

# Minister's Statements and Speeches

## **PUBLIC BILLS**

### **THE ACADEMY OF DESIGN AND INNOVATION BILL**

**(NO. XI OF 2022)**

**(12.07.2022)**

**The Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives (Mr S. Bholah):**

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am extremely honoured today to present to the House, the Academy of Design and Innovation Bill, which will bring design to new pedestals.

This Bill provides for the establishment of an Academy of Design and Innovation which will take over the functions and powers of the existing Fashion and Design Institute. Consequently, the Fashion and Design Institute Act of 2008 will be repealed.

I have deemed it important to introduce this new piece of legislation to better respond to emerging global permutations in the design field. This new Bill will address recurring challenges by providing for an adequate supply of a new generation of highly skilled, technologically savvy and versatile labour force in the country.

Indeed, we are paving the way for a renaissance in multi-sectorial design fields. The proposed Academy of Design and Innovation will spearhead excellence in several design fields and will provide a new boost to the creative industry in fields such as graphic and multimedia, built-in and architecture, arts and crafts as well as jewellery. Greater exposure to multi-sectorial designs will be conferred upon the whole gamut of the design sector and will counter the common understanding restricted to fashion and design only.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is to be reckoned that the establishment of the existing Fashion and Design Institute, that is, FDI was one of the recommendations made by a former UNDP Consultant, namely Professor Edward Newton, in 2008. He advised that training programmes should be provided in the fashion and design field with a view to responding to industry needs. Consequently, the FDI became fully operational in 2009 with the merger of the School of Design of the then Industrial and Vocational Training Board (IVTB), the Department of Textile

Technology of the University of Mauritius and the Textile and Apparel Development Centre of the then Enterprise Mauritius.

The FDI is currently responsible for the conduct of academic, professional, vocational and training programmes as well as short courses in the field of fashion and design. The FDI has, since its creation, acquired a wide experience of more than a decade in providing training in the fashion and design field, and it is striving hard to become a reference in the field of creativity and design in Mauritius.

The Institute has currently in place four Faculties, namely, Art and Design, Fashion, Media and Communication and Built-In Environment. The Institute offers 13 programmes related to Fashion And Textile, Graphic and Multimedia, Interior Design, Media, and Jewellery Manufacturing and Design at Certificate, Diploma and Undergraduate Levels.

Members of the House would recall that in 2017, the responsibility of providing skills in the jewellery sector was entrusted to the FDI through the Budget 2017-2018, whereby the Jewellery Centre from the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD) was transferred to the Institute. This policy measure eventually led to the setting up of the Faculty of Jewellery Manufacturing and Design in 2019 and since then, I take pride in mentioning that, as at now, two cohorts of students have been trained in the specific field and are already bringing their expertise to the jewellery sector.

The Institute has also been active in providing short courses to cater for continuous professional development, as well as increase employability of youngsters. In fact, during the past academic year, the Institute introduced new short courses targeting unemployed youth in Photo Media and Advertising Design, Jewellery Design and Manufacturing, Creating Artefacts Using Upcycling Materials and Natural Fibres, and Craft Design and Techniques, in collaboration with the Human Resource and Development Council (HRDC).

During the same year, the Fashion and Design Institute and the Civil Service College collaborated in developing two online courses relating to history of Printmaking Printing and Fundamental of Design.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the institutional experience and knowledge acquired by the FDI during these few past years have enabled the Institute to win international accolades. During the *Salon International du Textile Africain (SITA)*, held in Djibouti, in November last year, the Fashion and Design Institute excelled by winning the prize of Best Stylist 2021 out of 22 participating African countries.

Furthermore, in March 2022, the Fashion and Design Institute organised its first Fashion Show in the Middle East in the margin of the Dubai Expo 2020. This show, I must say, was a resounding success and was attended by dignitaries from UAE as well as high profile fashion designers in the Gulf Region.

Still in Dubai, the Institute successfully organised in March 2022 an International Conference on Sustainable and Innovative Design, regrouping international designers from countries such as Switzerland, Ukraine, Pakistan and Italy to share experiences in the field of design, innovation and sustainability.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the FDI has been pursuing a policy of promoting international networking. On this note, it is worth mentioning that in April this year, a Fashion and Design Institute signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Birmingham City University of United Kingdom with the objective of upgrading its level of education and quality of teaching.

It is gratifying to note that since its inception, the FDI has trained over 2,000 students in the fashion and design fields. More encouragingly, the Institute is known for having a high employability rate of nearly 90%. It is a matter of pride to highlight that the offspring of the Institute has now become renowned designers locally and internationally. The former students have either set up their own enterprises or occupy senior positions in reputed textile and clothing firms.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite these eloquent achievements, I must confess that the functions of the FDI are no longer attuned to the present and future needs of the economy. There is an urgent need for the Institute to reinvent itself to be better equipped to address emerging challenges and to support the economy in terms of supply of skilled labour force, promoting innovative practices and the adoption of state-of-the-art technologies in all economic activities. Hence, the setting up of the Academy of Design and Innovation.

The Academy will be called upon to exercise a far wider role in promoting design education in the country, as evidenced by the overarching objects stipulated in Clause 4 of the Bill. These are to –

- (a) promote excellence in the design field of fashion and textile, graphic and multimedia, built-in and architecture, jewellery, and arts and crafts;
- (b) promote multi-sectorial design fields;

- (c) disseminate knowledge of the design fields;
- (d) develop a multi-disciplinary approach in carrying out research and training in the design fields with a view to ensuring a better coordination of the interests of multi-sectors;
- (e) provide educational, research, consultancy and training facilities and services in the design fields;
- (f) promote, with regard to the design fields, the development of incubators and entrepreneurs, and
- (g) promote innovation in the design fields.

I wish to emphasise that one of the inherent limitations of the Fashion and Design Act of 2008 is that the FDI was not conferred awarding powers. However, the Fashion and Design Institute has made recommendations to its main awarding bodies such as the Pearson (UK) and the University of Technology of Mauritius for the award of certificates, diplomas, degrees and other qualifications.

However, in addition to being tedious and time-consuming, this process poses significant cost implications for the FDI as the latter has to incur additional expenses to remunerate the above mentioned institutions for the award of these Certificates and Degree Programmes.

This House will appreciate that Clause 6 of the Bill confers the much-needed power for the Academy to award certificates, diplomas, degrees, honorary degrees and other academic or professional qualifications, whether on its own or jointly with any higher education institutions or international institutions.

As such, the Academy, in its capacity as an Awarding Body, will be able not only to develop its own programmes but to hold examinations independently. The requirement of making recommendations to any University or any other institution for such awards will no longer arise, with the coming into force of this Bill.

Mr Speaker Sir, the importance of the Academy cannot be over-emphasised since it will henceforth, not only promote excellence in the field of fashion and design technology but also explore innovation in other design fields, such as Adaptive and Medical Apparel, Technical and Smart Textiles, Furniture and Ergonomic Design, Eyewear Frame Design, Luxury

Jewellery Design as well as Built Environment and Green Architectural Design. This is not an exhaustive list.

New emerging global trends in design fields will be tapped into. For instance, the Academy will introduce new concepts in apparel designed specifically for people with disabilities or with sensory issues, including comfortable wear for medical use and inclusive concepts to design wearable for all communities. Furthermore, Technical and Smart textiles commonly known as functional fabrics and e-textiles will also be promoted for industrial purposes and everyday use.

As for furniture design, ergonomic features in relation to comfort, functionality and the movement of the human body will also be considered. It is worth mentioning that this type of furniture is becoming more popular in modern design schemes. Design items and accessories for eyewear such as frames and eyeglass cases for fashion or adornment and protection against the environment will also be duly taken into consideration.

As a consequence, the Academy will be able to extend its services to other sectors of the economy, contrary to the FDI, which was servicing mainly the textile industry. It is also envisaged that the Academy will contribute to the development of smart cities, which are gaining rapid momentum in Mauritius. Design will be called upon to take on a different dimension through more quality teaching, research and innovation.

Mr Speaker Sir, Mauritius as an export manufacturing country has to compete with many countries, especially in the textile and clothing sector. It is noted that many of these countries have developed a competitive advantage through the establishment of their own Design Institutes. These Institutes service this sector with the appropriate skill needs and are able to award their own diplomas and degrees. I can, for instance, cite here the Royal Academy of Arts in England, the World University of Design of India and the Dubai Design Academy, which are well known to be among the pantheon of renowned global education institutions in the design field.

Another point worth mentioning is that the fact and I quote –

“Industrial design, combining innovation and creativity, is essential for attaining the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 9 on infrastructure, innovation, and sustainable industrialization.”

This statement has been made by the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), as an acknowledgement of the key role that design plays in enhancing value addition and overall competitiveness.

In fact, with its revamped mandate, I am confident that the Academy will provide valuebased innovative industrial design courses and will contribute to the upgrading of technical and human capabilities in the manufacturing sector. Ultimately, this sector will benefit through the development of unique and competitive industrial designs and innovative product lines, representing higher value-added goods and greater competitiveness.

Another important factor is that with awarding powers, the image and the credibility of the Academy will be enhanced both locally and internationally. This will enable the newly established Academy to foster strong collaborative partnership with local as well as foreign educational institutions. It is expected that the collaboration with international educational institutes will help the Academy to ensure quality education and good business practices as well as strengthen its expertise in specific skills development and research.

The setting-up of the new Academy will also open window of opportunities and will attract a greater number of potential students to develop and fine-tune their skills. It is viewed that the Academy of Design and Innovation will be a dynamic platform for research and design for a new generation of students and aspiring entrepreneurs. As a matter of fact, the Bill makes provisions at various clauses, namely Clause (4)(f) and Clause (5)(f) for the Academy to promote entrepreneurship, through the creation of incubators which will lead to more economic growth in the future.

The Academy will also set up a User Research Design Development Centre as part of its revamped mandate. I wish to point out that during the “National Policy Dialogue on the Manufacturing Sector” organised by my Ministry in collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in March 2022, an appeal was made by manufacturers for high-skilled training of their workforce. There was a recommendation to set up a dedicated School of Textile to respond to the needs of the Textile and Apparel sector.

The Academy of Design and Innovation will give due effect to this proposal by ensuring a proper restructuring of its actual FDI Apparel Centre, situated at Vallée des Prêtres by converting it into a User Research Design Development Centre. The Centre will house a dedicated unit in textile and material technology to cater for specific industry needs. The Centre

will also focus on addressing short-term as well as long-term challenges relating to sustainability, flexibility and reliability for greater resilience in the textile and clothing sector.

One of the rationales for the creation of the Academy is to strengthen its financial sustainability. Since its inception, the FDI has been heavily reliant on grants from the Government, even though it was generating a certain amount of revenue. However, this income has been far from sufficient for the Institute to break even and therefore, it had to continue to rely on state funds.

This new Bill will empower the Academy to be more financially independent, especially with regard to its recurrent expenses. In fact, the new Academy ambitions to increase the current student population from about 350 to some 1500 students by year 2026, including international students. This increase of student enrolment coupled with additional consultancy services to be offered by the Academy will lead to greater income generation for the Academy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the need to promote services in the manufacturing sector is one of the reasons that have inspired us to come up with an Academy with a revamped and more elaborate mandate. Indeed, in the global commodity chain, Research and Development (R&D), design and packaging represent important components in the manufacturing process.

As a matter of fact, the five-year Strategic Plan of my Ministry, namely the Industrial Policy and Strategic Plan (IPSP) (2020-2025), has emphasised the importance of upgrading value chains through process upgrading, product development and product design and use of latest technologies associated with Industry 4.0. Indeed, in the long term, the manufacturing sector has to shift to a more capital and technology-intensive model based on Industry 4.0 technologies.

Allow me to cite some examples where R&D, design and packaging could contribute to transform our manufacturing landscape. Mauritius has over 50 years of experience in the manufacturing of textile and clothing. The exports of this sector, which hover around Rs20 billion represent 48% of exports within the Export Oriented Enterprises (EOE) sector. Many textile enterprises have become global players, exporting to prestigious brands such as Abercrombie & Fitch, Marks & Spencer, Tommy Hilfiger, Woolworths, Asos, Armani and Calvin Klein. Such a performance of the textile sector has been made possible with the maturity acquired by operators in R&D and design, amongst others.

This sector is certainly poised to grow further, calling for more advanced techniques in R&D and design and such a strategic requirement will be fulfilled by the new Academy through the provision of new courses, training programmes and consultancy services.

The jewellery sector is yet another important pillar of the manufacturing sector, driven by enterprises already working with international brands such as Tiffany's, Leo Schachter and Swarovski. The jewellery sector is the third-largest sub-sector within the EOE, with an export value of Rs3.8 billion in 2021. This sector has to achieve its next lap of development through upgrading and modernisation of its production processes. It is viewed that the Academy will have a positive impact on this sub-sector, through the supply of a technically qualified labour force that has long been undermining its growth potential.

As indicated earlier, packaging constitutes a critical stage in the manufacturing value chain. Mauritius has the potential to offer services in packaging design locally as well as within the region. I have no doubt that the Academy of Design and Innovation will leave a significant imprint on the packaging industry, given the success of many past students of the FDI in the graphic field.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is also important that I shed some light on the capacity of the Academy of Design and Innovation to become an Awarding Body. I wish to mention that the new Governance Structure proposed in the Bill together with the maturity acquired by the FDI over the past decades constitute the essential ingredients for the Academy to become a recognised Awarding Body.

As per clause (8) of the Bill, the Academy will be managed by a Board, comprising representatives both from the public and private sectors, including a representative of industry associations. Such a constitution displays a fair representation of all stakeholders involved in the design field. The functions and powers of the Board have been furthermore delineated in clause (9), which is in consonance with the overall principles of good governance and management.

With a view to attaining its enhanced mandate, the Academy will be manned by strategic new positions at managerial level, established under clauses (14) to (16) for Head of Academia and Research, Head of Projects, Business/Industry Development and Consultancy and the Registrar.

Such provisions will provide an added boost to greater professional paid services that the Academy may provide to the business sector. As for the Registrar, he will be the custodian



of records, papers and documents of the Academy, as in the case of other established universities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Clause (19) of the Bill provides for the setting up of an Academic Council, comprising key representatives in the education and design field, namely representatives from the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, Higher Education Commission, academic staff and persons who have wide experience in the design fields. This membership is highly relevant and is aligned with the vision of the Academy of Design and Innovation to become a recognised Awarding Body. The Council will, *inter alia*, prepare academic, professional and training programmes and will be responsible for the general regulation of teaching, examinations, research and training. It will have the power to recommend to the Board the award of relevant certificates, diplomas and degrees.

Akin to Senates of Universities, the Council will be the Authority overseeing teaching and research as well as academic quality and standards, thereby charting out the overall academic direction of the Academy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as part of its social responsibility and to promote talent, the Academy, under Clause (25), will be empowered to grant fellowships, scholarships and bursaries with a view to ensuring access to high-quality education to one and all. This is in line with Government's objective to promote social inclusiveness and equality.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as Members of the House are aware, a Fashion and Design Institute is currently accommodated in four separate buildings in two different locations, namely, Ebène and Vallée des Prêtres. Such a situation is not conducive for an effective learning environment. In a bid to cater for the upcoming broadened activities of the Academy and to bring all its faculties in one location, the Academy will explore new premises to accommodate its campus for enhanced coordination and optimal performance. The proposed campus will be in line with Government Programme 2020-2024 in terms of innovative, greener, cleaner and sustainable infrastructure as well as providing for high quality education in a conducive environment through modern technologies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I wish to reaffirm that the Academy will confer a multitude of benefits in the educational and continuous professional development fields in Mauritius. Besides offering a better career path to the Academy staff, the Academy is geared to become a centre of excellence and a leading design hub in the region. May I now, Mr Speaker, Sir, commend the Academy of Design and Innovation Bill to the House.