

Summary of responses to Dutch Survey on fair trade handicrafts in UK

A Dutch student contacted BAFTS for help with a survey of the market for Fair Trade handicrafts in Europe. As a result BAFTS composed a Survey about the above issue which was sent to our members. We have compiled a summary of responses to the five questions asked.

Question 1: What are the biggest current issues which have consequences for your business?

A lot of the problems centred around slow sales, either due to the recession, fear of another one, poor footfall, difficulty keeping stock fresh, or having enough volunteers to keep costs down. Some individual cities or towns were having building work done which added to the interruptions and many felt that people were buying gifts but not luxuries. Some felt that the EU debate, the referendum and taxes was making things worse, and the availability of online shopping especially larger e-commerce superstores was making it harder for bricks and mortar shops to exist.

Question 2: How big is the demand for Fair Trade handicrafts? Do you see demand growing or decreasing? It would be helpful here if you would add a word to say whether you are a supplier or a retailer.

Responses came from both retailers and supplier members. There were mixed responses as to whether, as retailers, the demand for fair trade handicrafts was growing slightly, staying steady, or dipping somewhat. One supplier noted that the product had to be right and that whether it was fair trade or not was secondary. Others felt that solid fair trade credentials were still a big selling point. It was also felt that items with a good quality finish sold better and many sales were in the three-month lead-up to Christmas.

Question 3: Which product categories are getting more popular/which categories are decreasing in popularity?

It seems food, clothing, cards and accessories are good sellers. Jewellery sales are on the decline. Some products are seasonal sellers. Toys are fairly steady sellers as are recycled or natural products. There is a leaning towards all cheaper-end products selling well, and non-functional goods are selling less-well. Again seasonal products eg Christmas lines, always sell well at the right time of year, as do good quality chocolates.

Question 4: What product trends do you see in your sales?

Customers always like new or unusual products. Handmade cards and handcrafted products sell well, as does incense and small value items. Natural, eco-, long-life, recycled and "useful" products keep selling whereas paper sales are low. Colours seem to go in and out of fashion as do certain toy products.

Question 5: Is there anything else you would like to add about the demand for fair trade handicrafts or fair trade retail in general in the UK?

It would appear that demand for Fairtrade food, household goods and clothing will probably always be good, but maybe demand for handicrafts is diminishing. Some feel a labelling system would help, others feel supermarkets selling some Fairtrade products has killed off some of their customer base. There are always loyal customers but Fair Trade needs to keep up with the market trends in order to survive. It was again felt that sometimes the fair trade element was secondary to the quality of the product. The question as to whether people care enough and have enough money to care when they have a lower cost alternative such as Amazon was highlighted again. The fact that it is harder to explain about fair trade crafts (as opposed to eg food with the FAIRTRADE Mark) was a factor of concern, and that better marketing, awareness and information for customers was vital.