

Inspection of Arts University Plymouth

Inspection dates: 23 to 26 May 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Arts University Plymouth is a small specialist art and design university located in Plymouth, Devon. The university changed its name in May 2022 having previously been known as Plymouth College of Art. The university provides a range of further education courses at level 3 in the creative arts. Plymouth College of Art previously received a full inspection in June 2013, when it was judged to be good. A short inspection confirmed this grade in June 2017.

At the time of the inspection, Arts University Plymouth had 370 students aged 16 to 18 on education programmes for young people, 10 adult students and 12 students with high needs. Adult students and students with high needs study the same programmes as those studied by young people.

Arts University Plymouth does not work with any subcontractors.

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

Students enjoy their courses. They are supported well by staff who help them to build their confidence and resilience. Students are positive about the inclusive community of the university. They value how staff and other students celebrate differences and individuality.

Students benefit from how teachers encourage them to study the work of artists and understand how this can improve their own creative work. For example, students on the extended diploma in art and design explore the ways in which artists express mental health topics and use what they learn to improve their work.

Students are prepared well by teachers for their next steps into higher education. They benefit from teachers' knowledge of degree courses which helps them to assemble a suitable portfolio for the courses they apply to. Students are taught about storytelling techniques in filmmaking and how they can use these principles to present their own story as part of job and higher education applications.

Students' behaviour is excellent. They are respectful towards staff and each other. Those students who are made anxious by loud noise appreciate how other students thoughtfully comply with their requests for silent study. Students value that staff ask them about their personal pronouns before they start their course. As a result, students comment positively about how the university takes diversity seriously.

Students benefit from impartial careers advice and guidance. A qualified careers guidance adviser visits the university weekly and is available for individual consultations with students.

Students feel safe at Arts University Plymouth. They value the calm and friendly community that staff have created. They know that if they raise a concern, it will be taken seriously by staff.

Students are not prepared well enough by their teachers for the workplace. Only a small minority of students benefit from well-planned work experience. Consequently, too many students do not gain further insight into the creative industries or develop important wider personal, or subject skills specific to the workplace.

Students' attendance at GCSE mathematics classes and on the level 3 graphics, illustration and games arts course are too low. Teachers do not follow up on students' absences quickly enough. They do not timetable GCSE lessons on days that students have other lessons. As a result, students are not motivated to attend these lessons and make slower progress in developing their mathematics.

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

Leaders and governors have established ambitious curriculums for students that enable them to develop their creative knowledge, skills and behaviours. Leaders plan

curriculums that align closely with the strategic skills needs of the city. They ensure that students learn about immersive technologies and entrepreneurial skills to support the growth in creative and digital microbusinesses. Leaders plan curriculums to ensure that students are taught the digital skills they need to work remotely and flexibly to prepare them for work in an industry that no longer requires professional creatives to live in larger cities.

Teachers give students opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge by accessing the university's higher education art and design resources. For example, students strengthen their model-making skills by using three-dimensional printing technologies and more advanced computer-aided design software. Students on the fashion and textiles course practise and make finished articles using tufting guns. As a result, they become skilled in this increasingly popular creative discipline.

Teachers assess carefully students' starting points when they join the university and use this information well to focus teaching on students' weaker skills. For example, where students' language and writing skills are weaker, teachers help them to develop subject vocabulary so they can better analyse and discuss their creative work.

Teachers work well as a team to provide students with coordinated feedback daily. They give students targets for the day, and this helps them to improve. For example, teachers reinforce the importance of students maintaining digital portfolios and sketchbooks as records of the development of ideas. As a result, students can describe what they have learned at each stage of their course and how they are improving their skills and knowledge.

Teachers use a series of short projects at the start of courses to build students' technical and creative skills. This prepares them well to work more independently on projects later in their course. As a result, students learn how to make their own creative decisions and how to interpret project briefs in a more personal way. However, teachers do not teach drawing techniques well enough on the level 3 art and design course and, as a result, students do not have the skills they need to realise their ideas effectively.

Teachers of photography courses have revised the curriculums in response to feedback from industry experts. They now teach filmmaking skills that enable students to be better prepared for work in the industry. A minority of photography students now move on to moving image courses in higher education. Teachers of the foundation course in art and design refresh the curriculum content annually to ensure that it is representative of contemporary creative practice.

Teachers make good use of well-managed group critiques of students' work. This develops students' self-confidence and communication skills well. They learn how to analyse each other's work respectfully and constructively which helps them to make better decisions about their own creative work.

Teachers ensure that curriculums are planned well for those students with high

needs. They collaborate effectively with special educational needs staff to agree on adjustments to, and strategies for, their teaching. Consequently, students with high needs reach their potential.

Teachers provide effective support for those students who are from disadvantaged backgrounds. They intervene swiftly to ensure that they have the resources and support they need for study, for example free breakfasts, food vouchers and financial support for travel to and from university.

Teachers do not plan well enough how work experience and work-related opportunities are embedded in curriculums to develop students' knowledge, skills and behaviours. As a result, too few students learn about and experience professional practice in the creative industries. For example, students on the art and design course cannot recall phases of the design cycle or how to manage projects.

Leaders provide staff with the training they need to improve their subject knowledge and to work effectively with students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. For example, teachers carefully consider seating arrangements to meet the individual needs of students and adjust the readability of course materials to ensure that they are easily understood by all students.

Governors understand their roles and responsibilities well. They know the strengths and weaknesses of the quality of teaching and training. They provide support for leaders who wish to propose new ideas and are unafraid to challenge senior leaders about the quality of education. They use their considerable experience in further and higher education to make carefully considered strategic decisions.

Leaders ensure that well-planned curriculums result in the large majority of students achieving their qualifications. Nearly all of those who apply to higher education achieve their first-choice destination. The majority of students in receipt of high-needs funding achieve their qualification and go on to courses in higher education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff responsible for safeguarding are appropriately trained and are supported by a qualified designated safeguarding lead. Leaders make appropriate checks to ensure that staff are safely recruited.

Leaders ensure that safeguarding information about students is communicated and used sensitively so that staff can support vulnerable learners to fully access their curriculum. Leaders ensure that safeguarding incidents are recorded in appropriate detail and are reported to the university-designated safeguarding lead.

Leaders ensure a safe environment where students are supported to explore their identities as part of the respectful and kind university community. However, although

leaders ensure that students receive training about the risks of radicalisation, not all students can recall what they have been taught.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that students' work-related learning opportunities are structured in curriculums to enable them to apply what they learn, to improve their knowledge, skills and behaviours.
- Ensure that students on the level 3 art and design course are taught drawing skills so that they can confidently and skilfully realise their ideas.
- Ensure that students' attendance and punctuality are more closely monitored and that improvement actions are more effective.
- Ensure that all students know the risks of extremism and radicalisation to prepare them for life in modern Britain.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130650
Address	Tavistock Place Plymouth Devon PL4 8AT
Contact number	01752203434
Website	www.aup.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Professor Paul Fieldsend-Danks
Provider type	Other further education and skills
Date of previous inspection	20 June 2017

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of pre-degree curriculum, 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 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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