

INDUSTRY BRIEFING:

# LEVELLING UP THE SOCIAL MEDIA CREATOR ECONOMY



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2023



UNIVERSITY  
*of York*

## What's the report about?

The report outlines issues in the **creator economy**. It addresses **gaps in policy** in efforts to **level up**, and recommends **action in three areas** that could support **regional diversity and inclusion**:

1. revenue streams
2. professional training and networking spaces
3. collective trade representation

The report draws on:

- policy
- industry data
- interviews with 53 self-employed social media content creators in Yorkshire

The right **platforms** and **government policy** could:

- bolster the digital creative industries
- promote regional development
- foster stable and reasonably paid careers for creators

## Context and new insights

The UK government has produced a policy agenda called *Levelling up the United Kingdom*. It has addressed **uneven economic development and social deprivation** in regions such as Yorkshire.

The **digital creative industries facilitate growth and productivity** that could provide opportunities across the country.

But a report by the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, *Influencer culture*, reveals social media creators struggle to build careers that are **sustainable and decently paid**.

In this context, Yorkshire creators face numerous challenges and perceive a variety of opportunities.

The digital creative industries

# facilitate growth

and productivity



## Finances

- Platforms use revenue-sharing models that require creators to have high follower counts to be eligible.
- Creators are also concerned about revenue splits, especially on TikTok.
- Creators engage in brand partnerships, but many opportunities come from national or international companies – creators recognise that there is untapped potential for Yorkshire brand collaborations.
- More positively, creators diversify revenue through third-party subscriptions and merchandise sales to try to achieve more direct and equitable earnings.
- Ensuring minimum pay rates for creators could provide more financial stability.

## Training and networking

- Most Yorkshire creators struggle to access professional training and networking opportunities, which leads to the perception among Northern-based creators that creator culture is more normalised in the South of England.
- Some creators praise the now-closed London YouTube Space as a model for co-workspaces and networking events.
- A regional public 'Creator Hub' in Yorkshire could offer professional equipment access and community networking.
- Government-backed Creator Hubs at libraries and universities could encourage community building and learning among creators.
- Expanding programmes like #YouTubeBlack Voices (which supports Black talent on YouTube) to cover regional inclusion could be a way to provide creators with networking opportunities and resources.



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**community building and learning**

among creators

## Collective representation

- Yorkshire creators generally support unionisation, believing it could address issues such as underpayment and unfair contracts.
- A creators' union could negotiate pay with platforms and brands, which would increase pay transparency and make working conditions fairer.
- A union could also assist with:
  - professional development
  - education
  - funding
  - networking
- Challenges with unionisation include:
  - defining eligibility and membership fees
  - balancing individual autonomy with collective representation
- Unionisation may not resolve all issues but can be a key step towards industry-wide support and recognition.



# What next / action points?

Social media content creation does these things:

- generates value for the creative industries
- creates regional job opportunities
- contributes to the country's GDP
- positively impacts communities

The following actions could ensure creators are supported in policy and industry programmes:

1. Reorganise platform payment schemes:
  - increase the revenue split for creators
  - provide start-up funding from platforms and the government
  - establish a minimum wage for creators
2. Facilitate regional brand partnerships and collaborations to expand this revenue stream. Highlight them in an Influencer Marketing Code of Conduct or a Creator Bill of Rights.
3. Launch regional long-term physical Creator Hubs and programmes, with support from platforms, collective trade organisations, and the government. House them in wider Digital Inclusion Hubs in public libraries and universities.
4. Legally recognise and promote professional collective trade organisations that can advocate for and support creators at the regional level. Ensure they are accessible and membership criteria are clear. Campaign for industry-wide minimum pay rates.

These action points raise implications for **boosting regional development, pay, jobs, living standards and economic growth across the UK in regions such as Yorkshire.**

By providing a living wage, professional training and networking opportunities, these actions could support creators to build sustainable careers and establish regional creator clusters.

## About the author

Dr Errol Salamon is a senior lecturer in digital media and communication in the Department of Communication and Humanities at the University of Huddersfield. He is principal investigator of the SIGN-funded collaborative research project 'Creator labour: Screen production cultures and transmedia intersectionality in Yorkshire'. His research has been published in various journals, including *New Media & Society*, *Digital Journalism*, *Communication Theory and Management* and *Communication Quarterly*.

## Further reading

Read the full report:

<https://screen-network.org.uk/publication/levelling-up-social-media-content-creator-labour/>

Read more about the rise of social media entertainment and its impact on the traditional entertainment industry:

<https://nyupress.org/9781479846894/social-media-entertainment/>

Read the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee's (2022) Influencer culture report:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5802/cmselect/cmcomeds/258/report.html>

Read the government response to the Influencer culture report:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmcomeds/687/report.html>

Read more about the rise of the creator economy:

[https://creativeclass.com/reports/The\\_Rise\\_of\\_the\\_Creator\\_Economy.pdf](https://creativeclass.com/reports/The_Rise_of_the_Creator_Economy.pdf)

Read more about how YouTubers in Germany organised a trade union:

<https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/16535-20210225.pdf>

Read more about the impact of YouTube in the UK:

<https://www.oxfordeconomics.com/resource/youtube-uk/>

Read more about how freelance media workers balance individual autonomy with collective representation:

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819861958>

Read more about the rise of the 'creator middle class':

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/creativegroup/youtube/meet-the-creator-middle-class/>

## Disclaimer

This brief does not represent the views of the University of York as an institution.

To find out more about the University of York's work on digital creativity, check out SIGN and the School of Arts and Creative Technologies:

[screen-network.org.uk](https://screen-network.org.uk)

[york.ac.uk/arts-creative-technologies](https://york.ac.uk/arts-creative-technologies)

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