

# Assessment for quality and standards initial conditions B7 and B8

**Fashion Retail Academy**

**Provider legal name:** Education for Industry Group

**Provider trading name:** Fashion Retail Academy

**UKPRN:** 1009213

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# Executive summary

Type of assessment	Initial conditions B7 (quality) and B8 (standards)
For	Fashion Retail Academy
Advice to the OfS on B7	Fashion Retail Academy has <b>credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply</b> with conditions B1, B2 and B4 from the date of registration
Advice to the OfS on B8	The standards set for the courses Fashion Retail Academy intends to provide, and the achievement of students on these courses <b>appropriately reflect</b> sector-recognised standards

1. This report is an independent assessment of Fashion Retail Academy ('the Academy') about its compliance with the Office for Students' (OfS's) initial conditions of registration for quality (condition B7) and standards (condition B8).
2. The report shows the findings of an independent assessment team. It does not represent a decision by the OfS about the Academy's compliance with these conditions of registration.
3. The OfS's regulatory framework sets out that a provider wishing to access the benefits of registration must register with the OfS.<sup>1</sup>
4. As part of the registration process, the OfS must assess whether a provider satisfies the initial conditions of registration, including initial conditions B7 (quality) and B8 (standards).
5. Concerning the OfS's initial condition of registration for quality (condition B7), the assessment team found that, if registered, the Academy has credible plans that would allow it to comply with the OfS's ongoing conditions of registration for academic experience (condition B1), resources, support and student engagement (condition B2), and assessment and awards (condition B4).
6. Concerning the OfS's initial condition of registration for standards (condition B8), the assessment team found that, if it is registered, the standards set and applied for any relevant awards granted to students who complete a higher education course that the Academy intends to provide appropriately reflect applicable sector-recognised standards.

For providers seeking registration with the Office for Students (OfS), the OfS will assess a provider's application and relevant evidence to determine whether the provider satisfies the initial conditions of registration. For providers that applied for registration on or after 1 May 2022, this includes an assessment of whether the provider satisfies initial conditions B7 (quality) and B8 (standards) as set out in the regulatory framework (November 2022). As part of the registration process the OfS also undertakes a risk assessment in relation to the related revised ongoing conditions of registration, to include B1, B2, B4 and B5.

<sup>1</sup> See [Regulatory framework for higher education in England - Office for Students](#).

As part of its assessment of initial conditions of registration B7 and B8, the OfS appoints an assessment team, including external academic experts, to undertake an assessment of quality and standards. The assessment includes a visit to the provider by the assessment team, after which it produces a report. The report does not take into account matters which may have occurred after that period.

7. The Academy is a specialist provider offering a wide range of courses in fashion, from Levels 2 to 6, with plans to additionally offer a Level 7 course. The Academy offers degrees awarded by Falmouth University, diplomas awarded by University of the Arts London and Gateway Qualifications, and apprenticeship courses awarded by Fashion and Retail Awards, the Chartered Management Institute and NCFE.
8. In accordance with the guidance on registering with the OfS (Regulatory advice 3),<sup>2</sup> the OfS decided that it was necessary to undertake an assessment visit to the Academy to gather evidence and provide advice to inform the OfS's decision about whether the Academy satisfies the initial conditions B7 and B8. The OfS decided that this assessment should be undertaken by assessors able to provide expert academic judgement.
9. The purpose of the assessment is to provide advice to the OfS to enable it to decide whether the Academy satisfies initial conditions B7 and B8 and whether there is any regulatory risk.
10. The evidence from the assessment informs the OfS's decisions about whether to register the Academy and, if registered, whether any mitigation is necessary.
11. The OfS appointed an assessment team that consisted of two academic expert assessors and a member of OfS staff. The team was asked to give its advice and judgement about the Academy's compliance with initial conditions B7 and B8.
12. The team considered a range of information submitted by the Academy as part of its application for registration.
13. The assessment team visited the Academy in February 2025 during which time it met with students, staff, senior leadership and industry partners, toured the Academy's premises and observed teaching.

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<sup>2</sup> See [Regulatory advice 3: How to register with the Office for Students - Office for Students](#).

## Introduction and background

14. Fashion Retail Academy is a specialist provider offering a range of courses in fashion from Levels 2 to 6. Founded in 2005, the Academy's provision includes degree courses, diplomas, apprenticeships and online courses. Following growth in its student numbers, the Academy moved to new premises in Electra House, Moorgate, in 2024.
15. The Academy's vision is 'cultivating the next generation of leaders to shape the fashion and retail industry', and its mission is to 'foster and develop talent through progressive specialist education with the fashion and retail industry'. The Academy's strategy, informed by research from external consultants, focuses on identifying future skills gaps in the UK's fashion retail industry. The strategy and the Academy's quality assurance enhancement framework outline its focus as delivering an education that is 'by industry, for industry, with industry'.
16. Education for Industry Group Limited is the parent group of Fashion Retail Academy, which additionally acquired the London College of Beauty Therapy in 2024. The group's objective is to provide specialised education training.
17. The Academy began offering degree programmes, in partnership with Falmouth University, in 2017. These programmes are Bachelor of Arts (BA) (Hons) Marketing and communications for fashion, BA (Hons) Fashion business, BA (Hons) Buying and merchandising. The Academy registered 359 students across these three courses for the 2024-25 academic year, and the Academy forecasts 202 students registering for the 2025-26 academic year. These courses underwent revalidation in April 2023 with Falmouth University.

Course	Level	Awarding body
BA (Hons) Marketing and communications for fashion	6	Falmouth University
BA (Hons) Marketing and communications for fashion	6	Falmouth University
BA (Hons) Buying and merchandising	6	Falmouth University

18. In 2024 the Academy intended to expand its provision and offer a further five undergraduate courses in fashion and retail. Falmouth University validated the following courses to commence in September 2024: BA (Hons) Sustainable fashion, Bachelor of Science (BSc) (Hons) Data analytics for retail, BA (Hons) UXUI design for retail, and BA (Hons) Fashion communication and styling. The BA (Hons) Art direction for fashion was under consideration by Falmouth University in February 2025. The Academy chose these courses to respond to skills gaps within fashion industries and promote efforts to create more sustainable retail landscape. Except for data analytics, which is a three-year course, all of the Academy's degree programmes are accelerated, two-year courses.
19. Due to insufficient student numbers, only the BA (Hons) Fashion communication and styling course ran in the 2024-25 academic year, with 61 full-time students. The Academy forecasts 127 students registering across these five courses for the 2025-26 academic year.

Course	Level	Awarding body
BA (Hons) Sustainable fashion	6	Falmouth University
BSc (Hons) Data analytics for retail	6	Falmouth University
BA (Hons) UXUI design for retail	6	Falmouth University
BA (Hons) Fashion communication and styling	6	Falmouth University
BA (Hons) Art direction for fashion	6	Falmouth University

20. The Academy intends to offer a postgraduate course in international fashion marketing and communications, commencing in September 2025. This course was undergoing validation by Falmouth University in February 2025 at the time of the assessment. The Academy forecasts 20 students in its first intake for this course, for the 2025-26 academic year.

Course	Level	Awarding body
MA International fashion marketing and communications	7	Falmouth University

21. The Academy offers six Level 4 diploma courses, in fashion, retail, and digital marketing. The Academy registered 286 students across these courses for the 2024-25 academic year, and it forecasts 326 students to register for the 2025-26 academic year. These courses comprise 120 credits, all of which is at Level 4.

Course	Level	Awarding body
Level 4 Diploma in fashion retail	4	University of the Arts London (UAL)
Level 4 Diploma in buying and range planning for fashion retail	4	UAL
Level 4 Diploma in buying and range planning for fashion retail (fast track)	4	UAL
Level 4 Diploma in garment technology for fashion retail	4	UAL
Level 4 Diploma in visual merchandising and branding for fashion retail	4	UAL
Level 4 Diploma in digital marketing	4	Gateway Qualifications

22. The Academy offers five undergraduate apprenticeship courses, with 166 apprenticeship students registered for the 2024-25 academic year, and 165 students forecasted to register for the 2025-26 academic year.

Course	Level	Awarding body
Assistant buyer and merchandiser apprenticeship	6	Fashion and Retail Awards
Operations or departmental manager apprenticeship	5	Chartered Management Institute

Course	Level	Awarding body
Buying and merchandising assistant apprenticeship	4	Fashion and Retail Awards
Retail manager apprenticeship	4	Fashion and Retail Awards
Data analyst apprenticeship	4	NCFE

23. Additionally, the Academy offers two online courses in buying and merchandising, and fashion business retail. These courses have been designed by the Academy and are endorsed by Open College Network at Level 4. The courses run for 36 weeks and students receive a certificate of recognition instead of a formal qualification. 40 students are registered across these two courses for the 2024-25 academic year. The Academy is looking to develop these courses into Level 4 diplomas.
24. In total, the Academy has 872 higher education students, all studying full-time, registered for the 2024-25 academic year. The Academy forecasts 858 students registering for the 2025-26 academic year.
25. The Academy's board of governors includes professionals from the fashion industry and is responsible for the strategic direction of the organisation, including the students' academic experience, and the financial health of the organisation. From September 2024, student representatives have additionally been invited to the board of governors meeting to provide feedback on students' experience at the Academy. The board of governors is also attended by the chief executive officer, and principal of the Academy.
26. The Academy host an industry advisory committee, made up of eight industry experts, whose term usually lasts for two years. The committee usually meets termly and provides industry insights to the Academy. The terms of reference of the industry advisory committee are currently under review, to further maximise the impact of the group in ensuring the relevance of the Academy's provision. For example, going forwards, the Academy intends to invite student representatives to attend the committee.
27. The Academy's quality enhancement groups monitor the quality and standards across its higher education provision. The groups convene at department level and the groups' objective is to ensure that course developments align with the objectives of the Academy's quality assurance and enhancement framework. Teaching staff are invited to these meetings to contribute to discussions on programme design.

## Assessment process

### Initial condition B7: Quality

28. The Academy submitted a quality plan and supporting evidence, as required by the OfS's guidance for providers applying for registration (Regulatory advice 3).<sup>3</sup>
29. The assessment team sought further evidence from the Academy on 8 November 2024, 13 December 2024, 21 January 2025 and 5 February 2025.
30. The assessment team undertook an assessment visit on 4 and 5 February 2025, during which it met: a range of students, academic staff, administrative and support staff, and senior leadership.
31. During the assessment visit, the team toured the Academy's premises, including the teaching and learning spaces, and virtual resources. The assessment team also observed teaching of sessions on garment technology, digital marketing, marketing and communications, and fashion communication and styling.
32. The assessment team used this evidence to provide advice on whether the Academy complied with the requirements set out in initial condition B7. Condition B7 requires that the Academy has credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with conditions of registration B1, B2 and B4, and requires it to have the capacity and resources to deliver these plans.

### Initial condition B8: Standards

33. The Academy submitted information relevant to the academic standards of all of the courses it intends to provide if registered, including course documentation, programme specifications and module outlines.<sup>4</sup>
34. The Academy submitted evidence of student achievement in a sample of assessed work and associated records of this achievement for the courses it intends to provide if registered (see also Annex A for the approach to sampling).
35. The 'sector-recognised standards' are set out in a document published by the OfS.<sup>5</sup> These set out the standards that all registered providers are required to meet and were used by the assessment team for its assessment.
36. The standards the OfS has identified as applicable are:
  - A.1: Qualifications at each level
  - A.2: Volumes of credit

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<sup>3</sup> See [Regulatory advice 3: Registration of English higher education providers with the OfS - Office for Students](#).

<sup>4</sup> See Annex I, 'Guidance for providers on the assessment of initial condition B8 (standards)', at [Regulatory advice 3: Registration of English higher education providers with the OfS - Office for Students](#).

<sup>5</sup> See [Sector-recognised standards - Office for Students](#).

- A.3: Qualification descriptors, specifically:
  - A.3.1 Descriptor for a qualification at Level 4
  - A.3.2 Descriptor for a qualification at Level 5
  - A.3.3 Descriptor for a qualification at Level 6
  - A.3.4 Descriptor for a qualification at Level 7
- B: Classification descriptors for Level 6 bachelors' degrees.

37. The assessment team considered the evidence available to provide advice on whether the Academy complied with the following requirements set out in condition of registration B8: that the Academy demonstrates, in a credible manner, that any standards to be set and/or applied in respect of any relevant awards granted to students who complete a higher education course provided by, or on behalf of, the Academy (if registered), whether or not the Academy is the awarding body, appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards.

## Part 1: Assessment of condition B7: Quality

This section sets out advice on whether the Academy has credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with conditions B1, B2 and B4 from the date of registration.

### Condition B1: Academic experience

#### Criterion B1.2

**Does the Academy have credible plans to ensure that the students registered on each higher education course receive a high quality academic experience?**

38. The assessment team considered the Academy's plans to ensure students registered on each higher education course would receive a high quality academic experience.
39. In doing so, the assessment team first considered the factors set out below at B1.3 alongside any other information relevant to ensuring a high quality academic experience.

#### Criterion B1.3.a

**Does the Academy have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is up to date?**

#### Advice to the OfS

40. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is up to date. Courses are representative of current thinking and practice in the subject area, and the Academy takes reasonable and timely steps to monitor and review whether courses remain up to date going forward.

#### Reasoning

41. The Academy's core ethos 'By industry, for industry, with industry' is articulated in key strategic documents reviewed by the assessment team, including the strategic plan, the quality assurance enhancement framework, and the learning, teaching, assessment and feedback strategy. The quality plan indicates the numerous formalised interactions the Academy maintains with industry stakeholders, including live briefs, guest speakers and the industry advisory council. The assessment team examined the impact of these processes and engagements and found that the Academy has credible plans to ensure that its higher education provision is up to date, as discussed in paragraphs 42 to 53.
42. The assessment team reviewed the live project briefs submitted as evidence alongside the quality plan and found them to be representative of current industry practices. The assessment team agreed that these projects enable students to engage with real-world industry scenarios relevant to their area of study. For instance, a brief with a multi-channel retailer for the BA (Hons) Buying and merchandising course required students to develop a trading plan, which allowed students to apply their learning to up-to-date industry scenarios. The value of these real-world applications was further confirmed during the visit by an

industry partner involved in providing a live brief. During the visit, students outlined how live briefs allowed them to link their learning to current industry practices.

43. The assessment team reviewed the schedule of guest speakers for the Academy's undergraduate courses and found that the speakers represent a diverse range of industry professionals relevant to the area of study. During the visit, the assessment team observed a guest lecture focused on sustainability, where students asked relevant and challenging questions. Furthermore, during the visit the students spoke with enthusiasm about the input of guest speakers, particularly highlighting their relevance to module content. As such, the assessment team was confident that these mechanisms ensure courses remain relevant and continuously adapt to changes in the fashion industry.
44. The assessment team reviewed the minutes and terms of reference of the Academy's industry advisory council. During the visit, the assessment team further discussed the function and structure of the council, with senior management and two current members of the council. The assessment team is satisfied that the structure and the remit of the council is beneficial in ensuring relevance of provision. For example, the industry advisory council provided insights to the Academy around the significance of data in current industry practice, which informed the development of a new core module for 2024 titled 'consumer and data insights'. The Academy is continuing to review the terms of reference of the industry advisory council and, based on the track record of the council's positive contribution to course developments, the assessment team is confident of the capability and capacity of the council's input in maintaining course relevance.
45. The assessment team reviewed the Academy's higher education self-assessment report, the quality improvement plan, and the terms of reference and minutes of the quality steering committee. The higher education self-assessment report provided a holistic view of the performance of the higher education provision over an academic year. The report for the 2022-23 academic year consolidates in detail insights from external examiner reports, the National Student Survey, Graduate Outcomes survey, module evaluation surveys and feedback from staff and student meetings. The assessment team found that actions identified from these mechanisms are clearly documented and evidenced in individual course action plans, as well as in the Academy's quality plan. This was triangulated during the visit, when the assessment team heard from teaching staff that the Academy holds weekly module meetings and pre-semester module meetings to ensure provision is current and to monitor alignment across the undergraduate courses. As such, the assessment team is confident that the Academy has appropriate processes and frameworks in place for continuous reflection and self-assessment, to ensure the relevance of its higher education provision.
46. The assessment team considered the evidence submitted to support the revalidation of three undergraduate courses for September 2024: BA (Hons) Buying and merchandising, BA (Hons) Fashion business, and BA (Hons) Marketing and communication for fashion. The new modular structure has two credit systems across the programme, comprising core and specialist modules. The assessment team was assured that the Academy has developed the new style curriculum with industry insight and academic rigour to ensure the ongoing relevance of the courses. This is because the course revalidation documents provide relevant rationales for curriculum developments, based on external research, to ensure the course content is aligned with current industry practice.

47. The assessment team reviewed the curriculum strategy alongside the quality plan and found that it reflects a forward thinking and up-to-date approach. The assessment team observed that the curriculum strategy incorporates recent research conducted by industry consultants, with a key focus on identifying skill gaps in the industry. This focus enables the Academy to equip students with the necessary skills through its course provision. This approach aligns with the introduction of four new undergraduate bachelors' degrees: BA (Hons) Fashion communication and styling, BA (Hons) UXUI design, BA (Hons) Sustainable fashion, and BSc (Hons) Data analytics for retail. The Academy's decision to introduce these courses was informed by industry consultant research and insights from the Academy's industry advisory council. During the visit, senior management discussed the development of a new curriculum strategy which includes input from students, external advisors and teaching staff. Based on the Academy's industry partnerships and track record of considering industry research as part of course changes, the assessment team is confident that the Academy has credible plans to maintain a current and relevant curriculum.
48. The assessment team reviewed a sample of module handbooks and course specifications and found that the module contexts and content reflect current thinking and practice in the subject areas taught by the Academy. The courses incorporate topics addressing societal issues such as sustainability, ethical practice, diversity and inclusivity, explored through both theoretical and practical processes. Live projects enable students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios. For instance, a live project with a clothing and home furnishings brand tasked students with developing an expansion strategy. The project allowed students to explore different business models, key economic theories, and market drivers across the fashion industry.
49. The assessment team reviewed the module reading lists and found that they contain up-to-date references relevant to the subject areas studied at the Academy. The assessment team observed an appropriate selection of academic books and journals, alongside contemporary industry and professional databases, readily accessible to students via the virtual learning environment (VLE). As such, the assessment team is satisfied that reading lists are up to date and appropriately reflect the subjects studied at the Academy.
50. The assessment team reviewed the evidence provided regarding staff teaching qualifications and found that appropriate support is available for staff to pursue relevant postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) and postgraduate certificate in higher education (PGCHE) qualifications, particularly for tutors transitioning from industry to academia. All higher education staff have the opportunity to undertake the PGCHE through the Academy's collaborative agreement with its awarding university. The assessment team noted that a significant proportion of the teaching staff already hold PGCE/PGCHE qualifications and teaching staff told the assessment team that the Academy supports and facilitates them in pursuing these qualifications. Additionally, the Academy has adequate support for tutors delivering the Level 4 diplomas to achieve a Level 5 PGCHE teaching qualification, via one of their external validating organisations, and noted a positive uptake of this opportunity by staff.
51. The Academy's quality plan acknowledges its need to further foster and develop a research strategy to embed a research culture at the Academy in support of its higher level courses. In support of this, the assessment team reviewed the Academy's outline of its five-year research plan, the knowledge exchange plan and an overview of academic career fields. The research plan is credible and realistic because it outlines a coherent build year on year, and clearly

identified mechanisms for monitoring success metrics, and evaluating progress. For example, year one of the research plan prioritises a focus on institutional strengths and industry demands, along with engaging staff and stakeholders to align research goals with academic and professional expertise. During the visit, senior management further discussed the Academy's research strategy, and the assessment team heard how the research strategy aligns with the Academy's ethos and the academic staff's areas of interest. The assessment team found the plans to be detailed and resourced, and reflective of the Academy's commitment to developing and formalising this area.

52. The assessment team reviewed the evidence provided regarding continuing professional development (CPD) for staff and found that appropriate support and structures are in place to facilitate staff engagement in CPD activities. During the visit, teaching staff expressed enthusiasm for the opportunities available and provided practical examples of professional development, including funding for additional training, attending relevant conferences and industry forums and obtaining professional membership with the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CMI).
53. The quality plan emphasises the Academy's commitment to monitoring innovation to identify developments in learning and teaching practice and to ensure the provision is up to date. One example of this is the Academy's response to developments in artificial intelligence. During the visit, assessment staff outlined plans to introduce content on artificial intelligence in coding, for the BSc (Hons) Data analytics programme, and that this is an area that the Academy is considering as part of their forthcoming curriculum strategy. The Academy has working groups in place to continually monitor emerging technologies and industry developments and to allow them to respond accordingly.

### **Criterion B1.3.b**

**Does the Academy have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course provides educational challenge?**

### **Advice to the OfS**

54. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure that each higher education course provides appropriate educational challenge because the course documentation demonstrates the rigour and difficulty reasonably expected in the context of the subject matter and level of these courses.

### **Reasoning**

55. The quality plan highlights the Academy's use of external scrutiny as a mechanism to ensure that academic challenge aligns with national standards in comparable subject areas and meets the levels set out in the sector-recognised standard descriptors. The assessment team reviewed a sample of external examiner reports and it is the view of external examiners that overall appropriate standards are met. The assessment team acknowledged the efforts the Academy has made to address areas for improvement identified by external examiners, including research skills and criticality. For example, the Academy has introduced a core module in 'research and study skills' and it incorporated a literature review project for all final year bachelor students.

56. The assessment team reviewed the course approval documentation supporting the proposed MA course in international fashion marketing and communications. The plan is detailed and sufficiently resourced and, as such, the assessment team agree the Academy has credible plans to ensure an appropriate level of educational challenge for the subject area. In addition, the Academy has an established track record of progression, having grown its provision from further education to higher education. The assessment team agree the Academy demonstrates a commitment to enhancing research and academic skills, due to the presence of suitably qualified staff to supervise the research project, the Academy's research strategy and the recruitment of additional staff for the new MA course.
57. The quality plan highlights industry exposure as a means of introducing challenge within the Academy's curriculum. The assessment team reviewed a sample of industry briefs, challenge briefs and student work, and concluded that the range of live projects provides an appropriate level of educational challenge. These projects enable students to demonstrate the expected academic rigour, aligned with relevant learning outcomes, applied to real-world scenarios. As an example, a live brief for a clothing and home furnishings retailer requires students to develop a commercially viable plan for international expansion, incorporating business models, economic theories, and market drivers. The assessment team found the selection of industry partners for live projects rigorous, in particular the consideration given to ensuring both educational challenge and alignment with the learning outcomes.
58. The quality plan emphasises the Academy's plans to provide an innovative and challenging curriculum to support educational challenge. The assessment team reviewed the evidence to support this including live project and challenge briefs, module handbooks, project briefs and assignment briefs. The team concluded that the curriculum provides an appropriate level of educational challenge, aligning with sector-recognised standards. In particular, the industry projects challenge students to develop original solutions for real-world scenarios. The Academy structures assignments to reflect increasing academic challenge at each level and assesses learning outcomes appropriate to those levels.

### **Criterion B1.3.c**

**Does the Academy have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is coherent?**

### **Advice to the OfS**

59. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is coherent because there is an appropriate balance between breadth and depth of content. The Academy teaches subjects in an appropriate order, where necessary building on other subjects throughout the course, and introduces key concepts at the appropriate point in the course content.

### **Reasoning**

60. The BA courses follow a modular structure that has two credit systems across the programme, consisting of both core and specialist modules. The assessment team reviewed the higher education overview document and course specifications and found that the Academy appropriately positions core modules at each level of study to facilitate a structured

and coherent learning journey. Furthermore, the Academy introduces underlying concepts at appropriate opportunities to ensure students are secure in their understanding of foundational topics. For example, students undertake the core module 'research and study skills' in the first year of study and the 'entrepreneurial practice' module in the second year of study, demonstrating an appropriate level of build in research skills, relevant to the level of study.

61. Furthermore, the assessment team reviewed the evidence to support the specialist modules and agree that these facilitate students' academic progression throughout the relevant BA courses. The Academy structures specialist modules to ensure a coherent development in students' learning over the course of their studies. For example, on the BA (Hons) Buying and merchandising course, students begin with 'fundamentals of buying and merchandising' in study block one of their first year, before progressing to 'advanced buying and merchandising' in study block three. As such, the assessment team found that appropriate scaffolding is embedded across all degree programmes. Furthermore, the Academy reinforces this progression with appropriately placed live projects which require students to apply theoretical knowledge to practical real-world scenarios.
62. The assessment team reviewed evidence submitted to support the coherence of the Level 4 diplomas and apprenticeship courses and is satisfied that these facilitate an appropriate standard and sequence of learning. For example, in the Level 4 diplomas, the 'buying and range planning' project requires students to build on the knowledge and insights from earlier projects. Furthermore, appropriately placed industry-led projects provide opportunities for students to apply theoretical knowledge to practical real word scenarios.
63. The assessment team reviewed the evidence submitted to support the proposed new MA, including the course development report. The proposed structure of the MA demonstrates an appropriate breadth of relevant subjects to build to a masters' level research project.
64. The Academy uses formative assessment and feedback across all modules and the assessment team agree that the Academy appropriately times its formative assessments and provides feedback to students in an appropriate timeframe to support progression to summative assessment. During the visit, a group of students corroborated this conclusion.
65. The assessment team found that, based on the Academy's current delivery of existing undergraduate course, and the resource and detail within the proposal for the MA, that the Academy has credible plans to ensure students receive a coherent learning experience.

### **Criterion B1.3.d**

**Does the Academy have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is effectively delivered?**

### **Advice to the OfS**

66. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is effectively delivered.

## Reasoning

67. The Academy's higher education courses are delivered via a two-day model, with one day allocated to core module delivery and the second day to specialist modules. Core modules are delivered in a lecture style format, whereas specialist modules, which are taught in smaller groups, incorporate a more diverse range of learning activities. The assessment team reviewed an example lesson plan for a core module session which outlined a three-hour session, delivered in a lecture theatre, and demonstrated a variety of delivery methods. The session incorporated lecture delivery, active engagement, small group activities and two short breaks. The afternoon session comprised a student-led activity task, student-led discussions and tutorial time. The two-day model allows students to balance their studies with other commitments such as part-time employment; some students told the assessment team that they chose to study at the Academy due to this delivery model. During the visit, the Academy outlined its processes for managing the timetabling, the capacity of physical resources and the availability of teaching staff, and as such the assessment team found that the Academy has credible plans to continue the implementation of this delivery model.
68. The assessment team is satisfied that the Academy uses an appropriate range of delivery methods and learning activities across all courses. The assessment team reviewed module handbooks, module specifications and course specifications. The team observed a balanced delivery method appropriate to the subjects studied at the Academy, with delivery type clearly set out week by week in the module handbooks. For example, delivery methods in the 'fundamentals of buying and merchandising' module include lectures, seminars, workshops, retail store visit, factory visit, tutorials and a guest speaker. During the visit, the assessment team met with teaching staff and found the range of delivery methods discussed aligned with the evidence in the quality plan, supporting the effective delivery of each course.
69. The quality plan emphasises the use of trips as a method of providing experiential learning opportunities. During an observation of a Level 4 garment technology lesson, the assessment team observed how a recent trip to a garment factory informed the lesson. Furthermore, during the visit, a group of undergraduate students spoke positively about exhibition trips, noting various benefits such as contributing to current briefs, providing inspiration and fostering engagement with industry. Examples provided by the students included a visit to an exhibition which linked to a brief, a visit to a fashion magazine exhibition which provided insight into the history of the catwalk, and visits to fashion head offices which linked to live projects. As such, the assessment team found that the Academy uses trips appropriately to support and further the student learning experience.
70. The quality plan identifies guest speakers as a means of bringing industry experts and practitioners into the classroom to share real-world insights. The assessment team reviewed the evidence submitted to support the range of guest speakers and agree that these industry professionals represent a relevant and appropriate mix for the courses at the Academy. Additionally, during the visit, the assessment team observed a guest speaker delivering a lecture session on sustainability. The assessment team noted the presentation of real-world industry experience, supported by extensive examples and opportunities for students to engage with the guest lecturer through a question and answer session.
71. The assessment team reviewed the evidence submitted to support assessment design, including module handbooks and assignment briefs. The assessment team found that module handbooks clearly outline assessment details, which are also communicated in teaching

sessions and through the VLE. The assessment team agree that, at all levels of study, assessment tasks adequately consolidate the student learning experience. Furthermore, the Academy appropriately tailors the complexity and length of assessment tasks to specific levels of study. The assessment team noted the varied range of assessment outputs and conclude that they are relevant to the range of subjects studied at the Academy. In addition, the assessment team considered the evidence submitted to support the timing of assessments and is satisfied that the Academy appropriately schedules assessments across the study blocks to avoid overburden for the students.

72. The quality plan identifies the role of the VLE to support students' learning and the delivery of modules. Each course is presented visually to a set format with modules and weekly content clearly laid out. During the visit, the assessment team received a comprehensive demonstration of the VLE and agree that the Academy uses it to appropriately support delivery (as discussed at paragraph 89), with content appropriately structured to support student learning.
73. The assessment team reviewed the evidence to support the number of contact hours and expected independent study hours per module. The assessment team found that guided independent study hours and contact hours are clearly outlined under modes of delivery in the module specifications. The Academy calculates allocations of contact hours and independent study hours based on module credit. The assessment team found that the Academy has appropriate structures in place to determine these allocations because the module handbooks outline a breakdown of target learner hours for students, including guided independent study. However, during the visit, the assessment team heard that students were less clear on the number of independent study hours per module. This may pose a risk to the effective delivery of the Academy's courses because students may not be completing the required number of independent learning hours.

### **Criterion B1.3.e**

**Does the Academy have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course, as appropriate to the subject matter of the course, requires students to develop relevant skills?**

### **Advice to the OfS**

74. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure that each higher education course requires students to develop relevant skills, as appropriate to the subject matter and level of the course.

### **Reasoning**

75. The assessment team reviewed the Academy's module handbooks, course specifications, project briefs and assignment briefs to assess whether students develop knowledge and understanding appropriate to the subject matter and level of study. The assessment team agree that the Academy structures core and specialist modules within the BA courses to foster relevant intellectual skills, such as evaluating evidence, mobilising an argument and problem solving, in alignment with the subject area and level of study. In addition, the module specifications emphasise relevant transferable skills, including creative problem solving and

resilience, communication and collaboration, curiosity, creativity and risk taking and planning. During the visit, senior management and members of the industry advisory committee told the assessment team about the focus placed on supporting students to develop 'power skills' such as resilience, which are essential for preparing students to navigate a fast-evolving industry.

76. Furthermore, appropriately placed live projects provide students with the opportunity to apply knowledge and understanding gained on their courses to real-world scenarios and develop practical industry skills. For example, on the BA (Hons) marketing and communication for fashion course, a specialist module requires students to create a customer magazine for a large retail brand as part of their assessment. The assessment team agree that live projects allow students to demonstrate industry specific skills relevant to their field of study, while also meeting expected academic requirements, as reflected in the learning outcomes.
77. The Academy's strategy to future-skill graduates is underpinned by research from industry consultants and input from the industry advisory committee. The strategy aims to explore emerging trends and skills gaps in the fashion industry. The assessment team reviewed industry research commissioned by the Academy and found that industry insights are embedded in course material. For example, the Academy introduced the core module 'consumer and data insights' due to the increasing relevance of data-led systems across the fashion industry. At the visit, senior management spoke of the changing skillset of students and further outlined how the development of the curriculum strategy has been informed by students, external industry advisors and teaching staff. As such the assessment team agree that there is commitment to the ongoing development of relevant knowledge and skills across the Academy's courses.
78. The Academy has introduced four new bachelors' courses; BA (Hons) fashion communication and styling, BA (Hons) UX/UI design, BA (Hons) sustainable fashion, and BSc (Hons) data analytics for retail. The quality plan states how these degrees underwent a rigorous amount of industry testing in terms of skills gaps and employment opportunities. The assessment team acknowledge the correlation between the subject areas of the new degrees and the skills gaps identified by the Academy's industry research. As such, these new degrees represent the central ethos of the Academy which is to future-skill graduates.
79. The quality plan emphasises the development of collaboration opportunities across institutions to further expose students to multi-disciplinary industries and skills. The benefit of cross-institution collaboration is also noted in the external examiner report. At the visit, senior managers told the assessment team about a planned assessed project in collaboration with a London based, specialist film school which is planned for the BA (Hons) Fashion communication and styling course. The assessment team agree that this initiative demonstrates a commitment to future collaborations, further enabling students to develop and demonstrate the skills necessary for success in the fashion industry.

## **B1 conclusions**

**Does the Academy have credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with condition B1 from the date of registration?**

80. The assessment team considered that, overall, the Academy has credible plans to ensure, if registered, that students on each course would receive a high quality academic experience relevant to the course level.
81. The assessment team found that the course documentation, industry initiatives and evidence of monitoring and review demonstrates that the Academy courses are and would remain up to date. The documentation reviewed, discussions with staff and students and observed teaching delivery assured the assessment team that each higher education course that the Academy provides has educational challenge, is coherent, and is effectively delivered. Similarly, the assessment team's review of course and module documentation, campus-based digital resources, observed teaching delivery, in addition to discussions with staff and students, assured the team that students acquire relevant skills appropriate to the subject matter of the courses delivered at the Academy.
82. The assessment team noted that the requirement of condition B1 is expressed as a principle that can be satisfied in different ways. The assessment team is of the view that the evidence set out above is sufficient for it to make an overall view in respect of initial condition B1. Considering the findings at B1.3.a, B1.3.b, B1.3.c, B1.3.d and B1.3.e above, and the reasoning contained therein, the assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure students will receive a high quality academic experience.

## **Condition B2: Resources, support and student engagement**

### **Criterion B2.2.a**

**Does the Academy have credible plans for how each cohort of students would receive resources which are sufficient for the purposes of ensuring:**

- i. a high quality academic experience for those students**
- ii. those students succeed in and beyond higher education?**

### **Advice to the OfS**

83. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure that each cohort of students will receive resources sufficient to deliver a high quality academic experience and for those students to succeed in and beyond higher education.

### **Reasoning**

84. In August 2024 the Academy relocated to Electra House in Moorgate and, during the visit, senior managers indicated that this transition had involved a period of adjustment. The assessment team toured classrooms, lecture theatres, the library and breakout areas and agree that the Academy has sufficient physical resources to support the current student cohorts. During the visit, students spoke positively about the learning spaces, stating that they were appropriate to class sizes and conducive to engagement. This was confirmed through teaching observations, where lecture theatres and classrooms were appropriately set up and comfortably accommodated the cohorts. However, in the design studio space, during the tour, the assessment team observed several students pattern cutting on the floor due to a lack of available table space, raising concerns about the student-to-space ratio in this particular area.

85. Based on feedback provided by senior managers during the visit, the assessment team is satisfied that the Academy has credible timetabling plans in place to accommodate the anticipated increase in student numbers, considering recruitment is underway for four new BA courses, and an MA course. For example, the assessment noted that the Academy has explored the possibility of expanding its facilities into a neighbouring building if more space is required. The assessment team heard that the top floor of the building has been designated as a dedicated space for the new MA course, and agree that this will aid in community building, which senior managers identified as priority to the Academy.
86. The assessment team found that the Academy has appropriate plans in place for specialist resources to support the growing needs of students on the BA (Hons) Fashion communication and styling and the proposed BA (Hons) Art direction for fashion. For example, the assessment team viewed evidence to support the fit-out of a new photo studio, including renderings and costings. Although the photo studio was not fitted out for the visit, the Academy provided evidence that the refurbishment would be completed by March 2025. During the visit, the assessment team viewed a space that the Academy is considering as a dedicated space for the BA (Hons) Art direction for fashion. At the time of the visit the space was being used as a computer room. However, based on the previous track record of the Academy in providing sufficient resources for students, the assessment team is reassured that the new course will be appropriately resourced in terms of a dedicated space.
87. The assessment team observed a range of study spaces during the visit and found that the Academy appropriately allocates spaces to support student study. For example, the assessment team noted the provision of appropriate breakout areas designed to support informal learning and collaboration. Additionally, it observed dedicated quiet study spaces, suitable for individual work. The Academy has further designated open study areas which offer flexible environments conducive to both independent study and peer interaction. Overall, the assessment team found the variety of study environments aligns with student needs and learning preferences. This was reinforced by students during the visit who spoke positively about the seating space in the library and the spaces for independent study.
88. The Academy provides students with access to laptops. Bursaries are available for laptop loans for Level 4 students for the duration of their studies. In addition, the assessment team reviewed the evidence submitted to support software packages available to students and found that these are appropriate to the subjects studied at the Academy. As such, the assessment team concludes that the Academy's students have access to appropriate hardware and software to support their studies.
89. The assessment team reviewed the Academy's digital resources, including the VLE, during the visit. The assessment team found that the VLE provides an appropriate resource to support student learning, with content appropriately structured and readily accessible. Students are able to access the VLE via computer and mobile phone. Students have access to an appropriate and relevant range of digital resources and databases, including the library catalogue for the Academy's university partner, for students on courses under this partnership. The assessment staff noted the usefulness of smart guides for students which include an edited list of databases relevant to their area of study.
90. Students at the Academy have access to an on-site library which the assessment team viewed during the visit. The library is equipped with a collection of approximately 6,000 print

books and approximately 40 magazine subscriptions. In addition, students have access to library staff and technicians to support their learning. Students who met with the assessment team spoke positively about library support, including one-to-one tutorials. Additionally, the assessment team viewed specialist resources designed to aid students in using digital resources. For example, the Academy provides a library skills course covering using the library, academic research skills, referencing and digital literacy to students through a suite of videos.

91. The assessment team found that teaching staff at the Academy are appropriately qualified and sufficient in number, with plans in place to recruit teaching staff for the new BA and MA courses. The assessment team reviewed the evidence submitted to support the quality plan and agree the Academy has an appropriate balance between qualified teaching practitioners and industry professionals. The Academy has frameworks and resources in place to support full-time and associate/visiting lecturers with appropriate levels of teaching support, including the requirement for all full-time teaching staff to undertake a PGCHE, as discussed in paragraph 50. As such, the assessment team conclude that credible plans are in place to recruit staff to teach the new degrees, where necessary, including the proposed MA.

### **Criterion B2.2.a**

**Does the Academy have credible plans for how each cohort of students would receive support which is sufficient for the purposes of ensuring:**

- i. a high quality academic experience for those students**
- ii. those students succeed in and beyond higher education?**

### **Advice to the OfS**

92. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure that each cohort of students will receive support sufficient to deliver a high quality academic experience and for those students to succeed in and beyond higher education.

### **Reasoning**

93. The assessment team reviewed the evidence submitted in the quality plan to support the area of academic support at the Academy. This included the student services handbook, the academic integrity policy, the academic misconduct procedure and the academic integrity skills module available on the VLE. Overall, the assessment team found this information and guidance to provide an appropriate level of detail, and during the visit students voiced that they felt supported with academic skills. However, the assessment team did note that completion of the academic integrity skills module was only mandatory for those students who had been penalised for academic misconduct. Given the benefits that such a course can provide in supporting students to understand the rules and regulations around academic misconduct, the fact it is not mandatory may pose a risk to the fulfilment of this condition, particularly with regards to supporting students to develop good academic conduct. Notwithstanding this, during the visit, students demonstrated satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the academic misconduct policy.

94. The assessment team reviewed the library skills course on the VLE which the quality plan states the Academy has designed to support students to have the appropriate knowledge and skills to find and use library resources and services. During the visit, the assessment team was told by teaching staff that they integrate the content of this course appropriately into the teaching schedule. Furthermore, during the visit, students spoke positively about their experiences with library support. They highlighted the availability and effectiveness of one-to-one tutorials, which they found beneficial in developing their library skills and improving their understanding of academic referencing.
95. The assessment team reviewed the evidence submitted in relation to the personal tutorial policy at the Academy. The Academy allocates all students a personal tutor for the duration of their studies, with the role and remit of the personal tutor clearly outlined in the personal tutorial policy. During the visit, teaching staff indicated that uptake by students of personal tutor appointments is relatively low. Likewise, during the visit, some students voiced a limited awareness of the personal tutor system. Teaching staff suggested that this may be attributable to the high level of contact time with students across the two-day model. This was echoed by students who told the assessment team that teaching staff are available for informal one-to-ones, which they appreciate. Teaching staff told the assessment team that the Academy is reviewing the personal tutor process for the bachelors' courses, with plans to introduce a centralised system to record tutorials. The Academy currently operates a centralised online platform to record personal tutor meetings at Level 4. Based on this track record, the assessment team is reassured that an appropriate system will also be implemented for the bachelors' students.
96. The assessment team reviewed the evidence submitted regarding the industry mentorship programme, which clearly outlined the role of mentors and provided guidance for mentees. During the visit, the assessment team heard positive feedback about the programme through discussions with both industry mentors and mentees. One mentee described how they had successfully secured a placement as a result of guidance provided by their assigned mentor. Based on the evidence submitted, and these discussions, the assessment team recognises the valuable role this programme plays in supporting students during their studies. The team note that the programme helps to foster industry connections that help prepare students for placements and future employment opportunities. In addition, the assessment team reviewed the evidence submitted to facilitate the introduction of a Level 4 mentor scheme. The assessment team is satisfied that a credible framework is in place to support this because it has seen evidence of a pilot scheme with appropriate detail and the Academy has a track record of delivering a mentoring scheme for the bachelors' students.
97. The assessment team reviewed the evidence provided in relation to careers support at the Academy. The assessment team found that relevant support is in place to support students in their career choices and progression. During the visit, students spoke positively about talks and presentation delivered by the careers team and the access they had to careers support staff via email and in person. It became evident during the visit that certain aspects of this provision have evolved since the submission of the quality plan. Specifically, the Academy has adopted a new set of software platforms to support students with reviewing their CVs and exploring career options. Although the new software is in its first year of implementation, teaching staff reported a high level of uptake by students. Students spoke positively about the platforms, particularly regarding its usefulness in developing their CVs. The assessment team also noted the opportunity for students to continue accessing these platforms beyond the

completion of their academic studies. Overall, based on the evidence provided and discussions during the visit, the assessment team is satisfied that the career support at the Academy provides appropriate provision to support students in their learning journey and beyond their higher education studies.

98. Furthermore, the Academy runs a careers fair on-site, which takes place across three days and is attended by relevant fashion brands that are actively recruiting. Students are supported in developing their CVs in preparation of attending this event. The assessment team note that this initiative supports students in tailoring their applications to real-world employment opportunities.
99. During the visit, students fed back positively about networking opportunities provided by masterclasses, live projects and guest speakers. Students highlighted the value of engaging with presenters after these sessions, allowing for informal networking and the development of industry connections. The assessment team agree that these activities contribute meaningfully to students' academic experience and play a supportive role in preparing them for success beyond higher education.
100. In its quality plan, the Academy identifies the need to further enhance and develop its higher education alumni community, acknowledging the potential positive impact of a strong alumni network in supporting current students. Currently, alumni engagement happens on an ad hoc basis, via guest speakers and industry live projects. For example, during the visit the assessment team met with an alumnus of the Academy who is now working in industry for an online fashion retailer and is running a live student project. The Academy recognises the need to formalise their alumni network. During the visit, the assessment team heard about plans to recruit a head of futures role, which will consolidate careers, industry and a future alumni structure.
101. The quality plan highlights the opportunities students have at the Academy to access work placement opportunities. The assessed curriculum does not include work placements although students have multiple opportunities throughout their programme to experience a placement. During the visit, the assessment team heard from an industry partner who offered multiple placements for the Academy's students, and students shared positive accounts of their placement experiences. However, the discussions with students highlighted potential scope for improvement in the organisation and communication of placements, particularly in relation to student expectations regarding placement availability. Staff acknowledged the importance of managing placement expectations to ensure that students experience a high quality academic experience.
102. The assessment team reviewed the Academy's reasonable adjustments policy and access and participation statement which outlined the process for students who have evidenced a need for additional support. During the visit, senior management explained to the team that the learning support team has expanded significantly over the past three years, including the recruitment of staff with expertise in special educational needs. Based on this track record, the assessment team conclude that the current provision is appropriately structured to accommodate current student numbers and future increases in student numbers.

## Criterion B2.2.b

**Does the Academy have credible plans for how it would ensure effective engagement with each cohort of students which is sufficient for the purpose of ensuring:**

**i. a high quality academic experience for those students**

**ii. those students succeed in and beyond higher education?**

### Advice to the OfS

103. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure effective engagement with each cohort of students which is sufficient for the purpose of ensuring a high quality academic experience and for the purpose of those students to succeed in and beyond higher education.

### Reasoning

104. The quality plan details the proactive approach taken by the Academy to address student engagement following the return to face-to-face teaching after the coronavirus pandemic. A key development in this area was the appointment of a quality assurance and enhancement student experience officer. The role was introduced to support the Academy in student-led enhancement across all areas of provision. The assessment team reviewed the evidence provided to support these key changes. This included a discussion paper on student voice enhancement, minutes from the quality steering committee and the board of governors, and the course executive framework proposal. The team acknowledges the progress the Academy has made in this area. The assessment team found that the Academy has credible frameworks and reporting structures in place to continue to develop the area of student-led enhancement.

105. The Academy facilitates a course executive scheme where one student from each learning group is nominated to represent and feed back about students' experiences at the Academy. The course executive role description outlines that the purpose of the role is to ensure that the student voice is captured and that students are kept informed of changes that are made in response to their feedback. Course executives are invited to attend monthly meetings with course leaders. During the visit, students told the assessment team they felt able to provide feedback to course leaders via their course executives, and the assessment team heard from course executives that they felt able to voice concerns at course enhancement meetings. As an example, when first year students fed back that they would like greater clarity about their timetables, course executives were able to speak with course leaders to provide further information about upcoming milestones and checkpoints. The Academy is additionally looking to invite course executives to attend meetings with the industry advisory council, as rotating members. As such, the effective track record of the course executive scheme, and the Academy's commitment to further embedding the student voice, confirmed to the assessment team that the Academy has credible plans to effectively engage with students.

106. In addition to the course executive scheme, the quality plan provides a detailed outline of the various opportunities for student contribution to groups and committees at the Academy. These include the higher education quality enhancement group, board of governors, external examiner focus groups, student enhancement committee, and meetings with the higher

education programme managers/course leaders. In addition, the assessment team reviewed the updated 2024 quality assurance and enhancement committee structure, which presents a formalised framework for student contribution across various committees. Recent initiatives to enhance student engagement include the employment of a student experience officer to establish a formal role and process to represent the student voice, and the introduction of a student self-assessment where students self-assess their experience every study block. During the visit, senior management indicated that these initiatives have led to an improvement in student engagement. Similar sentiments were also offered by student representatives during the assessment visit. Based on these developments, and review of the 2024 quality assurance and enhancement committee structure, the assessment team is satisfied that the Academy demonstrates an ongoing commitment to engage with their students.

107. The Academy captures student feedback in a number of ways. For bachelors' students, this includes midterm polls, module evaluations, the National Student Survey and Graduate Outcomes survey. For Level 4 diploma and apprenticeship students, it includes termly student surveys. The assessment team found specific examples of where the Academy has acted upon student feedback. For example, students who met with the assessment team noted that module staff had incorporated visits from industry speakers into student timetables following requests from students. As such, the assessment team conclude that the Academy has appropriate processes in place to capture student feedback and engage effectively with each cohort.
108. The assessment team noted that the Academy's library team has recently updated and enhanced the academic skills training provided to students to ensure that students do not inadvertently engage in academic misconduct through a misunderstanding of academic referencing conventions. During the visit, the assessment team was granted access to the Academy's online library skills course and found that this resource provides sufficient information and guidance to students around academic misconduct. Nevertheless, the assessment team did note that completion of this training was optional and not mandatory for all diploma and undergraduate students. Similarly, the assessment team also noted that completion of the Academy's academic integrity skills course is only mandatory for students penalised for academic misconduct.
109. The assessment team noted that the Academy's learning support team includes English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) as a specific learning difficulty and offered appropriate support to students in relation to reading and writing skills. Feedback provided by students during the visit also indicated that those who engaged with the writing and literacy skills provided by the Academy had found them effective and beneficial.
110. Finally, the assessment team did note that the Academy currently does not have any non-UK students registered on its courses and has historically not recruited overseas students. Senior staff confirmed during the visit that the Academy is not planning to change its recruitment approach in the near future and would continue to recruit students from the UK. Based on these factors, the assessment team is satisfied that the Academy's plans for supporting ESOL students are credible.

## B2 conclusions

**Does the Academy have credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with condition B2 from the date of registration?**

111. The assessment team considered that, overall, the Academy has credible plans to enable it, if registered, to comply with the requirements of condition B2 in relation to resources, support and student engagement.
112. The assessment team found that the Academy provides sufficient resources for students to receive a high quality academic experience and to succeed in and beyond higher education. This was evidenced by the tour of the Academy's premises, discussions with staff and students and the observation of its VLE and digital resources, together with the team's review of course documentation and the staff resources in place. This evidence, alongside that provided by the Academy on its approach to academic support, careers support and guidance, demonstrates that students receive support sufficient to ensure a high quality academic experience and to succeed in and beyond higher education. The assessment team found that in light of the opportunities for students to feedback, and effectiveness of these mechanisms, that there is sufficient engagement with students to ensure a high quality academic experience and for students to succeed in and beyond higher education.
113. Considering the findings above, and the reasoning contained therein, the assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure high quality resources and support and effective student engagement.

## Condition B4: Assessment and awards

### Criterion B4.2.a

**Does the Academy have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is assessed effectively?**

### Advice to the OfS

114. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans that would enable it to ensure, if registered, that it assesses students effectively because:
- it assesses skills relevant to the awards issued
  - it provides stretch and rigour in the courses appropriate to the level and builds in challenges as students progress through the courses
  - it designs assessments so that students reflect on their learning and the potential for academic misconduct is minimised.

### Reasoning

115. The assessment team considered the learning outcomes outlined in the Academy's module handbooks, course specifications, and curriculum strategy, to examine whether the

Academy's approach to assessment tests students on skills relevant to the award issued. In line with the Academy's overarching strategic plan, the assessment team noted that the Academy emphasises, at all levels, the development of courses that equip students with skills relevant to the fashion and retail industries. As outlined in their curriculum strategy, the Academy identifies and updates these skills in consultation with various external stakeholders, including industry partners and external consultants, to ensure that they remain relevant to 'the needs of industry'. The assessment team also observed that, in accordance with the requirements of the Academy's various awarding partners, the learning outcomes of all courses draw on relevant Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) advice and guidance and made direct reference to appropriate sector-recognised standards.

116. To assess how far the Academy embeds learning outcomes in the assessment activities, the assessment team reviewed a range of assessment briefs, with accompanying marking rubrics, at different academic levels from across the suite of programmes offered. The assessment team found that the tasks set out for each sample assessment brief relate to the appropriate levels in the sector-recognised standards and aligned with the broader curriculum strategy of the Academy. The assessment also noted that the Academy uses an appropriately varied range of assessment approaches, including report writing, groupwork, podcasts, presentations, artefacts, and business plans, that both enabled and encouraged students to further develop a range of relevant skills.
117. The assessment team reviewed a sample of assessment briefs, to examine how far they evidenced a commitment by the Academy to ensure that its courses have appropriate stretch and rigour relevant to the level and build in challenge as students progress through their learning journeys. The assessment team found that the Academy's level assessment framework effectively outlines the different standards expected across Levels 4, 5 and 6 of its undergraduate programmes, as it clearly articulates the different skills and abilities expected of students at each level. However, the team noted that few assessments across Level 6 directly contributed to learning outcome three ('analysis') of the Academy's assessment framework. The assessment team also noted that similar comments around the need for more rigorous assessment of research skills, data analytics and interpretation were raised by the Academy's external examiner in their reports for the academic years 2021-22 and 2022-23. While the assessment team acknowledge the efforts that the Academy has made to address these issues, such as the implementation of a research and study skills module at Level 4 and the provision of additional research skills training, it notes that there is scope for the Academy to more fully embed this learning outcome across its assessments. This is particularly pertinent at Level 6, given the centrality of analytical and critical judgement skills to the sector-recognised standards descriptor at this level.
118. In reviewing whether the Academy has credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is assessed effectively, the assessment team note that the Academy intends to launch a new Level 7 MA in international fashion marketing and communication. The detailed plans outlined in the supplied validation paperwork show that the Academy plans to use appropriate assessment strategies. During the visit, the assessment team heard that the Academy has plans to hire additional staff with PhD qualifications as well as prior experience of designing and conducting assessments at Level 7. The Academy's track record of managing assessment practices across Levels 4, 5 and 6, allied with the fact that it will deliver the proposed new MA course in conjunction with the same validating partner as the Academy's

undergraduate programmes, offers further reassurance that the Academy will assess this proposed new course effectively.

119. The Academy places emphasis on embedding formative feedback and assessment activity across all its learning. All modules across Levels 4, 5 and 6 provide students with opportunities to receive structured formative feedback on assessed work. Students told the assessment team that they found the formative feedback useful in helping them to reflect on their own learning. Finally, the assessment team examined a sample of student work which demonstrated that the Academy seeks to embed personal reflection into its assessment practices. As such, the assessment team found that the Academy's assessment practices provide sufficient opportunities for students to reflect on their learning.
120. The assessment team noted that the Academy has adopted a three-week minimum policy for the turnaround of student marks and feedback. During the visit, students on both the diploma and undergraduate programmes indicated that this policy was generally adhered to. The assessment team did note that some teaching staff reported to them that they found meeting this deadline challenging on occasion, particularly given the condensed nature of the Academy's teaching timetable. In relation to this point, the assessment team also noted that, because of the 'accelerated' nature of the Academy's two-year undergraduate courses, the Academy has less flexibility in the academic calendar to fit in opportunities for students to retake assessments if required. As a result, students must take resits 'in study', as opposed to taking them during vacation periods in between terms. Nevertheless, based on both the positive feedback provided by students and on the efforts made to embed feedback opportunities across study blocks, the assessment team found that these minor challenges did not compromise effective delivery, and are acceptable given the benefits that students seemed to derive from the accelerated structure of the academic timetable.
121. The assessment team reviewed the Academy's academic misconduct procedures and guidance, to explore the credibility of the Academy's plans for minimising academic misconduct. The policy provides clear guidelines for both students and staff about how different forms of academic misconduct, such as plagiarism and collusion, should be dealt with. The assessment team noted that separate, but related, policies and procedures are in place for the Academy's Level 4 diploma courses and its online provision. All the Academy's policies drew from its validating partner's respective academic misconduct policies and procedures and provided clear guidelines around academic misconduct in line with sector norms.
122. During the visit, the assessment team noted that students were aware of these policies and had at least a basic comprehension of their content. The assessment team found that the Academy's academic misconduct guidance includes a clear flowchart that outlines the stages involved in investigating and penalising cases of academic misconduct. The assessment team consider that the approach adopted by the Academy is both fair and transparent, with the usage of viva panels involving students, quality assurance staff, and module staff being a particularly effective means to assess culpability. The submitted evidence was triangulated with discussions with assessment and quality assurance staff during the visit and the assessment team is reassured that this approach is implemented effectively in practice.
123. Finally, the assessment team noted that the Academy has recently set up an artificial intelligence (AI) taskforce team which brings together teaching and quality assurance staff to

explore the 'opportunities and challenges/risks posed as a result of the growing use of AI in education'. The taskforce team shares the insights from their discussions with the Academy's quality enhancement groups. Minutes from the meetings of this taskforce indicate that the Academy has made efforts to update assessment guidelines and practices in light of the growing influence of AI. Furthermore, teaching staff are working with the library team to provide additional guidance to students around appropriate and unacceptable uses of AI.

## **Criterion B4.2.b**

**Does the Academy have credible plans to ensure that for each higher education course assessment is valid and reliable?**

### **Advice to the OfS**

124. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans that would enable it to ensure, if registered, that for each higher education course assessment is valid and reliable. Assessment at the Academy takes place in a way that results in students demonstrating knowledge and skills in the way intended by design of the assessment. In addition, assessments require students to demonstrate knowledge and skills in a manner which is consistent, between the students registered on a higher education course and over time, as appropriate in the context of developments in the content and delivery of the higher education course.

### **Reasoning**

125. The assessment team considered the relationship between learning outcomes and assessment criteria outlined in the Academy's module handbooks and course specifications, to examine whether assessment takes place in a way that results in students demonstrating knowledge and skills in the way intended. The assessment team noted that, for each individual unit of most of its Level 4 qualifications, specific learning outcomes mapped directly against relevant assessment criteria to ensure alignment between course objectives and assessment strategies. For the bachelors' qualifications, the assessment team noted that the Academy has made similar efforts to match specific learning outcomes to relevant assessment tasks. The assessment team considered a sample of student work which further illustrated that assessments take place in a way that allows students to demonstrate the knowledge and skills intended by design of the assessment. The assessment teams noted that assessment briefs for modules on both diploma and undergraduate courses are designed to test student learning over the breadth of a module, as opposed to just focusing on a subset of material taught at a specific juncture of that course.
126. The assessment team considered the Academy's group assessment policy, which outlines the principles and guidelines for how students working in groups are collectively and individually assessed. This document provides clarity around expected marking practices for groupwork activities, as well as detailing how to handle extenuating circumstances of various kinds. The assessment team noted that the Academy has clear guidelines on the use of peer-marking for group assessment activities and both staff and students who met with the assessment team had a clear understanding of the relevant guidelines.

127. The assessment team considered the Academy's internal moderation and second marking practices to explore the reliability of the marking and ensure that the Academy marks students in an equitable manner across cohorts. In line with the regulations of its awarding partner, the Academy's policy at bachelors' level is for 10 per cent of scripts to be moderated, including all fails and first class marks. Both the submitted evidence and the testimony of teaching staff during the visit reassured the assessment team that the Academy effectively implements this internal moderation policy effectively. The assessment team noted that all assessed work at diploma level goes through a process of external moderation by the respective awarding partner for that course. Again, the evidence submitted indicates that, in line with sector norms, the Academy moderates a 10 per cent sample of scripts from across the mark boundary. The sample scripts provided to the assessment team indicated that moderation was being done effectively and consistently across modules. Finally, the assessment team noted from the evidence collected during the visit, that members of the teaching staff are proactive in discussing and sharing approaches to marking and assessment. As a result, the assessment team conclude that the Academy has adequate internal, and external, processes in place to ensure that students are marked in an equitable manner across cohorts and that situations do not arise in which students demonstrating the same achievement are awarded different marks.

### **Criterion B4.2.c**

**Does the Academy have credible plans to ensure that for each higher education course the academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible?**

### **Advice to the OfS**

128. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans that would enable it to ensure, if registered, that, for each higher education course, the academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible because the awards granted by the Academy provide an appropriate reflection of student's knowledge and skills. In addition, the Academy has credible plans to ensure that any changes over time in terms of the number of awards granted and the classifications attached to them can be effectively monitored.

### **Reasoning**

129. The assessment team evaluated the academic regulations governing the Level 4, 5 and 6 courses delivered by the Academy, to assess the credibility of the Academy's assessment procedures. The Academy's assessment procedures are informed and guided by the assessment regulations of its various validating partners in respect to the assessment of students' work, the requirements for relevant awards, and how it determines classifications. The assessment team's view is that these regulations are sufficiently robust to ensure the credibility of student achievement and of awards granted, as they clearly set out an effective and consistent approach to the assessment and grading of students' work; the requirements for awards in terms of credit; and the methods used to determine classifications of those awards. In addition, during the visit, teaching staff told the assessment team that the Academy regularly communicates with its respective validating partners to keep abreast of any changes in assessment policies and procedures.

130. The Academy has nominated two staff to act as 'assessment champions', who work closely with the quality assurance team to ensure the Academy academic regulations align with validating partners. This is to encourage and promote best practice with respect to marking practices, and to try and ensure standardisation of marking practices and procedures by teaching staff. The assessment team noted that teaching staff who met with the assessment team confirmed that regular meetings around assessment policies and marking practices do occur within the Academy.
131. The assessment team found that the Academy's quality assurance team have in place committees and structures designed to scrutinise student marks and monitor student outcomes. Evidence from the Academy's self-assessment report also provided assurance to the assessment team that the Academy is monitoring student performance over time and has the mechanisms in place to monitor any inflation of grades. Feedback from teaching and assessment staff during the visit provided further confirmation to the assessment team that the Academy monitors student outcomes through regular assessment boards, in which appropriate assessment data is presented. Finally, the assessment team noted that external examiner reports and external moderation reports indicate that the data around the number of awards granted and the classifications attached are subject to appropriate external monitoring. The assessment team therefore conclude that the Academy can effectively monitor changes over time in terms of the numbers of awards granted and the classifications attached.

#### **Criterion B4.2.d**

**Does the Academy have credible plans to ensure that, for each higher education course, the academic regulations are designed to ensure the effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language, in a manner which appropriately reflects the level and content of the applicable higher education course?**

#### **Advice to the OfS**

132. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans that would enable it to ensure, if registered, that, for each higher education course, the academic regulations are designed to ensure the effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language, in a manner which appropriately reflects the level and content of the applicable higher education course.

#### **Reasoning**

133. In considering the Academy's academic regulations for the assessment of technical proficiency in English, the assessment team noted that, in line with the requirements of its validating partners and its own admission regulations, the Academy incorporates appropriate English language requirements (minimum grade 4 or C for UK students and minimum IELTS score of 5.0 or 5.5 for international students) as part of the entry requirements for its Level 4, 5 and 6 courses. The Academy confirmed that it will adopt the same standards for its proposed new Level 6 courses and its proposed new Level 7 course. In addition, the assessment team also noted that, across all its courses, communication and presentation skills were integrated appropriately into course learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The assessment team considered a sample of student work across the Academy's courses

which provided further assurance that the students' technical proficiency of English language skills of students is at the required level, demonstrating therefore the effectiveness of regulations in place.

## **Criterion B4.2.e**

**Does the Academy have credible plans to ensure that relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously?**

### **Advice to the OfS**

134. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans that would enable it to ensure, if registered, that relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously.

### **Reasoning**

135. As discussed at paragraphs 129 to 131, the assessment team's view is that the Academy has in place appropriate committees and structures to allow for the scrutiny of student marks and outcomes over time. The assessment team reviewed a sample of student work, which showed that marking policies are implemented correctly and that credible grades are being issued. In addition, the assessment team also considered the number and classification of awards by the Academy at Levels 4, 5 and 6. Overall, the assessment team found that the range and number of awards issued is appropriate and credible when compared to those granted previously.
136. The assessment team also noted that, in accordance with the policies of its validating partners, the Academy has in place appropriate progression rules and regulations. Additional feedback provided by teaching staff during the visit confirmed to the assessment team that the Academy implements these rules effectively, and that an appropriate and consistent number of students progress across the Academy's Level 4, 5 and 6 courses.
137. Grade comparison charts and other quality assurance documents related to the student experience also confirmed to the assessment team that the Academy has arrangements in place to monitor award classifications over time, and that this data is used strategically.
138. The assessment team note that the final project modules on the Academy's undergraduate BA (Hons) Marketing and communication for fashion and BA (Hons) Fashion communication and styling qualifications had been reduced from 60 credits to 40 credits. During the visit, the Academy confirmed that this change was a result of a policy change on behalf of the Academy's validating partner to move away from traditional dissertation style projects and, instead, give students greater choice over what to produce for their final project. The assessment team examined samples of student work and accompanying project briefs and found that this change had not resulted in students achieving a higher classification than previous students without an increase in their level of achievement. Based on this evidence, the assessment team conclude that the Academy has credible plans that would enable it to ensure, if registered, that relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously.

## B4 conclusions

**Does the Academy have credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with condition B4 from the date of registration?**

139. The assessment team considered that, overall, the Academy has credible plans to ensure that, if registered, it would comply with the requirements of condition B4 with reference to assessment and awards.
140. The assessment team found that the Academy's academic regulations, assessment and marking procedures and monitoring processes ensure that it effectively assesses students, and that those assessments are valid and reliable. The assessment team also found that the Academy's admission procedures, assessment briefs, and academic regulations ensured the effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a manner which appropriately reflects the level and content of the courses. Finally, the assessment team found that the Academy's academic regulations, exam board processes and external examining procedures, and marking practices, ensured that relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously.
141. Considering the findings above, and the reasoning contained therein, the assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure it will effectively assess students.
142. The assessment team identified no broader concerns relevant to assessment and awards to report to the OfS.

## Part 2: Assessment of condition B8: Standards

### Requirement

**Does the Academy demonstrate in a credible manner that the standards set for the courses it intends to provide, if it is registered, appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards?**

### Advice to the OfS

143. The assessment team's view is that the Academy can demonstrate in a credible manner that the standards set for the courses it intends to provide, if it is registered, will appropriately reflect applicable sector-recognised standards.

### Reasoning

#### A.1: Qualifications at each level

144. The Academy currently offers the following six diploma courses: Digital marketing for fashion, Fashion retail, Fast track buying and merchandising, Fashion buying, Garment technology, and Visual merchandising for fashion. The programme aims and learning outcomes for all these courses accurately identify these qualifications as providing a foundation from which to move into the fashion industry or to advance onto degree level study.
145. The Academy has plans in place to offer eight undergraduate courses: BA (Hons) Fashion business, BA (Hons) Buying and merchandising, BA (Hons) Marketing and communication for fashion, BA (Hons) Sustainability in fashion, BA (Hons) Fashion communication and styling, BA (Hons) UXUI design for retail, BA (Hons) Art direction for fashion and BSc (Hons) Data analytics for retail. Awards for all these courses are provided by the same validating partner, and all courses are aligned to the Higher Education Credit Framework for England and to the credit volumes outlined in the sector-recognised standards. Though each focuses on a slightly different specialisation, the unifying feature of all these courses is their emphasis on ensuring that graduates develop the skills and knowledge required for a career in fashion retail. Based on the supplied programme specifications, the assessment team is of the view that the titles of each course adequately reflect the level of qualification, as well as the volume, nature and field of study undertaken.
146. The Academy intends to offer one postgraduate course: an MA in International fashion marketing and communications. At the time of the assessment, this programme is still going through validation; however, planning documents submitted to the assessment team indicate that the Academy pitches this new programme at the appropriate level and that the proposed title adequately reflects the level of qualification, as well as the volume, nature and field of study proposed.
147. The assessment team's advice, therefore, is that the various courses that the Academy intends to provide, if registered, appropriately reflect the sector-recognised standards set out in part A.1 of the sector-recognised standards.

148. Based on evidence provided, the assessment team conclude that the titles that the Academy has adopted for the qualifications to which its courses lead convey appropriate information about the level of the qualification, the volume, nature and field of study undertaken.

## **A.2: Typical volumes of credit for qualifications**

149. The Academy has adopted a credit system to define the volume of learning expected of students, and each of its courses is described in relation to the credit volumes set out in Table 2 of the sector-recognised standards. This can be seen in the programme specification for each course, and the module outline for each module. As outlined in the programme structure in the programme handbooks:
- a. The proposed new MA is designed to have a total of 180 credits, all at Level 7. This appropriately aligns with the typical credit values in Table 2 of the sector-recognised standards, which specifies a masters' degree typically has a total of 180 credits with a minimum of 150 credits at Level 7.
  - b. The BA (Hons) and BSc (Hons) undergraduate programmes each have a total credit value of 360 credits, with 120 credits at each of Levels 4, 5 and 6. This appropriately aligns with the typical credit values in Table 2 of the sector-recognised standards, which specifies a bachelors' degree typically has a total of 360 credits with a minimum of 90 credits at Level 6.
  - c. For the undergraduate programmes, the interim exit award Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) at Level 5 has a total credit value of 240 credits, with 120 credits at each of Levels 4 and 5. This appropriately aligns with the typical credit values in Table 2 of the sector-recognised standards, which specifies a DipHE typically has a total of 240 credits with a minimum of 90 credits at Level 5.
  - d. For the undergraduate programmes, the interim exit award Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) at Level 4 has a total credit value of 120 credits, all of which is at Level 4. This appropriately aligns with the typical credit values in Table 2 of the sector-recognised standards, which specifies a CertHE typically has a total of 120 credits with a minimum of 90 credits at Level 4.
  - e. The Level 4 diploma programmes each have a total credit value of 120 credits, all of which is at Level 4. Given that this qualification is equivalent to the first year of a bachelors' degree, or a Higher National Certificate (HNC), it can be seen to appropriately align with the typical credit values in Table 2 of the sector-recognised standards, which specifies a total of 120 credits with a minimum of 90 credits at Level 4.
150. Based on the above evidence, the assessment's team judgement is that the courses that the Academy intends to provide, if it is registered, do appropriately reflect sector-recognised standards and norms set out in part A.2 of the sector-recognised standards.

## **A.3: Qualification descriptors**

151. To review the standards of the Academy's qualification descriptors, the assessment team reviewed a sample of programme specifications and unit/module descriptors from across the Academy's Level 4, 5 and 6 provision. In addition, the assessment team also reviewed the

draft programme specification and module descriptors provided for the proposed new Level 7 MA programme.

152. The Academy's Level 4 diploma programmes accurately and clearly identify the required learning outcomes that students must demonstrate. Each unit descriptor also clearly details how these learning outcomes are embedded in the assessment practices for that unit. Finally, the Academy accurately and clearly maps individual units onto the wider curriculum map for each of the respective diploma programmes.
153. The assessment team found the titles of qualifications to which the Academy's courses lead are situated at the appropriate level of study. The diplomas are at Level 4, the undergraduate courses are at Level 6, and the proposed new MA course is at Level 7. This appropriately reflects the levels at which these qualifications would typically sit in Table 1 of the sector-recognised standards document.
154. The qualification descriptors, and accompanying programme learning outcomes, for the Academy's Level 4 diploma programmes effectively outline the aims and objectives of the programmes, as well as the skills and knowledge that students will develop while studying. In addition, they also provide clear breakdowns of the structure of each course, detailing learning hours, credits awarded, and assessment methods. In the view of the assessment team, the aims of this proposed new programme align with the descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 4 outlined in the sector-recognised standards. The aims test students' ability to evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems, communicate the results of their study/work accurately and reliably, and undertake further training and develop new skills within a structured and managed environment.
155. The module outlines for core and optional BA and BSc undergraduate modules accurately and clearly identify the required learning outcomes that students must demonstrate for each module. Each module descriptor also clearly details the required knowledge and understanding, and cognitive and practical skills required of students in a transparent and accurate fashion. The Academy accurately and clearly maps modules onto the curriculum map for each of the respective undergraduate programmes.
156. The qualification descriptors, and accompanying programme learning outcomes, for the Academy's undergraduate programmes do an adequate job of outlining the aims and objectives of the programmes, as well as the skills and knowledge that students will develop while studying. Though less polished than the descriptors provided for the Level 4 diploma qualifications, they nonetheless provide appropriate breakdowns of programme structures that illustrate how individual components fit together to contribute towards programme learning outcomes. In the view of the assessment team, the aims of this proposed new programme align with the descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 6 bachelors' degree with honours outlined in the sector-recognised standards. It requires students to demonstrate a systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline, and the ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources.
157. The detail contained in the draft programme outline for the proposed new Level 7 MA programme provides assurance that staff at the Academy have adequately considered the

structure and design of the proposed new course. Likewise, though the Academy has not yet produced individual module descriptors for this proposed new programme, the documentation shows that the Academy has taken steps to identify appropriate provisional titles and how each module will contribute to the learning outcomes of the new programme. In the view of the assessment team, the aims of this proposed new programme align with the descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 7 masters' degree outlined in the sector-recognised standards. It is designed to equip students with the skills to deal with complex issues, both systematically and creatively, demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and advance their knowledge and understanding to a high level.

158. The assessment team considered the Academy's alignment with qualification descriptors by mapping programme learning outcomes against them, as detailed in paragraphs 151 to 159. Programme learning outcomes are fulfilled through the learning outcomes of the modules, against which students are assessed. Learning outcomes are indicated in module outlines and address subject knowledge, subject skills and key skills. Learning outcomes for each module clearly connect appropriately with the qualification descriptors set out in sector-recognised standards.

159. The assessment team's advice, therefore, is that the courses that the Academy intends to provide, if registered, appropriately reflect the standards set out in part A.3 of the sector-recognised standards because the qualification descriptors appropriately detail the generic outcomes and attributes expected for the award of a particular type of qualification.

## **B: Classification descriptors for Level 6 bachelors' degrees**

160. Part B of the sector-recognised standards is relevant to the Academy's BA and BSc programmes, all which are validated by the same external validating partner.

161. In assessing the classification descriptors for these programmes, the assessment team noted that the Academy has adequately outlined the different learning outcomes expected across Levels 4, 5 and 6 of the students' learning journey, with far greater emphasis put on skills such as 'critical thinking' and 'problem solving' at Level 6. Subsequent discussions with teaching staff during the assessment visit also indicated that the Academy has made efforts to align teaching practices with these staged learning outcomes.

162. The assessment team also noted that the Academy uses a standardised mark categorisation table across all its undergraduate courses, which breaks down what students need to demonstrate to achieve different mark categorisation in relation to different learning outcomes. The Academy includes select rows from this table in individual assessment briefs, depending on the learning outcomes that are being assessed. The wording deployed in these classification descriptors is largely clear and consistent and describes the minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for a particular classification. The use of standardised marking criteria is also beneficial to students in that it describes the outcomes and attributes expected from any subject of study for that classification, rather than from any one particular subject, and so is applicable across subjects and modes of study.

163. Overall, therefore, the assessment team's advice is that the courses that the Academy intends to provide, if registered, do adequately reflect the sector-recognised standards set out in part B of the sector-recognised standards because they adequately detail the generic

outcomes and attributes expected for the award of a bachelors' degree with a particular classification.

## Requirement

**Does the Academy demonstrate in a credible manner that the achievement of students on the courses it intends to provide, if it is registered, appropriately reflects applicable sector-recognised standards?**

### Advice to the OfS

164. The assessment team advises that the achievement of students on the courses that the Academy intends to provide, if it is registered, does appropriately reflect applicable sector-recognised standards.

### Reasoning

#### A.1: Qualifications at each level

165. The assessment team's view is that the achievement of students at different levels is consistent with the title of the qualifications they are awarded, based on the criteria outlined in the sector-recognised standards for qualifications at each level. The assessment team also noted that the title of 'honours' is used appropriately as the Academy's BA undergraduate courses meet, in full, the expectations of the qualification descriptors at Level 6.
166. The assessment team noted that all the Academy's undergraduate exam boards are managed and overseen by its external validating partners. Prior to these boards, the Academy conducts its own internal pre-board meetings to assess students' marks and outcomes. The assessment team also noted that the Academy's head of higher education attends the exam boards and contributes to any decisions made in relation to referrals, retakes, or other exceptional circumstances.
167. For the Academy's Level 4 diploma programmes, progression boards and final grade entry boards to formally record student outcomes are held internally; however, ratification of grades is carried out by its external validating partner. The head of further education (or their nominee) chairs the internal boards, and membership includes the programme manager, quality assurance and enhancement representative. Group leaders are invited where there are particular areas that may require further detail or clarification.
168. Evidence collected during the visit showed that staff at the Academy took these responsibilities seriously and demonstrated appropriate consideration of student achievement before allowing progression or completion. External examiner reports also confirm that the content and assessment of the modules within these programmes do appropriately reflect the award titles, and that assessments were fair and appropriate for the awards provided.

#### A.2: Typical volumes of credit for qualifications

169. As detailed in paragraph 152, the Academy has demonstrated that the design of its courses ensures that students are required to obtain an appropriate volume of credit for each course. Its delivery of teaching and learning and exam board processes further demonstrate that

students studying on courses earn an appropriate volume of credit for the awards they receive.

170. In reviewing the volume of credits for qualifications, the assessment team noted that details relating to the proposed breakdown of learning hours are provided in module descriptors at undergraduate level and in programme documentation at diploma level. In line with sector norms, the Academy ensures that each credit equates to ten learning hours; meaning that a 40-credit module requires 400 hours of learning, and so forth. During the visit, students indicated that they are broadly aware of how much independent learning was expected of them. The assessment team noted, however, that students in the first study block of the undergraduate degree programme were seemingly less clear about how much independent learning was expected.
171. In reviewing the paperwork related to the Academy's own internal pre-board meetings, the assessment team also noted that evidence exists to confirm that students are amassing the appropriate volume of credits before being put forward for consideration for the award of relevant qualifications at assessment boards.

### **A.3: Qualification descriptors**

172. To consider whether student achievement appropriately reflects standards, the team considered a sample of module outlines and assignment briefs from a range of higher education courses that the Academy delivers at Levels 4, 5, 6 and 7. Assessment briefs are effectively connected to the learning outcomes for the modules, meaning that assessments are focused on examining whether students have demonstrated the required skills for the level of the course. The tasks set for assignments were appropriate for the level of each course. There is an appropriate increase in complexity and variety of assessments through the levels, with students at higher levels expected to demonstrate higher level skills through assessments.
173. The assessment team also considered a sampling of Level 4 student work to evaluate whether the achievement of students aligned with the outcomes specified in Section A.3.1 of the sector-recognised standards. In the view of the assessment team, the submitted samples provided evidence that, in accordance with the sector-recognised standards, students at Level 4 could demonstrate knowledge of the underlying concepts and principles associated with their area(s) of study, and an ability to evaluate and interpret these within the context of that area of study. The sampled work also showed that students demonstrated an ability to present, evaluate and interpret qualitative and quantitative data, in order to develop lines of argument and make sound judgements in accordance with basic theories and concepts of their subject(s) of study.
174. The assessment team considered a sampling of student work from Level 5 students to evaluate how far the achievement of students aligned with the outcomes specified in Section A.3.2 of the sector-recognised standards. In the view of the assessment team, the submitted samples provided evidence that, in accordance with the sector-recognised standards, students at Level 5 were able to demonstrate knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles of their area(s) of study, an ability to apply underlying concepts and principles outside the context in which they were first studied (including, where appropriate, the application of those principles in an employment context), and an

understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge.

175. Finally, the assessment team considered a sampling of student work from Level 6 students to evaluate whether the achievement of students aligned with the outcomes specified in Section A.3.3 of the sector-recognised standards. In the view of the assessment team, the submitted samples provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate that, in accordance with the sector-recognised standards, students at this level have developed an understanding of a complex body of knowledge and problem solving skills that can be applied in many types of employment. In addition, the samples also demonstrate that students at this level can evaluate evidence, arguments and assumptions, reach sound judgements and communicate them effectively. As discussed in paragraph 117, the assessment team did note the concerns raised by the Academy's external examiner around the need for more rigorous assessment of research skills, data analytics, and interpretation, as well as the need for more support to be provided to students in developing these skills. However, based on the samples of work provided, the assessment team is satisfied that Level 6 students at the Academy are currently producing work that demonstrates that they can apply the methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge. The students also critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data to a level that satisfies the threshold for the generic outcomes and attributes expected for the award of a qualification at this level, as outlined in the sector-recognised standards.

## **B: Classification descriptors for Level 6 bachelors' degrees**

176. The programme specifications for the Level 6 degrees each set out information on aims and learning outcomes, delivery of the programme, and structure of the programme. The learning outcomes – addressing subject knowledge, subject skills and key skills – are specified for each level of the programme. The progression is evident in the learning outcomes indicated in the module outlines for the different levels of study.
177. In considering whether student achievement appropriately aligns with the typical skills and attributes for each classification for Level 6 bachelors' honours as outlined in the sector-recognised standards, the assessment team did note that students on the Academy's undergraduate programmes generally scored highly. For example, the Academy reported the percentage of students achieving a first class or upper second class degree award in 2022-23 to be 72 per cent – a 10 per cent increase on 2021-22. Similarly, the assessment team noted that the external examiner had raised some concerns in their 2022-23 report about the number of marks in the 80s awarded to final year projects, and had questioned whether these submissions warranted such high marks.
178. To further investigate this matter, the assessment team reviewed a sample of student work, and requested additional samples of student work, specifically from Level 6 modules. Based on the samples provided, the assessment team concluded that student work is assessed appropriately because students receive marks aligned with classification descriptors outlined in Section B of the sector-recognised standards. For instance, a provided final year student project that received a first class classification demonstrated, in the view of the assessment team, the required levels of knowledge and understanding, cognitive skills, practical skills, and transferable skills needed for a first class piece of work, as specified in Section B of the sector-recognised standards.

179. Additional evidence collected during the assessment visit also showed that, on occasion, the Academy had used third markers to review certain project scripts where double marking had varied significantly. The assessment team reviewed a breakdown of grades across undergraduate modules which provided further confirmation that the Academy distributed marks in an appropriate way and that its marking standards were in accordance with the expectations outlined in Section B of the sector-recognised standards.
180. Based on this evidence, the assessment team's concluding advice is that the achievement of students on the courses that the Academy intends to provide, if it is registered, appropriately reflects the standards set out in part B of the sector-recognised standards.

## Annex A: Approach to sampling of evidence

1. The assessment team chose the following sample of course documentation to give the assessment team the opportunity to consider a proportionate and representative sample of the higher education programmes offered by the Academy. The assessment team requested a greater number of module outlines/handbooks for courses with a greater number of students enrolled. The assessment team deemed the sample appropriate to assess whether the standards set for the courses the Academy intends to provide, if it is registered, appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards.
  - a. For the BA (Hons) Marketing and communications for fashion, the assessment team requested the programme specification and module outlines/handbooks for three modules on the course.
  - b. For the BA (Hons) Fashion business, BA (Hons) Buying and merchandising, and BA (Hons) Fashion communication and styling, the assessment team requested the programme specifications and module outlines/handbooks for two modules on each course.
  - c. For the Level 6 Assistant buyer and merchandiser apprenticeship and Level 5 Operations or departmental manager apprenticeship, the assessment team requested the programme specification and module outlines/handbooks for one module on each course.
  - d. For the Level 4 Buying and merchandising assistant apprenticeship, the assessment team requested the programme specification and module outlines/handbooks for one module.
  - e. For the Level 4 Retail manager and Level 4 Data analyst apprenticeships, the assessment team requested the programme specifications and module outlines/handbooks for one module on each course.
  - f. For the Level 4 diplomas in Fashion retail, Buying and range planning for fashion retail, Garment technology, and Visual merchandising and branding for fashion retail, the assessment team requested the programme specifications and module outlines/handbooks for one module on each course.
  - g. For the Level 4 online courses in Buying and merchandising, and Fashion business and retail, the assessment team examined programme specifications for each course.
  - h. For the proposed MA International fashion marketing and communications and BA (Hons) Art direction for fashion, the assessment team sampled the relevant course approval and development documentation, which included module outlines, learning outcomes and assessment strategy.
2. The assessment team chose the following sample of student work, exam board paperwork and external examiner reports to provide a proportionate and representative reflection of the different programme types and levels offered by the Academy. The assessment team used the sample to assess whether the achievement of students on the courses the provider intends to provide, if it is registered, appropriately reflects applicable sector-recognised

standards. For each piece of student work sampled, the assessment team examined the relevant assessment brief, awarded grade and feedback given.

- a. For the BA (Hons) Marketing and communications for fashion, exam board paperwork and external examiner reports were requested for the last two academic years. In addition, the assessment team sampled five pieces of student work, including a range of awarded marks.
- b. For the BA (Hons) Fashion business and BA (Hons) Buying and merchandising, exam board paperwork and external examiner reports were requested for the last academic year for each course. In addition, the assessment team sampled three pieces of student work for each course, including a range of awarded marks.
- c. For the Level 6 Assistant buyer and merchandiser apprenticeship and Level 5 Operations or departmental manager apprenticeship, exam board paperwork and external examiner reports were requested for the last two academic years, for each course. In addition, the assessment team sampled three pieces of student work for each course, including a range of awarded marks.
- d. For the Level 4 Buying and merchandising assistant apprenticeship, the Level 4 diploma in Fashion retail and Level 4 diploma in Buying and range planning for fashion retail, exam board paperwork and external examiner reports were requested for the last two academic years for each course. In addition, the assessment team sampled three pieces of student work from each course, including a range of awarded marks.
- e. For the Level 4 online courses in Buying and merchandising, and Fashion business and retail, the assessment team examined three pieces of students work from each course, including a range of awarded marks.

## Annex B: Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
CertHE	Certificate of Higher Education
CMI	Chartered Institute of Marketing
CPD	continuing professional development
DipHE	Diploma of Higher Education
HNC	Higher National Certificate
OCN	Open College Network
OfS	Office for Students
PGCE	postgraduate certificate in education
PGCHE	postgraduate certificate in higher education
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
UAL	University of the Arts London
VLE	virtual learning environment



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