

Inspection of Kingston University

Inspection dates: 12–15 October 2021

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Outstanding
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this provider

Kingston University operates from several campuses in and around the town of Kingston upon Thames in south west London. At the time of the university's previous inspection in 2015, only the long-standing one-year level 3 foundation diploma in art and design was in scope for inspection. This inspection also included the newly-introduced apprenticeship programmes at levels 5 and 6.

Most of the 160 learners on the art foundation course are 18 years old when they commence the programme. Around 430 adult learners are on apprenticeship programmes. The apprenticeships include level 5 nursing associate, and level 6 in civil engineering, social work, environmental practice, and chartered surveying. In total, the university has about seventeen thousand learners on a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, most of which were out of scope for this inspection.

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

Many learners describe how they feel privileged to have the opportunity to study at the university. They appreciate the high standards set by staff and the quality of the teaching, resources and accommodation at the university. For example, nursing associates train in a state-of-the-art hospital ward simulation suite, so they can learn and practise new skills using simulation technology. They explain how this helps them acquire new skills and contributes to the quality of their programme.

Learners find their courses challenging and rewarding. Staff set high expectations of learners. They provide good support, and also encourage learners to think and work independently. Foundation art students explain how staff encourage them to push boundaries, to experiment with new ideas and techniques and to work outside their comfort zones.

Apprentices really like the valuable opportunity they have to pick up new knowledge, skills and behaviours that directly relate to their jobs and careers. Apprentices who have been away from education for some time appreciate that staff are flexible and understanding about work and domestic pressures, but still support them to develop and make progress. They feel staff respect them, as they grow more confident both in their jobs, and with their studies. They recognise how their apprenticeship allows them to develop and make progress in their careers.

Apprentices appreciated how willingly and skilfully the staff adapted their teaching during the main wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most apprentices consider that the move to online learning enabled them to minimise the disruption to their study and continue to progress with their studies.

Learners say they appreciate the safe environment and diverse culture across the university. They acknowledge a real sense of community across the university.

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

Since the university's previous inspection in 2015, staff have successfully maintained the outstanding quality of the art foundation programme. Leaders have developed an exceptional team of art educators and practitioners. This team teaches a very high-quality programme that reflects the creative and technical disciplines which the industry values.

Learners benefit from an intensive introductory period for the first few weeks of their programme. This enables them to gain a firm foundation in a broad range of disciplines, and to understand the connections between, for example, fashion, design, illustration, animation, fine art and three-dimensional design.

Staff skilfully plan and sequence activities to help learners reinforce their existing knowledge and progress on to developing new skills. For example, learners acquire knowledge of how to use layering and green-screen techniques in the film-making process. Teachers also establish a strong culture of collaboration between learners, who quickly display a maturity and thoughtfulness in reviewing and critiquing each other's work.

Staff provide expert guidance to the foundation art learners on university and career options. On completion of their programme, the vast majority of these learners successfully progress on to the university of their choice.

Over the past three years, leaders and governors have developed an effective apprenticeship programme in response to skills shortages in the area and the needs of employers. For example, the new nursing associate apprenticeship helps to address staffing shortages in local NHS trusts, while the new social work apprenticeship helps support the local council to recruit and train new social workers.

Leaders and managers ensure the apprenticeship curriculum meets the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship programme. They have invested significantly to support the successful introduction of the programme. They have appointed new staff and invested in accommodation and resources. This helps ensure a high-quality experience for the apprentices.

Leaders have also focused on developing the teaching skills and promoting the professional development of staff. For example, managers have supported teachers to develop skills in the delivery of blended and online teaching, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This enabled all programmes to move to online delivery during the height of the pandemic. This, in turn, minimised disruption to learners and ensured a high level of continuity on all programmes.

Managers have struggled to recruit sufficient staff in the construction-related disciplines. This has resulted in heavy workloads and pressure on staff time in this area. At the time of the inspection, managers had already identified this issue and were taking actions to address the staffing shortfall.

Occasionally, apprenticeship staff do not communicate sufficiently and frequently with apprentices' employers. Where this is the case, teachers do not hold apprenticeship review meetings in a timely manner. Employers are therefore not always clear about the progress of the apprentices and unable to ensure workplace opportunities link with classroom-based activities.

Staff support apprentices, including those with disabilities, to progress and achieve. For example, note takers support apprentices with a hearing impairment, or with dyslexia so they are not at a disadvantage.

Most teachers have up-to-date skills in the industry. For example, many of the art teachers work as practising artists and designers. Similarly, staff on the apprenticeship programmes are practising social workers, experts in climate change or on civil engineering lead bodies. This helps staff mirror current and emerging industry practice. Staff share their up-to-date vocational and technical knowledge and skills with learners.

Staff guide apprentices to help them gain full professional status and recognition in their respective fields. For example, surveying apprentices receive support to achieve chartered membership of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors.

Learners enjoy their programmes, through which they build on their existing knowledge. They receive the feedback they need to improve. Most learners remain on the course and make good progress. However, leaders and managers do not have access to sufficiently detailed information relating to the small number of apprentices who either withdraw or pause their programme. As a result, they cannot take action to address the specific reasons that result in breaks in learning or withdrawals.

Quality assurance and governance arrangements are effective. They have enabled governors and staff to maintain the quality of the existing programme, while also successfully introducing the new apprenticeship provision in response to market need.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Learners feel safe and know who to approach if they have any concerns about their safety or welfare. Learners and staff receive timely induction and training on safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty. Lead managers at the university for these areas maintain strong external links, for example with the local council, and the regional 'Prevent' coordinator. Staff rarely reinforce learners' understanding of safeguarding and prevent. As a result, learners sometimes forget the information they received on these themes at induction.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure they have sufficient staff in the construction-related areas to ease the pressure and workload on staff.
- Apprenticeship staff should increase the frequency and clarity of their communication with apprentices' employers. They should ensure review meetings take place suitably frequently and that employers and teachers plan more carefully the timing and delivery of practical and theoretical components of the apprenticeship programmes.

- Managers should gather timely and accurate information relating to learner withdrawals or breaks in learning and analyse the data to help them identify the cause of any disruption to learning.
- Teachers should reinforce and make more relevant to learners, themes around safeguarding and 'Prevent'.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133825
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Website	https://www.kingston.ac.uk/
Principal/CEO	Helen Laville (Provost)
Provider type	University
Date of previous inspection	20 January 2015

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the associate Dean for external engagement, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent 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 visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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