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Securing a future for technical and professional apprenticeships and skills in the creative sector

JULY 2025

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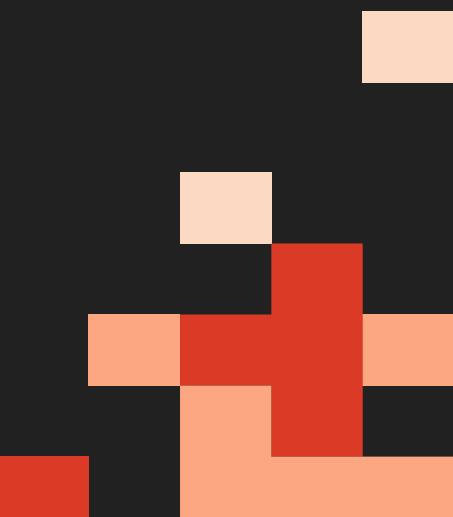
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1. Context

The UK's creative sector is one of the Government's eight priority sectors in its most recently published Modern Industrial Strategy¹, reflecting the opportunity for economic growth, both at home and internationally.

In terms of the creative industries, the sector encompasses a wide range of industries, including advertising, architecture, crafts, design, film, music, video games, performing and visual arts. It is also undergoing rapid transformation with the greater use of the likes of digital technologies, data analytics, artificial intelligence, leading to a demand for a fusion of skills blending the creative and technological, with the emergence of the 'Createch' sector advancing rapidly.

If we consider the recently published Department for Education 'Skills England: Sector Skills Needs Assessment for the Creative Industries'², it is reported that in 2023 the creative industries contributed over £124 billion to the UK economy, employing 2.4 million people, with the demand for jobs in this sector growing by nearly 55% between 2011 and 2023. However, this rapid demand for skills has led to reported skills shortages across multiple areas, with skills shortages particularly high in professional and associate roles (41% and 31% respectively) – which reflects the higher proportion of the workforce employed in higher level occupations.

The sector skills assessment also highlights a range of 'in demand' skills, with these being across three distinct groupings:

Technical and practical skills	IT specific skills	Soft/people skills
Specialist skills and knowledge needed to perform the role	Advanced and specialist IT skills such as graphic design, app development skills, and multimedia production skills	Making speeches and presentations
Solving complex problems	AI literacy	
Creative and innovative thinking	Digital and data analytics	

The Skills England report also notes that over two-thirds (69%) of employers in the creative industries said that they expect that their employees will need to upgrade their skills (compared to 62% of all employers), with the introduction of new technologies or equipment and the development of new products and services most frequently the driver.

If we now turn to the routes to addressing the skills gaps, the past decade has seen major changes to the apprenticeship and skills systems, with employers supported to drive the reforms forward as they are asked to commit funding to the training of apprentices via the Apprenticeship Levy.

¹ [The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy](#)

² [Skills England: Sector skills needs assessments - creative industries](#)

This has resulted in a rapid rise in the number of individual occupational standards developed right across a range of industry sectors and at a broader range of levels, with occupational standards currently available from entry levels (level 2 and 3), through higher levels (levels 4 and 5), right through to professional levels (levels 6 and 7).

The reforms to the apprenticeship system intended to offer a range of benefits, including offering:

- Businesses with a route to attract, develop and retain talent whilst addressing skills gaps and improve diversity
- Businesses with access to highly specialised on and off the job training, much of which includes formally recognised and regulated qualifications
- Apprentices a direct route into paid employment with training
- Apprentices with a structured and supported route into, and through, a career pathway

However, when we reflect on these intentions and actions across the creative sector, the recent **State of the Nations³ research undertaken by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) offers the following key findings:**

- Creative industries employers are more familiar with apprenticeships than the wider economy. Despite this, most employers in the sector were unlikely to use apprenticeships in future. 63% said they were unlikely to engage with apprenticeships going forward, compared to 57% across the wider economy.
- Awareness of apprenticeships is nearly universal, but detailed understanding is limited. 99% of creative industries employers had heard of apprenticeships, yet only 46% reported having some knowledge of what they involve.
- Creative industries engagement with apprenticeships remains low and less sustained over time. Only 5% of employers currently have apprentices, with another 3% having offered them in the past. Both these figures are below the national average (11% and 8%, respectively).
- Creative employers are more likely to have been offering apprenticeships for a shorter length of time: 45% of creative employers who offered apprenticeships had done so for 3 years or less, compared to 28% in all industries.

In understanding how the Labour Government might approach and take forward apprenticeships and the broader skills agenda for the creative sector, as well implementing the proposed changes to the 'Apprenticeship Levy' to a broader 'Growth and Skills Levy', Birmingham City University (BCU) and the University of the Arts London (UAL) came together in the Autumn of 2024, and hosted a number of roundtable workshops focused on exploring solutions to drive apprenticeship (and skills) growth in this key UK economic sector, whilst seeking to secure a sustainable supply of technical and professional skills, through high quality provision, that would be sufficiently flexible to aggregate as well as meet business and training provider needs.

This report sets out the findings from these roundtable workshops and presents a series of recommendations that will be put forward to Government as it embarks on delivering its Sector Growth Plans.

³ [Creative industries employers' perspectives on skills initiatives: 2025 - Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre](#)

2. Introduction

Over the past decade, apprenticeships and skills provision has undergone major change in England, with employers placed at the heart of the system but with the responsibilities to develop, manage and maintain a wide range of apprenticeship occupations. In return, and through the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, employers have been enabled to dedicate and utilise apprenticeship (co)funding to cover the costs of training and assessing apprentices.

This approach has seen a rapid rise in the number of individual occupational standards developed right across a range of industry sectors and at a broader range of levels, with occupational standards currently available from entry levels (level 2 and 3), through higher levels (levels 4 and 5), right through to professional levels (levels 6 and 7).

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In assessing whether these benefits have been realised, recent years have seen greater focus on refining occupations, addressing the funding and quality mechanisms, and better understanding the data and metrics through which Government measures success and value for money. This has been done through the respective Apprenticeship funding rules⁴, Ofsted inspection framework⁵, a greater focus on the number of starts and achievements, and how these now are compiled and collated via the Accountability Framework⁶.

In exploring apprenticeships in the creative sector, we can see the following availability of apprenticeship occupations and levels (as of 21 July 2025)⁷:

Apprenticeship standards	All sectors	Creative sector
All levels	727 approved for delivery (of which 58 are paused for new starts)	60 approved for delivery (of which 19 are paused for new starts)
	53 further occupations are in development or at proposal stage	3 further occupations are in development or at proposal stage
Levels 2 and 3	395 approved for delivery (of which 25 are paused for new starts)	30 approved for delivery (of which 11 are paused for new starts)
	13 further occupations are in development or at proposal stage	1 further occupation is at proposal stage
Levels 4 and 5	159 approved for delivery (of which 13 are paused for new starts)	15 approved for delivery (of which 4 are paused for new starts)
	14 further occupations are in development or at proposal stage	Nothing further in development or at proposal stage

⁴ [Apprenticeship funding rules - GOV.UK](#)

⁵ [Ofsted inspections of further education and skills providers - GOV.UK](#)

⁶ [Apprenticeship training provider accountability framework - GOV.UK](#)

⁷ [Apprenticeship search / Skills England](#)

Apprenticeship standards	All sectors	Creative sector
Level 6	109 approved for delivery (of which 9 are paused for new starts)	5 approved for delivery (of which 1 is paused for new starts)
	16 further occupations are in development or at proposal stage	2 further occupations are in development
Level 7	64 approved for delivery (of which 11 are paused for new starts)	10 approved for delivery (of which 3 are paused for new starts)
	10 further occupations are in development or at proposal stage	Nothing further in development or at proposal stage

When considering the number, as well as the breadth of individual occupational standards across the 15 industry sectors, we can see that the creative sector does have a fair number of options open to business to enable them to take on apprentices right across the competence, or skill, levels.

What this, however, masks is the fact that many of these apprenticeships have typically been funded at lower rates than their counterparts in other sectors, with many not including formally recognised qualifications within them (the apprenticeship itself hasn't been seen as a qualification in its own right), or providing the confidence for apprentices and employers needed especially when a progression pathway into and through the education system is sought.

If we examine creative apprenticeships at levels 6 and 7, we see that there are only 15 occupational standards currently available, with 4 of these paused for new starts due to issues with the availability of an End Point Assessment organisation or due to issues with the provision itself, and a further apprenticeship at level 7 formally set to retire from September 2025.

Turning to these 15 professional apprenticeships in more detail, there are only 6 occupations include a formal degree qualification, two at level 6 and four at level 7, with these being:

Occupation title	Level	Integrated or non-integrated	Funding band	Typical duration and EPA period	Date of approval or recent review
Model Maker	6	Integrated	£26,000	36 months + 2 months EPA	July 2024
Broadcast and Media Systems Engineer	6	Integrated	£24,000	36 months + 12 months EPA	March 2025
Outside Broadcast Engineer	7	Integrated	£9,000	12 months + 3 to 6 months EPA	Retired from September 2025
Archaeo-logical Specialist	7	Non-integrated	£15,000	36 months + 8 months EPA	July 2019

Occupation title	Level	Integrated or non-integrated	Funding band	Typical duration and EPA period	Date of approval or recent review
Cultural Heritage Conservator	7	Non-integrated	£27,000	54 months + 9 months EPA	April 2019
Historic Environment Advisor	7	Non-integrated, but Skills England site shows intention to move to integrated following review	£15,000	36 months + 6 months EPA	June 2022

These are the only apprenticeships in the creative sector that support apprentices and employers to co-achieve a degree qualification using the apprenticeship route. The remaining level 6 and 7 apprenticeships are non-degree apprenticeships and are often short in training duration (18 – 36 months).

If we consider the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Economic Estimates⁸ report on employment during 2023, the creative sector relies heavily on a workforce who are more highly educated compared to the broader UK economy, aligning with the high number of professional and associate roles in the sector. Therefore, training routes in the creative industries demonstrate a strong emphasis on higher education, with an estimated 69% of the creative workforce holding a degree or equivalent qualification. The proportion of degree-holders varies across the sub sectors of the creative industries, for example advertising and marketing industries see 71% with degree-level or higher qualifications, compared with 49% in crafts.

The lack of available and relevant apprenticeships which can deliver the technical and professional skills demanded by the creative sector through apprenticeship training pathways therefore remains very limited at present.

In terms of number of apprentices starting and achieving apprenticeship programmes, we can see the following trends for annual starts and achievements for the following academic years (as accessed on 21 July 2025)⁹:

Starts ¹⁰	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Total
All sectors and all levels	322,530	321,440	349,190	337,140	339,580	1,669,880
Creative sector	830	1,570	1,400	1,430	1,430	6,660

Achievements ¹¹	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Total
All sectors	87,920	105,600	118,770	128,290	440,580
Creative sector	370	660	780	890	2,700

⁸ [Economic Estimates: Employment and APS earnings in DCMS sectors, January 2023 to December 2023 - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/economic-estimates-employment-and-aps-earnings-in-dcms-sectors-january-2023-to-december-2023)
^{9, 10, 11} <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/aff4af34-488b-4215-a3d108dd8e33d0bf>

In looking specifically at the creative sector, the starts on programme can be further broken down into higher (level 4 and 5) and professional (levels 6 and 7) levels, as follows:

Starts in the creative sector by creative apprenticeship starts by level of apprenticeship¹²

Academic year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Total
All levels	1240	1990	2010	1920	1940	9100
Level 4 and 5	20	60	120	200	210	610
Level 6	10	10	30	50	50	150
Level 7	10	20	30	80	120	260

When compared to other sectors, the take up of creative apprenticeships remains stubbornly low and under 1% of all apprenticeship starts; when considering the creative apprenticeship total number of starts since 2019/20, only 11% of these have been at the higher technical and professional levels. However, there is a general year on year trend for increased numbers of starts, which is most clearly seen with the level 7 apprenticeship pathways available (degree and non-degree apprenticeships).

The rationale and reasons for low uptake were considered previously in our [Apprenticeships in the creative sector report](#)¹³ (Mba, Suka-Bill, Sudworth) in July 2024, but these can be summarised as:

- A lack of awareness of the range and availability of apprenticeships in this sector, with the vast majority of employers preferring to recruit individuals straight out of full-time education or degree programmes
- Only 5% of employers within the creative sector offer apprenticeships, with these spanning creative occupations as well as those that support business operations, such as project management, business administration, finance and so on
- Employers state that navigating the apprenticeship system remains difficult
- 72% of the creative workforce are already highly qualified, i.e. hold a degree/ higher level qualification (Level 4 or higher) compared with 45% for the whole economy in 2019
- Lack of sustainable training provision at a local and regional level
- Lack of 'high-quality' apprenticeship training provision, but also the expertise within the training provider to deliver the training to the competences required to meet the occupational standards available
- Lack of apprenticeship end point assessment solutions, further delaying and now pausing starts on apprenticeship programmes
- Funding bands for apprenticeship training and assessment are often low, with employers often now asked to 'top-up' funding to enable a viable training offer

Skills England^{14 15}, in considering the 2020/21 academic year, also reports the low uptake of apprenticeships, finding that apprenticeships in the creative industries accounted for only 2.1% of all apprenticeship starts in that academic year, for a sector which represents over 7% of the total workforce. The Department for Education¹⁶ explored some of the reasons for this and found take up was hindered by the delivery costs for small firms, inflexible duration requirements when presented in the project-based, freelance nature of the sector, and a limited market of specialised training providers.

¹² <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/3edd42b8-d6c7-4baa-580f-08ddc5cb2d82>

¹³ [Apprenticeships in the creative sector report](#)

^{14,15} 'Apprenticeship starts and achievements by enterprise characteristics' from 'Apprenticeships in England by industry characteristics', Permanent data table - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK

¹⁶ [Apprenticeships, Academic year 2024/25 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

However, the biggest barrier to uptake is the nature of the creative sector itself with the:

- 30% of the workforce operates on a freelance basis¹⁷, and
- Reliance on often short-term projects and work.

This affects large and medium sized employers but particularly prevents most microbusinesses and freelancers from committing to employing apprentices for the period they would be required to complete apprenticeship training and assessment in full.

We know the demand for high level specialist skills is there in this sector, but apprenticeships as they are currently funded, delivered and assessed, do not yet seem to offer a rounded and accessible solution for individuals or businesses in the creative sector.

This is mirrored in the recently published Creative Industries Employers' Perspectives on Skills Initiatives: 2025¹⁸ report, which also reports a variety of reasons as to why don't offer apprenticeships, including 18% of respondents stating that apprenticeships are not suitable due to the size of their organisation, as well as concerns about inflexibility in the design and delivery of the programmes, which do not allow adjustments to meet the distinct structural features and operating demands of their sector.

Some of these limitations have been recognised more recently in the Government's Modern Industrial Strategy 2025¹⁹ and the supporting 'Creative Industries Sector Plan'²⁰, where the need to '*address new areas for growth, ... developing world-class talent, ... and building on the strong foundations of world-renowned education providers*' is quoted alongside plans to invest in these over the next ten years, through more flexible skills and training packages, which can be taken up far more by large and small organisations alike but also addresses the need to provide options for the large freelancer nature of this sector.

It is here that the work undertaken by Birmingham City University (BCU) and the University for the Arts London (UAL) supports the aspirations of this Government, by providing advocacy related specifically for technical and higher levels skills in the creative sector, and is based on our recent work with a range of stakeholders providing valuable insight, working recommendations and a route to taking forward an approach to test and pilot both national and place-based solutions fit for this rapidly changing sector.

¹⁷ Creative UK's Forging Freelance Futures Report, Amy Tarr (2025): [Forging Freelancer Futures | Creative UK](#)

¹⁸ [Creative Industries Employers Perspectives on Skills Initiatives 2025](#)

¹⁹ [The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

²⁰ [Industrial Strategy: Creative Industries Sector Plan](#)

3. Our approach

In examining these issues in more detail, Birmingham City University (BCU) and the University for the Arts London (UAL) came together in Autumn 2024, following the election of a new Labour Government, to explore how opportunities for industrial and regional growth, changes in apprenticeship policy and the proposed changes to the apprenticeship levy into a Growth and Skills Levy, might support and drive growth in the uptake of apprenticeships and broader skills provision, with a focus on the higher level skills required by the creative sector.

Between October and December 2024, workshops were hosted which were split into three themes, ran twice – once in each region – covering the following themes:

- Increasing technical and professional apprenticeships (and skills training) in the creative sector
- Driving uptake and delivery of technical and professional creative apprenticeships (and skills training)
- Improving the promotion of technical and professional apprenticeships (and skills training) to better attract, develop and retain talent in the creative sector

Each workshop outlined the aims and aspirations to drive growth and uptake of apprenticeship and higher-level skills provision to delegates complemented by invited guest presentations from a range of stakeholders (as seen below), followed by facilitated discussions:

		Presentations at the Birmingham workshop hosted by BCU	Presentations at the London workshop hosted by UAL
Workshop 1	October 2024	Noel Dunne, Creative Alliance	Amy Smith, Framestore
Workshop 2	November 2024	Kirsty Woollaston, Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (now Skills England)	Kirsty Woollaston, Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (now Skills England)
		Richard Clewley, Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (now Skills England)	Richard Clewley, Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (now Skills England)
Workshop 3	December 2024	Kieran Corrigan, Royal Shakespeare Company	Siobahn Williams, UCAS
		Edward Coley, West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)	Phil Atfield, NextGen Skills Academy

Delegates were invited to the workshops by each collaborating university and included employer organisations, leading sector and regional bodies and a small number of training provider organisations, with representatives from higher education, further education and independent training providers. Details of the delegates is provided in Annex A below.

At the end of each workshop the Chair, with support from the event facilitator, summarised the discussions, and several actions were determined with these now supporting the collation and delivery of the following outcomes, discussion and recommendations.

4. Outcomes

Apprenticeships and higher-level skills provision provide significant opportunity, be that business and regional growth, for innovation and collaboration, but also for supporting and delivering a more agile, responsive and highly skilled workforce that is empowered to enter and adapt to the ever-increasing technological challenges that this sector is facing.

In realising these opportunities, our workshops highlighted several approaches that have enabled the aggregation of apprenticeship uptake and sustained growth, facilitated higher quality as well as greater diversity in training provision, all whilst building relationships with training providers, be that independent training providers, colleges or universities, which embrace and focus on 'high quality' and 'specialist' provision to drive availability and sustainability for employers, providers and apprentices alike. Examples of this included the Creative Alliance²¹ 'Umbrella Model' as well as that offered via the NextGen Skills Academy²² in partnership with employers including Framestore.

The commonality to these positive approaches has been employers working in direct partnership with specialist providers to aggregate demand from large, medium and small organisations, where that model to aggregate recruitment, selection and ultimately training provision, enables security for the training provider to invest in staff and facilities, which enables improvements and enhancements to training relevance and responsiveness, ultimately driving high quality and sustainable provision which can then be used to increase the uptake of apprenticeships.

These relationships have also supported training providers to adapt and sustain provision, as they have been enabled to attract and secure staff that can deliver the specialist skills at the levels needed, with this collective approach also driving innovative practice and committed resources up front to establish a long-term relationship with groups of employers, which increase the uptake of apprentices.

In return, this cohesive and collaborative approach has enabled employers and providers to raise awareness of the benefits of apprenticeships to others, who in return can access and invest in talent that enables business growth.

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Outcomes

The creative sector needs to undergo a culture change and be better supported to embrace apprenticeships and skills programmes:

- Communicate and demonstrate that 'investment' (in whatever for) can and does lead to improved business and skills retention outcomes
- Collaborate to attract, recruit, select and train those in the workplace

An Apprenticeship and skills first approach could drive activity and starts on a number of types of programme:

- Opportunity to work with sector, mayoral combined authorities and with government
- Trial programmes
- Opportunity for the Growth and Skills Levy and skills devolution to regions?

²¹ [Home - Creative Alliance](#)

²² NextGen Skills Academy Junior Visual Effects (VFX) apprenticeship: [Information for employers](#)

However, these benefits have not always been fully realised or communicated across the sector, resulting in pockets of specialist provision in only a few sub sectors or regional locations, resulting in the low apprentice uptake that we see in the data presented above.

Our workshop discussions highlighted the need for a significant cultural shift away from relying on the recruitment of those straight out of full-time education or on graduation, to an '*apprentice and skills first*' approach where the entry and retention of talent is the common goal. However, employers were clear: the quality of the training offer remains critical to their ongoing investment in apprenticeships or broader skills packages.

In driving up apprentice growth, the apprenticeship system needs to adapt to the demands and realities of this sector – a sector dominated by microbusinesses and freelancers.

The creative sector does need to develop additional apprenticeship standards alongside complementary skills provision, such as higher technical qualifications (HTQs), to offer high quality routes into good jobs with sufficient adaptability for freelancers to also benefit through modular upskilling. The current funding model for such programmes also needs far greater consideration; be that via the adaptation of the current apprenticeship levy to a broader growth and skills levy²³ (which could support the HTQ model) or access to modular training via the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE)²⁴.



Whilst there was some discussion regarding approaches to training delivery, such as the flexi-apprenticeship programme, where apprentices can be shared across organisations, and in levy sharing schemes, what came through clearly from our workshops was that the current apprenticeship system remains far too inflexible to drive additional investment in apprenticeship and broader skills growth and much more needs to be done to aggregate demand and communicate the options, access to and benefits of the range of different skills offers at technical and professional levels.

Front loading models of apprenticeship delivery were welcomed, as this approach supports the readiness of the apprentice to better perform in the workplace at an earlier stage and can provide some initial specialist training which provides the business with confidence that the apprentice can be a productive member of the organisation, but these modes of delivery remain scarce.

²³ [Prime Minister overhauls apprenticeships to support opportunity - GOV.UK](#)

²⁴ [Lifelong learning entitlement: what it is and how it will work - GOV.UK](#)

This approach, when combined with shorter duration programmes, would also be supported, but many felt that for technical and professional apprenticeships, the duration of many apprenticeships was not a key barrier, but the availability of work to support employment was more of a barrier. The inflexibilities of the current apprenticeship levy and their associated apprenticeship funding rules were found to stymy growth further, with far too much focus on delivering learning each calendar month as opposed to blocks where training provision could be made far more economically viable, and where business can moderate when apprentices and those in training can more appropriately access training away from the peaks of business operation.

The use and of the levy transfer option was also noted in discussions, but so far, the visibility of this option remains low, and levy transfer tends only to be offered by major or multinational organisations, such as the BBC, and the uptake remains low – with more flexible skills solutions as well as apprenticeships required.

In securing apprenticeship and skills growth in the creative sector, we need to explore solutions that will work for employers and freelancers alike, enabling the aggregation of demand that will drive and fund high quality solutions to recruitment, selection and training at technical and professional levels. This must be considered in the context of an emerging Creative Industries Sector Plan but also bring together key stakeholders to bridge the gap between increasing entry routes as well as offering clear progression, up-skilling and re-skilling at the levels that this industry sector demands, thereby driving the delivery of current and future skills, as well as the innovation and investment needed to secure the UK as a global leader.

5. Exploring solutions to deliver technical and professional skills for the creative sector

In our workshops, we explored a number of opportunities, challenges, and gaps in the apprenticeship and skills space and sought to define and outline initial workable solutions that would drive investment in skills growth, addressing many of the gaps and barriers currently faced.

Of critical importance to the delegates who attended our workshops was the need for high quality but flexible provision which supports the development and delivery of technical and professional skills, whilst providers noted that to achieve this there needs to be a route to defining and aggregating industry and sub-sector demand, which in turn would enable the right investment to be made to fund and provide equitable access to high quality sustainable provision, that not only delivers for employers, but also freelancers across the regions as well as nationally.

We see these reflected in the Skills England: Sector Skills Needs Assessment for the Creative Industries²⁵, where the following gaps in provision have been identified:

- Technical training programs, mid-career professional development, and upskilling in emerging areas like green technologies, digital skills, and AI.
- The importance of transferable skills that enable professionals to move between different roles and sectors. In creative industries, there is a sector-wide understanding that practical, hands-on skills and experience are equally valuable to transferable skills, particularly in fields like live events, film and theatre, where technical skills and expertise are paramount to delivering these roles.
- The current training system was felt to overemphasise entry-level positions, when the most acute skills gaps actually exist at mid-career and senior levels. There was a call for more flexible, lifelong learning models that support professionals as they advance in their careers, rather than treating training as a one-time, early career intervention.
- Sector employers also called for more flexible, modular learning approaches that combine practical experience with theoretical knowledge. Their recommendations focus on strengthening partnerships between education providers and industry, while establishing clear professional development pathways. This industry-led approach aims to build a workforce equipped with both technical and soft skills needed for future challenges.
- Making training accessible for the high numbers of freelancers and SMEs working in the sector.

Through our workshops, delegates advised that the sector does need to urgently review, revise and adapt to an '*apprenticeships and skills first*' offer, which would promote, support and drive investment in new skills, as well as attract and take on new talent.

By focusing on sub-sectors and regional priorities, approaches to communicating the value of investing in skills and competence do need to be promoted far more prominently and be supported by businesses to partner with training providers, where the aggregation and operationalisation of recruitment, selection and ongoing management of talent would be of great benefit. This was the approach taken by Framestore and Next Gen Skills Academy in London for Visual Effects apprentices and has been found to be a highly positive experience but does need investment and support to expand to other sub-sectors and to other regions. Similarly, the Creative Alliance is developing an '*umbrella model*' but at a national level, building on their findings, and engaging businesses to understand the broader impacts of skills development, and the return on investment it can have, as well as options to grow business.

²⁵ [Skills England: Sector skills needs assessments - creative industries](#)

It is here that the Government and Industry partnership to deliver a refreshed UK wide **creative careers** service could benefit from these findings and offer greater insight into the career pathways as well as supporting businesses to take on and train talent, either through HTQ or apprentice pathways building that '**apprenticeships and skills first**' approach, thereby driving up the delivery of technical and professional level skills in far greater numbers. This would also support investment in partnerships between industry and training providers, ensuring the talent required and sought really do develop the technical and professional competences required to meet future demand and build business resilience.

Existing models such as the flexi-apprenticeship programme and how the current flexibilities for funding might be best utilised, including the option for levy transfer, were also considered. Our discussions noted that the apprenticeship levy only funds apprenticeships and does not yet expand to the likes of higher technical qualifications (HTQs), which can, if developed appropriately, can offer a more **flexible, modular and 'step on and step off'** approach to the development of competence.

By expanding the scope of the apprenticeship levy (as part of the adaption to the growth and skills levy) to include other forms of skills training, the current restrictions to sharing apprentices and levy funds might further enable investment in skills, and could, through a **Creative Levy Transfer and Exchange** programme provide an opportunity to formalise and scale the approach, supporting far wider SME and freelancer engagement, de-risking investment in skills and facilitating new job and training opportunities for those seeking to secure a future in the sector.

Whilst availability and improvements to the apprenticeship system remained a focus during our workshops, alternative skills provision and funding mechanisms were also explored, seeking solutions that could be less restrictive and offer greater flexibility to employers, to learners themselves, and specifically address the need to support freelancers where there are major skills and delivery gaps.

One approach considered was the opportunity to define and scope a **Creative HTQ**, building on lessons learned from the development of a MedTech HTQ in the West Midlands. We found that when the model was presented by colleagues from IfATE (now Skills England), this approach was warmly welcomed. In particular, it offers a new approach to funding and supporting talent, 'building a resilient, skilled and diverse workforce fit for the future'²⁶, and could find a place at national and regional levels, where a revised Growth and Skills Levy (and the training provision it would facilitate and support) could prove supportive if expanded to cover such a programme. During discussions, what emerged was a Creative HTQ that must be responsive to the creative sectors demand for core and specialist competences, as well as regional strengths, but was also sufficiently flexible to offer freelancers, micro and small businesses the skills needed to tackle new technologies, to secure their Intellectual Property (IP), but also to develop their business models through greater commercial awareness and understanding of, and access to, finance.

For medium and larger sized operations, the flexibilities of the HTQ model proposed were equally attractive, offering a **Skills Passport** solution to occupational competence as routes into and through to occupational competence for new and existing talent, whilst also offering a flexible model for the business to support talent in new areas which would enable and increase productivity and innovation, and offer new approaches to better understand data and information, and explore both national and international markets.

²⁶ [Industrial Strategy: Creative Industries Sector Plan](#)

As an initial proposal, this approach to a more **flexible growth and skills funded HTQ**, built into a **Skills Passport** was offered, but must remain open to businesses of all sizes and to freelancers, offering modular stackable training that is a credible and industry recognised qualification, building core, top-up and specialist competences including:

Core competences	Combined with technical sub-sector specifics (in response to regional and local demand)	Top-up competences
<p>Advanced project management: accounting, financial and budget management, resourcing</p> <p>Business and commercial operations and development: to support freelancer and smaller business operations as well as contracting and commercialisation operations</p> <p>Digital skills: Understanding and applying design and software skills, introduction to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its use in the creative sector</p> <p>Securing commercial and Intellectual Property (IP): including understanding commercial awareness and IP, approaches to securing IP, working with Non-Disclosure Agreements and Confidentiality</p> <p>Stakeholder engagement and networking: collaboration, partnerships and networking</p> <p>Communication and marketing: analysis and routes to market</p> <p>Employment management: including HR and Leadership and Management skills</p> <p>Career and professional development: personal and organisational ownership and responsibilities</p>	<p>CreateTech: Visual Effects (VFX), Artificial Intelligence (AI), Augmented Reality (AR), Extended Reality (XR), robotics, engineering, and data and information management and analytics</p> <p>Film and TV: Screen production, production, content creation, exporting</p> <p>Gaming: Games design, digital technologies, and Augmented Reality (AR)</p> <p>Creative design: Advertising, marketing, media with content creation, multichannel marketing</p> <p>Create cultural (music, performing and visual arts): Museums, theatres, galleries, festivals, performance</p> <p>Fashion and textiles: Smart technologies, supply chain management, sustainability</p>	<p>Specialist and advanced IT skills: Understanding and applying specialist and advanced digital skills, Artificial Intelligence (AI), cyber security</p> <p>Understanding finance opportunities: understanding and accessing finance, including through Mayoral Strategic and Combined Authorities,</p> <p>Understanding opportunities for research and innovation: understanding and accessing and research & development, and innovation opportunities, such as those offered through Innovate UK, Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and Arts Council</p>

This approach was felt to be far more adaptable to the smaller business and freelance nature of this sector, as well as those in training providers, and would very much enable those entering, developing and progressing, and build the competence of individuals to operate and navigate this sector, whilst growing business and offering individuals to establish their own business and build a specialist portfolio career.

Furthermore, with Skills England working in partnership with industry, as well as with the UK research and innovation (UKRI), the ability to understand and determine skills demands towards a real time model will enable the creative HTQ model to adapt and respond to real time labour market intelligence, build supply, strengthen links between stakeholders, and signal a longer-term strategy for curriculum responsiveness. This approach could also respond to adapting creative roles, emerging technologies and future skills gaps, with the HTQ evolving to the demands of the creative economy.

This approach may also unlock inclusive skills programme and apprenticeship design, development and delivery: providing a framework for equity-led design and delivery across regions and creative corridors, particularly aligned to the Arts Council Creative People and Places (CPP)²⁷ priorities, and could further strengthen the cultural and civic mission of the work. There is also opportunity to foreground this especially in CPP-eligible areas and with a focus on racially minoritised and socioeconomically disadvantaged learners.

The advantages of having a Creative HTQ with core and options built into a Skills Passport also open the opportunity to reflect regional industry need and build regional capacity to deliver funded training but also provide some form of consistency across the UK. Such an approach would also enable the aggregation of demand, thereby supporting and driving viable high quality training solutions where local demand can be met, through cutting edge facilities often linked to specialist providers.

Of particular interest to delegates was how this might be **piloted** in the two regions: London and Birmingham, both of which have strong foundations in 'CreaTech', where the need to deliver cross discipline and highly specialist training could deliver the competence needed in *digital and AI technologies, whilst delivering commercial awareness, business and project management, problem solving, and communication skills.*

With the devolution of skills to the Mayoral Strategic Authorities, options to release funding to develop and pilot the delivery of the HTQ programme need to be considered. Furthermore, such a pilot would also capitalise on existing investment, such as that through:

- **CreaTech Frontiers**²⁸ – where Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), part of the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), will drive research and development, business innovation and skills and playing an instrumental role within the creative industries ecosystem across the West Midlands²⁹
- **CreateCentral**³⁰ – where there is a focus on investing in the CreaTech sector in the West Midlands to drive business growth and investment in skills

²⁷ [Creative People and Places | Arts Council England](#)

²⁸ [CreaTech Frontiers | Birmingham City University](#)

²⁹ [Creative industries clusters programme – UKRI](#)

³⁰ [West Midlands Create Growth Programme is open for applications! — Create Central | Home of original storytelling](#)

Such a pilot, if successful, could be considered for expansion to further AHRC-funded creative clusters, to other Mayoral Strategic Authorities, or right across the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) commissioned creative clusters and corridors³¹, and to other sub sectors and regional priorities set out in the Creative Industries Sector Plan, which offers the following insight to subsector and regional priorities³²:

Subsector	Greater London	West Midlands	Other regions	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales
CreaTech			West Yorkshire West of England		Glasgow	
Film and TV			North East West Yorkshire Greater Manchester Liverpool West of England	Belfast	Edinburgh Glasgow	Cardiff
Video games			North East West Yorkshire Liverpool			Cardiff
Music			North East West Yorkshire Greater Manchester Liverpool West of England			Cardiff
Performing and visual arts					Edinburgh	
Advertising, marketing and publishing			North East Greater Manchester		Edinburgh Glasgow	
Design					Dundee Glasgow	
Fashion and textiles			West Yorkshire			
Architecture						

³¹ [£380 million boost for creative industries to help drive innovation, regional growth and investment - GOV.UK](#)

³² [Industrial Strategy: Creative Industries Sector Plan](#)

By tapping into city and regional creative clusters, demand for the development and delivery of high-quality flexible provision that meets national and local demands can be better informed and met, and the delivery of the skills and talent supported through cutting edge facilities often linked to specialist providers.

In seeking to identify and aggregate demand, focus on technical and professional skills, and ensuring high quality and sustainable provision, we must forge skills solutions that build on the Sector Plan, bringing together activities and funding streams to better understand and align the skills demands and funding mechanisms with the drivers for innovation, research and development, as well as across regional clusters, to truly make a step change to the investment in skills, providing greater value for money and drive return on investment.

These opportunities must now be challenged, as the Creative Industries Sector Plan³³ showcases the need for skills reform with the adaptation of the current apprenticeship levy to the 'Growth and Skills Levy', where funding might be released to cover short courses and so on, specifically stating:

'We will go further by introducing short courses in England, funded through the Growth and Skills Levy, in areas such as digital, artificial intelligence and engineering. These will support Industrial Strategy sectors such as in Creative Industries and Advanced Manufacturing from April 2026. We will work with Skills England to determine the courses which will be prioritised in the first wave of rollout and subsequent waves, and how those sit alongside apprenticeships and other training routes. We will work with Skills England to introduce these short courses and consider how to prioritise investment across the programme'.

However, we are cautious in noting that much of the current detail in the skills plans tends to favour those initially entering the workplace rather than focussing on progression, or the potential for up-skilling and re-skilling, and when pushed, there remains a general reluctance towards committing limited funds towards higher technical and professional skills, where the creative sector does demand investment.

That said, with the release of additional details in terms of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE)³⁴, there is a route open to enable investment in more flexible provision, be that individually or co-funded as an alternative. However, the introduction of this does need consideration as it may remain the case that equality of opportunity and access might remain problematic, in that for 'personal' investment there needs to be a proven track record in enabling entry and progression in the sector, especially when compared to apprenticeship and/or traditional graduate entry routes.

³³ [Industrial Strategy: Creative Industries Sector Plan](#)

³⁴ [Lifelong learning entitlement: what it is and how it will work - GOV.UK](#)

6. Discussion

Since we held the workshops held in late Autumn 2024, there have been a number of announcements from the Labour Government in terms of apprenticeship and skills policies, the apprenticeship levy and the funding of level 7 apprenticeship programmes, as well as greater insight into Labour's plans for sector growth in *Invest 2035: The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy* (November 2024)³⁵, alongside the publication of the House of Lords report titled, '[Creative industries: Growth, jobs and productivity](#)' (January 2025)³⁶. These have now been formalised in the Government's Modern Industrial Strategy 2025³⁷ complete with the Creative Industries Sector Plan³⁸.

We have reflected on these alongside the outcomes from the workshops and now offer discussion that builds on the impact of recent policy changes with the aim to align our recommendations to likely future direction for growth and skills policies in this sector.

In taking forward a plan for the growth of apprenticeships and higher-level skills provision in the creative sector, we must start to align activities with the Labour policies for the Creative Industries Sector Plan complete with approaches for sub-sector and regional growth, with the creative sector now being one of the eight growth driving sectors that will be enabled to deliver:

- growth and innovation
- improved regulatory environment
- people and skills, and
- crowding in investment

This is an approach which the Labour Government states will bring together place, partnership and productivity in a 'pro-business' environment, for which both the London and West Midlands areas have a strong regional focus on creative industries^{39,40}.

The Government also recognises that they must also open the door to support micro-businesses and freelancers in particular, as there are nearly 270,000 businesses in this sector, of which the vast majority (93.4% in 2024) were microbusinesses with fewer than 10 employees⁴¹. Self-employment is also far more prevalent in the creative industries than in the UK labour market as a whole, with 28% of jobs in the creative industries being self-employed roles, compared to 14% of all jobs in the UK⁴².

In the House of Lords [Creative industries: Growth, jobs and productivity report](#) from January 2025 report, it notes that the next steps for defining a more focused approach to the creative sector within the industrial strategy remains to be published and published in light of the Spring 2025 spending review, but welcomes the commissioning of various bodies to delivering this including:

- **Industrial Strategy Advisory Council:** The council will make and publish recommendations on the development and implementation of the industrial strategy. Its initial focus will be to support development of the industrial strategy, including developing proposals to break down barriers to growth. The government appointed members to the council in December 2024. The government plans to put the council on a statutory basis.

³⁵ [Invest 2035: the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy](#)

³⁶ [Creative industries: Growth, jobs and productivity](#)

³⁷ [The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

³⁸ [Industrial Strategy: Creative Industries Sector Plan](#)

³⁹ [Invest 2035: the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy](#)

⁴⁰ [Creative industries: Growth, jobs and productivity - House of Lords Library](#)

⁴¹ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, '[DCMS economic estimates: Business demographics, 2024—main report](#)', [5 December 2024](#).

⁴² Department for Culture, Media and Sport, '[Economic estimates: Employment in DCMS sectors, July 2023 to June 2024](#)', 12 December 2024. See '[Economic estimates: Employment in DCMS sectors, July 2023 to June 2024 spreadsheet](#)', 12 December 2024, table 3, ODS file format. Figures are for filled jobs.

- **Creative Industries Taskforce:** Sir Peter Bazalgette and Baroness Vadera have been appointed to lead a taskforce to work on the sector plan. The taskforce will focus on areas such as crowding in investment, access to opportunity, people and skills, and supporting innovation.
- **Government chief scientific adviser and the national technology adviser:** These senior advisers have been tasked to lead a review on “barriers to the adoption of transformative technologies that could enhance innovation and productivity, with a focus on the growth-driving sectors identified by the industrial strategy green paper”. The review’s recommendations are intended to inform the development of the industrial strategy and sector plans. Within this, the interaction between artificial intelligence (AI) and intellectual property and its regulation will also be considered.

The Government is now taking forward its ‘**Creative Cities and Regions, and Creative Industries Clusters**’ model, which will release significant levels of funding via the Arts and Humanities Research Council on behalf of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) as well as through Mayoral Strategic and Combined Authority routes.

Although this approach was originally launched in November 2018, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has most recently committed to creative clusters in the West Midlands and Liverpool to boost **CreaTech** activity and live music activity respectively, signifying this shift towards regional development, the need to work with a define greater place-based partnerships to address technical and professional technical skills packages must remain a priority.

It is here where the role of universities, such as Birmingham City University and the University of the Arts London, will be essential to delivering on the aspirations of the Government, as well as the creative sector and the regions, to aid growth, investment and delivery of technical and professional skills and in the delivery of apprenticeships⁴³.

Lisa Nandy MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, has argued that the launch of Skills England and reforms to the apprenticeship levy would provide the skills needed for “a decade of national renewal” and “better career opportunities for young people”⁴⁴. She believed these reforms, including focusing apprenticeships more on young people, would “set them up to succeed and to help fill the 25,000 vacancies in the creative sector”.

At the recent creative industries growth summit held in January 2025, Ms Nandy announced the government would introduce shorter apprenticeships from August 2025⁴⁵. She said the current, “inflexible” model required an apprenticeship to be at least 12 months long, but for instance a film might take only six months to film. She argued shorter apprenticeships would recognise “the particular needs” of the film sector.

In February 2025, the Government did announce⁴⁶ that minimum apprenticeship duration would now be set at eight (8) and not 12 months, with this change aimed at supporting apprentices to ‘achieve occupational competence more quickly, where that makes sense, for example because they have significant prior learning, or their industry works to a different rhythm’, and that a that a pilot of this approach would be carried out from August 2025, with the level 3 Production Assistants - Screen and Audio (Creative and Design)⁴⁷ occupational standard.

⁴³ [CreaTech Frontiers | Birmingham City University](#)

⁴⁴ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [‘Culture secretary sets out plans to turbocharge the economic impact of British filmmaking’](#), 9 October 2024. For further information about Skills England and a new growth and skills levy to replace the apprenticeship levy, see: House of Lords Library, [‘Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education \(Transfer of Functions etc\) Bill \[HL\]’](#), 17 October 2024

⁴⁵ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [‘Culture secretary speech at the creative industries growth summit’](#), 24 January 2025

⁴⁶ [10,000 more apprentices as government slashes red tape to boost growth - GOV.UK](#)

⁴⁷ [Production assistant - screen and audio / Skills England](#)

Whilst many in the sector have welcomed this flexibility including Ben Rowland, chief executive of the Association of Employers and Learning Providers which states that:

‘Time served is not a measure of quality, and apprenticeships will still be substantial training programmes where apprentices will need to evidence full occupational competency, but the flexibility allows providers and employers to lean into different delivery models that enable accelerated learning’, some ministers have warned that ‘Shortening the minimum time to complete an apprenticeship to eight months risks pushing England further adrift of other leading nations’⁴⁸.

By increasing flexibilities, the Labour Government intends to remove funding from other apprenticeships, namely at level 7⁴⁹, which is where 10 of the 15 professional apprenticeships in the creative sector reside and have started to show real promise in changing attitudes to apprenticeships and in increasing uptake of apprenticeships. Some argue this is needed to focus apprenticeship funding towards those aged 16 to 21, and at the start of their career journey. Whilst there has been some retraction of a full funding cut back for level 7 apprenticeships to support those on these programmes in these age categories, it is highly unlikely that an age specific approach to level 7 apprenticeships will be viable – there will simply be far too few apprentices eligible resulting in provision being removed, and many now argue that this will also reduce social mobility⁵⁰.

In the recent release of the apprenticeship funding rules for 2025 to 2026⁵¹ (May 2025), there are also significant changes that will benefit how all apprenticeships are funded and ultimately delivered, with each standard has its own OJT hours prescribed, rather than the blunt 20% / 6 hours a week, meaning that these hours are no longer linked to duration, and can be delivered irrespective of how long the apprenticeship takes. This approach, if it can be implemented smoothly, will mean that apprenticeship training can be delivered in a more modular fashion and also be far more responsive to working patterns, or ‘rhythms’ of sectors.

Additional changes to assessment policy and practice are also set to explored and brought forward, with greater levels of ‘centre’ based assessment during the delivery of the apprenticeship, rather than all at the end⁵². What is clear is that:

Skills England, the Department for Education and DCMS were now committed to working with creative employers to identify where else the apprenticeship system could be more flexible to support skills gaps in the creative industries, with a review set to be published in Autumn 2025.

⁴⁸ [Short isn't sweet for apprenticeship standards warning](#)

⁴⁹ [Changes to funding for level 7 apprenticeships – Apprenticeship Service Support](#)

⁵⁰ [Level 7 apprenticeships: Disbelief at Phillipson's 21-and-under fudge](#)

⁵¹ [Apprenticeship funding rules 2025 to 2026: summary of changes](#)

⁵² [FE News | The New Apprenticeship Funding Rules: Next Steps for EpAOs](#)

7. Our recommendations

In delivering the growth in apprenticeship and skills provision, enabling greater investment in technical and professional skills via apprenticeship and skills programmes which are fit for the creative sector, we now offer the following six recommendations to drive greater innovation and investment in the regions, by engaging businesses of all sizes (including freelancers) driving economic growth of this key sector of the UK economy.

Recommendation 1: Develop a **Creative Skills Observatory** via Skills England to better understand, inform and act on skills demands and provision in the sector

Through Skills England there is now an opportunity to develop a Creative Skills Observatory which would utilise national data, to identify and track in real-time, the skills demands and trends for the sector at all occupational levels.

In understanding and analysing the data, there are opportunities to strengthen links between Government, employers and training providers, using and sharing the data to inform and produce skills solutions that respond to skills demands and signalling a longer-term strategy for skills development and delivery, as well as curriculum responsiveness.

A real-time labour market intelligence system to track demand for creative occupations, technical and specialist skills such as emerging technologies (e.g. AI, VFX), and readily identifying future skills gaps would also ensure that we can act on areas of critical skills need more readily and where these are needed most.

This observatory would further support policy alignment, funding decisions, education and skills responsiveness, and also drive investment in innovation, research and development, providing value for money and greater return on investment for all stakeholders.

Recommendation 2: Harness creative industry clusters and corridors to drive coordinated approaches to supporting the coordination, development and delivering of skills programmes

Utilising the findings of the Creative Skills Observatory, and by working through Skills England, the Strategic Mayoral Authorities, Creative Clusters and Corridors, provide hubs with the appropriate infrastructure to coordinate, engage and support employers and freelancers alike – bringing together and partnering with training providers, to define and determine the technical and professional skills requirements at both sub-sector and local levels.

With specific activities and resources dedicated through these hubs, creative clusters and corridors will be better aligned and enabled to work with the DCMS, Skills England and the Department for Education, and be able to prioritise and pump prime funding, whilst also extending investment in the technical and professional skills that are in demand now, and design approaches that will meet future local industry need.

Using the infrastructure and resources within the hubs, supported through regional skills devolution, there is opportunity to formalise and scale skills and funding solutions that will support wider SME and freelancer engagement, de-risking the uptake and expansion of apprenticeship & broader skills provision, and focus on investing in skills products offered via regional providers, where the right facilities and where there are opportunities to consider staff exchanges to increase capability, capacity and increase equality of opportunity and access.

Recommendation 3: Design and develop technical and professional apprenticeship and skills provision responsive to sub sector, regional and future skills demand

Utilising the findings of the Creative Skills Observatory, and by working through Skills England, the Strategic Mayoral Authorities, Creative Hubs (Clusters and Corridors), provide routes to designing, developing and delivering new and improved technical and professional level apprenticeships and more flexible skills products, such as new occupational standards and Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs), which respond to identified demands at a sub-sector and at regional levels.

These products must focus on business need, as well as including options for freelancers, and deliver the specialist skills needed for individual occupations, whilst also offering broader skills, such as those related to:

- Technical and specialist skills
- Project and business management,
- Understanding of intellectual property and commercialisation skills,
- Digital and AI technologies and
- Drive innovation

These products must also align with the proposed HTQ model presented earlier in this report, offer step on step off options, and provide a Skills Passport for individuals whereby access to provision can be funded appropriately.

Greater consideration of the equality of opportunity and access must also be considered, ensuring that the skills programmes developed do strengthen the cultural and civic priorities as identified in the Creative People and Places (CPP) programme and offer all those undertaking skills training with the career development recognition and support which enables talent to be developed and retained in this key UK sector.

Recommendation 4: Focus on supporting high quality provision to deliver technical and professional level creative apprenticeships and broader skills products

By designing and developing the right technical and professional skills packages across the sub sectors and regions, we need to ensure that these products are funded appropriately to ensure they offer high quality training, which in turn will enable business to:

- take on apprentices and develop them through technical roles and into highly skilled professionals
- provide routes to upskill and reskill the existing workforce to adapt to the technological and innovation challenges they will face
- open opportunities to enable freelancers to access and undertake training to ensure they too can grow and develop, and seek to partner with others to take advantage of growth opportunities and drive innovation

With more responsive and flexible provision that meets the needs of this sector, training providers will be able to focus on the development of high-quality provision that is viable and sustainable.

Using the regional creative hubs, the opportunity to communicate the value and benefits on investing in skills development and undertaking training can be aggregated and thereby improve value for money and increase the uptake of high-quality skills provision.

By opening provision at these technical and professional levels that is appropriately funded and of high quality, the sector can attract and engage employers, who will be empowered to increase intakes of apprentices or support those in the workplace to progress and upskill, and the option will be there for freelancers to embark on more flexible skills training that is recognised via an industry recognised Skills Passport.

This approach will also empower training providers to invest in the resources and specialist staff to deliver skills programmes that are responsive to, and sufficiently flexible to meet, employer demand, and financially robust and delivered to the high quality required.

There is the additional opportunity to link existing regional growth and subsector programmes (currently aimed at driving research and development, and innovation), to capitalise on and built additional capacity to linking the high tech with the education and skills policies, building relationships and coordination functions right across the spectrum of skills levels and priorities, to drive growth and return on investment.

Recommendation 5: Go further with flexible funding by enabling the Growth and Skills Levy to sustain apprenticeship and other skills provision

Whilst strides to make the Apprenticeship Levy more flexible and responsive to demand have been limited, the Creative Sector needs to challenge Government as it moves forward with a revised Growth and Skills Levy to enable even further flexibility, empowering the sector to reap the benefits for technical and professional apprenticeship and skills provision.

Recent revisions to the Apprenticeship Funding Rules which now enable shorter duration programmes (moving from 12 to eight months minimum durations) and the changes to the 'Off the Job Hours' formulation, are very much welcomed. However, even with these initial flexibilities the training flexibilities needed for apprentices in technical and professional occupations needs to go further to truly support businesses and apprentices where there are often peaks and troughs between major projects and productions.

However, in providing these initial flexibilities, the sector now faces the loss of its level 7 apprenticeship programmes following the removal of funding for those aged 22 and over⁵³. This will have a significant impact on apprentices and employers, and training providers, who will now lose the opportunity to engage in apprenticeships that will drive innovation and the CreaTech agenda forward.

There is a risk that employers who have started to invest in the apprenticeship model, as well as training providers, will now walk away from investing in talent at these levels, reverting to full time school and college leaver and graduate intakes – impacting social mobility in this sector further.

The Growth and Skills Levy therefore must not be for apprenticeship training alone, and we welcome the announcements that some short courses might be funded, but we must go further and drive the need for such funding to cover skills packages right across the creative sector, and at technical and professional levels.

Funding must also be open to freelancers, who cannot access funding at the present time, so the adaptions to the Growth and Skills Levy must deliver for the Creative Sector as a whole, offering far more flexible technical and professional level skills provision.

Through regional creative hubs, there is far more opportunity to offer a **Creative Levy Transfer and Exchange**, which would formalise and scale support, using a digital exchange where large creative employers (e.g. broadcasters, platforms, studios) can redirect unspent levy to SMEs, freelancers and grassroots organisations. This would improve uptake and overcome structural barriers for smaller employers to engage in apprenticeships.

It would also offer a means for all to explore apprenticeships as well as Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs), modular programmes and short courses in one facility, leveraging greater investment and return on investment for all. Through the creative hubs, options to explore how the introduction of the Lifelong learning Entitlement (LLE) can benefit the sector can also be considered.

⁵³ [Changes to funding for level 7 apprenticeships – Apprenticeship Service Support](#)

Recommendation 6: Enable employers (including freelancers) to adopt an 'Apprenticeship and Skills First' approach

The strong business case and broader benefits to increase business investment in technical and professional skills and apprenticeship programmes is not currently well communicated nor contextualised to the Creative Sector.

Pockets of good practice and collaboration are few and far between, and the return on investment messaging remains poorly communicated, too often on a case-by-case basis.

Employers need to clearly and readily understand the apprenticeship and skills products on offer, how to access, fund and manage these programmes in partnership with training providers, to truly benefit from investing in these programmes to attract and retain talent that will drive growth.

Far more must be done to enable businesses, and freelancers, to undergo a significant culture change that means they can adopt an 'apprenticeship and skills first' approach.

By utilising the approach to regional creative hubs, supporting employers and freelancers to identify, access and fund high quality flexible training provision we can start to approach a step change in employers and freelancers taking forward an 'Apprenticeship and Skills First' approach.

It will only be by addressing the recommendations presented above that this approach will become the norm, with the aspiration and purpose of driving 'talent investment' through fit for purpose, relevant and responsive high-quality training, which must be and remain the overarching goal to mobilise employers to take on, grow and invest in talent.

Our ask

In implementing the DCMS and Skills England led **Creative Sector Skills Forum**, our ask is that technical and professional skills remain a priority, our solutions are considered for piloting in our regions, and that, alongside others, we take our place in supporting an approach that will deliver for this priority sector.

Whilst we offer these recommendations, we also see opportunity for our institutions to play an active role in developing and delivering solutions in partnership with Government, employers (including micro-businesses and freelancers) and other training providers.

Both Birmingham City University and the University of the Arts London want to continue to advocate for and contribute to, the right technical and professional skills solutions needed for the Creative Sector, tapping into our relationships at national and regional levels.

Our institutions seek to explore with Government and the Creative Sector Skills Forum opportunities to co-lead and pilot a **National Creative Apprenticeship Innovation Hub**, a dedicated technical and professional skills innovation space, reinforcing our commitment as regional partners and leaders, to shape skills and system reform. This approach could be dedicated to prototyping new delivery models, supporting provider capacity, and aligning the outcomes and recommendations of this report with the evolving demands of the creative economy.

We can and must ensure that we can continue to attract world class talent, offer routes into and through this priority sector, developing and supporting business to access world renowned facilities and to ensure we play our part in increasing innovation and improving productivity.

8. Annex A: Delegates at each regional workshop

Staff from each university were in attendance across the six workshops, and included:

- Professor David MBA, Vice Chancellor, Birmingham City University
- Professor Zey Suka-Bill, Dean of Screen, London College of Communication, University of the Arts London
- Dr Caroline Sudworth, STEM Explored Ltd (facilitator)

Across each workshop, the following delegates attended:

	Delegates at the Birmingham workshop hosted by BCU	Delegates at the London workshop hosted by UAL
Workshop 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juliet Baillie, Historic England • Jagpreet Bhambhra, IfATE (now Skills England) • Noel Dunne, Creative Alliance • Marie Garnett, NAJ • Sara Harris, Birmingham City University • Rhoda Numan, Gymshark • Kate Tague, BOA • Professor Zey Suka-Bill, University of the Arts London • Kirsty Woollaston, IfATE (now Skills England) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nicola Drury, Amazon • Noel Dunne, Creative Alliance • Arit Eminue, Arit Eminue • Sally Garner-Gibbons, Chichester College • Neil Hatton, UK Screen Alliance • Maighread Hegarty, Independent Consultant (University Vocational Awards Council) • Wesley Lawson, United College Group • Ruby Nightingale, University of the Arts London • Amy Smith, Framestore • Sabrina Smith-Noble, Morley College London • Sarah Waterman, Royal Opera House • Tim Weiss, Screen Skills • Kirsty Woollaston, IfATE (now Skills England)
Workshop 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juliet Baillie, Historic England • Jennifer Barr, IfATE (now Skills England) • Jagpreet Bhambhra, IfATE (now Skills England) • Richard Clewley, IfATE (now Skills England) • Marie Garnett, NAJ • Natalie Griffiths, RBH • Sara Harris, BCU • Jacqui O'Hanlon, RSC • Clare Richardson, McCann • Kate Tague, BOA • Kirsty Woollaston, IfATE (now Skills England) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lindsey Barrass, Global Media Enterprise • Richard Clewley, IfATE (now Skills England) • Harry Cole, Creative UK • Noel Dunne, Creative Alliance • Kath Geraghty, National Theatre Skills Centre • Maighread Hegarty, Independent Consultant (UVAC) • Siobhan Williams, UCAS • Kirsty Woollaston, IfATE (now Skills England) • Representative, City of Westminster College

Workshop 3	Delegates at the Birmingham workshop hosted by BCU	Delegates at the London workshop hosted by UAL
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juliet Baillie, Historic England • Jagpreet Bhambhra, IfATE (now Skills England) • Edward Coley, WMCA • Keiran Corrigan, Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) • Noel Dunne, Creative Alliance • Natalie Griffiths, RBH • Sara Harris, BCU • Ollie Pardom, McCann • Zey Suka-Bill, UAL • Toby Watley, BMAG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sally Garner-Gibbons, Chichester College Group • Kath Geraghty, National Theatre Skills Centre • Sasha Hanratty, ITV • Mandy Crawford Lee, University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC) • Kate Ridley Moy, Department for Education (DfE) • Maighread Hegarty, Independent Consultant (UVAC) • Wesley Lawson, City of Westminster College • Amy Smith, Framestore • Sara Whybrew, BFI • Siobhan Williams, UCAS • Aimee Barby, Global Media • Sarah Waterman, Royal Opera House