

BRITISH FASHION COUNCIL

An Open Letter regarding the Model Health Inquiry

7th February 2008

Dear All,

With London Fashion Week about to start in the next week I thought it would be an appropriate time to give an update on our progress in implementing the recommendations from the Model Health Inquiry (MHI) as well as giving an honest appraisal of some the problems we are encountering on our journey.

Firstly and I believe most importantly we have successfully and significantly raised the awareness of this important issue providing the context for an informed debate amongst a wide group of interested parties from Government and health bodies, to designers, model agencies and print media. Awareness is one of the key goals of the campaigners who quite rightly aim to keep this issue in the public arena in order to gain publicity for an understanding of eating disorders. While it is understandable that there is a call for speed and regulation we remain convinced that real progress is only achieved by long term fundamental changes in attitudes and behaviours.

With regard to the recommendations of the MHI I want to talk specifically about areas of progress as well as explain the problems of making steps forward in other areas.

Firstly, we are delighted that Equity, traditionally known as a union for actors, has agreed to allow models entry. This is a significant step which recognises the role of models and gives models access to representation for the first time. This has been achieved as a direct result of the work of the MHI and we regard this as a significant breakthrough. We thank Equity for their support and wish them success.

The MHI contained 14 recommendations which fall into 3 categories;

- Firstly, those which are within the scope of the British Fashion Council (BFC) and deliverable by us. These number three and were all put in place immediately following the announcement of the MHI recommendations.
- Secondly, those which required involvement and action by other organisations but which the BFC could facilitate progress. Of the 5 recommendations of this type two have been implemented, two have achieved significant progress and one is causing us some concern.
- Thirdly, those recommendations which fell outside the scope and remit of the BFC. There are six of these which have been passed to the appropriate trade body or the Government for review and comment and at this time we are still awaiting responses.

Each of the recommendations and actions are laid out in the appendix at the end of this letter.

I want to focus on one of the biggest challenges and this was recognised by Baroness Kingsmill and the panel. Medical certification is one of the most radical and ambitious recommendations and one that we agree would have the most benefit if adopted internationally. Over 70% of models at London Fashion Week are based overseas, employed through agencies outside of the UK, and arrive hours before the shows. Most arrive from New York Fashion Week and go on to Milan and Paris after London. Model industry representatives advise us that any unilateral action by London Fashion Week will simply mean that models will decline to work in London which is already the least commercially attractive of the four major Fashion Weeks. The panel recognised these challenges and the potential damage to the future of London Fashion Week, as without internationally recognised catwalk models our designers will not want to show here.

I have written to all of my counterparts in New York, Paris and Milan and met with the Camera Nazionale della Moda (CNDM) in Milan and with the CFDA in New York. Their lack of enthusiasm for an international solution is causing us concern. The Chambre Syndicale in Paris feels that the issue lies outside their remit and is a matter for the government department that licences model agencies. In Milan the CNDM has instigated a code of conduct with the Italian Government which asks for the provision of health certificates but to date there is no evidence of this being put into practice and CNDM have expressed a preference for self regulation and education. In New York the CFDA do not believe that US working practices allow for regulation and health certification, but do believe that the route forward is education and awareness.

We on the other hand are committed to moving this forward and in the coming months we will be undertaking a feasibility study with a view to a pilot scheme taking place in London in September 2008. We will monitor carefully the results and the impact on London Fashion Week and share our work with the other international cities in a bid to change their views.

In summary we feel that the MHI has already affected positive change. Designers have offered us their support and are now more aware about the working conditions they provide for models. We are pleased to be working with **beat** and will be funding the first staff training session on eating disorders for model agency employees and we encourage agencies to build a relationship with **beat**. The larger London agencies are leading the way by providing access to nutritionists and mentoring schemes. Together with partner organisations such as the AMA, **beat** and Equity, we are moving the acceptable boundaries in favour of models and making all those who work with models aware of the issues they face.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hilary Riva', written over a horizontal line.

Hilary Riva
Chief Executive
British Fashion Council

APPENDIX

When the 14 recommendations were announced by the Model Health Inquiry, the panel made it clear that some were beyond the remit of the BFC but they had been included within the report to raise awareness of the subject and for consideration by a wider audience. Here is an overview of the recommendations and actions in the three groups outlined above

DIRECTLY ENFORCEABLE BY THE BRITISH FASHION COUNCIL:

1. BAN MODELS UNDER 16 YEARS OF AGE AT LONDON FASHION WEEK
2. ENSURE THAT LONDON FASHION WEEK CATWALK SHOWS HAVE HEALTHY BACKSTAGE ENVIRONMENTS.
3. PUT IN PLACE A PERMANENT MODEL HEALTH PANEL TO SEE THROUGH AND OFFER FURTHER ADVICE AND SUPPORT ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS

All these were put in place immediately, with the first two now forming part of the designers contracts to show on schedule at London Fashion Week

REQUIRING PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITY:

4. A REPRESENTATIVE BODY FOR THE MODELLING PROFESSION – Equity will now take on this role.

A model 'Sanctuary' was established by Erin O'Connor in September 2008 which we financially supported and will continue to do so going forward. This Sanctuary provides rest, respite and opportunities for advice and counselling for models during London Fashion Week.

5. BFC ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIPS WITH EQUIVALENT ORGANISATIONS TO ACHIEVE BEST PRACTICE IN A GLOBAL INDUSTRY

The British Fashion Council has met with Chambre Syndicale in Paris, Camera Nazionale della Moda in Milan and CFDA in NY with a view to establishing positive working relationships and we are having open discussions on mutually important issues. In the context of the MHI we feel strongly that an international code of conduct and internationally recognised medical health certificate is the way forward for the modelling industry. If we continue to find resistance we may seek advice from central government to help broker an international agreement.

6. BFC WORK WITH AMA ON BEST PRACTICE FOR BOOKING MODELS

The BFC has held several meetings with the AMA and with Equity. The AMA has established best practice for their members. Equity will now take this forward to ensure information on best practice is available to models.

7. MEDICAL HEALTH CERTIFICATES

We recognise that this is most difficult to implement, it requires acceptance by models and enforcements by agencies and their clients including the global fashion weeks. While we have found little support for this approach but have committed to a feasibility study and a pilot in London in September 2008.

8. HEALTH EDUCATION AND AWARENESS PROGRAMME

We have provided funding for the first eating disorder awareness seminar, delivered by **beat** for model agency staff. This will take place in Spring 2008 and will be available to representatives from all model agencies.

As a longer term initiative we are scoping and costing a "Healthier Model Programme" using the UK Healthier Dance Programme as a possible template together with AMA, Equity and the LDA.

OUTSIDE THE REMIT OF THE BRITISH FASHION COUNCIL, requiring action by a wider audience and in some instances further guidance from government:

9. CRIMINAL RECORD BUREAU CHECKS

London Fashion Week no longer allows the use of models under the age of 16 and as an event now falls outside this recommendation. On the subject of the broader issue within the fashion industry, this recommendation implies that photographers, show producers, make artists, stylists, assistants, retailers, marketing personnel, publishers, bookers, etc would be required to be checked. This is no government legislation to enforce this and we have passed the matter to DCMS for consideration. Our discussions with model agencies indicate they will look to implement this as best practice for their own staff.

10. ENGAGEMENT OF MODELS ONLY THROUGH UK AGENCIES

We understand this to be anti-competitive and unenforceable in the UK under European law. This matter has been passed to DCMS for comment.

11. RIGOROUS SCIENTIFIC STUDY INTO EATING DISORDERS AMONGST MODELS

The BFC would be delighted to co-operate with such a study and have enquired through DCMS whether it could become part of the Department of Health's £2m Study into Anorexia which was announced in April 2007.

12. INVESTIGATION INTO WORKING CONDITIONS OF MODELS

The BFC will co-operate with any such study and have referred this to DCMS. In addition we have now referred this to Equity who will be active in this area as part of their role as model union.

13. FINANCE FOR BFC'S BROADER REMIT ON MODEL HEALTH

A wider remit for the BFC would be possible if the different sectors that make up the fashion industry and government have a requirement for a single representative body. In the first instance we have asked DCMS if central government has a requirement for this but to date have not had feedback.

14. DIGITAL MANIPULATION

We have written to the Periodical Publishers Association outlining the Inquiry's recommendation that consideration should be given to a voluntary code of conduct. To date we have received no response.