What's Next for
Coventry's Creative Industries?
Opportunities & Challenges

Coventry City Council

Commissioned by:
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Creative Industries?
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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of Report

This report was commissioned by Coventry City Council to inform plans to develop a Coventry Creative Industries strategy/plan in 2025-26. The purpose was to gain a better understanding of the current size of the creative industries sectors in Coventry, as well as map current challenges, opportunities and activities through sector consultation and existing data sources.

The report is primarily focused on the economic development of the creative industries sub-sector, and the wider creative economy, across Coventry. Although in addition it touches on the relevance to this of the cultural offer, tourism and the visitor economy.

This report seeks to bring a clearer understanding of the immediate importance of the creative sector and the wider creative economy to Coventry, as well as consider how these could be aligned with wider regional and national opportunities.

The report is intended to provide evidence and advice to Coventry City Council through a set of recommendations based on the findings. These recommendations and a proposed roadmap of priority actions can help ensure the city is ‘on the front foot’ to take advantage of emerging opportunities and funding. It should be emphasised that the recommendations are made by the author and do not represent adopted policy or approaches by Coventry City Council.

1.2 Executive Summary

This is a potentially transformational moment for Coventry's creative industries. With wide-ranging creative and tech expertise, leading games cluster status with Warwickshire, strong industry collaboration from its universities and huge placemaking potential post UK City of Culture 2021, all it needs now is the right targeted policy actions to deliver lasting economic and social value to the city, its people and the wider region.

Coventry's creative industries represent a significant economic force that extends far beyond traditional creative boundaries. The city hosts 1,290 creative businesses comprising 13% of all local enterprises, directly employing 7,250 creative and cultural workers.

However, the sector's true impact is much larger—approximately 14,500 workers (circa 9% of the entire city workforce) are engaged in creative occupations, including across the broader economy, from designers at Jaguar Land Rover to marketing teams in utility companies. When combined with Warwickshire, the region boasts over 7,000 creative businesses and 80 game development studios, forming one of the UK's most significant creative clusters.

These creative and tech strengths combine with Coventry’s strong business clusters, such as automotive, advanced manufacturing and healthcare, to drive createch - a fusion of creative innovation and cutting-edge technology that is enabling the development of new products, services and experiences.

However, alongside this context of creative and business strength the city is facing some urgent challenges that need to be addressed head on. These include:

- A lack of affordable creative spaces, venues, and specialised facilities is a major challenge
- Tourism and branding need a stronger, coordinated city identity to attract investment and visitors
- Business support services are fragmented across different authorities causing uneven access. This lack of creative industry specialist support hinders handling of key sector concerns, such as around intellectual property (IP), finance or AI adoption. These two factors often mean that creative businesses find it difficult to get the support they need.
- Short-term funding cycles cause instability, hindering business investment
- Skills shortages and limited career opportunities lead to poor graduate retention; with only 15-20% of Coventry University creative graduates staying in the region, compared with a lower still 12% retention across all courses at the University of Warwick[1].
- Freelance creative work is often uncertain, poorly paid and lacks career progression, with limited business focused support available.
- The City of Culture Trust collapse caused significant uncertainty; with economic pressures pushing many businesses into survival mode, limiting planning and collaboration.

Fortunately, on the other side of the balance sheet, the city has a vast array of opportunities that can be harnessed to solve many of these challenges and put Coventry on a stronger economic path, these include:

- Business Development: specialist support, better funding access, and stronger freelancer networks can boost growth in all creative areas
- Cluster Development: building on the success of CWX - Coventry & Warwickshire Exchange – gives potential for a unified creative cluster with physical spaces, brokerage, and university ties
- Skills and Innovation: modernised university curricula, more bootcamps, and AI adoption support can solve workforce issues and position Coventry as a creative and tech leader
- Infrastructure: new projects like the City Centre Cultural Gateway offer creative spaces, venues, and hubs to transform the city
- Tourism and Branding: relaunching Destination Coventry and new partnerships help rebuild the city's cultural brand and leverage immersive and live performance strengths

Having explored the statistics of the city, its wide-ranging activities, alongside challenges and opportunities, this report sets out recommendations to begin 'moving-the-dial', including:

Business and Freelancer Support
- Providing targeted creative sector support with specialist advisors
- Broadening funding options beyond grants, including venture capital and angel investors
- Building freelancer networks offering co-working spaces, training, and advocacy

[1] https://www.savills.co.uk/research_articles/229130/336190-0

Networking and Partnerships

- Launching a creative cluster initiative led by a dedicated Cluster Manager
- Creating a central business hub to drive collaboration and innovation
- Offering brokerage services to connect businesses, universities, and other sectors

Skills and Workforce Development

- Expanding digital and AI training within business support programmes
- Aligning education with industry needs and strengthen graduate retention
- Promoting creative bootcamps and apprenticeships for upskilling

Places and Spaces

- Increasing creative spaces through temporary, repurposed, new and affordable developments
- Addressing safety in creative areas and integrate space needs into major city projects
- Exploring innovative business models to speed up the development of places and spaces

Tourism, Visitor Economy, and Branding

- Positioning eSports as a flagship event, leveraging university expertise
- Promoting Coventry's unique live experiences blending arts, games, and technology
- Developing a unified brand and marketing strategy for the creative sector

Public Funding and Government Policies

- Focusing a creative cluster initiative on high-growth sectors and maintain a strong project pipeline
- Capitalising on opportunities from the government's recently published Modern Industrial Strategy, including immersive tech and gaming clusters

Roadmap – Priority Actions

Resources are always limited, and so in the report's final section a number of key actions are identified that could bring timely impacts whilst using limited resources. The first set of these can be delivered by a wide range of partners working together. Actions include:

Business, Clusters, Networks

1. Improve coordination of creative sector support, focusing on needs like sustainability and AI, and broaden finance options for creatives
2. Pilot expert business support schemes (e.g., active-brokerage, entrepreneur in residence) and relaunch networks to better serve creative business clusters
3. Launch a creative cluster initiative in Coventry, building partnerships among key organisations for stronger knowledge sharing and networking
4. Leverage all opportunities to bring new creative jobs into the city and region
5. Enhance support for creative freelancers, especially newcomers, to help them establish and market their careers

Skills & Workforce Development

6. Align further and higher education courses with industry needs and foster more collaboration between education and industry
7. Promote more creative bootcamps, apprenticeships, and short courses in Coventry to upskill current and aspiring creatives

8. Talent Development - including access and inclusion of creative expression from primary school age upwards - is essential for a strong and diverse creative workforce in the future

Places & Spaces

9. Establish a Creative Economy Development Agency to secure affordable creative spaces, repurpose existing venues, and encourage collaboration among creative hubs

Tourism, Visitor Economy & Branding

10. Develop unique live experiences for Coventry's visitor economy, such as blending arts with digital tech and e-sports, and test pilot projects to create standout immersive events

Public Funding, City Development & Government Policies

Public bodies such as combined authorities and city councils are central to coordinating and growing a city's economic power and increasing its national profile. Below is a list of roadmap priority actions for consideration by Coventry City Council itself:

1. Lead the creation of a creative cluster initiative, including a Cluster Manager, and ensure the initiative is industry-led, acting as a catalyst for collaboration
2. Explore establishing an independent Creative Economy Development Agency to unite stakeholders and drive growth in the creative sector
3. Build a pipeline of creative projects to be ready for new funding and ensure integration with wider city investment plans
4. Study vacant or underused buildings for potential creative sector use, including asset transfer opportunities
5. Develop a full Creative Industries & Creative Economy Strategy for Coventry with up-to-date mapping of sector scale and employment. Integrate this with a revised marketing and branding plan for the city

In conclusion: This is an important moment in time for Coventry and a timely opportunity to develop its creative sector and its positioning as a leading UK city.

2.0 Mapping the Creative Sector

This chapter focuses on mapping the key statistics in relation to creative industries in Coventry and the sub-region.

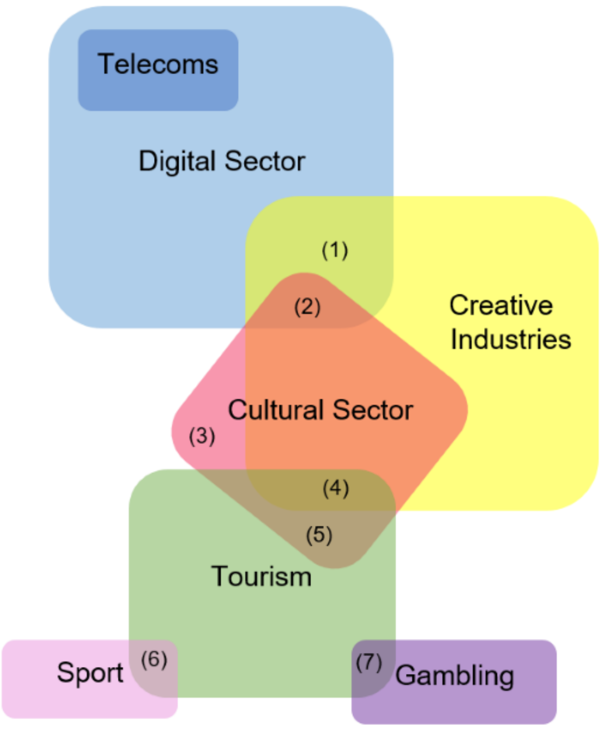
2.1 Defining the Creative Industries

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) supports culture, arts, media, sport, tourism and civil society across every part of England — recognising the UK's world-leading position in these areas and the importance of these sectors in contributing so much to our economy, way of life and our reputation around the world.

It defines the Creative Industries as including the following sub-sectors:

- Advertising & marketing
- Architecture
- Crafts
- Design & designer fashion
- Film, TV, radio and photography
- Museums, galleries and libraries
- Music, performing and visual arts
- Publishing
- IT, software and computer services including games

It has responsibility over the UK's Digital sector, Cultural sector, Tourism, Sport, Gambling regulation, Telecoms regulation as well as the Creative Industries. The Venn diagram below[2] shows how these domains overlap and interact with each other:



(1) Publishing, computer games, software publishing, computer programming, computer consultancy activities
(2) Film, TV, Music, Radio
(3) Heritage, retail of music and video recordings, manufacture of musical instruments, reproduction of recorded media
(4) Arts, Museum activities
(5) Heritage
(6) Renting of sports goods, operation of sports facilities, other sport activities
(7) Gambling

Note: Civil Society has not been depicted in this figure because it spans across all industries, both within DCMS sectors and outside. The overlap between Civil Society and other DCMS sectors is taken into account for All DCMS totals (mainly SIC 90 – Arts, which overlaps with Creative Industries, Cultural Sector and Tourism sector).

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[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dcms-sectors-economic-estimates-methodology/dcms-sector-economic-estimates-methodology Section 2. Definitions figure 2.1 Overlap of SIC codes within DCMS sectors

This report is focused on the Creative Industries part of this and how it overlaps and interacts with especially Culture, Digital and Tourism.

2.2 Creative Sector in Numbers

The scale of the city and the creative industries are set-out below, to give some context to later chapters of this report that consider challenges, barriers and opportunities.

2.2.1 Coventry City and its people

345,325	**population**
10th	**largest English city**
2nd	**largest in West Midlands**
9%	**Growth in last decade**
45%	**identify global majority**
22%	**Under 18**

Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS) Census 2021, Coventry City Council

Coventry has a population of 345,325, making it the 10th largest English city and the 2nd largest in the West Midlands, after Birmingham. It has enjoyed 9% growth in the last decade.

Based on assumed levels of future fertility, mortality and migration, and based on the above 2021 data, the population in Coventry is projected to change from 400,523 people in 2025 to 449,021 people in 2040. This is an increase of 12.11% over a 15-year period.

45% of Coventry's residents identify as part of the global majority, meaning they identify with the majority of the world's population who are not from white ethnic groups.

Coventry is also a very young city, with 22% of its population under 18.

Coventry is famous for many things, including Lady Godiva, Two Tone, its Cathedrals and history of reconciliation, as well as being the birthplace of British motor cars and now a centre for advanced manufacturing where tech converges with creativity in so many ways.

Coventry as UK City of Culture in 2021 provided an important opportunity for the city and its cultural and creative sectors, as outlined in the case study below.

Case Study: UK City of Culture – Coventry 2021 – Impacts & Legacy

Coventry's year as UK City of Culture (UK CoC) in 2021 brought many benefits and positive impacts alongside some documented negative impacts. It significantly enhanced its national and international profile, positioning it as a "future-facing, pioneering city" and highlighting Coventry as a global and connected city. The event showcased Coventry's diverse communities and creative strengths, helping to reshape external perceptions and instil a sense of pride among residents.

The City of Culture programme brought substantial economic benefits. It generated more than £183 million for the local economy, with a net additional Gross Value Added (GVA) of £11.6 million in Coventry and Warwickshire. The award attracted over £176 million in direct investment and has supported wider regeneration activity valued at over £500 million since 2017. The city also saw an expansion in cultural revenue funding by 22% between 2023 and 2026.

Coventry experienced record-breaking tourism following its tenure as UK City of Culture. In 2022, the visitor economy was valued at £750.86 million, a 26% increase on pre-pandemic levels, and visitor numbers reached 11.05 million—up by one million from 2019. The city outperformed the wider West Midlands region in tourism recovery, with major events during the UK City of Culture year acting as key drivers for this growth.

Participation in cultural activities rose across the city, with 47% of residents engaging in UK City of Culture events. The programme's focus on inclusivity and co-creation, especially in areas of historically low cultural participation, led to improved wellbeing and a greater sense of belonging.

The UK City of Culture year strengthened Coventry's creative and cultural sector by increasing opportunities, funding, and visibility. There was a notable expansion in creative workspace and infrastructure. The event fostered partnerships, supported the development of creative production hubs, and encouraged participation from diverse communities, boosting the sector's resilience and growth potential.

Major capital investments transformed Coventry's cultural landscape. The Cultural Capital Investment Programme enabled significant refurbishments of venues like the Belgrade Theatre and Drapers' Hall.

Sadly, the financial collapse of the Coventry City of Culture Trust caused reputational damage and the loss of a number of the planned legacy programmes. As the trust entered administration in 2023, this also left a number of creditors, which included local cultural and creative organisations. These issues generated public debate, political scrutiny, and a sense of missed legacy opportunities.

2.2.2 Coventry's creative businesses

1,290	**Creative businesses**
12.9%	**of 9,975 total**
860	**Digital**
1,020	**Creative industries**
355	**Culture**

Source: ONS Business Count Data, Economic Impact Assessment relating to Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 by Amion Consulting, plus a process of validation at DCMS with 2022 data.

TO NOTE: *There is a discrepancy between the two data sets, as the data for total number of businesses is from 2021, whilst the sub-sector total figures are from 2022. For this reason, the total number of businesses does not tally with the sub-sector businesses. Despite this discrepancy, this is the best available data at the time of writing to demonstrate the size of the industry.*

Coventry has 1,290 creative businesses, defined as those either registered for VAT and /or running a PAYE employer scheme (see information box). Government classification sub-divides these into three further categories: 860 of them being **Digital**, 1,020 being **Creative Industries** and 355 being **Cultural**. These terms are defined as:

Digital businesses – those primarily engaged in the production and provision of digital goods and services, such as serious games, games and digital publishing.

Creative industries – those that "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", such as advertising & marketing, architecture, fashion, film/tv/radio and photography.

Cultural Sector – those businesses with a "cultural object at the centre of the industry," focusing on the production, preservation, and dissemination of cultural products, such as design, crafts, music, and visual arts.

Classification of businesses

The main source for these business totals is the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR). The IDBR is a comprehensive list of UK businesses, and inclusion is primarily based on registration for either: Value Added Tax (VAT) or Pay-As-You-Earn (PAYE) employer scheme.

The overwhelming majority of businesses in the dataset are limited companies, sole proprietors, and partnerships. The ONS Business Count Data does not include unregistered businesses—that is, businesses that are not registered for VAT and do not operate a PAYE scheme. This means that the cited total of 1,290 creative businesses is under-counting the true number, although we do not know by how much.

These creative businesses represent nearly 13% of the total of 9,975 businesses within Coventry.

2.2.3 Coventry's creative and cultural workers

7,250 employed

4.4% of 165,000 jobs total

\+

45-50% freelance

\+

50% **3,500** Creatives in non-creative industries. Creative Economy

= maybe

14,500 nearly 9% entire workforce

Source: ONS Business Count Data, Economic Impact Assessment relating to Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 by Amion Consulting, plus a process of validation within DCMS. with a caveat that the extrapolation to nearly 9% is 'reasonable' based on known facts but still an approximation

Coventry has 7,250 employed creative and cultural workers in the sector, this represents 4.4% of total employment in the city of 165,000. However, that is not the whole story as around 45-50% of creative workers are freelance, and these are not counted in that headline.

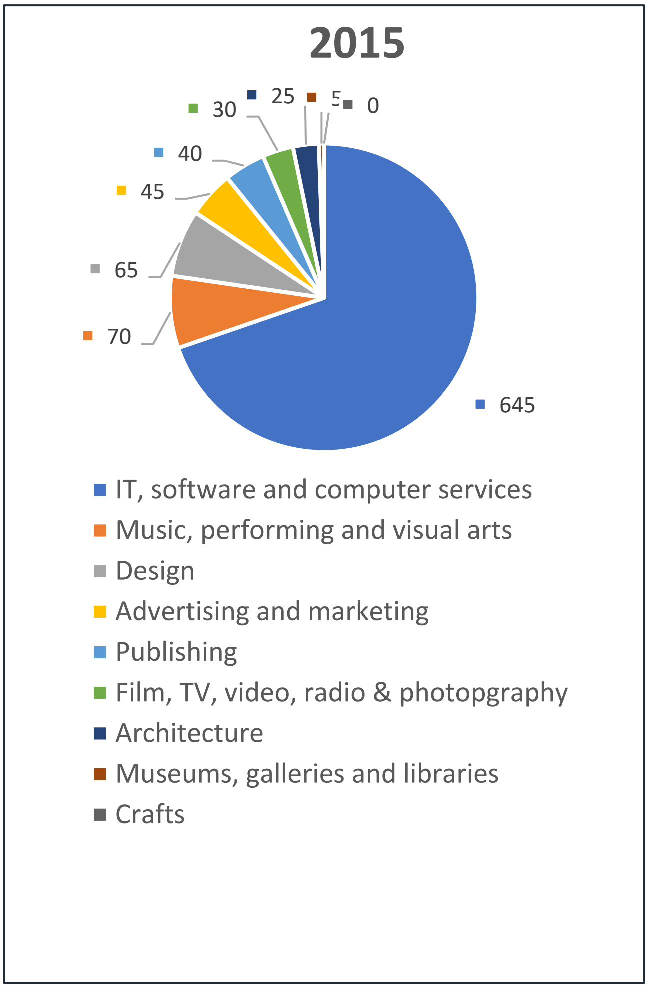
And it doesn't stop there either, as 50-55% of all those doing creative occupations are actually employed in other sectors. For example, designers at Jaguar Land Rover or Marketing teams in utility companies.

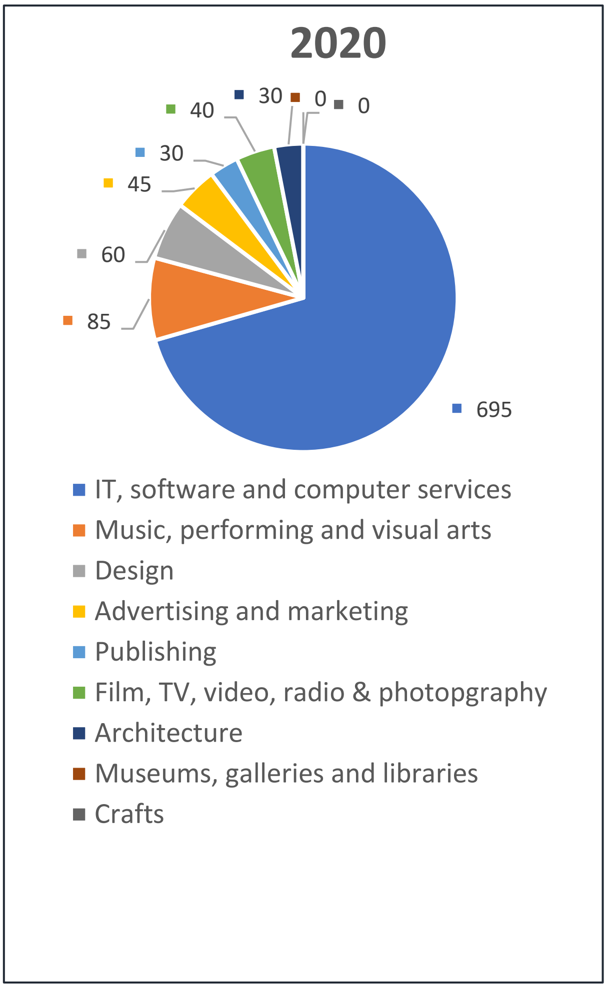
This suggests that maybe 14,500 workers, or approaching 9% of the entire workforce, are either working in the creative industries or doing creative occupations in the wider creative economy.

This underscores the importance of the creative and cultural sector and these creative jobs to the city of Coventry.

2.2.4 Coventry's Creative Sub-sectors by size

The table below provides a breakdown of sector businesses. Again, with the caveat that it only counts those businesses which are VAT and or PAYE registered. So actual numbers will be larger, especially in cultural sectors such as crafts and visual arts. For this reason, the data should only be used to understand the comparative size of different creative industry sub-sectors across Coventry.





Source: Source: IDBR data from NOMIS using DCMS creative industries and Tech Nation SICs, Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy 2021.

The charts above show that Coventry has a very good spread and balance between different creative sub-sectors as defined by DCMS. IT software and computer services appears much larger than other sub-sectors because they include some unrelated software fields alongside major strengths in entertainment games production, serious games and other tech related creative industry businesses.

This wide spread of creative expertise is a real asset to the city, especially when we consider the way creative expertise is a catalyst of cross-sector innovation and growth, exemplified by the city's strengths in the emerging createch sub-sector, see section 2.2.7.

2.2.5 Coventry and Warwickshire's creative sector

7,000	Creative businesses
Design, digital marketing, virtual reality, film & TV	
80	Game Development Studios
44,000	Creative workers
10% of UK	West Midlands Games Cluster £224m pa
3,500	employed, 2,500 Leamington

Compiled from multiple sources: Invest Coventry & Warwickshire, Warwickshire District Council & Warwick Business School Creative Report, 'What is Next for Video Games Cluster', Report by BOP Consulting, The Association for UK Interactive Entertainment (Ukie), Coventry & Warwickshire Exchange & University of Warwick, c. 2022-3

When we consider Coventry & Warwickshire as a combined creative sector its importance becomes even clearer. With over 7,000 creative businesses and 80 game development studios, the region is buzzing with talent. From design and digital marketing to virtual reality, film, and TV, around 44,000 creative minds are shaping the future here.

A major part of this activity is the West Midlands Games Cluster, which includes 10% of all UK games companies, that is around 3,500 businesses, 2,500 of which are based in Leamington Spa.

This Games cluster is one of the UK's most significant and diverse, internationally recognised and worth around £224m per year[3]. It includes the disciplines of entertainment games and eSports alongside serious games for training, simulation & education alongside animation, visual effects, immersive experiences and other content creation.

Since the publication of the above data the sector has been hit by cutbacks, with a reduction in the number of businesses and a cut in employment, although the exact scale of these cutbacks is not known.

Fortunately, alongside these cuts there are emerging new opportunities, which need to be maximised.

[3] GVA of £224m comes from 2015 but continues to be cited as no more recent data is available, use as rough guide only https://midlandsinvestmentportfolio.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Invest-in-UK-RD-Midlands-Universities-and-Creative-Digital-Industries.pdf

2.2.6 Coventry’s key clusters & their relationship to Creative Industries

Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering
Automotive & Future Mobility
Energy & Low Carbon
Modern Services
Health & Life Sciences

Source: Coventry City Council

Coventry’s key sectors, outside of creative and culture, include:

- **Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering** – including automotive, aerospace, rail, motorsport, engineering, material sciences and metrology.
- **Automotive & Future Mobility** – automotive manufacturing, electric and hybrid vehicles, connected and autonomous vehicles (CAV), off-highway vehicles, and future mobility solutions
- **Energy & Low Carbon** – clean energy, low carbon technologies, storage, utilities, and sustainable infrastructure
- **Modern Services** - professional and financial services, legal, accountancy, management, fintech, proftech (high technology) shared services, and outsourcing
- **Health & Life Sciences** - healthcare, pharmaceuticals, medical technology/devices, biotechnology, clinical trials, and health innovation

When combined with Warwickshire, the automotive, rail, aerospace and motorsport sectors employ in excess of 40,000 people.

Coventry is nationally recognised for its innovation and activity across these business clusters and is especially known for advanced manufacturing, future mobility and energy & low carbon. They are especially relevant to developing Coventry’s creative sector now because:

1. Coventry’s business strengths align exactly with the UK government’s newly published ‘Modern Industrial Strategy’ and its high-growth sector focus.
2. Coventry’s creative industries can benefit all of these sectors, because it is a catalyst of cross-sectoral innovation and growth within all of them.
3. Coventry’s creative sector uniquely blends multiple creative sub-sectors with tech such as immersive and games, meaning that it is already a strong Createch cluster.

This alignment of high-growth sectors and creative strengths means that Coventry, Warwickshire and the wider West Midlands are uniquely placed to benefit from this government's new policy and public funding focused around the Industrial Strategy.

2.2.7 Industrial Policy, Createch and Coventry

The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy is focused on eight sectors as a deliberate, long-term approach to address low investment and productivity, spread prosperity, and secure the country's place in the global economy. By targeting sectors with the highest growth potential and spillover benefits, the government aims to create well-paid jobs, foster innovation, and ensure resilience in an increasingly volatile world. The IS-8 high growth sectors are:

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Life Sciences
- Clean Energy
- Defence
- Digital and Technologies
- Professional and Business Services
- Financial Services
- Creative Industries

These sectors are important because:

- They could add £152 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA)[4] and create 1.1 million new jobs to the UK economy by 2035
- They are export-oriented and have seen global opportunities expand by $5 trillion over the last decade, with a further $10 trillion forecast by 2035
- A focus on them will strengthen the UK's economic and national security, reduce reliance on volatile global supply chains, and support foundational industries like steel, chemicals, and ports
- Clean energy, advanced manufacturing, and professional services are central to delivering on the UK's net zero commitments and capturing the economic benefits of the green transition
- Supporting these sectors will especially drive innovation, skills and tech adoption

Advanced Manufacturing - is pivotal for innovation, automation, and digitisation, receiving £4.3 billion in funding (including £2.8 billion for R&D over five years). Advanced manufacturing underpins supply chains for other sectors and is essential for the UK's ambition to double business investment and anchor high-value jobs.

Life Sciences - the UK aims to be one of the world's top three life sciences economies by 2035, with up to £600 million invested in a Health Data Research Service to create a secure,

[4] https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/gross-value-added.asp

AI-ready health data platform. Life sciences drive improvements in healthcare, support high-value R&D and attract global investment.

Clean Energy - the strategy positions the UK as a clean energy manufacturing and innovation superpower, supporting the global transition to net zero. Clean energy industries are critical for energy security, lower electricity costs, and delivering the government's Clean Energy Superpower Mission.

Defence - defence is highlighted for both national security and its spillover benefits for growth, exports, and innovation. Increased defence spending (targeting 2.5% of GDP, with ambitions for 5%) will grow the industrial base and support the development of dual-use technologies, that benefit civilian and defence purposes.

Digital and Technologies - the UK is investing £670 million in quantum computing, £500 million in a new Sovereign AI Unit, and establishing AI Growth Zones. This sector is foundational for building sovereign capabilities, supporting frontier innovation, and ensuring the UK remains globally competitive in emerging technologies.

Professional and Business Services - growth focused on increasing tech adoption and AI integration, with £150 million to expand the Made Smarter scheme. This sector is a key enabler for productivity growth and supports the broader economy through high-value services and expertise.

Financial Services - the UK is actively working to maintain its status as the world's leading financial services hub by rebalancing regulation for growth, cutting red tape for FinTech, and opening access to private capital. Financial services are essential for funding innovation and supporting other high-growth sectors.

Creative Industries - delivers comprehensive economic and social benefits across multiple dimensions including:

- The creative industries contribute £124 billion in GVA and support 2.4 million jobs nationwide[5]. By 2035, the strategy aims to increase annual business investment from £17 billion to £31 billion[6], positioning the UK as a global leader in film/TV, video games, music, and advertising.

- The plan targets 55 major creative clusters and 709 micro clusters nationwide, including support for the West Midlands. Initiatives like the £150 million Creative Places Growth Fund empower Mayoral Authorities to drive locally tailored investment in creative infrastructure.

- Placemaking and the visitor economy are vital to cities like Coventry, where the creative and cultural sector plays a crucial part, factors include:
    - Continuing existing and developing new major events to drive tourism.

[5] https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/creative-industries-growth-jobs-and-productivity/#heading-2
[6] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/380-million-boost-for-creative-industries-to-help-drive-innovation-regional-growth-and-investment

- Supporting grassroots participation, local venues and public art that enhances social cohesion (aided by Central Government's annual funding of £440 million to Arts Council England).
    - Developing new and upgrading existing creative spaces will drive economic growth, social impacts and improve sustainability. The £85 million Creative Foundations Fund is designed to support infrastructure projects like these, it is contestable, and some could be won by Coventry, helping to drive footfall, spending and enhance the quality of life and opportunity for residents.
    - Creative activities improve wellbeing and mental health outcomes, while initiatives like the National Centre for Arts and Music Education (launching 2026) expand youth access to creative careers.

- Devolved funding enables regions like the West Midlands to address specific needs, such as Coventry's focus on digital skills for gaming and immersive tech.

- Programmes like the £9 million creative careers service target underrepresented groups, while freelance champions advocate for job quality and fair contracts.

- R&D Investment: UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) will deploy £100 million to establish R&D creative clusters in new sub-sectors and locations, fostering innovation-led growth outside London.

  This includes a Coventry-Specific Opportunity, as part of the West Midlands corridor, Coventry benefits from:

    - Access to the Create Growth Programme, which funds regional skills bootcamps and creative accelerators.
    - Support for creative "corridors" linking cities, enhancing collaboration and infrastructure.

- Spillover Effects on Other Sectors include:

    - Innovation Diffusion: Creative R&D generates spillovers into defence, healthcare, and education. For example, games technology advances surgical training tools, while AI-driven design optimises sustainable manufacturing.
    - Business Synergies: Advertising/marketing (£109 billion indirect GVA) fuels growth across all UK industries by enhancing brand visibility and consumer engagement.
    - Createch (creative tech) is projected to add £18 billion GVA and 160,000 jobs over the next decade.

- The updated Industrial strategy[7] identifies 'cutting-edge Createch in the West Midlands', acknowledging the great potential for its development not only in Coventry and Warwickshire but across the region too. (see information box below)

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7 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/685943ddb328f1ba50f3cf15/industrial_strategy_creative_industries_sector_plan.pdf page 59

Createch – Definition as part of UK Industrial Strategy 2025

Createch is a newly emerging fusion of all creative sub-sectors, defined in the UK Government's Creative Industries Sector Plan[8] as the 'fusion of creative innovation and cutting-edge technology'. It enables the creation of:

- New products (e.g., immersive games, interactive media, AI-generated art)
- Innovative services (e.g., virtual production for film/TV, AR/VR experiences)
- Unique experiences (e.g., digital fashion shows, interactive museum exhibits)
- New systems and business models (e.g., creative content marketplaces, blockchain for digital rights management)

Examples of use-cases include:

- Films using virtual production and real-time game engines
- AI-powered music composition tools
- Augmented reality in advertising and design
- Virtual reality training for education or performance arts
- Digital platforms for licensing and monetising creative content

Createch embraces all creative sub-sectors, as defined by DCMS:

- Advertising
- Architecture
- Crafts
- Design and designer fashion
- Film, TV, radio, and photography
- Museums, galleries, and libraries
- Music, performing, and visual arts
- Publishing
- Software and computer services (including video games)

Within Createch, the focus is on those businesses in these sub-sectors that are actively developing or innovatively using technologies such as:

- Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- Augmented and Virtual Reality (AR/VR)
- Real-time game engines
- Blockchain and distributed ledger technologies
- Advanced digital production tools

Createch activities are especially prominent in:

- Film, TV, and visual effects (e.g. virtual production, digital animation)
- Video games (e.g. immersive and interactive content)
- Advertising and marketing (e.g. personalised, data-driven campaigns)
- Design and fashion (e.g. digital prototyping, virtual clothing)
- Music and performing arts (e.g. AI composition, virtual concerts)
- Museums and cultural heritage (e.g. digitisation, interactive exhibits)

The UK Government identifies Createch as central to the future growth of the creative industries, aiming to establish the UK as a global leader in this emerging sector.

[8] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-industries-sector-plan

Createch is highlighted as a "frontier industry" with disruptive growth potential, and government policy is focused on removing barriers to innovation, finance, skills, and international trade to unlock its full impact.

Coventry is well placed to be a national leader in this Createch revolution, as it has so many of the relevant sub-sector skills and complimentary business clusters needed for success.

2.2.8 Educational Institutes across Coventry & Warwickshire

Coventry and Warwickshire are well supported by significant educational institutes that take a very active role in the key Coventry business sectors as well as the creative and cultural sector itself.

The University of Warwick is a key player in the West Midlands' knowledge economy. Ranked in the top 10 of all UK universities, its Warwick Manufacturing Group (WMG) is nationally renowned for industry collaboration. Alongside its tech credentials, the University has established strengths in Interdisciplinary arts-science degrees, cultural policy research and digital humanities. In addition, Warwick Arts Centre, which is also part of the University of Warwick, is a major arts venue and cultural hub for the area. Warwick Business School, also part of the University, is central to the regional business innovation ecosystem, particularly in tech and creative industries. It is ranked among the UK's top 5 business schools with a strong focus on creative entrepreneurship. It has key strengths in creative industries management and Innovation strategy for cultural enterprises.

Coventry University is ranked in the top quartile of all UK universities. It is a well-regarded anchor institution in Coventry driving the local creative economy through applied research and industry partnerships. The University has held the arts, design and creative practice, industry engagement and the university's contribution to the regional economy in its DNA from its inception in 1843. Its College of Arts and Society continues to be a leading provider of applied creative courses. It is home to the School of Arts & Creative Industries, which offers foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Animation, Architecture, Automotive Design, Curating, Digital Media, Games Design, Media & Communications, Film Production and Photography amongst others, which directly serve the skills needs of the Creative Industries. These courses are highly-regarded by industry stakeholders – Automotive & Transport Design in particular has global significance.

Coventry University's Delia Derbyshire building – home of the College of Arts & Society – was opened in May 2024 to provide industry standard facilities for students and stakeholders in a range of creative, immersive technologies (including 360 Motion-capture, Dolby Atmos – immersive sound design), fully-equipped TV, film, photography, podcasting and design studios, as well as high-tech fabrication spaces. It also acts as an open, creative and Civic hub, being accessible to the public and the city and regional Createch ecosystem, with a case study provided in chapter 5.1.2. All students learn through a project methodology which sees them respond to 'real-world' briefs and global challenges, which are delivered through engagement with external/industry partners.

Similarly, the University has expanded its research in arts, culture and creativity with a fourth Research Centre for Creative Economies joining the Centre for Arts, Memory and

Communities, Centre for Dance Research, and Centre for Post Digital Cultures. College and Research Centre staff continue to hold numerous governance roles within the cultural and placemaking creative organisations of Coventry, Warwickshire and the West Midlands, supporting talent and skills development. In addition, they jointly supervise doctoral students with industry and undertake collaborative R&D. Such activity is combined with the provision of commercialisation and business support activities to support Coventry's economic and social development as a thriving creative cluster.

The two universities have a combined student population of around 60,000, most of whom live in Coventry. As well as the creative life they bring to the city through societies, volunteering, attending and putting on cultural events etc, they bring new ideas, energy and talent. Many run creative 'side hustles' or set up student businesses while they are studying and both universities support through talent development and incubation. There are opportunities to build this pipeline into graduate start-ups that stay locally and also to position Coventry as the best city to study at if you want to start a creative business.

The Universities are also working together on joint initiatives such as CWX[9], the Coventry & Warwickshire Exchange and Crea Tech Frontiers. CWX is a highly successful creative cluster management organisation that has earnt its reputation in supporting the region's creative and immersive cluster. CreaTech Frontiers has leveraged this profile, expertise and partnership to the regional scale. More detail about both initiatives can be found in chapter 3.1.

Within Further Education (FE), Coventry College is well known for its wide-ranging creative courses which include: Art & Graphic Design, Fashion & Textiles, Photography, Performing Arts & Music, along with Creative Media and Games. The Warwickshire College Group has specialisms in digital media, performing arts and games design and partners with the games cluster. In addition, Coventry University has FE Pathways to help students achieve the necessary entry standards for their undergraduate or post-graduate courses. Their foundational courses include games, digital design and creative technologies. Neighbouring Solihull College also attracts students from Coventry and has delivered a number of creative industries bootcamps in the past few years.

Overall, this is a compelling offer from educational institutes which puts Coventry in a very strong position to develop its creative industries, as well as to be a leader in Createch.

2.2.9 Investing in Coventry

Apart from the funding for Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 and related investment, Coventry has missed out on some other public funding to support placemaking[10] across the city in the last 4-5 years. Fortunately, there is an opportunity now for it to be 'on-the-front-foot' and ready, as new funding is expected soon.

The previous Conservative UK government was committed to 'levelling up' across the whole of the United Kingdom, especially since Covid. A number of funds and levelling up programmes were started, including; UK Community Renewal Fund, Levelling Up Fund,

[9] https://www.wearecwx.co.uk/
[10] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Placemaking

Community Ownership Fund and UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), which is still running in 2025/26.

The largest of these was the UK government's Levelling Up Fund (LUF), which had £4.8 billion of capital across three rounds focused on:

- Regenerating Town Centres and High Streets: projects to revitalise urban centres, support retail, and improve public spaces
- Upgrading Local Transport: Investments in public transport, active travel (e.g., walking, cycling), bridge repairs, bus lanes, local road improvements, and accessibility
- Cultural and Heritage Assets: Support for maintaining and expanding cultural venues, heritage sites, and local cultural infrastructure

Despite a £125,000 capacity building grant from central government, to support its bid writing into this contestable fund, none of it was won for Coventry in the three Levelling Up Fund Rounds, as the chart below shows:

Levelling Up Funding Allocated to Coventry – Rounds 1-3

Indicator	Coventry	West Midlands	England
Levelling Up Fund (Round 1)	£0	£195,975,000	£1,351,429,923
Levelling Up Fund (Round 2)	£0	£155,579,834	£1,588,735,058
Levelling Up Fund (Round 3)	£0	£118,052,777	£742,236,976

Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

Data included in: Culture and Place Data Explorer Detailed Report, Coventry, Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion Ltd for Arts Council England 2025

However, Coventry was awarded £5 million through the Labour Government's Plan for Change in 2025, following an initial award through the Conservative Government's Levelling Up Culture announcement in 2024. This funding was awarded towards the development of the Coventry City Centre Cultural Gateway as outlined in chapter 3.2. of the report. The new Labour government has further replaced the competitive local growth funds with a devolved, block-grant approach called the Integrated Funding Settlement, with the first year this runs expected to be in 2026/27. This should be the start of a series of multi-year settlements, moving away from short-term, project-based funding.

Meanwhile, the government has allocated £389 million for the West Midlands region in 2025/26 as a single annual payment. Combined with £211 million in existing transport funding, the region will have £600 million to invest in growth, housing, jobs, and transport. The West Midlands Create Growth Programme is also included in the Integrated Settlement with WMCA 2026/27 onwards, providing an opportunity for creative businesses in Coventry to access some of the investment.

Coventry's allocation from the UKSPF is £4.65 million double devolved funding through the WMCA, which will be directed at Supporting Local Businesses (Creative SMEs are eligible for support), People & Skills (some of which could equip residents with skills or tackle barriers to employment associated with Creative industries), and Communities & Place (which will be used to upgrade community venues).

Future UKSPF public funding is expected to be folded into the previously described multi-year Integrated Settlement from 2026/27 onwards. This could be a huge opportunity for Coventry City Council to plan more strategically around placemaking, economy and to maximise wellbeing and opportunity for its citizens, especially as Digital, Tech & Creative are flagged as a priority sector in the new West Midlands Local Growth Plan.

Coventry is also expected to receive a share of the £150 million Creative Places Growth Fund, allocated to the West Midlands in the 2025 Spring Budget and Government's new Creative Industries Sector Plan, with WMCA as lead partner for its distribution. The Government announced on 29 September 2025[11] that WMCA would be receiving £25m as part of funding, designed to support creative industries by devolving funding to high-growth potential Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs). The £25 million allocation will be awarded to WMCA over three years, starting in the 2026 financial year, for it to distribute according to local barriers and opportunities. This funding will grow the already booming creative industries of the West Midlands - including film and TV, video games, createch, music and performing arts and design.

No specific allocation has been made to Coventry, and so it is likely that a pitch and business case to WMCA will need to be made by Coventry City Council and partners to secure a reasonable portion of this funding for the city.

2.3 What does the data tell us?

The data tells us that Coventry has a significant creative sector, made stronger by its synergies with Warwickshire, with the potential to have its impacts multiplied across the city.

This creative sector has unique strengths, such as games & immersive tech, that has put it at the forefront of creative sectors anywhere in the country in its ability to catalyse innovation and growth across the city's other key business sectors, such as advanced manufacturing and automative.

Further, creative sector strengths in Coventry are spread widely amongst all creative sub-sectors; from design, music and theatre to tv, film and visual arts. This means Coventry is well placed to become a key centre for the diversity of invention that is at the heart of Createch, giving the city an opportunity to directly benefit from the government's imminent investments in its Modern Industrial Strategy.

Major regeneration projects, alongside its heritage and the legacy of UK City of Culture 2021, already help to define the city, shaping its identity and making it a place where people want to live, work, study, and raise families. Coventry ranks well as a city to live in when balancing low housing costs[12], great schools and universities[13], job opportunities, and cultural amenities, although more can and needs to be done.

However, right now the cultural sector needs support, as it has not fully recovered from the collapse of the Coventry City of Culture Trust and this, coupled with broad public sector cuts – such as within Arts Council England funding – and the impact of COVID and the cost-of-

[11] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/six-regions-receive-25-million-to-bolster-creative-industries
[12] https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/housingpriceslocal/E08000026/#house_price
[13] https://en.uhomes.com/blog/cost-of-living-in-coventry#cost-of-living-in-coventry-overall-view
https://www.coventry.ac.uk/news/2024/coventry-ranked-as-best-student-city-in-the-midlands/

living crisis, means that for many cultural organisations the times remain challenging. (See section 4.0 Challenges & Barriers)

The city's cultural and heritage offer drives economic benefits, attracts visitors, boosts local businesses, and enhances the city's national and international profile. Despite the limitations in the legacies of UK City of Culture, Coventry has seen an increase in visitor numbers, as in 2023 they rose by more than 1m, from 10.03m in 2019 to 11.39m in 2023. Coventry's visitor economy was worth £855m in 2023[14], up 44% (or £261m) compared with 2019, and up by over £100m from 2022. Coventry has outperformed Warwickshire and WMCA in terms of % growth in Visitor Numbers, Economic Impact and Total Employment in 2023.

Coventry's universities and their various research institutes are a huge asset for the city, combining strong international reputations with specific expertise in current and emerging creative and tech, such as around eSports.

Finally, the creative cluster, CWX, Coventry & Warwickshire Exchange, is an exemplar of bringing together industry, universities, creative businesses and other high growth sectors, this is something to build on.

In summary, this is a moment in time for Coventry - with there being good alignment between a strong creative sector, universities, huge innovation potential across its business clusters and the government focusing industrial policy on Createch and the city's other strengths. What is needed now is a new private public partnership that will bring understanding and clarity on the best ways to work together to fully capitalise on current and emerging opportunities.

[14] Source: Destination Coventry

3.0 Assets, activities & programmes

3.1 Current or recently available

A selection of current activity, initiatives, programmes and key assets, mainly centered on Coventry, are included below. These show the depth, breadth, variety and quality of what is on offer across the city:

- **FarGo Village** – a 'Creative Quarter' in Coventry – home to over 40 creative businesses, niche and unique retailers, artists' studios, creative workspace, crafts, cafes, markets and entertainment. FarGo Village is an independent, creative quarter located on Far Gosford Street in Coventry's city centre. Developed from a repurposed industrial site, it houses over 40 small, independent businesses, including artisan food outlets, vintage shops, a craft brewery, creative studios, and unique attractions like a museum dedicated to TV actor Phil Silvers. The site is designed to foster creativity, community, and alternative culture. https://www.fargovillage.co.uk/

- **Daimler Powerhouse Creation Centre** - a £2.4 million creative hub provides dedicated, fully accessible spaces for artists and creative companies to develop new work, also supports young people. Imagineer Productions is the lead tenant and the space also includes Open Theatre and Talking Birds. Facilities include rehearsal spaces with a sprung dance floor, studio spaces for artists, aerial rig, vertical dance wall, a large-scale construction space and recording facilities.
https://imagineer-productions.co.uk/the-daimler-powerhouse/

- **Coventry & Warwickshire Growth Hub** – provides core business support signposting and services to all businesses. It does not have a dedicated creative adviser support service but does signpost existing – usually short-term – creative sector support programmes run by others. It is engaged with Createch programme support.
https://cwgrowthhub.co.uk/

CW Growth Hub – summary of services			
Service Area	**Available to All SMEs**	**Creative/Createch Focused?**	**Details/Examples**
Business Advice & Mentoring	✓	✓	Tailored for all, with creative-specific initiatives
Access to Finance/Funding	✓	✓	Guidance for all, including creative sector grants
Training & Skills	✓	✓	General and sector-specific training
Networking & Events	✓	✓	Creative/tech meet-ups, industry events
Innovation Support, technology adoption	✓	✓	Createch/immersive tech innovation programmes
International Trade	✓	–	General export support
Property/Relocation	✓	–	General business support

In addition, they promote specific initiatives for creatives including:

Networking and Cluster Development: The region is home to the "Silicon Spa" gaming cluster and benefits from university-led activities aimed at fostering collaboration and growth within the creative and Createch sectors.

- **1 Mill Street Hub, Leamington Spa** – a creative coworking and facility hub, in Leamington Spa. 1 Mill Street is a vibrant co-working and community hub located in the heart of Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, providing offices, meeting rooms, podcast studio, event space, and a popular coffee house. It is tailored for entrepreneurs, freelancers, start-ups, and established businesses. It has 294 members and 3,000+ Passioneers (volunteers). The Mill Street Exchange within the hub provides a business support service and the venue runs regular business development and networking events. https://www.1millstreet.com/

- **CWX - Coventry & Warwickshire Exchange** – University of Warwick and Coventry University are supporting the local creative economy through their cultural and creative partnerships and through management of the nationally-funded UKRI funded Immersive and Creative Industries Launchpad (CWX). CWX is a new Exchange programme designed to empower creators, innovators, and pioneers to explore and develop groundbreaking ideas. By fostering collaboration and providing access to support, opportunities, community, and resources, CWX helps unlock the potential of the Coventry & Warwickshire region, positioning it as a leader in the UK's creative economy. A partnership between Innovate UK, the national innovation agency, and Coventry City Council, Warwickshire County Council and the West Midlands Combined Authority, the Coventry and Warwickshire Immersive and Creative Industries Launchpad has achieved grant funding of £7.5m to support innovation and entrepreneurship https://www.wearecwx.co.uk/

- **CreaTech Frontiers** – another key creative industries initiative is CreaTech Frontiers, as outlined in the case study below.

Case study: CreaTech Frontiers

CreaTech Frontiers is a five-year, £7.2 million initiative funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), designed to transform the creative industries ecosystem in the West Midlands. The project is led by Birmingham City University (BCU) in collaboration with Coventry University, the University of Birmingham, the University of Warwick, Royal Shakespeare Company and Digital Catapult.

Specialist labs will co-create with creative businesses, cultural organisations, artists, and academic experts to co-create new ideas and explore technologies. The focus will include:

- Immersive and virtual production technologies
- Gaming and eSports
- Animation and 3D modelling
- Applied artificial intelligence for creative applications
- Digital heritage and live performance
- Integration of generative AI, green production, IP protection, and commercialisation.

Freelancer and SME grants will be available from £5,000-£50,000, starting at the lower end of this scale in early grant funding rounds.

It will also connect with related high-growth industries (e.g. electric vehicles) through its createch offering and build skills and support talent; through mentoring, workshops internships and PhD placements.

The programme aims to generate £65 million and create 1,500 jobs in the West Midlands' gaming and content sectors by 2030. See 2.2.7, a full description of Createch, on p17/18.

- **Business Growth West Midlands** - Business Support programme that also covers Coventry. Partially overlaps with the C&W Growth Hub but it has some additional strands, such as creative growth programmes: https://www.businessgrowthwestmidlands.org.uk/support-programmes/

Programme/Service	Available to Coventry?	Creative/Createch Focus?	Notes/Restrictions
Business Adviser Support	Yes	All sectors, inc. creative specialists	Free, tailored 1:1 support
Start-Up, Build & Grow	Yes	All sectors	For start-ups in Coventry & Warwickshire
Accelerated Growth	Yes	All sectors	For eligible Coventry & Warwickshire businesses
Coventry University Enterprises (CUE) Business Solutions	Yes	Innovation focus	Coventry University-led
CreaTech Frontiers	Yes	Yes	Grants, R&D, internships, PhDs for creative tech
Create Growth Programme	Yes	Yes	Creative sectors, excludes freelancers/sole traders
Coventry City Council Grants & Loans	Yes	All sectors	Coventry-based businesses only
Business Energy Advice Service	Yes	All sectors	Some sector exclusions, but not location-based

Warwickshire businesses are not eligible for support for the above WMCA funded Growth Hub support services but do have bespoke services of their own linked to Warwick County Council.

- **University-led Creative/Business Collaboration Programmes** - Wide-ranging programmes that emphasise collaboration, skills development, commercialisation and inclusive innovation at their core. These programmes work with and compliment other business support services. Some have a creative focus, all can support creatives:

University Led Collaboration Programmes & Relevant Activity – current & recent			
Programme / Initiative	**University / Lead Partner(s)**	**Focus / Description**	**Business Collaboration & Impact**
Creative Futures incubators	University of Warwick (Creative Futures, One Mill Street)	Incubator for Createch SMEs; coaching, mentoring, CPD, workspace for creative startups.	Selects 5 Createch SMEs every 6 months; connects startups to university resources and networks
Inclusive Immersive	Coventry University, Hollywood Gaming, Open Theatre	Arts Council-funded R&D project on technology and non-verbal theatre for people with learning disabilities.	Cross-sector collaboration; industry event for sector engagement; potential for further funding
Delia Derbyshire Building/College of Arts and Society	Coventry University	Flexible, outward-facing creative and civic hub; meetings, events, research, and business engagement.	Increasing use by industry and creatives; business planning for sector-facing packages
Place Partnerships Application	Coventry University, Coventry City Council, Cultural Education Partnership, CV Life	Skills and careers development in culture and creative industries; place-based partnership model.	Focus on employability, skills pipeline, and business engagement in creative sector
DigiSpin	Coventry University, Wolverhampton, VCU	Shared support services/IP commercialisation for digital R&D; pilot for Research England-type driver.	Academics from three universities taught to commercialise ideas and pitch to investors; supports creative/digital business spinouts
Creative People & Places	Voluntary Action Coventry; Coventry University is a consortium partner,	Co-creation, community engagement, citizen social scientists in creative sector evaluation.	Collaborative evaluation with community and business input; supports sector development
Media & Creative Industries BA	University of Warwick	Undergraduate programme increasing regional/national visibility for creative industries education.	Produces skilled graduates for local creative businesses; links to sector growth and talent retention

Arts & Creative Industries BA and MA programmes	Coventry University	Project based learning with externality sits at the heart of all Arts & Creative Industries modules across Undergraduate and Postgraduate programmes	Works with local creative businesses during programmes of study, embedding students within creative ecology and tailoring skills to need
Creative Futures (Warwick)	University of Warwick (Creative Futures, One Mill Street)	Broker between university and local creative/digital cluster; knowledge exchange, regional partnerships.	Gateway for SMEs to engage with Warwick; short-term projects, collaboration, and knowledge exchange
eSports Centre/ Fusion Createch Lab	University of Warwick	Campus-based facility supporting research, business partnerships, and sector development in eSports.	Collaborative work with eSports organisations and businesses; regional/national impact
Health Determinants Research Collaboration	Coventry University, NHS	Research on arts, well-being, and citizen social science.	Engages creative sector in health and well-being research; business/community crossover
Reaching Communities Fund (EOI)	Coventry University, Coventry Council, Catherine Partridge	Creative technology for older adults; digital inclusion and evaluation.	Cross-sector project with business, care, and technology partners
European Projects (Space X, mobility schemes)	Coventry University, European partners	Postdoctoral fellow residencies, mobility, and creative sector collaboration.	Supports international business-university research links in creative sectors
Creative Business Support (Warwick)	University of Warwick, Warwickshire County Council	Tailored business support, commercialisation, and knowledge exchange for creative SMEs and freelancers.	Focus on R&D, commercialisation, and sustainability for creative businesses
Graduate Retention/Ecosystem Development	Coventry University, Warwick University, Coventry City Council	Strategies to retain graduates in creative tech sector, align skills with business needs.	Ecosystem mapping, career progression, and business-university connections

This list is not comprehensive, but it does show that Coventry is very well served with business, academic and sector support and collaboration services.

There is huge potential to market these more coherently and maximise their impact across the city's business clusters and the sub-region.

3.2 Emerging

Coventry has a number of major initiatives, which will be truly transformative when completed:

- **Coventry City Centre Cultural Gateway**, the former IKEA building is being repurposed and refurbished as a cultural hub and Collections Centre, see case study below:

Case Study: City Centre Cultural Gateway, Coventry

The City Centre Cultural Gateway (CCCG) is a major regeneration project transforming the former IKEA building in Coventry city centre into a landmark cultural hub. The CCCG will bring together local and national partners across the cultural and creative sectors, aiming to deliver long term benefits for the local community and engage visitors alike.

The facility will provide maintenance and storage services for art works, as well as create space for research, innovation and enterprise work, driving Coventry's cultural and creative development, with a number of these facilities being open to the public.

The construction programme will comprise five phases, as follows, with the first phases (Phases 1-3) due to complete in summer 2026:

- Phase One: Conversion of part of the building into a Collections Centre of national significance, where partners like CV Life, Arts Council England, Arts Council Collection, and the British Council will house collections.
- Phase Two: Coventry University will transform the upper two floors into a cultural hub, developing spaces for research, innovation and enterprise, with key spaces open to the public.
- Phase Three: The Council will enclose and future-proof the internal car park floors, enabling feasibility work to explore alternative uses for this new internal space
- Phase Four: This phase concerns the proposed activation of Ground Floor, facilitating an inviting public welcome to the building and an opportunity for cultural and commercial activity.
- Phase Five: This phase concerns the proposed development of the remaining Floors in the building, further to the Phase Three works above.

- **City Centre South Development**, Coventry, see case study below:

Case Study: City Centre South Development, Coventry

The Coventry City Centre South development is a major regeneration project aimed at transforming a significant portion of Coventry's city centre. This £450 million scheme is one of the largest city centre redevelopment projects in the UK, designed to rejuvenate areas such as City Arcade, Bull Yard, Market Way, Shelton Square, and Hertford Street.

https://www.wmca.org.uk/news/demolition-starts-as-massive-city-centre-south-regeneration-scheme-gets-underway-in-coventry/

Key Features of the Development:

- Residential: Up to 1,500 new homes will be built, ranging from studio apartments to three-bedroom family homes. This includes around 200 affordable homes, with a focus on social rented tenure
- Commercial and Leisure: The scheme will deliver over 8,000 square metres of new commercial space for shops, cafes, and restaurants, as well as leisure facilities such as a cinema and a hotel
- Public Realm: 17,000 square metres of new public open space will be created, including pedestrian routes that link the development to the wider city centre, Friargate, and the City Centre Cultural Gateway
- Community Facilities: The project includes new co-working and community spaces, improved public realm, and enhanced car parking
- Sustainability and Biodiversity: Plans include replacing concreted areas with trees, hedges, and children's play spaces, aiming to improve the city's biodiversity.

Project Timeline and Delivery:

- Phasing: The development will be delivered in phases, with Phase 1 focusing on the bulk of new homes and commercial space. Phase 1 is expected to be completed by summer 2032, with the entire project due for completion by 2034.

- Expansion of Coventry's creative infrastructure, through a multi-facetted regeneration and investment initiative. Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 supported a wider process of major investment in cultural infrastructure as outlined below:

Development of Coventry's creative infrastructure

Investment in cultural and creative infrastructure has included: FarGo Village, Daimler Powerhouse Creation Centre, Coventry University's Delia Derbyshire Building, Charterhouse Heritage Park and other green spaces and heritage sites. Expected benefits and impacts include:

- Regeneration of historic and underused buildings
- Creation of Mixed-Use Spaces
- Enhanced Public Realm and Connectivity – such as improvements to public spaces, pedestrian routes, and transport links, such as the proposed Very Light Rail tram stop at FarGo Village.
- Support for Digital and Creative Industries, with new facilities for digital SMEs, collaborative studios, and technology labs - attracting high-quality creative jobs
- Community and Cultural Engagement
- Sustainable and Green Development

4.0 Challenges & Barriers

4.1 Data on sector - fluctuations

The many exciting assets, activities and programmes that Coventry has need the right business, economic, social and policy environment to maximise their value to the city.

A key part of realising this value will be to first fully understand the current challenges and barriers being faced by businesses. By understanding their issues, the city can either begin to solve them or at least advocate for their resolution.

4.1.1 Fluctuations in number of Creative Businesses in Coventry

The following statistics need some analysis, but do show a trend that needs consideration.

13.7% **decline CI businesses in Coventry 2017-2022**

compared

5.8% **decline in West Midlands**

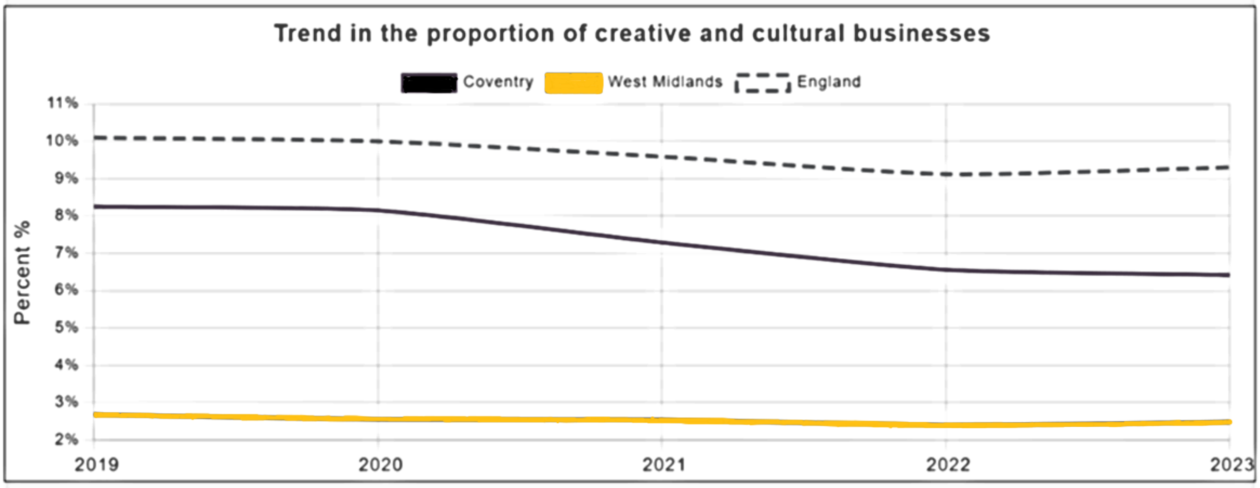
4.7% **decline across UK**

Source: ONS Business Counts/Amion Consulting including a process of validation within DCMS

Coventry saw a 13.7% decrease in its number of creative businesses between 2017-2022. This drop compared with a smaller 5.8% decline across the West Midlands and a 4.7% decline in creative businesses UK wide during the same period.

4.1.2 Trend in Proportion of Creative & Cultural Businesses 2019-2023

Trend in the proportion of creative and cultural businesses



Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS)

Data included in: Culture and Place Data Explorer Detailed Report, Coventry, Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion Ltd for Arts Council England

In a different study over a different period of years a similar trend can be observed. The line chart above shows that the proportion of creative and cultural businesses in Coventry has decreased from 8.25% in 2019 to 6.42% in 2023. It also shows that declines in creative business numbers across the West Midlands and England as a whole were smaller.

Positively, it shows that by 2023 the decline in the West Midlands had stopped, the England-wide numbers were already rising and within Coventry itself the decline seems to have almost stopped, so potentially approaching a rise in business numbers. Business data beyond this point is not currently available for this report.

NB: It is very important to note that the definition of creative and cultural businesses used in each of the two studies are different, and so they cannot be directly compared, but they do corroborate each other broadly.

It is possible to speculate about some of the reasons for these changes:

- Covid 19 bringing a very adverse operating environment for businesses, including higher energy costs, supply chain issues alongside reduced consumer demand.

- Recruitment difficulties – which continue today – meaning that even those businesses with brilliant new ideas have not been able to expand to take advantage of their potential opportunities.

- Coventry UK City of Culture 2021, which boosted the sector, may have temporally driven up the number of businesses, with a subsequent contraction. This effect having been made worse by the financial collapse of the Coventry City of Culture Trust.

Today in 2025, it can certainly be argued that the reasons for these declines make sense and we have real potential to reverse these effects and grow the sector across the city. But we do still need to address business barriers and challenges for the sector set out in the next chapter.

4.2 Challenges & Barriers – latest analysis

4.2.1 Business Challenges – Uncertainty

Many creative businesses, especially from the cultural sector, are experiencing a period of uncertainty that has led to a **'survival mode mentality'**, hampering long-term mission-driven action and collaboration in Coventry, with similar situations in Birmingham.

This is partly down to:

- Lower sales due to economic conditions.
- Less public money, such as from Arts Council or local councils, due to the state of the economy and government finances.
- A tendency to lurch from one short term contract to the next, resulting in a lack of stable long-term repeat business.

This means:

- Business owners having little bandwidth to think beyond today.
- Adapting and growing their business is often 'on hold' – which stops investment in new ideas & new markets, e.g., a project-based mentality hampers long-term sustainability and the drive to find recurring customers and think long-term and more commercially.

In addition, Creative freelancers make up around 45-50% of creative workers and many are experiencing a drop in work contracts, making their lives less secure.

This is partly down to:

- Cuts in funding having decreased job opportunities in some creative sub-sectors, such as in film & TV production where streaming platforms like Netflix have cut-back on UK production.
- Budget pressures within creative projects, where producers are offering lower day rates.
- Early effects of artificial intelligence taking over some types of creative work.

This means:

- A lack of work within the region, with fewer freelancers able to sustain a career in the West Midlands leading them to move away.
- The pool of freelance work in the region is not enough to sustain all the freelancer grades needed and leads to a lack of career progression and shortage of certain key skills, which disincentivises producers even more from bringing their projects to the region.
- There is a lack of more senior creative roles and this is a viscous circle leading to fewer highly skilled freelancers being available within the region.

- Many are permanently changing careers into jobs with more stable and guaranteed hours and forcing them to consider career changes or accepting lower paid and/or less satisfying work.

4.2.2 Business Challenges – Business & Freelancer Support

Key business challenges around business and freelancer support include the following:

- Business support services run by Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce have **no dedicated creative industry specialists** and thus can lack an understanding of sector specific issues, such as intellectual property. Support is often generic signposting only, with few specific programmes focused on the sector.

- **Business support is highly fragmented**, with multiple overlapping contracts across the West Midlands Combined Authority, Warwickshire County, and district councils—resulting in up to eight layers of contracts for a single initiative. This fragmentation leads to inefficiencies, such as excessive meetings to secure relatively small funding within Coventry & Warwickshire Growth Hub. In addition, this fragmentation has caused a "postcode lottery" effect where businesses in one area may receive support unavailable just a short distance away.

- There is also a **shortage of funding** to support business growth, both smaller scale loans and grants as well as risk capital from, e.g. angel investors. While Innovate UK's presence is positive, greater access to angel networks and other finance is required, even though this might mean scaling up beyond city scale.

- Risk funding is often focused on capital expenditure, but there is also a lack of risk revenue funding for people-driven creative businesses, who need support for staff and capacity often more so than for equipment or physical assets.

This means:

- Businesses may not be able to solve their funding issues and therefore don't grow and develop to match their potential.
- Businesses may not have access to the support needed to ensure they keep up with the latest changes in their industry, risking them falling behind and losing customers.
- A lack of support can lead to a lack of innovation, a failure to make the right business partnerships, a failure to capitalise on their new ideas which means they don't create new products, services and experiences and enter new markets.
- For freelancers there is a lack of a dedicated voice to provide tailored support for their unique situations, for example, when their payments are very delayed. Coventry CollaborACTION and Knowledge exCHANGE[15] is a network run by University of Warwick to begin developing recommendations and actions to support freelancers.

[15] https://warwick.ac.uk/research/partnerships/place-based-research/coventrycollaoraction/

4.2.3 Business Challenges – Networking & Partnership Working

Key business challenges around networking & partnership working, including partnerships with universities, include the following:

- An overall lack of access to effective networking & collaboration. One key reason why some existing networking can be ineffective is that they are not 'pro-active', i.e., they do not help attendees make meaningful connections with others. This missing element is sometimes called 'proactive brokerage', where those running the network really understand the expertise, needs and opportunities of everyone in the network and can make intelligent introductions between them, thus enabling the formation of new partnerships and consortia.

- Universities – doing such brilliant work as they are – could be working more effectively with the sector, building trust and stronger relationships over time. It is important to recognise that embedding industry professionals in the cluster (not just academics) strengthens network building and community engagement. Thus, a network being private sector or industry 'led' is considered the best approach with the public sector enabling and pump priming. This is why the CWX network is so effective; University of Warwick supported but industry led in most of its activities and knowledge exchange.

- Scarcity of substantial anchor tenants to drive significant job creation and supercharge the region's growth.

- Institutional processes need to be speeded up, e.g., universities need to speed up contracting and getting things 'pushed through', such as for research and ethics approvals.

This means:

- Sub-optimal networking and partnership building means businesses get less effective support, less problem solving and less innovation is happening. This slows down business development and growth, less money is available, less partnership building happens, and fewer new products, services and experiences are launched.

4.2.4 Business Challenges – Skills & Workforce Development

Key business challenges around skills and workforce development include:

- Shortage of highly skilled workers

- Lack of targeted specialist training options, e.g., need a better coordinated skills framework across tourism, the visitor economy and the wider cultural and creative sectors.

- Need more direct industry-linked training programmes in Coventry, current provision is mainly through college diplomas and university degrees.

- Significant financial pressures on UK Universities nationally due to declining real-terms domestic tuition fees, rising operational costs, and a drop in international student numbers following visa changes. This is particularly impacting Universities with high numbers of international students.

- Creative industry sector in Coventry lacks local skills training opportunities in specialist areas. Need a greater focus on short intensive courses and pilot programmes.

- Graduates can be expensive for businesses who hire them, this is because they need considerable input in their initial training to become effective and valuable to the company, and they then tend to move on quickly to their second job role, before the first company has recouped its own investment into them.

- There is a lack of effective brokerage and networking mechanisms to facilitate direct connections between companies and emerging talent, e.g., between a TV production company and the locally available talent they require, such as graduates.

- There is a need to improve accessibility and diversity in those people securing creative industry jobs.

- A lack of knowledge about the best uses of AI is slowing adoption within businesses. To remain competitive, it will be essential for businesses to fully understand the value of AI in their specific industry sub-sector and markets.

  AI impact presents both challenges and opportunities for creative sector jobs, it does offer productivity opportunities if these can be harnessed but is less effective in the face of highly complex human skills and human creativity to ‘think outside the box’.

Worker challenges around skills and work development include:

- Wage and working conditions remain significant barriers for many parts of the creative and cultural sector. For example, hospitality and tourism are facing significant skills gaps, especially for chefs and front-of-house roles. And in theatre, people in specialist technical roles, such as in lighting and sound, are seeking better pay and less anti-social hours, such as by looking to the film & TV sector.

- Pay rates need to be revised to better reflect the freelance and intermittent aspect of so many creative jobs.

- Graduates lack job options and often experience poor career progression. There is a need for proactive brokerage in networking events to connect students with key industry figures rather than relying solely on large-scale event networking with limited targeted interaction.

- The absence of big national names and companies limits confidence and job opportunities in the city.

- Freelancers lack long-term work contracts, have poor career progression and miss out on training that would be essential for them to keep up to date and relevant as their industry evolves.

- Skills bootcamp initiatives, while valuable for securing industry placements, are criticised for potentially adding minimal extra value since essential industry know-how is already imparted within the university programme.
- Inadequate skills development in digital and entrepreneurial areas for creative talent, and a shortage of opportunities for students to access real-world projects and practical learning.
- Lack of alignment between graduate opportunities and training creatives in real-world projects.
- Lack of understanding of the way AI could be impacting the creative job market and what that means to both businesses hiring workers and for workers themselves in the way they market their skills to businesses.

This means:

- There could be less creative jobs needed if there is wide-spread adoption of AI tools for creative work, this could limit sector growth. But equally, a prevalence of too much AI could mean sector growth is inhibited because the work being done here is less creative, and thus the city's reputation as a place to make creative things happen gets damaged.
- Graduate retention is poor, with only 15-20% of Coventry University's creative graduates staying in the area, because of few jobs and limited career progression. Similar challenges exist at the University of Warwick, with only 12% of all graduates remaining in the region. Some of the stakeholders consulted have also highlighted the importance of ensuring an ecosystem of support is in place for students, working together with the creative industries to secure pathways into sector careers.
- A lack of suitably skilled people to fill vacancies e.g., a shortage of heads of department for film & TV projects or key theatres professionals, such as sound engineers and costume leads.

4.2.5 Business Challenges – Places & Spaces

Business challenges around places and spaces include:

- Lack of affordable and accessible workspace, despite many empty spaces existing across Coventry, affordability remains a significant barrier to their use for creative purposes.
- Shortage of match funding and investment schemes to de-risk creative projects and the spaces needed to run them in.
- Lack of incubation and collaboration space.
- Lack of large build spaces for film & TV (5-7m high with an area of 5,000-15,000 sq. ft), pre-existing spaces such as school gyms can be utilised at certain times of the year.

- Lack of performance, showcasing, practice, innovation and other hyperlocal spaces, e.g., potentially a lack of dance studio spaces and a general lack of affordable creative spaces.

- The absence of a dedicated independent cinema space in Coventry limits opportunities for independent film screenings and related events. Although recent developments may in fact have helped solve this in the short term.

  There are conflicting views on the availability of spaces for independent cinema. Warwick Arts Centre[16] (see case study box below) is a highly regarded venue for the arts, including cinema, but many in this consultation said it was hard to get to from Coventry, being a nearly 10-mile return trip from Coventry City centre. There is an opportunity for stakeholders involved to look closely at the issues and opportunities and see if anything can be done to integrate the Arts Centre more closely into the minds of those in Coventry city centre, potentially involving Very Light Rail (VLR) in the longer term.

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

Warwick Arts Centre is a major multi-venue arts complex located on the University of Warwick's campus, on the outskirts of Coventry. It is one of the largest arts centres in the UK outside London, attracting around 300,000 visitors annually to over 3,000 events. The Centre features a 1,500-seat concert hall, theatre, three cinemas, the Mead Gallery, the Helen Martin Studio, practice and rehearsal rooms, hospitality suites, cafés, and bars.

Its diverse programming includes:

- Theatre and performance (including drama, dance, and comedy)
- Contemporary and classical music concerts
- Film screenings (blockbusters, indie, and foreign films)
- Visual arts exhibitions
- Family events, talks, and workshops
- Festivals and special events

It serves as a cultural hub for both the University and the wider region, hosting internationally renowned acts as well as supporting local and emerging talent. Warwick Arts Centre is deeply integrated into student life at the University of Warwick.

A lack of creative places and spaces means:

- New business starts and business growth – using grow-on-space – is hampered
- Job growth is held back
- Inward investment and growth opportunities are slowed
- Placemaking and the city image is damaged and improvements in quality of life for citizens are hampered

[16] https://www.warwickartscentre.co.uk/

4.2.6 Challenges & Barriers – Tourism, Visitor Economy & Branding

Challenges and barriers around tourism, visitor economy and city branding include:

- Coventry's UK City of Culture event in 2021 was highly successful in stimulating significant capital infrastructure build across the city. It was also notable in bringing stakeholders together and improving the perception amongst young people of Coventry as a place to study, work and live. However, the independent City of Culture Trust entering administration also generated some negative perceptions.

- Coventry saw a 16.5% decrease in footfall in Quarter 3 of 2024 compared to the previous year and year-to-date visits in 2024 (Q1-Q3) were down 6% compared to 2023[17]. This was especially driven by a drop in higher-income visitors[18].

- Coventry needs a stronger brand and clearer identity to communicate its creative strengths; this includes the need for coherent storytelling around Coventry and the region. Previous consultancies have suggested 'Creative Midlands' as a brand. Comments included, "People would just glaze over as soon as you mentioned Coventry, but as soon as you mentioned RSC… everyone was like, oh yeah, great, Shakespeare."

- Coventry's tourism and visitor economy are facing funding cuts and restructuring challenges.

- Coventry's Destination Management Organisation, Destination Coventry has recently restructured and launched its new branding and website content, including a focus on attracting major sporting events to the city. Further coordination and progress is still needed though, especially around fashion, music, eSports and digital events.

These challenges mean:

- Whilst footfall is rebounding in 2025, the city still needs to do more to attract visitors and residents to the city centre.
- Destination Coventry can do more by bringing new high-profile events to the city, such as around fashion, eSports and digital and addressing the reduction in higher-income visitors.

4.2.7 Challenges & Barriers – Public Funding, City Development & Government Policies

Challenges and barriers around public funding, city development & government policies include:

[17] https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/43898/coventry-city-centre-q3-2024-report
[18] https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/43899/coventry-city-centre-q3-2024-summary

- Government funding for business support has been very short term, leading to inefficiencies and fragmentation. The result of this has been sub-optimal publicly funded business support across Coventry & Warwickshire.

  This is the context within which the West Midlands combined Authority (WMCA) and Coventry City Council - through the Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce – are operating to try and put in place an improved business support offer, which can be more specialist and less of a postcode lottery.

  To this end, a positive development is that the government is moving towards longer-term contracts (three to four years) to provide greater stability and enable better staff recruitment and retention. These new arrangements should make it easier to reduce the current administrative burden, which has been exacerbated because Warwickshire County Council is not in the same devolved public funding area as Coventry, which is part of WMCA.

- There is a lack of revenue funding (not just capital) from the public sector, which is needed to accelerate placemaking and the economy within Coventry.

- Coventry lacks a stable and robust support network to facilitate business growth, which is needed to improve connectivity and visibility between creative and other sectors is essential. To facilitate this there is a need to put greater emphasis on the importance of putting in place dedicated cluster management within Coventry City Council or through other structures (e.g. CWX, Universities), to help drive the development of existing and emerging creative clusters across the geography.

- There is a difficulty attracting large companies to Coventry through inward investment due to costly, cumbersome processes and a lack of convenient mechanisms, such as efficient licensing and business planning. A clearer understanding of the levers required to make inward investment more compelling is required.

- Care must be taken in the way the West Midlands Combined Authority and West Midlands Growth Company action their responsibilities across their sub-regional patch as they could create unintended consequences, mismatches and unfair effects for parts of the wider geographic West Midlands outside of their patch. This is especially relevant to Coventry as its economic and business ecosystem is joined so closely to that of Warwickshire.

4.2.8 Challenges & Barriers – Other Factors – artificial intelligence

Challenges and barriers around artificial intelligence include:

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) adoption among SME's remains limited and exploratory with few significant productivity gains or market opportunities developed to date. More specialist business support in this area is needed urgently to help businesses, freelancers and not-charitable creative/cultural organisations make informed decisions as they develop their businesses for the future.

- The UK government is re-writing its copyright laws (Summer 2025) after a consultation process[19]. Currently, AI companies, such as OpenAI or Anthropic, do not have an automatic right to use copyrighted works without the permission of the rights holder when building large language models (LLMs). However, if new proposals to add an 'Opt-Out' become law in the UK, AI developers will be able to use copyrighted material for training—including for commercial purposes—unless the rights holder has expressly reserved their rights in a machine-readable way (an "opt-out"). Pro-business advocates of this law say this gives copyright holders adequate protection, but those against feel it is unfair, as it puts the onus on the copyright owner to specifically find out about, and pro-actively opt-out of, any number of AI companies and their LLM building activity anywhere in the world.

  The UK needs an ethical AI framework that is fair to creatives, and these current government proposals risk not being fair to them. There is also potential for collective management organisations (CMO's) to play a part in responsible AI, to represent creatives and prevent exploitation.

- Businesses need additional support and safeguards to fully understand the evolution of UK law around AI, and especially the training of AI models, so they can protect their rights with the least amount of cost and complexity.

- Automated AI workflows are a threat to some jobs, for example, aspects of junior roles in web companies. Support is needed to help businesses and workers better understand the challenges coming their way and how they might adapt to overcome them.

4.2.9 Challenges & Barriers – Screen Production (film, TV, social media)

Challenges and barriers around screen production (film, TV, social media) include:

- There is a lack of build space (e.g., 5,000–15,000 sq. ft with 5–7 meters height) to support set builds, which is a key requirement for attracting and retaining film & TV productions.

  Suitable spaces do not have to be dedicated sound proof 'studios', they can be converted warehouses, or even school gyms, used just in the school holidays.
- There is a lack of skills locally for local freelancers to fill Head of department roles on screen productions[20]. Further specialist training is required.
- There is a lack of specific screen related bootcamps based in Coventry, as most bootcamps available in the region are centred on Birmingham. This makes it harder for Coventry based people to attend and get re-trained around their existing work commitments.

[19] https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/copyright-and-artificial-intelligence/copyright-and-artificial-intelligence

[20] Source: Film Birmingham, and separately Create Central, included in specific interviews conducted for this report

4.2.10 Challenges & Barriers – Theatre

Challenges and barriers around theatre include:

- Rising operational costs, such as energy bills and staffing are contributing to making theatres less sustainable.
- Post-pandemic struggles with audience behaviour, e.g. younger generations are consuming media differently and often find theatre tickets too costly as an entertainment choice for them.
- There is a precarious employment situation for staff and freelancers which is resulting in, for example, theatres losing talent to the screen sector who offer better pay and conditions.
- There are currently limited sources of public money that can support infrastructure investments in the theatre sector, such as for maintenance or making changes to improve the long-term sustainability of venues.

5.0 Opportunities – now & emerging

5.1 Opportunities - now

This section highlights opportunities that are available now, to help address the challenges and barriers highlighted earlier, as well as identify opportunities for growth that could drive valuable positive impacts across Coventry and the sub-region.

5.1.1 Opportunities - Business & Freelancer Support

Opportunities around business & freelancer support include:

- The current business support offer could be adapted, to provide a more specialised creative sector service.

- Opportunities can be explored to enable more business partnerships; both across Coventry and Warwickshire, the wider Midlands, nationally and internationally.

- Opportunities can be leveraged amongst business leaders to increase their skills and capabilities to identify transformational change through 'low hanging fruit', i.e., where a small change or investment from them can make a big difference to their companies' prospects.

- Opportunities exist to attract more business anchor tenants into Coventry through inward investment, such as big brand names, by leveraging Coventry and Warwickshire's strategic advantages around location, low housing costs, and strong sustainability credentials.

5.1.2 Opportunities – Networking & Partnership Working

The fundamental opportunity around optimising networks and partnership working comes from optimising creative clusters and actioning all of the factors that make business clusters effective.

The UK government prioritises the need to invest in effective clusters[21] and the Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre (PEC), alongside NESTA have published a huge body of work understanding and mapping creative clusters across the country and why they are important[22].

The information box below summarises the key facts about clusters to underpin why Coventry as a city would hugely benefit from developing its own pro-active cluster initiative. With a first step being to hire a **Creative Cluster Manager** to help realise all of the benefits that a cluster initiative can bring to the city's economy.

[21] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-the-growth-potential-of-creative-clusters
[22] https://pec.ac.uk/creative_economy_res/nesta-creative-economy-archive/#nesta-archive-creative-clusters

Case Study: Developing Effective Creative Clusters[23]

A creative cluster is a geographic concentration of creative businesses, professionals, and supporting organisations that collaborate, compete, and benefit from shared resources, knowledge, and networks. Key factors to develop an Effective Creative Cluster include:

- **Access to Finance** – a robust local financial ecosystem, including business services and investment, is essential for growth.
- **Access to Talent** – essentials include skilled workforce, local universities and other training institutions Availability of a skilled, creative workforce is vital. Local universities, training institutions, and a high retention of graduates contribute to a strong talent pool. Opportunities for ongoing skills development and attracting creative professionals are crucial.
- **Innovation -** High levels of innovation, including both technological and “soft” (aesthetic, organisational) distinguish successful clusters. Collaboration on R&D, adoption of new technologies, and openness to new ideas are key.
- **Broader Environment** - Quality infrastructure: digital (broadband), transport, and physical facilities. High quality of life and cultural amenities that attract and retain creative talent. A supportive local policy environment and business support networks.
- **Exporting and Market Reach** - Ability to access and compete in wider (including international) markets. Export orientation helps clusters grow beyond local demand and diversify risk.
- **Connectivity and Networking** - Dense networks of formal and informal relationships between firms, freelancers, universities, and support bodies. Opportunities for collaboration, knowledge spillovers, and cross-sector partnerships.
- **Sectoral Synergies and Complementarities** - Co-location of related creative sectors and knowledge-intensive business services (KIBS) fosters synergies and innovation. Clusters benefit from complementarities with sectors such as high-tech manufacturing and digital industries.
- **Cluster Awareness and Identity -** A shared sense of identity and awareness among cluster members enhances collaboration and external recognition. Branding and visibility help attract talent, investment, and clients.

Developed correctly, Coventry can have a highly effective creative cluster, building on what already exists, and bringing huge benefits. See 6.1.2 for more detailed recommendations, p59.

The government have endorsed the importance of creative clusters and cluster policy in a huge way by making it the central plank of its Modern Industrial Strategy[24], launched in June 2025, as set out earlier in section 2.2.7.

There is a huge opportunity to engage fully in all the ways Coventry could leverage this interest and funding around cluster policy for Coventry and Warwickshire, working closely with the WMCA who will be a key delivery mechanism for this policy region wide.

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23 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363ef4b8fa8f57a29a23a92/Understanding_the_growth_potential_of_creative_clusters_-_accessible.pdf

24 https://www.gov.uk/government/news/business-leaders-welcome-the-governments-modern-industrial-strategy

- Seize the opportunity of developing a Creative & Innovation Corridor – with improved cross-sector partnerships expanding the creative and tech cluster by building on the region's status as having the strongest tech cluster in the West Midlands, and fostering collaboration between universities, tech companies and the wider creative sector. See information box:

Creative & Innovation Corridor

The concept of a Creative & Innovation Corridor is not a single, physical corridor but rather an innovation cluster and regional initiative focused on immersive and creative technologies. This cluster is already active and supported by significant investment and collaboration among local government, universities, and industry. This cluster includes:

- Immersive, tech and creative companies collaborating across key sectors such as automative and healthcare, with Createch funding now a catalyst for novel products, services and experiences.
- A recognised regional ecosystem with massive ongoing growth and investment potential that hosts industry events and is recognised as a national leader in video game development.

- Use the Industrial Strategy to further cement Coventry and Warwickshire's immersive tech and games cluster to become established as a national centre of excellence for tech and gaming. 'Entertainment Games' versus 'Serious Games' or educational content is now widely dispersed between both geographies. WMCA see this as the USP Coventry and Warwickshire have over and above the rest of the region, especially regarding entertainment games and serious games.

- Leverage the CreaTech Frontiers project as a key part of the above, ensuring that Coventry can fully capitalise on the opportunities this brings, this means ensuring that the city can establish an effective creative cluster itself, which is linked to Warwickshire.

- Put in place a pilot that tests how to achieve more effective **network brokerage**, i.e. moving away from unstructured networking to facilitate meaningful collaboration and knowledge exchange. Do this in close collaboration with existing cluster networks such as CWX. Invest in Coventry & Warwickshire and others, to ensure that both geographies are promoted in inward investment projects, especially in the games sector.

- As part of this pilot, establish a physical space in Coventry City similar to 1 Mill Street in Leamington Spa, and linked to it. This could be a temporary, meanwhile-use space initially. Leverage any potential funding or support coming from WMCA and the government linked to the Modern Industrial Strategy, see 5.1.6.

- Make better use of the Delia Derbyshire Building at Coventry University as a facility that businesses can engage with on a regular basis, to foster greater collaboration and trust between the creative sector and the University.

Case Study: Delia Derbyshire Building at Coventry University

The Delia Derbyshire building officially opened in May 2024, creating a £43m flagship home for the College of Arts and Society at Coventry University. It was named the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) West Midlands Building of the Year 2025.

- It includes State-of-the-Art Facilities: with immersive studios for sound, vision, AR, VR, and XR, a Hyperstudio for large-scale cross-disciplinary projects, advanced photography and film production facilities, hack labs, post-production and games suites, and fully updated creative practice studios and workshops.
- The building Includes a gallery, café, and events atrium open to the public, serving as a showcase for student and staff work and fostering connections across the city
- The building's design and programming aim to increase engagement with local creative industries, supporting internships, placements, and collaborative projects that prepare students for careers in the sector.
- The building's accessible design and public-facing facilities help break down barriers between the University and the local creative economy, enhancing opportunities for students to interact with and contribute to the region's cultural and business landscape.

In addition:

- Seize all available opportunities to build a stronger eSports cluster, leveraging the University of Warwick's position as the top UK university for eSports courses over the last six years.
- Leverage existing gaming clusters into healthcare/education applications, e.g., partnership with NHS and the USA market on resilience training using immersive tech.
- Leverage Coventry's world-leading automotive sector, e.g., collaboration with Jaguar Land Rover on sound design, which has the potential to be leveraged further into creative content.
- Leverage opportunities for growth in virtual production, immersive technologies and cultural heritage. Feedback from the consultation said that Coventry's unique strengths lie in live performance, motion capture, digital mapping, and projection, rather than broad claims like AI or virtual production.
- Extend innovation in theatre beyond VR/technology to include creative audio, gaming, and interdisciplinary approaches.
- Creating new work streams through tech convergence, with opportunities for partnership-level investment and enhanced tech infrastructure to help retain university talent.
- Leverage additional opportunities in other creative sub-sectors, such as the local music industry.

In summary, **massive opportunities exist** where the tech and creative sectors converge.

5.1.3 Opportunities – Skills & Workforce Development

Opportunities around skills & workforce development include:

- Explore any new opportunities for skills and workforce development through the Modern Industrial Strategy.

Within the education space:

- Leverage the opportunity of curriculum modernisation in universities, to offer improved courses in subjects such as AI/immersive tech and content creation, e.g., Coventry University is implementing innovative changes to education delivery which includes six entry points per year and block-style learning.

5.1.4 Opportunities – Places & Spaces

Opportunities around places & spaces include:

- Ensure the upcoming City Centre Cultural Gateway can become an effective sector hub which helps enable improved creative sector networking, partnership working and the establishment of an effective creative cluster across Coventry that connects to Warwickshire and beyond.

- Develop an equivalent space to 1 Mill Street in Coventry City Centre, as detailed in the previous section. This could be a temporary meanwhile use space initially.

- Look for opportunities to support and partner with Createch Village, a major new development at the University of Warwick. This will transform a disused swimming pool at the heart of the campus into a flagship hub for creative industries, connecting businesses, academia, and communities.

- Look for opportunities to establish other co-working spaces or repurpose unused buildings into innovation and creative spaces, with a focus on affordable city centre creative and tech spaces.

- Integrate the need and opportunity for more creative spaces and more effective creative networking with developments at FarGo Village in Coventry, such as with more parking, more business units and a safer environment.

- Look for opportunities to develop more suitable spaces for dance, performance and increase the number and regularity of festivals and performance venues, with an emphasis on showcasing local talent.

5.1.5 Opportunities – Tourism, Visitor Economy & Branding

Opportunities around tourism, visitor economy & branding include:

- Relaunching **Destination Coventry**, its services and a new approach to the visitor economy, which is now providing an opportunity to make a big difference to visitor numbers. It has moved from a Council run model to a commercial operation, inspired by models from Liverpool, Bristol, and Manchester. A new board will be in place soon.

- Leverage opportunities emerging from West Midlands Growth Company (WMGC) which has achieved **Destination Development Partnership** (DDP) status with £350,000 of additional funding. Combining this with the relaunched Destination Coventry means there is no better time to maximise the potential for tourism and the visitor economy across the city, see pilot information box below:

Destination Development Partnership (DDP) for the West Midlands - pilot

The West Midlands Destination Development Partnership (DDP) is a government-backed pilot aimed at boosting economic growth through tourism by fostering collaboration among local authorities, tourism bodies, and businesses. Key Impacts include:

- The DDP has increased the region's visitor economy by 15% to £16.3 billion, supporting nearly 144,000 jobs
- It unites Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs) for coordinated marketing, product development, and data-driven decisions.
- Initiatives like the digital visitor pass improve access to attractions and transport.
- The DDP prioritises workforce skills, sustainability, and accessibility.
- It aims to spread tourism benefits region-wide and leverage major events for increased visitors.
- The pilot serves as a model for future national tourism policy and investment.

- There is the opportunity for a huge win for Coventry to launch effective new branding for the city as soon as possible. This is needed to better attract national investment and larger companies, and could be linked into promoting the city as a great place to live, see information box below:

Coventry[25] – a great place to live, work, study and bring up your children

Coventry stands out as a leading English city and a great place to work, study, raise children, and make a home based on several strong pieces of evidence:

[25] Summary drawn from multiple sources including: https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/building-fairer-towns-cities-and-regions-insights-marmot-places#case-studies https://host-students.com/is-coventry-a-good-place-for-students/ https://host-students.com/is-coventry-a-good-place-for-students/

A Child-Friendly City with Strong Support for Families
Coventry is committed to being the best city in the UK for children and young people to live and grow up in. The city's "Child Friendly Cov" campaign emphasises valuing, supporting, and ensuring children enjoy themselves. This is backed by a comprehensive Early Help Strategy that focuses on early intervention and family support through initiatives like Family Hubs, aiming to provide a holistic and inclusive environment for children and families.

A Growing, Diverse, and Young Population
Coventry's population is growing rapidly and becoming increasingly diverse, with a median age of 35 years, younger than the national average. This youthful demographic is supported by two major universities attracting students locally and internationally, contributing to a vibrant and dynamic community.

Excellent Higher Education Opportunities
Coventry is ranked the 5th best city for students in the UK, hosting Coventry University and the University of Warwick. Both universities offer high-quality education, state-of-the-art facilities, and strong student support through active student unions that foster social engagement, societies, and volunteering opportunities.

A Great Place to Work with Strong Employee Support
Coventry Building Society, a major employer in the city, is recognised as one of the UK's Best Workplaces in 2024, with 86% of employees saying it is a great place to work—significantly higher than the UK average of 54%. This reflects a workplace culture built on trust, respect, fairness, and innovation.

Commitment to Inclusion, Diversity, and Wellbeing
The city's workforce strategies and services prioritise diversity, inclusion, and wellbeing, ensuring that the workforce reflects the community it serves and that staff are supported to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

In summary, Coventry's combination of strong family and child support services, excellent educational institutions, a youthful and diverse population, recognised workplaces, and inclusive community values make it a leading English city and an excellent place to work, study, raise children, and settle down.

5.1.6 Opportunities – Public Funding, City Development & Government Policies

This report and its associated public consultation mark the start of a stronger engagement between Coventry City Council's Creative Economy team and the wider creative sector. It will help identify shared priorities and the establishment of an ongoing dialogue and collaboration going forwards.

Opportunities around public funding, city development and government policies include:

- It will be crucial for Coventry City Council and other public sector partners to fully understand all the ways the UK's new Modern Industrial Strategy, launched in June 2025, creates an opportunity for developing the economy and placemaking across the city.

- It will be important that Coventry City Council works very closely with all stakeholders involved in this strategy roll out, such as WMCA, as well as with other pro-active plans for the city and sub-geography from the universities, Chamber of Commerce and existing clusters and networks.

- This should include actions that will help position Coventry and Warwickshire as a creative and tech testbed, capitalising on strengths in Createch, eSports, immersive experiences, and entertainment and serious games.

- An important aspect of this will be to Invest in a Creative Cluster manager so that Coventry City Council can play a pro-active and central role in maximising the impact and value of new and existing creative clusters across the city, alongside leveraging opportunities to get more creative spaces of all types for the sector. This role could be employed between the various stakeholders within the cluster, e.g. university led, with some direct co-funding from the council or the combined authority.

5.1.7 Opportunities – Other Factors – artificial intelligence

Opportunities around artificial intelligence include:

- Identifying ways for Coventry's business clusters to adopt artificial Intelligence early, thus giving Coventry creatives an edge in the market. Specialised business support, such as workshops and knowledge transfer will be required. All creative businesses will need to consider how they will be affected and how best they can respond.

  For example, in high-end design, marketing & PR agencies, AI could enable more sophisticated delivery for customers, with improved data analytics (optimising marketing campaigns) and lowering the cost of supplying a wider range of design assets for any given budget. In this case AI can be seen as an enabler of more comprehensive service, with lower-level digital marketing tasks being automated through AI.

- In addition, generative AI tools will democratise a lot of content creation; with smaller, simpler or less demanding tasks being most affected. This will enable anyone – with no training – to generate a wide range of creative assets, from video and audio clips to coding their own commerce-enabled website. This means that in many scenarios AI will remove the need to contract a creative business or creative worker at all – which could be seen both as an opportunity (e.g. increasing capacity) – but also a challenge.

- With film & TV production, AI tools are being widely used in post-production, pre-production and script writing. AI can assist in tasks like creating pitches and language translation.

- AI can provide a huge benefit in driving more sophisticated data analytics to better predict market trends and identify where marketing/ads should be targeted.

5.1.8 Opportunities – Screen Production (film, TV, social media)

Opportunities around screen production (film, TV, social media) include:

- Opportunity to advocate for specific screen related bootcamps and other creative training, to be based in Coventry.
- To seek out readily available 'build spaces', large enough to build temporary sets for TV & film production companies. These can be re-purposed spaces or, like school gyms, hired exactly as they are during the school holidays.
- In addition, there is an opportunity to fund new Studio Build spaces (5-7m high with an area of 5,000-15,000 sq. ft), to encourage larger productions to build their sets and shoot in the city on a more regular basis.
- Create a more coherent approach to filming in the city, working in partnership with e.g. Production Central.

This list of opportunities amongst creative sub-sectors gives a flavour but is not exhaustive, e.g., theatre, music and many more sub-sectors will also have opportunities right now.

5.2 Opportunities - emerging

The emerging opportunities most identified by stakeholders that could help drive the economy across Coventry and Warwickshire include the following:

- The Coventry and Warwickshire Gigapark Investment Zone (CWGIZ), which across its four zones will potentially provide £1.5 billion of investment into the fabric of Coventry and beyond.
- Greater adoption of immersive technology will increase markets over the next few years as will many other products, services and experiences developed through createch.
- Coventry's future USP could be around the bridging of techniques from film/TV and games into arts and culture, linking motion capture, digital mapping and air projection (where images appear to float in the air) to create 'one-of-a-kind' types of live performance.
- Universities will potentially carve out a nationally recognised niche around excellence in working hands-on with creative tech businesses and creatives, including bringing co-creation into universities.
- Stronger synergies between cultural and creative assets, anchor institutions, and collaborative infrastructure should be expected. Especially if an effective creative cluster is developed as soon as possible.
- Screen tourism development may become possible for Coventry in future years.

- Coventry has a significant music sector that could be developed further, it includes the well regarded and popular Coventry Music Museum.

- AI enabled content creation and data analysis will become more sophisticated, leading to new markets opening up for creative businesses.

- Better promotion and reaching out to all sector businesses about the value of connecting with the creative industries, and for example, bringing more creative expertise and tech innovation to their business, markets, products, services and experiences.

- Coventry will have the opportunity to benefit from improved branding in the future, some suggest 'Creative Midlands' is a naming starting point.

- The Minerva Angel network could be relaunched on a larger scale.

5.2.1 Sub-Sector & Emerging Factors - Screen Production (film, TV, social media)

Emerging opportunities around screen production (film, TV, social media) include:

- A regional film office is being launched by the West Midlands Growth Company, WMCA, and Create Central, the industry screen cluster. This should make it easier to bring major film & TV productions to the city and region, by enabling simpler coordination of location, facility and permitting needs.

- Previous use of Coventry for filming has generated renewed interest, especially as some productions wish to return due to positive experiences with locations. The loss of certain facilities (e.g. temporary 'meanwhile' use of the former IKEA building) has impacted opportunities, but there is ongoing interest in developing new build spaces.

- If new production and build spaces can be made available, that will position Coventry well to benefit from the evolving commissioning model that requires regions to demonstrate sufficient infrastructure to support productions. Commissioning is now often on a single-show basis with longer turnaround times, making regional readiness and available facilities more important.

- There is also an emerging opportunity to put in place facilities to support streamers and influencers, to ensure the city is adapting to a content creation landscape that includes platforms like YouTube, reflecting broader trends in audience consumption and the need to engage with non-traditional, non-linear platforms.

- The Intellectual Property Content Fund with BBC and Channel 4 could be expanded, which could provide potentially more production within the city region.

6.0 Recommendations & Roadmap

6.1 Recommendations

This section makes a broad range of recommendations by the author David Furmage, designed to address the opportunities, barriers and challenges discussed in this report. They are made in the context of how Coventry City Council currently sits in its funding and policy relationship between Warwickshire County Council and the WMCA.

It should be noted that these recommendations are made by the consultant authoring this report and are therefore note recommendations or policy endorsed by Coventry City Council. Rather, these recommendations provide an opportunity for Coventry City Council to use this evidence and recommendations to consider next steps.

These recommendations are based on optimising actions within Coventry City Council that will make progress on addressing the issues and enable progress towards realising the opportunities.

They do not take into account at this stage the City Council's political or funding context, as any recommendations, once proposed, must then be reviewed in the prevailing context of what is possible, taking into account the current political and funding landscape.

It is in the next section, 6.2, that a proposed roadmap of priorities is set out. This identifies potential low-hanging fruit, where actions can start to bring about change, with many of these recommended actions focused on quick or low-cost interventions which will bring a high positive impact to Coventry and the economic wellbeing of the city.

These roadmap recommendations and actions are made independently of the City Council; this means they do not they take into consideration in any comprehensive way current or planned policy actions of the city.

These recommendations are not intended to provide any advice or suggestions to Warwickshire County Council. However, they are a crucial stakeholder and their view on these recommendations and how they might be adapted or optimised to connect better with current or planned Warwickshire policies would be hugely valuable.

These recommendations do acknowledge Coventry City Council's crucial relationship with the West Midlands Combined Authority, especially around modern industrial policy and the devolution of public money.

6.1.1 Actions - Business & Freelancer Support

Recommendations around business and freelance support include:

- **Support suppliers of business support services.** Help simplify and secure longer-term business support contracts to stabilise services, reduce fragmentation, and enable long-term planning and staff development. Rework district-level funding to reduce fragmentation, aiming for unified "one-pot" funding models that streamline access and administration for business support. Explore all possible avenues to extend services as detailed below.

- **Increase access to targeted specialist creative business support.** Focused creative sector business support is needed, especially around R&D, commercialisation, skills development, and sustainability, potentially using a horizontal development model, i.e., collaboration, knowledge exchange, and capacity-building is developed between a number of organisations, businesses, or individuals operating without a hierarchy.

- **Draw on best practice examples of business support**, e.g., One Mill Street has monthly drop-in sessions, mentoring, university support in accessing innovation funding, pro-active brokerage amongst creatives and new collaboration techniques between universities and around co-creation. Also, consider adopting a high-impact, no-nonsense approach requiring businesses to commit and actively drive their growth, rather than passively attending programmes.

- Consider adopting an **Entrepreneur in Residence Model** which embeds entrepreneurial expertise within a co-working centre, business support hub or investment zone, to accelerate innovation, guide new ventures, and strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Entrepreneur in Residence – business support model

An entrepreneur in residence (EIR) model is a business support approach where an experienced entrepreneur is embedded within an organisation—such as a university, incubator, venture capital firm, or business support centre - to provide guidance, mentorship, and expertise to emerging businesses or projects.

Key features of the EIR model:

- Temporary Engagement: EIRs are typically engaged for a fixed period, often ranging from six months to a year, though the duration can vary depending on the organisation's needs.
- Expertise and Guidance: EIRs leverage their entrepreneurial experience to help organisations and startups identify new business opportunities, develop business plans, evaluate investments, and solve operational challenges.
- Mentorship and Networking: They act as mentors and sounding boards for founders, helping them refine strategies, make critical decisions, and connect with advisors, investors, and potential partners.
- Operational and Strategic Support: EIRs may assist with launching new ventures, commercialising research, or supporting the growth of existing businesses by providing hands-on operational support and strategic advice.
- Flexible Compensation: Compensation structures for EIRs can include a salary, stipend, or equity, depending on the arrangement and the value they bring to the host organisation.
- Mutual Benefit: While the host gains access to the EIR's expertise and network, the EIR often receives support for their next venture, access to resources, or the opportunity to explore new business ideas within a supportive environment.

- Increase **access to a range of different funding** for business growth and development. Explore all available options to provide access to a wider range of funding types; from grants and loans to venture capital and risk funds.

- Encourage the **creation of an investor network** to ensure access to capital and risk funds for creative and tech businesses, including the development of a supportive angel network, e.g., through expanding existing angel networks like Minerva.

- To progress this, **review current tech and creative sector investment funds**, understanding any limitations in their funding and finding ways to extend funding programmes to cover any gaps, e.g. are there gaps in access to funding that would enable a business to take a risk with the labour of its team to develop new products and services.

- **Increase support for freelancers and self-employed:** through the provision of networks, infrastructure, e.g., affordable or free co-working spaces and support. Coventry Central Library should consider joining the British Library Business and IP Centre Network. Support could include entrepreneurial training and helping the freelancer turn into their very own 'mini business', helping them develop a multi-pronged portfolio career model, and then marketing themselves into it.

6.1.2 Actions – Networking & Partnership Working

Recommendations around networking & partnership working include:

- **Launch an expanded creative cluster initiative** that involves Coventry City Council directly and takes advantage of all emerging opportunities for the creative sector and its economic growth across the city. Fund a cluster manager to drive this forward who can build on the existing creative cluster activity.

  New cluster activity needs to link to and build on existing clusters, most notably connecting CWX and Silicon Spa to have a wider Coventry & Warwickshire footprint that connects beyond, into Birmingham too.

- **Promote partnerships between universities, industry and new clusters,** to broker deals and connect creative and tech companies with key sectors such as automotive, healthcare as well as tourism and new collaborations coming out of CreaTech Frontiers.

  Many of these partnerships already exist, and in many cases are very active, but right now most of the effort is on the side of higher education. The opportunity and policy change is for the city to be pro-active in looking for and enabling new industry led connections and opportunities.

- Develop an **anchor creative business building hub** in Coventry city centre as part of the above cluster initiative. A physical space is essential, something similar to 1 Mill Street in Leamington would be ideal, but getting a temporary solution quickly will be important.

Note that One Mill Street's success is attributed to private management and agility, with the enabling support of the University of Warwick. It is a highly flexible environment, with flexibility in invoicing and rapid resource mobilisation, e.g., hiring guest speakers or deploying an ice cream truck outside during a heatwave. 1 Mill Street constantly demonstrates responsiveness to business needs.

- Encourage **'active brokerage' and/or Entrepreneur in Residence** to deliver expert nuanced on the ground business support to creative and tech businesses.

  This can be done in several ways, the essential is that networking becomes pro-active, with expert knowledge on hand that really understands the businesses in the room and the ways they could meaningfully connect with and collaborate together.

  This can be used alongside a Collaborative R&D model where ideas need pilot testing, this would involve:
  - Use of research assets, academic expertise and seed funding for iterative product development.
  - Knowledge transfer managers who align academic outputs with business expectations and identify high-potential growth companies through project piloting

A pro-active cluster initiative within Coventry City Council can be the catalyst for more effective creative cluster supporting and networking across the city.

6.1.3 Actions – Skills & Workforce Development

Recommendations set-out below around skills & workforce development are not exhaustive:

- **Expand digital and AI training opportunities** within the current business support offer. Unpack in detail the specific opportunities and challenges arising from AI developments across the creative and tech sectors.

- Continue to **align FE and HE courses more closely with changing industry demands**, e.g., Curriculum modernisation at Coventry University. Look for more ways to bring education and industry together.

- **Maximise the impact that CreaTech Frontiers funding** and support can bring to skills and workforce development.

- FE and HE institutions should work together to **create a graduate support ecosystem** to improve the chances of graduates finding meaningful work locally, to improve their retention in the city and region.

- Advocate for **different skills & upskilling opportunities such as creative bootcamps, paid internships apprenticeships and enterprise hubs** to be based in Coventry and explore how more short courses can be used to upskill existing and aspiring creatives.

NB: This report does not cover the crucial area of talent development from school age upwards. Its focus is on the point that students leave FE or higher education courses and are seeking entry to the industry, plus it looks at the current creative workforce and how that needs to change and be upskilled. It also considers the challenges of being a freelance, creative worker, with the uncertainty of work and unclear career progression that brings.

6.1.4 Actions – Places & Spaces

Recommendations around places and spaces include:

- **Bring more creative spaces into use across Coventry**. All avenues should be explored to find temporary or longer-term spaces, owned or leased, refurbed or new, which will address the opportunities and needs identified for spaces and places across the city, which include:
    - An equivalent 1 Mill Street hub
    - affordable city centre creative, tech and innovation spaces
    - spaces for performance, events, festivals and showcasing local talent
    - developing hyperlocal spaces, such as for dance

  Look at different business models and ways to mitigate risk to progress potential spaces. Consider the integration of these needs into existing and upcoming developments, including: the City Centre Cultural Gateway, FarGo Village and Delia Derbyshire building at Coventry University. See section 6.1.6 for specific public sector recommendations.

- **Address safety concerns** in areas like FarGo Village and Far Gosford Street to ensure thriving creative communities continue.

6.1.5 Actions – Tourism, Visitor Economy & Branding

Recommendations around tourism, visitor economy & branding:

- **Establish e-Sports as a major event area for Coventry & Warwickshire**, building on the work done so far by University of Warwick and others.

- Explore ways to bring forward Coventry's potential USP around **'one-of-a-kind' types of live performance**, which bridge the techniques of film/TV and games into arts and culture linking, e.g., motion capture, digital mapping and air projection (where images appear to float in the air). Find ways to run some pilot actions in this experiential space to test reaction.

- Host a **wider range of major national and international events** and PR campaigns to raise the profile of local creative industries. Strengthen links between culture, heritage, and the visitor economy to create integrated overnight stay and tourism models, leveraging the region's diverse assets.

- Develop a **clear, unified brand and marketing strategy** to boost Coventry's national profile, with a renewed focus on storytelling and the region's creative strengths.

Hopefully, this work is already happening within Destination Coventry, as it is needed urgently. For an example of previous branding suggestions, see information box:

Reminder: Previous branding work – for reference only

‘Creative in Coventry’ was underpinned by the themes of [i] Imagination – a city of dreamers, [ii] Invention – a city of makers and [iii] Innovation – a city that shapes the future. It included five commitments to the city:

1: Inclusive and fair
2: Creativity and imagination will be valued and foregrounded.
3: Excellence as standard.
4. Sustainable development and environmental responsibility will be pervasive.
5: Outward facing– a city born global.

‘Coventry will be known internationally as a Creative City. It will position arts and culture at the heart of strategic development to safeguard its future as a place of sustainable wellbeing, with a healthy and happy population, an enriching environment and a productive and balanced economy. It will position creativity as the connecting agent across the industrial value chain and it will foster the enabling conditions for a diverse talent base which chooses to live, work and play in Coventry as a city of imagination, invention and innovation.’

Coventry was also identified through these statements:

Coventry as a place of making. Bridging Coventry’s past as city of innovative making with its hi-tech future, making in all its forms (from community activity through to artist-led and designer maker activity).

Coventry as a testbed city: Coventry’s size, geographic position and demographics make it an ideal place to pioneer new technology, new services and new ideas. Just as it is leading the way with the flight technology of the future and 5G it should be positioned (using its excellent research base) as the ideal test bed for future technology and innovations. Brighton’s FuseBox, a hub digital innovator, tech visionaries and creative technologists, provides an excellent model.

6.1.6 Actions – Public Funding, City Development & Government Policies

Recommendations around public funding, city development & government policies include:

- Establish a **Creative Economy Development Agency of a Board** (or similar), independent of the Council that can pull together a strong set of stakeholders, especially business leaders. It would champion ways to get new creative spaces open and new clusters, networks and partnerships active, putting Coventry more firmly on the national and global stage. Whilst the cluster manager would be a more hands on role, the agency/board could focus on the strategic opportunities, including major projects, investment and high-level advocacy.

Creative Economy Development Agency/Board – legacy proposals worth re-visiting

Priority themes can be supported by a Creative Economy Development Agency which champions creativity across the city; and nurtures clusters of activity which are transdisciplinary and cascade from spaces of imagination (the arts, education), to spaces of invention (Universities, enterprises), to spaces of innovation – the city as an innovation ecosystem.

The agency's role will be one of an enabler; bringing different stakeholders together, helping find solutions that result in new partnerships, new business models and a range of new spaces, clusters and networks that can become active sooner than expected.

It will not be afraid to shake up the status quo, suggest the unexpected, pilot temporary solutions and find ways to de-risk developments so Coventry's creative, cultural and tech ecosystem can become a national and global exemplar.

- **Launch an expanded creative cluster initiative** that involves Coventry City Council directly and takes advantage of all emerging opportunities for the creative, cultural and tech sectors and its economic growth across the city. Fund a **dedicated cluster manager** between key stakeholders including the universities to drive this agenda forward.

- Instigate **macro-economic actions that improve conditions for businesses** to survive and thrive in the city, e.g., by instigating a pro-active business cluster initiative that focuses on high-growth sectors, leverages local strengths, promotes the area for inward investment and helps maintain a strong project pipeline over the next five years.

- Use this new pro-active cluster approach to test and put in place more effective networks that use **active brokerage** to better understand all our local businesses and the ways they can be supported to survive, grow and form new partnerships. Do this in close collaboration with existing cluster networks such as CWX, Invest in Coventry & Warwickshire and others, to ensure that both geographies are promoted.

  Maximise all of the opportunities mentioned earlier in this report including:
    - Creative & Innovation Corridor
    - Coventry's USP around games (serious & entertainment)
    - Strong e-Sports cluster and potential for major e-Sports events
    - Unique tourist experiences emerging from the intersection of live performance, motion capture, immersive technologies, digital mapping and 'in air' projection

- Develop an **advocacy toolkit** with an up-to-date evidence base on the creative industries sector and the wider creative economy, which details the current and potential expanded impact it can have across the city's economy, wellbeing and quality of life for its people.

- Request that WMCA commissions an **up-to-date CI sector mapping study** for the whole region, which can include sub-sector data for Coventry and the wider sub-region. Ensure it includes freelancers and creative occupations employed in non-creative companies, i.e., the creative economy.

- Leverage public monies, buildings and convening power to **help businesses access more risk capital,** streamline publicly funded business support, accelerate SME commercialisation.

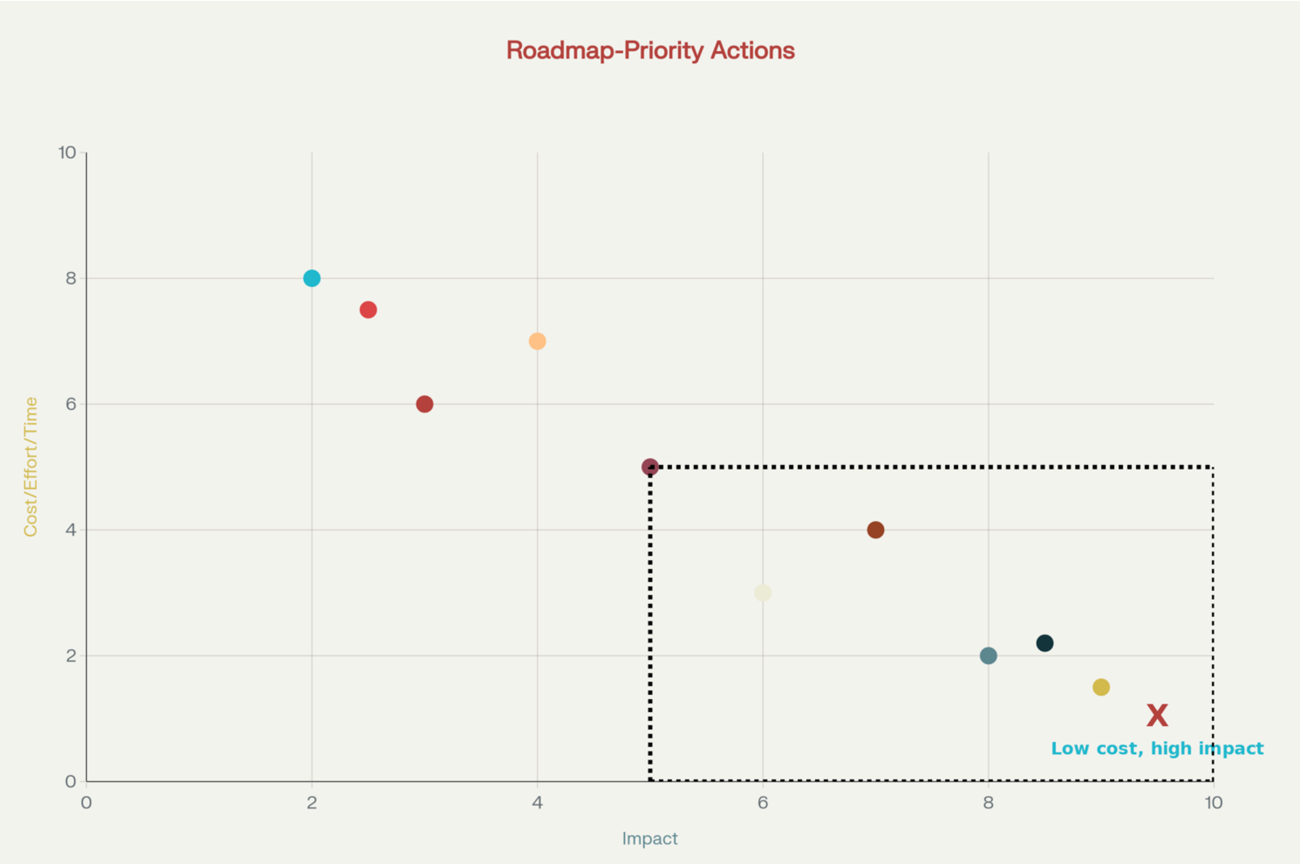
- Coventry City Council should review whether it has any vacant buildings it can make available to the creative sector, or ideally asset transfer into sector ownership. Support the development of a sector consortia, perhaps with an element of educational institute included, that could ultimately run and take the risk on new creative spaces across the city, especially in the city near FarGo Village.

- Create a clear strategy for coordinating Coventry City Council actions with Warwickshire while maintain separate funding streams. Explore the potential for more co-funded initiatives, that work individually for each authority, but can multiply the value when combined

6.2 Roadmap – recommended priorities

The previous section sets out a range of recommendations, their implementation being dependent on the political and funding context of the moment. These roadmap priorities are the recommended initial focus of priority actions resulting from this report.

The **Roadmap-Priority Actions** chart below sets out a way of identifying which recommendations to focus on first, based on cross referencing cost, time and effort against impact for the city.



The vertical axis indicates the increasing cost, effort, or time taken to deliver any particular action or recommendation. With lower cost/effort at the bottom of the axis.

The horizontal axis shows the resulting impact of that action or recommendation, from low to high. The coloured dots on the chart are for illustrative purposes only, representing theoretical recommendations and where they would rank on cost/time versus impact.

The take-away from this chart is that some recommended measures can deliver quick wins with less time, effort and resource, they are the low-hanging fruit in the bottom right quartile of the chart. It should be noted that some of the high cost and very hard stuff does also need to be started at least, e.g., by advocating to government for extra resources.

Business, Clusters, Networks

Roadmap actions are for a range of actors to get engaged including; business support intermediaries Chamber of Commerce, universities, cluster organisations, creative hubs plus local and regional authorities, including private as well as regional and national public monies:

1. Better co-ordinate **specialist creative sector support** responding to sector needs, such as around sustainability and use of AI. Explore ways to increase the range of finance available to creatives.

2. Pilot an **'active brokerage'** and/or an **Entrepreneur in Residence** scheme to deliver expert nuanced business support and re-launch networks that will now be more responsive to the needs and opportunities of the creative business cluster.

3. Launch an expanded **creative cluster initiative** in Coventry and begin developing a more pro-active partnership between CWX, universities, Chamber of Commerce, trade bodies, creative spaces and more, providing Coventry with a dynamic creative cluster that connects accurate knowledge and valuable networking across the city and region.

4. Better coordinate **support to all freelance creative industry workers**, especially new entrants, so they are better able to set-up an effective portfolio career and become entrepreneurial themselves in how they market themselves

Skills & Workforce Development

5. Accelerate the **alignment of FE and HE courses more closely with changing industry demands**, e.g., Curriculum modernisation at Coventry University. Look for more ways to bring education and industry together.

6. Advocate for more **creative bootcamps and apprenticeships to be based in Coventry** and explore how more short courses can be used to upskill existing and aspiring creatives.

Places & Spaces

7. Set-up a **Creative Economy Development Agency** for advocacy and coordination, using all levers available, to identify and secure affordable creative spaces. These to include; repurposed spaces for co-working (like 1 Mill Street), creative and tech hubs, build spaces for film & TV, participatory and performance spaces including hyperlocal ones. Activity to include looking for opportunities to make more of existing spaces and the ways they collaborate together.

Tourism, Visitor Economy & Branding

8. Explore ways to bring **'one-of-a-kind' live experiences** to Coventry's Visitor economy, e.g., blending /TV, games, arts and culture with motion capture, digital mapping air projection (where images appear to float in the air) and more. At the same time push forward e-sports events.

9. Instigate **pilot actions in this experiential space** to test reaction. Leverage the potential of a re-launched creative cluster, alongside new funding streams like CreaTech Frontiers, to set-up collaborations and create some contender immersive experiences.

Public Funding, City Development & Government Policies

Actions specifically for Coventry City Council, with potential input from Warwick District Council, WMCA and other public bodies:

10. Take a more active role in the **expanding of a creative cluster initiative** for Coventry city that will take full advantage of all emerging opportunities for the creative sector and its economic growth across the city. Co-fund a dedicated cluster manager to drive this forward and explore business models and ways to get this role as 'industry led' as possible.

11. Align with opportunities from the newly launched **Modern Industrial Strategy** and partnership opportunities with WMCA around their newly launched **Culture & Creative Framework: Invest in Creative Growth & Cultural Impact.**

12. Support activity elsewhere to provide **active brokerage** to creatives and tech companies so networking is more effective and provide specialist creative support, such as through an **entrepreneur in residence model** and/or by using CWX's approach of monthly drop-in sessions with focused workshops on key topics.

13. Instigate **exploratory work to start a Creative Economy Development Agency** (or similar), independent of the Council that pulls together a strong set of stakeholders, especially business leaders. It would champion ways the creative economy and creative spaces can turbo-charge the city's growth.

14. **Develop a creative project pipeline** for the city of both capital and revenue projects, to ensure the city is ready, 'on-the-front foot', when political context and new devolved

funding allows. Ensure this is fully embedded in wider investment plans for Coventry. This would include instigating a study into vacant buildings or potential meanwhile-use sites that can be made available to the creative sector, including any potential candidates for asset transfer.

15. **Develop a full Creative Industries & Creative Economy Strategy** for Coventry with up-to-date mapping of sector scale and employment. Integrate this with a revised Marketing & Branding plan for the city.

16. Position Coventry as a **creative-industrial hub**, combining the opportunities and synergies between all priority growth sectors (e.g. culture, design, automotive)

7.0 Consultation, Credits and Data

7.1 Consultation & Credits

Original research was conducted for this report between May and July 2025 through discussion groups and individual interviews with key experts representing different aspects of the creative industry sector and wider creative economy ecosystem across Coventry and Warwickshire.

This was augmented with an analysis of current and recent reports and strategies, both locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

The report is primarily focused around economic development of the creative industry sector. It includes culture, tourism and visitor economy but these are not the primary focus of the report.

The report is intended to provide evidence and advice to Coventry City Council. It is not intending to give advice to Warwickshire or the wider region.

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Paula Deas	Coventry and Warwickshire Business Partnerships	Coventry City Council and Warwickshire County Council	Economic Policy, Tourism
Prof Pietari Kaapa	Professor in Media and Communications - Head of Policy & Media Policy Studies and Createch	University of Warwick	University/Film Policy/Sustainability
Prof Chris Bilton	Director of the BA in Media and Creative Industries	University of Warwick	University/creative industries
Prof Jonothan Neelands	Academic Director for Cultural Partnerships	University of Warwick/Warwick Business School	University/creative industries, cultural policy
Prof Nigel Driffield	Economist, Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor for Engagement	University of Warwick/Warwick Business School	University/economic policy
Rachel Davis	Director of Warwick Enterprise for Innovation Group	University of Warwick	University/creative industries, innovation
Rachel Farrer	Associate Director for Cultural and Community Engagement	Coventry University	University/creative industries, innovation
Erica Love	CEO	Culture Central	Cultural sector
Marcus Lynch	Development Manager, Culture & Creative Economy	Coventry City Council	Cultural policy
Prof Rachel Moseley	Profess of Film & Television Studies, Vice-Provost for the Faculty of Arts	University of Warwick	University/creative industries, innovation, cultural sector
Salla Virman	Head of Culture & Creative Economy	Coventry City Council	Cultural policy, creative industries policy
Sanna Wicks	Course Director for BA (Hons) Film Production/Assistant Professor Film Production	Coventry University	University/Film, Studies
Dr Shaun Hides	Academic Dean, College of the Arts & Society	Coventry University	University/creative industries, innovation, cultural sector
Stacy O'Connor	Digital Creative Industry & Inward Investment Specialist	Warwickshire County Council/ Invest Warwickshire	Creative Industries policy, economic development
Tim Luft	Dealmaker & Innovation Specialist, Screen Industry Consultant	Founders Faculty, Create Central	Screen industries, Createch, innovation

Dr Vicky Belt	Director of Impact & Engagement	Warwick Business School	University/economy

7.2 Data Caveats

The mapping section describing the size and make-up of the creative industries across Coventry & Warwickshire has been compiled from data with a high veracity of accuracy, but some of it is a few years old and does not fully clarify the situation concerning freelancers in the creative sector and the extent to which creative occupations exist in non-creative companies.

Despite this caveat over data, the author is confident that the data included is sufficiently accurate and up to date to support the statements and recommendations made throughout this report.

However, in the future, it will be advantageous to gather a more up-to-date picture of the scale and composition of the sector, and the make-up of its workforce.

8.0 Appendices

Appendix A: Provisional Funding Streams – Creative Industry Modern Industrial Strategy

The list below is a provisional list of funding programmes that form part of the government's creative sector industrial strategy published in June 2025. At the time of writing broad details of these funds have only just been announced, so there is a lack of clarity as to the specifics of these funds. But this list is a prompt to ensure Coventry City Council supports the sector, universities and other sector stakeholders, to investigate the options to ensure that these funded programmes can deliver the maximum benefit to the city.

Direct funding to the region related to industrial policy will be directed through the mayor of the West Midlands and the West Midlands combined Authority (WMCA).

Creative Sub-sector	Programme/Fund Name	Type of Funding	Size/Range	Timescales (When Available/Spent By)	Status/Notes
Cross-sector / All Creative	UKRI Creative Industries R&D Strategy	Grant	Not specified	Strategy published 2025	Significant increase in public funding for R&D, commercialisation, tech adoption; details TBA1.
	Creative Industries Clusters Programme	Grant	£100m (next wave)	Spending Review period	For R&D clusters in new sub-sectors/locations 1.
	Creative Futures Programme (COSTAR Labs)	Grant	£25m	Not specified	Five new R&D labs, two showcase spaces, commercialisation support1.

Creative Sub-sector	Programme/Fund Name	Type of Funding	Size/Range	Timescales (When Available/Spent By)	Status/Notes
	British Business Bank (BBB) Industrial Strategy Growth Capital	Debt/Equity /Venture Capital	+£4bn (Industrial Strategy Growth Capital)	Ongoing; additional funding from 2025	Sector-focused, includes specialist VC fund managers, angel syndicates, debt funds1.
	Creative Places Growth Fund	**Grant**	**£150m**	**Devolved over 2025–2029**	**To six Mayoral Strategic Authorities for tailored investment readiness1.**
	Creative Content Exchange	Marketplace/Platform	Not specified	In development	For licensing, buying, selling digitised creative assets; details TBA1.
	UK Export Finance (UKEF)	Loans/Guarantees	Up to £80bn (all IS-8 sectors)	Ongoing	Not Creative-exclusive; available to sector exporters1.
	Creative Careers Service	Grant	£9m	Refreshed, UK-wide	For creative careers awareness and support1.
	Creative Foundations Fund	Grant	£85m	Spending Review period	For arts and culture infrastructure modernisation1.

Creative Sub-sector	Programme/Fund Name	Type of Funding	Size/Range	Timescales (When Available/Spent By)	Status/Notes
Film & TV	Screen Growth Package	Grant	£75m over 3 years	2026–2029	For independent UK content, inward investment, exports, regional hubs1.
	UK Global Screen Fund	Grant	£18m/year	2026–2029	For international business, co-productions, distribution1.
	National Film and Television School Expansion	Grant/Co-funding	£10m public, £11m private	Subject to business case	Co-funded by Disney, Broccoli Foundation, Sky1.
	BFI Film Academy	Grant	Not specified	2026–2029	For 16–25s from underrepresented backgrounds1.
	Film/TV Tax Credits (Audio-Visual Expenditure Credit, VFX, Independent Film)	Tax Relief	Not specified	Ongoing	Enhanced rates for VFX; new Independent Film Tax Credit1.
Video Games	Video Games Growth Package	Grant	£30m over 3 years	2026–2029	For start-ups, new titles, skills, inward investment1.

Creative Sub-sector	Programme/Fund Name	Type of Funding	Size/Range	Timescales (When Available/Spent By)	Status/Notes
	UK Games Fund (UKGF) Enhancement	Grant/Match-funding	Not specified	2026–2029	Support for new titles and skills, match-funding required1.
	London Games Festival Support	Grant	Not specified	2026–2029	To strengthen investor partnerships, double private deals1.
	Video Game Expenditure Credit	Tax Relief	Not specified	Ongoing	For video game developers1.
Music, Performing & Visual Arts	Music Growth Package	Grant	Up to £30m over 3 years	2026–2029	For emerging artists, touring, mentoring, export, grassroots1.
	Arena/ Stadium Ticket Levy (LIVE Trust)	Industry-led Levy	Up to £20m annually	Ongoing	For grassroots music sector, venues, festivals, promoters1.
	Arts Council England National Portfolio	Grant	£440m/year	Ongoing	For artists, organisations, talent across England1.

Creative Sub-sector	**Programme/Fund Name**	**Type of Funding**	**Size/Range**	**Timescales (When Available/Spent By)**	**Status/Notes**
	Creative Foundations Fund	Grant	£85m	Spending Review period	For capital investments in arts/culture infrastructure1.
Advertising & Marketing	No specific new fund, but sector benefits from cross-sector finance, innovation, and export support	-	-	-	Sector to benefit from cross-sector measures and export finance1.
Fashion & Design	British Fashion Council NEWGEN	Grant	Not specified	Ongoing	For emerging designers, London Fashion Week showcases1.
	World Design Congress 2025 (co-funded)	Grant/Events	Not specified	September 2025	For sustainable design leadership, international business exchange1.
Proposed/Undefined Funding	National Centre for Arts and Music Education	Grant	Not specified	Launch September 2026	Improving access and opportunity for children/young people; funding not yet defined1.
	Creative Content Exchange (marketplace)	Platform	Not specified	In development	Details of funding and operation TBA1.

Creative Sub-sector	Programme/Fund Name	Type of Funding	Size/Range	Timescales (When Available/Spent By)	Status/Notes
	IP-backed Lending Initiatives	Loan/Guarantee	Not specified	In development	Working group to publish update by end of 2025[1].
	BBC Charter Review/Commercial Activity	Not specified	Not specified	Charter Review launch 2025	Potential for new investment routes; details TBA[1].