

## REPORT OF THE FOCUS GROUP DEVELOPED BY PETROC

### EURMODA project

*Monday 20<sup>th</sup> August – CARDIFF*

*Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> August – LONDON*

*Monday 17<sup>th</sup> September - TIVERTON*

#### **THE MAIN SKILLS ISSUES AND CONCERNS**

The Fashion and Textiles sector as a whole in the United Kingdom (manufacturing, trading and servicing) is dominated by small and medium-sized employers. In fact, more than 80 per cent of establishments have 10 employees or fewer.

Large employers (establishments with 200+ employees) are very few in number, but vitally important, as they account for around one fifth of the people employed in the sector.

Traditionally, it has been the larger employers who have taken part in training and development activities. Smaller employers have relied on this investment "trickling down" as trained employees move on, bringing their experience and training to the wider market.

However, as the number of larger employers contracts, and as training budgets are cut in response to tough market conditions, smaller employers can no longer rely on the trickle-down effect, and must look to develop skills within their own businesses.

#### **The sector workforce and differences in skill needs**

**Gender:** overall, the apparel, footwear and textiles sector is split fairly evenly between men (48 per cent) and women (52 per cent). However, different parts of the sector have different gender patterns (for example, men dominate the shoe repair trade, whilst women are more prevalent in clothing manufacturing).

**Ethnicity:** the sector is a major source of employment for people from ethnic minorities. The manufacturing and servicing elements of the sector employ approximately 38,000 people with an ethnic minority background, and ethnic minority-owned firms account for a significant proportion of the sector's company base. For those who speak English as a second language, the difficulty of accessing training

materials in an appropriate language, and training providers with an awareness of cultural issues, can be a barrier to developing skills and attaining qualifications.

**Age:** the sector has an ageing workforce, with around 73% aged 35 or over - far higher than the figure for the UK economy as a whole. As skills are lost through retirement, there will be a need to attract fresh young talent into the industry. Promoting a positive industry image, and providing meaningful work placements for those looking to enter the sector, will be key to achieving this.

**Occupations:** historically, employment in the sector has been concentrated in lower-skilled occupations, rather than in professional and administrative roles. However, the profile of the industry is changing, with manufacturing moving overseas, and management occupations remaining in the UK. As this happens, there will be a growing need to recruit and train personnel in higher-level posts in areas such as technical development, management, administration, sales/marketing and research.

**Part-time employment:** whilst the amount of part-time employment in the sector is slightly below the UK economy average, certain parts of the sector (such as manufacturing, washing and dry-cleaning) have a very high level of part-time work. This again can have an impact on skills, as it can be difficult to fit training and development into part-time hours. The ability to find flexible training could become very important here.

**Self-employment:** the sector has a high level of self-employment relative to the economy as a whole - particularly in the areas of washing, dry-cleaning and shoe-repair. Many self-employed people also work in soft-furnishings, household textiles, knitted clothing and women's outerwear. Typically, self-employed people need to be multi-skilled in order to handle all the different aspects of their business, from production, to financial management, through to sales and marketing. Again, the flexibility of training provision may well prove crucial to the self-employed.

### **THE ACTION PLANNING OF THE FOCUS GROUP:**

#### **Outcomes**

The outcomes that were reached with our focus groups were the specific opinions, suggestions of the participants, in order to elaborate final versions of Competence Maps.

Petroc worked in collaboration with Creative Skillset who are the UK Sector Skills Council for the Fashion and Textiles in order to seek the views of industry experts as to the validity of the competence maps. Petroc attended two focus group meetings, one held in Cardiff (Wales) and the other in London. Both meetings were held in the local offices of Creative Skillset. Although we looked at both of the vocational profiles for the Designer and Quality roles, Petroc has subsequently been only asked to supply the findings of the review for the Quality role.

Petroc also secured a third meeting held at the factory of Heathcoat Fabrics who are an established fabric manufacturing company based at Tiverton in the county of Devon. This meeting was with manufacturing specialists, but the company also asked if it was possible for their new intake of six apprentices to attend the session, both to understand how the standards were formed, and also to perhaps ask some relevant questions as to why the standards were compiled in the way that they are.

During all of the meetings the participants reviewed the standards for the Quality role as required by this project, but also compared these to the National Occupational Standards for the Quality vocational role which are used in the UK vocational educational system in order to compare and contrast.

**Time devoted:**

- The focus group meetings held in Cardiff and London each had duration of four hours and a half which was that set out in the agendas.
- **Previous, during and post- Organization:**
  - o Prior to the focus groups, initial exploratory meetings with the Sector Skills Council (Creative Skillset) were held at their offices in both Leeds and London.
  - o An additional meeting, post-Focus Group, was held with a local textile manufacturer, Heathcoat Fabrics Ltd at Tiverton in Devon
  - o All documents produced for the Focus Groups were in the national language of English.
  - o The introductory presentation to each focus group was given using the PowerPoint presentation as supplied, and not changed in any way.
  - o The use of meetings rooms for all of the Focus Group meetings was supplied to Petroc on a free of charge basis, this also very kindly included the use of the audio visual equipment and coffee and tea, as well as lunch in the case of rooms provided by Skillset.
  - o Since the conclusion of the meetings I have been in touch with Creative Skillset to both thank them for allowing me to take part in their review meetings, and also to gauge any feedback they might have had since the completion of the review activities.

### **The recruitment plan of the participants:**

The Sector Skills Council in consultation with Petroc used the following methods of communication to both advertise the Focus Groups and to target participants in specific vocational related areas of the textile industry. The ways of contact used were:

- The Creative Skillset website [www.skillset.org](http://www.skillset.org)
- Sending of information to Skillset regional offices throughout the UK.
- Setting up of Focus group meetings via email within each regional area.
- Direct email communication to members of the Skillset regional panels.
- Telephone calls to local textile manufacturing organisations with whom Petroc already work.

### **Issues of the Focus Group:**

**The issues explained and discussed in the Focus Group were the following:**

#### **1. ISSUE 1 – The Quality Control Role**

It was generally felt that the Competence Dictionary for the Vocational Profile of the Fashion Quality Controller (FQC) **was only covering a very small part of the overall quality tasks** carried out in manufacturing within the sector. A certain level of competence related to quality is instilled across every actual job function within the textile manufacturing sector. From those people who receive the raw materials into the factory, to those who transport in throughout the factory and those who are directly involved in manufacturing – all of these staff, as well as the actual Quality Controller, have a part to play in the quality of the product/s being produced for the customer.

That said we then discussed the issue relating to the need for the FQC to ensure that wherever possible to **maintain the flow of production** – this is not mentioned in any of the sub-processes. It was felt that an emphasis should always be placed on this statement in the documentation.

#### **2. ISSUE 2 – The Customer Specification**

Across the whole set of processes/sub-processes there is **no mention of analysing the customer specification/order/technical information** to develop the FQC Technical specifications. It was generally felt that some mention of information relating to the customers' requirements should be included in these sub-processes for the FQC competence map, perhaps mentioned in Activity ID 1.1

### 3. ISSUE 3 – Training Courses

During the meetings it was generally felt that some **mention needed to be included with regard the vocational competence training being to the required national standard/s**. Within the Activity ID 1.4 some mention need to be made that the required FQC training needs to be to nationally recognised standards of competence and knowledge.

### 4. ISSUE 3 – FQC Level of Competence

It was also suggested in one of the meetings that some mention should be made within the Competence Description 2.1 with regard **to ensuring that the FQC works within their scope of authority**, and those problems outside of this must be referred to the appropriate person/s

#### **Schedule of structured questions for the focus group:**

The questionnaires were prepared in collaboration with the Sector Skills Council – Creative Skillset in the UK National language of English. Given the time allowed for each meeting we felt that it was important to keep the questionnaire structure relatively simple and straightforward to allow as much time as possible to focus on the actual task in hand which was to view the existing and proposed competence maps. Copies of the questionnaires had been included in the Annex.

#### **People involved and types:**

<b>Entity</b>	<b>Position /Role in the entity</b>
Alan Scott	Director Fashion & Textiles
Chris McHugh	Textile Lecturer
Stamo Ambetielon	Fashion & Textiles Consultant
Celia Thornley	Fashion Manufacturer Director
Carol Adams	Fashion & Textile Company Director
Angela Venn	Fashion Manufacturing Director
Mike Fear	Training Manager
Carol Thomas	Fashion & Textiles Course Leader

Lynne Abbott	Textile Lecturer
Vicky Dean	Textile Lecturer
Claire Padfield	Fashion & Textiles Lecturer
Clive Rowe	Manufacturing Specialist
Sally Laight	Lecturer in Manufacturing
Colin Sargent	Textile Manufacturing Specialist
Jake Somerwill	Textile Manufacturing Apprentice
Brandon Williams	Textile Manufacturing Apprentice
Daniel Cook	Textile Manufacturing Apprentice
Ben Evans	Textile Manufacturing Apprentice
Tom Sixsmith	Textile Manufacturing Apprentice
Danny Berner	Textile Manufacturing Apprentice

**DESCRIPTION OF COLLECTED DATA:**

**1. CONCLUSIONS:**

QUESTION	ANSWERS
<p><b>1. Innovations that could generate the adoption of the process based model?</b></p>	<p><b>1.</b> It was generally felt that a statement relating to the need for the Fashion Quality Controller (FQC) to ensure that wherever possible to <b>maintain the flow of production</b> – needs to be included in the sub-processes. It was felt that an emphasis should always be placed on this statement in the documentation.</p> <p><b>2.</b> In order to ensure full compliance with any specification which the FQC in their role may be putting together their must be a mention made in Activity ID 1 <b>of analysing the customer specification/order/technical</b></p>

	<p><b>information</b> to develop the FQC Technical specifications. It was generally felt that some mention of information relating to the customers' requirements should be included in these sub-processes for the FQC competence map.</p> <p>3. Some <b>mention needed to be included with regards to the vocational competence training being to the required national standard/s</b>. Within the Activity ID 1.4 some mention need to be made that the required FQC training needs to be to nationally recognized standards of competence and knowledge.</p> <p>4. A mention should be made within the Competence Description 2.1 with regard <b>to ensuring that the FQC works within their scope of authority</b> and those problems outside of this must be referred to the appropriate person/s.</p>
<p><b>2. Priority of the options chosen (in question 1) to raise the quality of training process.</b></p>	<p>The groups felt that the priorities of the above options should be carried out in the order 4, 3, 2 &amp; 1</p>
<p><b>3. Aspects of importance that have not been sufficiently analyzed in the process/es presented.</b></p>	<p>As previously mentioned it was generally felt that the Competence Dictionary for the Vocational Profile of the Fashion Quality Controller (FQC) <b>was only covering a very small part of the overall quality tasks</b> carried out in manufacturing within the sector. A certain level of competence related to quality is instilled across every actual job function within the textile manufacturing sector. From those people who receive the raw materials into the factory, to those who transport in throughout the factory and those who are directly involved in manufacturing – all of these staff, as well as the actual Quality Controller, have a part to play in the quality of the product/s being produced for the customer.</p>

### **GENERAL COMMENTS BY PETROC ABOUT THE FOCUS GROUP**

This whole Focus Group exercise has been really useful. Often, how people are using learning standards is quite different than they will reveal to an outsider. Or, the detail of their usage is difficult, boring or too elementary to talk about to an outsider. However, people will get into the most amazing detail with other people who are in the same shoes, who speak the same language, who they expect to understand them. Too many managers think they understand how the standards are being used (often they used it when they were in the market), and they miss many opportunities to fill shifting needs. The views from the three groups that I have worked with have been enlightening and very interesting and will prove beneficial to the outcomes of this project. I would like to take this opportunity that thank all those who contributed to these meetings, Creative Skillset for allowing me to “piggy back” on to sessions which they were setting up, and in particular to Verity Gay-Hardy at Skillset for all her help and assistance.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE DRAFT COMPETENCE MAPS**

Reference to the answers above should be included within the sub processes for the Competence Dictionary of the Vocational Profile for the role of Fashion Quality Controller. The dictionary, as supplied, was similar in many respects to the National Standards of Competence used within the United Kingdom (UK) and used as a benchmark for comparison. The UK standards for the fashion and textile industry are controlled by the Sector Skills Council, Creative Skillset and written in consultation with industry experts. For any such dictionary of competence to have credibility in the UK the main points for inclusion as discussed in this report need to be included in any such competence maps.

### **ANNEXES:**

1. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS
2. COPIES OF THE QUESTIONNAIRES
3. CARDIFF MEETING PHOTOGRAPH
4. MEETING NOTES WITH SECTOR SKILLS COUNCIL
5. LONDON MEETING AGENDA
6. CARDIFF MEETING AGENDA
7. EXISTING UK NATIONAL STANDARD FOR QUALITY CONTROL
8. EXISTING UK NATIONAL STANDARD FOR QUALITY CONTROL
9. EXISTING UK NATIONAL STANDARD FOR QUALITY CONTROL