

Craft Apprenticeship Initiative

Background

The Art Workers Guild (AWG) was founded in 1884 “*to advance education in all the visual arts and crafts by means of lectures, meetings, demonstrations, discussions and to foster and maintain high standards of design and craftsmanship in all branches of the visual arts and crafts in any way which may be beneficial to the community.*”

The AWG became the cradle of the Arts and Craft Movement in Britain and helped to stimulate similar movements elsewhere in Europe and North America. Today, the membership numbers some 280 craftsmen, designers and artists with skills spanning more than 80 crafts. Many of these people are acknowledged leaders in their field. Membership is planned to grow to about 500 over the next 5 years.

The Guild facilities at 6 Queen Square in Bloomsbury host some 70 kindred Arts based organizations, many of which have been spawned by the AWG. It is estimated that between 30-40,000 people use the building every year. With the help of its website, www.artworkersguild.org, this network is spreading once more throughout the UK and abroad.

The AWG is administered by a part time secretary, Monica Grose-Hodge, who currently works four days a week.

The Need for a new initiative for craft, fine and applied arts apprenticeships

There is widespread concern within the membership of the AWG and amongst many other kindred professional, trade and academic organisations about the current state of apprenticeship within the fine and applied arts and crafts. The reasons for this are various but, lying at the root of many of these is the fact that the whole subject of apprenticeship has become fragmented.

There are numerous funding bodies offering scholarships and bursaries to those interested in pursuing a career in the fine or applied arts and crafts, the majority of these help to fund students whilst they are studying for a degree, diploma or NVQ qualification. Many of these funding bodies struggle to find suitable candidates to support.

People considering a career in the fine or applied arts or crafts often struggle to get good careers advice and so the full breadth of opportunities which exist in these fields is frequently not properly understood. All too often they struggle to find good courses and, after obtaining their qualification, they struggle again to move from education into employment. Having graduated, few students manage to set themselves up in a self-employed business because they are not yet sufficiently skilled, experienced or aware of how to run a business. For this majority, the only real option is to seek employment with an established craft firm.

Whilst there are examples where this works well, the vast majority of fine and applied artists or craftsmen are sole-traders with no employees and it is here that one of the major problems lies. Few, if any sole traders can afford to pay a second salary to an apprentice, especially whilst taking time away from their own gainful employment to train up a junior. The burdens of insurance, health and safety and employment are further disincentives for such people.

The AWG, an independent organisation with a long, distinguished history and with a membership of leading artists, craftsmen and architects in Britain, is ideally placed to play a constructive role in improving this situation.

The AWG would like to:

- Improve the quality of advice available to those considering a career in the fine and applied arts and crafts.
- Raise the profile of good training courses.
- Make it easier to get the funding and experience students need to enable them to establish themselves as skilled, competent professionals.
- Make it easier for established professionals to take on apprentices.

The internet provides the ideal integrated environment within which these aspirations can be realised in an efficient way.

If the issues of taking on an employee could be demystified for established craftsmen and if some of the funding presently available to those wanting to pursue to a career in the crafts could be redirected to support apprentices in practice, the AWG believes that two of the most significant obstacles to encouraging craft apprenticeships would be removed.

The Proposal

The AWG would like establish a section of its website dedicated to apprenticeship. This would offer a one stop shop on the subject with information for potential apprentices, including details of funding bodies, potential employers, art and craft training courses, information on employment law, health and safety, insurance etc. Each section would have links to other relevant websites. In this way, the Guild website would become a hub for all those with an interest in apprenticeship in the arts and crafts. This would be the first time that this information would be assembled in one place. The synthesis of this information would help to:

- raise the profile of apprenticeships in the crafts, fine and applied arts
- identify career paths in particular areas of interest
- bring together potential apprentices with employers
- improve access to possible sources of funding
- help funding bodies find suitable candidates for their support
- help funding bodies direct their resources in the most effective way
- identify courses where students can train
- provide links to sources of support for both apprentices and employers

To achieve these aims, the AWG website would include:

- Lists of arts and crafts – there are currently some 80 distinct types of artist or craftsman represented by the membership of the Guild. For each of these there would be contact details for established practitioners in each field who could offer practical advice to students considering their career options.
- Lists of individual artists, craftsmen and craft businesses who would, in principle, be prepared to offer apprenticeship schemes together with links through to their respective websites.
- Lists of possible sources of funding, together with appropriate links to websites
- Lists of courses offered in the fine and applied arts and in the crafts in the UK, together with web links
- Web links to sources of information for employers on such subjects as employment law, insurance, health and safety etc
- Links to websites of other kindred arts and crafts based institutions overseas, so helping people at the outset of their careers to ensure that they get the best possible training in their particular area of interest.

Timescale

It is estimated that it would take approximately 11 months (9 months to assemble the information set out above and a further 2 months to construct the website). Therefore the aim would be to have the website up and running at the end of 2007.

Management

The project would be managed by a small working party of members of the AWG. This would consist of Past Master Dick Reid (master carver), Past Master Stephen Gottlieb (Lute maker), the current Master, Assheton Gorton (Film set designer) and Hugh Petter (Chairman of the Trustees).

*Hugh Petter
Chairman of the Art Workers Guild (Trustees) Ltd
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