Who's Gone Bust in UK Retailing 2015 & 2016

Company failures are listed in reverse order, starting with December 2016

A table of annual retail company failures can be found on the webpage ***Who's Gone Bust?*** (web address www.retailresearch/whosgonebust) along with details of how this listing of company is created. There is also an analysis that can be downloaded of the major retailers that have gone into administration since 2008. When using this list please take into account the following conditions that form part of the list:

Business failure can often be a temporary. We are not suggesting that the businesses listed here no longer survive, but they gone through the legal process of insolvency known as **administration***. This listing is based on research carried out at the time based on our understanding of their business affairs. More recent information may well change some of the assumptions or conclusions. Some of these firms entered administration and then were closed down. Others have had a second life as ecommerce-only businesses with no or few physical stores. Most of the large firms came out of administration and are still trading. Some have been sold, but changed their name. Others exist as departments or concessions in larger stores. The presence of any business in this listing must not be taken to imply that it no longer exists, its name is no longer used or that such business, if still trading, is impaired in anyway.*

2007-2019 Review

	Companies failing	Stores Affected	Employees Affected
2019	For 2019 see our regularly-updated page www.retailresearch.org/Whosgonebust		
2018 (12 months)	43	2,594	46,014
2017 (12 months)	44	1,383	12,225
2016 (12 months)	30	1,504	26,110
2015 (12 months)	25	728	6,845
2014 (12 months)	43	1,314	12,335
2013 (12 months)	49	2,500	25,140
2012 (12 months)	54	3,951	48,142
2011 (12 months)	31	2,469	24,025
2010 (12 months)	26	944	10,930
2009 (12 months)	37	6,536	26,688
2008 (12 months)	54	5,793	74,539
2007 (12 months)	25	2,600	14,083

Failures in 2016

- **Cambridge Toy Shop**, an independent store in the university town, is to close after 12 years, attributed to high rates and rents and loss of customers due to high parking charges.
- **Rugby crisis** with both the northern game (**Bradford Bulls** in administration again for the third time) and union suffering high costs from professionalism, shown by **London Welsh** liquidating to re-form as a semi-professional team.

- **Formal Affair Weddings,** Tamworth-based wedding hire retailer with three stores, went into administration at the end of December. It had previously been bought out of administration in 2014. The chain closed its stores immediately, inconveniencing several couples that were to marry. We understand the group is not expected to continue.
- **The Ness Chain,** a design-focused Scottish women's wear chain of 15 stores, went into administration at the end of December 2016. Although the business continues to trade, seven of its stores have closed already. The rapidly-expanding business had experienced working capital difficulties. In 2015 the company received £2.5 mn from a UK venture capital firm.
- **Worldstores Group,** one of the largest online retailers of home and garden products, is to go into administration as a condition of its £8.5 mn purchase by Dunelm, the homewares/furnishings superstore company. Worldstores Group had estimated annual sales of £76 mn (2016) and 45 mn visitors annually to its website Founded in 2008, the company had expanded rapidly, losing £6mn last year. It is short of working capital. The Dunelm agreement seems to be a pre-pack administration and on the face of it leaves Worldstores Group much as it was before. There are two associate companies, Achica (luxury store selling furniture and homewares) and Kiddicare (nursery and children's goods suppliers).
- **Independent Pharmacists in England,** which receive the vast bulk of their turnover for NHS work, will be seriously affected by cuts in the total subsidy, starting from December 2016 of more than £315 mn over 16 months. There are 11,800 pharmacies in England and perhaps 20%-25% will close as unprofitable under this new regime. The government view is that there are too many pharmacies, often in the wrong locations, and larger and better-equipped stores will give a better service. The work of a pharmacist is a highly specialist job, where each task has to be carried out individually with the pharmacist being personally liable if any mistake is made. There are no particular economies of scale. Around 2,300 are expected to close with possibly 9,000 staff affected. A different approach might involve using pharmacies more instead of GPs and A&E for minor interventions, thus saving the NHS cash, but that would be too easy and 'difficult to manage'. CRR has not included the forecast losses of independent pharmacists in the totals, yet.
- **Staples,** the well-known stationery retailer selling to businesses as well as consumers, is to close its 106 UK stores employing 1,100 staff after selling the company for a nominal sum to Hilko. Staples has suffered from online competition as well as falls in demand for of stationery as a result of widespread ownership of computers, tablets and smartphones. It placed its UK and European operations under review after its merger with Office Depot earlier this year was prevented on anti-competition grounds. Hilko has taken over the business and will attempt to trade from its stores, but not as 'Staples'.
- **Betta Living,** the bedroom and kitchen furniture retailer with 24 stores, went into administration early in November. The company had grown from sales of £1 mn to £50 mn but the costs of newer stores turned profits into losses. The company ceased trading with immediate effect, although the nature of the business is that most transactions would be pre-payment or involving finance. There are 300 employees.
- **American Apparel,** the beleaguered U.S. fashion retailer, put its UK operations and some stores from other European countries into administration. The U.S. parent company filed for *Chapter 11* (protection from creditors) in 2015 and is now up for sale. The UK stores are expected to trade through until Christmas, and the administrators hope to sell the stores afterwards. There are 13 stores and 95 staff affected. The merchandise was pricey compared to clothing produced in SE Asia, the fashions ceased to be current and there were controversies about the U.S. parent company.
- **William Watson & Sons**, the homeware store trading as Watsons of Perth established for more than a century, is to close, blaming high business rates

(£40,000 for 2016) and a secular change in demand away from the quality end of the market.

- **Exhibit,** the well-regarded Northern Ireland fashion chain with 16 stores, went into administration in mid-October, blaming a change in customer habits. The company's owners, Cucco Retail Limited, have been trading since 1983. Some shops have already closed and staff told there is no money for wages. There are 100 employees.
- **Banana Republic,** the fast-fashion subsidiary of Gap, is to close most of its UK stores by the end of December 2016 and supply the UK solely from its website. Other Gap stores in the UK are unaffected (though rationalisation is occurring in other parts of the business). There are eight Banana Republic stores and 90 staff (including part-time).
- **Charity shops in Rugby** face a tough retail climate: three closed in just two weeks in October (Shelter, Scope and Acorns), indicating that in some environments there are few winners even those staffed by volunteers and enjoying 80% rate rebates and peppercorn rents. However the Royal Horticultural Society has awarded Rugby a gold award in the small city category indicating that all is not lost.
- **Icon Live Limited**, a large Sussex-based designer, wholesaler and concession retailer for jewellery and fashion accessories, went into administration in mid-October. It had 1,300 (455 FTE) mainly part-time staff and served 3,000 stores (including Oasis, Lipsey and ASDA) in UK and Europe. So far there have been 80 redundancies.
- **De Bradelei Stores**, a well-established discount (millstore-type) retailer operating from a number of towns (Belper, Dover, and Nottingham) with franchises in Ilkley, Skipton and Northallerton ceased trading in October: the stores have closed. The Belper store itself has been bought by a local businesswoman and reopened (albeit with 50% of the space). There have been some complaints that wages owing have not been paid. Overall around 260 staff are affected.
- **City Motor Holdings,** a car dealership based in the Thames Valley area including Newbury and Reading, went into administration in September 2016. There were 13 dealerships, including Gowrings Ford and City Peugeot: two have shut down (City SEAT and City Skoda) and 276 jobs (out of almost 300) have gone already. The administrators seem to have decided to wind up all the companies, blaming a long period of poor trading related to the current economics of the motor trade, in particular the excess supply of nearly-new and used cars.
- **Specsavers Optical Lens processing operations** in Aston Laboratories, Birmingham, serving Specsavers' opticians stores in the UK and Ireland has been scheduled for closure involving 200 redundancies. The operation is understood to be moved to Poland. The company has successfully registered 'should've' as a trademark. Should've™ thought about the employees.
- **Joshua James Jewellery**, a Hessle (Hull)-based independent retailer, went into administration in July. There were 13 staff. The company had been successful enough to win *Retail Jeweller of the Year Award* at the British Jewellers Association 125th Anniversary Awards and was runner up in the etailer category of the UK Watch and Jewellery Awards in 2012, 2013 and 2014.
- **Store Twenty One**, a value-oriented clothing and homewares chain with 220 stores, has reorganised its store portfolio (including closing 77 stores and obtaining rent reductions of up to 25% on a number of others) to revamp the business as part of a company voluntary administration (CVA). Its property subsidiaries, *Be-Wise and QS Plc, are in administration*. Almost 270 jobs have gone. It is part of the Grabal Alok Group, a substantial Indian textiles business, and comprises parts of the former Bewise and Quality Seconds (QS) operations. The company had 950 employees when it started this process.
- **HMV Ireland** is to close all its outlets in the Republic, retaining one Belfast store. Its presence will be continued online through a new online video-streaming platform offering 3,000 films in a move that will see it compete directly with Netflix.

- **Netto Stores**, the discount chain brought back to the UK by Sainsbury's in 2014, is to close. It comprised 16 stores in the north of England run as a joint enterprise with Dansk Supermarket Group. Sainsbury's view was that the chain would need heavy funding to enable it to become a national chain and this would detract from the changes Sainsbury's was already making to its business, including the acquisition and integration of Home Retail. All 16 stores are to close, affecting 400 staff.
- **My Local**, the 120-branch convenience chain formed from Morrisons' *M Local* foray into small stores, went into administration at the end of June. There are around 2,000 employees in total. Before administration, Morrisons announced they would offer jobs to the bulk of My Local staff. My Local closed 90 stores (1,658 staff) before the company entered administration and the remainder are likely to be bought from the administrators by other groups including the Co-op. Morrisons sold its (then) 140-store chain to Mike Green in September 2015. After a good start, trading became more difficult in Spring 2016. The leases on many of the stores will revert to Morrisons. Most of them were Blockbuster sites bought by Morrisons when that company collapsed: few are in prime convenience store territory.
- **BHS,** the clothing-based variety chain, went into administration on 25 April 2016, the largest retail collapse since Woolworths. Last month it had apparently achieved a stay of execution from its difficulties: 95% of creditors voted for a company voluntary arrangement (CVA, see below). There are 164 stores and 11,000 staff. The prospects are bleak, and the administrators announced on 2 June 2016 that none of the would-be suitors had enough funds to run the company so it would be closed down. Like all retailers it has been hit by adverse trading conditions, but has not been given the imaginative overhaul required to keep its place in the high street and its assets have instead been used to produce cash for its owners for many years. The pension fund deficit is £571 mn, compared to a surplus of £5 mn in 2001 shortly after being taken over by Sir Philip Green's Arcadia.
- **Austin Reed,** the tailoring brand with 155 stores and almost 1,000 staff, appointed administrators in April a few days after being taken over by hedge-fund Alteri Investors. The company sold some stores and brand names to Boundary Mills/Edinburgh Woollen Mill, but then announced at the end of May that all other Austin Reed stores (Viyella and CC (formerly Country Casuals) are to close. The traditional gents clothing market served by Austin Reed has been undermined by the trend for casual clothes and sportswear; additionally Austin Reed suffered from being 'stuck in the middle' of this market, neither luxury, exclusive or low price.
- **Debenhams Retail (Ireland) Ltd** (otherwise DRIL), part of the UK's Debenhams PLC (but a separate legal entity), has had an interim examiner appointed by Ireland's High Court to examine its affairs. The company has been loss making since the 2007 recession and the Debenham PLC board ceased supporting its Irish chain early in May. The court was told that the only alternative to the interim examiner and protection from its creditors was liquidation. There are 11 stores in Ireland with 2,265 employees, 1,415 being directly employed and the others working in concessions or cosmetics. Total sales in 2015 were €167 mn, 22% below that of 2007. DRIL is continuing to trade and is honouring its vouchers and gift cards. Rents and staff costs are 15% and 22% respectively. DRIL is regarded as being insolvent on a balance sheet basis, but is expected to attempt to cut is fixed costs. (see also, the *Irish Times*, 12 May 2016).
- **Backwash from BHS**, the first failure caused by BHS' administration was Courtaulds Brands in Derbyshire, the manufacturer of Pretty Polly tights, which was owed large sums by BHS.
- **Some good news ('What?!!!'). Hawkins Bazaar owner Tobar Group** which closed all but eight of its 60 stores in 2012 when a staff buyout saved it from impending administration, now has 29 Hawkins Bazaar stores and Tobar is an independent wholesaler. It employs 300.
- **McEwans of Perth**, another old iconic department store trading since 1868, went into administration at the end of March. Two branch stores in Oban and Ballater

have already closed, one-half of McEwan's staff has been made redundant and its closing sale is under way. The company closed its stores in Inverness and Aberdeen in 2015. McEwan's employed 110 staff when it went into administration. McEwans has suffered poor trade for a number of years. In view of the fall of McEwans, the town council is to rethink its bid to become one of Europe's 'great small cities' based on its tradition of independent retailers.

- **Trod Ltd**, a Rubery-based (hint: it's near Birmingham) online business trading as Buy 4 Less, Buy For Less, Buy-For-Less-Online, 247 Toys and Global Trader, went into administration towards the end of March but continues trading with 60 staff whilst the administrators seek a new buyer for the company. Trod's last-reported sales figure was £15 mn. It sells mostly toys via its own websites and third-party websites in the UK and North America. It was investigated over Christmas 2015 by the West Midlands Police (the now inevitable dawn raids, etc) as part of a U.S. State Department case using the Sherman Act involving alleged price-fixing for the sale of wall posters on Amazon. The Sherman Act was introduced in the nineteenth century to combat racketeering and corruption in the U.S. by the main steel and railroad tycoons. It is good to know that the Sherman Act is now being used to put the axe to the alleged tree of alleged corruption in the new economy. No doubt the giant multinational companies selling coffee, retail goods, software and internet search at practically no declared profit in the UK will be next. Perhaps not, as everything *they* do is strictly legal.
- **Furniture Barn**, a family-run chain of seven furniture and bedding superstores and three warehouses mainly in the Midlands which has gone into administration, is now operating (under a 6-month licence) as The Furniture Barn 2016 Ltd, although the Sutton Coldfield and Thurrock stores and three warehouses have closed. The company continues to trade normally.
- **Austins of Derry**, founded in 1830 and one of the world's oldest department stores located in a fabulous building, was put into liquidation on 8 March 2016 with the loss of 53 jobs. It had been trading in receivership for some time, having been saved from failure in 2014 when a hotel group bought it. Trading was being handled by a separate company when it finally was put into liquidation. As well as the problems faced by all department stores, Austins has been affected for years by Northern Ireland's specific problems, the shift in the retail centre away from Austins and a lengthy town-centre remodelling revamp of the city centre which made life difficult for pedestrians.

- **BHS** gained 95% support from landlords and creditors for its company voluntary arrangement (CVA) aimed at reducing its financial charges and slashing its operating costs. There are 164 stores and 11,000 staff. It is likely to close stores under the CVA, but reports that one-half its outlets trade profitably - high rents and rates cause the main problems for the rest. It has requested **major** rent reductions (50% to 75%) on 50 stores and **significant** rent reductions (of 25% to 50%) on another 30. Its losses in 2015 were £85 mn, a crystallised pension deficit of more than £500 mn, and problems with maintaining supplies. The CVA has bought time for the chain. Its new strategy looks plausible. In the last 35 years, BHS has attracted retail gurus like Terence Conran and Philip Green to turn it around, pioneered hypermarkets with Sainsbury's, but today BHS is not a good fit with modern retailing, has suffered years of underinvestment and is stuck in the middle, neither cheap and cheerful enough to beat the discounters nor upmarket enough to attract a wealthier and style-conscious clientele.
  However BHS went into administration in April and closed down.
- **Beales,** the department store chain with 30 outlets, has agreed a CVA (and has not gone bust) to reduce rents by 30% on 14 stores and will pay rents monthly instead of quarterly on all its stores. The company alleges it is being held back because of high legacy rents fixed in the pre-recession, pre-internet days when retail was highly profitable. The good news (for Beales) is that its major landlord has already agreed and most stores operate at a profit. It has bought a number of stores in the last ten years from Vergo Retail, Co-ops Fenwicks, Bentalls and Westgate Stores.
- **Sports Authority** in the US has filed for Chapter 11 protection from its creditors as yet another American big retail beast suffers problems. It intends to sell 140 0f its 540 stores and close two distribution centres. There are 14,500 employees. Ten years ago it was the market leader but a vague strategy and heavy repayment costs from a leveraged buyout doomed the business.
- **Kendall Mint Cake** is now under threat following the administration of its manufacturer, Wilsons based in Holme, Kendall, in February. There are only 35 employees remaining: they have all been given redundancy notices. The company has experienced difficulties for several years, and previously went into administration in 2015. It is not a retailer, but its performance is an important marker of change – and perhaps age - equivalent in its way to the loss of Dan Dare and *The Eagle* comic, Woolworths, C&A Modes, Timothy Whites, the Sony Walkman and Safeway.
- **Castle Bakery,** a bread and sandwich retailer based in Beaumaris (Anglesey), closed its six North Wales' shops in February with one day's notice. It was established in 1885. There are 35 employees.
- **Hawick Knitwear,** the iconic Scottish supplier and retailer of knitted goods, went into administration, and has made 126 staff redundant. 56 staff are still working at the company, whose future looks unpromising.
- **Ben Sherman,** the menswear retailer, was sold via pre-pack administration to the clothing supplier BMB Clothing in January 2016. There are 10 UK stores (3 to close immediately), 10 UK concessions in the House of Fraser and 10+ in major overseas destinations. The German, Dutch, Austrian and Swiss operations will be managed by a German licensee. There is a total of 250 staff and the head office is likely to close. BMB is part of the Baird Group that also owns Racing Green and Jasper Conran.
- **Brantano,** the 'value' shoe firm with 140 branches and 60 concessions, went into administration in late January, but continues to trade whilst a buyer is found. There are 2,000 staff. Six months before, Branano had been bought with Jones The Bootmaker by investment firm Alteri from the Dutch firm, Macintosh, which went bust itself in January this year (see note below). Causes of the failure include changing shopping patterns, lack of investment in stores, and unexciting offer. At one time Brantano was an international group operating in The Netherlands, France

and Denmark, but closed these stores, though separate companies still run stores in Belgium and Luxembourg. The UK Brantano started in 1998 when the firm bought Shoe City, relabelled Brantano.

- **John Cooper & Sons,** Aga and kitchen suppliers in the south east, went into administration in 2015, and is thought to be in the process of closing down.
- **Atterley,** the online Scandi-inspired fashion retailer founded in 2011 and supported by high-profile backers, went into liquidation early in January. In 2015 it reported to Vogue that it was hoping to turn over £100mn pa by 2020.
- **Blue Inc,** which focuses on young fashion trading in 230 stores as Blue Inc and The Officers Club, is to appoint administrators for A Levy & Son, which holds the leases on all its stores. It is understood that this will enable Blue Inc to give up the leases on (and thereby close) 60-65 stores, losing 500 jobs, and buy back the remainder it wishes to keep trading. The company started in 1912 as A Levy & Son, and traded mostly as Mr Byrite before rebranding as Blue Inc.
- **Dick Smith, Australia's** largest electronics retailer, went into volountary administration in January only two years after listing on Australia's stock exchange. The usual reasons were given: massive price competition, online competition, low profit margins. The company continues to trade from its 393 stores with 3,300 employees.
- **Another blow to Australia is the failure of the Australian arm of UK-based Laura Ashley,** fashion country prints etc, went into administration on Jan 7th with its 38 stores continuing to operate. The Australian firm is a licensee of the parent company and as such does not directly affect the UK operations.
- **In the Netherlands three retailers went bust in the same week.** The large department store chain, **Vroom and Dressman** (V&A) with 10,000 staff in 67 stores declared itself insolvent at the end of December after losing sales for several years. Sales in November 2015 were 15% less than last year and in December 20%. This is the Marks and Spencers of Dutch retailing, so its failure is very significant. For discussion of the Dutch Black Week in which 16,800 jobs ended, see Waard, P. de (2015) 'Zwarte kerst dreigt voor tienduizend V&D-medewerkers', *Volksrant*, 23 December, http://www.volkskrant.nl/economie/vend-balanceert-op-rand-afgrond-voor-10-duizend-mensen-dreigt-ontslag~a4213331/
- **Netherland's DA,** a Dutch drugstore with 212 permanent employees and another 1,100 at affiliated franchises has gone into receivership. This chain was condemned for pursuing an middle of the road business strategy at a time when drug store products were being sold widely by supermarkets.
- **Netherlands' Macintosh** store group, a shoe chain with 5,500 employees, went bust in the same week as V&D and DA. It franchises brands such as Dolcis, Invito, Manfield and Scapino.

Failures in 2015

- **Shannon's Jewellery,** based in Lilburn Northern Ireland, went into administration at the end of 2015. This upmarket jeweller, first set up in 1925, was bought out of administration and continues to trade, its staff of 20 being unaffected.
- **Home Mills,** the Huddersfield furniture business set up in 1980, is to close its retail operations in Milnsbridge, which the family will rent off to other businesses.
- **Cadwallader**, a Welsh ice-cream producer with 14 stores and 120 employees, was bought out of administration in November, although five stores were closed (reducing the workforce to 92).
- **Burns Jewellery Group,** a Salford/NW-based retailer with four stores, went into administration in September, subsequently being purchased by management.
- **American Apparel,** the large once-trendy young person's clothing shop that has not made a profit since 2009, applied for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in the U.S. from its creditors. It has more than 200 stores worldwide, with 20 in the UK (195 employees). It has suffered several internal problems and, like many such stores, has lost business to fast fashion. It continues to trade.
- **Direct Golf,** the 20-store golf supplies retailer, announced on the last day of September 2015 it was filing for administration and was found to owe large amounts to HM Revenue & Customs, landlords and its suppliers. Sports Direct was a major shareholder: it allegedly changed the locks on the head office whilst the owner was away from the building. Sports Direct then bought the company from administration, transferred all the stores to Sports Direct with all 162 jobs being retained.
- **Two retailers engaged in** s**trategic trading** in July and August – the subsidiaries are not in administration and not included in the figures. Sainsbury's sold its 281 in-house and hospital pharmacies to Lloyds for £125mn (2,500 staff) and Morrisons is disposing its 156 convenience stores (sales £289 mn, staff around 4,000).
- **Pet Supermarket** and its owner **MedicAnimal**, the online pet supermarket and pet healthcare provider, ceased trading in July and issued notice of intention to appoint an administrator as a result of cash-flow problems. However Forward Dimension Capital purchased Kokoba Ltd trading as MedicAnimal in mid-August, thus saving it from administration and allowing it to start trading again. MedicAnimal is a pet healthcare provider whose website operates in five European languages and deals with everything from farm animals to pigeons as well as the more conventional cats, dogs and gerbils.
- **MFI** (remember them?) once a formidable operator in the furniture business and latterly a website brand operated by Victoria Plum has now been shut down and replaced by a Victoria Plum branded furniture website.
- **Woolworths**, once a high street staple, and latterly a website owned by Shop Direct, which used to trade as Littlewoods but sold most of its shops to Primark. Shop Direct (which also trades as Very and K&Co), now a major online retailer, stopped using the Woolworths brand in summer 2015 in favour of 'Shop Direct'. They retain ownership of the Woolworths' name and brand.
- **Blinkbox Music,** formerly owned by Tesco and bought by Guvera early in 2015, collapsed into administration in June 2015 after Guvera failed to restructure it and its users drifted away One hundred employees are likely to be made redundant.
- **Spirit of the Andes,** a luxury retailer selling clothes made by artisan knitters in Peru and Bolivia using high-end alpaca fibres and pima cotton, went into administration in July 2015 after several loss-making years. It had 12 shops with 62 members of staff.
- **East,** the women's fashion retailer with 106 stores, went into administration in late June and emerged via pre-pack as a subsidiary of East lifestyle Limited, thought to be owned by Fabindia the majority shareholder of East since 2012. The business lost £0.74 mn last year and UK sales were down from £44.3 mn to £38.8 mn. 82

stores and concessions will remain but 19 will be closed. 550 posts will remain and 155 lost.

- **Game Sweden,** the Nordic game/digital chain originally set up by Game UK, went into administration in June, leading to the expected closure of all 32 stores in Sweden and Norway. After the administration of Game UK (now Game Digital) in 2012 the Swedish operation was bought by Nordic Games AB. It has no link with the UK operation.
- **Cumming of Leven,** a clothing and small department store chain with 16 stores operating as Cumming of Leven, Sphere and Turrett went into administration in May. There are stores in Glasgow, Arbroath, Leven, Kirkaldy, Dumferminline, Glenrothes and three other Scottish towns. There are around 85 employees. The first store opened in 1879.
- **Carcraft,** the second-hand car dealer based in Rochdale, went into administration at the end of April. It is the seventh-largest second-hand dealer with ten showrooms around the country and has been losing £5m-£8m pa in recent years. There are 500 employees affected and the company will be closed.
- **Motor World,** the car spares and accessories retailer with 34 stores went into administration at the end of March as a result of poor trading and competition both online and offline. Its owner, Maccess has also put the Godfrey Autoparts chain (6 stores), Pacific Retail (the Motor World operating company, 34 stores) and Maccess cash-and-carry chain (11 stores) into administration. This will cause the loss of 350 jobs. Group parent, Tetrosyl, intends to buy 32 Motor World stores from the administrators and continue to trade.
- **Ensemble Clothing,** the workwear and clothing retailer based in Washington (Tyne&Wear) went into administration early in 2015. Thirty-seven people lost their jobs and a further 15 have been kept on to wind down the company. Formerly part of The Co-operative it lost a major corporate contract and suffered severe cash flow problems in 2014. HMRC notified the company it was about to seize part of its assets, and both Ensemble and its sister company, **Packaging Xtra Ltd** (Derby) went immediately into administration. The parent, B&C Investments, is not in administration.
- **First Active Media**, originally an online lingerie company, went into administration in February 2015. Its website, **Female First**, a magazine site gets 2 mn visitors per month and is still trading. The company was bought out of administration by the managers, saving seven jobs.
- **In February 2015 widespread concern** was expressed about how recent business failures had been handled. There is no imputation of illegality but the processes have produced undesirable outcomes.
    - **USC:** laying off warehouse employees with 15 minutes' notice, transporting merchandise to Sports Direct warehouses then buying back the business. HMRC is still owed £0.6 mn by the old USC, staff are owed £0.1 mn in unpaid wages (to be refunded by the taxpayer), and suppliers (including Adidas, Diesel, Converse) are owed £9.9 mn and landlords £4.6 mn.
    - **HMV:** staff, suppliers and landlords lost millions in the failure, but administrators charged £11.7 mn (of which they expect to be paid only £8 mn) and advisors £8 mn. Retail Agents 260, part of Hilco, was paid £2.7 mn as an advisor: but did they advise their own owners who ultimately bought the company? The process of administration looks very strange. Melanie Leech, CEO of the British Property Federation has criticised the administrative process as 'lacking proper checks and balances'.
    - **City Link:** there is no doubt that the directors put the company into administration when absolutely necessary, but the self-employed drivers face particular hardship because they worked (ultimately unpaid) for City Link driving their rented vans in City Link colours (ultimately not reimbursed) until Christmas Eve although they could have transferred to other couriers in good time to offset some of their losses.

    - The way in which the 2012 **Comet** failure was handled from the point of view of employees and creditors (both unsecured) still rankled with many, as the owners had secured the they had put into the company against Comet property and largely got their money back.
- **Cooplands,** a Doncaster-based baker and cake shop with 562 employees, went into administration in February. It started in 1932 when Mrs Jenkinson opened her first store selling home-made cakes and chocolate. At the time of its administration Cooplands had 80 stores and 26 mobile sandwich vans. Forty-one stores and the mobile business have been sold to ReSolve and continue to trade, whilst 39 stores, the bakery and head office have been closed with 300 job losses.
- **Mexx,** the Dutch fashion brand that went bankrupt in December 2014, has ceased sending supplies to several countries. Its Irish franchisee, John Houston, has been forced to close 14 stores in Northern Ireland and 11 in the Republic, mostly trading as concessions. The Irish stores were trading successfully. Mexx closed its UK stores and concessions in 2008, 300 people losing their jobs, although it continued to supply its branded goods to other retailers on a wholesale basis.
- **Radio Shack,** the famous American IT, kit and electronic devicesretailer, applied in February for Chapter 11 protection from its creditors under U.S. law. This affects its 21,000 employees and 4,500 stores, although around half are to be sold to Standard General, which will lease most of these to Sprint Corp. Radio Shack played a major part in the development of early personal computers simply by making cheap components available all over the US, but failed to make the transition from geeky specialist store to selling a wide range of branded computer and mobile phone products.
- **Blinkbox Books,** the e-books seller owned by Tesco as part of its Blinkbox operation, was closed down by Tesco in January as it failed to find a seller. It had hoped to sell it to Waterstones. Sixty jobs are at risk. Tesco itself set up Blinkbox Books in 2012 after it bought digital seller Mobcast. Tesco sold Blinkbox Movies operations to TalkTalk: Australian music streaming corporation Guvera bought Blinkbox Music. TalkTalk are mainly acquiring 75,000 Tesco broadband subscribers and 20,000 phone subscribers for it will close as a standalone service.
- **Country Casuals and Austin Reed,** the clothing outlets, are going through a CVA (not administration) and are seeking 50% rent reductions on its rapid closure list: 26 Country Casuals stores and nine Austin Reed, stores marked for early closure, and 20% rent reductions on a further 30 Country Casuals and five Austin Reed. All seem to be secondary locations apart from Bluewater and Meadowhall
- **USC,** the young fashion chain originally bought out of administration in 2011 by Sports Direct owner Mike Ashley, went into administration after Christmas. The directors decided they were unable to pay outstanding bills. There are 90 stores with 1,000 staff and the Dundonald warehouse (100 staff). One-third of stores and the warehouse were expected to close. Attempts were made to clear the Scottish warehouse *before* the company went into administration and, according to the Scottish *Daily Record*, suppliers that were owed money blockaded Sports Direct waggons for a period. USC was bought from administration by another Sports Direct subsidiary, Republic (rescued in 2012).
- **Bank**, the clothing store with 84 stores and 1,555 staff was put into administration after Christmas by its new owner Hilco. Hilco is expecting to sell the company as a going concern. It suffered a pre-tax loss of £8.1 mn in the y/e February 2014.