

Plymouth College of Art

Specialist college

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| Inspection dates | | 30 April – 3 May 2013 |
| Overall effectiveness | This inspection: | Good-2 |
| | Previous inspection: | Good-2 |
| 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 majority of students and apprentices achieve well and make good progress. In 2011/12, success rates were exceptionally high on the foundation diploma in art and design and the intermediate-level art and design course. On most extended diploma courses students made at least the expected progress, with excellent progress on the fashion and textiles diploma where a very high proportion of students achieved merit and distinction grades.
- Standards of students' work are high. Teachers use their specialist subject knowledge and own creative practice well to enthuse and inspire students. Carefully designed and structured assignments help students to develop good levels of practical skills, and enhance their understanding of working in the creative industries.
- Students enjoy their studies at the college and benefit from very good support from their teachers and ready access to well-equipped studios and workshops. Students value the creative atmosphere and ethos of inclusion and respect evident within the college.
- Good advice and guidance on progression opportunities help most students to progress to related higher education courses or employment.
- Senior managers have a clear vision of how the college can continue to make a distinctive contribution to the local area, and to the creative industries, both regionally and nationally. Course teams manage the provision well. The overall self-assessment for college-based courses is detailed and comprehensive, and largely accurate in identifying key strengths and areas for further improvement.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- While teaching, learning and assessment are good overall, too little is outstanding. Lesson planning is not always explicit about what students are learning. On occasions, assessment feedback and targets are not sufficiently detailed to ensure students know how to improve.
- On a minority of extended diploma courses, students do not make as much progress as expected in light of their prior attainment.

- Results for the small number of students taking GCSE English and mathematics and AS-level courses were poor in 2011/12.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that teachers' planning focuses more explicitly on what students need to learn and how they will develop their knowledge and understanding through the planned activities
 - making better use of questioning in lessons to challenge all students and extend their knowledge, so that they make the best possible progress
 - sharing existing best practice in providing detailed assessment feedback and setting students more precise improvement targets, so that they all know what to do to improve their work and achieve higher grades.
- Implement fully the plans to ensure that students' functional skills in English and mathematics are developed fully on all courses, and that those re-taking GCSE examinations in these subjects succeed in improving on their previous grade.

Inspection judgements

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| Outcomes for learners | Good |
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- The majority of students successfully complete their qualifications, with outstanding achievement on the foundation diploma course and intermediate-level diploma in art and design in 2012. The relatively small number of students who took functional skills last year achieved very well. Students speak very positively of their experiences at the college and of the good progress they make in developing their practical and creative skills.
- Students' achievement on extended diploma programmes varies across the different specialisms but is good overall. All students who completed their courses in 2012 achieved their qualification. However, on four of the six extended diplomas offered, around one in every five students did not complete their course. Fashion and textiles students made excellent progress, and over 80% achieved merit or distinction grades, but on art and design, and creative media production courses, students made less progress than expected based on their prior attainment.
- In 2011/12, achievement was poor for the small number of students taking foundation-level art and design, GCSE English and mathematics and AS-level courses in a range of art and design subjects. Managers have identified key issues which contributed to these areas of underperformance, and actions taken have secured some improvements, notably in improved in-year retention rates on the foundation-level art course. However, almost one third of AS-level students will not complete their courses this year.
- In 2011/12, apprentices on advanced-level programmes achieved well, progressing swiftly through all elements of their frameworks. However, during 2011/12 too many intermediate-level apprentices left the college without completing their programme.
- Rates of progression to higher-level study or art and design-related employment are very good. Students value the impartial advice on career progression they receive from their course tutors, as well as input from undergraduate lecturers and students at the college.
- Students develop good creative design and making skills, and are confident in working with various materials and techniques, including traditional craft skills as well as digital media and technology. Frequent opportunities to work on live briefs, often set by external clients, enhance students' understanding of working in the creative industries. For example, graphic design

students gain confidence and experience through presenting their ideas to, and receiving constructive feedback on the viability of their design proposals from, external clients.

- The well-established, annual 'Design to Sell' project enables extended diploma students to develop relevant business and entrepreneurial skills, through exhibiting and selling their work in a commercial context. As well as implementing a thorough design process from inception to realising a final product, students learn about important practicalities such as copyright, costings and marketing.
- Students on all courses are strongly encouraged to explore personal areas of interest and to work increasingly independently. The skills they acquire in using specialist media and techniques help them determine the direction of their own creative practice. Students value the positive creative atmosphere where, as one student commented 'everyone speaks art' and staff treat them as adults and creative practitioners.
- Apprentices develop a sound understanding of professional practice that also benefits their employers. For example, one digital and media apprentice's short film about creative apprenticeships brought additional income to her employers when the National Apprenticeship Service bought it to use for recruiting new apprentices. Another apprentice, working at a small photographic business, has developed enough confidence and skill to take responsibility for running the studio, freeing her employer to develop marketing strategies and gain new clients.
- Students develop good evaluation skills so that they can accurately identify their own strengths and areas for development. Foundation diploma students routinely use excellent written journals to plan and review their work, justify choices made and identify future actions. Teachers monitor closely how well students follow through these actions to improve their work. Media students complete excellent illustrated 'blogs' that act as digital portfolios, reflective diaries and a thorough record of their progress over two years.
- The best sketchbooks are characterised by lively exploration of materials and techniques, and demonstrate clearly how students explore personal ideas and interests in depth. Students use first-hand and secondary visual research and other artists' work well to develop their thinking and creative practice.
- Weaker examples rely too much on secondary imagery, where images are sometimes just pasted in, with limited development or annotation to demonstrate their relevance to students' own work and ideas. On the intermediate-level art and design course inspectors noted that, where visual language and drawing skills were underdeveloped, students' work relied too much on copying second-hand imagery and so lacked personal interpretation and imagination.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers use their considerable experience and knowledge as current creative practitioners to inform the curriculum and enthuse students. Well-conceived and planned assignments engage students' interest in developing inventive and challenging ideas. Teachers explain activities clearly so that most students make good progress. However, while planning for assignments is thorough, and objectives are closely linked to the course unit criteria and learning outcomes, plans often focus too much on activities, rather than the key knowledge or learning that students need to acquire through completing these activities.
- In the most effective lessons, teachers give insightful, individual feedback to students that challenges their thinking and helps them realise their creative ambitions. They know the students well and are skilful in asking questions that elicit a student's intention, contextual understanding and command of appropriate technical skills, making suggestions that empower and motivate the student. However, some larger group sessions are not consistently well managed to ensure all students make rapid progress.
- Effective links between theory and practice help students apply their critical and contextual understanding to their own practice. Well-taught theory for machine printing enables apprentices to gain relevant and useful background information which broadens their

understanding of the workplace. In a few lessons, questioning techniques are underdeveloped and not sufficiently directed to specific students to check their understanding rigorously. As a result, some students are not sufficiently challenged and opportunities to extend learning and progress are missed.

- Students develop good critical thinking and writing skills. Helpful guidance on evaluative language and preparing essays enables them to plan written work well. Teachers check and annotate students' contextual studies work carefully, indicating to students how they can improve their spelling and punctuation. Most assignments develop students' research and enquiry skills well, resulting in a good standard of analytical annotation in many sketchbooks and journals, particularly on the foundation diploma course.
- Ready access to excellent technical resources and specialist equipment for working in printmaking, ceramics, fashion, textiles, metal and glass, as well as to extensive digital facilities, enables students to produce innovative and exciting art and design work. Rich and stimulating displays of work in studios, corridors and the college gallery inspire further learning. A strong commitment to developing drawing and visual language skills builds students' confidence and ability to develop and communicate complex and original ideas.
- Written feedback to students is mostly good; some is excellent, with the best examples explaining clearly the knowledge, skills or conceptual understanding the student must acquire and apply to improve their work and achieve higher grades. In a few instances inspectors noted feedback that was too general and not sufficiently related to specific tasks within the assignments or grading criteria, leaving students unclear about exactly what to do to improve. Workplace assessors' flexible approach to assessment helps most apprentices to make swift progress through their qualifications.
- Comprehensive pre-enrolment information and advice, and effective induction to their course, prepare students well to learn. They receive clear information on the wide range of support services the college offers. Tutors use regular individual tutorials well to ask searching questions to ascertain students' understanding, to set clear targets and follow these up in the next tutorial. In a few cases targets for improvement are too broad and generic to help students know exactly what and how they could improve, and it is then difficult for teachers and students to measure progress towards them.
- Design apprentices make very good use of 'blogs' to communicate and share work and ideas with tutors and other apprentices, which is particularly helpful when they spend a great deal of time off site. Graduate teaching assistants work very closely with teachers and the study support team to ensure that students receive well-focused and individual support in lessons.
- The promotion of equality and diversity within teaching and learning is very good. The college ethos encourages students to engage with a diverse range of influences and difference and teachers develop students' awareness of their own circumstances readily. Assignments routinely expect students to develop their work within broad historical and cultural contexts. For example, in one graphic design project, students illustrated an episode in the life of an iconic cultural personality to develop a narrative sequence for a comic novel. Students explored and illustrated issues relating to race, gender and social hierarchy as well as conventions of American and European sub-cultures.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The college has established a distinctive role in the city and in the wider arts community. Governors and senior managers provide strong strategic leadership and have engendered confidence in their plans among staff and partners across the city. Work is progressing well on regenerating the college's accommodation to provide greatly improved facilities on the city centre campus. Managers continue to develop advanced and higher-level provision and a good range of creative apprenticeship opportunities, as well as sponsoring and creating a new school based on a creative arts curriculum in the city. The college is committed to sustaining

programmes that develop students' craft skills and help local craftspeople and businesses to improve their skills as well as its full-time further and higher education programmes.

- Management of the college's provision is good. An improved performance management system is helping to raise standards of teaching and learning and students' achievement has improved over the last three years. However, some aspects of the college's work still need to improve further. While teaching and learning are good, some lessons still require improvement and not enough provide outstanding learning experiences. On a small number of courses, the proportion of students successfully completing their programme is too low. The monitoring of all aspects of the quality of apprenticeship provision is not covered fully by the quality assurance system.
- Governors bring a very rich mix of appropriate skills and experience to their strategic leadership role. They understand the work of the college and its role in the local community well. Together with senior managers, they have developed plans to improve arts provision for children and young people of all ages across the city and to support areas with high levels of social and economic deprivation. Governors monitor the college's financial and academic performance well and play a prominent role in the creation and monitoring of the self-assessment report. The college is in good financial health.
- Partnerships with business, schools and the local council and community organisations are wide ranging and productive. They provide good opportunities for students to develop their commercial skills and to introduce them to the requirements of the art and design industry. For example, the National Marine Aquarium helps to set assignments for students and then displays their work to the public on their website. A well-established programme of Saturday workshops for local school pupils is very effective in enriching their experiences of art, craft and design, and a significant proportion progresses to study art at higher levels.
- Courses are well designed and managed. Clear and well-planned progression routes enable students to progress to higher-level study and prepare them well for employment. Advertisements on the 'Job Wall' effectively help students to access job opportunities, relevant competitions and useful website links. Students acquire the necessary specialist and study skills to support their progression to higher education, although not all courses provide opportunities for the development of consistently high standards of English and mathematics.
- The college has developed a growing and successful apprenticeship programme to support the creative industries. Good partnerships with local small and medium enterprises enhance the apprentices' experience, due in part to the careful and thorough way the manager and other staff communicate with supervisors and employers. The range and variety of programmes offered are good and include less commonly offered apprenticeship programmes such as those in cultural heritage.
- The self-assessment report presents a largely accurate picture of the college, and sound quality assurance processes lead to improvements. The college listens and responds regularly to students' views as part of its improvement strategy. A good programme of professional development helps staff to improve their work and enhances their professional creative practice. While the overall college self-assessment report presents a clear analysis of strengths and areas for development in teaching and learning, course teams do not evaluate the quality of teaching and learning rigorously enough in course reviews. The observation of all aspects of the apprenticeship provision has not been fully implemented.
- The college engenders a welcoming, inclusive and respectful atmosphere. Teachers promote equality and diversity well in lessons and through assignment briefs. For example, the 'Others' project requires first-year students to design and then undertake experiences around the college that help them to understand aspects of disability such as visual impairment and restricted mobility. The college has made good progress in improving success rates for male students so that they match those of female students. Students receiving additional learning support achieve as well as their peers overall but, at course level, on a minority of courses, students not identified with additional support needs achieve less well than those receiving support.

- Managers and staff safeguard students effectively, meeting all statutory requirements and ensuring that staff and governors are appropriately trained. Good links with a wide range of local agencies ensure that child protection matters are dealt with effectively. Staff demonstrate a good understanding of the wide range of support available to keep students safe. Students feel safe and they adopt safe working practices in studios and workshops.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Plymouth College of Art

| 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 | Apprenticeships |
|--|----------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Overall effectiveness | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Outcomes for learners | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| The quality of teaching, learning and assessment | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| The effectiveness of leadership and management | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |

| Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Grade |
|--|--------------|
| Arts, media and publishing | 2 |

Provider details

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|--|--------------------------------------|
| Provider name : | Plymouth College of Art |
| Type of provider | Specialist further education college |
| Age range of learners | 16-18 |
| Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year | Full-time: 565 |
| | Part-time: 532 |
| Principal/CEO | Professor Andrew Brewerton |
| Date of previous inspection | November 2007 |
| Website address | www.plymouthart.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 | 0 | 0 | 30 | 7 | 450 | 78 | 0 | 0 |
| Part-time | 9 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age | Intermediate | | Advanced | | Higher | | | |
| | 16-18 | 19+ | 16-18 | 19+ | 16-18 | 19+ | | |
| | 12 | 4 | 18 | 10 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Number of learners aged 14-16 | 2 | | | | | | | |
| Number of community learners | 464 | | | | | | | |
| Number of employability learners | N/A | | | | | | | |
| Funding received from | Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency | | | | | | | |
| At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Petroc ■ Plymouth Learning Trust ■ City College Plymouth | | | | | | | |

Additional socio-economic information

Plymouth College of Art offers further and higher education courses in a range of art, design and media specialisms. Further education courses constitute around 40% of the college's total provision. Most students study on advanced-level extended diplomas and the foundation diploma in art and design. A small number of students take foundation- and intermediate-level art and design courses and a few study A-level subjects and GCSE English and mathematics. The college also has a growing creative apprenticeship programme. The Saturday Arts Club caters for 170 children and young people throughout the year, and the college offers a range of community learning programmes for adults. The college draws a significant proportion of its further education students from areas with relatively high levels of social and economic deprivation. Around two thirds of students are female and 5% come from minority ethnic heritage. Almost 45% of students are in receipt of additional learning support.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Janet Mercer HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the Associate Director (Quality) as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider'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. 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 provision and graded the sector subject area 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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