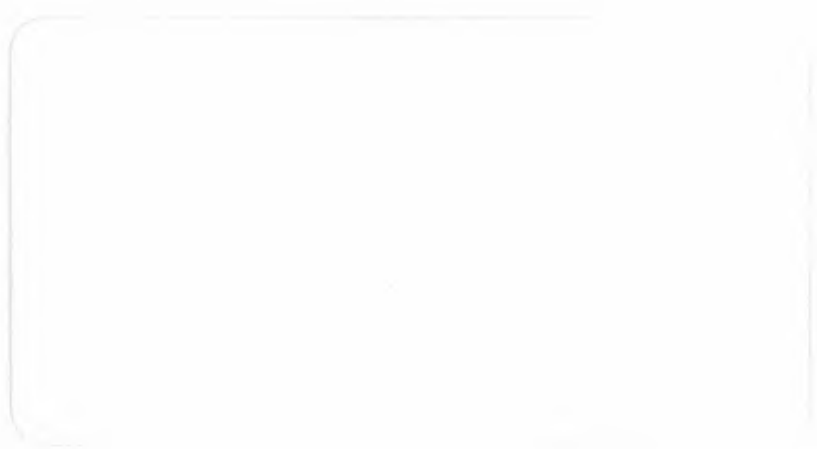


92-047



# DISCUSSION DOCUMENT



## INTRODUCTION

Within this folder is a discussion document produced as part of the process of putting together a national strategy for the arts and media. It does not form part of the strategy. Neither does it express any sort of 'official' view. It was written in order to focus discussion and stimulate ideas.

## WHY?

*The arts and media in Britain are in renaissance. Over the last decade, they have shown a confidence and diversity never seen before. In quality of work and audience demand, the arts and media have never looked healthier or more central to people's lives. More than ever before, the arts are a source of civic pride as well as personal enrichment.*

*The arts and media in Britain are in crisis. Scarcely a day goes by without press stories of theatres facing closure, grants being cut or audiences declining; of a lack of good innovative work in all art forms; of the absence of a sense of direction, purpose and adventure.*

These views may not be incompatible, and each has some truth. What is beyond doubt is that ideas of what is art have expanded; that demand has rightly grown for access to the arts, film and broadcasting to be the right of all rather than the privilege of the few; and that resources, both public and private, have struggled to keep up. Growth in the variety of the arts contains its own problems. So how can the strategic injection of public money, and the growth of partnership with the private sector, encourage new developments? What should the priorities be? How do we make sure that the opportunity to enjoy the arts is spread ever more widely throughout society?

This is where the national arts and media strategy comes in. In 1990, the Minister for the Arts asked the arts and media funding bodies (the Arts Council of Great Britain, the British Film Institute, the Crafts Council and the Regional Arts Associations/ Regional Arts Boards) to prepare a national strategy. One of its purposes is to provide the basic framework for their work. The Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils are conducting parallel exercises; and the local authorities and museums funding bodies are also associated with the strategy.

A further purpose is to consider whether the public money spent on the arts and media has been used to best effect, and how those responsible can do better in the future. It is important that all those with experience of and a passion for the arts and media provide support, assistance and advice to get the strategy right. Most important, it must be seen as a strategy for the arts and media, not for the bureaucrats.

## HOW?

The paper in this folder is part of this process. It is one of a series of discussion documents; each is available free on request. Responses to them will be collated by the National Arts and Media Strategy Unit. Arising from this, a draft of the strategy will be prepared by Spring 1992. This too will be available for comment. The final version of the national arts and media strategy will be completed by Summer 1992. The hope is that the resulting document will be slim, challenging and readable - and that it will provide a mission statement for the arts and media over the next decade, as well as setting out clear goals and targets.

The national arts and media strategy will not write a single novel, put on a single play or make a single film. What it can help bring about, if the funding bodies receive the help of those who care about the arts and media, is the maximum opportunity for such creativity to flourish and for it to enrich the lives of ever more people. Your contribution to this process will be valuable and valued. Please send your views on this discussion document to the address below, to arrive by 30 November 1991.

For further information on the national arts and media strategy, please contact:

**National Arts and Media Strategy Unit, Arts Council,  
14 Great Peter Street, London, SW1P 3NQ Tel: 071-973 6537**

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## CRAFTS

**Crafts Council and RAA officers,  
with Charles Bourne**

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lijk, tenzij de publikatie inmiddels is besproken.

De uitleentermijn is verstreken op:

15-8-01

## **NATIONAL ARTS AND MEDIA STRATEGY: DISCUSSION DOCUMENT ON CRAFTS**

This paper has been written in order to generate discussion and debate. It is not a chapter of the national arts and media strategy or a definitive statement.

We should like to hear **your** views on what seemed to you the key issues in the field of craft over the next few years. The paper is divided into a number of major headings, which are:

- The significance of craft
- Definition of craft
- Access and equal opportunities
- Standards and assessment
- Research
- Information
- Status
- International links
- Links with industry
- Public awareness
- Craft education
- Training
- Infrastructure for craft production
- The craft economy
- Craft exhibitions

Each of these sections contains a number of questions and while these are given as a focus for responses we would welcome views on any points raised in the paper or on any issues which you feel have not been mentioned.

In addition it would be of interest to us hear from you what you feel have been the most exciting developments in craft over the past five years, both in this country and abroad, and what you think may be the exciting areas for development over the next five.

**NATIONAL ARTS AND MEDIA STRATEGY  
AUGUST 1991**

# NATIONAL ARTS AND MEDIA STRATEGY

## DISCUSSION DOCUMENT ON CRAFTS

### CRAFTS COUNCIL AND RAA OFFICERS, WITH CHARLES BOURNE\*

#### Preface

The Craft Discussion Paper asserts the significance of craft in culture but asks if there is sufficient justification for singling it out from other creative activities and what the structure for supporting it should be. It also provides a broad definition for craft but questions whether this definition is useful, or too limiting.

The paper recognises that inequalities exist and explores ways in which craft can be made more accessible, both for craftspeople and the public. Education is the key and therefore it is argued that craft should be placed centrally within the curriculum. It is also important for all makers to have equal access to appropriate equipment, exhibition space, marketing resources, etc and for gender/race/disability stereotyping to be challenged.

The need for assessment is recognised but given the subjective element in such judgments, the paper puts forward the case for clear criteria, assessors drawn from a wide constituency and assessments taking into account the work's context. The paper questions whether, in craft, the distinction between "amateur" and "professional" is valid.

The importance of research and information is accepted but only where these are relevant and effective. There is also a need for better craft career information. International links are thought to be valuable, as are links with industry.

Better understanding of craft is required. The public impressions of craft are contradictory and it is important that a consistent message be communicated, although what this message should be is open to debate. Here again the crucial role of education is recognised. It is argued that the lack of a shared language for discussion of craft limits critical debate and that this needs to be addressed.

The fact that craft activity is central to many people's lives adds strength to the argument for craft being a key component in all sectors of education. Craft education should place work within its aesthetic, cultural, socio-economic and historical contexts and practitioners should be encouraged to teach throughout the system. Risk-taking must be encouraged although a consistency of approach is essential. There should be a myriad of educational approaches for people to develop craft skills and craft appreciation throughout their lives.

\* See pages 13 and 14

The importance of the individual craftsperson is asserted and therefore the need to enhance the standing of craft to ensure that makers gain the economic return and respect accorded to other professions. The agencies responsible for assisting craftspeople should ensure that they meet the diverse and changing needs of the constituencies which they serve.

The craft economy is essential and the paper argues that profit should not be considered a dirty word! Ways of developing the infrastructure for the sale of craft must be explored although individuals must have the right to make work which is not commercially viable.

The crucial role of craft exhibitions in extending the audience for craft and its understanding of the work should be recognised and methods found for expanding the range and number of exhibitions.

## **The significance of craft**

All societies recognise the importance of and celebrate creativity. In many ways creativity is synonymous with culture. It should be a fundamental aim of our society to recognise and encourage all forms of creativity, including craft.

Craft is a creative activity and is central to culture. The desire and ability to create objects by manipulating materials and to impose personality on the environment through decoration has been, and remains, a basic characteristic of the human race. Craft combines these activities.

One must question any imposition of a hierarchy within creative activities, féting some above others by calling them "art". It is equally questionable to argue whether craft should have "function", as if the provision of pleasure itself were not a function. What is important is to affirm the particular qualities of craft.

First, every craft object is unique. For this reason craft assists individuals and communities to define their personality. This can be through making, owning, appreciating, celebrating, etc.

Secondly, through related craft techniques, craft work allows people to appreciate the creativity of other cultures.

Finally, it is important to recognise the educational value of craft activity. It develops the capacity to co-ordinate the hand, eye and brain. This combination of practical thinking and physical coordination is of everyday importance in the lives of nearly everyone. Furthermore it should be remembered that many of the conceptual and practical skills of craft are essential for the regeneration of the national economy.

**Is there sufficient justification for singling out craft from other creative activities ?**

**Is it true to say that the " function " of craft objects includes decoration, contemplation, argument, and suchlike ?**

**Should there be an aesthetic component in all craft education ?**

## **Definition**

There is a need for a clear definition specific to the activity of making objects. " Craft " is often used to denote skill in general, eg "an actor's craft".

Craft must also be distinguished from industrial production but care is needed to avoid implying that one or the other is superior. Some say that "craft" demands skill in designing as well as making ( even if the overall design is prescribed by another ). The woodworker David Pye makes a useful distinction here between the craftsperson's "workmanship of risk" and the "workmanship of certainty" of most industrial production.

Perhaps the best definition is the creation of a physical object using appropriate technical skill combined with sensitivity to materials. This would cover the shaping and transforming of materials by hand and/or tools, with critical judgement, intelligence, imagination and dexterity. The important part is the individual's involvement with the object.

A wide range of activities would fall within this definition, going beyond decorative and applied arts to "fine art", craft used to support other art forms (eg theatrical set design ), building crafts, cooking, fashion, conservation, restoration, etc. Some of these activities come within the scope of other agencies (eg Design Council, Rural Development Commission, Museum & Galleries Commission) and it is important that such agencies be invited to participate in this consultative process. It is also important to note that some crafts do not come within the scope of any agencies and consideration needs to be given to this fact.

There is also a problem with the current use of the word "craft" in an international context, given that in some languages there is no equivalent word, while in others the word has a different meaning.

**Is this definition useful, or too limiting?**

**Does it matter that some makers object to the term "craft" as a description of their activity?**

**Must craftwork be innovative to be culturally important, whether in the "traditional" or "contemporary" genre?**

**Is it just a historical accident that certain creative activities are supported by official bodies while others are not?**

**Are there more relevant structures for the future?**

**Within that structure, if the Crafts Council accepts this broad definition, should it try to encompass all craft areas or focus on specific categories?**



## Access & equal opportunities

An essential prerequisite for ensuring equal opportunities for all craftspeople, and access to craftwork for the widest possible range of people is to recognise that many inequalities exist. Life is more difficult for makers in certain disciplines; problems also abound for victims of gender/race/disability stereotyping, and for members of all minority groups. The most important solution lies in better education. A significant contribution can also be made by exhibitions and by all bodies involved in the development of craft.

The educational situation can best be improved if awareness of and respect for craftwork can be raised. It should be possible to develop a wider audience and market for craft. Emphasis should be placed on the idea that everyone should have equal access to educational opportunities in craft.

Different disciplines have different needs. "Equality of opportunity" means that adequate resources must be available for all crafts, even those requiring unusually expensive equipment. Furthermore, support is needed for those disciplines which are economically less strong than others. It is crucial to ensure equal access for all makers to appropriate equipment, exhibition space, marketing resources, training and information. In addition, it is desirable that makers should be able to decide their own optimal level of production.

Some crafts reflect gender stereotypes, and these must be vigorously challenged. Thought needs to be given to the specific needs of ethnic minority groups, including particular craft activity relevant to their cultures. There is also the problem of access to craft as a result of disability. A specific but important example concerns craftwork made in therapeutic institutions. Care is needed to ensure that such making is creative, and that the work is sold in a non-exploitative way.

A conspicuous area of inequality is in levels of pay. Individual makers have a right to a proper financial return for their work, including their fee for participating in public-sector exhibitions.

Access to craft can be assisted by exhibitions. Where appropriate exhibitions should take worldwide craft activity into account : beware the vice of Eurocentricity! Individual exhibitions, however, can address themselves to minority audiences. Touring exhibitions increase audience access and can multiply the benefits to participating makers. Audiences can also be widened by the showing of exhibitions in both specialist and non-specialist venues.

Exhibition venues can develop the audience's perception and understanding of context by providing associated activities appropriate to venue and public. All venues should be physically accessible, and efforts should be made to establish a welcoming atmosphere.

**How can craft be taught in schools in ways which make it attractive both to future makers and consumers ?**

**What is the fairest way of distributing resources among different disciplines ?**

**Is it possible to provide extra support to makers or craft disciplines currently disadvantaged ?**

**Would audiences increase if the work in exhibitions was better explained ?**

**Can galleries be persuaded to tailor their practices to makers with special needs ?**

### **Standards & assessment**

Assessment of craft work is obviously important. Each maker will have his/her own standard, but the creative process must always entail some ambition to evolve, and the ability to respond to criticism.

Assessment, because of its subjective nature, should take place within the framework of clear criteria and be carried out by assessors drawn from the widest possible range of people. Whenever work is assessed, clear reasons should be given for the verdict. The criteria must be set in a sensitive way. This is especially true within the education system. Here any idea of an "ultimate" standard should be avoided, for those who fell short would always feel censured. Assessment should include consideration of the context, intention and purpose of the work, and be based on agreed criteria.

Criteria should be adjusted to the work's context, both culturally and in terms of production. Indeed, in craft education, it is important to judge the quality of the production process as well as the finished object.

Assessment of the process may sometimes actually be more significant than judgement of the object. This is likely to be true of crafts involving the intellectual translation of someone else's idea (restoration, conservation, costume-making...). These crafts require their own specific criteria.

Finally, standards should also be set for the selection and presentation of exhibitions. For this, it is essential that the aims and objectives of each exhibition be clearly specified. In particular, organisers should strive to include more information about the background and context of craft today.

**Is it feasible to reduce feelings of alienation and failure among those excluded in selection procedures ?**

**Is it possible to overcome the problem of subjectivity in assessing craft ?**

**How can realistic assessment be made of the full range of abilities ?**

### **Research**

Study of all aspects of craft is the life blood of craft development. But study must be properly directed if it is to be of value. Research should be relevant to current issues of debate, and should always be undertaken with a view to action.

One obvious improvement would be to co-ordinate research carried out by different people, to avoid wasteful duplication. And the findings of particular research will accomplish little if no one hears of them. Proper channels should be set up to disseminate information.

Craft research must not be too introspective. A researcher should know when to extend his/her field of study into other areas: fine arts, design, architecture, industrial crafts... This would be facilitated by inter-organisational links and partnerships between appropriate bodies to prioritise and co-ordinate research.

Priorities for research should be regularly under review, whether by craft bodies, practitioners or students. In this way, research about production of work can be related to the needs of craft producers. It can then be hoped that research will result in some positive action, instead of existing in a vacuum.

**How can research be made relevant and effective?**

**Is research too localised? Is it not time for study of the provision and structure of craft abroad?**

**What is the best way for craft history to be recorded? How can exhibitions be recorded in a way that will last?**

### **Information**

Those involved in craft, and those wishing to become involved, cannot always lay hands immediately on the information that they need. Proper systems should be developed for gathering and disseminating information effectively.

Part of this task will involve identifying what information is most important to whom. It would certainly be desirable, for example, for practitioners to record their own experiences in a way accessible to others.

Priority should be given to information on all aspects of craft production. Many makers are under-informed on marketing and promotion; material on these should be readily available to all.

However, educational resource materials are also needed for programmes of study in craft. More specifically, for those considering a career in craft, it is vital to be accurately informed of appropriate educational opportunities. This could best be achieved by a centralised agency distributing information on careers, and on courses - in the UK and abroad - at further and higher education levels.

The organisation of exhibitions would be rendered more effective if exhibition venues and development agencies were fully informed about the range of available material at any given time. The real need here is for improved communication between these venues and agencies.

Perhaps the hardest question is that of who should hold what information. Research is needed into the existing agencies which provide craft information. An overall picture would identify gaps to be plugged and links to be developed. Indeed, links should be established between organisations in different fields, for information will often be needed which concerns different visual arts fields and different craft activity.

**How can information be more effectively collected and disseminated ?**

**How best should people be informed about a career in craft ?**

**How best should makers be given access to the experience of others ?**

### **Status**

The distinction between "professional" and "amateur" makers is especially troublesome in craft. This is largely because in craft (unlike disciplines such as the performing arts ) the two categories have a tendency to merge. It is quite common for amateur makers to sell some of their work, while some professional makers actually sell little, or do full-time jobs outside the realm of making.

Care is needed when using these terms, as they can sometimes give offence. In particular, some craftspeople are loath to be described as amateur, for they feel it has negative overtones. Meanwhile, some are pleased to be called amateur, because the term implies that their activity gives them pleasure. Also, it must not be suggested that specific exhibitions be confined to one category or the other; if the work is relevant to the exhibition, the classification of the maker is unimportant.

However, greater understanding is needed between those who derive nominal parts of their income from selling craftwork, and those who are dependent on sales to make a living. The aim should be a generally agreed pricing framework for craft, so that the value of craft can be established in the public's mind.

**Is there a valid distinction between professional and amateur craftspeople ?**

**Is it feasible to develop a generally agreed pricing framework for craft ?**

### **International links**

Craft is internationally recognisable, and it is time proper recognition was given to the international pre-eminence of UK makers. This recognition in the immediate term could take the form of more government support for showing and selling abroad. That pre-eminence should be recognised not just for its own sake but also for its usefulness, the way exhibitions can play a strategic role in diplomacy and international understanding and craft sales can assist exports.

International exhibitions, inwards and outwards, should be encouraged; they break down national provincialism and insularity, and help to build new audiences.

Development of craft on an international scale cannot happen without an adequate infrastructure. International networks through agencies such as the World Crafts Council and the British Council should be strengthened. Support should be increased for makers who exhibit abroad and extra help provided to enable makers to export, especially in the form of effective information. Development of overseas sales, to be really effective, should take place on a national, not just a regional basis.

Perhaps the most urgent priority is to forge and strengthen specific international links, such as contacts between individual makers, exhibition venues and other bodies. There should be more provision for overseas work opportunities for makers, educationalists and others and for exchanges of craft students. It could be useful if overseas experiences, contacts and events were documented, and this documentation made available as a centrally held national resource.

**How can makers be encouraged to overcome the difficulties of exhibiting and selling abroad ?**

**What further communication is necessary between overseas development agencies ?**

**What is the best way to encourage international exhibitions and links between craftspeople from different countries ?**

**Can exhibitions be organised in exchange with the countries of origin of the UK's ethnic minorities ? How will such exhibitions take account of craft's varying status and function in different cultures?**

### **Links with industry**

The link between craft and industry is obvious and important: there are shared skills and approaches to working which can be mutually beneficial. It would be particularly desirable to develop opportunities for craftspeople to use industrial techniques, materials and equipment. Also craftspeople have skills and approaches to working which could benefit industry.

Exhibitions are a particularly effective way of pursuing these links, and can emphasise the interface between craft, industry and architecture. Those which explore the uses of new technologies and materials which expand opportunities for craftspeople are specially to be encouraged.

**How can effective links be developed ?**

**In differentiating between craft and industry, how best should the implication be avoided that either is superior to the other ?**

### **Public awareness**

One thing is clear; public awareness and understanding of craft have some way to go. An atmosphere in which people were more aware of what craft is and its importance, would assist production, education and participation. Above all, if the standing of craft were improved, craftspeople could command the economic return and respect accorded to other professions. One basic message about craft which needs to be put across is its importance in simple economic terms. At the same time, the contribution of craft to culture should be emphasised, and on both these points there is a need to lobby at a national and international level.

Once again, one of the hardest tasks is that of defining craft in a way that will satisfy representatives of the various disciplines. The public should be given a consistent and accurate picture. Current views of craft encompass the following: traditional, nostalgic, collectable, élitist, unique, expensive, tacky, touristy, intellectually lazy, decorative, environment-enhancing and personally fulfilling. Obviously enough, the negative perceptions must be ironed out and the positive ones encouraged! In addition, different messages will have to be aimed at different sectors of the public.

How can this be achieved? A starting point is education: craft should be promoted at international, national and regional levels. A general problem is the lack of a shared language for discussion of craft. A common vocabulary is required, embracing descriptive and theoretical terms. Craft criticism must be expanded, for a developed critical voice is notably absent. The quality of reviewing must be raised in all available media, for reviews are often the only record of exhibitions.

Exhibitions themselves are an essential tool for expanding public awareness, and the informational material which accompanies them should capitalise on this, taking approaches which will appeal to a wide range of audiences. Exhibitions often have the strength of a collective voice, speaking for many makers who otherwise work in isolation. It is this collective voice which must generally be developed; effective forums and associations are needed at all levels.

**Can the public image of craft as a cosy backwater be reversed? If so, what image should replace it?**

**How can messages be effectively targeted at specific audiences, or for specific craft disciplines?**

**In the educational system, who should take responsibility for conveying the importance of craft, and how can this be done effectively?**

**What are the most effective ways to lobby for increased support for craft?**

**How best can a common vocabulary and a critical voice be developed?**

### **Craft education**

Craft activity is central to many people's lives. Craft education - in whatever form - should therefore be a key component of statutory and non-statutory education schemes. After all, manipulative skill requires the systematic procedural thinking which arises whenever one is engaged with materials to exploit and develop their potential. Craft education also gives insight into commerce and industry, and the links between designer, producer, distributor and customer. And of course, it assists multi-cultural studies, as craft has a long history of international exchanges of ideas and techniques.

Craft education should teach the application of knowledge, practical skills, visual, cultural and historical awareness and foster experimentation and invention in designing and making. To be complete, it must cover the creative and practical as well as the cognitive. It has so far, like other subjects, been hampered by a knowledge-based conception of education. The role of vocational training in craft must be properly defined. The one constant aim is the stimulation of creative thought.



Craft practitioners should be encouraged to teach throughout the system, even in industrial craft. This will require appropriate pay and conditions, the opportunity for part-time work, and teacher- training for the makers involved. The concept of work placements is valuable, though care is needed in recognising the difficulties of many makers in accommodating trainees or students. Organised placement systems and models of good practice would be useful. However, craft education does not solely concern making skills; participation can enhance the appreciation of craft objects even for those who do not specialise in making.

Risk-taking must be encouraged: mistakes are a vital part of learning! Consistency of approach, however, is essential. Standards should be defined to develop a consistent pattern through school level into further education. But craft study should not be tied to particular systems or levels: there should be a myriad of educational approaches for people to develop craft skills and craft appreciation throughout their lives.

**How can the teaching of craft be given a higher profile ?**

**What are the gaps in craft education at each level, and what new courses or approaches are required ?**

**How can Industrial Lead Bodies be co-ordinated to avoid duplications or omissions in the preparation of national vocational qualifications?**

**In what ways can teachers place craft within its aesthetic, cultural, socio-economic and historical contexts ?**

### **Training**

Those wanting a career in craft should have access to training in the relevant skills. This should include training in professional practice, and be available at any stage of a person's career. All relevant bodies must regularly research and prioritise the demands for training, to create appropriate programmes. Above all, training opportunities must be relevant, effective and widely disseminated.

Makers should be assisted to understand marketing and promotion, and models of good practice should be created and partnerships between relevant agencies providing business training should be developed and care taken to ensure that such training is appropriate for craft businesses. Training in alternative uses for craft skills should be developed.

Also there should be training for those involved in other areas of craft activity, including administration, museum and gallery exhibition and display, retailing and writing. Here again, partnerships between agencies providing such training should be encouraged.

A useful innovation could be systems for giving accreditation for different types of training.



**What should the priorities be for training ?**

**What overlaps and gaps exist between the various agencies which provide craft training ? How can these be dealt with ?**

**What links are needed to co-ordinate training in those crafts which overlap with other visual arts ?**

### **Infrastructure for craft production**

Craftspeople, as much as any other professional body, require a supportive infrastructure. This should help to provide the means of production and appropriate outlets for the work. It is the makers who are essential in ensuring a continued vitality for craft.

Obtaining this infrastructure may depend on craft being accorded its proper standing, but paradoxically, creating the infrastructure may enhance the standing of craft, and help makers to gain the economic return and respect enjoyed by other professions.

Account must be taken of the diversity of different makers' needs. Recently the focus has tended to be on those working in those crafts which could be described as the applied and decorative arts and thought should be given to those who work in crafts which support other art forms (costume-makers, model-makers, etc) and to other areas which involve craft production, such as building trades, fashion, cooking, restoration and suchlike.

One central and difficult requirement is for workshop space. There should be research into what is needed and what is available. Group workshops - involving shared facilities, training and marketing - should be encouraged, and perhaps models should be set up. However "craft zoos" in which makers demonstrate their skills to tourists are to be discouraged and craft should not be seen as an instant use for derelict buildings. Some makers experience problems working from home, because of planning rules and other factors. These problems need examination. Access to the equipment of colleges and other institutions should be encouraged.

It is desirable that the various agencies which support craftspeople be organised, so that the most appropriate can be found for individual makers. These agencies - at international, European, national and regional levels - should ensure that they can meet the diverse and changing needs of the constituencies which they serve.

**What are the most effective ways of assisting the diversity of craftspeople ?**

**How can more workspace be found and paid for ?**

**How can individuals be matched with the right agencies to help them ?**

### **The craft economy**

It is vital that the craft economy be continuously developed, so that craftspeople can be economically viable and earn a proper return for their work. It must be accepted that the market-place is important in developing standards and public awareness; profit is not a dirty word! This need not cloud the distinctions between the social and cultural benefit of craft and the maker's economic and artistic development.

Craft sales fall into three broad categories: production, where objects of a similar design are made in batches; one-off, where the object is distinctive; commission, where the object is made to order. The categories command different markets and different prices; so, each should have its own promotion.

Again, diversities have to be recognised. "Craft" is not an easy concept to sell, and it may be better to promote disciplines individually, taking account of differences in market and prices. In addition, overlap should be sought between public and private sectors. This could help craft in the areas of education, access, profile and selling. Consideration may also need to be given to other areas of craft activity, involving other artforms and other industries.

Craftspeople have a right to make work which is not commercially viable, but that work can still be promoted in a commercial context. What is most undesirable is the approach of those craft groups, outlets and makers who do not take the craft economy or the selling process seriously; by under-pricing work, shoddy presentation or an unprofessional approach. Equally detrimental are craft fairs where the only motive is profit for the promoter.

Improved professionalism on the part of makers must be matched with clear ethical trading practices by retailers. Purchasing schemes such as extended credit for buying expensive pieces is greatly beneficial to craft production. Where craft is promoted through exhibitions, standard contractual practices would be helpful. Craft fairs of high quality, where the motive goes beyond profit for the organisers, should be encouraged, for they widen access to craft.

**Within the context of the National Craft Strategy, should the work promoted commercially be product-led or market-led ?**

**What forms of craft selling may be the most effective for the future?**

**The sale-or-return system causes problems for makers; how can this be resolved ?**

**What is the best way to show that craft is the most widely accepted vehicle for public art commissioning ? Can the vital "per cent for art " principle be extended ?**

### **Craft exhibitions**

Exhibitions of contemporary work help craftspeople to establish their level of achievement, communicate with their audience, place their work in a wider context and stimulate sales. However, the benefits are more extensive than this: exhibitions also give the public a uniquely direct experience of the work of craft, and in this way develop the identity of craft.

Any aspects should be encouraged which bring together craftspeople and their audience from all sectors of the community. Exhibitions which draw on the wide and varied range of collections throughout the country have a specially valuable role. So do touring exhibitions, which maximise investment in resources and curatorial skills.

The usefulness of interpreting craftwork and placing it in historical, social, cultural and the wider context of visual arts activity cannot be over-emphasised.

Education is integral to all exhibitions; venues must create links with the educational sector.

More than anything else, exhibitions should challenge existing perceptions, for they offer unique opportunities for research and critical writing and lead to greater public knowledge.

**How can exhibition provision be expanded ?**

**What forms of exhibition may be required for the future ?**

**How can proper arrangements for contracts and fees be set up between craftspeople and exhibition venues ?**

### **Note**

This document was prepared by the National Crafts Strategy  
Co-ordinating Group which is :

Tony Ford            Director, Crafts Council  
Alan Humberstone   Assistant Director, Lincolnshire & Humberside Arts  
David Kay            Craft Officer, Southern Arts  
Barclay Price        Head of Grants, Crafts Council

The process involved a number of small working groups consisting of makers, educationalists, exhibition organisers, and others and the Group should like to thank all those who took part.

The Group should also like to thank Charles Bourne who assisted in the writing of this discussion paper.

## **Background information**

The Crafts Council was established 20 years ago with the objective of encouraging the creation of works of contemporary craft and increasing access to, and enjoyment of, the crafts throughout England and Wales. This work is undertaken in conjunction with the regional arts associations within England and the Welsh Arts Council. The crafts covered are primarily ceramics, textiles, metalwork, jewellery, bookbinding, letter & calligraphy, musical instruments, furniture, leatherwork and basketry.

There are many other agencies involved with craft given the importance of craft in museum collections, conservation and restoration, tourism and the economy. These agencies include the Museum & Galleries Commission and Area Museum Councils, the National Trust, English Heritage, British Tourist Authority, the Prince's Youth Business Trust, TECs, Enterprise Agencies and the Rural Development Commission.

In the context of funding from the Office of Arts & Libraries, craft receives a very small share. In 1991/92 the grant to the Crafts Council is £ 2.8 million. This is about 20% of the funding given to the Arts Council for visual arts, which is again small in comparison to the funding for performing arts.

Within the area of craft covered by the Crafts Council it is estimated that there are around 7,500 full-time and 13,000 part-time and semi-professional craftspeople working within England and Wales.

The combined annual turnover of this sector of the craft market is estimated to be £200 million. As well as the large number of specialist craft galleries and shops, craft work also sells through a range of other retail outlets in this country and abroad. Importantly, craft work accounts for a large part of the work undertaken within Per Cent for Art projects.

While no figures for attendances at craft events are available, given the large number of craft exhibitions, craft fairs, open workshops and other craft events the figure is substantial.

Participation in craft is also extensive. Research indicates that there are some 15,000 further education courses with a craft content and that these account for about 20% of all further education activity. There is also extensive craft activity outside of the further education system, for example The Embroiders Guild has itself around 20,000 members.

# NOTES

