



County Wicklow Partnership



COUNTY WICKLOW CRAFT STRATEGY

2023 - 2027

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The European Agricultural Fund
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Funded by The Department of Rural
& Community Development

This project is funded through the LEADER Rural Development Fund 2014 - 2020,
County Wicklow Partnership and Wicklow County Council.



Mark Wilkes "Reflection Ring"
Image: Studio Lugh

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Michael Calnan "Bird"
Image: Michael Calnan

1.0 FORWARD

County Wicklow Partnership is delighted to present this Five-Year Strategy for the development of the Craft Sector in Co. Wicklow.

Wicklow has always shown a deep and strong connection with the discipline and practice of craft and its processes. With an estimated 400 Craft Makers, Designers and Practitioners calling Wicklow their home, this is certainly a valuable resource which offers a huge contribution to the economic and cultural wealth of the county.

From the Olde Shillelagh Stick Makers, historic Arklow Pottery and the Mill at Avoca, it too in turn offers an additional flavour of attraction to the many thousands of tourists that visit the county annually.

While Wicklow has an abundance of craft activity, it has however, been revealed through the development of this strategy, that those working in the area of craft, have at times a sense of being "fractured and disconnected", not only within their community of fellow workers but also within the wider sphere.

This strategy provides a clear strategic roadmap forward to address this. It will help to create a more cohesive, collaborative and supportive network for those working in the traditional and contemporary Craft Sectors and help to enhance the current offering within the sector as a whole.

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Evelyn Murray (County Wicklow Partnership) for overseeing the research process, and the work of Brian O' Regan (Arts Leaders Associates) who completed the research and who devised and produced this County Wicklow Craft Strategy.

Ian Daly
Chairperson
County Wicklow Partnership



Chaim Factor: "Oyster Knife with Yew Handle"
 Image: Chaim Factor

2.0 INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

In August 2021, the Design & Crafts Council of Ireland (DCCI) published a report which found that the “craft and design-intensive sectors” and other design-focused sectors generated over €53 billion in turnover in 2019, which would be the equivalent of 6.7% of Ireland’s total business turnover in 2018¹. The same report found that over 100,000 people are employed within the broad “craft and design-focused sectors”, which collectively generated €2.9 billion in Gross Added Value in 2019. This represented an increase of 111% since 2012.

Today, the Craft & Design Sector in Ireland is flourishing despite the setbacks of the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing challenges of Brexit. Despite these issues, over 40% of DCCI's client base reported increases in 2020 revenue compared to the previous year, and it is estimated that the "craft and design-intensive sectors" alone have the potential to generate almost €14 billion in turnover by 2026².

Within the Co. Wicklow context, there are estimated to be over 400 Craft Makers, Designers & Practitioners operating in the county, across a wide variety of different craft practices on both a full-time and part-time basis³. There is also a strong connection with traditional and contemporary crafts in Wicklow, from the Olde Shillelagh Stick Makers and historic Arklow Pottery to the refurbished traditional Mill at "Avoca", a brand which is now recognised throughout the world.

Wicklow’s tourism offering is also closely linked to craft, with almost all of the major tourist attractions and places of interest including Glendalough, Avoca, Russborough House, Powerscourt and Kilruddery House all showcasing Irish/Wicklow-made craft products. A considerable number of renowned full-time Craft Makers & Designers proudly call Wicklow their home and there are also significant numbers of part-time Craft Practitioners dotted throughout the county. The research and engagement conducted has highlighted a vibrant, diverse but somewhat fractured Craft Sector in Wicklow.

The purpose of this Craft Strategy is to provide a strategic framework for the development of a thriving, mature and sustainable Craft Economy, a collaborative and visible infrastructure for craft and a support network which encourages and nurtures Wicklow’s diverse group of full-time and part-time Craft Makers, Designers, Artists, Artisans, Educators and Mindfulness Craft Practitioners.

This strategy aims to bring the fractured facets of Wicklow’s Craft Sector together, to create a more cohesive and supportive network which provides opportunities for growth and synergy, combining existing resources and enhancing the current offering within the sector.



Gunvor Anhøj "Birdbath"
Image: Roland Paschhoff

1. Design & Crafts Council of Ireland (2021): "Economic Impact Assessment of the Design and Crafts Sector of Ireland"

2. Ibid

3. Estimate based on responses to the Co. Wicklow Craft Maker/Designer Survey (2021)

Based on in-depth research and engagement with the sector, the findings clearly demonstrate the significant value of Wicklow's Craft Sector. However, it has also highlighted the many challenges faced by Wicklow's Craft Makers & Designers. This Craft Strategy for Co. Wicklow provides the framework to address these challenges, to consolidate resources and to build a sustainable, diverse, inclusive and visible Craft Economy for Wicklow.

This framework, comprising Five Strategic Priorities and Three Strategic Pillars, is locally focused but situated within an international context. It incorporates ideas, models, practices and principles which have been effectively implemented in other parts of the country and in different parts of the world.

In working towards a new vision for Craft & Design in Wicklow, the Three Strategic Pillars outline the proposed strategic objectives from a conceptual perspective, and the Five Strategic Priorities present the specific actionable projects or initiatives through which these objectives could be achieved.

This Craft Strategy for Co. Wicklow represents a significant paradigm shift from the way that the Irish Craft Sector is currently represented, supported and valued. It acknowledges the economic metrics that the Craft Sector has come to be measured against, but it also taps into a deeper sense of value, highlighting the social, community-based and wellness benefits of craft as a practice rather than just as a product.

This interconnected, interdependent and synergistic framework is more powerful than merely the sum of its parts, and as each Strategic Priority is implemented, the outcomes of one priority become the input of the next. As more priorities are activated and realised, the power of those preceding it grows and grows. This collective county-wide craft ecosystem has the potential to be fully sustainable and could also be replicated in other counties.

Following a public tender process, Arts Leaders Associates Ltd was appointed to undertake the project to research and develop a Five-Year Craft Strategy for Co. Wicklow. The approach taken involved a three-stage process, beginning with a "Research & Engagement" phase, followed by a period of "Strategic Analysis & Development" and then the final stage of "Strategic Planning & Implementation". The following chapter presents some of the key activities, findings and insights across these three stages and outlines the core strategic actions proposed.

The team of consultants from Arts Leaders Associates who were directly involved in this project were Brian O' Regan (Founder & Director), Elaine Falzon (Research Associate) & Meabh Ring (Craft Business Consultant).



Geoffrey Healy Pottery "Moon Jar"
Image: Pab Cahill



Wicklow Willow "Dome"
Image: SDCC

3.0 SUMMARY OF ACTIVITY & STRATEGY OVERVIEW

3.1 Research & Engagement

The first stage of this project involved in-depth primary and secondary research, in order to develop a detailed understanding of Wicklow's Craft Sector and the diverse challenges, opportunities, people, groups and resources which make up the complex craft ecosystem.

Work began on the Co. Wicklow Craft Strategy in February 2021, and over the next few months more than 40 individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse range of Craft Practitioners in Wicklow and beyond. In addition to interviews with representatives from the key stakeholder groups for this project (County Wicklow Partnership, Wicklow County Council and the Local Enterprise Office), virtual meetings were also arranged with representatives from Craft & Design organisations and groups in Ireland and internationally. These included the Design & Crafts Council of Ireland (DCCI), Cork Craft & Design, Wexford Craft Trail, Donegal Designer Makers, Canadian Crafts Federation, Norwegian Crafts, Malta Craft Foundation and many others.

Two online surveys were also used to gather further insights from a wider group of Craft Makers/Designers and Craft Consumers with a total of over 200 responses contributing towards the two survey reports, which are included as Appendices to this document. While it is acknowledged that the findings from these surveys are not fully representative of the broad spectrum of Craft Makers, Designers, Retailers and Consumers in Wicklow, the data provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by Craft Makers/Designers as well as showing a disjointed, fractured and often misunderstood Craft Sector.

The primary aim at this stage was to engage directly with local, Wicklow-based Craft Makers & Designers to gain an understanding of the challenges and opportunities at county level, to compare these with other established groups and organisations in Ireland and to assess the national policies and infrastructures supporting craft in Ireland within an international context. This approach led to some key findings around the nuances and challenges in relation to the paradigm through which the Craft Sector is perceived, not just in Wicklow but in Ireland as a whole.

A total of four focus groups were also held during Stage 2 and Stage 3 to gather feedback on some of the proposed actions and to gain further insights into the sector. Individual Craft Practitioners, representatives from craft groups, organisations, retailers, craft enthusiasts, consumers and local authority representatives were all consulted throughout the process through these focus groups, interviews and the online surveys.

During this initial stage, four case studies were also developed, and these have been continuously expanded throughout the process. These case studies provide important insights relating specifically to the Five Strategic Priorities, and are referenced within the relevant priority area in this document. Insights from primary research also informed an alternative Craft Categorisation Model, which presents a different perspective on how craft products and practices could be defined and understood.

3.2 Strategic Analysis & Development

At Stage 2, the information and data gathered during the Research & Engagement Stage was examined within the broader strategic environment. A number of additional studies were carried out including a SWOT & PESTLE Analysis, TOWS Matrix, Stakeholder Analysis and Resource Audit which drew upon the findings from the surveys, semi-structured interviews and secondary/desk research.

The SWOT Analysis outlines the perceived internal Strengths & Weaknesses of the sector, as well as identifying the external Opportunities & Threats which may affect it. The key strengths included Wicklow's strong tourism offering, its location and proximity to Dublin, the long-standing tradition of craft in the county and the quality, passion and resilience of its Craft Makers/Designers. The key weaknesses included a lack of county-wide collaboration, the prevalence of "lone workers", the lack of a county-wide strategy or joined-up thinking and the lack of visibility of the sector.

The impact of Covid-19 and Brexit on the Craft Sector was also examined, and some of the key challenges identified include the loss of significant retail opportunities due to cancelled craft events and markets, the forced closure of non-essential retail, increased costs of import and export and shipping delays for products and raw materials.

A group called the Wicklow Craft Foundation (WCF) had already been established prior to the commencement of this project with the aim of developing a more joined-up, collaborative approach for the Craft Sector in Wicklow. Ongoing engagement with the Wicklow Craft Foundation was fundamental in the development of the Strategic Pillars and Priorities outlined in this strategy.

The first focus group included members from the WCF, along with other influential individuals from a broad spectrum of Craft/Design practices. The Wicklow Craft Foundation have been identified as the key drivers behind the implementation of this Craft Strategy, and the WCF will also act as the membership group or database of Craft Makers/Designers referred to in this document.

3.3 Strategic Planning & Implementation

Data generated from primary research, combined with the information gathered through secondary/desk research informed the development of Five Strategic Priorities and Three Strategic Pillars, which underpin the Craft Strategy for Co. Wicklow.

These Priorities and Pillars outline an ambitious, but strategically robust and viable model for the development of a sustainable, interdependent Craft Economy in Wicklow. They draw upon the findings of in-depth research and strategic development, with insights from a broad range of stakeholders including Craft Makers/Designers, policy makers, funders, retailers, educators, mindfulness practitioners, local councillors and others.

The Five Strategic Priorities are presented in order of importance, rather than in order of activation. This reflects the highest priorities of the hundreds of Craft Makers & Designers who contribute to the sector. These priorities consolidate existing resources where possible, and utilise the networks and resources available within the specific municipal districts across the county.

With the aim of presenting a strong case for support, the perceived "Return on Investment" from funding allocated to the Craft Sector was an important consideration within the economic context. In 2015, the Design & Crafts Council of Ireland (DCCI) delivered the "Irish Design 2015" (ID2015) programme and the project evaluation reported a return on investment of 1,000%, based on funding of €5 million with a benefit to the economy of €55 million⁴.

Although this return on investment may not be as significant in relation to funding allocated within Wicklow, it clearly demonstrates the value of the sector and its potential to deliver significant returns to the local and national economy.

3.4 Notes

This document is accompanied by a detailed "Business Development Plan", which provides a more in-depth research report, detailed descriptions of each of the Strategic Priorities as well as further operational planning documents and estimated cost projections. Also accompanying this document are a number of appendices, including the Craft Maker/Designer and Craft Consumer Survey Reports, the four case studies, proposed timelines and estimated costs as well as information about some of the potential sources of funding.

This Craft Strategy for Co. Wicklow has been developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, and ongoing engagement with the Craft Sector. The diverse range of voices and stakeholders represented here, is considered essential to the long-term success of the strategy. It is envisaged that the Wicklow Craft Foundation (WCF) would be central to this ongoing engagement initiative, with the support of the proposed Craft Strategy Group (CSG) and Craft Liaison Officer (CLO).

Some of the terms used in this document, such as "Wicklow Craft & Design", "Master Crafter", "Wicklow Native" and "Craft Cluster" are suggestive only and it is assumed that the final terminology adopted would be discussed and agreed between members of WCF and the CSG. The terms "Craft Maker/Designer" and "Craft Practitioner" are also used interchangeably, and are used to represent the many individuals and groups working and engaging with the broad spectrum of Craft & Design in any capacity.

This strategy is not meant as a conclusive, prescriptive or definitive document and it is anticipated that some aspects of the planning and delivery may require alternative approaches during the implementation stages.

Arts Leaders Associates would like to sincerely thank everyone who has contributed to this Craft Strategy, and we would also like to thank County Wicklow Partnership and Wicklow County Council who commissioned this project.

4. Design & Crafts Council of Ireland (2017); "ID2015 - Making Design Matter"

COUNTY WICKLOW CRAFT STRATEGY

Our vision is for “A Visible & Viable Craft Economy”, which nurtures “A Collaborative, Connected & Supported Craft Community” and which contributes to the development of “An Innovative, Knowledgeable & Contemporary Craft Sector”

STRATEGIC VISION

STRATEGIC PILLARS

A Visible & Viable Craft Economy

To create a visible and viable craft economy in Co. Wicklow by raising awareness of Wicklow’s Craft Sector, stimulating the local economy through craft/design and fostering a deep appreciation of locally produced craft.

A Collaborative, Connected & Supported Craft Community

To foster a collaborative approach within Wicklow’s Craft Sector, encouraging and facilitating coherent networks and ensuring that the broad spectrum of Craft Makers/Designers are represented, supported and valued.

An Innovative, Knowledgeable & Contemporary Craft Sector

To stimulate innovative thinking, and support knowledge creation while protecting and showcasing Wicklow’s craft tradition.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1. Wicklow Craft Clusters Network

A visible and collaborative network of Craft/Design facilities which could provide the possibility of flexible workshop spaces, retail opportunities, educational activities, events and visitor experiences where feasible and appropriate.

2. Co. Wicklow Craft Trail

A digitally-native and accessible Craft Trail which promotes Wicklow’s Craft Makers/Designers and encourages visitors to discover the range of craft-based activity in the county.

3. Craft Strategy Group & Craft Liaison Officer

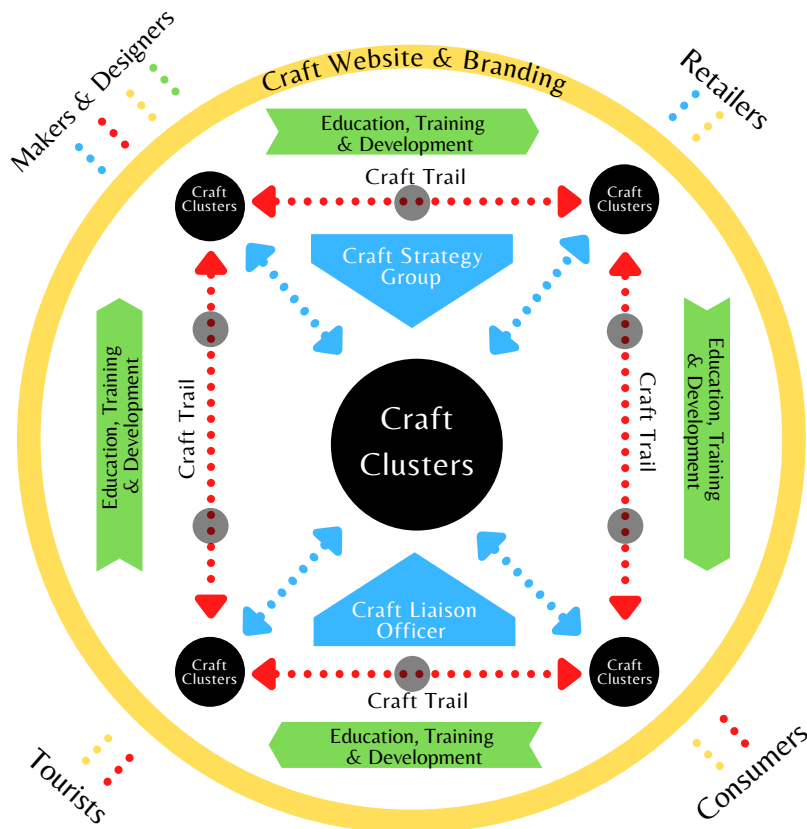
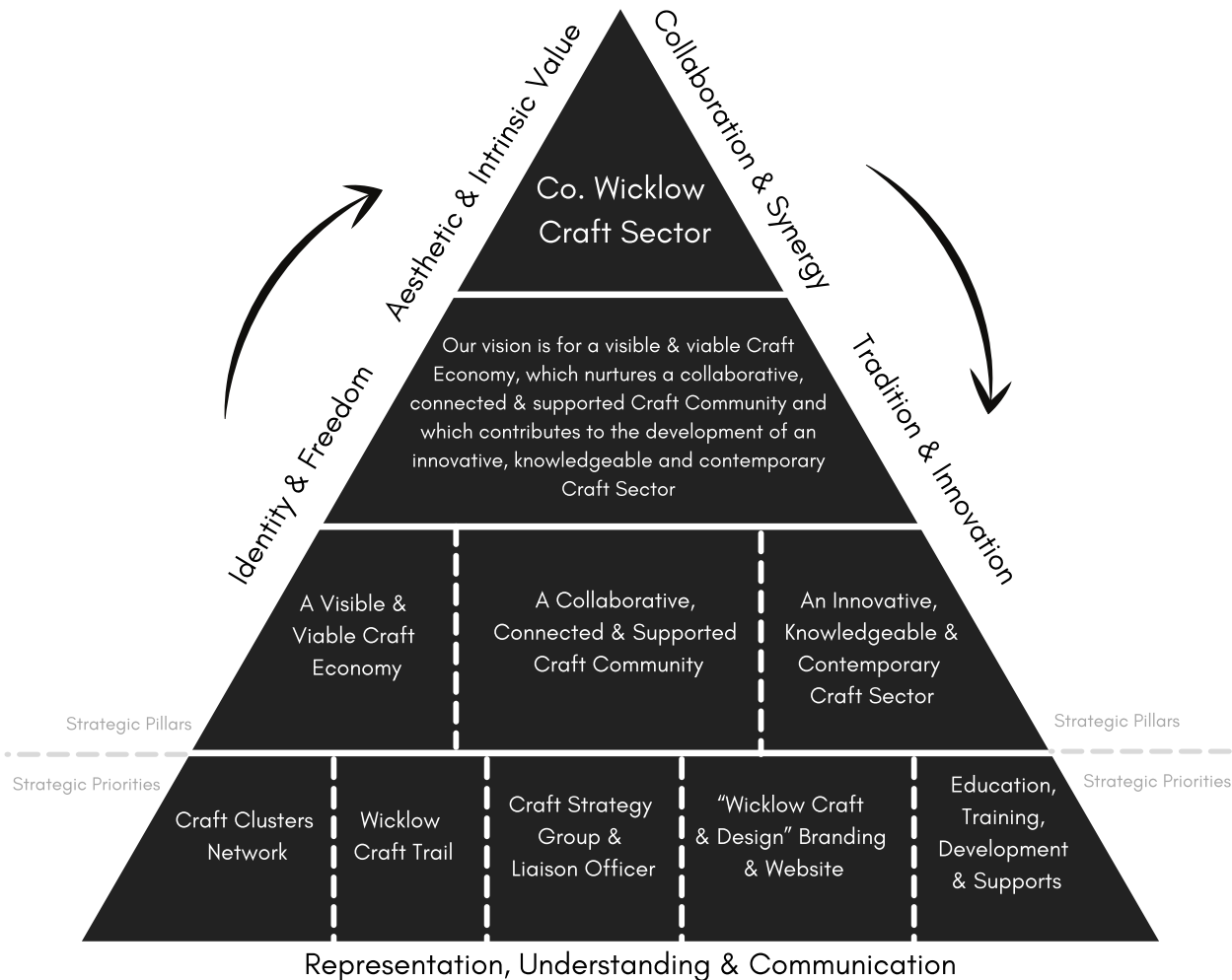
A synergistic, diverse and inclusive group with the sole purpose of implementing this Craft Strategy. Once appointed, the Craft Liaison Officer would also take a leading role in the development of further initiatives to enhance the Craft Sector beyond the strategy timeframe.

4. “Wicklow Craft & Design” Branding & Website

A recognisable and contemporary brand which represents Wicklow’s Craft Makers/Designers, and a fully integrated website which encompasses all aspects of this Craft Strategy.

5. Education, Training, Development & Supports

An innovative and supportive suite of opportunities which complements current provision and which aims to support the development of individual craft practices, techniques and skills.



4.0 RESEARCH METHODS & KEY FINDINGS

During Stage 1 of this project, a number of research methods were used to gather the data required to inform the development of the Craft Strategy. Initial secondary/desk research informed the local, national and international context of the Craft & Design Sector, and subsequent primary research consisted of more than 40 semi-structured interviews (conducted virtually), two online surveys and four focus group sessions. The key findings which emerged from this research have directly informed the development of this Craft Strategy, and further meetings and conversations provided valuable feedback on the Strategic Pillars & Priorities.

4.1 Research Methods

4.1.1 Secondary/Desk Research

At the beginning of the Research & Engagement stage, a number of key documents and online resources were reviewed and studied in order to build a firm understanding of the Craft & Design Sector as a whole, both on a local, national and international level.

This secondary/desk research continued throughout the strategic development process, and additional documentation was sourced where required to inform specific areas of interest, including around the economic structures which support the sector, the role that Craft/Design plays in the tourism offering of an area, as well as the specific policies in different regions and countries relating to Craft & Design.

Some of these key documents include...

- Design & Crafts Council of Ireland (DCCI): "*Economic Impact Assessment of the Design and Crafts Sector of Ireland*" (Grant Thornton, 2021), "*Design4Growth Report*" (2019) & "*Profile of Business in the Traditional Design Sectors*" (Con Kennedy, 2016)
- Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation: "*Policy Framework for Design in Enterprise in Ireland*" (2016)
- Expert Group of Future Skills Needs (EGFSN): "*Together for Design*" (2020) & "*Winning by Design*" (2017)
- Indecon/DCCI: "*Economic Significance & Potential of the Crafts Sector in Ireland*" (2010), & "*Creative Clusters - Economic Analysis of the Current Status and Future Clustering Potential for the Crafts Industry in Ireland*" (2013)
- Scandinavian Design Group in Ireland: "*Design in Ireland*" (1961)
- World Crafts Council Europe: "*Manifesto Towards a European Strategy for Craft*" (2019)

4.1.2 Primary Research

Primary research included over 40 semi-structured interviews, two online surveys and four focus groups. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, all interviews and the majority of focus group sessions were held virtually. Each interview lasted between 60-90 minutes, and detailed notes were taken throughout each interview. Interviews were not recorded or transcribed directly.

4.1.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

A broad range of candidates were invited to participate in the semi-structured interviews, and the specific questions asked varied from person to person depending on their unique perspectives, experiences and role within the Craft Sector. The data generated from these interviews was used to inform the questions and themes of the subsequent online survey and provided key insights which contributed to the development of the Strategic Pillars and Priorities which form the framework of this Craft Strategy.

On a local level, Wicklow Craft Makers/Designers were asked about the challenges that they faced in building a sustainable business, the supports that they received, the impacts of Covid-19 and Brexit on their practices and general perceptions of the wider Wicklow Craft Sector. Interviewees were also asked about their needs, any perceived gaps in support and what they thought would enhance the sector for Craft Makers/Designers, as well as for consumers, tourists, retailers and other stakeholders.

Representatives from other local and regional craft groups including Cork Craft & Design, Wexford Craft Trail, Made in Sligo, Kilkenny Design and others were asked to share their insights and experiences of establishing craft groups, creating craft trails, developing regional craft brands and the challenges around sustaining these initiatives.

Policy makers, funders and resource organisations both within Co. Wicklow and on a national level, were also asked about their perceptions of the Craft Sector. Representatives from organisations including the Design & Crafts Council of Ireland, Wicklow Local Enterprise Office, County Wicklow Partnership, Wicklow Arts Office, Visual Artists Ireland, Carlow LEO (regarding Craft Hub EU project) and Wicklow Tourism provided insights into the broader environmental context in which the Craft Sector exists, as well as the structures and priorities of funding programmes which support the sector.

The primary goal was to devise a Craft Strategy which addressed the local needs in Wicklow, but one which was also situated within the context of international models of Craft/Design policy and support. Insights from these interviews led to an exploration of the concept of “Artist versus Entrepreneur”. It was observed that in many other countries, Craft Practitioners are often perceived more as artists than as entrepreneurs, which appeared to contrast with the Irish approach which focused more on economic metrics.

In order to gain a better understanding of the international context, interviews and virtual meetings were arranged with representatives for organisations including the Canadian Crafts Federation, Norwegian Crafts, Visual Arts & Craft Strategy (VACS Australia) and the Malta Crafts Foundation.

4.1.2.2 Online Surveys

Informed by data collected through semi-structured interviews and secondary research, two in-depth online surveys were created. The first was aimed at Craft Makers & Designers and the second focused on Craft Consumers & Retailers. Both surveys were launched on 6th May 2021 and remained open until 30th May 2021, a total period of 25 days. The survey was conducted online using the Survey Monkey platform and the primary survey links were based on www.artsleaders.ie.

A press release was issued with the survey and both surveys were promoted by the Local Enterprise Office in Wicklow, the Design & Crafts Council of Ireland, Wicklow County Arts Office, Wicklow Tourism and Wicklow News as well as other promoters in email newsletters, direct mailing and on social media. The surveys were also sent directly to each of the Craft Makers/Designers who had been spoken to during the interview phase as well as being sent by the DCCI directly to their registered Wicklow members.

The Craft/Designer Survey received a total of 121 responses, and the Craft Consumer Survey received 84 responses making a total of 205 responses across both surveys. The data was analysed, and two detailed Survey Reports were prepared. The findings from the surveys reinforced many of the insights and ideas which had emerged during the interviews and secondary research. An overview of the key findings is provided on the following pages, and the full Survey Reports are included as Appendices.

4.1.3 Case Studies

Using a combination of primary and secondary research, four in-depth case studies were developed throughout the entire process and the final focus of these case studies relate directly to the proposed Strategic Pillars presented here. The full case studies are also included as Appendices.

Case Study No. 1

Craft Clusters

“Creative Hub at Bull Ring Mall” & “Benchspace”



Case Study No. 2

Craft Trails

“Wexford Craft Trail”



Case Study No. 3

Craft Collectives & Local Branding

“Cork Crafts & Design” & “Made in Kilkenny”



Case Study No. 4

The International Perspective

“Canada Crafts Federation”



4.2 Craft Maker/Designer Profile

Based on data from the Craft Maker/Designer Survey, this Profile presents an overview of a "typical" Craft Practitioner operating in Co. Wicklow. It is acknowledged that this is not representative of the entire population of Craft Makers & Designers, nor does it account for all of the nuances of different practices.

4.2.1 Geo-demographics & Work Structure

- Mostly Female (81%), aged 45-54 (37%) with no children under 18 years old (55%) and living in a Large Town/Urban Centre (44%) on Wicklow's East Coast.
- Operating under No Formal Structure (50%) or as a Sole Trader (41%) and working on their Craft/Design practice on their own (84%) and from their own home (69%).
- They consider their products to be mostly decorative (40%) or a combination of decorative and functional (32%). Many don't offer activities (42%), but some offer workshops (38%) or individual lessons (38%). These activities make up less than 10% of their overall income from Craft & Design.

4.2.2 Craft/Design Practice

- Not registered with DCCI (74%) or any other Craft/Design collective (58%) and mostly receiving no supports from external organisations (46%), except from the Local Enterprise Office (32%).
- Mostly identifying more as an Artist (51%) than an Entrepreneur (11%), and feeling that supports are equally focused on the Artistic (35%) and Entrepreneurial (35%) aspects of their practice.
- Majority prioritise high-quality products (92% said very important) and enjoyment of the process (88% said very important), over selling products (22% very important) or scaling up business (22% said very important.)
- Earning less than €10,000 from Craft/Design (42%), which accounts for less than 10% of their total income (32%) but still represents a small profit (31%) which sustains them.
- Promoting their products primarily on Facebook (75%), Instagram (66%) or their own websites (49%). Selling their products mostly through their websites (35%) or at Craft Fairs/Markets (35%).
- According to their own observations, their customers mostly purchase bespoke commissions (57%), gifts (42%) or homeware (34%).
- Sustaining their business is challenging (85% agree), they think the sector needs more promotion (85% agree), and they don't feel connected to other Craft Makers & Designers (78% agree).
- Selling products wholesale is not financially sustainable (75% agree), the financial supports available are mostly not suitable for their needs (61% agree), and they're not sure whether traditional techniques are being lost to innovation (54% agree; 46% disagree).

4.2.3 Co. Wicklow Craft Sector

- The best things are the location, tourism and high-quality, talented makers, while the worst things include the lack of suitable workspaces, venues, retail opportunities, networks, visibility and support.
- The most important of the proposed initiatives would be a Craft Hub (77% very important) and a Craft Trail (74% very important). Working Grants, a Craft Group and Craft Liaison Officer would also be important for the development of the Craft Sector in Co. Wicklow (63% very important).

4.3 Craft Consumer Profile

Based on data from the Craft Consumer Survey, this second profile describes a "typical" Craft Consumer based in Co. Wicklow. Again, this overview is based solely on primary survey data and is not intended to represent the diverse range of different Craft Consumers in the county.

4.3.1 Geo-demographics & Media

- Mostly Female (91%), aged 45–64 (64%) and living in a Large Town/Urban Centre (52%) on Wicklow's East Coast.
- Working full-time (54%), regularly engaging with Facebook (65%) and Instagram (46%), and reading the news from a mix of national sources like RTE News (62%) and The Irish Times (45%) and local sources like the Wicklow People (31%).

4.3.2 Interest in Craft/Design

- The majority are keen to support local business (63%) and a considerable number are also hobbyist Craft Makers/Designers themselves (48%).
- Purchasing a wide range of Craft/Design products including Ceramics (63%), Woodcraft (52%) and Textiles (51%), and generally spending up to €100 per purchase (90%) with the most common price range being €30–€60 (41%).
- Mostly sourcing and purchasing items at Craft Fairs & Markets (75%) or from local, independent gift/craft shops (71%). A significant number purchase directly from Craft Makers/Designers in some form (52% - Wicklow, 37% - Irish).
- The items purchased are generally an even combination of functional & decorative (55%) and most purchases are used as gifts (88%). Top priorities for consumers when choosing items are the quality of the item (77% very important) and its design/appearance (75% very important).

4.3.3 Co. Wicklow Craft Sector

- The best things about the Craft Sector are the traditions, the quality of Craft Makers/Designers, the societal and community benefits of craft itself, the contribution to local economy and the employment that the sector brings.
- The worst things about the Craft Sector are the lack of visibility and promotion, the poor quality of some products/makers/designers, the limited range of products available, and the lack of supports, workspaces, retail opportunities and networks for Craft Makers/Designers.
- Consumers agree that the Co. Wicklow Craft Sector is not visible enough (73% strongly agree), and would be interested in visiting and purchasing from a Co. Wicklow Craft Hub (83% strongly agree).
- They think the quality of Craft Makers/Designers in Wicklow is reasonably high (42% strongly agree, 58% agree), they usually try to buy from local craft businesses (29% strongly agree, 58% agree) and they generally don't find the higher cost of locally made craft products to be prohibitive in their decision to purchase.
- The most important of the proposed initiatives would be a Craft Hub (83% very important) and a Craft Trail (69% very important).
- A branding campaign like "Made in Wicklow" would also be quite important for consumers (65% very important), and they also see the benefits of the Craft Foundation (60% very important), but there are also some negative perceptions of these initiatives.
- They mostly associate Craft/Design with words such as "Hand-Made" (96%), "High-Quality" (81%), "Bespoke" (63%) and "Attention to detail" (60%).

4.4 Craft Categorisation Model

It is widely acknowledged that the variety of craft practices and disciplines are difficult to categorise with any degree of certainty. The "Irish Design Footprint", which was presented in the 2016 report "Policy Framework for Design in Enterprise in Ireland" outlined six distinct "Design Groups" with "Craft" alongside others including "Architecture", "Digital", "Engineering", "Advertising" & "Specialised Design"⁵.

The "crafts" or "trades" identified under this category include "Glass Product & Ceramics Makers", "Weavers & Knitters", "Furniture Maker & Craft Woodworkers" and "Smiths & Forge Workers". A special sub-category is reserved for "Traditional Design Sectors", which includes "Manufacture of Jewellery", "...other Furniture" and "...Ceramic Household & Ornamental Articles".

The DCCI's Craft Makers/Designers database provides 28 different craft disciplines, while the Malta Crafts Portal offers 48 different categories and the Crafts Council (UK) has 31 categories. As outlined in Case Study No. 4, the Canadian Crafts Federation recently published a new position paper titled "The Craft Spectrum" which acknowledges the challenges around defining craft as well as outlining a different approach⁶.

Aiming to provide new insights into the potential methods and rationale behind craft categorisation, a question was created in the Craft Maker/Designer Survey which provided some unique insights into the way craft can be categorised. Instead of asking respondents to select from pre-determined disciplines, they were asked to describe their practice in their own words. This approach led to a vast array of different answers, which were subsequently analysed and categorised.

The most common categorisation referred to "**Raw Materials & Products**" and this category included sub-categories for the more commonly used disciplines including "Ceramics", "Jewellery", "Woodcraft", "Textiles", "Metal" and "Print". These are ubiquitous categorisations, but it was discovered that these did not fully represent the broad scope of descriptors found in the data.

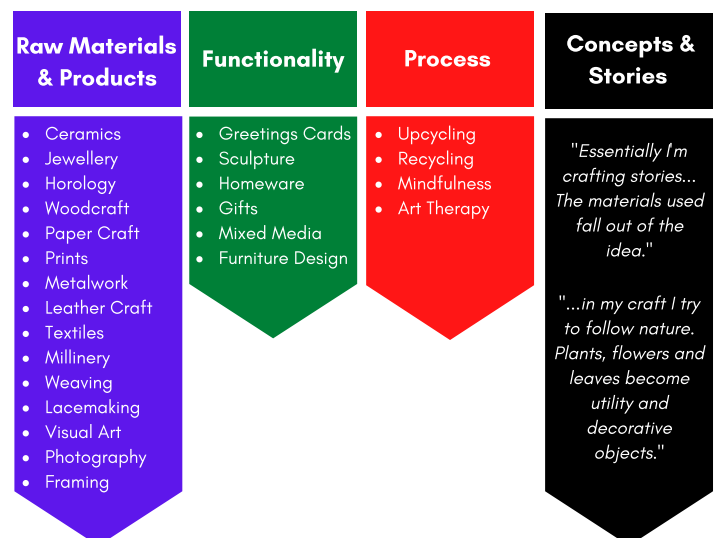
In order to represent the data and focus of the answers more fully, three additional categories were created for "Functionality", "Process" and "Concepts & Stories" which captured the range of responses more accurately.

"**Functionality**" was used to categorise some answers such as "greeting cards", "gifts", "homeware" or "furniture" which all serve a purpose but could be made from different materials. For example, "greetings cards", "gifts" or "homeware" all serve a particular function but could be made from paper, wood, metal, textiles or jewellery. Similarly, "furniture" serves a function but could be constructed from wood, metal or plastic.

There was also evidence of "**Process**" driven categorisation, and two sub-categories of "Upcycling" and "Mindfulness/Art Therapy" were also identified. As with the above "Functionality" category, "Upcycling" is a process which could involve almost any type of raw material or products and it is this process that drives the Craft Practitioner rather than the specific material used, or the product which is created. In a similar way, with "Mindfulness/Art Therapy" practices which use craft as a medium, it is the process that is important and not necessarily the type of material used.

The final category was "**Concept/Story**" based, where the concepts around someone's work was the focus, rather than the material, product, process or functionality. The respondents which fell into this category tended to be multi-disciplinary, and some leaned more towards "visual art" type definitions, using more conceptual language.

It was also found that single respondents often described multiple, diverse and sometimes unrelated craft disciplines so it is clear that a large number of Craft Makers/Designers have a multi-disciplinary practice. It should also be noted, that educational activity and workshops (addressed elsewhere in the survey) were not the focus of this exercise.



5. Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation (2016): "Policy Framework for Design in Enterprise in Ireland"

6. Canadian Crafts Federation (2021): "The Craft Spectrum - A Position Paper"



5.0 OVERVIEW OF THE CRAFT & DESIGN ECONOMY

In order to set the context for the Strategic Vision, Pillars and Priorities outlined here, this section provides an overview of the wider Craft & Design Sector as well as the local and national Craft Economy. This section draws insights from primary and secondary research, as well as from the case studies, stakeholder analysis and resource audit.

5.1 The National Context

Ireland has a long history of craft making, and Irish-made craft products are sold throughout the world. As mentioned in the introduction, the “craft & design-intensive sectors” have the potential to generate almost €14 billion in annual turnover by 2026, employing over 1,000 people.

In 2012, the Design Sector accounted for over 21% of total Irish exports, and according to the Annual Business Survey of Economic Impact at the same time, the Craft Sector alone contributed over €39 million to the Irish economy⁷. This represented an increase of more than €10 million over a five-year period and at this rate of growth, the Craft Sector alone was estimated to be worth well over €50 million to the Irish economy by 2022.

The “Policy Framework for Design in Enterprise in Ireland”, from where these figures are drawn, also found that employment across all 6 “Design Groups” (as outlined in section 4.4) rose by 6.7% between 2011 and 2014. In 2014, employment in “design roles” accounted for 2.5% of total employment in Ireland and a subsequent report titled “Together for Design”, published in 2020 by the Expert Group for Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) estimates that by 2025, employment across digital, product and strategic design could account for as much as 2.8% of total employment across the country⁸.

The Design & Crafts Council of Ireland (DCCI) is the National Agency for Craft & Design in Ireland, and according to its website, the DCCI “promotes the commercial development of Irish designers and makers, stimulating innovation, championing design thinking and informing Government policy”. The reference to commercial development is particularly relevant in relation to the “Artist vs Entrepreneur” debate, and this commercial focus is evident in much of the DCCI’s initiatives, such as the annual “Showcase” event and the recent “Made Local” campaigns, as well as within the many valuable business development programmes on offer.

In its new strategy document, published in 2022, the DCCI’s revised mission statement hints at a slightly different approach, which focuses on more than just commercial development. The statement reads “...we will support designers and makers to develop their businesses in a sustainable way, and advocate for the societal benefits of craft and design”⁹.

The supports provided by the DCCI are extremely important and valued within the sector, however 74% of respondents to the Craft Maker/Designer survey are not registered with DCCI. This indicates that the support programmes are only reaching 26% of Wicklow’s many Craft Practitioners.

The focus towards the commercial value of craft, and the birth of “Irish design” as an industry, can be traced back to the period of time surrounding a report published in 1962 called “Design in Ireland” which was commissioned by William Henry Walsh (founder of the Kilkenny Design Workshops) when he was General Manager of the Irish Export Board (Córas Tráchtála Teo).

Also known as “The Scandinavian Report”¹⁰, it was written by a group of five Scandinavian designers and was critical of the infrastructure and education around design in Ireland. The report sparked ongoing debate over the subsequent years, but it set in motion a chain of events which would change Ireland’s approach to design, craft and visual art for years to come.

A keen arts enthusiast himself, with broad interests in theatre, classical music and literature, William Henry Walsh had recognised the weaknesses in Irish design and its negative impact on the Irish export market as early as the 1950s. While there is some debate on whether “The Scandinavian Report” actually led to the development of the revolutionary Kilkenny Design Workshops (KDW), it is fair to say that this initiative was in some way inspired by the scathing report which criticised design education and practices in Ireland. Using the report as leverage to get government backing, William Henry Walsh established the Kilkenny Design Workshops (KDW) which opened in 1965.

Established with the aim of helping amateur craft makers to develop into self-sufficient entrepreneurs, Kilkenny became the craft capital of Ireland as Craft Practitioners were invited to attend the KDW. The “Artist” versus “Entrepreneur” debate begins.

7. Dept of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation (2016): “Policy Framework for Design in Enterprise in Ireland”

8. Expert Group for Future Skills Needs (2020): “Together for Design”

9. Design & Crafts Council of Ireland (2022): Strategy 2022-2026

10. Franck, K; Herlew, E; Huldtt, Å; et al. (1961): “Report of the Scandinavian Design Group in Ireland”

At the opening of the first workshop, visitors asked to buy some of the products and gifts on display, and this served as the inspiration for the first "Kilkenny Design Shop", which is now recognised globally. Similar to Co. Wicklow's "Avoca", the "Kilkenny Design" shops also feature integrated cafés which turned out to be a very effective and profitable business model. This structure forms part of the proposed model of Craft Clusters for Wicklow.

While the long history of Irish Craft & Design is beyond the scope of this report, another key turning point which is relevant to this Craft Strategy relates to the Crafts Council of Ireland (CCI), as it was previously known. Originally set up in 1971, partly as a result of Ireland's hosting of the World Crafts Council Conference the previous year, the CCI was originally located in Dublin, and its role was to improve the welfare of craftspeople, raise the standards of craft-making and to advise the Irish Government on craft related issues.

Now located in Kilkenny, and on the site of the original Kilkenny Design Workshops, the "Crafts Council of Ireland" announced in 2014 that it was changing its trading name to the "Design & Crafts Council of Ireland" (DCCI) having signed an agreement with its core funder, Enterprise Ireland¹¹. This marked a significant turning point in the development of the Craft Sector in Ireland and cemented the coming together of the "Craft" and "Design" industries.

Around the same time, a new initiative bearing the title "Year of Irish Design" (2015) was announced, which aimed at building on the success of Ireland's "Year of Craft" in 2011. This subtle, yet extremely important new focus on "Design" has led to significant growth in this collective sector. However, the economic metrics which often define success in this sector also present significant challenges for Craft Practitioners, as it doesn't always accurately reflect the reality which many independent Craft Makers & Designers face as micro-enterprises.

With the re-focus on "Design", the DCCI launched the "Design Ireland" brand in 2016 which aimed to increase awareness of Irish Craft & Design within the domestic and international markets. The Design Ireland programme continues to provide a valuable resource for Craft Makers & Designers in Ireland as well as being a key promotional vehicle for Irish Craft & Design.

The DCCI is funded through Enterprise Ireland, which administers funding directly from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE). DCCI works in partnership with the Local Enterprise Offices in each county and the "Association of LEOs" is a member of DCCI's network of "GANS" (Guilds, Associations, Networks and Societies) along with more than 60 other member organisations.

It has been noted that there is currently no registered "GANS" for Co. Wicklow, although some individual Wicklow-based Craft Practitioners may be represented through memberships of other GANS groups, such as "Ceramics Ireland", the "Irish Woodturners Guild" or the "Irish Patchwork Society" among others. As the primary group representing Wicklow's Craft Practitioners, it is recommended that the Wicklow Craft Foundation would register for GANS membership with the DCCI.

In the DCCI's 2019 Annual Report, it reported having over 3,000 registered clients, and that over €25 million worth of orders were placed at the annual "Showcase" event. This flagship event was attended by over 2,500 people, with over 200 different clients having participated. Working across five strategic priorities under the headings of "Enterprise", "Research & Innovation", "Knowledge & Skills", "Promotion & Awareness" and "Policy & Advocacy" the DCCI also operates and directly funds the National Design & Craft Gallery, which welcomed over 300,000 visitors in 2019 and hosted exhibitions featuring 157 makers, designers and studios¹².

According to Fáilte Ireland, Cultural Tourism was worth an estimated €2 billion to the Irish economy in 2019 and also represents one of the fastest growing tourism sectors on a global scale¹³. Encompassing a broad spectrum of offerings including festivals, museums and exhibitions, this growing sector also incorporates aspects of indigenous culture, providing visitors with insights into a country's cultural identity. Ireland and Wicklow have a long tradition of craft, so the potential value of craft within the area of Cultural Tourism is potentially a significant area of growth.

11. Design & Crafts Council of Ireland (2014): "The Crafts Council of Ireland now trading as the Design & Crafts Council of Ireland" (www.dcci.ie)

12. Design & Crafts Council of Ireland (2019): "Annual Report 2019" (www.dcci.ie)

13. Fáilte Ireland (2012): "A Tourism Toolkit for Ireland's Cultural Experiences"

5.2 The County Wicklow Perspective

County Wicklow is synonymous with traditional and contemporary craft making, from the Olde Shillelagh Stick Makers to the “Avoca” brand which is recognised throughout the world. The historic craft practices at the Avoca Handweavers Mill and Arklow Pottery (closed since 1998) highlight the long-standing tradition that Wicklow has with craft and the global success of the “Avoca” brand is proof of how a traditional craft making practice can be brought back to life for contemporary consumers.

From a tourism perspective, popular destinations such as Russborough House, Killruddery and Powerscourt Estate, to name just a few, all showcase and sell a wide range of Craft/Design products, with other key tourist locations including Glendalough, and many of Wicklow's towns and villages also selling craft products in local retail.

According to the DCCI's Database of Craft Makers, there are currently 164 registered Craft Makers & Designers in Co. Wicklow, but there are estimated to be more than 400 active Craft Practitioners operating across the county. 74% of survey respondents said that they were not registered with the DCCI, so it is possible to assume that the 164 who are registered with the DCCI only represent 26% of the total number of active Craft Makers/Designers in the county. If this is an accurate assumption, there could be far more Craft Makers/Designers operating in Co. Wicklow than the DCCI registration might suggest.



Sharon Wells "Greystones"
Image: Sharon Wells

The majority of supports available to Wicklow's Craft Practitioners come through the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment and are distributed through the Design & Crafts Council of Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and Local Enterprise Office. Only registered members are eligible for the supports provided by DCCI, which potentially means up to 74% of Craft Makers/Designers in the county are unable to benefit from the supports provided by Ireland's national Craft & Design agency.

A recent report from DCCI/Grant Thornton titled “Economic Assessment of the Design and Crafts Sector of Ireland” (August 2021), found that Wicklow has the third highest Craft & Design-Intensive Enterprises per 1,000 of population, after Co. Clare and Co. Kilkenny. At 10.2 enterprises per 1,000 people, Clare tops the list, with Kilkenny having registered 7.8 and Wicklow following closely behind at 7.6. The report describes this as a “Very Highly Concentrated” area of Craft & Design-Intensive Enterprises¹⁴.

5.2.1 SWOT Analysis (Abridged)

This abridged SWOT Analysis provides an overview of some of the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats which emerged from primary and secondary research. A more detailed analysis is provided in the accompanying Business Development Plan, with a summary provided here. A detailed PESTLE Analysis is also included in the Business Development Plan, which examines the external Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental factors which may affect Wicklow's Craft Sector over the timeframe of this strategy.

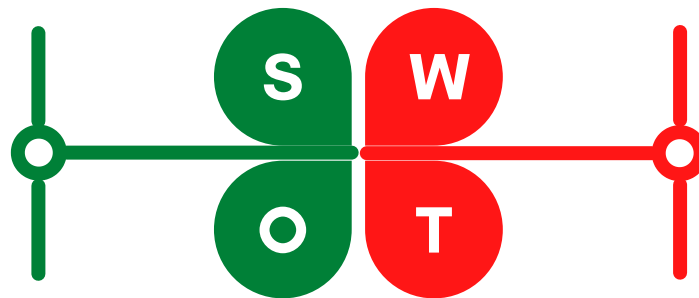
14. Design & Crafts Council of Ireland (2021): "Economic Impact Assessment of the Design and Crafts Sector of Ireland"

STRENGTHS

- Proximity to Dublin with good transport links and wide geographic spread of key areas of interest.
- Strong craft tradition alongside globally recognised brand of "Avoca".
- High-quality, unique craft products being made by highly skilled professional craft makers.
- Large community of part-time craft makers with strong emerging emphasis on mindfulness and wellbeing practice through craft.
- Pre-existing outline of craft infrastructure with resources such as Wicklow Marketplace, Absolutely Wicklow, Russborough House, craft workshops and craft retail.

WEAKNESSES

- Fractured and disjointed Craft Economy, with lack of joined-up, collaborative, synergistic thinking within the diverse Craft Sector.
- Lack of county-wide strategy and no clearly defined shared vision for the development of the sector.
- Current local supports (while effective & valued) are focused mostly on business development, employment & enterprise. Perceived gap in local development supports for craft-focused practice & skills.
- Lack of visibility, networks, centralised resources, appropriate representation, advocacy and cooperation leading to a potentially undervalued Craft Economy.
- Lack of shared workspaces and facilities, retail opportunities, and centralised county-wide tourism/visitor engagement platform and promotion.



OPPORTUNITIES

- "Join the dots" by connecting the existing fragmented craft infrastructure and foster collaborative thinking to developing a synergistic, joined-up and sustainable Craft Economy.
- Consolidate existing resources to avoid displacement and duplication. Work collaboratively to develop a centralised resource portal/facility with long-term support structures.
- Leverage craft's multi-faceted nature by securing funding and grants from new sources, including the Arts Council (visual art & sculpture), social enterprise, community and not-for-profit grants.
- Empower and support Wicklow's municipal district councils/town teams to create shared workshop spaces in each district area, incorporating retail and tourist offerings.
- Establish links with Wicklow's growing screen sector to provide new opportunities for craft makers and develop crossover between film trails and craft trails. Develop other new relationships outside of the immediate Craft Sector to find new opportunities and potential for synergy.

THREATS

- Current perceptions of craft as a primarily commercial industry could present challenges in advocating for the value of community-based craft practice and the aesthetic value of craft as well as ensuring available supports reach all practitioners across the broad spectrum of craft practices.
- Advances in technology and innovation have meant that production of craft has become easier, faster and cheaper, which poses a significant threat to traditional, local, hand-made craft.
- Covid-19 has presented major challenges for Craft Practitioners, and the impact of the pandemic continues to affect businesses. The economic uncertainty which followed in the wake of Covid-19 has been exacerbated by the war in Ukraine resulting in rapidly increasing costs and inflation.
- Brexit will also continue to affect Ireland's import and export market for Craft Makers & Designers with increased costs, administrative issues and delays in deliveries. The war in Ukraine and the rapidly increasing cost of living in Ireland also poses significant financial threats to Craft Practitioners.
- Sustainability has become a key priority for businesses in recent years. Craft Makers/Designers are becoming increasingly aware of their own obligations when sourcing raw materials and this may result in increased costs for practitioners.

5.2.2 Stakeholder Analysis & Competitor/Collaborator Analysis (Abridged)

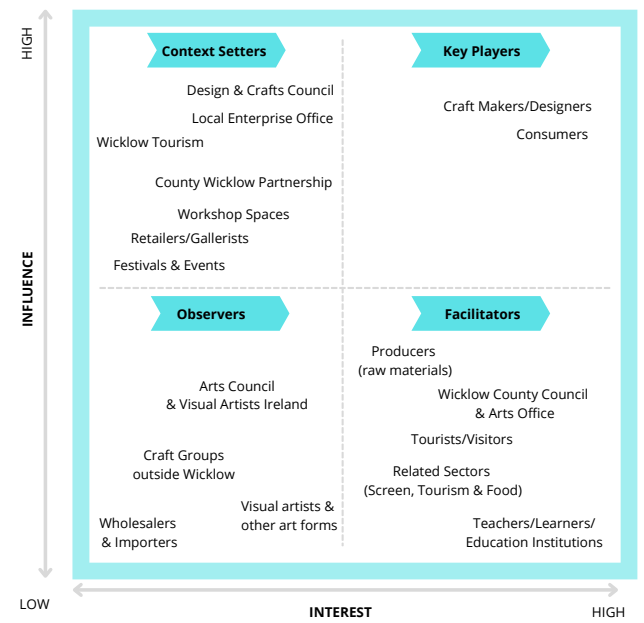
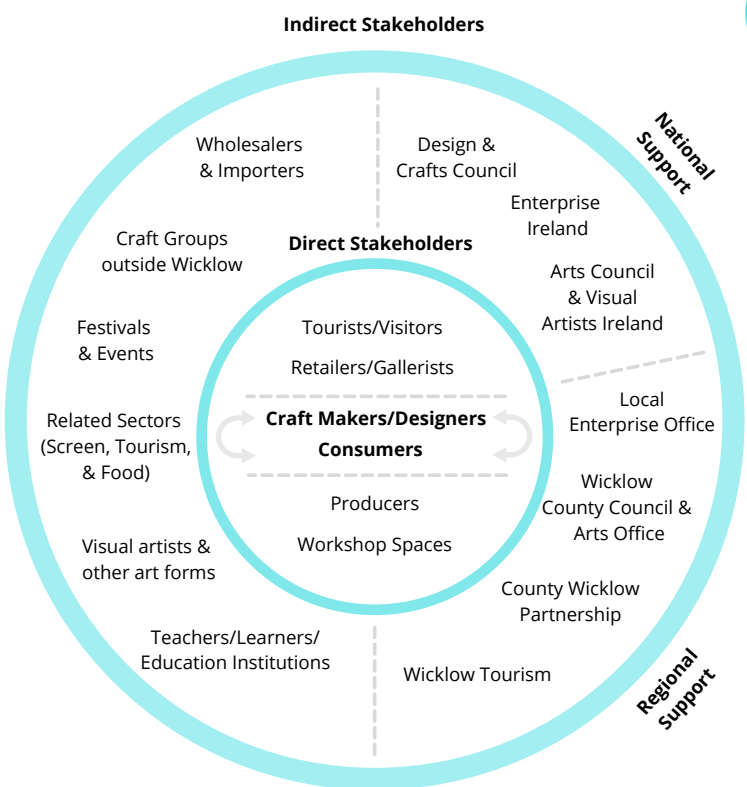
Craft Makers/Designers, both in Wicklow and nationally maintain relationships with a significant number of different stakeholders, competitors and collaborators.

Considering the fact that many Craft Practitioners are also retailers, gallerists, event organisers and teachers themselves, there is an additional level of complexity in the relationships that a Craft Maker/Designer maintains in their practice.

This is an abridged version of the full Stakeholder Analysis and Competitor/Collaborator Analysis which is included in the accompanying Business Development Plan.

In the majority of cases, the relationships between the Craft Maker/Designer and these various groups could be seen as either collaborative or competitive, depending on the approach taken. The attitude of both parties and the nuances of the specific context in which the transaction or activity takes place also impacts the relationship status.

Craft Makers/Designers



5.2.3 Resource Audit (Abridged)

This abridged resource audit aims to provide an overview of some of the shared resources or assets currently available to Wicklow Craft Makers/Designers and Consumers. These resources include retail opportunities, shared workspaces, education, online portals and other similar assets which make up Wicklow's Craft & Design Sector. The full resource audit is included in the accompanying Business Development Plan.

Among the **Physical Resources** specific to Wicklow, there are a range of retail spaces spread across different locations and housed within different types of structures such as tourist attractions (eg. Russborough House & Powerscourt), galleries (eg. Kilmantin Art Gallery & Signal Arts Centre), independent workshops and studios with retail (eg. Appletree Crafts, Shuttle Knit, Boat Yard Gallery) and "high street" retail (eg. Avoca, Carraig Donn, Lorient Gift) as well as online resources, retail portals and craft-based activity organisers including Wicklow Marketplace, Absolutely Wicklow and Windrush Farm.

Among the **Human Resources**, the wider network of Wicklow-based and Irish Craft Makers/Designers is perceived as a valuable resource with many opportunities for learning, sharing and collaborating together. The newly formed Wicklow Craft Foundation has cemented that resource locally. There is also a large group of trainers & mentors, both independent and connected with DCCI and LEO.

As a result of their unique nature, Craft Makers/Designers can benefit from a wide range of different **Financial Resources**, from business development programmes to social enterprise funding, and from visual art/festival grants to business expansion grants/micro-finance loans. In addition to training, mentoring and informal apprenticeships, there are also a range of **Formal Education & Training Resources**, which focus both on Craft/Design practice as well as business development. Bray Institute of Further Education (BIFE) and Wicklow Further Education and Training Centre (WFETC) both offer a "QQI Level 5 Award in Art, Craft & Design", and Wicklow's Local Enterprise Office also offers a range of business development programmes including the "Start your own Business" and "Accelerate Management Development" programmes. Outside of Wicklow, there are a significant number of Educational & Training Resources, including at Grennan Mill Craft School (Kilkenny), Irish National Heritage Park (Wexford), National College of Art and Design (Dublin), Crawford College of Art & Design (Cork) and many more.

The range of **Intangible Resources** are also important to consider, as these can be leveraged and used to support and develop the Craft Economy. Wicklow's long history and tradition of craft are intangible resources which contribute to the Craft Economy and tourism offering in the county. The expert skills, knowledge and reputation of Wicklow's "Master Crafters", the perceived value of craft products among consumers, and the respect, trust and relationships between Craft Makers/Designers and their customers are also intangible resources which make a valuable contribution towards the overall craft ecosystem.



Avoca

By far the most widely recognised Craft/Design brand originating from Wicklow, “Avoca Handweavers” or simply “Avoca” began in 1723 when a cooperative weaving mill was established along the Avoca River. The original mill is still in operation today and is recognised as Ireland’s oldest weaving mill. Operating in a similar way to the proposed Craft Clusters, the Avoca Mill was a shared resource where locals could grind corn, spin and weave wool for clothing. Over the years, the Avoca Mill became an integral local resource and served as a focal point in the village which had become a vibrant community as a result of the copper, zinc, lead and gold mines in the locality.

Throughout its long history, Avoca Mill grew and developed, along with the technology and techniques used in weaving and spinning. During the 1940s, Avoca Mill started exporting rugs and wool internationally and by the 1950s two thirds of Avoca’s products were being exported, primarily to America, England and France. Following a period of neglect, Avoca Mill was purchased by Donald and Hilary Pratt in the 1970s, and although they had no experience in handweaving, they built an expansive network of Avoca retail outlets with locations in Dublin City Centre and Kerry as well as a range of stunning locations across Wicklow, including at Mount Usher Gardens, Powerscourt and Kilmacanoge.

Now selling far more than just handwoven products, it was Simon Pratt (son of Donald & Hilary) who began the move towards a greater focus on food, something which Avoca is now almost equally associated with, along with craft products. Over the years, Avoca Cookbooks were published and a range of cafés and food markets were opened combining artisan food with Craft/Design products. The company grew its international market with the launch of its online store in 2007, and continued to grow the number of shops, cafés and food markets around the country.

“Avoca”, as it had come to be known was purchased in 2015 by the American company “Aramark Property” and there appears to be little remaining connection with Wicklow’s local Craft Makers/Designers. From the perspective of Wicklow’s Craft Trail, the Avoca locations would be key stopping points for visitors, and similar to The Design Loft and Russborough, the added tourism offering of beautiful gardens, and of course the café facilities provide much for tourists.

Russborough House

As well as being a popular tourist attraction, Russborough is also home to a group of traditional craft makers and artisans who have workshops in the courtyards within the grounds. While the resident artisans tend to specialise in larger, one-off, bespoke pieces, the gift shop in Russborough House itself offers a wide selection of craft products from Irish and international makers. Up until recently, the West Wicklow Community Arts Group “Cruthú” had also been located here.

There is an extensive online shop within the newly redesigned Russborough House website, and customers can purchase a wide range of craft products and gifts. The model of support for Craft Makers currently in operation at Russborough is a prime example of how a Craft Cluster could operate, with dedicated workspace for craft practitioners, a tourism offering for visitors, retail opportunities for local craft makers/designers and a community of artisans.

Russborough would be included as a key point of interest on the Co. Wicklow Craft Trail.

The Design Loft - Powerscourt Estate

Showcasing craft and art products from over 80 unique Irish Craft Makers/Designers, the Design Loft is located in the beautiful Powerscourt Estate near Enniskerry. Another excellent example of an all-inclusive tourism and visitor experience, the Design Loft within Powerscourt Estate is perfectly placed as a retail opportunity for Wicklow’s Craft Makers/Designers and also offers an extensive online retail facility. Run by Heather and David Walsh, the Design Loft houses a diverse range of small craft/gift products and art work from craft makers, designers and artists from all over Ireland and doesn’t exclusively showcase Wicklow craft. Products include handmade soaps, jewellery, woodcraft, visual art and much more.

Like many other craft retail outlets in Wicklow and nationally, The Design Loft are part of the DCCI’s “Made Local” campaign, although this is not a location specific campaign and does not exclusively indicate that these products were made in Wicklow. On the Design Loft’s website, there is also a blog which is authored by one of the owners Heather Walsh. This blog is used primarily to promote products and craft ranges coming into the shop, but could also be a great opportunity to showcase Wicklow’s Craft Practitioners.

Like Russborough House, The Design Loft would be another key stopping point on the Co. Wicklow Craft Trail.

5.3 The International Perspective

While this Craft Strategy is locally focused, it is situated within both a national and international context, and so the influences and implications of that wider international sphere also need to be considered. The purpose of this section is not to provide a summary of the global Craft Economy as a whole, but rather to offer comparisons and insights from specific examples with relevance to the Co. Wicklow Craft Strategy.

During the secondary/desk research stage, a variety of contrasting models relating to the support, advocacy, finance and perceived value of Craft & Design were explored. This initial phase proved to be highly valuable in terms of providing some insight into existing strategies and efforts advocating in favour of the Craft Sector, such as the Manifesto presented by the World Crafts Council Europe, as well as providing some actual leads to conversations with representatives from different organisations.

Following up on this secondary research, a number of semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives from the Canadian Crafts Federation, Norwegian Crafts, Australia Council for the Arts (VACS - Visual Arts & Craft Strategy) and the Malta Crafts Foundation (previously the Malta Crafts Council). A brief summary of insights and perspectives is provided below.

5.3.1 Malta Crafts Foundation

Similar to the Irish model, the Maltese Craft Sector is supported via the equivalent government department, the Ministry for the Economy, Investment and Small Businesses. Across two meetings with different representatives, the regulatory-focused role of the Crafts Foundation was discussed, as well as its development from the previous Crafts Council.

The Malta Crafts Foundation's primary focus includes promotion, innovation and education, and the representatives outlined their planned efforts in relation to retail, export and incentives. Within the Craft Sector, the country seems to be in a particularly exciting stage, addressing gaps in provision and seeking growth within economic and tourism development.

One of the biggest developments in Malta, is an ambitious project to convert the existing tourism location of "Ta' Qali Crafts Village" into a major centre of excellence for Malta's diverse artisans, including food producers.

5.3.2 Australia Council for the Arts (VACS)

An in-depth interview was also conducted with representatives from the Australia Council for the Arts in relation to the "Visual Arts and Crafts Strategy" (VACS). During the meeting they explained the multi-tiered framework which sets out their strategy for funding allocation and disbursement. They also explained how the funds are used as "top-up funds" in order to help Craft Practitioners stay in business and to scale their work according to their needs and aspirations.

Background information was provided around the decision to introduce the VACS and it was explained how and why crafts came to be grouped within the visual arts. The implications around this type of grouping for craft led to further conversations and research into the positioning of crafts within the wider creative industries.

5.3.3 Norwegian Crafts

As an organisation, Norwegian Crafts primarily focus on internationalisation with specific attention given to funds for touring and presentation as well as networking and market penetration. Similar to the Australian approach, they tend to classify contemporary crafts as another form of visual art and support the sector in that manner.

As an interesting comparison, Norwegian Crafts do not focus on developing "craft entrepreneurs" but rather encourage them to upskill and invest in their business. The organisation also provides "working grants" which provide makers with some time to work on their own development and projects.

5.3.4 Canadian Crafts Federation

An interview with the Director at the Canadian Crafts Federation proved to be highly engaging and presented a very interesting model. As such, it was decided to focus on this model as the main international case study. The historical context of the Canadian Crafts Federation's approach, and focus on the importance of networking and advocacy for crafts proved particularly interesting.

The Canadian Crafts Federation has been striving to agree on a definition of crafts and since this interview, the organisation has published a position paper on the topic titled "The Craft Spectrum". This case study provides a valuable alternative perspective for Wicklow's Craft Sector and is included in the Appendices.

5.4 Towards a Sustainable, Connected & Circular Craft Economy for Wicklow

Considering the local, national and international context which has been outlined for this Craft Strategy, the next chapter presents a new Strategic Vision for Wicklow's Craft & Design Sector. This new strategy represents a significant paradigm shift in the way that Craft & Design is perceived, valued, supported and represented both for Co. Wicklow and on a national level.

The evidence provided here shows that Wicklow has a vibrant, diverse and highly skilled Craft Sector, however it appears to be badly fractured and disjointed. This is not just an issue for Wicklow, with evidence from primary and secondary research showing that similar issues also exist in other counties, even where craft collectives have formed.

Based on the in-depth research conducted, the current framework, on which Wicklow's Craft Economy is delicately balanced, is not sustainable. The financial success of a small number of Craft Makers/Designers and the economic success of Wicklow's "Avoca" brand have masked the reality that many Craft Practitioners are struggling to make their business financially sustainable and to compete in an increasingly industrialised, commercial marketplace.

The Craft Economy is considered a fundamentally interdependent model, with raw material producers supplying Craft Practitioners, who supply retailers, who subsequently supply consumers. The relentless upward trends of commercialisation is considered unsustainable for the majority of small businesses operating in Co. Wicklow, and without a robust infrastructure of support, advocacy and collaborative relationships, this vital part of the craft ecosystem is at risk of becoming extinct.

Having outlined the local, national and international context for this project, the following chapter presents a new vision for Wicklow's Craft Sector in further detail. This vision is made up of Three Strategic Pillars and Five Strategic Priorities, and the strategy is situated within the framework of Five Core Values.

The strategy overview graphics which were first introduced in Chapter 3 are presented again here for emphasis, and as a convenient reference point prior to the more detailed breakdown of the Strategic Pillars and Priorities.



Lucy Robinson "Winter Oaks"
Image: Robert Taylor

6.0 STRATEGIC VISION, PILLARS & PRIORITIES

Our vision is for “A Visible & Viable Craft Economy”, which nurtures “A Collaborative, Connected & Supported Craft Community” and which contributes to the development of “An Innovative, Knowledgeable & Contemporary Craft Sector”

A Visible & Viable Craft Economy

To create a visible and viable craft economy in Co. Wicklow by raising awareness of Wicklow’s Craft Sector, stimulating the local economy through craft/design and fostering a deep appreciation of locally produced craft.

A Collaborative, Connected & Supported Craft Community

To foster a collaborative approach within Wicklow’s Craft Sector, encouraging and facilitating coherent networks and ensuring that the broad spectrum of Craft Makers/Designers are represented, supported and valued.

An Innovative, Knowledgeable & Contemporary Craft Sector

To stimulate innovative thinking, and support knowledge creation while protecting and showcasing Wicklow’s craft tradition.

1. Wicklow Craft Clusters Network

A visible and collaborative network of Craft/Design facilities which could provide the possibility of flexible workshop spaces, retail opportunities, educational activities, events and visitor experiences where feasible and appropriate.

2. Co. Wicklow Craft Trail

A digitally-native and accessible Craft Trail which promotes Wicklow’s Craft Makers/Designers and encourages visitors to discover the range of craft-based activity in the county.

3. Craft Strategy Group & Craft Liaison Officer

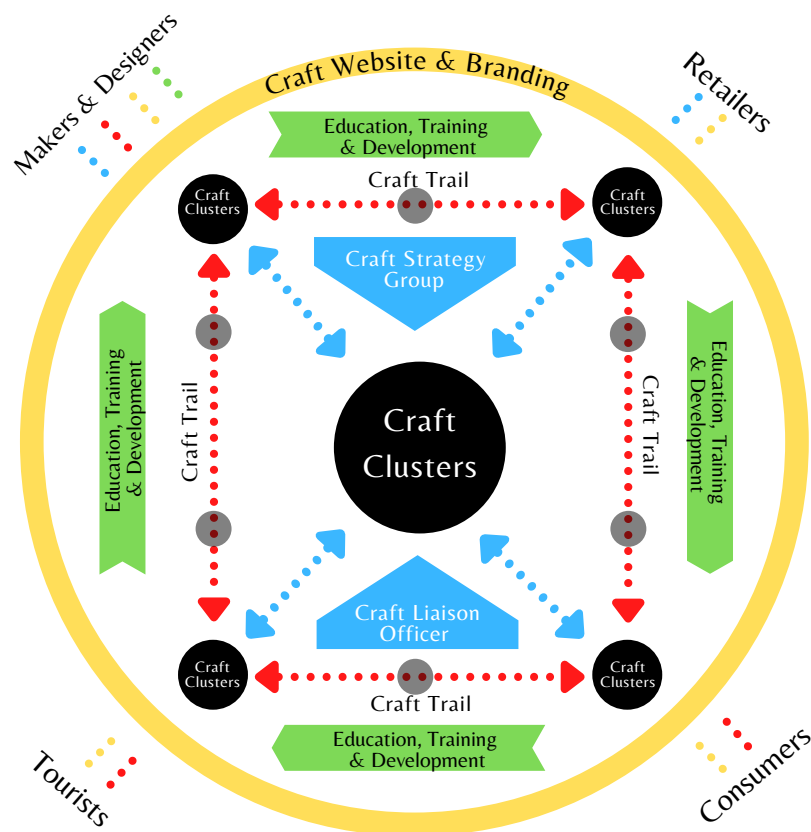
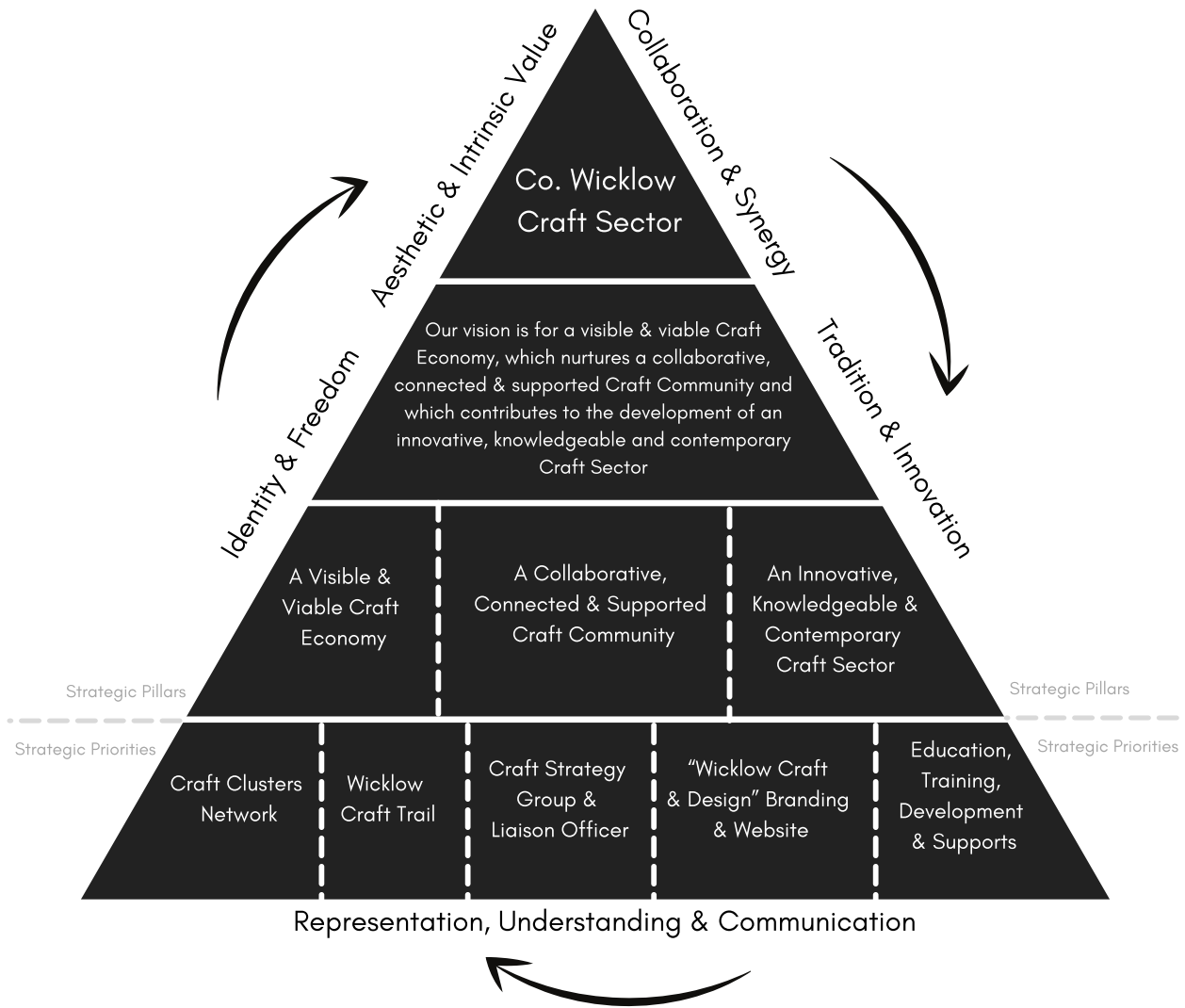
A synergistic, diverse and inclusive group with the sole purpose of implementing this Craft Strategy. Once appointed, the Craft Liaison Officer would also take a leading role in the development of further initiatives to enhance the Craft Sector beyond the strategy timeframe.

4. “Wicklow Craft & Design” Branding & Website

A recognisable and contemporary brand which represents Wicklow’s Craft Makers/Designers, and a fully integrated website which encompasses all aspects of this Craft Strategy.

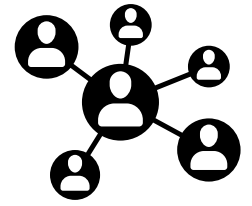
5. Education, Training, Development & Supports

An innovative and supportive suite of opportunities which complements current provision and which aims to support the development of individual craft practices, techniques and skills.



Collaboration & Synergy

Wicklow's Craft Sector is made up of highly skilled, creative individuals with a diverse range of trades, skills, knowledge and experience. There is significant potential for synergistic relationships to emerge and thrive, but many are working in silos, each with their own individual practices, priorities and concerns. By fostering a proactive approach to collaboration and by nurturing an "abundance mentality", collaborations across the sector could emerge, leading to a more joined-up and synergistic Craft Sector.



Aesthetic & Intrinsic Value of Craft

According to research conducted, since the 1960s, the Irish Craft Sector has been understood mostly through the economic paradigm of employment, business and trade. Primary research insights have indicated that the deep tradition of craft making which is synonymous with Ireland's cultural heritage is at risk of being lost. This strategy recognises the aesthetic and intrinsic value of craft and the process of craft-making, as well as its economic potential. It also seeks to emphasise, and advocate for support for the broad spectrum of craft practice in Ireland.



Representation, Understanding & Communication

As a result of this economic paradigm, many of the Craft Makers/Designers interviewed as part of this project felt that the challenges they face are often misunderstood. Wicklow's Local Enterprise Office (LEO) continues to provide invaluable support to local businesses and sole traders, and the recent collaboration between the LEO and the DCCI has enhanced its offering to Craft Makers/Designers. While Wicklow's Craft Practitioners are well-supported as "entrepreneurs", this strategy aims to highlight, and recommend additional supports for, the "artistic" or "craft-based practice" aspects of the Craft Sector. It aims to help others to understand the multi-faceted Craft Sector and to promote and facilitate clear lines of communication between Craft Makers/Designers and all stakeholders in this vibrant sector.



Acknowledging Identity & the Freedom to Choose

As a further result of the economic metrics through which Craft is understood in Ireland, a perceived "identity crisis" has emerged among Craft Practitioners, many of whom see themselves more as artists or artisans, rather than entrepreneurs. Acknowledging and nurturing the artistic identity of those who see themselves through this paradigm would give them the freedom to choose whether they want to be an artist or an entrepreneur, and to benefit from the appropriate supports available. This could also contribute towards better use of available supports.



Protecting Tradition & Driving Innovation

Wicklow has a long-standing tradition of craft but today's market pressures mean that small craft businesses and micro-enterprises need to embrace the advances in technology which could potentially allow them to be more competitive. This strategy recognises this moral and financial dilemma and seeks to find a balance between protecting the traditions of craft in Wicklow, while simultaneously driving innovation in the sector.





All Shapes All Makes "Commission for Strandings Museum" (Denmark)
Image: Jens Lind Larson

STRATEGIC PILLAR 1: “A Visible & Viable Craft Economy”

To create a visible and viable Craft Economy in Co. Wicklow by raising awareness of Wicklow’s Craft Sector, stimulating the local economy through Craft/Design and fostering a deep appreciation of locally produced craft.

OBJECTIVES

1. To create a new, centralised **WEBSITE** for Wicklow Craft & Design, which showcases **WICKLOW CRAFT FOUNDATION**’s inclusive Craft Maker/Designer database, and which demonstrates the diverse spectrum of Wicklow’s Craft & Design Sector as well as providing practical signposts for Craft Practitioners & Consumers.
2. To develop a **“WICKLOW CRAFT & DESIGN”** brand, which promotes high-quality Craft/Design products made in Wicklow, as well as other key priorities, and to deliver ongoing marketing & PR campaigns to showcase the brand across digital and print platforms.
3. To create a digitally native Co. Wicklow **CRAFT TRAIL** with supporting “Tourist & Leisure Signage”, which champions Wicklow Craft Makers/Designers and which is integrated into the wider Wicklow offering for residents and visitors alike.
4. To build, nurture and support a vibrant **CRAFT CLUSTERS NETWORK**, which supports Craft Makers & Designers through the provision of flexible workspaces, retail and exhibition opportunities, where feasible and appropriate.
5. To make Craft Tourism a priority within Wicklow’s tourism sector, by working in partnership with Wicklow Tourism and other groups to promote the **CRAFT TRAIL** and **CRAFT CLUSTERS NETWORK** to tourists and visitors, developing cross-promotional opportunities with “Wicklow Naturally”, “Wicklow Outdoors” and “Wicklow Passport Scheme” as well as building new relationships outside the immediate Craft Sector.

Actions (summary)

- Issue a callout for Craft Makers/Designers to join the Wicklow Craft Foundation database & Craft Trail.
- Source & secure funding for the development of the "Wicklow Craft & Design" brand, website and Craft Trail. Appoint a creative agency (via RFT) to develop the "Wicklow Craft & Design" brand, website and Craft Trail platform.
- Identify and incorporate other tourist attractions and facilities into the Craft Trail to encourage crossover with Wicklow Passport Scheme, Film Trails, Heritage Trails and Wicklow Way Walking Trails.
- Identify and secure suitable locations/buildings for the first Craft Clusters with a vision to draw up initial plans for the refurbishment and securing of funding for the renovations. Consult with the local registered Craft Makers/Designers in the area to establish specific needs, ambitions and ideas to realise this vision.
- Working with the appointed creative agency, design and plan a major promotional campaign around the launch of the "Wicklow Craft & Design" brand, website and Craft Trail along with the opening of Craft Cluster 1. Utilise the national pilot project of "August Craft Month" to increase the visibility of the sector by planning events to coincide with this national initiative.
- Working with Wicklow Tourism, promote the Craft Trail as widely as possible to visitors, tourists, locals, day trippers and tour operators. Encourage crossover between other tourist attractions, and integrate with Wicklow Naturally, Wicklow Outdoors and Wicklow Film Trails.
- Plan and deliver further promotional campaigns around key milestones, including the launch of the 2nd and 3rd Craft Clusters, recruitment and appointment of the CLO, and the Education & Training programme callouts.

Timeline & Key Milestones (summary)

2022 - Initiation Phase

Q3/Q4: Craft Strategy launched & CSG formation begins. Callout for new members to join the Wicklow Craft Foundation. Fundraising and planning begins for Craft Cluster 1, "Wicklow Craft & Design" website/branding, CLO, "Wicklow Craft Trail" and Education Programmes.

Q4: Request for Tenders (RFT) issued for website/branding & Craft Trail development.

2023

Q1: Creative Agency/Contractor appointed from RFT and work begins on "Wicklow Craft & Design" website/branding and Craft Trail in consultation with WCF & CSG.

Q3: Suitable site identified and secured for Craft Cluster 1. Fundraising continues and planning for refurbishment and fitout begins.

2024

Q1: Fundraising, research and planning begins for Craft Cluster 2.

Q3: "Wicklow Craft & Design" website/branding and "Wicklow Craft Trail" officially launched. Craft Cluster 1 finished and opened.

2025

Q1: Fundraising, research and planning begins for Craft Cluster 3.

Q3: Suitable site identified and secured for Craft Cluster 2. Planning for refurbishment and fitout begins.

Q3/Q4: Interim Evaluation of Craft Strategy.

2026

Q2: Craft Cluster 2 is officially launched, opened and added to "Wicklow Craft Trail".

Q3: Suitable site identified and secured for Craft Cluster 3. Planning for refurbishment and fitout begins.

2027

Q2: Craft Cluster 3 launched and opened.

Q3/Q4: Final Evaluation of Craft Strategy.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 2:

“A Collaborative, Connected & Supported Craft Community”

To foster a collaborative approach within Wicklow’s Craft Sector, encouraging and facilitating coherent networks and ensuring that the broad spectrum of Craft Makers/Designers are represented, supported and valued.

OBJECTIVES

1. To support the establishment and growth of **WICKLOW CRAFT FOUNDATION**, which would represent the diverse voices of Wicklow’s Craft Practitioners and ensure that they are represented, supported and valued.
2. To assemble a **CRAFT STRATEGY GROUP** and **ADVISORY GROUP**, comprising members of Wicklow Craft Foundation and other representatives from key stakeholder groups, with the sole purpose of implementing this Craft Strategy.
3. To appoint a full-time **CRAFT LIAISON OFFICER** to support the **WICKLOW CRAFT FOUNDATION**, and act as an advocate and key development officer for **“WICKLOW CRAFT & DESIGN”**.
4. To utilise the **CRAFT CLUSTERS NETWORK** by offering shared workspaces and studios for Craft Makers, Designers and Practitioners as well as flexible space for craft-based festivals, markets, classes, and educational activities where feasible and appropriate.
5. To devise an **EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT** programme in partnership with other organisations to enable Craft Makers & Designers to better articulate their identity as artists and/or entrepreneurs, and to understand the implications and opportunities connected to both.

Actions (summary)

- Support the establishment, growth and development of Wicklow Craft Foundation and register WCF as a GANS with the DCCI.
- Establish the "Craft Strategy Group" (CSG) with supporting "Advisory Group" to be tasked with delivering the Five Strategic Priorities outlined in this document. The CSG would comprise 10 members, with 5 representatives from WCF and 1 representative from County Wicklow Partnership. The Advisory Group would be made up of representatives from local authority bodies and other stakeholders.
- Arrange regular meetings for the CSG to discuss and manage the ongoing delivery of the strategy. Engage with the relevant local authorities and municipal district councils through the Advisory Group and broker new relationships.
- Source & secure funding for the creation of the Craft Liaison Officer role, who could be employed directly by WCF or by County Wicklow Partnership (CWP). Prepare a detailed job description and implement the relevant policies and procedures as required.
- Once appointed, empower the Craft Liaison Officer to take a leading role in the implementation of the Craft Strategy, and the development and nurturing of new relationships and partnerships.
- As each new Craft Cluster is launched, coordinate a public callout for Craft Makers/Designers to apply for flexible workspaces and develop the criteria and guidelines around membership and casual usage.
- Working closely with the LEO, DCCI and others, develop and evaluate an Education & Training pilot programme which builds on the research and insights from this Craft Strategy.
- Review the role of the Craft Strategy Group beyond 2027, with the aim of disbanding the group and empowering the Wicklow Craft Foundation and Craft Liaison Officer to lead the future development and sustainable growth of Wicklow's Craft Sector.

Timeline & Key Milestones (summary)

2022 - Initiation Phase

Q3/Q4: Craft Strategy launched & CSG formation begins. Callout for new members to join the Wicklow Craft Foundation. Fundraising and planning begins for Craft Cluster 1, "Wicklow Craft & Design" website/branding, CLO, Craft Trail and Education Programmes.

2023

Q1: WCF registered with DCCI as a "GANS" representing Wicklow Craft Makers/Designers. CSG & Advisory Group formed with initial key members appointed.

Q2: Fundraising and planning for part-time CLO position begins. Development of 1st Education & Training pilot programme begins.

Q4: Callout for the 1st Education & Training pilot programme with delivery and evaluation (EP1).

2024

Q2: Funding secured, planning completed and part-time CLO appointed prior to Q3:2024 milestone launches.

Q3: "Wicklow Craft & Design" website/branding and "Wicklow Craft Trail" officially launched. Craft Cluster 1 finished and opened.

Q4: Callout, delivery and evaluation of EP2.

2025

Q2: Fundraising and planning for full-time CLO position begins.

Q3/Q4: Callout, delivery and evaluation of EP3. Interim Evaluation of Craft Strategy.

2026

Q2: Funding secured, planning completed and full-time CLO appointed.

Q3/Q4: Callout, delivery and evaluation of EP4.

2027

Q3/Q4: Callout, delivery and evaluation of EP5. Final Evaluation of Craft Strategy.

Q4: CSG & Advisory Group disbanded (depending on findings from the evaluation and if deemed appropriate at the time).

STRATEGIC PILLAR 3:

“An Innovative, Knowledgeable & Contemporary Craft Sector”

To stimulate innovative thinking, and support knowledge creation while protecting and showcasing Wicklow’s deep craft tradition.

OBJECTIVES

1. To stimulate development and innovation in Craft Making/Design through workshops, events and flexible workspace through the **CRAFT CLUSTERS NETWORK** and with support from the **WICKLOW CRAFT FOUNDATION** and **CRAFT LIAISON OFFICER**.
2. To support the creation and sharing of knowledge through an **EDUCATION, TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT** programme, developed by **WICKLOW CRAFT FOUNDATION** and **CRAFT LIAISON OFFICER** with support from the **CRAFT STRATEGY GROUP**.
3. To protect and highlight Wicklow’s long-standing tradition of craft making through a physical and digital exhibition series such as “Wicklow’s Craft Heritage” spread across the **CRAFT CLUSTERS NETWORK** and **CRAFT TRAIL**, alongside the development of a practical **EDUCATION & TRAINING** programme.
4. To nurture alternative approaches to Craft & Design, including the support of craft-based mindfulness practices, craft therapy and community-based craft initiatives through facilitation at the **CRAFT CLUSTERS NETWORK**, promotion on the Wicklow Craft & Design **WEBSITE**, and inclusion on the **CRAFT TRAIL** as well as within the **WICKLOW CRAFT FOUNDATION**’s database of Craft Practitioners.

Actions (summary)

- Based on the findings of this strategy, develop a programme of workshops and events focusing on innovation, experimentation, and contemporary product design within the Craft & Design Sector.
- Develop new partnerships with organisations such as Visual Artists Ireland and the Arts Council to support knowledge creation, nurture sectoral crossover, synergy and innovative thinking.
- Where available, offer flexible workshop space to Craft Makers/Designers at the Craft Clusters on a project-basis to develop new techniques and to experiment with new processes, concepts and materials.
- In consultation with Craft Makers/Designers, LEO, DCCI and craft-based educators, develop an Education & Training pilot programme which addresses the challenges in the sector but which also avoids duplication of existing supports.
- Nurture the development and growth of Craft Festivals which incorporate innovation, experimentation, discussion and exploration. Support Craft Clusters to organise similar events, and provide guidance and support in applying for festival/event/project-based funding from appropriate sources.
- Curate, commission and design the educational content for the “Wicklow Craft & Design” website, including tutorial videos, educational resources, information about apprenticeships, masterclasses and other opportunities.
- Curate, commission and design a digital and physical “Wicklow’s Craft Heritage” exhibition which tells the story of Wicklow Craft through video, images, interactive displays and exhibitions of traditional tools with accompanying educational activities.
- Highlight the Craft Makers/Designers on the Craft Trail who still use traditional craft making techniques and/or tools. Highlight Craft Practitioners on the Craft Trail who offer alternative benefits related to process of Craft Making/Design. These alternative offerings could include “Mindful Craft” practices, “Craft Therapy” and community-based craft activities.

Timeline & Key Milestones (summary)

2022 - Initiation Phase

Q3/Q4: Craft Strategy launched & CSG formation begins. Callout for new memberships to join the Wicklow Craft Foundation. Fundraising and planning begins for Craft Cluster 1, “Wicklow Craft & Design” website/branding, CLO, Craft Trail and Education Programmes.

2023

Q1: Initial research and development of Education & Training pilot programme begins with WCF & CSG. Potential partners are identified, approached and invited to collaborate.

Q4: Callout for the 1st Education & Training pilot programme (EPI) with delivery and evaluation.

2024

Q3: “Wicklow Craft & Design” website/branding and “Wicklow Craft Trail” officially launched. Craft Cluster 1 (CC1) finished and opened.

Q3/Q4: Craft Cluster 1 issues a callout for local Craft Makers/Designers to use flexible workshop space. The CC1 committee/team is supported by CSG & WCF to organise craft-based activities and events and to develop its offering to visitors and Craft Practitioners alike.

2025

Q3: Following on from EPI (pilot) & EP2, develop an extended Education & Training Programme for 2025-2027 (EP3-EP5) based on insights, feedback and learnings from EPI & EP2.

Q3/Q4: Working collaboratively, and drawing on the expertise of the WCF, CSG, CLO and Advisory Group, conduct an internal Interim Evaluation of the Craft Strategy activity to date, with a strategic review and recommendations for the final 2 years of the strategy.

2026

Q1-Q4: Based on the Interim Evaluation, plan and implement any agreed changes in direction or priority for 2026 and 2027.

2027

Q3/Q4: Final Evaluation of Craft Strategy. Source funding and issue an RFT for an independent review and evaluation of the full Five-Year Craft Strategy.

1. Wicklow Craft Clusters Network

A visible and collaborative network of Craft/Design facilities which could provide the possibility of flexible workshop spaces, retail opportunities, educational activities, events and visitor experiences where feasible and appropriate.

1.1 Context & Rationale

According to the Craft Maker/Designer Survey, 77% of respondents said that the establishment of a "Craft Hub" was "Very Important" and this was echoed in the Craft Consumer Survey where 83% rated this proposed initiative as being "Very Important". The lack of affordable workspaces was also identified as a major challenge, with 69% working from their own homes and 50% operating under no formal legal structure.

The core idea behind the "Craft Hub" concept was to have a facility which offered shared workshop spaces and retail opportunities for Craft Makers/Designers, a location which was attractive for tourists to visit, and a place where workshops, classes and events could be held. Despite the importance of this initiative, the costs associated with the development of a large "Craft Hub" presented significant challenges, and it was decided to focus instead on the establishment of a network of "Craft Clusters".

1.2 Overview

This Craft Strategy encompasses the realisation of three "Craft Clusters", which would be developed at suitable locations and sites across the county. It is envisioned that each Craft Cluster would be a hyper-local, self-sufficient facility, run primarily by, and for, Craft Makers/Designers under a social enterprise model. This structure is merely suggestive, and it would be the decision of the CSG, WCF and CLO whether this model is appropriate for each proposed Craft Cluster.

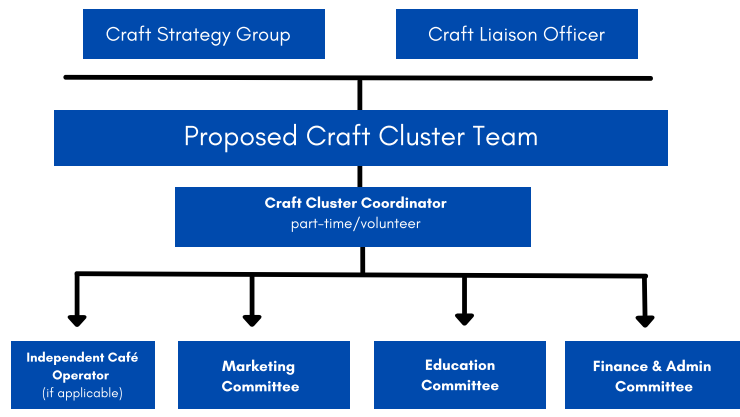
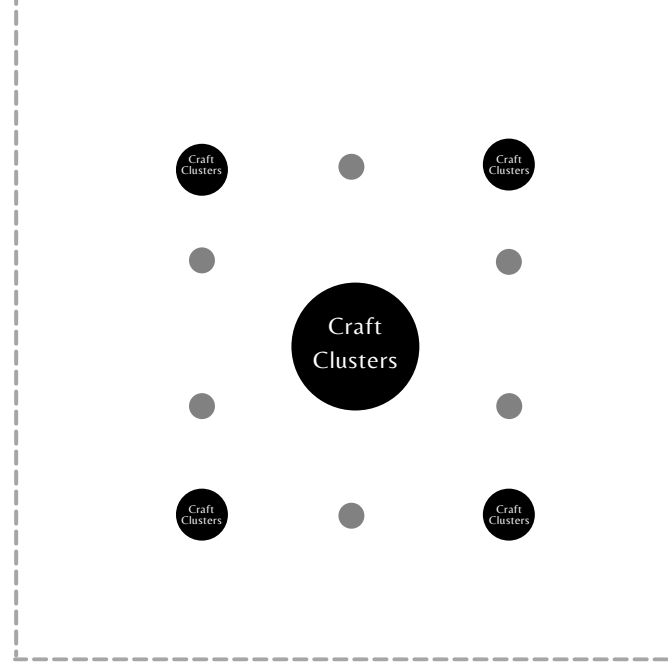
With support from the local Municipal District Councils/Town Teams, the Craft Clusters could become key attractions for visitors and locals alike, with a welcoming retail space, exhibitions, festivals, events, workshops and educational activities. In line with the membership model of the Wicklow Craft Foundation, Craft Makers/Designers could apply for a specific "Workshop Membership" to use the Craft Clusters facilities and each member could be asked to contribute some of their time to the running of the Craft Cluster via the proposed "Craft Cluster Team".

Working under a collaborative social enterprise model, Craft Makers/Designers could benefit from this more formal structure as well as from the county-wide support of the Craft Strategy Group, Wicklow Craft Foundation and Craft Liaison Officer. Each Craft Cluster would operate independently, and as such could be able to apply for project-based funding and other supports, as well as creating self-generated income from membership fees, commission on sales, workshops, classes and other events.

For more details, please see the accompanying Business Development Plan 2023 - 2027*.

1.3 Key Features

- It is envisaged that Craft Clusters would be shared facilities with flexible workshop space, modern equipment, tools and materials for local Craft Makers & Designers to produce their craft.
- Depending on the facility, it may be possible to offer on-site craft retail for "Wicklow Craft & Design" products linked with online retail via the "Wicklow Craft & Design" website. Craft Clusters could also be linked with the Co. Wicklow Craft Trail and identified as key points of interest for tourists, visitors and craft enthusiasts.
- The flexible space could be used to facilitate classes, workshops, masterclasses, "meet the makers" events, craft fairs, festivals and other activities. There may also be the potential to feature craft-based archives and permanent or temporary craft exhibitions.
- Where feasible and appropriate, it may be possible to incorporate café space into the Craft Clusters, which could potentially be rented to independent food companies with additional potential for links to "Wicklow Naturally".
- Craft Clusters would be "maker-led" with a hyper-local focus and membership-based structure in line with Wicklow Craft Foundation's membership. An additional fee could be charged to "Workshop Members" to use the facilities with a potential requirement to contribute time through the proposed Craft Cluster Team & Committees.
- Each Craft Cluster would receive support from the county-wide Craft Strategy Group, WCF and CLO with localised support from Municipal District Councils as key partners.
- Operating under a proposed social enterprise model, Craft Clusters may have the capacity to apply for their own grants and the model offers potential for self-generated income from membership fees, commission on sales, workshops, classes and events.



**CASE STUDY 1:
Craft Clusters
(Appendix C)**

As a comparison Case Study, the models of "Benchspace" (Cork) and the "Creative Hub at Bull Ring Mall" (Wexford) were examined. This Case Study presents two contrasting models, both of which have been very successful and are continuing to grow and develop.

1.4 Timeline Overview & Key Milestones



2. Co. Wicklow Craft Trail

A digitally-native and accessible Craft Trail which promotes Wicklow's Craft Makers/Designers and encourages visitors to discover the range of craft-based activity in the county.

2.1 Context & Rationale

The idea of a Co. Wicklow Craft Trail was identified as being the second most important initiative proposed in the surveys, with 74% of Craft Makers/Designers and 69% of Craft Consumers saying that a Craft Trail would be "Very Important" for Wicklow's Craft Sector. This sentiment was also represented in the semi-structured interviews which were conducted, and Case Study 2 (Appendix C) highlights some of the benefits and challenges relating to this initiative.

Craft Trails have become ubiquitous across different regions in Ireland, and there are already a number of successful models operating in Kilkenny, Cork, Donegal, Wexford and Sligo to name just a few. Identified as a key initiative for increasing the visibility of the Craft/Design Sector in Wicklow, the Craft Trail would provide a tangible link between the Craft Clusters, craft studios, retail outlets and other craft-related points of interest, encouraging visitors and locals alike to explore Wicklow's craft offering and contribute to the Craft Economy.

Research has shown that the success of existing Craft Trails often depends on the level of integration with other similar initiatives, such as walking trails, film trails and food trails. With this in mind, a key focus for Wicklow's model would be around linking up with existing trails and other tourism initiatives such as the Wicklow Passport Scheme and the Wicklow Way.

2.2 Overview

The Co. Wicklow Craft Trail would provide a tangible link between the Craft Clusters, as well as highlighting a diverse range of other Craft Maker/Designer studios, craft retail outlets, exhibition spaces, galleries, craft heritage sites, tourist attractions and many other key locations of interest for craft enthusiasts, visitors, tourists and locals. Visitors would be encouraged to learn about Wicklow's craft tradition at the historic Avoca Mill and Olde Shillelagh Stick Makers, and to participate in craft classes or workshops with some of Wicklow's finest "Master Crafters" (see Strategic Priority 4). Visitors would also be invited to explore Wicklow's Craft Clusters and other tourist attractions such as Russborough House or Powerscourt Estate and encouraged to purchase high-quality locally made craft products from retail outlets in towns and villages across the county.

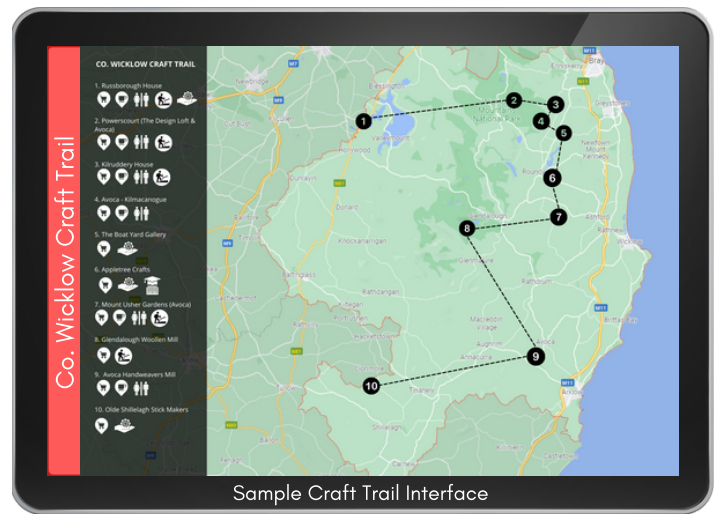
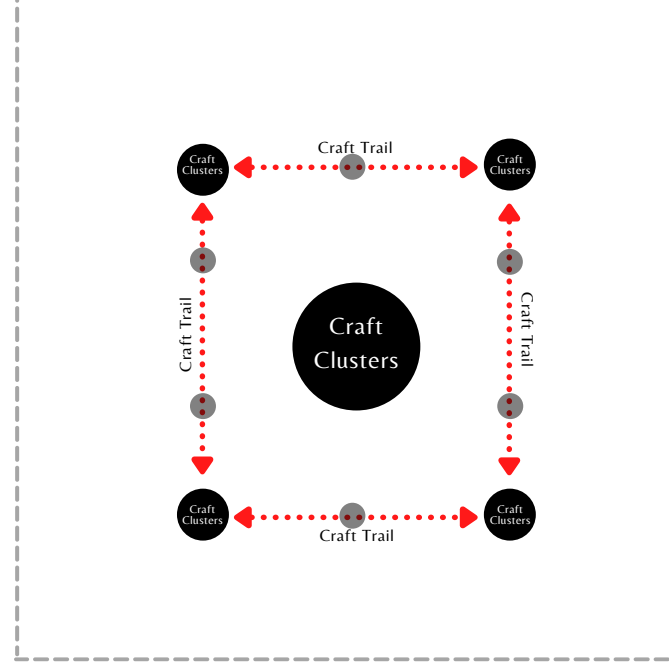
It is envisaged that the Co. Wicklow Craft Trail would be a "digitally native" platform, accessible via the "Wicklow Craft & Design" mobile-friendly website. As a fully interactive and integrated experience, users would be able to explore the diverse database of Craft Practitioners in Wicklow, book classes and workshops, watch educational video content, find contact details and up to date information for craft studios, workshops and retail as well as purchasing local craft products.

In addition to showcasing Wicklow's vibrant Craft Sector and increasing its visibility both locally and further afield, the Co. Wicklow Craft Trail could also be integrated with other trail-based tourism initiatives such as the Wicklow Way, Film Trails and Wicklow Passport Scheme providing an all-inclusive, distinct tourism offering for the county.

For more details, please see the accompanying Business Development Plan 2023 - 2027*.

2.3 Key Features

- The Co. Wicklow Craft Trail would act as a connector for the Craft Clusters, as well as visibly joining up the network of Craft & Design workshops & studios, galleries, retail spaces, heritage and tourism sites which offer craft-based activities, exhibitions or retail.
- Accessed primarily via the "Wicklow Craft & Design" website, the Craft Trail would be "digitally native" and with a fully interactive user-experience. This would allow visitors to plan their routes in advance, make bookings for "meet the maker" experiences, classes or workshops in advance, explore educational content, purchase craft products online and find up to date information about Craft Makers/Designers.
- With a contemporary, user-friendly and accessible design which reflects the "Wicklow Craft & Design" brand, the Craft Trail would feature an experiential focus, with integrated video content and a calendar of events, featuring dates and locations of craft fairs, markets, workshops, festivals & events.
- Integrated with Wicklow Craft Foundation's membership database, a search filter would allow users to find Craft Practitioners based on location, facilities, activities, craft discipline and membership type, such as "Wicklow Native", "Mindful Craft" and "Master Crafters" (see SP4).
- The Craft Trail could also be linked with other "trail-based tourism" initiatives such as Wicklow Passport Scheme, Film, Heritage, Food & Walking Trails with cross-promotion facilitated by the CSG & CLO (see SP3). Links with Visit Wicklow & Fáilte Ireland could attract new visitors, and encourage crossover with other trails.
- Complemented by on-site signage at the Craft Clusters and other key locations of interest, the Craft Trail would also benefit from "Tourist & Leisure Signage" ("Brown Signs") to further increase visibility and encourage spontaneous visits as well as planned routes.



CASE STUDY 2:
Craft Trails
(Appendix C)

Having examined multiple different examples, "Wexford Craft Trail" was chosen as the core focus of the Craft Trail case study. This study makes reference to other similar models including the "Made in Sligo" trail and presents key achievements and challenges in relation to developing and sustaining a regional Craft Trail.

2.4 Timeline Overview & Key Milestones



3. Craft Strategy Group & Craft Liaison Officer

A synergistic, diverse and inclusive group with the sole purpose of implementing this Craft Strategy. Once appointed, the Craft Liaison Officer would also take a leading role in the development of further initiatives to enhance the Craft Sector beyond the strategy timeframe.

3.1 Context & Rationale

When asked about the idea of establishing a Craft Foundation (or similar group), 63% of Craft Makers/Designers thought this initiative was "Very Important" and a further 26% said "Fairly Important". A similar response was recorded in relation to the idea of a Craft Liaison Officer, with 63% saying "Very Important" and 21% saying "Fairly Important".

The Wicklow Craft Foundation, which currently comprises a small group of Wicklow's Craft Makers/Designers, has already been established, and similar groups are active in other counties including Kilkenny, Wexford, Sligo, Donegal and Cork. While the WCF mirrors many others around the country, the formation of a dedicated "Craft Strategy Group" with supporting "Advisory Group" would create a uniquely powerful and collaborative driving force with the collective skills, knowledge, experience and contacts to implement this Craft Strategy and to continue developing Wicklow's Craft Sector beyond 2027.

Although less common in other counties, the role of a Craft Liaison Officer (CLO) is also considered an important initiative and once appointed, Wicklow's CLO would support the WCF and the Craft Strategy Group. In addition to being a major driving force behind the implementation of this strategy, the CLO would also act as a key point of contact for Craft Makers/Designers, as well as for the local authority representatives in the county.

3.2 Overview

With a proposed total of 10 places, the Craft Strategy Group (CSG) would comprise 5 members of the Wicklow Craft Foundation, a representative from County Wicklow Partnership, and an additional 4 members representing the voices of the diverse range of community craft groups, craft retailers, craft-based organisations and other Craft Practitioners in Wicklow, as well as other key stakeholders and experts as required.

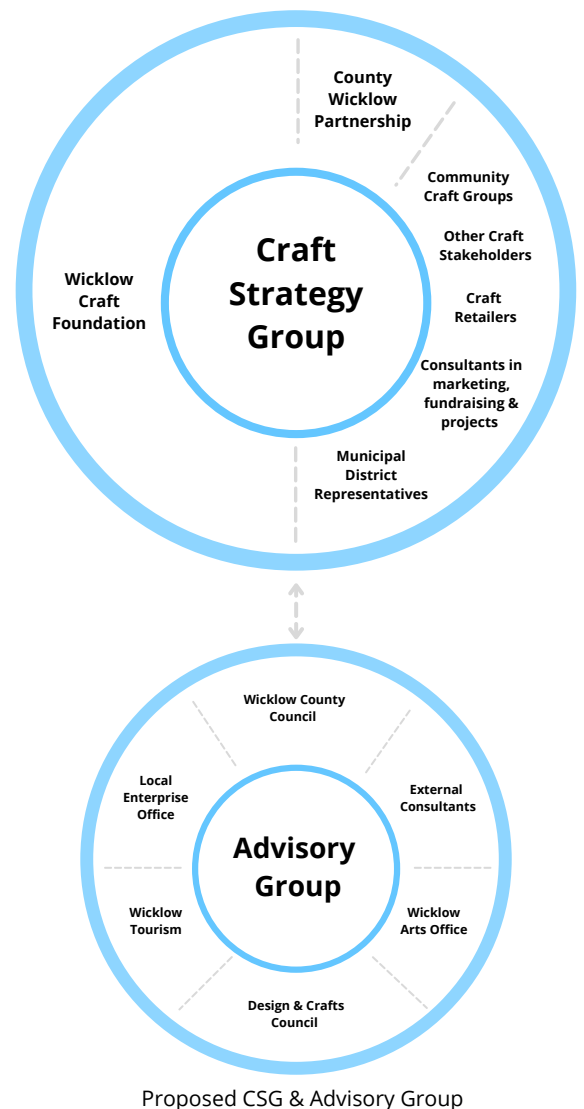
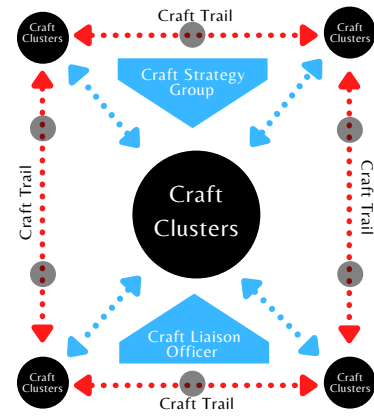
Unlike some of the craft groups researched, the CSG would also be supported by an Advisory Group, which could include representatives from local authority bodies and funders, such as Wicklow County Council, the Local Enterprise Office and Wicklow Tourism. This approach could bring about a unique balance of representation and support from key stakeholders while maintaining the nimble autonomy required for the CSG to move forward with these initiatives.

This group would subsequently be disbanded upon the completion and evaluation of the Craft Strategy in 2027, and at that stage it is envisioned that a full-time Craft Liaison Officer would be in place to support the Wicklow Craft Foundation which would continue to represent and advocate for the diverse Craft Community in Wicklow. Once appointed, the Craft Liaison Officer (CLO) would provide invaluable support to the CSG and WCF as well as to the Craft Sector as a whole. This role could sit within WCF, or within County Wicklow Partnership itself and the position is proposed initially on a part-time basis from 2024. It is envisaged that this role would become a full-time position by 2026 and that the CLO would continue to play a pivotal role in the long-term development of Wicklow's Craft Sector.

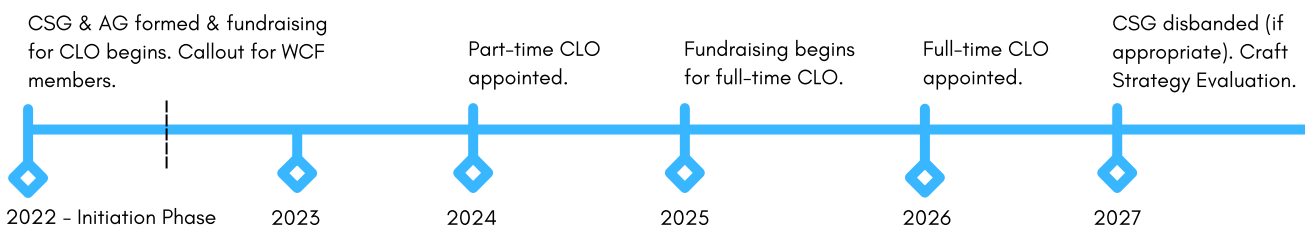
For more details, please see the accompanying Business Development Plan 2023 - 2027*.

3.3 Key Features

- The Craft Strategy Group would be the collaborative driving force whose sole purpose would be to review, implement and evaluate the Co. Wicklow Craft Strategy with support from an Advisory Group.
- There is a proposed membership of 10 people in total, comprising 5 members of the Wicklow Craft Foundation, 1 representative from County Wicklow Partnership and a small group of representatives for other Craft Practitioners and sector stakeholders. The Advisory Group would comprise representatives from local authorities and other key organisations, such as Wicklow County Council, the Local Enterprise Office and Visit Wicklow among others.
- With 50% membership of the Craft Strategy Group, the Wicklow Craft Foundation would be the largest group represented and as such they would play a much more significant role in the CSG than the other members. WCF would be registered with the DCCI as a "GANS" (Guilds, Associations, Networks & Societies) providing access to increased levels of support, funding and representation for Wicklow Craft Makers/Designers and the sector as a whole.
- The CLO could be employed directly by WCF, or by County Wicklow Partnership (CWP) itself. Working on a part-time basis initially, the CLO role could develop into a full-time position and this person could become a central point of contact for Wicklow's Craft Makers/Designers and local authority representatives. The role would include brokering new relationships with representatives from other sectors, including Food & Beverage (Wicklow Naturally), Wicklow Tourism, and the Screen Sector, sourcing new funding streams and engaging in long-term, inclusive and collaborative strategic planning.
- Following a full review and evaluation, it is anticipated that the Craft Strategy Group & Advisory Group would be disbanded at the end of 2027, leaving the WCF and CLO as the main points of contact for Wicklow's Craft Sector.



3.4 Timeline Overview & Key Milestones



4. "Wicklow Craft & Design" Branding & Website

A recognisable and contemporary brand which represents Wicklow's Craft Makers/Designers, and a fully integrated website which encompasses all aspects of this Craft Strategy.

4.1 Context & Rationale

The idea of creating a "Made in Wicklow" type of brand was presented to the focus groups, in the semi-structured interviews and also in the online surveys. In total, 85% of Craft Makers/Designers and 88% of Craft Consumers thought that this idea was important for the Craft Sector. For the Craft Makers/Designers, 53% said a "Made in Wicklow" brand would be "Very Important" and 32% said it would be "Fairly Important". For Craft Consumers, 65% said it was "Very Important" and 23% said "Fairly Important".

Models of localised craft branding can be seen in many counties, including "MADE in Kilkenny", "Made in Sligo", "Cork Craft & Design" and many others, although these have had varied levels of success. In 2020, the DCCI introduced their "Made Local" campaign, and while this could be considered an alternative to the "Made in Wicklow" approach, there is currently no requirement that products being sold in Wicklow with the "Made Local" branding have to be made in Wicklow. As a result, a dedicated brand which highlights Wicklow-made Craft & Design could provide greater benefits for Wicklow's Craft Economy.

As an alternative to the somewhat overused "Made in XXX" model, the term "Wicklow Craft & Design" is used here. It should be noted that this is presented as a holding name only, and the decision around the terminology used would be reserved for the Craft Strategy Group to make, with input from the creative agency engaged to develop the brand and website.

4.2 Overview

There are three aspects which need to be considered in relation to a "Wicklow Craft & Design" branding model: **The Group, The Brand & The Website**. While the term used to describe the Brand and the Website here is "Wicklow Craft & Design", it is understood that "The Group" would be the Wicklow Craft Foundation membership database.

- **"Wicklow Craft Foundation" (The Group):** In this case, it is proposed that the membership group which would represent Wicklow's Craft Practitioners would be the Wicklow Craft Foundation. WCF's values are fully inclusive and the model of membership outlined by the group is one that is open to anyone, from full-time craft professionals to craft consumers, retailers, craft educators and other Craft Practitioners.
- **The Brand:** Consultation with the sector indicated that the "Made in Wicklow" model was somewhat overused, and so a "Wicklow Craft & Design" brand may be preferable. A creative agency would be appointed to develop the full brand aesthetic in close consultation with the Craft Strategy Group. The brand would then be applied across the Craft Clusters and Craft Trail as well as being utilised in other craft retail settings.
- **The Website:** The "Wicklow Craft & Design" website would function as the primary digital point of contact for all stakeholders in Wicklow's Craft Sector, including visitors and tourists. It would be integrated with the Craft Clusters and Craft Trail, as well as hosting training and educational resources, and information about Wicklow Craft Foundation membership.

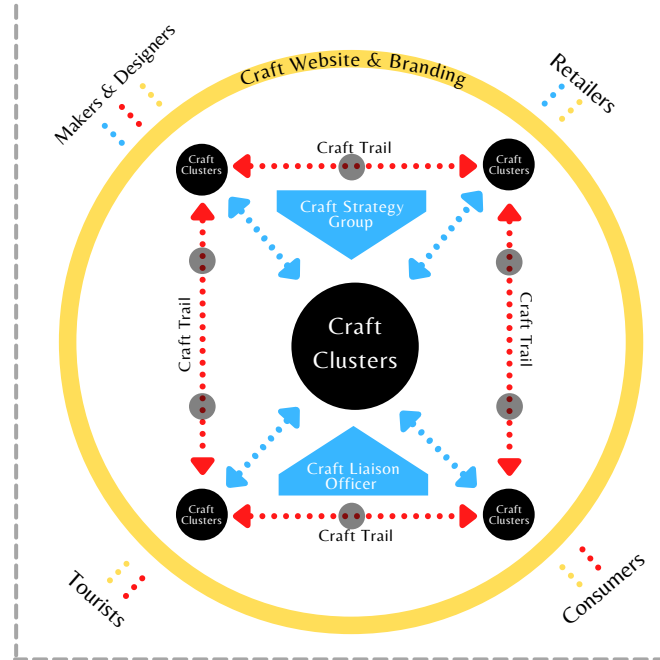
For more details, please see the accompanying Business Development Plan 2023 - 2027*.

4.3 Key Features

- As an accessible and inclusive membership group, it is envisaged that Wicklow Craft Foundation would issue an open call for new members in Q3/Q4:2022 and this diverse group of Craft Practitioners would then be featured on the website's database, as well as being included on the Craft Trail and in other relevant areas. Although no formal assessment would take place for new members, specific criteria may be developed to highlight alternative approaches to craft, such as...
 - **"Master Crafter"** (elite group of highly skilled, renowned makers/designers)
 - **"Wicklow Native"** (practitioners using only Wicklow-sourced raw materials)
 - **"Mindful Craft"** (practitioners and organisations which focus on the process of craft making and the associated benefits)

- "Wicklow Craft & Design" would be a fully integrated, contemporary and accessible brand, which would serve as the central point of contact and primary promotional voice for Wicklow's diverse Craft Sector. The brand would significantly increase the visibility of Wicklow's many Craft Practitioners, and encourage visitors to engage with the sector's offerings, thereby stimulating the local Craft Economy.

- The accompanying website would be a user-friendly, interactive platform which incorporates all of the aspects and initiatives of this Craft Strategy. The site would also act as the first point of contact for visitors interested in exploring Wicklow's deep craft tradition and its many contemporary Craft Makers/Designers. Proposed website features include...
 - Interactive Co. Wicklow Craft Trail
 - Craft Clusters sub-sites
 - Education & Training Resources
 - Calendar of Events & Festivals
 - Online craft retail platform
 - Wicklow Craft Archives & Heritage
 - WCF's database of Craft Practitioners

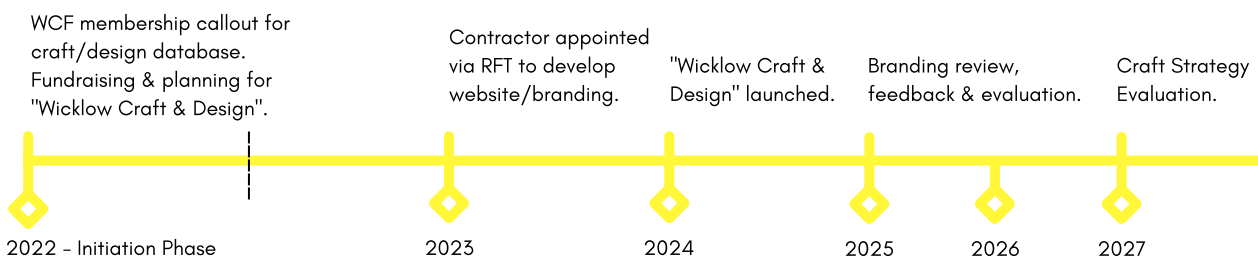


**CASE STUDY 3:
Craft Collectives
& Local Branding
(Appendix C)**

Covering aspects of Strategic Priority 3 and 4, this Case Study examines models of craft groups, and the development of local branding for craft products.

The specific groups which are featured in this Case Study are "MADE in Kilkenny" and "Cork Craft & Design" and both are examined in relation to Craft Collectives and Local Branding.

4.4 Timeline Overview & Key Milestones



5. Education, Training, Development & Supports

An innovative and supportive suite of opportunities which complements current provision and which aims to support the development of individual craft practices, techniques and skills.

5.1 Context & Rationale

As identified in the Research & Engagement Phase of this project, the majority of available supports, training and development initiatives for Craft Makers/Designers are focused on business development, enterprise growth, sales and marketing but there are fewer supports which focus on the development of specific craft making techniques or artistic development.

In Wicklow, the Local Enterprise Office (working closely with the DCCI) provide invaluable supports to Craft Makers/Designers and the initiatives proposed here aim to complement this current offering, rather than replace them. According to the primary research conducted, "Business Development training" was seen as being "Very Important" by 60% of respondents, "Fairly Important" by 19%, "Not Really Important" by 19% and "Not Important at all" by 2%. Similarly, "Website Development" was considered "Very Important" by 63%, "Fairly Important" by 21%, "Not Really Important" by 14% and "Not Important at all" by 2%.

While it is acknowledged that these business development supports are vital and hugely beneficial to the Craft Sector, findings from the Craft Maker/Designer Survey also showed that 51% of respondents identified more as an "Artist" and only 11% identified as an "Entrepreneur". This highlights a perceived gap in the current supports for the "Artist" rather than the "Entrepreneur" and this forms the focus of Strategic Priority 5.

5.2 Overview

This Strategic Priority proposes a suite of complementary Education, Training, Development & Supports which could help to continuously enhance, refresh and revitalise the Craft Sector, bringing it to ever-higher levels of skill, collaboration, expertise and knowledge. The proposed programmes could enhance the current offering to Craft Makers/Designers in Wicklow, and are not intended to replace any of the existing supports or developmental programmes which are already being delivered by the LEO and DCCI. Instead, they are aimed at supplementing these initiatives and filling the perceived gaps in current provision.

Taking a holistic viewpoint, Strategic Priority 5 could enhance all of the other priorities presented in this Craft Strategy for Co. Wicklow. These training and development initiatives could also enrich the membership base of Wicklow Craft Foundation, whilst augmenting the Craft Trail and advancing the "Wicklow Craft & Design" brand. Also working in reverse, the realisation of the Craft Clusters could provide significant additional opportunities for the creation and facilitation of further educational and training supports which respond directly to the needs of Craft Practitioners in Wicklow.

It is envisaged that the Craft Liaison Officer and Wicklow Craft Foundation would play a fundamental role in the ongoing development of these programmes. Courses and workshops could be held at the Craft Clusters and in other locations along the Craft Trail and online resources could be available on the "Wicklow Craft & Design" Website. Strategic Priority 5 completes the circular Craft Sector model, and provides the momentum to keep it spinning.

For more details, please see the accompanying Business Development Plan 2023 – 2027*.

5.3 Key Features

Below are three proposed programmes which are based on some of the perceived gaps in current education and training opportunities in Wicklow. These are suggestive only, and it is envisaged that further initiatives would be developed by Wicklow Craft Foundation based on the needs of its members.

5.3.1 "Presenting as an Artist" Workshops

Addressing the dichotomy of "Artist" vs "Entrepreneur", this programme would enable Craft Makers/Designers to present themselves as "artists" rather than "entrepreneurs" (if they wish to do so).

Adopting the "language of the artist" could help to open up new opportunities including grants, residencies and commissions as well as potentially enabling Craft Makers & Designers to benefit from Artists' Tax Exemption, if appropriate.

5.3.2 Mentorship & Apprenticeship

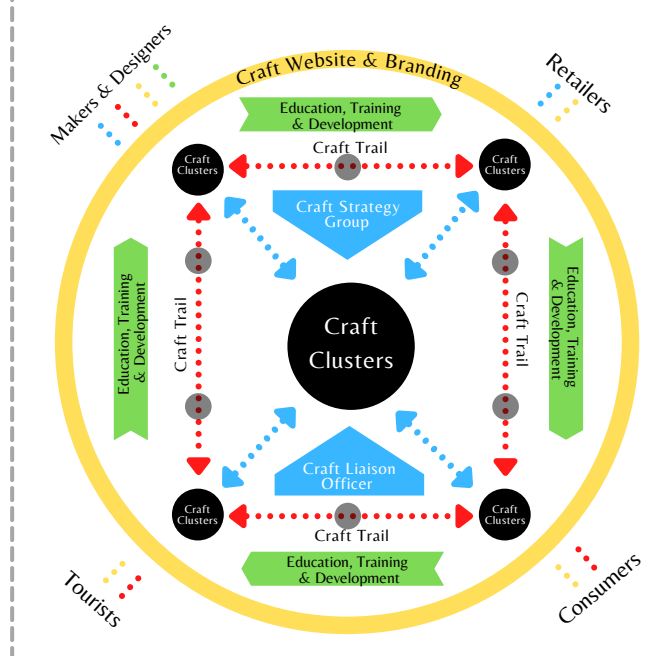
A programme of craft-practice mentorship and apprenticeships would also help Craft Practitioners to develop their craft discipline and help to preserve the skills, knowledge and techniques of Wicklow's Master Crafters.

This programme would not duplicate or replace any of the existing mentorship programmes offered by the LEO and/or DCCI, and instead it would focus on filling the perceived gap in the current provision.

5.3.3 Peer Critique Programme

Emphasising the development of craft practice rather than business practice, a "Peer Critique" programme would facilitate constructive conversation with peer-to-peer feedback matching "Master Crafters" with part-time or early-career Craft Makers/Designers.

This could also encourage more collaborative working patterns, as well as enhancing the creative output of Craft Practitioners of all disciplines and approaches.

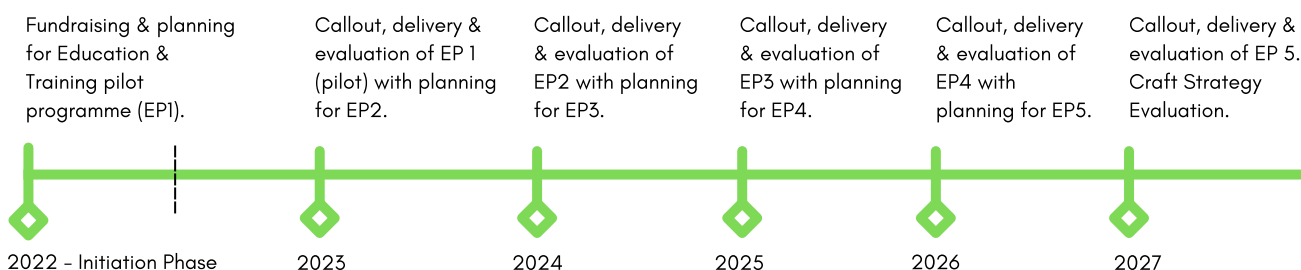


CASE STUDY 4: Promotion, Support & Positioning: The International Perspective (Appendix C)

Although not focused solely on the educational aspects or specific programmes offered, this final case study presents an overview of the International perspective and highlights the different perceptions and value placed on Craft & Design in different countries. This is a fundamental issue which underpins some of the recommendations outlined in Strategic Priority 5.

The primary focus is on the Canada Crafts Federation, but reference is also made to practices in Australia and Norway.

5.4 Timeline Overview & Key Milestones





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Funded by The Department of Rural
& Community Development

This project is funded through the LEADER Rural Development Fund 2014 - 2020,
County Wicklow Partnership and Wicklow County Council.