Creative Tech Growth Plan Primer

An initial assessment of creative technology across Local Growth Plans

A **Foresight**Lab policy briefing

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This primer is a complementary resource to the *Creative Technology Futures: Policy Pathways to 2035 and Beyond* report, which explores long-term policy development in creative technologies across the UK. As set out in the report, there is a strong emphasis across national, regional and devolved policy, on the high-growth potential of creative technology.

This document has been developed to systematically map policy priorities related to creative technology across all Growth Plans developed by Local and Combined Authorities across England. It provides the broader context for the UK-wide growth potential of creative technology and the importance of recognising it through the lens of devolution and place.

We see this work as a starting point for further work and collaboration with local and devolved authorities in the coming years. Whilst there are multiple analyses of sectoral performance across the UK, and assessments of UK-wide creative clusters, as far as we can discern, this is the first attempt to systematically map creative technology and aligned priorities across Local Growth Plans. It does so to track prioritisation alignments across the UK and to paint a picture of creative technology as an emerging area of high priority that is inherently embedded within a broader context of regional devolution and place-led growth and innovation.

Context: Regional Devolution

The Government has placed increasing emphasis on devolved power and responsibility – realised through the establishment of a new Council of Nations and Regions as well as a Mayoral Council soon after the Labour Party was elected in 2024.[1] Most recently, HM Treasury launched a 'revamped' Green Book, amended to ensure more balanced decisions on investments in every part of the country, across urban, rural and coastal communities.[2] The changes mark a step change in the ways local authorities can decide how to use investment to most benefit local communities and neighbourhoods – with a mandate for any investment decision to take into account a fuller range of impacts including restoring pride in place, reinvigorating local community spaces, and bringing people together through events and activities.[3]

In relation to the devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Government's Industrial Strategy identifies a series of sectoral investments to boost growth-driving sectors across the UK. It commits to an enduring partnership with devolved governments to ensure that growth impacts people and businesses nationwide. Devolution across England has also been established as a strategic imperative. The Industrial Strategy has within it a whole chapter focussed specifically on supporting the UK's city regions and clusters.[4]

1 Deputy Prime Minister launches first-ever Mayoral Council - GOV.UK

2 The Green Book (2026) - GOV.UK

3 New Green Book to ensure that investment in all parts of the UK given a "fair hearing" - GOV.UK

4 The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy 2025 - GOV.UK

In December 2024, the Government launched the English Devolution White Paper, capturing the mission to "ignite growth in every region" of the UK by shifting powers away from Whitehall to Local Authorities. Success, the paper outlines, would see skilled workforces, competitive industries and a brilliant capacity for innovation across every corner of the nation – ensuring that opportunities are shared and potential is realised.[5] The White Paper also outlines an Integrated Settlement to fund local priorities – with Strategic Mayoral Authorities receiving a consolidated budget overseen by a mutually agreed outcomes framework. The White Paper also set out the commitment for Mayors across England to develop Local Growth Plans to establish local strategic priorities to deliver on in partnership with central government, in addition to a list of strategic priorities, including:

All of England should benefit from devolution: a focus on coherence and consistency, ending deal-based approach in favour of a systematic approach.

More directly elected Mayors to create visible leadership and greater accountability: leveraging Mayoral soft power to convene local partners and tackle shared problems.

Powers in the right places: community empowerment and strong local institutions.

The Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, initially published in June 2025 following the Devolution White Paper projects a legislative shift of significant powers from Whitehall to local leaders.[6] It sets out a devolution model and standardised framework around duties and powers. The Bill creates the new category of "strategic authorities" in England, which includes and goes beyond Mayoral Authorities.[7] It set out new

"Devolution enables coordinated action in a place. Policies across skills, innovation, and infrastructure are much more effective when used to complement each other. We have already seen the difference that can be made when local leaders and Mayors work together in the interests of the local population. It creates the right mix of local intelligence and capacity with strategic vision...

Devolution done right drives innovation, enabling different leaders to trial different methods, and learn from what works to ultimately deliver more for citizens."[5]

5 English Devolution White Paper - GOV.UK

6 English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill - Parliamentary Bills - UK Parliament

7 English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill: LGA policy summary | Local Government Association

powers across transport and local infrastructure; skills and employment support; housing and strategic planning; economic development and regeneration; environment and net zero; health, wellbeing and public service reform; public safety.

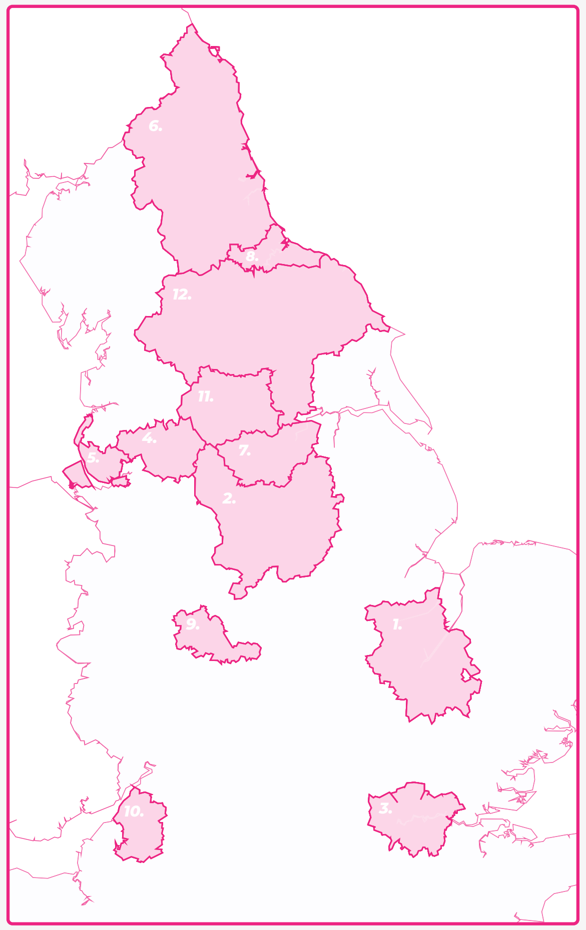
A big component of the Bill, in addition to standardisation measures and streamlining of processes across local governance functions, is the emphasis on strengthening the voice of communities; duties are outlined for local authorities to ensure the effective governance of neighbourhoods, working with the Secretary of State to meet the duty of "community empowerment." This includes measures around local decision making, right to buy for community assets, special protections for local sporting assets, encouraging community spaces for encouraging participation, and promoting civic pride.

This emphasis on devolution and place also applies to innovation and R&D – where there have been a number of significant developments and priorities outlined to recognise the role of place in enabling nationwide growth, as well as giving local authorities a role in innovation. Indeed, both of the aforementioned publications place strong emphasis on regional clusters and research institutions, aiming to strengthen local innovation ecosystems and clarify the role of Strategic Authorities in innovation; support to enable local leaders to work closely in partnership with businesses and universities to unlock regional innovation potential is set out to ensure "everyone benefits from innovation-led growth." As part of this, commitments to enhance the direct connections between regions and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) – including the Local Innovation Partnerships Fund which asks "local leaders to develop bespoke innovation support offers for their regions." [8]

It is in this context that across national, regional and devolved policymaking, creative technology is increasingly becoming an area of focus for R&D and innovation across

8 English Devolution White Paper - GOV.UK

the UK. The DCMS Creative Industries Sector Plan identifies 'createch' as a frontier industry[9] – and has been recognised as an area for significant growth potential in the UK economy.[10] Indeed, this is affirmed by the presence of the Creative Industries and Digital and Technology sector priorities across Local Growth Plans, and areas where these sectors converge.



1. Cambridgeshire & Peterborough CA
2. East Midlands CCA
3. Greater London Authority
4. Greater Manchester CA
5. Liverpool City Region CA
6. North East CA
7. South Yorkshire MCA
8. Tees Valley CA
9. West Midlands CA
10. West of England MCA
11. West Yorkshire CA
12. York & North Yorkshire CA

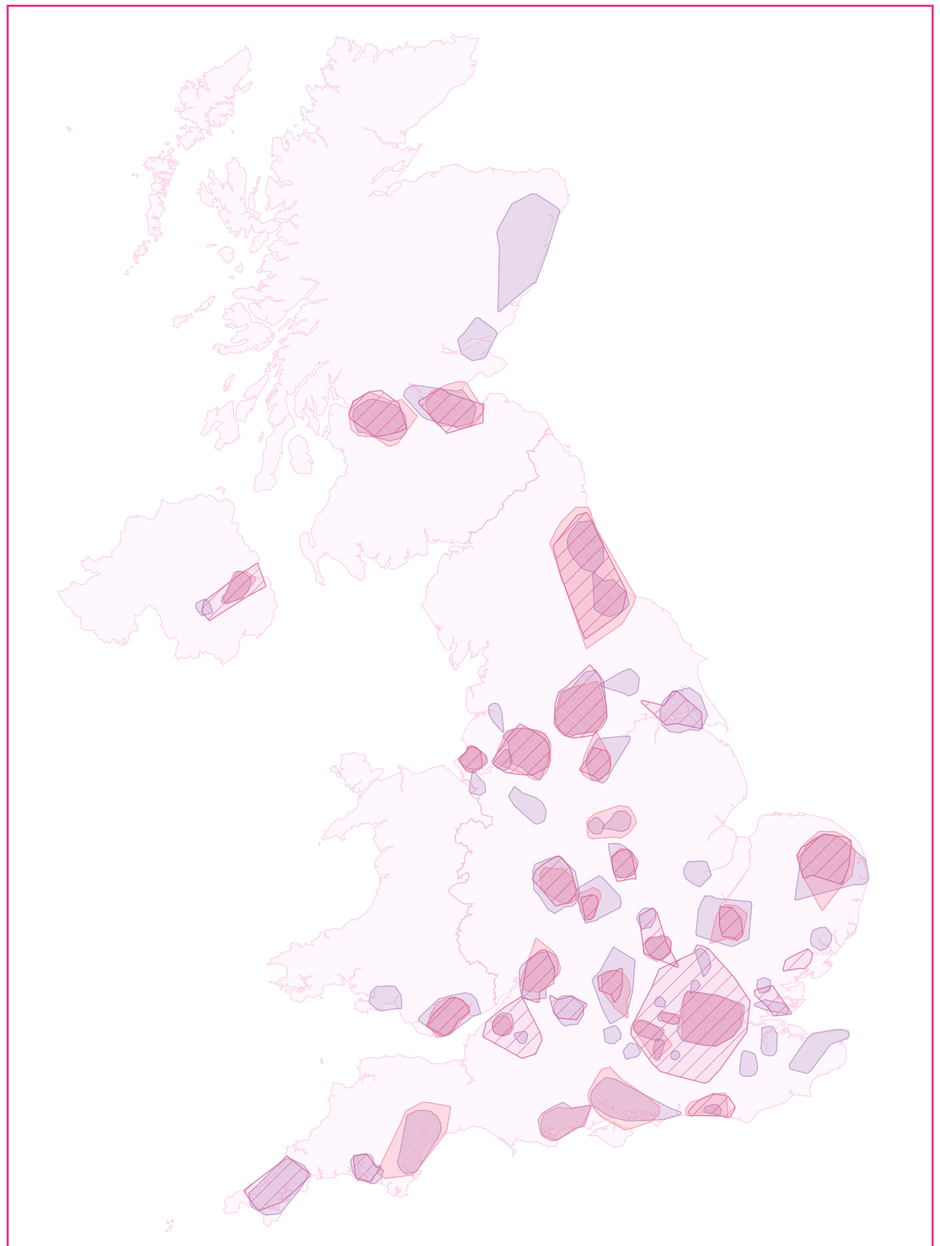
England's Mayoral & Combined Authorities

9 The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy - Creartive Industries Sector Plan

10 AI and creative technology scaleups: Communications and Digital Committee report - House of Lords Library

Regional Clusters

To provide a 'top-down' view of current cluster data relating to creative technologies, the Innovation Clusters Map tool, launched recently (October 2025) by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), has been set up to "support the UK's ambition to foster regional innovation and drive economic growth." [11] The Clusters captured are based on high business density in specific sectors to reflect the real spatial distribution of businesses, rather than through the lens of administrative boundaries. Below, there is an illustration of the mapping of the Creative Industries and Digital and Technology IS-8 sectors, as well as the Real Time Industrial Classification sector of 'Digital Creative Industries':



Source: DSIT Innovation Clusters Map

Creative | Digital & Technologies | Digital Creative Industries

11 About Innovation Clusters Map – this work is available under the Open Government

This is a living document that we will seek to update. The analysis that follows is based on an initial review of Local Growth Plans that were published prior to April-May 2026, as well as those committed to delivering Plans by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.[12]

We have used the names of Authorities as stated within the Growth Plans (e.g. 'Combined Authority') as opposed to 'Strategic Mayoral Authority', which is a status designated by Government based on meeting certain criteria.[13]

We intend to undertake further analysis of recently published and forthcoming Local Growth Plans, as well as undertaking further engagement with Combined Authorities to understand priorities beyond those set out in the Plans If you would like to contact the team, please email please email v.r.williams@lboro.ac.uk.

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12 Agreed shared Local Growth Plan priorities - GOV.UK

13 Established Mayoral Strategic Authority designation: Criteria and evidence guidance - GOV.UK

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority[14]

- Digital Technologies identified as a priority sector – with focus on AI; Advanced Connective Technologies; Software and Digital Infrastructure; Cyber; Quantum; Semiconductors.
- Home to Europe's largest technology cluster and recognises Geographic importance of Oxford-Cambridge Corridor and nexus within 'Golden Triangle'
- 'Digital Technologies' is listed as a priority sector, employing an estimated 36,000 people and generating £13.4 billion in revenue.
- Identifies 'Digital Creative Industries' as a connected sub-sector, but not a priority sector.
- Recognises growth being driven by technology innovation and clusters, aligned too to the Industrial Strategy.
- Driving future growth of the Digital Technologies sector by: undertaking skills and talent forecasting with a 10-year future focus; supporting the creation of AI partnerships that centre on societal interests; and conducting a feasibility study of an AI Growth Zone.
- Outlines Growth scenarios to 2050.

15 C220817 CPCA Prospectus

East Midlands Combined County Authority[15]

- Framed around 'inclusive growth' to ensure a rise in living standards and creation of new opportunities
- Identifies 'Digital, Creative and Cultural Industries' as a sectoral priority area – noting regional strengths in creative technology with strong higher education labs and R&D centres of excellence.
- Framed within 2025-2035 time horizon
- Will drive growth in this sector by: increasing access to creative and digital skills training, building awareness of careers and establishing targeted training and education initiatives; supporting academic-business partnerships; enhancing digital connectivity, particularly across rural areas; supporting investment for innovation and infrastructure, including via UKRI national investment and partnership with national bodies.
- Commits to strengthening innovation ecosystem, to create new innovation facilities and infrastructure, more investment in innovation and supporting more businesses to undertake innovation by 2035.
- Nottingham as the fastest growing cluster of digital, creative and cultural activity outside of London

15 The East Midlands Growth Plan - East Midlands Combined County Authority

Greater London Authority [16]

- Recognises leadership in innovation and tech, as a leading city for tech in Europe, and in the top 3 globally, and the role of universities and research institutes.
- Establishes Creative Industries, including creative technologies – termed as "Creative Industries and technologies" as a key strength of London, globally competitive, a significant economic contributor and highly productive.
- Its missions within this sector are to: secure the places to grow London's Creative Industries, including new studios and makerspaces; and to grow internationally significant Creative Industries clusters, with those focussed on future growth potential.
- Also recognises the Experience Economy – whilst not yet a top-ranking productive sector, it will boost London's soft power including via Theatre, screen and music tourism
- Outlines digital and technology, but not as a sector, but a cross-cutting mainstream across sectors – identifying transformative technologies across sectoral boundaries including: AI; quantum computing; bioengineering; advanced robotics; materials science.
- Splits actions into 10 year horizon (2025-2035) and one year actions. 10 year plans include: an Inclusive Talent Strategy; fair pay and good work; global talent attraction.
- Recognises regional leadership in tech and the Creative Industries, referring to GM as "the beating heart of the UK's Creative Industries".

16 London's growth plan - London Growth Plan

Greater Manchester Combined Authority [17]

- Recognises regional leadership in tech and the Creative Industries, referring to Greater Manchester (GM) as "the beating heart of the UK's Creative Industries".
- Outlines 'Creative and Media' and 'Digital, AI and Cyber' as growth sectors.
- Fastest growing local economy in the UK
- References the region's Foundational Economy Innovation Fund, providing grants to drive innovation across health and social care, early years, high street retail and hospitality.
- Includes reference to Greater Manchester Baccalaureate to provide pathways for young people into high-quality jobs, including in Digital and Technology and the Creative Industries.
- 'GM Good Growth Fund' launched to drive growth and regeneration – with an initial £400m investment into new homes, new jobs, and new employment space. [18]
- Ambition for the region to be a leading centre for security and AI

17 Greater Manchester Strategy 2025–35

18 Mayor Andy Burnham unveils plan to pioneer a new model of economic growth with £1bn 'GM Good Growth Fund' and pipeline of more than 30 projects across city region - Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority[19]

- Identifies Creative Industries and Digital and Technologies as two 'Key Growth Drivers' in the region. Digital and tech focus on AI and Quantum, emerging technology adoption and infrastructure, assets and capabilities. Creative Industries focus on enhancing offer for cross platform narratives, upskilling creative talent in latest technologies and increasing productivity through digital tools and AI.
- Outlines 48% growth in 'Creative and Tech sector', compared to 29% nationally – with strength in creative content and convergence across frontier subsectors like music and film.
- Also recognises opportunities in convergence across established key strength sectors and assets.
- Identifies three broad principles relating to regional productivity including: inclusive growth, ensuring prosperity and opportunities are shared; AI for good, becoming a leader in responsible AI and supporting sovereign AI capabilities; Net Zero by 2035, investing in clean energy.
- Recognises innovation as a driver of local growth, with focus on: frontier R&D, research and invention; commercialisation and early-stage business development; adoption and diffusion.
- Built around 2025-2035 time horizon

19 Liverpool City Region Growth Plan 2025-2035

North East Combined Authority[20]

**Note that the Authority rebranded to the 'North East Strategic Mayoral Authority' in May 2026[21]*

- Identifies regional economic strengths, assets and opportunities across 'Creative Industries and content' and 'Tech, digital and AI'.
- Priority to boost innovation and increasing the concentration of businesses innovating and those with scale-up and potential to export.
- Creative Industries has seen growth of 67% over last ten years in region, with "established expertise in creative-digital sector including video games, e-sports, and immersive technologies." Focus on diverse talent pipeline, infrastructure, sector-specific business support, and creative place making.
- Tech, digital and AI building out of established strengths in games development, e-sports, software development, data analytics, immersive tech, 5G innovation, e-commerce, fintech and cybersecurity. Focussed on skills, adoption, diversifying talent pool, data infrastructure, rapid growth of AI-driven economy, and 5G innovation. Leveraging NE AI Growth Zone.
- References the delivery of an Inclusive Innovation Deal and Action Plan.
- Built around 2025-2035 time horizon

20 Local Growth Plan

21 About

South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority[22]

- Identifies regional economic strengths, assets and opportunities across ‘Creative Industries and content’ and ‘Tech, digital and AI’.
- Priority to boost innovation and increasing the concentration of businesses innovating and those with scale-up and potential to export.
- Creative Industries has seen growth of 67% over last ten years in region, with “established expertise in creative-digital sector including video games, e-sports, and immersive technologies.” Focus on diverse talent pipeline, infrastructure, sector-specific business support, and creative place making.
- Tech, digital and AI building out of established strengths in games development, e-sports, software development, data analytics, immersive tech, 5G innovation, e-commerce, fintech and cybersecurity. Focussed on skills, adoption, diversifying talent pool, data infrastructure, rapid growth of AI-driven economy, and 5G innovation. Leveraging NE AI Growth Zone.
- References the delivery of an Inclusive Innovation Deal and Action Plan.
- Built around 2025-2035 time horizon

22 South Yorkshire’s Growth Plan - South Yorkshire MCA

Tees Valley Combined Authority[23]

Plan not published at time of writing – analysis based on draft found on Tees Valley CA website.

- Acceleration of rapidly growing digital cluster and creative cluster set as a Growth Plan priority – aiming to secure further investment, grow business base and attract and retain talent in these areas. Recognises the ‘spillover potential’ across these two clusters.
- These areas are defined as ‘growing clusters’
- Focus on industries including: gaming and animation; software development; e-commerce; digital design; cybersecurity; film; TV and media production; visual effects; performance arts; music production; photography and videography.
- Ambition to forge collaboration with other sectors including manufacturing and smart tech – enabling IP development and export.
- Recognises its ‘Modern Industrial and Technology Cluster’ as globally competitive and highly productive - alongside advanced manufacturing as an enabling sector.

23 Tees Valley - Local Growth Plan DRAFT

West Midlands Combined Authority[24]

- 'Digital, tech and creative' identified as a high growth cluster within the plan. Emphasis on strengths in: content creation; video games; music and performing arts; design and CreaTech.
- Outlines a new Skills Innovation Challenge fund that will be delivered locally focussed on AI and digital skills. In addition, the region will publish an AI Skills Action Plan and invest £10m in an AI Academy focussed on inclusive AI innovation – providing pathways into tech careers.
- Outlines strengths in Digital and Technology sector – with supply side strengths in AI, quantum, cyber, robotics and advanced communications technologies.
- In addition, reflects strength of Creative Industries, generating £4b in GVA in 2022 – with growing ecology of studios as well as craft and design expertise. Acknowledgement of digital technologies "driving next generation services and the creative industries."
- £10m investment into 'Inclusive Innovation' – co-producing solutions with local authorities, and community organisations to support marginalised communities into better work.

24 West Midlands Growth Plan

*West of England Mayoral Combined Authority[25]

- Digital and Technologies and the Creative Industries identified as regional 'core growth sectors', with highest job growth in the region since 2015.
- Puts creativity at the centre of its future ambitions – with growing film and TV production, digital creativity, art, theatre, music and festivals. Strong SME base across: advertising; marketing; design; post-production; VFX; animation; Augmented Reality; Virtual Reality and gaming.
- Future growth areas in Creative Industries as: powering next generation VFX, gaming, AR, VR, and personalised content production.
- Recognises strengths in 'creative-tech' R&D – pioneering in next generation 6G technology, AI, digital engineering, robotics and creative technologies. Recognises creative tech strengths in "blending of world-class digital talent with cutting-edge storytelling, immersive media, and design innovation" as a fast growing success story.
- Recognises global expertise in quantum, AI, cyber, and national security. In particular outlines its AI Supercluster for global leadership, with Isambard AI – securing UK's sovereign competitiveness in AI. National leadership in "responsible, trusted and secure AI."

25 West of England Growth Strategy - West of England Combined Authority

West Yorkshire Combined Authority[26]

- Creative Industries identified as an emerging regional cluster.
- Regional specialisms in Digital and tech and the Creative Industries, with CI accounting for £1.7bn of the economy.
- Driving clusters of opportunity through: targeted support such as accelerators for high-growth businesses; expansion of networks and support infrastructure; mission-led innovation; finance provision; soft landing and access to markets; technical pathways and routes to access; support to open up employment land.
- World leader in data and artificial intelligence as recognised by Government's High Potential Opportunities programme. Pitching to host the new National Data Library.
- Will establish an Innovation Centre of Excellence focussed on clusters to address societal challenges, including opportunities of advanced technologies including generative AI, Virtual Reality and the Internet of Things. Will host accelerators, incubators and hubs to drive local economic growth.
- Set within 2040 time horizon

26 West Yorkshire Local Growth Plan

*York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority[27]

- Creative Industries identified as a 'competitive advantage sector' in the region, with innovation and international trade and investment as priority drivers of growth.
- Emphasises location within the One Creative North corridor.
- Aims to support the sector through: increased R&D, innovation and product/service development; increased start-ups, scale ups and northern cluster development; increased supply of talent.
- Outlines Inclusive Growth Ambition – ensuring growth is good for businesses, communities and the environment, leading to healthy and thriving communities.
- Strengths across high-end VFX; digital storytelling; animation and filmmaking; games design; theatre; contemporary art and culture.
- "The region is committed to keeping its world-class creative industries ahead of growing international competition, encouraging the application and adoption of new and emerging immersive technologies like AR, VR, XR in various creative industries including gaming, virtual production, TV and film, visual communication and media."
- Delivery includes: connecting the creative ecosystem; skills support; pipeline of regional creatives accessing R&D capabilities like CoSTAR; focus on freelance workforce; establish a content creation fund.
- Recognises central strength in Digital and Technologies as engineering biology as a key sector for the region.
- Pursuing an AI Growth Zone

27 York and North Yorkshire's Local Growth Plan
> York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority

What begins to emerge consistently across Growth Plans:

- A large majority of Local Growth Plans align their local digital and creative clusters growth ambitions – seeing them as interlinked areas with significant growth potential
- Reformulation of ‘growth’ not simply through lens of economics, but of inclusivity and community-driven growth
- The long-term potential of skills, jobs and innovation at the intersection of the Creative, Digital and Technology Industries
- The critical importance of getting ahead of future skills needs in jobs likely to emerge across these sectors
- Ensuring that innovation is inclusive, enables local opportunity and directly impacts local communities

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