

FASHION RETAIL ACADEMY

The next generation

Former Prime Minister Tony Blair joined top retailers including Arcadia tycoon Sir Philip Green to celebrate Fashion Retail Academy's 10th anniversary. **George MacDonald** reports

Talent is one of the most common words heard from any retail leader. As shopping habits change in an intensively competitive industry, attracting and retaining the best people is at the top of any retailer's must-do list.

And few retail talent pools can compare with the Fashion Retail Academy, the shopkeeping school created by Arcadia tycoon Sir Philip Green with the backing of some of the industry's flagship businesses.

The academy this year celebrates its 10th anniversary. Since opening in 2005 backed by Arcadia, Marks & Spencer, Next and Tesco's F&F clothing business, along with retail data specialist Experian, it has gone from strength to strength.

A decade ago, the first intake of students numbered 50 and they had a choice of two year-long courses. Fast forward to now and there are 770 students with a choice of 13 courses.

From buying to visual merchandising to ecommerce, the academy has it covered – graduates are in demand across the industry and more than 100 retailers now support it.

The reason is obvious – it produces top talent, reflected in the fact that over the 10 years, 76.4% of graduates are employed and 12.8% are in further or higher education.

Perhaps that should be no surprise because any visitor to the academy would be struck by the enthusiasm of the students, who benefit from masterclasses from top retail executives and placements with the top companies.

Graduate Thom Scherdel, who left in 2006, found employment with Selfridges and Topman before launching online business The IdleMan.

He says: "The Fashion Retail Academy was totally life-changing. Without the tutors and

experience I had there my life would not be the same. They spotted skills in me that I didn't even know I had."

Similarly Courtney Spellacy, who graduated in 2013, says: "I was fortunate enough to be exposed to industry experts through masterclasses as well as undertaking an invaluable work placement. I was able to achieve my goal and secure my first job in the lingerie allocation team at M&S."

Former Prime Minister Tony Blair joined retailers including Green to celebrate the Fashion Retail Academy's 10th anniversary.

As Prime Minister, Blair supported the creation of the academy, and formally opened it. He returned last week, when the 10th birthday was marked at the shopkeeping school's annual awards.

Blair recalls: "When Sir Philip came to meet me at Number 10 to discuss his vision he wanted to create something that was not a school but an academy. Somewhere that taught to the best degree and maximised young people's potential."

"Our country is a leader in design and creativity and the Fashion Retail Academy has helped nurture its students and excite them about future possibilities."

Since Blair's early visit the academy has been visited by greats from the worlds of politics and business, emblematic of its success. From David and Samantha Cameron and former Education Secretary Michael Gove to *The Apprentice* star and businessman Lord Sugar or musician and entrepreneur Will.i.am, the school has attracted interest from all fields.

Retail leaders including former M&S boss Lord Rose and his successor Marc Bolland, Harrods chief executive Michael Ward, Tesco commercial director Jason Tarry and



Fashion Retail Academy founder Sir Philip Green surrounded by award-winning students and singers Paloma Faith (to his right) and Ciara (on his left)

Boohoo.com founder Mahmud Kamani were all at the 10th anniversary event.

Green said: "I would like to thank the founding partners for helping me bring my vision to life. We have been fortunate to have been able to provide endless opportunities and are very proud of our 90% employment rate over 10 years for our level-four students."

Green chose the occasion to launch a £100,000 seed capital fund to provide backing for students with good ideas for starting their own businesses.

Typically ambitious, Green says – only half-jokingly – that he might find the next Mark Zuckerberg among the students.

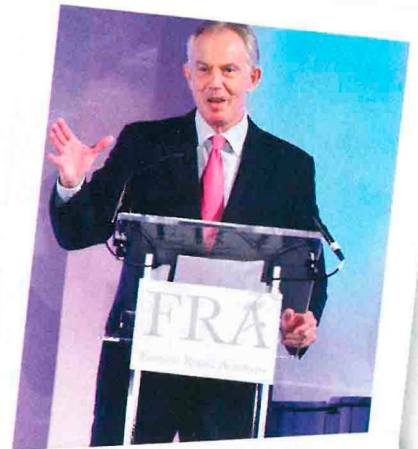
Even if no new Facebook is found, the academy has already produced business owners. Employers of the future, as well as great employees, are among the students' ranks.

"The Fashion Retail Academy has helped nurture its students and excite them about future possibilities" Tony Blair



Sir Philip Green spoke to Retail Week about the future of the industry at the Fashion Retail Academy awards. Watch the video at Retail-week.com/philipgreenfra

ion of retail



Former Prime Minister Tony Blair (top) gave an address celebrating the success of the Fashion Retail Academy, while other guests at the event included singer Paloma Faith and chief executive of the British Fashion Council Caroline Rush CBE



Lord Stuart Rose, Tony Blair, Sir Philip Green and Marc Bolland at the event

