



Crafts Council news and policy briefing note

11th November 2009

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Section I: News and publications, for information

1. Political developments and party conferences

None of the three major party conferences this autumn placed much emphasis on arts, culture or the creative industries. At the Conservative Party conference, Jeremy Hunt's speech focused almost entirely on the need for competitive sport in schools. Ben Bradshaw's Labour party conference speech was essentially an attack on the Conservatives' putative cuts, and an attempt to position Labour as the party of sport and culture. It included a familiar rehearsal of perceived successes such as free admission to museums, but no new policy announcements. Don Foster did not make a major speech at the Lib Dem conference.

The Labour conference offered very few policy commitments in any relevant areas, and most ministerial speeches concentrated on attacking Conservative policy, rather than offering a clear vision for action. A few relevant points did emerge:

- At a fringe event, organised by the Social Market Foundation and Camelot, Ben Bradshaw sought to dispel fears that the sectors' budgets would be cut under a future Labour government, arguing: "I don't consider that these sectors are luxuries we can't afford in a time of economic crisis." He stressed the importance of demonstrating that culture was a net contributor, given that for every £1 the government invests in the sector it gets £5 back in terms of economic activity.
- Barbara Follett, in her new capacity as minister at DCLG, spoke about new jobs and new industries at a fringe event and stressed the importance of the economic contribution made by sectors such as theatre, film and fashion, which suggests that she may continue to be an advocate for the creative industries in her new role.
- Peter Mandelson's conference speech included a section on the need to nurture a wider range of industries, and reverse an over-reliance on the finance sector, which may have some relevance to craft-based businesses:

"The potential is there in Britain – we know that. In the services sector, the creative sector, the biosciences sector and in hi-tech advanced manufacturing...I want to see an innovation nation.... And we want closer links between businesses and universities so that good ideas don't stop at the research lab or the library door."

The Conservative party conference was marked by an emphasis on austerity and belt-tightening. Jeremy Hunt, at a NESTA sponsored fringe event on the Creative Industries, was pressed for details on what a Conservative government would do for the creative industries. He said: "The money has all gone. Every pound that we spend is borrowed. I don't however believe that it's about spending more money. It's about creating the environment that allows innovation and risk taking to flourish."

A few other points of interest:

- Nick Herbert, shadow environment secretary, announced a range of measures designed to help the countryside, which could be relevant to the craft sector – e.g. citing the potential for sustainable jobs in rural areas, and reduced corporation tax for small companies, to boost the rural economy. (But there was also much in his speech on cutting DEFRA quangos and the need to save money.)



- Ed Vaizey spoke at a fringe event, partly organised by the Design Council. He reiterated the Conservative commitment to stop government 'plundering' of Lottery funds, insisted that the Conservatives are "committed to culture" and outlined plans to simplify the gift aid system to promote philanthropic giving in support of culture and the arts. He said he wanted to create a DCMS that was open and transparent.

Since the party conference season, Jeremy Hunt, Ed Vaizey and Ben Bradshaw have all made major speeches. Ed Vaizey's, at the Culture is Right conference, offered some pointers about how a future Conservative government would reshape the Arts Council, and cited arts education as an area where reform was "urgently needed". Jeremy Hunt's speech focused on heritage, promising a Museums and Heritage Bill under a future Conservative Government. Strong support for heritage seems to be emerging as a key area where the Conservatives are seeking to distinguish their cultural policy from Labour's. Meanwhile, Ben Bradshaw's speech to the Progress forum focused on what he said would be Conservative erosion of the independence both of the BBC and of bodies such as the Arts Council.

2. New creative and cultural sector apprenticeships

The National Skills Academy for Creative and Cultural Skills (NSA) has announced a new programme of apprenticeships. The apprenticeships will be available from April 2010 and will cover theatre, live music, craft, cultural heritage, design, literature, music, performing and visual arts. NSA is part of Creative and Cultural Skills, the Sector Skills Council responsible for Craft and this new announcement represents an extension of NSA's remit, which previously covered only the performing arts. The NSA will establish an Apprenticeship Service to manage the new Apprenticeship programme and recruit Apprentices. The Apprenticeship Service will provide support aimed at making it easier for small businesses to host an apprenticeship.

Issues and impact for the craft sector

The format of the apprenticeships and support available should enable makers and craft-based businesses – who have previously found the apprenticeship model somewhat inaccessible - to get involved in the programme.

3. National Arts Learning Network reviews admission procedures

Art for a Few, a new report from the National Arts Learning Network (NALN) suggests that university admission procedures on art and design courses are highly, if unintentionally, discriminatory. The report's authors suggest that the expectations admissions tutors have about applicants' prior knowledge and cultural awareness discriminate against students who do not fit a preconceived ideal, typically students from diverse ethnic backgrounds or lower socio-economic groups. The report is available to download at:

<http://www.naln.ac.uk/download.cfm?docid=48679ED4-7E0B-4AD8-8F1BE3368C7A50D1>.

Issues and impact for the craft sector

The HE craft community needs to consider whether the criticisms made in the report are justified and to formulate a response.



4. Creativity, Culture and Education: literature reviews

Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE), the new organisation established to run Creative Partnerships and Find Your Talent, has published a series of academic literature reviews. There are currently eight literature reviews, with more planned to follow, available to download at: <http://www.creativitycultureeducation.org/research-impact/literature-reviews/>.

The aim of the reviews is to provide a theoretical underpinning for CCE's work, as well as to provide pointers for areas where the research base is less strong, and further research is felt to be needed. They are highly academic in style and intent, but some of them may be useful to people working in the craft sector. Four of the reviews in particular offer historical and/or theoretical background, which may help practitioners situate their work in a broader context and provide arguments to use with policy makers. Report 4 on the history of the cultural and creative industries may be useful to anyone seeking to articulate or reconceptualise the craft sector's relationship to the creative industries. Report 5 on arts in education and creativity and report 7 on the development of cultural and creative learning in English education since 1944 could offer useful background to anyone who needs to describe or advocate for the importance of craft, or the arts and creativity more general, in education.

Report 8, on cultural labour markets is perhaps the most relevant of all the reviews to the craft sector, since it offers both factual information about the cultural and creative workforce, and an insight into theoretical debates around cultural labour. For example, the review considers the question of the extent to which satisfaction and sense of achievement are understood to compensate for the lack of monetary reward for many in the cultural sector. Chapters of the review cover subjects including, the precariousness of much work in the cultural sector and the prevalence of "free work", from volunteering in cultural organisations to online content generation. The review also considers the extent to which government can successfully intervene to shape the cultural sector workforce.

Issues and impact for the craft sector

People working in the sector may find the reports useful in giving a historical and theoretical context for their work.

5. NESTA initiative on fashion manufacturing

<http://www.nesta.org.uk/manufacturing-a-la-mode-programme-launches-to-unite-uk-manufacturers-and-fashion-designers/>

NESTA has announced a new programme, which aims to bring fashion designers and specialist manufacturers together, motivated by the idea that it is often a lack of understanding between designers and manufacturers.

Issues and impact for the craft sector

The initiative may be of some relevance to makers who work in textiles and fashion.



Section II: Consultations, reviews and reports for Crafts Council response

6. NIACE report

NIACE (the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education) has just published a substantial report, from a 2-year inquiry into the future of lifelong learning: *Learning Through Life*. The report is not available online. It aims to establish priorities for the whole lifelong learning sector, over a 10-15 year time frame.

Its main recommendations are structural, and it deliberately does not address questions about curriculum content, so it has no specific recommendations that are directly relevant to the craft sector. However, it does make some recommendations that – if implemented - could have implications for craft learners and course providers in both HE and FE.

The major recommendation is that there should be a gradual rebalancing of public investment so that increasing proportions of resources are allocated to learners at a later stage in their careers. Given that craft is increasingly a second career choice, this is relevant to the sector.

The report also seeks to change the emphasis, which came out of the 2006 Leitch report, on an employer-led approach to skills development and argues for a greater recognition that people's life courses and their progression through employment are not linear. Both of these recommendations are potentially beneficial for the craft sector, given that the employer-led model causes difficulties for the self-employed and for SMEs, and that increasing numbers of career changers are joining the sector.

Issues and impact for the craft sector

If adopted, the report's recommendations would have benefit for the craft sector, especially in prioritising the needs of learners at later stages of their career. It is in the sector's interest to promote the recommendations of the report.

Crafts Council actions

We will be writing to the inquiry to welcome its recommendations and ask to be involved in further stages of work following the inquiry and using the information in relevant meetings with politicians and opinion formers.

7. New government university strategy and review of postgraduate provision

Peter Mandelson announced the publication of a new government strategy for universities on November 3rd. The strategy, which has already caused considerable consternation in the academic community, places a great deal of emphasis on the economic contribution of higher education and sees universities as organisations that train people in the skills that businesses need. This narrow view of higher education is of course potentially damaging to the creative sector. The rhetoric is uncompromising. The strategy states that the focus will be on:

“teaching programmes that will best prepare students for the jobs of the future. That means focusing on the key subjects essential to our economic growth, and boosting the general employability skills expected of all graduates. We will enable universities to compete for funds to provide courses in subjects relevant to Britain's economic future, working in partnership with business. Institutions unable to meet such strategic needs can expect to see their funding reduced to provide resources for those who can.”



The strategy is available to download at: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/publications/Higher-Ambitions.pdf>.

In a related development, BIS has issued an initial call for comments on the scope of the review of postgraduate provision, which was announced by Peter Mandelson in a speech in July. Details are available at: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/postgraduate-review>. Some academics are concerned that the subtext seems to be a desire to make postgraduate funding work harder for the economy. The review will report in 2010.

Issues and impact for the craft sector

The key aim for the craft sector will obviously be to make sure that the teaching of craft in higher education and postgraduate provision in craft is not further eroded.

Crafts Council actions

We will be discussing the university strategy and the postgraduate review with key stakeholders in higher education so as to be in a strong position to respond. We will be conducting research to provide robust evidence of the current status of craft provision in the HE sector in 2010.

8. HEFCE consultation on the new arrangements for the assessment and funding of research in UK higher education

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has published a consultation on proposals for a new Research Excellence Framework, which will replace the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) as the mechanism for assessing research and allocating funding. The way in which research value is assessed and funded clearly has significant implications for the overall quality of teaching provision within universities, as well as a direct impact on the work of makers working as practice-based researchers within HE.

The proposals apply to the whole of the UK, and the consultation is being run in conjunction with the other relevant funding councils. The closing date for comments is Wednesday 16th December 2009, and the consultation can be found at:

http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2009/09_38/09_38.pdf. There has already been considerable debate on the broad proposals, including a previous consultation in 2007.

The underlying principle of allocating funding on the basis of research excellence remains the same, but the intention is to make the process simpler. There is also a stated ambition from the government to ensure that research has a greater impact on society and the economy. The REF is not intended to be comprehensive of all research activity, but to focus on excellence. It will assess the work of discrete research units or groups, rather than individuals or whole departments. It will aim to measure three things: quality of output, the quality of the research environment, and – for the first time – economic, social and policy impact.



Issues and impact for the craft sector

The university craft sector will need to work to ensure that the new framework measures the quality of its work effectively. Researchers working in craft may need to find new ways to demonstrate the impact of their work on society and the economy. Practice-based researchers may be concerned about how well the new framework will reflect their work.

Crafts Council actions

The Crafts Council will be responding to the consultation exercise, focusing on the proposal's potential impact on university craft departments and consequently on innovation and learning across the sector. The Crafts Council will also be contributing to the CHEAD (Council for Higher Education in Art and Design) response, which will draw together the views of senior academics and partner agencies.