

Creative Industry and Content

Annex A: Detailed Information on Skills Needs Assessment



Creative Industry and Content

The National picture

The national strategy targets the Creative Industries as a high-growth sector, aiming to increase annual GVA by £50 billion by 2030. The emphasis is on "Createch", the intersection of creativity and technology, and on distributing growth outside London and the South East. The government is committed to supporting creative clusters and tax reliefs for high-end TV and gaming production. This strategic pivot is intended to address the historical concentration of the sector, where London currently produces 45.3% of total Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) sector GVA. As of 2026, the national objective is to evolve the UK into the world's premier destination for creative innovation, supported by a record investment of £369 million in research and development (R&D) allocated for the 2026–2030 spending review period.

National policy is also adapting to the disruptive influence of AI. This policy shift prioritises human creativity, emphasising that rights holders must be fairly remunerated and that AI developers should maintain transparency regarding the content and data used to train their models. This approach aims to protect the creative sector's GVA, which generated £146 billion in 2024 (roughly 6% of the UK economy), against the potential risks of unregulated AI deployment.

The specific sector in the North East

The Creative Industry and Content sector in the North East are undergoing a renaissance, driven by major infrastructure investments. This sector is a vital driver of regional identity, tourism, and economic diversification. The North East Screen Industries Partnership (NESIP) has been a pivotal driver of this momentum, delivering an estimated GVA contribution exceeding £65 million and achieving a return on investment of £6.70 for every £1 of public funding utilised.

Creative industries employers across film, TV, digital content and production services describe a sector characterised by volatility, freelance dominant labour models and uneven regional opportunity. Businesses often operate with small permanent teams supplemented by freelancers, while many production companies operate entirely without PAYE staff. The North East continues to face structural disadvantages in securing national commissions, with commissioners favouring London and Manchester. Despite this, regional production capacity is growing, supported by new facilities, increased drama output and the potential development of major studio infrastructure.

The North East's creative industries employ around 47,745 people, representing 5% of the region's jobs. The sector has seen a 67% job growth over the past decade, the largest percentage increase in the UK.

Nationally, the government aims to grow the creative industries by an extra £50 billion in GVA by 2030. The North East is positioned as the fastest-growing region in the UK for film and TV production, with a recent 131% surge in regional production spend. The sector is projected to grow at an annual rate of 3.6%, reaching 58,987 roles by 2030. Growth is increasingly driven by "Createch", the intersection of creativity and technology, where skills in AI literacy, digital data analytics, and immersive tech (RTIC 0018) are becoming as vital as traditional artistic talent.

The region boasts strong partnerships with the BBC and North East Screen, and established expertise in gaming and immersive tech. The BBC partnership alone has contributed £18.6 million in GVA and resulted in 293 jobs being created. Cultural hubs and shared workspaces across the region support entrepreneurship and development. Organisations such as The NewBridge Project and Generator North East have been essential in nurturing the 2.2 million freelancers who now form the backbone of the creative workforce. The regional game changer remains the £450 million Crown Works Studios development in Sunderland (initial site progress supported by £25 million of investment from North East MSA). As of 9 March 2026, Mayor Kim McGuinness has committed over £38 million to supercharge the delivery of Phase 1, which will feature 125,000 sq ft of flexible studio space and the refurbishment of the Doxford Printworks building. This project will enter the final investment stages later in 2026, and it will potentially create up to 8,450 new jobs by 2033. At full capacity, it is forecast to generate £336 million in GVA annually, adding a cumulative £2 billion to the regional economy over the next decade. The sector supports employment outside of the TV/Film/Music technical production jobs.

Priority SIC Codes: Motion picture, video and television programme production (59), Programming and broadcasting activities (60), Publishing of computer games (58.21), Creative, arts and entertainment activities (90), Specialised design activities (74.1).

RTIC: 58110 Book Publishing, 58120 Publishing or directories, 58130 Publishing of newspapers, 58141 Publishing of learned journals, 58142 Publishing of consumer and business journals and periodicals, 58190 Other publishing activities, 58210 Publishing of computer games, 58290 Other software publishing, 589111 Motion picture production activities, 59112 Video production activities, 59113 Television programme production activities, 59120 Motion picture, video and television programme post-production activities, 59131 Motion picture distribution activities, 59132 video distribution activities, 59133 Television programme distribution activities, 59140 Motion picture projection activities, 59200 Sound recording and music publishing activities, 60100 Radio broadcasting, 60200 Television programming and broadcasting activities, 62011 Ready-made interactive leisure and entertainment software development, 62012 Business and domestic software development, 63120 Web portals, 63910 News agency activities, 63990 Other information service activities not elsewhere classified.

Priority Occupations (SOC 2020):

SOC20 unit	SOC2020 – Priority Occupation unit label	Average monthly job postings, 2021–2025	Forecast average monthly job postings by 2029	Forecast change in monthly job postings by 2029	Forecast percentage change in average monthly job postings by 2029
1131	Financial managers and directors	5.4	4	-1.4	-25.93%
1132	Marketing, sales and advertising directors	1.8	2.6	0.8	44.44%
1137	Information technology directors	1.65	7.1	5.45	330.30%
1255	Managers and directors in the creative industries	2.7	7.1	4.4	162.96%
2132	IT managers	3.1	7.1	4	129.03%
2133	IT business analysts, architects and systems designers	3.3	7.1	3.8	115.15%
2134	Programmers and software development professionals	15.1	10.5	-4.6	-30.46%
2141	Web design professionals	1.7	1.4	-0.3	-17.65%
2142	Graphic and multimedia designers	6.7	7.3	0.6	8.96%
2432	Marketing and commercial managers	3.2	3.3	0.1	3.12%
2451	Architects	0.65	0.46	-0.19	-29.23%
2452	Chartered architectural technologists, planning officers and	3.4	2.43	-0.97	-28.53%
2472	Archivists and curators	0.37	0.31	-0.06	-16.22%
2491	Newspaper and periodical editors	0.27	0.23	-0.04	-14.81%
2492	Newspaper and periodical journalists and reporters	0	0	0	0.00%
2493	Public relations professionals	0.72	0.55	-0.17	-23.61%
2494	Advertising accounts managers and creative directors	0	0	0	0.00%
3411	Artists	2.8	2	-0.8	-28.57%
3412	Authors, writers and translators	0.73	0.58	-0.15	-20.55%
3413	Actors, entertainers and presenters	0.58	0.49	-0.09	-15.52%
3415	Musicians	0.47	0.39	-0.08	-17.02%
3416	Arts officers, producers and directors	2.47	1.96	-0.51	-20.65%
3417	Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment opera	0.53	0.45	-0.08	-15.09%
3421	Interior designers	0.27	0.23	-0.04	-14.81%
3554	Marketing associate professionals	7.03	6.12	-0.91	-12.94%
3556	Sales accounts and business development managers	5.17	4.45	-0.72	-13.93%

Analysis of these forecasts reveals a profound shift toward high-level leadership and technology-led roles. The 330% growth projected for IT Directors (1137) and 163% for Creative Industry Managers (1255) reflects the sector's pivot toward complex, large-scale infrastructure projects like Crown Works. Conversely, the 30% decline in Programmers and Software Developers (2134) for this sector in some models suggests a transformation in digital roles, where AI and automated tools are increasingly handling baseline production tasks, shifting demand toward AI implementers who focus on high-value creative strategy and integration.

Real-world challenges for the specific sector

- **Fragmented demand signal:** The freelance nature of the industry makes it difficult for skills providers to establish long-term vocational pathways. This is compounded by new regulatory hurdles in 2026, including the shift of IR35 responsibility to recruitment agencies and the implementation of Making Tax Digital (MTD) for sole traders earning over £50,000.
- **Talent Retention:** Historically, the region has suffered from a "brain drain" of creative talent to London and Manchester due to a lack of large-scale production infrastructure and steady work. The scarcity of junior roles is particularly stark in 2026, with many entry-level opportunities having evaporated post-pandemic.

- **Freelance Precarity:** A significant portion of the workforce is freelance, facing instability and barriers to training access compared to employed staff.
- **Sector inclusivity and Retention:** There are persistent issues with diversity, particularly regarding female employment in technical roles within the sector, mirroring the challenges in other tech-heavy industries. Women represent 37.4% of the creative workforce and hold 25% of Director positions. However, exit rates for women are higher than in other sectors, frequently driven by low pay and working hours incompatible with caregiving responsibilities. Leadership representation for ethnic minorities and disabled people also remains critically low, with ethnic minorities holding just 12% of executive roles in film and TV.
- **Recruitment Challenges:** Equipment rental and technical services employers report strong interest from people seeking trainee opportunities, but many applicants are not yet ready for work. Common gaps include understanding how freelance work operates, managing self-employment, invoicing, and meeting industry expectations. Graduates often need to be reoriented into trainee-level roles despite holding academic qualifications, which suggests a disconnect between formal education and the practical skills required by the industry. Employers also report difficulty recruiting experienced technicians, noting that some roles would have been difficult to fill without teams relocating to the region. By contrast, production companies currently report an oversupply of freelancers due to the sector downturn since 2023, meaning skills shortages are not an immediate constraint, although this may change if the market recovers.

Skills needs, current provision and demand

Employers highlight significant gaps in applied technical skills, industry awareness and commercial understanding among new entrants. Camera and lighting roles require hands-on competence with cinema-level equipment, yet many graduates lack practical experience and must begin with basic tasks such as kit preparation and camera builds. Across TV and film production, employers emphasise the need for “360-degree digital creatives” able to shoot, edit, use graphics tools and apply emerging AI technologies. There is also a specific shortage of grips, while the volume of jobs extends beyond mainstream film production into positions such as finance, catering, event management, joinery and electrical work. Soft skills gaps include confidence, communication, applied creative judgement and an understanding of real-world production workflows. Business skills—particularly freelance readiness—are consistently identified as missing from current FE/HE curricula.

Training Provision and Development Approaches are predominantly employer-led and delivered in-house, with technical services companies providing continuous training in camera systems and lighting. Engagement with external training funding is limited due to operational pressures and misalignment with scheme requirements. Employers deliver workshops and masterclasses to FE/HE institutions and industry bodies, though capacity for placements is constrained by production schedules. Production companies note that training alone cannot address regional challenges without parallel investment in local production capacity. Across the sector, there is a strong call for more practical, hands-on learning, access to industry-standard equipment, and the integration of production management and business skills modules.

Engagement with Education and Talent Pipelines is generally strong among technical services employers, who contribute to curriculum development and deliver workshops. They advocate greater emphasis on freelance readiness, practical technical learning and production management skills. In contrast, engagement from production companies has declined in recent years due to reduced production activity and fewer approaches from providers. Work placements are offered, but they are not consistent or embedded within structured pathways. Employers stress that FE/HE provision must better reflect industry needs, including multiskilling, digital content creation and AI-enabled workflows.

Education Pathway: Focus on creative arts, design and performing arts. However, training in computing and ICT has become a national priority for this sector at all qualification levels.

National ambition is to upskill 7.5 million workers in AI by 2030, with specific "knowledge packages" being developed for the media and creative sectors to ensure the domestic pipeline remains globally competitive.

If regional studio developments proceed and production volumes increase, demand will rise sharply for camera technicians, lighting and grip crew, production managers, assistant directors, runners, set builders, carpenters, electricians and logistics personnel. Digital content creation, multiskilling and AI-enabled production will become essential across all entry-level roles. Employers anticipate that future entrants will require broader digital literacy, stronger commercial awareness and practical experience with industry-standard equipment. Long-term sector growth will depend on strengthening local production companies and ensuring that training pathways prepare learners for freelance careers and multi-skilled digital roles.

From the 2026/27 academic year, the educational landscape is also being reshaped as the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) replaces previous student finance systems, providing a modular approach to funding that aligns with the career-long upskilling required in the Createch space.

Standard or framework	ST Code	Level	North East starts 24/25
Print Operative	ST0613	2	0
Sewing Machinist	ST0322	2	0
Content Creator	ST1352	3	40
Print Technician	ST0612	3	10
Bespoke Furniture Maker	ST0202	3	0

Creative Industries Production Technician	ST0622	3	0
Creative Venue Technician	ST0251	3	0
Cultural Learning and Participation Officer	ST0532	3	0
Event Assistant	ST0300	3	0
Fitted Furniture Design Technician	ST0329	3	0
Library, Information and Archive Services Assistant	ST0253	3	0
Live Event Technician	ST0254	3	0
Production Assistant - Screen and Audio	ST0256	3	0
Digital Community Manager	ST0624	4	0
Post Production Technical Operator	ST0255	4	0
Audiovisual Technician	ST0621	5	0
Journalist	ST0252	5	0
Creative Digital Design Professional (Integrated Degree)	ST0625	6	10
Archivist and Records Manager	ST0761	7	0
Creative Industries Production Manager	ST0623	7	0
Senior Journalist	ST0257	7	0
TOTAL			60

What's currently happening in the region

- **Crown Works Studios:** The game changer for the region is the £450 million Crown Works Studios development in Sunderland. Following the confirmation of £38.5 million in total public commitment on 9 March 2026, the project is moving into construction. Set to be one of Europe's largest studio complexes with 20+ sound stages, it has the potential to create over 8,000 jobs, requiring a massive influx of technical skills. Phase 1, encompassing 125,000 sq ft, will begin construction in July 2026 and is expected to be ready for use by the end of 2027.
- **Filming Friendly Region:** North East Screen is actively working to make the region "filming friendly," attracting productions that spend in the local economy. This initiative has already secured an 89% increase in filming days and a 90% increase in filming days for long-form productions since 2022.
- **Centre for Writing:** A major investment to attract publishing businesses and develop local literary talent. This partnership with New Writing North aims to create a dedicated talent pipeline from underrepresented communities into successful careers in writing and publishing.
- **Tech Talent Engine Expansion:** While primarily digital, the Tech Talent Engine is also identifying roles in the creative digital space, such as VFX and gaming, bridging the gap between the two sectors.
- **The Create Talent Programme:** Unveiled by Mayor Kim McGuinness in early 2026, this £4 million, three-year programme is designed to help residents access careers in music, screen, writing and publishing. Delivered in partnership with Generator, The NewBridge Project and ITV Signpost, the programme prioritises groups underrepresented in the industry, including care-experienced young people, women and residents from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. It aims to close the regional skills gap and create a "ready-to-go" workforce that builds confidence among national and international production companies.

What needs to be retained

- **North East Screen Partnership:** The collaborative model between local authorities and North East Screen is effective and should remain the central coordinating vehicle for sector growth.
- **Cultural Hubs:** Support for cultural hubs and shared workspaces that foster entrepreneurship must continue to provide a "landing pad" for new creative businesses. The regional music strategy, supported by organisations such as Generator, has been vital in retaining world-class talent and must be sustained to ensure the North East remains a competitive cultural capital.

What changes are needed

- **Technical Skills Scale-Up:** A massive scale-up in technical screen skills (lighting, rigging, sound, VFX) is needed to service Crown Works Studios. The current pipeline is insufficient for the projected demand.
- **Creative Catalyst:** Development of a Creative Catalyst to unlock private investment for smaller creative businesses and/or additional funding or grants is needed to help them scale.
- **Music Strategy:** Providing infrastructure for live performance and recording to support musicians and the visitor economy.
- **AI Integration and Copyright Advocacy:** The region must take a leadership role in navigating the AI landscape. With the government's March 2026 policy shift toward mandatory licensing, the North East has an opportunity to attract creators who value intellectual property protection over unregulated AI exploitation. This requires local skills providers to focus on "human-centric" creative skills that AI cannot easily replicate, such as strategic storytelling and complex relationship building.

Potential benefit

The sector offers a potential £1.3 billion annual GVA boost by 2030. Beyond economics, it enhances the region's brand, making it a more attractive place to live and work, which aids recruitment in all other sectors.