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EXPORTING KNITTED APPAREL

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ABSTRACT

As the globalisation process accelerates there is a growing need for individual countries to understand the bases for effective performance in international trade. Because it makes up such a large share of world trade, it is especially important to understand what determines effectiveness in exporting. Despite much empirical research, especially over recent decades, the state of knowledge on this topic remains fragmented, unclear and unsatisfactory. The motivation for the present study was therefore twofold: dissatisfaction with the present state of knowledge in this vital area and the importance to the UK economy of improving its export performance in a world of increasing competition. Its aim was to contribute to the resolution of both.

In addition to finding what appeared to be quite serious methodological problems in a group of earlier studies, our review of the literature indicated that the best prospects for identifying the determinants of effective exporting were to be found, not at national or sectoral level but at that of the individual firm. Accordingly, an empirical survey research project was developed. To minimise unquantifiable inter-sectoral variability, it was focused on a single sector of industry. For a range of reasons, including the limited amount of information available about its current export activity and prospects, the UK knitted apparel industry was chosen..

Special care having been taken to assemble the fullest possible sampling frame and to develop a suitable instrument (which included an export performance model), a mail survey in the form of a stratified random sample of exporting UK manufacturers of knitted apparel was carried through from late 2000. Persistent follow-up by mail and telephone generated a response rate of 70 per cent, comprising close to half of the sampling frame, that was representative of all company size bands, levels of exporting and products. The overall quality of the responses was good; tests of non-response did not find any indications of non-response bias.

Data analysis, designed to test thoroughly our 10 export-determinants hypotheses, relied primarily on Pearsonian correlation at the bivariate level then sequentially on Multiple Regression Analysis, Canonical Correlation Analysis and Partial Least Squares. A perhaps slightly novel aspect of the research was that it was not solely cross-sectional in format; a longitudinal element was provided by drawing on the researcher's earlier surveys ; and a panel element by following-up, in 2007, the main 2000 field survey. Where possible, these data were drawn upon in the analysis and interpretation.

There did not appear to be any conflict between the three multivariate techniques employed and indeed their findings were not dissimilar. The outcome of the data analysis was to uphold, to varying degrees, most of our hypotheses about the determinants of effective/ or successful exporting. Those that did not find support were three: firm size, product adaptation, and price determination method. Most strongly supported as determinants were promotional intensity, serving many markets and visits to trade fairs/ exhibitions; others which were statistically significant, included management commitment, special staff skills and the use of Commission Agents. While the conclusions must remain a bit tentative they are encouraging.

EXPORTING KNITTED APPAREL

A study of the determinants of exporting performance in the UK knitted apparel sector

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Thesis submitted to the University
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of
Doctor of Philosophy

2008

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My main thanks are due to the following:

My late parents , Owen and Mary Murphy, who fostered in me from an early age an enthusiasm for learning for its own sake that has endured;

Dr Ronald Hope OBE, former Director, Marine Society and College of the Sea, sometime Fellow, Brasenose College, Oxford, longtime mentor and valued friend, who, in the early-1960s, set a young Merchant Navy officer on the course that would take him to university and beyond;

My brother, Donald, a tenacious autodidact who, with negligible assistance from others, progressed to an important management position in an international electronics company, for his inspirational example;

Dr Tony Pickles, my supervisor, for the important motivation and support he provided during the extended course of this research project and the many problems, medical and technical, which have attended it.

My former colleagues at the National Economic Development Office (NEDO), especially George Gater, Caroline Brierley, Liz Bailey, Steve Allera, and Garth Wiseman, for their camaraderie and stimulation; and Sir Ronald Halstead and the members of the high-achieving Knitting Economic Development Committee, of which I had the privilege of being Secretary for a long period. All of them have helped to motivate this later study;

Professor David Greenaway and Dr Richard Kneller, Nottingham University, for supplying customised parameters from their large-scale industry sample; and Professor Richard Brereton, Bristol University, for advice on the interpretation of Partial Least Squares;

All of the knitted apparel companies who participated in the research, the apparel trade associations and agencies, including especially Peter Glover of Skillfast UK Ltd, Adam Mansell /Laurien Davies of BATC, and the other industry specialists who offered valuable insights and information.

And last, but not least, my thanks to John Purvis, for logistical assistance on several occasions; and to Sophie North, of Learning Support Services, whose ever-cheerful and helpful stance has been a real boon throughout.

University of Bradford
December 2008

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