



Female employment sees significant growth in Northern Ireland, fuelled by rise of creative entrepreneurs

- Female labour force in Northern Ireland increased 11.6% in last decade, bringing female employment to 393,000
- Northern Ireland one of the fastest growing regions for female labour force participation across the UK
- This is, in part, being fuelled by 2,820 small creative businesses in Northern Ireland, contributing an impressive £77m gross value added to the economy

A new report by notonthehighstreet.com and Oxford Economics has shown that Northern Ireland, which has seen female employment rise 11.6% in the last decade, is a hot spot for creative businesses, with 2,820 small creative businesses contributing £77 million to the economy. Nearly a third (27%) of these businesses are run by women.

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

The growing creative sector is emblematic of the changing world of work, which 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 is demonstrated by the 27% increase nationwide in self-employment over the last ten years, bringing current numbers to 4.8m. The 50% increase in self-employed women is particularly notable, now standing at 1.5m. With a record number of two-parent working households, which now stands at 3.6m, people want flexibility.

The report also found 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 sprung up across the UK, creating jobs, driving wealth creation and contributing significantly to the overall UK economy. This is particularly true in Northern Ireland, which is home to nearly 3,000 small creative businesses, contributing to the significant 11.6% rise in labour force participation amongst women there in the last decade.*

These creative businesses are highlighting the huge change underway in the UK workforce; 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."

Northern Ireland case study:

County Down-based entrepreneur Hilary, the founder of **Molly Moo Designs**, which makes hand illustrated gifts and stationery, has always had a creative flair. However, until she found herself out of work following a temporary relocation to the Isle of Wight, she had not imagined that her hobby could become her profession. *"My husband got a job on the Isle of Wight back in 2009. Whilst there, I took the opportunity to throw myself into my passion and hobby of designing and illustrating cards. I decided to try selling my cards online and quickly started getting 3 or 4 orders a day; it soon turned into a little business, giving me some pocket money. But when we returned to Northern Ireland a couple of years later I joined notonthehighstreet.com and this is when things really took off. In a short space of time, my business went from being very small, to providing a steady income. My husband has since joined the business to enable us to cope with the demand. We both now work full-time on the business in our studio at home, but still enjoy the flexibility being your own boss allows, which is particularly important now we have a young family."* Hilary added: *"I never dreamed that my hobby could turn into a successful business, but hard work, determination, and a love for what I do, has paid off."*

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.

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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

About notonthehighstreet.com

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 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 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
- Andy Logan, Associate Director, Oxford Economics



- Ian Saxon, Senior Economist, Oxford Economics
- Ella D'Amato, Chief Commercial and Partner Officer, notonthehighstreet.com
- Any of the case studies mentioned above. Other case studies also available.

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