Delegated Decision Report

20 November 2025

Title: Create Talent Programme
Report of: Charlotte Carpenter, Director of Skills, Inclusion & Public Service Reform
Portfolio: Home of Real Opportunity

Report Summary

The purpose of this report is to seek approval of up to £4m from the Investment Fund for a three-year, industry led skills programme supporting the North East's creative sector – specifically music, arts, writing & publishing, and screen industries.

The Create Talent skills programme will deliver inclusive, sector-leading technical training aligned with industry needs, and develop a pipeline of diverse talent with clear pathways to employment in the creative sector. It will also equip freelancers and entrepreneurs with high level, transferable skills to support career mobility

The added value of the Create Talent Programme lies in its ability to fill critical gaps in the North East's creative sector that existing skills programmes do not address. It will offer flexible, modular learning that suits the freelance and project-based nature of creative work. It is also designed to promote and open up opportunities within the creative sector, it will explicitly target underrepresented groups including women, ethnic minority communities, disabled individuals and socio-economically disadvantaged residents. The programme will include targeted outreach, flexible learning formats, and additional support mechanisms to ensure equitable access and progression.

The Mayor's Manifesto, the North East CA's Devolution Deal and interim Local Growth Plan note the importance of the creative industries as a core asset of the North East economy. To unlock the economic opportunities in this thriving sector a programme of bespoke skills and training interventions is required to develop a pipeline of diverse talent, clear pathways to employment, and to equip our entrepreneurs and freelancers with the skills they need to grow. The programme will play a key part in delivering the Mayor and Cabinet's mission 'Home of Real Opportunity', providing our workforce with the right skills and training to build an inclusive and competitive economy.

Reason for delegated decision

This activity was included within the Strategic Portfolio Plans considered by Cabinet in July 2024, and the following delegated authority agreed:

To progress subsequent business cases and make investment decisions associated with the activity described within the Strategic Portfolio Plans in consultation with the Mayor and relevant Portfolio Holder subject to the following thresholds which is included within the adopted Single Assurance Framework:

- Investment approvals up to £500k are to be approved by the Chief Executive, in consultation with the S73 Officer and Monitoring Officer, under the Cabinet approved delegated authority.
- Investment approvals over £500k and up to £1 million are approved by the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Technical Officers Group, S73 Officer and Monitoring Officer, under the Cabinet approved delegated authority.
- Investment approvals over £1 million and up to and including £5 million are approved by the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Finance and Investment Board, S73 Officer and Monitoring Officer, under the Cabinet approved delegated authority.'

The development and appraisal of a full business case for the Create Talent programme has been completed. The funding requested in this report was recommended for approval by the Finance and Investment Board at its meeting held on 6 October 2025 through the Chief Executive's delegated authority.

Recommendations

The Chief Executive is recommended to:

i. Approve up to £4m of funding from the Investment Fund for the three-year Create Talent Programme.
ii. Approve the commencement and agreement of the associated procurement activity for the delivery of the Create Talent programme.

A. Context

1. Background

1.1 The Creative Industries are a cornerstone of the North East's economy and cultural identity and encompass a wide range of sectors, including advertising, architecture, crafts, design, film, music, video games, performing and visual arts. There are 61,000 people employed in the North East wider region's Creative Industries, 5% of the region's total jobs.

1.2 Over the past 10 years, the North East region has seen significant growth in these sectors. The potential to rapidly scale this up further is recognised in our Mayor's manifesto and Local Growth Plan which has identified Creative Industries as an area where the North East has unique economic assets and opportunities.

1.3 Whilst the Creative Industries are a driver for economic development, without significant investment in skills the North East risks lacking the talent required to sustain the rapid growth in this area. Investing in this Create Talent Programme for the North East will not only address current skills gaps but will pave the way for a sustainable, diversified, and competitive creative sector in the region.

1.4 By creating a skilled workforce and a new focus on workforce development, the North East can expand its creative infrastructure and attract new investment into the region. This skills programme will foster talent, support local entrepreneur's businesses, and contribute to the long-term growth of the sector in the region, and also ensure our talent is industry and export ready.

2. Summary of Investment Proposal

Project Outline	
Funding Source	Investment Fund
Proposal Name	Create Talent Programme
Lead Organisation	North East Combined Authority
Delivery Areas	Whole North East Combined Authority region
Start Date	December 2025
Financial End Date	March 2029
Practical completion date (date by which all outputs will be achieved)	March 2029
Total Project Value	£4,000,000
Grant Amount Requested	Up to £4,000,000
Budget Implications	The request from the North East CA Investment Fund is up to £4m for the Create Talent programme. In the event that other government funding comes forward that is a more appropriate solution for this need, the call on the Investment Fund will be reduced accordingly.

2.1 Create Talent is a three-year, industry-led skills programme supporting the creative sector—specifically music, screen, and writing/publishing. The key objectives of the programme are to deliver inclusive, sector specific technical training aligned with industry needs. It will develop a diverse talent pipeline with clear employment pathways, the programme will also equip freelancers and the self-employed workforce with high-level transferable skills.

2.2 The programme will focus on three strands that complement the North East CA's wider investments in the creative sector including the North East Screen Industries Partnership; Culture and Creative Zones; Culture and Creative Investment Programme; Create Growth Programme, the Centre for Writing, the Quayside Recording Studios, and Crown Works Studio Sunderland. These strands include:

Music Professionals and Technicians - This strand of the programme will support the North East's thriving, inclusive music and performing arts sector. It will deliver industry-led training and learning opportunities for current and aspiring professionals and technicians to support a pipeline of talent and address skills shortages in the sector.

Screen Sector Skills - A key goal of this strand is to promote the screen sector as an employment option and will actively target groups that are underrepresented in the sector which e.g. women, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, disabled people, and individuals from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. It aims to secure a sustainable, diverse and locally sourced workforce to support the North East's ambitious plans for becoming a major destination for film and high-end TV production as well as sustaining existing screen sectors in the region. The programme of activity in this strand will also support existing freelancers with transferable skills training, tailored professional development sessions and networking opportunities.

Writing and Publishing Skills - This strand will play a new strategic role in the region aligning the opportunities for young people and adults to develop aspiration for and career pathways and job opportunities within the writing and publishing industries including freelance writing, professional writing, writing in education, journalism, writing for all medias, publishing and the related communications and digital narrative and storytelling industries.

2.3 The programme will be designed and delivered by creative industry specialists, combining practical experience with theoretical knowledge and delivered in real work environments (e.g., studios, writing hubs). This specialised approach will nurture talent and prepare individuals for diverse career paths, the programme will engage professionals from creative industries as mentors or guest speakers providing learners with industry insights, guidance, and networking opportunities.

2.4 Industry engagement in the design and delivery of this programme will promote the benefits of offering industry placements, work experience and apprenticeships to a wider range of creative businesses. This may also offset some of the challenges around the sector's low employer investment in training, not just in terms of co-funding but offering placements. Suppliers will also be expected to facilitate collaboration and partnership working to increase opportunities and strengthen the connections between industry and FE.

2.5 This programme bridges a gap between the end of the North East CA's Skills for Growth programme and ensures that momentum is maintained in sector development and avoids disruption in skills support. Funding through the Skills for Growth programme for the Creative Sector is due to fully complete in November 2025. The timing of this investment proposal will enable the commencement of procurement procedures to ensure that skills revenue remains in place for the sector.

3. Commissioning Approach

3.1 The Create Talent Programme will be commissioned through open and transparent procurement processes. We do not intend to replicate the Skills for Growth Programme through this exercise but will incorporate the lessons learnt into the specification and awards of funding.

3.2 This programme will work with residents on a wider regional footprint across the North East CA unlike Skills for Growth, which was focused on the North of Tyne region, suppliers will need to demonstrate capacity to achieve this. The specification will be clear that we are seeking industry led partnerships for this delivery, including formalised consortia approaches that draw on a range of expertise.

3.3 A clear set of performance management and quality assurance measures will be included in the procurement documentation. Whilst we do want to incorporate greater flexibility in this programme, it will be important that suppliers have the knowledge, track record and ability to deliver education and

training. Bidders will also be required to demonstrate VFM within the tender response documents. The VFM will account for any additional support that is included to promote diversity in the sector.

3.4 The consortia/delivery partner approach to the Create Talent programme is to establish partnership working from the beginning of the programme rather than leave it to develop over a period of time. We will also be seeking outreach into communities from the programme as a result of feedback from North East Screen who are aware this is an element of their programme that has not been developed.

3.5 The specification will also set out the tangible outcomes we expect from the community engagement and outreach in terms of KPIs in relation to moving participants into further education, gaining modular qualifications from the activity and moving into work placement or apprenticeship delivery. We view the outreach element of the programme as an opportunity to identify talent in our communities and providing the means for this to progress rather than a one-off activity.

4. Outputs and Outcomes

4.1 The programme will support 1,800 residents, with 650 residents engaged on the programme entering into further education/training as a result of the programme and 360 moving into employment. There will also be support for 120 freelancers with 80 increasing their social value following support.

Outputs	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29	Total
Residents who have received a direct intervention in line with the aims of the programmes.	100	800	600	300	1800
Number of unique enterprises receiving a support.	0	50	50	20	120

Description of Outcomes	Timeframe for achievement	Totals
Residents gaining a qualification.	30/03/2029	500
Residents in education/training upon completion of the intervention.	30/03/2029	650
Residents in employment, including self-employment upon completion of the intervention.	30/03/2029	320
Increased social value.	30/03/2029	90

B. Impact on North East Combined Authority Objectives

The priorities and aims of this programme are explicit in the Mayor's manifesto and in the North East CA's Local Growth Plan. The North East Combined Authority has demonstrated a commitment to support the region's cultural and creative industries. Within both the *North East CA Corporate Plan 2024-2028*, and the Local Growth Plan, it is confirmed that, the Combined Authority intends to "*Invest in our creative industries, both in their physical infrastructure and access to skills training*."

The proposed programme supports this priority by providing high end training for both up and coming, and established creatives. It will support the growth of the Creative Industry and the visitor economy through its purpose.

This proposal also aligns closely with the UK's Industrial Strategy and initiatives like the Creative Corridor. These strategies are designed to position the UK as a global leader in innovation, economic growth, and the creative industries, with a particular focus on regional regeneration and equity in growth.

C. Key risks

A summary of key risks relating to the investment proposal is included below:

Risk description	Planned Mitigations
Failure to gain market engagement	Keep relevant industry stakeholders warm. Work with comms

in the procurement exercise	on an engagement plan
Resident engagement with the programme is less than anticipated	Suppliers will be expected to set out a comprehensive engagement strategy as part of the procurement exercise with risks and mitigations. A strong demand for the programme has been undertaken through stakeholder consultation and there will be an ongoing comms campaign throughout the programme.
Leadership and accountability	The Create Talent Programme will have an identified project manager within the Skills team who will have clearly defined responsibilities throughout the lifetime of programme. The Principal Skills Manager will have overall oversight of the investment.
Incomplete systems to monitor supplier performance including the outputs and outcomes.	Performance and monitoring of the programme will be aligned to the North East CA devolved Skills Fund Performance Management processes to ensure there is a consistent and joined-up approach to performance reporting. There will be clearly defined processes to actively monitor delivery and expenditure to provide the necessary assurance that expenditure is within the defined categories of the investment.
Communications	A communications plan will be developed to support the launch of the programme to raise awareness amongst potential applicants. A similar approach has been undertaken when commissioning other Skills programmes.
Risk management	Risk management of this programme will be aligned to the Combined Authority's Risk Management Framework. A comprehensive risk register will be developed to support management of this programme which will be reviewed monthly.

D. Financial and other resources implications

The financial profile for the project/programme is included below:

Funding source	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Total
North East CA Investment Fund (£)	£400,000	£1,425,000	£1,300,000	£875,000	£4,000,000
Total (£)	£400,000	£1,425,000	£1,300,000	£875,000	£4,000,000

Note: The request from the North East CA Investment Fund is up to £4m for the Create Talent programme. In the event that other government funding is a more appropriate solution for this need flexibilities are in place to carry out a 'funding swap' and reduce the call on the investment fund. Any such adjustment would alter the profile set out above.

E. Legal implications

The comments of the Monitoring Officer have been included in this report.

F. Equalities implications

The North East CA follows the Public Sector Equality duty and this report has due regard to the need to achieve the objectives set out under s149 of the Equality Act 2010.

A full Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out, in consultation with the equalities and inclusion team. We will share findings and actions from this assessment with delivery partners appointed through the procurement process.

The activity outlined in this proposal will contribute to the North East CA equality objectives including investing in services that are accessible and responsive to the needs of all communities and businesses, removing barriers to success and driving economic growth that delivers for all our residents.

G. Consultation and engagement

In preparing this proposal Skills Officers have conducted a comprehensive market assessment through consultations with creative industry experts and regional partners. These include:

- Generator North East Ltd who have extensive experience and insight into the music industry as well as access to a wide-ranging network of employers such as Warner and Universal Music.
- Signpost Productions and Beacon Films – part of the ITV network and leading players in the screen industry.
- New Writing North – a local charity creating more opportunities for writers to work in the region and to grow audiences for work.
- NewBridge Project - The NewBridge Project is the local leading support organisation for visual artists in the North East.
- The North East Screen Industries Partnership and workforce skills & development group
- Screen Yorkshire – Skills Officers have consulted with Screen Yorkshire on their creative skills programme 'Beyond Brontës', to learn and understand the impacts, and recruitment challenges in their region.

Consultation has taken place with colleagues in the Economic Growth & Regeneration Directorate including the Principal Manager for Sectoral Growth and Delivery to assess the demand for this investment and viability of a bespoke Create Talent Programme. The case for this investment has also been consulted upon with Local Authority colleagues responsible for cultural and creative development programmes across the region as well as Local Authority Employment and Skills Leads.

We have also conducted extensive wider research on skills gaps and demand in the Creative Industries to corroborate insight and anecdotal evidence gathered from providers and industry specialist.

H. Appendices - None

I. Background papers

Cabinet Report 30 July 2024 -The North East CA Strategic Portfolio Plans (Culture, Creative, Tourism and Sport).
Cabinet Report 26 November 2024 - Early Delivery Priorities for Culture, Creative, Tourism and Sport in the North East.
North East CA Corporate Plan
Local Growth Plan
Cabinet Report 22 July 2025 – New Deal for North East Workers

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K. Glossary

ASF	Adult Skills Fund
DfE	Department for Education
NE	North East
North East CA	North East Mayoral Combined Authority
SME	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise

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L. Consultee

1) Cabinet Member: Yes	2) Director/Head of Service: Yes	3) Director of Finance and Investment: Yes	4) Monitoring Officer: Yes