Stephen Hignell FRSA

Strategist, consultant, evaluator & capacity builder • Creative industries, culture and heritage

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PROFILE

Senior international creative economy and film sector economist, strategist and consultant with 18+ years' experience advising the British Council, UNESCO, governments and arts funders. Directs complex, multi-sector, multi-country initiatives around the world, combining theory-based mixed methods, participatory research, quantitative analysis and economic/value-for-money (VfM) assessment. Specialises in testing programme contribution, sustained partnerships, equity and cultural value—and translating robust, proportionate evidence into decisions on grant design, investment and future delivery.

SPECIFIC EXPERTISE

Screen-sector and creative economy economics • Retrospective grants and long-term outcomes • International cultural relations and partnership legacy • Gender, equity and underrepresented participants • Theory of Change, contribution analysis and Most Significant Change • Multilingual surveys, qualitative case studies and research QA • VfM, economic impact and non-market value • Team direction and senior-level learning

SELECTED PROJECTS

Philippines | Design Counts / design sector mapping
Directed economic and sector-mapping research for the Design Center of the Philippines / British Council. Relevant to Philippine institutional networks, mixed datasets and sectoral definitions.

Philippines | DTI/PSA creative-economy measurement capacity building (2024)
Co-designed/co-facilitated economic measurement and dynamic-mapping capacity building for Philippine government/statistics participants.

Philippines | Creative Industries and Social Enterprise for British Council (2019)
Led the national study of creative industries and inclusive growth in the Philippines for the British Council.

British Film Institute (BFI) — Training Routes from Education to Employment | UK
Led research examining education, training and employment pathways across the UK screen industries, identifying workforce development needs, skills gaps and opportunities to strengthen access to sustainable careers in film and television production.

Northwest Territories — Film Industry Economic Impact Assessment | Canada
Led an economic impact assessment of the Northwest Territories film industry, examining screen-production activity and its contribution to the regional economy to inform industry development, public investment and film-sector policy.

Bristol — Film Production Infrastructure and Studio Development | UK
Supported research into Bristol's film-production infrastructure and studio development, contributing to the evidence base for screen-sector investment, regional economic development and the expansion of local production capacity.

Northern Ireland / Ipsos | Night-Time Economy economic impact | 2025–2026
Economic consultant, contributing economic modelling and analysis of the scale and contribution of Northern Ireland's night-time economy. The study estimated £2.8bn–£3.7bn in 2024 GVA and 101,000–114,000 FTE jobs; the Department for the Economy cited it as instrumental in securing funding for a Belfast late-night transport pilot.

On Screen Manitoba — Film and Screen Industry Economic Impact Assessment | Canada
Contributed to economic impact research assessing Manitoba's film and television production industry, including production activity, employment, regional economic contribution and screen-sector development opportunities.

Screen Yorkshire — Yorkshire Content Fund Evaluation | UK
Conducted interim and final evaluations of Screen Yorkshire's European Regional Development Fund-supported Yorkshire Content Fund, assessing regional screen-production investment, programme delivery, industry development and wider economic outcomes.

British Council / Saudi Ministry of Culture — Saudi Film Sector Skills Mapping and Strategy | Saudi Arabia, 2019–2020
Led a national film-industry skills mapping and strategic review, examining workforce capabilities, recruitment challenges, training needs, gender and youth participation, and opportunities for sustainable screen-sector development.

Greater London Authority — London Video Games Sector Strategic Review | UK
Led a strategic review of London's video games industry, examining economic opportunities, industry development, growth barriers and strategic priorities for strengthening the capital's wider screen and digital-content economy.

ICR Facility / British Council | Inclusive cultural policy, Uganda & Zimbabwe | 2024–2025
Led cross-cultural stakeholder consultation, policy analysis and capacity building to advance women's economic empowerment, youth inclusion and creative-sector development; developed evaluation and impact frameworks for use by local partners.

BFI / Creative PEC / Ipsos | Economic Value of Cinema Venues | 2023
Economic consultant contributing to contingent valuation of cultural and social benefits of cinema. The study identified an estimated £600k additional annual non-market value for cinemas in the studied categories, supporting public-value and investment appraisal.

Jamaica | Cultural and Creative Industries research
Led the first-ever economic impact review of Jamaica's cultural and creative industries for JBDC/British Council/UNESCO, including mapping, survey evidence, economic contribution and policy.

British Council | Selector Radio / After Dark strategic review | 2026
Directed international stakeholder review (22 formal interviews) and strategic options analysis on reach, cultural relations, partnerships and future programme positioning.

UNESCO | Aschberg Programme global evaluation | 2025
Methodology lead and quality-assurance lead for UNESCO's international assessment of support for artistic freedom and cultural rights. Oversaw the full research brief, survey methodology, cross-cultural and multilingual implementation, and case-study research, with quantitative synthesis to inform design and priorities for the programme's next phase.

UNESCO | Voices of Courage: Women, Culture and Emergencies | 2025
Methodology and QA lead within the research team for UNESCO's first global study of women cultural professionals in emergencies. Designed and implemented survey, overseeing multilingual translation, multi-country delivery and case-studies. The resulting global study analysed 1,470 responses from over 120 countries, plus qualitative testimony, to inform gender-responsive policy and practice.

British Council | Mexico Creative Leadership Programme evaluation | 2025
Led evaluation of the sixth cohort: Theory of Change/logic model, interviews, surveys, participant journeys, creative reflection and a rapid VfM assessment. Integrated qualitative, quantitative and participant-generated evidence into findings and actionable recommendations on participant outcomes, delivery effectiveness, programme improvements and future learning.

Historic England | Heritage at Risk capital-grant evaluation design | 2025
Led evaluation inception and methods design for heritage grant investment, specifying evidence to assess conservation, community benefits, economic value and VfM considerations. Established evaluation approach for programme effectiveness, equity and learning.

Hackney Council / Create London | Windrush Art Commission evaluation | 2024
Led inclusive, community-centred evaluation of an equality and social-justice arts commission. Integrated interviews, survey responses, audience evidence and institutional perspectives to assess representation, participant experience, community outcomes and opportunities to improve future commissioning and engagement.

British Council | Venice Biennale Fellowships impact evaluation | 2022
Led research and evaluation of the Fellowship's early-career outcomes, access, inclusion and programme value; assessed VfM and barriers for people from lower socioeconomic and underrepresented backgrounds. Produced recommendations for widening recruitment, equitable participation and support, and improving the programme's accessibility, effectiveness and reach.

British Council | Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth (CH4IG) | 2019–2021
Directed global monitoring, evaluation and learning across Colombia, Kenya, Vietnam and the UK. Co-developed the results framework, coordinated in-country research teams and tested programme contribution to heritage, livelihoods and inclusive growth through surveys, case studies and process tracing. Undertook VfM assessment and synthesised cross-country learning to strengthen accountability and future programme design.

ECONOMIC IMPACT EXPERIENCE

Manchester City Council — Manchester Music Economy Economic Impact Assessment | UK, 2023
Led the economic and social impact assessment of Manchester's music economy, directing economic research, industry mapping and evidence synthesis to inform cultural policy, investment and sector-development priorities.

SaskMusic — Saskatchewan Music Industry Economic Impact Assessment | Canada
Led a provincial music-industry economic impact assessment, overseeing economic analysis, sector research and reporting to establish the industry's contribution to Saskatchewan's economy and inform development priorities.

Manitoba Music — Music Industry Economic Impact Studies | Canada
Led the economic impact research examining Manitoba's music industry, developing sector evidence to support industry development, investment discussions and economic policy.

Music PEI — Prince Edward Island Music Industry Economic Impact Assessment | Canada
Led the economic research and sector analysis assessing Prince Edward Island's music industry and developing evidence to inform provincial industry development and public-policy decisions.

Music New Brunswick — Music Industry Economic Impact Studies | Canada
Led the provincial music-industry economic impact research, examining industry activity and economic contribution to strengthen evidence for sector development and investment.

Canadian Independent Music Association — National Independent Music Industry Research | Canada
Led and contributed to national economic and sector research examining Canada's independent music industry, including industry structure, economic contribution and opportunities for business and sector development.

Indigenous Music Industry — Economic and Cultural Contribution Assessment | Canada
Contributed economic and cultural impact research examining Indigenous music in Canada, connecting industry activity and economic contribution with wider cultural and community value.

Ontario Sound Recording Tax Credit — Fiscal Incentive Evaluation | Canada
Co-authored and contributed to an evaluation of Ontario's Sound Recording Tax Credit, examining the operation and outcomes of a creative-industry fiscal incentive and its implications for public investment and industry development.

British Council — Iraq Creative Economy Mapping | Iraq, 2021–2022
Directed national creative-economy mapping and sector research, combining multilingual surveys, industry consultations and economic-development analysis to identify opportunities, constraints and policy priorities.

British Council — Imo State Creative Industries Mapping and Situational Analysis | Nigeria
Led regional cultural and creative-industry research, mapping sector activity, engaging industry stakeholders and developing evidence to support creative-economy development and policy.

British Council / DCMS — Cultural Protection Fund Heritage Contingent Valuation Pilot | Egypt
Led economic and cultural valuation research applying contingent-valuation approaches to understand the wider public value of threatened cultural heritage and inform cultural protection decisions.

Greater London Authority / London Economic Action Partnership — Affordable Creative Workspace Economic and Social Impact Reviews | UK
Co-led creative-workspace mapping and economic and social impact research, examining affordability, business conditions, cultural infrastructure and policy options to support sustainable creative-enterprise development.

Mayor of London / Greater London Authority — Cultural and Music Infrastructure Mapping | UK, 2017–2021
Directed successive studies mapping London's music and cultural infrastructure, producing geographical and sector evidence to inform urban planning, creative-industry development and cultural investment decisions.

Greater London Authority — Creative Enterprise Zones Evaluation Framework | UK
Led evaluation methodology development for London's Creative Enterprise Zones, establishing approaches to assessing place-based creative-industry investment, enterprise development and programme outcomes.

Tirgan Festival — Economic and Cultural Impact Evaluation | Canada
Led an impact evaluation of Tirgan Festival, examining its cultural and economic effects and developing evidence to inform festival strategy, stakeholder engagement and future development.

CREATIVE SECTOR EXPERIENCE

CoSTAR Network — Independent Programme Assessor | UK, 2025–present
Serves as an independent CoSTAR Programme Assessor, bringing research, evaluation and creative-industry expertise to the assessment of research and innovation activities spanning screen, performance and creative technologies.

Global Affairs Canada — International Cultural Relations and Film Industry Engagement | UK/Canada
Supported Canada–UK cultural relations and trade activities involving the creative industries, including engagement connected to the London Film Festival and international cultural-industry events.

FOCUS Wales | Welsh Music Export Programme retrospective review | 2026
Provided external analytical and evaluation-reporting support for a five-year (2021–26) review of international music export activity. Examined reach, partnership and career outcomes, sector contribution and sustainability, evaluating programme contribution cautiously where longer-term attribution could not be established.

Arts Council England | Quality Metrics National Test evaluation | 2016
Led ACE's independent evaluation of a 150-organisation test of arts-quality metrics, examining implementation, self/peer/audience perspectives, organisational data culture and feasibility. Findings helped Arts Council England understand adoption barriers and refine evidence-gathering and assessment approaches.

British Council | Digital Peacebuilding & Youth Connect, Lebanon | 2023–2024
Co-designed and evaluated a culturally sensitive youth programme in a conflict-affected setting; facilitated local partner capacity building, monitoring tools and learning handover to support locally led adaptation and future delivery.

Arts Council England / DfE | In Harmony programme evaluation | 2020
Led national evaluation of a multi-location music education initiative in areas of deprivation, assessing delivery, participation and social-inclusion aims to support funder learning and programme decisions.

British Council | DICE Social & Creative Enterprise Fellowship, Pakistan | 2019
Co-designed, facilitated and evaluated an inclusive creative-enterprise fellowship focused on women, young people and marginalised groups. Applied monitoring and learning methods to participant development, accessibility and delivery by local partners, supporting adaptation and programme capacity.

PRS Foundation | International Showcase Fund evaluations | 2016 & 2019
Directed two evaluations of international arts-export grants. The 2019 report reviewed grants to 364 artists and estimated £5.3m revenues generated during 2016–19; evidence supported fund refinement and partner investment discussions. PRS Foundation subsequently reported that the fund budget had doubled since the 2016 report.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE AND RECOGNITION

Creative Economy Consultant — Programme Evaluation, Strategy & Cultural Policy (2025–present)

Director, international consultancy — Analyst to Director (2008–2025); led multidisciplinary research, evaluation and economic-analysis teams.

Research Associate, NCACE / School of Advanced Study, University of London (2026): participatory and story-led research practice.

HERITΛGE Management Organization, Paros (2026): scholarship participatory heritage/community-engagement fieldwork.

Education: BA Economics (Political Economy & Macroeconomics) • Postgraduate Diploma, International Business (Advanced)

Languages: English (mother tongue); French B2; Spanish B1; Arabic A1

Member, UK Evaluation Society (UKES) • Clore Social Leadership Fellow (2024–25) • OECD Summer Academy Fellow (2022) • Fellow, Royal Society of Arts (FRSA) • Co-Chair/Trustee, Raze Collective • CoSTAR Programme Assessor