

Programme Re-curriculation: An Experience at the University of Johannesburg

Kem Ramdass, D.Phil: Engineering Management

Senior Lecturer: Business and Management

Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture

University of Johannesburg

Johannesburg, South Africa

Abstract

The clothing industry globally has undergone rapid change within the past few decades. The production of fashion has evolved into a multi faceted industry that is not only concerned with the manufacture of clothing but also the systems of production, distribution, diffusion, reception, adoption and consumption which drive the fashion industry. Within the last 10 years there has been a notable drop in applications for this programme even though there is a high employability rate with demand exceeding supply. A number of reasons for this trend have been identified. The South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (Sactwu) estimates 13400 jobs were lost in the sector in the first 11 months of 2009. Sactwu researcher Etienne Vlok says that in the mid-2000s, the industry was losing about 20000 jobs a year, but in the past three years this has dropped to between 12000 to 14000 jobs a year (Mathews, 2010). This trend is also evident in both the United States of America as well as the United Kingdom as Higher Education Institutions experienced difficulties in recruiting students for textile and clothing manufacturing programmes due to a negative public perception of the industry. This has brought with it the need to revise the Clothing Management programme in order to keep abreast with the changes in the industry and to align the programme to meet the regional demand for graduates. This paper explores the expectations of key industry, education and training constituencies in South Africa, and particularly in Gauteng. Empirical data was gathered through a series of focus group and individual interviews and analysed in terms of the idyllic relationship between education and the workplace. In the development of these insights, the study aims to inform the process of re-curriculation in higher education in South Africa (Cooper and Schindler, 2006).

Introduction

The South African education policy has been influenced by globalization of the economy since 1994. Skills development has become a national concern, and South African higher education institutions need to be responsive to the needs and expectations of the industry, of the state, of society they serve in view of social upliftment and economic prosperity. The priority for the SA government is the development of an educated workforce that is able to create jobs and add value to nation building (Venter, 2003).

Changes in the global economy have enabled the requirement for flexibility, adaptability and innovation that have led to new education and training demands in order to remain competitive.

The most significant demand is the proposed need for a highly skilled labour force that has the ability to employ new knowledge, technologies, business improvement methodologies and ultimately add value to existing goods and services. Essentially, these skills and capabilities are developed through a broad general higher education system.

The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) (1996), recommends a set of parameters for developing national higher education policy by defining a three-fold role for institutions:

- Human resource development: the development of human potential through lifelong learning that would contribute to the social, economic, cultural, and intellectual life of a rapidly changing society;
- High-level skills training: the training and development of person power that would strengthen the country's enterprises, services and infrastructure. This requires professionals who are socially responsible and conscious of their role in contributing to the national development effort and social transformation; and
- Production, acquisition and application of new knowledge: Economic growth and competitiveness is reliant on the application of technological business improvement and innovation which is driven by research.

Methodology

This paper explores the expectations of key industry, education and training constituencies in South Africa, and particularly in Gauteng through empirical research. Empirical data was gathered through a series of focus group and individual interviews and analysed in terms of the idyllic relationship between education and the workplace. In the development of these insights, the study aims to inform the process of re-curriculation in higher education in South Africa.

Background

The Gauteng region is one of the main retail centres in South Africa with the bulk of clothing manufacture taking place in KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape. The employment opportunities for the Clothing Management graduates in Johannesburg reflect the retail focus of the Gauteng region. The Department of Fashion Design is situated within the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, one of the nine faculties which constitute the University of Johannesburg. The University of Johannesburg (UJ) is one of six comprehensive universities in South Africa with the vision to be a premier, embracing African city university, offering a mix of vocational and academic programmes that advances freedom, democracy, equality and human dignity as high ideals of humanity through distinguished scholarship, excellence in teaching, reputable research and innovation, and through putting intellectual capital to work.

The proposed Diploma in Fashion Production is a vocational programme that has been developed in consultation with industry, alumni, current students and colleagues from other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) offering clothing related qualifications. It has been designed to contribute to the vision and Programme Qualification Mix (PQM) of the University of Johannesburg as well as to the knowledge economy of South Africa which is currently experiencing a severe shortage of intermediate, high and scarce skills. It is the intention of the programme to prepare “work-ready” graduates for a number of career opportunities within the supply chain of specified fashion products.

The Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture has set strategic goals that support the institutional goals and drive departmental strategic planning. Growth areas that have been identified are to increase student numbers, improve throughput rate, continued staff development, increased research output, programme and curriculum development and differentiation between competitors. The Department of Fashion Design is committed to contributing towards the universities vision, mission and values by continuing to offer programmes that promote teaching and learning excellence that are informed by institutional policies as required by both the students and the clothing industry within the Gauteng region. Integral to the development of UJ, as a reputable brand, is ongoing revision and development of curricula that is relevant, current and improves the supply base of employable candidates to industry.

Cagle (2008) identifies a *successful strategy*, in *retaining* programme offerings in clothing and textiles at Higher Education Institutions in the US, has been to shift:

...the focus of the programmes from traditional clothing and textile manufacturing technology related programmes to programmes focusing on marketing, design and consumer-focused applications. Some HEIs have even moved away from the term “apparel” and have changed the programme names to include the word “fashion” in an attempt to appeal to young adults entering higher education (Cagle as cited by Bester 2009:5)

The purpose and characteristics of a diploma as stipulated in new qualifications framework is to develop graduates who can demonstrate focussed knowledge and skills in a particular field. The depth and specialisation of knowledge in addition to practical skills and experience gained in the workplace ensure that students enter the career path of their choice and are able to apply their learning from the outset. As a university offering a comprehensive programme qualification mix it is essential that high quality programmes are offered that develop and protect diverse access opportunities to candidates wishing to enroll at UJ as their preferred choice. The Fashion Production diploma aims at developing academic distinction from competing institutions offering clothing related qualifications by contributing to skills development that are responsive to industry needs, as well as providing a greater opportunity for applied research that will contribute to the development of intellectual capital.

Results and Discussion

The public generally perceive a career in clothing management as being “fashion design” and are not aware of the opportunities that are available within the business and production of fashion. Feedback from colleagues within faculty, prospective and current students, reflects that there is confusion as to what constitutes a career in Clothing Management and often perceive it ‘as managing one’s wardrobe’. The name Clothing Management is also somewhat problematic as it implies that students exiting the programme will be entitled to a management position. This is a misconception as management positions are earned by consistent performance within company structures demonstrating a visionary ability to lead a profitable organisation and motivate the workforce. Development of management principles and skills remain critical components within the programme however, they are focused on the specific application of the production of fashion.

The Clothing, Textile, Footwear and Leather Sector Education Training Authority (CTFL SETA) has provided bursaries to prospective candidates in Higher Education Institutions in an attempt to incentivise the recruitment of candidates to the textile and clothing manufacturing programmes. However, this has had little impact on the retention of skills within these sectors. The *Learnership Tracer Study* conducted by the CTFL SETA in 2008, found that bursary holders leave the manufacturing environment in favour of the retail sector which offer better working conditions, a stimulating working environment and higher salaries. Our manufacturing sector is perceived as unattractive and not, as in other countries, abreast with developments in technology.

This is a clear indication that the focus in demand is shifting with regards to attracting candidates wishing to pursue a career in fashion. It is of vital importance that these trends are not ignored, however diploma programmes in clothing need to maintain and develop the critical skills that are required by both the retail and manufacturing sectors and not abandon them in order to contribute to the knowledge economy of South Africa.

In 2006 a critical review on all programmes offered within the University of Johannesburg was conducted in order to establish the comprehensive character of the Programme Qualification Mix (PQM) of the institution. The findings and recommendations from this process informed the re-curriculum process of the Clothing Management programme and ultimately the development of the proposed Diploma in Fashion Production in consultation with the following stakeholders.

1. Advisory Board

Meetings are held on a continuing basis with the industry advisory committee comprising of member from both the retail and manufacturing sectors within the clothing industry. The members are considered to be experts in their fields and participate in the experiential training component as well as provide employment opportunities for graduates.

2. Student participation

Focus group interviews are ongoing with students at all levels of study which provides insight into the ‘student experience’ within the department and their career aspirations.

3. Fashion retail in Gauteng

Meetings are held at the head office of EDCON, one of the biggest clothing and hard-line retailers in South Africa, on an annual basis whereby they inform and advise the department on critical curriculum development issues that reflect both the retail and manufacturing sectors requirements.

4. SETA participation

The department of Fashion Design participates in Clothing, Textile, Footwear and Leather Sector Education Training Authority (CTFL SETA) skills planning and activities as required.

5. Other Higher Education Institutions

Open communication is engaged in with colleagues’ from Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) and Durban Institute of Technology (DIT), who are the only other institutions, offering the current National Diploma in Clothing Management.

All recommendations have been carefully considered by the departmental strategic planning committee during scheduled meetings and workshops throughout 2008 and 2009. The proposed programme design has the potential to address the diverse technical skills requirements by the clothing industry as well as add value to applied research that can play a role in informing faculty, industry and the public of important issues that can contribute to intellectual capital and economic development of South Africa within the field of the production of fashion.

National requirements

The draft *National Plan for Higher Education* from 2001 reiterated that the challenges facing Higher Education in South Africa remain the same as those outlined in the *Education White Paper 3 – A Programme for the Transformation of the Higher Education System* (DoE: July 1997) and these include the need for:

...high-level skills training: the training and provision of person power to strengthen this country's enterprises, services and infrastructure. This requires the development of professionals and knowledge workers with globally equivalent skills, but who are socially responsible and conscious of their role in contributing to the national development effort and social transformation...Production, acquisition and application of new knowledge: national growth and competitiveness is dependent on continuous technological improvement and innovation, driven by well-organised, vibrant research and development system which integrates the research and training capacity of higher education with the needs of industry and of social reconstruction. (White Paper: 1.12)

Industry needs

At the CTFL SETA's annual strategic planning workshop held in 2009, *The Textile and Clothing Skills Development Plan: Strategic opportunities for the sector* (CTFL SETA 2009: 13) was presented which identifies the following professional skills to be delivered by Higher Education Institutions with specific reference to the re-curriculation of the current Diploma Clothing Management, or a derogative thereof, as including:

- Product development skills including garment design, Computer Aided Design (CAD)/Computer Aided Manufacturing (CAM), pattern-making, style, colour, size applications and fabric application, with attention given to fabric technology, production management and supply chain arrangements.
- Develop and supply the right product-buying skills to retailers. The diploma should focus, in order of priority and time allocated in the programmes, on supply chain arrangement, fabric technology, product development (design) and production management.

Other important general management skills as identified by the CTFL SETA (2009:17) that are lacking include:

- Motivational skills.
- Marketing skills, specifically understanding customer and end consumer needs in the market in which the company operates (South African consumer), development and use of market knowledge systems, market segmentation and differentiation.
- Product costing: local manufacturing entities have to negotiate along the supply chain to first deliver to customers the product they require and at the price they are willing to pay.
- Branding – building a brand that is linked to low cost, quality, flexible and reliable delivery.
- Establish skills capability to improve efficiency to supply quick response products.

In meetings held in 2007, 2008 and 2009 with EDCON, a prominent Gauteng retail industry supporter and employer of clothing management graduates from the University of Johannesburg, the following critical areas that will improve the supply base of employable candidates have been identified as:

- Strengthening the product development and skills content of the programme as these are core competencies required by the industry with specific reference to: conceptualisation and transformation of two dimensional forms into three dimensional products; body shapes and sizing; the processes involved in developing fibres to fabrics; fabric sourcing; quality management systems; construction problem solving and innovative global communication skills.
- Developing the knowledge base of production and manufacturing processes including exposure to manufacturing environments within the clothing industry
- Developing depth by delivering the programme using an integrated process approach and emphasising diversity of product range
- Developing life skills and corporate communication skills components, both written and spoken
- Incorporating components that provide exposure to the industry at all levels of study

Student needs

A situation analysis was conducted on the current Clothing Management programme during 2009 in collaboration with third year students in order to establish the future of the program from a student perspective. It was required of the students to analyse the situation in which the Clothing Management programme exists with regards to competitors, product (curriculum content) and service delivery in order to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and develop recommendations based on the findings. The scope of this study included conducting interviews with students at all levels of study and tracing alumni in order to identify employment opportunities and preferences. The results from this study are summarized below:

- It was felt that the branding profile of UJ is well received and gaining strength as a preferred choice of education with regards to the 'student experience' which is supported by FADA's location, facilities, staff experience and qualifications. The need to maintain a focus on technology and computer applications was emphasised.
- Few people know about the Clothing Management programme and often confuse it with fashion design however, once explained, it generates a lot of interest. It was also noted that a name change to include the word 'fashion' would be beneficial in raising the scope and profile of this programme making it more attractive to potential candidates.
- The current industry linkages were considered as extremely important for employment opportunities however it was expressed that exposure to industry at all levels of study would be highly beneficial to the programme and skills development.
- Programme content should place more emphasis on a diverse product range, principles of the design process, textile and quality applications, branding and brand management, retail and marketing and entrepreneurial studies.
- Student employment preferences are within the retail sector as technologists, merchandisers, buyers or those who choose to start their own businesses. They have identified the Clothing Management as a programme that will equip them with production and business skills that are specifically applied to the clothing industry.

Recommendations and Conclusion

There are currently only three institutions in South Africa offering the Diploma Clothing Management. It must be highlighted at this point that the University of Johannesburg is the only institution that offers a Masters of Technology in Clothing Management within its Programme Qualification Mix. The undergraduate strength of this programme is the technical skills development and production components. The proposed Diploma: Fashion Production intends to maintain and develop these components in compliance with industry needs as well as strengthen the technical design and quality, branding, retail and marketing applications, consumer requirements, supply chain arrangements, fabric technology and applications. This will prepare students for diverse career opportunities within the clothing sector ranging from technologists, technical designers, production operations, retail and buying and entrepreneurship.

If this programme is accepted at the Department of Education it is envisaged that an advanced diploma in Fashion Production will be applied for and ultimately a post graduate diploma in Fashion Production will be offered. It is of critical importance that the BTech and MTech Clothing Management programmes be maintained throughout the phasing out period and in compliance to the HEQF requirements. The MTech Clothing Management is the only masters' programme within this field in South Africa. Both the mission of the UJ and the *Education White Paper 3 – A Programme for the Transformation of the Higher Education System* (DoE: July 1997) emphasise the importance of research that supports academic, vocational and technological advancement. It is envisaged that the UJ is in a unique position to support research and development within the clothing industry via the BTech and MTech programmes in Clothing Management. Until such time that the BTech and MTech qualifications are discontinued as per the HEQF. This is an opportunity to contribute towards the development of intellectual capital and the knowledge economy of South Africa. The advanced diploma in Fashion Production will articulate into the BTech and MTech Clothing Management programmes in order to advance research within the area of clothing manufacture and production.

Programme structure

- Minimum duration: Three years formal instruction with a total of 360 credits
- The programme is offered full-time only.

- All modules are compulsory.
- Number of modules per year of study:
 - i) First year: 5
 - ii) Second year: 5
 - iii) Third year: 3

The proposed Diploma in Fashion Production will aim at contributing to the knowledge economy of South Africa by focusing on developing scarce skills as identified by the industry, and will be delivered in integrated modules focusing on applied processes that will develop conceptual and contextual knowledge.

The student obtaining this qualification will demonstrate competency in analyzing and applying the principles of the fashion system from production through to consumption in order to meet market demands.

In order to achieve this purpose the programme is structured around the following outcomes:

- Develop and apply a production strategy that reflects market research, product development, branding, marketing, merchandising and distribution of a product range that meets the needs of an identified fashion target market.
- Demonstrate the ability to apply advanced textile application, manual skills and computer technology (CAD/CAM) to the manufacturing processes of a diverse range of clothing products.
- Develop technical packages that analyse, solve and communicate problems related to technical product development and quality improvement of fashion products.
- Apply business, personnel and operations management principles to enhance quality, productivity and profitability related to clothing manufacturing.
- Conduct basic research in a selected specialised area of the clothing supply chain: technical product development; textile technology and application; production and quality systems; marketing and branding; material and product sourcing; adoption and consumption of fashion items

Students are promoted to the second or third year of study if they have passed all the prescribed modules of the preceding year.

Table 1: Proposed modules per year

Module	Prerequisite
First Year	
Technical Product Development I	None
Fashion Business Management I	None
Fashion and Textile Technology I	None
Applied Quality and Operations I	None
Fashion Theory I	None
Second Year	
Technical Product Development II	Technical Product Development I
Fashion Business Management II	Fashion Business Management I
Fashion and Textile Technology II	Fashion and Textile Technology I
Applied Quality and Operations II	Applied Quality and Operations I
Fashion Theory II	Fashion Theory I
Third Year	
Fashion and Textile Technology III	Fashion and Textile Technology II
Applied Quality and Operations III	Applied Quality and Operations II
Fashion Theory III	Fashion Theory II

Higher education institutions need to ensure that their faculties are familiar with sound curriculum practice. The underlying principles of constructive curriculum alignment, globalization, and quality assurance need to be integrated into their programmes. At this stage, the programme has been approved by the university, and the faculty is currently awaiting approval from the Department of Education.

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