

Mayor's Cultural Leadership Board Minutes 24 July 2025

24 July 2025

Key information

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Attendees

Ambassadors

- Sade Banks-Tubi, CEO, The What If Experiment (**Apologies**)
- Eliza Easton, Founder, Erskine Analysis
- Brenda Emmanus OBE, Broadcaster, Journalist and Consultant (**Apologies**)
- Lilli Geissendorfer, Director, Theatre Green Book and Independent Consultant & Facilitator (**Apologies**)
- Dr Paul Gilluley, Chief Medical Officer - NHS North East London Integrated Health System
- Anu Giri, Executive Director, English National Ballet
- Adem Holness, Head of Music SXSW London
- Claudia Kenyatta CBE, Director of Regions, Historic England
- Helen O'Donnell, Director of Development TalentWorks, BBC Studios
- Cllr. Anthony Okereke, Leader of the Council, Royal Borough of Greenwich
- Amanda Parker, **Co-Chair**, Creative Industries Representative
- Martin Prendergast, Founder of Martin Prendergast Communications (MPC)
- Amaarah Roze, Independent Facilitator, Performer & Producer
- Freya Salway, Head of the Lab, Google Arts & Culture (**Apologies**)

- Justine Simons OBE, **Deputy Mayor** for Culture and Creative Industries
- Tom Sleigh, **Co-Chair**
- Emma Squire CBE, Director of Regions, Historic England (**Represented by Claudia Kenyatta**)
- Dr Jo Twist OBE, CEO, BPI
- Nigel Twumasi, Co-Founder & Consultant, mayamada
- Deborah Williams OBE, Independent Representative (**Apologies**)

Additional Attendees

- Howard Dawber, Deputy Mayor for Business
- Shonagh Manson, Assistant Director, Culture, Creative Industries and 24 Hour London Unit
- Ann-Marie Soyinka, Assistant Director, Skill and Employment – Policy
- Rachael Wadsworth, Head of Creative Places, Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)
- Sam Spencer, Nightlife Taskforce
- Policy Officers, Culture, Creative Industries and 24 Hour London Unit

Item 1 - Welcome

1. Co-Chair, Amanda Parker welcomed everyone to the meeting and stated that Co-Chair Tom Sleigh would be join the meeting for Item 3.
2. Apologies were noted as above.
3. No corrections or changes were raised for the minutes from the previous meeting. The minutes were approved and will be published in August.
4. The Co-chair outlined the purpose of this session, which was to give the Board an overview of the Mayor's main skills and education programmes, and for the Skills and Employment Team to gather the Board's input and ideas to contribute to the Inclusive Talent Strategy (ITS). The Deputy Mayor for Business would also give an overview of the objectives of the London Growth Plan in relation to the creative workforce. There would also be an update from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport following the publication of the Creative Industries Sector Plan.
5. There were no declarations of Conflicts of Interest arising from any of the agenda items.

Item 1	Welcome and Outline of the Meeting	Amanda Parker
Item 2	London Growth Plan	Howard Dawber OBE
Item 3	Creative Industries Sector Plan Feedback	Rachael Wadsworth
Item 4	Creative Skills and Education	Ann-Marie Soyinka
Item 6	Workshop – Inclusive Talent Strategy	Tom Sleigh
Item 7	AOB and Close	Tom Sleigh

Item 2 - London Growth Plan

1. The Deputy Mayor spoke about the objectives of the London Growth Plan within the context of the Creative Industries. A summary of the speech is as follows:
 1. London's creative sector urgently needs skilled professionals, but traditional training models don't always suit the freelance-heavy workforce.
 2. The London-wide Inclusive Talent Strategy is being developed by the Mayor with London Councils, placing employers needs at the centre. It aims to simplify the system, align education and industry, and support inclusive hiring. Insights are being shared with BusinessLDN to inform the Local Skills Improvement Plan.
 3. The Strategy will be co-designed with the sector. The goal is to make London the world's best place to build teams by improving access to talent and streamlining hiring across the 5 priority areas of the London Growth Plan, including the creative industries.

Item 3 - Getting Culture Strategy Ready

1. Rachael Wadsworth from the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) gave an update on what had happened since the publication of the Creative Industries Sector Plan in June, which is part of the Industrial Strategy.
2. Key Issues raised by the Board that are reflected in the Sector Plan include an acknowledgement of the following:
 - issues around fair payment for creative content in the context of AI
 - the fragmented support for freelancers
 - the perception of the sector not a viable career or investment opportunity
 - the perceived competition between London vs regions instead of collaboration
 - innovation landscape challenges
3. In the Plan, the Government has committed to strengthening London's creative industries through targeted growth financing, innovation investment, support for freelancers – including the appointment of a DCMS Freelance Champion – priority funding in film, games and music, and enhanced trade and export opportunities. London will also have a seat on the Creative Places Group.
4. Following the update, the following points were made by Board members:
 - The cultural sector is a powerful driver for growth, and Green Book-compliant research shows the impact.
 - This future-facing sector plan is welcome, but foundational issues remain with many organisations struggling to keep their doors open. The sector still needs help to stabilise.
 - There are still concerns about the impact of significant reductions in local government funding, as councils are the core funders of local cultural services.

Item 4 - Inclusive Talent Strategy

1. The Assistant Director gave a short presentation about the Mayor's Skills and Employment programmes, such as the Adult Skills Fund, the London Careers Hub and the Mayor's Skills Academies.

2. The Board then heard more details about the Inclusive Talent Strategy objectives. A summary of what was said is as follows:

- Sector Employer Boards will allow employers to shape the skills and careers offer to meet sector needs.
- Each sector will have a Pan-London Hub as a central access point for large employers, while subregional multi-sector hubs will support SMEs and engage Londoners furthest from the labour market.
- Place-based initiatives will help disadvantaged communities access growth sectors, raise career awareness and build progression pathways with employers and anchor institutions. The shift to an employer-led system will begin with a pilot board with creative industries, construction, and life sciences proposed as pilots.

1. Item 5 - Workshop Inclusive Talent Strategy

1. The Co-Chair, Tom Sleigh, reminded the Board of the objectives of the Inclusive Talent Strategy: to deliver better results for employers; to help employers shape the system to fit their hiring and skills needs and to simplify the workforce system - cutting complexity and improving access to jobs.

2. The Board and guests discussed the following questions in the workshop:

- What are the main barriers to growing and diversifying the creative industries workforce?
- What can the Mayor and the GLA do to support better collaboration between employers and education/skills providers?
- Where are the opportunities to build better employment rights and inclusive work practices in the creative industries?
- Do you have any examples of best practice?

1. Discussions on 'the main barriers to growing and diversifying the creative industries workforce', centred around cultural and perception, recruitment and networking, education and skill pipeline gaps and structural and financial challenges. This included:

- Many heritage and creative microbusinesses lack capacity and external support, leaving them too stretched to recruit or develop diverse talent.
- Low pay for early-career creatives (e.g., c£12.5k for writers; c£14.5k for visual artists) makes the sector inaccessible to those without financial safety nets.
- Lack of Further Education/Foundation courses and underperforming/inflexible apprenticeships mean many young people have no clear route into creative careers.
- Over-proliferation of postgraduate qualifications raises entry requirements without improving career prospects.
- Employers often fail to recognise transferable skills—such as a social-media editors in traditional media roles.
- Elaborate job adverts and the absence of competency-based frameworks obscure true role requirements.
- It's a highly networked, project-based industry. Many roles are filled through informal or direct recruitment, making it harder to apply conventional employment pathways, such as Job Centres or standard recruitment schemes, to open up access to jobs.
- Culture roles are often among the first to face cuts in financial downturns, reinforcing the view that creative careers are unstable.

1. Discussions on what 'the Mayor and the GLA could do to support better collaboration between employers and education/skills providers' centred around data and market intelligence, curriculum and skills provision, partnerships and collaboration and grassroots and sector-wide coordination. This included:
 - Engage HR directors and sector leaders in accurate skills-gap analyses, then translate findings into accessible summaries for educators and employers.
 - Explore new funding models, derisking entry into the sector (e.g. funding teams rather than individual projects).
 - Fund and co-design Further Education/foundation courses that align with current creative-sector needs, embedding AI competencies in long-term skills strategies.
 - Link existing initiatives (Grow London Local, accelerator programmes) to broader business-support schemes, embedding dedicated specialists within creative organisations.
 - Convene roundtables with RADA, the BRIT School, and other hubs to identify scalable models and best practices for wider rollout.
 - Map and support micro and grassroots organisations by creating targeted funding streams so they aren't overshadowed by large institutions.
 - Encourage collaborative training and development: joint funding bids, co-accredited sector-wide training mechanisms, shared roles across organisations, and clear benchmarking frameworks for pay and skills.
2. Discussions on the 'opportunities to build better employment rights and inclusive work practices in the creative industries' focussed on rights and protections for freelancers, inclusive recruitment and progression, training and reskilling pathways, data, benchmarking and accountability. This included:
 - Work with the Government's new Freelancer Champion to consider how rights can be improved without introducing unnecessary bureaucratic burdens.
 - Advocate and support organisations to adopt anonymised recruitment practices, diverse interview panels, and transparent, competency-based job descriptions to broaden access.
 - Establish trusted recruitment platforms to bypass opaque, networked hiring.
 - Support sector-wide, co-accredited training validated by employers, with guaranteed hiring pipelines linked to competency frameworks.
 - Support businesses to provide wraparound care, mentorship, and business-skills support at all career stages, not just entry points.
 - Use agile market-intelligence and skills-gap data (e.g., Innovate UK) to inform policy and course design.
 - Consider providing guidance on salary bands (as is done by the German unions)
3. Suggestions on 'examples of best practice' included:
 - External support and training framework in the heritage sector that doubled small-business participation from 20% to 40%.
 - Embedding employment specialists within creative organisations to build recruitment and skills capacity.
 - Cultural Infrastructure mapping approach to identify and preserve creative jobs.
 - Innovate UK's agile market-intelligence framework applied to arts-education programmes.
 - Children's Capital of Culture (Rotherham): paid trainee roles, mentoring, and 6–8-month placements across local creative organisations.
 - Weston Jerwood Creative Bursaries: paid entry-level jobs for candidates from low-socioeconomic backgrounds.
 - Goodwin's Create to Change (Hull): community-focused creative development.
 - University Museums Group using apprenticeship-levy funds for sector-specific training schemes.

- **Action:** Secretariat to share the notes from the Board's workshop with Skills and Employment Unit to feed into their stakeholder analysis in the development of the Inclusive Talent Strategy.

Item 5 - Any Other Business (AOB)

1. Co-Chair Tom Sleigh thanked the Board and guests for their contributions and closed the meeting.
2. The next meeting was scheduled for 2 October 2025.
3. The meeting was closed.

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