
PLACE WORK KNOWLEDGE

Profiling business support provision for small, medium and micro-sized enterprises in London's fashion sector

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Abstract

The primary aim of this paper is to build a profile of the business support landscape that exists for fashion SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) and MSEs (micro-sized enterprises) in London. In the face of multiple challenges, fashion sector SME/MSEs benefit from the services provided by business support organisations. We have identified 21 fashion support organisations that exist in London. They can be broadly divided into two types of business support organisations: fashion incubators and partial-support organisations, both of which play an equally important role in the sector.

1.0 Introduction

This paper offers a profile of the business support landscape that exists for fashion SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) and MSEs (micro-sized enterprises) in London. Fashion sector SME/MSEs face a number of critical challenges that will be examined in more detail later.

The fundamental need for business support organisations has been established on the back of these different challenges. Business support organisations are those range of organisations that provide SME/MSEs with assistance in specific or general areas of business growth development.

Through an examination of 21 fashion support organisations that exist in London it is apparent that two types of business support organisations exist: fashion incubators and what we call 'partial support' organisations, both of which play an equally important role in the sector.

The research shows that partial support organisations tend to provide SME/MSEs with targeted and specific assistance in particular and limited areas, whereas fashion incubators provide a more comprehensive and industry-specific set of services that have to meet specific criteria in order for them to be considered as incubators. These differences are discussed in section 4.1.

The structure of this paper is as follows. It outlines why the fashion sector is important to the UK economy, while emphasising the central importance of London to the industry. It then examines the challenges that face fashion SME/MSEs in this sector in order to establish the need for different kinds of business support. In order to illustrate the business support landscape in London it provides information on 21 organisations in London that provide business assistance to fashion SME/MSEs. Finally, the paper concludes by suggesting that fashion business support in London is characterised by these two types of organisations.

2.0 The UK fashion industry

The UK fashion industry spans textile production, design, wholesaling, marketing, manufacturing, education and media (Griffith, 2011). Recently the British Fashion Council (BFC) have added 'retail' to the list in light of fashion retail's significant direct contribution to the UK economy (BFC, 2010). The BFC state that fashion as a whole directly contributes nearly £21bn to the UK economy or 1.7% of GDP (BFC, 2010), though even if retail were removed from the equation it is estimated that the manufacturing and production arms of the fashion sector alone would still contribute £6.6bn or 0.5% of GDP (ibid.). The fashion sector, including retail, contributes more to UK GDP than the publishing (£9.9bn), car manufacturing (£10.1bn), and chemical manufacturing industries (£10.6bn) (ibid). Fashion also has an indirect economic impact, by encouraging spending in other retail, design and entertainment industries totalling close to £16bn (ibid) , Employment in the fashion industry is currently estimated at around 120, 000 people (DCMS, 2014).

According to Malem et al (2009), much of the UK fashion industry is made up of SMEs with less than 50 employees. MSEs, which are businesses that have 0 to 10 employees, actually make up the majority of businesses in the sector, while 60 per cent of the sector has five employees or fewer and 20 per cent are sole traders employing no staff at all (Malem et al, 2009). These are the businesses that collectively contribute most to the £21bn generated by the UK fashion sector (Davies, 2005)¹. Important to note, is that although SME/MSEs play a significant role in the sector, major British fashion multinationals (such as the Arcadia Group, and Next) also contribute substantially to the sector. For instance, according to the Financial Times (2014) Next.Plc, headquartered in Enderby, UK, has total revenues of £3.74bn for 2014 with a net income of £553.20m for the same year. The Arcadia Group, headquartered in London, controls nine retail outlets/high street stores: BHS ,Burton , Dorothy Perkins , Evans , Miss Selfridge ,Outfit ,Topshop , Topman, Wallis. For the year 2012 the Arcadia Group generated revenues of approximately £4.23bn (AG, 2014).

2.1 London:

London is at the heart of the UK's fashion industry as well as being a leading global centre. It boasts half of the specialist fashion design jobs in the UK and employs approximately 46,000 people in fashion (Mayor of London, 2013). It is home to a large number of internationally renowned designers and offers a strong retail sector ranging from high street to global high-end fashion and luxury brands of both British and international origin. Regarding retailing, it offers some of the most prestigious shopping districts in the world devoted to designer fashion including: New Bond Street, Mayfair, Brompton Road, Knightsbridge and Sloane Street, which are home to the most expensive stores in London, whilst both the boroughs of Hackney and Camden have emerged as new hubs for street markets and independent retailers.

Regarding designer/makers in London, the industry has a few institutions that play critical roles. These include universities that offer world class fashion courses² as well as events like London

¹ In this particular case, Davies (2005) talks about SMEs in general and does not focus on the fashion sector. The point here is that SMEs contribute significantly to all sectors of the UK economy, and this is particularly salient in the fashion sector which is mostly made up of these types of businesses.

² The London fashion education system is widely recognised in the UK and internationally as one of the best in the world (Griffith, 2011). Central Saint Martins, the London College of Fashion, and to a certain extent Kingston University and

Fashion Week (LFW) which has become the zenith of young, fashion, showcasing in Europe³. A strong publishing and print-media interest in fashion further supports the sector, as does a well-established fashion marketing, public relations and promotions sector. Links to other creative industries such as music, art and advertising are also important and well-developed. These are amongst the elements most vital to the health of London's fashion industry.

3.0 Fashion sector challenges

While relatively successful and established, the challenges facing UK fashion SME/MSEs are considerable. This is especially true if they are located in expensive and highly-competitive cities like London. Although London has a particularly strong infrastructure for supporting fashion businesses, major pitfalls, hurdles and challenges still exist. These challenges are indicative of the fashion industry in general.

This section will elaborate on the challenges faced by fashion sector SME/MSEs, critical factors that all businesses must at some point consider. It is by no means an exhaustive list but provides an indicative sense of the issues facing UK and London designer/makers.

3.1.1: Fashion product life cycle:

The first of these challenges is the turnover speed of consumer fashion trends, which affect the already short life cycles of many products. Garments and products may only be in fashion (and thereby commercially exploitable) for a matter of weeks or months. Bhardwaj and Fairhurst (2009, pp. 167) state that, conventionally, a typical life cycle for fashion apparel has four stages: introduction and adoption by fashion leaders; a growth and increase in public acceptance; mass adoption and conformity (maturation); and finally the decline and obsolescence of fashion. The actual time-span of this cycle is especially accelerated for designers trying to start their businesses in cities like London, Paris or New York. The competition as well as the level of innovation in these cities is fierce, which affects the rate at which fashion styles come to, as well as leave, the market. Navigating this ground can be incredibly difficult for new entrants and small businesses, especially when a reputation or brand image has not yet been established, or when support systems are not available or sufficiently established to help manage the demands of the process.

3.1.2: Seasonal additions:

Westminster University all have world renowned fashion courses – the graduates from which are often headhunted by large design houses (Ibid).

³ LFW is the primary showcasing event for designer/makers in the UK. LFW usually takes place in September and is held over six days. In 2011, it featured 37 presentations and 68 catwalk shows (Mayor of London, 2013). More than 200 accessory designers took part in LFW, as well as a whole host of both British and international fashion designers. According to the BFC (2014), it is one of the highest profile fashion events in the world and one of the 'big four' international catwalk influencers. It is organised by the BFC and funded by a number of sponsors (including principal sponsor Vodafone). It is estimated that orders of over £100m are placed during LFW each season. Over 5,000 visitors attend including buyers, TV and radio, journalists and photographers. Media coverage equals or exceeds most major news and international sporting events.

Importantly, the shifting tastes of consumers are not the only source of industry dynamism. The structure of the fashion industry helps create fashion cycles, through its embedded, seasonal patterns of production which are designed to ensure maximum returns and a constant throughput of new products and trends. Therefore the second challenge is the changing fashion calendar. This was traditionally based on the fabric exhibitions, fashion shows and trade fairs, organised around dual Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter ranges. This typically resulted in designers and firms planning and developing a seasonal range in one full year (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2009), where they were able to plan one year ahead and had ample time to work on both ranges. This has now changed. Since the 1990s retailers started focusing on expanding their product range with updated products and faster responsiveness in an attempt to stay ahead of the curve by increasing the speed at which fashion trends enter and exit markets. This has also come to be known as the advent of 'fast fashion' (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2009; Guercini, 2001; Fletcher, 2013). Bhardwaj and Fairhurst (2009) state that there has been a fundamental switch from a production oriented economy to one driven by the demands of retailers and consumers. In the literature, fast fashion is viewed as a business model where the reduction of production time occurs (Bailey 2001), and the urgency of 'coming to market' takes precedence within compressed time-frames, now more determined by the needs of clients and retail customers. In order to increase variety and turnover in the fast fashion market, it is notable that there has been an introduction of more and intermediate 'mid-seasons'. One of the consequences of this, according to Suzy Menkes (2013), is that the strain on budgets, systems and designer/makers themselves is tremendous, especially where a designer in any one year may have multiple shows and ranges to attend and produce. Immense pressure is now placed on suppliers, designers and makers to deliver fashion apparel in smaller batches to retailers with significantly reduced lead time (Tyler et al, 2006). For young or up and coming designers, working alone, or in small businesses, that may not be fully established, the demands are onerous and having the resource and expertise to meet them, many find challenging.

3.1.3: Branding

A third challenge involves a need to develop a reputation and a brand image with viable staying power - which many view as critical to the success of fashion businesses, given how much more readily consumers now attach themselves to particular brands and designer goods (Brun and Castelli, 2008; Power and Hauge, 2008; Malem, 2007; McRobbie, 1998; Richardson, 1996). Branding is essential for five principal reasons according to Brun and Castelli (2008): firstly, brands allow consumers to recognise the product that they intend to purchase; secondly, brands provide a basis for differentiation and positioning of a product; thirdly, they create consumer trust in that their mass appeal implies that they are legitimate and, say, held accountable by the law; fourth, brands create particular semiotic bonds with consumers thereby increasing customer identification and loyalty; and fifth, and probably most importantly, they allow for the extension of the brand into other products. Moreover, Davies (1992) states that elevated pricing can often be justified based on having an established marque or reputation, which further suggests the commercial premium that might stem from having a 'good brand'.. Therefore a source of competitive advantage in the fashion market is the degree to which organizations are able to orient their practices towards building a brand and sustaining it over time (Bridson and Evans, 2004). Individual firms are not always able to develop their own brands, internally, in a systematic way, and so seeking external support or expertise from professional marketers and agencies is increasingly regarded as a necessity.

3.1.4: Counterfeiting

The fourth challenge involves counterfeiting (Hagin, 1991; Hilton et al, 2004; Miller, 2008; Richardson, 1996; Terakura, 2000). The OECD (1998) has stated that it is difficult to pin point the direct costs of counterfeiting although it is substantial. Counterfeiting affects fashion sector SME/MSEs especially at the design and manufacturing stage. Designs are often easily replicable, and even with legal protections, forgeries and copies may be opportunistically produced once an original design is on the market. In attempts to stabilise manufacturing costs many designers choose to manufacture their work overseas. Although this is often positive since designers can reduce the costs associated with manufacturing by offshoring abroad, it makes counterfeiting difficult to protect against since legal protections and enforcements , vary significantly from country to country. For instance according to Mackey (2011 pp. 373) India affords quite extensive and sophisticated copyright protection to its fashion designers, whereas China, although having one of the largest fashion sectors in the world, provides poor protection against counterfeiting. There is a formidable amount of literature on this subject which is beyond the scope of this paper to examine⁴.

3.1.5: Manufacturing:

A further challenge involves the sourcing of affordable and competent local, as well as international, manufacturers (Power and Hauge, 2008; McRobbie, 1998; Tokatli, 2004). The fashion design and apparel industry is international. Over the past three and a half decades, competition on price and quality has intensified due to low cost global manufacturing which is not only available to large established fashion houses but to relatively new or unestablished SME/MSEs as well (Richardson, 1996). Apparel manufacturing being labour intensive has traditionally been seen as migrating from the high-wage 'developed' to low-wage 'developing' countries. There is evidence however of an increasing reversal of this process⁵. This is often because there are certain risks attached to manufacturing abroad, that low costs cannot easily compensate for. For example, some designers have opted to manufacture more locally and incur larger costs in order to make sure that the quality that they desire is maintained. Moreover, a certain level of copyright control can be maintained if manufacturing stays local. Concerns over unethical or 'sweatshop' production in distant locations has also arisen as a legitimate concern. It might still be the case, however, that designers are forced to rely on suppliers and manufacturers from more than one location, depending on the type of apparel they would like to see produced. Moreover, there may be large variations in quality or patterns of delivery across (or within) different countries. However, and as alluded to earlier, issues such as copyright control and the limitation of imitation and counterfeiting are more difficult to manage at a distance, and when dealing with multiple territories. Sourcing, and then managing, both national and international suppliers and manufacturers remains a significant challenge.

3.1.6: Local challenges:

Local challenges are interrelated, and linked to the wider economic conditions of cities. For example in London, issues such as rising rents (Fernie et al, 1998), limited studio availability and high costs of maintenance (Moreton, 2013), lack of organizational support infrastructure (Malem et al, 2009) are all significant. The lack of basic affordable housing in central locations, and the high costs of living

⁴ See: Raustiala and Sprigman (2006); Shultz II and Saporito, (1996); Wall and Large (2010).

⁵ This evidence has arisen out of an ongoing research project the findings of which will be published soon.

generally, contribute to the difficulties of establishing small businesses at the 'hub' of the fashion industry. Yet London is fortunate, in that not all cities have as strong an organizational and infrastructural support for fashion SME/MSEs. While the fashion industry is highly networked and regionalized, and London-centric, often giving ambitious designers little choice as to where they should locate, the support infrastructure tends to be more well developed than in regional cities. . However, fashion entrepreneurs and small firms may still struggle to properly access and make use of this support infrastructure since one of the difficulties is identifying the availability of such resources. Other local challenges include attracting high-quality staff, since the uncertainty of the industry and the low capital base and wages that characterise most fashion businesses mean that it is often difficult to attract well-trained, skilled workers.

3.1.7 Creativity – business tension:

Mills (2011, pp 225) points out that there exists a 'creativity-business tension' in the fashion industry. Characteristically, this tension was depicted as a disconnect between designer's self-identities as 'creatives' and their expectations about how to run a commercial business, which relies on certain types of financial, organisational and managerial skills and tasks not commonly associated with creative fashion work. These tasks can range from, for example, acknowledging the importance of budgeting, costing, or documenting cash flow and sales, to knowing how to appropriately employ staff, or managing the manufacturing aspects of the business. As an example of this, a significant finding that emerged from the report commissioned by the BFC (2010) is the existence of high business failure rates due to under-developed business skills as well as a lack of entrepreneurial training in start-up designer businesses. Interestingly, in contrast, Malem (2007) found that those designers with a strong business perspective were not necessarily more successful. She found that practical needs may overpower or overshadow the creative needs of the business to generate new and innovative products, which is also vital to the success of any fashion business. But, as in the BFC report, she also found that those whose artistic focus led to a neglect of business strategies also tended not to survive. Ideally those who are able to blend highly innovative creative work and develop business aware skills are more likely to be successful and endure (Malem, 2007).

Thus the challenge for fashion business support organisations in cities like London is to understand the critical issues that face designers, and to subsequently offer interventions that work in ameliorating these problems in a constructive and balanced way. Of course, this is easier said than done, though the following section identifies those at the leading edge of the support infrastructure.

4.0 Business support

Business support for fashion SME/MSEs varies between dedicated incubators and organisations that offer targeted or partial support, the basic characteristics of each are discussed in this section, before we focus on London-specific provision in section 5.0.

4.1 Business and Fashion Incubators:

This section outlines the basic characteristics of incubators, and fashion incubators⁶, in order to help us further identify their specific role in the London context.

⁶ See Hackett and Dilts (2004) for a useful and succinct literature review on business incubators.

According to Smilor (1987) incubators can serve a variety of purposes and types of firms and industries. They tend however to mostly provide services and support to start-ups and small businesses (Peters et al, 2004). The rationale for their existence is the fact that over 90% of new businesses globally that are started each year will fail within the first five years of operation (OECD, 2002; Peters et al, 2004). The reasons for these failures are multi-faceted; however there is a consensus in the literature that many of these businesses fail because of lack of financial and business management skills (Hausman, 2005; Peters et al, 2004; Perry, 2001; Story, 1994), as well as a lack of resources (Peters et al, 2004) – incubators are designed to try and prevent these failures.

There are large variances in the types of incubators that exist. They, however, do share certain similar characteristics. According to Hackett and Dilts (2004) as well as Peter et al (2004) incubators can be identified by:

- they tend to be sector-specific, that is offering services tailored towards particular kinds of businesses/industries that they are trying to help;
- they tend to offer resources in the form of low priced spaces to rent and/or shared business services, mentoring, managerial or financial;
- there are usually minimal entry requirements for firms (i.e. to be regarded as feasible or viable businesses) and exit policies (designed to 'release' the firm into the market)
- access to contacts, expertise and opportunities for network building are often provided;
- they are usually tied to host universities or other public or private institutions in some capacity;
- incubators may also charge a fee based on the growth of the incubatee, although sometimes these fees can be waived for other types of payment options such as 'percent of sales'.

In line with this general model, fashion incubators tend to have certain common characteristics. First, they tend solely to focus on the small or independent fashion designer/maker ; secondly they provide some sort of shared workspace, subsidized rent, or studio for design and/or manufacture; third, they tend to have specific entry and exit requirements to ensure an appropriately managed business development and draw on experienced experts to provide both general and fashion-specific business knowledge ; fourth, they often provide showcasing opportunities which are tremendously important to up and coming designers.; fifth, they tend to have university links or are fully embedded in an established fashion college or university; sixth, they offer provision for industry-network building with manufacturers, suppliers, retailers and other designers; and seventh, they usually charge a fee for services (either a fixed fee, or a proportion of sales, or stake in the business).

4.3 Targeted or partial business support

Outside of incubators exists a whole range of organisations that offer targeted or specific or partial business advice. Most organisations that aim to provide fashion SME/MSEs with partial or targeted support do so in a few general areas. These are: mentoring; and resources and information provision; awards, competitions and schemes; business support/advice; environmental and ethical fashion information and advice; export advice/support; knowledge transfer partnerships; mentoring; resources and information provision; showcasing opportunities; and business related training/courses (BFC, 2014).

Section 5.0 below lists both fashion business incubators and partial business support organisations in London.

5.0 Fashion business support in London:

London has a number of fashion business support organisations that run different types of services and combinations of services. This section provides an overview of London's primary fashion business support organisations (incubators and partial support organisations) as well as what they provide in order to build a profile of London's support sector⁷.

5.1 Fashion Incubators:

5.1.1 Centre for Fashion Enterprise (CFE):

The Centre for Fashion Enterprise (CFE) is an innovative business support programme and business incubator that grows London based high-end fashion businesses by reducing the risks inherent in establishing them. It is supported by: University of the Arts London, Olswang and the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund). It provides: business support/advice; awards, opportunities for competitions and schemes; funding; incubator units; mentoring; and studio space. By way of a four-level programme, CFE provides expert guidance in the fields of finance, legal, manufacturing, marketing and digitisation. It aims to provide designer/makers with strategic advice on progressive business solutions as well as bespoke mentoring from industry leaders and key influencers. More information is available at: <http://www.fashion-enterprise.com/>

5.1.2 Craft Central:

Craft Central is a charity that works to enable and promote quality in fine craft and design skills. Their aim as an organisation is to facilitate creative excellence and good business practice whilst raising awareness of creative crafts to help practitioners flourish. They provide: business support/advice; mentoring; showcasing opportunities; studio space; training/courses. More information is available at: <http://craftcentral.org.uk/>

5.1.3 Cockpit Arts:

Cockpit Arts is a social enterprise and business incubator for designer-makers. It specialises in hand-crafted cutting edge fashion, jewellery and interior products. It started in 1986. The focus is on nurturing and supporting designer-makers from a broad range of disciplines with a craft basis to their work. They house 165 designer-makers at their London business incubators and many more access support through their Making It programme and online resource. It provides: business support/advice; awards, competitions and schemes; funding; mentoring; showcasing opportunities; and studio space. Having a studio at Cockpit Arts is a recognised benchmark of excellence in craftsmanship. More information is available at: <http://www.cockpitarts.com/>

⁷ The following information has mainly been retrieved from the organisations' websites as well as the British Fashion Council's business network section of their website available at http://www.britishfashioncouncil.co.uk/bsn_results.aspx last accessed 16/06/14.

5.2 Partial support organisations:

5.2.1 British Fashion Council (BFC):

The British Fashion Council (BFC) is the largest fashion not-for-profit organisation in the United Kingdom. It is funded through leading businesses in fashion retail, media and finance and support from the Mayor of London, European Regional Development Fund, UK Trade & Investment and the Arts Council (BFC, 2014). It promotes British fashion design and supports the growth and development of emerging designers through grants and mentoring support. Created in 1983, the BFC is supported by industry patrons and is linked to higher education institutions and local government. Regarding business support and incubator activities it provides: awards, competitions and schemes, funding and showcasing opportunities. These include the Colleges Council, an initiative that offers MA scholarships and facilitates links between the fashion industry and fashion graduates; BFC Fashion Film; Rock Vault, its fine jewellery initiative; Headonism, a millinery initiative; Estethica, an ethical fashion initiative, and its menswear and womenswear talent identification, business support and showcasing schemes NEWGEN, NEWGEN MEN, Fashion Forward and the BFC/GQ Designer Menswear Fund. The BFC also run London Fashion Week, which is the UK's most important showcasing platform for up and coming as well as established designers. The BFC runs and owns charities including the BFC/Vogue Designer Fashion Fund, the BFC Fashion Trust, the Fashion Arts Foundation and the BFC Princess of Wales Charitable Trust. The BFC has published the Designer Fact-File, an online handbook for designers, and the first ever in-depth statistic-based reports on the fashion industry, most notably, The Value of Fashion (2010, figures updated in 2014) and The Future of Fashion (2012). More information is available at: <http://www.britishfashioncouncil.co.uk>

5.2.2 Centre for Sustainable Fashion:

Through collaboration the CSF design transforming solutions that balance ecology, society and culture. It is funded by: M&S, Nike, Forum for The Future, DEFRA, HEA, Leverhulme Trust, ESRC, AHRC, ERDF (CSF, 2014). It provides: awards, competitions and schemes; business support/advice; environmental/ethical info and advice; export advice/support; knowledge transfer partnerships; mentoring; resources and information provision; showcasing opportunities; and training/courses. The CSF is a Research Centre of the University of the Arts London based at London College of Fashion. Established in 2008 by Dilys Williams, actively supported by other key change-makers from fashion and beyond, CSF's starting point was human and ecological resilience as a lens for design in fashion's artistic and business practices. CSF was devised to question and challenge reactionary fashion cultures, which reflect and re-enforce patterns of excessive consumption and disconnection, to expand fashion's ability to connect, delight and identify individual and collective values. More information is available at: <http://www.sustainable-fashion.com/>

5.2.3 DISC:

The Designer-Manufacturer Innovation Support Centre (DISC) supports fashion manufacturers and designers to innovate their business, products and services. DISC gives fashion businesses access to a team of industry experts. Their specialist experience covers the manufacturing industry

incorporating factory production, global sourcing, jewellery production and sustainable manufacturing. It offers free support in three ways: first, on-line resources offering toolkits, market intelligence reports, case studies, news and other useful information for both designers businesses and manufacturing businesses; second, a series of workshops, seminars and demonstrations which promote innovative ideas, solutions and techniques to both designers and manufacturers; and third, they offer businesses unique one-to-one advice and support in all areas of fashion production. DISC provides: export advice/support; business support/advice; knowledge transfer partnerships; incubator units; mentoring; and resources and information provision. More information is available at: <http://www.fashion-manufacturing.com/about/>

5.2.4 East London Small Business Centre:

ELSBC actively helps new fashion businesses to start up and existing fashion/accessories businesses to survive and grow. It provides: business support/advice; funding; mentoring; training/courses. It does provide fashion sector specific advice. More information is available at: <http://smallbusinesscentre.org.uk/growth/fashion-sector-support/>

5.2.5 Ethical Fashion Forum:

The Ethical Fashion Forum (EFF) is a network of designers, businesses and organisations focusing on social and environmental sustainability in the fashion industry. They provide: awards, competitions and schemes; business support/advice; environmental/ethical info and advice; resources and information provision; training/courses. More information is available at: <http://www.ethicalfashionforum.com/about-eff>

5.2.6 Fashion East:

Fashion East is a non-profit initiative established by the Old Truman Brewery in 2000 to nurture emerging young designers through the early stages of their career. It receives sponsorship funding from Topshop, TOPMAN and The Greater London Authority. Each season they offer three womenswear and three menswear designers the opportunity to present a catwalk collection to the international press and buyers attending London Fashion Week. Designers receive a bursary, free venue and complete catwalk show production, professional catwalk photographs and video. Designers are also given mentoring, guidance and in-house PR throughout the season from Lulu Kennedy and her team. Designers are selected by Lulu Kennedy and a panel of fashion industry experts. In 2005 the team behind Fashion East initiated MAN, an identical support scheme for emerging menswear designers, sponsored by TOPMAN. Since 2009, FE have staged menswear installations on menswear day at London Fashion Week, giving up to ten menswear designers a platform to showcase their collections to UK and international press and buyers. FE also take designers to a sales show room in Paris each season, giving them the opportunity to showcase their collections to top international buyers. FE provides: showcasing, training and funding opportunities. More information is available at : <http://www.fashioneast.co.uk/about.asp>

5.2.7 Fashion Enter/ Fashion Capital:

Fashion Enter is the sister company to Fashion Capital co.uk the UKs leading fashion portal site established in 2001. Fashion Enter is a not for profit, industry based specialist that helps start-ups. It offers support from industry experts, mentoring and seminars but also has facilities to make sales

and business such as selling to asos.com and Debenhams on behalf of a business. It provides: awards, competitions and schemes; business support/advice; export advice/support; funding; intellectual property advice; knowledge transfer partnerships; mentoring; resources and information provision; showcasing opportunities; training/courses. Information is available at:

<http://www.fashion-enter.com/index.php/fashioncapitalcouk/>

5.2.8 Fashion Fringe at Covent Garden:

A platform to discover, nurture and sustain young design talent established in 2003 by Colin McDowell, in partnership with IMG Fashion Europe. The initiative was set up to support the profile of London and British designers in the face of growing pressures within the sector, particularly relating to production issues. It provides: awards, competitions and schemes; business support/advice; funding; mentoring; showcasing opportunities. More information is available at:

<http://www.fashionfringe.co.uk/about/fashion-fringe/>

5.2.9 London College of Fashion: Fashion Business Resource Studio

The Fashion Business Resource Studio (FBRS) at London College of Fashion (LCF) has been set up as a single point of contact for sharing the creative, business and technical expertise of the college with the fashion and lifestyle industries. The FBRS provides: awards, competitions and schemes; mentoring; showcasing opportunities; training/courses. More information is available at:

<http://www.arts.ac.uk/research/research-environment/research-infrastructure/archives-and-resources/enterprise--research-resources/>

5.2.10 London Designers Fashion Show

The London Designers Fashion Show is an innovative fashion event, which aims to assist, celebrate and enhance the careers of the next generation of up-and-coming fashion designers. LDFS provides: business support/advice; environmental/ethical info and advice; mentoring; resources and information provision; showcasing opportunities; training/courses. The Company currently organises events within the fashion industry with a view to enhancing the careers of young designers, models and exhibitors and also encourages designers of diverse origin to achieve their fashion goals, acknowledging their contributions to the fashion industry and helping them to achieve their potential. More information is available at:

http://www.britishfashioncouncil.co.uk/bsn_detail.aspx?Id=35

5.2.11 NESTA:

NESTA has developed three initiatives, providing business support to creative entrepreneurs across the UK. Working closely with experienced partners nationally, their programmes provide the business training, mentoring and expertise needed to turn assist business ventures. They provide: awards, competitions and schemes; business support/advice; funding; mentoring; training/courses. More information is available at: <http://www.nesta.org.uk/develop-your-skills>

5.2.12 On/Off:

On|Off was established in 2003 by Doll UK Ltd's director Lee Lapthorne. On|Off provides a professional platform in London for new and established designers and also offers international exhibition opportunities for designers in Paris and Milan. It solely provides showcasing opportunities. More information is available at: <http://www.onoff.tv/>

5.2.13 Own it:

Own-it provides intellectual property advice and support for creative businesses. It is run by University of the Arts London. More information is available at: <http://www.own-it.org/>

5.2.14 Oxeon Consulting:

Oxeon Consulting is a luxury fashion consultancy that is able to assist in many aspects of running and/or growing a fashion label, from design inception through to store development. They provide: access to technical/IT facilities; business support/advice; environmental/ethical info and advice; funding; knowledge transfer partnerships; mentoring; resources and information provision; training/courses. More information is available at: <http://www.oxeon-consulting.com/>

5. 2. 15 Portobello Business Centre:

The Portobello Business Centre (PBC) is a Not for Profit business support organisation working within a broad range of business sectors but with a particularly strong record in Pan London support for businesses in the Fashion sector. They provide: business support/advice; intellectual property advice; resources and information provision; training/courses. More information is available at: <http://www.pbc.co.uk/>

5.2.16 Creative Skillset:

Creative Skillset helps businesses in the creative industries to develop skills and talent through influencing and shaping policy and by securing investment. They work across film, television, radio, fashion, animation, games, visual effects, textiles, publishing, advertising, marketing communications and performing arts. They provide: awards, competitions and schemes; business support/advice; funding; resources and information provision; skills strategy; training/courses. More information is available at: http://creativeskillset.org/about_us

5.2.17 Fashion Scout (formerly Vauxhall Fashion Scout):

Fashion Scout provides platforms in London and Paris for selected international designers and collective showcases including China, Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, Middle East and Asia. Frequented by top media and Fashion Scout has built an acclaimed reputation as a leading international fashion showcase. Now in its seventeenth season, Fashion Scout is one of the UK's largest fashion showcases for emerging and established design talent and a prominent fixture among the Paris showrooms. Fashion Scout provides mainly showcasing opportunities. Information is available at: <http://www.fashion-scout.co.uk/fashion-scout/>

5.2.18 The Trampery London Fields:

The Trampery in London Fields provides support and workspace to Hackney fashion designers and start-ups. Morley Hall at 125-127 Mare Street has been fitted with workshops and studios plus a

café. The project is a collaboration between The Trampery, Hackney Community College and the London College of Fashion. An open plan area provides flexible desk space for designers and other creative freelancers and small businesses. Designers and businesses can take permanent space or book by the hour and use facilities including space for catwalk shows and exhibitions. The Trampery primarily offers: studio space, university links, networking provision.

Table 1: Business support for fashion SME/MSEs in London based on incubator requirements*.

Organisation name	Fashion sector / designer makers only	Provision of space	Entry/Exit requirements	Fee	University links	Network building	Showcasing opportunities	Mentoring
BFC	X		X	X			X	
CFE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
CSF	X		X	X	X		X	X
Cockpit Arts	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Craft Central	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
DISC	X		X	X	X			X
East London Small Business Centre				X				X
Ethical Fashion Forum	X			X				
Fashion East	X		X	X		X	X	X
Fashion Enter/ Fashion Capital	X		X	X			X	X
Fashion Fringe at Covent Garden	X		X	X			X	X
London College of Fashion: Fashion Business Resource Studio	X		X	X	X		X	X
London Designers Fashion Show	X		X	X			X	
NESTA			X	X				X
On Off	X		X	X			X	
Own it			X	X				
Oxeon Consulting	X		X	X				X
Portobello Business Centre			X	X				
Creative Skillset			X	X				
Fashion Scout	X		X	X		X	X	
The Trampery London Fields	X	X						

*The table categories are based on the characteristics of what makes up 'business incubators' according to the literature. Any organisation that has all of the characteristics shown are, for all intents and purposes, incubators based on the definition used here. Data Source BFC (2014).

6.0 Summary

The primary aim of this paper has been to build a profile of the business support landscape that exists for fashion SME/MSEs in London. It stands therefore as a resource that others might use in determining the existing and potential future range of support offered to the London fashion industry. We have identified that the fashion sector SME/MSEs face a number of challenges. These challenges, of which there are significantly more than the ones discussed in this paper, qualify the need for business support in this highly competitive sector. This is no truer than in the city of London. Through examining 21 organisations in London we found that there exist two types of business support for fashion SME/MSEs. These are fashion incubators and partial support organisations.

Looking at Table 1 not all of the organisations that are listed provide similar support. This is because business incubation entails a characteristically specific range of services as stated in section 4.1 earlier. As shown above, of the 21 organisations listed only 3 can be viewed as actual incubators. These are: Centre for Fashion Enterprise, Craft Central and Cockpit Arts.

We found that there is a fundamental difference between fashion business incubation and organisations that provide partial and/or targeted business support. This is because they target different components of the fashion sector in London. Where fashion incubators provide assistance to those that have been accepted into their programmes, and those that meet a certain criteria such as being a start-up and trading for a set number of months, partial support organisations provide services to those that do not meet these criteria.

The services provided by the remaining 18 organisations listed in Table 1 are of tremendous use to the sector and represent a wide range of services available. For instance: DISC provides detailed information on how SME/MSEs should approach manufacturing; the CSF provides detailed advice on the use of ethical fashion; and the Ethical Fashion Forum provide information on how to be environmentally sustainable. These are but a few of the services that these organisations provide adding to the already robust range of business support available to fashion sector start-ups and SME/MSEs.

In light of the findings brought forward in this paper there is an obvious need to include some discussion of how the different types of organisation are more or less successful at providing different kinds of support. This may mean that research must be undertaken at the organisational level in order to illustrate areas of good practice and relative success. Examining areas of overlap and complementarity, or potentials for collaborative intervention might also be useful. This paper has identified two types of organisational set ups for fashion SME/MSEs support in London – incubators and partial/generalist supporters – but ironing out what they do in particular and do particularly well needs further research.

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