

UK high street in danger of 'talent exodus'

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The UK is in danger of a fashion retail talent exodus, warn headhunters, as more professionals consider taking opportunities overseas.

Two years on from the UK vote to leave the European Union, job candidates are now more open to accepting roles in the US, Canada, Germany and Asia, recruitment experts report.

Uncertainty around Brexit, a wave of retail redundancies and restructuring of UK head office teams have been highlighted as reasons for the change in attitudes.

Victoria Nightingale, director at recruitment agency Barracuda Search, said an uninspiring UK retail market had led to a change in perception for UK talent working abroad: “More people are starting to think of new opportunities. It was a London-centric market [in fashion], but now people are asking what the options are and thinking about the potential of moving abroad.

“North America pays good money. The salaries in the States and Canada are far higher, they have much bigger teams and they take design seriously. It’s a struggle to get the same level in the UK.

“Design teams of 15 [in the UK] can become teams of 36 [In the US].”

Shelley Pinto, managing director of TRP Recruitment, agreed: “More and more people are open to options abroad now. I spoke to one designer who now would rather go and work in Germany as they didn’t want a role in the UK that may only exist for six months.”

Another recruitment consultant said: “The creative roles have always moved around but I think some of the roles in fashion just aren’t [there in the UK] at the moment – there is a pause in recruitment while people wait and see what happens.”

One recruitment agent said the allure of UK fashion had dimmed following a series of poor financial results and widespread cost-cutting: “Frankly, the Arcadias, Marks & Spencers and Nexts of this world have lost their attractiveness for young, ambitious candidates.”

Caroline Pill, vice-president, global executive search at Kirk Palmer Associates, believes the globalisation of fashion retail means retailers cannot focus solely on their own market: “The candidate pool has become global. Companies seek out executives who have broad skills and can bring a different perspective and voice.

“Whereas 10 years ago being sent to Asia or the Middle East was viewed as a ‘placeholder’, today, they are the hottest markets for people to go to, and being sent there is now viewed as a great opportunity.

“[There has been] a shift in mentalities and there is a new openness to stepping outside of traditional comfort zones.”