



ELFI Prospectus

WELCOME



I am proud to welcome you to the East London Furniture Institute (ELFI).

Established as a centre of excellence in furniture making and upholstery education, ELFI builds on the values of LDE UTC - combining technical excellence with a clear focus on employability and progression.

With expert tutors, industry-standard facilities, and a curriculum shaped by employers, ELFI supports learners to gain the skills, confidence, and experience needed for further study, employment, or starting their own business.

I look forward to welcoming you into our growing community of learners and makers.

Geoffrey Fowler, CEO & Principal

CONTENTS



- 06. Introduction
- 08. Programme Pathways at ELFI
- 10. T-Levels
- 12. T-Level Craft & Design (Furniture)
- 16. AMUSF Diploma in Upholstery
- 22. Leisure & Specialist Short Courses
- 28. Meet the Team Leaders
- 30. Rachael South, Subject Lead: Upholstery
- 32. Derek Jones, Subject Lead: Furniture
- 34. Industry Engagement
- 38. Industry Collaboration
- 44. Sponsors, Awards & Bursaries
- 46. Events & Community
- 52. Our Facilities
- 56. Applications
- 58. Our Location
- 60. Expanding Our Vision



Located in the creative heart of East London, ELFI draws upon over a century of educational tradition and craftsmanship.

Initially established in 1893 by the The Vestry of St. Leonard's Shoreditch as trade classes, our work helped form the London College of Furniture and now continues at ELFI in a new, future-facing form.

We combine a rich heritage of modern practice, sustainability, and technological innovation to deliver high-quality education in Furniture Making and Upholstery. Our programmes prepare learners with the knowledge, skills, and behaviours to thrive in a fast-evolving, design-led industry.

PROGRAMME PATHWAYS



Programme Pathways at ELFI

ELFI offers three routes into the furniture and upholstery industries:

T-Level: Craft & Design (Furniture)

A two-year course for 16–19-year-olds, combining technical training with real-world industry experience. You can read more about this course on **page 12**.

AMUSF Diploma in Upholstery

A structured, hands-on qualification in traditional and modern upholstery, suited to aspiring professionals. You can read more about this course on **page 16**.

Leisure & Specialist Short Courses

Flexible, practical courses for all levels, focused on skill-building and creative exploration. You can read more about this course on **page 22**.



T-LEVELS:

T-Levels are a new, high-quality technical qualification for learners aged 16–19, designed to align education with industry needs. These two-year programmes combine classroom-based learning in our industry-standard workshops with extended on-the-job experience, enabling students to develop both practical skills and theoretical understanding.

Developed in collaboration with employers and professional bodies, T-Levels are tailored to meet the demands of the upholstery and furniture sectors, providing a direct pathway into skilled employment, apprenticeships, or further study.

T-LEVEL: Craft & Design (Furniture)

The T-Level in Craft & Design – Furniture equips learners with the technical skills and business insight needed to thrive in the furniture and design industries.

The course combines practical training with extended industry placements, offering hands-on experience in professional workshops and real-world settings.

Learners gain valuable insight into production processes, client engagement, and commercial practice.

The curriculum is designed to develop:

- **Knowledge:** Design history, sustainable practices, ergonomics, materials, and emerging technologies
- **Skills:** Advanced joinery, furniture construction, CAD/CAM, CNC operations, and finishing techniques
- **Behaviours:** Creativity, precision, professionalism, problem-solving, and entrepreneurial mindset

Designed with employers, this T-Level provides a direct route to employment, further study, or self-employment in the creative industries.



“The T-Level course provided a structured pathway into the furniture industry.

The placement gave me first-hand insight into production environments and taught me to think commercially as well as creatively.”

Ala'A Khamouc, T Level Graduate

AMUSF DIPLOMA IN UPHOLSTERY



AMUSF DIPLOMA IN UPHOLSTERY:

The Association of Master Upholsterers and Soft Furnishers (AMUSF), founded in 1947, has long championed excellence and high standards in the upholstery and soft furnishings industry.

Its commitment to education ensures the sector remains resilient, skilled, and forward-facing.

The AMUSF Diploma is a three-stage, industry-recognised qualification that offers structured training in both traditional and modern upholstery techniques.

Developed in collaboration with practitioners, it balances core skills with opportunities for creative exploration through project-based learning.

Our professional-standard workshops provide learners with full access to specialist tools, materials, and expert guidance.

The course develops:

- **Knowledge:** Upholstery history and heritage, materials science, contemporary practices, health and safety, and project planning
- **Skills:** Frame preparation, hand and machine stitching, traditional stuffing, modern upholstery methods, fabric selection, and finishing techniques
- **Behaviours:** Precision, craftsmanship, sustainability, time management, and reflective practice

Ideal for both new and experienced upholsterers, the AMUSF Diploma offers a solid pathway into professional practice, restoration, or independent enterprise.



“I recently completed my AMUSF Upholstery diploma, and the skills I gained provided me with fundamental knowledge of the craft, which I have been able to expand and refine in my job role.

I also gained significant insight into how various approaches can be taken through the stories shared by the friendly teaching staff, many of whom draw from their own experiences in the field.”

Maria Lorence

LEISURE & SPECIALIST SHORT COURSES



LEISURE & SPECIALIST SHORT COURSES:

Our Leisure and Specialist Short Courses are designed for individuals at all levels, whether beginning their journey in furniture making or upholstery, returning to the craft, or seeking to expand specific skills in a focused and supportive environment.

Delivered in structured blocks to accommodate a range of commitments, our Leisure and Specialist Short Courses offer a flexible entry point into high-quality craft education.

Learners can choose to work on guided projects or pursue personal design ambitions, all within a collaborative, hands-on setting.

Participants benefit from:

- Access to industry-standard tools, machinery, and materials in our professional workshops
- Expert instruction from tutors with extensive sector experience

- A chance to develop technical competencies and creative confidence
- A community of like-minded individuals focused on growth and craft excellence

Course content includes joinery, upholstery techniques, fabric application, finishing, design drawing, and sustainable materials.

Whether you're exploring a new interest or enhancing your existing practice, our short courses foster the knowledge, practical skills, and behaviours that underpin creative confidence and lifelong learning.



“I had a fantastic experience on this Upholstery course! The tutors were incredibly knowledgeable, offering expert guidance while keeping the learning process fun and engaging.

The structure of the course was both enjoyable and rewarding. Not only did I gain a deeper understanding and love of the craft, but the course also gave me the discipline and confidence to grow my business.

I came away feeling truly inspired. I highly recommend this for anyone looking to develop their skills in a supportive environment.”

Hayley Poulter, Fox and Furb

MEET THE TEAM LEADERS




At the East London Furniture Institute, teaching is led by a team of highly experienced, industry-engaged educators with deep expertise in furniture making and upholstery.

All tutors are formally trained and bring real-world experience from running workshops, consulting in design studios, or working with national employers. Their insights ensure that learning is current, practical, and aligned with industry standards.

Tutors offer personalised guidance, mentor learners through projects, and model the professional behaviours expected in the workplace. Their commitment to excellence and inclusive, hands-on education is central to ELFI's reputation as a leading provider of craft and technical training.

RACHAEL SOUTH

A portrait of Rachael South, a woman with short brown hair, smiling and wearing a dark blue button-down shirt. She is standing with her arms crossed against a light blue background.


“I am proud to lead a team that nurtures creativity, celebrates heritage techniques, and equips learners to shape the future of this vibrant craft.”

Rachael South

Rachael South, Subject Lead: Upholstery

Rachael is a highly regarded figure in the upholstery and textile industries, with over 25 years of experience across bespoke production, design, and education. At ELFI, she leads the Upholstery provision with a strong emphasis on material understanding, traditional craftsmanship, and sustainable approaches.

Rachael’s vision is rooted in accessibility and excellence, ensuring that learners of all backgrounds can gain the skills, knowledge, and confidence to thrive in the creative industries. Her leadership inspires a culture of rigour, creativity, and collaboration across all upholstery courses.

A portrait of Derek Jones, a man with short grey hair and glasses, smiling and looking down at a wooden surface he is holding. He is wearing a dark jacket. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a workshop or classroom setting.

“Furniture making is about more than just tools and materials, it is about thinking critically and making purposefully. At ELFI, we prepare learners not only to craft beautiful pieces but to lead and innovate in a rapidly evolving industry.”

Derek Jones

Derek Jones – Subject Lead: Furniture

Derek is a master furniture maker and respected design educator. His career has spanned craft practice, industry consultancy, and curriculum development. He leads ELFI’s T-Level in Craft & Design, Furniture.

His teaching centres on sustainability, precision, and innovation, fostering the knowledge, technical skills, and entrepreneurial behaviours needed for success in the modern furniture industry. Derek is deeply committed to mentoring young designers and makers as they navigate their creative and professional journeys.

INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT



At ELFI, industry engagement is embedded at every stage of our learners' journey. We believe that the most impactful education is rooted in real-world application and that meaningful collaboration with the sector is essential for developing confident, capable, and creative professionals.

This deep industry collaboration gives ELFI learners a competitive edge. They graduate with authentic workplace experience, a professional portfolio, and the confidence to operate effectively within the creative industries. It also opens direct routes to employment, apprenticeships, and further study, ensuring their progression is both supported and inspired by the very sectors they aim to join.

Our programmes are co-developed with leading employers to ensure content remains relevant and future-facing. Learners benefit from a rich array of industry-integrated learning experiences, including:

- **Extended work placements, providing the opportunities for students to apply technical skills in live production and design contexts**
- **Employer-led projects (ELP), in which learners respond to real commercial briefs with support and feedback from practising professionals**
- **Employer Engagement (EE) Master-classes led by industry experts offering insight into emerging materials, production methods, sustainability, and design innovation**

- **Competitions and public exhibitions, allowing students to present their work to industry panels and potential employers**
- **Mentoring and career coaching, linking students with professionals for guidance on pathways into employment or entrepreneurship**

These interactions ensure students constantly build the knowledge, practical expertise, and behaviours required by employers, such as collaboration, critical thinking, time management, and resilience.

INDUSTRY COLLABORATION



ELFI is proud to partner with a range of respected organisations including:

- **The Worshipful Company of Upholders**
Offering awards, bursaries, and industry insight
- **The Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers**
Supporting people's welfare, educating for the future and championing excellence
- **John Lewis** (Furniture & Upholstery Dept)
Supporting curriculum development and commercial awareness
- **Hille Furniture Ltd**
Contributing design expertise
- **Martins Upholstery Supplies**
Enhancing learners' access to industry-standard materials and tools

ELFI is pleased to collaborate with the Furniture Makers and the Upholders' livery companies. Their support offers our students exceptional opportunities for mentorship, awards, and industry engagement, empowering them to become future leaders in furniture and upholstery.



The Furniture Makers' Company **the furnishing industry's charity**

Founded as a guild in 1552 and granted livery status in 1663, the Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers serves as the City of London livery company and charity for the furnishing industry.

The Company is dedicated to supporting and promoting excellence in design and production within the UK furniture industry.

The Furniture Makers' Company offers a range of educational initiatives, including awards and bursaries, aimed at fostering the next generation of furniture designers and makers.

Their commitment to education and excellence aligns seamlessly with ELFI's mission to cultivate skilled professionals who are prepared to contribute innovatively to the industry.



The Worshipful Company of Upholders:

Established on 1 March 1360 and incorporated by Royal Charter in 1626, the Worshipful Company of Upholders is among the oldest livery companies in London. Historically, 'upholster' referred to an upholsterer, encompassing professionals engaged in the manufacture and sale of upholstered goods, as well as cabinet making, soft furnishings, and related trades.

The Upholders have been supporting study programmes for over 35 years, demonstrating a long-term commitment to nurturing talent in upholstery and related disciplines.

Annually, they confer four prestigious awards to our students, recognising outstanding craftsmanship and dedication. Additionally, representatives from the Upholders visit our workshops biannually to engage with students and review their progress, providing expert feedback that bridges the gap between education and industry standards.

Students can also apply for specialist bursaries the Upholders offer, further supporting their educational journey.

SPONSORS, AWARDS & BURSARIES



ELFI learners are regularly recognised through prestigious industry awards.

These include:

- **Worshipful Company of Upholders**
4 annual student awards
- **The Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers**
4 awards
- **John Lewis** (Furniture & Upholstery Dept)
Award for Innovation in Furniture
- **Hille Furniture Ltd**
Modern Upholstery Award
- **Specialist support from City Livery Companies**

These awards reward excellence in craft, innovation, and professionalism.



“The London IWF changed my practice. The access to master makers and advanced tools made me rethink my approach to design and fabrication.”

Alexis Alexandrou

At ELFI, we recognise that the development of outstanding makers depends not only on technical mastery but also on strong communication, collaboration, and professional engagement.

These attributes are vital in today’s design-led and people-centred industries, in which success is shaped by the ability to share ideas, work in teams, adapt to new challenges, and build networks within the creative community.

Our events strategy creates meaningful opportunities for learners to connect, communicate, and collaborate with leading figures in the furniture, upholstery, and woodworking sectors.

The London International Woodworking Festival (London IWF) is a cornerstone of this approach.

Held annually at LDE UTC, the London IWF event celebrates craftsmanship, innovation, and education.

This week-long festival unites professionals, educators, and aspiring makers from across the globe through:

- Master-classes in joinery, upholstery, finishing, and tool restoration
- Lectures exploring sustainability, design innovation, and industry futures
- Hands-on workshops in CAD/CAM, CNC technology, and traditional woodworking
- Networking and exhibitions that showcase creativity and facilitate peer-to-peer learning

Participation in the festival encourages learners to communicate effectively, present their ideas, receive critical feedback, and gain insight into professional working practices, all of which build confidence and readiness for industry engagement.



“The short courses at the London IWF provided hands-on learning from top craftsmen in the industry.

Chris Schwarz’s chair-making course deepened my understanding of traditional craft, while Derek Jones’ Cricket Table workshop sharpened my joinery skills.

Megan Fitzpatrick’s Dutch tool-chest build improved my workshop organisation, and Mark Harrell’s session gave me the confidence to maintain saws to a professional standard.

Ian Parker’s Drawing for Furniture Makers transformed how I communicate design ideas.

The access to precision tools and expert tuition in LDE’s facilities made this a truly outstanding learning experience.”

Jamie Taylor, London IWF Participant

OUR FACILITIES



Building design: scottbrownrigg.com

The East London Furniture Institute (ELFI) is housed in a brand-new, purpose-built facility designed to deliver world-class technical education in furniture making and upholstery.

Every space has been co-designed with employers to meet real-world industry needs, ensuring that learners gain not only the technical skills but also the workplace behaviours required to succeed in the creative and manufacturing sectors.

This major development, **backed by an £8.4 million investment**, includes new facilities that will significantly expand the technical skill opportunities available to learners in Newham and the wider region, mirroring professional studios and preparing learners for direct entry into the workplace.

The state of the art environment features:

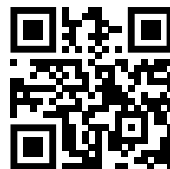
- Advanced woodworking and upholstery workshops
- CNC routers, lathes, band-saws and digital fabrication technology
- Dedicated CAD suites and design studios
- Specialist upholstery benches and material handling systems
- A comprehensive materials and sustainability resource hub

APPLICATIONS



APPLICATIONS:

If you are passionate about what you have discovered while reading this prospectus and would like to explore joining any of the three pathways we offer, please visit our website to learn more about the admissions process:



[**elfi.uk**](https://elfi.uk)

If you have any questions, please email us at:
[**admissions@elfi.uk**](mailto:admissions@elfi.uk)

VEHICLE ACCESS

PEDESTRIAN ACCESS



Buses: 366, 376, 474, 678

A406
A13

ROYAL DOCKS RD



ROYAL ALBERT WAY A1020

A1020

ROYAL ALBERT WAY A1020

A1020

CYPRUS

AVA Building

Knowledge Dock

West Building

East Building

Sports Dock



Library

Royal Dock



University of
East London



London City Airport



EXPANDING OUR VISION:

The East London Furniture Institute (ELFI) is a strategic brand extension of the London Design & Engineering UTC (LDE UTC).

This is an institution widely recognised for its distinctive ethos, shaped by innovative technical education and strong partnerships with industry.

LDE UTC is consistently oversubscribed, with hundreds of learners turned away annually due to high demand.

This reflects the success of a model in which academic rigour is embedded within real-world relevance and where employer engagement is central to curriculum delivery.

To respond to demand and extend the reach of its educational impact, LDE UTC has established a brand extension, the **Technical Education Skills Trust (TEST)**.

TEST exists to scale and strengthen the integration of technical education with employer-led practice, creating new opportunities for young people to gain the skills, knowledge, and behaviours required in an evolving labour market.

To drive this mission forward,
TEST is developing a suite of
pioneering initiatives:



The London Design & Engineering University Technical College for 13–16-year-olds.



University Technical 6th Form Specialising in Technical and A Level STEM Qualifications.



Specialist Engineering College for 16+. Delivering apprenticeships and independent training.

You can find out about
each of these initiatives
by visiting: testrust.uk



Focused on professional furniture making and upholstery education.



Specialist Aviation training provider.



Bridging the gap between Industry and Education.



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