



National College of Art & Design

**Coláiste Náisiúnta Ealaíne is Deartha
A Recognised College of the National University of Ireland
Coláiste Aitheanta D'Ollscoil na hÉireann**

**Quality Assurance Review in the Department of
Fashion & Textiles
2009**

Peer Review Report

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Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance
Peer Review Group Report
Department of Fashion & Textiles
Academic Year 2008/09

A Self-assessment Report was undertaken by Fashion & Textiles in the academic year 2007/2008. The Peer Review site visit took place on 29th and 30th January.

Dates: 28th, 29th & 30th January 2009

Location: Conference Room 1 and Small Meeting Room, Clock Building

Peer Review Group: Cynthia Deane, Options Consulting - Independent Chair

Amanda Pratt, Creative Director, Avoca

Stephen King, Lecturer in Fashion, University of Ulster

Philip Napier, Internal Advisor, NCAD

<u>Day</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Action</u>
<i>Day 1</i>			
Wednesday 28 th January	NCAD Staff Room	5.00 p.m.	PRG meet with Nicky Saunders, QA/QI Officer to confirm schedule and roles of each member of PRG and agree format of review for next two days
Wednesday 28 th January	Eden Restaurant	6.30 p.m.	PRG & QA/QI Officer - Informal dinner

<u>Day</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Action</u>
Day 2			
Thursday 29 th January	Conference Room 1	9.15 – 9.30 a.m.	PRG meet with Nicky Saunders, QA/QI Officer and prepare for day
Thursday 29 th January	Conference Room 1	9.30 – 10.15 a.m.	PRG meet Director, Professor Declan McGonagle and Registrar, Ken Langan
Thursday 29 th January	Conference Room 1	10.15 – 11.00 a.m.	PRG meet Head of Faculty of Design and Acting Head of F&T, Professor Angela Woods and Dr. Helen McAllister, designate Head of F&T
Thursday 29 th January	Conference Room 1	11.00 – 11.15 a.m.	Tea/Coffee & review of early sessions
Thursday 29 th January	NCAD	11.15 – 12.00 noon	PRG & Head of Faculty tour Department and related College facilities – Core, Library
Thursday 29 th January	Conference Room 1	12.00 – 1.00 p.m.	PRG meet Department Staff: Oonagh Benner, Linda Byrne, Andrew Campbell, Nigel Cheney, Rachel O'Connell, Samantha Corcoran, Sandra Cotter, Clare Daly, Ann Cullen, Bob Sower, Adeline Dolan, Mairead McDermott
Thursday 29 th January	Oak Room	1.00 – 1.45 p.m.	Light lunch with Staff of Department
Thursday 29 th January	Conference Room 1	1.45 – 2.00 p.m.	PRG – private review of morning sessions with QA Officer
Thursday 29 th January	Conference Room 1	2.00 – 2.45 p.m.	PRG meet with undergraduate Student Representatives: Fashion 2 nd Year – Anne Carey Textiles 2 nd Year - Triona O'Neill Fashion 3 rd Year – Alan Taylor Textiles 3 rd Year – Jennifer Ryall Fashion 4 th Year – Claire Geraghty Textiles 4 th Year – Aoife Twomey
Thursday 29 th January	Conference Room 1	2.45 – 3.15 p.m.	PRG meet with postgraduate Student Representatives: MA Fashion – Inez Nordell MA Textiles – Kathy Mooney MA graduate – Logan McLain
Thursday 29 th January	Conference Room 1	3.15 – 3.30 p.m.	Tea/Coffee & review of afternoon sessions
Thursday 29 th January	Conference Room 1	3.30 – 4.15 p.m.	PRG meet with Dr. Siun Hanrahan, Head of Research & P/G Studies & Kevin Atherton, GradCAM Fellow
Thursday 29 th January	Conference Room 1	4.15 – 5.00 p.m.	PRG meet with industrial collaborators and graduates of Department in industry: Philippa Harvey, Mairead Mclean, Pamela Quinn, Caroline Moran - Textiles Grace Mangan, Amy Hamilton & Jilly Hamilton - Fashion Gareth Maloney - John Rocha Jenny McDermot – Peter Mark
Thursday 29 th January	Conference Room 1	5.00 – 5.30 p.m.	PRG and QA/QI Officer review sessions and note main issues and commendations for inclusion into report
Thursday 29 th January	The Winding Stairs Restaurant	7.00 p.m.	Dinner with PRG, Head of Faculty/Department, QA Officer

<u>Day</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Action</u>
Day 3			
Friday 30 th January	Clock Building Meeting Room	9.15 - 9.30 a.m.	PRG & QA/QI Officer meet to prepare for day
Friday 30 th January	Clock Building Meeting Room	9.30 – 10.00 a.m.	PRG meet Hilary O’Kelly, representative from Visual Culture and Joe Wilson, Head of Core Studies
Friday 30 th January	Clock Building Meeting Room	10.00 – 12.30 p.m.	PRG draw up draft report with QA/QI Officer
Friday 30 th January	Clock Building Meeting Room	12.30 – 1.30 p.m.	PRG meet with Director & Registrar to present and discuss draft recommendations of draft report. (Director and Registrar are unavailable for final presentation due to a change in date for a Board Meeting).
Friday 30 th January	Oak Room	1.30 – 2.30 p.m.	Working Lunch with QA/QI Officer
Friday 30 th January	Clock Building Meeting Room	2.30 – 4.30 p.m.	PRG complete draft report
Friday 30 th January	Clock Building Meeting Room	4.30 – 5.00 p.m.	PRG present recommendations of draft report to Professor Angela Woods, Head of Faculty, Dr. Helen McAllister Designate Head of Department and available staff of Fashion & Textiles

While the schedule was very full, the meetings were well organised and the peer review group was able to follow the allocated timetable.

Following the recommendations of an earlier NCAD peer review group report, the schedule for the Fashion and Textiles review included a short preparatory working session on the first day, which gave an opportunity for group members to discuss the specific areas that they wanted to explore during the meetings on the following days, and to formulate relevant questions. The group members regarded this as a very helpful session, which enabled them to begin working as a team immediately.

2. Peer Review Methodology

The Peer Review Group (PRG) had an independent Chair, Cynthia Deane, who was appointed by the College. At the informal meeting on the evening before the review visit, the group members discussed the self-assessment report and formulated some of the main questions they wished to raise in the meetings with staff and students.

During the meetings on the two following days, all group members had an opportunity to ask questions so that all areas were adequately addressed. Staff and students were also invited to make additional comments or observations at the end of the meeting, if they felt there was something important that the Peer Review Group should know and that they had not had an opportunity to say. All members of the group took notes during meetings.

All members of the PRG contributed to the writing of the report. The group worked together on the second day of the review to note commendations and recommendations, which were recorded by the QA/QI officer in draft form. Based on this draft report, the Chair of the PRG made an exit presentation to the Director and Registrar, and later to the Head of Faculty, designate Head of Department and staff at the end of the second day. The QA/QI officer circulated the draft report to all members of the Group in the following days. Group members amended the draft and the agreed report was then sent to the QA/QI officer who forwarded it to the Acting Head of Department on 2nd March 2009. The Department had an opportunity to check the report for any factual errors before submitting it to the QA/QI Steering Group for publication on the NCAD website.

3. Fashion & Textiles Overview

3.1 Mission Statement

“To educate students to realise their full potential as designers and practitioners within the creative industries in an evolving world.”

The ethos of the Department is to educate students, through a comprehensive programme of learning and teaching strategies, to become professional practitioners in the field of fashion and textiles and/or to progress to postgraduate study and research.

The Department encompasses a broad creative perspective and approach, together with a high level of performance. Students are enabled to develop an awareness of design in its social, economic and historical context, and to take an intellectual, conceptual and practical approach to the solving of design problems.

The Department encourages students to become creative, independent and reflective design practitioners. It fosters versatility in order to enable a diversity of career possibilities both in Ireland and internationally.

3.2 Aims and Objectives

The overall aims of the Fashion & Textiles Department are:

- To enable graduates to be able to work within Fashion/Textiles and related industries.
- To foster a complementary balance between education/research and vocational needs.
- To engender an awareness of the developing trends and design needs within an ever-changing society.
- To be recognised nationally and internationally for our high standards of design education.
- To provide students with the necessary understanding of creative practice and design process.
- To provide a stimulating environment for the development of creative ability and aesthetic awareness.

The objectives of the Department are to enable students:

- To develop a high degree of skill as a designer/maker in their chosen discipline.
- To develop an understanding of the balance between expressive originality and fulfilling specified design criteria.
- To utilise appropriate work practices and methodologies.
- To obtain an awareness of craftsmanship in the realisation of ideas and concepts.
- To extend their analytical skills and the ability to be critically objective.
- To develop a professional outlook.
- To acquire a personal visual language.
- To develop qualities of initiative and resourcefulness.
- To develop abilities and fluency in visual and oral communications.
- To gain an understanding of technical requirements within industry.

3.3. Background

The Department of Fashion & Textiles offers two separate undergraduate courses leading to a Bachelor of Design Honours Degree in either Fashion Design or Textile Design with three elective pathways in Textiles – weave, embroidery and print. It is the largest of the

departments within NCAD (with the exception of Core Studies) both in terms of undergraduate courses offered, elective strands within each course and the number of undergraduate students in the Department.

The programme for the course in Fashion Design, which includes knitwear design, enables students to develop technical and design skills and to develop design briefs from conception to conclusion. Emphasis is placed on professional practice, marketing skills and on preparation for the needs of industry.

The course in Textile Design enables students to specialise in Embroidered, Printed or Woven Textiles and provides a broad textile educational base leading to career possibilities such as practising in-house designers, consultant designers or designer crafts persons. Emphasis is placed throughout the course on all design and production processes including in-depth computer-aided design development.

4. Preliminary Comments of the Peer Review Group

The Peer Review Group considers Fashion and Textiles to be a talented, energetic and enthusiastic department that is committed to achieving high standards in design education. The group found a great deal to commend in the work of the department: creativity and technical excellence are significant strengths, and there is also clear potential for further development as well as a demonstrated willingness to change. The need for change is evident, as the fashion and textiles industry in Ireland and throughout Europe has altered dramatically in recent years, with a sharp decline in production and a consequent shift in the kinds of skills that are relevant to the workplace.

It is evident that the Fashion and Textiles Department is regarded as a flagship for NCAD, gaining publicity and creating a positive public image for the college. There is a high level of demand for the courses from prospective students; the atmosphere of learning and development is very good, and the department has created a supportive environment within which students thrive and can achieve their full potential. Students and graduates speak highly of the quality of their learning experiences, and they are very loyal to the department. Good links have been made with the fashion and textile design community, which allow the department to open constructive dialogue about the role of design education in shaping future directions for the industry.

The quality assurance process can help a department to reflect on the educational processes they are engaged in and how well the curriculum meets the needs of learners, society and the economy. While it was clear that the quality assurance process engaged everyone in the Fashion and Textiles Department, the Peer Review Group noted that the self-assessment report was largely narrative and descriptive, with little real critical analysis or reflection. It was also somewhat inward-looking, and there is a need for the department to look outwards at the global fashion and textile industry and to analyse the changing environment where their graduates will find a livelihood. To complement the outward-looking perspective, it would be useful for the department to undertake systematic follow-up on the destination of graduates after a number of years. This will help to identify ways in which the curriculum might need to adapt to prepare students for a range of future careers as “creative, independent and reflective design practitioners”.

In spite of the above shortcomings, the Peer Review Group felt that the self-assessment report was informative and clearly written; however in some respects it may have underplayed the strengths of the department. For example it did not seem to do total justice to the passion, energy and creativity that the group found during the visit and the meetings with students, graduates and staff. In addition, while some aspects of the report were already out of date by the time of the visit, the group was able to get up-to-date information during the meetings.

It was clear from the review visit that there is a genuine commitment among staff to follow through to the quality improvement phase and the Peer Review Group hopes that this report will help the Department formulate its quality improvement plan. Everything that is included in this report is intended to support the department in making its plans for the future: the group is convinced that the report is timely for the department as it faces into an exciting period of change and innovation.

5. Report of the Peer Review Group

5.1.	Academic Matters
	Commendations
a)	The Department philosophy and its aims and objectives are well-stated and by and large they are achieved.
b)	The PRG commends the high level of technical skills that is evident in the courses; however it was difficult for the group to get a clear sense of the course content because of the “coded” nature of the module documents, which used a lot of jargon.
c)	The group commends the high levels of expertise among the staff and their dedicated support of the students. The staff set high standards and ensure that the students achieve those standards. All staff members demonstrate great pride in the courses and in the achievements of their students.
d)	The staff members also demonstrate a great sense of ownership of their own specialist area within the courses.
	Recommendations
e)	<p>The department’s mission statement acknowledges that graduates may not work in fashion and textiles but in the broader creative industries, however there appears to be a mis-match between the mission and the curriculum, which is very specific to the “traditional model” fashion and textiles industries.</p> <p>The fundamental assumption of the courses seems to be that they are preparing people for work in the fashion and textiles industries. This means that the modules are heavily vocationally focussed with a lot of skills development. Much of the staff time and energy is taken in building a high level of skills in their undergraduate students, to some extent overlooking broader knowledge/competences and postgraduate development.</p> <p>The PRG recommends that the department consider how different pathways could be offered to broaden the courses in keeping with their mission statement.</p>
f)	The PRG strongly recommends that the textile specialisms should be more integrated across all three years of the degree programme (for example as elective modules) to develop a more holistic approach to textiles and to help free up resources.
g)	The department should explore opportunities for more integration across other disciplines: within the department, faculty and college.
h)	The written descriptions of the modules need to be more consistent and transparent throughout the courses.
i)	Some curriculum areas could be developed and strengthened: to include for example the <i>business of fashion</i> , which could be addressed through a module or a project in the later years of the course.
j)	Another area for development is Computer skills: the Department should work towards giving students a reasonable competency in Illustrator and Photoshop. A possible approach would be to start this in Core and further develop it as required in later years
k)	The PRG supports the recommendation from some staff and students to consider global awareness and social responsibility within the curriculum along with issues such as the environment, ecology and sustainable, ethical production.
l)	The PRG noted that the learning outcomes of the degree courses are strongly skills-based, and recommends that the department look also at developing the <i>knowledge</i> and <i>competences</i> aspects to achieve consistency of standard in accordance with the guidelines given in the NFQ.
m)	The PRG recommends that a structured period of work placement should be an essential part of the degree courses, with clear learning outcomes and appropriate monitoring procedures.

n)	The teaching methodologies employed by the department in its courses appear to include a high proportion of one-to-one interaction with students. The PRG recommends that seminars and group tutorials should be systematically structured into the timetable to promote peer learning and communication skills. Students need more opportunities to make decisions and solve problems for themselves, with less “hand holding” by staff.
o)	The value and the benefits of group work should be examined. It appears that the same skills are reiterated through different projects, and more creativity and diversity is needed in looking at the full range of knowledge, skills and competences that can potentially be developed in an integrated way within the projects and modules.
p)	The PRG strongly encourages the Department to explore all possible areas of postgraduate development for a variety of reasons – financial, status, industry requirements, growing skill levels and specialisations. Staff must take a creative approach in their considerations of MAs, possibly in collaboration with overseas Colleges. The development of postgraduate provision could include aspects of industrial placement, discursive forums, incubator support and partnership as set out in other sections of this report.
5.2.	Industry Links
	Commendations
a)	The PRG commends the department for the initiative it has shown in developing links with the fashion and textile industry, mostly in the form of sponsorship for awards and shows.
	Recommendations
b)	<p>The PRG strongly recommends that the current links with industry be extended and strengthened, which would produce mutual benefit for both sides (“win-win”). However, the department needs to be discriminating & selective in choosing partners, to ensure that the values of the companies they link with are consistent with the values of the college and the department, especially with regard to design and production ethics. The department might also explore forming links with other types of creative industries, while ensuring the relevance of all partnerships to the learning experiences and career prospects of students.</p> <p>Some new forms of co-operation might be considered in future, for example:</p> <p>Industry advisory group or consultative group to discuss curriculum, changes in industry, standards of skill required and provide commissions for research to be carried out by the department.</p> <p>Industry Forum Set up an industry discussion forum (led and organised by staff with collaboration of industry representatives, students and agencies such as IDA, <i>Forfás</i>, Enterprise Ireland) to discuss issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Positioning Ireland as a leading design “cell” for fashion and textiles worldwide ▪ Plagiarism, originality, ethics, sustainability, moral and social responsibility ▪ Fashion and textile design as a potential growth area in the economy ▪ The impact of global finances on the fashion and textiles industry ▪ Other topics to be suggested by staff/students and industry representatives <p>Incubator unit & research links Explore the idea of setting up an incubator unit where state of the art production facilities can be used or “earned” by practising designers and researchers.</p> <p>Work placements Work with industry to set up meaningful and relevant work placements and internships for students during their courses.</p>

	Visiting lecturers/industry site visits The PRG suggests that industry would be willing to collaborate on these activities too.
5.3.	Facilities and Resources
	Commendations
a)	The department feels like a vibrant, creative hub and the PRG encourages further dynamic and strategic development of that learning environment. The recent new developments on the campus indicate what can be gained from fresh, bright, modern, open spaces for teaching and learning.
	Recommendations
b)	The PRG recommends that the department and the college should consider the benefits of moving the department to the School of Design building – this would result in a better quality teaching and learning environment, with improved shared facilities such as computer rooms.
c)	A re-structuring of the textile degree course programme as recommended above (page 10 f) offers the potential to free up space and other resources, giving opportunities for more flexible working as recommended earlier in 5.1 n) and o).
d)	The PRG supports the department’s suggestion of developing a garment and materials archive together with NIVAL.
5.4.	Communication
	Commendations
a)	The annual Fashion Show is a significant public face of NCAD and gives the Fashion and Textiles Department an opportunity to enhance the college’s public image and create good linkages with the media and industry.
	Recommendations
b)	The PRG commends the development of operational planning meetings in the department and recommends that there should also be reflective/brainstorming meetings to strengthen the team approach to curriculum development, planning and innovation.
c)	The PRG recommends that the department consider including student representation at appropriate meetings.
5.5.	Staff Development and Research
	Commendations
a)	The PRG commends the initiatives that staff members have already taken to develop their own professional practice and to build their teaching skills. There is scope for further development in this area, and the PRG notes that staff members have expressed a willingness to undertake appropriate continuing professional development.
	Recommendations
b)	The PRG urges the staff of the department to take more time to reflect on their current practice and to take responsibility for directing change themselves, rather than waiting for external forces to dictate what happens.
c)	The PRG encourages staff to submit proposals for carrying out practice-based research and for the development of postgraduate qualifications in the fashion and textiles areas.
d)	The department should develop links with similar departments in other higher education institutions in Ireland and abroad, to help provide an insight into best practice and a way of “benchmarking” their own work. This might also give scope for staff and student exchanges or joint degree programmes.

Acknowledgements

The PRG would like to record its thanks to everyone involved in this review for the courteous and helpful manner in which they participated.