Future avenues for createch

Insights and recommendations
from rapid evidence review and industry engagement

Dr Emily Hopkins, Dr Vicki Williams and Bernard Hay
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Executive summary

Cross-cutting recommendations

Createch is a dynamic and highly innovative part of the UK economy spanning both the Creative Industries and Digital and Technology Sectors – two of eight growth sectors identified in the UK Government's Industrial Strategy. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Creative Industries Sector Plan further highlights createch's importance to economic growth. As such, it is vital that a coherent and consistent definition of createch is agreed to bring clarity and measure progress.

The delivery of Government-backed support for createch will require further collaboration across Government Departments, including The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) and the Department for Education (DfE), working closely with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). The Government should proactively use its convening power with industry and sector organisations to encourage collaboration.

As jobs of the future which utilise creative and digital skills, coherent and clear pathways intro createch careers (including education and upskilling opportunities) will be critical for achieving long-term growth.

Clear areas of strength are emerging across the createch sector, including IP-led exports and responsible technology adoption and innovation, where the UK has the potential to build a global advantage. These areas should be central to cross-departmental UK Government policy and delivery. Around Artificial Intelligence (AI), there is an opportunity for the UK to further explore 'Small Language Models' (SLM) as a central createch high-growth use case.

Government Departments and wider stakeholders such as UKRI, the Creative Industries Council (CIC) and Mayoral Authorities should prioritise the design and delivery of createch commercialisation interventions and IP-backed finance models, which should be supported by clear monetisation and licensing frameworks.

This short report provides recommendations gathered from a series of participatory workshops and is intended to inform the development of policies to maximise the growth potential of createch. They are starting points for further development through the delivery of the UKRI Creative Industries R&D Strategy and the DCMS Creative Industries Sector Plan.[1]

The report builds out of previous work undertaken by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC) and the CoSTAR Network, as well as recommendations set out in the DCMS-funded Royal Anniversary Trust report on CreaTech – which outlined skills, investment into R&D, building capability, access to R&D tax reliefs, and new funding mechanisms in createch as areas for policy development.[2]

A rapid research and engagement exercise was hosted by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and DCMS between November 2025 and January 2026, delivered in partnership by Creative PEC and CoSTAR Foresight Lab. The workshops were attended by industry and academic experts working across R&D, innovation and investment to explore avenues for maximising the growth potential of createch. The report draws on primary research sourced from the workshop engagement as well as findings from secondary sources gathered through a rapid evidence review. Additional materials including the evidence review and the methodology design have been published alongside this report by Creative PEC and CoSTAR Foresight Lab.

This work responds to the DCMS Creative Industries Sector Plan commitment to make the UK the best place in the world to start and grow a createch business.[3] The report refers to 'createch' as it is defined in the Sector Plan, as the combination of "creative innovation and cutting-edge technology to generate novel products, services and experiences".[4] Whilst acknowledging the Sector Plan's reference to the "emerging 'createch' sector", as is evidenced by the recommendations set out here, further work is needed to develop a consistent and broadly recognised approach to defining, measuring and assessing createch to build common understanding of the different aspects and dynamic nature of this area of the UK economy.

1   DCMS (2025) Creative Industries Sector Plan
2   Easton et al. (2025) CreaTech How the fusion of emerging technologies and the Creative Industries can transform the UK's approach to skills, innovation and business
3   DCMS (2025) Creative Industries Sector Plan
4   ibid

Introduction

Createch is defined in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Creative Industries Sector Plan as the combination of "creative innovation with cutting-edge technologies to develop novel products, services and experiences."[5] The Sector Plan outlines a commitment to making the UK the best place to start and grow a createch business.[6] Taking inspiration from earlier achievements in 'fintech' (financial technology), createch is set to harbour future disruptive potential, with createch businesses recognised as key economic drivers of growth in the Creative Industries sector.

Existing research shows that createch businesses are R&D intensive, leading in the development of new technologies and their application. They demonstrate similar growth trajectories to other technology businesses across the economy.[7] [8] [9] The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC) has previously defined createch businesses as those "where the development of new technologies or the adaptation of existing technologies in a novel way is a significant part of their business, and where creative businesses do not include creative businesses working exclusively in the IT/software sub-sectors".[10]

The future growth potential of createch has also been recognised by the recent £75.6m UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) investment into CoSTAR, the UK's creative technology R&D infrastructure network. There have been a further series of commitments set out by the UK Government to accelerate innovation-led growth by increasing public and private investment into R&D, including through the DCMS Creative Futures Fund and a new wave of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Creative Industries Clusters.

A rapid research and engagement exercise was hosted by the AHRC and DCMS in response to a Creative Industries Sector Plan commitment for UKRI to "bring together stakeholders to tackle barriers and accelerate createch growth, reporting to DCMS and Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) ministers with evidence-based recommendations".[11] Creative PEC and the CoSTAR Foresight Lab worked in partnership to deliver this qualitative research.

5   DCMS (2025) Creative Industries Sector Plan
6   ibid
7   Mateos-Garcia, J. (2021) An analysis of Createch R&D business activity in the UK
8   Siepel et al. (2022) Understanding createch R&D
9   Mateos-Garcia, J. (2021) Mapping the R&D landscape for creative technologies
10 Siepel et al. (2022) Understanding createch R&D
11 DCMS (2025) Creative Industries Sector Plan

In addition, Creative PEC undertook a rapid evidence review to identify present opportunities and challenges for createch growth in the UK. The workshop format was then built around futures and policy foresight methodologies designed by the CoSTAR Foresight Lab,[12] responding to themes mapped out in the DCMS Creative Industries Sector Plan, as well as a series of questions posed by the DCMS Creative Industries policy team. The workshops and report will also inform future research by Creative PEC and CoSTAR Foresight Lab.

Workshop methodology

The structure of the workshops was built out of an established CoSTAR Foresight Lab methodology based around future scenario co-design, to distil recommendations that could enable desired futures. The workshop format was adapted to address key themes across the Industrial Strategy, the Creative Industries Sector Plan and specific questions posed by DCMS policymakers.

Participants were split into six thematic groups, and were tasked with the following:

Establishing a 2035 vision to provide an anchor point
Participants were tasked with establishing a short, aspirational vision related to the group theme that reflected what they would like to see for createch in 2035, using a series of provided prompts to aid thinking.

Backcasting – working backwards from the desired future to identify steps needed to achieve the vision
Backcasting refers to the process of working backwards from a desired future state to identify the steps, decisions and conditions needed to get from today to the desired future. Participants were provided with a worksheet to capture key opportunities, barriers, relevant actors and evidence needs.

Designing a pilot intervention around the group theme
Drawing on key elements of the backcasting exercise, groups were invited to co-design a pilot activity that could be rolled out in the next 12 months, reflective of a tangible intervention to act as a first step towards the desired future.

Shortlisting actions and recommendations for group discussion
Participants were tasked with pulling out key insights to take back to the room for the main plenary discussion. Following the workshops, findings across the groups were synthesised and developed into a series of policy recommendations and priorities for future research.

The report reflects the findings from the two workshops undertaken between December 2025 and January 2026, alongside the gathering and analysis of secondary evidence through a rapid review.

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12 For further information on the development of the workshop futures and foresight methodology, see complementary briefing paper 'Future visions for creative technology'. See also 'Introduction to Moments' and 'Scenarios in Creative Convergence': Resources | CoSTAR

Report structure

This report is structured around six central recommendation areas:

1. Address the scale-up funding challenge for createch businesses

2. Continue to prioritise UK createch content within future IP developments and trade agreements

3. Prioritise createch skills and education pathways

4. Further leverage createch infrastructure to drive technology adoption

5. Create inclusive, participatory and accessible routes into the createch workforce

6. Boost createch commercialisation and spinout opportunities

Each thematic section begins with two illustrative workshop outputs: a speculative 2035 vision and a future pilot, developed by workshop participants as part of the facilitated exercise. Following this, the sections summarise existing evidence alongside workshop discussions and insights from participants, before closing with a list of identified policy recommendations and areas for future research, evidence and R&D building out of the primary workshop insights.

The insights and recommendations outlined in this report act as provocations for further industry engagement and consultation. Additional materials on existing createch evidence, research and methodology design have been published alongside this report by Creative PEC and CoSTAR Foresight Lab.

1. Address the scale-up funding challenge for createch businesses

Illustrative workshop outputs

2035 vision and long-term success
Workshop participants noted the need for a cohesive approach to createch funding and finance opportunities to address the scale-up funding challenge, which would be anchored upon the provision of adequate growth finance for createch. There would be a joined-up funding and investment approach across public and private investors – including UKRI R&D and innovation funding and public finance support via public investment institutions like the British Business Bank. Private investors would be well-informed about createch business and IP models, with a greater range of IP-backed financial products available to support high growth potential createch businesses.

Futures pilot design – establish a national Createch Co-investment Board
A coordinated multi-funder body combining public and private investment. This would be a ringfenced budget for createch businesses to create a clear, sequential investment pathway with match-funding opportunities.

Createch businesses in the UK demonstrate a similar high-growth trajectory to other technology businesses across the economy, and forthcoming research suggests that createch businesses account for most high growth potential businesses within the UK's Creative Industries.[13] Whilst many have successfully attracted equity investment,[14] structural barriers persist in many createch businesses being able to access the right kinds of growth finance domestically. As was highlighted by the House of Lords' Communications and Digital Committee's report on growing creative technology businesses in the UK, this has limited the ability of createch businesses to scale.[15]

These concerns are shared by createch businesses across the ecosystem. Despite high-growth businesses in the Creative Industries securing over £23 billion in equity investment between 2013 and 2023 (the vast majority of which were in IT, software and computer services),[16] it is still the case that many struggle to access funding.[17] As noted by workshop participants, there is a persistent perception among

13 Siepel et al. (2022) Understanding createch R&D and Bakhshi et. al. (forthcoming) High-Growth Potential Firms in the Creative Industries. Creative PEC/Beauhurst

14 Ibid

15 House of Lords Digital and Communications Committee (2024) AI and creative technology scale-ups: less talk, more action

16 Wilson, N. (2025) The Equity Gap in Britain's Creative Industries

17 Bakhshi et. al. (forthcoming) High-Growth Potential Firms in the Creative Industries. Creative PEC/Beauhurst

createch businesses that funders view them as 'too risky',[18] with participants flagging that this is often due to a lack of investor understanding of createch business models and the value of their intangible assets. Recent research by Creative PEC estimated unmet equity gap across the UK Creative Industries sector as a whole stood at around £3.1bn in 2023.[19]

Workshop participants noted that the funding offer for createch businesses across UKRI programmes, public bodies and institutional and private investors remains siloed and fragmented. This complicates the scaling journey and makes it difficult for innovative businesses to identify clear, long-term investment pathways. Consistent with recent recommendations from the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee,[20] participants suggested a need to streamline the diverse support on offer for innovation, to make growth opportunities more comprehensible and less difficult to navigate. This would encourage greater collaboration and coordination between public and private investors to create a more streamlined approach to providing financial support.

The Government has already recognised the need to strengthen investment into createch businesses and has begun to take steps to address persistent barriers. The DCMS Creative Industries Sector Plan commits to securing growth finance for creative start-ups and scale-ups, including the British Business Bank providing new funding for specialist venture capital funds, widening the range of growth capital available.[21] The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) has undertaken targeted work to expand the investment ecosystem by attracting domestic and international private capital with an appetite for investing into UK-based creative technologies, including investor-facing showcases at major global events such as SXSW London and the inaugural UK House at Slush in Helsinki.[22] [23] These initiatives demonstrate a growing strategic focus on building investor capability and confidence in createch.

Previous research also highlights a specific and significant late-stage funding gap for createch businesses,[24] with the recent report by Erskine Analysis for the Royal Anniversary Trust finding that, of createch businesses that have secured seed funding in the UK, only 27% have progressed to Series A funding, and only 1.8% reach Series B – in comparison to the 7.4% of wider tech businesses that secure Series B funding.[25] This risks high-growth potential creative businesses looking overseas for investment, leading to valuable IP and skilled workers leaving the UK market.[26]

18 Bakhshi et al. (2025). Unleashing Creativity: Fixing the finance gap in the creative industries

19 Wilson, N. (2025) The Equity Gap in Britain's Creative Industries

20 House of Lords Digital and Communications Committee (2024) AI and creative technology scale-ups: less talk, more action

21 DCMS (2025) Creative Industries Sector Plan

22 BVCA (2025) Slush 2025: UK Engagement at Europe's Principal Venture Forum

23 GREAT (no date) UK HOUSE at SXSW

24 Mateos-Garcia, J. (2021) An analysis of Createch R&D business activity in the UK

25 Easton et al. (2025) CreaTech How the fusion of emerging technologies and the Creative Industries can transform the UK's approach to skills, innovation and business

26 Jones et al. (2024) Foreign Direct Investment in the UK's Creative Industries

Workshop participants highlighted an opportunity for UK Government, research councils and domestic institutional investors to design and pilot new innovation-focused finance products specifically tailored to createch businesses. This could involve UKRI, DCMS and the British Business Bank, and build on recent commitments to support IP-backed lending (the use of IP as loan collateral) for Industrial Strategy growth sectors made in the Creative Industries Sector Plan.[27] Although it was not discussed in the workshops, the steps that HMRC is taking, in collaboration with Creative PEC, to ensure that its guidance for applicants for R&D tax relief acknowledges that Arts activities in interdisciplinary projects are within its scope if they resolve scientific or technological uncertainty, are also important steps for encouraging investment for createch businesses.[28]

Finally, participants referenced the uneven geographical distribution of growth finance for createch businesses. This aligns with the difficulties innovative businesses located outside London and the South East face in securing finance,[29] which is reflected in the fact that createch businesses are disproportionately concentrated in London.[30] Continuing the support of createch businesses through new place-based and regional R&D investment mechanisms implemented by bodies including UKRI and Mayoral Authorities will ensure the ongoing growth of createch innovation activity in regions beyond London – for example, through forthcoming investments such as the DCMS Creative Futures fund.[31] [32] [33]

27 Creative PEC (2024) Scaling Up: AI and Creative Tech Submission for the Communications and Digital Committee

28 Siepel and Bakhshi (2023) Estimating the Contribution of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) R&D to Creative Industries R&D and Bakhshi et al (2021) Understanding R&D in the arts, humanities and social sciences

29 Siepel et al. (2024) Growth Finance in the Creative Industries

30 Mateos-Garcia, J. (2021) An analysis of Createch R&D business activity in the UK

31 UKRI (no date) Convergent screen technologies and performance in realtime (CoSTAR)

32 Innovate UK (no date) Create Growth Programme

33 UKRI (2024) Creative Industries Clusters: A new wave

Policy recommendations

Develop a createch business investment roadmap
Develop a clear, streamlined roadmap of createch business investment pathways to inform work by the British Business Bank and being delivered by UKRI as part of the forthcoming Creative Industries R&D strategy.

Target the late-stage funding gap
Building on the recommendations from the Royal Anniversary Trust report around late-stage funding, explore the creation of bespoke financial products for createch businesses, which would also be applicable to other high-growth potential businesses in the creative industries. This could be led by DCMS, the British Business Bank and institutional investors, tailored to the intangible and IP-based assets of createch businesses and seeking to address the Series B funding challenge.

More navigable communications on funding opportunities for createch businesses
Rather than highlighting opportunities from individual funders, funding opportunities should be flagged as relevant to createch businesses through a coordinated approach.

Follow-on investment opportunities
UKRI should coordinate with the British Business Bank, including their regional investment funds and cluster champions to support follow-on support for businesses engaged in UKRI programmes like AHRC's Creative Clusters: This would support follow-on investment for businesses supported through regional funds.

Areas for future analysis and R&D

Map investment journeys
Map existing investment journeys for createch businesses to identify at which stages businesses are most likely to drop out.

Data on scale up
Gather stronger data on the scaling up of createch businesses, as well as createch business retention rates.

Develop initiatives to boost investor understanding of createch
Implement programmes to improve domestic institutional investor and private investor understanding of createch business models, often rooted in IP and intangible assets, to unlock greater private investment.

Createch Investor Board
Explore development of a createch investor board bringing together public and private investors to define clear pathways for future growth and ensure an easily navigable createch investment journey; this could be developed in partnership with the Creative Industries Council (CIC).

2. Continue to prioritise UK createch content within future IP developments and trade agreements

Illustrative workshop outputs

2035 vision and long-term success

By 2035, success would see the UK recognised globally as the hub and partner of choice for createch innovation, with a set approach and definition to createch backed by trade statistics and evidence on future growth areas. UK createch businesses across the UK would regularly be exporting IP across immersive media, AI-driven tools and content experiences. The UK would set the gold standard for the effective licensing and regulation of creative IP as part of its AI ambitions, backed by evidence-led frameworks that provide createch businesses the ability to experiment, innovate and exploit their IP with confidence. This would lead to an increase of inward investment both domestically and internationally.

Futures pilot design – Createch IP Lab

A world leading cross-disciplinary hub is developed, bringing together creative IP lawyers, academics and experts to generate new knowledge on best practice for createch IP protection and exploitation. The Lab would also act as a rapid-response unit to support createch SMEs with their own IP management in the UK, alongside enabling opportunities for international partnerships, collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Increasing trade and exports is a central facet of the Creative Industries Sector Plan, developing new prioritisation of high growth emerging markets and increasing creative investment missions to share UK IP internationally and secure investment. Established priority markets include Australia, China, the EU, Gulf Cooperation Council, India, Japan, and North America.[34] The CoSTAR Foresight Lab's series of creative technology policy snapshots have begun to explore developments across these territories to establish potential areas for partnership and collaboration, as well as a series of international scans to explore emerging trends.[35] [36] [37]

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34 DCMS (2025) Creative Industries Sector Plan

35 Creative Technology in Japan | CoSTAR

36 Creative Technology in India | CoSTAR

37 Creative Technology International Scan #4 | CoSTAR

Both the DBT Trade Strategy and the DSIT Digital and Technologies Sector Plan outline the Government's approach to put digital and technology businesses at the heart of its trade with global markets and international partnerships.[38] [39] The Trade Strategy in particular highlights the importance of aligning UK standards with international regimes to reduce costs and bureaucracy for exporters – with the UK remaining a strong supporter of the World Trade Organisation's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, which sets minimum standards for IP protection and enforcement.[40] The UK also advances international IP protection mainly through Free Trade Agreements with dedicated IP chapters, complemented by digital, sectoral and regional agreements that support trade in priority sectors. Investment and mutual recognition agreements further protect UK IP abroad and reduce regulatory barriers.

This is ever more pressing as technologies, particularly generative AI, continue to evolve at pace; the acceleration of advanced technologies presents significant regulatory and legal challenges regarding IP ownership and exploitation, requiring urgent action.[41] There is a lack of cohesive international regulation on AI and IP, which also complicates the global competitiveness of IP coming out of the UK's createch sector.[42] Almost all of the leading Generative AI models are being developed without an adequate level of IP permission, transparency or method for remunerating creators, which is explored further in the CoSTAR National Lab AI Copyright Framework for the Creative Industries.[43]

Workshop participants emphasised the opportunity for the UK to position its createch sector as a global leader in the development, management and commercialisation of creative IP in the age of advanced technology – as well as fostering international collaboration and alignment on issues such as AI and copyright, working closely with the EU to align with their copyright legislation. Further exploration of createch-specific IP would support this, including for example creative software and tools, game mechanics and engines, and immersive experiences. This could form the backbone of a createch specific trade campaign.

Participants indicated that, domestically, the UK should formally promote and prioritise the areas where createch businesses are leading and can build comparative international advantage, such as the development and application of Small Language Models (SLMs) for AI, immersive technologies and innovative content generation. Participants also emphasised collaboration with international partners to shape complementary regulatory frameworks for

38 DBT (2025) The UK's Trade Strategy

39 DBT and DSIT (2025) Digital and Technologies Sector Plan

40 WTO (no date) TRIPS – Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights

41 Creative PEC (2025) Creative PEC response to the AI and Copyright Consultation and CoSTAR Network (2025) CoSTAR Network response to the AI and Copyright Consultation

42 ibid

43 Time to ACCCT: an AI copyright framework for UK creative industries | CoSTAR

AI and IP that directly support the long-term growth of createch businesses through regulatory certainty and appropriate remuneration.

Further research and evidence on createch exports was raised as an area of opportunity by participants, including undertaking further analysis on trade data and in the growing area of digital trade as it relates to createch exports.[44] Focused strands of international collaboration specifically focused on createch and createch-adjacent themes should be made available, fostering recognition of this being an area of strength for the UK.

Policy recommendations

Continue to develop international createch collaborations
DCMS, DBT, UKRI and the Intellectual Property Office (IPO) should build upon existing collaborations and develop new connections with international partners and jurisdictions to harmonise policies on protecting creative IP, particularly concerning AI and IP.

Expand createch-specific international campaigns
Building on lessons learnt from missions to Japan and the US to create complementary export frameworks and advice for createch businesses, aligning with DCMS Creative Futures commitments.

Areas for future analysis and R&D

Capture the scale and value of UK-generated createch IP to inform frameworks and secure international competitiveness
This includes new methodologies for assessing where IP originates and how it is commercialised. Further targeted studies could include measuring the loss of UK createch IP,[45] mapping where createch IP generation is concentrated in the UK, and identifying the international markets where R&D programmes are located/where domestic createch IP is being exported

Lead in AI-era IP frameworks
Develop and promote evidence-led frameworks for the exploitation of IP by creators and SMEs in the era of Artificial Intelligence, focusing on areas like Small Language Models.

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44 Fazio et al. (2024) UK Trade in a Global Creative Economy

45 Oxford Economics (2023) How to Measure the Impact of Overseas Mergers & Acquisitions on the UK Video Games Industry

3. Prioritise createch skills and education pathways

Illustrative workshop outputs

2035 vision and long-term success
Participants suggested long-term success would be realised through the embedding of creative-technical education and skills into UKRI-funded R&D programmes, place-based initiatives and all levels of education. In 2035, industry links with universities would be strengthened through knowledge exchange and placement opportunities. Skills development pathways would be expanded, including createch adjacent apprenticeship routes, maintaining a matched prioritisation of creative and technical skillsets.

Futures pilot design – university-based technology training labs for sector freelancers
Accessible regional labs attached to universities to support freelancers with access to specialist training, accreditation and formalised R&D collaboration with HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) and industry.

There is set to be a significant rise of future jobs that are reliant on creative and technical skills. Skills England have recently acknowledged that the Creative and Digital and Technology Industries are estimated to have the highest additional employment demand up to 2030 out of all frontier industries.[46] Research suggests that UK employers across the economy are showing a growing demand for createch roles and for both creative and digital skills, with significant mismatches between current skills provision and employer demand.[47] It is estimated that createch businesses currently employ a skilled workforce of over 350,000 people in roles that combine creative and digital expertise.[48]

Workshop participants noted that there was a lack of common understanding around createch skills, education and career opportunities. This aligns to recent polling by Ipsos Mori which found that both young people and their parents were less likely to associate the Creative Industries with the IT and computer services subsector, even though this was the subsector they would both be most interested in for future work for themselves/their child.[49] This is compounded by the rapid pace of technological change, with participants consistently referencing the challenge around ensuring that technology skills and education

46 Skills England (2025) Assessment of priority skills to 2030
47 Bakhshi et al. (2019) The Creative Digital Skills Revolution
48 Easton et al. (2025) CreaTech How the fusion of emerging technologies and the Creative Industries can transform the UK's approach to skills, innovation and business
49 Ipsos Mori (2025) DCMS Creative Careers Research

provision is agile and responsive to change. Whilst several initiatives have been announced by the UK Government, particularly around AI skills and education,[50] these do not specifically consider createch skills.[51]

Similar challenges can be found in Further and Higher Education, the latter being the main route of entry into the creative sector workforce. At the doctoral level, Creative PEC research finds that only 29% of createch businesses reported employing PhD-qualified R&D workers, compared with 46% of other tech businesses.[52] Createch founders are also less likely to hold a PhD.[53] There is also a strong presence of Arts, Humanities and Design degrees within the createch workforce compared with the non-createch baseline, supporting the idea that companies at the intersection of the arts, creativity and technology need access to talent with skills that go beyond STEM alone.[54] Additionally, many creative workers – particularly freelancers, who form a large part of the workforce and often undertake R&D with createch businesses[55] – require access to training opportunities which keep pace with emerging technological advancements.

Participants reflected the need for education providers to integrate further options to teach technical skills to students of all ages, as was also recommended in the Royal Anniversary Trust report.[56] Industry placements and PhD studentships could be expanded in the Higher Education sector. For the existing workforce, the Department for Education's (DfE) forthcoming Lifelong Learning Entitlement provides an opportunity to integrate creative and technical courses relevant to createch, such as generative AI and virtual production.[57]

Further provision of training, upskilling and industry placement opportunities could be implemented at both a national and regional scale – including the integration of createch-focused pathways into existing training and apprenticeship schemes (for example, as part of the DCMS and Discover! Creative Careers initiative, which is also recommended within the Royal Anniversary Trust report).[58] [59] Participants recognised the value of deepening local connections and forging further createch ecosystems across the country. This could include more of a focus on local training opportunities, the development of specific createch apprenticeship programmes and connecting young people with the opportunities available.

50 ibid

51 Bakhshi et al. (2025) What UK Job Postings Reveal About the Changing Demand for Creativity Skills in the Age of Generative AI

52 Siepel et al. (2022) Understanding createch R&D

53 ibid

54 Mateos-Garcia, J. (2021) An analysis of Createch R&D business activity in the UK

55 Siepel et al. (2022) Understanding createch R&D

56 Easton et al. (2025) CreaTech How the fusion of emerging technologies and the Creative Industries can transform the UK's approach to skills, innovation and business

57 DfE (2025) Lifelong learning entitlement: what it is and how it will work

58 Discover! Creative Careers

59 Easton et al. (2025) CreaTech How the fusion of emerging technologies and the Creative Industries can transform the UK's approach to skills, innovation and business

Policy recommendations

Prioritise interdisciplinary education
Continue coordination between DCMS, DSIT, DfE and UKRI to prioritise creative and digital education at all levels. This should involve embedding interdisciplinary teaching, industry placements and innovation-focused PhD study opportunities funded by UKRI Research Councils, as well as the inclusion of AI skills being applied across the Creative Industries as part of the Government's TechFirst programme. These could take a place-based approach alongside partners like HEIs and Mayoral Authorities.[60]

Ensure createch-focused offers are included in the Lifelong Learning Entitlement
As previously recommended in the Royal Anniversary Trust report, ensure that the forthcoming DfE Lifelong Learning Entitlement funds key creative and technical courses and modules relevant to emerging technologies like generative AI and immersive production.

Areas for future evidence and R&D

Research on skills needs of createch businesses and into 'what works' in delivering interdisciplinary education relevant to createch
An assessment of skills challenges could build on existing research, such as the DCMS and CIC-funded Skills Audits for the Creative Industries being undertaken by Creative PEC and Work Advance, and that of bodies like ScreenSkills and the British Film Institute (BFI).

Createch R&D training framework
Create a framework and guidance for embedding createch training opportunities into UKRI R&D programmes, like CoSTAR and the forthcoming AHRC Creative Clusters and DCMS Creative Futures programmes. This could include piloting the design of industry placements and training programmes for freelancers.

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60 Tech giants join government to kick off plans to boost British worker AI skills – GOV.UK

4. Further leverage createch infrastructure to drive technology adoption

Illustrative workshop outputs

2035 vision and long-term success

Participants recognised that knowledge sharing and collaboration focused on technology adoption across R&D programmes would enable and better connect adoption hubs across the UK. In addition, access to digital research infrastructure – including AI capability – would become default for all bids submitted to UKRI. Freelancers would be acknowledged as a vital component of the createch ecosystem. Finally, the UK would lead in piloting new initiatives around IP ownership and responsible AI as strength areas.

Futures pilot design – national createch adoption network

A Government-backed initiative coupled with incentives to better connect businesses and individuals to technology infrastructure, involving big tech, SMEs, scale-ups and freelancers. Activities would include skills showcases, a "good tools" directory to share tools /software /equipment /suppliers, professional development opportunities for freelancers, and R&D vouchers for scaling businesses to access national infrastructure (including, but not limited to, CoSTAR Labs).

Technology adoption – the integration and use of new technologies by an individual or businesses – is a significant area for future UK Government policy and intervention, as a driver for growth and innovation across the economy.

The DBT and DSIT Technology Adoption Review outlines how cross-departmental efforts in this area will be critical, as well as partnerships with industry across sectors.[61] DCMS's Creative Industries Sector Plan also commits to implementing these actions for the Creative Industries, including establishing B2B createch demonstration hubs and developing a facilities directory and strategic roadmap.[62] [63] Technology infrastructure in and for the Creative Industries remains a priority, and will be realised through the expansion of CoSTAR, the UK's Creative Technology infrastructure network funded by UKRI.

It was acknowledged by workshop participants that funding allocations for technology adoption initiatives in the sector are spread thinly across a multitude of different areas, rather than focusing on specific areas of strength. The latter

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61 DSIT (2025) Technology Adoption Review
62 DCMS (2025) Creative Industries Sector Plan
63 DSIT (2025) Technology Adoption Review

must be identified to drive cohesive approaches, but also to build capacity to scale for createch businesses – particularly SMEs. One area of opportunity outlined consistently was around the development of Small Language Models (SLMs) as a way of capturing distinct packages of high-value, responsibly sourced expert data catered to specific areas, built out of the UK's world leading creative IP and responsible development/applications in AI.

Government convening power was recognised as an important factor in efforts to forge collaboration around niche areas of excellence where the UK can lead, as well as enabling connections across different infrastructure investments. The importance of establishing a createch freelancer community/network was also raised as well as recognising the centrality of freelancers in knowledge exchange, upskilling and programmes of activity delivered across technology infrastructure. This point is supported by research that found createch R&D to use a larger number of freelancers, on average, than R&D in wider tech firms.[64]

Barriers around knowing which tools exist for creators were raised by participants. Further exploration of responsibly developed tools and use cases could accompany these efforts, offering accreditations to UK technology developers that adhere to standards linked to IP management, remuneration and transparency. Future mapping of sub-sector specific use cases and examples of technology in practice would help build trust in new technologies and boost their adoption.

In addition, increased access to technology infrastructure could encourage upskilling and widespread adoption – for example, by enabling access to creative AI tools and collaborating with education providers from Further and Higher Education, as well as businesses that offer apprenticeships. It was noted that UKRI could convene all major tech providers to support these efforts by investing into upskilling and technology adoption activities. Access could also be supported through the generation of R&D vouchers to access sovereign technology infrastructure such as Isambard and AI centres of excellence.

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64 Siepel et al (2022) Understanding createch R&D

Policy recommendations

Undertake createch-specific infrastructure mapping
UKRI and DCMS should convene relevant experts to map labs, equipment, national infrastructure and local innovation programmes aligned to the proposed directory in the DBT-DSIT Technology Adoption Review. This map should be made publicly available to share the information collected.

Develop Createch use case repositories and adoption toolkits
Further analysis of tool adoption and demand across Creative Industries subsectors (e.g. music, games, screen, design) to create use case repositories and a 'createch toolkit'. This should build out of Creative PEC and CoSTAR Foresight Lab joint research findings.

Areas for future evidence and R&D

Research and pilot activity around SLMs
Further exploration of SLMs and undertaking R&D in this area, aligning with the efforts of the Creative Content Exchange (CCE) pilot funded by DCMS and analysis in the CoSTAR Introduction to Moments report and ACCCT Framework.[65] [66]

Collaborate on the implementation of Technology Adoption Review recommendations
Cross-departmental implementation of recommendations set out in the Technology Adoption Review including B2B createch demonstration hubs, facilities directory and strategic roadmap to increase awareness and access to technology adoption support across the Creative Industries ("Create Smarter"), working with the CoSTAR Network.

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65   Introduction to Moments | CoSTAR
66   Time to ACCCT: an AI copyright framework for UK creative industries | CoSTAR

5. Creating an inclusive and participatory createch workforce

Illustrative workshop outputs

2035 vision and long-term success
Participants envisaged an inclusive, UK-wide createch skills and talent pipeline embedded across education, with clear pathways into createch careers and sustained investment in skills. Inclusion would underpin all createch innovation and technology co-design, ensuring affordable, UK-wide access to infrastructure, tools and opportunities so that createch businesses can start, grow and scale across all four nations.

Futures pilot design – inclusive createch business support
Financial support and advisory services enabling marginalised founders to kickstart createch businesses, building on evidence of difficulties around minority ethnic and disabled founders being able to access finance. This could potentially be delivered as a specific part of financial models being offered through Combined Authorities.

The Creative Industries have persistent challenges with respect to equity, diversity and inclusion, with inequalities also found in the UK's createch workforce: recent research found that whilst there is relatively balanced gender representation in the sector, 90% of those working in createch are ethnically white, whilst only 6% are Asian and less than 1% Black.[67] Initiatives such as the Digital Catapult's Black Founders Programme are responding by supporting investor readiness for Black founded high growth potential createch start-ups.[68]

As a cross-government priority, ensuring join up between commitments to inclusion and participation across both technology and the Creative Industries will be critical to ensure the broadening of inclusion and participation in createch. This will build on commitments set out in the Creative Industries Sector Plan to forge collaboration between DCMS, DfE and Skills England to work with industry and support increased access to specialist education provision.[69]

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67 Easton et al. (2025) CreaTech How the fusion of emerging technologies and the Creative Industries can transform the UK's approach to skills, innovation and business

68 Digital Catapult (no date) Black Founders Programme

69 DCMS (2025) Creative Industries Sector Plan

Participants noted that a lack of joined up governance and cross-departmental collaboration meant that opportunities spanning both Creative Industries and Digital and Technology, remain siloed. This is then reflected in career opportunities across the UK, where arts and tech/science opportunities are seen as two separate and disjointed career pathways; this can be seen in recent publications such as the DSIT AI for Science Strategy.[70] There was also recognition of the lack of understanding of the associated risks – including technological-driven impacts on careers in the Creative Industries, projected job losses, and opportunities for freelancers in the sector. This is compounded by a lack of available training routes, as well as the pace of change across the curriculum to align creativity with digital skills and education programmes.

This affirms the importance of enabling broader societal definitions of what 'createch' is, with buy in from all UK Government Departments, and the relevant opportunities available. Areas of opportunity raised included close working between HEIs, industry and freelancers. This could tie to improved signposting and collaboration with the UK Government's designated Creative Freelance Champion. Undertaking more creative-led research that places practical application of technology as a core value, enabling a broadened approach of createch beyond the Creative Industries and enabling cross-sector opportunities across the identified eight named sectors from the UK Government's Industrial Strategy.[71]

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70 DSIT (2025) AI for Science Strategy
71 DBT (2024) Invest 2035: the UK's modern industrial strategy

Policy recommendations

Develop a UK-wide, publicly accessible createch talent pathway map
Led by DCMS (with scope to work with Skills England), this should clearly set out suggested study routes (e.g. Further Education, High Education), entry-level opportunities (e.g. apprenticeships, early career roles) and an overview of the creative-digital skills that are needed to work in the sector. This should be co-designed with industry stakeholders, freelancers and young people and would make routes into createch jobs more transparent and accessible.

Ensure existing skills funding is accessible for those working in createch
Rather than developing new skills programmes, existing offers at a national and local level should be tailored towards the development needs of those individuals and businesses working in createch across the UK. Programmes could be delivered by Mayoral Authorities, research councils and/or HEIs and should be informed by industry leads. They should address structural exclusion by ensuring that paid places are reserved for freelancers and marginalised groups working in createch to increase participation in skills development.

Alignment of national opportunities
Continue cross-departmental governance and join up across relevant initiatives to boost awareness of createch opportunities, career pathways and upskilling opportunities. A particular focus on freelancers working in this space would also contribute towards the upcoming work of the Creative Freelance Champion.

Areas for future analysis and R&D

Further research and evidence focused on structural barriers
Undertake further research on structural barriers for freelancers and marginalised createch workers, including benefit structures and risk tolerance.

Data gathering on createch talent pathways
Map the courses, education providers and opportunities on offer across the UK to identify where there are gaps in supply.

Compare UK wide available data
Collate evidence on links between digital divide and access to platforms, IP, services and infrastructure.

6. Boost awareness of createch commercialisation and spinout opportunities

Illustrative workshop outputs

2035 vision and long-term success
Participants envisioned a growing ecosystem of createch businesses of different sizes. Createch would become as successful and recognisable across the economy as other sector technology areas such as healthtech and fintech. In the UK there would be a start-up landscape that is ambitious to scale, spurred on by a focus on successful IP exploitation with supportive regulation and incentives, where human-centred technology innovation has been prioritised.

Futures pilot design – national createch commercialisation campaign
A month-long activity series and online campaign led by DCMS, working with DSIT and DfE in collaboration with nationwide investment funds and bodies as well as key industry partners and organisations. The campaign, made up of events hosted across the UK, would spotlight success, share case studies and help to convene universities/founders/investors/tech transfer offices. This would make createch commercialisation avenues and best practice visible at the national scale, focusing on coordination rather than reinvention, providing peer coaching and investor-founder engagement opportunities.

Recognised for their world-leading IP and expertise, it is essential for the createch businesses to access commercialisation opportunities to scale, grow and provide long-term economic value. National and regional bodies and organisations, including HEIs, must ensure businesses are given ample commercialisation and spinout support; this is ever important when growth-oriented equity investment remains both sectorally and geographically uneven.[72]

Public investment has been central to 'crowding in' wider investment to incentivise new createch start-ups and scale-ups across the UK.[73] UKRI-backed interventions such as the AHRC's Creative Industries Clusters Programme (CICP) and the national CoSTAR network demonstrate how sustained R&D funding, shared infrastructure and industry–academic collaboration can transform early-stage innovation into successful commercial outcomes.[74] The first wave of CICP alone saw the £56m investment deliver nine regional clusters,

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72 Siepel et al (2024) Growth Finance for Creative Industries

73 ibid

74 UKRI (no date) Convergent screen technologies and performance in realtime (CoSTAR)

leverage £277m of public and private co-investment and generate 466 spinouts, start-ups and scale-ups[75] – all whilst supporting a more geographically diverse innovation ecosystem.

With the second wave of CICP open in 2026 and the ongoing investment into CoSTAR,[76] there are set to be more avenues for createch businesses to be supported. Furthermore, the development of creative corridors has also been identified as a potential mechanism to scale up creative clusters,[77] [78] including the pioneering One Creative North and West of England-South Wales corridors – the latter of which is rooted in a strong foundation of publicly funded creative technology R&D and will build upon investment and skills needs.[79] [80] This wider coordination is important, as companies in creative microclusters outside of creative clusters are more likely to be growth oriented but also view access to finance as a barrier to growth.[81]

Evidence shows that investment into creative businesses overwhelmingly follows creative clusters and microclusters,[82] reinforcing the case for interventions that strengthen place-based ecosystems, support investment readiness and build clearer commercialisation and spinout pathways. These programmes also highlight the critical role of HEIs as anchor institutions for local createch ecosystems; HEIs have existing relationships with createch businesses, supply talent, intellectual property, innovation infrastructure and applied R&D which can strengthen pathways from research to market.

Alongside public R&D programmes, regional investment vehicles are increasingly shaping the commercialisation landscape by linking with HEIs, industry leads, investors and high growth createch businesses. Place-based HEI investment models and funds such as Northern Gritstone and Midlands Mindforge illustrate how venture capital can support the translation of IP-rich research into investable businesses while retaining economic value within the regional economy.[83] [84] Encouraging such models to support createch and the Creative Industries and raising awareness of the growth potential in the sector more broadly could be a novel way of attracting commercial opportunities whilst finding new modes of financial support for IP-rich businesses.

This is critical in a context of increasing devolution, with the roll out of the £150m Creative Places Growth Fund and UKRI-funded opportunities enabling Mayoral Authorities to deliver locally tailored interventions. Other regional

75 UKRI (2024) Creative Industries Clusters: A New Wave

76 UKRI (2025) Creative Industries Clusters: the next chapter in a UK success story

77 RSA, ACE and Creative PEC (2024) Creative Corridors: connecting clusters to unleash potential

78 DCMS (2025) Creative Industries Sector Plan

79 Creative Lancashire (2025) One Creative North Report Launched

80 Leaver et al. (2024) The Cardiff Capital Region and West of England Creative Supercluster – Scoping Study

81 Siepel et al. (2020) Creative Industries Radar: Mapping the UK's creative clusters and microclusters

82 Siepel et al (2024) Growth Finance for Creative Industries

83 Northern Gritstone (no date) About Us

84 Midlands Mindforge (no date)

interventions such as the Creative UK and the North East Combined Authority's Culture and Creative Investment Programme,[85] highlight a range of approaches for accelerating createch growth across the UK. As Mayoral Authorities and devolved nations develop strategies to support their local creative ecosystems, existing programmes and initiatives should be built on whilst being tailored to local strengths.

Whilst there is significant commercialisation support available, workshop participants noted that navigating these opportunities and signposting remained a challenge. The importance of peer-led support, cross-sector networks and upskilling academic communities into the world of working in a start-up or being a founder was also raised. The critical role of HEIs was referenced alongside other bodies including Foundology (who offer founder coaching and networks), regional investment funds like Northern Gritstone, as well as start-up accelerator programmes from established financial institutions like Natwest were illustrated as playing an important role in developing commercialisation ecosystems in place.[86] [87]

Collaboration and knowledge exchange also featured regularly in discussions, particularly in the building and development of regional ecosystems and embedding solid cultures of innovation in and beyond universities. Existing regional campaigns, coalitions and initiatives such as the Midlands Mindforge 'Forging Ahead' illustrate localised knowledge sharing and intervention design where Creative and Digital have been explicitly prioritised alongside other sectors.[88] On a national level, with Government Departments convening efforts, in collaboration with the Creative Industries Council, there is an opportunity to raise awareness of createch commercialisation across the UK. Participants also emphasised the critical importance of rigorous IP frameworks and monetisation that not only support but encourage new createch products and services through ample monetisation and exploitation avenues.

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85 Creative UK (no date) North East Investment
86 Natwest (2024) Empowering UK start-ups through our Accelerator programme
87 Foundology (no date)
88 Midlands Innovation (no date) Forging Ahead

Policy recommendations

Prioritise IP commercialisation
UKRI should establish createch IP commercialisation and IP-based investment models as a key area of focus, concurrent with Government and regulatory development of monetisation and licensing frameworks that give start-ups confidence to develop new IP that has commercialisation, and growth potential across the economy. This should be developed in collaboration with industry.

Explore the creation of a national createch commercialisation campaign
Convene a domestic createch commercialisation campaign led by DCMS and the CIC, in partnership with DSIT and DBT to highlight success stories, case studies and raise awareness of opportunities across the UK – working with Mayoral Authorities on regional micro campaigns.

Areas for future analysis and R&D

Comparative research into successful createch scale-ups
Both in comparison with more established sectors (e.g. fintech) and geographically, within and beyond creative clusters, to identify regional and sector-specific conditions for sustained growth.

Robust evaluations of the social and economic impact of interventions associated with creative spinouts and commercialisation
For example, public investments like the second round of AHRC's CICP; regional investment funds; novel financial models like IP-backed loans. This would provide evidence to deepen mutual understandings across both createch businesses and investors.

Next steps

As outlined, this report sets out a series of policy and research recommendations from a rapid engagement and evidence review exercise. As such, the findings and recommendations should be seen as starting points for further development, providing a springboard to shape the delivery of both the UKRI Creative Industries R&D Strategy and the DCMS Creative Industries Sector Plan. Additional engagement and outreach with wider stakeholders working across the createch ecosystem will be required to further develop the priority actions to be taken forward.

The report also provides an outline of where Government Departments – including DCMS, DSIT, DBT and DfE – can foster further collaboration and drive forward the growth potential of the UK's createch sector.

We would like to end this report by thanking all the stakeholders involved in this initial engagement phase for their time, support and invaluable contributions.

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