

# University for the Creative Arts

## Inspection report

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**Unique reference number:** 133821

**Name of lead inspector:** Lynda Cole HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 18 November 2011

**Type of provider:** Higher Education Institution

**Address:** Falkner Road  
Farnham  
Surrey  
GU9 7DS

**Telephone number:** 01252 722441

## Information about the provider

1. University for the Creative Arts is a specialist university located in Kent and Surrey. It was established through a merger with the Surrey Institute of Art and Design and the Kent Institute of Art and Design in 2005, and formally adopted its name after being granted university status in 2008. Provision is located in Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester. Qualifications offered include foundation diploma in art and design, BTEC extended diploma over two years, BTEC diploma over one year and access to higher education.
2. The further education provision accounts for around 22% of the university's provision overall. Approximately 67% of students study on the foundation diploma and 8% on the access to higher education programme. Around 23% study on the BTEC two-year programmes and only 2% on the BTEC one-year programme. Most students are aged 16 to 18 and a high proportion of all students are female. A small proportion of students are from minority ethnic communities in line with the low proportions in the populations of Kent and Surrey overall.
3. The socio-economic characteristics of each set of campuses in Kent and Surrey vary considerably. This is exemplified by the high proportion of students in receipt of educational maintenance awards in Rochester, Kent, compared with the low proportion in Farnham, Surrey.
4. The institution has an executive and senior management board which includes two pro-vice chancellors. Two associate deans for further education each have responsibility for campuses situated in Surrey, at Epsom and Farnham, and in Kent, at Canterbury, Maidstone and Rochester.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
<b>Provision for young learners:</b>	
Further education (16 to 18)	1,093 full-time learners 1 part-time learner
<b>Provision for adult learners:</b>	
Further education (19+)	128 full-time learners 100 part-time learners

## Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision		Grade 2
Capacity to improve		Grade 2
		Grade
Outcomes for learners		2
Quality of provision		2
Leadership and management		2
Safeguarding		2
Equality and diversity		1
Subject Areas		
Foundation diploma and access to higher education		2
Vocational arts		2

## Overall effectiveness

- University for the Creative Arts is good, as is its capacity to improve. Managers and staff have created a culture of trust leading to high expectations for students and an atmosphere where experimentation and creativity flourish. Tutors and staff are proud to work at the university. Students greatly enjoy what they do, and develop confidence and very good creative skills. They are confident and articulate in explaining their work. Progression to higher education is good and students are prepared well for future careers in the arts. Pass rates are high and many students achieve high grades. However, in a minority of provision, too few students complete their courses. In BTEC provision, managers have changed the way the courses are offered and have monitored progress more closely, resulting in a much higher proportion of students on two-year BTEC provision returning for their second year.
- Staff throughout the university work well together to keep students safe and care for their welfare and personal development. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding, with excellent projects and activities designed by staff to ensure strong understanding of contemporary social themes. Work with partner organisations is also outstanding, providing the local community and schools with excellent opportunities to explore creativity and learn about the

many ways it can enrich their lives. Collaboration with higher education within the university is seamless and students benefit greatly from access to very good workshops, facilities and higher education staff and lectures. Students have very good opportunities to discover the professional art world through the excellent networks the university has both nationally and internationally, and the many practising artists and designers amongst the staff who share their expertise effectively.

## Main findings

- The proportion of students who successfully complete foundation diploma courses across the five campuses is high. Pass rates among those who complete are high, and many students achieve high grades. Success rates vary on access to higher education provision and are low at Maidstone and Rochester because too many students did not complete their course. Access provision is better at Canterbury where success rates are very good.
- In vocational arts provision, the BTEC diploma at Epsom shows excellent success rates. The specialist media BTEC course at Maidstone shows good success rates. However, on two other two-year BTEC courses retention rates are poor because students did not return for the second year. As a result of effective strategies put in place by staff, current numbers returning for the second year on this provision are very high.
- Students' drawing is of a high standard, and students use it effectively to investigate ideas. They carry out their research very thoroughly and effectively. Sketch books show that students explore ideas fully using a wide range of techniques and media. Finished work shows high levels of professional practice, which students can explain with confidence and clarity. As a result, students are well prepared for their future careers as artists and designers.
- Technicians provide thorough introductions to the technical aspects of students' projects, making for sound understanding of safe working practices. Students say they feel safe and are confident in using a range of materials and equipment safely.
- Teaching and learning are good. Tutors create a culture of high expectations and aspirations. Very well-planned and stimulating project briefs provide carefully structured opportunities for students to explore a wide range of creative possibilities. Assignment briefs contain wide ranging cultural and contextual references to support independent research, and tutors make good use of well-chosen exemplars to illustrate key points and inspire students.
- Tutors provide good verbal and written feedback on students' work, but not all tutors set sufficiently precise actions to help students understand not only what to improve, but how to do so. In a minority of lessons, students remain disengaged during over-long introductions. Occasionally tutors' questioning is not open enough to elicit extended responses from students, to develop their thinking.
- A good choice of pathways fosters students' own aptitudes and interests. Diagnostic courses enable students to explore a wide range of techniques in

depth in order to identify their preferences. Extensive enrichment opportunities considerably enhance students' creative development.

- The range and quality of partnerships are outstanding. The university's links with the professional art world provide extensive opportunities for students to gain professional experiences that effectively develop their communication skills and confidence. The university's role in encouraging participation post-16 is exemplary. Outreach work is extensive and collaboration with local schools is highly productive.
- Support for students is comprehensive and effective. Study advisers help students greatly with the development of organisational and research skills, along with their understanding of academic conventions, such as referencing. Good support for those with specific learning difficulties helps them succeed. Guidance and advice for moving on to higher education are strong.
- Management of the further education provision at all levels is good. Curriculum teams work hard to organise courses so that students can work intensively and creatively.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Tutors are highly successful in designing learning materials and assignments to enable students to explore cultural diversity and social issues. In addition, outreach and liaison activities successfully encourage people across Kent and Surrey to consider further education and careers in the creative industries.
- Self-assessment and quality assurance are satisfactory. Curriculum teams' annual reviews accurately identify strengths and areas for improvement but do not always identify how teaching and learning can be improved. The 2009/10 self-assessment report for the further education provision is not evaluative enough and its accompanying action plan is not sufficiently focused on bringing about improvements.

### **What does University for the Creative Arts need to do to improve further?**

- Improve retention rates across all provision, and particularly on the BTEC extended diploma and access to higher education provision, by: monitoring students' progress closely; preparing students better for continuation into their second year; and, reviewing the curriculum to meet their needs.
- Ensure that all action plans for students following assessment and tutorial reviews are sufficiently detailed and precise, so that students know what to improve and how to do it; and that tutors review the impact of these actions on students' work.
- Ensure that the further education self-assessment report clearly evaluates the quality of teaching and learning, and identifies areas for improvement through a sharply-focused action plan, in order to increase the rigour and effectiveness of self-assessment.

## **Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors**

### **What learners like:**

- the way tutors encourage them to take experimental, individual approaches to their work and develop their creativity
- the excellent range and quality of library resources, and excellent help and advice from the library staff
- the way they are treated as budding artists and designers by staff who are professional practitioners in their fields
- the very enthusiastic and fun way tutors teach and give them freedom to be original
- the very good and wide range of support from tutors and other staff
- the way tutors help them to think for themselves rather than just follow instructions.

### **What learners would like to see improved:**

- the amount of storage and space in some studios and the time the facilities are available after 5.00pm
- the clarity of instructions about their project work and the introduction to using specialist software
- the amount of information on options and increased opportunities for tasters for degree programmes.

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

**Grade 2**

7. The university's capacity to bring about sustained improvements to its further education provision is good. Since the last inspections of predecessor institutions, senior managers, staff and governors have secured improvements, consolidated strengths and tackled most of the areas for improvement. Management information and data now effectively inform curriculum reviews. In 2009/10, success rates on a minority of courses declined below national averages but retention rates of students returning for their second year are high. Standards of learners' work are very good. However, the monitoring of teaching and learning, whilst improved, is still not rigorous enough.
8. Managers communicate clearly the strategic direction and future of the further education provision, and this is well understood by staff, students and stakeholders. Quality assurance is satisfactory. Self-assessment reports at curriculum level are accurate and evaluative and bring about improvement. However, the overarching further education self-assessment report and action plan are not sufficiently focused on specific ways to improve. Partnerships with others are outstanding and lead to significant benefits for the local community and students. Students benefit from good resources and financial management is very good.

### Outcomes for learners

**Grade 2**

9. Outcomes for students are good. Success rates are high for the large proportion of students studying on the foundation diploma across all provision. However, retention rates have declined to slightly below the national average at Epsom. Success rates on access to higher education provision at Canterbury are very high. However, across the other three access courses, although pass rates are high, retention rates are low. Progression rates to higher education are good.
10. Among students who complete their courses, pass rates are high. Students make good progress as shown by the high proportion of high grades. This is particularly the case at Epsom on the one-year diploma, and at Canterbury on both the foundation diploma and the BTEC extended diploma where rates for high grades are well above the national average.
11. Retention rates are low on BTEC national diploma courses where they take place at Canterbury and Rochester, mainly due to students not returning for the second year of their course. Effective strategies have been put in place by course teams, and currently almost all students on this provision returned for their second year.
12. Variations in the achievement and progress of different groups are not significant. The small proportion of students from minority ethnic groups

achieve at least as well as others, as do dyslexic students. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do much better than those without.

13. Students' attainment is very good. Students carry out their research well. Sketch books show students explore ideas very effectively. Finished work is original and creative and professionally executed. Students are articulate, explaining their ideas and concepts very clearly.

## **The quality of provision**

## **Grade 2**

14. Teaching and learning are good, with many examples of outstanding practice. Tutors create a culture of high expectations and aspirations where students are challenged and supported. Very well-planned and stimulating project briefs provide carefully-structured opportunities for students to experiment and develop their creative practice. Students benefit from tutors' extensive and specialist subject knowledge.
15. Managers and staff have significantly improved the arrangements for assessing additional learning support needs at the start of courses. Students identified with support needs receive prompt and effective help.
16. Tutors are adept at managing large mixed-course groups well but, in a few cases studio accommodation is cramped, making it difficult for tutors to circulate round the room, to support each student individually.
17. In a minority of lessons where learning is satisfactory rather than good, tutors spend too long talking and students remain passive during over-long introductions. Occasionally tutors' questioning is not open enough to elicit extended responses from students or check their understanding.
18. Tutors provide good verbal and written feedback. Tutorials and portfolio reviews provide constructive and very insightful discussion between staff and students. However, not all tutors help students to understand exactly what to do to improve their work.
19. The university meets the needs and interests of students very well. The university offers a range of advanced level courses that allow both breadth and depth. These courses are successful in preparing students for higher education study in art and design. The extended diploma has been redesigned to allow for faster completion of units in year one, in order to take a more flexible approach to curriculum planning in the second year.
20. Wide-ranging enrichment of the curriculum enhances students' motivation, enjoyment and learning. Students benefit from numerous visits to exhibitions, galleries and museums, as well as from residential trips abroad which are highly purposeful and productive.



21. The range and quality of partnerships are outstanding. Students benefit enormously from highly constructive collaboration. The numerous projects within the community promote employability skills and allow students to grow in self-esteem and confidence. The university's outreach work is extensive and effective in widening participation among many people who otherwise would not have taken part. The numerous progression agreements and projects with local schools are greatly valued.
22. Support for students during their course is good. Preparation for progression to higher education is effective. Further education students clearly benefit from the knowledge of the higher education lecturers. Careers events, with visits from experts in the world of art and design, give valuable insights. However, formal, individual careers advice is not widely available.
23. Staff provide effective general support through counselling, financial and welfare advice. They provide beneficial support for those with disabilities, and learning mentors work effectively with students with specific learning difficulties. Study advisers provide invaluable guidance for all students on organisational and research skills, as well as academic conventions such as referencing and plagiarism. Tutors monitor attendance and progress closely and regularly, but a small minority of action points in tutorial reviews lack clarity and precision.

## **Leadership and management**

## **Grade 2**

24. Leadership and management are good. Senior leaders are clear in their strategic vision for further education and communicate this effectively to the staff, students and partners of the university. Senior managers have successfully encouraged an ethos of open communication and productive teamwork. The university is developing a strong culture of review and evaluation, although it does not yet evaluate comprehensively the quality of teaching and learning in further education.
25. Management of the further education provision at all levels is good. Day-to-day organisation of learning and the provision of resources are well managed. Tutors are proud to work at the university and feel that provision for students has improved over the past few years. Outcomes for learners are good, although success rates for students aged 16 to 18 on two-year national diploma courses declined in 2010/11. Current college data on in-year retention rates indicate that they will improve this year.
26. Procedures for safeguarding young learners and vulnerable adults are good. Roles and responsibilities for safeguarding are clear. Incidents of harassment or bullying are rare and managers and staff deal with them effectively. Managers ensure that appropriate checks are carried out on all staff who regularly come into contact with young learners or vulnerable adults, and a central record is maintained. In addition, these staff and some governors have recently completed relevant safeguarding training.

27. The further education provision benefits from good governance at the university. Governors have a wide range of skills and provide critical challenge and support to managers. They fully appreciate the role and distinctiveness of further education in the institution.
28. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Tutors successfully design learning materials and assignments to enable students to explore equality and diversity themes. As a result, students' work often reflects and celebrates cultural diversity. The equality and diversity committee ensures that the university fully meets all its legal duties in preventing discrimination. Staff have created a strong culture of trust and cooperation with their students. All courses have student representatives who meet with staff regularly to discuss problems and areas for improvement. In addition, extensive outreach and liaison activities take place to encourage young men, who are under-represented, and members of communities in deprived areas, to consider further education and careers in the creative industries.
29. Self-assessment and quality assurance are satisfactory. Curriculum teams produce evaluative and analytical annual reviews, informed by the effective use of data, which bring about improvements to provision. However, the overarching 2009/10 self-assessment report for the further education provision is not evaluative enough, and its accompanying action plan is not sufficiently focused on bringing about improvements. Managers have recently updated the teaching and learning observation system. There is now a more consistent approach to monitoring the quality of teaching and learning across all campuses, but the moderation of teaching and learning reports is not yet rigorous enough. However, observers' feedback to tutors following observations has led to improvements.
30. Financial and risk management for the further education provision are good. Managers and curriculum leaders have responded well to national changes in funding and students' recruitment continues to be buoyant. The university has invested significantly in information technology and specialist equipment, which is well used to promote learning. The teaching accommodation is efficiently used, although occasionally students work in crowded and cramped studios. Further education provision in the creative arts represents good value for money.

## Subject areas

### Foundation diploma and access to higher education

**Grade 2**

#### Context

31. Some 870 students are enrolled on the foundation diploma course and 92 on the access to higher education course. Overall, two thirds are aged 16 to 18. Most students on the access to higher education provision are adults. Approximately 14% of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

#### Key findings

- Success rates on the foundation diploma are good overall, with many students achieving high grades. At Canterbury, almost two thirds gained merit or distinction grades, well above the national average. Success rates on the access to higher education provision are more varied; they are low on provision at Maidstone and Rochester as a result of too few students completing their courses. At Canterbury, success rates for access provision are very high.
- Students' drawing is good. Sketchbooks show thorough development of ideas and lively explorative work, particularly at Canterbury and Maidstone where students use an unusual range of materials and adventurous approaches. Illustrated reflective journals are often filled with imaginative historical and contemporary references and contain clear records of tutors' feedback. As a result, students develop good evaluative skills and discernment.
- Health and safety awareness is promoted very well and students say they feel safe. Workshop inductions effectively introduce students to safe working practices. Resources and accommodation are generally very good. However, in a few studios conditions are cramped, which hinders effective demonstrations and tutors' ability to provide individual support. This problem is identified in the annual course monitoring report.
- Teaching and learning are good. Tutors' planning is thorough and stretches and challenges students to develop a broad range of creative ideas. Tutors have high expectations, and dynamic team teaching leads to inspirational art work. Tutors use probing questions to encourage students to develop concepts further. In a very few sessions tutors' introductions are too long and fail to all engage learners fully.
- Tutors' assessment feedback is mostly useful and constructive. Exemplary feedback by a few tutors provides a culture of high aspirations. This feedback is explicitly linked to grading criteria and leads to detailed individual action planning which explains exactly what the student needs to do to improve. However, a small minority of tutors' written feedback is cursory and provides little helpful criticism.

- The curriculum is well planned to meet the needs and interests of students. Staff plan external visits meticulously, ensuring an intense experience which stimulates and complements learning very well. Excellent partnerships and collaborations with industry ensure students gain a very clear understanding of professional working practices. Part-time lecturers who are professional artists and designers share their experience and knowledge very effectively.
- Support for students is good. Strong academic and pastoral support is personalised in a variety of ways and is highly successful in meeting individual needs. Additional personal and study support is bookable outside class time. Highly-qualified specialist librarians significantly improve students' research techniques.
- Curriculum management is good. High levels of trust and respect are fostered between tutors and practice is shared. However, the best practice is not shared widely enough. Tutors are required to develop a research profile to inform their professional practice, and teaching and staff development is good.
- Staff promote equality and the celebration of diversity well. They challenge students to think about other cultures and the personal perspectives of a wide range of artists. As a result, students develop a deep and broad understanding of our multicultural and diverse society.
- Arrangements for quality improvement are good. Involvement in the self-assessment process by staff and students is good. Annual course monitoring reports show routine use of data to monitor students' progress. However, action plans are not always sufficiently incisive and detailed.

### **What does University for the Creative Arts need to do to improve further?**

- Identify rapidly those students on access to higher education provision at risk of not making the progress expected of them, or of leaving the course early, and provide support in order to improve success rates.
- Ensure that all tutors give students sufficiently critical, timely and specific verbal and written feedback, ensuring that they understand what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve their work further.

## Vocational arts

## Grade 2

### Context

32. Currently 307 students study on BTEC extended diploma courses at level 3 on three campuses of Canterbury, Maidstone and Rochester. Programmes provide specialist pathway options in fine art, textiles, lens-based media, three-dimensional studies and visual communications. Some 28 students study on the one-year diploma at Epsom. Most students are aged 16 to 18. Just over 70% of students are female and a small proportion of students are from minority ethnic groups.

### Key findings

- Success rates on the one-year BTEC diploma course at Epsom are very high and well above average, while those on the BTEC interactive media national diploma are high. Pass rates overall are high with a significant proportion of students achieving high grades, well above the national average. Most students who complete their courses progress to higher education.
- However, retention rates are low on the two-year general art and design national diploma courses. Too many students did not progress to the second year of their course. Currently, the proportion of returning students now in their second year is very high.
- The standard of students' work is good, particularly in observational drawing. Students' research is thorough and subsequently students develop highly-experimental and original work. Most students can evaluate their work critically and are articulate and confident during the critiques of their own and others' work. However, a few students are not reflecting astutely enough and their sketch books lack evaluative and insightful annotation.
- Students say they feel safe and they use safe working practices in studios. Students demonstrate clear understanding of potential dangers of specialist equipment and are shown how to use these during the helpful induction for practical areas.
- Teaching and learning are good. Tutors design thoughtful and well-planned projects that develop students' ability to think for themselves and produce innovative work. Tutors skilfully reiterate concepts to aid understanding during lessons. Tutors' critiques are highly successful in raising expectations, and provide excellent models for how students should reflect on their own work.
- In the best lessons, tutors use their extensive professional experience to create an atmosphere of structured freedom to develop students' originality and creativity. Students value highly the way they are allowed to experiment with materials and media, and are encouraged to produce unique outcomes. However, although feedback is timely and regular, in a few examples tutors are not always giving students clear enough directions on how to improve their work.

- The range and levels of courses for main programmes are good and provide good opportunities to students for progression. Excellent collaboration with industry and the wider national art world ensures students are fully prepared for careers in the creative industries. The university has exceptional links with galleries in Amsterdam, London, and in Kent and Surrey where students experience innovative projects to enrich learning.
- Support for students is good. Study support staff, library staff and tutors coordinate their work carefully to give students a wide range of academic and pastoral support to help them with assignments and develop effective skills in research, essay writing and editing.
- Students work in well-managed studios where good displays, resources, equipment and tutors' use of projected images create a highly-productive and visually-stimulating environment. However, some accommodation is crowded and this has an adverse impact on learning, as students are unable to see detailed demonstrations. In the better lessons, tutors have compensated for these difficulties by arranging carousel-type demonstrations.
- Leadership and management of the curriculum are good. Course coordinators and managers use data well to inform annual course monitoring, and identify clear strengths and areas for improvement. However, managers' evaluative analysis of the records from lesson observations is insufficiently critical or clear.
- Managers have taken effective steps to rectify the poor retention rates through re-designing course structures, closer monitoring of progress and better preparation for students between their first and second year.
- Staff promote equality and diversity well in all lessons. Students have a good awareness of a wide range of social and cultural differences.

### **What does University for the Creative Arts need to do to improve further?**

- Improve retention rates on two-year programmes by ensuring that students understand at enrolment the high level of commitment required, and that their prior knowledge and aptitude are fully taken into account when placing them on courses. Monitor and support students more precisely during the first year of their programme.
- Develop and implement more effective ways of working within the current accommodation, to ensure all students who are taught in large groups are given the same high level of individual support and access to learning demonstrations.
- Encourage all students to reflect on their work astutely by ensuring that staff review their sketch books regularly, and provide critical and helpful feedback to develop students' skills in using annotation.
- Sharpen course managers' capacity to identify strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and learning, through better analysis of observation records. Ensure that course managers develop clear action plans to improve aspects of teaching and learning.

## **Information about the inspection**

33. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the university's associate dean for further education, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the university's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspections.
34. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires students had recently completed for the university. They observed learning sessions, and assessments. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the university offers.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

## University for the Creative Arts

**Learning types: 14 – 16:** Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades <b>using the 4 point scale</b> 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive
<b>Approximate number of enrolled learners</b>			
Full-time learners		1,033	337
Part-time learners		0	
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	2		
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2		
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2		
How well do learners progress?	2		
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	1		
How safe do learners feel?	1		
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well-being?*</i>	-		
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	-		
<b>Quality of provision</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2		
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2		
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1		
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2		
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2		
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	2		
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2		
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	1		
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2		
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3		
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2		

\*where applicable to the type of provision



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