Heritage Crafts Strategic Plan 2026-29

Safeguarding living heritage for future generations

1. Executive summary

Since its establishment in 2010, **Heritage Crafts** has served as the UK's national charity for the support, safeguarding and celebration of traditional craft skills. Over the past fifteen years, our work has illuminated both the profound vulnerability and the irreplaceable cultural, economic and social value of the UK's living heritage.

Following the milestone UK ratification of the 2003 UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), Heritage Crafts stands at a pivotal juncture. We are no longer solely a campaigning voice; we are an essential national delivery partner, an authoritative research institution and an active conduit connecting makers to vital resources.

The **2026-29 Strategic Plan** establishes a clear, rigorous roadmap structured across three core pillars:

1. **Making a compelling case** – generating robust evidence, influencing national policy, and inspiring the public.
2. **Enabling sustainable practice** – building business resilience, embedding craft in local communities, and championing mindful production.
3. **Enabling timely investment and direct support** – removing financial barriers for new entrants, providing targeted intervention for endangered practices, and ensuring knowledge transmission across generations.

Underpinning these pillars is an institutional commitment to organisational resilience – maintaining an independent, well-governed charity with diversified revenue and exceptional staff and board leadership.

2. Our evidence and insights – 15 years of sector learning

Our strategy is informed by empirical evidence gathered across fifteen years of direct casework, statutory consultation, and extensive sector mapping:

- **Living heritage is at risk:** The UK possesses an exceptionally rich lineage of craft practices. However, market pressures, an ageing maker demographic, high training

costs and rapid technological shifts place many of these disciplines in critical danger of disappearing.

- **Public and cultural value:** Craft skills possess both *instrumental value* (driving regional economies, supporting material repair and enriching mental wellbeing) and *intrinsic value* (anchoring cultural identity, personal agency and pride). When the public is introduced to these practices, appreciation and support are overwhelmingly positive.
- **Economic bottlenecks:** Craft enterprises have immense potential within a mixed economy, yet they are structurally constrained. Handcrafted production cannot simply 'scale up' like industrial manufacturing. Furthermore, small craft businesses bear disproportionate regulatory burdens and rarely possess the spare operational capacity or capital to absorb the costs of training an apprentice or successor.
- **Inclusivity and community cohesion:** While skilled manual work is a universal human impulse, its expressions in the UK are diverse and multifaceted. Democratising access to heritage craft training creates strong social bonds, cross-cultural appreciation and civic renewal.
- **A growing funding ecosystem:** Philanthropic institutions, livery companies, statutory bodies, and commercial brands increasingly recognise that safeguarding craft requires strategic collaboration. Coordinated, aggregated funds achieve far higher impact than fragmented efforts.

3. Vision and mission

Our Vision

A flourishing UK where traditional craft skills are widely valued, celebrated as vital intangible cultural heritage, embedded in local communities, and passed seamlessly to future generations as sustainable, viable livelihoods.

Our Mission

To safeguard, support, and champion heritage crafts across the UK by creating an undeniable evidence base, removing systemic barriers to business viability and training, and delivering targeted financial investment.

4. The three strategic pillars

Pillar 1 – Making a compelling case

Advocacy is only as effective as the data and stories that support it. We will establish an undeniable case for public, political, and institutional investment in heritage craft skills.

1.1 Generating a robust evidence base

- **The Red List of Endangered Crafts:** Publish biennial editions utilising enhanced digital back-end infrastructure to maintain the UK's benchmark inventory of craft vulnerability.
- **Socio-economic research:** Commission and partner with academic institutions and research agencies to quantify the economic footprint, employment contribution and Social Return on Investment (SROI) of the heritage crafts sector.

1.2 Informing and Inspiring the public

- **Centralised platform for heritage crafts:** Maintain the definitive digital gateway for UK heritage crafts, directory listings and opportunities.
- **National media and profile:** Drive high-visibility broadcast and print coverage celebrating makers and challenging disposable consumer culture.
- **Awards and honours:** Deliver prestigious national award ceremonies and actively coordinate nominations for National Honours to celebrate exemplary practitioners.
- **Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) leadership:** Serve as an accredited NGO for UNESCO and official Community Support Hub for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Living Heritage Inventory, guiding public participation.
- **Inspiring the next generation:** Partner with secondary schools, colleges and creative career initiatives to match 14–16-year-olds with craft taster and work-experience opportunities.

1.3 Influencing policy and structural reform

- **Targeted government advocacy:** Engage directly with ministers, civil servants and devolved administrations across Westminster, Holyrood, the Senedd, and Stormont.
- **Reducing bureaucracy:** Advocate for regulatory frameworks tailored to micro-businesses, ensuring taxation, export controls and health and safety requirements do not unintentionally penalise vernacular makers.

- **Apprenticeship reform:** Campaign for vocational education reform, working with government agencies to adjust funding bands and assessment methods so that rare, workshop-based crafts can access state apprenticeship models.

Pillar 2 – Enabling sustainable practice

For craft skills to endure, the workshops, studios, and businesses that house them must be commercially viable, community-connected and environmentally conscious.

2.1 Future viability of craft businesses

- **Entrepreneurial skills training:** Deliver tailored business literacy programmes, tax webinars, digital marketing guidance and specialised resources addressing the distinct challenges of solo makers.
- **Cross-sector mentoring:** Operate structured peer-to-peer and professional mentoring programmes, connecting emerging makers with established practitioners and commercial business advisors.
- **The `matchMAKER` platform:** Expand our dedicated recruitment and workplace-training portal, connecting prospective craft trainees and job seekers directly with established workshops offering on-the-job entry routes.

2.2 Practice rooted in strong communities

- **Regional member networks:** Nurture active regional networks and regular networking forums across the home nations and English regions, empowering local groups to take ownership of regional craft heritage.
- **Strategic regional partnerships:** Collaborate with Combined Mayoral Authorities and local enterprise partnerships to anchor heritage crafts within local industrial strategies and cultural masterplans.
- **Community craft initiatives:** Design and establish dedicated community grant schemes that support craft activities in grassroots spaces, community centres and regional cultural hubs.

2.3 Mindful production and the environment

- **Environmental sustainability advocacy:** Champion traditional craft methodologies as regenerative, resource-efficient and low-waste alternatives to industrial overconsumption.
- **Sustainability recognition:** Raise awareness of environmental sustainability initiatives to celebrate circular-economy innovation, natural materials sourcing and energy efficiency within craft businesses.

Pillar 3 – Enabling financial support and investment at the right time

Targeted financial intervention at pivotal career moments is the single most effective way to prevent endangered craft skills from vanishing.

3.1 Overcoming obstacles to viability (targeted intervention)

- **Endangered Crafts Fund:** Award competitive grants to critically endangered craft businesses to overcome immediate, concrete barriers – such as purchasing specialist tooling, repairing antique equipment, acquiring raw materials or mastering rare techniques.
- **The Recipients' Circle:** Deepen our ongoing support network for grant and bursary alumni, providing post-award surgeries, peer advice, cross-promotional platforms and ongoing development.

3.2 Universal access for new entrants (equity and inclusion)

- **Training bursary programme:** Disburse targeted bursaries to assist new entrants and early-career practitioners facing financial hardship.
- **Widening participation:** Actively partner with foundations and diversity-focused trusts to fund bursaries for under-represented groups, low-income practitioners and historically marginalised communities, ensuring craft skills are accessible regardless of background or privilege.

3.3 Enabling direct skills transmission

- **Apprenticeship support pilots:** Provide top-up funding and salary subsidies (building on the *Apprenticeship+* model) to enable micro-businesses to train an apprentice without threatening their financial viability.
- **Skills transmission documentation:** Commission high-definition masterclass recordings and instructional documentary films to preserve the tacit, undocumented knowledge of Britain's foremost master craftspeople in critically endangered disciplines.

6. The virtuous circle – how delivery drives change

Our strategy operates as a continuous, self-reinforcing ecosystem:

1. **Direct action:** Delivering grants, bursaries, and training pilots provides direct relief to frontline makers.

2. **Action research:** Every grant application and delivery cycle generates rich, unvarnished insight into the real-world barriers facing practitioners (e.g. equipment inflation, rent spikes, training deficits).

3. **Compelling advocacy:** This real-world evidence feeds directly into our research reports, Red List updates, and ministerial roundtables.

4. **Attracting investment:** Evidencing clear need and measurable returns gives statutory funders, trusts, livery companies, and corporate sponsors the confidence to deploy further capital.

7. Organisational sustainability and enablers

To deliver this ambitious strategy sustainably, Heritage Crafts must protect its own core health, institutional governance, and capacity:

- **Diversified financial architecture:** We will maintain balanced income streams, blending multi-year trust funding, statutory contracts, corporate sponsorships, livery partnerships and individual philanthropic donations with earned income.

- **Membership vitality:** Following our operational website migration and strategy review, we will invest in our membership experience – transforming members into active regional advocates and generating steady unrestricted income.

- **Modern systems and infrastructure:** Deploying modern, cloud-based grant management CRMs and secure research databases to maintain lean, efficient operations without overtaxing our team.

- **Governance excellence and succession:** Implementing the recommendations of our independent governance audits, maintaining active Board sub-committees, and conducting planned Board and Chair succession.

- **Valuing staff:** Maintaining a sustainable team baseline, supporting professional development, offering fair compensation benchmarks and fostering a collaborative, supportive workplace culture.