



CEREMONIAL GOWNS: COTTON, CARBON AND CHINA

In 2019, we carried out [the first part](#) of our gowns supply chain mapping project; we identified areas of concern, raised them with our suppliers and asked for their feedback.

After the [BBC highlighted the issue of cotton farm workers](#), we continued our work and this time asking suppliers to look further down their supply chain to their second tier. This article details the outcomes.

We asked our suppliers:

- Where the raw materials for their gowns come from
- About social and environmental impacts of production on garment industries
- Due diligence practices in their supply chains, including the monitoring of working conditions.

Importantly, we discovered that all of our suppliers use man-made fibres (not cotton) to manufacture gowns, and that most source their raw materials from China.

H Tempest source not just essential material (polyester) for gowns and hoods, but accessories such as satin, thread, metal buttons and gathering tape, all from China. H Tempest was unable to provide further information relating to working conditions and the environmental impact of their supply chain. We will continue to work with them on these aspects.

J. Wippell source all their materials including polyester, wool, and imitation silk, from the same established vetted UK supply chain they have had for over 30 years. Quality is important to them, and they confirmed that the companies they work with have achieved accreditations such as ISO 9001. The business also undertakes an annual review of their suppliers and are now considering implementing site visits to gather even more information.

On environmental considerations, the organisation has recently made publicly available their environmental and corporate social responsibility policies. Additionally, they



have undertaken a [carbon review of their operations](#) with Low Carbon Devon; this provided an opportunity to look at the entire life cycle of the gowns and materials used and compare a recycled polyester with a standard polyester.

Graduation Attire (Eves) use various weaves of fabric, but all have polyester as the main raw material. The main source of its recycled polyester is used [PET](#) bottles from the Guangdong province in China and their fabric suppliers are also based there.

Historically Graduation Attire has utilised a cascading auditing approach - they encouraged their suppliers to audit lower tiers. In an attempt to simplify the approach and encourage greater transparency, they plan to audit directly in the future, starting with the main fabric suppliers. Timescales to audit lower tier suppliers have yet to be agreed though some information has been requested.

For its environmental performance, Graduation Attire has partnered with an organisation in China, to work towards measuring their carbon footprint utilising some unique software. Once emissions are calculated the supplier will work towards offsetting these.

Graduation Attire said “The calculation of CO₂e of the gowns is the essential first step we do in order to evaluate any further action. This calculation is based on industry average emission factors as well as the production information & product details provided by the factories. Water and electricity usage are part of these calculations. All calculations are done in accordance with the GHG protocol. Given that polyester is the main material used, we subsequently move towards recycled polyester fabrics to drastically reduce the gown’s CO₂e. Carbon offsets are done with certified projects.”

Regarding the disposal of the gowns, the organisation will first assess whether a garment can be repaired or reworked. If this is not possible, and only as a last resort, they report that the item will be recycled.

Marston Robing uses recycled polyester. Visits to the factory where gowns and hoods are produced has taken place, and working conditions checked however no official report or audits have been provided yet.

Marston advised that all polyester waste is taken by recyclers to companies where it is turned back into grain, filament, then thread and finally fabric.

LUPC will continue to work with its members and suppliers across all aspects of responsible procurement activity.

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