De Montfort University

Higher education institution

Inspection dates		11–14 November 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		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Students achieve well and thoroughly enjoy the course. Standards of practical and written work are mostly high and the vast majority of students progress to higher education.

- Teachers work well together to plan stimulating and challenging projects. Intensive individual tutorial support enables students to develop individualised ways of working find a personal voice and refine their creative practice.

- Students benefit from a variety of trips to local and national museums and galleries and opportunities for study visits abroad, which provide rich visual sources for primary research.

- Students have access to high standard, well-equipped specialist workshop facilities enabling them to work with a wide range of materials and techniques, gaining skills in using industry standard equipment.

- The programme management board provides an ambitious vision for the foundation course, raising its profile in the university and local area.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- A minority of students do not make sufficiently rapid progress in improving observation drawing skills and developing good critical and reflective evaluation in the early stages of the course.

- Group teaching sessions are not consistently good. Teachers' planning does not focus sufficiently on learning and they do not use sufficiently varied teaching strategies to meet students' different needs and abilities, or to check their understanding. Not all teachers give consistently detailed feedback to identify accurately what students need to improve further.

- Managers have not evaluated fully the quality of teaching and learning to enable them to provide a well-targeted programme of staff professional development. Quality assurance process are not clearly enough defined, or implemented rigorously enough to secure improvements.

- The programme management board does not scrutinise the impact of actions for improvement in sufficient depth to hold managers to account for the quality of provision.

- The university does not fulfil legislative requirements in relation to the safeguarding of students under the age of 18 and vulnerable adults.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure teachers provide better support to students who join the course with weaker observational drawing skills or limited experience of critically evaluating their work to improve these skills quickly, so that they make more rapid progress in their work.

- Make sure teachers plan group sessions with a clear focus on learning and use an appropriate range of teaching methods and questioning to check that students have understood key principles and concepts.

- Ensure teachers provide clearer, critical evaluation of weaker aspects in written assessment feedback in order to provide students with specific areas to develop further.

- Implement rigorous and comprehensive quality improvement systems, making better use of data, including trends over time, to report more effectively on what is working well or less well. Identify precisely all key areas for development in self-assessment reports and quality improvement plans and ensure that these focus more sharply on the impact of management actions.

- Monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment regularly and robustly. Ensure that all staff who observe teaching and learning use clearly identified criteria consistently to make accurate and objective judgments about the quality of lessons and learning, with a strong focus on the progress students make. Ensure areas identified for improvement from observations trigger targeted individual and/or group staff training and that managers evaluate this training fully to determine its effectiveness.

- Strengthen the programme management board's review of the foundation course's performance by ensuring they scrutinise the accuracy of course data and review fully the impact of managers' actions, particularly those taken to improve teaching, learning and assessment.

- Ensure the university meets legislative requirements for safeguarding of students under the age of 18 and vulnerable adults. Ensure all support staff working in regulated activity undergo disclosure and barring scheme checks to ensure their suitability for working with young people.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good

- Students achieve well on the foundation diploma, and most make good progress in developing their skills and exploring new ways of working. In 2013, success rates increased on the previous year and were high, and around two-thirds of students achieved merit or distinction grades. Few significant differences exist in the achievement of different groups of students. Those receiving additional learning support achieved very well. Students from areas of social or economic disadvantage achieve a little less well than their peers.

- Students clearly enjoy their studies and value how the course enables them to explore a wide range of different art and design disciplines and helps them to make a well-informed choice of specialism for higher-level study. The majority of students have a strong commitment to the course and work diligently and independently. Progression to higher education (HE) is good and students are successful in gaining places on their chosen courses, often at prestigious and competitive universities.

- Students' work is mostly very good, especially by the final stage of the course, when they have developed highly individual creative responses. From the start of the course, students learn to work with unfamiliar media and techniques and develop new practical and technical skills. Early

projects frequently challenge students to think and work in new ways, and to rethink radically how they make art.

- Most students cope well with the more ambitious and challenging activities of observational drawing, a key element of the early part of the course. For instance, the better examples of life drawing show how students learn to tackle working on a larger scale, explore varied media and produce lively and expressive drawings. However, an increasing proportion of students join the course with limited experience of, or weak skills in, observational drawing, and not all make rapid enough progress in the early stages of the course. The drawing skills of a small minority of students are underdeveloped; these students do not apply new techniques learned in subsequent sketchbook work, and lack skills and confidence in basic measurement and proportion in life drawing.

- The majority of students are particularly effective at conducting extensive visual and written research, drawing on a wide range of primary and secondary sources. This results in lively sketchbooks, brimming with exploratory work using a wide variety of media and techniques. Weaker examples of sketchbooks do not demonstrate clearly enough the sequential development of ideas and the impact of contextual research on students' own practice.

- Students develop good reflective, research and analytical skills over the duration of the course, as seen in examples of their critical appraisal essays, which they complete during the final major project. However, in the initial stages of the course, the quality of critical analysis and evaluation varies considerably. Some students use their reflective journals very well to evaluate the more or less successful aspects of their work, articulating clearly how their research informs their thinking and future planning. Weaker examples of reflective journals record information and plan work, but contain little reflective evaluation.

- The quality of research and analysis of other artists' work is variable. The better contextual studies books demonstrate good research and critical analysis of chosen practitioners, and thoughtful personal visual and written responses. However, in too many examples, the written research is superficial and limited to brief biographical information. Some students focus too much on decorating pages and too little on in-depth research and analysis of the work, and its wider context.

- Students value the good range of enrichment activities available, particularly visits to local and national museums and galleries, and study visits abroad, which provide rich sources of first-hand study to instigate and support research and practical work. Students can also attend the lectures by visiting speakers for higher-education students, although staff do not record their attendance at these events, or evaluate the impact on students.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good

- Good teaching, learning and support enable students to achieve well, and produce highly creative final project work. Teachers and support staff work well as a team and they have developed a stimulating and well-planned programme of activities for students. Teachers' thoughtful assignment briefs help students investigate and experiment with a range of concepts and ideas. Assignments are often playful, designed to stimulate enquiry and take students on unusual routes, providing insight into the process of making artefacts and exploring ideas.

- Teachers' practical help, encouragement and close supervision, together with insightful feedback about professional practice, make studio sessions interesting and engaging. Students have good access to technical workshops that help them gain a wide range of techniques for experimentation and realising finished pieces of art, craft and design work.

- Students with additional or specific learning needs receive good support, which helps them achieve well. University support staff maintain effective links with the course team to ensure

they have a sound understanding of the course requirements and the stresses and pressures faced by students.

- Good pre-course information ensures that students know what to expect. Portfolio reviews help teachers identify where students might need additional help before they start the course. However, staff do not always complete this information comprehensively or routinely share with all their colleagues.

- The university has no formal arrangements to carry out initial assessment of literacy, particularly for students whose first language is not English. Arrangements to ensure students access English language classes are not systematic enough. Teachers provide good support for students when writing their personal statements for applying to higher education, and their final major project plans, but do not routinely develop students' literacy skills throughout the course.

- Academic tutorials clearly help students resolve dilemmas about which direction to take in their work. Tutors extend their students' knowledge and broaden horizons with reference to different approaches, suggestions about ways to take work forward and how other artists' work can inform their practice. As a result, students understand their own work well enough to enable them to make a well-considered choice of specialist pathway and produce sophisticated and well-researched work for the final major project.

- In studio sessions, teachers do not focus sharply enough on what students will learn. Learning objectives are not always clear with schemes of work stating what students will do, not what they will learn. Although design briefs stimulate enquiry and motivate students, teachers do not always set high enough expectations or check students' depth of understanding. Consequently, not all students make as much progress in studio sessions as they could.

- In the more formal teaching sessions, and group plenaries teachers provide too few opportunities for students to participate in discussion or review of learning. In such sessions, teachers use too narrow a range of teaching methods, do not pitch the content at the right level or check that students understand the terminology they are using.

- Assessment feedback is encouraging and provides students with adequate information about their progress and standards of work. However, a minority of written feedback is too generalised and targets for improvement are imprecise and lack specific detail. The recent introduction of a self-assessment form for students prior to their formal assessment points provides a useful opportunity for students to reflect on strengths and areas for development in their work.

- Learning materials and written guides to help learning outside the studio vary in quality. Teachers have produced some good e-learning guides for digital arts sessions, using colour theory themes to help students remember basic principles. Although students comment favourably about the virtual learning environment, it is primarily a repository for information rather than a resource for materials to aid independent learning.

- Despite one or two project briefs that teachers have specifically designed to help students explore social or cultural diversity, and a few individual examples where students have explored these themes in their own work, the wider promotion of equality and diversity through teaching and assignments is underdeveloped.

The effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement

- Although managers have strengthened aspects of quality assurance over the last two years, processes are not sufficiently robust to bring about consistent improvement. While much teaching, learning and assessment are good, a persistent minority remains less effective. Managers are aware they need to strengthen quality assurance further to ensure that learning is of a consistently high standard and that all staff have equally high expectations of students.

- Members of the programme management board provide an ambitious vision for the course. Board members attend foundation art and design exhibitions and prize giving ceremonies, which has raised the profile and work of the course within the university. The board monitors the work of the course regularly, but does not provide enough scrutiny of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the impact of management actions to improve provision.

- The day-to-day management of the foundation course is mostly good. The course team have managed the interim relocation of the foundation course to the Mill Street studios exceptionally well and with minimal disruption to students. The course leader and the course team have structured the foundation course well and they review its effectiveness frequently. For example, staff recognised the need to strengthen students' drawing and introduced an extended drawing project into the first few weeks of the programme. While newly introduced, this is beginning to support students' understanding of basic drawing techniques.

- Resources and accommodation is good overall. Students have access to well-equipped, specialist workshops, enabling them to develop good technical skills, and enrich the work they produce within their portfolios. In the main studios, students' individual workspaces are too cramped. This restricts their ability to stand back and evaluate their work or be able to draw effectively from still life arrangements.

- Self-assessment is well established. Managers' use of data has improved although data are not always accurate or analysed sufficiently. For example, managers do not review how well learners from each specialist pathway achieve. As a result, they are unable to report and review all key trends in performance. While the self-assessment report is largely evaluative, a few aspects are too descriptive. In several cases the report overstates strengths and does not define areas for improvement sharply enough. Staff collate and use students' views well to support improvement.

- Managers and leaders do not review the quality of teaching, learning and assessment comprehensively or objectively enough. Consequently, this impedes how well managers plan staff development and limits the sharing of good practice. Managers have recognised this and have substantial plans to introduce a systematic process to monitor teaching and learning later this term.

- Leaders review quality improvement plans frequently, but areas for development, timescales and targets are not always precise enough. Consequently, members of the programme management board are not able to ask sufficiently probing questions of the course team to assure themselves that all areas identified for development are improving quickly and securely.

- The university has a clear process for the management of staff performance. All staff receive an annual appraisal that outlines how they can improve their work. However, as managers do not evaluate fully the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment, appraisal objectives are not specific enough on how to improve teaching, or how this will contribute to improving students' outcomes.

- The university promotes a wide range of events to raise students' awareness of diversity, such as Black history season and marking international days for disabled people and action against homophobia. However, the extent to which the course team use these and other approaches to promote equality and diversity through teaching and assignments on the foundation course is uneven. Nevertheless, staff reinforce a culture of respect and students from very diverse backgrounds work harmoniously together. Achievement gaps between most different groups of students for 2012/13 were minimal, but managers do not report clearly on whether gaps in achievement are widening or closing over time.

- Very experienced technical demonstrators provide a thorough health and safety induction in each specialist workshop so that students learn to use equipment and techniques safely. The number of accidents on the course is very low. All students receive training in using ladders prior to their end of year exhibition to ensure they can work safely when hanging their work. Risk assessments for workshops are thorough, but managers have been slow to update them where circumstances change, such as relocation to other buildings.

- Managers have very recently updated the university's safeguarding policy to provide clearer protocols for staff. However, the university does not meet its legislative responsibilities in relation to safeguarding students under the age of 18. While all course staff have undergone Disclosure and Barring Scheme (DBS) checks to ensure their suitability to work with young people, several university learning support staff have not. Once brought to their attention, managers provided inspectors with written confirmation of their plans to undertake the necessary staff checks without delay.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

De Montfort University			
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	3	3	3

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

Provider details

Type of provider	Higher education institution
Age range of learners	16-18
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 143
	Part-time: 20
Vice Chancellor	Dominic Shellard
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Website address	www.dmu.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	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	106	31	N/A	N/A
Part-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	20	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

The foundation art and design course is located in the university's School of Art, within the Faculty of Art, Design and Humanities. A programme management board oversees the work of the course and is chaired by the head of the School of Art. Over the summer of 2013, the course relocated to temporary accommodation in the Mill Street studios, in preparation for moving to the new arts building due to open in 2015. Two thirds of students are female, and almost 30% of students are from minority ethnic heritage, with Indian students being largest minority group. Around 15% of students come from areas of social or economic disadvantage.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Janet Mercer HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the programme leader for the diploma in foundation art and design as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the university's most recent self-assessment report 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 to gather the views of learners; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection focused solely on the university's foundation diploma in art and design.

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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