

Christmas boost for Midlands businesses

Exports of greeting cards from the UK rose by 1.5% last year to a total value of nearly £63 million. Key destinations include the US, where sales grew by 87.8% (£3.9 million) between 2015 and 2018, while exports to Australia doubled in the same period.

One Midlands firm tapping into this global demand is Stamford based Old English Company, who were aptly named Small Business of the Year at the 2019 Mercury Business Awards. The stationery and giftware company was initially established in 2012, and has since become a successful global e-commerce brand.

For Old English Company, exports to the US alone have increased by nearly 100% since 2016. The company has also recently signed a three-year contract with American card giant Papyrus, which will see them design an array of greeting cards for the retailer. As the largest consumer market on the globe, the US presents huge opportunities for Midlands businesses. In 2018, goods exports from the West Midlands to the US alone totalled £6.6 million.

With over 200 stores across Australia, Germany, Sweden, France, China and the UAE, Old English Company also has an impressive presence here in the UK, being stocked in over 1,000 stores nationwide.

Ben Treanor, Director and Founder at Old English Company, said:

Christmas is by far our busiest time of year and now we can benefit from international seasonal demand due to support from DIT, who have enabled our business to export and grow into new markets, such as the United States, Europe and Asia.

We pride ourselves on being a stylish British brand with strong British roots and as we continue to expand in the United States and across Europe, we are eyeing up the potential opportunity to move our business into Scandinavia with the help of DIT.

Also benefitting from the growing demand for stationery and greeting cards is Loughborough based Ohh Deer. The stationery company works with more than 100 new and upcoming illustrators to create quirky, arty and funny illustrated products.

Ohh Deer exports to 51 countries, with overseas sales accounting for 37% of the company's annual turnover.

To make the most of the global demand for its products, Ohh Deer turned to

DIT for advice on navigating customs regulations and paperwork requirements in countries it was exporting to for the first time.

DIT has supported Ohh Deer from the beginning, providing one-to-one advice from local trade advisors, specialist international embassy consultations, as well as specific trade show grants at international trade shows, which have enabled Ohh Deer to expand their reach.

Laura Philbin, Sales Manager at Ohh Deer, said:

In the lead up to Christmas we see a big increase in sales particularly from the end of November onwards, as Black Friday becomes more of a key trading period in the UK.

We have also seen an increase in international customers over this period. Last Christmas we saw 15% of our overall sales attributed to exports with the US, Germany and Scandinavia being our biggest export markets.

Ian Harrison, DIT's Director of Exports in The Midlands, said:

It is great to see innovative brands like Old English Company and Ohh Deer capitalising on seasonal trade overseas.

Success stories such as these illustrate just how profitable exporting globally can be with overseas consumers increasingly looking for British products and premium quality brands.

DIT has a network of expert trade advisers on the ground in the Midlands to support businesses as they look to start or build their exports.

Border Force crackdown on Christmas counterfeits

Counterfeit designer label scarves, sportswear and electrical equipment are among thousands of counterfeit items seized by Border Force in the run up to Christmas.

The seizures highlight Border Force's robust work to prevent attempts by organised crime gang's to exploit the UK's border for profit.

Since the start of November, items detained by Border Force have included:

- More than 1300 counterfeit Chanel, Burberry and Gucci scarves worth an estimated £904,775, seized at London Gateway Port
- Approximately 850 counterfeit Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent, Versace, Nike, Champion and Converse bags and trainers with an estimated value of more than £842,000 seized at Milton Keynes Inland Pre-Clearance Centre
- Around 3400 items of counterfeit Gucci, Versace, and Chanel bedding, together with items of counterfeit Royal Crown Derby Collection tableware with an estimated total value of £299,400 and seized at Milton Keynes Inland Pre-Clearance Centre
- Over 5200 counterfeit Dr Dre Beats headphones and Apple earphones estimated to be worth over £778,000 seized at Milton Keynes Inland Pre-Clearance Centre
- Approximately 130 counterfeit North Face jackets, Levi T-shirts and Lyle & Scott jumpers estimated to be worth more than £6,000 seized at London Gateway Port
- More than 200 counterfeit Estee Lauder skincare sets seized at Heathrow Cargo

All the seized counterfeit goods originated in China.

Security Minister Brandon Lewis said:

This Government is committed to cracking down on criminals and the trade in counterfeit goods.

People who deliberately purchase counterfeit goods are funding and supporting serious and organised criminals and their illegal activity.

These seizures show how effective Border Force officers are in cracking down on criminality across our ports, airports and mail hubs to keep fake, counterfeit goods out of the country. Their critical work protects legitimate business and ensures that smugglers do not profit.

Once counterfeit items are detained, Border Force's specialist international trade teams work with the owners of big brands to establish whether goods are genuine. If they are fake the goods are destroyed, and the rights holders must decide whether to privately prosecute the importers.

Consumers who believe they have purchased counterfeit goods are advised to contact Action Fraud, their local Trading Standards office or visit the Citizens Advice website.

Anyone with information about activity they suspect may be linked to smuggling should call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 or go to <https://www.gov.uk/report-smuggling>

Christmas comes early for first £5k winner of new Treasury-backed savings account

The first winner of a new-Treasury backed savings account has been announced today (Sunday 22 December), winning a £5,000 cash prize just in time for Christmas.

The lucky saver, a postal worker from London, opened one of the new PrizeSaver accounts with participating credit union Commsave.

As well as the top prize winner, a further 20 savers have received runner-up prizes of £20 each, deposited directly into their savings accounts.

The prize draw is part of a new collaboration between the Treasury and 15 credit unions across Britain to pilot a prize-linked savings account. Savers who put away as little as £1 with participating credit unions will have a chance to win.

Since its launch in October, nearly 3,500 PrizeSaver accounts have been opened, giving each saver the chance to win up to £5,000 every month.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury, John Glen, said:

Saving for the future is something we all try to do, but we know it can sometimes be challenging. That's why we teamed up with credit unions across the country to launch this new account, giving savers the chance to win up to £5,000 every month.

I've no doubt our first winner is working tirelessly to make sure we get our cards and parcels in time for the holiday season, and hopefully this win will help them to have an extra happy Christmas

this year!

The CEO of Commsave, Amanda Ivey, said:

We are absolutely delighted that a Commsave member was the winner of the very first headline prize in the PrizeSaver draw.

Commsave was excited to be chosen to take part in the HM Treasury pilot to encourage more people to save with credit unions. Saving a small amount regularly helps build financial resilience and improves overall wellbeing.

Our lucky members all over the country from Dundee to Torquay have won prizes on their hard-earned savings, by opening a Prizesaver account with us. We look forward to encouraging more people to join credit unions and sign up for a PrizeSaver account as 'Saving feels good, winning feels great!'

The scheme, announced at last year's Budget, is designed to help more people to save for the future, as well as raise awareness of credit unions, who play a vital role in financial inclusion as an alternative to high-cost lenders.

The account is partly inspired by the 'Save to Win' scheme in the US, which has helped credit union members save \$200 million and has awarded \$3.1 million in prizes nationwide.

The pilot will run until the end of March 2021 and will help inform understanding of the PrizeSaver model. The Treasury will work with participating credit unions to evaluate the success of the PrizeSaver accounts throughout the pilot, with an ambition to roll the account out more widely if successful.

Further information

To find out more about the scheme, go to: <https://prizesaver.co.uk/>

The participating Credit Unions with accounts available today are:

- 1st Alliance Credit Union
- Bradford District Credit Union
- Central Liverpool Credit Union
- Clockwise Credit Union
- East Sussex Credit Union

- Merthyr Tydfil Borough Credit Union
- Nottingham Credit Union
- Riverside Credit Union
- South Manchester Credit Union
- Westcountry Savings and Loans
- Commsave Credit Union
- Plane Saver Credit Union
- Police Credit Union
- Lewisham Plus Credit Union
- London Capital Credit Union

Fintech company incuto was appointed by the Treasury earlier this year to administer the pilot and work with credit unions to ensure they can operate the account. The move is part of the government's drive to use innovative UK fintech companies to boost financial inclusion.

For every pound put into the savings account, savers will receive an entry into the prize draw, with a maximum of 200 chances to win per month. For example, if a member saves £20 in their first month they will get 20 chances at winning. If they save an additional £30 in their second month they will then have 50 chances of winning.

Elements of the savings account may vary between credit unions – savers should make sure to check the terms and conditions with their chosen credit union first.

[More funding to boost adoption support](#)

Thousands more children in care are set to benefit from stable, loving families following a £45 million boost to adoption services that offer music

activities, play therapy and family support sessions.

The new multi-million pound package to pay for an additional year of the government's landmark Adoption Support Fund is announced today by Education Secretary Gavin Williamson – making clear this new Government's continued commitment to get more children out of the care system and into adoption.

The funding will reduce the number of children waiting for a permanent home and strengthen relationships with their adoptive parents, underlining the government's manifesto pledge to prioritise adoption and give vulnerable children in the care system the best opportunity to thrive in adult life.

Since its launch in 2015, the Adoption Support Fund has grown every year and so far almost 50,000 families have benefitted from its services. Its expansion for an additional year follows the publication of data showing there are far more children waiting for a stable, loving home than there are adopters – a trend the Education Secretary has pledged to reverse.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Most of us are lucky enough to be able to spend time with a loving family over Christmas – but not everyone is that fortunate. It is a heartbreaking fact that there are far too many children still waiting for a stable home and the love and support they need.

One of the most generous gifts anyone can give is that of a loving home, which is why I have nothing but admiration for those who foster or adopt a child and help them develop and flourish into happy and successful adults.

We've been working hard to reverse the falling numbers of adoptions but the problem we have is that there are simply not enough foster or adoptive parents. That's why I'm announcing this new package of support for adoptive families and am determined to help find new ones.

Alongside this, more than £1 million will be provided for Regional Adoption Agencies, working with voluntary organisations around the country, to run recruitment campaigns in 2020 aimed at finding adoptive families for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) children. The latest data shows that of the 2,700 children waiting for adoption, almost 40 per cent have waited over 18 months – of these, 24% were from BAME backgrounds. The regional recruitment drives will have a particular focus on finding families for these children, as well as groups that the system has not previously prioritised, including siblings and older children, helping make sure there are enough adopters around the country and helping reverse the trend in data swiftly.

Many adopted children experience difficult and traumatic experiences before being adopted, which can prevent them from settling into their new home. The Adoption Support Fund will provide cognitive therapy, family support sessions and activities such as play and music to help children recover from earlier

traumas, help enhance the attachment they feel to their new families and adjust to their new lives.

Total investment will reach nearly £200 million since 2015. The £45 million available for next year is more than double the original investment of £18 million, underlining the government's determination to support adopters who are changing and transforming lives.

Sue Armstrong-Brown, Chief Executive of Adoption UK:

This is such a welcome vote of support for adoptive families in England. Most adopted children are living with the legacy of traumatic early childhoods, and have very complex needs. The Adoption Support Fund already has a fantastic track record of helping hold families in crisis together. This extra funding boost will allow more families to get the expert therapeutic support they need and deserve.

We're looking forward to working with the new government to support adopters from the day their child arrives home, so that fewer families ever have to reach crisis point.

Andrew Christie, Chair of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board:

I am delighted that the new Government is going to give adoption more priority. Adoption can transform the lives of vulnerable children giving them new loving homes. The sector-led leadership board will prioritise the recruitment of sufficient adopters for the children waiting and ensure that adopted families get the support they need. The additional Government funding for recruitment and the Adoption Support Fund is really welcome and will make a huge difference to the lives of thousands of families.

Maggie Jones, Chief Executive of the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies, said:

The additional £45m for adoption support announced today is excellent news. The Adoption Support Fund provides a life line for families at all stages of their adoption journey, supporting children and families to overcome the challenges of difficult early experiences and build a resilient happy future.

This wonderful extra funding will enable Voluntary Adoption Agencies and other adoption support providers to increase the help they provide and reduce the time families have to wait to receive vital support. VAAs are united with the adoptive families in welcoming this evidence of the Government's ongoing commitment to

the Adoption Support Fund and to providing the support needed to enable adoptive families to thrive.

PM's speech to British troops in Tapa, Estonia: 21 December 2019

My mission is very simple, it is to say thank you. Because of course in the next few days everybody in our country is going to spend Christmas with their families, and you are going to be here. A long way away, in a pretty cold place, at Christmas, in the Baltic States in Estonia.

And what you are doing is incredibly important because the reason everybody in our country can have Christmas in peace and security is because of what you are doing here.

Quite literally what you are doing is showing that NATO works, and that NATO is an alliance to which we in this country are absolutely committed.

And the idea of NATO is very, very simple. It's all for one and one for all. And that means that when our Estonian friends want a commitment by the British Army we make that commitment with this Enhanced Forward Presence.

And they love it. It does fantastic things for the local community and I talked earlier on to Prime Minister Jüri Ratas and he says that the contribution of British troops is fantastic and all the engagement with the local population is wonderful.

But it's about much more than that. It's a demonstration by our country that we are committed to the security and stability of the whole of Europe, and you are the most vivid and powerful possible symbol and expression of that support and commitment.

And that is why one billion people are protected by the NATO alliance. The most successful military alliance in history.

And that is why we have peace and security and stability in Europe, and peace and stability in Europe for seventy years.

And it is an incredible thing for me to come to Estonia and think that when I was a kid, when I was your age actually, Estonia was part of the Soviet Union and we are now here helping to protect Estonia and to guarantee its security.

It is a fantastic thing, it is a deeply moving thing for someone of my generation.

Thank you all very much for what you are doing. Happy Christmas.