



## Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of The Condé Nast Publications Ltd t/a Condé Nast College of Fashion and Design, March 2016

### Section 1: Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that The Condé Nast Publications Ltd t/a Condé Nast College of Fashion and Design (the College) has made commendable progress with implementing the recommendations arising from the March 2015 [Higher Education Review \(Plus\)](#).

### Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review

2 There have been few changes since the 2015 review. Two new roles have been created: Principal Lecturer and Course Leader. A Careers Adviser, who also teaches some workshops and supports students in career tutorials, has been appointed. The number of students is stable, with 27 enrolled on the 10-week certificate and 29 on the one-year diploma programme at the time of the monitoring visit. The College has progressed the development of its BA (Hons) programme and expects that final approval from its new awarding body, the University of Buckingham, will be confirmed during spring 2016. It plans to admit the first cohort of students to this validated provision in October 2016.

### Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The College has implemented the recommendations in its 2015 Higher Education Review (Plus) report in a commendable manner: features of good practice identified in the report are well embedded in the College's programme design and delivery, which emphasise the student learning experience and future employability. These aspects are demonstrated clearly in the design and development of the new BA Fashion Communication degree in consultation with fashion media companies. Involvement of industry professionals and guest lecturers enhances student learning and promotes potential student professional engagement. Teaching staff continue to broaden their higher education expertise by working as external examiners, with the encouragement of the College. Student employability is supported by expert teaching staff, and a range of high quality physical and digital resources. The College enhances student learning opportunities and skills for employment through industry projects, which employers value.

4 Responses to the recommendations in the action plan are all complete. The College has agreed and implemented a Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy, aligned with the Strategic Plan 2014-17, and developed by the Academic Director in consultation with the Academic Standards Committee. The Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy encompasses further development of wide industry involvement linked to enhancing student employability skills, and has been disseminated to the teaching team and to new staff at induction. The recent appointment of a Careers Adviser, who provides careers tutorials and workshops, demonstrates the College's commitment to increasing employment opportunities for students.

5 The College has updated the terms of reference of its committees and strengthened academic governance through timely and recorded minutes of their agreed actions. The revised format of the Examination Board and the Academic Standards Committee improves the verification process. Student representation is now more effective, with one student present at the annual Academic Standards Committee meeting and student participation in course steering groups.

6 Since July 2015 the Gateway Qualifications (the College's awarding organisation) External Quality Assurer attends all Examination Board meetings, with recorded actions on recommendations to be responded to at the following meeting. On this first occasion there were points of good practice recorded and no recommendations. The College's appointed external examiner attends the annual Academic Standards Committee meeting and provides a formal report, which is responded to in the Annual Monitoring Report.

7 The new Peer Observation Policy and recording template formalise the process of teaching observations to support staff development. Observations have become the basis for discussion at good practice and enhancement meetings. Staff development through the Higher Education Academy is in progress; all members of the academic team are qualified to at least BA level and most hold a PGCE and MA.

8 The College has mapped its use of external reference points in programme monitoring and review to demonstrate how each relevant indicator is met effectively and consistently. There are Annual Monitoring Reports, which reflect the deliberative processes and action plans for the two successive student cohorts. The reports are written by the Academic Director, in consultation with the course team, and discussed by the Academic Standards Committee, which also considers the effectiveness of annual monitoring processes. For example, the College includes consideration of external reference points and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) as a new feature of annual monitoring. The most recent report is both reflective and analytical, with consideration of external examiners' comments and identified good practice, student feedback information and student achievement for the Vogue Fashion certificate and foundation diploma programmes. The College student steering groups consider student surveys and feedback from each student cohort. Issues identified are reviewed by the Academic Director and Registrar and discussed with College staff. Annual enhancement and planning meetings inform future programme delivery, with termly meetings for the certificate course, which has three cohorts per year.

9 The College has developed an information review checklist to formalise its regular review and updating of published documentation for internal and external stakeholders. All information was reviewed in August 2015 to ensure that it is fit for purpose, reliable and trustworthy, with changes communicated in College committee meetings. Students confirmed that helpful and reliable information is available in the certificate and diploma courses handbooks and the Student Handbook. Contractual information for staff is located in the Staff Handbook.

10 The College's approach to the dissemination of good practice and the enhancement of student learning opportunities is guided by the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy. Termly academic team meetings discuss these enhancement aspects, together with the outcomes from peer observations.

11 The College's formal process for programme design, development and approval is the responsibility of the Academic Director. At present, the processes are linked to the awarding organisation, Gateway Qualifications. Programme developments are underpinned by a close working relationship between the Academic Director and Gateway Qualifications representatives. In future, the College will work with the new validating university to ensure

that procedures are consistently applied through policies that are available to all staff and students. The College encourages and records external and student input to its programmes, and considers *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) in new programme design. In the validation of the BA Fashion Communication course, for which there is no specific Subject Benchmark Statement, reference is made to the Statements for Art and Design; Communication, Media, Film and Cultural Studies; and Business and Management. The College consulted a wide range of industry specialists and fashion industry companies about module design, and there was a student member of the validation panel. To support new programme development further, the Academic Director and Registrar have attended a training day and a workshop for alternative providers.

12 English language competence is assessed during the application process, and through compulsory interviews as set out in the Admissions Policy. The online application form requires a declaration that the applicant has a degree taught in English, is a national of an English-speaking country, or has passed a secure English language test. In the last case, the test score and a certificate are required. Written English skills are assessed from the personal statement and from a writing assignment, the College Challenge. Evidence of prior qualifications, with institutions attended, is required on the application form. Genuine intention to study the programme is assessed from the personal statement and from the College Challenge critical evaluation of a specific fashion collection or an advertising campaign for a fashion brand. Students who met the review team, some of whom are graduates, confirmed that the admissions policies are clear and fair.

13 College assessment processes ensure the integrity of student work through the close ongoing supervision of each student during the development of assignments. Assessment is based entirely on coursework, and staff are familiar with the capabilities of the students in project work that requires highly individual methodologies. Staff consider that academic malpractice is not an issue, as copying from industry would be recognised, and student reports depend upon primary referenced research. Staff check electronically submitted work for plagiarism.

14 Internal verification processes ensure that student work is genuine, achieves the required learning outcomes, and is marked fairly and accurately. The processes include first and second markers, and presentations are recorded in case of disagreement. Pass/fail borderline decisions are scrutinised by the Academic Director and the final mark agreed with the Registrar. Decisions on feedback grades, including the award of merit or distinction, are similarly adjudicated by the third marker before written feedback is given. The Gateway Qualifications External Quality Assurer attends the Examination Board meeting, moderates work and provides feedback. The College's appointed external examiner also comments on the assessment procedures and outcomes.

15 The College engages its students in quality assurance and enhancement using a three-tier system. Student representatives for each programme are members of a steering group, which meets the Academic Director and Registrar to discuss matters raised by their respective cohorts. Students informed the review team that the Fashion History course is the result of a steering group request. Student representatives communicate College responses to the student cohort. Diploma students complete online surveys each term, while certificate students complete surveys midway through and at the end of the course. A student representative attends the annual Academic Standards Committee meeting to consider student issues as a part of its agenda.

16 The College's rigorous Admissions Policy, and the learning support afforded to its students, results in a highly creditable pass and retention rate. Since 2013 the pass rate for all cohorts on both the 10-week certificate and one-year diploma courses has been in excess

of 90 per cent, and 100 per cent for six out of the 10 cohorts that have completed the programmes of study. A 100 per cent retention rate is usual.

#### **Section 4: Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education**

17 The College continues to engage effectively with mapping its policies and procedures against the Quality Code. Most notably, there is significant progress in the College's alignment with the Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*, and with *Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval*. The College also used the FHEQ and allied Subject Benchmark Statements in developing the new BA Fashion Communication degree programme.

#### **Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit**

18 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

19 The monitoring visit was carried out by Professor Nicholas Goddard, Coordinator, and Dr Elizabeth Briggs, Reviewer, on 9 March 2016.

**QAA1562 - R5031 - Apr 16**

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