

Oxford Brookes University

Higher education institution

Inspection dates		26–29 November 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good - 2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
Outcomes for learners		Outstanding - 1
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:

- Students make excellent progress, produce very high standards of work, and a significant proportion achieve merit and distinction grades.
- Students successfully progress to highly regarded higher education courses and institutions.
- Students receive extensive and insightful individual feedback from teachers.
- Students have very good access to study skills support and advice.
- Teachers produce well-structured, exciting and challenging project briefs.
- Teachers set high expectations for students and foster a strong culture of independent thinking.
- The experienced, skilled and knowledgeable staff team provides a high quality of course and curriculum management.
- All teachers have good access to a broad range of valuable, high-quality staff development and team-building opportunities.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- The quality of group lessons is not yet consistently high enough.
- On occasions, teachers are not checking learning thoroughly; they are making insufficient use of probing questioning techniques to involve students fully and to test their developing understanding.
- Managers do not make full use of lesson observations as a means of continuing to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the standard of formal and large group teaching by:
 - ensuring teachers' planning focuses more on what students need to learn rather than what activities they need to complete
 - ensuring all sessions are suitably well paced, interesting and challenging for all students
 - improving the checking of learning, in particular through the use of more effective and probing questioning techniques
 - improving the consistency of quality and detail of written feedback to students.
- Ensure that lesson observations add value to the continuous improvement of teaching, learning and assessment.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Outstanding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students achieve exceptionally well on the foundation course in art and design. They already have high levels of academic achievement when they join the course. Managers set ambitious targets to ensure that all students make the best possible progress. Success rates are consistently very high. In 2013, almost half the students achieved distinction grades. The proportion of students achieving high grades continues to improve from previous years and is well above the high national average for this course. ▪ No significant differences in the achievement or progression of different groups of students exist. Those with specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, receive very good individual support, which enables them to achieve well. The course prepares students very well for progression to specialist higher education courses. The great majority of students gain places in their chosen specialism, often in prestigious and highly competitive universities. ▪ The quality of students' art and design work is outstanding. Students' final portfolios demonstrate clearly how well the students have absorbed the course ethos of in-depth visual, contextual research and extensive exploration of a wide range of materials and techniques and independent study to realise well-executed and highly individual project work. Students noted that the early projects help them to shift their focus rapidly away from the finished image or artefact to developing multiple ideas and responses to a given brief. Students recognise and value the emphasis on the design and development process over merely producing finished pieces of work. ▪ Teachers place a strong focus on developing drawing from the start of the course. This helps equip students with essential skills to record and develop their ideas sequentially. Students draw for a wide variety of purposes and with varied media and techniques. As well as developing good observational drawing skills, students use drawing very well to research and develop their ideas, and devise design solutions. ▪ For example, students in the three-dimensional studies pathway develop good technical drawing skills to develop and present their design ideas through carefully composed presentation sheets. Fashion and textiles students combine drawing creatively with photographs, knitted and woven samples and fabric and yarn swatches to create highly professional mood boards. Students in all disciplines explore the possibilities of drawing with non-conventional media, such as with stitch and fabric, combining mixed media and drawing with digital media. They use sketchbooks and reflective journals well to investigate, annotate and evaluate their individual creative practice. ▪ Students' written work is of a high standard. The students produce high quality statements of intent for the final major project and evaluate the outcomes thoroughly. They research critical 	

and contextual essays well. They write fluently, illustrate their work well and clearly reference their bibliographies. Where appropriate, students develop the required mathematics skills to support their design and making, for example in three-dimensional design, architectural project work, pattern cutting and garment construction.

- Tutors make very good use of their own creative and industrial experience to help students acquire a sound understanding of the requirements of higher education and the creative industries. For example, they place a strong focus on how well students communicate their ideas visually, making explicit connections to professional practice through working to briefs and presenting ideas to clients.
- Weekly lectures from visiting commercial artists or designers, foundation course alumni and representatives from specialist higher education courses provide students with useful insights into artists' and designers' work. Regular tutorial sessions and group critiques ensure that students develop confidence in presenting and discussing their work, using appropriate technical and critical language, which prepares them well for higher education interviews or working with future clients.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Good teaching and learning, combined with very insightful assessment, ensure students make excellent progress and produce work of a high standard. Teachers plan the curriculum thoughtfully, ensuring students have a broad and very varied programme of study.
- Students are highly motivated, keen and work productively without supervision. Teachers monitor attendance closely and students respond well to the increasing emphasis and expectation of good attendance. Students have 24-hour access to studios and are highly conscientious, frequently working in their designated workspaces outside timetabled sessions, and often late at night or over the weekend.
- Students benefit from a wide range of specialist facilities, equipment and resources. Staff teach students high quality technical skills using a wide range of media, which students are actively encouraged to use when carrying out projects.
- Teaching across the school is at its best during one-to-one and small group lessons. In these sessions, teachers provide extensive insightful verbal feedback to individual students, helping them to improve their work. In the best sessions, teachers' thoughtful advice and careful questions prompt students to think for themselves and find highly creative solutions.
- The planning of teaching in more formal group lessons is less thorough. It does not motivate and challenge all students sufficiently and, on occasions, the pace is slow. Teachers' use of questions to enhance learning in more formal group settings is weak; the teachers often ask rhetorical questions and do not target or direct questions well enough to keep all students engaged.
- Teachers carry out valuable weekly progress reviews to monitor developments in students' work. They set high expectations in the standard of presentation and make good use of students' own reflections on their strengths and areas for development. As a result, students make swift progress, work with increasing autonomy, and learn how to take ideas to the next stage in sophisticated and novel ways.
- Teachers are well qualified and use their professional experience to ensure students understand the demands of progression to university. Teachers organise useful lectures about the university application procedure and former students present their work and information about their degree-level experience. Students receive very good one-to-one support to help them use specialist digital software to produce their e-portfolios for university. Teachers also provide excellent support for writing personal statements. Consequently, many students gain places at competitive universities on highly regarded courses.
- Teachers design project briefs well; they are detailed and show clearly what students should do. The projects regularly contain clear references to industry and employment skills. They also

often contain topics that explore and promote a broader understanding of equality and diversity themes. Teachers regularly plan briefs to include quirky and inventive ideas for students to explore in individual and personal ways. For example, teachers set a good project designed to help students get the most out of the well-organised annual trip abroad. Teachers tailor both the project and pre-trip information very well, making good use of the first-hand visual research from the trip to support students' specialist development when the students return to their studios.

- The quality of most verbal feedback students receive is very good and formative assessment contributes significantly to how quickly students make progress. However, teachers' written comments in parts of the summative assessments of project work are often insufficiently detailed.
- Students receive very good support for study skills. A specialist teacher provides regular tutorials where students benefit from specific advice and clear strategies to plan their work and write effectively. Specialist help, for example for dyslexic students, is particularly effective and students gain confidence and suitable skills.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The senior management team and governors have established a clear strategy, mission and values for the university. These demonstrate a strong commitment to providing high quality provision, promoting social responsibility, nurturing intellectual creativity and making a positive contribution to society. The foundation studies programme in art and design fully meets these aspirations.
- Students benefit significantly from studying in a higher education environment. They have good access to high quality accommodation and resources, and extensive opportunities to work with professional artists and academics. Staff set high expectations for students, in particular for the development of their practical and creative knowledge and skills, as well as actively promoting a culture of independent thinking. These factors contribute significantly to enabling students to achieve such high standards.
- The governing body possesses an appropriate range of knowledge and insight into the further education-level provision. Governors play a significant part in supporting, testing, challenging and approving the work of the senior management team.
- Managers maintain strong and constructive links with local and regional schools. These help ensure that potential applicants have a good insight into the content and value of the course and the progression and vocational opportunities that it provides. Students also benefit from strengthening links with local arts and exhibition spaces. These provide valuable opportunities for students to exhibit work, to undertake work experience and to gain greater insight into the arts industry.
- The university has thorough performance review and development procedures in place for staff. Managers use the scheme well to review the progress of individuals and to identify priorities for staff development, as well as promoting suitable research and scholarly activity.
- All staff have very good professional development opportunities, including access to post-graduate study, industry-specific conference and training activities, teaching qualifications and Masters degree-level programmes. Managers also actively support and encourage staff to apply for fellowship programmes and professorships within the university. Managers create increasingly good opportunities for teachers to share knowledge, insight and good practice across the team, and to strengthen the shared expertise.
- Managers use the self-assessment and quality assurance processes very well to help drive improvements. The self-assessment report provides accurate and insightful judgements on the quality of the provision. The quality improvement plan is succinct and identifies suitable priorities. Managers have thorough audit processes in place to track progress against previous action plans and ensure staff fully implement quality improvement initiatives. Managers are

starting to make increasingly effective use of timely, accurate and reliable data and student perception information to help inform quality improvement and strategic planning. Whilst observations of teaching and learning are taking place, managers are not utilising the scheme sufficiently to identify and underpin the ongoing quality improvement priorities for teaching, learning and assessment.

- The quality of curriculum and course management is very good. All staff are actively involved in the annual design, planning and delivery of a very high quality, creative and innovative curriculum. At all times, teachers maintain a very strong focus on raising students' awareness of the vocational nature of the knowledge and skills they are acquiring. There is a strong team ethos and keen focus on delegated authority and leadership across the organisation.
- The promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion is a high-profile feature of the university's core values. All teachers actively promote an inclusive culture. Managers have analysed recruitment data and identified the relatively low number of students from Black and minority ethnic heritage and from disadvantaged backgrounds. Using targeted recruitment initiatives, they have made some progress in improving recruitment in these areas. Academic staff find good opportunities in their teaching to promote equalities and human rights, to challenge students' perceptions and stereotypes, and to raise their awareness of diversity issues.
- The university meets its requirements for safeguarding students. Staff actively promote safe working practices in workshops and studios and have a conscientious and thorough approach to assessing risk, for example prior to international field trips. Students have very good access to additional learning support, particularly for those with dyslexia. They also have ready access to professional counselling and guidance where necessary.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Oxford Brookes 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	1	1	1
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

Type of provider	Higher education institution							
Age range of learners	18+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 84							
	Part-time: 0							
Principal/CEO	Professor Janet Beer, Vice Chancellor							
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected							
Website address	www.brookes.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	-	-	-	-	79	13	-	-
Part-time	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency and Education Funding Agency							

Contextual information

Oxford Brookes University provides a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses and a selection of foundation courses, including one further education course, the foundation diploma in art and design, which was in scope for this inspection. All students are 18 or over when they join the course, having usually completed A-level study or equivalent. The university recruits around 40% of its students to this course from the local area; the remaining 60% come from across the country, with a small number of international students.

Oxfordshire is a prosperous county. Rates of employment in Oxfordshire, and the total proportion of people with higher-level qualifications, are above the national average and above the average for the South East region. In Oxford around 12% of the population are of minority ethnic heritage.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Peter Nelson HMI
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Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the Head of School of Arts as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider'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 and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners; 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 funded by the Skills Funding Agency and Education Funding Agency.

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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