

The UK Fashion and Textile Association

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Graduate outcomes for fashion and textile courses

Compiled by UKFT in collaboration with, and on behalf of, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

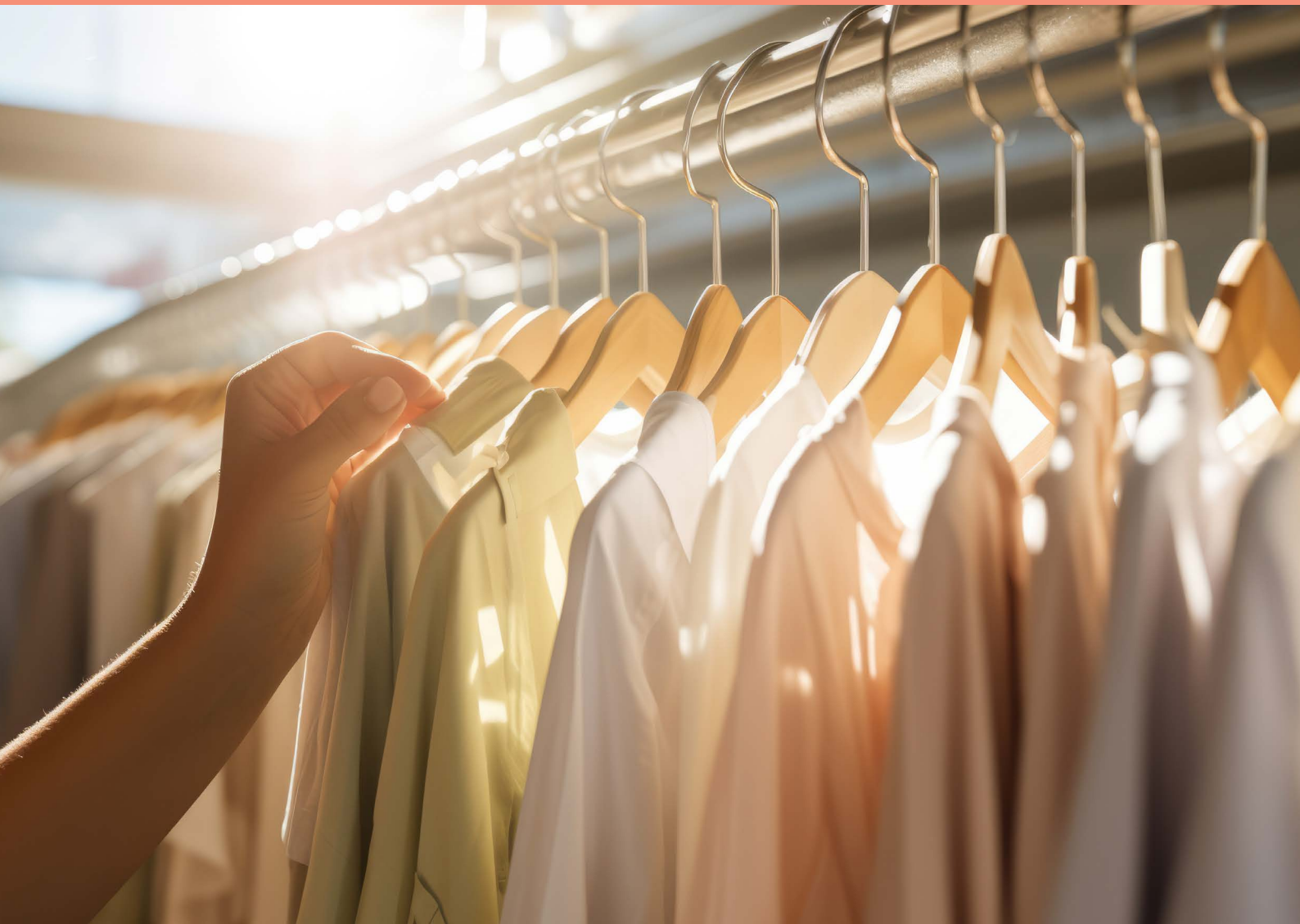


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Introduction

The UK Fashion and Textile Association (UKFT), on behalf of its Education Partner Network, has facilitated a working group to review the challenges experienced by fashion and textile departments with the current Graduate Outcome Survey conducted by Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

The working group participants have reported a common set of issues with the Graduate Outcomes survey methodology that is affecting several key job roles and job types. In many cases they are being categorised as negative graduate outcomes where industry employers classify these as graduate level jobs.

The 'downgrading' of these employment outcomes is having a significant impact on the courses affected as they are scrutinised (both internally and externally) based on these outcomes. Graduate Outcome metrics feed into university league table positions, as well as jointly affecting the OfS B3 conditions and the Higher Education Institution's (HEI) Teaching Excellence Framework. Good courses are threatened by reduced student uptake and even cancellation due to this 'downgrading'. If unaddressed, this could lead to further industry skills shortages in areas which have previously demonstrated an effective pipeline of appropriately skilled graduates entering good quality jobs in the industry.

This working group has allowed these HEIs to share findings and research, undertake further analysis and to produce a comprehensive report of the situation. This report concludes with a set of actionable recommendations.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- Request the reclassification of key affected job roles – HESA and ONS
- UKFT to explore a strategy to influence the ONS classification of job roles
- Develop fashion and textile Graduate Outcome Literacy resources

WORKING GROUP MEMBERS



Representation from the Association of Fashion and Textile Courses.

Context

The Graduate Outcomes survey, undertaken by HESA on behalf of UK universities, records graduate destinations of UK Full Time First Degree Graduates (UKFTFD) students 15 months post-graduation. Graduate destinations, and the skill level of the roles, are defined by SOC codes and certain key words used in job titles.

The working group, facilitated by UKFT, led by Manchester Metropolitan University has come together to review common challenges brought about by the Graduate Outcomes survey, to explore opportunities for collective solutions.

The fundamental issue, which affects all participants, is the way in which the Graduate Outcomes survey methodology classifies graduate level roles. SOC codes are used to rate a job role as are certain key words. This rating is then used to define whether a job role is deemed to be a highly skilled or not, as an employment outcome.

Each job role is given a score from 1–9 against a set of coding categories defined by HESA. Codes 1-3 are categorized as 'Professional' and codes 4-9 are categorized as 'Non-Professional'.

The coding categories are defined as follows:

- 1 - Managers & directors
- 2 - Professional occupations
- 3 - Associate professional
- 4 - Administrative & secretarial
- 5 - Skilled trade
- 6 - Caring & leisure
- 7 - Sales & customer service
- 8 - Plant & machine operatives
- 9 - Elementary occupations

After analysis of post-survey data, the working group participants have found that:

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...it clearly demonstrates multiple roles within the fashion industry (and associated industries), which are often considered as graduate entry level roles, are however not recorded as positive outcomes against current SOC coding.

- Manchester Metropolitan University

Each year HESA invites feedback on the survey in December. There have been instances of Universities successfully arguing for changes to be made, but many universities have also found that, on sending recommendations to HESA regarding job titles to be considered for review, changes are minimal.



Summary of key challenges

KEY JOB ROLES AFFECTED

From data collated by this working group participants, we have analysed multiple key job roles that are affected by this 'downgrading', the most affected job roles for our sector are as follows:

- Buyers/Buying Admin Assistant
- Merchandising Admin Assistant
- Buyers Assistant
- Visual Merchandiser
- Assistant Buyer/Merchandiser
- Industrial Sewing Machinist
- Production Assistant
- Studio Assistant
- Trainee Merchandiser
- Merchandising Allocator
- Product Development Assistant
- Technical Admin Assistant

KEY WORDS AND TERMS AFFECTED

The following words are used in job titles, industry wide, and are accepted as industry standard terminology for graduate level roles, however, these are considered 'negative' outcomes.

'Admin'

Using the word 'admin' negatively impacts the classification of a job role and automatically codes it as a negative outcome. As an example, Buying Admin Assistant generates a negative outcome even though many university courses are specifically designed to fill the role.

- Buying Admin Assistant = Negative
- Buying Assistant and Assistant Buyer = Positive

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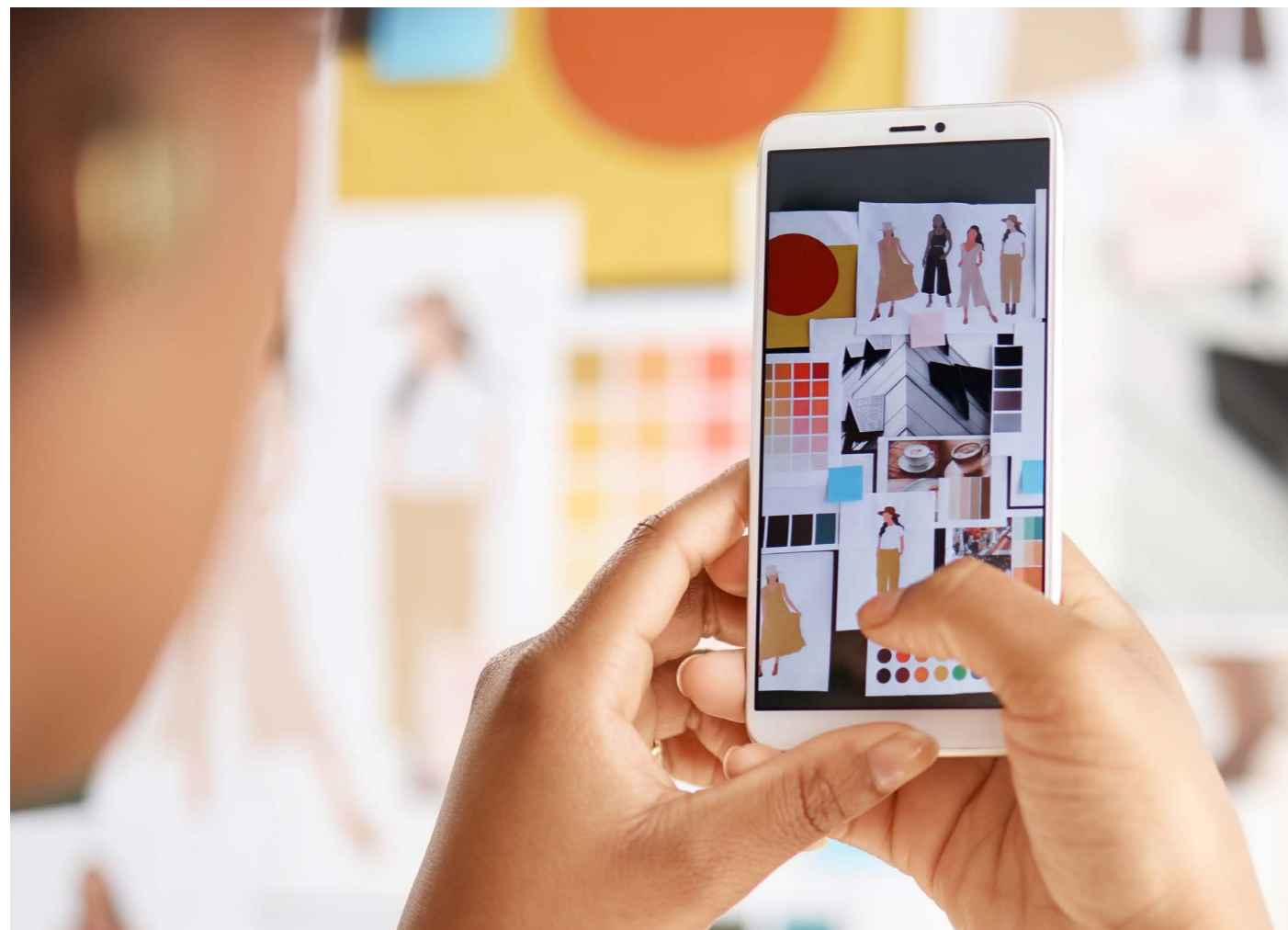
'Buying Admin Assistant' and 'Merchandising Admin Assistant' key job titles, and several other common graduate destinations on creative fashion courses are not recorded as positive destinations due to their job titles.

- Manchester Metropolitan University

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... as soon as the word 'admin' is included in the job title, it immediately knocks the SOC coding down to medium skilled.

- De Montfort University



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...a number of LCF graduates working in Buying Admin/Assistant roles have been coded differently depending on if the word “admin” featured in the Job title. It ends up being about half of those in buying admin roles who are affected, so quite a significant number for us.

- London College of Fashion

HESA should accept that Buyers Admin Assistant is a highly skilled role (SOC 1-3 level) because:

- **The same duties and responsibilities are required as in other ‘High skilled’ roles:** Even though the term “admin” is applied by some employers but not others, the job duties and responsibilities are largely the same regardless of whether the term admin appears in the job title or not. We would urge that the role Buyers Admin Assistant be categorized as Buyers and Procurement Officers (3551) in line with Buying Assistant and Assistant Buyer.
- **A degree is required:** The role of a Buyers Admin Assistant, just like the role of an Assistant Buyer and Buyers Assistant almost universally requires a degree.

‘The fourth skill level relates to what are termed “professional” occupations and high-level managerial positions in corporate enterprises, or national or local government. Occupations at this level normally require a degree or equivalent period of relevant work experience.’ according to SOC guidelines.

- **Precedent for the term “administrator” featuring in a Highly Skilled job titles elsewhere:** As an example the job title Database Administrator is defined as highly skilled in the 2020 SOC Codes Index. Therefore the word “administrator” in of its own right should not exclude the role of a Buying Admin Assistant from being classed as a highly skilled role.
- **Employer evidence supports that they are in the same role, with the same level of skill and qualification required:** This is readily seen across job adverts such as the examples here.

Buying Admin Assistant - WoolOvers LTD

Woolovers Ltd | 2.1 ★ | Burgess Hill

Apply now



Key Responsibilities

- Load new styles to the company system with accuracy
- Work closely with the Assistant Buyer to manage the critical path, a vital tool on the department
- Chase down submissions, samples, and deliveries inline with critical path dates, highlighting any concerns to the wider team
- Ensure all Lab dip and bulk submissions are organised and neatly filed
- Organise samples for our weekly fit meetings, liaising with the Garment Technologist
- Attend the weekly fit meeting, taking notes and updating the merchandising team on sample approvals.
- Prepare and maintain all department documentation eg. Critical path, Intake tracker, Range plan and buy sheet.
- Prepare range rails for meetings (Lessons learned, pagination & sign-offs).
- Pull together best sellers' sheets & intake for Monday Trade meeting

Buying Assistant

Premier Work Support • Basildon • via LinkedIn

🕒 22 days ago | 💰 £26K-£30K a year | 🕒 Full-time | 🚫 No Degree Mentioned

Apply on LinkedIn

Apply on Jooble

Apply on Monster.co.uk

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Job description

Premier Work Support's client are currently recruiting for a permanent Buying Administrator with previous experience in an office environment to support their commercial team based in Basildon. This role is office based, Monday to Friday, 8.00am to 5.00pm.

Administration, reception and general duties will include:

- Handling calls, mail, and emails.
- Dealing with couriers and deliveries.
- Typing, photocopying, and scanning.
- Creating PowerPoint presentations.
- General admin duties and supporting the division.
- Arranging meetings and seminars, and ensuring all meeting rooms are setup in a timely manner.
- Updating and maintaining company files.
- Keeping up to date with health and safety & environmental policies

'Assistant'

Using the word 'assistant' at the start of a job role generally does not negatively affect the outcome. However, if the word 'assistant' is used at the end of a job title it is often negatively impacted.



KEY 'AREAS' OF ROLE AFFECTED

Employer type

The job title can differ from employer to employer based on the responsibilities expected of the candidate. For example, typically a graduate working for a larger retailer would have a 'smaller' more focussed role with fewer duties and a graduate working for a micro/start-up might be expected to carry out a wider more extensive set of duties across multiple job areas.

Therefore, it is likely that a graduate employed by a larger business may be penalised (in terms of graduate outcome) for undertaking a more focussed role within the business, but that would be universally accepted by industry as a graduate level role.

Freelancers and sole-traders

It is common in the fashion and textile industry to work as a freelancer and many graduates will choose the route of starting their own business.

When completing the Graduate Outcome survey freelancers deliver a range of results, some choose to describe themselves as the 'director' of a business (which gets a highly skilled outcome) whereas some end up being described as 'shop-keeper' (which is rated as a non-highly skilled outcome).

Some will also have a part time job in something like hospitality or retail whilst setting up their own business. If they choose to list this rather than being a 'director' then the results will be considered by the survey as a non-highly skilled outcome.

This often relates to how graduate present themselves. There may be a further education piece required to help graduates to present themselves in a way that supports a highly skilled outcome in this and similar instances.

Craft and technical roles

Craft and technical roles in fashion and textiles generate a negative outcome. Whereas within other disciplines like Fine Art and Design and Graphic Design partitive roles would generate a highly skilled outcome.

In relation to craft and technical roles SOC codes do not recognise the skills level or training required, for example a degree or degree apprenticeship, for roles that industry would recognise as graduate roles. These jobs are being classed as 'low skilled'. This issue is also arising in other areas that use SOC codes e.g. the Shortage Occupation List (SOL).

This ends up placing a low value on some of the technical roles that the fashion and textile industry deem to be highly skilled as well as essential skillsets in terms of training and recruitment needs for the industry.

Impact of leaving challenges unaddressed

It is critical to address these challenges to ensure some of our most valuable industry skills pipelines are not shut down, leading to industry skills shortages.

LOWER GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES LEAD TO LOWER RECRUITMENT ONTO COURSES

Universities demonstrate the value of their courses using employment data. Prospective students, parents and advisors will all be influenced by this data.

University league tables rank institutions by subject, looking at student satisfaction and career prospects using Graduate Outcome Survey data. This can directly affect the number of applicants for future cohorts.

LOWER GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES NEGATIVELY IMPACT A COURSES' ABILITY TO MEET CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION

Courses must meet the Conditions of Registration set by the Office for Students (OfS) by satisfying the B3 threshold, a regulatory framework for higher education in England.

Graduate outcomes contribute to the measure of course quality. Therefore, negative graduate outcomes affect a courses ability to satisfy the Conditions of Registration.

LOWER GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES AND LOW RECRUITMENT NUMBERS CAN LEAD TO COURSE CLOSURES

Universities, and departments within them, with several affected courses are negatively impacted by lower recruitment numbers.

Additionally, the Graduate Outcomes Survey is a key University KPI and affects investment decisions by the institution.

Both factors can lead to a decision to close a course, and even threaten a department, regardless of the industry need for those graduates.

LOSS OF AFFECTED COURSES CAN LEAD TO INDUSTRY SKILLS SHORTAGES

Unnecessary course closure due to missed Graduate Outcome related KPIs and lower recruitment numbers, can negatively impact established skills pipelines into crucial industry roles.

Multiple course closures in the same (affected) areas will reduce the supply of appropriately trained graduates into key roles in the fashion and textile industry.

The key roles highlighted in this report are in demand job roles for the industry. It is critical we maintain these HEI fashion and textile courses.

A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE VERY START OF THE SKILLS PIPELINE

There is an ongoing campaign throughout the creative industries to ensure creative subjects and careers are represented at school level and catered for within the National Curriculum. If we are not able to demonstrate the true value of the jobs that graduates are going into, the argument that supports creative careers, particularly fashion and textile jobs, are weakened at a very early stage.

Reputational damage to creative careers and jobs in the fashion and textile industry, along with a further reduction of teaching in these areas at a school level, will impact the skills pipeline at the very beginning of the education and training journey.

Recommendations

The Graduate Outcomes Working Group recommends the following:

REQUEST THE RECLASSIFICATION OF KEY AFFECTED FASHION AND TEXTILE JOB ROLES

- Write a letter to HESA, with accompanying supporting evidence and narrative, requesting reclassification of the identified most affected job roles.

Action: Letter from UKFT, co-signed by HEIs and employers.

- Write a letter to ONS with accompanying supporting evidence and narrative requesting reclassification in SOC coding of the identified most affected job roles.

Action: Letter from UKFT, co-signed by HEIs and employers.

UKFT TO EXPLORE A STRATEGY TO INFLUENCE THE ONS CLASSIFICATION OF FASHION AND TEXTILE JOB ROLES

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is the body that defines the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code, a common classification of occupational information for the UK.

HESA use SOC codes as a basis for their own classification of graduate employment outcomes. This report demonstrates a clear issue with several roles being classified (re SOC code) inconsistently with the way they are universally perceived by industry, which in turn is resulting in negative graduate outcomes.

ONS conduct a review of SOC codes every 10 years. The next review will be in 2030.

Throughout 2019, the SOC Extension team at ONS worked with University of Warwick's Institute for Employment Research (IER) to conduct an extensive engagement exercise with organisations identified as having significant knowledge of and interest in the SOC and the extension project.

Action: UKFT to explore how they may be able to influence ONS to reclassify inconsistent job roles in 2030.

Additionally, the working group (further supported by the UKFT Education Partner membership) to explore how, as a working group, we can work proactively to influence the correct classification of 'emerging job roles' within the industry.



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