

Red Dragon Flagmakers (a Red Dragon Manufacturing Ltd brand)

Wales' only registered social enterprise manufacturer has invested in new premises, equipment and procedures thanks to support from Welsh Government's SMART Productivity programme.

Swansea-based Red Dragon Flagmakers was born out of a merger of three businesses into the world's first and only social enterprise flagmaking business in 2014. The merger brought together over 55 years of manufacturing experience from Jo Ashburner Farr and her father Robin Ashburner, who first started making flags in 1969 for the investiture of Prince Charles at Caernarfon Castle.

Jo has always been passionate about ethical social enterprise and fair manufacturing practices. In 2006, Jo was awarded Welsh and UK National Businesswoman of the Year for ethical manufacturing, based her award-winning eco brand Noonoo which she set up after graduation with a First Class Hons in Surface Pattern Design from UWTSD in 2014. Jo went on to set up an independent ethical manufacturing unit in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam supporting abandoned women and their children through the manufacture of the eco ethical baby products which sold to retailers worldwide.

After restarting the flagmaking business and its immediate success, Jo took the decision to gift the Noonoo brand to InKind Direct, the Princes Trust charity in March 2017 and put continued production on hold. Sales revenue from the donated stock and assets have since benefited over 100 children's charities UK wide.

Red Dragon Flagmakers which effectively started at the kitchen table in 2014, now employs ten full-time staff at its new factory in Clydach, Swansea. Every staff member is trained using the company's own eight-stage training programme which focus of the development of skills in the manufacturing cut make and trim processes and the team is always very much involved in the growth, development and decision making of the business on a 'push together' basis.

Red Dragon designs and makes for a range of notable clients including the Welsh Government, European Space Agency and Foreign and Commonwealth Office but the core business revenue comes from private and corporate clients who invest in coats of arms, branded livery, ceremonial flags and coffin drapes. The company has adopted a 'no production line' and 'no order too small' ethos and is able to produce custom products with a relatively fast turnaround and the same efficient service extended to all customers regardless of budget.

Red Dragon worked with SMART Productivity to ensure that the business is well-equipped for future growth which helped to identify the assets the company needed to achieve its ambitious growth plans. Part of that growth plan is the ongoing development and production of [ROOF](#) the coat bag with the specific social mission to alleviate homelessness

and enable marginalized people to get back into mainstream society through training and sustainable employment.

This groundbreaking project is supported by an established partnership with University of Wales Trinity St David and Llamau, Wales' Homeless Charity and all IP has been underwritten by TrustLaw through the Thomas Reuter Foundation.

Since working with SMART Productivity, Red Dragon has moved to new and significantly larger business premises which has increased production space fivefold and enabled the company to have the space to use their investment of the identified new apparel specific sewing machines, cutting tables and tools. These developments have contributed to an improved efficiency in production and the construction of the ISO9001 (identified by the SMART Productivity report as a key tool) will allow Red Dragon to expand capabilities and work to its goal of increasing training and employment opportunities in the South Wales valleys.

As a result of the SMART Productivity report being actioned and pending test results on the stabproof element of the coat bag, it is anticipated ROOF will officially launch by November 2018.

“As a small business it can be intimidating to have anyone outside your business scrutinise your processes but it is important and useful to get an outsiders view on what you're doing. Bill, our allocated SMART Productivity consultant, put me at ease instantly by patiently listening to the tangle of visions which, like most creatives is held almost entirely in my head. He then condensed those into a report which totally represents what Red Dragon is all about with practical, actionable advice that will enable us as a company to get to where we want to be.

The report went a long way to reassuring the Board and I that the business is on the right track and it has allowed us to implement internal processes that are meaningful to us rather than just being there for the sake of it. Importantly, the process has allowed me to communicate plans to my talented team and ensure we all know exactly where we are heading, together.”

Jo Ashburner Farr, CEO and Operations Director at Red Dragon Manufacturing Ltd.

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