

# Bucks New University

## Higher education institution

<b>Inspection dates</b>		23–26 October 2012
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good-2</b>
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

### Summary of key findings for learners

#### This provider is good because:

- Learners achieve well on the foundation diploma course in art and design, and the majority progress to higher education courses in art and design.
- The course helps learners to develop good practical and thinking skills, and develops their confidence through teamwork. They learn to critically reflect on and evaluate their own work, and to give and receive constructive feedback in group critiques.
- Teachers plan varied and challenging projects which enable learners to explore and experiment with a wide range of materials and techniques from many different cultural contexts, and develop their creative potential and highly individual approaches in their work.
- Teachers' high expectations of independent work encourage many learners to work in studios and workshops outside usual lesson times. Many learners are well motivated to undertake first-hand research and independent gallery visits, as well as benefiting from university-organised visits in the United Kingdom and Europe.
- Learners receive good advice and guidance on choosing their specialist pathways and selecting appropriate university degree courses. Access to very good specialist resources and equipment and working alongside undergraduates in studios and workshops enable learners to acquire in-depth knowledge and skills in their chosen specialism.

#### This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Teachers do not routinely ensure that learners critically annotate their work, and do not always show them precisely enough through assessment feedback how to improve their work. Teachers have not developed systematic ways to monitor how well each learner is progressing that takes full account of their different abilities and experiences when they first join the course.
- The university's systems to monitor the quality of the provision do not identify key strengths or areas for development in teaching and learning, and the course team does not make enough use of available data on learners' achievement and progression to support further improvement.

## Full report

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen learners' skills in critical reflection and evaluative annotation so that all learners can confidently apply these skills to all aspects of their own creative practice.
- Ensure that teachers make better use of their knowledge about learners' different abilities and experiences when learners join the course to plan teaching and monitor individuals' progress from their different starting points. Ensure that assessment feedback gives clear direction on how learners can improve their work.
- Improve quality assurance by systematically reviewing the performance of the foundation course each year and rigorously reviewing the quality of teaching and learning so that key strengths and areas for improvement are accurately identified.
- Make better use of learners' views and the opportunities for collaboration with other foundation programme providers in order to share good practice and improve the provision further.

### Inspection judgements

<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Good
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- Learners on the foundation diploma in art and design make good progress and achieve well. The proportion achieving merit and distinction grades is above that seen nationally. Most learners progress successfully to undergraduate courses in a wide range of subject specialisms, and often to prestigious universities. The university's analysis of achievement by gender, ethnicity and disability shows no significant variations in the performance of different groups.
- Learners speak very positively about their experiences, identifying how much the course enables them to develop practical and thinking skills while building their confidence. For example, through regular group critiques, learners develop confidence in presenting their work to groups of peers and tutors and learn how to critically reflect on their own work and that of others. They value the good opportunities to experiment with a wide range of media and techniques, which enables them to make well-informed choices of subject specialism and universities for higher-level study.
- Opportunities for paired and group project work help learners to develop good personal and teamwork skills, and learn how to give and receive constructive feedback. While learners are encouraged to reflect critically on their work throughout the course through tutorials and group critiques, evaluative annotation of work and sketchbooks remains underdeveloped, particularly in the early stages of the course. Learners complete written reflective journals, chiefly during their final major project, but the examples seen by inspectors tended to describe process rather than critically evaluate ideas and outcomes.
- A diverse range of practical work enables learners to develop a strongly individual approach to their work, exploring ideas and themes of personal interest, resulting in highly personal final projects. The best work demonstrates a capacity for sustained investigation of chosen themes, making use of varied media, techniques and wide-ranging contextual references to support their studies. Challenging project briefs encourage learners to experiment and take creative risks in their work.
- For example, in a graphic design project, learners explored the construction and deconstruction of letterforms, resulting in thoughtful articulation of fragments and distressed letterforms in different page layouts. Where work was less successful, learners were not so confident in manipulating letterforms and relied too heavily on repetition or an overly literal interpretation of word and image.
- Fashion and textile work showed how learners had conducted comprehensive market and contextual research, and extensive investigation and experimentation with media and materials,

including unconventional use of process and techniques. Learners resolved their ideas and findings well through concise working drawings of garments and constructed features.

- Working in close proximity with undergraduate learners helps foundation diploma learners to develop a good understanding of specialist disciplines, and also provides access to some excellent specialist facilities, for example in glass, furniture and printmaking.

<b>The quality of teaching, learning and assessment</b>	Good
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- Good teaching, learning and support enable learners to achieve well and progress successfully to higher education. Well-qualified and very experienced teachers use their specialist subject knowledge very well to plan a coherent and stimulating course. They plan rich and varied activities which frequently challenge and expand the creative potential of learners. Projects progressively develop learners' conceptual thinking in concert with practical skills alongside their experience of media and materials.
- Teachers establish high expectations of independent work, fostering learners' good motivation and engagement. Many learners use the studios and workshops between lessons to complete or develop their own work. Teachers carefully plan study visits to galleries and museums to enable learners to carry out visual research to directly support their own practice.
- Teachers are very aware of the range of different learners' prior experiences and abilities in the subject. While they use this knowledge to support or challenge individual learners well, they do not routinely use their assessment of learners' different starting points to plan teaching and measure how well individuals are making progress relative to their starting points.
- Regular assessment points provide good opportunities for learners to reflect on their work and progress, and consider how they can improve their work. Verbal and written feedback effectively identifies strengths and areas for further development. However, while teachers' feedback clearly identifies the aspects of work learners can or need to improve, it is not always sufficiently precise about how learners can achieve this.
- Teachers know their learners well and this enables them to guide and encourage learners to succeed. In the most effective tutorials, teachers ask searching questions to elicit considered and reflective responses which help learners to make thoughtful connections between different aspects of their work. On a few occasions teachers do not encourage learners enough to engage in critical discussion, or to formulate or express their opinions.
- The development of the critical and writing skills of learners is good. The course enables them to research and write well-constructed essays, evaluating artefacts and objects and conforming to the conventions of academic writing expected in higher education. The learning development unit provides good support for those who require additional support with written work, including learners who have dyslexia. Support for numeracy work is available on request.
- The university provides good pre-course advice and guidance to ensure learners are on the right course and know what to expect. Teachers provide good on-course guidance to help learners choose appropriate specialist pathways and develop their personal interests. Good advice about progression to higher education and future career opportunities, along with personal support for the higher education application process, ensures that most learners gain a place on the programme of their choice.
- The promotion of equality and diversity in teaching and learning is very good. Teachers engage learners in cultural and creative enquiry across a broad spectrum of contexts and influences. For example, in one project learners explore how the body functions or dysfunctions and create designs to enable it to operate more effectively. In some self-initiated projects, learners explore complex cultural issues such as the emotional consequences of society abandoning sections of community and the impact of groups or individuals being, or feeling, abandoned.

**The effectiveness of leadership and management****Requires improvement**

- Leaders, governors and senior managers set a clear strategic direction for the further education provision within the university, and demonstrate a strong commitment to developing and improving it. Senior leaders and governors monitor programmes objectively, in accordance with university procedures.
- Senior managers have successfully encouraged an ethos of open communication and productive teamwork. Teachers work hard to organise the course so that learners can work intensively and creatively and day-to-day course management is good.
- Although inspectors judge teaching, learning and assessment to be good, the university does not systematically evaluate the quality of teaching and learning each year. Lecturers informally review each other's performance, but this does not lead to a rigorous identification of key strengths and areas for improvement. Consequently, there is no systematic plan for the quality improvement of teaching, learning and assessment for the foundation programme.
- Quality assurance is largely informal and lacks rigour. For example, the course team does not produce an annual evaluation of the foundation diploma course to identify key strengths and areas for improvement. Thus it is not clear to the team or to senior managers what progress is being made in ensuring quality improvement.
- Managers are well aware of the progress made by the learners, many of whom successfully progress to higher education each year. However, the course team does not make enough use of data to monitor trends in outcomes and progression for learners, for example by gender, ethnicity, disability or specialist pathway.
- The course team regularly seeks and acts on learners' views but does not always record these at foundation programme level, so there is no systematic analysis to support quality improvement or demonstrate to learners how the university has responded to their views.
- Teaching staff benefit from a supportive annual appraisal of their performance. They are active practitioners in their disciplines and enthusiastically and regularly update their subject skills and knowledge. They have attended occasional development sessions on teaching and learning provided by the university.
- Teaching staff work collaboratively with those in other universities on undergraduate programmes, and liaise effectively with local schools to encourage progression. However, they do not always make best use of contacts with other providers of the foundation diploma in order to share good practice and to strengthen quality assurance arrangements.
- Resources for learning are very good and foundation learners benefit from working alongside their undergraduate peers. They readily use a wide range of specialist resources that enable them to develop skills in a good variety of disciplines.
- Equality and diversity are actively promoted both in the foundation programme and more widely across the university by specialist staff and through the Students' Union. The university provides a good range of subject specialist pathways through the foundation diploma. The course is well regarded locally and recruits well, especially in the High Wycombe area. The gender, ethnicity and disability profile of learners largely reflects the characteristics of the local population.
- Staff and learners work safely in the workshops and studios. A well-organised and thorough system of health and safety training is supported by a clear, and regularly updated, health and safety policy. Over the past two years there have been no reported accidents or 'near misses' in foundation programme activities. Safeguarding is good and, where necessary, Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out. The university's comprehensive safeguarding policy ensures that all staff have completed safeguarding awareness training.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

<b>Bucks New University</b>			
<b>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</b>  1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	<b>Overall</b>	16-18 Learning programmes	19+ Learning programmes
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>	2	2
Outcomes for learners	<b>2</b>	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>2</b>	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>3</b>	3	3

<b>Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment</b>	<b>Grade</b>
9.2 Visual arts	<b>2</b>

## Provider details

<b>Bucks New University</b>	
<b>Type of provider</b>	Higher education institution
<b>Age range of learners</b>	16+
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year 2011/12</b>	Full-time: 111
	Part-time: 0
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Professor Ruth Farwell, Vice Chancellor
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

<b>Provider information at the time of the inspection</b>		
<b>Main course or learning programme level</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	
<b>Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)</b>	16-18	19+
<b>Full-time</b>	63	19
<b>Part-time</b>	0	0
<b>Funding received from</b>	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency	

## Additional socio-economic information

Bucks New University provides a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses and one further education course, the foundation diploma in art and design. Almost all learners are aged 18 or over when they join the course, having usually completed A-level study or equivalent. The majority come from the High Wycombe area.

Buckinghamshire operates a system of grammar and secondary modern schools. The proportion of students achieving five or more grades A\* to C at GCSE, including English and mathematics, is almost 10 percentage points above the national average, and for Ebacc subjects almost twice the national average. The proportion achieving three or more A levels, or equivalent, is seven percentage points above the national average.

Rates of employment are above the national average, and higher than in other areas of the South East. An above-average proportion of people have higher-level qualifications. The largest employment sectors are in the service industries, particularly distribution, hotels and restaurants, finance, information technology and business and public administration, education and health. Around 12% of the population are from minority ethnic groups, the largest being of Pakistani heritage.

## Information about this inspection

<b>Lead inspector</b>	Janet Mercer HMI
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Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the Department Manager, Creative & Visual Communications as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's departmental evaluation and development plans. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and on-line questionnaires to gather the views of learners; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed tutorials and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the further education provision at the provider.

## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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