
CRAFT IN INDUSTRY: Unlocking potential

Craft skills and mindsets are integral to product development in many industries. These cards show how they create value.

We see craft skills applied in such diverse fields as engineering, technology, architecture, fashion and design. 'Fusion' – the combination of creative, technological and enterprise mindsets – is a key driver for success.

Craft skills generate £3.4bn in industries across the UK economy. Without targeted support to assist businesses using those skills to grow, opportunities will be lost for the UK economy.

To unlock the full potential of craft skills in industry, businesses need access to investment towards facilities and equipment, skills support, improved regulation for freelancers, structured opportunities to collaborate, and business mentoring for scaling up and exporting.

The selected case studies showcase how craft skills, products and professionals contribute to other industries. They tell the story of nine businesses, each representing one of the many disciplines within manufacturing, technology and other creative industries where craft mindsets are applied to add economic, cultural and social value.

1	Benchmark	Furniture
2	1882 Ltd	Ceramics
3	Harris Tweed	Textiles
4	Smile Plastics	Materials
5	Unmade	Digital technology
6	Vanessa Cutler x OMAX	Engineering
7	Cod Steaks	Film
8	Phoebe English	Fashion
9	Bentley Motors	Automotive



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- Access to finance
- Investment in skills
- Improved regulation
- Collaboration opportunities
- Business mentoring



Benchmark produces craft-based, high-quality furniture made responsibly at two workshops in the South of England. With over 30 years' experience, it makes and sells its own furniture collection and works with the world's top architects and designers on a range of projects, furnishing commercial and public buildings.

Benchmark employs over 60 people, including some of the most technically advanced furniture makers, who engage in traditional woodworking, veneering, wood turning, metal wrapping and pagination, and digital CNC-ing.

High point

Winning the Queen's Award for Enterprise in Sustainable Development twice, and Best Small Employer award for its apprenticeship scheme.

Challenge

Moving to new premises and exporting to mitigate post Brexit impact.



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Increase in supply of commercial development land and economic confidence and stability.

1882 Ltd combines innovative design and industrial craftsmanship to produce everyday ceramic objects and one-off special pieces. Established in 2011, the company builds on Stoke-on-Trent's heritage craft skills and the five generations of Johnson Brothers, their predecessor firm.

150 industrial craftspeople are engaged in modelling, blocking, casing, making, casting, fettling, sponging, decorating, hand painting, glazing and printing the ceramic collections.

High point

Barnaby Barford's Tower of Babel, a 6m tall installation at the V&A comprising 3000 bone china models, each depicting a real London shop.

Challenge

Staying current, innovative and competitive while expanding their customer base.



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Access to investment in state-of-the-art equipment and kilns.

The Harris Tweed Authority was established by an Act of Parliament to promote the world-famous cloth and protect its authenticity. The cloth is produced by hand by weavers, applying craft skills such as design, dyeing, blending, spinning, and finishing, with every process carried out, by law, in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland.

The Industry supports nearly 200 self-employed weavers, approximately 140 mill workers and administrative staff and circa 40 part-time jobs in allied retail, logistics and craft sectors.

High point

Protecting the industry for nearly 110 years through the trademark registered in 1909, the passing of the Act in 1993 and the resulting creation of the Harris Tweed Authority.

Challenge

Competitors producing and selling imitation cloths faster through advances in synthetic fabrics, mechanisation and e-commerce.



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The survival of the industry depends on building appreciation of the fabric's provenance.

Smile Plastics creates high-end recycled plastics. Based on Colin Williamson and Jane Atfield's concept for the pioneering recycling agency Made of Waste, Smile relaunched in 2015, expanding its classic range of plastic panel products. Smile now offers bespoke recycled materials consultancy as well as custom design and build services in residential premises and commercial facilities.

Understanding the nature of materials is key to maximising potential. With just three employees, the biggest challenge is making enough material to satisfy demand.

High point

Working with top designers and brands such as Selfridges, Liberty, Wellcome Trust, Droog and Paul Smith.

Challenge

Securing investment for new equipment and expanding to meet growing demand.



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Mentoring and business support would help Smile scale up to the next level.

Unmade is a technology and manufacturing platform that works closely with its brand customers to create customisation experiences bespoke to each brand's personality.

The company was established in 2014 by three Royal College of Art graduates and now employs 26 people. Unmade combines knitting with engineering and programming skills and handles all the steps from online order to factory floor.

High point

Launching a bespoke platform that produces visualisations and manufacturing files for knitwear integrating the design, e-commerce and production processes of three leading brands, Opening Ceremony, Farfetch and Johnstons of Elgin.

Challenge

Convincing big brands to change their supply chain.



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Encouraging a more open innovation culture on an executive level among potential clients and partners.

OMAX is a manufacturer of abrasive waterjet cutting equipment founded in 1993 with over 350 employees all over the world.

Vanessa Cutler is a glass artist who employs industrial processes of glass cutting to make pieces for interiors, commissions and exhibitions.

For the last two years, Vanessa has been working with OMAX's engineers to apply technical solutions that demonstrate the capability of waterjet cutting in various fields through uncommon choices of materials and geometries.

High point

Collaborating to create artistic and technical glass pieces that were received with enthusiasm at many international technological conferences.

Challenge

Lack of time and resources towards collaborative opportunities of this kind.



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Financial support and opportunities for artists to collaborate with industry.

Cod Steaks is a multi-disciplinary design and construction company specialising in bespoke 3D solutions for film, TV, PR, advertising, exhibitions, public art, retail and leisure.

With 35 years' experience, passion for dynamic design and quality craftsmanship, its 20+ permanent employees create everything from intricate miniature models to large scale themed interiors.

High point

Sets and props for the popular clay animation comedy series Wallace & Gromit.

Challenge

Contracts rely on teams of craftspeople skilled in carpentry, metalwork, model-making, sculpting, art working and spray. Yet tax regulations make it difficult to attract and retain the 40+ freelance creatives needed each year, compounded by skills shortages of creatives who work with their hands.



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Changes to the law governing freelance contracts and investment in arts and vocational training.

Phoebe English is a luxury women's and menswear label established in 2011. Sold internationally in high-end concept and department stores, the label offers a range of accessible and wearable designs alongside labour-intensive textile pieces.

The studio balances craft and design through attention to finishing and quality of textiles, often employing handmade techniques, including smocking, weaving, knotting, hand stitching, macramé, knitting and other lost, forgotten or little-used techniques.

High point

At the V&A Fashion in Motion 2017 catwalk event, the studio showcased an archive edit as doubles – originals presented on real life models alongside replicated versions on puppets made by puppet maker Judith Hope.

Challenge

Finding time and money to experiment with techniques and materials within fast-paced fashion cycles.



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A more flexible fashion industry, financial support and opportunities for experimentation.

Bentley Motors, the British luxury car manufacturer, combines traditional craft techniques with technological innovation to be distinctive and competitive in an international market. 75% of Bentley's production line staff use craft skills in paintwork, woodwork, leatherwork and needlework, and in more technical skills in engine production.

High point

Bentley continues to develop vehicles with very high levels of craftsmanship. It invests in new technologies that complement the "hands-on" methods used to build vehicles and in skills-based competencies needed for the future.

Challenge

Bentley invests heavily in skills, recruiting the next generation of craft technicians and engineers. Even with a dedicated apprentice training centre, there are constant challenges to ensure its status in the luxury car market is maintained. In addition, international suppliers are increasingly competitive.



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The UK supply chain needs technological investment and training to support its world-leading luxury car manufacturing sector.

