The project working towards a sustainable and



Safe and supportive spaces for under-served people to learn new skills could provide a vital boost to a threatened trade.

Many heritage crafts that use traditional hand-skills working with wood are in danger. The Red List of Endangered Crafts features elements of woodworking across all categories from ‘currently viable’ to ‘critically endangered’.

On top of this is a lack of women, trans and non-binary people working in the heritage woodworking and furniture-making sectors.

The Woodworking & Gender project, delivered by the charity Sylva Foundation, is aiming to tackle those trends through training and access to facilities, seminars and networking events and partnering with employers and educators.



A 2023 sector survey conducted to support its £240,000 grant application found that 91.5% of manufacturing roles are held by men. The figures are even more stark in a 2023 survey by home improvement company, Kingfisher, which found the UK's skilled tradespeople – including carpenters and joiners – were 98% men.

Project lead Cat Poppensieker says: "Heritage woodworking crafts are in danger. If there is no transfer of knowledge to the next generation, we'll have a real issue. And if we don't encourage women to be part of that next generation, we're losing half of the potential people entering the trade."

She is keen to point out, for the avoidance of any doubt, that women, trans and non-binary people don't need special support because they're less capable than men, but because they face greater barriers to entry and employment than men.

The barriers begin in school, with girls less likely to be encouraged to pursue 'trade' careers, and continue in adulthood where cost and time challenges can prevent women from trying short courses. And those who do find employment often face outdated attitudes and facilities. Confidence and contacts can also be an issue.

But the Woodworking & Gender project has found strong interest from women, trans and non-binary people when the support is right. Also, that "businesses where the maker roles are gender diverse have such a thriving workforce", Cat says.



Among the project’s activities over the past year have been a one-week summer school which employed three women tutors and welcomed eight women, trans and non-binary makers, and two one-day seminars which attracted 60 participants spanning industry and education as well as individual makers. Further training and events are planned in 2025 and beyond, and alongside this activity is on-going mentoring and the promotion of peer networks.

Cat says: “I know at least two people have found employment through coming to our seminars. One, who found employment after the first seminar, was invited back to the second seminar with their boss to talk about their experience and how things have changed at the business.

“One of the businesses we partner with, Matthew Cox Furniture, has started doing regular posts on social media to highlight their women staff, their skills and favourite products to make. And another business has invested in building a women’s toilet.”



But there’s still more work to be done. In fact, Cat says, “I have such great ambitions for the project that I’m going to need to apply for more funding”.

One of her hopes is to introduce woodworking to children at an early age, in mixed-gender groups.

“I would really like to see early engagement in woodworking with a group of children where girls can be super confident, and boys can experience girls as their equals and there is no division between them. That’s how to ensure the future of the sector.”