

# Belfast Creative Sector Review

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EKOS Limited, St. George's Studios, 93-97 St. George's Road, Glasgow, G3 6JA  
Reg 145099

Telephone: 0141 353 1994

Web: [www.ekos-consultants.co.uk](http://www.ekos-consultants.co.uk)

Direct enquiries regarding this report should be submitted to:

**Brian McLaren, Director, EKOS**

Email: [brian.mclaren@ekos.co.uk](mailto:brian.mclaren@ekos.co.uk)

Tel: 0141 353 8313

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# 1. Conclusions and Recommendations

Taking into account the findings of each element of the research, we have a number of conclusions and recommendations for BCC.

## 1.1 Review of previous support

BCC's programme of support for the creative industries in the city has been successful and valuable in a number of ways:

- it has been very well received by the sector, and has generated quantifiable impacts in terms of increased revenue and investment in the sector, as well as supporting the start of new businesses;
- employment impacts are less obvious, but two key factors must be taken into account here:
  - the impacts of the recession is such that even with increased revenues, businesses are increasingly wary of taking on new staff
  - much of the activity focussed on networking and events, activities that should not be expected to have major employment impacts
- it has helped to promote a sense of community across the creative sector and has raised its profile both at home and internationally;
- the involvement of BCC has also created less quantifiable but nonetheless important benefits for companies through advice, support and connections. This is a direct result of having a dedicated Creative Industries Officer in post that can act as a knowledgeable point of contact for micro-businesses in the sector;
- BCC has also played an important role in facilitating partnerships across the public agencies in the city, most obviously around the South by South West initiative which is now led by Invest NI and supported by a broad partnership; and
- the Council has focussed its support on micro-businesses, as these are not fully addressed by existing provision.

Given the modest level of investment, it is fair to conclude that BCC's Creative Industries programme has delivered good value for money.

## 1.2 Future Activity

Our recommendations for the future are detailed below.

### 1.2.1 Strategic Focus

**BCC Economic Development Unit's** future engagement with the creative industries should focus on three main areas:

1. provision of **business support** to micro-businesses;
2. developing a **supportive environment** and infrastructure that will allow the creative sector to thrive; and
3. **co-ordinating city strategies** for arts and culture, cultural tourism, events and creative industries to provide a **creative vision** for the future of the city.

#### Business Support

Support for creative micro-businesses is a valid and important area for BCC given both its past track record and the relative lack of other suitable provision. Two approaches are therefore possible:

- develop bespoke creative industries support programme(s) to be delivered directly or through third parties (e.g. commissioned); or
- channel creative businesses to BCC's wider business support programmes, ring-fencing resource for the sector.

Following the recent evaluation of the work of the EDU, BCC has restructured its support to businesses into the following areas:

- employment and skills, including work placements, internships and apprenticeships and bursaries for education and training;

- export support; and
- start-up support through the Belfast Enterprise Academy.

Enterprise support is always needed in the sector, and our survey indicated that the main issues for creative businesses were around accessing international opportunities. Therefore, there is a strong fit with the mainstream programmes proposed by BCC.

Rather than develop specific programmes for the creative industries and risk duplicating existing provision, it would make more sense to ensure that creative businesses seeking support are connected to the appropriate provision, including, for example, support for bands/ companies to attend South by South West, which has proven its success<sup>1</sup>. This is a more cost effective and connected approach that ensures that the creative industries are brought into the mainstream business support pipeline. This argues strongly for the continuation of the **Creative Industries Officer** role to act as the connection between the sector and BCC's business support programmes.

There is also scope to develop a high level **mentoring programme** that connects creative businesses to expert mentors with experience in their sector. This will augment the more general business support available from BCC with more sector specific input in a way that is less resource intensive.

As highlighted in the previous section, business support should be targeted towards those areas of the creative industries that offer strongest potential for economic growth – music, creative services, screen industries and digital media. This is broadly in line with the approach taken to date, but would broaden support to incorporate the whole of the design sector (and related activities such as advertising).

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<sup>1</sup> BCC should not lead the SXSW mission, but should support companies/ bands to attend

## Supportive business environment

In developing a supportive business environment for the creative sector, there are four main priorities:

- building the telecommunications infrastructure;
- taking forward the digital hub proposal;
- providing effective networking opportunities across the creative sector; and
- promoting Belfast as a creative centre.

The development of the **broadband infrastructure** will be addressed through BCC's Urban Broadband Fund Programme which has a strong focus on the creative and digital industries. However, there may be further work to do in encouraging uptake from the sector, although this is a feature of the proposed programme of work.

As noted above, there are two proposals currently under consideration for the **digital hub** – Titanic Quarter and Crumlin Road. It is difficult to provide firm guidance on this without more detailed option appraisal work, but the Crumlin Road proposal offers greater potential to connect to the cultural and tourism agendas as well as contributing to regeneration objectives. If this option is developed, it should be pitched as a **creative hub**, and not just restricted to digital.

BCC has already been delivering effective and well received **networking** events to the creative sector and this should continue. This should take the form of a series of events, bringing key figures from abroad to Belfast to raise the profile of the sector and share knowledge about international markets (thereby linking back to the internationalisation priorities). A cross-sectoral approach should be taken, linking with partners such as the universities, NI Screen and Invest NI. Creative Belfast can provide a useful brand under which this work can take place.

In addition, **Belfast Music Week** should continue as this has been successful and has built support within the music sector in Belfast.

The **Creative Belfast** brand should also be promoted more widely (e.g. at international events and through promotional campaigns in partnership with the NI Tourist Office).

## Strategic co-ordination

BCC has an important role in connecting various strands of work under a single strategic vision from the city as a creative place. This should encompass:

- the economic development of the creative industries;
- cultural and artistic development;
- development of the economic and cultural infrastructure;
- promotion of Belfast's culture and creative sector; and
- cultural tourism and events.

This will require some co-ordinating work within the Council and with its key partners, and should be an early priority action.

### 1.2.2 Summary of Actions

Priority area	Action	Responsibility
<b>Business support</b>		
Micro-business support	Connecting creative micro-businesses to BCC support (e.g. export support)	Creative Industries Officer/ BC EDU
Mentoring programme for creative micro-businesses	Establish bank of mentors and match to creative micro-businesses	Creative Industries Officer
Informal advice to creative micro-businesses	Continue to provide ad-hoc and informal advice to creative micro-businesses	Creative Industries Officer
<b>Business Environment</b>		
Broadband infrastructure	Implement the infrastructure works outlined in the Urban	BCC EDU



	Broadband Fund application	
Broadband uptake	Series of workshops with creative businesses to support uptake of new ultrafast broadband	BCC EDU/ Creative Industries Officer
Creative/ Digital Hub	Commission detailed option appraisal to identify the best proposition for the creative/ digital hub	Creative Industries Officer/ Invest NI
Creative/ Digital Hub	Implement recommendations of option appraisal	BCC/ Invest NI
Creative Belfast	Series of networking events across the creative sector	Creative Industries Officer/ all partners
Belfast Music Week	Continue to support the Belfast Music Week event	Creative Industries Officer/ BCC Tourism, Arts and Culture team
Promotional Campaign	Develop and implement a wider promotional campaign for Creative Belfast	Creative Industries Officer/ BCC Tourism, Arts and Culture team
<b>Strategic Co-ordination</b>		
City Strategy	Align strategies for creative industries, arts and culture and cultural tourism in Belfast	Creative Industries Officer/ BCC Tourism, Arts and Culture team
	Engage wider partners in developing a vision for Belfast	Creative Industries Officer/ BCC Tourism, Arts and Culture team/ other partners

## 2. Next Steps

### 2.1 Industry Feedback

Following the production of the draft report, a workshop was held in Belfast with representatives of creative businesses and partner agencies to gather feedback on the identified areas of priority and discuss actions.

Feedback on the priority areas was very positive, and there was general agreement that BCC should focus effort on co-ordinating business support, providing essential infrastructure and strategic co-ordination and promotion of the creative sector in the city.

In particular, the workshop identified the following as important priority actions:

- connect business support within the city to present a clearer and more co-ordinated offer to the sector;
- showcase the sector both within and beyond Belfast to raise its visibility;
- take forward key infrastructure projects – broadband and the creative hub; and
- promote the sector and lobby for recognition of its importance and support for future development.

Importantly, there was no strong demand for BCC to provide specific creative industries business support programmes, with the preference instead that support could be provided through mainstream services with sector specific input via industry mentors. The wider role for BCC in this area is one of co-ordination and signposting rather than delivery.

## 2.2 Actions

There are a number of actions now for BCC to take forward the recommendations of this review. These are detailed below.

Priority area	Action
<b>Business support</b>	
Micro-business support	Package and communicate the range of support available from BCC to creative businesses in the city. This could take the form of a leaflet doe wide distribution, and could extend to cover signposting to the support provided by other organisations – a Roadmap of Business Support in Belfast.
Mentoring programme for creative micro-businesses	Establish bank of industry mentors and match to creative micro-businesses in Belfast.
International	Work with key partners such as Invest NI and ACNI to develop a clear approach to international showcasing and export promotion. There is proven value in et Creative Belfast brand for international promotion (e.g. at South by Southwest) and there is work to do to agree how this is best handled within a national approach to export promotion for the creative industries.
<b>Business Environment</b>	
Broadband infrastructure	Implement the infrastructure works outlined in the Urban Broadband Fund application.
Broadband uptake	Develop and deliver a series of workshops with creative businesses to support uptake of new ultrafast broadband. Although not targeted solely at et creative sector, they will be major users of this infrastructure and must be encouraged to take up the opportunities that it offers.

Creative/ Digital Hub	Commission a detailed feasibility study and option appraisal to identify the best proposition for the creative/ digital hub.
Creative Belfast	Develop series of networking events across the creative sector. These should be cross-sectoral and focussed on key area of business need.
Music events	Work with the Tourism, Arts and Culture unit to develop a coherent strategy and approach to music events in the city.
Promotional Campaign	Develop and implement a wider promotional campaign for the Creative Belfast brand, linking into the international showcasing and export promotion work highlighted above.
<b>Strategic Co-ordination</b>	
City Strategy	Align strategies for creative industries, arts and culture and cultural tourism in Belfast (starting with the music work referred to above).
	Engage wider partners in developing a vision for Belfast as a creative city.