

The Manchester Metropolitan University

Higher education institution

Inspection dates		4–7 December 2012
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Outstanding-1
	Previous inspection:	Outstanding-1
Outcomes for learners		Outstanding-1
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Outstanding-1
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is outstanding because:

- Students achieve exceptionally well and almost all make at least very good progress and complete the course with either a merit or distinction grade.
- Students are very well motivated and their attendance is excellent. They rapidly develop their drawing and artistic skills, ability to use specialist equipment and theoretical knowledge to produce individualised and often inspirational work.
- The work in sketchbooks and journals is high quality and well written with good evidence of extensive research covering a broad range of controversial and thought provoking topics that demonstrate students' free thinking and creativity.
- Progression is excellent and almost all students continue in education with undergraduate studies. Students develop very good independent and team-working skills that support them well in higher education and employment.
- All tutors are practising artists and designers and they have high expectations of their students. Through careful coaching, stimulating assignments and access to exceptional resources students are encouraged to push creative boundaries and produce innovative work using a wide variety of materials and techniques.
- Leaders and managers are passionate about the course and the success of their students. Day-to-day management is highly effective. Students' views are listened to carefully and, where appropriate, acted upon promptly.
- The curriculum is carefully designed and offers several specialist pathways to build on students' skills and interests. The teaching of drawing, in all its forms, is central to all stages of the course and results in students producing rich and varied portfolio work. Equality and diversity are promoted very well.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Enhance quality-assurance arrangements by ensuring that data, including the analysis of different student groups, are evaluated and used more systematically to inform management actions and further improve student performance.
- Develop more-formal arrangements to monitor the quality of group and workshop sessions to identify in more detail the excellent practice and share this to ensure that in every session all students make the very best progress that they are capable of achieving.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Outstanding
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- Outcomes for students are outstanding. Almost all students successfully complete the foundation programme. In 2011/12 over half of all students achieved a distinction and a further 40% achieved a merit. This pattern of high-grade success has been consistent over the last three years. Students' attendance is excellent.
- In 2011/12 students achieved equally well with very little difference in success rates between gender, disability or ethnicity. The achievement of merit and distinction grades is consistently high across different groups although a greater proportion of female students achieve high grades.
- Students are extremely well motivated and very keen to learn, which contributes notably to their rapid and often exceptional progress. Students are encouraged to adopt unconventional creative approaches that heighten their thirst for knowledge and skill development. Consequently, their portfolios contain highly individualised and exciting work.
- Students' work is consistently of a very high standard across all four specialisms. Their sketchbooks and journals contain extensive visual and contextual research, including references to past and present artists that influence their thinking. Students' work is frequently self-expressive, mature and perceptively relays very personal, controversial, or socially poignant topics such as poverty, gender identity, feminism and oppression.
- Students gain a comprehensive understanding of how to use and apply diverse styles of drawing to interpret and express their ideas. Experimental and conceptual drawing is central to students' high levels of confidence in manipulating and applying different materials and approaches. For example, a graphics student painted with ice cream to produce eye-catching two-tone illustrations for a worksheet. A fashion textiles student produced a collage of photocopied images of bird wings onto transparent paper and used staples to add structure and decoration, creating a delicate layered corset design.
- Students have excellent access to the outstanding resources, both modern specialist technology and traditional craft equipment, that enhance their technical awareness and skill development significantly. They use these skills very well, for example, a fine art student learnt how to use very sophisticated film-editing software to produce a short film creating a mesmerising montage of imagery and music, on how the mind wanders.
- Innovative and thought-provoking assignment briefs enable students to think conceptually, gain confidence in expressing their own creativity and develop their team-working and problem-solving skills. For example, a 'cardboard catwalk' project facilitates students working together to create three-dimensional articles from recycled card, influenced by the work of two contrasting artists. The result of students' research, design, construction and choreography was a stunning, high-energy parade of contrasting and creative interpretations ranging from giant puppetry to life-size photo booths.

- By the end of the foundation course, students' technical expertise and their ability to think abstractly and reflectively means they are prepared exceptionally well for higher education. Almost all of them progress to undergraduate courses; around half at Manchester Metropolitan University and a significant proportion to other prestigious universities.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching is planned very well, uses imaginative and interesting tasks and is of a consistently high quality. Tutors' expectations of their students are very high and in turn students have high expectations of themselves, which leads to rapid skills development and exceptional achievement. Theory is taught well and is imaginatively linked to practice with energising topics such as Gypsy Rose Lee and American Burlesque which develops students' critical skills.
- Students learn very effectively and demonstrate highly professional attitudes when working in studios. They are mature, concentrate well and listen actively to others' views. Students feel secure in taking risks and participate with confidence. Tutors skilfully introduce project work that builds on students' knowledge and supports them in challenging their creative thinking. The exploratory stage of the course enables students to think freely and develops their ability to experiment with mark making.
- Creative assessment procedures include peer-assessment, self-assessment and the imaginative use of portable interactive tablets to generate prompt feedback. Tutors' regular and perceptive feedback and sprinklings of praise motivates and inspires students well. However, in a minority of cases tutors' written comments are not always sufficiently detailed to provide guidance on exactly what students need to do to improve their work to achieve the highest grades.
- Students can quickly gain access to an extensive range of impressive resources and specialist equipment that enables them to work with innovative mediums. Studios are spacious and light, with individual work stations. Students' research and project development are enhanced significantly by using the university's extensive library and specialist reference collections. The virtual learning environment is used very well to support learning. It contains key messages, assignment briefs, a very good range of interactive resources and blogs that are stimulating and thought provoking.
- Inspirational and skilful staff are successful artists, designers and writers and this helps students to develop their own professional practice and independent research skills. In many sessions teaching is stimulating and energising. For example, an art history lesson used storytelling particularly effectively to explain the work of Gerhard Richter.
- Assignments are reviewed annually to meet the needs of students and to incorporate current issues. They are quirky and challenge students to create imaginative work. For example, students produced intricate concertinaed sketchbooks as part of the city threads project.
- Students' learning is enhanced significantly by a rich diversity of enrichment activities, including live community art projects. Opportunities to link with undergraduate students' work enable foundation students to be involved in new and interesting projects. For example, a kite flying project that combines art theory and practice linked to the work of the philosopher and practitioner Ludwig Wittgenstein.
- Tutors encourage students to enter prestigious national competitions and many are successful, for example, one textile fashion student recently won a national competition for paper cutting and her work is exhibited in the Manchester City Art Gallery. These activities help students to articulate their ideas professionally. However, not all students are aware of some of these additional opportunities.
- Students with specific learning needs are assessed quickly and appropriate support is organised promptly. Individual learning plans for all students contain specific and challenging targets. Structured, well-organised personal tutorials ensure that plans are reviewed and progress is monitored regularly. Tutors' verbal feedback motivates students to acquire new knowledge, develop their skills quickly and identify what they need to do to improve.

- Projects are carefully constructed to develop students' English and mathematics skills. Students' written English is of a high standard and they can articulate their ideas well. They use aesthetic language confidently and with flair. Students' mathematics skills are developed well through observational drawing. They develop accurate skills in measuring and using proportions across all pathways.
- Skilful studio management promotes an industrious climate conducive to learning. Teachers share their time equitably and this fosters mutual respect and productive working relationships with their students. Careful coaching develops students' independence and together with working in groups prepares them very well for progression to higher education and employment.
- Inclusive references to other cultures and beliefs invigorate teaching and learning. Students' sketchbooks and journals contain a myriad of fresh and lively work demonstrating their knowledge of equality and diversity issues. For example, fine-art students produced large images of constructed photographs based on apartheid and 3D students produced exquisite and inventive pieces based on research into Mexican and Polish traditional paper cuts. The rich cultural diversity of Manchester is used well by students to create a visual clash of colour, surface and imagery.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers in the school of art demonstrate a strong commitment to the foundation programme. The Dean recently completed a strategic review of the foundation programme and the key issues raised are being addressed quickly by the foundation staff.
- Day-to-day operational management is highly effective within a very supportive team. During 2011/12 staff responded positively to the substantial long-term absence of two key tutors and ensured that students' experience and exceptional performance was maintained.
- All tutors have considerable expertise in their specific area and are passionate about the world of art and the success of their students. They are practising artists and designers who pursue academic research that enhances their knowledge and this brings significant benefits to students' learning. Extremely knowledgeable technicians provide carefully planned workshop inductions to animation, etching, bookbinding and letterpress processes that promote safe working practices in the use of specialist equipment.
- All staff have a supportive annual review to discuss their performance and set targets for the following year. However, these are not always recorded in specific enough detail to be monitored effectively. The university's centre for excellence in learning and teaching supports the very good staff development opportunities. All staff from across the school of art regularly share good practice in delivering innovative projects and using new technology to support learning.
- Tutors delivering the foundation programme work very closely together to share ideas and they know their students very well. Tutors frequently teach group sessions together and consequently review each other's performance on an informal basis. Whilst plans are in place to introduce more formal observations next term the current system does not enable a systematic evaluation of strengths and areas to improve.
- The university's quality assurance process is implemented across the school of art. The foundation programme's continuous improvement plan is regularly scrutinised by the faculty executive group. However, a few areas are not sufficiently self-critical and the actions are not specific enough to see how they will lead to further improvements or how these will be measured.
- The continuous improvement plan reviews information on applications, enrolments, withdrawals, students' grades, destinations, student feedback and a detailed analysis of the external examiner's report. However, the plan does not make enough use of data to monitor trends, in particular by gender, ethnicity or disability.

- The university provides many opportunities for students to share their views and to influence decision-making processes. Student representatives from each of the foundation pathways attend programme committee meetings to raise concerns. Staff act quickly on the issues raised, for example, increasing the number of workshop induction sessions, and where students requests are not viable it is clearly explained why this cannot happen.
- Resources for learning are excellent; students are carefully guided to build up their confidence to work independently in the extensive range of workshops. Students use a wide range of specialist equipment, from traditional craft technology in ceramics, glass and printmaking to the latest industry standard digital technology which enables them to develop skills in a broad variety of disciplines. All students have their own studio space which helps foster good relationships, a professional working environment and enables individuals to benefit from personalised support.
- Managers structure the curriculum carefully to develop students' skills and extend their knowledge. Students explore a diverse range of options before they specialise. The university has well-established links with the arts community and plays a pivotal role in raising the profile of the arts provision in Manchester. Students benefit notably from these partnerships and are actively involved in city arts events.
- Equality and diversity are actively promoted both in the foundation programme and across the university. The course recruits a diverse student population. Around a fifth of students are male and whilst their high grade achievement improved in 2011/12 it remains below that of female students. Students with a declared learning difficulty and/or disability and those from a minority ethnic group achieve very well.
- The university has comprehensive health and safety policies and procedures. The Dean chairs the health and safety committee that meets termly and monitors the implementation of agreed actions. The school of art has systematic and thorough risk-assessment processes for all activities. The management of safety in the workshops is outstanding. Students say that they feel very safe and receive guidance on lone working in studios and working in the local community. They benefit from very good support from their tutors and a comprehensive range of support services.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

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

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Visual Arts	1

Provider details

The Manchester Metropolitan University	
Type of provider	Higher education institution
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 167
Vice Chancellor	Professor John Brooks
Date of previous inspection	March 2005
Website address	www.mmu.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 3	
Total number of learners	16-18	19+
Full-time	142	19
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency	

Additional socio-economic information

The Manchester Metropolitan University is the sixth largest in the United Kingdom with around 35,000 students. It provides an extensive range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses and one further education course, the foundation diploma in art and design. Foundation students opt for one of four specialisms; fine art, textiles/fashion, graphics or 3D. Selection to a place on the foundation art programme is very competitive.

All students on the foundation art and design diploma are aged 18 or over and most have completed A levels or equivalent qualifications. They all study full-time, around two thirds are from Greater Manchester and 9% are from minority ethnic groups. Unemployment in Greater Manchester is above the national average. The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is below the national average. The proportion achieving three or more A levels, or equivalent, is equal to the national average.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Bev Barlow HMI
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Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the director of study as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the university's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. 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 online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment on the university's foundation art and design programme.

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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