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FRI 11 SEP 2009

Which UK city is the most creative? Leicester?

UK

How creative is the city you work in? That is the question The Drum asked creatives across the country. Leicester missed out on our original list, but it makes its case now.

LEICESTER

Ross McMinn, media producer, Twist & Shout

When I left Leicester in 1998 I hated it. It didn't, in my eyes, live up to what a city was meant to be. For much of the 90s Leicester was largely eclipsed under the shadows of Nottingham and Birmingham and I thought that's how it would always be.

The last decade, however, has seen Leicester truly bloom. It's become a melting pot of culture, creativity and innovation with design and creativity across the city drawing from British, European, and Asian cultures. While plenty of new architecture has been introduced, replacing many of the 1970s concrete monstrosities, the city has retained much of its character.

We spent three years on the outskirts of Leicester, working in tiny offices with carpet on the walls, a corrugated iron roof (fun in the summer) and were routinely gassed out every time the lawn mower repair shop downstairs decided to test their formidable array of petrol mowers. We, like many other businesses, were drawn more centrally to Leicester by the changes that were unfolding. That isn't to say there aren't plenty of businesses still surrounding Leicester, but that the creative core of what is Leicester has grown.

The much-needed investment and redevelopment of Leicester has galvanised the Creative Industries through the creation of centres like the LCB Depot and the new digital media centre Phoenix Square which house an abundance of production facilities, offices and meeting spaces in the recently established Cultural Quarter. Businesses that five years ago wouldn't have even registered the others existence are now collaborating on regional and national projects, the fruits of which can be seen across the city.

Culturally Leicester has also hit its stride with the annual Leicester Comedy Festival becoming the biggest outside of Edinburgh and a range of other festivals, such as Summer Sundae Weekender, and events being hosted the year round. The recently opened Curve theatre is hosting West End size shows (and breaking world records for the most Michael Jackson Thriller zombies dancing in one location).

As Leicester & DeMontfort Universities have expanded, they've acted like a springboard for injecting the city with a youth and energy that it previously lacked. The university themselves have been integral in the re-establishment of Leicester, developing an Innovation Centre and providing premises to act as business incubators for young creatives and designers alike.

Okay, Leicester may not have the sheer amount of large creative agencies and design studios other cities do, but there is still a deluge of award winning work coming out of it and there are hundreds of fledgling creative businesses that are growing everyday. We've lost one or two big companies, such as THA, but there are plenty of others taking their place. We may not be quite the biggest city in terms of creativity yet, but you should probably start looking over your shoulder.

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> **Jamie Potter**

Fri 11 Sep 2009 18:06

I agree wholeheartedly and it's this burgeoning creative and truly multicultural scene that has convinced me to come back to Leicester to do an MA in New Media. Speaking as a recent graduate of DMU too, I think there's far more potential among the student body of the city. You rightly point out that students contribute to the creative vibrancy of Leicester but from my own experience there are even more talented students who just need a bit of encouragement and support to come out of their shells. Hopefully in the next couple of years we can do that as well as make progress in the wider community.

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Katherine O'Sullivan

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