

Clothing and Textile Industry AN OVERVIEW

Whether it is clothing and accessories for the wardrobe, textiles for the home or for garment manufacturers, or clothing for the workplace or leisure activities; whether the design is classic, contemporary or cutting edge, British suppliers can provide the answer.

An important, evolving industrial sector: The clothing, textile and footwear industry is the eighth largest manufacturing sector in Britain, generating sales in excess of £15 billion and exports of £8.5 billion from over 15,000 companies employing 350,000 people. The shape of the industry has changed dramatically every decade. It continues to respond to new trading opportunities and to ever demanding consumers. Its inherent strengths in innovation, design, quality, supply chain management and technology ensure that the industry is well placed for the challenges of the 21st century.

The industry is represented via the British Apparel & Textile Confederation (BATC) which debates the issues affecting trade at both national and international level. The BATC also has a number of leading trade associations and organisations representing specific sectors within its membership.

A wealth of products: British companies are renowned for supplying top quality apparel, home furnishings, and cutting-edge designer fashion which is sold around the world. This success is founded on a close partnership with the equally internationally successful textile industry which designs, manufactures and supplies top quality woolen and worsted fabrics for suiting and furnishings as well as linens, Harris Tweeds, fine cottons, silks, cashmere and tartans. Traditional and contemporary apparel brands are found in stores and boutiques worldwide and British fabrics and yarns are much sought after by international branded fashion houses.

Britain has an international reputation for its innovative design expertise, so much so that several of the best British designers are working for leading international fashion houses. Bespoke orders for clothing, such as suits made by the famous tailors in the Savile Row area of London, and, increasingly, footwear, are another important element of the industry.

A unique retail environment: The unique structure of the British retail scene, where the large stores and chains account for 75 per cent of the market, has led to a further innovation in clothing and textile companies. Britain has developed one of the world's most sophisticated supply chain management systems, focused upon providing high quality, designed, innovative garments and furnishings via stores, catalogues and, more recently, Internet sites serving the consumer.

Manufacturing diversification for growth: In the past 20 years, manufacturers of traditional apparel fabrics have diversified and a growing number have developed businesses supplying technical textiles for industrial applications. Traditional weavers now produce cloth not just for clothes, but also for hotel furnishings. Machinery used in the past for cotton weaving is being used for new products such as seamless airbags for cars. A lace specialist is producing synthetic aortas for the medical sector, and many companies are diversifying.

ing into geotextiles for construction projects.

Efficiencies from IT: Information technology plays a large part in ensuring the efficiency of supply. Many retailers and suppliers use the data provided by sophisticated computer programmes to follow which lines are selling, to locate merchandise in the supply chain and to identify the components needed for production. More administrative work is being conducted on-line to speed up procedures and CAD/CAM systems are also widely used in the industry.

Educational excellence: The variety of products available from Britain is due in some part to the wide range of courses on offer from the country's 30 major colleges. Students can choose to learn about technical subjects such as colour chemistry and pattern cutting, business skills such as management, marketing and merchandising or a wide variety of fashion and textile design courses. Though many specialist courses in specific product areas, for example footwear, lingerie and lace, are available, many colleges are starting to offer courses combining modules to ensure graduates leave with a broad base of skills.

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