

## Sustainable Supply Chain Optimisation

New supply chain platform launches to drive sustainability, transparency and profitability in UK fashion and textiles

- A consortium will develop a data-driven technology platform to enable real-time decision making, effective track-and-trace and more sustainable choices in the UK fashion supply chain.
- The platform will help to meet the Government's commitment to the development of new innovations of digital technology within UK manufacturing.

The UK Fashion & Textile Association (UKFT) is working with IBM, Tech Data, and the Future Fashion Factory to design, prototype and pilot a new technology platform based on IBM technologies to help the UK fashion and textile industry to drive sustainability and profitability through increased transparency within the supply chain. Retailers Next, H&M (COS brand), N Brown, New Look and yarn manufacturer Laxtons will be part of the initial pilot.

The Sustainable Supply Chain Optimisation project has been awarded £1.4m funding by Innovate UK, part of UK Research and Innovation, on behalf of the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF) Manufacturing Made Smarter Challenge.

The global fashion industry is one of the biggest global polluters and one of the greatest producers of waste, while issues around unsafe workplaces, labour abuses and low wages continue. One of the major obstacles preventing organisations from implementing more sustainable, responsible practices and preventing consumers from shopping more sustainably is a fundamental lack of transparency and visibility across the different stages of the supply-chain. Data is siloed, systems tend to operate in isolation and parties have had little to no incentive to share data with the rest of the ecosystem due to the significant manual effort.

The new technology platform will combine a number of emerging technologies like blockchain, AI and sensors to digitise the key processes in the supply-chain creating a shared system of data that the different parties can trust and easily act upon.

For example, it will be possible to gain a much better understanding of where and how each garment's fabric was processed and finished, by whom and in what conditions. It will be easier to spot potential disruptions before they have a chance to affect delivery. It will also be possible to better monitor production processes and flows resulting in a real chance to reduce waste and optimise stock.

These unprecedented levels of insight will allow real, measurable and auditable actions across the whole of the supply-chain, enabling increased understanding of and compliance to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) criteria as well as improved operational efficiency.

In essence, the platform will be designed to help make a complex and disjointed global supply chain more sustainable, resilient and able to cope with unforeseen disruptions.

Joanne Poynor, Head of Sustainable Development at Next, said: "Working together, we are pleased to support the development of a new supply chain platform tool for the apparel and textiles sector, to facilitate the gathering of robust sustainability data and provide clear visibility of environmental and ethical impacts to empower better decisions."

Sue Fairley, Head of Sourcing, Sustainability and Quality at New Look said: "We are delighted to be taking part

in the UKFT SSCO Project as part of New Look's core strategic commitment to integrate sustainable practices across the business. We recognise that collaborating on this project will help remove complexity, increase transparency and help develop sustainable solutions with more reassuring visibility of the people and the environments impacted throughout the value chain. We anticipate that by bringing new technologies and global networks together, UKFT will accelerate change and allow the provenance of the products we sell to open up from origin to end user."

Neil Cornish, Business Manager, Ecosystems Programme UK, Tech Data, said: "We are delighted to offer our experience in supply chain management and technology platforms, our expertise in new technologies such as IoT, artificial intelligence, and data analytics, and our deep relationships with retail ecosystem partners to this exciting project. Our team is looking forward to working with the consortium to develop and deliver a sustainable, transparent and efficient solution for the UK fashion and textiles industry."

Angela Gaskell, Director of Sourcing, Sustainability, quality and Fit of N Brown, said, "We're proud to be involved in this UKFT & IBM project and as we progress our ESG programme, SUSTAIN. We recognise the huge potential in collaborating to drive sustainable and transparent supply chains, something which is extremely important to N Brown."

### **About Innovate UK**

Innovate UK drives productivity and economic growth by supporting businesses to develop and realise the potential of new ideas.

We connect businesses to the partners, customers and investors that can help them turn ideas into commercially successful products and services and business growth.

We fund business and research collaborations to accelerate innovation and drive business investment into R&D. Our support is available to businesses across all economic sectors, value chains and UK regions. Innovate UK is part of UK Research and Innovation. For more information, visit [www.innovateuk.ukri.org](http://www.innovateuk.ukri.org)

### **About UKFT**

The UK Fashion & Textile Association (UKFT) is the largest network for fashion and textile companies in the UK. We bring together designers, manufacturers, suppliers, agents and retailers to promote their businesses and our industry, both in the UK and throughout the world.

We are in a unique position representing the entire UK fashion and textile supply chain, from spinning, weaving and knitting, right through to the catwalk.

UKFT's activity is focused on five key areas: lobbying, business support, UK manufacturing, skills & training, and international business (exports). UKFT is the Sector Skills Body (SSB) for fashion and textiles in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We work with employers, training providers and other stakeholders to raise the skills and productivity of the people who work in our sector to the highest level, ensuring the UK fashion and textile industry remains competitive against global competition.

### **About IBM**

IBM is the global leader in hybrid cloud and AI, serving clients in more than 170 countries. More than 2,800 clients use our hybrid cloud platform to accelerate their digital transformation journeys and, in total, more than 30,000 of them have turned to IBM to unlock value from their data. With this foundation, we continue to

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### **About Tech Data**

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### **About Future Fashion Factory**

Future Fashion Factory is an industry-led programme that focuses on applying, co-developing and implementing new textile and industrial digital technologies (IDTs) in collaboration with designers, supply chain manufacturers, retailers and other technology experts in the high value luxury textile and fashion sector. The R&D cluster is delivering exciting new creative innovation opportunities, new products, shorter product development and design lead times, reduced costs, and increased global industrial competitiveness and productivity.

Future Fashion Factory is a five-year, £5.4m project funded by the Creative Industries Clusters Programme (CICP), which is part of the UK government's Industrial Strategy. Find out more:

<https://futurefashionfactory.org/>

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