MAKING THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

What skills and training opportunities do young people need for a career in creative technologies?

A MyWorld & Watershed Fellowship Report
by artist and educator, Frazer Meakin

MyWorld
UK Research and Innovation
University of BRISTOL
WATERSHED

About MyWorld

Led by the University of Bristol, the aim of MyWorld is to position the West of England as an international trailblazer in creative media production and technology. Through forging dynamic collaborations between academia and industry it has been able to progress technological innovation, deliver creative excellence, establish and operate state of the art facilities, offer skills training and drive inward investment, in order to raise the region's profile on the global stage.

MyWorld is funded through UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) 'Strength in Places fund'.

About Watershed and Pervasive Media Studio

Watershed is a cultural organisation focused on togetherness. We produce accessible and inclusive experiences that fire up the imagination in our venue, online and across the world. We are recognised internationally as a leading centre for film culture, art and technology practice, and talent development programmes. Our values sit at the heart of everything we do, both creative and operational. With an ethos of responsibility and kindness, we produce and deliver support which is more than the sum of its parts.

The Pervasive Media Studio hosts a brilliant community of over 200 artists, creative companies, technologists and academics exploring experience design and creative technology. We have an open plan studio with a culture of generosity, curiosity and interruptability. We believe that by clustering together people from a broad range of backgrounds, with differing skills, experiences and opinions, all of our ideas get better. It is a collaboration between Watershed, University of Bristol and UWE Bristol.

Published September 2026

Contents

3 Where it Began

5 The Fellowship Journey

7 The Sector Working with Young People and the Education System

8 Collaboration Is Key

10 Working in SEND Schools

11 Reflecting and Moving Forward

12 Work Experience as a Developmental Opportunity

14 Education System Working with Industry

18 For Young People and Families - I Am Intrigued by Creative tech, But What Next?

22 References

Where it Began

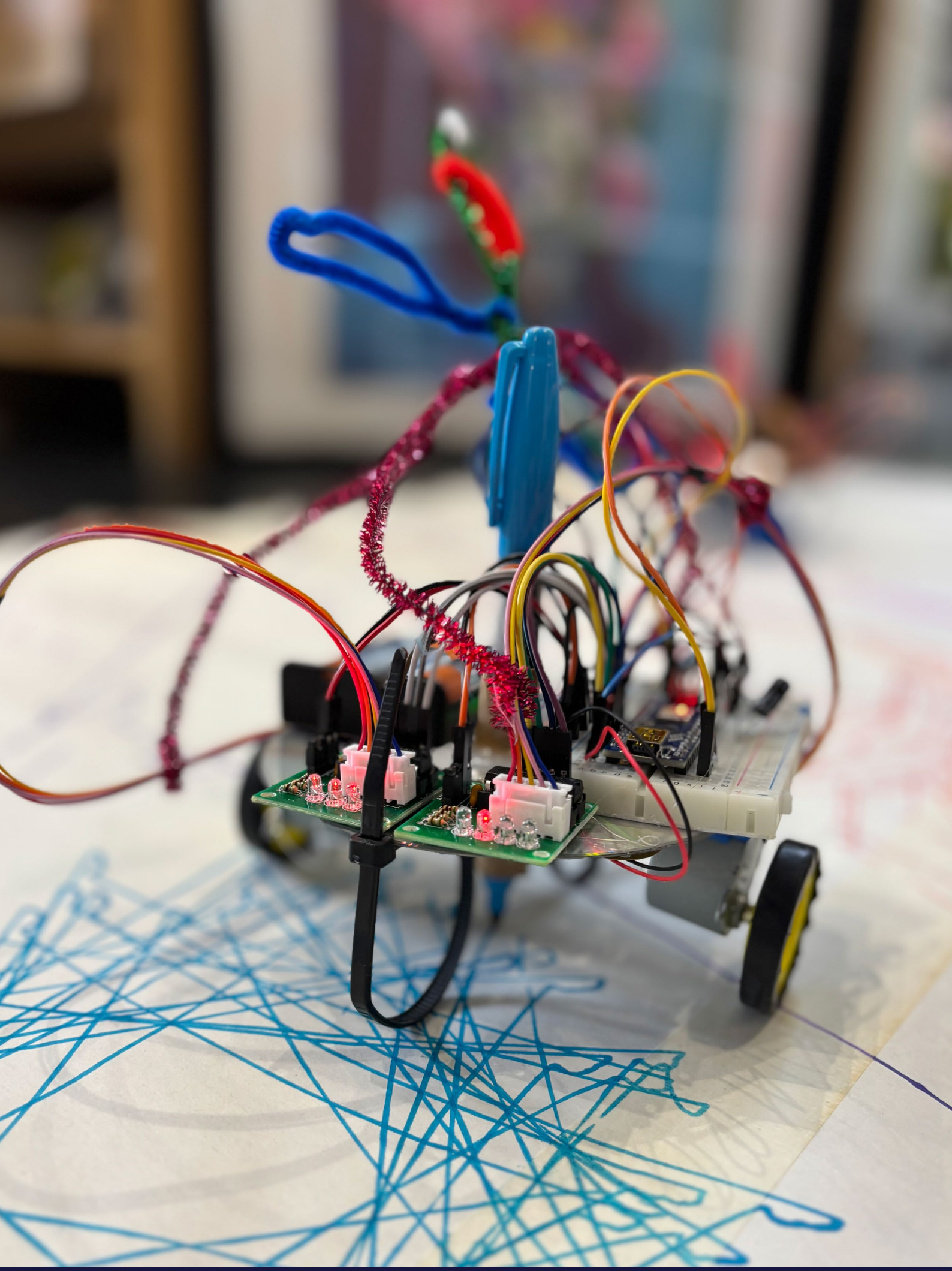
I embarked on the journey as a MyWorld Fellow, driven by the desire to uncover what skills and opportunities young people need to thrive in the world of creative technology. Partnering with *Watershed* and the *MyWorld* Skills and Training Team, I faced the challenge of taking the current needs of the workforce, wading through the current education system and responding to the voices of young people to see how we can move forward proactively. My core aim is to support young people into this dynamic sector.

The creative technology sector is a vibrant mosaic of talents and ideas, thriving on collaboration and the unique skills each expert brings to the table. Whether you're a game designer, computer scientist, theatre maker, immersive artist or animator, the heart of this field is 'specialism'. However, from 2020, there's been a renewed emphasis on developing core and transferable skills—often referred to as "soft skills"—which are essential across multiple sectors. This isn't just industry talk; WEF Future Jobs Report (World Economic Forum, 2023) has this to say about the evolution of skills over the next five years: "Cognitive skills are reported to be growing in importance most quickly, reflecting the increasing importance of complex problem-solving in the workplace. Surveyed businesses report creative thinking to be growing in importance slightly more rapidly than analytical thinking. Technology literacy is the third-fastest growing core skill." No creative technologist would argue that these aren't pivotal and it's by no means revolutionary for a creative. How do we cultivate a dynamic workforce when our education system is under pressure, focusing more on assessment than on developmental processes?

It's crucial for businesses and industries to clearly express what they need from their workforce, but have they stopped to ask emerging talent what they need to succeed? Empowering young people with the right tools not only enables success but also promotes greater social mobility.

Over ten months, I was deeply immersed in this endeavour. While the title "Fellow" is traditionally associated with academia and research, this experience has been more akin to a fellowship—a community of like-minded individuals united by shared passions. This research impacts a wide array of stakeholders: young people, educational systems, and the creative technology sector itself.

Throughout this report, I will highlight my work with each of these stakeholders and discuss my findings across 10 months of interrogation. I hope to provide an insightful and honest resource for others to reflect on, and hopefully, look forward with optimism to enact change for the better.



The Fellowship Journey

When I set out to explore the pressing questions surrounding career development, I knew that the real answers lay with young people themselves. To create something that truly matters, I needed to work directly with them, understanding their aspirations, challenges, and potential. And whenever you hear me talk about this work, you'll often notice one word coming up again and again—impact.

It isn't just a buzzword; it's the driving force behind everything we do. But here's the thing—impact can take many forms. On one hand, there's broad impact: the kind you achieve through career fairs, assemblies, and other large-scale events. These activities reach many people, but the engagement level tends to be surface level, a quick touchpoint rather than a deep dive.

But then there's deep impact—it doesn't just scratch the surface but digs in, creating lasting change and memories. Think of this as the difference between handing out a brochure and a quick inspirational chat to running a series of workshops that give young people hands-on experience and skills they can develop and carry with them for life.

Both types of impact are crucial, and any successful career development strategy needs a balance of both. But when I started designing programs for young people, I knew I wanted to go beyond just creating "a nice activity for an afternoon at school". I aimed to craft experiences that would serve as a launchpad to probe thinking and ignite ongoing learning and development. Educational psychology backs this up—research shows that spaced learning (or distributed practice) is far more effective for retention and understanding than cramming everything into one short burst.

A key element of my active research was launching 'The Skills Roadshow': a series of workshops that build skills and autonomy in creative technology, each session building on the last. The idea was simple yet powerful: start with the basics and gradually dive deeper, creating a strong foundation that young people could build on with the correct signposting.

The first phase of our workshop pipeline was all about providing a practical introduction to creative technology, setting the stage and a chance to gauge the current understanding and skill levels of the young people we were working with. What I found was both encouraging and eye-opening. Young people had a basic understanding of areas like VR, game design, and robotics. They had heard of them; some may have encountered them. In every group visited, AI was frequently mentioned, but often with a sense of apprehension—many believed it was poised to take over the world or their future jobs.

This highlighted a crucial point: while young people are aware of the wonders of creative tech, it still feels distant and inaccessible, especially to those from under-represented or lower-socioeconomic backgrounds. The term "creative technology" itself is too broad, too vague. If we can't define it clearly and succinctly, how can we expect it to be something young people feel they can engage in?

Although the sector and title creative tech felt distant to young people, interacting with technology and discussing the groundbreaking work happening here in the West of England sparked a buzz that was hard to ignore — a tangible energy that stood in stark contrast to the typical classroom environment. As soon as we shifted to the practical elements of the workshop, the young people truly came into their own. Remove the chairs and bring desks together to create a makeshift workshop to encourage creativity to thrive.

In teams, they were tasked with creating a prototype for a musical instrument using conductive paint and various materials. This wasn't just about building something; it was about designing, problem-solving, and ultimately presenting their creations. Each young person pushed themselves to learn new skills, stepping out of their comfort zones. It was incredible to see everyone's unique talents emerge as they collaborated on this project.

As a first contact with creative tech this task was useful to allow their own experiences in the task to highlight the broad range of job roles and different areas of interest (e.g. designers, creative directors, producers, technologists).

The task itself was revealing, highlighting both strengths and areas for growth in their skills development. On the positive side, their creative thinking was off the charts. They consistently thought outside the box, coming up with innovative designs, clever use of materials, and imaginative ideas for their instruments.

However, the challenge also highlighted a skill that needs developing: resilience in problem-solving. When things didn't go according to plan, some students were quick to throw in the towel, often not even attempting other ways of working without guidance. This isn't entirely surprising— resilience is something that often needs to be nurtured, especially in an educational setting where tasks are typically compartmentalised into manageable chunks. This structure, while useful, doesn't always prepare students for the fluid, often unpredictable nature of real-world problem-solving.

How do we prepare students for the world of work when the education system is set out to provide success, but the sector needs them to persevere through difficulties, adapt when things go awry, and develop the grit that's essential for success in this field?

The Sector Working with Young People and the Education System

It's no secret that the education system is under immense pressure, with funding for creative subjects hitting an all-time low. A striking indicator of this trend is a report by the Cultural Learning Alliance, revealing a staggering '42% decline in the number of arts GCSEs undertaken since 2010' (Cultural Learning Alliance, 2024). While technology-based learning is faring slightly better, the reality is that access to tech education in schools remains inconsistent. Some schools don't offer computing beyond Key Stage 3 (age 14), and in many cases, those teaching the subject are not specialists, leading to a curriculum that is often limited in scope and depth.

Amid these challenges, one constant across all schools is the focus on the Gatsby Benchmarks for careers education, which are part of the Ofsted framework.

The eight Gatsby Benchmarks of Good Career Guidance

(Gatsby Charitable Foundation, 2024) are:

1. A stable careers programme
2. Learning from career and labour market information
3. Addressing the needs of each pupil
4. Linking curriculum learning to careers
5. Encounters with employers and employees
6. Experiences of workplaces
7. Encounters with further and higher education
8. Personal guidance

These benchmarks are intended to ensure that students receive high-quality career guidance, and it is 5 and 6 that are of particular interest to our work in connecting young people with the sector and the sector with young people. But there's a crucial disconnect just as young people are often confused about what creative technology truly entails, so too are the careers leaders and subject leads who guide them. These educators, who have regular contact with students, need a clearer understanding of creative technology to communicate its potential not just to young people but to their parents. This must come from visibility The more creative technology gets into schools or young people get a snippet of the workplace experience (however unconventional that may be) the easier it becomes to win over school staff and parents.

When career leaders and teachers are on board, the job of introducing and integrating creative technology into education becomes significantly easier as they understand its relevance in today's world. Without their support, there's a constant uphill struggle to convince people that careers in this area are viable and valuable. Young people deserve honesty and openness when it comes to careers. Unfortunately, career fairs and assemblies can feel more like a competition to prove which path is best, rather than focusing on what is best for the individual students and creative technology often is not featured. This can create an overwhelming information overload instead of a supportive environment for exploring career options.

Collaboration Is Key

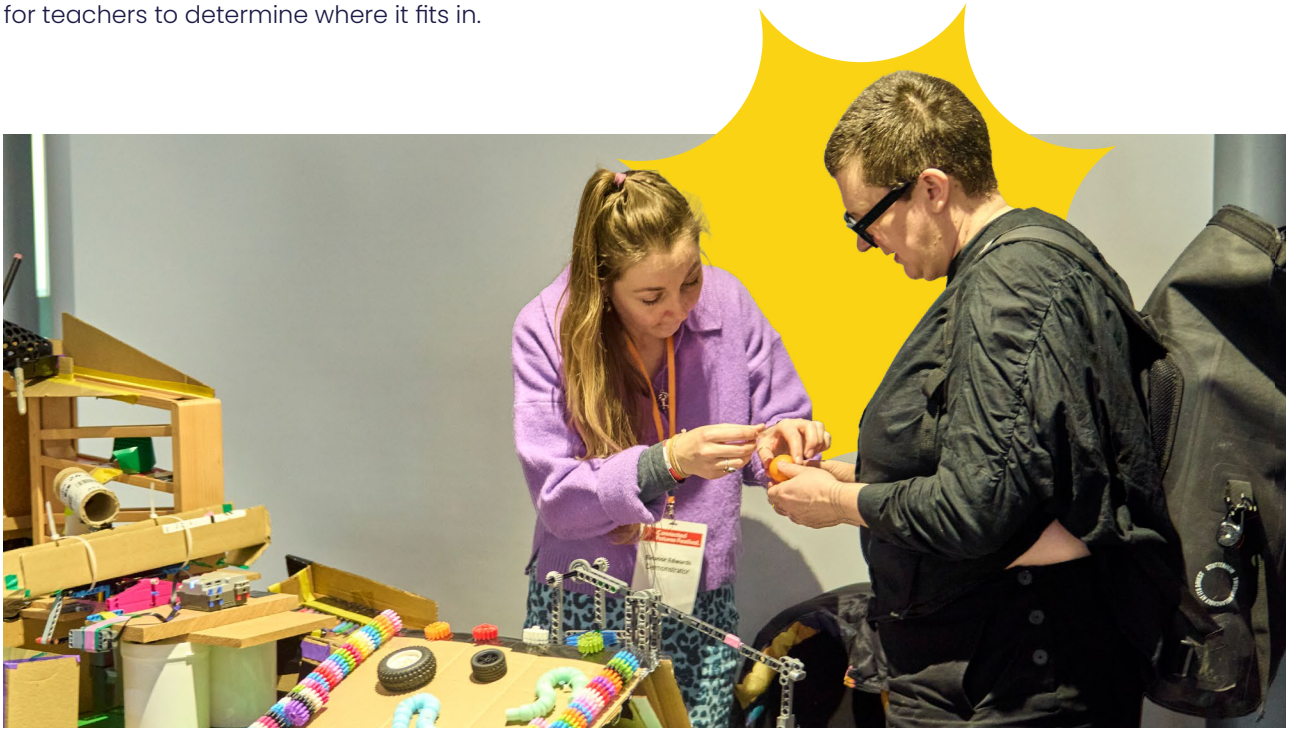
The first challenge for the sector wanting to work with young people is getting schools on board. And this leads me to my first key takeaway—collaboration is key. By partnering with organisations like *Bristol Works, South Bristol Youth, and Bristol Education Partnership,* I gained easier access to schools and the hard-to-reach areas I was targeting. In just two weeks, I went from having no confirmed schools for my Skills Roadshow to 13, including two SEND (Special Educational Needs) schools. These partnerships were crucial—yes, they helped get a foot in the door; but they were finding allies with a shared mission, making the work mutually beneficial.

If you are reading this, I am sure you understand the importance or are inquisitive about working with young people. It is important to understand how your work could fit into the existing educational framework. Every school structures its faculties differently, and because creative technology straddles so many disciplines—art, computing, design, and more—it can be confusing for teachers to determine where it fits in.

Teachers are already stretched thin, so when discussing engagement, the key points they say resonate most with them are:

- **Relevance:** How does this fit into the current curriculum and objectives? Why that school?
- **Support:** What resources and training are available to help them deliver this content?
- **Impact:** How will this benefit their students in both the short and long term?

Understanding these needs and addressing them directly is essential for ensuring that creative technology education doesn't get lost in the shuffle. It's about making it easier for teachers to integrate this important content into their already packed schedules, ensuring that young people get the exposure and opportunities they deserve. Any collaborations you make will help you with this.



Phase 2 of The Roadshow – It is never as easy as you think

Some of my most enlightening findings emerged during the organisation of phase two of the Skills Roadshow. The aim of this phase was to offer a diverse program featuring various workshops and speakers from across the creative technology spectrum, including prominent names like Aardman, Lux Aeterna, and the University of Bristol. The event was designed to be unique, impactful, and highly beneficial for young people. It was free of charge, structured to fit within a standard school day from 10 AM to 2 PM, and seemed like a perfect opportunity on paper. Yet, despite the success of phase one, the take-up for phase two was minimal. But why?

After digging into the reasons, two key issues came to light. The first is a financial one. Every time a staff member leaves the school site, it incurs a cost. For teaching staff, this is approximately £170 per day, and for associate staff, it's around £120. So, who absorbs this cost? Charging young people for the opportunity is out of the question—it contradicts the very purpose of the event, which is to be accessible and inclusive. However, schools often don't have the extra funds to cover these costs. If the money has to come out of faculty budgets, the event must demonstrate significant impact on the curriculum and measurable outcomes to justify the expense.

Top Tip: If you can, do a workshop or talk in school first where they get a glimpse of what a trip could be like and can gain details on how it will be an impactful development opportunity. This is a lot easier for the school to organise at their end.

This financial burden shouldn't deter the planning and execution of such events, but it's a factor that must be carefully considered during the planning stages. Budgeting these costs or finding alternative ways to subsidize them is crucial for ensuring that schools can participate.

Another consideration is the organisation of the event from the school's side. It is not as easy as sending a letter home and off we go. Schools need between 4-6 weeks' notice to organise such an event. For something to run, the teachers and school staff need to be invested, they cannot do everything they are offered as they simply don't have the time to organise it.

While it's easier and more cost-effective for schools to host organisations and businesses on-site, the value of taking students off-site should not be underestimated. When young people witness the inner workings of a workplace and see the "heart of the action," it can have a profound impact. The experience of being in a professional environment, surrounded by industry experts, can inspire and motivate in ways that a classroom setting simply can't replicate.

For phase 2 of the Skills Roadshow, we ended up with six schools participating across three dates. However, the journey wasn't without challenges. Two schools dropped out the day before their scheduled participation, and another school almost had to withdraw on the day itself. Thankfully, we were able to secure extra funding at the last minute, allowing those young people to still take part. Whilst we all understand the strain the education system is under, this unpredictability makes our work as the sector increasingly difficult to plan and deliver impactful work in a sustainable way.

As a result, I encourage the use of cancellation clauses in contracts — not out of reluctance to partner, but as a necessary protection to ensure we can survive and continue serving young people in the long term.

Working in SEND Schools

It's also important to highlight that these workshops were delivered in two SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) schools, and what we observed there was truly eye-opening. The essence of play, which was central to the tasks, seemed almost second-nature to these students. Their approach to problem-solving was notably different; they were less likely to see challenges as roadblocks and more likely to view them as opportunities to explore new solutions.

To enhance accessibility, I revised the workshop plan by reducing its duration to just over an hour and incorporating scaffolded resources and tasks. These adjustments maintained and potentially amplified the workshop's effectiveness. The positive feedback from both students and teachers underscores a key insight: prioritising SEND education is essential in outreach and educational planning, as it significantly impacts participant engagement and outcomes.

If you're considering working with young people and education as part of outreach or to support your future workforce, it's vital not to discount SEND education. These students bring unique perspectives and talents to the table, and by including them, we enrich our community and broaden the chances for success and diversity. Ignoring this group not only does a disservice to them but also limits the potential for innovation and inclusivity in our society. As a sector, we can learn an awful lot from all young people.

Reflecting and Moving Forward

To conclude any workshop, create a space for reflection and evaluation; the process becomes a space for forward-thinking. This approach encouraged participants to not only assess their immediate learning experiences but also consider how I can apply insights and strategies moving forward.

My research question focused on "what young people need", so this was pivotal to plan the next steps and begin working directly with the sector we are aiming to serve.

Below are the simple questions I asked at the end of the Phase one workshop.

Question	Key Takeaways
What will you leave today knowing that you didn't know before?	• Understand different forms of creative tech. • There's lots of types of jobs in creative tech. • Able to identify the difference between core skills and specialist skills.
What would stop you from pursuing work in this area?	• Unstable profession • Lack of diversity/visibility • It's hard to succeed/get into.
What do you want to experience or learn next?	• Work with more advanced tech (VR). • Meet more people working in industry. • What I need to study to work in it/ understand career pipeline in more detail.

These findings from phase 1 shaped the next steps of the 'Roadshow' and my research in general We're not just teaching skills—we're bridging gaps, making creative technology more accessible, and showing young people that they can be more than just consumers; they can be creators, innovators, and leaders in the field.

Work Experience as a Developmental Opportunity

Traditional work experience is finite and can be structured differently across sectors. We have all heard the stories of turning up and making tea all day in an office or brushing hair off the floor in the local hairdressers.

In the fast-evolving landscape of creative technology, the journey from education to employment can be challenging, especially for young creatives eager to break into the industry. Conversations with professionals in the sector reveal a critical issue: while young talents are hungry for experience, many employers feel overwhelmed and ill-equipped to provide it; especially with deadlines, small teams and heightened workload.

As it stands, the traditional work experience of offering a week or two weeks to an individual often leads to frustration on both sides.

- **Limited Capacity:** With deadlines looming, professionals often feel stretched too thin to provide the support and mentorship young creatives need.
- **Quality of Work:** Some young individuals struggle to meet the demands of the tasks at hand, leading to dissatisfaction for both parties.
- **Communication Gaps:** There can be a disconnect between the communication styles of seasoned professionals and younger creatives, making it difficult to provide guidance.

By reframing this concept, we can create a win-win scenario that fosters growth for both young creatives and the professionals guiding them.

It's essential to view work experience as a two-way street. For young creatives, the goal shouldn't just be about completing tasks but rather about absorbing insights into the workplace culture and processes. This perspective encourages them to focus on learning rather than merely contributing.

For employers, hosting a young person can be seen as an opportunity to teach and reflect on their own practices. By adopting this mindset, professionals can find value in sharing their knowledge and expertise, turning the experience into a collaborative learning journey. It is without doubt that this may slow down work, but this can be scaled up and down accordingly. One slow day in your year of work could be one day that sparks and makes a career.

Not every organisation has the bandwidth to support a full-fledged week program. That's where flexible structures come into play.

- **Scaled-Up Experiences:** For those with the capacity, structured internships can include project shadowing, mentorship components, and guided learning sessions. This setup allows young creatives to absorb insights without the pressure of independently completing tasks. At Watershed, where I completed my research, we were able to provide a full week of workshops and guided practice where young people meet several people from industry, and in groups, paper prototypes and test a new experience or product. They were not contributing to the workings of the organisation but were immersed in the building and developing of the skills and understandings needed to work in the sector (deep impact with autonomy to be creative and an artist).

- **Scaled-Down Experiences:** SME's and freelancers could offer "micro-experience" opportunities. These could involve half-day shadowing with chances to ask questions, maybe a small talk with Q & A after school, or a workshop where a small task can be given that helps with learning the skills but is not directly linked to your workload. This still provides young creatives and technologists with a taste of the industry without overwhelming employers. Focus on understanding possibilities and inspiring, not product and strictly 'work'. Scaled-Down Opportunities can be completed with as few or as many young people depending on your capacity. There are many charities and orgaisations that can help make this work possible: connect with local authority careers hubs and they will take the pressure off organising and school liaison

Establishing clear learning objectives at the onset of the experience can help manage expectations. Young creatives can set goals for specific skills they want to learn, while employers can outline how they plan to share their expertise and the value of their processes. This focus ensures that the experience is beneficial for both parties.

Young people are used to feedback all the time at school – both positive and negative. Incorporating structured feedback sessions throughout the experience can facilitate dialogue about what is working well and what could be improved. This ongoing feedback loop allows both young creatives and employers to adjust their approaches in real-time, enhancing the overall learning experience. Young people can be held accountable but don't be afraid to hear what they say too.

By reimagining work experience in this way, we can transform it from a task-driven obligation into a dynamic learning platform. For young people to become our future sector, it becomes an invaluable opportunity to gain insights into industry practices, build a network, and develop skills that will benefit their careers. For employers, it provides a chance to engage in reflective practice, inspire the next generation, and potentially discover fresh talent who can bring new ideas and perspectives to the table.

In this creative technology sector, realigning our thinking around work experience is more than just an administrative adjustment; it's a cultural shift that emphasises education, collaboration, and growth. By fostering an environment where both young individuals and experienced professionals can thrive, we can ensure that the next generation of creatives is not only prepared to enter the workforce but is also equipped to innovate and lead within it. It is our duty as a sector to make this work if we want to have a workforce of the future.

Education System Working with Industry

Shared Pressures and Purpose

Recent guidelines laid out by the Department For Education (DFE) in the 'Careers guidance and access for education and training providers' (DfE, May 2025), now require schools and students to have increased contact (at least 2 weeks) with employers and greater exposure to the workplace throughout their education. We know that meeting these targets presents a significant challenge, particularly at a time when securing any form of work experience is increasingly difficult. However, the revised guidance does allow for greater flexibility in how employer engagement can be delivered. This makes it more important than ever for schools and employers to collaborate with a shared understanding of each other's constraints and priorities.

I have already touched upon the strain educational institutions are under, in terms of time, money and resources. It is equally important to consider the disruption that organising outreach events can create for those working in the sector. "28% of the workforce in the Cultural and Creative Industries are self-employed (compared to 14% of all workers in the UK). Almost 50% of people who work in the Cultural Sector are self-employed" (Creative UK, 2024) — resources are often scarce, and time is a valuable commodity, especially when often relying on time to create income. Balancing outreach with the demands of commercial work can be difficult, especially in a highly competitive and resource-limited environment.

However, when employers choose to engage with young people, it is a considered decision. Their involvement may be driven by workforce development goals, funding obligations, school requests, or community values. Regardless of the motivation, the benefits are well documented and those within the sector understand its importance but feel they are often met with obstacles that outweigh the benefits..

Even larger organisations, which may appear to have greater capacity, face their own challenges with outreach budgets often restricted to or tied to specific projects. These organisations must also manage internal priorities, allocate staff time effectively, and navigate the ongoing instability of arts funding. As such, capacity for meaningful engagement remains limited across the board. If they cannot accommodate it, it certainly is not personal.

Acknowledging the shared challenges and limitations on both sides is essential to developing more sustainable and effective partnerships.

Mismatched Expectations and Missed Opportunities

There have been several occasions where I requested a specific group size or a targeted cohort to work with but was instead assigned a much larger or more general group; sometimes simply a standard school class of up to 30 young people. In these situations, what was intended to be a tailored, high-impact session often becomes a generic classroom activity. As a result, those facilitating can feel, and be perceived, more like a supply teacher than an industry expert.

This shift can significantly reduce engagement, limit the session's effectiveness, and diminish the value of the facilitator's time and expertise. While it's understood that schools face a range of logistical challenges, clearer and more proactive communication is essential. Key details such as group composition, safety considerations, available equipment, and the workshop's intended objectives should be discussed well in advance.

Facilitators may not have training in behaviour management and are most effective when working within clear, realistic parameters. Establishing these boundaries early ensures a more meaningful experience for students and allows facilitators to deliver their best work.

Unpredictability Undermines Impact

The uncertainty that sometimes surrounds school engagements such as last-minute cancellations or lack of clarity can make outreach unsustainable. These situations are not only frustrating, they also disadvantage students. Young people benefit most from consistency and structure, and this should be reflected in how outreach is planned and delivered.

Initiatives like the Skills Roadshow rely on strong, reciprocal relationships between schools and industry. Schools need to trust that these engagements will provide meaningful value for their students. At the same time, employers need confidence that schools will participate in a reliable and organised way. These outcomes require open communication, mutual flexibility, and aligned objectives.

To ensure outreach is both feasible and impactful, realistic expectations must be set from the outset. When schools and employers work together with a shared vision, they can develop models that reflect their operational realities while still delivering significant benefits to students.

Looking Ahead: Embedding Engagement in Education

Once trust and consistency are established, there is potential for broader experimentation with formats and group structures. In one case, a school with whom I have built a strong relationship invited me to co-develop a term-long scheme of work for Year 8 design and technology students as a Creative Technology module. Embedding industry collaboration into the curriculum in this way has the potential to improve outcomes dramatically. If replicated more widely, this model could create a meaningful connection between education and the sector, benefitting young people and industry alike.

Cross-curricula collaboration as a key step to the future of education?

The question is, how much is down to the sector and how much can the education system itself also foster industry levels of collaboration and models to enhance its own pedagogy? I have had the opportunity to deliver Continuing Professional Development (CPD) sessions for teachers focused on embedding creative technology and cross-curricular creativity within classroom practice. While my workshops have traditionally been rooted in art and design disciplines, the evolving educational landscape, highlighted in the World Economic Forum (WEF) The Future of Jobs report (2023) referenced in the introduction, underscores the importance of creativity and problem-solving as transferable skills beyond specialist subject areas. In the face of rapid technological change and global complexity, the ability to connect ideas across disciplines, think creatively, and adapt quickly is no longer optional — it is essential.

Exploring prototyping methodologies and creative thinking strategies are aimed at helping young people make meaningful connections across subjects and lived experiences. It is time to encourage each other to consider how students can draw on prior knowledge, collaborate across disciplines, and develop core competencies such as critical thinking, communication, and adaptability. By getting students to design and paper prototype immersive experiences rooted in early-stage project development, allows students to use all the senses to support integrated, student-centred approaches to teaching and learning.

By fostering immersive, interdisciplinary projects, teachers can help students develop deeper understanding of their own subject areas and transferable skills critical for navigating complex real-world problems.

For Young People and Families - I Am Intrigued by Creative tech, But What Next?

At the end of many creative workshops, I'm often asked the same question: *What's the best way to break into industry?* Are there apprenticeships, study specific A-Level subjects, or are there starter jobs? The answer is complex, and that's what makes the creative technology sector seem so inaccessible, but once in it so unique and exciting. The journeys of professionals in fields vary widely, with each person's route shaped by individual passions, practical experiences, and sometimes a healthy disregard for convention. We are innovators, rule-breakers, yet re-aligners; a mix that's hard to reduce to a single path. So how do we offer guidance to young people when no two stories are the same?

Exploring the Current Educational Landscape

There's good news for those interested in creative tech as more people begin to understand its growth possibilities and expansion across a broad range of sectors; there's an increase in jobs for those with specialist key skills. However, how do young people get those skills? More educational institutions are recognising the demand for specialised training in VFX, animation, game design and those working with sound. At the post-16 level, several colleges now offer Level 3 courses that cover these subjects, allowing students to get a taste of industry-specific skills and software.

The courses, while promising, still often fall short of a true interdisciplinary experience. Creative technology thrives on the intersection of multiple disciplines—art, coding, storytelling, music, and even psychology. Cross-curricular collaboration is key, yet many programs still operate in silos, mirroring the more rigid subject separations seen throughout traditional schooling. This divide can leave students with a strong foundation in one area but without exposure to the diverse skill set the sector demands.

The Role of A-Levels: A Declining Opportunity?

A-Level courses that seem relevant to creative technology such as Design and Technology, and Digital Media, are becoming less common or harder to reach in some regions. "The number of young people entering Design and Technology qualifications in England has declined in recent years: 136,150 (21.8%) students at the end of key stage 4 entered a Design and Technology GCSE in 2020, compared to 280,670 (44.2%) in 2009" (Education Policy Institute, 2022). This trend limits options for students who might otherwise have used these courses as a launchpad. While A-Level study in these subjects isn't mandatory for a career in creative technology, it does allow young people to explore and develop their interests early, building transferable skills in problem-solving, technical literacy, and creative thinking.

For students who do choose A-Levels, it's worth noting that a well-rounded set of subjects that play to both technical and creative strengths can be incredibly valuable. A blend of digital skills, storytelling, and analytical thinking will likely prepare them for an industry that's as much about telling stories through visuals and sound as it is about technical execution.

The Importance of Diverse Routes and Lifelong Learning

The sector values practical skills, creativity, and resilience, often more than any specific credential. The "learn-as-you-go" mindset is essential, as technology and techniques evolve rapidly. Courses and programs that stress interdisciplinary collaboration and continuous learning give young people the tools they need to stay adaptable.

One of the most significant barriers to entry for aspiring creatives is a lack of awareness about the opportunities available in the creative technology sector. Parents, often influenced by their own experiences and perspectives, may not fully understand the breadth of career paths that exist within this dynamic field. Many may lean towards traditional, secure career options, guiding their children based on familiar frameworks rather than the diverse possibilities that creative technology offers. It's also crucial to recognise that young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds may have fewer resources and less exposure to creative and technological opportunities at home.

To address this gap, it's essential to engage in dialogue with those who influence young people's career choices: parents, school career leads, and teachers. Educating all these key stakeholders about the variety of pathways available and ways in which they can develop skills at home can empower them to provide informed guidance. This shift in understanding can help parents recognise the value of pursuing passions over conventional expectations. By fostering open discussions and providing resources, we can better equip young people to navigate this exciting field. Engaging parents in this dialogue ensures they feel empowered to support their children's exploration of their passions, unlocking the potential of the next generation of creatives in the ever-evolving landscape of creative technology.

Finding and Creating a Path

Today, the possibilities to explore creative tech extend far beyond the classroom. Online platforms, free software, open-source projects, and active communities make it possible for students to learn, create, and get feedback on their own.
Students can:

- **Dive into online tutorials and courses** on platforms like YouTube, Screenskills, and Blender, Resolve, where they can explore everything from animation, 3D modeling to sound design at their own pace.
- **Engage with communities** on forums like Reddit, Discord, or dedicated creative tech spaces, like the Pervasive Media Studio in Watershed, where they can connect, collaborate, and even share work with industry professionals.
- **Participate in hackathons, game jams, or digital art challenges,** which give students real-world project experience, sometimes alongside working professionals.
- **Tinker and play:** start with free software and enjoy creativity out of the limitations. I once made a homemade 'peppers ghost illusion' to use as a hologram in a theatre piece. It wasn't fancy but it allowed me to problem solve and think about my craft in new ways.

These self-led paths not only build practical skills but also encourage the kind of curiosity and independence that will serve them well in a professional creative environment.

Advising young people on their path into creative technology should focus on building a foundation in creativity, adaptability, and problem-solving. They don't need to have a full roadmap; they need the curiosity to explore and the resilience to keep learning. By focusing on these qualities, educational institutions and mentors can guide aspiring creatives toward fulfilling and dynamic careers in an ever-evolving industry.

The best path? It's the one they shape themselves. And as they continue to innovate and redefine, the sector will be better for it. They just need our guidance and the sector to step up, shout about its work and make them feel welcome. If you are reading this as a parent, encourage your children to remain playful and explore what they enjoy, the lack of distinct route may seem daunting but just know the skills they will learn will be valuable in any sector they find themselves in.

Stick
T
An induction loop is provided for the benefit of hearing aid users. To use please switch your hearing aid to T.

References

World Economic Forum (2023). *The Future of Jobs Report 2023*. World Economic Forum. Available at: https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2023

Cultural Learning Alliance (2024). *CLA-2024 Annual Report Card*. Cultural Learning Alliance. Available at: https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/CLA-2024-Annual-Report-Card.pdf

Gatsby Charitable Foundation (2024). *Good Career Guidance: The Next 10 Years*. Gatsby Charitable Foundation. Available at: https://cdn.gatsbybenchmarks.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/11/good-career-guidance-the-next-10-years-report.pdf

Department for Education (2025) *Careers guidance and access for education and training providers*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-guidance-provision-for-young-people-in-schools/careers-guidance-and-access-for-education-and-training-providers

Creative UK (2024) *CCI stats sheet*. Available at: https://www.wearecreative.uk/champion/publications/

Education Policy Institute (EPI), 2022. *Spotlight on Design and Technology: A report on the state of Design and Technology education in England*. [pdf] Available at: https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Spotlight-on-DT-report_EPI-March-2022.pdf

Acknowledgements

With thanks to Watershed, The Pervasive Media Studio, MyWorld, the University of Bristol, Bristol Works, South Bristol Youth, the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority, Cultural Education Hub, Department For Culture, Media and Sport, Victoria Tillotson, Kirsten Cater, Jo Gildersleve, Cotham School, Bedminster Down School, City Academy, Kings Weston School, Northstar 260 School, Gavin Strange, Lux Aeterna, Aardman, Pyka, and Air Giants—without whom the research would not have been as rewarding, and the young people would not have had such a valuable and enriching experience.

MyWorld

UK Research and Innovation

University of BRISTOL

WATERSHED