

AUSTRALIAN FASHION DIRECTIONS – GETTING IT RIGHT



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Victorian Government (TAFE)/ISS Institute/Fellowship

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Executive Summary

The Australian Textile, Clothing and Footwear (TCF) Industry faces an uncertain future in the light of changing global trends. Manufacturing in Australia has diminished dramatically and management of the Supply Chain has been restructured. Very few large clothing factories remain, while small fashion designers and entrepreneurs are emerging and sometimes thriving. Additionally, an analysis of skills within the TCF Industry identifies that many 'early' skills associated with the industry have been lost and the implications of new trends have yet to be fully appreciated.

The output of designer-driven businesses is characterised by small production runs of high fashion content items/garments and a quick turn around from concept to customer. The fashion content fulfils specific niche markets and satisfies the demands for innovative, unique design. Compact networks are important for speed, accessibility and economy of supply and distribution. Priorities for these businesses are networks that facilitate accessibility, economic information exchange, specific training on a needs basis, and trouble-shooting solutions.

In the larger retail-driven fashion sector of the TCF Industry, design is managed by product developers rather than creative designers. Businesses feature medium to large scale corporate Supply Chains, directed from local centres, but reliant on economies of off-shore production to meet competitive price points and linked to specific retail outlets.

Mainstream, medium to large scale, retail-driven Supply Chains seeking lowest price, quickest delivery and with a 'knock-off' mentality mean that the design component is one of direct copying at worst and adaptation at best. Many design concepts and product ideas are electronically sourced and cheap imports flood stores with limited design points of difference. The department/chain store 'designers' limit fashion choice as they are not sufficiently confident (or funded) to support local emerging designers.

The TCF Industry is moving towards a free-trade market with the reduction of tariffs, 5% downwards to 0%. This reduction of tariffs will inevitably bring about increased competition from an escalated flood of cheap fashion imports, while the increased access to overseas markets may bring opportunities. There are several Australian brands which are personality-driven with well-established and maintained international design identities. This type of business could be poised to expand.

At this time, a new perspective on training is required and insights gained into the techniques and specialised skills required in order to prosper and survive in new global markets.

Areas where skill enhancement is needed include:

- Support systems, networks and linkages for talented individuals and creative start-up businesses
- Support for the rapid adoption and integration of advanced technology and innovative materials
- Identification and adoption of IT solutions specific to the TCF
- Fostering and supporting the acquisition and utilisation of advanced skills and industry training programs

Executive Summary

- Sustainability – conservation of natural resources in manufacturing and distribution
- Ethical practices – non-exploitive behaviour, and compliance with relevant awards
- Logistics – adopting and utilising proven global Supply Chain models in an Australian context
- Triple bottom line – operating within acceptable financial, environmental and social parameters.

The 'Identifying the Skills Deficiencies' chapter discusses these skills deficiencies.

The aims of this Fellowship were to undertake an overseas study program to gain skills and a comprehensive understanding in the fields of:

- Creative and quality design within the context of a rapid response to market demands and Supply Chain for local and international settings, including marketing and sales strategies
- Building the business of textile and fashion design, manufacturing and distribution, with management models based on innovation and flexibility
- Understanding the Inditex group with a focus on Zara, Spain, as an example of fast-fashion, and transporting those contexts to firms and vocational training in Victoria, Australia, as specified within the Fellowship agreement
- Study other international fashion companies, industry organisations, professional activities and education and training leaders.

Stemming from the Fellowship study, six major recommendations have been made, and are detailed in the 'Recommendations' chapter. These broadly align with the Australian Government's review of the TCF resulting in the 'Building Innovative Capacity' report released in August 2008.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AWI	Australian Wool Innovation Limited
CAE	Council of Adult Education
CAD	Computer Aided Design
CMT	Cut, make and trim
DIIRS	Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, TCF Division
FGI	Fashion Group International
FIT	Fashion Institute of Technology
GIDC	Garment Industry Development Corporation
IED	Instituto Europeo Design
IFC	International Fibre Centre Limited
IFFTI	International Foundation of Fashion Institutes of Technology
ISS Institute	International Specialised Skills Institute Inc
ITAC	Industrial Technology Assistance Corporation, New York, USA
LCF	London College of Fashion
MMU	Manchester Metropolitan University
PAA	Paris American Academy
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University
RTO	Registered training organisation
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TCF	Textiles Clothing and Footwear Industry Group
TFIA	Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Limited
TI Australia	Textile Institute, Southern Australian Section
TI Manchester	Textile Institute Headquarters, UK

Definitions

Innovation	<p>Creating and meeting new needs with new technical and design styles (new realities of lifestyle).</p> <p><i>Reference: 'Sustainable Policies for a Dynamic Future', Carolynne Bourne AM, ISS Institute 2007.</i></p>
Design	<p>Design is problem setting and problem solving.</p> <p>Design is a fundamental economic and business tool. It is embedded in every aspect of commerce and industry and adds high value to any service or product - in business, government, education and training and the community in general.</p> <p><i>Reference: 'Sustainable Policies for a Dynamic Future', Carolynne Bourne AM, ISS Institute 2007.</i></p>
Skills deficiency	<p>A skill deficiency is where a demand for labour has not been recognised and where accredited courses are not available through Australian higher education institutions. This demand is met where skills and knowledge are acquired on-the-job, gleaned from published material, or from working and/or study overseas.</p> <p>There may be individuals or individual firms that have these capabilities. However, individuals in the main do not share their capabilities, but rather keep the IP to themselves; and over time they retire and pass way. Firms likewise come and go.</p> <p><i>Reference: 'Directory of Opportunities. Specialised Courses with Italy. Part 1: Veneto Region', ISS Institute, 1991.</i></p>
Sustainability	<p>The ISS Institute follows the United Nations NGO on Sustainability, "Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"</p> <p><i>Reference: http://www.unngosustainability.org/CSD_Definitions%20SD.htm</i></p>

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Sylvia Walsh would like to thank the following individuals and organisations who gave generously of their time and their expertise to assist, advise and guide her throughout the Fellowship program.

Awarding Body - International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute)

We know that Australia's economic future is reliant upon high level skills and knowledge, underpinned by design and innovation.

The International Specialised Skills Institute Inc (ISS Institute) is an independent, national organisation, which has a record of nearly twenty years of working with Australian industry and commerce to gain best-in-the-world skills and experience in traditional and leading-edge technology, design, innovation and management. The Institute has worked extensively with Government and non-Government organisations, firms, industry bodies, professional associations and education and training institutions.

The Patron in Chief is Sir James Gobbo AC, CVO. The ISS Institute Board of Management is Chaired by Noel Waite AO. The Board comprises Franco Fiorentini, John Iacovangelo, Lady Primrose Potter AC and David Wittner.

Through its CEO, Carolynne Bourne AM, the ISS Institute identifies and researches skill deficiencies and then meets the deficiency needs through its *Overseas Skill Acquisition Plan (Fellowship Program)*, its education and training activities, professional development events and consultancy services.

Under the Overseas Skill Acquisition Plan (Fellowship Program) Australians travel overseas or international experts travel to Australia. Participants then pass on what they have learnt through reports, education and training activities such as workshops, conferences, lectures, forums, seminars and events, therein ensuring that for each Fellowship undertaken many benefit.

As an outcome of its work, ISS Institute has gained a deep understanding of the nature and scope of a number of issues. Four clearly defined economic forces have emerged out of our nearly twenty years of research. The drivers have arisen out of research that has been induced rather than deduced and innovative, practical solutions created - it is about thinking and working differently.

A Global Perspective. 'Skills Deficiencies' + 'Skills Shortages'

Skill deficiencies address future needs. Skill shortages replicate the past and are focused on immediate needs.

Skill deficiency is where a demand for labour has not been recognised and where accredited courses are not available through Australian higher education institutions. This demand is met where skills and knowledge are acquired on-the-job, gleaned from published material, or from working and/or study overseas. This is the focus of the work of ISS Institute.

There may be individuals or firms that have these capabilities. However, individuals in the main do not share their capabilities, but rather keep the IP to themselves; and over time they retire and pass away. Firms likewise come and go. If Australia is to create, build and sustain Industries, knowledge/skills/understandings must be accessible trans-generationally through nationally accredited courses and not be reliant on individuals.

Our international competitors have these capabilities as well as the education and training infrastructure to underpin them.

Addressing skill shortages, however, is merely delivering more of what we already know and can do to meet current market demands. Australia needs to address the **dual** challenge – skill deficiencies and skill shortages.

Acknowledgments

Identifying and closing skills deficiencies is vital to long-term economic prospects in order to sustain sectors that are at risk of disappearing, not being developed or leaving our shores to be taken up by our competitors. The only prudent option is to achieve a high skill, high value-added economy in order to build a significant future in the local and international marketplace.

The Trades

The ISS Institute views the trades as the backbone of our economy. Yet, they are often unseen and, in the main, have no direct voice as to issues which are in their domain of expertise. The trades are equal, but different to professions.

The ISS Institute has the way forward through its 'Master Artisan Framework for Excellence. A New Model for Skilling the Trades', December 2004. The Federal Government, DEEWR commissioned ISS Institute to write an Australian Master Artisan School, Feasibility Plan.

In 2006, the ISS Institute established an advisory body, the **Trades Advisory Council**. The members are Ivan Deveson AO; Martin Ferguson AM, MP, Federal Labor Member for Batman; Geoff Masters, CEO, Australian Council of Educational Research; Simon McKeon, Executive Chairman, Macquarie Bank, Melbourne Office, and Julius Roe, National President Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union. ISS Institute also puts on record its gratitude to the former Chairman of Visy Industries, the late Richard Pratt, for his contribution as a member of the Trades Advisory Council.

Think and Work in an Holistic Approach along the Supply Chain - Collaboration and Communication

Our experience has shown that most perceive that lack of skills is the principal factor related to quality and productivity. We believe that attitudes are often the constraint to turning ideas into product and a successful business; the ability to think laterally, to work and communicate across disciplines and industry sectors, to be able to take risks and think outside the familiar, to share – to turn competitors into partners.

Australia needs to change to thinking and working holistically along the entire Supply Chain; to collaborate and communicate across industries and occupations - designers with master artisans, trades men and women, Government agencies, manufacturers, engineers, farmers, retailers, suppliers to name a few in the Chain.

'Design' has to be seen as more than 'Art' discipline – it is a fundamental economic and business tool for the 21st Century

Design is crucial to the economic future of our nation. Australia needs to understand and learn the value of design, the benefits of good design and for it to become part of everyday language, decision making and choice.

Design is as important to the child exploring the possibilities of the world, as it is to the architect developing new concepts, and as it is to the electrician placing power points or the furniture designer working with a cabinet-maker and manufacturer. As such, design is vested in every member of our community and touches every aspect of our lives.

Our holistic approach takes us to working across occupations and industry sectors and building bridges along the way. The result has been highly effective in the creation of new business, the development of existing business and the return of lost skills and knowledge to our workforce, thus creating jobs - whereby individuals gain; industry and business gain; the Australian community gains economically, educationally and culturally.

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Fellowship Sponsor

The Victorian Government, Skills Victoria is responsible for the administration and coordination of programs for the provision of training and further education, adult community education and employment services in Victoria and is a valued sponsor of the ISS Institute. Walsh would like to thank them for providing funding support for this Fellowship

Supporters

Fellowship Supporters

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- Kerry Dickson, TCF Consultant – TCF Industry mentor to the Fellow.

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- Stephanie Dick, Textile Institute, Headquarters Operations Manager, Manchester
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- Australian and Victorian TAFE, TCF Sector
- Australian Government, Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, TCF Division (DIIRS)
- Australian TCF Industry
- Clare Walsh, Project Manager Knowledge Services, AWI Australia
- Dr Raviprassad Krishnamurthy, Program Manager Nanomanufacturing, Nanaovic, Monash University Nanotechnology TCF
- Emer Diviney, Chief Researcher, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Industry Digital Supply Chain Project Victoria, TCF Industry Members Advocate
- Jo-Ann Kellock, Executive Director, Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Limited (TFIA) representing all TCF Industry sectors, companies, organisations and individuals
- Joseph Merola, CEO, IFC, Deakin University, representing TCF textiles research networks
- TI Australia President, Committee and Members, Southern Australian Section.

About the Fellow

Name: Sylvia Walsh

Qualifications

- Diploma of Fashion Design and Production, Emily MacPherson College, RMIT, 1972
- Fashion Retail and Merchandising Diploma, London College of the Distributive Trades, London, 1976
- Fashion Diploma, Paris American Academy (PAA), Paris, 1979
- Diploma of Technical Teaching, Hawthorn Institute, University of Melbourne, 1980
- Bachelor of Education, University of Melbourne, 1985
- Master of Arts, Textile Design, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), 2008

Walsh is a fashion educator with extensive practical experience. For the past 25 years she has been responsible for teaching and mentoring many of Australia's leading young fashion designers. Involvement in government and business initiatives has enabled Walsh to maximize her contribution to the fashion industry. In addition to her Australian fashion design and teaching qualifications, Walsh studied in Paris and London and was awarded a Masters of Art, Textile Design in 2008. In 2006 Walsh made a presentation at the International Foundation Fashion Technology Institutes (IFFTI) Conference in Toronto on her Masters project. Walsh was accepted to present a paper at the 2009 IFFTI Conference, in London.

Walsh currently holds the position of TAFE Teacher, Fashion Design and Fashion Manufacture at RMIT. In this role, she is active in encouraging student placements in industry and is involved in coordinating industry events.

From the mid 1960s through the 70s Walsh worked in a wide range of design, product development and merchandising roles in the fashion industry in Australia and overseas. She designed for mainstream international brands and also managed design projects for niche markets. Walsh worked with Aquascutum in London and Victron Fashion Imports in Hong Kong and was involved in the development of trade with China through business initiatives out of Hong Kong.

Walsh is the author of *Flappers to Flares – Six Decades of Fashion*, 2000, and *Sheep to Suit*, 1984. She is an Australian representative for the Textile Institute, UK (TI) a member of the Fashion Group International Inc, USA (FGI), and the Paris American Academy, Fashion Education Division, France (PAA) and plays a major role in the activities for the TI Southern Australian Section as a long-term Committee Member.

Aims of the Fellowship

Observations of the international context of fast-fashion and lean-manufacturing Supply Chains, design Supply Chain support systems, and design and innovation skills hubs and exchanges, were made with the aim to provide guidance for the benefit of the future Victorian TCF Industry and education sectors.

As agreed by ISS Institute, the aims of this Fellowship were to undertake an overseas study program to gain skills and a comprehensive understanding in the fields of:

- Creativity and quality design within the context of a rapid response to market demands and Supply Chain for local and international settings, including marketing and sales strategies
- Building the business of textile and fashion design, manufacturing and distribution, management models based on innovation and flexibility
- Understanding the Inditex group with a focus on Zara, Spain, as an example of fast-fashion; and transporting those contexts to firms and vocational training in Victoria, Australia, as specified within the Fellowship agreement.

Additionally, as identified by ISS Institute in July 2008, the Fellowship investigation focus was adjusted to include the study of other international fashion companies, industry organisations, professional activities and educational leaders.

Overseas investigations sought directly relevant answers to questions currently being asked in the Australian TCF Industry and specific up-to-date case studies. Comparisons can be drawn with the Australian context, synergies identified, linkages established and recommendations presented as to how the Fellowship findings may be integrated into the Australian environment.

Also sought from this overseas investigation were potential solutions to the major skills deficiencies identified in the Australian marketplace.

Skills enhancement opportunities were sought by gaining understanding of:

- Conditions operating in selected situations, programs and systems that nurture and promote creative designers long-term and that nurture and promote long-term, the uptake and integration of advanced technology and innovative materials and processes by creative designers.

Commercial entities were selected and considered in the light of business goals, scale of operations, employee numbers and annual turnover; indicating that the relevant aspects of these organisations have the potential to be adapted to the Australian TCF Industry.

The international market was observed to identify issues that are key to the survival of the Australian TCF Industry. For example, how are the challenges of reduced tariffs, in tight financial and labour conditions, being faced by innovative designers and creative manufacturers in ways that may be adopted in Australia?

The Australian Context

The Australian Industry Perspective

The Australian TCF Industry is often seen as primarily concerned with manufacturing. However, in recent decades, the actual quantities of fashion apparel/clothing made in a traditional manufacturing environment in Australia has dramatically diminished. At the same time, the management of the Supply Chain has been re-structured. Large clothing production factories have all but vanished and small fashion entrepreneurs are emerging, and sometimes thriving. There has been a gradual re-alignment in the focus, momentum and drive of the process of designing, manufacturing and selling fashion in Australia.

Design studios and workrooms are a significant sector. These feature high levels of creative design content, micro and small business models, quick small production runs, the desire for ethical and sustainable practices, high quality, and value for price. Such businesses appear to require specific support systems, networks and linkages for creative design start-up, beyond the initial incubation enthusiasm and moving into commercial, self-sufficient reality. The journey from laboratory prototype to marketable product represents a special challenge.

Studios and workrooms are design-driven, usually owner-operator businesses, locally based and resourced. They are led by design personalities and develop a creative identity. Often these leaders are young/emerging designers or recent graduates. The designer-driven sector consists of businesses of the average size in Australian TCF (4.1 workers or less). *(Interview with Jo-Ann Kellock, Executive Director, TFIA, July 2009)*

These businesses tend not to have factories but studios or workrooms that are often attached to their own small retail facility. They may sell directly to specific fashion customers and retail outlets. These designers need to maintain low-overheads to remain viable.

The output of designer-driven businesses is characterised by small production runs of high fashion content items/garments and a quick turnaround from concept to customer. The fashion content fulfils specific niche markets and satisfies the demands for innovative, unique design. Compact networks are important for speed, accessibility and economy of supply and distribution. Priorities for these businesses are networks that facilitate accessibility, economic information exchange, specific training on a needs basis, and trouble-shooting solutions.

In the larger retail-driven fashion sector of the TCF Industry, design is managed by product developers rather than by creative designers. Businesses feature medium to large scale, corporate Supply Chains, directed from local centres but reliant on economies of off-shore production to meet competitive price points and linked to specific retail outlets.

The retail-driven sector comprises retailers sourcing and developing, designing, and/or capturing (often referred to as 'knock-off') styles, based on maximising sales at the best cost price, at all fashion market niches. Included in the product range are designer/house/store/generic brand labels. This mainstream, medium to large scale, retail-driven Supply Chain approach seeking lowest price, quickest delivery and 'knock-off' approach means that the design component is one of copying at worst and adaptation at best. Much of the design concepts and product ideas are electronically sourced and cheap imports flood stores with limited design points of difference. The department/chain store 'designers' limit fashion choice as they are not sufficiently confident or funded to support local emerging designers. It appears this is the nature of close to 90% of Australian fashion businesses. *(Interview with Kerry Dickson, TCF Consultant, industry mentor to the Fellow, July 2009)*

The Australian Context

A third sector includes the remnants of the earlier corporate/designer label clothing manufacturing including production operations based on specific design briefs for basic apparel, business clothing and uniforms. This sector is driven by specific design briefs/orders and includes designer and house/store/generic brand labels. Generally, they produce their product ranges using combinations of local and off-shore manufacture.

Types of garments produced in this sector include fashion basics, government clothing, corporate clothing and uniforms, and are usually driven by competitive tendering processes. The design input in this sector is limited and conservative. Attached to the corporate clothing sector, are local specialist production units that occasionally supplement the largely off-shore sourced Supply Chain. Quick, small production runs designed to replenish retail stocks are featured as are some specialist manufacturing processes such as colouration, finishing, embellishment or branding of imported basic garments. Competitive price points drive this sector.

Australian companies generally work with short-term perspectives. The design Supply Chain on the whole, is driven by the traditional mode of work characterised by rushing from range to range, season to season, and one order to the next order without long-term vision. The TCF Industry is moving towards a free-trade market with the reduction of tariffs, 5% downwards to 0%. (*Interview with Jo-Ann Kellock, Executive Director, TFIA, July 2009*)

Reduction of tariffs will inevitably bring about increased competition from an escalated flood of cheap fashion imports, while the increased access to overseas markets may bring alternative market opportunities. There are several Australian brands, personality-driven, with a well-established and maintained International, design identities. This type of business should be poised to expand.

The recent initiative of the Federal Government regarding sustainability and 'green employment' makes no specific mention of the TCF Industry, which is regarded by many as operating in a non-sustainable manner; fashion continues to be driven by continual change and obsolescence. Australia has exported most of our large-scale non-environmental (or those activities regarded as 'dirty') operations to overseas cheaper labour countries (eg early stage wool processing and colouration). In addition, training levels in this area already exceed the number of employees that the industry can absorb, thus the opportunity for the industry to become involved with the initiatives for unemployed and disadvantaged employment is minimal.

However, there are two examples of where the TCF Industry could consider environmental improvement. The production of organic cotton material uses scarce water resources and the 'tyranny of distance' in Australia means that product distribution demands the utilisation of large amounts of energy. Further investigation could identify other issues. Companies involved in this industry should be looking to innovative actions to address these issues, and must be at least following Australian EPA instructions and regulations for their waste.

The Australian Context

SWOT Analysis

A strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis provides a useful avenue for summarising the current situation in the Australian TCF Industry. A SWOT analysis indicates the implications of addressing, or not addressing, problem areas and identifies needs for maintaining existing skills levels and initiating ongoing skills development. Such an analysis can be used to assist with assessing future directions for Australian fashion.

Strengths

- English as business language
- Export capacity
- High profit margin for designer items
- Established labour laws
- Established commercial practices
- Flexible small scale designer businesses
- Strong economy

Weaknesses

- Distances from world centres – logistics
- Fragmented industry sectors
- Limited support for creative start-up businesses
- Lost skills and resources
- Lack of TCF specific IT solutions
- Small scale local market
- Lack of workplace relevant training
- Slow adoption of ethical and environmental practices

Opportunities

- Overseas and local niche markets
- Full utilisation of design innovation
- Development of best practice manufacturing
- Re-focusing of fashion and textile industry training
- Development and utilisation of innovative high-tech textiles.

Threats

- International threat from low production cost countries
- Flow on from global financial crisis
- Uncertainty of ongoing government support
- Loss of creative skills to overseas

Identifying the Skills Deficiencies

The Skills Deficiencies

The TCF Industry of the future requires skill enhancement to survive and thrive. The Australian TCF Industry needs to enhance and increase the skills to meet the challenges of rapid worldwide change and global competitiveness. TCF Industry leaders have identified areas of concern where skills deficiencies exist and improvement is required to ensure a viable future:

- Support systems, networks and linkages for talented individuals and creative start-up businesses
- Identification and rapid adoption and integration of advanced technology and innovative materials.

It has been reported that there is a trend for many start-up businesses, not only TCF focused ones, to fail shortly after establishment. *(Interview with Jo-Ann Kellock, Executive Director, TFIA, July 2009)*

Accessible support networks, information and training hubs and resource exchanges could value-add to the creativity of fledgling businesses. Nurturing and mentoring for start-up businesses and designers needs to be developed. Young designers new to the industry claimed at the recent TCF review presentations that they require more specific, cost-supported, training and business mentoring.

Start-up designers hold the key to new design directions and innovation but lack resources. Appropriate market research and business tools are needed to identify specialist, niche services as well as development and training resources and to provide advanced knowledge and skills. A culture of quality educational outcomes such as skills mastery needs encouragement during the early stages of business development and beyond. Easy access to training on a needs basis is required with various entry and exit points.

Design inspiration needs to be drawn from sources other than fashion. Designing fashion in response to new specialist textiles, processes and materials should be explored in depth. The cultivation of mature Australian design style with subtlety of identity is required, not another koala motif or desert colour palette. Start-up designers hold the key to new design directions and innovative up-take of new technology. Investment in creative design businesses needs to be commensurate with unit value and long-term survival prospects and profit.

Sustainability

Conservation of natural resources in manufacturing and distribution are key issues. Australian industry response to conservation issues is behind International, first-world responses. Up-take and maintenance of improved practices needs to have more wide-spread commitment. The most commonly used codes of practice, standards and practical systems used by world-leading TCF manufacturers, need to be considered and codes of practice encouraged and/or legislated.

Ethical Practices

Non-exploitive behaviour and compliance with relevant awards require special attention. The focus on agreements such as no-sweat-shop accreditation for businesses and agreements on environmental and working conditions in overseas production need attention, in line with EU and Global standards.

Identifying the Skills Deficiencies

Advanced Skills and Training

There is a relatively high level of government, private and informal education in this area, considering the size of the Australian TCF Industry. RMIT's School of Fashion and Textiles, Brunswick campus, is the largest provider with approximately 500 enrolled students. There are at least another five Victorian TAFE institutes offering the same programs.

In addition, at least three private registered training organisations (RTOs) offer similar courses, as well as those offered at the Council of Adult Education (CAE) and other community providers. Interstate, there are TAFE and private providers offering similar programs. While fashion and textiles courses are traditionally popular 'hobby' courses, these numbers are beyond industry and recreational needs. At the same time, hands-on TCF apprenticeships and workplace training has diminished over the past two decades.

Employers like the idea of a highly trained workforce but they need bottom-line, practical, commercial skills so that graduates can immediately add value to their business and take initiative with minimum supervision. Training and re-training of graduates in employability skills and workplace relevancy after their higher education is often regarded as a disincentive to their employment. In reality, there are no entry level qualifications and anyone can start design and manufacturing businesses if they have the motivation and financial resources.

IT Solutions Specific to The TCF Industry Need Development

A lack of master-plans for IT systems procurement, use and maintenance appears to be a shortcoming common in the TCF. Implementation of IT continues to be viewed as a quick fix solution that in many cases does not prove cost-effective. Replacement instead of redesign is encouraged. Lack of flexibility and resilience to respond to changing needs is often not in-built into IT systems and highlights the generally poor cultivation of linkages between design and all Supply Chain sectors.

Electronic communication by nature can seem brusque and demanding instead of professionally neutral. Many Supply Chain systems lack access and transparency. The needs of the human components present in successful Supply Chains is often overlooked.

Logistics Opportunities Need Customisation and Implementation

In consideration of imminent changes in tariffs, it is timely for Australian TCF industries to review global Supply Chains. Lack of resilience in response to changing environment will not service the TCF well in the future. A readiness to take advantage of opportunities provided by increased markets could mean that manufacture and distribution models need development closer to new markets to reduce transportation costs and environmental impact. This appears to be one of the key success strategies of the International leaders in fast-fashion, global design Supply Chains.

Free-trade agreements place pressures on quality maintenance and control of supply in the light of anticipated flood of imported units. Industry leaders warn that when everyone is involved in fast-fashion it is not fast anymore it is just the usual process. Accordingly alternative points of difference will need to be found.

Identifying the Skills Deficiencies

Triple Bottom Line

The TCF Industry is traditionally driven by only the financial bottom-line and this perspective needs expanding. Reporting and recording of combined financial, environmental and social issues is not deeply embedded in Australia. Value adding holistically to earlier, narrow commercial criteria is gaining international acceptance and provides leadership for Australia.

Insufficient market/consumer research adversely influences well planned strategies. Low quality, wrongly pitched price and consumer expectations of continual mark-downs can each create ongoing problems. Cheap price at any price is not genuinely cheap if it does not take equal account of quality, environmental and ethical issues being put into practice.

Lack of reflective practice often means that market review and research are overlooked after point of sale. Bad sellers are quickly pushed aside and 'the next big thing' is rushed after. In a new climate of conservation, consumers need to be checked for their requirements regarding environmental and well-being aspects of design, textiles and clothing. Strengthened Supply Chain linkages require a holistic approach to overall operation including reliable delivery of consumer satisfaction. Reduced distribution costs may be achieved by relocating manufacturing bases closer to markets. Gains made in this way will need to be made in the light of non-exploitive and sound environmental measures.

Why the Skills Deficiencies Need to be Addressed

There are considerable benefits of the Fellowship. Flowing from this Fellowship report are insights into the skills and updated perceptions of where the Australian TCF Industry and industry training stands in terms of major world fashion centres.

Opportunities exist to incorporate this information into a number of new and established areas. As a participant in the TAFE fashion education field, the Fellow will seek appropriate ways to pass on knowledge gained. Workshops and seminars lead by international experts and overseas work experience and study are amongst the recommended actions leading from this Fellowship.

The International Experience

New York (USA), London, Manchester, Huddersfield, and Leeds (UK), and Milan (Italy), were visited during the period from September 23rd to October 17th 2008. In each city, educational providers and industry organisations and their representatives were selected because of the breadth of their spheres of operation. Contact had been made in advance to confirm interviewees' willingness to be interviewed and to share their experience and specialist insights.

To ensure the research was time-efficient and to maximise information gathering, each organisation was selected on the basis of their known track record in terms of nurturing creative designers and their involvement with advanced technology, materials and processes.

Overview of the Destinations

- NY Designs, Design Business Center, Long Island City, New York, USA
- Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), New York, USA
- Garment Industry Development Corporation (GIDC), New York, USA
- Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), Manchester, UK
- Centre of Excellence, Design and Textiles Incubator, Huddersfield, UK
- Council for Fashion and Textiles, Skillfast-UK, Leeds, UK
- Fast Fashion, Supply Chain Business Forums, London, UK
- Fashion Design and Technology Centre for Fashion Enterprise, London College of Fashion (LCF), London, UK
- Australian Wool Innovation Limited (AWI), Milan, Italy
- Paola Ambrosoni Design Studio, Milan, Italy
- Istituto Marangoni, Milan, Italy
- Istituto Europeo Design (IED), Moda Lab, Milan, Italy

The Interview Topics

In the course of meetings and interviews, the following questions were asked, wherever appropriate:

- How do you define innovation and how important is genuine innovation?
- What completely new approaches to innovation can you identify?
- Are there any totally new niches being developed and new and unusual sources of supply emerging?
- Do you know of any commercial cases that demonstrate rapid adoption and integration of advanced technology, innovative material with creative design?
- How do you and your organisation nurture and promote design talent and innovation?
- How important are core structures, strategies and funding and what is the role of training and technology?
- How significant are global economic and environmental issues and corporate responsibility?
- What else do you think is significant and are you optimistic about the future?

The International Experience

NY Designs, Design Business Center

Long Island City, New York, USA. Site visit and interview with Jane Tabachnick, Director.

Originally a New York and US Federal Government initiative, NY Designs operates in conjunction with La Guardia College. Its objective is to ensure that, despite decentralisation, New York City continues to be regarded as an international fashion centre. The organisation identifies and nurtures creative design talent and directs it towards sustainable commercial opportunities. NY Designs prides itself on its 'green', re-furbished building. Programs focussed on achieving ecological balance in business have proven to be popular.

NY Designs commenced operations with programs in 2004 with their designers in residence by 2007. At the present time, NY Designs has four full-time staff and some 13 design companies operating under its stewardship, which represents near full capacity. Showrooms and gallery spaces complement the design studios. Carefully selected specialists are employed on a needs basis in the key areas of industry mentoring and business coaching. From NY Designs' perspective, the quality of being coachable is pivotal for selection before involvement in their programs.

Of immediate impact on the visitor is the high level of professionalism demonstrated. Participants in NY Designs' programs and beneficiaries of their services and facilities have in every instance had to demonstrate the ability to operate as fully-rounded business people with both high quality output and the ability to articulate and promote their design businesses.

It was noted that NY Designs provided support services and work spaces for furniture and glass designers, graphic designers and website developers. This results in synergies across the design disciplines from which business opportunities may be identified. NY Designs plays an important role in developing self-motivated, talented designers capable of promoting themselves in tough markets.

Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT)

New York, USA. Site visit, interviews and panel discussion with Collette Wong, Chairperson Fashion Design, Karen Scheetz, Assistant Chairperson Fashion Design, Daniel Cole, Fashion Design and History Lecturer and Creative Consultant.

Recognised as a world leader in fashion education, FIT has strong creative and industrial associations. It is a New York fashion icon located in the centre of the garment district, housed in historical rag trade buildings. The proximity to the garment centre adds to FIT's relevance and the strong bonds between education and industry.

Students, staff and the wider community benefit from FIT's involvement in high calibre Fashion Arts and Fashion History programs as well as original research, combined with contemporary studies. FIT's galleries and programs are established as a prestigious resource for the benefit of fashion industry members and general public alike. It has a range of international linkages including student exchange programs in which RMIT fashion students have participated. During this study tour contact was made with the current exchange student who contributed insights from her experience. FIT is an underutilised resource in terms of opportunities for Australian students to study there. Knowledge to be gained at FIT could more widely benefit the Australian TCF Industry.

The International Experience

While having many student issues in common with Australian educational institutions, there are differences in staffing requirements and experiences at FIT. Many of FIT's lecturers are drawn from highly-regarded practitioners operating successfully in the business world. This provides students with state-of-the-art practical knowledge and role models in their prospective field of employment.

Garment Industry Development Corporation (GIDC)

New York, USA. Site visit and interviews at the head office and showroom with Tommy Wu, Operations Director and Andrew Ward, Director of Sourcing/Designer Development.

Established to strengthen and support New York's apparel industry, GIDC provides training services and advice on worker education, factory management and production systems. In operation for the last 25 years, GIDC representatives are optimistic about the future of the fashion industry, even under economic pressure, as it is traditionally competitive. Making money is regarded as a key measure of success.

Talented new designers are represented in the GIDC showroom which operates as a professional fashion agency. In common with NY Designs, participants have to present fully-developed business plans and strategies in order to participate in the GIDC's agency. Located in New York's traditional garment district, GIDC's headquarters and showroom facilities foster superior, creative design businesses. The showroom is a relatively new enterprise for the GIDC but has proved to be a significant draw-card for US and international attendees to New York Fashion Week. GIDC's reputation for design innovation has made the showroom venture an essential stop for international fashion retail buyers and the world's fashion press.

The organisation is governed by a board comprising union and business representatives. It plays an important role in sourcing raw materials and workplace specialists as well as providing export and merchandising advice. It is clear that GIDC sees its role in encouraging and guiding serious, sustainable businesses with long term plans.

Interviewees were knowledgeable about fast fashion trends and global sourcing, manufacture, distribution and merchandising. Nevertheless they were adamant that the 'Made in New York' branding will prevail in the long run. GIDC and its network of companies already follow the successful fast fashion system of logistics by focussing the sourcing of materials and workforce in regions close to its main market. Rapid response to the garment industry employers' and employees' needs is the GIDC's strength, particularly in the provision of skilled workers and brokering intensive training to cover skills deficiencies. The GIDC's objective is to energise the 'Made in New York' brand with fresh new design input from the designers that it nurtures in its fashion agency.

Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU)

Manchester, UK. Site visit and panel discussion lead by Helen Rowe, Principal Lecturer, including additional input from Heather Iwanow, Senior Lecturer.

The Department of Clothing and Technology at MMU proudly refers to graduate profiles that show ex-students who are employed in senior fashion and textiles design, clothing manufacturing and marketing roles throughout the world. International marketing and product development are key focuses of the University.

The International Experience

A full range of fashion qualifications are offered from BA and BSc Degrees to specific Masters of Science. Work experience and industry internship are a significant part of the education programs. Over 500 companies participate in workplace projects. MMU are actively involved with the need to match graduate skills-sets to employer requirements and ensuring graduates have employability as well as technical skills. University staff agreed that the ability to look behind and beyond fashion trends and investigate the effort, processes and ideas that contribute to successful fashion products is essential.

Confidence in building regional design backed by fashion market research and modern marketing practices is embedded in MMU's fashion and textiles studies. The close links between advanced textiles, inventive technology and innovative fashion design is stressed. Ongoing projects reflect opportunities for innovation and the application of specialist textiles to produce designs for high performance commercial products. MMU is extensively referred to by the TI and is regarded as a world leader.

Fast Fashion, particularly the Inditex company brand, Zara model, were subjects upon which a depth of knowledge was evident in discussions. Similarly, the impact of the green movement on fashion has been the subject of considerable analysis in MMU projects, creating a base for predictions as to its future impact. Generally, global Supply Chains and green issues are being grappled with to a far greater extent than they are in Australia.

This University has a significant research capacity and there is a depth of valuable intellectual capital within the Department of Clothing and Technology. In many ways, the University appears to be some years ahead of its Australian counterparts in terms of contemporary issues.

Centre of Excellence, Design and Textiles Incubator

Huddersfield, UK. Site visit and interview with Sue Taylor, Manager, Centre of Excellence, Design and Textiles Incubator.

The centre provides businesses with state-of-the-art design, textile and clothing training and facilities. Optimism and professionalism were obvious to the centre visitor. As a vibrant, regional training hub, the centre promotes strong local branding in coordination with the national 'Made in Britain' campaign. Representing 65 established and emerging companies and individuals, the organisation has introduced innovative programs including a Design Incubator and Manufacturing Leadership Program. Regional, national and international linkages are supported from a strong local design and technology base with the focus on achieving tangible business results.

Participation of businesses and designers in programs is dependent on well-developed business plans with significant opportunity for success. An extensive range of advisers and resources are available to businesses operating as tenants in the incubator space. Creative, technical and business skills-sharing are important aspects of this incubator experience. Collaboration across other design disciplines and business networks aims at strengthening regional solidarity and uniqueness while encouraging innovation – blending the old with the new.

The centre includes a production unit where there is hands-on training and a focus on obtaining apprenticeship program competencies. Training is tailored to the specific requirements of trainees, the particular business and product range.

The International Experience

Core activities include: consulting, prototype development, clothing – cut, make and trim (CMT) samples and small production runs, specialist machinery services, hire, support and technical advice. Cross fertilisation between textile and fashion design and production is nurtured through commercial activities.

There is a strong emphasis on practitioner teachers with even the centre manager maintaining a private design practice. There is a notable degree of emphasis on locally sourced materials and product design development, as borne out by the sponsorship of a Yorkshire Fashion Week. The centre's programs work towards promoting, to a wider market, local artisan traditions that are now enhanced by innovative approaches and advanced technology.

Council for Fashion and Textiles, Skillfast-UK

Leeds, UK. Site visit, interview and discussion with Linda Florance, Chief Executive, Skillsfast Sector and Jamie Petrie, Head of Qualifications and Standards.

Skillfast-UK is part of the Skills for Business network of the 25 employer-led sector called Skills Councils of England and Wales. Skillfast has developed out of recognition that the fashion and textiles sector has changed, and is still changing. Global markets, improved logistics and the removal of tariffs have all increased the level of competition and, at the same time, opened new opportunities. To stay productive, competitive and profitable, employers are re-engineering their companies and renewing and developing employees' skills with the assistance of Skillsfast-UK.

This organisation brokers skills agreements between employers, funding agencies and training providers. Skillsfast focuses on ensuring fit-for-purpose qualifications. It has an established role in UK fashion and Supply Chain businesses. It assists industry and education and training bodies to co-ordinate certification standards that are relevant with flexible awards acquisition. Skillsfast-UK's interests complement the current, growing acceptance for 'Made in Britain' branding. This brand fits the niche market where traditional values and artisanship together with enhanced product performance, through technology and innovation are core values. Skillsfast-UK's expertise is recognised internationally.

Skillfast-UK's core areas of expertise include: fibre and yarn processing, technical textiles, design, apparel manufacturing, trading, and wholesaling. Access to training qualifications is provided for at various entry and exit levels and duration. Programs range from apprenticeships and to higher degrees and specific enterprise skills building courses. Attracting the best and brightest workers and students is seen as a traditional problem with the industry. At the same time, the growing number of courses aimed purely at garments for catwalk showings were regarded as placing unrealistic emphasis on glamour aspects of the industry and unlikely to produce well-rounded, long-term industry participants.

From the Skillfast-UK perspective, over the last decade, key developments have been implemented in training programs and industry standards and priority solutions have been identified. Ethical practices and appropriate responses to environmental and sustainability issues have largely been embedded. Technology has been used to support rather than drive creative design businesses. Authenticity of the artisan products containing high levels of design maturity is increasing acceptance in niche markets. Skillfast-UK suggests that further improvements can be gained from ongoing, relevant professional development opportunities for industry trainers with resultant recognition of their valuable role.

The International Experience

Fast Fashion, Supply Chain Business Forums

London, UK. Seminar session and interview with Ken Watson, Director, Fast Fashion Fastreact.

This information transfer company has special insights into fast fashion businesses' global models. Fast Fashion forums have successfully implemented solutions in around 300 companies worldwide. In connection with peak industry bodies such as the British Design Council, Textile Institute and retailers associations, Fast Fashion personnel conduct industry workshops in response to training and business change management demand.

These seminars are designed for fashion industry participants with genuine interest and/or experience in rapid response design and manufacture. Participants are expected to use the workshop experience as it relates to the needs of their enterprise. Workshop audiences may be from industry associations or sectors or may be company-exclusive groups devoted to real-life organisational re-structuring and business re-modelling. Participants are expected to be aware of fast fashion model concepts and to be ready to achieve practical outcomes rather than general knowledge building.

In general, the greatest benefit is to be gained by participants with advanced analytical skills and attributes. During the course of the seminars participants encounter very sophisticated business trend analysis, computer presentations and graphing techniques. Companies can anticipate improved ability in the control their Supply Chain with added accuracy, speed and profitability. Concepts of fast injections of perfectly pitched design content for each retailing context, with minimum wastage and maximum logistics economies, are explored in these seminars.

The Fast Fashion Forums enterprise is recognised in the global context. Forums are constantly in demand and in the past year were held in the UK, Ireland, Netherlands, Spain, Hong Kong and Fiji. Designers, manufacturers and retailers were involved in custom-made business building, training activities based on the concepts and practices of Fast Fashion supply-chain systems, commercial environment issues and key performance characteristics and implementation strategies. This expertise in business modelling and predictive techniques appears readily adaptable and transferable to the Australian context.

Fashion Design and Technology Centre for Fashion Enterprise

London College of Fashion (LCF), London, UK. Site visit and interview with Jason Caine, Manager, Centre for Fashion Enterprise.

This centre is recognised for supporting emerging fashion design talent and nurturing the development of sustainable fashion businesses. The way UK designers are viewed internationally by investors, manufacturers, retailers and the press is influenced by the centre. It initiates unique programs tailored to demand.

The commercial value of the centre is recognised through the ongoing success of members in creating business viability through their exposure at International Fashion Fairs. There is strong interaction between the centre, the LCF and industry peak bodies and fashion leaders. Fourteen associated fashion designers successfully showed their collections at the 2008 Paris and Milan Fashion weeks.

The International Experience

Over the previous five years of its operations, the centre has supported some 40 designers with close to 80% still trading successfully. The centre allocates high levels of funding and professional support that significantly boosts the growth and sustainability of carefully chosen businesses. Participation depends on well-developed business plans, a demonstration of a real hunger to succeed in the industry and personal resilience. Applicants are required to show a strong press folio and an emerging sales profile with their range currently represented in a minimum of two or three significant stockists.

Originally set up as an incubator for LCF graduates, this not-for-profit organisation is an important showcasing platform with access to large scale investment from industry and venture capital resources. Members usually work on three to five year operational plans during their time with the centre.

The centre provides a framework with wide options for members to customise resources to the requirements of each business. Needs analysis is carried out for developing a viable production unit for each business. Business mentors are on hand and are carefully matched to each business and working style. There are six to eight consultants providing specific industry mentoring and general success coaching. These include: retail buyers and creative directors, finance specialists brokering key relationships, facilitators of skills sharing, training advisors identifying and filling deficiencies, and manufacturing mentors matching designers to compatible production facilities.

Subsequent to a successful selling season at Paris Fashion week, it was interesting for the Fellow to observe several participant design businesses at work assessing their orders from the recent international fashion shows and meticulously planning production resources and schedules with their mentors.

Australian Wool Innovation Limited (AWI)

Italy. Referrals from Maurizio Servant, Regional Manager, Australian Wool Innovation Limited, Treviso, led to discussions with Piergiorgio Minazb, Manager, Australian Wool Innovation Limited, Milan.

This organisation links Australian raw material into the global Supply Chain. High-end, Italian traditional fashion in quality wool fibre is recognised internationally for superior design. Traditional Italian design with a long track-record for satisfaction of fashion conscious consumers world-wide is nurtured parallel to the promotion of contemporary labels and products.

The AWI, through its Italian offices, provides encouragement to a new breed of creative and flexible commercial designers. The unique business approach is highly regarded internationally. It matches the high quality performance and aesthetic characteristics of wool fibre to traditional Italian craftsmanship. The industry principle is that a sound marketing of wool needs to look at the finished product at a retail level and work back to the fleece and the sheep. Collaboration between all partners along the whole Supply Chain is well established with demonstrable success.

The International Experience

Paola Ambrosoni Design Studio

Milan, Italy. Site visit, interview and viewing of work with Paola Ambrosoni, Fashion Design Business Owner/Operator, Designer and Design Lecturer, currently contributing to IED projects.

This Italian fashion designer seeks out and promotes new design talent and innovation. Paola Ambrosoni has worked with Australian Wool Innovation Limited and is recommended by them. As an AWI winning designer, recognised in the 1980s, Ambrosoni has built her business from original qualifications as an architect. While use of luxurious fibre and artisan methods in traditional products is a first love, Ambrosoni is cognisant that design must serve business and vice versa to remain viable.

As a designer with an established career record, Ambrosoni has an eye on future commercial and ecological creative opportunities. Ambrosoni has her own fashions labels, a design forecasting business and lectures in Fashion Design in line with the prevalent practitioner/lecturer role encountered elsewhere.

Ambrosoni sees the role of the creative designer leading and developing the whole Supply Chain for her clients. She particularly encourages retailers to take calculated design risks instead of being trapped into design mediocrity by the constraints of price points. She believes that the creative designer's role is to propose authentic, innovative concepts that are workable and saleable. The designer should lead, stretch and inspire the client within their design brief. All aspects of the process from sketch to store are seen as the realm of the designer and this demands a breadth of knowledge and skills.

Ongoing up-skilling is essential and to this end Ambrosoni has become competent in Computer Aided Design (CAD) for fashion and textiles design. At the same time, aspects of expertise that are not possible for the designer to personally achieve must be accessed externally and Ambrosoni sees it as the designers' job to identify and obtain all required resources and personnel to deliver innovative products to the client.

Ambrosoni's client base covers the fashion and interiors sectors in Italy and throughout Europe. She employs an agent to drive her marketing and uses Italian production and resources wherever possible, but also has more than 20 years experience of China as a manufacturing source. Over the years she has observed that Chinese production has increased in quality and moved towards up-market manufacturing capacity which is now giving her the standard of product required at higher price points in Europe.

Ambrosoni's optimism about the future stems from the young designers she interacts with and the stimulation of being able to constantly draw from Italy's design history when integrating new technology and inventive materials and systems. Textile and fibre technology are seen as having strong application in everyday fashion that value-add to products.

Paola Ambrosoni sees many opportunities for individuals in the fashion industry to become creative within their specialisation. She has a select client base chosen for their receptiveness to innovation.

The International Experience

Istituto Marangoni

Milan, Italy. Site visit and interview with Paula Gunter, International Relations Manager, on behalf of Fabrizio Tovagliari, International Relations Manager.

This leading Italian fashion design institute promotes Italian design, merging global perspectives and local traditions. Founded in 1935, the Istituto Marangoni has campuses in Milan, Paris and London. It regards itself as a cosmopolitan community with Italian, French and English as the school's official languages. The Istituto's 24,000 students and staff are drawn from more than 70 countries. Courses range from three year undergraduate programs through to advanced specialised Masters courses over one year. A full range of fashion subjects are taught from design, styling and brand management to fashion promotion.

The Istituto Marangoni maintains close relationships with the local and global fashion marketplace and this is fundamental to the design approach. Obvious pride is expressed in the facility and the lecturers are afforded a high level of respect. The elegant professional impression that the organisation demonstrates is reflected in a respectful, interactive learning and teaching environment.

Though not spacious, the overall teaching area's appearance lacked the chaos often witnessed in Australian learning centres. Action learning situations are designed to maximise interactions of groups of ideally 20 students. Compact lecture rooms are designed for larger groups with opportunity for interaction still the key. Competition for prestigious scholarships and jobs drives students in well-planned individual and team projects. It was expressed that project participation is under ongoing review in the light of the feeling that inclusion in career building projects has to be genuinely earned.

International fashion agents source new talent from Istituto Marangoni and offer substantial internships and promotional opportunities which are a boost to start-up careers. This appears to be an outward looking school in its physical approach but at the same time dedicated to traditional foundations. Istituto Marangoni staff observe differences between their student profile and the different images of their campuses. Students are drawn to the Milan campus because of its reputation for a cool elegance. The Paris campus is noted for its indefinable chic, while London reflects a contemporary flamboyance. At all campuses, there are strict standards of perfectionism and skills mastery.

Istituto Europeo Design (IED), Moda Lab

Milan, Italy. Site visit and interview with Ivana Mazzi International Co-ordinator.

IED is an Italian fashion and textiles design and business education leader. The IED has a 40 year history with a presence in Milan, Rome, Venice, Torino, Madrid, Barcelona, Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Faculty members have strong industry involvements and there are vital business and cultural partnerships. Post diploma courses are offered in a range of fashion, design and textiles subjects conducted in Italian and English. Advanced research study programs for Masters qualifications are also available.

Course work emphasises the importance of real-life content and work experiences for students and the opportunity of ongoing employment, stemming from work experience, is encouraged. References to the contemporary socio-economic climate and global environmental challenges add relevance to traditional fashion design concepts.

The International Experience

Strong links between all parts of the design Supply Chain are fostered and are evident in industry projects. The students work through every process as linked to the next one where importance of fibre and yarns, textiles and surface decoration are stressed in achieving successful end-use. Design, manufacturing and merchandising are extended through projects that involve marketing and business students and other campus resources. The results are very impressive professional outcomes. Industry can often take student project work straight into production in the commercial market.

Projects develop students' commercial awareness and enhance their employability skills. After initial consultations, students take ownership of projects with staff stepping back into a coaching role. Industry experts provide specific skills mentoring where required. Exceptional levels of competence and industry exposure are achieved as students collaborate and work with industry gaining an awareness of the whole commercial environment. Project memberships and subsequent success are seen as very prestigious achievements by students.

Around the campus large inspirational affirmations are printed on the walls, in English. By these and general attitudinal means, a positive coaching environment is achieved. Presentation skills and well developed Italian and English language skills are essential for program entry. There are language up-skilling, bilingual classes and peer language mentoring schemes. The importance of English language in the fashion industry is vital with agents sometimes declining to represent otherwise talented graduates who lack the ability to sell themselves effectively in English.

Knowledge Transfer: Applying the Outcomes

Throughout the study tour, a number of common factors were observed where the points of difference with the Australian situation were very clear. In the main, these factors were largely cultural and attitudinal, having sprung from historical, industrial and trade backgrounds quite different from those upon which modern Australian practices are based. In Italy, for example, the reverence and respect for master craftspeople and their work was particularly strong and in England there remains an influence of respected merchant and trade guilds behind many products and services.

Significantly, these points were largely attitudinal and had strong influences on the way business and educational activities functioned. It is from these matters that lessons can be learnt or knowledge transferred. Among these observations were the following:

Understanding of First Class Talent and Skills Incubator

In giving consideration to the fashion incubator concept within Australia, we need to recognise that these services should be only provided after rigorous assessment of prospective participants. Individuals warranting incubator services need talent coupled with strong business acumen and the ability to self-publicise. The whole package of skills needs to be present in order to qualify. A high standard of English was expected, even where it was not a first language.

Re-Thinking Exchange Programs

Whilst limited benefits have flowed to individuals participating in student exchange programs, a semester or two in another educational environment is not the real key to knowledge transfer. More emphasis needs to be placed on sending overseas for experience, those individuals who have completed their training and who are showing genuine ability in the marketplace. Some form of bonding may be required such as contractual agreements, in order to ensure such individuals return and provide input back into the Australian Industry. As well as participating in overseas education, the undertaking of overseas internships and workplace assignments need to be explored further. Knowledge transfer opportunities of the overseas experience need further consideration.

The Educator as Practitioner

Time and again during the study tour it was found that fashion and textile industry educationalists were concurrently involved in design businesses and practices and that professional development opportunities and secondments were the norm. Far from being regarded as a conflict of interest or distraction, these activities were regarded as vital requirements. Students clearly had respect for people who actually made a living from what they lectured about. While there may be some examples of this in Australia, it is not commonplace. It is recommended that consideration be given to this issue when appointments are being made regarding tenure of fashion industry educators in Australia. Skills mastery opportunities should be available for educationalists. Industry relevant professional development needs to be supported with genuine industry release and study projects.

Respect for Fashion Teachers

It was apparent that lecturers in fashion subjects were held in high esteem by their departmental managers and students. Overall, fashion and textiles education and skills were seen to have a high degree of difficulty with demanding pre-requisites.

Knowledge Transfer: Applying the Outcomes

Students appear to have genuine desire to learn and respect for the complexity of knowledge and skills in the field in which they plan to forge a career. This contrasts with the Australian scene where government-supported fashion and textiles training can be an alternative to Centrelink payments and where the 'student-as-client' emphasis creates a situation where poor performers are allowed to denigrate their teachers. In Australia entry requirements for government-supported fashion and textiles training do not always call for high levels of aptitude or dedication; poor students are frequently allowed to nominally complete courses with little hope of forging careers in the creative and commercial areas of the industry. An attitudinal rethink across the board appears warranted in Australia.

Advanced Qualifications for Fashion Teachers

Common to all organisations visited was a pride in lecturers with advanced technical and academic qualifications. At all the educational institutions, lecturers are encouraged to undertake advanced professional development, training and research programs and become master artisans. This is not the case in Australia where a 'trade' approach with minimal narrow skills acquisition still lingers. Advanced tertiary training, high level professional development and skills mastery are often regarded as irrelevant or accessible only by those who have moved from teaching into management roles within educational bureaucracies.

Green Issues

An emphasis on environmental or 'green' issues is embedded in training programs and product design to a far greater extent than is currently the case in Australia. It is clearly an integral part of training and not an inconvenient add-on extra. In the same way, consideration of fair wages and social justice are a matter of course included in business and training discussions. This has come about through well-understood legislation and established industry codes of practice. It is recommended that Australia should be moving faster in this direction.

The Best and Brightest

Rigorous selection was found not only to apply to potential incubator participants but to tertiary training, generally in the field of fashion and textiles. It was widely recognised that to succeed, individuals needed to have more than a basic aptitude. In almost every instance, reference was made to demonstrable self-motivation and multi-language skills. In Italy, it was recognised that a student who was not proficient in English as well as their own language, was at a disadvantage at the outset. This is in stark contrast to the Australian situation where scant regard is paid to realistic English competence among fee-paying students. Funding issues are recognised, but it does appear that the time has arrived to take stock of the competency of students accepted into diploma and degree courses.

Fast Fashion

Fast Fashion concepts, as exemplified by the Inditex group, particularly Zara, were discussed with all interviewees and a broad understanding was demonstrated of this movement in fashion trend uptake, manufacturing and marketing. By and large, the requirement was seen to adapt the concept to specific business size and needs rather than attempt to be another Zara, H&M or Mango.

Knowledge Transfer: Applying the Outcomes

Likewise, it is seen as necessary for Australian fashion businesses to understand the high degree of analysis, sophistication and advanced technology behind fast fashion systems. A greater understanding in Australia will enable appropriate smaller scale adaptations for the Australian marketplace.

Niche Markets

Almost universal advice was received during the study tour for Australia to 'play to its strengths' in terms of fashion developments. In other words, the knowledge gained was for Australian fashion and textiles businesses to do more of what they do really well, while at the same time, understanding world trends. Most interviewees were able to name several key Australian brands and saw opportunities for more international players of this calibre. There was strong interest in new and emerging Australian designers and design niches. Advice was given that Australia should consolidate a design signature building on strengths and natural advantages such as geographic uniqueness, quality natural fibres, inventive fibres, fabrics and processes. A unique Australian design maturity should be fostered to gain design confidence and recognition beyond tourist iconography.

Personal Activities

The knowledge and insights gained in completing this Fellowship study need to be shared and directed to areas where they may assist students, teachers, educational planners and industry officials.

To these ends, future participation in the following activities is envisaged:

- Student career and overseas study planning
- Teacher discussion groups and networks
- Industry discussion groups and networks
- Industry organisation panels and committees
- Curriculum planning
- Support and mentoring of future ISS Institute Fellowship recipients
- Articles in relevant publications
- Watchfulness for opportunities to dovetail with events where knowledge and insights would be valuable
- Seminar and workshop activity
- Attendance at conferences where relevant knowledge can be gained
- Disseminating and gathering information via membership on the Textile Institute committee
- Government functions, should invitations be forthcoming

Recommendations

The following recommendations stem from witnessing first-hand the operation of what may be regarded as centres-of-excellence, in the TCF Industry in the USA, UK and Italy. Interviews with key executives and educationalists repeatedly brought home shortcomings within the operations and training areas of the Australian TCF Industry. In many instances answers to key questions were very similar across the spread of organisations visited. The focus of the responses to key questions identified the importance for successful new designers of business skills meshed with creativity and personal characteristics such as stamina, high work ethic and coachability.

In endeavouring to conceptually adapt successful overseas approaches to the Australian market, it is necessary to be cognisant of limited opportunities for economies of scale because of Australia's modest size population by world standards. It is also necessary to recognise that Australia simply does not have a deeply embedded tradition of master craftspeople backed by centuries of proud production of superior products.

Nevertheless, leaders in the TCF Industry in Australia have expressed the need for change to meet future challenges. The Australian Government's review of the TCF, resulting in the report 'Building Innovative Capacity' released in August 2008, makes some 15 major recommendations. Throughout this report there is emphasis on the following: innovation, well-designed industry assistance, collaborative measures, stringent support eligibility, quality recognition, and ethical standards. In every instance, the recommendations that follow may be tied back to one or more of the Ministry for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research's recommendations. This review progressed to the calling of submissions in response to the recommendations with a 29 January 2009 deadline. It is conceivable, therefore, that in the period immediately ahead proposals allied to those in this report may come under active Federal Government consideration for funding allocation.

Government, Education and Industry Recommendations

TCF Industry Skills Centre and Talent Incubator

There is a need in Australia for one comprehensive centre-of-excellence for the TCF Industry. Models exist in the USA and UK involving existing industry members and new industry entrants. All levels of industry participants gain from blending traditional expertise with new creativity and enthusiasm.

A high calibre TCF Industry skills centre and talent incubator should be unashamedly selective. Opportunities to participate should be restricted to companies and individuals able to demonstrate superior design skills, significant business acumen, and the ability to self-promote through advanced communication skills.

The objective of this TCF Industry skills centre and talent incubator would be to nurture top talent through coaching, professional assistance, customised training and specialised resources and facilities. The end result would be individuals and companies capable of operating successfully on the world stage and enhancing Australia's commercial reputation.

Important elements of the talent incubator would include:

- Open to TCF Industry businesses and individuals with a proven track-record and potential to operate at the highest levels
- A professional board or controlling committee comprising design, manufacturing, marketing, financial, legal and State and Federal Government representation

Recommendations

- Rigorous selection process to ensure that applicants have the full package of requirements, and that they are coachable
- Adequate levels of funding strictly tied to specific performance achievements
- Self-funding commercial design, production units and showroom facilities
- Sophisticated coaching and mentoring of designers
- Information and know-how brokerage for technical skills, specific equipment, legislative matters and workplace issues
- Facilitating of multi-discipline networking
- Commercial services providing opportunity for key employees to aggregate skills acquisition towards recognised qualification or stand-alone certification. Tested achievements rather than merely acknowledgment of attendance
- Location and ambience of state-of-the-art business facilities rather than a school
- Superior skills acquisition, flexible and accessible training entry and exit opportunities

Superior Skills Acquisition

For the long-term survival and global thrust of the Australian TCF Industry, there needs to be consideration and consolidation of skills acquisition programs.

Matters needing to be re-examined and recast in a realistic light include the following:

- Standards do matter. Not everyone can be a designer and not everyone who engages in training can be expected to pass – unless standards are very low. Standards are in danger of being compromised when high pass rates are artificially managed. Consideration needs to be given to elite streaming as well as maintaining and elevating degree standards.
- How can the best and brightest individuals be attracted to careers in the TCF Industry? Consideration is needed to ensure an ongoing process of attraction and selection is implemented.
- Exchange programs. Opportunities should be explored to increase the number and quality of exchange programs. A student spending one semester at an overseas institution does not have the same value as internments and extended periods of work experience in world class operations where master artisans (craftspeople) are recognised. In this respect some form of bonding may be required to ensure the acquired skills are brought back and disseminated in Australia.
- Pathways should be sought to ensure that new designers have the opportunities to learn from other disciplines, particularly where new technologies are concerned.
- Utilisation of computer technology needs to be backed by a thorough understanding of the creative manual techniques that the technology supports. Activities should be supported, not driven, by information technology.
- Students need to have respect for their teachers who should be encouraged to seek advanced qualifications. Steps towards this would be advancement of the concept of master artisans, as in Europe. Educators should be encouraged to have a dual role as educators and practitioners.

Recommendations

Fast Fashion

While Australia may lack the pre-requirements to produce Zara, H&M or Mango scale global operations, it is important to understand the extent of the sophistication behind their corporate models. Only by examining key technical aspects of the major global players' operations will Australian design businesses be able to engage in complex analysis and rapid response to market preferences on a more modest scale.

Niche Fashion

Considerable thought needs to be given toward encouraging and developing creative design concepts unique to Australia and its region. Already a number of Australian TCF Industry players have established themselves internationally in areas including country and bush apparel, swimwear and specialist surf wear.

Part of the role of an elite TCF talent incubator should be to encourage the development of innovative, uniquely Australian points of difference. Every effort needs to be made to attractively market products using new commercial designs in high-tech textiles. At the same time traditional strengths need nurturing and renovation. Steps need to be taken to avoid the benefit of technically advanced and traditional Australian materials and components being exported and then sold back to Australia in highly value-added forms.

Green and Ethical Issues

An Australian ethical quality mark (EQM) and labelling, as recommended in the 'Building Innovative Capability' report is long overdue. Generally, Australia is moving slowly in this area. In the United Kingdom and United States the stage at which Australia is placed is referred to as 'green-washing'. That is the stage where there is significant talk about environmental responsibility and fair trade but very little action. It is time to fully support moves to legislate for ethical business behaviours, eco-consciousness and industry codes of practice. The TCF Industry will play its part if it fully supports moves on an authentic, auditable EQM.

Recommendations to ISS Institute

Visiting Experts – Conference and Workshops

During the study tour two interviewees stood out as being particularly capable of bringing valuable insights to Australia, and should be invited by the ISS Institute to engage in conferences and workshops. A high standard of presentation and content is assured along with relevant media coverage where appropriate. Both prospective speakers have well-established networks of professional contacts both overseas and in Australia.

Recommended experts are:

- Ken Watson, Director of Fast Fashion, Supply Chain Business Forums, London, UK. This information transfer company has major insights into fast fashion business global models and a long track-record of working with TCF Industry internationally. Watson is an excellent speaker capable of generating strong interest.
- Paola Ambrosoni, Designer, Milan, Italy. As an Italian fashion design practitioner, Ambrosoni nurtures and promotes design talent and innovation. She is a leader in creative designing and innovative approaches blended with commercial viability. Ambrosoni is an experienced presenter in the English language with a vivacious personality.

Recommendations

Conclusion

The preceding recommendations are directly relevant to issues being widely canvassed in the TCF Industry at present. Very significant changes have taken place in the industry during the past decade with parts of the industry no longer existing and others subject to ongoing shrinkage.

This report focuses on areas where regeneration and growth are a realistic possibility, given an understanding of existing strengths and opportunities to develop Australian-based high-level skills.

Of particular relevance is the recommendation to form a TCF Industry skills centre and talent incubator comparable to those visited by Walsh during the course of the Fellowship. This particular recommendation, along with the other recommendations, aligns with the Australian Government review resulting in the 'Building Innovation Capacity' report released in August 2008.

Additionally, this report highlights a range of uniquely Australian issues and attributes that have a bearing on future success or otherwise in world markets. It provides a realistic assessment of the Australian TCF Industry today and directions in which it might improve in the future.

In a report of this nature there has not been the time or space to encapsulate the many hours of information recorded in note form and on audio tape. Given the opportunity, the Fellow would be pleased to expand on any of the foregoing.

The ISS Institute is thanked for its support and encouragement in providing this Fellowship.

References

Building Innovation Capability - the report on the Review of the Australian Textile, Clothing and Footwear Industries, August 2008, Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIIRS), Government of Australia.

Review on the Australian Textile Clothing and Footwear Industries, July 2008. Over 80 written submissions collected and published on this website. Consultation meetings were also held in each state where verbal submissions were made.

<http://www.innovation.gov.au/tcfreview/Pages/ReviewofTextileClothingFootwearIndustry.aspx>
(Website accessed July, August 2008, and January 2009)

Attachments

During the course of this Fellowship study a collection of documents was assembled. These documents can be obtained from ISS Institute:

NY Designs, Design Business Center, Long Island City, New York, USA

- Internet information printout

Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), New York, USA

- Internet information printout

Garment Industry Development Corporation (GIDC), New York, USA

- Internet information
- *Fashion Manuscript magazine, September 2008*

Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), Manchester UK

- *Muse* magazine, Department of Clothing Design and Technology
- Careers Information Brochures:
 - BA (Hons) Clothing Design and Technology
 - BA (Hons) Fashion Design and Technology
 - BSc (Hons) Fashion Buying
 - BSc (Hons) International Fashion Marketing
 - BSc (Hons) Fashion Clothing Technology and Design
 - BSc (Hons) Fashion Materials and Technology
 - MSc International Fashion Buying
 - MSc Clothing Product Development

Textile Institute, (TI) International Headquarters, Manchester, UK

- *Textiles, Quarterly Magazine of the Textiles Institute*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2008, including these Inserts: *TI Annual Report, 2008, Brits in Paris* brochure, October 2008

Centre of Excellence, Design and Textiles Incubator, Huddersfield, UK

- *Huddersfield magazine*, Summer/Autumn, 2008

Council for Fashion and Textiles, Skillfast-UK, Leeds, UK

- Internet information printout

Fashion Design and Technology Centre for Fashion Enterprise, London College of Fashion (LCF), London, UK

- *Manifesto*, Venture Alumni, current students, pioneer designers
- *Sample fashion photography*, promotional folder, Fashion Week 2008

Istituto Marangoni, Milan, Italy

- Comprehensive Organisation and Programs booklets

Istituto Europeo Design (IED), Moda Lab, Milan, Italy

- Comprehensive Information package 2008/9
- International Students Guide 2008/9
- Exchange Study Program – Bilateral Agreement Documentation

Inditex Reports 2004

- Annual Report
- Corporate Governance Report
- Sustainability Report