

# University of Sunderland

## Higher education institution

|  |                         |                          |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Inspection dates</b>                      |                         | 4–7 March 2014           |
| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>                 | <b>This inspection:</b> | <b>Outstanding 1</b>     |
|  | Previous inspection:    | Not previously inspected |
| Outcomes for learners                        |                         | Outstanding 1            |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment |                         | Outstanding 1            |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management   |                         | Outstanding 1            |

## Summary of key findings for learners

### This provider is outstanding because:

- Students achieve exceptionally well and most make very good progress, with a large majority achieving high grades.
- Progression rates to specialist degree courses are excellent.
- The course develops students as independent practitioners exceptionally well.
- Students have particularly good opportunities to work alongside higher education students and practising artists to learn about working in the creative industries.
- Students develop excellent practical and technical skills with a strong focus on an inter-disciplinary approach.
- Highly effective teaching and rigorous assessment help students improve and develop their own individual talents.
- All staff are well qualified and have specific subject specialist and research interests that enhance the students' learning and progression.
- A culture of high expectation and challenge motivates students to enjoy their course and achieve well.
- Students benefit hugely from the location of the provision in the National Glass Centre and the extensive, high-quality range of subject specialist resources.
- Staff undertake extensive professional development that ensures teachers share good ideas, reflect on their practice and as part of the appraisal process agree development targets.
- The university promotes health, safety and well-being very well that ensures students feel safe in workshops and around the campus.

## Full report

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Review the quality improvement procedures to ensure that the high standards are sustained by:
  - ensuring a consistent approach to performance management of all staff
  - speeding up the process of formal validation of quality reviews by senior managers
  - introducing formal peer mentoring and lesson observation as a means of continuing to review the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

### Inspection judgements

| Outcomes for learners   | Outstanding |
|---|-------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The overwhelming majority of students on the foundation diploma in art and design course complete and achieve their qualification extremely successfully. The proportion of students, who gain either a merit or distinction at the end of their course, across all specialist art and design pathways, is high. Those in receipt of additional learning support achieve very well. Students from areas of social or economic disadvantage also achieve as well as their peers.</li> <li>▪ While managers do not routinely analyse data for different groups, data scrutinised during inspection showed all groups of students achieve equally well over time, including in the achievement of high grades.</li> <li>▪ 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 their next step. The majority of students demonstrate a strong commitment to the course and work diligently and independently. Students develop good personal, social and employability skills through the wide range of opportunities to work alongside practising artists. Students develop their English and academic writing skills through thought-provoking assignments and projects. Attendance is good.</li> <li>▪ Students develop excellent practical and technical skills in a wide range of art and design disciplines. Well-presented portfolios demonstrate very clear sequential development of ideas and imagery and reflect the course ethos of applying research to practice. A strong focus on an inter-disciplinary approach at all stages of the course encourages students to explore and combine different media and processes and make intriguing connections between apparently disparate ideas and elements.</li> <li>▪ The university's specialism in glass and the course's location within the National Glass Centre provides good opportunities for all students to explore this medium as an additional specialist option. Students frequently incorporate digital and lens-based work into their practice.</li> <li>▪ Drawing is a key component of the course and strong examples of life drawing demonstrate students' ability to work on a large scale, using varied media and mark-making confidently to explore and describe form and the muscularity of the figure. Students are adept in varying style and approach to suit different purposes and intentions. For example, one student's series of drawings of an animal skull ranged from very light and delicate mark-making, with a sensitive touch, barely suggesting form, volume and inter-relationships of space to creating a much more solid and sculptural interpretation, with a heavily textured and built-up surface.</li> <li>▪ The majority of students produce reflective, critical, and well-considered written responses, in a variety of contexts and for different purposes and audiences. This includes reflective evaluation of their own work in sketchbooks, journals and blogs, as well as more formal and analytical writing, for example, exhibition reviews, critical and contextual studies and writing personal statements about their work. For example, one student's blog explored the idea of Breughel as a 16th century Banksy, by thoughtful comparisons of their use of wit and satire to comment on contemporary social and political issues.</li> </ul> |             |

- By the end of the foundation course, students' technical expertise and their ability to think abstractly and reflectively mean they are prepared exceptionally well for higher education. Almost all of them progress to undergraduate courses; more than half at the University of Sunderland and a significant proportion to other prestigious or competitive universities.
- Extremely knowledgeable technicians provide carefully planned workshop inductions to, for example, animation, ceramics and glass. Students develop an understanding of the need to work safely by teaching staff and technicians promoting safe working practices in the use of specialist equipment.
- Students have excellent access to outstanding resources, modern, specialist technology, and traditional craft equipment that enhance their technical awareness and skill development significantly. Students value the excellent 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 also attend lectures by visiting speakers and work alongside resident artists and degree-level students. Students gain valuable work experience by organising and curating exhibitions of their teachers and more recently, their own work.

### The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching, learning, and assessment are of a consistently high standard. This ensures that students are equally challenged and supported to achieve the best they can; this is reflected in the high quality of their work, and high levels of achievement and progression to undergraduate study.
- From the outset, the course instils an ethos of developing students as individual and independent practitioners, inculcating a strong sense of self-awareness about their work, the impact of decisions they make and how they might present their work to different audiences. Teachers have very high expectations of students and encourage them to challenge themselves to explore new ways of working, tackle complex subject matter, and devise personal and innovative solutions to problems set.
- The teaching staff make excellent use of their own specialist subject knowledge, current research and their own creative practice to create a stimulating environment where students can explore new ideas and media, take creative risks, and begin to develop highly individual interests and personal work. Students gain valuable insights into a wide range of different contemporary practices as well as the practicalities of presenting work in different contexts, for example, through curating exhibitions, participating in arts events, and creating printed editions of their work.
- The very well-designed course ensures that students develop strong practical and technical skills, and quickly extend their conceptual thinking about the nature of art, how it is made, its meaning and impact on the viewer. Students develop the necessary practical and conceptual skills to make informed choices of specialist pathways through projects set during the exploratory stage that vary in content and approach.
- As students begin to explore specialist options, open-ended projects provide ample scope for them to combine complex concepts through an inter-disciplinary approach to research, materials, and methods. For example, in the 'Game Play' project students explore roles, uniforms, and codes of conduct in society, alongside different approaches to game playing to develop a highly personalised interpretation of their subject matter.
- Assessment is excellent, with frequent one-to-one reviews and group critiques, self- and peer-assessment, which help students to exchange ideas and extend their thinking. Teachers provide sharply focused, constructive criticism within an overall culture of support and encouragement. Verbal and written feedback are detailed and specifically targeted to help each student to improve and extend their work. They include clear actions for students, and teachers follow up the impact of this at the next review.

- A thorough interview process ensures that teachers know students' different starting points and set appropriately challenging targets. The university provides a two-week course in the summer, open to all who have gained a place, but specifically targeted for those students who need additional skills development to cope well with the demands of the foundation course. This provides an excellent induction to the university, builds students' subject skills and confidence, and enables them to make the transition from school to the university environment very well.
- Students benefit from excellent facilities and specialist equipment to support their practical and academic work. Extensive library and specialist reference collections significantly enhance students' research and project development. The virtual learning environment supports and extends learning well, including wide-ranging subject specific resources as well as materials and guidance to support their academic writing skills.
- The university identifies any students with specific learning needs early in the course and provides prompt support, for example, for students with dyslexia. Tutors monitor students' progress closely through regular subject and personal tutorials. Comprehensive initial advice and guidance ensure that students are very well informed about the requirements and demands of their course. Tutors are very knowledgeable about higher education progression routes and specialist courses and take considerable care to guide students to the most appropriate course. Students receive very good support with the application process and preparation for interview and can access a wide range of university support services such as counselling, financial support, careers advice and equipment loan.
- Teachers ensure that students continue to develop their English and mathematical skills to support their practical and written work. Most students already have GCSE English and mathematics when they join the course. The university provides study opportunities for English and mathematics for those students who do not enter the course with an intermediate-level qualification. Teachers provide clear guidance on developing appropriate writing skills to meet different needs and purposes. Students articulate their ideas well, verbally and through written work. They use complex language and subject-specific terminology confidently. Rigorous marking of written work helps students to correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation, and to develop more sophisticated use of language and critical analysis. Practical projects provide appropriate opportunities to practise and develop relevant mathematical skills, for example, spatial measurements and understanding ratios and proportions.
- Course materials support the development of students' understanding of issues related to equality and diversity well. Course handbooks make explicit reference to equality and diversity policies and practice. Project briefs provide appropriate opportunities to explore themes of cultural and social diversity, although these are not always identified explicitly. Teachers encourage students to explore work from different cultures and a diverse range of practitioners. Students develop personal work which explores varied social and cultural themes, including feminism and representation of women, different cultural attitudes, and rituals around death and the ethical implications of surveillance in contemporary society.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Outstanding

- The art foundation course closely aligns to the university's strategic priorities, set by governors and senior managers, to provide good support to students, valuable learning opportunities and a high level of engagement with the local community. Tutors show a real passion for their subject and are keen to encourage students to achieve high standards. This strategic focus and commitment from staff help students to develop their knowledge, skills and experience, and progress successfully and confidently, having achieved very well on their course.
- Students benefit substantially from the location of the arts provision within the National Glass Centre – an outstanding facility with a high profile reputation and status as a research centre for glass and ceramics. The centre also houses a number of practising artists, hosts influential arts exhibitions, and accommodates commercial arts outlets. Students really value the opportunity of sharing studio space and working alongside undergraduate and post-graduate students,

research academics and practitioners. This setting ensures students are immersed in a highly creative, cultural and stimulating environment throughout their course.

- Tutors possess a substantial range of relevant expertise as arts practitioners, academics and teachers; they use this to assure consistently high-quality, innovative provision for students. Managers utilise the performance review of most staff well to monitor their performance and to identify areas for development. However, managers have not yet implemented the review process with all tutors.
- The university has a very strong culture of promoting continuous professional development of its staff, for example, by encouraging them to undertake appropriate research, training, scholarly activity or to gain fellowship status. All permanent staff have an annual review to discuss their performance and set targets for the following year. All these initiatives add further to the overall breadth of expertise among the course team and help enhance the students' learning experience.
- Managers have suitable processes in place for reviewing the quality of provision and identifying key areas for development. They use the information from the external examiner's report well, along with the perspectives of tutors and the student representatives, to help inform this process and identify suitable strategies for further improvement. Managers particularly value the students' contributions and actively promote their enthusiastic involvement in quality improvement processes. Senior managers review the quality of provision through an annual monitoring and review board. However, the process to appraise and validate the quality review and action plans is comparatively slow.
- Tutors regularly have the opportunity of working together to plan and deliver learning sessions and assignments. This helps them share ideas and promotes professional dialogue and reflective practices. Managers have, however, been slow to introduce systematic evaluation of the quality of teaching through a more formal peer mentoring or lesson observation process to underpin continuous development of teaching staff.
- Managers maintain very strong links with the local community. In particular, they work closely with local schools and other regional arts networks, for example, by providing Saturday art clubs for local school pupils, training, and access to facilities to support local schoolteachers in developing their skills and experience. Students benefit from the opportunity of developing their interpersonal skills and sharing their enthusiasm for art by working as volunteers on the Saturday art club.
- Curriculum management is very good. Managers have clear and effective lines of communication with students, the staff team and with senior colleagues. Managers maintain careful oversight and control of the work of the tutors. They coordinate the planning and delivery of teaching extremely well, ensuring that students are able to gain maximum benefit from the very high level of staff expertise, the excellent facilities and accommodation and the specialist resources.
- The curriculum comprehensively meets students' needs. The course structure enables students to explore and experiment with a broad range of ideas and techniques. Tutors provide suitable challenge, guidance, and support. They encourage students to develop their research skills and an imaginative, reflective and self-critical approach. Tutors also help students develop their numeracy and literacy skills where appropriate, and promote an understanding of careers and employment opportunities within the arts sector.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is central to the priorities and values of the university. Students are treated as individuals and all achieve well. All staff actively promote a culture of equality and maintain a zero tolerance approach to any form of harassment or bullying. Students have very good access to a broad range of support, for example, counselling services; they also receive very good advice, guidance and support on a range of topics including health and well-being, higher education, careers, employability and finance.
- All students indicate they feel safe around the university campus. Tutors and technicians maintain a strong focus on promoting health and safety around the workshops. They carry out thorough and frequent risk assessments and health and safety audits, and take appropriate action where necessary. The provider meets its statutory duties regarding safeguarding.

Students also benefit from a close link with the local police service that provides a regular police presence around the campus and advises students on strategies to stay safe around the city.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

### University of Sunderland

|  |         |                           |                           |                        |              |                         |                 |               |                    |
|--|---------|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------------|
| <p>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</p> <p>1: Outstanding<br/>                 2: Good<br/>                 3: Requires improvement<br/>                 4: Inadequate</p> | Overall | 14-16 part-time provision | 14-16 full-time provision | 16-19 study programmes | Traineeships | 19+ Learning programmes | Apprenticeships | Employability | Community learning |
| Overall effectiveness  | 1       | NA                        | NA                        | 1                      | NA           | NA                      | NA              | NA            | NA                 |
| Outcomes for learners  | 1       | NA                        | NA                        | 1                      | NA           | NA                      | NA              | NA            | NA                 |
| The quality of teaching, learning and assessment   | 1       | NA                        | NA                        | 1                      | NA           | NA                      | NA              | NA            | NA                 |
| The effectiveness of leadership and management   | 1       | NA                        | NA                        | 1                      | NA           | NA                      | NA              | NA            | NA                 |

| Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Grade |
|---|-------|
| Visual Arts   | 1     |

## Provider details

|   |                              |     |                 |     |                |     |                          |     |
|---|------------------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|----------------|-----|--------------------------|-----|
| <b>Type of provider</b>   | Higher education institution |     |                 |     |                |     |                          |     |
| <b>Age range of learners</b>  | 16+                          |     |                 |     |                |     |                          |     |
| <b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>                  | Full-time: 37                |     |                 |     |                |     |                          |     |
|   | Part-time: 0                 |     |                 |     |                |     |                          |     |
| <b>Vice Chancellor</b>  | Professor Peter Fidler       |     |                 |     |                |     |                          |     |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>  | n/a                          |     |                 |     |                |     |                          |     |
| <b>Website address</b>  | www.sunderland.ac.uk         |     |                 |     |                |     |                          |     |
| <b>Provider information at the time of the inspection</b>                                       |                              |     |                 |     |                |     |                          |     |
| <b>Main course or learning programme level</b>  | <b>Level 1 or below</b>      |     | <b>Level 2</b>  |     | <b>Level 3</b> |     | <b>Level 4 and above</b> |     |
| <b>Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)</b>                                     | 16-18                        | 19+ | 16-18           | 19+ | 16-18          | 19+ | 16-18                    | 19+ |
| <b>Full-time</b>  | NA                           | NA  | NA              | NA  | NA             | NA  | 37                       | NA  |
| <b>Part-time</b>  | NA                           | NA  | NA              | NA  | NA             | NA  | NA                       | NA  |
| <b>Number of traineeships</b>   | 16-19                        |     | 19+             |     | Total          |     |                          |     |
|   | NA                           |     | NA              |     | NA             |     |                          |     |
| <b>Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age</b>                                    | <b>Intermediate</b>          |     | <b>Advanced</b> |     | <b>Higher</b>  |     |                          |     |
|   | 16-18                        | 19+ | 16-18           | 19+ | 16-18          | 19+ |                          |     |
|   | NA                           | NA  | NA              | NA  | NA             | NA  |                          |     |
| <b>Number of learners aged 14-16</b>  | NA                           |     |                 |     |                |     |                          |     |
| <b>Full-time</b>  | NA                           |     |                 |     |                |     |                          |     |
| <b>Part-time</b>  | NA                           |     |                 |     |                |     |                          |     |
| <b>Number of community learners</b>   | NA                           |     |                 |     |                |     |                          |     |
| <b>Number of employability learners</b>   | NA                           |     |                 |     |                |     |                          |     |
| <b>Funding received from</b>  | Education Funding Agency     |     |                 |     |                |     |                          |     |
| <b>At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:</b> | None                         |     |                 |     |                |     |                          |     |



## Contextual information

The University of Sunderland is situated on the north east coast of England and has around 17,000 students. It provides an extensive range of undergraduate and post-graduate courses and one further education course, the foundation diploma in art and design. This is located within the university's faculty of art, design, and media which currently has around 2,000 students. The course is located in specialist accommodation at the National Glass Centre adjacent to the St Peter's campus. Foundation students opt for one of seven specialisms; fine art, fashion, visual communication, animation, lens-based media, glass, and ceramics. All students on the foundation art and diploma course are aged 18 or over and most have completed A-level or equivalent qualifications. They all study full time and the large majority are from the Sunderland area, with a very small number from minority ethnic groups. Around one third of students come from areas of social or economic disadvantage. Unemployment in Sunderland is well above the national average. The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, is above the national average. The proportion achieving three or more A levels or equivalent is equal to the national average.

## Information about this inspection

**Lead inspector**

Andrea Machell HMI

Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) assisted by the associate dean as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the university's most recent annual monitoring report and development plan. 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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