

Crafts on the Map

In our last issue Skills Minister John Hayes explained a little about the government's plans to address the crucial question: 'How are we going to train the next generation of craftspeople?'

To follow up on this, Jan Lasnon put some specific questions to the Minister to find out how things are progressing.



Skills Minister John Hayes

"This desire to create, to physically relate to the world around us is part of who we are, what makes us human."

Please tell us about the craft mapping exercise that was mentioned in our last issue, the aims, how and when it will be actioned and how craft&design readers can help with the project.

"I want to do all I can to keep our proud traditions of craftsmanship alive and well – and our skills system must support that objective. I know from my own conversations with craftsmen and women that a real barrier to growth is the lack of detailed knowledge about existing heritage craft skills. Many practitioners work alone and tend not to engage with the skills system on a regular basis. There are also many niche practices and traditions that are handed down "father to son" that just aren't available through mainstream training providers.

"Without that knowledge, we can't effectively help the sector meet its future skills needs. That's why I have asked your sector skills council, Creative and Cultural Skills, to undertake the first comprehensive mapping exercise, to give us a full picture of heritage craft skills in the UK, and to report back to me by Christmas. The results of this exercise will help us to work with the sector to deliver the training it needs to thrive.

"The steering group behind this exercise will include many people who read craft&design magazine, including potters and metal workers who use traditional mediums and techniques but produce contemporary items of immense beauty and value.

"I hope your readers will help me with this – it is a complex piece of work that requires the craft community to engage to make it effective. I want Creative and Cultural Skills to work with you to keep your readers informed as the work progresses."

You also stated: "I am leading work to develop a new framework for the recognition and celebration of craft."

The aim will be to raise the status of craft and make people know that achieving craft skills is as important, perhaps more important, than academic prowess alone." Could you tell us more about what this involves, the stage it is at now and plans for the future?

"This country should value and reward practical excellence just as highly as it does academic study. I want to develop a prestigious national award for

the sector that helps get that message across. My officials are working up proposals as we speak, and I look forward to making an announcement as soon as possible."

Could you explain about the apprenticeships you want to put in place. How will they be funded and how does the government plan to ensure that there is work for the apprentices at the end of their training?

"Apprenticeships offer a fantastic opportunity for people to gain the skills they need for the jobs of the future, equipping the country for our goal to build long-term sustainable growth.

"That is why despite some difficult decisions on spending, we are boosting the number of apprenticeships. Funding for Apprenticeships has been increased in 2011-12 to over £1.4bn, sufficient to train 360,000 apprentices. Overall, this Government will deliver at least 250,000 more apprenticeships over the Spending Review period than the previous Government had planned.

"We think this is absolutely vital not just to help people into work for the short term, but to make sure they can have successful long term careers. And as every apprenticeship is a real job, most apprentices do remain with the companies, or within the sector, that trained them. The pay dividend is considerable too – an apprentice earns an additional £100,000 over a lifetime compared to their similarly qualified peers.

"In the context of craft and design, the mapping project we discussed earlier is a first step towards helping meet the skills needs of the sector, including through apprenticeships. It is already clear that many small employers need more help to access the programme and that specialist training courses are often not available locally. Once we have the evidence from the mapping exercise I can look at how we can work with the sector to overcome these barriers.

"However there are things we can do now. Many people in your sector are self-employed, which is why I have asked NIACE* to produce a toolkit to help people set up their own business. NIACE have already produced a detailed online resource – and again, the input and experience of your readers is essential in making this a bespoke tool for the craft sector which will help people who are looking to enter the craft community."

"Let me say first how important I consider craft education for young people. In this age of instant gratification - from 24-hour news to downloadable music and online shopping - it teaches the value of taking time to do something well."

In 2000 you were Shadow Schools Minister... perhaps that role presented the opportunity for you to consider why craft is no longer taught in schools - shouldn't we be starting the teaching of creative skills at the earliest opportunity in the education of our young people?

"I'm firmly of the view that an appreciation of the practical and aesthetic value of craft should be taught at an early age – not just in schools but also at home and in the wider community. The Government is promoting Free Schools that will enable young people to benefit from different approaches to learning and to learn new skills. In particular, University Technical Colleges (UTC) will enable those young people with practical tastes and aptitudes to gain the skills they need to progress to skilled employment and a rewarding career."

Many craft&design readers consider that their contribution to Britain's economy goes unrecognised and unappreciated in Government figures, that micro-businesses are generally 'invisible' to the statisticians. These are professional makers who earn a living by selling their work, often at Craft Fairs and Exhibitions, and many also provide training and employment for other creative people. They keep the unemployment figures down!

In addition to that aspect of craft in the UK, there are hundreds of craft events taking place throughout the year, many contributing substantially to the local economy with large numbers of exhibitors and visitors going in to an area and spending on accommodation, eating out, buying incidentals such as fuel etc.

Has the value of these very small businesses in relation to Britain's overall economy ever been researched and quantified? If so, what were the results. And if not, will it be looked into do you think?

"Let me say first how important I consider craft education for young people. In this age of instant gratification - from 24-hour news to downloadable music and online shopping - it teaches the value of taking time to do something well.

"That's a great lesson whichever walk of life young people go into. For me, learning to paint inspired a passion which has given me enjoyment, relaxation and also spiritual enrichment throughout my life. The same is true for many thousands of people.

"Of course, many young people who learn a craft go on to make a career of it. That is something my

colleagues in the Government and I want to encourage. Many programmes are available to encourage start-up businesses, offering advice and more practical help on everything from finance to intellectual property. The fact that the craft sector is so heavily based on SMEs is certainly nothing to be diffident about. The same is true of our whole economy. 99% of British businesses are SMEs and they provide jobs for well over half our workforce.

"And of course the benefits of craft to local economies are considerable. I hope this is one of the things that our mapping exercise will quantify more clearly. To take just one example, I'd love to know how many craft potters have followed the example of the great Bernard Leach and based themselves in Cornwall. I suspect it's quite a few.

"The value of the craft sector should never be underestimated, locally, nationally or globally. The craft industry contributes £3 billion GVA to the UK economy each year - which is greater than the visual arts, cultural heritage or literature sectors.

"I know that there are at least 88,250 creative practitioners working in the craft sector across the UK. And more than 11,000 businesses are estimated to be working in the traditional, heritage and contemporary crafts. So make no mistake – this is a sector that won't be overlooked on my watch."

I understand that craft is extremely important to you personally. Can I ask, is there a particular reason for this?

"My love of craft stems from my love of my father who was a skilled worker and much wiser than me. I learnt from him that practical endeavour is often superior to academic study. For while most academic learning, until higher degree level at least, is derivative, craft is always creative. This desire to create, to physically relate to the world around us is part of who we are, what makes us human."

*NIACE - The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
www.niace.org.uk/NIACE

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