

## CRAFT ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE IMAGINED PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

**Supervisors:** [Professor Emma Bell](#), Department for People and Organisations and [Professor Richard Blundel](#), Department for Public Leadership and Social Enterprise, The Open University Business School

### Project description:

In recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in craft entrepreneurship, from urban micro-breweries<sup>i</sup> to bespoke clothing making practices enabled by technology<sup>ii</sup>. This revival has been enabled by open access makerspaces, craft districts and specialist online intermediaries that have reduced barriers to entry for craft entrepreneurs. Craft has become a powerful social imaginary that enables people to consider alternatives to the dominant, modernist imaginaries of industrial production and consumption. The craft imaginary relies on historical narratives and local traditions which are used to construct what are often seen as more ‘authentic’, often hand-crafted products and services (Bell *et al.* 2021; Bell *et al.* 2019). It also draws attention to materially embedded, emplaced practices of making and consuming things and their associated affects (Bell and Vachhani 2020).

This studentship provides an opportunity to investigate the practice of craft entrepreneurship in the UK in response to the consequences of Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing challenges posed by the climate emergency. In addition to investigating craft-based organisations and practitioners in the UK nations, regions and/or sectors, there is potential for international comparative analysis involving the study of craft enterprise in other countries, such as Italy or Ireland.

We particularly encourage research proposals that examine how the application of craft-related values and ways of being could help to inform a transition towards more environmentally and socially-benign models of growth (Clarke *et al.* 2014). We also encourage applicants to consider how researcher-practitioner collaborations might be used to explore craft entrepreneurship (Koomen and Blundel 2017, Smith and Blundel 2018). Novel theoretical contributions and interdisciplinary approaches are desirable, so long as there is a clear connection to organisation studies, small business and/or entrepreneurship research.

We envisage a broadly qualitative approach being adopted in the proposed study. Applicants should be able to demonstrate prior experience in applying appropriate methods in empirical studies. Fieldwork may involve a combination of interviews, ethnography, historical and documentary analysis, multi-modal methodologies or visual analysis (Bell and Davison, 2013).

The successful applicant will have opportunities to work with other research students and academics in relevant research groups in the faculty including the [Social and Sustainable Enterprise](#) (SSE) research cluster and [Research into Employment, Empowerment and Futures](#) (REEF) Centre and well as cross-disciplinary Open university groups such as on Innovation, Knowledge and Development [www.open.ac.uk/ikd](http://www.open.ac.uk/ikd)

## About the Supervisors:

**Professor Emma Bell** is Professor of Organisation Studies at the Open University. Her research explores culture, belief and materiality in organizations using qualitative methods of inquiry. She has done recently done research in ceramics, cycle making and shoe making companies and is currently engaged in a study of craftivism. Emma's research has been published in *Organization Studies*, *Human Relations*, *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, *Organization, Management Learning* and *British Journal of Management* and she is the co-author of the leading textbook, *Business Research Methods* (OUP, 2018).

**Professor Richard Blundel** is Professor of Enterprise and Organisation at The Open University. He has examined the nature and implications of growth and innovation in craft-based firms, including cheesemakers, small boat builders, furniture designer-makers and brass musical instrument manufacturers, and has a particular interest in the relationship between craft and environmental sustainability. Richard's work has been published in journals such as *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, *Enterprise & Society*, *Business & Society*, *The Journal of Small Business Management*, *Industry & Innovation* and *Making Futures*. He has contributed two short essays, on artisan production and industrialisation, to *The Oxford Companion to Cheese* (Oxford University Press, 2016), and is co-author of, *Exploring Entrepreneurship* (SAGE, 2021).

## References:

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<sup>i</sup> See for example: <https://www.economist.com/1843/2018/02/08/crafting-a-life>

<sup>ii</sup> See for example: <https://www.inc.com/jessica-stillman/21-future-jobs-robots-are-actually-creating.html>  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/16/t-magazine/london-fashion-designer-embroidery-technology-alice-archer.html>