

# Uncertainty for UK fashion as Brexit continues

*As The end of Brexit draws near, the fate of UK fashion is unknown.*

The Independent

As Brexit plunges into chaos, we still do not see the end nearing anytime soon, the Brexit fog is dark and thick, and designers and brands are in a worried state. With no way of knowing how they will manufacture and sell their goods in the near and far future.

In 2016 shortly after the referendum, the value of the pound dropped to its lowest in over 20 years, causing a drastic rise in the cost of buying materials from Europe, and the UK fashion market to become one of the cheapest places to buy luxury goods in the world, for a moment it seemed as if the Brexit vote would have some kind of positive impact on the fashion industry as it saw a rise in tourism buying. However, the cost of materials outweighs the profit that is made from tourism. As 2018 comes to a close, not much has changed. As Theresa May prepares her 3 deals, the fashion industry awaits in anticipation, with both luxury and non-luxury clothing brands like Joules, a high street clothing store, known for its quirky patterns, making contingency plans for the next year. Preparing for the worst-case scenario of a NO-Deal Brexit, by selecting particular pieces to be made, and importing them into the UK ahead of Spring-Summer 2019. While other brands and designers are moving their business to Europe entirely, some are looking to the international market to save them, and the rest unsure of their fate.

It's not just those who work in fashion that face uncertainty, but those who flock from Europe to study at one of the many top fashion schools in England. The UK boasts some of the top fashion schools and degrees in the world, with 6% of the student body being from Europe, eventually seeking employment in the UK, and although some like UAL and UCA have not seen a drop in EU applicants in the last 2 years, they are expecting to see one in 2019, Sarah Simms Head of Admissions at UCA Said "we received -9% fewer applications from EU applicants to study in the 2017/18 academic year than we had received from EU applicants to study in the 2016/17 academic year. We then received +11% more applications from EU applicants to study in the 2018/19, This means we received +1% more applications from EU applicants to study in the 2018/19 academic year than we had received from EU applicants to study in the 2016/17 academic year." However, in an instance of a No-Brexit Deal or a Hard Brexit deal, EU students will be then facing International fees, making it more expensive to study in the UK, more so if the UK leave the EU without a No Brexit deal, allowing a new set of immigration rules and customs to be applied. The odds of a No-Brexit deal are uncertain but Dr Louise Thompson a politics lecture stated in the Independent recently that "I think it's likely that MPs will be asked to vote again on a modified deal in the new year," Which at this point seems the most likely way forward, now that 48 MP's have sent Vote of No Confidence letters, calling for Theresa May to step down.

in 2016 the BFC conducted a survey asking 500 designers for their view on Brexit, with 290 responses, 90% voted remain and 4.3% voted leave. So, what does this mean for this multibillion industry. If in the event a Hard Brexit deal is agreed upon, this will mean all trade deals are no longer valid, the industry will face an 11% increase overall, which is an

extra £1 Billion in costs to produce and import from Europe, inevitably we will see a huge rise in the price of shoes and clothing, which could potentially see a drop in consumer buying and tourism. The BFC have recently conducted another survey but have yet to publish the results.

For a single market, it would mean that designers and brands would have the freedom to move and trade within the EU, as well as EU nationals and students allowed to work and study in the UK. While many have hoped for this to happen, the odds are not in favour for a single market, leaving everyone in the dark as May tries to bargain for her own Hard Brexit deal. A Hard Brexit means much will change, but the UK will leave the EU in March 2019 with a trade agreement. Which will mean, that the UK will no longer be subjected to the EU Tariffs and regulations, meaning the government can draw up its own rules and custom arrangements for trade and have the ability to control the boarder and implement new customs and immigration laws, perhaps seeing less immigrants from around the world trying to settle in the UK.

Although, companies have been promised that other trade deals will be made, Designers do not feel confident in the Prime Minister, with smaller luxury brands being the ones to take the fatal blow. Unsure as to whether they will be in business this time next year, have begun expanding their market to other countries for trade and production. The Fashion Industry is the fourth highest industry in the UK to employ EU Nationals, but has since seen a 4% drop, EU Nationals have said they no longer feel that their position in the UK will be safe, and fear being removed, and some have commented that they feel unwanted and unwelcomed. The fashion industry will undoubtedly face a loss in workers.

The BFC (British Fashion Council) who have taken on the role to come up with a solution for designers, launched the Tier 1 Visa for Exceptional Talent Visa for Fashion Designers in July 2018 along with The Home Office, whom the BFC run the fashion department with, and the support of the Arts Council England. As of October 2018, the BFC are also working to consult the government on a potential Free Trade deal with USA, allowing the UK market to expand and source elsewhere. One has to wonder what affect this will have on the European fashion industry, with less EU nationals coming into the UK for work with designers, who will they turn to?

The opposing side are hopeful for the future, and believe that leaving the EU will give us the opportunity to make stronger trade deals, Trevor Butler a political enthusiast and for Brexit said “style knows no boarders, Brexit will give us the opportunity to take back our traditions and find freedom to makes us stronger, China is an opportune market for fashion that designers should explore” Despite the Brexit fears, Luxury British fashion is positive that they will continue to grow, as wealthy Londoners and tourists continue to spend money on luxury goods. Others do not feel as confident, Álvaro González who owns the shoe brand Alvaro said in an interview recently “Delivery for SS19 is just before [Brexit day] but our next collection, which we are designing now, is a concern — we have no way of knowing how we can sell and deliver it.”

As we enter the final months for the Brexit Deal, there is a lot that is still very undecided, many are left without clarity, and feel rushed to make decisions sooner rather than later,

and with the recent 42 votes of No Confidence in Theresa May, Brexit seems far from over, and we are all left wondering how we will be entering 2019. We are faced with a new Brexit problem on a daily basis, as the fight for what's best for the country continues. If Theresa May loses to her vote of confidence, potential candidates to take the reins of Brexit include Boris Johnson, Sajid Javid, Jeremy Hunt and Penny Mordaunt. This could mean we will be facing a very different Brexit; however, the EU have refused to negotiate even more, there's no saying which deal will be put forward. With no decision yet made, the fashion industry is preparing for the worst-case scenario. Many questions remain, and the future is left unclear, Brexit seems to have become a real-life Hunger Games, who will survive? No one is left untouched by Brexit, as the BFC continue to fight for the fashion industry to survive, smaller luxury brands will probably be the first hit, and will see the end before the beginning, and bigger design houses that have been a part of the British culture for hundreds of years may seek other avenues and markets to venture down. The UK awaits with bated breath to hear their fate in 2019.

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