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Professor Alison Honour
Pro Vice-Chancellor and Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Design and Humanities
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Dear Professor Honour

Short inspection of De Montfort University

Following the short inspection on 5–6 December 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 November 2013.

This provider continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection, you and your managers have ensured that the foundation diploma in art and design (FIAD) continues to develop students who produce work of a high standard. You and your managers have ensured that the programme continues to attract students from disadvantaged areas, with the vast majority progressing to higher education and achieving well there.

Since the previous inspection, you have enhanced considerably the resources available to students. In the last year, along with the faculty of arts, the programme has moved into a newly built, state-of-the-art complex. FIAD students have their own dedicated floors. They also have access to workshops equipped with the very latest technology. In this building, students benefit from proximity to higher study. Contact with undergraduate teachers provides your students with excellent guidance and information on how to develop their ideas and work.

Students appreciate the new facilities and the studio spaces. They are able to identify how their technical skills have developed as a result of the support they receive from teachers, technicians and through the wide variety of workshops offered.

You have introduced new quality assurance arrangements to tackle the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. As a result, you know your provision well and identify and deal effectively with areas of underperformance. You have also introduced a new system of observation to improve teaching, learning and assessment. This is in its early stages and you are aware of the need to develop it

further to ensure a greater focus on learning and progress.

Since the previous inspection, you have ensured that the course meets the new requirements of the study programme for students aged 16 to 18. Students benefit from wide-ranging enrichment activities and trips abroad to enhance their learning. They continue to develop their English and mathematical skills and benefit from good impartial careers advice.

You have resolved most of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection, particularly those related to leadership and management, including safeguarding.

Safeguarding is effective.

Managers swiftly dealt with a concern raised at the previous inspection to ensure that all staff who have any contact with FIAD students receive an appropriate background check. The university's single central register has a discrete section for the FIAD programme, which is a comprehensive and detailed record of all required checks. Managers have a comprehensive policy in place for the management of students who are under 18 years of age at the time of enrolment.

All university staff are required to attend mandatory training in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Almost all staff who have contact with FIAD students have completed the training and are confident to refer students if necessary.

Students receive information on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty at induction, which teachers reinforce in personal tutorials. Posters in studios and corridors raise awareness of abusive and unacceptable conduct in different contexts. Students understand safe working practices. They are confident that they would recognise safeguarding concerns about fellow students or incidents outside the college. They know whom to report concerns to within the university.

Managers have introduced robust procedures for risk assessing external speakers, field trips, social media and information technology usage. As a result, students feel safe in college and during educational visits. Managers have good links with relevant external agencies to safeguard students.

Inspection findings

- Over the last three years, the proportion of students aged 16 to 18 who successfully complete their programme has improved to around the high national rate for this qualification. The proportion of students who achieve good grades has also improved and is high. The vast majority of students progress to higher education degrees at De Montfort University. FIAD students go on to a very broad range of arts-related degree courses. They perform well at university and a significant majority attain high degree grades. Students from disadvantaged areas have in previous years achieved less well than other students. In 2016/17, all the 14 students from disadvantaged areas successfully completed the course

and achieved better than their peers.

- Over the last three years, adult students have achieved less well than students aged 16 to 18. In 2015/16, nearly one in four students did not successfully complete the programme, which is low and well below national rates. Over the last three years, male students have achieved less well than female students. This achievement gap narrowed slightly in 2016/17. Achievement rates for students with learning difficulties are lower than those for other students. However, their achievement of high grades is better.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to be good. Teachers explain complex procedures and ideas very well. In one lesson, students quickly learned very specialist lighting and photographic techniques to record small architectural models and prototype products in three-dimensional design that they had made. This improved their presentation skills and confidence in their professional portfolio.
- Unit and stage assessment is good. Written feedback is clear and detailed. Students are able to understand their progress and improve their work. Verbal feedback from teachers is clear and constructive. The majority of studio tutorial notes record progress with project work and set challenging targets. Students find these helpful in improving their work. However, a minority of tutorial notes are too vague or brief and do not help students to improve their work. In a minority of lessons, teachers do not use questioning techniques well enough to check students' understanding. They do not reinforce and consolidate learning sufficiently to ensure that all students understand and progress quickly.
- Managers have ensured that students continue to make good progress from their starting points. Students benefit from excellent resources. Studios are spacious and allow large and ambitious final project work and exhibition. Students use a wide range of specialist workshops in which they develop advanced practical skills. They use craft skills such as glass, metal, ceramic and digital skills to enhance their work throughout the course. For example, visual communication students use monoprint skills well to transfer observed drawing and ideas into narrative illustration. Projects and assignments are exciting. They explore challenging subjects and enable most students to develop original ideas and solutions. In the 'City' project, students explore the structure and organisation of urban living, and how to manage the social and emotional challenges facing residents.
- In a few lessons, teachers do not engage and hold the attention of all students. Teachers allow a few students to spend too long on tasks. As a result, these students do not engage productively with their ideas at key points in assignments. Not all these students develop the self-critical skills and confidence in independent working as quickly as they are capable of, and consequently they make slower progress at these points.
- Managers have improved the quality assurance arrangements. They have created a new foundation quality improvement committee which meets monthly to monitor students' attendance and performance, as well as to monitor progress against the quality improvement plan. The committee has had a positive impact on bringing all pathways to the same standard. For example, underperforming

areas such as photography and visual communication have improved their outcomes significantly in the last year.

- Managers have recently introduced a well-considered peer observation process for FIAD courses that links well with the university's processes. However, managers have not addressed the areas for development identified for teachers through the previous observation process. Themes such as using effective questioning techniques and checking students' understanding are still areas for development. The observation process does not evaluate sufficiently well the quality of learning and the progress students make.
- Managers have successfully adapted the course to meet the requirements of the study programme. The course includes a wide range of productive enrichment activities, such as local and international visits and invitations to guest speakers from the design, cultural and creative industries.
- All students enter the programme with a good grade in GCSE English and mathematics. Despite this, teachers encourage students to continue to develop their English and mathematics skills. They signpost them to support sessions offered within the faculty and Leicester School of Art. Teachers also check students' written assessments for spelling and grammar, and share strategies with them on how to correct their work.
- High-quality impartial careers advice and guidance enable students to attain their next steps. Students' well-being is supported through their access to high-quality information on the university's website and formal referrals for counselling and personal support. The very few students who arrive at the university with an educational, health and care plan receive good support.
- Students undertake activities such as exhibition and show curation, where they develop their employability skills. This meets their needs well. However, students do not sufficiently record these work-related activities as part of their course.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- managers monitor and close performance gaps between different groups of students
- managers improve teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that teachers develop their use of questioning and other techniques to reinforce and check the learning of all students
 - ensuring a greater consistency in written feedback in studio tutorial notes that enable all students to make rapid progress in each assignment
 - ensuring that teachers identify precisely the support students require at key points in longer assignments to help them to progress quickly.
- managers develop the observation process and accompanying professional

development to:

- ensure that all tutors use effective teaching and learning strategies for students, particularly in taught sessions, enabling students to make good progress
 - improve the monitoring of the impact of continuous professional development undertaken by tutors in relation to the weaknesses identified
 - include a focus on students and their progress within the observation process.
- managers ensure that students are able to record and evaluate the impact of their work-related activities on their development.

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

Yours sincerely

William Baidoe-Ansah
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The associate dean academic, as nominee, assisted a team comprising one Her Majesty's Inspector and two Ofsted inspectors. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, and online questionnaires, to gather the views of students; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.