

**The North East**

**CREATES**

## North East Culture, Creative Industries, Heritage and Sport

**2026-2036**

Strategic Framework





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## Mayors Foreword

### The North East is a place that creates.

Our people create music, stories and art. We make films and television watched around the world. We produce extraordinary sporting talent and host events that bring hundreds of thousands of people together

These things matter because they make the North East feel like home.

They give our places character. They bring people together. They create that sense of pride and belonging which is so important to me as Mayor.

But they are also a serious part of our economy.

Around 55,000 people already work in our creative industries, while our visitor economy is worth more than £7 billion. Between 2019 and 2022, the North East saw the fastest proportional growth in creative industries of any English region.

I want us to build on that success.

My ambition is simple: talented people should not feel they have to leave the North East to succeed.

A young musician should be able to start out in a small venue here and build a career. A young person interested in film, writing, design, sport or digital creativity should be able to see a route from the classroom into a good job. Our freelancers and creative businesses should have the support they need to grow here. And people in every community should have the chance to take part, not just those who already know which doors to knock on.

That is why this strategy is about much more than funding individual projects. It is about building a region in which businesses grow, talent stays and thrives, communities participate and investment follows.

Over the next decade we want to create thousands of new jobs, grow our visitor economy, support businesses and freelancers, bring major events to the region and open up many more opportunities for people to experience culture and sport.

My Mayoral Strategic Authority will use its investment, convening power and growing devolved responsibilities to help make that happen.

But we should be ambitious about further devolution too. Too many decisions about culture, heritage and sport are still made too far away from the communities they affect. I will continue to argue for more power and investment to be placed in the North East, because people here understand our places, our talent and our potential better than anyone.

So that's our vision.

From Durham Cathedral to The Glasshouse, Hadrian's Wall to the Stadium of Light, our region already has assets recognised around the world.

Our task now is to make sure their success creates opportunity everywhere.

Because this is not just about celebrating what the North East has been.

**It is about giving more people the chance to create what the North East becomes next.**

**Kim McGuinness**  
North East Mayor



# Introduction: Vision for the North East

From world-leading musicians, writers and screen talent to iconic sporting moments that bring people together; from grassroots creativity deeply rooted in our communities to internationally recognised venues, festivals and destinations – the North East’s culture, creativity, heritage and sport are part of who we are. They are also a powerful and growing part of our economy, and central to our future prosperity.

The region is steeped in rich and diverse cultural heritage, featuring UNESCO sites such as Hadrian’s Wall and Durham Cathedral, alongside more than seventy castles in Northumberland – more than any other county in England – as well as Beamish Museum, the Roman forts of Segedunum and Arbeia and a wealth of historic and contemporary cultural assets. From the Angel of the North to the Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art and the Great North Museum: Hancock, our historic and contemporary assets together tell a story of transformation, from industrial strength to creative ambition.

Sport is central to that story. From the Charlton brothers to Jonny Wilkinson, Lionesses Jill Scott and Lucy Bronze to Ben Stokes, the North East has shaped some of England’s defining sporting moments. Today, our two Premier League clubs, Newcastle United F.C. and Sunderland A.F.C., are not only anchors for their communities, but significant drivers of tourism, investment and regional pride. Sport is also a major economic sector: DCMS estimates put the wider UK sport sector’s direct contribution at £63.2 billion, supporting 1.3 million filled jobs<sup>1</sup>.

Great places are shaped by the culture, creativity, heritage and sporting assets that give them their character and sense of identity. They bring our towns, cities, coast and countryside to life, creating places that are distinctive, confident and connected. They foster pride and belonging, whilst supporting regeneration, attracting investment and encouraging people to spend time in their neighbourhoods.

Across the North East, investment has helped transform places such as Ouseburn in Newcastle, Berwick in Northumberland, North Shields Fish Quay, Gateshead Quays and Sunnyside in Sunderland, demonstrating how creative activity, heritage and cultural infrastructure can animate neighbourhoods, support local businesses and contribute to long-term renewal. These sectors are therefore essential not only to economic growth, but also to creating places where people want to live, work, visit and invest.

Despite these strengths, the North East is not yet realising its full potential. Productivity remains below the UK average, many creative businesses and freelancers face structural challenges, participation is uneven, and too many talented people leave the region to build careers elsewhere. These challenges are interconnected and require coordinated regional leadership if the North East is to realise its full economic and social potential.

<sup>1</sup> DCMS Sport Satellite Account: employment and GVA estimates. gov.uk/government/collections/sport-satellite-account-employment-and-gva-estimates



This Strategic Framework sets out how the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority (North East MSA) will use its devolved powers, investment and convening role to strengthen culture, creative industries, heritage and sport over the next decade. Developed through extensive engagement with local authorities, national agencies, education providers, businesses, practitioners and sector organisations, it provides a shared strategic direction for partners across the region and a framework for aligning investment, evidence and collective action around a common ambition for sustainable economic growth, thriving places and increased opportunity.

This Framework supports delivery of the Mayor’s Manifesto by aligning culture, creative industries, heritage and sport with four linked priorities: growing the North East economy through good-quality jobs, talent retention and high growth sectors; widening access to opportunity and helping tackle child poverty; improving health and wellbeing through participation and prevention; and strengthening pride in place and regional confidence through cultural infrastructure, major events and sporting excellence. The Mayor’s Small Venues Fund provides an early example of this approach in practice, with a £2.2 million fund providing investment over three years to support small venues across the North East.

Our wider ambition for further devolution is central to this Framework. We will continue to make the case for deeper and more meaningful devolution of culture, creative industries, heritage and sport funding, ensuring the North East secures its fair share of national investment and that decisions affecting our communities are shaped closer to the people and places they impact. This means working with Government, Arts Council England and other national partners to move beyond fragmented, top-down approaches towards a stronger regional partnership model – one that reflects local priorities, supports regional growth and gives the North East a clearer voice in how public investment is directed. We will also work with partners to strengthen the regional evidence base, including through the region’s research ecosystem, the new Culture Connect Data Observatory and partnerships with relevant bodies and centres such as the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC).



Delivery will depend on strong collaboration with cultural and sporting organisations, education providers, local authorities, businesses, national partners and the UK’s Arm’s Length Bodies. This Framework seeks to align regional priorities with national investment, expertise and programmes, while recognising the value of international collaboration in supporting innovation, knowledge exchange and the North East’s growing global profile. Sustainable economic growth depends on sustainable careers, resilient organisations, stronger connections across the wider ecosystem and innovation and dynamism to ensure that businesses stay competitive and meet changing demands.

This Framework therefore adopts an ecosystem approach, recognising that major investments and internationally significant organisations can only succeed when supported by a strong network of freelancers, creative businesses, community organisations, education providers, investors, local authorities and grassroots activity. Together, these connections generate the talent, ideas, audiences, supply chains and innovation that underpin long-term economic success.

## Why act now?

# The North East stands at a pivotal moment.

Devolution gives the region a new opportunity to align investment, skills, culture, creative industries, heritage, tourism and sport around a shared long-term ambition. At the same time, these sectors are being reshaped by economic uncertainty, changing audience behaviours, new technologies including AI, and the transition to a lower-carbon economy. The region is already demonstrating significant momentum. Nationally significant investments in cultural infrastructure, creative industries and major events are strengthening the region's profile, while growth in sectors such as screen, music and digital creativity is creating new opportunities for businesses, communities and residents. DCMS data shows that the North East's creative industries experienced the fastest proportional growth of any English region between 2019 and 2022. The region's visitor economy continues to grow, with significant ambitions to develop further, supported by internationally recognised heritage, cultural assets and major sporting events that attract visitors, investment and talent.

This momentum will not automatically translate into sustainable or inclusive growth. Many creative businesses and freelancers continue to face barriers to growth, participation remains uneven, talent pathways are not always clear, and investment can be fragmented. Major assets and events will only deliver their full value if they are connected to the wider ecosystem of freelancers, SMEs, community organisations, education providers, grassroots venues, heritage organisations and local places.

Without coordinated regional leadership, these opportunities risk operating in isolation. The North East MSA has a unique role in bringing partners together, aligning investment, strengthening evidence and ensuring that local success contributes to wider regional growth. Public investment in culture, creative industries, heritage and sport is not a discretionary add-on. It is a strategic investment in the North East's future: supporting business growth, attracting inward investment, creating high-quality jobs, strengthening places, improving health and wellbeing and widening opportunity for people and communities across the region.



## Evidence and what we know works

Place-based, sector-specific investment is most effective in supporting creative and sporting talent, particularly in regions with strong identity, emerging clusters and lower operating costs (Creative Policy and Evidence Centre, 2024).

The North East MSA Local Growth Plan identifies creative industries as a priority growth sector due to their contribution to productivity, employment and exports, and their alignment with innovation, digital and cultural strengths. Nationally, the creative industries continue to outpace the wider UK economy, with DCMS provisional estimates showing creative industries GVA growth of 4.6% between 2023 and 2024, compared with 1% for the UK economy overall, and supporting around 2.4 million jobs (DCMS, 2025/26)<sup>5</sup>.

### Within the North East, DCMS regional data demonstrates that:

- Creative industries GVA grew by over 50% between 2019 and 2022, the fastest proportional growth of any English region<sup>6</sup>
- Employment in creative industries has recovered strongly post-pandemic, with growth concentrated in screen, music, digital content and publishing
- Creative businesses remain predominantly microbusiness, with high self-employment rates, reinforcing the need for tailored business support (DCMS, 2024)

Sport is also a significant economic asset.

Latest DCMS estimates put the wider UK sport sector's direct contribution at £63.2 billion in 2024, supporting 1.3 million filled jobs. Latest available local-authority estimates indicate around £1.2 billion of sport-related GVA across the seven Local Authority areas (DCMS, 2024)<sup>7</sup>.

Evidence that has come from a range of delivery programmes – including for example from the Creative Growth Programme, and place-based programmes. There is a clear opportunity for the North East to engage with nationally funded programmes, for example the AHRC Creative Clusters programme. It has also drawn on learnings from the Creative Fuse North East programme, also funded by AHRC, but outside the Creative Clusters programme. For example, Create Berwick, demonstrates the value of sustained investment in creative clusters to support business growth, talent development and supports targeted support, including for example access to finance, leading to:

- Increased productivity
- Higher survival and scale up rates among creative SMEs
- Increased business turnover
- Stronger engagement with export markets (DCMS, 2023)

<sup>2</sup> DCMS (2026), Sectors Economic Estimates: Gross Value Added 2024 (provisional), DCMS (2025), Sector Economic Estimates: Employment, January 2024 to December 2024. London: DCMS

<sup>3</sup> Latest available comparative regional data

<sup>4</sup> DCMS (2024), Sport Satellite Account for the UK 2024: Research into a new measure for estimating the value of sport.

The region's universities also play a critical role in research, innovation and commercialisation within the creative economy, supporting areas such as digital media, immersive technologies, design and cultural entrepreneurship. This, necessary to ensure that our creative industries are leaning into the opportunities offered by technologies such as AI, developing the region's cutting-edge offer. Creative PEC research has highlighted the role of universities in attracting inward investment into the region's creative industries (Jones & Maioli, 2023<sup>5</sup>) as well as supporting the growth potential of creative clusters alongside their role in training and education (Siepel and Wang, 2026<sup>6</sup>). These lessons learned directly inform this framework's approach to aligning talent development with business growth and innovation support.

For heritage, the evidence and consultation feedback highlight the importance of connecting the historic environment, museums, collections, specialist skills and organisational capacity to regeneration, visitor growth, learning and community identity. The North East MSA will work with Historic England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, local authorities, universities and sector partners to strengthen the regional evidence base and identify where coordinated action can add value.

Innovation will underpin the future competitiveness of the North East's culture, creative industries and sport sectors. The Strategic Authority will encourage collaboration between businesses, universities, cultural organisations and investors to accelerate the development of new products, services, technologies and business models. By strengthening innovation alongside creativity, we can increase productivity, improve resilience and create higher value employment opportunities that are fit for the future.

We will build measurement and evaluation into innovation activity from the outset, using evidence on take-up, business performance, productivity and wider outcomes to understand what works and inform future investment.

<sup>5</sup> Jones, J. and Maioli, S. (2023) The Motives of Inbound Foreign Direct Investors in the Creative Industries. Creative PEC.  
<sup>6</sup> Siepel, J. and Wang, Z. (2026) Creative clusters, geography and university-industry links. Creative PEC. Doi:10.5281/zenodo.21218359



## Our ambition for the North East

This Strategic Framework therefore sets out a shared ambition for the North East: to harness the power of culture, creative industries, heritage and sport to drive inclusive growth, create high-quality jobs, strengthen pride in place and improve opportunities for people and communities across the region.

Building on the ambitions of the North East Local Growth Plan and complementing and adding value to local cultural strategies, this Framework provides a shared direction for regional leadership, investment and collaboration. It focuses effort where it can make

the greatest difference – growing businesses, developing talent, increasing participation and ensuring that the benefits of investment are felt across every part of the North East.

This Framework is built around three strategic themes that reflect where Mayoral leadership can make the greatest difference over the next decade:

### 1 Create Jobs, Drive growth, investment and recognition

Supporting business growth, attracting investment, strengthening the visitor economy and raising the North East's national and international profile.

### 2 Developing skills and talent

Creating clearer pathways into creative and sporting careers, supporting lifelong talent development and ensuring businesses can access the skilled workforce they need to grow.

### 3 Increase opportunity

Ensuring more people can experience, contribute and benefit from culture, creativity, heritage and sport, improving health, wellbeing, opportunity and community resilience.



## Over the next ten years, our ambition is to:

- Create up to 10,000 new jobs
- Support more than 8,000 enterprises/businesses/freelancers to start and scale up
- Host more than 900 cultural, tourism and sporting events including up to ten major events
- Increase participation in culture and sport across our communities. A regional participation target will be developed with the sector as part of the action plan development
- Welcome more than 10,000,000 attendees to regional events and cultural venues
- Improve pay and job quality across culture, creative industries, heritage and sport

The scale of the Framework's jobs ambition should be understood against a substantial existing employment base and a growing regional economy. Visitor economy evidence shows that the North East visitor economy was worth £7.13 billion in 2025 (Experience North East England, 2025<sup>7</sup> and supported 63,600 jobs (ibid). This demonstrates the scale of one of the key employment bases that the Framework seeks to strengthen, while providing clear context for the ambition to support the creation of up to 10,000 new jobs across culture, creative industries, heritage and sport. Wider employment estimates for creative industries, heritage and total workforce jobs will be used only where the underlying source tables can be confirmed, as definitions and sector boundaries differ and should not be aggregated without a consistent methodology.

<sup>7</sup> Experience North East England, 2025 STEAM visitor economy data



**By 2036**, we want the North East to be recognised as one of Europe’s leading regions for culture, creativity, heritage and sport: a place where world-class talent is developed, sustainable careers are built, businesses grow, communities thrive and these sectors drive long-term, inclusive prosperity. Each starts from a different position and will require a different route forward, but all will benefit from stronger regional leadership, better-aligned investment, shared evidence and sustained partnership working.

For culture and the creative industries, this means building a connected, innovative and resilient ecosystem in which businesses can start and grow, cultural organisations and venues can thrive, and people from every part of the North East can participate, develop their talent and build sustainable careers.

For sport, this means building a region that converts its passion for watching sport into more opportunities to participate, develops a skilled workforce and clearer pathways, and uses major clubs, foundations, facilities and events as anchors for wider community and economic benefit.

For heritage and the historic environment, this means caring for and sustainably using the places, landscapes, buildings, collections, skills and stories that make the North East distinctive, while strengthening their contribution to community identity, regeneration, learning, visitor growth and investment.

This framework is firmly aligned with the North East Local Growth Plan and complements a wider suite of regional strategies, including the Child Poverty Action Plan, High Streets Commission, North East Strategic Careers Hub Plan, emerging Spatial Development Strategy and North East Transport Plan. Together these provide a joined-up approach to inclusive growth, ensuring culture, creative industries, heritage and sport contribute to wider economic, social and place-based priorities.

## Our Places

The North East’s greatest strength is its people and communities. From internationally recognised cities to market towns, historic settlements, coastline, countryside and rural communities, every part of the region contributes to a vibrant and interconnected cultural, creative, heritage and sporting ecosystem. This includes sporting and physical activity infrastructure, from leisure centres, swimming pools, playing pitches and parks to community facilities and active travel networks. These are all integral to the quality of place, participation and wellbeing.

Each place has its own distinctive identity, assets and opportunities and these strengths are complementary rather than competing. Together they create a regional offer that is greater than the sum of its parts, one that attracts investment, visitors, businesses and talent while improving quality of life for the people who live here.

Culture, creative industries, heritage and sport already connect places across the region. People travel across local authority boundaries to work, study, volunteer, perform, compete, visit attractions and attend events. Businesses collaborate through regional supply chains, freelancers work across multiple locations, and audiences increasingly experience the North East as a connected destination rather than a collection of individual places.

The North East MSA has an important role in strengthening these connections. By aligning investment, improving transport and accessibility, supporting collaboration and championing the region nationally and internationally, it can help ensure that the success of one place contributes to the prosperity of the whole region.

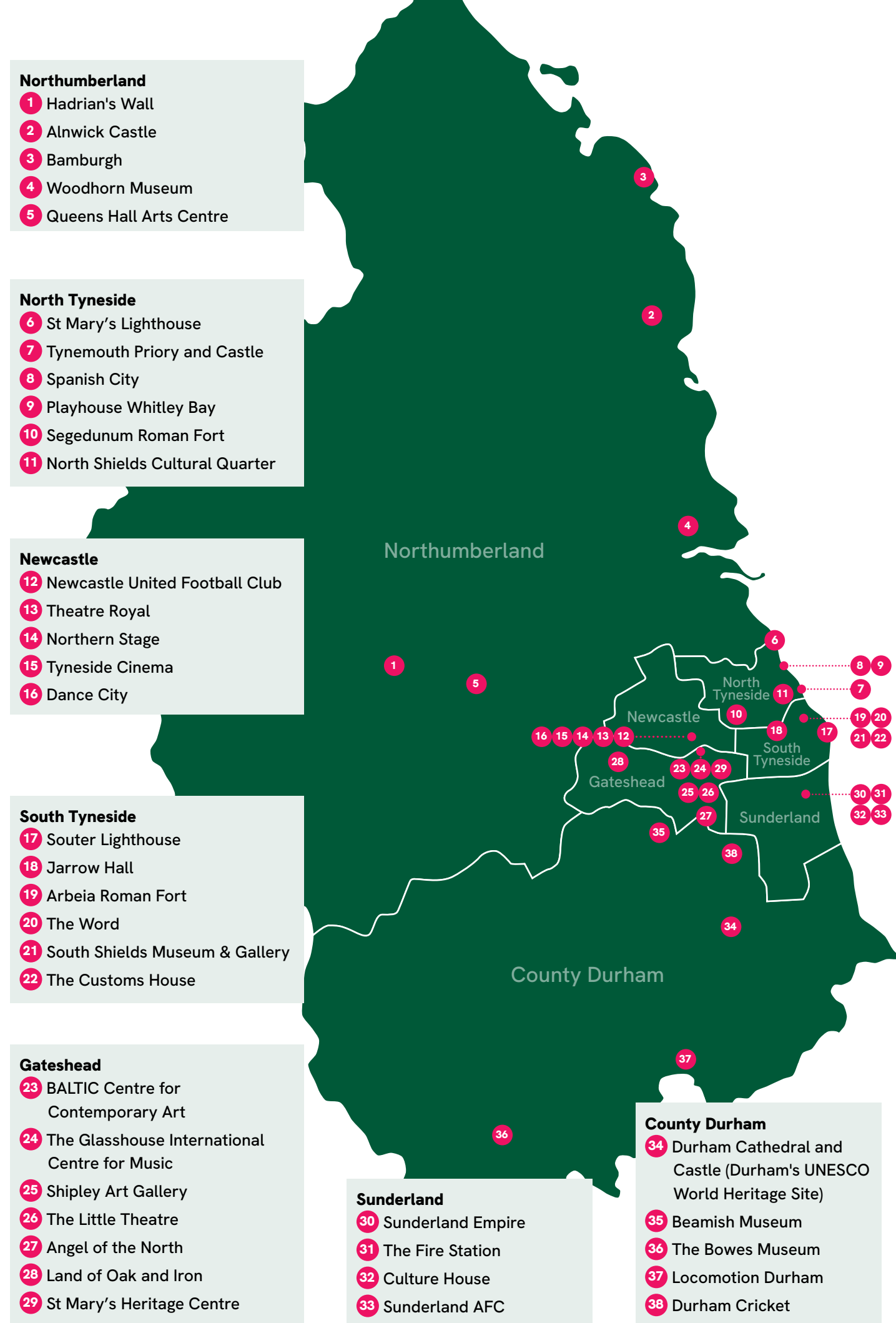
The North East is also home to several creative clusters and micro clusters, including in Newcastle, Whitley Bay, Sunderland and Durham. The Framework will support the distinctive needs of these places and recognise the opportunities presented by emerging creative and innovation activity, including media and publishing, immersive technologies, gaming, software and design. This is particularly important in rural and coastal areas, where smaller creative concentrations can play an important role in local economic development and place making.

Universities are important anchor institutions within local innovation ecosystems, providing research, skills, networks and routes to commercialisation. The North East MSA will work with universities and partners, including Universities for the North East (UNEE), to strengthen links between research, education, creative businesses and places and to support the development and growth of creative clusters across the region.

This framework recognises that different places require different approaches. Urban centres, towns, coastal communities and rural areas each face distinct opportunities and challenges, from access to cultural provision and transport connectivity to workforce development and business growth. A place-based approach means recognising these differences while ensuring that every community can contribute to, and benefit from, the region’s long-term success. This place-based approach will also align with wider regional spatial and place work, including the emerging Spatial Development Strategy and the Coastal & Rural Taskforce.

Creating active places will be an important part of our approach. Working with partners, we will support environments that encourage walking, cycling, recreation and everyday physical activity, helping to improve health outcomes while strengthening connectivity between communities.

Rather than promoting competition between places, this Framework champions collaboration. It seeks to build a stronger regional ecosystem in which local identity is celebrated, investment is better coordinated, and the strengths of individual places combine to create a more resilient, productive and internationally recognised North East. The North East’s competitive advantage comes from connecting its cities, towns, coastal communities and rural areas to create a stronger regional offer for residents, businesses, visitors and investors. By taking a regional approach, we can maximise the impact of local investment, reduce duplication and ensure that success in one place contributes to prosperity across the whole North East.



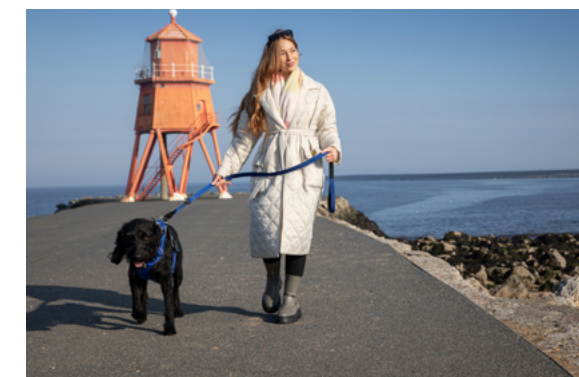
**Northumberland's** internationally recognised heritage, outstanding landscapes and cultural attractions underpin one of England's leading rural visitor economies while supporting sensitive culture-led regeneration and creative sector development growth. Iconic sites such as UNESCO World Heritage Site Hadrian's Wall 1 alongside over 70 castles including Alnwick 2 and Bamburgh 3 80 miles of breathtaking coastline, 400 square miles of dedicated National Park, historic market towns, and cultural anchor venues such as Woodhorn Museum 4 and Queens Hall Arts Centre 5, contribute to international tourism, town centre vitality, community pride and creative enterprise. Together, these assets strengthen the county's profile, support freelance and micro-business activity, attract film and television production, and create opportunities for skills, innovation and year-round cultural programming.

**North Tyneside** offers a distinctive coastal, heritage and cultural proposition, from St Mary's Lighthouse 6, Tynemouth Priory and Castle 7, Spanish City 8 and Playhouse Whitley Bay 9 to Segedunum Roman Fort 10, the most urban and accessible section of Hadrian's Wall UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its coastline, town centres, grassroots music and sporting infrastructure, community-led arts activity and events such as Mouth of the Tyne Festival and the North Sea Weekender support a strong visitor offer and growing creative economy. Regeneration programmes, including the North Shields Cultural Quarter 11, are further strengthening the area as a centre for cultural and creative activity, supporting business growth, skills development and wider town renewal.



**Newcastle** Newcastle is the North East's commercial and cultural capital, combining diverse creative communities, nationally recognised venues, major universities, heritage assets and a growing creative and innovation economy. Institutions including Newcastle United Football Club 12, elite rugby and basketball venues for Newcastle Falcons and Eagles, Theatre Royal 13 Northern Stage 14, Tyneside Cinema 15, Dance City 16 and the city's museums support a strong cultural and visitor offer. Major events, from NOVUM and the Mercury awards to UEFA Euro 2028, strengthen Newcastle's national profile, while organisations such as Generator and New Writing North support talent, business growth and the region's wider cultural credentials.

**South Tyneside** combines maritime heritage, coastal culture and community-led creativity to offer a distinctive visitor and cultural destination. Key assets including Souter Lighthouse 17, Jarrow Hall 18, Arbeia Roman Fort 19, The Word 20, South Shields Museum & Art Gallery 21 and The Customs House 22 support participation, learning, heritage interpretation and visitor engagement. Alongside a lively programme of festivals, seafront events, and community celebrations, these strengths reinforce local pride, animate town centres and coastal spaces, and contribute to the wider North East cultural and visitor economy.



**Gateshead** is a nationally significant cultural destination, anchored by BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art <sup>23</sup> and The Glasshouse International Centre for Music <sup>24</sup> on the Quayside. These flagship venues sit within a wider creative ecosystem including the Shipley Art Gallery <sup>25</sup>, The Little Theatre <sup>26</sup> grassroots cultural spaces and community-led activity. Distinctive assets such as the Angel of the North <sup>27</sup>, Land of Oak and Iron <sup>28</sup> and St Mary's Heritage Centre <sup>29</sup> connect heritage, landscape and outdoor activity, while sporting events including the Blaydon Race and Great North Run support the visitor economy and place profile.



**Sunderland** is building momentum as a cultural, creative, and sporting city, anchored by Sunderland Empire <sup>30</sup>, The Fire Station <sup>31</sup>, and Culture House <sup>32</sup>. Assets like Sunderland AFC <sup>33</sup>, an Olympic-size swimming pool, and the city's growing Esports offer demonstrate its capacity to attract audiences and deliver high-quality experiences. Programmes delivered by National Portfolio and Creative People and Places organisations, such as Sunderland Culture, Southpaw Dance Company, and The Cultural Spring, sit alongside investment in music, digital creativity, glassmaking, creative and screen industries, and major urban regeneration. Together, this is supporting participation, business growth, and the city's wider role as a hub of culture, creativity, and innovation.



**County Durham** combines internationally significant heritage, outstanding landscapes and seascapes, and a distinctive cultural identity rooted in its communities. From Durham's UNESCO World Heritage Site <sup>34</sup> to world-class destinations like Beamish Museum <sup>35</sup>, The Bowes Museum <sup>36</sup>, and Locomotion Durham <sup>37</sup>, alongside vibrant festivals and living traditions, its contemporary approach to heritage and storytelling brings the county's past to life and inspires new creative experiences. A growing creative sector, rich cultural assets, elite venues like Durham Cricket <sup>38</sup>, community sport, and outdoor recreation support a thriving visitor economy, participation, wellbeing, and sustainable growth across its city, towns, villages, and rural and coastal communities. Together, these strengths make County Durham central to the North East's cultural identity and international appeal, and a significant contributor to the region's creative and economic future.



## Our Priority Sectors & Ecosystem Approach

The North East is home to a diverse culture, creative industries, heritage and sport ecosystem. It includes cultural institutions, creative businesses and freelancers, heritage and sporting organisations, public services, education providers, investors, local authorities, volunteers and community organisations. These people, organisations and places contribute to the region's economy, identity and quality of life.

This Framework adopts an ecosystem approach because sustainable growth depends on the connections between businesses, cultural organisations, education providers, investors, communities and public partners. Increasingly these connections extend across traditional sector boundaries, with digital technologies, design, heritage, tourism, education, research and sport creating opportunities for innovation, skills development and business growth. By strengthening these connections, the North East MSA will help create the conditions for inclusive growth across the region.

Within this whole-system approach, the Framework identifies three creative industries priority sectors where the North East has distinctive strengths, significant growth potential and opportunities to increase productivity, create high-quality jobs and enhance national and international recognition: screen, music, and writing and publishing. These are the initial focus for targeted creative-industries investment, rather than an exhaustive definition of regional opportunity.

Creative technology and design will operate as cross-cutting capabilities, connecting creativity with immersive media, games, digital production and AI and supporting innovation across the wider economy. Future priorities and investment will continue to respond to evidence, emerging opportunities and the distinctive needs of the wider ecosystem.

The Framework also recognises events, sport and physical activity, and heritage and the historic environment as major regional priorities, each with economic, social and place-based potential.

## Priority sectors

### Screen

Screen is one of the fastest growing creative sectors in the North East. DCMS regional GVA data shows strong recent growth in the North East's creative industries, with screen-related activity, including film, TV, animation and post-production, forming a key part of the region's creative industries growth story (DCMS, 2024/26)<sup>8</sup>. Through previous and current investment into the film and screen industries, working through the North East Screen Industries Partnership (NESIP) with the Tees Valley Combined Authority and the BBC, delivery to date across the sector clearly demonstrates that with public support through tailored activity, and a North East Production Fund, productivity and job creation have increased exponentially. Since 2022, production spend in the North East has increased by 83%, with £88.5m GVA generated over four years and the equivalent of 1,419 full-time jobs created across the screen sector (North East Screen, 2026). Based on independent analysis undertaken by Saffery, the ambition is to generate up to £502m GVA and support 8,136 jobs in the North East screen sector by 2031/32, subject to funding levels, studio readiness and sector capacity

<sup>8</sup> DCMS (2024/26), DCMS Sector Economic Estimates: Gross Value Added - Regional GVA data tables



The BBC has demonstrated its commitment to supporting the growth of screen industries across the North East. In 2021, the BBC signed a MOU with North East Screen in support of the North East Screen Industries Partnership investing £25m in screen industries across the region. After successful delivery, in March 2026, the BBC committed a further £15m to support the partnership bringing its total investment to £40m. There is an opportunity to further strengthen the commitments and presence of the BBC within the North East through the charter renewal process which is currently underway. The current BBC Charter renewal process presents an opportunity to strengthen the Corporation's presence across screen, audio, digital and technology activity in the North East, building on its existing investment through NESIP. The North East's distinctive places, including its heritage sites, are also an asset for screen. They can provide compelling film locations while strengthening the region's cultural pull for screen talent to live and work here.

Crown Works Studios will deliver a new state-of-the-art production studio on the banks of the River Wear in Sunderland, supported by significant investment from the North East MSA. It will position the region to attract major national and international productions, test market demand for large-scale screen facilities, and catalyse future private sector investment. Research from the Creative PEC has found that skills shortages in the screen sector are wide-ranging (Carey, Giles and Hay, 2026<sup>9</sup>). As activity continues to grow, including through developments like Crown Works Studios, ensuring the region has the technical, production management, digital and creative skills needed across the full production ecosystem will become increasingly important if the North East is to maximise the economic and employment benefits of this growth.

<sup>9</sup> Carey, H., Giles, L. and Hay, B. (2026) 'Creative Industries Skills Audits', Creative PEC. Doi: 10.5281/zenodo.20072107.

## Music

Music is one of the North East's greatest cultural and economic strengths. With an array of North East musicians recognised on the international stage such as North Tyneside born Sting and Sam Fender, South Tyneside born Jade and Newcastle born Cheryl Tweedy and Brian Johnson, music is a long-standing strength of the North East's creative identity. Nationally, music contributes billions to the UK economy each year, with live

music, recording, publishing and touring providing a diverse range of employment opportunities (UK Music, 2023). In the region, a dense network of grassroots venues, promoters, festivals and artists provides a strong foundation for talent development.

With a newly launched Music Strategy, Newcastle and Gateshead pursuing UNESCO Music City status, Sunderland recently joining the International Music Cities Network, two major labels committing to operations in the region, the launch of the Northern Music Export Office led by Generator, and the creative industries identified as a priority within the North East Local Growth Plan, the music sector is already demonstrating a strong return on investment. Building on this momentum, a pipeline of ambitious activity is emerging that has the potential to strengthen the North East's national and international reputation as a leading region for music. The region's universities also contribute significantly to music education, research and performance capability, alongside institutions such as the Glasshouse, strengthening the talent and innovation pipeline.

Investment in Quayside Production Studios, alongside Warner's commitment to use and promote the facility, demonstrates growing confidence in the North East's music infrastructure. The studios are due to complete in 2026 and are already attracting interest from producers and investors.



The region benefits from a strong and evolving music ecosystem. Sunderland Music City demonstrates how music can be embedded within wider economic development, skills and place-making agendas, using coordinated, city-wide approaches to grow talent, audiences and industry capacity. This place-based model provides a blueprint for how music can contribute to regeneration, investment and regional profile. Furthermore, the North East also experiences a strong grassroots music culture across the region; Creative PEC research has highlighted the economic, social, and cultural value of live music and venues in place-based policy (Rozbicka, Behr, and Hamilton, 2022)<sup>10</sup>. In North Tyneside, North Shields has a long-standing musical heritage and an increasingly vibrant independent music scene, supported by local venues, festivals and creative communities that play an important role in nurturing emerging talent.

Generator plays a central role in talent and industry development across the region, with a long-standing track record of supporting artists, music businesses and professionals to progress, export and sustain careers. At the grassroots level, GigLab is strengthening the region's live music ecology by supporting venues, promoters and local delivery capacity. Grassroots venues are a critical part of the talent pipeline and local economies.

Given that skills gaps in the sector impacted 31% of music industry employers in 2025 (Carey, Giles, and Hay, 2026<sup>11</sup>), this framework recognises the importance of venues and infrastructure as talent pipelines, aligning with existing work to support live music, audience development and artist progression. Partnership with sector bodies including Generator, and the Music Venue Trust, will help to ensure that emerging artists can develop locally, build audiences and access both national and international markets. Many of the region's music venues are also heritage buildings, creating opportunities to connect investment in venues with the conservation, and sustainable adaptation, of the historic environment. The North East is seeing a major surge in activity across the music sector, bucking historical trends. Music Tourism in the North East has more than doubled since 2022, with UK Music data showing that between 2023 and 2024 the region attracted an additional 225,000 music tourists, generated £178m in additional music tourism spend/GVA and supported 1,350 additional full-time jobs (UK Music, 2025)<sup>12</sup>. Our ambition is to continue the upwards trajectory of between 15% (target) and 25% (aspirational) growth by 2030.

<sup>10</sup> Rozbicka, P., Behr, A. and Hamilton, C. (2022) 'Live Music Ecologies in the UK - A local perspective in the context of the pandemic', Creative PEC, ISBN: 978-1-913095-49-9

<sup>11</sup> Carey, H., Giles, L. and Hay, B. (2026) 'Creative Industries Skills Audits', Creative PEC. Doi:10.5281/zenodo.20072107

<sup>12</sup> UK Music (2025), Music Tourism Data Map 2024. London: UK Music

## Writing and publishing

Writing and publishing play a distinctive role in the North East's cultural and creative economy, supporting both creative expression and place-based identity. The sector contributes to growth across screen, theatre, games, heritage interpretation, tourism and digital storytelling, while also supporting literacy, wellbeing and lifelong learning through the region's network of libraries, festivals, schools and community organisations. Investment in writing strengthens intellectual property creation, storytelling and export potential across the wider creative economy.

The UK publishing sector contributes £11 billion to the economy, supports 84,000 jobs and is one of the UK's strongest export sectors, with international demand expected to increase by a further 20% over the next decade<sup>13</sup>. Despite this, fewer than 2% of the UK's publishing workforce are from the North East, highlighting a significant opportunity to grow talent, attract investment and retain creative careers within the region. Investment in writing and publishing also delivers wider social benefits through literacy, reading and educational attainment, supported by the region's libraries, schools, festivals and cultural organisations.

Regional organisations such as New Writing North play an important role in developing writing talent through programmes such as the Northern Writers' Awards, supporting progression into

publishing, screen and theatre and improving diversity within the writing pipeline. These initiatives sit alongside festivals, libraries, education providers and community programmes that nurture writers and readers across the region. This includes nationally significant organisations such as Seven Stories, the National Centre for Children's Books, alongside a growing commercial publishing presence in the region.

At the same time, Local Authority library services across the region play a central role as cultural anchors in communities, providing access to reading, creative activity, learning and digital skills. Libraries support adult literacy, family reading programmes, reading for wellbeing and community engagement, forming an essential foundation for the region's wider literacy and creative development.

The North East is also home to major commercial publishing activity, including Hachette, demonstrating the region's capacity to support high-value creative employment, professional career pathways and national-scale publishing operations. Alongside this, Durham's major heritage and visitor assets, including The Bowes Museum and Gala Durham, and Northumberland's distinctive cultural landscape, including Queen's Hall Arts Centre, Hexham Book Festival and Bloodaxe Books, contribute to a rich ecosystem for writing, publishing and place-based storytelling. Northumberland's museums service, including Woodhorn Museum, Northumberland Archives and the region's library network, also play an important role in preserving and sharing local stories.

Investment in writing and publishing aligns with the Local Growth Plan's emphasis on creative exports, intellectual property and cultural distinctiveness. Emerging initiatives, including the proposed Centre for Writing and Publishing, have the potential to strengthen talent development, professional networks and industry connections. Together with the region's libraries, festivals, universities and community programmes, these assets provide a strong foundation for future growth.

<sup>13</sup> Publishers Association (2024), Vision for Publishing: The role of publishing in the UK's success. London: Publishers Association

## Events

Events are one of the North East's most powerful assets for driving economic growth, attracting visitors, strengthening place and showcasing the region to national and international audiences. The region has a strong track record of hosting events of regional, national and international significance, from the Great North Run, one of the world's largest mass-participation sporting events, to BBC Radio 1's Big Weekend and the North East's role as a host region for UEFA EURO 2028. Alongside these high-profile events, festivals such as NOVUM, Mouth of Tyne, Durham Book Festival and Dark Skies Festival contribute to a distinctive year-round programme that reflects the diversity of the region's cities, towns, coast and countryside.

Evidence from the North East MSA's Early Events Programme, delivered between 2024 and 2026, demonstrates the contribution events can make to economic growth, participation and place. Across a portfolio of cultural and community events, the programme attracted more than 590,000 attendances, generated approximately £2.6million of direct visitor expenditure and engaged both residents and visitors from outside the region. Eighty per cent of attendees were from within the North East, while one in five visitors travelled from elsewhere in the UK or overseas. Evaluation also found that 72% of attendees felt prouder of the North East after attending an event and 69% felt more connected to the region, demonstrating the role events can play in strengthening community identity and civic pride.

The region's events portfolio delivers a broad range of outcomes. Major destination events can increase visitor numbers, support local businesses and enhance the North East's profile nationally and internationally. Festivals such as Lumiere demonstrated their ability to attract visitors and encourage repeat visits, with 62% of non-resident attendees reporting they were more likely to return to County Durham following the event. At the same time, smaller festivals and community events play an important role in animating places, celebrating local identity and creating opportunities for participation, volunteering and cultural engagement.



The wider evidence base also demonstrates the growing importance of events to the UK economy. The UK events industry is estimated to contribute £68.7 billion annually<sup>14</sup>, while music tourism alone generated approximately £10 billion of spending and supported 72,000 jobs in 2024<sup>15</sup>. As the North East continues to strengthen its visitor economy and cultural profile, events provide a significant opportunity to attract investment, increase visitor expenditure, showcase regional talent and support inclusive growth across the region's places and communities.

Despite these strengths, independent analysis has highlighted the need for a more coordinated and sustainable regional events ecosystem, capable of attracting major opportunities while supporting the growth of home-grown events and festivals. As the scale and ambition of the North East's events portfolio continues to grow, ensuring the region has the workforce, volunteer base, delivery capacity and supply chains needed to maximise economic and social impact will become increasingly important. Maximising the value retained within the regional economy, while continuing to grow participation and strengthen community benefit, represents a significant opportunity for the decade ahead.

<sup>14</sup> UK Events (2024), The UK Events Industry Economic Impact Study.

<sup>15</sup> UK Music (2025), Music Tourism Data Map 2024. London: UK Music



## Sport and physical activity

Sport is central to the North East's identity. From the region's professional clubs and community foundations to its volunteers, coaches, leisure centres, parks, playing fields and natural environment, sport plays an important role in community pride, health and wellbeing, participation, employment, tourism and investment. The region has produced some of England's most recognisable sporting figures, while major institutions such as Newcastle United, Sunderland AFC, Durham Cricket, Newcastle Eagles and Newcastle Red Bulls, alongside one of the world's largest mass-participation runs Great North Run, continue to shape the region's reputation nationally and internationally. The North East is also home to a strong culture of grassroots participation, with running, walking, cycling, parkrun and mass-participation events playing an increasingly important role in helping people become active.

Sport also has a significant economic footprint, supporting employment, visitor demand, supply chains, facilities, events, coaching, volunteering and associated businesses across the region.

The North East's sporting ecosystem extends far beyond professional sport. It includes community clubs, governing bodies, charities, local authorities, universities, leisure providers, volunteers and thousands of people who contribute to sport and physical activity every day. Rise, the North East's Active Partnership supported by Sport England, plays a key role in connecting partners across the region and supporting efforts to increase activity levels, reduce inequalities and improve health and wellbeing outcomes. Alongside the region's major clubs, events and facilities, this network provides a strong foundation on which to build.

Despite these strengths, participation remains uneven and too many residents are not sufficiently active. Sport England's Active Lives data shows that 27.5% of adults across the North East MSA area are inactive, undertaking less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week, while only 62.1% meet recommended activity levels. Among children and young people, less than half achieve the recommended 60 minutes of daily activity.

These inequalities are often greatest amongst those communities already experiencing poorer health outcomes, lower incomes and fewer opportunities.

The opportunity is therefore not simply to celebrate the North East's passion for sport, but to convert that passion into greater participation, healthier communities and stronger economic outcomes. Sport England estimates that community sport and physical activity generate £122.9 billion of social value annually across England, with every £1 invested generating £4.38 in social value through improved health, wellbeing and wider societal benefits. National evidence also demonstrates the important role that physical activity can play in preventing illness, improving mental wellbeing and reducing pressure on public services.

Engagement undertaken through the development of this Framework, alongside wider work on the North East Region of Sport, highlighted significant strengths across the region's sporting ecosystem, alongside challenges relating to participation, facilities, pathways, workforce development and coordination. Stakeholders consistently identified opportunities to strengthen connections between participation, talent

development, volunteering, coaching, facilities, major events and economic growth, creating a more connected and sustainable sporting system for the region.

Our ambition is to build towards a North East Region of Sport: a region that converts its passion for watching sport into more opportunities to participate; strengthens the systems, workforce and pathways that enable people and talent to progress; and uses major clubs, foundations, facilities and events as anchors for wider community, health and economic benefit.

## Heritage and the historic environment

The North East's heritage is one of its defining strengths. From Hadrian's Wall and Durham's UNESCO World Heritage Site to the region's industrial, mining and maritime heritage, historic townscapes, museums, archives and collections, the North East possesses a nationally significant concentration of heritage assets. Together these places, buildings, landscapes and stories shape the region's identity, support community pride and provide a foundation for visitor growth, education, creativity and place-making.

Heritage is both a cultural asset and an economic driver. England's heritage sector contributes around £40 billion annually to the economy and supports more than 500,000 jobs. Heritage attracts millions of domestic and international visitors each year, generating almost £30 billion in visitor spending (Cebr, 2024)<sup>16</sup>. While investment in heritage assets supports regeneration, strengthens local identity and helps create attractive places in which people want to live, work, invest and visit.

In the North East assets such as Beamish Museum, Durham Cathedral and Castle, The Bowes Museum, Woodhorn Museum and the North East's internationally recognised historic landscapes attract visitors from across the UK and beyond. Heritage also contributes to wider growth opportunities through its connections to screen production, cultural tourism, education, research and regeneration.

The North East's heritage ecosystem extends beyond individual sites and organisations. It includes museums, archives, local authority services, universities, community heritage groups, volunteers, specialist craftspeople, conservation professionals and independent organisations who collectively care for, interpret and animate the region's historic environment. Together they help preserve the North East's distinctive character while creating opportunities for learning, participation and economic activity.

Consultation feedback and engagement with partners highlighted the significant contribution heritage already makes to regeneration, visitor economy growth, learning and community identity. At the same time, stakeholders identified challenges relating to

organisational capacity, specialist skills, the condition and sustainable use of historic assets, and the need for stronger regional coordination and evidence. There is also an opportunity to connect heritage more effectively to wider priorities around town centre renewal, visitor economy growth, creative industries development, skills and inclusive economic growth.

The North East's heritage assets are increasingly contributing to a broader cultural and creative ecosystem. Historic buildings are being adapted for new cultural and community uses, heritage sites are attracting film and television productions, and museums, archives and collections are supporting research, education and place-based storytelling. As interest in authentic experiences, heritage tourism and place identity continues to grow, the region is well positioned to strengthen the contribution heritage makes to economic growth, participation and regional distinctiveness.

<sup>16</sup> Cebr (2024). 'The heritage sector in England and its impact on the economy: An updated report for Historic England'.



# Theme 1: Create Jobs, Drive Growth, Investment and Recognition

## Why these matter

Culture, creative industries, heritage and sport are powerful drivers of economic growth. They create jobs, attract investment, generate intellectual property, strengthen the visitor economy and contribute to vibrant places where people want to live, work, study and invest.

The North East already has significant strengths. Our internationally recognised cultural organisations, heritage assets, major sporting institutions, creative businesses and events attract millions of visitors, support thousands of jobs and contribute to the region’s growing reputation. The North East’s creative industries are internationally orientated, with 35% of creative businesses in the region exporting<sup>17</sup>. Major cultural investments, including Culture House Sunderland, demonstrate how cultural infrastructure can also support regeneration, skills, participation and inclusive growth. Creative industries are among the fastest growing sectors of the UK economy, and the North East has demonstrated exceptional growth in recent years, particularly in screen, music, digital creativity and publishing.

Culture is also a catalyst for high street and town centre renewal. By bringing empty buildings and underused spaces back into use, creating opportunities for creative businesses, freelancers and communities, and fostering thriving creative clusters and ecosystems, culture helps strengthen local identity, increase footfall, support local businesses and attract further investment. In doing so, it contributes to more vibrant local economies and sustainable long-term growth.

However, the region is not yet realising its full potential. Many creative businesses remain small, freelancers face barriers to growth, investment can be fragmented and too many talented people continue to leave the region to pursue opportunities elsewhere. At the same time, competition between places for investment, visitors and talent continues to increase.

<sup>17</sup> Simandjuntak, D., Fazio, G., Jones, J., Maioli, S. (2025) Will the creative exporters please stand up? Recent exporting trends and features of exporting creative micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. Creative PEC State of the Nations Research Series. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.17750369

## Our areas of focus

### 1 Growing businesses, entrepreneurship and innovation

Creative businesses, freelancers and entrepreneurs are central to the North East’s economy. We will support business growth by improving access to networks, investment, innovation support and opportunities for collaboration, including accessible and easy to navigate business support through the wider North East business support offer. This includes strengthening the sport and physical activity economy, recognising the contribution of businesses, organisations, facilities and supply chains to jobs, investment, tourism and regional growth.

Evidence from the Culture and Creative Investment Programme (CCIP) shows that aligning business support, skills development and investment strengthen productivity, improves business survival and scale-up, and increases exports across the creative economy. These lessons have informed our focus on supporting business growth, innovation and the development of the North East’s priority sectors.

Emphasis will be placed on targeted investment where evidence identifies distinctive strengths and growth opportunities, while supporting the wider creative ecosystem through cross-cutting business, skills, innovation, finance and network support. Their long-term success depends upon a wider ecosystem of cultural organisations, education providers, investors, local authorities and community organisations.

We will also encourage greater collaboration between the creative industries, digital technologies, research institutions and businesses, supporting innovation, productivity and the development of higher-value products and services – recognising that micro-firms in the creative industries are nearly 20% more likely to engage in research and design compared to other sectors (Siepel, 2025<sup>18</sup>). This approach will also support challenge led R&D and cross-sector collaboration, helping businesses and organisations respond to rapid technological change, including AI, and develop new products, services and business models.

<sup>18</sup> Siepel, J. (2025) Support for R&D and Innovation in Creative Industries Micro Firms. Creative PEC State of the Nations Research Series. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.17750466, ISBN: 978-0-7017-0292-2.

### 2 Attracting investment and strengthening place

Long-term growth requires sustained investment in businesses, infrastructure and places. Sustaining that growth also depends on organisational capacity and resilience, alongside investment in businesses, infrastructure and places.

The North East MSA will work with partners to attract public and private investment that supports business growth, cultural infrastructure, regeneration and innovation. We will align regional investment with wider economic priorities to maximise impact and ensure that investment contributes to stronger town and city centres, thriving rural communities and more resilient local economies. We will recognise and promote ambitious,

integrated cultural infrastructure that brings together culture, learning, participation, skills and creative opportunity. This will include supporting the sustainable use and adaptation of heritage assets, strengthening museums and heritage organisations as local anchor institutions, and connecting heritage-led regeneration, conservation and retrofit capacity more effectively to place, skills and visitor economy investment.

Alongside this, we will champion the North East as a competitive destination for inward investment, building on the region’s strengths in creativity, culture, heritage and sport.

### 3 Growing the visitor economy and events

Culture, heritage, sport and events are central to the North East’s visitor economy.

We will work with partners such as Experience North East England and Local Visitor Economy Partnerships, to develop a connected regional visitor offer that encourages longer stays, increases visitor spending and promotes the North East as a sustainable year-round destination. Events will be supported where they deliver lasting economic, social and reputational benefits for the region.

Our approach will focus on creating long-term value through events that strengthen local supply chains, develop skills, support businesses and enhance the North East’s reputation nationally and internationally.

### 4 Raising the North East’s profile

Recognition is an economic asset. A stronger national and international profile attracts visitors, investors, businesses, students and skilled workers. It increases confidence in the region and creates new opportunities for exports, partnerships and collaboration.

The North East MSA will champion the region through coordinated promotion, strategic partnerships and support for internationally significant cultural, sporting and creative activity, ensuring the North East is recognised as a leading destination for creativity, innovation and investment.

### 5 Strengthening the wider ecosystem

Regional programmes reinforce the importance of investing across the whole creative ecosystem. Generator’s work demonstrates that combining talent development with business support, touring opportunities and export readiness creates stronger, more sustainable careers, while New Writing North has shown how long-term investment in writers increases professional progression and generates wider benefits across publishing, screen, theatre, heritage and tourism. Together, these programmes highlight

the value of long-term investment, collaboration and strong regional networks in creating resilient creative industries.

Sustainable growth depends on a connected ecosystem in which businesses, freelancers, education providers, investors, cultural and heritage organisations, sporting bodies and communities collaborate. The North East MSA will strengthen these connections, advocate for national investment and improve the evidence available through the Culture Connect Data Observatory and wider research partnerships.

# Theme 1 Delivery

This theme will be delivered through:



# Theme 2: Developing Skills and Talent

## Why this matters

People are the North East's greatest asset. Developing the skills and talent needed across culture, creative industries, heritage and sport is essential to supporting sustainable economic growth, improving productivity and creating high-quality employment. A strong skills ecosystem enables businesses to grow, helps people build rewarding careers and ensures the North East can maximise the opportunities created through devolution and investment.

The North East has a proud history of producing world-class creative and sporting talent, yet too many people continue to leave the region to build their careers elsewhere. At the same time, employers face skills shortages, careers pathways can be unclear and access to opportunities remains uneven; creative industries are also particularly in need of a mix of skills, including technical, digital, transversal and business-critical (Carey, Giles, and Hay, 2026)<sup>19</sup>. The North East MSA has an important role in bringing together employers, education providers and sector partners to strengthen the talent pipelines, improve workforce development and create the conditions for more people to build successful careers within the region.



## Our areas of focus

### 1 Creating clear pathways into work

Developing a skilled workforce begins with creating clear, accessible routes into employment. We will work with employers, education providers, sector bodies and national partners to strengthen pathways from education and training into employment, freelancing and entrepreneurship. By improving transitions into work and reducing reliance on informal or unpaid routes into the sector, we will help more people build sustainable careers across culture, creative industries, heritage and sport. This will align with the wider North East skills and employment agenda, ensuring sector specific pathways are connected to mainstream workforce development, progression and employment opportunities. This includes connecting sport and physical activity careers to wider regional skills, employment and workforce priorities.

### 2 Widening access to opportunity

Everyone should have the opportunity to develop their talent, regardless of their background or where they live. We will work with local authorities, schools, colleges, universities and sector organisations to improve awareness of careers across culture, creative industries, heritage and sport, strengthen progression routes and remove barriers for people currently under-represented in these sectors. We will also support the development of specialist skills, including heritage conservation, retrofit and traditional crafts, ensuring the region has the workforce needed to protect and enhance its historic environment. This work should begin early, helping children and young people to see culture, creativity, heritage and sport as areas in which they can participate, develop their interests and build future career aspirations. Early engagement can help reduce the barriers that arise when young people begin to perceive some careers as not being for people like them, while increasing awareness of the opportunities available across the sector.

<sup>19</sup> Carey, H., Giles, L. and Hay, B. (2026) 'Creative Industries Skills Audits', Creative PEC. Doi:10.5281/zenodo.20072107.

**3 Supporting sustainable careers and freelancers**

Sustainable growth depends on sustainable careers. We will support leadership development, professional progression and entrepreneurship, helping people develop the technical, business and leadership skills needed to succeed. Emphasis will be placed on supporting freelancers and creative entrepreneurs, recognising the vital role they play in driving innovation, business growth and productivity across the region.

**4 Developing sector-specific skills**

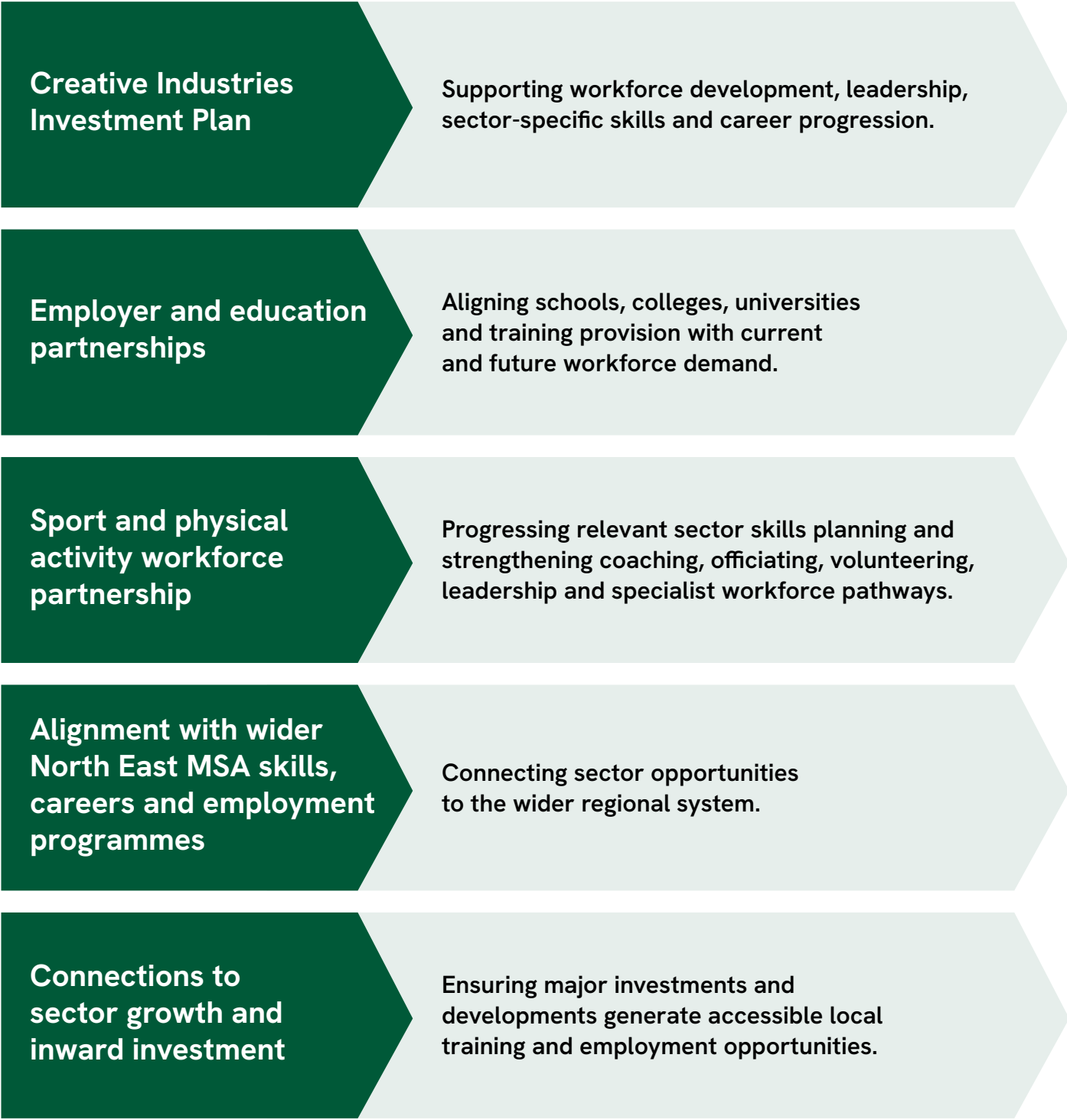
We will align skills development with opportunities in the North East’s priority sectors, including screen, music, writing and publishing, and events. Working closely with employers, universities, colleges and Business North East, we will ensure education, training and workforce development respond to current and future industry demand, helping businesses access the skilled workforce they need to grow. This will also include the sport, leisure and physical activity workforce, including coaches, instructors, staff, community sport practitioners and volunteers, working with sector partners and drawing on relevant sector skills planning.

**5 Attracting and retaining talent**

The North East has a strong reputation for developing talented people, but too many continue to leave the region to build their careers elsewhere. We will work with employers, universities and partners to improve graduate retention, strengthen leadership opportunities and create the conditions that encourage talented people to build long-term careers in the North East. By improving workforce intelligence and strengthening links between education, business and industry, we will ensure future investment reflects changing skills needs and employment opportunities. Universities will be key delivery partners, alongside employers and sector bodies, contributing to talent development, graduate retention, research translation and the development of sport, coaching and rehabilitation skills, as well as supporting elite sport.



**Theme 2 Delivery**  
**This theme will be delivered through:**





## Theme 3: Increase Opportunity

### Why this matters

Culture, creativity, heritage and sport play a vital role in creating healthier communities, stronger places and greater opportunity. Participation improves health and wellbeing, builds confidence and skills, strengthens social connections and supports pride in place. It also creates the foundations for lifelong learning, employment and active citizenship, helping more people benefit from the North East's cultural and sporting strengths. Increasing physical activity and active lifestyles can also contribute to preventative approaches across health and public services, helping to tackle health inequalities, support mental wellbeing and reduce barriers to employment and economic participation.

However, access to these opportunities is not equal. Too many people continue to face barriers linked to income, geography, disability, transport and caring responsibilities, with participation remaining lower than the national average across many communities. The North East MSA has an important role in working with partners to reduce these barriers, widen participation and ensure that everyone can benefit from culture, creativity, heritage and sport, regardless of where they live or their circumstances.

### Our areas of focus

#### 1 Widening participation

We will work with partners to increase participation across culture, creativity, heritage and sport, focusing particularly on children and young people, families experiencing poverty, disabled people and communities currently least likely to engage. By reducing barriers and increasing awareness of opportunities, we will help more people take part more often. Progress will be tracked against regional participation and physical activity baselines, with a particular focus on reducing inactivity and narrowing inequalities. Early participation will also help children and young people develop their interests, recognise future opportunities and connect participation with longer-term talent and career pathways. As part of action plan development, we will consult with the sector to establish a regional participation target, informed by the available baseline data and wider regional priorities.

#### 2 Supporting grassroots and community provision

Community organisations, volunteers and local venues are at the heart of participation across the North East. We will work with local authorities, community organisations and national partners to strengthen grassroots provision, recognising its contribution to community resilience, health and wellbeing, local identity and inclusive growth.



The Small Venues Fund is a **£2.2 million investment**, over three years to help small venues across the North East improve, grow, and become more sustainable. The fund is co-designed with creative industry partners and organisations, it will:

- The fund will increase opportunities for freelancers, artists and people starting their creative careers
- Revenue grants can support business planning and development, mentoring and consultancy, audience growth, marketing and bid writing
- Capital grants can support venue improvements and equipment, including sound and lighting, staging, green energy solution, accessibility improvements and retrofit or refurbishment
- The fund is being delivered in two stages, and is focused on strengthening the sustainability and growth of grassroots venues and their contribution to local communities and the region's cultural identity



**3 Embedding culture, creativity, heritage and sport in everyday life**

We will encourage culture, creativity, heritage and sport to be integrated into the places and services people already use, including schools, libraries, parks, community centres and public spaces. By aligning participation with wider priorities such as education, health, transport and regeneration, we will make opportunities more accessible and part of everyday life.

**4 Creating lasting participation and community legacy from events**

Where the North East MSA invests in major cultural or sporting events, proportionate participation, volunteering, workforce and community legacy plans will be built into investment decisions from the outset, with anticipated outcomes identified at the point of award.

**5 Improving access across the region**

Everyone should be able to benefit from the North East’s cultural and sporting offer, regardless of where they live. We will work with partners to improve access across urban, rural and coastal communities through better connectivity, place-based investment and flexible approaches to delivery, ensuring opportunities reach every part of the region.

**6 Strengthening health and wellbeing**

Culture, creativity, heritage and sport are important contributors to prevention, health and wellbeing. We will strengthen collaboration across sectors, aligning investment with

wider priorities around health inequalities, child poverty and economic inactivity, ensuring culture and sport contribute to healthier, more resilient communities. We will also align this work with the UK Chief Medical Officers’ Physical Activity Guidelines, using them as a clear benchmark for reducing inactivity and improving physical activity levels across the region. We will work with health, public health, planning, transport and neighbourhood health partners to strengthen the contribution of physical activity to prevention, healthy ageing, mental wellbeing, rehabilitation and helping people remain in or return to work.



**Theme 3 Delivery**  
**This theme will be delivered through:**



# Delivery, governance & partnerships

## Delivering this Framework

This Framework sets the long-term strategic direction for culture, creative industries, heritage and sport across the North East. Delivery will be achieved through partnership, evidence-led investment and strong regional leadership. The North East MSA will not deliver activity directly, instead, it will work with partners to align investment, convene collaboration and create the conditions for sustainable economic growth, stronger places and increased opportunity across the region. Local authorities and delivery partners will retain responsibility for local delivery, while helping to shape future priorities through the investment plans and partnership structures set out below.

Delivery will be supported through three complementary investment plans, which translate the ambitions of this Framework into targeted programmes and investment priorities. These plans will be refreshed periodically to respond to emerging opportunities, changing evidence and evolving regional priorities while remaining aligned with the long-term ambitions of this Framework.

## Investment Plans

The North East MSA’s initial direct investment in support of this Framework will be delivered over the next three years through three investment plans:

- **£29m Creative Industries Investment Plan** – supporting business growth, innovation, workforce development, creative places and identified creative industries priority sectors.
- **£13m Events and Participation Investment Plan** – supporting major, signature and grassroots events while increasing participation in culture, heritage and sport.
- **£7m Growing the Regional Visitor Economy Investment Plan**<sup>20</sup> – strengthening visitor economy through destination development, marketing, collaboration and investment.

These plans will provide the principal mechanisms for deploying the North East MSA’s currently identified investment in support of the Framework. They will set out the relevant interventions, delivery arrangements and measures of success, with individual investment decisions remaining subject to the appropriate business case, assurance and approval processes.

The plans do not represent the full extent of activity needed to deliver the Framework’s ten-year ambitions. Delivery will also depend on the investment and activity of local

authorities, national agencies, sector organisations, businesses, education providers and communities, together with alignment across wider regional programmes covering skills, transport, health, regeneration and spatial development.

Where priorities fall outside the current scope of the three investment plans, including aspects of sport and physical activity, heritage-led regeneration, specialist skills and infrastructure, the North East MSA will work with partners to develop the evidence, shared priorities and investment propositions needed to inform future action. This includes further development of the North East Region of Sport proposition with Rise, Sport England, local authorities, clubs, foundations and wider sector partners.

The investment plans will be reviewed periodically so that delivery can respond to evidence, evaluation, emerging opportunities and future funding, while remaining aligned with the long-term ambitions of this Framework.

<sup>20</sup> <https://northeast-ca.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s1391/North%20East%20Visitor%20Economy%20update%20and%20next%20steps.pdf>.

## Partnership at the Heart of Delivery

The success of this Framework depends upon strong collaboration across the public, private and voluntary sectors. The North East MSA will work closely with local authorities, businesses, education providers, cultural and sporting organisations, community organisations, investors, government departments and national agencies to maximise the impact of regional investment.

The North East MSA will add value by providing strategic leadership where regional collaboration delivers greater impact than individual organisations or places could achieve alone. This includes aligning investment, convening partners, advocating for the region nationally and internationally, and strengthening the evidence base to support better decision making.

## Devolution and National Partnerships

We will also use this Framework to continue making the case for proper cultural and creative devolution. Through our work with Government, Arts Council England and other arm’s length bodies, we will press for stronger regional influence over investment priorities, improved data sharing, clearer regional outcomes and funding models that respond to the North East’s places, people and growth opportunities. Our aim is not simply better consultation, but a more mature partnership in which national funding decisions are informed by regional evidence, regional strategies and the voices of local communities. As a first step, our intention is to move towards devolution of relevant funding streams and stronger joint governance, alongside the stronger regional influence, data sharing, regional outcomes and funding models set out above.

Strong national relationships will be essential to achieving this shift: devolution will require trust, shared evidence, clear accountability and a willingness to move decisions closer to the places they affect. The North East MSA will therefore continue to strengthen its strategic relationship with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and its Arm’s Length Bodies, including Arts Council England, Sport England, Historic England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, as the basis for a more accountable model of partnership.

Alongside this, we will continue to work collaboratively with neighbouring Mayoral Strategic Authorities through the Great North Partnership and with national government to champion the North East as a leading destination for investment, creativity and innovation.

## Governance

Delivery of the Framework will be overseen by the North East MSA, supported by the Culture, Creative Industries and Sport Advisory Group. Bringing together expertise from across the sector, the Advisory Group will provide strategic advice, help shape investment plans, identify emerging opportunities and challenges, and ensure delivery continues to reflect the needs of partners and communities across the region. UNEE and other university partners will remain part of this wider strategic partnership, supporting evidence, skills, innovation, graduate retention and delivery.

Progress will be monitored through the Framework’s performance and evaluation arrangements, with investment plans reviewed periodically to ensure they continue to respond to changing evidence, opportunities and priorities.

The governance arrangements for this Framework build on lessons from the Hodge Review, which highlighted the need for stronger regional leadership, improved partnership working and a more coordinated approach to investment. The North East MSA’s role as a strategic leader, convenor and investor, supported by the partnership structures set out, responds directly to these recommendations and provides a stronger foundation for long-term delivery. The Hodge Review is a useful first step, but does not go far enough, this Framework therefore seeks to build on its findings through stronger regional partnership, governance and coordination.

# Evidence, Data and Measuring Impact

## Why evidence matters

Good decisions require strong evidence. The North East MSA is committed to strengthening the evidence base for culture, creative industries, heritage and sport, ensuring that investment decisions are informed by robust data, research and evaluation. By improving our understanding of business growth, workforce development, participation, infrastructure and place, we will maximise the impact of devolved investment and ensure resources are directed where they can make the greatest difference. The evidence base will also consider market trends, changing demand and technological developments, so that investment can respond to emerging opportunities and disruption across the sectors.

Working alongside local authorities, universities, national agencies and sector partners, we will continue to strengthen the regional evidence base. We will also launch the Culture Connect Data Observatory and develop wider research partnerships, including with the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. This will improve access to consistent regional data and insight. The North East MSA will also work with national data providers such as the ONS and DCMS to improve regional data and comparability at national and, where appropriate, international level, and with the region’s research ecosystem to coordinate data collection, reduce survey fatigue and explore novel data sources and methods. This including new digital and web-derived data sources and approaches that can capture lived experience and longer-term change. These activities will support better decision making and enable continuous learning across the lifetime of this Framework. This will include working with Historic England and other partners to strengthen the availability of heritage data within the Culture Connect Data Observatory.

## Why evidence matters

Progress will be measured through a shared regional performance framework aligned with the North East Local Growth Plan, the Integrated Settlement Outcomes Framework and the ambitions of this Strategic Framework.

Performance will be monitored against a small number of headline outcomes that reflect the Framework’s three strategic themes.

## What we will measure

Progress will be measured through a shared regional performance framework aligned with the North East Local Growth Plan, the Integrated Settlement Outcomes Framework and the ambitions of this Strategic Framework.

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| Strategic Theme                                       | Headline Outcomes                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Create Jobs, Drive Growth, Investment and Recognition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Jobs created and safeguarded – pay and job quality</li><li>Business growth</li><li>Private investment leveraged</li><li>Visitor economy growth</li><li>Regional profile</li></ul> |
| Developing Skills and Talent                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Skills development</li><li>Workforce progression</li><li>Talent retention</li><li>Clearer pathways into sustainable employment</li></ul>                                          |
| Increasing Opportunity                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Increased participation</li><li>Reduced inequalities in access</li><li>Stronger health, wellbeing and community outcomes</li></ul>                                                |

Alongside these headline outcomes, delivery programmes and investment plans will include programme-specific measures to monitor outputs, outcomes and longer-term impact. This two-tier approach will provide strategic oversight while allowing individual programmes to respond to local needs and priorities.

## How we will measure it

Monitoring and evaluation will combine national datasets with regional intelligence and programme evaluation to provide a comprehensive understanding of economic, social and cultural impact.

## This will include:

- Labour market, pay, business and GVA data
- Visitor economy and participation data
- Sport England Active Lives data
- Workforce and skills intelligence
- Programme monitoring and evaluation
- Evidence generated through the Culture Connect Data Observatory
- Research undertaken with universities and partners including the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC)

Where evidence gaps exist, the North East MSA will work with partners to develop new datasets, pilot innovative approaches and embed evaluation from the outset of new investment programmes. This will ensure future decisions are based on demonstrable outcomes rather than activity alone, while reducing reporting burdens through a shared regional approach to performance management. This will include exploring novel approaches to capturing longer-term, diffuse and indirect impacts such as wellbeing, civic pride and cultural identity.

## Continuous learning and accountability

Evidence will not simply be used to report performance; it will shape future investment. The North East MSA will use monitoring, evaluation and continuous learning to understand what works, improve programme design and ensure investment continues to respond to emerging opportunities and regional priorities.

Progress will be reported through the North East MSA’s established governance arrangements, with regular reporting to the Mayor and Cabinet and oversight from the Culture, Creative Industries and Sport Advisory Group. Investment Plans will be reviewed periodically considering new evidence, ensuring this Framework remains responsive, accountable and focused on delivering long-term economic and social impact for the North East.

## Looking ahead

This Strategic Framework provides a shared direction for culture, creative industries, heritage and sport across the North East over the next decade. Its success will depend on continued collaboration between local authorities, businesses, education providers, cultural and sporting organisations, communities and national partners.

By combining strategic leadership with evidence-led investment, strong partnerships and a commitment to continuous learning, the North East MSA will help create the conditions for businesses to grow, people to thrive and places to prosper. Together, we will build a more creative, inclusive and internationally recognised North East, where culture, creative industries, heritage and sport continue to drive opportunity, identity and sustainable economic growth for generations to come.





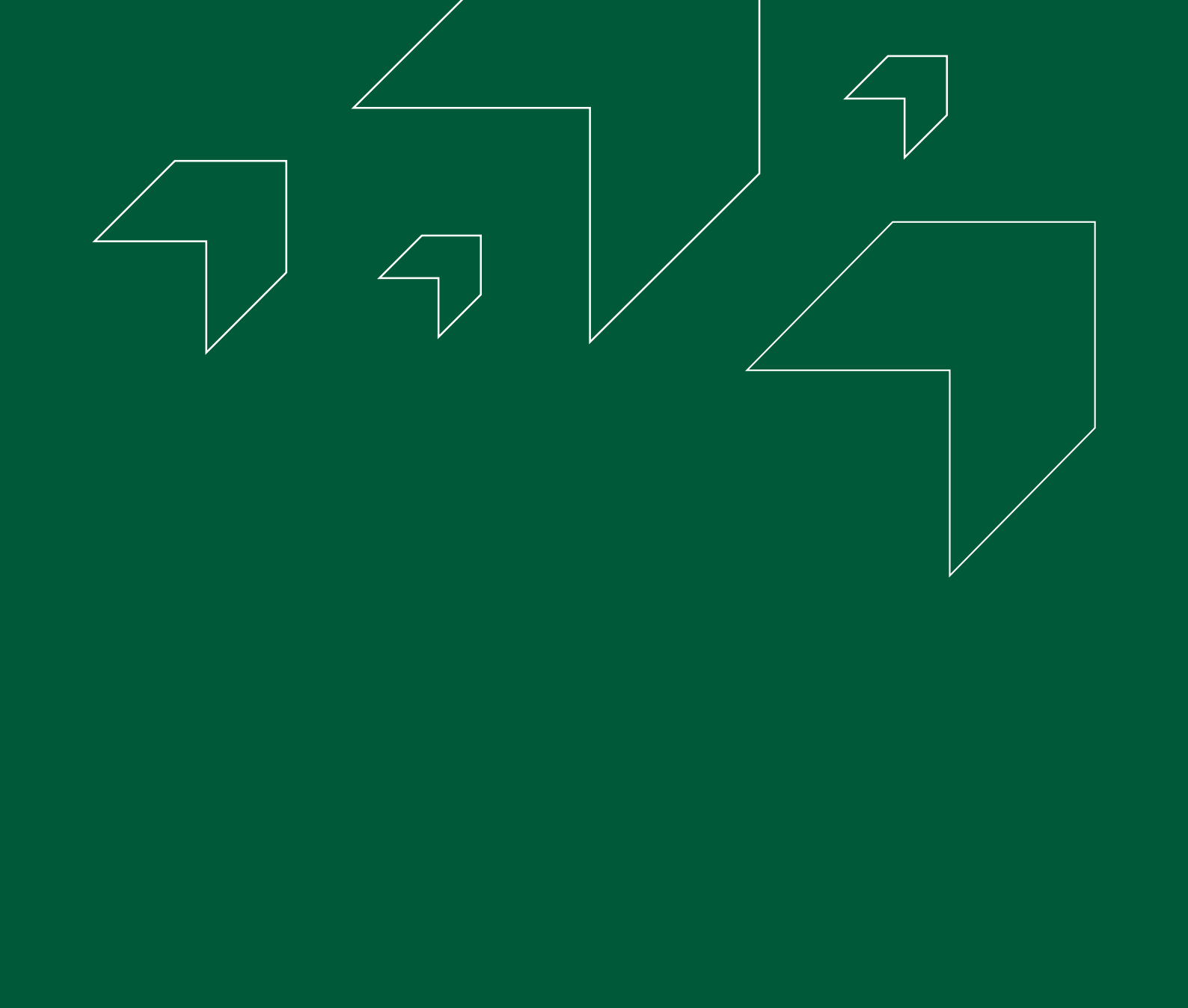
**Appendix A: Creative Industries Investment Plan**  
can be found online [here](#)

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**Appendix B: Events & Participation Investment Plan**  
can be found online [here](#)

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## Contact us

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