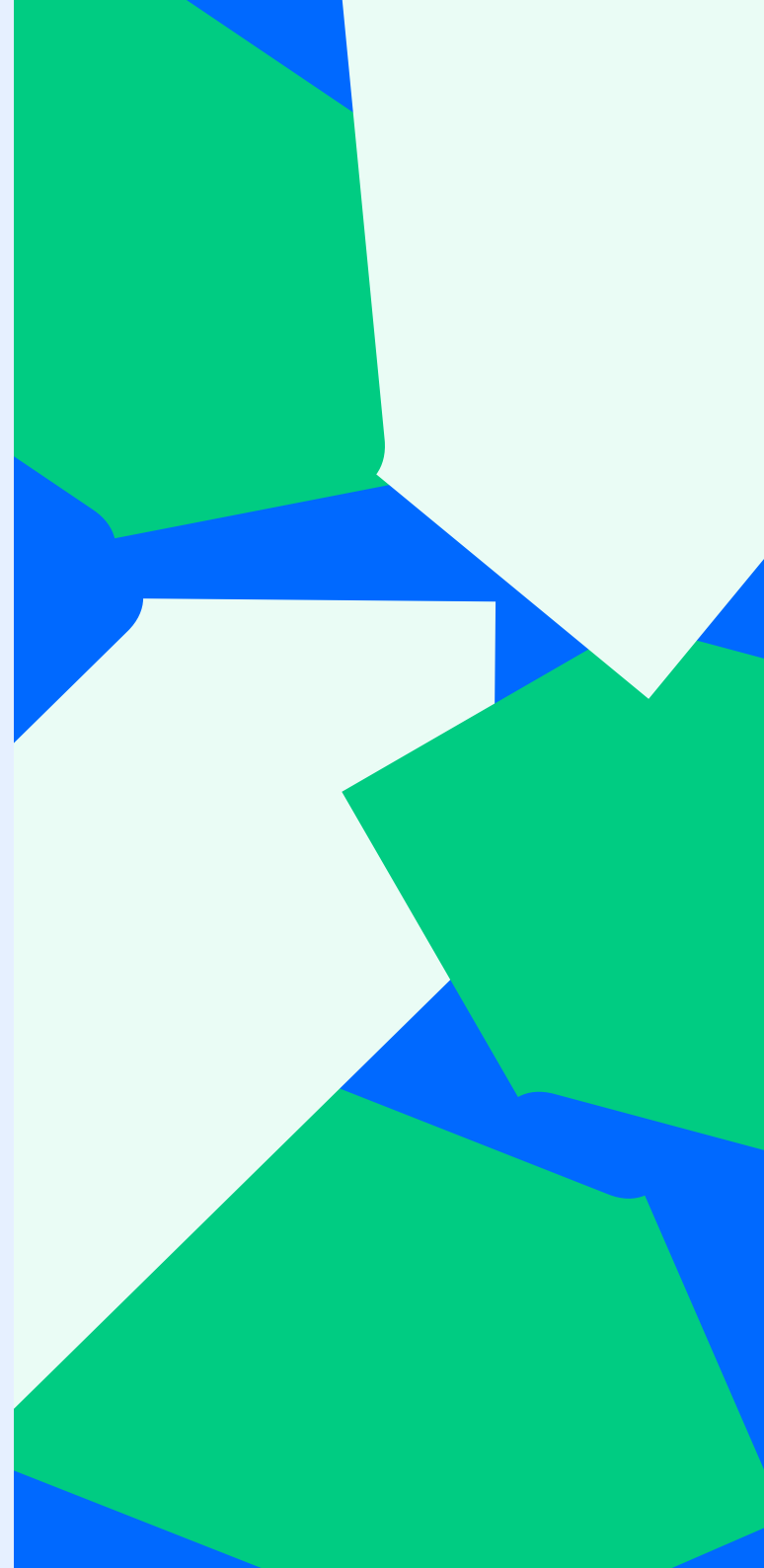**BRISTOL+BATH CREATIVE R+D**

Hopeful Futures for Creative Innovation

Executive Summary

Bristol+Bath Creative R+D was established to support equitable, meaningful, and impactful research and development (R&D) into emerging digital technologies. We were awarded £6.8M as part of a much bigger £80M programme called the Creative Industries Clusters Programme (CICP), which was run by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), to drive innovation and growth in the UK's creative industries by getting universities and creatives to work together.

Executive Summary

The Bristol+Bath Creative R+D programme took place between 2018 and 2023. We were a collaboration led by UWE Bristol, Watershed, Bath Spa University, and the Universities of Bath and Bristol. In these five years, we established an effective R&D ecosystem for creative practitioners in the region. This ecosystem has facilitated create work that has continued beyond our programme for many of our participants, demonstrating the value of supporting thoughtful and responsible innovation in creative technology.

Our R&D projects were designed to be both innovative and inclusive; we worked hard to create safe spaces in which businesses could experiment, take risks, and make work that was rich and fulfilling. Participants were encouraged to develop ideas around the social, political, and cultural impacts of technologies — and not to focus solely on market success. The programme therefore cultivated many alternative ways of working, from practising inclusion to business development.

The work we have done in this programme has created a network of over 330 creative businesses and individuals, providing 140 investments in R&D. This has led to 72 new pieces of IP, generated more than 80 jobs and 18 new businesses. All this has attracted more than £20M of investment to support the community in the future.

Between 2018 and 2023 we spent £3.4M supporting R&D. We engaged with 332 creative companies and freelancers and awarded £1.6 million directly to creatives across more than 140 investments.

This led to...

£20.2 million in further co-investment in our creative ecosystem

18 new businesses

82 new jobs

72 new prototype products or services

34 international collaborations

123 investments in new talent

29 new early-career researchers supported

634 public appearances

320+ blogs, reports, and other outputs

1.5m+ engagements with the public

Ecosystems over clusters

We want to build inclusive and caring environments for creative innovation. Central to doing this is understanding regions as creative ecosystems. This is different from the model of the 'creative cluster', an economic categorisation that measures the success of the creative sector in a given region with easily quantifiable outputs such as wealth generation or the production of exportable goods, but which frequently misses the rich network of creative work that supports those outputs.

Our programme framed Bristol and Bath instead as a creative ecosystem, allowing us to widen the scope of our support to include networks of people and places that propagate cultural and creative work that don't always appear in industrial categorisations – like freelancers – or in sectors that aren't always understood to overlap – like computer games and theatre. This alternative framing allowed us to see that the core motivating factors for creative work were not only economic success, but also supporting shared values around ways of working, and the desire to do good.

Partnership

Creative ecosystems need deep and trusting partnerships between different kinds of organisations to thrive. Universities can play a key role as anchor partners, maintaining a research and talent pipeline, and moderating cash flow and legal support. But this partnership doesn't go far enough. Creative businesses and practitioners require a range of industry partners, at different scales, to truly accommodate their work. Universities also need to work with and learn from cultural organisations and organisations doing work to challenge inequalities, social exclusion, or improving access to job markets for groups marginalised by society. In our programme, we had dedicated team members – Creative Producers – who facilitated this complex net of partnerships, thus fostering new and valuable relationships for our participants.

Inclusion

One of the main aims of this programme was to redress the narrow sectors of population that make up the creative sector. A creative ecosystem approach recognises the need for more and diverse voices to contribute to creative R&D, while recognising the barriers that exist. We set out to address this challenge in the following ways:

> We funded diversity and inclusion experts to support participants in our programme and ensured the practice of inclusivity ran through all strands of the programme.
> The companies that received investment from us were required to demonstrate meaningful inclusion commitments in their project plans.

> We developed an *Inclusion Framework* for creative SMEs, stakeholders, and funders.

- We invested in the online journal Container, which amplifies traditionally underrepresented voices providing critical commentary on the challenges and possibilities for creative technology.
- We attempted to change our own governance structure to improve the variety of lived experience and skillsets present in our decision making processes

Sustainability

As the intensity of the climate emergency grew over the course of the project, we supported a fellowship in sustainability that created a _Framework for Creative Climate Action_ usable by SMEs. It is geared towards creatives wanting to be more environmentally responsible within their practice but are unsure of where to start. We were then awarded £250k by AHRC to create a programme called Grounding Technologies to to understand the needs, strengths and potential of using creative technology in the field of climate action.

Hybridity

We took a human-centred approach to creative technology. We supported our participants in using technology to provoke experiences that foregrounded audience experience and questions of ethics and engagement. Many projects explored ways to embed technology into physical spaces and create joyful, unique sensory experiences for different audience groups. Merging tactile stimuli with invisible technological enhancements resulted in a multitude of exciting shared interactions, and paved the way for new modes of audience participation.

Care and Responsibility

There are many complex dynamics to take into consideration when producing work that is physical, digital, and participatory. Through this programme, we developed methods of working that emphasised care. This meant employing a thoughtful and deliberate approach to understanding the needs of staff members, participants, and users of technology. A tenet of our approach to innovation is being aware of the vulnerabilities that emerge from
the creative process, and respecting them. Our work with Consequential CIC on _Responsible Innovation_ captures this approach.

Support Business Development

Part of our work in this programme was to reimagine how creative businesses might thrive in the future. The convention of seeking investment to then profit from a buy-out is appropriate to a vanishingly tiny proportion of creative businesses. Many of our business partners seek long-term creative and financial stability, which has an embedded relationship with places and communities. We invested in the development of business support that allowed companies to think about what form they wanted their business to take; to experiment with business structure to find a shape that worked for them.

The B+B Team

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