



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of The Royal School of Needlework, June 2016

1 Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that The Royal School of Needlework (the School) has made commendable progress with implementing the action plan from the [June 2014 Higher Education Review \(Plus\)](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 During 2015-16 there were 30 full-time students enrolled on the BA in Hand Embroidery for Fashion, Interiors, Textile Art. Since the review visit in 2014, the number of students has increased by five. The degree programme was validated by the University for the Creative Arts (the University) in April 2014. The degree programme is now fully operational and has replaced the foundation degree and top-up programme. As the awarding body, the University maintains effective academic oversight of the School through the University's School of Craft and Design. There are two full-time and two part-time permanent members of academic staff (3.2 FTE), one full-time personal assistant to the Chief Executive (1.0 FTE) and two part-time administrators (1.1 FTE). There are seven permanent part-time academic tutors (0.4 FTE) plus contributions from two visiting lecturers (six days) and visiting specialist tutors (16-20 days) on professional development. Since the review in 2014 the number of academic staff has increased by 0.8 FTE whereas the level of administrative support remains the same.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The School has continued to review, embed and enhance the good practice identified in the 2014 review. The School has been diligent in managing, developing and embedding procedures for the University's processes for annual programme monitoring and admission of students. Through effective action planning, implementation and review the School has continued to enhance employer engagement in programme development and students' professional development. The School recruits students with integrity, effectively distributes bursaries to support student attendance and engagement and listens and responds to the student voice. There were no recommendations at the review in 2014; the School is developing its practice in line with its internal action plan.

4 The School uses meetings of the Course Board to manage the programme in consultation with students. The School's Course Board comprises all academic tutors and student representatives from all three levels of study. The University's Students' Union trains student representatives for their role. The Course Board considers annual monitoring arrangements as described in paragraph 9. This includes reviewing the external examiner's report, which is made available for all students and staff through the virtual learning environment. The course leader generates an annual live action plan to manage completion of action by designated staff in a timely and evidence-based manner. This is considered at the termly meetings of the Course Board and at the University's Annual Collaborative Executive Partner Meeting. Course Board minutes are available to all students through the virtual learning environment. The course leader provides a report on the management and

delivery of the programme to the School's Council every other month. The report highlights progress made in meeting targets set in the School's internal action plan.

5 The School continues to enhance the student learning experience through engagement with leading-edge practitioners, who provide opportunities for students to work on live projects to industry schedules. Employers, including fashion houses and film companies, have made repeated approaches to the School to secure students for specific projects. The School uses flexible learning approaches that encompass academic, self-reflection, practical and live projects to enable students to develop skills relevant to employment. Teaching staff are actively engaged in scholarly activity, which includes delivering papers at national and international conferences, and publishing papers and books. The School makes timely and effective use of external speakers to bring important specialist knowledge and skills that are greatly valued by students. Students value highly the opportunities to participate in a range of work-based and work-related projects, which typically lead to employment opportunities. Students use social media very effectively to promote their work and secure internship opportunities, commissions and employment.

6 The School's arrangements for admission of students are outlined in paragraph 8 and it continues to support students through the distribution of bursaries. Bursary funds are acquired by the School from a range of external organisations and individuals and are distributed through effective formal arrangements. In 2015-16 the School awarded 19 bursaries totalling £27,000. Bursaries can be used for subsistence or projects; recipients must report on the impact on their academic progress and skill development.

7 The School engages its students in a very close and effective communication about all aspects of their programme of study and experience. The School ensures that students are able to provide programme-related feedback to enhance their learning experience. The arrangements for student representation, including regular meetings with the programme leader, provide an open platform of discussion that supports the students' experience. Students participate in formal surveys that include an internal University-led survey at Levels 4 and 5 and the National Student Survey of finalists. While students are aware that participation in University committees is open to student representatives from the School, none have yet volunteered for this role. Students receive timely responses to their feedback and are very satisfied by the School's responsiveness. The School's programme leader and new University link tutor foster close collaborative working arrangements between staff and students of the School and University.

8 There are highly effective arrangements in place for admission of students to the programme, which are managed jointly by the University and the School. The University receives applications through its secure portal and its admissions staff check the formal qualifications of UK, EU and international applicants. The University sends the applications of suitable candidates, plus e-portfolios of their work, from the secure portal to the programme leader. The School has effective arrangements in place for mandatory face-to-face interviews, or telephone interviews with candidates who are based overseas. This includes evaluation of the portfolio of work, knowledge and skills, intention to study, and proficiency in English language that must meet sector norms (International English Language Testing System - IELTS - 6.0). Applications for recognition of prior experiential learning are considered formally by the University following an evaluation by the School's programme leader.

9 The School has thorough and systematic procedures in place for the annual monitoring of the programme. The University convenes an annual review of the management of the partnership that considers marketing, recruitment, delivery, quality assurance and resources. The School conducts annual monitoring of the programme in accordance with the University's process for Annual Academic Monitoring. The School

produces a comprehensive report that incorporates comments from the external examiner and findings from student surveys, with analyses of programme data. Such analyses of data include retention and progression of students and their attainment at module and programme levels. The University reviews the annual academic monitoring report against its benchmark performance indicators. To date, the School has met the required performance indicators of the University. An integral part of the University's annual academic monitoring process is the preparation of an action plan. The University is introducing a new style of action plan to be known as the course live action plan. This new initiative generates a programme holistic action plan that is continually monitored and updated during the academic year. The course leader's live action plan has been a forerunner for the course live action plan, which will be introduced fully by 2016-17.

10 The School attracts relatively small numbers of committed and able students. There are currently 15 students at Level 4, 12 students at Level 5 and three at Level 6. Only one current student is an international student. During the past two years three students failed to complete the Level 6 top-up programme of study, two in 2014-15 and one in 2015-16. One student has withdrawn from the programme in 2015-16, for financial reasons. All remaining students completed their programme of study and gained an award (100 per cent).

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

11 The School and University work in tandem to implement an effective and robust cycle of quality assurance activities to support the management and delivery of the programme. The high level of integration between the School and the University's School of Craft and Design enables effective academic oversight. The School follows the direction of the University on policies, procedures and administrative arrangements, and in this way meets the Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

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

13 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mrs Marian Stewart, Reviewer, and Dr Anne M Miller, Coordinator, on 7 June 2016.

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