

Short inspection of Leeds Arts University

Inspection dates:

26–27 February 2020

Outcome

Leeds Arts University continues to be a good provider.

Information about this provider

Leeds Arts University is a specialist creative arts university with some further education provision, based in the centre of Leeds. At the time of the inspection, 467 students were on full-time and part-time level 3 programmes in art and design. Two hundred and thirty students were on the one-year foundation diploma, 202 students were on the two-year extended diploma and 35 adult students were on the one-year access to higher education programme. Most students are aged 16 to 19 years.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Students benefit from and talk enthusiastically about the inclusive and supportive university community that provides a safe and positive environment for learning and developing individual expression. They have a strong sense of belonging and commitment to the university.

Students behave well and demonstrate respect for their fellow students, tutors and staff. They are confident in challenging each other and engaging in meaningful and positive debate. For example, students engage in building individual and group 'manifestos' that express the values that they expect of each other, celebrate the diversity of their community, and encourage mutual respect and collaboration.

On completion of their programmes, a high proportion of students gain places at the university of their choice. Most progress to higher or further education, with a few gaining employment or beginning an apprenticeship.

Students feel safe in the university and know who to go to if they have any concerns or issues. They see their learning space as a protected environment in which they work well with others and are free to experiment within the confines of the design briefs provided. Most students, through the work that they carry out in design briefs and group activities, can clearly articulate the risks of radicalisation and are aware of risks in the local area such as far-right extremism.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have ensured that the curriculum, as designed by managers, enables students to develop successfully the knowledge and practical skills that they need to make a smooth transition to university. Students are encouraged to explore and use different techniques and approaches. This improves their confidence in undertaking more complex artistic and design applications and enables them to make informed choices about their specialist pathway.

The curriculum is well planned in three stages that enables students to undertake increasingly complex and challenging activities. Students initially develop a good understanding and knowledge of form, shape and colour. They use this knowledge well through an assessment period to identify their specialism. Towards the end of their course, students use their specialism to create high-quality projects and showcase their work in exhibitions. For example, students on textiles and print courses improve their knowledge of artists such as Orla Kiely, and use this knowledge to develop their own styles when producing work.

Students improve their knowledge and skills quickly enabling them to produce a high standard of work. In addition, students have access to workshops such as bookbinding, life-drawing, photoshop, animation, mono-printing and photography that makes a positive difference and expands their skills development. Consequently, students are able to undertake complex projects and present their work more professionally.

Tutors assess students' work accurately and provide helpful feedback on how to make improvements. Students benefit from individual tutorials, written feedback and 'crits' to help them to focus and be more aware of their own practice. For example, students in illustration can clearly identify how their approach to their creative practice has developed and is more structured as a result of the feedback that they have received.

Students benefit from a comprehensive programme of impartial careers advice and guidance and employability activities that prepares them well for their next steps to higher education, employment or an apprenticeship. For example, students are set live briefs by visiting professionals that they work on as projects and then present as part of an exhibition.

Governors and leaders have an effective oversight of further education programmes at the university. They receive frequent reports detailing progress towards key objectives and the quality of education that students receive. They provide effective challenge to managers to ensure that improvements are made where necessary. For example, governors and leaders challenged managers to put in place measures to improve the number of students who progressed from year one to year two on the extended diploma course, following a fall in the previous year.

Attendance is very high on year one of the extended diploma for art and design. However, a few students in the second year of their programme and on access to higher education programmes do not attend regularly enough, particularly towards the end of their course. As a result, these students do not make the progress or achieve the grades of which they are capable.

A few students do not complete the two-year extended diploma programme, and retention fell in year one of the programme last year. Leaders and managers have reviewed the programme and implemented strategies to improve retention. However, it is too early to assess the full impact of these strategies in the current year on the numbers progressing from year one to year two.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have put in place appropriate policies and procedures to safeguard students from risks including those associated with radicalisation and extremism. Designated safeguarding leads are appropriately experienced and trained for their role. They take advice from local agencies and groups including the Leeds Silver Prevent Group, and cascade this to staff well. Managers carry out appropriate background checks on staff to ensure that they are suitable to work with young people and vulnerable adults. Staff undertake regular training in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty to develop their understanding of how to recognise signs of abuse and radicalisation.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Managers should ensure that students' attendance on year two of the extended diploma and on the access to higher education programme improves.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that the number of students progressing from year one to year two of the extended diploma course increases to the previous high level.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130547
Address	Blenheim Walk Leeds LS2 9AQ
Contact number	0113 2028000
Website	www.leeds-art.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Professor Simone Wonnacott
Provider type	Higher education institution
Date of previous inspection	2 March 2016
Main subcontractors	N/A

Information about this inspection

The inspection was the second short inspection carried out since Leeds Arts University was judged to be good in March 2011.

The inspection team was assisted by the curriculum manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements including observing learning sessions, scrutinising students' work, seeking the views of students, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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