



THE STUDIO

BSU

BATH SPA
UNIVERSITY

Alternative Budget Day

12 • MARCH • 2026

**Rethinking Our Creative
Economy**

Event Summary for
Participants & Partners

Alternative Budget Day

Micro-businesses, sole traders and freelancers make up the vast majority of the South West's cultural and creative ecosystem. Yet they often struggle within traditional business models built for scale, speed and competition. The aim of Alternative Budget Day was to bring together the region's artists, makers, micro-enterprises, funders, policymakers and educators to explore a vital question:

What if our economy was designed to nourish people and places as well as encouraging sustainable growth?

The event used performance, debate, and accessible metaphors to reimagine what a governmental Budget Day could look like if it centred fairness, sustainability and the lived experiences of creative practitioners.

The metaphor of cake (represented by actual cake) provided a powerful, playful, and accessible tool for introducing four competing economic models:

MAXIMUM CAKE: growth at all costs with trickle down as a form of redistribution.

THE FAIRER CUT CAKE: emphasis on growth but more equal redistribution of wealth.

THE DOUGHNUT: thriving within social and planetary limits.

THE CIRCULAR CAKE: no waste of people, ideas, places or resources.

Key Themes

Traditional growth models are failing micro-businesses

Participants repeatedly noted that “maximum cake” growth strategies do not benefit micro-businesses and often create precarity, burnout and inequity. Patient long-term investment beats quick wins. Sustainable creative businesses take time to develop and need funding cycles that reflect that reality.

Circular and doughnut economic models reflect real creative lives

We underinvest in the people who can use and share technology, so expensive equipment sits idle. We need to fund training, mentoring, and knowledge exchange to make the most of our region’s expertise and assets. Participants placed high value on sustainability as a definition of success, holistic wellbeing over scale, adopting a strategy of zero waste of materials and assets, as well as ensuring more opportunities for people and ideas to flourish.

Invisible labour & community value must be recognised

Invisible work keeps the sector alive. Bartering, unpaid collaboration, and skill sharing provide crucial support for creative ecosystems, yet current funding systems struggle to acknowledge this. Long-term social impact and social value need to be more firmly recognised as key factors in the creative economy.

Funding & procurement structures exclude the very people who need them

Heavy administration and reporting requirements along with the use of jargon and overly complex contracting processes create barriers for micro-businesses. Fair access matters as much as funds. Tender frameworks can lock out micros. Make applications micro-business friendly.

Place-based co-designed funding & decision-making processes could reshape the creative economy

Creativity thrives when decisions are made with and by communities, not imposed from the centre.

Promising Ideas Emerging From the Day

Here are three widely supported ideas that we think could be piloted in collaboration with creative micro-businesses, funders, policy makers and universities in the South West:

A Micro-Business Support & Regeneration Fund

Small, low-admin grants (£500–£2,000) that reward collaboration, reuse, inclusion and community benefit as well as audience headcount and revenue .

Micro-Business-Friendly Procurement Models

Establish ways, through consultation, to enable councils, universities and public bodies to work more effectively with local creatives. Develop frameworks for micros to collaborate on applying for larger pots, utilising the **BSU BOOST** model. Simplify requirements and give micro-businesses a fair shot.

A South West Creative Micro-Business Network

A distributed network to promote regenerative practice and reduce waste, including sharing underused and meanwhile spaces, tools and equipment, skills and knowledge. The network could convene regular assemblies where micro-businesses, funders, and policy-makers co-create policies and share resources.

Next Steps

We invite you to stay connected, contribute your voice, and help us design the next steps. We are keen to bring together representatives from our creative economy to design and deliver the change that's needed.

If you'd like to join us do the following:

- **Register your interest** in this conversation via [this simple form](#)
- **Share this document** with colleagues and networks far and wide

**Together,
we can build an economy
that nourishes everyone.**