

## A DESIGNER'S SPIN ON SKILLS SHORTAGE IN COTTONOPOLIS

Northwest designer, Yvonne Gillon who operates a couture business on the verge of expansion in Marple, Cheshire is increasingly concerned by the shortage of young professional skilled people in the bespoke fashion industry and fears that businesses will struggle to survive unless training programmes are introduced to revive skills once valued by our grandparents. Yvonne's concerns are also shared by Saville Row Bespoke and Jermaine Street Suit & Shirt who feel that they will have to send items abroad to be manufactured.



"Over the last few years, I have found it increasingly difficult to find people with the skills I need," said Yvonne. "The stereotypical images of the rag trade and sweatshop no longer apply but young people are simply not coming into the industry. I want to help recruits develop skills in machining, finishing and pattern cutting which are highly specialised crafts."

She continued,

"Bespoke tailoring is something that I am extremely passionate about. This area was at the height of the textile industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries – Cottonopolis - the workshop of the world in cotton, from the raw materials to spinning, weaving, dyeing, fabric design and manufacture and marketing. Now that the vast majority of our clothes are manufactured in the abroad and we are all too well aware of the social issues surrounding that, the skills to produce clothes are disappearing."

There is now a growing movement to address this skills shortage with the Government's **Skillfast-UK** initiative but Yvonne hopes that it is not too little too late,

"As the demand for the type of service which I provide increases, I am finding that I have to limit the amount of work which I take on. This is purely because of the lack of machinists. I have schemes in place to train those keen to pursue a career in couture. There is a genuine concern that there may not be enough young blood to keep our world class bespoke tailoring industry alive. I would urge anyone interested in developing a career in couture to contact me at the studio either via email or telephone."