

Kingston University

Higher education institution

Inspection dates		20–23 January 2015
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Outstanding-1
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
Outcomes for students		Outstanding-1
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Outstanding-1
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Outstanding-1

Summary of key findings for students

This provider is outstanding because:

- students achieve exceptionally well and make very good progress; a large majority achieve merit and distinction grades and almost all progress to a specialist degree course
- standards of practical art and design work are very high; students develop as independent practitioners and produce exciting and ambitious work across all specialist pathways
- students are highly motivated, enjoy all aspects of the course and work very well together
- the course ethos of 'thinking through making' and a strong multi-disciplinary approach ensure that students develop high level technical and craft skills
- highly qualified and committed teachers provide consistently strong teaching and assessment, which challenge students to achieve their individual potential and to refine their ideas and develop well-considered design solutions
- innovative and inspiring teaching methods stretch and challenge students' thinking and enable students to achieve high standards of research and practical work
- teachers integrate English and mathematics skills well into a range of projects.
- students benefit from working alongside higher education students and practicing artists to learn about working in the creative industries
- excellent specialist learning resources, facilities and equipment enable students to research in depth and to realise their ideas using a wide range of materials and processes
- skilful management and development of the curriculum ensure that the course meets individual students' needs and interests and supports high levels of progression to higher education
- students explore wide-ranging and challenging themes on social equality, cultural diversity and the impact of arts on society through their work

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Share the good practice in teaching, learning and assessment evident on the foundation course within the course team and across the wider faculty to benefit all teachers and students.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for students	Outstanding
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- Kingston University offers one full-time further education course. Around 150 students are enrolled on the one-year foundation diploma in art and design. All students are aged over 18 and have already completed an A-level study programme or equivalent advanced-level course. The university also works in partnership with the Sorrel Foundation to provide Saturday art classes in the local community.
- Students achieve exceptionally well, with a very high proportion of students achieving merit or distinction grades. Almost all students are successful in gaining a place on an art or design related degree course, often in highly prestigious and competitive universities and specialist arts institutions. Although managers do not routinely analyse achievement by different groups of students, data reviewed on inspection show no discernible differences in performance or progression to higher-level study.
- The acquisition of high levels of practical and technical skills underpins all assignment work; through the early diagnostic stage of the course, students learn to work with varied materials in two and three dimensions, which they apply confidently in a variety of different design and production contexts. Well-presented portfolios and sketchbooks demonstrate clear evidence of the strong sequential development of ideas and imagery and reflect the course ethos of 'thinking through making'.
- Drawing is a core skill in each of the specialist pathways, and students make frequent use of innovative and experimental approaches to drawing, to record observations, explore and develop ideas and solve design problems. Students create intriguing installations, design inventive and functional products, build fascinating models and use film and photography effectively, both to research and record work and as a means of making artwork.
- Collaborative projects, along with frequent group critiques of work, enable students to develop good team working skills and they learn to give and receive constructive feedback. Students are highly motivated and thoroughly enjoy the foundation course, and articulate clearly how much their practical work and thinking skills have developed since they joined the course. Students know where they have made most progress and which areas of their practice they need to develop further. They are ambitious about their plans for future work and progression to higher education.
- All students have gained a GCSE or equivalent qualification in English and mathematics prior to joining the course. They continue to use and develop relevant skills in their practical and academic work. For example, students on the 3D design pathway learn to work with scale drawings and models and are adept in calculating areas, volumes and quantifying material requirements and costs. Students continue to refine their oral and written communication skills through regular presentations about their work to staff and peers, reflecting on and annotating their work in sketchbooks and journals. They use specialist terminology and technical language confidently.
- Students learn about creative enterprise through working with visiting practitioners, including writers, designers, choreographers and architects, and working on externally set briefs, local and

national design competitions and community projects. Recent examples include designing elements of hospital waiting rooms, curating and installing exhibitions and running workshops at a public gallery. Students secure high-profile internships at prestigious arts organisations, including the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Institute for Contemporary Arts. The extensive programme of seminars and visiting lecturers, many of whom are former foundation students, helps current students to develop a sound knowledge of what to expect in higher education and employment in the arts.

- Students learn about social and environmental responsibility through considering waste in consumer packaging, recycling and ecology; a textiles student used contemporary research on bio-couture to 'grow' fabric from vegetable sources to use in her design work. Others set up a high-profile pop-up shop, developing their economic skills through selling their work; a foundation student won the university-wide competition to re-design a mobile food van, now used on campus.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding, leading to very high success rates for all students. Teachers devise challenging and creative exploratory tasks that extend students' thinking and making skills very well; consequently, teaching promotes students' knowledge of the development of different art contexts, art history and theory extremely well.
- Students are highly motivated and enjoy learning through research and problem solving and understand the importance of testing their ideas through the making process. Students work with sustained focus and concentration; they work independently, managing their own time and workload in line with teachers' high expectations of them.
- Teachers' challenging project briefs, often with innovative and unusual starting points, encourage students to take creative risks in their work; the interdisciplinary nature of the course enables students to combine different media and approaches confidently and creatively and to work beyond the usual confines of a specialist pathway. Students draw on a wide range of historical, contemporary and cultural references that extend well beyond the art and design world to encompass areas such as literature, geography, history, sociology and ecology.
- Teachers provide very good support in studios to help students reflect on and refine their ideas within tightly specified deadlines. Regular progress reviews and group critiques ensure that students learn to talk about their work with clarity and confidence and are able to articulate reasons for the choices they make.
- Students receive very clear guidance on how to present their work well and prepare portfolios for interview. They tailor the style of presentation well to complement their work. Folios and sketchbooks often demonstrate detailed annotation, very clear sequential development and recording of ideas from the initial concept, through various test stages to the realisation of the final product. In a small minority of cases, research lacks depth and is not well organised; a few students do not analyse their work in sufficient depth.
- Teachers' thorough assessment and regular feedback ensure that students understand their progress clearly and know how to develop their work further. Teachers monitor progress well, with clear records of completion of work, grades awarded and some excellent examples of evaluative feedback. Students assess their own work and that of their peers regularly, developing a strong culture of reflective and critical practice. Where portfolio reviews identify gaps or weaker aspects in students' work, teachers run additional workshops to help students improve.
- Teachers develop students' understanding of working in the arts very well, for example by discussing the working day of an illustrator, art director, graphic designer and different tasks within visual merchandising, in direct connection with students' project briefs. Teachers bring a wealth of current creative experience and expertise in areas such as communication design, illustration, animation, curation, three-dimensional design, fine art and fashion; several are commissioned artists with work in high-profile collections such as the Design Museum and the

Crafts Council. As a result, students develop a good understanding of contemporary art, design and craft and how current practitioners work in the arts.

- Teachers integrate English and mathematics skills well into a range of projects. Students learn relevant mathematics skills in fashion, three-dimensional and graphic design programmes, for example, through pattern making and cutting, grid measurements and scale calculations. Mathematics skills are embedded in various production processes; for example, in a surface cladding design brief, students calculated plaster mixing proportions and block pattern dimensions. Students used geometry and algebra in developing design for a global habitat design brief. Students continue to develop their English and communication skills through regular presentations, group critiques and discussions, writing personal statements about their work and for progression to higher education and through research using recommended texts and online resources. Teachers mark and correct draft written work carefully so that students can improve the final version.
- Tutors provide clear, impartial advice on progression to higher education and tailor this well to each student's individual aspirations and choice of specialist course. They prepare students well for interviews, through folio reviews and asking students challenging questions about their work. However, too few students attend a good range of university open days before they apply. Teachers also provide carefully tailored advice for the very small number of students who do not choose to progress to higher education at the end of the course.
- Students explore sensitive, and sometimes contentious, subject matter from a personal perspective. Students' individual projects focus on diverse themes such as gender identity, ethnicity, ecology, politics and social views on sexual orientation. Students use their art work as a vehicle to explore and express their views on different religious, social or political systems. One fine art student created a site-specific performance piece at Speaker's Corner to explore political and legal ideas about public space and identity. Students' work demonstrates well-considered responses to diverse themes; for example, creative protest and dissent within the current political climate; the impact of government policy on the arts and arts education; free speech; fashion ethics and the impact of art on different groups in society.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The course director leads a team of highly committed, experienced and well-qualified teachers and support staff very well. Each of the four specialist pathways has a lead tutor and together they form a cohesive and effective course management team. The location of the studios in one building creates a strong course identity and enables very good communication between teachers and their students. The team works very closely together in planning assignments, teaching and assessment, which results in a very good experience for students.
- The university has a clear rationale for offering the foundation course and managers value its role in supporting progression to higher education courses at the university and further afield. The foundation programme will form the basis of a new school in the faculty in the next academic year. The multi-disciplinary approaches used in the foundation diploma are well regarded and managers are keen to spread these across other areas of the faculty.
- Faculty managers recognise the need to continue to build and support the small course team; currently the course director is the only full-time member of staff, with a significant management role in coordinating a team of part-time and visiting lecturers, as well making a substantial contribution to the teaching programme. Managers have rightly identified the importance of reviewing the balance of full- and part-time staff, and administrative support, to maintain the current high quality of provision in the light of the proposed growth in numbers.
- Plans to refurbish and extend the studios for the foundation programme by September 2015 are well advanced. Currently, the accommodation is only just large enough to cope with the numbers of foundation students; studios are lively but often cluttered, with little space to make larger-scale work or store work in progress and students' personal belongings.

- Easy access to a wide range of specialist workshop facilities and excellent support from experienced technicians enable students to work with a very wide range of materials in the production of their artefacts. These activities are central to ensuring that the course meets the faculty mission of 'thinking through making'. The learning resources centre provides a wide range of specialist art and design resources, including books, periodicals and online resources to support breadth and depth of research.
- Performance management is effective in securing improvement, as evidenced in the fine art pathway last year. Staff appraisal is effective; however, the extensive documentation that supports this process is not always fully completed.
- Although the course is not formally included in the university's quality assurance procedures, the course director monitors closely the quality of teaching and learning and students' progress. The team reviews the overall quality of the course each year, identifying any areas for further development or improvement. Students complete an end of course evaluation and teachers adapt their teaching programmes to respond to students' comments. However, the university does not gather and analyse systematically students' feedback on the quality of teaching and assessment or resources. Managers recognise that there is scope to strengthen arrangements for course review and analysing student feedback, within a context appropriate for the size of the course.
- Staff are very well qualified and experienced in their specialist subjects and have regular opportunities to participate in relevant continuing professional development. Not all have sufficient knowledge of the specialist support services that the university offers so that they can ensure their students benefit fully from these, for example to help them to develop their writing skills or to seek help with personal or health problems.
- The university promotes equality and diversity well; students develop a very good understanding of related issues through their research and practical work, and discussions with peers and teachers.
- Arrangements to keep students safe are good. Students receive thorough instruction in health and safety during inductions to the well-organised specialist workshops and students work safely in these studios and workshops. They operate a range of workshop equipment confidently. Staff carry out appropriate risk assessments for studios and workshops, and are in the process of completing any required improvements identified. Students feel safe on the university campus.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Kingston University

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	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	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-
Outcomes for students	1	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	1	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-
The effectiveness of leadership and management	1	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Visual arts	1

Provider details

Type of provider	Higher education institution							
Age range of students	16–18							
Approximate number of all students over the previous full contract year	150							
Principal/CEO	Dr Julius Weinberg Vice-Chancellor							
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected							
Website address	www.kingston.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 students (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	-	-	-	-	108	18	-	-
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of students aged 14-16								
Full-time	-							
Part-time	-							
Number of community students	-							
Number of employability students	-							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	None							

Contextual information

Kingston University operates from several sites in Kingston-upon-Thames, and offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The foundation diploma in art and design is the only further education course offered and operates within the faculty of art, design and architecture. The main aim of the course is to prepare students for entry to specialist higher education in a range of art and design related disciplines. Students choose from one of four specialist pathways: fine art; visual communications; fashion and fabrication; and 3D design. Students come from across the United Kingdom; almost two thirds are female and almost one quarter are from a minority ethnic background.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Janet Mercer HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the course director for foundation art and design 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 students' 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 students; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant 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:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012

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