

How will Brexit impact the UK fashion industry?

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Many businesses across the UK are going to be affected by Brexit, requiring them to adapt to new legislations and procedures. Not only is this time-consuming, but it can also be financially demanding, and even detrimental to some businesses. For the UK fashion industry, Brexit was not welcome, with [figures stating](#) that 90% of designers telling the British Fashion Council that they were going to vote to remain in the EU. The UK imports almost £10 billion worth of clothes and footwear from the EU each year, and there are over 10,000 European staff members working in the British fashion industry.



According to [BBC News](#), over 400 figures from the UK fashion industry have expressed their concern to the prime minister in an open letter with their signatures, discussing how Brexit and travel restrictions could cause great damage to their businesses. Popular celebrities in the industry such as Twiggy and Katharine Hamnet have said some businesses have even begun relocating their offices to the EU to avoid the post-Brexit restrictions. Hamnet has even released anti-Brexit T-Shirts, with slogans reading 'FASHION HATES BREXIT' and 'CANCEL BREXIT'.



Katharine Hamnet in one of her Brexit T-Shirts

According to the letter, those in the fashion industry feel that they have been overlooked throughout the whole Brexit deal, even though 'the fashion industry contributes "more to UK GDP than fishing, music, film and motor industries combined".' They go on to discuss the compensation package that was offered to the fishing industry, stating that 'Fishing contributes as much to the UK economy as East London does from the fashion and textile industry, employing the same workforce as just one of the many high street retailers currently facing liquidation'. [Fishing allegedly makes £1.4 billion for the UK economy, whereas the fashion industry contributes almost £30 billion.](#)

Not only does Brexit have an impact on fashion retailers themselves, but also for models who rely on the easy travel between the UK and the EU, often at very short notice, for work. Yasmin LeBon, an English fashion model, said that the nature of the industry requires travelling to and from different countries at a very short notice, stating she would sometimes 'get a call, make a decision and be at the airport in the next two hours.' With travel restrictions now in place, models may find it much more difficult to get work, and businesses may find it very difficult to find models that they can access, which fit their image and requirements.

Designer Katharine Hammett spoke out about the VAT charges on goods being shipped into the EU, and other difficulties now being put into place post-Brexit. Without changes being made, Hammett feels that 'British brands will die'. Samantha Cameron, wife of former prime minister David Cameron, has said that she fears for her fashion businesses, finding it difficult to trade with the EU post-Brexit. [Figures show](#) that to trade clothing and footwear with the EU, it could cost businesses around £1 billion more yearly.

Impacts can also be seen in the prices of clothing items, and we can expect to see a rise in pricing throughout fashion retailers. Due to the new restrictions, the industry will also face a shortage in staff and an 'inflationary impact' on staff wages. José Neves, founder of Farfetch (an online platform selling luxury designer items), spoke at the Web Summit in Lisbon, saying that in his London office, there are over 25 different nationalities employed, and if Brexit affected this, it would cause a major loss for his company. Nick Vinson also stated that many great 'British' designers are actually European, such as Peter Pilatto being Austrian-Italian, and Simone Rocha being Irish.

The industry is also worried about new potential talent not coming to UK universities from the EU to study. However, The London College of Fashion has stated they have not yet seen a drop in European students applying to their school to study, which is a positive. Frances Corner, the head, stated a more positive message on Brexit, stating 'Brexit gives us an opportunity to ask what sort of fashionable future we want. Ideas and thoughts can't be tied down to national boundaries, they will always break through'. She will, however, miss funding from the EU and the Erasmus scheme, which will now be replaced by the Turing Scheme.

The fashion industry is used to planning everything in advance, so Brexit has been very difficult to maneuver through, with such unexpected issues arising. We can expect to see it begin to settle as Brexit deals and rules are set in place, and the fashion industry can then adapt to a new way of working.