

## South Yorkshire's Creative and Cultural Investment Framework

### The power of Cultural and Creative Industries in South Yorkshire

In South Yorkshire, growth has long been defined by industrial excellence and global influence. From coal and steel to precision engineering, this region has powered national progress and exported expertise around the world. Our contributions to the first and second industrial revolutions were built on practical ingenuity – designing practical solutions for complex challenges through engineering, manufacturing and materials science.

Our contribution to the creative and cultural output of the country is as significant.

South Yorkshire is a region of makers; of music, literature, games, theatre productions, tv and film, as well as producing generations of talent for the fashion, architecture, publishing, and design industries.

We make things that you can touch and feel, as well as those that *make* you feel.

The sector increasingly drives growth in clean energy, advanced manufacturing and engineering, life sciences, and in digital and tech, and these industries are a critical part of South Yorkshire's economy. They generate up to £2bn in GVA, with over 4,000 companies, thousands of freelancers, and more than 31,000 people employed across the sectors.

The best of our talent has put South Yorkshire on the global stage; we are a powerhouse across the arts, heritage, museums, music, gaming, festivals and live events, theatre, design, film, digital media, publishing, and creative technology sectors.

South Yorkshire is also a national leader in bringing to bear the power of cultural and creative practices to change lives in our region; our approaches are widespread, ambitious and rooted in action. Rotherham's Children's Capital of Culture, our approach to music education, our capabilities in early years creative practices, and visions for creative health, all give us a platform to better the lives of South Yorkshire's diverse communities.

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## Backing our talent

Building on our existing successes, we envision a region where creative and cultural practices create a more productive, vibrant, and resilient economy, that attracts investment; delivers greater pride, purpose and prosperity; and makes our communities healthier, happier and wealthier.

This Creative and Cultural Investment Framework sets out our intention to capitalise upon our strengths, identify further opportunities, and learn from those things we've already invested in.

We have a proud track record of cultural and creative investment. These include:

### ***Rotherham's Children's Capital of Culture***

**Our investment:** £1 million investment into a year-long cultural programme led by children and young people, designed to celebrate Rotherham's identity and empower its future cultural leaders.

**Why we did it:** It leveraged local heritage, storytelling, and youth-led creativity to build civic pride and attract national attention.

**Impact:** The programme has delivered a series of high-profile events, creative commissions, and leadership opportunities for young people.

### ***Harmony Works***

**Our investment:** Capital investment into the development of Harmony Works, a new music hub in Sheffield that will provide education, rehearsal, and performance space for young people and cultural organisations.

**Why we did it:** Harmony Works is a flagship infrastructure project that anchors South Yorkshire's music ecosystem. It supports collaboration between education providers, arts organisations, and communities, and provides a permanent home for music development.

**Impact:** Once complete, Harmony Works will serve thousands of young people annually, support regional music education, and act as a catalyst for cultural regeneration in Sheffield.

### ***Barnsley's Digital Media Centre (DMC)***

**Our investment:** Ongoing support for Barnsley's DMC, a hub for creative and digital startups offering workspace, mentoring, and innovation programmes.

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**Why we did it:** The DMC is a key asset in South Yorkshire's CreaTech landscape. It fosters collaboration between SMEs, cultural practitioners, and higher education institutions, and supports the growth of creative technology businesses.

**Impact:** The centre has incubated dozens of startups, hosted innovation labs and events, and built a strong community of creative entrepreneurs.

### *Creative Bootcamps in Doncaster & Barnsley*

**Our investment:** A series of bootcamps offering intensive training in creative disciplines such as digital media, design, and production, targeted at young people and career changers.

**Why we did it:** These bootcamps provide accessible, industry-relevant training that bridges the gap between education and employment.

**Impact:** Hundreds of participants have gained practical skills, built portfolios, and progressed into further training or employment, helping diversify the creative workforce and strengthen South Yorkshire's talent pipeline.

### *Shared Prosperity Fund investment into Culture and Creative*

**What We Supported:** Regional coordination and capacity-building across cultural organisations, including support for collaborative bids, leadership development, and organisational resilience.

**Why we did it:** This programme addresses fragmentation in the sector by fostering cross-district networks and shared strategic planning.

**Impact:** The programme has led to joint initiatives across boroughs, increased the number of collaborative funding bids, and strengthened the sector's ability to influence regional and national policy.

### *Crossed Wires Festival*

**Our investment:** Early-stage investment into a new creative enterprise through a repayable finance model, designed to support growth while enabling reinvestment.

**Why we did it:** Crossed Wires exemplifies SYMCA's approach to supporting independent creative businesses with scalable potential. By offering repayable investment, SYMCA encourages commercial resilience and sustainability, rather than dependency on grant funding.

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**Impact:** The enterprise has expanded its operations, developed new content and platforms, and attracted further investment. If successful, the initial funding will be returned to SYMCA, creating a revolving fund model that supports future creative ventures.

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### The challenges we can address together

Public funding for creative and cultural industries is limited, and the pressures on public services to deliver in different ways to meet ever-increasing demand presents challenges to old ways of working.

Public, private, and philanthropic investment in South Yorkshire's culture and creative industries has been too low. That is slowly changing, but without a gear shift in our thinking, we run the risk of missing out on further investment and failing to capitalise on opportunities.

Through this framework, we can, and will:

1. Tell our creative and cultural story better; we're on the national and international stage, but our voice isn't loud enough to cut through and take advantage of the opportunities our success stories give us.
2. Be better networked and engaged with decision-makers, and support partners in the creative and cultural sectors to come together through new networks and collaborative practices that advocate for the sector.
3. Be clearer on what our priorities for investment are - to create genuine clusters of excellence, we need to set out priority areas and be clear with national government and funders on where we need their support.
4. Make more of the investments, programmes, and capacity we have available to us in South Yorkshire. We can do more to make sure our programmes to support productivity, skills, transport, health, and regeneration, all drive growth in creative and cultural industries.
5. Make creative and cultural investment part of the conversations when we seek to transform public services.
6. Help our creative and cultural partners to build their capacity and capability to grow, whilst ensuring simplicity when engaging with us for support.
7. Work to make sure that everyone, whatever their background and wherever they are from in South Yorkshire, has the opportunity to participate in creative and cultural activities.

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### Six strategic investment priorities

We’ve identified six strategic priorities for creative and cultural investment at the South Yorkshire level. Alongside these priorities are a set of underpinning investment criteria that we will apply to any proposal or investment brought forward.

| Priority 1: Building pride and telling South Yorkshire’s Cultural and Creative story   | Types of funding available and underpinning investment criteria  |
|--|--|
| Develop, strengthen, and advocate for South Yorkshire’s distinctive cultural and creative offer within the region, nationally, and globally, with a focus on leveraging our heritage assets, live events, and festivals to drive visitor growth, showcase our talent and opportunity, and position the region as a northern cultural and creative hub. | <p><b>Flexible funding models:</b> The MCA is open to exploring a range of investments covering grants, loans, co-investment models (including match-funding) and direct investment in funds.</p> <p>Our focus will be on supporting proposals that demonstrate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Strategic fit and deliverability</b></li> <li>• <b>Scale and cluster building:</b> Creating scale and building out clusters of existing capabilities.</li> <li>• <b>Evidence-led:</b> Informed by robust data and evaluation.</li> <li>• <b>Leverage:</b> Unlocking other public, private, and alternative funding sources.</li> <li>• <b>Collaborative:</b> Built with and through partners, including local councils, funders, cultural orgs, HEIs, and communities.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Priority 2: Events and live space activation</b>  |  |
| Support South Yorkshire’s festivals, live events, and creative enterprises to be more commercially resilient, aligning major events with regeneration and high street activation. This will allow these events not just to survive, but to thrive, benefitting South Yorkshire’s cultural landscape and visitor economy.                               |  |
| <b>Priority 3: Cultural Sector Ecosystem and Leadership</b>  |  |
| Fund cross-district networks, collaboration, and organisational development, to embed a culture of cooperation within South Yorkshire’s creative and cultural industry, strengthening them by building resilience and capacity across organisations, as well as opening up future leadership pathways.   |  |
| <b>Priority 4: People, skills, and talent</b>  |  |
| Invest in the people at the heart of the creative and cultural industry, focusing on growing and progressing the talent that already exists in South Yorkshire, and ensuring that talent stays in South Yorkshire. We will also strengthen cultural and creative practices to ensure   |  |

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| <p>that every child in the region has access to high-quality creative experiences, giving them the best start in life, where they have the opportunity to thrive.</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>A route to sustainability:</b> Removing barriers to growth, supporting financial sustainability, and building capacity.</li> <li>• <b>People-centred:</b> Driven by local talent, cultural identity, and community participation.</li> <li>• <b>Inclusive:</b> Ensuring equitable access to opportunities.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Priority 5: Places and infrastructure</b></p>   |   |
| <p>We will seek to invest in game-changing creative and cultural infrastructure that builds upon existing strengths and capabilities, whilst strengthening South Yorkshire’s impact on the national and international stage.</p>  |   |
| <p><b>Priority 6: Enterprise, technology, and innovation</b></p>  |   |
| <p>Support cultural and creative startups, as well as wider CreaTech innovation, by fostering collaboration between South Yorkshire’s higher education institutions, SMEs, and other cultural practitioners, to unlock new opportunities for growth and innovation.</p> |   |

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### Accessing funding through the South Yorkshire MCA

The MCA has a well-established set of processes in place to guide partners through the investment decision-making process.

Early engagement with teams in the MCA is recommended to ensure potential schemes are entered into the decision-making process and that initial ideas can be tested against strategic fit.

These are set out in full in our Assurance Framework, with a brief summary of the process below:

- 1. Project Mandate** - Projects enter the SYMCA investment pipeline either via inclusion in approved Place Plans or Government bids, or by submitting a Mandate Form outlining strategic fit, rationale, and indicative costs.
- 2. Business Case Development** - Applicants develop a proportionate business case based on project scale: Strategic or Programme Business Case (initial stage), followed by either a Business Justification Case (up to £2m) or Outline Business Case (over £2m), with Full Business Case required prior to contracting.
- 3. Appraisal and Assurance** - Business cases are independently assessed for strategic alignment, value for money, deliverability, and risk, with recommendations made by SYMCA's Investment Board.
- 4. Investment Decision** - Final funding decisions are made by the MCA Board, with Business Justification Cases proceeding directly to contract and Outline Business Cases requiring Full Business Case confirmation.
- 5. Contracting and Delivery** - Successful projects enter into a Funding Agreement with SYMCA, setting out delivery milestones, outputs, and conditions, with quarterly monitoring and reporting throughout the project lifecycle.
- 6. Support and Evaluation** - SYMCA's Programme Management Office provides guidance throughout the process, and all projects are subject to evaluation to assess impact and inform future investment.

We would encourage organisations to engage with their respective local authorities, as well as SYMCA, when going through the funding process, as local authorities are well-positioned to provide support to facilitate a smoother process.

The investment framework, and our continued focus on supporting the region's creative and cultural industries, represents an opportunity for the MCA and our LAs to align future creative and cultural funding with wider funding pathways across the MCA's portfolio, including in skills, business support, and community engagement. This is especially important given the cross-cutting nature of the industries. By joining up work carried out across the MCA, we can ensure that there is a more cohesive focus on supporting the creative and cultural industries within the MCA and our LA partners.

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### Key Performance Indicators and monitoring and evaluation

The following are a number of indicative KPI’s that are designed to help identify the impact of our investments into the cultural and creative industries. In developing a project for the MCA, you are expected to set out how the project delivers against our agreed South Yorkshire Outcomes Framework.

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| <p><b>1. Investment and funding leverage</b></p>      | <p>Number of successful funding applications to Arts Council England, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, and other major cultural funders.</p> <p>Total value of external cultural and creative funding secured annually.</p> <p>Amount of private investment or match funding leveraged into the CCI sector.</p> <p>Number of cultural organisations in the region with Arts Council England NPO status.</p>   |
| <p><b>2. Collaboration and partnership</b></p>        | <p>Number of collaborative funding bids involving multiple cultural partners or local authority areas.</p> <p>Number of joint regional initiatives or programmes developed through cross-sector collaboration.</p>   |
| <p><b>3. Talent and workforce</b></p>                 | <p>Number of additional creative sector jobs/ days of work in the region.</p> <p>Number of participants in funded talent and skills development programmes.</p> <p>Number of participants in non-funded talent and skills development programmes</p>   |
| <p><b>4. Participation, engagement, and reach</b></p> | <p>Total annual attendance at cultural festivals, events, and venues across the region.</p> <p>Number of externally funded community or youth-led cultural projects supported.</p> <p>Visitor numbers to cultural and heritage attractions and festivals.</p> <p>Number of national or international partnerships and collaborations involving South Yorkshire cultural organisations.</p> <p>Time spent doing a creative, artistic, theatrical, or music activity or a craft, per the DCMS Active Lives Survey.</p> |

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## 5. Financial resilience

Percentage of cultural organisations with diversified income streams (public, earned, private).

Growth in earned income and commercial revenue within the sector.

Number of organisations reporting increased financial stability or growth as a result of participation in supported programmes.

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### *Annex A: Strengths and Opportunities Mapping*

| <b>Theme / Strength Area</b>                 | <b>What it Represents</b>   | <b>Why it Matters for Investment</b>   |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Cultural identity and civic pride</b>     | A strong sense of place, proud communities, and distinctive cultural character across urban and rural settings. | Provides a foundation for place branding, tourism, community engagement, and inclusive regeneration.                               |
| <b>Geography and natural assets</b>          | Unique blend of vibrant towns and cities alongside access to the Peak District and rich local greenspaces.      | Enhances livability, visitor appeal, and the region’s identity as an accessible, distinctive cultural hub.                         |
| <b>Cultural reputation and profile</b>       | Established national and international audiences and cultural icons across music, literature, and screen.       | Strengthens visibility in funding conversations and positions South Yorkshire as a nationally significant cultural region.         |
| <b>Heritage and historic environment</b>     | Distinctive built, industrial, and landscape heritage across the region.  | A cornerstone of regional identity and tourism; attracts dedicated funding streams and provides powerful anchors for regeneration. |
| <b>Anchor city and regional connectivity</b> | Sheffield as a recognised cultural centre, well connected to surrounding towns, communities and rural areas.    | Provides a focal point for investment and cluster growth, enabling cross-regional collaboration.                                   |
| <b>Creative disciplines and specialisms</b>  | Strength across design, music, screen, literature, creative health, and emerging CreaTech industries.           | Offers multiple routes for targeted investment, innovation, and collaboration across creative sectors.                             |

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| <b>Creative talent pipeline</b>        | Strong universities, colleges, and grassroots networks that nurture and retain creative talent across disciplines.          | Builds innovation capacity, supports high-value jobs, and strengthens the future workforce.  |
| <b>Children and young people</b>       | A growing focus on youth-led cultural participation, leadership, and co-creation across the region.                         | Embeds creativity early, supports future skills pipelines and builds inclusive participation in the cultural economy.                      |
| <b>Festival and event culture</b>      | A diverse calendar of festivals and cultural activities attracting growing regional, national, and international audiences. | Creates opportunities to leverage events for increased profile, investment, skills development, visitor spend, and cultural participation. |
| <b>Affordability and accessibility</b> | Lower living and operating costs than other UK cultural centres; good transport links across the region.                    | Attracts and retains creative talent, supports independent enterprise, and broadens audience participation.                                |