

Increasing resilience in the NI craft sector post-Covid

Research report commissioned by Craft NI

Prepared by Smith and Kent Consulting

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Contents

Key to abbreviations.....	4
Executive summary	5
Summary of key findings.....	5
Summary of recommendations	8
1. Introduction.....	9
About Craft NI.....	9
What we did	10
2. Impact of Covid-19 on craft makers	14
Impact on profit.....	14
Impact on turnover	14
Impact by hours worked	18
Impact by discipline	18
Impact by stage in career	20
Impact by operating model	24
Conclusions.....	25
3. Training and support for craft business.....	27
Training needs	27
Support from government	28
Other sources of business support	31
Sources of inspiration	32
Online training.....	33
Effectiveness of training.....	33
Conclusions.....	35
4. What might the future look like?	36
Start-ups.....	36
Makers' business priorities	36
Online sales and promotion	38
Customer relations	40
Craft hobbyists	41
The future of exhibitions.....	41

Destination craft.....	42
Crafts Council recommendations	42
5. Craft NI services and support	44
Satisfaction with Craft NI	44
What Craft NI can do to support makers in the future.....	45
6. How Craft NI can help build back better.....	48
“Punching above its weight”	48
Influencing.....	48
Sharing information	49
Networking for makers	49
Support and training for craft businesses	49
Support for start-ups	50
Support for craft retailers	50
Online sales and promotion	51
Further developing the craft market	51
Space to make	51
Export.....	52
Bibliography.....	53
Appendix 1: Survey.....	55
Appendix 2: Audit of local economic development training and support.....	63
Appendix 3: Benchmarking online training	69

Key to abbreviations

ACNI	Arts Council of Northern Ireland
ANBC	Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council
AND	Arts and North Down Borough Council
BCC	Belfast City Council
CCG	Causeway Coast and Glens District Council
DCSDC	Derry City and Strabane District Council
DfC	Department for Communities
DfE	Department for the Economy
FODC	Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
INI	Invest NI
MEA	Mid and East Antrim District Council
NMD	Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
OU	Open University
TNI	Tourism NI

Executive summary

In March 2021, Craft NI commissioned research into the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the craft sector. This research was based on desk research; a survey of makers across all disciplines throughout NI; interviews with makers working in different disciplines at different stages in their careers; and interviews with local and central government.

Summary of key findings

Turnover and profit

- Craft makers reported a 48 per cent reduction in their profit during 2020/21. High-value sales and exhibition sales were particularly negatively impacted by Covid. Commissions remained the main source of sales for most makers.
- While there was growth in both the number of makers reporting sales and the value of sales direct online, just over half of makers also reported no online sales in 2020.
- 52 per cent of makers also reported that their income from teaching fell.
- There was a reduction in both the number of makers exporting and the value of exports. It is likely that this was also impacted by uncertainty over the UK's exit from the EU.
- Half of the craft makers surveyed got no additional government support for their business during Covid.
- The most significant increase in income during Covid was from public funding. 21 per cent experienced an increase. However, 13 per cent also experienced a decrease. Overall, 30 per cent of makers were in receipt of public funding, an increase from 24 per cent in 2016.
- Income from non-craft sources was the second biggest area of increase for makers. This may include makers who had to take up a second job or find an alternative way to earn an income due to Covid.

Impact by stage of development

- Makers who had been selling their products for between 5 and 10 years were most likely to report being negatively affected by Covid, but those selling for more than 10 years reported the greatest impact on profit.
- Before Covid, just under half (48 per cent) of businesses were successful, thriving or mature. At March 2021, that had reduced to 17 per cent.
- At the same time, there was a significant increase in businesses surviving or in decline. Of those businesses "in decline", 18 attributed it directly to Covid. The most frequently given reason was the closure of retail spaces and markets, followed by inability to run classes and reduced trade orders.
- Recent graduates have missed out on face-to-face education, end-of-year shows, networking and early career development. This is both an individual and sectoral loss as new talent is important to keeping the sector refreshed and pushing the boundaries of practice. It is likely that a number have been lost to other careers. Those who remain may need an additional springboard to get them where they would otherwise be.

Impact by operating model

- Those working in jewellery and silver were among those whose profit was least affected, but along with those working in printing and mixed media, they were most likely to be negatively affected.

- Full-time makers were more likely to be affected than part-time, although impact remained high regardless of hours (a reduction in profit of between 63 and 64 per cent among those negatively affected).
- Those businesses with very low overheads, minimal stock and who on occasion make sales of high value pieces were less likely to have suffered high financial loss.
- Those who were able to continue to work away from home during Covid (for example, in their own studio) were less likely to report a loss of profit and less loss in profit. This demonstrates the importance of work space for makers.

Training needs

- The self-employed need the ability to combine and deploy a wider range of competences than employees. Networking and role models from within the sector are particularly valuable for developing competencies not generally gained through training.
- In terms of business skills, most makers would like help with marketing plans; online accounts/small business packages; and business planning.
- Most makers would like a blended approach of in-person and online training in the future.

Sources of support

- At 18 per cent, makers are most likely to turn to their local council for help with their business. 14 per cent said there was no one they would turn to or they didn't know where to turn. 10 per cent would go to Craft NI. However, 23 per cent of makers were not aware of local council or local enterprise agency training programmes and 7 per cent found them not relevant to their business.

Local government support

- Having a dedicated officer or champion in the local council district appears to correlate with the strength of the local craft community.
- Those councils with greater coordination between arts, tourism and economic development teams also appear to provide stronger support for the sector.
- Eligibility criteria relating to turnover and job creation passed down from EU and central government limits the scope local councils have to tailor programmes for the craft sector. Nevertheless, council officers interviewed were generally keen to work with craft businesses in recognition of their wider economic and cross-cutting social and cultural impact.
- Demand for creative bursaries, start-up programmes (across all business sectors) and online training is particularly high. However, some councils reported low uptake on training, including for free and craft-specific courses.

Experience and impact of training

- Most makers found that training tailored to the craft sector in general or to their discipline in particular was most useful.
- Of those makers who had previously taken part in local council or local enterprise business support programmes, only one third found the experience positive.

Ambitions for the future

- Most makers hope to increase their profile and sell more direct online in the next three years. Other opportunities that makers are prioritising include selling their services (teaching, workshops and so on); commissions; exhibitions; and online sales through third parties such as Etsy. However, for some, just "staying afloat" or "having a roof over my head" is the priority for the next three years.

Online sales and promotion

- Covid accelerated trends in online shopping, particularly among those who had not shopped online before. During lockdown, more craft makers also promoted their products online.
- A willingness to adapt in itself was not necessarily a protective factor against financial loss. While 44 per cent of makers reported that they sold more online during 2020, 26 per cent sold less. For many, it is likely that their efforts were the result of necessity, rather than strategy, and some may not have adopted the most effective promotional tactics. Reduced sales could also reflect less disposable income and an increasingly crowded market.

Training needs

- Networks, role models and mentoring have a key role in developing the competencies entrepreneurs need to succeed.
- Other makers and artists are also a key source of business support and inspiration for makers.
- The digital skills members would most like support for are: using Instagram to sell their work; managing their online shop; and selling in online marketplaces. Creating online courses was the digital skill makers were least confident in but the one they also felt was least relevant.
- Makers would prefer Craft NI to signpost them to good quality technical-based workshops (such as glazing, stone setting and other techniques), rather than for Craft NI to deliver such workshops direct. Only 5 per cent already had specialist support in place.

The changing craft market

- Covid has accelerated online sales, particularly among those who have not previously shopped online.
- While online sales are a priority for many makers, there is still a need for physical retail space.
- People are keen to return to galleries and exhibition spaces. They help people feel “inspired and uplifted”.
- Opportunities to physically see and feel products is important for higher-value, more intricate and more innovative work and work by newer makers.
- In-person contact is also important for building customer relationships.
- There is a growing demand for holistic craft hubs or experiential destinations, and opportunity may be presented as retail core is hollowed out by recession, pandemic and changing consumer trends.

Views on Craft NI

- Nearly half of makers surveyed felt that Craft NI met or exceeded their expectations. 9 per cent felt it fell below expectations. 42 per cent had not yet availed of Craft NI’s support.
- There was recognition that the sector is very diverse and that one size cannot fit all, but that Craft NI should strive to unite the sector.
- Makers seldom have large marketing budgets. This is an area in which Craft NI does, and can further still add value, for example, through August Craft Month.
- Craft NI could lead by example by providing exemplar and cutting-edge sales platforms and social media.

Summary of recommendations

The following section summarises six key priority areas for action.¹

Influencing local and central government

1. work with local and central government to influence new and improved business support programmes, including programmes tailored to the craft and creative sectors
2. engage closely with local councils and the cross-council arts managers group to advocate for support and develop joined-up programmes
3. lobby for specialised support for start-ups and craft retailers

Direct support for makers

4. continue to create and share relevant information with makers using role models from within the sector to develop new resources
5. carry out an annual training needs analysis with makers
6. create networking opportunities for members including salons, a closed Facebook group and cross-sectoral events lobby for specialised support for start-ups and craft retailers
7. pilots a springboard programme for recent graduates

Market and audience development

8. work with TNI to promote local craft in visitor centres
9. develop a communications campaign to promote the intrinsic value of craft to consumers

Online sales and promotion

10. develop training and support in online sales, promotion, video and immersive content
11. work with local councils to develop and support online sales platforms and campaigns (such as “Buy local”)

Spaces and experiences

12. work with CCG and BCC in particular to develop their respective craft hubs
13. work with TNI and local councils to explore appetite for and feasibility of craft trails
14. advocate for craft studios and spaces to be included in new developments

Export and Brexit

15. lobby for a new export strategy
16. engage further with makers to support them through the UK’s exit from the EU

¹ A total of 30 recommendations arranged under 11 themes are included in the main report.

1. Introduction

Craft NI is the champion for the design-led contemporary craft industry in Northern Ireland.

In February 2021, Craft NI commissioned Smith and Kent Consulting to carry out research into the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and make recommendations to increase the resilience of the sector in 2021 and beyond.

In its specification, Craft NI requires that the research explore the following questions.

1. What has been the impact on income for makers and craft retailers in Northern Ireland in 2020/21 due to Covid?
2. Which makers were most impacted, including particular disciplines and where in the craft-talent pipeline has the impact been most severely felt?
3. What are the ongoing impacts likely to be in 2021/22?
4. How prepared is the craft sector in NI to participate in trends in retail and reaching new audiences accelerated by Covid? For example, the shift towards to online shopping and arts participation.
5. What training needs are already being met through local government and enterprise agencies and where can Craft NI appropriately fill gaps?

Craft NI will then use this research to:

- focus its future actions, such as its business and creative skills development programmes, and
- identify where partnering and additional funding may be needed to meet emerging needs and increase the stability and resilience of the sector.

About Craft NI

Craft NI exists to promote and support the development of the design-led contemporary craft industry in Northern Ireland. It does this by supporting developing and promoting a vibrant creative and entrepreneurial industry as part of the economic, social and cultural infrastructure.

Its core strategic objectives are:

Advocacy and profiling

- promoting the industry as a sector with high standards of artistic and creative practice with strong relationships to visual arts, architecture, design, fashion
- promoting the industry as a contributor to the delivery of wider strategies, e.g., arts and culture, business and the economy, education and training
- publicising the sector and its activities to arts, cultural and wider general publics

Partnerships and Infrastructure

- building partnerships for delivery within the wider sector with, e.g., craft organisations, arts centres, local authorities, galleries, cultural organizations, colleges and universities

Raising Quality Awareness

- supporting and delivering professional development for designer-makers
- creating opportunities and an opportunity environment for the development of creative and business practice through, but not limited to, the Craft NI Gallery

What we did

Smith and Kent Consulting carried out the following research.

Desk research

This included:

- A review of relevant Craft NI operational and strategic documents to familiarise ourselves with what they do, why
- Identifying and reviewing available data on the known and emerging effects of Covid-19 on the craft sector and its supports
- Identifying and reviewing wider sectoral and government reports
- Online benchmarking to identify how other craft support bodies have responded to the pandemic and are planning for the future

Further detail is included in the bibliography.

Training and support map

We carried out desk research and made follow-up enquiries as necessary to identify relevant training currently provided by local government, local enterprise agencies and other business start-up and sector-support bodies.

Survey

An online survey targeted at craft makers, which opened for just under two weeks, received 91 responses. A prize draw was used to incentivise the survey which was publicised via Craft NI's e-newsletter and social media; boosted Facebook posts; Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) social media and e-newsletters; and local council, enterprise agency and other supporters' communications platforms.

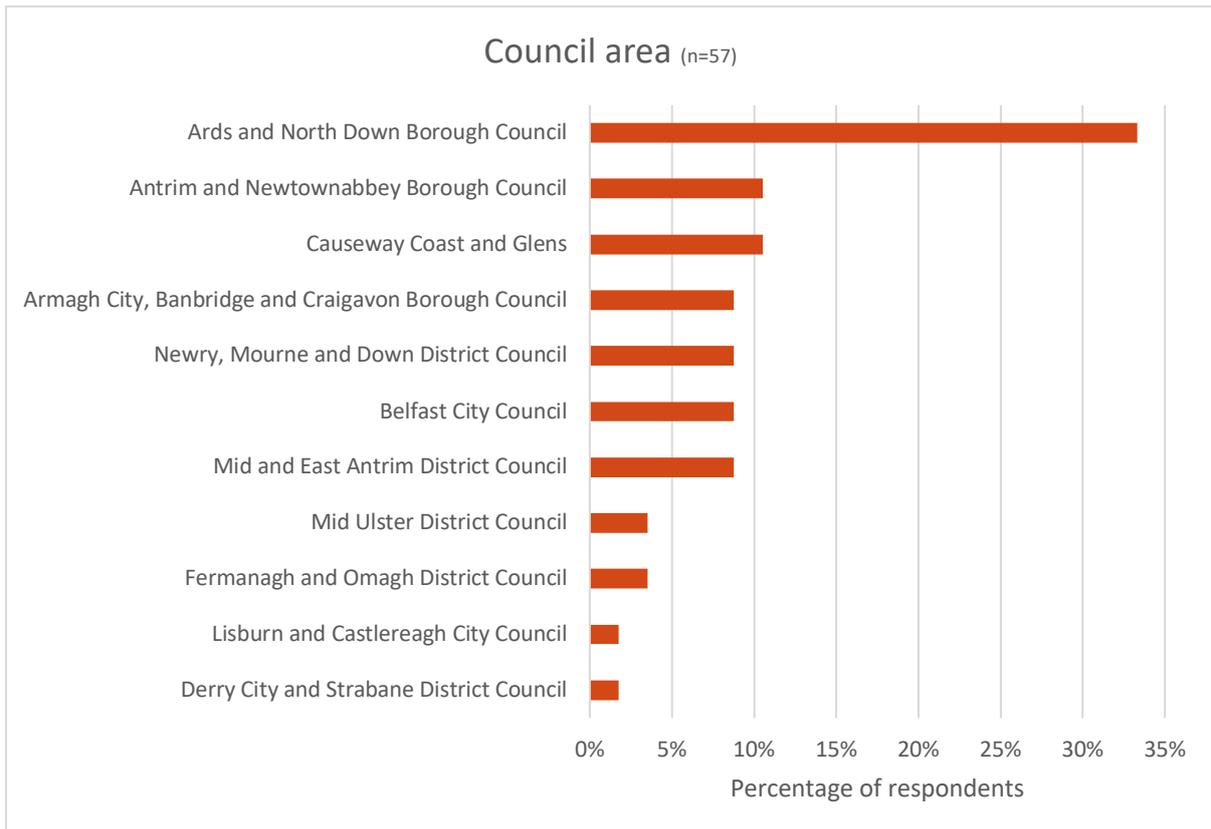
The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data to enable in-depth exploration of the economic impact of Covid; opportunities, threats and expectations for the future, including any plans to adapt business or practice; and other areas for exploration based on the research questions set down in Craft NI's specification.

The estimated number of craft makers in NI is 700. This means that we can be 90 per cent confident in the quantitative data with a margin of error of plus or minus 8.

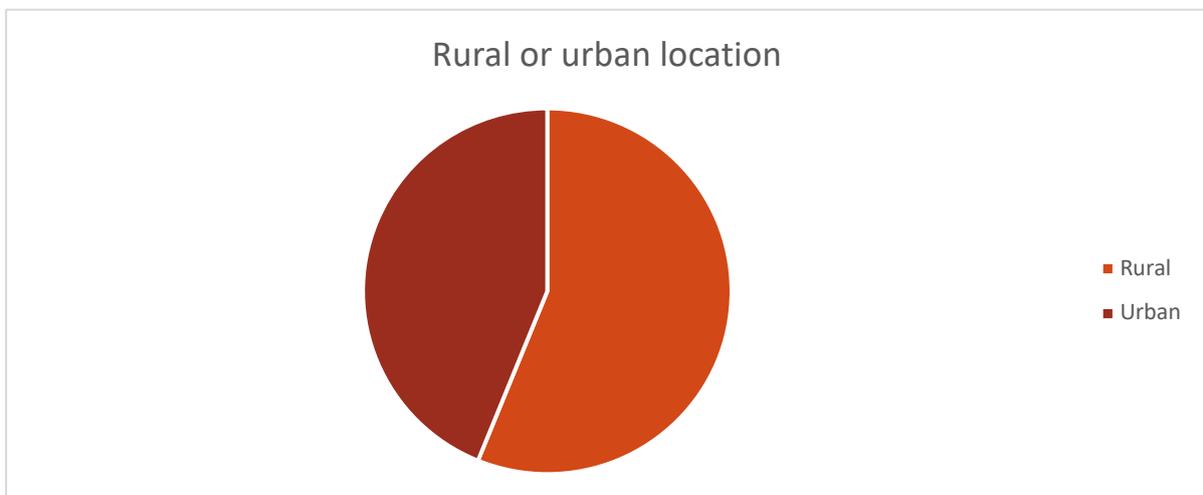
Craft NI's Contemporary Craft Sector Research Study 2016 provided a baseline from which to measure change and also verify the robustness of the findings. It was based on responses from 133 surveys.

Overview of survey responses received

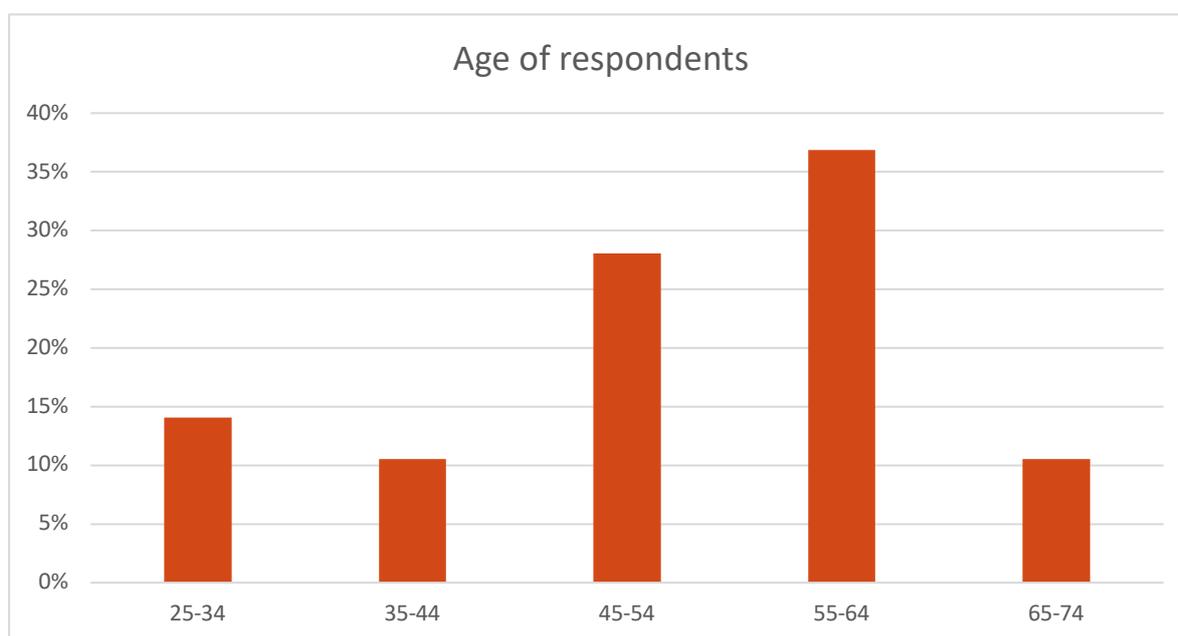
Of the 91 people who responded to the survey, 57 told us what council area they are based in. The sizeable majority were based in Ards and North Borough Council, with fewest makers based in Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council. The majority of responses also came from Ards and North Down in 2016. There was a notable increase in responses from Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council and a decrease from Derry and Strabane, which may be due to how the survey was promoted rather than a statistically significant change.



Just over half of respondents were based in a rural location, that is settlements with a population under 5,000 or open countryside. This is similar to the 2016 baseline.



Most people who responded were aged 55 to 64. No responses were received from makers aged under 25² or 75 and over. In 2016, most responses came from the 35 to 44 and 45 to 54 age brackets, and it was considered at that time that the average age of makers was getting younger.



Interviews

We carried out deep-dive interviews with ten makers from across NI representative of the wider sector including by discipline (ceramics, jewellery, textiles, print and mixed media) and stage in career. These interviews considered the impact of Covid on their business; experience of training and support previously received; and current and future support needs.

We also carried out interviews with key stakeholders who support the craft sector. These included one-to-one interviews with:

- Ards and North Down (AND) Arts unit
- AND Economic Development
- Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI)
- Belfast City Council (BCC) Tourism, Culture, Arts and Heritage unit
- BCC Economic Development
- Causeway Coast and Glens District Council (CCG) Arts
- CCG Prosperity and Place unit
- CCG Tourism
- Causeway Enterprise
- Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC) Arts unit
- DCSDC Festivals and Events unit
- Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (FODC) Arts

² However, makers interviewed include those under 25.

- Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NMD) Arts unit

We were unable to secure interviews with the Department for the Economy (DfE) and Department for Communities (DfC) at the time of writing.

2. Impact of Covid-19 on craft makers

The following section considers how Covid-19 has affected NI's craft makers. It is based on survey findings, interviews with craft makers and stakeholders and relevant research carried out by other craft bodies and policymakers.

Impact on profit

Enterprise Northern Ireland's 2020 Enterprise Barometer shows that 85 per cent of small, micro and self-employed businesses, which predominate the craft sector, have been negatively impacted by Covid-19.

The 59 craft makers who told us the impact of Covid on their profit estimated that it resulted, on average, in a **48 per cent reduction in their profit**. This included:

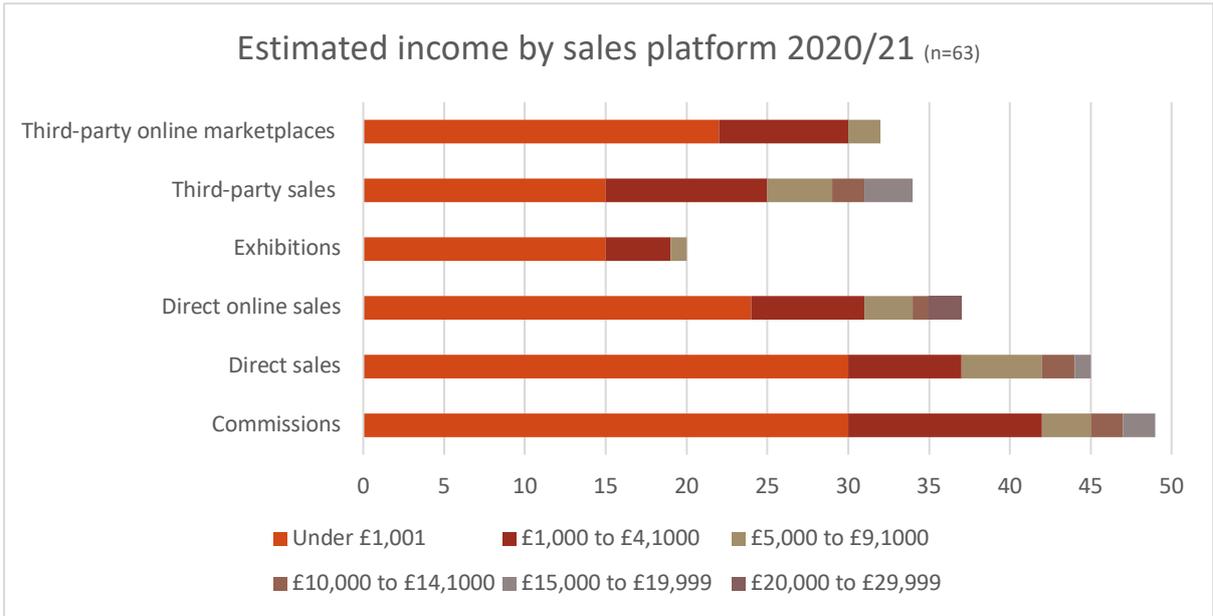
- 50 makers (85 per cent) who estimated a reduction of, on average, 63 per cent, ranging from -1 to -100.
- 8 makers (14 per cent) who estimated an increase of, on average, 33 per cent, ranging from +1 to +100
- 1 maker who estimated no change

Impact on turnover

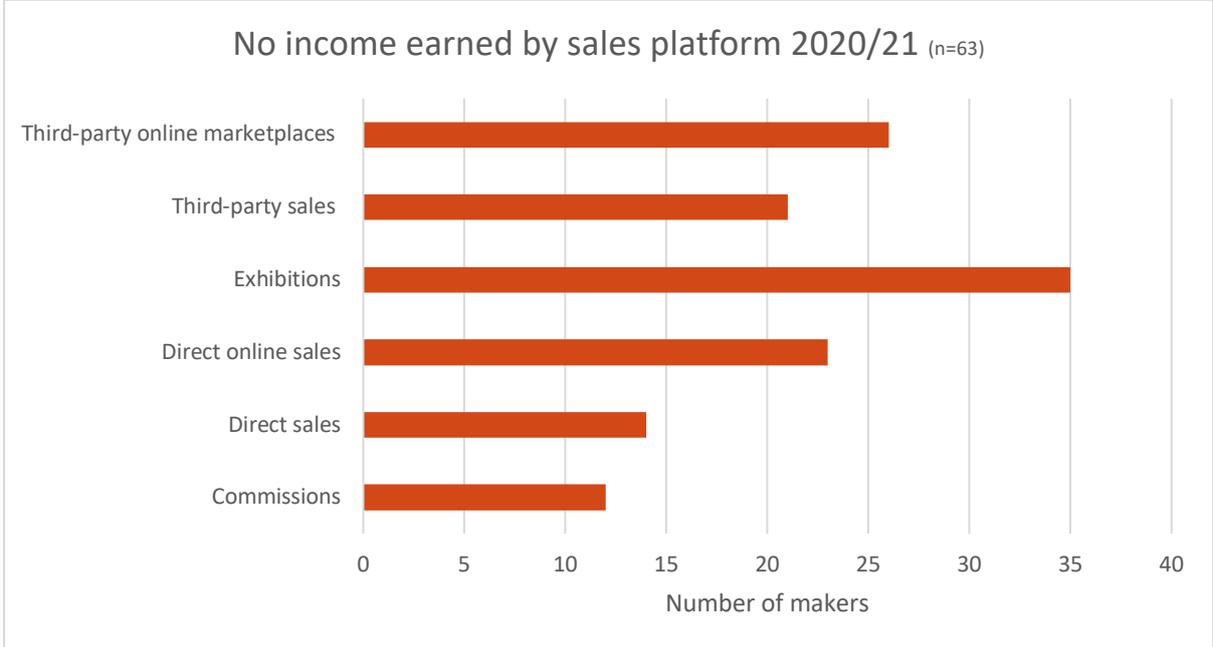
Impact on product sales by sales platform

We asked makers to provide an estimate of the income they earned through different sales platforms over the past year. These sales platforms were:

- Commissions
- Direct sales (such as their own retail outlet, not including online)
- Direct online sales (such as their own website)
- Exhibitions
- Third-party sales (such as other shops, not including online)
- Third-party online marketplaces (such as Etsy)



Commissions were a source of income for the majority of makers. Most makers earned less than £1,000 from each platform. Only two makers reported sales in the £20,000 to £29,999 bracket, both through direct online sales, and no makers reported earning more than £29,999 from any platform. **Thirty-five makers reported no income from exhibitions. Thirty-three makers also reported no online sales (from either third-party online marketplaces or direct online sales). This may mean that half of makers did not sell online in 2020/21 or that their online sales tactics were not successful.**



However, a number of interviewees attributed their resilience to their use of or ability to adapt to online sales, and overall **there was a growth in both the number of makers reporting sales and the value of sales direct online** between 2016 and 2020/21.

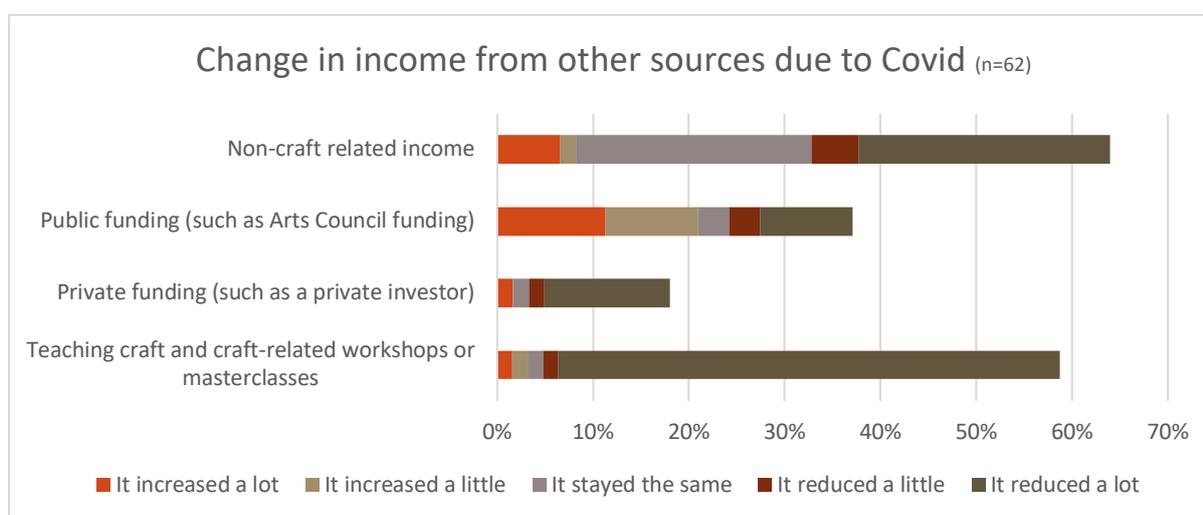
In 2016, commissions was also the main sales platform. However, more makers then reported sales of between £20,000 and £29,999 through commissions, direct sales, third-party sales and

exhibitions, and a small number reported sales of over £30,000 both from commissions and third-party sales. This may mean that **high-value sales were particularly affected by Covid** because, for example, there were fewer commissions or people were less likely to invest in pieces they had not physically seen.

ACNI noted “*shocking damage to finances, sales and workshops*” and “*had seen the evidence from emergency applications of the impact on sales and income and broader opportunities*”.

Other sources of income

Focusing on income not directly from product sales, **craft makers saw the biggest decrease in income from teaching (reported by 52 per cent of makers),³ followed by income from non-craft sources (26 per cent of makers).**



Interviewees also reported lost income from workshops or classes, but one interviewee had successfully moved classes online. Another diversified their product, including supplying DIY kits so people could make craft at home.

Income from non-craft sources was also the second biggest increase for craft makers. This may include craft makers who had to take up a second job or alternative way to earn an income due to Covid.

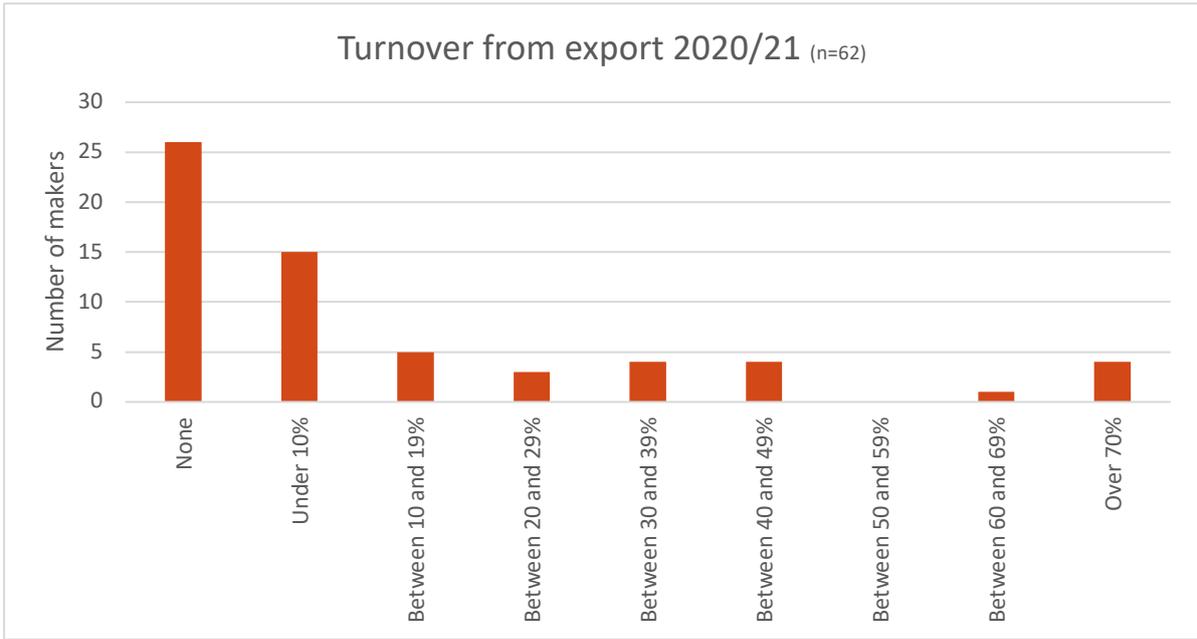
The most significant increase in income was from public funding. 21 per cent experienced an increase. However, 13 per cent also experienced a decrease.

There was least change in private funding, probably because this is not generally a source of income for 82 per cent of craft makers.

Impact on export

Compared to 2016, **there was a reduction in both the number of makers exporting and the value of exports** in 2020/21.

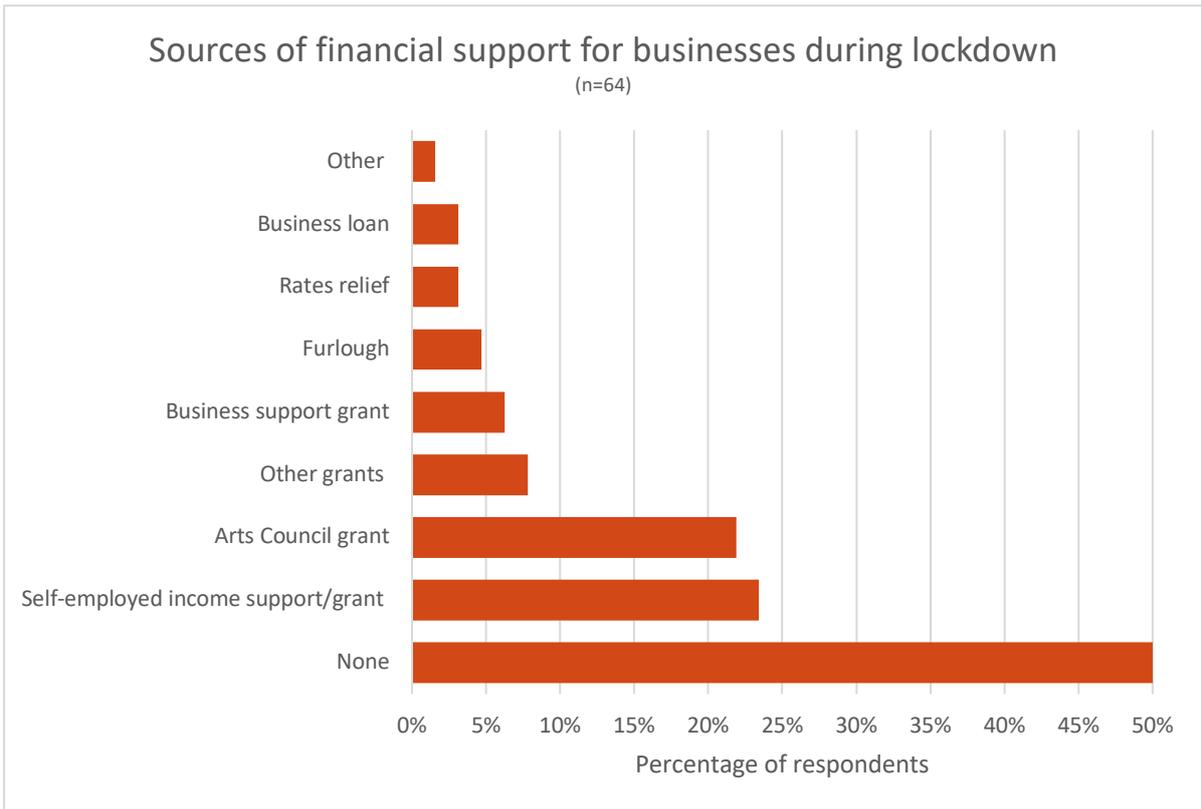
³ In 2016, at least 83 per cent of makers earned income through teaching, workshops and masterclasses



It is likely that this was also impacted by uncertainty over the UK’s exit from the EU. Almost all stakeholders mentioned Brexit, but rather than seeing impacts to date, they are seeking certainty. While interest was particularly high along the Derry/Londonderry/Donegal border, Covid has both masked and exacerbated the challenge: *“Brexit snuck in – but as so little retail was open we’ve not sucked and seen its real impact on craft yet.”*

Sources of financial support during Covid

Half of the craft makers surveyed got no additional support for their business during Covid. 30 per cent were awarded a grant from ACNI or other funders, a slight increase from 2016 when 24 per cent were in receipt of public funding. ACNI reported that this includes makers who came to them as new clients, previously having been self-reliant. 23 per cent got support to cover loss of income through self-employment support or grant.



Impact by hours worked

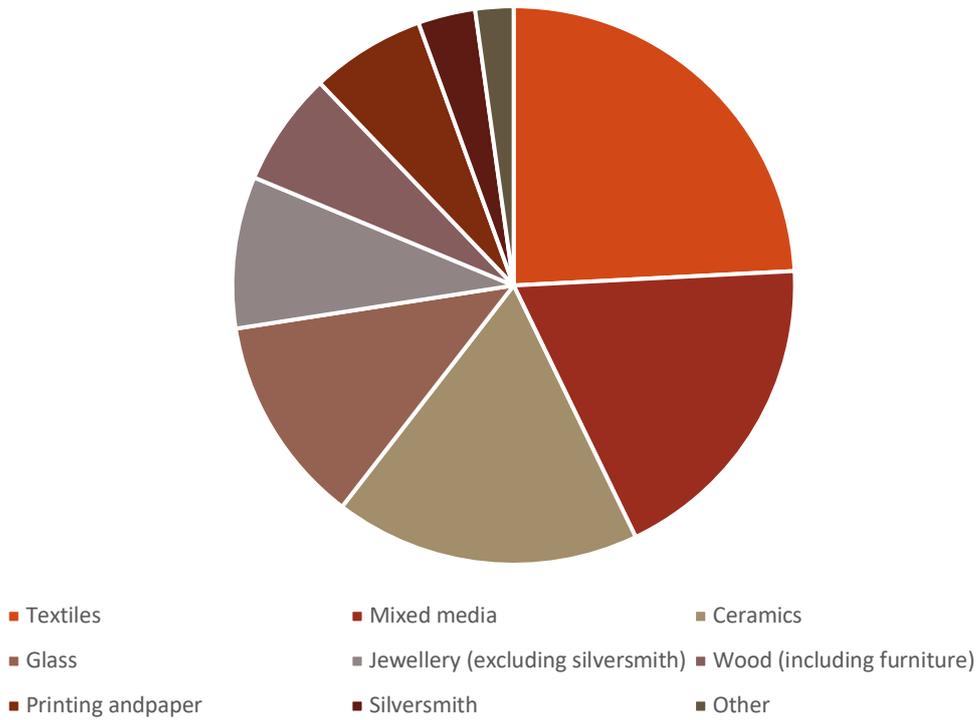
51 per cent of makers who responded to our survey worked full-time (that is more than 16 hours a week) and 49 per cent worked part-time (less than 16 hours per week) as a craft maker.

Those who worked full-time reported being more negatively affected by Covid: 90 per cent reported a reduction of, on average, 63 per cent, compared to 76 per cent of part-time workers who reported a reduction in profit of, on average, 64 per cent.

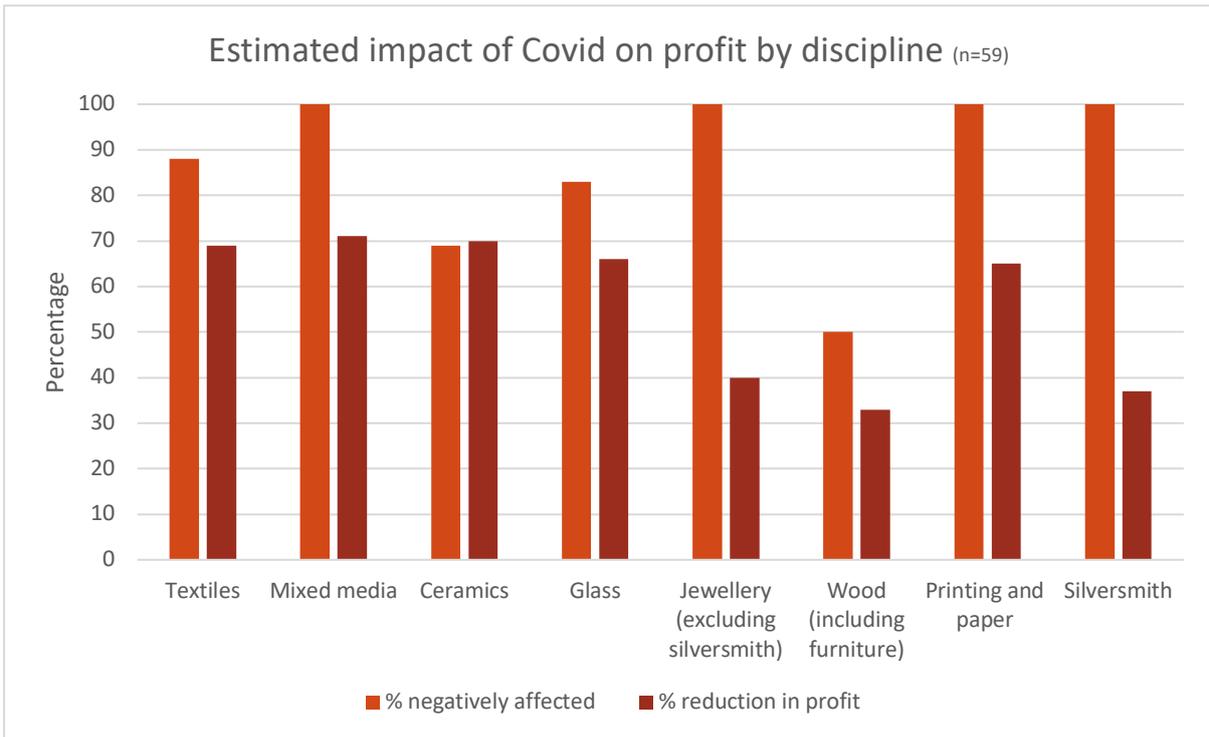
Impact by discipline

The majority of respondents worked in textiles such as knitting, embroidery and weaving, followed by mixed media, ceramics and glass. Other responses included leather and retail.

Survey responses by discipline (n=91)

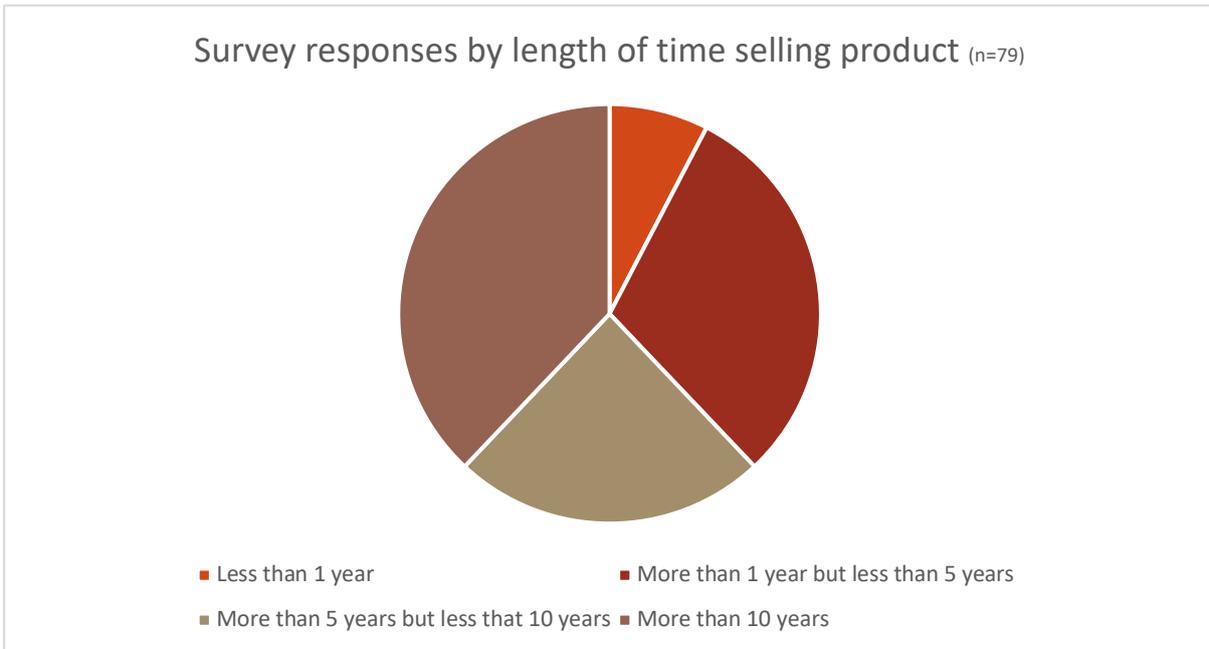


Those working in jewellery and silver were among those whose profit fell least, and interviews with makers also support the conclusion that jewellery was relatively resilient. This may be due to stock levels and margins per item. However, **along with those working in printing and mixed media, jewellery-makers and silversmiths were most likely to be negatively affected. Makers working in wood may have been least affected overall.** However, it is important to remember that the numbers responding under each discipline were relatively small.

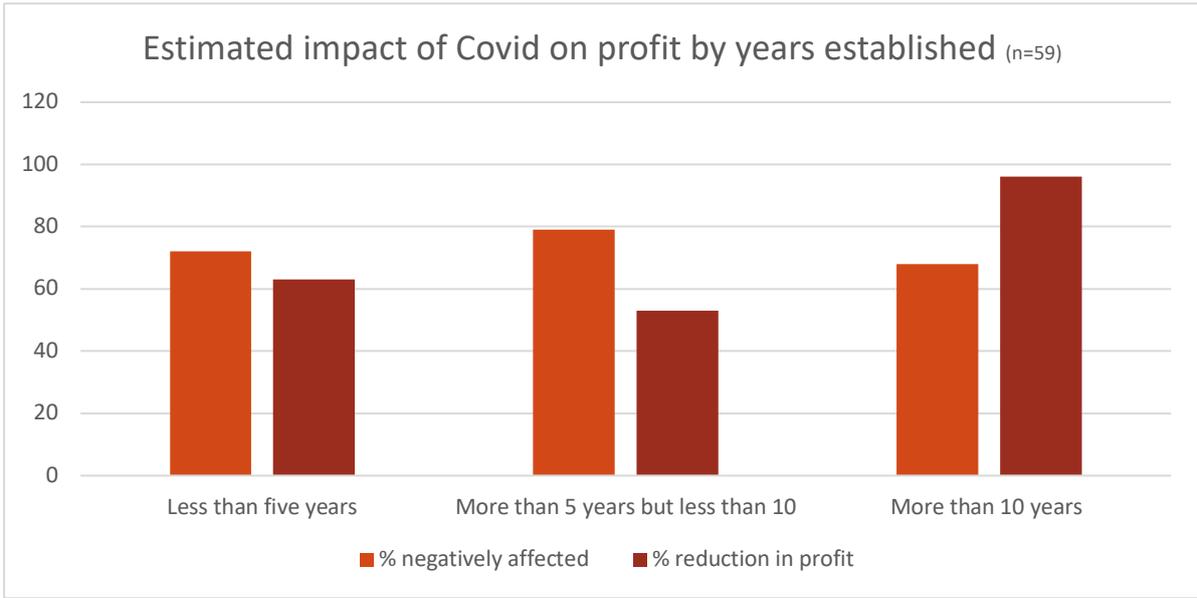


Impact by stage in career

Most people who responded to the survey were established craft makers who have been selling their product for more than 10 years. During our interviews, we spoke to craft makers who had been established for both more and less than 10 years, including two who had started during the pandemic.



Among those surveyed, **makers who had been selling their products for between 5 and 10 years were most likely to report being affected by Covid, but those selling for more than 10 years reported the greatest impact on profit.**



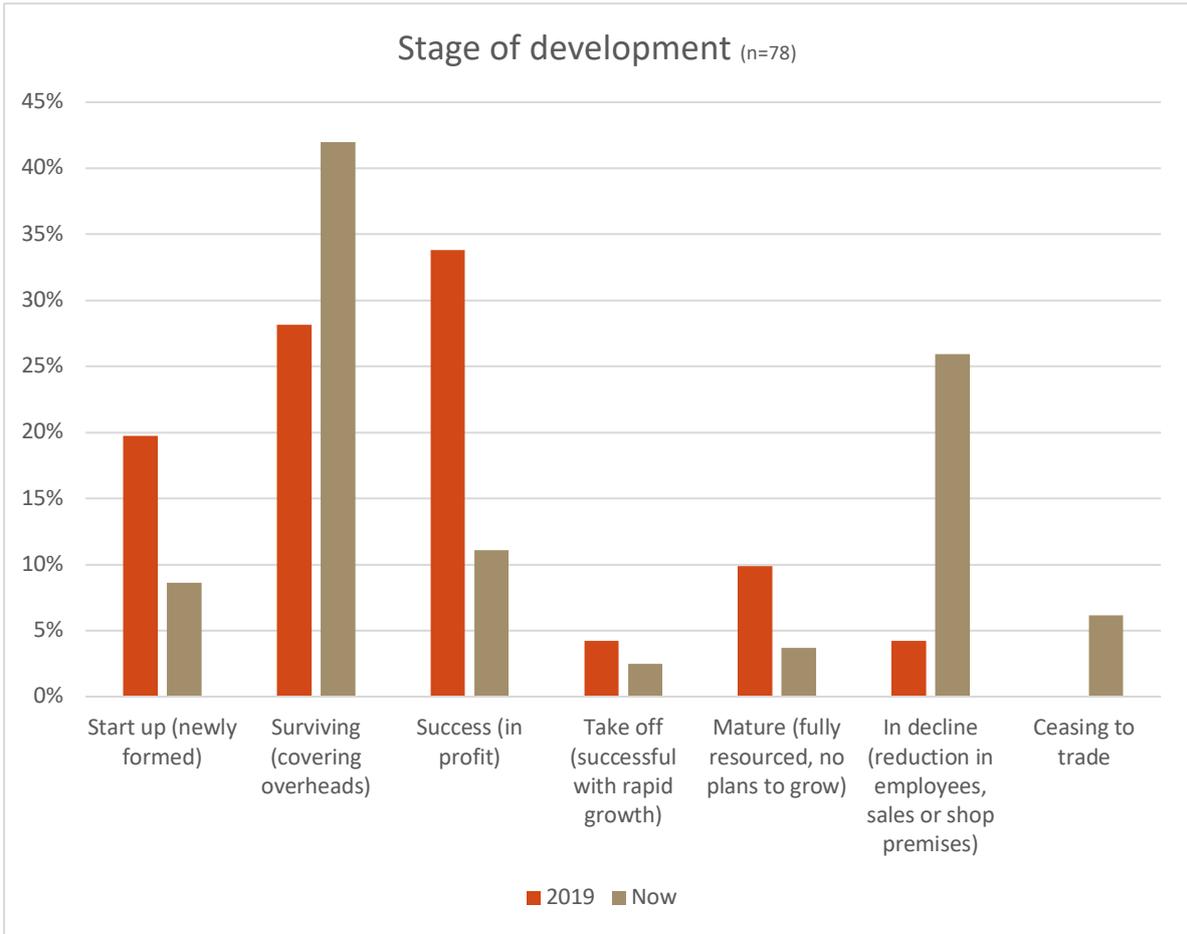
Graduates

Up to an estimated three years of recent graduates have missed out of face-to-face education, end-of-year shows, networking and early career development. This is both an individual and sectoral loss as new talent is important to keeping the sector refreshed and pushing the boundaries of practice. It is likely that a number have now been lost to other careers. Those who remain may need an additional springboard to get them where they would otherwise be.

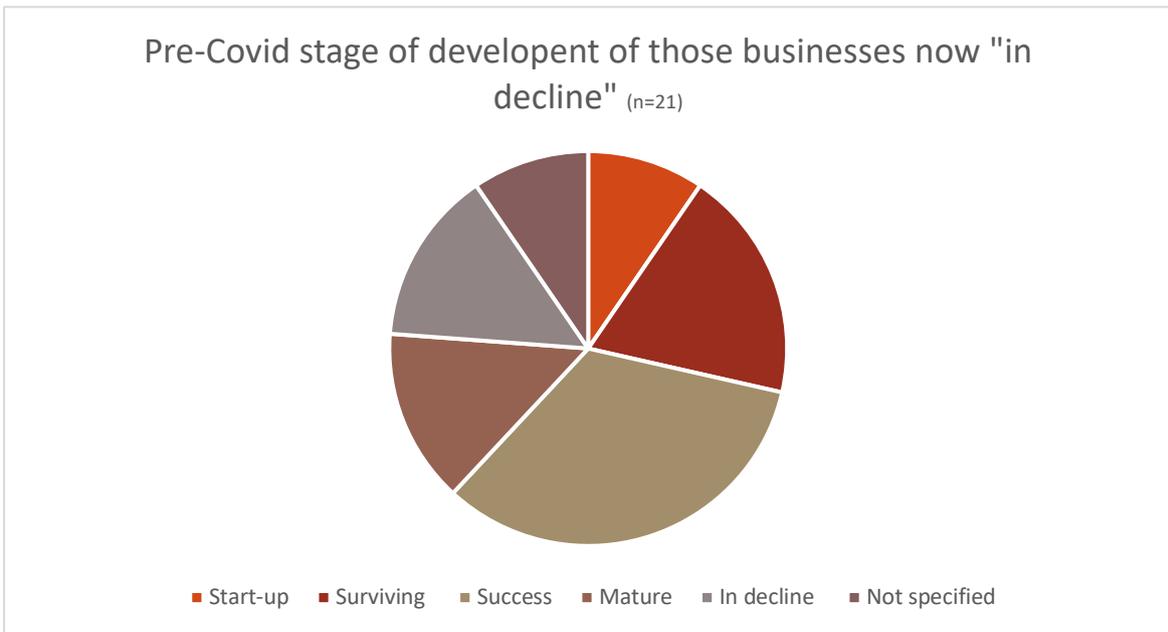
Impact by stage of business development

We also asked respondents to classify what stage their business was at before Covid and now.

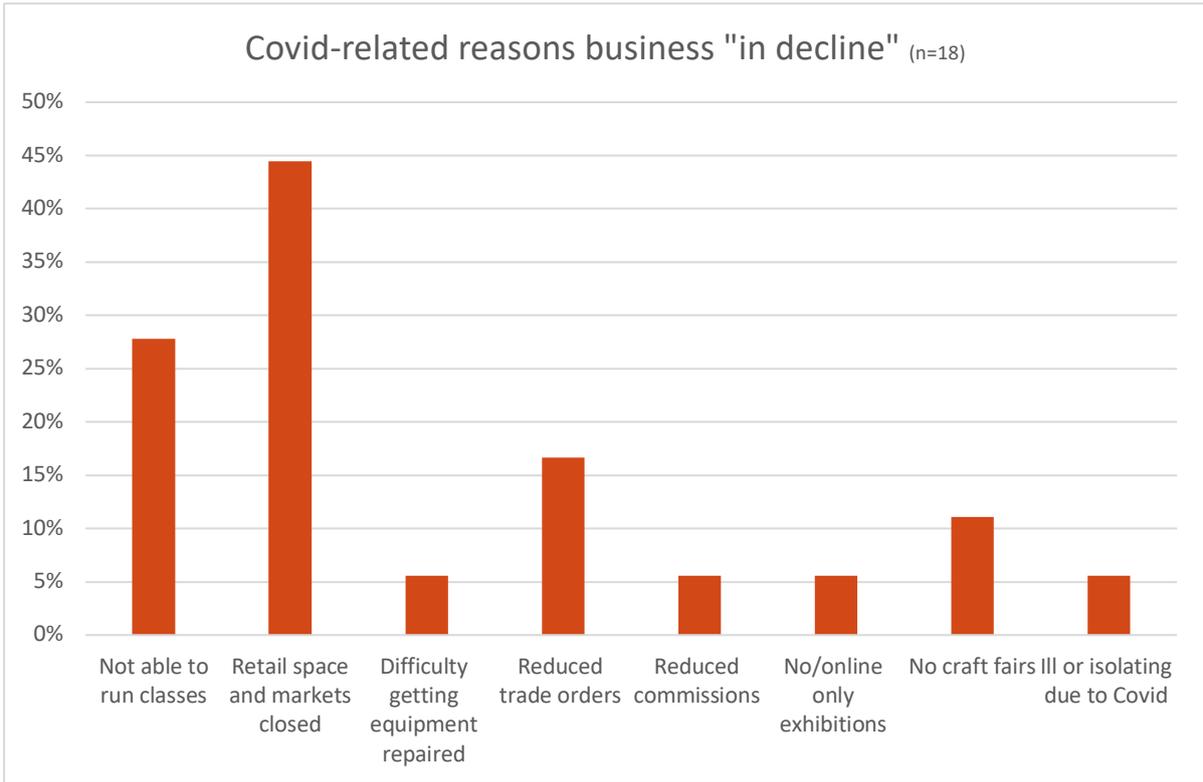
Before Covid, just under half (48 per cent) of businesses were successful, thriving or mature. At March 2021, that had reduced to 17 per cent. At the same time, there was a significant increase in businesses surviving and in decline with five businesses planning to wind up as at March 2021.



Of those businesses that described their stage of development as “in decline” at March 2021, seven had been a success, three mature and two, start-up pre-Covid.



Of those businesses “in decline”, 18 attributed it directly to Covid. The most frequently given reason was the closure of retail spaces and markets, followed by unable to run classes and reduced trade orders. Two businesses suffered because of ill-health impacts of Covid.



One interviewee explained the precariousness of economic survival during the pandemic, which may have, in part, been down to timing and luck. *“I got the government self-employment grant and ACNI grant and have got through. With the government grant and a big commission I’ve just made it. I had two big sales and those were the saving thing.”*

However, of those “ceasing to trade”, three had already been in decline before Covid; one had been surviving; and one was retiring.

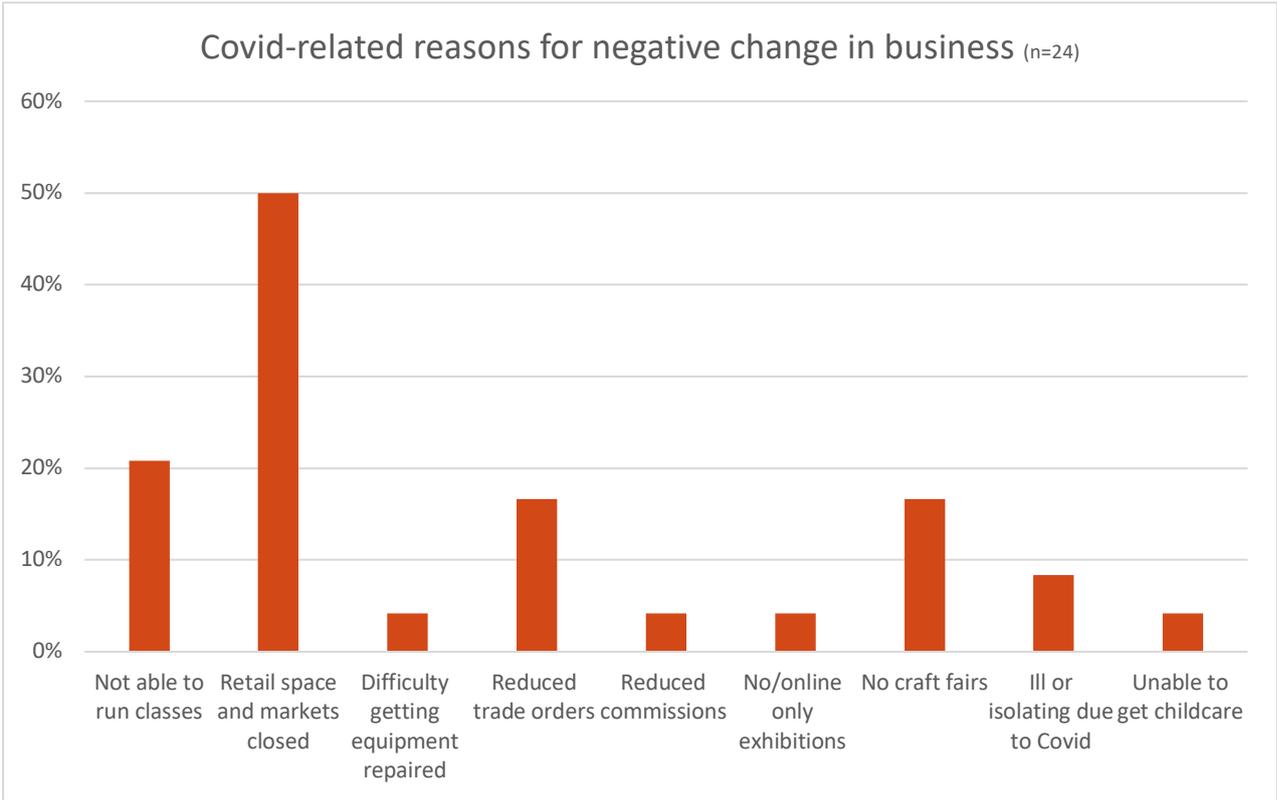
General direction of travel

Excluding business that had just started-up prior to Covid, we also analysed results according to the general direction of travel – whether this was positive, negative or there was no change.

Of the 47 businesses (excluding start-ups) who told us their stage of development now and before Covid, 60 per cent had experienced a negative change. Only 6 per cent had experienced positive growth.



Twenty-four businesses attributed a negative change in their business directly to Covid. The reasons given were similar to among those businesses in the “in decline” stage.

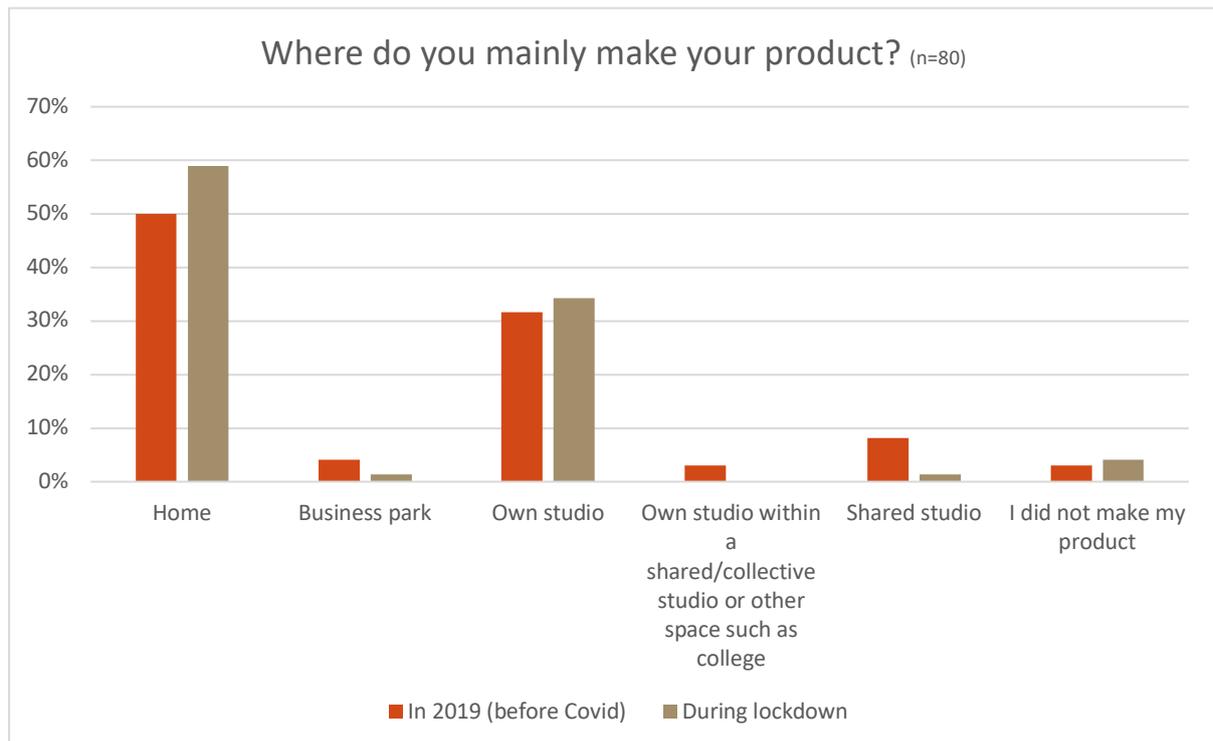


Impact by operating model

86 per cent of those who responded to our survey were sole proprietors and 7 per cent were in a partnership. Those who answered “other” included two limited companies and those who had not yet commenced trading.

The survey identified no significant difference relating to business model. However, among makers interviewed it appears that those **businesses with very low overheads, minimal stock and who on occasion make sales of high value pieces were less likely to have suffered high financial loss.** This was true of both new and established businesses.

Before Covid, 50 per cent of respondents made their product at home. This increased to 59 per cent during lockdown. There was also a slight increase in people using a studio of their own during this period. The use of business parks and shared or collective studios decreased in the same period. Two people stopped making their product altogether during lockdown.



There was a greater impact on profit among those who worked from home pre-Covid (-59 per cent) compared to those who worked outside the home (-46 per cent) pre-Covid. During Covid, those who were able to continue to work away from home were less likely to report a loss of profit (72 per cent compared to 88 per cent of those working from home) and less loss in profit (-55 per cent compared to -64 per cent). This demonstrates the importance of work space for makers. However, those interviewed with home studios reported making more, while others noted that travel restrictions provided more time to plan and ideate.

Conclusions

The 2020/21 pandemic had a major impact on craft business development and their bottom line. ACNI noted *“shocking damage to finances, sales and workshops”* and *“had seen the evidence from emergency applications of the impact on sales and income and broader opportunities”*. Craft makers estimated that their profit fell by 48 per cent overall. Only 14 per cent reported an increase in profit during this time.

Before Covid, just under half (48 per cent) of businesses were successful, thriving or mature. At March 2021, that had reduced to 17 per cent. At the same time, there was a significant increase in businesses surviving and in decline with five businesses planning to wind up as at March 2021. Of those businesses “in decline”, 18 attributed it directly to Covid. The most frequently given reason was the closure of retail spaces and markets, followed by unable to run classes and reduced trade orders.

Profit and survival may be attributable to the ability to adapt successfully to online sales platforms – securing new customers in new markets – and continue to secure commissions, including from established customers and clients. Those businesses running for between 5 and 10 years were most likely to be affected by the pandemic, but those established for more than 10 years were most likely to experience the greatest fall in profit.

Online sales was not a boom for all. Half of makers reported that they made no online sales in 2020/21. There was also a fall in high-value sales.

Government support for craft makers was not universal. Half of makers did not benefit from any Covid-related financial support, and while 21 per cent increased their funding from public sector grants, 13 per cent saw funding reduce. Overall, 30 per cent were awarded a grant from ACNI or other funders, a slight increase from 24 per cent in 2016.

Craft makers also reported an increase in income from non-craft related sources, which may include makers who had to take up a second job or find alternative ways to earn an income due to Covid.

Those who worked full-time and from home were most likely to be negatively affected.

Those working in jewellery and silver were among those whose profit fell least, but along with those working in printing and mixed media, they were most likely to be negatively affected. Makers working in wood may have been least affected overall.

3. Training and support for craft business

Sector support bodies, such as Craft NI, the Crafts Council and Craft Scotland, are set up to support the craft sector. They provide a range of support tailored to craft businesses – from managing finances and pricing strategies to good product photography, time management and mental health to networking and inspiration.

As part of local government reform in 2015, responsibility for local economic development transferred from central to local government. This included support for business start-ups, micro-businesses and social enterprises. Most training is generic, designed to benefit all businesses regardless of product or sector.

Training needs

Competencies and behaviours

The majority of craft makers are self-employed. The self-employed need the ability to combine and deploy a wider range of competences than employees.

86 per cent of makers who responded to our survey were sole proprietors. In 2011, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills found that social and cultural factors, often acquired through family and social networks, can predispose people to sole entrepreneurship and help make them good at it. Rather than formal qualifications, it seems generic competences are required for successful self-employment, including:

- values, beliefs and attitudes (such as action orientation, desire for independence, initiative, creativity and so on)
- “soft” skills including interpersonal, communication and networking skills
- realistic awareness of the risks and benefits of self-employment
- functional business skills (financial, HR management and market research)
- relevant business knowledge (legislative, taxation, sources of finance and so on)

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills also found that difficulties arise where there is

- insufficient self-awareness of own skill needs and lack of self-assessment as “business people”
- lack of business experience or lack of relevant business training, with particular reference to skills such as cash flow or financial management and marketing and winning business
- insufficient “soft” skills, including interpersonal skills
- lack of staff management skills (where relevant)

As training cannot easily make up for an absence of these factors, the study concludes that policy-makers should consider how to incorporate factors such as

- establishing and reinforcing participation in entrepreneurial networks, and
- the key function that can be played by “enterprise role models”.

Many stakeholders we interviewed also felt that craft makers benefited more from mentoring than traditional business skills teaching. One council has developed a programme for crafts that

exclusively uses mentors who have experience running a craft business in recognition that usual business consultants were unable to support makers with, for example, marketing face-to-face at shows, packaging design or other elements distinct to the craft sector.

Craft NI Maker-led Training Needs Survey

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, Craft NI asked its members to consider what training and support it should offer. Fifty-five members responded. It found that:

- The digital skills members would most like support for are using Instagram to sell their work; managing their online shop; and selling on online marketplaces.
- Creating online courses was the digital skill makers were least confident in but the one they also felt was least relevant.
- 33 per cent of respondents would like Craft NI to signpost them to good quality technical-based workshops (such as glazing, stone setting and other techniques), while 25 per cent would like Craft NI to deliver such workshops. Only 5 per cent already had specialist support in place.
- In terms of business skills, most makers would like help with marketing plans; online accounts/small business packages; and business planning.
- Other suggestions for training included:
 - Always like to be thinking what could be added to my products to make them better
 - Getting together with other artists creates an environment where skills can not only be learned but shared
 - I want to keep up with current trends and bounce ideas with like minded creators
 - Hearing from makers & designers who have worked with industry for all or part of their production process, to help with future planning & business development - I'd love to hear from experienced designers/makers
 - Peer support from other small business owners & makers
 - Getting my brand name recognised as quality
 - Advice on insurance / liability issues for online workshops, copyright issues
 - Advice on exporting especially with Brexit
 - Applications for funding – public commissions – advice would be helpful on what documentation is useful, what a budget looks like, what is considered reasonable to ask for aspects like R&D and set up
 - Take my products to a bigger market
 - Pricing for profit and calculating cost price

Support from government

EU funding

Most of the programmes on offer through local councils are supported by European funding. These are reported as being secure until December 2022. Thereafter, the UK government's Shared Prosperity Fund is due to come in to operation. There are few details as to how this will operate. However, the UK government has stated:

As we look towards the UK Shared Prosperity Fund next year, we are conscious of the need for an evolution of the way we support local economic growth so it can best support levelling up for the long term. The UK government will work with local partners throughout 2021 to develop an approach that delivers the infrastructure and regeneration priorities local leaders want to see in their area. We will also be working with local businesses on the future role of Local Enterprise Partnerships. We want to ensure local businesses have clear representation and support in their area, in order to drive the recovery. We will work with Local Enterprise Partnerships over the coming months, with a view to announcing more detailed plans ahead of summer recess. This will also include consideration of Local Enterprise Partnership geographies.

The UK government has also launched three new investment programmes to support communities: the UK Community Renewal Fund; the Levelling Up Fund; and the Community Ownership Fund. It is not clear whether social enterprises and community businesses will be recognised within these, but they have not been ruled out.

Central government

DfC leads on creative industries in central government. Its website states that

Prosperous economies are characterised by a strong creative sector and the creative industries are recognised across the globe for their potential for wealth and job creation. They are emerging as one of the fastest growing and increasingly important sectors of the economy.

Promoting innovation, R&D and creativity has been recognised by the NI Executive as a key priority in rebuilding and rebalancing our economy. The creative industries are important drivers of economic and social innovation. This vibrant sector has huge potential and can have significant spill-over impact into other business areas such as manufacturing and tourism.

DfE works towards a vision of a globally competitive economy that works for everyone by developing and implementing agile policies and programmes which promote a competitive, sustainable and inclusive economy through investment in skills, economic infrastructure, research and innovation and business development.

Its strategic objectives include enhancing education; skills and employability; driving inclusive, sustainable growth; and building the best economic infrastructure. However, its focus is on job creation and skills for employment.

DfE sponsors three organisations that have a key role in supporting businesses.

Invest NI

Invest NI (INI) is the regional business development agency. It aims to grow the local economy by helping new and existing businesses to compete internationally and by attracting new investment in to NI.

INI states that “*Because our resources are limited we use them to support those businesses that can make the biggest contribution to the economy.*” As a result, eligibility to become a client includes the ability to reach a turnover of £250,000 per annum within five years and achieve at least 25 per cent of those sales outside NI. Some financial and capability development support also require job creation of 20 per cent or 20 jobs within three years.

Invest NI also operate www.nibusbusinessinfo.co.uk, which is the official online channel for business advice and guidance in NI. This site contains short guides such as a guide to digital marketing and a guide to the creative industries which links to Craft NI.

Tourism Northern Ireland

Tourism NI's (TNI) vision is to champion confidently and passionately the development and promotion of the NI experience. Its mission is to build the value of tourism to the local economy.

TNI's *Grow Your Business Online* content is available free of charge. Of particular relevance to craft businesses at present are the online marketing toolkits covering getting online, social media channels, Google Analytics and search engine optimisation.⁴

TNI also encourage visitor services to stock local products, which is assessed in a mystery shopper report.

Colleges of further education

In response to the pandemic, DfE has funded regional colleges to provide free training to NI residents whose employment has been negatively impacted by Covid-19.

Sole traders and small companies can also get Skills Focus funding of 100 per cent to upskill, retrain and gain a qualification at level 2 or above. The creative industries are an eligible priority area for these funds.

Free training includes Digital marketing at OCN level 2 and Social media at OCN level 2 across the regional college system.

The Open University

The Open University (OU) and INI have developed a new business hub offering free learning on entrepreneurial leadership across three themes:

- Leadership and management
- Entrepreneurship development
- Digital skills

The hub contains advice from OU on how to make the best use of online learning and signposts to other content that is relevant and practical for businesses users.

⁴ <https://tourismni.com/Grow-Your-Business/toolkits-and-resources/>

Local government support

As part of local government reform in 2015, responsibility for local economic development transferred from central to local government. This included support for business start-ups, micro-businesses and social enterprises.

Most training is generic, designed to benefit all businesses regardless of product or sector, although interviewees involved in its delivery acknowledged that the focus is on job creation, which can present a barrier to the sole enterprises, partnerships and micro-businesses that dominate the craft sector. Nevertheless, council officers were keen to work with craft applicants in recognition of their wider economic and cross-cutting social and cultural impact.

Some councils with a particular craft focus, including AND, CCG and DCSDC, also have programmes tailored to the craft sector for those who “fall between the cracks”. In CCG, this includes The Designerie, an arts and crafts hub operated by an enterprise agency.

Some councils did, however, report a poor uptake among makers and other creative entrepreneurs, even for free tailored training and support, such as product photography.⁵

Other councils offer professional development bursaries and residencies and report a high level of interest. BCC’s recently launched 10 £10,000 creative bursaries. It registered 400 inquiries, approximately one third from craft makers.

In most council areas, including those without an officer or unit with designated responsibility for craft, it was widely acknowledged that this function was vital to having an active local craft community. Coordination between arts, tourism and economic development teams in council also appears to correlate with a strong, supported craft sector. For example, post-lockdown, CCG plans to help local makers continue to sell by absorbing VAT on sales of stock through their arts and visitor attractions while signposting to makers’ online shops. The CCG Economic Development team also funded the Arts teams to support craft businesses with marketing and branding, which was further supported by Visual Arts Ireland.

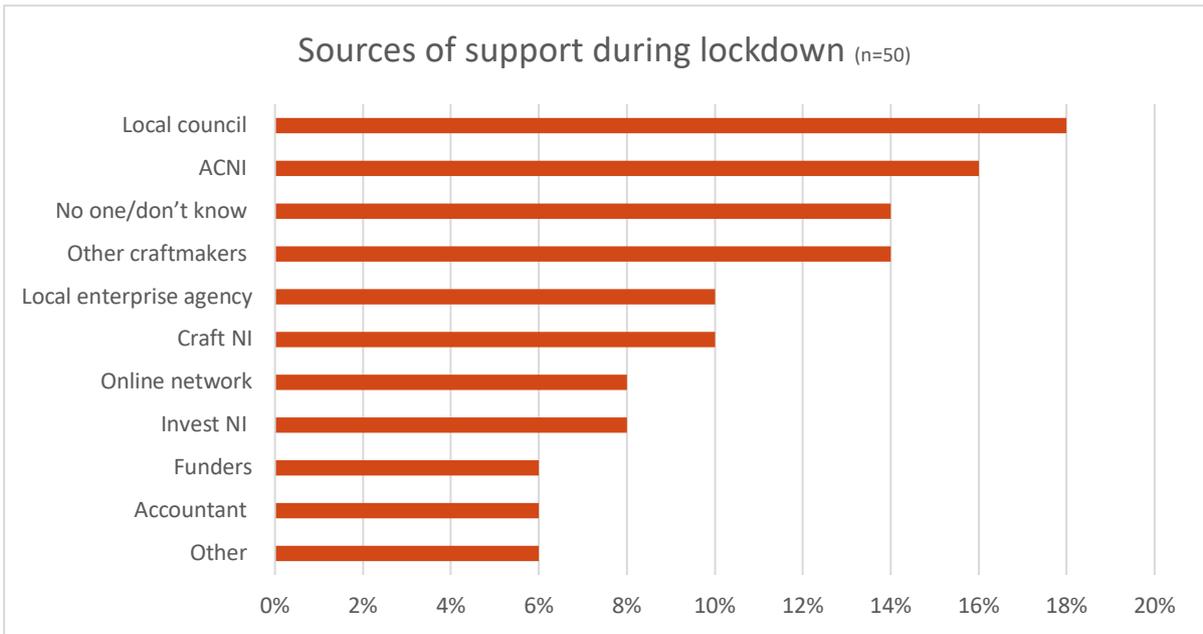
In many council areas, such business support programmes are delivered by or in partnership with local enterprise agencies.

An audit of local government and local enterprise agency support that is relevant to craft businesses is included at appendix 2.

Other sources of business support

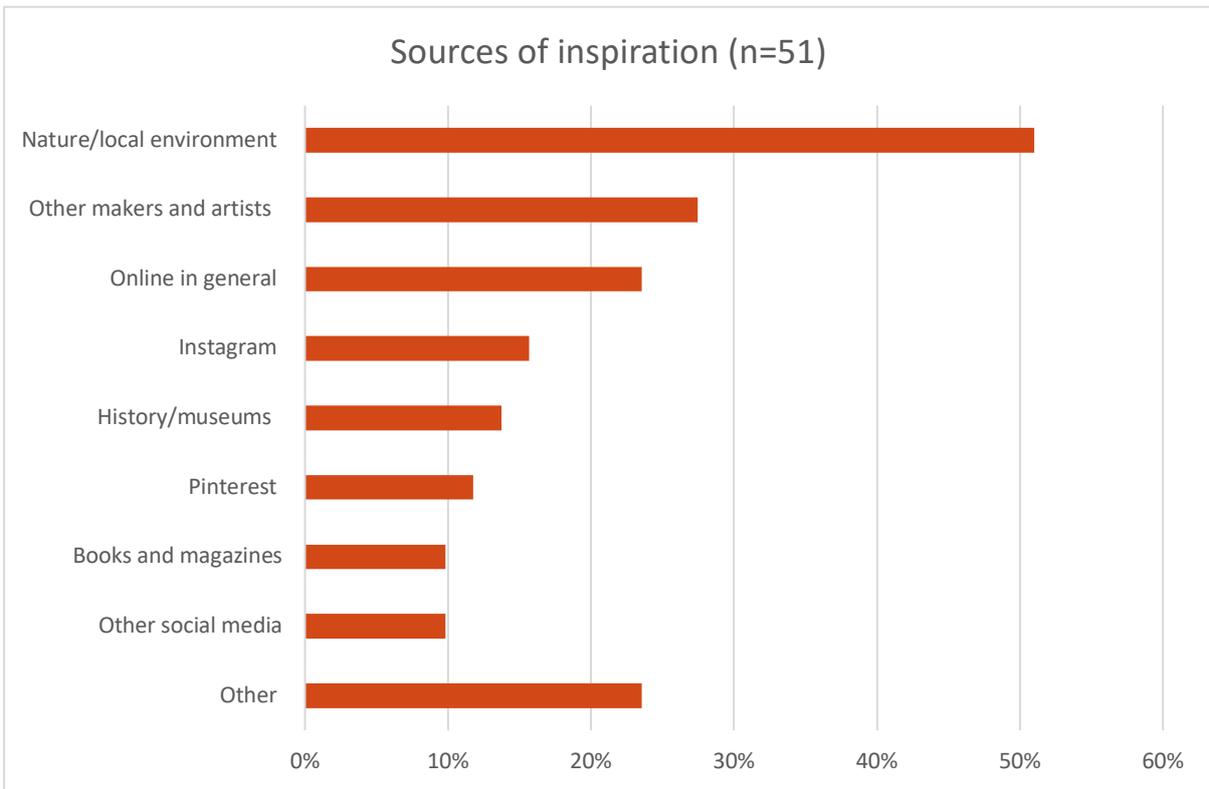
We asked makers, “Aside from family and friends, who would you turn to first if you needed help with your business?” 18 per cent would go to their local council, followed by 16 per cent to ACNI. 14 per cent said there was no one they would go to or they didn’t know. Craft NI was the seventh most frequently provided answer.

⁵ The Craft NI product photography session in the summer of 2020 attracted 45 participants



Sources of inspiration

The main source of inspiration for makers is nature or their local environment. Many mentioned going for a walk locally. The second main source of inspiration was other makers and artists.



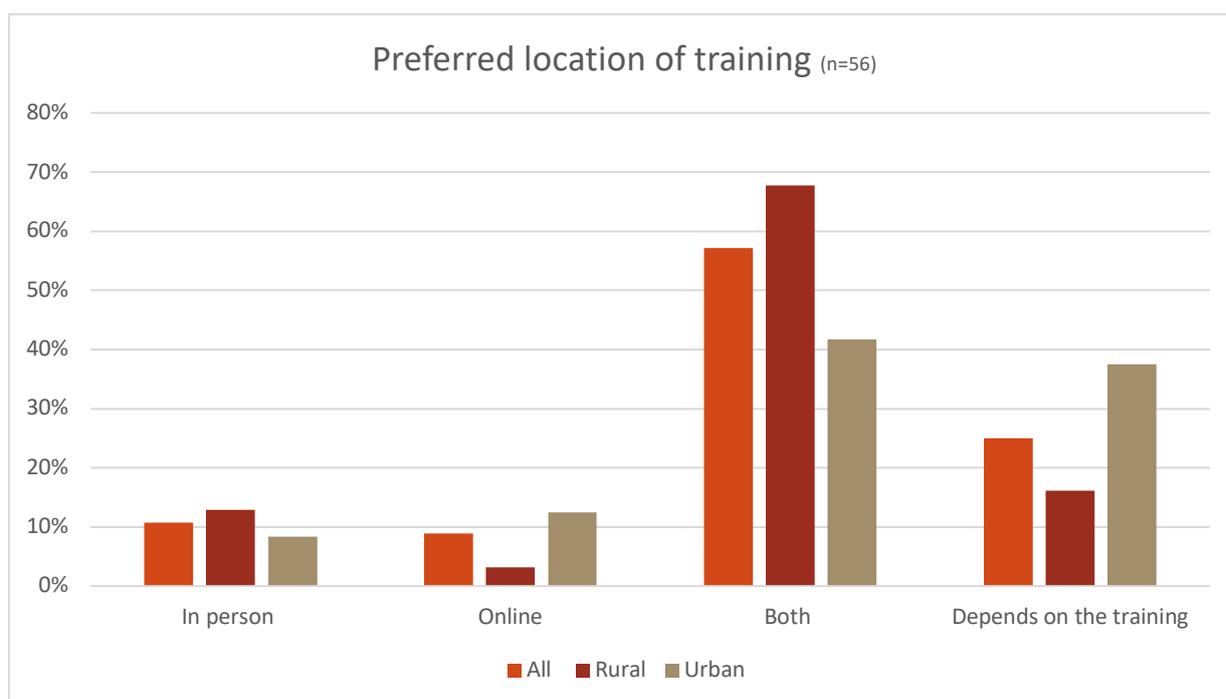
Online training

Most sector support organisations, including Craft NI, started to move support online during the second lockdown in autumn 2020. By spring 2021, many are planning off-line training again with in-room events being advertised from mid-April.

A number of councils and enterprise agencies also moved their training and business programmes online in response to the pandemic. They reported that demand for online training was high. For councils with rural residents, online training may be more practical. A number of councils indicated that at least some online training would continue after lockdown.

A benchmark of the online support provided by sector support bodies, local councils and enterprise agencies is included at appendix 3.

In our survey, we asked makers where they would like their training delivered after lockdown. Most makers would prefer a blended approach of on- and off-line training. While stakeholders in rural councils in particular felt that the accelerated digitalisation on training and support “levelled the playing field” for rural businesses, rural makers may particularly value the opportunity to meet and network with others at in-person training.

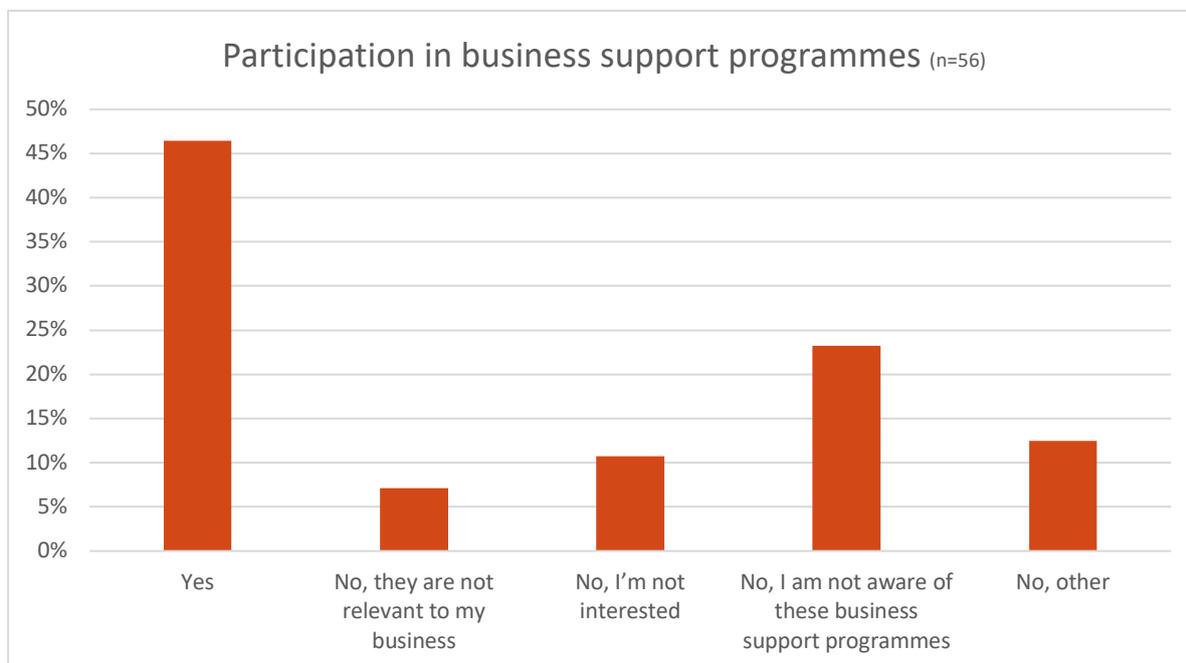


Effectiveness of training

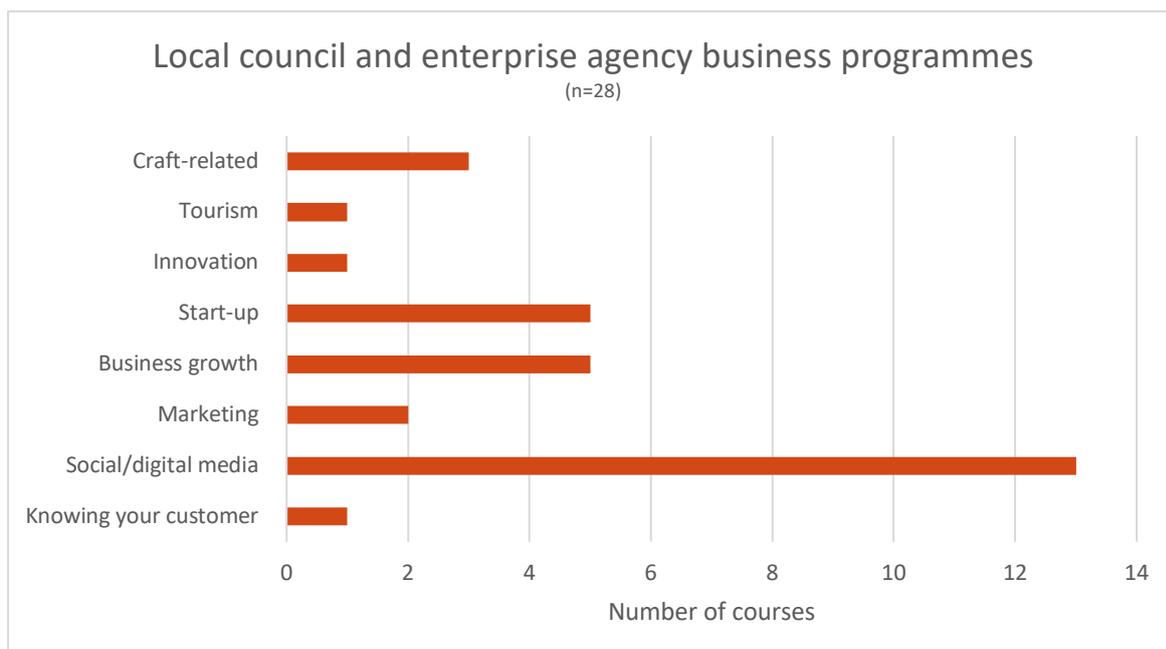
In our survey, we asked people to tell us about the best training course they had ever taken part in. Most people cited training that was tailored to the craft sector in general or to their discipline in particular. This included training provided by Craft NI and the Crafts Council. One-to-one mentoring or small group workshops with high calibre craft makers were particularly valued. Impacts resulting from these training experiences included increased confidence; feeling understood; feeling valued; opportunity to meet and learn from peers; new or enhanced craft skills; and new business skills.

Local government training

46 per cent of respondents reported that they had taken part in business support programmes offered by their local council or enterprise agency. However, 23 per cent were not aware of the programmes (across all council areas) and 7 per cent found them not relevant to their business (in Mid and East Antrim District Council (MEA), NMD and ANBC).



Most makers availed of social media or other digital training including web development and Zoom for business. Three craft-specific courses were mentioned including photography and how to make DIY craft kits, although these may have been part of Craft NI (Crafting Business) or Crafts Council training, not council or enterprise agency.



Overall, only 13 per cent of training was sector-specific, and among those who indicated their satisfaction with their course, only a third said something positive. Negative comments included:

- It wasn't useful as the mentor I had did not value a craft business
- I'm usually perceived to be too old, not a start up, not in the right council area
- Local council digital business training. It was never provided even though I was granted a place. They were all too busy to deliver the meetings or continue. It was a flop.
- One (1 hour) business session online (Knowing your customer) – which was somewhat superficial.

During interviews, only one maker reported having taken part in a local government business support programme. Their experience of Go For It was that it was not really for craft; that mentors had no understanding of the sector; no shared vocabulary' and did not get the importance of the customer experience.

Conclusions

The majority of people working in craft are self-employed. The self-employed need to combine and deploy a wider range of competences than employees. Entrepreneurial networks and role models can help develop these competencies where training falls short.

Makers would like help with business skills such as marketing plans, online accounts/small business packages and business planning; and digital skills, such as using Instagram to sell their work, managing their online shop and selling on online marketplaces. Digital skills are further discussed in section 4.

There is a surfeit of business support programmes and resources, both on- and off-line (when not in lockdown) including from sector-support organisations, local councils, enterprise agencies, NI Business, OU, TNI and others. However, 14 per cent of makers do not know where to go for business help.

18 per cent of makers would go to their local council for business help. However, at least 87 per cent of local council and local enterprise agency training is not sector-specific, and there are low levels of satisfaction with the offer. Makers are generally more satisfied with training that is specific to the sector or their discipline. This may indicate need for more relevant, better quality and better promoted training for craft makers.

Only 10 per cent of makers would go to Craft NI for business help. Craft NI could therefore play a greater role signposting makers to training and support that is relevant and good quality.

Most makers would prefer a blended approach of on- and off-line training after lockdown. Rural makers may particularly value the opportunity to meet and network with others at in-person training.

4. What might the future look like?

The following section considers the opportunities and threats for the craft sector in 2021/2 and beyond. It is based on survey findings, interviews with craft makers and support organisations and relevant research carried out by other agencies.

Start-ups

Successful lobbies by the Arts Collaboration Network here and the arts and creative sectors in Great Britain brought increased recognition of and investment in the vital and vulnerable creative sector. There is an opportunity to build on this to sustain investment in the future. Interviewees noted that it is particularly difficult to secure start-up funding. *“Craft is marginal. You buy what you can when you start out, your parents give you equipment for your birthday and Christmas. You do not invest heavily unless you get a grant”*, one commented. Another considered, *“It may be changing now, but banks don’t invest in craft businesses.”*

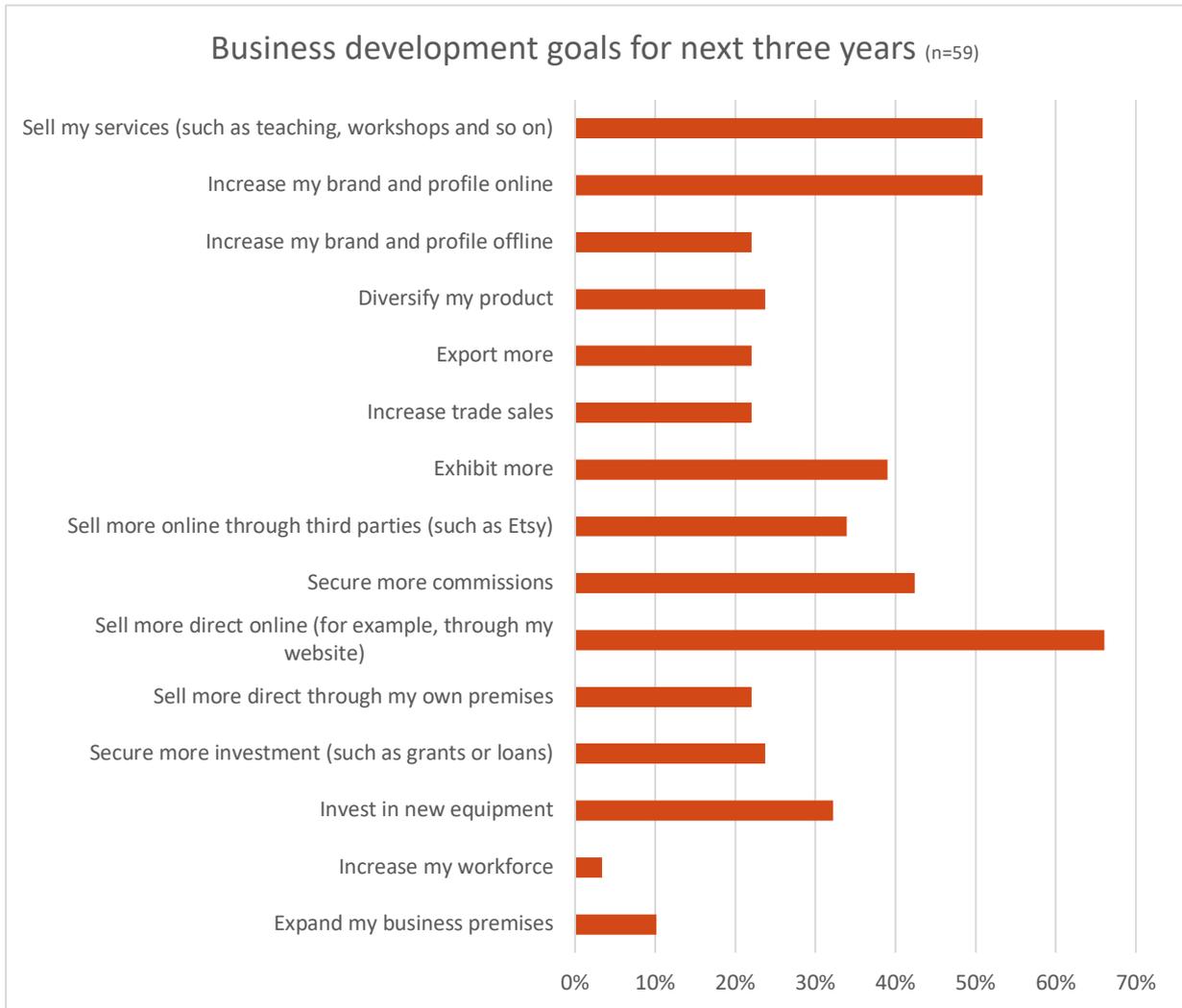
The Federation of Small Businesses’ Back to the Start-up campaign asserts that:

“there is real value in seeking to develop a truly balanced enterprise ecosystem across Northern Ireland – one with more than a single focus on leveraging the institutional supports available [...] It would be an intermediate to long-term strategy requiring more vision, self-belief, determination, calculated risk-taking as well as strategic leadership. [...] If this assertion is to be accepted by policymakers, it would suggest a need for new strategic thinking to ensure more deliberate and even more coordinated action by partners crucially including, and perhaps led by, representatives of the private sector, the community sector, the education sector and finally, government. It would also suggest the need for a critical, root and branch review of Northern Ireland’s base potential to develop a truly balanced enterprise ecosystem – including cultural and social aspects alongside institutional support.”

Local enterprise training providers noted that demand for training and support for start-ups is now particularly high as a result of Covid. This increases competition for support, which is likely to favour those business with potential for high job creation.

Makers’ business priorities

According to our survey, most makers hope to increase their profile and sell more direct online in the next three years. Other opportunities that makers are prioritising include selling their services (teaching, workshops and so on); commissions; exhibitions; and online sales through third parties such as Etsy. Just under a third intend to invest in new equipment.



Export

22 per cent of makers wanted to export more. Already in decline during 2020/21, there was a strong sense, that this is the opportunity most at-risk. Almost all interviewees spoke of Brexit as a threat. However, one stakeholder reflected that *“Craft NI could work with Invest NI to look at Brexit as a launchpad and get buy-in across the UK for opportunities to show at international shows as four nations post-Brexit, post-Covid. Ireland is very good at promoting itself on the international stage and UK could be.”*

Other goals

Makers were also asked if there was anything else they would like to achieve over the next three years. Ambitions included producing a book, international residences, collaboration with the private sector, self-sufficiency and more work on community-based projects. While one person was *“Happy where I am”*, others were concerned with survival:

- I think if I still have a roof over my head in 3 years, that will be quite an achievement in itself!!
- Just want to hang on in there.
- Not get evicted

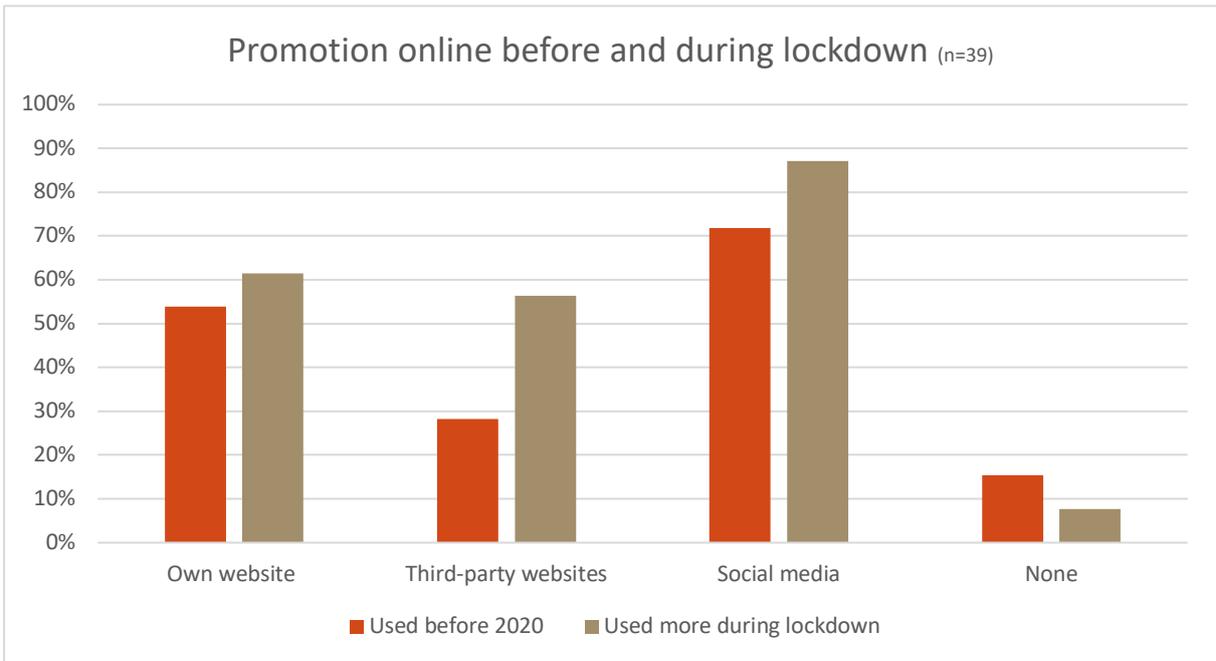
- To stay afloat.

Online sales and promotion

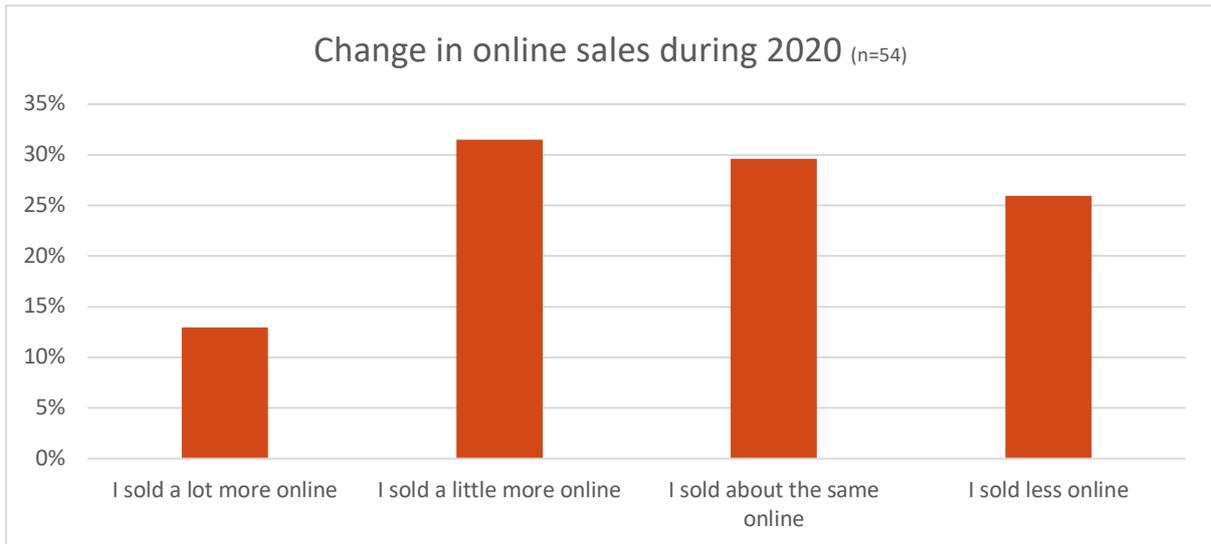
According to the Crafts Council, 10.3 million people bought craft online in 2020 – a third of all craft buyers – a figure that has more than tripled over the last decade. Online platforms have fuelled much of this growth. In December 2018 there were 220,000 active sellers on Etsy and a further 9,000 on Folksy. Jewellery is the most popular craft purchase in terms of units sold, but glass and metal have seen the most sizeable growth since 2006.

Covid has accelerated trends in online shopping, particularly among those who have not shopped online before, and according to thrive, NI’s cultural audience development agency, one third of those who engaged with visual arts online during lockdown were new online arts consumers. Across the UK, the Audience Agency found that 80 per cent of first-time website visitors to galleries have never physically attended the gallery, more than for museums and heritage organisations (61 per cent) and performing arts (65 per cent).

More craft makers also promoted their products online during lockdown.



However, increased presence did not necessarily correspond to increased sales. Among those surveyed who had increased their online promotion, only 30 per cent reported selling more online. Overall, 44 per cent of makers reported that they sold more online during 2020, while 26 per cent sold less.



For many, it is likely that their efforts were the result of necessity, rather than strategy, and they may not have adopted the most effective promotional tactics. Among interviewees, those who had already a well-established online presence or already had high levels of digital literacy, confidence and social media savvy, for example, in their personal life, appear to have been more successful. One maker who started their business from scratch during lockdown was particularly enthusiastic about video and how that had contributed to their rapid success:

“Video is the craft revival bringing craft promotion into the twenty-first century. It pushes you to the top of the algorithm on Instagram so increases visibility. Video documents the making of pieces –shows the process and why it is special – people see the time, the complexity and understand the value. Video gives brings the person making the craft to life – it’s not a machine.”

Others established businesses starting their web presence from scratch credited the availability of online support and increased spare time:

“I survived because I got a retail website up and running. I had a wholesale one for retail outlets, but they were all closed. Direct selling sites are different. I had to learn how to make social media work for the business to get results. I used free courses and the free bits of online coaching. Lockdown did create the time to learn!”

Stakeholders were “surprised at reticence and fear of selling on line, even if you take people by the hand” and that some makers are just “old school and happy to do craft markets.” Another noted that three less digitally able makers partnered up to establish a collaborative online shop.

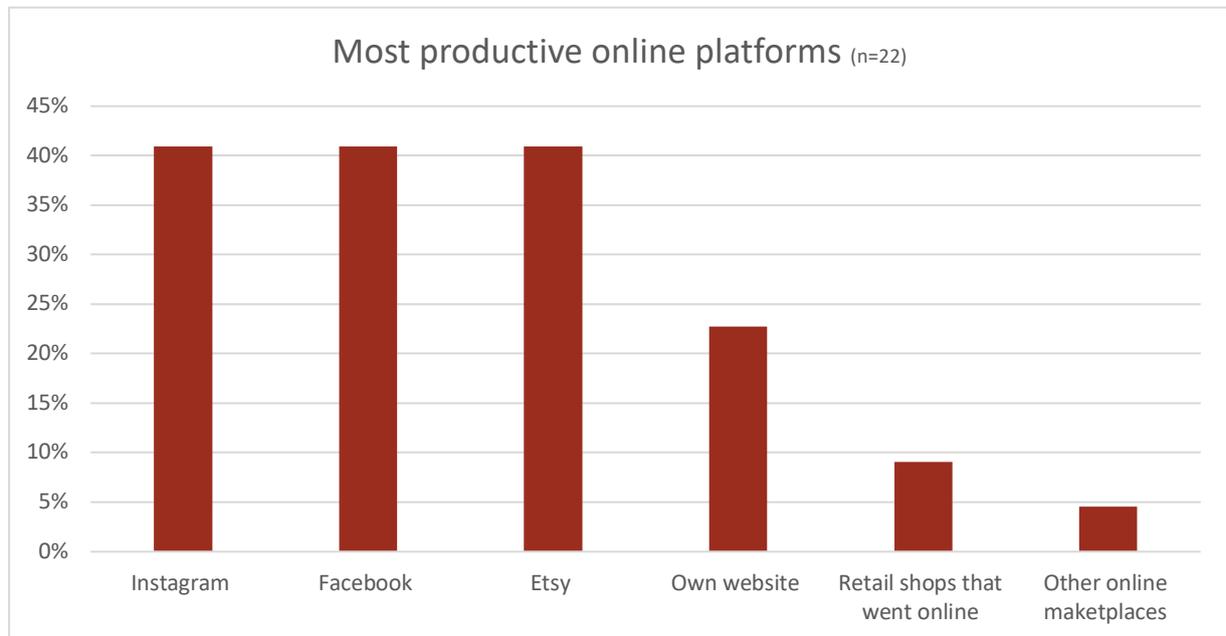
Reduced sales could also reflect an increasingly crowded market and conservative consumer spending in the face of job loss and recession.

There was also no significant difference in estimated change in turnover between those who did and did not promote online.

Those who did sell well online, however, are likely to continue to do so as it offers higher return without commissions.

The social media platforms most frequently used, according to the survey and interviewees, were Facebook (including Facebook marketplace) and Instagram followed to a much lesser extent by Twitter. One person used tumblr. Other platforms such as LinkedIn were not mentioned.

Instagram, Facebook and Etsy were considered the most productive platforms for creating or making sales.



Types of product sold online

There was some sense that mid- or mixed-career makers interviewed found it harder to identify which products and services would suit online sales. Others struggled to tell the story of their work online.

Products that were reported a selling well online during lockdown included wall art and small items of utility such as mugs, tea towels and utensils. Makers felt that consumers knew what they were, they were considered robust enough to post, and they were low financial risk.

Conversely, most makers found that delicate, high-end artistic work did not sell well online. Makers generally felt that buyers needed to interact with such work – hold it, feel it and view it in real life.

Nonetheless, such pieces were sold and commissioned during lockdown. In some cases, this was because the makers had established reputations and clients knew them; in others, the items were for special occasions and customers met with makers online to discuss the commission. In one case the maker was located through their website and invited to place a proposal by an international buyer.

Customer relations

Not meeting the public at shows and markets for a year means makers not only lost sales but had not been able to maintain relationships with regular customers and retailers, nor been able to make new contacts to expand and replenish client lists. There was a sense among interviewees that online

promotion and sales did not build the same depth of relationships as face-to-face market engagement.

Craft hobbyists

Lockdown appears to have also seen a boom in craft hobbyists. According to the Craft Council's Market for Craft (June 2020), *"The current pandemic has highlighted the growing craft trend – the BBC's Great British Sewing Bee has shifted to a prime-time BBC TV slot and attracts audiences of close to 5 million, and sellers of craft supplies for the domestic market are seeing a surge in sales."* This represents an opportunity for craft businesses who do or can teach online: the Crafts Council also found that 20 per cent of British consumers would pay to attend a craft workshop.

Several makers interviewed had rapidly, and successfully adapted their teaching and workshops online. Another had produced and sold DIY craft kits with training provided by Craft NI. However, in Craft NI's Maker-led training needs survey, creating online courses was the digital skill makers were least confident in but the one they also felt was least relevant. This survey was carried out early in the pandemic and interest may have changed over time in response to consumer demand and inspired by other makers' successes. However, it is not known whether consumer demand will continue once people return to work and more leisure facilities reopen after lockdown.

The future of exhibitions

For makers

More makers surveyed want to sell more online than want to exhibit more in the future. It may be that online sales are considered more resilient to future pandemics or other crises.

Interviewees further elaborated on the particular impact that shutting retail and exhibition space had on their finances and wellbeing. Makers did not know when these spaces would re-open; whether or not to collect stock left in outlets on a sales or return basis; or to sell online. Stress arising from uncertainty and loss of control was multiplied for those booked to attend major shows – trying to untangle travel, accommodation, product shipping and show fee refunds was clearly traumatic and left makers out of pocket by between £1,000 and £2,000.

As a result of this stress, some makers who were successful online believe they will reappraise the value of shows. They will still use them to find new buyers, reach the public and connect with the community of makers, but they may be more strategic in their approach and attend fewer. However, other stakeholders were concerned that the cancellation of shows would be particularly detrimental in the long-term as a loss of "career-building exposure" particularly for those in mid-career.

Interviewees also felt that uncertainty around craft fairs and exhibition cancellations has increased the importance of the Craft NI gallery as a permanent physical space to show and of the Craft NI directory as a virtual shopfront.

Stakeholders from rural councils in particular considered that accelerated digitisation and travel restrictions for all helped rural makers access new markets further afield. Online exhibitions and shopfronts may continue after travel restrictions have eased, extending the opportunity for rural

makers. However, many council-led initiatives in particular were part of “support local” campaigns, indicating that there has been localisation as well as globalisation.

For audiences

Audiences may be more keen to return to galleries and exhibition spaces. According to thrive, 57 per cent of visual arts audiences are eager to go back to galleries soon compared to 15 per cent of audiences for live cultural events. The main reasons for looking forward to attending galleries and exhibitions spaces again in the future are “being inspired and uplifted” (75 per cent) and “experiencing something new or different” (75 per cent). This may influence exhibition content.

Destination craft

Selling experiences, rather than products, is a consumer trend that has been burgeoning for nearly a decade. It is particularly key for tourist as well as local markets.

Among stakeholders and craft makers we spoke to, several would welcome a more experiential and holistic approach to supporting the sector in the future. This could include craft hubs in place of separate craft shops, galleries and workspaces – destinations where people can experience craft being made, attend classes, view the gallery, browse interactive catalogues and purchase craft online and in the shop. Interviewees looked to successful models local, such as Duncairn Arts Centre, and further afield:

“We are missing what Kilkenny has – centres or hubs for design – have an experience a day out – coffee, craft. A studio where people can see me work – and other studios around – bring tourist to craft destinations and experiences. Build relationships with the maker and the product. There are sure to be big empty buildings that can be re-purposed when we start over.”

In CCG, building on the success of The Designerie, the old Courthouse in Bushmills is to be repurposed as a craft destination with studio, workshop, shop and café. This is a model that could be followed and learned from.

BCC’s retail core, already in decline, is likely to have been further hollowed out by the pandemic. BCC is keen to see how arts and creative businesses can help revitalise the city, including through the provision of studios and makerspaces. On a large scale, its Belfast Story hub is to be sited at the northern end of Royal Avenue. It is to include retail, exhibition and maker space. Close to Craft NI’s new home, there is a real opportunity to develop high levels of synergy.

Crafts Council recommendations

In October 2020, the Crafts Council made a submission to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport outlining steps that would aid the craft sector’s recovery from Covid and the impact of leaving the EU. Its recommendations included:

- Targeted investment schemes to support innovation in the craft and small creative-business sector

- An export strategy or targeted support for makers to access Great British, EU and other sympathetic markets for handmade, luxury or bespoke NI-made artwork
- “Buy local” campaigns across the sector at key times of the year such as Christmas
- Creative clauses in regeneration development programmes, similar to social clause and percent for art
- Developing aggregated occupational data for the craft sector

Stakeholders considered that:

- Investing in innovation might be useful, but there may be more pressing needs in the sector
- An export strategy for makers was seen as useful and something Craft NI could work on with key players around the table
- “Buy local” campaigns, including “Buy real” and “Buy green” were seen as essential. All councils already do these. They regarded Craft NI’s role as providing profile, for example, as part of August Craft Month or around Christmas and Mother’s Day.
- Creative clauses were seen as unrealistic by all but BCC, where developer clauses have been slow to bed in, but cultural participation is being introduced as a social clause option. Other councils referred to local government’s lack of local regeneration powers. However, there was support for Craft NI making representation to have crafts and creative industries included in new developments, perhaps by showing how this has worked well elsewhere.
- All stakeholders wanted better occupational data and mapping of the craft sector. Some held local data but had no official statistics.

5. Craft NI services and support

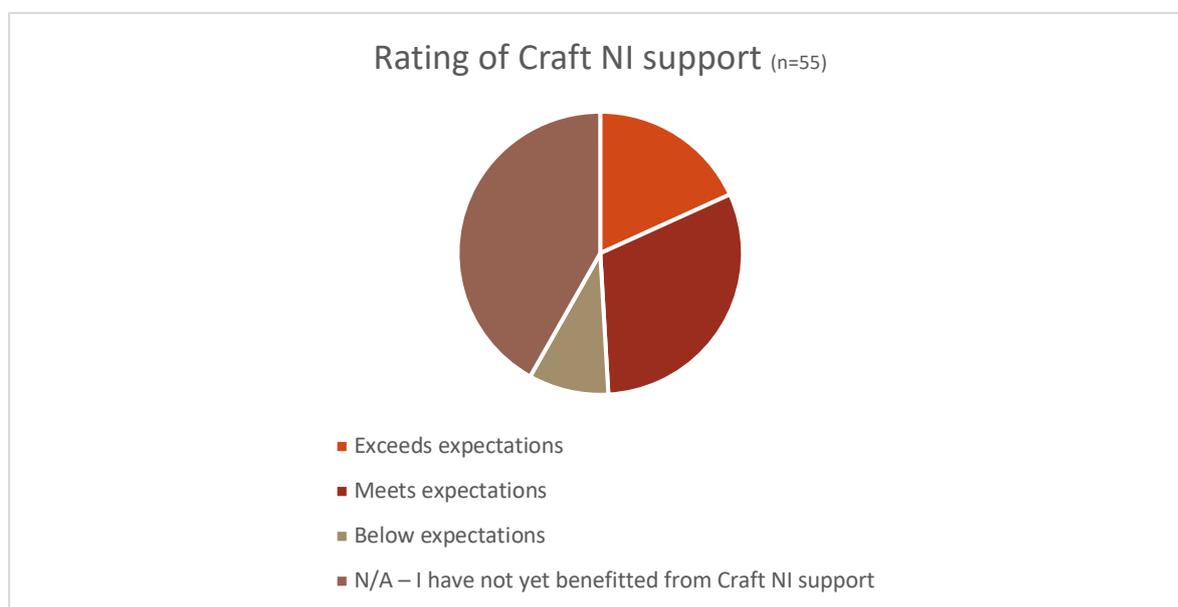
Craft NI uses a wide variety of platforms to support and engage with craft makers across NI. This includes:

- 195 artists, designers and makers included in the online craft directory
- 89 venues highlighted in its Craft Map
- Over 240,000 visitors to its website
- Over 22,000 social media followers across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram
- August Craft Month
- Artist talks
- Training, currently including digital skills, photography, developing craft kits to sell online and developing online workshops
- Resources including regular Brexit briefs and webinars

Satisfaction with Craft NI

We asked makers to rate the support currently offered by Craft NI. Nearly half said that it meets or exceeds expectations. Several makers commended Craft NI for the good work it is already doing. Others noted that it was already “*punching above its weight*” in terms of the organisation’s size and resource.

9 per cent felt it fell below expectations, while 42 per cent had not yet availed of Craft NI’s support.



Among those who felt Craft NI met or exceeded expectations, comments included:

- Recently, Craft NI has proven itself to want to step up and equal the quality of craft that is practiced in mainland UK and also abroad. It has raised its bar and that is a very good thing.
- [It] has become more creative and energetic after a period of disruption and lassitude
- Craft NI is a very small organisation but is 'punching above its weight'

- I believe that the new Craft NI will accomplish even more out of lockdown. It was an odd year to begin with.
- Solid foundation I can rely on
- Southern craft council (DCCI) is an enormously funded organisation in comparison, it always seems that they can shout louder than Craft NI

Areas that were praised frequently included training, information services, staff and connecting people. Three interviewees with online shops who attended recent Craft NI seminars found them useful and reassuring that they were on the right track.

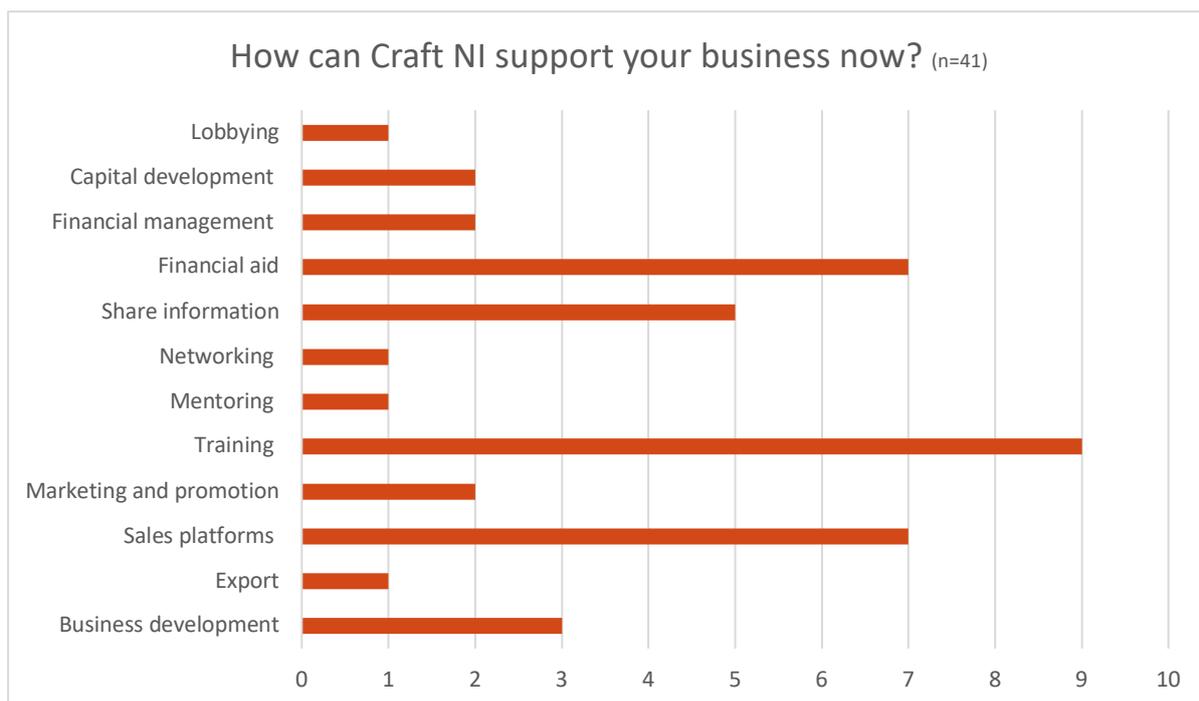
Those who felt that Craft NI fell below their expectations commented:

- You should pay the makers at the end of each month and not have to wait over two
- Promote excellence, the process of making, accept differing backgrounds and be approachable
- Keep looking for a suitable premises with better access, more space for exhibitions, workshops and studios
- More support for the traditional crafts sector, international recognition for our Traditional Crafters Brand NI
- Focus on supporting makers and increasing their confidence

Several interviewees – both makers and other stakeholders – mentioned Craft NI’s *Making It* programme as being both beneficial and missed. It was seen as a good model for venue-based development of makers and markets: “makers left as very different people having sold and got name recognition”. ACNI singled out Craft NI’s online makers meetings for praise.

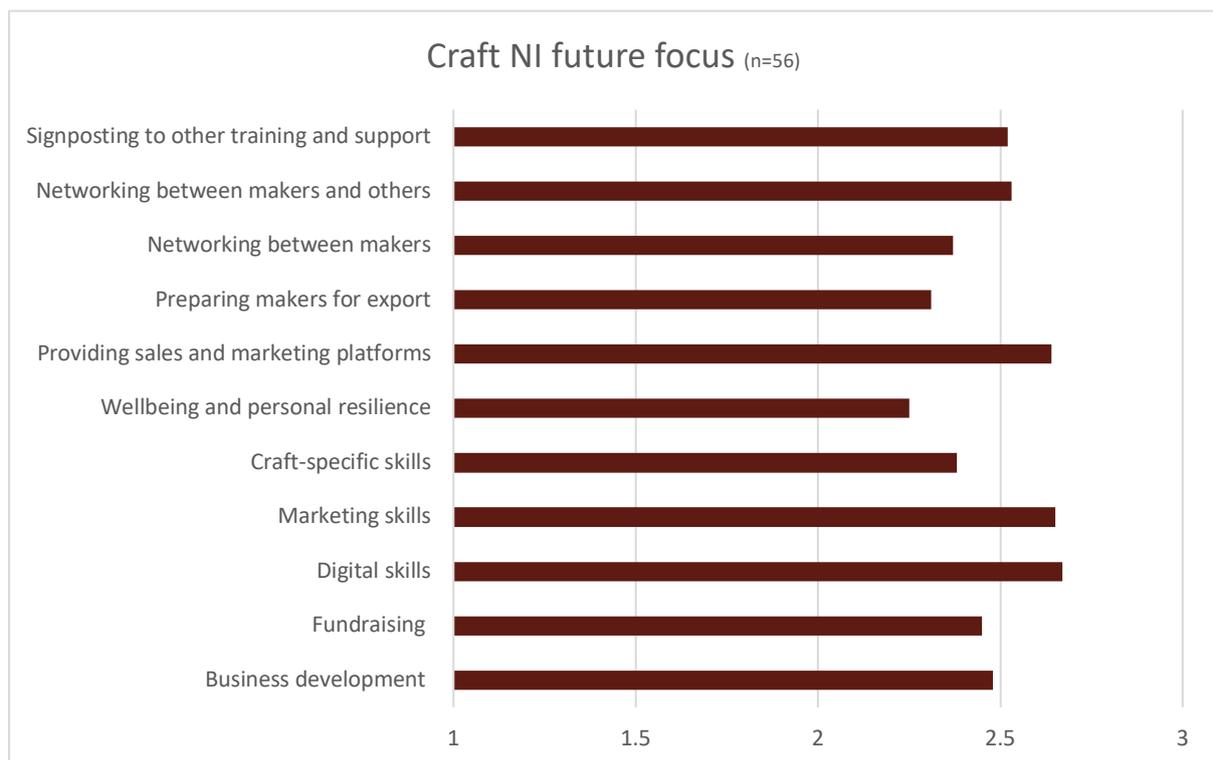
What Craft NI can do to support makers in the future

We asked makers what Craft NI can do to support makers now.



Sales platforms included craft fairs and help setting up online sales platforms. Digital sales and marketing skills were the most frequently requested training. Capital development included support for finding premises and funding equipment. Three makers communicated a sense of hopelessness, that there was nothing that could help them or their business now.

We also asked makers to say which types of training and support Craft NI should focus on in the longer-term on a scale of “Very important” to “Not very important”. The following graph shows the weighted average of all responses across the scale where higher numbers are more important. Accordingly, digital skills, marketing skills and providing sales and marketing platforms were considered the most important.



Suggestions for other types of training and support included:

- Diversify the makers that are promoted in the NI crafts Council. Far too narrow and unprogressive. I found myself meeting more progressive and supportive crafts makers artists in places such as Germany, China, London, Romania, etc....here is far too insular thinking and moving.
- Juried exhibition opportunities in prominent venues
- Keep live exhibitions in future with live and online workshops. Support for filming online workshops? Maintain August Craft Month.
- One on one assistant like an apprentice in a role reversal physical 6 week placement to specifically and in their own premises teach older artist/craftspeople digital skills as most well established makers don't need help to make their goods but need more help to market them as technology moves soo fast lol
- Supporting craft more, not the arts.

- Trailblazing new ways of making. Highlighting more local designer/makers Promoting high end craft and workshops Giving advice on how to seek out, prepare for and follow through for exhibitions
- Your plan c is fantastic as it rounds up opportunities for us! Thankyou.

Among interviewees, few makers had large marketing budgets and wanted Craft NI to add value to their marketing where it can. August Craft Month was cited as a useful platform, providing a spotlight on crafts which all makers can share. Some makers would like to see it become a festival with its own funding and greater NI-wide profile.

One stakeholder highlighted the need for clarity soon: *“Craft NI should let makers know whether they do or do not know when shows will be back – information from the sector body would reassure and stop the guessing”*.

Connectivity and unification

There was recognition that the sector is very diverse and that one size cannot fit all, but that Craft NI should strive to unite the sector. Some commented that they felt *“on the outside”*, for example, due to their craft not being suitable for traditional retail. Some felt that they should be more people-focused and less product-focused, actively contacting members during Covid, for example. This was supported by ACNI, which considered that *“CNI should support the whole ecosystem of craft – whether makers aspire to show at the V&A or not.”*

The pandemic may make this role more difficult as a number of new start-ups have gone straight to Instagram, bypassing traditional retail and support channels.

Some felt that Craft NI is too Belfast-centric and should reach out to the rest of NI. Given the concentration of makers outside Belfast, this may just be a perception.

Others felt that there was a role connecting outside the sector – with tourism, arts and business across the UK and ROI and rest of the world.

Pushing boundaries

Some makers also felt that Craft NI needed to encourage makers to *“push their aesthetic”* and unite through a *“brave and edgy”* brand. There was also a feeling that Craft NI should *“think outside the box”*, both in terms of the type of craft it supports and the type of support activity it runs: *“more daring [...] it all seems a bit ordinary/expected”*.

Some would like Craft NI to lead by example by providing exemplar and cutting edge sales platforms and social media.

Other makers and stakeholders encouraged Craft NI to continue or do more to support public education and awareness of craft.

6. How Craft NI can help build back better

There is a wide variety of quality craft made in NI. However, the sector is sometimes overlooked in central and local government policy, and as it is predominated by sole traders and micro-businesses, it is especially vulnerable to changes in the wider operating environment.

This section considers how Craft NI can help increase the sector's readiness and resilience to embrace future opportunities and withstand future challenges. It is based on survey findings, interviews with craft makers and support organisations, relevant research called out by other agencies and mapping of the training and support currently offered by local government, enterprise agencies and other relevant bodies.

"Punching above its weight"

Craft NI provides good quality support. The majority of makers who had availed of Craft NI support felt that it met or exceeded their expectations.

42 per cent of those surveyed, however, had not yet benefitted from Craft NI services. This represents a significant opportunity to provide support to more makers. This also responds to calls that Craft NI should be inclusive of all makers and disciplines.

To do this, Craft NI would require more investment in its core including more staff as network and member support is time intensive.

It is therefore recommended that:

1. there is an awareness raising campaign to increase Craft NI's penetration in to the craft sector
2. Craft NI continues to fundraise and lobby ACNI, DfC and local councils for additional resources that are required to meet the expectations of the wider sector

Influencing

With EU funding to be replaced by the Shared Prosperity Fund, there is an opportunity for Craft NI to influence business development programmes. This could include lobbying central government policymakers and local government delivery agents to:

3. ensure that eligibility criteria and indicators of success (such as business growth and job creation) are appropriate to craft businesses. This might include, for example, encouraging recognition of contract, freelance or casual work.
4. design and deliver more programmes that are tailored to craft businesses in particular or creative industries in general. These should build on support tactics that have been proven to work such as networking, mentoring and role models.

There is good will towards the craft sector in many councils. However, this varies across councils and departments. Those councils with good support for and understanding of craft appear to have staff with a designated craft role and effective working relationships across departments. It is recommended that Craft NI:

5. continues to engage with councils on a regular one-to-one basis to keep abreast of and influence local initiatives, provide insight and feedback from makers and develop opportunities for local collaboration, including recommendations included in this report
6. engages with the cross-council arts managers group to encourage centralised and peer-to-peer learning and sharing, helping develop more in-council craft champions. This should include representation from enterprise role models (see “Sharing information”) where possible.

Sharing information

Craft NI is seen as a valuable source of good information. Makers cited the resources Craft NI produces itself as well as its ability to signpost to other relevant resources. There is opportunity to build on this through social media.

It is recommended that Craft NI:

7. continues to author and signpost makers to relevant, good quality resources. This should include for business and technical support.
8. creates a closed Facebook group where members can search for and filter relevant information while interacting and sharing knowledge in a safe space. As this can be labour intensive, Craft NI should consider using volunteer makers from main disciplines or each council area to manage the group.
9. identifies and works with makers who can be enterprise role models to share their experience and learning through innovative communications platforms, such as TED-type talks, blogs, webinars and vlogs.

Networking for makers

Craft NI’s efforts during Covid to ensure that makers did not feel isolated were particularly welcomed. Further networking could help share some of the positive learning from this challenging period while helping to put in place long-term protective factors for mental health and wellbeing.

Networks have a key role in developing the competencies entrepreneurs need to succeed. Other makers and artists are also a key source of business support and inspiration for makers. As the majority of makers are sole traders, this is a fruitful way to foster collaborations within the sector, which could also be extended across other sectors, such as local government, tourism, the private sector and the community sector.

Recommendations include:

10. organises regular, informal makers salons for networking, shared learning and peer support. These could be hosted by regionally by local champions.
11. ensure that all training and events include opportunities for maker-to-maker networking
12. work with local government to organise cross-sectoral networking events where the craft sector can help deliver on local strategic priorities
13. identify and promote participation in existing local and regional entrepreneurial networks such as Women in Business, the chambers of commerce and craft guilds

Support and training for craft businesses

There are low levels of awareness of and satisfaction with local council and enterprise agency business support programmes. This stems from a lack of understanding of the craft sector among

delivery agents. However, Craft NI does not have the resources to deliver all business training for the craft sector itself. In addition to lobbying for more tailored business programmes supported through the UK Prosperity Fund (above), Craft NI should:

14. work with local councils that already deliver craft-specific business support programmes to evaluate their impact and contribution to community planning outcomes
15. work with local councils to audit uptake on general business support programmes, gather and analyse feedback from makers and work together to improve satisfaction and impact. This could include, for example, adding non-core craft-relevant modules to current programmes or helping councils and local enterprise agencies source expert craft mentors.
16. continue to use this intelligence and awareness of other business support programme to signpost makers to the best quality and most appropriate training
17. carry out a short, annual training needs analysis with makers to ensure that training meets new and emerging needs

Support for start-ups

Covid has shown both the need for and a way forward for public sector investment in the craft and wider creative sector. More makers accessed ACNI funding than before and, while makers value their self-sufficiency, this investment could continue to be ringfenced for the sector in the future. Craft NI's *Making It* programme was considered instrumental for some makers who were interviewed or surveyed.

As entrepreneurship and business start-up are increasingly valued for their role in helping the economy bounce back post-Covid, and there is increasing demand for training and support from start-ups across all sectors, this could include craft business start-up programmes, building on the success of Making it, including funding or support for equipment and premises.

It is recommended that Craft NI:

18. works with the Federation of Small Businesses, NI Chamber of Commerce and other potential allies to lobby for specialised start-up support for the craft sector from central government
19. works with ACNI and a local council that already provides good, tailored support to pilot a springboard programme for recent graduates

Support for craft retailers

It is likely that more craft retailers also accessed more public funding than ever before during Covid, including through INI's micro-business e-commerce grant.

20. Craft NI could work with INI and DfE to review uptake among craft businesses and lobby for continued specialist support programmes

TNI assesses visitor services local stock as part of its mystery shopping. A number of local councils have identified craft as part of their brand and key visitor offer.

21. Craft NI should engage with TNI and local councils to develop a craft campaign that supports makers and visitor centres across NI (such as meet the maker and meet the maker) and targets consumers in key markets (such as hallmarks of quality or authenticity)

Online sales and promotion

Some makers found online sales lucrative during the pandemic. Others found them a lifeline or “necessary evil”. Others still tried but, frustratingly, could not convert effort into sales. Those who did experience a boom considered video storytelling to be the *“craft revival bringing craft promotion into the twenty-first century”*.

While direct sales are commission-free, there is demand for centralised online sales platforms among makers. All councils we interviewed provided this during lockdown, and many intend to continue to offer it when restrictions ease.

It is therefore recommended that Craft NI:

22. connects with ACNI and Future Screens to explore use of video and immersive technology to promote craft
23. delivers sector-specific training in online promotion and sales led by makers who are leading the field. This could include, for example, training on how to select, price or diversify for online sales; and how to build a brand and tell the story of the maker and their work in words, images and video. It should also encourage collaboration between makers to develop shared resources.
24. works with each local council to review and enhance their online sales platforms and campaigns (such as “Buy local”) and helps to promote them to both makers and consumers

Further developing the craft market

Makers and stakeholders agreed that Craft NI should have an audience and market development role including the public’s appreciation of the value of artisanal products. They would welcome, in particular, the development of craft hubs or experiences where makers and customers can enjoy end-to-end immersion in craft.

While online sales remain a priority for many makers, opportunities to physically see and feel products is important for higher-value, more intricate and more innovative work and work by newer makers. Relationships established with customers and trade in-person may also be more resilient.

It is recommended that Craft NI:

25. works with local councils (alongside local “Buy local” or similar campaigns), TNI, ACNI, thrive and other potential partners to develop a communications campaign to promote the intrinsic value of craft to consumers
26. works with Causeway Enterprise and BCC to develop their respective craft hubs and shares learning across all council area
27. works with TNI and local councils to explore appetite for and feasibility of craft trails

Space to make

Having space to create outside the home was particularly important for makers. It is recommended that Craft NI:

28. works with local councils to advocate for craft studios and space to be included in new developments

Export

The Crafts Council's proposed export strategy was met favourable by government stakeholders. Export was also identified by makers as the opportunity that is particularly at-risk. Nearly all interviewees talked about Brexit.

It is recommended that Craft NI:

29. should lobby for and ensure its place at the table alongside the representative bodies for England, Scotland and Wales to develop a new export strategy.
30. should further engage with makers to develop actions to support them through the UK's exit from the EU and beyond

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Appendix 1: Survey

2020 has been a challenging year for many people. As we emerge from lockdown, Craft NI would like to further understand the impact of Covid on craft makers so that it can tailor its work and help build back a stronger and more resilient craft sector.

This survey is aimed at NI-based craft makers. It will take about 15 minutes of your time.

At the end of the survey, you can enter in to a free prize draw to win a £30 Mike's Fancy Cheese voucher.

Any information you give us in this survey will be treated in confidence and anonymised. This means we won't do anything with your answers that would let anyone else know that you took part in the survey. We will use all the responses we receive to write a report for Craft NI – but the report will not use any names or identify people in any other way. We will only ask for your name if you want to be entered in to the free prize draw.

We will look after anything you tell us about yourself in line with the data protection law. To learn more about how we will do this, please visit www.craftni.org/gdpr-privacy-policy.

The survey will close at 11.59pm on Sunday 21 March.

About your work

First of all, we would like to ask you a little about what you do.

1. Do you work as a craft maker

Full-time (16 hours a week or more)?

Part-time (up to 16 hours a week)?

2. Are you a

sole trader?

partnership?

Other (please specify)

3. What is your primary discipline? If you work across multiple disciplines, please identify your main discipline.

Wood (including furniture)

Glass

Mixed media

Jewellery (excluding silversmith)

Silversmith

Printing (textile, paper and 3D)

Textiles (inc knitting, embroidery and weaving)

Ceramics

Other (please specify)

In 2019 (before Covid) During lockdown

Home

Business park

Own studio

Own studio within a

shared/collective studio

or other space such as

college

Shared studio

I did not make my

product

Other (please specify)

4. Where do you mainly make your product?

5. How long have you been selling your products?

Less than 1 year

More than 1 year but less than 5 years

More than 5 years but less than 10 years

More than 10 years

In 2019 (before Covid)? Now?

Start up (newly formed)

Surviving (covering overheads)

Success (in profit)

Take off (successful
with rapid growth)

Mature (fully resourced, no plans to grow)

In decline (reduction in employees, sales or shop premises)

Ceasing to trade

6. What stage of development was your business in ...

7. Why do you feel your business has changed in this way?

None

Under

£1,000

£1,000 to £4,999

£5,000 to £9,999

£10,000 to £14,999

£15,000 to £19,999

£20,000 to £29,999

£30,000 to £49,999

£50,000 and over

Commissions

Direct sales (such as your own retail outlet, not including online)

Direct online sales (such as your own website)

Exhibitions

Third-party sales (such as other shops, not including online)

Third-party online marketplaces (such as Etsy)

8. What was your annual turnover last year through each of the following sales platforms? If you do not have this information easily to hand, please provide your best estimate.

9. In the last year, approximately what percentage of your annual turnover was from export (that is, sales outside NI)?

It increased a lot

It increased a little

It stayed the same

It reduced a little

It reduced a lot

N/A – this is not a source of income for me

Teaching craft and craft-related workshops or masterclasses

Private funding (such as a private investor)

Public funding (such as Arts Council funding)

Non-craft related income

10. What impact did Covid have on other sources of income?

11. Can you provide an estimate of how Covid affected profit from your business?

My profit decreased 100%

My profit stayed the same

My profit increased 100%

12. What government support for your craft business during lockdown? Tick all that apply.

Support for employees (such as furlough or statutory sick pay)

Business rates relief

Deferred paying tax

Self-employed income support

A loan (such as a Business Interruption Loan)

Business support grant

Arts Council Northern Ireland grant

None

Other (please specify)

Going digital

In 2020, more people and activities went online. This section is about understanding how the craft sector responded to this new opportunity.

13. How did you promote your business and craft online before 2020? Tick all that apply.

Yes, through my own website

Yes, through third-party websites

Yes, on social media

No

Which social media platforms did you use?

14. Which platforms, if any, did you use more during lockdown? Tick all that apply.

My own website

Third-party websites

Social media

I used them all about the same as before

N/A – I don't promote my business online

If you answered yes above, please tell us which online platforms (such as your own website, Facebook, Etsy and so on) were most productive.

15. Did your online sales grow during 2020?

Yes, I sold a lot more online

Yes, I sold a little more online

No, I sold about the same online

No, I sold less online

16. Is there anything that prevents you promoting your business online?

The future

This section is about your plans for your business going forward.

17. Where do you hope to develop your business in the next three years? You should pick up to five options and rate each option from 1 to 5 with 1 being your top priority.'

Expand my business premises

Increase my workforce

Invest in new equipment

Secure more investment (such as grants or loans)

Sell more direct through my own premises

Sell more direct online (for example, through my website)

Secure more commissions

Sell more online through third parties (such as Etsy)

Exhibit more

Increase trade sales

Export more

Diversify my product

Increase my brand and profile offline

Increase my brand and profile online

Sell my services (such as teaching, workshops and so on)

18. Is there anything else you would like to achieve in the next three years?

Training and support

This section is about the support you need to help realise your plans for the future.

19. Aside from family and friends, who would you turn to first if you needed help with your business?

20. Where do you go for inspiration?

21. Tell us about the best training you have ever done. This could be business training, craft training – or something else entirely. What made it so good?

If you answered yes, please tell us which course or courses you attended, and how useful you found them for your business.

22. Have you taken part in any business support programmes offered by your local council or enterprise agency?

Yes

No, they are not relevant to my business

No, I'm not interested

No, I am not aware of these business support programmes

No, other

Very important

Somewhat important

Not at all important

Business development (such as planning and financial management)

Fundraising (such as loans, grants or angel investment)

Digital skills

Marketing skills

Craft-specific skills

Wellbeing and personal

resilience

Providing sales and marketing platforms

Preparing makers for export

Networking between makers

Networking between makers and others (retailers, tourism sector, government)

Signposting to other training and support

Other (please specify)

23. Where should Craft NI focus its training and support in the future?

24. When it is safe to meet in person, would you prefer Craft NI's training to be
in person?
online?
both in person and online
depends on what it is

25. How can Craft NI support your business now?

26. How can Craft NI support your business in the longer term?
What makes you feel this way?

27. Overall, how would you rate the support Craft NI currently provides?
Exceeded expectations
Met expectations
Below expectations
N/A – I have not yet benefitted from Craft NI support

28. What age are you?

29. Which council area is your business based in?

30. Would you describe your area as
Rural (its population is less than 5,000 or it is open countryside)
Urban (its population is more than 5,000)

Appendix 2: Audit of local economic development training and support

All programmes require the applicant to live in or to run a registered business in the council area. All councils offer pre-advice assessment with a council economic development officer or third party adviser.

Training name Nature	Eligibility	Availability
Pre start-up support		
<p>Exploring Enterprise Programme</p> <p>An insight into starting a business with the option of a CCEA level 1 qualification. Includes one-to-one mentoring with a business advisor covering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing • Financial planning • Introduction to HMRC • Job searching • Writing job applications • CV design and development • Searching for further education courses or other relevant training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aged 16 or over • Legally able to reside and work in the UK • Unemployed/inactive or working/studying less than 16 hours per week • Not participating in any other government funded programme 	<p>All local enterprise agencies</p>
<p>Go For It</p> <p>Planning to start a business with step-by-step advice and mentoring to produce a business plan and to go on to register for self-employment. Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to 6 hours of bespoke mentoring support delivered by a business advisor through one-to-one meetings, group workshops and calls • Finance and business planning workshops • Tailored mentoring, guidance and support covering everything from sales and marketing to accessing funds and securing premises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New businesses trading 6 months or less 	<p>Available from all councils via 26 local enterprise agencies</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best practice tools, videos and help to get started 		
<p>(Go for It) Covid Recovery Start Up Grant</p> <p>Cash to assist with marketing products, capital costs, rent, set-up costs or cost of renovating premises.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning to start a new business • Closed March 2021 	<p>Antrim and Newtownabbey: £200:</p> <p>Derry and Strabane: £500</p>
<p>Belfast Enterprise Academy</p> <p>Degree level students can develop and launch their own business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • generating, testing and refining ideas • learning from past students who have started their own business • meeting the people who can help them make it happen • having a team of experts working with them • accessing financial support to become self-employed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree-level students who are serious about starting their own business • Students in all third level institutions in the city including arts at Ulster University 	<p>Belfast</p>
<p>Business Boot Camp – Start and Grow</p> <p>Uses practical activity to instil the most important aspects of Business Start and Business Growth. Help to develop your own entrepreneurial style and a “never give up” winning attitude. Support from experienced business professionals and online support platform with a range of resources, advice and guidance on every aspect of business.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aged 16 to 35 • Live in Belfast, Lisburn, Castlereagh, Newtownabbey, North Down, Carrickfergus or Donegal 	<p>Belfast, Lisburn and Castlereagh, Newtownabbey, North Down, Carrickfergus</p>
<p>Growth support</p>		
<p>Business Mentor Growth Programmes</p> <p>Free mentoring support to local companies to become more competitive in both indigenous and export markets. Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free mentoring support, bespoke to the business requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Already trading (minimum 6 to 12 months depending on council) • Employ fewer than 50 people 	<p>All Councils under different names: for example, Business Growth in Newry and Mourne or</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to workshops and thematic programmes • Networking opportunities with other small to medium enterprises • Linkages with other business support initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the potential to create additional jobs (at least 1 FTE) • Have export, innovation or productivity improvement potential • Can demonstrate the potential to be a “quality business referral” to Invest NI • Not already an INI client 	<p>Business Boost in Derry and Strabane</p>
Digital growth support		
<p>Digital Growth Programme</p> <p>Aims to enhance digital capabilities and develop knowledge in new and existing platforms including social media management and advertising; SEO and website optimisation; and delivering new customer experiences through AR, VR and immersive technology. Businesses receive between 8 and 35 hours of tailored support to help them grow.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer than 50 employees • Businesses that are in operation for more than 12 months (fewer in some councils) • Businesses that can demonstrate the ability to create jobs • Have export, innovation or productivity growth and/or improvement potential 	<p>Antrim and Newtownabbey; Newry and Mourne; Causeway Coast and Glens; Mid and East Antrim; Lisburn and Castlereagh; Mid Ulster; some digital other digital support available in all councils</p>
<p>The Digital Retail Therapy Programme</p> <p>Learn new skills and develop confidence to make the most of digital retail opportunities. Includes an in-depth diagnostic audit of digital capabilities in addition to two days’ one-to-one digital mentoring across</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website marketing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only retailers with premises solely used for retail will be considered. • The business has been trading for at least 12 months. 	<p>Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data and analytics • Social media marketing • Affiliate marketing • Email marketing • Display marketing • Mobile marketing • Geo-marketing tactics • Search engine optimisation • Per pay click (PPC) advertising 		
Tendering support		
<p>The Tender For Growth Programme</p> <p>Provides owner-managers of SMEs and micro-enterprises with the skills and the confidence to identify, target and bid for public and private sector tendering opportunities in Northern Ireland and further afield. Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One to one expert mentoring support • Group-based mentoring • Meet the Buyer events. 	<p>Employ less than 50 people</p> <p>Have the potential to create additional jobs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have export, innovation or productivity improvement potential • Operating in markets where there are viable tender opportunities relevant to their business services in the UK and beyond 	<p>All councils (name of programme varies)</p>

<p>Some councils have opted to offer their support under a single wraparound programme. These encompass the Go for it, Growth, Tendering and Digital elements set out above with occasional additions.</p> <p>Alchemy in Causeway Coast and Glens</p> <p>OPTIMAL (Outstanding Performance Through Individual Mentoring And Leadership) in Antrim and Newtownabbey</p> <p>Advance in Mid Ulster</p> <p>Transform your business in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon (includes Young Entrepreneurs Support aimed at the 18 to 29 age group)</p>	<p>As above for each element within the programmes.</p> <p>Applicants are invited to register on line or call and are filtered to most relevant element.</p>	<p>Antrim and Newtownabbey</p> <p>Mid Ulster</p> <p>Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon</p> <p>Causeway Coast and Glens</p>
<p>Alchemy “Lite” Mentoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • up to 3 days of bespoke mentoring support • referrals to other relevant business support partners • business workshops and networking events 	<p>People who do not meet the EU or INI criteria of other programmes</p>	<p>Causeway Coast and Glens</p>
<p>Other forms of support</p>		
<p>The LEAN Business Network</p> <p>A business forum to help local business people meet and develop their business contacts and skills. Includes a Small Business session. Currently on Zoom.</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>Antrim and Newtownabbey</p>
<p>ASK Programme</p> <p>The ASK programme provides one-to-one mentoring for new start-ups or existing businesses to help them through these uncertain times by providing specialist advice, skills and knowledge. Mentors are available with expertise in finance, marketing, IT, HR, business planning, etc. If they don't have the expertise required, they will endeavour to source it.</p>		<p>Antrim and Newtownabbey</p>

<p>Business Support Helpline</p> <p>Phone line to economic development</p>		Lisburn and Castlereagh
<p>EU Exit Mentoring Support</p> <p>Expert mentors are available for topics including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding customs, tariffs and taxation • transport and logistics – avoiding delays and extra costs • working with your supply chain so it delivers what you need • people issues – employment and immigration rules • managing your organisation and processes • managing your cash and handling currency exchange issues • making sure your products meet technical and legal standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer than 50 employees 	Belfast
<p>Yes You Can – Women in Business</p> <p>A female enterprise programme which is a collaboration between all councils, INI and Women in Business. Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imagine it: A one day bootcamp for women at the pre-start stage delivered in all council areas • Explore it: An initiative that targets women who have not started trading • Sell it: A two-day residential to inspire women already trading • Local female networks: Networking events • The female enterprise conference and pitching competition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Females who have an innovative idea • Females at an idea stage and ready to launch a new business • Female business owners already trading (up to 2 years – some elements over 2 years if part-time) 	All council areas

Appendix 3: Benchmarking online training

Most sector support organisations started to move support online during the second lockdown in autumn 2020. By spring 2021, many are planning off-line training again with in-room events being advertised from mid-April.

A number of councils and enterprise agencies also moved their training and business programmes online in response to the pandemic. They reported that demand for online training was high. For councils with rural residents, online training may be more practical. A number of councils indicated that at least some online training would continue after lockdown.

The following section provides a benchmark of the online support provided by sector support bodies, local councils and enterprise agencies.

Craft Scotland

Craft Scotland's staff and board responded to the first lockdown by phoning and emailing makers and running an impact survey. All planned training then moved online including Compass, a three-strand programme for makers at different career stages: Next Generation, Emerging Maker and Established Maker. Additional virtual support created include:

- A Maker's Guide to Coronavirus (COVID-19)
- A webinar on financial support, one-to-one maker sessions with an accountancy firm and a Financial Support Toolkit containing different types of funding and eligibility
- Craft Development Network meetings to keep curators, producers and craft organisations connected

The Resilience Programme from Craft Scotland in partnership with Applied Arts Scotland was designed to help makers navigate lockdown through peer-to-peer co-mentoring and more traditional mentor–mentee mentoring.

Makers Guild in Wales

The Makers Guild in Wales used their YouTube channel to show videos of stock on sale in their Craft on the Bay shop and Meet-the-Maker videos. These had less than 20 views.

Crafts Council UK

The Crafts Council's online resources for craft businesses include Covid advice, advice on getting Brexit-ready and tips for growing business in 2021. Makers also provide insight in webinars, videos and articles on

- The legal requirements for small businesses
- Getting noticed with good photography
- Making the most of your mailing list
- Selling online
- Getting the most from a website
- Legal requirements for small businesses

Its Crafting Business creative business training programme for emerging makers will be delivered online via Zoom, resources and self-directed learning.

[The Design Trust](#)

The Design Trust's online training includes one-day workshops in:

- Creative business planning
- Dream clients
- Branding and storytelling

Longer online courses run for up to five weeks including coaching. These include:

- Kickstart your creative business
- Get clients now

The Trust also curated an eBook of over 450 useful books, podcasts, websites and apps to help start and grow a creative business in topics such as grants and finance, social media, marketing, selling, time management and more. The eBook retails for £6.00.

[Design and Crafts Council Ireland](#)

Design and Crafts Council Ireland has a dedicated enterprise website with online articles, video links and signposting to further support. These are grouped in themes:

- Business: including Brexit, export, product development, pricing and more
- Ideas: grouped around competitiveness, marketing, production and retail including, for example, guides to good product photography, PR and attending trade shows.
- Support: including mentoring and training opportunities
- Connections: a list of many other relevant agencies

The Council also maintain a mentoring panel of mentors with craft, business, design, export and marketing expertise. Successful applicants make a subsidised contribution towards the cost of each session.

[The Biscuit Factory](#)

The Biscuit Factory is an online membership community for creative people who “want to make a living from what they do and feel proud of what they put out there”. It offers paid-for support, mentoring, networking and training. For a monthly fee of €49, members get access to a library of online training, join a private Facebook group of 9,000 members, Monday meetings, monthly masterclasses and discounts with suppliers.

[Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council](#)

Free business webinars filmed in response to COVID-19

[Keeping Customers and Staff Safe](#)

Practical guidance for maintaining a safe workspace for employees, visitors and customers.

[Critical Financial Analysis](#)

Financial management and cash flow along with templates to download and use.

[Complete Guide To eCommerce](#)

Covering general marketplaces and web platforms along with some marketing strategies

[Personal Resilience](#)

Business resilience through the current economic challenges

[Personal Resilience](#)

How to deal with the unconscious blocks that hold us back and move forward through Covid-19

[New Ways To Sell](#)

How your offline selling methods can work well online, building new packages and add-ons and what makes good content along with the different types of content to use

[Innovation - New Opportunities For Your Business](#)

A walk-through the internet showing how to identify new opportunities online from Google Analytics to new platforms to use.

[Innovation - Improve Efficiency, Cut Costs And Increase Sales](#)

Online business tools and software that could help improve efficiency, cut costs and increase sales.

[Remote Working](#)

How to take control, stay structured and get used to working remotely including top tips and tools available to maximise efficiency.

[Re-Opening With The Greatest Impact](#)

What can you do to ensure you make the greatest impact when the economy is back up and running and how to target customers and increase your market share.

Belfast City Council

[Getting your business online](#)

[Getting ready to sell a business service on YouTube](#)

[Preparing a 100-day cashflow](#)

[What can a business do during the COVID-19 pandemic?](#)

[Social media for business](#)

[SEO and Google Analytics](#)

[Managing stress](#)

[Managing your mental health during a crisis](#)

To help business adapt to digital marketing during Covid-19.

[Video Marketing Tips](#)

How you can use video to promote and market your goods or services during COVID-19 and beyond.

[Homeworking Set Up](#)

The best way to set up and work from home, including some free productivity, communication and marketing tools.

[Online Sales/E-commerce beginners](#)

[Online Sales/E-commerce advanced](#)

[Digital Transformation Summit in November 2020.](#)

Guest speakers on digital transformation and practical guidance to using social media platforms