

## Features

# Investing in people

The new Schwarzman Centre in Oxford is a landmark at a time when investment in arts and humanities is at a critical low, writes its managing director, Alexandra Vincent.

## [Alexandra Vincent](#)

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The Schwarzman Centre comprises a concert hall, theatre, recital hall, immersive space, exhibition space, practice rooms and a purpose-built learning centre for schools

Photo: David Levene

Why does anyone choose a particular job or sector to work in? When I look at my career choices, those of colleagues, and even the pathways my children are tentatively pursuing, it is usually guided by a passion or an interest, coupled with the opportunities available.

As a teenager, I stumbled across a scheme for a 'youth technical crew' at my local theatre and, at fourteen, began learning skills that instilled a passion for the arts. Now I want to ensure we create the same opportunities for other young people, throughout their careers and whatever their backgrounds.

My career has followed a very squiggly path but I am lucky now to be in my dream job at a really exciting time.

### **Breathtaking facilities**

Last September saw the opening of the new Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities at University of Oxford, where our cultural programme kicks off this month – with a diverse schedule of events including music, theatre, visual arts, spoken word and immersive experiences.

The facilities are breathtaking. A 500-seat concert hall, 250-seat theatre, recital hall, black box immersive space, white box exhibition space, music studies, practice rooms and a purpose-built learning centre for schools – and all of it sits alongside the teaching and research that puts Oxford at the top of the QS 2026 World Rankings for Arts and Humanities.

Core to our vision for this phenomenal new building is opportunity for all. We want the Schwarzman Centre to become a place where knowledge and ideas combine with creativity and curiosity to help understand what it is to be human in an increasingly complex world. Through our academic work, our cultural activities and our partnerships we want explore challenging issues such as climate change, geopolitics and new technology.

This vision means investing in the skills and opportunities needed to ensure young people see the potential in the arts and humanities and can develop those skills through the various different career pathways they may take.

And we want to create opportunities not just in degree programmes but through apprenticeships, continuing professional development, and schools programme – to sustain a pipeline of children and young people, passionate about the arts and humanities.

### **Alignment with government strategy**

With our new facilities and spaces, we want to draw in people from backgrounds who may feel university is not for them, so they can take advantage of the opportunities for skills development and help shape the ideas and creativity in the centre. This isn't about us being in a transmit mode: we want schools, cultural partners, business and industry to help craft opportunities together so that our offer fit their needs.

This aligns with government strategies around growth. Almost 30 years after the Creative Industries first emerged as a policy priority, they are now one of the nation's fastest growing sectors, contributing to the UK's global reputation and economic prosperity. But the government's Creative Industries Sector Plan, published last June as part of the Modern Industrial Strategy, highlighted persistent sector that could undermine their future stability and their contribution to the government's growth agenda.

The political and media debate surrounding creative degrees, the humanities and higher education highlights the difficulty of achieving the Sector Plan's aim to develop a skilled talent pipeline without further intervention and investment. Within it, unhelpfully, creative arts qualifications are often deemed 'low value'.

This skew to a primarily economic value lens overlooks the contribution creative higher education makes in terms of innovation and societal benefit. It also overlooks why many people enter careers in the Creative and Cultural industries in the first place: the passion for performance, the artforms, creativity and the institutions that make up the sector.

### Challenge of scale

These challenges are familiar and are reflected in the sector's development over the last 30 years. But the challenge is also one of scale. This is a sector comprised not just of micro-organisations but of teams and operations that work on a nanoscale.

These organisations have a high reliance – almost double the average across all sectors – on freelancers to keep the sector afloat. This makes it difficult to target investment and skills development in a meaningful way, which is why we want to ensure our facilities are open to those without the resources to access the tech or the skills to use them.

It's not just about investing in the technology, although that helps; it's about opening access so that those who might not ordinarily benefit can use the facilities and learn the skills. Through these sorts of collaborations, we can ensure we are developing innovation in content production, experiences and even the technologies being used.

The Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities is a landmark at a time when investment in the arts and the humanities is at a critical low. We hope that, through collaboration and creativity, we can develop different models of working to provide opportunities at every career stage. The investment in this new building will become an investment in people, from a broad range of backgrounds, to gain new skills, knowledge and experiences and to help them, and the sector, thrive.

#### About the Author



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