

NORTH WEST CRAFT NETWORK

Our Priorities 2021

After the turmoil of 2020, we took some time as a group to work on what our priorities should be for the next few years. We decided that there are three key things we need to focus on...

- Promoting the value of craft for health and wellbeing
- Supporting makers at all stages of their development and careers
- Addressing systemic racism and becoming more diverse and inclusive

Craft and Health and Wellbeing

Craft is having a moment and we must seize it! The mental health benefits of art and making came to the forefront during the Covid pandemic. People made masks, and sewed scrubs for the NHS. They made soft furnishings for their homes, took up new hobbies and 'had a go'.

To be doing something (making, mending, creating or helping through craft), was experienced as both positive and healing. For some the change may be small; a new hobby, interest or social group. For others it was life changing, leading to a review of life choices and maybe a new career.

To those of us previously involved in the field of craft and aware of the benefits of making, it felt like these benefits were being recognised for the first time. Still, it's a positive thing this wider, more recognised acknowledgement of the power of craft on health and mental wellbeing, but this re-evaluation of craft in terms of public appreciation needs to provide a platform on which to build.

Whether small or large, the benefits of craft to our mental health and wellbeing is underpinned with solid research and evidence, as the Crafts Council has outlined in their article '4 Reasons Craft is Good for You'.¹

What the effects of people's rekindled interest in craft in the long term will be, is yet to emerge, but we hope to be able to build on these experiences into the future, to shape our organisations to provide these newfound benefits and help them to flourish.

What we can do now

1. Consider diversity and inclusion and put it/these at the forefront of all we do.
2. Provide a safe space for mutual support
3. Provide networking opportunities to the members
4. Be willing to share, not compete

¹ <https://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/stories/4-reasons-craft-good-your-mental-health>

5. Break down barriers with talks and demonstrations and workshops across the sector

What we can do over the next 12/18 months

1. Reach out to the isolated, excluded, lonely and ill and provide a safe space. There is a need for deeds not words. GO TO THEM, don't expect them to come to us.
2. Provide/Create opportunities for collaboration on health and well-being projects
3. Apply for funding for well-being projects in light of mental health issues that emerged during Covid either on a network-wide scale or between several organisations.

What we can do over the next 3 years

1. Continue with all of the above
2. Craft can alleviate the symptoms of anxiety, depression, loneliness and even dementia, according to research. As an organisation we need to ensure that the recent emphasis on the role of health and wellbeing remains clearly in focus.

We are in a period of uncertainty, and that is always unsettling, but change can provide opportunities to rethink the way forward. What we can be sure of is that there is a sense of fulfilment from making and the everyday acts of creativity.

Diversity and Inclusion

The murder of George Floyd in 2020 was a wake-up call to us all to address longstanding structural inequality and racism and the dominance of white narratives in the craft sector. As the Crafts Council's Market for Craft report (May 2020)² says "Craft is succeeding in offering an income stream and creative fulfilment for makers with disabilities, but the sector has to go further to ensure craft is an inclusive space for all ethnicities and genders, with the proportion of Black, Asian and ethnic minority makers remaining unchanged compared to 2006 at 2–4% and three quarters of makers identifying as female." Furthermore, the day to day realities of the inequalities in the prospects and experiences of these makers are vividly articulated in the 'Making Changes in Craft' report by Karen Patel³.

We need to be prepared to look honestly at ourselves and our own organisations, understand how we unwittingly support the status quo, and examine how we can make positive change. Meaningful change will take time, but there is a will within the Network for change to happen. We need to promote the fact that a more diverse range of input and insights in craft gives better outputs. There is wide ranging evidence to support this, for example see the McKinsey report 'Why Diversity Matters'⁴. Craft is many different things to different people and we need to recognise this diversity of definition. Our recruitment processes must be transparent and open, actively pushing opportunities towards the communities who are underrepresented in our sector, rather than simply expecting them to come to us.

We need to advocate for diversity of experience represented in crafts related programmes and content through the NW and well as for the proportionate representation of audiences from diverse backgrounds at events. In addition, we want to articulate what levelling up looks like for craft in the

² <https://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/stories/market-craft-report-launched>

³ https://media.craftscouncil.org.uk/documents/Making_Changes_in_Craft_-_Craft_Expertise_Phase_One_Report_2021.pdf

⁴ <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/why-diversity-matters>

North West and advocate for change given that the North has been disproportionately affected by Covid.

We want to support and celebrate the work of NW makers and curators from different backgrounds who are marginalised or excluded by providing a platform for their voice to be heard. We need to acknowledge and seek ways to address the invisibility of black, Asian and ethnically diverse makers in the regional craft cannon, and as we train new makers we need to promote and advocate for an anti-racist craft curriculum.

We have an opportunity to start new dialogues about language and how it is used to describe collections, curricula, collaborations, opportunities and exhibitions and to actively detox and decolonise them.

What we can do now – our immediate actions (next 3 months)

- Put out a call for new network members, expressing an openness to including underrepresented groups and attending to where we promote this for maximum access. We will do this every year.
- We will write a membership and governance policy that centres inclusion and diversity.
- All recruitment to the NWCN Steering group will be by open call out that expressly welcomes those from underrepresented groups. We will write this into our policies.
- Rewrite our website, reviewing the language and making sure it has fully inclusive content

What we can do over the next 12/18 months

- Keep the conversation going in the region.
- Promote the Craft's Council 'charter' on diversity and inclusion and actively encourage all our members to ensure they or their organisations signs up to it.
- Schedule an agenda item for every full meeting of the Networks under the heading Diversity and Inclusion
- Share resources our Network members find and use, such as case studies and toolkits for organisations to examine and action every aspect of diversity, for example looking at the language used to promote commissions and opportunities; detoxing and decolonizing collections and curricula; and improving the proportionate representation of people as audiences at events
- Identify significant collective moments of national or regional celebration that address inclusion and diversity, and regularly ask the question – 'what are you doing for Black History Month?' or Pride week (for example) and encourage and promote supporting activities from our members all year round.
- Be attentive to outputs from the Crafts Council's Global Majority Branch, insights from Inc Arts, Shades of Noir and build links

What we can do over the next 3 years

- Use the NW Craft Network meetings to find examples and celebrate best practice any of the areas mentioned here
- Share and celebrate regional showcases of Black, Asian and ethnically diverse makers in the regional craft cannon

- Actively seek out and identify where conversations are happening on subjects above within the region, identify gaps, facilitate specific interest groups around curating, maker development, audience development, or other subjects as they emerge

Environmental sustainability

With the devastating impacts and outcomes of Climate Change becoming ever clearer, it's vital that every organisation, small and large, has a better understanding of the negative impact on the planet of our day-to-day activities and to do everything we can to reduce them.

The organisations across the NW Craft Network are varied in size and type. Some of us have venues and some don't, some are business to customer or audience, some are business to business, but we can all learn from each other to understand how best to approach this issue, to identify what good practice is out there and what works best. By pooling our collective knowledge and resources we can start to make a difference.

Carbon Literacy, Carbon Audits, participation in forums such as Manchester's Climate Change Agency, where Manchester-based organisations can sign a commitment to set science-based targets to reduce CO₂ emissions year on year and support Manchester in becoming zero carbon by 2038, and other similar groups and networks across other areas in the North West are all important. Our aim is to understand what we are all doing, identify the gaps and help each other explore what we can do to address them.

Maker Development

Maker Development encompasses several areas of a Maker's journey from early education and training, through to emerging, middle career and established makers, all of whom require support through the timeline. Recent changes to policy affecting Art and Design education, from high school, further and higher education is having a significant impact on the promotion of Craft as a valid career route and will affect the pipeline of new talent entering the market.

It is important to review the support offered in terms of diversification of craft, talent development and sustainability for established makers.

The benefit of Craft education is also far reaching in terms of skills for future job markets, as well as supporting the mental health agenda. We will need to look to supporting the promotion of craft and design as career choices and look to promote the many and varied opportunities available for graduates entering the market.

One of the main areas to review is continued professional development for mid-career or established makers who need support in areas such as writing successful funding bids, promotion and marketing, research and development, and digital selling tools. These aspects are particularly important areas to support in relation to the significant impact the pandemic has had on the maker market, especially those operating in a retail/gallery environment who have had to switch to digital selling via online showcase events.

What we can do now

6. Consider diversity and inclusion and put it/these at the forefront of all we do
7. Create a set of priorities for promoting craft as a valid career to all
8. Provide training opportunities in key areas
9. Be willing to share, not compete

10. Organise / align with programmes of talks and activities for schools, colleges, universities and makers to share good practice (with key makers as advocates / mentors) utilising the wealth of talent in the Northwest and badging with the Year of Craft.

What we can do over the next 12/18 months

4. Create a programme for mentoring, training, promotion
5. Promote 'stories' through the new webpage to highlight success stories
6. Apply for funding for training programmes / activities

What we can do over the next 3 years

3. Continue with all of the above
4. Craft and design education contributes to the health and wealth of our nation, supporting social inclusion, community and mental health agendas.