



# York Creative Industries' Strategy

2019 – 2024



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**"The UK's roaring creative industries made a record contribution to the economy in 2017, smashing through the £100 billion mark."**

DCMS-November 2018

## Executive Summary

The creative industries in York are growing and producing some truly amazing work. There is a sense of excitement and 21st century zeitgeist in the city, with a succession of significant accolades and projects being landed in York and the wider region over the last couple of years : Creative Media Labs – Arts and Humanities Research Council project, Digital Creativity Labs, Channel 4 moving to Leeds and York's UNESCO designation. Yet currently, many creative achievements remain unseen. As a consequence of this, there is a lack of understanding of the challenges, priorities and needs of the creative industries, e.g. the issues of workspace, new talent acquisition and retention and higher levels of business support. Through a focussed, joined up and strategic approach, the creative sector can be better served by raising the visibility of the creative strengths and assets in the city over the next 5 years.



**York is a forward thinking, innovative city with a unique combination of strengths that include**

- High knowledge capital.
- UNESCO City of Media Arts Designation.
- International relationships, particularly through the UNESCO Creative Cities Network.
- Evidence of extensive creative and digital activity.
- Strengths in Heritage that can and have utilised
- Interpretive Technologies.
- Digital Creativity Labs, the Creative Media Labs and other specialist centres.
- A rich range and availability of cultural venues and activities.
- Two excellent universities and colleges and a large diverse student population.
- A reputation for innovation and ideas.
- A programme of creative festivals : Aesthetica, York Mediale and The Festival of Ideas.

These components can contribute to York being acknowledged as a successful 'magnet city', a place that attracts the creative industries and wealth generators. More of them need to be encouraged to do business here.

To ensure that York does not get left behind as other cities flourish, it needs to take advantage of the dynamism and potential of its creative industries by focussing support for the creative and digital sectors. In addition, to ensure that York competes at the forefront of creative technological development, the city should support the emergence of immersive technology businesses that have started to cluster in the city.

While this is a high yield sector, forecast to generate over £1 billion in sales in the UK by the end of 2018, it is still an embryonic sector, so will need support, particularly around "access to infrastructure and technological expertise" to develop further and grow.

If the Strategy is followed, York has the potential to lead the way in both immersive technology and the new wave of screen based technologies and truly set itself apart as a city that nurtures cutting edge innovation.

# Introduction

York is a vibrant city that attracts visitors from around the globe to take in its breath-taking sites – but it is much more than a beautiful façade. The city is also home to inventive, pioneering businesses that create internationally renowned work. The work of these organisations sets York apart as a 'modern day heritage city', a place that celebrates its past while embracing the future.

This Creative Industries' Strategy, the first for the city, represents the voice of over 140 creative businesses, both universities, the Guild of Media Arts and other major stakeholders in the city. It reflects their needs now and their ambition for the future. It is hoped that this document will illustrate the wonderful opportunity this sector creates for York if it is nurtured.

York was recently chosen as the best place to live in the UK by the Sunday Times for this very reason. It was stated that "York today is a mini metropolis, with cool cafés, destination restaurants and innovative companies — plus the fastest internet in Britain." York may be a smaller sized city but it has audacious ambitions. However, the York Economic Strategy 2016 to 2020 ('Economic Strategy') indicates that, if no interventions are made, a likely future scenario for York's economic growth would focus mainly around the tourism and hospitality sectors. With almost 7 million tourists each year, these sectors are incredibly important to the city but they are not classed as 'high growth' and do not produce high levels of GVA for the economy of the city.

The national dialogue about the contributions of the creative industries (defined by DCMS, includes a diverse range of creative sectors such as interactive technology, screen-based industries, games, design and software development) would indicate that any failure to acknowledge the sector is short-sighted.

The numbers, as detailed in this paper, demonstrate time and again that the creative industries are high growth, yield significant economic turnover, employ highly-skilled workers and are not prone to the risk of automation. Beyond their direct economic value, they also promote both entrepreneurialism and 'intrapreneurialism', encourage modern thinking and attract young talented people to the city.

The creative industries are "at the heart of the UK's competitive advantage" and "represent a major strategic opportunity", according to the Government's Industrial Strategy and Creative Industries Sector Deal.

Unlike other cities of a similar size, York is fortunate to have a growing 'creative cluster' (an aggregation of creative businesses), one that has grown organically in spite of a lack of robust infrastructure or sustained prioritisation from the city. This Cluster comprises businesses that have made a real investment in York and have produced quality work that is recognised nationally and internationally.

Additionally, York is one of only ten UK cities in the UNESCO Creative Cities network and is the UK's first and only city with a UNESCO City of Media Arts designation. There are 14 Media Arts designated cities across the world in total.

The city also hosts international festivals that showcase cutting edge development in media arts, e.g. the York Mediale and the Aesthetica Short Film Festival. York Mediale is the only international festival focussing on digital art

and creativity in the UK. The Aesthetica Short Film Festival is BAFTA accredited and is now in its 8th year. This status and these festivals bolster the city's international reputation as well as providing a viable and valuable platform to promote the great work happening here and generating global collaborations.

The city has a substantial opportunity through its creative industries to differentiate itself from other cities – to capitalise on the creative cluster and create a reputation as a city where ideas are nurtured and advanced. With the right effort and investment, York could easily evolve as a vibrant 'magnet city' attracting investors and start-ups to relocate and develop here and make a significant economic contribution to the city. This would also future-proof York by further diversifying its economic breadth capitalising on a fast growing sector that can produce a high level of GVA.

To achieve this however, York's creative industries cannot continue to exist in 'a vacuum', where businesses operate here in spite of the challenges as opposed to because of the benefits. The pull of cities who better support their creative people – e.g. London, Manchester, Leeds, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Liverpool, Bristol, and Cambridge – is constant and without the proper focus and support, York could lose its own creative companies to them.

There are four main areas where support is most needed in York and that will be addressed by this strategy :

- (1) Workspace
- (2) Talent Pipeline
- (3) Business Development
- (4) Visibility

# Vision and Strategic Objectives

The aim of the creative industries' strategy is to build on York's existing strengths and to deliver a bold, ambitious plan that will position the city as **one of the creative powerhouses in the North of England.**

It will be a cornerstone of the York Economic Strategy and the commitment to "a fresh loud statement of cultural and visual identity."

The strategy consists of four key development areas, each of them to be underpinned by a detailed action plan that will be finalised in early 2019. The development themes are:

- 1. Workspace**
- 2. Talent Pipeline**
- 3. Business Development**
- 4. Visibility**

At the heart of the strategy is a 5 year action plan that by the end of 2024, will:

- Create a sector that is worth £195 million to the York economy (an increase of 32% from 2015/2016 when the economy was valued at £140.4 million).
- Increase the number of creative and digital businesses in the city by 10% to 620 (from a base of 558, calculated from a mapping project of the creative industries undertaken in 2018. Data mapped within the city's ring road).
- Ensure that NESTA recognises York as a 'creative cluster' and one of the most significant creative 'second cities' in the UK.
- Place York as one of the leaders within the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (currently numbering 180 cities across the world) through frequent and active collaboration and relationship building, particularly with the UNESCO City of Media Arts designated cities.
- Encourage creative businesses to feature strongly in York's forthcoming major developments: York Central, The Guildhall and The Castle Gateway project.
- Assist the two universities in developing their creative offering and reputation as well as their engagement with employers within the creative industries sector.
- Contribute significantly to the economic development, growth and prosperity of the city.

# 1. Workspace

Ambition: A city with a wide range of creative places to work, experiment and play



**Needs:**

York needs more collaborative workspaces in the city, through which communities of creative professionals can come together. Well-designed workspaces not only encourage creativity but can also attract new businesses and new clients. For these spaces to be effective, the infrastructure also needs to be robust. Issues around Wi-Fi 'not spots' and affordability must be addressed to ensure that creative professionals do not go elsewhere for better connectivity and financial feasibility. In addition, creative professionals need a public-facing element to their workspace so that the visibility of their businesses can be amplified to residents and visitors.

**Recommendations and Actions:**

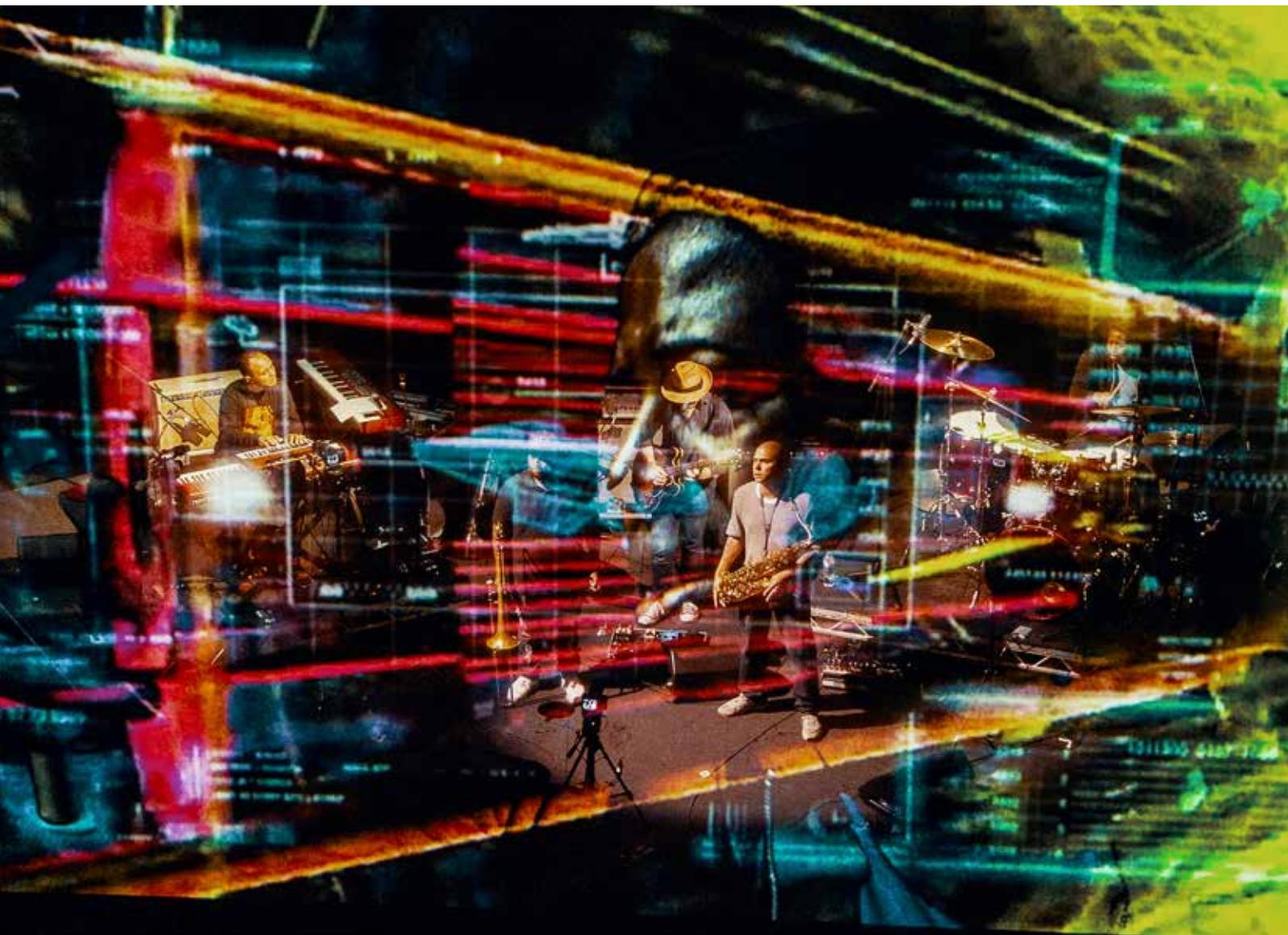
- Approach city landlords about incentivising the use of empty shops as 'pop-up' spaces for creative businesses.
- Address Wi-Fi concerns and lobby to ensure the promise of a 'Gigabit city' is delivered across the whole city and to businesses as well as residents.
- Support CYC's place-making agenda through contributing creative ideas and possibilities, e.g. future development discussions for York (including York Central, Castle Gateway and the Guildhall).
- Assist with projects developing workspace in the city e.g. the Creative Centre bid (York St John University) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Creative Media Labs project (University of York).
- Ensure incubator and accelerator spaces are supported and developed e.g. Creative Media Labs, Science Park incubator.
- Assist the creative industries in developing a 'creative hub and spoke model' – a suite of collaborative, public facing places with individual attributes.

**Overall Outcomes:**

- Better connection and collaboration between creative businesses through the development of a hub and spoke model.
- More incubator and accelerator space in the city to develop new ideas and experiments, to generate innovation, build relationships, foster existing communities and retain talent.
- More workspace in the city for the entire lifecycle of creative businesses.
- Raise the profile of the creative industries locally through a more visible presence.

## 2. Talent Pipeline

Ambition: A city that attracts talent in



**Needs:**

NESTA "underscore the importance of universities as anchor institutions in emergent creative clusters, particularly in the North of England." There needs to be a better link between the universities and businesses in the creative industries to fully take advantage of the universities' knowledge capital. But this should not be limited to developing and retaining talent at Higher Education levels, it should include attracting talented work professionals as well as students from Further Education institutions (e.g. York College) and younger. To start the process of talent development even before university age, the city should look at linking schools with the creative industries to a much greater extent.

**Recommendations and Actions:**

Link the Universities with employers, including the following:

- Support the development of 'business boot camp' style events to educate students on general and sector-specific business skills.
- Develop events which bring students into contact with employers and encourage students to attend creative industry events.
- Encourage peer-to-peer support.
- Support, promote and develop freelancing pools, programmes, networks and job boards to better connect creatives.
- Produce a local creative-digital jobs board.
- Ensure the available help and advice for students, young creatives as well as more established businesses and freelancers is visible and widely available.
- Understand talent supply and demand within the sector.
- Develop and deliver programmes like the 'Digital Adventurers Programme' to link school children with the creative industries.
- Link with established talent development franchises (e.g. Pint of Science).

**Overall Outcomes:**

- Higher graduate retention with more students staying here and growing with the city, or coming back to the city after a period of development.
- Increased number of creative start-ups in York.
- Having a better linked up network of freelancers so that businesses can easily find subject specialists for projects and enable a flexible approach to working.

## 3. Business Development

Ambition: A city with a strong, more joined-up creative network



**Needs:**

For small businesses, networking is vital, as meeting like-minded individuals or organisations can help with best practice sharing, equipment sharing, problem-solving and client generation. Furthermore, it can address issues of isolation through making businesses feel more supported as a part of a community.

According to NESTA, policymakers can help "by supporting local business networks, and bridging the gap between communities and groups with complementary resources and capabilities."

Also, many businesses do not appreciate how Research and Development (R&D) and Intellectual Property (IP) are exploitable and protectable assets, and this is having a negative impact on their business development.

**Recommendations and Actions:**

- Create R&D and IP courses and toolkits.
- Create development workshops for creative businesses (including accessing finance).
- Develop a 'creative industries specific' pitch event (similar to Make It York's 'Stand and Deliver' event).
- Develop a mentoring programme for both students and working professionals (including pop-up surgeries for continued support).
- Encourage, link and support the sector-specific networking groups and events already in place to link creatives with each other as well as potential clients.
- Develop a series of collaborative networking events across the sector that enable the spread of best practice knowledge for the sector, both in and out of York.
- Create and enable research projects that lead to creativity and innovation.
- Provide business development for start-ups as well as more established businesses.
- Incentivise suppliers to develop packages for York creative professionals.

**Overall Outcomes:**

- Networking that links up the sector leading to better and more frequent collaborations.
- Sustained workflow for York creatives by having better links with potential clients.
- Creative businesses taking more advantage of their R&D and IP.
- Mentoring programmes both for students and working professionals.
- Creative businesses having better access to finance.

## 4. Visibility

Ambition: A city that is known as a 'hybrid of heritage and hi-tech' far and wide.

**Needs:**

York needs to develop a compelling story to raise the profile of its creative cluster as a whole, through generating a strong association between York and cutting edge creativity and innovation. This will help to attract and retain new skilled talent as well as bring in new investors to the city. York should be seen as a creative 'hot spot', so the city must raise awareness around creative successes, achievements and accolades as and when they happen.

A photograph showing the silhouettes of an audience in the foreground, looking towards a large screen displaying the TEDx York logo. The logo consists of 'TEDx' in red and 'York' in black. Below it, the text 'x = independently organized TED' is displayed in black. A smaller version of the 'x York' logo is visible on a stage or screen in the background.

**TEDx York**  
x = independently organized TED

**Recommendations and Actions:**

- Develop a PR and communications strategy for the creative industries in York.
- Map the creative industries in York and benchmark what exists now.
- Create an aggregated platform of the sector's activities, including:
  - A calendar of events of what is happening within the sector.
  - Regular promotion of York's creative businesses and their successes.
  - A 'bucket list' creative e-Newsletter that is curated.
- Develop the PR and Communications around the creative industries, including:
  - Develop media relationships with sector specific news outlets.
  - Produce 'creative stories' publications, including York-based creatives and those from York working elsewhere.
  - Create 'Top 50 Innovators' initiative.
  - Encourage York creative businesses to enter international competitions; e.g. UNESCO Creative Cities project calls.
- Develop a 'creative ambassador programme' to raise York's aspirations and expand its reputation regionally, nationally and internationally.
- Use the city's UNESCO City of Media Arts designation more assertively, including:
  - Developing relationships and working more with the other UK creative cities.
  - Developing relationships and working more with the other international Media Arts cities.
- Support, develop and utilise innovative international events (e.g. York Mediale, Aesthetica) as well as the Universities and international gatherings to inspire and raise the profile of the sector.
- Make more use of physical/public-facing storytelling mechanisms (e.g. posters, public art, projection mapping) to raise the profile of York's creative businesses to those living and working in the city.
- Maximise the opportunity of conferences both by bringing creative industry-specific ones to York and showcasing York businesses at those further afield.
- Create regional links with content and stories, including working with the Universities to showcase research and develop stronger links between business and academia.
- Develop the reputation and reach of York throughout the region, nation and world.

**Overall Outcomes:**

- York to be recognised universally as a creative city and an important part of Yorkshire's creative cluster, therefore receiving higher profile in any subsequent analysis of and publications on creative clusters.
- Better knowledge of York's creative sector locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.
- Develop the reputation of York as a 'creative city', blending heritage with hi-tech innovation.
- Showcase York's creative and digital achievements internationally.
- Encourage local York residents, businesses and other stakeholders to be ambassadors for the sector.

## **The challenge:**

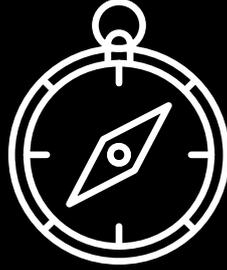
**In order to realise the vision and ambition for the next five years, work needs to take place collaboratively, quickly and with ambition. The city needs to be bold and brave. It needs to reach out to the UNESCO Creative City Network and maximise the opportunities of York's unique position as the UK's only City of Media Arts. Now is the time for York to become a leader for innovation in media arts and creative technologies in the UK. Now is the time for York to be audacious.**





**The following businesses and city stakeholders have helped to shape this strategy, have provided first hand evidence and have endorsed the document as an accurate reflection of their opportunities and challenges in the city now and for the next 5 years.**

Aesthetica  
Ay-pe  
Beetroot Box  
Biomimicry UK  
Blank Canvas  
Bright White Ltd  
Buttercrumble  
Creative Media Labs  
Coachwork Studios  
Damson Audio  
Digital Creativity Labs  
Guild of Media Arts  
Hewitt & Walker  
Ideas Group  
Inkblot Films  
Into Mania LTD  
Isotoma  
Janette Ray  
Jim Poyner Photography  
KMA Associates  
Keith Findlater Photography  
LazenbyBrown  
Lotte Inch Gallery  
Make It York  
My Future York  
NCEM  
Netsells  
New Moon Studios  
Nik Morris Associates  
Orillo Films  
Over and Above  
Pica Studios  
Piksel  
Ravage Productions  
Red Bonsai  
Red Publications  
Revolution Games  
Rolling Snowballs  
Science City York  
Screen Yorkshire  
Simon Guffogg  
Skippko  
Spark York  
Stage One Productions  
Symbolism Studios  
Talk Talk  
The Distance  
Thinking Studios  
United by Design  
University of York  
VIDAVEO  
Viridian FX  
YNYER LEP  
York @ Large  
York BID  
York Creatives  
York College  
York Explore  
York Mediale  
York Metrics  
York Mix  
York Museums Trust  
York Science Park  
York St John University



**For the Supporting evidence and  
latest information on the progress  
of the strategy go [scy.co.uk](http://scy.co.uk)**

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Visit us at 1 **Museum St, York YO1 7DT**

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