
INSTITUTIONALISING FASHION EDUCATION

A Policy Framework for Four-Year Degree Programmes
in Nigeria's Private Universities



DAMILOLA ADEMILOKUN

Foreword

I have spent over a decade watching talented, ambitious, hardworking Nigerians navigate a fashion industry that offers them almost no institutional support. I have seen designers who should be running global brands operating without basic business knowledge because no one ever taught them. I have placed HR managers into fashion companies that had never had a structured people function before. I have watched graduates from our short courses outperform their peers simply because they had access to organised, intentional learning — and I have wondered, every time, what they could have become with four years instead of four weeks.

This paper is the product of that decade. It is not a theoretical argument. It is built from the evidence I have gathered running Africa's first Fashion Job Centre, connecting over 6,000 fashion talents to economic opportunities, conducting Labour Market Intelligence research across Nigeria's fashion sector, and completing graduate-level study in Fashion Human Resource Management at IIFM in Milan. I know what this industry needs. I know what is missing. And I know that the missing piece — the one that would unlock everything else — is a properly resourced, academically rigorous, four-year university degree.

I am writing this paper because I believe Nigeria's private universities have the agility, the ambition, and the access to resources that this moment demands. The question is not whether fashion belongs in the university. The question is which university will be bold enough to go first.

Oluwadamilola Ademilokun

Founder & CEO, Obsidian Advisory Africa | The Bridge Institute

Executive Summary

Nigeria's fashion industry is one of the largest and most dynamic in Africa, generating billions of naira annually, sustaining hundreds of thousands of livelihoods, and producing globally recognised talent. Yet it operates on a fundamentally fragile foundation: a workforce trained almost entirely outside the formal university system, through short courses, apprenticeships, and self-directed learning. The result is a sector rich in creativity but chronically under-resourced in management capability, technical mastery, and institutional knowledge.

This paper argues that Nigeria's private universities are uniquely positioned — and strategically obligated — to close this gap by introducing full four-year Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts degree programmes in Fashion Studies, Fashion Business, Fashion Technology, or Fashion Human Resource Management. A four-year degree is not a luxury. It is the infrastructure the industry needs to professionalise, scale, and compete globally.

Drawing on workforce development data, international precedent, and over a decade of on-the-ground experience building fashion talent pipelines in Nigeria, this paper presents a five-pillar framework for implementation: strategic international partnerships; locally grounded curriculum design; investment in world-class physical and digital infrastructure; the recruitment and retention of exceptional faculty; and sustainable funding and accreditation pathways.

*Fashion is not a soft subject. It is economics, culture, technology,
management and identity — all at once.*

1. The Case: Why Fashion Belongs in the University

1.1 A Sector Without Institutional Infrastructure

Nigeria's fashion economy contributes approximately \$6.1 billion to the country's GDP — a figure confirmed by the Minister of Art, Culture, and Creative Economy in October 2024. The broader creative economy, of which fashion is a primary driver, employs approximately 4.2 million people according to the 2024 State of the Creative Innovation Ecosystem in Nigeria study commissioned by the UK-Nigeria Tech Hub. The apparel market alone is projected to reach \$10 billion in revenue by 2025, growing at a compound annual rate of 7.25 percent (Statista, 2025). Yet despite this scale, walk into most Nigerian universities and you will find no dedicated fashion department, no fashion laboratory, no fashion library, and no fashion professor.

The few programmes that exist — typically housed within Home Economics or Clothing & Textiles departments — are poorly funded, undervalued, and disconnected from the contemporary industry. They prepare graduates neither for creative roles nor for the managerial and strategic functions that growing fashion businesses desperately need. The same 2024 UK-Nigeria Tech Hub study found that over 80 percent of practitioners in Nigeria's creative industries are self-taught. Of that figure, an estimated 45 percent learned through Nigeria's informal apprenticeship system — a deeply embedded cultural structure in which families, particularly from lower-income households, deliberately enrol their children with a skill master to learn a trade alongside their formal education. These apprentices learn while they serve: running errands, assisting with production, observing technique through proximity rather than instruction. It is a system built on dedication and resilience, but it is not a substitute for structured, credentialled education. The talent is clearly there. The infrastructure to develop it formally is what is missing.

1.2 The Skills Gap Is Structural, Not Individual

When fashion entrepreneurs struggle to find competent operations managers, or when a brand cannot scale because it lacks a trained HR team, or when a designer exports poorly because no one taught them fashion buying or logistics — this is not a personal failure. It is a systemic one. Nigeria has invested heavily in training fashion creatives but almost nothing in training the business ecosystem that sustains them.

Obsidian Advisory Africa’s Labour Market Intelligence reports consistently show that the most acute talent shortages in the Nigerian fashion sector are not in sewing or design but in: product costing and margin analysis, supply chain management, retail operations, talent acquisition and HR, brand communications, and export compliance and market access.

These are not skills a short course can adequately deliver. They require sustained, structured, academically rigorous education.

1.3 The Global Precedent Is Clear

Institution	Programme Offered
Parsons School of Design (USA)	BFA Fashion Design; BS Fashion Studies
London College of Fashion (UK)	BA Fashion Business; BSc Fashion Management
IIFM, Milan (Italy)	Master in Fashion HRM; BA Fashion Studies
ESMOD Paris (France)	BA Fashion Design & Management
Istituto Marangoni (Italy/UK)	BA Fashion Business; BA Luxury Brand Management
University of Ghana	BA Textiles & Fashion Design
Stellenbosch University (SA)	BA Visual Arts (Fashion Design stream)

Every comparable economy has responded to the professionalisation of fashion by institutionalising its education. Nigeria must do the same.

2. The Five-Pillar Implementation Framework

A world-class fashion degree does not have to look like London or Milan. It has to feel like Lagos.

Pillar 1: Strategic International Partnerships

The fastest route to credibility is partnership. Nigerian private universities should establish formal academic alliances with internationally accredited fashion institutions to achieve three things simultaneously: curriculum credibility, faculty development, and student exposure.

What a strong partnership looks like:

- A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Feeder Institution Agreement with a recognised fashion school such as IIFM Milan, ESMOD Paris, London College of Fashion, or Istituto Marangoni
- Joint degree or dual certification arrangements, allowing Nigerian graduates to exit with both a local degree and an internationally recognised qualification
- Student exchange programmes: a semester or final year placement at the partner institution
- Staff development exchanges: Nigerian faculty spending short-term placements at partner schools to observe pedagogy, update curricula, and build networks
- Co-developed modules: certain courses — particularly those in luxury brand management, global supply chains, or fashion technology — co-taught by partner faculty online or in-person

Critical design principle:

The partnership must not become a colonisation of curriculum. International institutions bring global standards; Nigerian universities bring local intelligence. The syllabus must be built here, from Nigerian industry data, case studies, and practitioner input. The international partner validates and enriches; it does not dictate.

Obsidian Advisory Africa’s partnership with IIFM and its ongoing Labour Market Intelligence work positions it as an ideal intermediary broker for universities seeking to initiate such alliances.

Pillar 2: Locally Grounded Curriculum Development

A fashion degree in Nigeria cannot be a photocopy of one designed for Paris or New York. It must be built from the ground up using Nigerian economic realities, cultural resources, and industry structures as its foundation. This is not a limitation — it is a competitive advantage.

Proposed four-year curriculum architecture:

Year	Theme	Core Modules (Sample)	Applied Learning
Year1	Foundations	History of Nigerian & African Fashion; Textile Science; Introduction to Fashion Business; Design Fundamentals	Market visit across Nigeria: Balogun, Aba, Kano, Eko Market to mention a few; Industry guest lectures
Year 2	Industry Systems	Fashion Supply Chain; Pattern & Garment Construction; Brand Management; Fashion Communications	Live brief from a Nigerian fashion brand; showroom study
Year 3	Specialisation	Fashion HR Management; Retail Buying; Export & Trade; Fashion Technology; Luxury Studies	Semester abroad or industry placement; capstone research
Year 4	Leadership	Entrepreneurship; Policy & Advocacy; Global Fashion Economy; Dissertation	Graduate showcase; portfolio defence; industry panel assessment

Curriculum non-negotiables for the Nigerian context:

- A dedicated module on African textile heritage, including Ankara, Aso-Oke, Adire, Akwete, and Kente traditions — treated with the same academic rigour as European fashion history
- A module on the informal economy and artisanal production systems that characterise Nigerian fashion at scale
- Mandatory industry immersion: every student must complete a minimum of 400 hours of structured industry placement across the four years
- An ethics and sustainability module addressing the environmental and labour conditions specific to West African supply chains
- A digital skills thread running throughout all four years: PLM software, CAD/pattern technology, social commerce, data analytics

Pillar 3: World-Class Fashion Infrastructure

A fashion degree without the right physical and digital infrastructure is an insult to the profession. Universities considering this investment must be willing to build, equip, and maintain facilities that signal to students, industry, and potential partners that fashion is taken seriously.

The Fashion Lab Suite: minimum viable infrastructure

- Pattern Cutting & Construction Studio: industrial cutting tables, dress forms at multiple size grades, cutting machines, professional sewing machines (industrial and domestic), pressing equipment
- Textiles & Materials Library: a curated physical library of textile swatches, trims, closures, and findings sourced from Nigerian and international markets, updated annually
- Digital Design Lab: CAD workstations loaded with industry-standard software (CLO 3D, Adobe Creative Suite, Optitex), high-resolution printers, colour calibration tools
- Fashion Business & HR Suite: a co-working style space equipped for mock HR simulations, brand audits, pitch presentations, and case study workshops
- Runway & Exhibition Space: a multipurpose space capable of hosting graduate showcases, industry presentations, and pop-up retail experiments
- Resource Centre: curated fashion library with international trade journals, NUC-compliant academic texts, access to WGSN and equivalent trend intelligence platforms

Universities should resist the temptation to launch the programme with inadequate infrastructure and upgrade later. The lab and the degree should launch together. Under-resourced delivery damages the credibility of fashion education for years.

Pillar 4: Recruiting and Retaining Exceptional Faculty

The quality of a fashion programme is ultimately determined by its people. The Nigerian fashion academy faces a specific challenge: many of its most knowledgeable practitioners are not academics, and many of its academics are not practitioners. Bridging this gap requires an intentional, hybrid faculty model.

The hybrid faculty model:

- Full-time academic faculty: PhD or Masters-qualified educators with specialist knowledge in fashion business, textiles science, design history, or related disciplines. These faculty carry the research and curriculum development mandate.
- Resident industry fellows: Senior practitioners — creative directors, brand founders, HR leaders, buyers, supply chain managers — appointed on one to two year fellowships to teach applied modules and maintain industry currency in the department.
- Visiting international faculty: Two to four visiting professors per year from partner institutions or global fashion schools, delivering intensive week-long modules in specialist areas.
- Adjunct practitioners: A rotating cohort of working professionals who contribute guest lectures, live briefs, and studio critiques on a flexible basis.

Faculty attraction and retention strategies:

- Competitive remuneration benchmarked against private sector equivalents, not only against other academic institutions
- Funded professional development: annual budget for conference attendance, industry visits, and continuing education
- Research support: dedicated time and resources for faculty to publish, consult, and maintain practitioner relationships
- Titles and recognition that honour both academic and industry credentials
-

Obsidian Advisory Africa and The Bridge Institute can serve as a resource and partner for universities designing their faculty strategy, drawing on a network of over 6,000 fashion professionals and its established relationships with industry leaders across Nigeria.

Pillar 5: Accreditation, Funding and Sustainability

The accreditation pathway

All new degree programmes in Nigerian private universities require National Universities Commission (NUC) accreditation. Universities should engage the NUC early in the design process, treating the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) as a floor rather than a ceiling. The fashion industry's professional bodies — including the Fashion Designers Association of Nigeria (FADAN) — should be engaged as external validators.

Funding architecture

- **Tuition revenue:** realistic programme costs should be transparently communicated to students from the outset, reflecting genuine infrastructure and faculty investment
- **Industry sponsorship:** major Nigerian fashion brands, textile companies, and retail groups should be approached for lab naming rights, scholarship endowments, and equipment partnerships
- **Government and development funding:** SMEDAN, the Federal Ministry of Finance's SME and education desks, and international development partners such as the British Council, GIZ, and the European Union all have active fashion and creative economy funding windows
- **International university partnerships:** some partner institutions will co-invest in curriculum development, lab equipment, or faculty training as part of strategic alliance agreements
- **Revenue diversification:** the fashion department should be designed as a revenue-generating entity from year one, through open short courses, industry training contracts, consulting, and graduate showcase events open to the public

3. A 36-Month Implementation Roadmap

Phase	Timeline	Key Actions	Milestone
Phase 1	Months 1–6	Feasibility study; NUC pre-engagement; identify international partner; secure founding industry sponsors; appoint programme director	Board approval; MOU signed with partner institution
Phase 2	Months 7–18	Curriculum design with Obsidian/Bridge Institute; lab design and build; recruit founding faculty cohort; develop student recruitment strategy	NUC provisional approval; lab commissioned; faculty contracts signed
Phase 3	Months 19–24	Inaugural student intake; launch industry advisory board; begin year one delivery; initiate first industry placement partnerships	First cohort enrolled; industry board convened; first placements confirmed
Phase 4	Months 25–36	Full NUC accreditation review; launch short course and executive education arm; first graduate showcase; begin international exchange placements	Full accreditation granted; showcase attended by industry; first exchange students deployed

4. Why Private Universities, and Why Now

Nigeria's private universities have consistently demonstrated the agility and ambition that federal institutions have struggled to match. They have introduced new programmes more rapidly, built infrastructure more decisively, and attracted international partnerships more creatively. Fashion education requires exactly this disposition.

The argument for urgency is simple: Nigeria's fashion industry is at an inflection point. International attention is growing, diaspora investment is increasing, and the global market for African fashion is expanding faster than the sector's institutional capacity to respond. The window to build the educational infrastructure that the next generation of Nigerian fashion leaders will rely on is now.

Private universities that establish fashion degree programmes in the next three years will not merely be entering a market. They will be defining one. They will attract the most ambitious students, the most forward-looking industry partners, and the most transformative research funding. They will produce the Chief People Officers, Creative Directors, Supply Chain Directors, and Entrepreneur-founders that Nigerian fashion will be powered by in 2040.

*The university that dresses the future of Nigerian fashion will be remembered
long after the season is over.*

4. Recommendations

For University Councils and Governing Boards:

1. Formally commission a feasibility study for a four-year fashion degree programme within the 2026-2027 academic planning cycle, benchmarking against the NUC's Minimum Academic Standards framework
2. Designate a senior academic champion within the institution to lead the development process and engage the NUC's Directorate of Academic Standards proactively
3. Engage Obsidian Advisory Africa or The Bridge Institute as a technical partner from the outset, leveraging their existing Labour Market Intelligence, curriculum frameworks, and industry networks
4. Establish an Industry Advisory Board with a minimum of five active fashion professionals — drawn from NFC frameworks, FADAN membership, the Nigerian Export Promotion Council's fashion export network, and leading Lagos Fashion Week participants — before the programme launches
5. Explore TETFund's institutional capacity-building intervention lines and the UK-Nigeria Tech Hub's Creative Fund as early funding sources for lab infrastructure and curriculum development
6. Develop a dedicated Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) framework for fashion-specific degree programmes that reflects the unique pedagogical and infrastructure requirements of the discipline, as distinct from existing Home Economics or Clothing & Textiles standards
7. Create a fast-track provisional approval process for universities partnering with internationally accredited fashion institutions, building on the transnational education pilot framework currently being developed in partnership with the British Council and TETFund
8. Commission national labour market research on the fashion sector, in partnership with organisations such as Obsidian Advisory Africa, to inform accreditation standards and graduate outcome benchmarks
9. Engage leading associations/clusters, industry enablers and professional communities — as an official industry validator in the accreditation process for fashion degree programmes

For the National Universities Commission (NUC):

10. Develop a dedicated Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) framework for fashion-specific degree programmes that reflects the unique pedagogical and infrastructure requirements of the discipline, as distinct from existing Home Economics or Clothing & Textiles standards
11. Create a fast-track provisional approval process for universities partnering with internationally accredited fashion institutions, building on the transnational education pilot framework currently being developed in partnership with the British Council and TETFund
12. Commission national labour market research on the fashion sector, in partnership with organisations such as Obsidian Advisory Africa, to inform accreditation standards and graduate outcome benchmarks
13. Engage FADAN — the Fashion Designers Association of Nigeria — as an official industry validator in the accreditation process for fashion degree programmes

For the Fashion Industry:

14. Formalise placement agreements with universities, committing to a minimum number of structured student placements per year and participating in the design of placement assessment frameworks
15. Establish industry-funded scholarships specifically for fashion degree programmes at Nigerian private universities, channelled through the NUC's scholarship coordination mechanism or directly through university endowment funds
16. Participate in curriculum co-design processes — particularly through FADAN's skills and education committee — to ensure that graduate profiles match genuine industry needs
17. Recognise and reward degree-qualified fashion professionals with differentiated compensation structures, creating the labour market signal that makes degree investment worthwhile for the next generation

About the Author and Organisations

DAMILOLA ADEMILOKUN



Dami Ademilokun is the Founder and CEO of Obsidian Advisory Africa, and the founder of Africa's first Fashion Job Centre. She is a Fellow of the Council for International African Fashion Education, a certified SMEDAN Business Development Service Provider, and is currently completing a Master's in Fashion Human Resource Management at IIFM — Istituto Italiano di Moda e Management, Milan. She has connected more than 6,000 fashion talents to economic opportunities across Nigeria and beyond.

OBSIDIAN ADVISORY AFRICA



Obsidian Advisory Africa is a Lagos-based fashion HR and workforce development organisation with four divisions:

- Obsidian Advisory Africa (HR consulting)
 - The Bridge Institute (fashion skills education),
 - The Bridge Hub (co-working and community space), and
 - Warise (a fashion and creative sector job-matching platform).
-

THE BRIDGE INSTITUTE



The Bridge Institute is Nigeria's dedicated fashion workforce development institution, delivering structured skills education programmes, professional certifications, and industry immersion experiences to the next generation of Nigerian fashion professionals.

For partnership enquiries, curriculum consulting, or to commission this research for your institution, please contact:

*Obsidian Advisory Africa | info@obsidianadvisoryafrica.com
The Bridge Institute | Lagos, Nigeria*

"Nigeria's fashion industry will not wait.
The question is whether its universities will."

*For partnership enquiries, curriculum consulting, or to commission this research for your
institution, please contact:*

*Obsidian Advisory Africa | info@obsidianadvisoryafrica.com
The Bridge Institute | Lagos, Nigeria*