The UK Creative Industries Public Funding Allocations and Investment Review

Mutibwa, Daniel H

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Daniel H. Mutibwa

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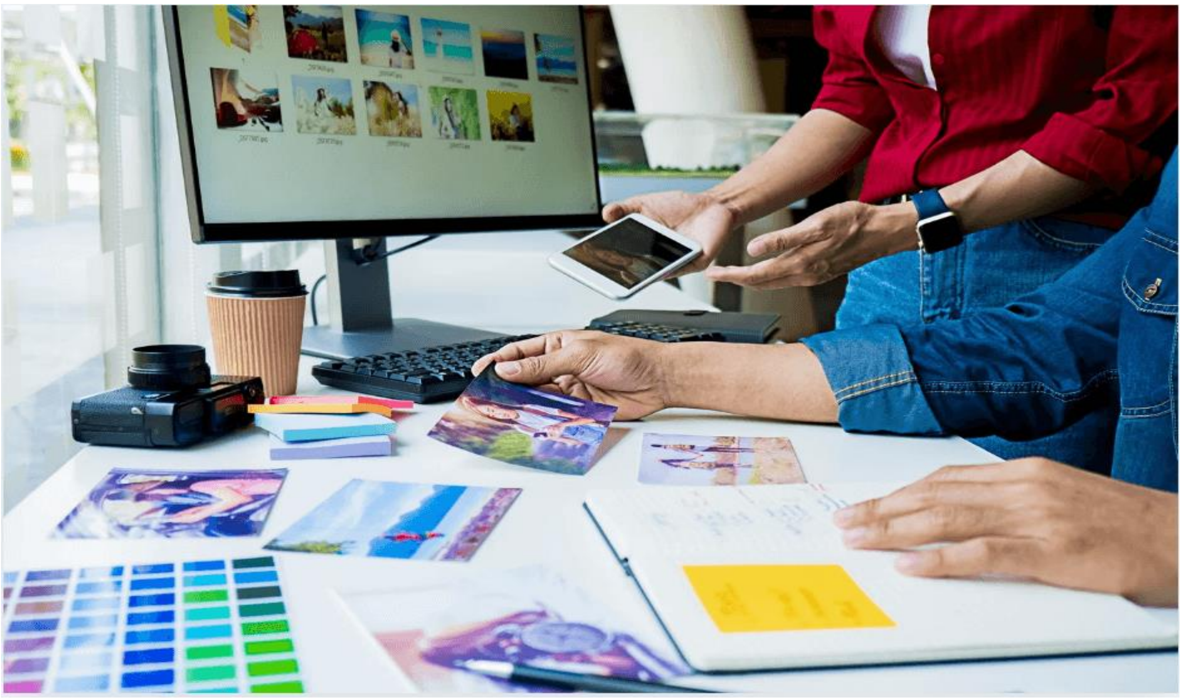

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This is a multi-partner project led by the University of Birmingham.

Project team: Sheela Agarwal (University of Plymouth), Sarah Ayres (University of Bristol), Jon Burchell (University of Sheffield), Ceri Davies (National Centre for Social Research), Jonathan Davies (De Montfort University), Shona Duncan (SD Consulting), Mike Emmerich (Metro Dynamics), James Gilmour (Metro Dynamics), Anne Green (University of Birmingham), Charlotte Hoole (University of Birmingham), Daniel Mutibwa (University of Nottingham), Andy Pike (Newcastle University), Megan Russell (Metro Dynamics), Abigail Taylor (University of Birmingham), and Sanne Velthuis (Newcastle University)

Summary

- The UK is home to world-leading creative industries that enjoy a strong global reputation.
- British creative industries are powerful engines of economic growth and cultural influence both at home and abroad.
- The strong ability of the UK creative industries to generate jobs, spark innovation, facilitate inclusive growth, and drive welfare development has led to their identification as one of the eight growth-driving industries in the forthcoming Industrial Strategy scheduled for publication in June 2025 by the current Government.
- Against the backdrop of greater devolution, public funding allocations to, and investment in, the creative industries and their wider ecosystem are aimed at tackling longstanding geographical disparities across the UK.
- Devolved funding allocations to, and investment in, the highest performing sub-sectors within British creative industries hold huge promise to further drive economic growth, help extend the benefits of that growth to other regions, develop soft power following the effective national strategic framework developed in Ireland, and widen opportunities for inclusive welfare development across the country.
- Key recommendations to the current Government on futureproofing the economic power and enormous success of British creative industries include: (1) expediting devolution arrangements to enable places and regions to offer bespoke and timely support to their creative industries in alignment with the Government's growth mission; (2) rewarding devolved places and regions with additional funding where the creative industries are demonstrably supported to contribute to long-term growth via local growth plans; and (3) extending the Creative Industries Clusters Programme to capitalise on the private-public investment networks initiated across places and regions to tackle geographical disparities sustainably while keeping generous and higher tax relief beyond 2026 to maintain the distinctive comparative advantage enjoyed by British creative industries.

Introduction

The purpose of this review is three-fold. First, to provide contextualisation and systematic exploration of public funding allocations to, and investment in, the creative industries between 2015 and 2025. Second, to put forward key recommendations to the current Government on futureproofing the economic power and welfare development role of the creative industries in the UK while developing a strategic framework for leveraging their power and global influence for soft power building. Third — and following on from the first two points, to contribute to robust policy evidence to inform Government efforts to develop simplified, sustainable, and more efficacious models of public funding allocations and investment to reduce geographical inequalities across the UK in the context of greater and fast-changing devolution arrangements.

This review is structured as follows. It starts with a useful contextual discussion featuring the pioneering definition of the creative industries, related sub-sector reclassifications, and the factors that render British creative industries key drivers of the economy and powerful engines of growth before situating these industries in the current Government's growth mission. Exploration then engages with the central existing barriers to the even growth, geographical distribution, and backing of the creative industries in the UK before discussing how the Government is intervening using a range of place-based instruments — including the establishment of selected creative industries priority regions. Further exploration reviews the comprehensive package of public funding allocations and investment announced by the Government between October 2024 and March 2025. Review here further contextualises public funding allocations and investment within a period spanning ten years (2015-2025) before concluding by highlighting the central theme of British creative industries as a success story both at home and abroad. The conclusion is followed by five key recommendations that the Government should implement to futureproof the economic power and global reputation of British creative industries while leveraging their extraordinary success to build soft power across the globe.

The UK Creative Industries: Definition and Context

In seminal mapping documents published in 1998, the then New Labour Government defined the creative industries as 'those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, DCMS, 1998: n.p). The documents classified these industries into 13 sub-sectors. Following revision of the documents in 2001, the definition was retained (DCMS,

2001) but the sub-sectors have since been reclassified by successive UK governments into the following 9 categories:

- Advertising and Marketing;
- Architecture;
- Crafts;
- Design: Product, Graphic and Fashion Design;
- Film, TV, Video, Radio and Photography;
- IT, Software and Computer Services;
- Museums, Galleries and Libraries;
- Music, Performing and Visual Arts; and
- Publishing (DCMS, 2013; 2016; 2023a).

The definition and sub-sector reclassifications have subsequently and prominently shaped creative industries scholarship, adoption and development, and policymaking at intranational and international levels. They have considerably shaped the conceptualisation of these industries in the academy in the UK and beyond (Garnham, 2005; O'Connor, 2009; Flew and Cunningham, 2010; Flew, 2011; Pitts, 2015; Hesmondhalgh, 2019; Harper, 2020; Cateridge *et al*., 2024). They have served as a 'template' for other countries (Higgs and Cunningham, 2008: 7) and 'become a benchmark for identifying creative industries internationally as well as at regional, sub-regional and city levels within the United Kingdom, Europe and Asia' (Foord, 2009: 94; see also Lee *et al*., 2014). The definition and sub-sector reclassifications have also informed international public policymaking in managing increasingly complex and rapidly changing social, economic, environmental, political, technological, and research and development (R&D) environments across national borders in which these industries operate (Pessoa and Deloumeaux, 2009; Naylor *et al*., 2021; UNCTAD, 2024). These developments — coupled with the UK's perceived status as the 'home to world-class creative industries' (Bryant, 2025: n.p) and 'third largest exporter of creative services globally in 2022' only behind Ireland in second place and the U.S ahead of the field (UNCTAD, 2024: 28) — have cemented the country's position as a world leader in the creative industries.

Positioning the Creative Industries at the Centre of the UK Government's Growth Mission

In a parliamentary debate on the state of the creative industries in the UK in late January 2025, Chris Bryant — the Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism — underscored their importance both at home and abroad. Bryant (2025: n.p) noted that British creative industries:

- bring joy to millions of people in the UK and around the world;
- are an integral component of the UK's soft power and economic power;
- are not only key drivers of the economy, but also an important source of innovation and among the country's most powerful engines of growth — a key fact that the current Government is proud of and acknowledges;
- are powerful engines of growth in a four-fold sense. First, they were worth more to the economy in 2022 than three of the UK's heavyweight industries — aerospace, life sciences and automotive industries — combined. Second, they generated £125 billion for the economy in 2023. Third, they currently contribute one in 14 jobs across the country — with that ratio estimated to improve to one in 10 by 2029. Fourth, they have demonstrated staggering growth at one and a half times the rate of the rest of the UK economy in the past decade, despite the numerous economic headwinds they have faced; and
- have recorded these achievements and successes despite not always being duly supported by successive Conservative Governments since 2010.

This review returns to a discussion of economic power and soft power later. For now, it is worth flagging the perceived lack of adequate support for the creative industries under successive Conservative Governments over the last 15 years. The last Conservative Government, for example, did not include the creative industries in its key five growth industries in its 2022 Autumn Statement. Instead, it prioritised (1) Digital Technology, (2) Life Sciences, (3) Green Industries, (4) Financial Services, and (5) Advanced Manufacturing (HM Treasury, 2022b). One explanation given was that the Government needed to implement a 'responsible fiscal strategy' which worked towards achieving 'fiscal sustainability' among other things (HM Treasury, 2022a: n.p). Citing the considerable economic value that the creative industries possess, and the world-leading reputation they enjoy as presented above, commentators comprising scholars, regional and national decision-makers, and key actors within the creative industries strongly criticised the omission of the creative industries. Drawing on that criticism, decision-makers in the UK Parliament implored the Conservative Government to (1) 'commit to placing the creative industries at the heart of its growth plans', (2) 'take difficult choices about the allocation of scarce resources', and (3) not concede the global leadership role that the UK gained ‘when it defined the concept of the creative industries’ in 1998 (Communications and Digital Committee, 2023: n.p).

In its 2023 Spring Budget, the Conservative Government acknowledged the economic power of the creative industries and the need to protect them against ongoing economic pressures. It pointed to the public funding and investment allocated to the creative industries between 2015 and 2023 (HM Government, 2018; DCMS, 2022c; 2023a; 2023c) as well as the generous tax reliefs it had introduced (HM Treasury, 2023a; 2023b). This review picks these up later. By contrast, the current Labour Government has gone much farther since taking up office in early July 2024. It has done this by featuring the creative industries prominently among its priority growth industries. In October 2024, it published a Green Paper titled ‘Invest 2035: The UK’s Modern Industrial Strategy’ which explained how the Government’s new Industrial Strategy will guide public funding allocations to, and investment in, selected high-growth industries that will drive the Government’s growth mission (DBT, 2024a). The Industrial Strategy, whose publication is expected in June 2025 (Pickett and Hutton, 2025: 5), will focus on eight growth-driving industries, namely (1) Advanced Manufacturing; (2) Clean Energy Industries; (3) Creative Industries; (4) Defence; (5) Digital and Technologies; (6) Financial Services; (7) Life Sciences; and (8) Professional and Business Services (UK Government, 2024: 4).

This investment aims ‘to drive growth [by leveraging the] unique strengths and untapped potential [of these world-leading industries to enable them] to adapt and grow and seize opportunities to lead in new sectors’ (UK Government, 2024: 4). In this vision, investment will prioritise sub-sectors within these broad industries that meet the growth priorities set by the Government. Those sub-sectors will be expected to deliver outcomes via ‘[a]mbitious and targeted Sector Plans designed in partnership with business, devolved governments, regions, experts, and other stakeholders, through bespoke arrangements tailored to each [industry]’ (UK Government, 2024: 4). It is worth highlighting how these growth plans articulate a place-based approach and geographical focus — both of which appear closely tied to evolving devolution arrangements in places across the country where they exist:

> The Industrial Strategy will concentrate efforts on places with the greatest potential for our growth sectors: city regions, high-potential clusters, and strategic industrial sites. The Government is committed to devolving significant powers to Mayoral Combined Authorities across England, giving them the tools they need to grow their sectoral clusters and improve the local business environment through ambitious Local Growth Plans. Partnership with devolved governments will make this a UK-wide effort and support the considerable sectoral strengths of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland (UK Government, 2024: 5).

This review focuses primarily on the Government's growth plans for the creative industries in England — zeroing in on places that have been allocated public funding to date irrespective of whether devolution arrangements already exist. As public funding allocations and investment are closely tied to the vision of the Sector Plans under the Industrial Strategy, it is worth homing in on the Sector Plan for the creative industries. Scheduled for publication in June 2025, it is currently under design with the aim to:

- enable further growth and innovation in the creative industries;
- leverage their global competitive advantages by unlocking private investment;
- boost exports;
- develop the highly creative and skilled workforce in those industries;
- drive innovation through new and emerging technologies;
- ensure that great creative ideas and businesses can access the finance they need to grow; and
- expand the geography of the creative industries, creative clusters, and creative corridors to spread opportunity, growth, and prosperity in communities in regions and nations across the country — ultimately driving welfare improvement (DCMS, 2024a: n.p).

The last point here is significant considering the long history of the uneven regional/geographical distribution of the creative industries and associated creative clusters and creative corridors in the UK. This phenomenon has persisted despite efforts by successive Governments to simultaneously encourage growth in these industries while reducing the region/geography-induced differences and resultant inequalities that markedly characterise them (Tether, 2019; Gutierrez-Posada, 2023). For example, the London and the M25 region — commonly referred to as the UK's creative supercluster — accounted for 68% of UK creative industries GVA (£71 billion) in 2019 (Hay *et al.*, 2024: 7). The root causes warrant further treatment below not least because addressing them in a joined-up and sustainable manner lies at the centre of the Government's growth mission (UK Government, 2024).

Tackling the Uneven Geographical Distribution and Backing of the Creative Industries in the UK

Past research and policy evidence have consistently reported that the creative industries in the UK are characterised by substantial differences in regional distribution, something that consequently exacerbates geographical inequalities. A common theme is these industries are disproportionately located in London and the South East meaning that public funding allocations and investment, outputs, expertise and skills, infrastructure, productivity, comparative advantage, reputation, and the growth potential of those industries are heavily skewed towards these respective regions (Mateos-Garcia and Bakhshi, 2016; Tether, 2019; Siepel *et al.*, 2023; Hay *et al.*, 2024; Gault, 2025; Uwazuruike *et al.*, 2025). At the Creative Industries Growth Summit held on 17 January 2025 at Gateshead — the first national and international gathering of these industries chosen to be the centre of the Government's plan for economic growth (DCMS, 2025b), the Culture Secretary, Lisa Nandy, acknowledged this situation and its repercussions while stressing how this will be rectified:

> So it is extraordinary that for 19 of the last 20 years only two regions — London and the South East — have had the backing and investment to make a net contribution to the public purse. Trying to grow the economy while ignoring the potential in most parts of Britain is like trying to fly a jet on only one engine. So as well as breaking down the barriers to investment, innovation and skills, we are going to build on [existing achievements] through the Sector Plan — learning from the success of London as a global hub, to turbocharge the growth of the creative industries right across the UK (DCMS, 2025b: n.p).

To this end — and as is the case with the other seven growth-driving industries, the Government has devised an audacious approach and multipronged methodology to establishing an evidence base for public funding allocations and investment for the creative industries — taking account of the regional/geographical differences alongside these central criteria (UK Government, 2024: 16-26):

- **current strengths** (demonstrating highest productivity, strongest international competitiveness, and greatest growth capacity within the economy).
- **emerging strengths** (showing highest potential to develop a comparative advantage based on current strengths, favourable forecast for considerable growth, high future importance, and strong global position now and in the future)
- **sub-sector strengths** (evidencing highest **output growth** in terms of size and growth rate, highest **productivity** in terms of capacity to boost national productivity, and **international position** in terms of the ability to secure a world-leading position and comparative advantage).

This is best contextualised by providing a breakdown of the highest-performing sub-sectors in the creative industries by size, employment figures, and economic contribution in 2023-2024. Drawing on wide-ranging DCMS statistics, Nicola Newson (2025: n.p) reports that IT, Software and Computer Services was the largest sub-sector — boasting over 1 million jobs which amount to around 43% of all jobs in the creative industries. Newson notes further that this sub-sector — which includes video games production — contributed £49.1 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA), equivalent to just over 2% of the total UK GVA, and nearly 40% of the total creative industries' GVA. The two next largest sub-sectors were Advertising and Marketing (£21.5 billion) and Film, TV, Radio and Photography (£21.2 billion). The former had 260,000 jobs (10.8% of all jobs in the creative industries), and the latter, 256,000 jobs (10.7% of all jobs in the creative industries). Except for IT, Software and Computer Services, only Music, Performing, and Visual Arts had more jobs (311,000 or 13% of all jobs in the creative industries) although it reported less GVA at £11.2 billion.

In terms of geography and related economic contribution and job distribution across England, Uwazuruike *et al*. (2025: 11) provide instructive evidence drawing on DCMS' regional GVA statistics from 2022 and regional employment figures from 2023-2024. Confirming the substantial geographical differences and resultant inequalities discussed above, London contributed £63.26 billion (12% of region total GVA) and the South East, £20.13 billion (6% of region total GVA). At the bottom end, the East Midlands contributed £3.76 billion (2.9% of region total GVA), and the North East, £1.67 billion (2.6% of region total GVA). Across the UK, only two regions fared similar to the North East: Northern Ireland which contributed £1.60 billion (3.2% of region total GVA), and Wales, £1.24 billion (1.7% of region total GVA). In terms of the distribution of jobs across regions, London recorded 704,000 jobs (13.2% of region jobs), and the South East, 406,000 (8.6% of region jobs). By contrast, the East Midlands recorded 97,000 (4.2% of region jobs), and the North East, 55,000 (4.5% of region jobs). Across the UK, Wales recorded 75,000 (5.2% of region jobs), and Northern Ireland, 44,000 (4.9% of region jobs). It is with this vital context in mind that the Government has recently announced public funding allocations to, and investment in, city regions, creative clusters, creative corridors, and strategic industrial sites home to high-growth sub-sectors in the creative industries with the widest possible geographical spread.

Devolved Public Funding Allocations, Investment, and Creative Industries Priority Regions

In March 2024 while still in opposition, the current Labour Government published its 'Plan for the Arts, Culture and Creative Industries' (Labour, 2024). Not only did that Plan commit to strengthening British creative industries 'as a lynchpin for future growth' (Labour, 2024: 2), but also 'work[ing] collaboratively with Mayors and local leaders to make sure that the creative industries can grow outside London and the South East' (Labour, 2024: 12). To this end, Lisa Nandy (2025a) used the inaugural Creative Industries Growth Summit introduced earlier as an appropriate space to do three key things. First, to explain how support for growth and investment outside London will be delivered under the Sector Plan for the creative industries introduced above. Second, to announce the

Government's 11 priority regions for the creative industries which include: (1) the North East; (2) Greater Manchester; (3) Liverpool City Region; (4) West Yorkshire; (5) West Midlands; (6) Greater London; (7) West of England; (8) South Wales; (9) Glasgow; (10) Edinburgh-Dundee corridor; and (11) Belfast. Third, to announce £60 million in public funding allocations and investment — 40 million of which will be allocated over the next financial year (2025-2026) as presented below.

In keeping with its commitment to devolve significant powers to Mayoral Combined Authorities across England as a way of empowering them to grow the high-performing sub-sectors of the creative industries in their places, the Government has committed to allocating additional public funding to six Mayoral Combined Authorities. These are (1) the North East; (2) Greater Manchester; (3) Liverpool City Region; (4) West Yorkshire; (5) West Midlands; and (6) West of England (DCMS, 2025a). Capturing the spirit of the Government's Industrial Strategy — and the growth mission at its core, this public funding allocation is intended to 'maximise the strengths of these areas to deliver growth and build upon progress to provide an attractive business environment and encourage strong, continued investment in the creative industries for years to come' (DCMS, 2025a: n.p).

Devolved Public Funding Allocations and Place-based Approaches to Investment

Below is a comprehensive package of public funding allocations and investment announced by the current Government between October 2024 and March 2025.

Arts Everywhere Fund (£270 million+)

Informed by the understanding that the '[a]rts and culture are a vital part of [the UK's] first-class creative industries and are a key part of what makes Britain so great' (DCMS, 2025c: n.p), the Government has allocated over £270 million of major investment 'to ensuring that arts and culture thrive in every part of the country, with more opportunities for more people to engage, benefit from and work in [this sector] where they live' (Nandy, 2025: n.p). As part of the Government's Plan for Change, this investment will build fit-for-purpose cultural infrastructure, support the improvement of Britain's cultural offer, help attract tourism, generate more creative jobs, and facilitate creative skills development as part of a well-supported creative industries ecosystem (DCMS, 2025d; Nandy, 2025). Below is a breakdown of the allocated £270 million+ major investment.

- **Public Bodies Infrastructure Fund (£120 million)**: Established in 2020-2021 with **£60 million** (DCMS, 2021), an additional £120 million has been allocated to support national cultural public institutions to address essential works to their estate. This has been complemented by two further fiscal instruments. First, a **5%**

increase to the budgets of all national museums and galleries to support their financial resilience and help them provide access to the national collection (DCMS, 2025c). Second, generous and higher **tax relief** for theatres, orchestras and museums and galleries — with rates of 40 percent for non-touring productions, and 45 percent for orchestral and touring productions (DCMS, 2024e: n.p);

- **Creative Foundations Fund (£85 million)**: To support urgent capital works to keep creative venues across the country up and running;
- **Museum Estate and Development Fund (£25 million)**: To support museums to undertake vital infrastructure projects, and tackle urgent maintenance backlogs. This latest investment complements the **£86.6 million** allocated in the previous four rounds of this scheme (DCMS, 2024g);
- **Museum Renewal Fund (£20 million)**: To help keep civic museums operational and in the service of local communities;
- **Heritage at Risk (£15 million)**: To support repairs and conservation to heritage buildings and intangible assets at risk, focusing on those sites with most need;
- **Libraries Improvement Fund (£5.5 million)**: To support public library services across England to upgrade buildings and technology to better respond to changing user needs. This brings the total of investment allocated over four public funding rounds to **£20.5 million**;
- **Heritage Revival Fund (£4.85 million)**: To support local community groups to regenerate derelict and neglected heritage buildings for good use;
- 4 cultural education programmes **(£3.2 million)** funded by the Department for Education (DfE) until March 2025, and by DCMS from April 2026: First, the **Museums and Schools Programme** — whose funding is administered by Arts Council England (ACE) — provides educational museum visits for school pupils in areas with lower-than-average cultural engagement. Second, the **Heritage Schools Programme**, whose funding is administered by Historic England, utilises local heritage to connect children to where they live, develop a sense of place, and foster an understanding of how local heritage relates to the national story. Third, **the Art and Design National Saturday Club** — whose funding is also administered by ACE — offers adolescents across the country dynamic creative learning programmes to develop their skills, nurture their talents, and encourage their creativity. Fourth, the **British Film Institute (BFI) Film Academy** trains young people interested in pursuing a career in the screen industries anywhere in the country.

Create Growth Programme (£16.3 million)

The Creative Growth Programme (CGP) emerged from a pilot titled the 'Creative Scale Up' that ran between 2019 and 2021. Launched with **£4 million** of Government funding, the pilot enabled three Combined Authorities — Greater Manchester, West of England, and West Midlands — to support the growth of over 200 creative businesses and engage with 215 investors outside London (DCMS, 2023b: 3). CGP was set up in 2022 by DCMS to build on the success of the pilot by providing **£17.5 million** investment in six initial regions in England outside London, namely (1) Greater Manchester; (2) West of England and Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly; (3) Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire; (4) Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Lincolnshire; (5) Kent, Essex and East and West Sussex; and (6) the North East (DCMS, 2022a). Each of these six regions was awarded **£1.275 million** in grant funding to develop bespoke packages to support high-growth potential creative businesses with finance and build investor capacity-building activities and networks (DCMS 2022a; 2022b). In June 2023, the Government allocated an additional **£10.9 million** in funding and investment to expand CGP to cover six new geographical areas, namely (1) Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, (2) Devon, (3) Hull and East Yorkshire, (4) West Midlands, (5) West Yorkshire, and (6) Hertfordshire (DCMS, 2023b; 2024b). The current Government has allocated a further additional **£16.3 million** to CGP.

Separate to CGP but with significant overlap was the **£61 million** Creative Industries Clusters Programme (CICP) which ran between 2018-2023. Delivered by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) on behalf of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), CICP drove innovation and grew research and development (R&D) activity across the UK's creative industries (UKRI, 2024b). CICP operated a devolved funding model comprising nine Creative R&D Partnerships (mostly referred to as clusters) across the UK. These clusters were given control over how they allocated and managed their funds which totalled **£55 million**, led by a university that played a commissioning or grant-making role (Frontier Economics and BOP Consulting, 2024). Targeting regional rather than national economic development, CICP facilitated 'links between research undertaken in HEIs and the creative industries and then at the city-region level, to deliver regional economic benefits associated with R&D investment and cluster development including an expansion of capacity among creative businesses to exploit technical and data-driven innovation (DDI) (Frontier Economics and BOP Consulting, 2024: 5). Despite initial assessments showing that CICP has recorded returns of '600 percent higher' than what was thought possible when it was launched (Communications and Digital Committee, 2023: n.p) — including raising a total of £276.8 million in co-investment (Hay *et al*., 2024: 95), the current Government has not extended CICP as it did with CGP. However, UKRI has committed an initial **£50 million** on behalf of the Government to establishing a second wave of creative clusters to extend the benefits of the clusters model to new regional partnerships and places (UKRI, 2024a; Gault, 2025).

Cultural Development Fund (£16.2 million)

The Cultural Development Fund (CDF) was launched in 2019 to level up the country through investment in culture and the creative industries (DCMS, 2024f). Funded by DCMS and administered by Arts Council England over 3 rounds of public funding (2019-2023) that have allocated a total of **£76.9 million** to mostly local authority-led partnerships (DCMS, 2023c), CDF is demonstrably unlocking local growth and productivity, increasing access to the arts, and regenerating communities through investment in cultural initiatives (LGA, 2022; DCMS, 2024f). Places that have successfully secured funding are those that have demonstrated a strategic vision for their development and commitment to culture-led growth through investment in physical and/or digital infrastructure as well as other place-based assets to accelerate and maximise impact broadly considered. In Round 4, **£16.2 million** has been allocated as follows:

- The Centre for Writing (Newcastle): **£5 million** will support the redevelopment of a Grade II listed historic building that will house this hub of excellence for writing and publishing;
- Glassworks (Sunderland): **£5 million** will finance the construction of a new world class facility for glass making that will connect the city's 1,350 years of glassmaking heritage;
- Harmony Works (Sheffield): **£3.5 million** will support the redevelopment of a vacant Grade II listed building into a music education centre for young people from diverse backgrounds to explore and hone their musical talents; and
- The Tropicana (Weston-super-Mare, North Somerset): **£2.7 million** will fund the transformation of the historic seafront complex into a flagship cultural centre.

The UK Global Screen Fund (£7 million)

The UK Global Screen Fund (UKGSF) was initially established as a one-year pilot in 2021-22 but has since been expanded to run for a four-year period (2021-2025) (Safaie *et al.*, 2024: 11). Financed by DCMS and administered by the British Film Institute (BFI), UKGSF is a **£7 million per year fund** that supports the British independent screen sector, including film, TV, documentary, animation and interactive narrative games content, to accelerate revenue growth from the sale of UK screen content abroad and to boost the international competitiveness of this sector (BFI, 2025). UKGSF has a strong focus on 'ensuring a UK-wide benefit and addressing geographic imbalance within [this sector]' (BFI, 2025: n.p). Funding allocations and investment consider 'where companies are based, where projects are made and how projects reflect the culture and talent of Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the English regions outside Greater London' (BFI, 2025: n.p). An excellent example of this is the additional '**£25 million** devolved local growth funding' allocated to the North East Mayoral Combined Authority to build the new Crown Works Film Studio site in Sunderland which is 'set to be one of the largest film studios in Europe and is expected to lead to around 8,000 new jobs in the region' (DCMS, 2024e: n.p). Another example is the **£75 million** allocated to an Ulster University-led consortium in Northern Ireland by UKRI to build a state-of-the-art virtual production facility to help drive the next generation of visual effects technologies that will revolutionise the UK's film, TV and performing arts industries — giving Northern Ireland a global competitive edge (UKRI, 2023).

Funding allocations and investment to UKGSF are made across 5 strands: (1) International Co-production; (2) International Distribution Film Sales Support; (3) International Distribution Prints and Advertising Support; (4) International Distribution Festival Launch Support; and (5) International Business Development. UKGSF and other complementary funding have led to the UK becoming 'the largest film and high-end TV production location outside the USA, with the UK attracting £3.1 billion of film and high-end TV inward investment in 2023. This is driven by the availability of corporation tax reliefs and world-class production talent ranging from visual effects, virtual production, sound and make-up to line production and cinematography' (UK Government, 2025: n.p). In its Autumn Budget 2024, the Government committed to introducing **further tax relief** for the UK screen sector and other sub-sectors within the creative industries which will provide **£15 billion** of support until 2030 (HM Treasury, 2024a: 73). Administered through the Independent Film Tax Credit (IFTC) — which the last Conservative Government was also planning to introduce albeit with some restrictions (HM Treasury, 2024b), 'independent film productions costing up to £15 million will benefit from an increased tax relief of 53%' (DCMS, 2024d: n.p). Productions costing up to £23.5 million are also eligible for the IFTC, albeit with tapered relief (DCMS, 2024d). Productions will also benefit from **further visual effects (VFX) relief** to give them a distinctive competitive edge.

The UK Games Fund (£5.5 million)

The UK Games Fund (UKGF) was established in 2015 to support fledgling games businesses, develop innovative business models for creative digital Intellectual Property (IP), and nurture fresh talent through a skills development programme called 'Transfuser' across the UK (Bazalgette, 2017; DCMS, 2022c). Games production in the UK is 'the largest in Europe and 95 per cent of UK games development studios have global markets' (UK Government, 2025: n.p). This does not seem surprising considering that 'total government investment in the UKGF between 2022 and 2025 [has amounted] to **£13.4 million**' (DCMS, 2025c: n.p) — excluding the newly allocated **£5.5 million**. The UK games consumer market in 2023 is reported to have been worth £7.8 billion, further reinforcing the distinctive strength of the IT, Software and Computer Services sub-sector of which it is an integral part. Although this figure was not adjusted to reflect inflation, it indicates that UK games production has doubled its value since 2013 (DCMS, 2025: n.p). Funding recipients have so far been based in Scotland, London, North East, North West, South East, South West, East of England, and Wales.

Supporting Grassroots Music Fund (£2.5 million)

Following the initial **£5 million** investment in the Supporting Grassroots Music (SGM) programme for the period between November 2023 and April 2025, the Government is investing a further **£2.5 million** until April 2026. This investment 'supports rehearsal and recording studios, festivals and promoters, as well as venues for live and electronic music performance' (ACE, n.d: n.p). The programme is regarded as '[t]he engine room of England's thriving music ecology' — one that serves as a seedbed of skills development, experimentation with new ideas and approaches, and identifying new talent (ACE, n.d). In the absence of key data on funding recipients and their geographical spread, it is difficult to discern which places have so far received SGM programme funds — including the value of the awards. A look at the applicants and their geographical areas, however, provides some useful insights. In their recent evaluation of the experience of the 465 programme applicants they studied, Harris *et al*. (2023: 17) observed the following. 126 applicants (27%) were based in the North; 104 (22%) in London; 98 (21%) in the South East; 73 (16%) in the Midlands, and 64 (14%) in the South West.

The Music Export Growth Scheme (£1.6 million)

The Music Export Growth Scheme (MEGS) supports small and medium-sized music companies to build on their commercial potential by profiling their artists in overseas markets. Since 2014 — and over a cycle of 22 funding allocation rounds, 'MEGS has invested over **£6 million** in British music, leading to an estimated £55.5 million financial return to the UK economy and a return on investment of nearly £14 for every £1 received from Government' (DBT, 2024b: n.p). Like the previous funding allocation rounds, this latest round totalling **£1.6 million** seeks to maximise the potential of a new generation of home-grown talent as part of the Government's ambitious plans and efforts to grow the creative industries, and by extension, achieve its growth mission. In terms of the geographical spread of the award recipients, grant holders 'are from every geographical region within the UK. The Greater London area is the most represented region (48% of all grants)' — suggesting that MEGS grant holders use the capital as their base considering that most record labels, management companies and other associated music companies are located there (BPI, 2019, cited in, Matthews *et al.*, 2021: 13). Taken together, the global appeal of, and considerable appetite for, British screen and games content, music, heritage attractions, and the performing arts (including admiration for British creative industries leadership) among other things place the UK in a favourable position to build, wield, and exercise enormous economic and cultural influence on the international stage through soft power and to maintain and expand that influence.

Conclusion

In achieving its growth mission, the Government views the creative industries as 'a British success story with a big part to play' both at home and abroad (DCMS, 2025b: n.p). At home, the exponential growth of these industries means they have become an integral part of the national growth strategy — contributing substantially to the revitalisation of the UK economy as this review has shown. The UK continues to enjoy a world-leading position as an exporter of creative services and outputs and a contributor to inward foreign direct investment (FDI) — understood as an investment from a party in one country into a business or corporation in another country. Between 2013 and 2023, for example, British creative industries accounted for 10.3% of all inward UK FDI projects — capturing 9.3% of global share of creative industry FDI and 7% of the global share of all FDI only behind the U.S which recorded 12.9% of global share of creative industry FDI and 13.7% of the global share of all FDI respectively (Jones *et al*., 2024: 5). Investment in the arts, culture, and heritage as part of the dynamic ecosystem of the creative industries is serving as a driver of inclusive growth and welfare improvement — contributing to the formation of prosperous and proud communities whose enhanced wellbeing and quality of life are at the heart of the Government's mission-driven agenda.

Abroad, the success story continues. The current Government understands that the British creative industries enjoy a reputation as a world leader by virtue of their distinctive ability to 'attract investment to every part of the UK from every part of the globe' (DCMS, 2025d: n.p). The Government also understands that a strategic approach to leveraging this critical asset has not been taken in the past. It is for this reason that the Government has created the Soft Power Council, in part, to leverage the economic power, success, and reputation of the creative industries to (1) secure current and future creative industries markets, (2) re-imagine Britain's role on the world stage, (3) reinvigorate alliances, and (4) forge new partnerships (Bryant, 2025; DCMS, 2025b). To achieve this effectively, the Government should consider taking a leaf out of Ireland's book. This review noted earlier that Ireland was ranked second globally after the U.S at exporting creative services in 2022. Ireland's success here partially derives from the country's strong ability to embed its digital arts, culture, heritage, and creative industries in both its national and outward-facing strategic frameworks.

An illustrative example of the latter is 'Global Ireland 2025' which represents the most ambitious renewal and expansion of the country's international presence ever undertaken in terms of diplomacy, culture, business, overseas development assistance, tourism and trade (Mutibwa, 2024: 40-41). This is precisely the position that the UK Government is aspiring to be in — identifying the creative industries as an essential asset in this endeavour. To underscore the importance of learning from, and closely collaborating with, Ireland to develop British soft power effectively, a strategic partnership between Ireland and the UK was established in March 2025 (Prime Minister's Office, 2025). Published under the 'UK-Ireland 2030 Joint Statement', the strategic partnership aims to reinvigorate the relationship between the UK and Ireland in a wide range of realms. Of most relevance to the UK creative industries is the objective to deepen and amplify 'the extraordinary influence and contribution of British and Irish cultures and heritages to the artistic and cultural wealth of the public realm and creative industries and institutions in' the UK, Ireland and across the globe (Prime Minister's Office, 2025: n.p).

Recommendations for Futureproofing the Economic Power, Soft Power, and Welfare Development Role of the UK Creative Industries

- Expedite devolution arrangements to enable local leaders and their regional partners to offer bespoke and timely support to the creative industries in their places in alignment with the Government's growth mission.
- Reward Combined Authorities that demonstrate substantial contribution of the arts, culture, heritage, sport, tourism, and the creative industries to the long-term growth of their places via local growth plans with additional funding.
- Extend the Creative Industries Clusters Programme to capitalise on the private-public investment networks initiated, to continue to tackle geographical disparities, and to expand inclusive growth.
- Keep generous and higher tax relief beyond 2026 to maintain the distinctive comparative advantage enjoyed by British creative industries, and by extension, their economic power and soft power as well their role as drivers of welfare improvement.
- Learn from 'Global Ireland 2025' by leveraging the success story of British creative industries to present the UK to the rest of the world in a fluid and joined-up fashion.

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