

Embedding sustainability in the teaching of practical subjects: from rags to bags

To support their learning on the [garment technology](#) unit in their first year, students on the suite of fashion programmes at the University are introduced to garment technology through the deconstruction of garments. For the third year running, garments have been supplied by [I&G Cohen](#), a Greater Manchester based textile reclamation firm. This year they donated half a ton of denim garments which would have otherwise been sent for ragging to be used as a filler in furniture, as insulation or as cleaning rags.

Many usable garments find their way into textile reclamation and the less valuable or damaged garments are often not suitable for resale. These garments have been used within the school of materials to play an active role in the education of students, teaching them about manufacture as well as embedding sustainability practices into the curriculum.

Process

The garments donated by I&G Cohen were initially sorted by students, who selected one pair of jeans each to use in structured tasks focused on analysis of the material, methods of manufacture and styling. Having a wide range of garment styles even within the one product category exposed students to the different techniques, styles and finishes available and allowed them to make clear comparisons. Garments were then deconstructed to provide deeper insight into the techniques of manufacture, recognise component parts and gain a deeper understanding of material requirements.

Following this, garments and deconstructed parts were sorted by the students and the process of manufacturing was undertaken. The fabric selected needed to not be overly worn and could not contain stretch fibres as this would impact the characteristics of the bag in use and its handling during sewing. This exposed students to the importance of material selection and was possible due to the huge range of garments provided. After students had graded the garments to determine their suitability, they were then cut for the various parts of the bag and bundled. Students undertook this in a manner mirroring production so they could understand basic methods, as well as appreciate the possibilities for garment reuse. Following training, the students organised the manufacture of the bags and oversaw their production.



This year, between both factories (students were divided into two groups which formed each factory), 120 bags were made, half of which were taken by students with the remaining bags given to University visitors. This project highlights the possibilities of utilising garments destined for ragging to be repurposed as both a learning resource and then as a functional item which allows the students to engage in production as well as see the process of reclamation to reuse from start to end.

Future plans

It is hoped that further developments will allow for quantification of waste and the sustainability aspect of this project to be more deeply embedded in the students learning journey

Contact

For more information about this case study contact [Simeon Gill](#) at simeon.gill@manchester.ac.uk

More guidance on embedding sustainability in teaching can be found on the University's [sustainability website](#).