

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN FOR
CREATIVE
ENTREPRENEURSHIP
2019-2022




Oifig Fiontair Áitiúil
Local Enterprise Office

www.creativecoastdonegal.ie





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INTRODUCTION

The Strategic Action Plan for Creative Entrepreneurship in Donegal was published in 2015 and implemented by Donegal County Council through the Local Enterprise Office under the Creative Coast brand. The plan aimed to provide a flexible framework for collaborative actions to support creative entrepreneurship in Donegal with the ultimate aim of enabling the development of a cohort of sustainable businesses in the sector.

Two of the key objectives of the Plan were to set about establishing the right conditions for creative entrepreneurship in the county and thus enable the generation and development of sustainable creative businesses in the county.

The plan recognised that when these conditions are nurtured, Creative Industries can play a hugely important role in the economy of the county.

During the latter half of 2018, a review of the Creative Coast programme was carried out involving two separate and distinct formats.

At the first review event in 2018, details were presented of the seven key actions from the initial strategy document and how these had been met to a considerable degree over the previous three years.

Following on from this, a second gathering of creatives was assembled to provide a listening post for all members and to consider action steps that could strengthen the dynamic of the creative industries in Donegal.

This document, sets out an ambitious Vision for the sector in Donegal over the next three years, which will build on the progress to date, reflect the changing business environment within which the creative industries operate, and provide a rationale for continued support of the creative sector in Donegal, based upon greatest return on investment for the county. The approach proposed, seeks to highlight successes of the current Creative Coast programme from its concept phase and to build upon the momentum already started.

At the same time it recognises that, hand in hand with Donegal County Council's Creative Ireland Donegal Culture and Creativity Strategy 2018 – 2022, there is now a need to build upon the early successes of the Creative Coast with a new, clearly developed strategic approach, set against a coherent Vision, with clear and measurable action points that directly address the business challenges and development objectives of the sector.

From the outset it should be clear that the delivery of this Vision will be a long-term and on-going process, with Aims and Objectives that will be achieved in the short, medium and long-term.

This plan sets out a framework for a series of supports and services that should intertwine to create a coherent, relevant and dynamic programme of engagement.

In preparing this *“Creative Coast Strategy 2019 - 2022”* account has been taken of not only local supports and the existing support ecosystem in Donegal, but of the broader national and regional policy and framework documents.

The Western Developments Commission’s *“Creative West”* strategy of 2009 sought to outline a policy framework for the sector in the region and made a range of recommendations for actions – this strategy draws on and in some cases restates many of these recommended actions. The current Government policy statements and strategies of *“Enterprise 2025 Renewed”* and *“Future Jobs Ireland 2019”* set out a range of objectives, ambitions and actions to drive our nationaleconomy forward.

In particular the actions under Ambitions 2 and 3 of Future Jobs Ireland 2019 have influenced many of the strategy’s proposed actions in relation to improving SME productivity and maximising our skills and talent.

Similarly Enterprise 2025 Renewed’s focus on innovation, collaboration, clustering, and the need for scaling and internationalisation and for improved productivity is all reflected in the strategy.

The North West Regional Skills Forum carried out an audit of the skills requirement of the ICT /Fin Tech sector in the north west in 2018-2019. The main objective of the survey was to determine the current and future needs of employers in relation to the educational, skills requirements of future employees.

While the report highlighted the general and specific technical training and skills needs across the sector in the north-west it also emphasised the need for broader business development and business management training to form an integral part of skills training. The ICT/ FinTech cluster within the region is also keen to support the further growth and expansion of the sector within the region throughencouraging new start-ups and spinouts form within the sector.

The primary enablers of this will be an openness to knowledge sharing and knowledge exchange within the sector in the region, and the level of innovation within the supporting ecosystem. The creative strategy for Donegal seeks to promote such an innovative ecosystem and promote knowledge sharing and exchange and through its networks will seek to work with the ICT/FinTech sector to grow activity, start-ups and business development in the sector in Donegal.

The United Nations Creative Economy Report of 2013 stated that there is an urgent need to find new development pathways that encourage creativity and innovation in the pursuit of inclusive, equitable and sustainable growth and development.

This plan proposes such a pathway for Donegal.

WHAT ARE THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES?

The definition of the Creative Industries is the subject of much debate, but at its most basic, the creative sector is made up of those industries that rely on human creativity to generate wealth.

This means, not just creative application - industries that develop products or services, primarily for the purpose of selling (traditional arts and crafts sectors and traditional skills eg. thatching, dry stone walling) - but also creative expression, covering such areas as music, visual and performing arts, video, film and broadcasting and creative technology that includes creative industries that rely mostly on technology and digital media - including internet and software, gaming and animation and graphic design and web design.

Donegal's creative industries sector embraces all of these and it was interesting to note, for instance, that of the creative businesses who attended and contributed to the Creative Coast review in September 2018, over 50% were from digital or technology- related sectors, as opposed to businesses from more traditional craft areas.

In itself that is an indicator of what has always been recognised - which is, that the creative industries are dynamic and in constant evolution.

However, while steps have been taken and progress made, Donegal's response to the new dynamic in creative industries has been fragmented, and limited in its collective actions and resource commitment.

To achieve the vision set out later in this document, it will be important for the Creative Coast to be:

- an integral cog in all aspects of creative, cultural and digital activities in the county,
- for it to embrace and include enterprises in the creative fields of all sizes, and
- that it is supported by all agencies and organizations that are stakeholders in the sector in the county.

While they do not always map easily onto established metrics, the contribution of creative businesses and the sector to employment and the local economy is significant.

THE VALUE OF THE CREATIVE AND DIGITAL SECTOR TO DONEGAL

A Quick Overview

184 CREATIVES ON CREATIVE COAST WEBSITE

Excluding those still not registered, those who registered at the start and who may no longer be in Donegal or in business and also excluding cultural creatives registered (although there are jobs in these too), an examination of the database still points to approximately 140 active creative businesses in the county.

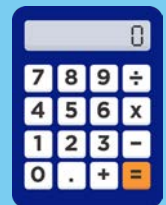


140 X 1 = 1 X 140

In terms of jobs value for this county, any one business with 140 employees would be viewed as a significant employer, but the mathematics remains that 140 x 1 creative jobs still gives the same total number as that 1 x 140.

IF THEY EACH ONLY MADE €20,000...

Turnover for these businesses does vary immensely, but even if each of those 140 businesses only turned over an average €20,000 per annum, that would still be a contribution of €2.8m each year to the economy in Donegal.



BUT IT'S MUCH MORE LIKE A CONTRIBUTION OF €9 MILLION!



The reality is that turnover for many creative business is significantly higher. There are also many more creative businesses who have not registered on the database. It would not be unrealistic to suggest a more accurate jobs figure of around 250 and as a result, a contribution of closer to €9 million* per annum.

CREATIVITY IS THE NEW ECONOMY

* 250 jobs based on an average turnover of 35,000

THE VALUE OF THE CREATIVE AND DIGITAL SECTOR TO DONEGAL

The creative industries is a dynamic economic sector in its own right and it plays an important role in the wider economy of Donegal although that contribution might not always be recognised. The fact remains that creative industries in Donegal account for hundreds of jobs and millions of euro in the economy of the county. The infographic on the previous page,* gives an indication not just of the number, but of the kind of contribution creative industries make.

The table outlines contribution from a creative economy here that has far from reached its full potential in terms of embracing the possibilities for expansion in the digital economy.

With that in mind, it seems both logical and appropriate to continue to provide support through the Creative Coast initiative to develop robust and innovative creative industries jobs that continue to contribute to the economy here. In doing so, it is vital that the psychology of creative talent should be better understood and accommodated in business support services. Patience is required and a balance needs to be struck when providing business support to creative businesses.

The practical steps that will create a sustainable business model are certainly vital, but the emotional intelligence that recognises the artistic inclination that underpins creative success has also to be nurtured and that this is part of the business development process.

Stories of highly successful businesses that emerge from back bedrooms or sheds, are arguably more common in the creative industries than in any other sector. We have businesses like that in Donegal now - and who knows where their potential will take them.?

Because of the work over the past three years, there is a momentum happening in the creative industries in the county. But it is a work in progress, and momentum needs to be maintained.



The business capacity of the creative sector in the county was highlighted in 2017 when of the 9 finalists in the Donegal Enterprise Awards, 4 were from creative industries. Two of the three awards were won by creative businesses. Donegal's overall Business of the Year Award winner went to Carndonagh Artist Sharon McDaid, while Thomas McLaughlin of Taddias clothing won best start-up.



VISION

Our vision for the sector in Donegal is: "To build a strong creative and digital economy in Donegal with businesses that are robust, confident, financially viable and collaboration-friendly, all impacting positively on the local economy in terms of job creation, as well as being pro-active and competitive on an international stage"

In developing this plan – based on feedback from the reviews and from interaction with the creative community in Donegal over the past three years – it is envisaged that this plan will be the framework for actions and interventions for the next three years and will lay out clear overall aims and objectives with a clear and concise series of well-defined actions.

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Aims

The three key aims of the plan are:

1. To support existing and emerging creative entrepreneurs with the desire, determination and diligence to build strong, sustainable, innovative and dynamic businesses.
2. To build the region's profile and reputation as place where the successful development of robust creative enterprises can flourish in a thriving creative economy.
3. To be the conduit that links industry, education and other relevant stakeholders with interests and activities in the creative sector in Donegal so the county makes the best possible use of existing assets and activities and to ensure the most appropriate supports for creative businesses are provided.

These Aims will be achieved through a series of Objectives and the interventions and required

supports, aligned with the set of clear action points outlined in more detail later in this document.

In developing our Vision, the importance of the overall role of creative industries in terms of cultural and social impacts must be acknowledged, as indeed must the importance of creativity in more general terms in sectors such as manufacturing, food and tourism all of which are of vital importance to the local economy.

Creative businesses, responsive to the current trends, play an important role in helping other businesses design better products and services, and market them more successfully. They also have a significant role to play in a well-developed cultural sector in attracting inward investment. Looking to the future it is vital that an environment is created that is attractive to young people so they can look to Donegal as a place to settle, pursue their careers, develop friendships, enjoy life, build businesses and raise families.

The Creative Coast initiative can play a major role in forging links with education and industry and work towards creating a vibrant creative environment that will encourage young people to stay and also be welcoming to both returning natives and those from elsewhere who want to come to live here.

CREATIVE COAST BUSINESS

“The Pear in Paper” owner Lynn Costello Erskine, decided in 2015 that it was time to follow her dream of creating select pieces of stationery and honest, hand-pulled prints. Restoring a rusty old letterpress platen from 1872 gave the perfect printing option to create both eco-friendly, handcrafted quirky greeting cards and original lino-prints using both the letterpress and lino-print techniques.

But Lynn quickly realised that in order to grow and build her business, the best place to look to was her Local Enterprise Office. From small beginnings in a workshop behind her house, Lynn with support from the Local Enterprise Office and Creative Coast, joined the Generate programme and has, over the past few years really grown her business.

Not only has she moved to new premises in the Craft Village in Donegal Town, she has developed new products, found new customers and placed her hand-crafted products into the world marketplace with a user-friendly, e-commerce website.



AIMS AND OBJECTIVES



The three years of the plan will involve a transition from the aims and objectives of the original Strategic Action Plan to a current support programme of actions outlined in this new strategic approach. This will not mean that there is a lack of practical activity from the outset and it would be envisaged that throughout the transition phase the continued progression and facilitation of successful programmes, supports and services will remain unaffected.

Going forward, the delivery of the supports detailed in the action points will depend on adequate resourcing. The three overall aims of this Strategy, identify the priority areas for action for the Vision is to be achieved. A series of Objectives are associated with each Aim. These Objectives reflect different aspects that must be addressed if each Aim is to be achieved. A number of actions, some of which are new, have also been suggested. The intertwining of these actions, programmes, projects or initiatives is required to deliver the Objectives, achieve the Aims, and thereby realise the Vision. An action point may serve to deliver more than one Objective and achieve more than one Aim. All serve to realise the Vision. The rationale for these Objectives is outlined as follows:

AIM 1

To support existing and emerging creative entrepreneurs with the desire, determination, capability and diligence to build strong, sustainable, innovative and dynamic businesses.

Objective:

To build creative businesses of scale and grow new markets.

Reasoning:

The scaling of Donegal's creative businesses is essential if they are to achieve their true potential. This will require these businesses to be market-driven, innovative in their products and services and be capable of scaling up in what they offer to allow them to step beyond their traditional and small-scale local markets, which present limited opportunities for growth.

These businesses require better understanding of customer needs and new markets, wider opportunities for international collaboration, and greater participation in targeted showcases and trade fairs.

AIM 1 CONTINUED

Objective:

Build networks based on attaining commercial objectives.

Reasoning:

Networks are critical to the success of creative businesses and informal networks are the norm in the creative industries. The plan envisages interventions to strengthen and grow informal and formal networks, as well as providing more opportunities to develop networking skills and experiences, and cultivate more formal networks.

Objective:

Utilise Shared Space

Reasoning:

The remote geography of Donegal and the nature of creative entrepreneurship results in many creative entrepreneurs finding themselves working in isolation. As well as looking to avail of the use of public and private spaces to grow and maintain creative clusters for networking and learning, the plan must examine ways of developing new shared spaces – both physical offline spaces and online shared space.

AIM 2

To build the county's profile and reputation as a place where successful and robust creative enterprises can develop and flourish in a thriving creative economy.

Objective:

Celebrate success

Reasoning:

By raising the profile of successful local creative entrepreneurs, showcasing their work to wider audiences and applauding their achievements, a brand of excellence can emerge for the county, raising Donegal's profile as a centre of creativity and innovation, and build wider public understanding of the investment being made in the creative economy in the county.

Objective:

Engage Young People

Reasoning:

By ensuring there is a greater engagement from young creative entrepreneurs, students and other interested young people in the delivery of the Creative Coast plan, it will ensure that it is future-focused and able to both deliver local creative jobs and build local creative businesses.

Because young people are particularly proficient as early adopters of technical innovation, their continued involvement and input will provide insights and indications of future trends and changes in both the sector and the market. This is in line with the recommendation from the ICT Fintech Skills Report that highlights a need for engagement with second level students.

AIM 3

To be the conduit that links industry, education and other relevant stakeholders with interests and activities in the creative sector in Donegal so the county makes the best possible use of existing assets and activities and to ensure that the most appropriate supports for creative businesses are provided.

Objective:

Build knowledge

Reasoning:

Understanding of the creative industries, and of what makes them different, necessitates particular approaches to addressing their development needs. Whilst responsibility for delivering the plan is likely to be led by Local Enterprise Office Donegal, that team will need to work closely with colleagues across several organisations to ensure that the Vision is realised. Those organisations include Donegal County Council (for example, the Culture Division, The Diaspora Project), Letterkenny IT, Colab, Donegal Digital, Donegal ETB, Udaras na Gaeltachta, Enterprise Ireland, Donegal Local Development Company, Inishowen Development Partnership, Regional Skills North West, etc...

Objective:

Maximise existing business support mechanisms.

Reasoning:

To build creative businesses that are sustainable, dynamic, innovative and truly competitive will need the expert knowledge and input of those supporting the progression of all business development within the county. To truly grow the reputation of Donegal's creative industries base to a more competitive and sustainable level, it is vital that all creative businesses - including those larger than those in the Local Enterprise Office portfolio - and the organisations that support them, should engage and contribute to achieving the vision. Working together the enterprise support ecosystem has a critical role to play in the development of a strong creative business sector in Donegal.

Objective:

Develop a cross-sectoral approach.

Reasoning:

The creative sector can play a major role in ensuring the greater competitiveness of other growth sectors in Donegal and it is imperative that projects with similar aims and objectives do not exist in isolation from each other. Donegal Digital for instance, a public-private partnership, has a vision of "Digitally literate communities co-building sustainable enterprises and societal services." That aim coincides with the Creative Coast vision of a strong creative and digital economy and their aims of local digital hubs and digital business models should link seamlessly with efforts to grow sustainable enterprises in Donegal. Similarly many of the aims and objectives of Donegal County Council's: Creative Ireland Donegal Culture and Creativity Strategy 2018 – 2022 have comparable ambitions as this plan for the further development of the creative industries. It is important that all connections to organisations with compatible or overlapping aims for the creative sector are recognised and developed.

AIM 3 CONTINUED

Objective:

Build the skills needed for growth.

Reasoning:

To better understand the skills needs of creative businesses in the region and ensure that the gaps inhibiting growth are addressed. The findings of the 2018 skills audit report by Regional Skills North West underlines how ICT jobs in the North West have grown by 72% in the seven years from 2008 to 2015. Looking to current and future needs, the report also highlights the value of proceeding resolutely and speedily with reform programmes. As tech skills permeate across all sectors of the economy it is vital for a project like the Creative Coast to continue to work with, Regional Skills NW, Donegal ETB, Letterkenny IT and others towards finding ways of forming the type of wider partnerships that can build both academic and business links and transfer knowledge into local creative businesses and cultural resources.

Objective:

Improve the use of regional cultural assets.

Reasoning:

It is important to ensure that Donegal's cultural scene works hand in hand with creative industries in the county to support their ongoing development and that the lines of communication and engagement are kept open with those in the creative cultural sector.

Cultural venues such as the Regional Cultural Centre, theatres, festivals, community and other organisations, play a significant role in developing both creative talent and exposing audiences and artists to new trends, and in many cases already support local creative businesses in developing local audiences and local markets. However, greater communication between units and organisations working within the sector would lead to improved collaborations across sub-sectors that could contribute immensely to sustained support for the successful development of local creative businesses.



AIM 3 CONTINUED

Objective:

Leverage more from third-level education

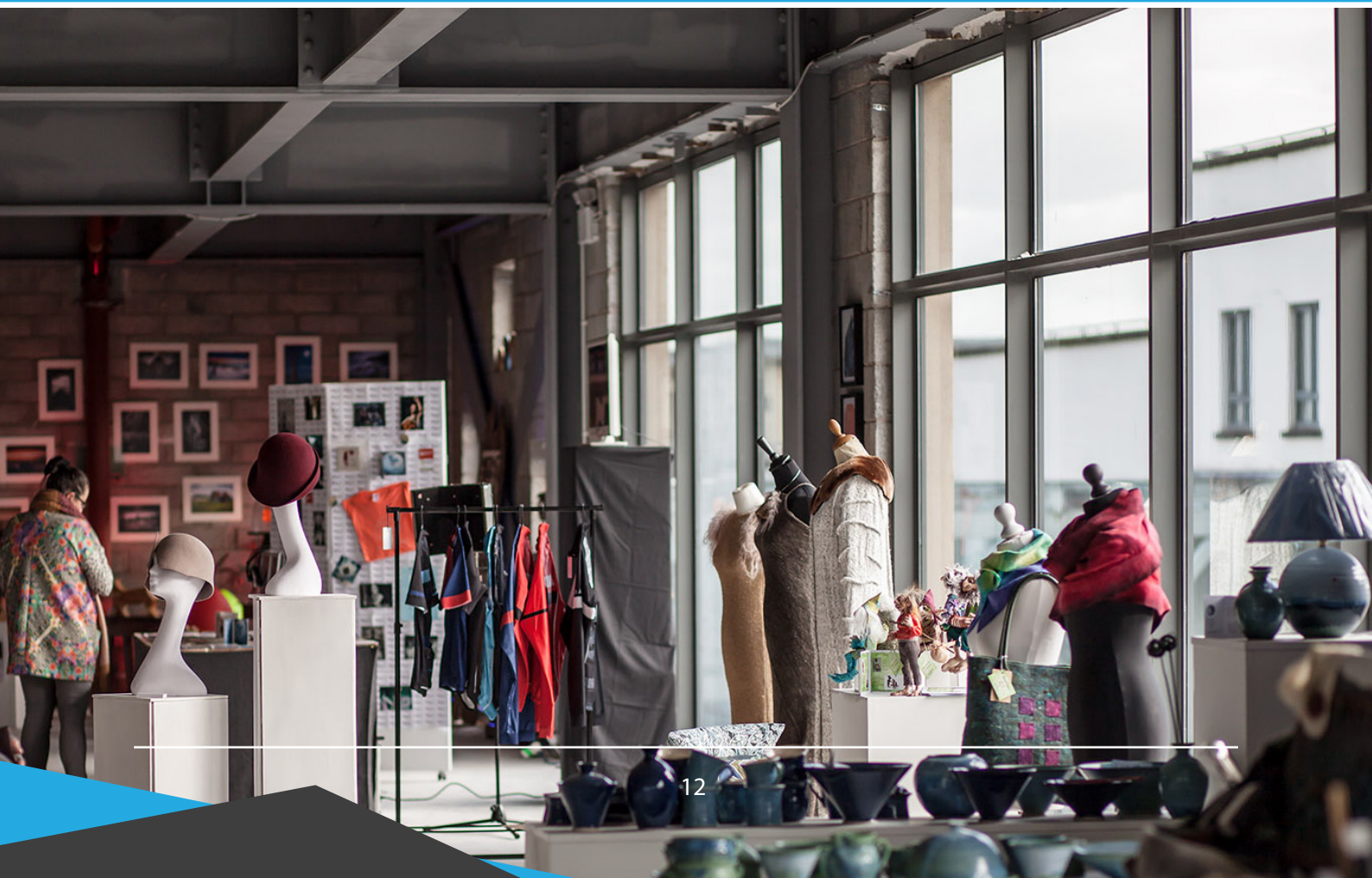
Reasoning:

The successful on-going and future development of the creative sector in Donegal will rely on young people choosing to pursue careers in the creative industries. The presence of Letterkenny IT in the county and NW College in Derry and the quality of courses which they offer will be major drivers for Donegal to build a strong and thriving clusters such as digital technology, fashion and design and FinTech.

The key role which the third level can and could play in the county must be realised if we are to succeed in driving these sub-sectors forward. With this in mind it is important that links with Letterkenny Institute of Technology (such as the strong links already formed with the Fashion & Promotion Programme) be further developed and supported.

This is also the case in the context of the creative digital and technology industries. It is vital to explore avenues on how links can be formed between education and industry to play a part in delivering this Strategy.

By ensuring programmes at the colleges in the creative fields are aware of and are aligned closely to the objectives of this Strategy, it can play a vital role building local skills, fostering creative talent and creative entrepreneurship and drawing students into the region from elsewhere.



CREATIVE COAST BUSINESS



Musician and former Riverdancer, Caitlín NicGabhann, found a way to combine technology with her passion for music, to teach concertina to students all over the world from her home in Gaioth Dobhair. The idea for the website came from her own experiences on the road.

Having travelled a lot over a 10-12 year period playing and teaching the concertina, she began to see a huge demand for lessons from people who had no access to a tutor, but who really wanted the lessons..

Caitlín came up with a solution of an online one-stop shop for those wanting to learn the concertina and has been astounded at how quickly the concept has grown.

She now has concertina students in places as far away as Australia, Canada, Japan and South Korea and right around the world.

ACTION POINTS

To achieve the Aims and Objectives that will lead to realising the Vision, the following six action points should be implemented.

1. Build Local Skills and Capacity.
2. Internationalise Our Creative Sector
3. Engage Entrepreneurs.
4. Drive Digital Development in non digital creative sectors.
5. Grow Sector-Specific Creative Networks.
6. Renaissance

The purpose, rationale and predicted outcomes from each one of these action points are outlined in more detail in the pages that follow.

1. BUILDING LOCAL SKILLS AND CAPACITY

Purpose

To grow the skills base and capacity in the region, thereby providing creative businesses with an environment within which they can develop and grow.

Reasoning

It is vital to ensure creative entrepreneurs and business owners in Donegal have the right skills to drive the development of the county's creative businesses. Without this it will be impossible to either build capacity or target new growth areas in the creative economy. Business skills within the creative sector are often weak and it is important to ensure creative businesses are aware of the training supports and services on offer from the Local Enterprise Office and other enterprise support agencies.

Actions

- Survey the skills of creative businesses in Donegal in terms of current and future needs and where applicable, cross-reference this with data already available from the 2018 survey of skills needs of the ICT and Fintech Sectors in the North West.
- Open lines of communication to ensure that education and industry is supported in providing the types of training that will ensure that the highly skilled workforce needed by the sector can be developed.
- Provide a tailor-made "start your own creative business" programme to ensure new creative start-ups get off on the best possible business footing.
- Work with Design and Craft Council of Ireland to provide development programmes that will strengthen and help develop existing craft businesses.

Outcomes

By surveying the current skills, a clearer picture of the skills capacities and needs can be developed. In turn this will better inform strategic investment decisions and support growth.

By utilising ongoing business supports and tailor-made SYOB programmes, creative businesses will be able to grow and provide new employment opportunities in Donegal. This approach will also lend itself towards young people looking to remain in or return to the county to pursue a career in the sector.

The one-to-one mentoring and business supports offered through programmes such as the GENERATE Programme will make businesses more sustainable and competitive and will grow the number employed in the creative sector in the county.

2. INTERNATIONALISE OUR CREATIVE SECTOR

Purpose

The scaling and internationalisation of firms are critical if the commercial potential of the county's creative industries is to be realised. At the same time there is a need to both better understand potential new markets and the changes within markets

Reasoning

The local market for Donegal's creative industries is small. For the sector to grow, the businesses here must look to new markets. Partnerships, current and new, are essential in this process.

Actions

1. Support the Fashion & Textile cluster to continue to build on major events such as their DEFINE showcase in June 2019 that exposed creatives to new sales opportunities and collaborations as a means of helping those in the industry here find new opportunities to scale up their business.
2. Support at least three craft businesses per year to attend the Design and Craft Council of Ireland Showcase international buyers event.
3. Work with Enterprise Europe Network to support three businesses from the Film & Digital creative cluster to attend international showcase/network events such as - Expo North Creative Industries Festival in Scotland.

Outcomes

Focusing on ways to grow and develop the creative industries so they act locally but think globally, will require actions that see creative businesses look towards forging deeper and more strategic collaborations. By growing the creative industries in Donegal onto a national and international platform, by celebrating the successes and telling the stories, the county's reputation for supporting the development of the creative economy will be magnified, in turn supporting greater opportunities for international collaboration and inward investment.



CREATIVE COAST BUSINESS

When Paul McMahon first came along to a meeting of the Art & Illustration Creative Cluster, two things quickly became apparent.

Firstly, that Paul was an extremely talented 3D artist, but secondly he needed support with his business acumen. Encouraged by the Creative Coast to continue to engage with the LEO, he attended and presented at the Film & Digital Creative Cluster and with ongoing interaction, he was eventually steered towards the supports and services on offer in the Local Enterprise Office that would help his business on a more secure footing.

As his business grew he was encouraged by the Local Enterprise Office to enter the contest for Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur where he was a Donegal finalist. He won several industry awards for his work in 2017, helping him to grow his business from Letterkenny while securing work from international clients such as Google, Snapchat, MicroSoft and Trivago.

He was also the runner-up in the Local Enterprise Awards Start-Up category in 2018.



3. ENGAGE ENTREPRENEUR

Purpose

In order to grow Donegal's reputation as a front-runner in developing a strong and sustainable economy in a largely rural area, it is important to look towards a cross-sectoral approach and to maximize the opportunities for networking and engagement that will inspire creative entrepreneurship and build a greater understanding of the potential of the region's creative economy.

Reasoning

To grow Donegal's reputation as forward looking and innovative in its outlook towards the creative industries, every opportunity should be taken to harness the knowledge and experience of existing creative entrepreneurs through on-going conversation that also engages the future-focused perspectives of young people.

One of the special initiatives prioritised as part of Donegal Culture and Creativity Strategy 2018 – 2022 includes:

To support the establishment of creative hubs working as a co-operative to share resources, skills and costs.

The idea of creative hubs has been a recurring theme in feedback from creative businesses engaged in the Creative Coast initiative in the first three years and it would be important that - in this respect - there is interaction, communication and information sharing between the Donegal County Council's Culture and Creativity Strategy and the Creative Coast initiative.

Actions

1. Support the Fashion & Textile cluster to continue to build on major events such as their DEFINE showcase in June 2019 that exposed creatives to new sales opportunities and collaborations as a means of helping those in the industry here find new opportunities to scale up their business.
2. Work with LYIT, ETB and other organisations to bridge the gap between education, industry and creative entrepreneurship. Use the Creative Clusters in Film & Digital; Artists and Makers and Fashion & Textiles as one way of encouraging collaboration and growing links.
3. Work with ETB, LYIT and other partners to devise a countywide second level Student Enterprise Programme that encourages entries not just in craft - but actively encourages entries in engineering, coding, digital and science-based ideas.

3. ENGAGE ENTREPRENEURS CONTINUED

Outcomes

Engaging the next generation of entrepreneurs in the delivery of the plan alongside the portfolio of current creative entrepreneurs, will empower and inform all interested creatives.

Moreover it will importantly include potential new young entrepreneurs who could be quicker to consider the dynamic changes driving the development of new business models, new networks and new markets.

The knock-on impacts of engaging with a dynamic mix of current and potentially new entrepreneurs should – because of the engagement of younger people on social media and new communications platforms – enhance the county’s global reputation as a region championing the development of the creative economy.

The spin-off in the longer term would be for more creative businesses to establish or relocate to and recruit in the county.



CREATIVE COAST BUSINESS

Close-knit sisters Elaine, Lyndsey and Zara McGonigle run their own glass studio - McGonigle Glass - in the Craft Village in Donegal Town but understand the value of also having a strong online presence to their business. Indeed, they say that one of the biggest changes over recent years has been the evolution of the internet and social media.

The whole idea of going online – social media - Facebook, Instagram etc – gives them another audience and customer base to think about, especially in the winter months when there are less tourists.

But, they say, having that ability to adapt, to see things that need change, is one of the reason for the success of their business.



4. DRIVE DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT IN NON DIGITAL CREATIVE SECTORS

Purpose

Successful creative businesses are user-focused, need to be nimble and have the ability to respond quickly to market trends and often depend on collaboration within and across disciplines. In this respect online communications, social networks and mobile communication are all vital tools in ensuring this responsive networked approach to doing business.

Reasoning

While there is no doubt that the global demand for new technology requires a clear focus in Donegal on the development of creative digital media businesses in a programme of long-term strategic development, it is also important for more traditional creative sectors to be aware of and to use and maximize the use of technological developments.

Actions

1. Re-design the Creative Coast website to serve as a useful information portal and communication tool for the creative industries in the county. This site would inform them of opportunities for training, advancement and collaborative opportunities to strengthen their business; to tell the success stories; and project the county as a place that encourages and welcomes new creative business.
2. Encourage 5 Creative Businesses per year to avail of Trading Online Vouchers to help them build an online e-commerce presence.
3. Host four workshops (one per quarter) on digital skills/social media - but aim these workshops at users from different levels: Beginners, Intermediate; Advanced.
4. Utilise opportunities to showcase Donegal strengths by using modern technologies such as the Live-Streaming selected events to a wider audience.

Outcomes

New business models emerge for local crafts makers, sustaining the resurgence in local craft making and build new marketing and business skills within the crafts sector.

New high value markets are identified, supporting the development of new – technology enabled – high growth creative businesses within the county.

An online creative community portal is created where creative entrepreneurs – working in isolation – can make contact with and be connected to - fellow creative industries within and beyond the county.

5. GROW SECTOR-SPECIFIC CREATIVE NETWORKS (CLUSTER)

Purpose

To build collaborative and networking opportunities with specific creative sectors, gain greater understanding of the knowledge base in those sectors and seek to address any skills gaps, thereby both facilitating and supporting the more effective development of the creative industries seeking to build dynamic businesses in these sectors.

Reasoning

Continuing and growing sector-specific creative clusters in the county provides an opportunity for creative businesses to come together to highlight and share experiences and through communication of needs, to subsequently tackle issues like artist isolation and at the same time enhance key skills development.

Actions

1. Hold at least one sector-specific cluster group meeting per quarter (4 per annum) for each of the following; Film & Digital; Fashion & Textiles: Artists and Makers.
2. Work with LYIT and other interested parties including the NW Regional Skills Forum to develop new clusters for Digital industries - for example - Animation.
3. Hold at least one wider networking event per year to encourage collaboration across different disciplines within the Creative Coast Network.
4. Identify suitable creative industries to take part in Diaspora trips and events.
5. Survey skill levels and requirements of creative industries and work with DCCI, LYIT, ETB and other organisations to devise training programmes to address any skills deficiencies.

Outcomes

Local education and training developed in line with industry needs to support skills and innovation in creative industries and Donegal becomes an emergent centre of excellence for creative industries.

New businesses established.

Additional job creation through small-scale manufacturing for the fashion & textiles industry.

Upskilling in the film and digital sectors to include further innovative interventions to address skills gaps and support the emergence of Donegal as not just a location for film, but also as a centre of excellence in terms of the skills available here.

High value markets for local crafts are identified, supporting the development of new – technology enabled – high growth crafts businesses within the region.

CREATIVE COAST BUSINESS

Thomas McLaughlin of Tadáias studied art at school but says it was being able to combine a mathematical and technical side to creativity that really drew him to the fashion industry.

Having worked with John Rocha in London and Dublin, Thomas decided to take the plunge and set out on his own setting up his cycling clothing business in Donegal. Despite the wealth of experience in the fashion industry, he says programmes like Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur were invaluable to give him a better understanding and focus on the business side of things.

Zoning in on a niche market that sees him combine his passion for cycling with his career, Thomas has seen his brand Tadáias grow steadily over the past few years. Thomas now has sales all over the world and with online shopping has happy customers in places like Japan, Australia, South Africa, Italy, America and South Korea – to name but a few.



6. RENAISSANCE

Purpose

To look – not just at opportunities to bring Donegal’s creative industries offering beyond the local, to new audiences and markets - but also and more significantly, towards promoting Donegal as a centre of creative excellence to encourage creative entrepreneurs to come home to the county or to come to the county and establish businesses here - and to highlight the stories of those who do so, in an effort to encourage more to follow suit.

Reasoning

Developing new markets, new audiences and new creative business collaborations within and beyond the region requires a greater connectedness. It is time to build support mechanisms in a phased manner allowing time to develop a deeper understanding of the creative sector and where the greatest potential for growth lies.

Actions

1. Use the Creative Coast website to tell the success stories of creative industries in Donegal and paint a picture for the outside audience of the county’s healthy creative industries ecosystem.
2. Encourage 5 Creative Businesses per year to avail of Trading Online Vouchers to help them build an online e-commerce presence and increase the visibility of their skills and services.
3. Map the locations, dates and times of creative-led festivals including Earagail Arts, Remote Photo, Northern Xposure, Ballyliffin Film Festival, Allingham Arts Festival and others and work with relevant partners including tourism promotion and the Donegal Diaspora project to highlight the festival offerings.
4. Use the skills and technology available to live-stream selected events -highlighting creative excellence.
5. Support an application for and organisation of a Digital Nomad Conference in the county.

Outcomes

Capacity within local creative businesses will be developed further, new opportunities will be envisioned and realised.

Graduates, returned natives and new comers attracted to the county, seeking to establish creative businesses in Donegal.

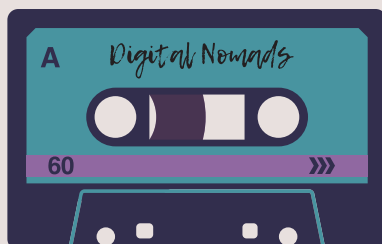


RECORDABLE RESULTS....

It is important to recognise that achieving the overall aim of the vision set out for the Creative Coast is a longer-term project and outcomes of that are outlined elsewhere. Within the shorter term the following are just some recordable results that will help move forward towards that goal.



The launch during Local Enterprise Week 2019 of the book and film "Donegal - We Create," were success stories highlighting the diversity of the Creative Industries in the county. Every opportunity should be used at creative and other business events to show these and highlight how creative industries success is possible in the county.



Digital Nomad conferences are constantly seeking new locations and hosting such a conference would give an opportunity to position the county as an ideal location for international workers in digital industries to establish a base. A public-private partnership to utilise shared spaces under Donegal Digital initiative should try to maximise this.



Business skills within the creative sector are often weak and it is important to ensure all new creative businesses understand the importance of scale and internationalisation. A tailor-made 'Start Your Own Creative Business' in 2020 would develop start-ups with potential to move beyond lifestyle stage.



The DEFINE Showcase of fashion and design by the Fashion & Textiles Creative Cluster in June 2019 promoted the growing fashion & textiles industry in Donegal and put local designer/makers and student designers (the future of the industry in Donegal) on a new platform of awareness. The first of its kind in Ireland, the event has the potential to be the catalyst for a regeneration of traditional skills in Donegal. With a growing global focus on ethical fashion, the contemporary design from Donegal has huge international potential.



The conclusion of the pilot programme 'Generate' in September 2019 has resulted in a cohort of creative and digital businesses that are more robust and ready to scale up and internationalise. That programme had clear outputs required from the outset and the end of Generate provides an opportunity to critically examine it in terms of its strengths and weaknesses. This should accommodate the application of the best aspects of the programme to future supports.



Develop a new website. It is important to have a digital portal that portrays all that is positive about the skills and potential that exists in Donegal. In doing so, not only will the creative industries in Donegal have a shared online space for information, collaboration and even just communication, but those thinking of establishing here can get some sense of the skills and potential that exists. Longer term this should be of benefit to all businesses in the creative/tech and digital sectors, while helping as a selling point for other enterprise promotion programmes.

RECORDABLE RESULTS CONTINUED



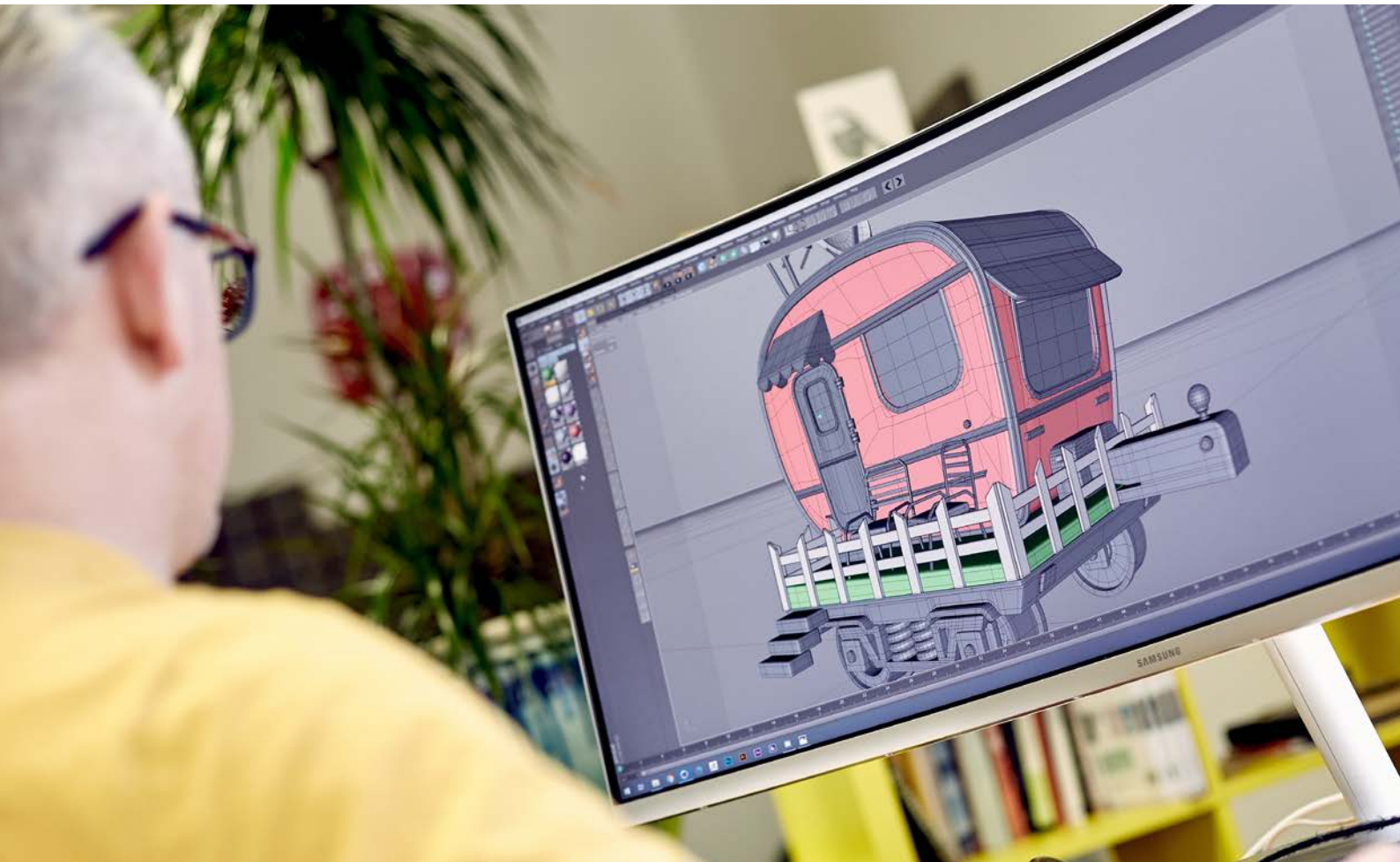
Conducting an audit of the skills and skill requirements of the creative industries will help identify skills gaps that are currently hindering growth. A starting point should be the examination of the skills required in the Film Industry to help drive the county as a location where skilled Film industry professionals are available to work.



Continuing to build and grow the networking groups (clusters) with opportunities across Donegal will provide opportunities to discover new creative talent in the county. Already the cluster meetings have unearthed many new businesses all with potential to grow significant enterprises in Donegal in the digital, tech and fashion and textiles sectors.



To bring creative industries in Donegal to a new approach to markets, a target of 10 businesses a year engaged in international trade fairs or other international sales opportunities. Examine all avenues available through Enterprise Europe Network and Diaspora Project and Design and Crafts Council initiatives to make this happen.



SUMMARY OF AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTION POINTS

Vision

A strong creative and digital economy in Donegal with businesses that are robust, confident, financially viable and collaboration-friendly, all impacting positively on the local economy in terms of job creation, as well as being pro-active and competitive on an international stage.

Aims

1. To support existing and emerging creative entrepreneurs with the desire, determination and diligence to build strong, sustainable, innovative and dynamic businesses.
2. To build the region's profile and reputation as place where the successful development of robust creative enterprises can flourish in a thriving creative economy.
3. To be the conduit that links industry, education and other relevant stakeholders with interests and activities in the creative sector in Donegal so the county makes the best possible use of existing assets and activities and to ensure the most appropriate supports for creative businesses are provided.

Objectives

- To build creative businesses of scale and grow new markets.
- Build commercial networks
- Utilise Shared Space
- Celebrate success
- Engage Young People
- Build knowledge
- Maximise existing business support mechanisms
- Develop a cross-sectoral approach
- Build the skills needed for growth
- Make better use of regional cultural assets
- Leverage more from third-level education

Action Points

1. Build Local Skills and Capacity
2. Internationalisation
3. Engaging Entrepreneurs
4. Drive Digital Development in non digital creative sectors.
5. Local Clusters
6. Renaissance Project



HOW ACTION POINTS CAN MEET SEVERAL OBJECTIVES

ACTION POINTS	OBJECTIVES										
	Build scale and grow markets	Build commercial networks	Utilise Shared Space	Celebrate success	Engage Young People	Build knowledge	Maximise business support	Develop a cross-sectoral approach	Build the skills needed for growth.	Make better use of cultural assets.	Leverage more from 3rd Level ed.
Build Local Skills and Capacity	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Internationalisation of creative industries	●	●		●		●	●		●		●
Engaging Entrepreneurs			●		●		●	●			●
Drive Digital Development	●	●		●	●	●	●		●		●
Local Clusters	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Renaissance Project	●	●		●	●						●

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN FOR
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2019-2022



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