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**Paper for the University of Salford Conference  
Knowledge Transfer in Higher Education:  
Enhancing Entrepreneurship, Employability and  
Global Citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.**

Working paper

*Title of the Working Paper: PMI2 China UK Collaborative Partnerships in  
Employability and Entrepreneurship for the Fashion Industries – London  
College of Fashion and Beijing Institute of Fashion & Technology*

*The strategic challenges of academic collaboration between UK and China in  
relationship to employability and creative curriculum.*

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## Introduction

The rise of the creative industries and their importance to economic growth provides the context for this paper that attempts to explore China/UK curriculum approaches to employability and entrepreneurial practices for fashion design. The paper is based on the British Council Prime Ministers Initiative 2 Collaborative Partnerships Proposal for Employability and Entrepreneurship between two HE institutions participating in this project. The University of Arts London; London College of Fashion (LCF) and Beijing Institute of Fashion & Technology (BIFT) are well-established institutions providing work-based learning for the fashion industries. Both HE institutions have been working together on various projects for the last 4 years, and from these informal relationship a move towards a deeper collaborative partnership will emerge.

The UN states that the creative industries already account for more than 7% of global GDP, with the UK employing around 2 million people and contributes to £11.4 billion to the UK balance of trade. As China begins to develop its creative industries and new knowledge economy, the emphasis is shifting towards the individual and consumerism. These trends are influencing the need to build creative capacity through education and higher level skills to impact on the strategic and operational levels of industry.

## Key Challenges of the China/UK PMI2 Project

What are the strategic challenges for academic collaboration between China and UK in relation to employability and creative curriculum developments? The following two questions have informed our thinking and have provided the structure to this paper. The paper is an attempt to outline how in year one of the project we have explored these issues to arrive at new learning experiences.

1. What infrastructures do we need to develop to strengthen our employability processes that enhance the students' awareness of international business environments in China and UK?
2. How to develop better alignment between creative curriculum and professional practice and work based values?

## Purpose

The project aims to demonstrate that HE has an important role to play in identifying talent and adding value to the creative industries. With an overarching objective of developing curriculum and delivery methods that fosters the skills and attributes that lead to graduates gaining and retaining work for global business environments. By exploring industry facing academic models, and gathering industry insights from both cultural perspectives, this will lead to curriculum that is aligned to professional practice and work place values.

*“Advice and guidance provision and services to the creative Industries workforce should be informed by the industry and incorporate industry input, sector intelligence, business skills and intellectual property awareness. This needs to be developed in a way that is innovative and relevant to the people and the industry they want to enter or move into”. DCMS. Creative Economy Programme. Work Foundation Draft Report 2007*

## The first year of the project has been undertaken through 3 key phases:

### Phase One

The First phase has been investigating and exploring the current employability practices in China and UK to map out similarities and differences.

### Phase Two

The second phase has been the analysis of this data and information to identify the gaps, which in turn informed the writing of a curriculum project brief that is aligned to professional practice and global environments and staff development activities.

### Phase Three

The third phase has been exploring the initial benefits of undertaking the project.

## Phase One - Researching China/UK approaches

The research approach has been based on investigating the two key areas: Comparative mapping into both institutions employability practices has been conducted through; Development of a tool to explore the employability activities/dimensions; Project steering workshop with both UK/China academic teams to identify different approaches to how employability is implemented to students.

Three Company Interviews have been undertaken to identify employability needs.  
 Company Visit 1 – Large Chinese Brand supplying the International Market Place – LCF team visit 1 to China in April 2009  
 Company Visit 2 – Large Chinese Brand serving the Chinese Market – LCF team visit 1 to China in April 2009  
 Company Visit 3 – Large UK Brand Group serving the European/Asian market – BIFT team visit 2 to London in September 2009  
 During the company visits, company representatives were asked a set of questions to identify employability requirements.

Question 1	What does the company look for in a graduate?
Question 2	What is the recruitment process at the company?
Question 3	Do you recruit from Fashion Business courses?
Question 4	Have the company previously recruited students from the West?
Question 5	Does the company manufacture in mainland China?
Question 6	Do you offer work placements
Question 7	Are there any graduate skills missing in the current market?
Question 8	What are the main differences between graduates from China and graduates from UK/Western countries

## Phase One Findings and analysis

LCF has a dedicated unit, which is titled Fashion Business Resource Studio (FBRS). The FBRS model of Employability is based on shared responsibility and dialogue between industry, institution and student to generate a mutually supportive enterprise culture linking education and emerging talent to industry practitioner networks.

BIFT has one career office dedicated to support employability with four career advisors. The careers team provide support for work placements, presentations to students on career development, and has 40 relationships with companies for work experience. A set of employability and entrepreneurship activities have been outlined and used as a tool to compare the differences in practices between BIFT and LCF. See chart one.

**Chart One: Comparative Employability/Entrepreneurship Mapping LCF/BIFT**

Employability Activities	LCF/UAL	BIFT
1. Workshops to prepare students for work experience	Delivered to Y2 students By FBRS Powerpoints/One to one tutorials	Has a Career office with 4 people Deliver general presentations
2. Work Placements and Internships -	In Year 2 and Year 3 By FBRS Handbooks Industry database Students have a one to one meeting with specialist employability staff. One year paid placements and 3 month non paid placements	Students participate in work experience in summer Year 3 and BIFT has 40 relationships with companies – 2 months in length
3. Industry Projects	In year 2 By FBRS with academics/industry Stimulated and Live Project Briefs	Strong relationship with companies who provide research information to students.

4. Showcasing to Industry	End of BA Course Exhibition of student work to industry	BIFT has end of year exhibitions and catwalk shows
5. Career workshops	Year third and fourth year students By FBRs/Powerpoints	BIFT holds graduate events and invite companies to come and meet students face to face
6. Alumni and networking	Website for alumni Networking events for alumni	Alumni network is established. Nearly 93% of graduates gets jobs – 5% set up their own business
<b>Entrepreneurship ECCA</b>		
7. Enterprise Centre	University service Free resources	Government supports business start ups but Integrated within the UG curriculum
8. Enterprise weeks	University event Trade shows Information Packs for start ups	Lectures on legal problems and how to set up a business delivered by academic teams
9 Competitions	ECCA provide information on enterprise competitions	BIFT work with companies and offer individual companies consultancy
10. Funding opportunities for start ups	ECCA provide information on funding and mentoring schemes	Much easier to register a company in China
<b>Enterprise Development LCF</b>		
11. Fashion Incubators Support/Funding	Government funded support and University support for companies – studio/coaching	Beijing government
<b>Global Citizenship Activities</b>		
12 International Projects /cultural workshops	International Staff and Student Exchanges Specialist unit for Flying Faculty to encourage student to integrate into new cultures Government funded projects for students to share knowledge and talent Specialist team for cultural workshops	BIFT staff are taking international PhD study, BIFT supports staff development programmes for international mobility and exchanges Students encourage to learn different cultures
13 Institutional Partnerships and Networks/Relationships	Has partnerships in approximately 30 countries	Has relationships with Japan, Italy, France and USA, Korea – both companies and institutions

### Industrial insights

The company visits were undertaken during the first year of the project, and have provided rich data and insights into employer requirements for future graduates, academic pedagogic approaches to creative design, and employability support systems used by both educational institutions. The Chinese employability questions from two Chinese brands:

		China 1	China 2
Q 1	What does the company look for in a graduate?	Grades, creativity, portfolio, technical skills	Creativity, business, skills, presentation skills, portfolio, work independently, has work experience
Q 2	What is the recruitment process at	Company holds a recruitment assessment day and selects	Recruit all year round Through interview and portfolio

	the company?	the best students. Selected students have a 3-6 month trial period.	which must show strong creative skills Sometimes set a brief at the interview stage
Q 3	Do you recruit from Fashion Business courses?	Yes, recruit for communication and PR activities	At present, China does not offer specific fashion management courses
Q 4	Have the company previously recruited students from the West?	Have employees trained in West, and returned to Beijing, however language is an issue	TBC
Q 5	Does the company manufacture in mainland China?	Manufacture across China	Manufacture across China
Q 6	Do you offer work placements	Offer internships during Year 3 for Design, Marketing 3-12 months	1-3 month internships
Q 7	Are there any graduate skills missing in the current market?	Limited specialist courses for this product group	Graduates need to have a technical awareness of how to construct a garment
Q 8	What are the main differences between graduates from China and graduates from UK/Western countries	International students are very detailed and focused	Chinese students have a broader understanding of arts subjects, but less commercial insights, European students are perceived to have good attention to detail

### UK Company Insights for Global Employability

Various meetings with a large UK fashion group have been held to discuss the company's vision and direction for the future. This has informed the project brief outcomes and activities, based on the company now wanting to open up retail spaces in China, as well as strengthen their manufacturing strategies with Chinese suppliers.

## Phase Two – Gap analysis and development of the project brief

### From the initial comparative research findings it revealed the following:

1. There is limited inclusion of entrepreneurship inputs in undergraduate project briefs from both institutions
2. There is limited resources to support students developing understanding of international markets and consumers in particular China
3. Chinese companies are looking for designers that have holistic skills, whereas UK companies are looking for designers that can be creative and be trend led.
4. Project Briefs are developed in association with companies/industry, but the development of international learning outcomes with global partners was new to both BIFT and LCF teams.
5. Both institutions had employability activities embedded into the student programmes and was delivered by specialist support teams
6. Limited staff development planning was undertaken with regards to international collaboration and knowledge transfer.

Based on the six gaps identified the teams have included and developed the following inputs to support the successful deliver of the student work and the have been used in the design of the student project.

#### 1. Entrepreneurship Workshops

Workshops delivered in London and China – September 2009/April 2010

**UK Workshops-** To raise awareness of entrepreneurship education at LCF two workshops were delivered to BIFT staff. Two entrepreneurs who started their own company straight after

graduating delivered the first workshop; and the second workshop was delivered by an entrepreneur expert as part of her PhD project.

**China Workshops** – During the visit to China in April 2010 it is intended to deliver a workshop: From Concepts to Concrete Business. The workshop will be delivered by specialist Entrepreneurship experts and will explore what it means to be a global entrepreneur in terms of values, branding, networking and project management. In addition three podcasts on creative start ups case studies have been translated into Chinese [www.ecca-london.org](http://www.ecca-london.org).

## **2. International Market and Consumer Intelligence Resources/Reading lists/Staff Development**

To ensure that students can undertake the research to inform their design ideas and prototypes a set of learning resources are being developed so that market information can be as up to date as possible for student's to access. During the visits to UK and China time has been allocated to staff so they can undertake joint research trips into retail, consumer and cultural influences. Understanding how the Chinese consumer shops is key to effectively competing in this market, and knowing the apparel market in China will raise awareness of the potential of emerging growth markets.

### **3. Chinese /UK companies Requirements of designers**

From the company interviews Chinese companies are looking for holistic fashion designers that have a broad range of skills, but would put creativity over business/technical skills when they finally select the graduate. Chinese companies perceive UK graduates as having stronger attention to detail. All companies recruited designers on the quality of their portfolio, logical order of the portfolio, presentation of the portfolio. Tasks that promote creativity have been integrated into the project brief.

### **4. International Project Briefs**

Based on the company interviews and their business strategies for global growth, the project was developed "New Global Opportunity – through community creativity". The project brief will be delivered to Year 2 undergraduate students during the Autumn Term in 2010. Students will work in groups and create a product range/capsule collection for the company brand that is growing opportunities in new and emerging markets. The students will upload their work to the university websites so that both UK and Chinese tutors can view the work, and also that the companies can also monitor progress and developments. The final presentation will be through digital channels.

### **5. Global Citizenship**

At the present time no workshops are being delivered to students on global citizenship as a specific topic. This areas will be discussed during the BIFT visit to LCF in September 2010. It is an area that needs further development to identify the staff who can contribute to this area.

### **6. Staff Development**

During the visits, several workshops have been conducted to ensure that staff has the necessary skills to deliver the projects. It is anticipated that Chinese staff will develop important learning resources for UK students, and vice versa for Chinese students.

## **Phase Three - Benefits**

A set of benefits have been identified as a result of the China/UK academic collaborative project in year one:

### **International Work Placements/Internships**

New international business networks have been developed as a result of the industry visits undertaken during the staff mobility activities to China and UK. The companies have initially expressed an interest in offering students from LCF and BIFT one-year paid work placements in either their London or in Beijing. This is an example of how a UK-China industry/education network can strengthen employment opportunities for students who want to experience new global design challenges.

### **International Staff Development Activities**

The staff development benefits of the project have been the opportunities for academic staff, employability and entrepreneurship staff to participate in international travel, and develop joint curriculum projects. The project has focused the teams thinking on the challenges of what are the significant skills need by a fashion graduate to operate globally and to work in highly competitive and fast moving real life situations.

### **Internationalising the curriculum**

The benefits of the collaboration are the deeper understanding of curriculum models, pedagogic approaches and knowledge transfer of UK/China Fashion education systems. The project has drawn a diverse range of experts from both the college (LCF) and university wide (UAL): the Enterprise Centre for the Creative Arts (ECCA) – which is a centralised university service – has come to collaborate with LCF international development, employability and fashion specialist teams. This cross-cultivation of specialism has been required to develop new learning experiences. The project has required research and development in to digital technologies to make the sharing of knowledge and visual materials appropriate for China and UK. In addition, the project has enhanced the academic teams knowledge of real world challenges for the future of design and the role global communities in consumption.

### **Conclusions**

The strategic challenges of academic collaboration between China and UK have been complex and three key areas have been identified as playing an important role in successful collaboration:

#### **Differences in Creative Curriculum Models – Staff Development Challenges**

All of the companies interviewed indicated the need for strong creativity to drive product innovation. The research revealed that creativity is critical for all graduates to ensure a successful career in fashion. The role of creativity in the fashion design process has been discussed during the two visits between staff. This dialogue has been important in understanding the differences in how fashion design is taught in the UK and China. Through the development of the new project brief which outlines in detail the creative tasks and methodology needed to design future products it is anticipated that this will be an important tool to raise awareness.

The competing challenges between creativity and commerciality have provided the context for developing student experiences that are based on these dimensions. Both Chinese and UK companies have been fully engaged to develop new learning experiences that introduce new global contexts, cultural differences and market challenges that open up students to new business models and consumer segments. Through researching and shaping new strategies for fashion design and product development it is anticipated that the experiences will enable future graduates to seamlessly work across borders.

#### **Differences in Employability Infrastructures – Engagement and Entrepreneurship Challenges**

Both universities have strong industrial links and contacts that inform the institutional employability frameworks and activities. Both universities have embedded employability into the curriculum to ensure that graduates understand the commercial needs of fashion businesses and to establish strong and lasting relationships with the industry. The engagement with companies in both countries is high and involves close interactions to ensure graduates are prepared for the work of work.

The impact of the project will be to influence the capabilities of student, staff and companies. The goals of the project are to improve the employment rates of future graduates in order to serve the international industries demands for highly creative professional who can work globally. The challenges faced is preparing students to be able to understand the strong cultural differences between China and UK which must be built in the curriculum to raise greater insights into what to expect when working in this type of business environment. The language constraints are of particular significance that needs to be considered. Global employment opportunities will drive more confident, culturally aware and highly motivated

students who can deal with global employment opportunities; and contributing to business growth through graduates better understanding of the tensions between commercial/creative outputs.

### **Managing Collaborative Projects – Relationship Challenges**

The management of collaboration projects are challenging and require sensitivity to successfully build trust and long-term relationships with partners. However the impact and benefits of undertaking such projects is important for future staff and student developments. The need for regular and communication with partners is critical for open and continuous involvement in next steps. The need for management commitment and investment by both partners into such a collaborative project is required terms of academic, marketing, support staff that work at the operational levels. The relationship is also determined by the digital collaborative technologies that need to be put in place to build virtual and online meetings/projects and how the student work can be viewed by all partners with regards to, e-design reviews, blogging platforms, and uploading of images, text and videos for sharing progress and outcomes.

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