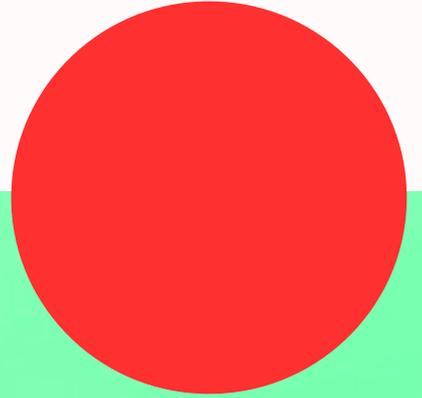


Nurturing Creative Futures

How Watershed supports creative
research and development

WATERSHED





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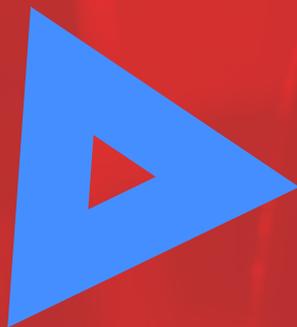
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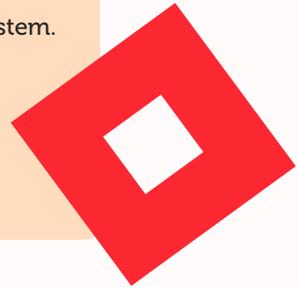




Introduction

This report charts Watershed's value to the creative research and development ecosystem. Watershed works at the interface between research, creative practice and emerging technologies, bringing a values-led approach to innovation. It does this primarily through its long term support of a community in Pervasive Media Studio.

Watershed's value to the creative R&D ecosystem has four core features.



Watershed has an international reputation for hopeful, values-led creative enterprise

“Watershed is a prime example of a highly connected, flexible, porous piece of cultural and creative infrastructure, of which there are too few examples. Watershed is more than just an arts cinema. It is at once a cultural centre, a business broker, a social networker, a research and innovation facility, a café/bar, and a cultural tourist attraction.”

UK Creative Economy Programme, Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Watershed was founded in 1982 as 'Britain's First Media Centre', the first organisation to combine a cinema with space for producing and exhibiting experimental media art.

Today, Watershed continues to model a boldly different way of researching and developing creative technology. It nurtures paradigm-shifting practices, businesses and research in a collaborative space like no other:

Pervasive Media Studio.

The Studio is produced by Watershed and run as a strategic partnership with Bristol's two universities, UWE Bristol and University of Bristol.

It is both a physical R&D space located in Watershed's building on Bristol's harbourside, and an international community of artists, technologists, researchers and community organisers operating all over the world.

- Studio residents generate an average of **£5.5 million in turnover each year** and **employ an average of 370 people per year.**
- Between 2012 and 2025, the Studio's collaborative R&D projects brought **over £72 million of investment** into the West of England region.
- Dozens of the Studio's residents and their ventures have garnered international acclaim, from touring installation artists like Luke Jerram to the ground-breaking social impact of Open Bionics' 3D prosthetics.



The Studio supports creative and technological innovation that aspires to greater equality, justice and sustainability. Its policies and processes reflect a desire for broader culture change that focuses on **togetherness**.

These values are mobilised through widely-referenced toolkits and methodologies. They have been developed and refined through Watershed's 40+ years of experience in the creative sector, leading multi-million pound

creative R&D programmes and nurturing generations of individual talent.

Watershed's way of working has proven that financial value and ethical values are not mutually exclusive. Creative business growth can go hand-in-hand with enabling positive change in an environment that retains the knowledge and connections generated by the projects it supports. ■



Watershed is the central hub in an inspirational creative technology ecosystem

“It’s a very visible convening point for thinking around the crosspoint of creativity and technology. One of the reasons that West of England businesses are so good at immersive technologies is because of the interventions of places like Pervasive Media Studio early on. We’re exploring an entirely new medium, so we need a place where people can work on that together.”

Mark Leaver, Creative Industries Development Consultant

A collaborative R&D hub with break-out spaces, meeting rooms, social spaces, and a popular programme of talks, showcases, networking and testing sessions, the Studio is intentionally positioned to leverage Watershed's superpower: its **network**.

Since 1982, Watershed's partnerships have established long-running connections between artists, universities, companies, social enterprises, community groups, funders, venues and policymakers. They have been **local, national and international in scope**, with programmes such as Creative Producers International and initiatives like Playable City engaging creative industries around the world.

By convening this ecosystem in a space and community built for sharing opportunities, facilities, knowledge and resources, the Studio provides the conditions for sustained holistic support.

As a result, **the Studio has been a core part of developing the R&D strength of the West of England region**. In its first 17 years, the Studio has been at the heart of **10 major creative R&D and business development programmes**, including multi-million pound investments that directly brought new creative businesses and individuals into its community.

This ecosystem produces a range of outputs: prototypes, new products and services, artistic works, research outputs, and public events.

The Studio's network continues to evolve and grow through an **openness** and **generosity** that is built into its public offer:

- Activities designed for young people, families and community groups, such as Make Shift meetups for early-career creatives, cultivate pathways for new talent to access opportunities in creative tech.
- Open Studio Fridays and Lunchtime Talks invite members of the public into the R&D space, where conversations with Studio producers and residents are encouraged. ■



Watershed has developed a caring model for supporting creative R&D

“Being a Resident at Pervasive Media Studio instantly puts you in contact with a super creative, highly innovative and open-minded community of makers, designers, thinkers, inventors, artists and academics. Every time I come in, I have an interesting chat with someone and meet someone new.”

Sarah Nicolls, Studio Resident

The Studio plays a crucial role as a space of **nourishment** and **connection** for creative entrepreneurs. It provides a generosity of support that is unique in the region, offering funding, business development, thought leadership, showcasing opportunities, and chances to meet, connect, and make new work.

Each year the Studio offers **over 300 'timebank' sessions** for free to its resident community, offering advice in marketing, creative technology, inclusion and business development, as well as **over 400 hours of one-to-one producer support** and **over 40 accountancy and law clinics**.

The Studio's support recognises that much of the business development funding and training opportunities provided

for creatives today are designed to propel people towards economic growth. However, while high-growth pathways may be appropriate for some individuals and companies, many creatives

- are still working out where they want to go next
- are at the early stages of a project, without a clear idea of what will emerge
- are experimenting with ideas that don't easily fit with existing business models
- are looking for potential collaborators or identifying possible markets

For those doing early-stage work, the Studio's monthly Show & Test sessions and First Friday networking/showcasing give creatives much-needed feedback, without the reputational or commercial risks encountered in industry contexts. For companies that want to grow, the Studio has a suite of established business development methodologies, from industry-led peer learning cohorts exploring business planning and leadership, to bespoke guidance provided in-kind by creative industry experts.

Most importantly, Watershed places **care** at the centre of all its support for its community. Commercial and academic partners describe the Studio as a space of **trust**, **openness** and **curiosity** that they often haven't experienced before. ■



Watershed is strategically placed to sustain impact beyond project cliff-edges

“There’s often lots of support for people when they’re doing a project; when you get some funding. And then that project finishes, and the support vanishes, and there’s nothing in between. That’s the bit that we try to fill in. We should be the place that you come back to between doing the big, exciting projects. We should be the place that you go when you didn’t get the funding.”

Martin O’Leary, Head of Studio

The Studio is designed to sustain the impact of investments and opportunities that enter its creative community.

With regular events, training and networking opportunities, work space for its resident community, and production support and professional advice provided in-kind, **creatives can remain connected to a supportive professional network regardless of their current situation.**

An all-too-common problem across the creative sector is that when funded programmes finish, there is no ongoing support for the participants. This reduces the impact that creative work can have into the future, and prevents people and organisations from continuing to make work, employ people, reach audiences and make money.

This kind of support doesn’t come at the expense of growth. Rather, it **increases opportunities for the creative community to flourish**, by ensuring that people don’t fall off the cliff-edge at times when resources and opportunities are scarce.

The Studio’s offer sustains a wider collective network of people with diverse expertise, backgrounds and experience, who can support and generate paid work for each other. ■



Nurturing Creative Futures

Images: [Top] Watershed First Friday. Credit: Naomi Williams.

[Bottom] The Future of Immersive Exhibition at Watershed. Credit: Shamphat Photography.



2

An international reputation for hopeful, values-led creative enterprise

What is Watershed? What is Pervasive Media Studio?

Watershed is a cultural organisation located on Bristol's harbourside, consisting of three cinemas, a café/bar, event spaces, staff offices, and a creative technology R&D space, Pervasive Media Studio.

Watershed was founded in 1982 as 'Britain's First Media Centre'. As well as being the first multi-screen independent cinema outside London, it was the first organisation to combine this with space for producing and exhibiting other contemporary media arts, including photography, video and television.

By the turn of the millennium, Watershed's programming recognised the impact that digital technology was having on art and society. The organisation has supported the development of creative work using technologies including mobile, locative, robotic, immersive and AI technologies. Since 2008, the Studio has been a home for this creative technology work. The Studio is an R&D space within Watershed's building that brings together a resident community of creatives, researchers, technologists, businesses and activists working at the nexus of art, technology and society. It offers desk space,

meeting rooms, events, opportunities and practical support for free, based on principles of generosity and mutual exchange.

"The point of pervasive media, from its original idea of a layer of digital technology laid over the world, was about togetherness. It wasn't about creating isolated experiences that didn't speak to the real world. So hybridity is something that we're interested in, in the way that hybridity creates relationships. Especially right now, in terms of polarised communities, having a place of generosity, openness and togetherness is really important."

Clare Reddington, Watershed CEO

The founding team was Clare Reddington and Dick Penny from Watershed, Phil Stenton from HP Labs Bristol and Bill Sharpe from Appliance Studio. They were soon joined by Jon Dovey from UWE Bristol. Initial funding for the Studio came from the South West of England Regional Development Agency and HP Labs Bristol.

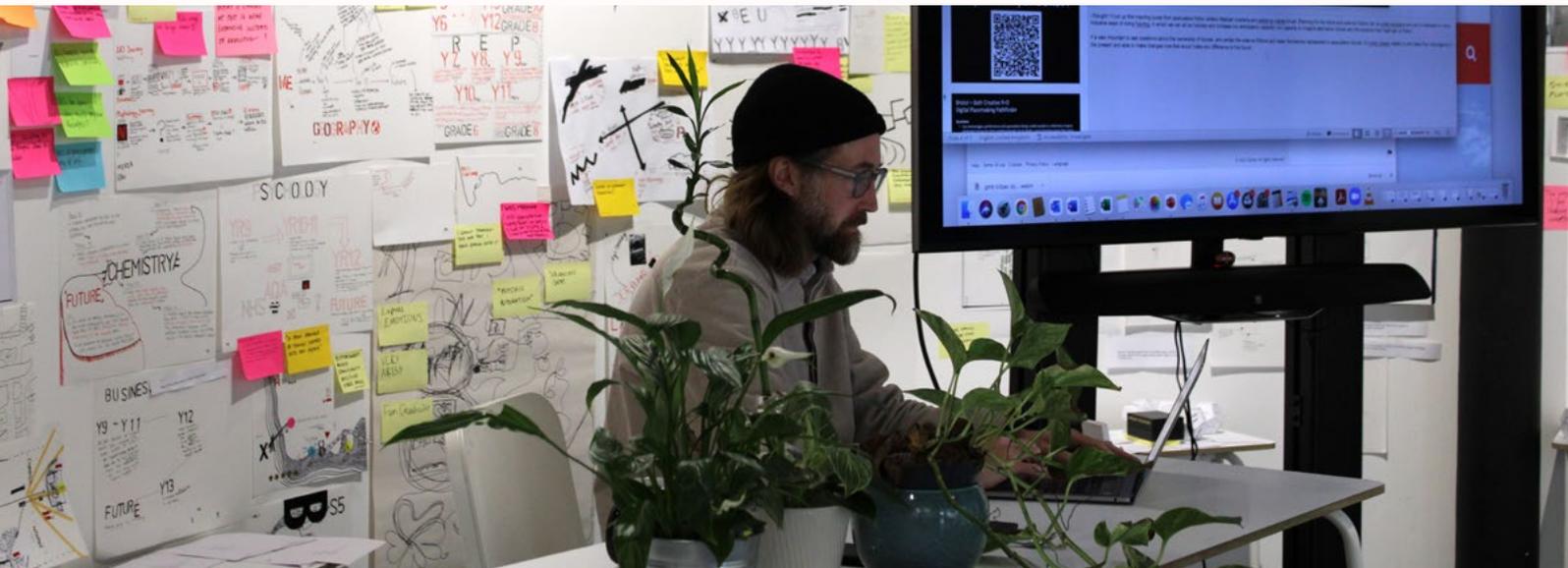
Today, the Studio's funding model is mixed. Its three partner organisations, Watershed, UWE Bristol and University of Bristol, contribute to core costs. Meanwhile, fixed-term publicly-funded R&D projects - often funded by UK Research

and Innovation (UKRI) - help pay for programmes, staff and overheads. Watershed is also supported through Arts Council England's National Portfolio.

While Watershed hosts the Studio, university research is a central element of its ecosystem. UWE Bristol's Digital Cultures Research Centre and University of Bristol's Centre for Creative Technologies are based in the Studio. University partners provide ongoing investment with the understanding that the benefits will emerge over time.

By intentionally moving away from classic economic innovation metrics, the Studio partnership provides a scale and continuity of provision for **early-stage** ideas development that would be difficult to achieve otherwise.

This allowance for invention, exploratory thinking and practice-based experimentation is why the Studio continues to thrive as a space for creative technology innovation. ■



Watershed's work in Pervasive Media Studio

Watershed supports work that uses art and technology to imagine different, better futures. This manifests in several roles:

- **Showcasing:** Watershed's public programming, through its cinema curation, exhibition spaces and events, provides opportunities for appreciating, learning about and discussing media art.
- **Connecting:** Watershed provides spaces and opportunities for people with different backgrounds, skills and experiences to come together and collaborate. It forms partnerships with businesses, universities, cultural organisations and community groups to achieve this.
- **Talent development:** Watershed supports young people in forging a career in the arts, technology and screen media, as well as those of any age or career stage who are looking to make a change in their practice. It bridges skills and access gaps by running programmes directly in response to needs identified through inclusion data.
- **Business development:** Watershed brings together industry-led peer learning cohorts of creative businesses (of all sizes and at all stages), and provides in-kind, one-to-one business development advice. It helps companies and sole traders align their business models, planning and management to the impacts they want to achieve.
- **Funding:** Watershed distributes money it receives from funders to support creative R&D, enabling individuals and small companies to explore early-stage ideas and develop prototype products, services and experiences. It also supports its community to raise their own funding, through in-kind contributions and bid-writing support.
- **Research:** Watershed critically examines its own processes of supporting creative communities of practice, to produce learnings that are relevant to the wider cultural sector. Its partnerships with universities support academic research engaging with digital culture, media production and the creative economy.

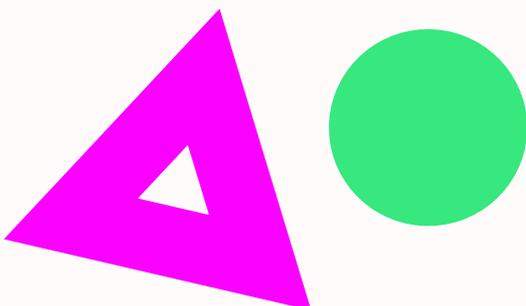
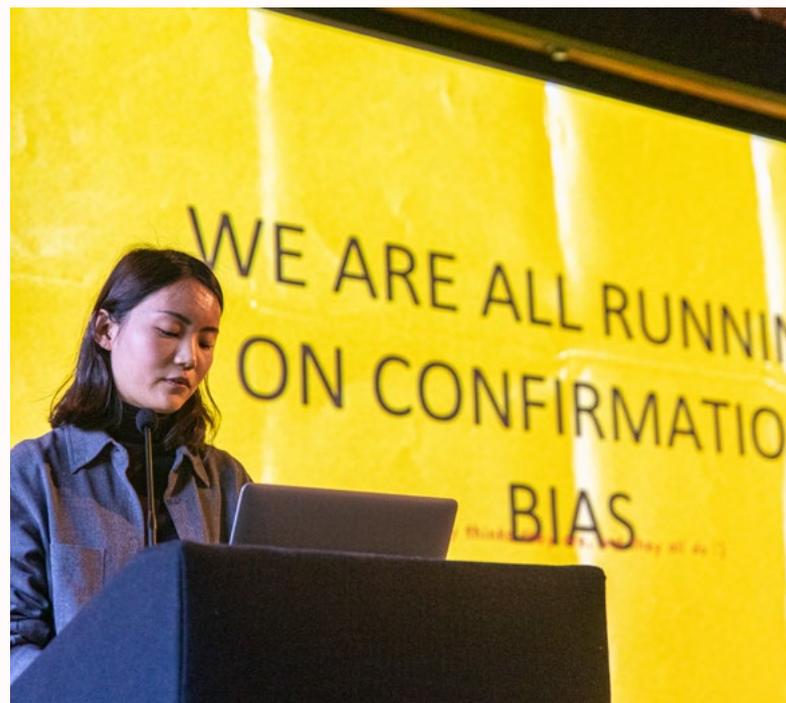


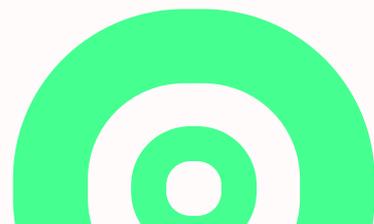
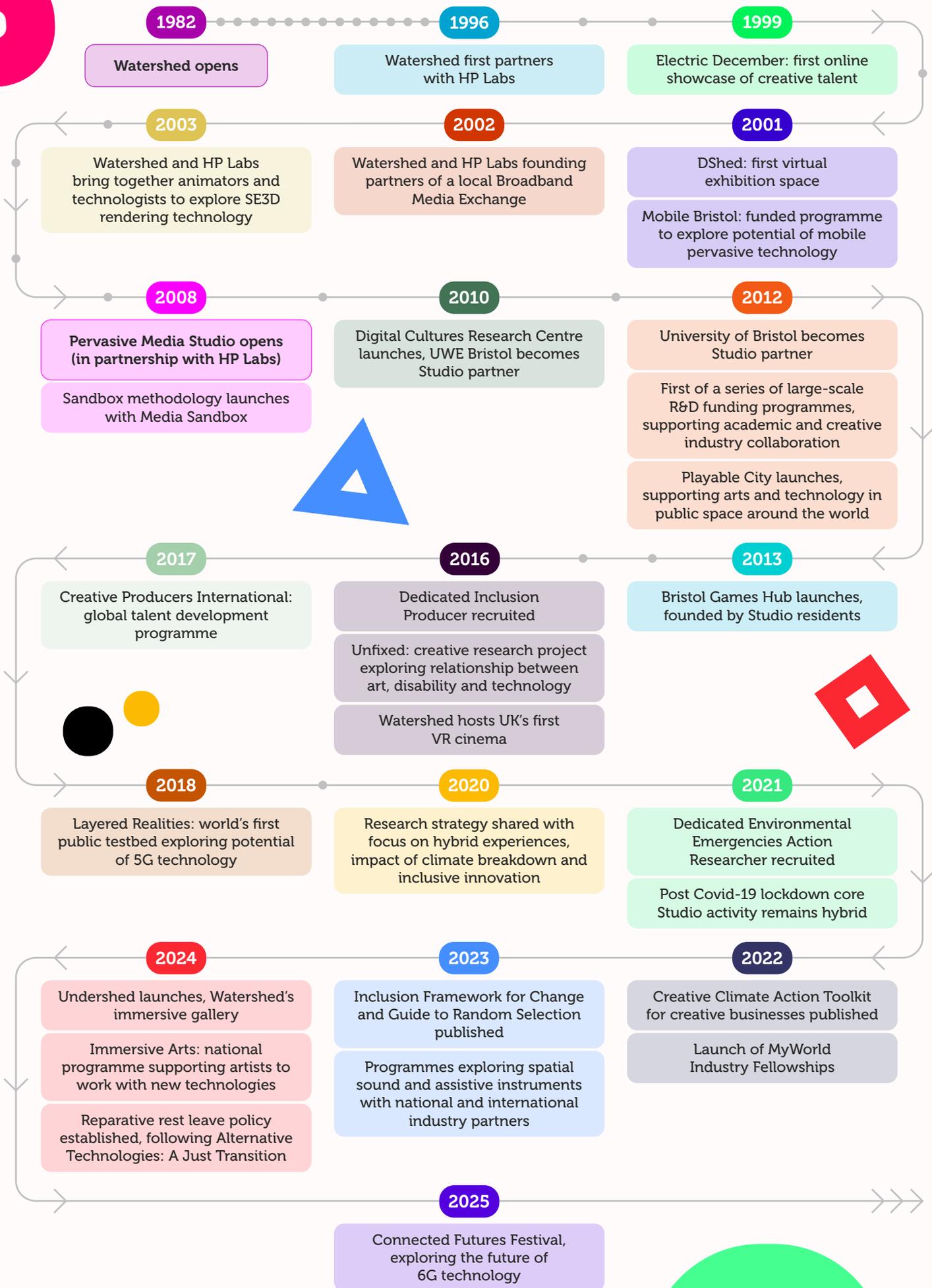
“It is no exaggeration to say that in five months the Sandbox has achieved more than some mainstream publishers have in five years”

George Walkley, Head of Digital at Hachette

Working with its core university collaborators and a range of other cultural and commercial partners, Watershed supports R&D in the Studio through:

- **Sandbox:** Watershed’s Sandbox methodology provides a facilitated space where teams transform an experimental idea into a working prototype over three months of rapid research and development.
- **Industry Fellowships:** Paid experimentation and research time for freelancers, practitioners, industry experts and academics, with an emphasis on collaboration and interdisciplinary working. Fellows are encouraged to be part of an active cohort with varied skills and expertise, with whom they can share ideas, feedback and learning.
- **Artist residencies:** At least 2-3 months of dedicated time and space to support early-stage creative technology ideas that need R&D to grow. Open to people across the UK, regardless of career stage, discipline or background. All residencies provide opportunities for testing, sharing and feedback from Studio residents, without the pressure of producing a polished output.
- **Labs:** Focused periods of ideas generation and prototyping, often designed in collaboration with commercial partners to explore challenges of mutual interest with the Studio community. Facilitated by Watershed producers to support new relationships and visions of future possibilities.
- **Ongoing infrastructural support:** Running R&D and networking events, providing training/advice sessions and paying for staff time that supports a wider community of creatives engaging with Watershed. ■







3

The central hub in an inspirational creative technology ecosystem



Wider context

Today, Bristol and the wider West of England is known as a nationally important creative technology cluster. Pervasive Media Studio has cultivated an ecosystem of cultural and commercial work, technological innovation and knowledge production at the heart of this cluster.

However, the region has not always been known as a thriving place for the arts and cultural industries. The post-war economic restructuring, when manufacturing, engineering and dock-related activities moved outside the city, led to an evolution in the region's economic profile. In Bristol, this post-war period saw the opening of several organisations that were to become 'anchor' institutions for the city's culture and technology sectors. These include BBC Natural History Unit (1957), Arnolfini (1961), Aardman Animations (1972) and Inmos (1978). The local labour market and attraction of inward investment was supported by the city's two universities.

Watershed's early days in the 1980s and 90s represented an uncompromising public funding environment for the arts. The organisation's dedication to creativity and strong relationships with partners, funders and audiences within and beyond the region helped to ensure its

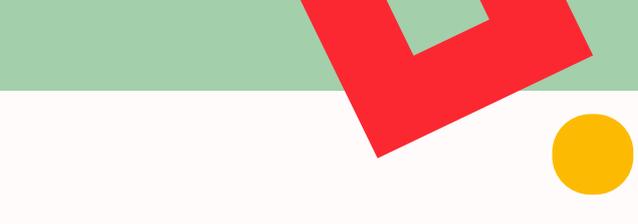
existence into the 21st century, thriving alongside other organisations like Spike Island, Knowle West Media Centre, Bottleyard Studios and Engine Shed.

Watershed has played a pivotal role in elevating Bristol's status as a creative city, galvanising organisations and individuals from across the region and attracting large amounts of public and private funding in the process.

"We always say that we're in and of Bristol. The Studio is both a response to Bristol, and Bristol activism, interdisciplinarity and independence. The Studio really speaks to those values of the city. But I also absolutely think that we've been part of helping to create a brand that is about creative innovation and doing things differently. And I think the large amounts of money that have come into the region from the partnership projects are based on the Studio's practice."

Clare Reddington, Watershed CEO

Watershed's ongoing work takes place amid a fast-changing social, cultural and political backdrop. When the Studio opened in 2008, there was considerable optimism about the widespread availability of the internet and social media, and what it could mean for everyday life. Creative projects as



varied as street games, locative audiowalks and interactive theatre explored how these technologies might positively transform the ways we interact with each other and our surroundings.

More recently, the ever-growing wealth of Big Tech companies, and awareness of the influence that their platforms and products hold over our lives, has drawn attention to the inequities, exploitation and injustices that underlie the accumulated power of a small group

of people. World events have provoked thorny questions about what positive difference the creative sector can make in the face of existential challenges.

Watershed's response has been to extend and deepen a values-led approach: supporting work that aspires to greater equality, justice and sustainability in visions of the future. This has been reflected in a more considered, codified approach towards inclusion, accessibility and climate action. ■



■ Sustaining an ecosystem

The community of residents at the Studio engage in an extensive range of creative practices, including comedy, coding, product development, performance art, games, animation, robotics, film, music and more. Residents create work as individual freelancers, businesses, social enterprises, academics and activists. It's a space for a diverse set of people to come together and collaborate, experiment, discuss and share what they've learnt.

Watershed creates the conditions to sustain this community and multiply the impact of every investment into it. This is designed to address a gap that Watershed perceives in the wider ecosystem: too often, the momentum generated by funded projects is lost when the funding ends. Watershed offers long-term support by inviting recipients of its R&D funding to be part of the Studio community. Not only does this enable their work to reach people it wouldn't otherwise - through the collective power of a community that shares and celebrates its members - but it allows skilled individuals with a wide range of experiences (in industry, in academia, in communities) to come into contact with one another, and influence the further development of ideas.

Enabling multiple pathways for entry into the Studio ecosystem is a priority for Watershed. Producers know from their work with young people, families and community groups that building confidence and skills to access opportunity is crucial for enabling new talent to enter the sector. When first-time visitors feel comfortable and excited to return to the Studio, possibilities for impact multiply.

As an ecosystem, the Studio's culture is always evolving.

The work supported reflects emerging interests and ideas within their community and wider network of partners, which helps to keep it relevant. While Watershed's methods produce work that is novel and experimental, the team also does ongoing research into processes of supporting people, identifying where there are opportunities to nurture creative futures more effectively and responsibly.

"The model of generosity within the Studio is that it's underpinned by tangible gifting: of time, expertise, resources, desk space, shared stories, useful feedback, relevant signposting, and so many in-betweens. The beauty of it is that residents and partners also contribute, to the varying degrees that they can, in keeping this model viable."

Furaha Asani, Watershed Research Lead

Perhaps most importantly, the Studio is an open space. The community thrives on connections forged with new people, ideas, projects and organisations. This extends beyond the physical space, with community members and collaborators working across all continents and in sectors beyond the creative industries. ■



Bridging boundaries

Interdisciplinary collaboration and practice sits at the heart of the creative technology sector. In industries from fashion to video games, skillsets from the sciences, computing and engineering sit alongside those from the arts, humanities and social sciences.

The ability to traverse different fields of knowledge is therefore particularly valuable for anyone working in the creative industries. This is where Watershed believes that spaces like the Studio can play an important role in supporting new talent and collaborations.

The Studio's community of residents is curated to encompass all career stages, engage with a wide spectrum of interests and expertise, and derive from partnerships with multiple universities, companies and community organisations. It is a melting pot that facilitates shifts in perspective and knowledge exchange; collaborative outcomes that are greater than the sum of their parts.

Since its earliest days, the Studio has been home to UWE Bristol's Digital Cultures Research Centre (DCRC), a loose-knit, multidisciplinary group of academics undertaking a mixture of theoretical, data-driven and practice-based research. DCRC regularly organises public events in the Studio - workshops, talks, symposia - that are informed by research but relevant to audiences beyond the university. By being a core part of the Studio community, members of the DCRC offer a variety of skills, resources and perspectives that might not be present otherwise.

The Studio also hosts a range of academics from the University of Bristol, who have collaborated with Watershed both individually and through partnerships with research centres including the Brigstow Institute, Centre for Creative Technologies, Bristol Digital Futures Institute, and Centre for Sociodigital Futures.

Academics from both universities have worked closely in partnership with Watershed to win large scale research grants that support creative R&D and knowledge exchange across the Studio community and wider South West region.

For creative organisations and businesses, the expertise and backgrounds represented in the Studio provide fresh insights into their work, opening up new avenues for ideation, research, development and commercialisation.

"It has been a fermentation process which has required the company to reflect on what drives us, how we want our work to affect people and to be (sometimes uncomfortably!) ambitious with our dreams. It's been an incredibly valuable and creatively fertile time and we're so grateful to have had this type of support."

Richard Sewell, Air Giants

As an independent arts organisation, Watershed's ability to bridge the boundaries of industry and education enables it to foster more reflexive and agile projects. Funding recipients benefit from creative, commercial and academic expertise within the Studio community without the formal restrictions that would be entailed when working with partner organisations directly. Participants in business development programmes have space and time for exploration that is responsive to the needs of their particular sector and situation.

Watershed has built a core community in the Studio that matches or exceeds UK population data for marginalised groups in terms of their stated ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and/or disability. The team recruits carefully, brokers relationships and works proactively to remove barriers to participation, bringing people together from different backgrounds in a way that is rare in creative industry spaces. ■



4

A caring model for supporting creative R&D

Trying things out

Watershed supports people to do things differently to how they have done them before. This includes creative companies wanting to try out different business models or ways of working, educational or community organisations wanting to collaborate with new partners or engage with different types of audiences, and creatives wanting to experiment with a new creative practice or set of concepts.

The overarching offer is that, however risky or speculative the idea is, however few resources there are available, and however much is still needed to realise the idea, working with Pervasive Media Studio will help to navigate the obstacles between where an individual or organisation is now and the change they want to make.

“That’s what I see the Studio and Watershed doing really well, is offering those opportunities to experiment, get things wrong; not necessarily having something perfect at the end of it.”

Liz Counsell, Freelance Producer

The Studio holds space for experimentation, focusing on process, not outcome. Watershed is very comfortable with messy or incomplete outputs. For Watershed, the most important thing is providing a space to learn, fail, experiment, and share the work with people. This enables those involved to learn from both the process of experimentation, and the diverse perspectives of those who engage with the work.

Watershed’s opportunities for testing early-stage prototypes in the Studio are a direct response to the typical development process for technology products, where too often the earliest stages of the creative process are not accessible to the people who these products are designed for. Although revealing methods of working and unfinished projects can make creatives feel vulnerable, the Studio’s producers believe that the possibilities of creative work can only grow from being exposed to different practices and lived experiences.

Watershed applies this experimental ethos to its own internal processes. In seeking to continually adapt to new contexts, new partners and new ways of working, they test out new methods of achieving change within their organisation. Examples include using random selection as part of application processes and appointing advisors from its community of residents to review their governance structure.

In its role as a funder of creative R&D and business development support, Watershed has frequently adjusted its methods of collective learning, monitoring and evaluation, as well as expectations around outcomes, to meet the needs of people impacted by the work being done. The talent development offer responds generatively to data showing which parts of the local population aren't being served, seeking to actively address the needs of those who aren't yet engaging with Watershed. ■

Being responsible

The Watershed team believe they have a duty of care to the people they interact with. They recognise that life is difficult for many people in the creative sector and beyond, but that support for creative work is often extractive, focused on the value and outputs of what is created rather than the wellbeing of creators and their stakeholders.

Through the Studio, with its central value of mutual exchange, Watershed aims to create the conditions where everyone who engages with the creative R&D ecosystem can benefit together from creative work, rather than putting one person's needs and objectives above another's.

On one level, this is about trust. Watershed demonstrates trust by allowing for risk in their contracting processes, paying people more money upfront than is typical, reducing the reporting requirements of those they fund and by never making any claim over the intellectual property of those they support.

On another level, this is about intentionality. Staff at Watershed think deeply about the purpose and possible consequences of the things they do, through methodologies like Consequence Scanning, a tool developed by doteveryone. In Watershed's organisational and decision-making processes, they respond to need through conversations happening across the organisation, within the Studio community and in local communities more broadly.



Watershed is motivated by a desire for broader culture change. When staff learn about a more equitable or effective process, not only are Watershed open to changing their own policies, but also using their position to influence partners.

"There is a sensitivity to context. And I think that everybody takes responsibility there to uphold principles around respect, ethics, impact on people and planet. There's also a great understanding of what it means to be a freelancer, moving between opportunities, and there's just great support there."

Helen Brown, Watershed MyWorld Fellow

They have led by example in adopting inclusive application processes, such as sending interview questions in advance and reducing the workload of applicants through initial expression of interest stages and random selection where appropriate. Many of these approaches are now being used by university and project partners.

Many people in the Studio community are equally keen to have a positive impact on the world through their work. However, staff identified that barriers to this are usually due to limitations in capacity, resources and/or power, as identified within the Inclusion Framework for Change, produced by Watershed in partnership with Plot Studio and Jazlyn Pinckney.

Pervasive Media Studio has developed toolkits such as the Inclusion Framework for Change and Creative Climate Action Toolkit to help those they support identify touchpoints: practical changes that can be made now, rather than being overwhelmed by all the desirable changes that aren't possible.

Staff in the Studio have been honest that they don't always get things right. They try to be vocal about the thorny questions raised by the work they do and support, and be transparent about the times they are unsure or divided.

By being clear about how to raise issues and having a reparative process in place for when things go wrong, Watershed aims to safeguard the Studio community while remaining dedicated to continued learning. ■



■ Safety to experiment

Watershed knows the positive transformation that organisations experience when given the opportunity to try new things, without having to worry about undermining an existing track record. Innovation involves a departure from 'business-as-usual', but the risk of stepping outside an existing way of working is often what puts organisations off from testing ideas that could lead them into a more sustainable and impactful future.

Watershed believes that public funding exists to support activities that go beyond already-established markets.

Its expertise is in leveraging organisational funding to create a safe space for organisations and ventures to experiment with new ideas.

The Studio supports a wide range of experimental practices, including:

- developing new types of product
- trying out different design methods or other creative processes
- working out which business model suits an organisation's goals
- forming new types of partnership, or taking work overseas
- identifying new markets for an existing offer

When businesses find their way to the Studio, they are often in a moment of change. They might have just finished a project and be in the process of figuring out what direction they want to head in next. They might be at an early stage of research or idea generation for a new project. They might be considering a shift to a different business model or creative process.

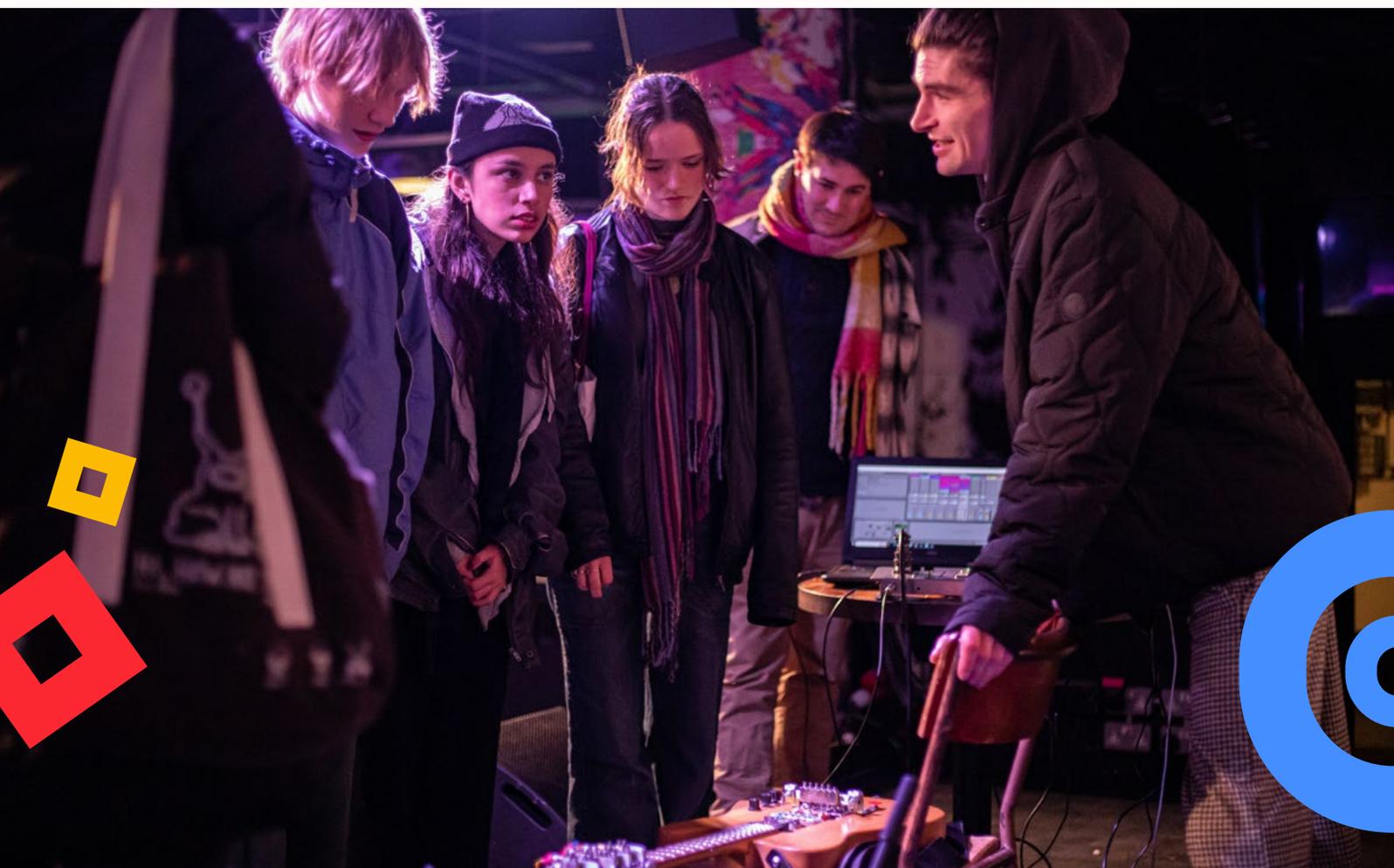
“There has to be a space for catalysing high-risk projects. And you have to accept that not everything works, but you also have to make sure that value is extracted along the way. The person learnt something; you learnt something that changed the thing that you did. The Studio now has a long enough history to be able to say ‘here are a significant number of things that benefitted from somebody taking a leap’.”

Mark Leaver, Creative Industries Development Consultant

The most prominent impact that businesses describe from working with Watershed is the generation of **new ways of working**. By collaborating with researchers and creative technologists in the Studio community - exposing and discussing their ideas with people from a wide range of backgrounds - businesses change their methods of engaging with audiences and working with user data.

The kind of self-evaluation that early-stage experimentation involves can be challenging. Watershed has established processes and toolkits to guide individuals and organisations through change and re-alignment. Such changes might include making work more inclusively, reducing environmental impact or exploring the potential consequences of decisions. Considerable experience is available to help organisations or individuals find effective ways to articulate the different forms of value their work has, beyond solely commercial objectives.

Businesses that work with Watershed describe it as ‘refreshing’ to see the problems they’re solving through a different lens. They deeply value the opportunities for user testing offered in the Studio, which provide important feedback early in the development of new projects. ■





Sustaining impact beyond project cliff-edges

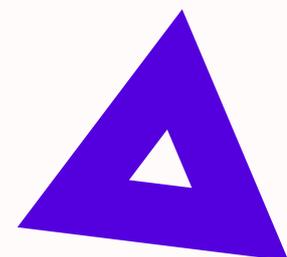
Production support

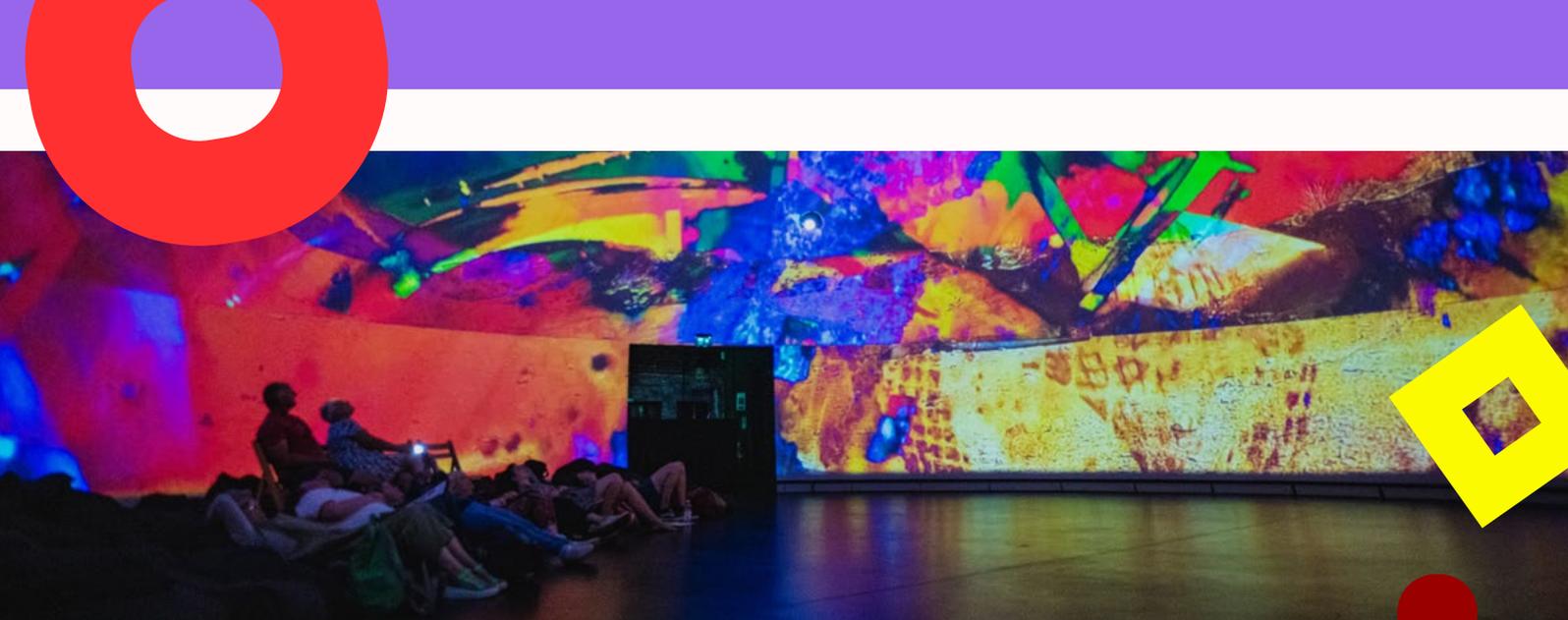
“The way we work as producers in the Studio has significantly evolved over the course of its lifetime. The early years were bold, high-risk and characteristic of a contagious dynamism. As the Studio grew, so did our methodologies, awareness and purpose. Producing became more reflexive, deliberate and centred around inclusive support which continues to shape how we collaborate with our evolving communities.”

Vanessa Bellaar Spruijt, Watershed Producer (creative technology)

At the core of Watershed’s approach is a team of producers, who combine in-depth work on funded projects with a wide range of ongoing assistance for the community, providing a continuity of support. Pervasive Media Studio’s producers turn ideas into something practical that can be shared, receive feedback and progress further. Their producers are:

- **Practical do-ers:** providing the space, tools and expertise to help make things happen. They provide advice in responding to challenges that arise along the way and overcoming the hurdles of admin and resource.
- **Critical friends:** helping people to reflect on, evaluate and develop their work by asking questions and identifying issues. They help to work out the balance between what can and should be done.
- **Community signposts:** supporting people from across the Studio’s network of creatives, businesses and partner organisations to connect through shared interests, goals and ideas.
- **Living archives:** bringing a vast amount of knowledge, learning and contacts from previous projects and using this experience to continue supporting people to make work.
- **Strategic thinkers:** looking across the bigger picture, both within and beyond the Studio community, and identifying new opportunities for funding, collaboration and knowledge sharing. ■





Continuity of engagement

There is no single point of entry for individual creatives or organisations into the Studio community. They might apply to one of the Studio's funded residencies or fellowships, or access the Studio space and resources as a collaborator on an existing project. They might turn up to one of the Studio's public events like Make Shift or First Friday and learn more about what happens there, or use a hotdesk during Open Studio Friday and chat about shared interests with Studio residents. Over time, many of these creatives access different kinds of support, depending on what they need or are interested in at the time.

"The studio is an incredible hub of ideas and focus and support. It's really trying sometimes to be an artist and to make a living out of it, so to be able to connect with a creative community is sometimes a lifeline."

Deanna Rodger, Studio Resident

There are three key ingredients to facilitate this continuity of engagement:

1. Empowerment in a safe and inspiring environment

People supported by the Studio frequently refer to a common sensitivity that exists within its community. They value the rules of engagement provided in all of the Studio's offers, for creating a feeling of safety and comfort that gives them the confidence to express themselves authentically. At the same time, being around other creatives, researchers and organisations in the shared space of the Studio provides a continued source of inspiration.

2. Moving beyond the comfort zone; embracing the unexpected

The Studio provides regular opportunities for creatives to test out high-risk ideas and collaborate with different groups of people. Participants highlight the personal growth they experience through confronting their own creative processes, being vulnerable and being open to learning new things. Navigating obstacles and being prepared for unexpected outcomes during production processes are frequently pointed to as areas of learning.

3. Reducing isolation; providing opportunities for professional development

Being connected to a community of creative individuals and organisations with widely varied interests and practices has helped those who engage with the Studio feel less isolated when working on experimental, early-stage or unusual work. Through these networks, they have become aware of job, funding, training and social opportunities that they wouldn't have known about otherwise. ■



Being there

With a regular programme of events and engagement with its community of residents, the Studio is a place where people can talk openly about their ideas and needs, finding ways to take their work forward no matter how limited their resources might be.

The Studio holds a particular value for those doing work that is unusual, early-stage or difficult to explain, with no obvious community that can be turned to for companionship. It is a place where people can feel cared for and connected to a wider network in spite of that difference. Diversity is celebrated because of the rich range of knowledge and perspectives it adds to the community.

Alongside the consistency of Studio events and support, being connected to a wider creative ecosystem brings **consistency of opportunities**. With partners as varied as universities, social enterprises, companies, community groups and other creative organisations, the Studio regularly opens doors to creatives that wouldn't be available without these partnerships. The Studio also funds creative work itself on a regular basis, running programmes to help individuals/organisations explore new ideas while joining its community of residents and benefitting from the long-term support it provides.

The pastoral care and professional advice provided by the Studio extends beyond any individual programme. Across its staff, partners and resident community, the Studio provides guidance on topics as varied as IP, funding applications, business development, further study and more.

Where any member of the Studio community can give support to another, this is expected to be offered as part of a spirit of mutual exchange.

“Being in the space and being able to talk to any member of staff about an idea you've got, and they'll sit and give you the 5 minutes to help you to grow it or to connect you to someone - that's what lots of people are looking for.”

Tony Bhajam, Inclusion Producer

Pervasive Media Studio was one of the first co-working spaces in central Bristol. It is deliberately designed to be a nice environment to spend time in: safe, secure, friendly and accessible. This space is offered for free to residents and those who visit the Studio. More than just a workspace, it is a place to hang out and be around people doing interesting things.

Studio staff think carefully about points of entry into the space, ensuring there are multiple pathways for those who can benefit from it. Building awareness of opportunities in the Studio's ecosystem, and helping people to access them, are central to Watershed's talent development aims. Whether it is a first-time visitor for a family workshop or Make Shift Meetup, or somebody returning after a long time away, Watershed are invested in helping people feel comfortable in the Studio. ■



Nurturing Creative Futures

Images: [Left] Layered Realities, 5G Showcase. Credit: Jack Offord.

[Right] Watershed Experimental Audio Camp with Real World Studios. Credit: Vanessa Bellaar Spruijt.

6

Nurturing Creative Futures

Looking back over nearly two decades of Watershed's work in Pervasive Media Studio reveals a multitude of values. Many of the Studio's residents have turned their creative practices into successful businesses that have had commercial success, achieved international acclaim and improved people's lives.

"I feel so empowered by them all, I don't think I have ever been able to feel that vulnerable in a studio environment and I felt comfortable to be my true self without judgement. It was really life-changing"

Watershed Lab participant

Examples include international artist Luke Jerram (over 900 exhibitions worldwide, working with dozens of major public institutions), world-renowned immersive experience producers All Seeing Eye (multi-award winners at IDFA, Tribeca, Sundance, Venice and SXSW), augmented reality game creators Sensible Object (launching the world's first digital/physical board game acquired for an undisclosed sum by Niantic in 2019) and the revolutionary 3D prosthetics company Open Bionics (James Dyson Award for Engineering, Wired Social Innovation Award).

Every year residents collectively generate over £5.5 million in turnover, leverage over £6.7 million in funding, employ over 370 people and reach over 113 million people as audiences for their work (figures based on 3-year averages). Beyond this, since the Studio opened in 2008, the partnership has worked with companies, cultural organisations, research institutions, local authorities and

community groups locally, nationally and internationally. It has leveraged over £72m of funding into regional R&D programmes that place the needs of creative communities at their heart. It has done this while developing a community in the Studio that matches or exceeds UK population data for marginalised groups in terms of their stated ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and/or disability.

This work has built a foundation for the years to come. As technology takes an ever more important role in all our lives, the UK needs more spaces like the Studio that support values-led, value-generating innovation from all areas of society. ■



Further information

Further detail on activities, processes, work and community within the Pervasive Media Studio can be found by following the links in the directory below.

Opportunities, events and activities

View the latest activities happening at Pervasive Media Studio here:

www.watershed.co.uk/studio/events

Reflections on process

What's the Studio and where did it come from?

www.watershed.co.uk/studio/news/2022/10/13/whats-studio-and-where-did-it-come

Watershed as a funder:

www.watershed.co.uk/studio/news/2022/05/30/watershed-funder

Creative Technology at Watershed:

www.watershed.co.uk/studio/news/2022/02/08/creative-technology-watershed

R&D You Can See:

www.watershed.co.uk/studio/news/2022/01/27/rd-you-can-see

Seven lessons learnt from evaluating our work in Pervasive Media Studio:

www.watershed.co.uk/studio/news/2024/02/13/seven-lessons-ive-learned-evaluating-our-work-pervasive-media-studio

Guides and toolkits

Inclusion Framework for Change:

www.watershed.co.uk/studio/process/inclusion-framework-change

Creative Climate Action Toolkit:

www.watershed.co.uk/studio/process/creative-climate-action-toolkit

Random Selection: A How-To Guide:

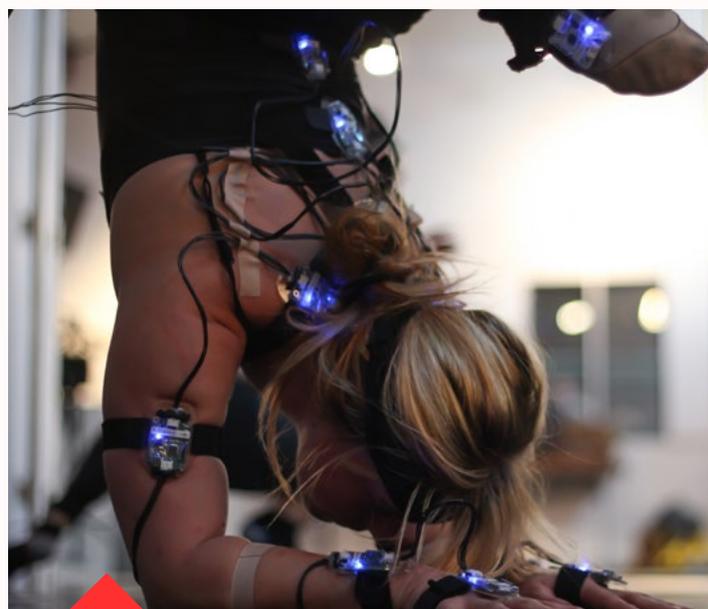
www.watershed.co.uk/studio/process/random-selection

Sandbox: A How To Guide:

www.watershed.co.uk/studio/process/sandbox-how-guide

The Pervasive Media Cookbook:

<https://pervasivemediacookbook.com>





Past Pervasive Media Studio projects

Connected Futures Festival:

Festival exploring the future of 6G. Working in partnership with the University of Bristol's Smart Internet Lab to support creative commissions, technical demos, artist residencies and schools workshops.

Website: www.watershed.co.uk/studio/projects/connected-futures-festival

Immersive Arts:

A three-year programme for UK-based artists, designed to help them develop their art using immersive technologies.

Website: www.immersivearts.uk

MyWorld:

A creative technology programme that built on the production, technology and research strengths of the West of England region to create a globally unique proposition for creative technology research and innovation. A five-year, £46 million collaboration with University of Bristol, UWE Bristol, University of Bath, Bath Spa University and a range of creative industry partners.

Website: www.watershed.co.uk/studio/projects/myworld-strength-places

Alternative Technologies: A Just Transition:

A 2-month enquiry into understanding and enabling life-affirming futures at the intersection of creative tech and climate action, which provided a toolkit for co-creating workshops underpinned by a contract of care.

Website: www.watershed.co.uk/studio/process/alternative-technologies-just-transition

Grounding Technologies:

A 9-month pilot project exploring the role of creative uses of mundane and existing technologies to bolster local climate action.

Website: www.watershed.co.uk/studio/process/grounding-technologies

The Future is Collective:

A one-year programme propelling community and climate activism by offering support and development to freelance creatives. Delivered in partnership with Bristol + Bath Creative R+D, the University of Bristol through MyWorld, and Bath Spa University through the Immersive Promotion Design consultancy.

Website: www.watershed.co.uk/studio/projects/future-collective

Bristol+Bath Creative R+D:

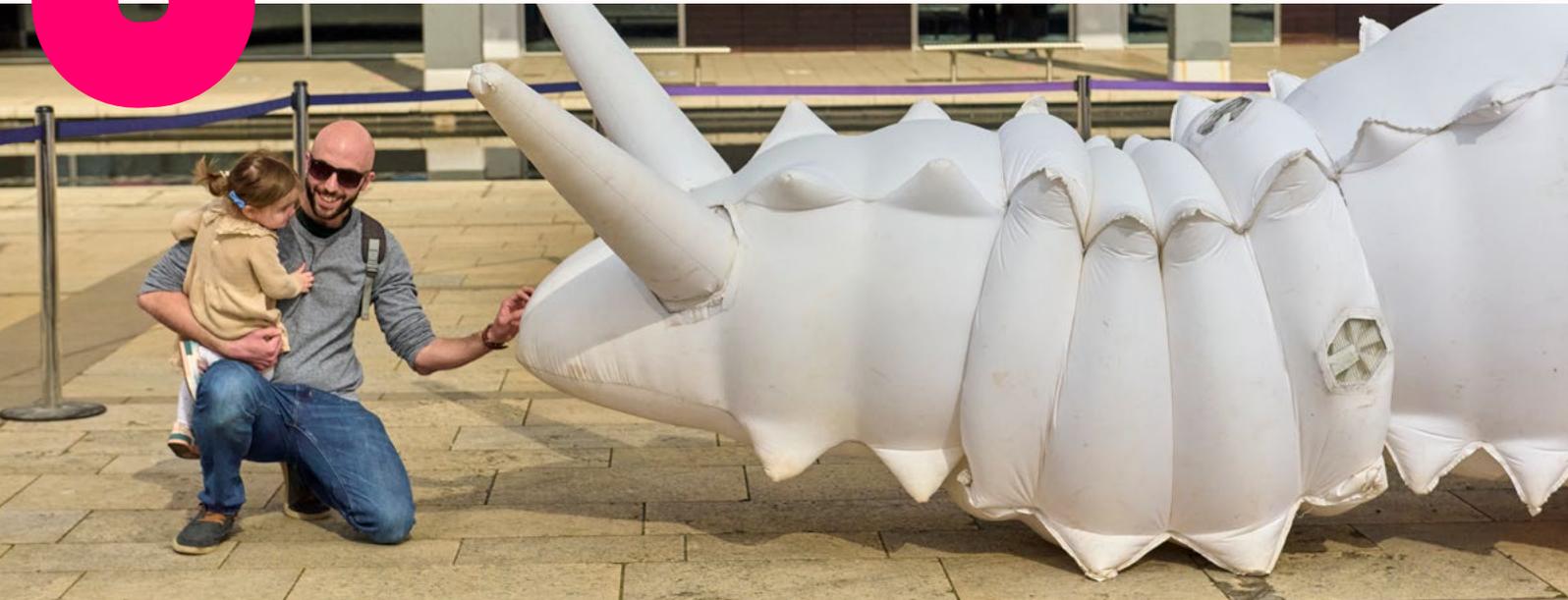
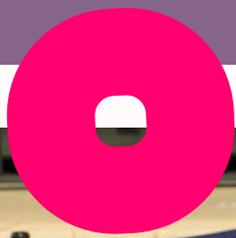
A five-year, £6.8 million programme that provided a suite of support to the region's businesses, creatives, artists and thinkers to experiment with new and emerging technologies, conduct research, and develop prototype products and experiences to share with the public. Collaboration with UWE Bristol, Bath Spa University, University of Bristol and University of Bath.

Website: www.bristolbathcreative.org

Creative Workforce for the Future:

A pilot project creating and fostering inclusive work environments to support young creative talent in the cultural and creative industries. This involved running a 48-week placement programme for thirteen 18-30 year old creative professionals from specific backgrounds currently not well represented in the creative sector.

Website: www.watershed.co.uk/projects/creative-workforce-future



Connecting through Culture As We Age:

Three-year UKRI Healthy Ageing Challenge funded project exploring how and why we take part in arts and culture as we get older. Working alongside disabled older adults and those that identify as socioeconomically and racially minoritized, the project involved co-designing new arts and cultural experiences.

Website: www.connectingthroughcultureasweage.info

Create Growth:

A series of creative sector growth programmes, commissioned by the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority and delivered with partners Upstarter Incubator CIC and Mark Leaver Consulting Ltd, to support high-growth potential creative businesses in the West of England.

Website: www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/growth-hub/financial-business-support/create-growth-programme

South West Creative Technology Network:

A £6.6 million project to link research to development by expanding the use of creative technologies and supporting business growth across the South West region of the UK. The network offered 3 one-year funded programmes around the themes of Immersion, Automation and Data.

Website: www.swctn.org.uk

Layered Realities, a 5G showcase:

Watershed and the Smart Internet Lab at the University of Bristol examined next-generation wireless connectivity through a series of experimental events, asking artists, researchers and creatives to produce bold new works which explore the capability and potential of 5G.

Website: www.watershed.co.uk/studio/projects/layered-realities

Creative Producers International:

Global talent development programme providing 15 Creative Producers from across the world with the tools they needed to lead the production of creative projects that helped to transform conversations in their city spaces.

Website: www.watershed.co.uk/archive-sites/cpi

Network for Creative Enterprise:

Programme supporting freelancers, artists, creative practitioners, start-up microbusinesses, and small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership to make a sustainable living from their creative ideas. Partnership with The Guild (Coworking Bath), Knowle West Media Centre, Spike Island and UWE Bristol.

Website: www.creativeeconomies.co.uk/publications/network-for-creative-enterprise-final-report

Ambient Literature:

Two-year collaboration between UWE Bristol, Bath Spa University, and the University of Birmingham, established to investigate the locational and technological future of the book.

Website: www.research.ambientlit.com

Rife Magazine:

A digital platform that amplified the voices, opinions, thoughts and stories of young people, through social media, videos and essays. All the content on Rife was made and curated by people under 25, and at its peak Rife boasted a regular monthly audience of 25,000 people.

Website: www.watershed.co.uk/archive-sites/rifemagazine

Nurturing Creative Futures

Image: Connected Futures Festival, Large Snail by Air Giants. Credit: Viva Arteaga-Rynn.



Being There: Humans and Robots in Public Spaces:

Three-year project exploring how robotics might impact upon our experience of public space and bridge the gaps between the ways we communicate in person and online. Partnership between the Universities of Exeter, Bath, Oxford, Queen Mary University of London and the Bristol Robotics Laboratory.

Website: www.watershed.co.uk/studio/projects/being-there

REACT:

Four-year project dedicated to connecting researchers from the arts and humanities with creative businesses to make new prototype products or services. A collaboration between UWE Bristol, Watershed, and the Universities of Bath, Bristol, Cardiff and Exeter.

Website: www.react-hub.org.uk

Playable City:

An ongoing international programme that supports the development of creative technology installations in public space, creating shared experiences through play and inviting social dialogue about the future of cities.

Website: www.playablecity.com

Theatre Sandbox:

A commissioning scheme which gave awards to six theatre companies to research and develop creative projects using digital technologies.

Website: www.watershed.co.uk/studio/projects/theatre-sandbox

Media Sandbox:

A programme of intensive research and development (R&D) supporting cohorts of creative talent, technology companies and content commissioners from the South West of England to collaboratively create new products and processes using interactive digital media.

Website: www.watershed.co.uk/archive-sites/mediasandbox

History of Watershed and Bristol's creative ecology

Rebooting the Digital City: Digital Placemaking at the Edge by Stephen Hilton, City Global Futures (2019):

Research mapping the history and development of Bristol as a Digital City, identifying significant milestones or 'breadcrumbs' that are recognised markers of the city's journey over a 100-year period.

Website: www.cityglobalfutures.co.uk/projects/rebooting-the-digital-city

'Britain's First Media Centre': A History of Bristol's Watershed Cinema, 1964-1998 by Steve Presence (2019):

Research article examining the origins and development of Watershed from "Britain's First Media Centre" in 1982 to an integrated digital development and independent film exhibition venue by the late 90s.

Website: www.watershed.co.uk/publications/britains-first-media-centre-a-history-of-brisstols-watershed-cinema-1964-1998

Bristol-Bath Innovation Cluster by SQW (2018):

A study investigating the processes through which the Bristol-Bath innovation cluster developed and considering steps that ought to be taken to nurture it further.

Website: www.sqw.co.uk/expertise/spatial-local-economic-development/bristol-bath-innovation-cluster

Unusual Common Ground: The Watershed/HP Labs Partnership by Clare Reddington, David Drake and Erik Geelhoed (2007):

This report describes the benefits of the Watershed/HP Labs partnership, listing a number of joint projects and programmes such as Mobile Bristol (the precursor of MediaScapes), SE3D, MeiGeist and CommunicationWear.

Website: www.shiftleft.com/mirrors/www.hpl.hp.com/techreports/2007/HPL-2007-147.pdf

People

Find out more about Pervasive Media Studio staff, residents and community members here:

www.watershed.co.uk/studio/people

Watershed website:

www.watershed.co.uk

Pervasive Media Studio website:

www.watershed.co.uk/studio



Credits

About this document

This report was produced with support from MyWorld. MyWorld is a creative technology programme in the UK's West of England region, funded by £30 million from UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI) Strength in Places Fund (SIPF) and £16 million in industry match funding to date. MyWorld is built on the production, technology and research strengths of the West of England region to create a globally unique proposition for creative technology research and innovation. Participation in MyWorld has enabled Watershed to develop its work in Pervasive Media Studio, and to evaluate its role in the creative ecosystem over time.

Findings in this report are based on interviews with individuals, companies and consultants who have engaged with Watershed, MyWorld participants and Watershed staff. Several secondary sources have also been consulted (listed in the Further Information section), which document Watershed's history, processes, projects, impacts and learnings.



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About the author

Dr Jack Lowe is a researcher and knowledge exchange manager in the Digital Cultures Research Centre at UWE Bristol. In this role, Jack has worked with Watershed for several years as a partner on three creative R&D programmes, Bristol+Bath Creative R+D, Grounding Technologies and MyWorld. He has also contributed to several talent development opportunities for young people in the Pervasive Media Studio.

Jack's research at the DCRC has centred on the creative economy of Bristol and Bath and its relationship with place. He was co-author of the final reports for Bristol+Bath Creative R+D and Grounding Technologies, and his research on the Bristol and Bath creative technology cluster has been published in the academic journals *Geoforum* and *City, Culture and Society*.

Jack is also a resident of the Pervasive Media Studio himself. He is a game designer who specialises in creating playful experiences and interactive stories that engage with place.

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With thanks and appreciation to all Studio residents who share information about their work and feedback with Watershed so generously.

WATERSHED

Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND
LOTTERY FUNDED



pervasive media studio



UKRI UK Research and Innovation