



**CREATIVE
GRADUATES
CREATIVE
FUTURES**



Crafting Futures

a study of the early careers of crafts graduates from
UK higher education institutions

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Executive Summary

***Crafting Futures* research into the early careers of crafts graduates**

Crafting Futures explores the early careers of more than 600 graduates in crafts subjects some six years on from graduation. This major study draws on the large body of data from *Creative Graduates Creative Futures* (CGCF) (Ball, Pollard and Stanley, 2010), a longitudinal study of the career patterns of more than 3,500 graduates from UK first degrees in art, design, crafts and media subjects undertaken between 2008 and 2010. It builds on and offers comparisons with an earlier study of crafts graduates' careers: *New Lives in the Making* (Press and Cusworth, 1998) more than a decade ago.

Crafting Futures explores the value of a crafts education to the economy through the experiences of crafts graduates as they move from higher education into work, and compares these experiences with those of graduates in the CGCF study. The timing of the research, during the economic downturn, offers unique insights into the impact of recession on their working lives and the strategies they employ to continue to work towards their goals.

The importance of the crafts sector

The crafts sector is part of the wider creative industries, and contributes substantially to the UK economy – £3 billion gross value added (GVA) each year. Employment in contemporary crafts increased by 11 per cent between 1997 and 2006, and for the future further growth is anticipated in contemporary crafts markets. Crafts makers enter the sector from a range of educational backgrounds, many embarking on their careers from a first degree or postgraduate study in arts, crafts and design at UK universities.

Women represent the majority both in undergraduate crafts higher education and in the crafts employment sector, and this is reflected in the make up of the survey sample: 91 per cent of respondents were female.

These highly qualified makers, practitioners, researchers and innovators are grounded in an educational experience that involves learning by doing. They largely operate independently in an ever-changing landscape of micro-businesses and freelance work which characterise the crafts sector. Innovation, high quality, authenticity and aesthetic value are important characteristics of the contemporary crafts output.

Crafts practice combines personal enquiry with crafts knowledge, processes and skills – often tacit in nature – and these are core business assets. Thus crafts making within a theoretical and critical framework (intelligent making) contributes to new processes, products and ideas.

There are concerns about the sustainability of funding for HE crafts-based courses. Yet, higher education is important to the crafts economic sector – providing skilled and motivated entrants and a focus for continued professional development, as well as a focus for practice-based research and innovation – an under-developed career route for crafts graduates.

Results and discussion

Crafts graduates value their creative education

- The majority of crafts graduates were positive about their undergraduate experiences and opportunities to pursue personal interests and ideas. Looking back, they recognised the value of learning through project-based enquiry, essentially learning by doing – setting and solving problems, often stemming from personal interests, working directly with materials, gaining an understanding of processes, and learning from mistakes in a shared critical context – ‘intelligent making’.
- Crafts graduates valued opportunities to learn in a real industry environment through placements and from those working in the industry. Other professional opportunities such as Personal and Professional Development (PPD), taking part in shows and exhibitions, peer and self-evaluation were commonly experienced.
- Crafts graduates were committed to their practice, adaptable and optimistic for the future, and carried this forward into their careers. They felt they had developed important skills and attributes through their courses; in particular, creativity, innovation, making/design skills, visual skills, presenting work and ideas.
- Working to deadlines, self-discipline and juggling priorities were felt by graduates to be important professional requirements that were fostered through their studies. Key career survival skills such as: independence, persistence, self-motivation and a strong work ethic, were also felt to be important.
- Some survival skills were felt to be less well developed, in particular understanding client needs, networking, IT and entrepreneurial skills.

Moving on and breaking in can be challenging

- Finding work after graduating was one of the main challenges facing crafts graduates and only half felt prepared for the world of work on leaving their courses.
- Work experience and contacts established at university were essential career facilitators; and crafts graduates continued to develop and nurture networks as their careers progressed, and accessed help from their universities mainly in seeking jobs and opportunities.

- Word of mouth was a vital means of getting jobs. Crafts graduates created their own opportunities and these evolved into paid work at a later date – graduates recognised and exploited opportunities that came their way.
- Graduates stayed focused on creative careers and recognised the importance of a professional attitude and self-belief, and to persevere in their job search even if it meant taking on unpaid work or a lesser job to get started.

Crafts graduates have complex and diverse careers

- Most crafts graduates were working in paid permanent employment, and half were engaged in multiple activities or ‘portfolio working’ at the time of the survey – typically combining several types of employment with self-employment, study or independent creative practice.
- Careers are diverse with two-thirds of crafts graduates in creative occupations and 14 per cent in non-creative roles. A quarter of crafts graduates were teaching in at least one of their work roles, often combined with a creative occupation.
- Teaching is a significant career for crafts graduates, and a positive career choice because it offers the opportunity to stay close to creative practice, and enables individuals to pass on their passion for craft as well as providing a secure and predictable income.
- Self-employment was an important form of working for crafts graduates relative to graduates in general. In their early careers, more than one in three crafts graduates had worked freelance, and at the time of the survey one in five were running a business and/or one in seven were working freelance. This was a serious expectation for the future with double this proportion saying that running a business was likely as their careers progressed.
- At the time of the survey, some four to six years into their careers, unemployment was low at three per cent, although one in three had experienced unemployment since graduating.

Crafts graduates are optimistic and strategic in navigating the labour market

- An important question for the crafts sector is the extent to which it is possible to make a living from crafts practice. One in 12 crafts graduates (eight per cent) stated they were working as full-time makers or creative practitioners, the more common model being to combine practice with other work activities in portfolio careers.
- Crafts graduates have realistic and creative career goals, making purposeful moves, within the crafts sector and beyond, and juggling multiple activities and roles to develop their careers, achieve a stable income and continue making. They are optimistic and strategic in their pursuit of work in a competitive job market. Three-quarters are in or close to achieving their career goals.
- As their careers progressed, some crafts graduates sought job and financial security through employment. However, retaining autonomy and control over their work was also important, and for some self-employment was a way to achieve this.

- Family and friends were a strong source of support and their largely hidden contribution to the growth of the cultural and creative sector deserves wider recognition.

Collaboration is key to the success and fulfilment of crafts graduates

- Career success is measured in terms of creative and personal fulfilment, recognition, life-work balance and progression to more stable careers and income levels.
- The crafts sector is focused predominantly in micro-enterprises and sole trader businesses and this is reflected in our findings. Over half of crafts graduates worked alone and a further one-third in organisations of 10 or fewer workers.
- In spite of the high levels of self-employment, crafts graduates valued working with others, and this may reflect a need to combat the isolation of the lone worker. Crafts graduates are naturally collaborative; they come together to find work, work on multi-disciplinary projects and pool resources. Collaboration crucially provides opportunities to discuss their work with others and seek critical feedback they need to progress.
- There may be a need for greater collaborative activity to be built into crafts courses, as working with students on other courses was less common during undergraduate study for crafts graduates than was found for creative graduates in other disciplines.

Crafts graduates are adaptable, resourceful and pragmatic

- In the economic downturn, crafts graduates were realistic and adaptable in coping with job losses and fall in demand. They were proactive in exploring new markets, maintaining demand for services, and strategic in cutting costs and working for lower rates of pay or professional fees.
- In responding to challenges they were resourceful and pragmatic, keeping their options open and investing in their own development and practice.
- The personal attributes fostered through crafts education – independence, persistence, self-motivation and belief, professional attitude, a strong work ethic and dedication to creative practice – were often key in how graduates responded during the economic downturn.
- Crafts graduates with no parental experience of higher education (proxy for social class) were just as successful in their careers as those whose parents had been to university, indicating that they adopted similar career strategies, whatever their social background.

Crafts graduates are lifelong learners

- Crafts graduates are lifelong learners and are prepared to invest in their own development, and at the time of the survey 38 per cent were engaged in further study or some form of CPD (Continuing Professional Development), often combined with paid work. Making full use of and improving knowledge and skills are among the most important factors in career decision-making for crafts graduates.

- Almost three-quarters of crafts graduates had undertaken some form of informal or formal study since graduating; mainly to develop further skills and knowledge, enhance job opportunities or to develop their creative practice.
- Postgraduate study was an aspiration for many crafts graduates, and one-third had gone on to study at postgraduate level. Reflecting the importance of teaching as a career choice for crafts graduates, one in six crafts graduates had taken a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). However, for some, postgraduate study was seen as financially unrealistic.
- Short courses were the preferred model for CPD, keeping up to date with new digital technologies and industry software, learning new practice skills, business knowledge and promoting their work – aspects which were felt to be under-developed during undergraduate study. Courses also provided opportunities to network and collaborate with like-minded individuals.
- In the economic downturn, learning continued to be a priority and crafts graduates were prepared to make sacrifices to study alongside work commitments.

The working patterns of crafts graduates have remained stable

- The characteristics of crafts graduates and their careers have remained consistent in the 10 years since *New Lives in the Making*. The crafts sector has grown and looks to continue to grow, but working patterns remain the same. Crafts graduates continue to carve out a space to continue with their practice.
- There have been some changes in the perceptions around crafts courses. The skills and knowledge learned through making are still well regarded by crafts graduates but graduates may now be better able to recognise and appreciate the development they have experienced particularly in creativity and innovation, making, design, technical and visual skills, and in presenting their work and ideas. However graduates continue to feel less well developed in the areas of IT, networking and other client-facing skills.
- There is still a demand to link courses to the real world but crafts graduates now appear to have had a better connection with industry during their studies. A significant group, more than two in five, had formal work placements linked to their courses; and more than four in five crafts graduates had taken part in shows and exhibitions, and had been taught by industry practitioners.
- Crafts-specific careers remain hard to define. This current study shows the diversity and complexity of crafts careers, that the full-time maker accounts for a very small proportion of crafts graduates, and that the sector is still small and fluid.
- Portfolio working, self-employment, unpaid work and part-time work continue to play a significant part in crafts graduates' early careers. However the study also shows that crafts graduates are strategic about their career moves. They have realistic expectations, stay focused on their career goals and may choose to work in non-creative sectors to use their skills and knowledge in wider ways, and/or to achieve a stable income whilst continuing in creative practice. They are largely satisfied with their working situation and are in or close to achieving their career goals.

- Key career survival skills of persistence and ingenuity remain the same, although now they are perhaps coupled with adaptability and realism. Crafts graduates recognise the challenges in finding work but the study highlights the persistent nature of crafts graduates in their pursuit of creative practice, work satisfaction and focus on new learning and achieving a work-life balance.
- In contrast with *New Lives in the Making*, graduates appear to be at ease with using new technology, though they would have preferred more experience of IT on their courses. After graduation they are keen to update these skills on a regular basis.

There are some differences between crafts disciplines

- Two distinct groups of crafts disciplines were examined in the study: Textiles (printed, constructed and textiles design); and Other Applied Arts and Crafts which included ceramics, metalwork, jewellery, glass and bookbinding, 3-D design and other applied arts (conservation, multi-media, plastics).
- Very few Textiles graduates were male, and those who studied Other Applied Arts and Crafts tended to be older and were more likely to be dyslexic than Textiles graduates.
- Textiles graduates were more likely to experience permanent employment than Other Applied Arts and Crafts graduates who were in turn more likely to be freelance, self-employed, portfolio workers, or to have engaged in independent study and develop their creative practice.
- Textiles graduates were more likely to study at postgraduate level or take a PGCE, whereas Other Applied Arts and Crafts were more likely to undertake a short course.

Crafts graduates are different to creative graduates as a whole

- There were also some differences in the nature of undergraduate experiences of crafts graduates. Crafts graduates have a distinctly different profile to creative graduates as a whole. They are considerably more likely to be female, from the UK and white; and so are less diverse in some respects than creative graduates overall.
- Crafts graduates valued making and technical skills in particular, and felt they were very important to their careers. This preference sets them apart from creative graduates as a whole. Crafts graduates appeared to have greater opportunities to learn through shows and exhibitions, field trips, competitions and business or enterprise activities than graduates in other creative disciplines.
- Focusing on career experiences, crafts graduates were more likely to be in permanent paid work than creative graduates as a whole, and slightly less likely to be working in the creative sector or in creative roles, or in an area related to their degree. Although equally likely to run their own business as graduates of other disciplines, crafts graduates were relatively less likely to report freelance work. These patterns are likely to be driven by the stronger desire for a stable/regular source of income among crafts graduates and the higher proportions entering teaching.

- This greater propensity to enter teaching as a career is reflected in the proportions engaging in further study: crafts graduates were more likely to engage in formal study than creative graduates as a whole – particularly PGCE courses.

Looking to the future - implications and conclusions

There is more complexity in the interaction between graduates, the crafts sector and wider creative industries and higher education than in the simple equation of supply and demand. Old models for work, purposes of education, skills agendas and graduate employment are limiting, and prevent dealing with a new reality in which crafts practice provides the context for academic study, work experience, employability, professional development, innovation, enterprise and productive careers. In this new reality, work satisfaction is focused on measures such as personal fulfilment and opportunities for creativity and new learning.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) provide an environment that fosters ‘intelligent making’ and encourages important employability skills and key career survival skills. A distinctive characteristic of the crafts curriculum involves the interaction between creative ideas, materials and processes, personal direction and high-level intellectual skills within a theoretical and cultural context.

Looking forward, it is critical that all stakeholders recognise the importance of the following factors and issues and their role in supporting or inhibiting the success of crafts careers and growth in the crafts sector:

- The sector is largely made up of women, and they account for 91 per cent in the sample for the study. It is worth noting that more than half the respondents anticipated some form of caring or parental responsibilities over the next few years.
- Fifty-three per cent of graduates were the first generation in their families to go to university (proxy for socio-economic class). Yet, these graduates appeared to be just as successful and satisfied in their careers as those from more privileged backgrounds.
- Thirty-nine per cent of graduates had worked unpaid since graduating, and working on a voluntary basis, or in an unpaid internship post-graduation is becoming increasingly common for graduates across all subjects. The role of parents and families in supporting crafts individuals financially at the start of their careers is a largely hidden contribution to the growth of the cultural and creative sector.
- The relatively low levels of pay and acceptance of unpaid work as a way to maintain creative practice and establish oneself in the creative industries mean significant hardship in early careers.
- For this reason apprenticeships, paid internships, grants, loans and residencies – small amounts of funding would have a positive impact on graduates, their markets and their creative ventures in their early careers is something to be explored.
- Half the respondents felt unprepared for the world of work on graduation. There is work to be done to prepare graduates for the likelihood that they will be self-employed and for the reality of crafts and other creative careers, with appropriate support for progression into work and continuing professional development into their careers.

- The potential for crafts graduates to apply their creative skills in non-creative jobs or sectors is largely untapped, as the focus for their careers is on staying close to their practice. Further exploration of the nature of creativity, the transfer of crafts-making thinking and processes, and the experiences of crafts graduates in non-creative roles would be beneficial and open up new opportunities and aspirations.
- Networking and collaboration are important career facilitators for crafts graduates. There needs to be greater emphasis on these interactions and collaborative learning opportunities within undergraduate courses.
- The formalising of opportunities for collaborations and networking by stakeholders in HE and beyond, both pre and post-graduation, might include commissioning and funding multi-disciplinary projects and would stimulate work and new opportunities.
- Crafts higher education plays a significant role in the education and professional development of practitioners, and provision of a coherent approach to professional development – progression for skills development, research and innovation – is central to sustainability.
- There are concerns about resourcing and HE funding for crafts-based courses, in which students learn by doing, working hands-on with materials and developing highly skilled technical processes within a critical context in a studio and workshop environment. In times of constraints on HE funding, these courses may be under threat at all levels of education.
- In their early careers very few graduates aspire to research careers in higher education, and although this may become an aspiration as graduates mature, there is a need to build further capacity in research communities to nurture academic careers, meet aspirations for new knowledge and innovation in the HE sector, and to bring in the next generation of teacher-practitioners.
- Lack of funding for postgraduate study is a serious barrier to academic careers. For the future health of research, it will be important to establish and maintain the foundations of practice-based enquiry at undergraduate level and signal postgraduate research as a serious career route and longer-term aspiration.
- Crafts graduates are ambassadors for the crafts – they have a strong desire to pass on their passion for crafts and making to others either through the objects, ideas and responses communicated through crafts practice, or by inspiring and teaching others.

Key Findings

- Three out of five crafts graduates had worked in the creative industries and in their field of expertise since graduating. At the time of the survey 9 out of 10 crafts graduates were in paid work, the majority in creative jobs and in or close to achieving their career goals.
- Portfolio careers are well established, with 50 per cent of crafts graduates in multiple jobs at the time of the survey, typically combining employment with self-employment, study or developing their creative practice.
- The remaining 50 per cent were in one main job or work activity at the time of the survey. The majority (72 per cent) of these graduates were in a permanent salaried job and the predominant mode of working was full-time (85 per cent).
- Unemployment was low at three per cent and seven per cent were working unpaid at the time of the survey. Unpaid work was a common strategy for job-seeking or learning new skills, particularly in the very early stages of a career, with 39 per cent undertaking some voluntary experience since graduating.
- Thirty-seven per cent of crafts graduates had worked freelance since graduating and at the time of the survey 15 per cent were still doing so. Twenty-six per cent had started a business during their early careers and 19 per cent currently had their own business.
- Seventy-four per cent of working crafts graduates were positive about their current work, enjoying the ability to be creative, having autonomy and potential for future opportunities, with 79 per cent in work they felt related significantly to art, craft, design or media.
- Teaching represents a significant career choice for crafts graduates: 41 per cent of crafts graduates had experience of teaching in their early careers and 25 per cent were teaching at the time of the survey.
- Crafts practice – learning by doing – through project-based enquiry in a critical context is the dominant pedagogic model on undergraduate courses. ‘Intelligent making’ provides students and graduates with vital transferable and cognitive skills to equip them for multi-track careers and portfolio working. Crafts graduates particularly valued making and technical skills and this preference sets them apart from graduates from other creative courses in art, design and media.

- Crafts graduates had developed many of the skills required for their careers on their undergraduate courses, rating most highly creativity and innovation, visual skills and presenting their work and ideas. They felt they had less well-developed IT, networking and client-facing skills.
- Crafts graduates were lifelong learners with 74 per cent undertaking further study of some kind since graduating, often returning to higher education (HE) to study at a higher level. Higher proportions of crafts graduates entered formal study, teacher training and short courses than graduates in other creative subjects.
- Crafts graduates aspire to creative careers and achieving a good life/work balance, their career goals aligning with their subject disciplines and their career plans most influenced by a strong desire for new learning, the pursuit of creative practice and achieving a stable or regular source of income.

Crafts Council

The Crafts Council's goal is to make the UK the best place to make, see, collect and learn about contemporary craft.

We believe that craft plays a dynamic and vigorous role in the UK's social, economic and cultural life.

We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to make, see, collect and learn about craft.

We believe that the strength of craft lies in its use of traditional and contemporary techniques, ideas and materials to make extraordinary new work.

We believe that the future of craft lies in nurturing talent; children and young people must be able to learn about craft at school and have access to excellent teaching throughout their education.

Institute for Employment Studies

The Institute for Employment Studies is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in public employment policy and organisational human resource issues. It works closely with employers in the manufacturing, service and public sectors, government departments, agencies, and professional and employee bodies. IES is a not-for-profit organisation which has over 70 multidisciplinary staff and international associates.

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- Camberwell College of Arts
- Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design
- Chelsea College of Art and Design
- London College of Communication
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University of the Arts London is Europe's largest university for art, design, fashion, communication and the performing arts. The University was the lead institution for the *Creative Graduates Creative Futures* study of the early careers of creative graduates from 26 UK higher education institutions. The study was also generously supported by CHEAD, the Council for Higher Education in Art and Design.



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The full research report can be downloaded from the Crafts Council website:

www.craftscouncil.org.uk
