

BROADCAST

INDIES

Brum indies to share hub as Create Central kicks off

By [Max Goldbart](#) 11 September 2020

£2m agency plans to reinvigorate film and TV in England's second city



Steven Knight

A group of high-profile Birmingham indies are banking on the £2m Create Central agency to bring commissioners to the city for the first time in decades, while Steven Knight has detailed more studio plans.

The Peaky Blinders creator, North One founder Neil Duncanson, Wonder exec-producer Sarah Trigg and Deloitte technology media and telecoms lead Ed Shedd are among the figures who have helped shape the agency, which is now launching in earnest.

It has been funded by Birmingham City Council and the BFI and plans to bring a clutch of West Midlands indies under one roof and invest heavily in training.

Create Central's two-year growth plan also details plans for infrastructure, job-creation, training via a Future Talent Studio and inward investment.

A content hub will open next year and the likes of North One, Wonder, Shipmates indie Full Fat and Inside the Mind of a Serial Killer producer First Look TV will share ideas for co-productions along with facilities and back office.

According to Duncanson, Channel 4 director of programmes Ian Katz has pledged to send commissioning editors to the city on a regular basis, after Birmingham narrowly missed out to Leeds to host C4's nations and regions hub in 2018.

"I've not seen any commissioners here since the black-and-white TV days," joked Duncanson.

"Birmingham indies are quite small and spread around, which is why no one ever sees a comm ed here. That means we fail to get a consistent dialogue going and can't generate ideas and business. It's been a self-fulfilling circle."

Wonder's Trigg said bringing numerous indies into a single space will also help with talent pipelines, while freelancers could be shared between projects.

"There is a strong sense of regional community that we have never felt before and this will help keep and develop a really diverse talent base," she added.

[Broadcast reported last month](#) on the work by specialist agencies to help Birmingham indies diversify their talent base, with Optomen seeking help from diversity consultancy Tin Smart to crew up the latest series of BBC2's Great British Menu.

Shedd said Create Central could correct a damaging West Midlands talent drain that has taken place over the past few years, stretching back to when the BBC closed Pebble Mill and other broadcasters moved out.

"There is this perverse thing going on where people from Birmingham join the creative sector but then tend to work outside the region," he added. "Over the last 10-to-15 years the West Midlands has lost its way."

Shedd also hopes that Create Central can help smash siloes between the TV, gaming and animation sectors in the region.

"In the post-Covid world, media formats are collapsing into each other and we can capitalise on the unique set of skills that the West Midlands has," he added. "Having

producers in the gaming sector so close could add spice to more traditional TV and film products.”

Studio masterplan

Meanwhile, Knight detailed more plans for the 38-acre Mercian Studios, which will house six sound stages along with studios and restaurants. It is situated next to a soon-to-be-built HS2 stop, meaning it will be less than 40 minutes away from London.

Knight envisions cutting the ribbon on filming of Peaky Blinders at Mercian Studios in 18 months and has ideas for a string of returning TV dramas, feature films and shiny-floor entertainment show to base themselves there.

One “triple-A-list Hollywood star and director” have already expressed interest in the location, according to Knight.

“We’re going to create a halo-effect to other related industries,” he added.

“We want to exploit the diverse youth of Birmingham – the youngest city in Europe – and take people from outside of TV into the industry. We have to start training now as the reality is this is happening in 18 months time.”