

Environmental Audit Committee

Oral evidence: Sustainability of the fashion industry, HC 1148.

Tuesday 13 November 2018, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

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Members present: Mary Creagh (Chair); Geraint Davies; James Gray; Caroline Lucas; Anna McMorris; John McNally, Dr Matthew Offord, Joan Ryan.

Alex Stitt, Director of Commercial, Digital and Exhibitions, Victoria and Albert Museum, was in attendance.

Questions 85 - 123

Witnesses

I: Claire Bergkamp, Sustainability & Innovation Director, Stella McCartney Ltd, Clare Hieatt, founder of Howies and Hiut Denim, Graeme Raeburn, Designer, Phoebe English, Designer, and Professor Dilys Williams, Director and Professor of Fashion Design for Sustainability.

II: Livia Firth, Eco-Age, Jane Grice, Waste Not, Want Not, Lucy Siegle, freelance journalist and writer, Jenny Holdcroft, Assistant General Secretary, IndustriALL union, and Andrea Speranza, TRAIID.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Phoebe English](#) | [PDF version](#) ( 101 KB) 
- [WASTE NOT WANT NOT - Artisans and Crafters group](#) | [PDF version](#) ( 152 KB) 
- [TRAID \(Textile Reuse & International Development\)](#) | [PDF version](#) ( 136 KB) 

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Phoebe English, Clare Hieatt, Professor Dilys Williams, Graeme Raeburn and Claire Bergkamp.

Alex Stitt: Good morning, everyone and welcome to the V&A. My name is Alex Stitt. I am the Director of Commercial, Digital and Exhibitions here at the V&A and I also lead on sustainability for the museum. Our director, Dr Tristram Hunt, unfortunately can only attend this meeting in spirit as he has been laid low with some flu, but he has asked me to deputise for him because we are extremely proud to be hosting what I understand is the largest audience for a Select Committee hearing in parliamentary history. We are all part of a great moment together.

Welcome to the V&A. It is a pleasure to host the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee here today for this important evidence hearing as part of its inquiry examining the sustainability of the fashion industry. This vitally important and necessary inquiry could not happen at a more appropriate venue. The V&A is the home of the national collection for fashion and textiles and we house more than 75,000 objects spanning a period of more than 5,000 years, the largest and most comprehensive collection of dress in the world. I would also add to this that we also have the world's leading textile conservation studio, so our job is to preserve and sustain textiles from many years. We are subject experts in that area.

More than that, we draw on this globally important collection for our revelatory fashion exhibits. In 2015 there was the phenomenally successful Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty; last year was Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion. We are leading the way in pioneering fashion exhibitions and educating an audience about this wonderful industry. Next year will be a big moment for our fashion galleries. Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams opens in February and will be the largest and most comprehensive exhibition ever to be staged in the UK on the House of Dior. Opening in April we will host the first international retrospective of the revolutionary fashion designer Mary Quant in nearly 50 years.

But it is our current exhibition Fashion from Nature, which I hope you will all take the time to see, if you have not already, which draws together



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beautiful, intriguing and sometimes unsettling objects from our collection to celebrate the ways that nature's immense beauty and power has inspired fashion over the past 400 years. But, as we know, this is also a complex and harmful relationship. Fashion from Nature marks the first time a museum has placed modern day concerns about the fashion industry's environmental impact within a historical context. Considering the nature of today's agenda, I have no doubt that the exhibition's content will be of interest and relevance to you all, alongside this important investigation of the social and environmental impact of disposable fast fashion and the wider clothing industry.

Focused on offering solutions, Fashion from Nature celebrates the creativity of the fashion industry while asking two important questions: what can we learn from the past and how can we design a better and more sustainable industry for the future? The exhibition challenges designers to create clothes that are both desirable and responsible, but also it encourages us all to consider our own choices more carefully. With its focus on cause, effect and solution, the themes presented in Fashion from Nature provide a timely backdrop for the vital discussion and debate to take place at today's session.

I am now delighted to hand over to today's Committee and the Environmental Audit Committee Chair, Mary Creagh.

Q85 Chair: Thank you very much indeed. Welcome and good morning to everybody in the room. My name is Mary Creagh and I am the Chair of the Environmental Audit Select Committee. I am the MP for Wakefield and I am delighted to be welcoming you all here with us this morning.

This is going to be largest public Select Committee hearing ever held, so you are part of a world record breaking audience here with us today. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the work of Select Committees, we are a cross-party group of MPs who conduct inquiries into areas of government policy and make recommendations for change to Government and others. I would like to ask my Committee colleagues to introduce themselves, starting from my left with Geraint.

Geraint Davies: Hello. I am Geraint Davies, I am the MP for Swansea West and also chair the All-Party Group on Air Pollution.

Dr Offord: My name is Matthew Offord. I am the Conservative Member of Parliament for Hendon.

Anna McMorris: My name is Anna McMorris and I am the Labour MP for Cardiff North.

Caroline Lucas: I am Caroline Lucas and I am the Green Party MP for Brighton Pavilion.

Joan Ryan: I am Joan Ryan. I am the Labour MP for Enfield North.

John McNally: I am John McNally. I am the Scottish National Party member for Falkirk, and the environment spokesman for the party here at Westminster.



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James Gray: James Gray. I am the Tory MP for North Wiltshire.

Chair: Thank you, colleagues. Our Committee has a particular remit to look at how well the United Kingdom is doing against the UN sustainable development goals and other environmental targets. We look particularly at how Government is doing in that area because Government are the largest purchaser of goods and services in the country.

The purpose of today's hearing is to gather evidence for our inquiry into the sustainability of the fashion industry. We will be holding a future session with fashion retailers, both online and high street, and then we will be hearing from Government Ministers just before Christmas, before we make recommendations on how to improve sustainability in the fashion industry in a report early next year. Nick Davies is our Committee specialist and he will be helping us to write that report.

Committee inquiries are a very powerful tool for holding Government to account as the Government have to respond to the recommendations that we make. They have two months from the date of the publication of our report to make their response and this Committee has been successful in getting the manufacture and sale of microbeads banned in the UK. We have had perhaps less success on our attempts to tackle the disposable coffee cups and disposable plastic bottles that we are all so reliant on but we are hoping that the Government will take action on that over the next three or four years.

As this is a formal parliamentary proceeding, we ask that you refrain from taking photos during the session so as not to disrupt the hearing. We have our own photographer with us who will be taking photos of the event, which we will be sharing online later. The session is not being broadcast live on YouTube; it is being recorded and it will be uploaded to YouTube later. We will tweet the link shortly. Our Twitter handle was there but has now gone, in the way of these things.

We are going to welcome our first panel and ask that they introduce themselves, starting with Claire Bergkamp, please.

Claire Bergkamp: Thank you for having me. My name is Claire Bergkamp. I am the Director of Innovation and Sustainability for Stella McCartney.

Graeme Raeburn: Good morning. I am Graeme Raeburn, Performance Director at Christopher Raeburn, a sustainable fashion label in east London.

Professor Williams: Good morning. I am Dilys Williams. I am the Director at the Centre for Sustainable Fashion and Professor of Fashion Design for Sustainability at London College of Fashion.

Clare Hieatt: I am Clare Hieatt, I am the founder of Hiut Denim, a company based in Cardigan in west Wales where we make our own jeans.



Phoebe English: Good morning. I am Phoebe English. I am a designer of my own label called Phoebe English and am based in south London.

Q86 **Chair:** It is quite an echoey and difficult auditorium so I ask colleagues and witnesses to sit up, speak clearly from the diaphragm and we will all get through it okay.

I am going to kick off the inquiry. I would like to ask the panel generally, you are all here as educators, designers, innovators—we have just had a brief tour of the Fashion from Nature exhibition looking at some of the cutting edge ideas and innovations that are happening in your industry—what inspired you to take this path and what is your vision for a more sustainable fashion industry?

Claire Bergkamp: For me personally? I was inspired to take this path by being part of the problem honestly. My first career and my first degree was in costume design and my first job was in Los Angeles and I was a shopper for the film and television industry. My day job was literally driving around all the malls of Los Angeles buying clothing for TV shows and doing fittings. That level of consumerism is probably the most extreme that anyone has ever experienced. Spending thousands of dollars a day in the malls of Los Angeles made me really question the industry. I have always been drawn to fashion. It is an incredible industry. The expression of clothing is a very powerful thing and that is what drove me to costume design, expressing that, the motivation, the psychology behind clothing, but I wanted to do something that would be for the good instead for the bad.

I am from Montana originally in the US and I have a very deep draw and tie to nature, growing up somewhere like that. My desire to move into this area came from exposure to the very extreme negative side and a desire to do something good, which is why I moved to London—actually to study with Dilys. I did my master's at London College of Fashion and then started working at Stella.

The vision that I have for the industry at this point is one where we really can learn from what we have done in the past, very similar to what the exhibition that you saw showed you, that we know how we got here at this point. We are aware that the industry's impact is outsized. It is unnecessarily large and it does not need to be this way. We can actually remember a time before this. It is not that it has been going on for so long at this speed and at this rate of consumption and disposal. My vision is that we just take a step back and figure out a system where we do not work this way.

I am very happy to be here today and very excited about the possibility of what this can bring towards helping companies, customers and the general public question what fashion should be. How should we embrace fashion? What is a t-shirt? Why is a t-shirt this cost versus that cost? What are these fibres? I think there is a really exciting opportunity for all of us, whether you are in a business or just purchasing something,



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because we all wear clothing, to start to understand these impacts and make more informed decisions behind them.

From the Stella McCartney brand point of view, I think it is worth mentioning that I work for truly an incredible woman and incredible company that has put ethics and value at the core of the business since day one, since Stella founded the business in 2001. Stella has a company that is a vegetarian business, meaning that we do not use any leather, fur or skins. That kind of value-led proposition is something that continues to lead the business. I think it is very powerful and it is also a real testament that business can be done in a way that is more sustainable.

We are a very good sized business. We operate globally and have stores all around the world. We do that while still bringing sustainability and ethics into all of the decisions that we make. I think that is a really powerful example led by Stella, who is such a brave person to create this company and see this vision through.

Graeme Raeburn: A little bit about the background of how I got here. Having studied and trained in fashion with my younger brother Chris, who is three years younger than me, essentially it was all we knew. Out of necessity of selecting materials that already existed, waste “scrap” products that were extremely cheap, extremely accessible and in exploiting their potential of the embedded energy that already existed, we were able to create an interesting, different expression within fashion by using these things that already existed. Through a 10-year career with a sportswear company, I was able to learn an awful lot about performance fibres and the importance of specifying and selecting your different fabrics and materials and exploiting the potential of them.

Having recently rejoined Chris at Christopher Raeburn in the spring, I am able to bring this expertise to the business, which is underpinned with the ethos of remade, reduced and recycled. Everything we do as a business touches one of those points, if not ideally all three. Whether that is from product or the way that we act and put on events and things like that, we try to have a positive, responsible impact and are accountable for those choices.

In terms of a future vision, that is the key thing, that everybody has to be accountable from the design phase to the supply chain and the consumer. There needs to be much more awareness, knowledge, accountability and responsibility for everybody involved in it because ultimately we are all involved in this and we are all part of the solution as well.

Professor Williams: Building on what Claire and Graeme have just been saying, my background is as a designer and I realised through my own practice and working as head designer at Katharine Hamnett that I was part of a big problem and that my actions were based on something that I did not really understand, that my own education and most industry



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practices do not really consider the environmental, social, cultural and power relationships in fashion.

I decided that I had an opportunity because, as Claire said, fashion is such a powerful tool on a personal, micro scale and on a global scale, a huge industry that supports the livelihoods of millions, mainly women. If we could find ways in which we could design better and rethink the fashion system from one that has the economy at its heart to one that has nature at its heart, to be able to do that and invert that system—I felt that it was really important to be able to look simultaneously at education, industry practice and research.

In setting up the Centre for Sustainable Fashion, we established a discipline, fashion design for sustainability, that does put ecology at the centre of fashion thinking. It honours nature and all living beings and looks at ways in which we can design practices for all of us to be able to participate in. We are looking at ways in which we can look at the fashion system and the current problems that it has, but also have a new starting point.

We work with a lot of small businesses that start with this idea of sustainability and apply it to fashion. We also look at large businesses that are already part of this big juggernaut, that are in a system that they need to be able to evolve out of. We have these two different ways of looking at transforming and evolving the system. Certainly Claire, as she said, is a great example. Now we have 10 years of graduates who are going out into the industry with a different kind of understanding of what design might be and different ways in which we can live well together.

Clare Hieatt: Our journey started back in the 1990s. I think it was in 1995 my husband and I started Howies Clothing, which was a company that was aimed at mountain bikers and skateboarders, and started using organic cotton. We were one of the first companies in the UK to use organic cotton in t-shirts. We started exploring natural fibres like merino wool for performance and we grew that company. The story of the company was very much about the environment and the way we could protect where we did our sports so that we could protect the land. We eventually sold the company to Timberland and we had a vision for the way it was going to grow because they had a very ethical standpoint as well, but it did not work out for us. We left and decided we wanted to have another go at it.

Denim had been one of the biggest lines that we had sold at Howies. It always sold well. We never had any extra stock sitting on the shelf that we had to get rid of, so we decided that perhaps we would just focus on denim. We were living in Cardigan, which had one of Britain's biggest jeans factories that had employed about 400 people. It shut down about 15 years ago. While we were thinking, "Let's start a denim company", we were thinking we would go to China, find some factories in China, really good factories that we had worked with before at Howies, and we would



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make our products there. Then, it dawned on us that we were living in a town that made jeans. It was a bit of a “slap your hand on your head” moment, “Actually, we can make jeans”. It gave us a purpose. It gave us a reason for carrying on.

We did not want to be in a situation where we were buying products in from all over the world, having to buy the factory minimums and sitting on surplus stock that we had to clear, get rid of and recycle. We thought, “If we can make what we sell, then that is a really good sustainable business”. The fact that the internet existed gave us the chance to sell direct to the customer. We could make this a viable, profitable business by selling direct to the customer and not going through the usual wholesale model that companies had gone through. We realised that there is a new way of doing things. Makers can make on a small scale if they sell direct to the customer, and I think that is a really interesting way forward for a lot of small companies starting up.

Phoebe English: Hi, I am Phoebe. My vision of sustainability stemmed from my time in New York as a student. I was interning for a huge fashion brand that produced a collection every month. I was a knitwear student at the time, which obviously is quite a slow process, if any of you have ever tried knitting. Being exposed to this incessant speed of production was something that really solidified my views on slower production.

I spent my time shipping samples in FedEx bags to China and then they would come back two weeks later. I spent my whole time doing this and there was a point where I realised that I was just sending this small, knitted swatch to the other side of the planet to be developed, for it then to be shipped back to me two weeks later. I realised that was really illogical in wasteful usage of carbon but also in the development time of design.

Years later, when I started my own business in 2011, I knew that was something that I did not want to have as part of my own practice. From the very start of my company, we produced in the UK locally, specifically in London, to reduce that shipping backwards and forwards. It also brought other benefits. Being able to see the faces of the people who made my clothes, which consequently had my name on them, was really important for me, to be able to see the rooms that they were working in and the environments that they were spending day-to-day work hours in.

That is where my vision came from, not making in England because I am a massive fan of the Union Jack but because I am in England and using the resources around me because they are close by and valuable. There are some very highly skilled manufacturers within the UK that are not being used as much as they could be. It was about taking a sensible look at how I was running things; doing things that were close by; doing things in a slower way; doing collections that were not 60 or 50 looks but doing collections that were maybe just 16 looks; making sure that all of



the fabric we were using was responsibly sourced as much as possible, and using all of the waste fabrics that we produced to go back into educational environments like art schools, go towards organisations that give fabric to refugees who are looking to make their own clothes, or reusing those fabrics ourselves to make textiles for the next collection. We are not throwing away anything that we have been responsible for producing. That is my vision.

Q87 Chair: Great, thank you. What are the biggest barriers or challenges that you face when you are trying to do the right thing, apart from obviously cheap competition from the high street?

Phoebe English: The biggest barriers? There are a lot of barriers. Most of them probably come down to money, which I am sure some of you have, and also knowledge. We are a tiny company compared to Stella and other bigger brands and we may not be able to afford to pay for sustainability consultants to come in and help inform us. We might not be able to have a dedicated department to help us learn this information. As you know, fashion is an extremely fast industry, some brands producing a collection a month and some shops receiving shipments every week. It is very fast and it is very hard to find the time to do the research and find reliable information that you can implement cost-efficiently into your company.

There are things like trying to persuade our manufacturers to return our scrap fabric. For those of you who are not familiar with the production process of a garment, you have your flat fabric laid out on the table, you have your pattern pieces—your sleeve piece, your front piece and your back piece—you lay them on the fabric, you cut around your pattern piece, you get your garment pieces and you put them together, but you are left with waste fabric. If you imagine every shop on Oxford Street and every garment that is hanging on a hanger in those shops on Oxford Street, then imagine that the space around that garment, every single garment, is waste. There is waste from every single garment that is in those shops.

Where is that waste going? I currently have not been able to find anywhere that will recycle my textile that I feel is a reliable source. We have been putting applications in ourselves and Raeburn have been doing that as well. Having to design that in is a big barrier, and it is also really hard to persuade manufacturers to return your waste. It incurs extra time and extra storage space for them, and from talking to manufacturers in London who have been going for three decades, that is not a problem they used to have. That waste used to be a resource. They used to sell those offcuts to the rag and bone man. They were once a resource. Now they are deemed a waste product, but there is nowhere for that waste product to go. That is a big barrier for us.

Q88 Chair: Thank you. Both of you are reshoring fashion back to the UK. Is that part of the answer or can we have that only on a small scale? I am from Wakefield. We had a Burberry factory in Castleford that shut down.



We had John Smedley in Doncaster that shut down. What is the future?

Clare Hieatt: It is a viable way of running a business. The way that we are doing it, direct to the consumer, is probably the only way that it can be done. There are no agents involved in selling our stuff. There are no wholesalers. We make it, we put our margin on it and we sell it. We sell our own brand. That is a real, viable way to take as long as you can sell it yourself.

Our biggest problem is finding the labour at the moment. There were 400 people employed by the original factory but that was 15 years ago and they have all gone and done other things. We have managed to get six of what we call "grand masters", who were the people who had spent from the age of 15 learning to sew. Our cutter is 65 and he wants to retire. He has given us another year and now he is bringing his son into the business to train him. We have taken on another level of young makers. We are looking at ways of working with the local college so that they can get some kind of training. I feel like "I am going to go and work in a factory" has lots of negative connotations, but if we can give them some kind of qualification along the way and there is a career path we might attract more younger people. We are looking at that kind of thing. We are in a small town. We are trying to get the town making jeans but we need people to come and work for us. That has been our biggest problem.

Graeme Raeburn: Primarily business rates, being able to operate effectively and scale as we need to. That is just a fundamental, black and white fact. There is a massive challenge for us.

To Phoebe's point on waste, we are working on lots of initiatives to minimise our waste output with the ambition that we will have zero waste with some really creative ability to transform it into insulation and things like that. We have run offcut workshops, which embeds and enforces the value into the apparel. On that basis, the biggest challenge is broad customer awareness or broad market awareness of why t-shirt A costs fractionally more or slightly more than t-shirt B, because the unseen values, the immaterial facts of where the fibre has come from, the worker rights and the durability of that product, for instance, are so important, and possibly aftercare there as well. Could you get the product repaired for free or rejuvenated when it is starting to lose some of its initial quality? There is a myriad of different challenges but also lots of opportunity.

Q89 **Chair:** Claire Bergkamp?

Claire Bergkamp: Specifically about reassuring?

Chair: Major challenges you face as designers trying to do the right thing.

Claire Bergkamp: There are a lot of challenges when trying to embrace and embed sustainability across the business. We have all the same challenges that were talked about first of all. We are a bit bigger than



some of the other brands but we are still dealing with waste in the supply chain. We are still making sure we can cut down waste, recycle waste and find waste. Our supply chains are spread out a bit more, they are primarily in Europe but that is still a bit further than just being down the road.

One of our biggest challenges is ensuring that we always have high-quality materials. As a luxury brand, we do need to ensure that we are always keeping up design and quality. Sometimes, the way it has been done in the past, there were issues with the quality of material when embedding and bringing in sustainable fibres. This is not always the case but it does mean we cannot just switch without looking at and considering the consequences outside of purely the environmental impact of fibre. For all decisions we have to, and we do, consider every step of production.

One of the other really big challenges we face and that we are always working on is having true transparency and traceability of our materials. We are really dedicated to having transparency and traceability back to raw materials, back to the farm level. That is not easily done. It is something we have been working on the whole time I have been at Stella and we have not achieved it for every fibre. I do not think anyone in the world probably has who is using a range of fibres and materials that are far spread in the world. We have it for some of our key materials, viscose being the most prominent, which represents a significant part of our material makeup. We did set up a supply chain where we have full traceability back to the forest and we know every step of that. Those are the types of supply chains we want to have for any natural fibre we are using. However, that does take time and money.

The time barriers of being a fashion brand are significant. We are creating collections that need to be design led and high quality and it does take time to change things. I do not think any significant change or project we have had that really made a difference took less than two years on the ground. To build the supply chains with actual integrity takes time. We are not cutting the corners, we are doing the hard work, but it is expensive for us sometimes and does take a lot of effort, travel, getting your hands dirty and actually getting to know these people. We are so far removed as individuals, some brands are also very far removed, from what it takes to build a product. Building this very basic understanding back in of, "This dress started as a tree"—the trousers I am wearing today literally started as a tree—and that cotton is a flower is probably our biggest challenge.

- Q90 **Caroline Lucas:** We have heard evidence that sustainability has to be designed in at the very beginning of the whole thought process of designing new clothes. Would one or two of you be able to share a little about the process you go through when it comes to determining the right materials, the right designs and so on? Already we have just had a snapshot of so many different things you have to have in your head



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about the waste, the pollution, the clothes miles and the workers' situation. Can you give us a sense of some of those processes you go through as designers to determine your materials and designs right from the start?

Phoebe English: As you say, it is a huge subject. As you will probably gain from this inquiry, most people approach it in different ways. There is not one universal way to be sustainable. There are many different ways to be sustainable, whether it is through your manufacturing, miles, packaging, fabric choice or workers. It is sometimes quite hard to know where to be. We approach it in a few ways and try to implement it in as many aspects we can. We are always researching to try to do it better, because there are always ways to do things better.

We do things like trying to reduce the waste of our pattern cutting, doing things like zero-waste pattern cutting where all of the pattern pieces of the garment are right up next to each other and fill the entire width of the fabric. Technically this can be quite complicated to do and, again, it is more time and more money in finding a very skilled and clever pattern cutter. That is something we are trying to build more and more into the clothes we are making so that we are not producing any waste because the whole width of the fabric is being used. Other things are using better fabrics, making sure we know where the fabrics have come from and, if it is organic cotton, that it is GOTS certificated.

All those things obviously come with extra costs. Additional to using a UK manufacturer, it can push the price up quite a lot on your end product, which can be difficult. The way around that is what Claire has been speaking about, where you are selling directly to the consumer and do not have the mark-up of selling through a third party. These are some of the ways we have been looking at this.

Professor Williams: We work with a lot of different designers. It might be useful to talk about two broad approaches that the designers we work with tend to use. One is a very technocentric approach, which a lot of the big businesses concentrate on. That is looking at symptoms of the current unsustainability of the fashion industry, looking at issues to do with waste and so on. For those big businesses, that seems the most appropriate place to start. However, technocentric approaches are not sufficient. In fact, there is evidence to say that efficiencies in creating one garment better have a rebound effect and we are actually using more resources by taking that approach.

The growth logic of being able to have efficiency in a garment but still producing more and more of them and looking at growth is not going to be the right way to approach this idea of fashion as sustainability. Do we want to sustain the fashion industry as it currently is or do we want to live within planetary boundaries and honour human equality? If we do, we do need to take a more ecocentric perspective. You have examples here. A lot of small designers are looking at ways in which they can bring their own values to their work and start with the notion of equality and



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the idea of what does living well mean. That may mean a different kind of business model, it may mean a less materialistic and less consumer-driven model. Maybe they are producing less, looking at services and looking at different ways in which they can thrive economically within planetary boundaries.

We have to be really careful to make sure that we have both of these approaches. We find designers are taking these two very different approaches and I think it is important we recognise the value of both of them together and not just concentrate on one.

Claire Bergkamp: We assess our impact as a brand every year, using a tool called the “environment profit and loss”. That is a form of natural capital accounting, assigning monetary impact to natural capital. This has been a very helpful tool and has shown us that of our overall brand impact 50% to 60% is in the raw material stage, the very furthest part of our supply chain. That is why we have taken the approach when we are talking about design and material choice to focus on raw materials.

Again, I will use viscose as an example as it is an easy example to use for us. When we made the decision to ensure that all of our viscose was sustainable it was as a fibre, way before it gets to a fabric. By making a decision that we will only use viscose from one source—we have two sources now that are approved—for the actual fibre then all of the viscose that goes into a large range of garments is coming from an approved source with reduced impact. Therefore, we are ensuring that we are not contributing to deforestation and are promoting sustainable forestry that far back in our supply.

When we are looking at how to design sustainably, it is very far back into the supply chain and then building that into the products. Sometimes it is about a specific forest region and sometimes it is more saying, “We are going to use GOTS certified cotton”. Then we are going to ensure certification and beyond that begin to get towards farms. For us it is really about fibres because that is where the biggest part of the impact lies. That is not to say we ignore the other parts of the supply chain; we certainly do not. However, from a design and material perspective, starting with the fibres has given us the most leverage to see changes and improvements.

I agree with Dilys that that in itself is not enough but that is where we have started. It is a good way to engage with this topic and it is a good way to talk with our teams about it as well. This has been collaborative internally. I am not a designer but I work with our design team extremely closely. I also work extremely closely with our production team and the mills that we work with. These efforts we have made, these targets and decisions that we make, can only be enabled by understanding the levers we have internally and in our supply chain to make it happen. Having those relationships with the people you rely on to make your products are necessary to drive the change. From the design perspective, it is ensuring



they still have beautiful materials and creativity brought into this as well so that we are still making something that is interesting and beautiful.

Q91 Caroline Lucas: Can I follow up with you on animal welfare, which is obviously central to your products and design? What extra challenges has that raised? Has it become much easier to source from non-animal areas? Do you think you have had influence on other brands coming through, that it is something that has spread through the industry?

Claire Bergkamp: More and more people are recognising that we do not have to kill animals for the sake of fashion, that it is not necessary and you can have beautiful products that do not involve slaughter. The movement towards companies going fur free has been very exciting to see. We do not need fur anymore. It is really an archaic fabric and is not something that is necessary. The UK banned the manufacturing of fur and there is a possibility for the UK to ban the sale of fur, which is of course something we support at Stella. In general, the industry is moving away from some of those types of fibres. I am not sure whether we can say it is influenced by us but it is heartening to see that.

When it comes to the materials we use, it does add a level of complexity. We use wool, for example, so we do use some animal fibres. While we do not use any leather, fur, skins or feathers, we do use wool and that is the main animal fibre we use. We need to ensure a high level of animal welfare at those properties. The UK has always been leading when it comes to animal welfare but the type of wool we rely on in luxury is typically merino, which does not come out of the UK unfortunately. We work with some UK farms. There has been a lot more awareness of this issue. Campaigning organisations like Animal Rights have shone spotlights on some issues and there has been a lot of movement away from mohair. That also creates an interesting opportunity in the UK for small farmers, because the UK does have mohair, cashmere and wool. That is very interesting and is something we have been looking at. While we do not do manufacturing here, we have looked at farming and farming practices here.

The other thing when it comes to being a vegetarian brand is that we are required to innovate on a pretty regular basis because we choose not to use a lot of the materials that form the background of the luxury industry. The vast majority of luxury brands make a lot of their profit on small leather goods and handbags, which is a big part of their business. From the beginning we have had to innovate and push for more sustainable different types of materials and push the alternatives, the synthetic leather space, to be a much higher quality product than what was there before. We are really the only luxury brand on the market that is using synthetic leathers and alternative materials.

What is exciting right now is that we are starting to see a new wave of types of materials coming out from companies. We have a partnership with a company called Bolt Threads and there are pieces in the exhibition of this. It is doing a lab-created spider silk type thing using yeast, sugar



and water. It is able to brew a protein that gives very similar properties to silk but without any harm of insects. Similarly, it has a new material called mylo, which is created from the root structure of mycellium. It is a beautiful material that looks a lot like leather but is a natural material and extremely low impact to create. That embracing of innovation has always been who we are but this is an exciting moment for us as a business when it comes to finding alternatives that are animal free and cruelty free.

Q92 **Caroline Lucas:** Obviously all of you have sustainability in your DNA. If you were designers for Primark or H&M, for example, and you were asked to product a t-shirt for £5.99, could you do that sustainably?

Professor Williams: I will take that only because we do work with very big businesses and with the designers in those businesses. It is important for us all to remember that those designers are individuals, like the rest of us, and certainly a lot of the design teams within some of those big companies want to show their principles around sustainability through their work. It goes back to that question about what is appropriate for different levels of business at different times. For all of those businesses, they are aware of the fact that their model is broken; that it will not be able to continue as it is; and they need to make that transition. That is why we also need legislation and we need the support of Government—so that there is not this different option or somebody else coming in and able to undercut. If a business is built on fair wages and living within environmental limits then, no, we cannot sell t-shirts at the price that we currently are—but the democratisation of fashion that was seen to be through low-priced goods is a myth. We are buying 400% more pieces than we were less than 20 years ago. We are spending the money; it is just we are spending the money on stuff that we are chucking away. Yes, the system is broken and it cannot continue as it is and most businesses know that, but it is about helping them to make that transition to a new form of business. As Claire said, we have not always relied on this business; we need to see it as a blip in fashion history.

Q93 **Caroline Lucas:** Graeme, did you want to add something?

Graeme Raeburn: There are two questions there really. Could you make something for that cost? You probably could, however it would not be that good quality. Can you replicate that buzz of somebody purchasing it or exploring somewhere and finding that piece of clothing for the same price? Yes, of course you could. We have too much stuff already; a lot of it is just in the wrong place. There are really interesting schemes now to connect these things—whether it is loaning or sharing economies—where people can go somewhere and upgrade or rejuvenate their apparel and extend their love of an existing piece of clothing that was maybe worn out or they want to recolour or embellish in some other way. Thinking about that £5.99 on the high street kind of buzz; what is the opportunity there around creating an experience, imparting knowledge about how important this is, and education around the value embedding these pieces with the real value that is not just the price sticker on it?



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Phoebe English: I totally agree with both of those things. There is a big problem with how our high street is functioning at the moment and, as Dilys said, they know their time is coming. It is not sustainable. Their business models are just not sustainable, and they are certainly not sustainable with the generations of children who are growing up and inheriting the planet as we are leaving it at the moment. They know that those kids will not be shopping in the same way that we are now. They will not be going into Primark and coming out with five bags of clothes where garments have cost them five or six quid to purchase and buying multiple clothes—the same clothes in different colours. It is just not how people will be shopping in the future and they know their time is coming up.

They are beginning to look into other business models, as Graeme was saying. The sharing economy and post-ownership economy is a kind of strange mythical thing in discussion, but within practice it is an amazing ground-breaking thing, which not only can make a huge difference to how we are consuming clothes but is also a really exciting business model. It could potentially make a lot of money for people who are willing to invest in it and go with it as a new scheme of owning and using things. We have been working with a hire company with our own clothes over the past six or seven months, and it has been so interesting to see how people have been responding to clothes in a different way because they are owning them and using them in a different way.

For example, one of our highly laboured textile pieces, which in retail would cost £800, £900 to buy and which in all honesty is not going to sell—it is not an easy product for someone to buy; it is expensive, and it is not an easy product for someone to wear or use, it is a special piece—if someone did buy it they may wear it once or twice for a special occasion and then it would sit in a wardrobe. That is me talking about my own work. When you put pieces like that on a hiring website, people are hiring them like that because they can take the risk. They do not have a big fee to pay in order to enjoy that really nice piece of design. They pay a monthly membership fee and they can take whichever clothes they like and then they can enjoy them. People are taking more risks with design and that is the key of sustainability in fashion. You still have to produce an amazing beautiful product that people will be excited about because, if you do not, there is no point.

Trying to sell someone a hessian sack is not going to work. People want to wear exciting clothes; they want to be inspired. If you are not doing that then you are not serving the industry and you are certainly not serving sustainability. It is a case of really exploring ways where you can perpetuate the excitement of purchasing. If you look at psychological charts, the endorphin high that you get from purchasing something begins to wane considerably by the third day. Then your £800 garment is sitting in your wardrobe gathering dust, unused and it might be used two or three more times.



With hiring you get that endorphin high constantly because you can have a new thing within your purchasing power, which can help transform you as a person and make you feel better and make you look stronger and more positive, and you can do it more regularly. If you look at it within that construct, it is a really exciting business plan that could absolutely be implicated within the high street and it definitely should be.

Q94 Joan Ryan: Phoebe, when we talk about fashion ways, people often think about the clothes that we all throw away, but you have highlighted the amount of fabric and textiles being wasted during the design and manufacturing stage. I note particularly in your submission when you say absolutely no material is thrown away from the studio, not even the smallest scrap, which is fantastic. Is that possible for bigger enterprises and do you think they will do that on their own or do you agree with WRAP, Waste and Resources Action Programme, that we need more leadership from the UK Government, that we are going to need some legislation?

Phoebe English: Yes, I agree that there needs to be some legislation and definitely some guidance. Saving fabric as you go is time consuming and it takes up space. Neither of those things a functioning company wants to put extra resources into because it just is not efficient. We have done it since we started. We try to find uses for those pieces but we are a small company compared to larger ones. I have been researching for years to try to find some way that we can use these off-cuts and I have not managed to find anything that I feel satisfied with and would feel that is going to work in a positive way. The only place I did find something like that, which I thought really relates to how people behave and how businesses run today, is in New York where they have a tax on commercial companies that produce more than 10% textile waste. Having this piece of legislation has then led to companies springing up and coming into existence to service those needs. For example, there are two companies that I found, one called Fab Scrap.

Fab Scrap is an app start-up company. It all runs digitally and they will bring bags to your commercial studio, your commercial manufacturing or factory. You get two bags, a brown bag and a white bag, and in the brown bag you put your natural fibre off-cuts and in the other bag you put your synthetic fibre off-cuts. Then if you have excess fabrics that are still on the roll, you leave them on the roll and you clearly label the contents of that fabric composition. Every week you just message them on your app and they come and remove your waste. They take it to their depot and then they use it for social enterprises, for workshops, they sell it, so it goes back into use.

Those companies would not have sprung up and come into existence without the legislation that dissuades commercial companies from producing the waste and then throwing the waste into landfill. I strongly believe that legislation is needed. I have struggled with my own manufacturers to persuade them to save the waste so that I can use it. I



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can tell you that I am sure that for bigger companies the only way to persuade people to put that extra time and energy into saving the waste is by putting some kind of guidance and legislation in place.

Q95 Joan Ryan: You are probably all aware that the Government are currently working on a new resources and waste strategy, which we are hoping to influence with this inquiry. You have already talked about what happens in New York and soon we are going to visit Paris to look at the scheme in France that was introduced some seven years ago. It feels a little bit like we are behind the curve on this, I must say. I was going to ask if there are any details or policies that you would like to see Ministers include to reduce and reutilise this mountain of clothing waste that we are currently producing.

Clare Hieatt: One of the things that we do is repair all our jeans. We offer a free repair service for customers, so they send them back—and some jeans have been back two or three times—and we have a darning machine that darns the holes in the knees and we send them back out. It is a cost to the business, and it is really nice seeing the jeans coming back and seeing how they age, but we are keeping the jeans going as long as we can. If there is some obligation on the manufacturer to offer a repair service in any way—it is not going to work for everything, like a t-shirt, but buttons fall off things, zips break in coats, these things can be repaired simply and they can last for years and years to come—I feel like some way of encouraging manufacturers to repair or companies to offer a repair service would work really well.

Professor Williams: Take the VAT off all repair services, please.

Q96 Joan Ryan: That is really interesting, because Graeme said about the problem with business rates; how feasible is this if it is going to add another cost to the industry and what is the reaction going to be? We can pass legislation, but it is not always as straightforward as it might seem.

Professor Williams: I think the problem in the UK with repair is because it is seen as sometimes being more expensive than buying new. We have to make it viable economically for people, for businesses and customers. It is that idea of the waste resource strategy, around being able to value the goods that we have got in environmental and social terms, and these pieces are not costed fully. We do not cost in the environmental impact or the social impact of a lot of the pieces around us. If we can find ways to extend the value of those pieces through repair and through making it more economically viable to repair things, that is one thing, along with all of the things that these guys have been saying as well. We have to have a menu of these different things all happening simultaneously. We also have to look at the waste strategy going all the way back, because some of these materials should not be in the system in the first place. They are not costed properly, they are not environmentally sound and they are not socially sound. We have to look at the end symptoms, but we also have to look along the line at the causes and at new business models where we are potentially producing less but it is still economically viable.



Graeme Raeburn: Sweden has recently reduced tax on their repair services to incentivise growth in that area, which is great to see. However, for Hiut Denim and Christopher Raeburn we already offer that as a free service anyway as part of when you buy that product in the first place. It is interesting to consider the responsibility on the side of the supplier, whether there is opportunity for a deposit scheme on a product so that at the end of its life a customer can return it into a correct end-of-life stream or rejuvenation stream. It is very interesting when you start to look at these things through the metrics of carbon currency and embedding the materials with an actual value, for example the awareness that a kilo of nylon takes 20 times as much energy to produce as a kilo of organic cotton. All of a sudden, when you look at those metrics of your cellulosic semi synthetics—which are so much more energy efficient to utilise and then reappropriate at end of life into viable waste streams—it completely transforms things as well. It is not just down to the financial cost of a fibre, but the carbon potential offset in some cases.

Claire Bergkamp: I also think that the UK has an opportunity to incentivise innovation in a way. Right now what we are seeing in the industry is that textiles are not readily recycled back into textiles. The statistic is that only 1% of clothing is recycled back into clothing. It is well cited; it is from the Ellen MacArthur report that they released last year. There is a lot of awareness now that we need to move in a direction where we are genuinely able to recycle things back into things that should be recycled.

To Dilys's point, we need to make sure that the feed stocks coming in are not going to be so toxic that they cannot be recycled or biodegraded. I think that right now there are technologies and companies out there looking for a home, looking for a place to come and build centres where polyester can become polyester again, nylon can become nylon again, materials can become the same materials again. There could be an opportunity to create an environment here and have the UK really lead towards enabling that. There is a lot of infrastructure already in the UK around collection; it is done very well here and it only takes a step from there. That is the feed stock for these companies; that is their resource, the waste that is already created here in this country or being generated, being sold and then disposed of.

There is a much larger issue, of course, around business models and how we slow things down but, as a part of what could be recommended, how do we encourage these companies to make this their home? If we are talking about reshoring, it is not necessarily only bringing back manufacturing to this country. It could be looking at what are the new innovations out there and do we want this to be a place that is hospitable for them.

Q97 **Chair:** Before we move on to the final question, I just wanted to ask you, Claire, both you and Phoebe talked about two different types of branding for sustainable cottons. What was it and can you explain it for Hansard,



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who is recording this?

Claire Bergkamp: Certification for organic?

Chair: Yes.

Claire Bergkamp: The certification that we use is GOTS, Global Organic Textile Standard. It is probably the most widely used. It is a regulated standard and is about farming practices. That is the one that is typically used. There is also OCS, Organic Content Standard, that is also used but it is one that is owned by Textile Exchange. GOTS is owned by the Soil Association, I believe.

Q98 **Chair:** This is one of the issues, is it not, about people's awareness and their understanding of what these labels mean?

Claire Bergkamp: There is a real opportunity there, too. Right now, claims are not really investigated; what "sustainable" means is not defined. "Organic" is defined, "organic" is a regulated word; that is something that can be checked very easily. Claims about sustainable cotton, however, are not checked. Even what we talk about, our viscose, is not able to be checked particularly. There needs to be accountability for the claims that brands are making towards the world.

Q99 **Anna McMorris:** All of your products are high quality but they also come with a higher price tag and I know most of my constituents would not be able to afford your clothes. Is it possible to make sustainable fashion that matches high street or online prices?

Professor Williams: Drawing on what we have been saying before about the democratisation of fashion through low pricing, it is really important for us to realise that people are buying a lot more than they were and they are throwing a lot more away. It is not that they are spending less. In fact, there is evidence to say that the mental wellbeing of people is diminished through the accumulation beyond a certain level of material goods. With this idea of cheaper fashion, not only are we not getting better value, we are getting worse value, but it is also detrimental both for the makers and the wearers potentially. We have to change cultures and legislation also around advertising and what we are saying about this consumerist attitude—that more is better. It is something that really needs to be tackled, and the fact that maybe we would realise the value of things more, by having something that we could be more proud of, that we are incentivised to buy and wear and repair.

Going back to the previous conversation about waste strategy, the creative industries are hugely important in this country, and all of us as individuals, professionals and citizens have creative abilities. If we can bring that back into the schools programme and into the higher education programmes, so that there are more making skills and more understanding of our active engagement in us being able to continue to repair our clothes, wear our clothes and look after them in different ways, we can be more proud of them ourselves instead of feeling as if the only



way to be socially acceptable is by buying more stuff and discarding what we already have.

Claire Bergkamp: We have talked about this already on the panel, but there needs to be an embracing of different business models; that resale and rental are an opportunity to have access to higher-quality products at a lower price point, and that incentivising that is necessary to really disrupt the model we are in right now. There is a generation now that has probably never seen anything outside of lower-quality product, and once you start to understand and have access to higher-quality product at a better price point, which these new models would allow, that will start to shift things, because if you want something that you are going to wear once rental is an incredible option. If you want something that is really beautiful and going to last a long time at a lower price point, resale is an incredible option. There are new businesses that have popped up around that. We work with The RealReal, which is a US organisation, which is a consignment model that really does give people access to luxury quality products, higher price point products but at a lower price point.

Professor Williams: To add to that, anecdotally Depop in this country is another of these resale models and we are already seeing that people are buying things now thinking what will be the value of this when I resell it. Potentially they can make more money on something by looking after it better and then reselling it, maybe even for more than they paid for it. There is agency for the citizen to be able to find ways in which they can be resourceful themselves and I think that is really exciting.

Phoebe English: Talking about Depop, I was with Tamsin Blanchard the other day. She is part of Fashion Revolution; who I think you have heard from already. She introduced me to Depop and she told me that her teenage daughter used it and that most of the people using it are young teenagers. That has a lot of things to say about the future consumers, how they are consuming and how they will be consuming in different business models than we have today, where you are just buying things that are cheap that will last about two weeks and then throw them away. These kids are reselling their clothes; they are looking after them so that they can resell them and Depop is massive.

Q100 **Anna McMorris:** Thank you. Yes, both my teenage girls use Depop as well and it is a great way of recycling. You have said, Dilys, that the current system is broken; we need to shift, create a new way of doing things with the current waste system completely needing restructuring. Is it possible to design those fast-fashion products that people and children—even my teenagers who go on the recycling websites and share their clothes—to minimise harm done to the environment and fit in with that circular economy?

Professor Williams: We do need different cycles and different speeds of clothes, and at different ages and different temperaments we will want things for different reasons. The idea of the circular model can only work if we look at the social value as well as the environmental value and we



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look at speed in relation to our mental wellbeing and in relation to the rights of the workers, for example. The idea needs to be really dug into more deeply. The circularity from a technical perspective of materials makes a lot of sense, and you can take that sort of technical cycle and look at how you can repurpose something, but without looking at the social implications of what we are talking about from a materials perspective—if we start with the perspective of fashion being a social process mediated by materials, then we have to expand what we are talking about as the definition of circularity. If what we are talking about is efficiency in materials terms and still selling more stuff, we are drawing on environmental resources more rather than less and we might be kidding ourselves.

It is probably a long conversation that we could have about this, but the precautionary principle needs to be adhered to, and to be looking at a more holistic model of circularity.

Q101 Anna McMorris: What role do you see for fashion companies like yourselves, designers like yourselves, in changing that behaviour? You have very expensive products but you are speaking out, you are providing that role model. What role do you have yourselves in changing the whole system?

Graeme Raeburn: You might say expensive but also some people might say good value for the durability, the lifespan, the experience, and the relationship that they will have with that product as well, just to correct you there.

Q102 Anna McMorris: I do not think my constituents think like that, though.

Graeme Raeburn: What I was going to say is that I think there are very close parallels with the food industry here as well, of learnings, incentivising, monitoring and reducing harm within the supply chain as well as giving information and making more information available so that people can opt in and opt out of certain choices. If you look at food packaging, there is more information on there than you will find on your clothing generally. It is also more heavily regulated and monitored with better incentives to have positive effects, and there are more options out there. There are lots of parallels between those two industries.

Phoebe English: As clothing producers, we have a responsibility and, as Graeme was saying, that is something that is already quite established within the food industry. It is also a lot easier to find recyclable food packaging options than it is to find for clothing packaging, which is near impossible. However, there are many things that personally we could be doing to help set standards. When you start to do something, even if it is small in my own company, it starts a ripple, it gets students talking, it gets our staff talking, who might go on to work for a bigger company and then implicate those things there. Things like the amount of plastic in oceans—which is coming directly from clothes and from how clothes are washed and cared for—if you think about it, we as designers, are putting



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harmful products into the marketplace. When we issue a garment that is made from synthetic clothing, we are fundamentally putting harmful products into the marketplace. If you think about other things that are put into the marketplace that are harmful, they come with regulations, labelling and guidelines, such as “Wash eyes”; they come with full disclosure about what they can do.

Maybe for the fashion industry, we should be doing things like clearly labelling the synthetic clothing that we are issuing to the general public with a warning or guidance on how to care for them to reduce the effect it has on our oceans, for example, “This is a synthetic garment, please wash within a Guppy Friend bag. This is a synthetic garment, please wash with a Cora Ball.” Both of those products can catch the microplastics that escape from garments during the washing process. That would be a very straightforward way to start tackling those kinds of things, taking steps that are not necessarily legislated or within law, but starting to make some kind of standard and pathway that has best practice in mind and just seeing those ripples go on somewhere else. That is something we can do. We might not be able to sell our clothes for £5 for a dress—we are selling stuff for £600 or £700—but we can certainly start setting some standards.

Chair: Thank you all very much indeed. Dilys, you had a formula, did you not, about value, which is cost divided by times worn equals value? That is something that my mother, who has my dad’s 54 year-old Rackhams’ dressing gown that she bought him when they got engaged, has certainly taken to heart. I just wanted to reflect on what you said, Claire. I took my daughter into a second-hand shop to show her what real clothes looked like and we looked at a garment that had been made and sold in Montana, your home state, 100% pure cashmere, hand-stitched, hand-lined, with a unionised workforce label in it as well. I thought that was the good old days of 1960s America, where it was made in America and the union put their label into the garment so that you knew the workers were getting paid a decent wage. She was very taken with this coat but sadly far too small to get into it.

Can I draw our first panel to a close? It has been absolutely fascinating—fashionating, perhaps. Caroline and I were slightly distracted by a fake zebra coat on Depop. That is hours of our lives that I can feel we are not going to get back when we get home tonight. You have certainly taught us a great deal. This is not our industry and it is extremely interesting to hear from you about the very creative, positive ways that you are making changes in your own ways, nationally, locally and globally. I really appreciate the time that you have taken out of your busy schedules to be here with us today. Can I ask the audience to show our appreciation?

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Livia Firth, Jane Grice, Jenny Holdcroft, Andrea Speranza, and Lucy Siegle.



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Q103 **Chair:** If I can draw you all to order again, we are going to kick off our second panel. Can I ask our guests to introduce themselves, starting from my right with Lucy, please?

Lucy Siegle: Hello, I am Lucy Siegle. I am a journalist and writer, and I have been on the trail of fashion, particularly fast fashion, for about 100 years—maybe 15.

Jane Grice: Hello, I am Jane Grice. I am the founder of Waste Not, Want Not, which is actually a Facebook group, and it is a group of artisans and crafters who upcycle, hence I am wearing upcycled today. Thank you.

Livia Firth: Hi, I am Livia Firth. I am the founder and creative director of Eco-Age, a consultancy company that specialises in sustainability and sustainable strategies for all sorts of companies. Today we are here for fashion.

Andrea Speranza: Hi, my name is Andrea Speranza. I am here for the charity TRAIID, Textile Recycling and International Development.

Jenny Holdcroft: Hello, everyone. My name is Jenny Holdcroft. I am from IndustriALL Global Union and we represent garment workers in the supply chains.

Q104 **Chair:** Thank you all very much indeed, particularly Jenny, who has just flown in from Switzerland, I believe. Thank you very much for being with us this morning.

Jenny, could you start off and explain what you think is wrong with the current system and how we can have a more socially and environmentally sustainable fashion industry?

Jenny Holdcroft: That is a very small question. How long do you have? What is wrong with the current system? The last panel touched a lot on how the nature of the fashion industry has changed over a very short period of time. When you think about the volumes of clothes that are being manufactured and sold, that implies a massive industry behind it.

You have seen in many developing countries enormous growth in the workforce, mainly female. This is a good creator of jobs but unfortunately, because of the way that manufacturing is done and the pressures coming from the brands that are buying it, those jobs are not what they could be. It is not news that they have very poor wages, very high pressure, very long working hours and often much more abusive conditions. We remember the Rana Plaza collapse. There are fires, there are injuries and there are a lot of very bad practices going on. It is really all driven by, "Produce as much as you can for the lowest cost possible in the shortest time possible", which is what the model has developed into.

On the other side, the workers do not have any power in the situation. Unionisation rates are extremely low. There is pressure from employers and there is pressure from governments to keep unions away from



factories because they feel that will get in the way of them doing what they need to do. The pressures on the factories themselves are enormous in terms of the price that they are paid. We can perhaps get into that a little bit later in more detail on how that impacts on working conditions.

It is difficult to say what needs to be better. There are a lot of things that we can get into. We can look at the current CSR practices of brands and whether they are fit for purpose, or we can look at whether focusing on improving conditions in an individual factory is going to really change anything. Certainly our perspective is that you cannot deliver change factory by factory because this industry is too big. You are working in a highly competitive environment where you have factories competing with each other for international orders and brands competing with each other to produce low-cost clothing to sell on the high street. You need to develop something that is not going to disrupt the competitive model in the sense that—as people on the previous panel said—if there are companies trying to do the right thing, we cannot enable them to be out-competed by people who do not want to.

It is difficult looking from the UK perspective. You certainly have a lot of influential companies based here and we can definitely talk about how the Government could help support moves by them. But they are only part of the global picture and when we are looking at the supply chains you have a whole lot of buyers from other countries who may be more or less interested in raising standards. What we need to focus on is how those UK brands can be used to help improve conditions on an industry level in those countries. I could say a whole lot more but I will perhaps stop there.

Q105 Chair: The World Benchmarking Alliance produced its human rights index yesterday. Have you seen that and do you think that is effective? Livia, you know about that. Do you want to say something about it?

Livia Firth: I have not seen yesterday's report but I can talk a lot about this. In fact, with Eco-Age we moved from this sustainability conversation only and focused a lot on the social aspect. When you start joining the dots together, fashion is one of the most polluting industries in the world but fashion is also one of the biggest employers of modern-day slavery in the world. When you talk about the democratisation of fashion and the fact that everyone has the right to afford cheaper clothes it is definitely not the democracy of the country who produced them, where the workers' working conditions and wages would likely be considered illegal, if not criminal, in this country and in the country where their goods are sold.

Our point of view is that by leveraging and focusing on the regulation and the lack of regulation, and legal regulation in particular, we can address a lot of the consequences and the environmental impact. In this country we have competition laws, anti-bribery laws and a lot of regulation in a lot of different markets, but we do not have any regulation in the fashion trade. That is a fundamental to address. This is why, two years ago, we



published a study that took two years to complete and involved lawyers from 14 producing countries, which the Circle NGO published. It was called "The Right to a Living Wage". It is the first time in history that the right to a living wage has been proven to be a legal finding.

Q106 **Chair:** Brilliant, thank you. Lucy, you have done this for 100 years. How is it going?

Lucy Siegle: Not well. It is not going well. Just to build on what has been said already—I am aware that we are the second group or the second day of evidence so apologies if I repeat stuff that you have already heard—Jenny just talked about how fast fashion is a fairly new offering. It is a fairly new business model. If you look at when fashion started to be outsourced, particularly from the UK—and obviously the UK has a very important history in this business model and in this story—there were only nine garment factories or garment production hubs originally in Bangladesh. Now there are thousands and thousands. We probably do not know how many there are exactly.

There was an early model. There was an early period where there was a programme that would skill garment production using a South Korean business. That collapsed fairly early on, it just did not quite work, but by that point the heat was in the system already. Now we are at this point where the heat has continuously built and built and built, and this is a story now about overconsumption and overproduction. That is where we are at this point.

I am sure you have already heard, but according to statistics we now consume 60% more garments than we did in 2000. This keeps ramping up. By 2050 we will need three times the amount of resources if we are to try to satiate consumption levels with the business model that we are using. The predominant business model is fast fashion, which is why I have been looking very closely at fast fashion for all of this time.

What has not really changed are the three fundamentals of the fast-fashion model, which are low cost, high volume and consequence-free production. In a way, when we are starting this conversation it is very simple. They are the holy triumvirate and we have to tackle each one of those to have a chance of tackling the damage, both environmental and social, as Livia began to articulate. We have to tackle those three elements.

Jane Grice: I am looking at things from post-consumer waste, mainly, and obviously there is a massive issue. We have all seen the news. We have all seen the piles of textiles that are leaving our shores and shipped abroad to be sold in markets, which is destroying their local economies as well. I start from that point of view. Waste is a horrible thing. I do not like waste, and I think the problem is you, it is me, it is all of you. We are all the problem because we bought into it and we have to change the way we think, the way we buy and the way we consume. We just have to change.



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Q107 **Chair:** Is there evidence that it is destroying home markets? What if there is no cotton industry or wool industry? I am thinking of places I have visited in sub-Saharan Africa. I have heard this anecdotally. What is the evidence that markets are being destroyed?

Jane Grice: I am afraid I do not have that evidence but other people may.

Livia Firth: There is evidence from Oxfam. They have done a lot of research on this, on fashion and dumping on other countries, their so-called second-hand market. We highlighted a bit of it in the documentary "The True Cost" that Lucy Siegle and I produced, directed by Andrew Morgan, which I urge everyone in this Committee to watch on Netflix if you want to have a catastrophic image of the fashion system today and the repercussions on the environment and people. The Committee should look at the Oxfam reports because there are numbers and evidence in there.

Q108 **Chair:** More homework for Committee inquiry members when we get off Depop. Andrea?

Andrea Speranza: Basically we have two big problems here. One is the unsustainable relationship that, as a nation, we have with our clothes, and the other is the current business model of the industry, which is a model based on extracting vital, limited natural resources. It is a model based on a massive infrastructure of complex marketing techniques, advertising and social media influencers encouraging people to buy clothes that they do not necessarily need. These clothes seem to be designed to last for very short periods of time. In a time in which it is imperative to take care of our natural resources and reduce carbon emissions, this is pretty unsustainable.

We need to change things and we need to do it quickly. At the moment we are heading in the wrong direction. The total carbon footprint of the clothes in use in the UK has increased to 26 million tonnes in 2016, up from 24 million tonnes in 2012. This is linked with our fashion consumption, which has increased between 2012 and 2016 by a staggering 200,000. We are buying approximately 38 million items of clothing weekly. This makes a mockery of the United Nations sustainability goals, especially goal number 12. Where is the sustainable, responsible consumption here? We need definitely to move and to move quickly. People need to have more information about the environmental impact of the clothing industry, the impact of consuming clothes, the environmental benefits of giving longer life to clothes and what is a smart way of consuming clothes. Where is all this information? We are talking about a waste prevention strategy. We also need a sustainable consumption strategy so that the way we consume clothes that does not threaten the life of the planet.

At TRAID, the most sustainable way of consuming clothes that we offer is buying more second-hand clothes. WRAP says that the highest



environmental impact of clothes is in the processing and the production phase. This is where the highest environmental impact is. Studies say for that every three items of second-hand clothes that we buy we displace the sale of a new item of clothing. This has a significant environmental savings. To follow up on Anna's question, it is also a very affordable way of consuming sustainable clothes.

Chair: We can all feel good buying three old garments as opposed to one new one. This is potentially a new rule to live by.

Lucy Siegle: I just wanted to add to that. A useful way of thinking about it is when we talk about the Paris agreement and carbon emissions, and we set a baseline of 1990, whatever we need to get the emissions down to, we should think about this problem in that way. If we use 2000 as baseline, we should be doing everything we can to reduce consumption to 2000 levels because that would solve a lot of problems.

Chair: A very excellent suggestion.

Q109 **Dr Offord:** Sometimes when I get on the Tube I see people with a certain brown paper bag of a high street chain and I often wonder if they have made the link between their purchase and what happened at Rana Plaza. A recent report showed that of 51 leading brands in the United Kingdom, about 71% believe that they could not be sure that modern slavery had not occurred at some point in the supply chain. If we look at the audience to represent that 30%, it is probably the top right-hand corner and so the rest of the people here would represent those who could not be sure how their products were produced.

I particularly wanted to ask what do you think the Government should do to encourage greater transparency across the fashion supply chains so that consumers can make a choice?

Jenny Holdcroft: Could I perhaps answer that?

Livia Firth: We all have to say something to that.

Jenny Holdcroft: Yes, and I am probably going to say something different. I do not think that is the answer. If we know that something is made in Bangladesh, it is made under a certain set of conditions. In the industry in Bangladesh, there may be certain factories—and I have visited many of them—that are better than others, but the underpinning competition in that market means that nobody is going to be able to say, "X brand in the UK high street is doing something different from Y brand in the UK high street". You can extrapolate that to all of the production countries. Anybody that is selling clothes at one price point or another price point is basically sourcing them from the same factories where the conditions are pretty standardised. Transparency is fantastic and absolutely we are calling for transparency but it is not so that consumers can say, "Based on what this company says it is doing and this company says it is doing, I am going to shop here instead of shopping there". We need to change the whole model.



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This idea that one company, through its own unilateral voluntary CSR efforts, can change conditions in its own supply chain is a bit of a dream, because when you are talking about that mass level of fashion, you talk about multiple companies sourcing from the exact same factory. If you are trying to even change conditions in one factory, as a company you are not going to be able to do that because there will be a line next door producing for another brand and it may not be a UK brand, it may not be a European brand, it may be a brand from Asia where these issues are not even discussed, believe me.

What we say is we need to work together to transform the conditions in the production countries where all of the companies are buying from. I am much more interested in hearing about how the companies are working together to change the industry in the markets where they are buying from rather than being able to say to consumers, "We produce our clothes in this way". The previous panel was very interesting because you have small producers that have absolute insight into their supply chain. At the scale that we are talking about on the high street, you simply do not have that and you could spend your time trying to get that or you could spend your time trying to change the conditions on the ground in the countries where the clothes are being produced, such that everybody who is buying clothes from that market, whether it be UK companies or companies based elsewhere in the world, will have to abide by those certain conditions that you have set. It is much more complicated, it is a global industry so even the impact that the UK, through its own legislation, can have on that global industry is limited. It requires a much more collaborative approach.

Livia Firth: I want to tell you a story. The last time two years ago I went to Bangladesh I was visiting a factory that was producing jeans in Chittagong. This particular factory produced 3 million pairs of jeans a month. They are a standard model factory from a sustainability and ethical point of view. The owner of the factory was citing the brand with the brown paper bag, because he had recently visited England and saw in the windows that they were selling jeans at six for £99. He said that he was completely shocked because he did not know how on earth they could sell jeans at that price, considering that they were probably produced for a fifth of that amount.

That tells you a lot about the fact that absolutely—I slightly disagree with Jenny—companies have huge responsibility. I might not have visited as many factories as Jenny has but I have certainly sat on endless panels where companies are using the fact that they share factories or they do not hire factories or the government in that particular country does not regulate it and they tried to perpetrate a system that for them is absolutely sustainable.

Hence why for us the strongest point we have is the law. If there is the laws, the regulations—as was said before, competition laws and bribery laws—why not apply laws for UK-based companies that produce outside



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of England to make sure that they pay their workers and they treat their workers the same way they would treat English workers. Obviously there is exploitation as well, as we know, but that is another story.

Lucy Siegle: I agree with Jenny in many respects. When we are presented with transparency arguments, we are often presented with a league table of which brand is doing best. What that normally means is, "These are the brands that have taken my calls or responded to my e-mails and this is what they have told me". A lot of consumers take heart from that and I understand why. In the aftermath of something like Rana Plaza, when you write pieces for mainstream media, you will get hundreds of people contacting you, especially via social media, and they will say, "This is terrible. Which brands can I buy from?"

Immediately the consumer impulse overrides everything, overrides all our sense of horror, overrides all our sense of priorities, whatever—all our values really. It is a very difficult question to answer because on 24 April 2013 there were lots of brands that breathed a sigh of relief because they found out that they were not in Rana Plaza, but they could have been because, as Jenny says, it is the system that is at fault.

Transparency tells us very little in the way that we talk about and understand transparency. You would have to have such infinite knowledge of the supply chain, have visited all the factories that Jenny and Livia have been to and have to understand things like standard minute values in factories and the fact that lots of these facilities are set up to fail. Western buyers are going in, placing an order; they do not know how much that factory can produce within the timespan they give them. As soon as they have turned their backs—I am sure you have heard this from other witnesses, other people giving evidence—that order will be subcontracted. What you normally get in these transparency reports are first and second tier factories. It tells you absolutely nothing.

There are ways, especially with new technology, that we hope that we could link the product to the producer and that we can follow it through the supply chain. It will really take some sort of legal mandate to do that. There needs to be some framework. Whether we use trade law, whether we use those kind of principles, there has to be some legal remedy somewhere to help the traceability. I think it is traceability rather than transparency.

It is also the case that some British brands are behaving very cynically in the marketplace, they really are. We know at the start of this year the ETI reported that a very well known brand—who I won't mention because they are pretty litigious—were going around paying suppliers 2% less than the agreed rate in Bangladesh and they were doing that having just signed up to the accord, the voluntary code of conduct, the voluntary code of alliance. If they are going to do that when the spotlight is on them, what are they going to do when our attention is turned on to something else? We have to start looking at these difficult, complex



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areas, especially across different jurisdictions where we have to see where we can apply legal remedies, because the voluntary system is not working.

Q110 Dr Offord: Excellent. It seems to me that the perception is that the Modern Slavery Act does not seem to be working within the fashion industry. I see a shake of the head there.

Livia Firth: The Modern Slavery Act was a commendable initiative. The problem with it is that it has no legal compliance. It is totally voluntary and it is up to the company to disclose and, if they do, the CEO or the shareholders are not legally responsible, which is the difference with the other laws that I was citing, the competition law and the bribery law.

Lucy Siegle: I would say whatever the product group, because obviously the Modern Slavery Act applies to all different product sectors and services, we are still at an early stage and it takes a lot of unravelling. There is part of the Modern Slavery Act that we need to understand better how it can change the way that consumers ask questions and perceive products. I watched a documentary the other day that was based on the Modern Slavery Act and it taught me four or five different things that I hadn't known, and I had read it. It is going to take a lot of time to embed. It is a useful thing to have but I definitely agree with Livia.

Livia Firth: Last year France adopted a step forward and that is something that the Committee should really look at and how it works.

Q111 Dr Offord: You anticipated my final supplementary question, which was the duty of vigilance law that France has introduced. What benefits has that brought to the market in France that we currently are failing to achieve in the United Kingdom?

Livia Firth: It is probably too early to know because it is only one year old, but definitely now it has become a law so companies are much more vigilant and have to pay extra careful attention. That law, if I am not mistaken, also incorporates public procurement, where you were saying the Government is the biggest buyer. That is also very important.

Lucy Siegle: It also shifts the whole paradigm. One of the things that is constantly—whether it be plastics, whether it be slavery and clothing production—being thrown back is, “The consumer demands it. We want it, we need it” and, “the free market is king, we cannot mess with this, it will regulate itself”, which we know is just complete nonsense, especially when it comes to the apparel industry. Instituting these laws is incredibly important and when we have brands that are continuing to play so cynically in the global market, it is something that is the obvious next step we have to do.

Q112 Chair: I want to come back, Lucy, on the supply chain. You talked about digital. There are some brands that can go down to the third and fourth tier suppliers through digital means. This is something that is completely



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standard in the food industry where you can see when you go to a shop who grew your peas and who grew your lamb. Is it that fashion just wants to turn a blind eye because it suits them? Is that really what the problem is here?

Lucy Siegle: Yes, I think it is. There are two things. The fashion industry has been allowed to mark its own homework for a very long time, so we have built up these transparency initiatives. We talked about the league table format. In a way these have been thrown out to consumers and we have not really demanded more. Consumers are very woke shoppers, if I can use that terrible expression, and people who love their fashion and want sustainable fashion and are ambitious for their product. We should be more ambitious consumers. This is the heart of this, that we need to demand more. I noticed when that French law came forward—I cannot remember the name of the MEP or whoever first brought that law to our attention—they said this is what the consumer deserves. We are doing this for them because they deserve this traceability within the product, they deserve to know, they deserve to have that peace of mind.

Since these issues started getting a lot of airtime, and I would say that is over a decade, we have had two or three fashion generations consuming with a very guilty conscience, slightly shame-facedly. I am not surprised people get rid of their clothes quickly because psychologically that is part of where we are slightly unnerved because we know we are buying stuff of uncertain provenance that we should not be buying.

Q113 John McNally: The aim of my questions is probably directed at Andrea and Jane to begin with and it is to explore some policies that help to reduce waste and make textile resources more available for reuse. I come from an era of repairing my own clothes, when my dad would sole and heel our shoes so they would last. We were taught how to do that. I find that where we are in today's industries is absolutely frightening. The amount of waste that is flung away needs to change, especially when you hear from the likes of a luxury brand called Burberry who in July this year burned nearly £30 million worth of products to protect its brand name. Fashion Revolution made the comment that that is the tip of the iceberg. That should be scaring everybody. They think that that is an acceptable practice and it absolutely needs to change.

To go on to my question to Andrea and Jane, every year in the UK hundreds of thousands of tonnes of unwanted or damaged clothing are thrown straight into household bins. For your information on policy, the Scottish Government has introduced a circular economy called Making Things Last, which was launched in 2016. Zero Waste Scotland play a supporting role in enabling businesses, local authorities and of course, most importantly, the public, to reduce waste production and increase waste use and recycling. It offers businesses support to services to enable manufacturing businesses to find other businesses that create the way that they can recycle. Is that the type of policy that you would be looking for to help in the reduction, in the reutilising of the amount of clothing waste we are currently producing?



Andrea Speranza: Yes, definitely. All industries that are about repairing and reusing have a potential. Currently research says that the clothing repair industry has a turnover of between £160 million and £300 million, which is quite significant, but definitely the Committee should find more evidence about the potential that that could have.

At the moment, we have a problem with putting clothes into the bins. We are sending 11 million items of clothes to landfill or incineration weekly. A report from the Ellen MacArthur Foundation says that sending clothes to landfill has cost £82 million per year to the UK economy, which is another significant figure.

However, there has been some improvement at UK level. We have reduced the amount of clothes into household receivable waste by 50,000 since 2012, which is an improvement that is positive. But the question is how can we do more of this, and the initiative that you mentioned goes in the right direction. But local authorities have a key role to play here because TRAIID believes it is important to make reuse and recycling clothes easy for people, the easier the better.

Do we have enough textile banks in our local communities? One of the problems that we have in London now is fly-tipping, so local authorities in London are asking to remove textile banks. We might be finding a solution for our problem but we might generate another one. Do we have enough drop-off in our libraries, our local community centres, our work spaces, our schools? All these not only encourage people or make it easy for those who are recycling clothes now, who are using it, but also remind those who are not doing it that there is the possibility to do it.

Something that TRAIID started a couple of years ago to make reuse and recycling clothes easier was a free home collection. For many reasons, some people cannot carry two or three heavy bags of clothes to charity shops or textile banks. People book this free home collection and we collect the clothes from their place. That has proved to be very popular. We have increased the amount of clothes that were collected in specific local authorities where we are providing this service. It is another way to encourage people to recycle and reuse. One of the benefits of the service—it is one of many, and people have different habits, communities are different—is that we keep the quality of the clothes. Sometimes people, with the best intention, drop off a bag of clothes outside the charity shop that is closed. It is Sunday evening, it is raining, and next day when we collect it, it is wet.

It is really important to make it easy and offer different options and initiatives to people. The Government should be looking to incentivise the industry of reusing and repair.

Coming back to what you say, at TRAIID we have an education department and we provide education to people of all ages about this issue in very different ways. There are many ways to address this problem that we have of sustainable relationship with our clothes. We



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have the problem that we are consuming too much. How we are using the clothes, which we did not address here, but the UK has the lowest expected active life of clothes in the European Union. We are using our clothes for 3.3 years. We are doing much worse than in Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany, for example. We are using the clothes for a very short period of time and our problem is that we have a lot of clothes in our wardrobes but we are not wearing them.

TRAID recently launched a new campaign. It is called the 23% Campaign, because 23% of London wardrobes are not worn. This is equivalent to 123 million items of clothes that are there, that we bought but we are not wearing. A funny story—not funny at all—is that the main reason why we are not wearing these clothes is because they no longer fit us. This is the main reason. At TRAIID we are encouraging people to do more clear outs and put these clothes into circulation. One of the reasons that would encourage people to buy more second-hand clothes is if there is more variety. But I am going to another issue.

Then there is the problem of giving longer life to clothes. For example, we are working with local authorities offering repair cafés. 70% of people who attend these repair cafés in certain local authorities state that they feel confident to repair their clothes after that. Half of them say that they went to this workshop, they repaired the item of clothing and, as a result of repairing that item, they would not be buying a new one. This café has a replacement element. Obviously repair cafés are not for everyone, but we need to find a different element and encourage people to do as much as they can, and reuse and repair is something important. As you say, it was not always like this.

Jane Grice: Everything Andrea said, but I will add that waste that goes into the bin is a big issue. I know in the first meeting that was held it was said that there would not be an introduction of kerbside collection by councils. But I do think that kerbside collections of textile waste is the way forward because we have to make it very easy for consumers to recycle their textile waste. That is the first thing. I am sorry if that is not what you have planned, but that is something we need to look at.

The other thing is that in the UK if people do not put their things in the bin they tend to take them to a charity shop and charity shops are inundated with waste. I decided to get my hands dirty and volunteer in a charity shop to see how it works. Quite honestly, there are a lot of things that get put straight in the bin for the ragman, or the textile recyclers is probably the proper word. It has labels on. It has never been worn. As upcyclers, people that I am representing today, people that make things out of old things, they want to get their hands on that and they are finding it difficult to get their hands on anything from a charity shop. The reason for that is because the charity shops find it easier to just parcel it all up and get 35p a kilo than offer it out to the public at a reduced rate.



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If all charity shops had to have bargain days, jumble days, bargain rails, where people who want to either get cheap clothing that is wearable, because it is all wearable, or want to upcycle it because you do not want to pay the rate that most charity shops are charging now—because this is another problem. Once you go into a charity shop it is more like going into a vintage store. The prices are silly and they cannot sell it at those prices. It does end up going back in the rag bin.

There is a lot we can do about the way that post-consumer waste is treated. One of the things we said is—and it is what you are doing already—it needs to be expanded out across the country where textile waste is collected at the door, goes into a recycling centre, and then people can buy it from there rather than it going straight to charity shops. I have since learned that charity shops do value that 35p a kilo because it is quite important to them.

There is no easy answer to this but talking to the people that are in my group, they have lots of ideas and I would like to just share with you a few of the things that they have said to me recently. They would like to see more tip shops. That means at council recycling centres there are places that things that are still reusable—textiles and other things—can be put aside for people to buy.

I do not know whether you have head of scrap stores. Scrap stores are amazing. They collect waste from businesses mainly and sell it on as craft supplies for schools, colleges, general public. Scrap stores are amazing.

Repair cafés. Repairing is an important thing. We have to learn to love our clothes. I took the decision about three years ago to not buy any more clothes. I spent my whole life in fashion as a fashion designer, fashion educator, and three years ago I decided not to buy any more new clothes. I broke my own rule because I bought this but this is upcycled so it does not count.

Classifications of waste is another thing that has come up in discussions, that maybe we need another classification that is “reusables”. Everything is classed as waste. A lot of it is not waste. It is reusable.

I would like to see waste penalised at all levels. I would like there to be a look at the legal framework to assist upcycling because that is an area where people are finding it quite difficult.

Another thing that came up quite recently is I came in contact with a lady who is part of a quilting group. They use upcycled fabrics to make quilts. They wanted to raffle one to raise money for a charity. That is fine except the gambling laws get in the way. It is going to cost them too much money to be able to raffle their beautiful quilt, which took many hundreds of hours to make by a group of ladies. Things like this—

John McNally: Can I thank you there?

Jane Grice: Sorry.



John McNally: It is an extremely interesting question and there has been very good answers. Just for your information, I am going to work in a charity shop and I will be keeping my eye on what comes in and what goes out. Thanks very much, both of you.

Chair: Thank you for those fascinating answers.

Q114 **James Gray:** Can we move on to the whole question of the internet and the way in which it has affected over-production and over-consumption? I am particularly interested in two aspects of this. First, in the old days you would go into a shop, you would buy something that is your size, and that was fine. Today, as I see from my own family—I have large numbers of teenage children—they buy on the internet far more than they need and then send half of it back. That must have an effect on the producers because they must presumably be producing significantly more to take account of that week's gap, whatever it might be, between the arrival and all that. Also, it is encouraging them to buy more than they would otherwise buy. To what degree do you think the internet is having a deleterious effect on this question of consumption?

Lucy Siegle: What we are witnessing, and this goes for companies that have been caught burning their product and those who are yet to be caught burning their product, of which there are many—I wish I could, I did not bring my lawyer with me. What we are seeing is—

James Gray: I will just jump in there on this lawyer question. You are giving evidence under parliamentary privilege and therefore if you chose to name somebody you would not be liable.

Lucy Siegle: I am not going to do it anyway, but thank you. I see what happens there.

This is symptomatic of a total loss of control of inventory. Recently we saw a fast-fashion company that was reputed to be left with \$4.3 billion worth of unsold stock. That is not just one season; it was multiple seasons. Then we have seen a lot of evidence—a recent documentary on German TV showed a fast-fashion company burning stock again. That stock goes through an incineration programme; one of the main energy producers in Denmark burns fashion. The fashion in this case, according to the brand, is stuff that is not fit for sale because something has gone wrong in production, there are too many chemicals in it, which raises the question why they are still using those chemicals, which is a slightly different issue.

It is all symptomatic of a system that is broken. Then you add on the power of social media and the online experience of buying clothes, which is set to get faster, and is getting faster, because we now have a touchscreen. There is a new TV show that is coming out where you can tap the screen if you like something and it will arrive at your house. We are taking away all of the steps in the chain that gave pause for thought in the old days when you saw something in a magazine, thought about it, saved your money; all of those kinds of processes are gone. We have to



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think very seriously, as the members of the other panel said, about mental health and what that does and the pressure that that puts on young people.

I also think that we have to be slightly careful not to put all of the blame on the shoulders of the digital generation. It is not their fault that they are digital consumers. We have to balance our shock and awe at the speed of delivery. But cutting inventory and curbs on inventories are absolutely key. We crashed through a barrier, which was not even acknowledged, a few years ago when we started producing over 100 billion new garments from virgin resources every year. That is absolutely extraordinary. By some estimations we are now at 120 billion to 150 billion new garments a year. We cannot sustain that on any level.

Jane Grice: There is another way to deal with fashion. There are lots of small people, young designers, people who have come to fashion later in life, who are producing on a very small scale. Without the internet they could not grow their businesses, so while it is bad on the one hand because people can order all these multiple things from large companies and send them back again, for the small company it is essential. It is one of the only ways to get their product out there. I do not think we should be too keen to put it down on the internet and shopping on the internet because there are always two sides to a story.

Lucy Siegle: It is not like we can turn it off at this point.

Jane Grice: No, we can't.

Q115 **James Gray:** We can't be too Luddite about it; it is going to happen and is here to stay. I find it commercially astonishing that companies are vastly over-producing in the way you describe and then destroying the material. That seems to me to be commercial madness.

Livia Firth: The over-production is a symptom of exploitation and it is only possible because we can exploit labour. Otherwise fast-fashion companies would not be able to produce at that volume—they would not—and at this speed. The issue of a living wage in the specific has to be addressed.

I would also like to remind the Committee that next year is the 100-year anniversary since the Treaty of Versailles, which first established that the right of every employee is to earn a minimum salary that allows the person a standard of living. Somehow throughout a century where we have been talking about the issue of a living wage, the words "living" and "minimum" have been separated. Today the minimum wage is often the ceiling for those companies rather than being the bottom line. It has been proven that if we establish the legality of a living wage then companies that pay the minimum wage are doing so knowing that they are not paying the living wage. That is wrong.

Q116 **James Gray:** The effect of social media particularly influences. I gather



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that within seconds of somebody appearing on “Love Island” the sales of the items on “Love Island” went through the roof. Those things are being kept by youngsters for extremely short times until it appears on Instagram and the moment it is on Instagram, they throw it away again. Is that a reasonable summary and, if so, what can we do about it?

Lucy Siegle: It is a great summary and when we quantify the impact of fast fashion at that level and at that velocity, we have to ask ourselves, and hopefully your Committee—you are taking evidence about it—and if we conclude that the price is too high to pay, both environmentally and from a social justice point of view, as Livia points out, it is based on exploitation. That is the only reason those economics work for those brands in that way. We have to say, “Should we be advertising—does that contravene advertising standards?” It is a highly polluting product. I think Professor Williams or somebody on the last panel mentioned that there is evidence now that it has an ill effect on mental health to be consuming at that level. You can imagine at some point, when we have an evidence base for it, that that will be considered harmful. These are the things that we have to look at.

We have to look beyond the immediate crisis and we have to think how it is impacting this generation, and how it will play out. I wrote a piece recently where I was involved in a documentary called “Fashion’s Dirty Secrets” that was on BBC One and was presented by Stacey Dooley who is enormously popular and doing brilliantly in “Strictly Come Dancing” at the moment. Please do vote for her. I hope that is not an abuse of this Committee.

James Gray: I am not sure parliamentary privilege goes to “Strictly”.

Lucy Siegle: Strike that from the record. What I thought was interesting about that documentary was that they specifically convened a panel of Instagram influencers. Stacey went out and uncovered the truth about the production of fashion, came back and basically confronted them with it. I thought several of them took it to heart and it was a very interesting examination of how they see their job as an Instagram influencer. Certainly for me this is a new profession that I was not aware of. We have to understand where they see their role and understand how they can help us deliver these messages.

When Andrea talks about waste, it sounds exciting and dynamic and there is so much opportunity in the reuse, rewear and resale economy, which by 2021 is projected to be worth \$33 billion. There is opportunity here and some Instagram influencers seem like bright people. They are going to switch on to those opportunities and not just over-consumption, over-consumption. But I know they get paid by affiliates and it is very hard for them to track how they get paid.

Livia Firth: On this note, there has been a new regulation that has been applied where social media influencers have to disclose if they are promoting something because they are being paid or gifted a product.



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That is a huge step forward, because obviously for the followers, rather than saying, "That person, my hero, is wearing this because it is cool", it is, "Oh no, my hero is wearing that because he is being paid". It is a very different mental association.

Andrea Speranza: We recently launched our 23% Campaign, and talking about influencers and the right influencers, we have a very talented young actress, Emma Watson, supporting our campaign, encouraging people to pass on the clothes they no longer need, and in that way supporting the United Nations sustainable development goal by doing something very simple. We got 10,000 likes for it and many more retweets, and we reached an audience that probably we would not in other ways. This is an example of how people are good with their celebrity status. The question is how we engage then.

Also, do not forget that all of us are influencers. Marketing technique says that people feel influential for the people who are around us, so we should not undermine our individual power either.

James Gray: Finally, can I say that I have not worn this tie as an influencer and I am sure no one will want to buy it.

Q117 **Chair:** James, you have a massive influence on us. Do not ever underestimate your influence.

I want to come back to Jenny on the issue of trade unionisation. Given how difficult it is for the consumer, are there any particular companies that people should be aware of or avoid? You have done a huge amount of work in Bangladesh with the compact there, but are there globally areas where you would hesitate personally when buying your clothes, or do you think these abuses are still prevalent?

Jenny Holdcroft: This is the difficult thing, and it is difficult to communicate to consumers, because many companies will say that they are doing all of these things. This is the danger of reporting and, like Lucy was saying, marking their own homework. They will give themselves a big tick but the question is for the consumer and for any of us to understand what they are really doing.

Every company will tell you that freedom of association is respected in their supply chains because they are sourcing from countries that have ratified the ILO convention on freedom of association, therefore everything is okay. Of course, the reality is very different from that. It is fair to say, yes, we are sourcing from countries that, on paper, have legislation. It is not ideal but most of it is not that bad. It is the enforcement of that legislation and this is where companies have a strong role to play.

The measure for us is to what extent are the companies working with us to solve these issues directly concerning workers. The workers are our members, or should be if they only had an opportunity to join a trade union, which they do not. We measure companies on the basis of are



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they prepared to sit down and talk to us about how they need to be working with their suppliers to ensure that the suppliers are not using the laws to abuse the situation. The unions, when they try to organise, face every kind of hostility from employers. They get sacked, arrested, beaten up; they get killed in some circumstances.

It is a huge challenge. What we need companies to do is to send a message to their suppliers that this is unacceptable and if you want to do business with us you have to stop these practices.

We have a number of ways that we engage with companies. Our gold standard is we have global framework agreements with individual companies. We have one with a UK company, which is ASOS. That is a fairly recent one and we are working with them. Our goal is to work directly with the companies in the supplier countries, with the factories that they are sourcing from, to say to those factories, "You have to allow workers to have access to a trade union" and that means allowing them to have contact with them and, if they choose to organise, allowing them to do that. That sounds very simple but it is incredibly rare. The norm is to resist that unionisation effort. Of course that means that the workers themselves have no means of influencing their wages, their working hours and so on.

The other thing that I would measure companies on is what they are doing about the way that they do business with their suppliers. We know about the living wage and how important that is, but it is unrealistic to say to a company, "We expect you to be paying a living wage" because that is too many steps down the chain removed from their business. What we want to know is what are they paying to the factories. This is something that requires a lot more scrutiny. We are working with a group of companies at the moment to open up their purchasing practices. It is incredibly complicated. Lucy referred to the standard minute value; how do you price a piece of clothing; how do you decide what is fabric, what is overheads, what is the price that actually goes to the workers; what about indirect workers who are not directly sewing but might be mopping the floors. It is incredibly complicated but this is the thing that determines the outcome for the workers. It is also linked to this volume thing, because if the workers were paid properly they could be still getting a decent wage not producing quite the same volume of clothing. You would have better quality clothes that are fewer but guarantee wages.

It all comes down to what is the business relationship between the company and the factories that it is sourcing from. I do not know to what extent there could be greater scrutiny of that. It is very complex but we are starting to learn what the different factors are that go into a price. We are doing that with the companies so that we can then make them make commitments about that that enable us to negotiate with the factories to get better wages. That is the first step of it. I think this is the contradiction between the CSR practices on the one hand where they say



that they are trying to do things, and some are actually doing it, but on the other side of the table there are the buyers who have a completely different set of practices.

When we first started having these conversations with the brands that are trying to do the most in this area, it was amazing to hear that the sustainability people had never had conversations with the buying people. It is completely separate arms of the company. On one hand you are trying to do good things; on the other hand, you are undermining yourself by the business model that you are purchasing. That is really at the heart of it and if you can get to that—

Chair: Yes, that has really come out in our written evidence as well, both the signed and some anonymous evidence that we have had.

Q118 **Anna McMorris:** I want to go back to the issue of social media. We have talked a bit about the dark side of social media and the influence of, perhaps, television programmes like “Love Island” and the marketing methods used. Could peer-to-peer networks also hold out hope for new fashion business models that rely on sharing, hiring, swapping rather than purchasing?

Lucy Siegle: As a real back-to-basics point, I said before that the online and offline resale market is projected to be \$33 billion by 2021. There is a massive opportunity. When the global middle class increases, as it is by 150 million a year or whatever, in different territories around the world, what often happens to reused clothing is that their market goes into decline. The middle class goes up and the reused clothing market shrinks. What we need to do is get the global middle class to have an appetite for reuse in that market and then we can match those markets up and maximise that opportunity. The way that we can do that is through innovation, awareness, brilliant campaigns and building the profile of reuse.

I was thinking before when Jane was talking about recycling and all the amazing things that you can do with upcycling that it is very like plastics in a way. I have written a lot about plastics recently. The big brands will tell you, “We can recycle this, let’s make it all about recycling. We will collect the garments and there will be closed loop and they will get changed into other garments”. As you know from the previous panel, we are a long way off that technically. Recycling has to be pushed so far along and then all the other Rs have to be slotted in between: resale, rewear, hiring—which doesn’t begin with an R but all of those kind of things. All of those business models have to slot in between so that we can match up these markets.

I think we are starting to see some very interesting projects such as Patagonia Worn Wear that are very interesting. They have created, with their partner, a white label for the reused Patagonia model. It means that people on lower incomes also get the chance to be part of this economy, which is also really important. Within those models there are new



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innovations in washing and preparing clothes as well, but you have to invest in them. At the moment, we see big brands, fast-fashion brands, so-called partnering with a recycling scheme and they are not really investing anything into it. There is no venture capital fund; there is no actual investment of energy or money going into these new things. For them to take off, we need proper commitment and investment.

Jane Grice: There is another word for “hire”; it is “rent” and it begins with an R.

Lucy Siegle: That is why they pay her the big bucks.

Livia Firth: Can I go back quickly to an answer about the company that has done the most to address social issues in their supply chain? That is Unilever. Unilever is not in fashion but with the lawyers we consulted with them a lot because what they have done across their supply chain is really extraordinary. It was the first company in the world to publish an ethical supply chain report publicly. They worked for a long time to establish a fair wage system. I would definitely talk to them and involve them in the conversation, because they can tell you not only about the problems but also about some of the interesting solutions.

Q119 **Anna McMorris:** Nothing about this and what you are talking about, Lucy, is legislated. We are taking evidence here. What should we as a Committee be saying to Government about that waste hierarchy system, about the whole process from beginning to end? At the moment you are talking about it coming voluntarily—Patagonia and all the other brands and the great brands we heard about this morning in the earlier panel—but that is voluntary. What do we need to be saying to Government to legislate on this?

Lucy Siegle: I think the panel before asked for VAT to be dropped on rewear and reuse start-ups, for example. I think that is a really amazing idea. With a lot of these brands like Patagonia, and you heard from Hiut before, it is part of their brand build that they put these—that is the market economy brings these things through but in order to create a level playing field where fast fashion does not dominate and lets these things through, I think something like VAT repeal or however you want to call it would be really useful. I don’t know if Jane wants to add anything.

Jane Grice: I think that small businesses, the cottage industries, need some help somehow, some leg-up, because it is not a level playing field at the moment. There is a real need for some legislation that helps people who want to start their own business, whether that is repair, upcycling, just using sustainable fabrics. Help is needed there to grow new industry in this country. That is one big thing that needs to happen.

Lucy Siegle: I would add about recycling that one of the things that has also happened in France—and I am not sure where this law has got to, but it is same with plastics, with recycling anything, you need to make it simple. You need to cut down the different streams of textiles going into



products in order that recycling becomes feasible. That is something that they have looked at mandating in France, I think I am right in saying.

Anna McMorris: Yes, it is. Thanks.

Q120 **Geraint Davies:** I want to come back to how we encourage young people to repair their own clothes. Is it through education and giving them the skills to do that or is it perhaps through imposing a plastics tax, given what we have heard from Phoebe English and Lucy about the polluting effect of plastics in our oceans but also when we wash clothes we inhale the microfibres and there are health links to cancer and so on? If we increase the price of these garments, surely less will be bought and more will be repaired. What is the balance between educating people to repair their clothes and perhaps taxing some of the pollutants that are driving this low-cost industry that are so harmful?

Livia Firth: If you want to educate people about repairs, you first have to educate them about the value of what they buy. The problem, the issue that we are all discussing here, is that thanks to the disposability of fashion today we don't value anything we buy and we do not even bother about repairing it in the first place. But education in schools is fundamental. In Italy when I grew up I started sewing in elementary school and I think one of the reasons why I still repair all my clothes and every hole in my socks is because I know how to sew. Education is definitely the key.

Jane Grice: Education in schools, crash skills in schools. I saw something, and I think it was on social media, that even surgeons need to know how to sew and the manual dexterity is not there because we are not teaching it in schools. Education has a massive part to play, but also making it possible for people to repair their clothes by encouraging repair cafés where people can take things to have them repaired is another thing that we could possibly support somehow.

Lucy Siegle: We are approaching an era when innovation means that there is an alliance between these kind of skills, like repairing and pattern cutting and stuff like that, and STEM, basically. Modern Meadow in New York is biofabricating leather in a laboratory without any cows. They have isolated the collagen and they can make it invitro. The next generation will need a mixture of really good skills and dexterity, an interest in innovation and a willingness to work at the bench with scientists. We are also looking at 3D printing now. There is great capacity for taking the heat out of over-consumption with 3D printing, for example. Things are changing really fast but these core skills remain fundamental. As humans, they are what we bring to the table. They are the things that cannot replace us and we need to remember that because as the global population grows, we need stuff to do. This is very important stuff that we bring.

Q121 **Geraint Davies:** If clothing is very, very cheap, there is simply no point or incentive to spend a lot of your time repairing it when it is easier to go



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and buy another. I agree that we should have all these skills and encouragement, but the issue is that if we tax the polluting plastic in clothing and increase the cost of buying these products, people would have more sustainable products and there would be an incentive to repair those products rather than keeping on buying more. Andrea, what do you think about that?

Andrea Speranza: I think that repair skills are really important, and we do that at TRAIID, but fundamentally what we need is to educate each other about the environmental impact of clothing. People do not know enough yet. In a survey that we commissioned, 47% of Londoners felt uninformed about the environmental benefit of giving longer life to clothes, but after knowing more information they would feel more inclined, for example, to pass on their clothes, to give an example, the power of information, the invitation to take action. People need to know the problem, first of all. If we want to decide whether or not we want to participate in the solution, first we need to know that there is a problem and not enough people know about the problem.

Not everything is for everyone. Not everyone will go to a repair café. However, we need to give the chance to those who would like to do so. Other people, having the information, will decide to buy better quality clothes, spend an amount of money buying something once for a longer period of time. Others will choose to buy second-hand. There are different options for different people but, first of all, we need to make sure that we have communications campaigns where we address the three problems: we are buying too much, we are wearing them for a very short time and we are putting them into the bin unnecessarily.

Q122 **Geraint Davies:** Isn't the solution to that to raise the price through taxing plastic? The situation is that now microfibres go through the sewage system. They are caught, they are put in slurry, they are put on the land. They then dry, they blow and we inhale them, and this is on top of the stuff we are all inhaling in our houses every day when we put our clothing on. People do not know about this, but shouldn't it be the case that we just put up the price so that people use natural fibres and not all this plastic?

Jane Grice: I remember a time before microplastics. We had synthetics and I want to point out that not all synthetics are microplastics. Synthetics are extruded in any wick you want to extrude them, so not all plastics are going to cause the problems that you are talking about. However, there is a massive problem, we know that.

The last thing I have written down on my notes here to say is that we need to reduce fashion consumption. In answer to your question, yes, I think we need to tax plastics. We need to stop using new plastics and recycle what we have because we have it, it is here, it is in the system, it is in the environment, and we need to make use of that. We do not need to bury it or burn it; we need to reuse it. Generally, we need to reduce fashion consumption and, just to put it into different words, we need to



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buy less, we need to buy better and we need to keep things for longer. That is basically how I feel.

Q123 **Chair:** I was just going to close the meeting but you can have the final word, if you want.

Lucy Siegle: Well, I would like it if you are offering. Can I respond to a point that was made about several hours ago? I wanted to get this across to you guys that when Jenny was talking about we are several steps away from that, why are we several steps away when we have had three decades of this? We have had all this obfuscation from big brands, we have had all this not dealing with the actual impact. It is a disgrace, but the fact of the matter is that Jenny is right. We still do not have entire datasets for production. We still do not know which orders are being placed in which factories at which time and we do not know what exactly is being paid, because this is all under the umbrella of commercial secrecy, anti-trust and all the rest of it. What we are lacking in datasets is also wrapped up in a FOB, free on board or freight on board, price, so when a buyer goes in they are paying a complete price. We need the fashion industry to give us these statistics so that we can drill down and make proper decisions and proper choices. I think that the fashion industry should be mandated to give us those statistics. That is what I would also ask for.

Chair: Thank you all very much indeed. Buy less, buy better, use longer will be our little mantra from this session. In our next session we are going to meet with the online retailers and the high street retailers, so we will be putting to them the questions that you have raised, in particular the fact that we have had 30 years, and five years since Rana Plaza, to really clean up our act and why has that not happened. Thank you all very much indeed.