
Title: Story Futures – Creative Digital Opportunity

Purpose: To inform board members of the opportunity being presented to BTVLEP in supporting the Story Futures Creative Digital Opportunity programme being led by Royal Holloway College as part of the Creative Industries sector development.

Recommendations:

- **That members note the content of this report and the presentation from Professor James Bennett from Royal Holloway College and identify further opportunities for BTVLEP to support this programme of activity.**
- **That Board Members endorse the involvement of BTVLEP together with colleagues at Berkshire Thames Valley LEP and Enterprise M3 LEP in supporting the programme steering board.**

Professor James Bennett, Professor of Television and Digital Culture at Royal Holloway University, is leading “Story Futures”, a programme of coordinated activity to secure up to £9m of government funding from BEIS which is being directed through the Arts and Humanities Research Council for digital innovation within the creative industries sector.

The Royal Holloway led bid, which covers a geographic area to the west of London including Buckinghamshire and our neighbouring LEPs in Berkshire and Enterprise M3, is one of 22 shortlisted bids approved through the first stage funding assessment. The final decision on funding will be made in June 2018 and if successful, the programme will commence from October 2018 for a 4.5 year period. Other academic institutions currently supporting the bid include the National Film and TV School, Brunel University and the University of Creative Arts.

The objectives of the project are to support audio-visual creativity and creative technology companies that form a gateway in and out of London and across sectors in one of the UK’s most important creative clusters. This cluster has to date been largely overlooked because of its dispersed geography as a conurbation. This ‘Gateway Cluster’ region contains nearly 20% of the UK’s high concentration, high growth creative Travel to Work Areas spanning Screen and IT, Software, Computer industries.

The Story Futures programme has 5 primary objectives:

- a) Enable cluster companies to undertake risky, cross-sector innovative product and service development that they would not otherwise due to lack of skills/expertise, capacity or financial jeopardy across 4 themes:
 1. Next-Generation Story Lab;
 2. Emergent Value Networks and Business Models;

3. Data in the Creative Workflow;

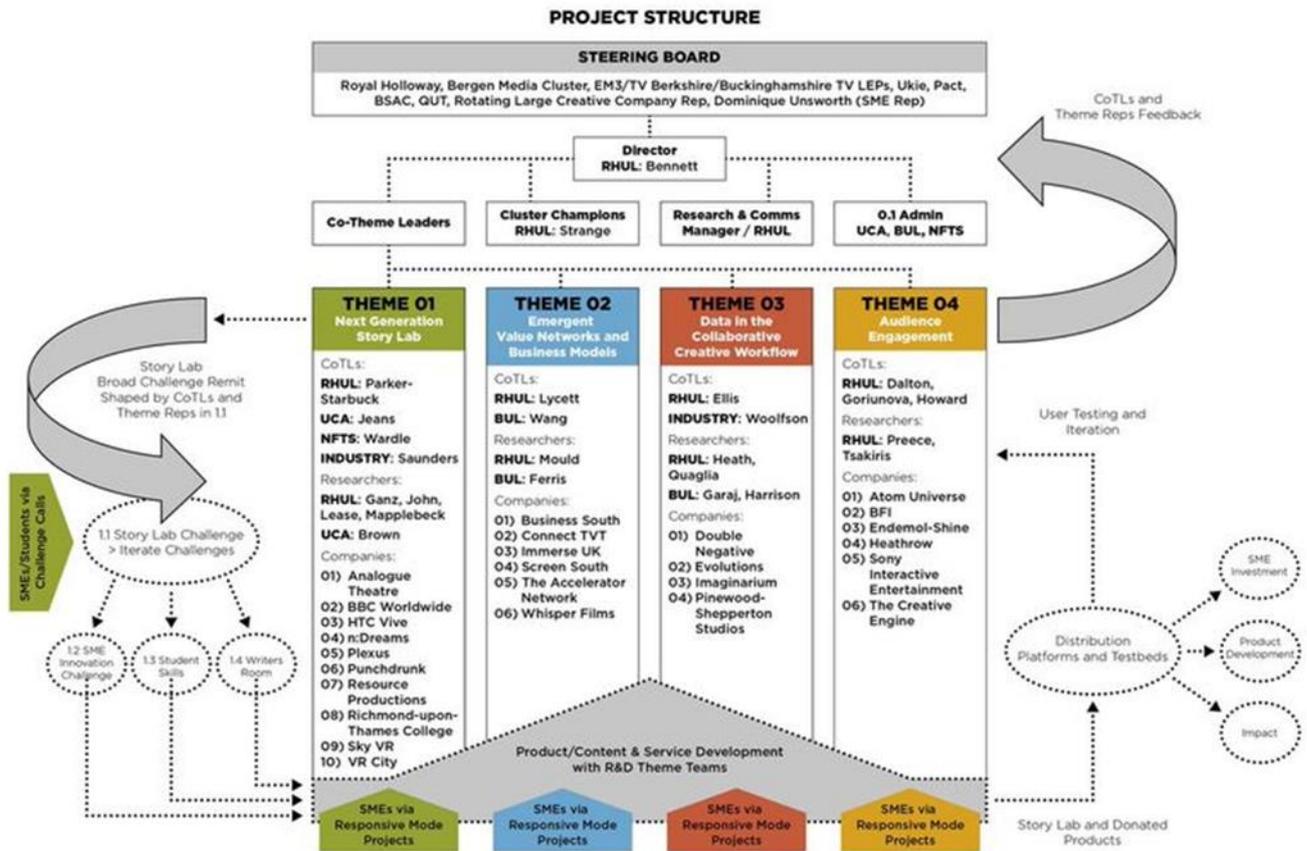
4. Audience Engagement.

- b) Grow companies' IP, revenue, exports, jobs and readiness for investment by brokering collaborative partnerships, providing support for prototypes and pilots to reach audience-facing platforms that engage users in novel ways and enabling companies to access further sources of funding and finance;
- c) Ensure that the 'Gateway Cluster' is recognised as an economic and cultural powerhouse, which is to act as a blueprint for regional growth elsewhere in the UK that is able to overcome geographic dispersal;
- d) Create a next-generation of innovators in story and technological form whose skills span the arts, humanities, social, formal and applied sciences by developing a talent pipeline.
- e) Address diversity issues in the screen industries, particularly the lower proportion of women across the sector.

The development of the creative industries sector has been identified as a priority for this LEP area, building on the strengths of film and screen businesses at Pinewood and surrounding area, as well as the creative design networks centred around Marlow and the outside broadcast expertise focussed in and around High Wycombe.

The National Film and TV School at Beaconsfield has been identified as one of 3 story labs to be used if the project is successful in securing funding. There is significant potential in linking other Buckinghamshire academic institutions into the programme as well as the growing cluster of Bucks based SMEs operating within these sectors as well as supporting a programme of inward investment and tourism opportunities.

BTVLEP provided an initial letter of support behind the phase 1 bid and together with the two other LEPs has been asked to support the joint LEP steering group to help advise on the development of the project, engagement with industry and identify further development opportunities. A summary of the proposed programme governance is shown overleaf.



Members are asked to:-

1. Note the content of this report and the presentation from Professor James Bennett from Royal Holloway College and identify further opportunities for BTVLEP to support this programme of activity.
2. Endorse the involvement of BTVLEP together with colleagues at Berkshire Thames Valley LEP and Enterprise M3 LEP in supporting the programme steering board.