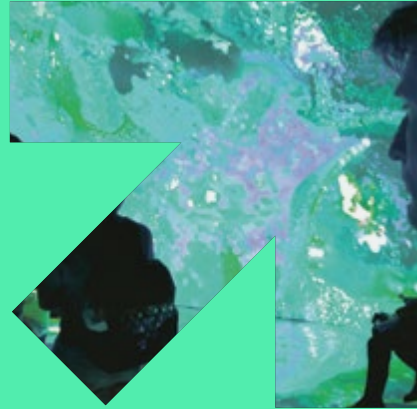
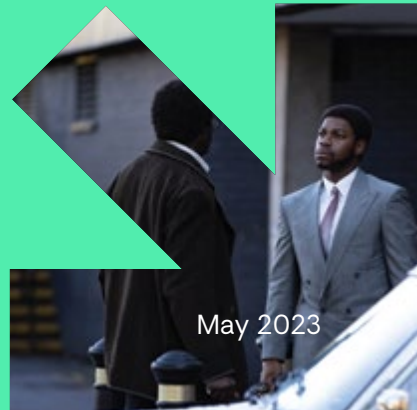


2030 and Beyond

Missions to turbo-charge the
West Midlands creative content sector



SHAPE THE FUTURE



May 2023



Chair's Foreword

2030 will be a world of IP content, enabled by mobile networks faster than our current fixed networks and by fixed networks offering awe-inspiring speed and capacity, be it 10, 25, or 50 gigabits per second. A layering of media formats will define this world. Video, gaming, social media, digital marketing, and commerce blend into a seamless whole, be that in the metaverse or alternate virtual worlds.

Consumers will feast on snackable subs - £5 per month or less, and quickly turned on and off - and social gaming commerce, where a game player, chatting to friends on a social broadcast feed, will be accustomed to responding to shoppable posts and buying a product without ever taking their eyes off the game they are playing, or the film they are watching. This world will be enabled by a small number of infrastructure players, who will be supplier, client, and competitor, such as Google, Amazon, and Alibaba. Therefore, working in partnership and co-opetition is ever more critical.

This rapidly developing world, where blending creative and technology skills across formats is crucial, is tailor-made for the West Midlands. This region has an even mix of TV, film, games, social media, and e-commerce skills - a positive advantage to companies looking to tap into the skills and capabilities critical to success in the evolving virtual reality.

And it is developing this unique blend of skills and capabilities as quickly and thoroughly as possible, on which Create



Central's *Shape the Future: 2030 and Beyond* is firmly focussed. Whether that be championing an IP Content Fund for the region to kick start creative ideas, clearly signposting the routes to market our creatives can take to get those ideas commissioned and developed, or our increased focus on the games and virtual world sectors alongside TV, film, and publishing, our aim is clear. To enable the Home of Original Storytelling to tell stories in as many formats as possible. Or, to put it more simply, to give the storytellers in the region of 100 languages their voice...

Add to that the tangible and remarkable achievements of the past three years, be that the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and Coventry City of Culture, our partnership with the BBC, which is bringing major TV brands such as MasterChef and Silent Witness to the region, or the construction of The Bond, our magnificent new content hub, home of the brilliant Late Night Lycett, not to mention the launch of Digbeth Loc. Studios, Steven Knight's brainchild, and one can see that the West Midlands is in a special place to grow a unique and impactful creative sector. Home to original storytellers, whatever the format and however the story might be communicated.

Ed Shedd
Create Central Chair



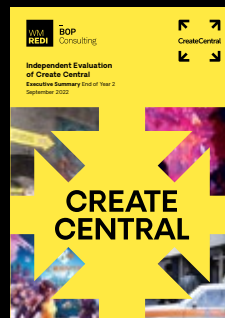
Small Axe, filmed in
Wolverhampton

Create Central is an industry-led network of the region's most successful TV, film, games, and wider creative content business leaders set up to turbo-charge the creative content industries in the West Midlands.



At Create Central, we champion the West Midlands' creative content industries. Through collaborations with national and international partners, we connect the region's storytellers with cross-sector initiatives, providing them with a network of opportunities to grow and develop their businesses.

Find out more about what has been achieved so far by the region's creative content sector working together through Create Central in our independent Evaluation Report.



Our mandate



In July 2022, the West Midlands Plan for Growth was launched. Drawn up by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), working with leading private sector figures, local councils, universities, and colleges, it focuses action to ignite eight economic clusters where the region already has a competitive advantage and in which businesses are confident to invest. It shows how, with the right interventions, growing clusters such as electric vehicle manufacture, health, medical technology, and construction can be supercharged to help grow the West Midlands economy by more than £3bn, creating up to 45,000 new jobs.

The Plan for Growth helps level up the West Midlands. It harnesses major public investment, including £88m UK Shared Prosperity Fund, land and infrastructure funding, and skills support, aligned to private investment. In this context, the West Midlands is regarded as a national trailblazer.

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



TV Production
Bootcamp

How we consulted

To support the West Midlands Plan for Growth, in June 2022, Create Central received the mandate from our governing body, the West Midlands Economic Growth Board, to lead the development of a long-term plan for the West Midlands creative content sector and has undertaken extensive consultation with a broad range of stakeholders to help drive the vision to 2030.

The Reel Store, in Coventry



We consulted with our Board and delivery team and held workshops with our regular public sector partners before we started conversations with the wider West Midlands creative content sector.

Our consultation included, but was not limited to, five roundtables with regional and national collaborators, influencers, disruptors, and voices that we hadn't had a chance to engage with; they covered the topics of:

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.

We also hosted collaborative community 'meet-ups' to invite community organisations to get to know Create Central and allow us to hear about the work they are doing at informal networking events (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).

In addition, we conducted online surveys to ensure we captured the views of anyone who could not join us in person. And finally, we targeted key stakeholders for individual conversations to check our direction of travel and further understand long-term goals.



Future content creators roundtable with Positive Youth Foundation

By 2030 we want the West Midlands to have a creative ecosystem that makes us internationally renowned as THE place to create for any storyteller.

Our VALUES flow through all our Shape the Future missions. We are committed to putting equity, diversity, and inclusion at the heart of everything we do.



Collaborative

We bring together the most successful TV, Film, Games, and wider creative content leaders, stakeholders, and partners in the West Midlands.



Responsible

Creativity is rooted in sustainable social, economic, environmental, and cultural practices. Create Central does business in a thoughtful, respectful, and responsible way.



Empowering

We provide support and advice but give private businesses the opportunities and freedom to discover their own success and tell their own story.



Authentic

We encourage honest conversations, feedback, and progress. Forming real bonds, recognising others for who they are, and being inclusive of one another – something that is a core part of the West Midlands' heritage, where over 100 languages are spoken.



Trust

We challenge the status quo with open minds. We make responsible decisions based on professional standards. Communicating openly and taking the time to build strong, trusting foundations.



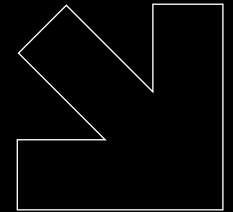
Evolving

We are always agile, always listening. We are supporting an evolving ecosystem that is sustainable for the long-term future of the region's creative industries.

Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games Bootcamp

Five Missions

Our extensive conversations with industry, public sector and individuals have allowed us to identify five priority areas that would benefit from Create Central action and provide the most effective interventions to enable us to reach our vision for the West Midlands creative content sector of 2030.



1

IP Content Fund

2

Monetising Content

3

Future Media

4

Games Sector

5

Sustainability

IP Content Fund

Intellectual Property =
Infinite Possibilities

What is this about?

Big creative hits don't just emerge from nowhere. They need to be nurtured and supported, especially in their early-stage development. We want to champion the region to set up a high-risk, high-reward investment fund designed specifically for the West Midlands' creative community. The idea is a Fund that would distribute small investments and grants enabling the most creative individuals, teams, and companies to develop IP in the region, allowing them to grow to become the next big global content or CreaTech innovation.

Why in the West Midlands?

Diversity

The West Midlands boasts a working-age talent pool of more than 1.8 million people from a vast array of backgrounds. Our region has a young, diverse population with a world of stories that need to be told.

Heritage

From Shakespeare and Tolkien to Forza Horizon and Peaky Blinders, the West Midlands has a record of creating incredible IP and delivering world-defining products.

What we've done so far

Set in Stone, an Innovate:Create project



Innovate:Create

A Create Central project powered by Innovation Engin3 – created a series of competitions for SMEs in the West Midlands creative content sector working closely with the low-carbon sector. Big brands like National Express and Uber issued a series of challenges that offered specific opportunities for local companies to participate in a competitive process to win a mix of mentoring and grant support to develop an idea into an audience-facing project or R&D pilot.

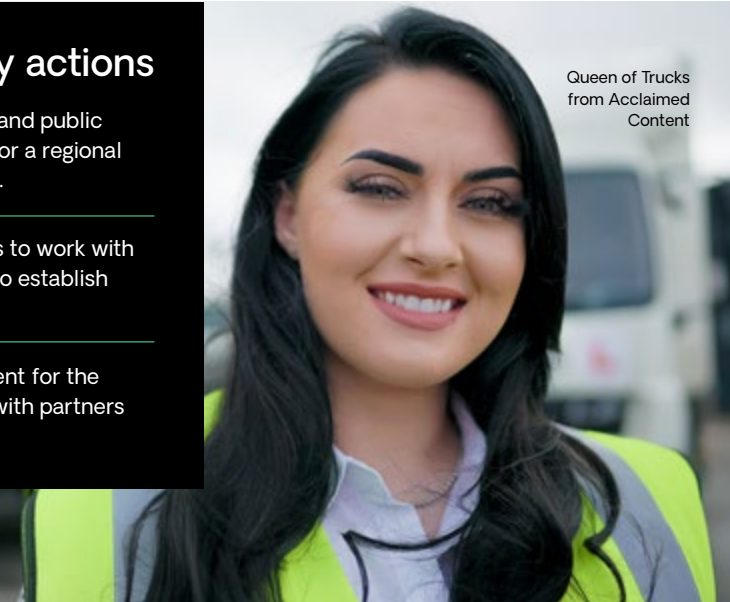
BBC Three/BBC England partnership

The West Midlands Voices initiative, led by the BBC in partnership with Create Central, gave local indies the opportunity to submit documentary ideas that reflect the life experiences of 13–24-year-olds. The project resulted in two start-up companies – Common Story and Acclaimed Content – winning first-time commissions from BBC Three and Birmingham-based Full Fat TV securing a 4-part series.

Three priority actions

- 1 Secure political and public sector support for a regional IP Content Fund.
- 2 Identify partners to work with Create Central to establish the Fund.
- 3 Secure investment for the Fund and work with partners to launch.

Queen of Trucks
from Acclaimed
Content



Monetising Content

Why in the West Midlands?

A mixed media ecology

The West Midlands has a richly mixed creative industries ecology. Alongside the games, TV and film sectors, the region boasts a strong advertising and marketing sector characterised by well-established independent agencies and the local presence of global networks like WPP, Dentsu and IPG.

A spirit of invention

Situated in the middle of the country, the West Midlands was founded as a place where buyers and sellers from across the world could come together to invent new products and find new ways to get them to market – just look at all those canals! That spirit of innovation, invention and enterprise is just as strong today, and makes the West Midlands ideally suited to finding the most appropriate and sustainable ways to support the creative content of the future.

What is this about?

Content creators face challenges in finding effective routes to market, such as partnerships with broadcasters or streamers, international co-productions, or advertiser-funded content. Global content production spend is expected to be the lowest in ten years. Third-party funding for original content will become increasingly important. Streaming services dominate but face competition, while mergers have changed the funding landscape, with Disney, Warner Bros. Discovery, and Comcast as the top three funders of original content. To provide opportunities for storytellers, clear and accessible support for identifying routes to market is essential.



What we've done so far

Corey Campbell, Creative Director at the Belgrade Theatre, at our Netflix in the Midlands networking event



Animation sector engagement

Create Central hosted a series of roundtable/meet and greets with commissioners from organisations that have traditionally had less engagement in the West Midlands. Regional animation studios heard from and had access to decision-makers from Disney, BBC Children's, BBC Ideas, and Warner Media.

Meet the commissioners

Create Central has hosted events to enable commissioners at Netflix, Paramount, UKTV, and Channel 4 to meet regional talent and start productive relationships.

Three priority actions

- 1 Develop a plan for engagement with the advertising sector.
- 2 Develop specific asks to Public Sector Broadcasters and international partners that tap into their goals/focus.
- 3 Use this to develop a plan for working with Public Sector Broadcasters to increase regional production.

Future Media

What is this about?

Virtual production, motion capture, real-time development, greenscreen, VFX, VR, AR, creation with games engines like UNREAL, AI creative tools - and whatever else is coming next! What do these technologies mean for the future of media and storytelling? How can they best be deployed to drive innovation and creativity? We want to put the West Midlands at the heart of these debates as the world wrestles with what the future might look like, placing centre stage the need for the creative vision to lead the application of the technology and for the technology to serve the future needs of storytellers. And we want to democratise these opportunities so that the young, diverse, and talented people across our region can access the technology, products, and skills to provide them with careers in as yet unknown roles.

Why in the West Midlands?

Skilled and diverse workforce

Including a growing number of graduates from leading universities in the area, who can help drive innovation and development in this field.

Digital innovation

The region has a strong track record in digital innovation, with Silicon Spa, Warwick esports, and Birmingham Tech blazing a trail.

Innovation infrastructure

The region supports collaboration across industry and academia, with initiatives like the Midlands Engine Investment Fund and the Innovation Alliance for the West Midlands.

What we've done so far

Virtual Production: Educating for the Future

Working with Coventry City University Create Central Member Chris Cox is developing courses in Virtual Production and all its elements focusing on creative storytelling being supported by technology.

Positive Realities: Innovation for a Purpose

An innovation programme that challenged companies to develop an idea using immersive tech (AR/VR) to impact young people's self-esteem positively. Delivered in partnership with Coventry City of Culture Trust, StoryFutures Academy, and Create Central with support from the BFI awarding funds from the National Lottery, local companies JellyBob and Rebel Creatives created Urban Jungle, which used innovative but accessible technology to raise the profile of local young talent, offering them a platform in high-profile locations across Coventry during its time as City of Culture.

Three priority actions

- 1 Clearly define what is meant when we talk about Future Media.
- 2 Curate conversations in the West Midlands around Future Media to lead a national debate on its potential applications.
- 3 Identify, encourage, and promote opportunities for local people to better understand Future Media and its potential to offer employment opportunities.



Games Sector

What is this about?

Silicon 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. We want to secure this success for the future and grow the West Midlands' games cluster.

As with every other industry, current success does not mean there are no future challenges, and we want to work with the local games sector to ensure the region is doing everything possible to neutralise threats and maximise opportunities for local investors.

Whether that is providing more significant support for the future skills needs of the sector, helping to diversify its talent pipeline, or investing in the creation of local games IP, we want to build links inside and outside the region's games sector and take it to the next level.

Why in the West Midlands?

Youth and diversity

The region has a young, diverse talent pool and world-renowned educational facilities, including Warwick University's esports hub. By opening doorways and breaking down barriers, we can help to address current skills shortages and change the face of the games workforce of the future.

Silicon Spa

The region has a fantastic asset in Silicon Spa; the games cluster in and around Leamington Spa is 10% of the UK's entire games development sector.

What we've done so far

Established esports task force

Create Central has brought together a task force to work towards collaboratively making the West Midlands the home of UK esports.

Games production bootcamp pilot

Working with games industry expert Gina Jackson we piloted a bootcamp on the skills required for games production to help the region's video games industry discover new talent and to encourage people from other careers to switch to the games industry.

Three priority actions

- 1 Engage the games industry to secure a clear pitch for how this sector wants to utilise Create Central.
- 2 Promote and demystify the potential career opportunities in the games industry.
- 3 Support the sector to develop a diverse talent pipeline.



Sustainability

What is this about?

The West Midlands has an opportunity to lead the way in sustainability. We aim to make the West Midlands the UK's first sustainable production ecosystem, where creators and suppliers can deliver original content sustainably. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for growth. Let's use sustainability as a content source and showcase how we can address the climate crisis creatively. This will raise the profile of the sector and educate people about sustainability.

Why in the West Midlands?

Education and innovation

The West Midlands' sustainability strengths stem from our top educational institutions and low-carbon transport infrastructure. Partnering with universities to develop sustainable practices for creative production, educate practitioners through bootcamps, and prioritise inclusivity.

Infrastructure

The region's testbed includes EVs, trams, cargo bikes, and charging infrastructure, and we leverage local, sustainable innovations for a hyperlocal supply chain, reducing carbon footprint and boosting production spend.

What we've done so far

Innovate:Create

A Create Central project powered by Innovation Engin3 – created a series of competitions for SMEs in the West Midlands creative content sector working closely with the low-carbon sector. Big brands like National Express and Uber issued a series of challenges that offered specific opportunities for local companies to participate in a competitive process to win a mix of mentoring and grant support to develop an idea into an audience-facing project or R&D pilot.

Innovate:Create project Crawly Bots



Three priority actions

- 1** We will ask the industry what they need from Create Central regarding sustainability and review current resources.
- 2** Based on the consultation, we'll create a sustainability charter for cross-sector adoption, starting with Create Central members and expanding to all industry companies.
- 3** We will develop a roadmap to support the West Midlands in becoming the UK's leading testbed centre for sustainability in the creative sector, particularly in production.

Who we consulted

Create Central Board:

Ed Shedd (Chair) - Deloitte's North & South Europe (NSE) Technology, Media & Telecoms (TMT) Practice Lead
Alison Warner (Vice-Chair) - Managing Director, Blue Zoo Rights
Jamie Bakewell - Founder, Bigtooth Studios
Paul Bramwell - Media Consultant and Chair of One Black Bear
Chris Cox - Head of Virtual Production & ICVFX - Film & Drama at VSS (part of MBS)
Kit de Waal - Writer, Portopia Productions
Neil Duncanson - Chair, North One TV
Jazz Gowans - Creative Director Nine Lives Media
Robin Gray - Co-founder and Co-CEO, Gray Jones Media
Mark Hughes-Webb - CEO, Space-2
Debbie Isitt - Writer and Director
Lisa Opie - MD Ubisoft Reflections & Leamington Studios
Nick Pinks - CEO, Covatic
Amrit Singh - Creative Director, Rebel Creatives
Yen Yau - Director of Training Programmes at The Grierson Trust

Thanks to:

Aquis Media
BBC
Birmingham City Council
Birmingham City University
Birmingham Enterprise Community
Birmingham Hippodrome
Birmingham Rep
Birmingham Royal Ballet
Birmingham Young Film Makers Network
Black Country LEP
Black Country Touring
British Film Institute
Channel 4
Coventry & Warwickshire LEP
Coventry Belgrade Theatre
Coventry City Council
Coventry College
Coventry Culture Trust
Coventry University
Creative UK
Crew Birmingham
Culture Central
East Village PR
Film Birmingham
Fresh Seed
Gap Entertainment
Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP
Hey Green Raven
Highly Strung
Hollywood Games
Horizon Collective
Innovation Alliance For The West Midlands
ITV
Kayala Productions
Learnplay Foundation
Ludic Rooms
Mission Accomplished
Nakuona
Nesta
Netflix
Nexus
One Black Bear
Open Lens
Pact
Powered By Can
Press Record Films
Red Talent Management
Rural Media
Screenskills
Sky Studios
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Solihull College & University Centre
Spaghetti
Storyboard Studios
Surfing Light Beams
Sustainability West Midlands
The MAC
The Space
UKIE
UKTV
Unit 2 Games (Meta)
University of Birmingham
University Of Warwick
University Of Wolverhampton
Warwickshire College
West Midlands Combined Authority
West Midlands Combined Universities
West Midlands Growth Company
WM5G
Wolverhampton City Council
Wolverhampton Film Festival
Your Place Your Space

...and many more as we work collaboratively across the region

Thanks also to the young people from the Positive Youth Foundation/Hillfields Youth Centre in Coventry, our bootcamp alumni, local media and film graduates, freelance film makers, producers and other creatives.



@createcentraluk

With special thanks to Jas Sansi, BBC, Common Story
Acclaimed Content, ESL, and Sky UK Limited.