

Moving The Needle

LOW CARBON TRANSITION PROGRAMME
FOR SMEs

2025 REPORT

 Funded by
UK Government

SUPPORTED BY
MAYOR OF LONDON



BRITISH
FASHION
COUNCIL



“I am thrilled to champion the British Fashion Council Low Carbon Transition programme, given its importance in supporting SMEs who dominate our UK fashion sector - one of our leading creativity industries. The project enables businesses to adopt innovation to support decarbonisation, which is important in advancing the creative industries and the London Green Economy. This pilot programme acts as a blueprint which can be replicated by other sectors and helps provide much needed data.”

- THE RT. HON. THE LORD DEBEN

Contents

A letter from the BFC	3
Acknowledgements	4
Executive summary	5
Introduction	9
Importance of the project	10
Programme approach	12
Delivery, impacts and outcomes	13
Decarbonisation activities	16
Insights and key themes	19
Barriers and challenges to decarbonisation	20
Recommendations and next steps	25
Beyond London and into regions	27
Net zero roadmap	28
Conclusion	29
References	30

**The Urgency of Decarbonisation:
Empowering UK Fashion SMEs for a Sustainable Future**



Caroline Rush CBE
CEO, British Fashion Council

The imperative to decarbonise isn't sector-specific; it's a critical global necessity. While the British Fashion Council's Institute of Positive Fashion (BFC IPF), launched in 2020, has been instrumental in driving sustainability within the UK fashion industry specifically, the decarbonisation challenge extends far beyond its boundaries.

Fashion alone contributes a staggering amount of global greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), surpassing the combined impact of aviation and shipping. To align with the Paris Climate Agreement's 1.5°C pathway, a drastic halving of emissions by 2030 is essential – a target we are currently far from achieving. While fashion and textiles is not currently recognised as a formal industry in the UK's climate targets, our hope is that by setting our ambitious vision it will be, so that we can accelerate progress as part of the UK's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC).

The UK fashion industry, particularly its vibrant SME sector, face a multitude of challenges today: increased trading costs with the EU, the loss of tax-free shopping, escalating operational expenses, and impending stringent European sustainability legislation. While large corporations grapple with these complexities, SMEs, the backbone of the industry, risk being left behind without access to vital resources, information, and mentorship for a low-carbon transition.

Recognising this critical need, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), funded by the UK government, has supported the ground-breaking Low Carbon Transition (LCT) Programme designed by the IPF. This initiative has empowered 50 London-based SMEs to develop actionable plans for reducing their environmental impact, enhancing transparency, and tracking progress. This vital work, made possible by dedicated partners and mentors, demonstrates the potential for targeted support to drive meaningful change.

While 50 businesses represent a significant step forward, the scope of the climate crisis demands a broader, nationwide approach. The LCT Programme serves as a blueprint for empowering SMEs across all sectors, particularly fashion, to actively participate in the decarbonisation journey. We actively invite regional and devolved governments to partner with us to expand this initiative to ensure that businesses of all sizes have the opportunity to implement robust decarbonisation strategies. The time for action is now; empowering SMEs is not just an opportunity, it's a necessity for a sustainable future. ■

A letter from the BFC

THANK YOU

The British Fashion Council (BFC) would like to thank the funders of the Low Carbon Transition (LCT) Programme – the UK government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). This publication has been prepared by the BFC Institute of Positive Fashion's (IPF) LCT team, Emer Quinn and Shailja Dubé.

The BFC wishes to thank:

- Pam Batty, Special Advisor, Low Carbon Transition Programme
- BFC's Designer Relations team, Audrey Khew, Georgia Mulvaney-Thomerson, Nikki Kravshik, Yvie Hutton
- The Low Carbon Transition Programme delivery partners:
 - QSA Partners, specifically Jennifer Decker, Kristina Bull, and Mark Hodgson
 - Seedling, Blair Spowart
 - Think Circular, Debbie Luffman
- All those who participated in this programme



Image credit: Talia Byre. Courtesy of BFC

THE BRANDS WHO PARTICIPATED

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Anciela | Nobody's Child |
| Banshee of Savile Row | OIZA |
| Bella Freud | Oliver Spencer |
| Beulah | Omer Asim |
| Bianca Saunders | Paolo Carzana |
| Blue Nude | Patrick McDowell |
| ByVarga | Peachaus |
| Charles Jeffrey Loverboy | Raishma |
| Dijago Studios | Really Wild Clothing |
| E.L.V. Denim | Renata Brenha |
| ERDEM | Richard James |
| Femponiq | Roksanda |
| Fruity Booty | Shrimps |
| Gandys | SIRPLUS |
| HARRI | Stuart Trevor |
| House of Baukjen | Sturla |
| Kyle Ho | TALA |
| Labrum London | Talia Byre |
| London Sock Company | Tammam |
| Margaret Howell | Temperley London |
| Maria Grachvogel | TOVE |
| ME+EM | VACLAV |
| Molly Goddard | Wales Bonner |
| Navy Grey | YAKU |
| Nicholas Daley | You Must Create (YMC) |
| Nicole Zisman | |

Acknowledgements

Threading

together

a low carbon

community

AS A SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION OF THE OVERALL BUSINESS POPULATION IN THE UK, THE COLLECTIVE POWER OF SMES TO REDUCE EMISSIONS SHOULD NOT BE UNDERESTIMATED.

Executive summary

Fashion is responsible for around 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions – more than aviation and shipping combined.¹ To stay on track with the 1.5°C pathway set by the Paris Climate Agreement², the industry must reduce its emissions in half by 2030.

On its current trajectory, the fashion industry is predicted to fall short by a substantial 50%³. In line with UN Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Change, “We only have until 2030 to halve global emissions in order to stand a chance at keeping global warming below 1.5°C. With tipping points potentially being reached beforehand, it is critical to act now. No Scope 3 emissions inventory must be perfect before you can start engaging.”⁴ In 2025, the industry recognises that it is not on track and that the need for coordinated action across all actors in fashion’s complex supply chain is more important than ever.

As the third-largest apparel and footwear market by global market share⁵, the UK fashion industry has a critical role in decarbonising the sector by reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions both domestically and globally. Brands and retailers have been recognised as key stakeholders in enabling accelerated abatement within the industry.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for 99.8% of the business population in the UK.⁶ As a significant proportion of the overall business landscape, the collective power of SMEs to reduce emissions should not be underestimated. Many SMEs have built their brands with sustainable design principles in mind from the outset. Their smaller size allows them to be more operationally agile, enabling them to implement changes more easily than larger organisations. This presents a significant opportunity to embed sustainable practices into the growing businesses of tomorrow, positioning SMEs as leaders in driving industry-wide change.

However, SMEs often lack access to the tools and expertise needed to tackle broader challenges, such as climate change. In particular, many struggle to formally address decarbonisation by measuring their impact and demonstrating progress. As a result, they frequently lag behind larger organisations in their climate initiatives. Rating agencies rely on publicly available information to assess businesses’ climate actions, and with new environmental, social, and governance (ESG) regulations emerging, SMEs that lack the necessary resources for measurement and reporting may find themselves at a disadvantage.

“We only have until 2030 to halve global emissions in order to stand a chance at keeping global warming below 1.5°C”

- UNFCCC & CDP, 2023

Image credit: Molly Goddard. Courtesy of BFC



The LCT programme, developed by the BFC's IPF, has established itself as an important framework for decarbonising a crucial segment of the UK Fashion industry. The programme assisted a selection of London-based small and micro fashion businesses in measuring their emissions and creating a tailored decarbonisation roadmap through 2030.

As part of the initiative, the IPF helped businesses identify opportunities to integrate circular economy principles into their operations while strengthening connections with their customer base. With data-driven insights underpinning their plans, participating brands can confidently communicate their climate actions and progress.

This programme has provided SMEs with support that may otherwise be inaccessible to them, largely due to the prohibitively high costs associated with external consultancy support and tools. Through the LCT programme, the BFC has supported 50 SMEs to access the necessary expertise and tools to:

- **Measure scope 1, 2 and 3 GHG emissions aligned to industry best practice⁷**
- **Develop bespoke decarbonisation plans to 2030**
- **Explore applicability of embedding circularity and circular economy business models (CEBM)**
- **Understand their customer base for new circular propositions**
- **Enable evidence-based public communication on their climate action plans**
- **Be part of a community of like-minded businesses**

The sense of community across SMEs is powerful and one we have sought to proactively grow in the LCT programme through its delivery framework. Businesses have expressed this sense of community as a positive attribute of the programme. The BFC sees SME potential to harness their collective action to transform the industry into one that prioritises both people and planet.



Image credit: Charles Jeffrey Loverboy. Courtesy of BFC

“Building a community of like-minded businesses can create its own movement and have a bigger impact”

RUPERT ADAMS, REALLY WILD CLOTHING

Through deep interaction with participating businesses, several themes emerged as challenges to decarbonise, including:

1. **Materials:** Materials choice is a carbon hotspot and therefore key decarbonisation opportunity
 2. **Minimum order quantities (MOQs):** MOQs for fabrics are prohibitively high for SMEs who lack finance and/or the scale necessary to meet order requirements and limit choice for designers
 3. **Logistics:** Systemic challenges in decarbonising the transport and logistics industry affect SMEs overall ability to decarbonise
- *Minimum order quantities (MOQs) are the minimum amount of product a supplier is willing to sell in a single order
4. **Regulatory compliance:** Brands require support in navigating the complex and changing Environment, Social, Governance (ESG) regulatory landscape
 5. **Marketing and showcases:** Marketing and event-related emissions are a significant hotspot for many brands

The BFC identified the need to connect a move to the circular economy as part of decarbonisation efforts by the industry and as a result, CEBMs were embedded into programme delivery from the outset. The insights gathered from participating businesses represent an identified set of industry stakeholders included in the IPF's flagship research report, The Circular Fashion Ecosystem Project⁸.

Based on the findings of this report, the recommendations and next steps of this programme are two-fold.

- 1 **Fashion industry decarbonisation efforts should focus on:**
 - Prioritising the use of lower impact alternative materials
 - Enhancing collaboration across all actors in the value chain to make improvements to data and decarbonisation across transport, distribution, and marketing
- 2 **Scale-up climate support for SMEs:**
 - Establishing formalised targets to accelerate climate action support for UK fashion SMEs
 - Providing further support to expand and scale programmes like LCT programme beyond London to support more of SME community
 - Enhancing knowledge and understanding on CEBM to increase uptake and encourage move towards the circular economy
 - Establishing a roadmap on UK compliance landscape which is harmonised with the EU

A total of 31,057tCO₂e* was measured across 50 brands. This is broadly equivalent to 120 million miles in an average car. Together, brands committed to actions that will result in an average emissions reduction of 25% by 2030.

Whilst total figures may contribute a smaller proportion of the UK's overall emissions reduction target, the collective action of many SMEs can have a multiplier effect. We hope that action taken by businesses involved in the LCT programme will inspire others to follow suit and foster an ongoing culture and community of SMEs with formal sustainability and climate considerations embedded into their businesses. When scaled to reach the entire 99.8% of SMEs representing the UK's business population⁶, this collective action can make meaningful contributions to the UK's broader climate targets.

*tCO₂e = tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions



FASHION IN UK'S CLIMATE TARGETS

An existing, quantified global industry goal is that the “textile value chain reaches net zero emissions by 2050, in line with 1.5°C of global warming, and a 45 to 50 per cent reduction in supply chain emissions by 2030.”⁹

With five years to 2030, 2025 marks the year for all nations to submit their revised climate goals to the UN Secretariat, called the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDCs) emissions.¹⁰ This five-year cycle began in 2015 when the Paris Climate Accord was signed, ensuring that all nations take necessary action to meet the 1.5°C pathway.

The UK has been regarded as a leader in setting NDCs, as it has consistently set the most ambitious targets. However, the fashion industry in the UK is not currently represented within these targets.

There are many existing global industry goals and initiatives the UK fashion industry follows, with an opportunity to bring together a coherent UK position on meeting net zero.

The BFC has identified a need for greater harmonisation of these existing initiatives, enabling a collective approach to decarbonising the UK fashion industry which UK government would benefit from.

Any comprehensive, sector-wide alignment should include fashion SMEs, given the role they play in the UK industry. This aligned approach is ambitious yet pragmatic, and will help to accelerate the UK fashion industry on the global stage with respect to the 1.5°C pathway. ■



Image credit: Paolo Carzana. Courtesy of BFC

Decarbonising fashion in the UK

The British Fashion Council's (BFC) Institute of Positive Fashion (IPF) is a climate think and action tank which convenes the fashion industry to address its environmental and social impact.

Founded in 2020 in response to the climate crisis, the IPF engages the industry to accelerate responsible business change with cross-sector programmes and thought leadership through three pillars: Business Change through Circular Economy, Climate & Nature, and Social Change.

Through the BFC Strategy which fuels responsible growth and drives innovation, and by convening an engaged network of Designer Members and Patrons, the IPF gathers evidence to create frameworks and roadmaps for coordinated business action and systems-level change. The IPF shares best practice and its extensive insights to inform policy change at national and international level.

The IPF's aims are to:

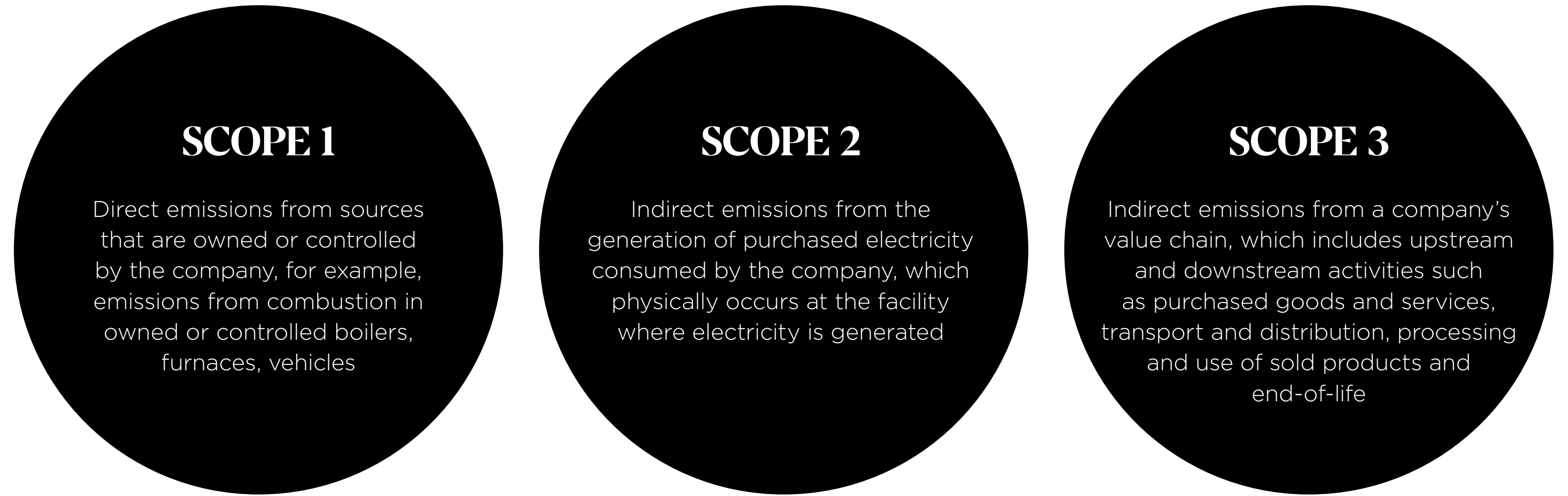
- 1 Continue to support the industry to decarbonise and meet UN goals by 2050, this will include halving GHG emissions as an industry by 2030
- 2 Work with UK industry and UK government for the fashion and textiles industry to be part of UK's formal climate targets, within the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) by 2035
- 3 Establish the foundations of a circular fashion ecosystem in the UK by 2032

The fashion industry is one of the UK's largest sectors – and its largest creative sector. In 2021, it contributed an estimated £28.9 billion in gross value added contribution to the UK economy. The sector supports a vast ecosystem of professions and businesses, spanning higher education, designers, product developers, farmers, manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers, and service providers such as rental and cleaning companies. In the same year, the industry supported over 1.4 million jobs, of which over 800,000 jobs were related to direct employment¹¹.

The UK's influential international reputation on the global fashion stage has been built up of the emerging talent, established designers and brands that make up such a huge part of this industry. Despite the contributions made by SMEs both in global influence and economic terms, this segment of the industry often lacks the tools, expertise and resource to respond to wider global challenges.

The fashion industry has the potential to reduce its emissions by 2030 which would put closer to a 1.5°C pathway. To do this, brands have a role as decision makers at a key part of the value chain, and so their ability to affect change along their supply chains.¹²

A COMPANY'S GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS CAN BE CLASSIFIED INTO 3 SCOPES⁷



The case for cutting carbon *now*

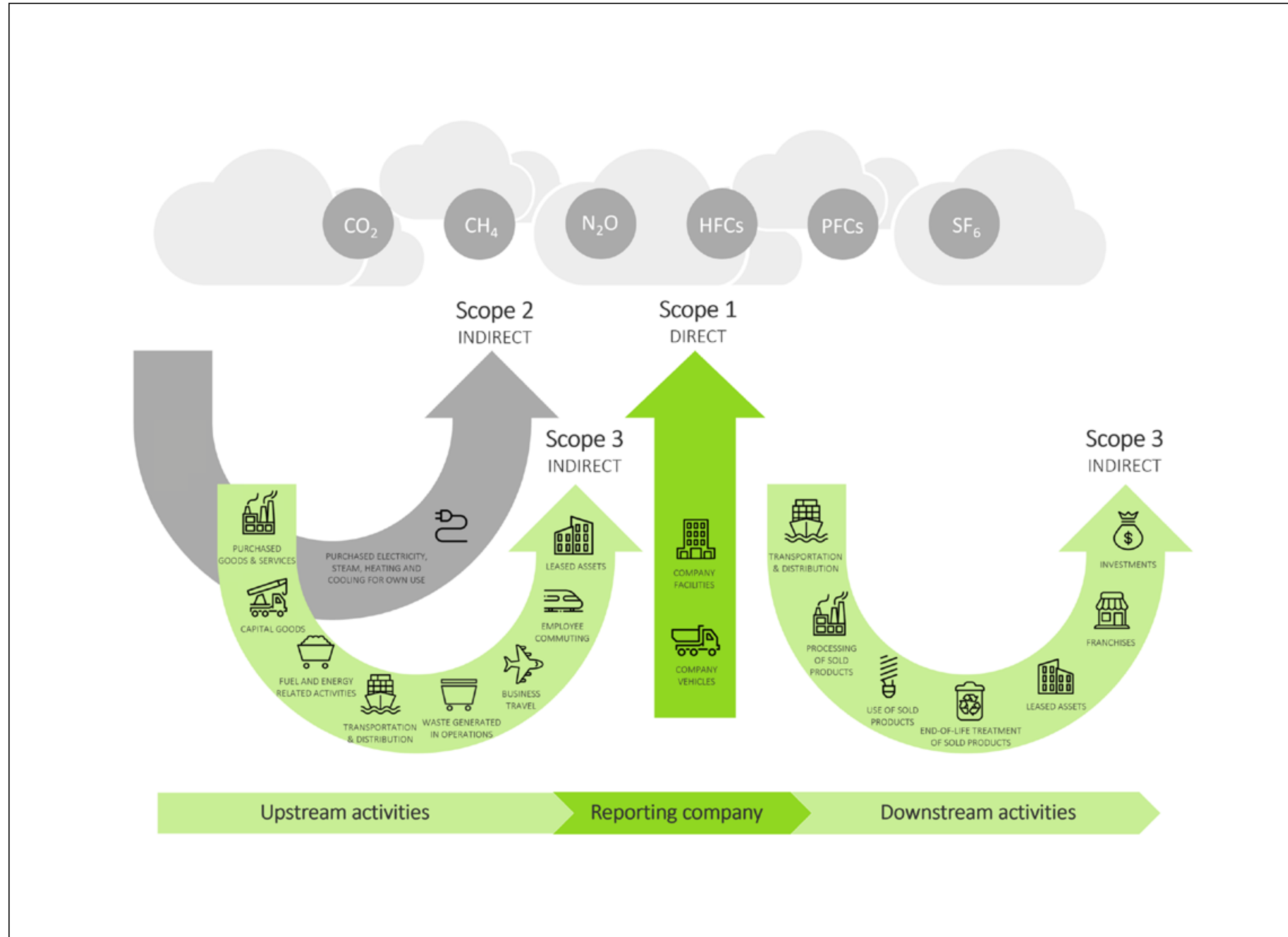


Figure A: Overview of GHG Protocol scopes and emissions across the value chain, GHG Protocol¹³
Climate impacts occur across the entire fashion value chain, as evidenced above.

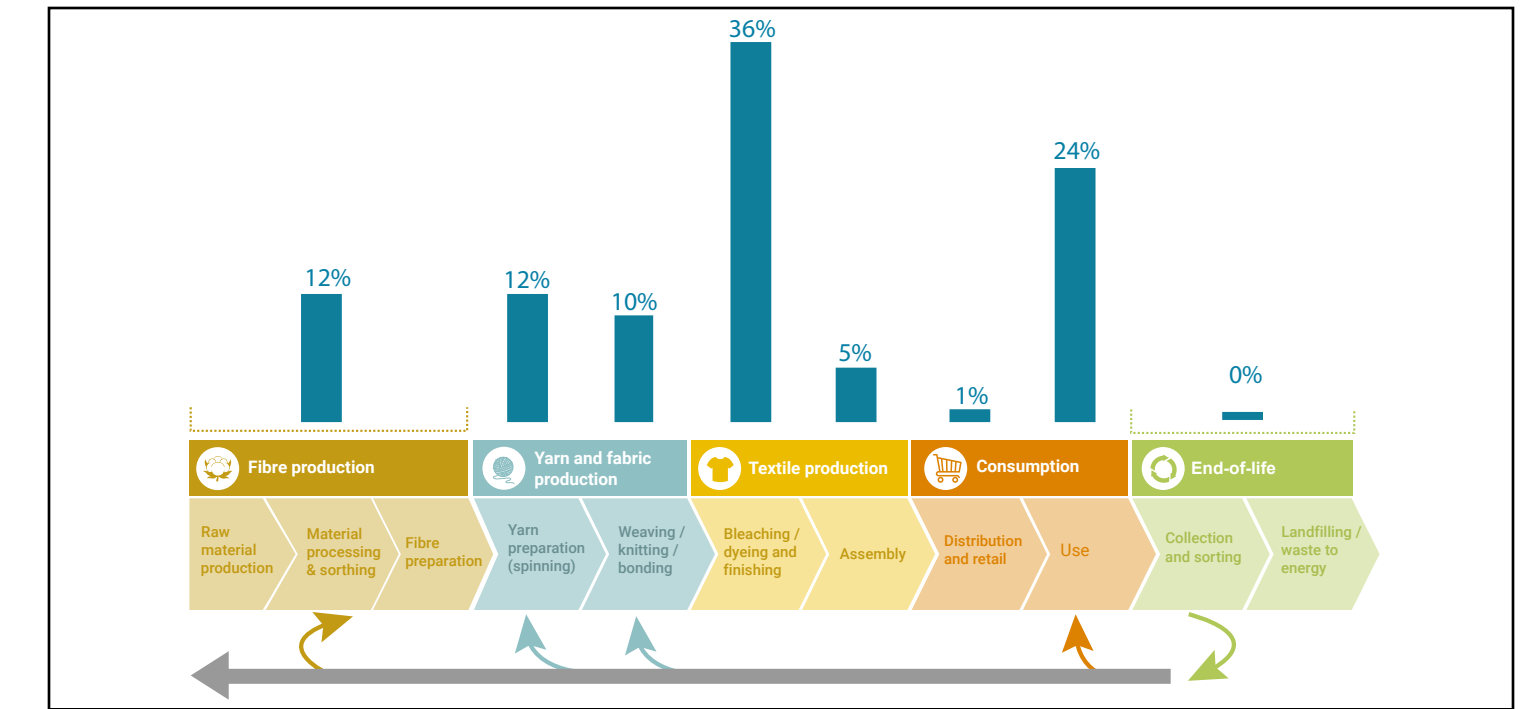


Figure B: Climate impact across the global apparel value chain, UNEP¹⁴

According to the UNEP, more than 70% of fashion’s climate impact comes from upstream activities, such as preparation, processing and production of materials¹⁴. Figure B shows the climate impacts across the global apparel value chain.

As a collective, accounting for 99.8% of the UK’s business population, SMEs have a pivotal role to help decarbonise the UK and globally. Despite this, SMEs often lack access to the tools and expertise required to formally address decarbonisation, by measuring their impact and demonstrating progress. This means many SMEs seem to trail behind larger organisations in their climate initiatives. On top of that, many rating agencies rely on publicly available data to make conclusions on brands’ climate actions. This, alongside the emergence of new sustainability regulations and its impact on UK market may put them at a disadvantage. SMEs recognise their need to stay informed how best to communicate with their customers in relation to sustainability and products on the market, for which support is needed to enable smaller businesses to comply.

The LCT programme responded directly to this challenge, through its evidence-based approach to data collection and decarbonisation roadmaps. This gives the LCT programme participants confidence in enhanced transparency of any public communications. ■

PUTTING 50 SMES ON THE ROADMAP

to DECARBONISATION

Image credit: Paolo Carzana. Courtesy of BFC

PROJECT SCOPE

Aligned with the BFC's mission to drive the fashion industry towards the UN's net zero goals, the LCT programme has supported 50 London-based SMEs to decarbonise by providing practical steps to reduce emissions across business operations and supply chains while exploring opportunities to adopt more circular practices.

To participate in the programme, businesses had to be registered as micro or SME fashion enterprises and based in one of London's 33 boroughs.

PROGRAMME DESIGN

The programme was designed and delivered between April 2023 and March 2025. A cohort approach was taken to onboard the 50 fashion businesses throughout 2024, with the following successes:

- Scalable programme design
- Creation of a community feel through small cohorts participating within a shared-learning environment
- Iterative programme improvements using regular review stages
- Development of toolkits in response to insights gained along the way

A major challenge of the programme was the limited capacity of SMEs to take up new opportunities, such as the LCT programme, as it required diverting time away from business operations, particularly for very small teams navigating ongoing economic challenges. Programme delivery was planned with consideration of global industry trade events, such as fashion weeks, from the outset.

A breakdown of the cohort groups is listed below.

COHORT	START DATE	# OF BUSINESSES
Cohort 1	February 2024	10
Cohort 2	April 2024	8
Cohort 3	June 2024	7
Cohort 4	September 2024	8
Cohort 5	October 2024	17



The power of collective action

The programme provided businesses with the tools to measure their emissions through a third-party platform, with direct access to a team of experts in GHG accounting, climate strategy, and circularity. All companies were offered industry experience and practical, hands-on support in developing their decarbonisation roadmaps.

For many small businesses, time and staffing constraints made it challenging to even begin considering what a decarbonisation strategy might entail. This funded support proved essential in helping them take those first steps. The IPF LCT team supported each participating business at every step of the programme, through core and optional components.

Programme dimensions

CORE PROGRAMME:

- Onboarding – provision of toolkit as a pre-read, which gave relevant context to decarbonisation through a fashion lens within the UK and relevant to an SME
- Climate literacy training – delivered at the kick-off workshop to formally enrol the entire cohort and provide a baseline understanding of relevant fashion-related climate topics
- Scope 1-3 emissions baseline measurement – access to the online platform to measure their carbon emissions baseline, in line with industry best practice of GHG Protocol
- Draft transition plan – developed for each business which detailed their carbon emissions baseline, top 10 carbon hotspots and additional decarbonisation opportunities
- One-to-one consultancy support – individual follow-up workshops to explore decarbonisation, materials choices, and circularity opportunities that would be best suited to their business
- Final low carbon transition plan – specific 2030 targets against each decarbonisation lever identified, evaluating each action for likelihood of completion by target date, including planned annual activities to move closer towards achieving 2030 targets
- Ongoing support from the IPF team to help accelerate their decarbonisation journey, and gather insights and perspectives which will have wider industry value
- Direct contact with other businesses in each cohort, including review meetings

ADDITIONAL PROGRAMME ELEMENTS INCLUDED:

- Materials masterclass – bespoke, deep-dive workshops supporting individual businesses to understand their materials impact currently, and explore lower impact alternatives
- Circular economy business models – exploration of potential opportunities relevant to each brand, for example resale, repair and rental
- Customer surveys – additional tools to understand each brand’s customer base, in terms of attitudes and actions regarding sustainability and circular business models
- Climate communication – provide businesses with a template to begin public communication of their climate efforts through LCT
- Additional resources – sharing and signposting of existing industry tools and resources.

PROJECT IMPACT

An overview of progress made against some of the programme activities are listed below.

PROJECT ACTIVITY	TOTAL
Draft transition plans	50
One-to-one consultancy workshops hosted	50
Low carbon transition plans developed	50
Materials masterclasses	21
Circular economy business model sessions	24
Customer survey workshops	6

The programme has enabled 50 businesses to measure their carbon emissions baseline to industry best practice. All businesses submitted a decarbonisation roadmap to 2030 which included individual actions against scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions.

21 businesses has additional consultancy support on materials, and 24 businesses explored more support on circular economy business models. Six businesses proceeded with customer survey workshops to further survey their customer base to better understand the strength of potential CEBM propositions for their business.

The programme has created the need for additional roles and responsibilities within each business, specifically around ownership of the emissions measurement tool and the data collection process going forwards.

“The programme has made me think in a different way and helped me with problem solving and to see what I can do better”

- MARIA GRACHVOGEL
Creative Director & Founder, Maria Grachvogel

“The programme itself is more than just a platform of measuring tools but also gives guidance”

- KYLE HO
Creative Director, Kyle Ho

Outcomes

AN OVERVIEW OF THE OUTCOMES ACHIEVED BY THE PROGRAMME ARE LISTED BELOW.

- Total emissions measured* (tCO2e) refers to the total aggregated emissions measured across all 50 brands
- Potential emissions reduction refer to the emissions reduction identified in the draft transition plan by the third-party platform, produced following completion of each business carbon baseline
- Planned emissions reduction refer to the emissions reduction committed to by the businesses in their final decarbonisation roadmap submitted as part of the programme

KEY METRICS	TOTAL
Total emissions measured (tCO2e)	31,057
Potential emissions reduction identified by 2030 (tCO2e)	9,883
Potential emissions reduction identified by 2030 (Avg%)	34%
Planned emissions reduction by 2030 (tCO2e)	7,451
Planned emissions reduction by 2030 (Avg%)	25%

A total of 31,057tCO2e was measured across 50 SMEs scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions. A total of 9,883tCO2e potential emissions reduction were identified across all 50 brands, which averaged a 34% reduction by 2030.

*49 brands' emissions baselines were measured formally through the programme. One brand had already baselined their emissions and this work was used through the programme to develop their roadmap.

All businesses were asked to evaluate the potential emissions reduction identified in their draft decarbonisation plans. Each action was assessed based on the likelihood of being completed by 2030. For example, an action could be marked as 100% or 0% achievable by 2030. For actions rated between 0% and 20% achievable, businesses were asked to highlight key barriers and challenges. This process resulted in a quantifiable plan with emissions reduction targets and key actions leading up to 2030.

Through submission of all business's final decarbonisation roadmap, we were able to understand the planned emissions reduction committed to by each business up to 2030. A total of 7,451tCO2e of emissions reduction were planned and committed to across 50 submitted plans, averaging a 25% reduction by 2030.

The decarbonisation roadmaps developed by each SME will help reduce their individual environmental impact while contributing to the UK's overall emissions reduction. While the absolute figures may be comparatively small, the collective actions of these 50 businesses can create a powerful multiplier effect. We hope the LCT programme will inspire other SMEs to follow suit, fostering a culture and community within the UK where sustainability and climate considerations are a priority. When scaled across the 99.8% of SMEs that make up the UK's business population, this collective action has the potential to drive meaningful progress toward the country's broader climate goals. ■

“Being able to know facts and understand emissions helps designers to make the right changes”

- PATRICK MCDOWELL
Creative Director, Patrick McDowell



Image credit: Maria Grachvogel

Decarbonisation by design

A number of decarbonisation opportunities were identified for brands to explore across each emissions scope.

“Taking action to decarbonise pushes you to be more innovative. Designers and creative people are great at problem solving and can come up with solutions not yet considered”

- SARAH COLEMAN

Head of Design & Development, Margaret Howell

SCOPE 1

Scope 1 emissions refer to direct GHG emissions resulting from sources owned or controlled by the company. Scope 1 emissions made up a small percentage of the total emissions measured, due to the small nature of operations for small and micro businesses participating. For businesses with scope 1 emissions, a number of decarbonisation levers were highlighted, for example:

- Reviewing energy efficiency of sites
- Engaging landlords about the possibility of transitioning from gas boilers



SCOPE 2

Scope 2 emissions refer to indirect emissions resulting from the generation of purchased electricity consumed by the company. Companies are not always in direct control of their electricity supply, depending on whether they own or rent their properties. Several activities were identified to decarbonise these emissions:

- Switching to greener electricity tariffs (e.g. renewable energy tariffs) for those businesses who can control electricity supply
- Engage landlords about the possibility of switching to green energy tariffs for those businesses who rent or share their properties

For some businesses, investigating their scope 2 emissions resulted in implementing data collection systems to monitor and manage energy use effectively, which will enable future improvements and better reporting to 2030.

Decarbonisation opportunities



SCOPE 3

Scope 3 emissions are indirect emissions resulting from activities of the company, occurring from sources not owned or controlled by the company. Most participating businesses emissions sat in scope 3 which is common for a fashion business. As a result, actions to decarbonise scope 3 were a focus for many businesses. These include:

SOURCING LOW IMPACT ALTERNATIVE MATERIALS

Switching fibres to lower impact fibres, for example conventional cotton to organic cottons, switching to recycled fibre options, for example conventional polyester to recycled polyester. The below Figure C shows the approximate fibre mix for all participating businesses on the programme.

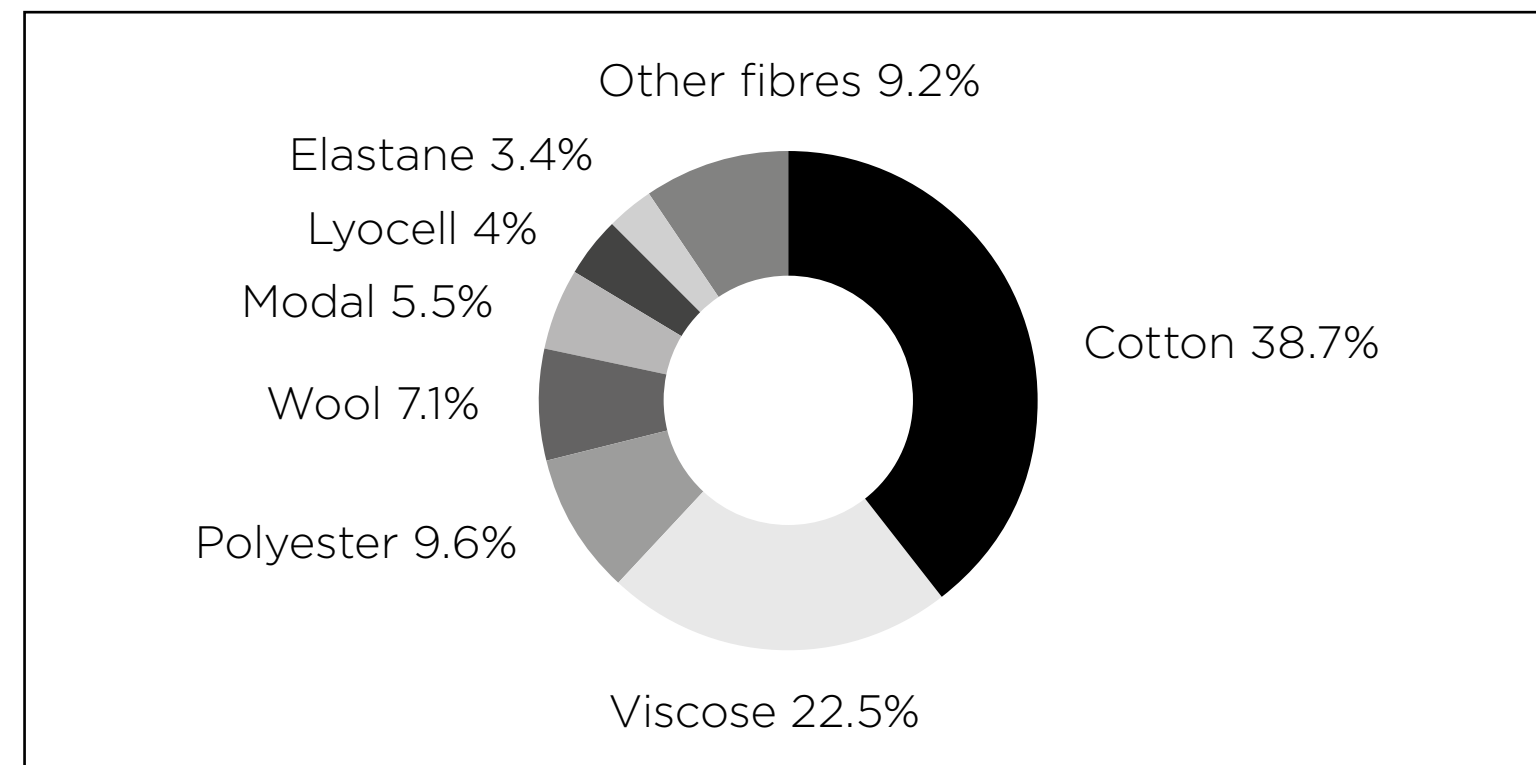


Figure C: Fibre mix of LCT Programme Participants, 2024

Use of blended fibres jeopardises a products potential to have a circular end-of-life. SMEs were encouraged to consider reducing blends or grouping biological and/or synthetic fibres

SHIFTING PRIMARY PRODUCTION

In many cases, shifting the primary production of materials to lower-emission countries, such as those in Europe, could significantly reduce emissions for many businesses. While many brands expressed a strong desire to source within the UK, they often faced challenges in finding suitable suppliers. As a result, some have decided to explore production in countries like Portugal, Spain, and Italy, with plans to pilot manufacturing in these locations to assess the feasibility and impact of the transition.

TARGET TIER 1 SUPPLIERS* USING RENEWABLE ENERGY

As a result of emissions related to garment assembly in the production phase, many businesses were encouraged to engage their Tier 1 suppliers in moving to renewable energy. Some businesses have committed to contacting their suppliers and identifying opportunities for improvement.

*Tier 1 suppliers are direct suppliers of the final product

INCREASE USE OF SURPLUS AND DEADSTOCK MATERIALS

A variety of the businesses who participated in the programme use deadstock either partially or fully in their collections. As a result, these businesses will benefit from lower carbon emissions than that of a conventional, linear model that sources mainly virgin materials. Some brands are now further investigating sourcing surplus or deadstock fabrics into product ranges and have leveraged service providers.

The IPF’s Circular Fashion Innovation Network programme partnered with The Materialist – a B2B marketplace for trading high-quality deadstock fabrics – to launch a physical pop-up showroom to sell surplus fabrics in 2024. Many of the brands contacted The Materialist as a result of the programme

REVIEW GARMENT WASHING AND CARE INSTRUCTIONS

Several businesses have already acted on changing washing and care labels for their garments, after learning about the impact of their customers’ wash and care. This action includes reviewing labels and care instructions to move to lower impact laundry and care by stating cold washes for example, using 30°C cycles. Businesses were encouraged to explore these opportunities further by surveying their customers to gather data on their use-phase habits and identify areas for improvement.

REDUCE BUSINESS TRAVEL

For some of the smaller and micro businesses participating in the programme, business travel represents a large proportion of overall emissions. For many fashion businesses, travel is a necessity to source materials, visit suppliers and factories, complete fashion shows and build a loyal customer base. Many businesses already limit these trips as much as possible. As a result, this decarbonisation lever is seen as a challenge to reduce. ■

Decarbonisation opportunities

A new collection of insights

It was acknowledged that if brands implemented all the decarbonisation actions in their draft roadmaps, the average emissions reduction would be 34% by 2030. However, businesses were encouraged to tailor their plans and assess how realistically this could be achieved. Through this process, the average emissions reduction became 25% across all 50 businesses.

The process of each business tailoring its decarbonisation roadmap led to valuable data and insights, highlighting some of the challenges businesses faced in achieving certain actions.

The majority of emissions reduction not taken forward were linked to Scope 3, specifically materials under purchased goods and services. Key decarbonisation actions suggested in this category included increasing deadstock use and exploring recycled alternatives. However, businesses raised several challenges in implementing these actions, which are explored in the next section.

By comparison, Scope 1 and 2 accounted for only a small portion of total emissions reduction not pursued. Several reasons were provided for this, as outlined to the right.

Scope 1 emissions relate to company facilities, with key decarbonisation actions including engaging landlords about transitioning from gas boilers (e.g. biomass, heat pumps) and reviewing energy efficiency measures. Some challenges cited by businesses included:

- Businesses do not own their buildings and share them with other organisations, making changes difficult
- Businesses do not have direct relationships with energy providers, making it challenging to switch energy types

Scope 2 emissions relate to purchased electricity, heat, steam, and cooling. Key decarbonisation actions included switching to 100% renewable energy tariffs, exploring the possibility of installing on-site renewable energy, and reviewing energy efficiency measures. Similar challenges were cited:

- These options were not within their control, as the sites were owned by others
- Short-term leases on current sites
- Difficulty in accessing affordable studios with verified sustainability credentials

The process of developing decarbonisation plans provided valuable insights into the challenges and barriers brands face in their decarbonisation efforts. Through this, several key themes and overarching insights emerged.



Image credit: Bella Freud

What's holding the industry back?

THREE KEY THEMES HAVE EMERGED REGARDING THE DECARBONISATION OF THESE BUSINESSES:

- 1 Materials: Materials choice is a carbon hotspot and therefore key decarbonisation opportunity
- 2 Minimum order quantities: MOQs for fabrics are prohibitively high for SMEs who lack finance and/or the scale necessary to meet order requirements and limit choice for designers
- 3 Logistics: Systemic challenges in decarbonising the transport and logistics industry affect SMEs overall ability to decarbonise

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS INCLUDE:

- 4 Regulatory compliance: Brands require support in navigating the complex and changing Environment, Social, Governance (ESG) regulatory landscape
- 5 Marketing and showcases: Marketing and event-related emissions are a significant hotspot for many brands



Image credit: Harri. Courtesy of BFC



Materials choice

Upstream activities such as production, preparing and processing of materials represent around 70% of the industry's climate impacts¹⁴. As a result, sourcing and switching to more sustainable and lower impact materials was identified as a key decarbonisation lever for many brands however, several challenges were raised when it came to implementation of this action, extending to deadstock and lower impact alternatives.

Despite these actions, through the programme, we found that almost 70% of emissions associated with actions rated not achievable or partially achievable were related to materials, thus highlighting a number of challenges businesses face when it comes to making these challenges.

DEADSTOCK

Deadstock refers to materials that have not been utilised or sold and is considered a lower impact material choice, as it extends the lifecycle of textiles. In addition, deadstock has a carbon benefit as it is viewed as a 'waste' material, and so users do not inherit the carbon associated with its production, therefore being a decarbonisation action for fashion businesses. A number of challenges were identified by brands when it came to incorporating more deadstock into their businesses. By its very existence as a 'waste' material, deadstock is often limited in supply and therefore does not work well with wholesale models which poses a challenge for larger brands who are unable to secure enough deadstock to make full collections. For smaller brands, this limitation was viewed instead as an opportunity to provide only a small number of garments, therefore enabling exclusivity; however, it was recognised by small brands that this could become a challenge with scale. Another important challenge that was highlighted was a lack of a widely accepted definition of deadstock which makes it difficult for designers to use and work with deadstock and communicate its benefits to consumers.

RECYCLED MATERIALS

Recycled materials offer a carbon reduction benefit when used instead of virgin materials. This was a key decarbonisation action outlined for many materials, for example cotton, elastane, polyamide, and silk. Many brands acknowledged the need to move to recycled materials however, several challenges were raised in doing so. For example, minimum order quantities and price challenges relating to recycled elastane, availability issues and quality considerations of the final garment and the potential impact of using recycled materials on product traceability. Some businesses acknowledged that some materials, such as silk, were a small but core part of their business and could not be removed without a realistic alternative.

CERTIFIED MATERIALS

The topic of materials raised some challenges relating to certified materials. Businesses highlighted using certified materials often involves a lengthy application which is difficult for time and resource-constrained brands. Brands also made clear that certified materials come with higher costs which are often difficult to pass onto the customer, in an already competitive and economically challenging environment.

NATURAL FIBRES

Through the programme, several brands discovered the carbon impact of some natural fibres used in collections, such as wool. Wool is the most common animal fibre used within the fashion industry however, the production process produces significant impact, including the emissions of potent greenhouse gases from livestock, land degradation from overgrazing as well as other animal welfare concerns. On the other hand, wool is warm, natural, durable, biodegradable and is odour and wrinkle-free, meaning that it does not need to be washed as frequently as other fibres, therefore saving on water and energy during the use phase.

The LCT programme focused on decarbonisation and looked at measurement through a carbon lens only however, this topic highlights the ongoing and nuanced debate relating to the use of natural fibres in the fashion industry.

INNOVATIVE AND EMERGING MATERIALS

There are many innovative and emerging materials options that offer exciting potential for sustainable fashion. Some examples include regenerated protein fibres such as those made from waste milk or discarded silkworm cocoons, biosynthetic fibres made from lab-grown or genetically engineered microorganisms, fibres from agricultural waste, such as pineapple leaves or banana stems. When considering these emerging options, it is important to assess their full lifecycle impacts, scalability and potential unintended consequences.

POTENTIAL INDUSTRY ACTIONS:

- The LCT Programme has developed a [Materials Toolkit](#)¹⁵ which is open-source and accessible to all industry to support more informed decision-making related to materials choice
- Continue supporting the work of organisations within the industry such as the [Textile Exchange](#), who work towards ensuring the materials used are produced in a way that supports our planet, its ecosystems, and communities
- Support the adoption of industry-wide definition of deadstock

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS:

- Implement dynamic trading identifiers to accommodate research and development (R&D) of innovative and emerging materials
- More strategic R&D for fabric and material innovation
- Extended producer responsibility (EPR) for textiles

Theme 2

Minimum order quantities

MOQs refer to the minimum quantity of items a manufacturer will accept for a production order. MOQs are set up as a threshold to manage production with the aim of justifying the costs associated with industrial manufacturing processes. As a result, some smaller brands face pressure to order more than needed to meet factory minimums, which can result in excess inventory and a higher carbon footprint. This raised a question on the link between MOQs with waste and overproduction within the industry.

In addition, it was highlighted by brands that the need for minimum order quantities extends to lower impact, alternative materials too, making the transition to – and adoption of – more sustainable material choices harder for SMEs.

Much of manufacturing still relies on old machinery, systems, and models – many of which may not align to the requirements of the modern world, including those relating to the sustainability and climate agenda. This recurring theme highlighted the need to continue working with this essential part of the fashion value chain to engage manufacturers on the sustainability agenda and increase knowledge and understanding where needed.

POTENTIAL INDUSTRY ACTIONS:

- Explore opportunities such as pre-sale orders and demand-driven models
- Highlight insights with other industry bodies responsible for manufacturing, such as UK Fashion and Textile Association
- Engage manufacturers on the sustainability agenda



Image credit: Oiza

Theme 3

Logistics

High-level analysis showed that around 25% of scope 3 emissions associated with actions rated as not achievable or only partially achievable were related to transport and distribution (upstream).

Most of these emissions were attributable to airfreight. A range of decarbonisation actions were proposed for example, exploring sourcing options closer to the UK and building in longer lead times to avoid the need for air freight. Some businesses signalled a move towards shortening supply chains and keeping airfreight to a minimum however, it was highlighted that many business models currently dictate the need for this and that due to size, some businesses do not currently produce enough to ship by sea.

Some brands highlighted that green couriers are available for shorter distances. In addition, some brands opted for ‘greener’ options from logistics providers however, they were not always clear on what this offer really entailed. Brands also explained that availability of information and data was lacking.

Improved vehicle efficiency, use of electric vehicles, and a move to alternative fuels are some of the ways the transport and logistics industry are trying to decarbonise. Systemic changes are required on a global scale, however, until there are economies of scale which can help to reduce costs and charges to logistics customers including the SME sector, the extent to which SME fashion businesses can decarbonise will be limited.

POTENTIAL INDUSTRY ACTIONS:

- Support from “green” providers to provide preferential rates for SMEs
- Work with the value chain to improve quality and availability of data
- Improve communications on “green” options

Theme 4

Regulatory compliance

The fashion industry's sustainability regulatory landscape is rapidly evolving with a swathe of new regulations coming into effect across the EU, UK, and US. These regulations will have a staged roll-out, prioritising larger businesses first.



Image credit: Lucie Vaclav

The Green Claims Code¹⁶ is an example of a regulation currently impacting SMEs. SMEs recognise their need to stay current with all incoming regulation, including how to formally communicate with their customers in relation to sustainability. Other regulations impact SMEs indirectly, for example, if they are suppliers to larger brands. Large brands and retailers are increasingly asking suppliers to disclose their scope 3 emissions, even if they are not legally required to report on it yet.

This complex and evolving regulatory landscape makes it difficult for smaller businesses to stay abreast of the latest developments and determine what applies to them. Many of these businesses also lack the resources to implement the necessary changes required to comply with incoming regulations.

SMEs requested additional resource to support them with implementing these changes and suggested some ideas such as creating a regulation library to showcase latest developments, for example on extended producer responsibility (EPR)¹⁷, which will require businesses to show sustainable certification. This regulation may be difficult for businesses depending on suppliers and quantities used or if they are using third-party deadstock materials. It was also noted that some certified materials lack critical information, for example, emissions factors which has resulted in brands being unable to make external claims about certain products, in line with the CMA's Green Claims Code.¹⁸

POTENTIAL INDUSTRY ACTIONS:

- Centralised repository of up-to-date information on regulation changes, and impacts on SME sector in the UK
- Develop policy and implementation guidance on specific regulations affecting businesses, especially SMEs
- Practical support for designers through the development of an industry pilot to specific policies, including Digital Product Passport (DPP) to support a selection of designers through the process in order to inform policy support
- A whitepaper on EPR was published in 2024. Developed by WEFT, with support from BFC, UKFT, the British Retail Consortium (BRC) and several luxury, fashion and retail brands, emphasised the need for immediate government action to enable a more circular economy and create a viable EPR textile scheme that works for all¹⁹
- Continue to share insights from all BFC programmes, including LCT, with the government to inform policy change

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS:

- Resource and training grants to be made available to provide further training, mentorship and workshops to support SMEs in getting regulation ready.
- Align UK regulation with other markets where possible to ensure a level-playing field
- Work with industry bodies such as BFC to understand the needs of the businesses they represent and work together to solve for challenges

Theme 5

Marketing and showcases

Many designers in the fashion industry rely on fashion tradeshows to showcase their latest collections during fashion weeks which take place around the world. The industry also relies on several other marketing activities, including photoshoots. Through the LCT programme, businesses were able to understand the impact that these activities had on their overall carbon footprint.

For many SMEs, emissions relating to marketing and showcases were a high proportion of total emissions. Businesses were encouraged to source more accurate emissions data from supply chain stakeholders to improve accuracy and avoid reliance on industry averages to calculate these emissions.

In response to this challenge, SMEs asked for further support to decarbonise marketing and showcases, for example, the creation of a sustainable events guide or toolkit. Other SMEs added that having this information broken down for other internal teams (e.g. ecommerce and marketing) would be particularly helpful to disseminate information and encourage collective responsibility throughout the company. Businesses asked for other supply chain actors such as PR agencies and production companies to be proactively engaged on this topic, to ensure that everyone along the value-chain is taking responsibility for their share of emissions.

POTENTIAL INDUSTRY ACTIONS:

The BFC recognises its role to lead the fashion industry with best practice, and has already taken the following action to support embedding ESG into the sector:

- The BFC has introduced a clear framework for the incoming emerging British designers with a key focus on ESG strategies, diversity and inclusion policies, and sustainable material use. Formally launched in 2024 is the BFC collaboration with Copenhagen Fashion Week, on their Sustainability Requirements framework. Roll-out of this framework is part of eligibility criteria for the 2025/2026 cohort of NEWGEN, BFC's flagship Designer initiative - where the framework's 18 minimum standards will be embedded into the mandatory criteria for admission²⁰
- Review and update existing documentation sent to designers prior to London Fashion Week to provide tips in making more informed decisions ■



The path towards progress



Image credit: Nicholas Daley
Courtesy of BFC



Image credit: Patrick McDowell
Courtesy of BFC



Image credit: Oliver Spencer

Based on the findings of this report, the recommendations and next steps of this programme are *two-fold*.

1

Fashion industry decarbonisation efforts should focus on:

- Prioritising the use of lower impact alternative materials
- Enhancing collaboration across all actors in the value chain to make improvements to data and decarbonisation across transport, distribution, and marketing

2

Scale-up climate support for SMEs by:

- Establishing formalised targets to accelerate climate action support for UK fashion SMEs
- Providing further support to expand and scale programmes like LCT programme beyond London to support more of SME community
- Enhancing knowledge and understanding on CEBM to increase uptake and encourage move towards the circular economy
- Establishing a roadmap on UK compliance landscape which is harmonised with the EU

1

Fashion industry decarbonisation efforts

PRIORITISING THE USE OF LOWER IMPACT ALTERNATIVE MATERIALS

Materials choice typically makes up a significant proportion of a fashion business's overall emissions and should be prioritised. Further work is required to support the industry in ensuring these options are easily accessible in terms of cost and availability whilst ensuring they meet current quality standards of higher carbon impact equivalents.

ENHANCING COLLABORATION ACROSS ALL ACTORS IN THE VALUE CHAIN TO MAKE IMPROVEMENTS TO DATA AND DECARBONISATION ACROSS TRANSPORT, DISTRIBUTION, AND MARKETING

The fashion industry should continue to work along the value chain by continuing to ask questions of other stakeholders within the supply chain and make improvements to signal market demand and accelerate overall decarbonisation.



Image credit: Bianca Saunders

2

Scale-up climate support for SMEs

ESTABLISHING FORMALISED TARGETS TO ACCELERATE CLIMATE ACTION SUPPORT FOR UK FASHION SMES

Most SMEs are at the beginning of their decarbonisation journey and often fall behind on measuring emissions or setting targets. Further work can be done to assess the best route to formalise climate target-setting for UK SME fashion businesses.

There are a number of industry initiatives, however, it has been recognised that the current ecosystem is complicated and could be harmonised to be more effective and relevant for SMEs.

PROVIDING FURTHER SUPPORT TO EXPAND AND SCALE PROGRAMMES LIKE LCT PROGRAMME BEYOND LONDON TO SUPPORT MORE OF SME COMMUNITY

The LCT programme has provided a selection of London-based SMEs to take the first steps in formally addressing and incorporating climate and decarbonisation considerations into their business. The decarbonisation roadmaps developed by each SME will help to reduce their individual impact whilst contributing to a reduction in the UK's overall emissions.

ENHANCING KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING ON CEBM TO INCREASE UPTAKE AND ENCOURAGE MOVE TOWARDS THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Through the LCT programme, businesses learnt about CEBMs and the benefits of embedding these into their businesses. The programme enabled businesses to explore these opportunities and the feasibility of embedding them into their business in the short, medium and long-term. Through our interaction with 50 businesses, we identified the need to enhance knowledge and understanding of CEBMs to increase uptake and encourage the industry to move towards a circular economy.

ESTABLISHING A ROADMAP ON UK COMPLIANCE LANDSCAPE WHICH IS HARMONISED WITH THE EU

The era of voluntary action on sustainability activities is coming to an end, as regulation plays a more prominent role in business operations. Through the European Union's Green Deal and the Circular Economy Action Plan, these rules will impact any business who have products on the EU market. Since 2023, many of the planned pieces of legislation relating to fashion and textiles have started to come into effect for larger businesses, with smaller businesses to follow. From product design, to supply chain operations and brand communications, UK SMEs are faced with confusion, duplication, or deviation between potential UK and established EU compliance obligations.

There is an industry need for more clarity on the UK policy landscape for fashion and textiles SMEs, which is harmonised with EU regulation. ■



Image credit: Erdem. Courtesy of BFC

Making a broader impact

Building on the success of this LCT pilot, the BFC aims to engage with regional authorities, outside of London, exploring the potential for the delivery of similar programmes across the UK. These efforts will focus on empowering more SMEs to measure their GHG emissions and develop comprehensive low-carbon transition plans through 2030 and beyond, ensuring that they can reduce their individual emissions while making an impactful contribution to the UK's climate targets. ■

impact
impact
impact
impact
impact
impact
impact
impact

Sketching the roadmap towards net zero

The BFC acknowledges that simply expanding the Low Carbon Transition Programme will not be enough to achieve the necessary outcomes. To make a demonstrable impact on decarbonising the British fashion industry and meeting UK carbon targets, a fundamental rethink and change in direction is required.

Several initiatives on climate action already exist today and have been integral to building momentum on sustainability within the fashion industry. For example, The British Retail Consortium's Climate Action Roadmap²¹ provides retailers with guidance on steps they can take to decarbonise their operations and supply chains. The UNFCCC's Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action²² contains a series of principles for addressing climate change and The Fashion Pact²³ is the largest CEO-led initiative for sustainability in the fashion industry and brings together members committed to working towards a shared vision for a nature-positive, net-zero future for fashion.

Whilst various initiatives and efforts exist, further alignment and harmonisation of these initiatives is needed to create a coordinated and centralised approach with consistent targets for decarbonising the fashion industry. A comprehensive, sector-wide roadmap must include all stakeholders across the value chain, whereas existing roadmaps tend to focus on larger organisations. Inclusion of the SME sector is vital for any climate ambition, as they play a dominant role in the fashion industry.

The BFC intends to leverage its position to bring together the industry to support alignment and help lead the UK fashion industry towards contributing to the UK's NDCs by 2035 and achieving net zero emissions by 2050. ■



Image credit: YAKU. Courtesy of BFC



Image credit: Femponiq

Image credit:
Margaret Howell

Image credit: Gandys

Collective change is crucial

Over the past few years, there has been growing recognition of the fashion industry's profound impact on both people and the planet, with a rise in voluntary commitments and targets serving as a testament to this shift. However, current efforts are not enough.

As we approach 2030, the fashion industry needs to quickly intensify its actions if we want to avoid the most severe consequences of climate change.

Systemic change is required to accelerate and scale decarbonisation efforts across the fashion industry. The BFC is uniquely placed, alongside government, to help drive the industry-wide transformation needed to reach net zero emissions and align the industry with a 1.5°C pathway.

All stakeholders across the fashion value chain have a role to play in reducing our overall emissions – and the importance of collective power should not be underestimated. The LCT programme has enabled 50 London-based SMEs to take the first steps in formally addressing and

incorporating climate into their businesses – equipping them with the tools and expertise needed to measure their emissions and develop a decarbonisation roadmap up to 2030. The key next step for these businesses will be taking ownership of their decarbonisation roadmaps and facilitating an annual review to ensure they are tracking towards their targets year-on-year.

Through this programme, several key themes and challenges have been raised when it comes to decarbonisation for SMEs. The BFC intends to leverage its position within the industry to address some of the challenges that have emerged from the LCT programme and enable SMEs to reach their full emissions reduction potential, with the aim of making more of a contribution towards wider UK climate targets.

More broadly, this report seeks to highlight the collective power of the SME community within the UK fashion industry, as well as the critical role SMEs play in contributing to the country's climate targets. The LCT

programme has proudly supported 50 London-based SMEs in measuring their emissions and developing a decarbonisation roadmap to 2050. However, more support is needed to scale and expand programmes like this to reach the additional SMEs that make up 99.8% of the UK's business community.

With this further support, the SMEs that dominate the UK fashion industry can harness their collective action to decarbonise along their value chains and make meaningful contributions towards the UK's broader climate targets.

Real change can only happen through a relentless, concerted effort across fashion's vast ecosystem – with everyone playing a role in driving positive change. ■

1. [Earth.Org \(2025\): The Environmental Impact of Fast Fashion, Explained](#)
2. [Paris Agreement to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change \(2015\)](#)
3. [McKinsey \(2020\): Fashion on Climate](#)
4. [UNFCCC & CDP](#)
5. [Fashion United \(2021\)](#)
6. [Department for Business & Trade \(2024\): Business population estimates for the UK and regions 2024: statistical release](#)
7. [GHG Protocol](#)
8. [British Fashion Council's Institute of Positive Fashion \(2021\)](#)
9. [UN Environmental Programme](#)
10. [Department for Energy Security & Net Zero \(2025\): United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland's 2035 Nationally Determined Contribution](#)
11. [British Fashion Council & Oxford Economics \(2022\): The Economic Impact of the UK Fashion Industry in 2021](#)
12. [Global Fashion Agenda, Fashion on Climate](#)
13. [Greenhouse Gas Protocol: A Corporate Accounting and Reporting Standard](#)
14. [UNEP \(2020\) Sustainability and Circularity in the Textile Value Chain: Global Stocktaking](#)
15. [Institute of Positive Fashion \(2025\)](#)
16. [UK Government: Green Claims Code](#)
17. [WRAP \(2024\)](#)
18. [Competition & Markets Authority](#)
19. [WEFT \(2024\)](#)
20. [British Fashion Council](#)
21. [British Retail Consortium: Climate Action Roadmap](#)
22. [Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action](#)
23. [The Fashion Pact](#)

References





BRITISH
FASHION
COUNCIL



SUPPORTED BY
MAYOR OF LONDON

www.instituteofpositivefashion.com