



Craft and Higher Education: An Update

Dr Karen Yair
Crafts Council Research Associate

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In November 2010 - the time of our last update - the foundations had been laid for a radical restructuring of Higher Education (HE) in England. In the 'new regime' proposed by the *Browne Review of Higher Education* caps on university tuition fees would be removed and student loan capacity dramatically increased, in a bid to control public spending.

Since then, we have seen average arts and humanities undergraduate tuition fees increase by 250%, accompanied by new controls on student numbers and an increasing policy focus on students with high A-level grades. At the same time, a significant overall reduction in research funding has been accompanied by a clear prioritisation of topics considered to offer the most immediate and quantifiable benefits for the UK economy.

Higher Education plays a crucial role in the craft sector infrastructure. The facilities, critical discourse and opportunities for creative collaboration offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are particularly important in a sector where independent freelancing and relatively low income inhibit investment in research and development. Indeed, much of the sector's most innovative work takes place within universities. In addition, HE serves as the primary route into the sector for professional makers. According to the Crafts Council's 2011 report *Craft in an Age of Change*, graduate makers are - in general - more commercially and critically successful than professionals who have entered the sector through other routes. Any risks to the HE craft infrastructure are therefore of great concern to both the Crafts Council and the wider sector.

In this briefing note, we examine how policy and funding developments over the past two years have influenced and continue to reshape the Higher Education craft landscape. In this, we draw on course and applicant / acceptance data from UCAS, student data from HESA and our own analysis of developments in policy and funding for academic tuition, research and knowledge exchange.

1. Policy and Funding Developments 2010-2012

1.1. Tuition funding

In December 2010, MPs voted to raise the cap on tuition fees from £3920 to £9000, effectively completing the transfer of tuition funding from government to students and making all arts and humanities courses dependent on market forces. In the same month, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) set out plans for a phased reduction in tuition funding. Over the coming months, and notably with the June 2011 White Paper – ‘Students at the Heart of the System’ – the government’s overall strategy of improving its return on investment in HE led to significant change in tuition funding priorities.

Beginning immediately, in the academic year 2010-11, the five-year phased reduction focused on September 2012 as the starting point for a ‘new regime’ of increased tuition fees and student loans. At this point, teaching grants would end for students in all but identified high-cost subjects (medicine, dentistry, science, engineering and technology).

Regulated student loans, made by the government, were intended to plug the funding gap. Nonetheless, many HEIs suffered a shortfall during the period 2010-2012, during which overall funding (for research, teaching and capital projects) fell almost 13% and tuition fees remained capped at previous levels. HEIs with an overall focus on teaching – including many of those hosting craft courses - were particularly badly affected overall, in comparison with those whose substantial research activity provided a buffer against the tuition cuts (see below).

In June 2011, HEIs published their first uncapped tuition fees, for the year 2012-13. HEIs were invited to set their own fee level up to the £9000 cap, guided by the government’s expectation of a £6000 average. However, 64 of the 130 HEIs in England priced their tuition fees at the upper possible limit of £9000, with the average tuition fee across all HEIs and courses being £8385.

One year later, in July 2012, tuition fees for the academic year 2013-14 were released by HEIs. These new fees showed a small increase in the average tuition fee (from £8385 to £8500) and indicated that 77% of HEIs would by 2013 be charging the maximum possible rate of £9000 for at least one course.

The wisdom of a Higher Education policy that seeks to reduce student numbers by decreasingly affordability has been fiercely debated throughout this process. In response, the government has introduced certain measures to improve the affordability of a university education for students from less advantaged

backgrounds. In particular, in September 2012 BIS introduced a National Scholarship Programme, to be administered by HEFCE.

This scheme was introduced in order to encourage and support students whose family income falls below a threshold of £22,500. It draws on a funding pot totalling £50m in 2012-13, to be doubled in 2013-14 and increased by a further 50% in 2014-25, plus required matched funding from HEIs themselves. Critics have, however, raised concerns that the funding available is insufficient to cover tuition fees for the projected number of eligible students, particularly as economic conditions result in an increased number of single income and lower-income families.

1.2. Student number controls and priorities

The need for student numbers to be controlled has been a focus for Government since the start of the reform process initiated by the *Browne Review of Higher Education*. Penalties for HEIs that recruit beyond their quota were introduced in 2010 and increased in 2012 - following the 2011 *White Paper on Higher Education* - in order to control the costs to the government of tuition subsidies and loans.

A number of other strategies were introduced in response to the White Paper, encouraging HEIs to allocate student tuition places in ways that support Government objectives. Each of these has implications for craft.

First, BIS's grant letters to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) have each year called for HEI recruitment policies to focus on 'Strategically Important and Vulnerable Subjects' (SIVS). As a result, HEFCE reviewed its list of SIVS policy in 2011, consulting widely with HEIs and organisations including the Crafts Council.

The Crafts Council was one of a number of organisations campaigning for art and design disciplines to be recognized as SIVS, alongside science, technology, engineering, mathematics (the so-called STEM subjects), modern languages and quantitative social sciences. This campaign was not successful, but HEFCE's revised SIV policy has created new opportunities for craft and other non-STEM subjects. Under the new policy, HEFCE will continue to support subjects previously identified SIVs. However, it will move away from a single list of specific subjects and towards a broader perspective, in which 'building on and extending' the subject areas around each of the previous SIV disciplines is important. Because collaboration between craft and the STEM disciplines can produce such innovative and market-ready research findings, this new policy can be considered a welcome shift for craft.

The second student recruitment policy to impact on craft is BIS's 'core and margins' strategy, which essentially top-slices 20,000 student places across all HEIs and reallocates them to those who could demonstrate demand and deliver quality, for tuition fees of under £7500. These HEIs – many of which are newer HEIs, formerly known as polytechnics, are known as 'the margin'. All other HEIs are known as 'the core'.

The 'core and margin' strategy particularly affects craft courses, because they are typically hosted by 'margin' HEIs. In 2011, HEIs including Birmingham City, London Metropolitan, Nottingham Trent, Staffordshire and Wolverhampton were successful in bidding for a portion of the 20,000 available 'margin' places, many reducing their fees to meet eligibility requirements.

Whilst BIS introduced the 'core and margin' strategy with the stated aim of 'increasing student choice and supporting a more diverse higher education sector', the move was widely reported as a strategy for boosting competition in the HE marketplace. In practice, far fewer HEIs than anticipated took the risk of lowering fees in order to bid for places that were not guaranteed. As a consequence, a 75% reduction in the number of 'margin' places was announced by BIS for the academic year 2013-14, in 2012, accompanied by the removal of the bidding process and the quality assurance associated with it.

This development creates difficulties for those 'margin' HEIs that had cut their fees and now risk losing applicants if they reintroduce market rates. For those delivering craft courses, it creates the added difficulty of delivering a relatively expensive course on a tight budget. Of course, it also represents a loss for students with lower academic qualifications at A-level - the core market for 'margin' HEIs. Given that a significant proportion of craft undergraduates have traditionally arrived at university through alternative routes to A-level (such as two-year foundation courses offered by Further Education colleges), and that many are the first in their family to enter HEI, this development is a particular concern for the sector.

Relatedly, the third and final student recruitment strategy affecting craft is the increasing emphasis – over the past two years – on recruitment high-achieving students, where high achievement is defined in terms of A-level grades. Under this policy, HEIs are able to recruit uncapped numbers of these high-achieving school leavers, and for the 2013-4 academic year the A-level results threshold at which student numbers are uncapped is being extended from AAB to ABB. This will mean that more courses in the most academically selective HEIs will be able to expand, increasing their income from student loans.

This development may not impact greatly on recruitment to craft courses, but will affect the income and resilience of the HEIs offering them. Combined, the reduction of 'margin' places and the extension of funding for high-achieving students clearly focuses resources still further on HEIs with an 'elite' reputation in traditional academic subject areas. Those without a concentration of ABB students who do charge more than £7500 a year in tuition fees will be 'squeezed': some sources report that the first year of the government's new fees and funding regime is expected to cost some post-1992 HEIs almost 13% of their undergraduate intake and up to 46% of their direct grant.

In addition to these recruitment strategies, it is likely that tuition will increasingly focus on the perceived employability of new graduates. Professor Sir Tim Wilson's 2012 *Review of Business and University Collaboration* formalised BIS's rhetoric in this area, proposing strategies including internships for recent graduates and more 'sandwich courses'. It also highlighted the need to encourage graduates to overcome a 'big firm mentality' and to consider entrepreneurship, post graduation. It is hoped that, as this agenda unfolds, there will be opportunities to recognise and build on the entrepreneurship typical of craft graduates.

1.3. Research Funding Priorities

Research funding cuts have not been as severe as anticipated, during the period November 2010 – November 2012: overall funding for research fell by a relatively moderate 2.8% in 2011-12, for example. Overall, research funding for the arts has been affected more by shifts in funding priorities, than by absolute levels of available funding.

A *Funding Plan* for each of the academic research councils was published by BIS in December 2010. The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), which funds both practice-based craft research and theoretical research into craft, was given a number of specific priorities that potentially create new opportunities for the craft sector.

One important development included in the AHRC's *Funding Plan* – and its subsequent 2013-18 strategy - was the requirement for the arts and humanities to connect with STEM subject areas. Given the 'push' from HEFCE for STEM researchers to 'build on and extend' their subject area, this is a key policy shift that could create interesting academic collaborations between craft and other disciplines. Within the *Funding Plan*, the AHRC was also charged with focusing on the creative economy, and specifically with building academic / non-academic partnerships in this area - something that the Crafts Council is pioneering through

its partnership with Falmouth University, i-DAT Plymouth University and Watershed Bristol's Pervasive Media Studio.

Two further developments have dominated the research policy agenda over the past two years.

First, the increasing emphasis on 'demonstrable impact' as a driver of academic research was formally linked to funding provision. In February 2011, HEFCE confirmed a 20% weighting on impact in the new Research Excellence Framework (REF), which will succeed the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in 2014 as the primary means of rating HEIs' research activity and determining their future funding.

The agreed 20% represented a decrease from the 25% originally proposed, and is countered by a 65% weighting for conventional measures of academic 'output' (such as publications) and 15% for 'environment' (such as journal editing and completed PhDs). The move was controversial, with many academics making valid claims for the long-term gains and unquantifiable value of 'blue skies' research. However, eliciting 'impact' in this way enables HEFCE to make a very necessary case to BIS regarding funding for academic research. For craft, the shift is likely to result in reduced funding availability for single-discipline practice focused on artistic enquiry, and potentially new opportunities for cross-disciplinary research focused on real-world problems.

Second, research funding has been increasingly concentrated within the Russell Group of large, older HEIs considered part of the international academic elite. Most of these HEIs avoided large cuts in their overall grant funding during the period 2010-2012, as their substantial research funding protected them from cuts in tuition funding. In contrast, newer institutions with lower-rated research suffered heavy overall funding reductions – these included specialist arts institutions such as the University for the Creative Arts, whose cut amounted to 7.8%.

An announcement made in March 2012 showed this trend intensifying, as research funding received by English members of the Russell Group was set to rise by 1.5% in 2012-13. Over the same time period, it was determined that research funding for the Million+ group of HEIs founded after 1992 (former polytechnics) would fall by nearly 11%. HEIs rated as 2* for their research would cease to be funded, with research grants being made only to 3* and 4* institutions.

This move was driven by the government's policy that HEFCE should allocate research funding solely on the basis of excellence. The payoff is that smaller HEIs

with a less well established research base stand to lose large proportions of their research funding.

This development is of particular concern to craft, and indeed to the wider art and design research community. As a relatively new area of academic enquiry, art and design has not yet had the opportunity to build up the scale of research activity or solidity of academic infrastructure typical of more established disciplines. The increasing research funding focus on 'elite' institutions will hold back newer fields of academic enquiry, like craft research, and inhibit its ability to deliver on BIS priorities around economic growth.

1.4. Knowledge Exchange

In accordance with its policy of supporting research that drives economic growth, BIS has maintained funding – throughout the past two years – for the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF). This well-established fund supports HEIs in contributing to economic recovery and growth through partnership with industry.

In May 2011, HEFCE announced a HEIF funding allocation of £600 million for the period 2011-12 to 2014-15. For the first time, the allocations were not distributed across all HEIs, but instead were directed towards the 99 institutions with the strongest track records of working with industry, not-for-profit organisations and the public sector. To release funds, institutions had to provide knowledge exchange strategies, to be approved by HEFCE.

In contrast to research funding, this focus on high-performing institutions did not initially produce an exclusive focus on the Russell Group elite. However, in September 2012 an unexpected, additional investment of £6 million into the HEIF fund was distributed amongst the top-performing 12 institutions. 9 of the 12 institutions in receipt of this additional funding were Russell Group members, adding further to concern about the intensification of research resources in traditional subject areas.

HEIF is not the only funding available for knowledge exchange, and – as we saw above – the AHRC is also charged with promoting knowledge exchange within the creative economy. As a result, in September 2011 the AHRC announced the creation of four Knowledge Exchange Hubs, designed to build new partnerships and entrepreneurial capacity in the creative economy, and to increase the number of arts and humanities researchers actively engaged in research-based knowledge exchange.

The four Hubs are to be located within four HEIs: the University of Lancaster, University of Dundee, Queen Mary, University of London and the University of the

West of England, each of which will lead consortia of other HEIs, creative businesses, including SMEs, arts and culture organisations and other agencies. Funding for the hubs will run for four years and total £16 million of AHRC investment – over £20m including the contribution from the HEIs themselves.

The University of the West of England hub, Research and Enterprise in Arts and Creative Technologies (REACT), will be based at the Pervasive Media Studio at Watershed in Bristol. REACT will work with the HEIs of Bristol, Exeter, Bath and Cardiff as well as the Watershed Media Centre and a range of other creative industry partners. In June 2012, the Crafts Council joined the steering group for this hub.

2. Statistics

2.1. Craft courses

There have been no high profile craft course closures since our Nov 2010 update, which reported on the controversial closure of several well established courses. However, many courses have restructured, and the impact of this move remains - as yet - unclear.

The main source of statistics relating to course numbers is currently the University Central Admissions System (UCAS). UCAS's database is currently being redesigned, and does not allow for longitudinal tracking. Reviewing the courses listed by UCAS one by one does, however, allow for a snapshot analysis of courses available in the academic year 2012-13.

Our analysis shows a total of 86 UK-based, 3-year undergraduate courses available, where craft is a significant component. Very broadly, one third of these courses are focused on single craft disciplines, and two thirds are interdisciplinary. The exact figures are as follows:

- 31 (36%) single craft discipline (eg 'ceramics').
- 21 (24%) broad, multi-material craft courses (eg 'craft').
- 34 (39%) interdisciplinary courses (eg 'design and craft' or 'fine art' with a strong craft component according to UCAS).

Amongst the single subject courses:

- 12 (33%) are textile focused.
- 15 (48%) are jewellery focused.

- 2 (6%) each are ceramics focused, glass focused and fashion accessory focused.
- 2 are 'other' – eg blacksmithing.

Within the interdisciplinary courses:

- 19 (56%) connect craft with design.
- 8 (24%) connect craft with fine art.
- 6 (20%) connect craft with other disciplines, eg theatre, costume, animation, graphic design.

2.2. Craft Student Numbers

Data from Higher Education Institutions:

We have disaggregated the 'creative arts and design' student data published by the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA), to focus solely on craft students enrolled during the period 2007/08 to 2010/11. This is the latest year for which data is available.

The resulting craft student numbers should be seen as a conservative estimate, as they exclude some students enrolled on joint honours degrees and other multi-disciplinary courses.

On this basis we find that with a total of 6023 students in the academic year 2010-2011 the student craft population has seen a very small overall rise since 2007-08, when it totalled 5852:

	Postgraduate			Undergraduate			TOTAL
	Full time	Part time	Total	Full time	Part time	Total	
2010/11	203	135	338	5261	424	5685	6023
2009/10	173	114	287	5133	573	5706	5993
2008/09	153	80	233	4816	515	5331	5564
2007/08	146	34	180	5179	493	5672	5852

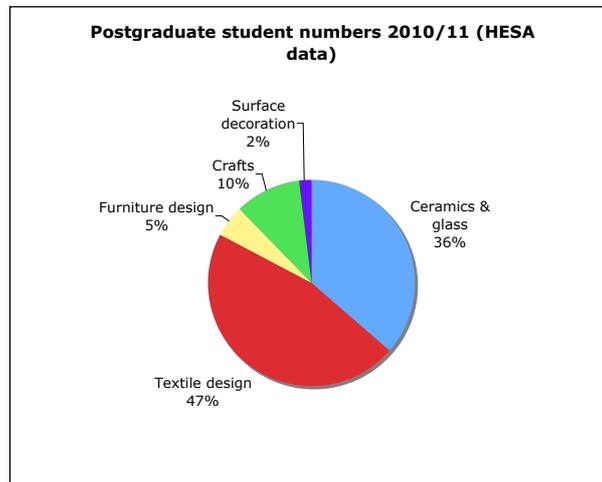
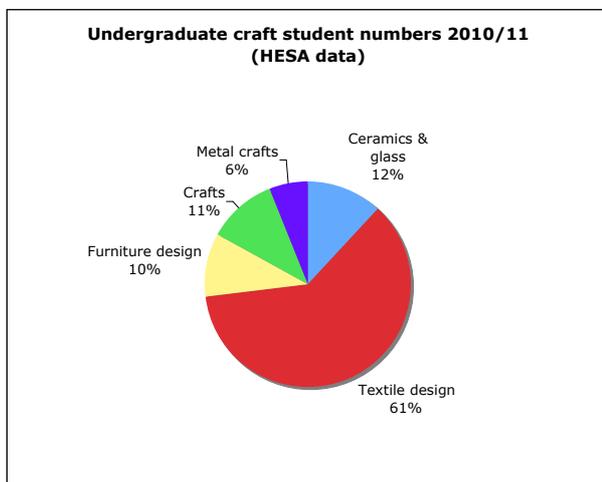
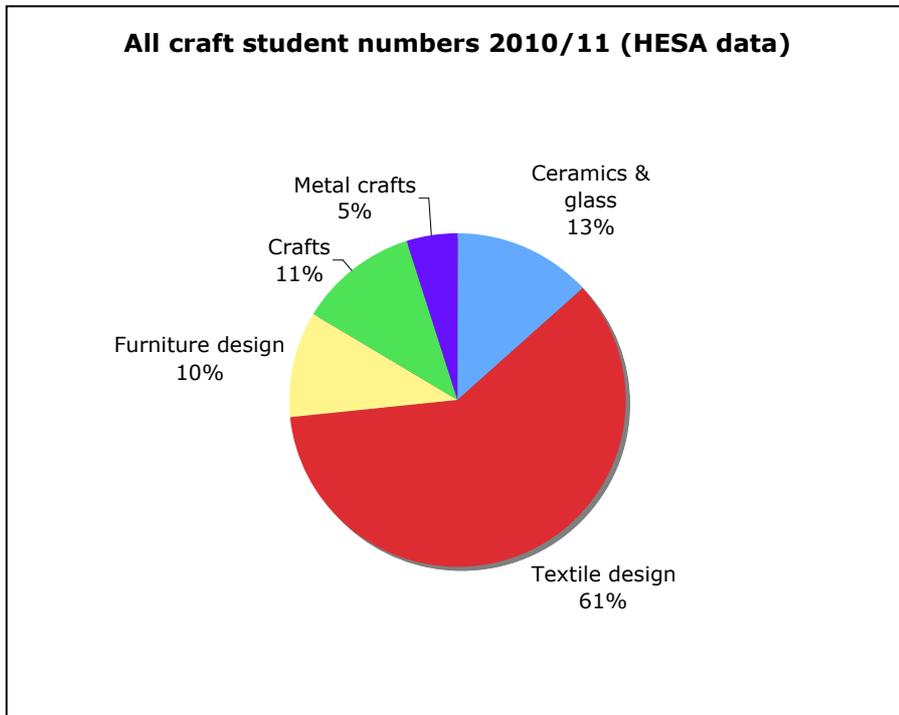
This 5% increase between 2009/10 and 2010/11 could be attributable to an overall increase across all university subjects of students domiciled in countries other than the UK. The proportion of these international students rose by 5.5% for the academic year 2010/11.

The make-up of the craft student population has gradually changed, over the four year period in question. During this time, the number of undergraduate students has remained relatively static but the number of craft postgraduates has almost doubled, from 180 to 338.

The increase in postgraduate study has been accompanied by a three-fold increase in part-time study at this level, from 23% of all craft postgraduates in 2007-08 to 67% in 2010-11. In comparison, the percentage of undergraduates studying part-time has remained reasonably stable, at between 8% and 11%. In fact in 2010-2011 part-time undergraduate study was at its lowest in the period under review at 8%.

Looking across the craft subjects as a whole, textiles remains overwhelmingly the most common subject choice, with student numbers rising gradually by 14% from 3073 in 2007-08 to 3580 in 2010-12.

Jewellery students are under-represented in the data, as there is no HESA course code for this discipline. This means that jewellery students will have been classified by HEIs either within the 'metal crafts' or 'silversmithing and goldsmithing' categories, or within the broad category of 'crafts.'



Notes on the 'Craft student numbers' charts above:

1. The data covers full time and part time students, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.
2. Individual HEIs classify their own courses, against standard codes issued by HESA.
3. The 'crafts' category includes data from those HEIs who chose not to classify their courses to the level of specific materials, as well as some jewellery students (see above).
4. We combine the student numbers for similar course codes, where one or more produces very small student numbers.

Concern is often expressed about the number of students studying ceramics and glass, considered the most vulnerable of the craft subjects at HE level due to the high cost of maintaining and running equipment and facilities. In fact, while a number of prominent ceramics and glass courses have closed (as reported in our 2010 update), overall student numbers in these subjects have been maintained at roughly 2007 levels; and ceramics and glass continuing to represent the second most common single subject choice for students.

Interestingly, the trend towards postgraduate study is at its strongest in the ceramics and glass fields. The statistics show that undergraduate ceramics and glass student numbers have fallen by a third since 2007-08, from 1062 in that year to 632 in 2010-11. Over the same time period, postgraduate numbers have increased by 300%, from 49 students to 121, with steady growth year on year. The proportion of postgraduates studying ceramics and glass has risen from 5% to 16%, whereas – for comparison – in textiles it has remained at 3-4% throughout.

It is important to keep this trend in perspective: the proportion of postgraduates remains comparatively low overall, at 7% of the total craft student population. However, the fact that one in six ceramics and glass students is studying at postgraduate level – compared with one in 25 textiles students – may both reflect and reinforce the differences between the two disciplines and the student experiences they offer.

Data from the University Central Application System (UCAS):

UCAS data captures students' applications to full-time undergraduate courses run by HEIs, and the acceptance rates on the courses to which they apply.

UCAS application data for the academic year 2012-13, published by the Guardian, suggests a 23.5% drop in applications made to full-time, undergraduate craft courses, compared to the year 2011-12 and despite further likely increases in international student applications.

This statistic is likely to have been influenced by the previous year's 5.1% increase in applications for university places, when students prioritized lower fees over gap years. However, this overall decline cannot fully account for a 23.5% drop in applications to craft courses. Neither can the drop be explained by the increase in part time study, as this is concentrated amongst postgraduate students.

Comparison of the HESA and UCAS acceptance data (the number of students accepted onto degree courses, rather than the number applying) since 2007 shows substantial differences in the way that craft students are counted or

categorized. Specifically, UCAS records between 535 and 771 acceptances to full time, undergraduate degree courses each year during the period in question. Multiplied by three (to represent three-year degree courses), this gives a total full time, undergraduate population of between 1600 and 2133. In contrast, as the table above shows, HESA records between 4816 and 5218 students in the same population.

Because UCAS does not publish a detailed break-down of its 'craft' classification, we cannot look at this issue in more detail. Clearly, there is concern around a substantial drop in applications to undergraduate courses in any part of the craft education sector. However, we would caution against seeing the reported 23.5% drop in acceptances reported by UCAS as representative. The real test will come in 2014, when the 2012/13 HESA data can be seen.