



GATSBY CURRICULUM DESIGN GROUP REPORT

Group: Creative and Media

Date of report: September 2026

Colleges involved: The Windsor Forest Colleges Group, Bedford College, East Kent College, Milton Keynes College, London South East Colleges (LSEC), Chichester College Group, Hertford Regional College, Wirral Met College, Barnsley College, City College Norwich

Context or problem being addressed

Level 2 learners face significant barriers when trying to progress into relevant employment or further study. For those taking level 2 creative courses, only around 16% go on to secure a job in a creative industries role. This group also has the fewest working-class students of any curriculum area. In some regions, employers in creative industries remain hesitant to offer placements and opportunities. Fewer higher education pathways for creative courses in some regions and geographically concentrated opportunities can further restrict progression. A lack of teacher confidence can also limit curriculum innovation, reducing the likelihood that they will design programmes that fully prepare learners on creative courses for the realities of a creative career.

These issues are compounded by how creativity is treated in the curriculum. A literature review commissioned to support this group's work (see [Appendix I](#)) found that creativity is widely valued by employers as a transferable skill that supports innovation, problem-solving and adaptability. However, it is inconsistently defined, unevenly taught and rarely embedded systematically across programmes. Without a shared, explicit framework for developing and recognising creative skills, learners – even those with strong subject-specific skills – struggle to translate them into sustained employment or progression.

Purpose (summary)

Our cross-college collaboration aims to embed creativity as a fundamental transferable skill in the curriculum, empowering students from all backgrounds to develop the confidence, resilience and professional capabilities needed to thrive in creative industries and beyond. The group is working to break down barriers to access, create sustainable pathways to employment and give young people the agency to shape their creative futures.

The group focused on three key objectives:

- To embed creativity as a transferable skill, which supports adaptability, resilience, collaboration, confidence and networking, in all programmes.
- To create pathways that connect creative courses to progression routes, such as university, apprenticeships and employment.
- To design collaborative projects that develop the professional feedback and teamwork skills used in workplaces, and build opportunities for portfolio development, creative self-reflection and for showcasing work to industry partners.

What is different or innovative about this work?

This work uses cross-disciplinary thinking, drawing on innovative curriculum approaches to embed wider creative skills, such as collaboration, problem-solving and innovation, as core technical competencies rather than as generic 'soft skills' bolted on to a programme.

Instead of treating creativity as innate artistic talent only some students have, the group defined it as **the ability to generate, develop and apply ideas to produce outcomes that are original, effective and valuable in a given context**. Framed in this way, creativity becomes a structured, teachable capability that can be made visible and progressively developed.

The introduction of a skills passport provides a consistent, visible way to verify a learner's transferable skills alongside their qualifications. The skills passport gives learners a portable way to evidence creative confidence, collaboration and problem-solving to future employers, in the same way a technical certificate verifies subject knowledge.

Activity to date

- Senior curriculum leaders met three times during the year to agree the group's overall ambition, refine the statement of purpose and set priorities for progression and transferable skills.
- The group commissioned an independent literature review, called Creativity as a Skill (see [Appendix 1](#)) drawing on educational research, psychology, workforce studies and international frameworks (including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Economic Forum and Skills Builder Partnership). This work established a shared, evidence-based definition of creativity (see [Appendix 1](#)) and a master skills list (see [Appendix 2](#)).
- Curriculum practitioners explored how this applies to real situations, working through key questions raised in college workshops, including how to manage assessment workload, how to strengthen employer involvement, and how to showcase student work and achievements more effectively.

- The group tested cross-college collaboration and industry-linked project models and explored policy changes affecting technical education and progression routes, including the forthcoming level 2 foundation certificate and occupational certificate reforms.
- Colleges worked together to design and agree the initial concept of the skills passport. They also began identifying some implementation challenges, such as staff confidence and employer engagement, and explored how they could be addressed.

Outputs that can be shared at this stage

- The literature review, *Creativity as a Skill*, which brings together the evidence base used to inform the group's approach (see [Appendix 1](#)).
- The draft skills passport framework, which is underpinned by a master list of creativity skills mapped to the Skills Builder Universal Framework and the World Economic Forum core skills (see [Appendix 2](#)).

Impact or early insights

Early findings indicate that explicitly embedding and recognising transferable skills improves student engagement, confidence and understanding of progression routes. Collaborative and project-based approaches more accurately reflect real workplace practices and improve employability outcomes. This supports employer feedback gathered through the group's wider college network, which shows that skills like teamwork, problem-solving and communication are valued just as much as formal qualifications.

Beyond these outputs, the colleges taking part identified emerging ideas and approaches that are already shaping practice. Discussion has moved from whether creativity can be taught to how structured reflection, iteration and feedback can best evidence it and how to ensure that showcase and enrichment activity (trips, employer forums, exhibitions, performances) is planned into a coherent programme rather than simply added on. Working groups are also grappling with practical questions raised by teaching teams: how to manage assessment workload in a sustainable way, how to improve the monitoring of English and maths alongside creative development, and how to consistently involve employers in curriculum design and delivery.

The wider impact of the collaboration has been just as significant as the results produced. Colleagues report that taking part has given them greater confidence to try new, project-based approaches and to move away from narrower, qualification-only thinking, which is especially important in the context of the ongoing qualification reforms. Bringing together senior leaders and practitioners from 10 colleges has created a genuine peer network; colleges are already sharing curriculum planning tools, a creative calendar of events and course-planning practice. There is a clear appetite for further staff visits between colleges to develop these collaborative practices further. Several colleges have also highlighted the value of simply seeing how creativity is defined and assessed elsewhere. This has helped create a common language and shared expectations in what has traditionally been a varied and locally defined curriculum area.

Taken together, this suggests the group's impact is being felt in three ways: in the outputs being developed (the skills passport, master skills list and shared project models); in early learning about how to implement these approaches practically and sustainably; and in the wider professional impact on staff involved (improved confidence, stronger networks and a greater willingness to share practice and collaborate beyond their own college).

Implications and transferability for other providers

Providers can define clear progression and skills outcomes that can be embedded in project-based learning and consider adopting a structured framework such as a skills passport. The master list of creativity skills developed by this group (see [Appendix 2](#)) offers other colleges a ready-made evidence-based starting point that is mapped against the Skills Builder Universal Framework and the World Economic Forum core skills so that individual colleges do not need to develop a framework from scratch.

The literature review, *Creativity as a Skill*, that underpins this work (see [Appendix I](#)) also has wider relevance. It highlights that creativity develops most effectively when embedded in subject teaching rather than when delivered as a stand-alone add on. Also, making creative pathways more inclusive means more than just redesigning curriculum; the barriers to access and confidence need to be removed. Providers considering a similar approach should plan early not just how creative skills are taught, but how they will be evidenced and shown to employers.

Cross-college collaboration will be critical for successful implementation. The experience of this group suggests that the collaboration itself (which included sharing planning tools and staff visits between colleges) is as valuable to providers as any single resource or framework. Investment in the collaboration should be deliberate and focused; it should not be treated as something that will just happen as a by-product of the work.

Next steps

The group has made encouraging progress since it formed and some members are interested in continuing this collaborative work. The group may wish to:

- pilot the skills passport in 2026-27
- expand collaborative cross-disciplinary projects, including holding cross-college virtual exhibitions
- develop a cross-disciplinary media festival featuring collaborative projects such as films, podcasts and exhibitions, as well as opportunities to showcase work to employers
- establish dedicated continuing professional development time for staff during which they can develop collaborative practices and visit other colleges

Want to find out more?

Colleagues interested in further information or collaboration are encouraged to email Gatsby at TEN@gatsby.org.uk

APPENDIX I: LITERATURE REVIEW – CREATIVITY AS A SKILL

Introduction

In further education, there is growing recognition that preparing young people for employment requires more than technical knowledge alone. In creative disciplines in particular, students often develop strong subject-specific skills but may struggle to translate them into sustained employment or progression.

At the same time, employers across sectors increasingly value creativity as a transferable skill that supports innovation, problem-solving and adaptability. This creates a tension: creativity is widely seen as important, but it is inconsistently defined, unevenly taught and rarely systematically embedded across curricula.

This literature review brings together evidence from educational research, psychology, workforce studies and international frameworks to define creativity as a practical, developable skill. It also considers how creativity can be embedded in further education programmes to support learners to progress into T-levels, creative industries and wider employment.

Creativity: Definitions and conceptual models

There is no agreed definition of creativity, but most research converges on a core principle: creativity involves producing ideas or outcomes that are both original and appropriate.

Amabile (1996) defines creativity as the production of work that is both novel and useful in a given context. This definition is widely used in organisational and educational research because it balances imagination with application.

Similarly, Runco and Jaeger (2012) argue that originality and effectiveness are the two essential criteria of creativity. These definitions move creativity away from artistic expression and towards problem-solving and value creation.

From an educational perspective, creativity is increasingly being seen as a skill that can be developed rather than being an innate talent that only some students have. The OECD (2019) positions creativity as a key competency that involves idea generation, evaluation and improvement. This aligns with classroom practices like iteration, feedback and reflection.

Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) systems model adds a social dimension, arguing that creativity comes from an interaction between individuals, domains (knowledge areas) and fields (which employers and institutions are the gatekeepers of). This is particularly relevant in creative industries where recognition and opportunities shape outcomes.

These perspectives argue that creativity is not a fixed trait, but is a developable, structured competency that involves idea generation, problem-solving, collaboration and refinement to be used in real-world contexts.

A working definition of creativity for further education is **the ability to generate, develop and apply ideas to produce outcomes that are original, effective and valuable in a given context.**

Challenges in creative education and pathways

Despite its importance being recognised, creativity is not consistently developed in education systems.

Major challenges are access and equity. Research by the Sutton Trust (2019) shows that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to pursue creative careers, often because their exposure to them is limited, there are financial barriers and they are less likely to have industry connections. This restricts who gets the chance to develop and apply creative skills.

Confidence and identity also play significant roles. Many learners do not see themselves as 'creative', particularly when creativity is narrowly framed as artistic talent. This can reduce participation and limit skill development (Banaji, Burn and Buckingham, 2010).

In further education, structural barriers include limited access to industry placements, particularly in creative sectors where opportunities are competitive and geographically concentrated. This also affects pathways such as T-levels, where industry placements are a central requirement.

There is also a tension between assessment models and creative practice. Standardised assessment can prioritise correct answers and fixed outcomes, whereas creativity requires experimentation, risk-taking and iteration (Lucas, Claxton and Spencer, 2013).

Finally, progression pathways in creative sectors are often fragmented. Unlike more linear technical routes, creative careers frequently involve freelance work, portfolio development and informal networks, making progression less predictable.

These challenges suggest that developing creativity requires both pedagogical change and structural support.

Creativity as a wider employability skill

Creativity is increasingly being recognised as a core employability skill across industries, not just in the creative sector.

The World Economic Forum (2025) identifies creative thinking as one of the most important skills for the future workforce, alongside analytical thinking, resilience and leadership. This reflects growing demand for workers who can adapt to change and generate new solutions.

The Skills Builder Universal Framework includes creativity as one of eight essential skills and defines it as the ability to use imagination to generate new ideas and solve problems (Skills Builder Partnership, 2025). The framework is a tool for measuring and building skills and shows how creativity can be developed by following a sequence of steps.

Research also shows how creativity supports other key skills. For example, problem-solving often requires the generation of multiple approaches, while teamwork benefits from combining diverse perspectives (OECD, 2019).

Importantly, creativity is not confined to traditionally creative roles. In sectors such as construction, engineering and digital industries, creativity supports innovation, efficiency and continuous improvement.

This positions creativity as a foundational skill that enhances both technical performance and long-term employability.

Evidence on developing creativity in education

Research consistently shows that creativity can be developed through structured educational approaches. Project-based learning is one of the most effective methods. By working on extended tasks with real-world relevance, learners engage in idea generation, problem-solving and iteration (Bell, 2010). This mirrors professional creative processes.

Collaboration is also critical to developing creativity. Studies show that learners' creative outcomes improve when they work in teams, share ideas and build on each other's contributions (Sawyer, 2007). This reflects the collaborative nature of most workplaces.

Exposure to real-world briefs and engaging with employers further strengthens development. Authentic tasks increase motivation and help learners understand how creativity applies in professional contexts (Lucas, Claxton and Spencer, 2013).

Reflection and feedback are essential components. Creativity involves refining ideas, which requires opportunities to evaluate and improve work over time (Hattie, 2009).

Finally, safe learning environments are important. Learners are usually more likely to take risks and experiment when they feel supported and are not penalised for failure (Fischer and Barabasch, 2023).

Evidence from vocational education suggests that creativity is best developed through subject-specific teaching and authentic problem-solving tasks, rather than being taught solely as a separate, generic skill (Fischer and Barabasch, 2023).

Creativity in practice: Implications for curriculum design

Translating research into practice requires a shift from treating creativity as an optional or implicit outcome to explicitly embedding it in curriculum design. This means:

1. Creativity should be integrated into all subjects, not limited to creative courses. This can include problem-solving in technical subjects, design thinking in engineering and innovation in business contexts.
2. Curricula should include real-world tasks, such as industry briefs or simulated projects. These provide context and help learners develop portfolio-ready work.
3. Structured tools, such as skills passports, should be used to support progression. By making creativity visible and measurable, these tools help learners understand their development and communicate their skills to employers.
4. Teaching approaches should prioritise iteration and reflection. Allowing time for improvement encourages deeper learning and mirrors professional practice.
5. Building confidence is essential. This includes helping learners see themselves as creative and providing opportunities for them to succeed in manageable steps.
6. Alignment with occupational standards and progression routes is important. Creativity should support, not compete with, technical competence and industry requirements.

Creativity and T-level readiness

In technical pathways, such as T-levels, creativity helps prepare students for industry placements.

Creative thinking helps learners adapt to unfamiliar environments, respond to real-world challenges and contribute ideas in the workplace. It also supports problem-solving and communication, which are critical for placement success.

However, creativity must be aligned with occupational standards. Activities that develop creativity should connect to industry expectations and realistic tasks.

Approaches such as project-based learning, simulated agency models and portfolio development can help bridge this gap, provided they are clearly linked to workplace outcomes.

This suggests that creativity should be positioned as an enabler of technical competence and employability, not as a separate or competing priority.

Conclusion

Evidence from educational research, workforce studies and international frameworks indicates that creativity is an important skill for individual development and progression, as well as for innovation, productivity and economic development.

Despite this, creativity is often inconsistently defined, and the way it is taught in further education is underdeveloped and uneven. Its impact is further restricted by barriers to access, lack of confidence and limited innovation in curriculum design.

Research indicates that creativity can be developed by using structured approaches that are embedded throughout the curriculum and combine real-world tasks, collaboration and reflection. When aligned with technical learning and industry expectations, creativity strengthens employability and supports progression into a wide range of careers.

Embedding creativity as a core skill in further education offers a practical way to improve outcomes for learners and meet evolving workforce needs.

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APPENDIX 2: RECOMMENDED MASTER LIST OF CREATIVITY SKILLS FOR THE SKILLS PASSPORT

Based on the evidence review included in this report, this table is the group's draft skills passport. It maps each wider creative skill against the [Skills Builder Universal Framework](#) and the [World Economic Forum core skills](#), alongside a learner-facing 'I can' statement to support self-assessment and evidence to present to employers.

Wider skill	Skills Builder link	World Economic Forum core skill alignment	'I can ...' statement
Creative enquiry	Planning	Curiosity and lifelong learning	I can ask purposeful questions and research ideas to inform my work.
Idea generation	Creativity	Creative thinking	I can generate a range of original ideas in response to a brief or challenge.
Idea refinement and iteration	Problem-solving	Analytical thinking Creative thinking	I can test, review and refine my ideas to improve their effectiveness.
Realisation of ideas	Problem-solving	Resilience, flexibility and agility	I can turn ideas into practical outcomes by planning, adapting and taking action.
Creative collaboration	Teamwork	Leadership and social influence	I can work effectively with others to develop and improve creative ideas.
Creative challenge and support	Teamwork	Empathy and active listening	I can give and receive constructive feedback to help myself and others improve.
Presenting and pitching work	Speaking	Leadership and social influence	I can present my ideas clearly and explain the decisions behind my work.
Creative confidence and risk-taking	Adapting	Resilience, flexibility and agility	I can share ideas and try new approaches, even when the outcome is uncertain.
Audience and user awareness	Speaking	Empathy and active listening	I can adapt my work to meet the needs and perspectives of different audiences or users.
Commercial awareness	Problem-solving	Systems thinking	I can consider customer needs, value, costs and opportunities when developing ideas and solutions.