



## **Small creative businesses thrive in the North East, contributing £87m to the UK economy**

- There are over 3,200 small creative businesses in the North East, employing 4,600 people in the region and contributing £87m gross value added
- Female labour force participation increased 3.6% over the last 10 years, making the North East the UK's second highest region of growth
- Nine out of ten of the 109 businesses working with notonthehighstreet.com in the North East are female-owned

A new report by notonthehighstreet.com and Oxford Economics has shown that the changing world of work is seeing more people than ever before turn away from traditional '9 to 5' roles in favour of more flexible and independent ways of working.

This 'creative attitude', which has emerged in the last ten years, is seeing more and more people find their own way to make work 'work' for them. They are seeking choice and freedom, and thousands are building successful businesses and setting their own work/life agendas as a result. With a record number of two-parent working households, which now stands at 3.6 million, people want flexibility.

As a result, there has been a 27% increase nationwide in self-employment over the last ten years, bringing current numbers to 4.8 million. The 50% increase in self-employed women is particularly notable, now standing at 1.5m.

The North East is a particularly strong region for growth as female labour force participation increased 3.6% over the decade, making it the UK's second highest region of growth.

This movement is fuelling entrepreneurship in the North East, where there are now over 3,200 small creative businesses employing 4,600 people and contributing £87m in gross value added (GVA) to the UK economy.

Today there are 134,000 small creative businesses in the UK, employing 192,000 people and contributing £3.6 billion in GVA to the UK economy. One in 40 UK businesses is a small creative business.

The findings of the report reveal that two thirds of creative entrepreneurs are benefitting from greater flexibility and freedom, with nearly half citing this as the main motivation for starting their own business. 95% of those surveyed feel a greater sense of achievement and 90% enjoy life more and feel happier as a result of starting their own business.

**A ticket back into the world of work for mums**



The shift to a different way of working is particularly empowering women entrepreneurs and parents with children living at home. In fact, for one in ten of the notonthehighstreet.com Partners surveyed, starting their own business was their ticket back into the world of work after a period of unpaid leave to care for young children. And this movement is happening nationwide with small creative businesses driving prosperity and economic growth in every single region of the UK.

These new ways of working are being driven by a number of macroeconomic changes:

- an increasingly connected and online world where physical location is no longer a barrier to the reach and success of a business
- advances in technology enabling more of life's functions to be carried out digitally, at any time and in any location (e.g. shopping on the move and outside '9 to 5' hours)
- post-financial crisis environment forcing people to re-evaluate their careers and working lives
- the increasing number of two-parent, or carer, working families looking for ways to juggle work and life, and the reluctance of many workplaces to adapt to this change
- the refusal by many to fit their increasingly diverse lives around traditional work structures which, because of the above changes, are no longer deemed fit for purpose

**Simon Belsham, CEO of notonthehighstreet.com**, said: *"In the last ten years, thousands of small creative businesses have emerged all over the UK, creating jobs, driving wealth creation and contributing significantly to the economy. In the North East, female ownership of NOTHS Partner businesses is at 91%, facilitating flexible working patterns and opportunities for those who may have experienced exclusion from the wider workforce. These businesses are highlighting the huge change underway in the UK workforce more broadly; a transformation that is seeing more women in work and more people turning to self-employment and flexible working as they shun the traditional 9 to 5 model.*

*"Our hyper-connected world and advances in technology are allowing more people to find greater autonomy over working lives and fulfilment through work. This is a real gift of our time, and our nation of creative entrepreneurs is leading the way, demonstrating what it is possible to achieve both economically and socially, for these businesses and society as a whole. "*

#### **North East of England case study:**

**Gillian Arnold**, a gift jewellery and interior designer brand was founded by Gillian and her husband Tim. Gillian was six months pregnant with her first child and was challenged by Tim: *"I married an artist, when are you going to start doing your own work?"* This led to the founding of the business in a humble garden shed and opening of a market stall at London's Greenwich Market. Gillian Arnold later moved to the North East to further develop the business and be part of the regeneration of Bishop Auckland. Since then, Gillian has grown her staff to a team of nine based at her workshop and opened her own retail boutique, whilst Gillian's own family has grown to three children. *"I'm not going to pretend it's easy being a mother of 3, 4 and 5 year old kids as well as a business owner, it's not. It takes long hours, dedication and a steely nerve. However, being able to provide job opportunities and experience in a region that has fallen behind in arts and culture whilst being able*



*to exert my creative best in my artistry and product design is a worthwhile cause that makes all the effort worthwhile."*

Gillian has been asked to speak at Universities as an expert about the benefits of working with interns and local institutions and truly sees arts, craft and design as a path to self-empowerment and stable employment.

*Further North East of England case studies below.*

## **Other report findings:**

### ***Positive impact of running own creative business***

When notonthehighstreet.com Partners were asked to compare how they feel now relative to how they felt before starting their business:

- 95% now feel a greater sense of achievement
- 90% enjoy life more and feel happier
- 88% feel the industry they contribute to is worthwhile
- 87% feel more fulfilled when they wake up in the morning
- 80% enjoy the responsibilities that come with running a business
- 52% of the Partners surveyed were employed by another business before setting up on their own, and nearly three quarters of those have undergone an entire career change in order to start their own creative business

### ***Empowering women***

Small creative businesses are more likely to be owned by women. 27% in the UK are female-owned compared with the UK average of 21% for female small business ownership. Some 89% of notonthehighstreet.com Partner businesses are female owned. Small creative businesses are retaining women in the workforce and encouraging other women back into it; 10% of the notonthehighstreet.com Partners surveyed were looking after children at home and were not in paid work before they founded their business.

### ***Empowering parents***

55% of creative entrepreneurs working with notonthehighstreet.com have children living at home, compared with 41% of working households nationally. When considering the rise in the number of two-parent working families - up 14% in the decade to 2016 - and the need to work flexibly around childcare, it is not surprising that this industry is attractive to, and supportive of, working parents, particularly as we know that two thirds of notonthehighstreet.com Partners work from home, meaning no time or cost is spent commuting. Nine out of ten Partners with children at home ranked freedom and flexibility in the top benefits of starting their own business.

### ***Employment on the rise***



Total UK employment has risen 9% from 29.1m ten years ago to 31.7m today. UK employment for women has risen by 1.4m to 15m over the last decade.

### ***Self-employment on the rise***

4.8m people were registered self-employed in 2016, compared with 3.7m ten years ago; an increase of 27%. The increase in self-employment amongst women is even greater, growing by 50% over the same period, from 1m to 1.5m. Male self-employment has risen from 2.7m to 3.2m in the last ten years.

### ***Flexible working***

In the ten years to 2016 part-time work has increased from 24.9% to 26.4% of all employment, and full-time work has decreased from 75.1% to 73.6%. The majority of notonthehighstreet.com Partners work full-time but flexibly, fitting working hours around personal life and other commitments.

## **Case studies – North East**

**Nick James**, a Newcastle-based designer and maker of high quality, unique and creative furniture, is another creative entrepreneur who is actively encouraging and supporting other small creative businesses in the North East. In 2005, Nick set up The Mushroom Works Community Interest Company, which provides 48 studio spaces for local designers and artists. Nick said: *“Running your own small business can be lonely and isolating at times so I wanted to find a way to bring together and create a community for local creatives.”* He added: *“Each day, we ring a bell which means the kettle is on; a time for everyone to get together to catch up over a cuppa and share their experiences, challenges and ideas. This kind of collaboration and networking has been hugely helpful for the growth of my business.”*

-Ends-

### **Notes to Editors**

For a full copy of the report, infographic, and national and regional versions of the press release, please go to: [www.notonthehighstreet.com/workthatworks](http://www.notonthehighstreet.com/workthatworks)

### **About notonthehighstreet.com**

[Notonthehighstreet.com](http://Notonthehighstreet.com) is the leading curated modern marketplace connecting the best small creative businesses, with the world. The brand has gained the trust and loyalty of its customers through offering an alternative to the High Street: a curated product selection with unique designs, high-quality craftsmanship and inspiring stories behind the people that make them.

Customers choose to support small creative businesses and therefore contribute to building the great creative talent and community of artisans across the United Kingdom. Shopping



with [Notonthehighstreet.com](http://Notonthehighstreet.com) is an opportunity for customers to be a conscious consumer, bringing human values back into retail and enabling the things they buy to say something about who they are.

Founded in 2006 by Holly Tucker MBE and Sophie Cornish MBE, the brand has experienced exceptional growth with gross sales (TTV) in 2016 reaching £158 million and delivering a compound growth rate of 135% since launch. Under the leadership of newly appointed CEO Simon Belsham, there is renewed energy and focus on building a brand that will captivate customers for decades to come by supporting Partners' growth and innovation.

With a team of over 200 at its headquarters in Silicon Upon Thames, South West London, [Notonthehighstreet.com](http://Notonthehighstreet.com) is Chaired by retail veteran Darren Shapland and backed by media and technology company, Hubert Burda Media and venture capitalists including Index Ventures, Industry Ventures and Eight Roads Ventures.

#### **About Oxford Economics**

Oxford Economics was founded in 1981 as a commercial venture with Oxford University's business college to provide economic forecasting and modelling to UK companies and financial institutions expanding abroad. Since then, they have become one of the world's foremost independent global advisory firms, providing reports, forecasts and analytical tools on 200 countries, 100 industrial sectors and over 3,000 cities.

#### **Available for interview:**

- Simon Belsham, CEO, [notonthehighstreet.com](http://notonthehighstreet.com)
- Andy Logan, Associate Director, Oxford Economics
- Ian Saxon, Senior Economist, Oxford Economics
- Ella D'Amato, Chief Commercial and Partner Officer, [notonthehighstreet.com](http://notonthehighstreet.com)
- Any of the case studies mentioned above. Other case studies also available.

**Photos** of case studies listed also [available here](#).