



CULTIVATE:
CREATIVE INDUSTRIES
IN THE NORTH EAST

#CultivateNE

PROJECT REPORT





Table of Contents

Executive Summary and Recommendations // p.1

Introduction // p.3

Cultivate: Events // p.7
Event summary

Business Mentoring // p.11
Support Delivery
Summary of support provision

Business feedback // p.14

Business Survey // p.15
Key findings

Project Outputs // p.19
Engagement
Building momentum
Understanding business needs

Next steps // p.20

Executive Summary

Based in Aberdeen, Look Again is an initiative of Robert Gordon University, that delivers visual art and design projects and events, with the aim of developing a vibrant creative sector in North East Scotland.

Look Again secured funding from Creative Scotland to deliver Cultivate, a programme of Creative Industries development delivered in the spring of 2018, which included:

- cultivation events: based on the Pecha Kucha model, to engage and inspire, and create opportunities for the creative community to meet, network and share.
- business mentoring: expert business growth support for creative businesses; one to one and tailored to fit company needs
- a business survey: to identify the profile and reach of the creative sector, and its development needs

The project built a significant level of momentum within a short space of time. Two cultivation events, in March and May, showcased 14 creative businesses and individuals, and were curated to represent the range of sub-sectors within the creative industries. 140 creative practitioners attended the events, with the venue at capacity. Appetite for this as an important and ongoing initiative is demonstrable.

Further support was delivered through a business mentoring programme, with four businesses at a varying development stages selected for a total of 10 days fully funded mentoring.

Over 100 creative businesses gave their views via the business survey, with further contributions secured at each of the cultivation events. This gave a strong endorsement of the approach taken within this project and a comprehensive view on business needs of the sector.

Interest was secured from a variety of stakeholders with proactive engagement from key bodies including Robert Gordon University and Gray's School of Art, the City Growth and Economic Development team of Aberdeen City Council, and North East Scotland College. Findings from the project show that the Creative Industries in Aberdeen and the North East are widespread, tenacious and highly committed to the area, but that further work is needed to better profile, support and connect the sector.

Recommendations

- 24 month series of 'Cultivate' events & supporting activities modelled on the PechaKucha night: 1 every 3 months from Sept 2018 – to develop engagement, connectivity and build momentum.
- a series of workshops with specific topics delivered in partnership with Business Gateway, and steered by Look Again.
- Regular clinics of 1-2-1 sessions, up to 1.5 hours to early stage businesses –free of charge for first one, fee chargeable for ongoing support.
- A business mentoring programme – for limited number of companies with growth potential, including 6 and 12 month follow up.
- Explore potential for creative innovation spaces, utilising temporary 'meanwhile spaces' model, developed in partnership with RGU and ACC.

Introduction

Background

Look Again is an initiative of Robert Gordon University that began in 2015 as a small-scale visual art and design festival, aiming to develop a positive narrative about Aberdeen by commissioning artists and designers to *'see the city through fresh eyes'* and invite the public to *'become a tourist in your own city'*.

Growing in reach and profile, Look Again now has a year round presence in the city, delivering mentoring projects and public events, with the aim of developing a vibrant creative sector in North East Scotland. This is in part a response to the increasing dominance in the city of festivals that import existing models from elsewhere, without investing in the creative community in the region.

Starting in 2015 with 6 commissions and a pop up design shop, Look Again reached 22,000 engagements with the public.

By 2017 the festival commissioned 12 new works, supported a further 12 projects with partners, and public engagements grew to 36,000.

Over this time the team has become increasingly aware of key skills and sector support gaps, as well as a view, prevalent both outside the region and within, that *'there are no creative industries in Aberdeen'*. Look Again seeks to challenge this assumption. The team offer an unparalleled range of skills and experience, combining expert knowledge of both the local creative scene and the UK-wide creative infrastructure. They have an exceptional reputation for high quality delivery and a proven track record of *'making things happen'*. As such Look Again is particularly well positioned both to undertake this research and deliver on recommendations.

While there are organisations throughout Scotland with a remit of assisting the Creative Industries sector, there is no overall programme of activities to cultivate and support the sector in the North East. Look Again is seeking to take the lead in developing a shared, multi-agency agenda for the development of the Creative Industries sector in the North East.

Look Again are grateful to Creative Scotland for funding this pilot project.





Cultivate: Events

Event summary

Two 'Pecha Kucha' events were hosted by Look Again in partnership with the Belmont Filmhouse, the first on 8th March and second on 31st May. The first event featured an opening talk by Gillian Easson of Creative Dundee, to showcase the organisation and test demand for a similar initiative in Aberdeen. She went on to host the presentations, and the event featured a 'Live Audit' seeking audience views on a set of questions about sector needs.

The second was hosted by the Look Again team, and feedback on the project was gathered through questionnaires. Both events featured a live 'shout out' for the audience to share their own events and activities. Both nights were attended by c. 70 delegates with tickets sold out in advance.

Speakers: Event 1

Marc Cairns • Director of Pidgin Perfect Creative Agency • Glasgow

Becky Orlinski • Hatch creative space • Aberdeen

Richard Slater • Architect + President of Aberdeen Society of Architects • Aberdeen

Lucia Gasparidesova • Designer/Director Prolong Bags • Aberdeen

Amy Gair • Textile Designer + Lead Researcher on KTP project with Montrose Rope and Sail

Laura Bremner • Illustrator, Juniper Press + Aberdeen Etsy Team Leader • Aberdeen

Gabi Reith and Phil Thomson • Graphic Design, Coding + Creative Learning • Aberdeen

Simon Gall • Musician • Aberdeen

Speakers: Event 2

Steve Smith • Photographer • Aberdeen

Karen Dicken • Jewellery Designer • Angus

Helen Greensmith • Helen Ruth Scarves • Aberdeen

Colin Leonard and Madeleine Edwards • Design and Code Creative Agency • Aberdeen

Theo Dounas • Architect • Aberdeen

Emily Utter • Writer • Aberdeen

Event 1: Feedback

The audience represented 12 of the 16 identified sub sectors of creative Industries.

In response to the question, '**How easy is it to find good information on making a sustainable living from your creative work in the north east?**' the overwhelming majority rated this as very or quite difficult.

Though a similar majority rate the importance of the place they stay as very important to the success and sustainability of their work.

The vast majority wanted to be more connected into a creative hub or network in the area.

Event 2: Feedback

Question: **What is it about Aberdeen & the NE that makes you proud?**

'its ambition and wanting to harness its talented people'

'Community, the blank canvas that is becoming increasingly colourful and making things happen'

'I can see that the city is switching from Oil & Gas to being more creative (e.g. Nuart, Etsy, Look Again...)'

'That there is a growing amount of opportunity to get involved and learn about the creative industries'

'Things like this! All the festivals in Aberdeen, especially when they engage not just with the creative community but with the wider public'

Question: **What do you think we should do next?**

'Have more events like tonight! Reach out to different industries to get involved'

'Creative a creative hub in Aberdeen. More inspiring and affordable co-working space'

'Continue doing these events and inspirational talks. Well done!'

'Network of creative industry practitioners - more of this kind of networking event'



Business Mentoring

Support Delivery

As part of the Cultivate: Creative Industries in the North East project, creative businesses could apply for free one-to-one business mentoring. Applicant businesses were offered individual mentoring and business development support designed to result in identified actions and objectives for the business.

The business mentoring support was delivered to four businesses representing both different sub-sectors within the Creative Industries sector and a range of business turnover.

Company	Product / service	Location	Turnover
Design & Code Ltd	Creative & technical design studio	Aberdeen	£200k
Helen Ruth Scarves	Fashion accessories	Aberdeen	£24k
Claremont Studios	Fine art & craft	Aberdeen	£10-£20k
Prolong	Sustainable fashion	Aberdeen	under £10k

The support process included an initial face-to-face meeting, with follow up tailored to each business. Each business was given a written summary of the discussion and agreed action following each meeting.

The provision was segmented by company type, with early stage companies getting limited time and more established businesses getting more support. This worked well and allowed limited resources to be focused on businesses with greater growth prospects.

A summary of support provision by company is given below:

Company	Delivery
Design & Code Ltd	3 days
Helen Ruth Scarves	2 days
Claremont Studios	1 day
Prolong	1 day





Business feedback

Feedback was extremely positive with all businesses rating the support 'excellent'. The participants all felt the programme made a positive difference to their business:

"I found the one to one support very helpful, to have someone really get to know your business and help you to plan a strategy was very valuable. It will make me take more control..."

Helen Ruth Scarves

"I can see this building solid foundations for us to plan our growth over the next 5 years. It's been a great experience and very very useful. It's also given the staff a lift as they have been included in the mentoring workshops and given an opportunity to contribute." **Design and Code Ltd**

"I feel more confident" **Claremont Studios**

"The most useful element... was to meet up with somebody who has much more knowledge about running business in a healthy and realistic way..." **Prolong**

The businesses also gave views on the need for, and structure of, support for Creative Industries sector in the North East. All participants felt there is a need, with specific note of:

- Longer timescale for business mentoring, with follow up over a 1-2 year period;
- Different levels of support depending on maturity of business;
- Need for support tailored to Creative Industries sector.

"I think having further meetings ongoing would be helpful, even if they were more spaced, say every 4-6 months"

"There could be different levels of support geared towards new graduates, new creative business start ups and those who are already in business..... Business Mentoring (for established businesses) over 18 months to 2 years..... Creative Business Surgeries for those who... may want some fresh eyes on their business"

"We've tried to find support in the past whilst growing the business and it has been hard"

"Opportunities to get involved with similar programmes to Look Again."

Business Survey

An online survey was designed and launched in March 2018. The survey was disseminated as widely as possible across the Creative Industries business sector, with over 100 responses received.

The question set was designed to gather data on the scale, aspiration and business and professional development needs of the creative community in the North East, identifying factors particular to the region.

Key findings

- **58% are micro enterprises, and 60% have turnover of less than £25k.**
- **Committed to region – 95% plan to stay in the North East.**
- **Cautious optimism – 34% are expanding and 58% are 'holding steady'.**
- **There were strong and consistent messages about the need to build a stronger creative network and a louder voice for the sector.**
- **There is clear evidence that the sector finds existing business advice to be inadequate, and that there is an appetite for much more tailored support.**
- **The lack of creative space continues to be highlighted as an issue for the city.**

Sector Profile

The survey resulted in a strong spread of responses from across the Creative Industries sector, with all but one of the 17 sub sectors* represented. The sub-sectors most strongly represented were design (38%), visual art (32%) and craft (26%).

**Scottish government categories*

In line with national statistics, the sector is dominated by micro enterprises with 58% of respondents self-employed or operating as sole traders. Given this picture, the majority of businesses sustain very limited employment numbers.

Almost half of the respondents (49%) work from home. 58% are located in Aberdeen and 35% in Aberdeenshire. 7% were based elsewhere, primarily in Angus. An overwhelming majority (95%) of respondents are planning to stay in the North East.

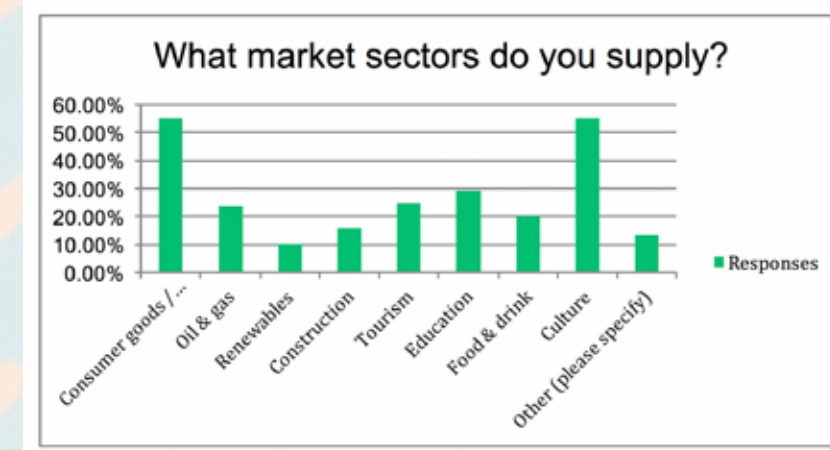
Turnover & Growth Prospects

Only 8% of businesses are declining. 34% are expanding and the remainder holding steady. 60% of respondents have an income level of under £25k, again in line with national statistics. A further 23% have an income level of between £25k and £100k. 8% of respondents have an income level of over £500k.

28% of companies own IP, with a further 10% planning to invest in developing IP.

Market Profile

Most of the companies operate in the service sector, with 41% offering services, 25% products and 34% offering both. The biggest single markets are culture and consumer goods/services with 55% of respondents supplying these markets. However, industrial sectors of oil & gas, renewables and construction featured strongly and collectively half of all respondents supply these sectors.



Critical issues

Respondents were asked **“What are the most critical issues facing your business today?”** This question resulted in a wide range of responses, including:

- Skills shortage, recruitment & retention of staff;
- Increasing costs;
- Lack of appropriate premises;
- Business advice.

However three issues were consistently mentioned by respondents:

Critical issues	Percentage
Market access: lack of visibility, opportunities, audience/buyers, promotion	46%
Economy: downturn in oil & gas, lower disposable incomes, lack of consumer confidence	31%
Public sector: funding cuts, lack of investment, lack of strategic approach	23%

“Oil & Gas downturn and shrinking public purse...”

“lack of audience”

“dissipation of effort. No sustaining and thoughtful collaboration between the creative, art establishments, council or businesses...”

“keeping the value in design”

“selling my product”

“more volunteer resources”

Business needs

The survey asked for respondents to identify specific areas of activity which 'would help your current business to grow'. This section identified business needs across all areas of business activity, including sales, marketing, finance, operations and skills.

Activities identified by over 50% of respondents are noted below:

Sales & Marketing

- Marketing & branding 59%
- Sales & promotion 79%
- Customer / public relations 52%

Finance & administration

- Financial planning 55%
- Business administration, book keeping, IT systems 53%

Operations

- Web development / ecommerce 54%

People & skills

- Creative skills development 64%
- Writing proposals / funding applications 60%

Business Management

- Strategic business planning 58%
- Networking & collaboration with other businesses 73%

Existing business support provision

The majority of respondents have received business advice from a number of sources, with 100% having received advice from Business Gateway, and many also having had contact with Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Development International and the Further & Higher Education sector.

84% have received funding from the local council and a further 69% from Creative Scotland. The survey did not ask respondents to value the funding or advice available although some respondents did make individual comments.

Future activity

The survey asked respondents ***"What one thing would you like to see happen in the North East of Scotland to support the Creative Industries sector?"***

Responses fell into four clear categories as noted below.

Priority activity	
Coordinated sector development activities	51%
Business support e.g. funding, advice	30%
Market access e.g. promotional & sales activity	11%
Space provision e.g. workspace, pop up's	9%

"a basic understanding of its (Creative Industries) value to both the economy and the well-being of local culture / quality of life"

"the development of a creative hub / community..."

"cheaper, varied and more accessible shared working spaces. Collaboration is a hot bed for innovation..."

"some resources dedicated to representing the sector..... not a short term project"

"have more creative led business advice"

"a fablab"

"more venues, events and opportunities to bring..... people to my work"

"usage of empty high street properties for temporary use by small creative businesses"

Project Outputs

Engagement

There was strong engagement from across the Creative Industries sector, with over 70 individuals attending each of the Cultivate events, and over 100 creative businesses responding to the survey.

The project team very deliberately sought to ensure there was engagement from across the breadth of the Creative Industries sector. This involved proactively identifying and approaching organisations and individuals from all sub-sectors to engage with the project, and by drawing on the local knowledge of the Look Again team to invite speakers representing the breadth of the sector.

In addition key stakeholders were approached, invited to attend events and kept abreast of progress on the project. This included Aberdeen City Council City Growth team/Economic Development, Aberdeenshire Council, Business Gateway / Elevator, Key individuals at RGU and Gray's School of Art.

Aberdeen City Council, RGU, Creative Scotland and Creative Dundee all were active participants in the Cultivate events.

Building momentum

The project has catalysed significant progress in building momentum in the sector.

The upcoming Look Again Festival of Visual Art & Design and annual Degree Show of Gray's School of Art are further opportunities to engage with many people in the creative sector in the North East – Aberdeen is a small place and conversations happen!

The event feedback, survey and business mentoring all evidence overwhelming support for developing an ambitious and coordinated approach to the sector in the North East.

Events have been critical to building a sense of 'community' and support. Other businesses have come forward to discuss business mentoring, and those who received mentoring are looking to self-fund further development input, in recognition of it's benefit to them.

As noted above, stakeholder engagement was actively sought and the Look Again team recognise that having generated widespread engagement and built momentum, the next stage is to secure proactive support from stakeholders to assist. Meetings will take place over the next months to discuss event and business support mechanisms with Creative Scotland and Aberdeen City Council.

Understanding business needs

All elements of the project contributed to developing an understanding of business needs, augmenting the various national and local strategies and economic assessments of the sector.

Based on the feedback sought in the project, demand is evidenced for:

- A strategic approach
- Cultivation/networking events
- Business support – funding and sector relevant advice / mentoring
- Space for innovation incubator and/or a creative hub

Next steps

Look Again is uniquely positioned to lead the development of the Creative Industries sector in North East Scotland. RGU through Gray's School of Art indicated their continued backing in terms of fit with the new strategic plan for the school, and potential allocation of staff time (one of the Look Again team also delivers the Creative Futures role at Gray's within which this cold sit).

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