AI Technologies and Emerging Forms of Creative Practice:

An Analysis of Investment in AI and Creative Practice by Arts Council England from 2019 - 2025

Written by Dr Oonagh Murphy and the New Technologies & Innovation Team

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

BRAID
Bridging Responsible AI Divides

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Contents

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Introduction

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. We employ around 700 staff across nine offices in England. We invest public money from the Government and the National Lottery to support the arts and culture sector.

Our strategy, *Let's Create,* sets out our ambition for everyone in England to have access to high-quality cultural experiences in the places where they live and work, and for the creativity of everyone to be valued and nurtured.

As part of our commitment to supporting innovation, we champion creative practitioners who are engaging with emerging technologies and responding to societal challenges. In recent years, we've seen growing interest from creative practitioners working with AI technologies or exploring the societal narratives that surround them.

When we began to consider the impact of AI on creative practice, we turned to creative practitioners to help us understand how these technologies are shaping new approaches. One of the ways we've supported this exploration is through our National Lottery Project Grants and Developing Your Creative Practice programmes.

Since 2019 Arts Council has invested £4 Million in creative practitioners using AI technologies in their practice, developing new skills to support engagement with AI technologies, or on projects and practices that engage with the wider impact of these technologies on society. These projects have been funded through existing grant programmes. This report analyses these projects, and the investment, to provide an evidence based foundation for emerging conversations about the opportunities that AI technologies are creating in the Creative and Cultural Sector.

In parallel to supporting creative practitioners who are engaging with AI technologies in their practice, Arts Council recognises the legitimate concerns many in the sector have about the negative impact these technologies are having on creators, as such Arts Council consulted the sector and responded the Copyright and Artificial Intelligence Consultation, advocating for the fair remuneration of creative practitioners and their work.

Whilst Arts Council has invested in creative practitioners who are at the forefront of these technologies, we know that these technologies will begin to impact the work of the creative sector more widely going forward. In our role supporting the sector, Arts Council wants to be there, to support creative individuals and organisations across the country to engage in the opportunities and challenges these technologies represent in a safe and responsible way. Arts Council are not advocating the use of AI technologies in creative practice but are responding to its increasing use by the sector itself.

AI at Arts Council England

This report forms part of the wider Bridging Responsible AI Divides project led by Dr Oonagh Murphy, Senior Lecturer in Digital Culture and Society at Goldsmiths, and Owen Hopkin, Director of New Technologies and Innovation, Arts Council England.

To date the project has seen the publication of:

- AI: Arts Council England Public Position Statement on the Writing and Assessment of Funding Applications
- Responsible AI in Practice: The Journey of Arts Council England
- Responsible AI: A Practical Toolkit

In addition to sharing our thinking and resources with the sector, in July 2025 we held a collaborative event with techUK AI Creative Expression & Skills, Forging New Pathways Together to bring creative practitioners and tech companies together to explore approaches to equitable partnerships. The impact of AI technologies on the Creative and Cultural sector is an evolving area of interest and concern for Arts Council. This report evidences the ways in which the sector itself is choosing to engage with these technologies, and analyses how existing funding mechanisms have been utilised to support this work.

Mapping Investment

In order to understand how creative practitioners are using existing funding mechanisms from Arts Council England to engage with AI technologies, we undertook a retrospective analysis of projects that had received funding through our broad, cross art form funding schemes which are open to individuals and organisations.

Successful National Lottery Project Grants and Developing Your Creative Practice applications from April 2019 - March 2025 were searched and analysed for references to 17 key words, namely: AI, GAN, NLP, Algorithm, Chatbot, Generative AI, Computer Vision, Generative Adversarial Network, Machine Vision. Machine Learning, Natural Language Processing, Neural Networks, Predicative Analytics. Robots, Robotics, Supervised Learning, Data Set.

This data set was then manually sifted, to identify projects that:

- Used AI technologies
- Provided opportunities for the development of AI skills
- Engaged with the narratives and impacts of AI technologies on society.

This analysis identified almost 200 projects (194), which represented an investment of almost £4 million (£3.988m) across the nine discipline areas supported by Arts Council England namely:

- Combined Arts
- Dance
- Digital Arts
- Libraries
- Literature
- Museums
- Music
- Theatre
- Visual Arts

Investment Mechanisms

Arts Council England has several funding programmes that can support projects and professional development for both individuals and organisations. The primary funds accessed to support the projects analysed in this research are Developing your Creative Practice and National Lottery Project Grants. Other time limited programmes, including Capital, are not included in this report but may also support digital innovation and resilience.

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We recognise that AI is a transformative, increasingly ubiquitous general-purpose technology with wide ranging implications for creative production and consumption.

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Developing your Creative Practice

- This fund supports individual creative and cultural practitioners to focus on their development and take them to the next stage of their practice. This can include:
- Building new networks
- Experimenting with new collaborators or partners
- International travel to explore your practice
- Professional development activities, such as
    - Training
    - Working with mentors
- Research and development time to explore your practice and take risks

Applicants can apply for between £2,000 - £12,000, this is an extremely oversubscribed fund making it competitive with an applicant success rate of around 19% at time of writing.

National Lottery Project Grants

National Lottery Project Grants is our open access programme for arts, libraries and museums projects. The fund supports thousands of individual practitioners, community and cultural organisations.

Applicants can apply for between £1,000 and £100,000 (and over £100,000 for nationally significant and touring projects). The success rate for applicants to this fund is around 30% at time of writing. There are different strands within this wider fund, and each strand has a distinct success rate, some strands require an expression of interest submission which creates a higher success rate, as applicants who exit at expression of interest stage are not included in the final success rate data.

Let's Create in Practice

To ensure the relevance of these funds to the breadth of creative activity and roles within the creative sector, Arts Council does not define 'art' or 'artist' but uses its funding to support 'creativity and culture'. We define 'culture' as activity associated with the nine stated areas in which we invest. For us 'creativity' refers to the process of making, producing or participating in 'culture'. Similarly, we use 'creative practitioners' rather than 'artists' for all those who work to create new, or reshape existing, cultural content. These terms were chosen based on external research with the aim of being more inclusive of societal perspectives.

Our eligibility criteria require an applicant to be working with one or more of our supported areas and provide credible, relevant responses to our application form prompts. For National Lottery Project Grants Under £30,000 strand this includes contributing to one or more of the Let's Create Outcomes (Creative People, Cultural Communities, or A Creative and Cultural Country) and a relevant plan for addressing the Inclusivity and Relevance Investment Principle. Grants of more than £30,000 also require relevant approaches to the Environmental Responsibility, Dynamism, and Ambition & Quality Investment Principles. Application guidance is prompt-led to enable applicants to respond relevantly to the Investment Principles and Outcomes in ways appropriate to the context of their project.

For Developing Your Creative Practice, applicants are required to provide information on their past and current creative practice, a clear and relevant developmental plan, and convey both timeliness and the potential impact on their future opportunities. It is not a requirement of Developing Your Creative Practice that applicants make a case against the Let's Create Outcomes or Investment Principles. There is no requirement for public facing outcomes, enabling creatives to take risks, experiment, and build skills and knowledge in ways relevant to their practice, resilience, and ambition.

The investments and case studies referenced in this report were supported under the current criteria for both NLPG and DYCP (and not through any targeted investment in the use of AI in creative practice by Arts Council – the sector brought these projects to Arts Council through its existing funding programmes). The funded projects evidence credible, relevant and competitive contributions to our strategy and criteria as effectively as any non-AI activity. This demonstrates our current published perspectives on culture and creativity, our Investment Principles, and decision-making processes can effectively include and support technological innovation like AI. But we're also cognisant that AI is changing the cultural landscape. We

> **“In many ways it is creative practitioners who help us to define and establish the questions we should be asking when it comes to thinking about AI technologies and their impact on society.”**

recognise that AI is a transformative, increasingly ubiquitous general-purpose technology with wide ranging implications for creative production and consumption. We will remain flexible in response, but currently our perspectives and criteria have been able to accommodate this new sector reality.

Insights and Analysis

- While wider society continues to debate the implications of AI, creative practitioners are already using these tools to imagine new worlds and develop new ways to understand, adapt, break and remake these technologies through their creative practice. Through 200 projects that have been realised in every area of the country, we see an emerging new approach to creative practice, and an emerging opportunity to centre the voice of creative practitioners in conversations about the impact of these technologies on creative practice, people and planet.
- These projects took place across each area of England, £1.26m invested in London, £960k South East, £760k North Area, £510k South West, £500k Midlands. Representing a significant place-based investment in engagement with AI technologies.
- These projects took place across disciplines, the largest percentage of investment went to Visual Arts (32%), followed by Dance (18%), Combined Arts (17%), Theatre (12%), Music (9%). Digital Arts, which is its own distinct art form classifier came in at 9% of investment. On the surface, this seems unusual, but it's a new classifier introduced to ACE's funds in 2024. As such, what constitutes 'digital arts', and the understanding of when to use it (by the sector and internal staff), is still maturing.
- The investment data shows that creative practitioners are both currently using these technologies, and keen to develop skills and practices that speak to these technologies. For example, 88 individual practitioners were supported in developing new skills in the use of AI technologies through the Developing Your Practice Fund during this period. This represents an investment of £900,000 in AI skills development.
- In many ways it is creative practitioners who help us to define and establish the questions we should be asking when it comes to thinking about AI technologies and their impact on society. A responsible interim approach to these emerging technologies may simply be: remember to ask questions, be curious, imagine a new world, support those that look at this technology differently and listen to, and platform, diverse stakeholders.
- The data shows that Arts Council England has been an early investor in the development and adoption of AI technologies. Arts Council and the sector it represents has valid and valuable insights to support the responsible adoption and regulation of these technologies and are well equipped to influence policy development beyond DCMS.

Superradiance, 2024, by Memo Akten and Katie Peyton Hofstadter, presented at Creative Machine Beijing 2024 - 25 organised and sponsored by Taikang Art Museum and London Geometry Ltd.

AI in Practice: Case Studies

The projects that have received investment from Arts Council England include creative practitioners using AI technologies as a tool for creative expression, creative practitioners engaging with the impact that these technologies have on people and the planet, exploring issues and contexts such as social care, climate change and democracy. Creative practitioners have also used these technologies to inspire change, create joy and strengthen communities. Others have sought funding to develop new skills to utilise these technologies in their practice.

In order to provide depth and granularity to the reality of how AI technologies are being used in creative practice, five case studies have been developed. These case studies are representative of the complexity, creativity, rigour and ambition we found evidenced across the funded projects examined for this research. Rather than 'AI Slop' we see creative practitioners redefining what these machines are capable of and reimagining the relationship between people and technology.

Creative Machine: A Decade of Art, Science and AI Collaboration

Interview with Frederic Fol Leymarie, Professor of Computer Science, Goldsmiths

Bridging disciplines and futures: *Creative Machine* has evolved over ten years into a vital platform for artists and technologists to explore the creative potential of machines; shaping careers, exhibitions, and international dialogue.

Summary

Creative Machine is a long-running initiative that brings together artists and technologists to explore the intersection of creativity and machine intelligence. Founded by Frederic Fol Leymarie and William Latham at Goldsmiths, University of London, the project has grown from a small Arts Council England funded exhibition into a globally recognised series of events, including conferences, exhibitions, and international collaborations.

Origins and Intent

The first *Creative Machine* event launched in 2014, supported by Arts Council England, Goldsmiths, and other partners. As Fol Leymarie explains, the concept was to "bring arts and science together… with artists who are fluent with aspects of new technologies" and to ask "questions that are in the air in the time, such as 'can a machine be creative?'".

From the outset, the project resisted the narrow confines of screen-based digital art, instead embracing physical machines, robotics, and hybrid forms. "We try to almost avoid computer art per se," Fol Leymarie notes, "and involve real machines that can act in the real world."

At its core, *Creative Machine* is "a concept where we try to bring arts and science together," explained Prof Fol Leymarie. Events are designed to feature artists fluent in new technologies alongside scientists and technologists, creating space for dialogue and experimentation. Some editions have focused on public-facing exhibitions, while others have taken the form of mini-conferences with invited speakers from both disciplines with joint small exhibitions of art works. "We always try to have… everything together," said Prof Leymarie, describing the consistent inclusion of both artwork and academic discussion. This format has allowed *Creative Machine* to remain flexible, adapting to different audiences and funding contexts.

Impact on Artists and Ecosystem

Creative Machine has played a significant role in platforming emerging artists. "Some of the artists were not well known yet," Fol Leymarie says. "We've helped them to develop their practice and establish themselves." Notable alumni include Patrick Tresset, now exhibiting internationally, and Memo Akten, whose work has grown from modest installations to large-scale exhibitions.

The programme is committed to situating contemporary AI art within a longer historical arc. "We try to defend the idea that this is not a new concept… for us the history of all this starts in at least the 1960s," the organiser explained. Collaborations with the Computer Arts Society have enabled *Creative Machine* to exhibit original works by pioneers such as Harold Cohen and his AI system AARON.

“Creative Machine demonstrates how long-term, interdisciplinary collaboration between artists and technologists can shape global conversations around AI and creativity.”

Funding and Partnerships

Arts Council England's early investment was pivotal. "It was key because it triggered other funding sources," Fol Leymarie recalls. "As soon as we secured an external funder, it triggered internal [support] at Goldsmiths." The first edition in 2014 had a budget of around £50,000, covering both the exhibition and symposium. With £25,000 of that budget coming from Arts Council England.

Subsequent events have varied in scale and funding model. The most recent exhibition in Beijing is backed by a Chinese insurance company that owns the museum venue. "It's a very special case," the organiser noted, reflecting on the diversity of funding approaches.

- *Creative Machine 1* (2014) – Held at Goldsmiths, University of London, this inaugural event featured a symposium and exhibition. Funded by Arts Council England and Goldsmiths, with a budget of approximately £50,000.
- *Creative Machine 2* (2018) – A combined exhibition and conference at Goldsmiths, continuing the dual-format approach developed in partnership with CYLAND (Russia).
- *Creative Machine 3* (2022) – Focused more heavily on robotics and AI, with expanded international participation. Funded by The Alan Turing Institute and Goldsmiths.
- *Creative Machine 4* (2023) – Featured large-scale installations and a more integrated format, combining academic and artistic elements which was held in partnership with Jesus College Oxford and funded by The Alan Turing Institute, Oxford University and Goldsmiths.
- *Creative Machine TAM China* (2024 - 25) – A major international exhibition at Taikang Art Museum (TAM), Beijing. The museum is owned and funded by a Chinese company, Taikang Insurance. The exhibition is curated by William Latham, Tang Xin, and Zhou Yi, with Han Yajuan as consultant and Frederic Fol Leymarie as Academic chair. The 2024 - 25 exhibition is divided into three sections — History, Education, and Contemporary — and features works by pioneers such as Harold Cohen, Vera Molnar, and John Whitney. This exhibition received more than 15,000 paying visitors, with extensive press coverage in China and an opening event that attracted 2,000 invited guests.

Even though Arts Council England only funded the first edition, the continued use of the Arts Council logo in the context of the story of *Creative Machine*, has been important. "It shows strong interest from a reputable organisation," helping to position *Creative Machine* as a legitimate arts initiative despite its roots in computing.

Learnings and Future Directions

Creative Machine has demonstrated the value of cross-disciplinary collaboration, historical framing, and flexible funding strategies. As AI technologies evolve, the organisers anticipate future editions will engage more deeply with embodied systems such as humanoid robotics. "Robotics is probably the next wave that we could prepare for… five years from now," the organiser suggested.

Creative Machine demonstrates how long-term, interdisciplinary collaboration between artists and technologists can shape global conversations around AI and creativity. Supported initially by Arts Council England, the project has nurtured emerging talent, influenced international exhibitions, and highlighted the need for strategic investment in future-facing creative research.

By maintaining a public archive and adapting its format, Creative *Machine* continues to support artists, inform public discourse, and anticipate technological shifts in the cultural sector.

***Creative Machine* received funding from Arts Council England in 2014, we have included it as a case study in this report to evidence the long term impact of £25,000 investment in novel applications of advanced technologies in creative practice.**

Women Reclaiming AI: Building Feminist Futures in Voice Technology

Interview with Coral Manton, Artist-Technologist, Design Researcher and Senior Lecturer in Creative Computing at Bath Spa University.

Women Reclaiming AI Workshop at Knowle West Media Centre - photographer Ibolya Feher

A grassroots creative computing project that challenges gender bias in AI by empowering women and non-binary people to design their own voice assistants.

Summary

Women Reclaiming AI is a participatory arts and technology project led by Dr Coral Manton and Dr Birgitte Aga. Supported by Arts Council England, the project brought together women and gender-diverse communities to co-create a feminist voice assistant. Through workshops,

data creation, and international recognition, it challenges the gendered tropes embedded in mainstream AI systems and opens up new pathways for inclusive digital futures.

Project Overview

The project began in 2018, motivated by the observation that "every voice assistant had a female voice and the personality design of it was gendered as a woman," the team sought to interrogate and reimagine this norm. "We know these technologies take a trope or stereotype and massively amplify it," said Manton.

The team's response was to create a space where women and non-binary people could design their own voice assistants. "We decided to do a workshop and get everybody into one of these makers… just a load of women and also inclusive of genderqueer, non-binary people. And we'll just have a go at writing these."

Workshops were held across the UK and were designed not only to build technical skills but also to foster critical conversations. The first workshop took place at Knowle West Media Centre in Bristol, a community-based digital arts centre. "One of the women in the group said, 'I would just really like it if I didn't have a woman's voice in my home that was constantly available.' It was one of those moments where you're like, yeah ."

Delivery and Impact

Arts Council England funding enabled the team to travel, run workshops, and build a website showcasing the project. "The workshops were really successful, always fully booked, and we met all sorts of different people" Manton noted.

The project's participatory approach was central. "A big part of it was sharing skills," she said. "We developed the dataset and also the system." The dataset includes community-generated language contributed by workshop participants, covering everything from feminist reflections to jokes and quotes from admired women. "There's lots of silliness in there as well. It's pretty cool."

Over 100 women and gender diverse people contributed to the chatbot, and when the chatbot was exhibited, as a smart speaker and video, all of the contributors were credited and are credited on the website. https://womenreclaimingai.com/

The project gained national and international recognition, including an invitation to present at Ars Electronica (Austria), Birmingham Open Media, Barbican Centre, and ITU 2019 - A United Nations Specialised Agency Conference on a panel titled "Diversity by Design: mitigating gender bias in AI" with panelists including Mastercard Chief Privacy Officer, Caroline Louveaux, and an AI Policy Advisor to The Commonwealth. The work was shown in two exhibitions More Than Meets AI in Kunstgaraasjen, Bergen (Norway) and Ryder Gallery, Berkeley, California (USA).

The project also led to further commissions and collaborations. "Knowle West Media Centre actually then commissioned us to do a workshop called AI Activist. It was all sorts of fun, and all sorts of people." The team also consulted on a theatre production. "Fuel Theatre Company

got in touch. We did some consultancy on a play they did called A Dead Body in Taos, and they had a chatbot on stage." This project also led to Manton becoming a mentor on the AI Sandbox at Watershed, and a mentor for Frame Documentary in Australia. The work was also shared at The State Library Victoria.

Reflections
Women Reclaiming AI exemplifies how artist-led interventions can challenge dominant narratives in technology. It also demonstrates the value of flexible, responsive funding to enable timely, socially relevant work. As Manton put it, "We hit a sweet spot… an artistic project that got you thinking, but also had potential skills you could use."

Manton sees Women Reclaiming AI as part of a wider movement. "There just seems to be a really great group of people who are doing work that can explain some of this stuff to the public in a way that's understandable." She believes artists have a vital role in shaping the future of AI. "It's really easy to scare everyone. But opening up the conversation - that's something we can do."

Project title Women Reclaiming AI
Applicant Birgitte Aga
Year 2019 - 2020
Area South West
Art form classifier Visual arts
Amount £14,967
Funding stream National Lottery Project Grant

> **"It's really easy to scare everyone. But opening up the conversation - that's something we can do."**
>
> Birgitte Aga

Consensus Gentium: Bringing AI Conversations to the High Street

Interview with Tom Millen Director of Crossover Labs

The Consensus Gentium Tour by Karen Palmer and Crossover Labs brought interactive AI storytelling to eleven shopping centres across England, engaging thousands in conversations about surveillance, bias, and digital futures. The project revealed both the appetite and the challenges of making critical technology discourse accessible to diverse public audiences.

Overview

In summer 2024, Crossover Labs and artist Karen Palmer launched *Consensus Gentium*, a groundbreaking immersive film experience that toured eleven shopping centres across England. Designed to engage audiences outside traditional cultural venues, the project used interactive pods equipped with mobile phones that tracked facial expressions, gaze, and voice to explore how AI technologies shape our lives.

Set in a speculative future where people resist weaponised technology and biased algorithms, *Consensus Gentium* offered participants a branching narrative experience that responded to their emotional reactions in real time. The project championed AI democratisation and digital literacy by creating a safe space for young people and minority communities to explore the implications of surveillance and algorithmic bias.

Locations and Audiences

The tour visited shopping centres in Leeds, Bradford, Hull, Bootle, Peterborough, Leicester, Bristol, Luton, Wolverhampton, and London. These venues were selected using research by Dr Rob Eagle and demographic data from The Audience Agency to reach young, diverse audiences. Across these venues more than 1,400 people engaged with this experience, with 70% of visitors being aged 14-24. Over 40% identified as being from the global majority, and at least 50% of visitors reported that they would not normally visit arts or cultural centres.

Visitors commented on the experience:

'I'm very interested in technology and AI but haven't had an actual experience with it until today.'

'I do feel like I'm more able to talk about it with other people now. I feel like I know something other people don't know.'

'It felt really contemporary and relevant. I liked that it was in a shopping centre with headphones, so it felt immersive ... I'd like to see more things like this!'

While some larger, more modern shopping centres declined to host the experience, smaller venues proved more receptive. As Crossover Labs noted, "each shopping centre provided a pathway to a new audience, an audience who hadn't engaged with this type of creative practice in terms of technology, or critical digital narratives."

Designing for Everyday Spaces

The experience takes place in pods described as "portals to the future" which allow participants to experience how AI can shape perception and decision-making. The technology used was familiar yet powerful: "*Consensus Gentium* uses functionality that is inbuilt into every

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Consensus Gentium is not just about showing people what AI can do. It’s about helping them understand what it means and what it could mean for their futures.

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iPhone… to track gaze and emotion, it brings things home pretty quickly to people, that their devices could literally be watching them," said Tom Millen of Crossover Labs. This made the experience relatable and unsettling. Participants began to understand the implications of a device seeing where you're actually looking on the screen.

The project aimed to demystify AI for those most affected by its risks, particularly young people and minority communities who often lack access to digital skills training.

Adapting to Audience Needs

Audience reactions were mixed. Many were intrigued but cautious. "People thought we were trying to sell them things. People thought that we were going to steal their data," said one team member. "They were worried about getting involved with anything official, in case we passed their name on to immigration or something along those lines."

Following feedback from the first venue, the branding was revised. "The messaging was just too dubious and was set too much in the story world of *Consensus Gentium*," the team explained. "We replaced this to move the branding towards a free experience and an award-winning interactive film. We made it look really friendly." Shifting away from the dystopian aesthetic encouraged participation.

Two staff members toured with the installation, providing onboarding and post-experience reflection. "Some people wanted to chat but didn't want to engage with the experience. Others engaged and reflected on how they were scared by the technology after they experienced it." The project created space for these emotions, offering a non-commercial platform for curiosity and critique. These conversations revealed low levels of digital literacy, with many participants confusing AR, VR, and AI.

Impact and Learnings

Consensus Gentium demonstrated that art can be a powerful tool for engaging the public in critical conversations about technology. It created a non-commercial space for exploring explainable AI and challenging the dominance of corporate narratives.

Key learnings include:

- Distribution challenges: Touring tech-enabled art requires flexible partnerships and strategic compromise.
- Audience appetite: There is strong interest in exploring AI's impact, especially among underserved communities.
- Art as safe space: Creative experiences can foster dialogue, build digital literacy, and empower participants.

As Tom Millen reflected, "Consensus Gentium is not just about showing people what AI can do. It's about helping them understand what it means and what it could mean for their futures."

Project Title Consensus Gentium
Applicant Crossover Labs
Year 2023 - 2024
Area North
Art form classifier Visual Arts
Amount £144,099
Funding Stream National Lottery Project Grants

OTMO: Making Motion Capture Accessible for Dance Education

Interview with Alexander Whitley, Artistic Director of Alexander Whitley Dance

OTMO is a user-friendly digital platform that enables dancers and educators to sequence and create movement using motion capture and AI. Developed by Alexander Whitley, it fills a critical gap in the creative technology market by making advanced tools usable without specialist knowledge. Arts Council England seed-funding enabled early development and leveraged further investment in order to bring the platform to market.

Summary

OTMO is a digital platform that enables users to sequence and manipulate movement using motion capture and AI. It is designed for dancers, choreographers, educators and creative technologists who want to work with 3D movement data but lack access to expensive equipment or technical expertise.

The platform allows users to upload motion capture recordings generated from video using AI tools like Move.ai and arrange them into choreographic sequences. It also includes features for avatar customisation, real-time interaction and educational use. *OTMO* is available via subscription and is currently in beta.

"We developed a concept off the back of a lot of research we did during the pandemic, thinking quite specifically about addressing the challenges in secondary school dance education," said Whitley. The project demonstrates how artists can identify practical needs and develop tailored solutions.

Platform Development

OTMO offers a streamlined, user-friendly interface for working with motion capture data. Its core services include:

- Uploading and editing motion capture recordings
- Sequencing movement into choreographic structures
- Customising avatars and visualising movement in 3D
- Educational applications for dance training and curriculum delivery

The platform is designed to be accessible to users without technical backgrounds, making it suitable for use in schools, studios and performance venues. "Once you've got a motion captured recording, it remains a complex minefield… *OTMO* was really intended to try and address that".

Recent advances in AI have made motion capture more affordable and accessible. Tools like Move.ai allow users to generate motion data from video recordings without specialist hardware. However, the creative use of this data remains limited due to the complexity of existing software.

OTMO fills this gap by offering a platform tailored to the needs of dancers and educators. It enables creative exploration without requiring specialist technical knowledge, bridging the divide between emerging technologies and artistic practice. "There's very little take-up of this technology within the dance industry… largely because of the fact that once you've got a motion captured recording, it remains a complex minefield of software," said Whitley.
The platform also supports sector development by providing tools that can be used in training, education and performance. It opens new possibilities for choreography, documentation and collaboration.

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Artists and arts organisations interrogate the ethical, aesthetic and social implications of technology, often working outside commercial constraints.

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Development and Funding

OTMO was developed by a small team led by Alexander Whitley, including creative technologists Luca Lubarda and Clemence Debaig. The project evolved over several years, with seed funding from Arts Council England through a National Lottery Project Grant. This initial investment was instrumental in shaping the project, and helped the team refine the concept to secure further investment from Innovate UK through both the Creative Catalyst and Create Growth programmes, totaling nearly £100,000 in 2022.

Academic partnerships played a key role. A collaboration with Dr Dan Strutt at Goldsmiths, supported by the British Academy, contributed to avatar customisation features. Further funding from the XR Network Plus supported integration with motion capture streaming technologies.

The team estimates a further £300,000 over two years is needed to bring *OTMO* to full market readiness. The platform is currently offered via monthly or annual subscription, with enterprise packages available for educational institutions.

AI Development in the Cultural Sector

The cultural sector plays a vital role in shaping the development and use of AI. Artists and arts organisations interrogate the ethical, aesthetic and social implications of technology, often working outside commercial constraints.

Dance companies like the Alexander Whitley Dance Company explore how AI can be used creatively and responsibly. Their work helps shape inclusive, human-centred approaches to technology and contributes to public understanding.

"There's a strong need to not rely too heavily upon the business of technology, but to actually be evidencing the thoughtful, meaningful, interesting ways in which it's being used," said Whitley. Cultural organisations also play a key role in sector development. By creating tools like *OTMO*, they help build digital literacy, support education and open up new opportunities for creative expression. "Artists and organisations are tackling the same issues in silos… investment from the Arts Council in mechanisms or platforms that help move the conversation forward would be enormously beneficial".

Key learnings

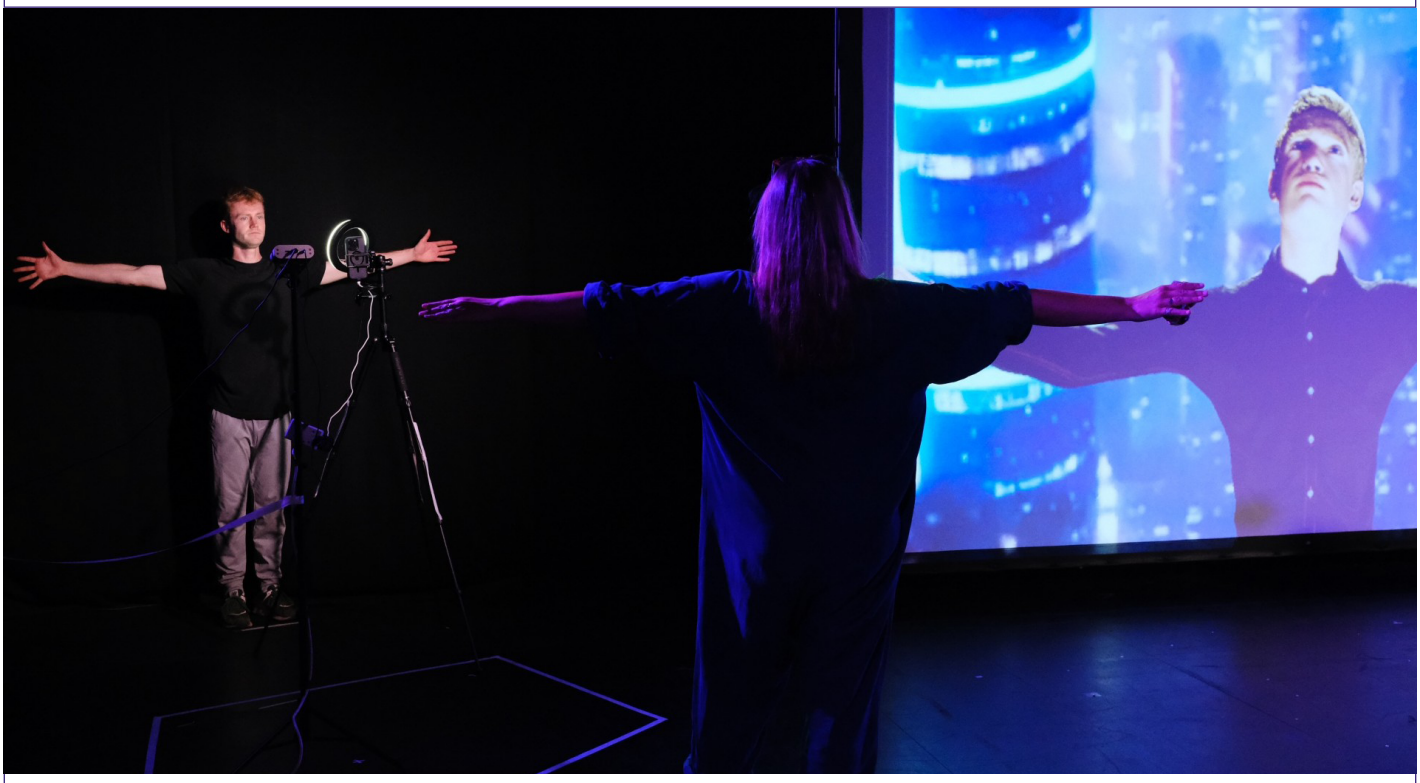
OTMO exemplifies how funding from Arts Council England can catalyse innovation in the subsidised arts sector. By leveraging Arts Council England support, the team built a scalable, sector-specific tool that responds to real-world needs in dance and education.

The platform demonstrates the value of artist-led innovation in shaping responsible, inclusive approaches to AI. It also highlights the importance of continued investment in infrastructure, training and partnerships to support creative technology development.

Project Title Innovation and Interactive Technology in Dance Practice
Applicant Alexander Whitely Dance Company
Year 2024 - 2025
Area South East
Art form classifier Dance
Amount £29,995
Funding stream National Lottery Project Grants

National Youth Theatre Digital Accelerator in Partnership with Microsoft: Empowering young creatives to shape the future of AI through performance, play and digital literacy

Interview with Joe Duggan, Head of Communications and Digital, National Youth Theatre



James Northcote for National Youth Theatre

The National Youth Theatre (NYT) *Digital Accelerator* is a youth-led, industry-informed programme that equips young creatives with AI and immersive tech skills. Distinct from formal education, it offers agile, multidisciplinary training and public performance opportunities, bridging the gap between emerging technologies and live theatre.

Background and Vision

Founded in 1956, coincidentally the same year the term "artificial intelligence" was coined, the NYT has long been a space for innovation in youth-led theatre. As Joe Duggan, Head of Communications and Digital at NYT, explains: "We're not a school. We're a theatre company. But we deliver training programmes as well. We work with about 10,000 people every year, all around the country from ages 11 up to 25, and d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people up to the age of 30." The *Digital Accelerator* builds on NYT's decade-long engagement with immersive technologies, including early experiments with VR theatre. "We did a play with 230 audience members in VR headsets in a professional theatre six or seven years ago."

Programme Design and Delivery

Launched in partnership with Microsoft, the *Digital Accelerator* offers free workshops across the UK for young creatives aged 18-25. These sessions are multidisciplinary, bringing together performers, lighting designers, editors, and technologists to explore AI in live performance, motion capture, and game engines.

"We're employing artists we work with already or new artists to say: how are you using new technologies, including AI - or how might you if we give you some space?" says Duggan. "Some of it is development of story and character, some of it is motion capture, some of it is improvising with chatbots."

The programme is designed to be inclusive and responsive. "We've had a lot of neurodivergent people sign up. Some deaf participants have talked to us about how they find working with new tech, which has been really interesting," Duggan notes. "We work a lot with underserved young people across the board. The Accelerator has been popular with those young people, which I think is interesting."

Distinct from Formal Education

Unlike formal education, NYT's approach is agile, responsive, and rooted in real-world practice. "We're quite nimble and opportunistic," says Duggan. "We don't have to listen to anyone else's curriculum…we kind of follow what industry are doing".

This flexibility allows NYT to respond quickly to technological shifts and to centre young people's lived experiences. Workshops are designed to be inclusive and multidisciplinary, bringing together performers, lighting designers, editors, and technologists. "There's an equality between the young lighting designer in the room and the young performer," Duggan notes. "It's more like: how do we make this escape room using AI collaboratively?".

The programme also fills gaps left by slower-moving academic institutions. "Participants are travelling from Portsmouth and Bristol, and they are studying some of these things at university," Duggan explains. "But we're adding to their curriculum, as what they are being taught at university is starting to fall behind the very latest skills and technologies needed in industry".

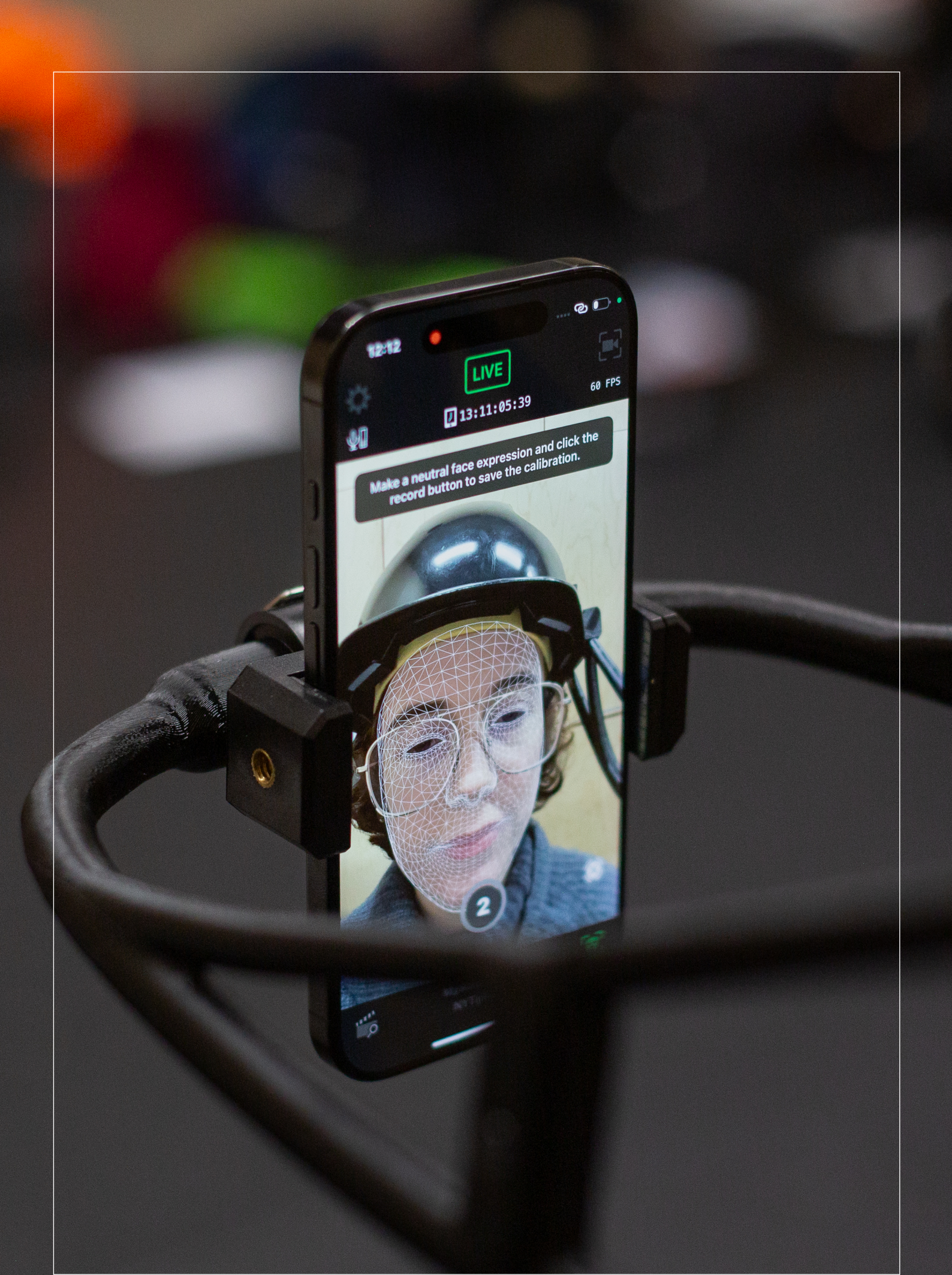
Public Engagement and Performance

NYT has showcased work from the *Digital Accelerator* at major events including BETT UK (the world's largest education technology event), and the Children's AI Summit, organised by the Alan Turing Institute. At BETT, NYT performed live on stage using Microsoft Copilot, demonstrating how AI can be integrated into creative practice.

"We did a live demonstration performing with Microsoft Copilot on stage in front of a group of educators and policy people," Duggan explains. "Terrifying…but amazing."

At the Children's AI Summit, NYT members shared original spoken word pieces and chaired discussions on responsible AI. "We basically said to our members: send us some original spoken word on AI," Duggan recalls. "One of our young people opened the conference with a really interesting piece."

NYT also launched a public call-out titled I Am Not A Robot, inviting creative responses to AI. "A 16-year-old girl from East London who makes amazing TikToks…made a really funny thing about being taken over," Duggan shares. "Young people approach it with humour a lot of the time."



Tobi Ejirele for National Youth Theatre

Skills Development and Industry Relevance

The programme is grounded in real-world industry needs. NYT consults with industry experts working in TV and film to understand how AI is being used in casting, costume design, and production. "We've got a TV producer advising us who's like, 'Yeah, I use it all the time'.'" Duggan says.

Workshops are led by artists under 35, many of whom are NYT alumni. "Finding who is going to lead the workshops has been interesting," Duggan notes. "They've probably all been under 35 so far, which wouldn't be the case in everything we do."

Participants are encouraged to think critically about AI's ethical implications. "We had a great session with Microsoft on Responsible AI," Duggan explains. "Microsoft have introduced young people to Responsible AI principles" explaining that they have been an enthusiastic partner, keen to share expertise and learn from the young people. Duggan reflected on one session which saw participants grilling a senior Microsoft lawyer for 45 minutes, no questions off limit, and a really genuine dialogue about what 'Responsible' means in this space between Microsoft and the young people.

NYT uses a standard evaluation framework across all workshops, asking participants about their prior knowledge of AI and how the experience compares to other creative interventions. "We've heard from young people who say, 'That's why I've come – to explore it,'" Duggan says.

Impact and Future Plans

The Digital Accelerator has already engaged over 500 young people in 2024, with plans to reach 1,000 in 2025. NYT is committed to surfacing this work in public forums – "theatre requires an audience." Alongside events already mentioned, they have shown work at SXSW London, and are showcasing work from this programme at their annual new writing festival. "We're planning to surface it to audiences and learn from that," Duggan explains. "We're really passionate about it being to big audiences and mainstream audiences…not just a digital exhibition in the foyer."

Feedback from the Digital Accelerator has been extremely positive.

- 100% of participants said they feel more confident using AI and new technologies in their creative practice.
- 94% feel more positive about the potential to use AI in their creative practice
- 72% plan to use AI and/or new technologies within their career progression

Describing their experience, young people said:

- "Fascinating, eye-opening and inspiring. I want to do more!"
- "I feel empowered knowing more about AI and its positive uses, so I'm very glad I attended the workshop"
- "An insightful series of weekends, where I felt free to explore a variety of different AI programmes"
- "Mind-bending adventures on the frontier of humanity and anywhere"

NYT is exploring international collaborations, including work with Youth Theatre Kenya supported by the British Council. "We're also really interested in gaming at the moment… using AI as something that levels the playing field in terms of access to new tech."

Reflections and Sector Learning

The *Digital Accelerator* is not just about using AI for NYT and its members, it's about understanding it. "We're not saying you should use this," Duggan emphasises. "We're saying: these are the technologies…and helping people to explore them if they want to use them."

By embedding digital literacy into creative practice, NYT is helping young people make informed choices. "The more informed our young people are, the better placed they are to make good decisions," Duggan says. "If we don't even talk about that now, then what chance has anyone got?"

As the arts sector grapples with the implications of AI, NYT's youth-led, performance-based approach offers a compelling model for inclusive, responsible innovation.

National Youth Theatre is a National Portfolio Organisation based in London. It receives £311,396 per year from Arts Council England.

National Portfolio Organisations

Alongside funding creative practitioners directly, Arts Council England has a network of 990 National Portfolio Organisations and Investment Principles Support Organisations (IPSOs). Within that portfolio are organisations who support creative practitioners, communities, and audiences to engage with AI technologies in creative, engaging and challenging new ways - from Serpentine Galleries in London, to FACT in Liverpool, and Watershed in Bristol. The cultural sector is strongly positioned to support place-based delivery in communities across the country, from the largest cities to the smallest villages.

- Serpentine Galleries' Creative AI Lab, is a partnership with Kings College London to 'produce knowledge for cultural institutions, artists, engineers, and researchers on how to engage AI/ML as a media'. It recently commissioned artists Holly Herndon and Mat Dryhurst to produce an exhibition called 'The Call' which saw the collaborators work with community choirs and a legal team to build an AI Model that is trained on fairly acquired data. In doing so they created a new legal framework for data governance.
- Collusion supports artists to utilise new technologies in their practice, including AI
- Blast Theory is a collective of artists/creative technologists whose recent work *Cat Royale* was a live installation/experiment that attempted to create a 'utopia where cats live in harmony with artificial intelligence' that responded to their needs.
- The Photographers Gallery commissions artists to engage with the implications of algorithms on our ways of seeing and experiencing the world.
- The National Holocaust Centre and Museum's Forever Project uses voice recognition technologies and AI to enable audiences to ask questions of holocaust survivors in real time, from wherever they are in the world.
- The National Youth Theatre have established a Digital Accelerator in partnership with Microsoft which is 'equipping the next generation of talent with the skills to use new technologies including generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in an informed and responsible way to make innovative creative content'.
- Watershed programmed *'More than AI'* a sandbox for creative R&D that explored the impact of AI on creative practice, through the lens of alternative forms of intelligence.
- FACT Liverpool have commissioned artists that have engaged with AI technologies in their creative practice, and artists that create playful experiences that support audiences to engage with these technologies in new and playful ways. For example, *Outdraw. AI* encourages visitors to engage with AI through drawing. In 2025 they will also show the work of Christopher Kulendran Thomas who engages with news footage just before the planes hit the Twin Towers on 9/11 through an algorithmic model that creates continuous new patterns and loops of the pre 9/11 world.
- The Arts Marketing Association has developed a range of sector support offers including developing an AI Policy and an AI Marketing training programme.

These organisations play a significant role in leading community and audience engagement with AI technology, often serving as a bridge between emerging technology and creative practice. They provide a critical and creative lens from which to drive AI literacy in wider society.

Conclusion

Arts Council England strives to take a transparent, responsible and considered approach to emerging technologies, recognising the importance of creative and critical thinking in shaping our cultural future. The arts and cultural sector plays a vital role in framing the critical questions surrounding AI, and we are committed to supporting a broad and diverse range of voices in this evolving conversation.

The adoption of AI technologies across society is creating new challenges and opportunities: from healthcare to education; from policing to welfare; and from entertainment to government. While society is debating what these technologies mean, creative practitioners are using them to create new ways to understand, new ways to use and adapt or adopt these technologies in their own creative practice.

We believe the sector we represent is well placed to lead innovative approaches to research and development, benefiting artists, industry and society. Creative professionals are not just passive users of technology, they have the potential to actively shape the development of AI tools and reimagine technological futures through direct engagement in design and development processes.

The investment data analysed in this report show us that the sector we represent is already engaging with the impact of AI technologies, and we recognise our role to support the emerging challenges and opportunities that these technologies create. As creative practitioners continue to explore the complexities and opportunities of incorporating AI into their practice, Arts Council England remains committed to supporting this work. While we are not advocating for the use of AI in creative practice, we are responding to its increasing presence in the sector. Our role is to ensure that individuals and organisations across the country are supported to engage with these technologies in safe, inclusive, and responsible ways.

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Artists and arts organisations interrogate the ethical, aesthetic and social implications of technology, often working outside commercial constraints.

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BRAID is a UK-wide programme dedicated to integrating Arts and Humanities research more fully into the Responsible AI ecosystem, as well as bridging the divides between academic, industry, policy and regulatory work on responsible AI. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), BRAID represents AHRC's major investment in enabling responsible AI in the UK. The Programme runs from 2022 to 2028. Working in partnership with the Ada Lovelace Institute and BBC, BRAID supports a network of interdisciplinary researchers and partnering organisations through the delivery of funding calls, community building events, and a series of programmed activities.

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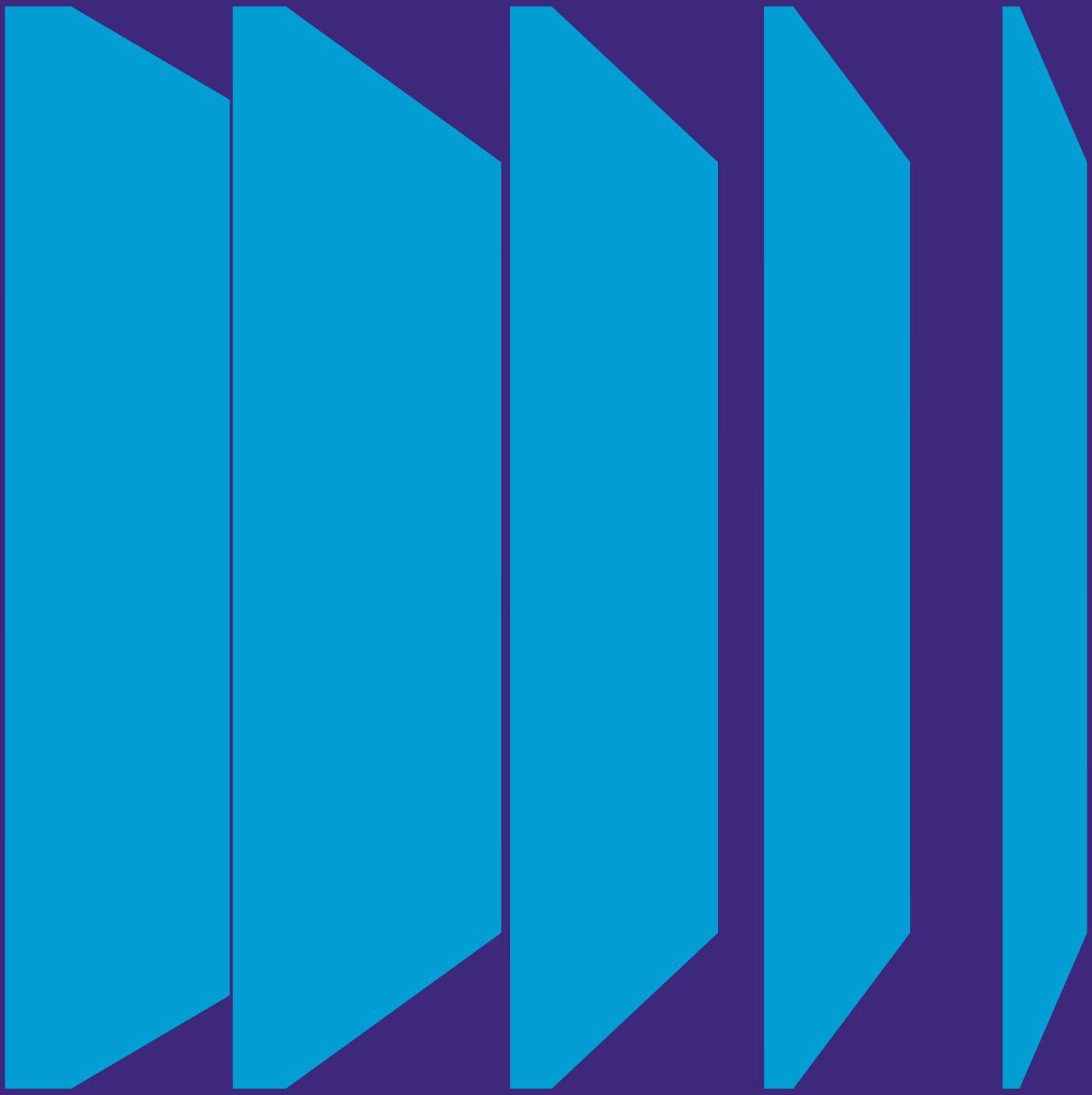
Learn more at: www.braid.org.uk



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