

School of Art, Architecture and Design

Postgraduate

- MFASH Fashion(TP)

Please indicate, below, whether you agree with the statements about the threshold standards of Leeds Beckett University's awards, student achievement and the conduct of the University's assessment processes, using as a reference the framework for higher education qualifications and applicable Subject Benchmark Statements / Qualification Characteristic Statements. Please also list any shortcomings and areas for commendation. You should expand on any issues you mention here in the main report. If any boxes are ticked "No" the Dean of School or nominee will be alerted and will oversee the response from the Course Director.

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Standards Set

	Yes	No
"In my view, the threshold academic standards set for the modules/awards meet with the requirements of the relevant National Qualifications Statement's."	X	

If your answer is 'no', please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short:

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Student achievement

	Yes	No	N/A*
"In my view, students' who have been awarded qualifications have had the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in course(s) or subjects in other UK institutions with which I am familiar." *Not applicable – if you are a practitioner and are not in a position to assess this statement, please note here:	X		

Please provide any further comment on the comparability of collaborative provision

This has been an unprecedented year and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has had a great impact across the HE sector. This has also been the case for the MA Fashion course which newly launched for the 2019-20 academic year, yet the staff supporting the students are to be commended for ensuring that the final outputs of the students on the modules and final projects undertaken during this period that this impact has been mitigated to a large extent, as the students have sought to produce work that remains comparable to others in the sector. It is clear the students have worked commendably with this support to produce work which is commiserate with their academic and professional skills gained through participating in the course supported by the expert guidance of their tutors. This demonstrates a strong and resilient start which bodes well for the future evolution and development of the MA Fashion course for the coming years.

Although a small cohort of 7 students the work produced demonstrates exciting potential for those enrolled to develop a personalised programme of creative research within the framework of an academic course. The individual 'voice' of each student is clearly evident in the creative and written work of each student and is a strength of the course that can surely be built on. It is clear the support and individualised attention the students have received has enabled them to produce work commiserate with their abilities and ambitions in alignment with the learning outcomes.

If your answer is 'no', please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short:

Conduct of process

	Yes	No
"In my view, the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are reliable, rigorous and fairly conducted."	X	

If your answer is 'no', please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short.

Actions from last year's report

(This will not be relevant if you are examining for the first time)

N/A

Areas of good practice/commendation

Any particular strengths or distinctive or innovative features in relation to learning, teaching and assessment:

It is clear from the work reviewed that students do have the opportunity to pursue their creative and professional interests related to fashion design and other creative and academic outputs in all the modules of the course. There appears to be a good balance between prescribed professional and academic support and the opportunity for students to evolve their own self-guided research. This is particularly apparent in the final projects and it is clear that the students have been well-supported in developing their own personal direction or 'voice' in their work, and this is commiserate with the standards expected at Level 7 where students should have the confidence and autonomy to develop themselves in this way. The work demonstrates a variety of relevant research areas related to contemporary fashion and the diversity of approaches related to this, some more commercial, others more freeform or artistic, is evident of this. The opportunity in the final semester to develop a business plan or a dissertation is a valid one in the context of the contemporary fashion sector and is a potential strength of the new course. The business plan in particular can be evolved to be a platform for students to establish their own viable SME in the fashion or related lifestyle sectors and perhaps more systematic support for this can be developed to assist students in creating valid business proposals they can build on as they make their first steps as entrepreneurs. Successful fashion entrepreneurs graduating from the course would also be a clear asset in future growth and support the promotion of the course through its growing alumni network.

Main report

External Examiner's report summary

In this section you are asked to describe more fully how the University has or has not maintained threshold academic standards and the quality of the student experience in relation to the course(s) for which you are the external examiner, using as a reference the framework for higher education qualifications and applicable Subject Benchmark Statements / Qualification Characteristic Statements.

Please complete all sections of the form fully and where not applicable please state N/A. Where applicable please also complete the sections for any collaborative provision sampled.

If you are an external examiner for any of the University's Pearson Licensed Centre Programmes (HND/HNC level) provision, please also complete the section on page 9 sections l, m and n entitled "for External Examiners Associated with Pearson Licensed Centre Programmes."

Professional Body Requirements

	Yes	No	N/A*
"In my view, the professional body requirements for this course have been met. *Not applicable if the course is not a professional body course please indicate here.			
If your answer is 'no', please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short.			

(a) The operation and conduct of the Progression and Award Board (and/or Module Board meeting you may also have attended).

The operations and conduct of the progression and award board appear to be commiserate with those of other HE institutions. Given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic it is admirable that the board has sought to ensure students have not been penalised because of this and have provided a fair review of final marks which are reflective of the students progress and achievements.

(b) The action, if any was required, taken in response to your report of last year. (This will not be relevant if you are examining for the first time.)

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(c) The overall performance of the students, in relation to that of comparable levels of work in other institutions.

The overall performance of the students is comparable to that of other institutions at Level 7. The assignments set are generally well considered and are rightly challenging yet exploratory enough to permit the students own autonomy. This has obviously been a well-motivated cohort, despite the impact of Covid-19, and that is reflected in the work produced and the marks awarded. The students and staff are to be commended for this and as a brand new course this is something to use as a foundation to build upon and evolve further.

(d) The strengths and weaknesses of the students in general with respect to knowledge, conceptual grasp or application of skills.

In terms of creative outputs it is clear that students have a commendable grasp of knowledge and application of skills to develop autonomous solutions whether commercially design-based or more conceptual, free-form solutions or outputs. At Level 7 there is an expectation of rigour and diversity in development of research, and especially for citation and referencing to support both conceptual and practical outputs. Some of the references listed were rather lacking in depth or diversity (some students appeared to rely on internet based sources), however, much more use of formally academic references (e.g. books, academic journal articles) should be supported and encouraged alongside fashion industry-based sources (e.g. Drapers, Business of Fashion, Mintel, WGSN). There is now a plethora of books and new academic journals being published (e.g. Intellect publishers) which can be now be made use of to develop academic understanding and underpin research for creative outputs.

(e) The standards of the structure, organisation, design and marking of all examination papers and/or other forms of assessment.

Standards in terms of the assessment and marking of the assessments appear to be commiserate with those of other HE institutions. There appears to be a clear attempt to provide detailed, personalised feedback for all the students and this is something to build on and maintain. There appeared to be some differences in how individual staff members completed the marking/feedback forms (perhaps guidance or training for some academic staff members is needed?). More inclusion of specific examples of feed-forward comments could also be included to help support students further with knowing how to improve or evolve their work.

(f) The curriculum, teaching or resourcing of the programme of study as indicated by the performance of the students in the assessment

Overall, as indicated by the outputs of the students, the curriculum and teaching of the course are commiserate with the students' performance in their assessments; and this can be built on as the course evolves and progresses over the coming years. I have not had the opportunity to visit the Leeds Beckett campus in person this academic year to see the facilities myself, however, my understanding is that the course is reasonably well-resourced in terms of equipment and staff commiserate with the numbers of students. As the course grows this will likely have to be reviewed to ensure the students are fully supported to maintain the standards already achieved in this academic year both academically and creatively.

(g) Comments on the use of My Beckett (Virtual Learning Environment) within the course (if applicable).

I have not had specific access to this to see how the content of the modules has been delivered, however, it would be welcome to do so to have a fuller, more rounded sense of how this operates, especially given the continued need to offer blended and/or online only delivery into the 2020-21 academic year.

(h) Module content, consistency of modules and module assessment across the course and the achievement of learning outcomes. (You may be asked by your School to provide detailed comments on the modules that you examine.)

Overall, modules and assessment appear generally consistent with the learning outcomes provided. Some more rigour is needed in places (e.g. citation and referencing, perhaps more practice opportunities for the students are needed with formative tasks). Some inconsistency in the writing of the handbooks is observed (e.g. in some LO's are numbered, in others bullet points are used) which needs to be addressed and rectified. Further comments include:

Independent Study 1

From the review of the work and the module perhaps more precision in how the self-study/research plan is put in place could be evolved and included. Do the students have a specific guide/template to follow? How are deadlines set and achieved? How is the research work undertaken kept realistic and timebound? Perhaps more up-to-date resources on the psychology of creativity and tacit knowledge can be included in the reading list. Learning outcomes are valid.

Independent Study 2

As above for Independent Study 1, how is the self-study/research plan put in place and to demonstrate how this has evolved from stage 1? Learning outcomes are valid. In the work produced by the students there is a clear sense of involvement, but perhaps this can be more closely documented (e.g. some element of reflective writing based on frameworks such as Gibbs, Kolb or Schon?)

Research Methods

While some students are evidently very capable in regards to evolving creative concepts perhaps more rigour is needed in developing their academic research to locate more robust academic and industry based resources. At Level 7 this can be self-directed, with support from the academic team, perhaps getting students to develop their own reading lists (perhaps related to research on Independent Study 1). Especially as the students demonstrate ambition to become fully-fledged entrepreneurs they need to be aware that proper business proposals which are convincing for a bank loan or angel investor need to be fully rigorous and based on factual data in order to proceed. Practical supporting exercises and workshops could help to support this development. Some odd use of language in the handbook - trimester, should this not be semester? Learning outcomes are valid; perhaps these need more linked emphasis in the outputs produced.

Disseration

Given that this module also permits the development of a business plan it would be logical for this to also be more properly reflected in the module title and the content of the module handbook. For a title: Final Project: Dissertation or Business Plan. Differentiated sections in the module handbook could be provided outlining aspects of what is required for each more specifically; would also help with ensuring those taking the Business Plan option are as fully rigorous as those taking up the Dissertation option. Only one student was reviewed taking the Business Plan as their final output, however, it is clear this could be a potential asset and real selling point of the course, and perhaps more precise support in how to write a proper business plan that is valid to take forward as a proper entrepreneurial venture to establish an SME fashion business could be put into place (e.g. practical workshops, industry guest speakers or alumni).

(i) Areas of student/staff engagement in teaching and learning, scholarship, research or professional practice.

As this is a brand new course this is an area which can be developed; to encourage students on the course to engage with and be aware of current new developments and innovations in the context of the fashion industry. For example, but not limited to, digitisation, sustainability, diversity and inclusion. Circumstances permitting this can include attendance at relevant events and conferences, exhibitions, trade fairs and networking events.

(j) The University welcomes external examiners' comments on its academic regulatory framework. Such comments may not have a direct bearing on standards set and achieved or the conduct of processes and so it may not be appropriate to include them elsewhere in this report or its summary. Please record any concerns or comments you may have here.

Overall, standards and conduct of processes appear to be in alignment with others in the HE sector and that of the national QAA.

(k) Collaborative Provision: please include here any comments you wish to make on elements of collaborative provision for which you have responsibility (in addition to those you may have indicated previously in this report).

N/A