

Creative Careers

Audra Gill



Head of Creative Industries, Arts and Humanities Research Council

I vividly remember the GCSE options sheet and being told I couldn't choose music, drama and art because they didn't fit into the timetable. I studied music and drama in the end, finding ways to bring my interest in art and design into my work through Design & Technology.

If I had my time again, I might have explored something like design or fashion more seriously, but those options just didn't feel visible or encouraged at the time. In fact, I even wanted to take drama at college, but I wasn't able to because not enough students had signed up.

However, without those early experiences of performing in front of an audience in drama or music, I don't think I'd feel nearly as confident in my role today, where I regularly present at events, contribute to panel discussions, and communicate the work we fund.

Why creativity matters (to everyone)

Creativity exists everywhere: it's in the design of products we use every day, the films we watch, the furniture in our homes and the buildings we live in. **Creative subjects help** people think differently. They encourage problem-solving, adaptability, and storytelling.

Access and visibility of these subjects are crucial. Young people need to understand the full range of creative careers that exist - but we need to support parents and carers too. Many worry whether creative subjects can lead to stable careers, but creative skills are valuable across almost every sector.

The future is creative

If we stop supporting creativity, the future risks becoming bleak and boring.

Creative subjects bring colour, joy, and new ideas into the world. They build confidence, communication and self-expression - skills that matter in every part of life. They're rewarding not only financially, but also on a human level.

A squiggly path to creative success

My own career journey hasn't followed a straight line. It's been very 'squiggly', driven by curiosity and a willingness to try anything.

It started with a degree in Physical Geography and Geology, followed by a funded MSc in Environmental Water Management at Cranfield University. After graduating, I did a brief stint in flood risk consultancy, which I quickly learned wasn't for me.

Things took off when I joined a national graduate management scheme in waste and recycling. I gained broad experience, including in health and safety and commercial bidding, before going on to coordinate operations, policy and regulations at a green waste recycling facility.

Later, after a year in the Netherlands and an incredible internship with the British Embassy at The Hague, I was introduced to UK research councils and learned about research funding - something I didn't know existed. It was this that led me to apply for a role with the research councils after a year of travelling.

I've been here nine years, and I haven't looked back since.

Finding the 'so what?'

When I started at the Arts and Humanities Research Council, I managed the evaluation for the Creative Industries Clusters Programme - a £56 million investment supporting nine research clusters across the UK - that spanned sectors such as fashion, video games and screen industries.

It was incredibly exciting because it connected research with industries that we all interact with every day. It also brought together many of my personal interests - including sustainability, design and fashion. I used to sew and make clothes, so seeing sustainability research applied to fashion and design was really fascinating.

My creative perspective enables me to turn complex research into clear, engaging stories that show the real impact research has on people's lives. As my background is not research-based, my questions always start with: **“So what? Why is this research important? What difference does it actually make?”**

I now oversee a portfolio of over £120m of investments into the Creative Industries sector, all of which are working toward UKRI's mission of advancing knowledge, improving lives and driving economic growth.

Bridge gaps with communication

Communication and relationship-building are at the heart of everything I do. A huge part of my job is supporting and leading my team while also communicating with senior leadership and external stakeholders.

You're constantly adapting your message for different audiences, whether that's researchers, policymakers or the public.

Closing the loop as a governor

Reflecting on my own career is one of the reasons I became a governor at a local secondary school. I'm the careers link governor, partly because I remember the challenges I faced when I was choosing my own subjects.

Looking back, I can see how those early creative experiences shaped far more than I realised at the time. If we can give more young people the chance to explore and value creativity, we're not just opening doors to careers, we're helping them build the confidence and skills to navigate whatever path they choose.

Find out more at go.pearson.com/creatives