

BRITISH FASHION COUNCIL

An Open Letter Regarding the Model Health Inquiry

13th August 2008

Dear All

The British Fashion Council (BFC) and London Development Agency (LDA) established the Model Health Inquiry (MHI) in March 2007, in response to public concerns for the health of models on London's catwalks and in the absence of a direct response from the modelling industry.

When announcing its recommendations in September 2007, the MHI highlighted that the model population is vulnerable, that it is a global and transient workforce that comprises predominantly young adults who had no independent voice and was not regulated in any way in this country.

The only British recognised organisation representing the modelling industry at the time was the Association of Model Agencies (AMA) which works with fourteen established modelling agencies.

The MHI outlined 14 recommendations to take forward within a twelve month time frame. It recognised that many of the recommendations fall outside the remit of the BFC which is an independent not for profit organisation set up to promote British fashion designer businesses to a global audience.

Three of the recommendations were directly within the remit of the BFC and were implemented immediately. Five required partner activity for implementation and the others were to be raised with other organisations for consideration.

Progress to date:

Seven of the recommendations have now been implemented, these are:

- 1. Ban models under 16 years of age at London Fashion Week**

This now forms part of the contract between the BFC and designers showing on the official show schedule at London Fashion Week. The BFC has briefed organisations involved in off schedule shows, recommending that this forms part of their agreements with designers.

2. Ensure that London Fashion Week catwalk shows have healthy backstage environments

This is also included in the designer contracts. In addition to this the BFC support Erin O'Connor's Model Sanctuary: a private location, available free of charge to all models during London Fashion Week to rest, meet and have access to healthy food and drinks. For the first time this season the BFC will offer a London Fashion Week model concierge service, providing information on essential services.

3. Put in place a permanent model health panel to see through and offer further advice and support on the recommendations

A panel has been in place, chaired by Simon Chambers, supported by secretariat provided by the BFC to oversee all elements of the MHI.

4. A representative body for the modelling profession

Equity has taken on this role and in doing so recognise that modelling is a professional industry, similar to the dance and acting professions.

5. BFC to work with the AMA on best practice for booking models

The AMA is working with the BFC to create a standardised Code of Best Practice for model agencies. Following this, the BFC will work with AMA and other interested parties to create a standardised Code of Best Practice for the fashion industry.

6. Scope out a health education and awareness programme

This has been completed, a funding package is now required to kick start the programme.

7. Raised the issue of Digital Manipulation with the PPA and BSME

The BFC has raised the issue with both organisations. The PPA has responded to state that editors they represent highlighted the important role magazines played in encouraging positive body image through high-quality relevant articles which their readers could relate to. The PPA believes that encouraging debate of the issue through these articles would be more helpful than the creation of specific rules on digital enhancement. It was agreed that PPA members would continue their positive engagement with the BFC and other stakeholders.

Of the seven remaining recommendations, we have made progress on all of these, either through referring to partner organisations which have the knowledge and remit to change or enforce, or through building them into the scope of the healthier model programme. One in particular, the Model Health Certificates, continues to create very specific challenges. We believe we have achieved significant milestones in the last 10 months, notably through increasing awareness

surrounding the general health of models, not just in relation to eating disorders, but also the pressures associated with undertaking a highly competitive career at a young age, which frequently requires long hours, travel to new countries, often with groups of people that the models are unfamiliar with.

The BFC believe that awareness and education are powerful tools to effect widespread positive change and that these have already had an encouraging impact on behaviours.

We hosted an eating disorder seminar in April this year, delivered by eating disorder charity BEAT which was free of charge to model agencies. BEAT highlighted behavioural signals common amongst young people with eating disorders and ways that concerns can be raised with individuals who agencies may feel are at risk.

A continued programme of awareness and education directly accessible by models is a key focus for the BFC going forward. We have scoped out the Healthier Model Programme (HMP) with the assistance of Dance UK who established the Healthier Dancer Programme (HDP). Public funding is required to start this programme, however if the example of the HDP is followed these costs would need to be met long term by the modelling industry. In addition to this, the BFC aims to launch an online resource for anyone interested in the modelling industry which will give guidelines on finding a professional agency, as well as information and links to Equity, AMA and BEAT.

Issues:

The most challenging of the MHI recommendations is the Model Health Certificate (MHC). The Inquiry found that BMI (Body Mass Index) and weigh-ins were not an accurate or reliable measure to identify eating disorders, which are complex physical and psychological illnesses. It recommended that models should see doctors with expertise in the area of eating disorders. The proposal was that all models working at London Fashion Week would be assessed and then provided with a medical certificate which would offer independent proof of good health and offer a 'fit to work' testimony, or not, and that these certificates should be internationally agreed and recognised.

From our conversations with our international counterparts in New York, Milan and Paris it has become clear that they do not recognise the need for an international health certificate.

The BFC commissioned an independent consultancy to conduct a feasibility study and pilot scheme on MHCs. Model agents, casting agents, show producers and models were all consulted. The

report shows that MHCs as defined by the Inquiry are rejected in principle by those consulted, as they feel the models are being discriminated against. The most widely recognised areas of their concern being:

- most similar industries do not require a 'fit to work' certificate and no other workers at London Fashion Week require a 'fit to work' certificate
- the BFC is a non regulatory body and therefore should not censor or vet models in such a manner.

All elements of the certificate were strongly resisted, some of these were:

1. The intimidating and intrusive nature of the questionnaires which form part of the assessment.
3. The time which it takes to get the certificate is unworkable for models entering the UK to work at London Fashion Week. On average 84% of catwalk models working in London are not UK based, some of whom fly in just a few hours before a show.
4. Models would find the cost of the certificate a prohibitive factor and financial barrier to working in London.

In summary Model Health Certificates are an unworkable solution based on concerns in principle and practicalities of implementation.

The BFC now feel that we have taken this as far as we can within the remit of our organisation. We are not a regulatory body and we have access to limited resources.

Going forward:

We are committed to continuing to help make the modelling industry a healthy and safer environment. Equity's decision to represent models and recognise the profession as a skilled industry on a par with performance arts is one of the most positive outcomes of the Inquiry. Erin O'Connor's Model Sanctuary, which we support, provides a healthy environment for models working at London Fashion Week. This season we will provide a concierge service for international models that will help take some of the stress out of working long hours in an unfamiliar city. We have also committed to developing a website which will link together all relevant organisations and campaigning for funding for the Healthier Model Programme.

We now call on the model industry itself, in particular the AMA, to demonstrate leadership and responsibility in safeguarding the health of models represented by its member agencies. The agencies see and speak to their models on a regular basis and are best placed to identify early behavioural signs of any health issues, including eating disorders and encourage the model to seek help.

We believe the AMA should take the lead role in developing and encouraging an international network, to set best practice in each market and develop a version of the MHC which will be a useful tool for models who work internationally.

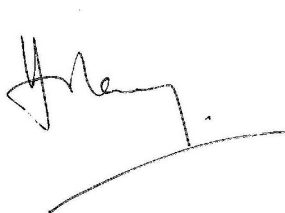
We recognise that the AMA needs to go through a period of change as an organisation, to be in a position to achieve this. Our feasibility study has confirmed that there is a demand for this.

The BFC's MHI has created a platform for increased awareness and positive change and we commit to continue to promote a better understanding of these complex issues throughout our industry.

Body image issues are of immense public interest demonstrating a growing demand to reject a single ideal of beauty.

Fashion is a large industry in the UK. It is not limited to catwalk shows and catwalk models; it spans many sectors including media, advertising and retail which have greater exposure to the general public. We urge the organisations representing these industries to join us in encouraging and promoting a diversity of image and body shape.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hilary Riva', with a long horizontal line underneath.

Hilary Riva
Chief Executive
British Fashion Council