For immediate release

**Making it in Textiles careers conference encourages the next generation to become a part of the UK’s thriving textile manufacturing industry**

The careers conference Making it in Textiles offered 130 fabric design and technology students the opportunity to learn more about the career options open to them in the UK’s textile manufacturing industries.

The two-day event, which was fully-funded by the Campaign for Wool, The Clothworkers’ Company, The Drapers’ Company and The Weavers’ Company, brought together professionals and students from 21 universities and art schools who participated in a packed programme that included:

* Interactive talks and the opportunity to network with peers and industry professionals
* Explanations of the supply chain, textile manufacturing methods and potential careers opportunities at every stage of production
* Tours of world-leading textile mills in the West Yorkshire area
* After-dinner talk by Patrick Grant, creative director of Savile Row tailor Norton & Sons and judge of BBC’s *Great British Sewing Bee*
* Travel and accommodation

Organiser James Sugden of The Weaver’s Company invited the participating students to consider the diverse roles that make the modern textile business function in the 21st century: “There is a vibrant industry out there, with 100,000 people working in the textiles in the UK.”

The conference opened with lively and frank talks by experienced members of the fashion and textiles industries who discussed their own career paths; tips for getting started; and advice on employers’ expectations. They also gave in-depth information about their companies’ diverse histories and capabilities.

Woven designer and tutor Kirsty McDougall, co-founder of the Savile Row men’s suiting company Dashing Tweeds, highlighted some of the company’s collaborations with brands such as Converse, Boxfresh and Fred Perry, as well as her own studio work with leading fashion houses such as McQueen and Marc Jacobs. “Textile designers tend to be people in the background but I think it’s time that the population knows what goes into their clothes, what the supply chains are. Should we be credited like a hair or makeup artist in the fashion world?” she asked.

Beryl Gibson explained her role as a colour consultant and its impetus in driving sales in the fashion industry, her involvement in international colour committees and ways of working with colour. On starting out, she advised the audience to build on their contacts: “Try and have a particular customer or retail level in mind. I go to various trade shows, Première Vision Paris, yarn fairs, interior fairs, it all helps you.”

Stephen Sheard, former MD and founder of knitting yarn company Rowan, explained the wide variety of yarn types and spinning systems. “It’s a wonderful time for hand knitting,” he said. “We are looking for designers to work with, and we never hide their names, like Sandy Black and Sarah Dallas.”

“My whole life has been involved with the wonderful fibre of silk,” said Richard Humphries, director, Humphries Weaving, who relayed the history of the silk industry in the UK and gave an entertaining show and tell presentation of some of the remarkable bespoke fabrics the company makes for stately homes, Buckingham Palace, 10 Downing Street, as well as art pieces. He also gave good advice on looking for work: “Send a letter, we bin emails. Don’t send a creative CV… we want to know you had a bar job for three years to pay your bills.”

Gary Eastwood, managing director of woollen and worsted mill Pennine Weavers, described the company’s commission weaving business model. He said: “There’s a strong area of opportunity in textile production. We have a skilled workforce of 78 and we make continual investment in technology, systems and people. It’s not a nine to five job – it’s hard but well rewarded.”

Paul Johnson, managing director of Huddersfield-based WT Johnson & Sons, completed the afternoon’s talks by highlighting the vital and often overlooked last process in the production chain – between weaving and garment making - of fabric finishing. He explained: “Textiles manufacturing is advanced manufacturing. But we recognise we are working with a natural fabric and you can’t get consistency every time, you recognise that experience and expertise have an advantage. All our people are decision makers, they see what’s going on with a fabric and act accordingly. We have lots of opportunities for dye technicians, designers… all of them trying to make cloth special.”

The evening offered an opportunity to network over drinks and dinner followed by a talk by Patrick Grant, creative director of Savile Row tailor Norton & Sons and judge of BBC’s *Great British Sewing Bee*.

On day two, the students gained first-hand experience of modern textile production methods through tours of five local textile manufacturers – all of which are world-leaders in their fields. The participating companies were felted wool specialist AW Hainsworth & Sons; woollen weaver Abraham Moon & Sons; interiors and transport fabric specialist Camira; Pennine Weavers; and worsted weaver Stanley Mills.

Following the mill visits, on reopening the conference chair Cheryl Kindness, formerly design and development director of Camira, described her own career path. And textile design consultant and lecturer Sheila-Mary Carruthers outlined the extent of the fashion supply chain, before chairing a roundtable discussion with a group of recent graduates about how they made the transition into their professional lives:

* Andrew Stevenson, textile designer, Paul Smith
* Sinclair Paterson, director, Sinclair Duncan Textiles
* Coral Beattie, designer, Begg & Co
* Danielle Saletes, designer, M Makower & Co
* Mary Penny, designer, Johnstons of Elgin
* Amy Miskelly, Elliott + Miskelly
* Harriet Wallace-Jones, Wallace Sewell

The panel then joined with the audience in group discussions and asked them to share what they had learnt from the conference that will help their own job prospects.

At the close of the conference, the attending tutors were universally positive about the interactive experience. Philippa Brock, senior lecturer, head of weave, at Central St Martins College, London said: “It’s an amazing opportunity for students to network with industry and fellow students; to see production and to speak with both junior and senior members of the industry. It’s allowed them to see what industry is really like from a variety of perspectives and the chance to see other types of manufacturing in the UK. It’s also good for the information we give them at college to be reinforced by other industry voices, particularly from recent graduates to whom they can readily relate.”

Ruth Greany, senior lecturer, head of weave, University of Brighton, said: “They are exposed to the reality of the industry, that there is so much more to creating the cloth than design, it has opened up their eyes to the reality of fabric, for instance the number of quality control checks and the finishing process.”

Elaine Bremner, subject leader weave at Glasgow School of Art, added: “For our students to come to Bradford and interact with students from other areas of the UK has broadened their horizons. They’re seeing the competition for jobs. And with 60 mills in the area, they also see the prospects for employment in other areas of the UK.”

For the participating students, the conference acted as a window onto the textile supply chain. Summer Bradford, student at Nottingham Trent University, listed some of the key points she would be taking with her from the conference: “Sustainability, I hadn’t realised how much companies care about it. I didn’t realise how important colour is in design. I hadn’t been to a mill before so that was really useful. I had wanted to focus on interiors but more so having visited Camira. I had no idea of the processes to get to the finished cloth.”

Emily Cornthwaite, student at the University of Derby, said “The main thing I am taking from this is to focus on the commercial side of design work to prepare for life after university. To make sure I have a full portfolio that will help me to best show the breadth of my capability to future employers. At first I didn’t want to go into the fabric production side of textiles, now having seen what I have over the last day or two it’s opened my eyes to the different opportunities in the industry.”

In conclusion, James Sugden said: “We’ve opened a big dialogue between industry and students, we’re trying to create pathways into the industry for graduates of textiles, both design students and technical students.”

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