

# Valuing Creative and Cultural R&D and Innovation

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# Executive Summary

Government policy recognises the Creative Industries as an economic success story and a force for innovation and R&D in the UK economy.<sup>01</sup> In 2024, “GVA in the DCMS sectors increased by an estimated 2.6% compared to 2023, while the UK as a whole grew by 1.0%.”<sup>02</sup> Research, Development & Innovation (RD&I) play an important role in the Creative Industries, stimulating ideas and growth that filter through to the wider UK economy.<sup>03</sup>

Driving this growth is a mix of dynamic creativity, experimentation and social innovation carried out by artists, curators, freelancers and cultural organisations across the country - from Rambert to Queer Britain, Birmingham Museums Trust to Battersea Arts Centre, storytellers to librarians. Though this is a vibrant field of activity, it lacks a clear narrative or an easy-to-understand set of metrics. RD&I is still often considered the domain of hard science and technology. In both the creative and cultural sector and in national policy, it remains significantly



Arts and humanities are not simply beneficiaries of R&D, they are the fertile ground in which invention, design and application come together.

*Sir Christopher Smith, AHRC<sup>05</sup>*

underrated and often taken for granted. At the same time, social innovation has fallen out of favour in policy and lost a champion in Nesta, who have stepped away from the supporting the arts.<sup>04</sup>

This paper, produced by The Audience Agency and Careful Industries working alongside Arts Council England, aims to build the case for the importance of RD&I in the creative and cultural sector, mapping how it operates across the sector, assessing its strengths and weaknesses, and identifying the policy actions needed to unlock its full potential. It draws together insight from across arts and cultural organisations and individual practitioners to gather a view of the current RD&I landscape - from independent artists creating new work to national institutions exploring the future of technology.

The report considers the different definitions of RD&I used by government, funders and the sector, suggesting ways in which more inclusive framings and data could help to support growth and drive evidence-informed policy. It illustrates with case studies the overlapping areas of RD&I undertaken by arts and cultural organisations and practitioners: artistic, technological, place & societal and business, with environmental as a thread across them all.

The future of the creative and cultural sector rests on its ability to innovate in the face of growing economic pressures, changing audience behaviours and fast-paced technological change. Without such innovation, there is a risk of not realising the full public benefit of the arts and culture, not capitalising on the opportunities for additional social impact, not benefitting from the full impact of artistic breakthroughs able to reflect society now, and not realising the potential for technological change brought about by innovators across the sector.



Without the right definitions and tools to measure it and effective policies in place to support it, the Government risks ignoring the full value of R&D in the UK economy, and missing out on incentivising investment in innovation in AHSS-related sectors and activities.

*Understanding R&D in the arts, humanities and social sciences*<sup>06</sup>

# Policy recommendations

Realising the full economic and social potential of the creative and cultural sector demands a collective effort from the Government, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), the sector and those in the wider policy ecosystem. Our eleven recommendations to support a transformation in the UK's creative and cultural RD&I span four distinct areas: national strategy, sector development, investment and impact, and research.

## A NATIONAL STRATEGY

**Revise UK RD&I strategy and policies to be genuinely intersectoral and transdisciplinary, with creativity and culture as embedded within them as science and technology is now.**

- A1/** Establish clearer, joined up accountability and responsibility for co-ordination of policy and funding of RD&I across the creative and cultural sector, advocating for its value and making decisions based on evidence.
- A2/** Revise strategies and policies to recognise and value the creative and cultural sector's essential role within the UK's RD&I ecosystem, and as a driver of economic, social and environmental value.
- A3/** Evolve definitions and related guidance for RD&I in ways that recognise the fundamental role of creativity and cultural understanding in RD&I in all policy areas, industries, sectors and disciplines.
- A4/** Use DCMS's Cultural & Heritage Capital framework to recognise and value cultural and heritage assets as inputs to, and outputs of, creative and cultural RD&I.

## B SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

**Strengthen creative and cultural RD&I by nurturing a more robust innovation ecosystem.**

- B1/** Recognise and support activities that build the RD&I capacity of the creative and cultural sector, in particular its high proportion of freelancers and small-to-medium enterprises.
- B2/** Recognise that opportunity lies in the relationships between organisations and practitioners and the tacit knowledge and individual skills of the highly mobile workforce.
- B3/** Develop, attract and retain entrepreneurial talent at all levels.

## C INVESTMENT AND IMPACT

**Deliver resilience through investment in new systemic RD&I programmes for arts and culture.**

- C1/** Fund 'Basic Research' in and involving the arts and cultural sectors.
- C2/** Key creative and cultural RD&I funders to widen their support for entrepreneurship and risk taking within existing funding programmes and alternative financial instruments.
- C3/** Support local authorities and their local creative and cultural sectors to include arts and cultural RD&I within place-based funding bids and projects.

## D UNDERTAKE FURTHER RESEARCH

- D1/** Develop an impact framework which recognises the contribution of creative and cultural RD&I to industrial RD&I, social innovation, the commercial experience economy and to the arts and cultural sector itself.
- D2/** Collect and make available granular evidence of creative and cultural RD&I activities including best practice in policy design, decision-making and making the case for investment.

Full recommendations are set out in "Detailed Recommendations" on page 56.

# The remit of this report

The “creative industries” were first defined as a sector in 1998, in a mapping document produced for the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS). They were defined 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>07</sup>

This report prefers the term “creative and cultural sector,” which has recently come into more common usage, alongside “creative and cultural economy.”<sup>08</sup> Both terms are inclusive of creative roles in other sectors, as well as the wider heritage sector. They respond to the fact that “creative industries” has often come to be understood as meaning solely the commercial parts of the sector.

Sector consultation focused on the remit of Arts Council England: primarily non-commercial organisations and practitioners working within Music, Theatre, Dance, Literature, Combined Arts, Visual Arts, Museums, Libraries and Digital Arts. Where we refer specifically to this part of the sector, we use the term “arts and culture,” aligning with the sector’s own usage.

However, many of our findings will have relevance to the wider creative and cultural sector. Where this is the case, we have made it clear.

## How to read this report

- **Section One: The Research, Development and Innovation Landscape** contextualises creative and cultural RD&I in the broader policy landscapes and includes a summary of frequently used definitions for Research & Development and different types of innovation.
- **Section Two: RD&I within Arts and Culture:** offers a snapshot of RD&I activities by arts and cultural organisations and individuals, unpacks the activities and outcomes that comprise four different areas of arts and cultural RD&I, and illustrates them with case studies.
- **Section Three: SWOT analysis** for arts and cultural organisations and practitioners.
- **Section Four: The Value of Creative and Cultural RD&I** demonstrates different forms of value and benefits created by creative and cultural RD&I including artistic, technological, societal, and economic.

- **Section Five: Funding RD&I** draws upon desk research to explain the current funding landscape, reflects on how RD&I activities are funded, and proposes opportunities for improving the funding landscape.
- **Section Six: Detailed Recommendations** sets out specific actions required to deliver our recommendations.

## Acknowledgements

The research was carried out by The Audience Agency (TAA) and Careful Industries working with Arts Council England (ACE). Through discussion, we developed a collaborative approach to understanding the state of R&D and innovation in the creative and cultural sector. The research was funded through an ACE grant, alongside generous in-kind contributions from both TAA and Careful Industries.

Research inputs included a self-selecting sector survey (with 170 respondents), roundtables, and in-depth interviews. In total, 265 practitioners from across the arts and culture sector contributed their insight to the report and we are grateful for their time and expertise. Further details about the methodology can be found in [Appendix One](#).

# 1

# The Research, Development and Innovation Landscape

*This section contextualises creative and cultural RD&I in the broader policy landscapes and includes a summary of frequently used definitions for research & development and different types of innovation.*

Across the R&D and innovation landscape, there are no single, agreed definitions of either R&D or innovation. Across government, academia and the creative and cultural sector, the terms are frequently used in different contexts without an agreed shared meaning. For example, HMRC definitions of R&D differ from those adopted internationally for statistical reporting of R&D and innovation. Different funding streams categorise R&D differently.

Definitions used broadly – as opposed to those particular to creativity or culture – tend to assume businesses undertaking scientific or technological research to improve commercial products. However, artistic and cultural organisations and practitioners include within their definition of R&D a range of artistic and curatorial practices to produce work, professional development, and shifts through adopting new technologies ([see Section 2 for more details](#)). ACE's own definition is more aligned with this artistic and cultural framing.

Consensus around the meaning of key terms related to RD&I is required for a renewed and rebalanced RD&I strategy. The following section sets out how such key terms are understood – including where there is divergence in understanding – and proposes a way forward to greater consensus and shared understanding.

## 1.1 Definitions: R&D

### Policy and Funder Definitions

The OECD Frascati Manual sets out the internationally recognised definition of R&D:

“ *Research and experimental development (R&D) comprise creative and systematic work undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge – including knowledge of humankind, culture and society – and to devise new applications of available knowledge.*<sup>09</sup>

The Frascati Manual informs UK government definitions for statistical, reporting, and funding purposes – for example, by the Office of National Statistics, within the Business Enterprise R&D Survey and in Higher Education Data Collection among others.<sup>10</sup> However, these definitions often assume the bodies undertaking R&D are for-profit businesses, even though the Frascati manual explicitly recognises R&D in the government/public, Higher Education and (private) non-profit sectors. They also assume the new knowledge resulting from R&D is technical or scientific in nature, even though the Frascati R&D definition explicitly admits other classes of knowledge.

In 2017 Hasan Bakhshi and Elizabeth Lomas proposed updating the Frascati definition to better reflect the types of R&D both within the creative industries and opening up greater opportunities for intersectoral work beyond the creative industries.

“ *Research and experimental development (R&D) comprise creative and systematic work undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge – including knowledge of humankind, culture and society – and to devise new applications of **economic, cultural or social value** of available knowledge.*<sup>11</sup>

(bold to indicate additional text)

These proposed changes have not been adopted.

In summary, OECD's Frascati Manual distinguishes between:

- **Basic research** – “undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge... without any particular application or use in view.”
- **Applied research** – “directed primarily towards a specific, practical aim or objective”.
- **Experimental development** – “systematic work... directed to producing new products or processes or improving existing products or processes.”<sup>12</sup>

Whilst UKRI does not have a single definition of R&D across its constituent parts, Innovate UK – its innovation agency focused on business innovation – divides R&D into:

- **Fundamental research** – “Experimental or theoretical work undertaken to gain new knowledge... without any direct practical application or usage”.
- **Feasibility studies** – “analysis... of a project’s potential... achieved by uncovering its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats”.
- **Industrial research** – “planned research or critical investigation to gain new knowledge and skills... for the purpose of product development, processes or services that lead to an improvement in existing products, processes or services.”
- **Experimental development** – “acquiring, combining, shaping and using existing scientific, technological, business and other relevant knowledge and skills with the aim of developing new or improved products, processes or services.”<sup>13</sup>

Arts Council England's funding and classification guidance defines R&D as:

“ R&D projects are typically where a person or group develop a new idea or explore a new way of working. We are keen to support projects that allow creative and cultural practitioners and organisations to develop their work. An R&D project can have a significant effect on an individual's or organisation's work.<sup>14</sup>”

## Definition for tax purposes

HMRC's definition of R&D for tax relief purposes is narrower than the OECD definition, additionally requiring R&D projects to seek to achieve an advance in science or technology.<sup>15</sup>

As Victoria Ivanova et al observe in Serpentine's 'Future Art Ecosystems Vol 5. Art x Creative R&D' report, this explicitly excludes work in arts, humanities and social sciences from eligibility for R&D tax credits.<sup>16</sup> Changes introduced by the 2025 Creative Industries Sector Plan support interdisciplinary innovation,<sup>17</sup> but the overall purpose of creative activities will still be required to lead to "an advance in science and technology" even though this is not a criterion within the OECD definition.<sup>18</sup>

## 1.2 Impact of R&D definitions

The different emphasis of each of these definitions shows that major public funders of R&D do not coalesce around a single approach. In a 2017 paper jointly funded by Nesta, Arts Council England and AHRC, Elizabeth Lomas proposed that,



*Rather than having a unique definition of R&D for the arts and cultural knowledge domains there is a value in having one unified R&D definition encompassing all knowledge domains for policy purposes... [This] could in principle result in parity across all knowledge domains.<sup>19</sup>*

While specific domains and contexts will of course require different approaches, the lack of a single definition across policies and funding opportunities not only points to strategic differences, it also creates an opportunity cost for R&D practitioners, whose research activities are displaced by undertaking administrative tasks to find and secure funding.

For arts and cultural organisations and practitioners, understanding the complex policy landscape and parsing the requirements of different funds and funders is resource intensive. The opportunities that do exist are often oversubscribed – such as the 2024 Immersive Arts funding call, within which only 3.32% of applicants received an award.<sup>20</sup>

HMRC's relatively narrow definition has the practical effect of limiting R&D activity in fields beyond science and technology; research by the Creative Industries PEC has found that only 14% of businesses in the wider creative industries are eligible for R&D tax credits, and this restriction has a chilling effect on R&D in arts and culture.<sup>21</sup>

Whilst private non-profit organisations have supposedly been included in the government’s Business Enterprise Research & Development survey<sup>22</sup> since 2023,<sup>23</sup> the language of that research is about businesses. For example, employment statistics are broken down into “scientists & engineers, technicians and other supporting staff.”<sup>24</sup> Its figures putting R&D expenditure by private non-profits at just £1.9bn at 2.7% of the total across all sectors – including business, government and Higher Education – could therefore be treated with some scepticism. Aligning Official Statistics with R&D tax credit claim data is also unhelpful, as the HMRC definition excludes many activities that artistic and cultural organisations undertake that fall within the Frascati definition. As a result of all these factors, there is a lack of reliable evidence of creative and cultural R&D on which to base policy.

A refreshed cross-sector approach to R&D, propagating and valuing both new and existing activities in arts and culture and other sectors, would increase the value of the UK’s R&D activities, enable more cross-pollination and collaboration between sectors, and unblock the pipeline for arts and culture innovators.

## 1.3 Definitions: Innovation

Recent government policy frames innovation – without defining it – in terms of technological outputs and economic and security impacts.<sup>25</sup> There is considerable focus on science and technology as levers for progress.<sup>26</sup> Where UK policy does provide a definition, it unhelpfully conflates ‘business innovation’ with ‘innovation.’

The internationally recognised definition of innovation in the OECD’s Oslo Manual is much broader:

“*An innovation is a new or improved product or process (or combination thereof) that differs significantly from the unit’s previous products or processes and that has been made available to potential users (product) or brought into use by the unit (process).*”<sup>27</sup>

The 2018 version of the Oslo Manual explicitly allows for the ‘units’ referenced in this definition to include not only businesses, but also government and public bodies, Higher Education Institutions, (private) non-profits, and private individuals and “households.”<sup>28</sup>

# 1.4 Impact of Innovation definitions

The dominance of business, science and technology in UK innovation policy has created a two-tiered approach. Such industrial innovation is visible, understood and evidenced, tied directly to measurable, short-term economic outcomes. Meanwhile, ambitious plans for social and cultural progress are left to be financed through “business as usual” models by non-profit organisations who by definition rarely have sufficient retained profits to invest significantly in R&D.

In the absence of broader or alternative UK government definitions, readers of the UK Innovation Survey as official statistics published by government could be forgiven for taking at face value that this is the definition of innovation in UK policy and that it can only apply to businesses and their for-profit products and services. Despite changes made to improve official statistics for R&D expenditure since 2018,<sup>29</sup> UK policy and evidence still need to catch up with the framework the 2018 edition of the OECD Oslo Manual introduces to “measuring innovation beyond the business innovation sector.”<sup>30</sup>

The term “Social Innovation” was popular in central government policy during the 2010-2015 Coalition Government, having increasingly appeared in academic and policy discourse since the 1990s.<sup>31</sup> It was delivered through investment models including Big Society Capital.<sup>32</sup> Under the leadership of innovation policy expert and former government advisor Geoff Mulgan between 2011 and 2019, Nesta performed a vital convening role helping to rally public, third and private sector organisations around this idea.

Social innovation then fell out of favour in UK policy. The Office of Civil Society was absorbed into DCMS’s Civil Society and Youth Directorate in 2016, national policy moved to lower profile social value initiatives and the UK’s social enterprise faced multiple challenges in the intervening years. When Nesta pivoted in 2019-21 towards its missions-based approach, it also stepped away from the creative economy as a priority sector. As a consequence, Nesta ceased its convening role as related to social innovation in the creative and cultural sectors as well as its own investment in that field.<sup>33</sup>

Although its meaning continues to be debated, the concept of social innovation focuses on:

- Solving social needs and problems as its primary purpose<sup>34</sup> – as opposed to profit maximisation.
- Collective or collaborative action across different parts of society, between different types of institutions as well as different institutions e.g. between non-profits, public bodies and businesses and across sectors.

- Solutions involving significant change to society – with a focus on changes to social processes (in contrast to business or technical processes) and the potential to result in changed social power relations.

One of the consequences of confusion over the meaning of social innovation, and inconsistent levels of interest in it within national policy, is the lack of a funding and support infrastructure to scale up the application of outputs of socially directed R&D in order to achieve social or other impact. By comparison, the EU has had a long-term consistent focus on social innovation and has instruments and infrastructure specifically directed at the needs of scaling up social enterprises and their social innovations, such as the InvestEU programme and European Social Fund Plus.<sup>35</sup> The current government launched the Office for the Impact Economy based in the Cabinet Office in late 2025 as an attempt to pull together cross-government policy in this area,<sup>36</sup> following the recommendations of the Social Impact Investment Advisory Group.<sup>37</sup> This is potentially a step in the right direction.

The term ‘inclusive innovation’ is a useful emerging concept, but it does not yet have a place in central government policy or any clear definition. It is increasingly being adopted to draw attention to inequality, in particular in place-making. The work in this area by Diane Coyle and Burcu Sevde Selvi from the Bennett School of Public Policy,<sup>38</sup> along with detailed research by the UK Innovation Districts Group and Connected Places Catapult, offers a framework and recommendations that align well with the strategic purpose of many arts and culture organisations. These show that inclusive innovation is not simply innovation with greater inclusion as its purpose, but also about inclusive – engagement and participatory – practices in both R&D and diffusion of the outputs of R&D. See [Appendix Two](#) for more details.

# Conclusion

To unlock the benefits of RD&I further, greater clarity is needed and formal definitions need to evolve. The lack of clarity is both a strategic issue and an operational problem. Strategically, it limits the potential for creative and cultural R&D to have cut-through and visibility in the national RD&I policy conversation. Operationally, it leads to an over-complicated landscape in which a lack of joined-up terminology and measurement can be a barrier to accessing funding and support.

Government policies relating to science and technology RD&I have become more formalised in the UK in recent years. Under successive governments, science and technology definitions of and approaches to RD&I – which, as Hasan Bakhshi and Elizabeth Lomas noted in 2017, were already dominant in policymaking and funding<sup>39</sup> – have become the default. This orientation towards science and technology RD&I holds the UK back from realising the full “economic, societal and strategic benefits”<sup>40</sup>. For creativity and culture to be fully integrated into the national RD&I strategy and policy for the benefit of all sectors, the importance of social innovation needs to be clearly defined and articulated within all sectors and disciplines.

As discussed in **Section Two**, arts and culture innovation uses a range of innovation practices that draw upon and combine technological, social and inclusive innovation practices to deliver better tangible outcomes for people and places. A cross-sector approach to innovation would enhance government’s ability to deliver change at scale, including but not limited to realising economic benefits, driving technology adoption, meeting social needs in novel ways and creating inclusive outcomes, including increasing social inclusion and community empowerment.

**Appendix Two** offers further clarity on the RD&I landscape through a conceptual framework for innovation and R&D. **Appendix Three** provides detailed suggestions on how to evolve definitions within UK policy.



Research, development and innovation (RDI) is an essential driver of productivity and sustainable growth, and has a critical role in securing economic, societal and strategic benefits.

*Sir Paul Nurse, Independent Review of the UK's Research, Development and Innovation Organisational Landscape*

# 2

## RD&I in Arts and Culture

*This section offers a snapshot of RD&I activities by arts and cultural organisations and individuals, unpacks the activities and outcomes that comprise four different areas of arts and cultural RD&I, and illustrates them with case studies.*

Research for this report focussed on the creative and cultural sector – specifically the activities of arts and cultural organisations and practitioners – where we found a vibrant, complex landscape of RD&I activities.

R&D can be very different in different art forms, and large national organisations innovate in completely different ways to independent artists. Changing how a theatre films and distributes performances is a totally different kind of undertaking to an artist working with materials scientists to revolutionise production methods; selling merchandise does not require the same processes as creating an opera – and on, and on. Yet all of these things – and many, many more – are happening right now, as part of the constant renewal and discovery that powers arts and culture.

Whilst there are established centres for arts and culture RD&I in the UK (Watershed, Serpentine, National Theatre and others), practice across the sector as a whole is still developing, with different terminology and processes used by different practitioners and organisations, supported by an emergent culture of learning and knowledge exchange.









We used a mixed methods approach to our research, drawing together input from 265 practitioners, including the project's advisory boards and those who participated in our self-selecting survey, roundtable discussions, semi-structured interviews, and informal field research. Key stakeholders within the advisory board included PEC, AHRC, DCMS and British Council. Participants in this process were likely to already be engaged with RD&I in some way, and the focus of the research activities was to understand more about self-reported RD&I to build a snapshot of what is currently happening across the sector.

## 2.1 Activities and approaches found

Of survey respondents, 94% were familiar with the term innovation and what it involves. When asked to look ahead, 99% of respondents said their organisation would benefit from more opportunities to innovate.

The current landscape combines a range of formal and informal, funded and unfunded RD&I activities. Arts and culture organisations are more likely than individual artists or practitioners to have taken part in a formal innovation or R&D programmes (75% of organisations and 60% of individuals) compared to a higher number taking part in informal kinds of innovation or R&D (93% of organisations and 86% of individuals). It is likely these levels are high as the results were drawn from a self-selected and proactive group who chose to complete the survey.

Among respondents, the most frequently cited motivations for RD&I activities were some form of artistic, creative or curatorial development, or professional or audience development. The chart below shows the top four survey answers:

Area/s innovation or R&D aimed to address	Organisation	Individual
Artistic/ creative / curatorial outputs	56% 	71% 
Artistic/ creative / curatorial methods	45% 	47% 
Artist or practitioner professional development	44% 	41% 
Audience development	42% 	27% 

A range of other activities were also cited less commonly as both primary and secondary motivations for RD&I practices, falling roughly into three categories: social impact and inclusion, financial and organisational development, and addressing environmental sustainability.

In qualitative research, the creation, use, and development of technology as a field of artistic inquiry and experimental delivery also emerged as a significant driver of innovation. This is an opportunity because CreaTech<sup>41</sup> (the intersection of creative skills and emerging technologies) is currently a focus for major support and funding in the UK, driven by UKRI, Creative UK, AHRC and others. Arts Council England adding Digital Arts as a supported artform (alongside other artforms like theatre) in January 2026 elevates the importance of creative uses of digital technology within its funding.<sup>42</sup>

## Outcomes

Of survey respondents, 49% of organisations and 48% of individuals said their RD&I activity was related to achieving income or economic targets. Within that group, 15% said they had reached their targets, 47% said it is too soon to tell and 19% said they fell short.

When asked what outcomes were generated from RD&I activities:

- The most common result was 'new reusable practices, processes or methodologies' (74% of organisations and 60% of individuals).
- The next three choices were all societal outcomes:
  - ▶ new engagement with minoritised and/ or under-represented audiences (44% of organisations and 33% of individuals)
  - ▶ beneficial social or economic impact for a community or place (42% of organisations and 34% of individuals)
  - ▶ an increase in inclusive working practices (36% of organisations and 35% of individuals)

In addition, a mix of ‘surprising or unintended outcomes’ were given, including:

- *Interdisciplinary partnerships.*
- *The reaction from visitors who reflected on their own losses, grief, joy, memory and gifts.*
- *Work becomes more inclusive as have to let go of “authorship”.*
- *A new prototype product that wasn’t considered in the early stages.*
- *A wish to do more.*

The importance of societal outcomes was a strong theme in how many interviewees and roundtables participants talked about the ambitions for their RD&I activities. These outcomes included:

- *Unlock people’s potential to shape a more interesting, equitable and sustainable world.*
- *Ensure anybody who wants to make music is able to make music.*
- *Creating the conditions for people to be able to experience the world on their doorstep differently.*
- *Understanding the needs and the interests of the people who are living and breathing around our building in the city, we can then take that information back and put something on our stages which is going to speak to them in the best possible way.*

## Processes

Within the many different shapes that creative and cultural RD&I activities can take, respondents identified new collaborations and partnerships, carrying out experimentation, and training or upskilling as being the processes most often used to help develop or launch RD&I activities. The table below shows the top 10 processes used to help develop or launch innovation or R&D activities.

Thinking about your innovation or R&D activities, have they included any of the following processes to help develop and launch them?

	Organisation	Individual
New collaboration/s or partnership/s	88%	70%
Carrying out experimentation	81%	77%
Training or upskilling yourself or your teams	73%	85%
Reviewing and evaluating your development	71%	58%
Carrying out testing	65%	59%
Carrying out or commissioning research	51%	41%
Launching your development externally	45%	37%
Launching your development internally	48%	25%
Considering and/or protecting related Intellectual Property (IP)	34%	30%
Changes to your business structure or governance	26%	21%

Within this research we have seen examples where R&D practices, such as experimentation, are used as a method to allow an organisation to try out a totally new way of working. The results of these experiments can lead to innovations in any area, including business practices, business models and relationships to audiences.

Looking at how RD&I is carried out we found that within organisations:

- 63% of innovation and R&D is led by a team designed for a specific project
- 20% have a dedicated RD&I team
- only 13% have a dedicated RD&I person

## Barriers

Survey responses cite lack of funding or resource as the biggest perceived barrier to undertaking innovation for both organisations (87%) and individuals (88%), with lack of capacity the second major barrier for organisations (82%) and for individuals (50%).<sup>43</sup>

This was backed up in interviews and roundtables where people mentioned “dysfunctional funding models”, a funding landscape that “excludes” people and

*“needing an MBA to speak corporate language”*. Many spoke of financial hardships when trying to work within RD&I:

“ *Our community of creatives are reporting about £10,000 less of income this year than last year, which as a micro company, a freelancer, an artist, is really substantial, and people are leaving and going to other sectors.*

Clare Reddington, CEO Watershed

The Clore Leaderships 2025 World of Work research reflects on the impact this loss of capacity has had on key aspects of operations for the arts and culture sector:

“ *Those within the sector are experiencing high levels of burnout and overwhelm, exacerbated by increased reporting needs, less funding and a lack of organisational capacity.*<sup>44</sup>

The knock-on effect of these challenges - burnout and overload, the crisis of the everyday and the culture of austerity – reduces and removes the ‘absorptive capacity’ of organisations and individuals, making R&D and innovation activities much more difficult. Absorptive capacity is the ability to identify, assimilate, transform, and use external knowledge, research and practice. It is described as “a measure of an organisation’s ability to learn.”<sup>45</sup> It is crucial for innovation, as it enables organisations to leverage external knowledge to develop new products, services, or processes.

The ACE Private Investment in Culture Survey 2025 sets out a clear relationship between financial resilience and the ability to create surplus for reinvestment in innovation activities.

“ *An organisation’s financial resilience and continued viability depends not just on its ability to increase income, but on its ability to create surpluses rather than deficits. Surpluses enable it to build reserves and therefore reinvest – in assets, innovation, managing change – as well as to weather difficult times.*<sup>46</sup>

## Mindset

The mindset and attitudes of the people involved - the individuals, partners, funders, leadership, staff, project teams etc – can also be a barrier to, or a facilitator of, innovation. The survey explored attitudes by asking respondents to what extent they would agree or disagree with a set of statements about things such as confidence, experimenting, risk taking and learning from

failure. The table below shows very high percentages of agreement in response to a list of selected behaviours:

	Organisation	Individual
Recognise the value that innovation activities bring	88% 	95% 
Has leaders that support and encourage innovation	82% 	N/A
Confident developing new ideas and ways of working	74% 	91% 
Recognise the importance of being inclusive	93% 	97% 
Value carrying out experiments as an important way to test things	80% 	96% 
Do not expect to get everything right the first time	85% 	99% 
Comfortable taking risks to foster innovation	74% 	100% 
Values learning from ideas and practices from different contexts e.g. other organisations, sectors, disciplines or places	89% 	99% 

## 2.2 Areas of RD&I

Drawing on the evidence, we have defined four broad areas of RD&I activity:

- 01/ Artistic**
- 02/ Technological**
- 03/ Place and Societal**
- 04/ Business**

Identifying different areas is a useful way to articulate both the differences and the overlaps. It does not imply that they take place in isolation, as many RD&I projects and programmes combine a range of methods and impacts. Neither are these the only kinds of RD&I that occur in the sector – they were simply the most prominent in our research. We also found that environmental sustainability came up as a cross-cutting impact within different areas.

The table on the next page maps each area to both R&D and innovation activities, and briefly describes relevant case studies. Full case studies can be found in [Appendix Five](#).

## 01/ Artistic



**R&D:** Creating or progressing artistic knowledge and creative expression

**Innovation:** Creating, curating, producing or presenting art and art forms or developing existing art and art forms to deliver improved outcomes

- **Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg, Pollinator Pathmaker:** Combining art, science and technology to inspire empathy for non-human species and mobilise communities to take action
- **Team Love, Glastonbury Mycelium Stage:** Revolutionising environmental sustainability in set design
- **Raquel Meseguer Zafe, A Crashcourse in Cloudspotting:** An intimate audio journey exploring the depths of human connection and the subversive act of lying down

## 02/ Technological



**R&D:** Creating or progressing technological knowledge

**Innovation:** Applying new and emerging technologies or applying existing technologies in novel ways to create new or improved outcomes

- **Royal Shakespeare Company, CreaTech Frontiers:** 5-year programme integrating cutting-edge technologies into live performance and creative production
- **Watershed, Pervasive Media Studio:** A fertile lab for R&D and innovation
- **Coral Manton, Building Feminist Futures in Voice Technology:** A grassroots creative computing project that challenges gender bias in AI

## 03/ Place and Societal



**R&D:** Creating or progressing societal or place-based knowledge

**Innovation:** Applying arts and culture knowledge, approaches and practices to create societal or place-based change or deliver improved outcomes

- **Hospital Room:** Redefining what is possible in mental health care environments and setting new standards for patient-centred design
- **Hood Future Studios, ABUELOS:** Community-owned cultural centre designed as civic infrastructure through the lens of radical hospitality
- **Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination, Artscaping:** Place-making arts project with children in the role of researchers in the community

## 04/ Business



**R&D:** Creating or progressing management, economic or organisational knowledge

**Innovation:** Applying new management, economic or organisational methods to create new or improved financial, operational, or governance processes or outcomes

- **Birmingham Museums Trust:** Unified solution for commerce to simplify legacy systems
- **Serpentine, Independent Research Organisation model:** Embracing a new institutional form to spark ecosystem change across the sector
- **Rambert, Peaky Blinders: The Redemption of Thomas Shelby:** Cross-genre innovation uniting artistry and commercial ambition



Artistic R&D leads to advances in artistic knowledge and creative expression, just as science and technology R&D leads to advances in scientific and technological knowledge. From time to time, it might include the invention of a new musical genre or form of media that will be as rare and transformative as the achievement of a scientific moonshot.<sup>47</sup> Artistic R&D takes place in many different contexts – within institutions, in studios, as part of both formal and informal development processes. As Cara Pickering, Head of Creative Places at The Audience Agency, describes, it includes:

“ *the artists, club scenes, DIY spaces and grassroots... This is where new ideas live – and often there isn't always language to claim or communicate the new creation. It's just happening.*

(research roundtable)

In interviews for this project, Jess Thom of Touretteshero referred to R&D as the process of “*consistently exploring an idea, often in collaboration with other people to understand something better, to make something new*” while choreographer **Raquel Meseguer Zafe** called it “*the time you get to scratch an idea before you go into the full process... [which is] essential before we go into a show*”.

As freelance creative director Annette Mees observes:

“ *Creating good culture is not immediately exploitable. It's a fundamentally different pipeline to something that needs to scale or have market fit ... the fact that [legendary theatre director] Peter Brooke changed how people think about the theatre doesn't mean he had a product to sell; his value extraction wasn't seeing his model of theatre making being adopted by others, it was being Peter Brooke.*

Artistic innovation brings artistic R&D to life and also imports innovations and discoveries from other fields and sectors into arts and culture contexts, driven by artistic vision and creative intent. As Kate Pullinger, Co-Director of the Centre for the Cultural and Creative Industries at Bath Spa University put it in a research interview, “*Innovation is about what you do with your R&D.*”

Choreographer Raquel Meseguer Zafe describes the process of creating the interactive audio show ‘A Crashcourse in Cloudspotting’ (see **case study #3**)

as combining highly focussed exploration with serendipity and opportunities generated from collaboration:

“ *I thought I was just making a show, but it ended up becoming a café that I host every month, a book club, an archive, a physical show and a radio play. I couldn't have predicted that.*

Artistic innovation can take many forms: sometimes it involves new and emerging technologies, but it might also be about the application of ingenuity or collaboration to solve a difficult problem. Sometimes it will be part of a formal “innovation programme”, but for many artists, producers and curators it is a natural way of working: the next stage in taking an idea into the world. Jess Thom contextualises innovation in her own practice:

“ *Although the term innovation has implications – and in some contexts people will always hear that as technology – we're really keen to always see it in the broadest sense. For [Touretteshero], innovation is about how we make things work better for different people's bodies and minds – we know disabled people experience barriers.*

[interview]

For Thom, the process of “*making things work better for different people's bodies and minds*” is an ongoing practice that can lead to the creation of products at scale. For instance, Touretteshero's Sonic Stories, a tool that helps audiences anticipate the sonic landscape of performances, brings to life findings from research into different disabled people's experiences of sound in spaces to create better experience. This is now used at a number of venues including The Globe and The Royal Shakespeare Company, and in 2023 was used by more than 2000 people, at performances including the RSC's *Matilda*.<sup>48</sup>



*Raquel Meseguer Zafe, A Crashcourse in Cloudspotting. Photo ©Paul Samuel White*



- 1 **Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg, Pollinator Pathmaker:** Combining art, science and technology to inspire empathy for non-human species and mobilise communities to take action
- 2 **Team Love, Glastonbury Mycelium Stage:** Revolutionising environmental sustainability in set design
- 3 **Raquel Meseguer Zafe, A Crashcourse in Cloudspotting:** An intimate audio journey exploring the depths of human connection and the subversive act of lying down

## 02/ Technological



Artist-led technological R&D catalyses innovation in ways that extend far beyond art and cultural production, driving technological advancement across multiple sectors through collaborations between artists, scientists, and engineers. In 'Future Art Ecosystems 5', Victoria Ivanova and her co-authors describe art and advanced technologies as comprising an ecosystem including:

- Artistic experimentation with emerging technologies like AI, quantum computing, web3, VR/AR, and other cutting-edge tools.
- Technological innovation driven by creative practitioners.
- Cross-sector collaborations between artists, cultural organisations, technologists, academics, and policymakers.
- Creative R&D that integrates artistic production with technological development<sup>49</sup>.

As well as surfacing new technologies and novel applications – such as Rebecca Allen's pioneering 3D motion-capture work,<sup>50</sup> which shaped the games industry – technological R&D in the arts brings reflection and critique.

The recent British Council report *Why Technology Needs Artists*, edited by Hannah Andrews and Aurora Hawcroft, shows how this critical influence extends beyond arts and cultural organisations and has led to transformative innovations including digital platforms, AI, and quantum computing. In the same volume, Erik Lucero from Google Quantum AI notes that artists help his team “push

the boundaries of human knowledge” towards assessing the social value of technologies, while Laura Herman from Adobe emphasises how working with artists refocuses her attention on more fundamental questions, addressing issues such as inclusion and community needs.

Andrews and Hawcroft also chart how artist-led technology R&D delivers crucial social and economic value by ensuring that innovation reflects cultural diversity and serves community needs, and testing not just what is technically possible but socially desirable.

Technology R&D in the arts also plays an important societal and ethical function, shaping pathways toward sustainable and equitable futures at a moment when technological development risks deepening existing inequalities. Artists reimagine what technologies can be and who they can serve, challenging the assumption that innovation must follow extractive or exclusionary models – for instance, Libby Heaney’s quantum computing artworks demystify complex technologies for broad audiences while interrogating questions of access and ownership.

Anagram’s “Goliath: Playing with Reality” explores schizophrenia and online gaming through immersive VR storytelling, challenging perceptions of mental health. The project won the Grand Jury Prize at the Venice International Film Festival and was funded by ACE, among other organisations.

In parallel to artist-led development, cinema and digital streaming – pioneered by the Metropolitan Opera in New York City in 2006 – are now mainstream audience engagement mechanisms. Live streaming by both the Royal Opera House and the National Theatre in the mid-2000s has gone on to fundamentally change how theatre and the performing arts are experienced, distributed and accessed. NT Live has captured over one hundred productions, and has transformed from a pilot project funded by ACE into a financially sustainable venture that now contributes 5% of the NT annual income.

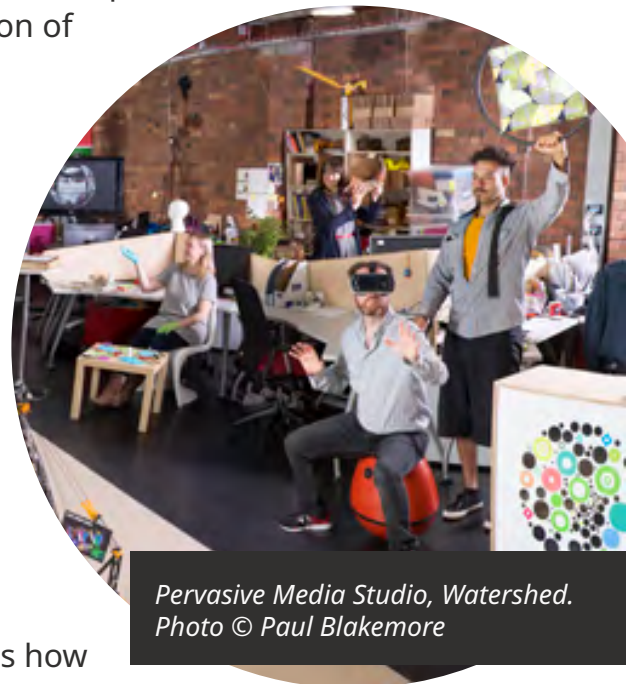
Over the last eight years the term CreaTech has been used widely by the Creative Industries Council (CIC) and others to characterise the role of



*Coral Manton, Building Feminist Futures in Voice Technology: Women Reclaiming AI Workshop at Knowle West Media Centre. Photo © Ibolya Feher*

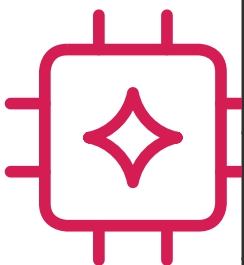
technology-driven innovation in the creative industries.<sup>51</sup> It represents a dynamic space where artists, technologists, and entrepreneurs co-create new products, experiences, and platforms, positioning artists not just as users of technology but as co-creators of its future. The 2025 CreaTech Report presents a compelling case for the UK to harness this fusion of creative industries and emerging technologies as a driver of economic growth, innovation, and global leadership. The report emphasises that CreaTech’s value extends beyond economic metrics, contributing significantly to audience engagement, mental health care, and cultural participation.

An example of the transformative impact of CreaTech is Museums in the Metaverse (MiM),<sup>52</sup> led by the University of Glasgow and funded through a £5.6 million investment from the UKRI Innovation Accelerator. MiM is a pioneering Extended Reality (XR) platform that enables virtual access to digitised museum collections, supports user-generated exhibitions, and facilitates immersive storytelling through VR and AR technologies. It exemplifies how creative and technological collaboration can unlock new forms of cultural accessibility and innovation.



*Pervasive Media Studio, Watershed.  
Photo © Paul Blakemore*

## Case Studies



- 4 **Royal Shakespeare Company, CreaTech Frontiers:** 5-year programme integrating cutting-edge technologies into live performance and creative production
- 5 **Watershed, Pervasive Media Studio:** A fertile lab for R&D and innovation
- 6 **Coral Manton, Building Feminist Futures in Voice Technology:** A grassroots creative computing project that challenges gender bias in AI



Place-based and societal innovation applies arts and culture knowledge, approaches and practices to create societal or place-based change or deliver improved outcomes. It creates positive social, health, wellbeing and experiential outcomes; some projects create this change for the whole of society, while others deliver outcomes for people in a specific place or for people who are members of a specific community or interest group. This innovation can take many forms, including:

- Engaging more and different people in arts and culture.
- Delivering positive outcomes for people and places.
- Developing inclusive practices that make art and culture more relevant and accessible for everyone.
- Exploring the social and ethical consequences of innovation and new technologies.

This happens because arts and culture creates opportunities that make change possible. It creates spaces for people to learn, have fun, develop new social connections and find meaning. In the words of Amahra Spence talking about her reimagining of a hotel and cultural centre in Birmingham (see [case study #8](#)):



*It will establish a 'site of imagination', giving space to rehearse the future, designing the ABUELOS space, testing and co-designing future programming ideas, exploring reimagining's of governance, growing skills and capacities of artists and community to become custodians of future cultural assets.*

Meanwhile, [Watershed's Pervasive Media Studio](#), launched in 2008, has successfully created a space for risk-taking and experimentation in creative technology, providing an inclusive ecosystem where ideas can evolve without rigid deadlines or commercial pressure.

These kinds of projects and programmes combine art and cultural production with positive societal intent, often consciously seeking to deliver a societal change in addition to delivering an artistic or cultural experience. As Hannah Fox, director of the Bowes Museum in County Durham says:



*what we want to do as an organisation is unlock people's potential to shape a more interesting, equitable and sustainable world.*

[roundtable participant]

This unlocking of people potential is supported by ACE and Cebr's recent paper on the spillover impacts of publicly funded arts and culture, which finds that:



*Beyond individual benefits, publicly funded arts initiatives also help reduce social isolation and foster prosocial behaviours.<sup>53</sup>*

An example is Hospital Rooms (see [case study #7](#)), a pioneering arts and mental health charity that have transformed 50 NHS mental health units with vibrant, restorative artworks, improving the atmosphere for thousands of patients, staff, and visitors. Projects have demonstrated measurable benefits, with clinicians reporting a reduction in incidents on ward, improved staff morale, and enhanced patient engagement (particularly amongst young people, who record a 79% repeat participation rate).

Outside of arts and culture, there is growing recognition of the importance of place-based innovation as a tool for redistributing opportunity and addressing regional social and economic imbalances. The Government's Industrial Strategy describes itself as:



*unashamedly place-based, recognising that stronger regional growth is critical for the competitiveness of the [priority Industrial Strategy sectors] and the resilience of the national economy.<sup>54</sup>*

Place-based arts and culture innovation leads to positive economic outcomes: in 2023, Liverpool Biennale generated £24.3m in local economic impact and Manchester International Festival £39.2m, while Durham's Lumiere Festival has generated £43m for the city across its lifetime.<sup>55</sup> In addition, economist Marianna Mazzucato finds that art and culture:



*Hospital Rooms, Workshop with Nilpua Yasmin at IKON Gallery, 2025. Photo ©Tegen Kimbley*

“

*not only improves local quality of life but demonstrates that all people, especially the most marginalised, deserve dignity, beauty, and joy. This investment in the aesthetic and social fabric of everyday life fosters self-worth and belonging, leading to greater civic engagement and economic participation.*<sup>56</sup>

The local and regional arts and culture organisations that took part in our research were constantly innovating to improve the lives of their local communities, bringing ingenuity and new methods to invest in the “*aesthetic and social fabric of everyday life.*” This kind of innovation is often characterised by close listening and responsiveness – testing out what works and changing course as needed.

Emily Dowdeswell, Director at Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination (see [case study #9](#)), which works with schools and communities to connect people with nature, explained her organisation’s “*responsibility, our role, is creating the conditions for people to be able to experience the world on their doorstep differently.*” This approach is built into the business model of Curve Theatre in Leicester, according to its director of creative programming, Kay Hardiman:

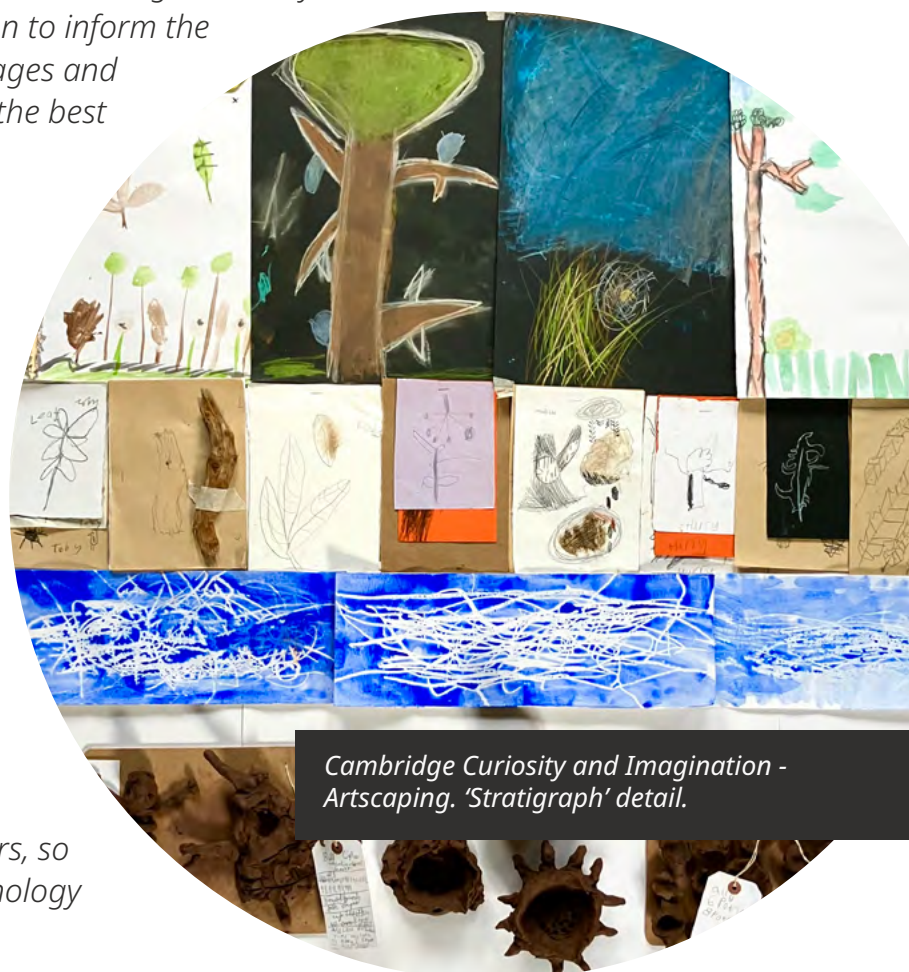
“

*It's really important that we understand the needs and interests of the people who are living, working and learning in our city. We can then use this information to inform the programming of our theatre stages and ensure shows speak to them in the best possible way.*

Beyond audience engagement, some artist-led organisations are rethinking the building blocks of their artforms using technologies to reduce barriers to access and participation in the arts. For instance, Hamble Wallace, of Alexander Whitley Dance Company (AWDC), shared that:

“

*Dance has fundamental health and relationship benefits, but there is a massive inequality of access to dance, of dance in schools, and support for creators, so we recognised that digital technology*



Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination - Artscaping. 'Stratigraph' detail.

*was a potential, real, massive enabler of there being more equality in who can take part.*

(roundtable participant)

AWDC has created accessible digital tools such as Otmo, a free tool that allows non-specialists to use motion-capture software. Not only is Otmo free-to-use but it is guided by artistic, philosophical and theoretical understandings of the body in relation to technology; it is an artist-created tool that embeds different values and approaches to those baked into commercial software. A commitment to the democratising aspects of technology is shared by Tim Yates from accessible music technology pioneers Drake Music, who described his organisation's ultimate goal as ensuring *"anybody who wants to make music is able to make music,"* removing barriers at every stage of the music-making process.

## Case Studies



- 7 **Hospital Room**: Redefining what is possible in mental health care environments and setting new standards for patient-centred design
- 8 **Hood Future Studios, ABUELOS**: community-owned cultural centre designed as civic infrastructure through the lens of radical hospitality
- 9 **Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination, Artscaping**: Place-making arts project with children in the role of researchers in the community

## 04/ Business



Innovations in business models, financial models, operations, internal systems, governance models, people management and ways of working are vital to ensure organisations are able to respond to the constant challenges of a changing political, environmental and technological landscape. As the Clore Leadership report Reframing the World of Work highlights, *"embracing experimentation, innovation and calculated risks can foster resilience and adaptability, enabling organisations to thrive in an ever-changing environment."*<sup>51</sup>

Some business innovations will be strategic and planned; others will be reactive, delivered in response to significant external events. Balancing these activities, particularly in the context of financial uncertainty, can be difficult when organisations are under pressure, as finding the organisational headroom or absorptive capacity for strategic change and development is often deprioritised in favour of short-term problem-solving.

Business innovation is wide-ranging and can include both operational and strategic change. Activities that came to light in our research included, but were not limited to:

- Ongoing digital transformation and new technology adoption
- Finding and delivering new revenue streams
- Developing cross-sector and multi-sector partnerships and collaborations
- Environmental sustainability
- Buildings and estates management
- Maintaining collections, archives and other physical assets
- Responding to external social and political events
- People management and staff wellbeing
- Visitor and customer experience

Addressing these issues is essential not just for organisational change but for the continued development and stability of the sector overall.

A number of formal and informal networks and learning cohorts across the sector are an important part of the ecosystem nurturing the confidence, connections and knowledge exchange necessary to support RD&I activities. These include:

- Museums Computer Group, an informal network of digital professionals
- What Next? a movement that brings together small and large organisations and freelancers to debate and shape arts and culture.
- Self-organised networks such as Sustainable Arts West Midlands providing peer support
- The Digital Culture Network providing practical, on-the-ground help to arts and cultural organisations and individuals to explore and harness the benefits of technology, reach and engage audiences, and develop sustainable business models.

As Zak Mensah of Birmingham Museums noted, these “coalitions of the willing” are significant forces for driving change.

“*Embrace the people who do try to make positive change. A coalition of the willing, the people who are genuinely interested, other people trying to solve genuine things. Find your tribe. For example, for me, the Museums Computer Group people help you solve a problem, saying “let’s jump on a call”, or “here’s some code”.*

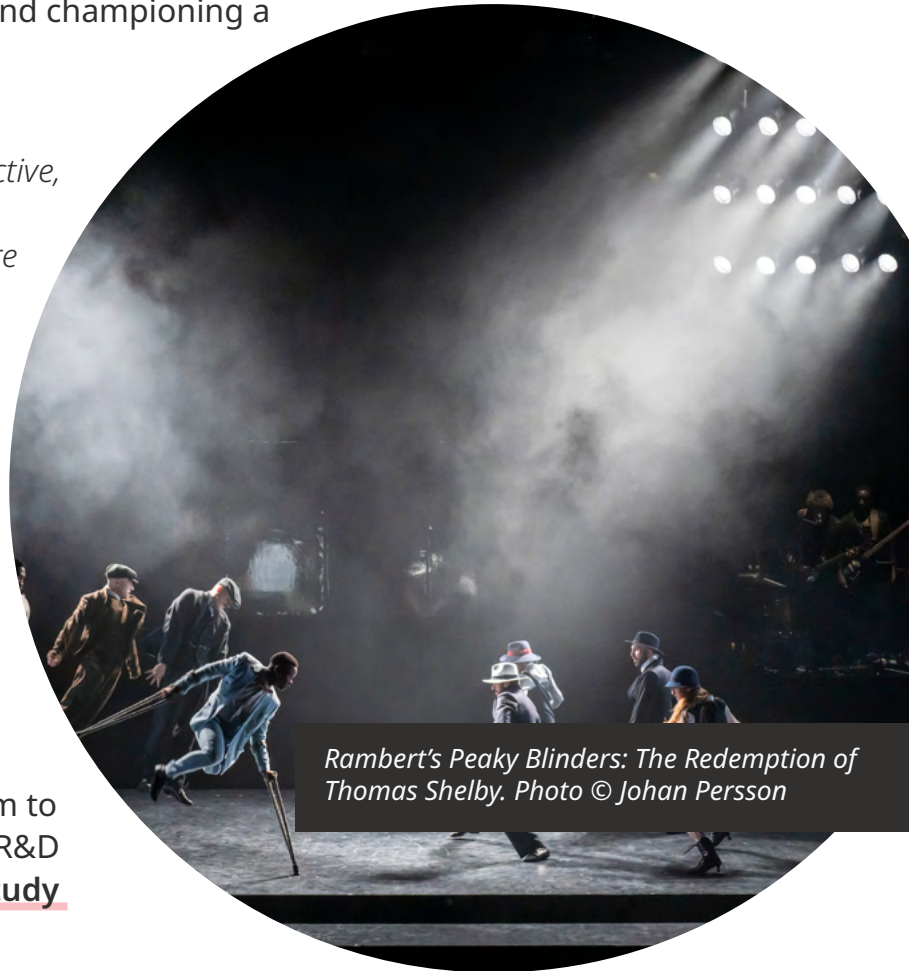
[research interview]

Since 2012 the action learning, skills and development programme Let’s Get Real (LGR) has brought together cohorts of cultural practitioners each year to address critical issues, supporting them to adopt experimental working and a human centered approach to technology.<sup>58</sup> Within each cohort, participants carry out experiments around a shared theme, learning together, learning by doing and learning from experts. The programme encourages them to become agents of change inside their own organisations, effectively introducing each cultural organisation to RD&I practices, nurturing confidence and championing a mindset of reflection and openness.

“*From an organisational perspective, it comes down to the people ... someone who is a catalyst. There always needs to be someone who drives that change.*

Anra Kennedy, LGR, The Audience Agency [research interview]

Programmes such as LGR by The Audience Agency and Future Art Ecosystems by Serpentine form part of strategies within both organisations to secure status as an Independent Research Organisation (IRO). If successful, IRO status would allow them to proactively lead and attract additional R&D investments to their work – see [case study #10](#).



Rambert’s Peaky Blinders: The Redemption of Thomas Shelby. Photo © Johan Persson

The Clore Leadership Programme, designed to develop and strengthen leadership across the cultural and creative is explicitly dedicated to

“cultivating excellence and innovation in the leadership of culture,” seeking to empower individuals and champion diversity and collaboration.<sup>59</sup>

Two organisations we talked to have focussed on RD&I to change how they work and who they work with, to drive new income generation and sustainability models.

- Rambert’s ‘Peaky Blinders: The Redemption of Thomas Shelby’ united artistry and commercial ambition through a bold fusion of genres, cultures, and platforms, bridging the worlds of high art and popular entertainment. See [case study #12](#).
- Birmingham Museums Trust (BMT) unified its ticketing, retail, and food & beverage sales using Shopify, a mainstream e-commerce platform not traditionally used in the cultural sector. See [case study #10](#).

Interestingly, BMT are also part of the Digital Good Network,<sup>60</sup> exploring how digital technologies can be used in ways that benefit people, society and the economy and demonstrating the plural nature of their approach.

## Case Studies



- 10 [Birmingham Museums Trust](#): Unified solution for commerce to simplify legacy systems
- 11 [Serpentine, Independent Research Organisation model](#): Embracing a new institutional form to spark ecosystem change across the sector
- 12 [Rambert, Peaky Blinders: The Redemption of Thomas Shelby](#): Cross-genre innovation uniting artistry and commercial ambition

## 2.3 Reflections on the four areas of RD&I

Each of the four RD&I activity types is accompanied by a different set of challenges and opportunities. Across the ecosystem there are both breakthrough projects and many sites of unrealised potential that could have significant impact for organisations, practitioners, audiences, communities and society.

The pluralism of the RD&I ecosystem is one reason why shared definitions – supported by better communications and storytelling – are needed. Definitions must offer coherence without suggesting either oversimplification or a rigid standardisation of the current diverse range of practices. A relatively multi-layered and transdisciplinary approach to categorisation and definition could then form the basis of an approach to impact measurement.

# 3

## Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

*For arts and cultural organisations and practitioners*

## Strengths

**Cross-sector collaboration:** Trusted organisations with strong potential for partnerships with academia, tech, health, and social sectors

**High levels of activity:** Lots of informal and formal R&D and Innovation already taking place across sector

**Highly creative output:** Sector that is rich in creativity and rooted in shared values. Able to address ethical and societal issues through creative inquiry and experimentation

**Multiple spillover impacts:** Growing evidence of spillover impacts on society and impact beyond economic value

**Public engagement:** High levels of community involvement and audience participation in R&D processes

## Weaknesses

**Evaluation & impact challenges:** Measuring impact and outcomes of artistic R&D can be complex and subjective

**Lack of capacity:** Organisations and artists lack capacity for R&D, experimentation or innovation activities

**Limited commercialisation pathways:** Difficulty translating artistic R&D into scalable or monetisable products

**Tight budgets:** Decreased ability to create surplus for reinvestment

**Complex funding landscape:** The current landscape can be difficult to understand

**Fragmented infrastructure:** Lack of consistent support structures or dedicated R&D labs with arts and culture

## Opportunities

**Funding streams:** Make grants and public funding available

**Articulating impact:** Define the national contribution of arts and culture RD&I to UK society and economy

**Ecosystem:** Nurture a more robust ecosystem that can support RD&I

**Inclusive innovation:** Drive equity and representation. Shape accessible, effective routes for future funding that support a resilient sector

**Place-based delivery:** Support RD&I as a recognised model to support stronger local ecosystems and social cohesion

**Commercialisation pathways:** Ability to scale products, services and experiences

## Threats

**Unclear case of impact:** R&D in the arts may be undervalued or misunderstood by funders and policymakers

**Economic pressures:** Short-term funding limits risk-taking

**High levels of administration:** Hard work to secure R&D or innovation funding, cashflow risks for smaller organisation

**Narrow definitions:** Existing definitions are too narrow and preclude arts and cultural sector from accessing funding

**Skills gaps:** Limited access to technical R&D skills (e.g. data science, prototyping) within some arts organisations

# 4

## The Value of Creative and Cultural RD&I

*This section demonstrates different forms of value and benefits created by creative and cultural RD&I, including artistic, technological, societal, and economic outcomes.*

Public investment in RD&I activity is recognised as a driver of economic growth. Recent analysis by DSIT concludes that, “on average, £1 of civil public R&D investment generates £8 in net economic benefits for the UK over the long term.”<sup>61</sup> This same analysis also acknowledges that “several hard-to-capture but real impacts” are not covered by this estimate, with some of the “true returns” of R&D applying to breakthroughs such as improvements in health, security, and greenhouse emissions.

Arts and cultural RD&I are contributors to economic growth and increased access to opportunity, but they also operate in a different value system to commercial innovation. Rather than seeking market fit or the maximisation of shareholder value, a creative and cultural innovation project or programme might instead prioritise achieving a creative breakthrough, a process innovation, resolving an ethical dilemma, or realising a tangible benefit for marginalised people, places, communities, and the environment.

Much of the value generated by arts and cultural RD&I can be understood as social innovation, with organisations looking for workable ideas to address real social needs around them. Many social innovations are modest and incremental, especially those using local insights and initiatives to address localised problems that improve social cohesion.

## Macro Benefits

Arts and cultural RD&I also creates value at a macro, societal level, in addition to any value being generated for specific beneficiaries through particular outputs. The macro benefits of RD&I include:

- offering an ethical counterbalance when science and technology RD&I faces ethical issues
- creating multiplier effects for art and culture, and
- acting as the engine of progress for creativity and culture.

## Plural Specific Benefits

The case studies in Section 2 show that the public value created by arts and culture RD&I is likely to be plural. For instance, Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg's Pollinator Pathmaker combines artistic R&D with artistic innovation, place-based and societal innovation, and technological innovation.

As such, the wellbeing and sustainability impacts of the project should be taken into account alongside its artistic and technological breakthroughs.



*Pollinator Pathmaker LAS Edition in the forecourt of the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin in June 2024. Photo © Sabine Bungert.*

This pluralism is likely to be particularly true of place-based and societal innovations, which may create numerous outputs. The public late night light festival 'Light Up Leicester' includes several artistically innovative pieces that are commissioned to reflect place and community with a mix of different kinds of outputs including:

- Aesthetic value
- Cultural value
  - ▶ Celebrating and reflecting the heritage and culture of particular communities
  - ▶ Supporting the development of new relationships across the city
  - ▶ Increasing social cohesion
- Economic value
  - ▶ Attracting footfall to a particular destination for economic purposes
  - ▶ Creating new job opportunities

This plural approach to recognising value shows the breadth of impact that arts and cultural RD&I activities have. It's impossible to understand the overall impact of the sector without this approach.

The table on the next page sets out examples of possible different kinds of value against the four areas of RD&I activity.

**01/ Artistic**

**R&D:** Creating or progressing artistic knowledge and creative expression

**Innovation:** Creating, curating, producing or presenting art and art forms or developing existing art and art forms to deliver improved outcomes

- New art and artforms
- Creating cultural progress
- Creating new knowledge
- New methods
- Solving or contributing to the solution of a known problem
- Improved public understanding
- Improved social inclusion

**02/ Technological**

**R&D:** Creating or progressing technological knowledge

**Innovation:** Applying new and emerging technologies or applying existing technologies in novel ways to create new or improved outcomes

- Technology breakthroughs
- Ethical diligence and debate around new and emerging technologies
- Contributing to scientific and technological progress
- Driving technology adoption
- Growing audiences
- Expanding the use of a technology for artistic or cultural purposes
- Improving production workflows

**03/ Place and Societal**

**R&D:** Creating or progressing societal or place-based knowledge

**Innovation:** Applying arts and culture knowledge, approaches and practices to create societal or place-based change or deliver improved outcomes

- Understanding community needs
- Coalition-based approach to changing systems (fieldbuilding)
- Developing cross-sector partnerships and ways of working
- Building trustworthy relationships
- Improved social cohesion
- Improved social inclusion
- Improved wellbeing
- Reduced inequality

**04/ Business**

**R&D:** Creating or progressing management, economic or organisational knowledge

**Innovation:** Applying new management, economic or organisational methods to create new or improved financial, operational, or governance processes or outcomes

- Reimagining operating models
- Experimental approaches to income generation and audience engagement
- Building a resilient organisation
- Contributing to the health of the creative and cultural sector
- Creating a new paradigm for creativity and culture
- Cost savings
- Environmental sustainability

This creation of plural kinds of value is perhaps best understood using a network approach, in which multiple indicators and measurements are able to co-exist, rather than being flattened into a linear ROI model. Diane Coyle's approach to Comprehensive Wealth Measurement offers a potential route for further development of this approach.<sup>62</sup>

Another way of framing different values resulting from investment into arts, culture and heritage is through 'capitals.' The DCMS Culture & Heritage Capital programme<sup>63</sup> has been – with the support of AHRC – developing the Cultural & Heritage Capital (CHC) approach, inspired by the Natural Capital Approach.<sup>64</sup> The first full version of the CHC framework of cultural and heritage capitals and their services and consequent benefits will be published in summer 2026, based on the draft framework published by DCMS in December 2024.<sup>65</sup> The framework will be turned into guidance for HMT's Green Book to be used to appraise (analyse the cost-benefit analysis of) any policy which potentially impacts arts, culture or heritage capitals. It will also be the basis of a future Cultural & Heritage Capital Account in the UK's national accounts alongside the Natural Capital accounts.<sup>66</sup>

This final CHC framework is expected to contain the intangible capitals:

- Knowledge and skills – both 'tacit' (inalienable from the people holding them) and captured (thereby usable by others and being able to be institutionally held).
- Creative and artistic works – from individual works through to composite assets such as theatre productions and exhibitions.<sup>67</sup>
- Institutional capital<sup>68</sup> – being the 'soft' cultural infrastructure comprising relationships between organisations and people, often within a locality.

The Culture and Heritage Capital programme is particularly relevant to creative and cultural RD&I policy because:

- R&D activities depend on such cultural and heritage capitals as inputs, as well as generating new or enhanced cultural and heritage capitals (as set out in the CHC framework).
- The value of innovation activities exploiting R&D outputs can be estimated using economic methods used and evidence collected in line with the CHC approach.
- When applied systematically, the CHC can ensure that culture is treated as an investable component of the UK's growth strategy as well as its social transformation.

# Conclusion

Creative and cultural RD&I is not well-served by metrics that only serve economic growth or increases in scientific and technological knowledge. The diversity of activity in the field requires a mixed metrics model reflecting the fact that multiple kinds of value may be produced by a single project or initiative – and that value to society and the economy may be generated by growth in artistic knowledge, wellbeing, social progress, and access to opportunity.

The segmentation provided in this report provides a basic framework that could be further developed to reflect the value created by creative and cultural RD&I. The use of such a framework would support more compelling advocacy for creative and cultural RD&I and make it easier for funders to harmonise metrics of success.



Culture already functions as growth infrastructure: it anchors local identity, drives productivity, reduces demand on health and welfare systems and attracts investment. Yet because it is rarely captured in national baselines or consistently appraised against Treasury standards, its value is not sufficiently visible when it comes to decisions about where capital flows. The result is a persistent underinvestment in assets that demonstrably generate economic and social returns.

*Culture as Growth Infrastructure, CreativeUK report<sup>69</sup>*

# 5

## Funding RD&I

*This section draws upon desk research to outline the funding landscape, reflects on our research participants experiences in funding their RD&I activities, and proposes opportunities for improving the funding landscape.*

### 5.1 Funding initiatives

R&D investment in the creative and cultural sector is not new. Our research indicates that the major public funders of arts and culture RD&I are:

- Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) through cultural ALBs
- Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) through UKRI
- HMRC through creative tax credits

Below are some of the current funding opportunities made possible by their investment.

## DCMS

- **Arts Council England - National Lottery Project Grants.** Ongoing grants (£1,000–£100,000) for individual practitioners, communities, and cultural organisations, supporting a wide range of creative projects.<sup>70</sup> Data from 2024/25 shows over £14 million awarded to projects classified as new work or R&D activity.
- **Arts Council England - Research & Development for Individuals.** A “ring-fenced £7.5 million to invest in projects that allow creative and cultural practitioners to develop their practice.” These grants are a “[t]ime limited priority for National Lottery Project Grants... available while Developing Your Creative Practice is paused until April 2026.” Applications closed on 26 February 2026.<sup>71</sup>
- **Arts Council England - Developing Your Creative Practice.** £14.4 million of National Lottery funding per year is awarded for this programme to support individual creative practitioners through grants of £2,000–£12,000 for activities such as research, networking, and creating new work.<sup>72</sup>
- **National Lottery Heritage Fund.** NLHF does not offer a standalone Research & Development grant programme, but R&D activities can be funded as a specific development phase within their main grant programmes.<sup>73</sup>
- **British Film Institute.** Funding opportunities for the screen and film sector that includes some funding for interdisciplinary arts organisations and individuals, such as the £1.8m BFI National Lottery Innovation Challenge Fund.<sup>74</sup>

## DSIT, via UKRI

The majority of research funding in the UK is awarded to universities and research councils via UKRI. They invest in research and innovation “to advance knowledge, improve lives and drive growth.”<sup>75</sup> In 2023/24 funding reached £9.6 billion – £1.58 billion (18%) for research and development grants, £2.31 billion (26%) for strategic institutional funding, and £946 million (11%) for infrastructure. Arts and cultural organisations are eligible to apply for pots of funding in the following ways:

## DSIT, via Arts and Humanities Research Council

- **CoSTAR Network** - the largest investment in Creative Industries R&D to date with a £75.6M grant awarded by the UKRI Infrastructure Fund and delivered by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. It drives innovation in virtual production, AI, and motion capture through a national lab and specialised regional labs.<sup>76</sup>
- **Specific Funds** - Specific AHRC programmes and partnership schemes allowing the cultural sector to apply for funds directly include initiatives like Spaces, Places and Belonging, a £550,000 fund that offers Seed Corn Grants, Skills Bursaries, and Project Grants to support “inclusive, community-led research across the UK’s galleries, libraries, archives, and museums... and heritage sectors.”<sup>77</sup>
- **Creative Industries Clusters** - Bring together universities, businesses, local and regional policymakers, and private funders to drive research, innovation and growth in the creative industries. Led by UK universities, the clusters create R&D driven commercial opportunities, strengthen regional capabilities and deliver real world impacts. £80m was available in round 1 and a further £27m in round 2 in 2026. The CI PEC published a useful roundup in Jan 2026 of evidence related to the sector and creative/cultural geographies [https://pec.ac.uk/blog\\_entries/creative-clusters-research-resources/](https://pec.ac.uk/blog_entries/creative-clusters-research-resources/).
- **Independent Research Organisation (IRO) status** - Most arts and cultural organisations (such as museums, galleries, or charities) can only apply for AHRC funding if they have IRO status or partner with an eligible research organisation. To qualify for IRO status, organisations must meet specific criteria, including having significant in-house capacity to carry out research that extends and enhances the national research base, and follow an intensive formal application process. Once awarded, IROs are eligible to apply for AHRC research grants; current AHRC success rates range from 20–27% depending on the programme.
- **Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)** - Beyond dedicated funds, the arts and cultural sector often collaborates with universities. HEIs exist to share knowledge and house expertise across a wide range of disciplines. They also offer valuable resources such as funding, facilities, and networks, and can act as brokers to connect organisations with other sectors and businesses.
- **Partnership Independent Research Organisations (IRO)** - Arts and culture organisations can partner with existing IROs.

## HMRC

HMRC tax relief supports companies that work on innovative projects in science and technology. To qualify for R&D relief, a project must seek an advance in a field of science or technology; this excludes many arts and cultural organisations. To address the challenge posed by mainstream R&D tax reliefs being limited to science and technology, sector-specific support has been made available to companies in the creative industries, such as Film Tax Relief and the Video Games Tax Relief. For the cultural sector, relevant reliefs include Orchestra Tax Relief, Museums and Galleries Exhibition Tax Relief and Theatre Tax Relief.

ACE commissioned an impact review of these cultural tax reliefs assessing their impact to date using data from their National Portfolio organisations. The report published in February 2026 set out to “quantify the benefit that CTR had on organisations and the sector’s contribution to the economy”<sup>78</sup> and demonstrates how those organisations claiming tax relief saw improvements in financial performance, cultural output and social impact.

## Targeted programmes with multiple partners

In many cases, multiple partners and funders have pooled resources to support the creative and cultural sector through targeted programmes.

- **2012–15: Digital R&D Fund for the Arts** (ACE, Nesta and the AHRC) enabled use of digital technologies to engage audiences with art in new ways and/or create new business models.
- **2016–17: Arts and Technology Pilot Programme** (Innovate UK and ACE) supported innovative projects that merged creative arts with cutting-edge technologies.
- **2017–20: CreativeXR** (Digital Catapult, ACE, CreativeXR), financed and supported the development of 60 immersive prototypes by leading UK creators with £1.2 million, plus production funding to 12 projects worth £850k. Completed works have featured in major film and industry festivals, cultural venues and storefronts worldwide.
- **2024-ongoing: Bloomberg Digital Accelerator Programme** strengthened the digital infrastructure of nonprofit cultural organisations. UK participants include Blast Theory, Newlyn Art Gallery & The Exchange, Nottingham Contemporary, and Rich Mix.
- **2024-ongoing: Immersive Arts** (AHRC, the Arts Councils of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and Creative Scotland) - UK-wide programme of £6m supported artists to explore, experiment, and expand their practice using technologies like Virtual Reality, and Augmented Reality.

- **Place-based investments** - Besides national investment programmes, numerous place-based programmes support R&D activity. These include initiatives such as the Creative Places Growth Fund, which gives Mayors £25 million each to support local creative businesses, and the expansion of Creative Industries Clusters, regional partnerships to accelerate R&D and innovation.

## 5.2 Funding challenges

Until early this year there was no comprehensive, cross-sector map of current RD&I funding opportunities for the UK. This reflects the complex nature of the landscape where available information tends to mirror how money has been previously allocated – for instance, there is some geographical mapping of research council investments, sector-specific guidance for industry, and the [GOV.uk Innovation Clusters Map](#), which details firm-level innovation – and the target audience for this information is presumably policy makers and analysts, rather than prospective grantees.<sup>79</sup> However, in February 2026 DCMS published their [Creative Industries finance map](#) providing an overview of current financial sources available to creative businesses at different stages of growth. The map focusses on the creative industries and does not include specialist funding, grants or support directed at arts and cultural practitioners and organisations.

Our survey shows a lack of awareness of RD&I funding programmes despite respondents being themselves actively engaged in RD&I activities. The two most well-known programmes were ACE’s National Lottery Project Grants (net awareness of 86%) and ACE’s Developing Your Creative Practice (net awareness of 68%). The Space’s digital commissions programme had a net awareness of only 30% and the various UKRI programmes were even lower.

The complexity of the funding landscape can be particularly challenging for small organisations and individual practitioners.

“ I would say 80% of the activity is fundraising, grant writing and doing all the business of the art. So 20% is spent on the rest of it, and then you’re exhausted. Just exhausted because everyone’s working the midnight deadline and creativity feels completely stifled.

Hamble Wallace, Alexander Whitley Dance Company (research roundtable)

Many who attended our workshops and roundtables described frugal innovation processes that were fitted in around business as usual. Many had little administrative capacity to manage complex funding bids or partnership

negotiations and lack the financial and organisational resilience to weather dramatic shifts in policy priorities. Rachel Drury from Cambridge-based NPO Collusion reports that:

“ *As a small organisation, having to navigate a changing context where innovation is increasingly shaped by commercial drivers [is difficult]. We are spending significant time on advocacy just to stay visible. While we have a proven methodology and track record, we're no longer operating from a front-foot position.*

However, data from ACE's data insights team show that applications received and classified as 'R&D' and 'Creation of New Work' have risen consistently since 2015/16, showing that both organisations and individuals are actively seeking additional support and finance despite the barriers.

## 5.3 Opportunities to improve the funding landscape

### Fit-for-purpose definitions

As discussed in Section 1, definitions of R&D and innovation are not consistent between funders or policy areas. Beyond the creative and cultural sector, there is a bias towards science and technology-focussed RD&I; within the arts and cultural sector, there is a lack of clarity as to what constitutes R&D and innovation and a complicated landscape of funding, governed by exceptions rather than clear common goals. This research suggests a range of ways that definitions and eligibility can be improved (see recommendation A1).

### Shared metrics

The absence of clear definitions also makes impact difficult to measure. This makes it harder to communicate the value of creative and cultural RD&I to those beyond the sector and restricts access to funding opportunities. Metrics aimed at both research excellence and income generation are not always appropriate for supporting either curiosity-driven or socially focussed RD&I activities. More work is needed here to develop an impact framework which recognises creative and cultural contributions to industrial RD&I, social innovation and the commercial experience economy, alongside the non-profit parts of the creative and cultural sector themselves (see recommendation D1

and D2). Exploring a way of sharing the learning from RD&I activities within the sector could be beneficial and limit future duplication.

## Simplified administrative and application processes for research funding

Access to research funding comes with an administrative overhead. Unless practitioners and organisations are able to partner with academic institutions, direct research funding requires designation as an Independent Research Organisation (IRO). The criteria for this designation are fairly stringent. Organisations must have “generated on average at least £0.5 million research income p.a. over 3 years or invested the equivalent amount in Research and Innovation.”<sup>80</sup> They must also be able to demonstrate:

- *independent capability to lead, manage and report on research and innovation*
- *their research and innovation strategy fits the remit and priorities of UKRI and the wider UK*
- *successful previous research investment or the positive impact on UK research and innovation*<sup>81</sup>

Cultural organisations only became eligible for IRO status around 2006, with British Museum, V&A and Tate gaining status in the first wave. Royal Shakespeare Company became the first performing arts IRO in 2021 and the Design Museum the first museum IRO in 2024. While this shift is welcome, the administrative and operational requirements of IRO status are not achievable for most arts and culture organisations, and for most committing the capacity to achieve them would come at the expense of their current mission and responsibilities.

## More equitable partnerships with Higher Education Institutions (HEI)

Collaborations and partnerships between the arts and cultural sector and universities provide access to both funding and research support. Across the UK, there are many successful examples such as Watershed’s joint investment with the University of Bristol and UWE in the Pervasive Media Studio (see [case study #5](#)). However, navigating the complex landscape of HEIs can be challenging.

Even when partnerships are formed, resources accessed via HEIs are often significantly top-sliced to cover university overheads, leaving limited financial benefit for arts and culture partners. While much of this feedback is anecdotal,

there is a clear need to explore these collaborations further and identify where arms-length bodies such as ACE and AHRC can play a convening or brokering role to strengthen relationships between the sector and HEIs.

## **Some RD&I activities should be covered by core funding**

RD&I activities are almost never covered by core funding, meaning that publicly-funded artists and organisations are often obliged to seek project funding to enable meaningful development. The administrative overheads this entails can have a chilling effect on the RD&I pipeline, with only those with the capacity to engage in complex processes able to negotiate the workload.

This means that curiosity-driven research is difficult to fund in creativity and culture, particularly for practitioners and organisations that do not qualify for AHRC funding. The exploratory research agency ARIA, which funds science and technology R&D “moonshots,” has no equivalent in arts and culture.

## **Update R&D tax credits to include arts and culture**

The majority of arts and culture organisations are not eligible to claim R&D tax credits. While some changes are promised by the Creative Industries Sector Plan, the overall purpose of creative activities will still be required to be “an advance in science and technology.”<sup>82</sup> Meanwhile, the Creative Industries sector-specific reliefs such as Theatre Tax Relief, Museum and Gallery Exhibition Tax Relief and Orchestra Tax Relief benefit specific artforms but exclude others (such as combined arts, visual arts) and disadvantage individual practitioners. They also disadvantage innovative organisations and practitioners working across artforms, including those making innovative use of emerging technologies.

Either broadening HMRC’s definition of R&D to include advances which are not purely scientific or technical but which are nevertheless capable of scalable application with economic impact, or ensuring full-sector coverage is provided by the Creative Industries sector specific reliefs, would create a more level playing field.

## **Investing in infrastructure and connection**

The work of organisations such as Watershed, who have been active in creative and cultural R&D and innovation for many years, provides clues to the kinds of infrastructure that is needed across the UK to offer a more joined up and robust foundation to support more organisations to embrace R&D and innovation

activities. In their report “From Hype to Hope: How Networked Neighbourhoods can make innovation work for everyone”, Careful Industries describe the importance of “beneficial attractors” such as Watershed:



*Connected Organisations ... deliver benefits such as fostering relationships, teaching new skills, creating pathways to new opportunities, and distributing funds. They provide a single access point to a range of neighbourhood assets and also offer a place to grow relationships and develop social capital.<sup>83</sup>*

RD&I activities are often about making things happen, and require a considerable amount of entrepreneurial and resourceful borrowing or repurposing of different kinds of infrastructure, platforms, and technologies. Our research illustrates that often these different types of supportive infrastructures exist locally, between organisations or inside of ‘connected’ organisations. They create the spaces for participation, collaboration, exchange and insight and help to underpin different types of activity, drawing in people that might be reluctant, or connecting people who are isolated (see [case study #8](#) Hood Future Studios ‘ABUELOS’)

## Better signposting of available opportunities

Responses to our survey illustrate a lack of awareness from respondents of the range of funding programmes that are targeted at supporting RD&I. This indicates a need for greater signposting for funding and further data analysis that goes beyond awareness and identifies applications and success rates.

# Conclusion

Our research shows that:

- RD&I funding is available, and funding for artistic and cultural organisations and practitioners is available, but there is little funding specifically tailored to creative and cultural RD&I.
- Obtaining funding can be extremely complicated and administratively burdensome.
- The lack of clarity around definitions in turn creates a lack of clarity around eligibility for funding opportunities and R&D tax credits.
- A lack of clear signposting means that there is low awareness about opportunities beyond ACE funding, and that some opportunities are massively oversubscribed.
- A recalibration of the relationship of creativity and culture to academic research is required.

Taken together, this means that available funds are not invested as productively as they might be, leading to lost opportunities across the creative and cultural sector.

Clearer RD&I definitions are an important part of unlocking progress for creative and cultural RD&I, but they are not sufficient. Funding does not flow through the sector in ways that make it easy to support the kinds of new knowledge and innovation needed to realise the potential of creative and cultural RD&I; this leads to lost opportunities and an over-investment in bureaucratic administrative processes. This is in part due to the organic development of funding opportunities, and in part to the lack of sufficient cross-sector advocacy for creative and cultural RD&I.

Improving the creative and cultural funding landscape is a responsibility for all the major funding agencies. A radical simplification of both the opportunities and criteria, combined with better signposting, could make a significant difference to the further development of RD&I and the wider societal benefits this brings.

# 6

# Detailed Recommendations

## A NATIONAL STRATEGY

Revise UK RD&I strategy and policies to be genuinely intersectoral and transdisciplinary, with creativity and culture as central as science and technology.

**A1. Establish clearer, joined up accountability and responsibility for co-ordination of policy and funding of RD&I across the creative and cultural sector.**

- Convene a time-limited Creative and Cultural Social Innovation Advisory Group, led by DCMS in collaboration with the Office for the Impact Economy (acknowledging the new R&D Innovation Group within CIC) with representatives from:
  - ▶ ACE and other DCMS arms-length bodies, including those representing heritage.

- ▶ The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Local Government Association, Chief Culture and Leisure Officers Association, and Combined Authorities.
  - ▶ UKRI, including representatives of AHRC and ESRC and the Senior Responsible Owner for the Government and Societal Priorities funding bucket.
  - ▶ Non-profit and for-profit parts of the creative and cultural sector.
  - ▶ Social impact investors, British Business Bank and other funders.
- Task the Advisory Group with recommending the most suitable permanent structures and processes to ensure accountability and responsibility for:
    - ▶ Joined up RD&I policy and funding across the creative and cultural sector – nationally, regionally and locally.
    - ▶ Co-ordinating research activity and pooling research funding and data across members to provide evidence.
    - ▶ Undertaking advocacy related to this policy.
- Task the Advisory Group with recommending:
    - ▶ Revised strategies and policies for RD&I (per recommendation A2).
    - ▶ Evolved definitions and related guidance for RD&I (per recommendation A3).
    - ▶ An Impact Framework for creative and cultural RD&I (per Recommendation D1).

## **A2. Revise strategies and policies to recognise the creative and cultural sector’s essential role within the UK’s RD&I ecosystem and as a driver of economic, social and environmental value.**

- Revise relevant DSIT, DCMS and UKRI strategies and policies<sup>84</sup> to recognise that creative and cultural organisations and practitioners:
  - ▶ Are specialists in creative practices, processes and methods.
  - ▶ Can invent such new practices, processes and methods in the delivery of, or as outputs of, R&D activities.
  - ▶ Bring different and complementary skills and knowledge to scientists, technologists, designers and business people, and in particular:

- Are key sources and repositories of skills and knowledge used and generated by RD&I in many sectors (including their freelance workforce and their non-profit sub-sectors).
- Are key components of the UK's research infrastructure.
- Both respond to and help create the culture of the future UK, including the cultural change necessary for adoption of new science and technologies.

### **A3. Evolve definitions and related guidance around RD&I to recognise the fundamental role of creativity and cultural understanding in RD&I in all policy areas, industries, sectors and disciplines.**

- Build on the internationally accepted definitions used by the UK (e.g. Frascati and Oslo Manuals); recommendations made by the Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre (PEC) and National Theatre; and DSIT's budget allocation agreement with UKRI.
- Ensure the term "innovation" admits social innovations which are not primarily technological or scientific or undertaken solely by the 'business enterprise' sector but instead address 'strategic government and societal priorities' (per UKRI funding settlement).
- Do not without good reason exclude creative and cultural activities, creative and cultural organisations or non-profit organisations, as long as the criteria for R&D or innovation activities are fulfilled.

Appendix 4 sets out detailed recommendations for how to achieve the above.

### **A4. Use DCMS's Cultural & Heritage Capital framework to recognise and value cultural and heritage assets as inputs to and outputs of creative and cultural RD&I.**

- In embedding the framework as supplementary guidance to the Green Book, ensure that worked examples and Civil Service training materials include cultural and heritage assets as inputs to and outputs from creative and cultural RD&I (DCMS and HM Treasury).
- Fund the development of valuation methods for such assets – with particular focus on intangible assets such as artistic and creative works, creative and cultural knowledge and institutional capital (DCMS with AHRC/ ESRC).

- Within funded implementation of CHC, support its consistent application in relation to creative and cultural RD&I policy and funding.

## **B** SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

Strengthen creative and cultural RD&I by nurturing a more robust innovation ecosystem.

### **B1. Recognise and support activities that build the RD&I capacity of the creative and cultural sector (DCMS, cultural arms-length bodies and UKRI).**

- Responsibilities:
  - ▶ Public funders make explicit their development role to build creative and cultural RD&I capacity (DCMS, cultural ALBs and UKRI).
  - ▶ Explore the sector development roles of IROs and HEIs in building creative and cultural RD&I capacity (UKRI, HEIs and IROs).
  - ▶ Encourage and support new IRO applications from organisations that would fill creative and cultural RD&I capacity gaps (UKRI).
- Focus:
  - ▶ Undertake horizon scanning and future scenario development with policymakers, practitioners, leaders, academics.
  - ▶ Support the development of partnerships between creative and cultural organisations, practitioners and HEIs/IROs.
  - ▶ Support the development of artistic and cultural practitioners as practice-based researchers to enable them to contribute more to UKRI-funded R&D.
  - ▶ Recognising the fragmented nature of the sector, provide pathways for involvement of smaller organisations and freelancers.
  - ▶ Build on existing strengths and good practice in developing RD&I capacity through collaboration, partnerships and knowledge transfer.

## **B2. Develop, attract and retain entrepreneurial talent at all levels.**

- Work with HEIs, sector bodies and commercial/third sector training providers to develop, attract and retain entrepreneurial talent within the sector.
- Build and fund supported communities of practice and knowledge exchange.
- Recognise the importance of entrepreneurial skills and experience (from SMEs and social enterprises and not just corporates) at producer, executive and board levels.

# **G INVESTMENT AND IMPACT**

Deliver resilience through investment in new systemic RD&I programmes for arts and culture.

## **C1. Fund ‘Basic Research’ in and involving the creative and cultural sector.**

- Fund practitioners to undertake curiosity-driven research via ACE (per Hodge Review recommendation 10).
- Enable suitably skilled cultural and creative practitioners to be eligible for basic research by:
  - ▶ AHRC encouraging HEIs and IROs to include such practitioners projects.
  - ▶ HEIs and IROs supporting such practitioners to develop necessary research skills.
- Encourage HEIs and IROs specialised in creative and cultural sector and sector bodies to act as conveners to build networks of artistic and cultural organisations and practitioners to more easily participate in UKRI-funded basic research bids and projects (UKRI and ACE).

## **C2. Widen support for entrepreneurship and risk taking within existing creative and cultural RD&I funding programmes and alternative financial instruments.**

- Shape accessible, effective routes for future funding that support a resilient sector, and prioritise access for individual practitioners and smaller organisations.
- Build on successful programmes like Immersive Arts to scale inclusive approaches.
- Reverse Innovate UK's decision to exclude non-profits and their enterprises from Knowledge Transfer Partnerships and other funding.
- Support clusters that are focused on social innovation rather than business enterprise innovation, not dominated by CreaTech and not based around already relatively resource-rich national cultural companies.
- Enable and encourage the use of commercial and private finance alongside ACE funding, recognising the importance of commercial rights holders, producers, venues, investors (mirroring Hodge Review recommendation 15).
- Minimise and lift restrictions on the commercial exploitation of creative and artistic works whose R&D is at least in part publicly funded (mirroring the lifting of such restrictions on physical assets generated or enhanced through capital grants per Hodge Review recommendation 3.9).
- Design public funding and other financial instruments (e.g. insurances, guarantees) to reduce the risk for developing, producing, distributing and presenting organisations and those investing in their RD&I. As well as delivering them directly, work with commercial (e.g. banks and insurers), impact investing (e.g. Figurative), sector (e.g. Creative UK) and other public partners (e.g. British Business Bank) to deliver them.

## **C3. Support local authorities and their local creative and cultural sector to include creative and cultural RD&I within place-based funding bids and projects.**

- Clarify in guidance for nationally run place-based funding schemes that creative and cultural RD&I is eligible when its outcomes otherwise align with the fund objectives and criteria (MHCLG, UKRI, DSIT, DCMS).
- Include in the criteria for such funds the requirement to develop place-based partnerships that will provide and enhance local RD&I capacity and,

where possible, provide pump-priming funding to support this at bidding stage.

- Map and recognise the assets the local creative and cultural sector brings to such RD&I and how RD&I will create new assets, using the Cultural and Heritage Capital framework.

## **D** UNDERTAKE FURTHER RESEARCH

Strengthen arts and cultural RD&I by nurturing a more robust innovation ecosystem.

**D1.** Develop an impact framework which recognises the contribution of creative and cultural RD&I to industrial RD&I, social innovation, the commercial experience economy and to the arts and cultural sector itself.

**D2.** Collect and make available granular evidence of creative and cultural RD&I activities including best practice in policy design, decision-making and making the case for investment.

- Building on the National Cultural Data Observatory blueprint,<sup>85</sup> put in place research infrastructure to collect, analyse, interpret and make widely available information about RD&I – including projects, investments, outputs, impacts – in comparable, benchmarkable ways so that the collective intelligence of those undertaking and funding such activities improves in respect of potential returns, levels and types of risk and in terms of ‘what works’.
- Use the Cultural & Heritage Capital framework to identify assets/capitals used in, developed and enhanced through RD&I.

Arts and cultural organisations, artists and individual practitioners have always been a source of experimentation, discovery and new knowledge. Yet as this research demonstrates, the potential of RD&I remains under-recognised in national policy, and creative and cultural RD&I remains underfunded. The fast pace of technological change combined with economic and environmental pressures puts the future resilience of the creative and cultural sector at risk unless it can exploit and scale its creative thinking, ideas and new ways of working.

Evidence shows that RD&I is already alive and kicking across the creative and cultural ecosystem, driving cultural, social and economic impact. We must build on this to unlock its full potential.

This requires careful and systematic change and a shared understanding of how RD&I manifests within the creative and cultural sector based on shared definitions that can enhance inclusion. By recognising cultural infrastructure and capitals as core contributors for growth, stability and place resilience, we can demonstrate their value as investable components of the UK's growth strategy.

The fragmented nature of creative and cultural RD&I can be fused by building the capacity of the organisations and individuals working in these areas and strengthening academia and wider creative industry and cross-sector partnerships.

Better evidence can demonstrate the value of social innovation, alongside economic models, and will deepen and enhance our understanding of the huge potential to help the UK thrive in the face of many challenges.

We hope this research represents a significant step towards unlocking this potential.

# Appendices



## Appendix One: Methodology

This research was carried out as a partnership between Arts Council England (ACE), The Audience Agency (TAA), and Careful Industries, with input from key stakeholders and advisors. We took a collaborative approach to understanding the state of R&D and innovation within artistic and cultural organisations and practitioners:

- **Literature Review:** Top level literature review and desk research was carried out between March and July 2025. It sought out existing reports and intelligence, gathered from our advisors and desk research, in order to provide a foundation based on understanding the current state of RD&I for the arts and cultural sector.
- **Sector facing survey:** An online survey was developed with a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions collaboratively designed by the project team with support from the advisors. In total 170 responses were submitted with a spread of responses geographically and approximately a 50/50 split of individuals and organisations. We took advice on how to ensure good practice in how it was created, considering online technical accessibility and alternative methods for survey completion offline. The survey was tested for accessibility prior to launch.

- **Roundtables and interviews:** Four online roundtable discussions were held around four themes - Collaboration, Place, Global and Value & Money. These gathered up-to-date intelligence from small groups of practicing experts chosen from a range of disciplines and locations around the UK. We conducted seven semi-structured online interviews with an invited selection of experts chosen to offer deep dives into specific examples. For both groups we deliberately sought experts working to champion inclusion and equity.
- **Analysis of data relating to ACE grant-making:** Data related to ACE's funding programmes was analysed, focusing on National Lottery Project Grants. The team interrogated and analysed top level application data which provided valuable headlines in relation to demand and funding for R&D activity.

The research and methods chosen deliver a subjective view of RD&I in the sector: the sector's own view of what R&D and innovation is and how it does it. We acknowledge this approach has some limitations (e.g. lack of direct benchmarks with other sectors) but is a significant step in lifting the lid on this important area of sector activity.

Advice and guidance came from two separate groups:

- **Sector advisor group:** A diverse group of sector professionals coming from different parts of England, chosen for their established reputation and expertise
- **Stakeholder advisor group:** Representatives from key sector stakeholders – AHRC (Arts & Humanities Research Council), DCMS (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport), British Council, Creative Industries PEC (Policy and Evidence Centre), Local Authorities.

# Appendix Two: Inclusive Innovation

Diane Coyle and Burcu Sevide Selvi from the Bennett School of Public Policy have identified five methods of using inclusive innovation to deliver “long-run economic growth and social progress.”

- 01/ innovation as a tool for affordability;
- 02/ innovation as a tool for social inclusion;
- 03/ building innovation capabilities;
- 04/ innovation as social empowerment in the face of constraints; and
- 05/ innovation as an inclusive system<sup>86</sup>

Research by the UK Innovation Districts Group and Connected Places Catapult presents a more detailed methodology for inclusive innovation that enables many people to contribute to, participate in and benefit from innovation and its spillovers.

Rather than prioritising an elite group of stakeholders or shareholders, this methodology prioritises equitable diffusion of the benefits of innovation throughout the economy. This holistic lifecycle approach recognises that inclusive innovation requires many different inputs and stakeholders to support development from diffusion through to delivery, combining operational elements, governance and participation, and careful stewardship of delivery impacts.<sup>87</sup>

Figure 3: Inclusive Innovation Lifecycle from “Opening the Innovation Economy”.



# Appendix Three: Research, development and innovation explainer

There are many overlapping and inconsistent definitions for R&D, innovation and related terms – across tax regulations, funding criteria and official statistics in the UK and internationally and between industrial, technical, scientific, public and cultural sectors. However, they all correspond to the same basic idea.

## Innovation

- I/** An innovation is the result of new knowledge being applied at scale in such a way that it creates and/or preserves value.
- II/** Any activities with the realisation of an innovation – as defined in I – as their goal can be classed as innovation activities.
- III/** Innovation can also be used to describe the process of undertaking such innovation activities – as defined in II.

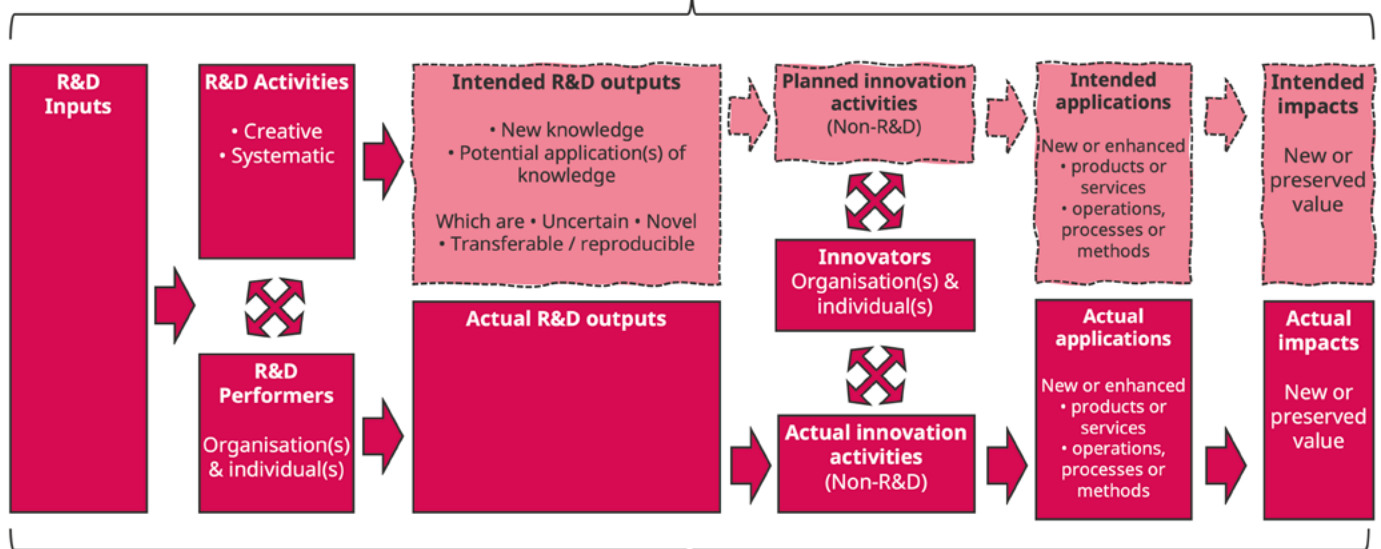
## Research & Development

*(being Research and Experimental Development, or R&D for short)*

- R&D is a subset of innovation activities which intend to create new knowledge and potential applications of that knowledge which are novel and have utility.
- R&D in and of itself does not achieve the creation or preservation of value. The outputs of R&D do not form part of an innovation until that value is realised. At that pre-impact point in their maturity, such outputs are just ideas, inventions, new practices etc.
- However, to count as R&D – to fall within the scope of innovation overall – such creation or preservation of value must be an intended outcome of the R&D.
- The realisation of this value is through non-R&D innovation activities which apply the knowledge produced through R&D at scale within new or enhanced products, services, operations, processes or methods.

Undertaking R&D on the one hand and realising value from the outputs of R&D through wider innovation activities on the other are very different. They can require fundamentally different capabilities and resources. Therefore, in many sectors – including the cultural and creative sectors – these are undertaken by different ‘actors’ – organisations and/or individuals. So ‘R&D Performers’ and the ‘Innovators’ within the model may be different.

An **R&D project** defined by its **performers** taking its **inputs** and undertaking its **activities** to create its **intended outputs** – which *together with* its **planned innovation activities** should result in its **intended outcomes** which in turn realise its **intended impacts**



An **innovation** in terms of the innovation process from **R&D** through non-R&D **innovation activities** undertaken by **innovators** to exploit the **R&D outputs** to result in the **actual applications** of new knowledge that in turn realise the **actual impacts** of the innovation overall

# Appendix Four: Evolving Definitions

Below are specific suggestions on how DSIT, UKRI, HMRC and others could revise UK definitions and eligibility criteria for RD&I in line with the latest Frascati and Oslo Manual definitions to not inadvertently exclude contributions from the cultural and creative sectors whilst not diluting the objectives of specific policy measures.

Overall, the intention of these revisions is to not dilute the strictness of the criteria for what falls within R&D or innovation overall, as set out in Appendix 3, for example: the intention to, and outline planning and resourcing to create impact; and the requirement to create new knowledge and novel applications of that knowledge.

It is proposed to:

- replace references to 'industry' with 'sector' – to admit references to the creative and cultural sectors, non-profit sectors and civil society
- replace references to 'business' and 'enterprise' with 'organisation(s) and/or people' – to admit the involvement of non-profits, individual specialists, non-incorporated associations and groups as well as the general public<sup>88</sup>
- clarify and emphasise through definitions, guidance and training materials that 'applications of knowledge' developed through R&D activities can be to government priorities, public services and within cultural or creative organisations, non-profits and civil society
- not exclude SMEs or freelancers generally; or cultural or creative organisations or practitioners; or arts, humanities or social science researchers from participating
- not exclude creative or cultural activities, reversing the presumption that they be excluded to recommending that they be included as an important element in creating new knowledge, identifying and designing new applications of that knowledge, getting those applications adopted at scale and finding other pathways to impact, and public engagement with research
- clarify in the definition of 'experimental development' "...acquiring, combining, shaping and using existing scientific, technological, business and other relevant knowledge and skills with the aim of developing new or improved products, processes or services" that "other relevant knowledge and skills" includes "knowledge of humankind, culture and society"<sup>89</sup>

- amend the definition of ‘industrial research’ “planned research or critical investigation to gain new knowledge and skills... for the purpose of product development, processes or services that lead to an improvement in existing products, processes or services.” to end “...products, services (including content and experiences), operations, processes and methods”<sup>90</sup>

There may be funding or policy measures with specific objectives where some of these revisions cannot be applied, for example in initiatives focused on business innovation for economic growth.

For example, R&D tax credits are a growth measure requiring a scientific or technological advance but are complemented by creative tax credits which do not require this. However, on the basis of the principles of non-inadvertent exclusion above, R&D tax credits should not exclude creative or cultural activities or organisations as long as the overall R&D project fulfils the other criteria e.g. of a scientific or technological advance overcoming an uncertainty not resolvable in the normal course of professionals working in their field. Similarly, creative or cultural organisations – including non-profit organisations – should not be excluded from these tax credits if their R&D project would otherwise be eligible.<sup>91</sup>

Even if the above revisions were made to R&D tax credits there is a class of potentially financially viable and economically impactful social innovations not primarily predicated on a scientific or technical advance,<sup>92</sup> which would fall between R&D and creative tax credits. With UKRI having such a significant ‘bucket’ of funding for ‘governmental and societal priorities’ but with it only ever part-funding such activities, a social innovation tax credit could be considered to fill this gap, in line with the principles of non-inadvertent exclusion above.

# Appendix Five: 12 Case Studies



# 1. Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg, Pollinator Pathmaker



Pollinator Pathmaker LAS Edition in the forecourt of the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin in June 2024. Photo: Sabine Bungert.

Combining art, science and technology to inspire empathy for non-human species and mobilise communities to take action.

Pollinator Pathmaker is an interspecies artwork that reimagines gardens as living artworks designed for pollinators. Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg has created a custom algorithm that generates planting schemes that prioritise empathy for pollinators over human aesthetics. These schemes are optimised to support the maximum diversity of pollinators, including bees, butterflies, moths, and beetles. Ginsberg has planted institutional commissions across the UK and Europe and has also made her algorithm available online at [pollinator.art](http://pollinator.art), allowing individuals and communities to create their own DIY artworks.

## Outcomes

- Major installations: Eden Project (55m garden), Serpentine (11 beds), LAS Art Foundation in Berlin (7,000 plants, 80 species).
- Community networks: Constantine village planted 17 DIY editions, creating a landscape-scale artwork that was implemented and studied in collaboration with the Universities of Exeter and Edinburgh as part of the UKRI's cross research council responsive mode pilot scheme; 15 DIY editions planted across the city of Berlin with LAS Art Foundation
- Project expansion: New Plant Palettes for California and the northeast states of the US, launching in spring 2026 to allow institutional and community planting in expanded regions
- Digital engagement: Thousands of DIY gardens generated globally via the online tool at [pollinator.art](http://pollinator.art)

## Impact

*Pollinator Pathmaker* has shown that art can mobilise public participation in biodiversity restoration when paired with accessible tools, and it can have large-scale impact when delivered with community networks and open-source technologies.

- Ecological: Provides vital forage and refuge for pollinators in urban and rural landscapes.
- Cultural: Redefines art as a tool for ecological restoration and empathy toward non-human species.
- Social: Engages communities in climate-positive action and encourages empathy and stewardship for the natural world, fostering connected networks of pollinator-friendly habitats.
- Policy influence: Demonstrates how creative practice can inform conservation strategies and urban greening initiatives.

## Next steps

Can be scaled through the expansion of educational programmes and citizen science initiatives and integration with urban planning and climate adaptation policies to scale ecological benefits.

## 2. Team Love, Glastonbury Mycelium Stage

Photo: Nema Hart



### Revolutionising environmental sustainability in set design

When mycelium is fed with agricultural waste, it forms an entirely biodegradable construction material, with properties potentially similar to polystyrene, foam and plastics. Team Love and Temple Design Studio's Hayes Pavilion at Glastonbury 2023 harnessed the interconnected power of mushroom roots – the underground network known as mycelium – to investigate the potential use and adoption of this biomaterial for set and stage creation.

Most set designs rely on the use of cheap plastic polymer-based products or wood that require fossil fuel for extraction for production, depletion of natural resources and release of various CO2 emissions alongside the supply chain. The project explored the possibility of using the waste from the farm to make mycelium panels to build a stage at Glastonbury and test its durability. Doing this publicly was also an opportunity to raise awareness of the environmental impact of the creative industries and share knowledge about the potential of green transition.

#### Outcomes

- Connected with a network of more than 100 sustainability experts online

- 100% of those interviewed said they were likely to recommend the project and its findings to their own professional network.

#### Impact

- Developed a relationship with Glastonbury Festival, the world's largest greenfield and performing arts festival.
- Ongoing festival commissions, in particular create better audio quality experiences in tents at Glastonbury and FORWARDS

#### Next steps

- Many practical lessons about production and use have been learnt during these pilot projects that can be used to support further use and scaling of these panels in festival and other settings, highlighting also the need for further technical R&D.
- Scaling this project – which has the potential to revolutionise environmental sustainability in the creative industries – also requires ongoing change and adaptation to business and financial approaches.

### 3. Raquel Meseguer Zafe, A Crashcourse in Cloudspotting

Photo ©Paul Samuel White



An intimate audio journey exploring the depths of human connection and the subversive act of lying down.

Creative tech was created to allow 48 remote participants to 'perform' their rest via an app: when they pressed 'start resting' their individual light in the installation came on and their unique sound loop was triggered. Collectively their patterns of rest were a large part of the visual and sonic world of the piece.

A horizontal 'amphitheatre' was created and the audiences was invited to partake in a collective act of rest to listen to the stories. This was an important 'mirroring' act and helped audiences understand what it takes to rest in public emotionally and psychologically. Remote participants could see who else was resting and could listen to the music created by the collective acts of rest for the duration of the live performances and digital shows.

#### Outcomes

- The Cloudspotting Archive shares 50+ of the 300+ stories about disabled people's attempts to rest in public collected over the life of the project. The archive is used as a resource by teachers and academics in the UK and in the USA
- The Cloudspotting community continue to engage with the piece and to share their acts of rest with digital audiences, five years after the first iterations of the work.
- Raquel continues to run a monthly online space for the participants she's met through the project called the Cloudspotters' Cafe.

- In 2024 the team were invited by German Radio station WDR to create a German language version of the piece for German audiences.
- Raquel continues to explore 'absent presence' in her work and most recently presented on this theme at HZT Berlin, as part of Claire Cunningham Bodies of Knowledge 2025.

#### Impact:

- The piece sought to make visible the invisible acts of rest that sustain many disabled and chronically ill folk, to share their stories about resting in public with audiences.
- Participants told us time and again, how much they benefitted from knowing they weren't alone in their rest and from being able to see and hear the music created through their collective acts of rest.

## 4. Royal Shakespeare Company, Driving Innovation Through CreaTech Frontiers

Five-year funding programme to drive R&D, business innovation, and skills development across the West Midlands.

The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) is playing a pivotal role in the CreaTech Frontiers project, a major initiative aimed at integrating cutting-edge technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and multi-platform content into live performance and creative production. CreaTech Frontiers is a £7.2 million, five-year programme funded by AHRC and UKRI, designed to drive R&D, business innovation, and skills development across the West Midlands. It brings together universities, cultural organisations including The Royal Shakespeare Company, local government, schools, and industry to build a responsible, inclusive innovation ecosystem.

The Creative Industries faces growing pressure to adapt to rapid technological change while maintaining artistic integrity and audience engagement and many organisations lack the expertise or infrastructure to experiment with immersive technologies in live settings. The RSC contributes its world-leading expertise in live performance to help tech firms and creative organisations explore new applications of emerging technologies, fostering cross-sector collaboration that brings together academia, industry, and cultural institutions to co-develop innovative tools and experiences.

The RSC is also leading an expert group to develop recommendations about how CreaTech can be embedded within apprenticeship standards to ensure the innovation pipeline is feeding across all aspects of technical production, creative content development and audience engagement.

### Outcomes

This project supports the development of inclusive, accessible, and immersive cultural experiences and enables creative organisations to experiment with VR, AR, and digital storytelling in ways that are informed by theatrical practice, showing the vital relevance of theatre and live production to CreaTech. The RSC's involvement also ensures artistic quality and audience experience remain central to technological innovation.

### Impact

- Strengthens the UK's position as a global leader in CreaTech.
- Builds capacity for inclusive approaches to innovation that include arts and culture, ensuring these opportunities are not limited to tech hubs or commercial enterprises.
- Encourages place-based innovation, with the West Midlands acting as a testbed for scalable creative technologies.

### Learning

Interdisciplinary working gives space for the new disciplines that are evolving and equips us to be agile to navigate the changes our world is experiencing.

## 5. Watershed, Pervasive Media Studio



### A fertile lab for R&D and innovation

Pervasive Media Studio is an internationally recognised hub for creative technology and interdisciplinary innovation that bridges arts, academia, and industry to shape emerging technologies before they become mainstream. Launched in 2008 by Watershed in collaboration with HP Labs it is now run as a partnership with UWE Bristol and the University of Bristol. It hosts over 200 residents – artists, technologists, academics – working on projects that fuse art, technology, and social impact.

Pervasive Media Studio is an example of how social innovation creates useful conditions for inclusive and adventurous technological R&D and innovation. Desk space is gifted to residents to remove financial barriers, and the Studio has a culture of sharing expertise and resources that is characterised by generosity and open interruption. It is a site of regular cross-sector collaboration between artists, universities, and tech companies and has delivered numerous thematic R&D programmes and annual funded residencies. This has been made possible by prioritising long-term exploration over short-term outputs, enabling iterative prototyping and co-creation.

### Outcomes

- Community of over 200 active residents and a wider global network of thousands
- Produced award-winning cultural experiences
- Brought over £72 million of investment into the regional economy through collaborative R&D projects
- Developed new R&D methodologies for the creative sector.

- Positioned Bristol as a global leader in creative tech

### Impact

- Distributed £10.6 million in R&D funding, primarily to freelancers, micro-companies, and SMEs, generating £12.62 for every pound invested.
- Enabled artists and technologists to shape ethical and inclusive uses of technology.
- Generated projects reaching 175 million people globally.
- Strengthened Bristol's creative economy and international reputation.
- Influenced policy and practice through resources like the Climate Action Toolkit and Inclusion Framework for Change.
- Supported social innovation by embedding cultural, environmental, and commercial value in R&D.
- Fostering public discourse around the impacts of technologies through working in the open and schools and families programmes.

### Learning

- Trust-based partnerships between cultural and academic institutions enable extraordinary outcomes.
- Open-ended funding models – rather than project funding – foster deeper innovation than output-driven approaches, and deliver extraordinary value for money in terms of outcomes.

## 6. Coral Manton, Building Feminist Futures in Voice Technology

*Women Reclaiming AI Workshop at Knowle West Media Centre - photographer Ibolya Feher*



A grassroots creative computing project that challenges gender bias in AI

Women Reclaiming AI is a participatory arts and technology project led by Dr Coral Manton (Artist-Technologist, Game Developer and Senior Lecturer in Creative Computing at Bath Spa University) and Dr Birgitte Aga (activist, creative technologist, and researcher). Supported by Arts Council England, the project brought together women and gender-diverse communities to co-create feminist voice assistants of their own design.

Through workshops, data creation, and international recognition, it challenges the gendered tropes embedded in mainstream AI systems and opened up new pathways for inclusive digital futures. The project's participatory approach was central. The dataset created included community-generated language contributed by workshop participants, covering everything from feminist reflections to jokes and quotes from admired women.

### Outcomes

The project gained national and international recognition, including an invitation to present at Ars Electronica (Austria), Birmingham Open Media, Barbican Centre, and ITU 2019 - A United Nations Specialised Agency Conference on a panel titled "Diversity by Design: mitigating gender bias in AI" with panellists including Mastercard Chief Privacy Officer, Caroline Louveaux, and an AI Policy Advisor to The Commonwealth. The work was shown in two exhibitions More Than Meets AI in Kunstgaaarsjen,

Bergen (Norway) and Ryder Gallery, Berkeley, California (USA).

### Learning

Women Reclaiming AI exemplifies how artist-led interventions can challenge dominant narratives in technology. It also demonstrates the value of flexible, responsive funding in enabling timely, socially relevant work. As Coral Manton put it, "We hit a sweet spot... an artistic project that got you thinking, but also had potential skills you could use."

Manton sees Women Reclaiming AI as part of a wider movement. "There just seems to be a really great group of people who are doing work that can explain some of this stuff to the public in a way that's understandable." She believes artists have a vital role in shaping the future of AI. "It's really easy to scare everyone. But opening up the conversation - that's something we can do."

Case study is part of 'AI Technologies and Emerging Forms of Creative Practice' report:

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/ai-technologies-and-emerging-forms-creative-practice>

# 7. Hospital Rooms

Richard Mark Rawlins, *Another Horizon*, 2021. Titian Ward. Photo ©Hospital Rooms (Damian Griffiths)

Redefining what is possible in mental health care environments and setting new standards for patient-centred design

Hospital Rooms is a pioneering arts and mental health charity who are transforming NHS mental health inpatient units by commissioning world-class artists to create extraordinary, site-specific artworks. Their approach integrates creative practice into clinical settings, aiming to radically improve environments for patients and staff.

## Innovation Approach

- Brings together multidisciplinary teams (artists, clinicians, patients) and NHS staff to co-design and deliver bespoke art installations
- Runs creative workshops on wards, ensuring patients and staff shape the artistic vision
- Release monthly online creative workshops and providing bespoke, high-quality art materials that enable meaningful participation across all 58 NHS mental health trusts in England.
- Embedding artists in clinical environments to foster new models of collaboration between the arts and health sectors.

## Outcomes

- Over 63 NHS mental health units transformed with vibrant, restorative artworks
- Measurable benefits, with clinicians reporting improved staff morale, and enhanced patient engagement
- 600+ workshops, 5,000+ patients - evaluation data shows consistent gains in Inclusion (“I feel welcome & included”) and Imagination (“It opened my mind to new possibilities”).

- 100+ artist-led workshop recordings produced and 1,750+ boxes of high-quality art materials distributed to all 58 NHS mental health trusts in England, reaching an online audience of over 300,000 people in 42 countries.
- Hospital Rooms’ model has inspired new partnerships and funding streams, supporting the integration of creativity into healthcare settings nationwide

## Impact

- Redefining what is possible in mental health care environments, setting new standards for patient-centred design.
- Supporting inclusive innovation, ensuring people with lived experience are central to the creative process.
- Championing cross-sector collaboration and building capacity for arts-led innovation across the NHS and beyond.

## Key Learning

- Innovation in healthcare is not just about new treatments—it’s about reimagining the spaces where care happens, and empowering people to shape their own environments
- Transformation in healthcare is sustained when the whole community is involved to create change that extends beyond the duration of a singular project.
- The arts play a role in imagining radical solutions to entrenched social justice issues.

## 8. Hood Future Studios, ABUELOS

Community-owned cultural centre designed as civic infrastructure through the lens of radical hospitality.

Based in a 1903 stable block and courtyard at Port Loop in Birmingham, transformation work starts in 2027 for ABUELOS, a community-owned cultural centre. Modelled on the nurturing environment of a “grandad’s house”, it is a reimagining of a hotel and cultural centre, with private accommodation, galleries, artist studios, event space and a studio theatre. It’s artistic and public programme will centre its position as a home for Black storytelling and culture, while investing in community skills, imagination, entrepreneurship and connection. It situates racialised communities at its heart, while being an open and inviting space for all.

### Innovation approach

- Establish a ‘site of imagination’, giving space to rehearse the future, designing the ABUELOS space, testing and co-designing future programming ideas, exploring reimagining’s of governance, growing skills and capacities of artists and community to become custodians of future cultural assets.
- Prototyped idea with ‘YARD’, a residency space, community lab and Community Centre, testing out ideas on a smaller scale with artists and communities
  - ▶ Free recording in response to struggling music scene time
  - ▶ Brunches with up-and-coming businesses, free food and building connections
  - ▶ Wellness Wednesday providing space for healing practices
  - ▶ Open house where artists and communities can use the space - testing how communities take over and shape space
  - ▶ Programming including residencies, exhibitions and screenings of artists making work that reimagines social systems

- ▶ Sliding scale pricing, community and solidarity – testing income generation

### Outcome

- Creation of a solid framework for community and creative practice.
- Strategic portfolio that can be used in other large scale infrastructure delivery
- Creation of a community hub offering a rich programme of spaces, cultural production, performance and exhibition, accommodation and community
- Co-designed and co-developed spatial modelling
- Intimate courtyard gardens designed for biodiversity and wellbeing

### Impact

- Community ownership via freehold, where community retains agency in decision making and are able to choose how value is generated and distributed equitably
- Engages the community, local business and artists to create a fully rounded and inclusive approach to creativity
- Empowers local artists to understand impact of their work in a community and place context

## 9. Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination, Artscaping



'Stratigraph' detail.

### Inclusive creative innovation through simple materials and local ecologies

Global interest in children's wellbeing is growing and now central to major international policy documents regarding children's life quality. The climate crisis is fuelling a loss of optimism amongst young people about their futures. In the UK, a series of social and economic shocks has had a stark effect on young people's lives. Artscaping, Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination's practice of artist-led exploration and creation in nature, is proven to support children's wellbeing and creativity. This place-based, artist-led, and life-centric practice reconnects young people with their innate ability to attend to and engage with the world around them: a bespoke, local solution that roots deep attentiveness, ease, and care through differently structured, more open-ended learning environments.

#### Outcome

- Successfully piloted with 101 children aged 7-10 from schools in highly deprived areas leading to more time outdoors and more engagement with the creative arts.
- Cultivated a different social contract with young people, that is premised on the four cardinal directions of CCI's Companionship Compass: Be kind; Listen and respond; Hold back; and Celebrate. This Compass has been adopted by Fullscope, a consortium of partners working with young people and mental health, as their manifesto for co-creation.
- Cross-sector teams from the arts, mental health, education, and conservation now regularly collaborate, fostering more inclusive partnerships

and professional development across siloed networks.

#### Impact

- By focussing on the everyday world on your doorstep, Artscaping amplifies inclusive innovation by inviting people to reconnect with their own ways of being, knowing and doing.
- Commitment to peer-learning is seeding a growing community of practice for cross-sector colleagues, as exemplified by the annual Creative Exchange.
- By creating a different learning environment, different conversations become possible. As one young Artscaper explained to their teacher, "how do you expect me to tell you how I am feeling, if you don't give me the opportunity to draw?"

#### Key Learning

- The crucial need to bring together different perspectives and insights.
- The value in working horizontally with cross-sector colleagues to do more.
- The principle of nurturing projects within relationships, rather than relationships within projects.
- Drawing together small, well-embedded organisations helps develop timely and versatile solutions to complex problems.

# 10. Birmingham Museums Trust

Unified solution for commerce to simplify legacy systems

In response to post-pandemic operational challenges and a need for more sustainable digital infrastructure, Birmingham Museums Trust unified its ticketing, retail, and food & beverage sales using Shopify, a mainstream e-commerce platform not traditionally used in the cultural sector.

This integration was a response to a fragmented landscape of systems for ticketing, retail, and food and beverage sales that were creating inefficiencies, data silos, and accessibility issues. Financial pressures and site closures during 2021-22 prompted a strategic review of digital systems and BMT needed a solution that was cost-effective, scalable, and inclusive, enabling staff across multiple sites to manage operations more easily. A custom Shopify app was developed to manage ticketing, including requirements like Gift Aid, multi-venue admissions, and event types.

## Outcomes

- Shopify was successfully integrated as a single platform for all commerce activities, leading to simplified workflows, improved data accuracy, and enabled real-time analytics.
- Staff across sites were engaged in the learning process, fostering inclusive digital capacity-building.
- The system is now easier to maintain, update, and scale, with ongoing support from a dedicated developer.
- By rethinking a technology not common to the museum sector, BMT have solved a problem for their family of museums and created something that is scalable to the wider sector.

## Impact

- Demonstrates how mainstream technology can be adapted for cultural sector needs through inclusive R&D.

- Reduces reliance on niche suppliers, enabling greater flexibility and sustainability.
- Empowers staff and improves operational transparency, aligning with BMT's digital strategy and commitment to inclusivity.
- Provided BMT with core infrastructure to build out their dream of having a single customer view

## Learning

Keep it simple—needless complexity benefits no one - This principle guided the project and ensured that the innovation was accessible, adaptable, and responsive to the needs of both staff and audiences.



**Birmingham  
Museums**

# 11. Serpentine, Pursuing Independent Research Organisation Model

Embracing a new institutional form to spark ecosystem change across the sector

Over the past decade, Serpentine has pioneered a distinctive approach to research and innovation at the intersection of Art and Advanced Technology (AxAT). Through the Future Art Ecosystems programme, the organisation has tackled underserved areas of the cultural technology landscape – AI, web3, video games, copyright, IP, ownership, and data governance – fields in which significant artistic work is happening. Over time this work has evolved into a comprehensive platform for R&D, policy development, and thought leadership. Serpentine is in the process of applying for Independent Research Organisation (IRO) status, which could contribute to reshaping how arts organisations are recognised and funded as sites of legitimate research and innovation.

The application addresses both a structural and cultural challenge. While immersive technologies enjoy dedicated initiatives and Creative Industries funding through programmes such as CoSTAR, artistic and cultural organisations undertaking RD&I focussed activity in other government priority areas, such as AI and biotech, have limited access to support. IRO status offers new pathways for arts organisations undertaking high-quality research and innovation to resource this activity beyond traditional arts funding, and the potential for Serpentine to facilitate the development of a new ecosystem for organisations navigating similar challenges.

## Innovation methodology

- Strategic briefings that translate complex developments with specific technological and policy fields for the sector
- Prototype projects embedded within free public-facing exhibitions and commissions, exemplified by Holly Herndon and Mat Dryhurst's The Call, where the Serpentine Arts Technologies team led a Choral "Data Trust" Experiment that produced both a white paper on Trusted Data Intermediaries and a public exhibition.

- Systematic convening and network building creates spaces for artists, technologists, and policymakers to collaborate.

## Impact

- Cultural innovation in terms of artistic and cultural practices
- Organisational impact for the Serpentine, including operational innovation that extends from AI policy development to approaches to audiences
- Cross-sector innovation across industry, academia, policy

# SERPENTINE

## 12. Rambert, Peaky Blinders: The Redemption of Thomas Shelby



Tommy (Guillaume Quéau) in Rambert's Peaky Blinders The Redemption of Thomas Shelby. Photo © Johan Persson

### Cross-genre innovation uniting artistry and commercial ambition

Rambert, one of the UK's leading dance companies, has long been committed to artistic innovation, creative collaboration, and expanding the boundaries of contemporary dance.

The Redemption of Thomas Shelby is a dance theatre production by Rambert, written by TV series creator Steven Knight and directed by Benoit Swan Pouffer.

The R&D process for Peaky Blinders was guided by the principle of cross-genre innovation, combining contemporary dance with the pop culture appeal of a widely successful TV series. This approach involved collaboration across different industries to create a unique, commercially viable dance production.

Benoit Swan Pouffer, Artistic Director at Rambert, led the creative process collaborating with creator Steven Knight, merging the art of contemporary dance with the iconic themes of Peaky Blinders. The choreographer focused on creating a narrative-driven performance that would maintain the raw intensity and character-driven drama of the TV series. The choreography was designed to translate the TV series' essence into dance, allowing each movement to narrate the story.

### Outcome

- Over 200 performances in 20 venues across 6 countries with 214,668 tickets sold, surpassing expectations.

- 66% of attendees had never seen a Rambert production, and 22% had never attended a dance performance
- significant revenue boost, helping secure future productions and offering a more sustainable financial model moving forward
- elevated the profiles of Rambert company and its dancers, attracting significant interest from international promoters and providing opportunities to perform on large culturally significant stages at home and abroad

### Impact

- The production's financing and delivery model broke new ground for Rambert and the wider dance sector.
- The project also unlocked new creative and commercial opportunities through its filmed version. The production's transformation into a feature-length dance film, co-produced with the BBC and Birmingham Hippodrome, extended its lifespan far beyond the stage including being hosted on BBC iPlayer and presented in multiple film festivals all over the world.
- Peaky Blinders showcased how cross-genre collaborations can open up new possibilities for dance theatre, proving that mainstream entertainment can play a major role in attracting new audiences to dance.

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## Sector Advisor group

- Marc Boothe, B3 Media
- Sarah Ellis, RSC (Chair)
- Tom Higham, Mediale
- Oonagh Murphy, ACE and Goldsmiths University
- Lisa Ollerhead, CEO Association of Independent Museums (AIM)
- Clare Reddington, Watershed
- Jo Verrent, Unlimited
- Kay Watson, Serpentine Galleries

## Stakeholder advisor group

- Karoline Andrew, DCMS
- Hannah Andrews, British Council
- Hasan Bakhshi, PEC
- Hazel Edwards, Arts Council England Area Director South East (Chair)
- Sarah Ellis (representing the Sector Advisor Group)
- Jonathan Freeman, CoSTAR
- Nona Hunter and Mark Leaver, West of England Combined Authority
- Matthew McCallum and Catherine Kerfoot, Allan Sudlow, AHRC

## Interviewees

- Birgitte Aga, Head of innovation at Munich Museum
- Richard Blows, Boomsatsuma
- Anra Kennedy, The Audience Agency
- Isabel Oswell, Network of Business & IP Centres
- Zak Mensah, Birmingham Museums Trust
- Raquel Meseguer Zafe, MAYK
- Kate Pullinger, Bath Spa University
- Jess Thom, Touretteshero and Battersea Arts Centre's Collaborative Touring Network
- Rachel Drury, Collusion

## Roundtable participants

- Kate Ashton, Gloucestershire Libraries
- Angie Bual, Trigger
- Graham Callister, Leicester Council
- Lizzie Day, Art Night
- Emily Dowdeswell, Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination
- Andrew Ellis, ArtUK
- Hannah Fox, Bowes Museum
- Daniel Ford, British Underground

- Joseph Galliano, Queer Britain
- Lindsey Hall, Real Ideas
- Kay Hardiman, Curve Theatre
- Shahina Johnson, Create Studios
- Rupert Lorraine, University of Plymouth
- Ollie Olanipekun, Flock together
- Clare Reddington, Watershed
- Emily Toth, Ouseburn Trust
- Kristina Veasey, Artist
- Hamble Wallace, Sadler's Wells
- Rachel Williams, Glasshouse
- Tim Yates, Drake Music

## The Audience Agency team

- Jane Finnis, Senior Consultant Director
- Darcey Henderson, Research Officer
- Anra Kennedy, Senior Consultant Director
- Rachel Oxtton-King, Senior Product Designer
- Cara Pickering, Head of Creative Places
- Lily Senner, Planning Coordination
- Anne Torreggiani, CEO
- Patrick Towell, Director of Creative Economy
- Richard Turpin, Chief Research Officer
- Sophia Woodley, Head of Policy Research

## Careful Industries Team

- Rachel Coldicutt, Executive Director
- Lucy Willis, Administrative Support

## Arts Council England

- Hollie Charles-Smith, Director, Creative Health and Change
- Sarah Crown, Director Communications
- Hazel Edwards, Area Director South East
- James Evans, Senior Manager Data & Insights
- Adam Gent, Senior Manager South West
- Paul Glinkowski, Senior Manager New Tech
- Cat Hamsley Director Data & Insights
- Nema Hart, Director South West and Inclusive Innovation
- Owen Hopkin, Director of New Technologies and Innovation
- Lee Hornsby, Senior Manager Creative Industries
- Ben Lane, Senior Manager Business Innovation
- Laura McFarlane, Senior Manager London
- Andrew Mowlah, Director Research
- Tonya Nelson, Executive Director, Enterprise & Innovation
- Mags Patten, Executive Director Communications
- Nicola Saunders Environmental Responsibility & Innovation
- Joe Shaw, Senior Manager Research
- Clare Titley, Director of Business Innovation

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Wilderspool Business Park, Greenalls Ave,  
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