

# **BUILDING THE COMMITMENT TO THE CREATIVE GROWTH OF THE NORTH EAST**

## **EXTENDED MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE BBC AND THE NORTH EAST SCREEN INDUSTRIES PARTNERSHIP**

### **CONTEXT**

The BBC, through its licence fee funding, is a key investor in the creative economies of the UK's nations and regions. The BBC is a champion of the best homegrown storytelling, through its investment in UK creativity, ensuring that local voices, stories and portrayal are supported across BBC content and programming.

The Mayors and Combined Authorities of the North East and Tees Valley also champion the region's creative and digital industries recognising both the economic contribution they make and the pivotal role they play in showcasing the region's profile and voice. They are a priority growth opportunity within both respective Local Growth Plans and recognised in the Government's national Creative Industries Sector Plan.

In 2021, the BBC and regional partners across North East England ('North East') agreed a ground-breaking creative partnership to grow the TV production sector and wider creative industries across the region. The partnership united stakeholders from 12 Local Authorities and 3 Combined Authorities (and since May 2024, the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority and Tees Valley Combined Authority). This collective ambition and investment for our screen industries was brought together through the North East Screen Industries Partnership (NESIP). That became a blueprint for other devolved strategic and policy priorities in the North East.

The partnership between the BBC and newly formed North East Screen Industries Partnership (NESIP) was supported by a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between partners for a 5-year period, signed in September 2021. The original investment and commitments set out in that agreement due to expire in September 2026, have largely been achieved and are on track to be exceeded.

To recognise the importance of the North East to the creative economy in the UK, support the ambitions of the North East Mayors in growing its creative industries and emphasise the on-going commitment from the BBC and NESIP to the region, all parties propose to extend the existing Memorandum of Understanding and continue the successful partnership up to the end of the BBC's current Charter, on 31 December 2027. This extension will include expanded ambitions and investment from all parties

A reminder of what has been achieved by the partnership to date, working together to deliver commitments under the existing MOU is set out in the Appendix below.

## **NEW COMMITMENTS AS PART OF THE EXTENDED MOU AGREEMENT (2026 – 2027)**

This extended MOU between the BBC and NESIP sets out further commitments up to the end of December 2027, to align with the BBC's current Charter period. It aims to continue the progress to date, around our shared ambitions for audiences, creators and the screen industries in the North East.

### **The BBC commits to:**

- An increase in Network TV commissioning spend in the North East to include an additional £15m of investment to the end of the BBC's current Charter in December 2027, as part of our commitment to spend more of our existing commissioning budget across the UK. This will take the BBC's total investment to a minimum of £40m across the Charter period.
- Continue to strengthen and broaden the range of genres of production activity and skills produced from the region in the longer term, including audio and visualised audio production. This will include new Scripted commissions such as *Adrian Mole*, and *The Northumbria Mysteries*
- Deliver its funding and support for the Digital Accelerator scheme, developing new digital-first content and talent across North East England, in partnership with NESIP.
- Advise NESIP and regional partners on the continued development of plans for creative industry skills and production related infrastructure in the region including Sunderland and Hartlepool, informed by our knowledge of technical requirements experienced elsewhere in the UK.
- To bring further major BBC events to the region such as Radio 1 Big Weekend in Sunderland in May 2026, which will include performances and other content on BBC iPlayer.
- Create regular connections and collaboration with other BBC creative partnerships across the region, including its Music and BBC Introducing partnership with music sector development agency Generator, The Glasshouse International Centre for Music, The Fire Station, Tees Music Alliance, and Middlesbrough Town Hall.
- Set out its support for long-term approaches to nurture and grow the creative economy in the region as part of its future Charter commitments. In its Green Paper response in March 2026, the BBC has confirmed its support for UK regional economic growth as a new Public Purpose as part of a new Charter agreement, and that the North East creative cluster – across both Combined Authority geographies - is an ongoing priority region for the BBC during the next Charter period, subject to future funding.

**NESIP commits to:**

- Seek approval for a minimum of £5.8m funding between now and December 2027 for North East Screen to promote the region, attracting production businesses, as well as investing in professional talent, skills, creative business and infrastructure development.
- Continue to support a North East Screen Production Fund by seeking approval for a minimum investment of £2.2m (included in the £5.8m investment above), and align its priorities, activities and investments to support the BBC's MOU commitments and wider ambitions in the region.
- Continue to invest in a talent and skills pipeline with a region-wide strategy and programme of activity that links North East Screen with Higher Education, Further Education and other partners with production locating in the region.
- Seek to, at a minimum, match-fund BBC investment in talent and skills development in the region associated with BBC productions or training initiatives.
- Continue its funding and support for the Digital Accelerator content and talent development scheme, jointly funded with the BBC.
- In partnership with Local Authorities, invest strategically in co-ordinated infrastructure support to maximise production spend in the region, collaborating with the BBC, and aligning delivery across the North East as a whole.
- This includes investment to support and promote the development of Crown Works (Sunderland), Northern Studios and Production Village (Hartlepool) creating a healthy pipeline of demand for production in the North East.
- Continue to provide a clear mandate, governance and budget to North East Screen to deliver the region's ambitions on production and skills growth.

North East Screen will continue to be the main interface between the region, the BBC and other partners. All parties agree to work together with other like-minded Broadcast, training and creative sector partners to further strengthen sustainable production activity, skills and talent in the region.

In addition, the North East Screen Industries Partnership Board, will continue to oversee the partnership and consist of appropriate representatives from the BBC, NESIP and other creative partners. The Board will meet quarterly to monitor the delivery of the commitments as well as how all parties are collectively supporting the wider ambitions to grow the region's creative community.

**Signatories:**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'T. Davie'.

**Tim Davie - Director General, BBC**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ben Houchen'.

**Ben Houchen - Mayor, Tees Valley Combined Authority**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Kim McGuinness'.

**Kim McGuinness - Mayor, North East Combined Authority**

**30 March 2026**

## APPENDIX

### DELIVERY OF EXISTING COMMITMENTS DURING CURRENT MOU (2021 – 2026)

#### FROM THE BBC:

- Target a minimum of £25m of Network TV commissioning spend to the North East over 5 years.
  - *As of March 2026, the BBC has met the spend commitment.*
- Strengthen unscripted production activity and skills in the short term with the ambition of broadening the range of genres produced from the region in the longer term.
  - *To date, the BBC has commissioned four series of Robson Green's Weekend Escapes, providing returning volume to underpin unscripted skills development. Other new commissions included: Joanna Page's Wild Life; The Big Idea Works; two series of Smoggie Queens and multiple series of The Dumping Ground.*
- Expanding BBC Three activity in the region, by launching a new creative commissioning opportunity in partnership with North East Screen (previously referred to as Northern Film + Media), to discover new factual talent, voices and ideas from the region.
  - *Content for BBC Three included: The Truth About Vaping; Therapy: Tough Talking; Canny Cops; Doppelganger. Plus, commissioned a range of small indies to make short videos for Morning Live and The One Show.*
- Investment in longer-term talent development:
  - *The BBC Writers Room has supported new writing talent identified through its NE Voices and Northern Voices programmes, as well as running a shadow writing scheme in the region for CBBC's The Dumping Ground.*
  - *BBC Drama, Film Nation and North East Screen IP development initiative*
  - *CBBC's three-step initiative from open day to trainee placement.*
  - *Newcastle hosted the first BBC Comedy Festival in 2022 and hosted the Northern Heat of the BBC New Comedy Awards in 2025 and broadcast on BBC Three. As part of the BBC Comedy Festival, a regional small indie producer received mentoring from Hat Trick Productions, Tiger Aspect produced a BAFTA nominated short film with North East writers and performers and 2 small indies were supported through the BBC small indie fund & BBC comedy collective*
- Supporting talent and skills development working with the regional screen agency, and their relationship with HE and FE organisations in the region.
  - *The BBC have forged a collaborative partnership with NES and skills suppliers to support the development of various initiatives including: Step Up; crew mapping; Going Places scheme, production shadowing; the Skills Group.*

## FROM NESIP:

- Commit a minimum of £11m funding over 5 years for North East Screen to promote the region, attracting production businesses, as well as investing in professional talent, skills, creative business and infrastructure development.
  - *In the 5 years of the partnership, regional partners have delivered their financial commitments in full. Economic impact research confirms that in the first three years of the programme, NESIP investment has generated a GVA of £65m, 1,046 FTE jobs, £55m production spend and 8 regularly commissioned companies in the region.*
- Create a North East wide Screen Production Fund, and will align its priorities, activities and investments to support the BBC's MOU commitments and wider ambitions in the region.
  - *The Production Fund is in place providing support of £5.3m (including an additional £1.5m top-up taking the overall funding t-date to £12.9m) over the first 4 years of the programme aimed at increasing GVA, jobs and building a sustainable film and TV infrastructure in the North East. 18 productions and the Digital Accelerator programme have been supported in this time.*
- Invest in a talent and skills pipeline with a region-wide strategy and programme of activity that links North East Screen with Higher Education and Further Education and other partners with production locating in the region.
  - *Created and delivered both entry level pathways into industry and career-long continuing professional development for regional crew identifying skills shortages and gaps. Working with partners to create Screen Alliance North to access BFI skills cluster funding – an additional £2.4m of funding across the 4 Northern regional partners.*
- Seek as a minimum, to match-fund BBC investment in talent and skills development in the region associated with BBC productions or training initiatives.
  - *Developed and delivered skills initiatives alongside BBC productions in the region, including both Production Fund-supported and non-Production Fund activity, drawing on best practice from the skills scheme delivered around The Dumping Ground.*
- Invest strategically in co-ordinated infrastructure support to maximise production spend in region (along with partner Local Authorities) – consulting with the BBC and aligning delivery across the North East as a whole.
  - *Productions hosted include RTS-nominated productions Transaction (ITV) & The Feud (Channel 5) and BAFTA-nominated productions I Fought the Law (ITV) & Smoggie Queens (BBC)*
  - *£15m investment into the expansion of the Northern Studios and a further £18m investment into the surrounding Production Village in Hartlepool*

- *£38.5m investment committed for the first phase of the Crown Works studios in Sunderland*
- NESIP will provide a clear mandate, governance and budget to North East Screen to deliver the region's ambitions on production and skills growth. North East Screen will be the main interface between the region, the BBC and other partners.

In addition, a regional North East Screen Industries Partnership Board was established, consisting of appropriate representatives from senior leadership from the BBC, regional authorities, skills bodies and the independent sector. The Board was required to meet quarterly to monitor the delivery of commitments as well as to collectively progress the wider ambitions for industry growth.