



Screen Industries Sectoral Action Plan

JUNE 2024

Minister's Priorities

In February 2024 Minister Conor Murphy set out his vision for the economy emphasizing four key objectives - **good jobs, regional balance, productivity** and **decarbonisation**.

Aligned with the Minister's priorities and the Department for the Economy's (DfE) Departmental Business Plan for 2024/2025 the Screen Industries Sectoral Action Plan has been developed. The Action Plan details several key activities to be undertaken by Northern Ireland Screen and its delivery partners to continue to grow the Screen Sector and deliver the Minister's vision for the economy.

Background

Northern Ireland has firmly established itself as a leading global location for Film and TV production and its fast-growing interactive sector. This has been achieved through continued development and support from Northern Ireland Screen, the government backed screen agency for the sector.

Northern Ireland Screen is committed to maximising the economic, cultural and educational value of the screen industries for the benefit of Northern Ireland. This goal is pursued through our mission to accelerate the development of a dynamic and sustainable screen industry in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland Screen has 3 overarching objectives:

1. For Northern Ireland to have the strongest screen industry outside of London in the UK and Ireland;
2. To ensure the industry supports vibrant and diverse cultural voices that will be recognised and celebrated equally at home and abroad;
3. Mainstream the most successful screen and digital technologies education provision in Europe across Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland Screen is primarily funded by the Department for the Economy (DfE), the Department for Communities (DfC), and the British Film Institute (BFI) on behalf of the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). While Northern Ireland Screen delivers an integrated strategy, in broad terms DfE supports our economic activities; DfC supports our cultural, educational and outreach activities, and the BFI supports our Irish Language and Ulster-Scots Funds.

Stories, Skills and Sustainability

Northern Ireland Screen is currently at the beginning of year 3 of its current 4-year (2022-26) strategy *Stories, Skills and Sustainability*.

Stories: Storytelling is at the heart of the screen industry whether considered from an economic, cultural or educational perspective. Support of Storytelling whether in a primary school or on a global streaming platform should be at the core of what we do.

Skills: The most significant limiting factor to the growth of the screen industries varies over time and between the different screen industry sectors but during this extended period of growth, the availability of appropriately skilled individuals is a constant issue. Appropriate focus on skills, and in particular, digital skills, is also the focus of our school, college and university engagement.

Sustainability: Sustainability is the confluence of economic, social, and environmental strategies that are focused on creating and maximising long-term value obviously including 2 meanings: We remain focused on stable incremental growth that considers the whole screen industry ecosystem including social as well as economic considerations and value. We must as a matter of urgency assist our screen industry to prioritise environmental considerations.

Most of the activity within this current strategy is a continuation of our successful initiatives from previous strategies with the Northern Ireland Screen Fund the primary economic vehicle, the Irish Language and Ulster-Scots Funds remaining largely unchanged and the majority of the education and exhibition activity continuing. However, there are a few new areas of focus and activities that are to receive greater focus:

CINE

The Creative Industries New Entrants programme (CINE) is a new initiative that was launched in April 2022 and aims to broaden access to the screen and creative industries at entry level. There are 93 trainees now taking part in the scheme which is funded by the Department for Communities and delivered in partnership with BBC Northern Ireland. In line with UK-wide screen industry initiatives it prioritises applicants from under-represented ethnic minority, socio-economic and disabled communities, to expand our growing creative industries sector and create a more diverse generation of 'New Entrants' of all ages

Sustainability

Across all our activities, but particularly within the economic/production activities, sustainability has been elevated to the highest priority as a consideration of support. The screen industry globally and in Northern Ireland has a long way to go to reduce its carbon footprint but it is an economic imperative that we do so and demonstrate that we are seeking to do so as quickly as possible. Our Facilities and Sustainability Manager leads on this important initiative.

Studio Ulster and Belfast Stories

While on different timeframes, the Belfast Regional City Deal supported projects Studio Ulster, led by Ulster University, and Belfast Stories, led by Belfast City Council, are critical to the future of the screen industry, culture and education in Northern Ireland. Support for these 2 BRCD projects is a priority for the strategy period and beyond.

The Screen Fund

Northern Ireland Screen operates the Screen Fund which is its primary tool in accelerating the development of the screen production sector. It is open equally to both indigenous and incoming productions and is targeted at the following sectoral priorities:

1. Large-Scale Production
2. Television Drama
3. Independent Film
4. Factual/Entertainment Television
5. Animation
6. Games & Interactive

Despite considerable headwinds during the first 2 years of the strategy, including sustained strikes shutting down large scale production, our progress against the key economic KPIs indicates we are almost up to pace to deliver our economic target of £431 million direct spend across the 4 year strategy period.

Action Plan

This sectoral action plan developed by Northern Ireland Screen, sets out a range of activities that aim to support the DfE's Minister's key priorities of **Good Jobs, Productivity, Regional Balance and Decarbonisation**. The focus of these activities can be categorised under 4 broad themes:



What's Next?

Northern Ireland Screen and its delivery partners will take forward these actions over the next three years. As a sector that has faced a range of external challenges in recent years, this action plan will require review and updating on an ongoing basis. This may include adding or removing actions in response to the needs of the sector. Updated versions of this Action Plan may be published as required over the next 3 years.

Theme 1: Economic

Objective: For Northern Ireland to have the strongest Screen Industry outside of London in the UK and Ireland and to deliver an economic return to Northern Ireland of £431 million over a 4 year period (2022-26).

Action No.	Delivery against Minister priorities	Detail	Delivery partners	Timescale
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Productivity • Good Jobs • Regional Balance • Decarbonisation 	<p>Screen Fund - The Northern Ireland Screen Fund, remains both a catalyst for development investment and an axis for production investment. This fund is the cornerstone of Northern Ireland Screen's Strategy to enhance the growth of the screen production sector. The fund supports activity across 6 key sectors and across Northern Ireland. Key objectives include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that % levels of NI crew and Heads of Department are met on all productions • Support and development of indigenous companies and incoming productions across 6 key sectoral areas • Delivery of a Northern Ireland economic return of £431 million across the strategy period (April 2022- March 2026) • 90% of production projects (by value) to secure investment and distribution from the UK market and 75% from the international market • Support projects that utilise virtual production/XR/AR or other innovative technologies and seek to increase the number of projects annually • Support R&D through Screen Fund development awards to production companies • Support All Island production and development projects 	DfE, Regional screen agencies, production companies, Broadcasters, Investors	Action Ongoing

Theme 1: Economic (continued)

Action No.	Delivery against Minister priorities	Detail	Delivery partners	Timescale
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Productivity • Good jobs • Decarbonisation 	<p>Studio Infrastructure - Northern Ireland Screen is collaborating with studio owners to enhance and maximize the use of their facilities. We are committed to integrating sustainable practices in the studio ecosystem. The phase 2 development of Belfast Harbour Studios which includes Studio Ulster is progressing and expected to be online by early 2025.</p>	Belfast Harbour Commission, Ulster University, Titanic Studios, Loop Studios, Silverwood Business Park	Action Ongoing
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Productivity • Good Jobs • Regional Balance 	<p>Dedicated marketing support across the sectors - Northern Ireland Screen serves as a global ambassador for Northern Ireland, promoting it as a hub for independent film, television, and games production to the international screen industries. We take pride in sharing our success stories and providing both practical and financial backing for distribution, sales, marketing, and PR within the sector. We will continue to enhance participation in industry markets, festivals, and conferences in 2024-25, further strengthening our presence in the global screen industries.</p>	Festivals, markets, Industry media outlets, Broadcasters, Distributors	Action Ongoing

Theme 2 : Skills & Education

Objective: Create opportunities to increase the number of new entrants to the industry and to develop the skillset of existing freelance crew.

Action No.	Delivery against Minister priorities	Detail	Delivery partners	Timescale
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High productivity • Good jobs • Regional balance 	<p>Skills Development - continued investment in a range training activity to support the professional development of the Northern Ireland Screen Industry. This will include a continued focus on all 6 Sectors with a further emphasis on Virtual Production and VFX with the opening of Studio Ulster expected in 2025.</p> <p>Key objectives include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support trainees in accordance with sectoral needs across a range of skills initiatives including company placements, stepping up, craft & technical, animation and interactive schemes • Ensure all skills initiatives are promoted across NI 	DfC, Skillset, BFI, Production companies	Action Ongoing
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good jobs • Regional balance 	<p>CINE - Continued delivery of the CINE scheme which is aimed at individuals from underrepresented ethnic minority, socio-economic and disabled communities. Current funding is due to finish in March 2025 but discussions are ongoing regarding funding support for continuation of the scheme.</p> <p>Delivery of a range of information and educational workshops, industry appropriate training and designing structured training plans by March 2025.</p>	DfC, BBC, VCOs, OCN	Action Ongoing

Theme 2: Skills & Education (continued)

Action No.	Delivery against Minister priorities	Detail	Delivery partners	Timescale
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good jobs • Regional balance 	<p>BFI Skills Cluster - The SCREEN Skills Cluster is an initiative designed to identify skills shortages and co-ordinate skills and training opportunities for crew in Northern Ireland. In consultation with industry, the cluster will continue to enhance education and industry pathways, address skills gaps hindering underrepresented groups through CPD and provide training on innovative technologies.</p>	BFI, Training Providers	Action Ongoing
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good jobs • Regional balance 	<p>Education - we will input into DfE's Digital Skills Action Plan 2024-2034, highlighting the work of the Creative Learning Centres in supporting schools, teachers and young people in the delivery of creative and digital skills.</p> <p>We will work collectively to strengthen existing partnerships across C2k, Education Authority, CCEA and the FE Colleges.</p> <p>Deliver year-round industry work experience for young people that provides visibility and understanding of jobs available across the screen industries and the pathways to those careers.</p>	Screenworks, Into Film, BFI, Cinemagic, Creative Learning Centres	Action Ongoing
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decarbonisation 	<p>Bafta Albert - To ensure that the next generations of screen industry professionals make efforts to reduce the potential environmental impact of their operations we have made Bafta Albert sustainable production training a compulsory component of Northern Ireland Screen training incentives.</p>	Bafta Albert	Action Ongoing

Theme 3: Innovation

Objective: Encourage the implementation of new screen technologies and techniques that will maintain an economically and environmentally sustainable screen industry.

Action No.	Delivery against Minister priorities	Detail	Delivery partners	Timescale
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High productivity • Good jobs • Decarbonation 	Studio Ulster - scheduled to come online early 2025, securing production that utilise Studio Ulster will be a high priority.	SUL Ulster University	2025
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting regional balance • Decarbonation 	Sustainable technologies - As part of Northern Ireland Screens practical approach to Sustainability we will continue to encourage the introduction of technologies that will allow projects to actively reduce their carbon footprint and accurately collect data. This includes the increased application of the renewable bio diesel HVO, the introduction of a food waste reduction technology and the development of a digital platform for sharing sets and materials.	Bafta Albert Olio	Action Ongoing
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High productivity • Good jobs 	<p>Screen Fund - continue to support projects that will utilise virtual production/XR/AR or other innovative technologies and seek to increase the number of projects annually.</p> <p>Explore the use of AI within projects across the sectoral areas and seek to develop a stronger understanding of its uses within the screen industry and the retraining of crew that may be required to ensure continuity of work across the region and sectoral areas.</p>	AICC, QUB, BFI, Production companies	Action Ongoing

Theme 4: Culture

Objective: To ensure the industry supports vibrant and diverse cultural voices that will be recognised and celebrated equally at home and aboard.

Action No.	Delivery against Minister priorities	Detail	Delivery partners	Timescale
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High productivity • Good jobs • Regional balance 	<p>Continuation of the Irish Language and Ulster Scots Broadcast Funds</p> <p>The Irish Language Broadcast Fund (ILBF) fosters the Irish speaking independent production sector in Northern Ireland and serves an audience keen to view locally produced Irish language programming across television, radio and interactive content. It funds a range of training initiatives in television and radio production for Irish speakers working or aspiring to work in the sector in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>The aim of the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund (USBF) is to ensure that the heritage, culture and language of Ulster-Scots are expressed through moving image for a Northern Ireland audience. The USBF is also open to supporting radio and interactive content and funds a trainee scheme designed to attract new researchers or aspiring assistant producers who are passionate and knowledgeable about Ulster-Scots.</p>	BFI, DCMS, BBC Northern Ireland, UTV, TG4, RTE	Action ongoing

Theme 4: Culture (continued)

Action No.	Delivery against Minister priorities	Detail	Delivery partners	Timescale
13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High productivity • Regional balance 	<p>Film Culture, Exhibition and audiences - Northern Ireland Screen provides core funding to the key cultural film festivals across Northern Ireland. As part of our strategy, we are committed to collaborating with all our exhibition providers to ensure that audiences, and in particular young and hard to reach audiences, have regular opportunities to see the widest range of films.</p>	Film Festivals, Docs Ireland, QFT	Action Ongoing
15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional balance 	<p>Heritage and Archive - through our contemporary collecting project, Northern Ireland Now, we will endeavour to address gaps and issues of under-representation in our screen heritage collections to ensure they better reflect the diversity of life in Northern Ireland today. We also seek to connect with underserved audiences and overcome barriers for audiences to interact with their screen heritage.</p> <p>Northern Ireland Screen works to preserve and promote Northern Ireland's screen culture, working with a variety of local and national partners to advocate for our moving image heritage and deliver a broad range of cultural, educational and wellbeing-focused archive activities. Participation in digitisation schemes allows us to safeguard our screen culture for future generations, whilst dedicated outreach and learning programmes ensure that the public value of materials can be realised by audiences today.</p>	PRONI, BFI, UTV	Action Ongoing