

APPG *for* CRAFT

Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Craft

Wednesday, 19th June, 4–6pm, Jubilee Room, Westminster Hall

Two open meetings have been held since setting up the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Craft on 12th June 2018. The first on October 16th focused on the topic that craft is more than just making, with keynote speakers of Professor Roger Kneebone and craftsperson Fleur Oakes. Professor Kneebone is a surgeon and teaches surgical skills at Imperial College London. Because of the lack of craft skills being taught in schools, he is having to teach trainee surgeons how to sew, develop their hand-eye co-ordination, observation and so on. Fleur Oakes is a needlelace maker and is also artist-in-residence at Imperial College. She and Professor Kneebone created the 'Textile Body' and they used this to illustrate their talk during the APPG. Robin Wood MBE, wood turner and tool maker talked about the advantages of knowing about craft and the challenges revealed by the Heritage Crafts Association's Red List of Endangered Crafts. Terri Adams, scientific glass interment blower explained how the lack of national qualifications and the lack of central government support for craft skills training was seriously undermining this crucial skill, supporting, as it does, our award-winning world-class scientists. Grace Horne, knife and corset maker explained the challenges in her crafts.

The second meeting (regarded as 'unofficial') was held on 4th April 2019 and looked at entry routes for craft. Michael Osbaldeston, Special Adviser at City and Guilds gave an overview which did not paint a very good picture. Sadly, parliamentary business meant that Greg Clark, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy could not attend the meeting. David Poole, clock maker, had overseen the Watch Maker Apprenticeship – a process which a civil servant described as 'tortuous', and clearly one that was not set up for any niche business or craft. Simon Sadinsky, Deputy Executive Director of The Prince's Foundation gave an account of the work being done at the Foundation and especially at Dumfries House. Steve Lowe, Lastmaker and owner of Crispinians explained his craft as a last maker and the courses that he ran with a huge overseas appeal but with few UK takers. Martin Frost MBE gained a gasp of amazement when a video was shown of his work as a disappearing fore-edge painter. He went on to explain how challenging it is to pass on his craft skills when there is no funding or support for learning such skills.

As a result of meetings held, a letter was sent to the Secretary of State at the Department for Education, the Prime Minister and the Editor of the Times newspaper lamenting the lack of crafts being taught in schools, particularly as there is significant research and evidence to show how valuable this is not only to hand-eye co-ordination but also, importantly, for well-being. Work is also ongoing to address the challenges of tapping into government funding for apprentices in niche crafts.

Patricia Lovett MBE

Secretariat of the APPG for Craft and Chair of the Heritage Crafts Association