



# Crafts Council

## **Culture, Media and Sport Committee - Tourism Inquiry**

### **Crafts Council Response: 13/05/26**

#### Introduction

Crafts Council is the national charity for craft. We believe craft skills and knowledge enrich and uplift us as individuals and can change our world for the better.

- 1) How effective are government policies in supporting the growth, competitiveness and long-term resilience of the tourism sector?
  - i. What are the main barriers to international competitiveness? How effectively does the UK promote itself overseas as a destination and what more could be done to strengthen its international profile?

The GREAT campaign offers a route to craft businesses to exhibit in international fairs, enhancing businesses' global visibility and reputation, offering targeted sales and networking and a deeper understanding of market intelligence and trends.

Further support from the GREAT campaign would support makers' professional development and promotion, validate their practice and increase demand for and appreciation of high quality craft.

The House of Lords Library paper of 4 June 2025 notes the following Crafts Council comments about the impact of Brexit on exports:

*'Export challenges such as increased paperwork and costs. Craft businesses selling to EU markets have faced new customs declarations and VAT changes. This has increased the time and cost of selling to the EU, often disproportionately affecting small makers with limited administrative capacity.'*

*Shipping delays. New border checks have led to delays and disrupted delivery times, which is particularly damaging for businesses reliant on timely fulfilment (such as for markets, galleries or customer commissions).'*

*Importing materials. Some UK craftsmen and women source specialist materials or tools from the EU, but post-Brexit import regulations have made these supplies more expensive or harder to obtain, leading to production delays or increased prices.'*



See Crafts Council: [How have craft businesses been hit by Brexit?](#)

ii. How does the UK's recent tourism performance (including visitor numbers, length of stay and visitor spend) compare with other major European tourism destinations?

N/A

iii. What factors explain any divergence in growth trends between the UK and European countries?

N/A

iv. What are the specific drivers of international tourism to the UK, what is the economic value of each of those drivers and how can their value be increased?

N/A

v. What are the arguments for and against the proposal to give mayoral strategic authorities the power to introduce an overnight visitor levy? If a levy is introduced, how should it best be spent to attract tourism and investment?

Increased support for creative businesses in mayoral authorities is very welcome. However, Creative PEC evidence shows that craft business are atypical in not being clustered predominantly in urban areas and the south-east. The channelling of funding towards mayoral authorities therefore risks neglecting potential routes for support in areas such as affordable studio development and small craft and other experience economies.

[See Creative Industries Radar Mapping the UK's creative clusters and microclusters](#)

2) How effectively do government structures and working arrangements support the tourism sector?

i. How well do VisitBritain/VisitEngland and Destination Management Organisations support the sector? How well do they compare to equivalent bodies in other countries?

The GREAT campaign is a very helpful vehicle for support.

We would also welcome increased support from Visit England to assist in promoting the craft and making experience economy. Craft tourism (see Q7 below) relies not only on craft skills, but on affordable studio spaces, effective marketing and advertising skills and, above all, support from councils and tourist bodies to promote opportunities as part of the local tourist economy.

A better understanding of the breadth of local making opportunities by such bodies would deepen visitors engagement with the heritage and identity of a destination.



ii. How effectively do the UK and devolved Governments work together to promote tourism and support the sector?

The following examples from Northern Ireland and Scotland illustrate the fragility of rural creative industries and how important support is to develop and extend tourist opportunities:

1. The Designerie, Bushmills, Northern Ireland, was established by Enterprise Causeway, a long established enterprise agency. The Designerie sells exclusive and hand-crafted giftware and funded through the Community Coastal Fund, with a target market of second home owners and tourists.

It offers a retail space for over 65 makers and 8 makers in residence to make and sell work from 2 studios. The Designerie is now on the itinerary for cruise liner tourists who are offered coach trips to The Giants Causeway and Bushmills Distillery. The Business offers local people the chance to learn and develop new skills in contemporary crafts. Tourists relish the chance to engage with a maker in a practical workshops, bringing alive stories of local heritage.

See Craft and Social Enterprise: Exploring Current Business Models, Crafts Council, 2019

2. Fair Isle Knitwear and Shetland lace, both products made in Shetland, are world-renowned and instantly recognisable, so it may seem surprising that these Shetland crafts need protecting at all. But recent economic and societal shifts have impacted the number of people learning to knit, while mass-produced knock-offs and the misappropriation of terms associated with heritage techniques threaten to dilute the authenticity of traditionally crafted items.

Shetland's knitting economy functions began to change in the 1970s when the oil industry brought new, higher-paying jobs to the islands. Many women went out to work and knitted less at home. They were also less inclined to teach their children. The trend has continued, so now there is a generation growing up for the first time without a knitter in the family to learn from.

Tourism now plays a vital role in the knitting economy in attracting people who appreciate the value of handmade garments. Visitors are an essential part of the customer base. Shetland's modern knitting economy is now diversified and intertwined with the global hobbyist community, which has seen an impressive resurgence in recent years. SOK, Shetland's Organisation For Knitters, is a very small charity which aims to preserve, protect, and promote Shetland's Heritage Knitting Traditions.

3. Harris Tweed is an example of how a traditional, place-based craft industry can fuel and intertwine with the tourism sector, transforming a remote location into a global brand. Protection under a 1993 Act of Parliament ensures that all genuine Harris Tweed is handwoven in the homes of islanders in the Outer Hebrides of



Scotland. This strict requirement creates a unique, authentic narrative that helps to attract visitors interested in heritage, craftsmanship, and "slow" fashion, where the story of the cloth—woven on looms in the weaver's homes—is as valuable as the product.

See [Harris Tweed: local lessons for the world from the Outer Hebrides](#)

4. Craft has always been part of the cultural fabric of Farnham, Sussex. In 2019 the Maltings and Farnham Town Council partnered together on an application to the World Crafts Council to have Farnham designated a World Craft Town in recognition of the special role that craft plays. Farnham's reputation for craft contributes to its status as a tourist destination, with regular craft festivals and events, workshops, studio tours, galleries and a month-long celebration of craft every October.

Research by Parker Harris estimates that the value of craft to Farnham and the surrounding area was £50+ million. It encourages local agencies and stakeholders, such as Farnham Town Council and Surrey County Council, to recognise craft's latent economic potential and invest in it to deliver much-needed growth and employment throughout the 2020s. However, there is evidence that the overall craft market in terms of craft sales could be enhanced via strategic marketing support for makers. The need for more retail opportunities for makers is also evident and the growing experience economy is identified as a significant revenue stream and a way of integrating craft more in the community.

See [Socio Economic Impact of Craft within Farnham and the Surrey Hills](#)

3) What opportunities exist to increase inward investment into tourism infrastructure and what changes may be needed to encourage it?

i. Which areas have seen the biggest growth in inbound tourism and why?

N/A

ii. How can investment be unlocked in all parts of the country?

See our answer to Q2(i).

4) How well is the visitor economy recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and what challenges continue to affect business and destinations?

Anecdotal evidence confirms that the number of new makers applying to craft fairs has declined sharply. One national craft fair found that, 'before Covid 40-50% of makers applying were within 2 years of starting their business. This declined to around 25% post Covid. Some short term bursary support initially boosted this back up to around 35%, but since then this has dropped again to 17%. There are plenty of applications from makers new to the fair, bringing variety and new talent, but it is hard for those makers who are



leaving craft courses and who do not have a route to market already established, especially if they are young without any other form of financial support.'

5) How effectively is the domestic tourism sector functioning across the UK and what factors are shaping current levels of demand and recovery?

i. To what extent have rising operational and workforce costs affected the affordability and viability of domestic trips for both operators and consumers?

When the [APPG for Visual Arts and Artists](#) met on 10 July 2025 to discuss affordable studio space across the UK, speakers from the Creative Land Trust and East Street Arts in Leeds explored successful approaches to securing long-term studio provision, as well as the challenges currently facing artists due to rising costs and redevelopment pressures.

The discussion highlighted examples including place-based solutions, capital investment, and partnerships, to safeguard creative spaces. Both speakers emphasised the importance of treating artist studios not simply as workspaces, but as vital components of cultural and economic ecosystems.

54.5% of respondents to an Artists' Union England survey said they do not rent a studio because they could not afford one. 63.4% worked from home or elsewhere and 13.5% cited a lack of suitable studios available.

A 2024 audit by LAASN (The London Affordable Artists' Studios Network) found that the average studio size has more than halved since 2020, reducing from 500 sq ft to between 200 and 250 sq ft, as artists are forced to downsize by the accelerated costs of living and working.

The Scottish Artists Union Affordable Studios Survey 2024 found that only 35% of respondents felt confident that they would be able to pay their rent over the following year, with 65% not confident or not sure if they would be able to pay their studio/workshop rent over the following year.

[From 'Hand to Mouth' to Bread and Roses: an inquiry into the lives of the Artists' Union England membership and the role of contemporary artists' unions in building grassroots power in the arts](#)

See [LAASN Network Research 2024](#)

See [Affordable Studios Survey 2024 Scottish Artists Union](#)

ii. What targeted interventions could support domestic tourism businesses to stimulate demand and strengthen year-round visitor numbers?

Support for affordable studio space, effective marketing and advertising skills would be effective in increasing tourism to craft clusters, together with support from councils and tourist bodies to promote craft experience opportunities as part of the local tourist economy.



6) How can tourism better support regional growth, community prosperity and wider Government objectives?

i. What barriers prevent regions from capitalising fully on tourism demand and what opportunities remain overlooked?

See Q7 below.

ii. Are transport links, digital connectivity and cultural infrastructure adequate to support regional tourism growth?

See Q7 below.

iii. What are the particular opportunities and challenges for tourism in: a) coastal areas, and b) rural areas

See Q7 below.

7) How can the Government and tourism sector maximise the potential of cultural heritage and creative assets to attract visitors?

Professional makers are known predominantly for their craft products, sold through studios, fairs, galleries, retailers and private commissions. But increasing numbers of makers are diversifying into craft experiences - an opportunity for a participant or consumer to engage in a craft activity or session.

Crafts Council's series of case studies showcase a variety of approaches to craft experiences and tourism. For example, Scarborough ceramicist Karen Thompson was helped by Crescent Arts, a community organisation that supports studio holders to develop and advertise workshops for local audiences. Located on the pier, she provides day tourists with a unique experience of the surrounding environment.

But craft tourism relies not just on craft skills, but on affordable studio space, marketing and advertising skills and, above all, support from councils and tourist bodies to promote opportunities as part of the local tourist economy. A better understanding of the breadth of local making opportunities by such bodies would deepen visitors engagement with the heritage and identity of a destination.

Having a go at making can include:

- experiencing a location, tourist venue, or event that includes craft;
- choosing a have-a-go taster session for fun;
- participating in a craft course or workshop;
- accessing a making session online;
- consuming craft in a setting that boosts a maker's or other business's brand.

The craft experience market offers everything from soap-making to stone-carving, creative collage to cartographic embroidery. It also includes exposure to craft; for



example, through studio visits or retail promotions. Experiences can be enjoyed face-to-face or online, in large groups or individually, as a one-one or in a series.

Evidence suggests that when people understand the skills involved in making they more readily engage with craft and are more likely to buy a maker's work; such experiences indirectly add value to the maker's business and to the area. The craft sector is able to offer products and experiences that create lasting and meaningful memories.

Crafts Council's *The Market for Craft* showed that 73% of adults in the UK are in the market for craft. The research identified an ongoing appetite for paid-for craft experiences, with 20% of the overall market for craft indicating that they would pay to attend a craft workshop in the future. One in five had paid to take part in a craft class, workshop, or course, with 5% (2.5 million) having done so in the previous 12 months and a further 16% (7.1 million) at some point in the past.

See

[The Power of Experiences, Bringing Craft Experiences to your Business: A Guide, Crafts Council, 2021](#)

[The Power of Experiences, Bringing Craft Experiences to your Business: Case Studies, Crafts Council, 2021](#)

[The Market for Craft, Crafts Council, 2020](#)

8) What are the key issues facing the tourism workforce?

i. How have immigration and employment policies and legislation affected the tourism sector?

N/A