GMCA Sector Development Plan:

Creative Industries

Executive Summary

The *Creative Industries Sector Development Plan* - sets out Greater Manchester's strategic vision to grow and sustain specifically the creative industries as a designated frontier sector. With over £1.4 billion in GVA and 48,000+ jobs, the sector is a key driver of inclusive economic growth, innovation, and place-making.

Key Objectives

- Strengthen sector leadership through a new GM Creative Council and Freelance Taskforce.
- Target high-growth sub-sectors: music, screen, createch, and design.
- Align education and skills with industry needs.
- Improve access to finance and investment-readiness.
- Promote inclusive, place-based growth across all ten boroughs.
- Foster cross-sector collaboration with digital, health, and manufacturing.

Delivery Approach

The plan outlines coordinated actions across five levers: leadership, infrastructure, innovation, enterprise, and skills. It proposes new initiatives including a GM Production Fund, Music Export Office, Creative Clusters, a Creative Council, and a Freelance Taskforce.

Impact

Success will be measured by job creation, investment leverage, skills development, business growth, and environmental outcomes—positioning Greater Manchester as a global leader in creative innovation and inclusive growth.

How this Plan Will Work

The Purpose of This Plan

This plan, as well as corresponding plans for Greater Manchester's Other frontier sectors (Advanced Materials and Manufacturing, Health Innovation and Life Sciences, Digital Cyber and AI, and Low Carbon Goods and Services) serve several purposes outlined below:

- **To provide strategic direction for GMCA, local partners**, stakeholders, institutions, businesses to work towards the development of each of Greater Manchester's Frontier Sectors, including shaping thinking regarding future funding utilisation. Plans will be "living documents," that will have an iterative approach to how it is written and implemented.
- **To identify intervention priorities** which the evidence suggests will support the development of the sector including areas such as physical developments, skills, business support, research and innovation programmes, or non-financial sector development initiatives and partnership models. **To provide an updated understanding of the state of our frontier sectors** including current and planned activity that is taking place within them, which were last reviewed as part of the Local Industrial Strategy process.
- To support the development of the Local Growth Plan and the National Industrial Strategy and its "targeted Sector Plans"
- To map out key inter regional partnerships and supply chain dependencies and links to National and international initiatives.

Our Approach

One of GM's key strengths is its partnership working across the public, private and academic sectors., This underpins its success in recent years in increasing productivity, driving growth and investment in its frontier sectors and making the clear case for the benefit of place-led greater devolution.

The ongoing development of devolution of powers and control of budgets has given GM greatly increased control of how it can deliver some of the changes needed to realise our vision and strategic priorities. However, in some areas this control remains limited so our ability to work collaboratively with partners to develop compelling cases for funding, more powers and control, and to develop collaborative, innovative ways of achieving our goals, will remain a primary element of how we deliver this plan.

There are therefore guiding approaches that will sit as overarching principles for how this plan develops and delivers.

1). This is a living document, which will have an iterative approach to how it is written and implemented. As befits sectors that are so rooted in new developments and innovation, the plan cannot be set in stone, or it will rapidly become irrelevant.

2). The Plans, from its vision, through its strategic priorities, to the interventions that deliver these, will be co-designed with the sectors.

3). Where possible, this will focus on impact and outcomes, over realistic timescales, rather than the delivery of blunt outcomes to arbitrary, short deadlines.

4). Governance and oversight will be proportionate, flexible, and responsive, rather than imposing rigidity, bureaucracy, and excessive reporting requirements.

We will ensure that different parts of the ecosystem work together and that various interventions complement and support one another. To unlock new employment spaces for growth, we must ensure the availability of necessary skills, transport to get people there, leadership to communicate the vision and attract interest, and business support to help businesses locate and thrive. These components complement each other, and we will work to break down silos and take a strategic approach to implementing, prioritizing, and sequencing interventions to create the most impact for the sector.

The development of the Greater Manchester Creative Industries Sector Plan marks a significant step in articulating a shared vision for the growth and sustainability of the sector. This plan is the result of extensive collaboration between local authorities, industry leaders, cultural institutions, academic partners, and creative practitioners. It is grounded in robust evidence and informed by the lived experiences of those working within the sector.

This report sets out:

A comprehensive overview of the current state of the creative industries in Greater Manchester.

An analysis of the opportunities and challenges facing the sector, such as skills gaps, access to finance, workspace availability, and the impact of emerging technologies.

Strategic priorities and targeted interventions designed to support sector growth, enhance resilience, and ensure that the benefits of creative industry development are widely shared across all communities.

A framework for delivery and measurement, including governance structures, partnership models, and indicators for tracking progress and impact.

The Creative Industries Sector Plan is not only a roadmap for economic development — it is a statement of intent. It recognises the power of creativity to transform lives, places, and economies, and it positions Greater Manchester as a leading city-region for creative innovation, investment, and talent.

Introduction

The Creative Industries play a key role in the UK economy, employing 2.4 million people and generating almost £126 billion in 2023, which accounts for nearly 6% of the country's annual Gross Value Added (GVA).[1]

Greater Manchester has the largest concentration of creative businesses outside London[2], with a mature and thriving ecosystem that holds significant potential to drive national economic growth. The city-region has long recognised the value of culture and creativity, investing in flagship developments such as MediaCityUK and the School of Digital Arts (SODA), which exemplify its commitment to harnessing the economic and social power of the creative industries. These investments have helped establish Greater Manchester as a centre of excellence for content creation, digital innovation, and creative education.

The region is home to world-class creative organisations and venues like Factory International and Co-op Live, alongside grassroots hubs such as Islington Mill and Grit Studios, which nurture emerging talent and foster community-led cultural production. Content produced at MediaCityUK and Space Studios, or filmed on location across Greater Manchester, reaches global audiences—demonstrating the international reach and influence of the city-region's creative output. From animators like Mackinnon & Saunders to recording studios such as VoltaLab Sound Studios and games companies like Cloud Imperium, Greater Manchester's ten districts host a diverse and dynamic creative ecosystem. Institutions including SODA, RNCM, the University of Salford, and the University of Manchester's Creative Manchester are central to an integrated approach to creative skills development, building on the Greater Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc) to connect learners with industry-aligned opportunities.

This creative strength is embedded within the broader ambitions of the new Greater Manchester Strategy (2025–2035)[3], which sets out a vision for a thriving, inclusive city-region where everyone can live a good life. The strategy positions Greater Manchester as the UK's fastest-growing economy, driven by innovation, new industries, and a ten-year pipeline of investment in growth locations. It emphasises the importance of aligning economic growth with social progress, ensuring that prosperity is shared across all communities. The creative industries are central to this vision—contributing not only to GVA and employment, but also to Greater Manchester's identity, international reputation, and capacity for inclusive, place-based regeneration.

[1] Skills England: Sector skills needs assessments - creative industries
[2] Creative Industries Radar: Mapping the UK's Creative Clusters and Microclusters
[3] Greater Manchester Strategy

GM Creative Industries Plan on a Page

Vision for the Sector

Greater Manchester will be the UK's leading creative powerhouse, where talent and businesses thrive across the city region, supported by inclusive infrastructure and dynamic policy. With deep international links and a bold spirit of innovation, GM will help drive global creative excellence and shape the future of cultural production.

Current State of the Sector

GM's creative industries contribute £1.4bn in GVA and support over 48,000 jobs. The sector is anchored by institutions like MediaCityUK and supported by a devolved funding landscape. It is integrated with other frontier sectors and benefits from strong research institutions. However, spatial inequality, a lack of diversity and underinvestment in some boroughs remain challenges.

Sector Definition

The creative industries are defined by the UK Government as those industries which originate in individual creativity, skill and talent and have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property. Sub-sectors include advertising, architecture, crafts, design, film, TV, createch, publishing, museums, music, and performing arts.

Strategic Priorities

1. Build strong sector leadership.
2. Focus on high-growth sub-sectors.
3. Align education and skills with industry and refine research priorities for the city region.
4. Improve access to finance and investment.
5. Promote inclusive and place-based growth.
6. Foster cross-sector collaboration and innovation.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths: Strong talent pipeline, global reputation, internationally significant infrastructure, cross-sector collaboration

Weaknesses: Funding constraints, spatial inequality, limited IP support, workforce diversity.

Opportunities: AI integration, export growth, regional branding.

Threats: Precarity of work, global competition, distribution of workspaces, affordability, economic uncertainty, technological disruption.

Key Actions

Establish a GM Creative Council and Freelance Taskforce.
Develop and implement a Creative Infrastructure plan.
Develop a coherent brand and narrative for the sector
Expand apprenticeships and training.
Support grassroots venues, SMEs, and freelancers.
Secure national and international investment.
Develop priority initiatives in high-growth sectors like music and screen.

Infrastructure and Physical Development

Short-term (0–2 years): Asset mapping, improvements to strategically important existing venues, adapting existing spaces across conurbation for creative use.

Medium-term (3–5 years): Development of new creative work, rehearsal, studio, fabrication, and performance spaces across GM, linked to growth locations and integrated pipeline

Long-term (6–10 years): Large-scale new facilities to increase production capacity of sector

Measures of success

Creative Jobs Growth
More diverse, high-quality creative employment in GM.

Business Start & Scale
Increase in creative start-ups and scaling businesses.

Global Reach & Exports
More international partnerships and export value.

Skills & Talent Access
Broader access to creative training and career pathways.

Audience & Participation
Growth in local and global engagement with GM's creative output.

Infrastructure Investment
Enhanced spaces and digital tools for creative production.

Sector Definition: The Creative Industries

The UK Government, through the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS), defines the **creative industries** as:

"Those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill, and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.

This definition underpins the **Creative Industries Sector Vision**[4], which outlines how government and industry will collaborate to unlock the sector's growth potential. For the purposes of this plan, we define the key creative industries subsectors of Greater Manchester as;

- Advertising and marketing
- Architecture
- Crafts
- Design (product, graphic, and fashion)
- Film, TV, video, radio, photography and podcasting
- Createch
- Publishing
- Museums, galleries, and libraries
- Music, performing, and visual arts.

The sector is an interconnected ecosystem of designers, creatives, artists, and engineers, often concentrated in creative clusters across the UK.

The Creative Industries contributed £3bn GVA in 2022, representing 3.4% of the GM economy. The sector employs more than 50,000 people and represents 5% of the UK digital and creative sector, with key assets and strengths in skills and research and innovation, programming and broadcasting, music, advertising, culture, performance and createch.

Creative Industries (Defined by the National Industrial Strategy)	GM Employment Count	GM Location Quotient
58 : Publishing activities	4,500	0.73
59 : Motion picture, video and television programme production, sound recording and music publishing activities	6,000	0.92
60 : Programming and broadcasting activities	4,500	1.81
90 : Creative, arts and entertainment activities	4,000	0.85
731 : Advertising	6,000	0.79
741 : Specialised design activities	2,000	0.71
742 : Photographic activities	700	0.88
743 : Translation and interpretation activities	450	1.70

[4] Creative industries sector vision: a joint plan to drive growth, build talent and develop skills - GOV.UK

6202 : Computer consultancy activities	9,000	1.04
6201 : Computer programming activities	21,000	0.72
3212 : Manufacture of jewellery and related articles	100	0.47
7021 : Public relations and communication activities	1,500	1.01
7111 : Architectural activities	3,500	0.81
8552 : Cultural education	350	0.83
9101 : Library and archive activities	800	0.56
9102 : Museum activities	600	0.41

Source: BRES via Nomis Strategic Context

Why This is a Frontier Sector

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority defines a frontier sector as a sector that:

- Has nationally & internationally recognised R&D strengths and complementary industrial / commercial assets
- Is innovative, bringing about new ideas, methods, products, services, or solutions and creating the jobs of the future.
- Is high productivity, as well as helping drive productivity across the economy through the adoption of their innovations?

These sectors contain multiple clusters where technologies, assets and businesses combine in a place, creating potential for innovation and creation of new markets or knowledge that increases the value being created in the cluster and the competitiveness of the wider sector in the region.

In 2019, Greater Manchester's Independent Prosperity Review [5] and Local Industrial Strategy [6] identified Digital, Creative and Media as one of its four priority sectors, noting the 'internationally significant clusters in broadcasting, content creation and media, and growing assets in cyber security'. As Greater Manchester's understanding of the specific opportunities within certain sectors and subsectors has developed and noting UK Government's selection of the Creative Industries as one of its Growth Driving Sectors[7] it was decided that there was sufficient strategic and economic rationale to select the Creative Industries as one of Greater Manchester's frontier sectors.

This sector plan recognises the interdependencies between the Creative Industries and other frontier sectors in areas like digital, cyber and AI, health innovation and advanced manufacturing, whilst affording the subsectors within this plan a level of specificity around growth interventions that was not possible when coupled with Digital.

Greater Manchester is home to Europe's largest purpose-built creative hub, MediaCity, some of the UK's most innovative venues, Aviva Studios and Co-Op Live, and a thriving independent ecosystem with creative hubs like Islington Mill and Ashton Old Baths developing innovative ideas and products to export around the globe.

[5] Greater Manchester Independent Prosperity Review - Greater Manchester Combined Authority
[6] gm-local-industrial-strategy-web.pdf
[7] The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy 2025 - GOV.UK

Greater Manchester has significant creative research capacity, with The University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University, The University of Salford, the Royal Northern College of Music and the University of Greater Manchester initiating and delivering research partnerships locally, nationally, and internationally.

Alignment with National and Local Policy

In June 2025, UK Government published the Creative Industries Sector Plan[8] as part of its suite of National Industrial Strategy documents. This plan identifies Greater Manchester as one of Six Creative Industries Priority Places, areas with potential for high growth set to receive a share of the new £150m million Creative Places Growth Fund.

The Plan states that the Creative Industries 'have increased output at over 1.5 times the rate of the rest of the economy', that the UK 'is the third largest creative services exporter in the world' and that 'rapid increases in the consumption of content, leisure and experiences are driving demand'.

The national Creative Industries Sector Plan aims to significantly increase business investment in the sector—from £17 billion to £31 billion—while addressing challenges such as technological disruption, skills shortages, and regional inequality. A central focus of the strategy is to build a more inclusive sector, with well-paid jobs for local people, and resilient creative economy. This includes expanding access to funding through institutions like the British Business Bank, enhancing R&D support via Innovate UK, and fostering regional creative clusters beyond London. The government also commits to strengthening the talent pipeline by investing in education, apprenticeships, and lifelong learning, particularly in digital and immersive technologies. The plan recognizes the need to modernize infrastructure and copyright frameworks to keep pace with evolving business models and global competition [British Business Bank, 'Backing Innovation: Creative Sector Investment Report', 2024.] [Innovate UK, 'Creative Industries R&D Impact Report', 2024.]

The strategy is underpinned by four key pillars: improving ease of doing business, supporting frontier industries, empowering regional growth, and forging enduring partnerships between government and industry. It sets out a long-term framework to ensure the UK's creative sector remains globally competitive, culturally vibrant, and economically vital. By aligning public investment with private sector ambition, the plan seeks to unlock the full potential of the UK's creative talent and institutions, ensuring that creativity continues to be a cornerstone of national prosperity.

One Creative North[9] is a pan-regional initiative designed to transform the creative industries across the North of England by fostering a connected and collaborative ecosystem. It envisions a "Northern Creative Corridor"—a large geographic area of creative clusters and micro clusters linked through shared supply chains, labour markets, networks, and coordinated policy. The initiative aims to unlock the North's immense creative potential by addressing long-standing disparities in access to finance, skills, infrastructure, and visibility. It seeks to inspire and retain talent, support business growth, and build a sustainable and inclusive creative economy. With a projected economic uplift of £10 billion in GVA and the creation of up to half a million jobs, One Creative North represents a bold reimagining of how creativity can drive regional prosperity and social transformation.

[8] Creative Industries Sector Plan - GOV.UK

[9] One Creative North report May 2025.pdf

Strengthening Creative Industries Research and Data in Greater Manchester

A robust evidence base is essential to understanding, supporting, and growing Greater Manchester's creative industries. While the region benefits from strong qualitative insights and strategic engagement, there remains a need to develop a more comprehensive and consistent baseline of creative sector data. This will enable better policy design, investment targeting, and impact measurement across the city-region.

Currently, Greater Manchester draws on a mix of national and local sources, including the Skills England Sector Skills Needs Assessment, the Creative Industries Sector Vision from DCMS, and PEC's Creative Clusters and Sparse Spaces report. Locally, GMCA has gathered extensive feedback through online consultation and sub-sector engagement sessions. These sources provide valuable insights into workforce trends, spatial inequalities, and sub-sector needs—but they are not yet integrated into a unified, regularly updated dataset.

To address this, as part of delivery of this plan, Greater Manchester will take coordinated steps to build creative industries data infrastructure. This includes establishing a regional baseline of employment, business density, GVA, and spatial distribution across all ten boroughs. Data will be disaggregated by sub-sector, business size, and workforce demographics to support inclusive growth and targeted interventions.

Partnerships with national bodies such as the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC), Creative UK, and the Intellectual Property Office will be key to aligning methodologies and accessing comparative data. GMCA will work with local universities to develop longitudinal research programmes and sector observatories that track trends in innovation, skills, and internationalisation. The infrastructure for this work is already in place via the GM Civic University Accord which has recently appointed its first jointly funded knowledge exchange research associate for creative health.

Growth Locations and the GM Investment Plan.

GM has identified six "Growth Locations" as prime opportunities for driving transformative change, each with brownfield and greenfield land for housing, employment and industrial growth. This Plan aims to support driving growth in these locations by identifying the physical and wider requirements for the Sector for it to grow, and by providing a joined-up narrative of our ambitions and plan for supporting the Sector going forward.

Through aligned strategy and planning policy, the Growth Locations will support clusters of innovation in all these areas, working with their existing business bases to maximise supply chain linkages, providing local grow-on space of the quality and type needed, and establishing links into communities, schools and town centres to develop the spill-over for all the city region's residents. This approach focuses on providing digital connectivity, integrated transport infrastructure, innovation assets, and tailored support to foster innovative businesses.

To support this activity Greater Manchester has developed the Integrated Pipeline[11] which captures the projects and interventions needed to deliver the full scale of our ambitions through investment in physical infrastructure including our strategic employment and housing sites, town centres and city centre developments over the next 10 years, bringing them together for the first time into a single platform. The pipeline will enable residents and businesses to see the type, scale and timing of development that is coming forward and ultimately enable us collectively to make better informed investment decisions

The below sections summarise the vision for each of these as well as how the Low Carbon sector is aligned to the visions for these locations.

Central Growth Cluster

The economic heart of GM, supporting growth in all four Frontier Sectors and accelerating growth across the city region. A globally recognised destination with landmark new neighbourhoods underpinned by growth in sport, culture, leisure and tourism that meets the needs of GM residents as well as an attractor for UK and international visitors. This is the leading area for the knowledge economy and R&D, bolstered by world-class universities and collaboration spaces. Key relevant initiatives taking place within this Growth Location include the development of Sister (in which green investment and climate tech ecosystem company Sustainable Ventures are a tenant) and the Oxford Road Corridor Strategic Regeneration programme including regeneration work on Upper Brook St, Willmott St, Former Elizabeth Gaskell Campus and John Dalton West.

Airport and Southern

The international gateway to the north. A proposition for growth built around digital innovation in the health sector, seeing the transformation of two hospitals (Wythenshawe health campus, and Stepping Hill hospital) accelerated by R&D at MIX Manchester (formally airport city). The Strategic Regeneration Framework for MIX commits to biodiversity and sustainably (incl. delivering at least 10% Biodiversity Net Gain), whilst wider plans include enhanced Metrolink connections.

Western Gateway

The UK's largest sustainable regeneration opportunity. A proposition around clean growth and digital innovation across the logistics sector, enhanced by a unique digital and sport offer, including the expansions of Port Salford and development of Trafford Wharfside. More specifically, plans include employment in low-carbon energy sectors, the development of Port Salford into a tri-modal sustainable freight hub (waterborne, rail, and road), and industrial decarbonisation through cluster partnerships (particularly around hydrogen and CCUS).

Eastern Growth Cluster

Ashton Innovation Corridor is at the forefront of advanced manufacturing and materials innovation. The vision for the Ashton Innovation Park aims to deliver 160,000 sqm of employment floorspace targeted at life sciences, health technologies, advanced manufacturing, and materials science/fabrication. The redevelopment of St Petersfield in Ashton aims to deliver modern, tailored development that will stimulate growth of the Digital, Media, Creative and Tech sector, diversify the economy and foster synergies between manufacturing/engineering and DCT businesses for Industry 4.0 opportunities.

Northeast Growth Corridor

Driving the future of advanced manufacturing and materials processes in the UK through a clustering approach at Atom Valley and partnership with the central cluster. Situated between Rochdale, Bury and Oldham, Atom Valley is a vision to create a vast innovation mega-cluster with the potential 20,000 new jobs and 7,000 new homes through public-private partnership. The plan includes developing 1.2m sqm of logistics and advanced manufacturing space, and government has identified this area as a 'High Potential Opportunity' for scaling up production of lightweight and specialist materials for the transport sector. The delivery of the ambitions of Atom Valley is a collaboration between the GMCA, Rochdale, Bury and Oldham councils, academia, and the private sector. Sustainability is built into its design, with thousands of zero-carbon homes to be delivered and the Sustainable Materials and Manufacturing Centre (SMMC) to be built at Kingsway Business Park by 2026/27.

Northfold

Northfold is at the forefront of future health, with health innovation and food technology driving growth alongside a refreshed sport and cultural offer, and new homes supported by transport infrastructure. The vision includes a concept for a food innovation centre in Northfold, along with a low-carbon transport focus (e.g., active travel and bus journeys) and models for sustainable housing development.

Greater Manchester's six designated Growth Locations[10] offer a transformative opportunity for the creative industries to scale, innovate, and embed themselves within the region's future economy. These sites—strategically selected for their potential to drive housing, employment, and industrial development—are primed to host clusters of creative activity that reflect the diversity and ambition of the sector. By aligning creative sector development with these locations, Greater Manchester can ensure that creativity is not only central to regeneration but also a catalyst for inclusive and sustainable growth.

The Creative Infrastructure Plan will be the blueprint for this alignment, setting out the short, medium, and long-term infrastructure needs of the sector. In the short term (0–2 years), the plan will focus on asset mapping, upgrading grassroots venues, and repurposing underused buildings into creative workspaces—particularly in boroughs and neighbourhoods with limited infrastructure. The medium-term (3–5 years) will see the development of Creative Improvement Districts, rehearsal and production spaces, and cross-sector innovation hubs linked to growth locations such as Atom Valley and the Oxford Road Corridor. In the long term (6–10 years), the plan will support flagship projects, designed to meet the evolving needs of high-growth sub-sectors including screen, music, fashion, and immersive tech.

To fully realise this vision, digital infrastructure must be prioritised alongside physical development. The creative industries increasingly rely on high-speed connectivity, cloud-based production tools, and immersive technologies such as XR and AI. Ensuring that growth locations are equipped with future-proof digital infrastructure—including ultrafast broadband, 5G, and smart building capabilities—is essential to attracting investment, enabling remote and hybrid working, and supporting innovation across all creative sub-sectors. This will allow Greater Manchester to remain competitive nationally and internationally, and to foster a resilient, digitally enabled creative ecosystem.

This integrated approach ensures that creative infrastructure is embedded in spatial planning, transport, and skills strategies—creating a joined-up pipeline that supports talent, enterprise, and innovation. By leveraging the unique assets of each growth location and coordinating investment across the city-region, Greater Manchester can position its creative industries as a cornerstone of place-based development and a driver of global competitiveness.

Connections and interactions with other Frontier Sectors

Greater Manchester's creative industries are a vital part of the city-region's innovation ecosystem, contributing not only to cultural vibrancy but also to economic growth, skills development, and technological advancement. As the sector evolves, it increasingly intersects with Greater Manchester's

[10] Integrated pipeline and growth locations | Together we are Greater Manchester

frontier industries—Digital, Cyber and AI, Advanced Manufacturing, Health Innovation, and Net Zero—creating new opportunities for collaboration, shared infrastructure, and inclusive innovation. These intersections reflect a broader regional commitment to place-based investment and cross-sector synergy, positioning creativity as a driver of future-facing solutions.

By embedding creative expertise into the development of frontier sectors, Greater Manchester can unlock new forms of value, whether through immersive technologies, design-led thinking, or public engagement strategies. The creative industries bring unique capabilities in storytelling, user experience, and ethical innovation, which are essential to shaping inclusive, sustainable growth. The following sections explore how each frontier sector can benefit from deeper integration with the creative economy, and how strategic collaboration can amplify Greater Manchester's leadership across the UK's innovation landscape.

m ecosystems are essential for driving sustainable growth across the creative industries, enabling collaboration, knowledge exchange, and the development of new business models. Within these ecosystems, Createch acts as a powerful connector across subsectors such as film, music, gaming, fashion, design, and immersive media. By linking artistic expression with digital innovation, Createch facilitates cross-disciplinary partnerships, accelerates product development, and opens up new markets. It also supports talent mobility and skills development, helping creative professionals adapt to emerging technologies and audience expectations. In Greater Manchester, fostering a vibrant Createch ecosystem can strengthen the region's global competitiveness, enhance cultural infrastructure, and contribute to inclusive economic growth.

1. Digital, Cyber and AI

Greater Manchester is a national leader in digital innovation, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence (AI), supported by world-class universities and initiatives such as Innovation GM, the AI Foundry, and GCHQ's Manchester base.

- **Technology Integration**: Creative businesses can adopt AI tools for generative design, immersive storytelling, and automated production workflows.
- **Cybersecurity Awareness**: As digital content creation grows, protecting intellectual property and user data becomes essential.
- **Skills Development**: Cross-sector programmes can blend creative practice with technical training in AI, coding, and cyber resilience.
- **Shared Infrastructure**: Createch labs and immersive media testbeds can support joint R&D and innovation.
- **Ethical Innovation**: Ensuring emerging technologies enhance human creativity and remain accessible to freelancers, SMEs, and underrepresented groups.

2. Advanced Manufacturing

Greater Manchester's advanced manufacturing sector focuses on sustainable materials, high-value production, and design-led innovation.

- **Design Expertise**: Creative professionals contribute to product aesthetics, functionality, and user experience.
- **Prototyping and Branding**: Creatives support early-stage development and market positioning through visual storytelling and brand strategy.
- **Sustainability Collaboration**: Creative input can help communicate and promote sustainable manufacturing practices.
- **Skills Exchange**: Joint programmes can foster mutual learning between designers and engineers.
- **Innovation Ecosystem**: Co-location of creative and manufacturing firms can accelerate innovation and commercialisation.

3. Health Innovation

Greater Manchester's health innovation strategy prioritises digital health, mental wellbeing, and inclusive design.

- **Human-Centred Design**: Creatives enhance usability and empathy in health technologies and services.
- **Public Engagement**: Storytelling and media production help communicate complex health messages to diverse audiences.
- **Mental Health Support**: Creative approaches can improve cultural sensitivity and emotional resonance in interventions.
- **Cross-sector Training**: Programmes that combine creative and clinical skills can foster innovation in health communication.
- **Inclusive Innovation**: Creative industries can help ensure health solutions are accessible and relevant to all communities.

4. Net Zero

Greater Manchester's net zero strategy focuses on climate action, sustainable infrastructure, and green innovation.

- **Sustainable Production**: Creatives are embedding low-carbon practices in fashion, events, and media.
- **Climate Storytelling**: Artists and producers shape public narratives around sustainability and behaviour change.
- **Green Design**: Creative input enhances the aesthetic and functional aspects of eco-conscious architecture and urban planning.
- **Collaborative Campaigns**: Joint initiatives can promote environmental awareness across sectors.

- **Policy Alignment**: Embedding environmental goals into creative sector planning ensures cultural contributions to climate targets.

Current State of the Sector in GM

Economic Contribution and Sector Strengths

The creative industries are a vital pillar of Greater Manchester's economy, contributing £3 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) in 2022—equivalent to 3.4% of the city-region's total economic output. With over 50,000 people employed, the sector represents a significant share of the UK's creative workforce, accounting for approximately 5% of national employment in digital and creative roles. This scale of activity places Greater Manchester firmly among the UK's leading creative hubs outside London, with a dynamic mix of large institutions, SMEs, and freelancers driving innovation and cultural production across the region.

The sector's strengths span a wide range of disciplines, including computer programming (21,000 roles), consultancy (9,000), advertising (6,000), and film, television, music production (6,000). These are complemented by vibrant activity in publishing, architecture, design, cultural education, and broadcasting, with the latter anchored by major institutions such as the BBC and ITV at MediaCity. This diversity reflects a mature and interconnected creative ecosystem, where traditional cultural forms coexist with emerging technologies such as Createch, immersive media, and AI-driven content production. The region's universities and research institutions play a key role in sustaining this ecosystem, offering world-class expertise and industry partnerships that fuel innovation and talent development.

Beyond its economic footprint, the creative industries in Greater Manchester are deeply embedded in the region's identity and social fabric. They contribute to place-making, civic pride, and international visibility, with creative exports—from music and fashion to digital content—reinforcing the city-region's global reputation. The sector's breadth and depth also make it a strategic lever for inclusive growth, offering pathways into employment, entrepreneurship, and cultural participation across all ten boroughs. However, to fully realise this potential, Greater Manchester must continue to invest in infrastructure, skills, and data-driven planning to ensure that the sector remains resilient, equitable, and future-facing.

Strategic Positioning and International Profile

Greater Manchester's creative industries are strategically embedded within the region's broader economic development framework, aligned with frontier sectors such as digital, cyber, AI, health innovation, and advanced manufacturing. This cross-sector integration enables innovation at the intersections of creativity and technology—for example, the use of immersive media in healthcare, AI in content production, and design-led approaches in advanced manufacturing. The region's universities play a central role in this ecosystem, with the University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University, and the University of Salford leading research in Createch, immersive technologies, innovation ecosystems, and cultural data science, and fostering strong partnerships with industry and national programmes.

Internationally, Greater Manchester is increasingly recognised as a globally connected creative hub. The city-region benefits from a vibrant visitor economy, strong transport and digital infrastructure, and a reputation for cultural excellence that attracts talent, audiences, and investment from around the world. Its creative exports—from music and fashion to digital content and design—are underpinned by a distinctive identity that blends innovation with authenticity. High-profile events such as the Chanel Métiers d'Art show, participation in global platforms like SXSW, and forthcoming international showcases such as The BRITs have helped elevate Manchester's profile on the world stage, positioning it as a destination for cultural tourism and creative collaboration.

This international visibility aligns with Greater Manchester's wider global strategy, which prioritises trade, innovation, and inward investment. The creative industries are a key asset in this agenda, offering both economic value and soft power. To strengthen this position, the region is working to attract international production contracts, creative tech investment, and cross-border partnerships that support growth in high-potential areas such as gaming, immersive media, and design-led innovation. By embedding the creative industries into its international strategy, Greater Manchester can leverage its cultural capital to drive inclusive economic development and reinforce its status as a globally competitive creative city-region.

Diverse Business Base

Greater Manchester's creative industries are characterised by a highly diverse business base, encompassing everything from global media corporations and established design agencies to micro-enterprises, freelancers, and community-led organisations. This diversity is a key strength, enabling the sector to be agile, innovative, and responsive to emerging trends. The mix of large anchor institutions, such as the BBC, ITV, and major cultural venues, and a vibrant ecosystem of SMEs and independent practitioners creates a dynamic environment for collaboration and experimentation. Freelancers and sole traders play a particularly important role in the creative economy, often acting as connectors across disciplines and contributing to the sector's adaptability and resilience.

The creative industries in Greater Manchester benefit from integrated and interdependent supply chains that span production, distribution, marketing, and technology. These supply chains link creative businesses with sectors such as manufacturing, retail, education, and health, enabling cross-sector innovation and commercialisation. For example, design studios collaborate with advanced manufacturing firms on product development, while digital agencies work with health providers to create immersive patient engagement tools. The region's strong digital infrastructure supports these connections, allowing creative businesses to scale and export their services globally. Supply chains also extend into the cultural and visitor economy, with creative content driving demand for hospitality, tourism, and retail services. This interconnectedness reinforces the sector's strategic importance and its role in supporting inclusive, place-based economic growth.

Challenges and Gaps in Representation

Despite its strengths, the sector faces persistent challenges. One of the most pressing is the uneven distribution of creative opportunities across the city-region. Spatial inequality limits access to creative careers for residents in underserved communities and contributes to wage gaps, with many jobs concentrated in central districts. While Greater Manchester leads among UK regional hubs it still trails London in employment share and investment. Internationally, the region requires focused investment and strategic planning to compete with creative capitals such as Berlin, Amsterdam, and Toronto, particularly in high-growth areas like gaming, immersive tech, and design-led innovation.

Working-class representation remains a critical issue. Greater Manchester has a proud history of producing globally recognised talent from working-class communities, particularly in music, broadcasting, and performance. These creatives have shaped the region's cultural identity and global reputation. However, the pathways that enabled their success are increasingly difficult to access. Rising education costs, unpaid internships, and the centralisation of opportunities have created barriers for young people without financial privilege.

Building a more inclusive talent pipeline is essential. The Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc) presents a strategic opportunity to embed creative subjects into mainstream education and link them to real-world careers. By connecting creative learning to progression routes and employment, the MBacc can help young people from disadvantaged backgrounds see the creative industries as viable futures. This must be supported by accessible skills programmes, mentorship, and outreach that reflect the lived experiences of working-class communities and respond to their specific needs.

Place-Based Access and Inclusive Infrastructure

Improving diversity also requires a renewed focus on place-based access. Opportunities are often concentrated in central districts, leaving many boroughs with limited infrastructure, programming, or visibility. This restricts access to creative careers and cultural participation for residents in outlying areas. Grassroots venues and creative hubs in all ten local authorities are essential to addressing this imbalance. These spaces provide entry points for emerging talent, foster local networks, and serve as platforms for community-led creativity.

Supporting creative activity across the city-region can unlock new voices and perspectives that enrich the sector. Local creative hubs play a vital role in building confidence, skills, and pathways into professional practice, especially for those who may not see themselves reflected in mainstream institutions. Ensuring that every borough has access to inclusive, well-resourced creative spaces is central to building a sector that reflects the full diversity of Greater Manchester's population. This approach not only strengthens the creative economy but also deepens its social impact, making creativity a shared and accessible resource across the region.

Geography of Creativity

Greater Manchester's creative industries are deeply rooted in place. Each of the city-region's ten districts contributes uniquely to the wider ecosystem, offering a mix of cultural infrastructure, creative talent, and sector specialisms. While Manchester, Salford, and Trafford form the core creative clusters—home to major institutions, production hubs, and global-facing assets—other boroughs are emerging as vibrant micro clusters, each with distinct strengths and growth potential.

The following district profiles highlight key creative assets and growth opportunities across all ten boroughs. They reflect the diversity of Greater Manchester's creative economy and the importance of a place-based approach to investment, planning, and support. By recognising and nurturing the creative identities of each district, Greater Manchester can build a more inclusive, resilient, and regionally balanced creative sector.

Bolton

- **Key Creative Assets**: Octagon Theatre, University of Greater Manchester (Bolton School of the Arts), Bolton Film Festival, Neon Creations, Wellsprings Business Centre, emerging creative workspace at Falcon Mill. Bolton Library and Museum Service and Bolton Music Service. Large scale events such as Bolton Food and Drink Festival. Bolton Culture Compact and Bolton Creative Health Network.

- **Growth Opportunities**: Expansion of film and TV production capacity and links to Bolton School of Arts and Bolton Film Festival, revival of fashion and textiles through heritage-led innovation, development of grassroots music infrastructure.

Bury

- **Key Creative Assets**: Bury Art Museum, The Met, East Lancashire Railway (heritage and film location), Build a Business in Libraries programme, Bury Sculpture Centre, Bury Music Service and The Fusiliers Museum.
- **Growth Opportunities**: Town centre creative hubs, regeneration-linked cultural programming, culture and creative industries across neighbourhoods linked to wider regeneration and place-based work, architecture and design-led placemaking, independent film and media production.

Manchester

- **Key Creative Assets**: Sharp Project, Space Studios, Screen Manchester, film/TV location filming, St John's Creative Campus, HOME, Manchester Art Gallery, Aviva Studios, Creative Manchester (UoM), SODA (MMU), RNCM, UNESCO City of Literature, Manchester Music City, Halle Orchestra, grassroots and large scale music venues ecology, major events and festivals, international partnerships, Rogue Artist Studios, Z-arts, Venture Arts, Contact, National Football Museum, Manchester Museum, Science and Industry Museum, Royal Exhange Theatre, Bridgewater Hall, The Whitworth.
- **Growth Opportunities**: Film and TV production, Smart city design, AI/gaming convergence, internationalisation of creative exports, creative R&D, and IP development. publishing, music businesses, creative workspace, and cultural expansion as part of major regeneration programmes, skills, and talent pipelines.

Oldham

- **Key Creative Assets**: Oldham Coliseum legacy, Oldham Theatre Workshop, Dare to Know Theatre, Oldham Music Service, Oldham Cultural Partnership, Gallery Oldham, 1853 Studios, Lyceum Theatre, Millgate Arts Centre.
- **Growth Opportunities**: Outdoor arts festivals, creative skills development linked to town centre regeneration, music, and dance.

Rochdale

- **Key Creative Assets**: Rochdale Town Hall (heritage and events), Fire Up co-working space, Voltalab Studios, community wealth building and co-operatives, Touchstones Gallery, strong presence in IT/software, publishing, and film/TV location filming.
- **Growth Opportunities**: Digital publishing and services, creative workspace development, cultural venue activation.

Salford

- **Key Creative Assets**: MediaCityUK, University of Salford (School of Arts, Media, and Creative Technology), The Lowry, Islington Mill, Sounds from the Other City, RHS Bridgewater, Salford Culture, Place Partnership, Quays Culture, and We Invented the Weekend.
- **Growth Opportunities**: Immersive tech and AI, cross-sector innovation with health and digital, international creative partnerships, creative skills pipeline, green and creative health.

Stockport

- **Key Creative Assets**: Stock Room, Hat Works Museum, ARC, Weir Mill creative redevelopment, grassroots music venues (e.g. SK1 Records), Strawberry Studios.
- **Growth Opportunities**: Creative workspace and property development, AI and robotics in design and fashion, music, workforce wellbeing and heritage tourism.

Tameside

- **Key Creative Assets**: The Vale, Ashton Old Baths (digital and creative hub), 344 Audio, Nequinox Studios, Tameside Creative Network, Stalybridge Victoria Market Hall, and Portland Basin Museum.
- **Growth Opportunities**: Digital tech and audio post-production, creative workspace expansion, local talent development and retention.

Trafford

- **Key Creative Assets**: MediaCityUK, ITV Studios, MacKinnon & Saunders, Imperial War Museum North, Altrincham Market, Creative Industries Trafford, Waterside Arts, Dunham Massey, Trafford Creatives Network.
- **Growth Opportunities**: Film and TV production, animation, and VFX, shared creative workspaces, talent development and industry pathways.

Wigan

- **Key Creative Assets**: Haigh Hall, The Old Courts, Curious Minds, Leigh Spinners Mill, Wigan Cultural Partnership, Wigan Pier redevelopment.
- **Growth Opportunities**: Creative production and space, creative retail and maker economy, heritage-led regeneration.

Subsector Strengths & Needs

In Spring, 2025, to support the development of this plan, a significant sector engagement exercise was undertaken, with more than 600 creative businesses, freelancers and stakeholders engaged through online and in-person general and sub-sector specific sessions and an online consultation form.

The sessions revealed a diverse yet interrelated set of strategic needs, with funding emerging as a consistent priority across all domains. Sub-sectors such as advertising, music, and architecture highlighted the imperative to adapt to technological advancements, particularly in artificial intelligence and immersive technologies, while others—such as crafts, publishing, and performing arts—emphasised the importance of structured talent development and career progression. The need for digital innovation, cross-sector collaboration, and inclusive access to opportunities was recurrent, underscoring the sector's role in driving both economic growth and cultural enrichment. These findings point to the necessity of a differentiated policy response that supports sector-specific interventions while enabling system-wide capacity building and resilience.

Advertising & Marketing

- Established agencies with national and international reach.
- Strong integration of AI and data analytics for targeted campaigns.
- Access to a skilled workforce from local universities and creative training programs.
- Collaboration with tech and digital platforms to enhance marketing innovation.

Stakeholders identified a need for enhanced access to funding mechanisms, sector-specific training, and support for the adoption of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI). Strengthening community collaboration was also highlighted as a priority to foster innovation and resilience within the sub-sector.

Architecture

- Strong culture of adaptive reuse and heritage-led design.
- Collaboration with artists and designers to shape public spaces.
- Integration of sustainability and placemaking in creative masterplans.
- Vibrant ecosystem of studios pushing architectural innovation.

Key challenges include limited access to procurement opportunities and the need to adapt to evolving roles driven by technological advancements, particularly in AI and virtual reality (VR). Stakeholders emphasised the importance of supporting professional development and sector growth through innovation-led initiatives.

Film, TV, Radio, and Photography

- Media City as an internationally significant industry hub, attracting major productions.
- Expanding independent film scene with support for local filmmakers.
- Investment into Podcasting.
- Strong production infrastructure with high-quality crews and post-production facilities.
- Investment opportunities for a dedicated production fund and coordination of screen agency services to boost local output.

Participants cited the need for increased production funding and structured talent development pathways. The sub-sector is also experiencing rapid digital transformation, necessitating investment in digital infrastructure and skills to remain competitive.

Design and Designer Fashion

- Historic textile legacy reimagined through contemporary fashion.
- Thriving e-commerce scene powering global fashion brands.
- Strong pipeline of talent from local universities and fashion schools.
- Independent labels and couture houses shaping a modern "Cottonopolis."

The sub-sector requires targeted investment to support early-stage businesses and emerging talent.

Sustainability was identified as a cross-cutting priority, with stakeholders calling for support in embedding sustainable practices across design and production processes.

Museums, Galleries, and Libraries

- World-class institutions blending heritage with innovative digital experiences.
- Rich storytelling through diverse collections reflecting local and global cultures.
- Creative programming that supports education, wellbeing, and civic engagement.
- Inclusive spaces fostering community dialogue and cultural participation.
- Strong links to tourism, placemaking, and Greater Manchester's global identity

Sustainable and stable funding models are essential to ensure long-term viability. There is also a growing demand for digital innovation to enhance audience engagement and broaden access, alongside a continued emphasis on community-based programming. With additional opportunities around archives and collections management and storage.

Crafts

- Vibrant community of makers blending tradition with innovation.
- Strong presence in local markets, festivals, and cultural venues.
- Cross-disciplinary collaborations with design, fashion, and visual arts.
- Supportive networks and studios nurturing emerging craft talent.

Sole traders and micro-enterprises require tailored business development support, including access to markets and visibility. Talent development remains a priority, particularly in ensuring the sustainability of traditional skills and practices.

Performing and Visual Arts

- Diverse and dynamic venues and organisations championing experimental and cross-disciplinary work.
- Strong grassroots scene nurturing emerging talent across theatre, dance, and visual arts.
- Integration of digital and immersive technologies in performance and exhibition.
- Celebrated for bold, socially engaged work that reflects the region's diverse communities.

The sub-sector continues to face structural funding challenges. Stakeholders highlighted the need for clearer career development pathways and greater support for digital innovation to expand reach and diversify income streams.

Createch

- Fusion of creative content with innovative tech like AI, XR, and immersive media.
- Strong research and innovation ecosystem led by universities and industry labs.
- Home to pioneering studios and start-ups pushing the boundaries of digital storytelling.
- Strong global links and international ambition
- Collaborative networks linking creators, technologists, and investors across sectors.

There is a strong demand for funding to support prototyping and early-stage product development. Cross-sector collaboration was identified as a key enabler of innovation, alongside the need for education and skills development to meet future workforce demands.

Publishing

- A rich literary and journalistic heritage, fostering diverse storytelling.
- Strong independent publishing scene alongside established media houses.
- Digital publishing growth, supported by content creators and online platforms.
- Cross-sector collaborations with film, gaming, and advertising.

Stakeholders identified the need for increased access to funding and training, particularly in digital publishing. Local recruitment and workforce development were also highlighted as areas requiring targeted intervention.

Music

- A globally recognised music scene with legendary artists and venues.
- Vibrant grassroots movement and independent artist support.
- Expanding international collaborations, attracting global music projects.
- Strong industry infrastructure, including recording studios and live events.

Support for grassroots venues and initiatives is critical to sustaining and developing the music ecosystem. Accessibility and inclusion were identified as key priorities, alongside the need to explore the implications of AI and other emerging technologies for music creation and distribution.

The Knowledge Engine - Research and Innovation assets

Key Assets: Strategic Infrastructure and Institutional Capacity

Greater Manchester's creative industries ecosystem is underpinned by a robust ecosystem of assets spanning education, production, cultural infrastructure, and institutional support. These assets collectively contribute to the region's competitive advantage in the creative economy and its capacity for innovation, talent development, and sectoral growth.

Education, Skills, and Research & Innovation (R&I)

Manchester Metropolitan University hosts the renowned *Manchester School of Art* and the *School of Digital Arts (SODA)*. These schools offer undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in subjects like Fine Art, Graphic Design, Illustration, Animation, Photography, Filmmaking, Sound Design, and Creative Computing.

The Manchester School of Architecture (MSA) is a globally recognised centre of excellence, jointly run by Manchester Metropolitan University and The University of Manchester, the school is ranked among the top five architecture schools in the world (QS World Rankings 2025).

The University of Manchester offers creative programmes through its *School of Arts, Languages and Cultures*, including Arts Management, Digital Media, Creative Writing, Drama, Music, Heritage Studies, and Art History. It also leads *Creative Manchester*, a research platform that connects interdisciplinary academic expertise on Creative Industries and Createch, Creative Health, and Civic Futures the city's cultural and creative sectors.

University of Salford is known for its *School of Arts, Media, and Creative Technology*, offering courses in Media Production, Journalism, Music, Performance, and Visual Arts. Its close ties to MediaCityUK provide students with direct access to industry-standard facilities and professional networks.

MMU's School of Arts and the School of Digital Arts contribute to the development of skills in visual arts, game design, and digital innovation.

UCEN Manchester and The Manchester College provide practical, industry-aligned courses in areas such as Game Art, Fashion and Textiles, Graphic Design, Photography, and Special Effects. These institutions focus on employability and hands-on experience, often in partnership with local creative employers.

BIMM Manchester specialises in music performance, production, and music business. Futureworks provides industry-focused training in film, TV, audio engineering, game design, and visual effects, with facilities that mirror professional studios. UTC MediaCityUK is a creative and digital specialist school for 14–18-year-olds, offering technical qualifications in media, film, and digital design in partnership with industry leaders. Hopwood Hall College offers a range of creative courses including graphic design, photography, and performing arts, with a focus on practical skills and employability.

These institutions not only supply a pipeline of skilled graduates but also engage in collaborative R&I activities with industry, supporting the development of new content, formats, and technologies.

Media Production and Broadcasting Infrastructure

Greater Manchester is a nationally significant hub for media and broadcasting, anchored by world-class facilities and the presence of major broadcasters:

MediaCityUK in Salford serves as a flagship cluster for digital and broadcast media, housing over 250 creative businesses. BBC North operations include BBC Sport, BBC Children's, BBC Radio 5 Live, and BBC Philharmonic, alongside BBC Research & Development. ITV, Dock10, and Channel 4 maintain a strong regional presence, supporting content production and commissioning. Space Studios Manchester, Old Granada Studios, and The Sharp Project provide high-specification facilities for film, television, and digital content production. All ten districts of Greater Manchester have location expertise and capacity, with significant strengths in Bolton and Rochdale.

This infrastructure supports a dynamic production ecosystem and positions the region as a leading destination for high-end TV, film, and digital media.

Cultural and Performance Venues

The region's cultural infrastructure plays a pivotal research and development and talent pipeline function for the creative industries, with strengths in scriptwriting and editing, acting, music, technical production, and design.

Factory International / Aviva Studios, home to the Manchester International Festival, represents a major investment in contemporary arts and performance. Large-scale venues such as Co-op Live, AO Arena, and Bridgewater Hall support a diverse programme of music and live events. Mid-sized and independent venues including The Met, Bury, Victoria Warehouse, Mayfield Depot, O2 Ritz, and Castlefield Bowl contribute to the region's vibrant night-time economy.

Theatres and multidisciplinary spaces such as Aviva Studios, HOME, The Lowry, The Octagon, Bolton, Hope Mill Theatre and Palace Theatre offer platforms for theatre, film, and visual arts. Visual arts institutions and museums including Manchester Art Gallery, The Whitworth, Bolton Museum, Touchstones, easa Contemporary and Castlefield Gallery support curatorial innovation and community engagement.

Public Sector and Industry Support Mechanisms

A network of public agencies and industry bodies provides strategic coordination, investment, and advocacy for the creative sector:

Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Marketing Manchester, and MIDAS lead on regional strategy, inward investment, and sector promotion. GM Growth Hub delivers tailored business support and innovation services to creative SMEs with specialism in supporting creative businesses through delivery of DCMS' Create Growth programme.

National funders such as Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund, and Historic England provide critical investment in cultural infrastructure and programming. Sector-specific organisations including UK Music, PRS Foundation (PRSF), and the British Council support talent development, internationalisation, and policy engagement.

Libraries and archives are foundational to the development of Greater Manchester's creative industries, serving as inclusive spaces for learning, inspiration, and cultural production. They preserve and share the region's rich heritage while supporting contemporary creativity through access to knowledge, collections, and community programming. Local authorities play a vital role in sustaining and evolving these institutions, ensuring they remain accessible, relevant, and connected to wider strategic goals. Through initiatives like Libraries Connected and a coordinated offer across all ten boroughs, Greater Manchester's libraries contribute to place-based cultural development, digital inclusion, and creative skills pathways. They act as hubs for storytelling, innovation, and civic engagement—making them essential partners in delivering the Creative Industries Sector Plan and enhancing the visitor economy.

GM Local Authorities

Greater Manchester's ten local authorities play a pivotal role in shaping the success of the region's creative industries. As place-based leaders, they are uniquely positioned to understand and respond to the cultural, economic, and social dynamics of their communities. Their involvement ensures that creative sector development is locally relevant, inclusive, and aligned with broader regeneration and growth strategies. From supporting grassroots organisations and cultural venues to facilitating creative education and skills programmes, local authorities act as enablers of talent, innovation, and participation. Their investment in cultural infrastructure — such as libraries, museums, studios, and performance spaces — provides the physical and social foundations for creative activity to flourish across the city-region.

As strategic delivery partners, the local authorities are essential to implementing Greater Manchester's creative industries strategy. Their capacity to convene stakeholders, coordinate funding, and embed creativity into local economic plans ensures that the sector is integrated into wider priorities such as health, education, digital inclusion, and net zero. They also play a critical role in identifying and addressing spatial inequalities in access to creative careers and opportunities, helping to ensure that all residents - regardless of geography or background - can benefit from the sector's growth. By working collaboratively across boroughs and with regional bodies such as GMCA, the ten authorities help to deliver a joined-up approach that strengthens Greater Manchester's position as a leading UK creative hub.

Grassroots Creative Venues and Creative SMEs in Greater Manchester

Greater Manchester's creative economy is significantly underpinned by a dense network of grassroots venues and small-to-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which collectively serve as foundational components of the region's cultural and economic infrastructure. These entities play a critical role in talent development, community engagement, and the diversification of the creative industries.

Grassroots Creative Venues

Grassroots venues function as essential incubators for emerging talent and cultural experimentation. Characterised by their small scale, community orientation, and accessibility, these venues provide early-stage platforms for artists, musicians, and performers to develop and showcase their work.

Notable examples include:

The Snug, Night & Day Café, The Deaf Institute, The Castle Hotel, Gulliver's, The Peer Hat, Sixth Trees, YES and Stage and Radio, venues that have consistently supported local and touring acts across music, spoken word, and multimedia performance.

These venues typically operate with limited resources and are often vulnerable to economic pressures such as rising rents, licensing constraints, and limited public funding. Despite these challenges, they are essential and contribute significantly to the vibrancy of Greater Manchester's night-time economy and cultural identity.

From a policy perspective, grassroots venues represent high-value, low-cost cultural infrastructure. Their preservation and development are essential to maintaining a healthy creative pipeline and ensuring equitable access to cultural participation across the region. Place base spaces across GM are also essential to mention here.

Creative SMEs

Creative SMEs in Greater Manchester span a wide range of subsectors, including digital media, design, publishing, fashion, film, and immersive technologies. These businesses are typically characterised by their agility, innovation capacity, and embeddedness within local communities.

Despite often operating with limited access to growth finance, many of these SMEs have strong export potential, engaging actively in both national and international markets. Their contributions to employment and skills development are also notable, particularly through informal training, internships, and freelance opportunities that help build a resilient and diverse talent pipeline. This dynamic ecosystem not only drives creative output but also plays a crucial role in shaping Greater Manchester's identity as a leading centre for inclusive and sustainable creative growth.

Support for creative SMEs is facilitated through regional initiatives such as the GM Growth Hub, Create Growth Programme, co-working and innovation spaces like The Sharp Project, Islington Mill and Ashton Old Baths. These support mechanisms provide access to finance, mentoring, and business development services, yet gaps remain in investment readiness, long-term sustainability, and access to affordable workspace. Independent organisations and production companies like Voltalab Sound Studios, State of Mythos and Northern Heart provide vital training and space for experimentation and development for emerging creatives but there is no coordinated support for organisations committed to developing and supporting talent across the city region.

Freelancers

The freelance workforce forms a vital backbone of Greater Manchester's creative industries, accounting for an estimated 30% of the sector's total employment. Freelancers are especially prominent in areas such as film, TV, design, music, and performing arts, where project-based work and portfolio careers are the norm. However, recent research by Creative UK highlights growing challenges for this workforce, including reduced work opportunities, late payments, and the impact of AI on creative roles. Around 66% of freelancers reported a decline in work since the pandemic, and 64% have experienced low or unfair pay. Structural inequalities also persist, with freelancers from underrepresented backgrounds facing barriers such as tokenism, inaccessible application processes, and limited financial security. In response, sector bodies are calling for reforms including portable benefits and payment protections. This will also align with aspects of the GM Music Plan and sub sector specific support.

Strategic Considerations

To fully leverage the potential of grassroots venues, SMEs and freelancers, policy interventions should focus on:

- Enhancing access to finance and investment-readiness support.
- Protecting and expanding affordable creative workspace.
- Strengthening local supply chains and networks through targeted cluster development.
- Embedding grassroots and SME perspectives in regional cultural and economic planning.
- Providing proper protections and support for freelancers.
- Creating pathways to employment, particularly for underrepresented demographics.
- Workforce wellbeing and mental health support to enhance productivity.

Current growth performance and direction of travel

The creative industries in Greater Manchester represent a significant and expanding component of the regional economy. The sector contributes approximately £1.4 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA), underpinned by a diverse ecosystem encompassing media, digital content, design, architecture, music, and performing arts. Growth in this sector has consistently outpaced the national average, particularly in high-growth sub-sectors such as film, television, and digital media production.

The region benefits from a well-established infrastructure, including MediaCityUK, which serves as a national hub for broadcasting and digital innovation. The presence of major institutions such as the BBC, ITV, and a network of higher education providers has fostered a collaborative environment conducive to innovation and talent development.

Employment within the sector has shown robust growth, with a high concentration of SMEs and freelancers contributing to a dynamic and flexible labour market. However, challenges remain in terms of access to finance, skills development, and ensuring equitable access to opportunities across all communities.

Direction of Travel

Greater Manchester's creative industries are primed for significant expansion, supported by a thriving ecosystem of talent, infrastructure, and innovation. The sector currently contributes over £1.4 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) and supports more than 48,000 jobs, making it the largest concentration of creative businesses outside London. With strengths across music, screen, design, fashion, publishing, and immersive technologies, the region is well-positioned to lead national growth in the creative economy. Local creative content produced at MediaCityUK, Space Studios, and independent hubs is streamed and showcased globally, reinforcing Greater Manchester's international reputation.

This growth potential is underpinned by the broader trajectory of Greater Manchester's economy, which reached £100 billion in total value in 2023, growing at twice the national rate[11]. Between 2018 and 2023, the city-region's visitor economy expanded by £3.7 billion, adding 22,000 jobs and increasing overnight stays by 700,000. The Greater Manchester Strategy (2025–2035) outlines a ten-year pipeline of investment in growth locations, aiming to spread prosperity through new industries, innovation, and inclusive development. Nationally, the UK Government's Creative Industries Sector Vision includes a £380 million investment package, with Greater Manchester set to benefit from initiatives such as the £150 million Creative Places Growth Fund, the CoSTAR R&D infrastructure, and expanded apprenticeship and skills programmes. By aligning national funding with local leadership and leveraging its unique creative assets, Greater Manchester can unlock new jobs, exports, and innovation—cementing its role as a global centre for creative excellence.

Real estate premises and requirements

Greater Manchester's creative industries are deeply rooted in place, with each of the city-region's ten districts contributing uniquely to the wider ecosystem through a mix of cultural infrastructure, creative talent, and sector specialisms. While Manchester, Salford, and Trafford form core creative clusters, home to major institutions and global-facing assets, other boroughs are developing vibrant micro-clusters with distinct strengths and growth potential. The forthcoming district profiles will highlight key assets and opportunities across all ten boroughs, informed by local intelligence and existing strategies.

To ensure a robust and equitable approach to investment, planning, and support, the identification of infrastructure priorities will be grounded in GM-wide asset mapping and local cultural strategies. Rather than pre-empting investment decisions, the Creative Infrastructure Plan will codify a pipeline based on business case development, strategic fit, and regional balance, aligned with the ten-year growth pipeline and frameworks such as Places for Everyone. This approach will enable Greater Manchester to recognise and nurture the creative identities of each district while supporting coordinated capital investment that delivers inclusive and sustainable sector growth.

In the short term (0–2 years), the focus will be on mapping existing assets, identifying gaps, and investing in quick-win projects that unlock immediate value. This includes upgrading grassroots venues, repurposing underused buildings for creative workspaces, and expanding digital infrastructure to support remote and hybrid creative work.

Over the medium (3–5 years) and long term (6–10 years), the plan will evolve to support larger-scale, transformational projects. Medium-term priorities include the development of Creative Improvement Districts, cross-sector innovation hubs, and shared production facilities in growth locations. Long-term ambitions will focus on flagship infrastructure such as a Greater Manchester Production Park, a regional touring and rehearsal centre, and a network of sustainable, digitally enabled creative

[11] Greater Manchester Strategy 2025–35 Summary

campuses. These projects will be designed to integrate with Greater Manchester's wider ambitions around net zero, inclusive growth, and global competitiveness, ensuring that the creative industries are embedded in the region's future economy.

Skills and Talent

According to the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) State of The Nations report on Skills and Initiatives [12], the creative industries face significant challenges in diversifying entry pathways, particularly across age groups. Employers predominantly recruit individuals aged 25–49, with only 28% hiring education leavers and 24% engaging workers aged 50 and over. Despite this, employers report positive experiences with both younger and older recruits, indicating untapped potential. However, concerns persist around the work-readiness of university leavers, with 21% of employers citing deficiencies in technical and transversal skills—figures notably higher than the all-industry average.

Work-based learning opportunities remain limited, with only 37% of creative employers offering placements and just 8% engaging with apprenticeships. A majority (63%) express reluctance to offer apprenticeships in the future, citing structural and cultural barriers. Furthermore, few placements lead to permanent roles, particularly for school and college students, highlighting a disconnect between education and employment. Awareness of newer qualifications such as T Levels and Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) is low, and while apprenticeships are widely known, actual uptake remains minimal.

Greater Manchester region's creative employers also face difficulties in engaging with work-based learning schemes. Apprenticeship uptake remains low, and only a minority of businesses offer structured placements that lead to employment. This is particularly concerning given Greater Manchester's ambition to lead on inclusive growth and innovation. While awareness of newer qualifications such as T Levels and Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) is growing, actual engagement is limited. Structural barriers—such as cost, complexity, and perceived lack of relevance—continue to deter many SMEs from participating in these programmes, despite their potential to diversify and strengthen the talent pipeline.

To address these challenges, Greater Manchester must adopt a place-based approach to skills development that aligns with the needs of its creative clusters. Central to this is the Greater Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc), which provides a framework for linking learners with high-quality educational pathways tailored to the region's growth sectors, including the creative industries. Expanding access to meaningful work experience, strengthening partnerships between industry and education, and tailoring skills initiatives to reflect the region's diverse communities and economic geography will be essential. Initiatives set up through DCMS-funded Create Growth Programme have shown promise in bridging the gap between talent and opportunity, but further investment and coordination are needed. Alternative pathways into the creative industries, such as those offered to neurodiverse young people through PiNC College, should be further explored as they increase access to and diversity of thought in the sector. There is also a need for targeted awareness campaigns and place-based customisation of skills initiatives. Future research should focus on sub-sector and regional

[12] Creative Education, Skills and Talent - Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre

analysis, the role of freelancers and microbusinesses, and deeper qualitative insights into employer motivations and barriers. These steps are essential to building a more inclusive, responsive, and sustainable creative workforce.

Developing skills within the cultural and creative industries is essential to ensuring the sector's long-term sustainability, inclusivity, and capacity for innovation. Greater Manchester's system-wide approach can support this by strengthening in-work training, progression pathways, and continuing professional development (CPD) across the sector. This includes working with employers, education providers, and cultural organisations to co-design flexible, accessible training models that reflect the realities of freelance and portfolio working. By embedding creative skills development into local and regional workforce strategies and aligning with initiatives such as the GM Skills Map and Local Skills Improvement Plans, Greater Manchester can better support career progression, leadership development, and sector resilience. A coordinated approach will also help address skills gaps, improve diversity, and ensure that creative professionals are equipped to respond to evolving industry needs and opportunities.

By embedding inclusivity, flexibility, and employer engagement into the design of future interventions—and aligning them with the MBacc—Greater Manchester can position itself as a national leader in creative skills development and workforce resilience.

Artificial Intelligence

Greater Manchester recognises the transformative potential of artificial intelligence (AI) for the creative industries, offering new opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and growth. Through targeted support, the city-region will enable creative practitioners, businesses, and institutions to explore and adopt AI technologies in ways that enhance creative production, audience engagement, and operational efficiency. This will include facilitating cross-sector partnerships between the creative industries, tech companies, and academic institutions, as well as investing in skills development, research, and experimentation. By embedding AI within the wider innovation ecosystem, Greater Manchester aims to position itself as a leading centre for creative AI, supporting both emerging and established talent to harness its potential responsibly and effectively.

At the same time, Greater Manchester will work with sector representatives to ensure that the integration of AI is underpinned by appropriate protections for workers, particularly freelancers and those in precarious employment. The proposed Creative Industries Council and Freelancer Taskforce will play a key role in shaping policy and advocacy around AI, ensuring that ethical standards, fair pay, and job security are prioritised. This includes monitoring the impact of AI on employment, safeguarding intellectual property, and promoting transparent practices in the use of generative technologies. By balancing innovation with inclusion and protection, Greater Manchester will support a creative sector that is both future-facing and fair.

Intellectual Property

Intellectual property (IP) is a cornerstone of the creative industries, enabling creators to protect their work, generate income, and scale their businesses. In Greater Manchester, where creative output spans music, film, design, publishing, and emerging technologies, a strategic approach to IP support is essential to unlocking innovation and ensuring fair returns for creators.

To strengthen IP across the sector, Greater Manchester must expand access to education and advice. Many freelancers and SMEs lack practical guidance on how to protect and commercialise their work.

By partnering with organisations such as the Intellectual Property Office, Creative UK, and local universities, GMCA will deliver tailored workshops, toolkits, and advisory services that demystify IP and empower creators to take control of their rights.

IP support should also be embedded within business development programmes. Initiatives like the Create Growth Programme and GM Growth Hub can integrate IP audits, licensing advice, and legal support to help creative enterprises safeguard their assets and prepare for investment. This will be particularly valuable for early-stage businesses and those exploring new markets.

Greater Manchester's innovation ecosystem offers further opportunities to support IP commercialisation. Universities and R&D hubs can help creatives develop IP-rich products and services, especially in high-growth areas such as Createch, fashion tech, and digital media. Collaborative research, prototyping, and licensing support will be key to turning ideas into scalable ventures.

At the same time, GMCA should champion fair IP practices and advocate for policies that protect creators from exploitation. This includes promoting ethical use of AI-generated content, supporting collective licensing models, and ensuring that underrepresented voices are heard in national IP policy discussions.

IP must be recognised as a gateway to global markets. By helping creative businesses register and manage their IP internationally, and by aligning export support with IP strategy, Greater Manchester can enhance its global competitiveness while ensuring that creative assets remain locally owned and valued.

Wider trends and drivers of the future direction of the sector

Trends and themes that emerged across the sub sector engagement and post strategic discussions were identified as:

Funding and Investment

Most consistently cited priority across all subsectors and engagement sessions. Participants expressed concern over the persistent London-centric focus of public and private investment, which continues to marginalise regional creative ecosystems. There was a strong call for more equitable distribution of resources and the development of regionally tailored funding mechanisms and alignment to the GM Music Export Office.

Creative Infrastructure and Spatial Equity

Participants highlighted the acute shortage of accessible and affordable creative spaces, particularly outside Manchester city centre. The high cost of living and working in central areas was seen as a barrier to working-class and early-career creatives. Attendees advocated for investment in localities to decentralise creative activity and promote inclusive growth.

Visibility, Advocacy, and Strategic Communications

There was consensus on the need to elevate the profile of Greater Manchester's creative sector. Stakeholders recommended a coordinated communications and public relations strategy to amplify the region's creative achievements, attract investment, and position GM as a national and international leader in creative innovation.

Collaboration and Ecosystem Connectivity

There is a strong appetite for cross-sector collaboration. Participants proposed the establishment of creative hubs as physical and digital spaces for knowledge exchange, partnership development, and public sector engagement. GMCA was identified as a potential facilitator of this ecosystem-wide coordination.

Talent Development and Retention

The retention of creative talent—particularly graduates and early-career professionals—was identified as a critical issue. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of strengthening the relationship between the creative industries and the education sector, with a focus on lifelong learning, reskilling, and clearer career pathways.

Diversity and Inclusion

There was a clear recognition that diversity within the creative industries remains under-supported. Participants called for more targeted interventions to ensure equitable access to opportunities, particularly for underrepresented groups, protected characteristics, and class.

Affordability and Access

The affordability of living and working in Manchester city centre was raised as a structural barrier to participation in the creative economy. Attendees proposed leveraging localities as both residential and creative production zones to support more inclusive sectoral growth.

Business Support and Peer Networks

Greater Manchester's creative industries are powered by a diverse ecosystem of microbusinesses, SMEs, freelancers, and grassroots venues. While this diversity is a strength, it also presents unique challenges in terms of business support and peer networking. Many creative enterprises operate outside traditional business models, with limited access to finance, fragmented support structures, and a lack of tailored advice. This is particularly true for sole traders, early-stage businesses, and those in underrepresented communities or sub-sectors such as crafts, design, and grassroots music.

The region benefits from strong assets such as the GM Growth Hub, Create Growth Programme, and innovation spaces like The Sharp Project and Islington Mill. However, gaps remain in investment readiness, long-term sustainability, and access to affordable workspace. There is also a need for more coordinated support for organisations that nurture talent and experimentation, particularly those working across boroughs or outside the city centre.

Peer networks are vital for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and resilience. Yet many creative professionals—especially freelancers—report feeling isolated, under-supported, and disconnected from decision-making. The sector would benefit from a structured, cross-subsector peer network that brings together practitioners, producers, and policymakers to share learning, co-design solutions, and build collective voice. Precedent and a model for peer networks exists in the GM Create Well network which is sector led and supports creative health freelancers and organisations.

To unlock the full potential of the sector, business support must be tailored, inclusive, and embedded in place-based strategies. This includes:

- **Flexible finance and investment-readiness support** for SMEs and microbusinesses.
- **Mentorship and alumni networks** to support early-career creatives.

- **Freelancer protections and support**, including fair pay, contracts, wellbeing support and access to benefits.
- **Cluster development and local supply chain strengthening**.
- **Digital platforms and physical hubs** for networking, collaboration, and visibility.

By investing in these areas, Greater Manchester can build a more connected, resilient, and inclusive creative economy—one that supports innovation, drives growth, and reflects the full diversity of its communities.

GM Growth Company

The Growth Company (GC) is a key strategic partner in Greater Manchester's economic development ecosystem. Operating as a social enterprise, GC delivers a range of services that support inclusive growth, employment, and innovation across the city-region. Its activities are closely aligned with GMCA's priorities and contribute directly to the delivery of this Sector Development Plan.

GC's business support functions are delivered primarily through the GM Business Growth Hub[13], which provides tailored advice and guidance to businesses across the advanced materials and advanced manufacturing sector. This includes support for innovation adoption, workforce development, access to finance, and sustainability. The Hub's publicly funded model ensures that services are accessible to businesses of all sizes and stages, helping to unlock productivity and growth across the sector.

MIDAS[14], Greater Manchester's inward investment agency, also sits within GC and plays a critical role in attracting and supporting businesses seeking to invest in the city-region. Through market intelligence, property search support, and stakeholder engagement, MIDAS helps businesses navigate the local landscape and connect with relevant networks and assets.

The Growth Company's wider priorities that will contribute to the sector plans are listed below.

1. **GM Global Promotion & Propositions:** Take the growth ambition, including Investment Pipeline, new innovation and experience assets to audiences through activation of our global networks, international missions to key markets and city to city partnerships that profile GM as a superlative place to visit, invest, study, live and do business.

2. **Upgrade our Global Investment Outcomes:** create new, and leverage existing international networks, with segmented market strategy to attract transformative high value investment in priority sectors and markets, maximising knowledge base/university linkages, workforce/employment opportunities and local business benefits.

3. **Increase impact of Business Support and simplify customer access** building on opportunities to be presented by the SME Review, devolution (also national government Business Growth Service), with more Local Authority and local partner integration. Extend provision in key theme of innovation, export and scale-ups whilst maximising use of business relationships across GC as key mechanisms for GMCA business engagement.

4. **Step Change Sector Development**: including frontier sectors, foundational and visitor economy (where they have unique leadership role via Marketing Manchester), particularly centred on strategic and research insight, market opportunities, supply side and workforce

[13] GM Business Growth Hub
[14] MIDAS

development. Leverage as a key mechanism for business engagement to maximise buy-in and support for the GM Vision.

5. **Enable Sustainable Growth, making GM the easiest place to be a net zero business**. Also grow Low Carbon sectors by transforming the climate challenge into economic opportunities, through innovation, inward investment, local business and upskilling residents.
6. **Realise Workforce Opportunities and Better Connect Residents to Good Work:** through Business Workforce Development activities create more and more inclusive opportunities including promotion of technical education pathways (T levels and apprenticeships) and increase the ability of residents to access these through upskilling and personal support (Education & Skills and Employment) assisting the key GM objective of having 80% of residents economically active.

Inward Investment

Greater Manchester's creative industries offer a compelling proposition for inward investment, underpinned by world-class infrastructure, a globally recognised cultural brand, and a thriving ecosystem of talent and innovation. As one of the UK's designated frontier sectors, the creative industries are central to GMCA's International Strategy, which positions the city-region as a magnet for global talent, capital, and collaboration.

The region's assets—including MediaCityUK, Factory International, Co-op Live, and a dense network of grassroots venues and creative SMEs—provide a diverse and scalable platform for investment. MIDAS, Greater Manchester's inward investment agency, identifies creative industries as a priority growth area, with strategic aims to attract high-value production, international partnerships, and export-oriented businesses. Opportunities span film and TV production, gaming, immersive tech, music, fashion, and design-led innovation.

Key inward investment opportunities include:

- **Screen and content production**: With high-spec facilities like Space Studios and The Sharp Project, GM is well-positioned to attract international productions and co-productions. A proposed GM Production Fund and Screen Growth Agency would further enhance competitiveness.
- **Music and live performance**: Co-op Live, AO Arena, and grassroots venues offer a full spectrum of performance infrastructure. The GM Music Plan and GM Music Export Office will support internationalisation of local talent and attract global collaborations.
- **Createch and immersive media**: GM's strengths in AI, XR, and digital storytelling—anchored by institutions like SODA and Creative Manchester—make it an ideal location for R&D and commercialisation in emerging creative technologies.
- **Fashion and design**: Building on Manchester's textile legacy and e-commerce strengths, the region offers opportunities for sustainable fashion innovation, manufacturing, and global brand development.

- **Cultural placeshaping**: Investment in Creative Improvement Districts and town centre regeneration creates opportunities for developers, cultural operators, and investors to shape vibrant, inclusive creative hubs.

GMCA and MIDAS are working to align investment promotion with sector priorities, including through targeted campaigns, international missions, and strategic partnerships. The region's devolved powers and integrated growth pipeline enable bespoke investment packages, streamlined planning, and coordinated support across transport, skills, and infrastructure.

By leveraging its creative identity, institutional capacity, and global networks, Greater Manchester can position itself as a leading destination for creative sector investment—driving inclusive growth, innovation, and international impact.

Inclusive Growth

The Living Wage Foundation (LWF) have highlighted the urgent issue of low pay within Greater Manchester's creative and cultural sector. Despite the sector's economic growth, many roles—especially support positions like cleaning, catering, and front-of-house—remain below the real Living Wage. This disproportionately affects women, disabled people, and people from marginalised backgrounds, contributing to in-work poverty and limiting access to creative careers for people from working-class backgrounds.

The Foundation argues that embedding the real Living Wage into GMCA's funding and investment strategies is essential for inclusive growth. It recommends that GMCA become a Living Wage Funder, requiring grant-funded roles to meet wage standards and encouraging grantees to pursue accreditation. Financial incentives, public recognition, and learning opportunities are proposed to support employers in making the transition. These measures would not only improve livelihoods but also strengthen the sector by attracting and retaining talent.

By implementing these recommendations, LWF have recommended GMCA could lead the way in creating a fairer creative economy. The plan aligns with the region's ambition to become the UK's first Living Wage city region and offers a model for other authorities. With measurable targets and strategic partnerships, the initiative could reduce inequality, boost the local economy, and make creative careers accessible to a broader range of people.

Governance

To support the growth, resilience, and representation of Greater Manchester's creative industries, GMCA proposes the establishment of a Creative Industries Council and a Freelancer Taskforce. These new structures will be sector-led, ensuring that the voices of creative professionals, businesses, and organisations are central to decision-making and policy development.

The Creative Industries Council will act as a strategic advisory body, representing the breadth of the sector—including design, fashion, film, TV, music, digital, publishing, and performing arts. It will advocate for the sector's interests at regional and national levels, provide insight into emerging challenges and opportunities, and help shape investment, skills, and infrastructure priorities. The

Council will be composed of sector leaders and practitioners, with representation from across Greater Manchester's ten districts, and will maintain formal links with existing GMCA structures.

The Freelancer Taskforce will focus specifically on the needs of freelance and self-employed workers, who make up a significant proportion of the creative workforce. It will provide a platform for freelancers to influence policy, share lived experience, and co-design support mechanisms that address precarity, access to workspace, fair pay, and career development. The Taskforce will work in partnership with unions, networks, and grassroots organisations, and will feed directly into the Creative Industries Council to ensure joined-up advocacy and action.

Together, these bodies will strengthen sector leadership, improve coordination across the city-region, and ensure that Greater Manchester's creative industries are well-positioned to deliver inclusive growth, innovation, and cultural impact.

SWOT Analysis

Greater Manchester's creative industries represent a vital and dynamic component of the region's cultural and economic landscape. The sector is underpinned by a solid foundation in established disciplines such as advertising, publishing, music, and the performing arts. Strategic partnerships between educational institutions and industry stakeholders have cultivated a robust talent pipeline, while the region's early adoption of emerging technologies—including artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and digital platforms—positions it as a leader in creative innovation.

The collaborative nature of the sector, supported by a well-connected network of local, regional, and international actors, enhances its capacity for cross-sectoral engagement and knowledge exchange. Furthermore, Greater Manchester's growing global reputation as a creative hub is reinforced by its infrastructure assets, such as Media City, and its diverse and skilled workforce.

Despite these strengths, the sector faces several structural challenges. Chief among these are persistent funding constraints, particularly for grassroots initiatives, mid-career professionals, and independent creatives. Smaller operators and underrepresented voices often struggle to gain visibility and access to advocacy platforms. Additionally, there are notable gaps in digital infrastructure, intellectual property support, and resources for micro-businesses and sole traders, particularly in the crafts and design sub-sectors.

Opportunities exist to address these challenges through increased investment, including the introduction of production funds, tax incentives, and international partnerships. Strategic branding initiatives—such as the development of a regional creative 'showreel'—could further enhance Greater Manchester's profile and attract global talent and investment. The integration of advanced technologies, including AI and robotics, offers further potential to streamline production processes and enrich audience engagement. Moreover, the establishment of a dedicated screen agency could strengthen advocacy and coordination across the screen industries.

However, the sector must remain vigilant in the face of external threats. These include intensifying competition from other UK and international creative hubs, concerns regarding the equitable distribution of resources, the pace of technological change, and broader economic uncertainties that may impact funding and long-term sustainability.

To fully realise the potential of Greater Manchester's creative industries, a coordinated and inclusive approach is required—one that prioritises investment, infrastructure, and equitable access to opportunity across the sector.

Strengths	Weaknesses
• **Established creative sectors:** Strong presence in advertising, publishing, music, and performing arts. • **Education and talent development:** Close ties between industry and educational institutions support career pathways. • **Innovation leadership:** Adoption of AI, VR, and digital platforms provide new opportunities for content creation and audience engagement. • **Collaborative culture:** A well-connected network fostering cooperation among local, regional, and international stakeholders. • **Global appeal:** A growing reputation as a creative hub with strong infrastructure, including Media City and a diverse talent pool.	• **Funding constraints:** Lack of sustained financial support for grassroots, mid-career talent, and independent creatives. • **Limited visibility:** Smaller operators and underrepresented voices struggle with recognition and advocacy. • **Infrastructure gaps:** Need for more support around AI development, digital infrastructure, and intellectual property management. • **Challenges for micro-businesses and sole traders:** Especially in crafts and design, where growth opportunities remain limited.
Opportunities	**Threats**
• **Increased investment:** Calls for production funds, tax breaks, and international partnerships to strengthen the sector. • **Promotion and branding:** The potential to create a Greater Manchester creative 'showreel' to attract talent and investment. • **Expanded global market access:** Leveraging local skills and infrastructure to attract international work. • **Emerging technologies:** Further integration of AI and robotics to streamline workflows and enhance audience experiences. • **Stronger advocacy:** Efforts to amplify Manchester's screen industries through initiatives like a dedicated screen agency.	• **Competitive landscape:** Other UK cities and international markets vying for investment and talent. • **Unequal resource distribution:** Concerns around fair allocation of funding, productions, and policy support. • **Rapid technological change:** Risks associated with keeping up with emerging tech without adequate funding. • **Economic uncertainty:** Potential macroeconomic factors impacting funding availability and creative industry stability.

Ambitions for growth

The Vision for the Sector in GM

Greater Manchester will be the UK's leading creative powerhouse, where talent and businesses thrive across the city region, supported by inclusive infrastructure and dynamic policy. With deep international links and a bold spirit of innovation, GM will drive global creative excellence and shape the future of cultural production

Strategic Priorities

We have worked with the sector, partners and other stakeholders to develop a series of strategic priorities for the development of the sector, as well as a comprehensive action plan outlined later in this document.

1 – Build Strong Sector Leadership

Effective leadership is essential to champion the sector, shape policy, and coordinate delivery. We will establish a representative and empowered leadership group—bringing together creative businesses, freelancers, institutions, and civic partners—to advocate for the sector, amplify its achievements, and ensure its voice is heard in regional and national decision-making.

2 – Focus on high-growth sub-sectors.

GM will prioritise investment and support for sub-sectors with the greatest potential for economic impact, innovation, and international reach. These include music, screen, gaming, immersive tech, and design-led industries. By concentrating resources and attention on these areas, Greater Manchester can accelerate growth and enhance its global competitiveness.

3 – Align education and skills with industry and refine research priorities.

A responsive and inclusive talent pipeline is vital for the sector's sustainability. GM will strengthen connections between education providers and industry, ensuring that creative skills development—from early years to adult education—is aligned with employer needs. Research priorities in createch and Creative Industries innovation ecosystems will be co-developed with civic universities to support innovation and address sector challenges.

4 – Improve access to finance and investment.

Creative businesses often face barriers to growth due to limited access to finance. The region will expand investment-readiness support, develop targeted funds (such as a GM Production Fund), and work with national partners to unlock public and private capital.

5 – Promote inclusive and place-based growth.

Creativity should be accessible to all communities. Greater Manchester will invest in grassroots venues, local creative clusters, and Creative Improvement Districts to ensure that cultural infrastructure and opportunities are distributed equitably across the city-region.

6 – Foster cross-sector collaboration and innovation.

The creative industries thrive at the intersection of disciplines. Greater Manchester will encourage collaboration between creative businesses and other frontier sectors—such as digital, health innovation, and advanced manufacturing—to drive new products, services, and experiences. Innovation hubs, research partnerships and shared R&D platforms will support this cross-pollination of ideas.

What we need to do to achieve growth

Our approach to delivery

The current support landscape for creative industries in Greater Manchester has evolved through a mix of short-term funding, competitive national programmes, and local innovation. Initiatives such as the Create Growth Programme, the development of Creative Improvement Districts, and the establishment of institutions like Factory International and SODA demonstrate the region's ability to shape impactful, place-led interventions despite fragmented national policy and funding cycles.

With the prospect of longer-term funding settlements and greater devolved powers, Greater Manchester is now well-positioned to take a more strategic, coordinated approach to supporting the creative sector. This includes aligning investment with the region's growth locations, embedding creativity in regeneration and placemaking, and ensuring that infrastructure, skills, and business support are delivered in a joined-up way.

We will ensure that different parts of the ecosystem work together and that various interventions complement and support one another. To unlock new employment spaces for growth, we must ensure the availability of necessary skills, transport to get people there, leadership to communicate the vision and attract interest, and business support to help creative businesses locate and thrive. These components are interdependent, and we will take a strategic approach to sequencing and integrating interventions for maximum impact. Our approach will build on existing capacity, create new interventions as needed, learn from successful examples elsewhere, and innovate where necessary in GM.

This section below outlines how Greater Manchester is and will continue to support the sector with the resources and leavers at our disposal, including via collaboration with delivery partners, government, and industry. Whilst some of the actions outlined in this plan are currently funded, or already in delivery, others represent early-stage exploration or proposition development intended to lay the groundwork for future investment.

How Our Action Plan is Structured: Levers of Growth

Realising our vision and strategic priorities requires a coherent, interconnected action plan based on collaboration and co-design with the sector, avoiding siloes. To ensure uniformity of approach across all five Sector Development Plans, enabling the opportunities for cross cutting interventions and sharing of knowledge to be maximises, we will develop our approach under 5 key "Levers of Growth".

Sector Leadership

Strong local leadership is essential to the success of Greater Manchester's creative industries. This requires partnership across political, business, academic, and cultural institutions. Local leaders understand the needs and opportunities of their areas and can build coalitions with creative entrepreneurs, researchers, and community organisations to shape a shared vision.

The proposed Greater Manchester Creative Council and Freelance Taskforce will provide strategic oversight and advocacy for the sector, while existing bodies such as Creative Manchester, and the GM Music Commission will play key roles in shaping delivery. A coordinated leadership structure will ensure that the sector's voice is heard in regional and national policy and that creative industries are embedded in wider economic and social strategies.

Development, Planning, and Infrastructure

A vibrant and inclusive creative economy depends on access to affordable, high-quality spaces for production, performance, collaboration, and community engagement. Greater Manchester's Creative Infrastructure Plan will align with the region's six growth locations to ensure that creative industries are embedded in regeneration and spatial planning.

This includes repurposing underused buildings, investing in grassroots venues, and developing new facilities such as rehearsal studios, fabrication labs, and digital production hubs. Creative Improvement Districts will support place-based growth, while integration with transport and housing strategies will ensure that creative workers can live and work across the city-region.

Innovation and Research

Innovation is central to the growth of the creative industries. From immersive storytelling and AI-generated content to sustainable fashion and digital distribution, Greater Manchester's creative businesses are at the forefront of experimentation and invention.

The region's universities, including SODA, Creative Manchester, and the University of Salford, provide a strong foundation for R&D. Through Innovation GM and partnerships with Innovate UK, we will support collaborative research, prototyping, and commercialisation. A focus on Createch and cross-sector innovation will ensure that Greater Manchester remains a leader in creative technologies.

Enterprise and Business Support

Creative SMEs and freelancers are the backbone of the sector but often face barriers to growth, including limited access to finance, business support, and networks. Greater Manchester will expand tailored support through the GM Growth Hub, Create Growth Programme, and new initiatives such as a GM Production Fund and Music Export Office.

We will also strengthen peer networks, support investment-readiness, and embed creative businesses in local supply chains. A place-based approach to business support will ensure that creative enterprises in all ten boroughs can thrive.

Skills and Labour Supply

A skilled and diverse workforce is essential to the future of the creative industries. Greater Manchester will align its education and training system with the needs of the sector, from early years to lifelong learning.

The MBacc, Local Skills Improvement Plan, and devolved Adult Education Budget provide a platform for targeted interventions, including apprenticeships, short courses, and technical qualifications. We will also work with employers and education providers to improve access to work-based learning, support career progression, and address structural barriers faced by underrepresented groups.

Delivery Plan

The below plan provides a series of actions that we believe GM needs to take to support the sector going forwards.

The table below outlines how these actions are aligned to our different leavers for growth, if this activity is ongoing or ne w activity proposed in this plan, organisations, and timeframes for this activity (short term – 25/26 FY or medium term - beyond this timeframe).

We also categorise actions in three different ways.

- "Distinctive" actions, which are only relevant to this sector development plan.
- "Shared" actions that thread together our frontier sectors and their plans.
- "Strategic" actions that sit above sector development plans and support business activities across the economy.

Lever	Action	Lead	Kind	Strategic Priority	Timeframe	Programme	Shared/Distinctive Action
Sector Leadership	Establish a Greater Manchester Creative Council to provide strategic oversight and advocacy for the sector.	GMCA / Creative Industries Partners	New	1	Short		Distinctive
Planning and Development	Develop a Greater Manchester Creative Infrastructure Plan aligned with growth locations.	GMCA / Local Authorities	New	1	Short		Distinctive
Sector Leadership	Launch a region-wide communications campaign to promote GM's creative identity and investment potential.	Marketing Manchester / GMCA	New	1	Short		Distinctive
Sector Leadership	Launch a cross-subsector creative industries network to foster collaboration, knowledge exchange, and joint funding bids	GMCA, GM Growth Hub	New	1	Short		Distinctive
Innovation and Research	Work with Greater Manchester's civic universities to establish shared creative industries research priorities and collaborative funding bids	GMCA, Creative Manchester, University of Salford, Manchester Metropolitan University	New	1	Short		Distinctive
Sector Leadership	Embed ethics of care principles across all creative sector initiatives.	GMCA / Sector Partners	New	2	Short		Distinctive
Sector Leadership	Develop approach to creative industries data and research, aligned to local, pan-regional, and national data approaches	GMCA / Sector Partners	New	2	Medium		Distinctive
Skills and Labour Supply	Establish a regional screen skills academy to support talent development in film, TV, radio, and photography.	GMCA / Screen Partners	New	2	Medium		Distinctive
Local Enterprise and Business Support	Launch a regional creative marketing accelerator to support innovation in advertising and marketing.	GMCA / Marketing Manchester / GM Growth Hub / Creative Agencies	New	2	Short		Distinctive
Skills and Labour Supply	Expand apprenticeships and training opportunities in creative sub-sectors.	GMCA / Education Providers	New	2	Medium		Distinctive
Local Enterprise and Business Support	Develop GM Music plan to inform strategic interventions in music, beyond export office, over next three years	GMCA / GM Music Commission	New	2	Short		Distinctive

Local Enterprise and Business Support	Support grassroots venues and creative SMEs through targeted investment and business support.	GM Growth Hub / GMCA	Ongoing	3	Short		Distinctive
Local Enterprise and Business Support	Create a GM Music Export Office to support internationalisation of the music sector.	GMCA / Music Commission	New	3	Medium		Distinctive
Planning and Development	Develop a GM Production Fund to attract and retain screen production in the region.	GMCA / Screen Partners	New	3	Medium		Distinctive
Sector Leadership	Establish a Freelance Taskforce to address the needs of freelance workers in the creative sector.	GMCA / Creative Freelancers Network	New	3	Short		Distinctive
Planning and Development	Support the development of Creative Improvement Districts across GM boroughs.	Local Authorities / GMCA	New	3	Medium		Distinctive
Innovation and Research	Promote AI integration in creative production through R&D and training.	Universities / GMCA	New	3	Medium		Distinctive
Local Enterprise and Business Support	Improve access to finance for creative SMEs and microbusinesses.	GM Growth Hub / GMCA	Ongoing	3	Short		Distinctive
Innovation and Research	Establish a prototyping fund and support programme for games and interactive media	GMCA, GM Growth Hub	New	3	Short		Distinctive
Innovation and Research	Develop a regional AI and creativity programme to support creative businesses to explore and adopt AI tools ethically and effectively	GMCA / GM Universities	New	3	Medium		Shared
Local Enterprise and Business Support	Develop GM approach to supporting creative businesses and freelancers to protect and capitalise on the intellectual property of their work	GMCA / GM Business Growth Hub	New	3	Medium		Distinctive
Local Enterprise and Business Support	Scale successful creative programmes aligned with inclusion and innovation.	GMCA / Delivery Partners	Ongoing	4	Medium		Distinctive
Sector Leadership	Develop a regional creative showreel to promote GM's creative output globally.	Marketing Manchester / GMCA	New	4	Short		Distinctive
Planning and Development	Support the development of cross-sector creative hubs for collaboration and innovation.	GMCA / Local Authorities	New	4	Medium		Shared
Innovation and Research	Establish a sustainable architecture innovation fund to support green design and placemaking.	GMCA / Manchester School of Architecture	New	4	Medium		Distinctive
Local Enterprise and Business Support	Create a craft enterprise incubator to support traditional and contemporary makers across GM.	GMCA / Craft Networks	New	4	Short		Distinctive
Innovation and Research	Develop a design innovation scheme to support SMEs in product and service design.	GMCA / Design Manchester	New	4	Short		Distinctive
Innovation and Research	Create a Createch Sandbox programme to support experimentation in immersive and AI-driven content.	GMCA / SODA / Creative Manchester	New	4	Medium		Distinctive

Innovation and Research	Support a publishing innovation lab to explore new business models and digital publishing formats.	GMCA / Independent Publishers	New	4	Short		Distinctive
Planning and Development	Develop a regional museums and libraries digital engagement programme to expand access and participation.	GMCA / Museums Development Northwest	New	4	Medium		Distinctive
Planning and Development	Create a performing and visual arts touring and commissioning fund to support new work across GM boroughs.	GMCA / Arts Organisations	New	4	Medium		Distinctive
Skills and Labour Supply	Create a GM Alumni Mentorship Network to support emerging creatives.	GMCA / Universities	New	4	Short		Distinctive
Shared Actions Across Al Frontier Sector Plans							
Development, Planning and Infrastructure	Develop a better understanding of the Quantum of market demand for physical infrastructure, including modular lab space, scale up space, larger sites for larger businesses including via FDI as well as GPU compute, and digital connectivity infrastructure requirements.	GMCA	New Activity		Short		Shared
Development, Planning and Infrastructure	Ensure the Investment Plan embeds provision for digital-first infrastructure (including AI Growth Zones, dark fibre, and 5G/6G) and clean energy systems required by the sectors at key locations to ensure sustainable development.	GMCA	Ongoing Activity		Medium	IP	Shared
Development, Planning and Infrastructure	Launch and utilise £2m Planning & Development fund for Districts can draw from to plan andfz prepare for the development of strategic sites.	GMCA	Ongoing Activity		Short/Medium	ISZ	Shared
Development, Planning and Infrastructure	Explore interim commercial space solutions for start-ups and scale-ups guided by the Integrated Pipeline and Regional Economic Spatial Plans (RESPs). This includes identifying opportunities to accelerate delivery through the Strategic Sites Accelerator and Mayoral Recyclable Growth Fund.	GMCA & Partners	Ongoing Activity		Medium		Shared
Planning and Development	Support the development of cross-sector creative hubs for collaboration and innovation.	GMCA / Local Authorities	New		Medium		Shared
Development, Planning and Infrastructure	Ensure we are maximising opportunities to unlock key strategic sites via the UKGovs Strategic Site Accelerator, Mayoral Recyclable Growth Fund and Connections Accelerator Service.	GMCA, UKGov	New Activity		Medium	NIS	Strategic
Enterprise and Business Support	Explore options for how additional business incentives (e.g. match funding) to attract businesses to the region could be structured if resources are made available.	GMCA & MIDAS	New Activity		Medium		Shared
Enterprise and Business Support	Complete research to understand what additional public investment tools could be developed to address key investment gaps for our frontier sectors.	GMCA	New Activity		Short		Shared
Enterprise and Business Support	Explore how we can enhance resources available to proactively engage major, global innovative firms and develop sophisticated inward investment plans to attract them, including via lunching key campaigns working with MIDAS.	MIDAS GMCA	Ongoing Activity		Medium		Shared
Enterprise and Business Support	Continue to develop closer working with DBT teams in post in target markets to strengthen FDI relating to cluster focus areas.	MIDAS GMCA	Ongoing Activity		Short		Shared
Enterprise and Business Support	Explore the introduction of a GM programme that provides an easily navigable platform for all frontier sector organisations to understand the current ecosystem of organisations and access opportunities for investment and grants, with regularly updated data, as well as options for creating "innovation" champions to support business with accessing grant support and other opportunities in the ecosystem.	GMCA	New Activity		Medium		Shared
Enterprise and Business Support	Expand existing programmes, such as Made Smarter, into other frontier sectors and other sub-sectors within frontier sectors.	GMCA & Growth Company	Ongoing Activity		Medium		Shared

Enterprise and Business Support	Work to develop a framework for higher quality output metrics for support programmes that focus on capturing progress towards commercialisation and quality of programme benefits for businesses.	GMCA	New Activity		Medium		Strategic
Enterprise and Business Support	Support the continued operation of Growth Company networks and ensure we are maximising the reach of current initiatives to support businesses to access programmes and funding, such as Made Smarter Programme, innovation ecosystem navigation service and BeeNetZero programme.	GMCA & Growth Company	Ongoing Activity		Medium		Strategic
Enterprise and Business Support	Support the GM Business Board with the implementation of the review Business Support offer in GM, to identify gaps and / or the need for specialisation of support for the sectors.	GMCA & Growth Company	Ongoing Activity		Medium		Strategic
Enterprise and Business Support	Strengthen and tailor Greater Manchester's intellectual property (IP) support offer across all frontier sectors by working with the Business & Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC) Greater Manchester and the Intellectual Property Office (IPO), maximising our support to IP-rich SMEs most in need of support, and ensuring that IP is embedded into wider business support and innovation programmes across GM.	GMCA Intellectual Property Office	New Activity		Medium		Strategic
Enterprise and Business Support	Undertake a cross-sector mapping exercise to identify key international markets and trade relationships for each of Greater Manchester's frontier sectors. This will include analysis of sub-sector strengths, export potential, and alignment with global demand, and will inform the development of targeted international engagement and trade propositions.	GMCA & MIDAS	Ongoing Activity		Medium		Strategic
Enterprise and Business Support	Support UKGovs Supply Chain Centre and Digital Supply Chain Hub with the data and collaboration activities as required.	GMCA, UKGov	New Activity		Medium	NIS	Strategic
Enterprise and Business Support	Ensure we are maximising opportunities for GM businesses to access funding via the British Business Bank, including the Industrial Strategy Growth Capital, Strategic Equity, IP-Backed Lending and Nations and Regions Investment programmes.	GMCA, UKGov	New Activty		Medium	NIS	Strategic
Enterprise and Business Support	Support the role out of UKGovs cluster champions programme and their Northwest Deployment, and maximise opportunities presented via the innovation cluster programme.	GMCA, UKGov	New Activty		Short	NIS	Strategic
Enterprise and Business Support	Ensure we are maximising opportunities for GM businesses to access funding via the enhanced remit of the National Wealth Fund announced as part of UKGovs National Industrial Strategy.	GMCA & Growth Company	Ongoing Activity		Medium	NIS	Strategic
Enterprise and Business Support	Complete a review of our current business engagement forums and processes across our frontier sectors and strengthen businesses voice in the development of our strategies and plans, including further iterations of sector development plans.	GMCA & Growth Company	Ongoing Activity		Short		Strategic
Innovation and Research	Maximise the impact of the Extended Innovation Accelerator Pilot and centre frontier sector needs in the development of Greater Manchester's response to the Local Innovation Partnership Fund	GMCA	Ongoing Activity		Short		Shared
Innovation and Research	Increase our understanding of industry and academia R&D partnerships in the city region relevant to the frontier sectors, to drive for GM to be a testbed for investment in innovation with commercial application.	GMCA & Partners	New Activity		Short		Shared
Innovation and Research	Explore the creation of a localised GM fund which reinvests the value from innovation into social value projects, e.g. data assets for health.	GMCA	New Activity		Medium		Shared
Innovation and Research	Explore the creation of a seed fund for high risk/reward pilots that industry cannot absorb but tackle key socio-economic challenges including net zero.	GMCA	New Activity		Medium		Shared
Innovation and Research	Support and input into the Science and Innovation Audit on behalf of all frontier sectors.	GMCA	Ongoing Activity		Short		Shared
Innovation and Research	Explore potential opportunities for a Joint Technology Transfer office to sit across all universities and maximise technology transfer opportunities across GM.	University Partners Innovation GM	New Activity		Medium		Strategic

Sector Leadership	Communicate the narrative of GM's cross cutting sectoral strengths to internal and external stakeholders, including industry and government, to inform national policy & strategy for the sector and ensure they are aware of GM's strengths and opportunities, initiatives locally, and gaps in our ability to develop the sector locally.	GMCA & Partners	Ongoing Activity		Short		Shared
Sector Leadership	Develop a mechanism for ongoing review of the evidence base regarding GM's frontier sectors, sub-sector strengths, and their development needs, responding to emerging capabilities.	GMCA	New Activity		Medium		Shared
Sector Leadership	Undertake research to map the gap between where sectors are now and where they need to be to deliver the 5YEP's targets, considering what sectors are currently delivering, what they are capable of, and focused activity required to plug the biggest gaps.	GMCA & Partners	Ongoing Activity		Medium		Shared
Sector Leadership	Explore options to develop a mechanism to facilitate cross sector communication between frontier sectors and increase engagement in decision making processes.	GMCA	New Activity		Medium		Shared
Sector Leadership	Explore options to increase our understanding of the supply chains that both services, and our businesses in the sector service, including the businesses in GM that make up these, and what is driving key decisions around supply chain management for OEMs and key opportunities for GM.	GMCA	New Activity		Medium		Shared
Sector Leadership	Ensure Greater Manchester is represented on relevant national industry groups supporting the delivery of the national industrial strategy.	GMCA, UKGov	New Activity		Medium	NIS	Strategic
Skills and Labour Supply	Work with partners to increase the impact of employer engagement in shaping the curriculum within colleges by working with existing advisory boards within colleges and facilitating events/conferences at a GM level where they add value.	GMCA & FE Colleagues	New Activity		Medium		Shared
Skills and Labour Supply	Review the opportunities for frontier sector relevant short courses, bootcamps etc. opened up by the new Devolution Deal on skills funding.	GMCA	New Activity		Short		Shared
Skills and Labour Supply	Ensure that we are aligning sector priorities with MBacc, and that young people have a clear line of sight to jobs in the sectors.	GMCA	Ongoing Activity		Medium		Strategic
Skills and Labour Supply	Align Skills and Employment Support interventions with Greater Manchester's Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), led by the GM Chamber of Commerce and utilise new devolved powers from the Integrated Settlement and existing programmes (e.g., Adult Education Budget, Skills Bootcamps) to address priority skills gaps. Support young people and adults in developing academic and technical skills identified through sector skills analysis, informed by business needs and feedback on the Skills System.	GMCA	Ongoing Activity		Medium		Strategic
Skills and Labour Supply	Work to ensure that employers and learners are more aware of existing provision and access points into it. This will include a concerted effort to link employers with providers to ensure that awareness of current provision is up to date taking in established options such as Apprenticeships and 'newer' options such as T-Levels and a range of shorter course options around HTQs.	GMCA & Partners	Ongoing Activity		Medium		Strategic
Skills and Labour Supply	Explore opportunities for new paid internships placing university students in SMEs to provide innovation support.	GMCA & Universitates	New Activity		Medium		Strategic
Skills and Labour Supply	Increase our understanding of specific graduate needs for frontier sectors and developing our approach to increasing retention in GM.	GMCA & Universities	Ongoing Activity		Medium		Strategic
Skills and Labour Supply	Foster greater collaboration between all parts of the skills systems (HE institutions, FE colleges, ITPs), facilitate shared learning by exemplar institutions on effective programmes, and join up existing assets within GM, using this as a platform to better engage industry and connect their future skills needs to available	GMCA, Fe Colleges, Higher Education Institutions and Partners	Ongoing Activity		Medium		Strategic

How we will measure success

These metrics (alongside delivery of actions outlined in this plan) will be used for the process of monitoring and evaluation. These metrics have a 10-year time horizon, and therefore GM should aim to achieve these by 2035. As outlined, this is a living document, that will have an iterative approach to how it is written and implemented, and as such these metrics may change in response to this. We will continue to evaluate our approach and the success of the delivery of these plans on a regular basis and adapt them as required in response to changing circumstances. These will also change in line with emerging information regarding National Industrial Strategy implementation (and corresponding national sector plans) as well as single settlement governance.

Measures:

- Number of jobs created.
- Amount of private sector investment leveraged towards the sector.
- Number of people trained in key skills suitable for jobs in the sector.
- Number of businesses supported via schemes to grow in the sector.
- Number of businesses able to commercialise due to interventions
- Amount of floor space unlocked for the sector.

Impacts:

- Increase in productivity and growth in the sector.
- Increased earnings of businesses in sector
- Increased proportion of businesses signed up to the good employment charter.
- Increased investment in R&D (public and private)
- Reductions in Carbon emissions from business in the sector

Methodology and Sources

The development of the Greater Manchester Creative Industries Sector Development Plan has been informed by a robust and multi-layered evidence base, combining national research, regional data, and extensive stakeholder engagement. This approach ensures that the plan reflects both the strategic priorities of Greater Manchester and the lived realities of those working within the creative industries.

National policy and research frameworks have provided critical context. The **Skills England: Sector Skills Needs Assessment – Creative Industries** (2024) offers detailed insights into workforce trends, recruitment challenges, and training gaps across the UK, helping to shape Greater Manchester's approach to skills and talent development. The **Creative Industries Sector Vision**, published by the UK Government in 2023, outlines a joint strategy to drive growth, build talent, and develop skills, and has been used to align Greater Manchester's ambitions with national priorities.

Spatial and cluster dynamics have been explored through the **Creative Clusters and Sparse Spaces** discussion paper by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC), which highlights the importance of place-based investment and the challenges faced by non-metropolitan creative ecosystems. These findings have informed Greater Manchester's emphasis on spatial equity and the development of Creative Improvement Districts.

Strategic partners like the Real Living Wage Foundation have provided advice on how to embed inclusive growth principles, particularly around fair pay, and the Living Wage int the plan.

This has been complemented by primary data gathered through **GM Consults and engagement sessions**, which involved over 600 creative businesses, freelancers, and stakeholders. These sessions—conducted both online and in person—offered granular insights into sub-sector needs, barriers to growth, and opportunities for innovation.

Together, these sources have shaped a methodology that is evidence-led, inclusive, and responsive to both national imperatives and local aspirations. The plan is designed to evolve iteratively, with ongoing engagement and data collection ensuring its relevance and impact over time.