



University of the Arts London Employability

Balancing the books: Creating a model of responsible fashion business education

ual: london college of fashion

Profile

- LCF is one of 6 colleges that make up UAL
- LCF has over 700 staff & 5800 students
- UAL has over 4700 staff & 19500 students
- LCF is located across 6

About the project

Summary

Fashion Business School students in the Balancing the Books project engage in an immersive final year experience applying the lens of sustainability to the entire fashion business curriculum, developing expertise and becoming socially responsible graduates. This new initiative challenged students to research sustainability strategy and apply learning to create innovative responses to real-world issues.

Project partners

The BA (Hons) Fashion Marketing team consulted with this cohort of students prior to design the initiative and worked with internal partners including LCF's Centre for Sustainable Fashion, UAL Careers and Employability and LCF Careers. External partners included TOMS who we worked with on a Strategy case study. Additionally, we partnered with sustainability experts including the Ethical Fashion Forum, Globescan and Redress, filmmakers The Rainbow Collective and sustainable fashion businesses Tengri, Kohl Kreatives and Shift India.

The results

The problem

The fashion industry is the world's largest polluter. In order to address this sustainability skills are increasingly important for business graduates' employability and we wanted to create authentic, impactful learning experiences for final year BA (Hons) Fashion Marketing students at the Fashion Business School. Following our pilot year graduates have launched social enterprise businesses, commenced MA study in Sustainable Business and are well-prepared for careers in sustainability.



The approach

The scale and reputation of the Fashion Business School makes it the industry leader in providing fashion and business management graduates who go onto careers in the UK and internationally. We designed a 360-degree sustainability learning experience that explores the interconnectedness of the global fashion industry value chain. Partnering with industry we used case studies, role plays and sustainability masterclasses students to imagine creative future sustainability scenarios across all aspects of the fashion industry.

Our goals

Our goal was to engage students with the challenges of sustainable business in order to develop their sustainability literacy and empower them with the awareness that their future actions can have positive societal impact through employment in the fashion industry. A desired outcome of sustainability literacy is the ability to form and present convincing policy arguments and as such the Balancing the Books project was designed to enable students to personalize their learning through selecting areas of sustainable business which resonated with their own personal interests and values.

Obstacles and solutions

Sustainability not seen as a curriculum priority for business students	The teaching team worked to reimagine a sustainability curriculum that focused on showing the interconnectedness of the fashion industry and how strategic decisions could have positive impact. Fully integrating sustainability in the curriculum across all subject areas and personalizing project topics gave students the opportunity to create a variety of responses e.g. text, film, business plan, project-based.
New course, new curriculum	Using the United Nation's Principles for Responsible Management Education as a framework. Reviewing sustainability/employability initiatives and then consulting students in a cooperative partnership to plan the curriculum and sharing our ethos around sustainability and ethical business gave it authenticity. Incorporating innovative pedagogies and a range of assessment tasks increased student engagement.
Complexity of the topics involved in sustainability	Working with sustainability experts to understand the scope and opportunities to integrate sustainability and employability skills.



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Finalist's case study



Performance and results

Business of Fashion has identified 'sustainability expert' as a future fashion career and LCF Careers report a significant increase in industry partners recognizing the role new fashion talent play in helping them improve their sustainability practices. Our project used UAL's Creative Attributes Framework to 'prepare students for change and for navigating uncertain futures, highlighting self-efficacy, curiosity and most importantly in this context resilience' (Richard Sant UAL Head of Careers and Employability). Involving a range of industry partners and alumni, educating our students on sustainability issues, designing projects that call for creative problem-solving, developing their ability to strategise and communicate, helps fulfil industry partner recruitment needs. Students say 'The strategy masterclasses were incredibly interesting and useful. I was provided with invaluable knowledge from industry professionals. I have become knowledgeable and realised I want a career in sustainable fashion.' We asked students to self-report their confidence level about responding to job interview questions about ethics and sustainability at the start and end of our Strategy unit; an increase from 43.4% positive responses to 77.8% positive responses was indication of transformational learning. Another of our innovations was incorporating a social enterprise business pathway in which students tackle societal issues through creative business solutions. Student business deal with a variety of issues connected to (in their words) 'the social issue which hurts me personally' e.g. the war in the Ukraine, mental health and financial vulnerability of the elderly in India. Although some of the businesses will stay at the concept stage the impact of planning a sustainable business will influence our graduates' future actions and societal impact.

The future

Lessons learned

To work sustainably is to challenge convention and find new ways of working that achieve ecological, social and cultural balance that is in tune with human behaviour. Or in the words of one of the students: 'Ethical and sustainable fashion will be one of the major trends in the coming ten years; every stakeholder should start to rethink the ways and methods they have been using.' A statement that applies to teaching and learning as much as to the fashion industry we study; we should work towards developing sustainability literate staff, students and alumni through innovative pedagogies with sustainability and ethics at their core.

Top 3 learnings from implementing your project

- 1 Designing a curriculum to fully integrate sustainability and business ethics is a challenging and rewarding process
- 2 New generations of business students have an appetite to create a better world through sustainable business
- 3 We can positively impact our industry through educating its future workforce in sustainability and business ethics

Sharing your project

Our focus on sustainability has encouraged the Fashion Business School in its school-wide curriculum review in the areas of sustainability and responsible management. Our work was showcased to Senior Leadership and our mapping matrix applied to all undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the school. Additionally, the project has been showcased at an event with LCF's Centre for Sustainable Fashion and nationally with the By the Fire sustainability educators' network. It features in LCF's SIP report to PRME and has been presented at the Chartered Association of Business Schools Annual Learning Teaching and Student Experience conference and at the International Foundation of Fashion and Textiles Institutions conference. Our approach has been



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What has it meant to your institution to be a Green Gown Award finalist?

“We are delighted that London College of Fashion, UAL has been nominated as a Finalist in three Green Gown award categories this year. We strive to embed sustainability in all that we do, using fashion, as a discipline, to drive change, build a sustainable future and improve the way we live. This recognition demonstrates the determination and skill of our staff, students, alumni and partners in realising sustainability aspirations to make positive change a reality.” Professor Frances Corner OBE, Head of London College of Fashion

Further information

For further information please contact Dr Natascha Radclyffe-Thomas n.radclyffethomas@fashion.arts.ac.uk

London College of Fashion PRME SIP report can be found here

<http://www.unprme.org/reports/LondonCollegeofFashionPRMESIPReportOctober2017.pdf>

Fashion Business School <http://www.arts.ac.uk/fashion/courses/fashion-business-school/>

www.green gownawards.org.uk

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