POSITIVE FASHION
INSTITUTE OF POSITIVE FASHION

BRITISH FASHION COUNCIL

The Low Carbon Transition Guide

FOR SME FASHION BUSINESSES

JUNE 2026

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A letter from the British Fashion Council

This is not another piece of commentary. It is a practical toolkit, built to help industry act.

Fashion does not lack ambition on climate. It lacks the infrastructure to deliver it, particularly for the small and medium sized businesses that make up the majority of the fashion industry. Too often, designers are expected to navigate complex, technical and resource intensive challenges without the tools, time or support required.

This guide is a response to that gap.

It builds on the Low Carbon Transition Programme, through which we have supported 75 London-based small and medium sized enterprise (SME) fashion businesses to measure their emissions and develop credible plans to reduce them. What this work has made clear is that when support is provided, action follows.

In line with the British Fashion Council's (BFC) mission to widen access, this guide takes those learnings beyond the programme itself. It is designed for the wider community of designers who are ready to act.

The industry does not need more theory. It needs tools, clarity and momentum.

This is a step towards that.

The UK has set ambitious net zero targets, yet there remains a clear gap between ambition and delivery when it comes to supporting the businesses expected to drive that change.

Small and medium sized enterprises sit at the heart of this challenge. They represent the vast majority of the UK fashion industry and hold significant collective power to reduce emissions. Yet they are being asked to respond to increasing regulatory and reporting demands without the infrastructure, funding or guidance required to do so effectively. Climate action cannot be delivered at scale without meaningful and sustained support.

Against this backdrop, the impact of the Low Carbon Transition Programme is significant. Through this initiative, the BFC has supported seventy five London based fashion SMEs to measure their Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions and develop tailored decarbonisation roadmaps to 2030. These businesses are now collectively planning meaningful emissions reductions, with an average reduction of around twenty five percent by 2030.

This is not a theoretical exercise. It is practical, measurable progress delivered at pace, and importantly, delivered in a way that removes cost as a barrier to participation. It demonstrates what can be achieved when the right tools, expertise and support are put in place, and underscores the leadership role the BFC can play in enabling industry wide change.

This guide carries those learnings forward. It is designed to simplify complexity, enable action and build confidence across the sector. But it also makes a broader point. If we are serious about meeting national and global climate targets, programmes like this must be scaled, sustained and supported.

Designers are ready to act. They now need the backing to do so.

Laura Weir
Chief Executive, British Fashion Council

Acknowledgements

Thank You

All those who participated in this programme:

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Peachy Den
Raishma
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Really Wild Clothing
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- This publication has been prepared by the BFC Institute of Positive Fashion's (IPF) LCT team, Emer Quinn and Shailja Dubé.

All imagery featured in this report is sourced directly from the brands that have actively participated in the programme.

Image credit: Gandys

You don't need a sustainability team or a big budget to take climate action.

Cover image credit: Maria Grachvogel
Image credit (right): Bocan Couture

This guide gives you practical steps to reduce your emissions, starting from where you are now.

It's modular

Read the guide in full or jump to the sections most relevant to your business. Start with materials if you're at the design stage. Focus on supplier engagement if you're in production.

It's realistic

We know you're running a business. Every action here is designed to help SMEs achieve their climate goals.

It's connected

This guide complements the IPF LCT Programme's Materials Toolkit (2025)[1] and draws on learnings from 75 businesses in the IPF's Low Carbon Transition Programme.

Where to start: If you haven't measured your emissions yet, begin with Chapter 1. If you already know your hotspots, jump straight to the relevant action chapter.

1 IPF LCT Programme's Materials Toolkit (2025)

How to use this guide

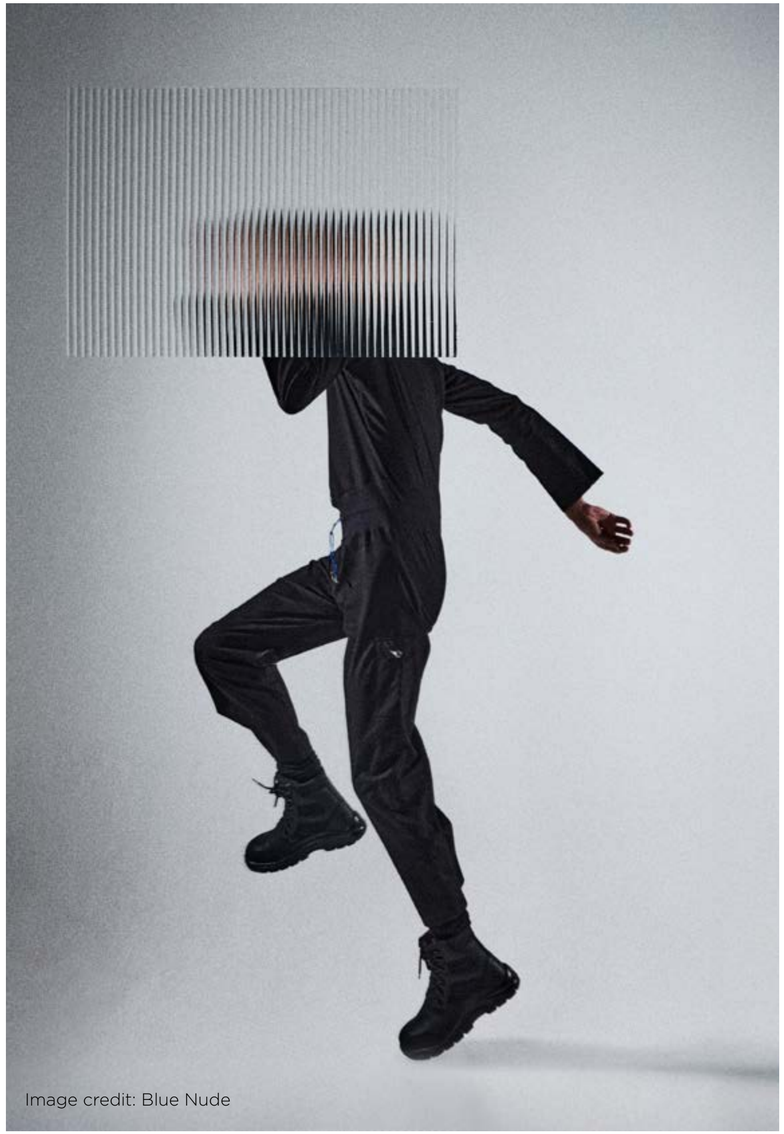


Image credit: Blue Nude

ABOUT THE BRITISH FASHION COUNCIL

The British Fashion Council (BFC), founded in 1983, is a not-for-profit trade association that exists to support, defend and promote British fashion globally, supporting designers and businesses to build creative and commercial resilience.

Through its core platforms, including London Fashion Week and The Fashion Awards, the BFC strengthens the global impact of British fashion, drives cultural relevance, international visibility and industry investment. The Fashion Awards is the world's biggest fashion fundraiser, raising funds for the BFC Foundation.

Established in 2019, the BFC Foundation (Registered Charity Number: 11852152) underpins the UK's creative pipeline, supporting creatives from education through to global business growth via its Prizes and Programmes. Collectively, this work positions British fashion as a driver of the UK's creative economy and a force in global cultural influence.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE OF POSITIVE FASHION

The BFC IPF supports the UK fashion industry to address its environmental and social impact in response to the climate crisis. As a climate think and action tank, the IPF convenes the industry to accelerate responsible business shifts, through its practical programmes of change based in research and published through industry reports and thought leadership. From supporting climate action to BFC Designer Community for responsible growth, to driving wider systemic change for a just and prosperous industry, the IPF's work informs policy change at national and international level. For more information visit: instituteofpositivefashion.com.

ABOUT IPF'S LOW CARBON TRANSITION PROGRAMME

The LCT Programme designed by the BFC IPF and funded by the UK government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), has supported 75 London-based SMEs to measure Scope 1-3 emissions, explore circularity and circular business models opportunities and develop tailored low carbon transition plans to 2030. For more information visit: https://instituteofpositivefashion.com/Our-work/Low-Carbon-Transition-Programme.

Chapter overview

YOU CAN USE THIS NAVIGATION TO FIND WHAT YOU NEED QUICKLY!

1: Introduction to fashion and climate	2: Materials	3: Supplier engagement	4: Transport & logistics	5: Events & marketing	6: Regulation & reporting	7: Circularity & circular business models	8: Communications

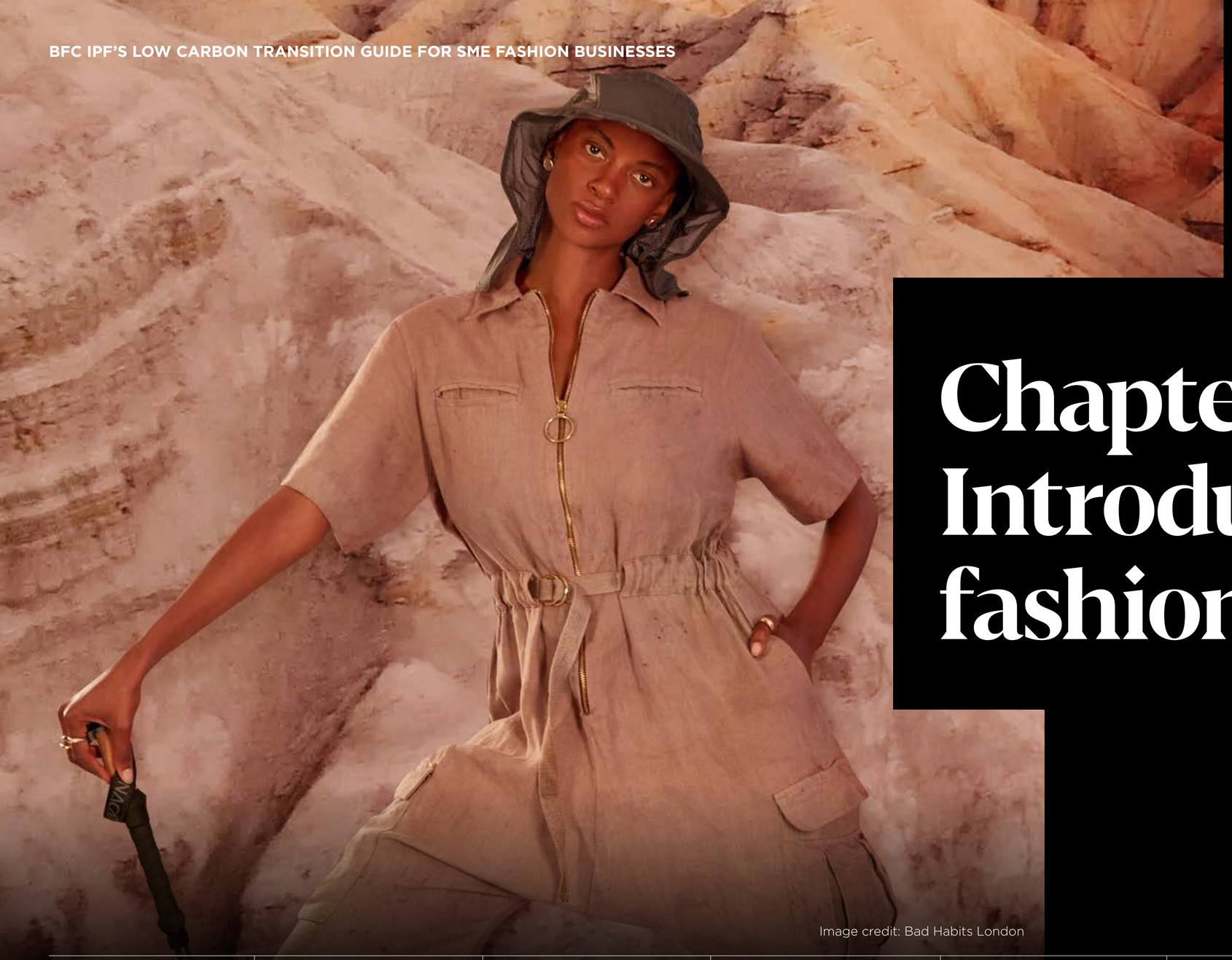


Image credit: Bad Habits London

Chapter 1: Introduction to fashion and climate

1.1 Fashion's impact and contribution to climate change

THE SCALE OF FASHION'S EMISSIONS

Fashion accounts for an estimated 2-8% of global greenhouse gas emissions[2] (GHGs).

Around 70% of the climate impact come from upstream activities, as shown in Fig. 1. Fibre production makes the third highest contribution to climate impacts, largely due to the production of synthetic fibres. The Apparel Impact Institute reported the apparel sector's emissions grew by 7.5% in 2023 from the previous year[3].

WHERE EMISSIONS COME FROM

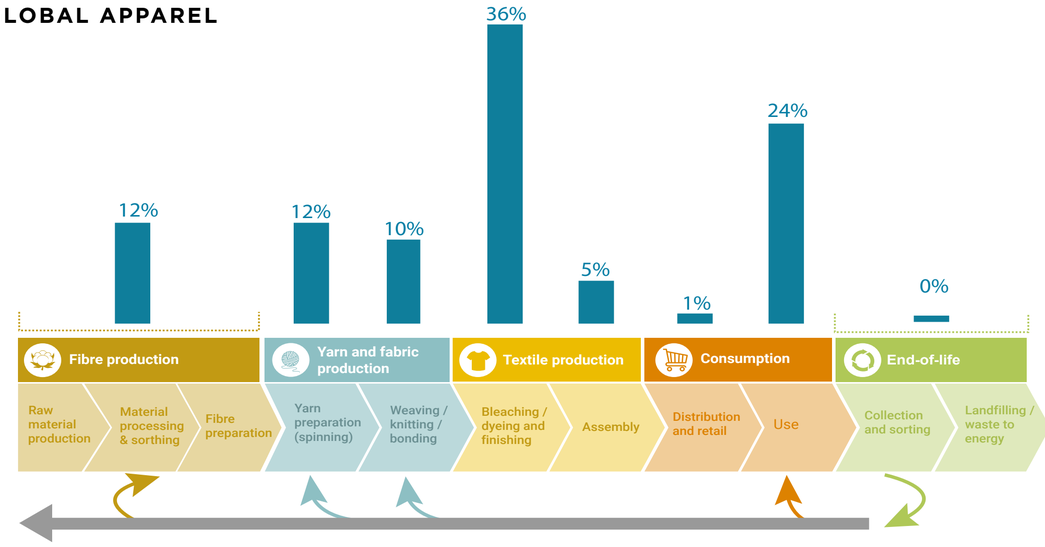
The increase is attributed to growing apparel production and a rising reliance on virgin polyester, driven by brands that prioritise volume and speed-to-market over durability, resulting in higher production rates and more frequent purchasing cycles.

Emissions intensity is different across fashion's main segments. Luxury has lower emissions compared to mass market brands; the latter of which uses more polyester, has the highest production volumes in the industry and its production is more often located in geographical regions where energy sources are fossil-fuel dominant.

Improving materials choices, such as using recycled cotton, which accounts for less than 1% of global cotton production[4], could deliver 41 million tonnes of GHG emissions savings[5]. Such a reduction would exceed the 37 million tonnes of overall growth projected for the global fibre market through to 2030 under a business-as-normal scenario[6].

> **"Fibre production makes the third highest contribution to climate impacts, largely due to the production of synthetic fibres"**

FIG 1. CLIMATE IMPACT ACROSS THE GLOBAL APPAREL VALUE CHAIN



Source: UNEP (2023), Sustainability and Circularity in the Textile Value Chain: A Global Roadmap

2 UNEP (2023) Sustainability and Circularity in the Textile Value Chain
3 Apparel Impact Institute (2025): Taking Stock 2025
4 Textiles Exchange: Materials Market Report 2025
5 UNEP (2023): Sustainability and Circularity in the Textile Value Chain
6 Textiles Exchange: Materials Market Report 2025

1.2 Industry decarbonisation progress

2030 remains a target year for the industry on climate action. Fashion must reduce its emissions in half by 2030 to stay on track with the 1.5C pathways set by the Paris Agreement[7]. Decarbonisation efforts remain too slow, with approximately 63% brands behind on their decarbonisation goals to hit 2030 commitments[8].

> **"1.5C pathways" are plans for limiting global warming to 1.5C by the end of the century to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Following these pathways means cutting carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions very quickly and more drastically than ever before and reaching "net zero" carbon dioxide around 2050."**
>
> Source: IPCC

The industry has made significant progress in the past few years, though Scope 3 emissions remain the biggest challenge. A growing number of brands, particularly large organisations, have set science-based targets and run successful pilots against key decarbonisation levers, for example expanded sustainable cotton, renewable energy and circular business models[9]. However, the UN Fashion Charter's 2025 Tracking Progress Report[10] shows that while foundational transparency is improving – with 80% of signatories now disclosing emissions across Scope 1, 2, and at least some Scope 3 categories – the pace of action is not yet sufficient to meet 2030 targets. Only 35% of signatories report being on track toward their Scope 3 targets, and a widening gap exists between leaders and starters, underscoring the need for both peer learning and cross-value chain collaboration.

Small businesses make up over 99% of the total business population in the UK and account for between 43-53% of business emissions[11]. While reporting GHG emissions is not mandatory for small and medium-sized businesses, an increasing number are being asked to provide emissions-related data from various sources, for example businesses they supply to. This disproportionately impacts small businesses who often lack time, resources and the finance to seek external support.

Image credit: Patrick McDowell

7 UNFCCC – The Paris Agreement
8 McKinsey & Company (2025): What is fast fashion?
9 McKinsey & Company (2020): Fashion on Climate: How the fashion industry can urgently act to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions
10 UNFCCC
11 Federation of Small Businesses (2025): New Growth Report

1.3 The BFC Low Carbon Transition Programme

The LCT Programme, developed by the BFC IPF, has established itself as an important framework for decarbonising a crucial segment of the UK fashion industry. Between 2023-2026, the programme has enabled 75 London-based small and micro enterprise (SME) fashion businesses in measuring their scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions and developing tailored low carbon transition plans to 2030.

The programme also helped businesses identify opportunities to integrate circular economy principles into their operations while strengthening connections with their customer base. With data-driven insights underpinning each plan, participating brands can confidently communicate their climate actions and progress.

Programme achievements:

- 75 low carbon transition plans produced
- 39,490tCO2e - first footprints measured
- Average 25% emissions reduction by 2030 across 75 brands

This guide aims to support LCT participants continue their decarbonisation actions and inspire other designers, or small or medium-sized brands, to begin their own climate action journey.

A more detailed overview of the LCT programme approach and key findings can be found in The 2025 LCT Programme Report[12].

12 The 2025 LCT Programme Report

1.3 Understanding and measuring GHG emissions

QUICK START: If you just want to get started with measurement, skip to "Getting started with measurement" below. Come back to the technical definitions if you need them later.

WHAT ARE GHG EMISSIONS?

GHG are gases that trap heat in the atmosphere. There are five major GHG which are typically represented as "carbon dioxide equivalents" or as a single unit as CO_2^e:

- Carbon dioxide – CO_2
- Methane – CH_4
- Nitrous oxide – N_2O
- Water vapour – H_2O
- Fluorinated gases

UNDERSTANDING SCOPES 1, 2, AND 3

GHG emissions accounting quantifies the total GHG produced directly and indirectly from a business or organisation's activities. Also known as a carbon footprint, it is a business tool that provides information with a basis for understanding and managing climate change impacts.

GHG emissions are classified into three scopes:

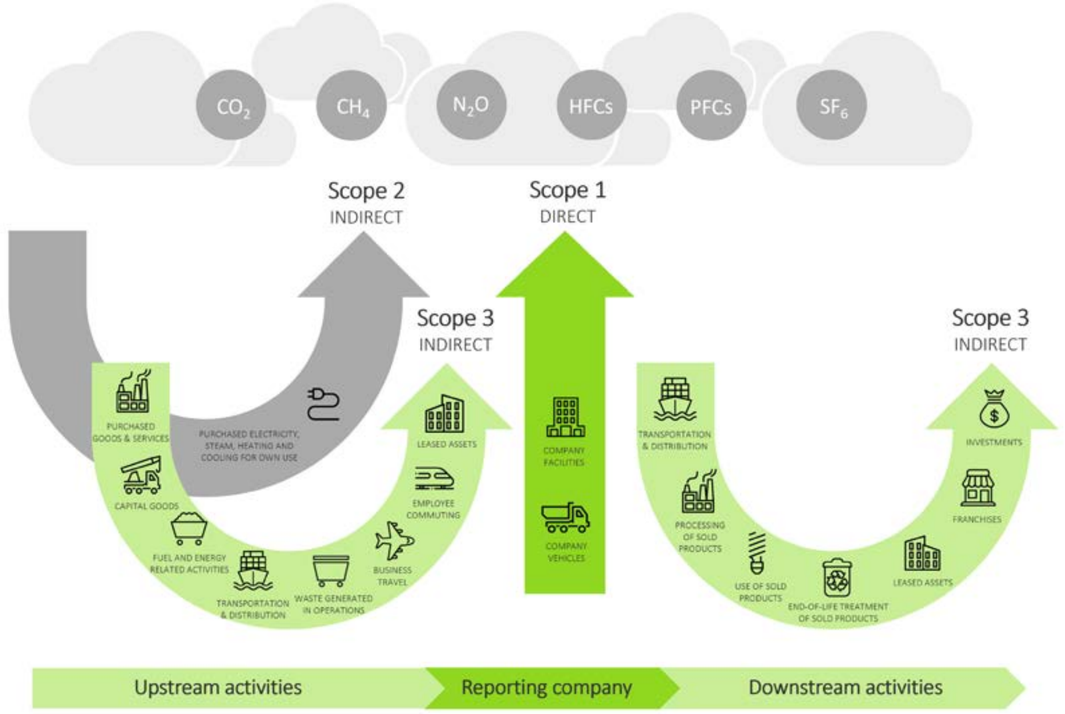
Scope 1: Direct GHG emissions
Direct emissions from sources that are owned or controlled by your company (e.g. company vehicles, on-site fuel combustion).

Scope 2: Indirect emissions from energy
Emissions from the generation of purchased electricity or steam consumed by your company.

Scope 3: Indirect emissions from your value chain
Emissions from activities of your company but occurring from sources not owned or controlled by you. This includes your supply chain, business travel, logistics, and product use.

GHG PROTOCOL CORPORATE VALUE CHAIN (SCOPE 3) ACCOUNTING AND REPORTING STANDARD

Source: Greenhouse Gas Protocol



1.4 Getting started with measurement

You don't need perfect data to start. A practical approach is to follow the money: prioritise your biggest areas of spend for data collection and start collecting data there, as these typically represent your largest emissions sources. Start with whatever data is most accessible in these high-priority areas.

1. Decide your measurement year

Your footprint is measured over a year period (e.g. calendar or financial) so data should cover that year only.

2. Gather data

Think about how easy the data will be for you to collect across your business value chain:

SCOPE 3 – SUPPLY CHAIN [PRIORITY: ESSENTIAL]

- How many units of each garment did you buy in the year?
- How much does each garment weigh?
- What is the fibre composition (e.g. cotton, linen)?
- Which countries are the fibres sourced from?
- What waste was generated in production?
- How much did you spend on IT equipment, digital marketing, food and drink?

Common mistake: Waiting for complete supplier data before starting. Can't get detailed supplier data? Start with spend data as a proxy – it's better to begin with estimates than to delay.

SCOPE 3 – BUSINESS TRAVEL [PRIORITY: HELPFUL]

- How much business travel did you do (e.g. by car, plane, train)?
- How many hotel nights were booked for business purposes?

SCOPE 3 – LOGISTICS [PRIORITY: ESSENTIAL]

- What shipping methods were used and what distances were covered?
- How much warehouse space do you use?
- What volume of customer returns did you handle?

SCOPE 3 – DOWNSTREAM [PRIORITY: IF AVAILABLE]

- Do you collect any items for resale or repair, or use a rental model?

SCOPE 1 & 2 – OPERATIONS [PRIORITY: ESSENTIAL]

- How much energy (electricity, gas) did you use on-site over the year (in kWh)?
- How do you (and other employees) commute to your sites?

This list is not exhaustive. Focus on gathering data that is available and relevant to your specific business operations.

3. Measure

Find a platform to measure your emissions aligned with best practice of the GHG Protocol. These tools help identify your carbon hotspots, prioritise areas for action, and set meaningful reduction targets. There are tools available to support with this, including free sources like SME Climate Hub or paid-for services like Seedling.

Your next steps...

1

THIS WEEK:

Decide on your measurement year (calendar or financial) and identify what data you already have access to

2

THIS MONTH:

Focus on collecting your essential priority data (supply chain, logistics, operations)

3

ONGOING:

Set up systems to track this data continuously rather than collecting it retrospectively each year

LCT Participant Spotlight: Raquel de Carvalho

Raquel de Carvalho is a Brazilian knitwear designer based in London who specialises in reimagining traditional crochet and knitting techniques. Her brand creates contemporary pieces using domestic machine knitting and hand crochet, working with upcycled materials to explore themes of body liberation through lace, transparency, and delicate handmade details.

The challenge
For a small brand, the questions around sustainability can feel paralysing. What should I do? How do I do it? Can I use this material? Is this option better than that one? Raquel's creative process already embraced many of the right ideas, but she didn't have the structure to turn those ideas into action. She knew about carbon emissions in theory, but had never actually tracked them in her studio. She wanted guidance and a clear goal to work towards.

"It's hard to tackle all the issues in the world. You have to choose the battles you want to fight."

For small brands, the challenge is compounded by limited access to tailored support. Most consultancy isn't specific to the realities of running an independent fashion business, which makes it harder to know exactly which direction to take.

What the LCT programme offered
The Low Carbon Transition Programme's one-to-one mentoring was invaluable. The support was specific to Raquel's business rather than generic advice, addressing the practical challenges small brands face.

"Most brands don't have access to this type of tailored support and consultancy, especially smaller businesses. You never know exactly what direction you should be going in to ensure it aligns with your business decisions."

Through the programme, Raquel measured her brand's emissions and overall impact for the first time. Creating a structured plan gave her clarity on what needed to change and in what order.

What changed
Raquel started implementing changes immediately. Working on the brand's autumn/winter 2026 collection, she began applying what she'd learnt about materials, finding options to achieve the same effects of texture and transparency with lower impact.

Supplier engagement was another important area. For small brands, securing agreements with large factories is already challenging. Asking detailed questions about sustainability can feel uncomfortable when you're trying to secure a relationship. But the programme helped Raquel understand the importance of asking necessary questions, giving her the confidence to do so.

The impact
Beyond the practical changes to materials and supplier relationships, the programme has helped build Raquel's confidence. She's been invited to speak on accountability and transparency in the supply chain - opportunities she wouldn't have felt comfortable accepting before.

"I don't think I would be confident speaking about these subjects if I hadn't been on the programme."

The programme helped Raquel feel confident about the things she was already doing right, while giving her a clear picture of what needed to change. Having a plan to follow has made the journey manageable rather than overwhelming.

Advice for other brands
Raquel's advice is straightforward: start with small things. "Once you set your priorities and see your impact, it makes it so much easier to go step-by-step. The plan I made with LCT gave me that clarity I needed."

Looking ahead
As a small, independent brand in London, Raquel acknowledges that "you go in the direction people open doors for you". Looking ahead, she identified that networking and connections would help significantly - being put in touch with brands already on this journey would provide both practical support and solidarity.

RAQUEL DE CARVALHO

Image credit: Raquel de Carvalho

Chapter 2: Materials

YOUR BIGGEST EMISSIONS LEVER

Image credit: Margene

2.1 Choose lower impact materials

START HERE

Materials account for the vast majority of textiles emissions, with choices made at the fibre and fabric stage determining over half of the industry's total carbon footprint[13]. The choices you make at the design stage lock in most of your product's environmental impact. Reducing emissions from this area requires the industry to decarbonise material production, material processing, and garment manufacturing, while minimising production and manufacturing waste.

WHAT TO FOCUS ON

Key impact areas to consider:

- Carbon emissions from fibre production and processing
- Chemical contamination from dyeing and finishing
- Waste generation in manufacturing
- End-of-life recyclability and biodegradability

For comparative assessments of different materials' environmental impacts, the Textile Exchange's Fiber and Materials Matrix provides data-driven insights to help inform material selection decisions.

QUICK START: USE THE IPF LCT MATERIALS TOOLKIT

The BFC IPF published a Materials Toolkit in 2025 to provide clear, practical guidance on selecting and sourcing sustainable materials, drawing on insights from the LCT Programme and broader industry expertise.

It covers five key aspects of sustainable material selection:

1. Understanding circular design
2. Selecting sustainable fibres and materials
3. Sourcing and certification
4. Material usage best practices
5. Taking action in your business

Image credit: Chen Chen Studio

13 Source: Apparel Impact (2025)

2.2 GOING DEEPER: Working with your materials choices

Fashion brands can reduce their environmental impact by choosing fibres and fabrics that are sustainable and responsibly sourced, efficiently processed, and designed for longevity and recyclability.

When selecting materials, consider:

- Switching from virgin to recycled or organic alternatives where possible
- Choosing materials designed for durability and longevity
- Selecting materials that can be recycled or composted at end-of-life
- Reducing material waste in your cutting and production processes
- Working with suppliers who use renewable energy in processing

Common mistake: Waiting for perfect data before taking action. Start with what you know; even switching 20% of your materials to better options makes a difference.

QUICK TIP: Material choices interact with other decisions. A durable material paired with timeless design reduces the need for frequent replacement – lowering overall emissions more than material choice alone. While this guide focuses on decarbonisation, remember that materials have other environmental impacts including water use, chemical pollution, and biodiversity loss.

Image credit: Nikita Karizma

Your next steps...

1

THIS WEEK:

Review the BFC Materials Toolkit to understand your options.

2

THIS MONTH:

Identify your highest-volume materials and research lower-impact alternatives using the Textile Exchange Matrix.

3

ONGOING:

Build material impact into your design decision-making process – make it a standard consideration, not a nice-to-have.

LCT Participant Spotlight: &SONS

&SONS is a British menswear brand that specialises in durable, well-made clothing with a focus on craftsmanship and longevity. Climate has always been part of the brand's ethos, shaping how it makes and ships products. But as Kelly James, Operations & ESG Director, explains, there's a difference between thinking you're doing the right thing and understanding your impact well enough to have a plan.

Measuring emissions revealed something Kelly hadn't expected. As Operations Director, she'd assumed transport and logistics would be the biggest impact. She was wrong.

"Seeing that sourcing of the material is where our biggest carbon impact was, which was a big eye-opener."

This insight clarified where to focus first. Kelly is now working with the garment team on materials changes, ensuring targets are both ambitious and achievable. Rather than imposing targets from above, she asked the team what they felt they could realistically change within a year - getting buy-in by involving people in setting the goals. "I thought it was important that it was led by the team, rather than me implementing targets that the team wouldn't realistically be able to achieve."

&SONS' garment tech and designer teams joined specialist materials calls during the programme and are now implementing changes product-by-product. The focus is on practical shifts, such as moving from standard cotton to Better Cotton Initiative-certified materials. In addition to this, &SONS have also added a range using natural dyes from the earth and food waste. Breaking it down product by product makes the task manageable rather than overwhelming.

The focus now is on keeping on track with the plan and keeping the team aligned on ambitions. Kelly acknowledges that carbon reduction work adds extra effort for colleagues producing garments, so securing internal buy-in is crucial.

"I'm going to be beating the drum, trying to get everyone on board."

Image credit: &SONS

LCT Participant Spotlight: Margene

Margene is a London-based womenswear brand founded by Kewal Gala and Aditi Sahoo, who bring extensive experience from working with large fashion houses. The brand specialises in contemporary tailoring and womenswear, with sustainability considerations built in from the outset.

While Margene already uses deadstock for almost 70% of its collection, the programme helped the brand understand the specific impacts of individual materials. Learning about the environmental footprint of silk and wool in particular prompted the team to explore alternatives and more responsibly sourced options.

"From a materials point of view, we learned how we use materials, how those materials affect the environment, and how we can improve," says Kewal.

Measurement enabled Margene to identify concrete changes it could implement immediately, rather than working on assumptions about what mattered most.

MARGENE

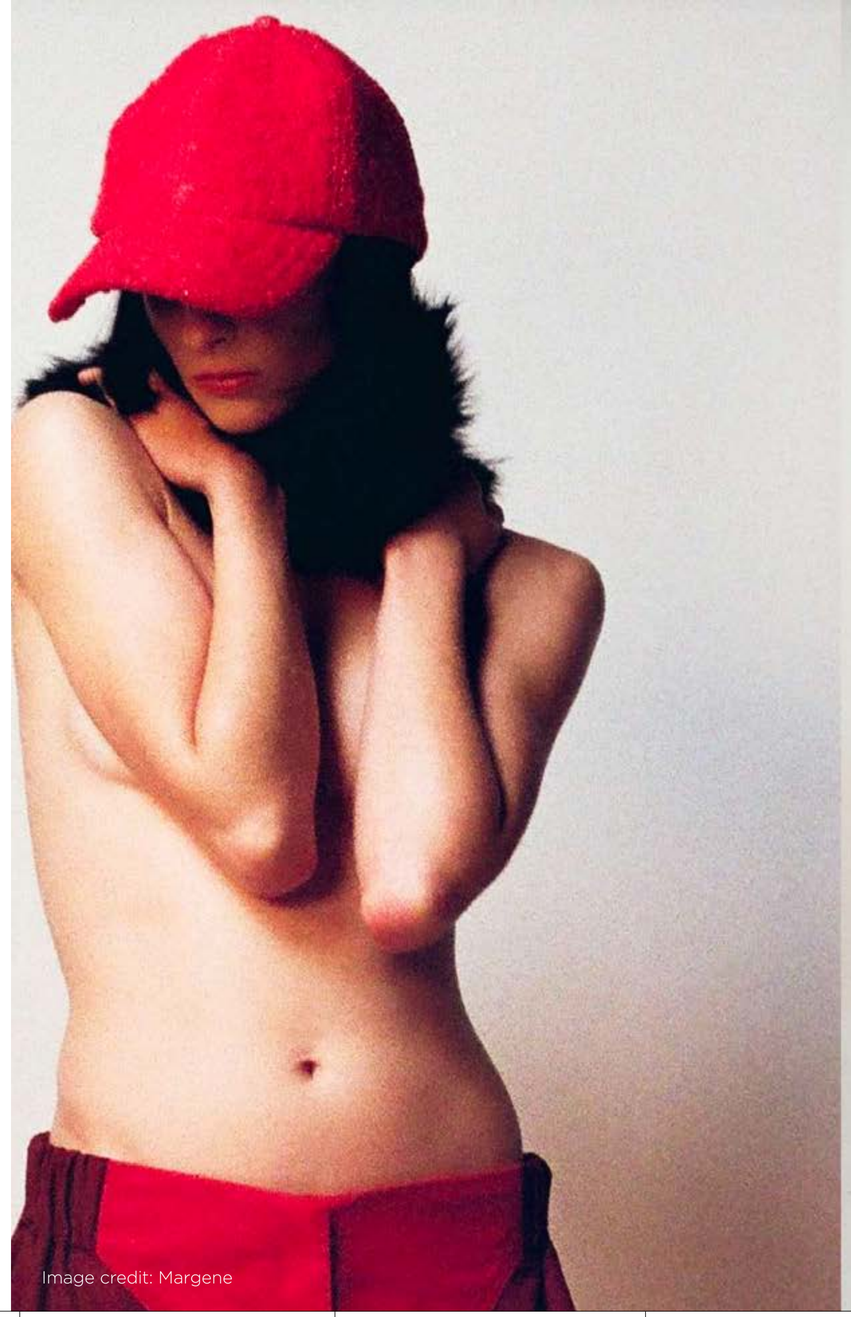


Image credit: Margene

Image credit: Renata Brenha

Chapter 3: Supplier engagement

WORKING WITH YOUR SUPPLY CHAIN

3.1 Focusing on your biggest suppliers

START HERE

Most of your emissions come from your supply chain. Engaging your suppliers is the single biggest action you can take to reduce your climate impact[14].

QUICK START: Focus on your top 3-5 suppliers

Not every supplier relationship needs the same level of engagement. Start where you'll have the most impact.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING WHICH SUPPLIERS TO ENGAGE FIRST:

1. Start with high-spend suppliers

Your highest-spend suppliers represent your biggest emissions hotspots. Focus here first for maximum impact.

2. Focus on suppliers producing high-impact materials

Suppliers working with energy-intensive materials (synthetic fibres, leather, heavy processing) typically have higher emissions.

3. Build on existing relationships where you have influence

Long-standing partnerships where you represent significant business give you more leverage for change.

3.2 GOING DEEPER: Full supplier engagement framework

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR SUPPLIERS

Emissions and carbon footprint	**1.** Do you currently measure your GHG emissions (Scope 1, 2 or 3)? **2.** Have you calculated the carbon footprint of the products or services you supply to us? **3.** Are you aligned with any emissions reporting frameworks? E.g. GHG Protocol, CDP
Decarbonisation and sustainability	**4.** Do you have a decarbonisation plan or any reduction targets in place? **5.** What steps (if any) have you taken to reduce your carbon footprint so far? **6.** Are you exploring lower carbon materials or process improvements?
Energy	**7.** What are your primary energy sources (e.g. electricity, gas, diesel, biomass)? **8.** What percentage of your energy comes from renewable sources, if any? **9.** Have you taken any steps to improve energy efficiency across your operations (e.g. LED lighting, equipment upgrades)? **10.** Would you consider installing renewable energy at your site (e.g. solar panels)?
Collaboration	**11.** Would you consider working with us to gather more data or explore emissions reductions? **12.** Is there anything we can do to support your sustainability efforts?

14 World Economic Forum & BCG (2021): Net-Zero Supply Chains: The Climate Opportunity

3.3 Making supplier engagement effective

- Set out clear expectations by communicating your commitments transparently
- Use surveys or templates to help standardise the process
- Track progress by revisiting the conversation annually and request evidence where possible e.g. emission reports, policies, third-party validations
- Recognise good climate performance e.g. public acknowledgement
- Ensure all employees are engaged in promoting and embedding climate action into supplier relationships

Watch out: Don't just send a survey and wait. Follow up with a phone call – relationships matter more than forms. Not all suppliers will have the answers yet. Focus on transparency and willingness to engage rather than expecting perfect data immediately.[15]

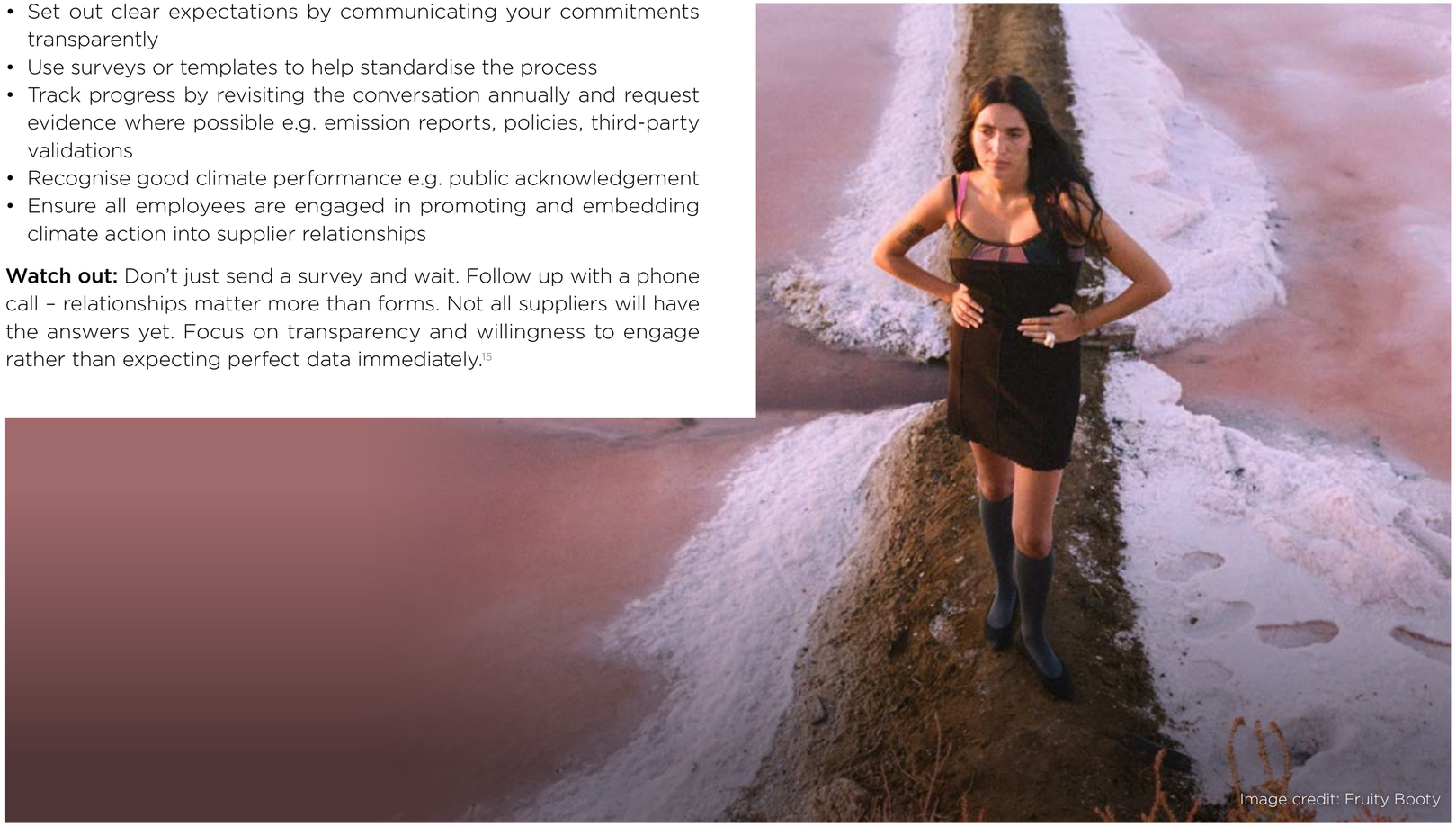


Image credit: Fruity Booty

15 Sources: Exponential Roadmap, Federation of Small Businesses and SME Climate Hub.

Your next steps...

1

THIS WEEK:

Identify your top 5 suppliers by spend.

2

THIS MONTH:

Send them the supplier questions from the table on the previous page, then follow up with a call to discuss.

3

ONGOING:

Review supplier engagement progress annually and recognise suppliers making improvements.

LCT Participant Spotlight: Studio Nicholson

Studio Nicholson is a London-based contemporary fashion brand built on timeless design and quality craftsmanship. The brand employs 45 people across its head office and retail sites. For Annie Gurney, Head of Production, sustainability isn't a new concern – the challenge is turning awareness into meaningful action.

"As a small team, it's sometimes difficult to know where to start. The opportunity LCT gave us was a specific, tailored programme with feedback and advice from experts. It was the push we needed."

Studio Nicholson's production team set itself a formal business KPI: conduct a full sustainability audit of its 2025 supply chain. The brand has already begun reaching out to vendors, asking detailed questions about energy use and carbon footprints to build a comprehensive picture of its manufacturing base.

"The supply chain sustainability audit is one of the key initiatives that we've set in place as a result of the LCT programme."

The programme gave Studio Nicholson something it had been missing: a repeatable methodology for measuring and addressing environmental impacts. It turned scattered sustainability efforts into structured business practice embedded in KPIs, quarterly reviews, and supply chain audits. "It was kick-started by the opportunity to be involved in the programme and having a clear framework and tangible goals to achieve."

For Annie, what distinguished the LCT programme was clear. "I was really impressed with how the programme was structured and organised, as well as the calibre of support we received throughout. We've participated in similar initiatives in the past, but they didn't feel as relevant or focused."

Studio Nicholson's 2025 supply chain audit will be substantial work for a business of its size. The quarterly operational reviews will continue, incrementally improving energy procurement and waste management. The framework will be applied to environmental concerns beyond carbon as the business evolves.

What's changed most fundamentally is how Studio Nicholson works. Sustainability is no longer something the team thinks about in principle, but something embedded in KPIs, meetings, and daily operations.

STUDIO NICHOLSON

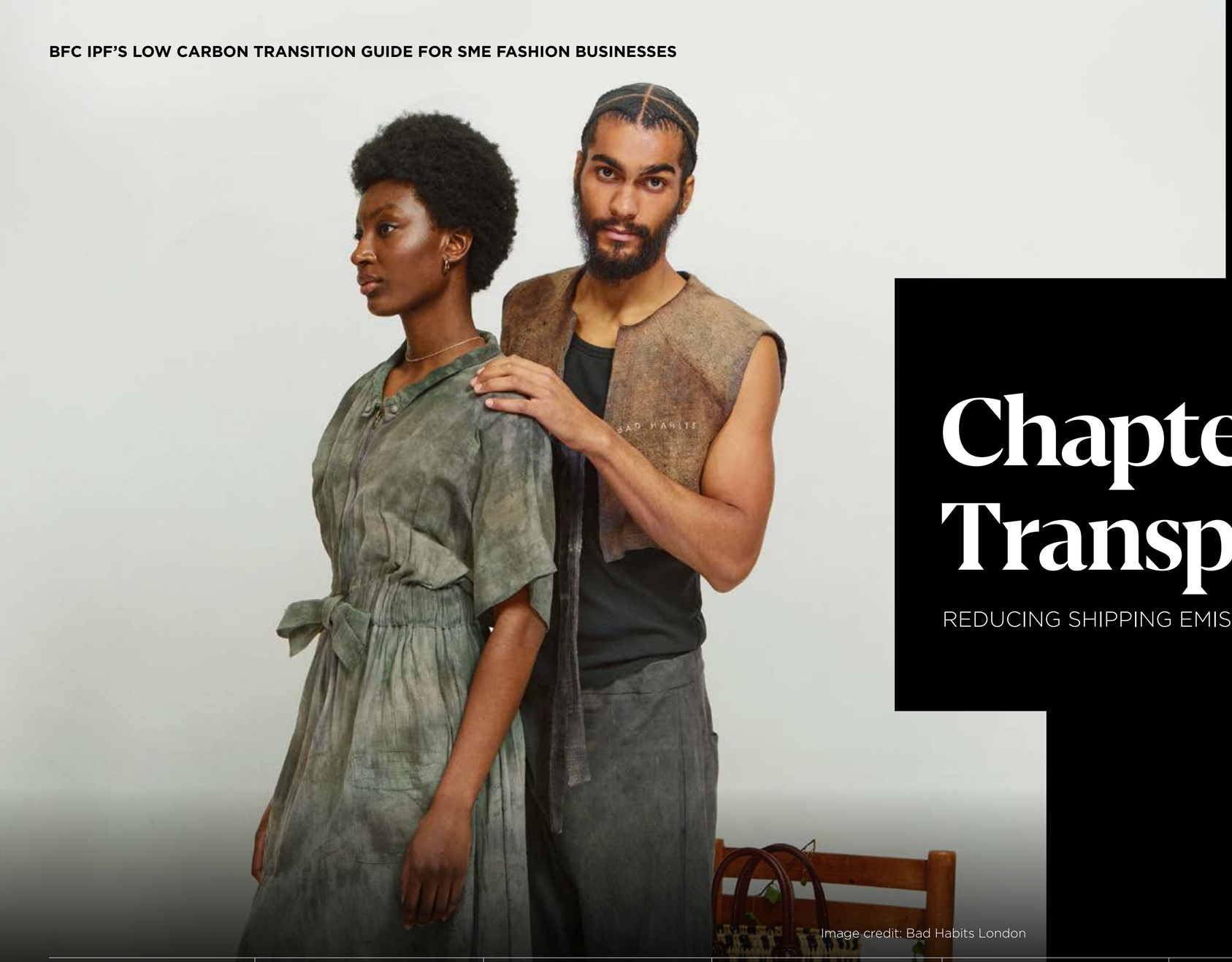


Image credit: Bad Habits London

Chapter 4: Transport & logistics

REDUCING SHIPPING EMISSIONS

4.1 Understand your transport modes

START HERE

Transport emissions vary dramatically by mode. Air freight produces significantly more CO2 (grams/tonne-km) emissions than sea, rail, or road transport. Until greener alternatives become standard, focus on three areas: reducing, replacing, and rethinking.

The transport sector is undergoing rapid change and a growth in new technologies such as e-fuels and electric vehicles will likely accelerate the shift towards more sustainable modes of transport. Until these systemic changes are implemented, there are several things you can consider.

> **"Focus on three areas: reducing, replacing, rethinking."**

QUICK START: REVIEW YOUR LAST 10 SHIPMENTS

Look at what modes you used and whether any could have been consolidated or switched to lower-emission options. This will quickly show you where your biggest opportunities are.

Image credit: Onalaja

4.2 The 3Rs framework for reducing transport emissions[16]

REDUCING TRANSPORT

Reduce unnecessary movements:

- Consolidate shipments to reduce environmental footprint as well as save costs and increase efficiency
- Optimise networks by planning more efficient routes and strategically locating warehouses or production facilities closer to key markets
- Minimise transport-intensive services such as the return of products by helping consumers make the right choices e.g. through sizing calculators or digital avatars

Reduce business travel and commuting emissions:

- Avoid unnecessary flights by defaulting to rail for domestic and short-haul travel, and video calls where in-person meetings aren't essential
- Encourage lower-carbon commuting among employees — cycling schemes, public transport subsidies, and remote working policies all reduce Scope 3 emissions
- Track business travel and commuting as part of your annual emissions measurement — these are often overlooked but can be significant, particularly for businesses with regular international travel

REPLACING FOSSIL FUELS

Shift to lower-emission modes:

- Shift away from air transport where possible
- Shift from road to rail transport where possible
- Shift from road to sea transport where possible (but consider the 'last mile' transportation when goods are transported to and from ports)
- Consider intermodal transportation – using the best of each mode can result in lower overall emissions than relying on one transport mode alone

Replace fossil fuels in transport:

- Where possible, look for electrification, hydrogen and fuel cells, biofuels and electrofuels (e-fuels). SME businesses should look for these options when working with logistics providers

RETHINKING TRANSPORTATION

Review your transportation strategy:

- Use route planning software to reduce unnecessary journeys and maximise vehicle capacity. Even small efficiency gains add up across multiple shipments
- Consider producing goods closer to your key markets to reduce overall transport distances
- Stay informed about emerging green transport solutions available in your region, such as electric vehicle charging infrastructure or alternative fuel options
- Partner with other businesses to share transport capacity and consolidate shipments, reducing overall vehicle movements

Common mistake: Assuming you can't influence logistics choices. Even if you use third-party logistics providers, you can specify lower-emission options and consolidate shipments.

QUICK TIP: Sea freight takes longer but produces far lower emissions. Plan ahead to reduce reliance on air freight for time-sensitive shipments.

16 SME Climate Hub: Reducing Emissions from Freight & Goods Transport

Your next steps...

1

THIS WEEK:

Review your last 10 shipments – what modes were used, and could any have been consolidated?

2

THIS MONTH:

Request emissions data from your top three logistics providers and ask about lower-emission shipping options.

3

ONGOING:

Build transport decisions into your planning process – default to sea/rail unless air freight is essential.

LCT Participant Spotlight: Maria Grachvogel

Maria Grachvogel embodies the transformative power of fashion. Through pioneering designs and timeless silhouettes exquisitely cut to celebrate the feminine form, the brand redefines the codes of modern style.

Through the LCT Programme, the brand measured its emissions for a second consecutive year and achieved a year-on-year reduction despite a 50% increase in production – a clear demonstration that business growth and emissions need not move in the same direction.

This was driven by targeted operational changes and more considered material choices. While output rose significantly, fabric-related emissions remained almost flat, reflecting deliberate shifts towards lower-impact fabrics.

A further success was almost halving business travel emissions over the year. This was achieved primarily through appointing a local representative to oversee the international trunk show. The approach avoided a long-haul journey and contributed meaningfully to the brand's overall emissions reduction.

Image credit: Maria Grachvogel

Chapter 5: Events & marketing

LOWER-IMPACT PROMOTION

Image credit: TAMMAM

The guidance in this chapter has been developed drawing on established frameworks from organisations specialising in sustainable events and digital practice, including Julie's Bicycle (a leading charity supporting the creative industries with environmental action) and Copenhagen Fashion Week's sustainability guidelines for fashion events.

START HERE

Focus on your highest-impact activities

Events, photoshoots, and digital marketing all contribute to emissions. Focus on practical steps that make the biggest difference.

5.1 Considerations for in-person events

Element	VENUE	SET DESIGN AND MATERIALS	MOBILITY & TRANSPORT	EVENT WASTE MANAGEMENT	FOOD & CATERING	COMMUNICATIONS TO ATTENDEES
Key Considerations	• Choose venues easily accessible via public transport • Look for sustainability credentials e.g. Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM), ISO14001 certification • Prioritise venues with renewable energy and/or energy-efficient systems • Check for waste management processes, including composting • Request emissions data from the venue • Include venue pictures and direct map links (Google/Apple Maps) in communications to guests	• Minimise producing new props; prioritise reusable items designed for easy disassembly and multiple use • Use digital invitations and communications; consider servers running on renewable energy • Use reusable or rental garment protectors and hangers for transport	• Encourage attendees to use sustainable transport (electric bikes/cars, bicycles, public transport, car-sharing) • Minimise travel (e.g. use e-bikes for delivery)	• Use digital tools for activities such as invites, registration and ticketing • Eliminate single-use items such as plastic bags, spoons, bottles, cups etc and replace with reusable alternatives • Implement a 'leave no trace' policy	• Source catering locally and ethically • Offer a lower impact menu (reduce or eliminate red meat, provide vegetarian options) • Serve smaller portions, finger food, fresh and local options to avoid leftovers • Donate or compost any surplus • Provide food waste bins to improve waste separation • Avoid bottled water; use tap water in dispensers, pitchers or carafes to eliminate transport emissions and packaging waste	• Promote your sustainability intentions before, during, and after the event • Survey attendees beforehand to understand their travel plans and environmental impact

QUICK TIP: Small changes add up. Switching to digital invitations and removing single-use plastics are easy wins that reduce both waste and costs.

5.2 Considerations for digital marketing and content production

Beyond physical events, fashion brands can reduce emissions across photoshoots, digital advertising, and content creation.

DIGITAL ADVERTISING

- Compress creative files before uploading to reduce data transfer and server energy use
- Use shorter video formats where possible (e.g. 15 seconds vs 30 seconds) to reduce file size
- Stream content rather than preload to reduce unnecessary data loading
- Avoid auto-play as default settings for video content
- Optimise targeting layers to avoid unnecessary data processing
- Prioritise WiFi over mobile targeting where available, as it consumes less energy

PHOTOSHOOTS AND CONTENT PRODUCTION

- Plan shoots efficiently to minimise travel, equipment use, and studio time
- Use digital lookbooks instead of printed materials where appropriate (although do be aware that digital products also have a carbon footprint)
- Reuse and adapt existing assets before commissioning new shoots
- Choose studios with renewable energy and energy-efficient lighting (LED vs traditional)

WEBSITE AND LANDING PAGES

- Optimise images for web without compromising quality
- Use lazy loading to only load content as users scroll
- Minimise use of heavy animations and auto-playing video
- Review hosting providers for their renewable energy credentials

DATA MANAGEMENT

- Conduct regular digital declutters - stored data requires ongoing energy for servers and cooling systems
- Manage emails efficiently: send links not large attachments, delete unnecessary emails, unsubscribe from unused lists
- Reduce social media data load: be succinct, use video/images sparingly, reshare existing content rather than always creating new
- Ask cloud and data centre providers about their renewable energy use and carbon footprint

Watch out: Digital doesn't automatically mean low-impact. High-resolution video content and data-heavy websites consume significant energy in data centres and transmission.

FURTHER READING AND TOOLS:

- Julie's Bicycle Sustainable Screen: Digital Tech
- Copenhagen Fashion Week Event & Show Execution Guideline
- Green Web Foundation
- Website Carbon Calculator

Your next steps...

THIS WEEK:

1

Review your upcoming events or shoots – identify one practical change you can make (e.g. switch to digital invites, choose a venue with public transport access)

THIS MONTH:

2

Audit your digital content – compress large files and optimise video lengths.

ONGOING:

3

Build sustainability criteria into your event and content planning from the start, not as an afterthought.

LCT Participant Spotlight: Anciela

Anciela is a London-based sustainable luxury womenswear label founded in 2019 by Jennifer Droguett Espinosa, celebrating South American folklore and experimental tailoring through the lens of migration and childhood memories.

Through the LCT Programme, the brand identified events as a key carbon hotspot. Jennifer responded by prioritising lower-impact formats, partnering with venues committed to sustainability and reducing energy use where possible.

This led to an unexpected collaboration with the Design Museum, where Anciela presented a preview of its SS26 collection as an immersive installation exploring the relationship between design and nature. Asking new questions about how and where to stage events opened doors the brand might not otherwise have found.

Alongside rethinking events, Anciela has also installed solar panels at its studio, reducing its operational footprint through self-generated power. As Jennifer notes: "It's been a great way to reduce our impact by generating the energy we need."

ANCIELA

Image credit: Anciela

Image credit: Peachy Den

Chapter 6: Regulation & reporting

WHAT'S COMING AND WHEN

The fashion industry is in a new era of regulation. A swathe of incoming measures will impact how products are made, labelled, and sold. While most of these regulations are being introduced into the EU market, the impacts will be also felt by UK businesses selling products into the EU, sourcing from the EU or otherwise active in that market.

This information is correct as of June 2026 however, as the regulatory situation is fluid and dependent on different jurisdictions and authorities, it is recommended to check for updates regularly. Here are some suggested resources to check the status of regulations that may affect fashion and retail businesses:

Global Fashion Agenda Policy Resources: https://globalfashionagenda.org/resource-library/

Vaayu Legislation Tracker: https://legislation.vaayu.tech/

Please note, these resources may not be complete, and brands should also take their own professional advice.

6.1 What this means for your business

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE FOUR KEY REGULATIONS AND WHEN THEY'LL AFFECT YOUR BUSINESS:

Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR)

Products sold in the EU must be designed for durability, repairability, and resource efficiency. Binding requirements for textiles are likely to come in by 2027.

Digital Product Passports (DPP)

DPP is part of the ESPR. Digital records containing information on a product's environmental impact, supply chain, materials, and end-of-life guidance. Required for products sold into the EU.

Green Claims Regulations (UK & EU)

Stricter rules on environmental claims. Generic claims like "eco-friendly" prohibited unless based on recognised standards. UK enforcement from 2024; EU from September 2026.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)

Producers must pay fees covering collection, sorting, and recycling of textiles. Fees may be eco-modulated – better-performing products pay less. Rolling out across EU Member States.

ACTION NOW VS. ACTION LATER

2026: Act now

- Review all marketing materials for Green Claims compliance – remove vague or unsubstantiated claims. For further information, see this guide.
- Start capturing comprehensive product data for DPP; Whilst the EU has yet to fully define the criteria for DPP, we understand that the following categories of information could be contained in the DPP: product description, composition, supply chain, transport, documentation, environmental impact, social impact, impact on animals, circularity, health impact, information on the brand, communication/identification media, granularity, quantity, costs, after-sale tracking and tracing, customer feedback.
- Budget for potential EPR fees.

2027: Prepare

- Refine product design approach in line with ESPR requirements (durability, repairability, resource efficiency)
- Implement systems for unique product identifiers (QR codes, RFID tags) linked to digital passports.

2028+: Monitor and adapt

- EPR schemes rolling out across different EU Member States – stay informed about specific requirements in your markets.
- Continue tracking regulatory developments and adjust practices accordingly.

Watch out: Even if you're a small business, these regulations may apply to you if you sell into EU markets. Don't assume you're exempt – check the specific requirements.

Image credit: Margaret Howell

6.2 GOING DEEPER: Detailed regulation breakdowns

ECODESIGN FOR SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS REGULATION (ESPR)

WHAT: The ESPR is a key measure under the EU Green Deal. Its primary objective is to have more sustainable products in the EU market, representing a fundamental shift by requiring products to be designed in a way so that they are more durable, repairable, and resource efficient. Textile and apparel products have been identified as a priority sector by the EU Commission.

WHEN: The regulation is adopted and in the process of designing requirements for textiles and apparel. Binding requirements likely in 2027.

WHO: Companies selling textile products on the EU market.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESSES:

- Ecodesign: Engage in the development of standards which may include issues such as durability, material efficiency, fibre shedding, water use, and product information
- Digital Product Passports: Comply with information and technical requirements of the DPP – more information below
- Unsold goods: Report on unsold goods one financial year after adoption. A ban on destruction of unsold apparel and footwear products enters into force in July 2026. SMEs are generally exempt, recognising the disproportionate burden it could place on smaller businesses

DIGITAL PRODUCT PASSPORTS (DPP)

WHAT: A digital record containing information on a product's environmental impact, supply chain, materials, and end-of-life guidance. The regulation aims to increase transparency and promote sustainability and circular economy principles by making this data accessible to consumers, brands, and regulators.

WHO: Any apparel and footwear company that sells into the EU market, regardless of where your brand is located and your company size.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESSES:

- Start capturing comprehensive data such as composition, origin, and environmental impact
- Products will need unique identifiers, such as QR codes or RFID tags, linked to their DPP

GREEN CLAIMS REGULATIONS

Both the UK and EU Member States are increasing scrutiny of environmental claims in the fashion sector.

UK: Green Claims Code

WHAT: The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) can now impose civil fines of up to 10% of global turnover for misleading claims, marking a significant shift from relying on court enforcement to direct regulatory action.

WHO: Any company selling products to UK consumers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESSES:

- Fashion businesses will need to be extra careful when making claims relating to products, to ensure they align with the guidance

EMPOWERING CONSUMERS FOR THE GREEN TRANSITION

WHAT: Generic claims such as "environmentally friendly" will be prohibited unless based on recognised performance standards, and restrictions will apply to carbon neutral claims. Businesses will not be able to use "sustainability labels" unless they have been based on a third-party certification scheme or established by public authorities.

WHO: Any business making environmental claims about products sold to consumers in EU markets, regardless of business size or location.

WHEN: From September 2026

IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESSES:

- Companies will not be able to use labels or logos to promote their own sustainability initiatives for their products

Image credit: Molini London

6.2 GOING DEEPER: Detailed regulation breakdowns

EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY (EPR)

WHAT: In September 2025, the EU Parliament gave the green light for a revision to its Waste Framework Directive to require all Member States to establish EPR schemes for textiles and footwear. Producers will be required to pay fees to cover the costs of collection, sorting, and preparing reuse and recycling of garments and shoes, as well as the disposal of associated waste. Producer fees will be based on the volume or quantity of textiles and footwear placed on the market, and fees will be eco-modulated – lower fees apply to products that perform well against the sustainability standards under the ESPR, creating financial incentives for more sustainable product design.

WHEN: EU Member States have until June 2027 to transpose EPR regulations into national law.

WHO: Each EU Member State will determine the scope of their textiles EPR.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESSES:

- Fashion businesses, specifically those selling high volumes, will need to budget for new costs, review reporting systems, and consider how design choices could reduce fees through eco-modulation
- Micro enterprises will benefit from exemptions or longer lead times

Detailed implementation guides will be available closer to regulation deadlines. For now, focus on the "Action now" items above to prepare your business.

Image credit: Emily Carter

Your next steps...

1

THIS WEEK:

Review your current marketing materials for any vague environmental claims ("eco-friendly", "sustainable") and remove or substantiate them.

2

THIS MONTH:

Start an audit of what product data you currently track vs. what you'll need for DPPs – identify the gaps.

3

ONGOING:

Stay informed about regulation timelines in your specific markets and adjust your practices accordingly.

Chapter 7: Circularity & circular business models

DESIGNING FOR LONGEVITY AND REUSE

Image credit: Fruity Booty

This chapter was written with support from QSA Partners LLP, LCT Programme delivery partner.

7.1 Keep products in use for longer

START HERE

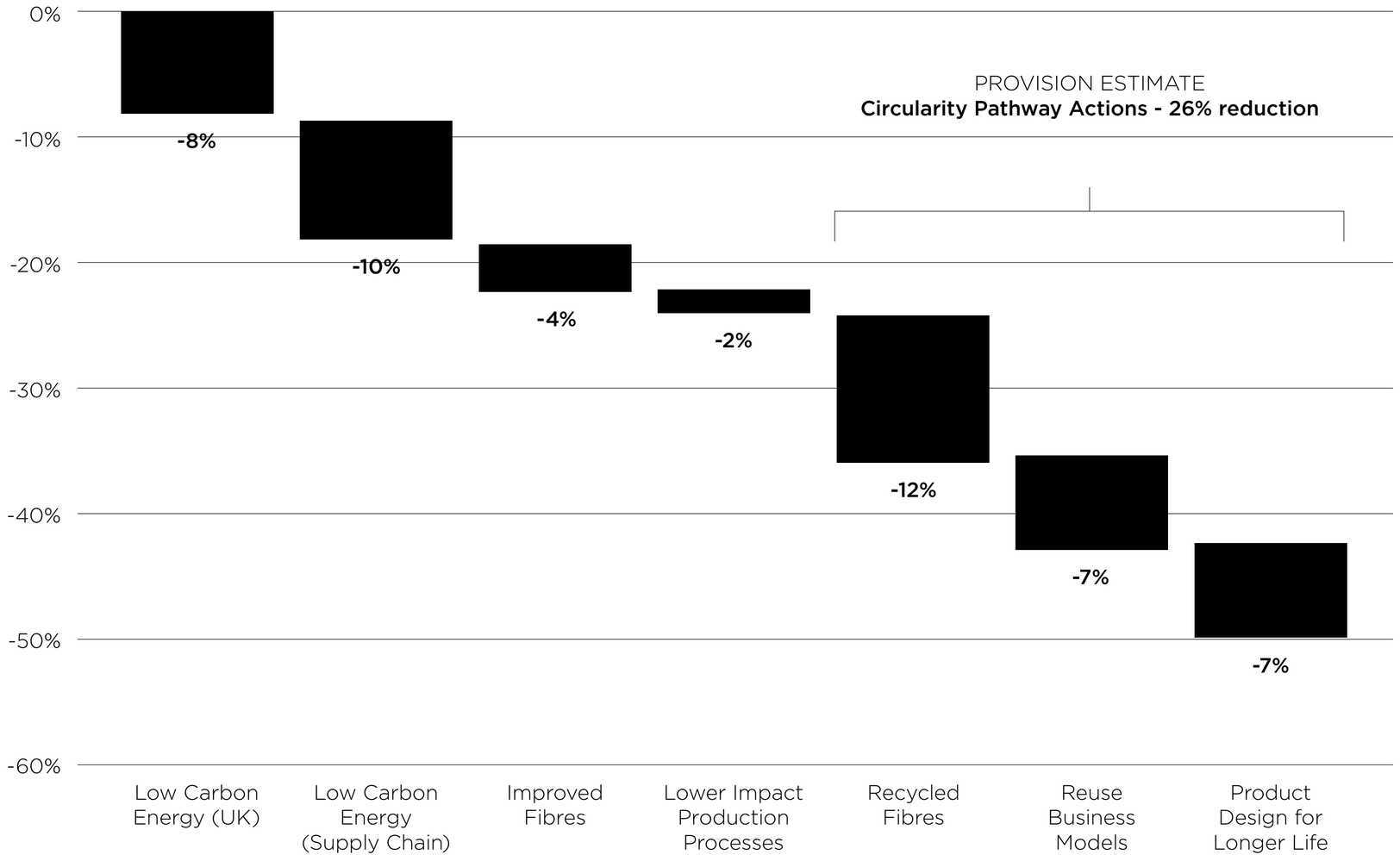
Keep products in use for longer

Circularity offers a practical pathway to reduce fashion's environmental footprint while building more resilient business models. By designing products for durability, repair, reuse, rental and eventual recycling, you can minimise waste, reduce dependence on virgin materials, and lower the carbon intensity of your operations.

According to WRAP, the UK fashion industry can cut carbon emissions by 50% by 2030 – with 26% of this reduction achievable through circular interventions such as the use of recycled fibres, reuse business models, and product design for longer life[17].

> **"Circularity offers a practical pathway to reduce fashion's environmental footprint while building more resilient business models."**

CARBON FOOTPRINT REDUCTION SCENARIO 2019-2030 (PROVISIONAL ESTIMATE 50% REDUCTION) Source: WRAP



17 WRAP, Circular business models guide

WHAT CIRCULARITY MEANS

Circularity means keeping materials and products in use for as long as possible, maximising material use and minimising waste. This can take place through reuse, repair, resale, rental, subscription, recycling, and designing for circularity.

Here's how circular approaches connect to decarbonisation:

1. Less production = lower emissions

Making new clothes from virgin materials uses significant energy, water, and chemicals. By reusing fabrics (for example utilising deadstock) or sourcing recycled fibres, you can avoid the emissions from growing, processing, finishing and transporting new materials.

2. Longer product life = fewer replacements

When products are designed to last and/or repaired, fewer new items need to be made. Implementing a circular business model such as resale can replace the purchase of a virgin garment. Every avoided new product means avoiding production-related carbon emissions.

3. Better material use = less waste

Circular systems reduce waste going to landfill or incineration, both of which release greenhouse gases. Recycling textiles back into new fibres also means fewer raw materials are extracted. Fibre-to-fibre recycling (textile-to-textile) is preferred over using recycled fibres from other sources such as plastic bottles.

4. Shared responsibility = scalable savings

When you design for circularity and your customers participate in take-back, resale, or rental programmes, the total carbon savings multiply across the value chain.

Image credit: E.L.V. DENIM

QUICK START: Building a circular proposition

To build and run a successful circular model, businesses need more than a good idea – the right foundations need to be in place.

Critical steps to success:

- **Know your customer** – who will buy the new circular offer? Existing customers? New customers? Use customer insight surveys to gain this information (see "Understanding your customers" below)
- **Build in profit and margin** – if the circular model does not add revenue or profit, it becomes a distraction from your core offer. Ensure the business case stacks up commercially
- **Take the approach that best suits your business** – is your product suitable for a circular model? Not all products work for all models. Match the approach to your offering
- **Choose the right-fit delivery partner** – find partners who understand your business and will offer the right level of service at the right price
- **Bring your team with you** – gain buy-in from your board, shareholders, stakeholders and teams from the outset. Align with their goals and motivations, sell the vision and purpose
- **Test and iterate** – trial on a smaller scale before a full-scale launch. Learn from the test phase and refine your approach

Common mistake: Launching a circular model because it seems like the right thing to do, without validating customer demand or ensuring it's commercially viable. Test with a pilot first.

7.2 GOING DEEPER: Circular business model options

There are several circular business models you can explore. Each has different implications for operations, customer relationships, and carbon impact.

Resale

Offering pre-owned items through your own platform or partnering with existing resale platforms extends product life and captures value from items that would otherwise leave your brand's ecosystem. This is also an opportunity to extend and deepen relationship with your customers.

Key considerations:
- Do you run it in-house or partner with a resale platform?
- How do you handle quality control, cleaning, and pricing?
- What's the customer experience for both sellers and buyers?

Rental

Rental allows customers to access items for a period rather than purchasing outright and works particularly well for occasion wear or high-value pieces.

Key considerations:
- What's the operational model for cleaning, maintenance, and logistics?
- How many rental cycles can each item sustain before quality degrades?
- What's the pricing structure that works for both you and customers?

Repair services

Offering repair services extends the life of your products, whether you provide this in-house or through partnerships.

Key considerations:
- Is repair built into your product design (e.g. accessible seams, available spare parts)?
- Do you offer it as a free service, charged service, or at cost?
- How do you communicate repair as part of your brand value?

Take-back schemes

Take-back schemes collect used items from customers for recycling, upcycling, or resale, often combined with incentives like store credit or discounts.

Key considerations:
- What happens to collected items? (resale, donation, recycling, upcycling)
- What incentive encourages participation without eroding margins?
- How do you handle logistics and sorting?

Subscription models

Subscription models give customers ongoing access to rotating wardrobe items. Sometimes called "slow rental", items are typically kept for weeks or months rather than days.

Key considerations:
- What's the optimal subscription tier structure?
- How do you balance variety, quality, and logistics costs?
- What's the customer retention strategy?

Design for circularity

Designing products from the outset to be durable, repairable, and recyclable underpins all other circular models.

Key considerations:
- Use mono-materials (single fibre types) where possible to ease recycling
- Design for disassembly so components can be separated
- Avoid mixed materials that can't be separated for recycling
- Choose durable construction methods
- Provide care instructions that help customers extend product life

QUICK TIP: You don't need to implement all of these at once

Start with one model that fits your business and customer base, prove it works, then consider expanding to others.

Upcycling & remanufacture

Upcycling or remanufacture transforms discarded and unused materials - including offcuts, deadstock and excess inventory - into new products. This process adds a different type of value through design, craft or innovation. Businesses capture what may be considered as "waste" streams and redesign them into new products while reducing landfill impact. This can also differentiate brands through sustainability storytelling and extends product lifecycles, turning environmental responsibility into a revenue driver.

7.3 Understanding your customers

Before launching any circular service, understand whether your customers will actually use it. Customer surveys are essential for validating demand and identifying barriers.

Key areas to explore in customer research:

- **Current behaviour** – how long do customers typically keep items before replacing them? What do they currently do with unwanted clothes? Have they used resale, rental, or repair services before?
- **Awareness and interest** – are they aware of circular fashion concepts? What's their interest level in participating? Which circular services would they actually use?
- **Motivations** – what drives them: cost savings, environmental impact, variety, quality? What benefits do they see in circular services? What incentives would encourage participation?
- **Barriers** – what concerns do they have about hygiene, quality, convenience, or cost? What prevents them from using these services more often? What would make circular services feel safer or more trustworthy?
- **Practical preferences** – how important is convenience? What service features matter most (easy drop-off, fast turnaround, clear pricing)? How do they prefer to hear about these services?

Watch out: Don't assume your customers want circular services just because you want to offer them. Validate demand first. Some customer segments will be more receptive than others.

7.4 Aligning circularity with your business strategy

Circular business models should strengthen your overall business, not distract from it.

Consider how circularity aligns with:

- **Brand positioning** – does it reinforce your brand values and differentiate you in the market?
- **Customer expectations** – are your customers asking for these services? Will it deepen customer relationships?
- **Revenue model** – does it open new revenue streams or protect existing ones?
- **Operational capacity** – do you have the infrastructure and capability to deliver it well?
- **Long-term vision** – does it future-proof your business against regulatory changes and shifting customer expectations?

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

- WRAP Circular Business Models Guide for Fashion
- BFC Circular Fashion Ecosystem Report (2021)
- Ellen MacArthur Foundation: Circular Economy in Fashion
- WRAP Textiles Pact (formerly Textiles 2030)
- IPF's Circular Fashion Innovation Network

Your next steps...

1

THIS WEEK:

Survey 20-30 existing customers about their interest in circular services – focus on one specific model (resale, rental, or repair).

2

THIS MONTH:

Based on customer feedback, pilot one circular approach on a small scale (e.g. accept 10 take-back items, offer repair for one product line).

3

ONGOING:

Track participation rates, customer feedback, and carbon impact. Refine your model before scaling up.

LCT Participant Spotlight: E.L.V. DENIM

E.L.V. DENIM is a British luxury brand founded in 2018 by Anna Foster, dedicated to crafting timeless pieces from 100% upcycled materials. The brand began with a signature contrast-colour denim mid-seam jean and has since expanded to include shirts, dresses, accessories, and a cotton collection upcycled from luxury hotel textiles.

Each piece is unique, beginning with fabric sourced from preloved garments before being handcrafted into designs built to last. Having demonstrated that upcycling is viable at scale, E.L.V. DENIM is now applying that experience to help other businesses identify their own waste streams and turn them into revenue-generating collections.

> ***"As a brand with sustainability already embedded in our business model, I was initially curious about what measuring our carbon footprint would truly reveal. By the second year of the programme, it was encouraging to see how operational decisions - such as bringing aspects of the business in-house - had a genuinely positive impact on our overall footprint."*** - Anna Foster, Founder and Creative Director, E.L.V. DENIM

E.L.V. DENIM

Image credit: E.L.V. DENIM

LCT Participant Spotlight: Emily Carter

Emily Carter is an award-winning British designer specialising in hand-illustrated silk accessories and interiors. Her collections are inspired by a lifelong interest in the natural world, with each design telling its own individual story.

The expert support provided through the LCT Programme proved particularly valuable in the areas of materials and circular business models. Acting on this guidance, Emily conducted a customer survey to understand existing behaviours and attitudes towards circular fashion, offering participants the chance to win a free scarf as an incentive.

The response exceeded all expectations – 65 replies arrived in a single day, providing data-backed evidence that will inform future initiatives. As Emily reflects: "The customer survey I did as a result of the programme was one of the most valuable things I have ever done for the business."

EMILY CARTER
LONDON

Image credit: Emily Carter

Image credit: Bocan Couture

Chapter 8: Communications

TELLING YOUR STORY RESPONSIBLY

START HERE: COMMUNICATE WITH CONFIDENCE AND COMPLIANCE

Communicating your climate and sustainability actions builds trust with customers, prepares you for incoming regulations, and helps scale circular business models. However, the regulatory landscape around environmental claims is tightening. This chapter provides practical guidance on how to communicate responsibly and effectively.

This chapter draws on insights from three expert-led workshops delivered as part of the LCT Programme in January 2026.

8.1 Principles of sustainable fashion communication and impactful storytelling

Led by: Rachel Arthur, United Nations Environment Programme

The Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook co-published by UNEP and UN Climate Change, provides a framework for communicating sustainability in ways that are credible, engaging, and drive real change. Fashion brands are storytellers and change-makers, and communication is a critical tool for shifting the industry towards sustainability.

The Playbook recognises that fashion communicators exist within a system built on mass consumption. Shifting the narrative towards sustainability requires confronting this reality and exploring how to decouple value creation from resource extraction and volume growth.

THE FRAMEWORK OPERATES ACROSS THREE LEVELS:

Foundation level: Information (Lead with science)

Dedication to evidence and transparency are fundamental. Misinformation and greenwashing have created a confusing landscape for consumers, with growing mistrust about what is and isn't sustainable. Communicators must work with sustainability experts to ensure relevant information is clearly and transparently shared, providing an evidence base that is verifiable and comparable in an accessible way.

Build level: Culture (Change behaviours and practices / Reimagine values)

Fashion shapes the very notion of desire and aspiration, impacting wider cultural norms and expectations. Communicators must eradicate messages of overconsumption and instead point consumers towards lower-impact and circular solutions. Storytellers, imagemakers and role models need to help portray alternative models of status and success, decoupling identity from newness, recalibrating what is deemed aspirational and considering values such as wellbeing, equity and community.

Leadership level: Advocacy (Drive advocacy)

Individual behaviour change alone will not suffice – systemic shifts are required at business, societal and policy levels. Communicators can help empower consumers in their role as citizens, interrogating and demanding greater action from businesses and policymakers. Inside organisations, communicators can advocate for change, calling out challenges and critical areas that need to be addressed.

THE EIGHT PRINCIPLES FOR SUSTAINABLE FASHION COMMUNICATION:

1. Commit to evidence-based and transparent communication efforts
2. Ensure information is shared in a clear and accessible manner
3. Eradicate all messages encouraging overconsumption
4. Champion positive changes and demonstrate accessible circular solutions
5. Spotlight new role models and notions of aspiration or success
6. Focus on inclusive storytelling that celebrates the positive ecological, cultural and social values of fashion
7. Motivate and mobilise the public to advocate for broader change
8. Support dialogue with leadership and policymakers to enable wider industry sustainability

PRACTICAL APPLICATION FOR SMES:

Be honest and transparent

- Share both progress and challenges – don't oversell achievements
- Avoid vague claims like "eco-friendly" or "sustainable" without specific evidence
- Provide data and evidence where possible

Focus on impact, not just intention

- Communicate what you've actually done, not just what you plan to do
- Quantify improvements where you can (e.g., "reduced water use by 30%")
- Be specific about timelines and targets

Tell human stories

- Connect sustainability to the people behind your products
- Share supplier partnerships and community impacts
- Make environmental benefits tangible and relatable

Empower customers to take action

- Provide care instructions that extend product life
- Explain repair, resale, or recycling options
- Make it easy for customers to participate in circular practices

Challenge overconsumption narratives

- Avoid messages encouraging frequent purchases or "newness"
- Promote quality, longevity, and versatility over volume
- Celebrate rewearing, repairing, and reusing

Watch out: The dominant economic model is built on volume growth, which fundamentally conflicts with sustainability goals. Be prepared to challenge traditional marketing approaches within your organisation.

Further resources: The Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook, UNEP and UN Climate Change

8.2 Preparing for green regulations: Greenwashing and Digital Product Passports

Led by: Olivia Fulton, Reema Sharma & Alexa Lamont, Mishcon de Reya LLP

The regulatory landscape for environmental claims is tightening. Understanding greenwashing regulations and preparing for DPP will help you communicate confidently while staying compliant.

NAVIGATING GREEN CLAIMS & AVOIDING GREENWASHING

UK regulations:

- **Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024** – this law prohibits adverts that mislead consumers, which could include greenwashing
- **CMA's Green Claims Code** – this provides guidance on greenwashing
- **Fraud legislation** – fraud offences could relate to greenwashing

EU regulations:

- **Unfair Commercial Practices Directive** – this law prohibits unfair B2C advertising, which may include greenwashing
- **Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive** – this law will ban certain greenwashing practices from 27 September 2026. For example, using unsubstantiated generic claims such as "eco-friendly".
- **Proposed EU Green Claims Directive** – this is proposed legislation in the EU which might regulate the substantiation and communication of green claims in the future

Watch out: High-risk terms require exceptional substantiation: "Sustainable" / "Sustainability" / "Eco-friendly" / "Eco" / "Green" / "Carbon neutral". Avoid these unless you can comprehensively prove your claims across the product's entire lifecycle.

BE SPECIFIC NOT VAGUE

Instead of general claims, provide concrete evidence:

✗ "Sustainable materials"
✓ "Made with 75% recycled polyester (Global Recycled Standard certified)"

✗ "Eco-friendly packaging"
✓ "Packaging made from 100% recycled cardboard (FSC Certified). Inner plastic film is not recyclable"

✗ "Carbon neutral"
✓ "We offset emissions from manufacturing through [named scheme meeting x standard]. Full methodology available at [link]"

Image credit: Margaret Howell

GREEN CLAIMS CHECKLIST

The CMA provides a Green Claims checklist which you can use before making an environmental claims. You need to answer **YES** to all of these:

☐ Truthful and accurate?
☐ Clear and unambiguous?
☐ Not omitting important information?
☐ Fair comparison?
☐ Full lifecycle considered?
☐ Substantiated with evidence?

INTERNAL PROCESSES FOR VETTING GREEN CLAIMS

Pre-publication review: Every environmental claim should be reviewed before publication.

Evidence management: Hold robust, credible, relevant, and up-to-date evidence that supports your claims.

Lifecycle assessment: Consider the effect of the total lifecycle of a product or service on the accuracy of your claims.

Supply chain management: Both manufacturers and retailers may be liable for green claims. If you manufacture or supply products to another business, both may need to substantiate claims.

Ongoing monitoring: Symbols, trust marks, or quality marks awarded by independent third parties based on formal assessment are less likely to be misleading. Self-assessed marks are more likely to raise concerns.

QUICK TIP: The ASA now uses AI to proactively scan adverts for greenwashing. Stay on top of enforcement trends in your sector and review your marketing materials regularly.

Image credit: Chenchen Studio

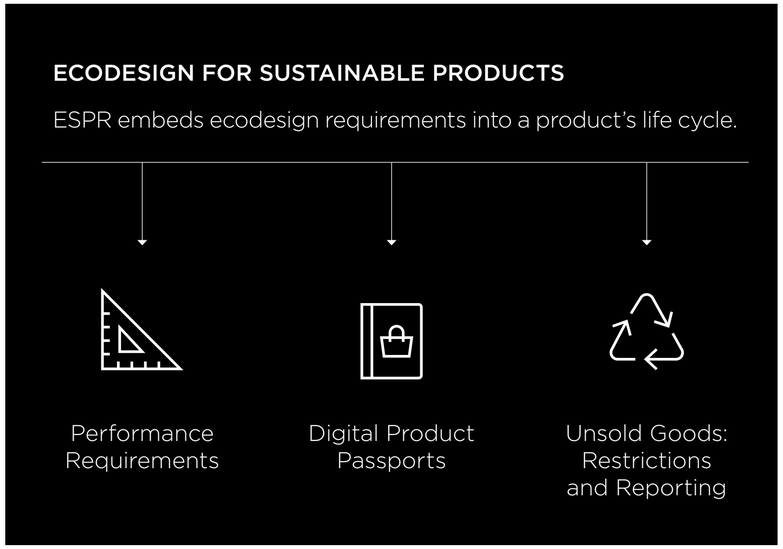
ECODESIGN FOR SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS REGULATION & DIGITAL PRODUCT PASSPORTS (DPP)

The Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR) is a framework piece of legislation which sets out the general principles and broad obligations which will apply to all products on the market (with very limited exceptions including food and medicines). How these principles and broad obligations will be fine-tuned and applied to specific products and product categories will be set out in secondary legislation.

What the secondary legislation may require:

- Performance requirements (for example, product design standards)
- Information requirements (such as DPPs)

The secondary legislation may also set out a framework to prevent the destruction of unsold consumer products.



DIGITAL PRODUCT PASSPORTS

A significant feature of the ESPR is the proposal of DPPs, which are designed to enhance consumer choice, facilitate information sharing across the supply chain, and improve product traceability.

What's included in a DPP?
The exact requirements would be set out in secondary legislation but could include:

DPPs must be accessible, interoperable, and available via a data carrier like a QR code.

At present, there are no exemptions or phase implementation for SMEs. Support for SMEs envisaged under ESPR include:

- SME specific guidelines
- Digital tools and training
- Financial support

PREPARING FOR DPP COMPLIANCE

- Map your supply chain – what information do you already hold?
- Select the right tech partner and unique identifier
- Seek to standardise how you collect supplier information
- Design products with traceability in mind
- Upskill internal teams

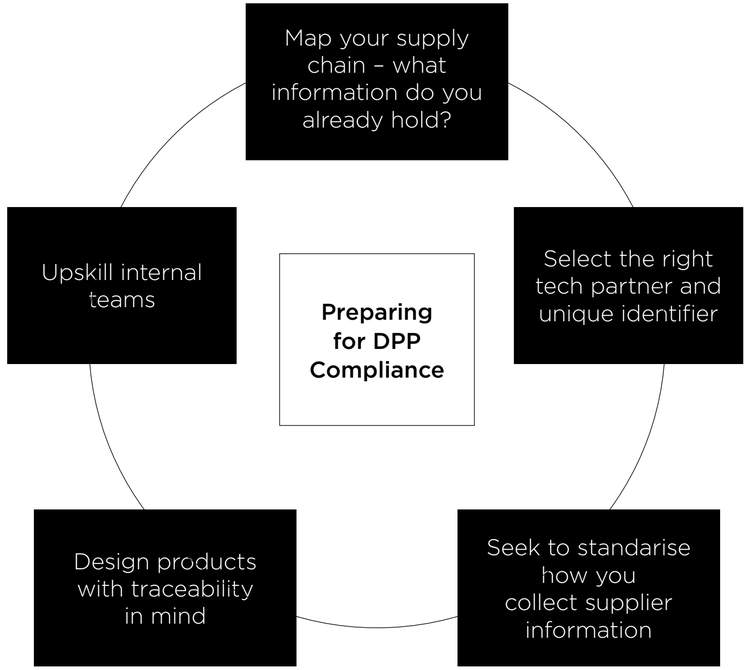



Image credit: Anciela

8.3 Circular fashion communication: Building trust and customer engagement

Led by: Loïc Le Fouest & Matt Morton, Clarasys

Circular business models only work if customers participate. While 82% of fashion brands have implemented at least one circular initiative, 0% of brands with a customer-facing circular business model report confidence in their ability to scale. Beyond operational challenges, 40% of UK brands identify customer communication as a major obstacle to circular initiative success.

Source: BFC/CFIN

THE THREE-SIDED COMMUNICATION CHALLENGE

Successfully scaling circular models requires addressing three interconnected barriers:

1. Legislation pressures

Evolving regulations like the EU Green Claims Directive ban vague sustainability claims and mandate third-party verification. The challenge: 53% of green claims give vague or misleading information, 40% have no supporting evidence, and 50% of labels offer weak verification (European Commission data).

Key issues: Inconsistent standards across markets, high compliance costs for smaller brands, and fear of greenwashing accusations leading to "greenhushing" – under-communicating genuine efforts.

2. Customer barriers

Customers are sceptical and confused. Survey data shows 47% cite limited availability or lack of awareness as barriers to participation. Mistrust from greenwashing, confusing terminology, and perception that circular options are less convenient or lower quality all create friction.

3. Internal operational challenges

Survey data shows 41% of brands cite internal barriers as their biggest challenge. Siloed teams, conflicting short-term priorities, limited expertise, and technology gaps in traceability prevent brands from delivering on circular promises.

Image credit: Peachy Den

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE CIRCULAR COMMUNICATION

Put customers at the heart

- Design experiences that solve customer problems, not just promote circularity
- Frame benefits around what customers care about: save money, extend product life, access exclusive styles
- Use plain language, not industry jargon

Build trust through transparency

- Be honest about both progress and limitations
- Explain how systems work (e.g., "returned items are cleaned, repaired if needed, and resold")
- Back claims with evidence to ensure regulatory compliance
- Use digital tools like QR codes and DPP

Make participation easy

- Remove practical barriers (free returns, convenient drop-off locations)
- Provide clear instructions
- Incentivise through discounts, loyalty rewards, or exclusive perks

Align internally first

- Establish cross-functional teams (sustainability, marketing, product, legal)
- Embed circularity into business KPIs
- Implement data systems to track impact and support transparent communication

A PHASED APPROACH

Phase 1 - Foundation: Understand your customers, audit existing initiatives, design the circular experience, align internal teams on goals and messaging.

Phase 2 - Acceleration: Pilot and refine services, develop incentive models, leverage digital tools, embed compliance into communications.

Phase 3 - Leadership: Scale successful initiatives, lead industry collaboration on standards, engage policymakers, cultivate a circular-first mindset.

WATCH OUT: Communication alone won't scale circular models if operational foundations aren't in place. Address all three barriers simultaneously for real impact.

QUICK TIP: Start small. Launch one well-executed circular service with clear communication before expanding.

FURTHER RESOURCES: Shaping the Future of Circular Fashion Communication – BFC Institute of Positive Fashion

Image credit: Molini London

Glossary

Image credit: House of Baukjen

Baseline year: The reference year against which a company's emissions reductions are measured and tracked over time.

BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method): An international certification scheme that assesses the environmental performance of buildings, including energy efficiency, water usage, and waste management.

Carbon footprint: The total amount of greenhouse gas emissions caused by an organisation, event, product, or person, expressed in CO2e.

Circular business model (CBM): A business model designed to keep products, materials, and resources in use for as long as possible through reuse, repair, rental, resale, or recycling.

Circular economy: An economic system that eliminates waste by keeping products and materials in continuous use through reuse, repair, remanufacturing, and recycling.

CO2e (Carbon dioxide equivalent): A standard unit for measuring greenhouse gas emissions that converts all greenhouse gases (methane, nitrous oxide, etc.) into the equivalent amount of carbon dioxide based on their global warming potential.

Deadstock: Surplus or excess fabric and materials left over from production runs that would otherwise go to waste.

Decarbonisation: The process of reducing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions, with the goal of achieving net-zero emissions.

Digital Product Passport (DPP): A digital record containing information about a product's environmental impact, materials, supply chain, and end-of-life guidance, required under EU regulations.

Downstream: Activities that occur later in the value chain, including product use by consumers, end-of-life treatment, and disposal.

Eco-modulation: A system of varying fees based on environmental performance, used in Extended Producer Responsibility schemes where products with better sustainability credentials pay lower fees.

Emissions factor: A coefficient used to convert activity data (such as kilometres travelled or kWh of electricity used) into estimated greenhouse gas emissions.

End-of-life: The stage when a product can no longer be used in its current form and requires recycling, disposal, or repurposing.

EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility): A policy approach requiring producers to take financial and/or physical responsibility for the collection, sorting, recycling, and disposal of their products at end-of-life.

ESPR (Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation): EU regulation requiring products sold in the EU market to be designed for durability, repairability, and resource efficiency, with binding requirements for textiles expected by 2027.

Fibre-to-fibre recycling (textile-to-textile recycling): The process of recycling textile waste back into new textile fibres, keeping materials within the textiles system rather than downcycling into other uses.

GHG (Greenhouse gases): Gases that trap heat in the Earth's atmosphere, including carbon dioxide (CO2), methane (CH4), nitrous oxide (N2O), water vapour (H2O), and fluorinated gases.

GHG Protocol: The most widely used international framework and set of standards for measuring and reporting corporate greenhouse gas emissions, developed by World Resources Institute and World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

Green claims: Environmental marketing statements or claims made about the sustainability attributes of a product, service, or company.

Greenhushing : The practice of under-communicating or remaining silent about genuine sustainability efforts due to fear of greenwashing accusations or regulatory scrutiny.

Greenwashing: Making misleading or unsubstantiated environmental claims that exaggerate the sustainability credentials of a product, service, or company.

ISO14001: An international standard for environmental management systems that provides a framework for organisations to manage their environmental responsibilities systematically.

Net zero: Achieving a balance between the greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere and those removed from it, with deep emissions reductions (typically at least 90%) supplemented by carbon removal for residual emissions.

Organic cotton: Cotton grown without synthetic pesticides, herbicides, or fertilisers, using methods that have lower environmental impact than conventional cotton production.

Recycled fibres: Fibres made from reclaimed materials, either post-consumer (from used products) or post-industrial (from manufacturing waste).

Science-based targets (SBTs): Emissions reduction targets that are aligned with climate science and the Paris Agreement goals, showing companies how much and how fast they need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to prevent the worst impacts of climate change.

Scope 1 emissions: Direct greenhouse gas emissions from sources owned or controlled by a company, such as company-owned vehicles or on-site fuel combustion.

Scope 2 emissions: Indirect emissions from the generation of purchased electricity, steam, heat, or cooling consumed by a company.

Scope 3 emissions: All other indirect emissions that occur in a company's value chain, including purchased goods and services, business travel, employee commuting, transportation and distribution, product use, and end-of-life treatment.

Supplier engagement: The process of working collaboratively with suppliers to understand, measure, and reduce environmental impacts throughout the supply chain.

Take-back scheme: A system where brands collect used products from customers for recycling, upcycling, resale, or proper disposal, often incentivised through discounts or store credit.

Upstream: Activities that occur early in the value chain, including raw material extraction, fibre production, material processing, and manufacturing.

Value chain: The full range of activities and stakeholders involved in creating and delivering a product or service, from raw material extraction through production, distribution, use, and end-of-life.

Virgin materials: New, previously unused materials that have not been recycled or reclaimed, such as newly manufactured synthetic fibres or conventionally grown cotton.

WEEE (Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment): Discarded electronic and electrical equipment that requires proper disposal and recycling due to potentially hazardous components and valuable materials that can be recovered.

Image credit: Gandys

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