



Woodworking and Gender: What's the story now?
Seminar report

Woodworking and gender What's the story now?

A seminar exploring gender
diversity in furniture making.

Friday 13th October
9.30 – 16.00



SYLVA
FOUNDATION

**Wood
School**

*'There really was magic in the air.
We felt privileged to take part and
to meet the incredible women and
supporters in the room.'*

Participant feedback

Woodworking and Gender: What's the Story Now? Seminar Overview

On October 13, 2023 a unique Woodworking and Gender Seminar was hosted by Sylva Foundation.

More than 70 participants came together at the Sylva Wood Centre for a day of talks, workshops and discussions around gender equality in the woodworking industry. People shared their experiences - both good and bad, connected with others, exchanged ideas, gave advice, and together developed strategies to support the woodworking sector to become more inclusive and accessible into the future.

As the seminar progressed, a number of themes started to emerge around woodworking and gender, which have been highlighted in this report. From the importance of woodworking education for all, to building confidence; from the benefits of employing women and non-binary people, to creating an inclusive culture in the workshop - these themes will be key to developing an ambitious new Sylva programme aiming to bridge the gap between education and employment for women and non-binary people working with wood.

Woodworking and Gender: What's the Story Now? really was an extraordinary day, full of extraordinary people. To everyone involved - the remarkable speakers and knowledgeable expert panel, to everyone who shared their stories and experiences - thank you.

Joseph Bray, Dr Gabriel Hemery, Dr Lynn Jones, Phoebe Oldfield, and Rae Sellen.



1 •

Sylva Wood School graduates and Summer School alumni share early career experiences of stepping out into the Woodworking Industry



Katy Thompson - Matthew Cox, Lincolnshire.
Sylva Summer School Alumni

"I proved to myself I was capable, and deserved to take up space in the workshop... Now we need to lead the change from within."



Beth Meehan - Christopher Bell, Oxfordshire.
Sylva Summer School Alumni

"I get so much joy creating with my hands - it's an unstoppable force. I've got a long way to go, but I never want to stop learning. My main goal is to work in a really diverse and collaborative environment."



Hannah Girvan - Woodlab, Devon.
Sylva Summer School Alumni

"I want people to be as happy as I am at the moment, and now I want to contribute to create an environment where that is possible."



Rachel Cox - Occupational Therapy Technical Instructor
Sylva Professional Course Graduate,
Sylva Summer School Alumni

"I'm looking forward to having more conversations on how to address these issues we all face in the industry."

Theme: **Education and Career.**

'We can do better to encourage women into woodworking.'

- *'I didn't know a career existed in woodworking for me until I was 18'*
- *'I dreamed of leaving university with a wealth of practical experience. It didn't happen.'*
- *'Teaching didn't set me up to be a maker.'*
- *'I had no workshop experience, only the teaching at the Sylva Summer School.'*
- *'Even at university there was not much support in developing the skills I needed in order to enter a woodworking career.'*

Theme: **Confidence and Role Models.**

'Women think they aren't as good as they are - we have to realise we are more deserving than just being lucky.'

- *'Having people in the workshop who look like you - it builds confidence.'*
- *'Confidence is a journey, I need more experience to be that person.'*
- *'We can build confidence through more opportunities like this - meeting up once a year, and talking to inspiring role models like you.'*
- *'I know how lucky I am - there's strong female mentors in my company. There was also a female tutor at university who was really inspiring.'*



2.

Participants shared positive stories, imagined a gender inclusive workplace and contributed to the development of our Woodworking and Gender programme



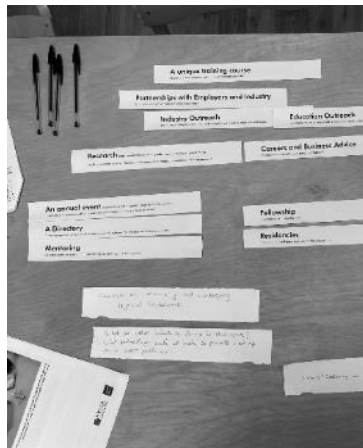
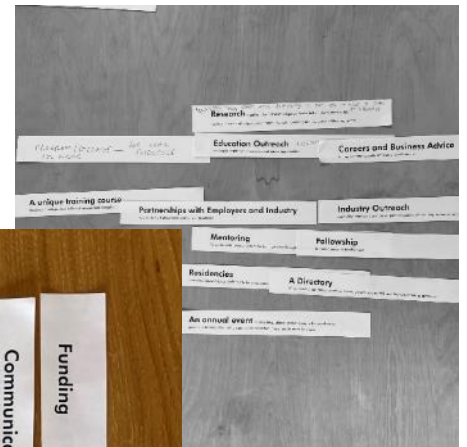
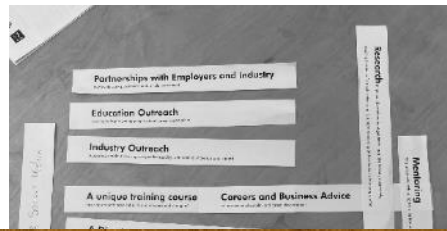
1. Bridging the gap (Mary's Workshop)

with the outcome: a list prioritising the future activities of our programme.

We shared the outline proposal for our woodworking and gender programme and a list of the proposed activities. Participants divided into groups to discuss their value and importance. They were encouraged to add any activities we had missed from our list and rank them in priority order.

The outcomes shared would be better described as diagrams than lists! The responses were very diverse, however some commonality was evident leading us to the list below and diagram overleaf. **Education outreach** was top of the list followed by a combination of industry focussed activities. **Research** was considered important overall and several groups suggested it should be ongoing to underpin the programme. A **sense of community** was evident in the importance placed on a directory and mentoring, providing role models. Important additional activities included **funding** and a **communications strategy**, both ongoing with a high priority.

1. Education Outreach
2. Research
- 3= Careers and business advice
- 3= Partnerships (employers/industry)
- 5= Mentoring
- 5= Directory
7. Industry Outreach
8. Fellowship
9. Unique training course
10. An annual event
11. Residencies



Education Outreach
to inspire young people about career opportunities

Partnerships with Employers and Industry
to provide work placements and to help recruitment

Careers and Business Advice
to improve employability and career development

Industry Outreach
supporting employers to improve gender equality, with training, materials and support

Mentoring
for participants, working from the training course through to employment

A Directory
of women and non-binary wood workers to provide role models and improve career progression

An annual event
to raise the profile of gender issues in the wood sector, potentially in conjunction with an annual exhibition featuring products made by women

A unique training course
focusing on both practical skills and interpersonal strengths

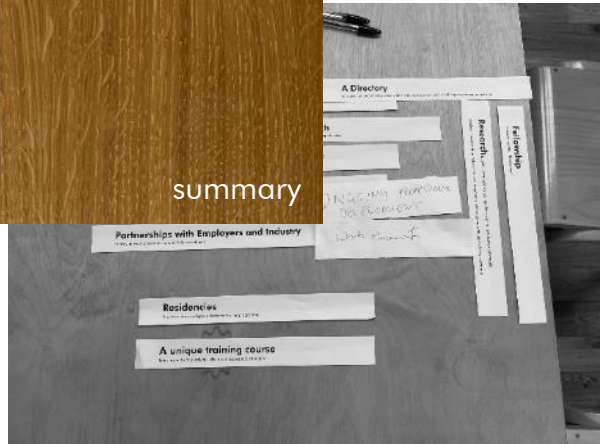
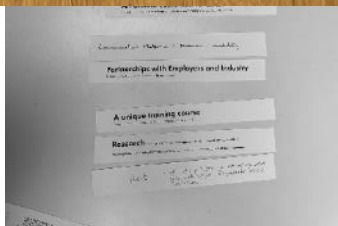
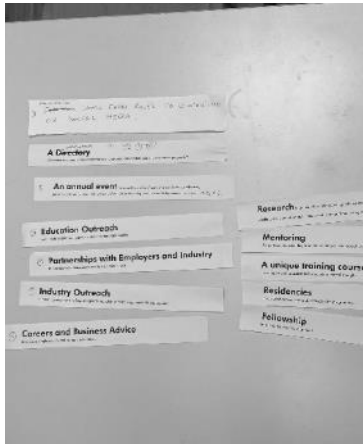
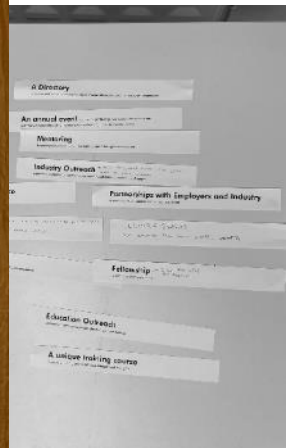
Fellowship
to extend personal development

Residencies
in a workshop/workspace dedicated to the programme

Research
to gather information about gender issues in the industry from publicly available data, interviews with employers and to support improving the visibility of the programme

Communication strategy
to raise media and marketing, targeting partners, sharing opportunities with partners, providing role models to young people

Funding



summary

- Tools: size... smaller? - light v. heavy (weight)
 range - exposure early
 space + time to explore tool.
 + power.
 Shoes! - size 5 is only in one color.

Machines - understand how they work
 - need to ask questions - confidence
 toilets - hygienic - menses cups + sanitary pads.
 social space... fund, community spirit.

Space: Does anything need to change or is it our attitude to it?
 more women around makes it less intimidating

2) Tools: HHS - lower emphasis on adventure under
 Fear factor →

education - confidence highlight risks.
 introduce to at early age.
 - after school clubs.
 - primary school.

Machines - familiarity with...
 teach how to safety check your machines.
 not task orientated (concept orientated)
 - tightness "hand tight, not man tight" eg...
 education a how to use + maintain - psychological safety.

Space: feeling nested... things go wrong.
 Sounds: of machines -

menstruating women - need gendered toilets??
 menopausal women - location - not far away!

Eating together! - toaster
 - "sacred to eat together"

3) Tools. Familiarity. eg - comfort.
 hands - small? (weight)

marketing... aimed at men
 Steel toe cap shoes - size 5
 Undoing - tightened
 Machines - setting up... not intuitive
 eg bed of planes / thickness - heavy

- read manuals! become knowledgeable
 - learn sound of machines.
 - emotional responses to training needs to be acknowledged
 - objectifying machines - eg sexy (male domination) (not fetishistic)

Space: safe space to ask questions
 - sanitary bins...
 - hygienic...
 "fundamental human need!"



3. What positive stories can we share about gender diversity in the sector?

(Forest School Site)

with the outcome: sharing of a positive anecdote/quote to influence the sector to become more gender diverse.

Each participant was encouraged to find someone they did not know to share a positive story with one another. After exploring this together we asked each individual to anonymously write down a short anecdote or quote on a postcard.

We received **83 postcards**, providing us with a very diverse range of responses.

Common themes shared were;

- the importance of **education** that is accessible for all
- the importance of inspiring **opportunities in childhood**.
- the importance of **role models** that you can relate to.
- the importance of support from a **community or network**.

Theme: **education** that is accessible for all

- *Opportunities for youngsters are out there. Apprenticeships are developing. Reaching the demographic remains the challenge but it is something we feel we can achieve.*
- *Training young people to grow their interest and skills in wood based (plus other materials) projects based, hands on, learning. And finding ways to broaden that remit beyond the privileged few that go to private school.*
- *Teaching is a great way to influence next generation of makers and help them navigate a sometimes outdated work environment. Create change from within.*
- *A close link with industry from education will enable change. Having a clear route into the industry/jobs has a positive effect on satisfaction and finding something you enjoy and are passionate about.*

Theme: inspiring **opportunities in childhood**.

- *Exposure to machines and tools from early age.*
- *Having positive childhood in creative family. Being supported to study in a wood/creative subject rather than in a more mainstream job prospect.*
- *Confidence in ability of making. Freedom to not conform from childhood*

Theme: **role models** that you can relate to.

- *Women have a positive effect on attitude of younger people coming into the workforce. Better role-models, different role-models.*
- *Positive for mental wellness to make. Positive to have role-models to check in with. Different cultures to talk to.*

Theme: support from a **community or network**.

- *In order to understand your struggles, you need to share with your community.*
- *Community of people to encourage and keep me doing what I'm doing. I haven't had many positive experiences in the industry apart from the key people who have kept me fighting to do what I love.*
- *With a small number of women in a workshop, having a really good kinship and bond with them to share experience and have a support network.*
- *Conversation between male representatives of furniture industry with diverse young future of the industry. This connection can and will make a positive change.*



3.

Panel Discussion with Employers and Industry Professionals



Dr. Lynn Jones - Teacher, Furniture Industry Recruitment Service and Furniture Careers Adviser

"Often being the only woman in the workshop, I've changed behaviour from the inside. There's still a way to go, but culturally things are changing."



Alice Blogg - Designer-Maker & Creative Director, Arttus Interiors

"We should be harnessing the power of women to embrace change - if we can, we're going to fly."



Kay Chattun - Managing Director, Lacaze London

"We work to be flexible, with open communication, making sure we provide a supportive environment - it's about finding the right balance."



Camilla McLean - Managing Director, Matthew Cox

"By employing women we are bringing in new perspectives, which increases creativity and improves communication."

Theme: **The Benefits of Employing Women and Non-Binary People**

- It creates a civilised workshop environment
- Everyone is regarded as equal
- There is a strong nurturing feeling
- It brings in new perspectives which increases creativity
- It improves communication, and there is also a strong empathetic trait

Theme: **The Logistics of Employing Women and Non-Binary People**

- It's important to have a culture where staff are happy to ask for flexibility, and to create an environment that is fair for all staff
- Maternity Packages: need to find the right balance between offering flexibility, open communication, and managing physical needs
- Impact of Pregnancy: a network, such as this Seminar, provides the opportunity to draw on experiences and ask in advance. This can be applied, not just about pregnancy, but dealing with all hormonal changes.

Theme: **Making Companies More Appealing to Woodworking Women and Non-Binary People**

- In the woodworking job market today, people are choosing the company they want to work for, rather than companies choosing them. This will help drive change in a traditional workplace.
- Show the value of having a compassionate, empathetic workplace, and show it's a great place to work through:
 - The job description - detail the inspiring, welcoming and creative environment
 - Commitment to raising awareness - attending events such as this Seminar
 - Publicity - actually show women and non-binary people working, such as social media
 - Values - include empathy, communication and highlight these across communications
 - Language - ensure it reflects values and commitment to raising awareness
 - Demonstrating - actually show people enjoying their jobs across all communications

Theme: **Creating an inclusive Culture in the Workshop**

- Be very clear from the outset about expectations, and grievance procedures
- Try to ensure equipment, including PPE, is accessible to women and non-binary people
- Have a transparent framework for pay scales - it's about experience and not gender
- Have a transparent framework for job progression - it's about competencies and responsibility and not gender



4.

What's next?

What's next?

We want to thank everyone who attended and participated so generously in our Woodworking and Gender seminar. The event exceeded our expectations and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Sharing stories was the central theme of the day, and we hope this report hints at the positive feelings of empowerment and community that were very evident on the day.

We are now reflecting on all of the information we gathered and will use it to shape and further develop our Woodworking and Gender Programme proposal. We will use this to build support and encourage match funding over the next few months, building towards a significant funding bid, early in 2024. The Sylva team will continue to plan and create events and opportunities for women and non-binary people until we are in a position to employ a full-time programme lead.



5.

Appendix: Post seminar feedback



alysbryan • Follow



alysbryan THIS is how to start a revolution!
Ready to listen, with open arms, with heart, through inclusivity.

Today @sylvawoodschool hosted 80+ people to talk about gender in woodworking, specifically how to increase the number of women training in woodworking and finding employment in workshops.

The day created a platform for:

- sharing positive and challenging lived experiences
- the exploration of how tools, machines, and spaces impact accessibility for women in a workshop environment
- empowering Sylva's upcoming programme through our collective input
- leadership level personal experiences on inclusive best practise

What the day delivered was a passionate, and emotional, call to action!

If more women are to train and work with equality in woodworking we must build an inclusive community, one where the collective voice instigates change.

Count me in!

Thank you to everyone involved in putting this amazing day together!

Edited - 1 w



jacksauntie This sounds great!





womenworkingwithwood • [Follow](#)



womenworkingwithwood Hoping to make this an active online community for women working with wood to share by tagging [@womenworkingwithwood](#) and using the hashtag [#womenworkingwithwood](#)

Inspired by a thought provoking woodworking and gender seminar organised by [@sylvafoundation](#) and a woodland to workshop course run by [@woodlandheritage](#)

[#onlinecommunity](#) [#womeninart](#) [#wood](#) [#thisgirlmakes](#)

6 d



sylvawoodschool Brilliant idea [@katiewalkerfurniture](#) So pleased you were inspired by last weeks seminar! It felt very different in the Wood School workshop this Friday!

6 d 2 likes Reply



Mandi Cleyndert · 3rd+
Director at Bill Cleyndert & Company Ltd.
1w · 🌐

+ Follow ...

Thank you to the Sylva Wood School for hosting an amazing event last week - Woodworking and Gender: What's the Story Now? We all know that women are underrepresented in construction & woodworking and according to their recently conducted research, it's about 8.5% in workshop based roles. I was surprised it was that high!

Thank you to [Joseph Bray](#), [Dr Lynn Jones](#), [Gabriel Hemery](#) and all of the team at Sylva Wood for creating a platform for those working in the industry to share their experiences. I was blown away by the insight these young Makers have and feel optimistic about the future for women in our industry.

As employers, it's very easy to say that we'd all love to receive more applications from women, but it's actually down to us to try a bit harder than that! We need to start getting the message across in schools. As one of your speakers put so strikingly, 'boys deemed less academic, dyslexic or who couldn't sit still were traditionally directed into the trades and woodwork. But what happens to the fidgety girls'?

Send them our way please!





Grown in Britain

Yesterday at 11:25 · 🌐



During Grown in Britain week the Sylva Foundation hosted a seminar at their centre exploring gender diversity in furniture making.

Led by Dr Lynn Jones and Joseph Bray, attendees were encouraged to share their experiences of gender diversity in the industry through a series of activities and workshops.

There was some insightful discussion from the panel made up of Alice Blogg (Arttus interiors), Camilla McLean (Matthew Cox) and Kay Chattun (Lacaze London), and we felt privileged to hear the stories by speakers Beth Meehan (Christopher Bell, Oxon), Hannah Girvan (Woodlab, Devon), Katy Thompson (Matthew Cox, Lincs) and Rachel Cox (formerly at Waywood, Oxon).

It was a truly inspirational and thought provoking day, thank you to everyone involved.

[#NewGrowth](#) [#FurnitureMaking](#) [#Diversity](#) [#GiBWeek2023](#)



Like



Comment



Share

We would like to thank

The speakers, panel members and summariser; Alice Blogg, Alys Bryan, Kay Chattun, Rachel Cox, Hannah Girvan, Camilla McLean, Beth Meehan and Katy Thompson.

Our steering group for generously volunteering their time and expertise; Lynn Jones, Pheobe Oldfield and Rae Sellen.

The whole Sylva Foundation team for ensuring the seminar ran smoothly.

Tom Barnes at Vastern Timber who generously supported the seminar through their 1% Woodland Tax scheme.

Camilla McLean (Matthew Cox), Bruce Hodgson (Artichoke) and Nina Varnham (Fryth) for their donations.