

Coventry University

Higher education institution

Inspection dates		25–28 March 2014
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		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Students make good progress throughout the course, achieve well and the vast majority progress successfully to higher education.
- The standard of practical and written work is high. Through exploring a wide range of disciplines, media and techniques, students develop a personal visual language and a strong sense of their own creative practice and identity.
- Most teaching is very good, with particularly effective one-to-one studio support and regular tutorial reviews, which help students to question and evaluate their own work and progress, and make informed choices about further development.
- Teachers have high expectations of students and challenge them to explore less familiar media and ways of working, to make creative use of unintended outcomes and to learn from mistakes.
- Students value the high level of support from teachers, support and technical staff, and have access to excellent specialist workshops, equipment and library resources to support their studies.
- The course team, fully supported by university senior managers, works collaboratively to devise and implement a well-structured course which enables students to thrive in a positive, creative environment.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Too many students have not completed their studies in the last few years and a small minority failed to complete final assessments.
- In group sessions, not all teachers ensure that all students participate fully, for example, by contributing to group critiques of work, or check what learning has taken place.
- The university's arrangements for monitoring the quality of students' learning and progress are not fully effective in securing further improvement and sharing best practice.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Maintain current improvements in the numbers of students completing the course successfully to raise success to at least in line with the high national average for this course.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment further by:
 - developing the lesson observation scheme to evaluate students' learning and progress more effectively
 - ensuring that teachers routinely check learning and make sure that all students participate fully in lessons.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- The vast majority of students make good progress and achieve well on the foundation diploma in art and design. Although overall success rates were well below the national average for this course in 2011, they have increased steadily each year since and are now approaching the high national average for similar courses. The course team have taken effective actions to increase the proportion of students completing the course, and in-year retention rates at inspection are very high. Students clearly enjoy the course, reflected in their high levels of attendance and individual commitment. The proportion of students gaining high grades also increased substantially last year, with over one-third achieving distinction grades.
- The university conducts a thorough analysis of participation, performance and progression of different groups of students. There are no significant differences in performance by gender, ethnicity, disability or specialist pathway. Students receiving additional learning support, for example, those with dyslexia, achieve as least as well as their peers.
- Students make good, and often rapid, progress from their various starting points. Most join the college from A-level courses, and those interviewed by inspectors commented on how well the foundation course helps to them to adjust to new ideas and new ways of working. They particularly value the individual and artistic freedom that the course gives them to explore personal areas of interest, within a well-structured course and a very supportive environment. One student described how she had developed personally and creatively in a culture of 'ordered chaos'.
- The majority of students produce practical and written work of a high standard. Well-planned assignments enable students to explore a wide range of media, techniques and process, with a strong focus on expanding their ideas and responses to drawing during the induction stage. Exploratory stage projects encourage students to experiment with varied media and processes, and challenge how they think about making art, its purpose and its interpretation. Students learn to develop deeper reading and research skills, which helps them to define and shape personal areas of interest and informs the development of their individual creative practice.
- Consequently, students produce very individual work, with a strong experimental and often playful approach to subject matter and materials. For example, in a three-dimensional design project, students devised a wide range of exploratory and speculative drawing and design ideas in response to the theme 'What if?', covering ideas ranging from practical human situations to highly improbable, fantastical scenarios. Fashion students develop strongly sculptural interpretations of clothing through manipulating single sheets of material, for example, paper, plastic, fabric and card, around the mannequin exploring the human form and how different materials work with it.

- Students draw confidently on a wide range of cultural and contextual reference materials, often beyond the usual confines of their specialist discipline. For example, a fashion student drew widely on the work of contemporary architects and architectural structures, and her own photographs of decay and deterioration in ruined buildings to develop a design collection and a photographic shoot to present the final work.
- The university partnership with a nearby further education college provides appropriate opportunities for the very small numbers of students who may need to gain a qualification in either English or mathematics. Students continue to develop English and mathematical skills in a vocationally relevant context through the course, exemplified in students' ability to articulate often complex ideas, when talking about their work and in their critical and contextual studies work. Students continue to develop relevant mathematical skills through practical drawing, design and making.
- The vast majority of students completing the foundation course progress successfully to higher education, across a range of specialist courses and often to institutions where recruitment for places is highly competitive. The university's undergraduate art and design courses offer all foundation students' taster days in October, where students participate in practical projects in different specialist disciplines and work directly with undergraduate students and staff. Tasters also provide a useful introduction to specialist studio and workshop facilities and equipment, which enables students to develop specialist skills and extend their own practice. From an early stage in the course, they are aware of the options for progression to higher education and the types of employment in the creative industries.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good as reflected in the high standards of work and good achievement. Teachers are very well qualified and students benefit from their expertise, current professional practice and research work. Teachers have high expectations of students and assignments are interesting and conceptually challenging. Teachers' excellent subject knowledge enables them to identify relevant artists and references for students to develop further their own ideas. Teachers insist that students take responsibility for the final ownership of their work and ensure that they recognise differing points of view and are receptive to alternative perspectives and opinions.
- Tasks are demanding and teachers design them so that students must research and develop ideas rigorously. Students learn to work within tight time constraints. For example, they present proposals for their final major project for the consideration of their peers and teachers in a specified number of minutes, knowing they have to stop the moment they overrun. Subsequent teacher assessment is very focused and penetrating. However, where a few students are reluctant to contribute to group discussion, teachers are not always sufficiently rigorous in ensuring that all students are involved fully in group critiques or checking what learning has taken place in these sessions. The sharing of good teaching practice does not always take place across the team.
- Students benefit from the artistic freedom they are allowed and the freedom to make their own decisions. Teachers encourage students to experiment and not to allow failure to deter them. In presenting ideas for major projects, students demonstrate good control of their material and share confidently their intentions with their peers and teachers. Their use and integration of digital media is skilful and imaginative. Students demonstrate good study skills and record thoughts and ideas well in sketchbooks.
- Excellent partnerships with local community groups provide students with the opportunity to experience the reality of commercial practice, and evaluate the impact of artwork within their community. For example, a local housing association has commissioned students to design appropriate sculptures for permanent installation to enhance residents' living environment.

Students submit their designs to a panel of judges with the winning designs attracting a 20K total budget for the project.

- Teachers assess expertly strengths and areas for improvement in students' performance and provide detailed and helpful feedback. Teachers also use imaginative and inventive strategies for feedback. For example, the 'feedback in five' approach in contextual studies provides accurate and succinct feedback in five short bullet points, along with images and colour to inform students of their progress and what they need to do to improve.
- The learning environment, accommodation, resources and level of maintenance are excellent. Students appreciate their access to the facilities normally reserved for degree students. Similarly, they value being able to participate in the international visits alongside higher education students.
- Teachers help students to continue to develop relevant English and mathematical skills very well. A challenging contextual studies assignment requires students to construct two opposing arguments within a given theme, each of which must be presented in exactly 128 words, within a square of particular dimensions, using a specified font and size of type. This makes students prioritise key messages and choose their words very carefully to convey their meaning within the limitations of this format. Inspectors agreed with students and teachers how this improves the quality and impact of annotation in sketchbooks and journals as a result of learning how to encapsulate meaning in a concise and economical form. However, teachers do not always correct spelling mistakes that detract from the overall quality of students' work.
- Students develop and use appropriate mathematical skills, for example, using measurement and calculation in 3D design and making projects, in garment design and pattern cutting in fashion and understanding correct ratios when mixing chemicals in working with resin and plastics. In one project, students had to calculate accurately use of ratios, angles and dimensions for a major design project involving flight. They routinely need to identify material requirements and costs for personal and external projects.
- The comprehensive course handbook provides detailed guidance about expectations, learning and assessment. Students know exactly what teachers expect of them. They receive good support from course tutors and specialist, appropriately qualified staff. Regular academic and pastoral tutorials provide useful feedback to inform their progress.
- Staff promote equality and diversity well through assignments and students explore related issues in their own work. For example, one student explored ways of representing visually mental health issues such as fragility and unbalance. Another student explored the potentially contradictory notions of commitment, confinement and coercion in marriage within different cultural traditions. Students are respectful and sensitive to each other and value the diversity brought to the course by international students.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers demonstrate a strong commitment to developing and improving further the foundation art and design course. Day-to-day operational management of the foundation programme is highly effective and senior managers in the school of art and design have successfully developed a productive and beneficial culture of high expectations and aspirations. The staff team work collaboratively and the foundation course is valued as a feeder course to undergraduate level study as part of the university's strategy to widen participation.
- Teaching staff are very well qualified and all are experienced, active practitioners in their specialist disciplines. Staff, including hourly paid lecturers and skills instructors, benefit from a supportive annual appraisal of their performance. Managers monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment as part of a university wide observation process. However, this is not used to its full potential to identify strengths and areas for improvement to share best practice

or to target training and development activity. The current process focuses too much on evaluating the performance of the teacher rather than the quality of students' learning and progress.

- Managers monitor performance comprehensively at course, school and university level. Regular course team meetings review the progress students are making and provide teaching staff with regular opportunities to discuss assessments, project briefs and students' feedback. The school of art and design board monitors the performance of the foundation course through a course specific annual quality monitoring report.
- This report provides a comprehensive overview of course performance, a very detailed and accurate analysis of performance data, by specialist pathway, gender, ethnicity and disability and an evaluative commentary on student recruitment, withdrawals and destinations. The report includes careful consideration of the minor issues raised by the external examiner and the views of students. The report is not as useful in identifying the key strengths and areas for improvement relating to the quality of learning and the progress students are making.
- The well-planned and carefully structured course enables students to experience, explore and develop skills in a broad variety of disciplines. Learning resources are excellent and include highly specialist facilities such as digital fabric printers, automotive design modelling workshops and an impressive array of both traditional and modern equipment that enhances students learning experiences. The university supports students to develop their English skills through the university's centre for academic writing, their mathematical skills through the network for excellence in mathematics and statistics support, and their personal, social and employability skills through a wide range of student support services that promote employability and progression.
- Staff promote equality and diversity well through art and design and project briefs, and more widely throughout the university. The course recruits from a wide and diverse student population, including a growing number of international students. Staff and students have productive working relationships and the learning environment is harmonious. Teaching staff encourage students to consider aspects of equality and diversity when completing course work and to explore themes to express their views, to challenge perceptions or to promote understanding.
- Staff and students work safely in workshops and studios and the university has comprehensive health and safety policies and procedures in place. Technical support staff conduct thorough risk assessments for workshops and ensure that students wear appropriate personal protective equipment in hazardous areas. Students value the university's wide range of pastoral support services. Security arrangements to control access to buildings are good and students report that they feel very safe.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Coventry University

<p>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</p> <p>1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate</p>	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	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	16-18							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	67							
Principal/CEO	John Latham Vice-chancellor							
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected							
Website address	www.coventry.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+
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	52	15	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 traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	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:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ N/A 							

Contextual information

Coventry University is situated in the centre of Coventry, and caters for over 22,000 students, including a significant body of international students. The university offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and one further education course, the foundation diploma in art and design. This course is located within the School of Art and Design in the Graham Sutherland building. Almost all further education students are aged 18 or over when they join the course, having previously completed A-level or other advanced-level courses. All study full time, and almost two thirds are female. Over 70% of students are White British, with the largest groups of minority ethnic students coming from British Asian and Black Afro-Caribbean groups. Around three-quarters come from the Midlands, with a small number coming from other parts of the UK, Europe and overseas.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Janet Mercer HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the head of department of design & visual arts, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent annual quality monitoring 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, telephone calls 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 graded 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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