

Create Central

# Evaluation of Create Central

Year 3 Report

7 August 2023

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**BOP**  
Consulting

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# Executive Summary

Create Central brings together the most successful TV, Film, Games, and wider creative content<sup>1</sup> leaders, stakeholders, and partners in the West Midlands.

The first year of Create Central (up to March 2021) established the potential of this distinctive organisation to deliver for the West Midlands. The second year (up to March 2022) more fully realised this potential, with increasing delivery for the region. The third year (up to March 2023) further built on this potential, especially in relation to skills and training, while updating and strengthening the Create Central strategy. It is well-placed to strengthen this delivery in coming years, building on the strategic foundations established over its first three years.

Create Central has benefitted from funding from British Film Institute's (BFI) National Cluster Growth Fund. This evaluation comes at the end of what was initially intended as the last of two years of funding from this source. There has been an extension of the overhead funding of the programme by an additional year, to allow for the completion of programme delivery that had been disrupted because of Covid-19 over Create Central's first two years.

As Create Central has completed its third year, it is necessary to establish its financial and organisational future beyond the National Cluster Growth Fund. This future will build upon the distinctive organisational structure established over the years covered by this evaluation – with a clear strategic focus and growing delivery for the West Midlands.

## Establishing a distinctive organisation

The first three years of Create Central have established a distinctive organisation in various senses:

- **Focus:** On the creative content sector, rather than a narrower focus on the screen industries sector or a broader focus on the creative industries. This focus has been effective in the first two years of Create Central. Looking ahead, it may be appropriate to consider whether enhanced delivery from Create Central could entail a broadened focus encompassing adjacent

sectors to creative content (e.g., music, fashion, design), although this has not to date been discussed by the Create Central board.

- **Membership:** Bringing together leaders from across the creative content sector of the West Midlands who are so passionate about this region that they have volunteered their time to serve as members and are pioneering a model of collaborative leadership for the creative content sector in the West Midlands. The approach was consolidated in the second year of Create Central with the appointment of Create Central Champions “*to act as global roving ambassadors for the region*”.<sup>2</sup> The warm welcome that Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands, provided to these champions is indicative of the consistent backing that he has provided to Create Central:



I can't think of better group to help raise the profile of the West Midlands both within the UK and abroad, and I know they will help grow our creative sector from strength to strength.

- **Partnership with key public sector agencies:** Alongside the private sector leadership of Create Central, the organisation benefits from a close relationship with key public sector organisations in the West Midlands, including the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), West Midlands Growth Company (WMGC) and the 3 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) that serve the region. The supportive Mayor chairs WMCA, which has helped to give momentum to Create Central. However, these public sector agencies have reorganised, following publication of the government's White Paper on Levelling Up in February 2022. In coming years, it will be important for Create Central to establish effective ways of working with these reconfigured agencies, allowing Create Central to best contribute to regional ambitions for levelling up and economic development.
- **Credibility and legitimacy:** This combination of private sector leadership and public sector partnership has given Create Central legitimacy and credibility in both the public and private sectors. This has enabled Create

Central to benefit from partnership arrangements and relationships with key national sector bodies<sup>3</sup> and existing sector intermediaries in the region.<sup>4</sup> These arrangements deepened and extended over the second year of Create Central.

We provide more detail on the background and approach of Create Central in Chapter 1.

## Year 1: Laying the foundations

With Chapter 3 of this report detailing Year 1 activities, the foundations of this distinctive organisation were laid over Year 1 and delivery began during this period.

The case studies that are presented in this report (Chapter 5) showcase key achievements over Year 1:

- **Production and Inward Investment Strategy:** Create Central created a strategy that unites stakeholders in the region and provides a clear proposition to investors considering investment in the region.
- **Securing a Five-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the BBC:** Create Central secured specific commitments from the BBC as part of a long-term partnership to increase its investment in the West Midlands and reassured the BBC that these investments will be complemented by coordinated activity and interventions in the region.
- **Establishing the Create Central brand:** Create Central is positioning the West Midlands as “*The Home of Original Storytelling*”. This branding unites the history of the region (e.g., Shakespeare, Tolkien) and the Create Central ambition, as expressed in our Theory of Change (Chapter 2), that the region be “*recognised and celebrated as a national and international creative content sector leader*”. This creative content sector leadership is intended to decisively move the region beyond disparate activity in different geographies and sectors of the West Midlands and enable the creative content sector in the region to embody the Create Central brand.

- **Creative Content Hub:** Create Central was fundamental to unlocking the investment that will bring the Hub, a 50,000sqft campus facility for independent TV producers and creative content developers, to the burgeoning creative destination of Digbeth, Birmingham.
- **Innovation and cross sector working:** Create Central has used its BFI funding to attract additional investment that will allow it, in partnership with other agencies in the region, to respond to societal challenges (e.g., mental health, climate change). These are important first steps on the journey envisaged by our Theory of Change of creating, “*a fully converged West Midlands creative content sector at the forefront of innovation*”.

## Year 2: Growing delivery for the West Midlands

The key achievements of Year 1 were built upon in Year 2. Chapters 4 and 5 shows how this was done:

- **Deepening the Production and Inward Investment Strategy:** This strategy was complemented in Year 2 by strengthened production services in the West Midlands, including the continued development of the WM Production Services Group. These services build on existing stage/studio space and crew mappings undertaken by Create Central, as well as a partnership with Creative UK, which supports those seeking to film in the region. This strategy is already helping to secure additional investment and filming in the region, as explored in more detail below.
- **Building on the Five-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the BBC:** In Year 2 of Create Central, these efforts:
  - Secured a commitment to bring all four strands of MasterChef to the region from 2024, in a landmark 6-year deal, as well as a new primetime drama series and a new primetime entertainment series, both to be announced.
  - Established a creative partnership with BBC Three and BBC England to commission three new works in the West Midlands from independent production companies based in the region.

- Were consolidated with additional strategic partnerships, including with Channel 4 and ITV.
- Announced in April 2022, a new collaboration between Channel 4 and Create Central to support and grow the West Midlands' TV production sector is a consequence of work undertaken by Create Central in Year 2. This partnership includes a £30K More4 linear content development fund, a £20K digital development fund and a Channel 4 West Midlands Open Day event.
- Create Central partnered with ITV and match funded two production placements for the drama *Stonehouse*, which was filmed in the region. These placements were awarded to candidates who had attended Create Central bootcamps.
- **Growing the Create Central brand:** Month-by-month growth of Create Central social media platforms. From a blank slate in 2020, there are now over 2,000 Twitter followers, 1,600 LinkedIn followers and 1,300 Instagram followers.
- The Create Central brand was strengthened in the West Midlands by delivery of events across the region. Create Central established some pattern of event delivery in the autumn of 2021, although this was impacted by the Omicron wave in winter 2021/22.
- The Create Central brand also helped to win the Creative Cities Convention for Birmingham, with this convention, in turn, further building the Create Central brand. 250 delegates and speakers participated in the Creative Cities Convention 2022 in Birmingham. This is an industry-backed conference celebrating content production and distribution across the UK – with backing from the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, 5, and PACT. With hosting from Kirsty Wark and Qasa Alom, the event reflected on key issues for the creative content sector in the West Midlands, e.g., building skills pipelines outside of London and celebrating the work of screen agencies across the UK. The Creative Cities Convention is clear on the importance of Create Central to bringing this about:



Thanks a million to Suzie Norton and the Create Central team for supporting and encouraging us from start to finish.

- **Progression of the Creative Content Hub:** An £18m facility, based in the former Bond building in Digbeth and scheduled to open in Autumn 2022. Alongside this, while Create Central is not involved formally in the development of Digbeth Loc., Create Central supported conversations about the studios at a strategic level regionally. MasterChef will be filmed at Digbeth Loc.
- **Innovation and cross sector working:** Year 2 saw numerous achievements relevant to this, including:
  - Positive Realities: Announced in Year 1, Year 2 saw the delivery of the winning project, Urban Jungle AR, an augmented reality platform hosting a series of virtual performances.
  - Innovate: Create – an innovation project that worked with Birmingham 2022 Festival and National Express. Built around challenge briefs. The Birmingham 2022 Festival has led to two commissions – one around statues and another around engaging 9–12-year-olds with the festival, while the National Express challenge seeks to encourage the sustainable use of public transport.
- **More skills delivery:** This was an important advance in Year 2, with 4 bootcamps delivered:
  - Content creation for business (June – July 2021)
  - TV production (August – October 2021)
  - Video games production (October – November 2021)
  - the Host Broadcast Training Initiative (HBTI) which had a specific focus on training up new talent for the Commonwealth Games (December 2021)

July 2022). There were 34 participants across the first three bootcamps, whilst around 125 people engaged with the HBTI bootcamp.

### Year 3: Looking ahead

During Year 3 of Create Central, the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) published the *West Midlands Plan for Growth* (July 2022). This will guide the next phase of economic development in the West Midlands, with funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the West Midlands benefitting from a ‘trailblazer devolution deal’.<sup>1</sup>

The Creative Content Production and Gaming Cluster has been selected as one of the eight clusters in the *Plan for Growth* with Create Central assigned responsibility for cluster development. Clusters within the *Plan for Growth* will receive cluster delivery support through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and other national and regional funds.

Create Central will act on this new responsibility from WMCA, informed by *Shape the Future: 2030 and Beyond*, which identifies 5 priority areas that will be the focus of Create Central action. These priorities provide the greatest likelihood of advancing the region’s creative content sector. These priorities are:

- Intellectual Property (IP) Content Fund
- Monetising Content
- Future Media
- Games Sector
- Sustainability

This refreshed strategy that Create Central developed over Year 3 will allow it to further advance over coming years, backed-up by 2-3 years of confirmed funding through:

- UK Shared Prosperity Fund
- National Lottery Funding through the British Film Institute’s Skills Cluster Fund
- Funding associated with Create Central being a delivery partner for the Innovation Accelerator funded West Midlands Innovation programme.

Create Central is embedded in the regional economic development strategy through the *Plan for Growth* and delivering on national priorities through its BFI funding. In addition to these sources of funding, it continues to seek to accelerate delivery of its 2030 ambitions through additional public and private sector funding.

This is a future in which the West Midlands will benefit in 2026 from BBC Midlands relocating to the Digbeth creative quarter. In addition to helping to facilitate this major relocation and investment, Create Central also acted over Year 3 to:

- Secure a new partnership with Channel 4, including a £30K More4 the West Midlands linear content development fund, a £20K Digital Development fund and a Channel 4 West Midlands Open Day event.
- Launch The Bond: Creative Content Hub in partnership with Oval, set to become the epicentre of TV, film, and digital content production in the West Midlands – now hosting weekly comedy shows by award-winning comedian Joe Lycett, broadcast by Channel 4.
- Support the opening of Digbeth Loc., with a range of productions such as MasterChef and BBC drama This Town set to kick-off.

Funding from British Film Institute’s (BFI) National Cluster Growth Fund ran into Year 3 of Create Central to enable delivery of training that was prevented at an earlier stage by Covid-19 lockdowns. This was delivered with 78 Bootcamp participants across four different Bootcamps. Creative content skills have, therefore, deepened in the West Midlands, due to Create Central.

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<sup>1</sup> This deal “transfers more control and influence over the levers of economic growth and levelling up the Mayor and West Midlands Combined Authority”: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/west-midlands-combined-authority-trailblazer-deeper-devolution-deal>

Over the 3 years of Create Central, there has been minimal strengthening of creative content employment clusters in the West Midlands. In 2018 the only Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) in the West Midlands with a Screen Industries cluster was Coventry and Warwickshire LEP in games – due to the concentrated presence of businesses and workers operating in Games in Leamington Spa. This Games cluster in CWLEP grew between 2018 and 2021 – from a Location Quotient (LQ) of 3.0 to 5.8. Over the same period, there was minimal change in LQs elsewhere in the West Midlands.

The actions of Create Central over Year 3 will support the future growth of the creative content sector in the region. It will be necessary for significant deepening of creative content employment and clustering to occur for Create Central to secure the ambitions that it has established for itself over Year 3.



# 1. Introduction to Create Central

Create Central brings together some of the most successful TV, Film, Games, and wider creative content leaders in the West Midlands. These leaders offer their time and experience to develop new sources of growth for the region's creative content sector.

This chapter provides some background on Create Central – both in terms of the creative content sector and the public policy context in the region. In addition, it provides an overview of the Create Central membership and governance, including finances.

## 1.1 Background

### Creative Content context in the West Midlands

The West Midlands' creative content sector has experienced a mixed decade with some sub-sectors responding rapidly to new markets (e.g., the Games cluster centred on Leamington Spa) and others (e.g., TV and Film) facing more significant challenges due to a historic lack of investment, infrastructure, and the decline of public sector broadcasting in the region.

Following the demise of Screen West Midlands in 2011, there was a lack of a regional body representing screen-sector businesses. This institutional loss coincided with the decline of regional production studios, leading to a major impact on sectoral growth. For example, within the geography of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP), there was a 42% drop in employment in film, television, radio and photography between 2010 and 2015.

However, in 2016, Birmingham was announced as the new home for BBC Three, the youth digital channel. The West Midlands sought to build on this success in 2018 by bidding to host Channel 4's new National HQ, announced

as part of its '4 All The UK' strategy. While Leeds, ultimately, secured C4's National HQ, the process of bidding re-focused local government attention and engaged the creative content sector in the West Midlands in a collective endeavour.

The mixed successes of TV and Film within the West Midlands contrast with the more consistent successes of its Games sector, concentrated on Leamington Spa and sometimes referred to as 'Silicon Spa'.

Codemasters is a key business within this games cluster. Established in 1986, it is one of the oldest British video game companies and is well-known for its long-running Colin McRae series. Pioneering businesses like Codemasters helped to attract major studios to Leamington Spa in the form of Ubisoft, Playground, SEGA HARDlight and Rebellion.

### Public Policy Context in the West Midlands

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) launched the UK's first Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) in May 2019. Within this strategy, Creative Content, Techniques and Technologies were identified as a major new market opportunity and Creative Industries as one of the region's twelve sector strengths.

Create Central was established by WMCA in October 2019 following WMCA's launch of the region's LIS to help drive forward the growth of the creative content sector.

In January 2020, Create Central established a consortium of public sector partners<sup>2</sup> to work with it to develop a growth plan for the sector and a supporting programme of activities, based on the output from Create Central members' working groups.

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<sup>2</sup> West Midlands Combined Authority, West Midlands Growth Company, WM5G, West Midlands Combined Universities, Innovation Alliance for the West Midlands, the Innovation Board for the West Midlands, Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP, Black Country LEP and Coventry and Warwickshire LEP

In March 2020 Create Central secured £2m investment to support the delivery of its growth plan – through WMCA, Tin Smart Social and BFI’s National Cluster Growth Fund.

It is key to this growth plan that Create Central brings together the region’s most successful TV, film, games, and wider creative content business leaders. Membership reflects not just the larger corporations but also the independent screen sector and has representation to reflect the diversity and youth of the region.

Create Central is private-sector only, and arms-length from local government, linking to the public sector via a governance framework agreed by the WMCA and LEPs. It links to public sector stakeholders and the regional ecosystem through a model of collaborative leadership, which includes:

- Partnerships with national sector bodies such as the BFI, Creative UK, ScreenSkills, Ukie, and strong relationships with, PACT, Creative Industries Council, British Film Commission, UK Screen Alliance, British Games Institute, and others.
- A formal partnership agreement with the West Midlands Growth Company to develop and deliver a Production and Inward Investment Strategy, with a shared senior post to deliver.
- Building stronger connectivity between with existing sector intermediaries such as Film Birmingham, Crew Birmingham, Silicon Spa, and skills and talent providers across the region.

## 1.2 Membership

Create Central is an industry body whose members comprise representatives from Film, TV, Games, and other creative content sectors.

Its membership offers an impressive and wide-range of skills and experiences – as is detailed on the Create Central website<sup>3</sup> and in Appendix 2 of this report.

Create Central’s founding membership was selected through an open-recruitment process with over 50 applicants from across the region. The final membership was selected by the Chair, together with the region’s Mayor and senior figures from the region’s three LEPs and WMCA.

Throughout the pilot year, Create Central evolved its model, moving from an initial membership of 28 to a body with an Executive Board, several Advisory Groups and nominated Create Central Champions alongside the wider membership (recruiting Champions was deferred to year 2). This process of change was initiated and led by the Create Central membership, and involved a review of both the governance model and the skills in place across the membership. Through this process, Create Central identified the key skills that were needed at an executive level and invited members to take more involved positions in the steering of Create Central based on a combination of skills and appetite for engagement.

The strength of these members has helped Create Central to secure legitimacy with key agencies in the region and beyond. The passion that these members have for the West Midlands is demonstrated by the Executive Board volunteering their time.

## 1.3 Governance

### 1.3.1 Governance principles and processes

Create Central’s model was agreed against the following principles, set out in the *Taking Forward the WM Screen Industry Report* published by WMCA and approved at the Strategic Economic Development (SED) Board in July 2019:

- The new body will be industry-led (private sector businesses) and arms-length from local government, linking to the public sector via a governance framework agreed by the WMCA and LEPs.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.createcentraluk.com/members>

- The body will appoint an Executive (highly skilled, with specialist industry experience) and a small number of leading sector specialists to support its function.
- The body will create an agile and responsive ecosystem, reflective of the rapidly changing nature of the screen sector.

This meeting of the SED board in July 2019 also agreed:

- Create Central's Executive Board will provide the principal oversight of the work of the Create Central. Create Central will consult with its Public Sector Consortium<sup>4</sup> on a bi-monthly basis to report progress on the bid and ensure alignment within the wider stakeholder framework.
- Create Central will align and engage with the formal governance structures of the West Midlands Combined Authority through a half-yearly report to the Strategic Economic Development (SED) Board.
- The SED Board exercises authority on behalf of the WMCA Board to oversee the economic strategy of the combined authority and to evaluate progress in delivering its Strategic Economic Plan. The SED Board comprises the WMCA Lead for Economy & Innovation, along with councillors from across the West Midlands and the region's three Local Enterprise Partnerships. It is therefore well-placed to oversee the progress and delivery being made Create Central. The SED Board meets in public and will provide wider transparency and assurance to the delivery of the project.
- As well as half-yearly reports to the combined authority's SED Board, Create Central will report quarterly to the BFI, providing regular monitoring evaluation and progress delivery updates. These quarterly reports will then provide the basis of the six-monthly report to Strategic Economic Development Board. The BFI will also receive a mid-term and end of project independent evaluation of Create Central Programme of Activities 2020-2022.

- Create Central members will receive training in line with the Nolan/Cadbury principles, including unconscious bias training.

The governance of Create Central has since been through various stages:

1. Create Central's launched as a 'proof on concept' body in October 2019. At this time, as discussed above under membership, 28 members were recruited.
2. Between August and October 2020 an independent review of members' skills, diversity, inclusion, geographic location, and sector representation occurred.
3. The SED Board in January 2021 approved Create Central's 'proof of concept' and the new structure proposed following this independent review.
4. After this January 2021 meeting of the SED Board, a public recruitment campaign occurred for members to join the Executive Board to fill the gaps identified in the independent review.
5. This public recruitment campaign concluded in March 2021 with the appointment of Create Central's Executive Board and four Industry Advisory Groups. Create Central Champions were recruited in Year Two, as agreed with the SED Board.

In years one and two, membership of the Executive Board was approved by the Mayor of the West Midlands and the West Midlands portfolio lead for Economy and Innovation following recommendation by WMCA Director of Strategy and the Chair of Create Central. This membership reflects the creative content sub-sectors and the WMCA geographical footprint.

Members join specialist Industry Advisory Groups, meeting every 4-6 weeks for 60-90 minutes to provide industry input to Create Central's delivery:

- Governance, Finance and Risk

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<sup>4</sup>West Midlands Combined Authority, West Midlands Growth Company, WM5G, West Midlands Combined Universities, Innovation Alliance for the West Midlands, the Innovation Board for the West

Midlands, Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP, Black Country LEP and Coventry and Warwickshire LEP.

- Skills and Talent
- Production and Inward Investment
- Communications and Content
- Innovation

The focus and activities of these Advisory Groups maps on to the Theory of Change presented in the next chapter.

BOP Consulting has benefitted from access to Create Central's Year 1 reporting to SED and BFI in generating Chapter 3 of this report (Year 1 Delivery).

### 1.3.2 Finances

Create Central was launched with no direct revenue or programme funding, aside from retainer costs for consultancy firm Zanna Creative's services paid by WMCA. WMCA also ring-fenced £500k from its Adult Education Budget for the Bootcamps (for which Create Central receives no direct funding).

In the first six months of operation, Create Central developed a growth plan and programme of activities, for which it received the following direct funding for its first year of operation (April 2020-March 2021)

- British Film Institute's National Cluster Growth Fund £500,000 in year one (£1m in total): Awarded to Create Central (via WMCA) to deliver a two-year programme of activities from April 2020 to March 2022. In its first year approximately £250,000 is revenue to support Create Central's small team of specialists and overhead costs, with the remaining £250,000 as direct programme delivery costs.
- WMCA – £400,000 Allocated by WMCA's Strategy Directorate between April 2020 – March 2021 for Executive Leadership of Create Central (Zanna Creative's retainer), 50% of Create Central's Innovation Leads via Innovation Alliance for the West Midlands and £250,000 Bootcamps.

It was initially planned that Create Central would work in partnership with Tin Smart Social to establish the Future Talent Studio project, which was terminated prior to launch due to Covid-19. The project had several months of development

across the Create Central team. If the time invested in this project had been allocated elsewhere, delivery in Year 1 might have been stronger. However, it was, of course, impossible to predict Covid-19.

In these changed circumstances, Create Central successfully pivoted into different activities and was able to secure new funding (e.g., Innovation Alliance of the West Midlands) to start to make up the shortfall created by the loss of Tin Smart Social funding.

Moving into year two (April 2021 – March 2022), the funding for Create Central has remained consistent, with both major funders repeating their commitments towards Create Central. Alongside this, Create Central secured additional funding from the BFI to cover staffing costs in year 3 of the project.

## 2. Theory of Change

This chapter introduces the Theory of Change (TOC) that we have used to structure our evaluation and the process by which this TOC was developed.

A TOC is foundational to good policymaking. Anchoring on existing evidence and robust assumptions, a TOC identifies the necessary inputs to support relevant activities, and articulate the expected short, medium, and long-term effects from the initial inputs and activities.

This relationship between inputs and impacts structures our evaluation of Create Central's activities and our assessment of the potential longer-term impacts of Create Central.

### 2.1 Development of the Theory of Change

The TOC was developed through an iterative process, working in collaboration with the Create Central Executive Board, and the evaluation steering group.

Following a desk review of existing policy documents, we devised an original draft of the TOC in the autumn of 2020. This was shared with the Create Central Executive Board for comments and was finalised in October 2020.

In the spring of 2021, an updated version of the TOC was produced. The refreshed version uses the same overarching levers; however, it breaks these down into smaller component parts, each of which aligns with a reporting mechanism for the Create Central Executive Board.

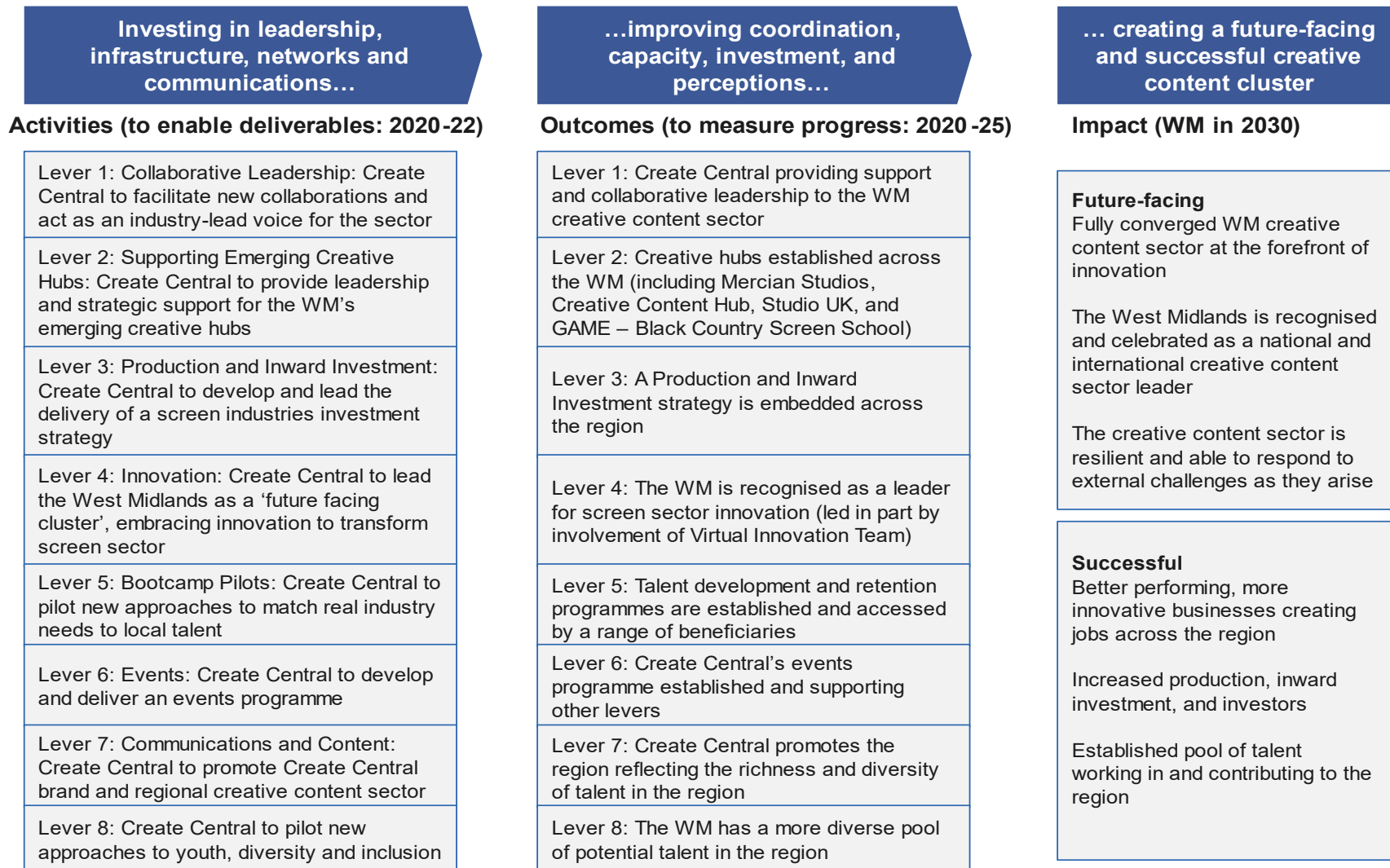
Revising the TOC in this way is consistent with the agility involved with the first year of Create Central being a 'Proof of Concept Year' – a concept that we discuss in our next chapter.

This revised approach, which has been agreed with the Create Central team, provides better transparency for reporting purposes, and enables clearer tracking of the progress of Create Central during this initial two-year period.

### 2.2 Theory of Change

The current iteration of the TOC is shown at figure 1 below. The delivery for year 1 is reported against this TOC at 3.2 below, whilst year 2 delivery is reported at 4.2.

**Figure 1 Create Central Theory of Change**



Source: BOP Consulting 2021

## 3. Year 1 Delivery

### 3.1 Year 1: Proof of concept

The first year of Create Central was a 'Proof of Concept Year'. This entailed agile approaches to review, adapt and develop the model. This has created a model that is distinctive – if not entirely unique – in its (a) governance/membership and financing structures and (b) focus on creative content, rather than a narrower focus on the screen industries or a broader focus on the creative industries.

This 'Proof of Concept Year' created opportunities for learning from Create Central's successes and failures. The model was adapted over the first year, helping to strengthen the opportunities for strategic development and deliver across year 2 and beyond.

Delivery in a 'Proof of Concept Year' will inevitably be less substantial than in subsequent years – especially when the 'Proof of Concept Year' coincides with a global pandemic and the necessity of lockdowns. However, the purpose of a 'Proof of Concept Year' is not to maximise delivery in Year 1 but to ensure that the organisation is best placed to maximise delivery over the lifetime of Create Central as a whole.

### 3.2 Outputs

Figure 2 shows the outputs that have been achieved against each of the Levers in the TOC during year 1.

For Year 1, delivery was predominantly focussed on establishing Create Central and working towards strategic aims. This had always been the intention for the

first year, although the Covid-19 pandemic did mean that some delivery originally planned for year 1 had to be postponed or reconfigured.

This strategic focus is particularly evident in relation to Lever 1 activity; during its first year there were a wide range of different group meetings across Create Central to help establish its scope. This includes: 4 board meetings; 19 meetings of the different working groups; and 23 meetings of the economic impact group.

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, Create Central were able to deliver a series of events and courses across each lever, with the exception of Lever 8, piloting new approaches to youth, diversity and inclusion, which was put on hold during year 1 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Significant numbers of people engaged with Create Central's talent development programmes (Lever 5) with over 2,300 people attending Create Central's events as part of BBC Digital Cities<sup>5</sup>. The first Bootcamp<sup>6</sup> pilot, which focused on TV production, saw more than four times the number of applicants to available places (55 to 12). Across the 12 campers, all of them have gone on to successfully interview for further work in the sector and between them have taken part in 22 work placements, 7 of which were paid, whilst one camper successfully applied for a six-month internship with Warner Brothers.

Around innovation (Lever 4), Create Central were integral to the successful delivery of Positive Realities,<sup>7</sup> with over 54 business applying to win the £120k grant award, which was awarded in Spring 2021. Alongside this, Create Central's involvement in the Creative Coalition<sup>8</sup> saw nearly 5.4k online festival attendees with over 1m social media engagements.

Additionally, although the bid was unsuccessful, the work that Create Central contributed towards the bid to DCMS for the 5G Creates Fund fostered strong relationships across the region between higher education and industry. For

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<sup>5</sup> BBC Digital Cities: a monthly series of free events and training for the creative industries. February 2021 was focussed on the West Midlands.

<sup>6</sup> Bootcamps: Create Central are working with WMCA and FE providers to deliver Indie, Film and Games Bootcamps, courses designed to develop sector skills in the region and run over 6-12 weeks. Bootcamps have been created and are being delivered in response to industry need around skills development and talent retention in the region. Each bootcamp culminates with a real job interview for each candidate.

<sup>7</sup> Positive Realities: an open innovation challenge in collaboration with Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 that encouraged applicants to explore new approaches to health and wellbeing

<sup>8</sup> Creative Coalition: a three-day festival from 9-11 November 2020 coordinated by Creative UK and the Creative Industries Federation; Create Central presented a panel session discussing how discuss how the region has found itself uniquely positioned to capitalise on its mix of industries during this year's lockdown

example, as a direct result of involvement with the bid, Covatic have created a series of 5-year placements for PhD students from BCU that focus on identifying and addressing gaps in the West midlands capabilities.

Strategically, Year 1 saw Create Central develop and adapt their structure, moving from a model where all members were part of the board to a model with an executive board and a wider consortium. Alongside this, significant steps

were made towards some of Create Central's strategic outcomes, including the development of a range of inward investment opportunities, two of which – the BBC Memorandum of Understanding, and the Creative Content Hub in Digbeth – are explored in greater detail in the case studies in chapter 4.

## Figure 2 Create Central Year 1 Achievements

### TOC Lever

### Year 1 Achievements (as of March 2021)

Lever 1: Collaborative Leadership: Create Central to facilitate new collaborations and act as an industry-lead voice for the sector

- Create Central creating partnerships with a wide range of public sector organisations, something not previously seen in the region. Partners include the BFI, BBC, Creative UK, ScreenSkills, Ukie, and the Producer's Alliance for Cinema and Television (PACT).
- Working partnership established with WMGC, particularly in relation to delivering innovation across the sector
- Involvement in Covid Recovery Groups convened by WMCA and LEPs
- Delivering the creative elements of the West Midlands Local Industrial Recovery Strategy alongside a range of partners
- BBC Engagement strategy
- Recruited for skills gaps on the Board
- Established new Create Central Executive Board & Advisory Groups

Lever 2: Supporting Emerging Creative Hubs: Create Central to provide leadership and strategic support for the West Midlands' emerging creative hubs

- Strategic support for GAME (Gaming, Animation, Media & Events incubation hub) aka the Black Country Screen School in Wolverhampton
- StudioUK – strategic support to Digital Catapult
- Creative Content Hub – announced strategic support to developers (Oval Estate) and funding approved by GBSLEP
- Digbeth Loc. – strategic support to developers (Nikal/Nebulastar) and lead stakeholder (WMGrowth Company)



## TOC Lever

## Year 1 Achievements (as of March 2021)

Lever 3: Production and Inward Investment: Create Central to develop and lead the delivery of a screen industries investment strategy

- Create Central part of BFI Screen Advisory Group for Global Screen Fund
- Submission to Ofcom on future of Public Service Broadcasters (PSB)s
- Production and & Inward Investment (PII) strategy approved by Strategy Economic and Development (SED) board which is made up of representatives from West Midlands Growth Company, West Midlands Combined Authority, local authorities across the West Midlands, local LEPs, and representatives from key sectors including higher education, further education, automotive, low carbon, and construction.
- Production Space and Crew Mapping commenced
- Development funding approved by BFI

Lever 4: Innovation: Create Central to lead the West Midlands as a 'future facing cluster', embracing innovation to transform our screen sector

- Positive Realities winner decided
- Virtual Innovation Team (VIT) established
- Innovation Engine 3<sup>9</sup> announced in collaboration with the VIT
- Creative Futures<sup>10</sup> UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) proposal submitted
- Task force and activities for West Midlands as an esports hub established
- Proposal submitted to EPIC Games "Mega Grant" initiative for a dedicated virtual production training programme that can upskill the games industry

Lever 5: Bootcamp Pilots: Create Central to pilot new approaches to match real industry skills needs to local talent

- TV production bootcamp: industry consultation on post-Covid needs, content and placements developed, cohort 1 recruited and in progress
- Digital media, esports and games bootcamps: in development
- Film bootcamp: in discussion with relevant training providers

Lever 6: Events: Create Central to develop and deliver an events programme

- Industry briefing event to launch Create Central
- Involvement in a range of partner events and panels including:
  - Venturefest<sup>11</sup> in collaboration with Innovation Alliance WM

<sup>9</sup> Innovation Engine 3: a 12 month project inviting creative content SMEs to apply for grants related to solving local challenges around the theme of 'low carbon

<sup>10</sup> Creative Futures: bid to UKRI as part of their Strength in Places Fund supporting the growth of immersive technologies in Coventry and Warwickshire

<sup>11</sup> Venturefest: a free one-day event supporting business growth through innovation

## TOC Lever

## Year 1 Achievements (as of March 2021)

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interactive Futures<sup>12</sup> with CWLEP keynote and support</li><li>• BBC Digital Cities panel sessions</li></ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>— A series of skills development events including a panel, blogs, and a live Q&amp;A session</li></ul>
Lever 7: Communications and Content: Create Central to promote Create Central brand and regional creative content sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>— Comms channels and contacts database established</li><li>— Social media channels in development</li><li>— “Home of Original Storytelling” campaign launched</li><li>— Highlights video created</li><li>— Knowledge share campaign</li><li>— Executive Board recruitment campaign</li><li>— Communications strategy in development</li></ul>

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Source: Create Central Executive Updates

## 3.3 Reflections on Create Central

To understand the strategic impact that Create Central has had on the region during its first year, we facilitated a series of roundtable discussions, as well as short one-to-one interviews with key stakeholders.

These conversations sought to understand:

- How effectively Create Central has operated in its first year
- The opportunities for Create Central to add value to the region in Year 2 and the threats to this value being realised
- How Create Central could support the region to capitalise on opportunities beyond Year 2 and the threats to this.

The full list of consultees can be found in our Methodological Appendix.

### 3.3.1 Year 1 effectiveness

Roundtable attendees and interviewees expressed recognition that:

- Year 1 was a ‘Proof-of-Concept Year’ and that the structures developed over this year will enable Create Central to increase its delivery and impact in future.
- While Create Central directly delivers some services (e.g., Bootcamps), many of its activities are strategic and delivered in partnership with other agencies. Year 1 was in part about developing these partnerships and with these in place more delivery will follow in Year 2.

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<sup>12</sup> Interactive Futures: a showcase festival focusing on the cluster of video games development companies based in the West Midlands

- Covid-19 and associated lockdowns have been disruptive to Year 1, especially in three respects:
  - Inability to hold networking and socialising events in person
  - Inability to hold training events in person and need to move them online
  - The actions in Lever 8 of our TOC relating to youth, diversity, and inclusion were to be delivered through the Future Talent Studio project which was cancelled due to Covid. New projects to support this aim are now in development.

Despite these factors, there is appreciation among consultees for the effectiveness of Create Central in Year 1 – including:

- **Speed of action:** Create Central moved quickly to establish itself and secured significant achievements over its first year (e.g., BBC Memorandum of Understanding, Creative Content Hub, and every participant on the Bootcamps having subsequently accessed paid employment in the creative content sector).
- **Brand established:** Create Central has established its brand in the region and is building its brand more widely. We discuss this in a case study in the next chapter.
- **Improved representation:** Create Central is representative of all the sectors that form the creative content sector and all parts of the West Midlands. It is also felt that those involved successfully represent the youth and diversity of the West Midlands. Equally, this representation will be further strengthened with the resumption of activities under Lever 8 of our TOC.
- **Strong team:** Create Central has established an impressive team and effective governance structure. This team is actively listening to the creative content sector in the West Midlands and providing new leadership. With the P&I strategy, which we discuss further in a case study in the next chapter, an important part of this leadership.

### 3.3.2 Supporting Creative Content in the West Midlands in Year 2 and beyond

Looking to Year 2 and beyond, roundtable attendees and interviewees were keen that Create Central maintained momentum: kept growing its membership, strengthening its networks, and demonstrating the value of Create Central for the creative content sector in the region.

After a ‘Proof-of-Concept Year’ and the challenges of Covid, there was hope that Create Central could more effectively attract and retain talent, inward investment, and production in the region.

To enable this and advance towards the impacts contained in our TOC, those consulted provided a series of reflections on Create Central that are relevant and which we discuss below.

#### Clarity of communications and positioning

Consultees recognised the strength of Create Central’s brand and communications, and were keen that these further strengthen. Two suggestions of ways in which this strengthening might occur are:

- Some consultees felt that they could more effectively advocate for Create Central if given more notice of announcements.
- There is also a keenness that the positioning of Create Central remain tightly defined on creative content and not too broadly defined across the creative industries as a whole and/or other kinds of activities.

#### Making the West Midlands more than the sum of its parts

Telling a coherent and cohesive story of the creative content sector in the West Midlands is core to Create Central’s mission. Consultees were keen to ensure that Create Central is not skewed by geography (i.e., towards Birmingham more than the other parts of the West Midlands) or sector (i.e., towards Film/TV over other creative content sectors).

## **The balance between strategic influence and delivery**

Consultees appreciated that Create Central cannot solve all challenges facing the region's creative content sector in isolation. It will need to form alliances to most effectively do this. These alliances are central to Create Central's strategic influence. At the same time, Create Central does directly deliver some services.

Finding the right balance between direct service provision and forming strategic alliances is an ongoing challenge for Create Central, which its Executive Board will keep under review. As we discuss below, there are some strategic challenges that consultees are keen that Create Central find ways to meet:

- Ensuring that the BBC act on the commitments to the West Midlands expressed in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreed with Create Central on behalf of the region.
- Making sure that the Creative Content Hub fulfil its potential.
- Unlocking other facilities for the region, especially at Digbeth Loc. Studios.

## **Ensuring delivery from BBC and Creative Content Hub**

As we discuss in case studies later in the report, Create Central was important to unlocking the MOU from the BBC and finance for the Creative Content Hub. As much as consultees recognised these achievements, they were also keen that Create Central now act to ensure that it fulfils its potential: making sure the BBC delivers upon all commitments made to the West Midlands and ensuring that the Creative Content Hub deepens the strengths of all parts of the creative content sector in the region.

The impact of the BBC commitments and the Hub depend on what else is happening in the region that they can complement – most crucially, Digbeth Loc. (formerly Mercian Studios), which is intended to be developed in proximity to the Hub and substantially deepen the creative content ecosystem that the BBC and the Hub interact with.

## **Digbeth Loc. and the need for facilities**

Digbeth Loc. (formerly known as Mercian Studios) is intended to be a hub of film and television studios and related industries – animation as well as virtual

reality. The 39 acres of the privately financed development are close to the Hub and the coming HS2 train station at Curzon Street. Together, the Hub and Mercian Studios have significant potential to advance the importance of the Digbeth area of Birmingham as a centre of creative production and a cultural destination.

Given the shortage of studio facilities in the UK and, even more pressingly, in the West Midlands, there was excitement among consultees about Digbeth Loc. Equally, as the development has been discussed for several years, keenness to see the development move ahead and benefit the West Midlands with a significant increase in studio and other facilities.

Plans for Digbeth Loc. preceded Create Central. The leverage held by Create Central over a privately financed development is constrained. Nonetheless, consultees are keen that Create Central use its influence to facilitate the development moving ahead in Year 2. Failing that, consideration should be given to whether any other routes can be found for meeting the demand for studios in the West Midlands.

## **Financial sustainability of Create Central**

Create Central secured funding from the BFI for two years, which, especially when Covid-19 has impacted delivery, is a short period in which to address the range of scale and diversity of challenges facing the creative content sector in the West Midlands.

It is important that Create Central improve delivery in relation to these challenges over Year 2, advancing progression through the outcomes and impacts illustrated in our TOC.

Equally, this TOC anticipates outcomes and impacts that run beyond the two years of funding secured from the BFI by Create Central and there needs to be realism, alongside ambition, about what is achievable over this timescale.

Create Central needs to find a model of financial sustainability such that it can continue adding value to the creative content sector in the West Midlands over the longer-term. Assessing various kinds of innovation funding (Lever 4 in TOC) is one means by which the financial position of Create Central might be

improved. These innovation projects often involve cross-sector working and it is important that Create Central's positioning remains firmly on the creative content sector at the same time as advancing these cross-sector opportunities.

## 4. Year 2 Delivery

### 4.1 Year 2: strategic development

Year 2 of Create Central's programme was initially planned to be more delivery intensive than Year 1. This has happened to an extent; however, strategic development remained a substantial part of Create Central's activities in Year 2. This shift has occurred for two main reasons:

- The unforeseen impact of the Omicron wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in winter 2021, which prevented some planned activity happening
- The scale of some of the projects Create Central is involved in means that delivery during Year 2 was not feasible and they required more planning time than initially anticipated.

Alongside this were a range of projects that were always expected to be in the strategic planning stage during Year 2, such as the Creative Cities Convention and the Creative Content Hub in Digbeth. In these cases, Year 2 was focused very much on progressing the planning and development ready for successful delivery in Year 3. This included brokering conversations and securing buy-in from key stakeholders across the West Midlands.

### 4.2 Responding to Year 1 provocations and recommendations

In our Year 1 report, we identified a series of provocations and recommendations for Create Central, which came from a combination of the roundtable discussions and wider review of Create Central's activity. These were:

- Maintaining clarity of communications and positioning
- Delivering for all parts of the West Midlands and the creative content sector

- Finding the best balance between direct delivery and strategic influence
- Achieving financial sustainability

#### 4.2.1 Maintaining clarity of communications and positioning

The Create Central brand has continued to grow over the last year, with social media reach increasing monthly and network contacts similarly increasing.

Alongside this, in April 2022, Birmingham hosted the national Creative Cities Convention, and, whilst this fell outside of Year 2, the involvement of Create Central in securing and developing plans for this convention throughout Year 2 was crucial to its success. It is a marker of the improved positioning that Create Central has achieved that all the major headlines for the 2022 conference were about the West Midlands, nearly all of which have had some level of involvement from Create Central.

#### 4.2.2 Delivering for all parts of the West Midlands and the creative content sector

Year 2 has seen Create Central branch out more widely, seeking to move away from perceptions from the sector of a "Birmingham-centric" and "HETV and film centric" model<sup>13</sup> towards one which can be more representative of the region and all the creative content sector. Key examples of this throughout Year 2 include:

- Innovate: Create challenges with National Express and Birmingham 2022 Festival
- Positive Realities involvement with Coventry City of Culture 2021
- Piloting a bootcamp specifically for people looking to work in video games
- Continued involvement in the development and opening of the Wolverhampton Screen School

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<sup>13</sup> Create Central has had some focus on HETV, alongside a greater focus on indie TV. Nonetheless, our point here is to report the perceptions emerging from our survey - even if this perception around HETV is misplaced.

Moving forward, as part of the development of a longer-term strategic plan for Create Central, it is expected that Create Central will continue to explore opportunities for the sector and whole region. This will help to embed Create Central more fully in the region and work towards mitigating some of the more negative perceptions of its role and remit.

### 4.2.3 Finding the best balance between direct delivery and strategic influence

Year 2 has not seen the higher level of direct delivery that was expected at the end of Year 1. This is, in part, due to the continued concerns around the COVID-19 pandemic, and particularly the impact of the Omicron wave in winter 2021-22 which brought with it both restriction on activity and a wider reluctance to engage with activity.

This said, there has been greater direct delivery in Year 2, and several strands – particularly Bootcamps – have been able to achieve the level of activity planned. Alongside this, Year 2 has seen Create Central continuing to work strategically across the region ready to create opportunities for delivery in Year 3. Key examples of this include the Creative Cities Convention, which was planned in Year 2 and delivered in April 2022, and the Creative Content Hub, which is currently scheduled to open at the end of 2022.

### 4.2.4 Achieving financial sustainability

In Year 2, Create Central successfully applied to the BFI for extended funding to cover staffing costs in Year 3. However, it was not possible to make an application for longer term funding for delivery and staffing over the next three-year lottery period as the BFI have temporarily deferred this funding to all its National Lottery portfolio organisations whilst they complete their next 10-year strategy.

As such, whilst in Year 2 Create Central has not achieved financial sustainability, the wheels are in motion for further work on this in Year 3. The expectation is that by the end of the next tranche of funding from the BFI, Create Central will have been able to make an application for longer term National Lottery funding, and will also have been able to explore additional

funding opportunities through the creation and implementation of their longer-term strategic plan.

## 4.3 Outputs

Whilst there has been a greater balance of strategic influence compared with direct delivery in Year 2 than previously expected, Create Central has achieved a range of outputs throughout the year. These are listed in the table at Figure 3.

Key outputs for the year include:

- Deepening the Production and Inward Investment Strategy through the continued development of the WM Production Services Group and strengthening of the partnership with Creative UK.
- Building on the long-term Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the BBC, including establishing creative partnerships with BBC Three and BBC England, and the announcement of several high-profile productions coming to the region, including MasterChef, a new primetime drama series and a new primetime entertainment series, both to be announced.
- Partnering with ITV to match fund two production placements for the drama *Stonehouse*, which was filmed in the region. These placements were awarded to candidates who had attended Create Central Bootcamps.
- Month-by-month growth of the Create Central brand and social media platforms. This was further strengthened by the delivery of a wide range of events across the region and the successful bid for the 2022 Creative Cities Convention.
- Continued progression of the Creative Content Hub at the former Bond building in Digbeth and scheduled to open at the end of 2022.
- Achievements related to innovation and cross sector working, including: the delivery of the successful Positive Realities project, Urban Jungle AR, an augmented reality platform hosting a series of virtual performances and Innovate: Create – an innovation project that worked with Birmingham 2022 Festival and National Express.

- Increased skills delivery with 4 Bootcamps successfully delivered across the sector in content creation for business, TV production, video games production and outside broadcast for the Commonwealth Games (the Host Broadcast Training Initiative).

### Figure 3 Create Central Year 2 Achievements

#### TOC Lever

#### Year 2 Achievements

Lever 1: Collaborative Leadership: Create Central to facilitate new collaborations and act as an industry-lead voice for the sector

- Continuing to develop national partnerships with the BFI, BBC, Creative UK, and other leading industry bodies
- Further developments around the regional MOU with the BBC
- New partnership established with Channel 4
- Development and strengthening of regional partnerships
- Continued involvement in the Covid-19 recovery response across the region
- Developing and strengthening industry connections
- Involvement with national and regional policy making and delivery
- Continued delivery of the creative elements of the West Midlands Local Industrial Recovery Strategy alongside a range of partners
- Recruitment of Create Central Champions to advocate for the sector regionally, nationally, and globally

Lever 2: Supporting Emerging Creative Hubs: Create Central to provide leadership and strategic support for the West Midlands' emerging creative hubs

- Work underway on the Creative Content Hub, with an expected opening date at the end of 2022
- Supporting strategic conversations around the progress of Digbeth Loc. phases 1 and 2, including supporting conversations to secure the first major bid for Digbeth Loc., production of MasterChef in the region from 2024.
- Strategic support for the University of Wolverhampton Screen School which formally opened in March 2022.

Lever 3: Production and Inward Investment: Create Central to develop and lead the delivery of a screen industries investment strategy

- Established a creative partnership with BBC Three and BBC England to commission three new works in the West Midlands from independent production companies based in the region
- Creation of the production services group, an output from the PII strategy



## TOC Lever

## Year 2 Achievements

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Lever 4: Innovation: Create Central to lead the West Midlands as a 'future facing cluster', embracing innovation to transform our screen sector

- Completion of Production Space and Crew Mapping research
- Create Central continues to be part of BFI Screen Advisory Group for Global Screen Fund
- Continued delivery of Innovation Engin3, in particular the Innovate Create innovation challenges which have been established with major partners including National Express and Birmingham Festival 2022.
- Positive Realities winner delivered their programme of activity following the Year 1 announcement
- Continued involvement in the esports taskforce

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Lever 5: Bootcamp Pilots: Create Central to pilot new approaches to match real industry skills needs to local talent

- 159 Bootcamp participants across four different Bootcamps:
  - Content creation for business (June – July 2021)
  - TV production (August – October 2021)
  - Video games production (October – November 2021)
  - Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games Host Broadcast Training Initiative Bootcamp, delivered in collaboration with the Commonwealth Games and Sunset + Vine (December 2021 – ongoing)
- Two TV production placements provided on the ITV drama *Stonehouse*
- Development of the BBC Apprentice Hub in the region

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Lever 6: Events: Create Central to develop and deliver an events programme

- Redevelopment of events programme to be better responsive to post-COVID-19 behaviours (rolling out in Year 3)
- Creative Cities Convention secured (delivered in April 2022)
- Involvement in a wide range of own and partner events and panels, ranging from masterclasses and breakfast briefings to large scale announcement and events, with over 1,600 attenders across all events. This includes:
  - Venturefest<sup>14</sup> in collaboration with Innovation Alliance WM

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<sup>14</sup>Venturefest: a free one-day event supporting business growth through innovation

Lever 7: Communications and Content: Create Central to promote Create Central brand and regional creative content sector

- RTS Midlands Awards
  - BBC Digital Cities Creative Futures Day
- 
- Continued establishment of the Create Central Brand
  - Growth of contact database and social media channels: contacts database has grown from c.800 in Q1 to just under 1,400 by the end of Q4, whilst there are over 2,000 Twitter followers, 1,600 LinkedIn followers and 1,300 Instagram followers across social media
  - Communications strategy developed and operational

Source: BOP Consulting 2022

## 4.4 Strength of the creative content sector

- Half of respondents feel that the creative content sector in the region has strengthened in recent years, and that this would not have happened without Create Central
- There are varying levels of awareness of the initiatives and roles that Create Central has within the region
- In comparison with other geographic areas, there is a perception that the West Midlands does not offer sufficient training and development or job opportunities, leading to skills gap and retention problems.

To understand more about the perceived strength of the creative content sector in the West Midlands and the role that Create Central can play within the sector, we conducted an open-call survey that invited responses from those living and working in the sector in the West Midlands. All the respondents had heard of Create Central before taking part.

### 4.4.1 Create Central’s role and purpose

The survey indicated strong and clear awareness of Create Central’s role and purpose.

Respondents were most likely to say that the purpose of Create Central is to represent the creative content sector in the West Midlands (81%), whilst two thirds (67%) selected “*support inward investment into the West Midlands*” as an option.

Similarly, respondents were asked about their awareness of initiatives which may or may not be linked to Create Central’s Production and Inward Investment strategy, and the extent to which Create Central has played a role in these initiatives on a scale of 1 to 5:

- Respondents were most likely to select “*Establishing a partnership with the West Midlands Combined Authority and the BBC – working directly with the BBC to strengthen production in the region*” (69% giving a rating of 4 or 5).
- Half of respondents felt that Create Central has played a driving role in the development of the Creative Content Hub in Digbeth (49% rating 4 or 5).
- In contrast, respondents were more likely to say that Create Central was not at all involved with developing pilot funding programmes for new productions

in the region (41% rating 1 or 2), securing investment for film productions in the region (35% rating 1 or 2) or promoting Creative UK's West Midlands Production Fund (35% rating 1 or 2).

One of the aims of Create Central is to create new collaborations across the creative content sector. Within the survey, respondents were asked about the extent to which, in their experience, this has been achieved in a range of areas, including innovation, skills, broadcasters, and both the public and private sectors:

- Two fifths of respondents reported that Create Central had been a driver of new collaborations across the public sector (40% rating 4 or 5), regional production, national partnerships, and broadcasters (39% respectively).
- In contrast, there was a perception that Create Central has been less of a driver for collaborations with the private sector (34% rating 1 or 2) and innovation (28% rating 1 or 2).
- It should, however, be noted that there was a relatively high level of neutrality in respondents' answers, with at least 35% - and up to 48% - of respondents scoring statements as 3 on a scale from 1 to 5 for each statement. This suggests that there is still work to be done around raising awareness of the collaborations that Create Central has created.

More widely, respondents are positive about the impact that Create Central has made on the sector in recent years:

- From a list of four different scenarios relating to the creative content sector, just over half of respondents (54%) stated that *"the creative content sector in the West Midlands has strengthened in recent years – and this would not have happened without Create Central"*.
- A further quarter of respondents (24%) selected the option *"the creative content sector in the West Midlands has become less vibrant and likely to succeed in recent years – but the scale of this decline has been minimised by Create Central"*. Whilst more pessimistic about the opportunities for the region, this does demonstrate a perception that Create Central is creating some beneficial impacts regionally in some areas.

- However, this is balanced by a fifth of respondents (20%) selecting the option *"the creative content sector in the West Midlands has strengthened in recent years – but this strengthening has had nothing to do with Create Central"*.

#### 4.4.2 Regional skills gaps

Respondents were overwhelmingly negative about the existing training and development opportunities for young people in the region wanting to enter different parts of the creative sector in comparison to other geographic regions:

- No-one provided a score of 5 (more opportunities than other geographic regions) for any of the different areas, with only games receiving more than one score of 4 (7%) and the highest neutral score of any sector (34% rating 3).
- Immersive tech (i.e., VR and AR) also had a comparatively high neutral score (28% rating 3).
- These responses for games and immersive likely relate to the well-established creative cluster for gaming around Leamington Spa and the strong links between gaming and immersive technology.
- In contrast, nearly half of respondents gave a rating of 1 (far fewer opportunities compared to other geographic regions) for training and development in film (46%), non-scripted television (45%) and content creation more broadly (44%).

Alongside training opportunities, we also asked respondents to reflect on the level of job opportunities for young people wanting to enter different elements of the creative content sector. Again, games and immersive technology were seen as strong compared with other regions, with a third (36%) giving a rating of 4 or 5 for games and a quarter (23%) giving a rating of 4 or 5 for immersive technology.

Similarly, film and scripted television were perceived to have significantly fewer opportunities for young people than other regions. Half of all respondents giving

a rating of 1 for film (51%) and two fifths giving a rating of 1 for scripted television (41%).

When asked to explain their scores, many respondents commented on the strength of the sector in London and Manchester in comparison to the West Midlands as a driver of low scores. There was also a comment by one respondent that even when film and TV productions are created in the region, they are routinely staffed by people travelling up from London, reducing opportunities for local employment.

As a mechanism for understanding what might mitigate the perceived skills gaps and retention issues in the region, respondents were asked to identify the initiatives that they thought would make the most contribution to talent retention:

- Apprenticeships were most frequently selected, with 80% of respondents giving a rating of 4 or 5, closely followed by providing industry mentors (75%).
- In contrast, most respondents did not feel that unpaid work placements in the sector would support talent retention, with only 30% of respondents giving this a rating of 4 or 5.

## 4.5 Impact of Create Central on beneficiaries

- Create Central beneficiaries are generally favourable towards Create Central, with high levels of satisfaction and likely recommendations across the different work strands
- Most Bootcamp participants have gone on to have further opportunities because of participating in their Bootcamp
- Funding beneficiaries valued the networking and connection opportunities created by Create Central, however, were split in the extent to which working with Create Central has created impacts.

In Year 2, Create Central has been able to deliver a combination of Bootcamps and funding programmes that have aimed to increase opportunities across the region, both for those already working in the sector and those looking to gain entry and establish careers.

To understand the impact that these interventions have on their beneficiaries, two surveys were carried out, one with those taking part in Bootcamps and one with those who had applied for funding programmes, irrespective of their level of success.

Response rates to the surveys were lower than expected, likely due to a combination of time elapsed since their involvement with Create Central and, for those who were unsuccessful, a lack of engagement with Create Central. However, the results still provide us with an indicative understanding of the impacts that Create Central has realised across its Year 2 delivery.

Bootcamp participants were favourable towards Create Central:

- 78% of respondents very likely to recommend their experience to others.
- Nearly all respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of their experience, the follow up activities, and the overall experience (93% for each category). There was a lower level of satisfaction with the level of communications from Create Central (74%), however as Bootcamps are not directly delivered by Create Central this is not surprising.
- When looking specifically at the course, respondents were fully satisfied with the quality of the tutors (100% satisfied or very satisfied, of which 81% were very satisfied) and highly satisfied with the course delivery (93% satisfied or very satisfied).

Just over half of the Bootcamp responders (56%) attribute taking part in Bootcamp with having a large influence on their decision for the future. The same proportion of respondents also felt that they would have been unable to access a similar level of support elsewhere had they not been able to participate in Bootcamp.

A large majority of respondents (78%) said that attending Bootcamp had led to further opportunities. This included roles with companies Bootcamp participants

were placed with, gaining TV production credits, and job interviews within broadcast television companies.

Funding respondents are also generally favourable towards Create Central:

- 70% saying that they were very likely to recommend their experience to others.
- There were also good levels of satisfaction with different elements of their experience; two thirds (63%) were satisfied or very satisfied with their overall experience and 75% were satisfied or very satisfied with the level of communication they received from Create Central.

However, when exploring the impact that working with Create Central had on participants' businesses, the results were more polarised, with a quarter of participants disagreeing strongly with each of the provided statements. Where participants did agree or strongly agree, this was most frequently in response to the statement "*I am more confident in the potential success of my business*" (54%) and "*I am better connected across the West Midlands' creative content sector*" (51%).

These polarities were also seen in the open text responses throughout the survey. Whilst some respondents made positive remarks about the opportunities that they had from engaging with Create Central, particularly around the value of the networking opportunities that were provided (both in the immediate and longer-term), others were more critical. This included questioning what "legacy" can come from the different initiatives and how this can be accessed, i.e.:

“ Create Central needs to consider the legacy of its initiatives – if it maps studio space, where can this be found? If there are 100 bootcamp alumni, how can we access these people?

There was also questioning around the extent to which Create Central is actively engaging with the sector beyond TV production companies based in Birmingham, i.e.:

“ The organisation seems to be almost entirely focussed on TV production in Birmingham. I saw little to no evidence of meaningful engagement with or investment in other screen sectors beyond an industry-switch boot camp for people wanting to move jobs into video game production.

The perception of Create Central being overly Birmingham-centric is a challenge that the organisation has grappled with over its first two years. This survey comment indicates that this perception persists, at least for some – but Create Central has delivered for other places in the West Midlands.

## 5. Year 3 Delivery

During Year 3 of Create Central, the West Midlands Combined Authority published the *West Midlands Plan for Growth* (July 2022). This will guide the next phase of economic development in the West Midlands, with funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the West Midlands benefitting from a ‘trailblazer devolution deal’.<sup>15</sup>

The Creative Content Production and Gaming Cluster has been selected as one of the eight clusters in the *Plan for Growth* with Create Central assigned responsibility for cluster development. Clusters within the *Plan for Growth* will receive cluster delivery support through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and other national and regional funds.

The foreword to the *Plan for Growth*, written by Andy Street (Mayor of the West Midlands) and Cllr Ian Brookfield (Portfolio Holder for Economy), underlines the importance that it attaches to clusters and, therefore, to Creative Content Production and Gaming:

“ The West Midlands Plan for Growth pinpoints those economic clusters where the region can ignite above-forecast levels of growth. These are clusters where the West Midlands has comparative advantage and businesses are confident to invest.

It was a major achievement of Create Central in Year 3 for Creative Content Production and Gaming to achieve this status within the Plan for Growth. In addition, Year 3 also saw:

- More delivery of the Activities contained in our Theory of Change (Figure 1), which enabled stronger delivery of the Outcomes indicated in that Theory of Change (see section 5.1).
- Enhanced strategy to align Create Central with the *Plan for Growth* and advance progress towards the Impacts in our Theory of Change (see section 5.3).

In section 5.2, we review ONS data to assess the extent to which Impacts anticipated by 2030 in Figure 1 have been secured to date. Unsurprisingly, as we remain some time from 2030, limited progress has been made – but Activities undertaken in Year 3 (as per section 5.1) are building blocks toward these Impacts and greater strategic clarity (as per section 5.3) will assist with advancing from these building blocks.

### 5.1 Securing Outcomes in Year 3

The BFI funding to Create Central from the Cluster Development Growth Plan for initially envisaged as two years of funding. However, Covid-19 impaired delivery over the first two years of Create Central and this funding ran into the third year of Create Central. In particular, the lockdowns and social distancing of Covid-19 hampered delivery of training during the first two years of Create Central and, therefore, Year 3 activities focus significantly on catching-up with these training activities. In so doing, Year 3 has improved delivery against the following Levers in Figure 1, which correspond to Outcomes to be achieved over 2020-25:

- Lever 3 – A production and inward investment strategy is embedded across the region.
- Lever 5 – Talent development programmes are established and accessed by a range of beneficiaries.

<sup>15</sup> This deal “transfers more control and influence over the levers of economic growth and levelling up the Mayor and West Midlands Combined Authority”: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/west-midlands-combined-authority-trailblazer-deeper-devolution-deal>

- Lever 6: Create Central’s events programmes are established and supporting other levers.
- Lever 8: The West Midlands has a more diverse pool of potential talent in the region.

Progress on talent development was particularly important in Year 3, so the discussion below begins with activities in relation to this. However, as Figure 13 shows, improved delivery against each Lever occurred in Year 3. Unlike the equivalent figures on Year 1 and 2 (Figure 2s and 3), Year 3 includes delivery against Lever 8, due to associated training activities.

Over Year 3, we worked closely with Create Central to improve the quality of their monitoring data, which we report over Figures 4 to 12.

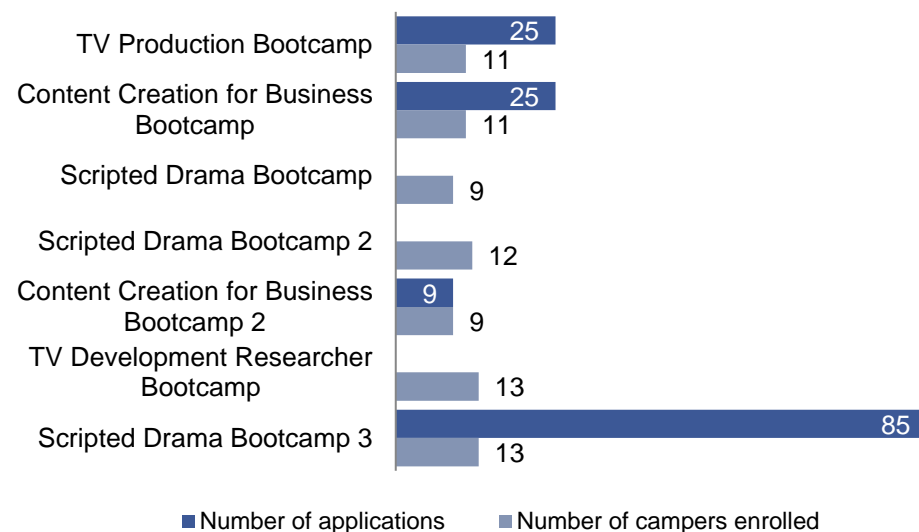
### Talent development

Create Central delivered four different types of bootcamps between April 2022 and March 2023, some with multiple iterations. These four types of bootcamps were:

- TV Production: a month-long programme in TV production followed by a work placement in one of the region’s top TV companies, with a guaranteed job interview upon completion of bootcamp.
- Content Creation for Business: a month-long programme in professional-standard content production, business, and marketing, followed by a work placement at a West Midlands business looking to develop their digital media capacity, with a guaranteed job interview upon completion of bootcamp.
- Scripted Drama: three-week training in scripted drama production, followed by a two-week secondment to a film or TV production, with guaranteed support to secure an interview or promotion, or retrain for a role in the industry.
- TV Development Researcher: six-week programme with local production companies, introducing trainees to the commissioning process and idea development for television factual programmes.

Every Create Central bootcamp during 2022-23 ran with cohorts of 9-13 participants. The bootcamps on which data was available were oversubscribed, such that more than double the number of people applied to the programme than the number enrolled. The third run of the Scripted Drama Bootcamp was especially popular and attracted more than six times the number of applications as the final intake of the programme. An exception in terms of oversubscription is the second iteration of the Content Creation Bootcamp, where all applicants were able to start the course.

**Figure 4 Number of applications and number of campers enrolled – by kind of Create Central bootcamp (April 2022 to March 2023)**

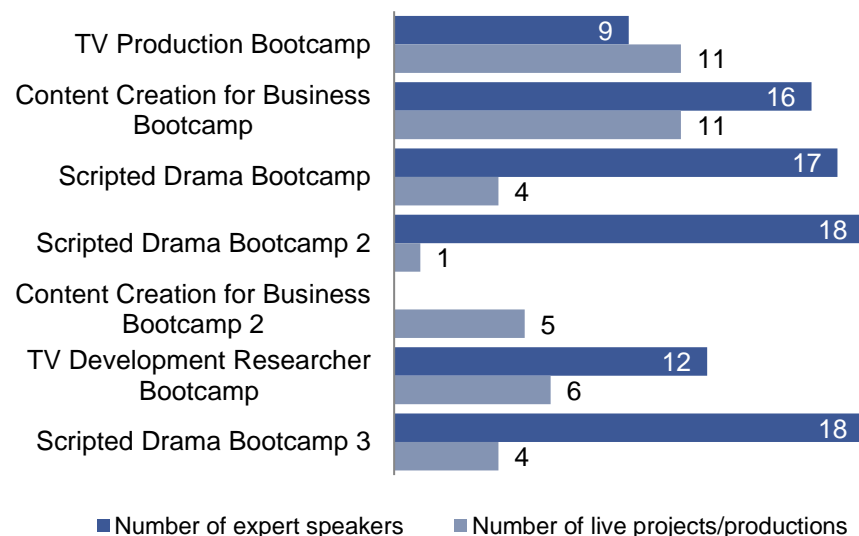


Source: BOP Consulting analysis of Create Central data

Based on the available data, Create Central showcased expert speakers at almost all their bootcamps in 2022-23. The Scripted Drama Bootcamps provided the most opportunities for participants to hear from industry experts and presented 18 speakers per bootcamp on average. While there was no data available for the second iteration of the Content Creation for Business

Bootcamp, the first run of the course provided ample opportunity for participants to learn first-hand from industry experts as it featured 16 speakers and enabled campers to work on 11 different projects. The number of speakers and live projects offered in the TV Development Researcher Bootcamp is representative of the average across all the bootcamps, with 12 expert speakers and 6 live projects during the programme.

**Figure 5 Number of expert speakers and number of live projects/productions by different kind of Create Central bootcamps (April 2022 to March 2023)**

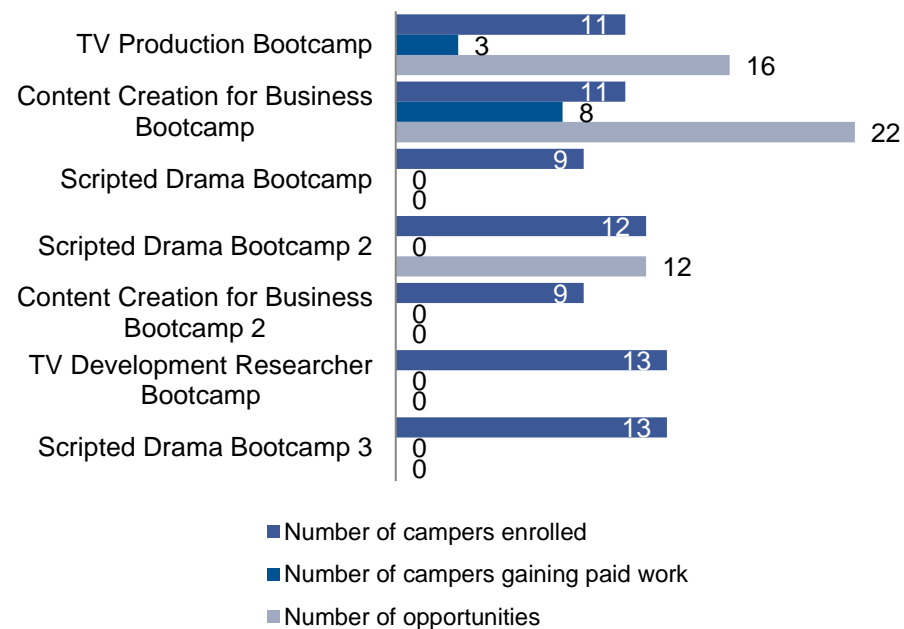


Source: BOP Consulting analysis of Create Central data

During and after the bootcamps, the highest number of opportunities arose for participants of the first Content Creation for Business Bootcamp. Here, 22 opportunities such as interviews, internships, or placements were offered across the cohort of eleven. From this group, eight out of the eleven campers went on to gain paid work after completion of the programme. While this is a success rate of more than 70%, the number of campers gaining paid work after the TV

Production Bootcamp corresponds to less than third of the whole cohort. In both cases, the number of opportunities exceeded the number of campers, yet not all participants went on to gain paid work after the camp. The number of opportunities and the number of campers were the same in the second iteration of the Scripted Drama Bootcamp, but no data was available pertaining to the number of participants gaining paid work after completing the programme.

**Figure 6 Number of campers enrolled, campers gaining paid work, and other employment opportunities – by different kinds of Create Central bootcamps (April 2022 to March 2023)**



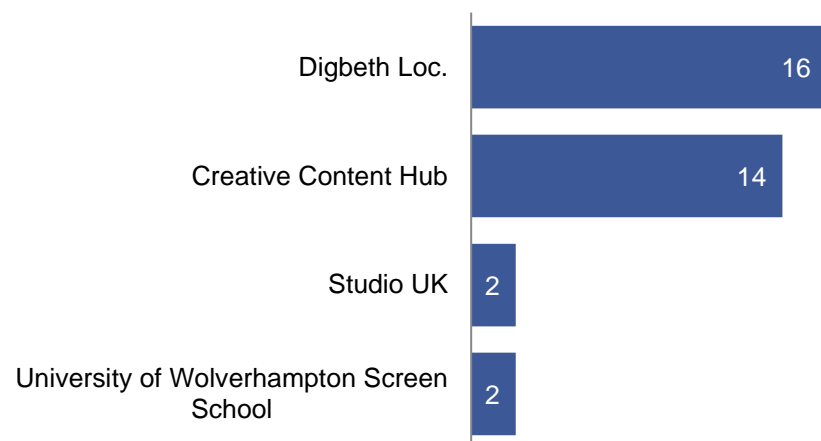
Source: BOP Consulting analysis of Create Central data



## Production and Inward Investment

To attract different investments to the West Midlands, Create Central focused on advancing various strategic investments and maintained a record of its activities in relation to these investments. In Year 3 of Create Central 88% of these activities related to supporting the development of the Digbeth Loc Studios and the Creative Content Hub (The Bond). These activities involved facilitating and attending meetings, events, site visits and launches on 16 different occasions with Digbeth Loc and 14 occasions with the Creative Content Hub. In addition, engagements with Studio UK and University of Wolverhampton Screen School related to 12% of their investment-attracting activities, with Create Central reporting 2 activities in Year 3 with each of these investments.

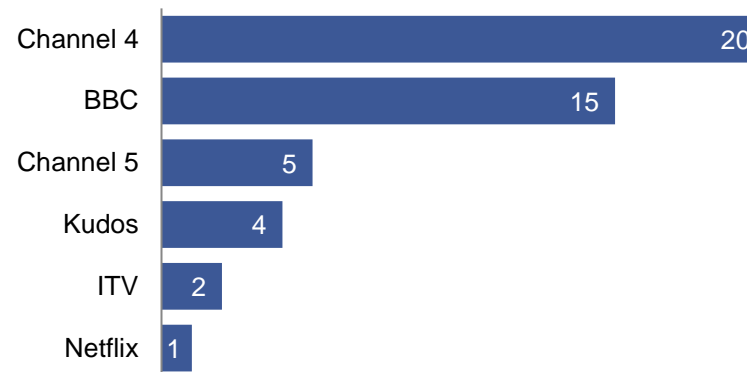
**Figure 7 Number of Create Central activities related to securing different investments in the West Midlands (April 2022 to March 2023)**



Source: BOP Consulting analysis of Create Central data

Over 2022-23, Create Central maintained valuable partnerships with key industry actors such as Channel 4, the BBC, and Netflix. The partnership with Channel 4 established in 2022 generated the highest number of related meetings and events, leading to two development funds (More4 the West Midlands linear content development fund, Digital Development fund) and an industry open day event (Channel 4 West Midlands Open Day) for the region. Ongoing engagement with the BBC over this year delivered tangible outcomes, such as the delivery of the Scripted Drama Bootcamp in partnership with BBC Drama Village, and the relocation of BBC Birmingham to Digbeth. Other partnerships have catalysed a lower number of engagements but encouraged developments such as the TV production company Kudos<sup>16</sup> opening an office in Birmingham.

**Figure 8 Number of Create Central engagements with partners (April 2022 to March 2023)**



Source: BOP Consulting analysis of Create Central data

<sup>16</sup> Kudos is a leading film and TV production company specialised in scripted content. They have produced TV series for the BBC, Channel 4, ITV, Sky, Amazon, and Netflix.

Work toward increasing regional production concentrated on one-to-one meetings during 2022-23, as shown in the figure below. In addition to individual meetings, there were several events and site visits where Create Central engaged with industry and non-industry actors to secure a successful future for production in the West Midlands. Other related activities included connecting and working with councils in the region to explore local production opportunities, as well as facilitating roundtables with professionals in the creative content sector.

**Figure 9 Number of different kinds of activities by Create Central related to increasing regional production (April 2022 to March 2023)**

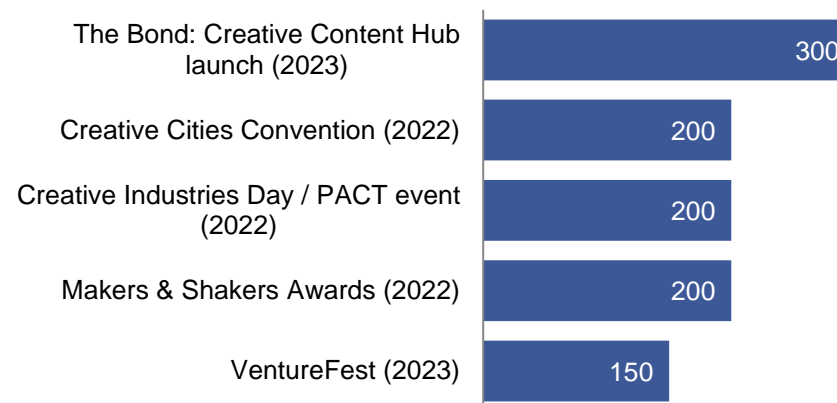


Source: BOP Consulting analysis of Create Central data

## Events

Across the year, Create Central has led and partnered in the organisation of various events promoting the breadth of creative talent in the West Midlands. In total, these events attracted more than 2,300 attendees. The scale of the biggest events is shown in the figure below. Create Central organised and supported smaller scale events as well, such as roundtable discussions, workshops, and networking events. Besides facilitating event organisation, Create Central also attended the industry events of other bodies.

**Figure 10 Attendances at top 5 most attended Create Central events (April 2022 to March 2023)**

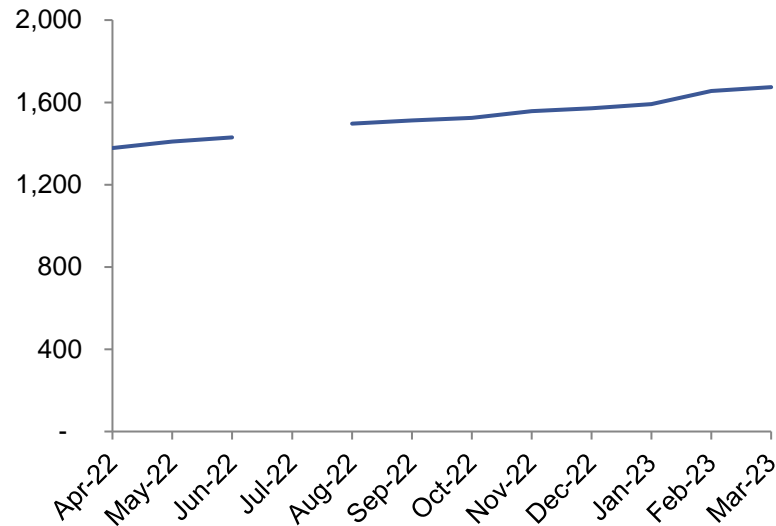


Source: BOP Consulting analysis of Create Central data

## Facilitating collaboration in the sector

One of the main activities of Create Central is to establish connections among West Midlands actors within and outside the creative content sector. Through such engagements, the organisation aims to facilitate collaboration among industry experts, local businesses, people interested in entering the sector, as well as the general public. Between April 2022 and March 2023, Create Central increased the network of the organisation with approximately 300 new contacts in its database. There were no data available for July 2022.

**Figure 11 Number of contacts in database (network growth)**

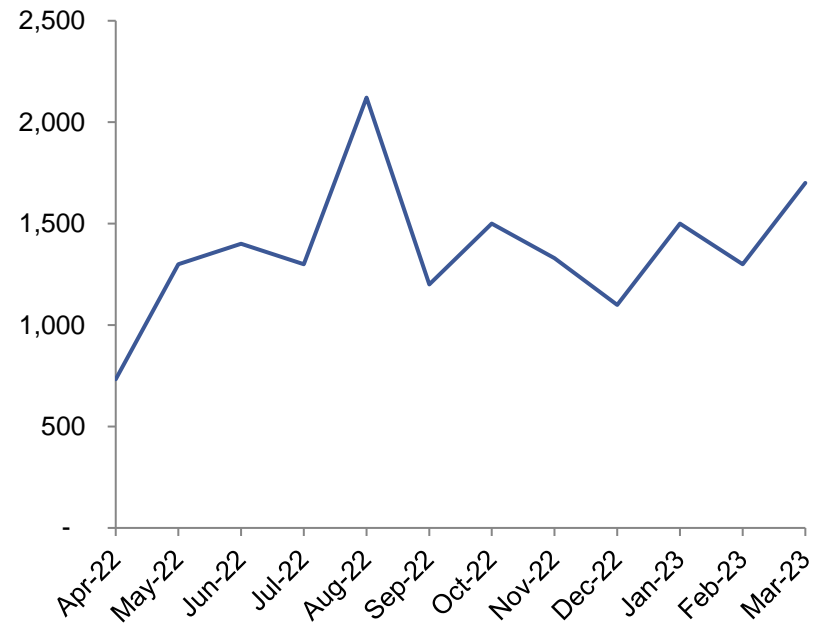


Source: BOP Consulting analysis of Create Central data

### Communications and content

To promote the regional creative content sector, Create Central has continued to develop and promote its brand. Its social media presence has grown to over 2,000 followers each on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram. From April 2022 to March 2023, there were on average 1,300 monthly visitors on the Create Central website. The number of visitors was highest in August 2022, when more than 2,100 people visited the page.

**Figure 122 Number of monthly visitors on Create Central website (April 2022 to March 2023)**



Source: BOP Consulting analysis of Create Central data

### Increased efforts to diversify developing talent pool

As outlined above, Create Central has achieved a range of outputs throughout Year 3. **Error! Reference source not found.** below lists these achievements, with the addition of Lever 8 for supporting regional youth and fostering diversity and inclusion in sectoral talent development. While such activities were put on hold during Year 1 & 2 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Create Central has been able to pursue related activities between April 2022 and March 2023. The organisation was awarded £1m funding from the BFI Skills Cluster Programme to establish local support for young and developing talent from underrepresented backgrounds. In addition, Create Central has continued to

partner in delivering talent development programmes such as the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games Host Broadcast Training Initiative Bootcamp, and two apprenticeships at the BBC Apprentice Hub (a year-long training

programme for a cohort of 10 apprentices, and the Digital Marketer Level 3 Apprenticeship).

### Figure 13 Create Central Year 3 Achievements

#### TOC Lever

Lever 1: Collaborative Leadership: Create Central to facilitate new collaborations and act as an industry-lead voice for the sector

#### Year 3 Achievements

- Continuing to develop national partnerships with the BFI, BBC, Creative UK, and other leading industry bodies
  - BBC Midlands relocating to Digbeth creative quarter from 2026 & BBC Drama Village bootcamp placements
- Further developments around the regional MOU with the BBC
- New partnership established with Channel 4, including a £30K More4 the West Midlands linear content development fund, a £20K Digital Development fund and a Channel 4 West Midlands Open Day event
- Leading the development of long-term plan for West Midlands creative content sector
  - Published the 'Shape the Future: 2030 and Beyond' plan, after consultations with industry, public sector partners and the wider sector, community workshops and networking events, as well as online surveys and targeted conversations with key stakeholders
- Development and strengthening of regional partnerships
- Continued involvement in the Covid-19 recovery response across the region
- Developing and strengthening industry connections
  - Invited to join Creative UK's Regional Filming Hub
  - Leading TV production company Kudos to open an office in Birmingham
  - Paramount Partners Day in West Midlands, opportunity to engage and connect with senior creative leaders of Paramount UK
- Involvement with national and regional policy making and delivery

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Continued delivery of the creative elements of the West Midlands Local Industrial Recovery Strategy alongside a range of partners</li> <li>— Recruitment of Create Central Champions to advocate for the sector regionally, nationally, and globally</li> </ul>
<p>Lever 2: Supporting Emerging Creative Hubs: Create Central to provide leadership and strategic support for the West Midlands' emerging creative hubs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Launched The Bond: Creative Content Hub in partnership with Oval, Greater Birmingham, and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership, set to become the epicentre of TV, film, and digital content production in the West Midlands <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hosting weekly comedy shows by award-winning comedian Joe Lycett, broadcast by Channel 4</li> </ul> </li> <li>— Supported the opening of Digbeth Loc., with a range of productions such as MasterChef and BBC drama This Town set to kick off</li> <li>— Strategic support for the University of Wolverhampton Screen School which formally opened in March 2022</li> </ul>
<p>Lever 3: Production and Inward Investment: Create Central to develop and lead the delivery of a screen industries investment strategy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Three new productions delivered through a creative partnership with BBC Three and BBC England, commissioning independent production companies based in the West Midlands</li> <li>— Creation of the production services group, an output from the PII strategy</li> <li>— Partnering with SPI for Crew Mapping and Skills Forecasting research</li> <li>— Ofcom content policy team in conversation with West Midlands production sector, to support independent production companies to be commissioned for PSB</li> <li>— Create Central continues to be part of BFI Screen Advisory Group for Global Screen Fund</li> </ul>
<p>Lever 4: Innovation: Create Central to lead the West Midlands as a 'future facing cluster', embracing innovation to transform our screen sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Continued delivery of Innovation Engin3, in particular the Innovate:Create innovation challenges which have been continuing, with major partners including Uber and Birmingham Festival 2022.</li> <li>— Positive Realities winner scaled up their project for CVX Festival, following the delivery of the pilot production in Year 2</li> <li>— Continued involvement in the esports taskforce</li> </ul>

- 
- WM first region to sign an MoU with the eSports Federation following its debut at the Commonwealth Games, to ensure region is at the forefront of the sector and to develop tech capabilities

— Free innovation workshop (October 2022)

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Lever 5: Bootcamp Pilots: Create Central to pilot new approaches to match real industry skills needs to local talent

— 78 Bootcamp participants across four different Bootcamps:

- TV Development Researcher Bootcamp (January – February 2023)
- Scripted Drama (three cohorts: October 2022, November – December 2022, February – March 2023)
  - Second and third programme in collaboration with BBC Drama Village and the University of Birmingham
- Content Creation for Business (July – September 2022, December 2022)
- TV Production (May – July 2022)

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Lever 6: Events: Create Central to develop and deliver an events programme

— Redevelopment of events programme to be better responsive to post-COVID-19 behaviours (rolling out in Year 3)

— Creative Cities Convention delivered in April 2022

— Involvement in a wide range of own and partner events and panels, ranging from masterclasses and breakfast briefings to large scale announcement and events, with over 2,300 attendees across all events. This includes:

- Venturefest<sup>17</sup> in collaboration with Innovation Alliance WM
- RTS Midlands Awards & RTS Midlands Baird Lectures 2023
- UKTV Meet the Commissioners
- Head of Department Networking
- ‘Shape the Future’ roundtable series (September 2022 – January 2023)
- HBTI (Host Broadcast Training Initiative) Careers Day in partnership with Sunset+Vine and BCU, for HBTI Bootcamp alumni to (re)connect with local and national employers in the screen industry

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<sup>17</sup>Venturefest: a free one-day event supporting business growth through innovation

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Lever 7: Communications and Content: Create Central to promote Create Central brand and regional creative content sector

- Continued establishment of the Create Central brand
- Growth of contact database and social media channels: contacts database has grown from c.1,400 in Q1 to just under 1,700 by the end of Q4, whilst there are over 2,500 Twitter followers, 2,800 LinkedIn followers and 2,000 Instagram followers across social media
- Communications strategy developed and operational

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Lever 8: Create Central to pilot new approaches to youth, diversity and inclusion

- Awarded £1m through the BFI Skills Cluster programme to establish local support for skills development and training, to create new opportunities in the sector for people from underrepresented backgrounds.
- Delivered Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games Host Broadcast Training Initiative Bootcamp, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Games and Sunset + Vine (December 2021 – August 2022).
- First cohort of ten apprentices start year-long on-the-job training at the BBC Apprentice Hub (August 2022 – ongoing).
- Support and promotion of the Digital Marketer Level 3 Apprenticeship running in the BBC Apprentice Hub (January 2023).

Source: BOP Consulting

## 5.2 Analysis of cluster strength at end of Year 3

At the start of 2020, Create Central presented evidence to the BFI on the extent of creative content clustering in the West Midlands. This evidence supported the application of Create Central for funding through its Creative Cluster Growth Fund.

Now, at the end of Year 3 of Create Central, we are revisiting this evidence and assessing the extent of evolution in relevant data within the West Midlands over the years of Create Central. We do so in relation to the sector definition provided in the figure below. This definition was used by Create Central in presenting evidence to the BFI at the start of 2020, following the same definition

as that used by the Yorkshire and Humber Screen Industries Hub in their *Economic Development Plan 2017-2022*. This definition was used for two reasons:

- First, in early 2020, Yorkshire and Humber was considered a more developed creative content centre than the West Midlands. As another English region outside of South East England that had enjoyed some success in developing its creative content sector, Yorkshire and Humber provided an inspiration to the West Midlands. As this definition was used by Yorkshire and Humber, therefore, it made sense for it to be mirrored by the West Midlands.

— Second, the definition provides a best-fit to the screen industries within Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes used by the Office of National Statistics (ONS). There is concern about the extent to which these SICs accurately map on the reality of the contemporary creative industries, due to the pace of technological change and industrial organisation within these industries.<sup>18</sup> The pace of technological change is particularly fast in the Games sector – nonetheless, UKIE, the trade body that represents the Games sector, recommends that the industry classify itself at Companies House in line with the SICs used for Games in the definition below.<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 14 Definition of Screen Industries – with relevant SIC codes in brackets**

TV and Film	Games	Screen Industries
Motion picture, video and television programme production activities (5911)	Publishing of computer games (5821)	Combined value of TV, Film and Games
Motion picture, video and television programme postproduction (5912)	Ready-made interactive leisure and entertainment software development (62011)	
Motion picture, video and television programme distribution (5913)		
Motion picture projection activities (5914)		
Television programming and broadcasting activities (6020)		

Source: Yorkshire and Humber Screen Industries Hub – Economic Development Plan 2017-2022

This sector definition is analysed below at two geographies – the constituent members of the West Midlands Combined Authority and a larger geography composed of the 3 LEPs that served the West Midlands.<sup>20</sup> These geographies were used to provide consistency with the analysis used to support Create Central’s application to the BFI’s Creative Cluster Growth Fund.

<sup>18</sup> These issues are discussed, for example, in a blog published in 2020: <https://thedatacity.com/blog/the-sic-note-why-the-uk-needs-to-overhaul-its-industrial-classification-system/>

<sup>19</sup> [https://ukiepedia.ukie.org.uk/index.php/Standard\\_Industrial\\_Classification\\_\(SIC\)](https://ukiepedia.ukie.org.uk/index.php/Standard_Industrial_Classification_(SIC))

<sup>20</sup> Black Country, Coventry and Warwickshire, Greater Birmingham and Solihull



## Employment and business base

Figure 15 shows that the Screen Industries are a considerable part of the West Midlands economy, supporting over 6,000 jobs and nearly 700 businesses on the 3 LEP geography.

**Figure 15 Employment and number of businesses in Screen Industries in WMCA and 3 LEPs geography of West Midlands (2021, 2022)**

	TV and Film: WMCA	TV and Film: 3 LEPs	Games: WMCA	Games: 3 LEPs	Screen Industries: WMCA	Screen Industries: 3 LEPs
Employment (2021)	2,575	3,685	485	2,405	3,060	6,090
Businesses (2022)	340	590	45	100	385	690

Source: BRES and Business Counts (ONS, 2021, 2022)

## Growth within employment and business base

Between 2018 and 2021, Film and TV employment in the WMCA grew by 12% - which is less than growth within Great Britain over the same period. In contrast, employment growth in Games in WMCA (59%) outpaced Great Britain (34%) between 2018 and 2021, as Figure 16 shows.

**Figure 16 Percentage change in the number of workers in the WMCA and Great Britain (2018-2021)**

	WMCA	Great Britain
Film and TV	12	20
Games	59	34
Screen Industries	17	21

Source: BRES (ONS, 2021)

Figure 17 shows that both parts of Screen Industries – Film and TV; Games – experienced a more rapid increase in businesses in the WMCA between 2018 and 2021 than in Great Britain.

**Figure 17 Percentage change in the number of businesses in the WMCA and Great Britain (2018-2022)**

	WMCA	Great Britain
Film and TV	19	15
Games	29	18
Screen Industries	20	16

Source: ONS Business Counts (2022)

## Employment clustering

Location Quotients (LQs) describe the extent to which there is a comparative cluster of workers. It compares the density of certain kinds of workers in an area to the national average. A figure of 1.0 or above means a higher density than the Great British average, and lower than 1 indicates less density. On this basis, as Figure 18 shows, in 2018 the only LEP in the West Midlands with a Screen Industries cluster was CWLEP in games – due to the concentrated presence of businesses and workers operating in Games in Leamington Spa. This Games cluster in CWLEP grew between 2018 and 2021 – from an LQ of 3.0 to 5.8. Over the same period, there was minimal change in LQs elsewhere in the West

Midlands. The LQs did not change at all in the Black Country, while GBSLEP experienced no change in its Film and TV LQ (constant at 0.5) and a small increase in its Games LQ (from 0.5 to 0.7).

The minimal change in these LQs over the years that Create Central has been operational and the lack of LQs above 1.0 – beyond the striking instance of Games in Leamington Spa – indicates that Create Central requires considerably further industry development in the region to achieve the Impact that our Theory of Change (Figure 1) envisages for 2030 of a future-facing and successful creative content sector.

**Figure 18 Location Quotients (LQs) for Screen Industries in WMCA and 3 LEPs (2018, 2021)**

	WMCA	Black Country	CWLEP	GBSLEP
Film and TV (2018)	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.5
Film and TV (2021)	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.5
Games (2018)	0.5	0.4	3.0	0.5
Games (2021)	0.6	0.4	5.8	0.7
Screen Industries (2018)	0.4	0.2	0.5	0.5
Screen Industries (2021)	0.4	0.2	1.0	0.5

Source: BRES (ONS, 2018, 2021)

## 5.3 Future planning

In addition to being a year of delivery (see section 5.1), Year 3 has been a year of Create Central planning to advance towards the 2030 ambition in our Theory of Change of being a future-facing and successful creative content sector, supporting the *Plan for Growth*.

Create Central was prominent in this *Plan for Growth*. This plan reported the business leadership of the creative content and games sector in the following terms:

- Create Central formed in 2019 with wholly business-led Board.
- Create Central delivered initial creative content cluster growth programme, funded by BFI and WMCA.
- Economic Growth Board supported Create Central’s work to develop a long-term cluster plan during 2022.

This support from the Economic Growth Board led Create Central to develop *Shape the Future: 2030 and Beyond* - missions to turbo-charge the West Midlands creative content sector. This development involved extensive consultation with a broad range of stakeholders around the vision to 2030. This consultation involved 5 roundtables on the following topics:

- Innovation, creativity and opportunity in the West Midlands - held in Leamington Spa
- Telling the West Midlands Story - held online (due to train strike)
- Production and infrastructure - held at SteamHouse in Birmingham
- Future content creators - held in Coventry in partnership with Positive Youth Foundation
- Place-making and culture - held in Birmingham in partnership with New Philanthropy for Arts & Culture and Culture Central.

Beyond these roundtables, Create Central consultation also:

- Hosted collaborative community 'meet-ups' to invite community organisations to get to know Create Central (in Birmingham in partnership with HDY Agency, in Wolverhampton in partnership with Learn Play Foundation and in Coventry in partnership with Coventry City of Culture Trust and The Reel Store).
- Conducted online surveys to ensure the capture of the views of anyone who was not able to join in-person.
- 1-2-1 conversations key stakeholders to sense check the emerging Create Central strategy.

This consultation resulted in *Shape the Future: 2030 and Beyond* which identifies 5 priority areas that will be the focus of Create Central action, which provide the greatest likelihood of advancing the region's creative content sector. These priorities are listed below, and all have Create Central board advocates assigned to them.

#### — **Intellectual Property (IP) Content Fund**

- Board advocates: Nick Pinks and Jazz Gowans
- This is intended to be a high-risk, high-reward investment fund for the West Midlands' creative community. The intention is that the fund will distribute small investments and grants enabling creative individuals, teams, and companies to develop IP in the region.

#### — **Monetising Content**

- Board advocates: Alison Warner and Paul Bramwell
- Content creators face challenges in finding effective routes to market, such as partnerships with broadcasters or streamers, international co-productions, or advertiser-funded content. This priority seeks clear and accessible support for identifying routes to market.

#### — **Future Media**

- Board advocates: Chris Cox and Robin Gray
- This priority relates to the application of emerging technologies (Virtual Reality, Artificial Intelligence, etc) in the service of storytellers. The ambition is to democratise these opportunities so that the young, diverse, and talented people of the West Midlands can access the technology, products, and skills to enable them to access careers in as yet unknown roles.

#### — **Games sector**

- Board advocates: Phil Bale and Robin Gray
- The games cluster in Leamington Spa is a fantastic West Midlands success story and home to some of the world's leading games companies, such as Sega, Sumo, Codemasters and Ubisoft. This priority wants to secure this success for the future and spread the benefits of this cluster across the West Midlands. This will provide more significant support for the future skills needs of the games sector, helping to diversify its talent pipeline, and investing in the creation of local games IP, such

that links are built inside and outside the region's games sector to take it to the next level.

#### — Sustainability

- Board advocate: Mark Hughes-Webb
- This priority aims to make the West Midlands the UK's first sustainable production ecosystem, where creators and suppliers can deliver original content sustainably. This will raise the profile of the sector and educate people about sustainability.

These 5 priorities sit alongside the priority projects that are identified within the *Plan for Growth*:

- Reap full economic and social impact of the region's Memorandum of Understanding with the BBC and similar commitments with major content commissioners.
- Support further public and private investment around the Digbeth Loc project and opportunities with the Digital Catapult on immersive technology.
- Drive cross-sector R&D collaborations, building on existing PIVOT programmes like the Innovate:Create partnerships between small creative firms with Commonwealth Games and National Express
- Deploy West Midlands Co-Invest Fund to help IP-rich creative firms grow rapidly.

Create Central – as detailed in Figures 2 (Year 1), 2 (Year 2), and 13 (Year 3) – has been key to driving these priority projects to date.

The refreshed strategy that Create Central developed over Year 3 will allow it to further advance these projects over coming years. This strategy is backed-up by 2-3 years of confirmed funding through:

- UK Shared Prosperity Fund

- National Lottery Funding through the British Film Institute's Skills Cluster Fund
- And funding associated with Create Central being a delivery partner for the Innovation Accelerator funded West Midlands Innovation programme.

Create Central is embedded in the regional economic development strategy through the *Plan for Growth* and delivering on national priorities through its BFI funding. In addition to these sources of funding, it continues to seek to accelerate delivery of its 2030 ambitions through additional public and private sector funding.

## 6. Case Studies

### 6.1 Production and inward investment

“ We are keen to work with Create Central on the inward investment piece... The high impact partnerships that they are attracting are magnets for investment. You need those anchor businesses, those magnets to bring investment into a region. (Nick Grimshaw, Creative UK<sup>21</sup>)

#### 6.1.1 What happened, and how does this align with the TOC?

Create Central's Production and Inward Investment (P&I) strategy was developed in late 2020 and announced publicly in April 2021. It provides a long-term commitment to the West Midlands creative content sector beyond the initial two years of Create Central's funding. The strategy aligns to Levers 1, 3 and 4 of the TOC.

One of the pre-requisites for a successful implementation of the strategy was securing a commitment from a major UK broadcaster to produce more content in the region, which would encourage sustained rather than intermittent growth for the sector in the West Midlands. In Year 1, this was realised through the MOU signed with the BBC, as discussed in the next case study, whilst in Year 2 further partnership agreements and working arrangements were agreed with Channel 4 and ITV.

Alongside work with broadcasters, the P&I strategy has a specific stream of activity around the development of physical infrastructure and production service in the regions. Realising this has involved working closely with Creative UK and Film Birmingham on the establishment of a Production Services Group as a mechanism for providing a joined-up approach across the region. Alongside this, there has been delivery around mapping of stage and studio

space in the region, as well as crew mapping across the region, to better understand the opportunities and challenges that exist.

#### 6.1.2 What was Create Central's role?

As part of its remit from the WMCA, Create Central was tasked with developing the P&I strategy in partnership with WMGC, ensuring that it can support the ambitions for the region initially set out in its Local Industrial Strategy.

To ensure that the strategy can truly be delivered in partnership, WMGC and Create Central jointly appointed Nick Toon to the post of Principal Advisor, Screen Industries Investment, focusing on inward investment, Production Services, and development fund delivery. Alongside this, each of the Create Central executive team have leadership for core elements of the strategy including core strategic partnerships and the leadership of the BBC Partnership and Creative Content Hub (Suzie Norton), developing the talent pipeline within the strategy (Sarah Wood), communications (Laura McCaughey) and cross-sector innovation (Tim Luft).

In developing the strategy, Create Central and WMGC actively consulted with a series of key stakeholders locally and nationally, including the BFI, Creative UK, Film Birmingham, and the BBC.

Alongside this, in developing the strategy, Create Central sought to review and build upon work previously delivered in the region, including a plan for cluster development devised by the West Midlands Screen Bureau and the work that the body itself has carried out since June 2020.

The culmination of this work is the identification of four key priorities for the region:

1. Supporting the development of Digbeth Loc. (formerly Mercian Studios) and seeking to maximise its impact and catalytic potential for the wider West Midlands region and help attract additional inward investment

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<sup>21</sup> Nick Grimshaw is the Head of Partnerships at Creative UK the Creative Industries Federation, and looks after regional relationships with both local authority and public sector partners.

2. Supporting and promoting the development of the Creative Content Hub to boost the local independent production sector
3. Prioritising achieving a high-impact, strategic partnership with the BBC in the West Midlands
4. Deploying the funding available from the BFI for the P&I strand to support TV programme development initiatives, in partnership with key broadcasters, and supporting sustainable opportunities for diverse, new entrants into the industry.

### 6.1.3 What was the added value of Create Central's involvement?

“ That's the strength of Create Central, they are a bridge that will help to draw investment in a way that builds trust with the investor network, but also delivers for creative businesses in the region. I think the Combined Authority will see the benefit of having Create Central in the region to support their inward investment agenda. (Nick Grimshaw)

Without Create Central, WMCA and WMGC would still have had a priority around production and inward investment for the region. However, the likelihood of the public sector being able to access, foster, and develop relationships with external private investors is likely to have been lessened had Create Central not been working in partnership with WMGC.

As an industry body made up of members drawn directly from the sector, Create Central has support and buy-in across the region. This provides a network of advocates who can make those links to private finance that might not otherwise be possible. This is also attractive to public funders, as it helps to demonstrate support for opportunities in the region and establishes Create Central as a body with a sustainable vision that looks beyond a single funding cycle.

More broadly, with external stakeholders Create Central has developed a perception as the “*voice of the region*”, that can provide connections between

different services, support delivery in the region, and make the West Midlands more production-friendly.

### 6.1.4 What does the future look like?

The first phase of delivery for the P&I strategy covers the current funding window. In this time Create Central in partnership with WMGC aimed to develop a sustainable film and TV cluster in the region, begin delivering on the four priorities outlined above, and pilot a series of initiatives to support activity in the region. This has largely been achieved – albeit in some cases more from a strategic than delivery perspective – and has laid firm foundations for the continued development of the sector in the region.

Beyond this, the P&I strategy seeks to create sustainable growth for the region by bringing together significant stakeholders from the public and private sectors and encouraging joined up working and collaboration. It looks across the region, considering the opportunities for development both inside and outside the clusters being established in Birmingham, and considers how best to support inward investment that can be linked to local pipelines and market activity. Again, the work that has been done around the Production Services Group and the research that has been delivered in Year 1 and 2 to map the infrastructure already existing in the region have contributed to these aims and present opportunities for the region in the longer term.

There is an expectation that over the next phase of activity sector growth will include greater opportunities for content development in the region, a high proportion of talent development and retention, and continued leveraging and attraction of significant investment to the region as it becomes better equipped to create the highest quality content. Alongside this, there are hopes from stakeholders that there will be opportunities for continued and improved joined up working through the region. Ambitions include initiatives like centralised crew services that can make a more unified experience for productions seeking to come into the region, in turn increasing the attraction of the region for inward investment and furthering the delivery of the P&I strategy.

## 6.2 Securing an MOU with the BBC

“ Working with Create Central has been a really creative, collaborative experience. We’ve worked together at pace to shape a partnership that has clear and measurable shared incentives for the region and the BBC, with the ability to grow into a much more significant and wider partnership for the region. (Tom Wrathmell, BBC<sup>22</sup>)

### 6.2.1 What happened, and how does this align with the TOC?

In March 2021 the BBC made a major announcement about its future in the Midlands, including signing a formal partnership agreement with Create Central and the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). The partnership agreement marks a major development for Create Central, and aligns with Levers 1, 2 and 3 in the TOC.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which spans the next five years, is designed to enable the BBC to work closely with Create Central, enhancing the presence of the BBC in the region, increasing its investment, and creating a role for the BBC as an anchor media partner across the region. It also aligns with the BBC’s wider ‘Across the UK’ strategy announcement, providing an opportunity for the organisation to create a production base that better represents all parts of the UK, acting as a catalyst for regional hubs of activity from other creative content producers.

In Year 2 of Create Central’s delivery, there have been a range of additional announcements related to working with the BBC in the region. This includes the announcement of BBC Three and BBC England commissions, with other new commissions expected to be announced soon, the establishment of the BBC Apprenticeship Hub, and, although not specifically aligned to the MOU, the announcement of the relocation of MasterChef to the region from 2024.

### 6.2.2 What was Create Central’s role?

Create Central were integral to the signing of the MOU and will continue to be integral as a key delivery partner for the MOU’s commitments over the coming years. Create Central lead the delivery of the partnership on behalf of the West Midlands, working closely with the team at the BBC.

Create Central helped keep the MOU coordinated with its own strategy for the West Midlands, while providing a narrative and context that adds weight and supports the delivery of the MOU. For the BBC, the key to a successful partnership is to align interests and make sure that all stakeholders can work together effectively. Having Create Central on board to facilitate consultation with and on behalf of the West Midlands enabled this.

More broadly, the model that was established in Year 1 has now been put to the test as the MOU moves from agreement into delivery stage. The perception of the BBC is that it is standing the test of time. Commissions and content are being delivered against the partnership, and there are ongoing discussions around what the West Midlands and the BBC are jointly looking to achieve and how best to achieve these goals.

### 6.2.3 What was the added value of Create Central’s involvement?

“ For us, Create Central has really set the bar for how to build a partnership at speed. They very much understood the challenge, they matched the strategic ambition, showed how it aligned to what they were trying to do, and then they really pushed us to make it the best that it could be. (Tom Wrathmell)

Previous discussions between the BBC and the region went through multiple channels and organisations. In this instance, Create Central provide a single point of contact for the BBC across the region, which means decisions could be

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<sup>22</sup> Tom Wrathmell is the Head of Special Projects at the BBC, leading a range of strategies including Across the UK which is integral to the signing of the MOU.

made quickly and effectively. This has the benefit of speeding the whole process up, adding ease to the overall transaction, and making sure that everything can progress smoothly whilst still working in weeks, not months.

The BBC still would have looked to engage with the region without Create Central's existence, however this engagement may have been less productive without the 'glue' of Create Central pulling all the stakeholders together. The experience of the BBC has been that having a single representative that can provide a mandate for the region has created a smooth process and a positive experience for developing these kinds of relationships.

#### 6.2.4 What does the future look like?

Over the first twelve months of the MOU a large amount of work has been delivered. The question moving forward is what limitations might exist within the region, both in terms of the potential for work and the capacity of Create Central to continue to support delivery. In isolation Create Central will struggle to grow the sector to match the level of ambition held by stakeholders regionally and nationally. As a currently resource light model (e.g., no full-time permanent staff members), decisions will need to be made about what shape the organisation will take if it is to continue working at the same level of intensity with the BBC and for the region.

More widely, with the arrival of HS2, the connectivity of the West Midlands will improve. Businesses are already taking advantage of this – the relocation of HSBC being a key example. For the BBC, being part of an increase in investment in the West Midlands can benefit them and the region. However, the easier part – the signing of the MOU – is now complete, and the bigger challenge is to ensure that the MOU is fully delivered upon.

Create Central must ensure that the BBC are held accountable for its commitments to the region in the MOU.

## 6.3 Establishing the Create Central brand

“ The conversation is happening; the West Midlands is open for business, and it means it. Steven Knight's studios, the BBC announcements, the Creative Content Hub, those messages are getting out there. (Alison Grade, freelance consultant<sup>23</sup>)

### 6.3.1 What happened, and how does this align with the TOC?

An integral aspect of any new organisation is developing a clear brand that can be used to communicate what that organisation does. For Create Central, this has been built around the idea of the West Midlands being the “Home of Original Storytelling”, drawing links from historic literary connections (including Shakespeare and Tolkien) through to current content producers across the creative industries and onwards towards the future.

Establishing the brand is a key lever for Create Central and is specifically referenced by Lever 7 in the TOC. More widely a strong and established brand will contribute to all levers, raising awareness of the role that Create Central plays within the region.

Within the first two years, there have been a range of different ways that Create Central has looked to develop its brand regionally and nationally. The successful bid for the Creative Cities Convention – which although delivered in April 2022 was announced and planned throughout Year 2 – can be seen as one such example of brand establishment.

### 6.3.2 What was Create Central's role?

During its first year, Create Central has worked hard to establish a recognisable brand throughout the region. Alongside the formal launch of the “Home of Original Storytelling” campaign, it ran a range of social media channels, established a series of different communications platforms, including a regular

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<sup>23</sup> Alison Grade is author of The Freelance Bible and CEO of Mission Accomplished. She has been working with Create Central as both an independent consultant and as a trainer for the Creative Scale Ups programme



newsletter, and created a series of standalone campaigns that link into the overall brand.

In Year 2, Create Central built on this foundation. This included increasing its reach across its newsletter and social media channels, staging a range of events to increase awareness of Create Central's activities, and the introduction of Create Central Champions to act as high profile national and international advocates for the West Midlands.

Through developing a clear and distinctive set of branding, Create Central has been able to establish the region as a place to work and create content, delivering an increased profile for the opportunities for producers in the region.

### 6.3.3 What was the added value of Create Central's involvement?

“ Create Central was a model that was very accessible to us, and the benefits were enormous. They understood our industry and helped to create a virtuous circle (Ruth Pitt, Creative Cities Convention)

There have been regional brands for the sector in the region in the past. Create Central's strengths come from it being across the breadth of the creative content sector, and a brand that has been designed in collaboration with the sector that it represents. It can capture the way that the region wants to be seen and project this image out into the national and international landscape.

This has been seen in a concrete way through the experience the Creative Cities Convention had working with Create Central. As an industry body – rather than, for example, a local authority – Create Central understands how the sector operates, how to work with industry figures, and how to capitalise on this to create the best outcomes for the Creative Cities Convention. Create Central was also able to draw on its Champions, making introductions and creating opportunities to leverage the strength of activity in the region. It is a sign of this strength that, whilst a national conference that looks to represent key industry stories from across the UK, the bigger stories at the conference were centred

around the West Midlands, including the announcement of the Channel 4 partnership and the MasterChef move.

### 6.3.4 What does the future look like?

“ Create Central is the home of original storytelling, it is about the content creation. But in order to deliver the content the region wants to deliver, there needs to be more people in the industry full stop. So actually, if you make the play that it's a nice place to live, it's a good quality of life, it becomes a place people choose (Alison Grade)

Establishing the Create Central brand is about more than demonstrating the richness of the creative content sector in the region, it's about demonstrating the richness of the region as a whole and creating a changed perception of the region as a place to live and work.

As the Create Central brand becomes more established, it should look for opportunities to champion the region as a place to live and work, contributing to the long-term development of the sector within the region by ensuring that talent trained in the region have reasons beyond work to stay.

More ambitiously, there are opportunities for Create Central to develop a brand that can work on a global level, identifying the region as being led by international experts and providing a clear indication of the West Midlands as a place where world-leading content is created.

## 6.4 Innovation and cross sector working

“ They’ve been very easy to work with and we’ve found a really good meeting of minds. It’s been a fun and positive experience working with them. (Pam Waddell, Innovation Alliance West Midlands)<sup>24</sup>

### 6.4.1 What happened, and how does this align with the TOC?

Innovation is a key strand of activity for Create Central; as well as being directly referenced in Lever 4 of the TOC, there is also a working group specifically focused on innovation within the region.

Key initiatives across the first two years have included:

- **Positive Realities:** a competitive opportunity for companies to access a £120k budget for audience focused creative content development in the region. The successful project (Urban Jungle, delivered in collaboration between Rebel Creatives and JellyBob) was announced in Year 1, and delivered as part of Coventry City of Culture 2021.
- **Innovate: Create:** a challenge programme that pairs key organisations in the region with small digital companies working in AR, gaming, and mixed reality to solve specific challenges set by the partner organisation. For example, Birmingham 2022 Festival created two challenges around developing festival-ready products that could be used to engage audiences in cultural activity around the city during the festival, whilst National Express have set a challenge around encouraging the sustainable use of public transport.
- **Create Central’s involvement with the Innovation Alliance’s Virtual Innovation Team (VIT):** the VIT is a cross-sector group, encompassing, amongst others, sustainability, manufacturing, construction, and health, with

a focus on demand led business innovation and supporting businesses to adapt to and adopt innovation practices. Create Central represents the Creative Industries as a whole on the VIT (i.e., not just the creative content sector). Other members of the VIT include Sustainability West Midlands, Transport West Midlands, the Centre for Rail Research and Education at the University of Birmingham, the Midlands Aerospace Alliance, West Midlands Health Technologies Cluster, and the Warwick Manufacturing Group.

### 6.4.2 What was Create Central’s role?

Create Central were the second organisation to sign up to the VIT, and within that role have been brokering conversations between the creative industries and other sectors. This has already led to an initial pilot project – Innovation Engine 3 – that has been developed in collaboration with the wider VIT. This project provides some of the grants that underpin the Innovate: Create programme, as well as providing opportunities for creative content SMEs to help deliver cross-sector solutions to local challenges, with Low Carbon as the central theme.

Within the Positive Realities programme, Create Central worked in collaboration with StoryFutures Academy and Coventry City of Culture 2021 to deliver a pathfinder project, giving creative companies across the region the opportunity to explore innovative new approaches to health and wellbeing as part of Coventry City of Culture 2021. The winning team created a collaborative web-based augmented reality project that appeared at a series of outdoor events across Coventry throughout the festival year.

For Innovate: Create, Create Central’s role was around raising the profile of the challenge and increasing the breadth of organisations that saw and responded to the challenges set by partner organisations. This enabled partner organisations to select candidates “beyond the usual” applicants that they might reach were they solely responsible for developing a call out for responses.

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<sup>24</sup> Pam Waddell is Director of the Innovation Alliance West Midlands, an alliance organisations active or interested in science and technology based innovation across the West Midlands. They lead the VIT and organise Venturefest.

### 6.4.3 What was the added value of Create Central's involvement?

“ I've been surprised by and encouraged by the breadth of what we've been able to do together. (Pam Waddell)

For the VIT, the involvement of Create Central has meant that VIT have been able to reach a much broader range of potential businesses. While connections were already well established with some sectors, the creative content sector had generally not been part of the conversation.

Create Central has opened conversations both within the creative industries and with low carbon, health, and manufacturing organisations. This success is in part attributed to Create Central being made up of people who are sector experts with experience of collaboration and partnerships.

Meanwhile, for Innovate: Create organisations, the opportunity to access commercial small-scale digital start-ups and studios has been invaluable. Create Central has provided expertise around who is working in the sector that might be able to respond to specific challenges and provided guidance around how the sector works, which has helped build understanding and knowledge in partner organisations.

For Birmingham 2022 Festival, there has also been a specific added value created around the legacy of the project that would not necessarily have occurred without Create Central. Both of their challenge projects needed to be finished projects that could be presented in a time limited way, to respond to the festival nature of their wider programme. Working with Create Central has given them access to project ideas that can continue beyond the initial lifetime of the project and can help with capacity building within the sector in the longer term. The perception of the Festival is that it is unlikely they would have had this type of response if working on their own, as they would have been more likely to solely receive artist-led responses (i.e., artists using digital as part of their practice, rather than digital practice incorporating artistic responses).

### 6.4.4 What does the future look like?

VIT has a further year of funded delivery. Over that timescale, there is an expectation that more projects will crystallise and the additional work streams will be operational between VIT and Create Central. Similarly, further Innovate: Create opportunities are expected to be announced in the coming months, including with Jaguar Land Rover and Wolverhampton Football Club.

Whilst regional priorities may change over time, there is an expectation that innovation in all its forms will continue to be a cornerstone of activity for the West Midlands and, by extension Create Central. As a region the West Midlands has significant growth aspirations, and within this there is a role for Create Central to play in driving up innovation and building a stronger ecosystem for innovation across the region. This has already been seen through applications to UKRI, Epic Games and the British Council, and there is an expectation that these bids will continue into the second phase of Create Central's activity in Year 3 and beyond.

## 6.5 Skills

### 6.5.1 What happened, and how does this align with the TOC?

Bootcamps – courses for new entrants and/or those looking to pivot into specific parts of the creative content sector – have been a key strand of activity for Create Central since its inception. Initially delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic, there have now been five Bootcamps, with the largest – the Host Broadcast Training Initiative (HBTI) – developed specifically as an opportunity for new entrants to work on outside broadcasts at the Commonwealth Games, offering over 150 paid roles across the Games delivery.

More widely, there has been a range of skills development opportunities in the region over the first two years of Create Central, including supporting the BBC in establishment of the BBC Apprentice Hub Pilot and TV production placements with the ITV drama *Stonehouse*.

Bootcamps directly respond to Lever 5 in the TOC, whilst other skills activity can be seen as contributing to the wider aim of this lever, namely matching industry skills to local talent.

### 6.5.2 What was Create Central's role?

Create Central worked to develop the Bootcamp pilots, with the long-term aim of creating an industry-led model for future skills programmes. Following consultation with different aspects of the industry to identify skills gaps and employment opportunities, they worked in collaboration with Solihull College & University Centre as the lead training provider of (most of) the Bootcamps to develop the timeline and curriculum for each Bootcamp. Create Central has also provided marketing and communications support across each of the bootcamps. Funding for the Bootcamps comes from money that WMCA has ringfenced from its Adult Education budget. This goes directly to the training providers.

The BBC Apprentice Hub is an initiative that has arisen from the MOU with the BBC and looks to place up to 50 apprentices with employers across the local creative sector. Create Central are working to find suitable employers that can work with the BBC on the Apprentice Hub – which responds to the appetite for

creative apprenticeships in the region, as expressed in responses to our survey reported in 4.5 above. More broadly, without Create Central's involvement in the MOU (see above), this initiative is unlikely to be taking place within the region.

### 6.5.3 What was the added value of Create Central's involvement?

“They're the glue that is making us all coherent especially in a world where we're not in an office. To have somebody that can piece us together was really useful. (Emma Riley, Sunset + Vine)

As an instigator of the Bootcamp pilots, Create Central have brought added value through their industry knowledge and connections, knowledge of the skills gaps existing in the region, and their ability to create links between key organisations regionally. Additionally, as Bootcamps have become more established, they have been able to have a “ready to go” model for the Bootcamps. This means that as new streams are developed – for example HBTI – the lessons have already been learnt and the programme has already adapted to any challenges that might arise.

For partner organisations, Create Central's ability to access a wide range of networks across the region also has added benefit. This has helped in circumstances where recruitment may not have been as high as anticipated; Create Central have been able to identify other avenues and mechanisms to raise awareness and help programmes meet their recruitment targets. With HBTI this included making approaches to sports clubs, parasports clubs, and community centre to broaden the demographic of those taking part.

### 6.5.4 What does the future look like?

Bootcamps have become an established part of the Create Central offer, and the model is now well established so that it can be rolled out to other parts of the sector as required. There is an appetite for further skills development opportunities in the region, and the successes so far have demonstrated that

there is an industry need for further Bootcamps and apprenticeships to support new entrants.

There are plans for a repeat of the TV Production Bootcamp in Year 3, as well as the majority part of the delivery of the HBTI Bootcamp during the Commonwealth Games. Beyond this, there will be continued opportunities to deliver Bootcamps, however this will be dependent on the financial sustainability of Create Central moving forwards and its ability to support new and repeated Bootcamps.

More widely, as Create Central moves into its longer-term strategic planning, it is likely that skills will continue to be a lynch pin of the wider strategic objectives of the organisation in its work across the region. This will require consideration and planning as to how best to create opportunities to sustain and develop the sector in the longer term.

## 6.6 Creative Content Hub

“ When you are trying to deal with bids from people who don't have the backing of the sector, it is really difficult to justify investment on that basis. So, I think the fact that [Create Central] exists, the fact that it is a voice, the fact that it is seen as a figurehead, and the right people are involved, it does make it much easier. (Neil Rami, West Midlands Growth Company<sup>25</sup>)

### 6.6.1 What happened, and how does this align with the TOC?

One of the most prominent features of the Create Central brand and strategy is the creation of a Creative Content Hub in the Digbeth area of Birmingham. A reimagining of Oval Estate owned The Bond Company building, the development will deliver a world-class 50,000 sq. ft. campus facility that enables sector specialists to develop content, technology and business models that position the independent television production and creative content industries in the region as future-facing propositions that can respond to the changing landscape. Oval Estates has so far received a £3m funding investment from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) and is scheduled to open at the end of 2022.

The Creative Content Hub is expected to be part of a growing ecosystem of sectoral infrastructure in the Digbeth area, joining the proposed Digbeth Loc. studios. Founded by Peaky Blinders creator Steven Knight, Digbeth Loc. Phase 1 has been confirmed, and initial productions will include the Peaky Blinders film and MasterChef from 2024.

With alignment to Levers 1 and 2 of the TOC, the Hub provides an opportunity for Create Central to deliver an industry-led initiative and create an industry leading facility in the heart of Birmingham.

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<sup>25</sup> Neil Rami is Chief Executive of the West Midlands Growth Company

## 6.6.2 What was Create Central's role?

Create Central conceived the idea for the Creative Content Hub in August 2019, with the initial pitch by Suzie Norton and Neil Duncanson to Andy Street. Following the launch of Create Central, development of the Creative Content Hub was written as a flagship idea from industry members within Create Central's Growth Plan.

Create Central secured political and public sector support for the project from 2019- 2021, culminating in a site being identified through Oval Estates and the successful GBSLEP bid, which included Create Central as a named partnership advisor.

With the commissioning of the Creative Content Hub, Create Central demonstrates the role it has to play in developing long-term, fixed assets for the creative content sector in the West Midlands. These assets will be able to be used to both provide creative services and jobs for the people of the region, and to provide an incentive to investors and creative producers, helping develop the sector.

## 6.6.3 What was the added value of Create Central's involvement?

The idea for the Hub came from Members themselves, and so arguably without Create Central this initiative would not exist. It provides a strong example of the industry developing ideas in response to a market need, with Create Central able to act as a vehicle on behalf of the industry to secure political, public sector, and private sector support. As the project has progressed, Create Central has also set up and chairs a strategic working group which acts as a vehicle to drive forward the project from concept to a realised and operational space.

Alongside this, Create Central's value can be seen in the improved reputation of Digbeth's creative quarter within the wider creative sector of the UK. The Hub provides an opportunity for Digbeth and the West Midlands to recover and thrive in the industry after the COVID-19 pandemic, building a strong working base

and developing relationships with a wide range of creative content producers who may not have previously considered the region as base.

As a significant and large-scale asset, the Creative Content Hub gives confidence to those outside of the region that the West Midlands creative content sector can successfully deliver. This is, in part, because it demonstrates that Digbeth possesses both the skills and, crucially, the physical infrastructure to carry out complex creative productions.

## 6.6.4 What does the future look like?

“ We ought to be thinking about 30 year strategies, and where do we want to be so that the steps that we're taking now can be seen as applying towards a particular vision that we're trying to reach (Neil Rami)

The development of the Creative Content Hub has been a key activity during the first two years of Create Central's activity. Having secured funding, the doors are currently scheduled to open to businesses from September 2022. At this point, there will be a need to establish a collective of businesses working closely and collaboratively together. To support this, Create Central chairs a delivery group with strategic oversight of the Creative Content Hub that works to make sure that the Hub can realise its ambitions once it is fully operational.

Beyond this first Hub, there are ambitions for two further Hubs in the Digbeth area that can drive a renaissance of creative content production:

- Digbeth Loc. Phase 1, which will focus on high-end Film and TV
- StudioUK, the UK's first virtual production studio that will be sited within Phase 2 of Digbeth Loc.

As well as supporting the region, establishing, and developing creative physical infrastructure can also support Create Central in developing their own future, providing opportunities to develop strategies that go beyond standard funding cycles that look instead to a multi-decade plan for the sector.

# 7. Conclusions and recommendations

## 7.1 The future of Create Central

The first two years of Create Central saw it, in the terms of our TOC, invest in leadership, infrastructure, networks and communities. Solid delivery against these activities occurred – albeit this activity was delayed and frustrated by Covid-19.

The creative content sector in the West Midlands has started to secure the outcomes identified in our TOC: improved coordination, capacity, investment, and perceptions. These perceptions are reflected in:

- Views expressed within the West Midlands – including the strong and clear awareness of Create Central’s role and purpose expressed in response to our survey.
- Confidence expressed in the West Midlands from beyond the region – including new partnership agreements with the BBC, Channel 4, and ITV.

There is a new belief in the West Midlands creative content sector. From MasterChef to Peaky Blinders, big brands are newly associated with the region and there is a reinvigorated sense of the possible.

This future is expressed within our TOC as the impact of a future-facing and successful creative content sector. If Create Central can build this by 2030, we are confident that the return on investment for the West Midlands will be vast: reversing historic underperformance in these high-value sectors and contributing to levelling up of the whole region. At that stage, the impact of Create Central could be assessed with more financial precision than is now possible.

Many of the impacts resulting from actions taken in the first two years of Create Central will accrue in years to come, e.g.: BBC productions being made in the West Midlands that do not now exist; intellectual property newly conceived at

the Creative Content Hub; Bootcamp graduates making successful careers in the region.

The immediate future for Create Central has been secured by team funding from the BFI’s National Cluster Growth Fund running in to a third year, however no programme funding was available for Create Central to bid for towards 2022/23. This is the same for all National Lottery funded organisations bidding for funding through the BFI. Year 3 will allow Create Central to build on the accelerating delivery achieved over Year 2.

In Year 2 Create Central began the development of a longer-term strategy, which they will complete in Year 3. This attempts to ensure that the foundations established over its first two years are effectively built on. The full impact of Year 1 and 2 depends on the extent to which the region can take advantage of the potential for longer-term delivery that has been established over these years.

A distinctive model for Create Central was developed over these first two years, as we discuss in our Executive Summary, in terms of its:

- Focus
- Membership
- Partnership with key public sector agencies
- Credibility and legitimacy.

As it acts upon its longer-term strategy, Create Central is now reflecting on this model – with questions including:

- What team structure, resourcing and organisation will best deliver on the strategic foundations established over the first two years of Create Central?
- How should this be financed?

These considerations go beyond the scope of this evaluation, with its focus on the first two years of Create Central. However, as the impact of actions over these two years is dependent on these future decisions, we conclude with recommendations for the future.

## 7.2 Recommendations for the future

In our evaluation at the end of Year 1, we noted that in Year 2 the executive team will plan for the future of Create Central, considering the operating model for the group beyond the current round of funding. This has occurred, with the development of a longer-term strategy for Create Central underway and ongoing deliberations about the best way to implement this strategy.

Consultation for this Year 1 report suggested numerous priorities for Year 2 and beyond. We now revisit and update these priorities:

— **Maintain clarity of communications and positioning:** Create Central established its brand in Year 1 and enjoys a tightly defined position, which is broader than the screen industries and narrower than the creative industries. This brand was strengthened in Year 2 – with the delivery of the Creative Cities Convention and implementation of eye-catching communications. Looking ahead:

- It is important that this clarity of communications and positioning is maintained – even if the focus of Create Central moves beyond creative content into adjacent sectors. An expansion in focus would bring new delivery opportunities but should not come with any dilution in clarity around Create Central’s purpose and the West Midlands’ proposition as the home of original storytelling.

— **Deliver for all parts of West Midlands and the creative content sector:** Our Year 1 evaluation stressed that Create Central should avoid being skewed towards Birmingham over the rest of the West Midlands or film/TV over other parts of the creative content sector. This perception of Create Central persists, as revealed by our survey. It is necessary for Create Central to combat this perception by continuing to deliver for all parts of the sectors and geography that it serves. This will build upon Year 2 delivery that includes:

- Strategic support for the University of Wolverhampton Screen School which formally opened in March 2022.

- Positive Realities winner delivering their programme of activity as part of Coventry UK City of Culture.

— **Find the best balance between direct delivery and strategic influence:**

The pace of delivery increased as Create Central moved into Year 2 and, hopefully, this trend will continue in subsequent years. Nonetheless, we argued in our Year 1 report, Create Central must also seek to exert strategic influence. We argued that this is important in relation to three outcomes, which we revisit here:

- *Ensuring that the BBC act on the commitments to the West Midlands expressed in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreed with Create Central on behalf of the region:* This has happened over Year 2, with the relocation of MasterChef to the West Midlands a key demonstration of this. Create Central also secured equivalent agreements with Channel 4 and ITV over Year 2 and should seek to build on them as effectively as it has done in relation to the BBC.
  - *Making sure that the Creative Content Hub fulfils its potential:* This is on track to open in September 2022 and is, therefore, a strategic imperative that extends well beyond Year 2.
  - *Unlocking other facilities for the region, especially at Mercian Studios:* In the past year, Mercian Studios has evolved to Digbeth Loc., with a phased programme of capital works. The first phase of works will, among other roles, become the home of MasterChef. This demonstrates the coordinating role of Create Central: its BBC MOU helped to bring MasterChef to the West Midlands, which is supporting an investment, Digbeth Loc., which builds on the production and inward investment strategy of Create Central. An imperative for coming years is that this strategy continues to deliver for Create Central and the region.
- **Achieving financial sustainability:** We stressed this in our Year 1 report and while a solution was found to Year 3 during Year 2 (i.e., team funding from the BFI’s National Cluster Growth Fund running in to a third year), it remains a significant challenge at the end of Year 2. If adequate funding cannot be found to make Create Central sustainable in the long term, there



is a risk of losing both the goodwill and voluntary contributions of the membership as well as the significant expertise and experience provided by the Executive Team. More widely there may also be economic impacts for the region as without Create Central's involvement and brokering skills, some of the longer-term initiatives may not be fully realised.

## 8. Appendix 1: Methodology

### 8.1 Year One

#### 8.1.1 Quantitative data gathering

The quantitative research was conducted using data provided by Create Central. This data gave BOP Consulting a contextual insight into the size, scope and reach of the programme, the sector and the West Midlands region more generally.

#### 8.1.2 Qualitative data gathering

BOP Consulting sought to understand how effective and successful the first year of Create Central was for the industry and the region, and to gauge what lessons could be learned for the second year and beyond.

The qualitative research was organised into three tranches to gain a rounded and wide-reaching understanding of the programme. These three tranches were:

- Roundtable discussions with key stakeholders
- Case study interviews with pertinent individuals
- Additional interviews with stakeholders that were unable to attend the roundtables

The responses from these roundtable discussions and interviews were transcribed, coded, and analysed using interpretive thematic analysis. Using this method, BOP Consulting was able to generate new insights and concepts.

#### Discussion guides

Each roundtable discussion was conducted using the same discussion guide to generate themes related to the past year and future of Create Central. The discussion guides were as follows:

- **Reflections on Year 1 of Create Central:** How effectively has Create Central operated in Year 1? What were its main achievements? What lessons can be learnt for Year 2?
- **Year 2 of Create Central:** How well placed is Create Central to deliver for the West Midlands over Year 2? What is it about Create Central that will enable it to add value for the West Midlands above and beyond what the region would otherwise secure?
- **Looking to the future:** What opportunities will the screen industries open-up for the West Midlands over the next decade? What does the West Midlands need to do to grasp these opportunities? Is Create Central acting as effectively as possible to enable this to happen?

The case study interviews were tailored to stakeholders who had been engaged from across the creative content sector of the region. There was no single discussion guide produced, however there were overarching thematic questions asked in each session as follows:

- **About you and your role:** how does your work relate to Create Central?
- **Experience relating to the case study:** what happened to achieve the outcome? How does this outcome sit within your other work? What benefits do you see this outcome having for the West Midlands?
- **The role of Create Central:** could the outcome have been achieved without Create Central? What added value did Create Central bring?
- **Counterfactual:** How does working in the Midlands with Create Central compare to working in areas without a similar body / working in the Midlands before Create Central was established
- **General reflections on the last 12 months and suggestions for the future**

#### Roundtable Discussions

We held three roundtable discussions with internal and external stakeholders of Create Central to understand a variety of views on the strengths and weaknesses of the programme. We consulted with the following stakeholders:

- Paul Bramwell, Chair of One Black Bear
- Caren Davies, Senior Head of Communications, BBC
- Mark Hughes Webb, CEO of Space 2 Consulting
- Shirley Hunt-Benson, BBC Producer and Freelance Producer
- Kully Khaila, Executive Producer of BBC Academy; Chair of Royal Television Society Midlands; Trustee, Coventry UK City of Culture
- Stacy O'Connor, Digital Creative Lead, CWLEP
- Caroline Officer, Media Education Consultant and Producer, The Outer Circle
- Louise Phipps, Senior Delivery Manager - Higher Level Skills, WMCA
- Tim Pile, Chair of GBSLEP
- Nick Pinks, CEO of Covatic
- Jonathan Skinner, Head of Economy and Local Industrial Strategy, WMCA
- Yen Yau, Director of Training Programmes, Grierson Trust

### Case study interviews

To inform the case studies, we spoke with individuals from across the Midlands who have had an in-depth involvement in a particular aspect of Create Central's delivery. These people are:

- Alison Grade, freelance consultant
- Nick Grimshaw, Creative UK
- Roger Mendonca, WMCA
- Pam Waddell, Innovation Alliance for West Midlands
- Tom Wrathmell, BBC

## 8.2 Year Two

### 8.2.1 Quantitative data gathering

As with Year 1, quantitative research was conducted using data provided by Create Central. This data gave BOP Consulting a contextual insight into the size, scope and reach of the programme, the sector, and the West Midlands region more generally.

Additionally in year 2, three quantitative surveys were carried out:

- Beneficiaries survey for those taking part in Bootcamps
  - Survey open from 5 to 29 April 2022
  - Total of 25 full responses and 2 partial responses out of a potential population of 150
- Beneficiaries survey for those involved in funding initiatives
  - Survey open from 14 April to 6 May 2022
  - Total of 24 full responses and no partial responses out of a potential population of 450
- Creative content sector survey for wider understanding of engagement with Create Central and perceptions of skills gaps in the region.
  - Survey open from 12 April to 6 May 2022
  - Total of 66 full responses and 56 partial responses. As this survey was done through an open call, including promotion via social media, the potential population size cannot be determined, however as a minimum it went to a mailing list of 1,500 recipients.

The findings of these surveys are explored in Chapter 4.

### 8.2.2 Qualitative data gathering

In Year 2, qualitative data gathering was focused around enhancing the case studies from year 1. This involved carrying out additional interviews to

understand progress in comparison with year 1. Not all interviews were conducted with the same people or the same organisation, depending on the progression of the different aspects of Create Central's work. Additionally, in year 2 we introduced a skills case study and did not build on the Creative Content Hub case study.

The case study interviewees in year two are:

- Hayley Armstrong, Creative UK
- Louisa Davies, Birmingham 2022 Festival
- Ruth Pitt, Creative Cities Convention
- Emma Riley, Sunset + Vine
- Tom Wrathmell, BBC
- Neil Rami, West Midlands Growth Company

## 9. Appendix 2: Create Central membership

There are three levels of involvement with Create Central: Champions, who are creative industry ambassadors from across the West Midlands; the Executive Board, who are responsible for decision making, strategy, and governance; and Industry Advisors, who provide advice ideas, and industry viewpoints to the Executive Board on key matters.

The Create Central Champions are:

- Marverine Cole, Journalist and broadcaster
- Angela Ferreira, Television producer
- Sir Lenny Henry, Comedian, writer, philanthropist and actor
- Ed James, Co-founder HDY
- Steven Knight CBE, Writer and Director, Nebulastar
- Dean Lovett, CEO, McCann Central
- Genea Lynch, Tech Entrepreneur
- Adil Ray OBE, Presenter, writer and actor
- Harinder Sangha, Operations Director, Sumo Digital
- Jess Symons, Producer

The Create Central Executive Board members are:

- Jamie Bakewell, Founder, Bigtooth Studios
- Paul Bramwell, Consultant
- Chris Cox, Head of VP and Real Time Solutions, MBSi
- Kit de Waal, Writer, Portopia Productions
- Neil Duncanson, CEO, North One TV

- Jazz Gowans, Creative Director and Executive Producer
- Robin Gray, Co-founder and co-CEO, Gray Jones Media
- Mark Hughes-Webb, CEO, Space-2
- Debbie Isitt, Writer and Director
- Lisa Opie, Managing Director, Ubisoft Reflections and Ubisoft Leamington studios (stood down December 2022)
- Nick Pinks, CEO, Covatic
- Ed Shedd, Chair of Create Central
- Amrit Singh, Creative Director, Rebel Creatives
- Alison Warner, Managing Director, Blue Zoo Rights
- Lee Wilcox, CEO, Electric House (stood down June 2022)
- Yen Yau, Director of Training Programmes at The Grierson Trust
- Phil Bale, Operations Manager, Ubisoft Reflections Limited (joined May 2023)

The Create Central Industry Advisors are:

- Daniel Alexander, Founder / Owner, Daniel Alexander Films
- Phil Arkinstall, Founder and Managing Director, Ark media Productions Limited
- Malcolm Barnes, Director, Hollywood Games
- Bhulla Behal, Creative Director, BlueBell Films
- Kevin Blair, Director, ATMOS VR
- Dan Bull, Musician and Rap Artist
- James Craig, Co-founder, Oval Estates
- Alex Darby, Technical and Design Director, darbotron ltd
- Justin Eames, Managing Director, Fish in a Bottle

- Justin Edgar, CEO, 104 Films
- Paul Flanagan, Advisor, Creative Mobile OÜ
- Colette Foster, CEO, Full Fat TV
- Katherine Fuller, Head of Innovation, Bruntwood Sci-Tech Birmingham
- Natalie Griffith, Band and Marketing Director, Unit 2 Games
- Nick Harper, CEO, Wonderful Games Limited
- Nigel Harris, Director, Jellybob Productions Ltd
- Oli Hills, CEO, Nonsensical
- Bonny John, CEO, Horizon Collective
- Ben Keen, Founder / Owner, Mockingbird Film Company
- Sara Lyddy, Interim Director of Comms - Campaign DRPG
- Lou Murrall, Director of Photography, Louingham
- Drew Roper, Founder/ Owner Yanimation
- Sarah Trigg, Executive Producer

## 10. Appendix 3: Create Central success stories

Throughout their delivery, Create Central has developed a suite of success stories that illustrate the different ways that they have made an impact in the region. These are provided here for reference and information. Queries about these success stories should be directed to Create Central.

### Collaborative Leadership

#### BBC partnership agreement

Following a consultation with industry, Create Central Members identified very early on that a historic lack of investment in the region from public service broadcasters had resulted in the West Midlands being left behind, when compared to media hubs like Manchester and Cardiff.

After lengthy negotiations and relationship building between the Director General of the BBC and Create Central, with the support of the Mayor's office and the West Midlands Combined Authority, we were able to formally establish a long-term partnership.

The BBC has committed to building on the region's TV production strength by moving primetime brands like the MasterChef series, at least one new primetime drama series and one new primetime entertainment series to be commissioned in the West Midlands; alongside significant investment in training and development for new entrants to the industry with a pilot Apprentice Hub.

Create Central ensured that the BBC engaged with the regions' public and private sector partners to gain grassroots support for their plans outlined in Across the UK, and facilitated negotiations between the varied stakeholders (Homes England, Digbeth Loc., Banijay and the Mayor's office).

Andy Street, the Mayor of the West Midlands, who has been instrumental in securing the BBC agreement, said "For too long the BBC has under-invested in the West Midlands and left us under-represented. But following a series of frank

and honest conversations with the new Director General I am delighted that is now changing, and that the BBC has made some significant commitments to our region. It was great to welcome Tim and his team to the West Midlands as we continue to strengthen ties with the BBC and work together to bring their commitments to life."

Create Central was key in facilitating those 'frank and honest conversations' and providing the strategic engagement necessary to maximise the catalytic impact of the deal for the region's creative content sector of today and of the future.

#### The Bond: Creative Content Hub for the West Midlands

Create Central Members envisioned a creative content hub that could act as a lightning rod for new production, training, innovation, development, meet the commissioner events and networking opportunities for the next generation of production talent. Creating a halo effect and providing a beating heart for Birmingham's creative cluster.

Through extensive lobbying and advocacy activities for the region we attracted and engaged Oval as a commercial partner for the project. Oval Real Estate and Oval Developments identified The Bond in Digbeth as the site for the new creative content hub and Create Central played a pivotal role in negotiating a £3 million grant from GBSLEP's Local Growth Fund programme. This funding helped bridge the financial gap, enabling the project to be delivered. The £18 million facility, based in the city's historic Creative Quarter, is a flagship project for Create Central and will be our new HQ.

Neil Rami, Chief Executive of the West Midlands Growth Company, the region's official Investment Promotion Agency, said: "The West Midlands is recognised as the largest emerging technologies cluster outside London - particularly within the Tech & Creative sector - where there are more companies across specialisms including digital transformation; gaming; immersive tech; process automation and software development, than in any other region.

"This new facility has the potential to turbo-charge the clustering of innovation already taking effect here, with the spill over benefits across wider sectors such as tourism, adding even greater value to our economy."

## Networks and Connections

### Bridport Black Writers Residency Prize

With a view to fostering stronger links with the publishing industry, a key source of material for the screen industries, Create Central was proud to support the Bridport Prize Black Writer Residency - an opportunity for new writers of African or African Caribbean heritage over 18 who live, work or study in Birmingham and The Black Country.

Create Central Member Kit de Waal (author of prize-winning, internationally bestselling novel *My Name is Leon*, currently being turned into a film for television) will be offering support and advice to the winners. And with help from Create Central they have been able to get new laptops for their work.

Kit said, "I am delighted to be part of the Black Writer in Residence Project with the Bridport Prize. Opportunities like this can make a huge difference to a writer's work and career and to have these first awards going to writers from the central region is very dear to my heart."

Winners Grace Peters-Clarke and Stephenjohn Holgate will be taking up their residency in April and June respectively and will be writing a blog for Create Central about their experiences later in the year.

### Bursary tickets for under-represented writers to attend the Birmingham Film Market

Create Central aims to support under-represented creatives to develop their networks and establish connections that can grow their businesses.

In conjunction with The Birmingham Film Festival (in its sixth year), The Birmingham Film Market (BFM) is a pitch, sales and network event, linking film, TV and digital content makers from the West Midlands with the industry figures who get projects made and sold.

Create Central supplied four tickets to the event for under-represented filmmakers through the Back In programme and Script Sirens Writers Group.

Michael Ellis (Back In Alumni), Sara Myers and Scarlett Kefford (Script Sirens) attended the event and took advantage of the opportunity to gain advice and pitch their ideas to industry leaders.

Scarlett Kefford said "It was a truly invaluable experience! So grateful to have been able to take part – fantastic connections made!"

### Support to help BBC's Radio Indie Development Fund engage with WM businesses

Part of Create Central's long-term partnership with the BBC in the region is about connecting the BBC with local businesses that require some advice and support to take them to the next level in growing their portfolio of work.

The BBC approached us to help them engage with companies in the audio sector, and as part of our remit to encourage collaboration across sectors and to act a collaborative leader for the creative content industries in the region, we were able to support a number of businesses within our network to connect with the BBC's Radio Indie Development Fund.

The £250,000 annual fund was launched in November by Charlotte Moore, BBC's Chief Content Officer, to boost the development capacity of the audio sector as well as create a pipeline of potential commissions from indies who may not already have sizable or regular commission from the BBC.

Create Central provided support to host an event to promote the fund in the region. It resulted in success for two of the winning companies from the BBC Three development programme and a further three companies from the region.

The successful WM indies are:

- Must Try Softer – Birmingham
- Glendale Media – Birmingham
- Common Story - Warwickshire
- True Thought Productions - Leicester/Coventry/ Birmingham
- Acclaimed Content Limited – Birmingham



Tony Pilgrim, Head of Business and Change at BBC Radio & Music says: “We were inspired by the range and quality of the entries we received from the production community, so thank you to everyone who applied. The inaugural recipients with their ideas and projects will help us and the audio production community to champion new talent, increase diversity and be more representative of audiences. And this is just the start, so we look forward to working with more indies with brilliant ideas in the coming years as part of the development fund.”

## Innovation

### **Positive Realities: XR for Youth Wellbeing, Coventry UK City of Culture in 2021 Positive Realities winners Amrit Singh and Nigel P Harris**

A key part of Create Central’s remit is to create opportunities for the creative content industries to partner with other industries, like automotive or healthcare, to grow their business.

For our first innovation pilot Create Central partnered with StoryFutures Academy, the UK’s National Centre for Immersive Storytelling, to give six West Midlands creative companies the opportunity to explore innovative new approaches to health and wellbeing for Coventry City of Culture in 2021.

We invited the region’s most creative thinkers in; Film, TV, Games, Digital Media and other creative content sectors to apply for an opportunity to attend a two-day workshop where they discovered the very latest technologies in immersive storytelling. They heard from creative practitioners and psychologists working in this field, as well as the young audiences in Coventry we wanted to reach.

A prototype budget of up to £120,000 was on offer to deliver the audience facing experience, with resources in kind from Create Central, StoryFutures Academy and Coventry City of Culture Trust to match, with support from the BFI awarding funds from the National Lottery.

After workshops with local young people, training from StoryFutures Academy and a rigorous selection process, Amrit Singh, Creative Director at Rebel

Creatives and Nigel P. Harris, Creative Director at JellyBob were chosen as the winning team that would collaborate on a web-based augmented reality project called “Urban Jungle”.

They worked closely with partner agency, Positive Youth Foundation and a cohort of “Digital Ambassadors” between the ages of 16 and 25, who co-curated a series of place-based experiences and stories that spoke to their lived experience of Coventry in 2021.

The result was Urban Jungle AR - a smartphone augmented reality platform which hosts a series of virtual performances by established and up-and-coming talent – from spoken word and grime artists to dance and circus performers, viewed using a smartphone or mobile tablet at locations around FarGo Village. Akin to “virtual busking”, Urban Jungle uses innovative but accessible technology to raise the profile of young talent, offering them a platform in high-profile locations across their city.

### **Innovate:Create – powered by the Innovation Engin3**

Having established our innovation and collaboration model with the Positive Realities project our next innovation project looked at the low-carbon sector, working with international brands like the Birmingham Festival 2022 and National Express.

Innovate:Create seeks to uncover bold ideas to innovate across digital technology and creative content. Challenge briefs are open to limited companies based in the West Midlands to apply for funding and support to produce innovative pilot projects in collaboration with a range of industry partners.

For the first challenge, Innovate:Create offered the opportunity to win a support package and one of two £50k grants to produce innovative projects in collaboration with the Birmingham 2022 Festival as part of the Commonwealth Games.

The Birmingham 2022 Festival challenges were around Statues in the 21st Century – seeking ideas to explore issues, tell stories, and celebrate progress through an innovative digital take on statues, a topic of much debate.

Our challenge set by National Express was to develop a project to encourage the sustainable use of public transport and get people back on the bus as a greener way to get around.

The winning company will be awarded £25k and support from Create Central and Sustainability West Midlands to develop a creative concept with National Express to communicate the benefits of a shift from single-occupancy cars to public transport and active travel.

Further challenges will be released over the course of the year in collaboration with a variety of organisations covering sectors including sport, technology and healthcare and will focus on new challenges and opportunities for innovation by creative companies in the region.

Later in the year we will also be hosting a workshop/networking opportunity for all the companies that applied for any of the Innovate:Create challenges to help them take their ideas forward and grow their networks.

## Skills Development

### Developing a model for our bootcamps

Create Central Members identified a lack of industry-ready talent as an issue for all the creative content sectors in the region. There is a gap between the academic world and the world of work that is not helping the skills shortage for industry.

With a view to addressing that issue Create Central engaged with industry to develop a series of bootcamps that meet their needs, provide a more diverse and inclusive talent pipeline and give young people in the West Midlands the skills, contacts and opportunities to start their careers.

Created with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), which is funding the training, this model supports stronger connections between training providers and industry and enables an open dialogue about what skills are in need and what paid opportunities are open in the region.

### Video Games Production Bootcamp Pilot

Create Central's Video Games Production Bootcamp pilot was created with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), which is funding the training, to help the region's video games industry discover new talent, and to support local people to get a flavour of what to expect in the industry.

The Bootcamp was developed in partnership with the games industry and course lead Gina Jackson OBE.

A small pilot delivered by North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College's Digital Skills Academy in Coventry, it resulted in a permanent job in the games industry for one of the seven 'campers'.

### TV Production Bootcamp pilot

Create Central's TV Production Bootcamp pilot was created to help the region's screen industry discover new talent and to support local people who would like to start a new career as a TV researcher, production co-ordinator or runner.

Create Central members who work in the TV sector helped to shape the bootcamp content and offered real-life work experience for existing gaps in their businesses, with a guaranteed job interview at the end.

Aresa Foster, from Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham, said: "I applied for the TV Bootcamp knowing that I wanted to pursue a career in TV production management. It was great hearing from so many industry professionals, gaining new knowledge and landing work opportunities within TV that I couldn't have achieved without the bootcamp."

Production Manager Amy Panesar, who is based in Birmingham, contributed to the bootcamp as a guest speaker and this gave her the opportunity to connect with the trainees.

"The trainees got stuck into being on location and blended really well with the team. Taking on responsibilities, getting the site ready for filming and being part of a large team, they got to experience a busy rig with loads of departments coming together. I hope it gave them a positive taste of TV life!"

The bootcamp consists of an intensive month-long programme, delivered by Solihull College & University Centre, followed by a real-to-life work placement in one of the region's top TV companies for people who have the drive and commitment to work in the TV sector.

Colette Foster, CEO of Full Fat TV and Create Central Member said, "The bootcamps scheme has turned out even better than any of us had hoped. With the film and television industry opening up again, we want to keep the momentum of getting people into the industry and giving them opportunities to stay in the industry, because the TV industry needs great people, and we want great people working with us."

Savhanha Nguyen, Camper from 2021's TV Production Bootcamp said "I've enjoyed absolutely everything! All the people, my camper friends, all the guest speakers – everyone I never would have had the chance to meet if it hadn't been for the Bootcamp! It's given me so many opportunities!"

Since completing the bootcamp, campers have been successful in gaining the following paid roles:

- 3 full time contracts offered after placements by Common Story, Optomen and Full Fat
- 1 camper got 6 month paid internship at Warner Bros, now extended to permanent role
- 1 camper working with BBC Bitesize creating content for the platform
- 2 campers completed contracts on "Bake Off the Professionals" at Love Productions
- 1 camper as Production Secretary on "The Great Pottery Throw Down" at Love Productions
- 1 completed a contract as a runner on "Bake Off"
- 2 worked in the art department of film "The Colour Room"
- 2 worked as runners on "All That Glitters" for Twenty Productions
- 3 completed contracts as junior researchers with Common Story

- 1 head hunted by postproduction house in Montreal, moved to Canada to take up role
- 1 worked at Film Birmingham as a location finder
- 11 of the 12 campers have worked regularly (12th camper had COVID, followed by long COVID. Common Story have agreed to offer a placement to them).

### **Content Creation Bootcamp Pilot**

This bootcamp was created to help young people with a talent and enthusiasm for producing eye-catching content for websites, blogs and social media, for platforms from Twitter to TikTok, YouTube to LinkedIn, to develop those skills into the start of a career in content creation.

Create Central members helped to shape the content and businesses from a wide variety of industries offered real-life work experience for existing gaps in their businesses, with a guaranteed job interview at the end. Create Central and the WMCA teamed up with Solihull College & University Centre to provide the skills training.

Lisa Cleaver, head of school for visual performing arts and media at Solihull College & University Centre, said: "We are delighted to be working with Create Central and the WMCA on this exciting project. It gives us the opportunity to work alongside industry to develop meaningful training which directly prepares people for the realities of a career in digital media. Every aspect of this programme is being co-designed and delivered with leading content creators."

Since completing the bootcamp, campers have been successful in gaining the following paid roles:

- 1 camper has set up a freelance company, clients include a dance company, a builders merchant and an amateur football league
- 1 camper has worked as a runner on ITV Studios production "Come Dine With Me" and completed a month contract on new BBC3 show
- 1 camper has worked as a runner on several food TV shows

- 2 campers continued to work with clients they created content for during bootcamp
- 1 camper has grown her marketing business using the skills learnt at the bootcamp
- 1 camper worked on film “The Colour Room”.

Providing young people in the West Midlands with these fantastically transferable skills provides them with a solid base to build their careers and provides the region with the talent pipeline to demonstrate it really is the Home of Original Storytelling.

### **Partnering with ITV in the West Midlands to support new talent**

As part of our goal to create stronger relationships with public service broadcasters, Create Central partnered with ITV by match-funding two production placements, under their Step-Up 60 diversity initiative, for the Snowed In Productions drama Stonehouse, which was being filmed in the region.

The placements provided the opportunity to fulfil the duties of a more senior role on the production (and receive a programme credit for doing so), to give individuals experience of stepping up to assist them in their career progression.

Create Central suggested candidates that we had identified through our bootcamps and events and they were interviewed by Caroline Bean of Snowed In Productions. Both of our candidates were successful and went on to take up the placements.

Chelsea Mills, who was able to work as Trainee Production Secretary for two weeks on the drama, said the experience was especially helpful for her as it enabled her to identify a clear career path.

Chelsea said “This role gave me a profound understanding of the essential responsibility of the production department to keep productions moving forward. Furthermore, the experience was a cherished lesson in how building great working relationships and communication with your colleagues can be a positive

catalyst in developing a more efficient workflow and in building my own confidence.”

Chelsea was able to identify script supervising as an area she wants to pursue and was able to use the opportunity to connect with the Script Supervisor on the production.

She added “Following my chat with the Script Supervisor, Georgia Redman, I trained with her for half a day during the shooting of three scenes. This experience gave me insight into the workflow of the script supervisor on set. Georgia gave me loads of advice about how she prepares and performs her role, the tools that facilitate her job and how she found a workflow that works best for her. She was an amazing mentor!”

### **Production & Inward Investment**

#### **Creative Partnership with BBC Three and BBC England**

Create Central Members in independent TV production identified a lack of development funding in the region as a major issue in holding back the growth of the small independent TV production sector.

As part of our goal to bring public service broadcasters into the region and strengthen our partnerships with them to invest in the West Midlands we established a creative partnership with BBC3 and BBC England to match-fund a development initiative.

Having initially committed to two commissions under the partnership BBC Three made three new commissions from West Midlands Indies as a result of the creative partnership with Create Central.

The partnership invited independent production companies based in the West Midlands to submit documentary ideas that reflect the life experiences of 13–24-year-olds.

The commissions include a 4-part access series from Birmingham-based Full Fat TV that goes on shift with the youngest recruits to the Leicestershire Police, an obs-doc from Warwick-based Common Story that follows two friends from Bromsgrove who’ve turned cleaning up other people’s waste into a successful

business after they were furloughed from their desk jobs and a single film from Birmingham-based Acclaimed Content that focuses on 26 year old's Shannan's school for budding HGV drivers.

Fiona Campbell, Controller BBC Three, says: "Regional representation that reflects the reality of young lives across the UK is a key priority for BBC Three and these titles fully deliver on that. This scheme was initially for two single documentaries, but the quality of ideas was so high we decided to commission three titles and made one a series."

Create Central was integral to bringing these burgeoning indies to the process and supporting them to engage with the BBC to develop their ideas into commission-worthy proposals.

### **Engaging commissioners with the West Midlands animation sector**

Create Central invited local animation companies to come together for a series of roundtable/meet and greets with commissioners from organisations that have traditionally had less engagement in the West Midlands.

Through Create Central regional animation studios heard from, and had access to decision-makers from Disney, BBC Children's, BBC Ideas and Warner Media.

Michael Ford, Head of Content at Threewise Entertainment, said "As an out of London indie, opportunities to access commissioners and hear the latest "wants and needs" are always more limited than those companies based in London or adjacent to the commissioning hubs. Create Central's 'Meet the Commissioners' events have been incredibly valuable to Threewise and have already led to one-to-one conversations with commissioning potential."

Drew Roper, Founder of Yamination, said "The fantastic 'Meet The Commissioner' events held by Create Central have been incredibly insightful, inspiring and immensely beneficial to us here at Yamination, and others (I believe I speak for others) within the wider West Midlands animation, film and TV production company community too. These events have enabled us to establish some wonderful new connections with commissioners we previously had not had the opportunity to speak with and also, encourage existing

relationships to further flourish. These types of high-profile meetings are usually so incredibly hard to come by. At established conferences commissioners are bombarded with an array of other talent seeking their wisdom, so to gain an almost intimate experience with them, is rather priceless. Thank you Create Central for allowing us to experience these fabulous opportunities!"

Jamie Bakewell, CEO of Bigtooth Studios, said "The roundtables have been fantastic, giving us a great insight into what kind of programmes and content the commissioners are looking for. They have allowed us the opportunity to ask questions directly, have interesting conversations, learn more about each other, build relationships and explore the region's talent."

### **Engaging the Channel 4 Emerging Indie Fund with West Midlands Indies**

As part of Create Central goal to forge stronger relationships with public service broadcasters for the region we invited local independent production companies to come together to hear from Channel 4's Head of Indie Relations Rebecca Thompson and Caroline Percy - Senior Portfolio Manager for C4's Indie Growth Fund. They heard in detail what Channel 4 was after and had the opportunity to ask questions and connect with Rebecca and Caroline after the meeting.

As a result, two West Midlands Indies were chosen as part of the programme, Full Fat TV (Birmingham) & Springboard (Birmingham), no local indies have ever been chosen to take part before.

Springboard Pictures co-founder Harshad Mistry said: "We are really delighted to be selected as one of Channel 4's Emerging Indies. It's a fantastic way to build our network with other indies across the Nations & Regions, who we'd like to collaborate with, particularly in the West Midlands.

"We're very much looking forward to working with Channel 4 and it's a terrific confidence boost for us as we go into the New Year. The best creativity comes through collaboration and that is what we hope this award will lead to. This is a big step up the ladder for us."

Rebecca Thompson said: "Awardees receive a development slate award and will have regular meetings with Commissioning Editors, as well as benefiting

from support from the wider Commissioning team and other departments, with guidance on how indies can secure commissions, develop slates, plan their commercial affairs and explore new revenue streams. This combination of support can be hugely effective in helping emerging companies to grow, and we saw the impact of this in last year's awardees, many of whom went on to secure first commissions with the channel."

## **Engaging the BBC Small Indie Fund with West Midlands Indies**

As part of our long-term partnership with the BBC, Create Central was able to help the Small Indie Fund connect with local businesses.

The BBC chose 50 UK companies to be supported through this year's Small Indie Fund. Launched in 2020, the £1m Fund supports the growth of small independent production companies with turnovers below £10m across Drama, Entertainment, Comedy, Factual and Daytime. The initiative was designed to help boost the strength of UK production in the context of global competition with a strong focus on companies with diverse leadership and producers based outside London.

Create Central connected a few key local independent production companies with Lucy Wilmore, Commissioning Supply Exec, BBC Content, allowing them to build their relationship and find out more about the BBC's requirements prior to their application.

As a result, two West Midlands Indies were chosen as part of the programme, Portopia and Cornered Tiger, no local indies have ever been chosen to take part before.

"Companies like these are the lifeblood of the UK's creative industry. Last year's fund led to dozens of ambitious commissions – and we have high hopes of this year's companies" said Helen Blenkinsop, Head of Commissioning Supply.

The successful companies receive a range of support packages including strategic investment, a BBC commissioning editor mentor and development deal to help them grow.

## **Communications & Events**

### **Bringing Creative Cities Convention to Birmingham**

A key part of Create Central's remit is to bring major events to the region. The Creative Cities Convention, a firm fixture in the TV and media calendar, attracts top creatives, broadcast leaders and producers together to provide delegates with their insights to help shape the future of screen production and distribution outside London.

The Creative Cities Convention hosts an annual contest to host the event and Birmingham was up against strong competition in Liverpool and Newcastle for 2022.

Create Central Members suggested we bid for the Creative Cities Convention – and thanks to the generous offer from Create Central Member James Craig to provide free venues in the form of Fazeley Studios and Factory Works in Digbeth, combined with Create Central providing access to our Champions (Steven Knight, Sir Lenny Henry & Adil Ray), we successfully bid for the opportunity and were able to host the nation's top TV executives at what turned out to be a lively and entertaining two day event.

The timing was perfect as so many of our projects are starting to bear fruit – a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate to a national industry audience the work that we are doing here in the West Midlands.

The Convention's Creative Director, Ruth Pitt, said "Thank you so much, we had an awesome time, and we definitely think this was the best Creative Cities Convention yet, helped along by the amazing support and inspiration provided by the Create Central team. The whole sector is so exciting in the West Midlands that we're only sorry we can't come back again next year!"

### **Networking event to celebrate Black History Month**

A key part of Create Central's remit during our first years was to support creative networks throughout lockdown. Our Proud to be networking at the Legacy Centre in Aston was our first formal in-person event.

We showcased Black West Midlands creative talent throughout Black History Month with the #proudtobe theme, and that culminated in a well-attended networking event at the Legacy Centre.

We had some great guest speakers who highlighted amazing initiatives to support Black creatives in the West Midlands and gave industry the opportunity to network with Create Central Members, local talent and creative businesses.

### **Social campaigns that deliver a narrative for West Midlands creative industries activity**

Create Central aims to promote the West Midlands as the Home of Original Storytelling. We started in 2020 with no brand recognition for the region as a place to create and grow innovative businesses.

As a result of our activities we have seen an increase in recognition for the region and for Create Central. Our campaigns have been supported by Create Central Champions with huge reach such as Sir Lenny Henry, Steven Knight, Marverine Cole and Adil Ray.

Create Central is very active on Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. As of the end of March 2022 we have accrued almost 5,500 followers.

We have featured campaigns that showcase activity in the region, champion the region's talent and creativity and highlight opportunities to for jobs, projects and funding for West Midlands' creatives.

# **BOP** Consulting

BOP Consulting is an international consultancy specialising in culture and the creative economy.

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