

MIDLANDS ENGINE OBSERVATORY ACADEMIC INSIGHTS

The Role of Universities in Enhancing Creative Clusters



This is a summary of a full report available [here](#), on the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre website.

Theme: Digital, Labour Market and Skills

Area of Focus: A report comparing the role universities can play in contributing to creative industry growth in two UK regions with developing creative clusters, the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and Cardiff Capital Region (CCR).

Key Findings:

The creative sector has been an element of UK Government economic policy for the last two decades. The cities of Birmingham and Cardiff have been identified by NESTA as 'Creative Challengers'. Both regions have substantial creative industry presence already, TV and Film in the CCR, and video games production in the WMCA.

A key obstacle for the growth of the creative industries is the presence of skills shortages, the [BFI](#) highlighting shortages 'across the board.'

Traditionally, the responsibility for upskilling workers in the screen sector resided within industry infrastructure, but has shifted away from industry to other pipelines, which include Higher Education providers and other institutions.

However, universities are expected to play many roles within their regions, including being attractors of skilled personnel, hubs of innovation and R&D spillover, anchor institutions and globally competitive centres of excellence. Additionally, there are barriers to regional engagement including human capital – the ability to attract, train, and retrain. It may be that universities are not aligned with the creative sector, and are thus being pulled in too many directions. This opens questions to how well-suited / nimble they are to closing skill gaps within industry – prompting for need for extra study.

With a continuing skill shortage of skilled personnel, other factors must be examined such as how well each region is retaining their creative graduates. Hence, a further understanding is needed for universities to enhance their creative clusters. This includes mapping any skills gaps, policy impacts including Levelling Up and the Shared Prosperity Fund on the creative sector, and the debate whether universities must reform their approach to fit in with the creative sector and policy.



Midlands Engine Impact:

Policy in the West Midlands prioritises the creative sectors and seeks to foster its growing creative clusters in Digbeth (TV) and around Leamington Spa (Gaming).

The expansion of creative industries within these local economies have the potential for innovation spill over, and collaboration with adjacent industries, including [JLR's](#) partnership with NVIDIA and AI-driven life sciences ([PathLAKE](#)), but targeted investment is required in connectivity, innovation and skills to link with the Government's Industrial Strategy.

The WMCA region benefits from a bigger population, multiple major population centres and a wider variety of HEIs than the Cardiff Capital Region. Whether the WMCA's increased size translates into a greater level of absorptive capacity including graduate retention, and a more attractive proposition for students and graduates is a matter for further research. The report has found that there is a disconnection between HEIs and the creative industry in the region prompting need to overcome barriers in regional engagement to enable growth.

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