



a creative  
momentum  
project

# Creative Sector Supports in the West of Ireland: Entrepreneur Perspectives on Future Needs



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Principal Investigator: Dr Patrick Collins

Post-Doctoral Researcher: Dr Aisling Murtagh

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### About *a creative momentum project*

A three year (2015-2018), transnational project co-funded by the EU Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme, *a creative momentum project* focused on the development of the creative industries sector in regions across Europe's Northern Edge. This report emerged from the 'Intelligence and Influence' aspect of *a creative momentum project*. For more information visit: <https://mycreativeedge.eu/>

*Disclaimer: This report is prepared on behalf of a creative momentum project partnership. Every effort has been made to ensure the information it contains is correct. We cannot assume responsibility or have liability to third parties arising out of or in connection with this information being inaccurate, incomplete or misleading.*



## Contents

<b>1. Introduction &amp; overview .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Creative sector development needs.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2.1 Creative enterprises and the business environment.....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1.1 Develop local creative spaces.....	6
2.1.2 Access to funding and finance .....	7
2.1.3 Strengthen existing capacity and develop business skills .....	10
2.1.4 Building international networks to support sustainable growth .....	13
2.1.5 Support interconnections to catalyse growth .....	14
<b>2.2 Regional creativity .....</b>	<b>15</b>
2.2.1 Support creative human capital growth.....	15
2.2.2 Attractive regions and peripheral creative industries .....	15
2.2.3 Infrastructure needs .....	17
<b>3. Conclusion &amp; recommendations .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Framework for developing cultural and creative industries.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Appendix 2: References .....</b>	<b>21</b>



## 1. Introduction & overview

In addition to *a creative momentum project*, recent years have seen the development of a number of projects supporting creative sector development in the West of Ireland. These include Creative Edge (Northern Periphery Programme funded), Harnessing Creativity (Interreg IVA funded), Creative Connections (supporting craft and led by four Local Enterprise Offices) and Creative Communities Igniting Change (Erasmus+ funded). Alongside this, Ireland's first national cultural policy 'Culture 2025' was launched in 2016. The Creative Ireland programme is Culture 2025's main implementation vehicle which is also rooted locally supported by county-level culture and creativity plans. With this increasing recognition of the importance of creative and cultural industries, and projects that have built networks and capacity in the West of Ireland, we need to look to the development of longer-term evidence-based strategies to support future growth. Good practice suggests approaches to creative industry development must be tailored to the requirements and characteristics of specific regions (Creative Growth, 2011; Banks & O'Connor, 2009; Bell and Jayne, 2010). In this context, this report provides evidence that can inform future development of the creative sector in the West of Ireland.

Here we present an assessment of creative sector support needs in the West of Ireland region based on the perspective of creative practitioners and entrepreneurs. The report is underpinned by evidence from an online survey of the creative sector, as well as a series of interviews with creative professionals<sup>1</sup>. Data collected aimed to gain an understanding of the general attributes of the region that impact the capacity for creative entrepreneurship, such as communications infrastructure, natural and broader business environment. It also focused on supports received and current needs of entrepreneurs, as well as challenges facing future development. We also discuss the strengths of the region and outline good practice examples of innovative initiatives and supports. This part of the analysis can also provide insights for other peripheral regions to inform approaches to creative sector development.

Our core findings highlight the multidimensional nature of the creative sector and an effective support structure can be likened to a jigsaw puzzle of interlocking parts. To assist the burgeoning creative sector in the West of Ireland to reach its full potential, a range of creative enterprise support needs emerge to facilitate future development. The key findings inform a number of recommendations made in the final section to support the future development of the creative sector in the West of Ireland (see section 3).

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<sup>1</sup> The survey was carried out in 2017, primarily to inform an economic and social impact assessment of the creative sector (see Collins et al. 2018), but also contained questions to gather information on existing supports, as well as future needs and challenges. The greatest number of observations to any survey question was 117, but respondent numbers vary across the survey. Low response rates are not unusual in surveys of this nature requiring detailed information. They tend to be low because of this burden on respondents (Bryan et al., 2000). Interviews were conducted from October 2016 to September 2017 with eight creative professionals from animation, film, TV, games, music, fashion and product design sub-sectors.

## 2. Creative sector development needs

### 2.1 Creative enterprises and the business environment

Across seven areas examined in relation to the business environment in the West of Ireland, **access to co-working infrastructure and finance emerged** as the **most significant issues** of concern with over half indicating they were a poor/very poor aspect of the business environment (see Figure 1). In other areas that we assessed the results were more mixed. Opportunities to collaborate emerged as a weakness for 41% of respondents who indicated this was poor/very poor, but 29% stated this was good/very good. In relation to availability of skilled staff, 37% indicated this was very poor/poor, but 32% also stated this was good/very good. For the remaining three areas assessed (access to business supports, networking opportunities and access to knowledge) on average across these areas a third indicated they were poor/very poor, but also a third stated they were good/very good (see Figure 1 and 2).

Figure 1: Poor ranking of aspects of the business environment

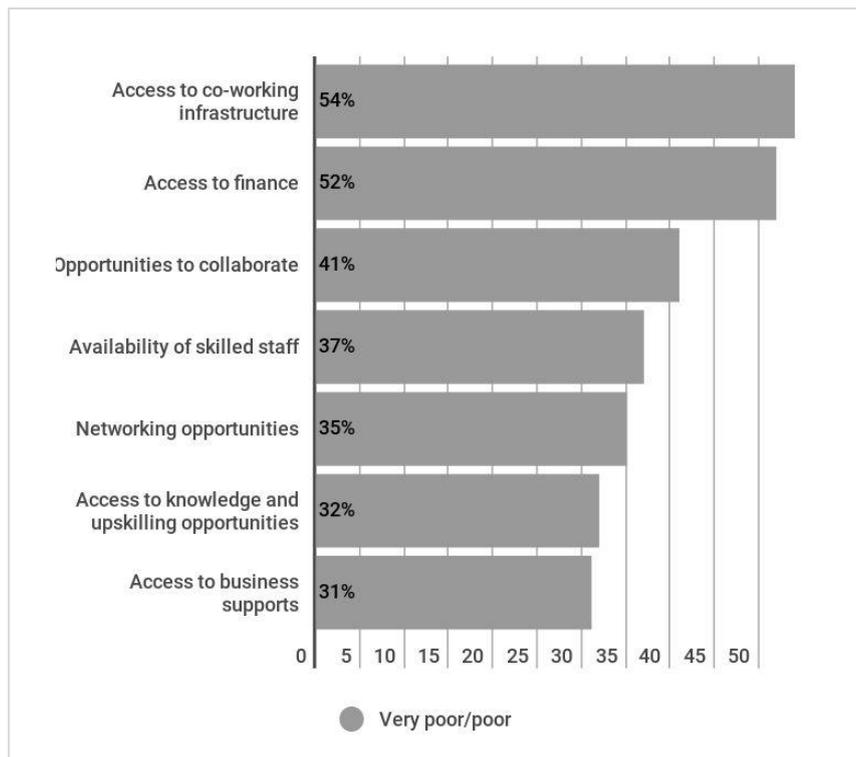
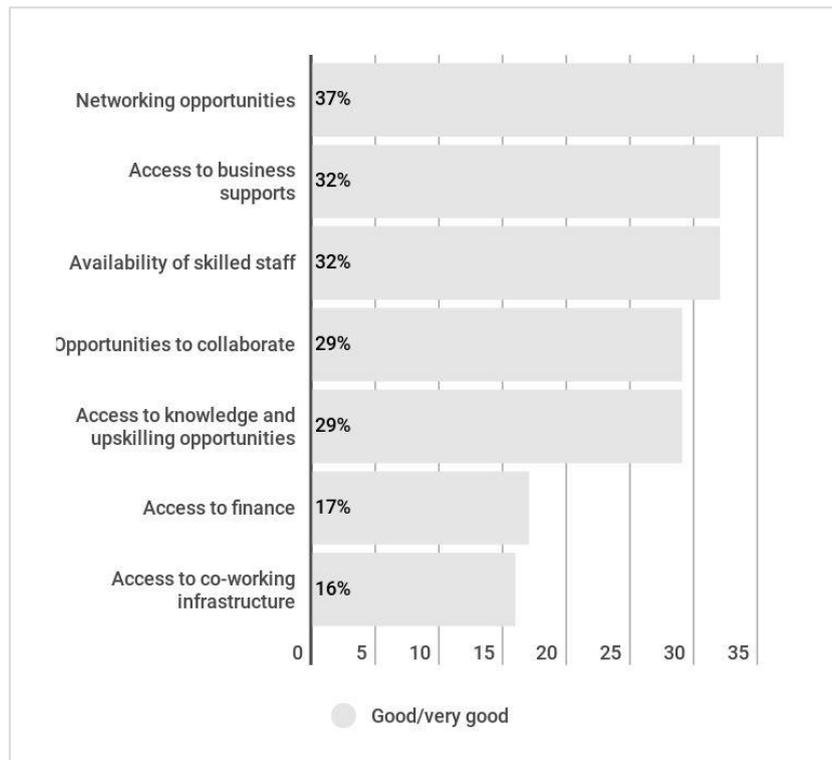


Figure 2: Good ranking of aspects of the business environment



Interviews with creative entrepreneurs and open-ended survey questions help to identify areas where specific supports appear needed, as well as strengths of the region to be sustained or further developed. We discuss the key areas of need and emerging issues in the remaining sections of this report.

### 2.1.1 Develop local creative spaces

The West of Ireland’s co-working infrastructure has developed in recent years with the emergence of spaces such the Building Block in Sligo and Portershed in Galway. **Our evidence suggests there is room for further development of this infrastructure to support the development of the West of Ireland’s creative sector.** Access to co-working infrastructure emerged as a weakness rated as a poor/very poor aspect of the business environment by 54% of our survey respondents in the West of Ireland. A strong co-working infrastructure has a multifaceted role in relation to the development of the creative industries business ecosystem. Strong networking and collaboration opportunities are an essential part of this ecosystem.

The European Working Group on Cultural and Creative Sectors has highlighted the importance of building networks between the micro and small enterprises that dominate the creative sector (OMC-EWG-CCI, 2012; 2014). Our survey showed mixed results in relation to networking (35% poor/very poor and 37% good/very good) and collaboration (41% poor/very poor and 29% good/very good) opportunities. Our evidence overall finds an open, supportive, creative community exists in the West of Ireland and

newcomers can break into networks with ease. Local networks appear strong, but broader networks need building (see section 2.1.4). This already **strong foundation of local networks could be further strengthened by the presence of dedicated places where creative professionals can better maintain connections with other local creative professionals.**

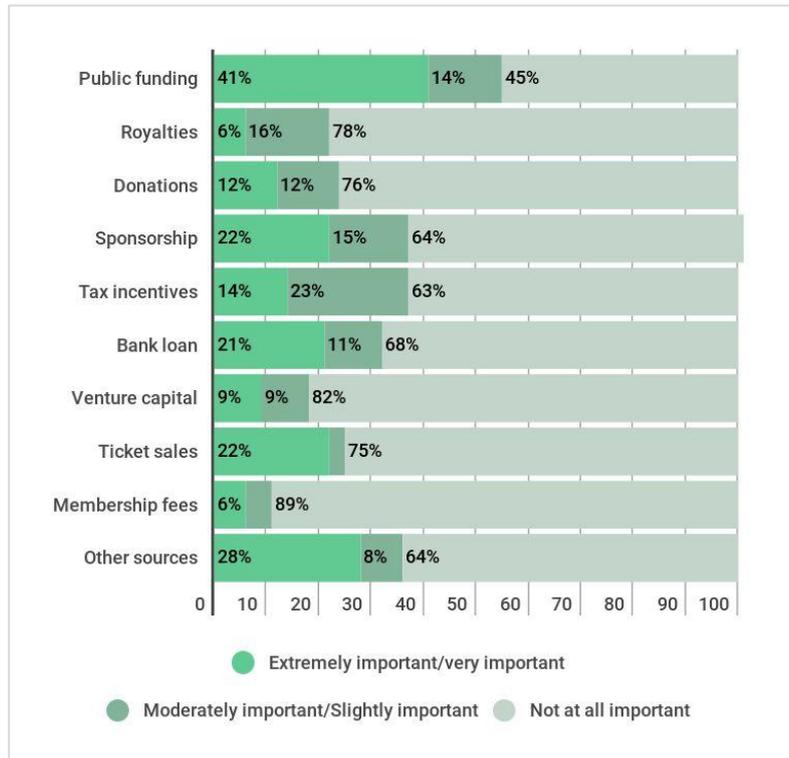
Creative sector entrepreneurs interviewed also identify a **range of wider benefits of working from local hubs or having broader access to them.** Interviews with creative entrepreneurs who do not work from home discuss how being located in a more visible space has helped them build new networks, access knowledge and support improved work-life balance. For some, because of poor local broadband quality, hubs provide vital access to a quality high-speed connection. Broader research has also found working in a more visible space, such as co-working hubs, can have more comprehensive benefits for businesses, such as reducing isolation and facilitating peer to peer learning. These spaces can also be effectively integrated into existing infrastructures such as arts centres or serviced offices (Fuzi, 2015).

More broadly, **developing creative business incubators has been recommended in the EU context** (Creative Growth, 2011). Research has also found business incubators have positive impacts in supporting creative enterprise development. For example, co-working spaces where facilitators support relationship building among young, start-up entrepreneurs have positive outcomes for their development (Fuzi, 2015). Incubators can also be used to bring together existing niche clusters of creative enterprises (Chambers and Serup, 2011). For example, in the Northern Finland region, the Oulu Games Campus shows how the development of these spaces can focus on niche areas that complement wider local resources, such as the existing talent base (see Murtagh and Collins 2018b). Incubators supporting enterprise development more broadly also have positive impacts on the creative sector, such as the case study on BizMaker in the Västernorrland region highlights (see Murtagh and Collins 2018d). Therefore emerging from our evidence is the **need for assessment of the potential and feasibility of a network of new shared creative spaces, such as dedicated creative enterprise co-working hubs or business incubators in the region.**

### 2.1.2 Access to funding and finance

The West of Ireland creative sector does appear to have **some reliance on public funding, but this is part of a mix of revenue sources** (see Figure 3). Based on our survey findings, public funding was extremely or very important as a source of revenue for 41% of survey respondents, while 45% said it was not important. Other sources of funding were most notably the sale of goods and services. The lack of importance placed on venture capital is also notable, with 82% indicating it was not an important source of revenue. This could also be a symptom of the sample surveyed – 49% were in business five years or less, and 51% were self-employed.

Figure 3: Importance of different revenue streams to creative enterprises in the West of Ireland



**A beneficial creative sector business support structure is available to creative sector entrepreneurs in the West of Ireland.** National and regional public funding is accessed and valued by the creative sector. Examples emerging from our evidence were supports available through Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), Local Development Companies, Enterprise Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta. Sub-sectors of the creative industries also access supports through specific agencies of relevance to them such as the Irish Film Board and the Design and Craft Council of Ireland. **Existing supports for small business and creative sector professionals are a central part of the support structure for creative sector development in the region. Our findings underline the importance of the continued availability of these supports.**

While a beneficial creative business support structure appears to exist in the West of Ireland, **access to finance** still emerges as an **issue for creative sector entrepreneurs**. Our survey found 52% of respondents indicating access to finance was very poor/poor. Access to finance and funding also emerges strongly as a key challenge from open-ended survey questions. To realise the need for increased finance supports for the creative sector, cross-collaboration between agencies with complementary goals could play an important future role. The Western Region Audiovisual Producer's (WRAP) Fund provides an example of how agency cross collaboration leveraged new funding to develop a support scheme targeting need in the audiovisual creative sub-sectors. This €2 million fund aims to support development projects and co-productions in film, television, animation and games (see Case 1, p.9).

Evidence from interviews and open-ended survey questions suggests that entrepreneurs' access grants to facilitate specific goals such as website design, business branding or attendance at conferences. Wider research has identified similar findings. KEA European Affairs (2010) found that finance obtained by creative businesses can be concentrated around support for specific projects and not for broader business development. For larger capital requirements to support business development or new projects, entrepreneurs appear to access funds from a variety of sources, sometimes also using their funds to raise the levels of capital required. Some entrepreneurs, notably in digital content sectors such as games and digital media, perceive their work as falling outside the remit of sub-sector support agencies such as the Irish Film Board and Arts Council. Wider research assessing finance gaps in the creative and cultural sector has identified the **need for tailor-made finance programmes.**

Finance needs of creative enterprises vary depending on the creative sub-sector and stage of development (KEA European Affairs, 2010). This points to the importance of dedicated creative industry capital finance schemes, such as the Western Development Commission's Creative Industries Micro Loan Fund (see Case 2, p.10).

**Future research could also focus more closely on the finance needs of creative sector enterprises in West of Ireland**

to understand how existing supports could be better tailored to creative business needs, or if new support schemes are warranted. One area of need we identify is a regional fund to support leading creative professionals to focus on their creative practice full-time for a period, which would also help to build distinctive cultural assets in the region. The potential for such a regional fund supporting a wide variety of forms of artistic creation would be a worthwhile area of future policy consideration. Our survey found that 28% of creative sector professionals surveyed were not working in the creative sector as a full-time occupation. Of these respondents, 69% engaged in other paid employment. Other employment was in areas such as healthcare, research, education and retail. If creative professionals are occupied in other jobs, rather than concentrated on their creative practice full-time, this can limit their capacity for new content creation. They lack time to invest in experimentation and idea development. A support scheme to help alleviate this issue in Iceland is the [Artists Salary Fund](#) which provides a salary of around €3,000 per month to artists for set

**CASE 1: THE WRAP FUND**

THE [Western Region Audio-Visual Producers \(WRAP\) fund](#) IS AN INITIATIVE OF THE GALWAY FILM CENTRE AND THE WESTERN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES OF CLARE, DONEGAL, GALWAY CITY, GALWAY COUNTY, MAYO, ROSCOMMON AND SLIGO ALONG WITH ÚDARÁS NA GAELTACHTA. LAUNCHED IN 2017, THE €2 MILLION FUND WILL RUN OVER A THREE YEAR PERIOD. IT WAS SET UP TO SUPPORT FILM, TELEVISION, ANIMATION AND GAMING INDUSTRIES IN THE WESTERN REGION OF IRELAND. THE WRAP FUND IS COMMITTED TO STRATEGIC INVESTMENT THAT ENCOURAGES REGIONAL PRODUCTION ACTIVITY ACROSS THE FILM, TELEVISION DRAMA, ANIMATION AND GAMING SECTORS. IT ALSO AIMS TO SUPPORT LOCAL TALENT, CREATE SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT, BUILD THE AUDIO-VISUAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE CULTURAL VERACITY OF THE REGION. IT IS ESTIMATED THAT THE INVESTMENT WILL CREATE 90 JOBS IN THE WESTERN REGION. THE WRAP FUND ALSO AIMS TO ATTRACT INTERNATIONAL PRODUCTION COMPANIES TO THE REGION AND HAVE SPILLOVER EFFECTS SUCH AS DRIVING FUTURE TOURISM (WESTERN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION, 2017).

periods so they can focus on their creative practice (see case study in Murtagh and Collins 2018a). The Arts Council of Ireland’s New Generation artist award provides promising artists with funding of up to €20,000 to focus on developing their practice and in particular focus on a specific development need (Arts Council of Ireland, 2018).

### 2.1.3 Strengthen existing capacity and develop business skills

Concerning access to knowledge and up-skilling opportunities, our survey results were mixed - 32% indicated they felt these opportunities were good/very good. However, a significant 29% also rated them as poor/very poor. Specific areas of need emerge from wider evidence analysed. **Entrepreneurs interviewed observe high levels of creative talent in the region. However alongside this, effective commercialisation of creativity appears a deficit among some creative entrepreneurs pointing to the important value of business skills development.** Continuous learning is important in creative professions, and proactive self-teaching is a trait observed among creative sector entrepreneurs interviewed. However, in the context of creative entrepreneurship, developing business skills is also vital.

Because of entrepreneurs existing training, experience and networks our evidence suggest they are more effectively equipped to develop their creative talent than business skills. The

#### CASE 2: CREATIVE INDUSTRIES MICRO LOAN FUND

THE [Creative Industries Micro-Loan Fund](#) PROVIDES LOAN FINANCE FROM €5,000 TO €25,000 TO CREATIVE SECTOR ENTERPRISES IN THE WESTERN REGION OF IRELAND. SOLE TRADERS, LIMITED COMPANIES, PARTNERSHIPS, COOPERATIVES AND GROUPS ARE ALL ELIGIBLE. THE FUND WAS DEVELOPED BY THE WESTERN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (WDC) TO SERVE THE NEED IT IDENTIFIED FOR IMPROVED ACCESS TO FINANCE TO ASSIST THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN THE REGION. REPAYMENT CAPACITY IS A KEY ASSESSMENT CRITERION FOR ELIGIBILITY, AND ONCE DETERMINED, APPLICATIONS ARE EVALUATED ON A COMPETITIVE BASIS ASSESSING SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT, EXPORT ACTIVITY AND SPILL-OVER IMPACTS OF THE BUSINESS. APPLICANTS ALSO SUBMIT A BUSINESS PLAN WITH THEIR APPLICATION WHICH MUST DETAIL THE PROJECT'S COMMERCIAL VIABILITY AND ABILITY TO REPAY THE LOAN FINANCE.

THE INITIATIVE WAS FIRST RUN ON A PILOT BASIS OVER A THREE YEAR PERIOD COMMENCING IN 2012 ALLOCATING €1 MILLION TO THE FUND. FOLLOWING THE SUCCESSFUL PILOT, THE FUND IS NOW AVAILABLE ON AN ONGOING BASIS. LOANS RANGE FROM A ONE TO FIVE-YEAR TERM WITH AN INTEREST RATE SET AT THE EU REFERENCE RATE FOR IRELAND FOR UNSECURED LENDING PLUS 650 BASIS POINTS (6.5%). CREATIVE ENTERPRISES THAT HAVE ACCESSED FINANCE UNDER THE MICRO LOAN FUND INCLUDE ARÓ DIGITAL STRATEGY, BANDIT FILMS, NÁDHÚRA AND JACKIE MAURER CERAMICS.

THE WDC ALSO OPERATES TWO ADDITIONAL ENTERPRISE FINANCE SCHEMES UNDER ITS [Investment Fund](#), THE BUSINESS INVESTMENT FUND AND COMMUNITY LOAN FUND. THE INVESTMENT FUND PROVIDES RISK CAPITAL (SEED/VENTURE CAPITAL AND LOAN FINANCE) TO MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES, AS WELL AS SOCIAL ENTERPRISES IN THE WESTERN REGION. IT IS SELF-FINANCING AND FUNDS NEW INVESTMENTS FROM REVOLVED FUNDING MEANING ALL FUNDS RECOUPED ARE REINVESTED IN WESTERN REGION ENTERPRISES.

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European Working Group on Cultural and Creative Sectors also identifies the need to strengthen the capacity of existing enterprises through professional development building business skills such as marketing and digital expertise (OMC-EWG-CCI, 2012). Initiatives in the West of Ireland have worked towards this, such as through Creative Coast Donegal (see Case 3, p.12).

Our evidence points to the broader **need for business skills development programmes for creative enterprises across the West of Ireland region. Also crucial to their effectiveness is how these programmes are designed.** They are best tailored to creative entrepreneur sub-sectors (e.g. craft and design, audiovisual media) and delivered by experienced creative entrepreneurs with context-specific knowledge and experience to pass on. From open-ended survey questions and interview evidence, we specifically identify export skills as an area of priority need. Open-ended survey questions find respondents indicating they lack the knowledge or skills to develop into export markets. Facilitating knowledge transfer from leading creative sector entrepreneurs successful in export markets could assist the commercialisation potential within wider peripheral creative industries. Particularly because of the small local market, developing exports is important to promote the growth of the creative sector. Overall, the areas of business skill development need identified were:

- Identifying and accessing export opportunities
- Effectively building a business brand message
- Assessing market demand for new product development
- Identifying and accessing niche markets
- Adapting to new industry trends and technologies
- Strategic planning to more effectively manage uncertainty
- Assessing e-commerce potential and exploiting key avenues
- Identifying and accessing further commercialisation and funding opportunities, e.g. IP, crowdfunding



### CASE 3: CREATIVE COAST DONEGAL

AFTER AN IN-DEPTH, MULTI-PHASED PROCESS OF CONSULTATION AND RESEARCH IN 2014, THE [Strategic Action Plan for Creative Entrepreneurship in Donegal](#) WAS PUBLISHED IN 2015 (LEO DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL, 2015). IT PLANS TEN YEARS INTO THE FUTURE AND SETS OUT ACTIONS TO 2025. THE PLAN IS IMPLEMENTED THROUGH THE CREATIVE COAST DONEGAL INITIATIVE WHICH ALSO LAUNCHED IN 2015. COORDINATING DELIVERY OF THE INITIATIVE IS THE LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE AT DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL IN COLLABORATION WITH THE CREATIVE PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE, WHICH INCLUDES PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR MEMBERS THAT OVERSEE ITS IMPLEMENTATION.

UNDERPINNING CREATIVE COAST DONEGAL IS RECOGNITION THAT THERE IS NEED FOR A RANGE OF CONDITIONS TO ADEQUATELY SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CREATIVE SECTOR. THREE STRANDS OF ACTIVITY UNDERPIN ITS ACTIONS WORKING TO DEVELOP THESE CONDITIONS. FIRSTLY TO INFORM PEOPLE OF POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES, WHILE ALSO INFORMING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SHARED VISION AND IDENTITY FOR DONEGAL'S CREATIVE SECTORS. CREATIVE COAST DONEGAL HAS WORKED TO RAISE THE PROFILE OF THE CREATIVE SECTOR LOCALLY AND DEVELOPED AN [online directory](#) VISUALISING DONEGAL'S CREATIVE SECTOR, AS WELL AS A VISUAL IDENTITY FOR THE INITIATIVE THAT BRANDS ALL OF ITS ACTIVITIES SUCH AS SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS, EXHIBITIONS AND SEMINARS. SECONDLY, IT WORKS TO CONNECT PEOPLE ACROSS DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES AND ACTIVITIES AND THIRDLY BROKER PARTNERSHIPS AROUND CREATIVE INNOVATION. IT DOES THIS FOR EXAMPLE THROUGH CREATIVE CLUSTER GROUP MEETINGS WHICH ARE INFORMAL NETWORKING AND INFORMATION EXCHANGE EVENTS FOR CREATIVE PROFESSIONALS WITH INTEREST IN CLUSTER AREAS SUCH AS TEXTILES & FASHION AND FILM & DIGITAL. OTHER ACTIVITIES HAVE INCLUDED DELIVERING TRAINING SEMINARS, DEVELOPING EXHIBITIONS SHOWCASING DONEGAL'S CREATIVE TALENT AND PROVIDING INVESTMENT TO CREATIVE ENTERPRISES TO SUPPORT BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR NETWORK DEVELOPMENT SUCH AS ATTENDANCE AT TRADE EVENTS.

CREATIVE COAST DONEGAL HAS ALSO FOCUSED STRONGLY ON CREATIVE ENTREPRENEUR BUSINESS SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND HAS IMPLEMENTED A NUMBER OF PROGRAMMES. ITS CREATIVE ENTERPRISE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME HAS BEEN DEVELOPED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE DESIGN AND CRAFT COUNCIL OF IRELAND AND FOCUSES ON GREATER CREATIVE BUSINESS COMMERCIALISATION. THIS INCLUDES A SERIES OF WORKSHOPS, LED BY ESTABLISHED CREATIVE SECTOR PROFESSIONALS, WHERE PARTICIPANTS FOCUS ON TOPICS SUCH AS BUSINESS PLAN DEVELOPMENT. TRAINING ALSO FEEDS INTO IMPROVING THE PROFILE OF THE CREATIVE SECTOR IN THE REGION AND THE 2018 TRAINING PROGRAMME CULMINATED IN AN EXHIBITION SHOWCASING THE WORK PRODUCED (MCLAUGHLIN, 2018). IT HAS ALSO DEVELOPED THE CREATIVE AND DIGITAL ENTERPRISE GROWTH PROGRAMME 'GENERATE' THAT AIMS TO SUPPORT SMALL BUSINESSES WITH GROWTH POTENTIAL. THE PROGRAMME IS FLEXIBLE AND OFFERS PARTICIPANTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND UP-SKILLING WORKSHOPS, GAIN ASSISTANCE IN DEVELOPING A BUSINESS PLAN AND PITCHING FOR FUNDING. THE PROGRAMME IS MODELLED ON GOOD PRACTICE FROM LIVERPOOL'S CREATIVE GROWTH INITIATIVE (PARRISH, 2018).

12

#### 2.1.4 Building international networks to support sustainable growth

Creative businesses operate in a highly competitive, changing market environment. A dependency on a narrow client base or revenue streams can threaten business sustainability. To build a sustainable business, creative entrepreneurs interviewed in the West of Ireland emphasise the vital importance of being open to reinvent business direction or develop additional new products and services where opportunities exist. They are also conscious that some projects and services offered by the company are necessary for revenue generation rather than satisfying more creative goals of the business. To support expansion in the peripheral context where local markets are small, creative sector enterprises can be driven to look to international markets.

Our survey results found 54% of respondents did not currently export. Open-ended survey questions find some respondents do not plan to export as it does not suit their business model. However many other respondents indicated they are not at the correct stage of development but plan to develop exports in the future. This suggests that **within the West of Ireland's creative sector is potential for growth of the sector as emerging businesses reach an appropriate stage of development to export. However, a number of factors are needed to realise this potential.**

**Combined with skills development** highlighted in section 2.1.3, **building international relationships and contacts is important to facilitate export development.** Digital communications can support network maintenance and remote collaboration, but a regular presence at key industry events is important to new network building. The European Working Group on Cultural and Creative Sectors highlights the issue of a lack of extensive international networks in creative industries, which makes it difficult to find the right partners, distributors or sellers (OMC-EWG-CCI, 2014). Trade fairs and industry conferences emerge as important spaces to establish and build relationships with new clients, markets and potential collaborators. Increased support for network building in new markets, through support for attendance at trade fairs and industry events or touring exhibitions, would provide a vehicle for creative professionals to extend their networks. The cost of attendance at these types of events can be prohibitive, particularly for more peripherally located entrepreneurs travelling and shipping products over long distances. The Trade Fair and Creative Hotspot support models developed by *a creative momentum project* provide examples of how such supports can be implemented (see Western Development Commission, 2018a; 2018b). The need for greater international trade and export support measures are also highlighted in the EU policy context (e.g. OMC-EWG-CCI, 2012; 2014). Supporting international cultural exchange and trade is identified as an essential enabler of creative sector development (European Commission, 2010).

The European Working Group on Cultural and Creative Sectors highlights another challenge to export development and internationalisation as a lack of information on international trends and competition, as well as rules, regulations and consumer preferences in target markets (OMC-EWG-CCI, 2014). This highlights the **need for intermediaries with specific functions, such as accessing new markets for existing creative products or knowledge provision.** Intermediaries that support and facilitate creative businesses to better access existing and emerging opportunities are important in the future development of the creative sector in peripheral regions. For example, the '[Design Cooperation](#)' programme between small businesses in Rovaniemi,

Finland and Sapporo, Japan provides an example of this type of support initiative. Coordinated by the City of Rovaniemi, the programme capitalises on the Japanese interest in Finnish design and develops connections between local Finnish enterprises and Japanese partners (see Murtagh and Collins, 2018c).

### 2.1.5 Support interconnections to catalyse growth

As discussed in the previous section, building a balance of revenue streams is important to creative enterprise success. Export markets provide one avenue to support business sustainability when local markets are small. However not all creative sector entrepreneurs aim or have the capacity to export. **Another route to help build more sustainable creative enterprises is working with and developing activities that cross over into creative industry sub-sectors outside the primary area of work, as well as other industry sectors.** Broader European creative sector policy research also recommends enabling cross-sector collaboration to stimulate innovation and growth (European Creative Industries Alliance, 2014). While evidence exists of some cross-sector working, **to assist creative sector development, unharnessed potential to develop greater synergies between creative sub-sectors, as well as wider industry sectors should be examined.** The development of grant supports to catalyse projects would also facilitate development. As part of our survey we asked respondents about the future potential to expand their business into 18 creative sub-sectors and some potential was identified in all sectors. Design (11%) and craft (11%) emerged of greatest significance. Between 5% and 10% identified potential to expand into a range of other sectors (cultural facilities (9%), visual art (7%), advertising (7%), marketing (7%), film (6%), performing arts (6%) and photography (6%)). This evidence suggests appetite exists for cross-sector collaboration within the creative industry sub-sectors. Interview evidence from the West of Ireland also suggests the local creative community has a collaborative outlook and sees local competitors also as potential collaborators. Awareness also emerges that to build on the existing industry structure that has a large concentration of sole traders and micro businesses, collaboration is important.

Research has also highlighted the **importance of stimulation and development of new co-operation models** to increase scale and bargaining power in the creative sector (De Voldere et al., 2017). This is because owners of infrastructure, such as record labels or production studios, and more recently digital platforms can retain a significant portion of revenues generated (Collinson, 2015). Intermediaries, controlled and run collectively by creative entrepreneurs are increasingly important to redress this imbalance (Fuller et al., 2010). The European Working Group on Cultural and Creative Sectors identifies challenges to export and internationalisation that the sector and subsectors are not sufficiently organised, international promotion is left for individual players (OMC-EWG-CCI, 2014). Measures to stimulate new types of collaborative creative businesses acting as intermediaries to build critical mass for the sector are also important. Interviews highlight for example potential for initiatives that support collective branding facilitating greater market reach. Our evidence highlights the potential for such initiatives, but also the need for careful development to ensure success, in particular in relation to the co-development of the brand message with the creative community to ensure buy-in.

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## 2.2 Regional creativity

### 2.2.1 Support creative human capital growth

Human capital is fundamental to support creative sector development. **An important part of an active support ecosystem in the region includes the integration of measures that aim to retain and build the region's creative human capital.** Interview evidence suggests that while a strong talent base exists in the region weaknesses also exist. Interview evidence highlights **the importance of higher level human capital development in the region**, such as experienced creative talent and entrepreneurs.

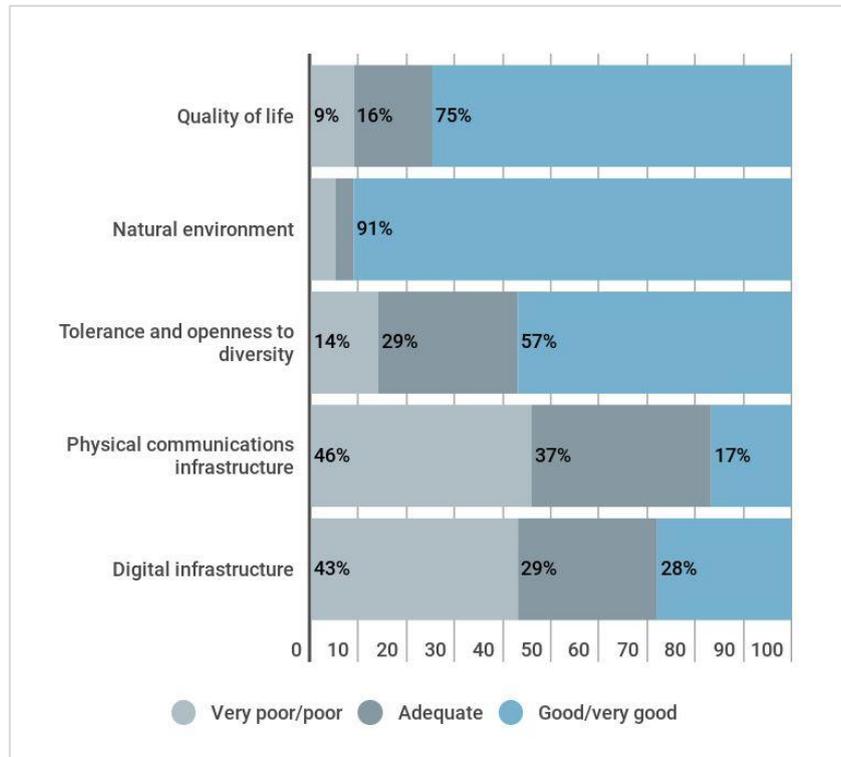
In relation to emerging talent, continuing to develop graduate skills after exiting third level education is important. Creative sector entrepreneurs interviewed highlight the vital importance of learning in practice to take recent graduates to the next level increasing their employability. Entrepreneurs also express an interest in passing their skills on and supporting emerging talent interested in creative careers. Enterprise Ireland's [Fusion](#) programme is cited as an important employment support in relation to new product development and innovation. Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection initiatives such as JobBridge also emerged to have facilitated employment. A more generally applicable **apprenticeship scheme to support creative talent development in the creative sector would facilitate the process of knowledge exchange and higher level talent development and retention in the region.** A good practice example in this regard is the [Creative Employment Programme](#) in Northern Ireland which provided funding support for creative businesses to provide paid internships (see Case Study in Murtagh and Collins, 2018c).

Evidence also suggests that **attracting human capital to the region can provide an important boost to its creative capital stock.** Education and employment opportunities can attract people away from the West of Ireland but incentives can also bring them back. The Aftur Heim (Back Home) grant scheme in the North East Iceland *a creative momentum project* region supports young creative professionals to return to the North East region to participate in cultural projects (see Back Home case in Murtagh and Collins, 2018a). Provision of similar grant incentives supporting creative projects in the West of Ireland region should help stimulate growth in creative human capital, as well as building the region's distinctive cultural assets.

### 2.2.2 Attractive regions and peripheral creative industries

To support the development of the creative sector in the West of Ireland, the region must be an attractive place to live and work. Creative entrepreneurs interviewed already located in the West of Ireland discuss its comparative advantages around lifestyle, cost of living and pace of life. Elements of the broader cultural infrastructure also emerge as important to the region's attractiveness to creative entrepreneurs, such as third level institutions, natural/cultural landscape, arts/cultural facilities, as well as temporary cultural spaces through the region's growing festival scene. Our survey also found that creative professionals who live in West of Ireland rank the quality of life and natural environment positively (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Ranking of the West of Ireland region



**The environment of the West of Ireland region is a positive asset that could support the future development of the creative sector. The need for building greater awareness of the West of Ireland’s advantages as a place to establish a creative business or work as a creative also emerges from our evidence.** [Look West](#) is an existing place-promotion scheme for the West of Ireland which provides information for individuals setting up a business or looking to relocate to the West of Ireland. Targeting promotion at particular industry sectors, such as the creative industries could help to attract creative professionals looking for a change of lifestyle in contrast to that offered in core, urban regions.

Complementary to this, **the presence of the creative sector in the region can further reinforce the region’s attractiveness as a place to live and work.** Interviews and open-ended survey questions highlight that the vibrancy and distinctiveness of the creative sector in the West of Ireland can be overlooked. Traits of the region itself, landscape, heritage and mythology, inspire creative professionals in the region. The structure of the West of Ireland’s creative sector can also be understood as part of its comparative advantage. The dominance of sole traders and micro businesses appears to have helped support the emergence of a wider creative community that holds a vision to also support the wider development of the sector in the region. Rather than focusing on building businesses of significantly increased scale, retaining and developing this network of small-scale businesses would maintain this distinctiveness compared to creative industries in core urban regions. Place-promotion

celebrating the creative sector's presence in the West of Ireland would also help to raise the profile of the sector itself. The Creative Coast Donegal initiative works to celebrate and raise the profile of the arts and craft sector in Donegal (see Case 3, p.12). Similar initiatives in other counties, or a collaborative initiative across the West of Ireland, would help to more broadly raise the profile of the region's creative sector.

### 2.2.3 Infrastructure needs

**While the West of Ireland has a range of strengths as an environment for creative sector development some weaknesses also emerged in our analysis around physical and digital communications infrastructure.** Our survey results show the quality of the digital communications infrastructure is an issue of concern with 43% indicating it was very poor/poor in the West of Ireland. Interviews highlight how quality broadband is vital to effectively run a creative sector enterprise in a peripheral region. Quality broadband can support the development of e-commerce, facilitate remote working and collaboration, while also assist being part of high-level networks from remote locations. Interviews and open-ended survey questions highlight the variability of internet speeds in different locations throughout the region. Where businesses exist in areas of poor provision they can invest in technology themselves to gain internet speeds needed for their business to effectively function, or locate their office strategically, such as in business innovation centres, to access required speeds.

Physical communications infrastructure was rated as poor/very poor by 46% of respondents which is also a point of concern. Our wider evidence points to mixed experience, with the more remotely located experiencing most difficulty. Those in larger centres in the region such as Sligo and Galway expressed general satisfaction with physical communications infrastructure. Evidence from interviews highlights how good physical and digital communications infrastructure are complementary resources. Much work can happen remotely through digital communications, but physical connectivity is also important as travel to larger urban centres or internationally is also necessary on occasion.



### 3. Conclusion & recommendations

The creative sector is made up of a diverse range of sub-sectors from arts and architecture to photography and publishing. Research carried out for *a creative momentum project* assessing the economic and social impact of the creative sector in the West of Ireland has highlighted its strong contribution to more sustainable regional economic development, as well as its wider social and cultural value (see Collins et al., 2018). Other research has also identified how development of the dynamic creative and cultural sector can support a diverse range of policy objectives (for example see Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016; Tafel-Viia et al. 2014). Given the multi-dimensional regional development value of the creative sector, effective support frameworks are important to facilitate its sustained value and potential for increasing impact. Also linked to the multidimensional nature of the creative sector and its impacts, an effective support structure is also complex, almost like a jigsaw puzzle of interlocking parts. Our findings point towards strengths in the West of Ireland, but also a range of creative enterprise support needs to facilitate future development. Based on our analysis a number of recommendations emerge:

- Further development of the co-working infrastructure in the West of Ireland would assist creative sector development. Assessment of the potential and feasibility of a network of new shared creative spaces, such as dedicated creative enterprise co-working hubs or business incubators in the region is recommended.
- A beneficial creative sector business support structure is available to creative sector entrepreneurs in the West of Ireland. However access to finance emerges as a core challenge facing creative sector entrepreneurs. Initiatives are needed supporting better access to finance.
- To support growth of existing creative enterprises, business skills development programmes emerge as an area of need and we specifically identify export skills as an area of priority need in relation to skills development.
- Building international relationships and contacts is important to facilitate export development. Increased support for network building in new markets through support for attendance at trade fairs and industry events or touring exhibitions would provide a vehicle for creative professionals to extend their networks.
- Intermediaries that support and facilitate creative businesses to better access existing and emerging opportunities in new markets also appear important in the future development of the creative sector in peripheral regions.
- Another route to assist creative sector development is the unharnessed potential to develop greater synergies between creative sub-sectors, as well as wider industry sectors. Development of grant supports to catalyse projects would also facilitate development.
- To support creative human capital development a creative sector apprenticeship scheme would facilitate the process of higher level talent development and retention in the region.
- Grant incentives supporting creative professionals with links to the West of Ireland to develop creative projects in the region would also help stimulate growth in creative human capital, as well as building the region's distinctive cultural assets.
- The need for building greater awareness of the West of Ireland's advantages as a place to establish a creative business or work as a creative also emerges from our evidence. Place-promotion celebrating the creative sector's

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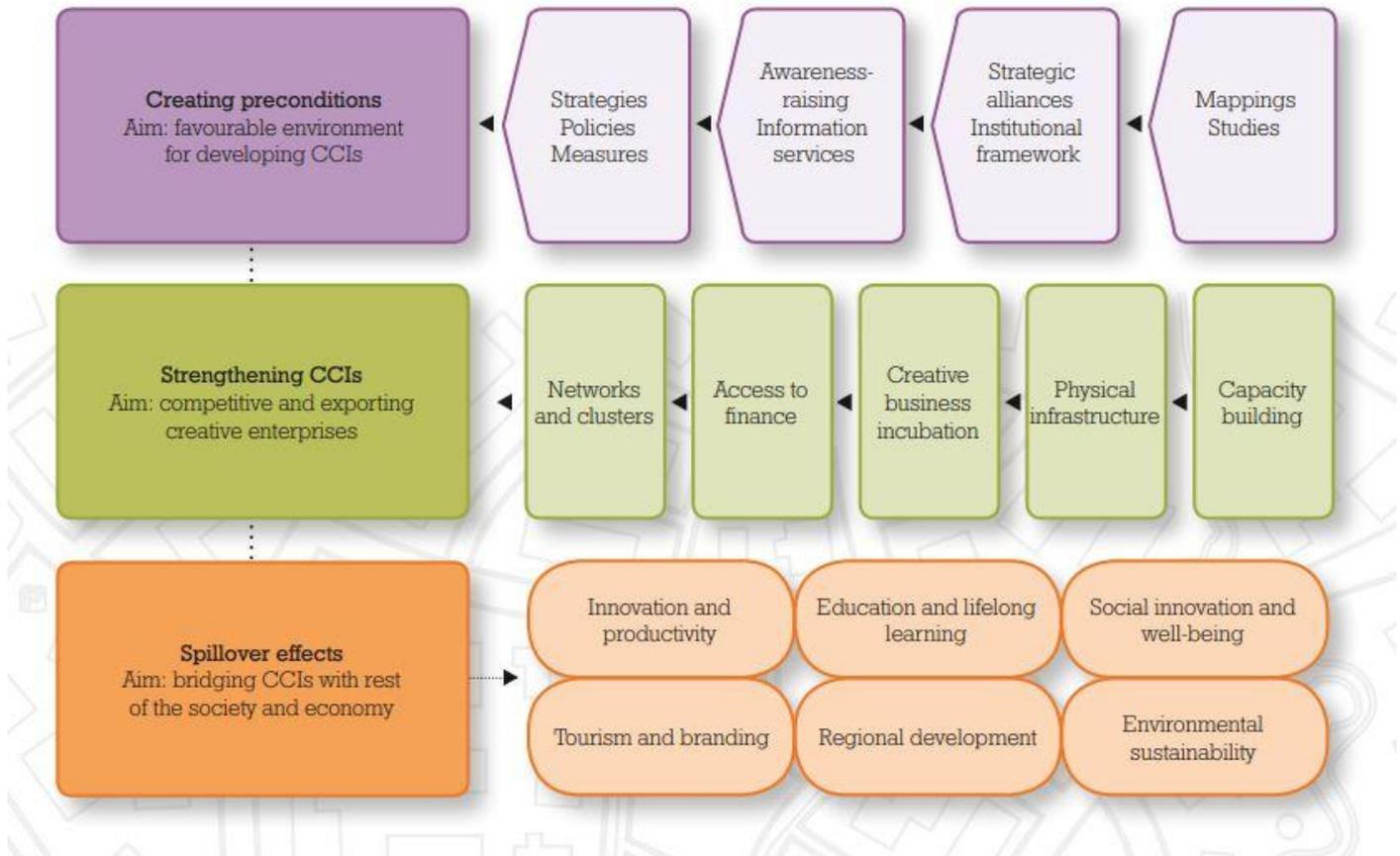
presence in the West of Ireland would also help to raise the profile of the sector itself.

- Some weaknesses also emerged in our analysis around physical and digital communications infrastructure. Good physical and digital communications infrastructure are complementary resources to creative sector development. In particular quality broadband is vital to effectively run a creative sector enterprise in a peripheral region.

Areas of future investigation are also important to highlight. Here we present the perspective of creative entrepreneurs on support needs. There is still call for more in-depth, comprehensive research. Studies incorporating data from a range of stakeholders, as well as looking at specific creative industry sub-sectors would represent positive next steps in assessing the needs of the peripheral creative sector in the West of Ireland. More broadly, our recommendations intersect with a framework for cultural and creative industries development recommending policies and supports at three levels (see OMC-EWG-CCI (2012) and Appendix 1). We also suggest our recommendations are assessed in the context of this framework, as well as evidence presented in other policy-oriented studies on creative sector development (such as Western Development Commission, 2009; KEA European Affairs, 2010; Creative Growth 2011; OMC-EWG-CCI, 2012; Collins et al. 2014; European Creative Industries Alliance, 2014; Austrian Institute for SME Research and VVA Consulting, 2016).



## Appendix 1: Framework for developing cultural and creative industries



Source: OMC-EWG-CCI, 2012

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