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Dear Dr Leet

Short inspection of Buckinghamshire New University

Following the short inspection on 17 and 18 October 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in October 2012.

This provider continues to be good.

Staff have continued to make sure that a high proportion of students achieve their level 3 diploma in art and design and that those who are capable achieve merit and distinction grades.

Students continue to make good use of high-quality and varied resources in the workshops and studios to develop their practical skills and their knowledge and understanding of art and design. Teachers are highly skilled in their various artistic disciplines and work together to support students' learning very well.

Staff have worked effectively to introduce new and emerging media into the course. For example, students use digital media competently to design websites and animations; this prepares them well for their next steps in education or employment.

Safeguarding is effective.

There have been no safeguarding incidents at the university affecting level 3 students. The very few safeguarding incidents at the university in recent years have affected students on undergraduate or postgraduate courses. Staff investigated these thoroughly and the students affected received appropriate support from specialist staff. Senior leaders and managers have established a culture and ethos of tolerance and respect throughout the university. Students reflect this in their conduct and behaviours. Staff carry out their roles in respect of safeguarding well.

They give students' welfare a high priority. Staff use university welfare, student finance and housing services promptly to refer students who need extra help or guidance. However, the designated safeguarding officer has not completed any update training recently.

Staff have yet to provide sufficient training for students in how to keep themselves safe from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. Students have a basic understanding of these topics, but much of this has come from previous learning and not from staff at the university. Posters and other displays around the campus remind students how to keep themselves safe. Staff have a good understanding of the indicators about which they should keep vigilant.

Inspection findings

- The proportion of students who achieved their level 3 diploma in art and design in 2016/17 remained high. A high proportion of students were successful in achieving their qualification at merit or distinction level. All students who applied for degree courses at university received offers and took these up. Staff do not have sufficient knowledge of the destinations of those students who did not choose to go to university at the end of their diploma course.
- Current students are producing a broad and imaginative range of work for the course. They are learning to use a wide range of media and materials creatively in well-equipped and resourced workshops and studios. Teachers develop students' knowledge and understanding further through a series of lectures from staff who teach on undergraduate courses. This raises students' aspirations to higher-level study very effectively and prepares them well for degree-level work, for example by improving their essay writing and research skills.
- Teachers do not give students enough feedback in the early stages of the course to help them improve the quality of their work or their skills. As a result, too few students know how well they are doing on their course and they do not feel well prepared for their first assessment. Teachers do not give students sufficient support and guidance in the early stages of the course to help them evaluate and critically reflect on work in sketchbooks enough; many of their notes are descriptive. By the final term, following teachers' feedback after their subsequent assessments, most students have developed these skills well.
- Staff are highly responsive to students' feedback about how the course could be improved. They make changes promptly, where this is feasible. However, university systems to monitor the quality of the provision and bring about improvements are underdeveloped and slow. The recently appointed head of department has put in place new systems to review and improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Teachers give students very high quality advice and guidance to choose their pathways and specialisms for the diploma course, and for university choices. Staff set well-considered projects and assessments that challenge students' preconceptions very effectively. Teachers structure project briefs clearly, which encourages students helps them to think and work independently in studios and workshops.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- quality-improvement actions are identified swiftly, improvements are made promptly and managers monitor progress towards these actions frequently
- students receive feedback from teachers on their progress and achievements earlier in the course, so that they know how well they are performing and what they need to improve in good time for their first assessments
- staff collect and analyse information on students' destinations to inform improvements to the course
- teachers improve students' understanding of how to keep themselves safe from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation and their knowledge of how British values apply to their lives and career aspirations
- the designated safeguarding officer completes update training for their role promptly.

I am copying this letter to the Education and Skills Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Richard Pemble
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Ofsted Inspector. The head of department for art and design, as nominee, assisted us. We visited workshops, studios and classrooms to observe teaching, learning and assessments and to look at students' work. We met with students, senior leaders, managers and teachers. We reviewed key documents including the university's most recent self-evaluation report and documents related to safeguarding. We also analysed data on the performance of students currently on the course and considered the views of students, staff and managers.