

Hereford College of Arts

Specialist college

Inspection dates		01–04 October 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement-3
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Outstanding-1

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Students achieve well, developing good practical and technical skills to support progression to higher levels of study or employment. Additional learning support is very effective in helping students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to achieve very well.
- Standards of students' art, design and performance work are high. The college provides a supportive and safe environment where students can take creative risks, learn from mistakes and pursue their personal interests in art, performance and music.
- Most teaching is good, with examples of outstanding practice by enthusiastic and committed teachers who know their students very well. Most set high expectations and successfully tailor work to stretch students, encouraging them to work beyond their 'comfort zone'. Frequent use of peer assessment and feedback develops a strong culture of critical reflection.
- Outstanding leadership and management have secured sustained improvement in the quality of provision and outcomes for students over the last three years. Self-assessment is rigorous and accurate in identifying strengths and areas requiring further development.
- Students benefit from excellent specialist resources and equipment, well-qualified specialist staff, and good practical workshop support from technical demonstrators.
- The college promotes equality and diversity very well. Students explore complex, challenging, social and cultural issues through assignments and students' practical and performance work.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Rates of students' progress are not yet consistently high on all courses. The proportion of students achieving high grades varies between different courses, and is below average on extended diplomas in art and design and music.
- Not all teachers are equally effective in ensuring that all students participate fully in lessons. A small minority of teachers have not yet developed confidence and skills in using questioning well to evaluate and extend students' knowledge and understanding. Occasionally, the pace of learning is too slow.
- Analysis of student progression does not provide comprehensive information on progression to employment. Destinations for students who take gap years are not always known.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of students achieving merit and distinction grades, particularly on extended diploma courses in art and design and music, by:
 - ensuring all teachers are skilled in providing sufficiently challenging activities and are adept in using probing questions to elicit thoughtful responses from students and to deepen their understanding of key topics
 - sharing the existing good practice in teaching and assessment across all teachers in the college to increase the proportion of outstanding teaching, learning and assessment.
- Collate a more comprehensive analysis of students' destinations, particularly in following up outcomes for those progressing to employment and those taking a gap year.
- Maintain the strength of focus on actions for quality improvement to embed the culture and staff collective responsibility for continuous quality improvement throughout the college.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Students' achievements have improved significantly over the last three years and success rates are now high and above national averages on all courses. Students make good progress compared to their prior attainment, although the proportion of students achieving or exceeding their target grades, or attaining merit and distinction grades varies between courses.
- There are no significant differences in the achievement of different groups of students, for example, by age, gender or ethnicity. Highly effective additional support ensures that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve at least as well as, or better than, their peers.
- Students develop their English and mathematics skills well through their arts courses. The proportion of students achieving functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics has improved considerably over the last three years and results are now good.
- Students attend well and clearly enjoy college, where they feel very well cared for by staff who know them well. This safe environment enables students to develop a highly individual approach to their work, take creative risks and develop their own visual language and performance practice.
- Students often make rapid progress in the early stages of their course, when they are exposed to new ways of working and thinking, and are encouraged to challenge any preconceptions they may hold about creative arts practice. Foundation diploma students noted that they quickly moved beyond their previous experience of answering questions set by teachers to defining and posing their own questions. Art and design students develop confidence and independence in exploring new materials and techniques, and varied approaches to drawing, image and ideas development. They are equally comfortable in using traditional and digital media, and combining different media to realise their ideas. They use drawing well as a means to investigate the visual world and explore and develop their thinking.
- Performing arts and music students acquire a good range of practical and technical skills. They work well together, taking on individual responsibilities for different aspects of a performance or production, while sharing collective responsibility for the whole project. They acquire a broad range of performance skills, including improvisation, engaging an audience through physical, vocal and emotional expression, and playing instruments as well as good technical skills, such as sound checking and recording, writing and producing music and theatre pieces.

- Students develop well-refined reflective and analytical skills, through questioning and reviewing their own work, and giving constructively critical feedback to their peers. They engage regularly in critical dialogue with tutors and other students and record their reflections through evaluative annotation in sketchbooks, journals and performance logs.
- The college prepares students well for progression to higher level study or employment. Progression rates to higher education (HE) have increased and are mostly good, but vary between courses. They are very high on the foundation diploma in art and design, where all students who applied to HE in 2013 secured their first choice institution. The college has begun to collect more information about students who progress to employment or take a gap year, although the analysis of these destinations is not as complete as for HE progression.
- Students acquire a good understanding of working in the creative industries. Art and design students organise an annual 'Affordable Art Fair' where they produce work to sell, and explore marketing, pricing and display of work. Performing arts students hone their professional skills through regular work with external companies and performance venues. This year, two college teams are competing in the Young Enterprise programme; art and design students are developing products for sale to a variety of different consumers and performing arts students are developing a service which they can sell to businesses, schools or other local organisations.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved since the last inspection and are now good, with examples of outstanding practice. These improvements have contributed to the high success rates across the college.
- A college-wide focus on the importance of teaching, learning and assessment and the introduction of a personal coaching programme for teachers has successfully invigorated teaching. Teachers work closely with a coach who provides skilful and sensitive support and challenge to extend teachers' current practice. As a result, teachers' confidence to reflect on, and question, the efficacy of their teaching strategies and methods has grown exponentially. The majority of teachers adapt their teaching regularly and critically assess its effectiveness in helping students to learn.
- Students are motivated to learn and aspire to achieve high standards because teachers convey a keen and infectious interest in their subject and challenge them to improve continuously. Teachers set high expectations for behaviour and instil professional practice. In one lesson, students reflected on their attitude to life and college and set themselves targets for improvement. At the start of the course performing arts students develop a strong work ethic through liaising with professionals and performing in public venues.
- Teachers provide good support for students and monitor their progress assiduously, using data well to build up a comprehensive picture of students' progress towards their targets. Teachers investigate any causes for concern and take appropriate actions for improvement. Students who need additional help make good progress through the wide range of individual support from teachers and support staff. They are encouraged to learn from their peers and helped to develop strategies to become more independent.
- Teachers use social media effectively to stimulate and extend students' understanding of their area of study. Students are encouraged to formulate their views and add their contribution to thought provoking subject blogs containing articles, video clips and examples of artists and performers' work.
- Many teachers use questioning techniques adeptly to promote curiosity, challenge ideas and check students' learning. However, in a minority of lessons teachers fail to engage all students or check progress adequately. In the weaker lessons, teachers start lessons too slowly with too little urgency to learn.

- The majority of teachers maintain their own creative, professional practice and perform or exhibit their work so that students benefit from the currency of their knowledge and expertise. Regular talks from other artists or performers, including former college students, and frequent use of live project briefs, also help to inform students about varied opportunities and the practicalities of working in the arts. For example, students undertook an assignment for the Hay Festival which met the organisers’ requirements while also increasing students’ understanding of the importance of adhering to tight deadlines and complying with budgetary constraints.
- Students receive regular, detailed feedback to improve their work before submitting it for final assessment. In performing arts, where swift feedback is often critical prior to a performance, students receive an emailed recording of teachers’ verbal feedback. Students learn very well from their peers. Teachers encourage them to share ideas and to give each other specific and supportive feedback to improve their work. In the best lessons, students develop good independent learning skills and set their own targets. However, in a minority of lessons, feedback is insufficiently detailed to advise students of their progress.
- Most teachers correct grammar and spelling routinely on students’ written work and encourage them to develop their English and mathematical skills through their assignments. In one GCSE English lesson, the teacher’s eloquence helped students to conjure up images and begin to appreciate the power that emotive, descriptive and factual language may have on the reader.
- Students receive good advice and guidance. At interview, teachers ensure students pursue the most appropriate course of study through careful assessment of their abilities and level of commitment to their subjects. They receive good information about potential careers and higher education opportunities.
- A culture of equality and inclusion is evident across the college and reflected in the vibrant artwork on display which subtly promotes different aspects of diversity and individuality. Assignments frequently cover topics relating to cultural diversity and current social issues. Students speak positively about the promotion of mutual respect and the range of activities in which they participate that make them feel valued and involved.

<p>Performing Arts</p> <p>16-19 study programmes 19+ Learning programmes</p>	<p>Good</p>
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- Good teaching, learning and assessment have led to sustained improvements in students’ achievement over three years. Success rates are now above national average and standards of students’ work are good. The proportion of students achieving merit and distinction grades is exceptionally high in performing arts, but a little below average in music.
- Teachers set high expectations and challenging targets for classroom and workshop activities. In dance and improvisation classes these are often both physically and mentally demanding. In many lessons teachers encourage students to be brave in extending their creativity and performance skills. The best sessions are well prepared, maintain a good pace of learning and include effective use of question and answer, demonstrations and audio and video recordings to give peer feedback. In a minority of cases, teachers fail to engage all students during question or review sessions. Where intermediate and advanced students are taught together, not all session planning takes sufficient account of their varying needs and starting points.
- Teachers provide good verbal feedback and support during classroom and workshop sessions. They praise good work and responses to questions that motivate students to extend their knowledge. Peer review and feedback is very effective. In an ensemble singing class, feedback from students highlighted the need for performers to convey enjoyment, even if they felt nervous or uncomfortable. In the majority of cases, feedback to students on assessed work is

constructive and enables them to identify how and where to make improvements even when a distinction has been awarded, for example, continuing to work on facial, vocal or physical expression. Students reflect carefully on feedback provided and identify personal targets for improvement.

- Initial assessment identifies effectively where students need to improve literacy and numeracy skills. Students understand the need to improve their English and mathematics skills in relation to achieving their aspirations. Teacher identify opportunities to integrate functional skills in vocational assignments regularly, although a few teachers are not yet confident in assessing and accrediting English and mathematics within students’ practical work. Opportunities to correct use of language, grammar and spelling are not consistently addressed in both oral and written work.
- Teachers make excellent use of their professional contacts and experience to develop project briefs in collaboration with external venues, practising artists and former students. These live projects provide students with relevant vocational experiences to develop professional standards and prepare them for progression to employment or HE.
- Staff and students make good use of resources on the college’s virtual learning environment to improve performance techniques. In one lesson, students used video clips effectively in presenting their research findings into aspects of the music industry. Students use technical vocabulary confidently.
- Good initial assessment and guidance ensures students are enrolled onto appropriate courses. Staff use interviews and auditions well to evaluate students’ abilities and commitment to the course. Short summer workshops and projects provide students with a clear indication of course requirements and expected levels of participation.
- Students receive timely and effective advice and guidance about their progress through regular tutorials and reviews. They appreciate the excellent guidance and support from teachers to apply for HE and prepare for interviews and auditions. Last year the proportion of music students progressing to HE increased markedly but was low for performing arts. The college does not yet have a complete picture of destinations for those students who took a gap year or gained employment.
- The promotion and exploration of equality and diversity is integrated effectively into assignments. Students explore a diverse range of cultures and traditions through World Music and drama productions tackle complex and controversial topics, such as homosexuality, sexual awakening, abortion and rape. Teachers promote important aspects of health and safety well, so that students adopt safe practices in studios and external venues.

<p>Visual Arts</p> <p>16-19 study programmes</p> <p>19+ Learning programmes</p>	<p>Good</p>
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- Teaching learning and assessment are good and contribute well to the skills students gain and their high success rates, which have improved significantly over the last three years. An increasing number of students attain merit or distinction grades. A high proportion of students’ progress from intermediate to advanced level within the college and an increasing proportion gain places at university, particularly from the foundation diploma art and design course. Attendance rates are high.
- Teachers have high expectations of learners and challenge, support and nurture them to produce high standards of work and make good progress. Students rapidly develop the skills required to work and learn independently, to experiment with digital and more conventional craft based media and to produce work reflecting their interests and personality.

- Students develop a very wide range of skills and gain experience of many creative techniques as a result of excellent access to specialist workshops and specialist teachers and technical demonstrators. Students develop these skills further though adopting a highly experimental approach to their work. Teachers encourage students to take creative risks, make mistakes, and use happy accidents as learning opportunities to find their personal style and voice. For example, in a textiles class one student was developing ideas in relation to the theme of urban decay and old age through mark making, based on declining heart beats, and building up varied textures in a weaving.
- In the best lessons teachers use their excellent skills, knowledge and experience as practitioners to plan effectively and teach lessons that motivate and challenge all students, following appropriate initial assessment of their needs. Teachers' expert use of sharply focused questions and sophisticated use of a range of assessment methods enables students to develop higher thinking skills, ideas and confidence. Teachers use interactive technologies well to enrich lessons. Students use mobile technologies creatively in lessons to record work and conduct research.
- In a minority of lessons teachers talk too much, particularly at the start of lessons, and spend too long recapping work. As a result, the pace becomes slow and students lose focus and momentum. Teachers occasionally do not give students enough time to formulate their answers to questions and provide too much information too soon. As a result teachers lose the opportunity to challenge students more effectively.
- Students produce high standards of work as a result of the timely, detailed and constructive feedback they receive. A combination of self, peer and teacher evaluation is highly effective in raising aspirations and supporting quality improvements. For example, in an advanced-level art and design lesson, two students conducted a highly animated and detailed discussion on the very different approaches and techniques used in their work. They made insightful comments on image creation, drawing techniques, the impact of manipulating images digitally, and how different colour choices had influenced the finished design. The teacher added to the discussion skilfully by making further suggestions for development to enable the students to improve on predicted grades.
- Teachers give students many opportunities to develop a wide vocabulary enabling them to communicate their ideas effectively, concisely and confidently. For instance, in some lessons students create spider diagrams to identify suitable vocabulary and in others teachers provide comprehensive vocabulary lists to help students select and use more sophisticated language in context. Students develop their written communication skills through well annotated sketchbooks.
- Students receive clear and appropriate advice and guidance at the start of their course to ensure that they are placed at the right level. Students appreciate the support they receive from staff when they apply to HE or preparing for employment.
- Teachers promote equality and diversity very well in lessons and tutorials. Students respect individual difference and have a good awareness of a range of cultural and social issues that they explore though a wide range of assignment work. In one art and design lesson, students were learning about Chinese art, philosophy and culture, discussing contrasting representations of eastern and western landscapes, as well as experimenting with mark making using traditional Chinese tools, inks and papers.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The senior management team and governors have established a very clear vision, strategies and values for the college which aim to deliver high quality provision, promote the role of the college in enhancing the cultural life of the region and to make Herefordshire a more attractive, lively and vibrant place to live. Over the past 18 months all staff have worked tirelessly to achieve this. They have been very successful in improving the quality of provision and students' achievement across the college significantly.
- Since the last inspection, managers have introduced a more rigorous performance management system and improved significantly the quality and impact of the lesson observation system. They have used these processes well with staff to set targets and identify priorities for development. Senior managers have also substantially improved the quality, range and impact of staff professional development. In particular they have focused successfully on raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment through a diverse array of training activities and interventions, most notably increasing the use of peer reviews, embedding a culture of sharing good practice more widely and through the introduction of a very successful coaching programme.
- The senior management team has also strengthened self-assessment and quality improvement processes successfully and embedded a strong culture of self-reflection, experimentation and ownership of continuous improvement amongst staff. The college's self-assessment report reflects accurately the balance of strengths and areas for improvement. It draws information from detailed course reviews, timely and reliable management data, extensive feedback from students and external stakeholders, as well as from accurate observations of teaching and learning. Staff use the findings from regular reviews well to continue updating and refining improvement strategies. All staff are clear about the priorities for both personal and departmental developments, and share the responsibility for initiatives to bring about improvements.
- Governors play an active role in establishing and reviewing the strategy, financial status and performance of the college. The broad range of expertise and the critical eye of the governing body help support the senior management team maintain the strategic focus and continue to raise standards across the college.
- The college has constructive links with local further education providers, schools, the local authority, commercial companies and performance and cultural venues. Staff foster strong working relationships with these organisations which benefit both students and the community. For example, staff arrange an extensive programme of additional events such as teacher forums, teacher development and taster days, as well as holiday and weekend courses for school pupils. Students have good opportunities to perform and exhibit artwork around the region which ensures that the college maintains a high profile in the community and makes a positive contribution to the local cultural landscape.
- Staff possess a very broad range of knowledge, skills and experience. A significant proportion of staff continue to work outside the college as practitioners in their respective fields, enabling them to bring a rich expertise into the college for the benefit of students.
- The range of courses available at the college appropriately targets those students interested in developing their skills in the arts and complements provision available elsewhere in the city. The courses enable students to make a smooth transition from school to college, and then on to higher education or employment. The curriculum design provides good opportunities for students to acquire additional English and mathematics skills and qualifications, and to gain suitable functional, enterprise and employability skills.
- Students have access to excellent specialist resources that enable them to develop a broad range of appropriate practical skills. The majority of accommodation is of a high standard and fit

for purpose; however a small minority of rooms lack natural daylight, suitable ventilation, or have poor acoustics. Staff manage these situations well to minimise any adverse impact on students. Extensive, striking and very high-quality displays of students' work are exhibited around the college. These displays, along with an excellent new reception and communal area for students, enhance significantly the overall quality of the college environment.

- The promotion of equality and diversity across the college is good. Managers actively review and report to governors on the performance of different groups of learners and take appropriate action where required to support any under-performing groups. Teachers create excellent opportunities to promote equalities and human rights, to challenge students' perceptions and stereotypes and raise their awareness of diversity issues through the design and delivery of innovative assignments and project briefs.
- The college meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding students. Students feel safe around the college. Staff actively promote safe working practices actively in workshops and classrooms. Students have good access to high quality additional learning support, and assistance with developing suitable study skills. They also have good access to counselling and guidance from external support agencies where necessary. All staff and governors receive suitable training and fulfil legislative requirements on health and safety and safeguarding.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Hereford College of Arts

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-19 study 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	1	1	1

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

Provider details

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: 347
	Part-time: 19
Principal/CEO	Richard Heatly
Date of previous inspection	17 May 2012
Website address	http://www.hca.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)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	0	0	25	2	283	37	N/A	N/A
Part-time	1	18	0	0	0	0	N/A	N/A
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Full-time	N/A							
Part-time	N/A							
Number of community learners	N/A							
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:	N/A							

Contextual information

Hereford College of Arts is a small specialist college offering further and higher education courses in art and design, performing arts and music. The largest further education courses are the extended diplomas in art and design, performing arts and music and the foundation diploma in art and design. The college also offers foundation- and intermediate-level courses in art and design and performing arts, and a range of entry-level personal and social development qualifications and skills for independent living for students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The college offers a wide range of arts activities for children and young people through weekend and holiday classes. In 2013 the vast majority of the further education students were of White British heritage and almost 60% of students were female. Almost 40% of students were 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 assistant principal 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 and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and stakeholders; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the 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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