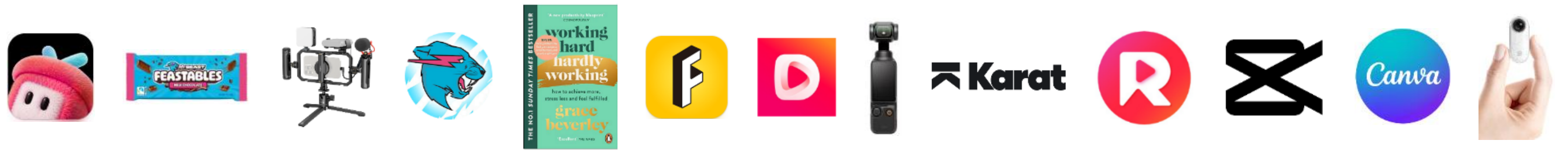
Ding!

Like and Subscribe

Insights and recommendations for supporting the Creator Economy in Reading

8 July 2026

R·E·D·A™
Reading's Economy & Destination Agency



A taste of what’s to come in this report….

“Ask a hundred kids what they want to be when they grow up, and most will say ‘YouTuber’. I’ve been doing this since I was 11 and it is in my DNA.”

Jimmy Donaldson (@MrBeast), YouTube creator

“The ways in which social media content can be monetised are diversifying and, increasingly, being a social media content creator (SMCC) is seen as a viable self-employment route”

HMRC, November 2025

“We launched the YouTube Partner Program in 2007, which laid the foundation of the creator economy as we know it today. At that time, the term ‘creator’ didn’t even exist. Now it’s a dream career for millions of people”

Neal Mohan, YouTube CEO

“over half (56%) of UK creators don't feel they have a voice in shaping government policies that impact their work. Nearly half (43%) of UK creators think their value is not recognised by the broader creative industry”

YouTube’s UK Creator Consultation, July 2025

“I am an entertainer, not a marketer”

David, attendee at REDA workshop, March 2026

“The DCMS-55 is not an American football squad, but a list of all the creative clusters in the UK, where Reading sits alongside London, Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow in the UK’s top 5 “creative capitals”

This report

Impressum

This report came from a simple idea in Reading's Economy and Destination Agency (REDA) in late 2025: Reading has a large number of creators working in the Creator Economy, the Creator Economy is growing, so how can we help it thrive? REDA then commissioned the Reading Tech Cluster (RTC) and its Creative Industries Special Interest Group to engage with creators across Berkshire and the Thames Valley and develop this short report during February and March 2026. The project attracted the input and support of Screen Berkshire.

The authors are identified as Mark Adams and Mojolaoluwa ("Jola") Aderemi-Makinde. AI was not used in the production of this report.

REDA is identified as the publisher. The publication date is 1 June 2026.

In this report, the language "we", "us" and "our" refers to the authors together. A creator is often referred to using their creator identity, usually on Instagram or YouTube, in the format @creatorname.

Thank you to Dominique Unsworth, Director, CEO and Producer at Resource Productions CIC and Co-Founder of Screen Berkshire and to Prof John Gibbs, Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research (Heritage & Creativity) and Professor of Film in the Department of Film, Theatre & Television at the University of Reading for contributions and comments. Thank you to Maria Lloyd, Pete Doyle, Caroline Gratrix, Paul Childs and Ian Germer who formed the original organising team. Special thanks to Paul Childs for coordination and project management, Maria Lloyd at REDA for facilitation and editorial contribution, and Ian Germer and Caroline Gratrix for organisation. Special thanks to Nigel Horton-Baker, Chief Executive REDA and Mark Pearson, Head of Economic Development at REDA, for vision, insight and clarity of direction and to Pete Doyle for inspiration and energy and the idea of naming the report "Like and Subscribe".

Special thanks also to Arts and Humanities Research Council's Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre and their helpful team, Josh Siepel and Zihan Wang for data and insights and gratitude to Yulia Syrovoiskaia, Events and Placemaking Manager at ONE Station Hill for providing an inspiring place to bring Reading creators together.

The cover quote from Jimmy Donaldson, aka YouTuber @MrBeast, is as quoted in Harvard Business Review in 2022[1].

Cover images show new products and services to power the Creator Economy – many of them may be new to UK readers! (from left to right): 1 Logo for the micro-drama app PineDrama from TikTok owner ByteDance. 2 "all in one" video kit from SmallRig, £194. 3 chocolate bar and 4 logo from influencer @MrBeast. 5 book cover from creator Grace Beverley. 6 FlickReels logo (short drama service), 7 DramaBox logo. 8 the DJI Osmo 3 vlogging camera. 9 the logo of Karat Financial, a banking services for creators. 10 logo of ReelShort, another micro drama app. 11 the logo of CapCut – the de facto video editing app for mobiles. 12 the logo of Canva, the go-to graphics generator for creators and 13 the Insta360 GO neck-mounted creators camera.

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Definitions

Let's start with a very few key definitions, and an open acknowledgement: the sector is still new and the terms are not universally agreed, there is no "definitive" source and whatever definitions we have, they have changed in the last year and will continue to evolve.

The best starting point for definitions in the UK is HMRC's report in late 2025[2], written with the aim of identifying how to tax social media content creators. It gave us:

SMCC	A "Social Media Content Creator" is a person who has regularly posted original content on social media for an audience beyond their personal network and to have earned money or non-monetary benefits from doing so in the last 12 months".
Types of SMCC:	an SMCC with less than 10k followers is a Nano Content Creator, with 10k-100k followers a Micro Content Creator, with 100k – 1m followers a Macro Content Creator and a Mega or "Celebrity" Creator with more than 1m followers[3]

Here are some other important definitions[4]:

Creators[5]	people who create content to grow audience and revenue using social media platforms – these people may trade as freelancers and grow to become production and general trading companies. Also called "Influencers" and "Key Opinion Leaders" (KOLs) (our definition).
Creator Economy	(with capital letters) the sum of the financial transactions between creators and their audiences, and the freelancers, companies, products and services and brands which support them (our definition).
Creative Industries	(with capital letters) industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill, and talent with potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property – this includes advertising and marketing, architecture, crafts, design and designer fashion, film, TV, video, radio, photography, IT, software and computer services, video games, publishing, museums, galleries and libraries, music, performing and visual arts (formal definition from the Government's Department of Culture, Media and Sport, or DCMS, not our definition).
creative economy	(without capital letters) a generic term for all creative economic activity combining both Creative Industries and Creator Economy.
Artists[6]	a person who creates art, as defined by them (our definition)

Chapter summary

The Creator Economy is young and there are missing and conflicting definitions. Our proposed definitions above are good for this report, where a creator is a "person who creates content to grow audience and revenue using social media platforms".

Background and executive summary

“Like and Subscribe” is the language of the Creator Economy – a term we use to describe a group of people who make money by creating content on social media, otherwise known as “creators” or “influencers”. The phrase seems to capture the essence of the social media creator – a person who captures audience.

This report is about boosting the UK’s creative economy. It was inspired by a simple insight from the REDA team: “the social media creators in Reading seem to be part of a massive new wave of creative energy – so how do we best support them?”.

This in itself came from an evaluation report of REDA’s role in funding the film ‘Just A Mum’[7] (Director, Maria Trevis) in 2025, a psychological horror about post-partum psychosis with a social purpose to raise awareness of, and advocate for, better support for women’s mental health around childbirth.

One of the biggest lessons in the report was the realisation that filmmakers and the Creative Industries could draw on lessons from that part of the Creative Industries built around social media, the part called “the Creator Economy”.

It was felt that the “Creator Economy” was distinct from “Creative Industries” and that REDA should bring the two worlds together to help both of them grow.

“It feels like there is more promotion of short films in Reading than anything to do with YouTube, TikTok or Patreon. I’ve never been to, or seen, a YouTube Festival, a Patreon Party, an eBay Masterclass or a TikTok Creator Meetup or an Influencer School promoted in Reading”, the evaluation report said. “The creator economy people are out there in significant numbers in Reading, I can assure you, but they are not supported. It feels like anything they do is outside the system, independent, self-starting, and almost antithetical to education, school, apprenticeships and a real job. They feel like loners and even outcasts” it said.

It continued, “The Creative Industries ecosystem around grants and fundraising is well established - there is tons of precedent, teachers, advisers, coaches, mentors and trainers and courses and training and pathways. The Creator Economy ecosystem of monetisation has none of this.”

At the same time as the evaluation report of Maria’s film was in development, there was a flurry of activity in 2025: a seminal report, “The Creator Consultation”[8], the “Creative industries employer’ perspective on skills initiatives: 2025” report from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre at Newcastle University Business School and the formation of the “Digital Creators All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)”[9] in late October 2025, with the support of the Digital Content Association (formed in 2023), and the Influencer Marketing Trade Body (IMTB, 2021).

Things were happening – creators were being recognised. REDA commissioned the Reading Tech Cluster’s Creative Industries Special Interest Group to collect views from around the Reading-Berkshire-Thames Valley region within the creative and tech industries, including special input from Screen Berkshire, with a view to developing recommendations to answer that question: “how do we best support our creators”?

In this report, we've taken quite a specific angle on what the creative economy actually is, and for us, it means increasing economic activity, increasing financial transactions, increasing revenues and increasing profits. In other words, the term "economy" is rooted in understanding the creation and flow of money.

Our Government acknowledges "the sector has not been given the recognition it deserves"[10] and that there is a need to "tackle misperceptions of the sector's value".

We believe that a new thing, called the "Creator Economy" is one thing that needs to be embraced into the heart of the UK's Creative Industries. It brings with it, a few specific characteristics, such as a passion among its creators for making money, reaching massive audiences, creating content to do just that, voraciously using new technologies and deeply embracing social media.

For some people who power the Creative Industries in the UK, the language of the Creator Economy is new and the passions for monetisation and new technologies among creators are seen as threats to art, to culture and creativity and to the creative economy as a whole.

And so, we have two worlds within the UK's creative economy: one very established and successful world, "the Creative Industries", and one new upstart world, "the Creator Economy". (We have tried to be explicit and consistent in the use of these words in this report: Creative Industries is the "established" one and Creator Economy is the emerging new one).

This report argues that both worlds should come together, and exploit the significant commercial opportunities which will come from drawing the best from each.

Drawn from consultation with 50 individuals and organisations from both worlds across Reading, Berkshire and the Thames Valley, we propose five recommendations specific to our area to grow one of the crown jewels in the UK's economy (and soon, one of the crown jewels in Reading's economy): the Creator Economy.

Mark Adams and Mojolaoluwa Aderemi-Makinde
1 June 2026

The UK Government's goals for the Creative Industries

Let's start at the top level of the UK Government and ask how they support creators in Reading, Berkshire and the Thames Valley.

The key thing to recognise is that social media creators fall within a sector which the UK Government calls "the Creative Industries". It generates £124 bn each year, makes up about 5.2% of the UK economy and employs 2.4 million people. It is one of eight sectors which the UK Government prioritises for economic growth and the plan for this sector, published in June 2025, is called the Creative Industries Sector Plan.[11]

The Creative Industries includes film, TV, music, performing arts, visual arts, video games, advertising and marketing, design, photography, architecture, software, publishing, crafts, audio and fashion, museums, heritage and cultural infrastructure, supported by the national development agency for creativity[12] and culture[13] (Arts Council England), the British Film Institute[14], the BBC and others. Within this, there are four "frontier industries" with "particularly high growth potential": film and TV; video games; music, performing and visual arts; and advertising and marketing. And technology sits within the Creative Industries as "createch" which includes robotics, engineering biology, XR, 3D printing, AI and gaming technologies.

> *The Government's goal is for the UK to be "a global creative superpower" and a "number one destination worldwide for investment in creativity and innovation" and "a global leader in the emerging 'createch' sector".*

There are many more detailed goals in the Creative Industries Sector Plan, such as:

- Increase business investment by the Creative Industries from £17 billion to £31 billion.
- Drive growth across the economy
- Become recognised as the best place in the world to make and invest in film and TV, video games, music, performing and visual arts, and advertising and marketing.
- Increase public and private levels of Research & Development (R&D) investment in the Creative Industries
- Make the UK the best place to start and grow a createch business
- Support the creation and value of creative IP
- Secure growth finance for creative start-ups and scale-ups

And looking to the future, the plan contains a commitment to "capitalise on the opportunities from digital platforms for musicians, performers and artists to reach new audiences". This is "Creator Economy thinking", but it is not referred to as the exciting opportunity we believe it to be in the Creative Industries Sector Plan.

Chapter summary

The Creative Industries get serious support from our Government. They are a priority. So anything we can do in Reading and our region to support the Creative Industries is in line with national priorities. **Let's do it.**

Opportunities for growth within the Creative Industries

Let's draw a picture of what economic growth in the Creative Industries, driven by the Creator Economy, could look like. Here are three (of many) graphic examples of serious commercial growth opportunities:

- PineDrama is a new app from the makers of TikTok and with ReelShort, DramaBox and Vigloo in Korea, are examples of microdrama apps. Variety magazine says microdramas will be a $26 bn global industry by 2030.[15] In 2024, revenues from microdramas in China surpassed China's domestic film box office. From zero to surpassing domestic box office in around eight years is explosive growth.
- 14-year old Jimmy Donaldson started a YouTube channel in 2012 and, aged 24, his channel (@MrBeast) recorded $60m in revenues and he overtook 33 year-old Felix Kjellberg (@PewDiePie) as YouTube's most popular creator with 112m subscribers[16] (now standing at 494m subscribers at the time of writing). His Beast Industries generated $250m in revenues in 2024[17], and reportedly valued at $5bn, now incorporating a range of businesses including financial services and all set for a stock market listing this year. @MrBeast's approach to film production values is the antithesis of the established film industry: "prioritizing viewer retention and engagement over traditional production values."[18]
- Grace Beverley set up her @GraceFitUK accounts on Instagram and YouTube in 2015/2016 and followed up with a sportswear and fashion brand in 2019 which generated over £6m revenues in its first year.

These are awesome successes. (There is awesome failure in this industry too and we are mindful of these: the Quibi short-form video app launched with almost $2bn in funding but failed to gain traction and closed within six months and by December 2025, it was commonly held that vertical drama had peaked).

Could we stimulate this kind of enterprise, venturing, experimentation and commercial growth in Reading?

Well, the UK Government is doubling down its support for growth in four of the Creative Industries' "frontier industries" and in 12 city regions and clusters. The four frontier industries are: [1] Film and TV, [2] Video games – the Government recognises that "mobile and user-generated content producers" (they probably mean Twitch streamers) are "new growth drivers", [3] music, performing and visual arts, and [4] Advertising and marketing. The 12 city regions and clusters are Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, the North East, Belfast / Londonderry, West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, West Midlands, Greater London, Cardiff and West of England. It seems to be "levelling up" other cities in a big way while we, Reading, already successful, are not the focus.

Chapter summary

There are clearly massive new global industries ("micro dramas" being just one example) opening up with commercial opportunities for all manner of creators and creative technologies. **We need to embrace developments from the US, Japan and Korea and China and engage with them to our own advantage.**

Market overview of the UK Creator Economy

"The Creator Economy is just getting started" said YouTube's CEO in 2025. And that explains how come there is so little data right now to exactly describe and size the Creator Economy. It is early days.

Let's start with YouTube's 2024 report on its impact in the UK[19] and the Creator Consultation results launched in July 2025, which tells us that YouTube's creative ecosystem:

- supported 45,000 full time equivalent jobs in the UK
- contributed over £2.2bn to UK GDP in 2024.

and

- Adobe says there are 16.6m people in the UK expected to contribute to the Creator Economy by 2027[20]
- The UK Government's Creative Industries Sector Plan says "Createch businesses have the same growth potential as other technology firms and are expected to generate £18 billion in gross value added (GVA) and 160,000 jobs over the next decade.
- Createch businesses are found in every creative sub-sector, with an estimated 13,800 creative businesses leveraging technologies including robotics, engineering biology, and XR in the UK.
- There are 5,987 high-growth potential firms (HGPFs) operating across the creative sector. That's nearly 10% of the overall UK population of HGPFs, compared with around 5% in the Life Sciences sector and 2% in Advanced Manufacturing[21].

Open to anyone

The Creator Economy is open to anyone. That is a critical factor. 93% of businesses in the Creative Industries are microbusinesses and 28% of employment is self-employment[22], so we could assume that the Creator Economy comprises an even higher percentage of microbusinesses and self-employed – open to anyone.

The Creative Industries has a problem with cultural and income diversity and is working hard to correct the imbalance. For example, in film, TV, video, radio and photography, just 8.4% of people identify as being from a working class background.[23] 90% of people working across arts, culture and heritage are white (higher than the general workforce figure) and 60% of arts, culture and heritage workers grew up in a household where the main income earner was in a managerial or professional role (higher than the general workforce figure).

Chapter summary

Because there are zero cost barriers to entry, with zero barriers to connecting to global audiences in the Creator Economy, it is likely that the Creator Economy (distinct from the Creative Industries) will play a substantial role in correcting diversity and inequality imbalances and improving cultural and income diversity. **So the Creator Economy is potentially not just about money after all, but also a powerful tool for social good.**

Examples from USA and China

It's helpful for us to take a step back from Friar Street and Broad Street in Reading and have a look-see into the very heart of the regions and the tech companies powering the Creator Economy around the world and see what's coming up for us: from Amphitheatre Parkway and Meta Way in California, USA to Haitian Second Road in Shenzhen, and Zhichun Road in Beijing, China, the homes of YouTube, Instagram, WeChat and TikTok respectively.

The Creator Economies

You may recall the UK Creative Industries as worth some £124bn to the UK economy. The global Creator Economy (defined along the same lines[24] as our definitions) might be around $150bn-$200bn at this point in time, with massive annual growth around 25%. Of this, the US comprises around $50bn and China comprises $17bn. They are ahead of us (the Chinese government has consistently placed the digital economy in the heart of its five-yearly plans with creators recognised as specific actors and economies).

The software tech

There is new tech coming all the time. TikTok's parent company owns CapCut, the definitive editing tool on mobile and desktop for social media content, and has released Dreamina to create 15-second cinematic clips from images and text prompts. Lemon8 is a platform providing long-form visual storytelling. Meta has been experimenting (and spending massively) on virtual worlds (VR), 3D immersive experiences along the same lines as Tencent's "mini-worlds". These are all opportunities for us in the UK now.

The hardware tech

The Creator Economy has given opportunities for Nikon, Canon and Sony to adapt their camera technology for the lone creator, and while GoPro briefly shone very brightly, creating its own huge family of daring creators, DJI and Insta (China) have grown off the back of the Creator Economy use case and all but taken over from GoPro. Podcasting has given Røde (Australia, launched 1990), Shure (US, 1925) and Neewer (China, founded 2011) the chance to become household names.

New content formats

Mini-dramas, vertical soap operas or vertical-dramas are worth looking at. People are actually watching them. With great quality cameras but amateur acting and very short scenes, these artforms have been stunningly popular. ReelShort from CMS is one platform for vertical dramas, launched in 2022 reported by some sources to have achieved $700m in revenues in 2025. DramaBox, from Singapore, similarly. We can also look at Karat Financial, the fintech app created for creators to help them manage their money. **Why could we not create apps like these in Reading?**

Chapter summary

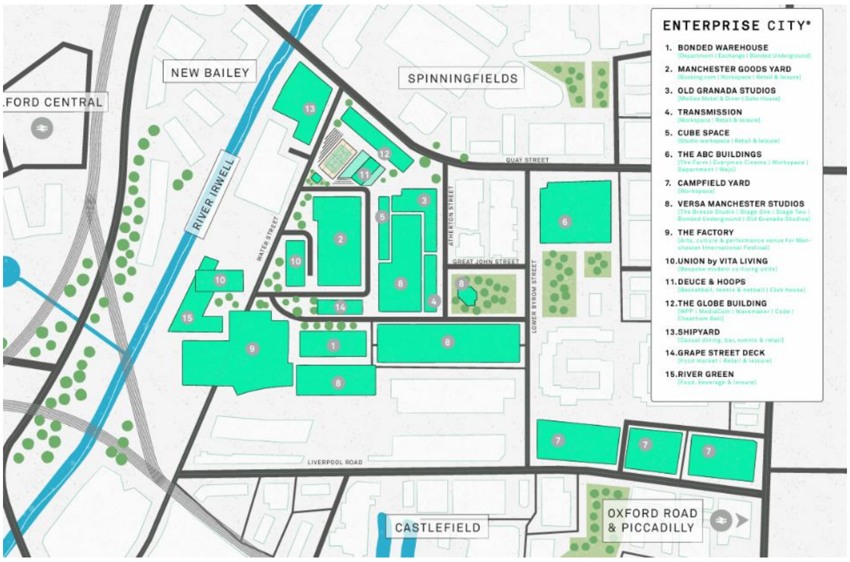
We need to take inspiration from around the world. New tech and new formats are emerging daily. (Ask any creator about the challenges of simply keeping up).

Examples from UK regions

What's going on around the UK which we should know about?

Let's look at the top cities in the DCMS-55 creative clusters. Manchester first: "No other city in Europe has invested as much in its media and digital scene as Manchester, with £3.5bn spent creating the second largest hub for creative industries on the continent" says Manchester's Enterprise City[25] website.

A £3.5bn investment in a "creative industries hub" is material. While reports on the economic impact were hotly debated back in 2017, the investment demonstrates a vision and commitment to this growing sector.



[26]Enterprise City is a "media, tech and creative cluster" and they tell us they are "designed to connect people and businesses, encourage collaboration and create success through expert place-making". It also claims to be a complete neighbourhood, a place to live, work and socialise, with everything needed for work, rest and play. It comprises at least 12 separate buildings, across the St John's area of Manchester.

Manchester creators can enjoy "Immersive Creator Huddles[27]", creator incubators, creator networks, "CreaTech Networks[28]", the "Creator Economy Live[29]" event and many more activities and enjoy the commercialisation from specialist creator agencies such as Bee Influence[30], Hoopla[31] and the creator-first performance agency, Fayrli[32].

Glasgow and Leeds are also "Creative capitals" in the DCMS-55 but they do not seem as lucky, hot and blessed as Manchester. And London? Well, obviously, London is a world epicentre for the Creative Industries and Shoreditch and Hoxton make it look like the Creator Economy is flourishing in London too – but let's be honest, London is Reading's back yard. There's no reason why we can't plug in and really differentiate ourselves so that we are different, complementary and interesting for the London creators to come out and see what we're doing here in the Valley (the Thames Valley).

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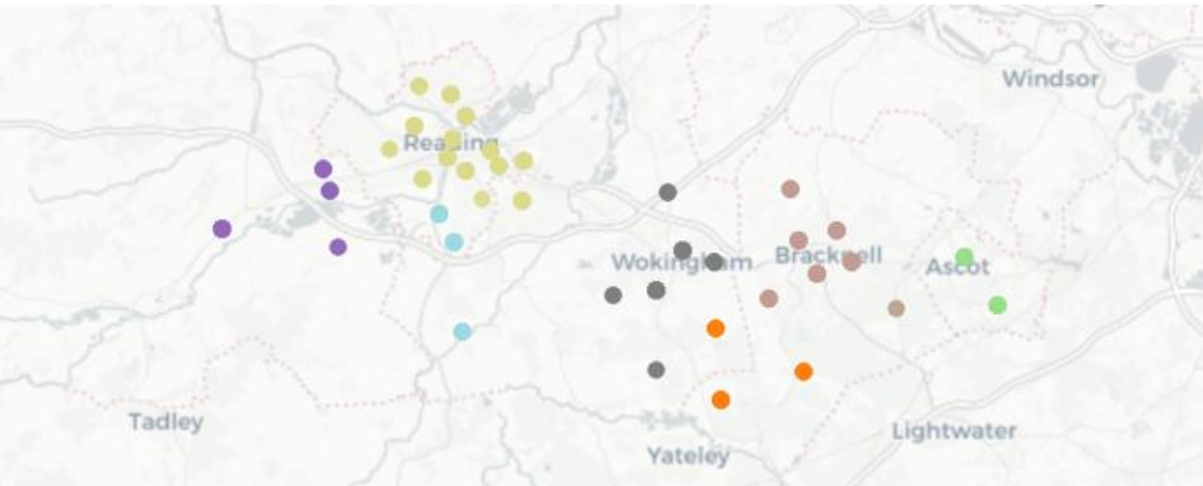
If we could walk any distance down the path to "The Manchester Model", we're doing the right thing: they've identified the priorities and it's happening now. **Let's copy and add our distinctive Reading-twist.**

Overview of the Reading Creator Economy

The "Geographies of Creativity" report[33] published by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre in 2023 gives us the UK-wide view of the locations where the Creative Industries are thriving and gives us the language and numbers around clusters, superclusters, microclusters, corridors, and even incipient clusters, creative districts and creative conurbations, down to some scary detail.

- The DCMS-55 is the list of the 55 areas with the highest density of creative businesses[34] in the UK.
- Within the DCMS-55 Reading is one of the UK's five "Creative Capitals" (alongside London, Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow)
- Within the town, there are three microclusters in Caversham, and a further 9 near the town centre, Coley Park and East Reading.
- The immediate surrounding areas (Calcot, Theale and Sheffield Bottom to the west and Ascot to the east) are also home to creative micro clusters.
- Slough and Heathrow was the second most successful creative area in the UK in terms of the number of jobs created, with Guildford and Aldershot to the south and east of us as the place in the UK where the third largest number of new jobs were created.
- Relevant figures for the South East show that labour productivity in these sectors and the economic growth rate are high.



From PEC, the Reading Microclusters: streets, neighbourhoods, villages or towns with at least 50 creative organisations

Chapter summary

We need to understand the detail and implications of these microclusters. We will find that the individual people in each one probably know of each other, and they know their own influencers. **Let's initiate a "microcluster-up" approach to supporting our Creator Economy.**

What triggers growth

The conventional drivers of economic growth are well understood: underlying economic growth, access to finance, access to talent, innovation, exports. As far as Creative Industries goes, we do well on most of these, and from Berkshire particularly, our exports do well, but the drivers also include "cultural infrastructure" such as museums, galleries, libraries, archives and heritage sites. We can secure money to invest in all of these, of course, but this report's focus is not on the big sweeping investments, but more tactical and practical steps.

The drivers of creative growth also includes music and performance venues, a region's dance schools and acting schools and the events that celebrate creative achievement: competitions, awards, performance at local festivals, talent competitions.

In practice, in Reading, we must recognise the human emotions of pride, envy, glamour, excitement, inspiration, encouragement, ambition and drive, poverty and wealth as drivers of growth too. These are far harder to quantify but they deserve attention. We have inspiration from the world-leading Reading Festival, we have active theatres with adventurous and progressive productions, we have the Purple Turtle music and town venue inextricably etched in the hearts and minds of all who live in Reading as places where inspiring stuff happens. Our bands such as The Amazons and Slowdive, are doing us proud and inspiring the scene, from their mounting Spotify streams to creating global music genres.

Our football culture is massive and our University (with its Community Fair as a prime example) has made itself an absolute treasure within the Reading community. We have the glamour, intrigue and buzz of Hollywood-level film productions being shot in Shinfield with young people throughout our schools eagerly awaiting the latest blockbuster shot in Reading and stabbing wild guesses at what may be being shot there right now and if Kate Winslet and Ricky Gervais might soon be shooting in their home towns.

These things are really important and we must recognise that they are driven so often more by those energetic personalities who want to do something for the town as much as by the large property developers and investors (the Pride of Reading awards reminds us of this).

Above all, we think, Reading has a unique strength in the cultural diversity of its communities and these could also play a big role in stimulating the creator spirit. There is no doubt that communities celebrating their heritage and individuality is a powerful spur for all creatives in the region. Having said this, there are some specific observations with regards to drivers of the Creator Economy (and not just the wider Creative Industries) in Reading:

- At this stage in our development, a small number of (maybe 50) pioneering individual creators should be identified and supported, recognised and celebrated as drivers.
- We need to identify one or two dramatic breakthroughs – such as our creators winning Cannes Lions awards – and work towards achieving them.
- Businesses are adopting "Creator Economy" marketing (influencer marketing) apace – we must do what we can to make these services available to our local businesses.

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What we can influence in Reading today, is our local behaviours: our collaborations, our sharing, our successes, celebrating our heroes and genuinely letting the huge pride that our existing creators have in the town have full rein.

What are the blockers to growth

The conventional blockers to economic growth of the Creator Economy are also well understood: low underlying GDP growth, low access to finance, low access to talent, low innovation and low exports, all stifle growth.

But in general terms, it seems the Creator Economy has defied many of these blockers: growth has been strong, there is definitely talent and innovation.

There are many other day-to-day blockers too which slow things down, hold up progress, and stall growth: such as confusion about the threats from AI, and the need for creators to use AI ethically, threats to privacy from filming, recording and filming rights being unclear, attribution of credit on small-team productions, protecting IP, cost of coffees and workspaces, gaming the algorithm, job insecurity, loneliness and isolation, intense pressure to perform which requires considered time out and care for wellbeing, ethical challenges, the pursuit of clicks over substance, the complexity of marketing in a digital world, market saturation and the need to “break through” in a very crowded market. And there is the growing “darker side” of the Creator Economy – its use by extremists, its use to sell bad or substandard products, the opportunities for fraud and a frequent disregard for ethics.

Misuse of human avatars which steal and exploit the identities of natural persons without their consent, is another example of a new behaviour which can also block growth of the Creator Economy.

Don’t ignore the niche creator

We need to look specifically at “talent” and how and where the creator talent lives and thrives as “the right talent” could be a blocker too. Our research showed us two distinct types of individual creator:

- The “full package” creator: a @MrBeast-type of person who has the experience and access to cover all the bases in being a high-growth, money-making creator, from marketing to quality production, good equipment, and friends to help ideate, book venues and edit so that commercially-appealing content with “high virality” can be produced.
- The “niche” creator: unlike @MrBeast, a person who brings deep passion, conviction and belief in their subject rather than just the virality of their work, limited resources and a small network, who produces authentic content which engages, perhaps unconfident and underestimating their own abilities, potentially less resilient and missing the aggressive commercialism and virality of the “full package” @MrBeast-type creator.

Both of these types need support and encouragement. It’s easy to spot the full package creator – and they may confidently ask directly for the support and encouragement they need. But the niche creator, more withdrawn, won’t be as clear or as strident in clarifying their own needs and wants.

Even top creators start as niche creators even if for a day, and niche creators often outperform celebrity influencers on measures of engagement, trust, and conversion. It seems that TikTok campaigns leveraging micro-influencers can average about 8.2% engagement, outperforming the 5.3% for campaigns with macro-influencers[35] and micro- and nano-influencers last year were the dominant tier of influencer in the UK with 81% of brands using them[36]. It is easy to overlook the niche creator and we must not allow this to happen, ensuring we have spaces and meetups, programmes and activities with which they can fully engage on their own terms and which are clearly designed to boost and support them.

Chapter summary

Dismissing niche creators, not supporting them, would be a blocker to our growth and we must be mindful to see this doesn't happen. We need an ultra-inclusive and open, accepting, non-judgmental culture (which Reading has already gone some way to build). One person with a mobile phone can generate economic growth. The creators we engaged with for this report were very clear on the top blockers they saw: space and community meetups. **The sooner we can unblock our creative spaces, and create occasions for creators to co-work and meetup, the better.**

What do local creators look like

We have "full package" creators such as @themummystylist from Slough – she runs a blog, posts around our area, uses TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, Flickr and YouTube, promotes products on her blog to earn money through affiliate marketing, and delivers a regular newsletter. (We won't tell you how many followers she has – it doesn't matter![37])

We have niche creators such as @ritchflames1 sharing updates on how he's helping his friends in Reading, particularly dealing with homelessness. We have creators who simply promote the best of what they see around – usually food and drink venues.

In addition, we recognise the businesses and organisations who do a good job in engaging individual creators, either as employees or as independent paid influencers, to create content for them: the Oracle shopping centre, the University and more.

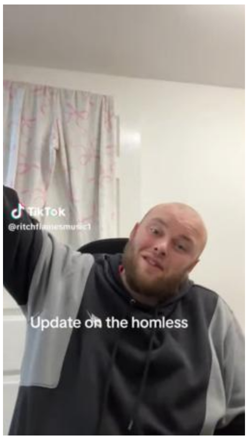
@oraclereading

@readingfreshers

@spudkingz.reading

@eatdrinkwithdean

@biangabites



@ritchflames1

@lloyd.hv

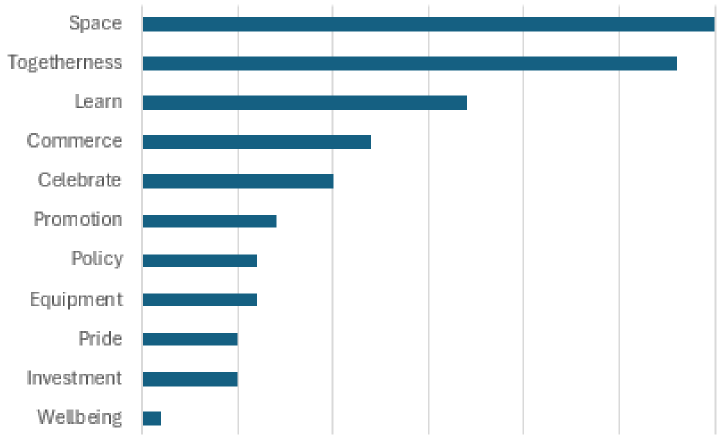
@themummystylist

Chapter summary

A good share of our creators are motivated and committed examples of people who believe in the power of social media to reach out to build audiences and in so doing, achieve a goal other than money: "giving back", expressing love for their community, wanting others to be successful. That spirit is at the heart of a good Creator Economy as they also tend to be generous in helping and supporting others on the same journeys they have been on.

What do local creators say they want

We ran two workshops on 19 March 2026 for creators and others in the Creative Industries to understand what creators themselves needed by way of support. Of 50 participants, 27 contributed through a combination of interviews, group workshops and an online survey, ending with list of 127 specific needs or requirements, which grouped into 11 main categories.



Our findings were dominated by the sentiment that there is a very strong pride in our place and creators want to work together more to share, learn, collaborate and celebrate Reading.[38] The overwhelming priority need was for spaces (co-working spaces, studios, galleries etc) in which to do things. This is strongly coupled with a need for working together, distinct from learning and mentoring, but simple IRL (in real-life) community opportunities to co-work, ideate and share, which we called “Togetherness” as the sentiments of “humanity” and “real life” were used a lot. Formal and informal learning, mentoring and open-mic formats was the next important category.

It’s worth noting that the categories which mentioned money were led by a need for creating money (“commerce”) from doing deals with brands and businesses, supporting brands and businesses and developing and providing valuable services. In contrast, the importance of money from grants and benefactors (“investment”) was relatively modest, indicating a good commercial spirit and the appetite for enterprise which characterises the Creator Economy.

There is a strong desire for promotion, linked to pride and linked to celebrating. This means creating visibility for the existence of the creators with awards, fundays, showcases and other acts of promotion and celebration.

There was some desire for policy changes, such as arts programmes, a need to address ethics, travel and transport.

A need for access to equipment, an equipment library, an equipment exchange, and low-cost rentals was also expressed.

The importance of wellbeing as part of the creator’s life was also addressed with requests for great links with nature.

Chapter summary

It turns out that our creators are very community minded, value each other’s company and experiences and would benefit from more communal time together in a variety of spaces which are conducive to collaboration and production.

Recommendations to support the Creator Economy in Reading

Recommendations should be made in the context of existing plans and visions, and the official Reading Economic Development Framework and the Reading 2050 Vision[39] which targets us to be (more) internationally recognised and (more) economically successful where (among other things) technology and innovation have combined to create a dynamic, smart and sustainable city with a high quality of life and equal opportunities for all. Our future plans are also clear that more engagement with businesses, something the creators do naturally, is a critical part of our economic growth story. Embracing the Creator Economy demonstrates comfort with new technology and is definitely dynamic and smart, and supports equal opportunities. And our recommendations must be made in the context of what money and resources are available to invest, and what outcomes can be achieved from the investment. Inspired by the natural enterprise within the Creator Economy using the Manchester Model and providing support through an Arms-Length Management Organisation requires serious consideration.

1. **Identity**. First and foremost, an initiative to support the Creator Economy in Reading needs a stated purpose, a name and a visual identity, a place online (probably WhatsApp, Instagram and TikTok as a minimum) and a place offline (a venue such as Plus X Innovation in Slough, Reading Gaol or ideally, a creator hub at Shadowbox Studios Shinfield), and a leader or facilitator. The name and the identity would be created by the community, the online places have negligible, if any, cost. A venue could be part of an existing food and beverage outlet, but the costs need to be modest. The leader costs money – with the best will in the world, the community can self-manage to a degree, but at least 1 x FTE, needs to be able to focus on event creation and community-building.

2. **Manifesto**. Creators need to be able to come together to create a manifesto to define their values and intent so that their approach to honesty, truth, ethics, care and kindness for others and respect for the law is open and transparent and clear for all to see.

3. **Recognition and Promotion**. The creators in Reading need to be publicly recognised and celebrated and their purpose shared to draw in other creators who may benefit, and to draw in the businesses and brands which are also required. An event or a small series of events powered by the creators' own networks, appearance at business networking events such as Caversham Traders, REDA Business Network and the BIDs, are all obvious places to welcome creators.

4. **Commercial Engagement**. Local businesses need to be engaged in the project – they will benefit from services and visibility. This requires one-to-one engagement from the leader/facilitator. There is no reason why every retail and food and beverage outlet in the town can not provide some support to the project – at the very least giving clear permission to creators to film, create and hangout in their premises. A participation decal or a community badge in shop windows and reception lobbies supporting the scheme would be a valuable signal to creators that we are "open for business".

5. **Legal documents and a financial plan**. This will depress creator freedom and growth, but to accelerate business deals (that is, independently generated revenue) some legal documents will need to be prepared: such as a clear statement of legal rights (and restrictions), notices to be given, permissions and consents required to support creators filming in public places. And a financial plan.
6. **Reading Creator Agency**. The region would not benefit from another entity to compete for funding but as a natural evolution of the above points, it makes sense to consider supporting the creation of a non-funded, commercial legal entity and the operation of all the above activities put on to a strictly commercial footing as a completely commercial, for-profit organisation, which might even sell to a larger group (there is a strong appetite for acquiring influencer marketing agencies) if it were to reach any scale. This would make it very clear that commercial income, not public money or grants, is valued by the agency alongside "creating virality" and "creating art" as a core principle for the agency. "Reading Creators plc" is an ambitious (and not an unrealistic) dream to nurture.
7. **Short Term Actions**. We also propose some actions which can have a short-term impact:
    - A competition and awards programme for local creators to raise standards and profile and celebrate success
    - An Equipment Lending Library to provide a source of expensive technical equipment which may be used infrequently
    - Regular Presentation Days where creators can present their work – maybe at the Biscuit Factory screen rooms
    - Consider early meetings in Whitley where there are already social impact activities which could illustrate the openness and accessibility of the Creator Economy to all
    - Invite a known local creator, such as Emma Matthews, an inspiring creator working for REDA and at @emma.robin_x on Instagram, to engage and contribute to the shaping the local Creator Economy initiatives
    - Annual Meetup or Conference to draw creators from the local areas together for a day to review health of the ecosystem and ways to develop and improve
    - The REDA website has already established itself as a source of information for creators and its language on the topics of Creative Industries and Creator Economy could be expanded to ensure consistency and celebrate the Local Creator Directory, the Creator Economy Events and the Made in Reading brand used by creators

Chapter summary

There is a real opportunity that Reading creators could build themselves a commercially viable and sustainable model where commercially-generated revenue is able to deliver on all the asks and needs expressed by our creators. A "starting fund" from local sources (grants and loans) matched with private investment may provide the perfect path to delivering a self-funded and significant community benefit.

References

1 "MrBeast: Building a YouTube Empire" by: Anita Elberse and Oliver Band https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=63941

2 "Research to understand Social Media Content Creators", published by HMRC 6 November 2025 at https://tinyurl.com/msfsm765

3 This term is not used by HMRC but defined by the Influencer Marketing platform Kolsquare https://tinyurl.com/atp78muh

4 We never set out to make our own definitions, but companies like YouTube and Adobe define the term far too broadly e.g. YouTube in its Creator Consultation document explicitly defines creators as "individuals creating content across all platforms" which clearly broadens it beyond YouTube but which misses the key ingredient of the driver of content being audience engagement and monetisation.

5 Our definition varies significantly from that used by Adobe and so it's harder to compare like-for-like numbers sometimes. Adobe says creators are "Adults (18+), internet-connected, who have done at least one of the following creative activities in the past 12 months: Photo Editing, Video Editing, Graphic Design, Layout Design, Web/App Design, or 3D Design". In other words, not necessarily people who are producing and monetising content on social media. A very important difference as Adobe sees "16.6m people in the UK expected to contribute to the creator economy in 2027" which is a materially different measure to ours.

6 The definition of "artist" arose during our research for this report, as there was a strong sense from artists that the term "artist" needs to retain its own identity between "Creative Industries" and the "Creator Economy" as a distinct group of people.

7 Just A Mum film on IMDB - https://www.imdb.com/title/tt39631291/fullcredits/?ref_=tt_cst_sm

8 "Creator Consultation" survey and report, by YouTube, https://services.google.com/fh/files/blogs/creatorconsultationreport.pdf

9 The Digital Creators All-Party Parliamentary Group at https://www.parallelparliament.co.uk/APPG/digital-creators. At launch time, we heard some really exciting language: "This new cross-party forum will ….tear down the barriers that stifle talent, championing creators as pioneers of our time, and making sure Britain leads the world as the ultimate home of creativity, innovation and ambition," from Chair, Feryal Clark. Officer Chris Curtis added: "We need to treat creators as cultural institutions in their own right. Creators reach audiences much bigger than many legacy outlets. They set trends, they spark debates, and they have incredible talents. Public funding and government policy should reflect that". Creators should benefit from the same access to financial support as traditional cultural institutions, argued Mr Curtis: "If the museum can get public support for an exhibition, why shouldn't a creator-led documentary series of local heritage be eligible for similar backing, especially if it reaches 10 times the audience?" The second goal for the APPG outlined by Mr Curtis is to help realise a greater investment in creative competences and "build up skills from the school to the studio". Young creators should be "learning how to create responsibly and sustainably, editing, storytelling, lighting, sound, audience development, digital rights and basic business skills like invoicing and contracts."

10 Creative Industries Sector Plan by HM Government https://tinyurl.com/37tcp7jj

11 Creative Industries Sector Plan by HM Government https://tinyurl.com/37tcp7jj

12 Arts Council England defines culture as "all those areas of activity associated with the artforms and organisations in which Arts Council England invests: collections, combined arts, dance, libraries, literature, museums, music, theatre and the visual arts". They note that their research tells them that that members of the public tend to use the words 'the arts' and 'artists' to refer specifically to classical music, opera, ballet or the fine arts. The Arts Council England also uses the term "creative practitioners" rather than "artists" to refer to "all those who work to create new, or reshape existing, cultural content". https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/14449/download?attachment

13 Which says it "funds the nation's cultural life" and defines creativity as: "the process through which people apply their knowledge, skill and intuition to imagine, conceive, express or make something that wasn't there before. While creativity is present in all areas of life, we use it specifically to refer to the process of making, producing or participating in 'culture'. "https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/14449/download?attachment

14 The BFI's mission is to "create the conditions in which screen culture and the UK's screen industries can thrive" – it uses the term "screen industries" and "screen culture", though this refers mostly to film and film screens ("cinema" is mentioned 126 times in its 2024/2025 annual report, "YouTube" is mentioned four times – with 57k subscribers - "social media" is mentioned once, and "mobile phone" is also mentioned once) https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/43162/download

15 "The Vertical Revolution: How Microdramas Became a Multi-Billion Dollar Global Phenomenon" https://variety.com/2025/tv/news/global-microdrama-boom-1236560947/

16 For an authoritative review of the MrBeast empire from Harvard Business School, read “MrBeast: Building a YouTube Empire” by Anita Elberse and Oliver Band https://store.hbr.org/product/mrbeast-building-a-youtube-empire/523103?sku=523103-PDF-ENG

17 MrBeast's $5.2 Billion Empire: Breaking Down the Beast Ahead of IPO https://quasa.io/media/mrbeast-s-5-2-billion-empire-breaking-down-the-beast-ahead-of-ipo (Note that the source of this information is a “self-employed” creator, Slava Vasipenok https://www.linkedin.com/in/slava-vasipenok/ rather than a “respected” authority and so the information may turn out to be completely unreliable - just saying!)

18 MrBeast’s YouTube Success: A Team Effort Behind the Scenes at https://quasa.io/media/mrbeast-s-youtube-success-a-team-effort-behind-the-scenes (Note that the source of this information is a “self-employed” creator, Slava Vasipenok https://www.linkedin.com/in/slava-vasipenok/ rather than a “respected” authority and so the information may turn out to be completely unreliable - just saying!)

19 “A platform for growth through creativity” published by YouTube https://services.google.com/fh/files/misc/impact-report-uk.pdf

20 https://tinyurl.com/bddhd5p4

21 From the “High-Growth Potential Firms in the UK’s Creative Industries” https://pec.ac.uk/research_report_entr/high-growth-potential-firms-in-the-uks-creative-industries/

22 From the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, PEC, “National Statistics on the Creative Industries” at https://pec.ac.uk/news_entries/national-statistics-on-the-creative-industries/

23 “Arts, culture and Heritage: Audiences and Workforce” from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre https://pec.ac.uk/state_of_the_nation/arts-cultural-heritage-audiences-and-workforce-2/

24 Definition of the global Creator Economy: “The Creator Economy refers to an ecosystem in which individuals – such as social media influencers, podcasters, YouTubers, artists, writers, and independent professionals – produce and distribute digital content directly to audiences via social platforms, monetizing through advertising, sponsorships, crowdfunding, subscriptions, and product sales. It is characterised by software-driven platforms enabling content creation, distribution, monetization tools, data analytics, and e-commerce integration”. Source: https://market.us/report/creator-economy-market/

25 Enterprise City is at https://www.enterprisecityuk.com/

26 Map of Media City from https://www.mediacityuk.co.uk/

27 Immersive Experience Network huddles: https://immersiveexperience.network/huddles/

28 The 2026 CreaTech Network Series is hosted at the University of Manchester https://www.manchester.ac.uk/about/news/2026-createch-network-series-creativity-and-ai/.

29 Creator Economy Live event in Manchester, 29-30 April 2026 https://www.creatoreconomylive.com/manchester

30 Bee Influence is a Manchester-based influencer marketing agency https://www.beeinfluence.co.uk/

31 Hoopla is a paid social and influencer marketing agency in Manchester https://www.hoopla-marketing.com/

32 Fayrli is a creator-first performance marketing agency in Manchester https://fayrli.com/

33 The Geographies of Creativity report, published by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre at Newcastle University Business School https://pec.ac.uk/state_of_the_nation/geographies-of-creativity/

34 The DCMS-55 is listed in the “Understanding the growth potential of creative clusters” https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6363ef4b8fa8f57a29a23a92/Understanding_the_growth_potential_of_creative_clusters_-_accessible.pdf

35 From Teleprompter.com, 27 August 2025 https://tinyurl.com/39cze3j8

36 From GoViral, 4 November 2025 https://tinyurl.com/3cvpty6r

37 “The new ‘F’ word: follower count falls from favor” and “the industry’s long-standing obsession with follower count is officially over” in preference for “Fit” instead of “Follower” as a way of gauging a creators’ value. As quoted in “The State of Creator Marketing” from CreatorIQ https://www.creatoriq.com/hubfs/2025-26%20State%20of%20Creator%20Marketing/CreatorIQ-StateofCreatorMarketing2025-2026.pdf

38 The focus on community and pride in Reading is unsurprising as the participants were attending free of charge and thus giving up their time for a project to help support them as a group more than individually. The vibe was most definitely not the greedy, money-grabbing, selfish, fame-seeking celebrity diva vibe often associated with creators.

39 The Reading 2050 Vision is here https://www.visit-reading.com/business/sustainable-future/reading-2050-vision/the-vision-in-detail