



Sheffield Hallam University

ART & DESIGN RESEARCH CENTRE

NEW LIVES IN THE MAKING

THE VALUE OF CRAFT EDUCATION

IN THE INFORMATION AGE

MIKE PRESS AND ALISON CUSWORTH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COMMISSIONED BY THE CRAFTS COUNCIL

AS PART OF THE LEARNING THROUGH MAKING RESEARCH PROGRAMME

APRIL 1998



Sheffield Hallam University

ART & DESIGN RESEARCH CENTRE

Sheffield Hallam University
 Psalter Lane Campus
 Sheffield S11 8UZ
 Tel: 0114 225 2688
 Fax: 0114 225 2603
 E-mail: design@shu.ac.uk

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank all those who contributed to this research project.

In particular we are indebted to the 216 craft graduates who shared their lives with us in the postal survey, and the 28 of those who took part in follow-up interviews. We are also most grateful to the course teams at the University of Brighton, Cumbria College of Art and Design, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, Staffordshire University and Wolverhampton University who participated in the survey and took part in discussions on the project.

Those craft educators who attended Crafts Council conferences in 1996 and 1997 where discussions on this project were held also contributed much in terms of their interest, enthusiasm and suggestions.

The Crafts Council Learning Through Making Steering Group chaired by Professor David Vaughan provided vital, supportive and critical direction on the project. Crafts Council officers Stephen Burroughs and Sarah Bowler were also essential in supporting our work and providing insights and direction.

Thanks also to our research support team at Sheffield Hallam University who provided an essential sounding board for ideas and assistance in some key areas: Hilary Cunliffe-Charlesworth, Tom Fisher, Professor James Roddis, Hazel White, and in particular Peter Hartley who provided the best idea of the lot: the starting point.

Gareth Stott's proof reading is also greatly appreciated. Finally, we wish to thank our excellent Research Administrator at Sheffield Hallam, Sarah Owen.

The authors

Professor Mike Press is head of the Art & Design Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University.

Alison Cusworth is Research Assistant at the Art & Design Research Centre.

Contents

Introduction	4
Background and overview of the report	
Methodology	4
Aims, objectives and research methods	
A new vision in the making	5
The theoretical framework setting the research agenda	
Making work	7
Examining and analysing patterns of employment of craft graduates	
Making a life.....	11
The relevance of craft to new patterns of everyday life	
Learning through making	13
The strengths and weaknesses of higher education in the crafts	
Make or break	15
Summary, conclusions and recommendations	

INTRODUCTION

This report details the findings of a two year research project which aimed to identify the skills and competencies of craft graduates, their career destination patterns and provide an assessment of craft education's relevance and value in today's and tomorrow's world. Conducted by the Art and Design Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University, the project was jointly financed by the Crafts Council, and had the following key objectives:

- 1 to develop a theoretical framework of craft learning in the context of socio-economic change based on existing research in the field;
- 2 to examine the perspectives of craft educators concerning the competencies and capabilities gained through craft learning;
- 3 to examine destination patterns of craft graduates and explore how they use their competencies and capabilities in 'everyday life' and in their careers.

This study represents the first major longitudinal research on craft graduate destination patterns and is intended to inform debate and policy on the future of design education in Britain. It is deliberately forward looking in its focus and seeks to assess the value of craft education in terms of the radical changes in work, economy and living which are underway and will continue into the next century.

METHODOLOGY

The initial hypothesis that drove our research proposal was that the nature of craft education, and the skills that it engenders are more widely applicable to areas of work, and everyday life, than a purely vocational view might suggest. This was based on an initial review of the literature surrounding post industrialism, and the emergence of the 'information age'.

Literature Review

Once the initial boundaries of the project had been established, an extensive literature review was planned and executed. This involved consideration of fields relevant to the inquiry and included:

- craft and design critical theory
- the post-industrialism and post-Fordism debates
- cultural economy literature
- research on trends in employment
- empirical research on craft practice in the UK
- design education research and theory
- general literature concerning education and competencies
- research on cognition and intelligence
- artificial intelligence research concerning spatial cognition

Through this initial phase of the research we embarked on the *New vision in the making* component of the project.

The Research Tool

In order to answer the questions raised by *New Vision*, by means of the longitudinal survey, it was recognised that an effective research tool would be required. We adapted a method used by historians to record concurrent world events - the 'Career Map'. One page of the questionnaire presented a 'time line' requiring people to detail their own personal chronology since they had graduated. Six craft based courses were chosen for the survey:

- BA (Hons) and HND Crafts - Cumbria College of Art and Design, Carlisle
- BA (Hons) Design: Jewellery and Metalwork - Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, Dundee
- BA (Hons) Wood, metal, ceramics, plastics - University of Brighton
- BA (Hons) Fashion and Textiles - University of Brighton
- BA (Hons) Design (Glass) - Staffordshire University
- BA (Hons) Ceramics - Wolverhampton University

In all cases every graduate from 1985 was mailed a questionnaire. Over 850 questionnaires were dispatched and 216 returned, representing a response rate of 25%.

Follow up interviews

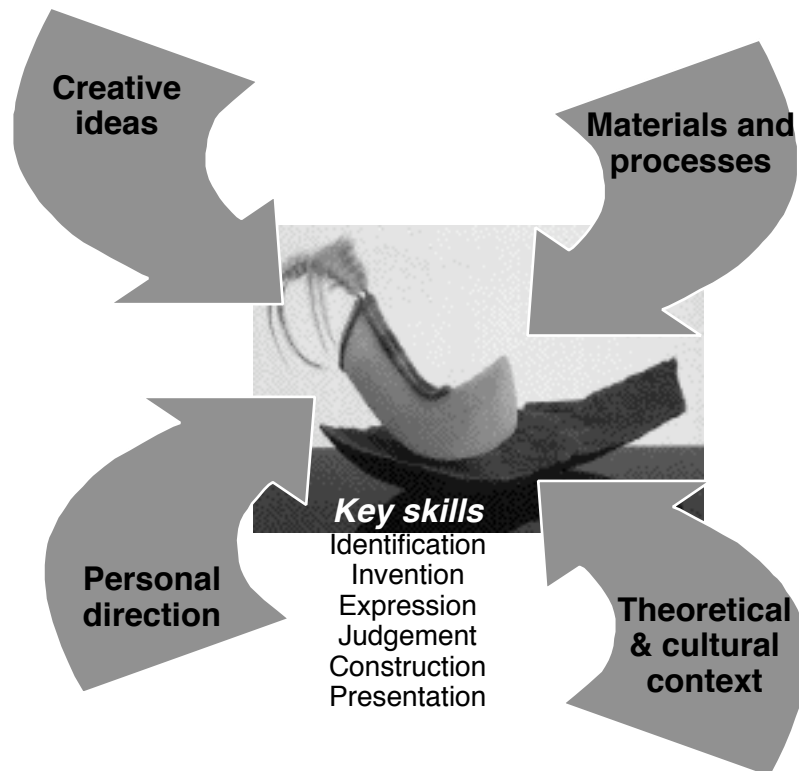
To enhance the richness and detail of the data, and to further explore our research agenda, follow up interviews were conducted with a sample of the respondents. 28 interviews were conducted, mostly by telephone, but some face to face, some by fax, and some by e-mail. This represents approximately 13% of all respondents.

Course reports and interviews

Following receipt of questionnaires and completion of follow up interviews for each course surveyed individual reports for each were prepared covering the main issues raised by the survey. The course leaders and tutors for each course were then presented with these reports and interviewed at their institutions.

A NEW VISION IN THE MAKING

Following an extensive review of literature and research it became clear that there is enormous scope for examining craft and craft education in a new light. There is indeed a new vision of craft in the making. Craft education appears to impart new styles of thinking, acting and problem solving to its students, which may be more appropriate



than traditional learning systems, in our changing culture. We can identify a model of intelligent making - see above - that is reflective, integrative and interactive. It utilises a range of skills - technical/manipulative, theoretical, creative, judgmental and analytical. In representing the skilful achievement of relevance, intelligent making applies and creates different forms of knowledge, both tacit and propositional. Intelligent making would appear to further many of the key requirements of the 'information age mind set' - flexibility through reflection-in-action, the exercise of judgement, creative problem solving, graphicacy and, of course, 'the 3 Rs'. For many individuals, craft education may well be the most appropriate vehicle for developing these.

Craft, as a distinct body of knowledge and as an activity, also has a clear place in community development, the new ethical enterprise culture, creative consumerism and new structures of everyday life.

Whether this new model and rationale for craft education has any validity depends on the answers to these questions:

- What are the competencies gained by students through a craft education, and how are they applied in their lives?
- To what areas of employment and future career do craft graduates apply themselves, and with what measure of success? Is there a formula or pattern to this employment, and if so in what areas, and for what reason?
- Can we detect new flexible patterns of employment, and what role does intelligent making play in them?
- Does craft have an important part to play in the achievement of self-fulfilment and contentment, as part of a 'life portfolio'?

The graduate survey and interview programme sought answers to these questions.

MAKING WORK

The analysis of employment patterns led to the following groups of findings and observations:

Slow start

Finding direction appears to start slowly, with high initial rates of unemployment. This rate soon drops markedly, with initial unemployment durations averaging three months. But unemployment is often used as a means of supporting creative practice.

- Immediately following graduation 48% of the people who completed the career map became unemployed, predicted to a certain extent by the degree grade that they were awarded. The higher the degree grade achieved, the less likely a respondent was to become unemployed, and the shorter the length of time that they could expect to spend initially unemployed.
- At the time of the survey the percentage of people experiencing unemployment had dropped from 48% to 9% - Fashion and Textiles at Brighton and Glass at Staffordshire were notable in having no survey respondents unemployed at the time when the questionnaires were returned.
- 58% of the sample had at some point in their career been unemployed, and unemployment accounted for 10% of the total potential working time since graduation of the whole sample.
- 38% of the people who had been unemployed at some point during their career admitted to using unemployment benefits to support development of their creative practice until it was financially self supporting.

Beyond Bernard

Art and design related self-employment is a significant recent destination, increasing over time from a modest start. But the 'Bernard Leach' paradigm is little in evidence. A diverse range of creative making and design activities are in evidence.

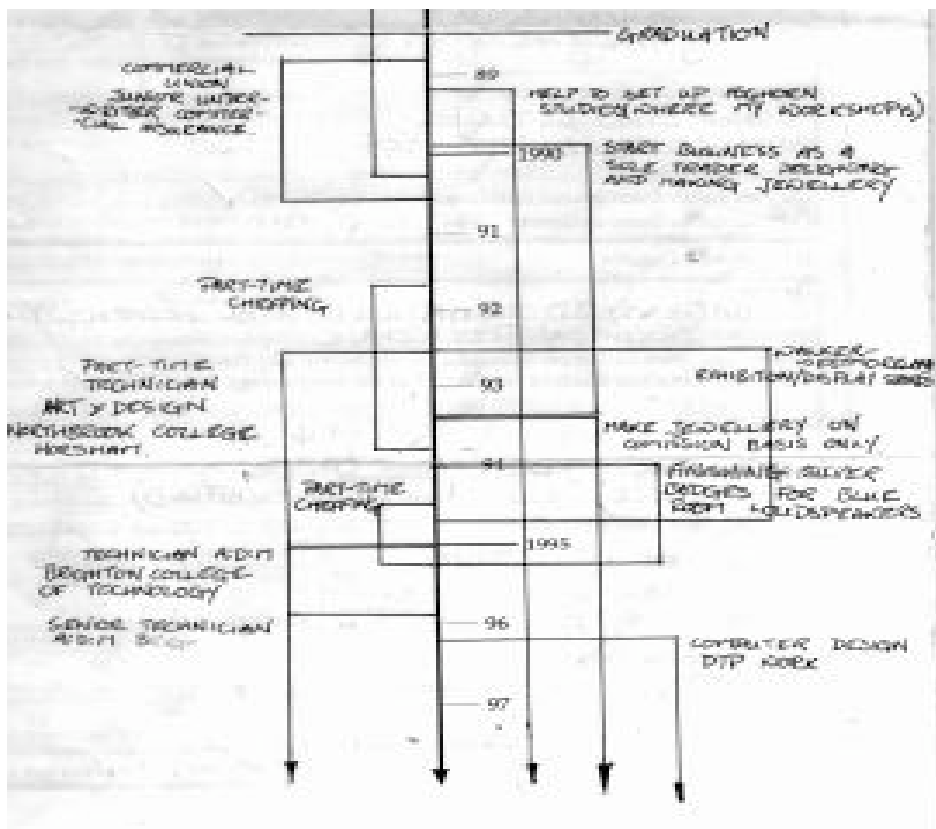
- Initial self employment levels were low - only 21% of the whole sample became self employed immediately on graduation. Only 9% were self employed on a full time basis in an area related to art and design.
- At the time when the survey was conducted 39% of the sample were in self employment - almost double the initial figure. 20% of the respondents were in full time self employment related to art and design - over twice the figure initially self employed in that way.

- 12.3% of respondents fell into the category of full time makers. But this group includes a significant number who will not be found in the Crafts Council's slide index, or will be exhibited in Contemporary Applied Arts. They include those who make the models and sets for Wallace and Grommit, Spitting Image, pop promos and props for 'Titanic'. They also include makers of retail displays and 'designer' fitted kitchens. The contemporary crafts are in reality far more contemporary and connected with our fast changing culture than the crafts 'establishment' acknowledges.
- 45% of respondents had at some point been involved in a full time, self employed making activity, and 37% had been involved in a making activity on a part time basis. It must be considered that 45% of those who had been a full time maker had also been a part time maker at some point.
- Only 7% of the people who had at some stage in their career been a self employed craft maker in some capacity had since given up making completely.
- Only 5% of the people who were self employed at the time of the survey were also involved in paid work within the higher and further education sectors.

Craft connected

64% of recent paid employment is art and design related. Work in this area increases over time. There is also significant employment in management professions.

- 39% of the whole sample became employed immediately on graduation. 45% of that initial employment was in an area related in some way to art and design. Art and design employment occurred mainly in major categories 2 - professional occupations, 3 - associate professional and technical occupations, and 5 - craft and related occupations, of the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC).
- At the time of the survey 60% of the people who completed the career map were in some form of paid employment - a substantial increase from the figure employed immediately on graduation. 64% of the employment being carried out was related to art and design in some way - also increased from the initial statistic. The recent employment being done occurred mainly in SOC major categories 1 - Managers and administrators, 2, and 3, representing a slight shift towards the higher status end of the employment spectrum.



- The figures for employment immediately on graduation showed that the non art and design related employment mainly occurred in SOC major categories 6 - personal and protective service occupations, and 7 - sales occupations. This employment was often unskilled or casual, and also often being carried out on a part time basis.
- At the time of the survey there was still some non art and design related employment in SOC major categories 6 and 7, but there was also a significant cluster of non art and design employment in the higher status categories 1, 2 and 3, with the most interesting group being within category 1 - managers and administrators. This shift shows a clear trend for craft graduates to become employed in management roles some years after graduation. It will be asked in the chapter 'Learning through making', how this type of education can contribute to employment within management.

Job juggling

Many craft graduates are engaged in multi-track portfolio careers. Nearly half of those self-employed undertake other forms of work and many who are in full-time paid employment also pursue forms of self-employment. Multi-tracking two or more part-time jobs, and two or more forms of creative practice are also in evidence. Art and design teaching is not a significant source of employment.

- Immediately on graduation 33% of those who were self employed were also engaging in some form of paid work, a figure which rises to 46% with most recent destinations.
- For those currently part time self employed, 89% are engaged in paid work, while only 17% of the current full time self employed do other paid work.

- The paid employment undertaken by self-employed graduates clusters mainly in SOC major categories 1 - managers and administrators, and 3 - associate professional and technical occupations. 75% of the all the jobs that the self employed were undertaking were art and design related.
- At the time of the survey, only 10% of the full or part time self employed were involved in teaching art and design or working as technicians within further and higher education.
- Those most likely to be ‘multi-tracking’ are people in full time paid employment who supplement their employment and lifestyle with some part time self employment activity.

Caring crafts

Voluntary work plays a significant role in the career development of craft graduates, and they in turn provide essential skills to care and arts projects.

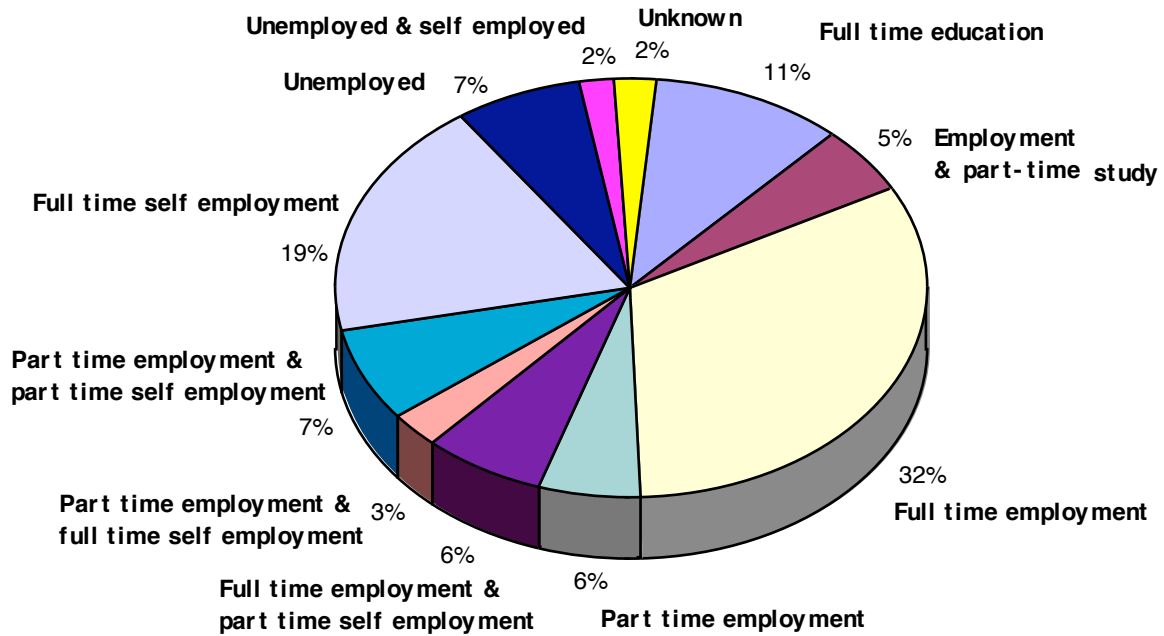
- 18% of respondents indicated that at various times they had worked on a voluntary basis. In most cases this work involved the use of craft skills.
- The contribution of voluntary work to career development worked in a variety of ways: a means of ‘keeping the creative hand in’ during initial unemployment; a conscious career decision, as in the case of VSO workers; a means of gaining work experience to make them employable in new fields; and overcoming isolation.
- Its relatively high incidence suggests that many health care and arts projects rely to some extent on the voluntary labours of this country’s craft graduates.

The big picture

Overall we find diverse and fluid patterns of work, with significant levels of multi-track working. Three quarters of respondents work in art and design related fields.

- 40% of the sample is in full time employment. Of these a few combine full time employment with part time self employment, and a couple combine full time work with part time education.
- 25% of the sample is in full time self employment. 19% have no other form of work or activity, while 3% also have part time employment, 2% are officially unemployed and 1% are in part time education.
- At the time of the survey forms of multi-track working were practiced by 16% of respondents with various combinations of self employment and paid employment.

*The big picture:
most recent destinations*



However, this static picture of most recent destinations understates the true nature of multi-track working. For around half of all respondents, multi-tracking is practiced to a greater or lesser extent.

- 75% of those who are employed or self employed work in art and design related fields.

MAKING A LIFE

Equally important to patterns of work, are patterns of living and the relevance of craft thinking, knowledge and sensibility to creating a life in a high technology information age.

Craft is relevant

Whatever areas of work craft graduates pursued, from making to management, there was a commonly held view that their education was relevant to the age in which they are living. Some expressed this in terms of the value of appreciating and being able to produce the 'handmade' in an increasingly digital age.

Providing flexibility

The project based approach to learning in craft, involving the management of time and multi-tasking, appears to equip people with the confidence and skills to develop multi-track 'portfolio' working. With over half of all respondents working in this way, craft graduates are perhaps at the forefront of developments in the restructuring of work and leisure.

Craft is lifestyle

A critical dimension of this is the use of their 'craft' in enhancing the quality of their lives and asserting their identities in an age when 'work' is becoming less significant in terms of providing a sense of self. Craft provides lifestyle and life-identity in a way that transcends the former meaning of this concept as a rural idyll: "the potter in a smock and handwoven socks living in a farm house in Wales". Through our interviews we have found many cases of people pursuing professional careers but continue making for themselves: the marketing manager who still makes pate-de-verre vessels, the Virgin Atlantic cabin crew member who built up a portfolio of watercolours on her travels, the care professional who still made pots. Craft empowers people with self-expression, an activity to counteract the stresses of working life, a means of identity.

Supporting parenthood

Craft also provides a flexible and self-driven form of work that we have found can be appropriate to full time, or largely full time, parenthood. Given the few cases in our survey, which is a consequence of the ages of respondents, this was not an issue we could explore in detail, but is worthy of further research.

Life long learning

Finally, the craft graduates in our survey exhibited strong tendencies to be 'life long learners'. 60% had undergone a further course of study since graduating. These included MBA study, various forms of business training, art therapy and art management courses, computer and language courses, MA study in a variety of areas, and other short courses. We suggest that attention is given to developing new appropriate forms of flexible post-graduate education to those with an art and design background. Furthermore we also highlight the importance of further developing adult education in the crafts.

Learning through making

This chapter considered the graduates' reflections on the education in the crafts that they had undertaken, and the implications of the survey for future education policy making with regard to craft. There were several specific features that were identified:

13

'Making' matters

The skills and knowledge learned through making was a very highly regarded aspect of craft courses.

- Graduates rated technicians, workshops, materials and practical skills teaching as the top four rated aspects of the craft courses that they had completed. These components, all relating to 'making' activities, are those which are resource intensive, and difficult to sustain within the university funding system.
- Of the skills that craft graduates thought were developed during their education, the top four were all related to 'making' -manipulating materials, creativity, experimentation, and design skills.

Vacuum formed

There was a strong sense that learning through making took place in a vacuum, with issues concerning 'the real world' rarely encountered. Careers guidance, business skills and marketing were poorly provided.

- The area of craft courses which came in for the most criticism from graduates was the provision of careers advice, work placements and business and marketing skills teaching. Many graduates said they felt unprepared for the realities of life after graduation.
- Related to the course rating, the skills that were thought by graduates to be least developed through their education in crafts were Business skills, marketing and the use of computers.

Low tech - no tech

The use of computers and advanced technology was considered insufficient, and was rated as the poorest aspect of craft education. This is linked to an inadequate grasp of such technologies by course tutors.

- The use of computers was rated at the bottom of the list of elements of course provision. It was also rated at the bottom of the list of skills that graduates felt were developed through their education.
- Craft course staff often feel unable to integrate the use of computers within the craft programme, and encourage the students to use them, because of their lack of knowledge and training.
- Currently most instruction in the use of computers is provided by people outside craft disciplines - according to the Dearing report, this should be rectified, and all staff should receive adequate training so that they are able to integrate the use of information technology within the main programme.

Determined creativity

Graduates did recognise that craft education provided some vital transferable skills - such as determination and creativity - which could be applied broadly.

- The skills that craft graduates rated as being most useful to them in their lives since graduation included determination, communication, creativity and independence.
- Craft graduates felt that their skills were applicable to a wide variety of employment and life situations.
- Over time, the word 'creativity' becomes associated with different aspects. Immediately on graduation it is linked with 'making' activities such as manipulating materials, experimentation and design skills. At the time of the survey it was linked with determination, communication and independence - more personal cognitive abilities.

Changing context

Craft education needs to refocus itself in the context of the most radical shift in higher education this century, in terms of its funding, structure and recruitment.

- The training/education debate - determining whether craft education is vocational training for work, or a general educational development - this causes craft considerable problems of definition, and measuring success.
- Craft students are often encouraged to hold unrealistic expectations about the careers that they will be qualified to go on to pursue.

- Student numbers have increased but the funding has not, causing problems in maintaining the quality and diversity of the education provided. This has also meant that more people are being accepted onto craft degree courses who are not necessarily committed to the goal of becoming a craft maker.
- Student and graduate debt has become a major factor. Students must compromise on the work that they do at university for financial reasons. Buying materials, and paying fees for studios is placing a major financial burden on students.
- Graduates are not in a financially stable position when they graduate, and are therefore forced to take paid employment in order to pay off debts and loans. There are very few graduates in a financially stable enough position to be able to start up a small business immediately on graduation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Institute of Craft Education & Research

Within the broad field of art and design education, craft disciplines have distinctive methods, processes and issues that need to be addressed. Currently there is no appropriate forum for the discussion of these issues or organisation to further the collective interests of craft education and to co-ordinate the other initiatives that we propose. It is therefore suggested that a specialist Institute be established, initially based on the Crafts Council Education Committee, with a brief to promote new educational practice and research in craft disciplines and disseminate best practice to a broad audience. Educational institutions, other public bodies and businesses would be invited to subscribe to the Institute.

The case for craft

It is essential that a stronger and more public case be made for craft thinking and learning. The current promotion of craft by the Crafts Council and other bodies solely in terms of crafted objects, meets the interests of neither craft education nor the graduates it produces. It is also arguable whether it meets the interests of most makers. In this area we make three recommendations:

- *Connecting craft to commerce and industry* - A campaign to demonstrate the relevance of craft to employers including printed material advocating the recruitment of craft graduates to management positions drawing on exemplar case studies, and representation at CBI and other relevant conferences.

- *Craft innovation* - Further research conducted on the distinctive role played by craft graduates in new product development (NPD) for manufacturing and media industries. From this research, and another project currently underway at Sheffield Hallam University, we have identified some cases of how craft thinking provides innovative forms of NPD. This needs to be explored further, and findings disseminated widely.
- *Exhibitions on making life* - The most significant physical output of craft is not objects - but people. The richness and diversity of the lives that they make for themselves is the most powerful and compelling finding of our research. This needs to be communicated visually, through exhibitions and other media.
- *Craft for communities* - There needs to be further research on the value of craft within adult education, and greater discussion on the issues involved. We also propose greater links are made between adult education providers and HEIs in order for the latter's resources and expertise to make a contribution to life long craft learning.

Crafts 2000

A campaign is necessary to encourage and empower craft educators to meet the challenges of 'learning through making' in our new age. This has to be a key mission of an Institute of Craft Education & Research. As part of such a campaign the following initiatives are proposed:

- *Course audits* - Educators should be encouraged to audit the nature of their current educational provision, especially in terms of information technology and digital design, careers advice, work placements, business skills, communications, and making more transparent the nature of intelligent making.
- *Making for modularity* - Unitised and modular course structures offer opportunities for craft courses to open themselves up to students from other disciplines, such as business and management studies, to learn through making. We need to examine the experience of this and identify cases of best practice.
- *Staff development* - New teaching resources and short courses are required to enable craft educators to deliver areas such as CAD and careers advice.

- *New postgraduate courses* - Craft departments should consider how they can plan and deliver, along with other specialists, short and more extensive courses in areas such as creative business management.
- *Creative professionalism* - There is a clear need for a unit/module to be developed for BA courses which links relevant issues of professional practice with careers guidance. A "What Happens Now?" video could be produced for such a unit which shows case studies of the diverse working patterns of craft graduates.

Reviewing financial support

The significant incidence of people supporting the early stages of their creative practice with unemployment benefits presents a policy dilemma. On the one hand it is a relatively cost-effective and flexible means of encouraging creative professionals to become established. On the other hand high rates of initial unemployment distorts the true picture of those unemployed and seeking work and is not the best advertisement for an education in the crafts.

We have no specific recommendations to make, other than a need to carefully review the issue and propose alternative means of financial support. It is our strongly held view that any compulsion to take up paid employment instead of developing creative practice would be highly damaging to the future prospects of craft graduates. There may be a case to link the payment of 'creative unemployment support' to a programme which encourages voluntary work for one or two days per week. This may be more politically acceptable, and has the virtue of encouraging a practice which is itself fairly widespread and positive to creative career development.

Placement and voluntary work register

To both further the measure suggested above, together with the clear needs of graduates across art and design and their courses, a national register of student placements, voluntary work and work experience opportunities could be set up. Making use of the Crafts Council website, the system could be self-generating simply by allowing employers and agencies to submit details on a web page form which would then be automatically appended to the database. The use of the web site in such a way could be linked to pages which provide career guidance and short course information to craft students and graduates.