

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



6 March 2018

Ms Paula Gamble-Schwarz
Programme Director
School of Arts, English and Drama
Loughborough University
Ashby Road
Loughborough
Leicestershire
LE11 3TU

Dear Ms Gamble-Schwarz

Short inspection of Loughborough University

Following the short inspection on 6 and 7 February 2018, 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 2012.

This provider continues to be good.

You and your well-qualified and experienced team of lecturers in the School of Arts, English and Drama (the school) have continued to focus on providing high-quality education and training in the creative arts for students from a wide range of academic and social backgrounds. You and your colleagues are passionate about the arts and this is reflected in the enthusiasm and commitment to academic achievement demonstrated by your students.

You and your senior team have made good progress in successfully tackling the most significant weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Your self-assessment provides an honest and accurate account of the school's key strengths and areas for improvement. The quality improvement plan clearly identifies the actions you are taking to resolve the few remaining weaknesses. Feedback from students indicates that they value the opportunity to study at a prestigious institution, and the large majority aspire to the university's undergraduate programmes in the creative arts.

The significant strengths in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have contributed to outstanding achievement rates for all groups of students regardless of their gender, ethnicity or disability. The proportion of students who successfully complete their programme has remained exceptionally high for the last three years. Very few students leave the programme early. In-year data for 2017/18 indicates that the pattern of high overall retention and achievement is likely to continue.

Students rightly comment favourably on the very high quality of teaching and learning they receive and on the quality of arts resources, studio spaces and work environment at the university. Student support staff provide very good assistance for the relatively high proportion of students who have dyslexia and other specific barriers to learning. As a consequence, these students progress and achieve as well as their peers.

Current students make good progress. Almost all are on target to achieve within the planned dates. Lecturers use learning plans to record and review progress towards targets well. Students have a good understanding of what they have achieved and what they need to do to complete their studies and to achieve a high grade.

The range of creative arts pathways that you offer meets students' needs well. Students value the introduction of a pathway that enables them to progress to the university's new undergraduate degree in architecture.

You recently decided to switch the awarding body that you use to a specialist art and design awarding body that more closely matches your curriculum offer and the range of pathways that students can study. Early indications suggest that this initiative is proving popular with students and with lecturing staff.

You correctly acknowledge in your self-assessment report that a few weaknesses noted at the last inspection still remain. For example, although you collect data on student retention and achievement, you do not sufficiently analyse this data to help you make decisions about the quality of provision or about the overall performance of the foundation programme. You do not routinely analyse data to establish whether performance differences exist between different groups of students or whether high-grade achievements are evenly distributed.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your colleagues have responded appropriately to the weakness identified in the previous inspection report about the arrangements for safeguarding. As a result, safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

All staff who teach on the arts foundation programme receive an appropriate security clearance to ensure their suitability for the role. Specific arrangements are in place to ensure that the university carries out its safeguarding duties in respect of any student under the age of 18.

Students say that they feel safe when on university premises and in halls of residence. Students living in university accommodation can report any concerns they may have about their safety or well-being to one of the wardens based in each hall of residence.

Managers have appropriate arrangements for recording and responding to safeguarding referrals, although none has been received in the school since the

previous inspection. Lecturers ensure that students have a good understanding of health and safety when working in the studios or when handling tools or chemicals.

Students' understanding and awareness of how to keep themselves safe from the risks of radicalisation and extremism are rudimentary. Their knowledge and understanding of British values are scant. The university's student services team has well-developed plans to promote a better awareness for staff and students of the 'Prevent' duty and of British values, but it is too soon to assess the impact of these initiatives.

Inspection findings

- Your permanent teaching staff benefit from an extensive range of professional development opportunities that support their teaching and enhance students' learning. As a consequence, teaching and learning sessions are mostly of high quality and suitably challenging. However, sessional teaching staff do not receive all of the continuing professional development enjoyed by permanent staff.
- Lecturers are very knowledgeable about their subject and they use their professional experience to enrich the student experience. They collectively contribute to a revised Contextual and Historical Studies course as part of the foundation programme, which develops a deep theoretical understanding in students and enables them to contextualise their knowledge within their emerging arts specialism.
- Student progression to undergraduate-level study is high. In 2016/17, almost all students progressed to higher education, with around two thirds deciding to continue their studies at Loughborough University.
- The standard of students' work is high. Lecturers ensure that students develop a wide range of skills during the first phase of the course that equips them well for their subsequent pathway specialism. Students' sketchbooks are rich and thorough documents. Lecturers ensure that students acquire creative skills such as recording primary research accurately, using a wide range of drawing skills to develop novel ideas, and experimenting with colours, designs and patterns.
- Students make good progress from their starting points. They develop sound art and design skills because lecturers motivate and inspire them well. Lecturers use their commercial and industrial experience to illustrate key themes and signpost students towards topics they might want to study further.
- Lecturers provide good verbal and written feedback so that students know how to improve their work and consider further themes to explore. They ensure that students develop reflective skills through discussion and debate on their work. Students make good use of peer feedback to identify their strengths and weaknesses.
- The attainment of a high grade in GCSE English and mathematics is a pre-requisite of entry to the arts foundation programme. Lecturers mark students' written work with appropriate focus on the correct use of spelling, punctuation and grammar. They work particularly well in developing students' higher level writing skills, especially in research and evaluation. These include online

research, academic writing and referencing.

- The development of students' mathematical skills is sporadic, with some good examples in three-dimensional design and in pattern making and cutting, but not so effectively on other pathways.
- Students receive good support to help them achieve. About one quarter of students have dyslexia, many of whom are found to have dyslexia following screening carried out by student services staff after students have enrolled on the programme. A specialist dyslexia support worker dedicates two days a week to the arts foundation programme to help students overcome this barrier to learning.
- Information, advice and guidance arrangements are satisfactory and entirely appropriate, given that most arts foundation students have a very clear idea about their next steps and how they will achieve their academic and career goals.
- During the beginning of the programme, staff from the university's careers service team provide an appropriate introduction to university studies and to the range of pathways available. Careers staff provide impartial advice and guidance towards the end of the programme for the very few students who decide that they want to study a subject other than art, or who decide to apply for a higher level apprenticeship or to seek employment.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- managers analyse the available information on student recruitment, retention, achievement and destination to enable them to:
 - make informed judgements about the school's performance
 - identify and narrow any achievement gaps between different groups of students.
- all students and staff have a good understanding of British values and of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

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

Yours sincerely

Jai Sharda
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Ofsted Inspectors, assisted by the programme director as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors took account of your most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used individual and group interviews to gather the views of students and lecturers. They reviewed key documents, including those related to safeguarding, students' achievements and progression.