

**Crafts Council  
Research**

**Crafting Professionals**

Craft higher education and sustainable  
business development

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PhD research conducted at King's College London, Department of  
Culture, Media & Creative Industries in partnership with Crafts Council  
UK





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# 1

## Foreword

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We're delighted to publish the findings of this collaborative research that enriches our understanding of how to support craft makers through higher education into successful careers in creative practice.

The report examines approaches to creative professional practice in universities. It focuses on the experiences of students and early career professionals and the skills and resources they need for their future professional practice and potential business development. The findings underline the importance of skills development, access to facilities, material understanding and business skills, alongside experimentation and engagement in extracurricular opportunities, in preparing students for employment and professional practice. At the same time, the report highlights gaps in specialised skills acquisition, studio management knowledge and business skills in the formal curriculum.

The Crafts Council convenes business development opportunities, seeking to grow the craft market by supporting creative education and the careers of makers. Central to this work is the role of a diverse ecosystem of education and training institutions – schools, community classes and higher education – in building successful careers. In a period of increased instability during the global pandemic, this report is therefore timely and welcome, with recommendations for us all (providers, government and partners) to drive forward our collective ambition to strengthen higher education support for creative career pathways.

We were particularly pleased to work in collaboration with King's College London on this study, exemplifying our commitment to developing co-produced research with higher education institutions. Our research programme enables us to produce and disseminate evidence to demonstrate the social, economic and cultural value of craft.

We are very grateful to Dr Lauren England (and her supervisors) for working with us throughout her PhD and for producing this report.

Nicky Dewar  
Director of Learning and Skills  
Crafts Council

November 2020

# 2

## Executive Summary

This report summarises and critically reflects on findings from a PhD at King' College London in partnership with Crafts Council UK entitled “Crafting professionals in UK higher education: Craft work logics and skills for professional practice”.

The main aim of this research was to improve our understanding of the everyday management of professional craft practice and how to support craft makers through training in higher education (HE) and graduate support.

The report summarises approaches to professional practice in craft HE, including the student experience, and reflects on the early career experience and the skills and resources needed for professional practice.

### **Key findings relating to students' expectations of HE include:**

- The importance of opportunities for material engagement, university facilities and geographical location of the course in students' choice of institution and degree
- Course expectations of first year students' including: skills development and material understanding; business skills; and preparation for employment and/or professional practice
- Students aspiring to make a living from creative practice after university but also having an awareness of the challenges

**Key findings connecting with professional practice in HE include:**

- Professional development is delivered through a combination of specific core modules, activities embedded into creative modules and extracurricular activities
- The individualised nature of career development and planning in undergraduate courses and the high degree of self-directed learning allowing for students to identify their preferred pathway
- An emphasis on signposting students to information and organisations rather than specific business skills teaching, alongside a focus on real-world experience and external engagement (with variation in the authenticity of these components)
- Students and graduates identified a number of benefits of their university education in preparing them for professional practice, including skills development and material understanding, access to equipment, facilities and opportunities to experiment and extracurricular opportunities
- Limitations were also identified by student and graduates: advanced or highly specialised skills (e.g. CAD); studio management knowledge; business skills and knowledge, as part of the formal curriculum.
- A disconnect between professional development and studio-based teaching, resulting in a lack of engagement Educators play a key role in determining students' network development and university locations influenced the availability and use of local networks and resources, presenting both opportunities and challenges
- The creative work validated by the university did not always align with the commercial world or offer an economically viable means of sustaining a creative practice with professional development modules
- The importance of ongoing development post university and the incubation period in establishing and building a professional practice

## **Key findings on the early-career experience include:**

- Recent graduates adopted a range of business models and strategies and often had multiple income streams
- Graduates faced challenges balancing their desire for self-expression and creative authenticity with the production of more commercial work and being economically sustainable
- A range of creative and non-creative skills and resources for professional practice were acknowledged as connected, and in some cases interdependent
- All skills, knowledge, attributes and resources became more important for graduates as their businesses developed, particularly financial skills and resources, sales skills, and business support, advice and guidance

The report also acknowledges a shift towards a more pragmatic and market orientated approach towards the delivery of craft education that reflects wider employability agendas and market reform in HE. The conscious effort to incorporate effective professional development into courses at many institutions is also recognised.

The report ends with a clear set of recommendations for stakeholders across government, HE and partners on the policy framework to support craft careers, course provision and investment, pedagogical practice and enterprise development to strengthen creative career pathways and support in HE.





Photo: Bethany Walker, Royal College of Art

# 3

## Introduction

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This report summarises and critically reflects on findings from PhD research conducted at King's College London (2016-2020) in partnership with Crafts Council UK entitled "Crafting professionals in UK higher education: Craft work logics and skills for professional practice"<sup>1</sup>. This research was funded by a Professor Sir Richard Trainor scholarship from King's College London.

The main aim of this research was to develop our understanding of the everyday management of professional craft practice and how to support craft makers through training in higher education and graduate support.

The focus of the study was on those graduates pursuing a creative practice as a sole trader or microenterprise, or alongside alternative employment. It is acknowledged however that craft graduates go into a wide range of careers and types of craft practice and may therefore have different professional development needs.

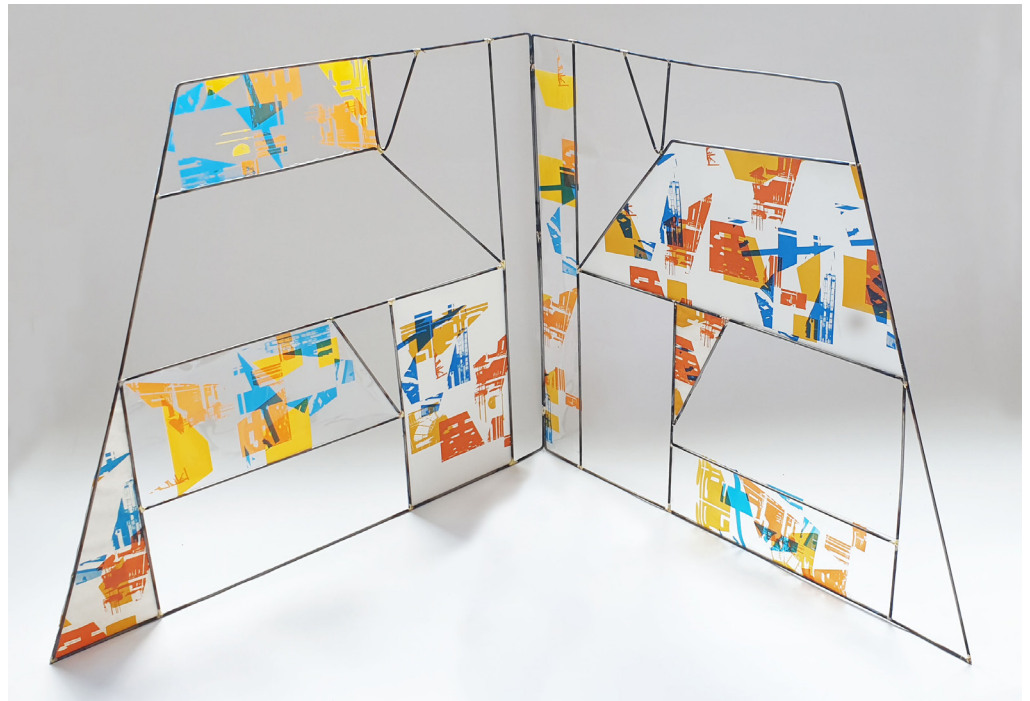
This report first addresses the methodology for the study before presenting commentary on the key findings in relation to:

1. Approaches to professional practice in HE including the student experience
2. The early career experience and skills and resource needs for professional practice

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The main conclusions from the research are then presented, followed by recommendations aimed at HE providers, craft sector stakeholders and policy makers to support the enhancement of professional development education and infrastructure for sustainable craft enterprise development.

Photo: Ella Budd,  
Bath Spa University



<sup>1</sup> The findings in this report are presented as commentary, with data and full analysis to be published in forthcoming academic publications. As a public report, the emphasis here is on communicating the practice orientated (educational and professional) findings. The thesis is under embargo until 2022, but will be available to download in the future from the King's College London research repository.

# 4

## Methodology

This research used a multi-method case study design, bringing together qualitative and quantitative data and multiple participant groups to capture different experiences and perspectives on craft HE and early-career professional practice.

The main methods of data collection were:

- Reviews of degree programme specifications and professional development module curricula
- Interviews with staff, students and graduates (n=82)
- Numerical rankings by early-career graduates of their skills and resources needs following HE

Qualitative and quantitative analysis was used to identify key themes in educational practices related to professional development, the student experience of these practices, the experience of early career practice, and the skills and resources needed for developing and sustaining early career practice.

**82 interviews were conducted across the case studies:**

- 15 educators
- 16 first year students
- 26 final year students
- 25 graduates (0-4 yrs experience)

**Four HE case studies were identified and data for this study was collected from four craft departments in England**

1. The University of Sunderland Glass & Ceramics (North East)
2. Staffordshire University 3D Designer Maker (West Midlands)
3. London Metropolitan Furniture & Product (London)
4. Plymouth College of Art 3D Design Craft (South West)



Map of four HE case studies

# 5

## Craft HE & Professional Development

### **Approaches to professional development in HE programme specifications and module curricula**

The first part of this report addresses how approaches to professional practice in HE influence the professional development of craft students and graduates from the perspective of educators, students and graduates. By including these different perspectives, a more holistic understanding of HE models and experiences was obtained. Common educational practices for professional development were found in programme specifications and module curricula, with additional practices identified through interviews with staff members leading and teaching on these modules. Alongside core modules, professional development practices were also embedded into creative modules and extracurricular activities, as outlined on page 16.

Career development and planning was seen to be individualised and tailored to the individual student. There was therefore a high degree of self-directed learning in this area allowing for students to identify their preferred pathway. Generally, there was a greater emphasis on signposting students to relevant information and organisations rather than specific business skills teaching, although some business education was available through graduate support programmes or a careers office linked to whole-university provision rather than department specific support or in-module teaching.

There was an emphasis on real-world experience and external engagement, particularly through live briefs and artist talks programmes. Local networks and resources and the personal networks of staff were used to create opportunities for students during the degree course, highlighting the importance of recruiting staff who are engaged in professional practice outside of the university. There was however variation in the authenticity of the ‘real-world’ components of live projects and externally set briefs. Briefs were most effective when there was a real outcome (i.e. competition, exhibition or production opportunity) rather than being a simulation or only involving surface-level engagement with external stakeholders.



Credit: Emily Mason,  
University of the  
Creative Arts.  
Photo: Eva Herzog



***“...we may go out into the professional world, have a tour of facilities, a talk by a design team and they see how, students start to see how it works in a professional kind of, arena.”***

**(Educator, Staffordshire)**

***“they go through the whole range of what they might do as a sole practitioner which is designing it, making it, wrapping it, packaging it, publicising it, taking it to the market, seeing if they can do it and what went wrong and analysing it, reflecting on everything they've done.”***

**(Educator, London Met)**

## **Core**

- Personal pathway and career planning
- Understanding codes and conventions of professional practice (sector specific)
- Understanding context of own practice (including market)
- Costing and pricing
- Marketing
- CV and application writing

## **Embedded**

- Engagement with industry and sector professionals
- Experience of working on live projects and client briefs
- Exhibition experience (including degree shows and graduate showcases)
- Communication of ideas and work

## **Extracurricular**

- Visiting speakers programme
- Careers and employability events, business advice and opportunities
- Pop-up shops and selling opportunities
- Internships/Work experience





Photo: Ally Powell,  
Nottingham Trent  
University

# 6

## Student experience

The student experience of craft education was explored, including their choice of university, expectations of the degree and career aspirations.

88% of first year students and 68% of final year students identified opportunities for material engagement as a key factor in their choice of university course, including making facilities and engagement with both diverse and specialised materials (e.g. glassblowing)

75% of first year students and 45% of final year students stated that the geographical location of the course was important in their choice of university choice, including proximity to home or being in a particular region, with reflection on cost implications.

Other influences included following on from a foundation diploma, the atmosphere at the university and the reputation of the university for particular materials or practices, although this was minimal.

### Key factors in university choice:

- Opportunities for material engagement (including facilities)
- Geographical location

### Key expectations of HE:

- Skills development and material knowledge
- Business skills and knowledge
- Preparation for employment and/or professional practice

***“I decided to come build some skills and gain a qualification because I've done an apprenticeship for like three years. And yeah basically just to get some skills from outside the workshop I can bring back there and enrich the work we do [...] the range of machinery here is, woodworking machinery's the same obviously but the metal-work, the laser cutting, the CNC routers and stuff like that, there's access to machinery that we'd never be able to afford.”***

**(First year student, London Met)**



Discussing their expectations of HE, 81% of first year students stated expecting to gain technical skills and material knowledge, 75% expected to gain business skills and knowledge and 69% expected to be prepared for future employment and/or professional practice.

***“I suppose, obviously a lot of skills! That's the main thing for me. And just how to, you know, be a professional craftsman and produce work that I'm really proud of and that I want to show everyone.”  
(First year student, PCA)***

When asked about their aspirations for career opportunities and activities after university, students (both first and final year) articulated a preference for pursuing their creative practice professional (100% first year students; 73% final year students), with the goal of making a living purely from creative practice, although only 50% of final year students specifically referred to being self-employed.

Some students intended to work for others to develop their skills and capacity to then become independent (35% final year students). Other pathways included teaching (19% first and final year students), and other employment in creative industries/occupations (65% final year students). Students were however aware of the challenges of professional creative practice and the likelihood of portfolio working.

***“I wanna be like a self-employed artist, that's my ultimate goal. But you can't do that from right after you graduate, just an undergraduate course I guess. And I don't really want to do a master's degree [...] I will look for like a teaching assistant job or yeah, or maybe do internships in galleries or something.”  
(Final year student, Sunderland)***

# 7

## Benefits

## Preparation for practice

This section explores final year students' and graduates' perceptions of how their degree had prepared them for post-university practice.

Students and graduates identified a number of benefits of their university education in preparing them for professional practice:

- Pathway identification and insight into careers and how to approach them
- Developing confidence to pursue pathway of choice including
- creative practice
- Degree as a starting point for further independent development of
- creative practice
- Skills (technical) and material
- understanding developed
- Access to equipment, facilities and opportunities to experiment and engage with materials
- Network development - staff, other students, other professionals
- Extracurricular opportunities made available by the HE provider

In particular, visiting speakers and ex-students were highlighted as a good resource for understanding creative careers, although students still wanted a more explicit explanation of how professionals 'got from a to b'. They were seeking information about the reality of pursuing a professional creative practice. This highlights the importance of maintaining alumni networks as a learning resource for new students.

Educators played a key role in facilitating students' engagement with other artists and professionals throughout the degree programme, often drawing on personal contacts. The university's geographical location also played a role in the practices and pathways that students were exposed to through the use of local networks and resources. These factors present both opportunities and challenges for professional network development in HE (England, forthcoming a).

Independently sought experiences (work-experience and internships or commissions and competitions) and previous experiences of running a business (for mature students) were also highlighted as supporting professional development. However, it is important to recognise that work experience/ internships are not always accessible to all students, particularly those without social and economic capital, or with work or caring responsibilities.

***“not only is there a confidence, a confidence uh effect of you know passing a degree, getting a decent grade [...] I feel confident now to be able to get a workshop together, to know the machinery I'd need and you know self-promotion and even knowing people.”***

**(Graduate, London Met)**

## Limitations

A number of limitations of both professional development modules and the degree programme overall were identified:

- A lack of advanced or highly specialised skills and some industry specific skills for design (i.e. CAD)
- A lack of studio management knowledge (i.e. kiln loading and equipment maintenance)
- Technical skillsets may become limited to those needed to create work for final degree show if involving specific processes
- A lack of business skills and knowledge as part of the formal (core) curriculum and somewhat unrealistic views of professional practice pathways
- Access issues when the majority of business learning or real-world opportunities are delivered as part of extracurricular programmes
- The challenge of real-world applications of career plans – accessing opportunities and markets, real-world pricing and selling work
- Critique of overly self-directed learning practices (lack of guidance)
- Professional practice and studio work are often separated in the curriculum, creating a disconnect between learning and with students prioritising studio-based activities

There was also some conflict between students and staff relating to their creative style, particularly when there was an emphasis on conceptual work that was not deemed (by the student) to be saleable or the type of practice they wanted to pursue. Conversely more fine-art orientated students considered tight design briefs to be restrictive.

Students acknowledged the time constraints of a three-year programme and the importance of ongoing development post university and 'learning by doing' in a professional environment. More time may also be needed for some students to identify and develop a personal pathway.

There was however a sense that more could have been done by the university to prepare them with respect to business education in particular. However, this would not be relevant to all students as not all are intending to pursue self-employment. In some cases it was felt that there was a lack of preparation for alternative career paths such as teaching.

***“It set me along the path. Whether it you know, I don't think that the course can teach you everything there is to know about everything. Um, and personally I don't think it should be expected to”***

**(Graduate, PCA).**

# 8

## The Early Career Experience

The second stage of this research considered early career craft practice from the perspective of recent graduates.

The aim here was to understand the experience of establishing and sustaining a craft practice or businesses, and how early-career makers manage the creative and business aspects of professional practice. It also aimed to identify their skills and resource needs.

From this, support gaps were identified and opportunities highlighted for enhancing knowledge and skills acquisition and resource access through HE provision or post-university support. These are presented in the recommendations section of this report.

### Business models and income streams

The graduates had adopted a range of business models and often had a number of different income streams. 64% of the graduates were employed in either full time (16%) or part time/temporary (48%) work alongside their personal creative practice. This included a range of activities and occupations including working for other makers/designers, doing fabrication work, gallery work, teaching, and administrative, hospitality and retail work.

Two graduates were undertaking unpaid work/internships. Of those graduates earning an income from their creative practice, 84% generated income from product sales (commissions, gallery sales, retail products and independent sales) and 24% from workshops. They also took part in non-income generating activities such as exhibitions.

A key finding from this study was that craft graduates were negotiating their desire for self-expression and creative authenticity alongside the economic demands of sustaining a professional practice. In this negotiation process graduates adopted different production methods, business models and income generation strategies. At one end of the spectrum, developing commercially viable product lines; at the other, supporting their making practice with other creative or non-creative employment. Many graduates undertook a combination of the above.

A number of challenges were however identified. Firstly, balancing time dedicated to creative practice and paid work was challenging and a reliance on additional employment for financial stability could prevent creative and professional development. For those with commercial lines, it could be a struggle to continue to develop creatively whilst also meeting commercial production demands.

Graduates also articulated a feeling of “selling out” and subsequently needed to legitimise their commercial work. This could be achieved in different ways:

- Products created from more experimental work were seen to retain the maker’s creative identity
- They enjoyed the creative process and felt an affinity with the materials and techniques used
- It was a necessity for financial survival

It was noted that the type of creative work that is celebrated by universities – by assessment or awards – is not always validated in the commercial world and may not be an economically viable way of sustaining a creative practice due to the highly specialised nature of the work, high price point and therefore small high-level market or audience for work.

Additionally, graduates felt they had lost a sense of community and a safe yet critical audience to help develop their ideas and question their practice after university. Studio collectives, friends, family and professional associations were however used to address this.

***“Because my work from my degree show was a bit, a lot more um, concept, it was still usable but it was a bit more conceptual. And then what I did is because I needed to make a living, I went back as it were to my second year's work [...] Which I absolutely love, and people love it and they buy it and that's great”***

**(Graduate, PCA)**

# 9

## Skills & Resources

Graduates were asked about the role and importance of skills and resources in developing and sustaining their professional practice after university.

- Making skills and motivation were seen as the most important skills, while business planning and IP/legal knowledge were perceived as the least important.
- Equipment/machinery, studio space and support networks were seen as the most important resources. Finance (start-up funds) and business support, advice and guidance were the least important.
- Skills and resources were positioned as interrelated, and interdependent. For example, family support networks were used for emotional and financial support including accessing studio space but also for support with business and financial skills where available – i.e. accounting.

The importance of certain skills also appeared to fluctuate depending on current concerns and graduates acknowledged that their skills developed (or would develop) over time and with practice. Differences were identified between the priorities of those in their first year after graduation and those with more than one year's experience of professional practice.

All skills, knowledge, attributes and resources became more important for those who had been in practice for more than a year (on average) and significant differences were observed in the higher prioritisation of finance skills (taxes, book keeping etc), sales skills, finance resources (start-up funds) and business support, advice and guidance among graduates with more experience.

This suggests that these skills and resources may either be important in sustaining a professional practice beyond the first year, and/or that they become more important after the practice and business develops.

***“now I've quit my job it's become more of a career to me. Because I had that job I didn't see it as I need to make money because I was getting enough money from a job [...] people don't worry about finances when they don't have a business. But as soon as they have a business that's when they've just started coming in, so cashflow, keeping on top of the money, what's going in, what's going out.”***  
**(Graduate, Staffordshire)**





Photo: Hisae Abe,  
University for the  
Creative Arts

# Skills

This section outlines the role of each skill in developing and sustaining a professional practice.

They are listed in order of perceived importance (based on the average value given between 0-10) and the reasons why they were important for graduates and their relevance in professional practice are given below.

## 1. Making skills

- The ability to make work yourself and make it to a certain standard
- Being able to realise your ideas
- Depending on your audience/ market the quality of work may be important
- Your skills will develop over time and your technical skills needs will depend on your individual practice

## 2. Motivation

- Why you want to be a professional creative practitioner
- Feeling that what you're doing is worthwhile
- Keeping you going even when it's challenging, or you are unsuccessful

## 3. Confidence

- Feeling confident in yourself, the work that you make and your skills
- Helping with your communication style and how you talk about your practice and work
- Confidence can be a sales facilitator – helping to convince others that you and your work are worth investing in (purchase or exhibition)

## 4. Communication & Presentation

- How you communicate your creative identity and ideas to your audience/ customers
- Communicating professionalism
- How you communicate visually, verbally and in writing can help you sell your work

## 5. Creative Identity

- A representation of the kind of artist/designer/maker do you want to be
- Creating a visual association between you and your work
- Managing your identity when making bodies of work for different audiences
- Your identity will evolve as your practice develops

## 6. Interpersonal Skills

- Helping you to build professional networks
- Helping you to access opportunities and markets and to sell your work
- Helping you to find opportunities to work with or collaborate with people
- Maintaining a positive reputation

## 7. Marketing & Promotion

- How you present yourself, your brand and your work
- Raising awareness of your work and developing your audience – generating sales
- How you differentiate yourself from the competition and remind people of what you do
- Online presence and social media are useful tools for marketing and promotion

## 8. Costing and Pricing

- The price of work is linked with the costs of production, but it is also linked with what the market will bear
- Understanding pricing structures and sales mechanisms in different markets
- Important not to undersell yourself or your work or to undercut other makers
- A learning process that develops over time as you understand your market

## **9.Vision**

- Setting goals and aspirations can help to motivate and drive your practice.
- Planning everyday making activity Your vision for your practice will develop over time
- Try not to set too many fixed goals (i.e. taking part in a specific exhibition) – think about what comes next and have a back-up plan

## **10.Market Context**

- Knowing where you want to position yourself and your work and how to differentiate yourself from the competition
- Understanding your audience and who will be receptive to your work
- Understanding the different markets for different types of work
- This is a learning process that will develop with time and practice

## **11.Time Management**

- Managing your workload and understanding how long projects will take to complete
- Making sure you don't let people down or miss deadlines
- Helping you maintain a positive reputation and good working relationships
- Managing a portfolio career and other commitments (i.e. family)
- Organisation is important but so is flexibility

## **12.Resilience**

- The ability to sustain your practice long term - establishing a professional practice and business takes time
- The ability to cope with setbacks, rejections and competition
- Sustaining the belief in what you are doing and what you are making

## **13.Finances i.e. taxes & basic accounting**

- Enabling you to run and sustain your practice
- Being aware of how much money you have coming in and out
- The knowledge and expertise of friends, family and other makers can help you to plug the gaps in own knowledge
- This will likely become more important as you progress and build up your practice even if it doesn't seem relevant at the beginning

## **14.Sales**

- How you are selling yourself and your creative identity or story
- Added value comes from the connection between the work, the maker and the narrative
- Knowing how to get your work in front of your audience/enter a market
- Knowing how to sell your work/services requires a combination of other skills – confidence, interpersonal skills, creative identity, communication and presentation, marketing and promotion etc.

## **15.Business Planning**

- Providing focus for your practice
- Giving you direction and a plan for achieving goals and structuring everyday business activity
- Helping to plan for busy or slow periods

## **16.IP / Legal knowledge**

- Getting insurance for workshops, craft fairs and exhibitions
- Understanding contracts – employment, projects, selling your designs, collaborations with companies
- Understanding tax regulations and registering as self-employed or a limited company
- IP- Making sure you know what other makers are doing
- IP- Keeping design records and sketchbooks (dated) can help you protect your work
- IP- Consider what you put on social media You can use the knowledge of others in your network for specific support



# Resources

This section outlines the role of resources in developing and sustaining a professional practice

They are listed in order of perceived importance (based on the average value given between 0-10) along with the reasons why they were important for graduates and their relevance in professional practice.

## 1. Equipment & machinery

- Enables the production of work which is essential to practice and building up the business
- Facilitates the testing of ideas and creative development
- Access requirements will vary depending on the type of practice and materials you are working with

## 2. Studio space

- Enables making but also provides space to think and get in the mindset to make
- Shared studios and complexes can support network development and access to markets and opportunities
- Requirements vary depending on practice

## 3. Support network (friends & family)

- Can provide access to studio space and financial support (family)
- They act as a first audience and clients, helping to raise awareness of your work
- Providing moral support, encouragement and feedback on your work
- Family networks can provide knowledge and expertise (i.e. business and accounting) while
- friends act as a source of informal business advice and help you find opportunities

## 4. Access to opportunities

- Getting your work out there, being seen by others
- This helps generate sales and develop your practice
- Opportunities to network and build contacts
- There may be costs associated with participating, and they may be irregular

## 5. Technical skills learning

- Continually building and improving your skills can help you develop your practice and business opportunities. This builds up over time.
- Achieving high quality work and advancing your practice

## **6. Professional networks**

- Provide a "foot in the door", access to markets and opportunities including collaborations
- Getting your name out there via your network
- A source of informal business advice, good practice, and technical support
- They act as a critical audience for feedback
- This can include university tutors, technicians, your peers or official networks among others

## **7. Social media**

- Can be used as a marketing tool and sales platform
- A space to test out ideas and conduct market research
- It can be used to find opportunities. You may also be invited to take part via social media

## **8. Access to markets**

- Getting work out there to sell and build up your business
- Building a reputation and client confidence through sustained presence and activity
- The type of market will depend on your practice and style

## **9. Finance (start up funds)**

- Finances facilitate the making process and development - access to space and resources/materials.
- You can start small and work up to larger, more costly projects
- May be accessed via graduate programmes, local government or enterprise funding schemes

## **10. Business support, advice and guidance**

- An external perspective can be valuable in understanding your creative practice as a business
- Help you understand your market and basic business practices (including finance management and marketing)
- May be accessed via graduate programmes, local government or enterprise schemes, or informally via friends and family
- The relevance of business advice may depend on the stage of your business

# 10

## Conclusions & Recommendations

This section presents the final conclusions and recommendations from the research.

### Conclusions

In considering the provision of craft HE, as observed at the four case studies in this research, it was noted that there has been a shift towards a more pragmatic and market orientated approach towards the delivery of craft education that reflects wider trends in the HE sector – employability agendas and market reform (England, 2018; forthcoming b).

It was also recognised that greater emphasis is being placed on professional development in degree programmes, with a conscious effort being made to incorporate effective professional development into courses. There are nevertheless tensions that arise between the role of a degree as a personal, intellectual and creative development period or an entry route into a profession.

There are also significant challenges in engaging students in professional development education despite the increased emphasis in the curriculum. The separation of professional development modules and creative modules in particular appears to create a wider disconnect and limit the application and perceived relevance of professional development practices. An embedded approach where professional development is combined with creative projects therefore appears to be the most effective.

Pathway identification and career planning activities also tend to rely on students identifying a career goal based on an existing model or individual (role model) and planning how to get there. This creates a challenge when graduates leave university and may struggle to access their identified markets or career due to competition, financial or structural barriers.

At the heart of this there is a supply and demand issue with the overall volume of creative graduates, but also problems with creative industries employment structures including unpaid internships and low-paid employment that may deter or prevent graduates from pursuing a creative career. These factors are likely to be exacerbated by the economic crisis associated with Covid-19 (Comunian and England, 2020) and have significant implications for supporting diversity in craft (Patel, 2020) and creative careers in general (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020).

With regards to graduates perceptions of the skills and resources needed for professional practice, this research has indicated that for those entering self-employment a combination of creative, technical, business and self-management skills, knowledge and attributes is required. More traditional finance and business skills also appear to become more important as the practice develops into a full business. This may not appear as relevant to those starting their practice alongside other employment, or to students. The importance of support networks and access to studio space and equipment requiring capital investment also raises questions about who is most able to sustain a professional creative practice.

Overall, graduates demonstrated a pragmatic approach to their practice, purposefully combining or separating their passion for creative work and the necessity of income generation for economic sustainability, resulting in the adoption of different business models. Greater understanding of this process and work with current students on how to balance commercial and non-commercial activity may facilitate the stability of early-career professional practice.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this research, a number of recommendations have been made for HE providers and craft sector stakeholders. First, recommendations for HE providers in relation to pedagogical practice for professional development are made, followed by considerations for creative educational provision and HE policy.

The final section addresses wider sector organisations and policy makers to facilitate the professional development of early-career makers and support the establishment of sustainable craft enterprise. The key stakeholders are identified in relation to each recommendation. These recommendations are presented as initial guidance for those seeking to enhance their provision of professional development opportunities for early-career makers and the craft sector.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The recommendations made in this report are based on findings of PhD research and reflect what was observed across four case studies in England. Some of these may therefore have already been implemented by other educational providers or sector organisations. The scale of organisational change proposed in some of these recommendations is also acknowledged, particularly around curriculum restructure, the development of graduate support programmes and development of new educational models.

# Pedagogical Practice

The key stakeholder for all recommendations in this section is HE providers.

## Options for vocational & professional development

Optional modules in more vocational training should be developed to address gaps in students' preparation for professional practice based on their personal pathway. This would allow students to choose modules that are relevant to them e.g. small-business management, studio management and maintenance, advanced skills (material and IT based) or an alternative module relating to teaching or non-creative employment.

## Collaboration between departments & faculties

Greater collaboration between creative and 'non-creative' university departments is needed. There is potential for an interdepartmental or cross-faculty curriculum (e.g. as an optional module system) and projects that bring in specialist knowledge and facilitate interdisciplinary working among students (and staff).

For example, working with photography, media and graphic design departments to develop marketing materials; working with business schools on small-business management; or with business/marketing/events courses on pop up sales and events.

## Authenticity in external engagement

Live briefs should be authentic and have an outcome beyond a module assessment where possible. Live briefs with real world outcomes (e.g. competition with reward – exhibition or production opportunity) tend to be more effective and engaging for the student than those that are a simulation of real-world practice (e.g. hypothetical proposals) and subsequently remove risk and potential for failure.

## Support collaboration & collectives

HE should move away from an overly individualised development model (creative and career) and incorporate (more) projects that encourage collaboration and partnership development. Pooling resources and forming co-operatives could be economically and professionally beneficial post university. However, this is unlikely to happen if students have only ever worked independently on creative projects and perceive their individual creative expression to be the utmost priority.



# HE Provision & Policy

The key stakeholders for each recommendation are identified below.

## Investment in making

The retention of and investment in making facilities is key to craft HE. Facilities and opportunities for material engagement are a significant factor in students' choice of HE provider, and final year students and graduates valued technical knowledge and material skills gains highly. A reduction in the space and equipment required to provide craft education could negatively impact student recruitment. Engagement with materials and industry standard equipment is also integral to skill development and innovation.

*Key stakeholders: HE providers; Government departments – Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), Department for Education (DfE), Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS)*

## Regional Provision

Location (region and proximity to home) is an important factor in students' choice of degree. This calls for sustained regional provision for craft HE and for policies that address the downward trend in craft HE provision (Crafts Council, 2016). Regional provision is important for the prosperity of the sector, the attraction of diverse talent into craft careers and equality in access to creative education. It is also key to regional skills development and supporting the growth of the wider Creative Industries and manufacturing across the UK.

*Key stakeholders: HE providers; Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP); Local Authorities (LA); Government departments – BEIS, DCMS, DfE*

## A better understanding of graduate “success”

Our understanding of graduate success needs to acknowledge the incubation period for creative practice and creative graduates' careers. This includes graduate surveys such as the Destination of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) survey and the use of Longitudinal Employment Outcomes (LEO), graduate salary and tax data to determine 'value for money' from a degree. In measuring graduate outcomes from creative degrees, the structure of the creative industries and employment trends also need to be acknowledged, this includes unpaid or low-paid internships and portfolio working where work supplementing creative practice is not at 'graduate level'.

*Key Stakeholders: HE providers; Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA); Government departments – DfE, BEIS*

## Alternative education models for craft

Alternative education models, programmes and qualifications (e.g. degree apprenticeships and non-HE opportunities) could fill the current gap between community classes and HE. This could widen access to craft education (regional provision and costs) and may also become necessary if HE provision continues to decline. Further investigation is also needed into hybrid educational models combining creative and business training, building on models that currently exist both in higher and further education and at some open-access studios to expand the offer and provide better regional coverage.

*Key Stakeholders: Government departments – DfE, BEIS; Crafts Council; HE providers; FE providers; Studio professional development courses*

# Craft enterprise development

The key stakeholders for each recommendation are identified below.

## Business mentoring and seed funding

More free or low-cost opportunities for crafts graduates and early-career makers to engage with business advisors and mentors are needed. This can help graduates understand business concepts, identify markets and assess the commercial viability of their work. Access to start-up funding would also support enterprise development and increase access to craft careers. This could be delivered as part of an alumni programme, by a LA or LEP to stimulate local business development, or commercially by creative / business organisations.

*Key Stakeholders: LEP; LA; HE Alumni Services; Crafts Council*

## Space to make

The extension of studio access to alumni and wider regional investment in open-access spaces for craft is recommended. Access to low-cost space, equipment and storage is crucial to the development of creative practice. This is particularly important for early-career makers and those without the financial or spatial resources to establish a home studio or commit to a tenancy.

*Key Stakeholders: LEP; LA; HE Alumni Services*

## Preserving a sense of community

Initiatives to preserve creative communities for graduates and support collaboration should be established and grown. This includes alumni groups for graduates remaining local to their university and new network development opportunities for those who move further afield (e.g. established at studio complexes or by craft organisations). Such communities could provide opportunities for critical reflection, collaboration and peer support and be sources of technical and/or studio management knowledge. They could be developed using both online and offline formats.

*Key Stakeholders: HE Alumni Services; creative associations, networks and studio groups*

## Understanding sustainability

Greater awareness of the sustainability mission and limits to scalability in craft production are needed. It requires an acknowledgement that national policy does not match the prominent growth mission and agendas for creative businesses. This connects with advocacy for sustainable enterprises as a key component of overall economic health and raising awareness that such enterprises also require start-up support.

*Key Stakeholders: LEP; LA; Crafts Council; Government departments. – DCMS, BEIS*





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Dr Lauren England conducted her PhD at King's College London in the Department of Culture, Media and Creative Industries as a collaborative doctorate with Crafts Council UK (2016-2020). On completing her PhD, Lauren taught Arts & Cultural Management at King's and developed publications and further research on creative economies, focusing on craft, sustainability and creative economies in Africa. Lauren has published research into the role of HE providers in the craft sector (England and Comunian, 2016) craft clusters in post-industrial regions (Comunian and England, 2019) and craft social enterprise (England, 2020). She joined the Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee, as a Baxter Fellow in Creative Economies in 2020.

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