



A Strategic Approach to Navigating the Creative Sector in the 21st Century

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1. INTRODUCTION

We live in turbulent times. In recent years, the UK economy has been rocked by Brexit and the pandemic, against a backdrop of uncertainty and war.

Workers in the creative sector – already in a precarious economic situation – are also facing unprecedented challenges from emergent technologies, such as AI.

Long Moon is a social enterprise that exists to address these problems. Our mission is to help artists and other creatives build careers that are commercially sustainable and adapted to new technology.

This document outlines the challenges Long Moon has been set up to address, the strategic approach we believe is necessary, and the practical steps we're taking to help creative professionals future-proof their careers.

Many thanks to our partners, and anyone who has supported us this far. We look forward to continuing to work with you in the future.

Dan Haycock
Director, Long Moon



2. CHALLENGES

Key Takeaways



2.3 MILLION

employed in UK
creative industries



£126 BILLION

creative industries
contribute to UK
economy

Nottingham's creative and
digital sector has grown

4.5x

FASTER

than other sectors
since 2010

£37k

PER ANNUM

median UK
income

£6k

PER ANNUM

UK artists earn from
their practice on
average

7%

UK ARTISTS

earn over £20k
per year

% FREELANCERS

- UK workforce **15%**
- Creative industries **47%**
- Visual artists **70%**

CREATIVES WHO THINK AI WILL IMPACT THEIR JOBS

- Yes **74%**
- Unsure **22%**
- No **4%**

2. CHALLENGES

The Creative Economy

The UK art market is valued at \$10.9 billion – equivalent to just over £8.6 billion.¹

Overall, creative industries in the UK employ around 2.3 million people, and contribute around £126 billion to the UK economy.²

However, many of these creative professionals live in economically precarious circumstances.

Since 2010, Nottingham's creative and digital sectors have grown faster than in any other major UK city, outside of London.

Creative and digital industries (CDI) currently employ around 7% of the Nottingham workforce, which translates to just over 11,000 workers.

The CDI sector is estimated to contribute around £1.2 billion to Nottingham's economy each year, representing 11% of Nottingham's GVA.³

The average amount of money that artists in England earn from their art practice is just £6000 per year.⁴

Only 7% of visual artists earn more than £20,000 per annum from their practice.⁵

For comparison, the UK's median annual salary in 2023 was £37,000.⁶

In fact, degrees in "design, creative and performance arts" have the lowest entry level salary of any degree subject,⁷ while Fine Art graduates specifically have the fourth lowest salaries out of all graduates after 5 years.⁸

Staggeringly, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, those who graduate with degrees in the creative arts actually earn *less* money than those who choose not to go to university at all.⁹

The creative industries also employ much higher numbers of freelance and remote workers than other sectors.

Around 47% of creative workers are freelancers,¹⁰ increasing to 70% for visual artists specifically.¹¹ This compares to 15% of the UK workforce as a whole.¹²

¹ McAndrew (2024)

² Evennett (2024)

³ Karagounis & Rossiter (2022)

⁴ TBR (2018)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Office for National Statistics (2023)

⁷ Oxford Learning College (2022)

⁸ Adzuna (2023)

⁹ Britton et al. (2020)

¹⁰ Easton & Cauldwell-French (2017)

¹¹ DACS (2024)

These workers face a unique set of challenges. They work inconsistent hours, for inconsistent pay. They have no access to sick pay or holiday pay.

They struggle with a higher degree of social isolation than workers in other industries, and they also face difficulty maintaining a separation between work life and home life.

Limited social interaction with fellow creatives can also limit awareness of professional opportunities, as well as reducing opportunities to share knowledge or collaborate.

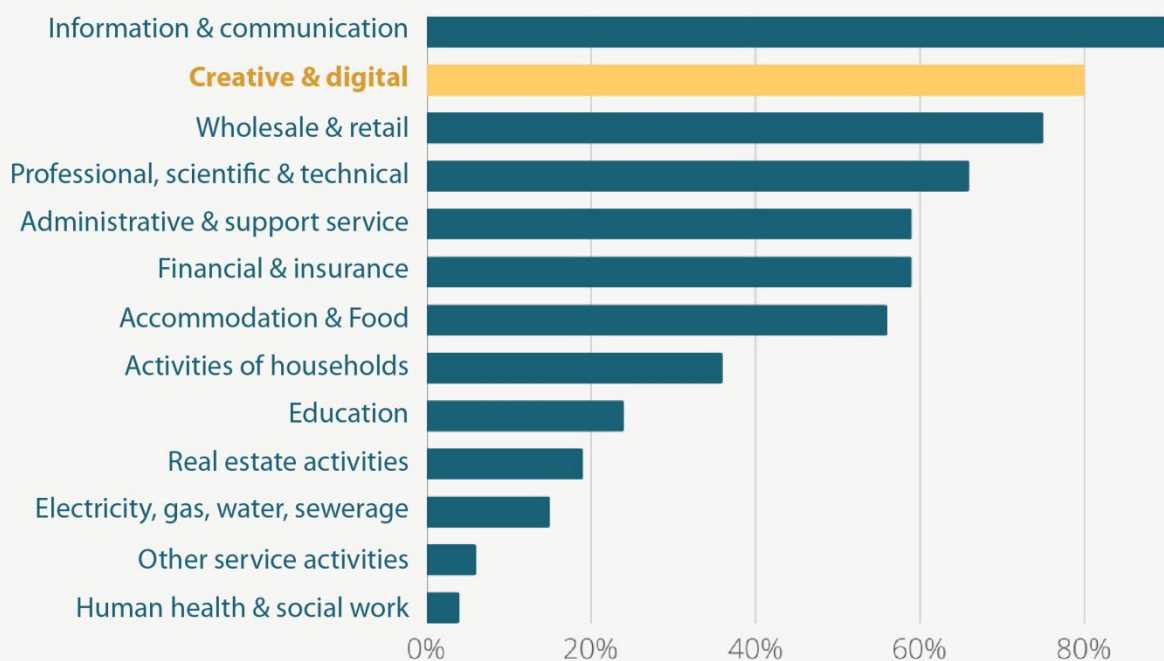
Nottingham's creative and digital industries have grown 4.5 times faster than other industries since 2010, and show no signs of slowing down.¹³

One report from 2024 attributes this growth to the presence of two large universities in a relatively small city, providing "a steady pipeline of talented graduates with creative and digital skills."¹⁴

Many creative businesses also cite Nottingham's small size as an advantage:

"In a smaller city, businesses, particularly creative ones, can network more easily, stand out and be more visible."¹⁵

GVA growth by sector in Nottingham (2010-2019)



¹² Easton & Cauldwell-French (2017)

¹³ Karagounis & Rossiter (2022)

¹⁴ Kennedy et al. (2024)

¹⁵ Ibid.

New and Emerging Tech

On top of these economic challenges, artists and other creative professionals are increasingly facing challenges from new and emerging technology.

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) estimates that up to 8 million jobs in the UK could be displaced by AI, with creative industries particularly affected.¹⁶

The report highlights the need to actively protect “tasks involving creative originality and artistic expression” from the intrusion of AI, in order to “ensure creative skills continue to be nurtured and valued among children and adults.”¹⁷

Another report from Engine Creative found that 74% of UK creatives “agree that AI is going to impact their job roles in some way in the next decade.”¹⁸ Only 3.5% of respondents disagreed.¹⁹

65% of creatives believe that “AI training will be necessary for both future and current employees,” while 62% agree that “those who do not embrace AI will fall behind competitors or miss out on opportunities.”²³

But it isn’t just AI. Many other emerging technologies are likely to have an effect on the creative industries.

Virtual reality (VR), the metaverse and augmented reality (AR) all have the potential to reshape creative industries.

Immersive storytelling and world-building will create demand for new creative roles, but potentially at the cost of reduced demand for traditional media.

At the same time, decentralised creative hubs and virtual events could weaken physical industries like live performance and gallery spaces.

3D printing and scanning, although around for some years now, still have the potential to upend traditional ways of making/manufacturing, especially as costs continue to decrease and production speeds increase.

“This feels like a tipping point in time when the people who embrace AI and use it well will prosper.”²⁰

“AI is here to stay and it is up to us to learn how to work with the technology to benefit ourselves and the creative industry as a whole.”²¹

“As with any change, we have to adapt to work with it rather than fear it.”²²

¹⁶ Jung & Desikan (2024)

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Engine Creative (2023)

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Smart materials, which respond dynamically to heat, light, pressure, or electricity, have the potential to blur the boundaries between the creative arts and engineering, as well technology and biology.

Living materials, like mycelium-based leather alternatives or bacteria-infused textiles, are already being developed.

Self-healing materials, shape-memory alloys and polymers, flexible interactive surfaces, and fabrics and pigments that change colour or opacity in response to light or heat are all in development.

Wearable technology will continue to blur the lines between the “online” and “offline” worlds, accelerating trends in remote work, gig labour, and the broader freelance economy by enabling more data-driven and location-independent work.

Conclusions

It’s clear that the creative industries are facing a period of profound change.

Economic instability, high rates of freelancing and low wages already pose challenges for creative professionals, and emerging technologies are set to reshape the landscape even further.

AI, VR, 3D printing, smart materials and wearable tech all bring the potential for disruption – threatening traditional creative roles while also opening new avenues for artistic expression and commercial innovation.

While there are risks, particularly for those slow to adapt, these technologies also present opportunities. However, we cannot simply continue to work and to create as we have in the past.

We need an entirely new approach – one which emphasises commercial viability and acknowledges the economic realities of the 21st century.



3. OUR APPROACH

If we are to successfully navigate the changing landscape of the creative sector over the coming decades, it's clear that we need a new strategy.

As the heart of that strategy, we suggest the following core principles:

1. We need to stick together

The easiest way to combat the isolation many creative professionals face is by building strong creative communities.

Long Moon is currently looking for premises in Nottingham. This will allow us to offer co-working space, private offices and creative workspace, as well as hosting networking events for artists and other creatives.

By bringing together artists, designers, musicians, performers and professionals from a range of other creative industries, we can foster an environment where ideas and knowledge can be exchanged and collaborative partnerships can form.

Beyond the practical benefits – such as shared resources and facilities, lower costs and increased productivity – we can also help establish a sense of belonging in a sector that can often feel fragmented.

Regular meet-ups, industry talks and informal gatherings will also give professionals a chance to connect, discuss their work and discover new career opportunities.

2. We need to take an actively commercial approach

It's a truism that the most successful artists are not necessarily those with the most talent, but those with the best business skills. But bewilderingly, those skills are

often entirely absent from arts education.

The creative curriculum often fails to equip creatives with the knowledge needed to market their work, price their services, negotiate contracts or build long-term careers. This leaves many talented professionals struggling to navigate the commercial realities of their industry.

Long Moon will fill this gap by providing tailored business support to creatives. From skills workshops to talks and seminars led by industry professionals, we will help artists and creative entrepreneurs develop the skills needed to thrive in an increasingly competitive landscape.

Too often in the arts, business and enterprise are seen as problems, rather than solutions. By taking an actively commercial approach, we can empower creatives to view their work not just as a passion but as a viable career.

3. We need to embrace change

In the past 10 years, Nottingham has seen some of the fastest digital sector growth in the UK, outpacing even London.²⁴ This has been driven, in part, by the presence of two large universities in a relatively small city.

Emerging tech presents both risks and opportunities for creatives. AI threatens to take away work and jobs in the coming decades, and has already thrown up new legal questions around copyright and

²⁴ Karagounis & Rossiter (2022)

ownership.

Understandably, some have responded with lawsuits and boycotts. But the genie won't go back in the bottle. We need to embrace change, placing ourselves at the forefront of innovation as early adopters.

Long Moon will host talks and seminars on emerging tech, speaking to industry experts and disseminating knowledge on how to integrate new technology into the creative arts.

By doing so, we will place ourselves in the best possible position to minimise risks and take advantage of opportunities.

4. We need to encourage dialogue between the arts, tech and enterprise

The creative sector does not exist in isolation. As technology reshapes industries and business models continue to evolve, the ability to collaborate across disciplines has never been more important.

It's critical that we promote cross-communication between those in the creative arts, those working in tech, and the forces of enterprise: entrepreneurs and business-owners, marketers and advertisers, investors and venture capitalists, start-up founders and business strategists.

Long Moon will act as a bridge between these worlds, fostering cross-sector dialogue through events, workshops and collaborative projects.

This approach will not only help artists access new tools and markets but also enable tech companies and enterprises to benefit from the unique insights and problem-solving abilities of creative

professionals.

By encouraging dialogue across these three domains, we can create an ecosystem where creativity, technology, and enterprise support and strengthen one another.

5. We need to talk about the purpose and meaning of the arts in society

By focusing on economic hardship or the threat of AI, it's easy to forget that the arts are powerful.

Stories, symbols, images, performance and music have an unrivalled power to cast a spell over an audience. To draw them in, and hold them, captivated. To evoke powerful emotions, and to change the way people think, feel and view the world.

Politicians and advertisers know this all too well.

In other cultures, these abilities are literally regarded as magic.

The arts are not just a piece of foam, floating on the surface of civilisation. They fulfil a deep human need, stretching back to the first hand print or the first bison daubed on some primordial cave wall.

But the fact that so many artists are in such a precarious financial situation suggests that we've forgotten how intrinsic the arts are to our humanity. It suggests that we can no longer adequately explain their value to others.

It suggests that we've lost our way.

We badly need to talk about the purpose and value of the arts in wider society. We need to have deep, wide-ranging

conversations – about art and culture, about psychology and meaning, about philosophy and anthropology.

We need to be able to advocate – knowledgeably and eloquently – for the value of our sector and our own careers, and for the value of the arts themselves.

If you want to be a part of these conversations, scan the QR code or follow the link below to register your interest and become a part of Long Moon.



www.longmoon.co.uk/register-your-interest

4. ABOUT

Long Moon is a social enterprise based in Nottingham. Our mission is to help artists and other creative professionals build careers that are commercially sustainable and adapted to new technology.

Find out more at www.longmoon.co.uk

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Long Moon Ltd is registered in England and Wales under the company registration number 15391804.

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