

# CREATIVE CONNECTIONS

BRUNEL UNIVERSITY LONDON AND THE  
CREATIVE AND CULTURAL SECTORS IN  
WEST LONDON

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Connecting

Showcasing  
Encouraging

Creative  
Industries  
Hub



Brunel  
University  
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**About the Creative Industries Hub**

The Creative Industries Hub was set up by Chris Cox and Professor Monica Degen in the College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences in November 2021 at Brunel University London to provide a forum to showcase and develop research and training opportunities between Higher Education and the Creative and Cultural sectors.

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# CONTENTS

Executive Summary	2
1.0 Introduction	4
2.0 Definitions and Methodology	6
3.0 Why Place matters: West London and the Creative and Cultural Sector	8
3.1. Context	
3.2. Distinct Features of the Creative and Cultural Industries in West London	
4.0 Impacts of COVID-19	18
4.1. Challenges: Living with COVID-19	
Changed audience needs: bringing audiences back to live settings	
Stretched finances and the search for alternative business models	
Shifting working practices: COVID-19 safe strategies	
4.2. Opportunities: A new environment	
Online innovations: engaging audiences digitally	
Working remotely	
Diversified programme offerings and business models	
5.0 Cross Cutting Current Concerns	28
Equality and Diversity	
Sustainability	
Skills shortages and recruitment	
Understanding local communities and audiences	
Need for support networks	
Value of creativity	
Learning to collaborate cross-disciplinarily	
6.0 Conclusions: Creative Hubs in HE	42
Pathways to collaborations between Brunel and the CCI sector	
Create and identify opportunities for partnerships and networking	
Understanding each other's objectives and working practices	
Tackling time and staff constraints	
Highlighting 'value' in collaboration	
Enhancing student opportunities	
7.0 Strategic Suggestions for the Creative Industries Hub Brunel	48

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Creative and Cultural Industries are some of the fastest growing sectors in the UK and shape West London's social and cultural life and economy in important and meaningful ways. While challenging for many, the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised the importance of the creative and cultural sectors and their outputs in our everyday lives, for mental health, and for business. In this report we examine:

1. The spread and unique profile of the Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI) in West London.
2. The main issues affecting the CCIs in West London in a post-COVID environment.
3. How Brunel University London can best support and partner with CCI sectors in a post-COVID environment.

We conducted quantitative and qualitative research of CCIs in the boroughs of Brent, Harrow, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Hillingdon, Hounslow and Richmond upon Thames and key CCI clusters just beyond the West London boundary within Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire.

Our quantitative research showed that SMEs and freelancers make up the majority of creative businesses in West London. Film, TV, radio and photography being the most predominant sectors followed by design, graphics and fashion; advertising and marketing; and IT software and computer services. Other important sectors in the region include: publishing; music, performing and visual arts; architecture; crafts; public arts; and museums, galleries and libraries. Hammersmith and Fulham is the most dense cluster of creative and cultural businesses followed by the boroughs of Richmond, Ealing and Hounslow.

Our qualitative research identified how COVID-19 affected the Creative Industry sectors very differently and identifies immediate challenges and opportunities that have arisen. The challenges brought about by

COVID-19 include changed audience needs - especially how to bring audiences back to live settings; stretched finances and the search for alternative funding incomes; and shifting working practices towards ensuring pandemic safety. Businesses had to respond quickly to COVID-19 and innovate on a number of levels including online innovation and engaging audiences digitally; working remotely; diversifying programmes and delivery; as well as developing new business models. A number of long-standing challenges were also voiced that have been further exacerbated by the current economic uncertainty. These are equality and diversity; improving sustainable practices; and skills shortages and recruitment. Other concerns and comments that were raised included a desire and need to understand local communities better; a need for support networks; an emphasis on the value of creativity for all businesses; and the need for interdisciplinary working practices in new technologies.

As a civic minded university Brunel can offer a 'thirdspace' for knowledge exchange, experimentation and dialogue between universities and creative and cultural economies, and foster the necessary visionary human capital - of creative and ground breaking graduates and academic practitioners - that benefit a creative and cultural local economy. This will involve creating and identifying opportunities for partnerships and networking; developing a common understanding and language across disciplines; and creating 'value' in collaboration. Our findings ultimately reveal that there is a strong appetite and need both within the CCI sector and Brunel University London to find innovative ways to work together; continue to improve on opportunities for students; and bridge the knowledge gap between industry and academia.

“ In 2019, 2.1 million people worked in the Creative Industries. A further 1.4 million jobs were directly supported by the Creative Industries through their supply chain. That is 1 in 10 UK jobs dependent on the Creative Industries. 1 in 10 new start-ups are creative businesses. In 2019 alone, 40 000 new creative businesses were born. Pre-pandemic, creative jobs were growing at 3 x the UK average.” (Creative UK<sup>1</sup>)

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Creative and Cultural Industries are some of the UK's fastest growing sectors, growing at four times the rate of the UK economy and contributing in 2019 £115.9bn in GVA to the UK economy - greater than aerospace, automotive, life sciences and oil and gas sectors combined.<sup>2</sup> Brunel University London has a wealth of knowledge and expertise in the global creative economy and a student cohort that is diverse and creative. This project set out to understand how Brunel can best support and engage with the creative and cultural economy in West London, and to build stronger relationships with the Creative and Cultural Industries - through collaborative research processes, in order to develop research opportunities, student projects and placement opportunities, civic engagement opportunities, as well as training and presentation opportunities. We had three key aims:

- 1. Map out the spread and unique profile of the Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI) in West London.*
- 2. Understand the main issues affecting the CCIs in West London in a post-COVID environment.*
- 3. Understand how Brunel University London can best support and partner with CCI sectors in a post-COVID environment.*

The impacts of COVID-19 are still being felt across much of the creative economy, however these impacts are being experienced unevenly across the sectors and are further exacerbated by the current economic downturn. Some areas, such as film and games, are experiencing growth now, while others like theatre and live music are struggling with finances that have been stripped and changed audience practices. Many individual practitioners were forced to retrain and left roles within the creative economy, leaving skills and talent shortages. Further to this, the current energy price rises, Cost of Living crisis and global economic insecurity adds further layers of uncertainty to deal with. Simultaneously, there





“ This report is very timely. National research and development funding is increasingly being focussed on local and regional challenges. Therefore there is a great opportunity for Brunel to build on its excellent relationships with the creative arts sector in West London, and to develop new collaborative research programmes that drive both innovation and economic growth.”  
 (Geoff Rodgers, Pro Vice-Chancellor Enterprise and Employment)

have been many innovations and creative responses coming out of the COVID-19 crisis, changing practices or producing new and exciting opportunities. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of the Creative Industries in everyday lives, for mental health, and for businesses. There is a significant drive to build on this, as demonstrated by the response to the Creative UK Report (2021) which argues for making creativity a central pillar of tackling societies biggest problems, regenerating places and future-proofing jobs.<sup>3</sup> Understanding how organisations and individuals are experiencing these effects was an important aspect of our research.

Throughout this research we have explored the key issues and needs of CCIs and have had many insightful conversations about issues and aspirations, which we further set out in this report. Some cross-cutting themes have emerged that will be discussed in detail: equality and diversity, sustainability, skills shortages and recruitment, a desire to understand and work with local populations better, need for support networks, the value of creativity, and cross-disciplinary collaboration in new technological advances.

In discussing these key themes we are also thinking about the expertise that Brunel academics hold and can provide, and the role that a Creative and Cultural Industries Hub within a university can and should play within the creative economy.

## 2.0 DEFINITIONS AND METHODOLOGY

The Creative Industries are defined by the DCMS as “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property”.<sup>4</sup> For this study we further expand our definition to include the cultural sector and add: “those industries with a cultural object at the centre of the industry”<sup>5</sup> to capture the broader CCI sector in West London.

Under the umbrella of CCIs we are focusing for this report on theatre, literature, publishing, digital arts, gaming, film, TV, media, local community arts, museums and crafts, and are seeking to understand how these different sectors have been affected by COVID-19 and the current Cost of Living crisis, and how they are responding.

In order to do this we conducted quantitative and qualitative research, described opposite, and have engaged with academic and policy literature.

### ***Brunel Context***

In the last 5 years CBASS has achieved 37 funded research projects in the CCIs from Arts & Humanities Research Council, Leverhulme Trust, British Academy, Clore Leadership, British Academy, UK Research & Innovation, Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council and NHS.

In 2021-22 the Entrepreneur Hub has supported 19 freelancers working in the CCIs, providing support for students and graduates who want help to develop their ideas into winning businesses.

The award winning Professional Development Office provides placements and employability initiatives.

### ***Brunel Student Body 21/22:***

86% from under-represented groups

5% students been in care

20% UK students from an area with high deprivation levels

30% Muslim, 23% no religion, 24% Christian, 11% Hindu, 2.5% Sikh

36% Asian, 25% White, 17% Black, 8% Chinese, 6% Arab

55% Male, 45% Female

10% living with a disability



## ONLINE SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS AND DATA CRAWLING TO MAP THE CCI'S IN WEST LONDON

The research focused on Creative Industries with a geographic focus on West London, defined as including the London Boroughs of Brent, Harrow, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Hillingdon, Hounslow and Richmond upon Thames. The study also examined the presence of Creative Industries within key clusters just beyond the West London boundary - namely Pinewood Studios, Elstree Studios, Leavesden Studios and Sky Studios, located within Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire. We employed glass.ai and their AI technology services to produce a quantitative mapping of creative and cultural businesses online. This identified 3018 creative & cultural businesses with a web presence. The glass.ai engine was employed to read the open web and produces a dataset of rich textual data from company websites and other sources like LinkedIn. These results were matched to the official Companies House register (official data), where possible, for validation. Relevant creative organisations were identified through this targeted crawling process.<sup>6</sup>

## INTERVIEWS AND SURVEY WITH BRUNEL ACADEMICS AND THE CCI SECTOR

We interviewed 23 Brunel University London academics, 24 West London CCI practitioners and 6 policy makers and CCI industry-wide organisations. These interviews provided direct accounts of views on the central challenges for the CCI sector, experiences of collaborations between the HE and CCI sector, expectations for collaborations as well as a wealth of further insights on the importance of the CCI sector for the economy, society, cultural life and their locality. These were coded through NVivo and thematically analysed. We also conducted an online survey to gather a cross section of experiences. The survey results provided us with broader insights on reasons for choosing West London as a location, key challenges, and individual experiences of collaborating with higher education.

# 3.0 WHY PLACE MATTERS: WEST LONDON AND THE CREATIVE AND CULTURAL SECTOR

## 3.1 Context

West London makes up a sub-region of London with a combined population of 2 million citizens, equivalent to the UK's 4th largest city. 'A combined value of £73 billion makes West London's economy the second largest in the UK. Only Central London is bigger.'<sup>7</sup>

In West London the creative sectors have always played an important role as major employers, and this continues with, for example 46% of London's broadcast sector jobs in the Great West corridor, Hounslow,<sup>8</sup> which is an area of significant importance for the digital and media sector.

In recent years there have been a number of new start-ups and businesses moving to West London. 23% of the businesses in the area are less than two years old, higher than both the London and UK averages, and there is a high proportion of start-ups and micro businesses (employing fewer than 10 people) – evidencing the strong entrepreneurial nature of the region.<sup>9</sup> There is therefore an important mix of large creative companies with international

### ***Strategic West London Partnerships***

A public sector partnership of the West London boroughs, the West London Alliance, was formed in 1997 to work across borough boundaries and focus on the priorities of economy and skills, employment support, mobility and transport, housing, health and care, and digital.<sup>11</sup> Capital West London is the new cross-borough approach to driving economic prosperity and business growth across the sub-region. Part of this work focusses on the Creative Industries and in 2019 a manifesto was developed to commit to: Collaboration, Connections, Capability.<sup>12</sup>

reputation alongside freelancers, SMEs, and companies servicing the creative economy supply chain in industrial focussed neighbourhoods.

However, as Capital London states:

‘We are not sure West London is telling the strongest story. Could it punch harder? Do we need a stronger narrative across the West London boroughs for the creative sector to drive interest and appetite?’<sup>10</sup>

As the mapping of the industries shows, each borough needs to be aware of the unique socio-economic demographics and the particular composition of the CCIs when developing their cultural strategies. The CCIs play a key role in enhancing and celebrating the particularities of place that create unique local identities. It is crucial to support the local grassroots creativity that nurtures strong local connections.

“As a university based in West London with its world-leading creative sector, Brunel is well placed to support creative businesses. We provide quick access to talent, expertise and facilities to help develop the sector’s innovation and address skills needs and challenges. The Research Support and Development Office (RSDO) at Brunel actively promotes engagement with the Creative and Cultural sectors with its dedicated Creative Industries business development manager. We assist organisations wanting to partner with Brunel on research and development projects, and we can support companies to access funding to realise their innovation potential.” (Teresa Waller, Director of Research Support and Development)

West London is uniquely situated within global and national network routes including Heathrow Airport, key railways and motorways connecting it to the south and north of the UK. These connections were central to conversations about how West London is exceptionally situated, as was the lifestyle it offers for new businesses choosing a London location to settle in. West London provides a mix of residential options for a variety of lifestyles, from central London living in boroughs such as Hammersmith & Fulham and Ealing, while also offering more suburban lifestyles in the Hillingdon or Richmond areas.

New cultural quarters are being invested in across West London. These include the development of Olympia by Yoo Capital as a creative quarter with a theatre, exhibition hall and creative businesses on site; the Creative Enterprise Zones in Hounslow, Ealing/OPDC and Hammersmith & Fulham which are shining a light on and supporting creative economies in those areas (see p15); the Old Vinyl Factory in Hounslow housing the Central Research Laboratory in collaboration with Brunel University London. Park Royal is also home to long standing creative and industrial businesses, supported through local planning laws, which is growing with a new local creative community. Ealing Council is developing a new cultural manifesto and cultural renewal plans for the borough, while Brent was the London Borough of Culture for 2020, and Metroland Cultures, the charity set up to deliver Brent 2020, has continued being active. Hammersmith and Fulham has long worked to make the borough a beacon for arts and culture.

West London is undergoing a lot of very visible development and change, however there is, as always, a concern about who benefits from these changes,

### ***Cultural History***

West London is a world class creative cluster being home to major TV and film studios: Ealing Studios, the BBC, SKY, ITV, Pinewood, Disney and others. Many theatres, dance and arts spaces hold a strong significance for local communities and in the performing arts landscape including the Lyric, Riverside Studios, the Beck, the Bush, Harrow Arts Centre, Watermans and the Kiln. Southall was a central location in the development of British Bhangra. The Ealing Club is the birthplace of British Rhythm and Blues music and Hayes was at the centre of UK vinyl manufacturing. There are numerous beautiful heritage sites including Chiswick house and Gardens, Boston Manor and Osterley House.

how it affects rental prices and produces displacement, and which businesses or communities get excluded in the process. The risk of gentrifying an area through creative placemaking so that it then becomes unaffordable was raised multiple times. However, there is an excitement about the focus shifting to West London as a place of creativity that is firmly rooted in its local community and heritage.

West London also features a concentration of world leading universities such as Brunel University London in Uxbridge, Imperial College with a new campus at White City, and newer universities such as Middlesex University campus in Hendon, Bucks New University in Uxbridge, University of West London in Ealing and Brentford, and Westminster University's Harrow campus that have all worked with the CCI sector in manifold ways.

There is a growing recognition in the CCI sector of the importance of local connections, supply chains, and creative clusters. Companies in creative clusters have better access to skills, customers, knowledge and desired lifestyle and amenities.<sup>13</sup> Organisations that we spoke to highlighted the benefits of being located in areas that have strong local links between creative businesses, and where collaborations are fostered. Organisations like Upstream, Park Royal Design District, co-work spaces and innovation hubs work hard to foster these links. While sites like Pinewood will house high numbers of businesses, the active work of generating creative clustering identity and connections that can foster innovation and growth occurs less in the outer London boroughs.

### ***Why West London?***

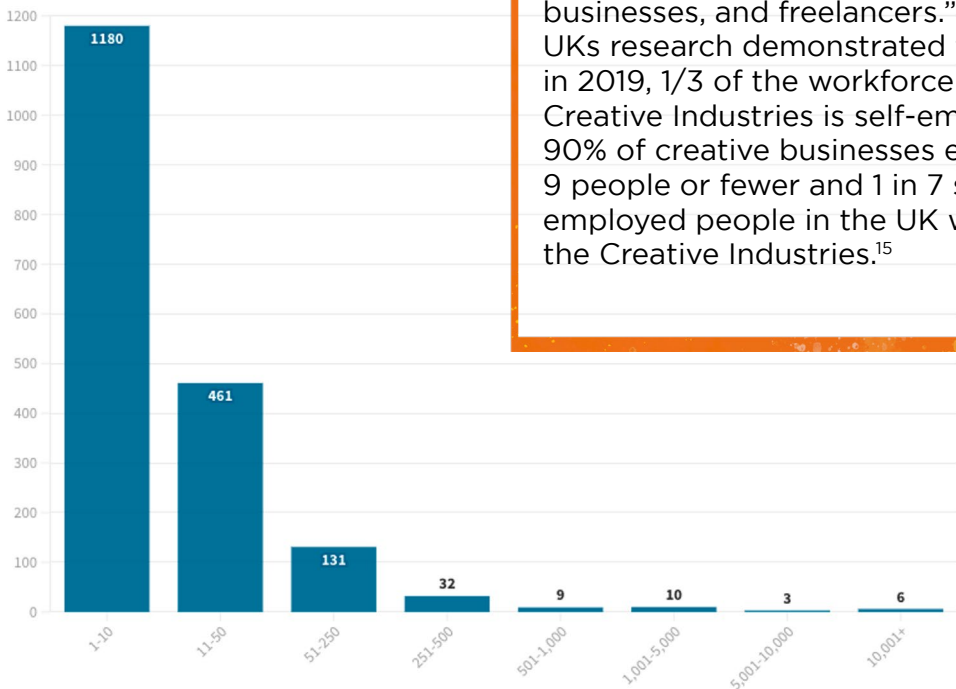
When we asked people why they had located their business in West London the most common responses were: proximity to clients, audience, other businesses, rail and road links, close to home and that the organisation had historically been located there. The most important partners were located in Greater London, followed by the rest of the UK, West London, Europe and North America. When asked if being located in West London caused any issues for their business the majority said they experience no specific issues for their business, however some mentioned the disruption caused by HS2, traffic policy, access to suitable and affordable studios, and the general Cost of Living.

## 3.2 Distinct Features of the Creative and Cultural Industries in West London

### BUSINESS SIZE:

The West London Business Alliance figures highlight the importance of SMEs and freelancers in West London. Out of the 120,000+ businesses, ranging from SMEs to multinationals, 90% of West London businesses employ fewer than 10 people and a further 7% employ between 10 and 49 people.<sup>14</sup>

Our research supports these high levels of small businesses, showing that 65% of the creative businesses in West London with a web presence employ between 1-10 people or are individuals.



“Although the UK is world-renowned for big creative names such as Tate, Burberry and Working Title Films, the creative sector is predominantly comprised of small businesses, micro businesses, and freelancers.” Creative UKs research demonstrated that in 2019, 1/3 of the workforce in the Creative Industries is self-employed, 90% of creative businesses employ 9 people or fewer and 1 in 7 self-employed people in the UK work in the Creative Industries.<sup>15</sup>

## CREATIVE INDUSTRY SECTORS:

“There are more than 19,000 creative industry businesses providing a huge boost to the sub-region’s economy. Film and TV studios, entertainment venues, advertising and digital creative industries are all part of this thriving sector.”<sup>16</sup>

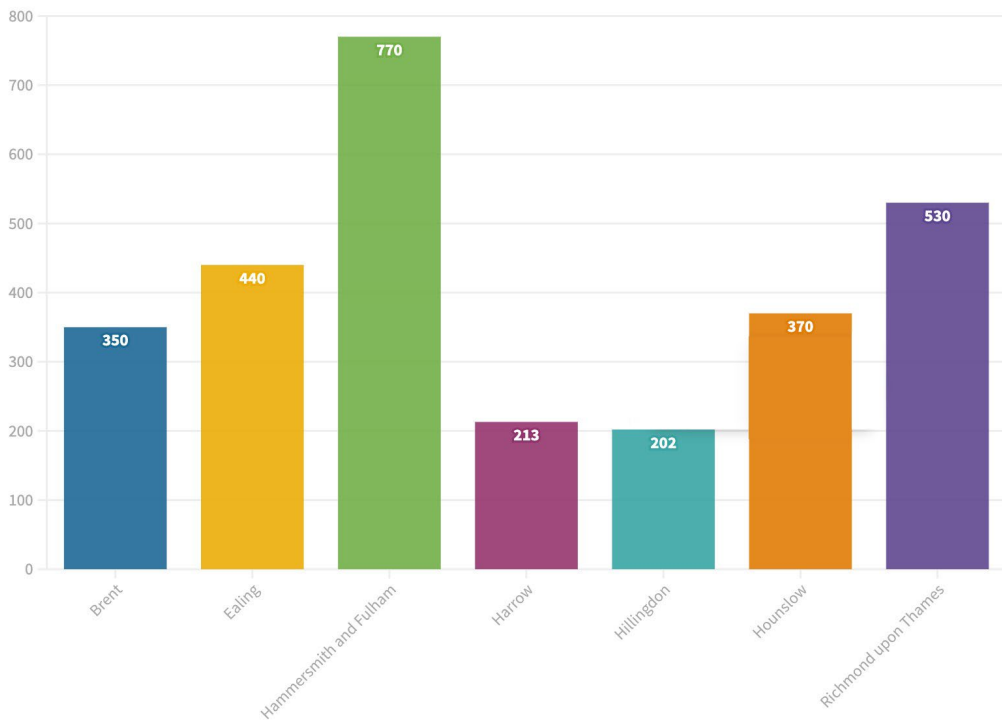
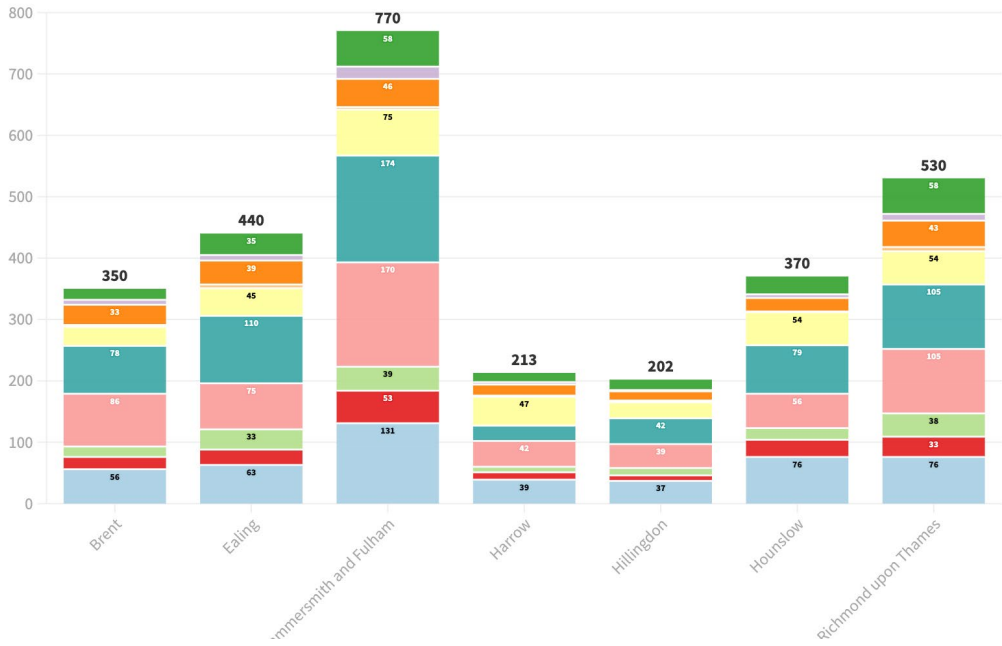
We carried out analysis of the online presence of creative industries in West London to better understand how the sectors are spread across the region. The following graphics provide a breakdown of the information we gathered.

There has historically been a strong Film, TV, Radio and Photography industry in the west of London, with internationally recognised studios such as Ealing Studios (the oldest film studio in the world), BBC, Disney, ITV, Sky and Pinewood holding a strong position in the sector. This sector continues to be strong and is currently growing with a number of new studios, including the latest video production technology and games, choosing to be located in West London and the Thames Valley, and existing studios expanding. The below graphic shows the prevalence of this sector, and the proportion of other sectors



# BRUNEL CREATIVE INDUSTRIES HUB

- Advertising & marketing
- Architecture
- Crafts
- Design product graphic & fashion
- Film TV video radio & photography
- IT software & computer services
- Museums galleries & libraries
- Music performing & visual arts
- Public arts
- Publishing



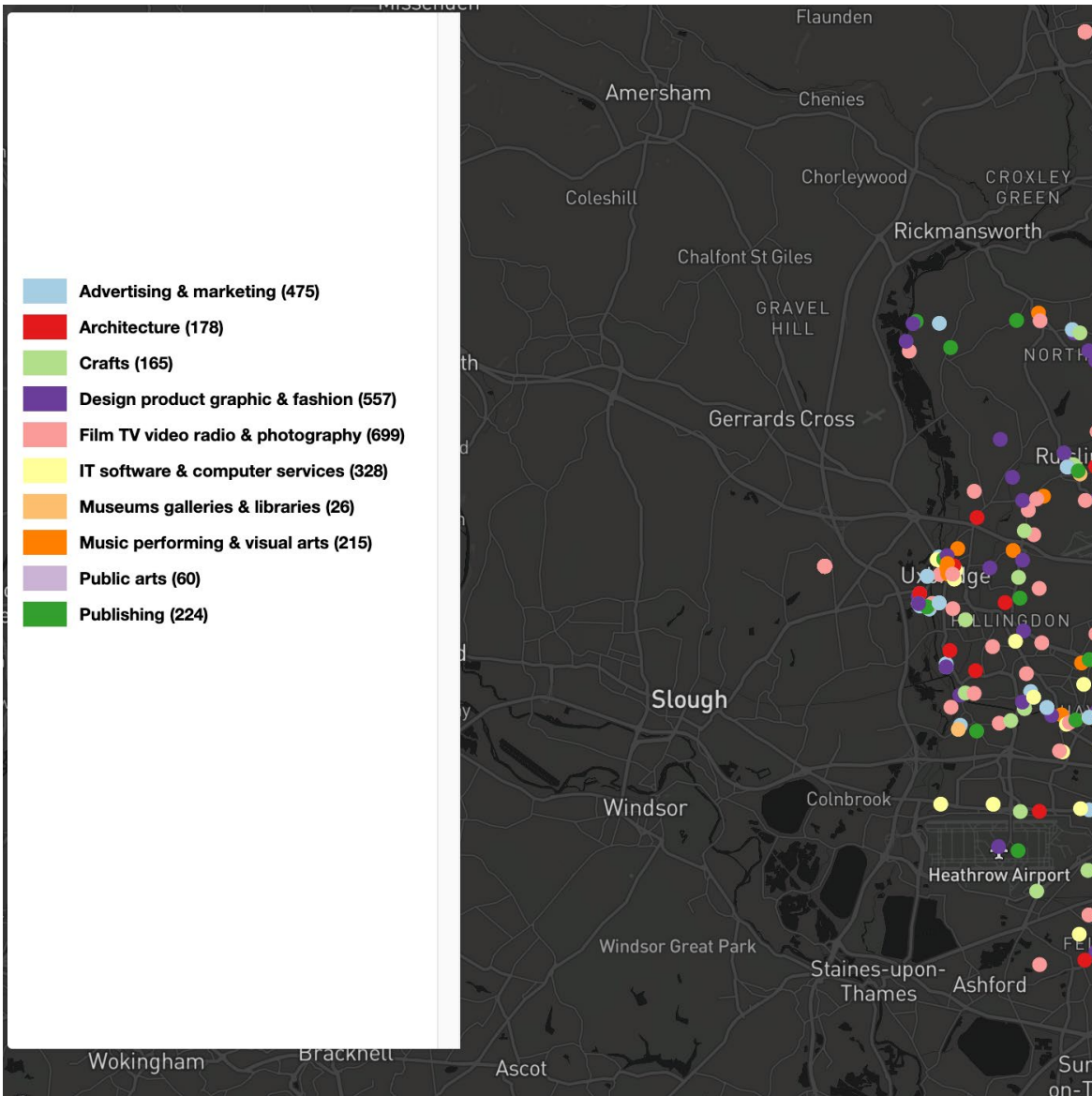


The chart on the facing page gives an overview of CCI sector distribution in each borough showing their unique characteristics.

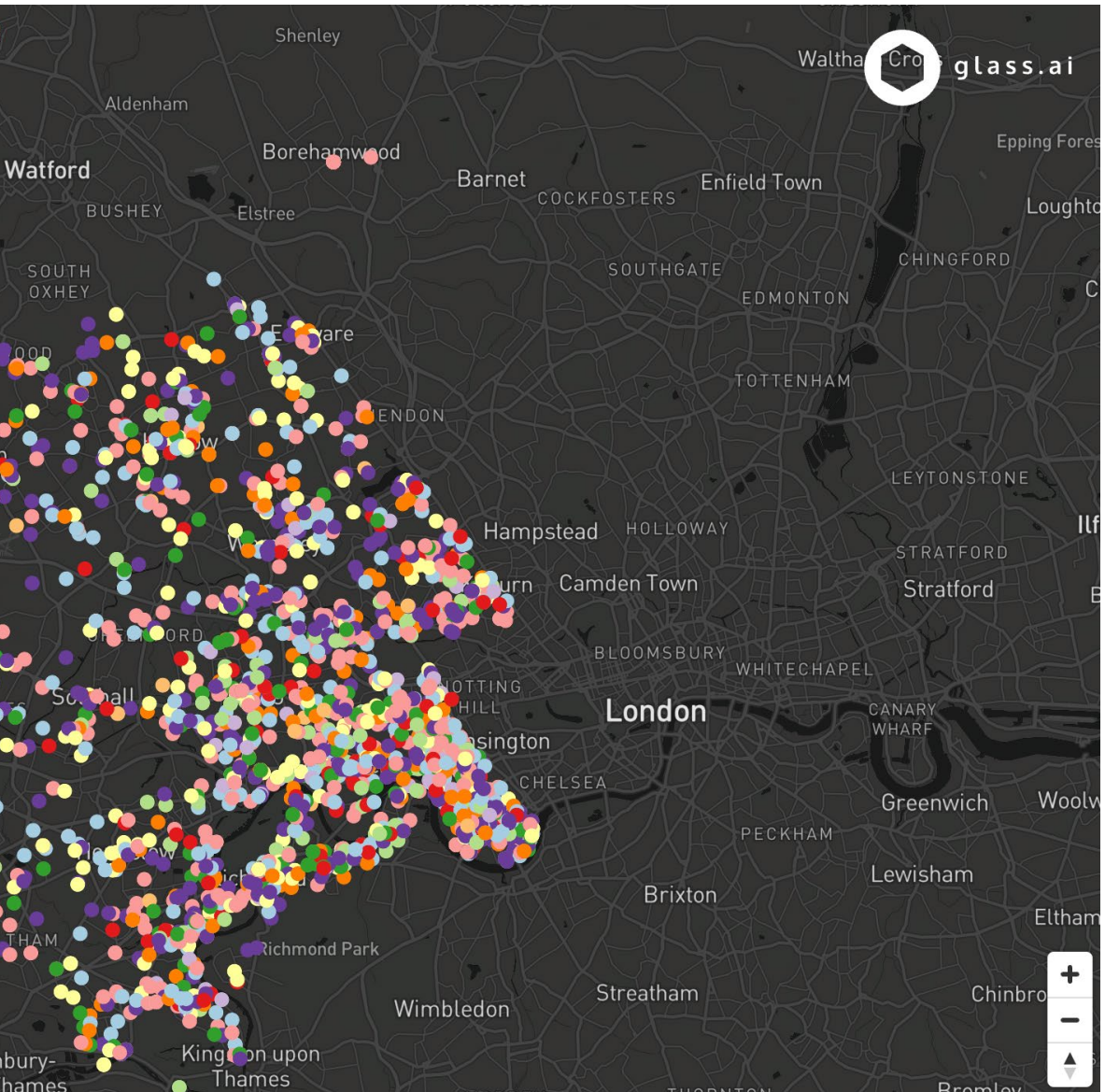
Hammersmith and Fulham was shown to have the highest number of creative industry businesses, followed by Richmond, Ealing, Hounslow and Brent while Harrow and Hillingdon have considerably less. This is visualised in the chart to the left and in the map on the following page.

### ***Creative Enterprise Zones (CEZ)***

Creative Enterprise zones<sup>17</sup> are a Mayor of London initiative launched in 2018 to support creative businesses and skills development within a designated area. Each zone delivers against a three year plan on the four pillars of the programme which are: Space; Providing skills and business support; Policy; Community engagement and socially inclusive places. The first to be established was Hounslow CEZ, or Great West Creatives Enterprise Zone, delivered by a consortium made up of: University of West London, West Thames College, London Borough of Hounslow, SME representatives, Sky, Watermans, Hounslow and Brentford Chambers of Commerce, and West London Business. It is the largest of the CEZs and builds on the area's expertise in the screen industry. In June 2022 a further two CEZs were announced - Ealing in partnership with Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation, and Hammersmith and Fulham. Park Royal is the UK's largest industrial estate covering 650 acres and home to 1700 businesses,<sup>18</sup> while Hammersmith and Fulham CEZ has a focus on tech and creativity.



There is a higher density of all creative and cultural businesses in more central boroughs, however there are visible clusters in other areas including Brentford, Harrow, Park Royal, Hammersmith, Fulham, Richmond, Ealing, Hayes, Ruislip and Twickenham.



# 4.0 IMPACTS OF COVID-19

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen in different stages, from the initial shock of lockdown, to innovative adaptations in working practices, and the lasting effects which we are yet to understand fully. There have been very uneven effects between industries, with music, performing arts and visual arts hit hardest – followed by museums, galleries and libraries – both sectors dependent on live events and audience attendance (see table). Freelancers have also been disproportionately impacted by the crisis as they were most likely to have fallen through the cracks in government support,<sup>19</sup> and lost work early. There is also evidence that the pandemic has worsened pre-existing inequalities in the Creative and Cultural Industries by causing job insecurity and financial instability among ethnically diverse people.<sup>20</sup> Research shows that London’s creative sector lost £6.1bn GVA during 2020 and 2021 (or 10%)<sup>21</sup> and across the UK 67% of businesses placed employees on furlough.<sup>22</sup> The collapse in demand for products and services was the largest barrier for many companies, however many companies and freelancers have successfully pivoted their offering and creatively innovated new practices.<sup>23</sup> The pandemic has also accelerated the digital turn across sectors, offering many new opportunities for research and collaboration.

DCMS Sector	Impact on Gross Value Added and jobs
Music, performing and visual arts	-39% of GVA (-£4bn) -26% of jobs (80,000)
Museums, galleries and libraries	-32% of GVA (-£310m) -14% of jobs (13,000)
Publishing	-14% of GVA (-£1.5bn) -6% of jobs (12,000)
Design and designer fashion	-14% of GVA (-£490m) -7% of jobs (12,500)
Film, TV, radio and photography	-12% of GVA (-£2.6bn) -5% of jobs (12,800)
Advertising and marketing	-11% of GVA (-£1.9bn) -6% of jobs (11,000)
Crafts	-8% of GVA (-£27m) -2% of jobs (225)
Architecture	-5% of GVA (-£165m) But created 481 jobs (+0.5%)
IT, software, computer services and video games	A temporary drop in GVA of 1% (-£535m) Creating 70,000 new jobs (+9%)

Source: Creative UK Group (2021) The Creative Industries

## 4.1 Challenges: Living with COVID-19

This research has focussed on translating these numbers into qualitative examples from individuals and businesses. In the section that follows we show key themes that came out of our conversations with CCI organisations.

### CHANGED AUDIENCE NEEDS: BRINGING AUDIENCES BACK TO LIVE SETTINGS

Organisations working in live settings, whether this is theatre, music, comedy or heritage locations, were hit the hardest and there is “work to be done on what the barriers are for getting back into the profession and getting audiences back.” (CCI adviser)

Some commercial spaces have experienced the emptying of shop spaces as businesses were unable to continue to pay costs or those who could moved studios home. With the rise in the desire for experiences over products, for some this means there is a pivot towards using these empty shops to support makers or to bring experiential projects into these spaces.

For companies, charities and freelancers who are engaged in live events there is a general consensus that there is a desire to go back to doing things in person. However, audience numbers have not necessarily returned to pre-pandemic levels and patterns of going out have changed amongst the public. For instance, some

“It was horrible for everyone. I think for some industries it was a lot worse than others. We don’t actually charge artists for services, it all comes down to ticket sales so without events there was no revenue coming in at all. And we pretty much slipped through the net with every sort of funding agency and grant. We were fortunate in that we had a studio space so we were able to transition our events online.” (Music agency)

venues are picking up fewer customers during the week because audiences are no longer in the vicinity of those events – customers do not walk past venues and see the advertising, nor do they just ‘drop in after work’. These events are now something that needs to be both discovered and planned for, they are less spontaneous.

“I think the appetite for doing things is really strong. There’s definitely a need to get back to normal, whatever that means, but on a smaller scale.” (Arts producer)

There is also a need for artists and performers to be back on stage in front of an audience. For many artists the reason they are in the role is the passion to perform, in many the need to be on the stage or performing live in other ways is what fuels their lifestyle and without this their desire to be in the sector lessens. Connected to this is the loss of grassroots performance spaces, mic nights, open sessions and similar, so that many artists don't get the initial springboard to showcase their work to talent agents. There is a circular element to all of these artistic endeavours which is in danger.

The changed demands of audiences since COVID-19 are being reflected in the programming of organisations. For instance the events organised by a borough-wide heritage curator are shifting to be more about quality experiences for the family such as storytelling, learning about traditional craft methods and archaeological activities.

*“ Now people are looking to do more outside, they want experiences different from home life, to get out and do something different. And they want quality. That's quite difficult sometimes because it costs money. We book specialist practitioners and performers for events, these are expensive, but the audiences want that.” (Heritage Curator)*

Cultural and heritage sites who work with and for local audiences, as well as drawing in the wider public, have seen COVID-19 exacerbate local issues and highlight the need for their organisations to be a place for local people. Their work has therefore focused more on supporting local communities.

*“ It's about getting that balance between putting on activity to draw people in, but making sure it's meaningful and delivering against our charitable objectives... we set up our programme on the back of COVID to address those issues. And the Cost of Living crisis is just exacerbating all of those issues.” (Heritage site and gardens)*

While the games industry had two record years during COVID-19, due to increased need for at-home entertainment, revenues are starting to decline as the Cost of Living crisis stops consumer spending. There are multidimensional issues impacting the CCIs creating complex future challenges.

*“ I don't think the industry needs to recover. It absolutely does not need to recover. We had two record breaking consumer spending years. We had amazing titles come out. I now think everyone's just focused on the global Cost of Living crisis.” (Games Industry trade body)*

## STRETCHED FINANCES AND THE SEARCH FOR ALTERNATIVE BUSINESS MODELS

For live and heritage venues the effects have been deep and long lasting with teams being cut, financial reserves being drained and the future picture looking very uncertain.

Organisations that support young people to get into the creative industries, particularly freelancers, are tackling the increased pressures on finances by launching new bursaries to support skills and training such as driving lessons (important for work in the TV industry) or to pay for an Adobe license.

For many working in the live sector – such as in theatre, for musicians and technicians – the furlough scheme was not accessible or not enough and they have left the Creative Industries to retrain in a different sector.

*“Freelancers had a poor deal, there were so many that fell through the cracks when it came to accessing government support and so we know that there are a number of freelancers who have either completely given up their creative careers. And there’s a real danger around losing a really talented and valuable part of our workforce.” (CI trade body)*

*“We drained all our reserves, we cut the team in half. We haven’t any reserves left and we don’t have the team back like other organisations. The Cultural Recovery Fund kept us going for two years, but they’ve now turned the tap off and like other small organisations we’re just trying to muddle our way through and try and work out what our future looks like.” (Heritage site and gardens)*

For some businesses the expectation was that they would be the first to be let go, as in other financial crises, however as a PR agency explained they were needed to manage the communications that had shifted online.

*“There was an understanding that we were needed to make sure that we’ve got the drum beat out there, that when this is all over we’ve got something to come back to.” (PR professional)*

Many businesses also needed to change their business model because clients wanted to move from a long term retainer to a more ad hoc project basis, making managing future financial planning more difficult.

## SHIFTING WORKING PRACTICES: COVID-19 SAFE STRATEGIES

There were differences in how CCI sectors were able to respond to the shift to working from home. Where employees and creatives are digitally literate, the work is primarily computer based, and they are accustomed to collaborating across time zones the shift to home working has not been an issue for their practices.

*“ You had digital natives who were super comfortable. For visual effects people, moving them from the office to at home, as long as you give them the kit and broadband, was totally fine. You have this very digitally competent workforce.” (Business Partnerships Manager)*

In the film and TV industry, the close work between industry bodies, their members and the government allowed them to identify key barriers preventing work from restarting and introduce measures to shift this, ensuring a focus on safe working practices and insurance. This enabled UK film and TV production to re-open earlier than in other parts of the world, bringing productions and the necessary supply chains to the UK.

*“ We asked the industry, as a kind of representative body, what is the major problem at the moment with restarting productions, the main problem was insurance. Nobody would insure these companies because they didn't know if they were going to be shut down the next day. And so our unit provided data and analysis for £100 million government investment called the production restart scheme.” (Film Industry trade body)*





## 4.2. Opportunities: A new creative landscape

While the effects of lockdown had immediate repercussions for many businesses, it also forced companies to be innovative with their working practices and with the services they offered. In the sections that follow we explore some of the innovations that organisations felt would have a positive lasting effect.

"Creative businesses and freelancers have completely pivoted their business models and been adaptable in what they do. People have come up with new ways to collaborate online and with other sectors. So during COVID the fashion sector came up with ideas for face masks or creative tech companies came up with ideas to support hospitals. It's something that is increasingly happening." (CI trade body)

### ONLINE INNOVATIONS: ENGAGING AUDIENCES DIGITALLY

We have seen new and creative solutions in working practices, audience engagement and digital presence, with long-lasting effects. Cultural institutions were forced, and had time, to focus on their digital programme and online presentation - reaching geographically wider and more diverse audiences. For example, heritage and arts sites developed virtual tours of sites that were able to be delivered digitally because there was time and resources during lockdown. There was also an increased use of social media to reach audiences.

*"It forced us to engage with people in new ways. It forced us to think differently and some of that has continued." (Curator)*

*"We brought in a new programme of online workshops and events for families and people in the borough, with a focus on the more vulnerable people in the borough. We did try to adapt as best we could and I think we did a fairly good job because it was so new to all of us. We still run a course on zoom for people who are nervous to come back in person or live further away, so we have adopted that." (Arts Centre)*

For organisations that relied on footfall and live audiences, and especially if they fell through the cracks for grants, shifting online and trying out novel models of income generation was absolutely vital to their survival. Some of these innovations have been refined and continue to be part of the business.

“*We pitched an idea to a charity that people would perform online gigs from their home, and using an existing online platform people would donate while they live streamed. We did just under 500 of those gigs in a 12 week period and raised slightly over £80,000 which we were really proud of. We asked our web developers to build us a bespoke fundraising platform on our website. At the time it was a lifeboat that kept people ticking over. But the platform we built is, post-pandemic, being used to raise money again.*” (Music agency)

Prior to the pandemic the streaming scene was mostly dominated by gaming and was less popular in music, but the infrastructure was in place. The online delivery of entertainment was thought by some to be inappropriate or inaccessible to both artists and audiences. The pandemic has changed many people’s preconceptions about this, legitimised live streaming and it is a potential growth area. Education has similarly shifted, with many academics previously against online education but more recently beginning to see some advantages in elements of that style of delivery.



## WORKING REMOTELY

Working from home for part of the week is being requested by workforces. For some people who experience social anxiety, online collaboration platforms are a safe way to interact. However, employers seek a balance of hybrid working as the need to provide support and networking to younger workforces and improve communication on projects requires face-to-face and in-office working. Many offices are now experimenting with hybrid practices and having specific in-office work days.

*“Employers recognised that people want flexibility. But when you’ve got creative teams you need to be able to collaborate and get influences through conversations, just through being together, going for a walk together, get the creativity flowing, and that is difficult to replicate.”*  
(Games Industry trade body)

Relationships that are formed with clients online are different, and while many people have adapted, we are yet to fully understand the consequences.

*“When you are face to face you can go off on tangents, you can have a proper conversation, whereas with zoom you have an agenda to get through and people are often multi-tasking and have meetings back to back.”* (PR professional)

In some instances the move to remote working has meant that new networks around the country can be accessed. Prior to the changed working practices due to COVID, there was much less interest in online workshops and meetings, but this has now opened up continuing benefits of networking with people without the time and expense of travel, leading to more environmentally friendly working practices. Practices that were once shunned have become normalised, opening the possibility for further interdisciplinary remote connections.

*“Our team is relatively small and there just wasn’t the capacity to be travelling across the country. The move online meant we could build those relationships in a way that we wouldn’t have been able to otherwise and it allows more people who aren’t based in London to join events.”* (CCI access organisation)





## DIVERSIFIED PROGRAMME OFFERINGS AND BUSINESS MODELS

Businesses and individuals have diversified their offering. For live performers this has included moving into education, developing workshops and talks online and in-person. Performers have found new audiences online, finding that they have the potential to reach wider audiences, have more control over the audience they speak to, and through working from home may have a better quality of life. The lockdown was also used to learn new skills, new technology and reassess how they work.

*“It’s been a great time for me to think differently, work differently and adapt to some of the changes that are going on.” (Comedy freelancer)*

The shift to online meetings and presentations has opened up a need for, and opportunity to, train people to better represent themselves online, where visual cues are different. A PR agency we spoke to now offers tailored training packages to fill this gap, and it has been integrated into existing offerings.

The services requested by clients during the lockdowns also shifted, businesses found that a different type of consultancy was being requested along with a different way of winning clients. It needed to happen much faster and clients were put on retainers for ongoing services.

Dr Hayleigh Boshier is an expert in Intellectual Property Law, a legal consultant in the Creative Industries and an advisor for the independent UK charity for professional musicians, Help Musicians. Hayleigh's research is on copyright and related laws in the Creative Industries, particularly in music, social media, and more recently artificial intelligence and related technologies e.g., NFTs. Her research always involves public, policy and industry engagement, with an emphasis on helping creators understand their rights whilst at the same time ensuring that those rights are fairly balanced and adequately supported by law. Her current work investigates copyright and related rights around music streaming, adding to the discourse arguing for regulatory changes that will rebalance stakeholder rights to enable and support a fairer music industry ecosystem. She also looks at the direct impact on the creative process for composers of the rising trend in the music industry of rightsholders bringing claims of copyright infringement. Her other work aims to help users and social media influencers understand more about copyright and other regulations related to social media.

“*They wanted strategic consultancy because it wasn't just COVID that was happening, it was Black Lives Matter, diversity issues, pay parity. And these issues were more pointed...so that's when we were being asked to come in and advise on strategy.*” (PR professional)

Theatres are struggling across the board to meet financial needs, and are thinking creatively about using their spaces for local groups and for different kinds of events.

“*There's now a lot more scope to use the space in a productive way rather than just being somewhere that someone comes for a zoom meeting. We've hosted refugee events, partnered with a homeless charity for a coffee morning.*” (Theatre professional)

Large scale businesses have different experiences of the COVID recovery process to small businesses and freelancers, and therefore have different needs. Larger businesses may be able to absorb higher costs differently, but they also cannot pivot as nimbly. The Cost of Living crisis will also affect these micro businesses in different ways as the cost of materials increases. While some people left Creative Industries during COVID to find more reliable work, others have re-assessed their priorities and shifted into work that they find more rewarding.

“*We need to think about how we support people that want to start creating business or actually started freelancing during lockdown periods and want to expand their business further.*” (Planner)

# 5.0 CROSS-CUTTING CURRENT CONCERNS

Through our conversations with professionals across the CCI sectors a number of cross-cutting pressing concerns emerged about long-standing challenges and needs to support their businesses. The top three concerns on peoples' minds were equality and diversity, improving sustainable practices, and skills shortages and recruitment. Other issues and comments that were raised included a desire and need to understand local communities better, a need for support networks, an emphasis on the value of creativity for all businesses, and the current interdisciplinary working practices for new technologies. We discuss each of these below, in particular with a view to thinking about how Brunel can engage with these topics in the future.

## Equality and Diversity

The subject of equality and diversity was raised by nearly every organisation we spoke to as a pressing issue that they are engaging on. This is relevant both for the creative content that is funded and published, and the staffing of businesses. There is an acknowledgement that while TV, film, theatre and written content has diversified in relation to topics and characters, there is still less class, gender and ethnic diversity in the higher management structures and it is harder for under-represented groups to access and retain jobs. It was felt that there is a lot more awareness across industries, diversity standards are being updated and extended, and industry-wide education is improving certain areas. Research

by academics at Brunel University London has highlighted continuing inequalities around race, class, gender and neurodiversity. Brunel University is in a unique position to offer interdisciplinary, impactful and policy relevant research, and to bring non-academic audiences into activities that support networks and capacity building between Creative Industry businesses and sectors.

“*In order to survive as a creative company, they need a multidimensional diversity of perspectives and experiences. You need to be able to talk to your potential players. It's not a moral imperative. It's a necessity.*” (Games Industry trade body)

Brunel Creative Writing research, including work by Benjamin Zephaniah, Bernardine Evaristo, Daljit Nagra, and Hannah Lowe, has actively focused on lack of diversity in the publishing industry, has rallied for the commissioning of more black editors and convinced publishing houses to start implementing change. Over the course of the last 7 years, Brunel research has enabled over 40 minority authors to be published in prestigious outlets and win internationally renowned literary prizes. Professor Evaristo has developed training networks and literary prizes to increase diversity in publishing. Professor Zephaniah's work has increased the representation of black literature in schools across the country, Professor Nagra, as first BAME Director of the RSL, has appointed 200 BAME and minority writers. Finally, the British Library commissioned Dr Lowe to create a poem-film for an exhibition about the Windrush Generation in order to educate the wider public. Overall, Brunel academics have worked tirelessly to transform the UK literary landscape across multiple industries to increase diversity and equality in publishing and beyond.

It is important that the multidimensionality of these issues is discussed, and that the socio economic inequalities are also tackled, as the personal networks for young creatives to access the industry are crucial.

*“It doesn't matter sometimes what your ethnic background is, what matters are the opportunities you've had and that always comes down to poverty. Socio- economics cut through everything.” (Games Industry trade body)*

There were concerns raised over the lack of bullying and harassment policies in smaller companies, and it was highlighted that many SMEs outsource HR and don't have the resources to research and implement new practices across many different areas. UKIE is developing a toolkit for businesses to be able to understand where

they need to improve and give them the tools and resources to do that easily.

Concerns about female performers or workers experiencing harassment and trolling were raised. It was highlighted that the Me Too movement enabled people to talk more openly about experiences, but knowing what to do about it if it does happen to you is still not clear.

*“It needs to be an ongoing discussion. It's still alive and well. I have been in a safe community where I can discuss how to go about discrimination when it happens, or what to do about being trolled. I think knowing how to deal with these sorts of issues when they come up is half the battle. You've got choices, you don't need to feel like you're a victim.” (Comedy freelancer)*

Professor Sarita Malik's work examines issues of inequality and culture across all three realms of representation, production and participation. As a former curator and public arts programmer, broadcast journalist and research bid writer, Professor Malik's research is built on knowledge exchange with a variety of stakeholder groups, community, professional and public, often drawing on collaborative, interdisciplinary and participatory research methodologies. Motivated by a concern to listen to largely unheard stories, the co-created AHRC funded research project 'Creative Interruptions', on which she was Principal Investigator, engaged with past and emergent grassroots artwork that has responded to forms of social exclusion. In this project she brought together diverse practitioners, artists, activists, academics and non-University based collaborators to build a space where creative practices as well as theoretical, cultural and policy perspectives converge. Her research and policy briefings on the use of the term 'BAME' was widely discussed and has led to major broadcasters such as the BBC and Channel 4 committing to avoid their use of the term. In 2022, Sarita was appointed to The Department of Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) College of Experts and she is a Trustee of the Voice of the Listener and Viewer.

## Sustainability

Improving an organisation's or sector's environmental footprint was a key theme raised across conversations. The actions ranged from improving recycling and cutting energy use to considering circular economies within a neighbourhood that has a high number of creative businesses. There was a general desire to share knowledge to improve practices, and several organisations had established staff-led working groups to implement practices from the bottom up rather than top down, responding to staff and client desires to do more. The cost of energy increases are putting more pressure on businesses to reduce energy use but for organisations with high energy needs, such as film studios and

theatres, this is a complicated process. It is also clear that while there is a desire to improve environmental footprints, there is a gap in literacy about how to do this, and for small organisations with limited time and resources it is a struggle to become experts in this. Academics at Brunel look at how and why the world around us is changing to encourage new ways of thinking to tackle the pressing issues that we face, with expertise in the scientific, social, political and economic factors.

Within the screen industries there are a growing number of discussions about how to tell the stories to not only educate about the causes of the climate crisis but also about the solutions in



order to visualise a better future. The power of games, film, TV and immersive experiences to influence people is strongly understood.

“*The next generation is thinking about how to use the power of the medium to tell a story to make other people feel connected to an experience or connected to an issue that they care about.*” (Games Industry professional)

Dr Stuart Andrews is Co-Director of Performing City Resilience, an internationally focused research-led consultancy that develops creative practices of resilience and emergency planning in the UK and internationally. This is highly collaborative work with local authorities, emergency and resilience planning organisations, arts councils and arts and culture practitioners. This work has included surveying arts and resilience practices, facilitating bespoke workshop programmes, and informing strategic planning. Stuart has published internationally on arts, architecture, culture, emergency and resilience planning, performance, and place. Publications comprise books and academic articles, professional reporting and blog posts. Currently, he is working with Dr Patrick Duggan (Northumbria University) on two new monographs for Louisiana State University Press and Palgrave. Stuart focuses particularly on facilitating research and research impact development, designing and managing degree programmes, and growing international partnerships.

## Skills Shortages and recruitment

Within the screen industry a top priority was addressing the skills shortage and recruiting new and diverse talent. This challenge was also raised by other sectors such as media and PR who are focused on finding new candidates and the next generation of talent. HE plays a key role in educating the next generation of talent, creating awareness of the range

of roles needed within the industry (including accounts, legal, HR), and supporting the latest skills transfer. Brunel University London is in a unique position to offer a pool of highly skilled, diverse and ambitious young people to the Creative and Cultural Industries. Brunel's unique placement degrees offer businesses the opportunity

to create 6-12 month work placements. Our students have gone to work at key businesses and venues across the UK and the world from M&C Saatchi, Sony Records and the Roundhouse in London to Luxxotica in Milan.

“  
*Dealing with the skills gap won't happen overnight and there needs to be compromises. The need for skills is not just in entry level roles, it needs experienced people and to keep hold of the talent. There are lots of schemes that are already happening to try to resolve this issue. This is also key in new technology spaces where talent is being poached worldwide. The training is being developed now to keep up with the new working practices. (Film industry professional)*

There were also lots of interesting ideas about how to help students and professionals become more entrepreneurial. For example, as COVID-19 showed the need for actors to build a skill set beyond auditions, developing their transferrable skills to be useful in a broad range of ways is important. For example, science and tech experts may be adept at communication, but writers can learn to run workshops to help with their narrative and storytelling.

The Professional Development Centre is an ambitious service that proactively supports students to achieve their career aspirations, by offering a broad range of engaging services and employability initiatives to our students. Supporting our students secure work experience and graduate roles in the thriving Creative and Cultural Industry forms a key part of this. A significant number of Brunel students secure placements in this sector and go on to work in the industry after graduation. We are keen to further increase and develop our relationships with employers in the sector to help support the growing need for highly skilled staff in this area.” (Jonathan Bainbridge, Director of Professional Development Centre)



# Understanding local communities and audiences

Organisations that are well connected to local communities, and seek to involve them in their work, want to better understand who their local audiences are and what their needs are. All theatres and heritage sites we spoke to want to do this, as did some film studios. In some instances there was a dedicated engagement role, and in some instances there was a newly created role for this purpose in order to better connect with other local groups post-pandemic. Organisations are developing programmes that

support local young people into industry, ensuring events meet the needs of and are relevant to local communities and bringing local people more into the buildings and programmes. However, this work was often under-resourced due to financial constraints. A common thread was the understanding that West London is ethnically, culturally and socio-economically diverse, and that it is important to reflect this in the work.

Professor Degen's research on the organisation, management and branding of sensory and temporal experiences has informed new approaches to curatorial and design practices of museum curators and urban planners across Europe. Her AHRC and ESRC funded work highlights the importance of experiences in our engagements with public places as well as the power of professional bodies to influence and regulate the sensory urban environment and has led to the development of a sensory toolkit. In 2016 she was awarded the prestigious British Academic Fellowship to analyse Timescapes of Urban Change. A long-term partnership with the Museum of London has led to co-organising workshops and international conferences for curators and devising new methodologies to understand the transformations cultural developments bring about in particular neighbourhoods. Her research on Sensory Smithfield has informed the Museum of London interpretation masterplan by examining how audiences interact with museum spaces, experience programmes and public spaces both within and in the environs of its buildings. Her work with the Cologne City Museum inspired them to experiment with new curatorial practices and exhibition designs around the themes of the senses and emotions, engaging with histories that were previously underrepresented. Such changes have enabled them to attract wider audiences and increase visitor numbers. Professor Degen has advised Barcelona City Council, the Corporation of London and Hillingdon Council in regards to evaluating and developing cultural regeneration strategies.

Finding out about the needs of local communities is done mainly through personal connections, attending local events, being out in the community and in some cases surveys. Where there are limited resources this can be very time consuming and there was interest in how an academic partner might be able to support these efforts. Brunel University London has expertise in understanding changing neighbourhoods, and the nuances of localities, as well as engaging creatively through poetry and theatre. Brunel has a large cohort of students from West London and offers a ready-made audience to test-pilot plays, programmes or other cultural outputs or could be drawn on as a resource to understand the needs and tastes of West London's diverse communities. Student projects developed by industry practitioners could provide useful research and offer students vital work experience.

Inequalities have been deepened by COVID-19 and the recent Cost of Living crisis. With the pressures on CCI budgets, and the increased pressures on communities they serve, it is important that activities deliver against the charitable objectives, and therefore attention and energy go into getting that balance and work right.

*“Our work requires understanding the different pressures on different communities, and trying to ensure everyone is accessing support.”*  
(Engagement officer)

*“We did a series of events about food heritage last year where 20 people from different ethnic backgrounds, some born and bred in Britain and some from abroad, talked about traditional recipes and produced different culturally rooted recipes for people to taste. This brought a different kind of audience and enabled cultural mixing which is an important aspect of what we do.”*  
(Curator)

Understanding local issues can help with long-lasting impactful programming to make sure activities work for the community, the artists involved and the organisation producing it.

Trying to use local companies and people to run or support events was also common, and this was mentioned in arts organisations, and film and TV production.

*“Literally giving young people tasters and workshops around different creative arts and then putting them in touch with industry networks that we know. Building those relationships has got to be quite key. We've got those businesses around us, so upskill young people and get them into industry. It's very much about creating a platform and how do we lift up this talent.”* (Film studio)

There was a mixed impression about the role of large organisations in local communities. While in some instances the large organisation felt they were doing good work to support and engage locally, the smaller local groups felt it was difficult to find a way to work together and had not managed to collaborate on projects that were important to them with large businesses.

## Need for support networks

Young graduates trying to find their way in the Creative Industries can find it hard to know how to navigate their different options. This can also be true for more experienced people who perhaps need to shift their expertise or retrain for new work. The freelance culture of many creative roles can exacerbate this and means that individuals are having to learn to manage their uncertain income streams, learn to pitch for jobs and sell their skills repeatedly, as well as do the job well. Mentoring is an important piece of the jigsaw, and there are key organisations in West London who focus on this, in particular for under-represented groups.

There is an opportunity here for HE to work more closely with key support organisations to offer programmes and spaces for informal support, more

formalised training sessions on current topics and to access more experienced people in the industry. Learning those very practical skills, like accounting or speaking to an agent, or ways of working with people from different disciplines is vital.

"You need collaboration and to build your own creative family. I never had that. You need to be around people that you trust...so you're not just out there in the wild west because a lot of the time you just get ripped off. Regular courses like designing a website, how to use a camera, how to promote yourself, book-keeping, how to overcome dark days and stay motivated, and monthly networking drinks events just to say hi, or a safe space to try out new ideas. And if you need to find a cinematographer you can go there to network and find the skills you need." (Creative freelancer)

The Centre for Comedy Studies Research (CCSR) is an international research Centre devoted to the academic study of comedy that considers the production, content, reception and wider socio-political implications of comedy in a variety of formats and from a range of perspectives. The Centre facilitates inter-disciplinary research and hosts events that examine the ways in which comedy can be used un/seriously and positively and/or negatively in all spheres of society: in business, party politics, IT, health, education, identity politics, media, arts, law. The Centre has strong links with the comedy industry and is supported by five CCSR Ambassadors: Jo Brand (Comedian, writer, actor), Nitin Ganatra (actor), Lee Mack (comedian, writer, actor), Simon Minty (Abnormally Funny People), Geoff Rowe (Founder of Leicester Comedy Festival). The Centre is committed to the development of strategic partnerships with businesses, industry and the not-for-profit sector.

When speaking to businesses there was also a common conversation around the need for a better understanding of the wide range of jobs that are available within the creative economy. While camera operators, directors, creative directors, writers and actors are well known jobs, the plethora of other jobs that are required to maintain the creative economy, which includes accountants and legal experts, are often missing from the discussion. There was a strong desire to find a way to reach out to people who might not think that the Creative Industries are for them, and might not be aware of all the roles they could do.

*“Connection is generally important. We need a hub for the exchange of ideas, to meet different practitioners, discuss what work you are doing and find out what others are doing and what events are going on. Those in person social meets are really important.” (Graphics business owner)*

Within the heritage, theatre and local community organisations we spoke to there was a recognition of the existing professional networks that are a useful resource for sharing best practice and asking for advice, such as the commercial team’s networks, visitor attraction’s networks, cultural organisation’s finance networks and theatre director’s networks. Some of these were far more informal than others. The level to which differently funded organisations are able to access subscription based networks differed, for instance an independent theatre is not able to access the same resources and training that publicly funded theatres are.

*“London is very welcoming if you know the people. But if you don’t know the people it’s quite difficult to know where to go.” (Business partnerships manager)*

## Value of creativity

The pandemic highlighted how important creativity is to our lives, whether it is film and music to get us through hard times or the value of creative thinking and collaboration to solve problems. This sentiment was key to many conversations. It is also a cornerstone of CreativeUK's recent campaign #WeAreCreative.

*“During COVID you had the Creative Industries bolstering the rest of us, the rest of the country and the world. What would we have done without Netflix and music. It goes back to those innovative ways of working where you might have noticed the filming looked slightly different because of COVID safe filming techniques, or concerts were taken online, or really interesting immersive stuff that was taken online.” (CI trade body)*

The arts are under threat from long-term government cuts in funding and education, lasting impacts of COVID-19 and the Cost of Living crisis. In order to support arts organisations we can think of new ways the university can support struggling creative businesses: small but useful ways of supporting like hiring spaces out, bringing people onto campus to use facilities, creating student projects that are applied and useful to businesses, developing events and training to share the expertise held by academics, co-producing research with non-academic partners so that impacts are genuine, and creating supportive communities of practice.

Professor Mitra's research examines whiteness and structural racism, that are foundational to the UK contemporary dance sector. Through long-term collaboration with the renowned dancer-choreographer Akram Khan and his company, Professor Mitra's work has introduced to Khan's artistic practice a critical language with which to frame his danced critiques of empire, racial minoritizations, and colonialism. She has also impacted Akram Khan Company's ethos of developing artistic training and curatorial practices that foreground the showcasing of new generation Black and Global Majority artists. Professor Mitra, alongside Drs Simon Ellis (Coventry) and Arabella Stanger (Sussex) also partnered with Independent Dance (ID), a London-based leading artists development agency, on a research project which helped shape ID's policies and practices. These included centring the programming of Black and Global Majority dance artists, introduction of an equity policy, an ethical fundraising policy, and racially diversifying ID's board members. Professor Mitra's individual and collaborative research exposes racist and colonial legacies and presents of the contemporary dance sector, and supports contemporary dance artists to challenge institutions and practices through their dance-works.

# Learning to collaborate cross-disciplinarily

New technologies, and new ways of working together in the CCIs show that interdisciplinary working is essential. There was a very positive response about the interdisciplinary potential of the Creative Industries Hub at Brunel where business, social science and the arts come together. Creative thinking is necessary to solve societies problems and creating a space to learn across disciplines and build on those diverse expertise could be a fruitful space for HE and the CCIs.

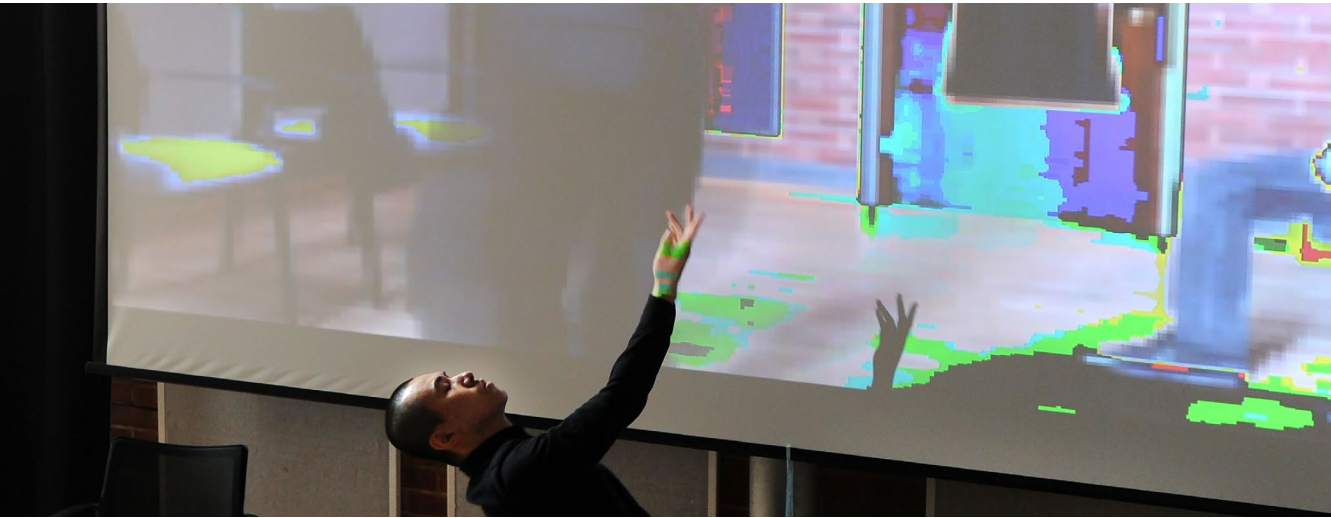
Education, collaboration, knowledge sharing and access to finance are seen as being the biggest challenges in the CreaTech movement which combines creativity and technology. The term STEAM highlights the importance of an education in the Arts in addition to STEM subjects, “in order to respond to the growing digital skills gap, creativity should not be ignored.”<sup>24</sup> Collaboration is also critical as a growing number of sectors require collaboration between creative and tech firms, and is seen as both a skill and an economic or business activity in itself.

“*I think opportunities for the Creative Industries to tap into other sectors and support other sectors are boundless really. I think COVID highlighted the importance of that.*”  
(CI industry body)

“A lot of how the university sector and the public sector policy frames the Creative Industries is through a focus on a particular type of creativity...We take a much broader view of what the creative sector can be, namely a ‘creative ecosystem’. In some ways it doesn’t make sense to just focus on artists or big film production, because when you see how they work they are reliant on lots of individual businesses on our patch. So, I think it’s interesting to look at where businesses, enterprise and academia intersect.” (Planner)

The pandemic sped up the development of new technologies across sectors, but particularly in the screen industry. Virtual production is at the intersection between video games and film, so people trained in very different disciplines are having to learn about each other’s skills very quickly. Interdisciplinarity and learning to work with new technologies across disciplines, as well as communication on and off set are vital skills. It also raises questions about who is able to access this new technology, and the environmental impact of it. The training, skills development, workflows and frameworks are being developed as the new technology is being used.





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*On the one hand virtual production democratises the film production process in that something like the Mandalorian was filmed in London, it does have very interesting technological innovations. But it does raise questions around environmental sustainability because to fuel technological innovations there are huge energy requirements.” (Film Industry trade body)*

Immersive technologies are also being developed quickly and creating new storytelling potential. The BFI is questioning whether funding for immersive story film makers should operate in the same way as funding for traditional film makers. From a curatorial perspective it raises interesting questions about how you can preserve immersive work.

Dr Mariza Dima specialises in User Experience and User Interface design for developing meaningful and engaging interactions AR and haptic technologies. She has worked between academia and the Creative Industries as an interaction designer and creative technologist in R&D projects combining engineering and design approaches. Her design approach is holistic and experiential, using collaborative design processes and viewing it as an educational and transformative experience rather than participating in it as a design expert. Sutton House Stories is an on-going project in collaboration with National Trust - Sutton House, a Tudor house in Hackney and an important place of history in central London which explores affective storytelling for situated learning in the cultural heritage context using smart glass Augmented Reality and is developing a framework for designing smart glass Augmented Reality experiences in this specific context. She also consults on strategies for devising and developing digital projects and user interactions in the creative industries and has expertise in design methods for collaboration and co-creation.



## Other important concerns raised

**NEED TO INVEST  
IN AND MAINTAIN  
AFFORDABLE SPACE  
IN WEST LONDON**

**CUTS TO ARTS  
IN GENERAL  
AND FINANCIAL  
SUSTAINABILITY**

**ENERGY PRICE  
RISES AND COST  
OF LIVING CRISIS -  
BUSINESS SURVIVAL  
AND ROLE OF  
CREATIVE AND  
CULTURAL SECTORS**

**FUTURE  
PLANNING IN  
UNCERTAIN  
TIMES**

**NEED FOR  
FINANCE AND  
LEGAL EXPERTS  
IN CREATIVE  
SECTORS**

**DIGITAL - NEW  
PRACTICES AND  
TECHNOLOGIES,  
PREVALENCE IN  
OUR LIVES**

**WORKING  
CONDITIONS  
AND PRACTICES  
- FREELANCERS  
AND PAY**

**WELLBEING  
AND MENTAL  
HEALTH**

## 6.0 CONCLUSIONS: CREATIVE HUBS IN HE

For the last decade there has been an increasingly strong appetite and need both within the Creative and Cultural Industries and the university sector to find innovative ways to work together, continue to improve on opportunities for students and bridge the knowledge gap between industry and academia. 'Examples of collaborations between creative industries, universities and local policy makers are becoming more common and, as a result, the 'triple helix' approach is now a reality also within the cultural and creative economy.'<sup>25</sup> Historically, UK Higher Education institutes often have had active relationships with arts and culture by hosting performing arts spaces on campus, opening up facilities for arts groups or film crews, hosting events and workshops, employing practitioners who teach and engage externally, and taking on academic research in arts and culture. Increasingly, these activities are being formalised through campus based academic hubs and networks, and progressively incorporated into research design by funder requirements and REF impact case studies.

"Third spaces are thought of as 'spaces which are neither solely academic spaces nor solely creative and cultural production spaces but an open, creative and generative combination of the two.' These approaches help for establishing the importance of creative hub initiatives as co-constructed and collaborative".<sup>29</sup>

There are several aspects to the value of HE in the local cultural economy:

- 1) the creative human capital, of creative graduates and academic practitioners, that benefit a creative local economy;
- 2) the knowledge exchange between universities and creative economies, often associated with 'third spaces' where the university is a civic resource;
- 3) the improved mental wellbeing of involvements

in arts and creativity.

While these partnerships have traditionally been linked to less formalised relationships for teaching activities – such as organising exhibitions, giving public lectures, sitting on advisory boards and organising student placements – it is important to cultivate more strategic policies to develop and foster networks to encourage collaboration and exchange.<sup>26</sup>

Ashton and Comunian<sup>27</sup> conducted a review of creative hubs in the UK Higher Education landscape and identified seven types of HE based Creative Hubs ranging from temporary spaces and competitions, through rented workspace, incubators or shared labs, to business support networks and impact driven or applied research centres. Both physical and virtual spaces are important, but so are activity programmes and networking opportunities. Further to this the balance between the hub's internal vs external facing role needs to be considered. The hub as a space of experimentation and serendipity can allow for unexpected collaborations as universities are spaces where people have the freedom to experiment without boundaries or the need to conform to commercial success. It is in this environment that art can sometimes thrive such as the successes of Monty Python, Greg Davies or Lee Mack, as students get the chance to find their own art form. Combine this with collaboration and we find new art or push the boundaries more than we otherwise might. A hub needs to have 'a clear enough established set of aims and approaches to be coherent and compelling to those that it might engage, yet open and flexible enough to be emergent, co-constructed and collaborative.'<sup>28</sup> Indeed as Ashton and Comunian state:

“  
*Across the different types of hubs we identify, there was a recurring theme around the balance between connecting communities of practice and creating communities of practice. A balance between the extant and the emergent. How established is the knowledge and how open are the networks?*”<sup>30</sup>

# Pathways to collaborations between HE and the CCI sector

Through our research and drawing from other work about Higher Education and Creative Industry exchanges we have identified the following strategic ideas for action to foster collaborations between Brunel University London and the CCI sector.

## CREATE AND IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKING

It is vital that organisations outside of Higher Education institutes understand what opportunities for exchange or partnership with HE look like and what kinds of partnerships could be developed. A common request by professionals interviewed in our study was a desire:

*To see examples of projects and partnership models to understand the practicalities of working with a university.*

*To better understand the expertise of Brunel academics to identify common interests and knowledge transfer opportunities - highlighting the need for a 'common language'.*

In research into collaborations between Creative Industries and Higher Education, Cole found that most partnerships came about either through a direct ask, where one party seeks out the other with an idea, or through meeting at networking events aimed at introducing industry and academia who might have shared interests such as a seminar series aimed at exploring how to develop collaborations. 'Both forms of initiation involved an identical period of unsupported collaboration, in terms of finances, resources and teaching relief, to develop ideas, nurture the partnership, and begin the knowledge exchange process prior to external funding being awarded. None of the collaborators mentioned begrudging this period, although several noted that they treated

the work, at this stage, as a passion project.<sup>31</sup>

Case studies from our research showed that in cases where there was or had been a working relationship this was often put down to having a personal connection with someone at Brunel that informally and organically led to a project or student engagement. A key challenge

is to nurture opportunities for these connections to be made and maintained over time, and of course to maintain such relationships when a staff member moves on. Ultimately if connections are only built in this fashion it is more down to providence than planning that these relationships take place.

## UNDERSTANDING EACH OTHER'S OBJECTIVES AND WORKING PRACTICES

As our interviews revealed, research collaborations or R&D activities tend to emerge from common needs when both parties find a shared goal, interest or passion. This can emerge from initial informal meetings or attending professional or research seminars where topics or societal challenges get discussed from cross-disciplinary and cross-professional perspectives. While this is a positive, these cross-disciplinary collaborations also require each party to learn one another's 'industry' culture and language. Racing in and not allowing the time to develop such a lexicon can lead to misunderstandings and assumptions, so it is helpful to dedicate time to the development of the design language as well as practice.

"Within the same knowledge exchange project, individuals may hold different interests, with some parties more invested in the process of knowledge exchange, some in the afterlife of the co-created output, and others in both process and product equally. Upfront discussions about expectations, time frames and budgets for the complete process, including the promotion of any outputs, can reduce later areas of tension."<sup>32</sup>

Impact needs to be thought of bilaterally so that the needs by both partners are addressed and so that transformations occur both in the CCI sector and in the advancement of knowledge, ideally combined with enhancing the student or graduate experience where possible.

## TACKLING TIME AND STAFF CONSTRAINTS

Practitioners or industry partners are sometimes hesitant to work with academic partners. Through our conversations we found that some are concerned about partnerships being truly reciprocal, and unclear about how it will benefit their organisation. There is sometimes hesitancy to work with academic partners as it is regarded as an additional investment in time, especially in smaller organisations, the charity sector, and in heritage and arts organisations who are struggling with funding and with limited staff resources. CCI businesses also focussed on the cost of their time and how collaborations

with HE need to have valuable outcomes and/or be profitable.

Academics sometimes feel hesitant to enter collaborations due to similar pressures on their time and resources, and not all academic work lends itself to collaborative partnerships. Brunel already offers knowledge transfer schemes and pilot funding for pilot or experimental projects. Better demonstrating the positive outcomes and cross-fertilization of ideas emerging from collaboration with CCI practitioners and professionals could help with overcoming some of these concerns.

## HIGHLIGHTING 'VALUE' IN COLLABORATION

The various CCI sectors we talked to recognised the potential of engaging with relevant academic research and student projects and training. Existing collaborations with academics have led to manifold outputs, from collaborative research outputs such as industry relevant reports, R & D innovation, films, international symposia, research, collaborative PhD studentships to mention a few. Such collaborations have led to changes in policy; generation of new ideas, knowledge and industry specific resources; research into areas

"It's really edifying to see how many people are interested and curious in our findings from working with academia. We have a postdoc working with us, and to have that space, we don't really have that time or position. For someone to really think through these things and then advise us on what they've found, it's really useful for us." (Film Industry trade body)

that the particular sectors might not have time to pursue due to time pressures, staff shortages and financial constraints. Brunel



University London should act as a ‘laboratory to generate ideas’ – offering a public space for ongoing conversations about future trends, technologies, culture and societal challenges and transformations.

## ENHANCING STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES

It is crucial that HE offers transversality and connections with reality. Placements, internships and talks from professionals in the sector are key in training the new generation of CCI practitioners. Such work is critical for a young person’s education and often provides an entry route into artistic industries, which, in the past has often been through giving of free time and work for ‘exposure’. This can often be achieved with funded schemes and opportunities when industry and a university work together.

Interdisciplinarity is key for the CCI sector, Brunel needs to offer transversal UG and PG degrees that allow students to combine subject areas from theatre to business

studies, design, law, media studies or computing. The possibilities are endless! A proposal would be to create a Creative Industries degree that crosses disciplines and builds a student’s knowledge of how the CCI sector functions, covering different disciplines (allowing some students choice in their speciality) but also covering clear areas such as arts administration, grant applications, marketing, activism and similar. Arts education for the modern day and for the future needs to include elements of the digital and interactivity. Such a degree could build a student’s position in the creative world more widely than a subject specific model.

Brunel Hive is the growth and engagement platform at Brunel Business School. We are fully aligned with the mission of Brunel University London: championing and delivering ‘engaged scholarship’. Brunel HIVE provides the ideal structure to accelerate knowledge exchange by connecting our academics, business consultants and students with businesses. We aim to engineer the accelerated growth for businesses based in West London and beyond. We have over 120 research-focused academics working on emerging critical themes including Artificial Intelligence, Sustainable Development, Organisational Transformation, and Corporate Brand Management. The future for university-industry-society collaborations is exciting. The future for co-creating new sustainable business models is equally fascinating. The new 5G world is set to transform our ways of creating new value, for the benefit of all stakeholders. At Brunel University London, and at Brunel Business School, we embrace these new challenges and opportunities.

# 7.0 STRATEGIC SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES HUB BRUNEL

A number of key suggestions have evolved from this research for Brunel University London on how to develop a Creative Industries Hub:

- Create clear points of contact for creative and cultural sector inquiries.
- Bring together academics and practitioners around focused and relevant themes: provisionally of Diversity and Inclusion, place making and new digital practices.
- Develop a programme of labs or events on and off campus that enable both formal and informal meetings and cross-fertilisation of ideas.
- Reciprocal relationships to support the arts by offering spaces, bringing groups onto campus, training and business support, short term research packages – for example understanding local community needs, develop storytelling for social enterprise.
- Promote and encourage cross disciplinary academic and professional work embedding technology and other practices. This would involve significant thought about how to remove some of the barriers alongside some culture change.
- Appoint a part-time co-ordinator for the Creative Industries Hub to continue developing and fostering contacts, set up a regular monthly series of public engagements from networking events to films, seminars and talks. This could lead onto further research.
- Build and foster relationships with local community interest groups and help with managing a network that other organisations can draw on to share knowledge and spread the word about CCI initiatives.
- Develop toolkits on collaborative working that can enable easier access and understanding about how partnership models work.

# CI Hub academic support

## ***Creating one online hub to gather and showcase resources:***

There are a lot of exciting engagements and fruitful partnerships that already occur between Brunel academics in CBASS and the Creative and Cultural Industries. This could also include explaining and showcasing latest research and initiatives in key thematic areas, in an online format – creating an online hub of resources. Develop the CI Hub website to showcase research and other projects with a focus on key themes, promoting this to university staff and externally, ensuring that both local (West London) and wider global research is featured.

## ***Maximise impact through a coordinated CCI approach:***

There is already a range of excellent initiatives developed by the Research Support and Development Office, Impact leads, course leaders, the Professional Development Centre and the Engagement Strategy Support Unit in terms of engagement with Creative Industries. These need to be co-ordinated more visibly to maximise impact.

## ***Regular CI sector and Brunel academics networking events:***

Academics want opportunities to meet non-academics to let relationships grow organically. Developing partnerships often requires long term conversations – over time Brunel needs to allow space, resources, time and skills for this to happen. Immediate actions could include:

Encourage Brunel academics to attend industry events, and enable this – perhaps with a small fund to attend a number of local events a year or skills/time tokens.

Match Brunel's expertise with industry needs and build a critical mass around these key topics via a central office, working with the PDC / Placements / RDSO / ESSU.

Create a number of community events (perhaps with the Brunel Engagement Team) for informal conversations, with events themed around cross cutting themes, that could include Pecha Kucha and skills swaps, perhaps published in the Hillingdon Herald.

A number of local events to speak about funding and encourage collaborations across departments.

# CI Hub student support

Placements in the arts are hard to get and we need to come up with novel models to make this happen. The CI Hub could develop a placement package that includes information for the employers on what to do/expect, financial support for the students, flexibility in lengths of placements. Initiatives could include:

Skills training courses.

Business skills are already taught by the Entrepreneur Hub for students and graduates going into setting up businesses in the arts after they graduate – promote this specifically for those working in the Creative Industries. In addition, practical skills courses across CCI relevant courses are needed to bridge the skills gap when moving into industry.

Link up with the regular graduate CI career fair advertised across the university.

Placements, internships and jobs board on the CI Hub website

For example link up with industry organisations to connect Brunel students with companies that have small pieces of work that need doing.

Develop a focused CI Hub Alumni mentoring scheme.

CBASS/CI Hub organised site visits for students to key venues

Encourage collaborations between academics and the CCI sector to organise fieldtrips, site visits and days out to expose students to the latest developments, trends and working practices in the CCI sector.

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