide spread of businesses, covering everything from advertising and marketing to arts and crafts, design and fashion, gaming, music and television.

To create a strategic plan for each company, businesses were required to explain their ambition and share which growth opportunities they wanted to focus on in their applications.

Emma Cox, Creative Project Officer for the Business and Skills Directorate said, “we understand that each business is very different and that growth isn’t exclusive to investment. It can look different for everyone.”

“Having access to people from the industry who have owned creative businesses is really beneficial.”



Emma Cox, Creative Project Officer for the Business and Skills Directorate

Objectives and delivery

As well as supporting investment readiness, the West of England team are helping founders build relationships with fellow business owners, programme alumni and investors.

Businesses can access mentors using a grant of £2,500, with a focus on finding the right mentor who can address their specific challenges. Emma says, “Businesses aren’t just looking for any kind of investment. Values are really important, so it’s crucial to find an investor who has values which align with the business’s.”

The programme is being delivered in partnership with Watershed, who are facilitating online training sessions with industry experts, exploring a different topic each month. This is followed by deep-dive, peer-to-peer sessions where founders can share their challenges and explore solutions.

Following the pilot, West of England alumni will also share their experiences and share learnings. Emma says, “We’re fortunate that we’ve got businesses who we’ve been working with since 2020 and are able to have those conversations. Being able to support these businesses after the programme ends is really vital.”

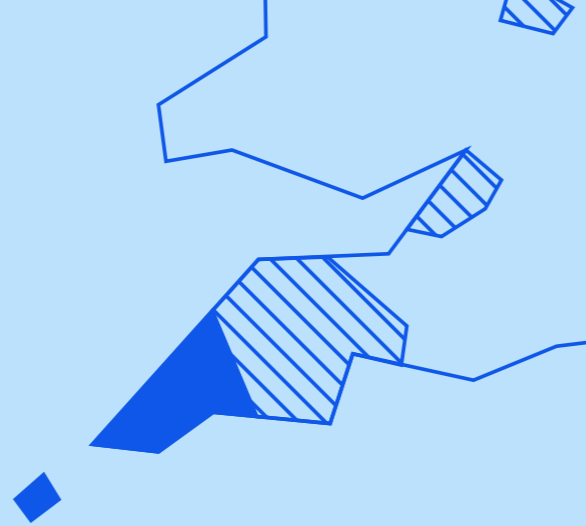
Impact and response

After the success of the pilot and subsequent learnings, the programme is already garnering a great response. Investor feedback has been really positive, many of whom have become mentors to support businesses on the programme.

The team are already seeing important relationships and collaborations across the region, thanks to peer networking and regular events to bring past and present cohorts together. The programme launch event was held at a venue run by programme alumni, showcasing the impact and success of the programme.

Cross-regional collaboration has also been valuable; building relationships with other regions has been extremely rewarding. Emma explains that the “knowledge exchange sessions in person are really valuable”, supporting better communication, understanding and standard of delivery across the regions.

[Connect with the West of England programme](#)



4 b

South West – Cornwall

Part of the South West region, Cornwall also includes the Isles of Scilly. Here, the Create Growth Programme is being led by Creative UK, in partnership with Screen Cornwall and Falmouth University, as well as Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP.

As a small region, Cornwall can provide a very bespoke offer and get to know businesses personally. This has allowed them to build great connections with other regional programmes, and offer a very well-coordinated ecosystem of support.

Cornwall already has lots of open access activity for creative businesses, and the team are looking forward to offering more networking opportunities via the programme. Working closely with the West of England,

South East and North East, they'll be able to deliver some of their sessions collectively, sharing contacts and ideas.

Cornwall's first cohort contains a rich variety of businesses, something the team are very excited about. They've got everything from the screen industry through to marketing, software development, fashion and product design, as well as specialists in the creative technology scene and creative venues.

Suzie West, Cornwall Programme Manager for Creative UK says, "One of the joys of this programme is that it's not restricted to particular subsectors, so we've really enjoyed meeting a wide range of businesses."

There's growing visibility of the creative industries and Creative UK in Cornwall, which enables the team to deliver more value and support. Suzie says that existing relationships have been vital in giving them a head start:

"We've been really lucky in Cornwall that we've got great relationships with so many other service providers, agencies and organisations. We're standing on the backs of giants and we've got an advantage of having such a good legacy of great creative support."

Objectives and delivery

The team in Cornwall are taking a very bespoke approach, and are focused on finding the right growth journey for each individual business.

One of the region's top priorities is helping businesses to develop partnerships, finding other businesses or innovative people to build ideas or solve problems with. The team encourage dialogue and connection amongst the cohort and with other creative professionals and investors, helping businesses to build a support network that extends beyond the completion of the programme.

Most businesses are also keen to develop as sustainably as possible, with a passion for developing B-Corp companies and finding innovative ways to tell stories and enhance people's lives.

They also want to close the language gap between investors and the creative industries, tackling misconceptions and demystifying what growth and business looks like. This includes helping creatives to better understand the world of investment, as well as sharing creative business language with investors.

“These businesses are doing such brilliant work, but they don't give themselves time to step back and refine plans or consider their options. The programme is about giving them some time and space to do that.”



Suzie West, Cornwall Programme Manager for Creative UK

Impact and response

The region has 15 businesses who will take part in the first cohort of the Create Growth Programme. But for those businesses who weren't eligible, the team plan to develop an additional smaller programme to support them. They're already making an impact with their open access activity, reaching about 80 businesses.

The initial response from investors and mentors has been encouraging, as Suzie explains:

"They're really fascinated by the ideas and the innovation that's happening in the creative industry. That's great, because if they're excited and optimistic about it, then they'll signpost other people."

Cross-regional collaboration and knowledge sharing has helped the team to find more contacts, enabling founders to spend time with experts who have worked elsewhere in the UK or abroad, bringing an entirely new range of experiences.

[Connect with the Cornwall programme](#)

4^c

South West – Devon

Part of the South West region, Devon is being led by Creative UK and encompasses the county of Devon.

From rugged moorland to golden beaches, market towns to bustling cities, Devon is known for its wonderfully varied landscapes and this diversity is reflected in the programme cohort.

The team are working with firms utilising videography and animation technologies in sectors such as sport and marketing, as well as interior designers, live arts, marketing companies and architecture firms. They're also helping CreaTech companies develop apps for clients including the Royal Marines and festivals.

The Devon team has welcomed the Create Growth Programme to boost creative industries in the county. Working alongside partners such as the University of Exeter and the University of Plymouth, the team are committed to delivering a programme that champions creative businesses and equips them with the tools for success. Now, the team are excited to unlock opportunities for creative businesses and craft a lasting legacy.

Sam Spake, Programme Manager at Creative UK, says, "It can sometimes be difficult to get investors to come down to the South West because there's a perception that it's miles away. The team are excited to close that perceptual divide with the programme."

“Collaborations with people and the introductions to new opportunities are really powerful.”



Sam Spake, Programme Manager at Creative UK

Objectives and delivery

Mentoring is a big feature of the programme and the team are excited to link founders to people with the specialist expertise they require. Alongside that, they're building a range of workshops around topics like business health, intellectual property and the opportunities investment can unlock. There will also be upskilling workshops.

Sam says, "We're particularly interested in how technology can be combined with business operations. People in creative industries are getting that pinch from both ends; AI looming in terms of enhancing or providing some competition, combined with funding changes with the EU funding stopping different pots of money."

As Devon is a large and remote part of the UK, the team are committed to developing peer networks that enable founders to make useful collaborative partnerships. They're also excited to raise awareness with investors about the value of the creative industries in Devon.

Impact and response

Having committed delivery partners like the University of Exeter and the University of Plymouth is having an early impact on the programme. These partnerships are already enabling the cohort to access world-class talent, expertise and facilities.

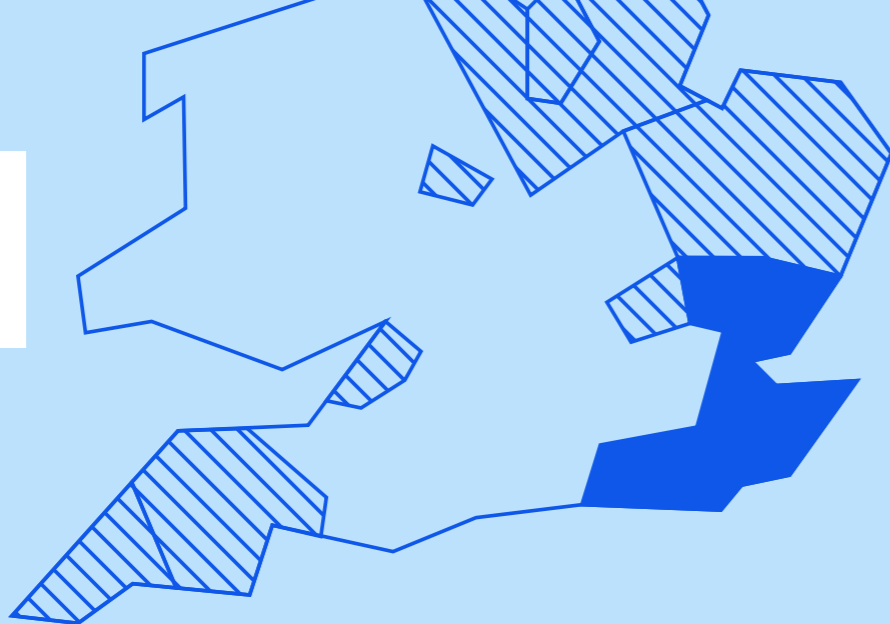
Both universities are running their own programmes in conjunction with the Create Growth Programme, creating a "doubling up of activity" that's helping founders develop their products and services in a safe environment.

Sam says, "A lot of creatives are accidental leaders; they started doing what they love, found themselves doing quite well and ended up in the position of CEO or director without necessarily understanding the full scope of how to scale a business."

The team are already mentoring founders on subjects like pitching and the language of business. Plus, being on the programme is also enabling participants to form relationships with creatives in Devon and further afield.

Sam says: "Getting to know other regions and programme managers and hearing about their cohorts is helpful."

[Connect with the Devon programme](#)



5

South East

The South East region is being led by Kent County Council on behalf of the South East Creative Economy Network and encompasses:

- Essex
- East Sussex
- West Sussex
- Kent
- Medway
- Brighton and Hove
- Southend on Sea
- Thurrock

Creative business owners benefit from a special programme of support, helping them prepare for investment and grow their business. The region has an appetite for creative growth and more investment in a historically-underfunded sector, with a strong partnership behind the programme.

For Create South East, it's critical that the programme is sector-led. With partners at Creative UK, Screen South, Wired Sussex and Angels@Essex, the team are all from the sector and understand the specific needs of growing creative businesses.

Dan Chilcott, Strategic Lead at Create South East says, "There's a huge amount of talent across the region, and I'm really excited about how those businesses we work with can grow."

The team are interested in any creative business with an aspiration to grow, but prior research into what's growing across the region has highlighted specific subsectors. There's a screen-based area of interest around film and digital tech, but also design including fashion.

The team see these as regional growth strengths, but are generally looking to find businesses who have an ambition to scale and a chance to unlock growth potential.

There are already amazing clusters of activity in different areas across the region.

By tapping into areas with a track record, the team hope to underpin and strengthen that demand.

Dan says, "An investment readiness programme can really add value to the way those founders are thinking about where their business might grow."



People are ambitious and knowledgeable, they know their sectors, and they're doing really amazing stuff. There's a huge talent across the creative sector in the southeast."



Dan Chilcott, Strategic Lead, Create South East

Objectives and delivery

The South East programme includes 1-2-1 mentoring, tailored workshops and peer-to-peer support to help businesses in the cohorts explore what investment means to them.

One of their core aims is to ensure that businesses within all the cohorts are well-networked, to combat some of the loneliness that founders might feel. Dan says, "It's about connecting [them] with people who are facing similar challenges and opportunities. All the businesses have a slightly different offer but everyone brings their own creative approach."

The programme provides quality advice and support from those who have grown their own creative businesses or are looking to invest. Grace Hart, Create South East Programme Officer, says:

"We want to make sure that there's a meaningful relationship that comes out of the mentor pairing. This isn't a programme where people get stuck with somebody who isn't aware of the stage they're at or the industry they're in."

Creating an environment that fosters growth and is beneficial to founders, they hope the first cohort will become champions for the programme and help drive long-term creative growth.

Impact and response

The programme has been very well received, with businesses, partners, mentors and investors all on board with its mission. Dan says, "There's no complacency about the programme and it's really exciting to see everyone working together toward its aims."

Collaboration has been a key success story, particularly between the different regions, who all share knowledge and experiences of delivering the programme. Grace says:

"The opportunity for collaboration is there and we really want to use it to the businesses' advantage. We want to create a support network that goes beyond the programme."

Bringing businesses together with their peers and mentors has been really positive, offering new challenges, accountability and leadership opportunities. The team also hope that encouraging partnerships and networking will identify opportunities for the community to invest and add value.

[Connect with the South East programme](#)

East Midlands

The East Midlands region is being led by Leicester City Council and encompasses:

- Leicestershire
- Lincolnshire
- Derbyshire
- Rutland

The East Midlands Creative Consortium, EMC², is supported by the University of Lincoln and De Montfort University, as well as Derby City Council, and leaders from Derbyshire and Leicestershire.

Historically, the region has not been recognised for its creativity and innovation, instead being known for textile manufacture. However, the team behind the Create Growth Programme in the East Midlands are keen to change perceptions:

“For us it’s about raising the profile of the sector and making it known that we do have a creative cohort in our area,” says Elizabeth Botmeh, Head of Delivery & Governance, Leicester & Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership.

The team had a good idea of the types of businesses in the region prior to the launch of the programme, but are pleasantly surprised by the range and variety of companies who have applied.

There are plenty of marketing and communications businesses, but also social media, traditional print media, interior design and architecture. They’ve also got tech businesses such as app developers and computer programmers.

When running their generic growth hub programmes in the past, Elizabeth and the team haven’t seen many creative businesses apply for funding or support. As such, they weren’t sure what kind of response they would get.

However, the number of expressions of interest has demonstrated an untapped need in the region, which the team are excited to explore.

Objectives and delivery

The team hope to change perceptions and raise the sector profile in the East Midlands, creating a legacy of creative support. Elizabeth says: “Historically, the businesses we’re seeing on this programme haven’t come anywhere near our generic business support. We’re trying to identify what we can do to support them legacy wise.”

The team also want to establish a more formal support programme that provides more structure and drives longevity. Elizabeth says, “We are working with some of the organisations that support the creative sector to try to establish how we can develop this programme long-term.”

To help them deliver, they’ve brought in creative expertise from Manchester, who will work with 20 to 25 businesses in the first cohort.

The process begins with in-depth diagnostics to understand individual needs, strengths and weaknesses, and devise a bespoke support package. The programme includes coaching and mentoring sessions with industry experts and investors, as well as networking opportunities, investment-readiness coaching and pitching practice sessions.

“I think lots of people are dismissive of the creative sector, so for us it’s being able to shout about it with confidence. We believe in the creative sector!”



Elizabeth Botmeh, Head of Delivery & Governance, Leicester & Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership

Impact and response

The initial response to the launch of the Create Growth Programme has been extremely positive, from businesses and within the local authority and supporting organisations.

Elizabeth says, “It’s been a fantastic news story for us, obviously for the business but also for the LEP. The programme coming along and securing funding has really energised the team.”

The team have been blown away by the response and are excited to put East Midlands creatives on the map. They’re thrilled that the state is investing in the programme and recognising the importance of growth in the creative sector.

In terms of the programme itself, the overall experience has been one of collaboration, including between regions. Elizabeth says, “I could approach any of the regions and they would answer my queries. It’s not like some things where everyone shuts the gates – they are all really supportive.”

[Connect with the East Midlands programme](#)

Nottingham & Nottinghamshire

The Nottingham region is being led by Nottingham City Council and encompasses:

- Nottingham
- Nottinghamshire

Research by Nottingham Trent University revealed that Nottingham is fast becoming a hub for Creative and Digital Industries (CDI) and employment in the sector has grown faster than most major cities including London since 2015. This comes in spite of the fact that the take up of equity and finance for business in the region has historically been low.

Branded Create Growth N2 (CGN2), the team are focussing on the creative and digital sector across the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire area, particularly CreaTech, a significant sector in the region. They're also looking to boost already thriving sectors such as digital marketing, app development and eSports.

Chris Pook, Economic Strategy Manager at Nottingham City Council, says, "When you look at data around the take up of equity and alternative finance, the East Midlands is bottom of the league. And that's something that we'd like to see improved through the Creative Growth Programme."

With two universities, a thriving cultural scene and world-famous heritage, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire has untold potential that the team are hoping to unlock. By facilitating access to growth finance opportunities for creative businesses, the team are committed to developing an investment scene in the region and getting creatives engaged in the city and the wider economy.

“Economic planning is not always looking for the next new thing – it’s about backing winners, enhancing what you’ve already got and building on success.”



Chris Pook, Economic Strategy Manager, Nottingham City Council

Objectives and delivery

The main objective is to facilitate access to growth finance opportunities for creative businesses in the region. The team will have a strategic focus on peer networking and learning opportunities with the aim of getting companies investment-ready.

The team will be delivering two main types of support within the city: one-to-one engagement and discovery sessions for businesses. The latter will include exploration days to help founders explore their own opportunities via group support within the cohort around particular themes and topics.

Businesses will learn about strategy, value proposition pitching, best business modelling, business development, marketing, market management and leadership, as well as the operational elements around financial management, legal, and intellectual property.

Chris said: "We want to support those companies who have the potential to grow. They may have already proven some growth, but we need to ensure they are going to be the best they can be. We are targeting both established and emerging businesses, particularly those on a significant growth trajectory."

Impact and response

There's been a great deal of interest from creative businesses looking to get involved with the programme and the support is proving useful to bolster the many positive things already happening in the region.

Bringing creatives and business leaders together and creating an arena for people to relay their successes, concerns or challenges has had an immediate tangible impact on the region. There has been a great deal of natural learning and networking thanks to the round tables, Chris is excited to reveal.

The team are making sure they're giving a real leg up to those companies that are emerging now and growing and could be real success stories with a bit of help and intervention.

Chris said: "Economic planning is not necessarily always looking for the next new thing and trying to be uber innovative. At its basic level, it's about backing winners and enhancing what you've already got by building on success."

[Connect with the Nottingham programme](#)

Hull & East Yorkshire

The Hull & East Yorkshire region is being led by the HEY Business, Growth and Skills Hub (formerly the HEY LEP) in partnership with Hull City Council, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, and the University of Hull. The region encompasses:

- Hull
- East Riding of Yorkshire

The creative sector across Hull & East Yorkshire has thrived since Hull was awarded the City of Culture status in 2017. The team plans to build on this “driver of change” with the Create Growth Programme and to support the ambitions of the creative business community.

The programme’s first cohort comprises small and independent businesses, many of which are just finding their feet. Participants include media organisations, companies

producing commercial videos, independent photographers, marketing agencies, advertising firms, public relations companies, as well as visitor attractions and venues.

In recent years, local authorities and the private sector have invested heavily in developing the independent business scene in Hull and East Yorkshire by creating additional resources including incubator units and managed workspaces.

Andrew Richardson, Create Growth Programme Manager, HEY Business, Growth and Skills Hub, says: “We have an emerging creative quarter that’s been established around the Hull Marina, the Old Town, and the Fruit Market, along with some established delivery in the East Riding, so we’ve got the fertile environment to cultivate the creative industries by encouraging people to start up, as well as spur on existing firms to scale up and grow.”

With such a varied and diverse first cohort, the team are committed to delivering an inclusive and accessible package of support to businesses. Working alongside partners such as the University of Hull, the team are keen to provide jargon-free expertise that’s tailored to the individual needs of each business, thus providing a unique pathway of support for each participating business.

Objectives and delivery

With the Hull University Business School as a principal delivery partner, the team are excited to offer a wide-ranging package of support for this year’s cohorts.

The team will be providing structured sessions, ranging from seminars and workshops, through to informal discussions, and potentially visits to comparable areas to learn lessons from what others in similar situations are doing. They’re committed to helping founders build a strong peer network, too.

Andrew says, “Working with the university, in addition to our Growth Hub Business Advisors across the region, we want to build on the social support side of things, in addition to the more usual subjects such as the value of growth and attracting investment.”

A big part of the support will come in the form of mentoring via group and one-to-one sessions. The team has a large group of experienced mentors ready to help every participant to succeed.

“The university has relationships with its successful alumni as well as lots of different companies that are well-established and we will match people with mentors that give them guidance and support,” Andrew says.

“If you’re new to a sector, it can be very difficult to break into those networks. We want to build on the social support side of things, rather than just straightforward lecturing.”



Andrew Richardson, Create Growth Programme Manager, HEY Business, Growth and Skills Hub

Impact and response

The response to the Create Growth Programme has been overwhelmingly positive. There has been a great deal of interest from businesses looking to take part, as well as from experts who are keen to help the cohort reach their goals.

Andrew says, “We’ve had a very good response to the programme and have around 18 businesses that are interested in being in the first cohort. We’re confident we’ll reach our target of supporting 60 creative firms overall.”

The team are supported by an array of partners, each offering unique value. The University of Hull offers the academic context and style that gives people motivation, mentors provide commercial insight and experience, and business advisors know what other support is available. When it comes to funding, they’re able to connect businesses with a plethora of funding streams including investors via Innovate UK Business Connect and the British Business Bank.

The programme is a fantastic opportunity for the region, and they are committed to making it a valuable experience that brings investment and much-needed support to creative startups and scaleups.

[Connect with the Hull & East Yorkshire programme](#)

West Midlands

The West Midlands region is being delivered by Creative UK in partnership with West Midlands Combined Authority and Create Central and encompasses:

- Birmingham
- Solihull
- Sandwell
- Dudley
- Coventry
- Walsall
- Wolverhampton

The West Midlands is a wonderfully diverse creative hub in the heart of England. The team are excited that this diversity is represented by the sectors and the participants included in the programme.

This year's cohort comprises 50 businesses, which are divided equally into two groups of 25. The stage one cohort includes businesses that are earlier in their journey, while stage two includes those closer to the point of investment. Creative UK has found this division to be the most helpful to participants, based on their experience of running the programme previously.

The businesses range from one-person enterprises right up to 65 employees. Participants hail from a range of sectors including film and TV, product design, advertising, gaming, and virtual reality experiences.

Applicant feedback highlighted a historic lack of infrastructure around film and TV in the region, with many mentioning a lack of skills, talent pools, and connection opportunities. Create Central has been working to address this industry feedback for some time and the issue will continue to be a priority.

Jasmin Davies, Programme Coordinator for Creative UK West Midlands, says: "We have a large film and TV focus and, along with Create Central and WMCA, have established relationships with the companies and organisations who are driving the development of TV and film studios in and around Digbeth and beyond."

The team are also keen for participants to tap into the extensive investment mentor pool at Creative UK. Their mentors have knowledge and interest in the creative industries alongside lengthy experience in investment opportunities and growing businesses.

Objectives and delivery

Stage one businesses will get six months of workshops covering topics such as intellectual property, investment, strategic networking, and marketing. Alongside that, participants will have one-to-one mentoring sessions including a diagnostic session at the end of the process to signpost opportunities and finalise their growth plan.

The stage two programme is nine months and includes workshops covering similar topics but with a focus on investment rather than growth planning. Participants also get more dedicated mentorship; 27 hours over the period with a bespoke investment mentor tailored to the needs of the business.

A big part of the programme for both cohorts is the investor connect events, where participants can practise their pitch and tailor their offering to real investors – and maybe even land investment.

Jasmin says: "The connect events include pitch and dines, pitch practice opportunities and networking events. These are a big opportunity for participants to refine their pitch or offering further, and meet people who might eventually be putting some money into their business."

“Being present in the West Midlands, it was important to include businesses that represent this very diverse region, and are also high-growth businesses with the potential to grow.”



Julia Hayes, Programme Manager for Creative UK West Midlands

Impact and response

The team are proud to reveal that there's real excitement among both cohorts. Participants are engaging with the content well and are eager for the journey ahead.

The first cohort has already started making new connections and solidifying existing connections as part of the programme – forging a creative infrastructure that many feel has been lacking in the region.

Jasmin says: "The response demonstrates to us that there is and has been a real need for this sort of programme here in the West Midlands. I really feel like we're filling that gap. While it's still early days, I think by the end of this process, we'll have a really strong case to do the same thing again."

The team are excited to announce that participants are already beginning to learn the language of business, something that many creative founders struggle with. Julia Hayes, Programme Manager for Creative UK in the West Midlands, explains:

"It's making sure that founders in creative industries can talk the same language as investors and reassure them that they are business people with an opportunity that has real potential."

[Connect with the West Midlands programme](#)

West Yorkshire

The West Yorkshire region is being led by the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and Creative UK and encompasses:

- Leeds
- Bradford
- Kirklees
- Calderdale
- Wakefield

Research by Data City has found that West Yorkshire is second only to London in terms of how fast its creative industries are growing.

Countless TV hits have come out of the region, including Happy Valley and Gentleman Jack, and Marvel has filmed there. What's more, West Yorkshire has a thriving music scene and became the home of EMI North last year.

Despite all these accolades, the region falls well behind the national average in terms of the amount of investment that it secures,

according to Data City's research. This is something the team are excited to tackle with the programme.

Paddy Buggy, Lead Programme Performance Officer for Creative Industries, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, says. "West Yorkshire creative businesses have had to do a lot without a huge amount of investment, but still represent themselves nationally and internationally. With a little bit more support, we could secure so many more opportunities."

The research also looked into where the high-growth businesses were and what sectors would be best served by the programme. It revealed that the region's specialist sectors were film and TV, convergent screen technologies, fashion and textiles, gaming, and music – and these are the main areas of focus for the team.

The West Yorkshire programme comprises 40 companies. The first cohort includes businesses at a more advanced stage who are ready for investment. Meanwhile, the second cohort is a "lighter touch" for businesses at an earlier stage. Creative UK has found that dividing the cohorts is most beneficial for participants, based on previous programmes.

Objectives and delivery

The team are setting an ambitious objective of at least 25% of businesses securing investment during the programme, a target they'll be working hard to hit.

Equality and diversity are a really strong part of their agenda and the team are proud to have "smashed" their diversity objectives for both cohorts.

Paddy says, "Half the applications received are from businesses owned by women and 20% are owned by people who identify as having a disability. We've got a really strong mix of ethnicity and diversity among the cohorts as well."

Both cohorts will receive in-person workshops and one-to-one mentoring. They also get diagnostic sessions to help with things like crafting their proposition, drawing up a business plan, and getting ready to scale once they secure investment. Networking events and peer networking are important aspects of the programme.

Creative UK's pool of mentors is a crucial part of the delivery. With a highly established network of mentors in many creative sectors, both cohorts will be able to seek advice from people further along in their journey."

“Half the applications received are from businesses owned by women and 20% are owned by people who identify as having a disability. We've got a really strong mix of ethnicity and diversity among the cohorts as well.”



Paddy Buggy, Lead Programme Performance Officer for Creative Industries, West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Impact and response

The response to the Create Growth Programme has been exceptionally positive and the quality of applications has really shone through. With such potential in both cohorts, the team are excited to deliver a package of support that creates a lasting legacy.

They hope the programme will help to address the historic lack of investment in the region and create even more opportunities for West Yorkshire's blossoming creative industries going forward.

Paddy says, "The Creative Industries in West Yorkshire is such a strength of our economy, but hasn't had the same opportunities that other sectors have, despite the difficulties we've faced over the last couple of years.

"Had West Yorkshire businesses attracted the same number of deals as the UK generally over the last 10 years, that would have been another £261 million invested in our economy, which is a huge sum."

The team are hoping that the Create Growth Programme will go some way towards addressing this shortfall.

[Connect with the West Yorkshire programme](#)



Hertfordshire

The Hertfordshire region is being led by Hertfordshire LEP and Hertfordshire Growth Hub and encompasses the ceremonial county of Hertfordshire.

The “jewel in the crown” of Britain’s film and TV industry, Hertfordshire offers myriad opportunities for creative businesses. Located to the north of London, the county is home to major players in the sector such as Elstree Studios, Warner Brothers, Sky and the BBC.

There are around 8,700 creative businesses in Hertfordshire, 2,500 of which are linked to the county’s booming film and TV industry. It’s estimated that the county’s creative sector employs some 33,000 people.

Working alongside partners Estu and the Royal College of Art, Exemplas and the University of Hertfordshire, the team are excited to connect Hertfordshire SMEs

to opportunities in the film and TV sector. With a broad programme of support, they’re committed to helping creative businesses to meet the needs of this fast-paced and diverse industry. Whether it’s providing flowers for film sets or cutting-edge animation for box office sensations, the team has the experience and the contacts to help creatives succeed.

While Hertfordshire has been the national centre for film-making for a century, the county has plenty more to offer, particularly for businesses looking to break into supplying the sector. The gaming and digital media sectors are also thriving and the team are excited to connect businesses with opportunities in these areas, too.

Georgina Wark, Communications Manager for Hertfordshire LEP, says: “In this time of economic uncertainty, for businesses to have the support to be able to diversify their product and test it safely is just amazing. It just opens up the doors for so many businesses.”



Hertfordshire is Britain’s jewel in the crown for the film and TV industry, but we can’t rest on our laurels. We have to build on that and that’s where this programme fits in.”



Tim Burton, Business Support Services Manager, Hertfordshire LEP

Objectives and delivery

The key objective of the Creative Growth Programme is to equip creative businesses with the skills, knowledge and contacts to access opportunities within the thriving film and TV industry in Hertfordshire. To achieve this, they’re delivering a film and TV sector plan and have piloted a supply chain initiative, which was trying to see how to better connect businesses to the opportunities within the film industry.

Supply chain innovation remains at the heart of the Hertfordshire assistance, bolstered by having access to additional support. Including investor readiness, providing workshops on topics such as debt finance, and accessing R&D tax credits. Mentoring will be available for businesses seeking active investment and Hertfordshire is looking to develop a local investor network.

The team are also connecting businesses to new product development support, including help on shaping commercialisation plans and where needed, access to research and facilities to test new product concepts.

Tim says, “Businesses are always looking to grow but they can be very internally focused, or they don’t have the contacts or know-how to actually approach these types of opportunities.”

Impact and response

While it’s still early days, the team has been helping businesses to understand where the key opportunities are within the TV and film industry in Hertfordshire. They’re also highlighting issues within the sector that creative businesses can help to solve.

Founders have had the opportunity to speak to key players from the film-making industry as part of initiatives such as the Supply Chain Innovation Programme. The eight-week programme, which ends with a finale event at Sky Studios, allows business owners to pitch and get critiqued by the procurement team at Sky.

Tim says, “The problem is that companies see the carrot of business within the TV and film industry but they either don’t know who to speak to or how to connect to them, or they don’t know how to pitch their proposition so that it actually meets the actual industry requirements. So the Supply Chain Innovation Programme is about looking at the propositions, refining them, and creating connections.”

[Connect with the Hertfordshire programme](#)

Conclusion

The Creative Industries are an exciting opportunity for entrepreneurs and investors alike, with a broad range of talent and subsectors displayed across the six regions. The Create Growth Programme provides the chance for regions to showcase the innovative businesses they are supporting and develop a framework for the future of the programme.

The success of the first cohort is already clear to see, and is testament to the importance and potential of creative businesses in the UK. Businesses or investors wishing to find out more about getting involved in the Create Growth Programme can visit the programme website or connect on social media.



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