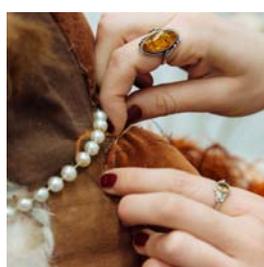
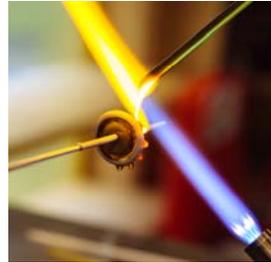




# CRAFT NORTHERN IRELAND STRATEGIC PLAN 2014 – 2017





# “Innovative Craft 2014-17”

March 2014

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## 1 CONTEXT

### 1.1 Craft Northern Ireland – history

Craft NI was established in 2005 at the end of a process of consultation with the craft sector in Northern Ireland (2000-2004). Through this consultation the sector agreed that Craft NI would:

- be a different kind of craft development agency from the Crafts Councils in UK and ROI;
- not be a membership organisation for designer-makers or craft organisations;
- be a small organisation focused on encouraging other organisations to support the craft industry across Northern Ireland;
- while recognising that the contemporary craft sector is broad and diverse, focus its resources on a **definition of quality craft** practice which:
  - extends practice and ensures high standards of technical skill and design;
  - does not reproduce or restore but is innovative in its aesthetic vision and use of materials;
  - reflects the signature of the individual maker and demonstrates investigation of processes and critical enquiry.

### 1.2 Evaluation

We have now evaluated the completion of our current three-year strategy, *Opportunity Craft 2011-14*. This evaluation was based on a number of strands of consultation which took place from November 2013 to February 2014:

- (i) with individuals and organisations working in the craft industry;
- (ii) with key funders and partners, e.g. Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI), Invest NI, NITB, University of Ulster, Craft & Design Collective;
- (iii) with Craft NI staff and Board of Directors.

#### 1.2(i) Consultation with the craft sector

The consultation was carried out using SurveyMonkey – an electronic survey completed online. It was emailed to approximately 450 designer-makers and craft organisations, as well as to a further 1500 individuals and organisations which have worked closely with the sector including, colleges and universities, museums, arts centres and galleries, local government, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Invest NI and NI Tourist Board,

among others. A total of 69 responses were received (76% designer-makers; 12% arts centres and craft organisations; 3% FE Colleges and Universities; and 9% other).

The results were compiled by the survey tool and where opinions were expressed:

1. We scored an excellent or good rating of between 50% and 80% for 12 out of the 21 key initiatives delivered over the past 3 years under our 3 core objectives. The Making It programme had the highest rating, followed closely by August Craft Month.
2. When the average ratings are included every initiative scores well in excess of 50%, and up to 90% in many cases.
3. Only 2 initiatives received a “bad” rating in excess of 5%, out of the 21.
4. On average 76% of respondents felt we should continue with these 21 initiatives or similar.
5. 88% of respondents think that our existing 3 core objectives are right for the next 3 years.
6. 90.9% of respondents think we are focused on the right groups of people to work with for the next 3 years.
7. Approval ratings for the 6 new areas of activity proposed by us for the next 3 years ranged from 85% to 95%. These included digital strategies, EU funding, new retail projects, application of new technology, online retailing and sector research.
8. Individual feedback comments centered on the need to focus activity all over NI; to provide support for part timers and traditional crafts; to look outside NI more; and to continue to work on general marketing and awareness for the sector.

### **1.2(ii) Consultation with key funders and partners**

This was undertaken through a series of meetings between the Chief Executive Officer of Craft NI and officers from ACNI, Invest NI, NITB, University of Ulster, Craft & Design Collective and others, the outcomes of which were reported back to the Board of Directors. Broadly the feedback mirrored that arising from the sector consultation.

### **1.2(iii) Consultation with Craft NI staff and Board**

Craft NI staff and Board of Directors also completed the online survey and met separately to discuss the survey results, feedback from meetings, and input their own

thoughts on the strategy and performance of the organisation since April 2011 before drafting this new Strategy which hopefully takes account of as many of these views as possible.

### **1.3 Other considerations in developing a new strategy**

In thinking about its new strategy, Craft NI is also aware of the current environment in which the craft sector operates. Primarily this includes: (i) the availability of funding; (ii) economic conditions; (iii) social attitudes; (iv) the NI Assembly report into the Creative Industries; and (iv) the impact of the Internet. In summary:

#### **1.3(i) Funding**

The availability of funding for the craft sector, and Craft NI in particular, has been significantly reduced since 2010. This situation is unlikely to improve significantly over the next two-three years with the result that there will be less money for programmes, exhibitions, marketing and general resources, as well as for directly supporting designer-makers. ACNI funding will be due a further major review in late 2014 which will influence the remainder of the period covered by this plan.

#### **1.3(ii) Economic conditions**

Economic conditions, while now more stable, are unlikely to improve significantly in the short-medium term resulting in continuing pressure on disposable income and keeping spending prioritized on essential items. This may continue to affect funding, craft sales and sponsorship opportunities.

#### **1.3(iii) Social attitudes**

Potentially craft can benefit from current environmental concerns that encourage people to buy local, hand-made products. There is also a trend to purchase work that is 'made not manufactured' – work that is unique and not mass produced. It is likely that these trends will continue over the next three years and need to be encouraged.

#### **1.3(iv) The NI Assembly Report into the Creative Industries**

This report was published in March 2013 and highlighted the potential of the creative industries in NI. It was also very critical of the current disjointed approach to support for these industries from government departments. This report and its recommendations are

likely to have an influence in the future on the shape and scope of government focus on support for craft.

### **1.3(v) The impact of the Internet**

The growth of the internet and social media channels is of potentially huge benefit to craft makers. The rate of change in this area has been exponential over the past 3 years and it is likely to continue to develop aggressively over the next 3 years. These tools allow makers to profile their skills and products to a national and international audience in a very cost effective and professional manner. It also provides a range of tools to facilitate and generate online sales to a wide range of markets.

## 2 KEY RELATIONSHIPS

### 2.1 Strategic relationships

Craft NI was established by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and receives the majority of its funding from this source for the promotion of the arts. Craft NI is also supported to a lesser degree by Invest NI and other funders whose remit is to support economic development. These agencies provide funding to Craft NI in order to achieve their own aims and objectives and any NI Executive funding, either directly or indirectly through these agencies, must help achieve government's aims and objectives. A third key relationship for the craft sector is with those organisations that educate and train craft students – schools, colleges and universities. Finally the relationship with the NI Tourist Board is increasingly important as craft has a very direct link with the current emphasis on the development of “experiential” tourism.

Craft NI's new strategy, *Innovative Craft 2014-17*, is informed by the following:

#### Arts and Culture

Arts Council of Northern Ireland - key themes:

- Champion the Arts
- Promote access
- Build a sustainable sector

#### Business and the Economy

Invest Northern Ireland - key themes:

- Promote a competitive and outward looking economy
- Promote higher value-added activity through innovation
- Support companies to diversify into new markets
- Improve the business capability of Northern Ireland businesses

#### Education, Skills and Training

Creative and Cultural Skills - key themes:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| ▪ Developing management and leadership | ▪ Progression routes and career information |
| ▪ Entry points into the craft industry | ▪ Continuing Professional Development       |
| ▪ Diversity of the workforce           |   |

- Qualifications reform
- Craft in schools
- Providing industry intelligence
- Business Support

### Tourism

- Developing quality visitor experiences

### NI Assembly: Programme for Government

Key themes (relevant to the craft sector):

- Productivity growth
- Skills for prosperity
- Increasing employment
- Supporting rural business
- Protecting our environment / reducing our carbon footprint
- Tourism
- Promoting access to culture, arts and leisure

## **2.2 Craft sector relationships**

Craft NI wants to build sustainable opportunities for designer-makers and craft organisations in Northern Ireland. Craft NI will primarily facilitate development through others although it will also deliver certain specific programmes directly itself, e.g. *making it*, August Craft Month etc. We will place emphasis on creating support across the region from partners that can help designer-makers and craft organisations develop and access creative and business opportunities. To do this we will prioritise our resources in creating opportunities around four broad areas of development:

- **professional**: supporting the sector - designer-makers and craft organisations - in the development of creative and business practice;
- **infrastructural**; developing the infrastructure, partnerships and resources, i.e. developing relationships with other organisations - such as arts centres and galleries, museums, schools, colleges and universities, craft agencies, tourism and heritage agencies, local government bodies and others - inter/nationally, regionally and locally, to support the craft industry;
- **public awareness and engagement**; working with audiences / consumers and the industry to educate, raise awareness, appreciate, and stimulate and develop markets;
- **Innovation**; developing relationships both within and outside the sector to focus on the role of innovation in the development of sustainable craft businesses.

### **2.3 Digital Relationships**

In recognition of the growth of the importance of the internet and social media in recent years Craft NI will develop a coherent strategy to enable craft makers to create meaningful digital strategies and relationships to assist in the development of their businesses. This will also link to e commerce opportunities including those operated by makers themselves as well as those operated by specialist third party organizations.

### **3 VISION FOR THE SECTOR**

**3.1 Mission** *To build an integrated, entrepreneurial and vibrant contemporary crafts industry in Northern Ireland, actively supported by regional and local stakeholders, that contributes increasingly to the creative, cultural and economic life of Northern Ireland.*

Craft Northern Ireland will work with, and on the behalf of, the industry and its stakeholders to achieve a significant impact on the cultural, social and economic life of Northern Ireland.

#### **3.2 Cultural Impact**

Craft NI will raise the artistic, cultural and critical appreciation of craft by:

- developing international recognition for practice in Northern Ireland;
- supporting high quality programming and activities: - exhibitions, seminars, workshops, publications, web site and communications;
- engaging with galleries, arts centres, museums, craft organisations and others to create wider access to high quality craft;
- Developing a digital media strategy to best profile craft activity in Northern Ireland.

#### **3.3 Social Impact**

Craft NI will develop the sector's social impact by:

- strengthening a industry that provides flexible working practices for makers with dependants;
- strengthening a industry in which over two-thirds of businesses are owned and run by women;
- supporting craft businesses within the rural community and economy;
- improving the image of Northern Ireland as place to live and do business;
- addressing the issues of Social Inclusion and Poverty in all its programmes;
- creating access to, and appreciation of, contemporary craft among a range of audiences both as practitioners and purchasers.

#### **3.4 Economic Impact**

Craft NI will develop the industry's economic impact by:

- increasing the profile and visibility of craft to audiences and participants in Northern Ireland and internationally;

- linking with the NI Tourist Board to promote craft as a key tourism product;
- providing designer-makers and craft organisations with opportunities to develop their business skills and capacity at all stages of career development;
- supporting individuals and organisations in providing increased options for the sale of craft in Northern Ireland through a broad range of retail opportunities;
- supporting designer-makers in developing exports and accessing new markets outside of Northern Ireland;
- Supporting designer-makers in developing a suitable online presence and linked digital media strategy to effectively promote their businesses;
- Supporting designer-makers in the development of suitable e-commerce solutions;
- Encouraging designer makers to embrace innovation in their businesses.

## **4 SUMMARY: CORE OBJECTIVES**

Craft Northern Ireland's core objectives remain relatively unchanged from the previous Strategic Plans but have been altered as required to reflect the world within which we must now operate. The key objectives, through which we will deliver our programmes, are:

### **4.1 Advocacy**

Craft Northern Ireland will:

- develop new audiences and markets by raising the profile, visibility and understanding of craft in Northern Ireland through initiatives, events and marketing activities;
- develop new audiences and markets by raising the profile and visibility of Northern Ireland craft to a national and international audience through effective use of the internet and social media;
- work with NITB to profile craft as an attractive tourism opportunity;
- strengthen the awareness of how the craft sector's values and ambitions complement those of key stakeholders and partners and how they contribute to the cultural, social and economic prosperity of Northern Ireland;
- support craft and other organisations to be advocates at local level;
- increase industry intelligence through research, data collection and evaluation;
- develop and assert its competence as champion and advocate for industry growth and development.

### **4.2 Partnerships and Infrastructure**

Craft Northern Ireland will:

- support craft, local government, and other organisations to engage with designer-makers in Northern Ireland and develop local activity;
- strengthen key strategic partnerships that support the longer-term delivery of ambitions for the craft industry;
- build and strengthen partnerships that deliver on the ground internationally, nationally, regionally and locally;
- strengthen its approach to securing further funding and investment in the industry, including European funding;
- ensure that Craft Northern Ireland has a secure, ongoing, organisational base to consolidate its role as the champion of the craft sector.

### **4.3 Raising Quality Awareness**

Craft Northern Ireland will:

- promote consistent qualitative standards;
- support aspiration, ambition and professional practice through the development of appropriate opportunities, both creative and business;
- continue to build a national and international profile for craft practice in Northern Ireland; and
- develop the region's participation and contribution at national and international levels.

For further information on the work we do please visit

[www.craftni.org](http://www.craftni.org)