

# MIDLANDS ENGINE OBSERVATORY ACADEMIC INSIGHTS

## The Role of the University in Enhancing Creative Clusters



This is a summary of a full report available [here](#), on the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre website.

**Theme:** Digital, Labour Market and Skills

**Area of Focus:** A report comparing the role universities can play in contributing to creative industry growth in two UK regions with developing creative clusters, the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and Cardiff Capital Region (CCR).

**Key Findings:**

The creative sector has been an element of UK Government economic policy for the last two decades. The cities of Birmingham and Cardiff have been identified by NESTA as 'Creative Challengers'. Both regions have substantial creative industry presence already, TV and Film in the CCR, and video games production in the WMCA.

A key obstacle for the growth of the creative industries is the presence of skills shortages, the [BFI](#) highlighting shortages 'across the board,' with middle management positions the most difficult to fill. In recent years, the responsibility for upskilling workers in the sector has shifted away from industry to other pipelines, including Higher Education providers.

Universities are expected to play many roles within their regions, including being attractors of skilled personnel, hubs of innovation and R&D spill over, anchor institutions and globally competitive centres of educational excellence.

With a shortage of skilled personnel not confined to entry-level positions, it may be the case that universities are not best placed to address the current skills issues.

The creative industries have historically had an uneasy relationship with HE. There are some key challenges with how well HEIs can achieve the objectives placed upon them. Universities may be overloaded with too many competing objectives to be agile enough to react to the needs of regional creative industries.



### Midlands Engine Impact:

Policy in the West Midlands prioritises the creative sectors, and seeks to foster its growing creative clusters in Digbeth (TV) and around Leamington Spa (Gaming). The expansion of creative industries within these local economies have the potential for innovation spill over, and collaboration with adjacent industries, including [JLR's](#) partnership with NVIDIA and AI-driven life sciences ([PathLAKE](#)), but targeted investment is required.

The WMCA region benefits from a bigger population, multiple major population centres and a wider variety of HEIs than the Cardiff Capital Region. Whether the WMCA's increased size translates into a greater level of absorptive capacity, and a more attractive proposition for students and graduates is a matter for further research.

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