

2020 Report

Rethinking Fashion Design Entrepreneurship: Fostering Sustainable Practices

Centre for Sustainable Fashion, UAL
CEEDR, Middlesex University
Open University





“Micro and small independent fashion businesses have functioned as the ‘research and development’ for the wider fashion industry for many years, while they themselves struggle to survive. The Fostering Sustainable Practices project recognises these enterprises as key drivers for transformation of the fashion system.”

Sandy Black
Principal Investigator, Centre for Sustainable Fashion

ABOUT

UK fashion designers are widely acknowledged as creative influencers on the world stage. Fostering Sustainable Practices (FSP) is investigating the creative practice in design-led fashion micro and small enterprises (MSEs) as a potential driver for change towards a more sustainable future for the fashion industry.

The FSP team are working with 40+ MSEs who provide the project with pioneering visions of sustainable prosperity in business. The team are observing MSE business models; design and business operations; working practices; networks and ecosystems. The findings will be used to develop tools for alternative business support systems, to benefit the MSEs, the support organisations, and the industry.

ABOUT

Led by Centre for Sustainable Fashion (CSF), a research centre at University of the Arts London, London College of Fashion, with project partners from Middlesex University's Centre for Enterprise and Economic Development Research (CEEDR is a key partner in Surrey University's Centre for Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity) and The Open University.

Generously funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

The project is also collaborating with London College of Fashion's fashion incubator Centre for Fashion Enterprise and key industry partners; business support organisations British Fashion Council and Common Objective; manufacturers' organisations UK Fashion & Textile Association, and Textile Centre of Excellence; online fashion platform Not Just A Label. Along with five core MSE partners, Raeburn, UNMADE, Riz Boardshorts, Michelle Lowe Holder and Martine Jarlgaard. These partners make an invaluable contribution to creating and evaluating the research outputs, enhancing validity and ensuring relevance and impact.

Project outputs will include 10-15 case studies, up to 8 academic papers, a project report, a policy briefing note and toolkit. Research outputs will also directly benefit educators developing curricula within HE both nationally and internationally.

PROJECT TIMELINE

30 months, ends 31 March 2021

Deliverables

WORKSTREAM	ACHIEVED	IN PROGRESS
1	4 Literature reviews and a comparison of existing sustainability tools for design.	
2	Project survey, survey data, matrix of MSEs, core study group identified, documented MSE research issues and knowledge of sustainability tools.	
3	Pilot interviews, initial interviews with 44 MSEs, identification of final core group.	Follow on interviews, observations, case studies, summary findings, network visualisation, typology of business models and ways of working.
4		Toolkit development for intermediaries and MSEs, trial of tools, focus groups with intermediaries and MSEs.
5		Final Symposium, academic papers, briefing note, final report and toolkit.

Workstream 1
Literature reviews and analysis

Workstream 2
Survey delivery

Workstream 3
MSE Interviews and observations

Workstream 4
Development and trials of business support for sustainability toolkit

Workstream 5
Iterative project review, synthesis and validation

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

Workstream 1 Literature reviews and analysis

- 4 literature reviews produced, covering the following areas:
 - Design for Sustainability, existing tools, creative design process
 - Networks of expertise, creative design eco-systems
 - Creative labour and operations
 - Innovation and entrepreneurship, business tools for fashion
- A comparison of existing sustainability tools for design

NEXT STEPS

The literature reviews will be reviewed and updated throughout the project, and inform research analysis and academic publications.

IMAGE
Molly Goddard, London Fashion Week AW19



OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

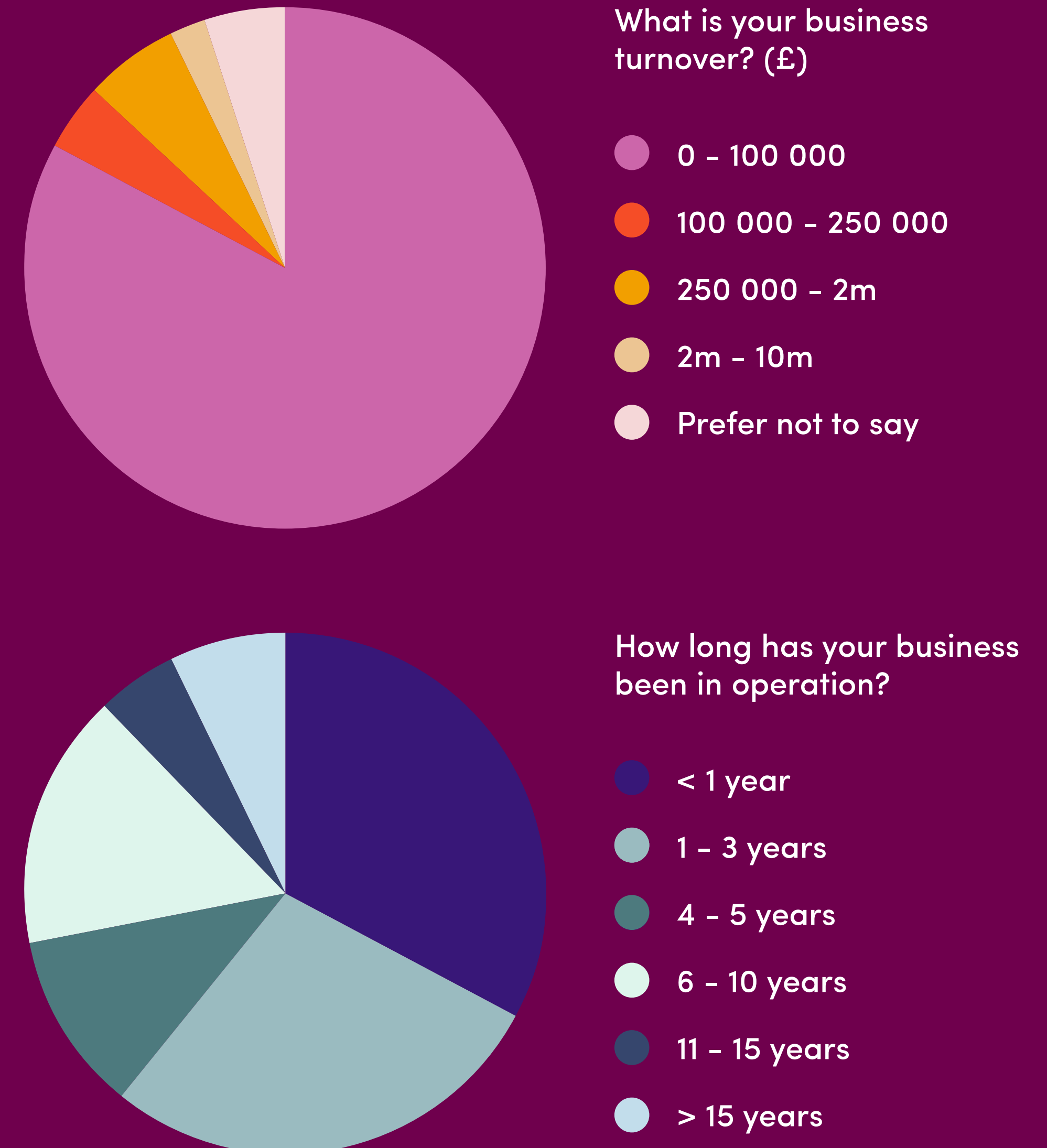
Workstream 2 Survey delivery

AIMS

- To Target 400 MSEs
- That 10-20% of fashion-designer entrepreneurs surveyed would be discontinued businesses
- To ensure coverage of a variety of fashion areas; womenswear, menswear, accessories etc. Across a diverse range of business experience 2-10 years
- To develop matrix of types – specialism, geographic area, length in business, business model etc
- To represent a cross section of approaches to design and sustainability
- To identify core group of MSEs for work stream 3

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Survey disseminated to fashion MSEs, using partner database's and beyond, including through the British Fashion Council, Not Just a Label, UK Fashion and Textiles Association, Centre for Fashion Enterprise, Common Objective, Centre for Sustainable Fashion
- The survey received 457 responses, 276 from fashion MSEs with 199 based in the UK
- Breadth of MSEs covered 0-15 years in business
- 39% of UK responses from outside of London



OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

Workstream 2 Survey delivery

Examples of some of the MSE responses to defining success for their business in the survey:

“To create and sell pieces that are both healthy for the environment and beautiful to wear.”

“To have made an impact on consumer behaviour to buy well and buy less, and to have a part to play in re-establishing the value of making and of clothing, to bring greater understanding of how things are made and to engage with communities, suppliers and students to inspire better ways to do business and to make better product.”

“Ultimate success would be to feel like we (and I) were part of a broader radical change in how fashion is approached by people like our customers. This would include a cultural and economic shift in how fashion is enjoyed.”

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

Workstream 3 Interviews and Observations

AIMS

- To conduct initial interviews with an identified core group of 24 MSEs
- To undertake further interviews and observations, investigating and addressing the projects research questions
- To map MSE networks of support
- To identify typology of business models

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Initial interviews conducted with 44 MSEs
- Findings from initial interviews analysed and a shortlist of 30 MSEs identified for phase 2 interviews
- Initial mapping of MSE support eco-system

IMAGE
Christopher Raeburn, SS19



OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

Workstream 3 Interviews and Observations

Quotes from some of
the MSE interviews:

“I wonder if there’s something about looking at finding ways of measuring potential impact as a way of comparing to potential growth. You know, like growth is generally measured in profit, but if a business looks like it would have a big impact, then it’s almost worth putting the money there.”

“...we like to design things that bring people together rather than separate them.”

“I found the fashion industry hugely inspiring because of this psychological impact that I could have on people, so giving an individual so much confidence or harnessing community power together.”

THE NEXT PHASE

Workstream 3 MSE Interviews and Observations (phase 2)

IN PROGRESS

- Follow on interviews with 30 MSEs
- Studio observations, in-depth analysis and stakeholder interviews with MSEs
- 12-15 case studies
- Analysis

Workstream 4 Development and trials of business support for sustainability resources

AIMS

- To develop alternative business support methods for sustainable prosperity in fashion enterprises, coordinated by CSF in conjunction with CFE and partners

METHODS

- Focus group with MSEs
- Needs analysis workshops with intermediaries
- 3-month action research period to trial and evolve toolkit
- Evolved toolkit trials

IN PROGRESS

- Needs analysis workshops with intermediaries – British Fashion Council, Common Objective, UKFT, Centre for Fashion Enterprise, The Trampery, Cockpit Arts, Fashion District
- Development and trial of toolkit/resources
- Network mapping

Workstream 5 Iterative project review, synthesis and validation

DELIVERABLES

- 10-15 case studies
- Academic papers
- A final report
- A toolkit for fashion support organisations and designers
- A symposium

IMPACT AND ENGAGEMENT TO DATE

Sept 2019

Design History Society Annual Conference 2019: The Cost of Design
'Beyond Money: The Meta-Economics of Fashion', paper presentation by Agnes Rocamora.

Oct 2019

'Better Lives: Fostering Sustainable Practices in Small Fashion Business', a presentation and panel discussion hosted by the project team and CSF. Guests included project partners from Raeburn, Riz Boardshorts, Sabinna, Martine Jarlgaard, Patternity and Cute Circuit.

Dec 2019

Westminster Business Forum.
Keynote presentation by Dilys Williams, on the work of the Fostering Sustainable Practices Project.

March 2020

'Dress in Protest', a half-day event led by project partners CUSP, fostered knowledge exchange across the Atlantic between Brazil and UK by exploring how sustainable fashion can become a force for good. Guest speakers included Patrick Elf, Middlesex University and FSP Post Doc Researcher.

“Having worked with micro and small businesses for over ten years in our work at CSF, we have seen visions, practices and processes undertaken by fashion designer entrepreneurs that might, if recognised, create a zeitgeist in practice and values based on their alternative approaches to fashion design and business.

Such businesses offer the potential to shift the fashion system from one that contributes to our current ecological and social crisis to one that contributes to prosperity in ecological, social, cultural and economic terms.”

Dilys Williams
Director of Centre for Sustainable Fashion

“General curiosity as well as a curiosity to do things differently are key to running a small sustainable fashion business – and a mindset that requires being fearless.”

Patrick Elf
Middlesex University, CEEDR

“The versatility of their skill-set demonstrates a constant determination to learn whatever skill is required for their business to be a success.”

Philippa Crommentuijn-Marsh
Open University

IMAGE
Halpern, London Fashion Week AW19



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