



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Istituto Marangoni, April 2017

Section 1: Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that the Istituto Marangoni (the Institute) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the April 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review

2 The Institute continues to offer undergraduate and postgraduate programmes validated by Manchester Metropolitan University. The Institute currently has 651 full-time students studying on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. This represents a nine per cent increase from the previous year when 595 students were enrolled on its higher education courses. Following the introduction of online admissions across the Marangoni group, there has been a shift away from recruitment via agents (from around 55 per cent to 35 per cent).

Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The Institute has made progress against all areas in the action plan related to the 2016 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers). The good practice identified in supporting student employability continues to be consolidated. The review team found progress has been made in respect to recommendations and affirmations. The team met staff and students during the visit and reviewed a wide range of documentary evidence.

4 Good practice in employer engagement, employer talks and the use of 'live briefs' set by employers continues to be embedded in programmes. The Institute has improved support available to students in finding placements through a new online system, and updated placement handbooks set out the support students receive on placement. Pre-course information, to include additional costs associated with individual programmes, has been drafted and will be made available for the next academic year. The Admissions Processes have been revised to include online application forms, entry tests and regular admissions decision meetings to agree offers to applicants. Explanations of the Complaints and Appeals procedures are provided to students as part of induction and referenced in the student handbooks. Consideration of issues raised is included as part of Programme Committee meetings, and clear timelines are adhered to in following up on student concerns. The schedule of improvements to the learning environment is being implemented in response to student feedback.

5 The use of 'live briefs', in which students work alongside a tutor on a real industry project, continues to be a feature of good practice in undergraduate and postgraduate provision. Students on postgraduate programmes undertake internships, as do students on undergraduate sandwich courses, and a placement handbook makes clear the procedures and support available to students. Undergraduate students are encouraged to take part in a range of alumni and industry projects. Active engagement with sector employers continues and is further supported through an events programme, including alumni and industry

representative talks, project opportunities, London Fashion Week activities and sector recruitment events.

6 Clear action has been taken to address recommendations to improve support available to students to find suitable work placements, and to ensure all students are supported in accordance with requirements set out in handbooks. Student engagement with the career network platform is being monitored by the Careers Service and Group Market Director. Information and guidance on finding placements has been updated and the new online system 'Symplicity' provides students with resources on how best to approach employers for placements, how to write CVs and improve interview techniques. Around 50 ongoing opportunities for placements are available on Symplicity. The system also provides information on advice available through the Careers Service, and allows students to book individual appointments with advisers. Advice and support is also offered by tutors. A placement handbook is available to students who undertake internships and sandwich courses, and tutor visits take place as described. Students confirmed that they receive clear guidance on finding placements and that these are approved by staff after completion of checks and liaison with the employer.

7 Clear action has been taken on improving information for students on complaints and appeals. New appeals procedures have been introduced in line with those of Manchester Metropolitan University in 2016-17, by which the University is involved at stage two as shown in the student handbook. Information on the complaints and appeals procedures has been improved and now forms part of the induction process. Students are given a PowerPoint presentation, and the complaints and appeals procedures are included in the student handbooks. From January 2017, student representatives receive more training in this area, although this is not yet reflected in the student representative handbook. The transparency of the assessment and appeals processes has been greatly increased, and students confirm it is now clear. As part of the Continuous Improvement Plan a register of complaints and appeals, along with resulting actions, is now kept under review by the Programme Committee and the London Quality Enhancement and Academic Development Committee. The appeals process has been revised and its effectiveness will be monitored by Programme Committees and the Student Forum.

8 The Institute continues to use open days and orientation meetings to support the pre-course information available online. Orientation or pre-admissions discussions and information is available face to face or online. Currently, only around 60 per cent of those admitted attend an open day or orientation, which means that some applicants arrive without being clear as to the nature of their programme and the range of topics it covers. To respond to this concern, short videos in which staff and students discuss the different programmes have been prepared and will be available on the website. The induction process has been enhanced; in 2017-18, this includes a week of meetings, more use of social media, and course-specific summer projects intended to support student integration.

9 Although mentioned in the terms and conditions, neither the likely amount of extra materials costs, the annual enrolment fees, fees for the sandwich year, nor the number of hours of teaching per week, are always clear to current students before they arrive. Documents detailing these costs are being finalised and will be available online, as well as to be sent out to students at the start of the next academic year.

10 In response to student feedback, the learning environment is being improved to provide more social and learning spaces. This work continues in 2017 and the impact will be monitored and evaluated by data on student use, as well as feedback through surveys and Student Forum meetings.

11 The London School Board and the London Quality and Enhancement Committee review Continuous Improvement Plans produced for undergraduate and postgraduate provision. These inform priorities for school improvements and are reviewed by Manchester Metropolitan University as part of its programme review and annual reporting requirements.

12 Further enhancement of admissions processes is taking place to ensure the effective management of applications. An online application form has been introduced across the Institute Group and around 50 per cent of applicants now take this route. New undergraduate entry tests have been designed and are being evaluated, based on skills relevant to specific programmes. These tests are being used for selection and to ensure students better understand what is involved in the course before enrolment, thus improving student retention. Prospective undergraduate students are invited to an orientation meeting run by the Admissions Team, either in person or online, before they submit an application. Discussions allow the Admissions Team to assess the applicants' commitment to study, as well as their potential suitability for their chosen programme. Applications are reviewed by the Admissions Team using a checklist before taking the applications to a School Admissions Meeting. This includes checking of English Language proficiency as evidenced through IELTS scores. Admissions meetings are held at least twice a month and those academic staff present formalise decisions made by the Admissions Team, taking into account evidence of previous qualifications and language skills.

13 Where a student application at undergraduate level does not fully meet the admission requirements through specified previous study and qualifications, the Director of Education may approve an exceptional admission based upon further evidence, or may recommend an interview by the Programme Leader, as Admissions Tutor. Master's programme candidates may be interviewed to ensure that the candidate's first degree provides an adequate preparation for the course. A record of interviews is kept, though there is no fixed list of questions, only a box for free-text minutes of the interview. It is therefore unclear whether the Supporting Professional Admissions guidelines on appropriate recording of information and rationale for decision making are being fully met at interview stage.

14 Annual monitoring is undertaken for all programmes validated by Manchester Metropolitan University. The Institute effectively uses qualitative and quantitative information from results, student evaluation and external feedback to complete the University's Continuous Monitoring and Improvement process on an annual cycle. Continuous Improvement Plans are produced by academic teams for undergraduate and postgraduate provision. These include actions linked to feedback from external examiners and students, and consideration of points identified in programme monitoring reports. Continuous Improvement Plans are discussed and updated at Programme Committees and overall evaluations reported to the London Quality Enhancement and Academic Development Committee, as well as the London School Board. These Plans form the basis for the Institution's annual monitoring process and the ongoing enhancement of the student learning experience. The University has recently undertaken a review of the Institute procedures, including internal verification and quality assurance, and identified that action plans clearly articulate and support the effective management and ongoing improvements to programme delivery.

15 The Institute currently offers three undergraduate degrees and four postgraduate degrees, and cohort sizes vary between small intakes, for example on the MA Womenswear, where seven students were recruited in September 2016 and a further three in February 2017, to 73 on the BA (Hons) Fashion Design 2016-17. Retention rates over the last three years have been improving year on year, growing from 78.8 per cent in 2013-14 to 86.8 per cent in 2014-15, and 92.2 per cent in 2015-16. Pass rates range from 75 per cent on the BA (Hons) Fashion Design (APEL Year 2) - where of the six students who joined the course with

advanced standing, four successfully completed in 2014 -15 - to 100 per cent on three master's programmes in 2014-15. In the latest cohorts to complete their studies in 2015-16, 32 of the 34 students (94 per cent) on MA Fashion and Luxury Brand Management successfully completed, and 16 of the 17 students (94 per cent) on MS Fashion Promotion, Communications and Media also achieved their qualification. Data on student retention and achievement is included at Programme Committees and evaluation of achievement rates forms part of the annual monitoring returns to Manchester Metropolitan University.

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

16 There is evidence of detailed engagement with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), and with subject benchmarking in Art and Design, and Business and Management, as part of the programme development and validation process and assessment strategies. Key policies are aligned with the Quality Code, for example the revised Recruitment and Admissions Policy, which is aligned with *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admissions to Higher Education*. Members of staff have attended training events organised by QAA and by Manchester Metropolitan University, including events with other University partners; and have bi-monthly meetings with the University. Connections exist beyond the link tutors, to include links at programme level and through an exchange of information and meetings with the University's quality assurance team. The other Schools of the Institute Group are also a source of support in identifying and disseminating good practice in the management and delivery of teaching, learning and resources.

Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit

17 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.

18 The monitoring visit was carried out by Professor Helen King, Reviewer, and Mrs Mandy Hobart, Coordinator, on 26 April 2017.

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