

#4: The issue is too big and I feel helpless



Summary

Learning about climate change and the impact of humans on the planet can result in a complex emotional response. In order to help young people deal with **climate anxiety**, it is important to talk about solutions and empower learners to take personal actions while reassuring them that tackling these issues is a shared task. Activities aim to support young people by encouraging them to explore positive responses to the issues they have learnt about relating to the fashion industry on a global, national, local and personal level.



This activity is designed to enable learners to reflect on their responses to what they have learnt about, and to support discussions about concerns they may have.

At the end of this learners will

- have explored their emotional responses to what they have learnt about some of the environmental impacts of garment production.
- also have considered some existing practical responses to these issues.

Time frame

45 minutes

Lesson format

- Learners watch and discuss short video.

- Learners record feelings, then discuss how they feel about what they have learnt about the impact of fast fashion on the planet.
- Learners work in groups to explore positive work being done in different areas of society, and share their findings.
- Learners record feelings and discuss if they have changed.

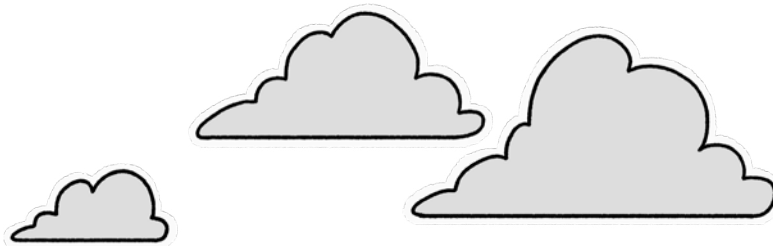
Note: We recommend that you read the following guidance about helping young people deal with climate anxiety as preparation for leading this activity.

<https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/support/climate-anxiety-faq>

<https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/support/youngpeople/544-youth-resources>

Key resources

- 4 This issue is too big and I feel helpless Presentation
- 4 This issue is too big Activity 1 – choose whether to use the templates of positive and negative words provided, or the blank template that learners complete. Each learner will need 2 ‘umbrellas’ – one with positive words and one with negative words, which they will use during task 2 and task 5.
- 4 This issue is too big Activity 2 – each group needs 1 sheet, and a device to access to the internet.



What to do

1. Learners discuss what they have already learnt about how fast fashion is affecting the planet, based on the case study in Section 2, Denim Detective and having watched the Can fashion be sustainable? BBC video.

Slide 1 **Task 1** Watch BBC Earth video (2min 52) called Can fashion be sustainable?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZoiU8sprXpQ>

Discussion points:

- How is fast fashion affecting the planet? Affecting species, habitats, air quality, polluting water
- How many items of clothing are produced? 100 billion each year globally.
- What can we do? Consider every purchase, love our choices, buy quality items that will last, consume less, recycle and repurpose.



- Slide 3 **Task 2** Learners log their individual personal emotional responses to what they have learnt so far, using the umbrellas in 4 This issue is too big Activity.

(**Note:** Each learner should have an umbrella with 6 positive words and another with 6 negative words. You may choose to use the version with feelings/responses on that we have provided, or you may want to encourage learners to discuss feelings/responses and use their ideas to complete the blank umbrellas. Learners should circle where on the scale of each feeling/response they feel they are at this point, and will return to the same umbrellas at the end of the session. The umbrella activity is intended as moment of private thought, though you may wish to hold a class discussion.)

Wellbeing umbrellas are taken from <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/culture/projects/ucl-museum-wellbeing-measures>)

- Learners then discuss their responses to what they have learnt about the impact of the fashion industry on the climate.
- Slide 4 **Task 3** Learners split into 4 groups. They use 4 This issue is too big Activity 2. Each group needs 1 sheet and a device with access to the internet. They will explore positive changes on a global, national, local and personal level, one per group..
- (**Note:** links have been included in slides 5 - 8 to enable content such as images to be easily shared to the whole group, if individual research groups wish to do so.)
- Slide 9 **Task 4** Learners feedback to whole group what they have learnt about positive practical approaches at different levels of society.
- Slide 10 **Task 5** Learners record/discuss how they feel about the impact of fashion on the environment at this point in their learning, using their wellbeing umbrellas again.

Discussion points:

- Do learners still feel the same?
- How do the emotional responses each learner noted at the beginning of the session compare to emotional response noted at the end?
- If there are any changes, are learners able to explain why their responses have changed?



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Museums



thinktank
Birmingham science museum



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Sustainable threads

**Be a fashion rebel -
reduce your global
environmental impact.**

Our Changing Planet – the environmental impacts of fast fashion

The term **fast fashion** relates to the design, manufacturing, and marketing methods used to rapidly produce high volumes of (often) cheap clothing which have short trends.

40% of purchased clothing is never even worn¹

93% of brands are not paying garment workers a living wage²

The fashion industry produces:

10% of global carbon emissions⁴

20% of global wastewater⁵

Growth of cotton - the raw material in your jeans - uses around 25% of the world's pesticides, damaging ecosystems, soil, water sources and aquatic life³



64% of new fabrics are made from plastics which pollute the oceans with microfibres at vast scale⁶

There are plenty of ways you can disrupt what's going on and work towards a more sustainable future of fashion.

"We should design opportunities for young people and adults to explore fast fashion and facilitate the discussion of ways of supporting more sustainable supply chains; train teachers to support the progress and wellbeing of teachers and learners in relation to climate change education and focus on how the individual is part of a complex system for change"

Dr Verity Jones, University of the West of England

Repair cultures: the up-side of upcycling

There is a long history of **mending** and **making** and repair cultures can be found across the world, from 'repair cafés', to 'DIY maker fairs', 'knit and natter' groups, Women's Institute meetings, the art of Japanese **Shashiko** (visible mending) or Brazilian **Gambiarra** (makeshift fixing of objects with whatever materials are to hand).



Coming together in seemingly small acts of making and repairing can be important in shaping a sense of togetherness, belonging and community, as well as tackling loneliness and sharing skills.

These cultures have a deeper importance than just mending and recycling things but for many the lost skills of sewing, a lack of time, or the expense of new fabrics can be off-putting.

There are **"key threads implicated in the destruction of cultures of repair"**, says Tristan Schultz, from the Decolonising Design Group in Australia.¹¹



Local Birmingham environmental activism

Extinction Rebellion 2019

In the summer of 2019, environmental activists, Extinction Rebellion (XR) organised a sustainable fashion show in Birmingham to highlight the environmental and social impact of fast fashion and **"develop a radical new relationship with clothing"**.⁷



Credit: Fast Fashion - Extinction Rebellion Birmingham (xrbrum.org.uk)

"Protestors said they did not believe in reliance on companies and the market, governments, or lifestyle changes by individuals to solve the climate crisis. Almost all said they were protesting to raise awareness of the climate emergency, and to pressure politicians to act."

Dr Graeme Hayes, from Aston University⁸

Sustainable Fashion choices, Birmingham 2021

Based in Digbeth and online, COW is a **sustainable and ethical** vintage clothes store. Even their shop interiors are made from 90% recycled materials. They offer a range of upcycled clothes – intended to add style to old clothes and make them last.

Reworked and Salvaged Vintage Style Clothing, Our Own Eco Chic Range – We Are Cow⁹

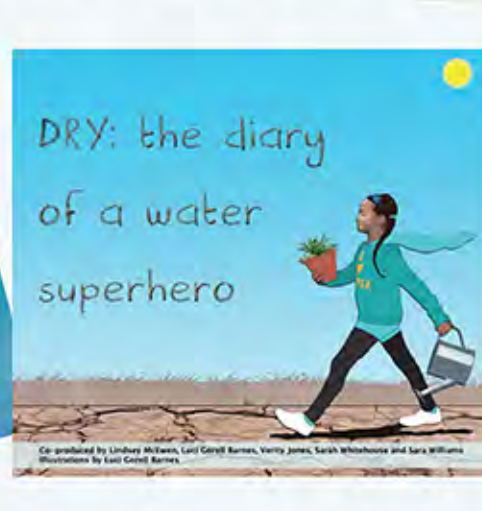
'Swapping' and 'swishing' are terms which capture a new enthusiasm for making sustainable fashion choices. The Rubery swap-shop in South West Birmingham is run by the local community to address the high cost and short lifetime of school uniforms by organising swaps and free uniforms for families.¹⁰

Take action

- **Buy less.** Only buy clothes you'll wear a lot!
- **Love the clothes you already have**
- **Mend, swap and recycle your clothes**
- **Upskill!** Learn, and then teach someone else, how to patch or sew on a button
- **Use social media to ask companies #whomademyclothes and #whatsinmyclothes**
- **Check out the work of Fashion Revolution and see what you can do to raise awareness**

Climate Fiction: Sparking the imagination on climate change

Fiction that draws on issues relating to the climate emergency is referred to as **'cli-fi'**; a growing genre on library and bookseller's shelves alike. These books offer opportunities for young readers to immerse themselves with characters, settings and plots that are dealing with processes and impacts of climate change and often, actions that people can take to make a difference.



Responding to 'eco-anxiety'

Feelings of grief and loss, fear and anxiety, trauma, depression and distress have been recorded in relation to climate change. Some argue that these feelings are a necessary part of motivating positive action and making our everyday habits more sustainable. Others observe that these feelings and the impacts of climate change are shared unequally between different social groups and places. Many think it is important that nature itself can have a 'voice' in fiction and that climate fiction plays an important role in opening pathways to alternative futures.

What do young people know about climate change?

A survey published in June 2021 by the Global Goals Centre asked over 1200 young people aged 7-18 about their feelings and understandings of climate change.¹²

- 7-18 year olds are confident in their understanding of key terms relating to climate change: carbon emissions, greenhouse gases, renewable energy and eco footprinting.
- Young people are more confident than adults in their understanding of fast fashion.
- 72% of young people are willing to support key habits in reducing climate change compared to 62% of adults.



Future solutions for sustainable fashion

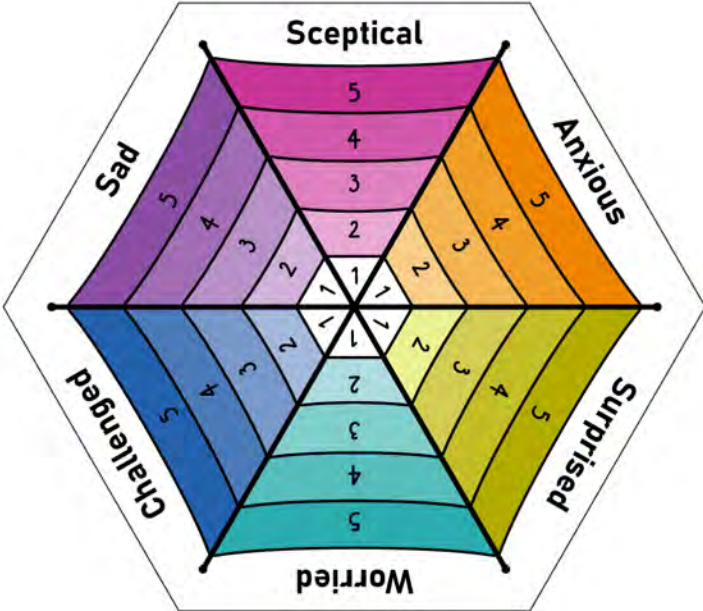
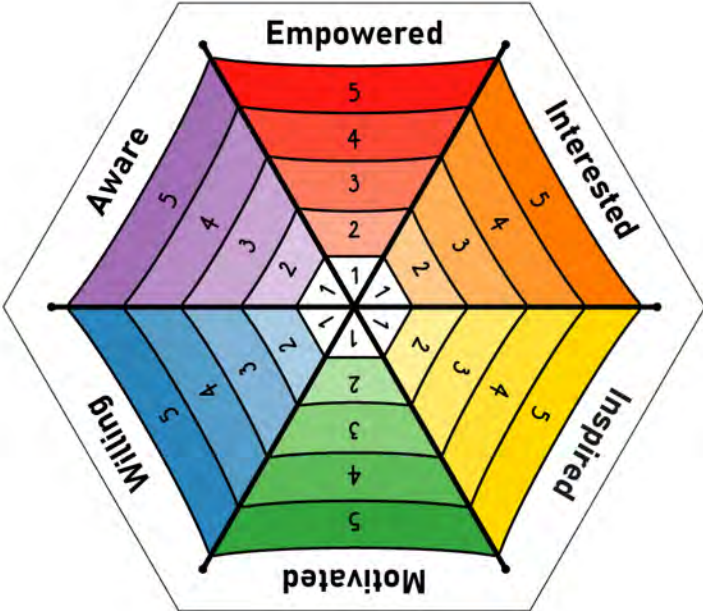
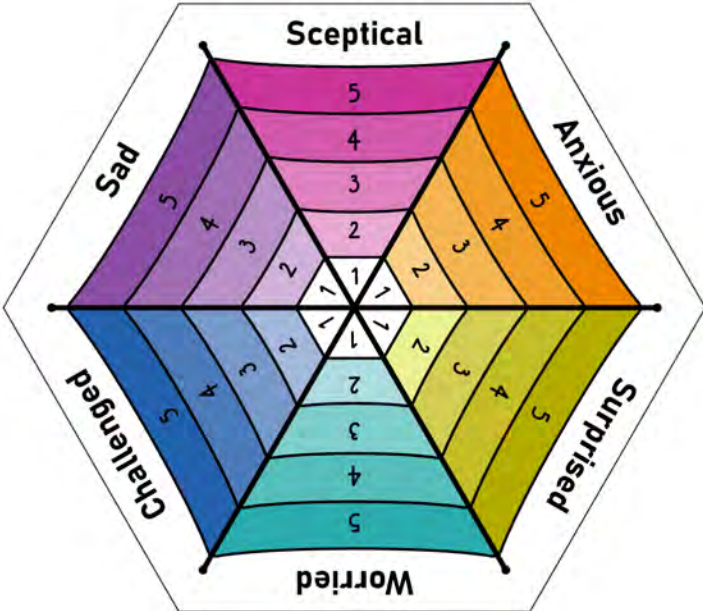
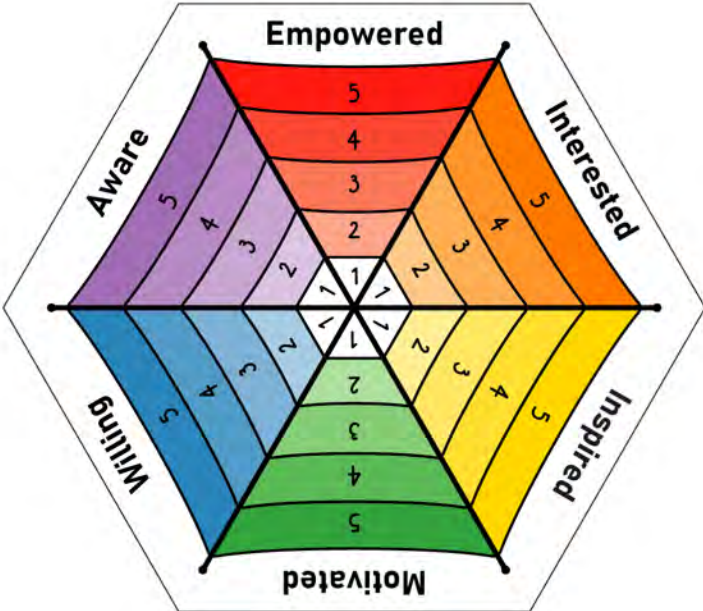
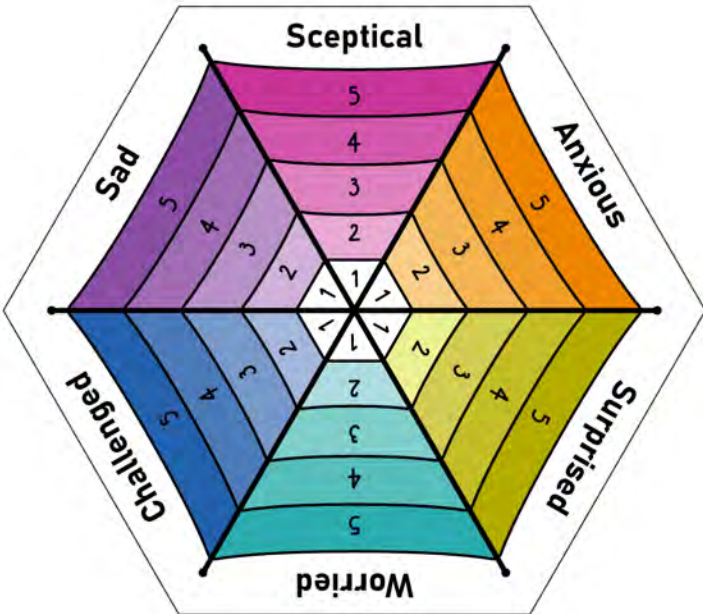
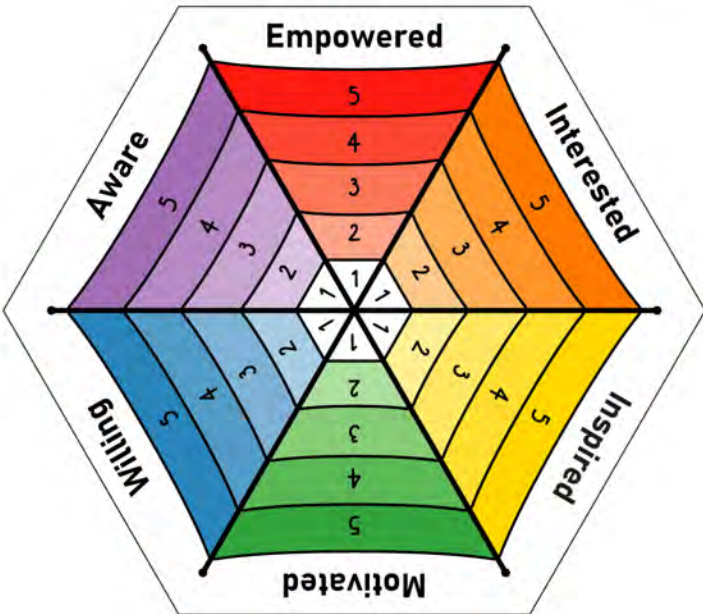
One promising area of activity in the fashion industry is the shift from a 'linear economy' to a 'circular economy', which involves rethinking how clothing is produced, consumed and re-used.

Another development within the fashion industry is to use technology to make visible the carbon footprints of specific materials, products and items of clothing.

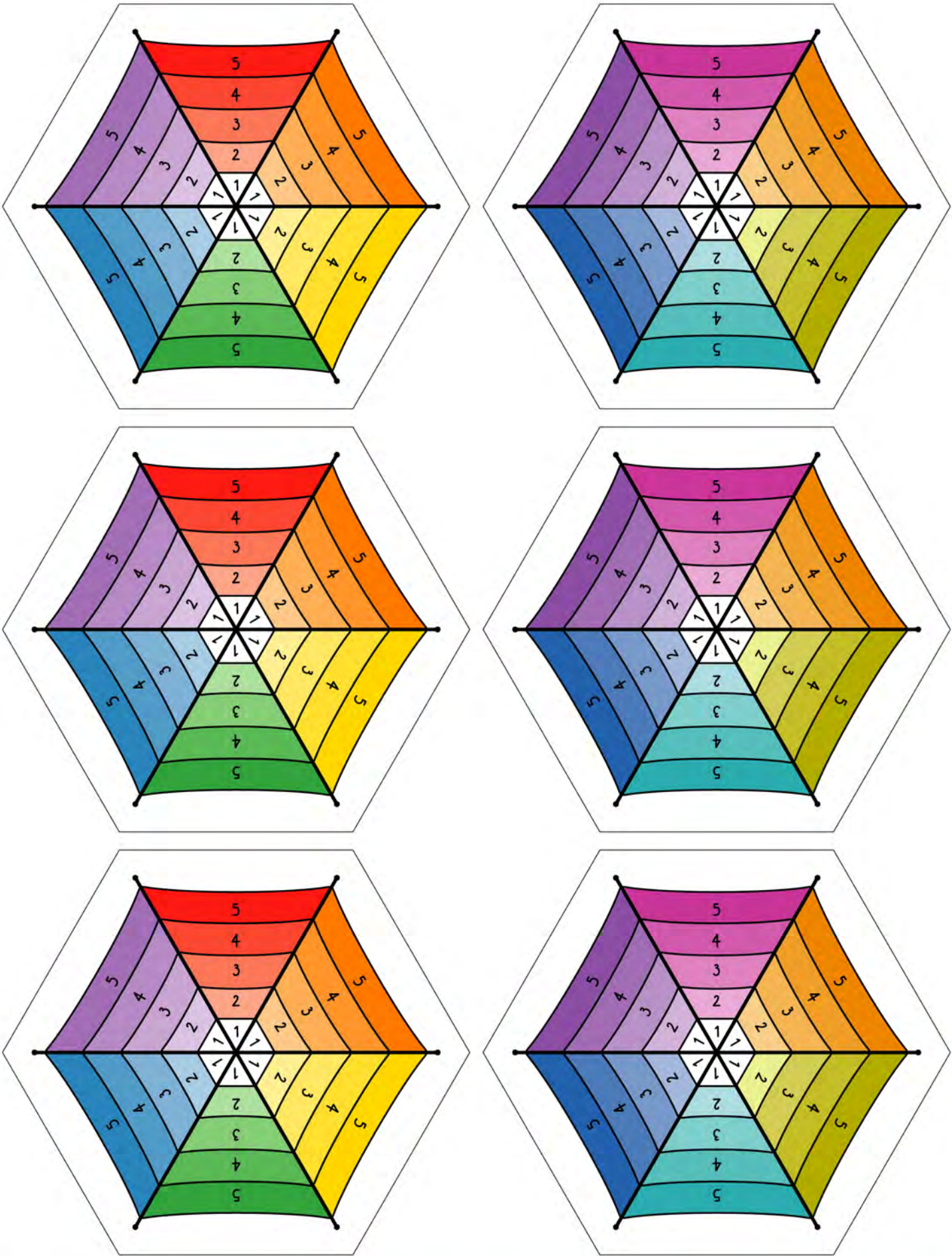
- **Carbon labelling** is being used to show how much carbon dioxide is used in clothing production
- **Digital passports** are being used to provide information about factory conditions, production processes, as well as documenting the energy use impacts of washing clothes too frequently
- **Traceability tags** are used by some ethical clothing companies to give consumers access to detailed information on who has made their clothes, and even which sheep may have been involved!

1 www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2019/09/23/costo-moda-medio-ambiente
2 fashioncheck.org/
3 www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/the-state-of-fashion-2020-navigating-uncertainty
4 www.unep.org/forestry/press/un-alliance-aims-put-fashion-path-sustainability
5 www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/fashions-tiny-hidden-secret
6 friendsoftheearth.uk/plastics/microfibres-plastic-in-our-clothes

7 xrbrum.org.uk/fast-fashion/
8 www.aston.ac.uk/latest-news/extinction-rebellions-activists-more-likely-be-new-protesting-study-shows
9 wearcow.com/collections/rework
10 www.ruberyswapshop.co.uk/
11 link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-10-3521-0_19
12 www.globalgoalscentre.org/news



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Research steps taken on a global level

Find out more about the Global Goals Initiative, 17 Sustainable development goals from Global Goals Centre.

<https://www.globalgoals.org/>

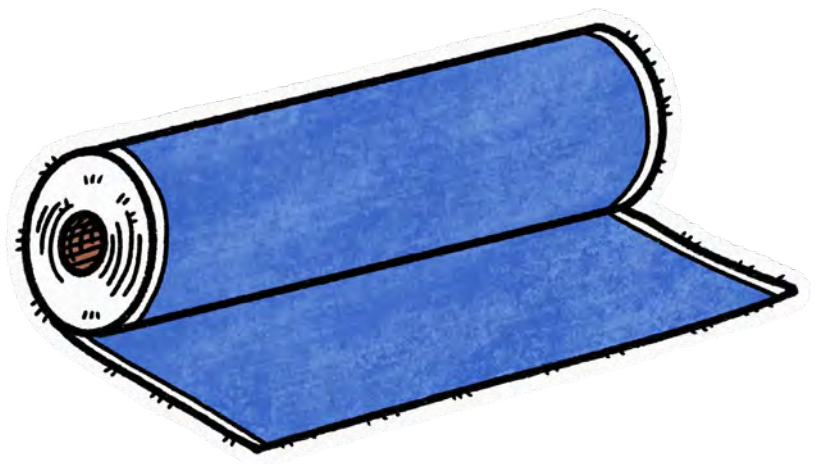
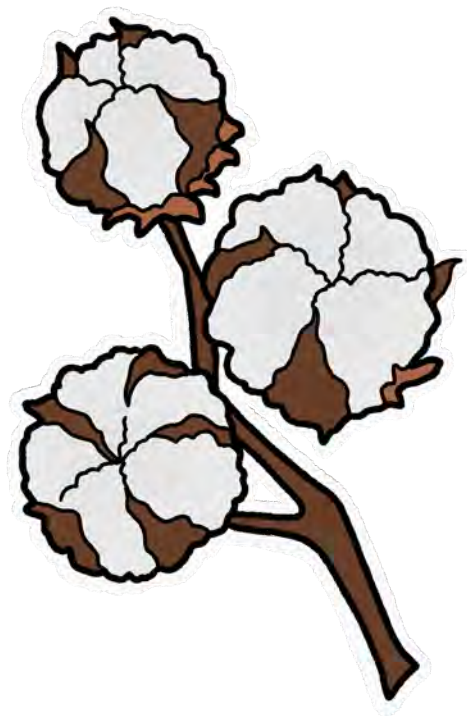
Which goals relate to a more sustainable approach to fashion?

In November 2021 COP26, the UN climate change conference, was held in Glasgow

<https://ukcop26.org/>

What did that mean for fashion?

<https://www.voguebusiness.com/sustainability/the-fashion-takeaways-from-cop26>



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Research steps taken on a national level

Learn about the Green revolution strategy, a 10 point plan for a green industrial revolution in the UK

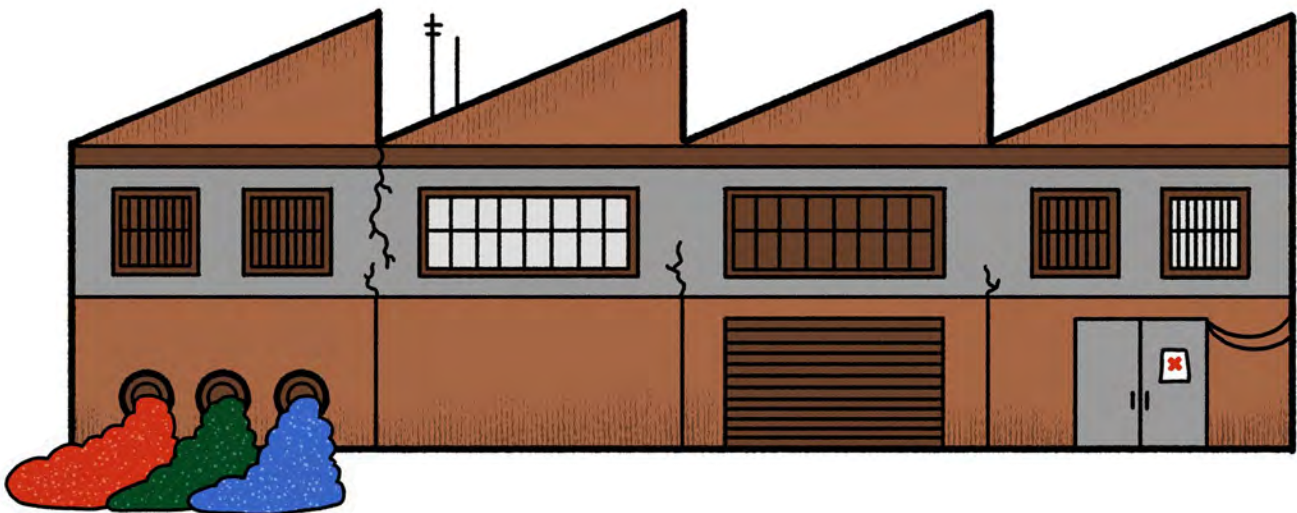
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-ten-point-plan-for-a-green-industrial-revolution>

A report summary of government report called 'Fixing Fashion: clothing consumption and sustainability'

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmenvaud/1952/report-summary.html>

Find out more about Fashion Revolution, founded after the Rana Plaza disaster

<https://www.fashionrevolution.org/about/get-involved/>



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Research steps taken on a local level

Find out about one local woman's response to re-using clothing in this BBC report about the Rubery swap shop:
<https://bit.ly/3GnR9ky>

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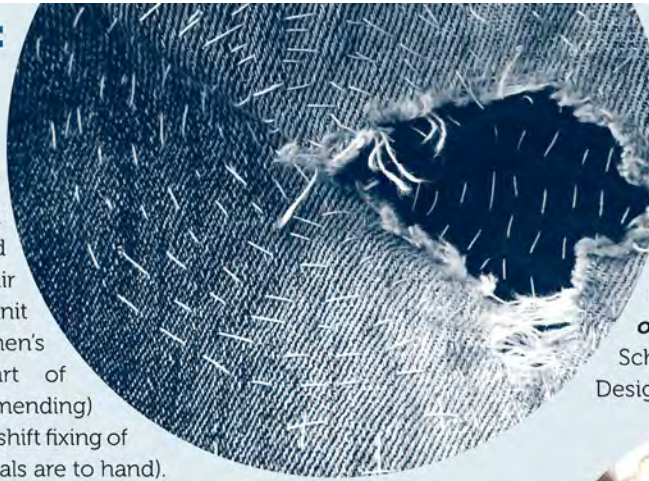
Research steps that can be done on a personal level

Upskill!

How to sew on a button (RedTed arts video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mlGGn3AS1E>**Repair cultures: the up-side of upcycling**

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