

FASHION SUMMIT
27 April at Portcullis House, Bridge Street, London SW1A 2LW
Minutes

The Secretary of State (SoS) opened the meeting by welcoming representatives and outlining the work that DCMS has been taking forward since gaining responsibility for the designer fashion sector which included several pre meetings which were hosted by James Purnell (JP).

JP briefly outlined the Government's Creative Economy Programme which aims to develop policy ideas to improve the way the Government supports the productivity of the creative industries, in order to make Britain the world's creative hub.

The main points raised in these pre meetings were focussed on education and skills, business skills, new technology and international trade.

Representatives outlined four key points:

- How to bring talent into schools - we should not be focussing on the design or modelling aspect of the industry but on the wider career opportunities that exist. There is a need for innovative partnerships between industry and educational institutions to make students aware of the choices.
- New technology - there is a need for traditional skills as well as the use of new technology.
- Higher Educational institutions - there needs to be a clear balance between business skills and the creative side.
- There needs to be a joined up approach – between designers, manufacturers, and retailers and there should be a better awareness between each of the sectors.

Representatives followed on by reporting that many of these issues are not just focussed on fashion but around the wider design industry, as shown by their inclusion in the Cox Report. Representatives also emphasised that the UK is famous for its creativity and innovation but there is a need to teach young designers how to sustain this.

It is important that educational institutions teach students to take risks and there is a need for more of a flexible approach in colleges to allow students to experiment. Representatives highlighted that there is a strong link between Government and cultural institutions in China.

More money is needed for technical equipment and research. Representatives felt that industry needs to look at how new technology is applied, how they achieve sustainability, how young designers are set up to work in the fashion sector, and how the industry supports graduates with technical skills.

There needs to be financial backing for manufacturers in the UK and there is also a need for London Fashion Week to be regenerated to attract international press and buyers. There was some concern from industry that London Fashion Week is

declining and that a quick turn around (18 months) could boost London Fashion Week.

Representatives outlined their experiences of attending fashion shows in previous years and that New York Fashion Week has been moving the dates on a year by year basis therefore making it harder for international representatives to attend London Fashion Week. It is important that London is promoted more to international representatives who would attend London Fashion Week. Representatives also felt there is a need to concentrate on the starting times of events at London Fashion Week and that in previous years events have started late having a knock on effect of key representatives (buyers and attendees) not being able to stay.

It was agreed that London Fashion Week needs regenerating and representatives felt that this would be an easy fix as only a small amount of money would be needed. It was also highlighted that it is almost impossible for students to succeed with little funding and that further financial support is needed to enable them to succeed.

JP reported that DCMS had been looking at what could be done to regenerate London Fashion Week and encouraged industry to come to Government with proposals on how this could be done.

There is huge competition globally but it would be easy to turn London Fashion Week around with a small amount of funding. Representatives felt that a semi permanent structure to house London Fashion Week would be a good opportunity to work with other creative disciplines.

It was highlighted that it would be difficult to move the date of London Fashion Week.

It was agreed that London Fashion Week is important for international press and buyers to see the UK's talent and that there was an increasing struggle to attract international representatives. It was also highlighted that fashion should not just be focussed on London but also how the regions can play a role.

Some fashion design companies have allowed students to come in and use their workshops and show rooms, and give advice to students. It was highlighted that this needed time, commitment and planning but costs very little. Representatives felt that they could call on other businesses to offer this kind of facility but for this kind of scheme to have a significant impact, a large number of businesses would have to offer this service.

The British Fashion Council had been working to set up a Forum to discuss how young designers can be supported. Topshop already had a good scheme called 'New Generation' which supports the best up and coming designers at London Fashion Week.

Funding is needed to help students to set up in business and there needs to be an awareness of business skills and the career opportunities within the industry. However, representatives also felt that "creative" people shouldn't be forced into

acquiring business skills, as their strength lies in creativity, not business. Better partnerships between business-minded people and creative people might be a more effective way to make new design businesses viable.

Skillfast have been looking at what can be done for 14-19 year olds to make them more aware of the broad career opportunities available in the industry. Representatives suggested that advice and guidance needed to be complete and that there could be centres of excellence set up in regional locations. There is also a need to see where technology is linked to creativity. Certain areas of the industry need to be "glamourised" to increase interest in them. These include sought-after skills such as pattern cutting and Computer Aided Design (CAD).

Representatives also agreed that there is a need for cheaper units that can be used as workshops with fairer rent.

Conclusion

The main key points agreed at the meeting were:

- DCMS will continue to work with industry, other Government departments and the British Fashion Council to look at strengthening London Fashion Week.

DCMS also agreed to see how the following issues could be fed into the work of the Creative Economy Programme.

- A structure for mentoring students and setting future partnerships between industry and colleges
- Access to new technology
- Clusters of accommodation with affordable rent for young designers starting up in business

SoS asked to have another meeting in 9-12 months to review progress with these key points.