

Summary of Roundtable Discussion on ‘The Future of Sustainable Fashion Education’

(Released 30 April 2015)

On 22 January 2015, fashion NGO Redress and the Hong Kong Design Institute (HKDI) co-organised a two-hour roundtable discussion entitled ‘The Future of Sustainable Fashion Education’ which took place at HKDI. A total of 24 participants joined the roundtable discussion representing academia (13), fashion industry professionals (7), NGOs and government organisations (4) from Hong Kong, Mainland China, Taiwan, Singapore, UK, USA and Switzerland. The participants were selectively invited to join the roundtable by Redress and HKDI.

The roundtable objectives were to review the current practices of sustainable fashion education, to explore the problems experienced in integrating sustainability education into the higher education fashion curriculum and to offer recommendations to educators.

This report outlines the main findings from the roundtable discussion.

FINDING: There is a need for sustainable education in the higher education fashion curriculum

The problems

- Many fashion students lack knowledge about the social and environmental impacts of the fashion industry and knowledge about sustainable design and production processes.
- There is a lack of sustainable modules and criteria currently in the curriculum. In most cases, sustainable fashion education is not aligned with other modules.

The recommendations

- Sustainable fashion education should be embedded in the higher education fashion curriculum and sustainability should be aligned with other modules.
- Most of the participants agreed that sustainable fashion education should be mandatory. However, voluntary implementation was also suggested for inter-disciplinary collaborations.
- Sustainable training should be given to all higher educational levels including both fashion students and also the teaching team. A mechanism should be identified for providing sustainable fashion education to fashion students and educators.

FINDING: Sustainable fashion is difficult to define

The problems

- Many educators and fashion students find the terminology of sustainable fashion difficult to define as it covers many issues from social to environmental impacts.
- This varied terminology coupled with the increased complexity of sustainability means that many fashion students find sustainable fashion difficult to comprehend.
- Many fashion students think sustainability is too big of an issue for them to tackle and these negative connotations reduce their interest in learning about it further.

The recommendations

- Educators have to be selective in the vocabulary they use so that students better understand sustainability and don't feel overwhelmed.
- Educators have to demonstrate to students what the complex vocabulary means in a visual and compelling way.



REDRESS



Member of HKU Group
HKU 成員機構

FINDING: Fashion students lack knowledge about the fashion supply chain and the entire product life cycle

The problems

- Today's fashion supply chain is complex and many fashion students lack the knowledge of how and where fashion is made.
- There is a mis-match between the level of education provided by fashion universities and the needs of the industry, because companies are looking for sustainability-educated students.

The recommendations

- Educators have to inform fashion students about supply chains so they can be motivated and understand their power to influence positively.
- The fashion industry is a global industry and so fashion students should think globally. Students can better understand the industry by getting experience in the industry, visiting factories and watching documentaries of the production process.
- Industry projects and hands-on practices should be integrated into the learning and teaching activities. An organic way of learning and teaching is important.

FINDING: There is a lack of teaching resources

The problems

- There is a lack of sustainable fashion education material available to educators.
- There is a lack of databases of sustainable materials available to educators and fashion students.
- There is a lack of time in the curriculum schedule, as the existing curriculum gives no space for fashion students and educators to develop new content.

The recommendations

- Educational institutions and the fashion industry need to collaborate to provide easier-to-implement collaborations in order to increase sustainable fashion education, such as through Forums to gather ideas of teaching and learning.
- Educators need a platform to exchange information and to discuss ideas with each other and government and industry representatives.
- Educators need time and space to develop sustainable fashion teaching materials. The curriculum needs to be changed to allow more time for sustainable fashion education.
- More PhD programs on sustainability need to be developed.

FINDING: It is difficult to motivate fashion students to see the core value of sustainability in their work

The problems

- Many fashion students do not see sustainability as a main priority in their work.
- Many fashion students do not associate the terms 'sustainable' and 'eco' with something fashionable.
- Many fashion students do not think there is any immediate perceived return for them, even though companies are looking for sustainability-educated students.

The recommendations

- Educators need to use visual tools and experiences to inspire the students.
- Educators need to show how sustainability can be fashionable and trendy by providing successful industry examples.
- Educators need to show fashion students the value of sustainability by showing them the business case for it.