

Falmouth University

Higher education institution

Inspection dates		26 February – 1 March 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- The vast majority of students complete the foundation diploma course successfully and the proportion achieving merit and distinction grades is above average.
- Students clearly enjoy their work and appreciate how the good teaching and challenging, varied projects help them acquire new skills and a mature approach to developing a personal visual language. Students benefit from good specialist facilities, including an excellent specialist art and design library and research resource.
- Standards of practical and essay work are generally high. The best work combines well-developed observational drawing skills, clear sequential development of ideas and visual imagery and sensitivity to the varied qualities and characteristics of chosen media.
- The well-planned and managed course builds students' skills, confidence and resilience well. Assessment arrangements are thorough and result in detailed, objective feedback. Tutors prepare students well for successful progression to degree courses in their chosen specialist pathways.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- The quality of drawing is not consistently good and not all students' design sheets demonstrate clearly enough how their work has developed through different stages of exploration, thinking or making. Students' writing for their final project proposals is less well developed than their academic essay writing.
- Not all tutors give clear feedback on weaker aspects of students' work, or identify sufficiently specific actions to support further improvements.
- The annual review process and actions for improvement are insufficiently focused on teaching and learning.
- Managers and governors have been slow in revising and updating safeguarding policies and procedures, and ensuring that all staff have relevant training.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all students demonstrate clear development of ideas through practical work and design sheets. Strengthen students' skills in writing about their own work by providing more precise guidance on writing specific aims for their proposals for the final stage of the course.
- Ensure that all tutors provide equally clear critical evaluation of the weaker aspects of students' work during assessment feedback and identify more specific actions to help students improve their work further.
- Increase the scrutiny of teaching and learning and ensure that the actions identified for quality improvement will have a clear impact on students' experiences and outcomes.
- Strengthen procedures for safeguarding through providing training for all staff and governors and ensuring that managers and governors act swiftly to complete the review of all safeguarding policies and procedures.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Students achieve well on the foundation course. Despite a small decline over the last two years, success rates remain high. The proportion of students achieving merit and distinction grades is higher than seen in other providers offering the same qualification. The university's analysis of performance data shows no significant differences in achievement for students by gender, ethnicity or disability. Students joining the course already demonstrate high levels of commitment and interest in art and design.
- Students clearly enjoy their work and articulate very enthusiastically how well the course has enhanced their practical and conceptual skills, and fundamentally changed how they work. They particularly value the opportunities to work with unfamiliar materials, techniques and processes, which help them to discover new ways of working and develop a highly individualised interpretation of subject matter and a personal visual language.
- Drawing skills are developed well through a good range of structured activities and carefully designed exercises that challenge preconceptions about the purpose of drawing, and how students evaluate the qualities within their drawing work. For example, in the 'Gestalt' drawing project at the start of the course, students worked on each other's drawings, and produced very large scale, intense and dynamic graphite drawings, which challenged notions of ownership of the work, or being too precious or conservative about the final outcome.
- However, the energy and dynamism of this work were not always effectively translated into subsequent observed drawing. Some early life drawings remained stiff and tentative in approach. Many of the early observational drawing activities were mostly executed in pencil, with few examples seen of exploring wider and more unconventional approaches materials, techniques and tools. Where students continued with life drawing as an option in Stage 2 they developed greater confidence in scale and mark making and used more varied drawing materials and tools, demonstrating good progress over time.
- Standards of practical work are generally high, with examples of outstanding work. The most successful work demonstrated very good drawing for a variety of purposes, including visual research and recording, developing and exploring different ideas, and planning for design and making. The best design sheets teemed with drawings, ideas, contextual and visual references, experiments with materials and processes and were well annotated to demonstrate clearly the sequential development of the work.

- However, not all students had fully grasped or demonstrated confident implementation of these processes. Weaker examples of design sheets or sketchbooks often contained rather isolated drawings and notes, without evidencing clear connections between different stages of work or sufficiently considered use of the layout and format.
- The foundation course develops a strong culture of exploring materials, particularly evident in design and making in three-dimensional art and design disciplines. In one highly successful example, a student produced a series of articulated figures, supported by a wide range of very fluid and sensitively observed drawings. The work explored and exploited the different qualities of paper, card, wire, fabric, ceramics and wood, and how these could be manipulated to capture movement and weight. These studies culminated in a carefully designed, and beautifully carved, jointed wooden mannequin figure, the thoughtful presentation of which conferred a sense of almost ritual significance on the object.
- The course prepares students well for progression to higher education in a broad range of art and design disciplines. Most students apply successfully for degree courses, and many progress to prestigious specialist universities. The 'Futures' sessions, where tutors and visiting speakers, including ex Falmouth alumni, present their work, provide students with valuable insights into different types of creative practice and employment in the creative industries.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- Consistently good teaching and learning, together with thorough and effective assessment, ensure that students achieve well. The well-established course team has developed a strong ethos centred on exploratory and experimental creative practice. Tutors plan a highly effective range of activities and projects that enables students to develop sound working practices.
- When introducing new assignments, tutors present carefully considered projects and themes to students in well-structured and stimulating ways. The accompanying visual presentations draw on a wide range of visual and cultural imagery and generate lively and provocative responses.
- Tutors ensure students develop both the practical and intellectual skills required to develop and execute their ideas. Experienced technicians provide highly valued additional practical and technical support to help students realise their ideas and concepts through two- and three-dimensional artefacts.
- Students develop good reflective and critical skills through the good programme of contextual studies, lectures and keeping their own reflective journals. Opportunities to present their research, and to discuss and critique their work with tutors and other students, help them to explore and articulate their particular interests, help prepare them for interviews and to learn to give and receive constructive criticism and feedback.
- This, combined with tutors' expectations that students work increasingly independently and take creative risks in their work, means that students develop creative insight and personal resilience. Many students were able to work confidently with the more serendipitous elements of design exploration and took creative risks with their work to experiment in interesting and exciting ways, often leading to playful and surprising conclusions.
- Arrangements for impartial assessment of students' work are a particular strength of the provision. Tutors, working in pairs, always assess the work of each other's students, ensuring that students receive objective feedback, as well as a wider range of views about their work. Tutors' insightful comments provide students with a very clear picture of the strengths in their work. This is particularly encouraging and contributes well to developing students' confidence.
- However, not all tutors are as clear or specific when identifying weaker aspects of students' work. For example, suggestions about how to improve often focus on doing more of something, rather than describing the specific qualities that are of a poor standard or require development.
- The broad contextual studies lecture programme gives students a thorough background to historical cultural and social issues and helps guide students to interesting and unusual sources of research. Well-coordinated support from library staff supplements this programme. For

example, tutors prepared students very effectively for their residential trip to Berlin with relevant contextual background lectures on the Bauhaus, Modernism and Post-modernism.

- The university's thorough and objective interview process is effective in ensuring that students are well suited to the academic rigour of the foundation course. Students receive good initial advice and guidance so that they are well informed about course requirements and expectations. Tutors' detailed knowledge and understanding of individual students' strengths and interests mean that students receive good and impartial advice about their choice of course and institution for progression to undergraduate study.
- Students receive carefully tailored individual tutorial guidance which helps them to develop their own personal style of creative practice. Astute, regular feedback and one-to-one guidance in studios also contribute to the way students develop reflective thinking and evaluative skills. As well as having regular individual tutorials with their personal tutor, students are actively encouraged to seek the opinions of other tutors to support their work.
- Tutors extend and develop students' academic writing skills, which results in well-researched and written contextual studies essays. A designated member of staff, who is also an art and design practitioner, supports students well with writing for essays and reflective journal entries. Students identified with dyslexia receive good individual support for all types of written work.
- However, students' writing about their own work, for example in their project proposal for the final stage of the course, is less effective, with too many spelling and grammatical errors. The uncertainty of students about what they are intending to produce as a body of work for their final stage means their written proposals do not always articulate the specific aims of their project clearly enough.
- The promotion of equality and diversity within teaching and learning is underdeveloped. The contextual lecture programme covers aspects of culture and society relevant to equality and diversity, but further exploration or discussion of these aspects is limited.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Falmouth University has an ambitious mission to be a world class university that gives creative minds inspiring futures. The foundation diploma programme represents around 3% of the university's provision. It has a clear purpose and is strategically well aligned with the higher education programmes. Managers and staff actively promote the values of the organisation, in particular to encourage creativity, connectivity and courage.
- The comprehensive teaching and learning strategy, along with the strategic plan, strengthens the institutional focus on teaching and learning. The strategy is appropriately focused on developing students for progression to higher education, and raising awareness of employment prospects in the creative industries. Students benefit from the institution's increasing focus on providing for the regional, national and international market.
- The detailed annual review process makes good use of feedback from external moderators and the staff/student liaison group. Arrangements for peer observation, team teaching, and assessment practices involving second markers for all assignments help assure the quality of provision. However, there is insufficient scrutiny to assess, evaluate and report formally on the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The quality improvement plan has some relevant actions, but lacks sufficient breadth of improvement strategies, or focus on teaching and learning, to act as a key catalyst for continuous improvement.
- The performance development review system for staff is effective in ensuring that key actions link directly to strategic and departmental priorities. The university has a strong culture of promoting opportunities for professional development. In particular, managers actively encourage staff to undertake teaching qualifications, higher-level degrees, scholarly activity and act as external examiners for other institutions.
- The course team plans and manages the curriculum very well to ensure it provides students with a progressive and coherent development of skills and understanding. Staff work well together to

promote high standards and expectations from students and ensure the smooth day-to-day running of the course.

- The university has productive links locally and regionally, for example with schools, art galleries and other higher education providers. Accommodation for learning is good. Students have access to good specialist technical resources that enable them to develop skills in a broad range of disciplines, including access to facilities used by undergraduate students. Students benefit from an excellent art specialist library and research resource.
- The university has recently raised the profile of the equalities agenda. It has appointed an equalities engagement and development manager and has amalgamated a suite of policies into a sound single equality scheme. It has also trained staff and governors on equalities.
- The relaxed environment around the university helps students feel safe and work well together. Academic and technical staff help raise awareness and promote safe working practices in workshops. Students have ready access to support, guidance and counselling services if required.
- Appropriate pre-employment checks are in place for all staff. However, managers and governors have been slow to update and embed new policies and procedures associated with safeguarding legislation. There has been insufficient training for staff and governors to develop a full understanding of safeguarding issues. The board of governors carries out other strategic and financial duties well, including monitoring the quality of provision and data on students' achievement.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Falmouth 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	2	2	2
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2	2

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Visual Arts	2

Provider details

Falmouth University	
Type of provider	Higher education institution
Age range of learners	16-18
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year (2011/12)	Full-time: 125
	Part-time: 3
Vice Chancellor	Professor Anne Carlisle
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Website address	www.falmouth.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)								
Full-time							111	20
Part-time							1	4
Funding received from								
Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency								

Additional socio-economic information

Falmouth University is a specialist arts university, operating from two main sites in Falmouth and Penryn. The university offers courses in art, design, media, performance and writing. The further education provision consists of a foundation diploma in art and design, validated by the University of the Arts London awarding body. It constitutes approximately 3% of the university's total provision. The university draws foundation diploma students from all over the United Kingdom and they progress to a wide range of universities and specialist courses across the country. Approximately 20% of the further education students come from Cornwall; a further 20% come from the West of England and most of the remainder come from all over the United Kingdom. A few students come from outside the United Kingdom.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Janet Mercer HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the university's head of the department of art, as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent annual strategic review 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 online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and external partners; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the further education provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the further education provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

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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